

The State of Public Space in Lusaka. Garden Cities, Urban Development, Greenfield Sites

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Abstract

Lusaka, a city of around 3 million people, faces massive urban growth challenges. Designed on the Garden City planning paradigm principles, the city currently lacks open public recreational spaces. The lack of public space is often linked to the high land value alongside the high demand for housing, the lack of national government prioritization of public space provision policies, and a general lack of financial resources available to Lusaka's local council.

This article explores the state of formal public spaces in Lusaka, its urban history, development patterns, and the effects of these factors on everyday life and social interactions. It also outlines different private sector attempts to make up for the lack of public spaces through the provision of private green spaces (e.g., green private entertainment centres, private play parks, private back yards, and front yards) and the commercial units and malls that cover some public space functions. It asks questions on where kids play (e.g., private play parks, mall play parks, etc.) and highlights the design elements preventing streets from becoming lively public spaces (e.g., walls and roads). The article also examines Lusaka's plans for creating green and open spaces networks inside the city and their applicability. It studies public space provision plans in Lusaka's Development Plan 2030 and older public space provision attempts. It highlights the urgency and the importance of taking serious steps towards public space provision in the city now. The article used field research, mapping, desktop research, and interviews.

Keywords: Lusaka, public space, garden cities, urban development, greenfield sites

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1. History of Lusaka

In 1934 the capital of Northern Rhodesia was moved from Livingstone to a more central location in present-day Lusaka (Mfune, 2015). An English professor, SD Adshead, designed an urban plan for Lusaka, a greenfield site, based on the principles of Garden Cities to create a "generous, gracious city" where every step of the development is regulated (Mukuka, 2001). The city materialized following the guidelines and thinking of Adshead: spacious roads, lots of trees, massive private lawns, and backyards with a complete separation of functions¹ (Bradley, 1935). The Adshead plan outlined everything from the placement of the different functions to the streets' width to the placement of the main buildings (Bradley, 1935).

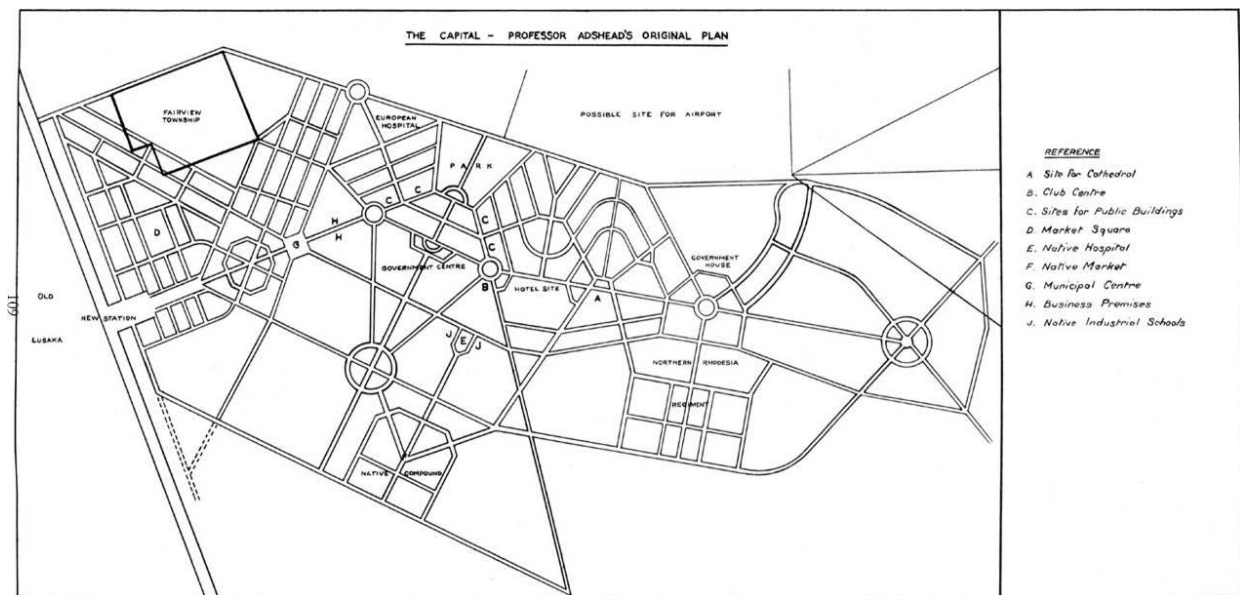


Figure 1 Adshead Original Plan. Source: Bradley, 1935.

It is essential to mention that the city was planned for Europeans (Mukuka, 2001). The natives were only allowed in the city for work, and registration papers controlled their existence and freedom of movement inside urban centres. African housewives and children were not allowed to accompany their husbands who worked in the city until the 1948 African Housing Ordinance passed, which allowed all Africans to reside in the city (Mulenga, 2003). The European residential area was segregated from the natives' housing, with European housing in more central locations and natives housing on the city periphery (Bradley, 1935). The governmental buildings and offices were designed in the modern imperial style of such architects as Herber Baker (Bradley, 1935).

2. Lusaka, today

Thirty eight percent of Zambian citizens live in cities. The UN projects that this number will increase up to 58% by 2050 (United Nations, 2018). Lusaka is growing every day,

¹ Trading areas, garages, sports ground, natives' housing, Europeans housing—each had a section in town completely separate from the other. With the natives' housing completely segregated from the residential area containing European housing.

with almost 3 million inhabitants today, the city is expected to double in size in 20 years. In the last few years, the city of Lusaka has been experiencing a massive boom with a rising middle class, which has coincided with the construction of urban amenities to cater to this middle class, including many more hotels, malls, and restaurants (Sladoje, 2016). Many residential units have been turned into coffee shops and restaurants in the CBD and different emerging middle-class neighbourhoods. Demand for the land has been increasing with rental prices soaring, and the city is expanding outwards but not upwards.

The colonial legacies of city-making have left the city with weak representative local governments, frail planning for urban growth, and insufficient infrastructure. While not enjoying financial independence, the Lusaka council serves as the planning authority for the city (Mulenga, 2003). Restrictive Garden City principles² are infamous for not planning adequately for urban growth (Dragica Gatarić, 2019). The historical segregation of Europeans and natives means that today the native townships have been left with insufficient infrastructure that's been unable to accommodate such a rapidly growing city. The initial design of the city did not account for growth or sufficient access to urban services for all citizens.

Most of the urban research on Lusaka focuses on managing urban expansion, congestion, transportation, and informal settlements and townships in the city (Tembo, 2014).

However, as middle and upper-class neighbourhoods increase, the decisions made today on the provision of public spaces will shape the future of public spaces in the city.

In Lusaka, public open recreational spaces are scarce, which is ironic for a city initially designed on Garden City planning principles. This article explores the state of formal public spaces in Lusaka, highlights all the other urban design elements found instead and examines the need for more public spaces in the city. It outlines the paradox of a Garden City with no public gardens or spaces. This article's data collection methods include desktop research, field research (mapping and observations), and semi-structured interviews with locals and experts in Lusaka.

3. In search of public spaces

According to UN-Habitat (2018) Public spaces are areas established by urban planning to entice social and cultural interaction and facilitate economic exchange. Informal areas mark only 38% of the total land in Lusaka (Chiwele, 2022). This article will focus on particular on the public space's provisions in formally planned Lusaka, as formal land constitutes most of the land in Lusaka, and the distinction between public and private is less evident, without formal private property rights. However, further research needs to be done on the ways informal areas use spaces for recreational activities

The state of public spaces varies from one city to another, even from one neighbourhood to another. Some cities have a great abundance of open spaces like Tshwane in South Africa (Landman, 2015). Others have dilapidated and underused public spaces like Sarajevo (Hatice, 2020). Still others have public spaces that are in the

² Garden city ideas aimed to combine the city's culture and economic advantages with rural ecological aspects. Garden City ideas emerged as a response the over crowedness of industrial cities in Britain. Garden City principles centred around low urban density and controllable population sizes—both principles are destructive for city growth, especially so in rapidly growing cities like Lusaka (Dragica Gatarić, 2019).

process of being commodified, like Alexandria, Egypt (Elhanafy, 2019). However, very few cities have no recreational public spaces; Lusaka is one of them.

3.1 Green Spaces on the Sides of the Streets

The city does not lack greenery like other African cities (e.g., Cairo); one can see trees and grass on both sides of roads almost everywhere (see Figure 2). This greenery has substantial environmental benefits in keeping the air clean and temperatures down, among others. However, they do not serve any recreational function. The recreational function is eliminated as a result of two main reasons. The first is the spatial distribution of greenery—the grass often occupies less than 2 meters of the sidewalks, and these green spaces are not central or spacious enough to be used as a small park. The second is the nature of the grass—the grass is almost never being cut, and the soil, especially in the rainy season, makes it impossible to sit on.

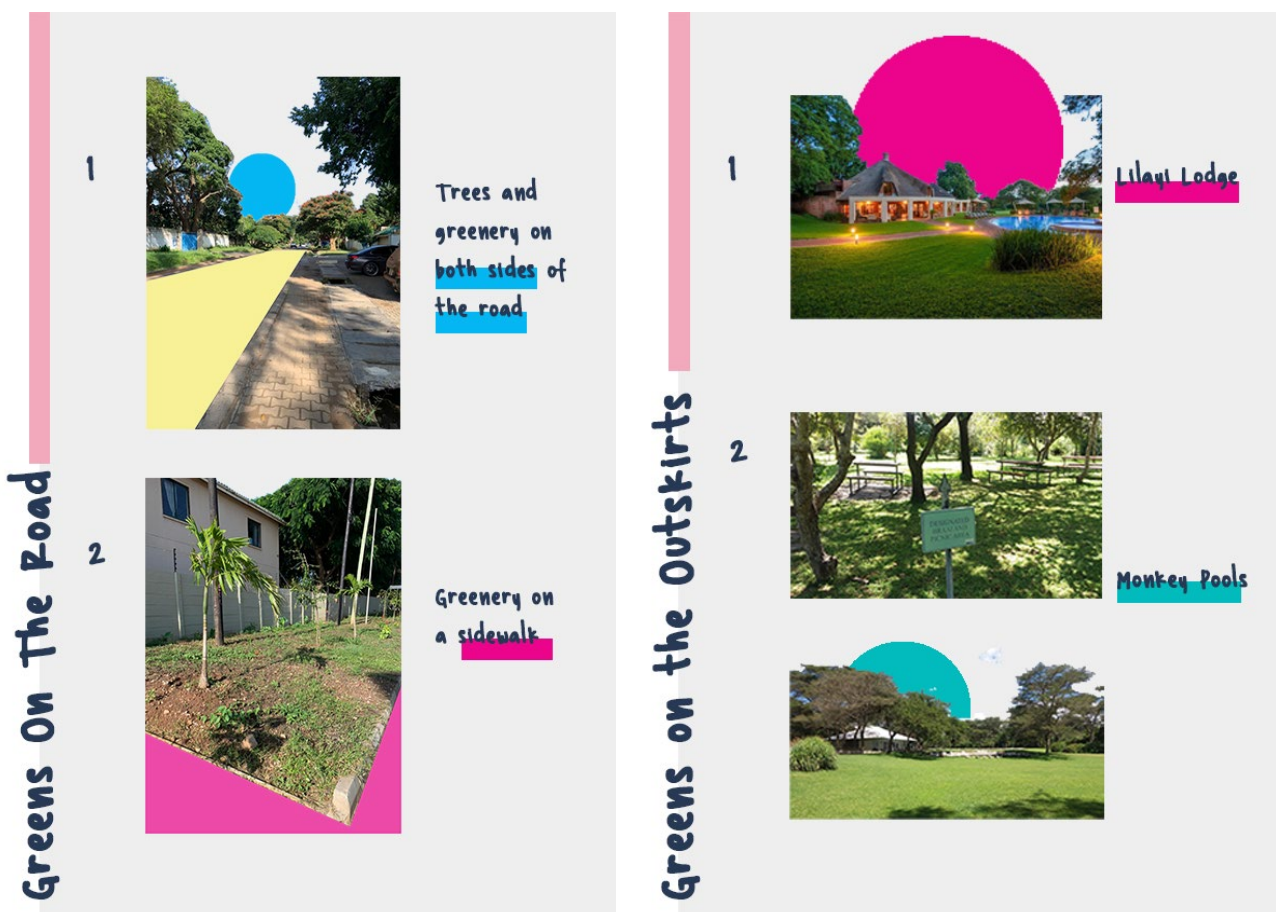


Figure 2 (left). Greens on the sides of the road. Source: Author, 2022.
Figure 3 (right). Greens on the outskirts. Source: TripAdvisor, 2022.

3.2 Greenery on the Outskirts

Inner-city neighbourhoods lack central recreational gardens, with greenery limited to trees and grass on sidewalks. However, there are various green, open spaces on the outskirts of the city. Monkey Pools—a gated community with a vast park—attracts

families to enjoy green spaces and water activities over weekends (see Figure 3). It also offers open green spaces for Braai (southern African barbeque) and picnics (see Figure 3). Both spaces lie on the city's outskirts and charge a user fee to usually middle- and upper-class residents to use their facilities, making it difficult and expensive for average Zambians to use (other examples similar to Monkey Pools include Tiffany Canyon and Sandys Creation).



Figure 4 (left). Public Green Spaces. Source: Author, 2022; Google Maps, 2022.
 Figure 5 (right). Private Green Open Spaces. Source: Tripadvisor.com, 2022; Mushiba, 2019.

3.3 Public Green Spaces

Except for a central green area next to the airport (which can be traced back to Adshead's initial plan), there are almost no open, green public spaces that can be utilized for recreational public uses. The initial Adshead design contained many traffic circles, most of which remain green to this day but again with no recreational use.

3.4 Private Green Open Spaces (Collective Goods)

Places like the golf club and the Mulungushi International Conference Centre contain open green spaces but are not used for public recreational functions. The Mulungushi centre is often rented out for events and conferences, and its vast open spaces are used to host those events. Several football pitches can be found (some owned by the council,

some by private companies) that can be rented by the hour. Several play parks in the city like Havillah Park and Joy Park are operational but are privately managed and owned, providing restricted access to green spaces within a few neighborhoods. The showgrounds -designed for the annual agriculture shows- have multiple green spaces that are used for horse riding, the open football field is rented per hour. The University of Zambia (UNZA) open green spaces are often used by students between classes but not used by the outside public UNZA for any recreational activities.



Figure 6 (left). Private Green Open Spaces. Source: Tripadvisor.com, 2022; Mushiba, 2019.
Figure 7 (right). Private Green Spaces. Source: Author, 2022.

3.5 Private Green Spaces

Most middle- and upper-class residential units enjoy generous front and back yards, the size of which depends on the unit's price (see Figure 6). These yards are often used to invite friends over, for Braai gatherings, and for kids to play. High walls surround almost all the houses, so those activities in the yards are often entirely private with no spillover to streets. Some residential units have a shared yard with one or two neighbours.

3.6 Kids Playgrounds

The lack of recreational public spaces, of course, adversely impacts children most—as they have no open spaces to play in their neighbourhoods. Finding kids playing in the

denser areas of the city is a somewhat familiar sight on a good-weathered day, especially in the informal townships of Lusaka. However, in Lusaka's upper and middle-class neighbourhoods, kids do not utilize the streets for play and often stick to their front or backyards, providing safe spaces for physical play but often lacking interaction with other kids. The lack of open playgrounds for kids has enticed the malls to utilize some of their spaces to build indoor and outdoor playgrounds for kids to play, charging parents by the hour. Kids' areas can be found in private play parks like those mentioned above.



Figure 8 (left). Kids Playgrounds. Source: Author, 2022.
 Figure 9 (right). Examples of walls in Lusaka. Source: Author, 2022.

3.7 The Streets and the Walls

Streets in themselves can be great public spaces and can induce lots of social interactions and activities. Streets are the main public spaces for more dense cities like Delhi and Cairo. In Cairo, streets are used by coffee shops, informal sellers, and even formal commercial units to showcase their goods, facilitating social interactions and creating lively streets. One feature in the streets of Lusaka is that they do precisely the opposite of facilitating human interaction. Walls surround most streets in the residential areas. Walls, cars, and roads are the most prominent feature of most formal neighbourhoods in Lusaka. Walls of all colours, sizes, and shapes are built around

Zambian residential units, offices, and even restaurants and coffee shops. Even the newly founded restaurants are also behind closed walls. Commercial units on ground floors often create good safe public life and “eyes on the streets” (Jacobs, 1964), but Lusaka's restaurants behind the walls do not contribute to public life.

3.8 The Commercial and the Green

The newly opened restaurants, coffee shops, and malls play a role close to those public spaces in enticing social interactions. Through a very curated and spatially restricted experience, Lusaka's residents get to meet and interact with each other in these spaces. Most restaurants in residential zones come with green spaces, and some even have playgrounds. These coffee shops and restaurants are not accessible financially to a considerable portion of the city population. Because of the high demand, coffee shops and restaurants proliferate, replacing one-story residential units.



Figure 10 (left). Commercial Units' Green Spaces. Source: Author, 2022.

Figure 11 (right). Lusaka's Markets. Source: Tripadvisor, 2021.

3.9 The Markets

Another public space that is often overlooked is outdoor markets. Arcades Market—a traditional crafts market held on Sundays in the Arcades Mall parking lot—is one example. The market is mainly used by tourists looking for traditional souvenirs. This

market is relatively controlled and limited in hours, and although it entices some social interactions between the buyers and sellers, it does not have any public recreational function. Another example is the Soweto Market, which is less controlled mostly used for canned goods, vegetables, and fruits. Soweto Market is one of the few places in Lusaka with less controlled and curated public life experience but, again, no recreational function.

4. The Effects

Comprehensively studying the effects of the lack of public space in Lusaka requires detailed social and economic studies across the city's different socioeconomic demographics. However, it is evident that the less financially able groups end up possessing very little access to any recreational spaces, as they cannot access coffee shops or restaurants, and there are no green or open spaces outside of these private, high-priced options that they can use. The interviews conducted with several workers indicated that they do not use any spaces for recreational use. On Sundays, they mostly spend their time in church or with family at home or a combination of both.

Another group affected by this is the emerging middle class, who often complain about how expensive it is to take kids outside or how much money it requires to spend time with friends in emerging coffee shops or restaurants. However, this group often lives in homes with back and front yards and is generally less affected by the problem as they still have the ability to access recreational spaces, even if on a lesser scale than more affluent classes.

Another issue noticed from the interviews is the complete unawareness of how the other class spends their weekend. "*I am sure they have places they go to,*" one interviewee answered when asked if she knew how the lower classes spend their free time or weekends. The lack of knowledge is, of course, a direct result of the lack of interaction that happens between different demographics in Lusaka

5. Lusaka Development Plan 2030

The Lusaka Development Plan of 2030 focuses on five main things: i) Industrial development ii) spatial development and land use, iii) urban centre development, iv) urban transportation, v) living environment and social services, vi) natural environment and green network development, and vii) infrastructure development (MLGH, 2009). In the Development Plan 2030, Lusaka's CBD is reimagined as a business core connected through public transportation system and a pedestrian network with mixed-use development to create lively, open, and green spaces. The plan also outlines links of public and green spaces connecting the CBD to other neighbourhoods in the city (MLGH, 2009). While the new green and open spaces are prominent in Lusaka's Development Plan 2030, almost none of these plans have taken place in reality so far.

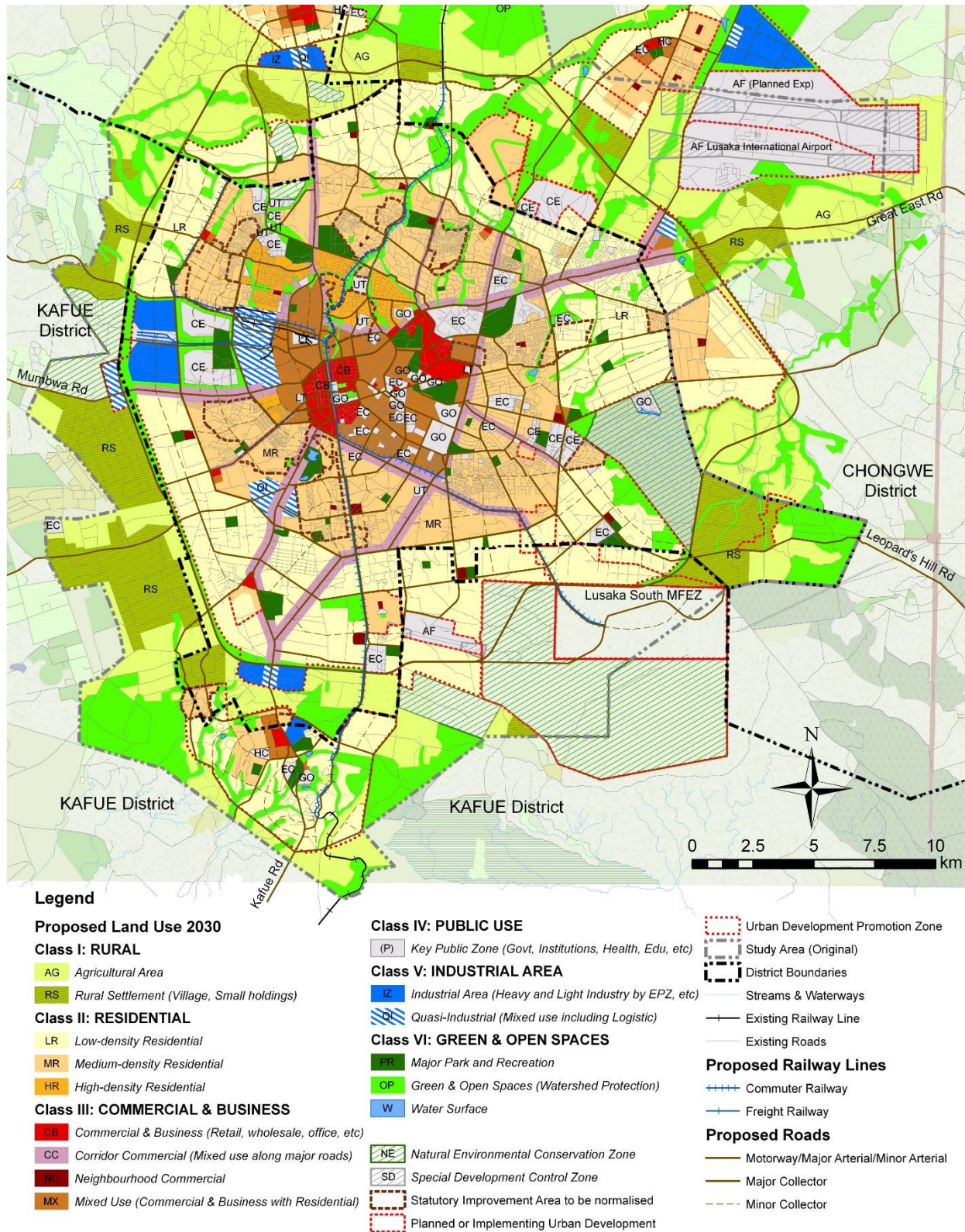


Figure 12. Lusaka Development plan 2030. Source: MLGH, 2009.

5.1 Barriers to Implementation

Several challenges impede the implementation of provisions for public and open spaces highlighted in the Lusaka Development Plan 2030. The first is the national government's long-standing record of not prioritizing public space compared to other infrastructure provision issues (Mushiba, 2019). The second issue is the lack of financial resources available to Lusaka's local council. The council is the main stakeholder responsible for implementing public spaces and mainly depends on national government grants, which delay many plans and often hinder their implementation (Mulenga, 2003). The third reason is the rising land values, housing demand with soaring rent prices, and complicated land ownership and acquisition processes that further raise the costs of urban development (Mfunne, 2015).

6. Conclusion

Public spaces are not a luxury but essential infrastructure to develop healthy and sustainable cities and communities (Kim, 2015). In times of transformation and growth, public spaces are essential for the exchange of ideas, stimulating political and community discussions, holding authorities to their promises, and integrating different social groups, and fostering a sense of cohesion (Project for Public Spaces, 2018). Besides the social importance of public spaces, markets, and green spaces also tend to increase the land values of their surroundings, thus helping cities and communities economically (KIM, 2015). They are also essential for the physical health of lower-income groups within the community—most importantly marginalized children—who are often confined to small residential units without proper ventilation or sun.

Lusaka is a growing city facing many challenges as it attempts to manage its rapid growth. The urban policies adopted today around public spaces will affect the city's urban form for decades to come. Lusaka needs to take concrete steps away from the Garden City planning paradigm that initially shaped the city. It needs to put people and their social needs at the centre of future planning decisions by planning for public spaces that are accessible to all. If Lusaka does not take the necessary steps to integrate public spaces in its development plans and ensure their accessibility and safety now, it will only get more complicated and costly for the city to retroactively find land and develop it for public space in the future. The time to act is now.

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