



# DeKalb County

G E O R G I A

DeKalb County

## Urban Redevelopment Plan

Decide DeKalb Development Authority  
In coordination with the  
Planning and Sustainability Department  
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## **Executive Summary**

This DeKalb County Urban Redevelopment Plan (“Plan”) shall constitute an urban redevelopment plan (“URP”) for DeKalb County, Georgia (“County”) within the meaning of the Urban Redevelopment Law, Title 36, Chapter 61 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, as amended (the “Law”). The Law enables local governments to access powers to redevelop areas of the community identified in a URP. To access the redevelopment powers allowable under the Law, a local government must undergo the following process:

- Develop a draft URP
- Hold a public hearing
- Pass a resolution adopting the URP and designating the Urban Redevelopment Agency (“Agency”) responsible for implementation (see: § 36-61-18 for more information on the Agency)

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Not all areas identified by this Plan exhibit or are located proximate to blighted conditions. There are many properties in the scope of this Plan that are productive and in good condition. Such properties will still benefit from the improvement of adjacent parcels and job creation resulting from additional resources, as explained in the Plan’s Statement of Purpose.

## **Introduction**

DeKalb was established as Georgia's 56th county and is situated on a natural ridge that runs between Atlanta and Athens, the Continental Divide. The county has 269 square miles. DeKalb was established from parts of Henry, Fayette and Gwinnett Counties with the General Assembly of the State of Georgia appointing five commissioners who picked land lot 246 in the 15th militia district as the county site. The county was named after Baron Johann de Kalb, a native of Germany and self-proclaimed baron who aided the colonists in their fight for independence. The City of Atlanta, in its infancy and until 1853 when Fulton County was created, was entirely in DeKalb County. (DeKalb History Center, 2020) It's currently Georgia's 4<sup>th</sup> most populous county with a population of 756,558.

### **Legislative Authority**

The Urban Redevelopment Law (O.C.G.A. 36-61-1 et. seq.<sup>1</sup>) was adopted in 1955 and has been revised several times since its inception. Adopting a URP allows cities and counties in Georgia to effectively use their statutory powers to improve public services and infrastructure, encourage private investment, and eliminate those conditions that have caused "pockets of blight", as defined by the Law. Pursuant to the Law, no municipality or county shall exercise any of the powers conferred upon municipalities and counties by this chapter until after its local governing body has adopted a resolution finding that: (1) One or more pockets of blight exist in such municipality or county; and (2) The rehabilitation, conservation, or redevelopment, or a combination thereof, of such area or areas is necessary in the interest of the public health, safety, morals, or welfare of the residents of the municipality or county.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The Plan sets out a framework for DeKalb County to strategically direct resources and investments within a designated urban redevelopment area ("URA") and allows DeKalb County to apply for the Georgia Opportunity Zone Job Tax Credit Program ("OZ") per O.C.G.A. § 48-7-40.1(c)(4) and Rule 110-24-1-.01.

The Law gives broad powers to designate the boundaries of a URA. The County has therefore decided to draw the boundaries of the URA based on the Designation Criteria for Opportunity Zones, with additional supporting criteria, as defined in the Summary of Conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Current through the 2019 Regular Session of the General Assembly and HB 276 and HB 444 of the 2020 Regular Session of the General Assembly as of July 2020

## DeKalb County Urban Redevelopment Area

This Urban Redevelopment Plan is an update to the current URP for DeKalb County, which was adopted in 2013. The URA has been redrawn to account for newly incorporated areas and annexations that have occurred.

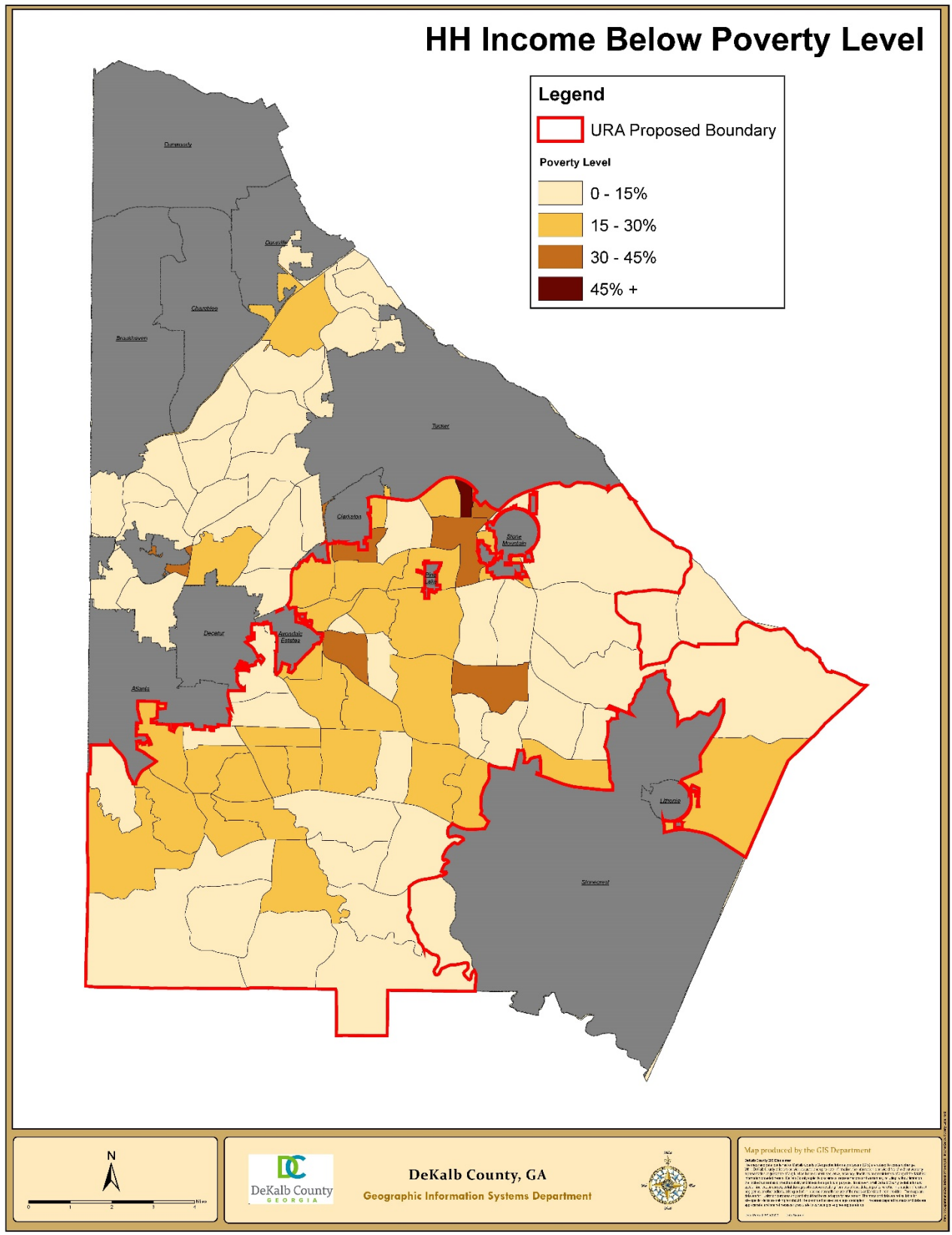
Pursuant to the Plan's Statement of Purpose, the URA follows the Designation Criteria for Opportunity Zones as defined in Rule 110-24-1-.01(5)(b)(1): "Areas Displaying Pervasive Poverty" shall be defined as census block groups with 15% or greater poverty and any "adjacent to" census block groups as determined from data in the most current United States decennial census.

Additional descriptions of the URA will be identified in this section, to support additional qualifying criteria for the URA. Additional considerations include presence of deteriorated or deteriorating structures; faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness; deterioration of site or other improvements; tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land; having development impaired by airport or transportation noise or other environmental hazards; or any combination of such factors, which substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the County.

The URA covers most of the southern part of the county, except for incorporated jurisdictions, and the census tracts which have less than a 15% poverty rate and are not adjacent to census tracts which have over a 15% poverty rates. Though there are some areas in the mid-north part of the unincorporated areas of the county that have a poverty rate over 15%, there are three additional factors beyond poverty rates that were considered when drawing the URA boundary. These are described in the Summary of Conditions: Unemployment, Building Permit Activity, and Code Enforcement cases. *The URA is not used to designate areas of the county that are "bad" or "less desirable" than other areas.* It is simply to identify areas of the county which can benefit from additional investment; adopting the URP is one tool which can be used to encourage that investment. Potential investment strategies are described in the Redevelopment Strategy section.

Figure 1: Proposed Urban Redevelopment Area Boundaries (with Household Income Below Poverty Level)

Source: DeKalb County Planning & Sustainability, 2020



## Summary of Conditions

### 1. Poverty

The percent of residents below the poverty level in the URA is 17.02%, compared to 14.3% in DeKalb County and Georgia.

Table 1: Poverty rates for Comparison Areas

	URA	DeKalb County	Georgia	United States
Poverty Rate	17.02%	14.3%	14.3%	11.8%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2018 (American Community Survey); DeKalb County Planning & Sustainability, 2018 data

### 2. Unemployment

COVID-19 has impacted the unemployment rate in the community. The June 2019 unemployment rate for DeKalb County was 3.8%<sup>2</sup>, but as of June 2020 is 10%<sup>3</sup>. The Urban Redevelopment Area has an unemployment area of 17.34%.

Table 2: Unemployment rates for Comparison Areas

	URA	DeKalb County	Georgia	United States
Unemployment Rate	17.34%	10%	8%	11.1%

Source: GDOL & BLS, June 2020; DeKalb County Planning & Sustainability, 2020

### 3. Code Compliance Cases

In 2019, there were over 8,900 code compliance cases in unincorporated DeKalb County. 7,600 of these code compliance cases occurred in the URA, which means that 85% of all code compliance cases occurred in the URA. Additional investment in the URA could help reduce the conditions which are causing the majority of

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<sup>2</sup> GDOL, June 2019

<sup>3</sup> GDOL, June 2020



code compliance cases to occur in this area. Please see Figure 3 in Appendix A for a mapping of the code compliance cases in 2019 and citation.

#### **4. Building Permit Activity**

Building permits for 2019 were mapped to gauge physical development in terms of new construction or renovations (Figure 4). Approximately 4,100 Building Permits were issued for projects in unincorporated DeKalb County. Approximately 2,200 of those permits issued were in the proposed boundary of the Urban Redevelopment Area. This equates to approximately 54% of the permits issued countywide, but primarily close to Atlanta, Decatur, and Avondale Estates. The intent of the URA is to encourage more growth in areas with lower permit activity, especially around areas designated as Industrial/ Light Industrial, Town Centers, and Redevelopment Corridors.

### **Planning Consistency**

#### **Statement of Conformity**

The Plan is generally consistent with the future growth and development goals of DeKalb County and conforms with the DeKalb County 2035 Comprehensive Plan<sup>4</sup> (“Comprehensive Plan”). Chapter 3 of the Comprehensive Plan identifies the following objectives: (1) Improve Business Climate, (2) Revitalize Commercial Corridors and Embrace New Employment Centers, and (3) Enhance Quality of Place. (DeKalb County, 2020)

The URP is further consistent with the visions and goals of supplemental plans and studies undertaken in DeKalb County. The following plans, ranging from small-area Livable Center Initiative (LCI) studies to topic specific comprehensive plans, have identified salient issues and planning goals for the County.

- Wesley Chapel LCI
- Candler Road / Flat Shoals Parkway LCI
- Kensington LCI
- Kensington Station/Memorial Drive Redevelopment Plan & Tax Allocation District
- Avondale/Columbia Drive Plan & Tax Allocation District
- Moreland-Bouldercrest-Cedar Grove Plan
- Clifton Corridor Transit Feasibility and Connectivity Study

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<sup>4</sup> Adopted February 14, 2017

- Memorial Drive Strategic Action Plan
- La Vista Blueprints Program
- Scottsdale Revitalization Plan
- Solid Waste Management Plan
- Transportation Comprehensive Plan
- MARTA I-20 East TOD Plan
- Memorial Drive Revitalization Plan
- North Druid Hills LCI
- Medline LCI

### **Land Use Planning & Objectives**

The Plan does not entail any deviations from the land use planning and zoning regulations developed for DeKalb County. Although land use and zoning changes are permitted in URPs to further particular land use objectives, there is no need in this case to do so. Rather, the URP aims to promote development in a manner consistent with the County’s land use plan developed for the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Strategy for Relocating Displaced Residents**

The County has no plans to acquire possession of and/or clear areas to carry out the URP that will lead to the displacement of residents. The redevelopment focus will be on vacant or non-residential properties and will not affect occupied residential housing.

### **Redevelopment Strategy**

The Urban Redevelopment Plan will afford maximum opportunity, consistent with the sound needs of the municipality or county as a whole, for the rehabilitation or redevelopment of the urban redevelopment area by private enterprise (O.C.G.A. § 36-61-7(d)(3)).

### **Urban Redevelopment Agency**

The Board of Commissioners for DeKalb County is the current Urban Redevelopment Agency.

## **Strategy to Utilize Private Investment**

### *Brownfields Program*

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) manages a Brownfields Program to encourage the remediation of properties contaminated by hazardous substances or pollutants. Grants are disbursed to communities to facilitating remediation through assessments, cleanups, loans, and environmental training programs. Promoting reuse of brownfields helps conserve greenfields, provides in-fill opportunities, and can improve environmental integrity and community health. EPA awarded DeKalb County \$900,000 in 2012 to establish a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) and has recapitalized the fund several times since then. The RLF has helped finance brownfield cleanup of hazardous waste and petroleum throughout the County.

### *Community Development Block Grants*

Community Development Block Grants (CDGB) are administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through each state. CDGBs serve as a vital funding source for revitalizing communities through housing, community and economic development activities. CDGB programs aim principally to benefit low to moderate income populations.

### *Opportunity Zones Job Tax Credit*

Upon approval of the Plan, the County will apply for State Opportunity Zones from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. Opportunity Zones are intended to encourage development, redevelopment and revitalization in areas through Job Tax Credits. This tax credit allows the maximum Job Tax Credit of \$3,500 per job created for businesses that create two or more qualifying jobs. Opportunity Zones also expand the definition of “business enterprise” to any legal business.

### *Tax Allocation Districts*

The 1985 Georgia Redevelopment Powers Law (O.C.G.A. § 36-44-8) empowers local governments to establish a Tax Allocation Districts (“TAD”) for the purpose of financing redevelopment efforts. A TAD derives its funding from the increase in an area’s ad valorem taxes levied by the County and the school system. The revenues are placed in a special redevelopment fund for the area and are used to directly pay for the redevelopment costs or to issue bonds to pay for the redevelopment costs. Successful TADs strengthen the tax base, create new jobs, attract businesses and developers, facilitate economic self- sufficiency, and have a

multiplier impact on surrounding areas. The benefit of TADs is that they can be used for a wide range of redevelopment projects, from mixed-use developments to infrastructure improvements.

DeKalb County has three (3) TADs: Kensington/Memorial TAD (established in 2004 with a termination date of December 2029), Avondale/Columbia Drive TAD (established in 2004 with a termination date of December 2028), and Briarcliff/N. Druid Hills TAD (established in 2007 with no termination date).

### *Community Improvement Districts*

A Community Improvement District (CID) is a self-taxing organization enacted by a vote among property owners in the community. Once a CID is established, each property owner pays dues into a pool that is used for improvements to the community in a wide range of areas including infrastructure, streetscaping, maintenance services, security, public safety, marketing, and economic development.

DeKalb County has four (4) CIDs that are partially located in unincorporated areas: East Metro CID, Tucker Summit CID, Tucker Northlake CID, and Metro South CID.

### *WorkSource Development Programs*

WorkSource DeKalb provides businesses with access to funds to assist with training new and existing employees as provided for under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. These services and programs include direct placement assistance, customized training, on the job training, supportive services, and incumbent worker training.

# Appendix A: Urban Redevelopment Plan Maps

Figure 2. Future Land Uses for the Urban Redevelopment Area  
Source: DeKalb County Department of Planning & Sustainability, 2020

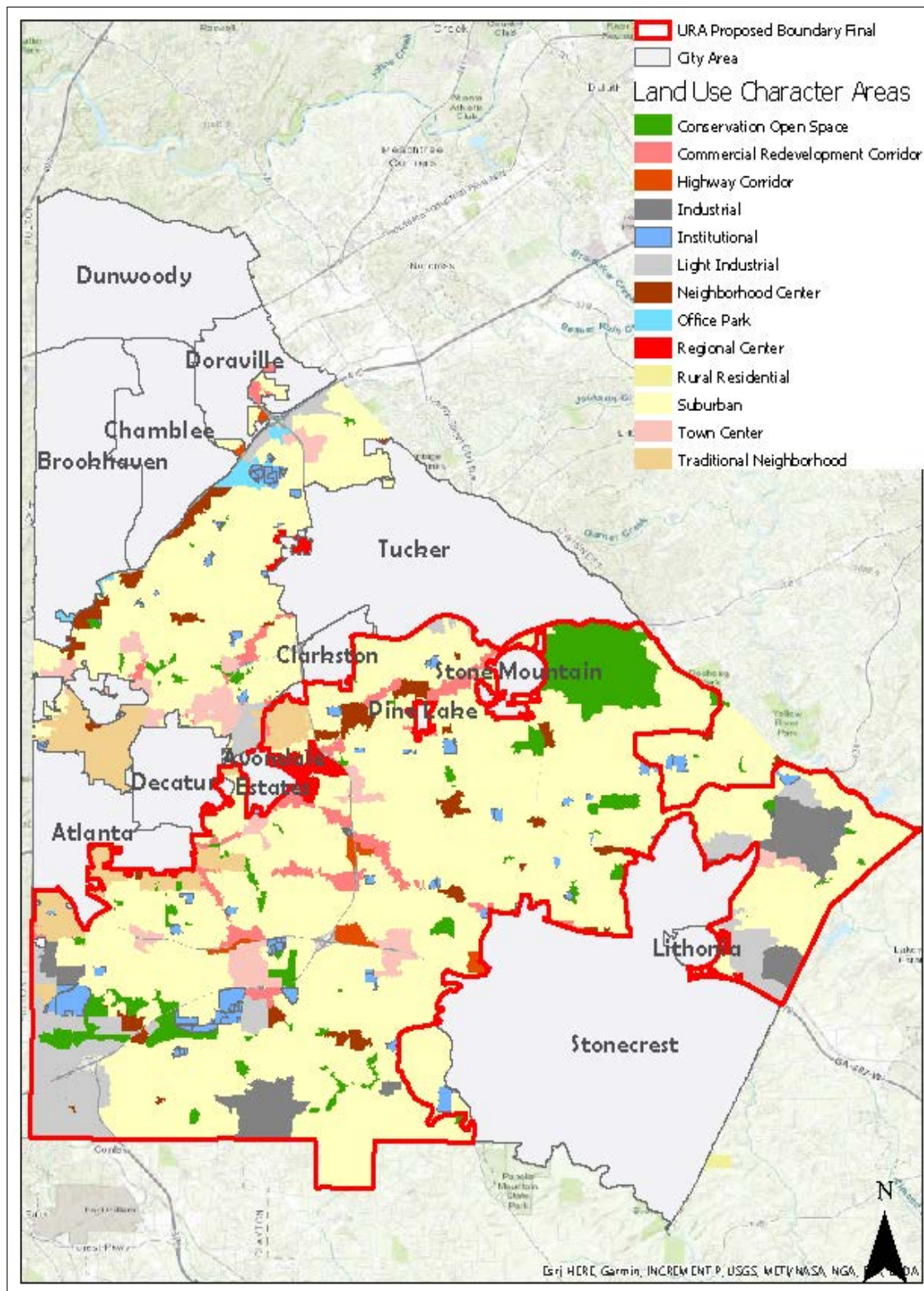


Figure 2: Proposed Urban Redevelopment Area Boundaries (with Household Income Below Poverty Level)  
 Source: DeKalb County Department of Planning & Sustainability, 2020

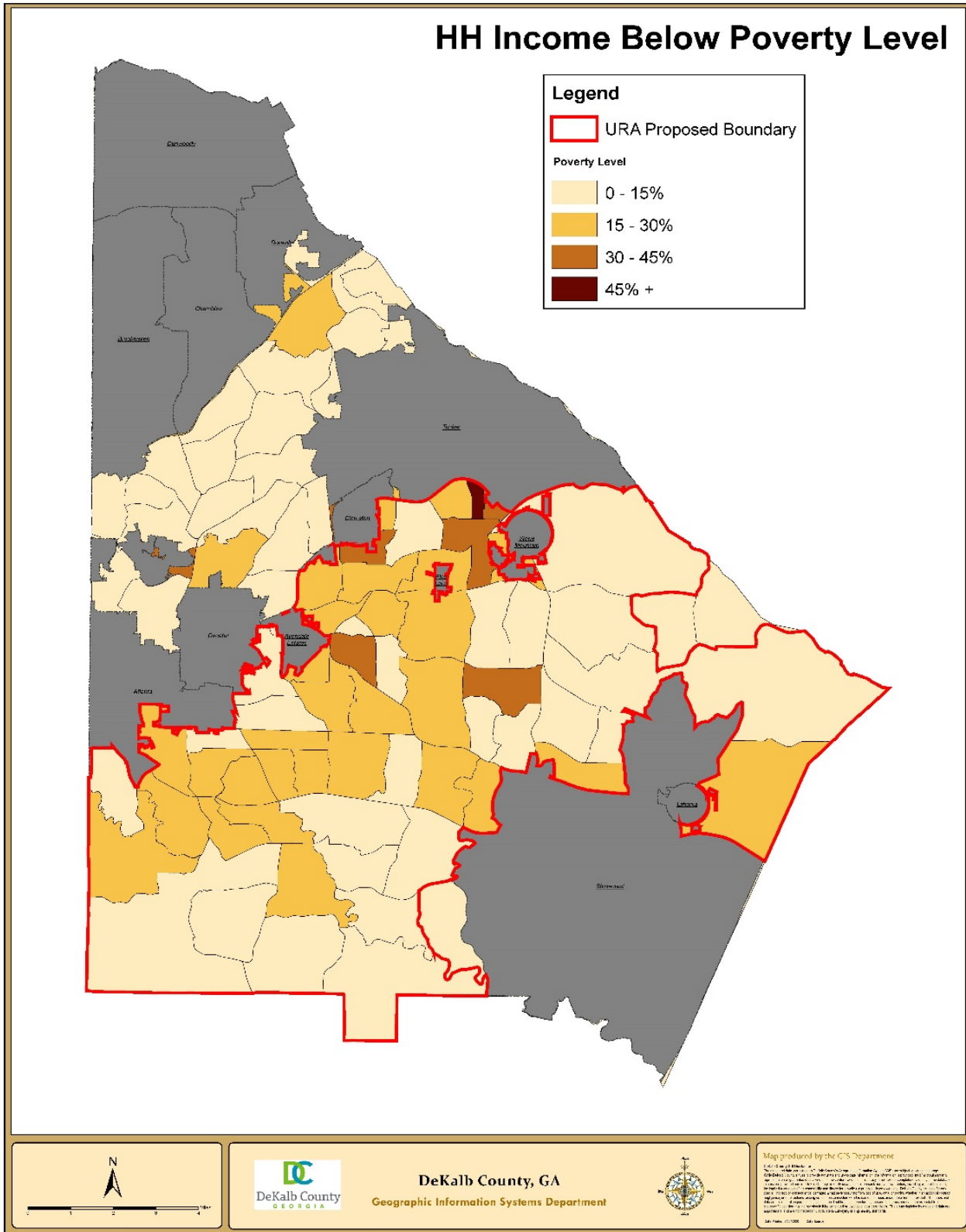
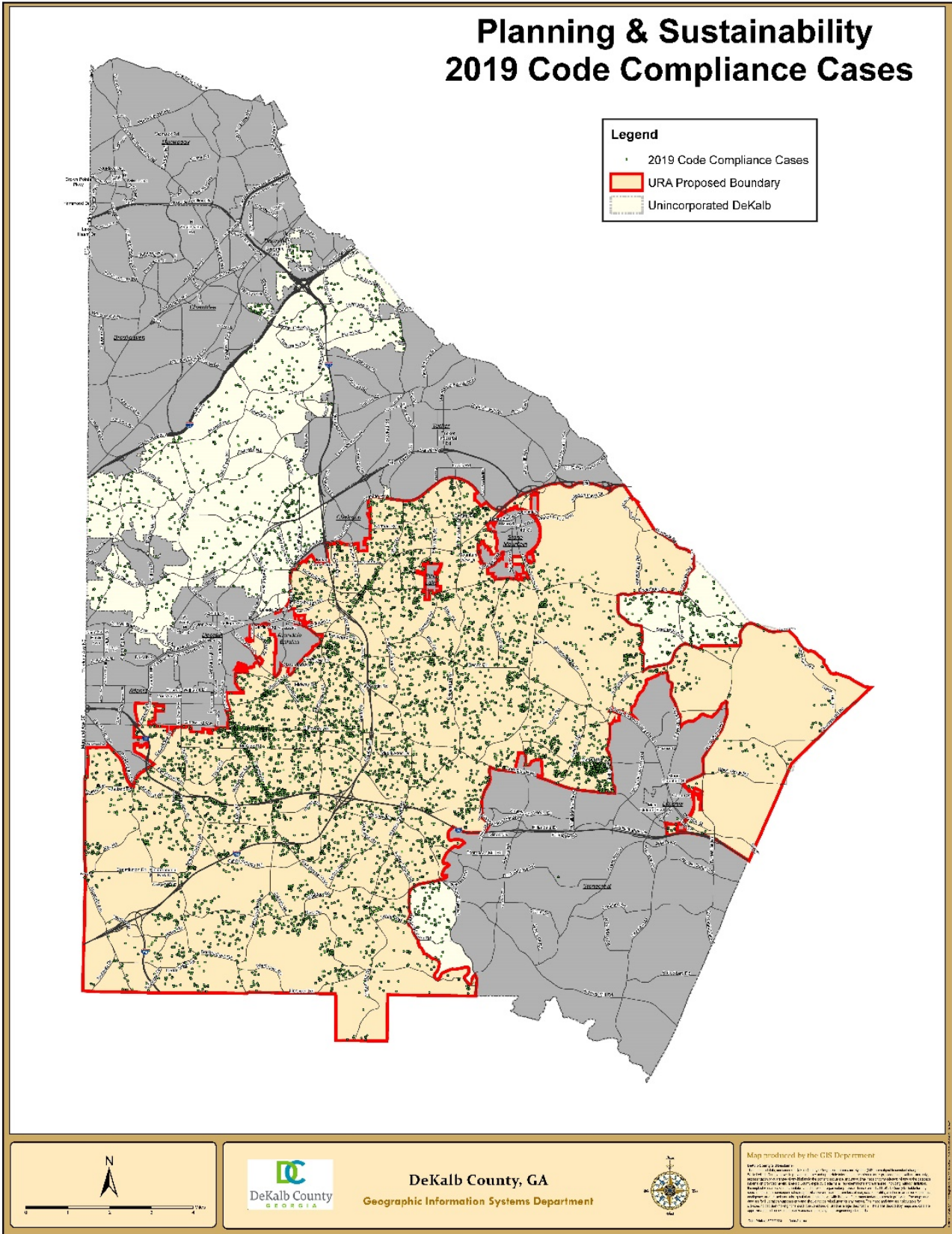


Figure 3: Code Compliance Cases, 2019  
Source: DeKalb County Department of Planning & Sustainability, 2020







## Appendix B: Examples of Properties

This section is a visual representation of properties which are part of the older industrial building stock in the URA. Encouraging a higher and better use for these buildings could improve the tax value to the County, encourage better job growth, and/or encourage renovations or improvements to the building which would benefit the quality of life of the people currently using the buildings. Some identifying characteristics have been obscured, since the intent of this document is not to disparage any of these particular properties or their owners or occupants.





Source: Costar