SAVANNAH DEVELOPMENT
& RENEWAL AUTHORITY

WELLS PARK REVITALIZATION PLAN

APRIL 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 3

About SDRA 4
Introduction 5
Project Overview 7

Priority Areas 10

Park Amenities 11
Traffic Calming 13
Event Programming 14
Neighborhood Revitalization 15

Historical Context & Conditions 16

History & Site Analysis 17
Historic Figure-Ground Drawings 19
Community Feedback 21

Parks & Recreation Data 22

Parks Comparrison 23
Parks Space Study 24

Neighborhood & Community Data 25

1960–1980 Census Tracts 26
1990–2010 Census Tracts 27
Population Demographics 28
Neighborhoods 30
2011–2015 Aldermanic Districts 31
Current Aldermanic Districts 32
Local Historic Districts 33
National Register Historic Districts 33
Bus Routes 35
Bicycle Routes 36
Traffic Counts 37
Public Right of Way Grades 38
Current Zoning 39
Proposed Zoning 40
Vaccant Lands 41
Vaccant Buildings 42
Church Ownership & Public Use 43
Social Service Providers 44
Crime (2014) 45

Proposals 46

Wells Park Streetscape Views 47
Wells Park Area Master Plan 51
Park Improvement Concept A 52
Park Improvement Concept B 53
Park Improvement Concept C 55
Wells Park Strategic Planning Phases 57

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT SDRA

Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (SDRA) is an independent authority supported by the City of Savannah. Its mission is to lead a coordinated strategy of economic development and civic design in order to strengthen greater downtown Savannah. SDRA strives to develop this area as an economic hub in the region by developing an attractive urban environment and a prosperous climate for businesses and institutions.

INTRODUCTION

High-quality and well-maintained parks are an essential component of any city. Not only do parks attract residents and spur economic activity, but they also serve to improve the quality of life for the surrounding community. A well-used and engaging park can act as a catalyst for economic renewal and as a tool for changing social perception and behaviors. Concurrently, the vitality of a park is only as strong as what surrounds it.

Wells Park, Savannah (1.37 acres).
Source: Personal photograph by author.

Johnson Square, Savannah (1.40 acres).
Source: http://www.visithistoricsavannah.com

INTRODUCTION

At the request of the City of Savannah, SDRA has made the redevelopment of Wells Park the focus of its economic and urban activities for 2015. In partnership with the community, the authority has identified the following conclusions and objectives:

1. Relative to other parks in the city, Wells Park has experienced neglect and disinvestment for years.

2. At present, the neighborhood lacks adequate passive park space and active recreational space. Due to the small scale of Wells Park, we must develop creative solutions to allow the park to accommodate both needs.

3. We strive to improve the lives of community members, including those individuals who currently use the park on a daily basis.

4. Change is coming to the neighborhood; we must be proactive to ensure that change serves to benefit existing residents and institutions.

5. We should not limit our ideas or ambitions.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In November 2014, St. Luke Baptist Church hosted SDRA for a Wells Park Community Planning Workshop. Over the course of three days, SDRA staff members and team of architects and designers solicited feedback from residents on potential changes and improvements to the park. These insights informed the concept development phase for the revitalization of Wells Park.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

With community input and guidance from SDRA, the architects and designers created three park improvement options: Concepts A, B, and C. Of the three schemes, Concept A constitutes the smallest extent of changes; it retains the basketball court and primarily entails improvements to landscaping. Concept B involves the removal of the basketball court, yet maintains the current layout of the park. Concept C reconfigures the park to correspond to other squares in Savannah.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In January, SDRA held a series of open houses for residents and community members to share their thoughts regarding the three concepts. Overall, participants showed a preference for Concept B, noting that the removal of the basketball court would increase the functionality of the stage. However, community members also expressed the importance of providing active recreation spaces for youth, and proposed that the basketball court be relocated to another location in the immediate area. Throughout the process, participants emphasized the need to shift prevailing perceptions regarding the park and to transform its ambiance. Residents voiced aspirations for a park that has more kid-friendly events and that appeals to users of all ages. Therefore, the final design proposals are centered on enhancing public safety and making the park more welcoming, useful, and connected to the neighborhood.

PRIORITY AREAS

To facilitate these improvements, SDRA has developed recommendations for how to proceed with the redevelopment of Wells Park. These recommendations may be organized into the following four categories: Park Amenities, Traffic Calming, Event Programming, and Neighborhood Revitalization.

PARK AMENITIES

Currently, Wells Park is relatively separate from the street. Surrounding the park is a large chain-link fence that offers limited entry points. The relative impermeability of the fence creates a negative sense of enclosure and a space hidden from public view. Replacing the chain-link fence with a lower, more decorative fence not only increases visibility into the park, but also presents the opportunity to install a colorful and artistic element in the urban landscape. Moreover, greater visibility into the park has the potential to positively influence the behavior of its users.

To further enhance safety and visibility in the park, it is recommended that the tree canopy be raised with existing oak trees cut up to a minimum of eight feet off the ground. In addition, all of the large shrubs along the perimeter of the park should be cut back or replaced with ground-cover to permit views to and from the street. Converting the existing pedestrian lighting to LED lighting will provide better visibility at night and reduced costs.

Priority Areas

PARK AMENITIES

Lastly, SDRA recommends the removal and relocation of the basketball court to an appropriate, nearby facility or public space that can support the addition of other active recreation spaces in the future. This modification to Wells Park allows the existing shelter on the site to be raised and re-purposed as a stage located along Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. This configuration creates an event space separate from the children's play areas and improves visibility along the busy street. Moreover, redevelopment of the area previously dedicated to the basketball court would allow the park to accommodate additional programming and features.

Proposed Wells Park Modifications:

- Remove the fence
- Raise the tree canopy
- Limb up any large shrubs
- Convert all lighting to LED
- Install an irrigation system and new grass or ground-cover
- Relocate covered seating
- Replace wooden benches
- Create new entries and bollards
- Add game tables
- Improve policing and site management

Priority Areas

TRAFFIC CALMING

Wells Park is unique among Savannah squares in that it is bordered by two wide, fast-paced streets. Traffic speeds through both Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Montgomery Street should be reduced to provide a calmer environment for users, safety for pedestrians, and visibility of activity taking place in the park. This measure can be achieved by raising the streets or intersections around the park and adding textured pavement such as brick, pavers, or stamped concrete. These traffic-calming techniques create the feel of a pedestrian zone in an urban area and help to slow traffic for neighborhood residents using the crosswalk.

ON RIGHT

Raised intersection in Boston, MA
Source: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-VpBQLfohlF0/T5X-RTdWZII/AAAAAAAABH8/JuomSGF4Kzc/s1600/S5031458.JPG

Priority Areas

EVENT PROGRAMMING

With these changes, Wells Park will have the capacity and amenities to support a wide variety of new programming. The annual Juneteenth festival held in the park can be accompanied by new events that draw attention to the area and bring the community together. As Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) has just purchased a building across the street, SDRA hopes to forge a strong tie between the park and the school and to coordinate cultural events that promote interaction with the surrounding neighborhood.

ON RIGHT

Juneteenth Festival, Wells Park.
Source: http://www.savannahnow.com

NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

In order to bring vitality back to Wells Park, the surrounding area must be prosperous as well. As part of its plan to reinvigorate the neighborhood, SDRA will work with St. Luke Baptist Church, existing property owners, and the City of Savannah to develop some of the lots adjacent to the park. In addition, St. Luke Baptist Church has expressed interest in redeveloping its property to create residences, an outreach facility, and an improved parking lot. The introduction of mixed-use buildings, row houses, and a neighborhood services office to replace the extant vacant land and used car lots will create more activity around the park and spur a higher-density, more pedestrian-friendly environment.

What is a neighborhood services office? A space for regular use by the district Aldermen and staff from various City departments, including Police, Parks & Recreation, Youth Services, Property Maintenance, Sanitation, and Housing. Non-profit organizations are also able to utilize the facility.

View West at Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
Source: Wells Park Open House (2015)

View North at 38th St.
Source: Wells Park Open House (2015)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT & CONDITIONS

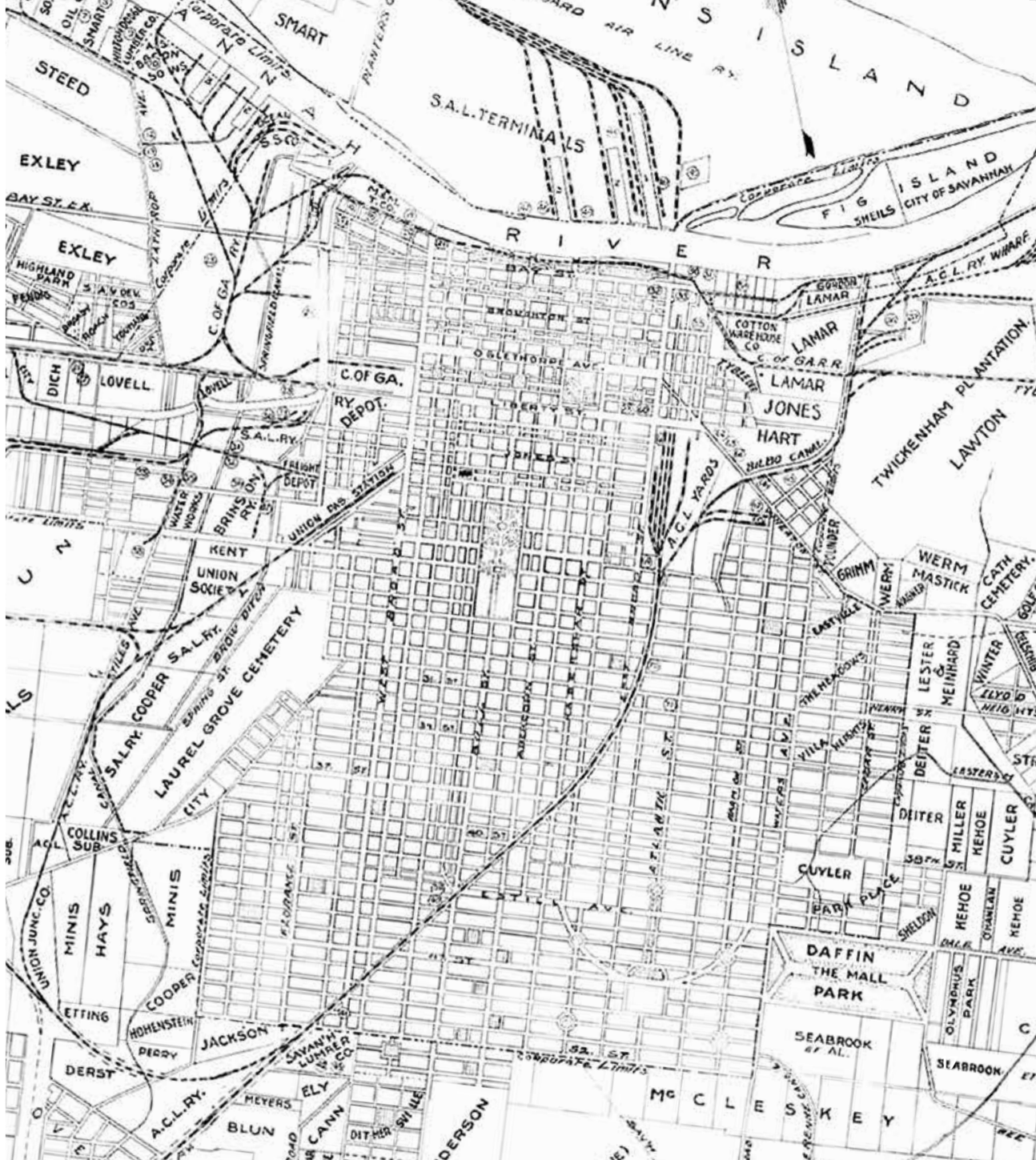
Historical Context & Conditions

HISTORY & SITE ANALYSIS

Wells Park is located in the greater downtown Metropolitan neighborhood of Savannah, one of the earliest suburbs to be created in the city. This area was originally named Dillonton after Mr. David R. Dillon, a Savannah merchant who owned and developed the subdivision beginning in 1863. Bounded by 37th Street to the north, 42nd Street to the south, Whitaker Street to the east, and Florence Street to the west, the farm-based tract comprised a one-hundred-acre plat laid out on a grid pattern with three squares, echoing the Oglethorpe Plan. Following Dillon's death in February 1887, the City formally incorporated Dillonton and the neighboring Brownville tract into its expanding limits.

ON RIGHT

Map of the City of Savannah and Vicinity 1910
Source: http://www.libs.uga.edu/darchive/hargrett/maps/1910h62.jpg



HISTORY & SITE ANALYSIS

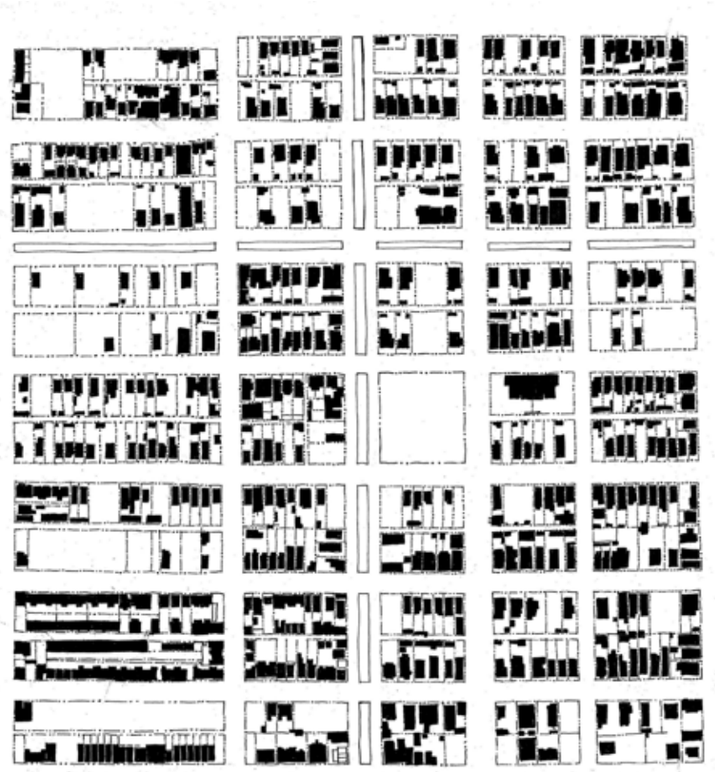
Also known as Wells Square, Wells Park is located in present-day Duncan Ward. The park is bound by Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to the west, 38th Street to the north, Montgomery Street to the east, and 39th Street to the south. It measures approximately 1.5 acres in area. The original square was laid out on February 9, 1887 by an ordinance of City Council, and may have utilized one of the extant squares laid out by Dillon. Wells Square was named in honor of Alderman David Wells, a lumber businessman who lived in Savannah during the early 1900s.

The area surrounding Wells Park experienced its most pronounced period of development following the introduction of the electrified streetcar in 1888. Within the same year, the City issued permits for the construction of forty-eight houses on the tract. During this time, the Metropolitan District developed as a residential suburb with distinct commercial corridors. However, as the rail lines were replaced with automobile infrastructure from the 1920s through the middle of the century, the Metropolitan District declined in investment and new construction. Urban flight contributed to the suburb's stagnation, with population decreases and higher vacancy rates occurring throughout the later half of the twentieth century. The general deterioration of the community was further evinced by higher rates of crime and drug use in the 1980s and early 1990s.

With the historic housing stock in the area facing dilapidation and demolition, a number of efforts to preserve the district took hold in the final years of the twentieth century. Encompassing the area between Anderson Lane (N), Victory Drive (S), Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (W), and East Broad Street (E), the suburb was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1997 as the Thomas Square Streetcar Historic District. Most recently, Historic Savannah Foundation and Savannah College of Art and Design have purchased and rehabilitated properties in the area. Throughout this history, Wells Park has remained an anchor in the community, serving as a link between the Thomas Square Streetcar and Cuyler/Brownville Historic Districts.

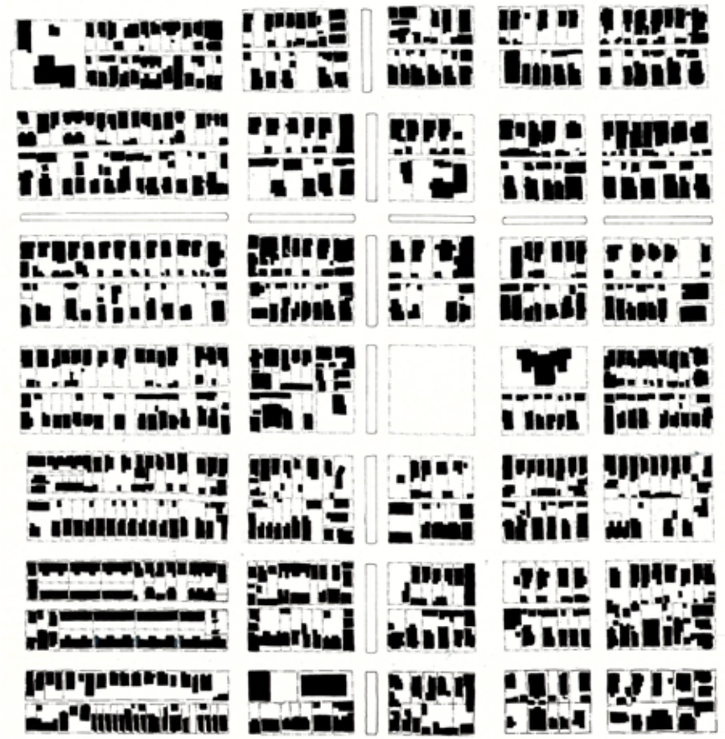
HISTORIC FIGURE-GROUND DRAWINGS

1889

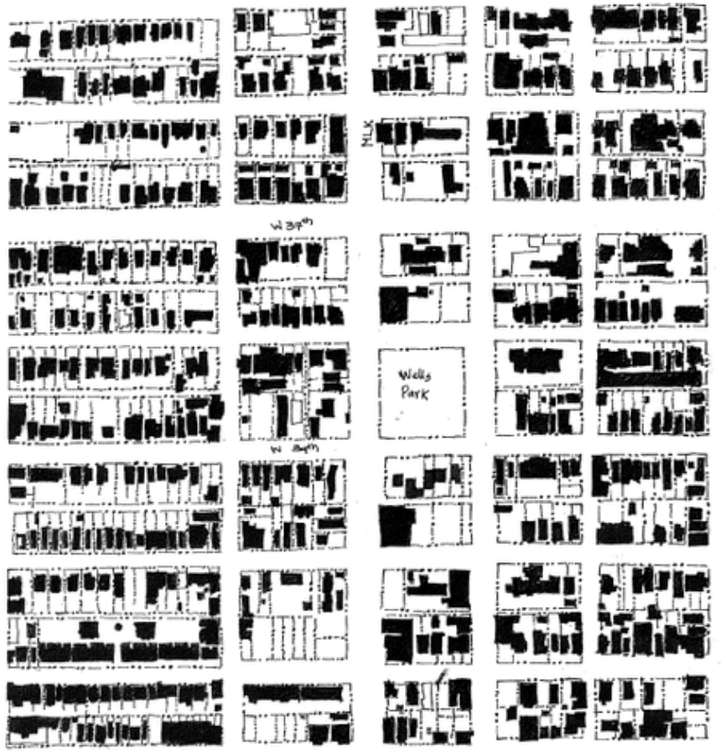


1916

HISTORIC FIGURE-GROUND DRAWINGS



1954



2014

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

In addition to historical analysis of the area, community input greatly informed the design process for the redevelopment of Wells Park. In November 2012, SDRA held a community-planning workshop at St. Luke Baptist Church, which borders the park to the north. At the workshop, residents were encouraged to share their goals and desires for the park. With these insights, the team of designers created three concepts for public review and further feedback.

Social Engagement

- City and community involvement
- Improved police/civilian relations
- A new name for the park (Andrew Knowles; a non-sports figure)
- The creation of zones for children, sports, and sitting
- The opportunity to meet new people
- Positive attitudes (about the park)

New Fencing

- Removal of chain-link fence
- Construction of decorative fence
- Low, decorative fence around children's play area

Event Programming

- Regular activities, classes, and sports training sessions
- Scheduled games
- Picnics
- Street closures on 38th and 39th to extend park space
- Arts and crafts activities
- Youth programs

Lighting

- Improved and additional lighting
- Lamp posts

Landscaping

- Additional green space and vegetation
- Community garden
- Shrubs trimmed to ground to improve visibility
- Tree canopy raised and shaped
- Pavilion removed
- Brick paving to replace dirt and sand
- Improved greenery surrounding the park
- Bicycle rack
- Signage
- Bird feeders

Active Space

- A larger, modern pavilion
- Horseshoes, footballs, and basketballs available
- Expansion of the basketball court
- Interactive facilities (climbing wall)
- Upgraded playground equipment
- Swings
- Dog park

Safety Measures

- Improved safety in surrounding area
- Gun-free zone
- More police involvement
- Neighborhood organization
- Park curfew

Seating

- Additional seating(bleachers, wooden benches)
- Removal of benches (from gathering areas)

Trash Collection

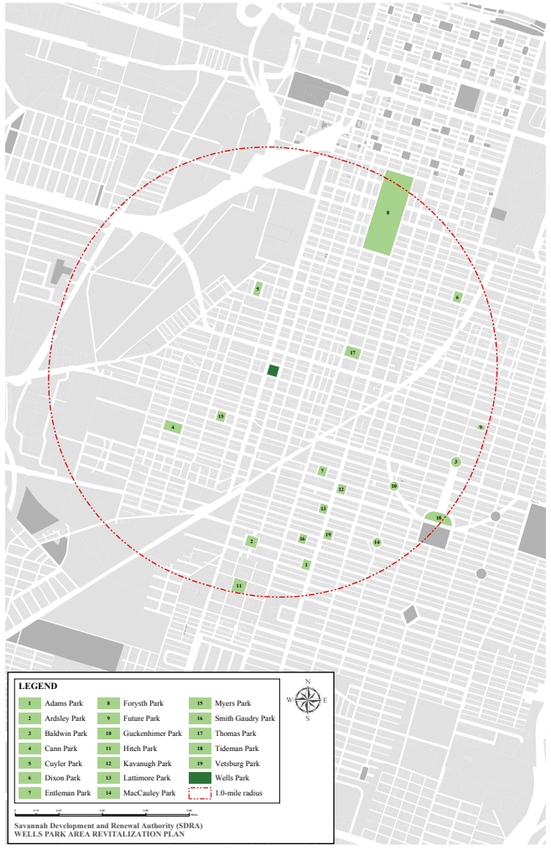
- Additional trash receptacles
- Proper waste disposal
- Recycling bins
- Pet waste bags and gloves

Water Features

- Water fountains (on each side of the playground)
- Wet play area for children

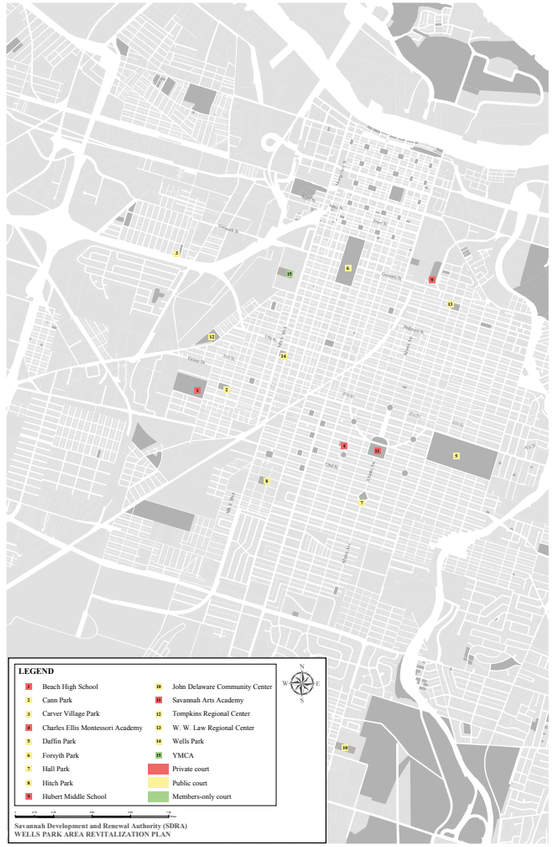
PARKS & RECREATION DATA

PARKS COMPARISON



Parks Within One-mile Radius

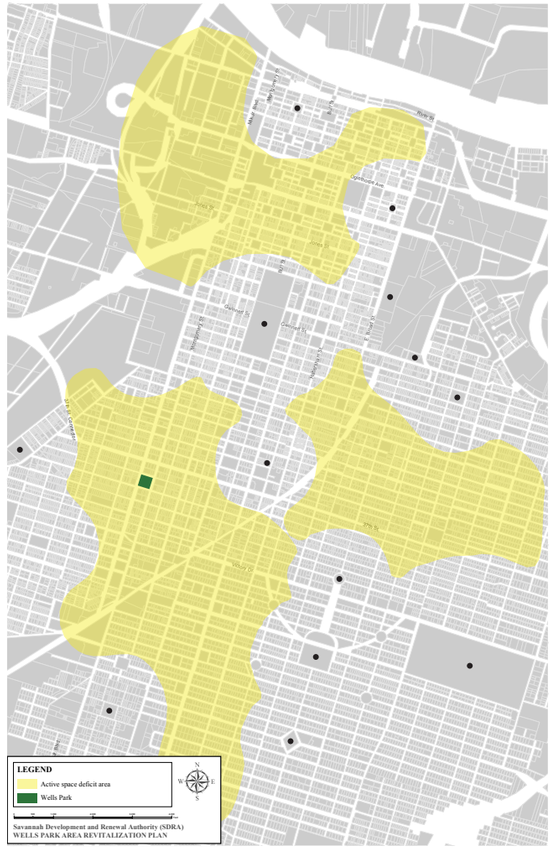
Parks & Squares Comparison



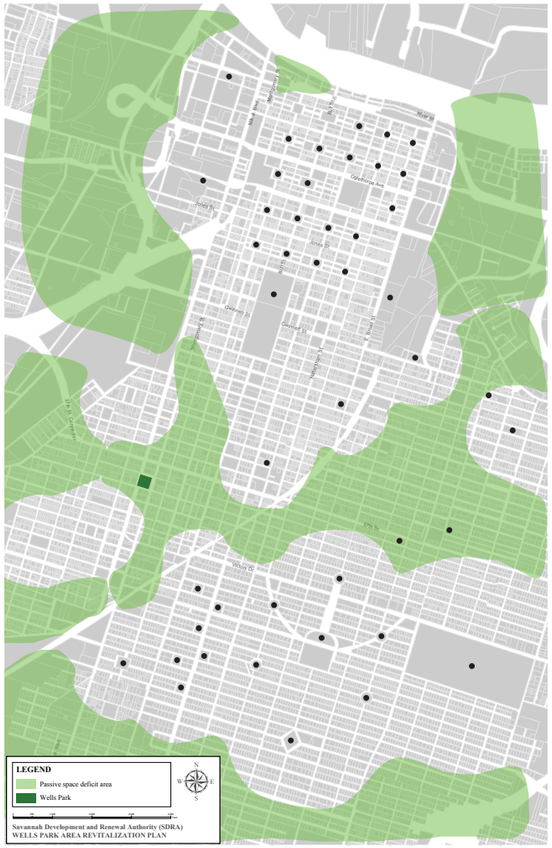
Basketball Court Locations

Parks & Recreation Data

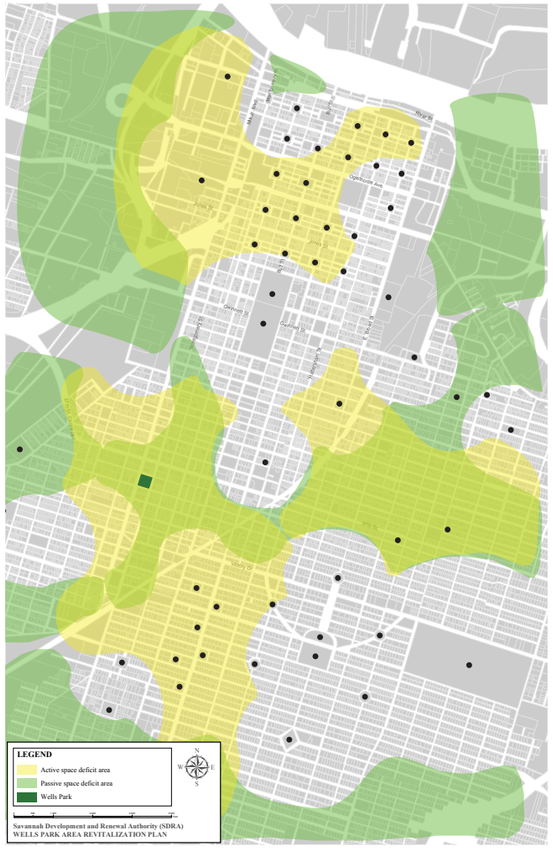
PARKS SPACE STUDY



Active Space



Passive Space



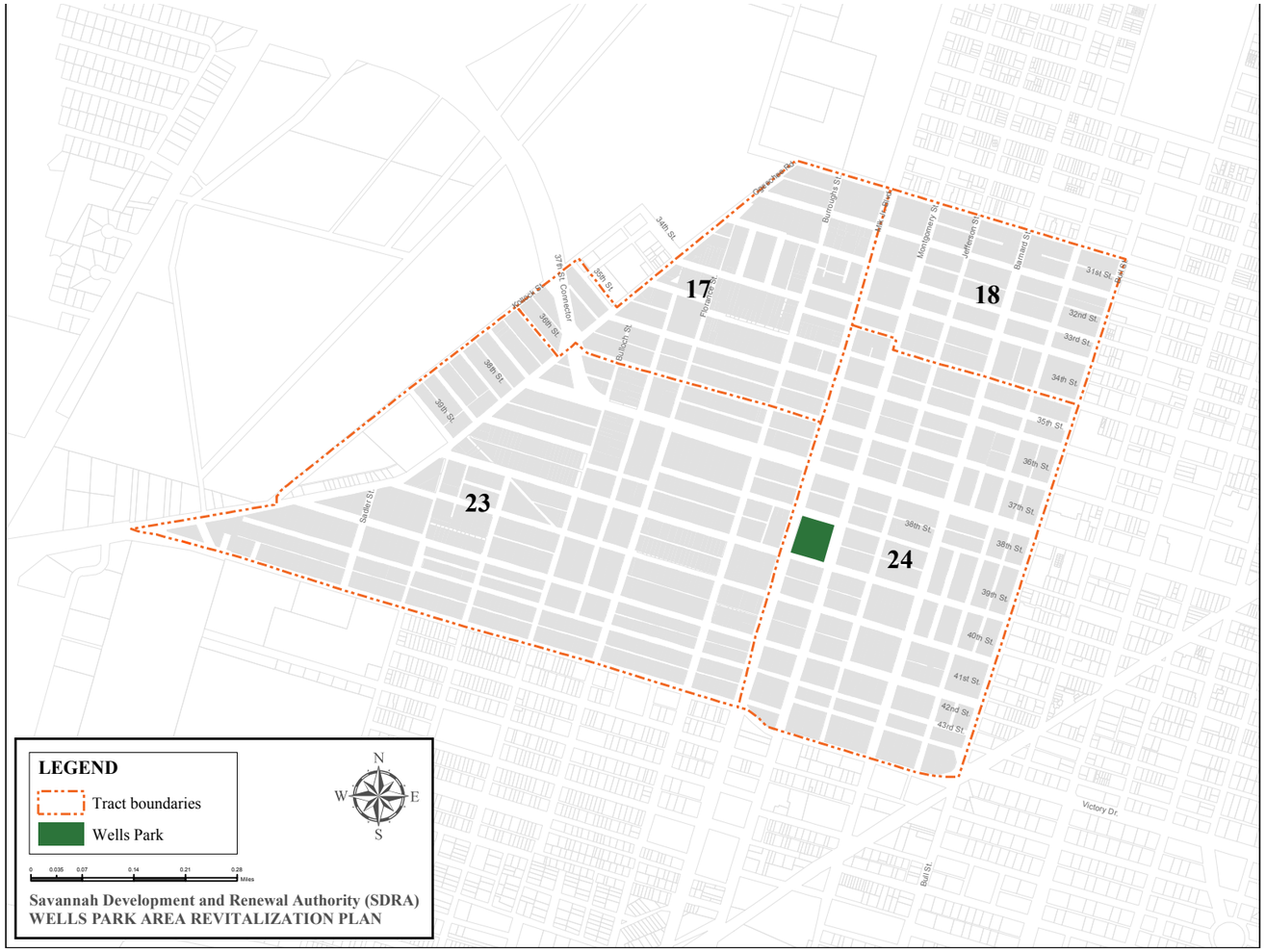
Active & Passive Space

NEIGHBORHOOD & COMMUNITY DATA

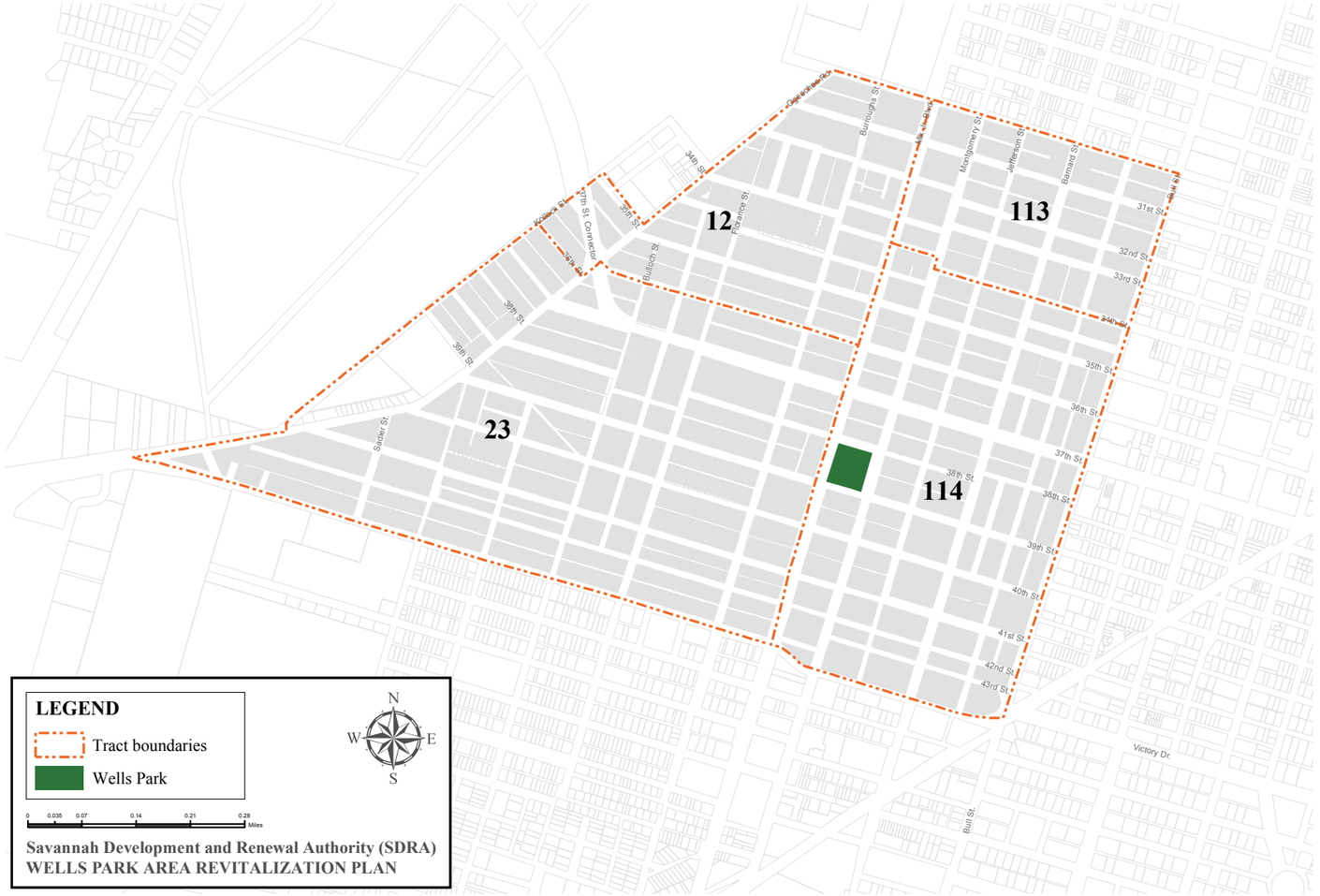
Neighborhood & Community Data

1960-1980 CENSUS TRACTS

The demographics of the users of Wells Park may be determined by reviewing available census data for the tracts encompassing the Cuyler-Brownsville and Metropolitan neighborhoods. As shown right, the boundaries of these tracts have shifted slightly in the past. Nonetheless, the information provided by these censuses regarding housing, population, and income provide insight into the community and its needs.

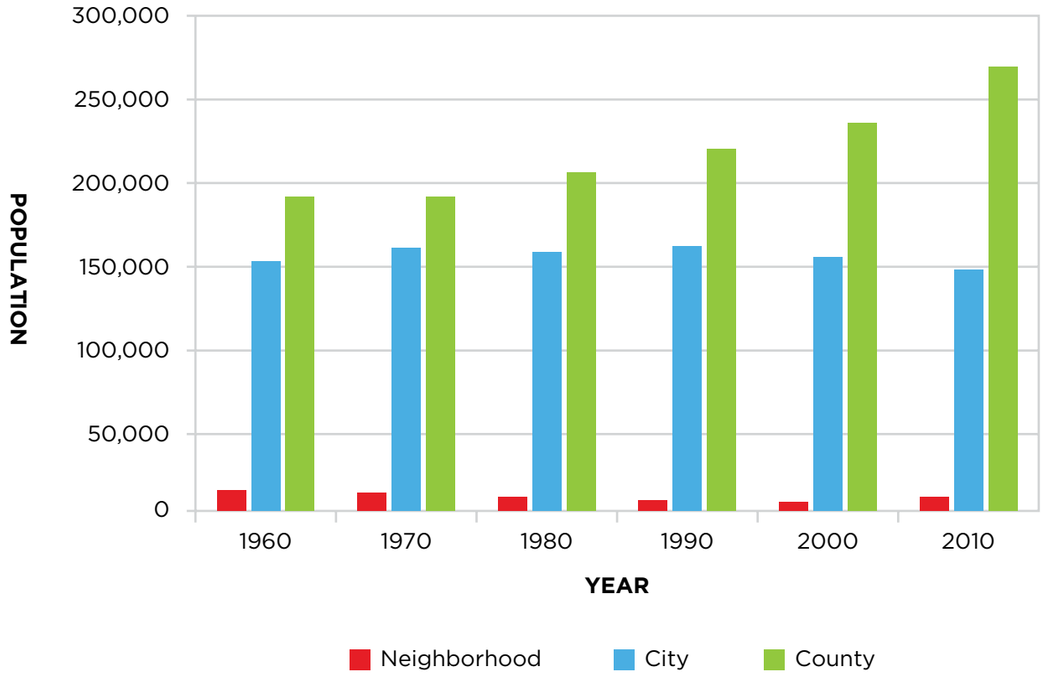


1990-2010 CENSUS TRACTS

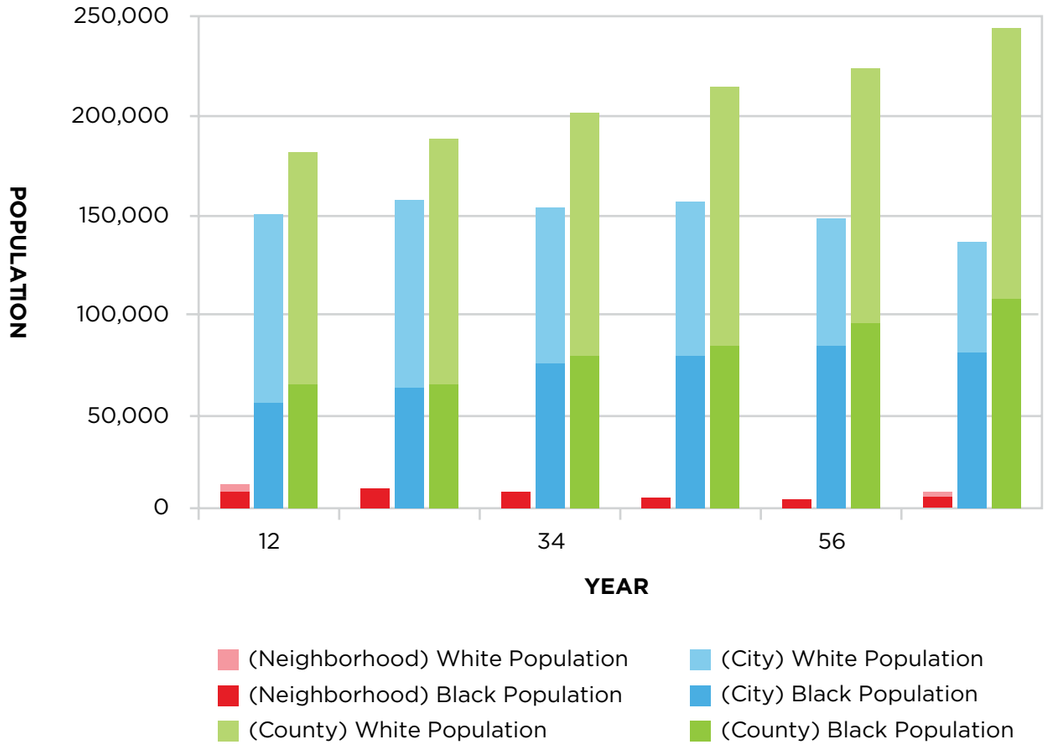


POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

TOTAL POPULATION

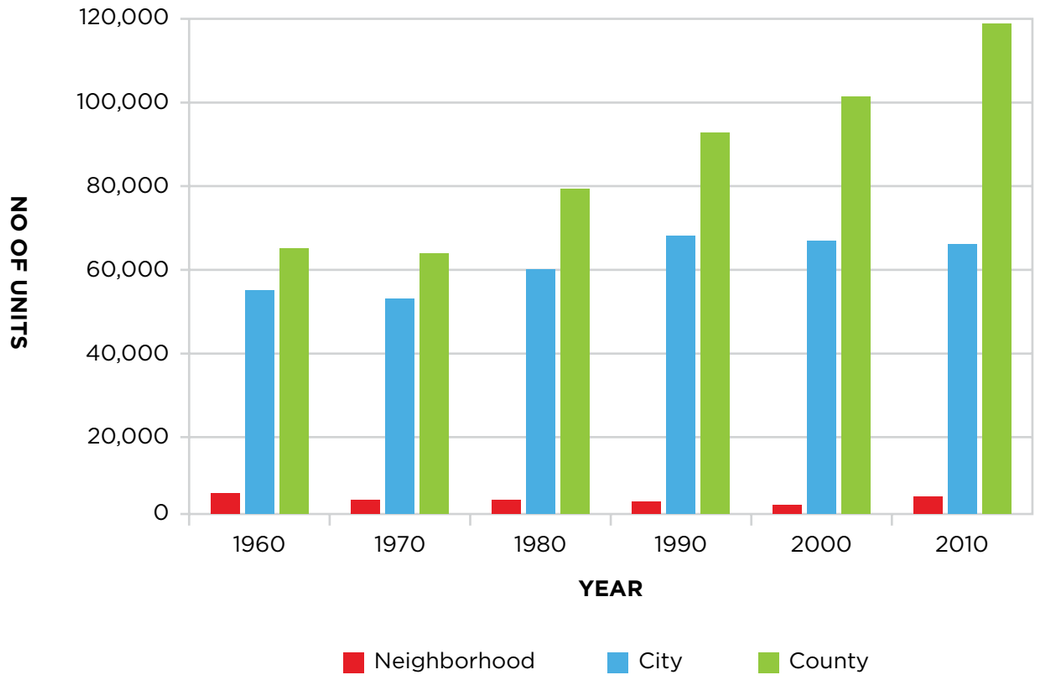


POPULATION BY RACE

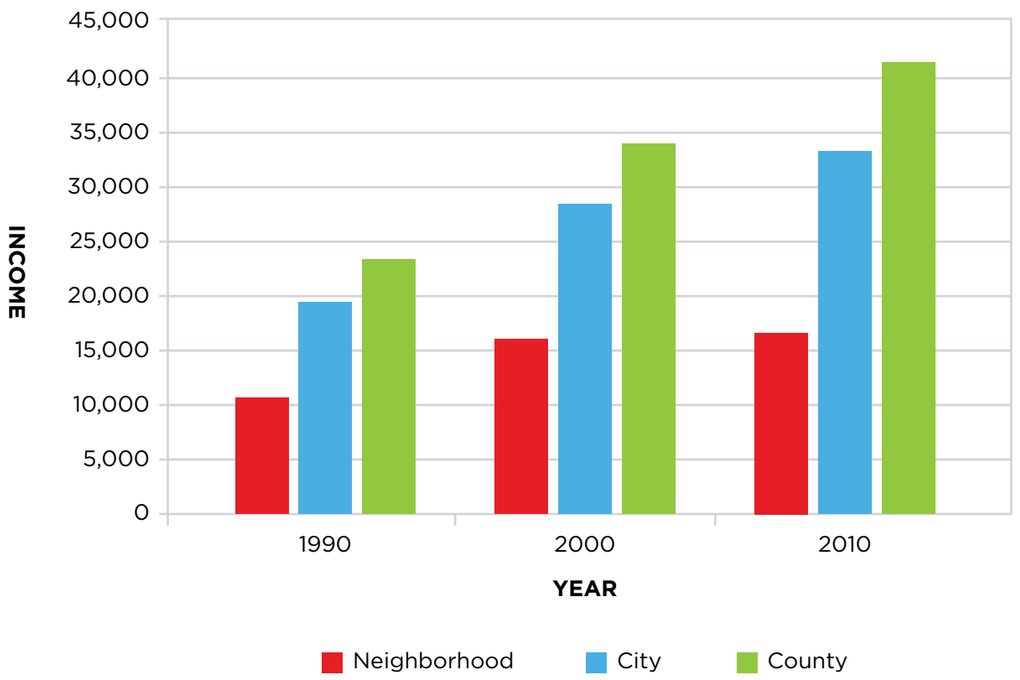


POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

HOUSING UNITS



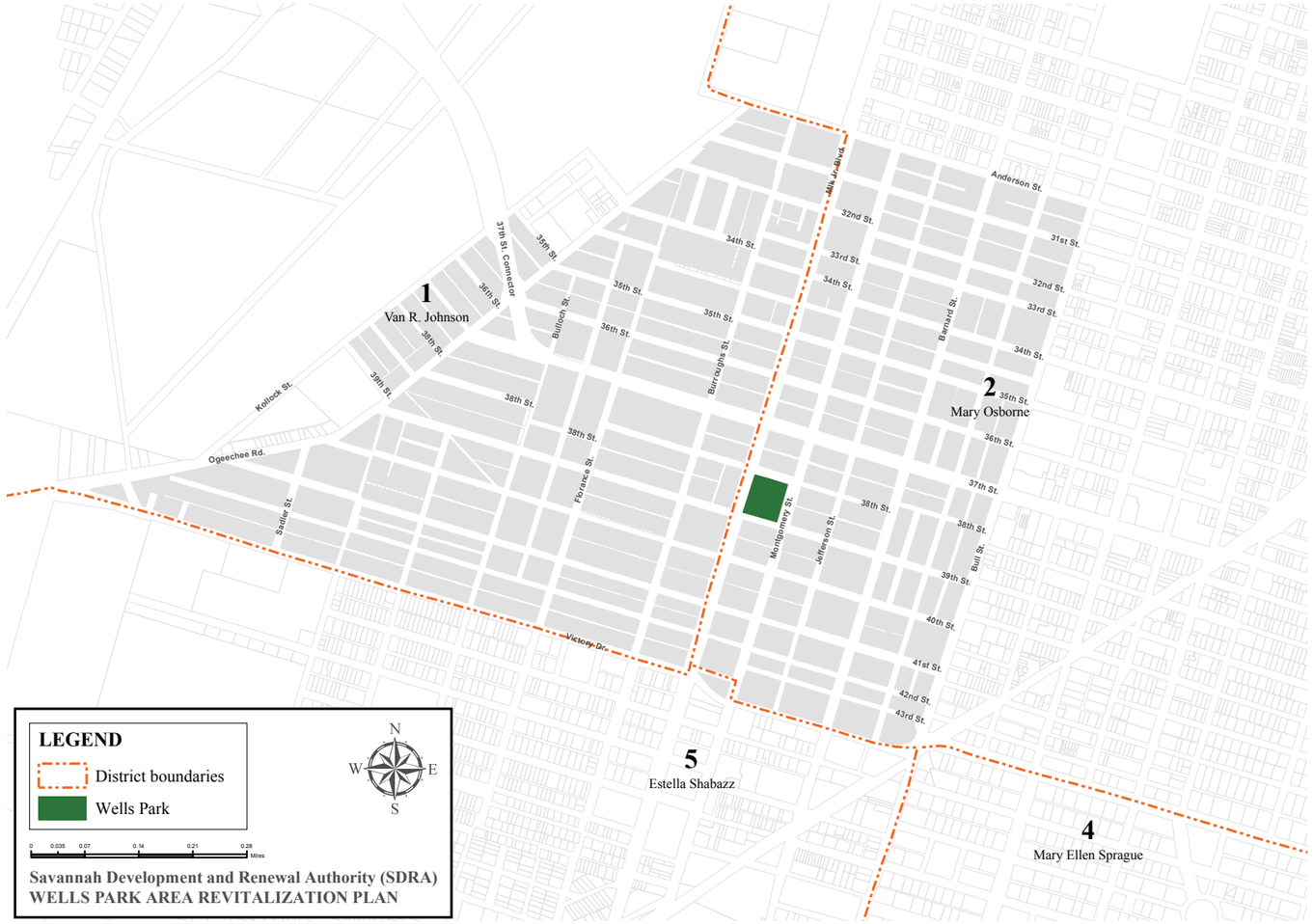
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



NEIGHBORHOODS

2011-2015 ALDERMANIC DISTRICTS

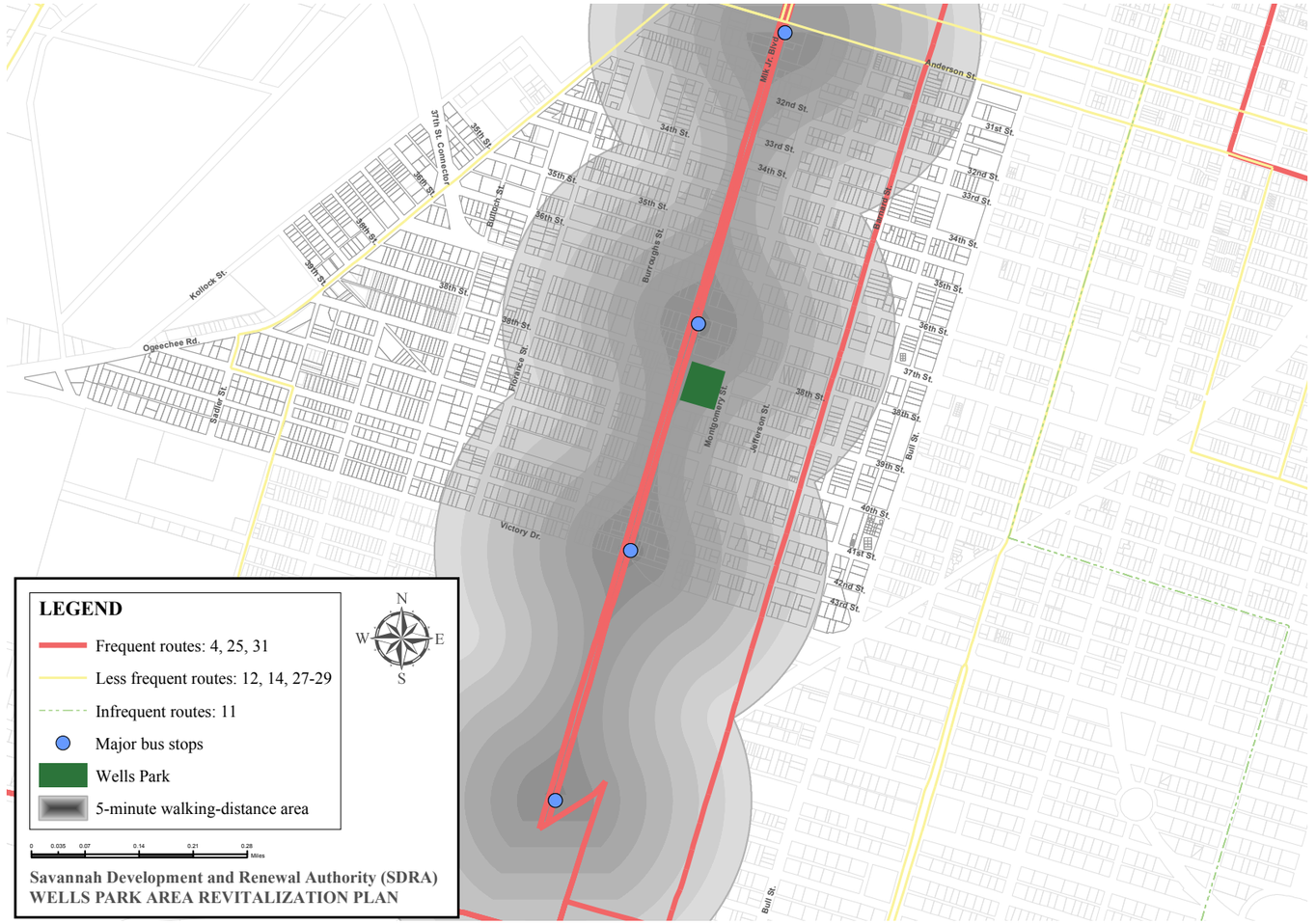
CURRENT ALDERMANIC DISTRICTS



LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS

BUS ROUTES

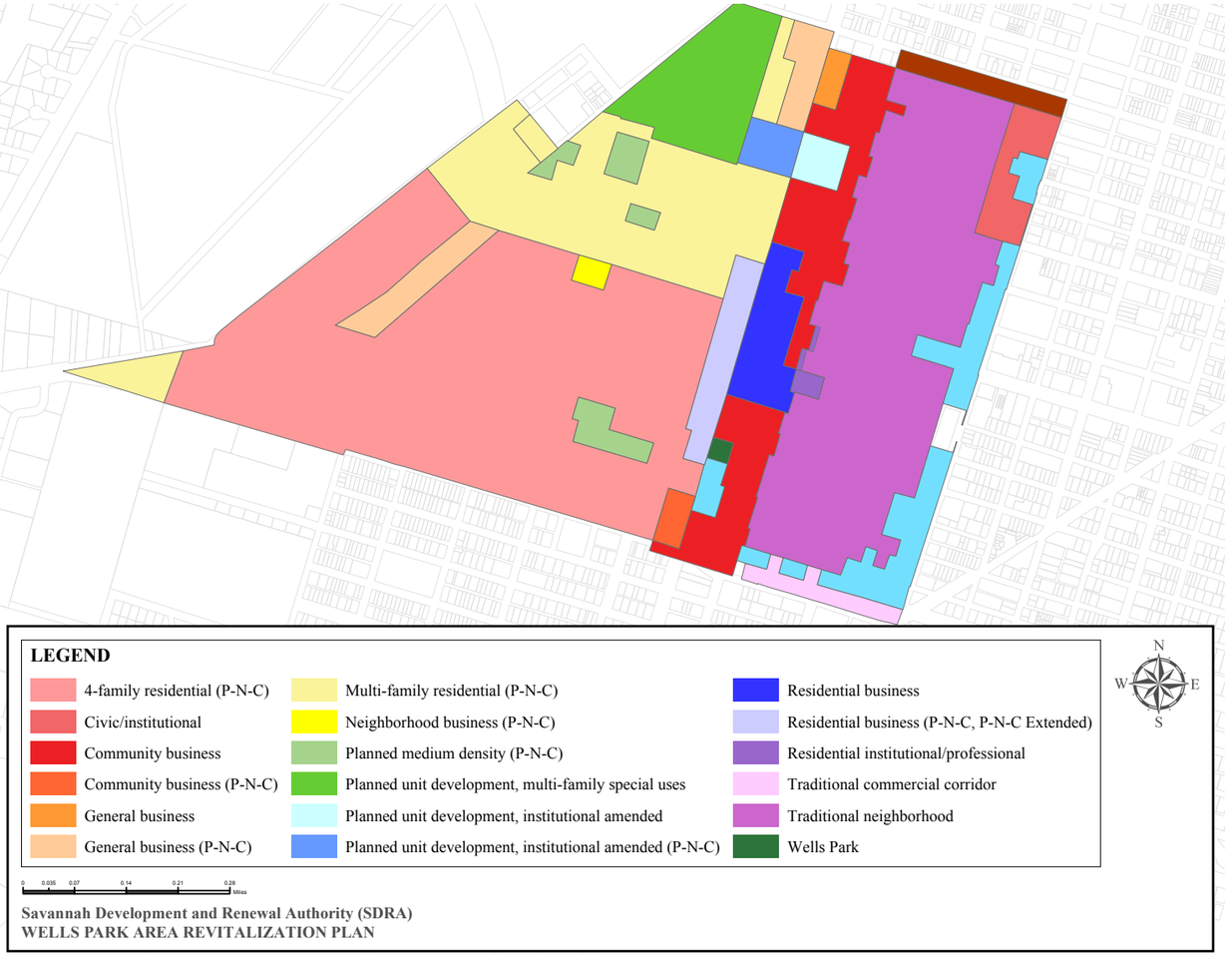

LEGEND
Frequent routes: 4, 25, 31
Less frequent routes: 12, 14, 27-29
Infrequent routes: 11
Major bus stops
Wells Park
5-minute walking-distance area
N
W
E
S
0 0.035 0.07 0.14 0.21 0.28
Miles
Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (SDRA)
WELLS PARK AREA REVITALIZATION PLAN
MLK Jr. Blvd
Anderson St.
Ogeechee Rd.
Victory Dr.
Kollock St.
Bull St.
Burroughs St.
Jefferson St.
Montgomery St.
Price St.
Stiles St.
Barnard St.
37th St. Connector
31st St.
32nd St.
33rd St.
34th St.
35th St.
36th St.
37th St.
38th St.
39th St.
40th St.
41st St.
42nd St.
43rd St.

BICYCLE ROUTES

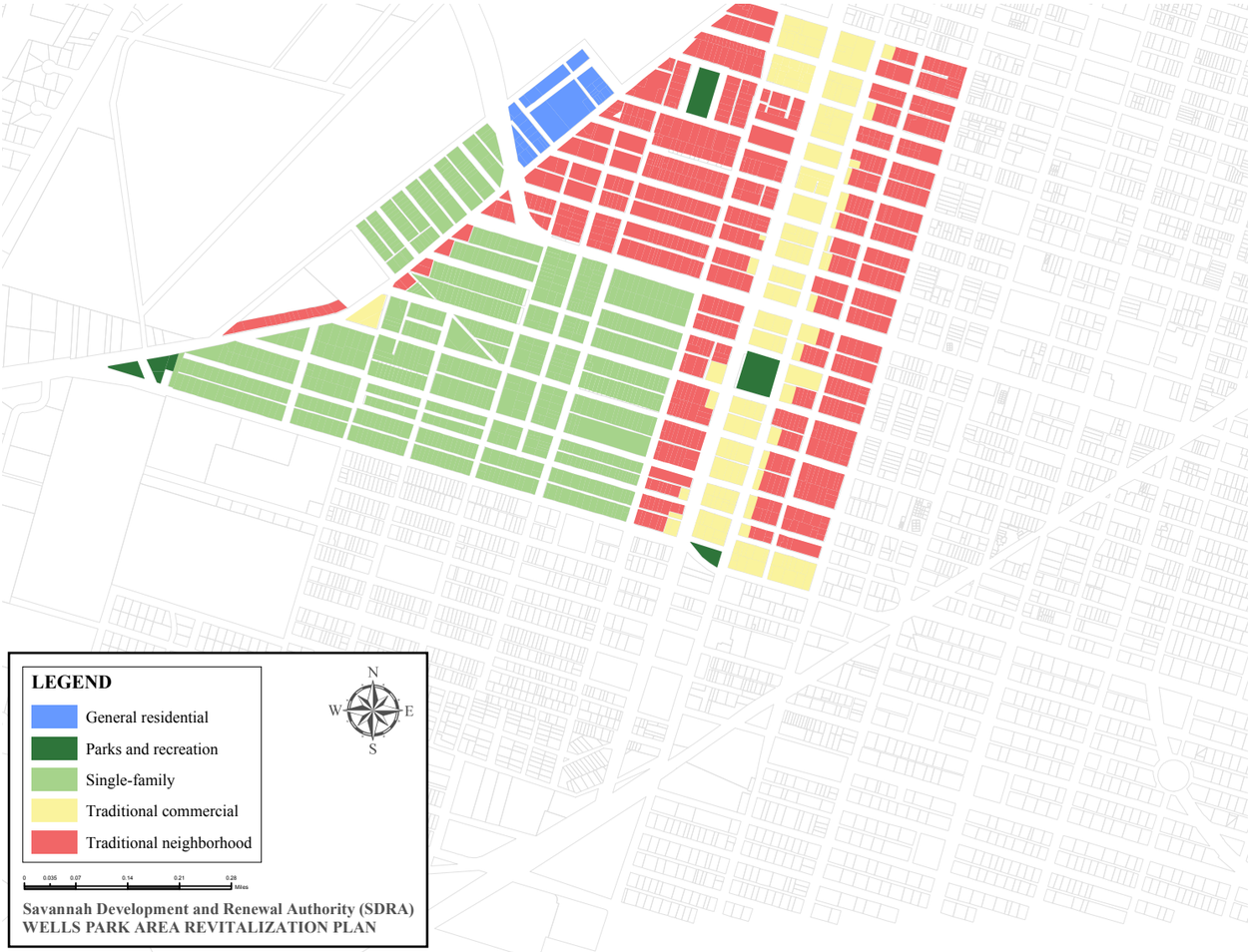
TRAFFIC COUNTS

PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY GRADES

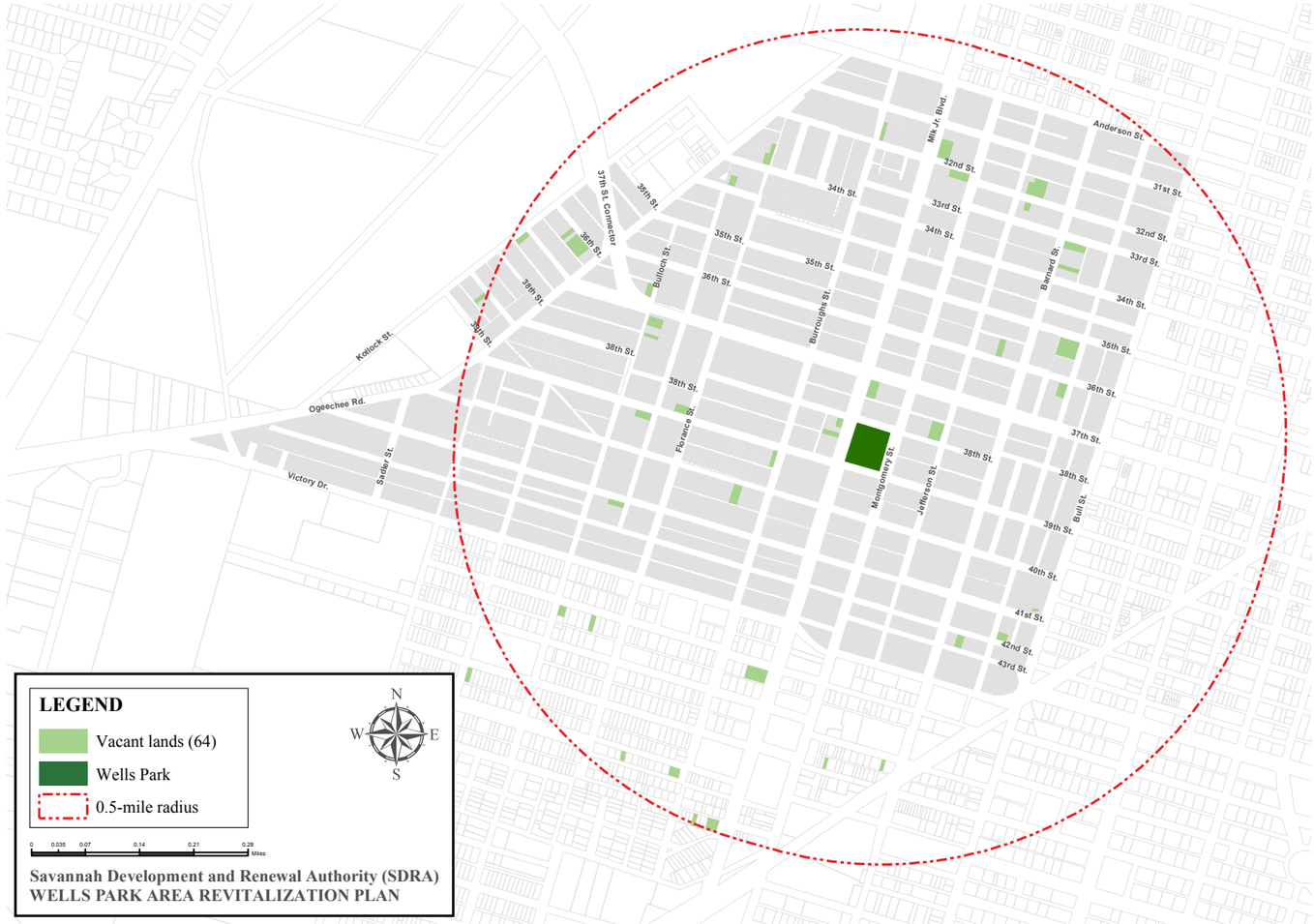
CURRENT ZONING



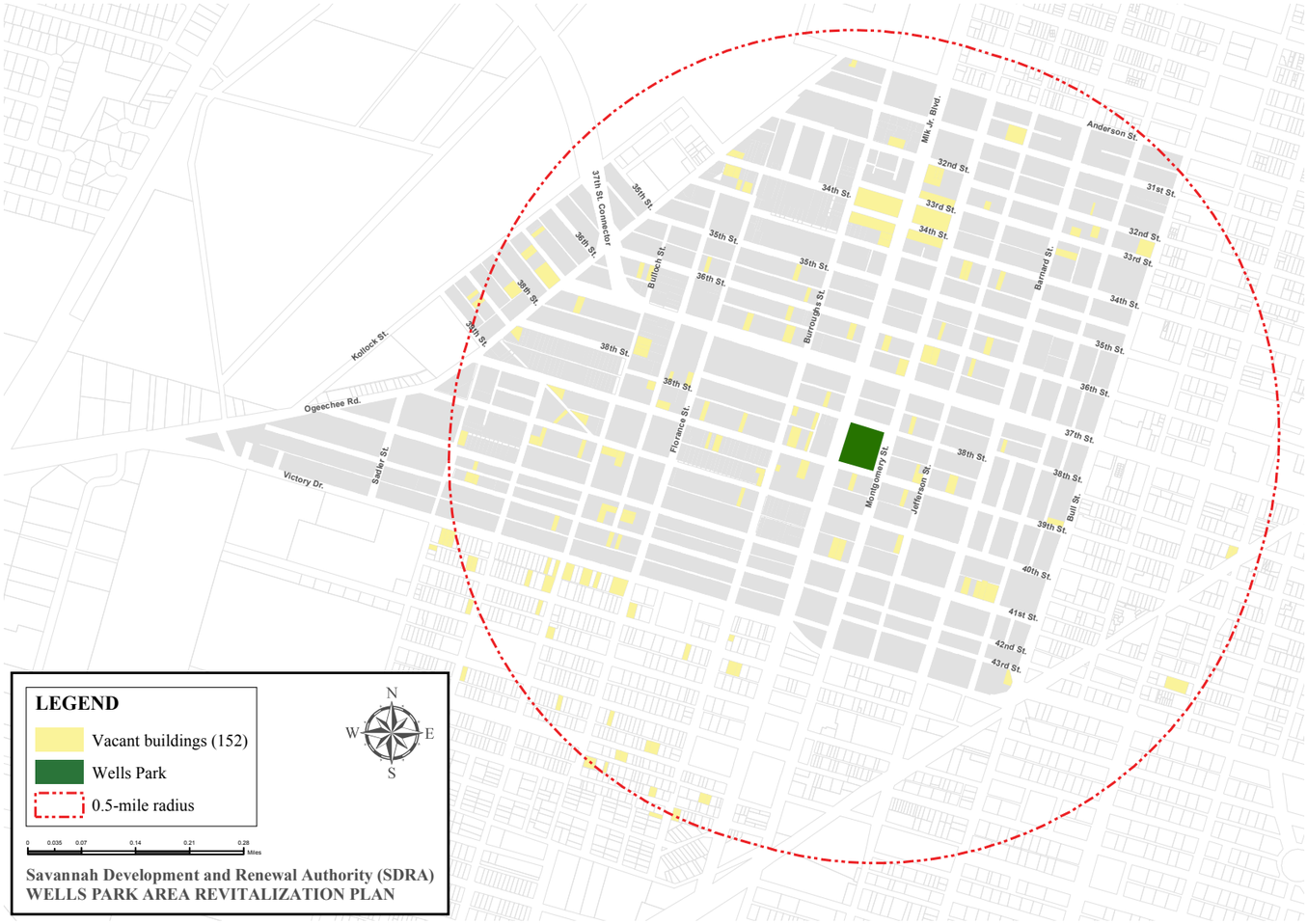
PROPOSED ZONING



VACANT LANDS

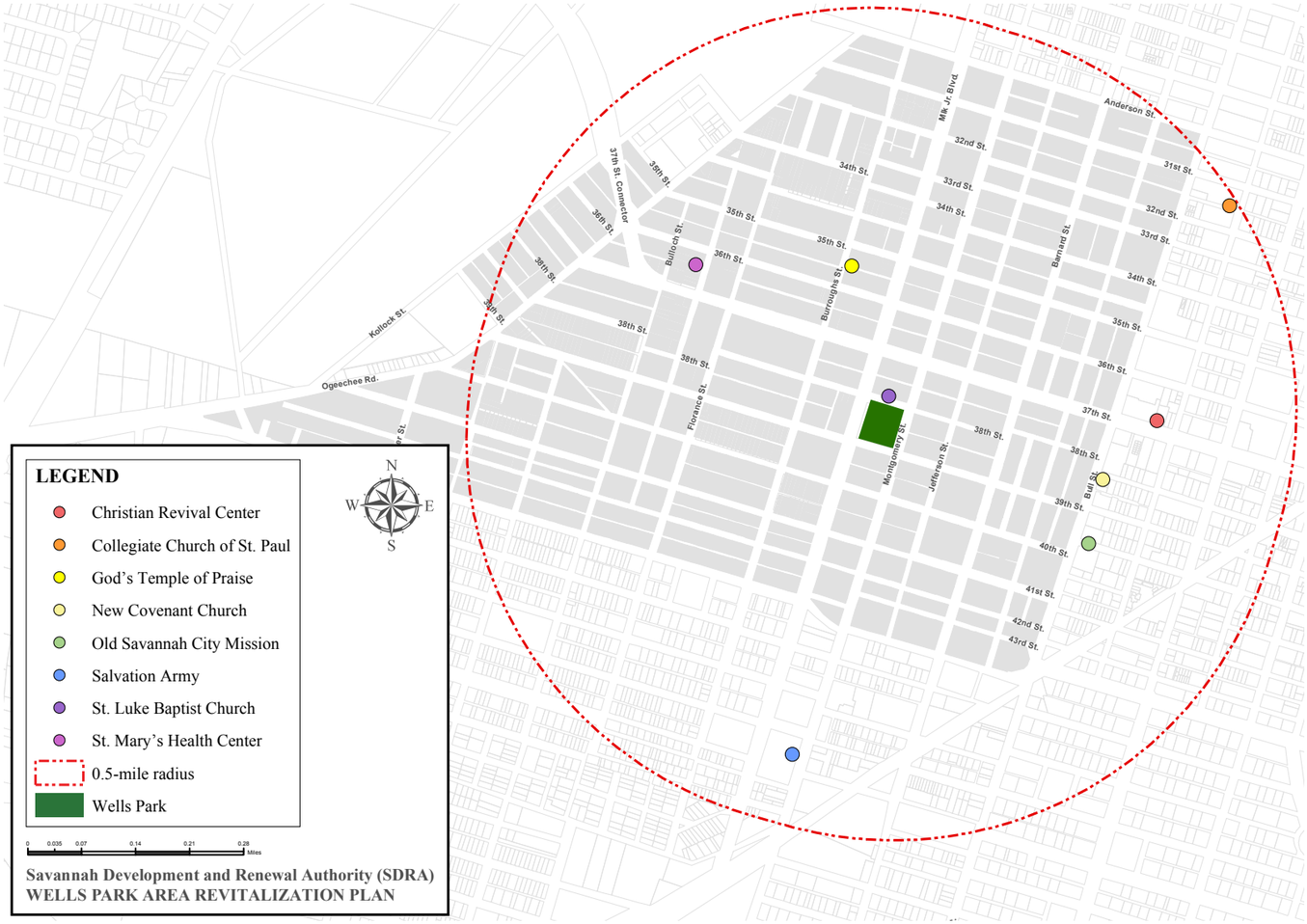


VACANT BUILDINGS



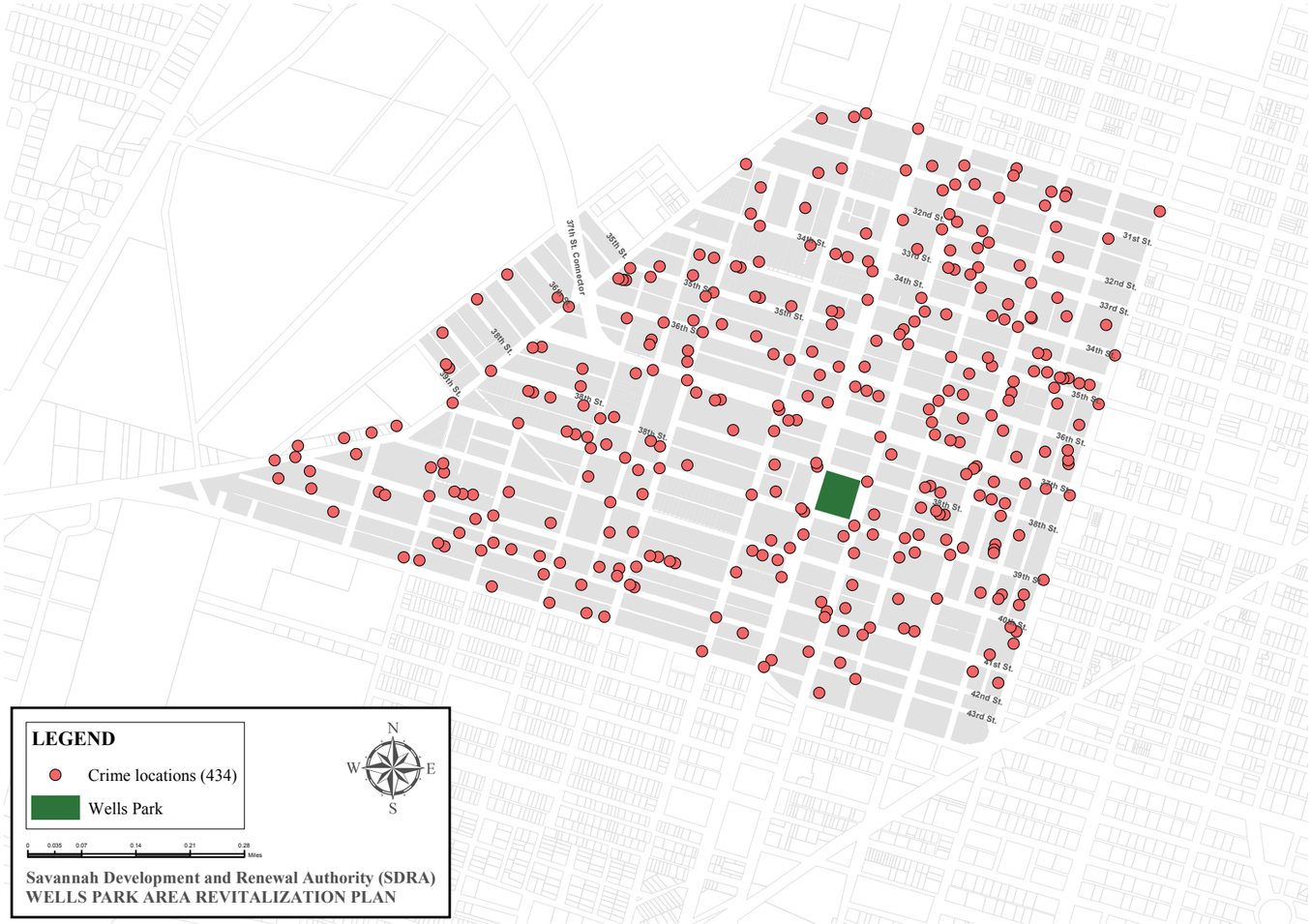
CHURCH OWNERSHIP & PUBLIC USE

SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS



Neighborhood & Community Data

CRIME (2014)



PROPOSALS

Proposals

WELLS PARK STREETSCAPE VIEWS

View North at 38th Street

Proposals

WELLS PARK STREETSCAPE VIEWS

View South at 39th Street

Proposals

WELLS PARK STREETSCAPE VIEWS

View East at Montgomery Street

Proposals

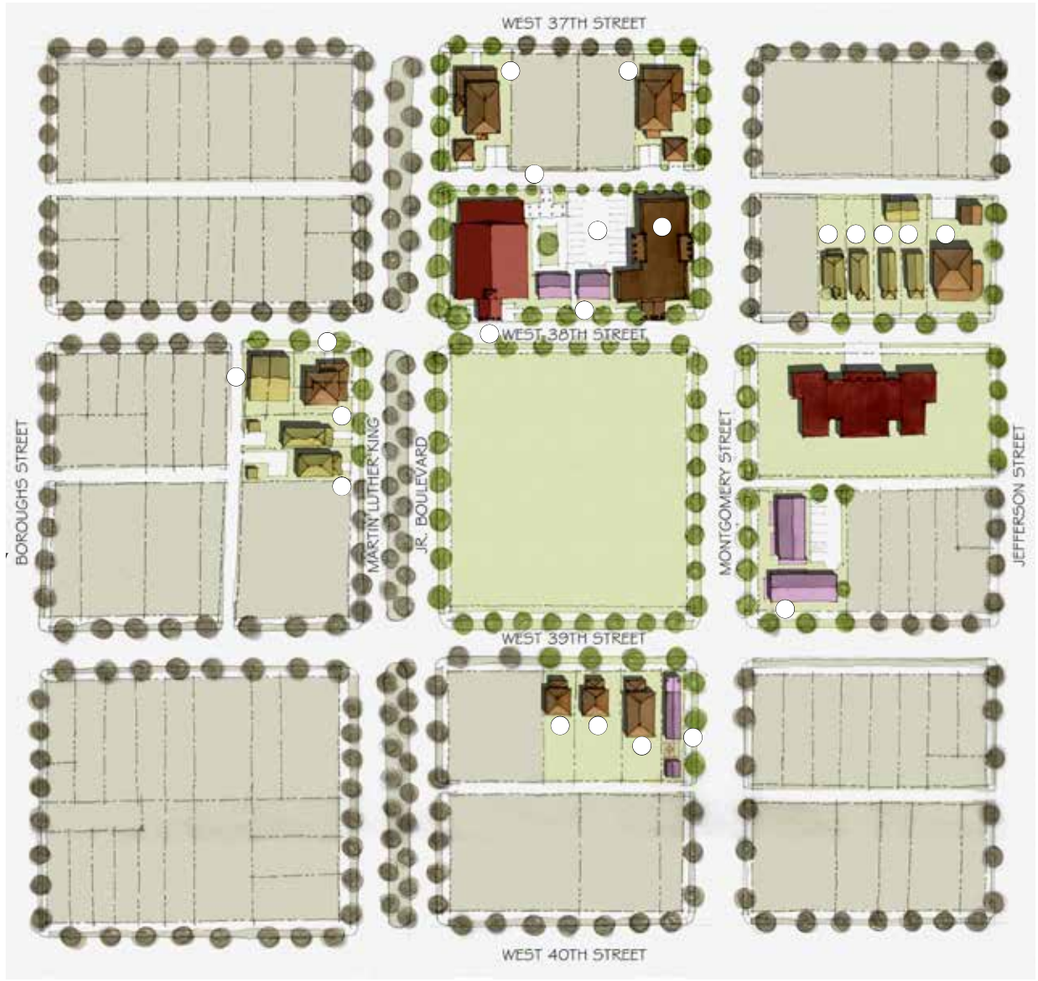
WELLS PARK STREETSCAPE VIEWS

View West at Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard

Proposals

WELLS PARK AREA MASTER PLAN

1. St. Luke's Baptist Church: Add new portico over sidewalk. New paint & exterior lighting make the church a visually bright symbol for the neighborhood.
2. St. Luke Parking Lot: Reconfigure parking and breezeway to provide new prayer garden, handicapped parking and rear access into church.
3. St. Luke Cottages: New small buildings to provide rental income, expansion space and block view of parking lot. Could be built as two small units with studio apartment above or as a larger single building.
4. St. Luke Apartment Building: New 8-12 unit apartment building of 2 or 3 stories. Could provide rental income or even church0controlled senior housing/assisted living.
5. St. Luke Lane: Clean up lane including new Sunday-only parking and trees.
6. Apartments: New small apartment building with 4-6 units. Build to be compatible with the larger historic houses along 37th St. May have new carriage house units also.
7. Single Family Infill: New single family or duplex infill unit(s). May have new carriage hose unit(s) also.
8. Single-Family Renovation: Renovate, restore or re-use existing historic building stock.
9. Mixed-Use Building: New small-scale corner mixed-use building. Small retail space apartment above and carriage house unit.
10. Mixed-Use Buildings: New three-story mixed-use buildings. Ground level commercial with apartments above. Units shown with a forecourt and some off-street parking.
11. Row Houses: Duplex: New 2-Unit Building.



PARK IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT A

Enhance existing park uses

1. Provide more separation of adult and children's facilities
   - Re-purpose and relocate shelter away from play areas
   - Provide separate seating areas and water fountains for adult and children's areas
   - Offer more adult games in the basketball court area

2. Improve public safety in the area
   - Place shelter in an open location close to the street
   - Limb up oak trees to a minimum of 8 ft off the ground
   - Remove all large shrubs and replace with low shrubs and ground cover to enhance visibility from the street
   - Extend new fence along 39th Street to provide a safety barrier between the street and the playground
   - Place bollards and/or gates at all pedestrian entrances to control vehicle entry into the park
   - Relocate playground access to paths inside the fence
   - Design new fence to allow greater visibility into the park
   - Construct a speed table on MLK Blvd. to slow traffic and create a pedestrian-friendly zone for residents
   - Upgrade existing pedestrian lighting to LED to improve visibility and reduce operating costs

3. Make the park inviting, useful, and connected to the area
   - Create crosswalks at park corners to match existing on MLK Blvd.
   - Replace chain-link fence with colorful fence to serve as a peacemaking element
   - Create enlarged pedestrian entrances at park corners and connect with crosswalks
   - Create an open lawn area to accommodate cultural events and large gatherings
   - Add and enhance existing side entrances to the park
   - Raise covered shelter and relocate to a permanent, central location in the lawn area to support events

PARK IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT B

Simplify and refine park programs

1. Provide more separation of adult and children's facilities
   - Re-purpose and relocate shelter away from play areas
   - Provide separate seating areas and water fountains for adult and children's areas
   - Add adult game tables/seating to west side of the park
   - Remove basketball facilities from the park

2. Improve public safety in the area
   - Place shelter in an open location close to the street
   - Limb up oak trees to a minimum of 8 ft off the ground
   - Remove all large shrubs and replace with low shrubs and ground cover to enhance visibility from the street
   - Extend new fence along 39th Street to provide a safety barrier between the street and the playground
   - Place bollards and/or gates at all pedestrian entrances to control vehicle entry into the park
   - Relocate playground access to paths inside the fence
   - Design new fence to allow greater visibility into the park
   - Construct a speed table on MLK Blvd. to slow traffic and create a pedestrian-friendly zone for residents
   - Upgrade existing pedestrian lighting to LED to improve visibility and reduce operating costs

3. Make the park inviting, useful, and connected to the area
   - Create crosswalks at park corners to match existing on MLK Blvd.
   - Replace chain-link fence with colorful fence to serve as a peacemaking element
   - Create enlarged pedestrian entrances at park corners and connect with crosswalks
   - Create a larger open lawn area to accommodate cultural events and large gatherings
   - Add and enhance existing side entrances to the park
   - Raise covered shelter and relocate to a central location on the west edge of the lawn area to support events and to take advantage of the tree canopy there

PARK IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT B

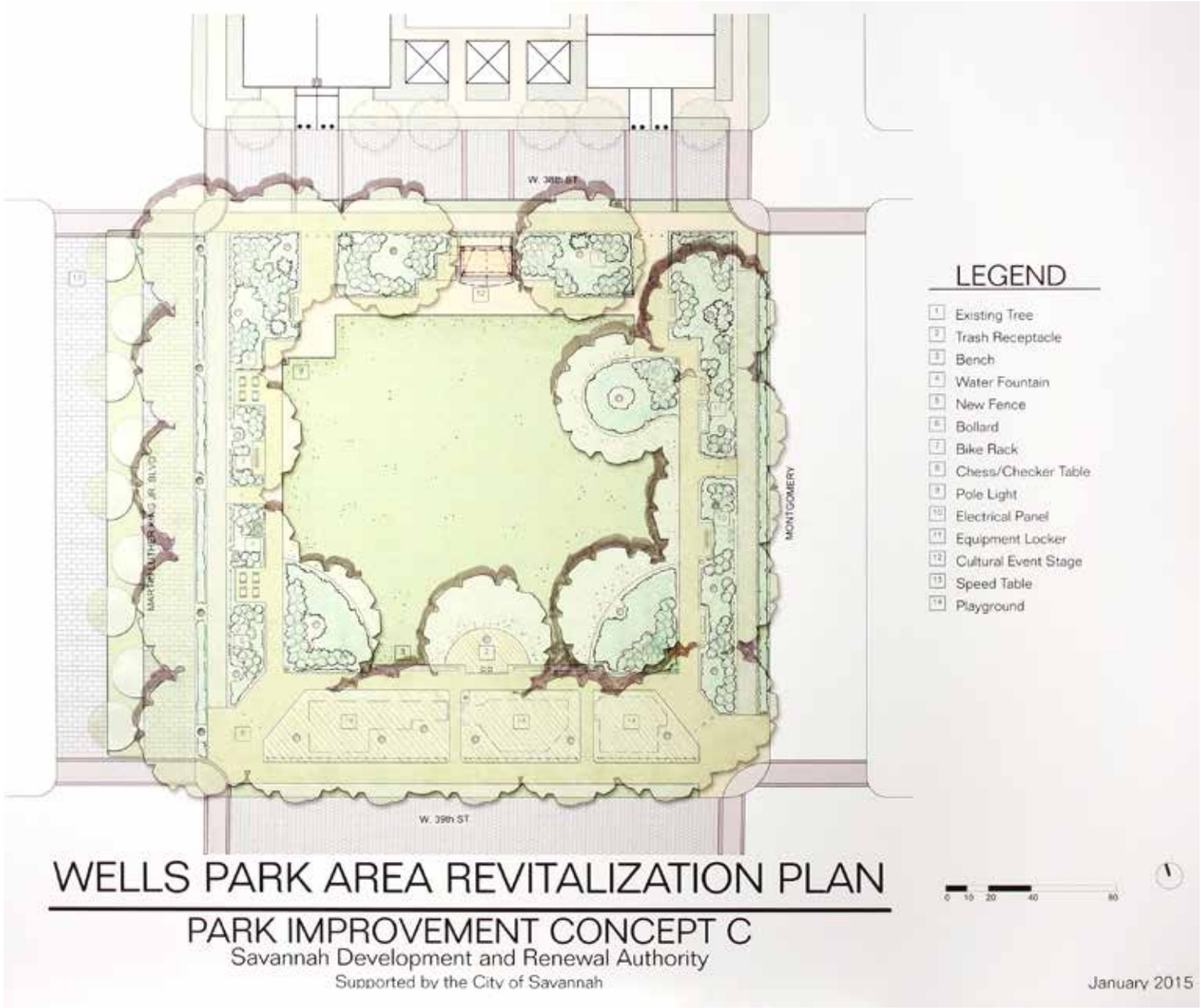
PARK IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT C

Create a local gathering place

1. Provide more separation of adult and children's facilities
   - Re-purpose and relocate shelter away from play areas
   - Provide separate seating areas and water fountains for adult and children's areas
   - Add adult game tables/seating to west side of the park
   - Remove basketball facilities from the park

2. Improve public safety in the area
   - Place shelter in an open location close to the street
   - Limb up oak trees to a minimum of 8 ft off the ground
   - Remove all large shrubs and replace with low shrubs and ground cover to enhance visibility from the street
   - Extend new fence along 39th Street to provide a safety barrier between the street and the playground
   - Place bollards and/or gates at all pedestrian entrances to control vehicle entry into the park
   - Relocate playground access to paths inside the fence
   - Design new fence to allow greater visibility into the park
   - Construct a speed table on MLK Blvd. to slow traffic and create a pedestrian-friendly zone for residents
   - Upgrade existing pedestrian lighting to LED to improve visibility and reduce operating costs
   - Change pavement on 38th and 39th streets to a colored and textured type to slow traffic

3. Make the park inviting, useful, and connected to the area
   - Create crosswalks at park corners to match existing on MLK Blvd.
   - Replace chain-link fence with colorful fence to serve as a peacemaking element
   - Create enlarged pedestrian entrances at park corners and connect with crosswalks and pathways inside the fence. Match north entrances to neighboring parcels
   - Create a larger open lawn area to accommodate cultural events and large gatherings
   - Add and enhance existing side entrances to the park
   - Raise covered shelter and relocate to a permanent, central location in the lawn area to support events
   - Reconfigure play areas to maximize open lawn area and preserve all existing love oak trees



PARK IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT C

WELLS PARK STRATEGIC PLANNING PHASES

PHASE 1

- Add more entries and bollards
- Redevelop landscaping
- Construct new fence
- Remove shelter
- Create improved signage
- Paint playground equipment
- Organize a park dedication event

6 MONTHS

PHASE 2

- Add speed table and crosswalks
- Remove basketball court
- Construct new stage
- Upgrade lighting to LED
- Add more cultural events
- Add bike racks, CAT bike station, and park furniture
- Redevelop one parcel facing the park
- Create weekly events through partnerships with St. Luke, SCAD, the City of Savannah, and neighborhood organizations

YEAR 2

PHASE 3

- Redevelop all parcels into mixed-use buildings

YEAR 5

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT