

11. SPECIAL STUDY AREAS

This chapter takes a closer look at several key planning areas that are critical to East Hartford's future: the Founders Waterfront District, the south Main Street area around Goodwin College and the Rentschler Field/Silver Lane area. In each of these locations, redevelopment and activity has begun to take shape, but a greater focus is needed for the areas to reach their potential to truly transform East Hartford. This chapter seeks to identify issues, opportunities and strategies for each study area, based on public and stakeholder input, site analysis and direction from Town staff and leadership.

11.1. Founders Waterfront District

Since the seminal Riverfront Recapture plan was completed in the early 1980s, the Connecticut riverfront has been the focus of significant public interest, not only for its recreation potential, but also for its importance as an amenity adding value to adjacent development sites. While much of this focus has been in the City of Hartford, the Town of East Hartford has also experienced benefits, including the creation of Great River Park and a strong pedestrian link over the Founders Bridge; construction of the Riverpoint residential tower and development of major commercial tenants including offices and a hotel.

The 1990 and 2003 POCDs, as well as other prior planning studies, devoted specific attention to the Founders Waterfront District, noting its great potential for economic development and enhanced waterfront access. As part of the current POCD, the following analysis was conducted to evaluate potential development opportunities in the Founders Waterfront District. The analysis includes a description of existing conditions and a conceptual plan illustrating infill development opportunities with the objective of creating a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use center on this large tract of land adjacent to the Connecticut River.

The Founders Waterfront District primary study area includes the block of property bounded by Pitkin Street to the north, Meadow Street to the east, Hartland Street to the south, and East River Drive to the west (see Figure 28). A secondary study area was examined, which includes the portion of Great River Park north of the boat launch/parking lot east of East River Drive and north of Hartland Street, as well as a larger area stretching north to Connecticut Boulevard, south to the Hockanum River and east to Main Street, looking at the potential to create linkages to the Town's central business district through targeted redevelopment and the establishment of gateways.

The primary study area encompasses approximately 28.9 acres and includes six parcels ranging in size from approximately 1 acre to 18.9 acres (see Table 30). Presently, all but one parcel, which is an officially mapped road, have active commercial uses including offices and a hotel (see Figure 29).

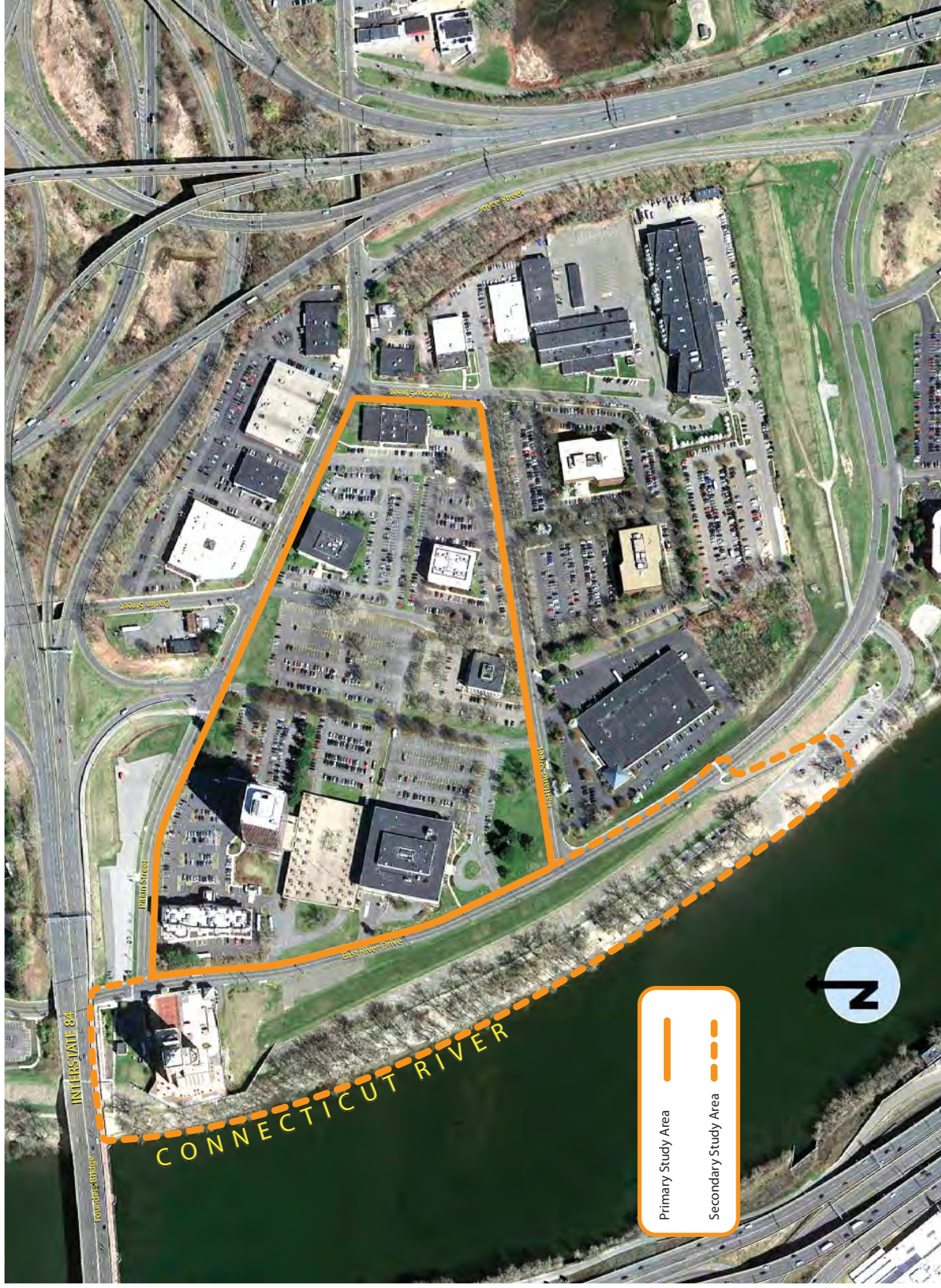


Figure 29: Founders Waterfront District - Buildings



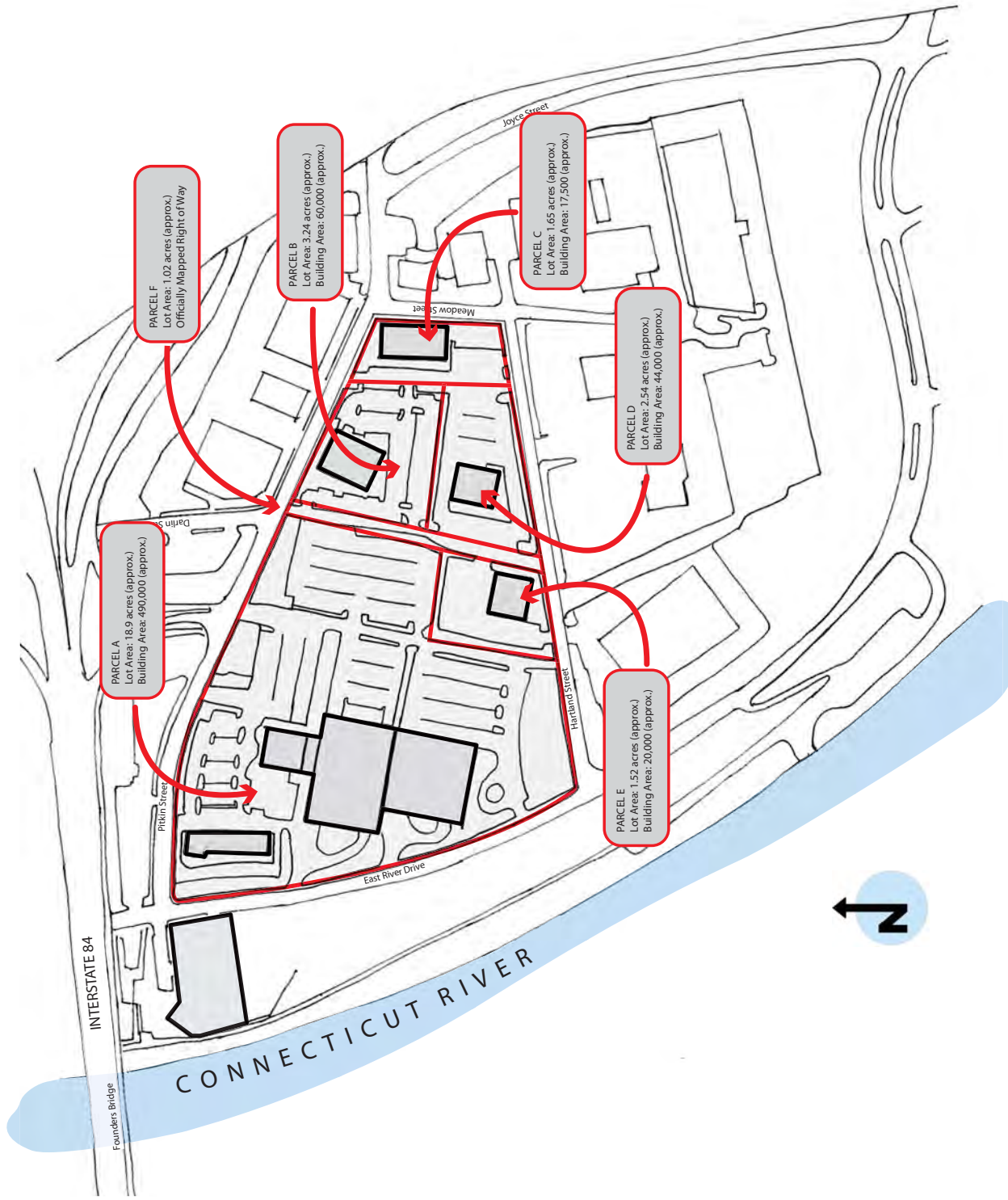
Due to recent economic conditions and the regional real estate market, the Founders Waterfront District remains significantly underutilized. As Figure 30 shows, most of the area is characterized by mid- to high-rise commercial/office buildings surrounded by surface and some structured parking. An analysis of existing buildings suggests that the study area exhibits extremely low density and has capacity for additional infill development (see Table 30).

As Table 31 suggests, approximately half of the study area is dedicated to surface parking. A visual survey of these lots suggests that many of the larger parking areas are underutilized. As indicated in Figure 31, the utilization of these parking areas varies, with some of the larger lots found to be empty by as much as 80% to 90%, while others are used near to capacity. Of note, the largest parking areas, which are located in the center of the study area, were observed to be the most underutilized, with vegetation growing up through the asphalt. The parking structure at the west-central portion of the study area appears to have ample capacity, suggesting that many users park in the adjacent surface lots for convenience.

Table 30: Summary of Founders Waterfront District Core Study Area Parcels

Reference	Name	Area (acres)	Approx. Bldg. Area (SF)	Approx. Parking Area (SF) [Percentage of Site Area]
A	Founders Plaza (Main)	18.9	490,000	416,000 (+ 65,000 FP parking garage) [0.52]
B	155 Founders Plaza	3.24	60,000	90,000 [0.64]
C	225 Pitkin Street	1.65	17,500	17,500 [0.24]
D	60 Hartland Street	2.54	44,000	87,500 [0.79]
E	50 Founders Plaza	1.52	20,000	40,000 [0.60]
F	Mapped R.O.W.	1.02	N/A	N/A
SITE TOTALS		28.9	631,840	666,350 [0.53]

As Figure 32 shows, the perimeter of the site has a strong pedestrian circulation system with sidewalks in good condition, but breaks in that network (e.g. missing sidewalks and crosswalks) impede connections beyond the site. For example, connections to the waterfront and Founders' Bridge could be improved as presently this route is difficult to navigate and not clearly marked. Contributing to this is the presence of the flood control embankment that protects and separates the site from the river. As a result, access to the waterfront (i.e. Great River Park) from the Founders Waterfront District core study area involves a circuitous route to the south. Pedestrian circulation within the study area is extremely limited as there are no sidewalks internally to the site. As shown in Figure 32, pedestrian access from the perimeter into the study area is provided in three locations only, and none of these connect. As a result, the site is comprised mainly of a series of disconnected parking lots.



PLAN OF CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT TOWN OF EAST HARTFORD FIGURE 30: FOUNDERS WATERFRONT DISTRICT CORE AREA - PROPERTY LINES AND EXISTING FAR

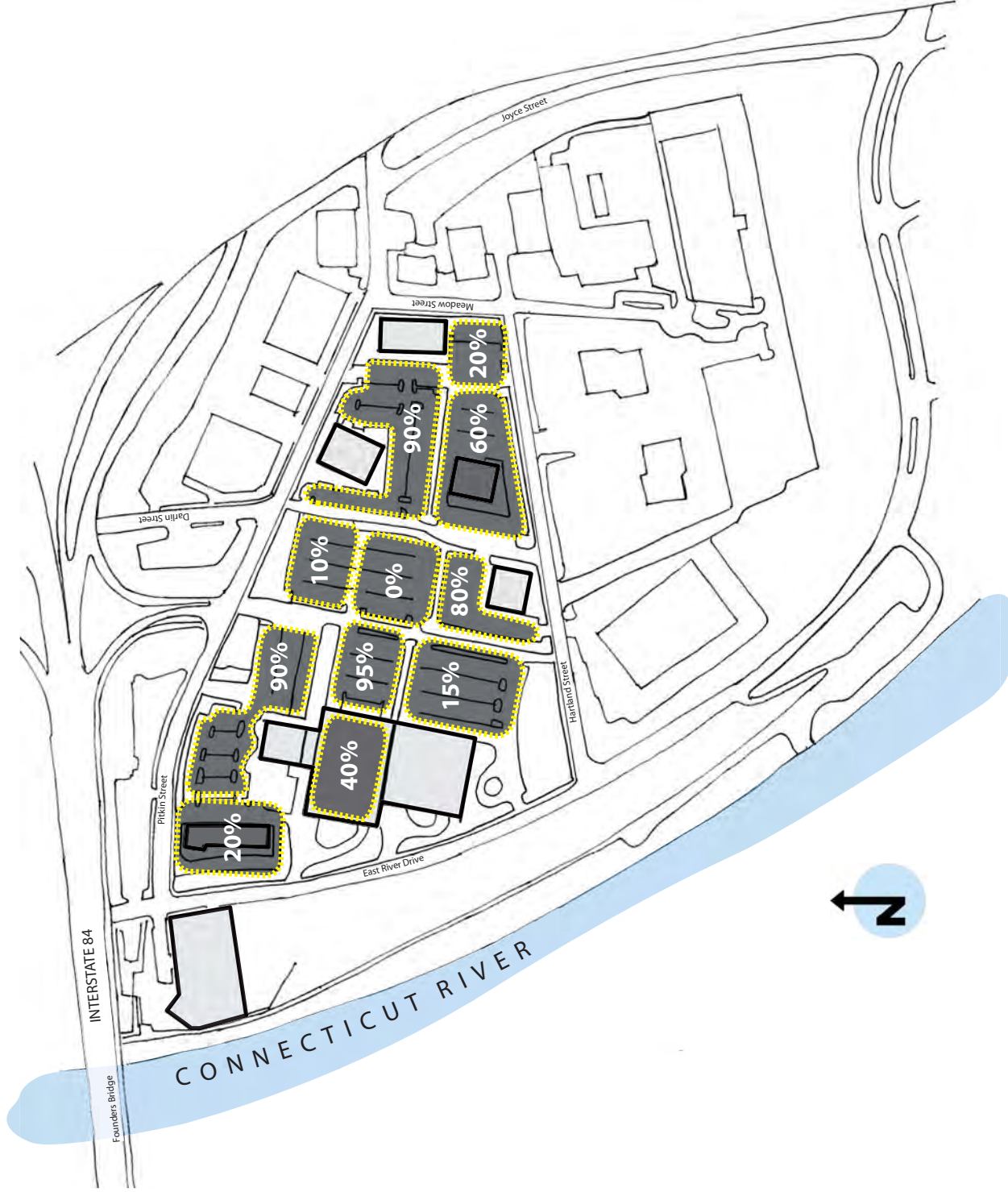
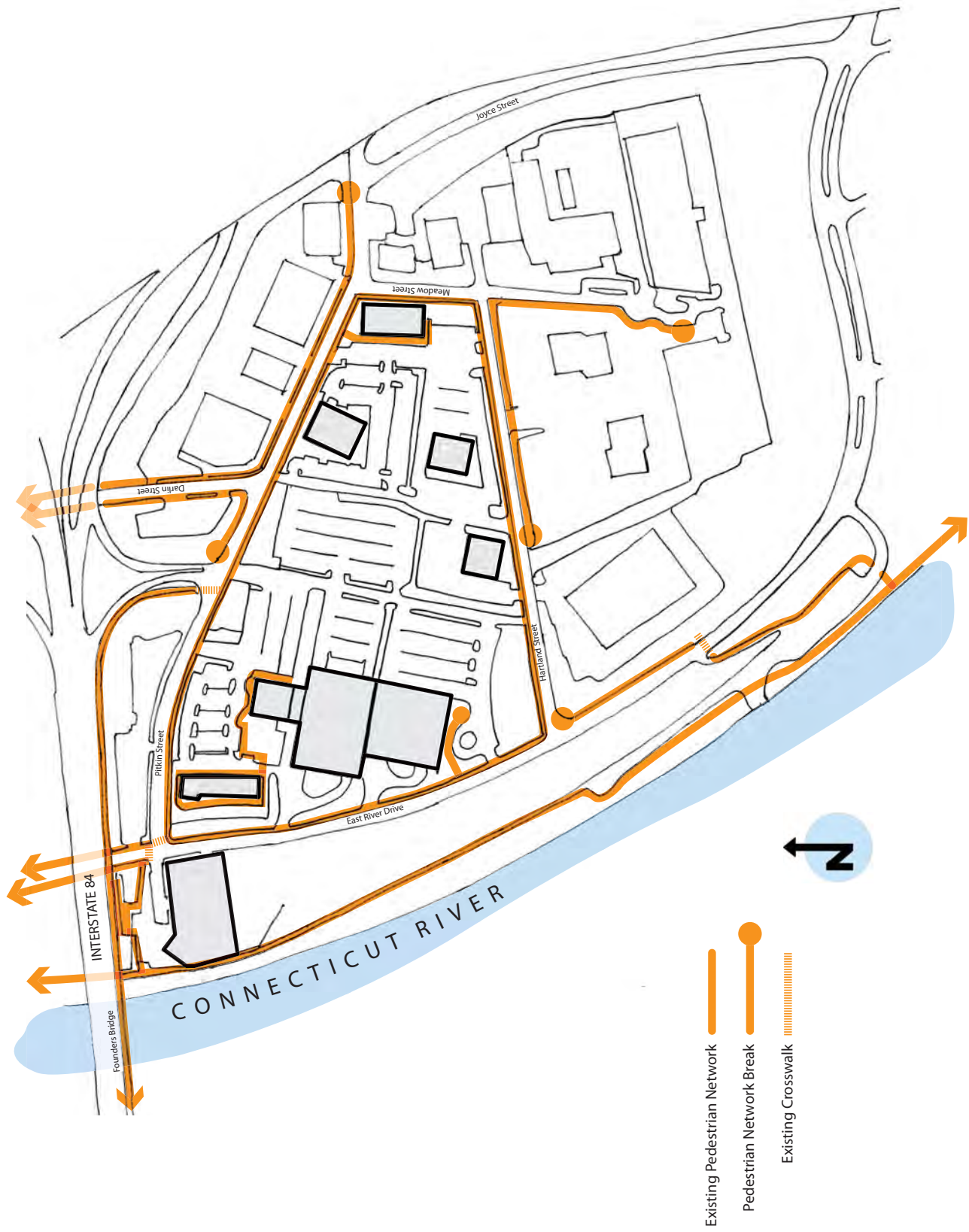


FIGURE 31: FOUNDERS WATERFRONT DISTRICT CORE AREA - PARKING UTILIZATION



PLAN OF CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

FIGURE 32: FOUNDERS WATERFRONT DISTRICT CORE AREA - EXISTING PEDESTRIAN NETWORK

The Founders Waterfront District core area is well served by transit (bus service) and by an external network of surface streets connecting it to adjacent areas in the town. Primary vehicular access is provided from the east via Pitkin Street, from the south via East River Drive and from the north via Darlin Street. Access from the west is provided via I-84. While numerous driveways provide vehicular access, two main entrances to the site (one on the north and one the south) were identified in relation to the existing street network (see Figure 33). These points align with an existing internal north-south roadway that is distinguished by an allée of mature growth trees that line both sides of the roadway (see image below). These locations make possible the creation of gateways as formal entrances to the western portion of the site from Pitkin and Hartland Streets. On the eastern portion of the site, north-south access to the site is provided via an existing mapped public street. Presently, this right-of-way remains undeveloped and therefore functions more as extension to the existing internal network of parking lots. Apart from this mapped street, internal vehicular circulation, however, is severely curtailed due to the lack of an articulated network of roadways, and by numerous card-access gates or placed jersey-barriers that further restrict travel.



Allée of trees lining the primary north-south internal roadway (presently closed to traffic) in the Founders Waterfront District core area.

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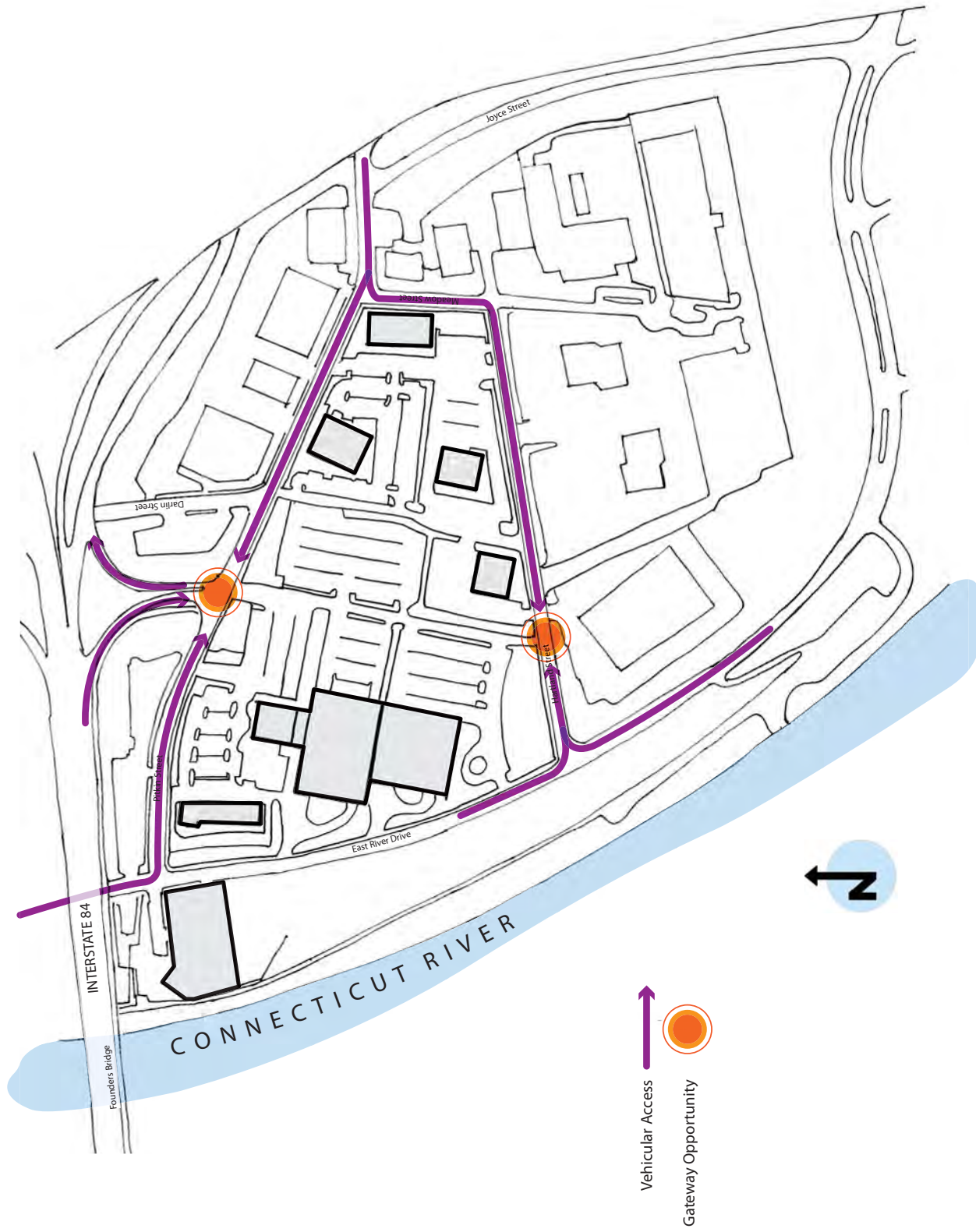


FIGURE 33: FOUNDERS WATERFRONT DISTRICT CORE AREA - VEHICULAR ACCESS

Figure 34 summarizes the discussion points above and presents issues and opportunities for the core study area, as follows:

- Underutilized parking areas in the center-west area of the site provide potential opportunities for new development.
- Existing green and open spaces occur mainly on the perimeter of the site. These should be preserved and function as part of a larger green/open space network on the site.
- The existing allee of mature trees along the closed north-south roadway on the site should be preserved. This roadway provides potential to create the spine of a formal internal circulation network on the site.
- Gateways to the site should be created on the north and south of this roadway where it intersects Pitkin and Hartland Streets.
- There exists a strong pedestrian and vehicular circulation network along the perimeter of the site connecting it to other parts of East Hartford, but poor internal vehicular and non-existent pedestrian networks impede internal circulation on the site.
- The flood control berm constrains access to the waterfront and Great River Park but, if rethought, presents a valuable design opportunity to link the waterfront and Founders' Bridge to the site, and that this link could be used to extend the green network from the waterfront into the study site. Redesigning the wide crest of the berm could also provide views and an opportunity to place a public amenity or focal point along the waterfront.

Responding to the information presented above, Figure 35 and Figure 36 present a concept plan for infill development of the Founders Waterfront District core area. The primary objectives of the concept plan are to allow for new mixed-use infill development, improve access to and circulation within the site, make a stronger connection to the waterfront, and create an urban place with an identifiable center through the use of publicly-accessible open space.

Figure 35 shows the main features of the concept design. These include opening up the primary north-south tree-lined roadway to traffic and placing a new building on the underutilized parking lots to the east of the roadway. The building is conceived as mixed-use with a mid-rise podium that has active uses along the frontage and a higher-rise tower above the podium. The roadway would be enhanced by creating formal gateways where it intersects Pitkin Street (to the north) and Hartland Street (to the south). These gateways would employ landscaping, improved crosswalks, lighting and signage. In front of the proposed mixed-use building, a central green could be created with a restaurant/convenience retail pavilion to serve existing professional and potential future residential populations. This green and the surrounding buildings would constitute a real center for the Founders Waterfront District, providing activity at the ground floor, including destination restaurants and the like to attract shoppers and visitors. As shown in the figures, the green including the roadways that surround it are approximately the same scale as Somerset Square in Glastonbury (see Figure 36), a place that functions in much the same way. From an urban design perspective, creating a central green (as an identifiable center) becomes an important organizing element around which existing buildings and other potential long-term future development sites to the west and south of the green might be organized (as shown in

Figure 34). The green also becomes an organizing element for pedestrian and vehicular circulation networks. As shown in Figure 35, the existing internal collection driveways serving various properties independently could be linked (and modified to include sidewalks) to provide both vehicular and pedestrian circulation east-west between properties. Completing crosswalks and providing pedestrian access points at key locations as shown in Figure 35 would further provide linkages to the external pedestrian network.

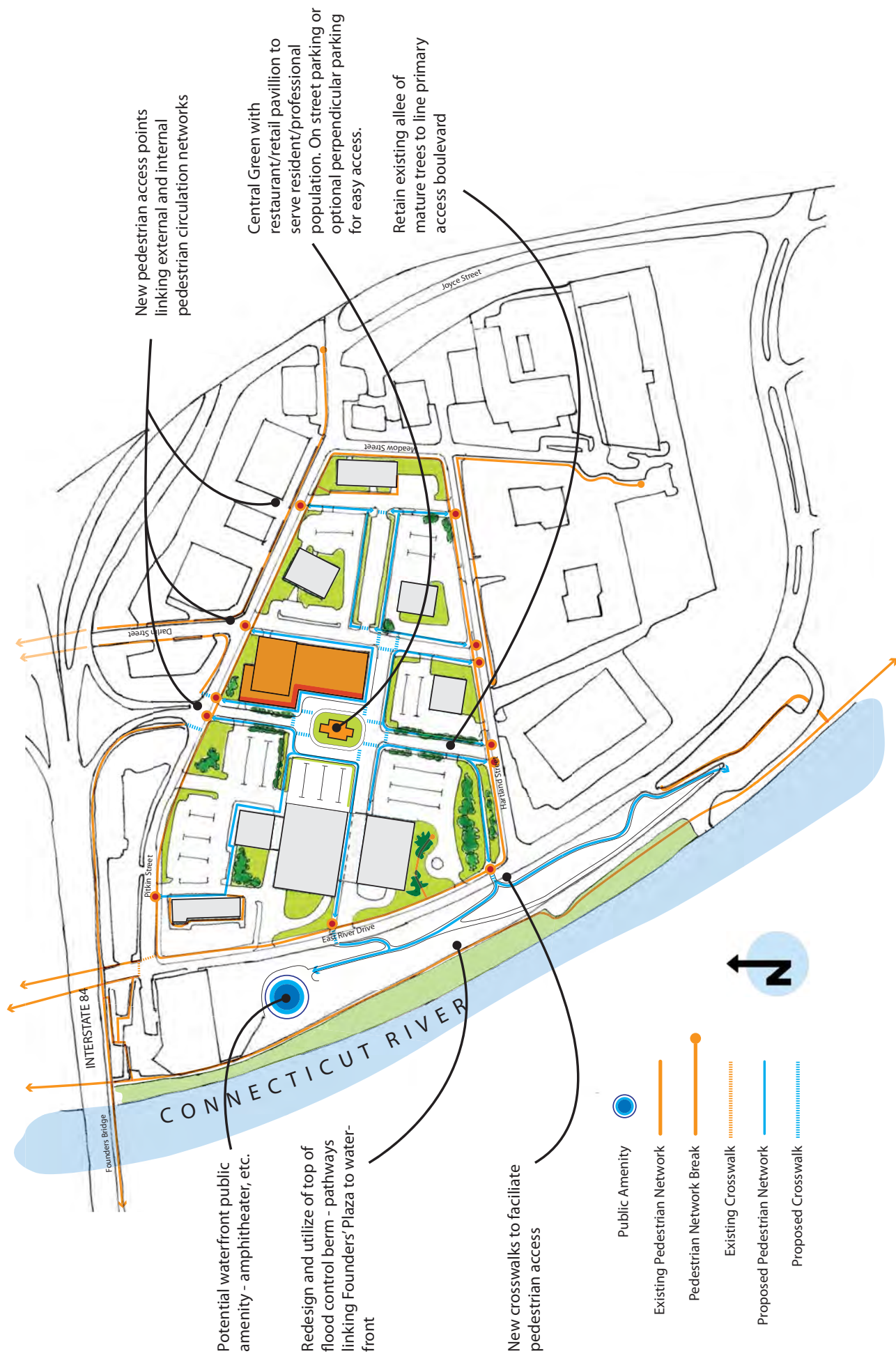
Once such an internal circulation network is created, the case to link the Founders Waterfront District core area to the waterfront becomes much stronger. As shown in Figure 35, this could be accomplished by extending pathways up the slopes of the flood control embankment. The sides of this structure are not too steep to preclude pathways, and the top of the berm could be redesigned to provide a walkway on its wide crest with sitting areas to capture impressive views of the Connecticut River, Hartford and back to the Founders Waterfront District core area. Considering this possibility opens up another: creating a potential waterfront public amenity toward the north end of the berm, smaller in scale but mirroring Mortensen Riverfront Plaza across the river in Hartford. Finally, creating a larger network of green spaces that would not only help knit the core study area to Great River Park, but would also provide existing workers (and potentially future residents) access to much needed open space.



Views from the top of the flood control embankment between Great River Park and the core study area.

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SCALE COMPARISON



FOUNDERS PLAZA, East Hartford, CT



GLASTONBURY BLVD. (Shops at Somerset Square), Glastonbury, CT

Beyond the core study area, the focus of this Plan is to build on the strong vehicular access into the Founders Waterfront District by reinforcing gateways with targeted redevelopment and improved landscape and streetscape amenities. As shown in Figure 38, the primary access routes from Main Street are via Pitkin Street and East River Drive (Silver Lane Extension), with a secondary access route via Connecticut Boulevard.

There are several key sites for development or redevelopment in the overall Founders Waterfront District. The largest of these is an area north of the Riverview Square office building off East River Drive, which represents a clear opportunity for infill development given strong access and visibility from Route 2. Other targeted redevelopment sites are in gateway areas, as discussed below.

As illustrated in Figure 39, the Main Street/Connecticut Boulevard gateway into the Founders Waterfront District can be strengthened through strategic infill development that builds on recent building activity, and with aesthetic improvements. The parcel at the southwestern corner of Main and Governor Street represents an opportunity for mixed-use development, while improvements to the streetscape, landscaped areas, signage and lighting along Main Street and onto Connecticut Boulevard will designate this area as an important gateway into the Founders Waterfront District, and will also help to enhance East Hartford's overall central business district.

Several key redevelopment sites are found at the Main Street/Pitkin Street gateway (see Figure 40). The most prominent of these is the former Kahoot's parcel, a highly visible and underutilized site that should be targeted for commercial or mixed use, but several other vacant or underutilized properties to the south are also ripe for development. An opportunity also exists to improve the entrance to the Hockanum River Linear Park Trail through better signage and lighting. Improved wayfinding signage, lighting and pathmarking along the west side of Main Street should be to improve the connection between this point of the trail and where it continues on the east side of Main Street to the north (near Saunders Street). Other redevelopment sites are on either side of Pitkin Street; a green buffer should be maintained as appropriate for these parcels to protect adjacent residential uses. Also along Pitkin Street, sidewalks should be extended and connected to reinforce pedestrian connectivity to the Founders Waterfront District and to the established residential neighborhood. Finally, landscaping and streetscaping improvements should be provided along both Main and Pitkin Streets to improve aesthetics and create a stronger sense of arrival.

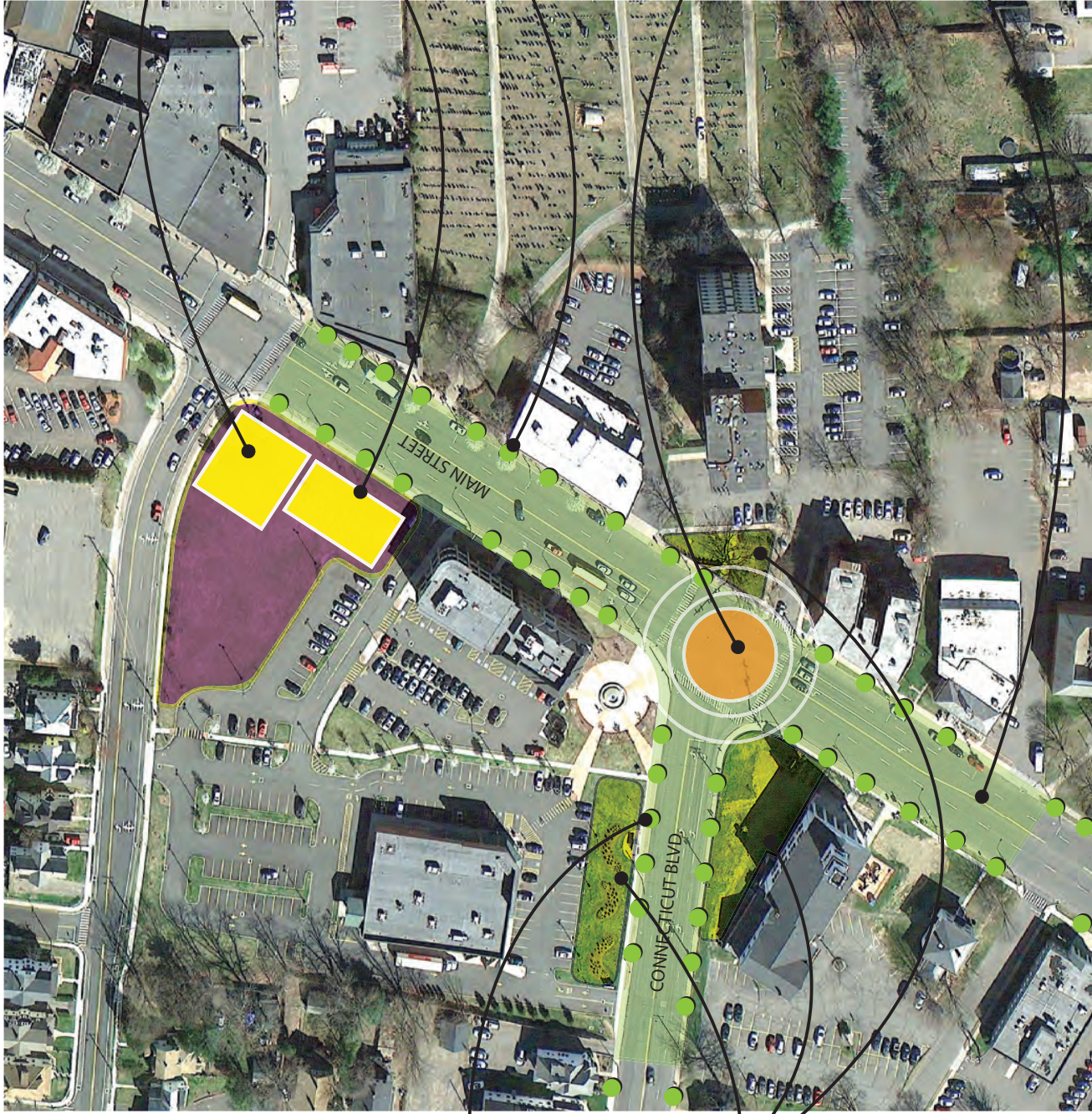
While conceptual, these plans illustrates the great potential the Founders Waterfront District offers East Hartford in creating a world-class mixed-use waterfront development. Presently the core area functions a collection of adjacent but essentially unrelated and mostly inaccessible sites, many of which are significantly underutilized. Such a plan would require a more focused planning effort involving cooperation from all property owners, the city, and related agencies. New zoning would also be required to provide necessary flexibility to develop an attainable master plan for the site and allow for mixed-uses, but these objectives could be accomplished through the Town's existing Design Development District 1. This district has been mapped on Rentschler Field and several other parcels along the southern riverfront area, corresponding to Goodwin College.



PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

FIGURE 38: FOUNDERS WATERFRONT DISTRICT GATEWAY IMPROVEMENTS





RECENTLY CONSTRUCTED
FARMINGTON SAVINGS BANK

NEW MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT
OPPORTUNITY

NEW STREET TREES
ALONG MAIN STREET

ESTABLISH GATEWAY WITH
SIGNAGE AND IMPROVED
LIGHTING

GENERAL STREET BEAUTIFICATION
PROGRAM - CONSIDER BRICK-
PATTERN CROSSWALKS, MEDIANS
WITH PLANTING STRIPS,
IMPROVED LIGHTING, ETC.

NEW STREET TREES
ALONG CONNECTICUT
BOULEVARD

KEY LANDSCAPE
BEAUTIFICATION AREAS

FIGURE 39: MAIN STREET & CONNECTICUT BOULEVARD GATEWAY

PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

EAST HARTFORD, CT

SOURCE: BFJ PLANNING/GOOGLE EARTH





NEW STREET TREES
ALONG PITKIN STREET

EXTEND SIDEWALKS
CONNECT EXISTING SIDEWALKS

UNDER-UTILIZED SITES -
POTENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT
OPPORTUNITIES - MAINTAIN
PARKING TO THE REAR TO
GREATEST EXTENT
PRACTICAL

UNDER-UTILIZED SITES - POTENTIAL
REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY -
MAINTAIN PARKING TO REAR, USE
GREEN BUFFER TO PROTECT ADJACENT
RESIDENTIAL USES

ESTABLISH GATEWAY WITH
SIGNAGE AND IMPROVED
LIGHTING

MARK HOCKANUM TRAIL
CONNECTION WITH SIGNAGE

STREET TREES ALONG
FRONTAGE

IMPROVE ENTRANCE TO
HOCKANUM LINEAR PARK
TRAIL WITH SIGNAGE &
LIGHTING

NEW STREET PLANTINGS IN
MEDIAN TO MATCH EXISTING
TREES

PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

FIGURE 40: MAIN STREET & PITKIN STREET GATEWAY



11.2. South Main Street/College District

11.2.1. Existing Conditions

The southern portion of Main Street south of the Charter Oak Bridge and north of Brewer Street has rapidly transformed since the 2003 POCD with the arrival and expansion of Goodwin College. In late 2008, the college opened its 110,000-square foot main campus building on Riverside Drive along the Connecticut River. Other development around this site included a brownfields remediation project, acquisition and clean-up of properties on Riverside Drive and reconstruction of the roadway itself. Recently, Goodwin College's projects have included construction of the Pathways Academy for Advanced Design and Technology Magnet School on Pent Road and the Connecticut River Academy Magnet High School (with associated incubator space) on Riverside Drive; conversion of commercial buildings on Main Street to academic and administrative use; and acquisition/rehabilitation of residential properties between Route 2 and Main Street, especially along Ensign Street. The college now owns most of the land in the study area (Figure 41).



Goodwin College main building, above, and Connecticut River Academy under construction, below.

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Along the riverfront, educational uses now predominate, with the former Willgoos site, which is currently zoned I-3, standing out as a significant redevelopment opportunity. Other waterfront uses include a restaurant, a rowing club facility and an electric substation. Between Route 2 and Main Street, the land use is primarily low- to medium-density residential, with the Willowbrook Early Childhood Center and its associated open space representing an important community use. Two key multifamily sites are also in this area: the 80-unit King Court affordable housing facility, recently purchased by Goodwin College from the State, and the private Carriage Park condominium complex. Both low-density and multifamily residential uses are generally in good condition. The western side of Main Street is characterized by small- to medium-scaled commercial uses, typically with large areas of surface parking to the front and side of the buildings. Several of these properties have been acquired by the college for use as either school-related functions or for ancillary purposes. Open space resources along Main Street consist of Hockanum Cemetery and a small community garden (owned by the college).

Zoning in the study area encompasses a range of districts. Properties fronting Main Street are zoned B-2, while the area between Main Street and Route 2 is mapped either R-4 or R-5, as consistent with current land uses. The land area covering the main Goodwin College campus, the Academy for Advanced Design and Technology Magnet School and the Connecticut River

Academy Magnet High School is designated under the DDD-1 floating zone. However, the rest of the riverfront land area is zoned I-3, the Town's heavy industrial zone, reflecting the area's historic manufacturing use.

11.2.2. Issues and Opportunities

Goodwin College's expansion in the southern portion of East Hartford has clearly benefited the town. Formerly industrial land with significant environmental contamination issues has been returned to a beneficial use. The riverfront has been redeveloped with architecturally distinctive buildings that have the potential to improve the town's image, and public waterfront access has been created. New educational uses provide more school choices for residents throughout the region. The college's expansion has helped to strengthen a key residential area, as well as activate and beautify Main Street. Finally, the college's approved master plan incorporates some 154 acres of open space, representing a significant preservation of land. This includes Goodwin College's creation of the Great River Land Trust, which provided an approximately 60-acre conservation easement to the Town, allowing for public access for passive recreational purposes in the South Meadows.



New riverfront access at Goodwin College.

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This growth presents challenges as well as opportunities. In the current fiscal environment, the conversion of previously taxable property to a non-profit use is a change to be considered carefully. The college's expansion has generated revenue for East Hartford in the form of Payments-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILOTs) and other fees, and has also contributed to an improved image and spurred redevelopment potential. However, the Town must ensure that the positive impacts generated by the college are not outweighed by the loss of ratables and impacts on municipal services. In addition, any significant redevelopment of property along the Connecticut River should incorporate public waterfront access to ensure that the river is connected to the rest of East Hartford. Finally, a further substantial conversion of Main Street's retail-oriented properties to office use, while possibly improving aesthetics in the short-term, could shift the corridor's traditional character and reduce street-level activity, which is vital to remaining businesses.

The college is well aware of these concerns, and has indicated that it desires to work with the Town to further mutually beneficial economic development goals such as increasing tax revenues, enhancing the visual environment and providing services to the larger community. However, communication between the institution and the Town – as well as with the public as a whole – could be improved. Community feedback during this planning process indicated general public support for Goodwin College, but little awareness or knowledge of its long-term plans.



PLAN OF CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

FIGURE 41 GOODWIN COLLEGE - LAND OWNERSHIP

One way to address this communication gap would be for the Town to create a new “Campus Focus Area” to encompass the current DDD-1 zone as well as the vacant I-3 parcels and R-4 area centered on Ensign Street, to ensure that the college’s recent land acquisitions and long-term objectives are consistent with the Town’s goals. Issues to be addressed through this zone would include future development along the Riverside Drive waterfront area, redevelopment along Main Street and plans for the existing residential area around Ensign Street. Some elements that should be addressed in such a Campus Focus Area include (see Figure 42):

1. Improving vehicular and pedestrian connectivity

Route 2 creates a visual and physical barrier for much of the Goodwin College/south Main Street area, separating the campus and waterfront area from the adjacent neighborhood and commercial corridor. The only access points across Route 2 are Willow and Ensign streets, and Riverside Drive essentially ends at the college’s parking lot south of Ensign. To provide for better overall circulation, Riverside Drive should be extended southward to connect with Pent Road, for additional access to Main Street and Route 2 via High Street. In addition, Ensign Street, as the logical “main entrance” to the Goodwin College waterfront area, should be improved with sidewalks and streetscaping amenities to enhance the pedestrian experience and induce people to walk under Route 2.

2. Preserving the overall commercial nature of Main Street

Main Street serves as one of East Hartford’s important commercial corridors. While a healthy range of uses should be encouraged here, the general active commercial character of the street should be maintained. To the greatest extent practicable, retail, restaurant and personal-service uses should be encouraged through incentives on the ground floor of buildings, with office and residential uses located on upper floors (see Chapter 3 for relevant zoning recommendations). This is to the college’s benefit, as it would provide shopping, dining and service amenities for students, faculty and staff. Further enlivening the southern portion of Main Street would also help to create a link to future activity at Rentschler Field, while also building on the successful development just across the Glastonbury town line.

3. Retaining the residential character of the existing neighborhood

The residential neighborhood between Route 2 and Main Street is a fairly stable area with excellent access to major employers such as Pratt & Whitney and Coca-Cola Bottling, as well as community resources such as Willowbrook Early Childhood Center and Hockanum and Shea parks. Goodwin College has the potential to act as an additional neighborhood anchor and employer. To ensure its ongoing stability and attractiveness, the residential form of this neighborhood should be maintained and enhanced. The college now owns a substantial portion of the properties in this area, and has indicated that it plans to retain much of its housing for students and employees. In the future, in addition to providing a range of housing (market-rate and student housing as well as income-restricted housing), many of these residential buildings may be appropriate for conversion to professional offices, both college-related and serving the larger community. Such a shift could be an

appropriate way to retain the lower-density feel of the neighborhood, but the Town should make every effort to assure that the residential built form remains largely intact, and that potential negative impacts from office conversion are minimized to the greatest extent practicable. Whether the neighborhood remains in the R-4 zone, is brought into the DDD-1 district or becomes part of a campus overlay zone, the Town may consider allowing some office-related uses as well as residences, so long as the character of buildings is preserved.

4. Enhancing public riverfront access

More development of the Goodwin College area should include continuation of public access on the Connecticut River. Access should be extended northward to link to Great River Park, and southward to the Putnam Bridge. Consideration should also be given to partnering with the college to provide access to existing docks along this portion of the river. The college has restored some of these docks for its programmatic use, but a public function could be included, promoting active recreation like fishing and kayaking. The college has also expressed interest in developing a publicly accessible marina along the river, a concept which is to be encouraged.



Riverfront docks at Goodwin College offer public access opportunities.

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5. Leverage key sites for mixed-use development

Several sites in the Goodwin College area are ideal for future mixed-use development. The first are the properties on the western side of Main Street flanking Ensign Street. The college owns the two lots on the southwest corner of the intersection; the properties to the northwest remain in private ownership, but the college has expressed interest in acquiring them. Goodwin College's vision is for this intersection to be a gateway into its campus, with new buildings and signage to create a distinctive entrance. While the ground floor of new buildings on Main Street should have a strong commercial character, this location would be a good fit for college-related office/residential uses, possibly at somewhat higher density given the presence of the Pratt & Whitney complex across Main Street.

Another key site is the property owned by the college at the Ensign Street/Riverside Drive intersection. The college presently envisions this area as accommodating a range of uses including a restaurant, dock, community space, potential commercial or residential uses and public waterfront access. Such development would help to further anchor and activate this portion of the riverfront, creating more of a connection from Main Street along Ensign. The main consideration is to ensure public visibility and access to the river, so that future development does not act to block the neighborhood from the waterfront.



A final key area is Pratt & Whitney's former Willgoos site. Any future redevelopment of this property, now undergoing environmental remediation, should entail a varied mix of uses and waterfront amenities, including continuation of the riverwalk, that link it to the nearby mobile home community and potential open space uses to the south. Sidewalks should be provided, and the Town may consider extension of streets (public or private) through the property to establish greater connectivity. This will help to ensure active street frontages and a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

11.3. Rentschler Field/Silver Lane

11.3.1. Rentschler Field

The approximately 1,000-acre Rentschler Field property represents one of East Hartford's greatest areas of development potential (see Figure 43). Since the closure of the former airfield in 1995 by United Technologies Corporation (UTC), the site has been the focus of master planning activities. In 2006, UTC joined with a master developer to create an overall site plan encompassing a mix of uses to accompany the 6 million-square-foot Pratt & Whitney office and manufacturing complex remaining on the western portion of the property (see Figure 44). Under that plan and as approved under the Design Development District I (DDD-1) Zone regulations, the University of Connecticut constructed its 40,000-seat football stadium in 2002, and the outdoor recreation retailer Cabela's opened a flagship store in 2007. These uses, together with the Pratt & Whitney complex and a designated 130-acre wildlife preserve, make up about half of the site, leaving some 500 acres remaining for additional development.

The property is approved for a total of 7.8 million square feet of new development, including 1 million square feet of retail/restaurant use, 1 million square feet of office/research space, up to 3,000 residential units throughout the site and hotel and conference centers. Retail was meant to focus around a central boulevard, culminating in a 12-acre artificial lake flanked by restaurants and an amphitheater. The Master Plan also included a new vehicular connection with Main Street, south of Pratt & Whitney, and extension of the Charter Oak Greenway (see Chapter 5).

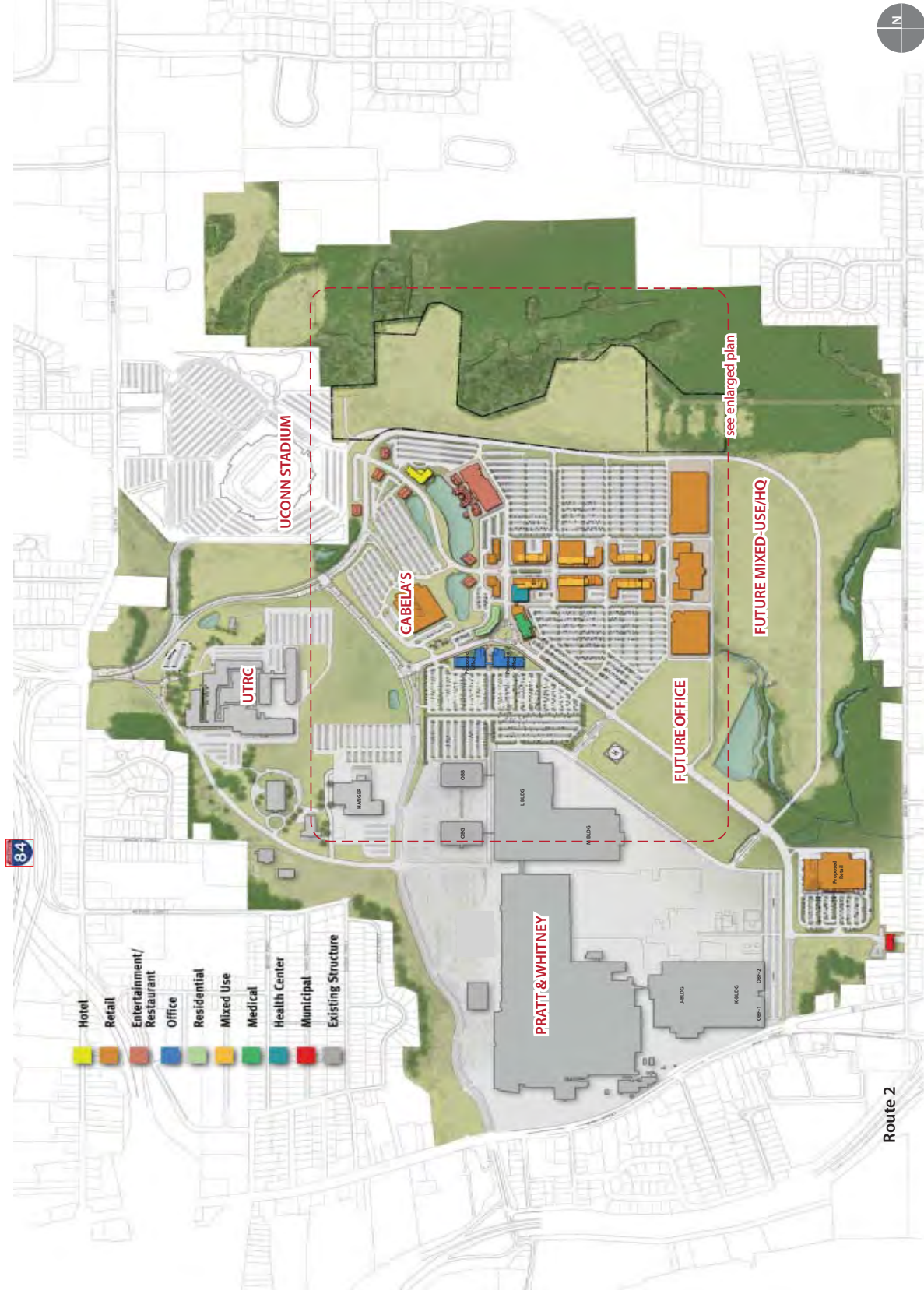
In March 2014, the Rentschler Field master developer reached agreement with Horizon Group Properties, Inc., a Michigan-based company, to develop a 350,000-square-foot outlet center on the site of the former airstrip. The center, to be named "The Outlet Shoppes at Rentschler Field," is scheduled to open in summer 2016, and also contemplates a 50,000-square-foot expansion. The developer has estimated that the center will generate more than \$1.2 million in annual property taxes and \$8.2 million in sales taxes upon completion.¹⁴ The outlet center concept could provide a lucrative niche for East Hartford. Adjacent municipalities offer an array of traditional shopping centers, but the closest outlets are in southern Connecticut, along I-95. Development of an outlet facility could also bring jobs for many East Hartford residents, and provide greater shopping and dining options.

¹⁴ <http://online.wsj.com/article/PR-CO-20140312-911596.html>



PLAN OF CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

FIGURE 43: RENTSCHLER FIELD - AERIAL



ARROWSTREET
Architecture
Urban Design
Landscape Architecture
Graphics and Interiors

TMG
The Mattos Group

United Technologies

**RENTSCHLER FIELD
DEVELOPMENT COMPANY**
A Division of
United Technologies Corporation &
The Mattos Group

RENTSCHLER FIELD DEVELOPMENT
East Hartford, Connecticut

PLAN OF CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT

FIGURE 44: RENTSCHLER FIELD - MASTER PLAN

TOWN OF EAST HARTFORD

Source: Rentschler Field Development Company



Given these recent developments, this Plan recommends that the Town support two alternatives for future development of Rentschler Field. The first option, previously advanced by UTC, would promote complementary uses to the existing Pratt & Whitney complex. This option would likely involve a mix of office, research and light industrial uses, capitalizing on good highway access and ample potential footprints. This option could also include hotels/conference centers and a residential component, although housing would need to be well-buffered from the office/industrial uses.

A second option would be closer to the Town's 2006 Master Plan for Rentschler Field, embodying a range of uses and amenities, with a more mixed-use character than the other alternatives. While this option represents an attractive goal from a planning standpoint, its implementation may be limited by the current local and regional real estate market, in particular the weak housing market. Nonetheless, the Town should continue to consider the Master Plan option, or components of it, as an overall goal for Rentschler Field.

Any redevelopment of the property should involve enhancing vehicular as well as pedestrian connectivity. A southern access point is indicated on the Master Plan, to connect with Main Street just south of the Pratt & Whitney complex. This Plan recommends a second access to the south of the site, to connect with Brewer Street (see the Future Land Use Plan in Chapter 12). Such a connection would provide a much-needed link to Rentschler Field from neighborhoods in the southern and eastern portions of East Hartford. The exact location of a secondary southern access link would be based on avoidance of wetland areas and minimizing potential negative impacts to adjacent homes along Brewer Street.

11.3.2. Silver Lane

Silver Lane is a major mixed-use corridor running from Main Street south of I-84 to the Manchester Town line. The roadway, containing an eclectic range of residential and commercial uses, runs along I-84 and the Hockanum River to the north and the Pratt & Whitney complex to the south, providing access to Rentschler Field, I-84 and the key north-south arterials of Simmons Road/Hillside Street and Forbes Street. The corridor also includes major recreational and open space assets, such as Shea Park, the Pratt & Whitney Aircraft Club and the DiPietro passive open space property, as well as agricultural properties at its eastern end.

Silver Lane was studied extensively as part of the 2003 POCD. Many of the recommendations of that analysis concerned the eventual full development of Rentschler Field. Other key recommendations included:

- Exploring roadway modifications, including a potential widening to five lanes, to improve traffic flows, especially between Simmons Road and Forbes Street.
- Supporting the proposed extension of the Charter Oak Greenway to connect with the Riverwalk trail network through the Silver Lane corridor.
- Working with commercial property owners to promote building reinvestment.
- Aggressively enforcing building maintenance and fire codes.

- Considering buffering, landscaping and screening options to ease the visual transition between residential and commercial/industrial properties and enhance urban design.
- Looking at site design regulations to limit excessive curb cuts and reduce impervious surface area.
- Reviewing the appropriateness of the B-1, I-2 and I-3 zones in the corridor, given the type and scale of existing development.

Each of the above recommendations remains valid, based on identified needs and further study.

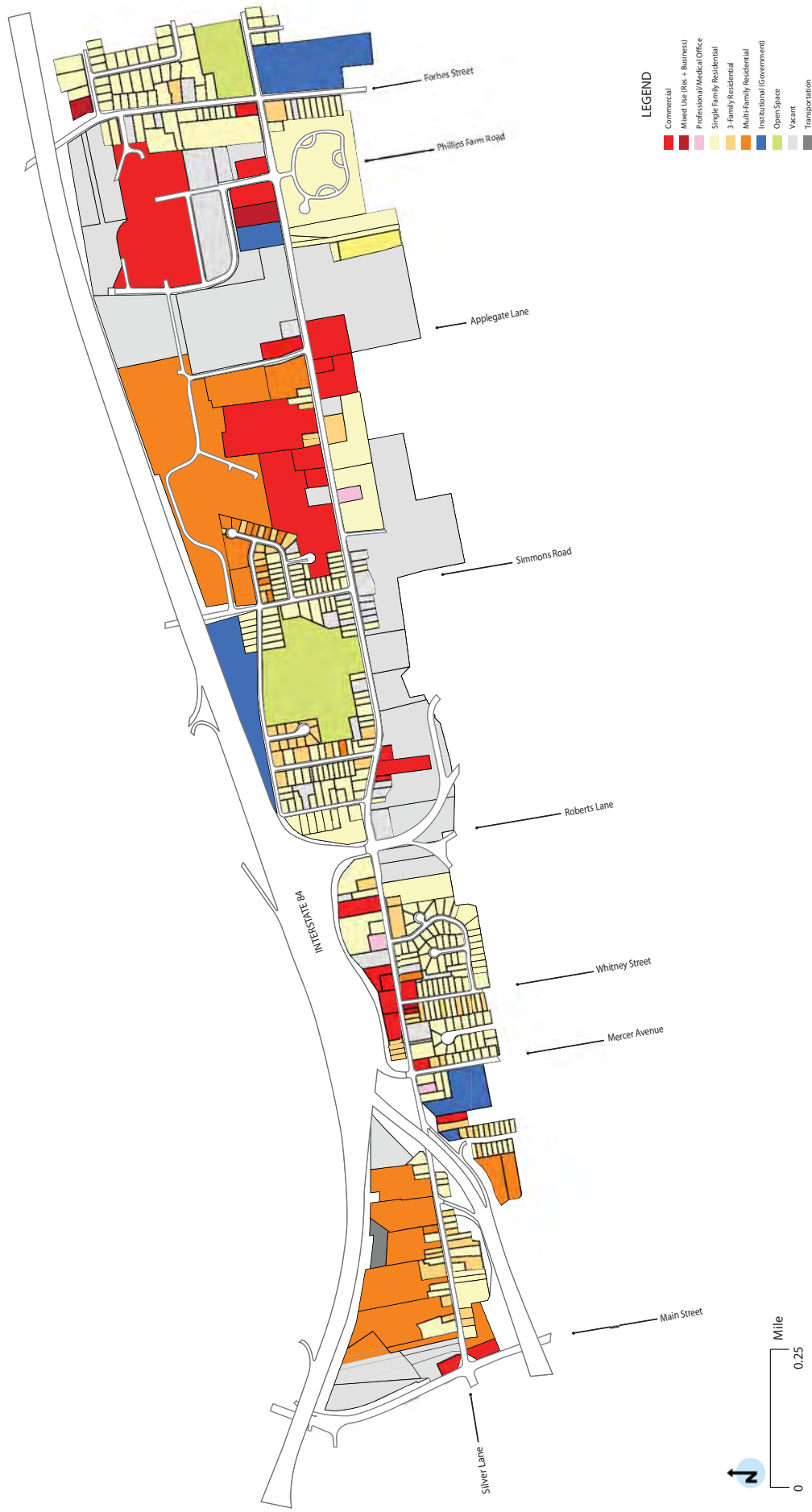
Existing Land Use

Land uses along Silver Lane vary greatly in type, scale and intensity (Figure 45). West of Route 15 (Wilbur Cross Highway), the corridor is heavily residential, including a significant concentration of multifamily uses. Continuing eastward to Roberts Lane, uses are more mixed, including commercial and office as well as residential, with low- to medium-density housing found to the south. The area between Roberts Lane and Forbes Street contains the greatest commercial concentration, with three large strip commercial complexes located on the northern side. However, this part of the corridor also contains a substantial number of vacant and underutilized properties, including large portions of shopping centers. It also includes a newly developed age-restricted condominium complex, Phillips Farm, as well as the Pratt & Whitney recreational fields. East of Forbes Street, the character of Silver Lane shifts noticeably and becomes much more residential in nature and includes passive recreational and educational uses.



Land uses on Silver Lane include (clockwise from top left) single- and two-family residential, multifamily and traditional strip commercial development.

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Zoning

As with land uses, zoning along the Silver Lane corridor is eclectic, representing a range of zoning districts (see Figure 46). All residential districts except the lowest-density R-1 and R-6 mobile home district are found, as are several of the business districts (B-1, B-2 and B-6) and the I-2 and I-3 industrial zones. In addition, two design development districts are mapped, corresponding to Rentschler Field and adjacent properties (DDD-1) and the Phillips Farm age-restricted subdivision (DDD-2), and one Incentive Development Zone (IDZ) is indicated for the parcel containing Dunkin Donuts on the northern side of Silver Lane.



Charter Oak Mall appears to be well used.



Strong residential core: Phillips Farm above, and single-family homes, below.

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Issues and Opportunities

The Silver Lane corridor contains a number of assets that greatly enhance its potential for redevelopment shown in the images below. The area has excellent access to the regional highway system as well as to the rest of East Hartford. In addition, the proximity to Rentschler Field creates economic development possibilities stemming from current and anticipated future development there. Silver Lane is also well-served by transit, with numerous bus stops located along the Finally, Silver Lane has a strong residential core that provides a consumer population for additional commercial uses. The neighborhoods to the east of Forbes Street are attractive and well-maintained, and many individual homes all along the corridor have been upgraded by their owners, while the new Phillips Farm condominium complex provides an example of the type of infill residential development that should be encouraged.

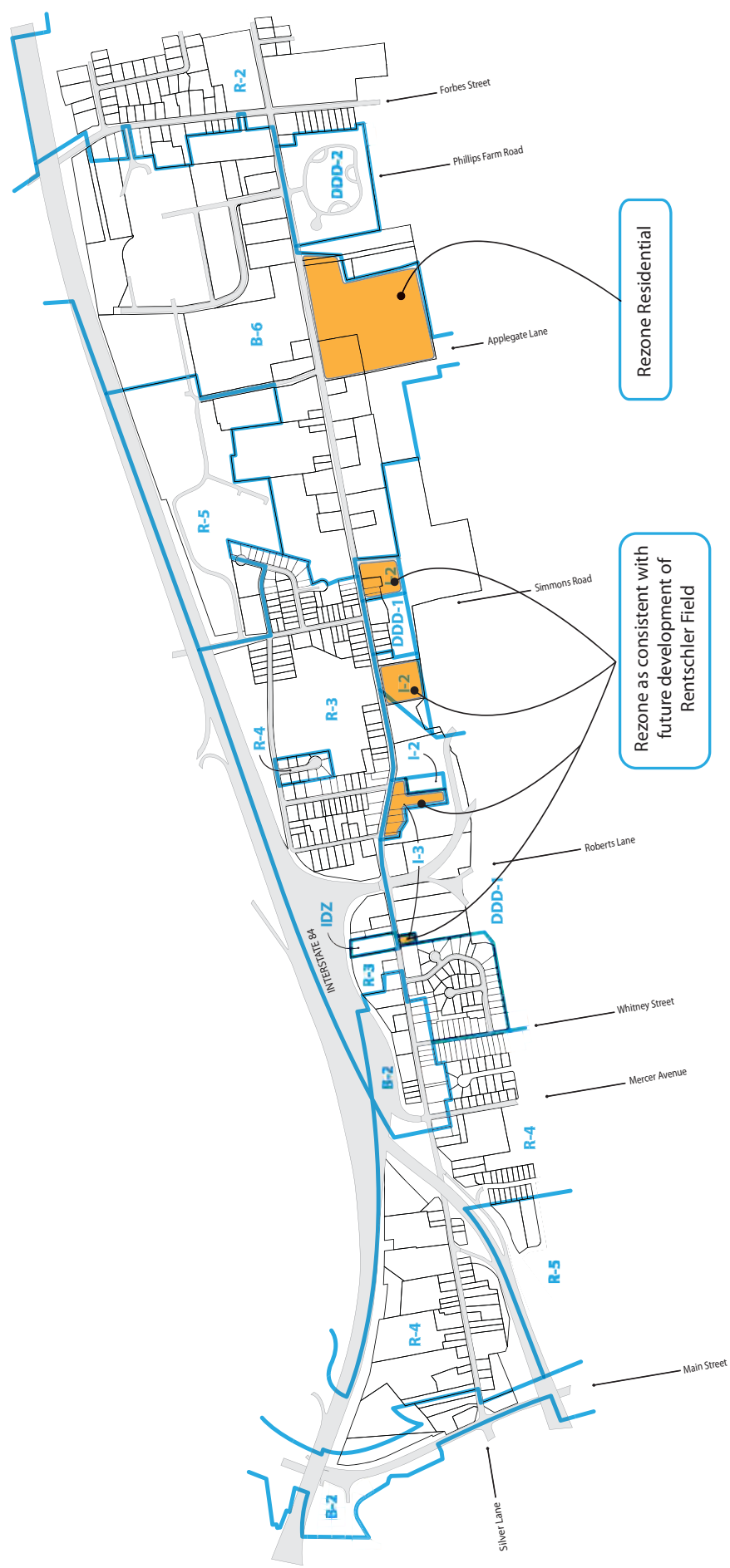


FIGURE 46: SILVER LANE ZONING

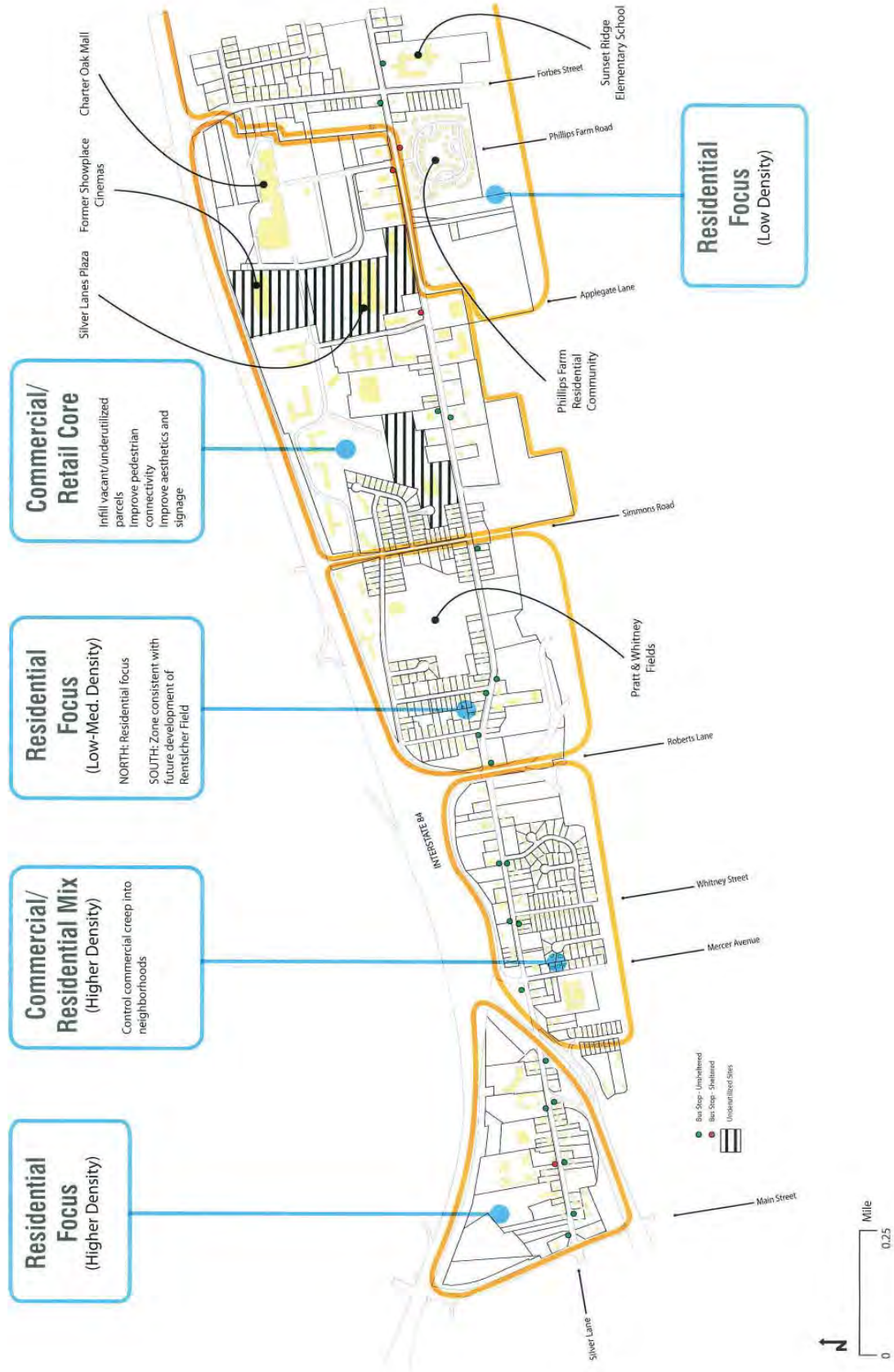
Silver Lane also faces significant challenges, the most important of which is the large number of vacant and underutilized properties, especially between Simmons Road and Forbes Street. Many of the strip shopping centers lie completely or largely vacant, in need of substantial reinvestment to make them attractive to tenants, while large vacant parcels create gaps in the urban fabric. Redevelopment of underutilized sites and infill development of vacant areas is needed to raise the level of activity along the corridor and generate business for commercial uses. One constraint to infill development that will need to be considered is the wetland area south of Charter Oak Mall.



Examples of constraints along Silver Lane: at top, vacant buildings in need of reinvestment; at bottom left, weak pedestrian connections; at bottom right, outdated signage.

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As indicated in Figure 47, this POCD envisions large portions of the Silver Lane corridor retaining their residential use and character. The commercial core should be located primarily along the northern side of the street, generally between Simmons Road and Forbes Street, while the portion on both sides of Silver Lane between Mercer Avenue and Roberts Lane is suggested as a commercial/residential mix, with the commercial uses carefully controlled so that they do not intrude into the adjacent neighborhoods. The rest of Silver Lane would have a residential focus, ranging from high-density at the west to low-density at the central and eastern portions.



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FIGURE 47: SILVER LANE ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Much of the zoning along Silver Lane is inconsistent with either existing or desired land uses. In 2013, the Town rezoned an area formerly zoned B-1 and B-1A, including the Charter Oak Mall and former Showplace Cinema, to a new B-6 zone, which is more in keeping with this area's big-box nature. However, the B-6 zone may not be the best fit for the vacant parcel west of the Phillips Farm condominiums; a residential zone is perhaps more consistent with the character of this part of the corridor, and could promote redevelopment of this parcel, possibly through a floating zone. Finally, the Town should review the appropriateness of industrial zones along Silver Lane. No industrial uses presently exist; all properties mapped as I-2 or I-3 are commercial, residential or vacant. The zoning for these areas should be adjusted to be consistent with future development at Rentschler Field due south.

Silver Lane could be improved in terms of aesthetics, pedestrian-friendliness and enforcement of zoning and building code regulations. Some commercial properties, though functional, are in poor or unattractive condition. Signage throughout the area could be enhanced; much of it is outdated and lacks cohesion. Provision of sidewalks is inconsistent; while generally present along the northern side of the corridor, they are intermittent on the southern side, with gaps on both vacant and developed properties. Sidewalks within shopping centers are limited. In addition, traffic lights with crosswalks should be explored to aid pedestrians. For example, there are few crossing opportunities between Simmons Road and Phillips Farm Road, yet pedestrians were observed jaywalking across Silver Lane in this area, from Silver Lane Plaza to the shopping center across the road. And, despite current zoning, there is evidence that commercial development on Silver Lane is "creeping" into adjacent neighborhoods. Preserving the integrity of residential areas and strength of commercial corridors requires ongoing strict enforcement of existing laws and periodic re-evaluation.



Commercial creep on Whitney Street, with a former single-family home in the R-4 zone converted to commercial use.

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11.3.3. Summary

Individually, Rentschler Field and the Silver Lane corridor present significant redevelopment potential, but as an interconnected unit, they show even greater promise. Each can build on assets of the other, while jointly addressing shared issues. For example, redevelopment of Rentschler Field could generate more activity on Silver Lane, while infill development on the corridor could aid Rentschler Field's success. The well-being of both is crucial to the Town's overall health, as stronger businesses will create positive economic activity and spillover into the central business district, while improved aesthetics and street life will help nearby residential neighborhoods.