

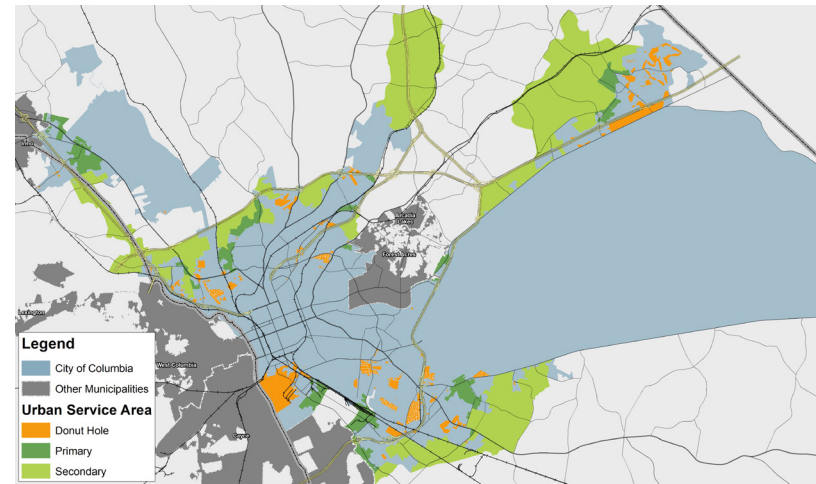
Urban Service Area Plan

WHAT IS IT?

Investment and redevelopment within the existing boundary of the City of Columbia is a priority, but with over 60% of the area population living in unincorporated areas, it is prudent to consider what areas the City can efficiently provide with services beyond its borders. However, any growth presents challenges we should plan for along with the opportunities that may be presented. The Urban Service Area plan provides a prioritization tool for City Council, staff, and the public to consider about the areas that present the best opportunities for the City's long-term growth, while minimizing both short-term and long-term challenges.

A review of existing infrastructure as well as the reach of our community facilities and services helps define how we classify areas within the Urban Service Area plan. Areas have been classified as Primary, Secondary, and Long Range areas - or as Donut Holes - in order to represent the general level of priority based on this review.

Importantly, this Urban Service Area plan is a policy guide, and not a determination about annexation on any individual property. Annexation of private property in South Carolina is by petition and except in limited circumstances a municipality cannot annex without the participation of the residents or owners of an area being considered for annexation. Whether it is presented with a petition from an owner, a group of freeholders, or a group of electors, City Council is tasked with making the determination of whether or not any proposed annexation is in the best interest of the City.



Urban Service Areas (2009 plan) overlaid against City boundaries (February 2019)

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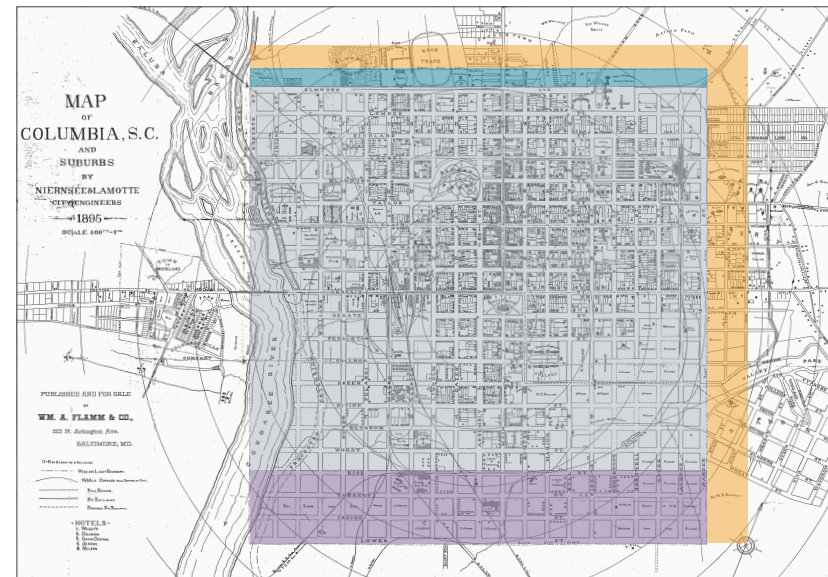
BACKGROUND

The South Carolina State Legislature regulates how Columbia and other municipalities can grow by annexation, but it used to exert even more direct control over Columbia's ability to grow. For a little over 80 years following the founding of Columbia by act of the state legislature in 1786, its boundaries remained stable, the population slowly filling in the two-mile by two-mile original grid bound by the Congaree River and the streets now known as Elmwood Avenue, Harden Street, and Heyward Street.

In 1870, during Reconstruction, it was not City Council but the General Assembly that expanded the boundaries for the first time, and a strip of land about two blocks deep was added to the northern and eastern boundaries of Columbia. Curiously, in 1878 after the end of Reconstruction the General Assembly reversed course and removed most of the land added in 1870 - though a thinner strip (about 400') north of Elmwood Avenue was retained. Legislators also removed from Columbia a strip of land the depth of the three southernmost blocks, the area between present-day Heyward and Rice Streets. Finally, six years later, the General Assembly made its last direct change to Columbia's boundary by restoring these three southern blocks to the City in 1884.

The first annexation that was acted upon by Columbia's City Council was the 1907 annexation of a rectangular tract encompassing most of what is now known as Elmwood Park.

The City has been operating under essentially the same annexation policy since it was formally adopted by resolution R-90-064 in 1990, though elements of the policy were in place before then, and minor



A section of the 1895 Niernsee & Lamotte map of Columbia showing the approximate location of the original City limits (gray and purple), 1870 addition (orange and blue), 1878 removal (orange and purple), and 1884 restoration (purple).

modifications have been made since (most notably resolution R-92-058 in 1992). Amongst its recommendations was the development of an “urban service area” to identify areas that the City would be inclined to provide with urban services.

A May 1992 plan prepared by the Planning Department, *The Columbia Urban Community*, proposed an urban boundary based upon the characteristics of census tracts. Council reaffirmed the annexation policy in 2008, and at that time requested that staff develop a map of the Urban Service Area, including designation of primary, secondary, and long range areas. In 2009, a plan was presented to and subsequently adopted by City Council, and this plan forms the basis of the categories that have been used since.

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CLASSIFICATION

Regardless of Urban Service Area classification within this plan, the timing of when, or even if, any potential future annexation would happen is difficult, if not impossible, to predict. That being said, these classifications are meant to focus the City of Columbia's future annexation efforts in the most rational way possible, and to help guide staff in planning future upgrades or expansion to City services and facilities.

The classification or division of the Urban Service Area into sub-areas within this plan continues the basic framework laid out in the 1990 annexation policy and the 2009 Urban Service Area plan, with some minor modifications. The 1990 annexation policy suggested defining primary, secondary, and long-range areas. It also suggested prioritizing the annexation of "islands" of unincorporated territory and developed areas adjoining the City limits. The 2009 Urban Service Area plan used these suggested classifications, but referred to the "islands" as "donut holes". While a Long Range Area was initially proposed as part of the 2009 plan, ultimately no formal boundaries to this area were adopted.

The most significant modification to this previously developed classification framework is the further categorization of Donut Holes into Primary and Secondary Donut Holes based upon the level of service the City can readily provide. Also, in order to encourage a cohesive and comprehensible boundary, an effort was made during the mapping of these areas to classify neighborhoods or developments that are partially in the City limits into either a Primary Area or Secondary Area, even if the remainder of the surrounding area would otherwise be within the Long Range Area.

DONUT HOLES

Donut holes are unincorporated areas that are completely surrounded by the City of Columbia and/or another municipality, or areas surrounded by the City of Columbia and a major geographical feature, such as a river. These areas pose a number of challenges to the City that can be addressed through annexation. Often, these are areas that were developed before the City or any municipality became adjacent, and may lack easy access to City utilities or other services.

Donut holes can often cause inefficiencies in the delivery of services due to confusion about jurisdiction, and if the land is in a jurisdiction with a different approach to code enforcement, these areas can negatively impact the quality of life for adjacent City residents. Such inefficiencies can impact property owners and residents both within and outside of the municipal boundaries through confusion over services as well as added operational costs to local government, resulting in a greater financial impact to City residents, who pay both City and County taxes.

Donut holes surrounded entirely by the City of Columbia, except in exceptional circumstances, should eventually be incorporated into the City limits. Likewise, donut holes surrounded by the City of Columbia and another municipality should eventually be incorporated into one of the adjoining municipalities, though not necessarily the City of Columbia.

As a general rule, these "split" donut holes are to be considered Secondary Donut Holes, a subclassification discussed further below, unless all or a portion of the Donut Hole would be more logically

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DONUT HOLES, CONTINUED

served by the City of Columbia. This would be, for example, when the City of Columbia serves a majority of an existing development, or intervening geographical or topographical features such as a river or railway separate the donut hole from other adjacent municipalities.

DONUT HOLES - PRIMARY

Donut Holes - Primary are the donut holes where services are readily available and the infrastructure is generally good. These services include fire, police, sanitation, and utilities.

Annexation within areas classified as Donut Hole - Primary is the highest priority. Barring unanticipated circumstances, annexation of these areas is recommended, and staff should work with individual property owners or neighborhoods/developments to encourage and expedite annexation.

DONUT HOLES - SECONDARY

Donut Holes - Secondary are the donut holes where the ability to provide all services and/or the condition of existing infrastructure may not be at optimal levels for annexation at this time. For example, it may be that the storm drainage and/or road system is substandard or that the area is in an overburdened service area.

Annexations within a Donut Hole - Secondary should be considered, but an assessment of the impact on the City's revenue and ability to serve the property/area in question is needed. In areas lacking infrastructure or serviceability, the City should work towards improving these conditions in collaboration with the communities, and the County and other organizations if possible.



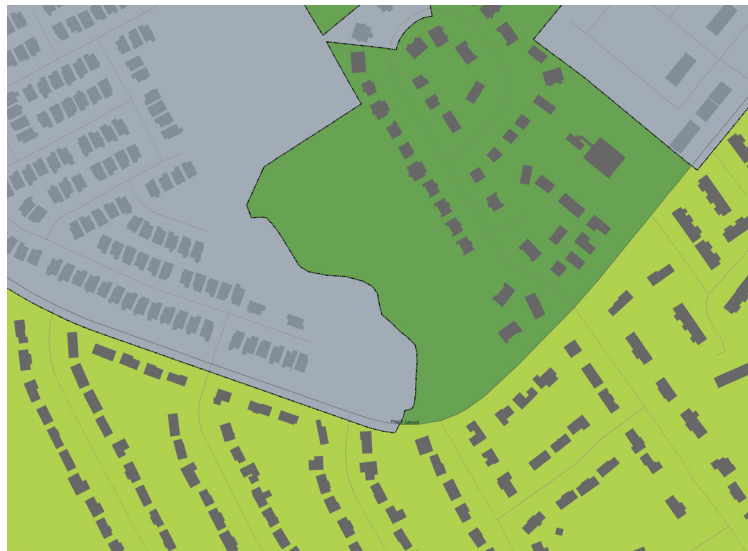
Primary (orange) and Secondary (yellow) Donut Holes

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PRIMARY AREAS

Primary areas are made up of land contiguous to the City where services are readily available and the infrastructure is generally good. These services include fire, police, sanitation, and utilities.

Annexations within Primary Areas are the second highest priority, after areas classified as Donut Hole - Primary. Barring unanticipated circumstances, annexation is recommended and staff should work with individual property owners or neighborhoods/developments to encourage and expedite annexation.



Primary (dark green) and Secondary (light green) Areas

SECONDARY AREAS

Secondary Areas are those areas where it may be logical or advantageous to provide City services, but where the ability to provide all services and/or the condition of existing infrastructure may not be at optimal levels for annexation. For instance, it may be that the property is outside of the generally accepted fire response area, or the storm drainage and/or road system is substandard. These areas may include “higher value” properties where annexation could prove beneficial to revenues.

Annexation within Secondary Areas should be considered, but an assessment of the impact on the City’s revenue and ability to serve the property/area in question should occur prior to consideration of and action on annexation petitions.

For example, the annexation of a single family residence may be beneficial to the property owner and of minimal impact to the City when it is in close proximity to other residences being provided with services such as police or solid waste. On the other hand, annexation may not be advisable for a similar single family residence that - despite being contiguous with the City limits - was isolated from other properties receiving these same services. While the City’s focus should be on Donut Holes and Primary Areas, staff should work with parties interested in annexation if workload permits, and may actively solicit an annexation if it is determined to be in the best interest of the City.

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LONG RANGE AREAS

Long Range Areas are those areas that do not meet the criteria of Primary Areas or Secondary Areas but are within the Columbia Water service area. They may not meet the criteria simply due to distance, because of the condition of the existing infrastructure, or because of the practicality of providing City services- or any combination thereof.

Even within the Columbia Water service area, not all areas beyond the Donut Holes and Primary and Secondary areas should be considered Long Range Areas. Long Range Areas are not mapped, but are generally those areas that meet these guidelines:

- Located within the Columbia Water Service Area
- Not located within another municipality, including the donut holes surrounded by that municipality
- A developed area of urban or suburban character, or an area undergoing development
- Not an area maintaining a rural character.

Rural character would typically be characterized by a low and stable population density (i.e. less than 200 people per square mile), or areas where the predominant existing and expected future land use consists of active or passive agricultural uses, or natural areas set aside for conservation. A rural or conservation future land use classification in a County land use plan, coupled with a rural zoning district assignment, may also be a marker of rural character.

Annexation within Long Range Areas is the lowest priority.

Annexation of small individual properties in these areas is generally not in the City's best interest, however new developments and group petitions can be considered for annexation with an assessment of the impact on the City's revenue and ability to serve the property/ area in question.

Generally, the City will not proactively seek to annex properties in a Long Range Area, including properties contiguous to the City limits. In particular, when the owner of a contiguous property in a Long Range Area wishes to connect to City water or City Sewer, the City, at its sole discretion, may wish to provide service without the requirement for a petition for annexation. In these cases, the owner would still be required to execute a recordable covenant agreeing to bind the owner and all future owners to annex into the City at a future time if or when the City deems it to be appropriate.

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UPDATING THE PLAN

A recommendation of Columbia Compass which can be found later in this chapter calls for an overall update to the Urban Service Area in coordination with City service providers at least once every five years. However, some adjustments to the classification of an area are warranted if one of these scenarios occurs:

- **If a new donut hole is created** through the annexation of surrounding areas, the classification should change to Donut Hole – Primary for areas previously within a Primary Area, and Donut Hole – Secondary for areas previously within a Secondary Area or a Long Range Area.
- **If an existing Donut Hole - Secondary is significantly reduced in size or divided** into smaller parts through annexation, the remaining donut hole(s) should be reviewed to determine if reclassification of all or part of it to Donut Hole - Primary is warranted.
- **Completion of significant capital improvement projects** (CIPs) may warrant a review of the affected area, especially in donut holes and those areas closest to the City limits.

THE URBAN SERVICE AREA MAP

The four classifications mapped within the Urban Service Area are identified as follows:

-  Donut Hole - Primary
-  Donut Hole - Secondary
-  Primary Area
-  Secondary Area

It should be noted that the boundaries between the Urban Service Area classifications are illustrative and therefore not parcel-specific. When processing the annexation of parcels located on or near boundary lines, staff will determine the area to which it most appropriately relates based upon services and conditions

The Urban Service Area is, as its name denotes, a representation of the accessibility of City services as it relates to the annexation of land. To determine the location of each area, Planning staff worked in consultation with other City staff, including representatives from Columbia Water, Police, Fire, and Public Works. Initial meetings laid out the scope as well as the goals of the project. Each department supplied information on their services and constraints, including fire response areas, police regions and staffing, solid waste routes and their capacity, and water and sewer lines. The data gathered from departments was overlaid and analyzed along with municipal boundaries, existing conditions, and current development patterns to devise draft boundaries. These were reviewed with departments and revised based upon feedback and additional analysis.

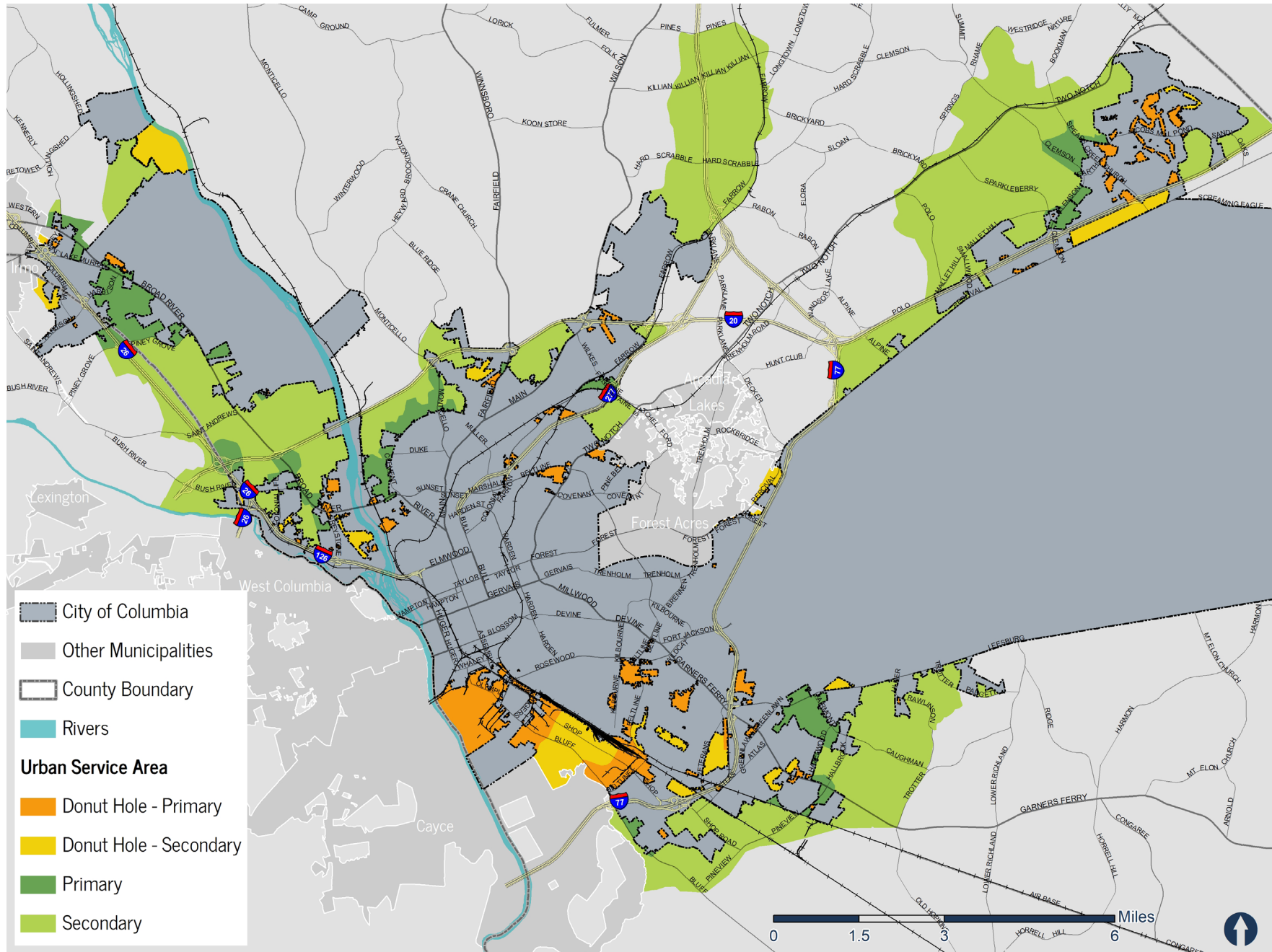
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THE URBAN SERVICE AREA MAP, CONTINUED

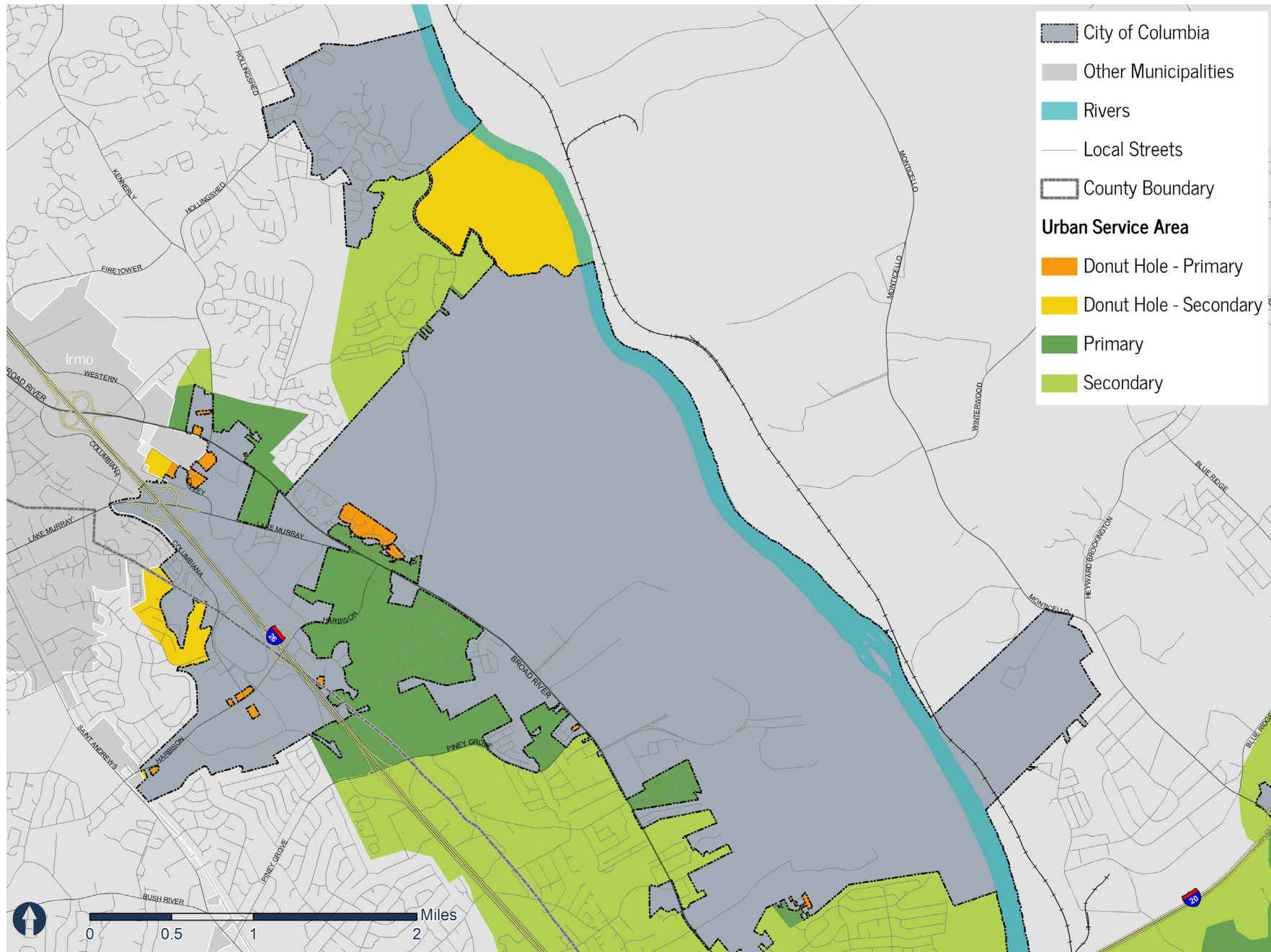
Some additional general information to aid in understanding the maps and the underlying factors influencing the extent of each of the service areas:

- Seamless fire service is available to areas within Richland County through an intergovernmental fire agreement between the City and the County, however fire service was only considered available for the purposes of the Urban Service Area if the fire service would be provided by a City controlled station. The Fire Department rightly cautions against a reliance on County-owned stations in determining the City's ability to provide service, as these stations may be relocated without consultation. The generation of revenue and service and funding responsibility that comes with annexation is addressed within the intergovernmental fire agreement, and is generally balanced
- Solid waste service on the Monday and Friday routes must consistently use overtime to complete pick-ups. Thursday is the least burdened route, but it is also nearly landlocked. Eventually the service dates will need to be changed for some customers to rebalance the work load between days, however changing service dates should not be done frequently as it will involve public outreach and involves changing ingrained customer habits. Annexation, especially the annexation of residences, brings immediate service and the associated costs, including the cost of providing garbage and recycling roll carts. Large annexations, like the annexation of an existing neighborhood, require planning to ensure that an adequate number of - and funding for - roll carts, trucks, and personnel are available on the date of annexation.
- As with Solid Waste, the Police Department may require adjustment to the staffing of or realignment between regions due to existing growth and development trends and/or annexation. In particular, the East Region has seen significant annexation and residential development over the last several years. Large annexations, like the annexation of an existing neighborhood, require planning to ensure that an adequate number of - and funding for - officers and equipment is available to serve the area on the date of annexation.
- Areas were ranked on the general availability of water and separately on the general availability of sewer. Availability does not necessarily mean that water and/or sewer extends to every lot. If water or sewer is not available to an area or parcel, the City may encounter some or all of the expenses of extending the utility or expanding capacity, and any required capital improvement projects (CIPs) require a significant amount of time and planning. In some areas sewer is supplied by another provider- as the City would not be involved in either the construction or maintenance of sewer in these areas, they are weighed the same as areas with high availability of City sewer.

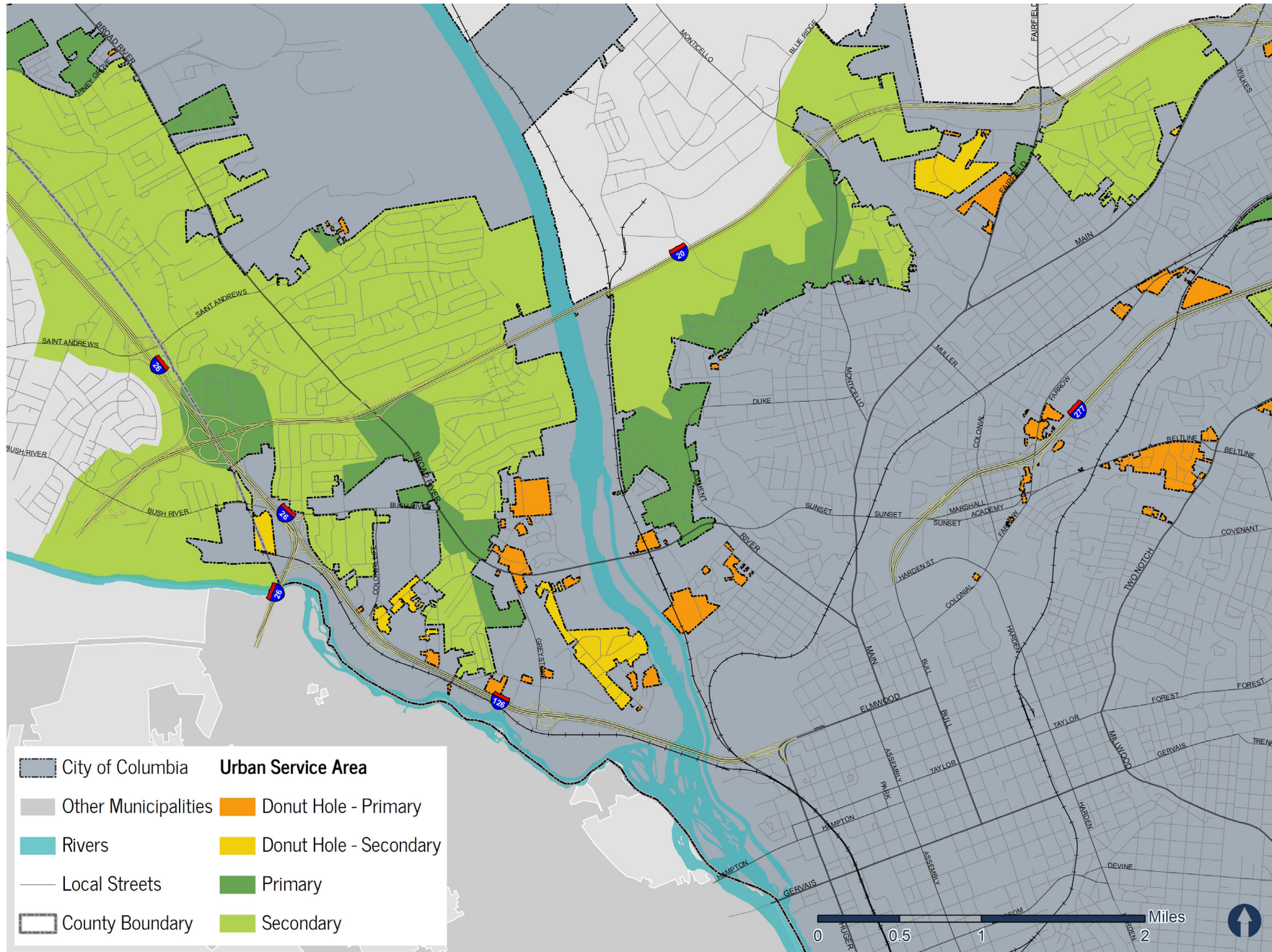
Urban Service Area Plan - Overview



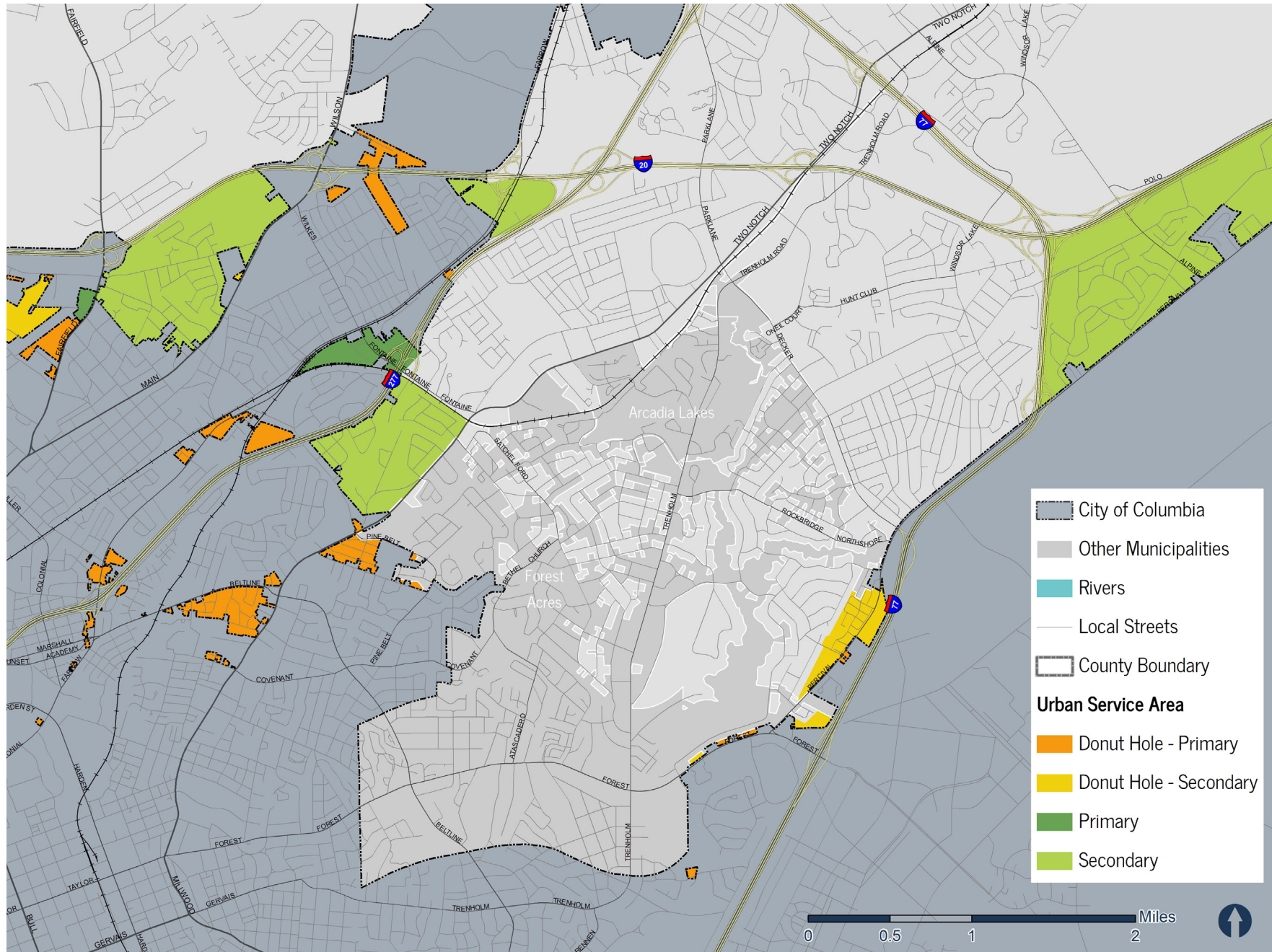
Urban Service Area Plan - Northwest



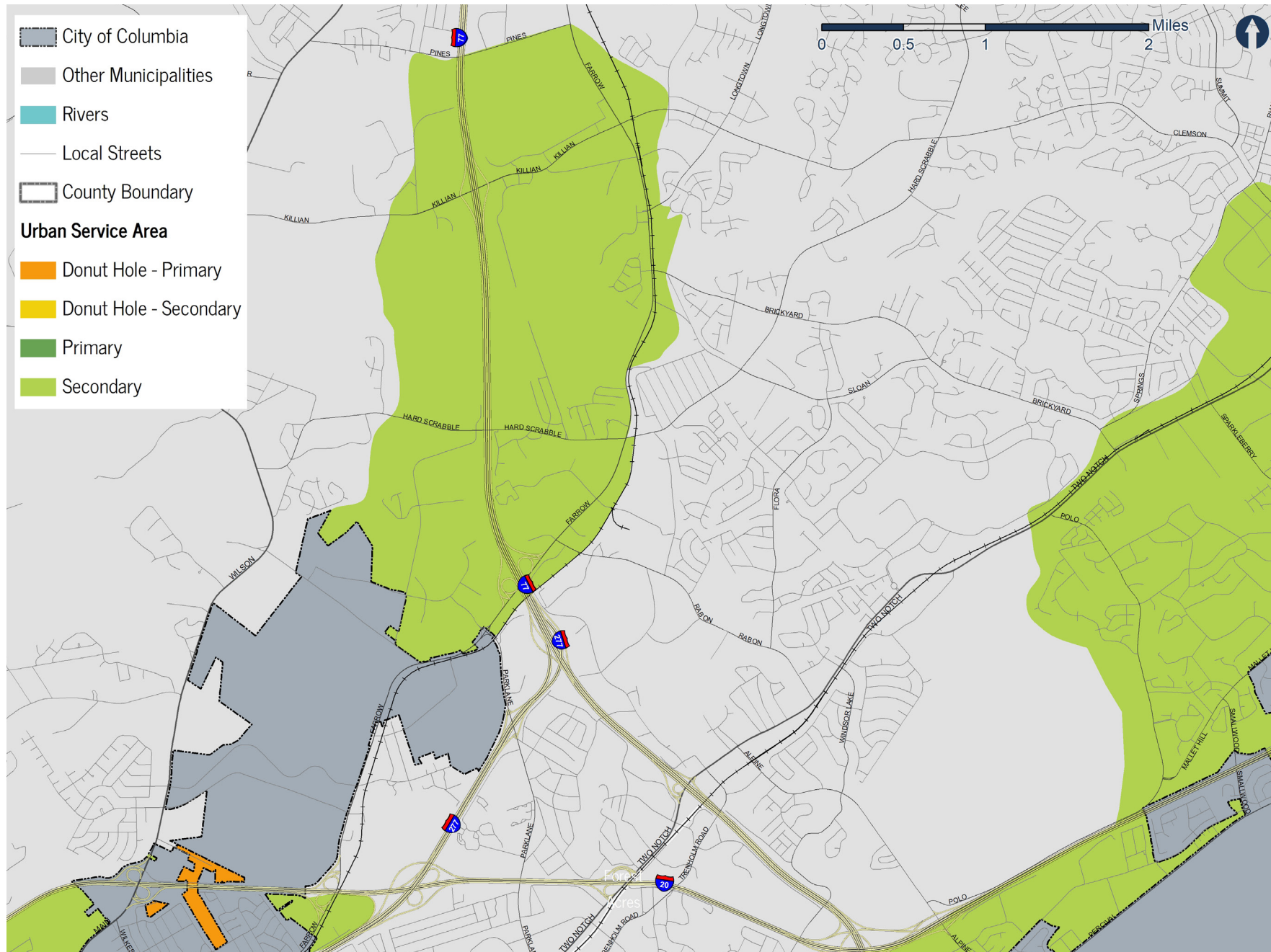
Urban Service Area Plan - West



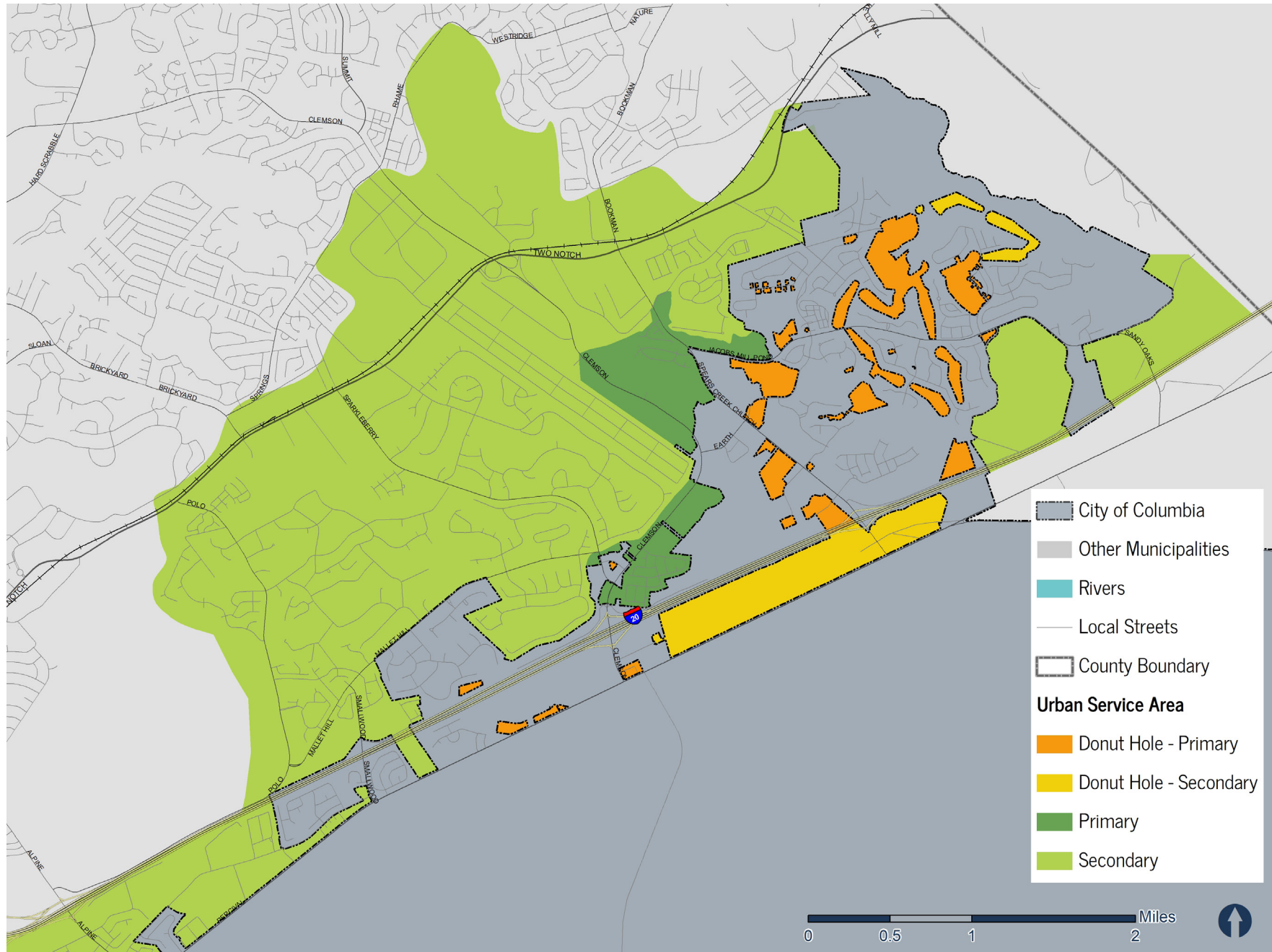
Urban Service Area Plan - East Central



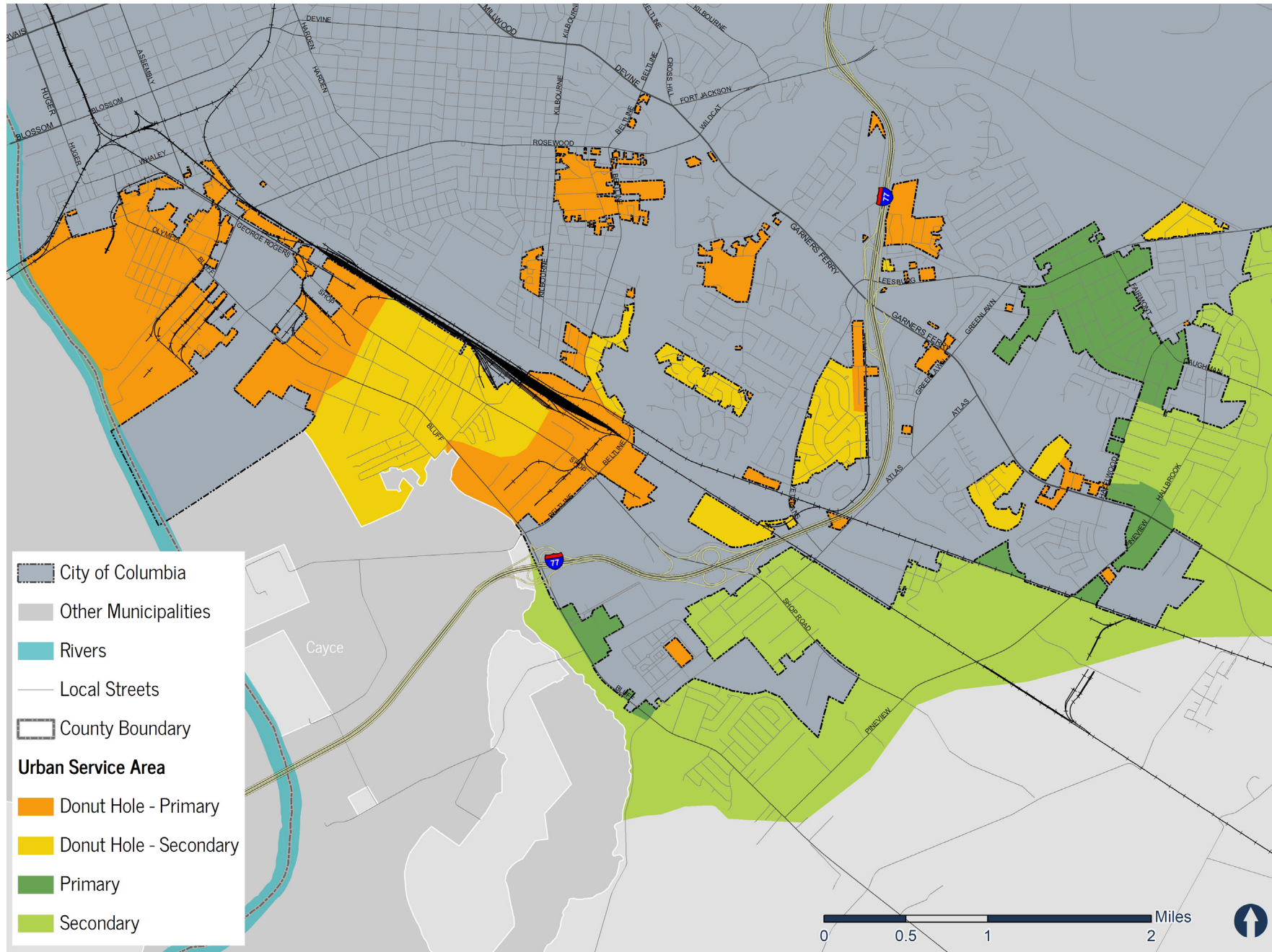
Urban Service Area Plan - North Central



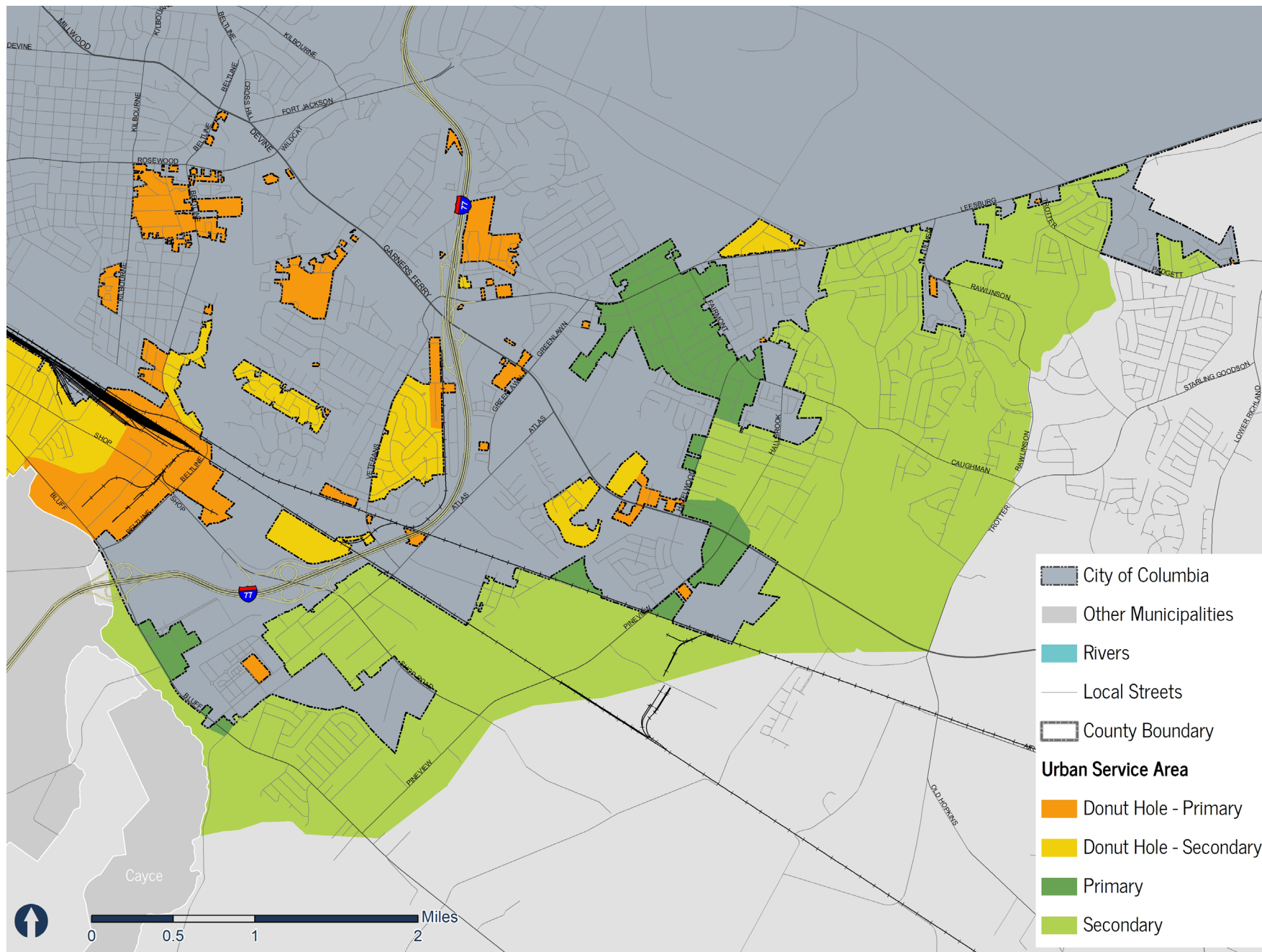
Urban Service Area Plan - Northeast



Urban Service Area Plan - Southwest



Urban Service Area Plan - Southeast



Urban Service Area Plan

THE URBAN SERVICE AREA PLAN & ANNEXATION

Even if a property is within a defined Urban Service Area category according to this plan, it does not mean that the property will be annexed anytime soon – or ever. While the City can encourage annexation and even require annexation from those seeking City services, the decision to annex is primarily in the hands of the property owners or voters.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2010 about 66% of South Carolinians were living in urban areas, but only 35% lived in municipalities. Likewise, the jagged edges and donut holes seen in municipal boundaries throughout the state, and their resulting inefficiencies, are to be expected given the relatively strict annexation laws in South Carolina. Beyond South Carolina, as of 2006, thirty-nine states allowed for municipalities to initiate annexation to some degree, while still providing some degree of due process and other measures to protect property rights.⁷

ANNEXATION PROCESS

A municipality in South Carolina cannot initiate annexations, except for the annexation of properties it owns or for cemeteries. However, because a municipality is under no obligation to provide services beyond its boundaries, it may require annexation as a condition of receiving any such services. Also, a municipality can work together with property owners and communities to encourage the completion of a petition for annexation. The three main methods of annexation authorized by state law all require a petition from the property owners or residents to initiate annexation.

100% FREEHOLDER PETITION AND ORDINANCE METHOD

Using this petition method, any contiguous area may be annexed by the filing of a petition signed by all property owners. The annexation is complete once council adopts an annexation ordinance.

The “100%” method has been the most frequently used method of annexation for the City of Columbia. This method is the simplest because it involves a direct interaction between the City and the owners of the property being annexed.

75% FREEHOLDER PETITION AND ORDINANCE METHOD

Under this group petition method, any contiguous area may be annexed by filing a petition, meeting certain specified requirements, signed by at least 75% of the freeholders who own at least 75% of the assessed valuation of the real property in the area requesting annexation. The annexation is complete if the governing body enacts an ordinance declaring the area annexed to the municipality. No election is needed, however a public hearing is held.

Prior to the annexation of 44 homes in the Garden Springs neighborhood in October 2018, this method had not been used by the City since 2001.

25% ELECTOR PETITION AND ELECTION METHOD

A petition of 25% of the electors living in the area proposed to be annexed triggers this group petition/election method. The election is held only in the area proposed to be annexed.

This method has not been used by the City since before the state law was amended in 2000 to remove a provision requiring a petition and vote of property owners in addition to the vote of electors.

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SERVICE CONSIDERATIONS

When a city grows through annexation, many focus on the impact to population, land area, and the expansion and diversification of the tax base, but it is equally important to understand the impact on the city's services - and the costs associated with providing them - to any newly annexed area. To ensure that annexation does not impact services to areas already within the City, the impact of annexation should be a consideration in the review of any departmental budgets, especially those that provide direct services to residents and businesses, such as Public Works, Columbia Water, and the City's first responders.

Costs to the City upon annexation are real and often immediate. Except in the case of large capital improvements (for example, construction of a new sewer main), the provision of services begin immediately upon annexation, yet any revenue in the form of property taxes may not reach the City's accounts for a year or more. Furthermore, while the services from large capital improvements may not arrive upon annexation, the expenses of planning, design, and construction will certainly precede any revenue.

A small annexation, such as the annexation of a single home or small business, does not usually have a significant impact on revenue, budget, or ability to provide services. However, the impact of annexation to the City and its departments is significant in the following ways.

Small annexations generally have an **annual cumulative impact**.

New garbage and recycling roll carts need to be delivered to residential properties in addition to providing weekly pickups, but the carts are likely to be in stock. The Columbia Police Department assumes primary responsibility for any service calls, and the City

becomes responsible for zoning and code enforcement. Water and sewer rates are lower for in-city accounts, and some properties beyond the City limits may require the extension of water or sewer lines to serve the annexed property. Some additional street, sidewalk, and stormdrain maintenance responsibilities may be incurred. When located within donut holes or adjacent to areas already served, these annexations may reduce existing inefficiencies and encourage a continuity of service. However, if isolated from areas already served, a small annexation may create new service inefficiencies and costs.

Large group annexations (for example, the annexation of an existing neighborhood) generally have both an **immediate impact** and a **longer-term impact**. If a community annexes by way of a group petition, the City must be prepared to provide most of its services at the time of annexation, though it may provide a time frame for providing any capital improvements such as new sewer service. In addition to the service impacts mentioned above, advance planning and budgeting may be required to ensure that adequate equipment and staff is available to serve the area proposed for annexation. Other considerations include budgeting for long-term maintenance and potential future repairs or reconstruction of existing substandard infrastructure.

Annexations of undeveloped land or land proposed for development generally have a **longer-term impact** on City services. Even if the area being annexed is large, without existing development the immediate impact on City services would be minimal. However, as these larger tract annexations often involve proposed greenfield development, impacts may be substantial. The City should prepare and budget for future increased services, bearing in mind that market forces can accelerate or delay development.