

**BELFAST CITY COUNCIL
REPORT TO CITIZENS OF BELFAST
FUTURE LAND USE PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS
AMENDMENT TO BELFAST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
OCTOBER 27, 2009**

The Belfast City Council, at its meetings of October 13 and October 27, 2009, adopted this Future Land Use Plan as an amendment to the Belfast Comprehensive Plan. The Council, in reaching its decision, conducted a series of public workshops and public hearings in 2009 on this Plan, and carefully considered all public comment that was presented. The Council also reviewed, discussed and considered the draft of this Plan that was prepared and recommended in March 2009 by the City's Comprehensive Planning Committee. The Council believes that this Plan provides City residents and Committees clear direction regarding how land use should occur in Belfast in the next 10 years.

This Future Land Use Plan replaces Chapter 12, Goals, Policies and Implementation Strategies, Section G. Orderly Growth and Development, of the Comprehensive Plan that was initially adopted by the Council in 1995, and all subsequent amendments to Section G. that the Council adopted between 1997 and 2008. Ultimately, this Future Land Use Plan will be incorporated into the new Comprehensive Plan which the City Comprehensive Planning Committee is now working to complete. It is noted that communities routinely update their Plan's about every ten years. Further, the new Plan is intended to address recently adopted amendments to the State of Maine Growth Management Law, and the regulations that State agencies use to implement this Law. This Law establishes the basis for municipal Comprehensive Plans in Maine.

The preparation and adoption of the Future Land Use section of a Comprehensive Plan is a major undertaking for any community. This information/document serves as the underpinning for the laws – zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance, site plan ordinance and similar provisions – that the City adopts to regulate land use. The Future Land Use section is a Policy document that provides guidance to the Council, Planning Board and Belfast citizens regarding how land use should occur throughout the community. It addresses questions such as; Where should growth be encouraged or discouraged? And, what types of development should occur in each area? The intent is to manage growth in the best interests of the community and its citizenry. Ultimately, the City will use the Policy direction provided in this Future Land Use section to prepare updated Ordinances. Ordinances are the specific laws that regulate land use.

The Belfast Mayor and City Council thank all residents who participated in the public process and the Comprehensive Planning Committee for their work in preparing a draft Plan.

Walter Ash, Mayor
Marina DeLune, Councilor, Ward 1
Roger Lee, Councilor, Ward 2
Catherine Heberer, Councilor, Ward 3
Janet Anderson, Councilor, Ward 4
Lewis Baker, Councilor, Ward 5

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC PROCESS ASSOCIATED WITH PREPARING THIS FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

The preparation of a Future Land Use Plan and Comprehensive Plan was a major undertaking. In Belfast, this task mostly was charged to the Comprehensive Planning Committee, a 7 member volunteer Committee appointed by the City Council. Most staff support to the Committee was provided by the Department of Planning & Community Development.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee conducted considerable research and background work in preparing the recommendations in this Future Land Use Plan, discussed and debated the recommendations which ultimately did and did not make it into this Plan, and also provided several major opportunities for obtaining public comment.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee delivered its Final Report to the City Council in late March 2009. The City Council, beginning in June 2009 reviewed the Plan, conducted public hearings, and made amendments to the Plan presented by the Comprehensive Planning Committee. The Council ultimately adopted the Future Land Us Plan, including amendments that it chose to make, at its regular meetings of October 13 and 27, 2009. This document is the adopted Comprehensive Plan.

Following is an abbreviated timeline of major events that were involved in preparing this Plan. The focus is on events that occurred post 2008 which is when the Final Plan was hammered out and presented.

- 2003. Committee initiates process by conducting 13 public neighborhood meetings. Committee offered no specific proposals at this time and solicited comment regarding what residents liked and disliked about Belfast and where they lived in Belfast. Over 300 persons attended these meetings.
- 2004 – 2005. Committee formulated its initial recommendations for this Future Land Use Plan and conducted two public informational meetings in the spring of 2005 to solicit public comment. Committee also worked with Planning Board and Council in pursuing amendments to the Zoning and Shoreland Ordinance for the Working Waterfront Area, and in pursuing amendments to the Shoreland Ordinance to address concerns raised at the neighborhood meetings.
- 2006 – 2007. Committee refined its Future Land Use Plan recommendations. Committee fulfilled Council assignment to identify an area in which larger retail would be appropriate.
- 2008. Committee, which now consisted of many new members, re-examined and completed work on a revised Future Land Use Plan. Committee conducted 2 public informational meetings on the Plan in September – October 2008, and conducted an additional 2 public informational meetings in November 2008.

- 2009. Committee revises its Plan to address public comment received at the Fall 2008 public meetings. Committee delivers its Final Plan to the Council in March 2009.
- March – April, 2009. Committee meets with Council at 2 workshop meetings to discuss its Final Plan. Council accepts Committee work and Council commences its review of Plan.
- June – August, 2009. Council meets at 6 workshop meetings and 2 regular Council meetings to review Committee Plan and identifies recommended changes it wants to propose for public consideration.
- September 8 & 10, 2009. Council conducts 2 public hearings regarding the Future Land use Plan which includes its recommendations.
- September 17 & 22, 2009. Council, at 2 public meetings, reviews comments received at the September 2009 hearings and directs changes it wants to make to the Plan. This document reflects the changes made by the Council following the September hearings.
- October 13 & 27, 2009. The Council adopted most sections of the Plan at its meeting of October 13th and adopted several final amendments to the Plan at its meeting of October 27, 2009. The Plan presented in this document is the adopted Future Land Use Plan for the City of Belfast. This Plan is part of the City Comprehensive Plan, and this Future Land Use Plan replaces the previously adopted Future Land Use Plan of 1995 and 1997, as such had been amended between 1998 and 2008.

In addition, through-out this extensive planning process, all meetings of the Comprehensive Planning Committee were open to the public. Persons did make comment and proposals to the Committee which the Committee considered in preparing its recommended Plan. It also is noted that the composition of the Comprehensive Planning Committee changed over the years, and that as changes in Committee membership occurred, it often necessitated orienting new members to the body of work that had been prepared by past Committee members.

**HOW TO USE THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
IN THE FUTURE LAND USE PLAN
OF THE BELFAST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
ADOPTED FUTURE LAND USE PLAN – 10/27/09**

The Future Land Use Plan of the Belfast Comprehensive Plan offers recommendations regarding how land use should occur through-out the City, particularly for the next ten years. These recommendations are *'policy'* statements. These *'policy'* statements are intended to serve as the foundation for zoning and other land use regulations, *'laws'* identified in the City Code of Ordinances, that the City may adopt to implement the Plan's *'policy'* statements. That said, all should recognize that *'policy'* statements are not the *'law'* or the City Code. As such, while the *'policies'* identified in this Plan are often very descriptive, persons should expect that some of the specifics or details contained in the land use area descriptions **may change** as the City moves forward in implementing the Plan through the process of preparing Ordinance proposals and amendments, conducting public hearings on these amendments, and choosing to adopt or not adopt the proposals.

Continuing, the purpose of a Comprehensive Plan is to provide overall *'policy'* direction to the community and its elected and appointed officials regarding issues such as land use. The preparation and adoption of this Plan involved considerable work and multiple opportunities for obtaining public comment and involvement regarding proposals in the Plan; reference timeline for preparing Plan, pages 3-4. Now that the Council adopted the Future Land Use Plan on October 27, 2009, the City will embark on the second stage of the public process which is to prepare, discuss and adopt amendments or new provisions to the City Code of Ordinances (*'the laws'*) to implement *'policy'* identified in the Plan. Examples of the *'laws'* which may be subject to amendment are the City Zoning Ordinance, Site Plan Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance.

Further, the public process associated with the second stage, preparing Ordinance amendments, is quite extensive. There will be future public hearings associated with this work, and the process will provide multiple future opportunities for the public, the Planning Board, and the City Council to consider the desirability of adopting specific amendments; including amendments which may differ from some of specific *'policy'* details included in this Future Land Use Plan. Also, when the City pursues amendments to its *'laws'*, the City usually will target a limited area of the community at any single time, such as the downtown and waterfront area, rather than seeking public comment on all areas through-out the City at the same time as occurred through the Comprehensive Planning process. And, consistent with current City practice, the City will send notification to all affected property owners regarding the public hearings for any proposed amendments so persons are aware of their opportunity to come forward and to be heard. The City believes that the process to adopt the *'laws'* (Zoning Ordinances) for the key elements of this Future Land Use Plan could take 3 years; 2010 – 2012.

In short, the preparation and adoption of a Future Land Use Plan is an important and critical step. This step, however, does not represent the final public opportunity to consider how land use

should occur. It is recognized that there is flexibility regarding the specifics of this Plan that may be reconsidered when ‘laws’ are prepared, and it is anticipated that changes may occur.

Overall, future users of this document should consider the following when preparing Ordinances (‘laws’) to implement the ‘Policy’ direction provided in this Plan.

- 1) This Future Land Use Plan provides solid ‘policy’ direction regarding the main purposes of each of the identified 20 Land Use Areas, but it should be recognized that there is flexibility in preparing Ordinance language to implement this ‘policy’.
- 2) This flexibility would apply but is not necessarily limited to ‘policies’ such as the boundaries of proposed land use areas, the range of uses allowed, and recommended lot size, density and setback requirements. It will, however, be critical that the ‘laws’ that are adopted are **consistent and harmonious** with the main theme of each land use area. For example, the theme for the Residential 1 Area is --- “To retain and support traditional urban residential living patterns so that long established neighborhoods can prosper.” As such, it likely would be inconsistent for the City to allow retail or industrial uses in this Area. However, it likely would be consistent if the proposed minimum lot size was adjusted from the recommendation of 10,000 square feet to 7,500 square feet; both of which are small sized lots in Belfast.
- 3) The public process associated with preparing these ‘policy’ recommendations was quite extensive, however, it is recognized that additional public comment will be forthcoming as Ordinances (‘laws’) are prepared. It is critical that the City be open to considering future public comment in helping to shape any final proposal. Also, events may unfold which may cause the City to re-think proposals in this Plan. Thus, it is understood that this ongoing public process and debate may result in changes being made to the specific recommendations in this Plan.

OVERALL GROWTH MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS PROPOSED MAJOR LAND USE AREAS

Often, persons who review a Comprehensive Plan want to know specifically how recommendations in a Plan may affect their property, their home or their business. For example, can I or my neighbor construct a duplex on a property, and if so, how large does the lot need to be and what are the setbacks which the structure must satisfy. Perhaps the most frequent question --- will there be any change compared to what I can do today? While all such questions and concerns are appropriate, the desire to examine or search for specifics can obscure one of the real purposes of a Plan --- which is to identify overall areas in which Growth should be encouraged, and areas in which attracting Growth is not the prime goal.

This map lays out 7 overall central themes for future land use in Belfast. These broad themes also represent a compilation of the more specific land use area descriptions described in this report for the individual land use areas. The 7 key themes and areas are as follows:

Waterfront & Downtown Area. The City's downtown and working waterfront area differ from any other area in Belfast. It is important that the City recognize their importance and unique qualities and adopt land use policies and direct capital expenditures to ensure the health of this area. This is a growth area. (shown in purple on the map)

Existing Residential. Much of this area is located within the by-pass and is shaped by long established residential neighborhoods. It also includes lands along the coast near the Northport line and along the River near Robbins Road and Patterson Hill. While additional residential development can occur in these areas, the amount of growth which likely can be accommodated is less than in the area identified as Encouraging New Residential. This is a growth area, but mostly because of existing development patterns. (shown in light yellow on the map)

Encourage New Residential Area. The Committee believes that this area presents real opportunities in which to encourage new or additional denser housing development. These areas often are located close to services, schools, shopping and major employers, and there is adequate land to encourage new housing without facilitating sprawl. This is a growth area. (shown in light orange on the map)

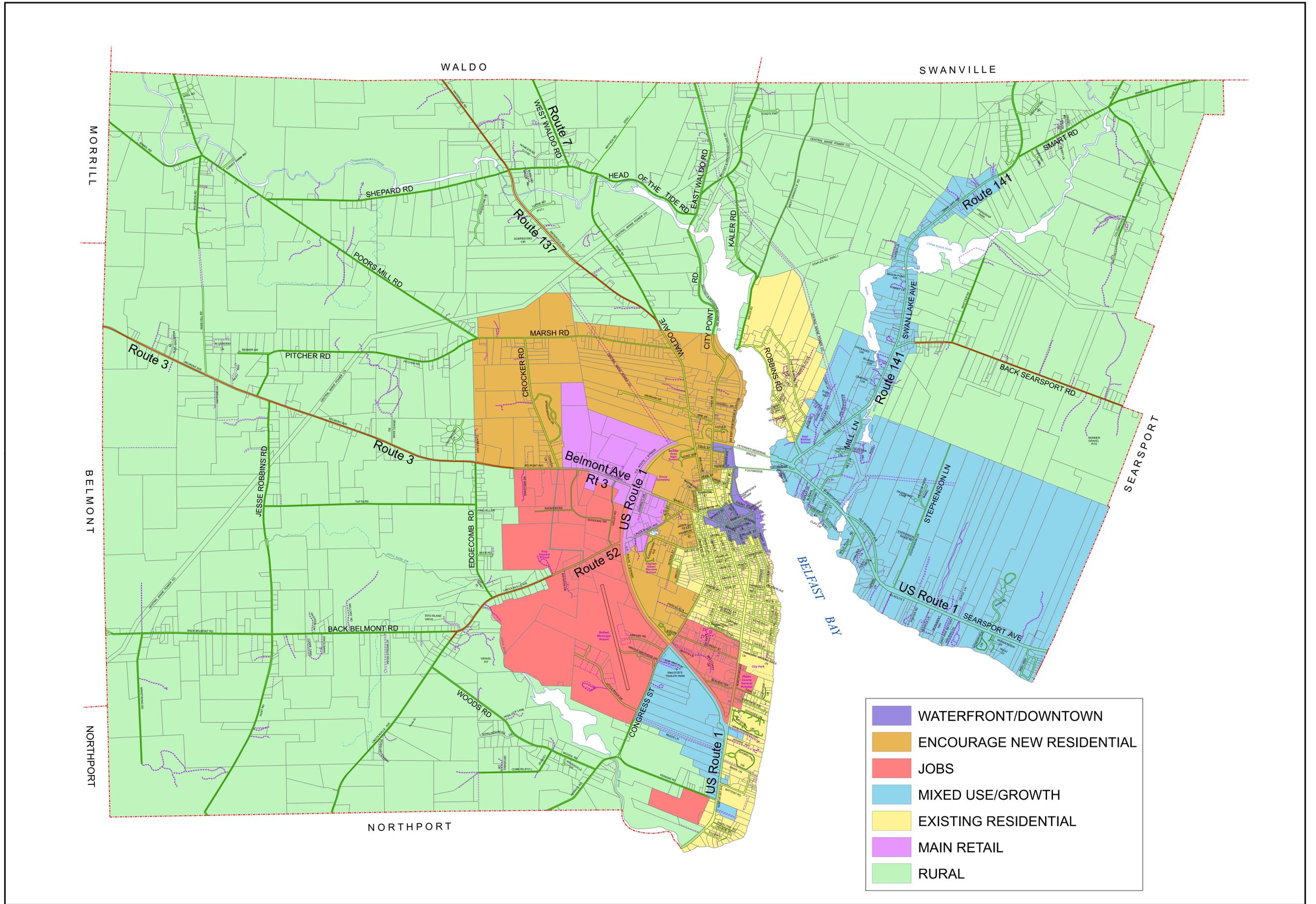
Mixed Use/Growth. Most of these areas now support a mix of development, including businesses that cater both to the tourism and local market, as well as housing. Public sewer and water usually is available, and often there is sufficient vacant or underdeveloped land to support future development. The areas are near major roads, usually Route 1. Allowing a mix of development can present challenges, but this approach reflects how owners have chosen to use their properties. This is a growth area. (shown in light blue on the map)

Jobs Area. This area now supports most of the larger employers in Belfast, including Waldo County General Hospital, Bank of America, Athena Health and the City Business Park and there is additional land to support future job creation development. The area is adjacent to the City's main road arteries, and often there is less likelihood of conflict between new intensive development and existing residential development. This is a growth area. (shown in burnt orange on the map)

Main Retail. This area near Route 3 supports most of the intense and larger scale retail development, including businesses which are nationally recognized, which now occurs in Belfast. It also is the area in which the City has chosen to seek development of a larger retail store that offers general merchandise. This is a growth area. (shown in pink on the map)

Rural Area. This area comprises greater than 50% of the land area in Belfast. While there are a significant number of single family homes in the area, most are located on larger lots and there is a significant amount of undeveloped land that is either forested or former farm fields. Many of the lots are greater than 50 acres in size. The City recognizes that development will occur in this area, but it is an area in which the City should not extend public sewer or allow significant levels or types of nonresidential development. This is a rural area. (shown in light green on the map)

PROPOSED MAJOR LAND USES



- WATERFRONT/DOWNTOWN
- ENCOURAGE NEW RESIDENTIAL
- JOBS
- MIXED USE/GROWTH
- EXISTING RESIDENTIAL
- MAIN RETAIL
- RURAL

OVERVIEW OF SPECIFIC/DETAILED LAND USE AREAS ADOPTED FUTURE LAND USE PLAN 10/27/09

The Future Land Use Plan identifies 20 proposed Land Use Areas for the City of Belfast. These detailed areas are intended to serve as the general boundaries for future zoning districts. Included in this Introduction section are two maps that help to illustrate the overall Future Land Use Plan.

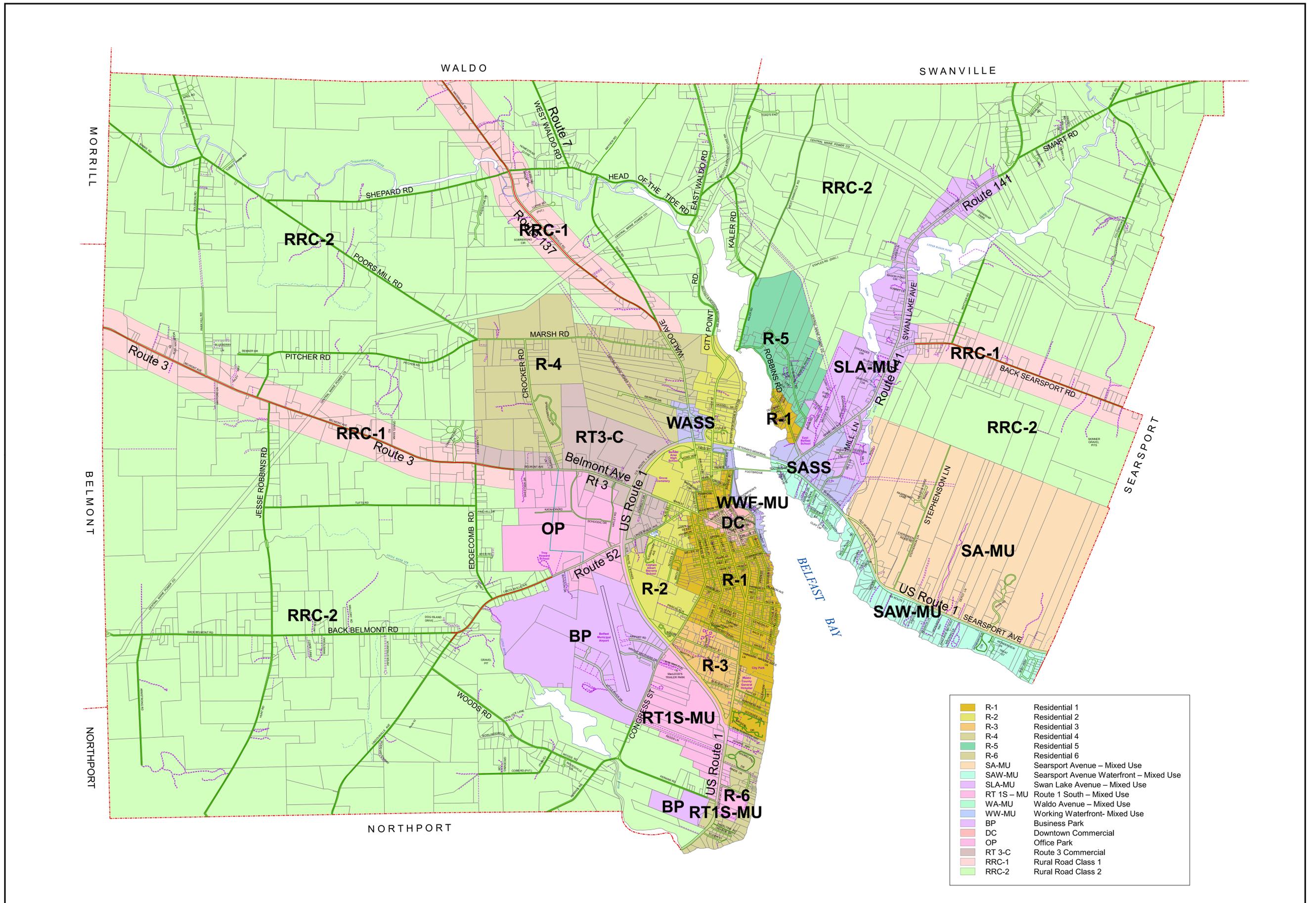
The first map identifies the boundaries of the more detailed land use areas. The second map compares the boundaries of these proposed land use areas to current zoning. The City recognizes that it may be difficult to identify detailed information, such as a specific boundary, on this scale of map. The remainder of this document reflects the City's approach to providing greater detail.

This Plan groups the City into four overall areas: 1) Inside the Route One By-Pass Area, 2) Near the Route One By-Pass Area, 3) the East Belfast Area, and 4) the Outside Rural Area. Continuing, these overall areas are then broken down into more detailed areas. For example, there are 5 land use areas within the Inside the By-Pass Area, 7 land use areas in the Near By-Pass area, 6 land use areas on the Eastside and 2 types of Rural Road Class areas in the Outside Rural area.

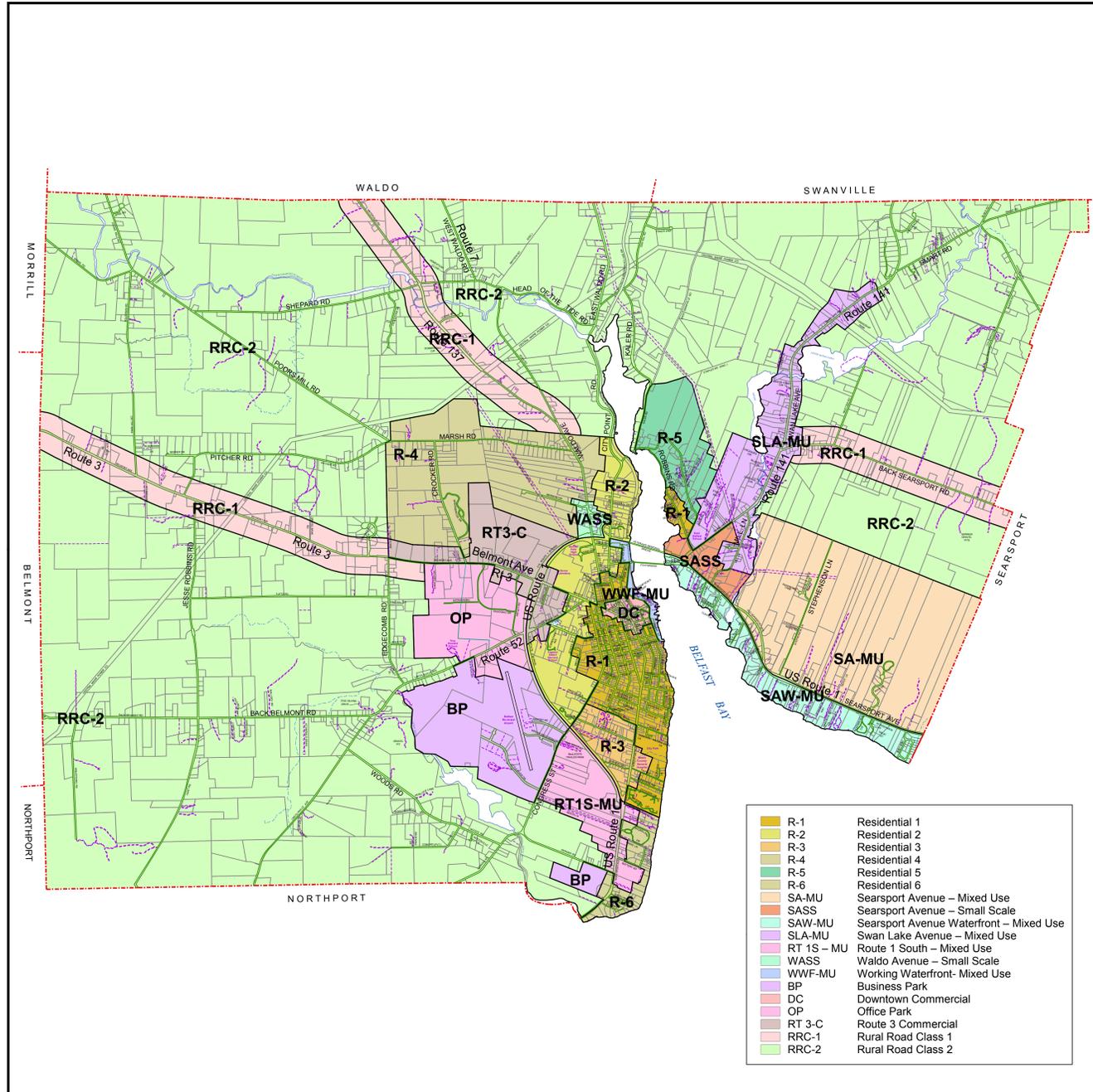
As you read through this Plan, you will find an 11" x 17" map at the beginning of each overall area, such as Inside the By-Pass, and you will then find an 8.5" x 11" map that identifies the boundaries of a more detailed area. This detailed map accompanies the narrative description that is provided for the respective Land Use Area. All of these maps compare the boundaries of the proposed land use areas to the boundaries of current zoning districts.

As noted elsewhere in this Plan, these boundaries are intended to be overall guidelines. It is recognized that as specific Ordinances may be prepared to implement these policy recommendations, and as public comment is received during the accompanying future public hearing processes, that the specific boundaries of one or more of the detailed land use areas may change. It is noted that the number of proposed land use areas, the purpose of such, and the boundaries of such, were often the subject of discussion and public comment during the process of preparing this Future Land Use Plan and that some areas were the subject of frequent changes.

PROPOSED LAND USE AREAS



PROPOSED LAND USE AREAS



EXISTING ZONING

