DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & CONSTRUCTION SERVICES
Planning Division

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TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Jenn Reed Moses, Planner II

DATE: April 4, 2016

RE: Arrowhead Road Land Use Study, PL 16-030

Background

After several recent development inquiries and applications drew attention to the Arrowhead Road area, the Community Planning Division initiated a land use study to determine whether any recommendations to change the Comprehensive Plan were warranted. The development activities seen by staff included:

- Edison school purchasing the Snowflake property, and subsequent applications to build a new high school on the property.
- Eastridge Church plans to expand, and Duluth Gospel Tabernacle plans to build a new church in the area.
- A wildlife rehabilitation clinic ("veterinary clinic or animal hospital" per the UDC) relocating to the area.

The area was previously studied in the Duluth Northwest Corner Area Study (2000), with future land uses further amended in the Comprehensive Plan (2006). These plans had envisioned much of the area as Low-Density Neighborhood, Rural Residential, and Preservation, with commercial/light industrial concentrated mainly at the intersection of Rice Lake Road and Arrowhead Road. These land use designations, however, do not necessarily reflect the character of existing development on the corridor. The existing land uses are a mixture of residential and undeveloped properties, with church campuses and businesses such as the oral surgery clinic interspersed, and at least one commercial site ready for development that would not be supported by the existing comprehensive plan. In addition, the type of suburban single-family development suggested for the northern side of Arrowhead Road may not be supported given the relatively narrow space available between the busy roadway corridor and Chester Creek. All of these questions and considerations led staff to initiate this land use study.

Process

Staff began doing research on the study area in December. A public meeting was held on February 23, 2016, with over 100 attendees. This was an open house where staff shared information and asked for input from attendees; 46 comments were received at the meeting, with additional comments received via email in the weeks that followed. A second public meeting was held on March 29, 2016, with 53 people who signed in. After a presentation with three land use scenarios, attendees were asked to submit feedback on potential land uses for the area. A summary of comments from these meetings is including in the Findings below.

7.4

Findings

Existing Land Use

As noted above, the existing land uses are a mixture of residential, church campuses, commercial, industrial, and undeveloped properties (see attached *Existing Land Use* map). Developed properties are located on large lots creating an overall low-density, sprawling development pattern. The exception to this is the Crystal Village and Ponderosa Groves neighborhoods, which were platted on smaller lots with a greenway system to connect to potential future development.

Many of the existing uses do not correlate with the future land use designations in the Comprehensive Plan. This can be seen in the attached *Comprehensive Plan* map. Some of these are long-standing uses (such as Cummings greenhouse) and others are newer (such as Wildwoods Rehabilitation). If in the future the existing zone districts changed to align with the Comprehensive Plan, these uses would become nonconforming uses. They would be allowed to legally continue with grandfathering rights, although they wouldn't be allowed to expand.

Transportation

The two main thoroughfares in the area are Arrowhead Road and Rice Lake Road; both are County roads. Rice Lake Road is a managed access road; the County's policy limits access to this road, and the County is actively seeking solutions such as frontage and backage roads for existing and new development. Arrowhead Road is characterized by frequent, often wide access points, resulting in heavy turning movements and potential conflict points. To manage this, the County is willing to investigate adding a center turn lane on Arrowhead in part of the study area if any future development is proposed prior to final designs for reconstruction of the roadway (approximately 2018). Drivers on both of these roads experience congestion at peak traffic times.

Other roads in the area are local city streets, mainly residential in nature. Duluth Transit does not provide service in the area, but has a route just east of the study area.

Natural Resources

The streams and wetlands in the study area are the defining natural feature, and are critically important to the hydrology in the city (see *Natural Resources* map). A tributary of Miller Creek and its associated floodplain run north-south along the western boundary of the study area. Miller Creek is a coldwater (trout) stream that is impaired, and which caused severe flood damage in the 2012 flood, particularly in the mall area. The headwaters of Chester Creek begin just north of the study area, and then flow east-west through the study area. Chester Creek is also a coldwater (trout) stream that caused severe flood damage in the 2012 flood, particularly in the East Hillside. Large wetland complexes exist in conjunction with the two streams, and other wetlands lie throughout the remainder of the study area.

Research has shown that wetlands and stream headwaters are crucial areas of water retention and infiltration. As annual precipitation continues to increase, and periods of extreme rainfall become more frequent, communities will need to identify ways to minimize future flood damage. One way to do this is by preserving areas such as mature forests, intermittent stream channels, and depressions to promote infiltration in upstream areas.

Utilities

Existing water, gas, and sanitary sewer (including sanitary sewer basins) were mapped and are shown on the *Utilities* map. City Engineering has indicated that most of the area is served by utilities, and that those utilities could be expanded or upgraded as needed for any future development. The notable exception is the area from the western boundary of the study area to just east of Swan Lake Road, which has no sewer. The City has no plans to upgrade sewer in this area.

Community Input

Comments received at the two public meetings and via email demonstrate support for commercial development along the eastern portion of Arrowhead Road. Recognizing the high traffic volumes of the road, people feel that uses such as gas stations, apartments, coffee shops, small restaurants, churches, daycare, hair salons, and community centers are appropriate for the area immediately adjacent to the road – but in many instances, comments also indicated this development should not extend all the way to surrounding single-family neighborhoods. Some commenters indicated that apartments would "ruin the neighborhood feel." Many of the attendees at both meetings were members of Eastridge Church and Duluth Gospel Tabernacle, so a large number of comments supported those churches' developments; Eastridge would like to incorporate a fitness center, and Duluth Gospel Tabernacle would like to build a new church and potentially sell parts of the property for other development. Other entities that have indicated an interest to expand/build are McCarthy Manor, Northern Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons, and Wildwoods Rehabilitation. There were no comments focusing exclusively on the area along Rice Lake Road.

A few comments recognized that the high traffic volumes on Arrowhead support additional development, but also cautioned that any new development should not worsen congestion. Instead, new development should "serve existing travelers."

On the western portion of Arrowhead Road, the comments received supported maintenance of the large-lot residential character. Additional comments focused on the protection of natural resources and need for green space, desire for bike routes and sidewalks, and a desire to avoid big box retail, car dealerships, and any more industrial uses.

Land Use Scenarios

Based on the findings and comments, Staff developed three land use scenarios to share at the second public meeting (all three are attached). All three scenarios included a recommendation of Institutional land use in the area around Edison, with the remainder of that property being Rural Residential. All three scenarios also supported Urban Residential as a land use for McCarthy Manor.

- **Scenario 1:** This scenario focused on the area as being the headwaters of Chester Creek and home to numerous natural resources. The recommendations in this scenario reinforced the existing development pattern of large-lot residential along the western portion, north of Arrowhead Road, while maintaining the current Future Land Use of Low-Density neighborhood south of Arrowhead Road. It recommended "Urban Residential" over the area with existing churches and clinic, reflecting the mix of uses already in that area.
- **Scenario 2:** This provided a very different land use pattern than Scenario 1, focusing instead on the nature of heavily traveled Arrowhead Road being capable of supporting further development. It supports a larger area for potential suburban-style neighborhood development, as well as commercial and mixed use development along larger parcels along the east side of Arrowhead Road.
- **Scenario 3:** This "hybrid" recommends higher intensity commercial and mixed use development than Scenario 1, but focused mainly on areas immediately adjacent to Arrowhead Road. It also recommends large-lot residential on the north side of Arrowhead Road to maintain the existing character and provide increased infiltration areas near the streams and wetlands in the area.

Recommendations

After researching the area, looking at existing land uses, and taking into account the comments received throughout the study, Staff has developed several Land Use Recommendations. Recommendations for the area:

- Recognize and support existing businesses and institutions and, where possible, look at a Future Land Use category that allows them to continue and to expand when necessary.
- Protect the character of existing single-family neighborhoods by placing close attention to buffers and transitions between land uses.
- Support land uses that protect natural resources while still allowing reasonable development on privately owned property.

All of the below are recommendations to change the Comprehensive Plan – Future Land Use Map as shown in the attached map, *Recommendations*.

A. **Increase areas of Preservation as a Future Land Use along Chester Creek**. The current Future Land Use Map reflects Preservation over a smaller area. It should be noted that the entire shoreland (300' on either side of the stream) has regulatory protection via the Natural Resources Overlay district; this recommendation adds the goal of shoreland protection into the guiding land uses of the Comprehensive Plan.

B. **Change the Future Land Use from Low-Density Neighborhood to Rural Residential along Arrowhead Road in the western portion of the study area**. This area is currently characterized by large-lot residential uses. Many of these residents attending the public meetings expressed a desire for this area to remain residential. As this area is bordered by major roads to the west and south, and Chester Creek on the north, and given the large wetlands and individual property ownership, it is unlikely that this area would develop into a suburban-style single-family neighborhood. The change to Rural Residential suggests a lower density for this area than what is currently shown in the Comprehensive Plan. ***This change matches the current RR-1 zoning of this area.***

C. **Change the Future Land Use to Institutional around Edison schools.** This includes a change from Urban Residential to Institutional for the existing North Star Academy, and a change from Business Park to Institutional in the location of Edison's proposed high school. While Edison can develop a high school with the existing RR-1 zoning, the Comprehensive Plan can better recognize the school use with a land use designation of Institutional.

D. **Change the Future Land Use to Rural Residential for the remainder of the Edison property.** Edison purchased the entire Snowflake property, which currently is developed with ski trails. Since the remainder of this property is not needed for a school use, it is appropriate to change the land use to Rural Residential to match the adjacent land use category to the north and east.

E. **Change the Future Land Use From Neighborhood Mixed Use to Urban Residential for McCarthy Manor**. Urban Residential is still supportive of assisted living in this area, but is a lower intensity than Neighborhood Mixed Use, which is more appropriate for this parcel as it is adjacent to Low-Density Neighborhood on the west and south sides.

F. **Change the Future Land Use from Low-Density Neighborhood to Urban Residential**. This area currently contains Eastridge Church, St. John's Church, and the oral surgery clinic. Since the land use category of Urban Residential supports not only residential but also institutions and businesses that serve the surrounding area, this is an appropriate land use. It also provides a transition between the Rural Residential to the west and the Neighborhood Mixed Use to the east. The City of Duluth encourages potential developments in area F to pursue Mixed Use-Planned zoning (Planned Unit Development) for flexible development options that also provides a greater level of public benefit than would be required under the existing zone district.

G. **Change the Future Land Use from Low-Density Neighborhood to Neighborhood Mixed Use.** This parcel contains a graded and ready-to-build commercial site. Adjacent to Nortrax on the east and Arrowhead Road on the south, this is not an appropriate location for a single-family house. It is separated from St. John's Church to

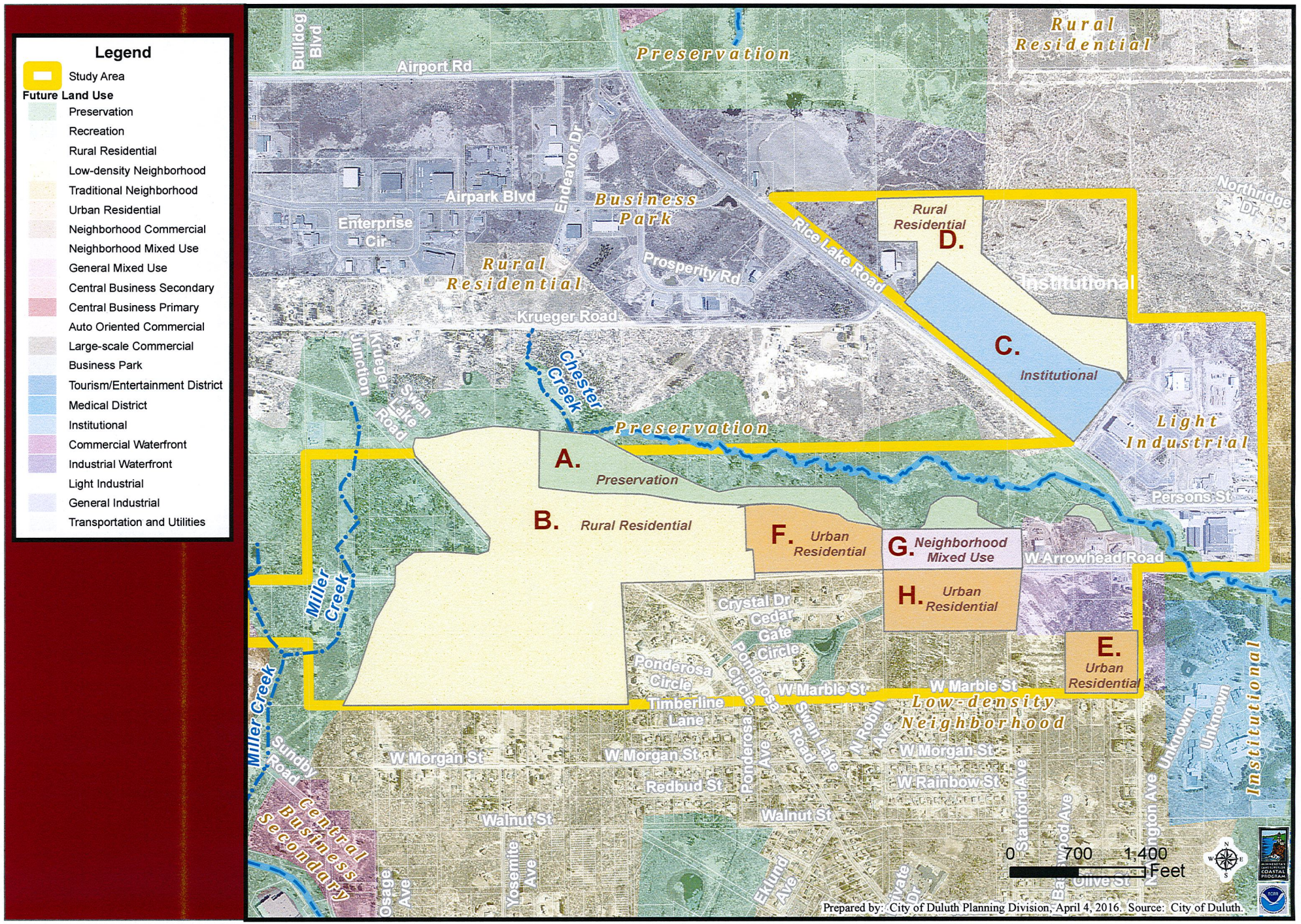
the west by a wetland area, which will provide a likely buffer between the more commercial uses to the east and the church/clinic campuses to the west.

H. **Change the Future Land Use from Low-Density Neighborhood to Urban Residential.** This reflects the general public support for increased development immediately adjacent to Arrowhead Road, and provides a transition between the Low-Density Neighborhood to the west and the Neighborhood Mixed Use to the East. The City of Duluth encourages potential developments in area H to pursue Mixed Use-Planned zoning (Planned Unit Development) for flexible development options that also provides a greater level of public benefit than would be required under the existing zone district. In addition, future development should pay attention to how it interacts with surrounding neighborhoods, including site design that supports the single-family neighborhood feel along Marble Street and continues the greenway and pedestrian trail system located to the west.

Next Steps

Planning staff is asking Planning Commission to recommend approval of these Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Changes to City Council. It is anticipated that a resolution would appear on the City Council agenda for its regular meeting on April 25, 2016. Council must adopt Comprehensive Plan amendments with a two-thirds vote. Future steps prior to development in the area would be rezoning of these areas to implement the Comprehensive Plan.

Recommendations



Arrowhead Road Area - Existing Land Use

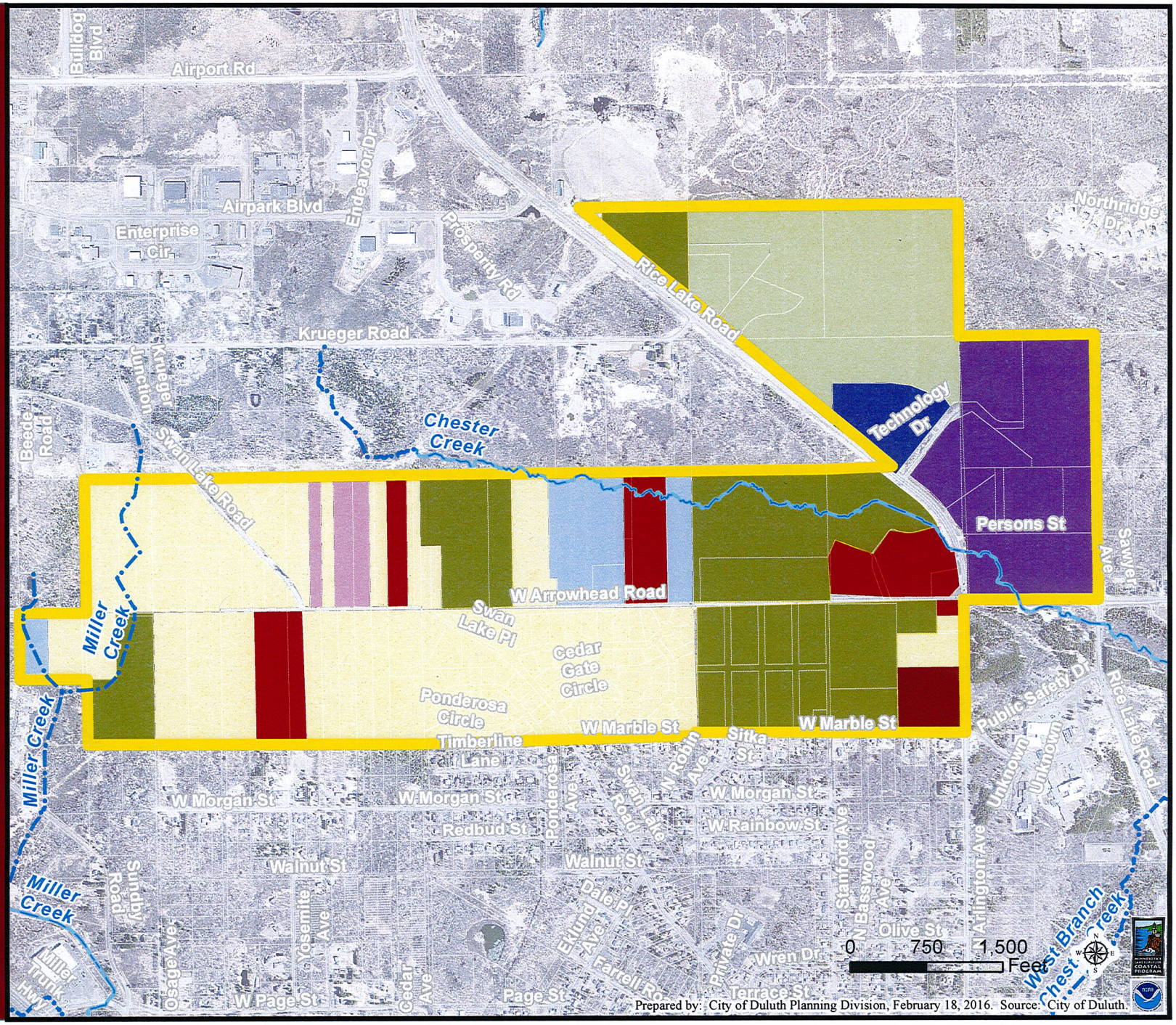
Legend

- Trout Stream (GPS)
- Other Stream (GPS)

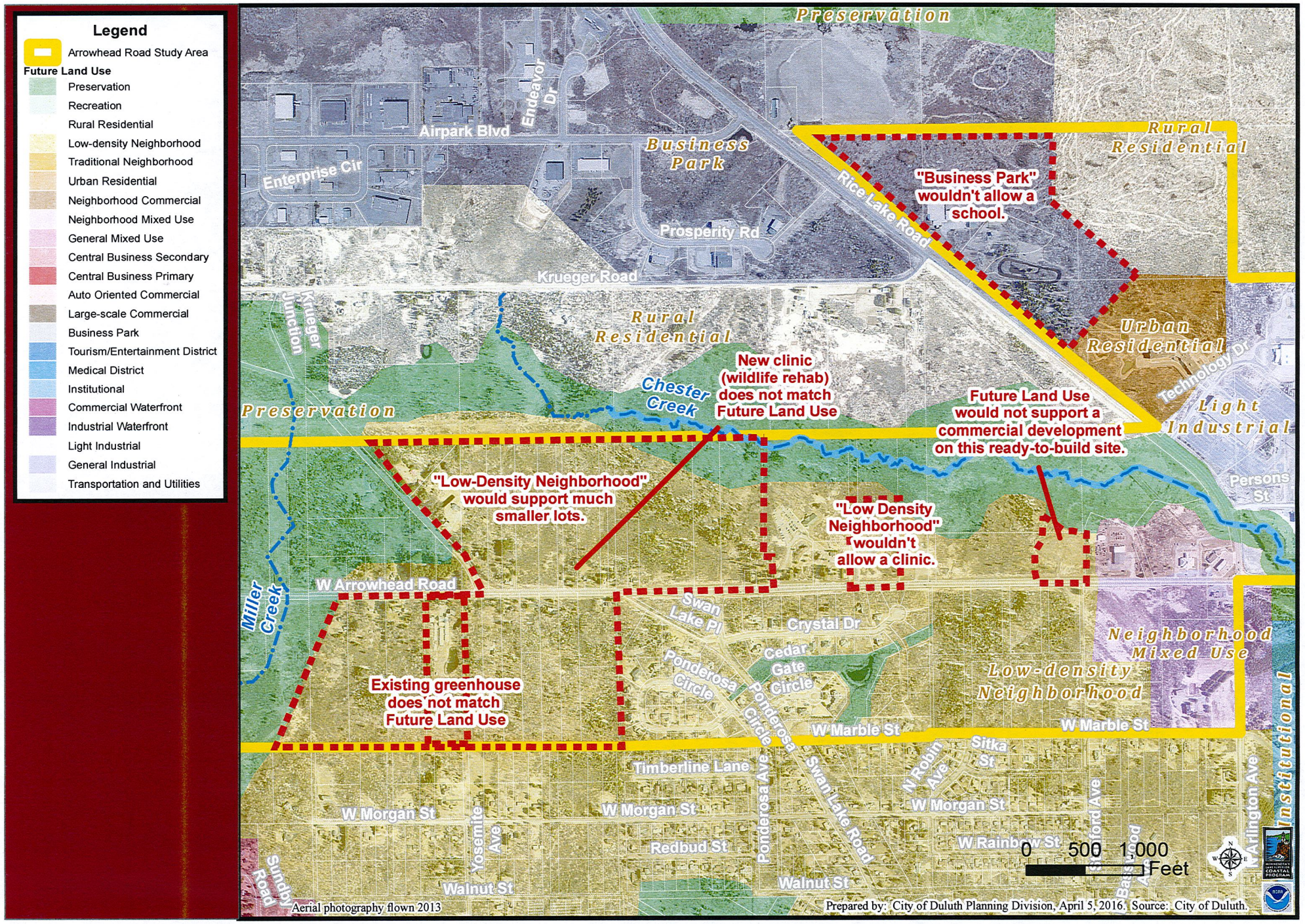
LandUse

- Assisted Living
- Commercial
- Institutional
- Light Industrial
- Recreation
- Religious Assembly
- Residential
- Tax Forfeit
- Vacant
- Study Area

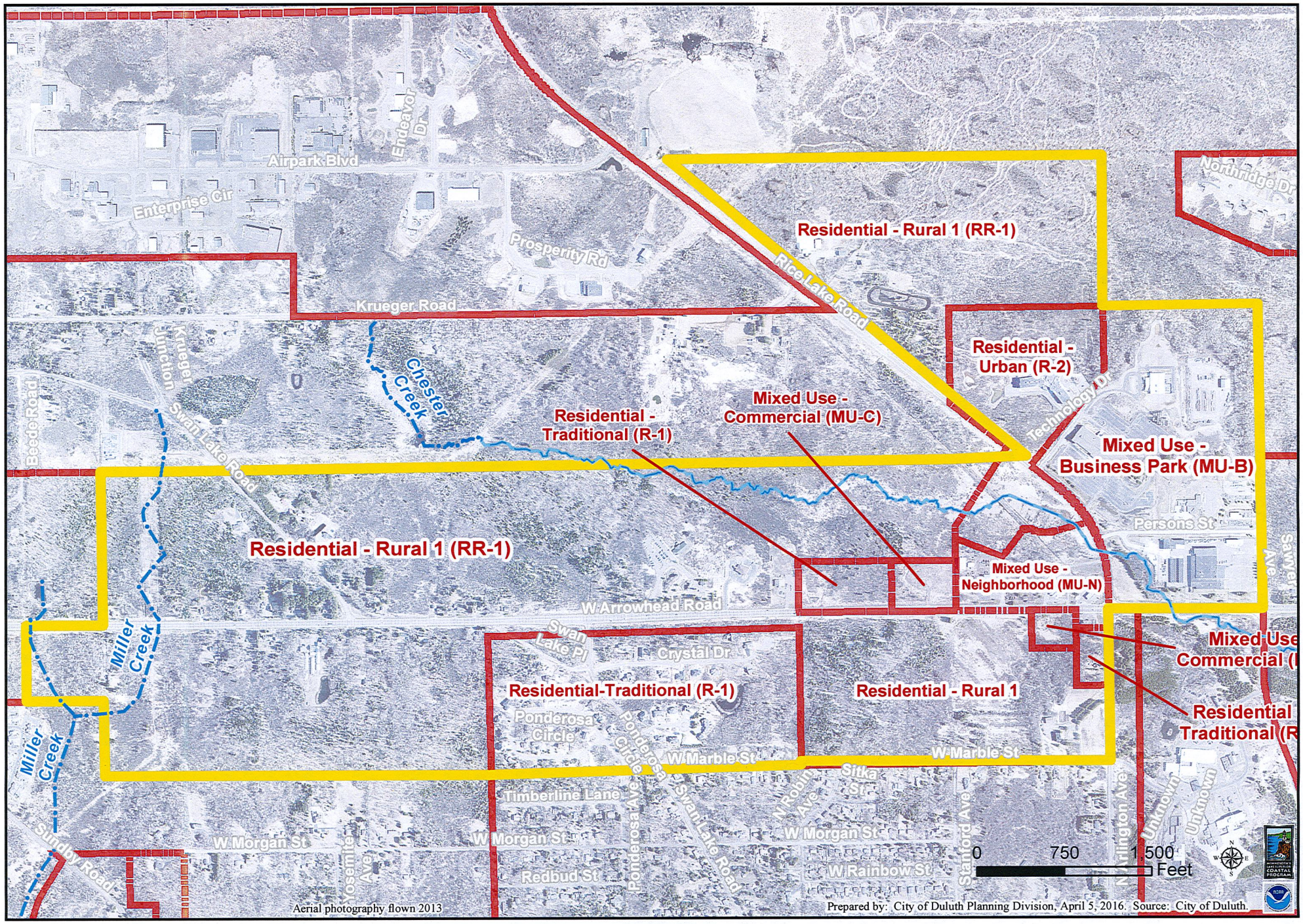
This map shows the existing land uses in the study area, as estimated by evaluating aerial photography and property ownership.



Arrowhead Road Area - Comprehensive Plan



Arrowhead Road Area - Zoning



Arrowhead Road Area - Natural Resources

Legend

- Arrowhead Road Study Area
- Wetlands (NRRI)

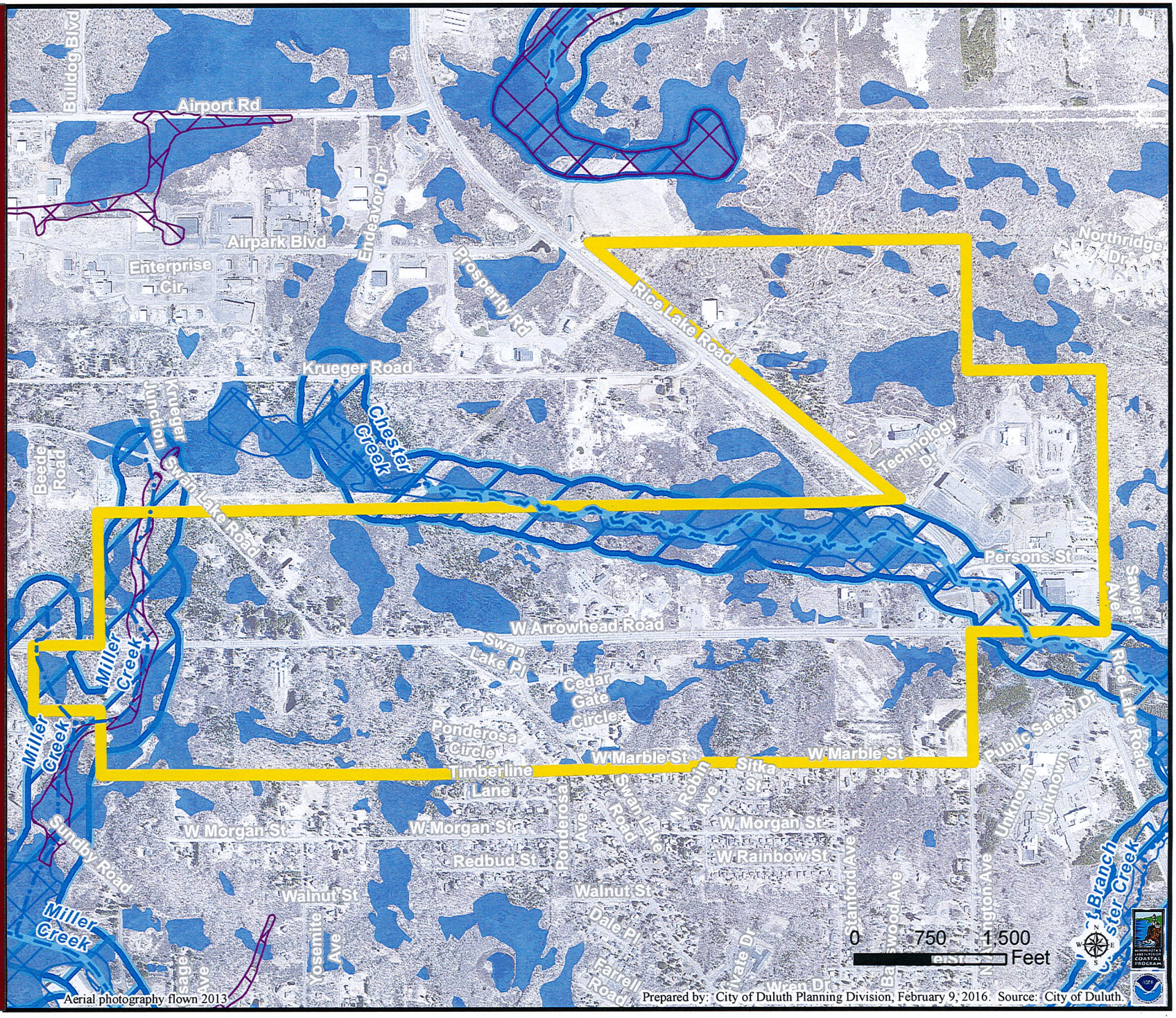
Shoreland Overlay Zone

- Cold Water
- Natural Environment
- General Development

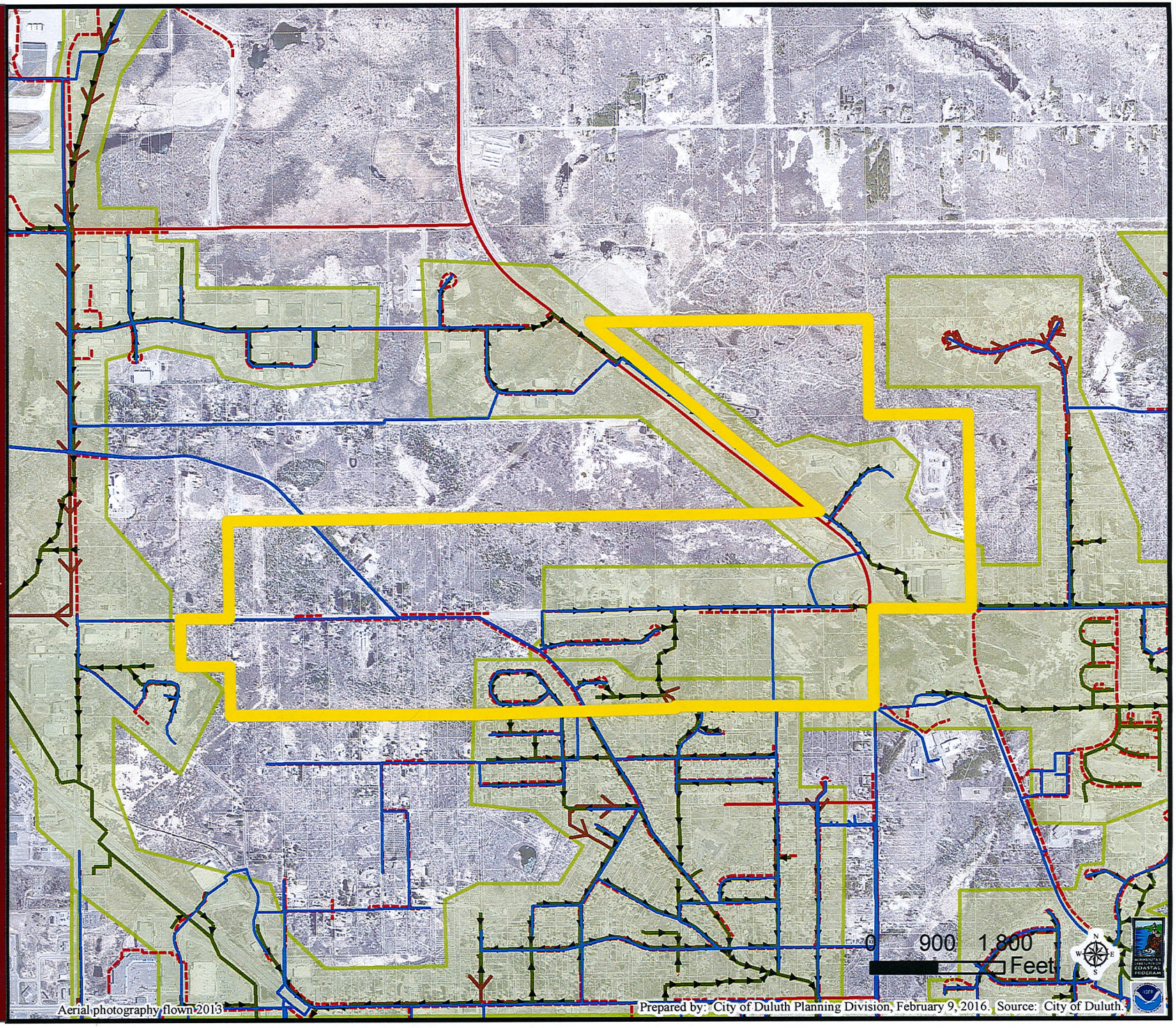
Floodplain Type

- General Flood Plain
- Flood Way
- Flood Fringe

This map shows Natural Resources in the area, including streams (and shoreland areas along streams), wetlands, and floodplains.



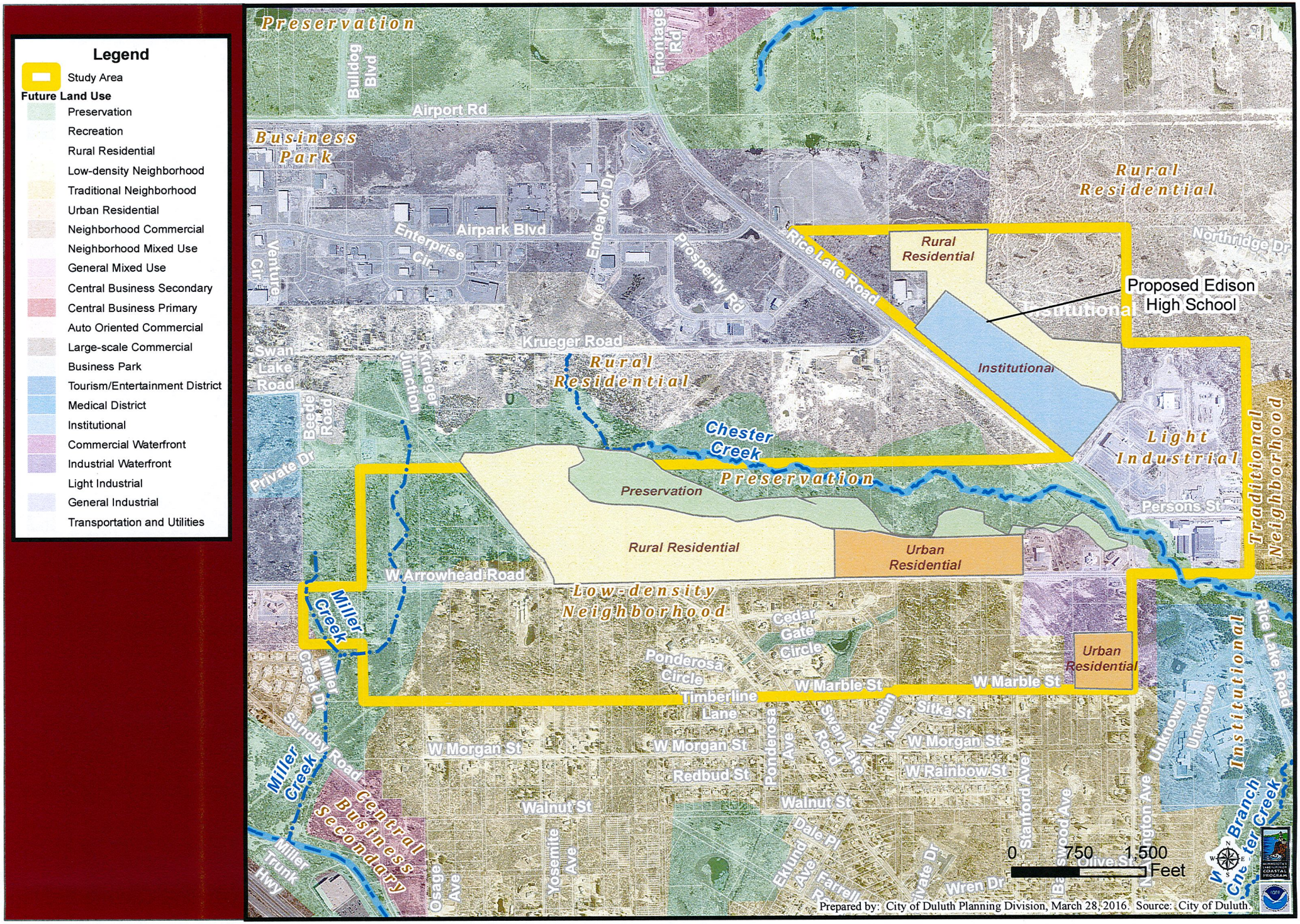
Arrowhead Road Area - Utilities



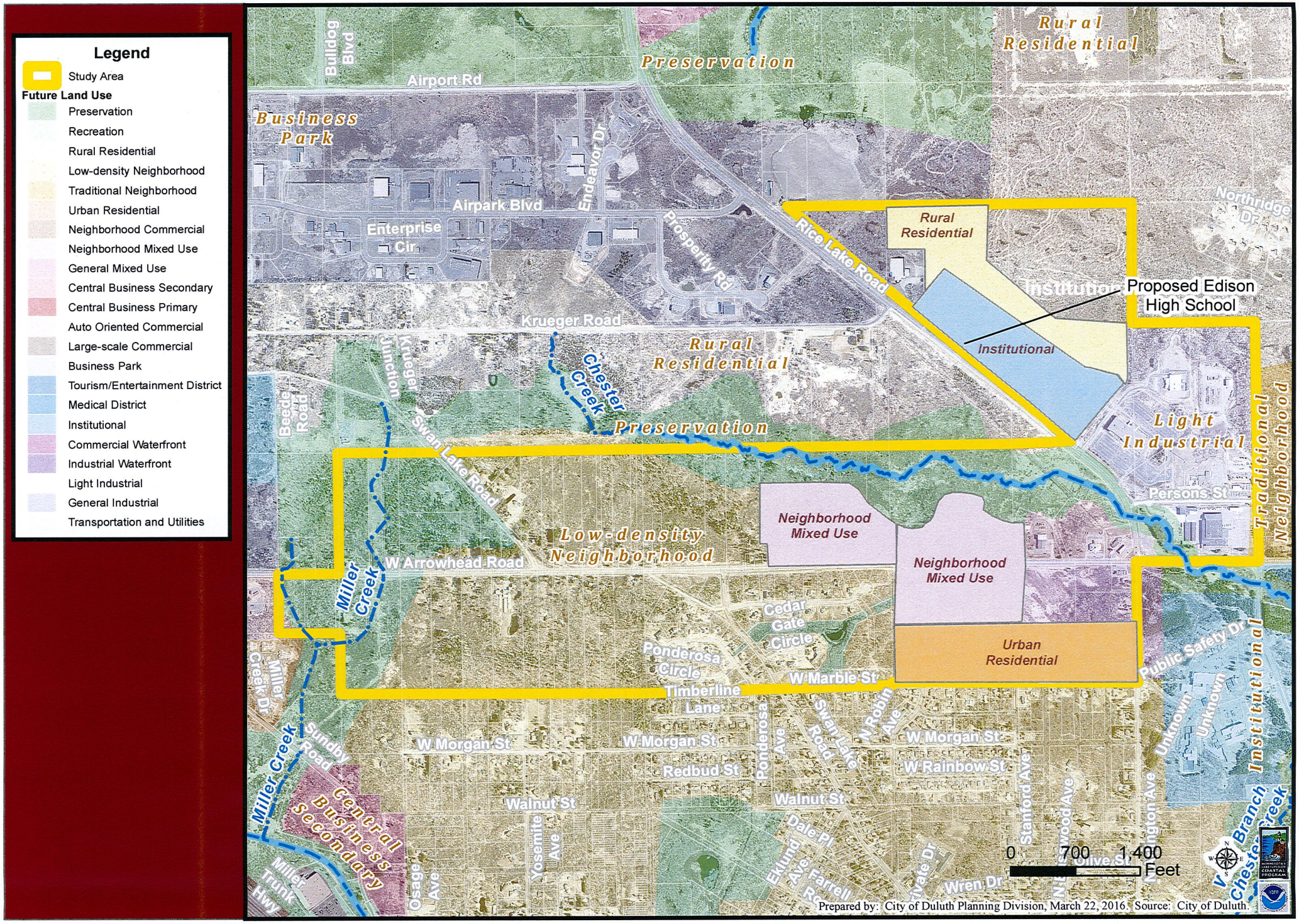
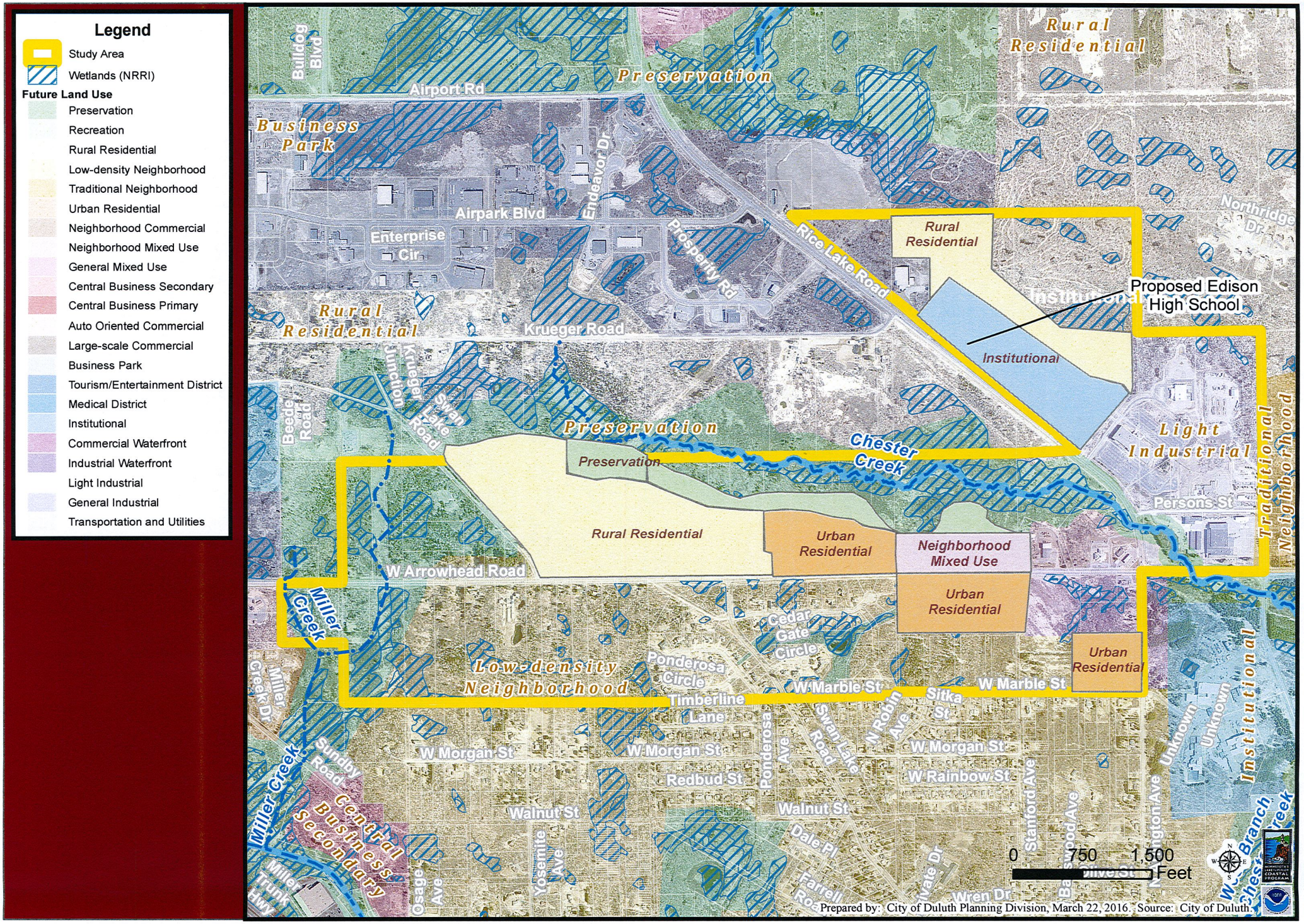
This map shows areas that are serviced by water, sewer, and gas.

Areas with existing utilities are more feasible for additional development than other areas. Areas without utilities would need to be evaluated for the feasibility of utility extensions, and any costs of those extensions would need to be paid for by the developer.

Option 1 - Low Intensity



Option 2 - High Intensity



Option 3 - Hybrid