

Spenard Corridor



Technical Report

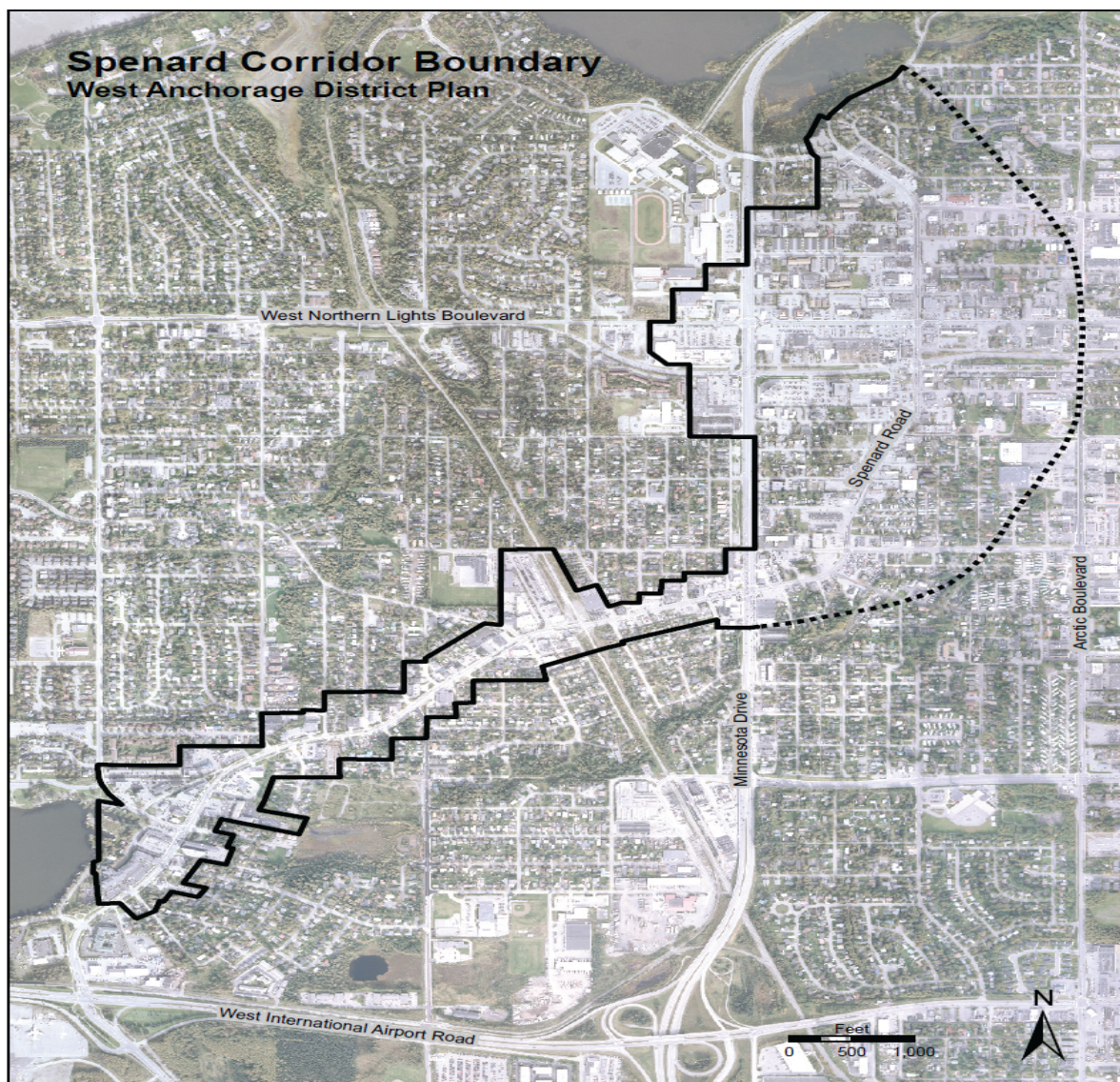
April 2011



Municipality of Anchorage

INTRODUCTION

The current draft of the *West Anchorage District Plan* (WADP) focuses on a comprehensive approach to the Spenard Road as a commercial corridor. The WADP identifies a suite of implementation actions and policies intended to promote and assist redevelopment and a commercial evolution along this roadway. The WADP identifies the corridor as a unique and exciting renewal opportunity. In context as a linear planning unit, the Spenard area is highlighted as Anchorage's first redevelopment commercial corridor, where commercial densities and a mix of land uses are encouraged. WADP recommends that the Municipality initiate a planning effort to develop a Spenard Corridor Strategic Plan. As a precursor to this corridor wide planning effort, the Community Development Department presents this technical report, which outlines existing conditions and some basic analyses of land use data within the corridor planning area.



Note: The northeast study area boundary (shown by the dashed line) is to be determined and will require coordinating with the adjacent community councils and interfacing with the *Midtown District Plan*.

Data presented herein was acquired and analyzed for the existing background conditions for the Spenard Corridor section of the WADP. Some of the analytical information follows trends and practices in commercial corridor planning methods from around the country. We have packaged these data here as a suite of technical conditions in the planning area. We assume that some of the data and findings we present will serve as a precursor to or initial step for the WADP implementation action for Spenard.

BACKGROUND

Spenard Road was originally blazed in the 1920's as a 3 mile wagon trail to connect the lumber camp in Spenard to the tent city railroad camp at Ship Creek. The road became the commercial heart of the city of Spenard, especially the initial mile from the Romig Hill southward. During the Pipeline years, the bars, nightclubs, and massage parlors thrived, and contributed to Spenard's colorful history.

Since at least the early 1980's, the business community, along with portions of the adjacent residential neighborhoods, the Municipality, and the community actively supported commercial revitalization in this corridor. This joint interest resulted in the 1986 *Spenard Commercial District Development Strategy*, which formalized a planning effort that resulted in the redevelopment of Spenard Road west of Minnesota. This represented one of the earliest redevelopment projects in Anchorage. It included the acquisition and demolition of many of the undesirable land uses along the corridor. The 1986 Spenard Development Strategy provided administrative, financial, and land use strategies that combined as an action plan to guide economic stability and revitalization along with major Spenard Road improvements. The plan remains an element of the Municipality of Anchorage's comprehensive plan, and many of its recommendations are still relevant today.

The majority of the Spenard Corridor is zoned commercial B-3. This includes the former residential area between 36th and Benson to the west of Spenard Road. The original mix of land uses, however, is what helped contribute to the "feel" of Spenard – retail, some office, residential, institutional. Existing structures are old by Anchorage's standards; development is often on small lots, with inefficient layouts and parking configurations. Ironically, the conditions that present challenges to redevelopment are in part what make Spenard unique.

Many of the Spenard Corridor businesses are small, owner-occupied, auto-oriented, and/or specialty shops. Staff identified 20+ businesses along Spenard Road that included some activity related to automobile sales or service. While the Corridor is dominated by auto-oriented businesses, this seems like an inordinately high proportion of the total. These are concentrated in the southern half of the Corridor.

Historic and current challenges to the Corridor's commercial viability and reinvestment potential exist. These include:

- Insufficient parking serves as an obstacle to business expansion;
- Nonconforming parking spaces create dangerous vehicle and pedestrian movements and a lack of shared parking areas discourage multiple pedestrian trips while in the area;
- Spenard Road is dangerous for motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists;
- Commercial expansion in other parts of Anchorage challenge Spenard businesses to reinvent themselves to remain relevant and attract customers;
- Small lots require land assemblage and replatting for new development;
- Declining building stock and high land prices make redevelopment costly;

- Insufficient and poor infrastructure and connectivity, especially on adjoining side streets;
- Declining housing conditions in adjacent areas brings the area “down;”
- While having a distinct feel and character, the district boundary is undefined and not marketed to its fullest potential.

Despite the challenges, Spenard Road and the adjacent areas continue their transformation as a result of private investment in local businesses and the support of committed Spenard residents. Key businesses serve to anchor the area especially around Northern Lights and Spenard, where the area is emerging as one of Anchorage’s major retail and entertainment destinations, while maintaining a unique local character.

Anchorage 2020-Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan identifies the northern portion of Spenard as a Town Center and the rest of the road as a Transit Supportive Development Corridor. The WADP carries these designations forward, and recommends a re-commitment of the Municipality as a partner in Spenard’s transformation into one of Anchorage’s most unique and vibrant retail and neighborhood districts.

MUNICIPAL PLANNING CONTEXT

The 1986 *Spenard Commercial District Development Strategy* identified recommendations to improve and revitalize the Spenard Road corridor west of Minnesota Drive. The recommendations included specific business district improvements as well as the establishment of a redevelopment agency that would support and fund improvements. Administrative recommendations included using tax increment financing, creation of a business association, and targeting a loan program through an agency called the Anchorage Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc. This loan program was initiated in the late 1980’s and fostered some localized business development in the corridor’s south end (e.g. House of Harley). The Municipality accomplished Spenard Road improvements in the 1990’s, which included right-of-way acquisitions, demolition of blighted properties, and conversion to a 3-lane road section with separate pedestrian facilities. These actions proved to catalyze revitalization in conjunction with local resident and business owner participation.

Anchorage 2020 provides a policy framework for the Anchorage Bowl. It highlights the growing need for infill and redevelopment in Anchorage’s older commercial and residential neighborhoods. The 2020 Land Use Concept Plan specifically identified new or future commercial districts with different levels of intensity, which included designating the northern portion of Spenard a Town Center and the road itself a Transit Supportive Development Corridor.

The Town Center concept describes areas with a mix of retail shopping and services, public facilities and medium to high-density housing in an area approximately one half mile to one mile in diameter. A Transit-Supportive Development Corridor represents optimal locations where increased commercial and residential intensities could support higher levels of transit service, and ideally result in 15- and 30- minute headways.

Anchorage 2020 outlines a series of implementation strategies for the plan’s policies, including design standards, infill and redevelopment incentives, and zoning supportive of mixed use development. The Title 21 Rewrite when adopted in its entirety, will represent a significant implementation step of Anchorage 2020. However, private investment and community excitement about Spenard and the potential for Spenard has gone forward in the absence of these steps, primarily in the northern, Town Center area. Examples of private business improvements include the Bear Tooth theater and restaurant, the Sugar Spoon building, Spenard Roadhouse,

and Northern Light Mall (with REI, Title Wave, Kaladi Brothers). A Spenard Farmer’s Market kicked off in 2010 and plans are in the works for West-Romig improvements as well as roadway improvements to Spenard Road, which would greatly enhance pedestrian amenities and safety. Recommendations from the 1986 Spenard Strategy and Anchorage 2020 are still relevant, and public investment in the area would help guide redevelopment and provide additional catalyst to the area.

SPENARD AREA EXISTING CONDITIONS

Note: All of the data and analysis provided herein comes from Municipal sources and was compiled and mapped by Municipal Community Planning Department Staff.

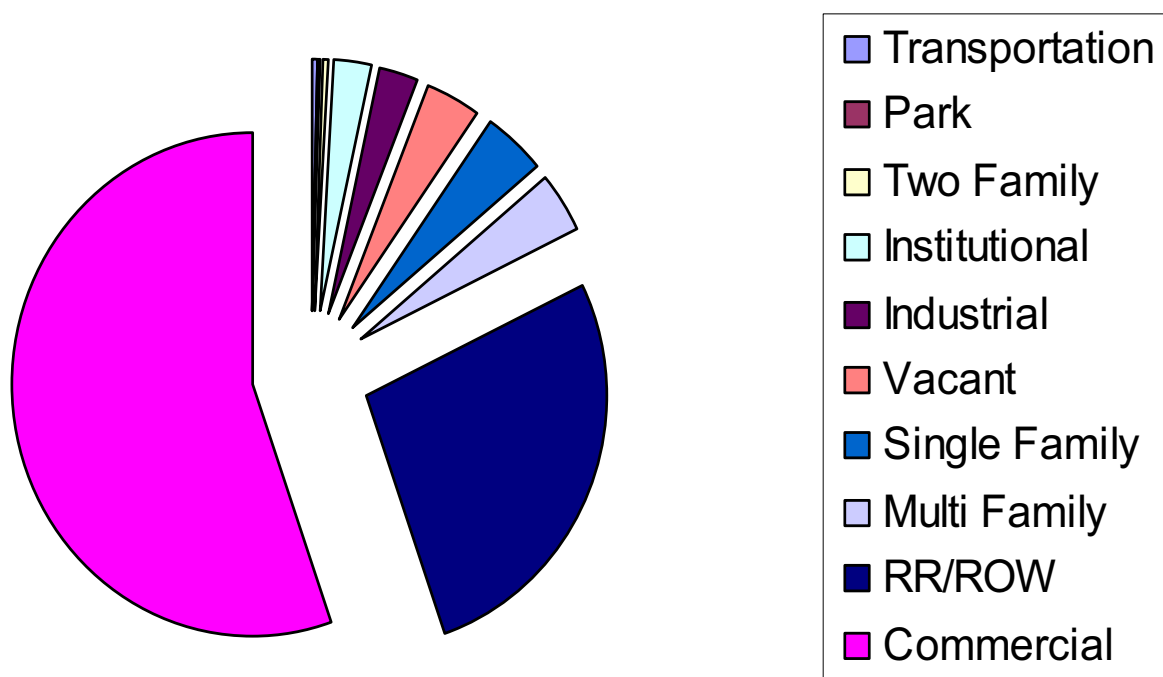
As a starting point for the recommended Corridor Plan, the following presents a suite of background information and technical details of the Spenard Corridor. Some of these data underscore the challenges that exist in the way of a successful commercial evolution along Spenard Road, while others show just how “ripe” or suitable conditions are for reinvestment and redevelopment.

- Basic Land Use Data for the Spenard Corridor [Hillcrest Dr. to International Airport Rd.]

General Land Uses by Parcel:

Land Use	Number of Parcels	Sq Ft / Category (approx)
Commercial	378	6771117
Industrial	26	322886
Institutional	8	301924
Multi-family Homes	35	504950
Park	3	36827
ARA-ROW	2	9751
Single Family Homes	63	501152
Transportation	5	33826
Two-family Homes	6	43936
Vacant Parcels	60	442874
TOTALS	586	8,969,247 sq ft

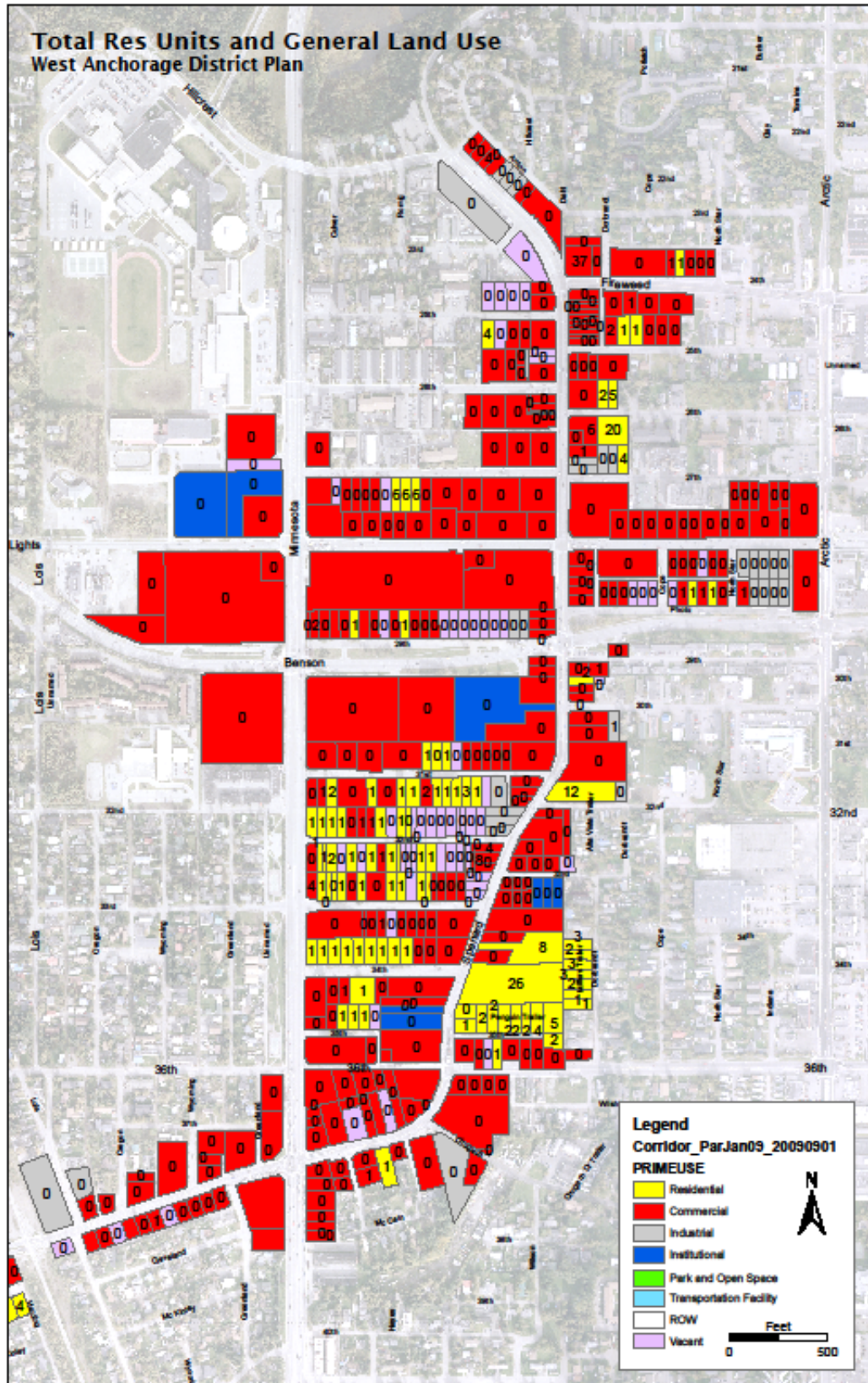
Spenard Corridor - General Land Use by %



General Zoning District breakdown within 1/2 mile of Spenard Road:

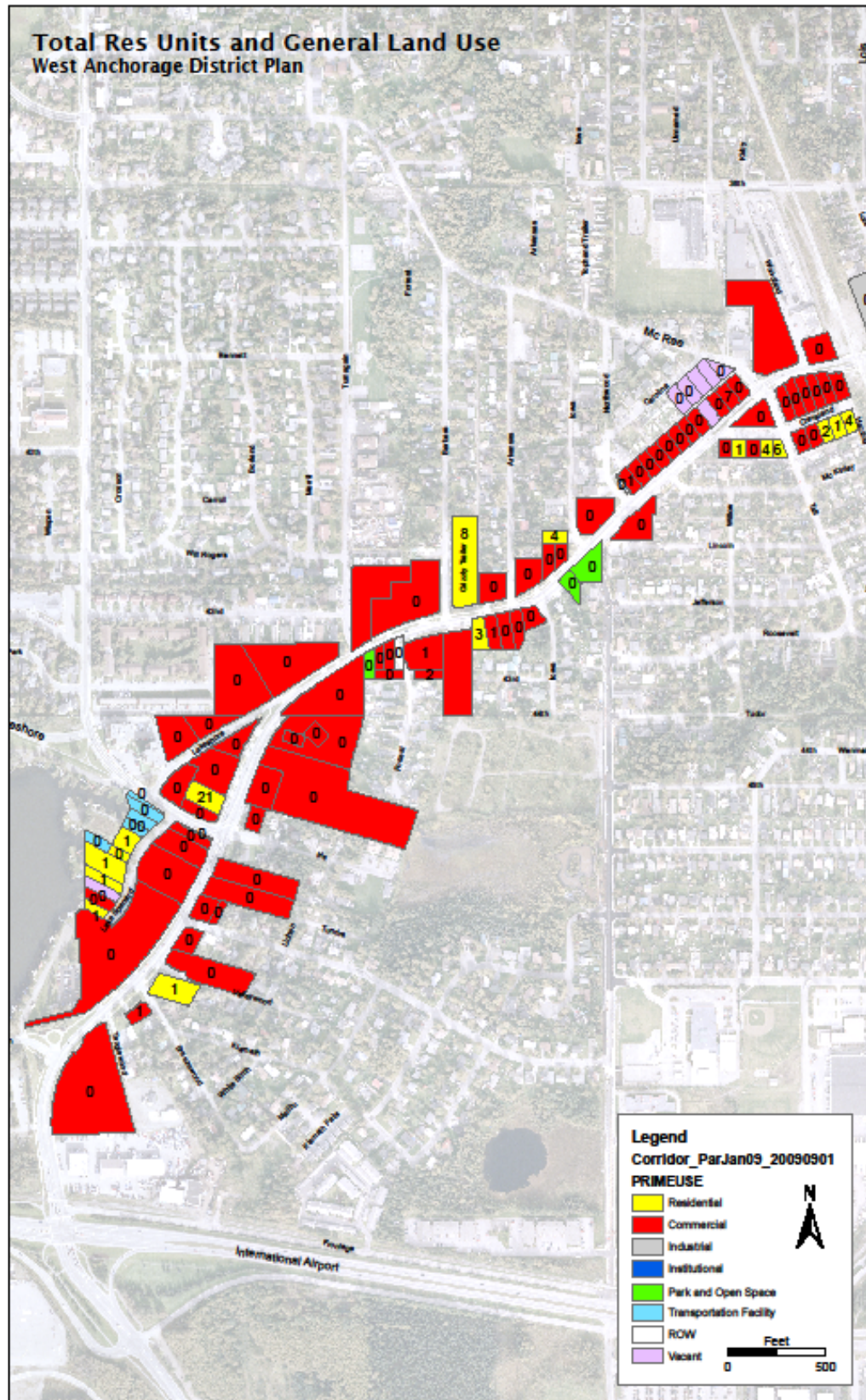
ZONING WITHIN 1/2 MILE OF CORRIDOR	
Zoning District	Acres
B-1A	1.28
B-3	359.60
B-3 SL	22.60
I-1	40.32
I-1 SL	1.83
PLI	114.36
PLI-p	124.81
R-1	219.55
R-2A	89.51
R-2A SL	0.60
R-2D	30.13
R-2M	460.54
R-2M SL	0.56
R-3	105.90
R-3 SL	0.56
R-4	10.65
R-4 SL	100.65
R-O	27.01
R-O SL	4.01
T	401.63

General Land Use with #s of Residential Units – North half of Corridor:



Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

General Land Use with #s of Residential Units – South half of Corridor:

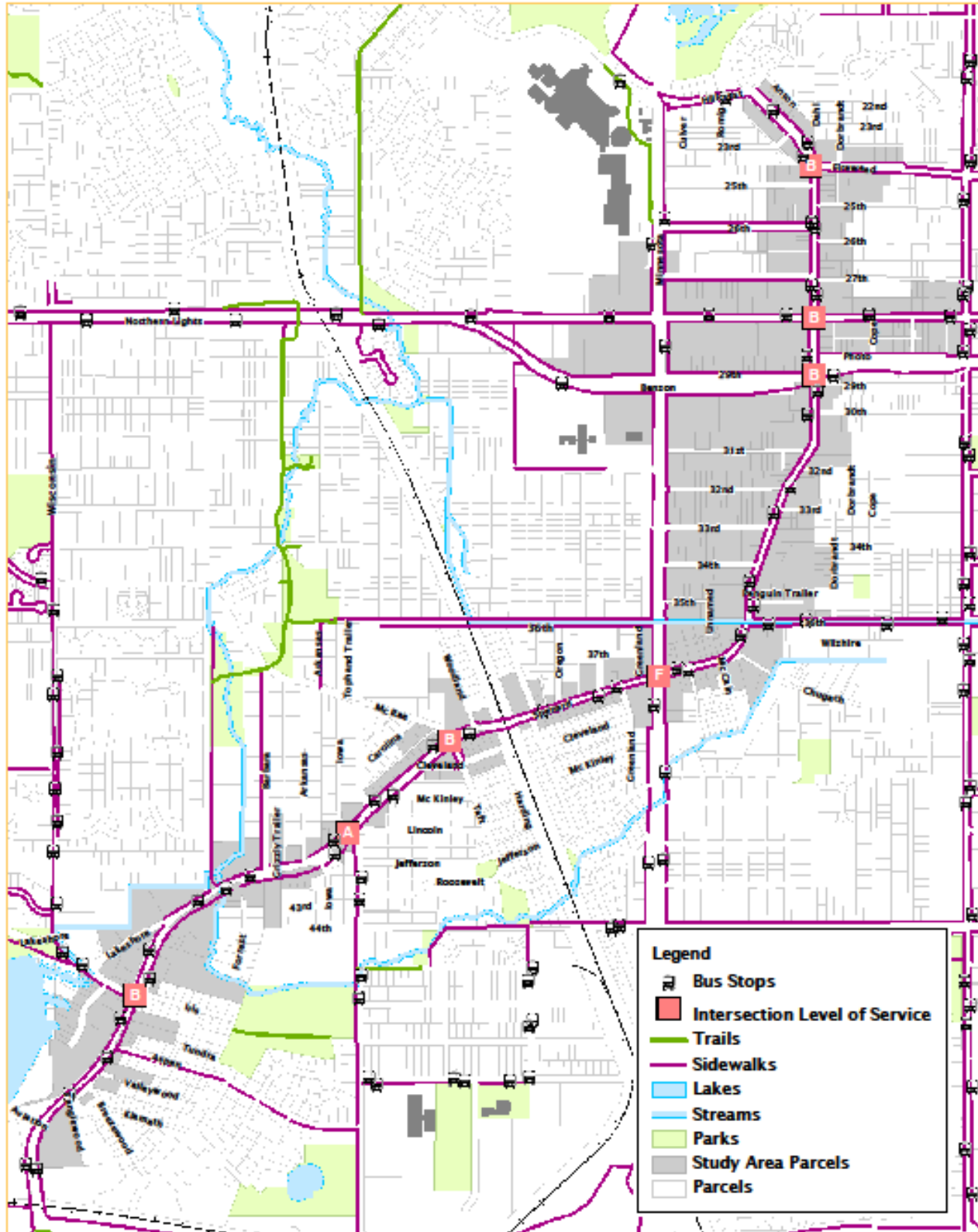


Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

PEDESTRIAN, ROADWAY, TRAILS and PARKING CONDITIONS

Recent Municipal Traffic Department data accumulated for a Spenard Road Upgrade Design Study Report, showed that the section of Spenard Road west of Minnesota handles more traffic volume than areas to the north with nearly half the crash numbers.

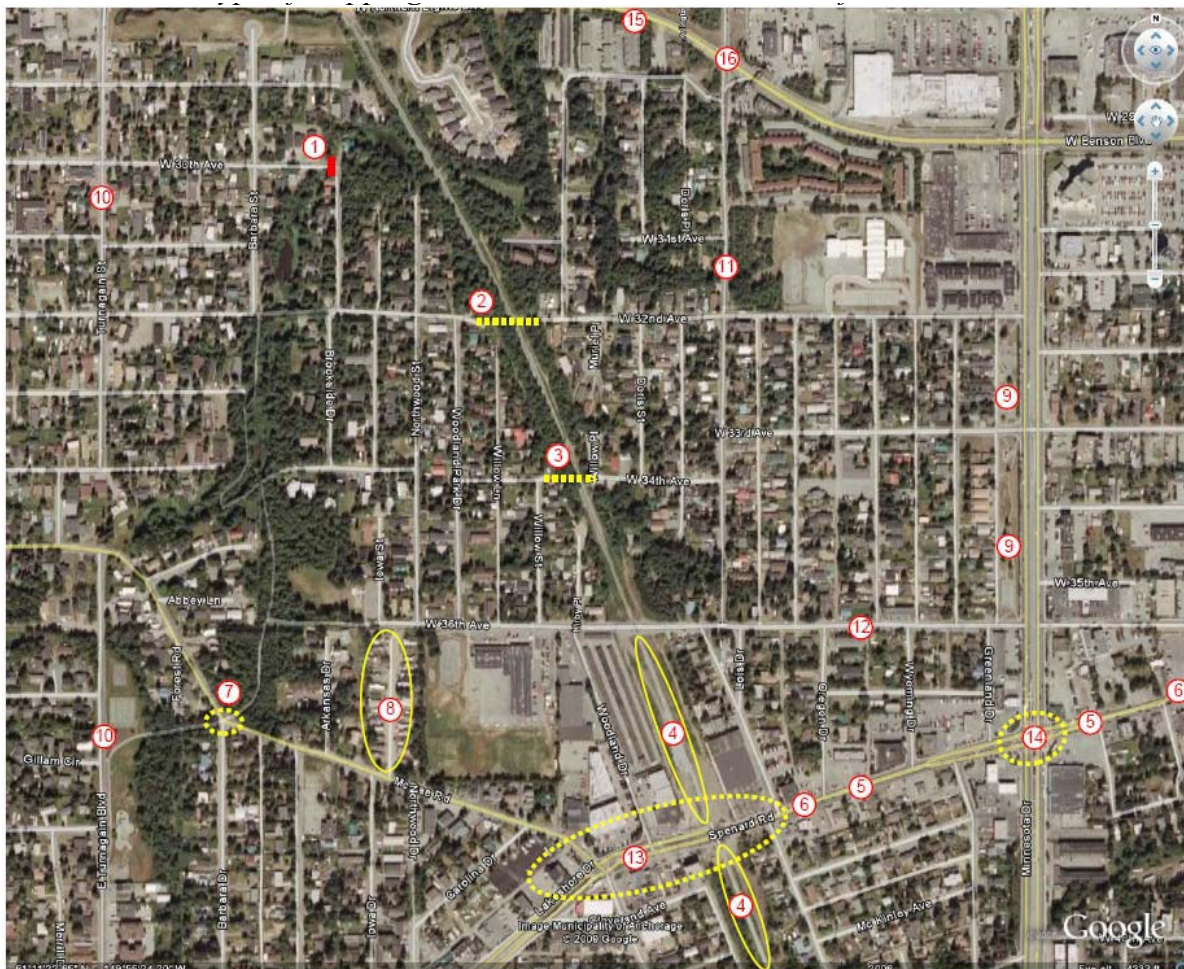
	NORTH SPENARD ROAD (Hillcrest - 30th Ave/4-lane)	SOUTH SPENARD ROAD (Northwood-Tanglewood/3-lane)
Road Length	0.51 miles	0.67 miles
Ave Traffic	3,860	18,958
Total Crashes	81	53



Transportation and Pedestrian Facilities

Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

This figure illustrates pedestrian connections and access deficiencies identified in the central portion of the Spenard Corridor. This type of mapping exercise should be undertaken for the entire Corridor.



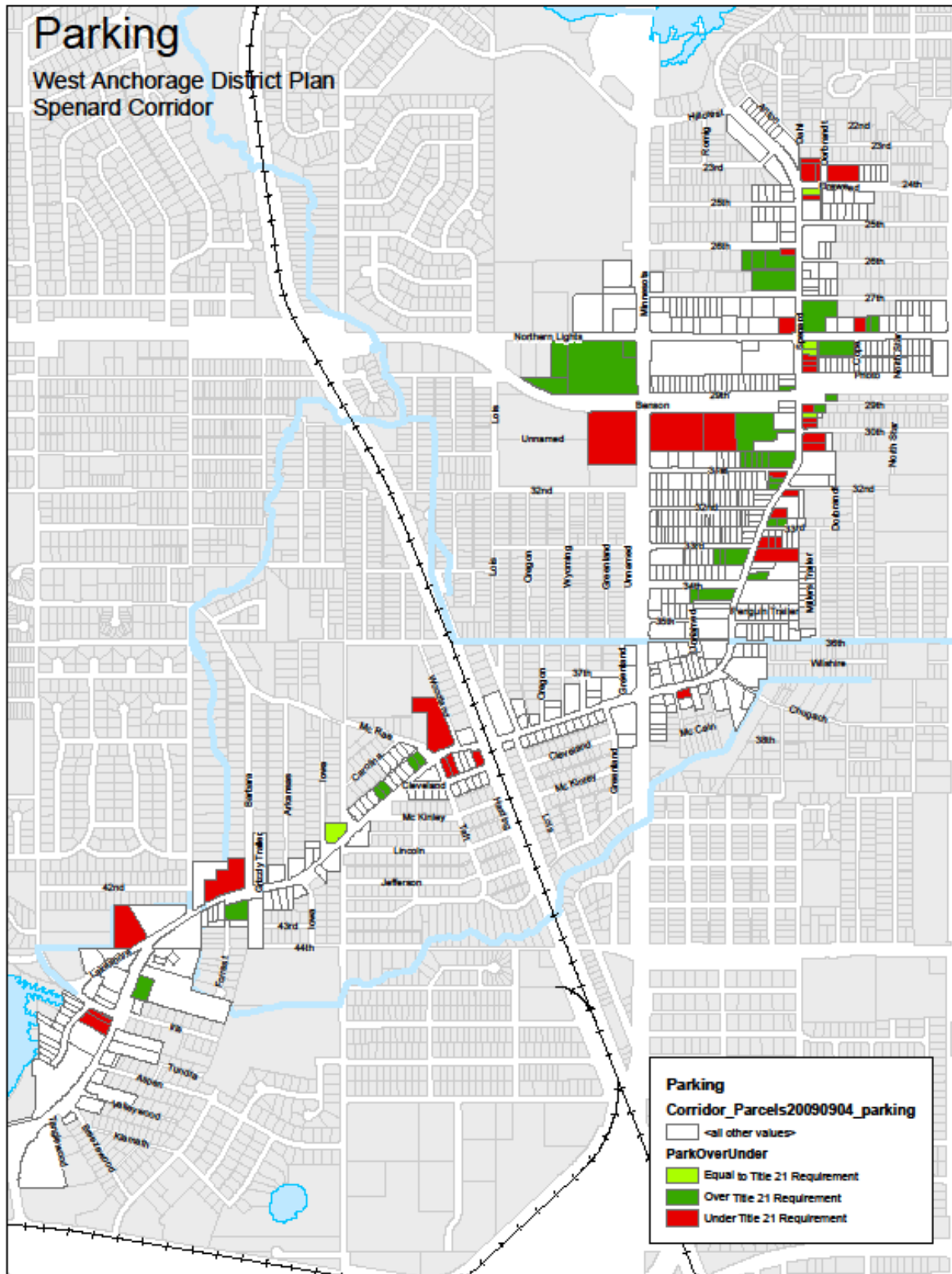
1. close 30th at Fish Creek to prevent high speed through traffic between Turnagain and Spenard via Brookside and Woodland Park
2. pedestrian/bike crossing at 34th across AKRR
3. pedestrian/bike crossing at 32nd across AKRR
4. light rail station in this area
5. add additional landscaping area along spenard
6. turn 4 lane into 3-lane configuration and include wider sidewalks and bike lanes
7. redesign and fix blind pedestrian crossing across McRae at fish creek trail
8. should existing trailer courts be redeveloped, the new development should not turn into another slum of multi-family dwellings
9. rehabilitate Minnesota Park. change existing tennis courts into usable features.
10. bring Turnagain Ave, up to neighborhood street standards with sidewalks and street parking if possible
11. bring Lois up to neighborhood street standards with sidewalks and street parking if possible
12. bring 36th Ave, up to neighborhood street standards with sidewalks and street parking if possible
13. encourage a neighborhood/transportation center/node to develop at this location to support potential light rail system and business centers already in place.
14. improve pedestrian and bicycle amenities and experiences
15. complete/extend sidewalk/path along south side of Benson from forest park to lois
16. complete pedestrian amenities. currently the curb/ramps are not connected to anything

General accessibility issues:

- increase enforcement of zoning and code violations. perhaps provide incentive to rental property owners to improve and maintain their units.
- get rid of dumpsters in the ROW and/or require screening structures
- add curbs and sidewalks at all residential streets/locations. most streets in this area have deteriorating pavement edges to gravel shoulders
- maintain existing parks and trails
- no right on reds at intersections to protect pedestrians and cyclists

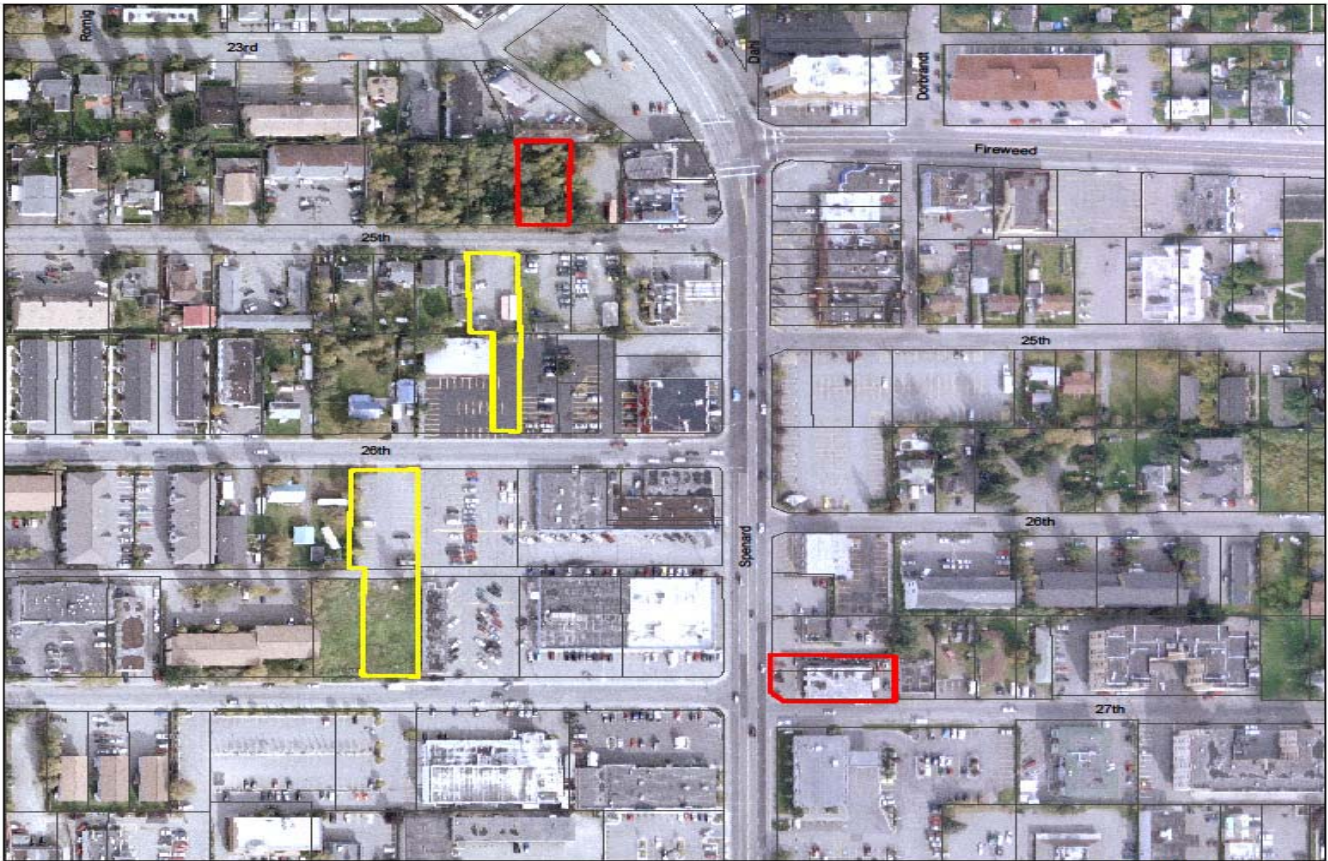
[Source: Jae Shinn, West Anchorage District Plan, Planning Group Member, October 2009]

Overview of some existing parking spaces based on current Title 21 parking standards:



Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

Possible Future Parking Lot
and New Road Locations



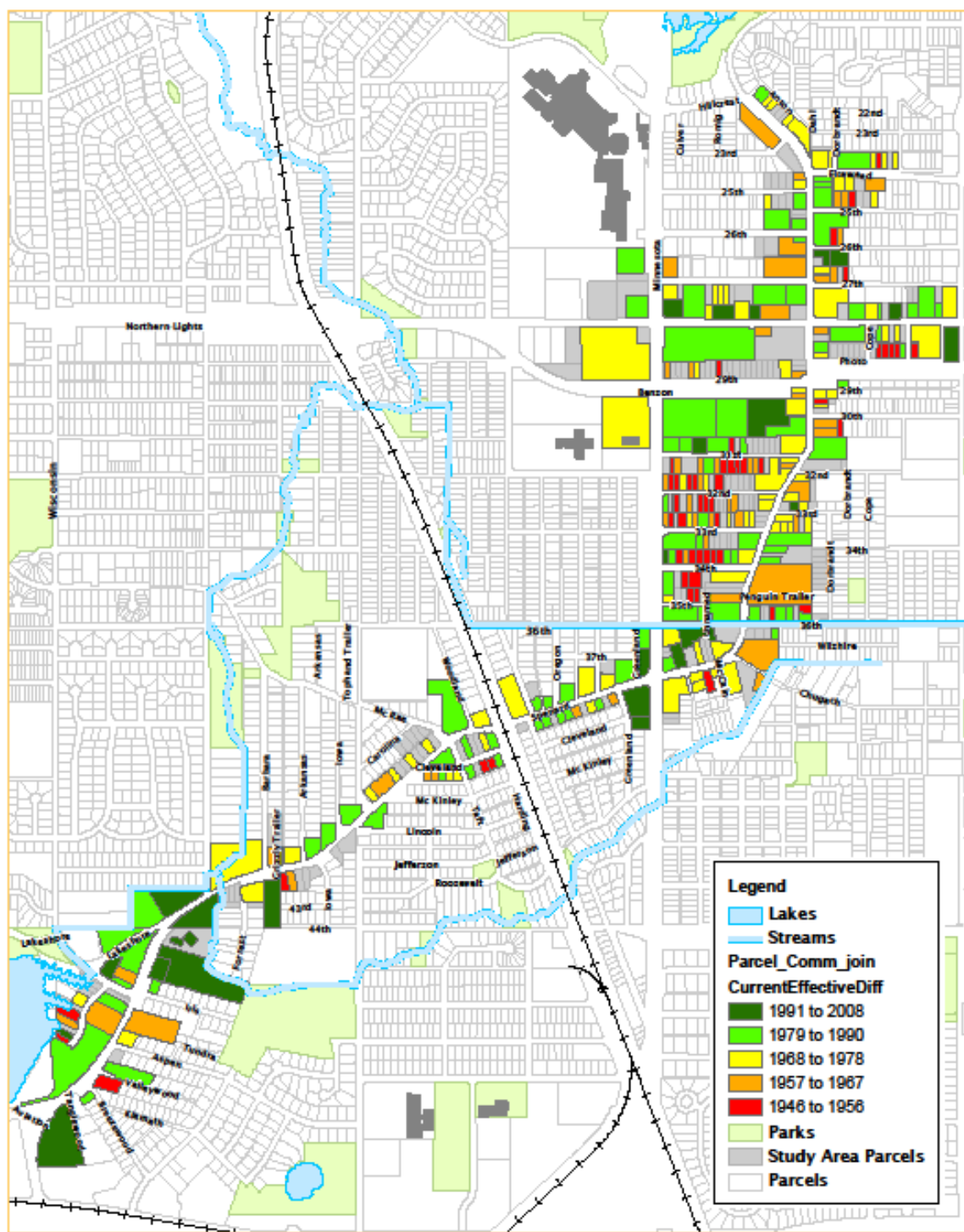
KK, MOA Planning, 3/23/10



REVITALIZATION INFORMATION & REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The following information illustrates an area's general suitability for revitalization and future redevelopment. Collectively these data start to show that the Spenard Corridor is "ripe" for commercial and limited residential redevelopment. These data sets are often used in commercial corridor planning across the country. These initial working draft analyses are intended to simply present some existing features within the Corridor. Collectively these data portray an area of the Bowl with great future potential to meet many Anchorage 2020 policies and goals.

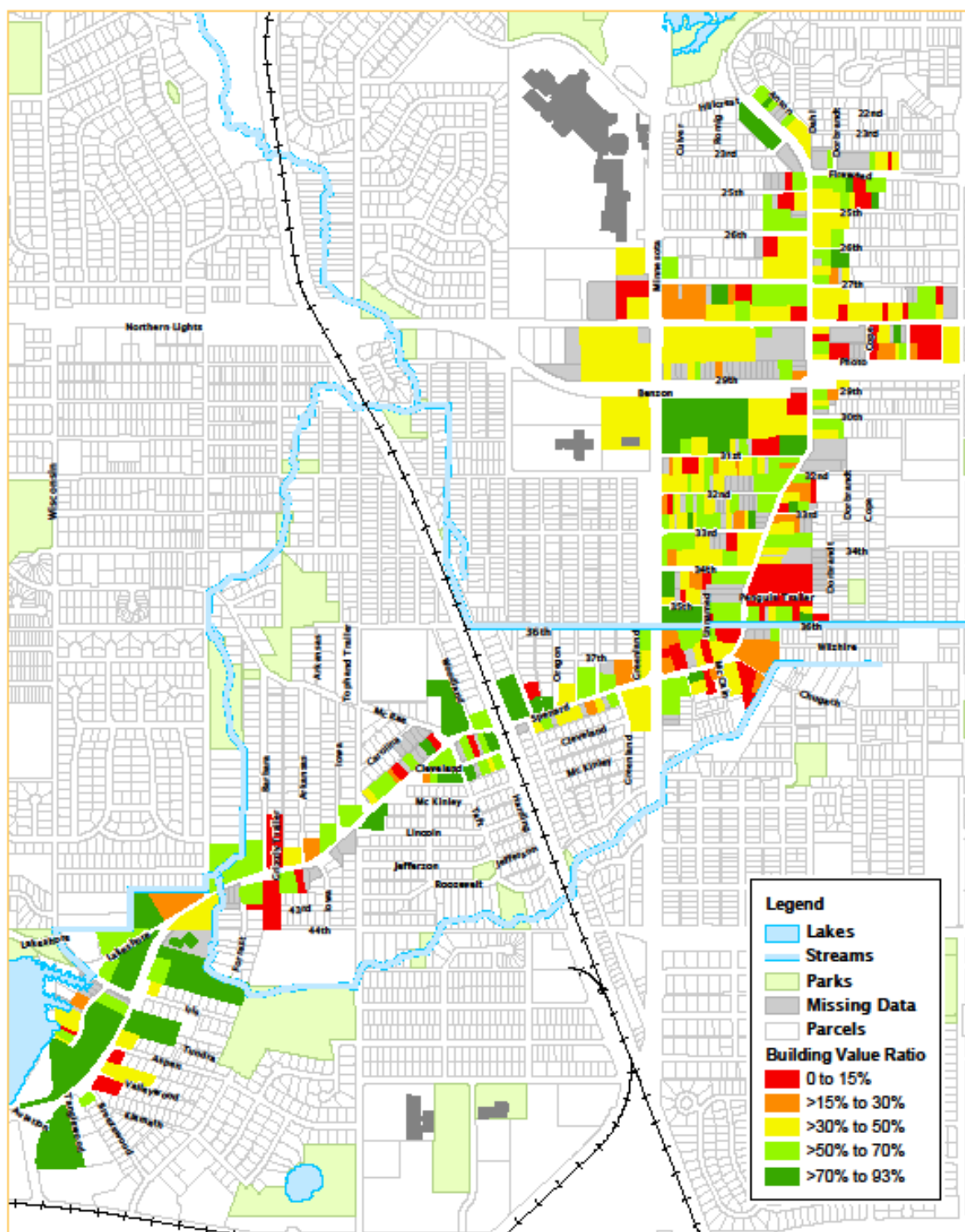
- **Effective Year Built** or general age of existing structures has become a common method used by planners to evaluate redevelopment potential. The Spenard Corridor is dominated by aging structures with the majority built before approximately 1970. At some point in the life of these older structures, building code requirements and associated costs with upgrades exceed the value or return of the building and redevelopment investment becomes a logical action. Many of these are ready for replacement.
- **Land Value per Square Foot** is another way to identify market conditions of raw land values. It can be an indication of where redevelopment potential exists, or it can show where property values may be depressed for many reasons. Developers and lending institutions often pay particularly close attention to these types of data when planning for future new development. Cheaper land values abound in the Corridor, which provides an indication that new developments and new businesses may have an easier means of getting established along Spenard Road. With the inclusion of new land use recommendations and other means, the Municipality strongly supports the intent of the original Spenard Strategy Plan, which focused new development in these areas.
- **Building Value to Total Property Value Ratio** is a correlation of an existing building's condition and age to the commercial value of the land it occupies. In general terms, this provides another insight into an area's market conditions and hints at overall redevelopment potential especially when compared to other areas of the Bowl. We have typically used a cut-off of 50% or less, building value to land value as a redevelopment indicator. This is not a strict indicator since older buildings often produce better income than newer ones given new costs.
- **Floor Area Ratio (FAR)** is a popular planning tool used to provide insight in evaluating redevelopment and reinvestment potential. FAR refers to the comparison of a building's total floor area measurement to the lot's total square footage. Generally, the higher a site's FAR, the less possible space remains to expand or upgrade a commercial use.



Effective Year Built

Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

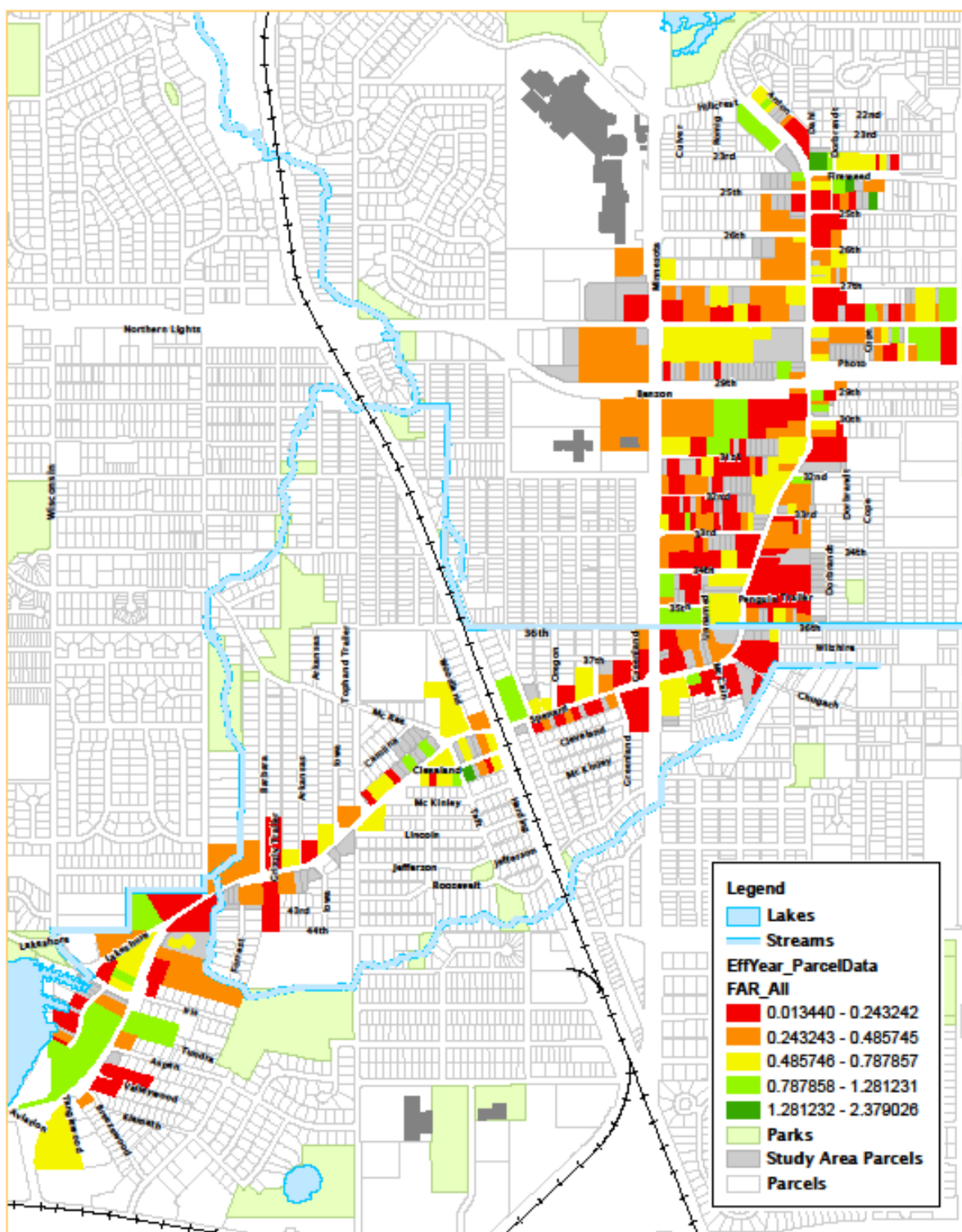
This graphic shows the relative age of existing structures using Municipal property assessment data. In many cases original structures were rebuilt, remodeled, or added onto. Property Appraisal staff produces an “effective year” built, which accounts for updates.



Building Value to Total Property Value Ratio

Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

This map shows the correlation (ratio) of a parcel's building assessed value to the parcel's overall total assessment based on Municipal property appraisal records. Lower ratios reveal prospective candidates for future replacement or significant redevelopment activities.



Floor Area Ratio

Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

Floor Area Ratio compares a building's total floor area measurement to the lot's total square footage. FAR is another indicator of candidate redevelopment sites.

□ Redevelopment Potential Data Analysis

For additional analysis of Spenard Corridor redevelopment potential, Municipal Long Range Planning Division staff combined and analyzed certain existing conditions data. These results are highlighted in the following two maps. Results of this exercise might be of value in future Spenard Corridor planning in conjunction with other items such as a market trend analysis and economic and demographic data.

For long range planning and marketing purposes, these two maps might provide a more comprehensive or relevant indication of redevelopment potential in the Corridor. These graphics perhaps better differentiate which parcels and what conditions are most ripe for redevelopment. These maps reflect a weighting of the redevelopment potential factors in ways that are more commonly done across the country. In fact, we modeled these based on current American Planning Association sanctioned commercial corridor studies. These are only used here as indicators of conditions in the Corridor and are not intended to serve as a basis for future courses of action or policies towards redevelopment.

The first map reflects the total sum of certain existing conditions per parcel. Five indicators were used to summarize relative redevelopment potential:

- Parcel Size
- Building to Total Parcel Value Ratio
- Land Value Per Square Foot
- Effective Year Built
- Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

ArcMap GIS software classified each of the above indicator's measure into five natural breaks and then assigned each of these classes a value, 1 through 5 (1 = low potential for redevelopment; 5 = high potential for redevelopment). To combine these data for each parcel, we calculated the sum of the assigned value (1-5) for each category. This gave a possible value range of 5 through 25 for each parcel. A 25 would indicate that the parcel was in the "5" or "high potential" class for each category, while a 5 would indicate that the parcel was in the "1" or "low potential" class.

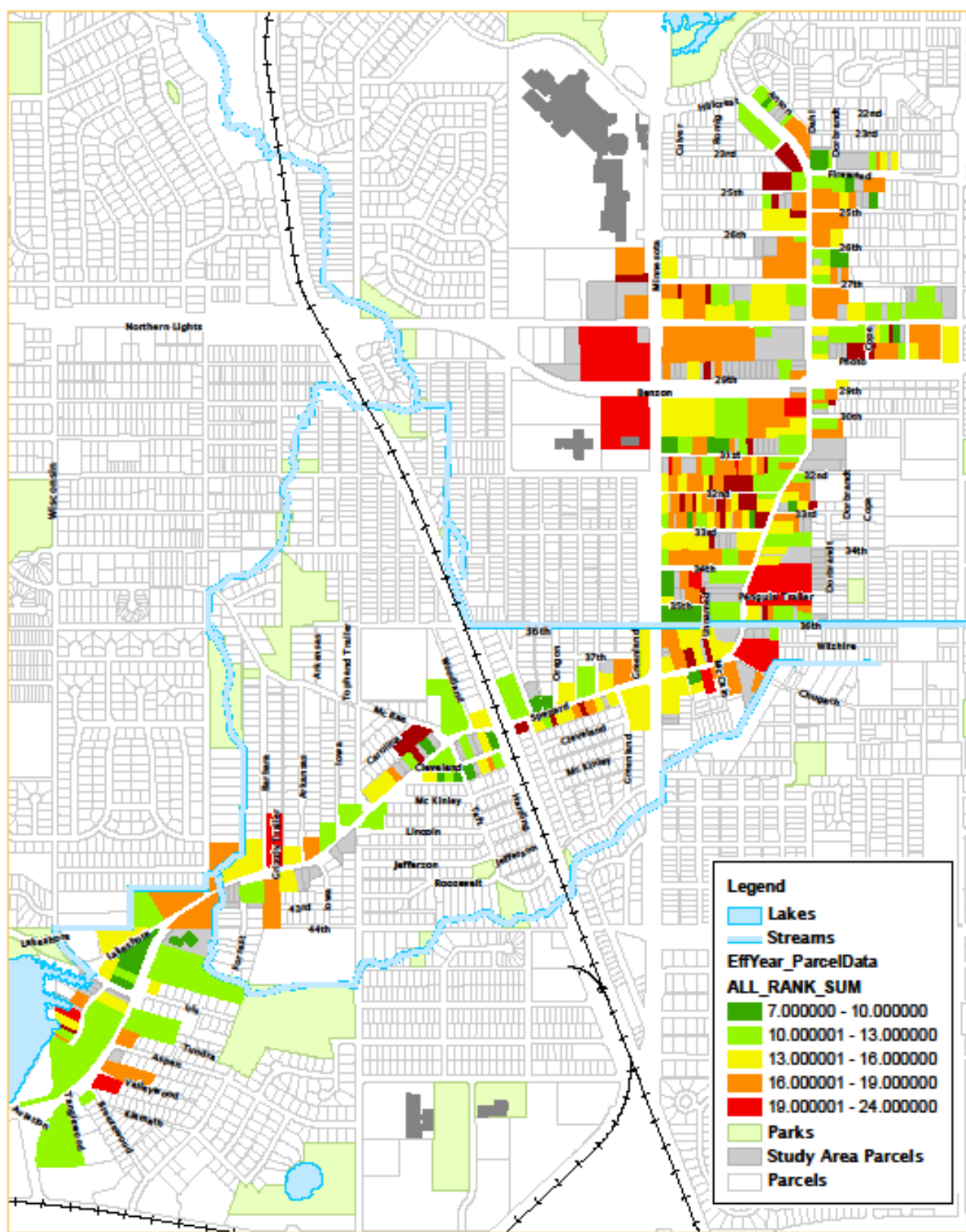
The second summary map sets a threshold for each of the existing condition categories and assigned the parcel 1 point for each threshold it met. A parcel could get a total of 0 for meeting no thresholds or up to a 5 for meeting all thresholds. This threshold evaluation is being used in communities with an active commercial corridor redevelopment program. The threshold items were:

- Effective Year Built: i.e. built earlier than 1980
- FAR: less than .25
- Land Value Per Square Foot of Land: less than \$17 per square foot
- Building Value to Total Value Ratio: less than .5
- Parcel Size: half acre or greater

For long range planning and marketing purposes, these two maps provide a different and perhaps more relevant indication for the overall area redevelopment potential in the Corridor. These graphics

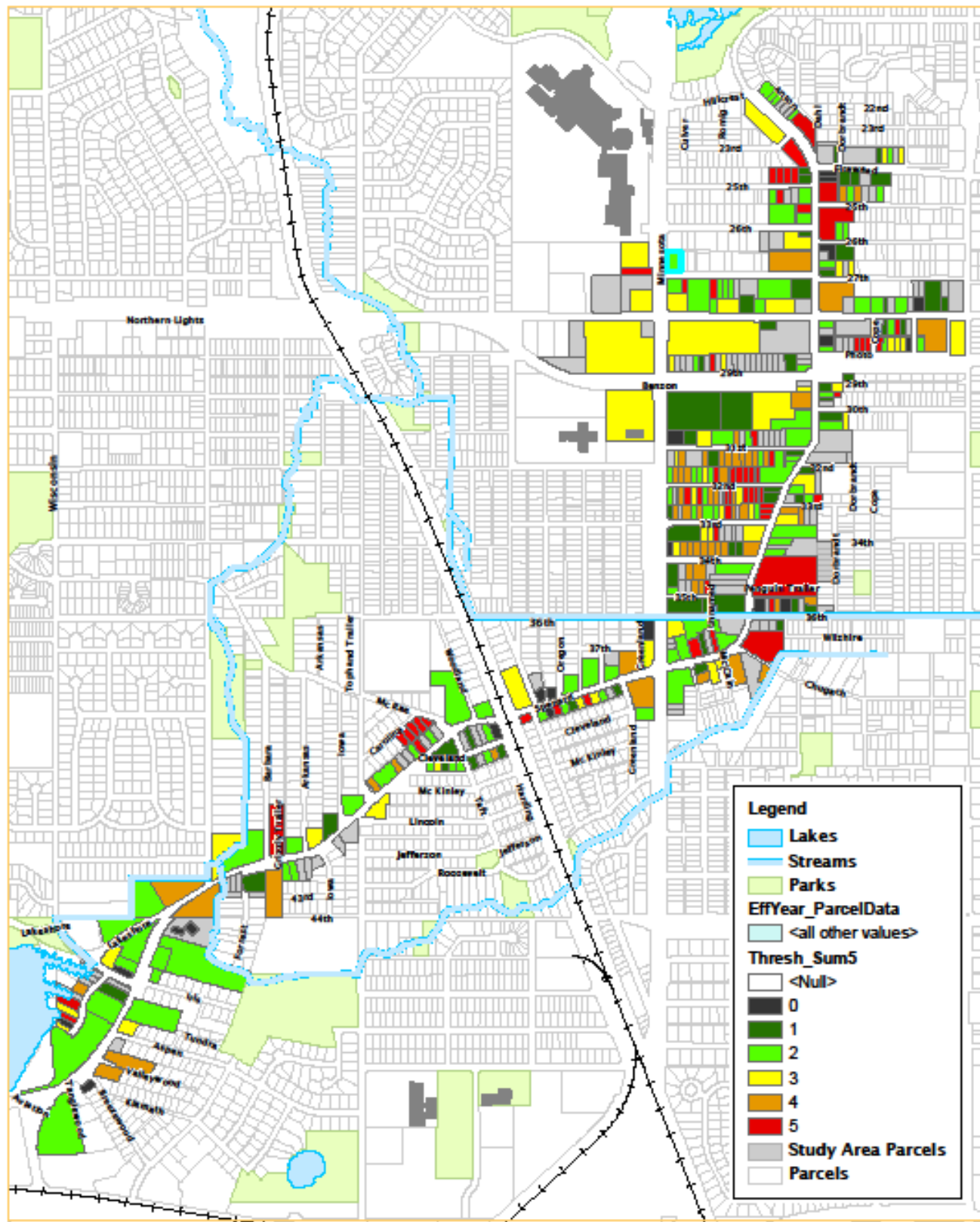
possibly better differentiate which parcels and what conditions are most ripe for redevelopment. These maps account for weighting the redevelopment potential factors in ways that are more commonly done across the country. In fact, we modeled these based on current state-of-the-art American Planning Association sanctioned commercial corridor studies. These are only used here as indicators of conditions in the Corridor and are not intended to serve as a basis for future courses of action or policies towards redevelopment.

In the following two maps, parcels towards the red spectrum of color indicate higher potential for redevelopment.



Redevelopment Potential Summary

Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

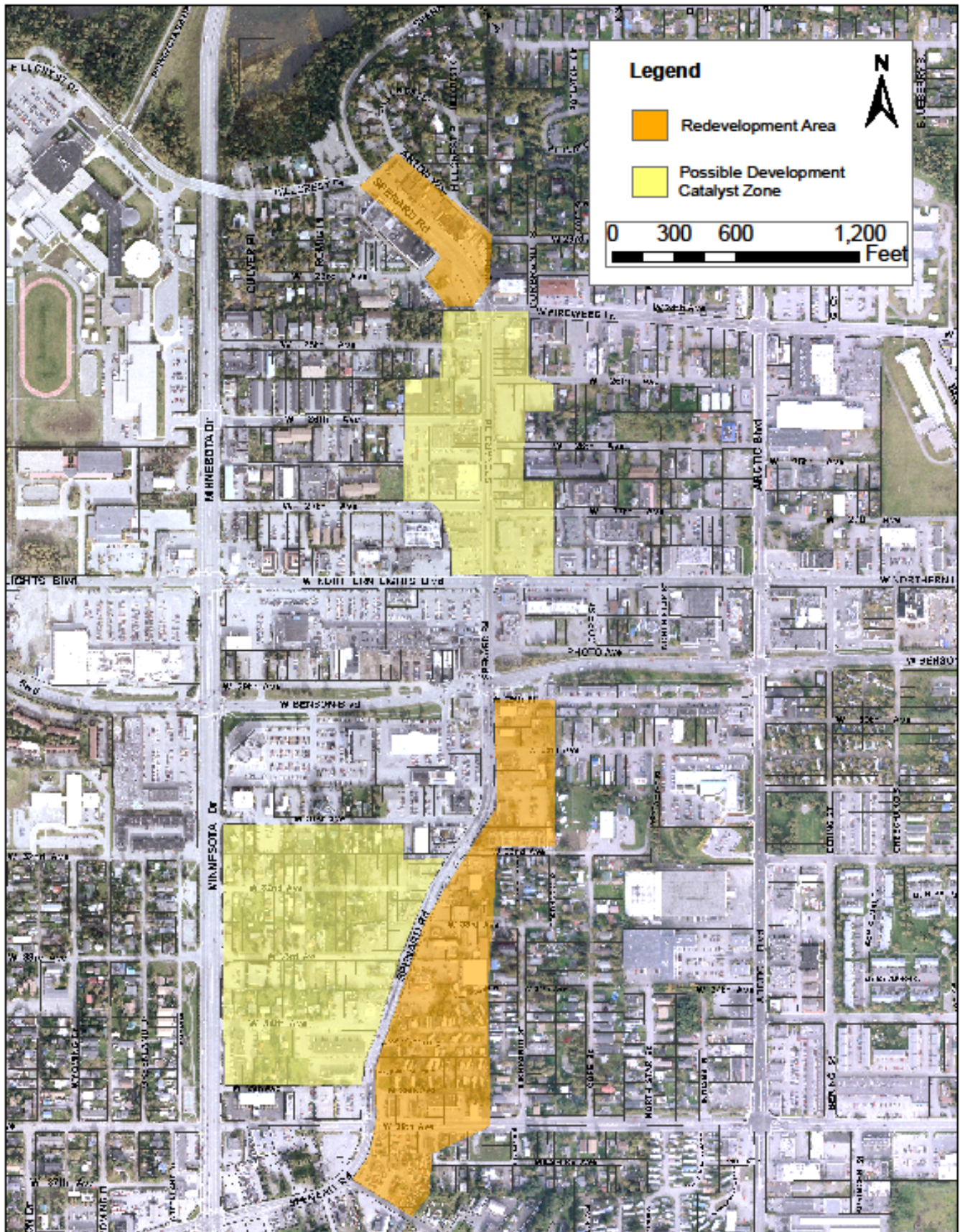


Threshold Redevelopment Potential

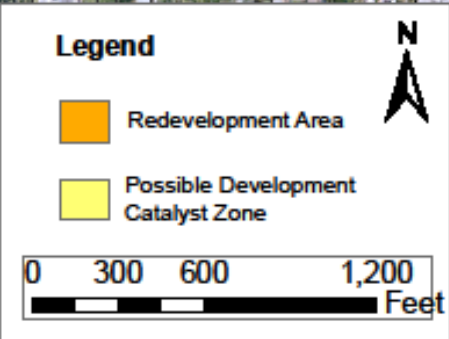
Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan

CATALYST ZONES

The 2007 *Anchorage Downtown Comprehensive Plan*, which represents an essential Anchorage 2020 implementation strategy for the Downtown, followed the lead of many communities and identified catalytic development sites. These include parcels or blocks whose existing conditions and/or locations are catalytic for future investment and revitalization energies. The Spenard area includes quite a few parcels and subareas proximate to existing reinvestment areas and public and private services and activities that can be considered as potential catalyst points. We identified a few here as examples of this concept, which may become more important as the area evolves. We also depict redevelopment “concentration” example areas where land use issues and future growth patterns would strongly support Anchorage 2020 and WADP goals and policies.



Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan



Source: Draft West Anchorage District Plan