



Whiteville

Business Starter Packet



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So, You Want to Start A Business...?

The City of Whiteville is invested in the success of your new business and would like to work with you to navigate the planning and permitting process. While the path to opening a new business can be filled with surprises and unexpected turns, the City wants to help you understand the typical steps before you get started on your journey. Whether you are thinking of opening a business from home, signing a lease in an established storefront, or even building new construction to house your venture, it is crucial that you acquaint yourself with local and state regulations and ordinances before you begin.

Home-Based Businesses

Many home businesses are permitted within Whiteville's residential zoning districts. If your home-based business does not require renovations or alterations to your home, then it is likely that you will not need permits. However, you will still need to make sure your business meets the requirements for "home occupations."

If you have questions about starting a home-based business, please contact the City of Whiteville Planning Department at (910) 640-1380.

Storefront Business and New Construction

If you are looking to operate your business from a storefront, then this packet will be useful! The City of Whiteville encourages you to review the steps outlined in this packet before signing your lease or hiring a contractor.

Fulfilling State Requirements

North Carolina requires a series of legal steps before opening your business. While this packet exists to walk you through the process of starting a business in Whiteville, it is also important that you complete the necessary state requirements. These can include, but are not limited to, registering your business, obtaining necessary occupational licenses, and employer requirements.

Information about North Carolina's statewide requirements can be found [here](#). Official business resource specialists are also available to answer your questions at 1-800-228-8443.



This packet was assembled by NCGrowth, an award-winning applied economic development university center with a goal of directly addressing inequality, poverty, underemployment, and other factors that keep people and communities from reaching their greatest potential. NCGrowth's team includes expert staff across the Carolinas, academic advisors from multiple universities and hundreds of local partners. Learn more at ncgrowth.unc.edu.

Business Starter Steps



I. Checking Your Zoning & Land Use Designation



II. Making Sure That Your Building Is Up to Code



III. Obtaining Your Permits for Construction, Alteration, Movement, & More



IV. Signing Your Lease



V. Getting Your Building Inspected



VI. Establishing Your Utility Accounts



I. CHECKING YOUR ZONING AND LAND USE DESIGNATION

Your first step should be to verify that the location you are considering for your business has the proper land use and zoning designation for the type of business you are looking to open. Zoning regulations are designed to protect the welfare of the community, conserve the value of property, and contribute to the development of the city.

To determine whether your business is approved in a given zoning district, consult either the zoning map located in the appendix of this packet or the online [interactive map](#).

If you use the interactive map, click on the “Data Search” bar in the top-right portion of the screen and select “Address.” Then type your proposed business address into the “Address Search” bar to locate it on the map. From there, click into the shaded region in which the address is located to reveal its zoning district.



Once you identify the zone that your business is in, visit the [table of approved uses](#) to determine whether your business is permitted in that particular zone. The table identifies three zoning designations:

- 1) **Unconditionally permitted ("Use by Right"):** indicated by a "P." If your use is unconditionally permitted, then you may move to the next step.
- 2) **Permitted as conditional use:** indicated by a "C." If your use is conditionally permitted, then you must [apply for a conditional use permit](#). Approval of a conditional use permit is the duty of the City Council and includes additional requirements. Details about the process and a table of regulations for conditional use can be found in [city ordinances](#) § 155.095 to § 155.097.
- 3) **Prohibited:** indicated by a blank. If your potential business is prohibited in the chosen district, then you need to consider a new location.

NOTE: Any use that is not specifically listed on the table of approved uses may be applied for as a conditional use upon approval from the City Council. Please contact the Planning Department to learn more about this option.



II. MAKING SURE THAT YOUR BUILDING IS UP TO CODE

After you determine that the building you plan to use is approved by the City of Whiteville's zoning regulations, your next step is to find out whether the building will require renovations in order to meet the [North Carolina State Building Code](#). The purpose of the State Building Code is to provide minimum standards to protect public safety, health, property, and general welfare.

It is recommended (though not required) that you work with a contractor or architect to determine whether the building you wish to use is up to code. If it is not, then working with a professional will help ensure that the proper renovations and/or updates are made to your building. This step is crucial for passing inspections further down the process. Failure to make certain that your building is up to code could result in penalties or fines.

Note: Many code requirements are based on the type of business that occupies a building. The Building Code calls this the occupancy classification of a business. Once the occupancy classification is established, then other portions of the code can be determined and applied. To learn more about the various building occupancy classifications, visit [Chapter 3](#) of the State Building Code.



Flooding: Protecting Your Business and Our Community

The City of Whiteville has identified flooding as a major issue for the community. The City has experienced two 500-year floods in the past five years and three 500-year floods in the past 21 years. These floods damaged business properties and interrupted commercial activities.

In June 2020, the [North Carolina Climate Risk Assessment and Resiliency Plan](#) predicted that annual precipitation, hurricane intensity, and inland flooding are all likely to increase in the near future. These factors have the potential to further damage wetlands and natural barriers that help protect communities from storm surge. As this problem worsens, we all must act to protect against flood-induced interruptions to business growth in Whiteville.



To address the concerns of citizens, the City commissioned a [downtown stormwater study](#) that identified areas for improvement, as well as approved a \$1.7 million buyout program for flood-prone homes. However, the City cannot tackle this problem alone and will require the help of all citizens who are opening businesses in the community to follow ordinances regarding floodplain construction and development. By following the rules laid out in the City code, it is more likely that growth in flood-prone areas will be preserved **when (not if)** the next flood occurs. Please see below for an explanation on how to determine if your business is in a floodplain and, if so, what steps you should follow to mitigate stormwater damage.

A floodplain development permit is required prior to any development activities within special flood hazard areas. To find out if your property sits within a designated flood hazard area, please visit the [Flood Risk Information System](#) website and type your address into the search bar on the left side of the screen. New development located in Flood Zones AE, A, AO, or A1-30 are subject to strict requirements regarding construction, substantial improvements, and more. Any new construction or substantial improvements to structures within flood hazard areas also requires adherence to city ordinances. Please see [Chapter 151](#) of the City code for more information on specific requirements. Again, the City recommends that you work with a contractor if you are making improvements or developing within a flood zone.



III. OBTAINING YOUR PERMITS FOR CONSTRUCTION, ALTERATION, MOVEMENT, AND MORE

Applying for Building Permits

Permits from the City of Whiteville are required before proceeding with the construction, reconstruction, alteration, repair, movement to another site, removal or demolition of any building or structure. The types of permits needed will vary depending on the changes you intend to make to your building.



Note: If you are changing the occupancy classification of your building (such as from Business use to Educational use), then you will need to contact the Planning and Inspections department to receive the proper permits and paperwork.

In general, any expansion or alteration to the footprint of your building requires you to request a [Commercial Building Permit Application](#).

Part of the Commercial Building Permit Application includes the submission of a site plan. A site plan is a diagram meant to show proposed improvements to your property. The plan includes both structural elements and a civil drawing, which show information about grading, landscaping, and other structural features of the property. An official *site plan checklist* is included in the Commercial Building Permit Application for your convenience. Additionally, an example site plan drawing is included in the appendix of this document for your reference. Aside from structural or floor plan changes, work requiring a permit could also include the installation, repair, or extension of 1) plumbing; 2) heating or cooling systems; and 3) electrical wiring, devices, appliances, or equipment. If you do not make structural changes to your building but are doing work to the plumbing, heating/cooling, or electrical, then you may simply apply for those permits individually. Please

“The City highly recommends you work with an architect or contractor...”

note that your Commercial Building Permit Application *does not* include trade permits such as plumbing, heating/cooling, mechanical, or electrical.

You can find individual permit applications on the [Planning and Inspections](#) webpage, in the Inspection Forms section. The City highly recommends you work with an architect or contractor to help determine occupancy classification, space layout, exiting requirements, and other requirements that may need to be addressed.

Note: If you are moving into a storefront and making no changes or updates to your building, you will likely still need a [zoning permit](#) and fire inspection. The only exception is if you move into a building that was previously inhabited by a business of the same occupancy classification and it has not been 180 days since the previous tenant occupied the building. For example, if you open a dance studio in a building that was previously occupied by a different dance studio, and it has not yet been 180 days since they moved out, then you will need no permits or inspections. Please contact the Planning Department to confirm that this exception applies to your building.

Note: In conjunction with or in addition to any building permits, you may need other permits, approvals, or licenses to start your business. For example, if your business will serve alcohol, you will need to obtain a permit from the North Carolina [Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission](#). All eating establishments will also need to complete a [Plan Review Application](#) through [Columbus County Environmental Health](#) and reach out to the [Wastewater Treatment Plant](#) regarding grease traps.

Visit the [permits section of the city ordinances](#) or call the [Inspections Department](#) at (910) 640-1380 ext 2002 if you have additional questions about necessary permits for your building.

Applying for Signage Permits

While thinking about signage for your business is typically one of the last steps of the process, the City encourages you to get ahead of the game and include this step within the larger permitting process. Whether or not you choose to design and install a sign, you will want to familiarize yourself with the City of Whiteville's [sign regulations](#).

There you will find information that includes the types of



signs allowed in various zoning districts, the materials you may use for a sign, the height restrictions on signs, and much more.

The [Sign Permit Application](#) includes questions about the area of the sign, general layout/design, and method of illumination. If conditions warrant it, the Building Inspector may request additional information that is not in the application to ensure your sign conforms with City rules.

It is highly recommended that you hire a professional sign contractor to help you design, construct, and install your permanent sign(s). Questions regarding permanent signs should be directed to a professional sign contractor or the City of Whiteville Planning Department at (910) 640-1380.

Permit Fees

The full schedule of fees for permits and inspections is on pages 55-68 in the City's [2020-2021 Operating Budget](#). There you will find the costs associated with zoning permits, building permits, fire inspections, water services, and much more. Please contact the Planning and Inspections Department at (910) 640-1380 if you have additional questions.





IV. SIGNING YOUR LEASE

The previous steps outline the due diligence that the City of Whiteville recommends you take before signing your lease. Once complete, you are ready to sign a lease!



Step I: Before entering into a contract for commercial property, it is essential to verify that land use and zoning will allow you to operate your business in that location.



Step II: Also verify whether the building requires renovations to meet State Building Code based on its occupancy classification.



Step III: Determine which permits are needed to begin the necessary work.



V. GETTING YOUR BUILDING INSPECTED

After the necessary renovations have been completed, you or your contractor may request a building inspection by calling (910) 640-1380 and selecting Option 2. You will need to schedule inspections for any work that requires permitting, including plumbing, electrical, heating and cooling, etc. To schedule a Fire Inspection, contact Hal Lowder at (910) 642-8046 ext. 2004.

Completion of a building inspection is required before you can receive a Certificate of Occupancy. Failure to call for an inspection or proceeding without approval at each stage of construction is a violation of city ordinances.

The City has compiled a list of [10 Common Violations Cited During Commercial Occupancy Fire Inspections](#) and a [Fire Inspection Checklist](#). Please refer to these documents to prepare for your Inspections.





VI. ESTABLISHING YOUR UTILITY ACCOUNTS

Unless your utilities will be handled through a landlord or management company, you will need to establish services for the property. The City of Whiteville provides water and sewage services. Included in water and sewage are garbage collection and leaf and limb services. To establish these services call (910) 642-8046 and press option 1. Other utility services provided for the property will need to be established with the appropriate utility providers. For example, electric service is primarily provided by Duke Energy. Internet service providers include Spectrum, Atlantic Telephone Membership Corporation (ATMC), and CenturyLink.

Electric

Duke Energy – (910) 642-1232

Internet

Spectrum – (888) 406-7063

ATMC – (910) 754-4311

CenturyLink – 1-877-410-1585

Gas and Propane

Cape Fear Propane – (910) 642-4137

Lumber River Propane – (910) 640-2471

Campbell Oil Company – (910) 642-4598

And that concludes the planning, permitting and inspections process. We're so glad you've decided to open your business in Whiteville!

Helpful Resources for Supporting Your Business

Organization	Overview	Contact Information
<p><u>Columbus County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism</u></p>	<p>A volunteer organization comprised of member businesses and associates that work together to be the “voice of business” as they strive to make Columbus County a great place to live, work, and play. They have been promoting, supporting, and developing businesses in Columbus County for over 75 years.</p>	<p>Mailing Address: 601 S Madison Street Whiteville, NC 28472</p> <p>Phone Number: (910) 642-3171</p> <p>Email: info@thecolumbuschamber.com</p>
<p><u>Southeastern Community College Small Business Center</u></p>	<p>The mission of the Small Business Center (SBC) is to increase the success rate and number of viable small businesses in North Carolina by providing high quality, readily accessible assistance to prospective and existing small business owners which will lead to job creation and retention. Business seminars, confidential business counseling, loan program information and vital resources are offered to residents of Columbus County free of charge. Other services include the Microenterprise Loan Program and the Real Entrepreneurship through Action Learning (REAL) program.</p>	<p>Becki McPherson, Director of Small Business Center</p> <p>Mailing Address: 4564 Chadbourn Hwy PO Box 151, Whiteville, NC 28472</p> <p>Phone Number: (910) 788-6419</p> <p>Email: becki.mcpherson@sccnc.edu</p>

<p><u>Small Business Technology Development Center (UNC-Wilmington)</u></p>	<p>Experienced business advisory team offers confidential, in-depth business counseling to small- to mid-sized company business owners and management staff and to entrepreneurs preparing to launch their next venture. They routinely assist clients with developing and implementing viable strategies that enhance their competitive advantage and success in the marketplace. Services provided include assessments of profitability and organizational effectiveness; identification of market opportunities; development of short-term and long-term business strategies; and much more.</p>	<p>Mailing Address: 803 S. College Rd, Suite A Wilmington, NC 28403-5977</p> <p>Phone Number: (910) 962-3744</p> <p>Email: Contact through form</p>
<p><u>Small Business Technology Development Center (UNC-Pembroke)</u></p>	<p>Serves the same function as the UNC-Wilmington office and works with Columbus County residents on occasion.</p>	<p>Mailing Address: UNCP Entrepreneurship Incubator 202 Main Street Pembroke, NC 28372</p> <p>Phone Number: (910) 775-4007</p> <p>Email: Contact through form</p>
	<p>Operated through the Columbus County Economic Development Commission, the park is located between the port of Wilmington and I-95, and is a suitable</p>	<p>Mailing Address: Highway 130 (Chadbourn Hwy) Whiteville, NC 28472</p>

<p><u>Southeast Regional Industrial Park</u></p>	<p>location for manufacturing, logistics and distribution operations. Businesses utilizing the park have access to diligent, well-trained workers. With the campus of Southeastern Community College next door to the park, arriving and expanding industries have access to free workforce training customized around their unique needs.</p>	<p>Phone Number: (910) 640-6608</p> <p>Email: GLANIER@COLUMBUSCO.ORG</p>
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COMING SOON:

The LAB Entrepreneurship Center: Columbus County recently received a grant for an entrepreneurial and business development center in Downtown Whiteville. The center will include low-cost office space, training, and expert guidance. There is also a speaker series in the works with guests from UNC-Wilmington, UNC-Pembroke, and Fayetteville State University planning to come share their knowledge about business development.

Ultimately, family-owned businesses that will stay in Columbus County and create jobs will be the focus of the LAB Entrepreneurship Center. Construction is slated to begin in Summer 2021, so stay tuned!



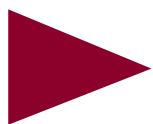
Launching and Accelerating Business in Columbus County.™



ECONOMIC INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

The City of Whiteville is committed to helping ensure that businesses become viable and sustainable. This is true for all businesses located in the City, but even more-so for our beautiful downtown area, Vineland Village. The City is proud of our downtown's excellent sidewalk network, ample parking, beautiful street-front buildings, cultural amenities (such as the Columbus Arts Council), special events, and the Vineland Depot event center.

It is the goal of the City of Whiteville to continue to establish the downtown area as a vibrant business center. To that end, the City has partnered with the Whiteville Downtown Development Commission and the SCC Small Business Center to develop and manage local economic development incentive programs to help new and relocating businesses, as well as property owners, achieve their goals of success.



Utility Incentive Program

Purpose: to encourage and draw new businesses into Downtown Whiteville, which is the center of the city and main economic driver for the City. The City of Whiteville encourages more businesses to consider locating in the Downtown area close to other shops, restaurants, and retail businesses to create a more walkable environment.

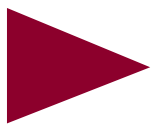
Program Description: The City of Whiteville will issue a one-time disbursement to eligible businesses of a 20% monthly discount in Year 1 and 30% monthly

discount in Year 2 of paid utilities. The disbursement is made after each one full year of operation and upon confirmation from the utility billing of payments being made in full. Please see the [Utility Incentive Program](#) handout to learn more about the program eligibility requirements.

Application Requirements: No application will be considered without:

- 1) a completed application form
- 2) business questionnaire/checklist to be reviewed by the Downtown Development Commission
- 3) a copy of the zoning permit issued by the City of Whiteville
- 4) a copy of at least a one-year lease agreement or proof of ownership

[*Utility Incentive Program Application](#)



Economic Tax Incentive Program

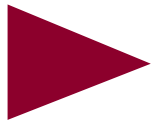
Purpose: This program is for property owners and intends to encourage the rehabilitation and redevelopment of older buildings. The City also hopes this program can promote growth in unused or vacant land with new commercial development in the Downtown area. The anticipated benefits include a reduction in downtown blight; increase in property values of existing and redeveloped properties; support of locally owned businesses; and a strengthened Central Business District.

Program Description: After the property owner pays all annual taxes, the City of Whiteville and Columbus County will “grant” the property owner a sum equal to the difference between the total tax amount paid and the original tax value before renovation and construction. The duration of this incentive is for five years after the renovation. A property or site **may not** receive this incentive more than once in any ten (10) year period. To learn more about the calculation of the tax incentive and see an expanded example, visit page 2 of the [Economic Tax Incentive Grant Program](#) handout.

Application Requirements: To qualify for the Economic Tax Incentive Program, a property owner or developer within the special downtown tax district must:

- 1) Submit an application with attached proposed development plans to be reviewed by the City of Whiteville Planning and Inspections Department, City Manager, and Whiteville Downtown Development Commission
- 2) Obtain all necessary and applicable State and Local permits
- 3) Receive a current tax value appraisal of the site or building from the Columbus County Tax Office before renovation or construction begins
- 4) Receive a tax value appraisal of the site or building from the Columbus County Tax Office after renovations and construction are completed
- 5) Pay the full amount of the newly appraised tax value of the property

[*Economic Tax Incentive Program Application](#)



Downtown Building Improvement Grant Program

Purpose: To provide assistance and economic incentives to downtown property owners to renovate storefronts of buildings in the downtown municipal service district. The City hopes to improve public understanding of the benefits of preserving and maintaining the unique architectural assets of the community. The program will encourage economic development in downtown Whiteville by improving the overall appearance of the downtown area. The City will assist property owners with design guidance and expertise while moving towards eligibility for contribution to the National Historic Registry.

Program Description: A grant of up to \$2,000 per property is available for approved applications. This is a matching grant program requiring a 50/50 cash match from the grantee. Additionally, grant funding will apply to improvements to the front (façade) of buildings. A comprehensive list of Project Guidelines is in the [Building Improvement Grant Program](#) handout. There you will find project standards, as well as examples of eligible and ineligible expenses.

Application Requirements: Applications must be submitted at Whiteville City Hall or Vineland Station. They must include:

- 1) All completed and signed application forms
- 2) Written authorization of the property owner, if applicant is not the property owner
- 3) Two written estimates of all project costs
- 4) Design plans or sketches, where applicable
- 5) Statements from lending institutions, if applicable
- 6) Project budget

Projects will be reviewed for compliance with existing codes and/or ordinance. Projects will be evaluated based on adherence to project guidelines, innovation, architectural appropriateness for the style of building, the context within surrounding environment, and impact to the appearance of the building and district.

[*Downtown Building Improvement Grant Program Application](#)



CONTACT US

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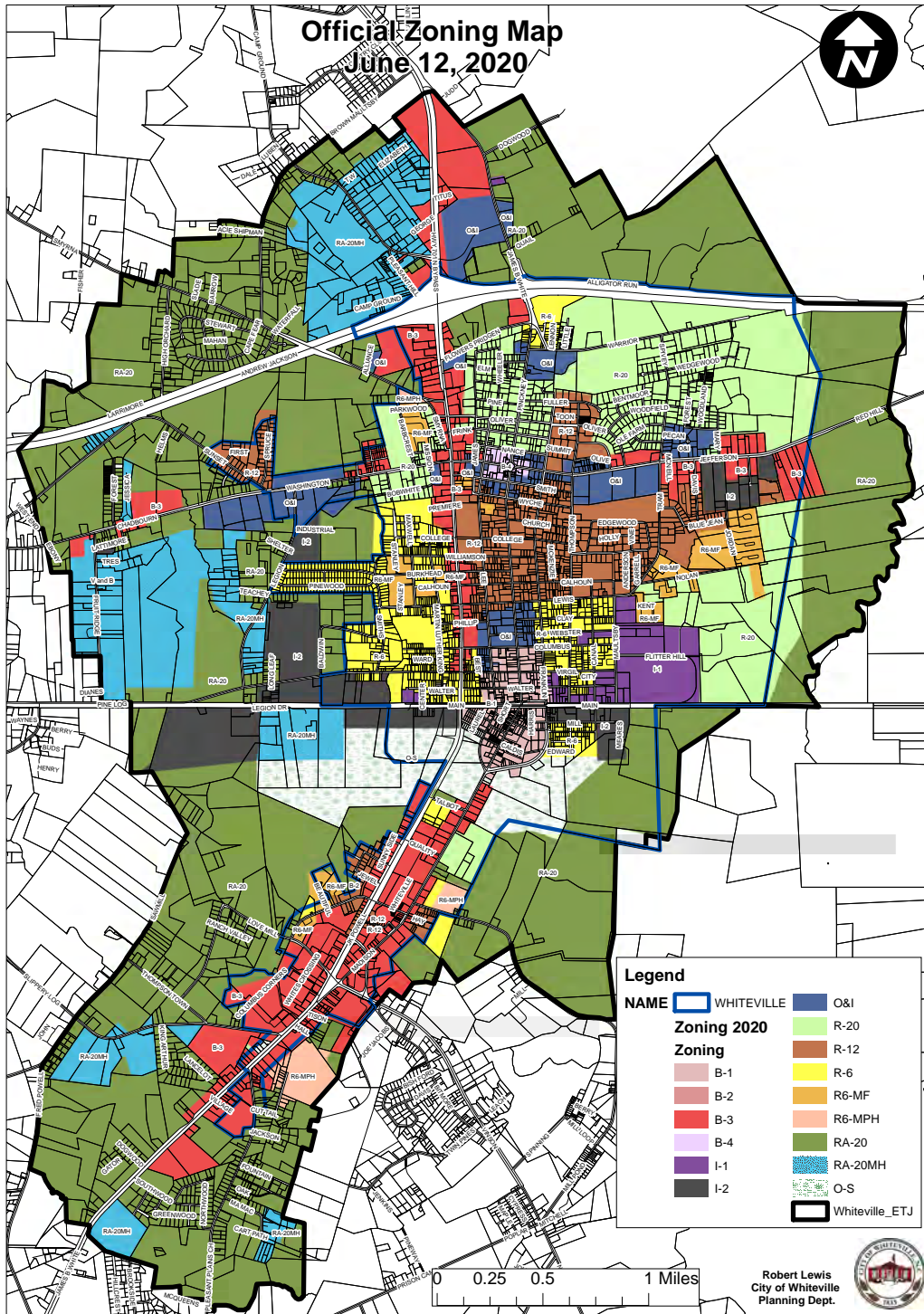
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2) Whiteville's Zoning Map



3) Whiteville's Future Land Use Map

