

A large orange sun with a green leaf on top. Inside the sun are icons of a storefront, a multi-story building, a tree, and a house. The background is a repeating pattern of various building icons.

# Land Use

STUDY

Lake Wales, Florida

## EXISTING CONDITIONS & CONSIDERATIONS REPORT

DRAFT 2 – 10.18.2022





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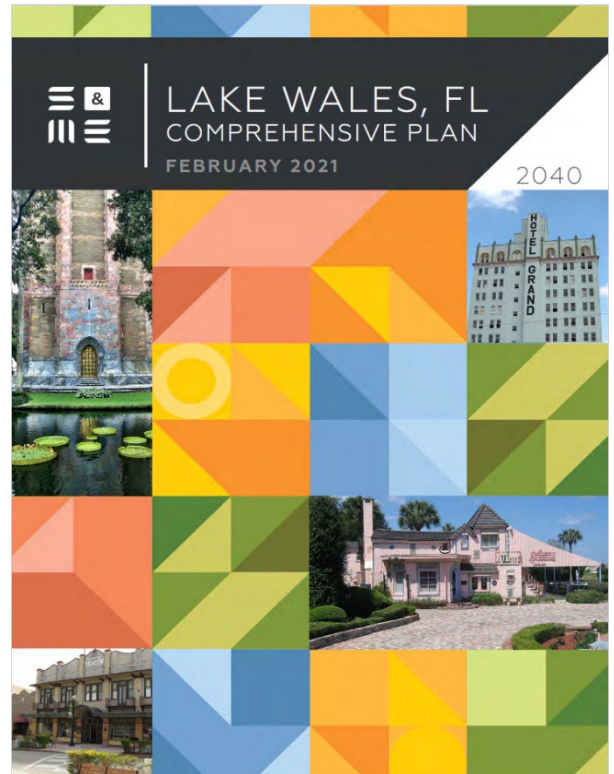
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## 1.0 Introduction

In 2021, the City of Lake Wales updated their comprehensive plan to establish achievable goals, objectives, and policies which could accommodate the City’s current and projected (2040) population in a manner consistent with its community’s long-term vision for growth. Since the Plan’s adoption, substantial growth has occurred within the unincorporated portion of the City’s Utility Service Area (USA), often resulting in higher demands on the City’s public facilities and services.

As a result, the City of Lake Wales is undergoing an extensive land use study within the unincorporated portions of its USA to better understand and plan for area’s future growth. The end result of this effort will be community-driven land use plan which establishes a clear vision for future growth within the Study Area.



## 2.0 Regional Context

The Study Area for this effort is located within the Lakeland-Winter Haven Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which mimics the Polk County boundary. The Study Area surrounds, adjacent to, or located near several other Polk County municipalities, including:

- Highland Park (located within the southern portion of the Study Area),
- Dundee and Winter Haven (which touch the Study Area’s northern boundaries), and
- Bartow, Eagle Lake, and Lake Hamilton (which are all located within a five-mile radius of the Study Area boundaries in varying directions).

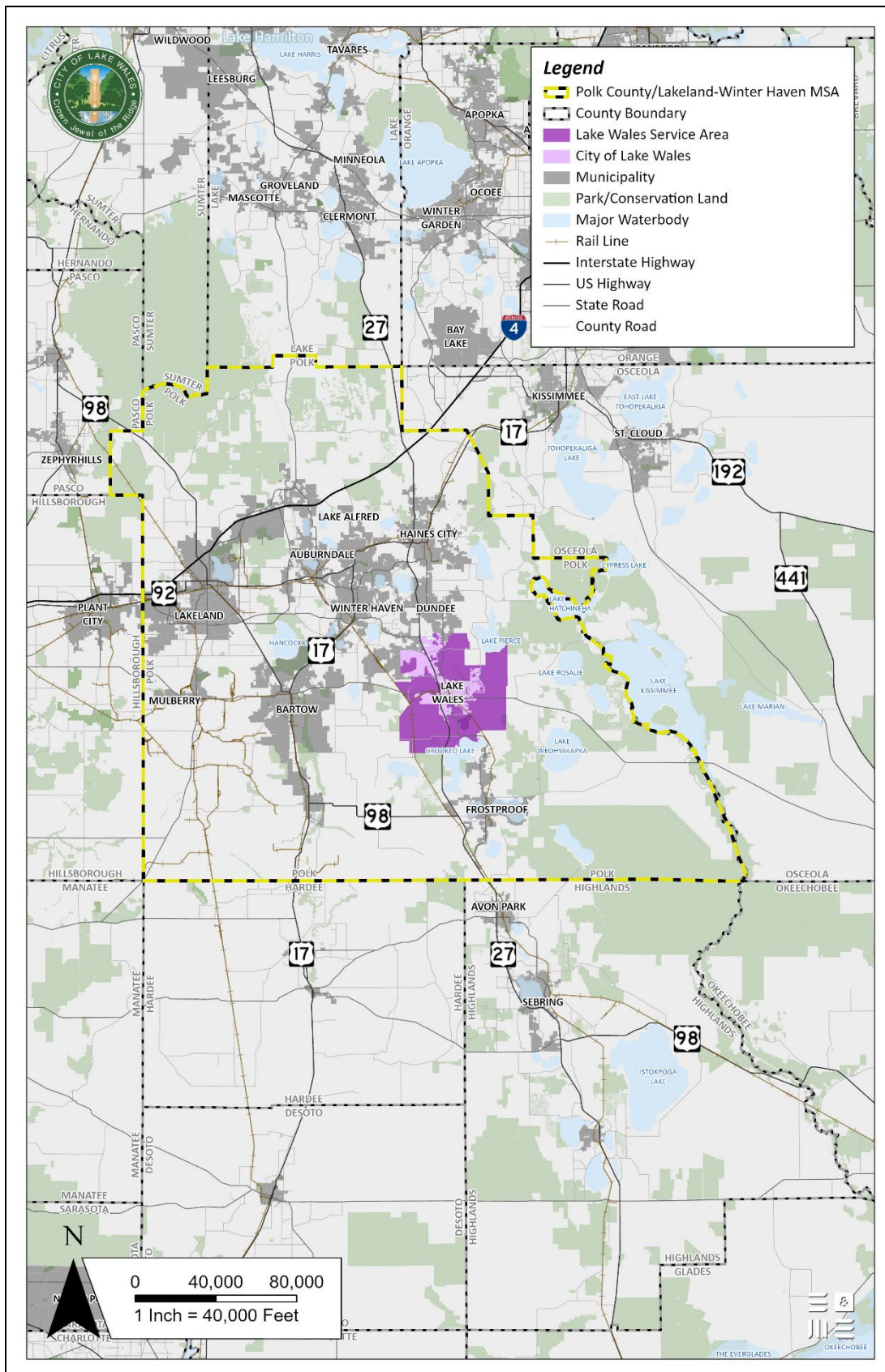
Like Lake Wales, many of these municipalities have seen substantial population growth occur within their respective jurisdictions within the last five years and are projecting to grow even more in the decade ahead. In fact, the Lakeland-Winter Haven MSA was among the fastest growing MSAs in the nation between 2020 and 2021. A map of the region has been provided in **Figure 1**.

## 3.0 Study Area Overview

The Study Area for this land use planning effort is limited to the unincorporated portions of the City’s current USA and is approximately 42,416 acres in size, which is over three times the size of the City of Lake Wales (±12,938 acres) today. The Study Area is generally bounded by Crooked Lake to the south, N Lake Wales Alturas Road and a CSX rail line to the west, the City of Winter Haven and the Town of Dundee to the north, and Mammoth Grove and Dude Ranch Roads to the east. This boundary is illustrated in **Figure 2**.



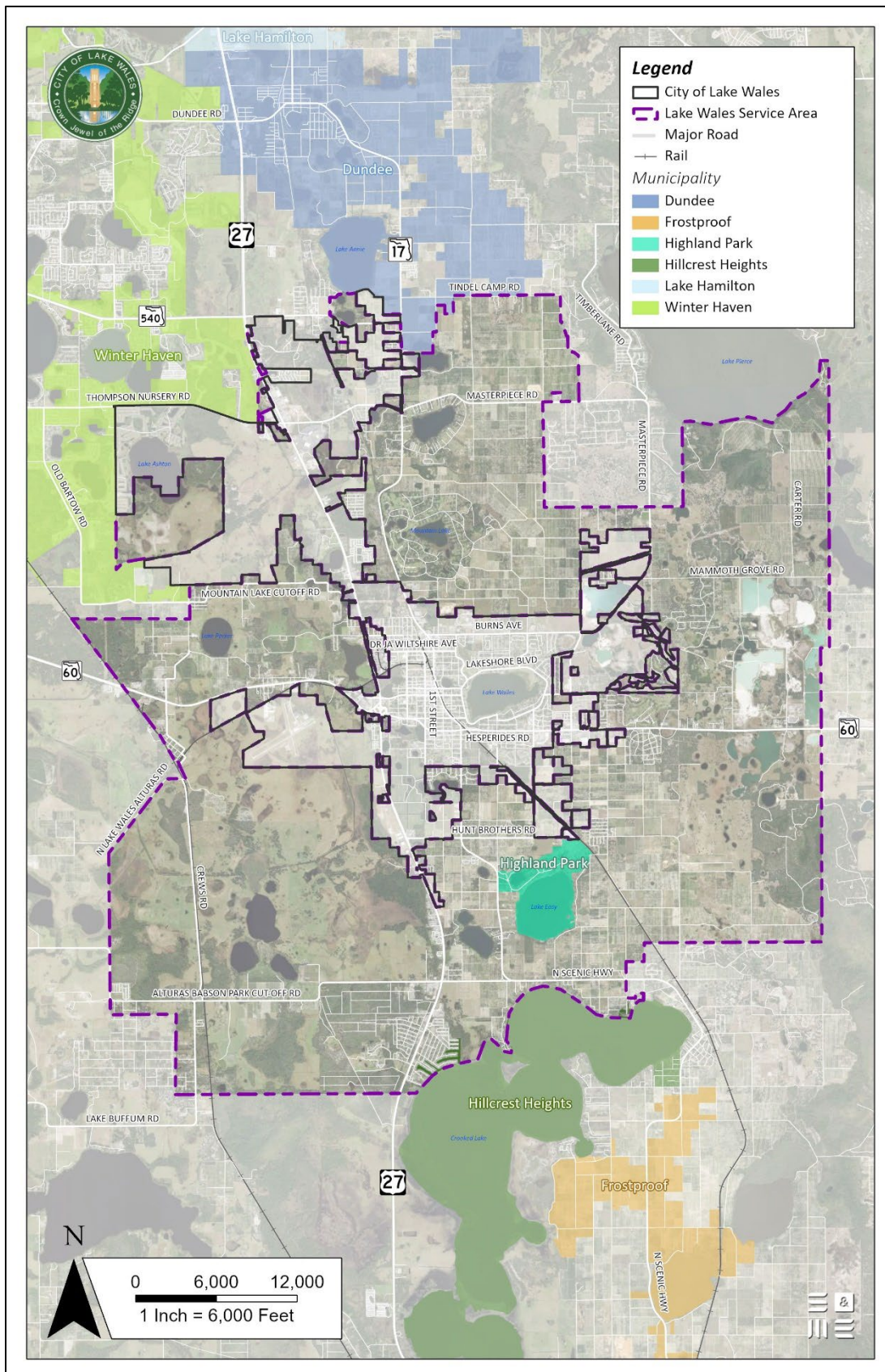
Figure 1. Regional Context



Sources: City of Lake Wales, Florida Geographic Data Library (FGDL), Polk County, 2022.



Figure 2. Study Area Boundary



Sources: City of Lake Wales, FGDL, Polk County, 2022.

## 4.0 Existing Conditions

Before planning for future populations and development, it is important to first understand the existing character and conditions found within the Study Area today. The following analysis seeks to understand the current demographic and socioeconomic composition of the area, what land uses are found within the Study Area, who the major landowners are, and what public facilities and services are offered or serving existing development.

### 4.1 Population, Demographics & Socioeconomic Composition

One method of understanding the lifestyles and rich character of a community is to conduct a profile and analysis of its current demographic (age, sex, and race/ethnicity) and socioeconomic (income, occupation, and education) composition. These findings can then be compared with the City, County, and State to understand the challenges and opportunities which may be unique to the Study Area and could be potentially addressed as part of this effort. A comparison of demographic and socioeconomic conditions for the Lake Wales Study Area, the City of Lake Wales, Polk County, and State of Florida is provided in **Tables 1 & 2**.

**Table 1. Demographic Comparison**

	Lake Wales Study Area	City of Lake Wales	Polk County	State of Florida
Total Population	14,851	16,622	754,798	22,114,754
Total Households	5,828	6,767	283,648	8,760,977
Average Household Size	2.55	2.46	2.66	2.52
Median Age	44.6	41.9	41.9	42.8
Female Population (%)	50.95	52.29	50.96	51.13
Male Population (%)	49.05	47.71	49.04	48.87
Senior Population (%)	25.37	24.80	22.40	22.12
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
<i>White Alone (%)</i>	67.71	55.7	59.45	56.66
<i>Black Alone (%)</i>	13.3	23.32	14.58	14.94
<i>American Indian Alone (%)</i>	0.51	0.51	0.54	0.44
<i>Asian Alone (%)</i>	0.75	1.0	1.89	3.02
<i>Pacific Islander Alone (%)</i>	0.09	0.04	0.06	0.06
<i>Some Other Race Alone (%)</i>	7.82	9.08	9.8	7.48
<i>Two or More Races (%)</i>	9.81	10.35	13.69	17.39
<i>Hispanic Origin (%)</i>	21.15	23.46	26.73	27.12
Diversity Index	67.2	75.4	75.5	77.0

Source(s): ESRI Business Analyst Online, 2022.

**Table 2. Socioeconomic Comparison**

	Lake Wales Study Area	City of Lake Wales	Polk County	State of Florida
Median Household Income	\$49,855	\$48,277	\$57,063	\$65,438
Median Home Value	\$185,199	\$214,960	\$217,684	\$285,477
Owner Occupied Housing Units (%)	70.69	54.35	70.24	66.14
Renter Occupied Housing Units (%)	29.31	45.65	29.76	33.86
Employed Population (%)	92.07	93.26	95.01	96.11
Unemployed Population (%)	7.93	6.74	4.99	3.89

Source(s): ESRI Business Analyst Online, 2022.





The demographic and socioeconomic data available for the Lake Wales Study Area reveals several important characteristics of the community, particularly when it is compared at the City, County, and State level. In terms of demographic composition, the population within the Study Area is generally older and significantly less diverse than its comparatives. Socioeconomically, the Study Area maintains a higher median income than those within the City, although both groups fall significantly behind both the County and State’s median income levels. The Study Area also features the lowest median home value out of the four groups but maintains the highest ownership rates. Finally, the Study Area’s high unemployment population (particularly when considered in tandem with its higher senior population and median age) seem to indicate that the Area has a higher retiree population percentage than those possessed by the City of Lake Wales, Polk County, and the State.

## 4.2 Existing Land Use

The existing land use categories presented within this analysis were based upon the Department of Revenue (DOR) land use codes assigned to each property within the Polk County Property Appraiser’s GIS parcel shapefile. Based upon these codes, the predominant land uses in the Study Area are Agricultural (59%), Low Density Residential (18%), Public/Semi-Public (6%), Vacant (5%), Commercial (3%), Mining (3%), Recreation (2%), and Conservation/Marshes (2%). There are four others, less prevalent, uses present in the Study Area, including Water, ROW/Utilities, Industrial, and Moderate Density Residential, which each account for less than 1% of the total Study Area. **Figure 3** shows these land uses visually, while **Table 3** shows the acreages of each category.

Geographically speaking, Agricultural, Low Density Residential, Public/Semi-Public, Vacant, ROW/Utilities and Conservation uses are spread throughout the Study Area. Recreation land uses consist of the Mountain Lake and Lake Wales Country Club golf courses. Moderate Density Residential uses are predominately found within the Lake Wales Country Club community. Commercial and Industrial uses are primarily concentrated along major corridors, such as State Roads 60 and 17, as well as US Highway 27.

Mining areas are primarily located along the eastern boundary of the Study Area.

### Loss of Agricultural Viability

Although a majority of the land within the Study Area is designated as Agricultural by the Polk County Property Appraiser, much of this land is slowly becoming less viable, as many citrus groves (historically and currently the primary fruit crop and industry within the region) have been devastated by the spread of *Huanglongbing* (also called HLB or citrus greening). Citrus greening is a disease spread by small insects called Asian Citrus Psyllids that have infected a significant portion of Florida’s citrus groves. Infected trees produce small, bitter fruit that is unfit for sale as fruit or juice. Once trees are infected, they cannot be cured and will often die within a few years.

As a result, many landowners of once-agricultural properties in Polk County and beyond are seeking alternative methods of generating profit from their land. Perhaps the common and lucrative path forward for these owners is to sell or develop all or portions of their now-vacant property for residential and nonresidential activities. Considering that much of the Study Area is comprised of now-defunct citrus groves, owners of these properties may choose to develop their land for more productive uses in the near future. This anticipated growth in both population and industry is likely to significantly

**Table 3. Existing Land Use**

Existing Land Use	Acres	%
Agricultural	25,068.3	59%
Low Density Residential	7,441.7	18%
Public/Semi-Public	2,702.7	6%
Vacant	2,034.0	5%
Commercial	1,356.1	3%
Mining	1,242.9	3%
Recreation	917.6	2%
Conservation/Marshes	872.9	2%
Water	255.1	<1%
Right-of-Way/Utilities	253.5	<1%
Industrial	241.4	<1%
Moderate Density Residential	29.9	<1%
	<b>42,416.1</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sources: Polk County Property Appraiser, S&ME, 2022.

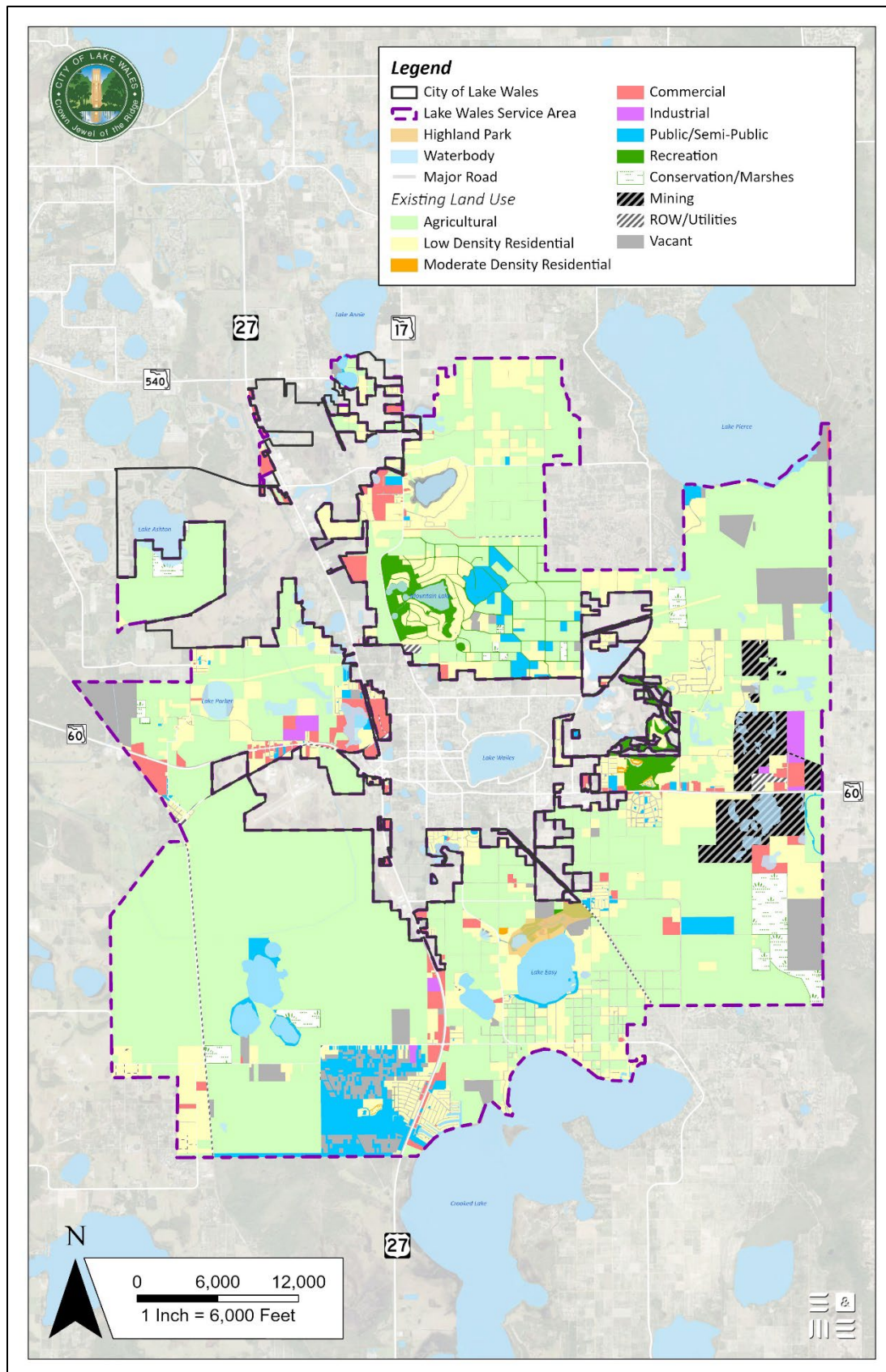


increase the demand for infrastructure and services from both the City of Lake Wales and Polk County in the decades ahead—further increasing the severity and time-sensitive nature of this effort.

### 4.3 Major Landowners

Of the ±42,416 acres of real property which comprise the Study Area, over half (54% or ±22,923.6 acres) is owned by the Area's 20 largest landowners. As shown within **Figure 4**, each of these landowners own multiple parcels within the Study Area and many of their properties are contiguous and vacant. Considering that two of the most expensive and time-consuming components of land development is (a) working with multiple property owners to aggregate large, contiguous tracts of land, and (b) clearing land for development, the Study Area currently possesses ideal conditions for near-term development.

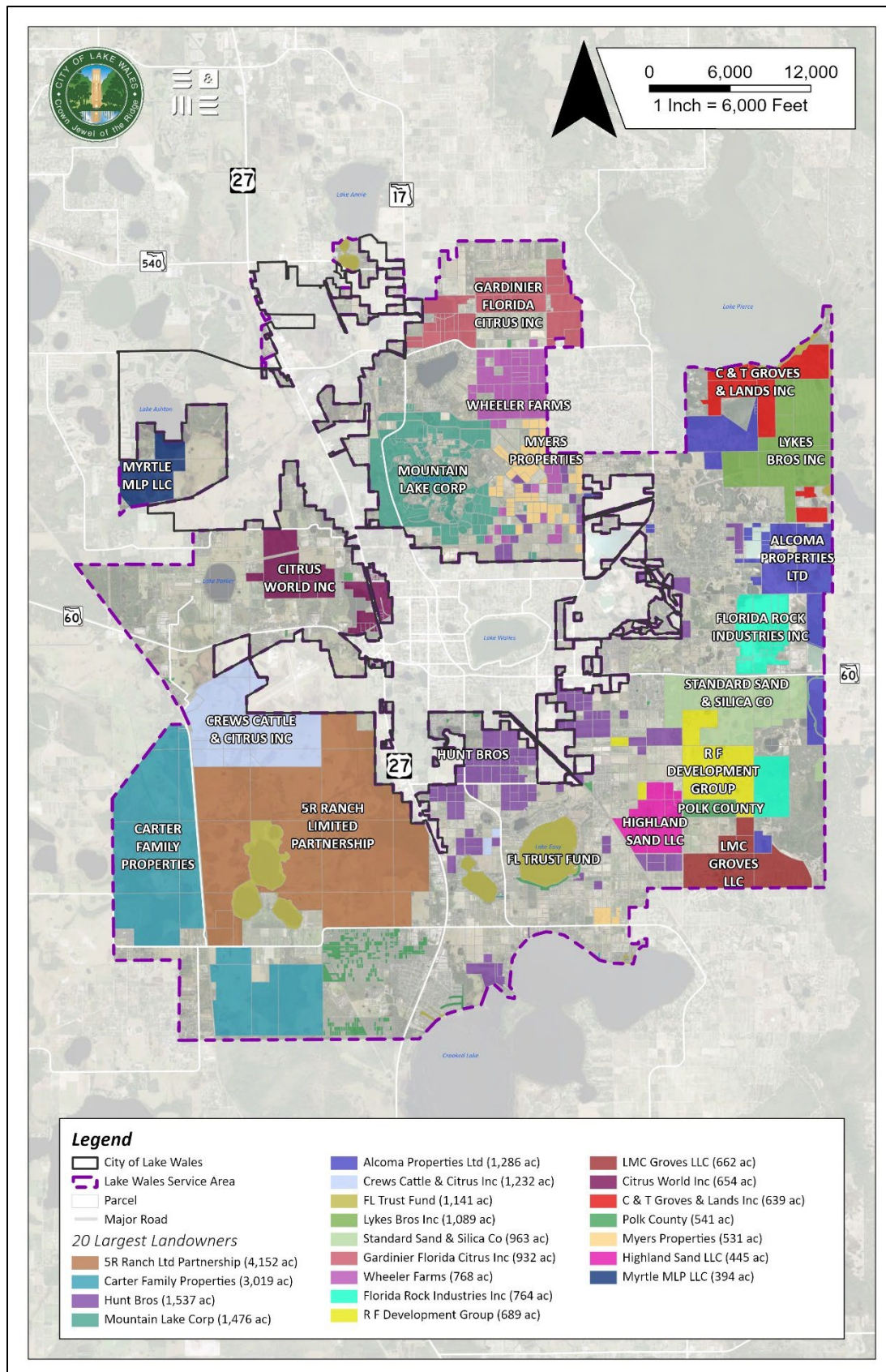
Figure 3. Existing Land Use Map



Sources: Polk County Property Appraiser, S&ME, 2022.



Figure 4. Major Landowners



Sources: Polk County Property Appraiser, S&ME, 2022.



## 4.4 Public Facilities & Services

One of the central goals for this effort is to understand how future development is likely to impact the demand for public facilities and services. New development will need to be serviced with amenities such as roadways, potable water, wastewater treatment and disposal, stormwater management, solid waste pickup, and park spaces. Not all of these services will be provided to new developments by the City of Lake Wales or Polk County. However, the City may wish to reevaluate its current service and connectivity requirements based upon the outcomes of this land use planning process. An inventory of the public facilities and services found within the Study Area is provided, as follows:

### 4.4.1 Roadways

A few major roads traverse the Study Area, including US Highway 27, State Roads 17, 60, and 540, and County Roads 640 and 653. Some minor roads run through the Study Area as well, but their network is not extensive, with many landowners relying on private roads for access to their properties. Florida's Turnpike Enterprise (FTE), part of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), is designing a new, tolled roadway in Polk County called the East Polk Parkway Extension (also known as State Road 570B, Central Polk Parkway, Northeast Polk Reliever, and US 17 Reliever Corridor). The proposed road would cross through the northeastern portion of the Study Area and is intended to relieve traffic on US Highway 27. Other, smaller future improvements within the Study Area will be discussed in a later subsection of this report.

The Polk Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) provides level of service (LOS) designations for a few roadways throughout the Study Area based upon each roadway's current and projected volumes. The TPO's 2040 LOS projections anticipate that several of the roadways found within the Study Area are projected to possess a LOS of "C," including US Highway 27 (south of Mountain Lake Cutoff), State Highway 60, State Road 17 (Ridge Scenic Highway), and County Road 17A (Masterpiece Road and Chalet Suzanne Road). LOS "C" denotes stable or near free-flow and is often the target for rural highways. US Highway 27, between Mountain Lake Cutoff and Waverly Road, is considered a LOS "D," which denotes a roadway approaching unstable flow and could potentially be cost prohibitive to increase to a higher level of service. For future development, the road network may require expansion to allow for sufficient capacity for residential, commercial, or industrial uses. **Table 4** shows the current LOS and projected LOS (2040) for Study Area road segments, while **Figure 5** shows 2040 LOS projections graphically.

**Table 4. Current and Projected LOS (2040) for Study Area Road Segments**

Road Segment	From	To	Current LOS	LOS 2040
Central Avenue	US 27	SR 17 (Ridge Scenic Highway)	B	C
Central Avenue	SR 60	US 27	B	C
CR 17A (Chalet Suzanne Rd)	SR 17 (Ridge Scenic Highway)	US 27	C	C
CR 17A (Masterpiece Rd)	Mammoth Grove Rd	SR 17	B	C
CR 17B (Buck Moore Rd)	SR 60	CR 17A (Burns Ave)	B	B
CR 17B (Hunt Brothers Rd)	US 27	SR 60	B	B
SR 17 (Ridge Scenic Highway)	Mountain Lake Cutoff	Waverly Rd	B	C
SR 17 (Ridge Scenic Highway)	E Central Ave	Mountain Lake Cutoff	B	C
SR 60	CR 655	US 27	B	C
SR 60	US 27	SR 17 (Ridge Scenic Highway)	B	C
Thompson Nursery Rd/Eloise Loop Rd	CC 653 (Rattlesnake Rd)	US 27	B	B
US 27	CR 640	SR 60	C	C
US 27	SR 60	Mountain Lake Cutoff	C	C
US 27	Mountain Lake Cutoff	CR 17A	C	D
US 27	CR 17A	Waverly Rd	C	D

Sources: City of Lake Wales, Polk County TPO, 2022.

## Future Projects & Improvements

Future improvements to the Study Area’s transportation network are primarily guided by two plans: the Polk TPO’s *2045 Long Range Transportation Plan (2020)* and the City of Lake Wales *Mobility Plan (2022)*. These important long-range planning documents provide a roadmap for how the Study Area’s transportation system will evolve into a connected multi-modal network by identifying strategic transportation projects and improvements for future implementation. The projects and improvements that are currently fully or partially funded for construction are listed below.

- **State Road 60 (Rattlesnake Road to Dude Ranch Road).** Improvements to this roadway segment includes resurfacing, removing acceleration lanes for safety, widening for bike lanes, drainage improvements, repairing cross slopes, and regrading ditches. Construction began in April 2022 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2035.
- **State Road 60 & US Highway 27 Interchange.** Improvements to this roadway segment includes a new bridge overpass and urban frontage road, a noise wall, roadway widenings (four to six lanes for both roadways), pavement, drainage, and signalization improvements, and sidewalk and bike lane installations. Construction is projected to begin in September 2022 and tentatively scheduled for completion in 2025.
- **US Highway 27 (County Road 630A to Presidents Drive).** Improvements to this roadway segment includes widening from four to six lanes, design and drainage improvements, bike lane installations, and new shared-use paths. The project is funded through construction, which is anticipated to begin between 2026 and 2030.
- **Thompson Nursery Road/Chalet Suzanne (US Highway 17 to State Road 17).** This project will widen this roadway segment from two to four lanes. The project is currently partially funded through construction, which is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2035.

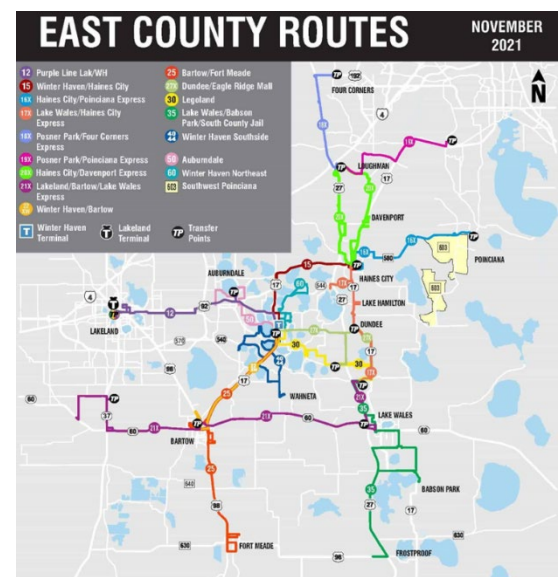
It should also be noted that the City of Lake Wales recently conducted a traffic study for **Buck Moore Road** which runs through portions of the eastern Study Area. The result of the study showed that with future development, the roadway functionality will decrease. Buck Moore Road is a County Road, which means the City will need to cooperate with Polk County to ensure improvements on the facility are context sensitive. When the land use study is complete, the City will be evaluating the future roadway network within the study area to determine the need for additional roads and expansion of existing facilities based on the preferred land use scenario.

### 4.4.2 Transit Service

Public transit can be a highly valuable service for both its users and the community in which they serve. An effective public transit system can reduce traffic and congestion, lessen a region’s impact on the natural environment, provide a cost-effective method of travel, and connect residents and/or workers to destinations where they can live, work, play, and grow. Two critical aspects of public transit are *service locations* and *hours of operation*.

In terms of service location, the Polk County transit system, *Citrus Connection*, has a few fixed service bus lines that serve the Study Area. These lines provide direct transit connections to other nearby municipalities, including Frostproof, Bartow, Dundee, Haines City, Lake Hamilton, and Winter Haven and primarily travels along major state and US highways. These routes are shown in the image on the right.

The four bus lines which run through the Study Area have variable schedules. The bus route with the most consistent service is *Route 30* which takes riders between Winter Haven and Eagle Ridge Mall in Lake Wales. This route runs thirteen times a day on weekdays, four times on Saturday, and three times on Sunday. *Route 35*, from Eagle Ridge Mall to south of the Study Area (South County Jail), runs seven times a day on



weekdays and four times a day on Saturday. *Route 17X*, which runs from Haines City to Eagle Ridge Mall, has a similar schedule to *Route 35* with six departures on weekdays and four on Saturdays. *Route 27x* runs from Dundee to Eagle Ridge Mall and has two departures on weekdays. As the population within the City of Lake Wales and the Study Area grows and the demand for public transit increases, new routes and expanded service hours should continue to be explored.

#### 4.4.3 Trail Facilities

Like public transit, the provision of trails can provide a myriad of benefits for its users, including improvements to community connectivity, health, character, and quality of life. Today, there are no noticeable trail facilities within the Study Area. However, there are several trails that are proposed within the Study Area which would eventually be incorporated into the regional trail network.

Some of the proposed trails are part of the Ridge Scenic Highway Corridor Management Plan, Lake Wales Connected and the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Many of the proposed trails would be accommodated in existing right-of-way and abandoned rail corridors. The map on the right shows the proposed trail connectivity throughout Lake Wales which extends into the Study Area.

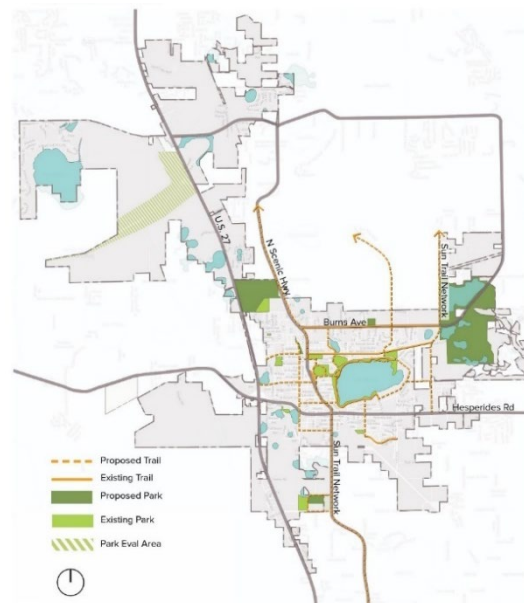
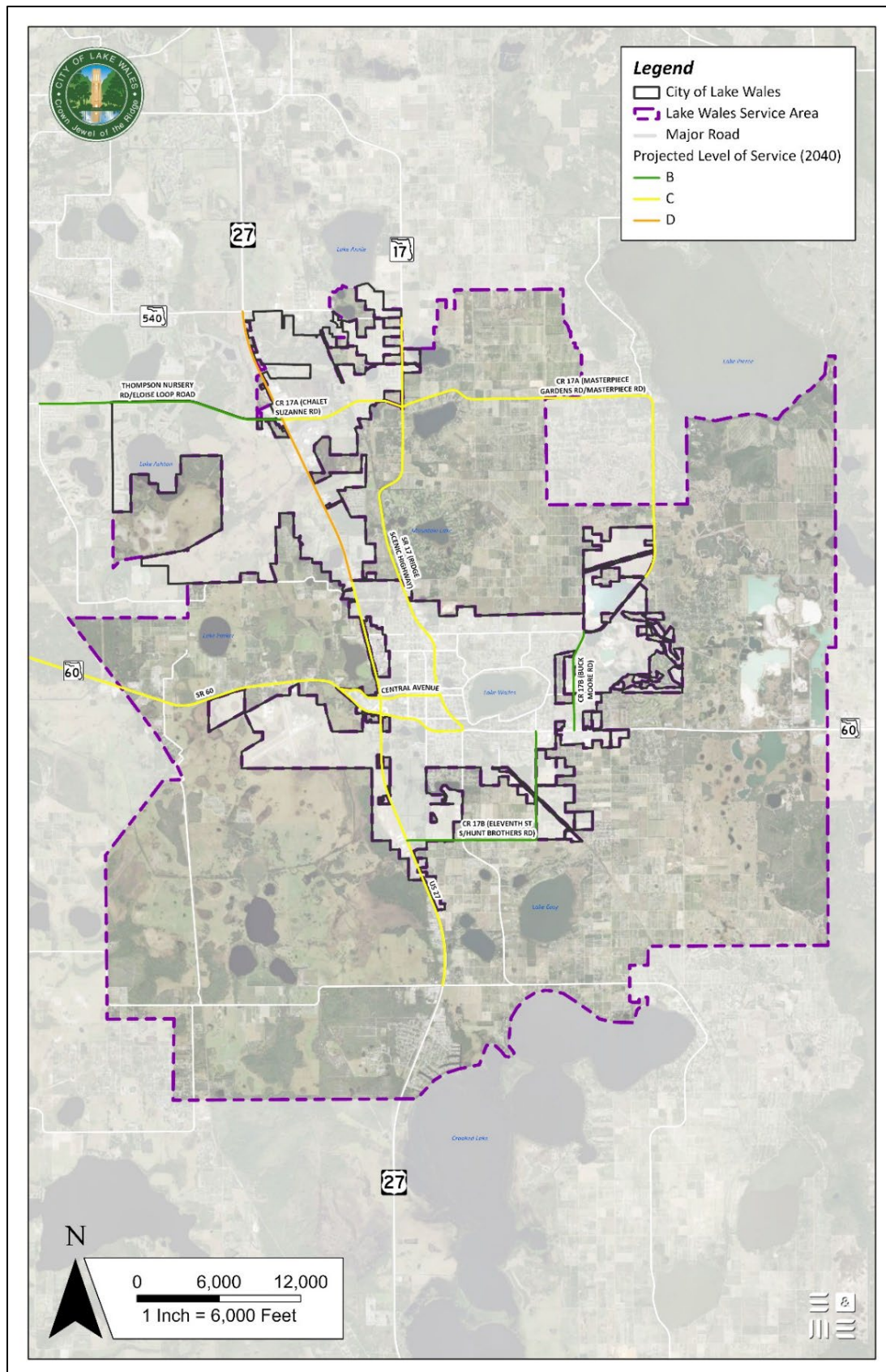




Figure 5. Projected Roadway LOS (2040)



Sources: City of Lake Wales, FGDL, Polk County, Polk TPO, S&ME, 2022.



#### 4.4.4 Potable Water

According to the City of Lake Wales Water Supply Facilities Work Plan (June 2022), the City currently delivers approximately 2.7 million gallons per day on average to a service population of roughly 26,000 customers. These customers are primarily located within the City, but also includes select portions of unincorporated Polk County within the Utility Service Area. New and existing developments within the Service Area are strongly encouraged to connect to the City's potable water system if suitable conditions for connections exist on the property and the owner is willing to enter into an annexation agreement with the City. The City's potable water system derives its water from the Floridan aquifer via one of three City-owned water plants: the Market Street Water Treatment Plant (WTP), The Grove Avenue WTP, and the Burns Avenue (High School) WTP.

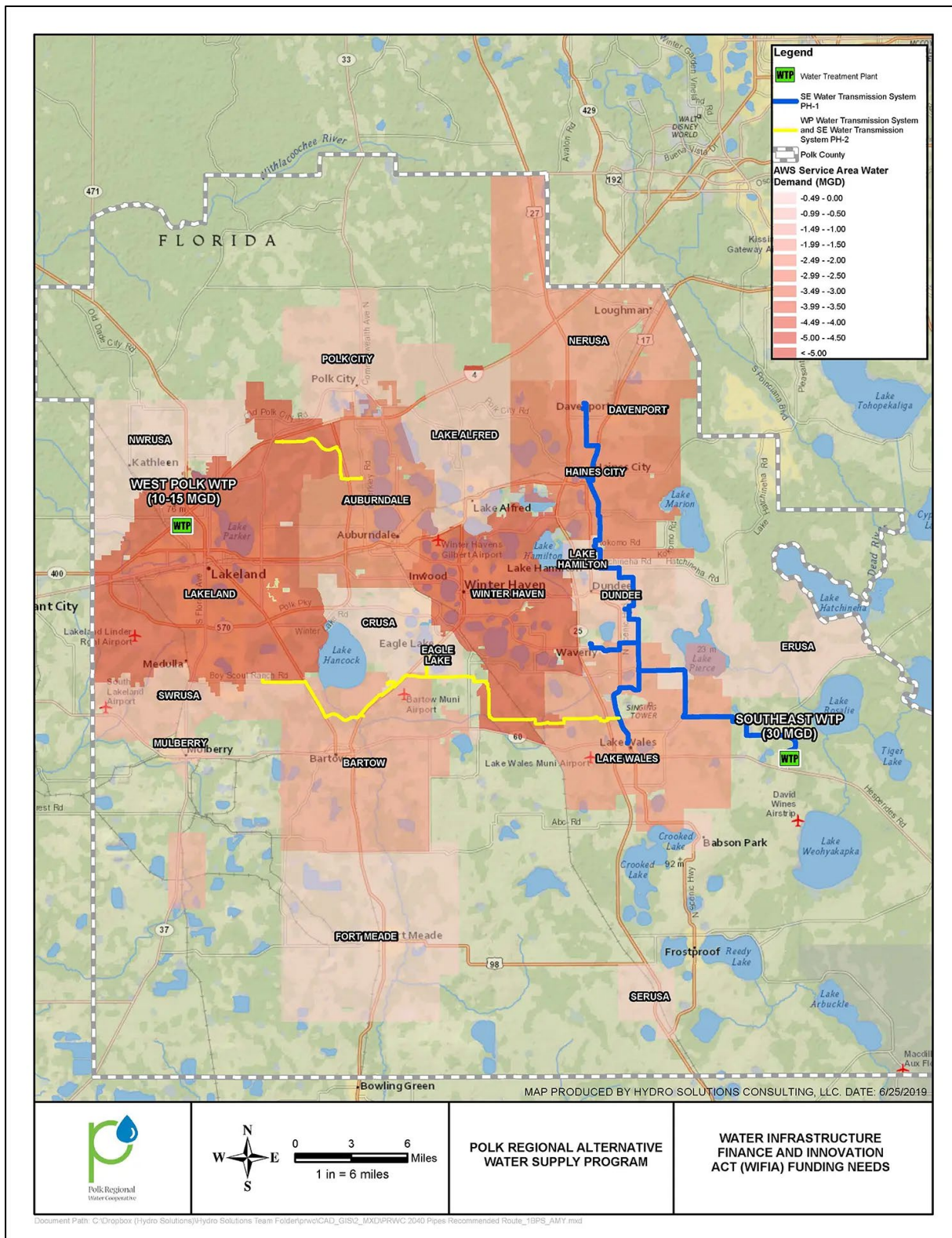
The City of Lake Wales is not the only major provider of potable water within the Study Area. The Village of Highland Park, a small residential community in the southeast portion of the Study Area, currently provides water services to their residents. Additionally, the Mountain Lake community, located immediately northwest of Lake Wales, maintains their own private potable water service for their residents and their local golf course. The final potable water supplier within the Study Area is the Park Water Company, which serves the southwest corner of the Study Area. However, the utility provider and its facilities were purchased by the City in 2020 and is now maintained by the Lake Wales Utilities Department.

#### **Regional Water Supply Projects**

The Polk Regional Water Cooperative (PRWC) is a non-profit, special district created by interlocal agreement between the County and its 15-member local governments. The primary goal of the PRWC is to plan, develop, and deliver a future high-quality drinking water supply for Polk County. To advance this effort, the Cooperative developed strategies to evaluate alternative sources of potable water, ensure that the potable water supply meets the County's estimated long-term needs, and help facilitate a regional conservation program which promotes responsible uses of water. The PRWC also helps to identify alternative water supply projects designed to meet the projected water needs of the County—several of which are partially located within the Study Area. These projects are discussed below:

- **Southeast Wellfield and Water Supply Facility.** The proposed project desires to increase the drinking water supply of its member governments by 12.5 million gallons per day (mgd) by securing brackish waters from the Lower Floridan Aquifer (LFA) and treating it via reverse osmosis at a new water treatment facility located in southeast Polk County. Water treated at this facility would then be supplied through the County via a new water transmission system—several segments of which intersect the Study Area. The project's proposed location is shown in **Figure 6**.
- **West Polk Wellfield and Water Supply Facility.** This project would utilize brackish waters stemming from the LFA located in the western portion of the County as a new alternative water supply. The water would then be treated via reverse osmosis at a treatment facility located in northwest Polk County and is anticipated to contribute an additional 10 mgd to its member government's total potable water supply. The facility, along with its anticipated transmission line routes (one of which pass through the Study Area), can be seen in **Figure 6**.
- **Peace River and Land Use Transitions Project.** The intent of this project would be to collect excess surface water from the Peace River resulting from both heavy rain events and excessive showers during the rainy season to use as an alternative potable water source for the County. If developed, the project is estimated to generate an additional 30 mgd for the PRWC's member governments once treated at a Polk County treatment facility. As shown on **Figure 7**, the Study Area is located within the confines of the Peace River and Land Use Transitions project boundary.

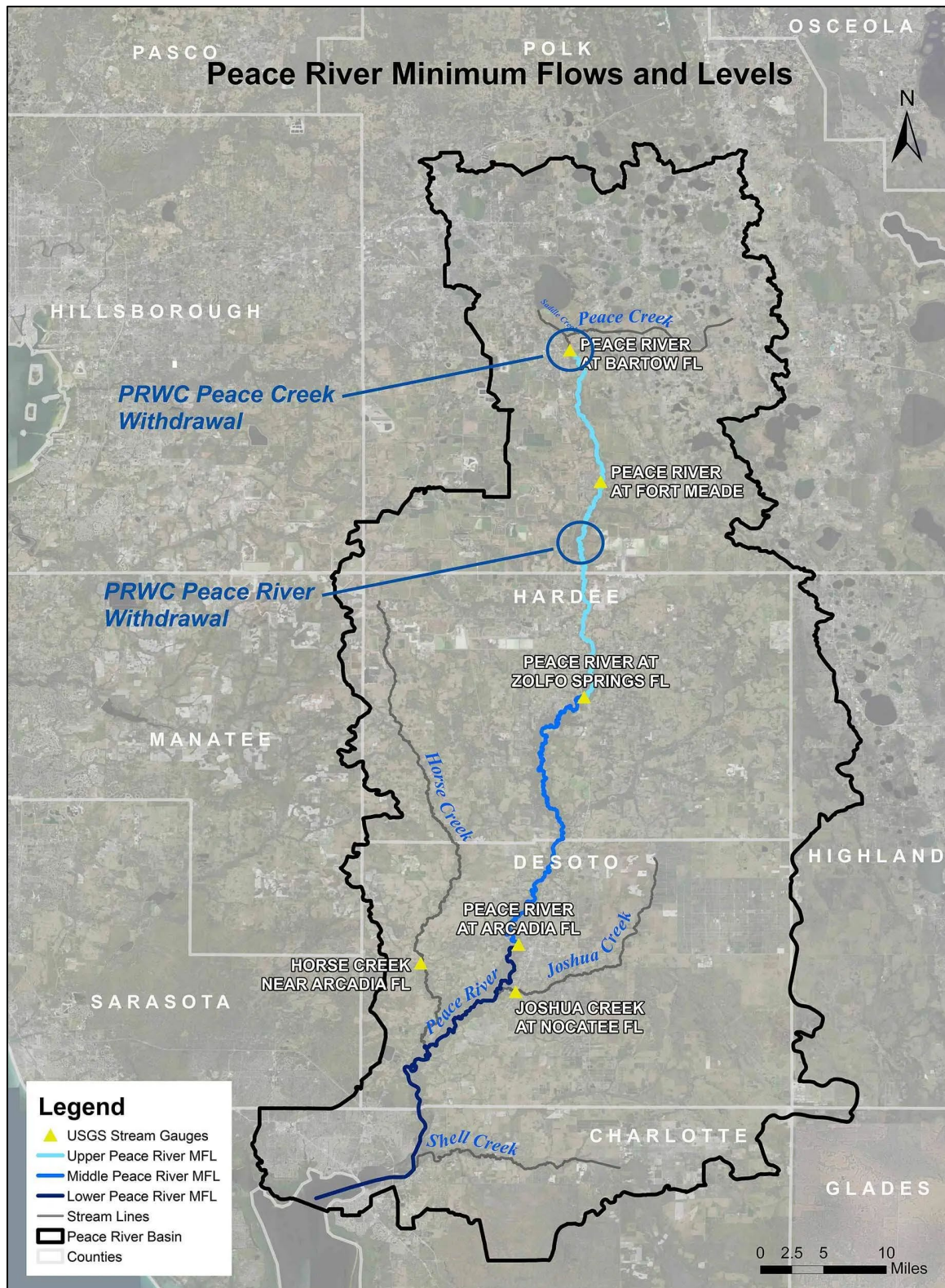
Figure 6. Southeast & West Polk Wellfields and Water Supply Facilities



Source: PRWC, 2022.



Figure 7. Peace River and Land Use Transitions Project Boundary



Source: PRWC, 2022.

#### 4.4.5 Sanitary Sewer

Although the City of Lake Wales maintains a centralized wastewater system within its municipal boundary, the City does not currently provide sanitary services to properties located within the Study Area. The wastewater system includes 177,000 linear feet of force mains, 40 lift stations, and a wastewater treatment facility located along Henry Street just south of State Road 60. New and existing developments located within the Study Area are encouraged to connect to the City's sanitary sewer network if suitable conditions for connectivity exist on the property and the owner is willing to enter into an annexation agreement with the City. There are currently no private sanitary sewer services available within the Study Area since Polk County Utilities took control of the Crooked Lake Park Sewage Company's sewage treatment plant in 2021 after the corporation abandoned the facility in November 2020. This facility currently serves approximately 300 homes near Warner University in the southwest corner of the Study Area.

#### 4.4.6 Stormwater Management

Polk County requires new development/redevelopment projects to implement stormwater management facilities which, at a minimum, manage runoff so that post-development runoff rates and volumes do not exceed pre-development conditions. As such, stormwater management facilities found throughout the Study Area are predominately private and maintained by the property owner. Additionally, several subdivisions and multi-tenant developments within Study Area have chosen to develop master drainage facilities and systems which collect, treat, and dispose stormwater runoff for multiple users, such as the Lake Wales Country Club and Warner University.

#### 4.4.7 Solid Waste

Solid waste pickup throughout the Study Area is primarily managed by Polk County. Hauling services are split between three providers: The Polk County Waste & Recycling Division, FCC Environmental (FCC), and Advanced Disposal (ADS). Today, ADS's service area includes the entirety of the Lake Wales Land Use Study Area and collects both trash and certain recyclables. The North Central Landfill is currently the only publicly owned and operated landfill within the County and accepts household waste and household hazardous waste.

#### 4.4.8 Parks

As shown in **Figure 8**, there are currently four parks within the Lake Wales Study Area, each owned and managed by Polk County. The largest park within the Study Area is Washington Park ( $\pm 9.4$  acres), which is located south of Mountain Lake Cutoff Road and west of the Lake Wales city boundary. This is followed by Mary Norma Campbell Park and Welling Park, both of which are located in the southeastern portion of the Study Area and are approximately 7.5 acres in size. The smallest park within the Study Area is West Lake Wales Park, which is  $\pm 1.5$  acres and is located on the western edge of the Study Area boundary, south of State Road 60.

Taken as a whole, these parks contain a mix of active (e.g., baseball fields, basketball courts, playgrounds) and passive (e.g., benches, pavilions, tables, restrooms) recreational opportunities. Additionally, Mary Norma Campbell Park includes an indoor community center with multipurpose facilities and recreational events and programming. Many of these park facilities currently feature large, unused spaces which can be used for expanded amenities and programming as the population within the Study Area continues to increase.







## 5.0 Regulatory Considerations

### 5.1 Polk County Comprehensive Plan

This land use planning effort is broadly supported by the Goals, Objectives, and Policies found in both the City of Lake Wales and the Polk County Comprehensive Plans. Each of these documents express a clear commitment to identifying and planning for the future use of land, as well as encouraging joint planning efforts between the City and the County. Furthermore, both jurisdictions express a clear desire to ensure that infrastructure and services are provided in a logical and efficient manner, new development does not result in suburban sprawl, and that natural resources and viable agricultural activities are protected, when practicable.

Currently, the City of Lake Wales and Polk County have yet to establish a joint planning agreement area for the Lake Wales Land Use Plan Study Area. As such, the City has little say as to what is permitted to develop within the Study Area unless the developer desires to connect to the City's centralized water and/or sewer system. Additionally, a number of County regulations and planning mechanisms are in place within the Study Area which should be considered as part of this land use planning effort. These regulations and mechanisms are described as follows:

#### 5.1.1 Future Land Use

The Polk County Comprehensive Plan establishes the Future Land Use (FLU) of properties throughout the unincorporated area. **Table 5** lists the FLU designations found within the Study Area and **Figure 9** shows these designations graphically.

The largest FLU designation, A/RR (Agricultural/Residential – Rural) accounts for 76% of the total Study Area. This designation limits the future development of land to agricultural and low-density residential uses. The second largest designation, RS (Residential-Suburban), comprises approximately 12% of the total Study Area and allows for residential development that is suburban in character, which may also act as a transition from between rural and urban land uses. The remaining land use designations found within the Study Area each account for 1% or less of its total acreage.

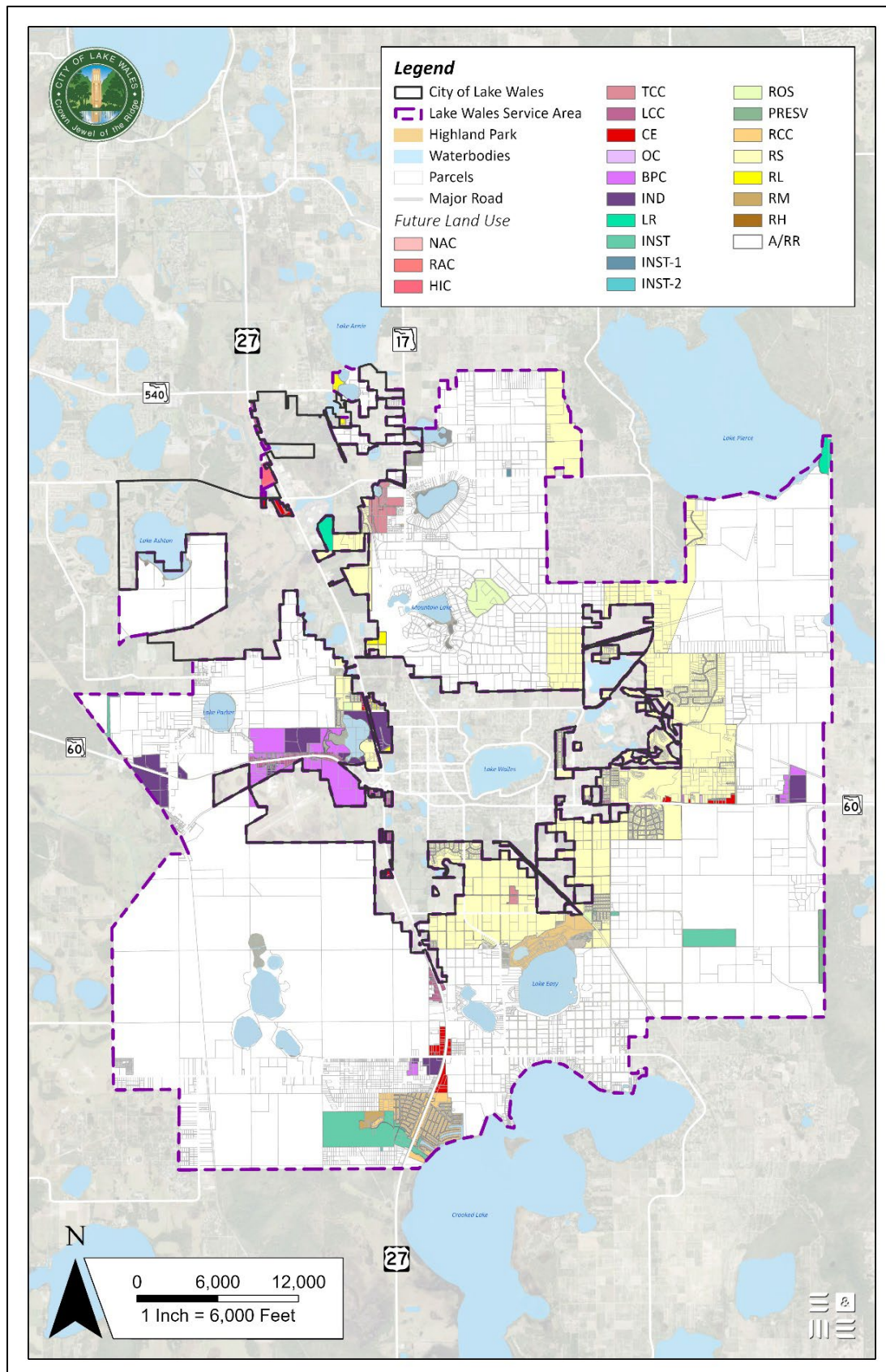
**Table 5. Future Land Use**

Future Land Use	Acres	%
Agricultural/Residential-Rural (A/RR)	32,338.9	76%
Residential-Suburban (RS)	5,250.1	12%
Business Park Center (BPC)	508.6	1%
Industrial (IND)	487.8	1%
Institutional (INST)	481.6	1%
Rural-Cluster Centers (RCC)	328.1	<1%
Recreation & Open Space (ROS)	160.8	<1%
Liner Commercial Corridor (LCC)	150.0	<1%
Tourism Commercial Centers (TCC)	137.5	<1%
Commercial Enclave (CE)	133.8	<1%
Leisure/Recreation (L/R)	96.3	<1%
Residential-Low (RL)	77.5	<1%
Preservation (PRESV)	53.4	<1%
High Impact Centers (HIC)	33.8	<1%
Residential-Medium (RM)	32.8	<1%
Regional Activity Center (RAC)	3.3	<1%
Neighborhood Activity Center (NAC)	2.8	<1%
Office Center (OC)	2.8	<1%
<i>Other Non-FLU Designations within the Study Area</i>		
Lake Feature	1,666.9	4%
Municipality	469.2	1%
<b>Total Land Area</b>	<b>42,416.1</b>	<b>100%</b>

Sources: Polk County, S&ME, 2022.



**Figure 9. Future Land Use**



Sources: FGDL, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.



### 5.1.2 Selected Area Plans

Two Polk County Selected Area Plans (SAPs) intersect with the Study Area, the *Gateway SAP* and the *Southeast Polk SAP*. Regulations regarding SAPs are discussed in the Future Land Use Element (FLUE) of the Polk County Comprehensive Plan and in Section 401 of Polk County Land Development Code (LDC). An SAP is intended to provide a specific land use plan for a targeted area which warrants greater detail than what is typically allotted for an area within the FLUE. The locations of the Gateway SAP and the Southeast SAP in relation to the Study Area are shown in **Figure 10**.

The Gateway SAP is discussed in Appendix 2.131-T of Polk County's Comprehensive Plan. The main priorities of this Plan involve promoting economic development, encouraging transit supportive development patterns, and protecting natural resources so as to not diminish the area's existing rural/agricultural character. The Gateway SAP impacts the western portion of the Study Area, as it is located north of Alturas Babson Park Cut-Off Road and west of US Highway 27.

The Southeast Polk SAP, which overlaps the southeast portion of the Study Area, is discussed in Appendix 2.131-U of the Polk County Comprehensive Plan and in the Polk County LDC Section 401.08. The primary intent of the Southeast Polk SAP is to manage growth within the area while protecting its rural character. Other key objectives of the Southeast SAP include protecting private property rights, conserving environmentally sensitive land and open space through development incentives, and supporting intergovernmental coordination with nearby jurisdictions. The SAP also promotes vibrant centers and sustainable development by establishing Village Centers and Village Center Cores, which are areas targeted for higher densities, intensities, and mixed-use development.

### 5.1.3 Overlay Districts

This section describes two types of overlay districts. The first type of overlays is known as *Resource Protection Districts*, which are discussed in the FLUE of the Polk County Comprehensive Plan. These overlay districts identify areas containing natural and man-made resources that provide general public value, and therefore require additional protection. The second type of overlay districts are called *Redevelopment Districts* (also identified within FLUE of the Comprehensive Plan), and are intended to facilitate rehabilitation, revitalization, and/or redevelopment opportunities within specific areas of the County via the implementation of associated *Redevelopment District Revitalization Plans*. These overlay districts are discussed in greater detail, as follows:

#### 5.1.3.1 Transit Corridors and Centers Overlay

The *Transit Corridors and Centers (TCC) Overlay* is detailed in Section 2.124-A of the FLUE of the Polk County Comprehensive Plan and is primarily intended to "promote and support community investment in transit" within the County. As such, this overlay provides a framework for land use policies and mobility strategies which advance this objective by seeking to: connect city centers, improve access to transit services, promote compact mixed-use development, reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicles, and promote energy efficient travel. The Overlay's direct impact on the Study Area is addressed in FLUE Policies 2.104-A6 and 2.104-A7, which permits higher densities and intensities within the TCC Overlay to support these strategies. The portion of the TCC Overlay which intersects the Study Area is shown in **Figure 11**.

#### 5.1.3.2 Wellhead Protection Districts Overlay

The *Wellhead Protection Districts Overlay* and its associated criteria are discussed in Section 2.124-D of the FLUE of the Polk County Comprehensive Plan and in the Polk County LDC Section 670. This overlay intends to protect existing and future potable water wellheads from direct contamination by regulating land use and restricting the storage, generation, or use of hazardous materials within 500 feet of all existing and future potable water wellheads and well fields. **Figure 11** shows the locations of the Wellhead Protection Districts in relation to the Study Area.

#### 5.1.3.3 State Road 17 Ridge Scenic Highway Overlay

The *State Road 17 Ridge Scenic Highway Overlay* is outlined in Section 2.124-H of the FLUE of the Polk County Comprehensive Plan and in Section 679 of the Polk County LDC. Development standards associated with the overlay are intended to promote economic development along the highway while protecting and enhancing its scenic, environmental, historic, and character qualities. Parcels and proposed development that abut the State Road 17 Ridge Scenic Highway are





considered within the overlay. Developments along the highway are encouraged to set aside land for scenic pull-offs, trailheads, and landscaping, and are required to minimize visually distracting uses by meeting established design standards. The location of this overlay as it relates to the Study Area is shown in **Figure 11**.

#### 5.1.3.4 *Mineral Resource Protection District*

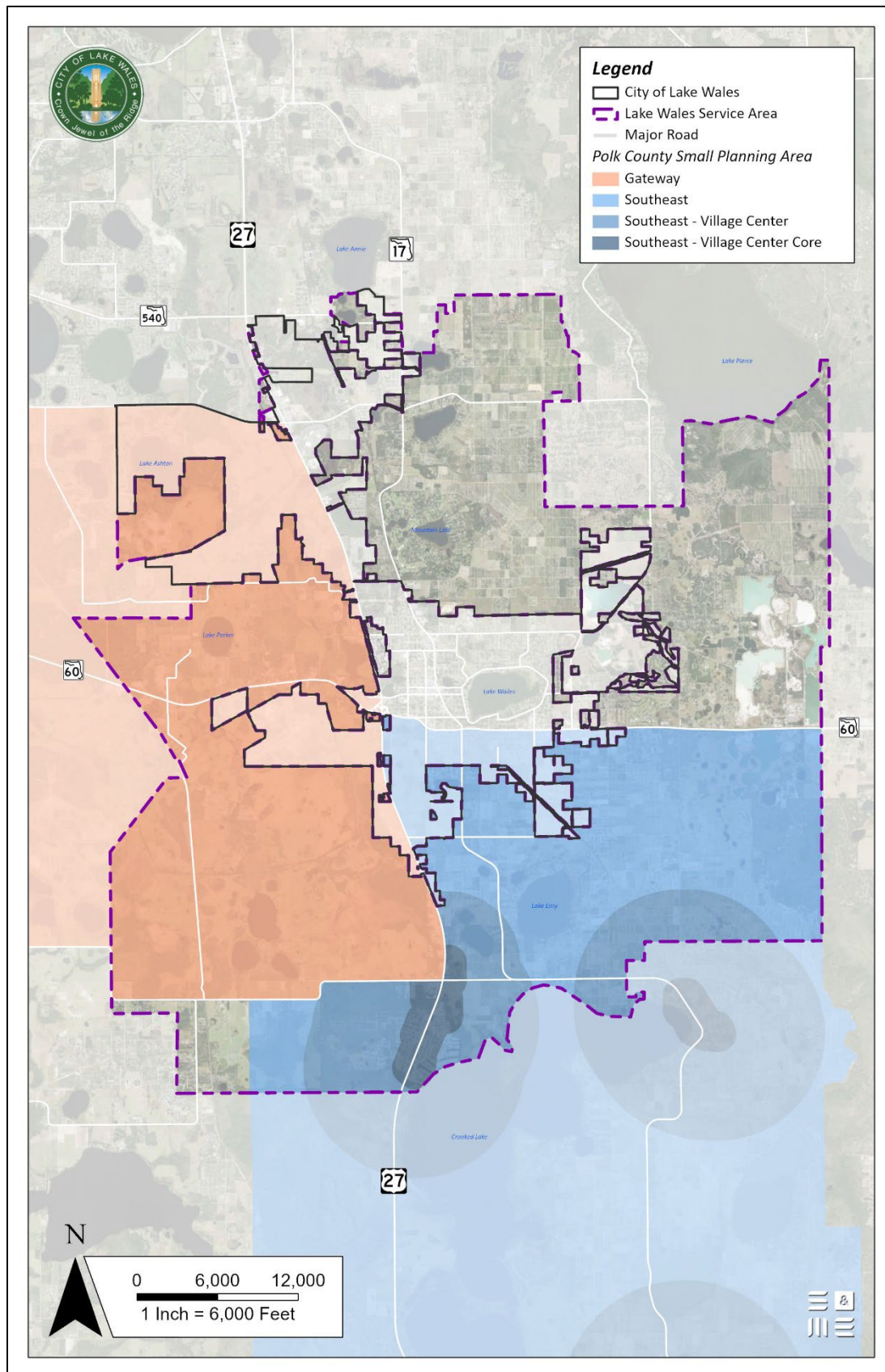
The *Mineral Resource Protection Districts (MRPD) Overlay* is discussed in Section 2.124-C of the Polk County Comprehensive Plan's FLUE. With this overlay, the County intends to ensure the continued availability of its mineral resources, including lime rock, sand, peat, and clay by protecting known deposits from encroachment by land uses that are not compatible with excavation and mining operations. Development that may interfere with future excavation activities is not permitted within the overlay, and property adjacent to MRPDs may be required to provide proper buffering. The location of MRPDs as they relate to the Study Area are shown on **Figure 11**.

#### 5.1.3.5 *Redevelopment Districts*

The Polk County Comprehensive Plan has designated *Redevelopment District Overlay* areas with corresponding *Redevelopment District Revitalization Plans* to facilitate their rehabilitation, revitalization, and/or redevelopment. They are discussed in Section 2.124-F of the FLUE of their Comprehensive Plan and in Policies 2.202-C2 and 2.202-C3 of the Housing Element.

Redevelopment Districts are areas identified as being low to moderate income and disproportionately in need of services. The plans intend to conduct comprehensive needs assessments, encourage community cohesion, develop plans to meet needs relating to social services, infrastructure, transportation, economic development, law enforcement, and affordable housing, promote a higher quality of life for residents, promote economic vitality, and encourage multi-modal transportation options. Four Redevelopment Districts intersect with the Study Area: Waverly, Washington Park, Lake Wales Estates, and Highland Park Manor—all of which are shown in **Figure 12**.

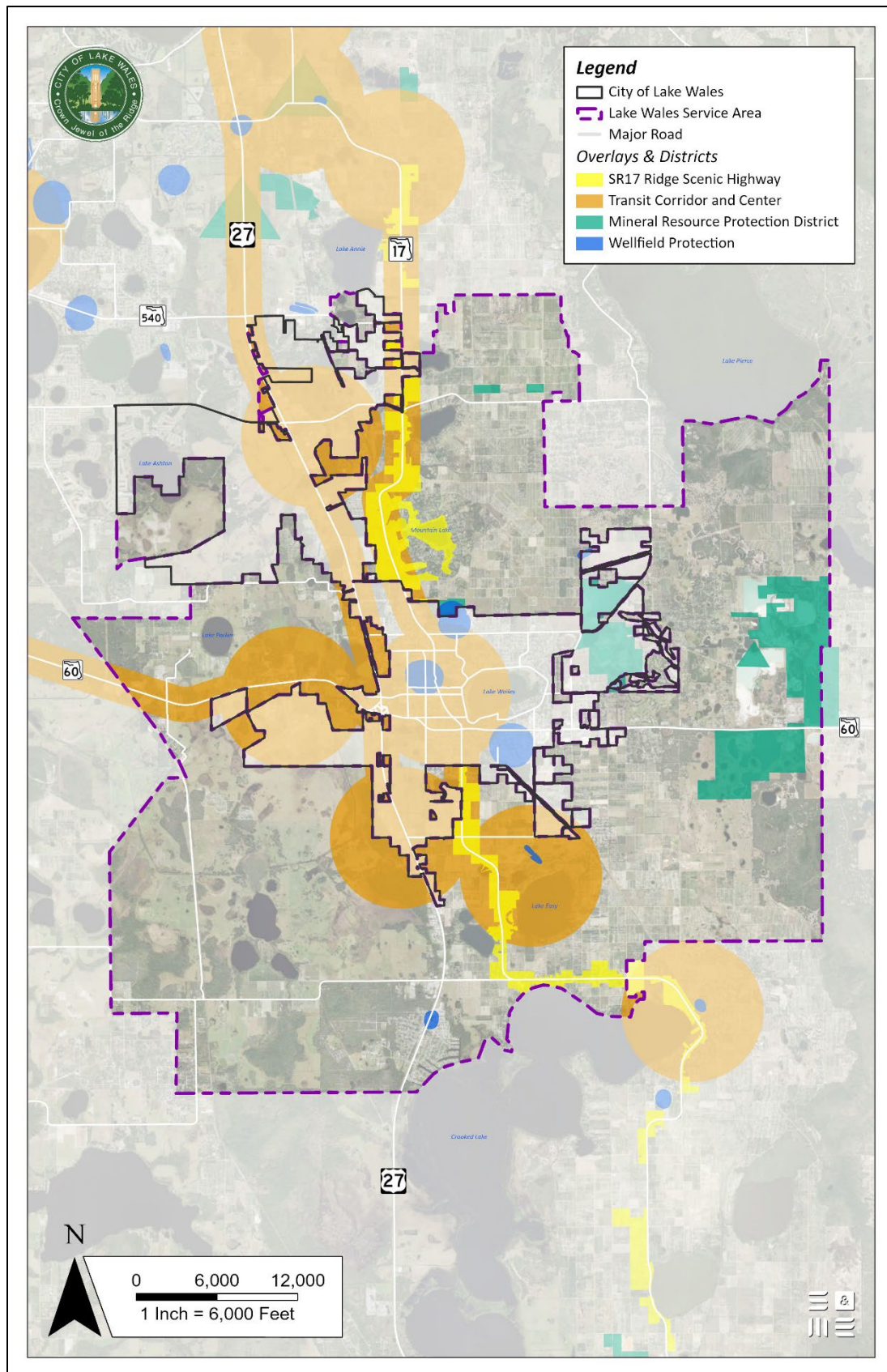
Figure 10. Selected Area Plans



Sources: FGDL, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.



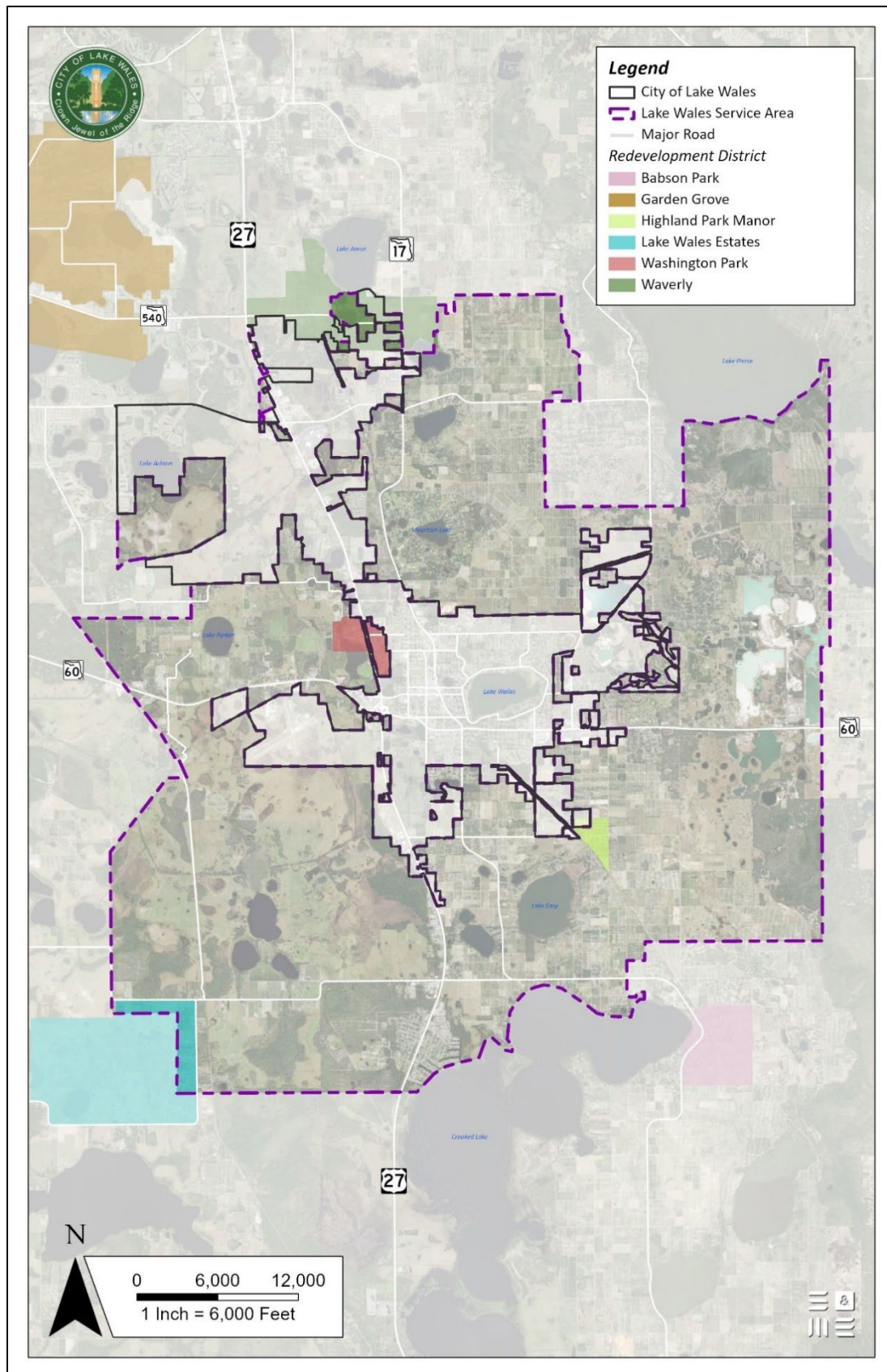
Figure 11. Resource Protection Overlays & Districts Map



Sources: FGDL, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.



Figure 12. Redevelopment Districts Map



Sources: FGDL, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.

## 5.2 Regulatory Tools & Opportunities

As part of this land use study, the City of Lake Wales will explore numerous regulatory tools and opportunities to help implement the Land Use Plan resulting from this effort. An inventory and analysis of several regulatory tools and opportunities are provided as follows.

### 5.2.1 Transfer of Development Rights

Transfers of Development Rights (TDRs) allow property owners to send (or 'transfer') development rights to another property. The sender retains ownership of their land but will be limited in the use of their land regarding potential development in the future. As such, a TDR program is often used as a land and character preservation tool which concentrates development densities and intensities within existing urban/suburban areas while simultaneously preserving the functions of agricultural communities and sensitive natural resource areas. This program also allows rural property owners to earn a profit from their property without having to sell or develop their land. Two notable jurisdictions within Florida which maintain an active TDR program include Collier and St. Lucie counties.

### 5.2.2 Conservation Easements

If the City desires to conserve and protect environmentally significant lands or farmlands within the Study Area from development, one regulatory tool worth exploration is the implementation of conservation easements, which is a legal instrument which effectively prohibits development within specified area. A few properties within the Study Area are currently under a conservation easement which were created as part of the Florida Forever Project in their efforts to preserve the *Lake Wales Ridge* ecosystem, which contains some of Florida's highest concentration of near-extinction plants and animals.

Similar to easements for environmentally sensitive lands, agricultural land easements have been utilized by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to preserve farmlands. Easement applications are prioritized if they protect agricultural uses and maximize the protection of contiguous agricultural uses, such as active farms and ranches.

### 5.2.3 Greenbelt

Another method in which natural and agricultural communities can be preserved is through the implementation of a Greenbelt. Greenbelts are naturally preserved areas located around existing urban areas which can be used for conservation and/or recreational purposes. They also provide a defined space in which wildlife and vegetation are left to inhabit and thrive without direct disturbance from urban development and associated activities. A greenbelt is typically achieved by via a combination of land acquisition, overlays which prohibit development within a defined boundary, TDRs, urban growth boundaries, and conservation easements. Notable examples of greenbelt communities include Austin, Texas and Lexington, Kentucky.



Barton Creek Greenbelt (Austin, TX)

### 5.2.4 Employment Center

Employment centers are loosely defined as land areas in which development is facilitated primarily for the intense creation of jobs. Employment-generating development may limit retail, professional services, and residential uses as accessory uses to employment-generating uses, such as factories, research centers, medical facilities, and distribution hubs. In some jurisdictions, such as Broward County, employment centers are formal land use (FLU) categories within their Comprehensive Plan, which establishes specific guidelines on developing employment centers. In other places, such as Alachua County, employment centers may be listed as an intended type of development within some of the County's various FLU categories. Notable local examples of employment centers include Progress Park in Alachua and the Central Florida Research Park in east Orlando near the University of Central Florida campus.

### 5.2.5 Joint Planning

One method to ensure the successful implementation of the Land Use Plan resulting from this effort is by entering into a joint planning agreement (JPA) with Polk County. JPAs, outlined by Section 163.3171, F.S., are planning mechanisms utilized by multiple jurisdictions that ensures land development in unincorporated areas is coordinated between local governments. In many cases, these agreements include a shared set of comprehensive plan policies or land development regulations with procedures in place that outline the process of sharing development approvals. For example, a JPA may require specific land use designations or limit densities for properties that are annexed into a city.

Another commonly used joint planning mechanism is the Interlocal Service Boundary Agreement (ISBA) as stipulated by Chapter 171, F.S. ISBAs are more detailed agreements engaged in by multiple jurisdictions that address how an area, if annexed, will be served by city or county services. An area surrounding the city boundary is delineated in the agreement, which identifies the extent the city may annex to. When multiple cities are engaged in this process, ISBA areas abut each other but never overlap. In addition to clearly identifying service providers within the agreement, an ISBA has the added benefit of allowing annexations that would otherwise be contrary to general state annexation laws according to Chapter 171, F.S. This means properties can be annexed into a city without being contiguous (or compact) to the incorporated city limits.

## 6.0 Environmental Considerations

### 6.1 Land Cover Composition

The Southwest Florida Water Management District documented and classified vegetative communities within Polk County using the Florida Land Use, Cover, and Forms Classification System. The five most prominent land cover designations within the Study Area are Tree Crops (10,656 acres), Cropland and Pastureland (7,506 acres), Vegetated and Non-Forested Wetlands (4,740 acres), Other Open Lands (3,067 acres), and Residential Low Density (2,866 acres). All other land cover categories present in the Study Area can be found in **Figure 13**. The significant amount of agricultural and natural areas contributes to the rural character of the Study Area.

### 6.2 Wetlands

Including surface waters, the Study Area has approximately 7,403 acres of wetlands within the boundary. The two most commonly occurring wetlands in the Study Area are Emergent Wetlands, meaning they are dominated by herbaceous plants, and Unconsolidated Bottom Wetlands, meaning they are permanently or semi-permanently flooded with less than 30% vegetive cover. These wetlands shown in **Figure 14**. Wetlands provide a number of important hydrologic functions, such as recharging our aquifers with high-quality water, reducing peak flows and flooding, and supporting free-flowing springs. Considering their importance, development within areas with wetlands is prohibited or significantly constrained. Where it is impossible to avoid impacting wetlands, impacts should be mitigated and minimized through wetland compensation and enhancement elsewhere.

### 6.3 Floodplains

The Study Area is moderately constrained by floodplains, as the 100-year floodplain covers approximately 10,942 acres of the Study Area. As shown on **Figure 15**, large floodplain areas exist in the western portion of the Study Area, and a series of smaller floodplain areas are dispersed throughout the eastern portion. The development potential of areas in floodplains is significantly reduced, as any fill material added within the floodplain area will require compensating storage, thereby reducing overall developable acreage. The developable areas outside of the floodplain are generally located in the north-central and south-central portions of the Study Area.

### 6.4 Conservation Lands

The Study Area has approximately 1,426 acres of conservation areas. They are owned by a variety of entities, including Bok Tower Gardens Foundation, the Southwest Florida Water Management District, Polk County, the Nature Conservancy, Green Horizon Land Trust, Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund, and private individuals. The conservation





areas are concentrated in three areas within the Study Area: along the southern boundary, in the southeast corner, and to the north near Mountain Lake. These conservation areas are shown in **Figure 16**.

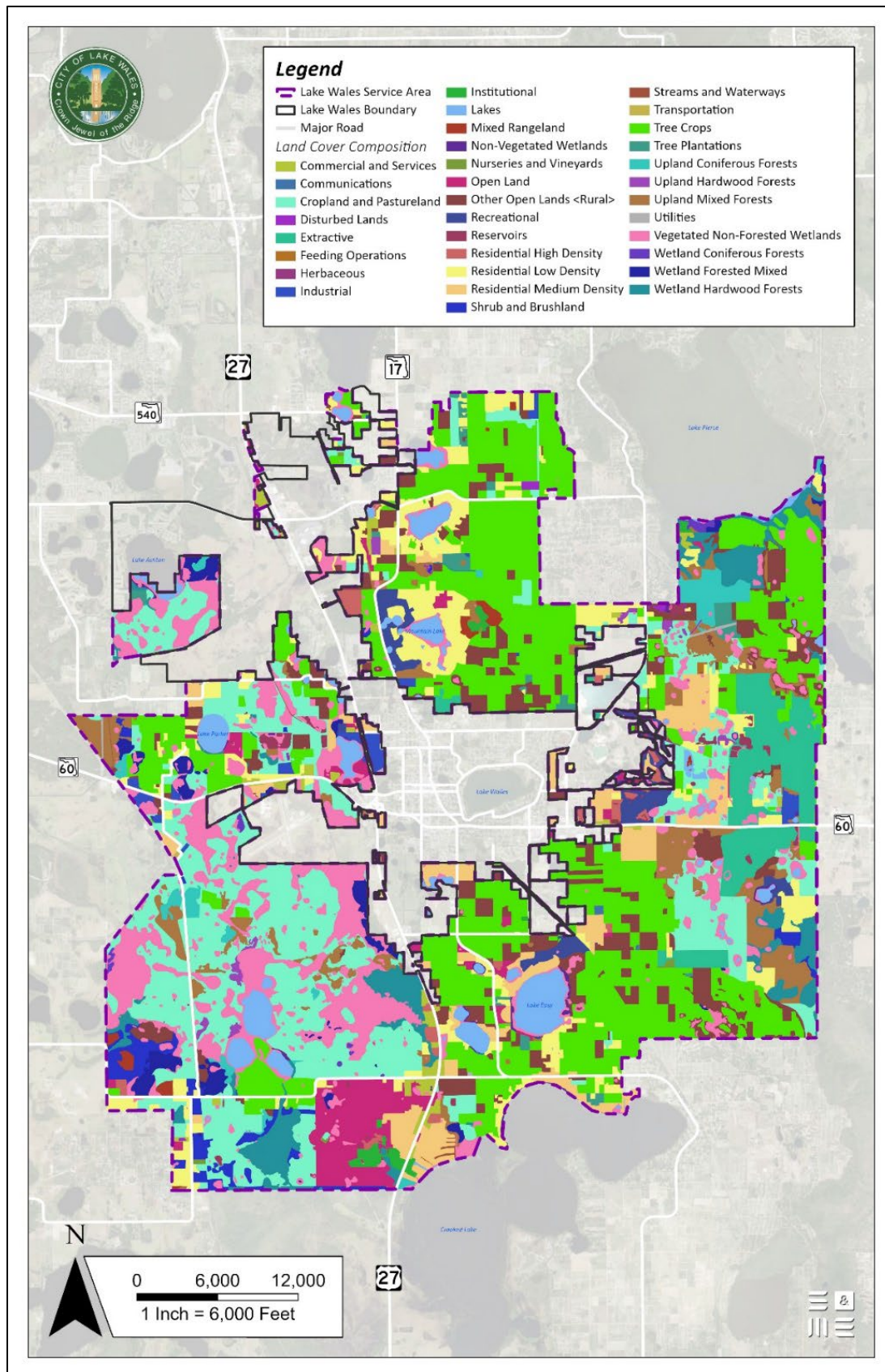
## 6.5 Soils

The permeability of soils has a major impact on the cost and location of new development, as soils that do not drain well and have poor load bearing features that are not suitable for many types of development. These conditions are typically associated with the presence of waterbodies, wetlands, floodplains, and other natural resources, and can therefore limit the net buildable acreage of an area and increase permitting requirements prior to development. As shown in **Figure 17**, soils in the Study Area range from very poorly drained to excessively drained. Lands located west of US Highway 27 exhibit the least desirable soil drainage characteristics, ranging from very poorly to somewhat poorly drained. Lands located east of US Highway 27 are more well-suited to development as drainage conditions significantly improve, ranging from well-drained to excessively drained.

## 6.6 Constraints

The Study Area's development potential is constrained by the environmental factors described above, including the 100-year floodplain, wetlands, and very poorly drained soil. The overall impact of these constraints is shown on **Figure 18**. A substantial portion of the Study Area west of US Highway 27 and the eastern boundary of the Study Area is significantly constrained, as those areas include high concentrations of floodplain, wetlands, and very poorly drained areas. The largest concentration of developable land in the Study Area is located just east of US Highway 27, to the north and south of the City boundary.

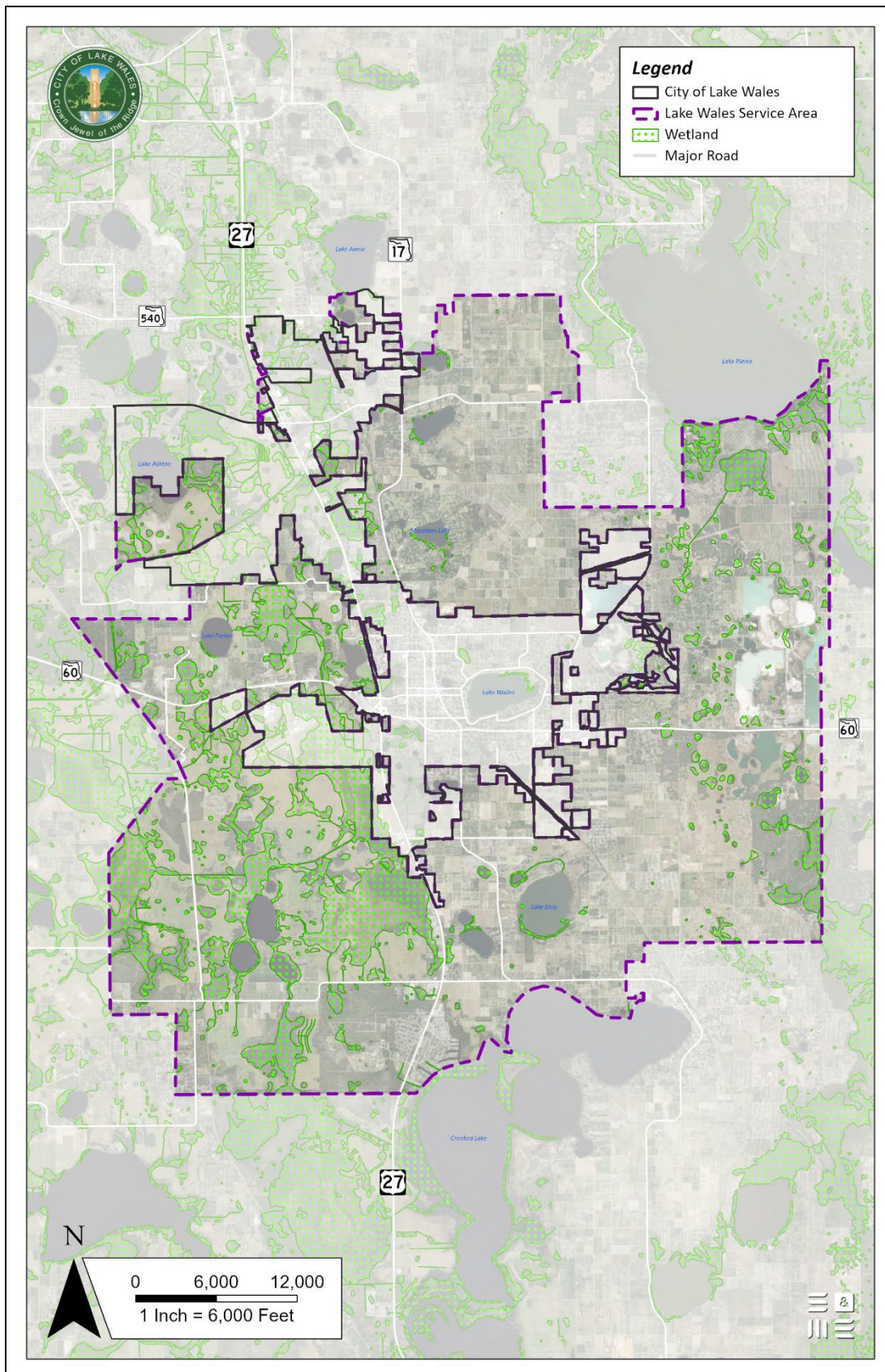
Figure 13. Land Cover Composition Map



Source(s): FGDL, Polk County, Southwest Florida Water Management District, S&ME, 2022.



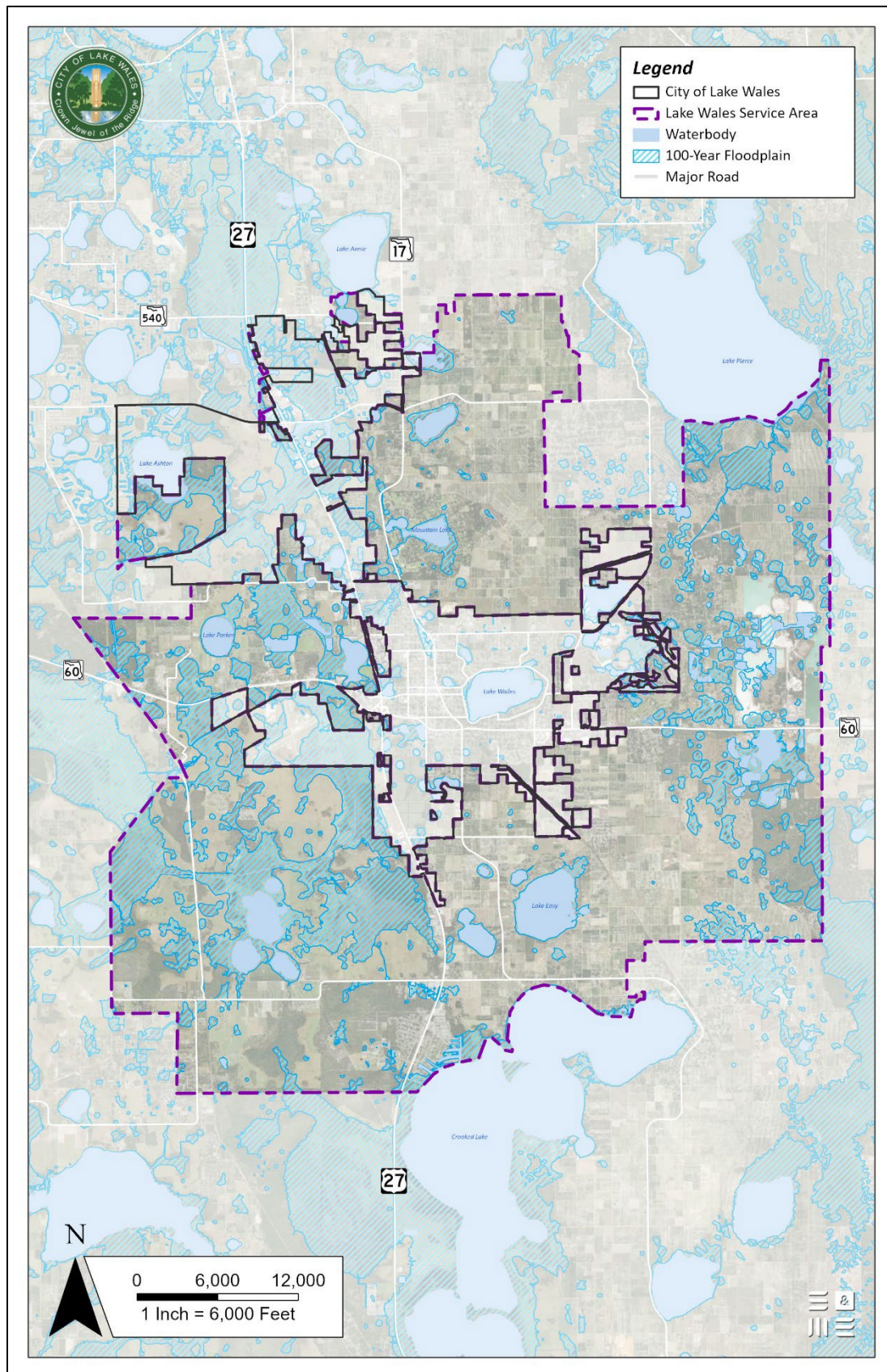
Figure 14. Wetlands



Sources: FGDL, NWI, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.



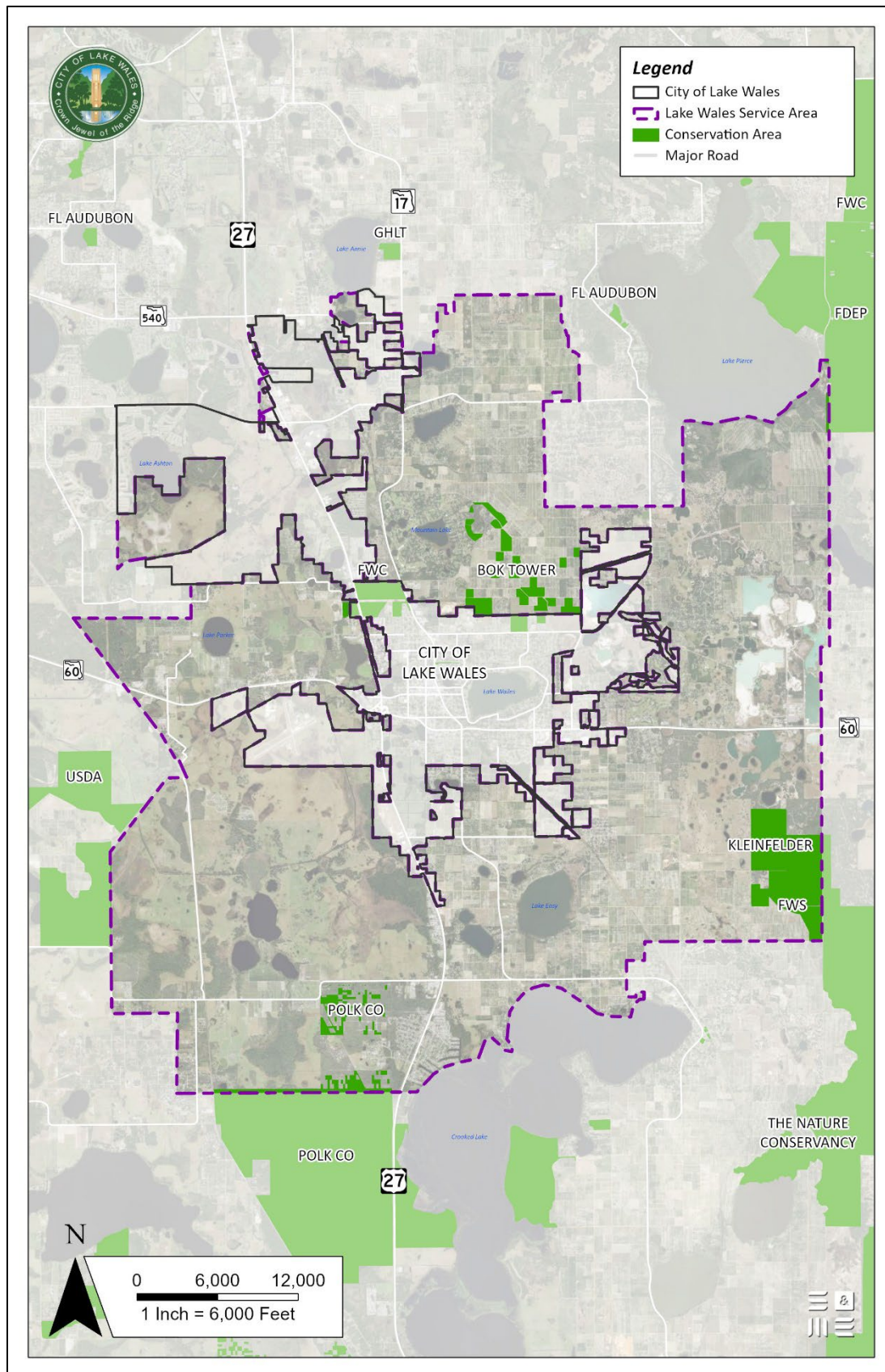
**Figure 15. Floodplains**



Sources: FEMA, FGDL, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.



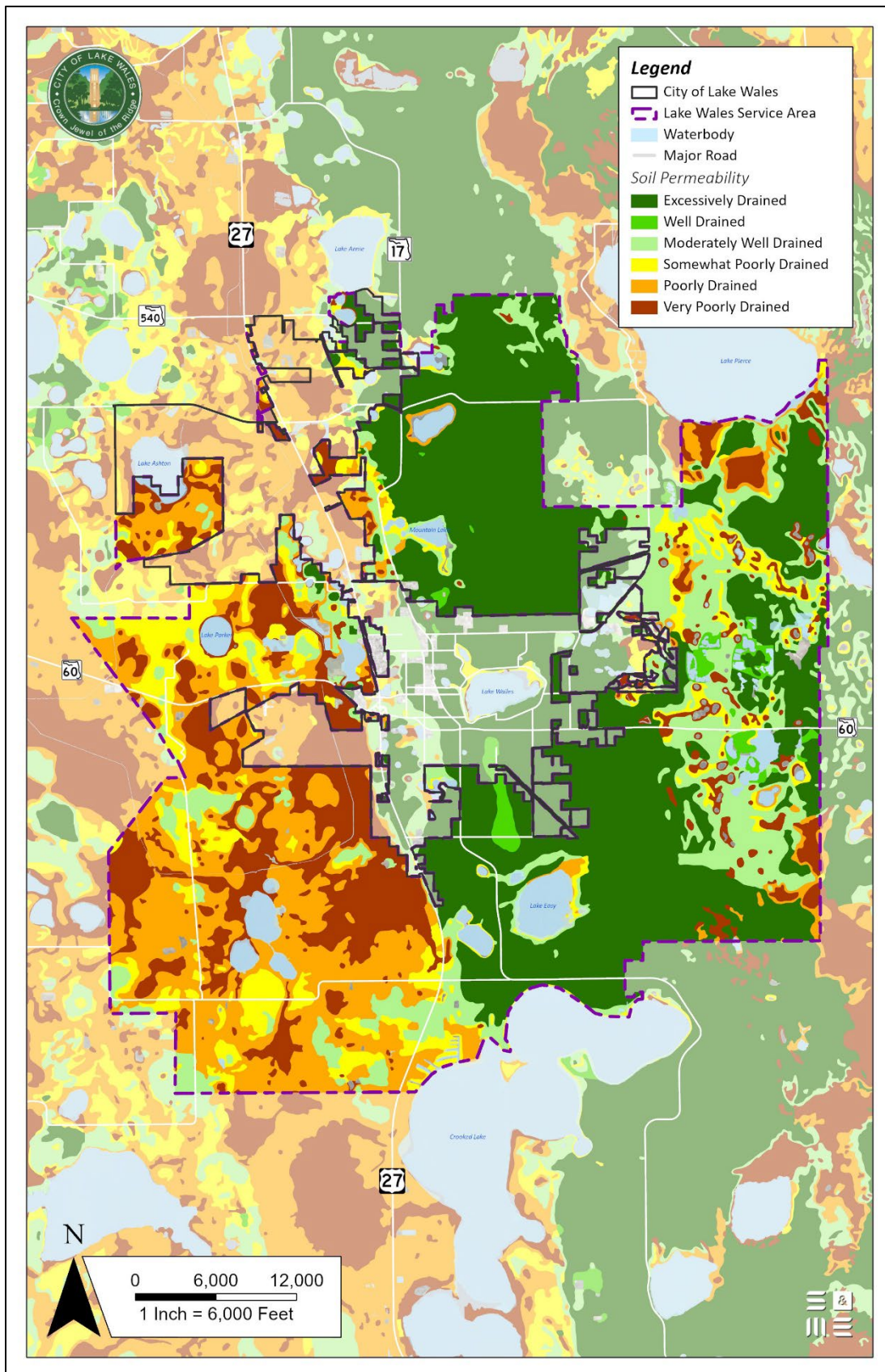
Figure 16. Conservation Map



Sources: FGDL, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.



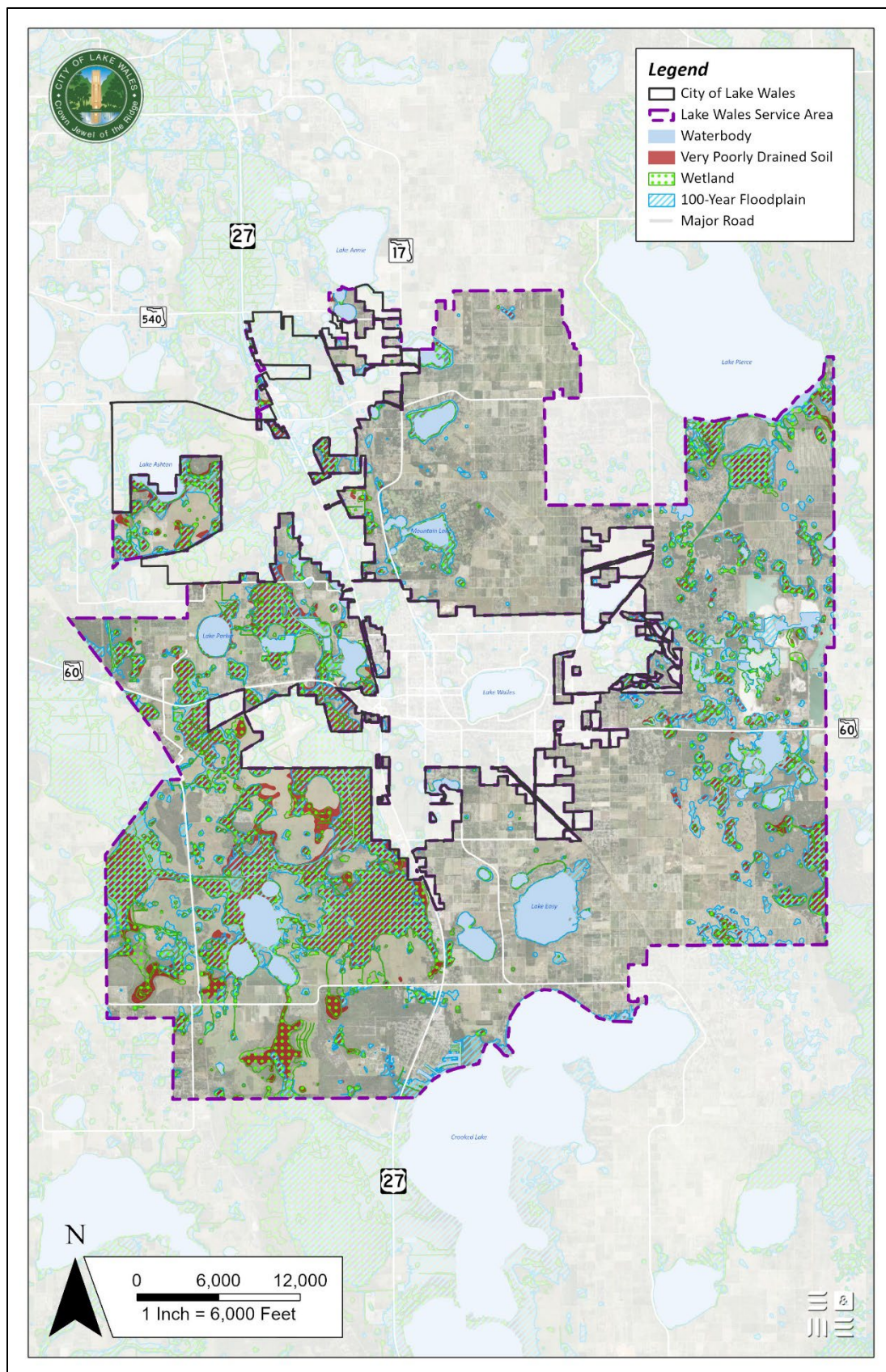
Figure 17. Soil Permeability



Sources: FGDL, NRCS, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.



Figure 18. Environmental Constraints



Sources: FEMA, FGDL, NRCS, NWI, Polk County, S&ME, 2022.