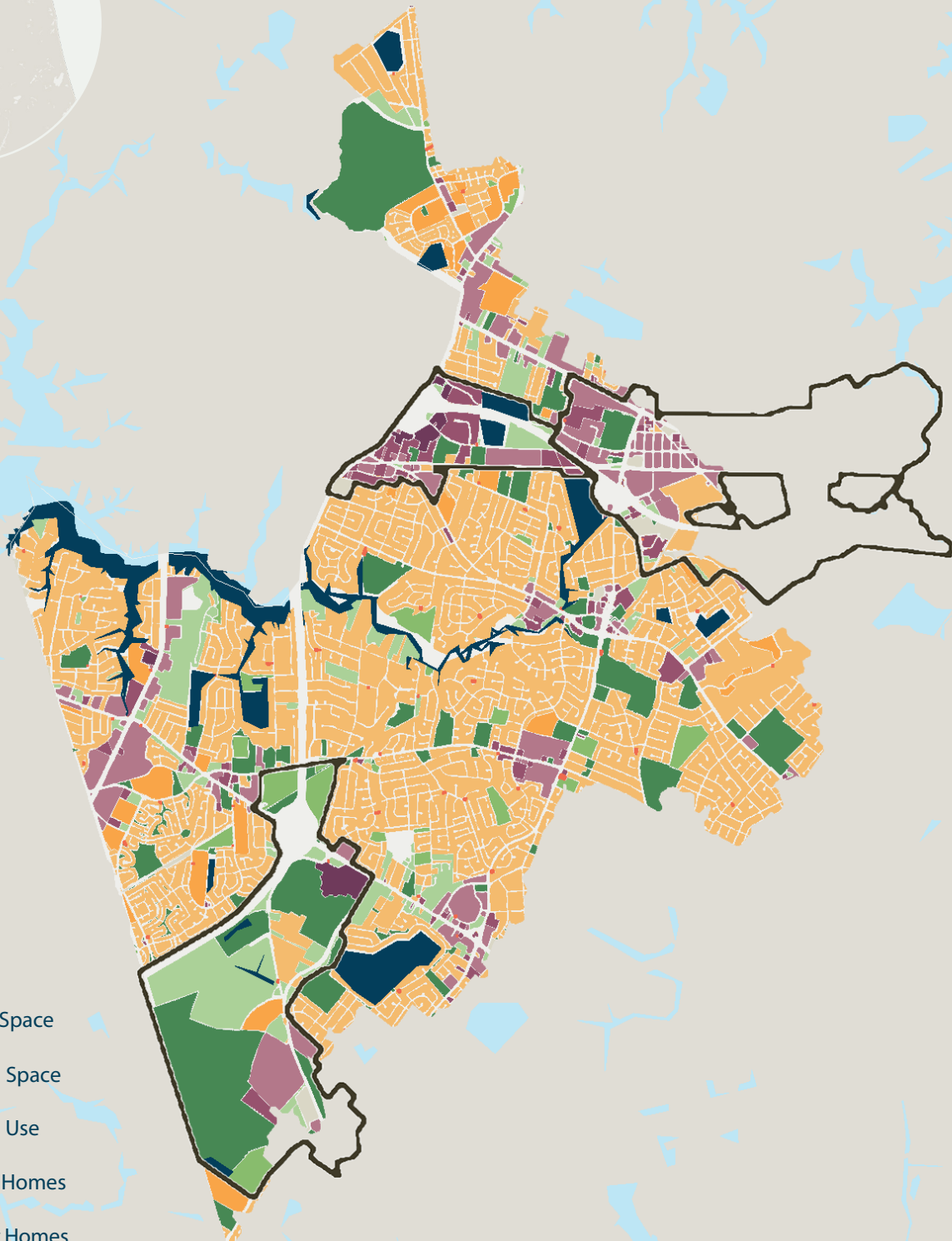


Elizabeth River Watershed Community Context



Waterways: The Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River is a thriving urban river that flows from Virginia Beach through Chesapeake and Norfolk.

Natural Resources: The Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River is fringed by tidal marshes and wetlands, which provide habitats to a diversity of birds, fish, and wildlife. As an urban river, water pollution has historically threatened species diversity in the watershed, notably leading to substantial declines in the native oyster population. In the past, oysters were so abundant along the Eastern Branch that they were used to form the foundation of “Shell Road”, which is now called Indian River Road in Virginia Beach. Significant work has been underway for the last several decades to restore the health of this urban river, including marsh and oyster restoration projects, which require continued coordination and support across all three cities. Public parks and recreational amenities along the waterfront are important to the communities surrounding the Eastern Branch in Virginia Beach. Although there are a few access points available to community members along the waterfront, they are scattered and are insufficient to serve the size of the community. One of the goals of the Eastern Branch Environmental Restoration Strategy is to improve public access along this branch, including extending the Elizabeth River trail into Virginia Beach to link together river access points, urban parks, and other points of interest.

Residential Population: The Elizabeth River Watershed is dominated by low-density residential neighborhoods. The residential population in the watershed has grown by about 7% in the past decade. The watershed’s population is 59,108 with 22,426 households. In 2019, the median income was \$67,910 with a per capita income of \$31,227. Residents are 58% white, 28% black, 9% Hispanic, and 5% Other. As of 2019, 58% of residents own their home, 37% of residents are renters, and 5% are vacation rentals.²³

Economic Industries: Further away from the waterfront edge are mixed-use areas with commercial and industrial centers that focus on retail and services. Together, these industries employ more than 60% of residents in the Elizabeth River Watershed.

Strategic Growth Areas: Three SGAs fall within the boundaries of the watershed, including Newtown, Pembroke, and Centerville. Visions for these areas include new or reconfigured commercial and residential corridors that maximize the use of exiting urban land uses.