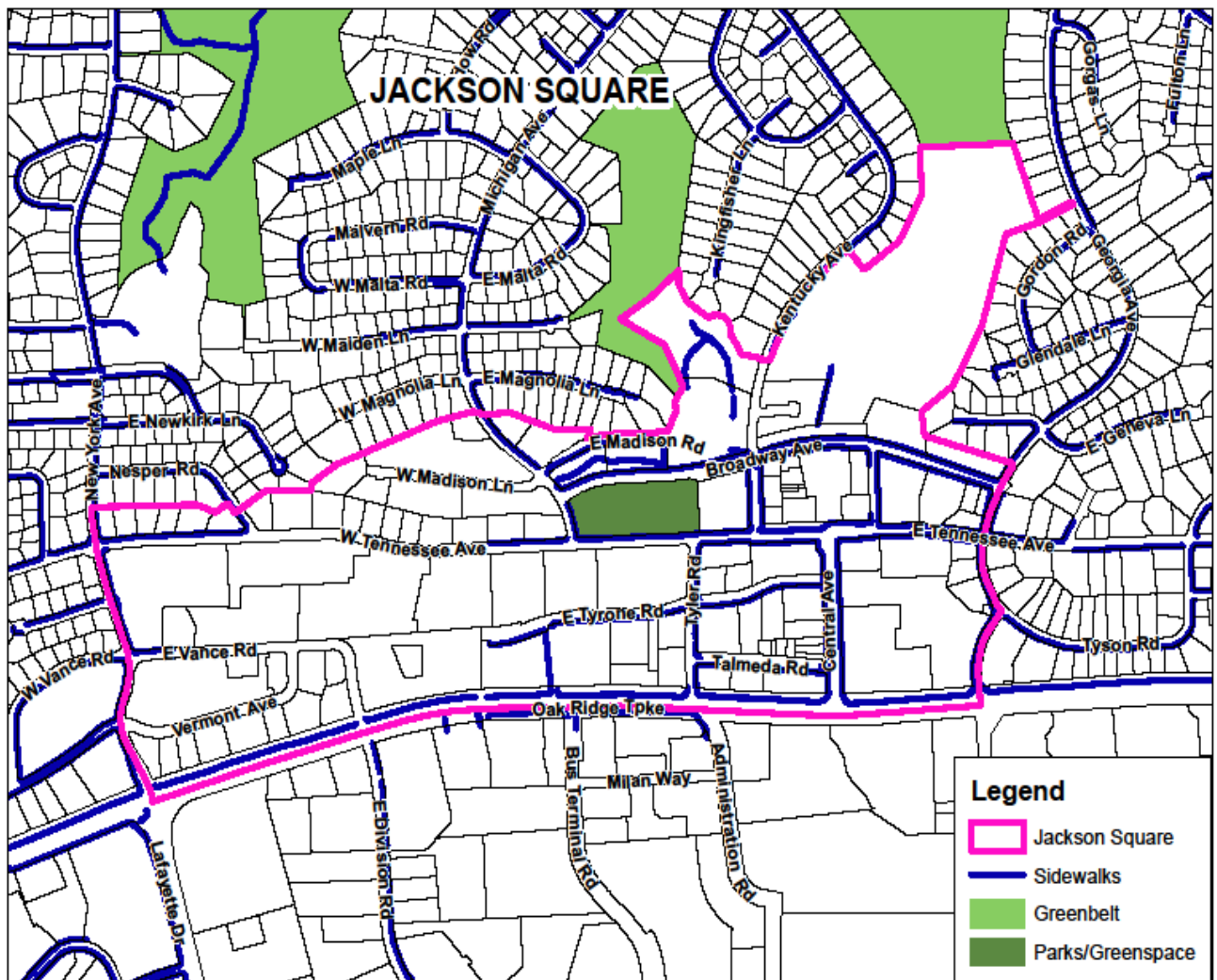


# JACKSON SQUARE

## SUB-AREA

Jackson Square is a mixed-use district that lies north of the Oak Ridge Turnpike between New York Avenue and Georgia Avenue. It includes some of the most well known places in the City. It is not unusual to hear Oak Ridge residents speak of Jackson Square as the heart of the city. The sub-area is anchored on the west end by the Methodist Medical Center and satellite medical offices; on the east end by the historic Jackson Square that gives the sub-area its name.



# Function, Character, and Zoning

The sub-area plays at least three distinct roles in the life of the city. It is a cultural center, a medical center, and a concentration of employment. Many citizens feel that the Jackson Square district in the east end of the sub-area is the cultural core of the city. The concentration of a historic playhouse, well know local restaurants, shops, public open space and the high school football stadium form a gathering place for students and residents alike. The square area tends to be active with people at the lunch and dinner hours as well as before and after plays or high school events. It is a place where memories are created and friendships are sustained.

The historic area of Jackson Square includes the Alexander House, a historic structure dating back to the Manhattan Project, now used as a senior residence. Nearby is the “Chapel on the Hill”, an interdenominational church that also dates back to the WWII years. The Oak Ridge Playhouse, local restaurants, a major engineering office, a high-school football stadium, and a collection of other offices and shops fill out the ensemble.



***Two of the historic structures in Jackson Square, the Alexander Guest House and the Interdenominational Chapel.***

The Medical Center has a reputation as one of the best hospitals in this part of the state. A full range of medical specializations and services are available in the hospital or nearby clinics. Many health professionals have offices in adjacent blocks. The hospital, satellite clinics and medical offices dominate the area south of Tennessee Avenue and east of New York Avenue, including substantial frontage on the Oak Ridge Turnpike.



***The Medical Center anchors the west end of the sub-area.***

At the eastern end of the sub-unit there is an office tower at Jackson Plaza fronting on the Turnpike, with access from both Georgia Avenue and Central Avenue. The Appalachian Underwriters office tower is occupied in part by call-center operations. The frontage property on the Oak Ridge Turnpike between the medical center and Jackson Plaza is occupied by a collection of fast food restaurants, retail shops, banks, personal services and offices that are typically found along major traffic arteries. There are many two and three story apartment units along Tennessee Avenue and other interior streets.



***The Appalachian Underwriters Tower in Jackson Plaza***



***Apartments near Jackson Square***

The zoning in the sub-area is a fine-grained composition of business, office and residential districts that accommodate the mix of uses that are present.





***Strip Commercial development on Oak Ridge Turnpike***

## Condition

The condition of buildings in the sub-area is generally good to very good. Many of the medical and commercial buildings are relatively new. Some are not yet old enough to have significant physical deterioration. Most show evidence of good maintenance. Very few buildings in the area have any of the characteristics normally associated with blight.

Signage in the area is mixed. The signage associated with the Methodist Medical Center is well coordinated. It blends tastefully with the architecture of the structures and it is effective in identifying buildings and directing drivers. In the remainder of the district it is generally a situation of individual signs for individual businesses. There are exceptions where office buildings have one exterior sign display listing all the tenants in their buildings.

The Jackson Square is worth special attention. The cultural core, including the playhouse and some of the most iconic restaurants, are housed in buildings that date back to the 1940's. These are old buildings with old structural elements, mechanical and electrical systems. Some buildings in the square have been modernized, but some have only been maintained sufficiently to meet codes. This square may be one of the most important historic preservation sites in the city. But it faces challenges.



***Historic Jackson Square in context.***

The structures were built in a wartime context when quick construction and economy were primary considerations. Now they are faced with the gradual impacts of age and the impending competition of the Main Street project. A successful future may require more than just continuing business as usual.

It may seem that there is a conflict between the impulse to preserve an important cultural resource and the impulse to modernize, expand and compete for more business. That does not have to be the choice. It may be possible to do both. Three things would help: factual information about the condition of all the structures in the square, clear objectives agreed upon by the major stakeholders in the square and coordinated action in support of a plan of action.



*Jackson Square up close.*

## Transportation

The sub-area has good accessibility because of its frontage on the Oak Ridge Turnpike. This provides good access from the region to the area. Within the sub-area, New York Avenue, Georgia Avenue and Tennessee Avenue provide interior circulation and access to the Turnpike at signalized intersections. The few other interior streets feed into the collectors.

Substantial off-street parking is available at offices, the hospital and in the Jackson Square area.

There may be minor conflicts in turning movements at specific intersections, but the general impression is that the area is well served by the public streets. Access to the Historic Jackson as a destination is a bit circuitous for a driver not familiar with the area.



# Safety

There is no specific evidence that crime is a problem of special significance in this area. The most significant public safety issue could be fire safety in some older buildings in the Jackson Square area that are typically used as restaurants or housing.

## Findings, Recommendations and Place-Making

Jackson Square is one of the most beloved sub-areas in the city. It is a major employment center with the employees at the medical center and satellite offices, plus the employment in the Plaza Tower location. It is an important part of the tax base of the city. Finally, it contains the most unique concentration of historical and cultural elements in the city. All of these elements are worth enhancing.

Jackson Square has been the subject of studies and proposals in the past. It is still appropriate to give it special attention that works toward enhancing the historical, cultural and business significance of the Jackson Square district. There is already an important dynamic. It needs to be preserved and enhanced. It is unlikely to extend into the long term future without some attention from both public and private sectors. Physical obsolescence shows in some of the commercial buildings. Main Street will compete more and more strongly for customers and attention as it develops. The emotional attachments to the area may fade as older citizens pass from the scene.



*Jackson Square up close.*

There is potential for the historic Jackson Square to retain its status and gain more. There is ample parking and public infrastructure to support more intense development of the square. In the long term the area would be improved with updated buildings to house existing uses and the addition of more residential space. More housing in the immediate area of the square would provide a more robust customer base for the businesses and make the area lively on a twenty-four hour basis.

Some steps that the major stakeholders in the Square; building owners, tenants, historic preservationists, and owners of nearby properties, could consider, include:

- Agree to work together to try to create and implement a plan for preservation and improvement of the square.
- Agree on a few basic objectives of their work.
- Employ an architectural firm to do an assessment of existing buildings and prepare a plan for achievement of their basic objectives.

The accessibility of the district could also be enhanced by installation of a system of wayfinding signage.



***Miscellaneous other views in the sub-area.***