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Franklin Boulevard Corridor

FRANKLIN BOULEVARD CORRIDOR

Franklin Boulevard Corridor Master Plan Goal

The vision for the Franklin Boulevard Corridor through Gastonia is to recreate a vibrant series of mixed-use centers that define the corridor as a gateway to the community by promoting distinct, multimodal destinations that provide a sense of character, history and economic opportunity for the next 50 years of Gastonia's evolution. The Franklin Boulevard Corridor will feature highly accessible, attractive and well-connected places that strengthen adjacent neighborhoods while enhancing regional mobility for people and goods.

Introduction

The Charlotte Metropolitan Region is expected to add nearly 400,000 people over the next 20 years. With downtown Gastonia a relatively short 20-30 minute commute to Uptown Charlotte and the airport, Franklin Boulevard offers an authentic and historic urban environment that, if positioned well, could attract a sizable percentage of regional growth to capitalize on revitalization efforts. The impacts of growth within the 2025 Study area, and within the Franklin Boulevard Corridor in particular, will impact land use and the resulting traffic volume, generation and distribution. With the understanding of the potential impact the growth would have on the City, in August 2006, the City of Gastonia, and the Gaston Urban Area MPO, contracted with Renaissance Planning Group to prepare a corridor study and Master Plan for the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.

The purpose of the corridor study and Master Plan is to integrate the land use, transportation, and urban design elements along the corridor in a manner that fosters redevelopment and improved personal mobility. The corridor is both a gateway and center to the history, culture, and economic fortunes of the City. What is now a disconnected hodgepodge of aging hotels, stately churches, fenced-off industrial uses, vacant storefronts, institutional land uses, as well as new suburban retail and residential development can be transformed into

a cohesive, interconnected corridor that includes a mix of residential, commercial and open space uses that enhance surrounding areas.

The plan is a long-range 30-year vision for the corridor that will guide development and provide a framework for policy direction for future implementation and controls. The corridor did not deteriorate overnight. For a variety of economic and social reasons, it took over 40 years for the corridor to decline. With that knowledge comes the reality that positive change, which reflects the community's vision, will also not happen overnight. However, there are many relatively low cost, near-term improvements that the City, and its partners, can undertake that will serve as a catalyst to the revitalization of this important gateway that links the City's past, present and future.

The Master Plan serves as a guide for the community to complete that transformation in a manner that unifies the corridor while celebrating the unique character and history within each segment. The vision for the Franklin Boulevard Corridor is to create places of distinction at key points along the corridor that enhance its character, strengthen the City's economic vitality and expand opportunities to attract residents, visitors and workers by increasing accessibility. These community focal points build upon existing issues and opportunities to create mixed-use places that encourage walking, cycling, and use of transit. They can also serve as a source of civic pride and economic vitality within the community.



Figure 8-1: Current Development Trend along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor



Community participation is vital to the plan's success. The Master Plan was driven by the concerns, ideas and visions expressed by the public and key stakeholders at multiple meetings, personal interviews, design workshops and other forums. The three community designed workshops drew between 60 and 80 participants collectively, representing diverse interests and perspectives along this nine-mile corridor.

The input drawn from the design workshop and public forms helped to develop the community's vision and goals for the corridor. The goals set the course to further define essential characteristics key to implementing the vision of the Franklin Boulevard Corridor. While they were important in the creation of the Master Plan, they will also be important in guiding the community's efforts during implementation.

- ◆ Enhance connectivity while preserving capacity.
- ◆ Provide land use and transportation alternatives that address community values;
- ◆ Capitalize on existing character and unique assets for redevelopment.
- ◆ Create pedestrian-oriented destinations and districts.
- ◆ Maximize use of Transportation System Management strategies along the Corridor to improve safety and capacity (traffic signal system coordination and access management improvements); and,
- ◆ Increase multi-modal opportunities along the Corridor.

This is a long-range 30 year vision for redevelopment of Franklin Boulevard. This section of the Comprehensive Plan presents the summary of the findings of the Franklin Boulevard Corridor Master Plan as well as the goals and policies that are specific to the area. However, the overall 2025 Comprehensive Plan applies to the Franklin Boulevard.

Location and Context

Perhaps the most important message of the Master Plan is that the Franklin Boulevard Corridor is a significant vital component of Gastonia's economy. The Franklin Boulevard Corridor stretches approximately nine miles east to west from Redbud Drive at the municipal line shared with Lowell on the east, through downtown to the municipal line at Barney Castle Road on the west. The study area included properties within one-quarter mile of Franklin Boulevard on both the north and south side of the roadway. The Corridor serves dual functions - both as a federally designated highway (US 29/NC 79) linking Charlotte and the Piedmont region, as well as the historic center of the community, connecting different neighborhoods within the City to the downtown. The Franklin Boulevard Corridor has perhaps

An examination of vacant redevelopable lands within one-quarter mile of either side of the corridor revealed a future growth trend where the highest growth is expected on the eastern and western ends of the corridor forming a barbell shape as shown in Figure 8-1.



The historic center of Gastonia, its downtown, sits along a high point, or ridge, running east to west, that forms the boundary between the South Fork Catawba (Long Creek) watershed and the Upper Catawba (Catawba Creek) watershed. The hydrology and land form shape Franklin Boulevard in a profound way, giving it an undulating character of high points and prominent viewsheds as well as low points with significant wetlands.

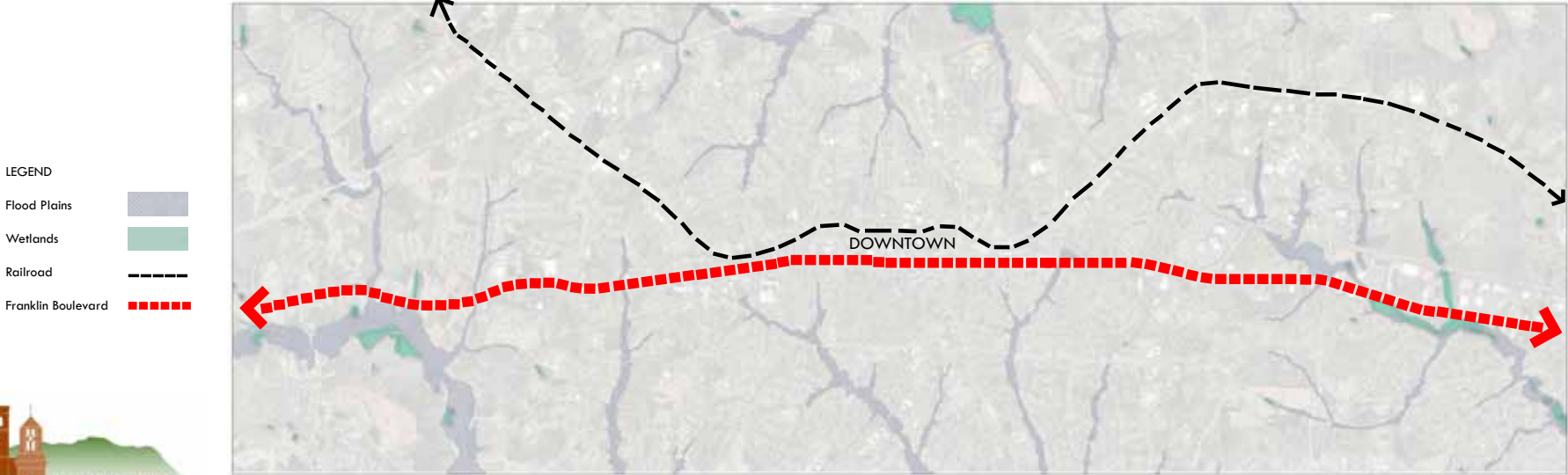
the greatest potential of any area in the City to become a high-quality, economic success.

Gastonia, like the rest of Gaston County on the western edge of the Charlotte Metropolitan Region along I-85, is poised for rapid growth. Much of the growth that previously occurred in the suburban ring areas of western Mecklenburg County is now leaping across the Catawba River into the previously undeveloped areas of Gaston County, where land costs have historically been less. An examination of vacant and redevelopable lands within a one-quarter mile on either side of Franklin Boulevard in the study Corridor revealed a future growth potential of 2,250 additional dwelling units and 5,000 new jobs by 2030, assuming there is no change in land use, and based on data from the Gaston Urban Area MPO transportation model. That's in addition to 12,600 dwelling units and 23,600 jobs from existing and approved development in the Corridor. This represents a growth increase of approximately 18 percent, largely following a typical suburban pattern of

growth. Under this trend, the highest growth is expected on the eastern and western ends of the Corridor, forming a barbell pattern of growth along the Corridor.

This growth in the Corridor, when combined with regional growth elsewhere in Gaston County and surrounding areas, could mean numerous additional daily vehicle trips on the Franklin Boulevard Corridor by 2030. These growth projections, as well as the incident management overflow requirements of I-85, were taken into careful consideration in developing the recommendations for the Franklin Boulevard Corridor Master Plan. The challenge and opportunity that is addressed in the Master Plan is how to redirect most of the anticipated growth into the urban core and established corridors in the form of quality redevelopment that fits the character of each community. The Corridor Master Plan presents an opportunity to re-conceptualize Franklin Boulevard through the City as a dynamic resource for attracting some of this new growth back into the older parts of the City. By re-using and

Figure 8-2: Land Form & Hydrology along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor



enhancing the existing infrastructure of the City for new growth, current rural areas of the county can be preserved.

Existing Conditions

Good planning relies on an understanding of the current natural and human characteristics of the planning area, the relationships between different types of characteristics, and how those characteristics have been changing over time. These conditions inform recommendations that emerge from the Master Plan. The following is a brief summary of the present conditions along the Corridor as discussed in the plan.

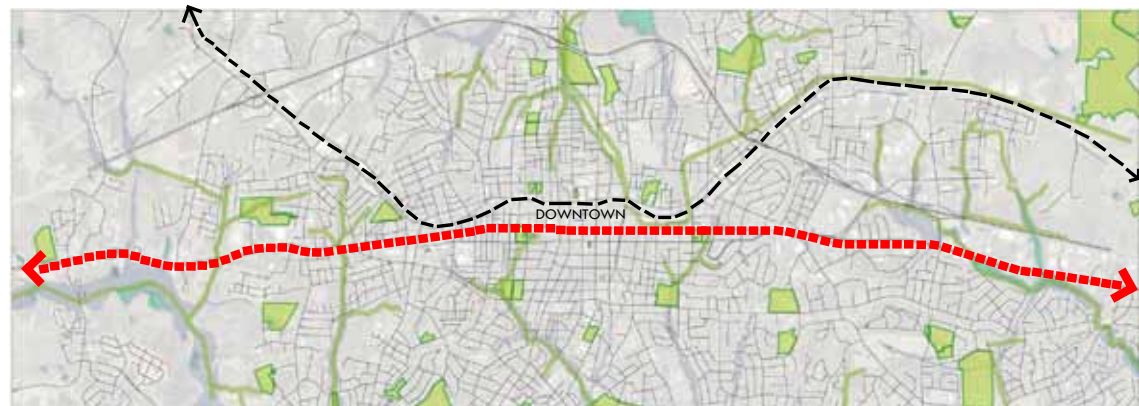
LAND FORM

Franklin Boulevard follows a historic route through the headwaters of the Catawba River, connecting the cities of Belmont, Lowell, Gastonia, and Kings Mountain with Charlotte and Mecklenburg County to the east of the Catawba River. The historic center of Gastonia, its downtown, sits along a high point, or ridge, running east to west, that forms the boundary between the South Fork Catawba (Long Creek) watershed and the Upper Catawba (Catawba Creek) watershed.

HYDROLOGY

The hydrology and land form shape Franklin Boulevard in a profound way, giving it an undulating character of high points and prominent viewsheds as well as low points with significant wetlands. Unlike the railroad line, which sticks to the high ground along the ridge, Franklin Boulevard follows a more direct east-west route. As such, the road crosses several flood plains and wetlands, as well as high points such as downtown and older areas west and east of downtown. The Boulevard rises and falls as it traverses this landscape, starting at a low point on the east as it enters the City, then rising at New Hope Road before falling down to the industrial area east of

Figure 8-3: Street Connectivity Along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.

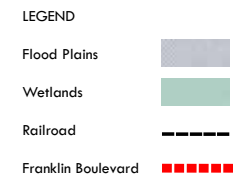


downtown. It then rises again to parallel the rail line through the high point of downtown, before falling and rising again as it traverses the mill villages west of the downtown.

STREET CONNECTIVITY

A key function of street connectivity is placemaking. Great places have well defined blocks and avenues that create an inter connected network for personal mobility. Older urban areas, such as central Gastonia, often have some form of street connectivity that pre-dates the rise of the automobile as the primary means of personal mobility. While newer areas of Gastonia, like other cities, are marked by less street connectivity and more disconnected arterials and residential streets. With less interconnection, the primary arterials in these places (such as Franklin Boulevard to the east and west of downtown Gastonia) become oversized in order to handle the traffic.

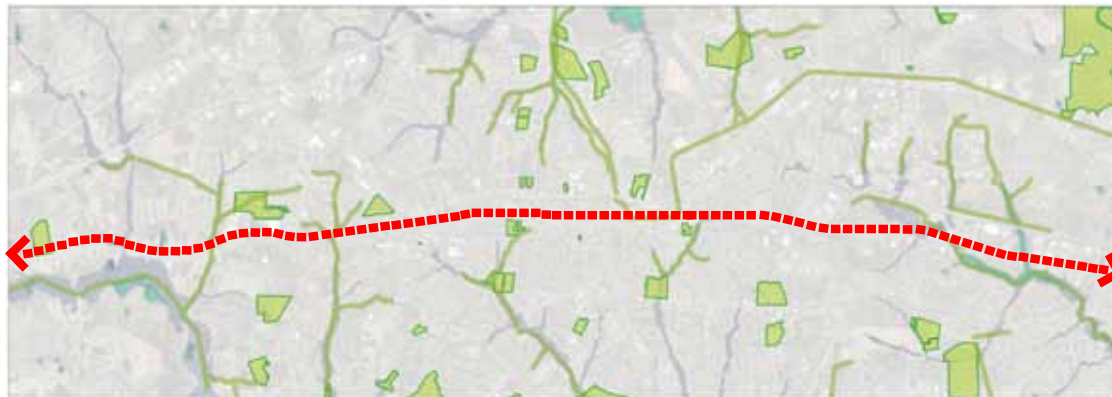
Along most of the Corridor there are six lanes (three in each direction). The exceptions to this profile are the segment of Franklin Boulevard downtown, from Broad Street to York Street, which consists of five lanes (two in each direction with a center turn lane) and the segment west of Myrtle School Road, which has two lanes in each direction separated by a wide median.



There is less congestion through downtown, and on the western edge of the corridor, but there are delays at certain signalized intersections east of downtown and in the vicinity of Franklin Square. These delays contribute to a perception of traffic congestion along the entire corridor.



Figure 8-4: Open Spaces and Greenway Opportunities Along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.



LEGEND

- Flood Plains
- Wetlands
- Railroad
- Franklin Boulevard

- Open Space
- Proposed Greenways
- Streets

The volumes are well below the road's acceptable service volume given the number of lanes and traffic signals per mile. There is less congestion through downtown, and on the western edge of the Corridor, but delays at certain signalized intersections east of downtown and in the vicinity of Franklin Square. This contributes to a perception of traffic congestion along the entire Corridor. The Corridor Master Plan looks at opportunities for enhancing the street network along, and adjacent to, Franklin Boulevard at key locations in order to improve the overall street connectivity.

CORRIDOR FUNCTIONALITY

Franklin Boulevard is designated as a primary arterial through-route that serves a variety of trip purposes and modes. The Corridor has three major functions. First, it serves as a federal-aid highway that is the primary reliever route for I-85 through Gaston County, and can accommodate a significant amount of truck traffic, which often occurs when incidents on the interstate force traffic to divert. Secondly, it has been designed to accommodate a significant amount of truck traffic due to the legacy of industrial development and increasing level of new commercial development. Another function of the Corridor is as a multi-

modal Corridor, where both Gastonia's and Charlotte's transit agencies operate routes that serve portions of the roadway. Also, the Norfolk Southern rail line is an active freight Corridor that was placed in a large ditch through downtown Gastonia two decades ago because the long freight trains caused access problems getting into and out of the downtown area.

OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS

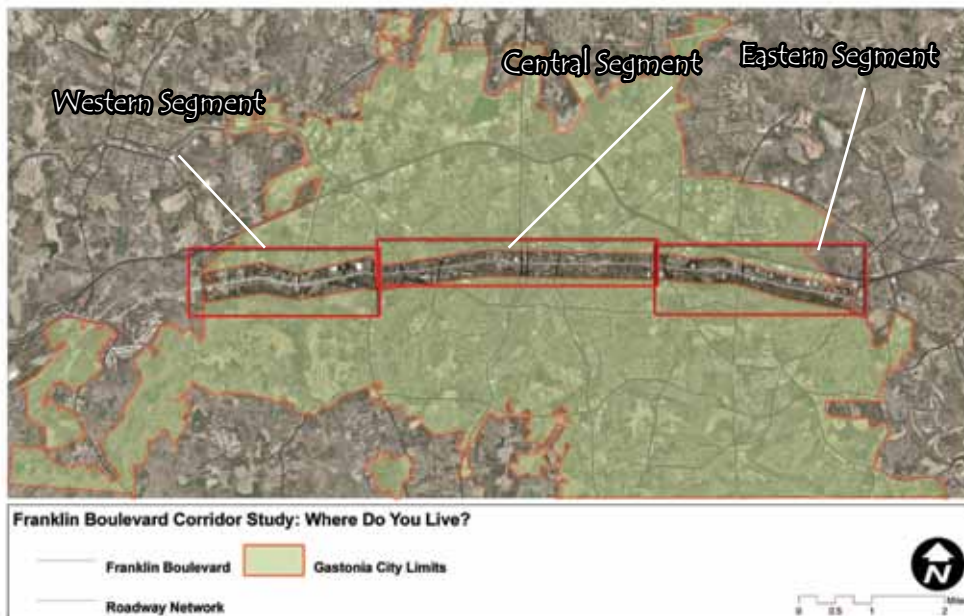
With the exception of the cemetery at South Chester and Franklin Boulevard, the Corridor functions as a primarily commercial spine, with residential areas sprinkled in at several locations. However, the decline and decay of some segments of the Corridor have introduced places for "informal" open space such as empty parking lots and abandoned building sites that may be considered as part of a formal open space network as the Corridor redevelops.

In several key locations, proposed greenways intersect with Franklin Boulevard. These places represent important areas for "making visible" the greenway network to the users of Franklin Boulevard and providing a logical place for multi-modal, mixed-use development.

Because the greenways typically follow low lying creek areas, they predominately run in a north-south orientation, without crossing the ridgeline where the railroad lies. This Master Plan presents opportunities for extending the proposed greenways to connect the neighborhoods north and south of Franklin Boulevard, and envisions a bike and pedestrian facility running east-west, parallel to Franklin Boulevard that connects the various proposed strands of greenway into a cohesive network.



Figure 8-5: The Franklin Boulevard Corridor, by Segment.



While the intent of the plan is to create a singular image and integrated plan for the Corridor, it was recognized early in the planning process that three distinct identity areas could be identified. Each segment has its own unique set of issues, challenges, and opportunities. Due to this, the early planning process focused on each of the three areas individually while still maintaining a holistic approach to the Corridor. Understanding the land use conditions throughout the Corridor is important for planning what it could be in the future. The land use condition for each segment of the Corridor is summarized below.

Land Use

The Franklin Boulevard Corridor functions in several roles as it traverses the City. Historically, it has served as an industrial Corridor in certain places, with institutions like Sun Drop and major places of employment, such as the current and former textile mills. It is a commercial linkage between new growth at either end of the City with the older established neighborhoods near downtown. Also, it is an important civic spine, containing numerous prominent religious and government buildings. Finally, the Corridor serves as the front door to different residential neighborhoods that are set back off the Corridor, including the York-Chester Local National Register Historic District, the Loray National Register Historic District, and the Downtown National Register Historic Districts.

The eastern segment of Franklin Boulevard, from the municipal line with Lowell on the east to the intersection with New Hope Road on the west, is differentiated by two primary conditions.

- 1) Some key land use conditions along the north side of the eastern section include large lot commercial uses such as dealerships, home improvement supercenters, and regional shopping centers. This area is a primary retail destination serving Gaston County and the surrounding region. Excellent access to I-85 has made this a prime location for car dealerships, home improvement supercenters and similar retail development catering to a regional market.
- 2) The south side of the Corridor consists primarily of single-family residential neighborhoods. Most of these neighborhoods are not directly accessible from Franklin

Eastern Segment, large lot commercial properties



Eastern Segment, retail destinations with excellent access to I-85



Central Segment, single family homes fronting the street, sheltered by a dense canopy



Western Segment, with commercial nodes but retaining its rural character



Boulevard, rather their access is from perpendicular streets such as Cox Road. Included in this category are several significant parcels of undeveloped land. This undeveloped land encompasses much of the 100 year floodplain. Much of this segment of the Corridor lies at a lower elevation relative to the rest of the study area.

CENTRAL SEGMENT

The central segment of the Corridor runs from New Hope Road on the east through downtown to Myrtle School Road on the west. This segment includes the oldest parts of the community, including the downtown and former mill village around the Historic Loray Mill. The most significant uses include:

- ◆ The National Register Downtown Historic District, which has the character of an urban mixed-use district.
- ◆ Gaston Memorial Hospital, an important employment and visitor destination, is located on the north side of I-85 east of New Hope Road.
- ◆ The Loray National Register Historic District, which is a former mill village characterized by small scale single-family housing with mixed scale commercial establishments and vacant parking lots.
- ◆ Industrial sites like the Sun Drop bottling plant.

The intersection around New Hope Road is similar in nature to the commercial properties further east along the Corridor. Franklin Boulevard travels slightly downhill from New Hope Road through an older established residential neighborhood, with single-family homes fronting the street, sheltered by a dense canopy. Leaving the residential neighborhood, Franklin Boulevard gradually ascends toward downtown through a former industrial Corridor, with a current mix of commercial and civic establishments, along with legacy industrial sites. Through downtown, prominent churches and government buildings are

interspersed with surface parking lots. The segment west of downtown includes the York-Chester cemetery, along with the former Sears building, the downtown YMCA, and the Gaston County Police station which fronts the Corridor, as well as several older hotels.

Leaving downtown, Franklin Boulevard runs through the old Mill Village around the Loray Mill, characterized by small scale single-family housing with mixed-scale commercial establishments and vacant parking lots. Parkdale Mills textile mill is located just west of the Firestone Mill. As the Corridor approaches Myrtle School Road on the west, the older commercial areas give way to some newer commercial development. This new commercial development forms the gateway into the City from the west.

WESTERN SEGMENT

The western segment of Franklin Boulevard runs from the Myrtle School Road intersection to the municipal boundary on the west near Sadler Elementary School. The character of the western segment differs most from the other segments. This difference is noticed specifically around the Myrtle School Road intersection and the intersections with Shannon-Bradley Road in that while it is indicated as commercial, much of the area around both intersections still retains its rural character. The roadway follows the rolling terrain and has a wide median with two lanes in each direction. Manufactured homes line parts of this segment and the low-lying floodplain that runs adjacent to the Corridor in this segment contains several old car dumps that have been there for at least three decades. Despite attractive rolling hills and views of Crowders Mountain, the scenery is marred by these decrepit buildings and auto junkyards.

Western Segment, rolling terrain with two lanes in either direction



Redevelopment Scenarios

Scenario building provides an opportunity to consider what might happen in the community under various policy conditions. The purpose of considering alternative scenarios is to understand the policy choices, educate local officials and the public about the implications of policy choices, and evaluate which policy choices are right for the Corridor. Understanding policy choices, and their implications, forces trade-offs between conflicting goals. The alternatives that are presented in the plan are general in nature and have been prepared to illustrate and explore distinct potential future development patterns for the Corridor. In order to arrive at the preferred scenario, a build-out analysis was conducted which examined the land use conditions to compare the existing conditions with two future scenarios—a trend and an alternative.

Build-Out Analysis

In order to arrive at a preferred redevelopment scenario, a build-out analysis looking at land use was developed to compare the existing conditions with two future scenarios—a trend and an alternative. The Build-out Analysis involves determining the potential amount and distribution of population and employment growth over a certain time frame. Using data from the Gaston Urban Area MPO Transportation Model, and an inventory of the existing land uses within one-quarter mile of the Corridor, the build-out analysis revealed several important lessons for Gastonia, which are measured in terms of “Business as Usual” or controlled growth.

Figure 8-6: Build-Out Analysis

	Existing		Build-out (Trend)		Alternative Scenario	
	Dwelling Units	Employment	Dwelling Units	Employment	Dwelling Units	Employment
City of Gastonia	27,400	35,700	34,900	44,000	35,550	50,000
Franklin Boulevard (Study Area)	12,600	23,600	14,850	28,600	16,600	35,700
Percent of City	46%	66%	42%	64%	47%	71%
Jobs and Housing Balance	1.83 jobs per household		1.92 jobs per household		2.15 jobs per household	

Figure 8-7: Existing Land Use (2007)



Figure 8-8: Future Land Use (2030)

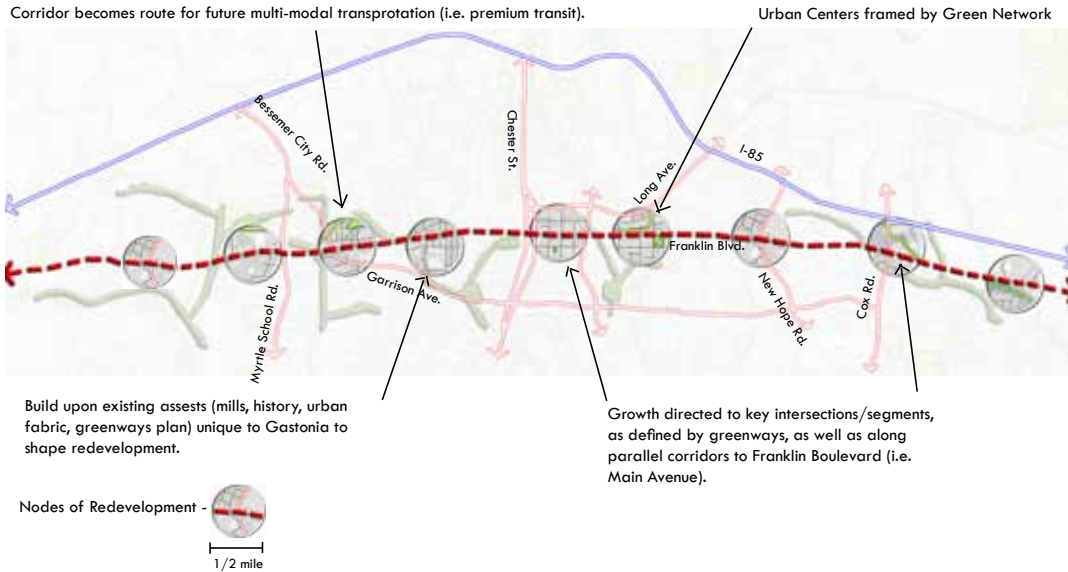


If business continues as usual, current trends indicate that future growth along the Corridor will increase the number of new dwelling units and jobs by 18 percent and 21 percent respectively over 30 years. However, the share of new dwelling units and employment would decrease in the Corridor in relation to the rest of the City. Given the



Figure 8-9: Nodes of Redevelopment along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.

Urban Green Boulevard



Enhanced eastern gateway streetscape

ease of developing greenfields over brown or greyfields, this is not a surprising trend. Also, the business as usual scenario indicates that development will continue to appear disproportionately on the eastern end and sprawl into western rural areas, creating a dumbbell effect, with limited or no growth and redevelopment in the historic center of the City. This scenario indicates development will also intensify in areas located along I-85 relief points (Bessemer City Road, Chester Street and Long Avenue) as the Corridor remains the primary reliever for I-85.

The alternative scenario, as proposed in the Master Plan, would set up a regulatory framework for directing significant amounts of the projected growth into the existing infrastructure of the Corridor. Under the alternative scenario, both dwelling units and employment would increase in greater number and in real terms versus the trend. In addition, the percentage of the City's total amount of dwelling units and jobs would increase

substantially along the Corridor. This is an important point, because for premium transit to work, there must be corresponding densities, particularly on the residential side.

As indicated by the number of jobs per household, increased density along the Corridor, especially if it occurs at key points, will create a transit-ready community in Gastonia along Franklin Boulevard. More residential development reaching 30-40 units per acre, at a minimum, within a one-half mile distance of a future transit station is needed to ensure a successful transit investment. The preferred growth scenario, as revealed through the alternative, suggests that the Corridor would become an urban green Boulevard and focus on building connections with existing assets at specific nodes. This provided the preferred vision for the Corridor.

Primary Nodes of Redevelopment

The Master Plan defines four specific nodes of development that can serve as gateways, activity centers, and hubs for existing and planned transit services. The enhancements for the nodes are illustrated on numerous maps, which serve as the primary method of describing the recommended land uses along the Corridor. These areas were chosen because they are strategic to the future economic development of the Corridor, and include a suburban commercial center (Eastern Gateway), the historic downtown, the close-knit community surrounding the mill villages (Greasy Corner/Loray Mill Village) and the rural to suburban transition along the western approach into Gastonia (Dixie Village/Myrtle School Gateway). The following is a summary of the four focal points of redevelopment along the Corridor:

EASTERN GATEWAY

Along the Eastern section of the Corridor, the vision includes



creating mixed-use infill redevelopment opportunities with transportation and greenway networks. In order to achieve this vision, strategic improvements will occur across a 10-year span, which include integrating new multi-use greenway trails along riparian corridors, a new park or open space south of Franklin Boulevard along the stream/wetland and new civic spaces within redeveloped commercial properties such as Franklin Commons and Gaston Mall. Design elements include creating pedestrian connections from residential neighborhoods south of Franklin Boulevard across the new park to connect with the greenway trail and roadway intersections.

Additional improvements include creating a sense of arrival through an enhanced planted median and street trees, with the potential for a pedestrian bridge crossing Franklin Boulevard at the municipal line, containing "Welcome to Gastonia" type signage. This is necessary, because the current entrance into the City of Gastonia from the east is indistinguishable from the surrounding municipalities.

DOWNTOWN

The downtown section of the Corridor includes a mixture of land uses, which vary in intensity, thus the plan envisions maintaining this mix; however, creating additional opportunities for mixed-use development with emphasis placed on the residential-retail mix and a continued emphasis on civic uses. The vision along the downtown section implies a heavy emphasis on intersection improvements on Franklin Boulevard at Oakland Street, Marietta Street, South Street, York Street, and Chester Street, and increasing pedestrian connections from existing developed areas to the new civic open space and greenway networks. As seen on Figure 8-10, the node located in the heart of downtown is equal to one-quarter mile radius, or a five-minute walk and envisions the following improvements:

- ◆ Creating new multi-use trails that connect the north

and south sides of Franklin Boulevard and run through Main Avenue;

- ◆ New civic open spaces located along Franklin Boulevard and along the railroad on South Street;
- ◆ Gateway signage marking the entry into the downtown area from the East and from the West on Franklin Boulevard;
- ◆ Integrating art galleries and other art amenities, community art center;
- ◆ Enhanced roadway section between South Street and York Street through the addition of a new stamped crosswalk, curbs, flower beds, street light enhancements, a street canopy and a planted median.

GREASY CORNER/LORAY MILL VILLAGE

The historic Loray Mill Village currently consists of a mix of single-family residential housing and underused or vacant commercial buildings. Plans are in the works to redevelop the front portion of the old Loray Mill into a mixed-use building with commercial, civic, and residential uses. The mill's redevelopment can serve as the catalyst for the Corridor's transformation. The City can therefore capitalize on historic preservation funding assistance, private market interest, proximity to downtown, and excellent regional accessibility to use this location as a catalyst for corridor-wide change. Strategic improvements along this section of the Corridor include improving greenway and open space networks by introducing a new multi-use trail along West Main Avenue connecting Dixie Village via Webb Street School and new trail spur along the railroad connecting to the proposed greenway trail running along the stream adjacent to Garrison Boulevard. The strategy also includes

Enhanced "Greasy Corner" Intersection



Existing conditions



New crosswalks, street lighting and greenway crossing



Street trees and planted median



Enhanced Dixie Village Intersection



Existing Conditions



New crosswalks, curbs and street lighting



Street trees and planted median

developing a new trailhead and pocket park between Vance Street and Linwood Road, and a new civic open space between Franklin Boulevard and Second Avenue, adjacent to Firestone Street.

Currently the western gateway into Gastonia along Franklin Boulevard, is an area where Franklin Boulevard transitions from a high-speed divided rural highway into a more urban roadway with retail and residential development. It is characterized by an aging strip commercial center (Dixie Village) across from a new strip commercial center (Walmart Supercenter). Much of the surrounding residential areas are not accessible to adjacent commercial developments other than by automobile.

The vision for the western section of the Corridor is to create a mixed-use infill redevelopment with transportation and greenway. Achieving this vision will require a number of key projects, which are focused on improving street connections, renovation of the Dixie Village shopping center, and a mixed-use residential development.

With relatively little private investment and continuing concerns about crime, blight and urban decline, the western portion of the Corridor from Shannon-Bradley Road to Myrtle School Road needs immediate attention. The catalyst for its transformation could be the redevelopment of the Firestone Mill/Loray Village site. The City can therefore capitalize on historic preservation funding assistance to implement these corridor-wide changes.

DIXIE VILLAGE/MYRTLE SCHOOL ROAD GATEWAY

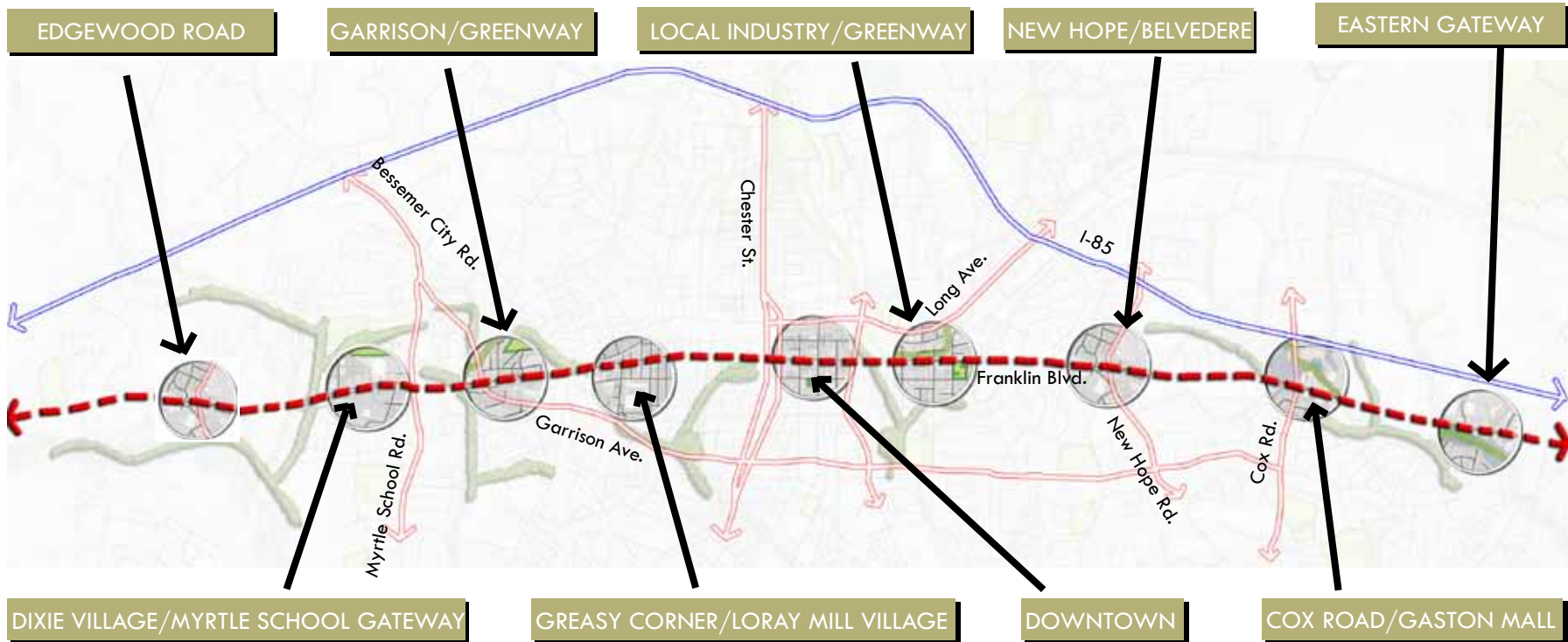
Currently the western gateway into Gastonia along Franklin Boulevard is an area where the Corridor transitions from a high-speed divided rural highway into a more urban roadway with retail and residential development. It is characterized by an aging strip commercial center (Dixie Village) across from a new strip commercial center (Walmart Supercenter). Much of the surrounding residential areas are not accessible to the commercial developments other than by automobile.

The Master Plan envisions creating a true gateway to enhance the transition from the rural high-speed roadway from the west as it enters Gastonia. This gateway would be located near the intersection of Franklin Boulevard and Myrtle School Road. Mixed-use in-fill development that meets the street will help to create a walkable district that forms a destination at the under-utilized Dixie Village shopping center and connects it to the new Walmart shopping district. Additional improvements along this section of the Corridor include:

- ◆ New multi-use trail that connects the north and south sides of Franklin Boulevard;
- ◆ New parks and open space areas located north and south of Franklin Boulevard that tie into a renovated Dixie Village containing new residential development;
- ◆ Landmarks and public art that mark the entry into Gastonia from the west;
- ◆ Intersection improvements at Franklin Boulevard and Myrtle School Road and at the entrance to Dixie Village;
- ◆ A new connection between Bolding Street and Hartman Street through the Walmart site;
- ◆ Renovation of Dixie Village shopping center;
- ◆ Mixed-use residential development North of Franklin Boulevard and west of Walmart; and,
- ◆ Residential development along the connection of Bolding and Hartman Streets.



Figure 8-10: Nodes of Redevelopment and Connectivity

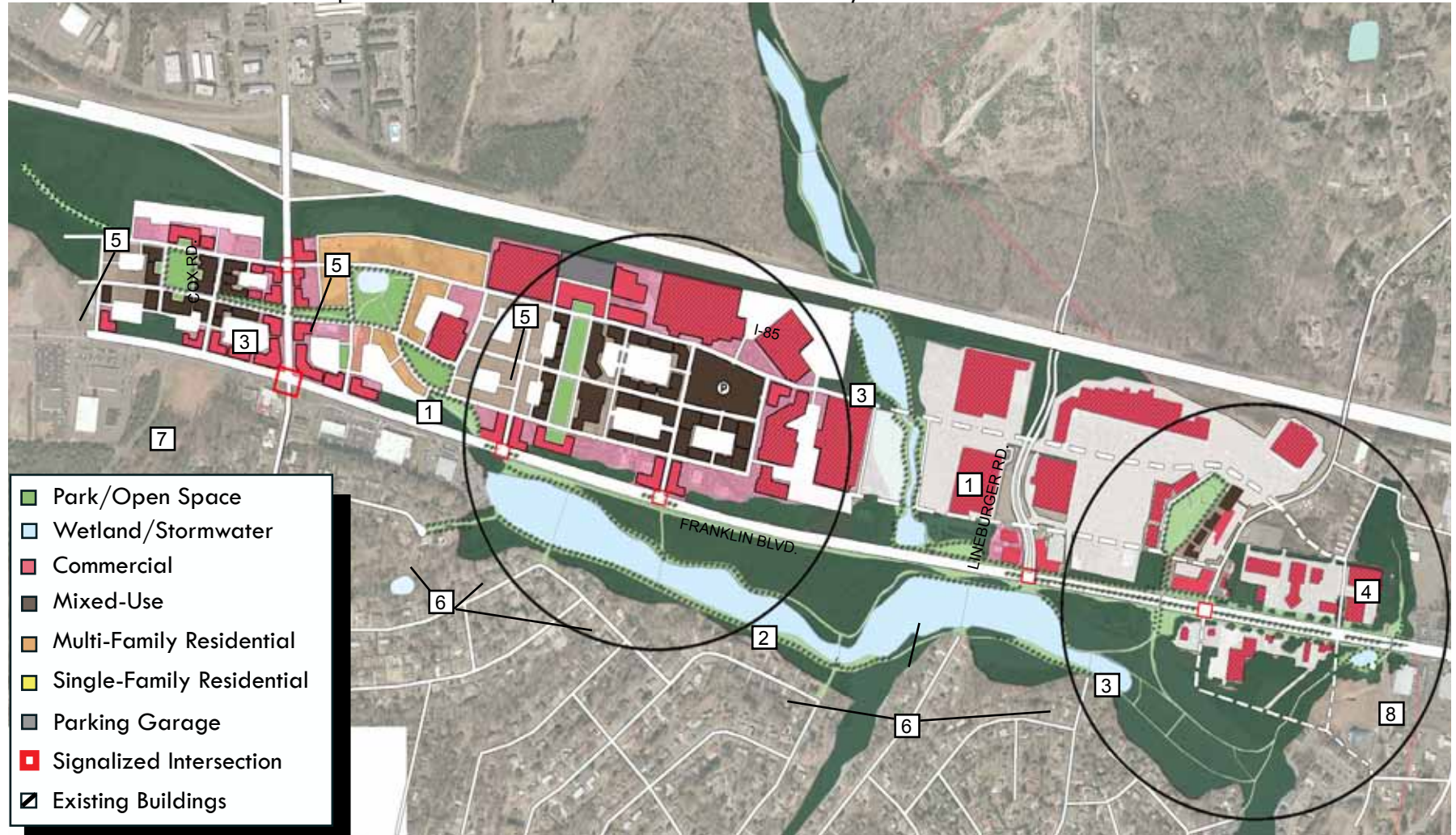


Nodes of Redevelopment - 



Figure 8-11: Eastern Gateway Redevelopment

Mixed Use Infill Redevelopment with Transportation and Greenway Networks



Circles equal to one-quarter mile radius, or a five-minute walk



Figure 8-12: Downtown Redevelopment

Mixed Use Redevelopment and Open Space Infill

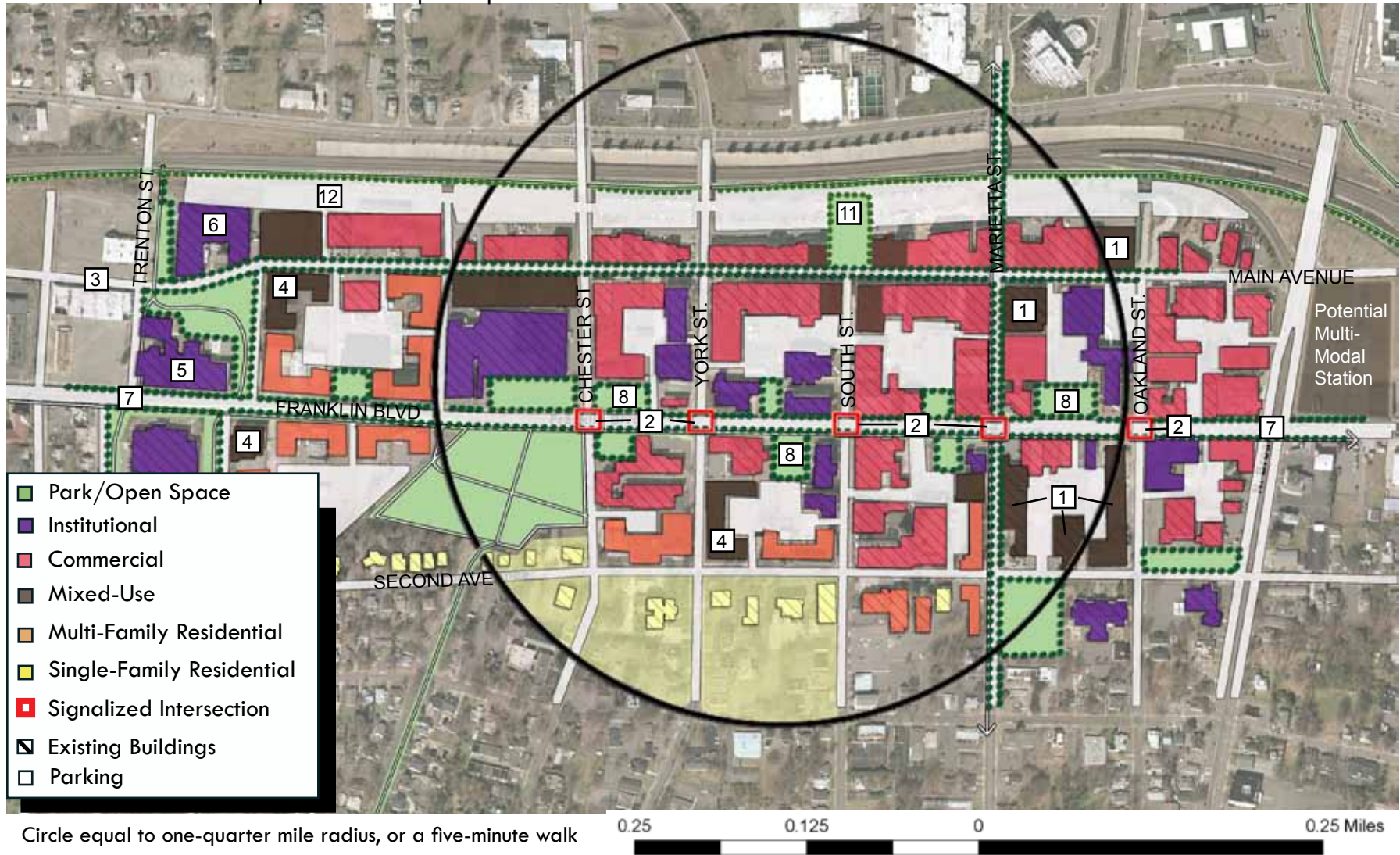


Figure 8-13: Greasy Corner / Loray Mill Village Redevelopment

Mixed Use Redevelopment with Open Space and Greenway Network

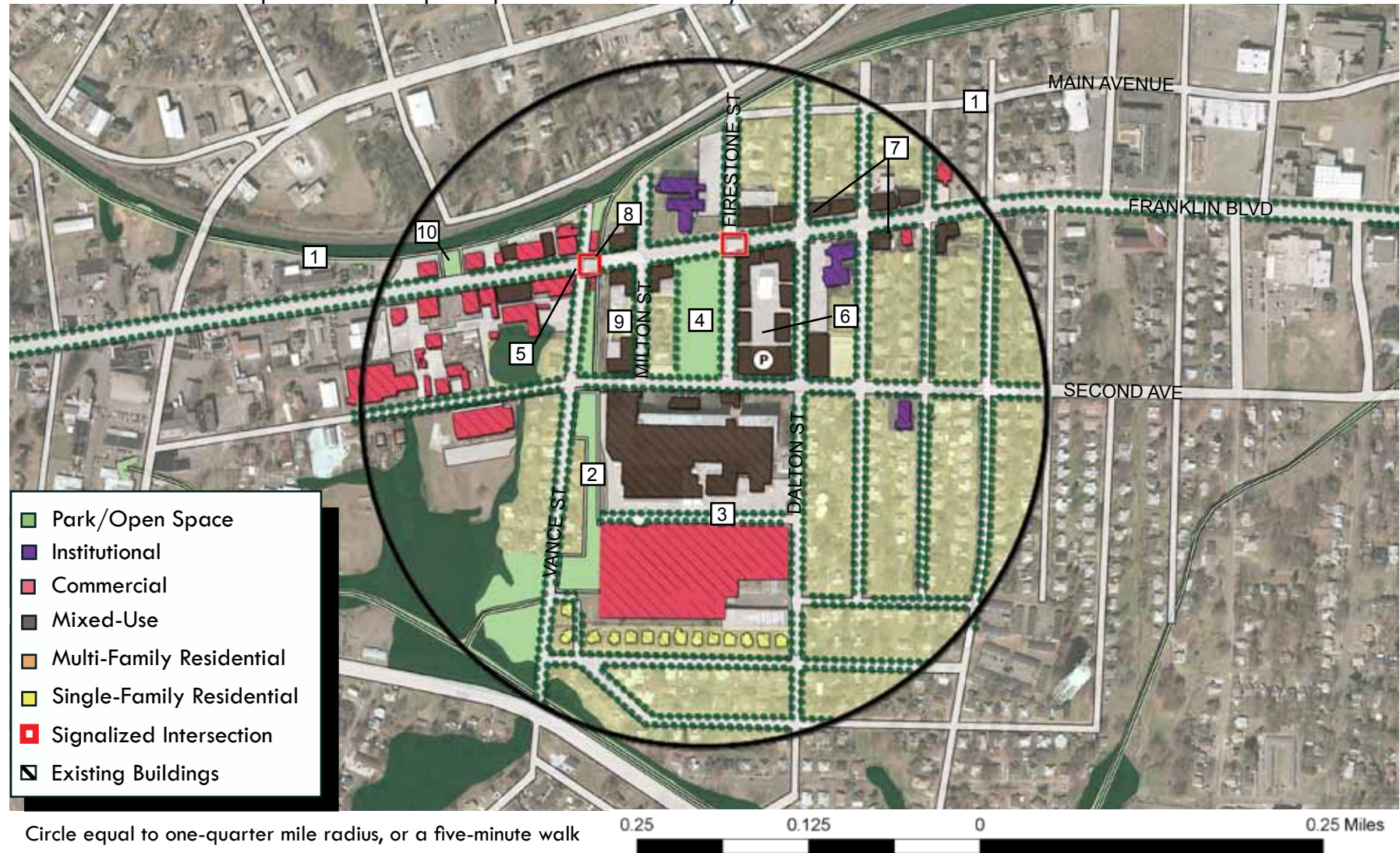
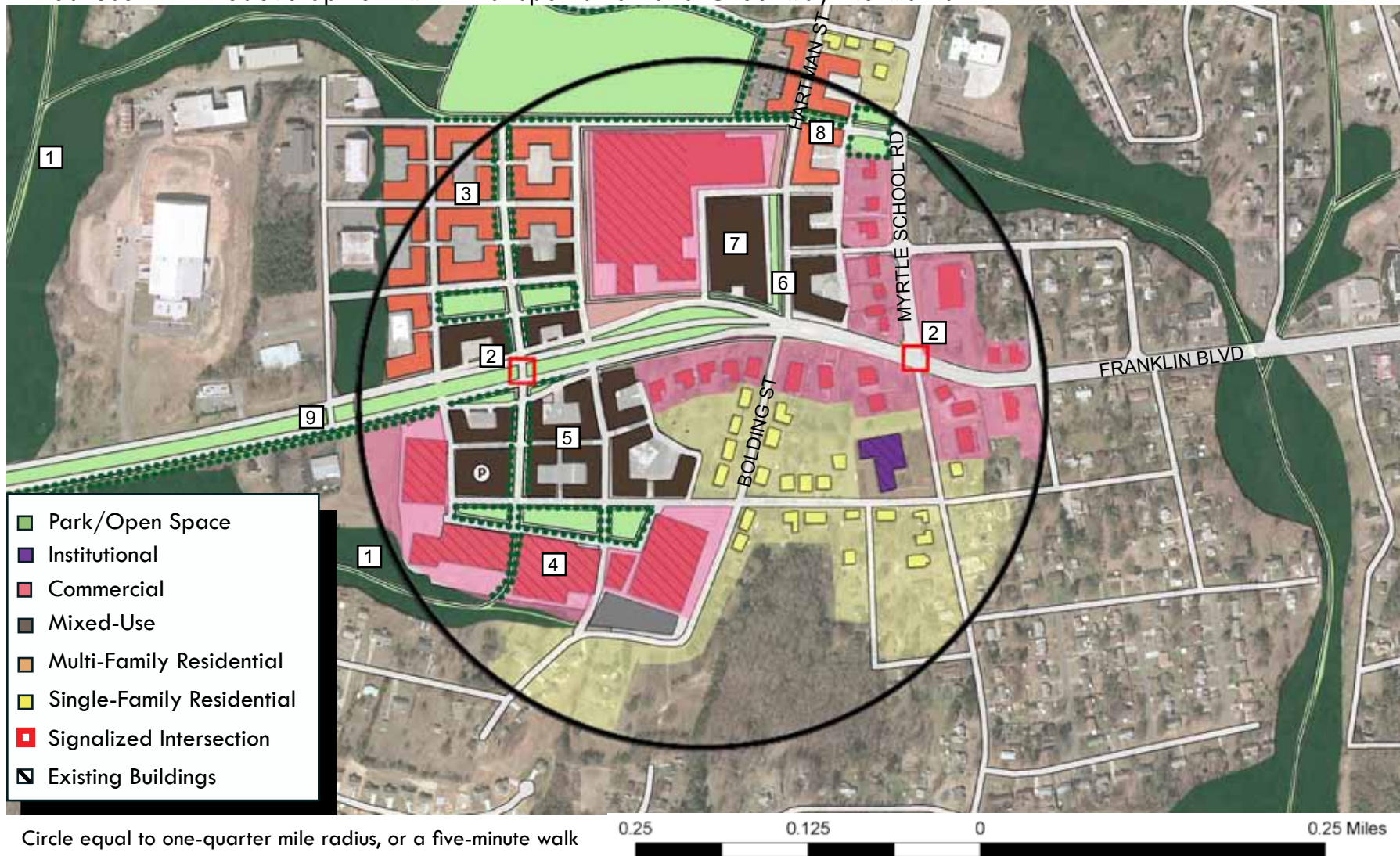


Figure 8-14: Dixie Village / Myrtle School Road Gateway Redevelopment Master Plan

Mixed Use Infill Redevelopment with Transportation and Greenway Networks



Road Capacity

Road capacity refers to the maximum traffic flow obtainable on a given roadway using all available lanes; usually expressed in vehicles per hour or vehicles per day. Roadway capacity deficiencies occur whenever the travel demand on a roadway is close to, or higher than, the vehicle capacity of that road. Figure 8-10 illustrates the ratio of the volume of cars to the amount of available capacity during the PM peak using a color code system that ranks the roads from well below capacity to well above capacity.

Transportation Strategies

As shown in Figure 8-10, according to projections from the Gaston Urban Area MPO Transportation Model, Franklin Boulevard will remain well below capacity until the year 2030. Consistent with the trend scenario described in the plan, capacity will be significantly degraded along the eastern and westernmost segments of the corridor in the City of Gastonia. This is a direct result of projected land use patterns for those portions of the corridor, as well as the lack of roadway network connectivity.

Transportation strategies as outlined in the plan include restricting left-turns and making intersection enhancements. These changes provide a framework which will help achieve the goal of lowering congestion along portions of Franklin Boulevard while enhancing design and sense of place. The changes, as detailed in the Master Plan, are outlined below.

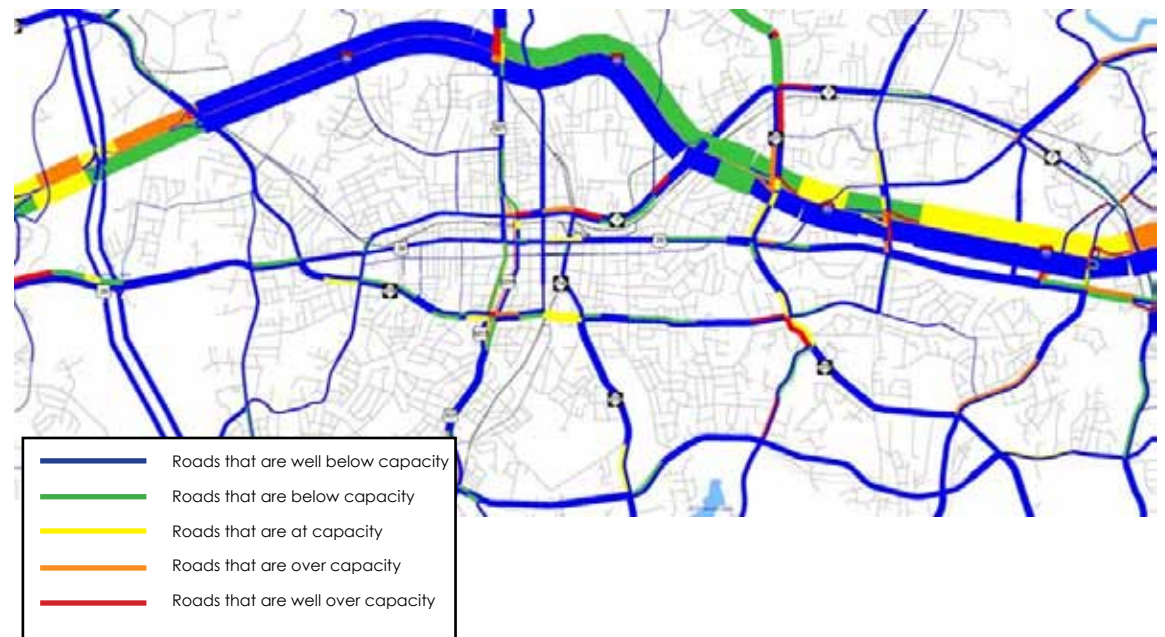
LEFT-TURN RESTRICTIONS

Much of the congestion along Franklin Boulevard is due to delays where vehicles make left turns at intersections. A

strategy of prohibiting left turns at selected intersections while providing for them at more suitable locations offers a range of potential benefits:

- ◆ Traffic throughput can be preserved along Franklin Boulevard, especially during incidents on I-85.
- ◆ Pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular safety can all be improved by reducing conflict points. Those that remain can be channeled to locations where they can be dealt with most effectively.
- ◆ The need to widen Franklin Boulevard to accommodate turn lanes can be eliminated at certain intersections, which will:
 - ◆ Reduce crossing distances for pedestrians;
 - ◆ Allow for medians that enhance the Corridor's appearance and provide safe, comfortable crossings for pedestrians.
- ◆ Potential locations for left-turn restrictions along Franklin Boulevard include:

Figure 8-15: Illustration of Road Capacity along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor



- ◆ Between York Street and North Broad Street;
- ◆ At minor streets in the vicinity of Greasy Corner/ Loray Mill Village.

INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS

The reason for the conceptual intersection enhancements is to make pedestrian travel more attractive by reducing barriers and improving safety. Key elements include:

- ◆ Reducing crossing distances, typically accomplished with medians and center islands which also serve as pedestrian refuges;
- ◆ Channelizing traffic to separate and delineate vehicle movements and isolate conflict points;
- ◆ Emphasizing both high-pedestrian locations and desired paths for pedestrian travel;
- ◆ Tempering vehicle speeds during turning movements.
- ◆ The principal constraint to realizing the conceptual designs will be turning movement requirements for large trucks. Therefore, careful consideration of truck routing and the provision of viable alternative for truck access are critical to the successful implementation of these enhancements.

The Franklin Boulevard Corridor has and always will be a major transportation corridor. Historically, the primary thoroughfare through the City, it now functions as part of a regional transportation network. The road serves as both a “main” street and as the incident management overflow for I-85. With these multiple demands placed on the corridor, it is important to design and enhance the roadway in a manner that can accommodate the vision laid out in the master plan while preserving its ability to move people and goods.

Figure 8-16: Enhanced roadway section: Franklin Boulevard at entrance to Dixie Village

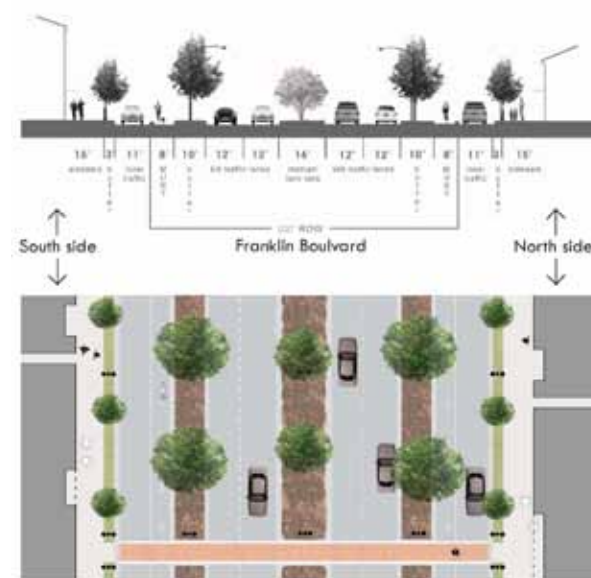
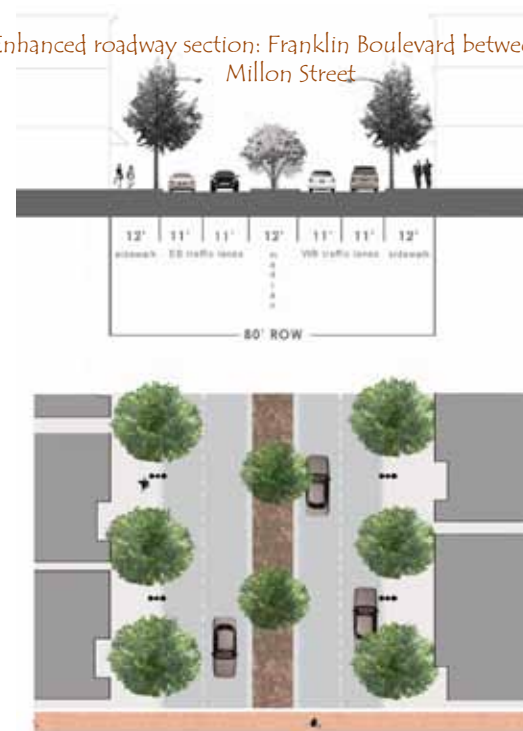


Figure 8-17: Enhanced roadway section: Franklin Boulevard between Vance Street and Millon Street



ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

Issues & Opportunities

As a means of developing a plan for obtaining the future vision of the corridor, an issues and opportunity analysis was conducted in a series of community meetings. The issues and opportunity analysis helped to conceptualize “big picture” ideas inspired from the community’s assets and unrealized potentials. Participants were asked to indicate on maps and flip charts areas where they saw issues along the corridor that needed addressing as well as places of opportunities. Those issues and opportunities are detailed in four maps segments-downtown, eastern gateway, western gateway, and mill village.

The issues included points along the Corridor with visible decaying buildings, industrial land uses, abandoned lots and acres of empty asphalt (parking lots). These issues present opportunities to redefine nodes along the Corridor by creating public spaces, existing historic and cultural mixed-use focal points, and new focal points, strengthening pedestrian connections, and adding greenway crossings. Redefining the nodes will ultimately create a unifying theme that reinforces the sense of history and promise for the future of the corridor as an attractive, attainable and rewarding place for people and businesses. The following were identified as primary opportunities to provide the basis for the redevelopment:

- **Regional Destination:** This opportunity capitalizes on the strength of the corridor’s dual role of providing regional mobility and a local destination for commerce, worship and entertainment.
- **Accessible Corridor:** This opportunity capitalizes on the high traffic volumes and existing cluster of auto-oriented uses and seeks to attract retailers and services

with a desire for visibility. This also seeks to capitalize on the Gaston Urban Area MPO framework to create a dedicated transit service connecting Gastonia to the airport and downtown Charlotte.

- **Historic and Cultural Mix:** This opportunity capitalizes on the vibrant mix of historic buildings and adjacent neighborhoods along the corridor, which provides an opportunity to create cultural and arts attraction for local and regional patrons.
- **Greenway:** This opportunity capitalizes on the strength and proximity of the established neighborhoods and seeks to build upon the existing Greenways Plan by connecting the various links into a parallel corridor to Franklin Boulevard.



Figure 8-18: Downtown Issues and Opportunities Map



Figure 8-19: Eastern Gateway Issues and Opportunities Map



Figure 8-20: Western Gateway Issues and Opportunities Map



Figure 8-21: Mill Villages Issues and Opportunities Map



Implementation Plan & Policy Framework

The Franklin Boulevard Corridor has a storied past, and has been the historical backbone of the City of Gastonia for both commerce and industry. Current conditions along the corridor do not reflect the significance and importance of this roadway, however, forming a collage of vacant and under utilized parcels mixed with a series of auto-oriented uses.

The Master Plan illustrates those conditions, and explains what can be done to bring back vitality, activity, and value to this key section of the City. The key issue now is, how to achieve that vision? What steps need to be taken to take the corridor from here to there? How best to honor the street? Achieving the vision that is outlined in the Corridor Master Plan will require ongoing attention, advocacy, and new tools.

The Implementation Strategy outlines the necessary mechanisms required to deliver the individual projects by presenting options for both public and private sector agencies, including partnership opportunities. The approaches to implementation can be categorized as follows: encouraging private investment, funding public improvements, making operational changes, and adjusting zoning regulations. The following objectives and tools will guide the corridor in redevelopment and improvement of ability to move people and goods

GOAL

Achieve a better balance between regional mobility and local multi-modal accessibility along Franklin Boulevard.

Objective 1

Develop methods to improve multi-modal connectivity between parcels along Franklin Boulevard, including street connections, cross-access driveways, shared-use paths and sidewalks to help reduce vehicle miles of travel and intersection delays along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.

Tools

- Work with NCDOT and other appropriate stakeholders to enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility through capital projects, signalization, signage and pavement markings at key intersections where walking and crossing Franklin Boulevard will be encouraged
- Work with the Gaston Urban Area MPO, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Area MPO, Charlotte Area Transit System and NCDOT to expand transit service and provide appropriate transit infrastructure at key focal points along Franklin Boulevard.
- Ensure that new development and redevelopment preserves the capacity of Franklin Boulevard for its regional purposes.
- Work with Gaston County, the MPO and other stakeholders to update the master plan for greenways and pathways, with a focus on connecting parks, civic space and destinations along Franklin Boulevard.
- Create a parking master plan for the downtown area and transition areas east and west of the City center to support desired redevelopment and improve multi-modal accessibility.

GOAL

Provide incentives and a regulatory framework to guide redevelopment along Franklin Boulevard in a manner that promotes economic growth, enhances the quality of the pedestrian environment and improves the physical appearance of downtown and its adjacent transition areas.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN & POLICY FRAMEWORK



IMPLEMENTATION PLAN & POLICY FRAMEWORK

Objective 2

Establish one or more overlay planning districts to guide the desired urban form, scale and character of redevelopment and infill development in the downtown area and transition areas, with a funding mechanism to generate revenue for needed capital improvements described in the master plan.

Tools

- a. Prepare design standards for specific urban design site plan elements that provide incentives and sufficient flexibility to attract desired future investment and achieve a diversity of land uses.
- b. Develop an ordinance to address nonconforming signage throughout the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.
- c. Establish key gateway areas that, through roadway design enhancements, create memorable entries to enhance the character of the area, and establish an identifiable image for the Corridor.
- d. Conduct a survey of existing signage along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor to identify nonconforming signs and subsequently notify property owners of that status and a time period to bring their signs into compliance.
- e. Create incentives for the provision of civic and usable open space with redevelopment along the corridor.
- f. Provide density bonus tied to attainable, live-work housing programs in key development nodes along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor, but particularly within the downtown and transition areas.
- g. Establish an incentive or matching program for underground utilities to reduce visual clutter along the corridor.
- h. Establish a tree planting program to help “green” the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.
- i. Target the capital improvement program toward addressing the recommendation of developing a key node starting with the western segment from Shannon-Bradley Road to Myrtle School Road.

Objective 3

The City will invest in public infrastructure along the corridor to encourage private investment in desired locations.

Tools

- a. Establish a type of Community Redevelopment Agency or Urban Progress Zone, which enables the City to use economic development incentives.
- b. Investigate creating a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district for downtown and transition areas immediately to the east and west.
- c. Develop Gateway Signage into downtown from the East, at Broad Street, and from the West, at Trenton Street.
- d. Partner with the developer of the Loray Mill property for construction of public parking spaces.
- e. Work with the developer of the Loray Mill property to develop an internal street network that has the same block dimensions as the surrounding Mill Village, and to develop single-family housing along new interior streets of the development.
- f. Develop pedestrian improvements in the Downtown portion of Franklin Boulevard such as crosswalks, planters, and other sidewalk improvements.
- g. Widen sidewalks at Franklin and Vance (Greasy Corner).
- h. Make intersection improvements at Franklin Boulevard and Myrtle School Road.
- i. Install safety intersection improvements at Oakland, Marietta, South, York, and Chester.
- j. Make intersection improvements at New Hope Road, Cox Road, Franklin Commons, and Lineberger Road.
- k. Establish downtown trolley bus circulator service.
- l. Create additional parking along the railroad tracks between Tremont Street and Chester Street.
- m. Change all hanging traffic signals in the downtown area to signals located on signal arms.
- n. Continue replacement of light fixtures downtown with historic lighting.



- o. Develop a shared-use trail for bicyclists and pedestrians along the railroad right-of-way between downtown and Dixie Village from West Main to the Webb Street School.
- p. Develop a shared-use trail on the south side of Franklin Boulevard.
- q. Work and partner with property owners to create civic open space within redeveloped commercial properties such as Franklin Commons and the Gaston Mall.
- r. Add new pedestrian-oriented signalization (e.g., pedestrian-activated, countdown displays) at Marietta Street and Franklin Boulevard and South Street and Franklin Boulevard, to mark the Carolina Thread Trail.
- s. Continue a park (or designated, maintained open space) south of Franklin Boulevard, across from Franklin Square, between Franklin Boulevard and the wetland areas.
- t. Develop pedestrian connections from the Gardner Park neighborhood south of Franklin Boulevard, to connect to Franklin Square.
- u. Create an internal street network north of Franklin Boulevard at the eastern end of the City to connect various parcels and reduce traffic demand at the signalized intersections along Franklin Boulevard.
- v. Develop a shared-use greenway trail running along riparian corridors, including a branch running north from Franklin Boulevard at the eastern end of the City, providing a connection to undeveloped property on the north side of I-85 between Franklin Square and Lineberger Road.
- w. At the point of market demand, establish a commuter rail service on the Piedmont and Northern railroad line connecting to Charlotte.
- x. Adjust refuse collection schedules to accommodate mixed-use development.
- y. Continue to encourage sidewalk dining downtown, but not on Franklin Boulevard.
- z. Place more emphasis on grant writing to secure additional resources. Possibilities can include use of Community Development Block Grant funds, programs administered by the NC Department of Commerce, more aggressive advocacy of tax credit programs related to historic properties and the New Market Tax Credits, and funding from the NC Department of Transportation and the NC Department of Cultural Resources for specific projects that improve the safety and character of individual development nodes along the corridor.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN & POLICY FRAMEWORK

