



MT. VERNON ROAD CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

01.24.2017



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01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.01 BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the City of Cedar Rapids underwent a public input driven visioning process to develop a new comprehensive plan called EnvisionCR. This plan, designed to further Cedar Rapids progress as a vibrant community, is founded upon six elements designed to achieve visionary goals over time and outlines initiatives essential for successful action. Among the many initiatives, and as part of the element StrengthenCR, the City identified Mt. Vernon Road as a key transportation linkage in need of a Corridor Action Plan (CAP).

This important corridor was part of the historic Lincoln Highway and remains the only primary connector from the east side of the City to downtown Cedar Rapids. It contains a wide mix of land uses, is served by public transit and is one of the top ten most traveled roads in the City with an average daily traffic count of over 20,000 vehicles for the majority of its length. Improvements to this corridor will help welcome visitors, facilitate the flow of all modes of transportation, encourage quality development and redevelopment and improve quality of life for its residents.

This CAP provides an analysis of current conditions and a list of recommended actions designed to improve or address issues along the corridor.

Primary areas of analysis and action relate to:

- Placemaking
- Connectivity
- Land Use
- Character
- Streetscapes

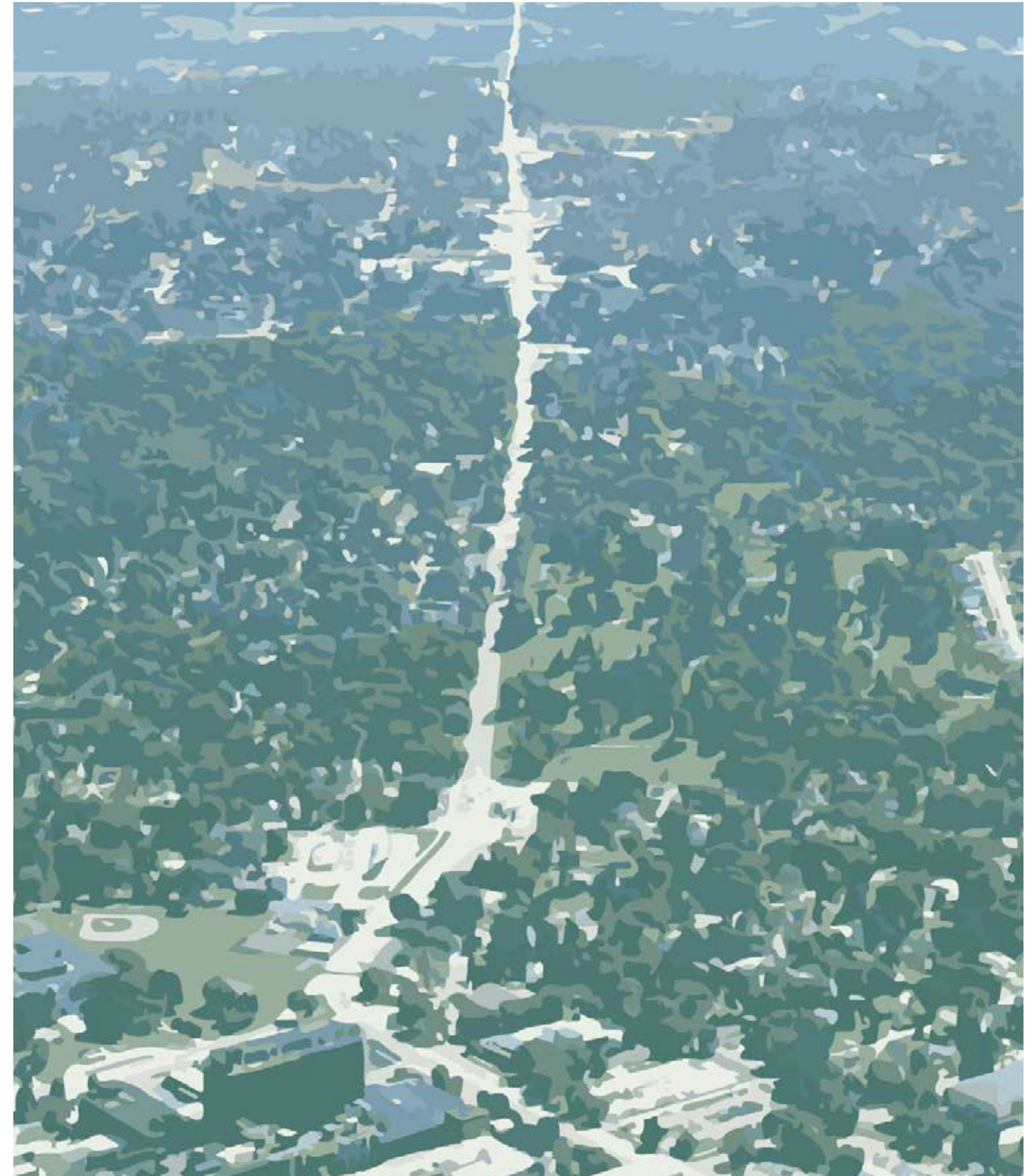


Figure 1: Birdseye View Down Corridor

1.01 BACKGROUND

PLANNING AREA

The 2.8-mile study area runs along Mt. Vernon Road from 10th Street SE to 44th Street SE. This corridor project encompasses a swath several blocks wide north and south of the main thoroughfare and is generally bounded by 8th Ave. SE and Dalewood Ave. SE on the North and 11th Ave. SE, Sheridan Dr. SE and Zeman Dr. to the south. See **Figure 2, 3 & 4**.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Mt. Vernon Road corridor contains a wide array of land use including retail, service, restaurant, office and residential. Commercial and retail development along the corridor has evolved with time creating a mosaic of land uses and architectural styles that are more of a reflection of the disparate times in which they were built than they are the result of strategic and managed growth. This corridor has adequately served the day to day needs of the SE Cedar Rapids residents for some time but recent losses of local restaurants and languishing redevelopment has taken its toll on the area. While numerous businesses and restaurants continue to prosper, there are others that exhibit signs of aging and deterioration. The increased traffic pressure, wide variety of right-of way (ROW) widths, land uses, and the resulting disjointed aesthetic can create a challenging development climate affecting the long term health of the corridor. **Figures 5 through 16** show images of the existing condition of the sidewalks and road.

PLAN GOALS

The Mt Vernon Road CAP will identify public improvements that will enhance the corridor and spur private investment by identifying the following:

- 1 AESTHETIC IMPROVEMENTS ALONG THE CORRIDOR AND AT KEY INTERSECTIONS.
- 2 OPPORTUNITIES FOR QUALITY DEVELOPMENT/REDEVELOPMENT.
- 3 PLACEMAKING OPPORTUNITIES.
- 4 PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE IMPROVEMENTS TO INCREASE CONNECTIVITY ALONG AND TO THE CORRIDOR.

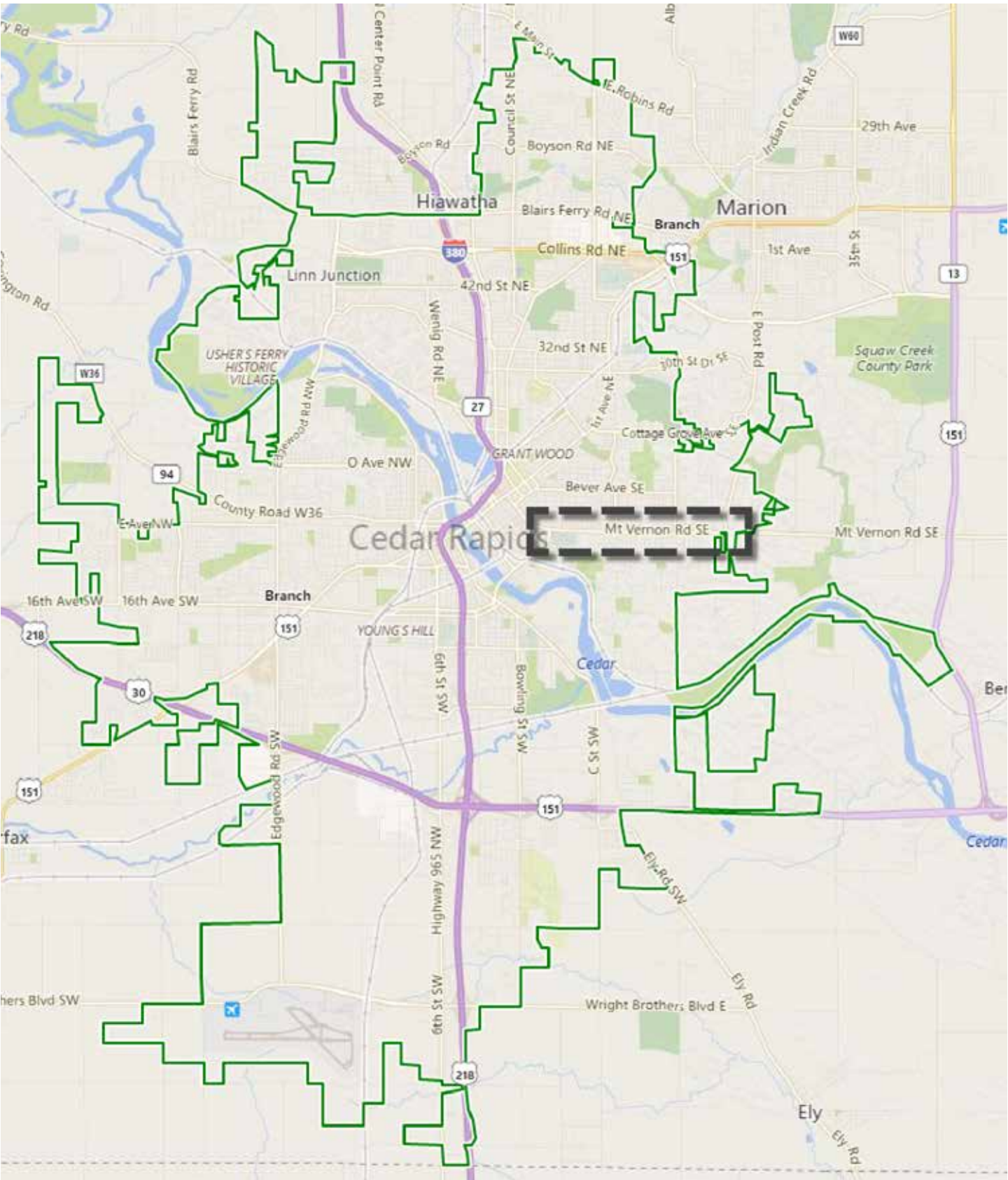


Figure 2: Plan Area

1.01 BACKGROUND

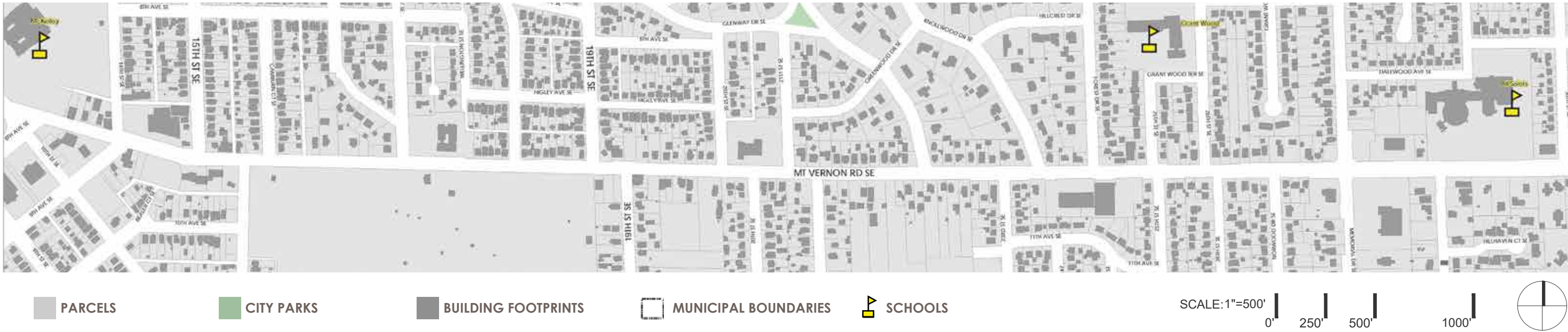


Figure 3: West Half of Project Area

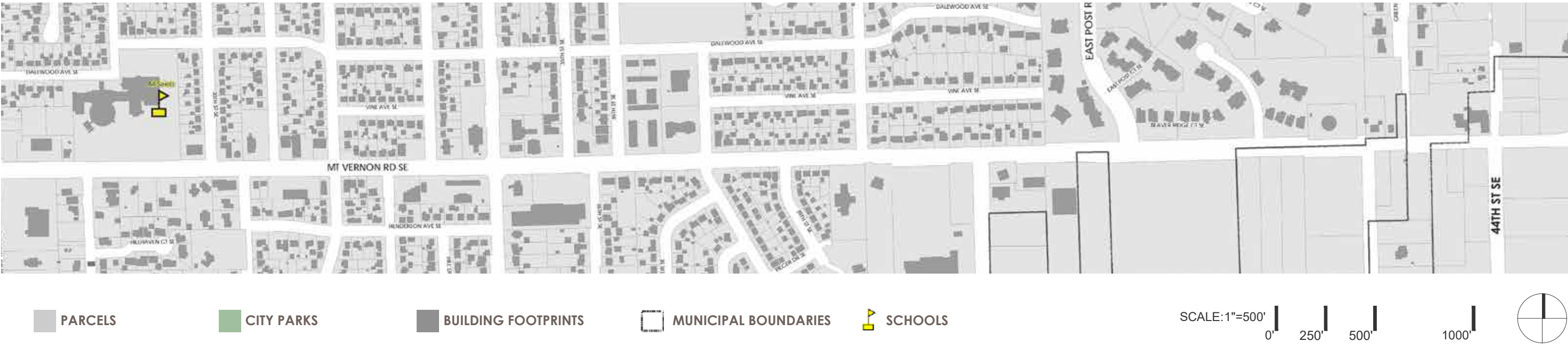


Figure 4: East Half of Project Area

1.01 BACKGROUND



Figure 5: Existing sidewalk condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 6: Existing sidewalk condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 7: Existing sidewalk condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 8: Existing sidewalk condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 9: Existing sidewalk condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 10: Existing sidewalk condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 11: Existing roadway condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 12: Existing roadway condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 13: Existing roadway condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 14: Existing roadway condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 15: Existing roadway condition along Mt. Vernon Road



Figure 16: Existing roadway condition along Mt. Vernon Road

1.02 PLANNING PROCESS

1.02 PLANNING PROCESS

The planning for this corridor action plan was a significant public collaborative process. Community stakeholders and the public contributed greatly in both the analysis and in planning and design direction. A key segment of stakeholders was the Advisory Group, who represented various interests along the corridor and, in addition to providing feedback, also provided a review of the public engagement process and the plan document. Initial meetings with key stakeholders helped the planning team to develop a clear picture of the corridor’s challenges and opportunities and gather diverse perspectives regarding corridor needs. Over the course of the project, three public input meetings were held to better understand the needs and desires of the citizens and the priorities regarding improvement efforts. Throughout the project, information, meeting results and draft recommendations were available on the City’s website and a public survey available to encourage feedback.

Initial planning efforts for the corridor began with data collection and an analysis of existing conditions. The project team reviewed data including existing infrastructure plans, existing land use and zoning, current design guidelines and standards, census data, building permit data, and existing and future anticipated development plans among others. The consultant team photo documented the area to assess the current factors relative to site characteristics and aesthetics, land uses and development issues.

A detailed transportation analysis was conducted and a high-level technical memorandum prepared. It included review of various public documents such as Paving for Progress Plans, Complete Streets Design Manual and EnvisionCR to identify consistencies and inconsistencies with the plans. Traffic and accident data was reviewed to better understand needed transportation improvements and opportunities.

Stormwater management, water service, and sanitary sewer analysis were performed and summarized in a high-level technical memorandum that contrasted findings with best management practices and outlined possible improved stormwater management opportunities.

Key stakeholder and focus groups were interviewed to provide the planning team with background, ideas and goals associated with the various groups. Stakeholder/focus group members consisted of business owners, residents, and developers. Gathering stakeholder views and perspectives early in the project allowed the stakeholders to provide focus and direction to the planning efforts.

The three public meetings were spread throughout the project timeline to engage the community in the planning process and provide input for the action plan as it was being developed. The first meeting introduced the planning project to over 200 members of the public and gathered opinions, thoughts and goals of the participants. Using the information gathered at the first meeting along with the stakeholder information, research and analysis, the planning team developed draft goals and action items. For simplicity, the goals and action items were categorized

into three primary focus areas; Circulation, Land Use and Character. The suggested action items provided solutions to concerns as express by the public and stakeholders.

At the second meeting, attended by over 80 citizens, an informational summary of input from the first public meeting along with the responding draft action items was presented. These action items were developed as a direct result of citizen and stakeholder input. Public voting to prioritize the draft action items helped inform the final recommendations.

The most highly prioritized draft action items in each of the three focus areas as derived from the public input were further developed for public review and comment in the third and final public meeting which was attended by over 90 citizens. These action items represented the primary recommendations for corridor improvement.

1.03 SUMMARY

Based upon the original goals of the Corridor Action Plan and the public input received during the planning process, the plan has been separated into three focus areas: Character, Land Use, and Circulation. The following is a summary of the focus area goals and preferred action steps.

Character

The Character focus relates to landscaping, lighting, signage, streetscaping, building architecture, property maintenance, and other appearance matters along the corridor.

Three major goals have been identified for Character:

- Improve the aesthetic appeal of the corridor
- Celebrate the historical significance of the corridor
- Reduce visual clutter along the corridor

From these goals the following action items were developed:

- Provide a unique sense of place through streetscapes, gateways, and signage.
- Identify future funding resources for enhanced maintenance and joint marketing opportunities such as a Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement Corridor’s (SSMID).
- Incorporate unifying plant materials throughout the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor.
- Include Lincoln Highway identity as part of aesthetic improvements.
- Provide educational signage and/or landmarks at historical sites along the corridor.
- Identify established neighborhoods and provide signage to celebrate these neighborhoods.
- When possible, bury overhead electrical lines and remove timber poles.
- Reduce the quantity and size of commercial signage along Mt. Vernon Road. Consider eliminating pole signs as an option.
- Plant additional street trees to unify the appearance of Mt. Vernon Road where possible.
- Evaluate the need for regular sidewalk and crosswalk inspection process and maintenance plan.

The following were further identified by the public as the top three action items in order of priority:

1. When possible, bury overhead electrical lines and remove timber poles.
2. Provide a unique sense of place through streetscapes, gateways, and signage.
3. Reduce the quantity and size of commercial signage along Mt. Vernon Road. Consider eliminating pole signs as an option.



Figure 17: Public Input Meeting #1

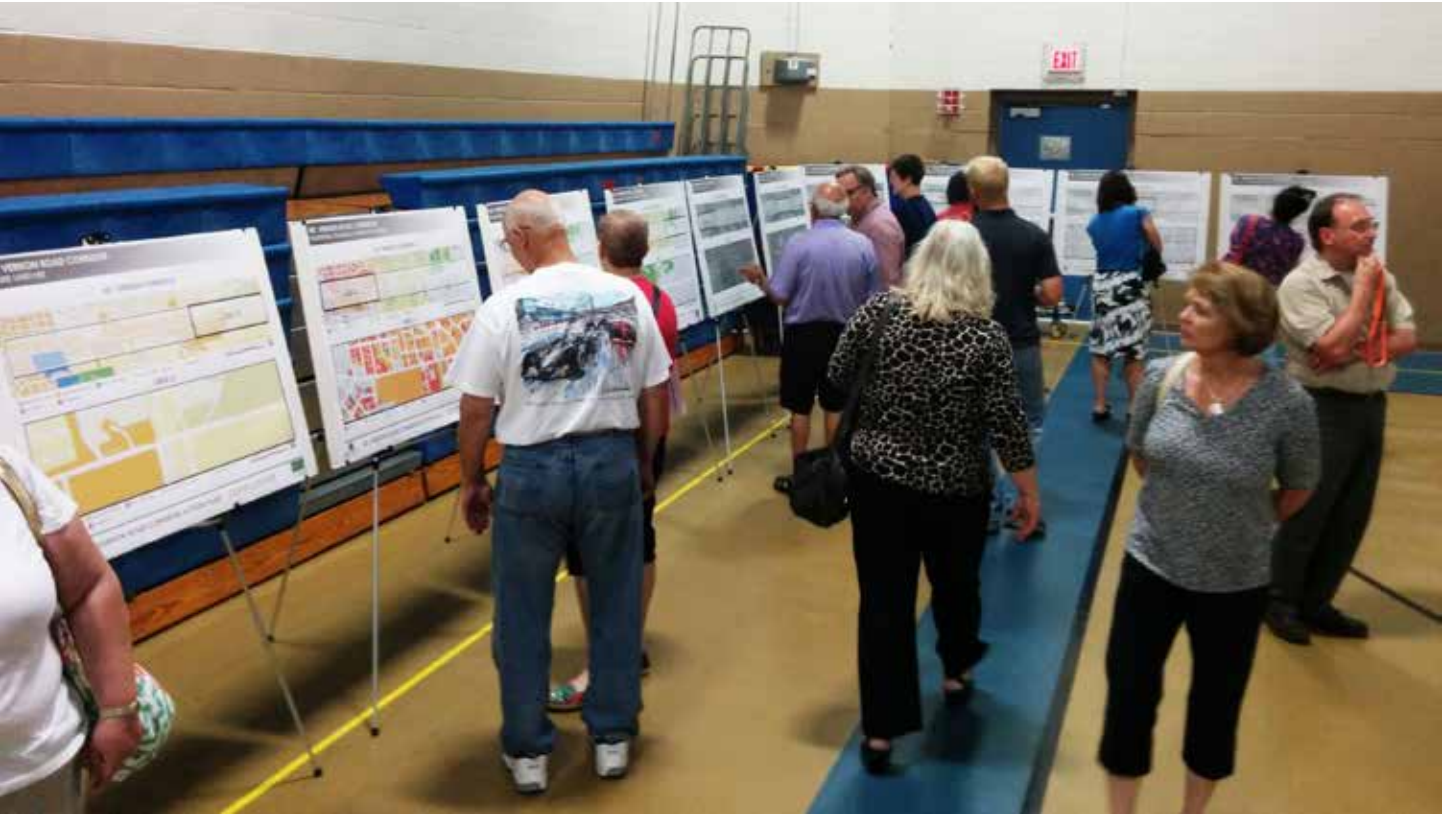


Figure 18: Public Input Meeting #1

1.04 NEXT STEPS

Land Use

The Land Use focus includes items related to zoning, permitted uses, and how property is developed and redeveloped.

Two major goals have been identified for Land Use:

- Promote new retail development and redevelopment along the corridor.
- Encourage neighborhood scale and neighborhood friendly uses.

To help implement these goals, the following action items were crafted:

- Establish design and use standards that support redevelopment on smaller lots, and promote buildings that are in scale with the surrounding neighborhood
- Restrict or prohibit uses that are not considered neighborhood friendly.
- Focus retail and multi-family development and redevelopment at major intersections and existing commercial areas.
- Continue to track the effectiveness of standard City financial incentive assistance programs that can benefit redevelopment of vacant or exisiting sites.

Two of the action items were further refined as the top action items for this focus area based on public feedback:

1. Restrict or prohibit uses that are not considered neighborhood friendly.
2. Establish design and use standards that support redevelopment on smaller lots, and promote buildings that are in scale with the surrounding neighborhood.

Circulation

The Circulation focus covers issues related to traffic congestion, pedestrian, and bicycle circulation, transit, street right-of-way, and safety.

The following two goals were developed for this area of focus:

- Improve traffic circulation and safety.
- Increase walkability and safety for pedestrians and bicycles.

From these goals the following seven action items were created:

- Analyze and make improvements to reduce the number of and/or impact of the existing off-set intersections.
- Reduce the number of commercial driveways that directly access Mt. Vernon Road and restrict left turns with a center median.
- Establish a minimum standard street profile and right-of-way that accommodates 4 travel lanes, turn lanes, center median, sidewalks and snow storage.
- Create a plan to improve access to and use of public transit including bus stop locations and minimum necessary improvements to bus stop locations such as sidewalk accessibility, signage, benches and shelters.
- Develop a plan to phase roadway, median, turn lane, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements with priority given to areas with the most congestion.
- Require right-of-way dedication, street and sidewalk improvements, and driveway relocations at the time of development or redevelopment of adjoining properties.
- Provide signage to delineate the preferred bicycle routes through and around the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor.

Three of these seven action items were identified as top priorities by the public:

1. Develop a plan to phase roadway, median, turn lane, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements with priority given to areas with the most congestion.
2. Provide signage to delineate the preferred bicycle routes through and around the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor.
3. Establish a minimum standard street profile and right-of-way that accommodates 4 travel lanes, turn lanes, center median, sidewalks and snow storage.

1.04 NEXT STEPS

All of the action items identified in this plan are important, however, those listed as top priorities in each category are the preferred items of focus moving forward. Certain action items will be easier to complete than others and the timeline and/or budget requirements for completion vary greatly. These action items and their priorities should be regularly reviewed and considered when completing capital improvement planning and identifying city department work priorities.

This plan’s goals and action items can further serve as a resource when evaluating the value, appropriateness, and standards of development proposals, rezoning requests, as well as public and private improvement plans within the corridor planning area.

02 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN

2.01 OVERVIEW

The Corridor Action Plan was developed as a response to the call for action as outlined in EnvisionCR. Specific action items and recommendations were informed by an understanding of the vision and goals for the corridor, technical assessment, analysis of existing conditions and public and staff input.

To reflect the concerns and values of the public, recommendations are addressed within the action plan in order of public prioritization. It should be noted, that the corridor poses numerous challenges, and potential preferred solutions are not always mutually compatible. For instance, the public desires to keep the existing single family homes and residential character; improve traffic flow; minimize congestion and improve streetscaping and appearance. Given the existing conditions, meeting all of these goals is not effectively possible. The minimum ROW width required to provide needed lanes, medians, walks and landscaping to soften and enhance the corridor would require purchasing significant additional ROW in some portions of the corridor’s, necessitating removal of existing single family residences. Thus corrective measures must be carefully weighed and prioritized to understand their full impact upon the short and long term vision for the corridor. These recommendations take such difficult decisions into account and provide solutions that will best serve the neighborhood and community for years to come.

2.02 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN APPROACH

During the planning process, it was found that the concerns for the corridor’s and improvement efforts generally fell into three areas of focus; Circulation, Character, and Land Use. As a result, these categories were used to organize and inform the structure of the information presented to the public and the Corridor Action Plan (CAP). For the CAP, all recommendations within these categories are enumerated in order of importance.

The Circulation recommendations focus upon actions that improve unsafe road conditions, ease vehicular congestion, and promote a more pedestrian friendly aesthetic environment. Character action items provide recommendations for aesthetic improvements and cohesive design focusing on elements that create a sense of place and bring meaning to the environment. The Land Use action category identifies beneficial changes in land use, standards and regulations that support the vision for this corridor’s as laid out by the city and citizens of the corridor.

2.03 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CIRCULATION)

CIRCULATION OVERVIEW

The City of Cedar Rapids and the Corridor Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) have both identified Mt. Vernon Road as a primary corridor within the Cedar Rapids area. It is part of the old Lincoln Highway system, one of the earliest transcontinental highways in the U.S. (now Highway 151) and the primary connection from the east edge of town to the downtown corridor's. This road is also part of the National Highway System, which is a network of arterial roadways and highways that serve major population centers or major travel destinations as part of the overall goals of improving the nation's economy, defense, and mobility. In addition, the entire Mt. Vernon Road corridor from Highway 13 to 1st Avenue East, via 10th Street SE, has been identified by the state as part of the Farm-to-Market Road System. These road systems are quality roads, usually highways that are slated to transport products to towns or distribution centers. The City has determined that this corridor will require improvements to meet future travel demands and direct the amount and type of urban growth desired. The comprehensive plan, EnvisionCR called for a “corridor action plan” for a number of primary city arterials and selected Mt. Vernon Road as one of the first to be developed. The Mt. Vernon Road right-of-way varies in width from 60’ to 100’ going from a 2-lane road at the east end to a 4-lane road with turn lanes at its widest points within the project study area. With a traffic count of over 23,000 vehicles daily, this roadway would typically require at least four lanes along with turn lanes to properly accommodate traffic flow safely. The majority of Mt. Vernon Road consists of 4 traffic lanes, (sans turn lanes) but even with 4 lanes, a 66’ wide right of way is insufficient to handle a major arterial such as Mt. Vernon Road. The implementation of a road diet on Mt. Vernon Road was examined. A road diet involves converting, often through re-striping travel lanes, a roadway from four lanes to three lanes. A three lane roadway has a thru lane in each direction and a center turn lane. This configuration increases the safety of the roadway for not only motorists but also pedestrians and bicyclists. However, factors such as traffic volume, the parallel street network, and its use as a truck route, led to the determination that a road diet would not be appropriate west of 34th Street.

Complaints of the industrial truck traffic were common throughout the public input process. While the comments are not unfounded, the City previously studied the truck routes and determined that an alternate route is not practical with the current circulation patterns and industry locations. Mt. Vernon Road is designated by the State as part of the Farm to Market system and is a truck route into the city from its connection to Highway 13, which is outside of the city limits. Additionally, from 44th Street to Highway 13, the road falls under the jurisdiction of Linn County. Furthermore, because of other natural barriers such as the Cedar River and the existing road infrastructure which lacks substitute arterial corridors from the east, it is impractical at this time to provide an alternate route.

The second concern noted in the technical assessment located in Appendix E is sidewalk accessibility. Multiple sidewalk accessibility issues and hazards were noted throughout the corridor's including 9 intersections entirely without curb ramps. In line with the City's adopted Complete Streets Policy, and in an effort to make the entire community accessible and connected, the City should continue to review walks, crosswalks, and sidewalk ramps to ensure they support the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). In 2016, the City committed \$5,000,000 annually for a period of four to five years to improve accessibility issues such as sidewalk ramps. It is estimated that an average of 1,000 sidewalk ramps per year will be improved city-wide over this time period.

With a wide variety of land uses along the corridor, the resulting access management issues of multiple driveways, access drives and alleys create hazardous conditions for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists. While diverse land uses along the corridor require different transportation needs, a cohesive circulation corridor can be achieved by targeted improvements in multimodal transportation, sidewalk accessibility, intersection design, access management and streetscaping.

Thorough analysis of the Mt. Vernon Road corridor circulation and infrastructure provided a solid basis to identify needs and opportunities for improvements. A combination of approaches and solutions are recommended as part of this CAP to address current issues and further enhance transportation of all modes in the project area. Vehicular circulation recommendations focus on adjusting the road profile by providing additional turn lanes and right-of-way where needed. Modifications for dangerous intersections are addressed through the use of medians and potential realignment of unsafe intersections. The City should strongly consider either intersection improvements (**Figure 20** and **Figure 21**) or realignment at the Mt. Vernon Road 19th Street offset intersection to improve safety, and median improvements to establish a ¾ intersection at 15th Street (see **Figure 19**) where the offset, and sight lines create the most dangerous condition in the corridor. Medians to restrict left turns should be incorporated to improve safety. An

The following table shows the anticipated schedule for when efforts will be intitiated on each action item.

Action Item	Timeframe
Develop a plan to phase roadway, turn lane, median, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements with priority given to areas with the most congestion.	2 to 3 Years
Establish a minimum standard street profile and right of way that accommodates 4 travel lanes, turn lanes, center median, sidewalks and snow storage.	2 to 3 Years
Provide signage to delineate the preferred bicycle routes through and around the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor.	Beyond 5 Years
Reduce the number of commercial driveways that directly access Mt. Vernon Road and restrict left turns with a center median.	Beyond 5 Years
Continue to improve access to and use of public transit including bus stop locations and minimum necessary improvements to bus stop locations such as sidewalk accessibility, signage, benches and shelters.	Within 1 Year
Require Right-of way dedication, street and sidewalk improvements, and driveway relocations at the time of development or redevelopment of adjoining properties.	Beyond 5 Years
Analyze and make safety improvements to key intersections and reduce the number of and/or impact of existing offset street intersections.	4 to 5 Years

2.03 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CIRCULATION)

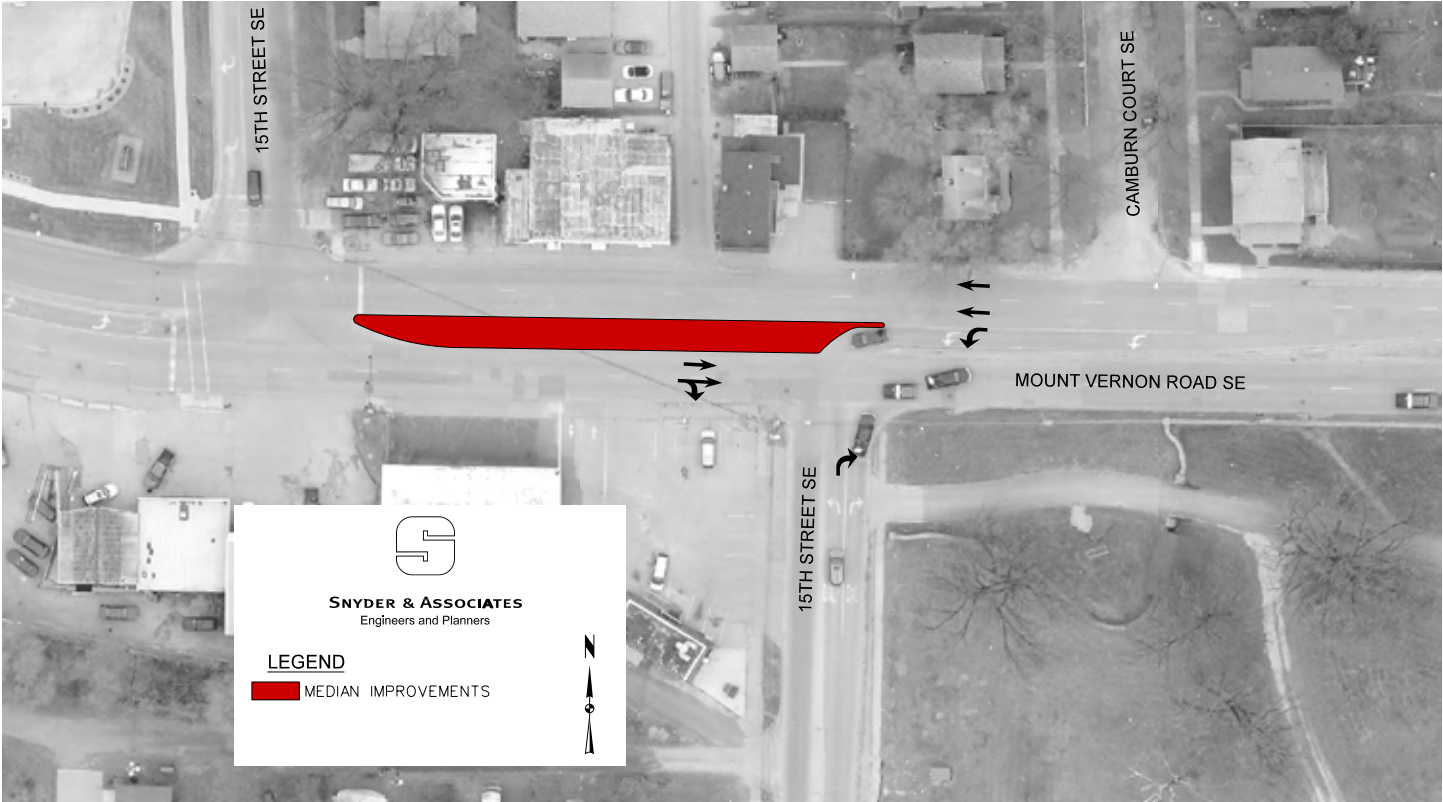


Figure 19: Proposed 15th Street Intersection Improvements



Figure 20: Proposed Short Term 19th Street Intersection Improvements

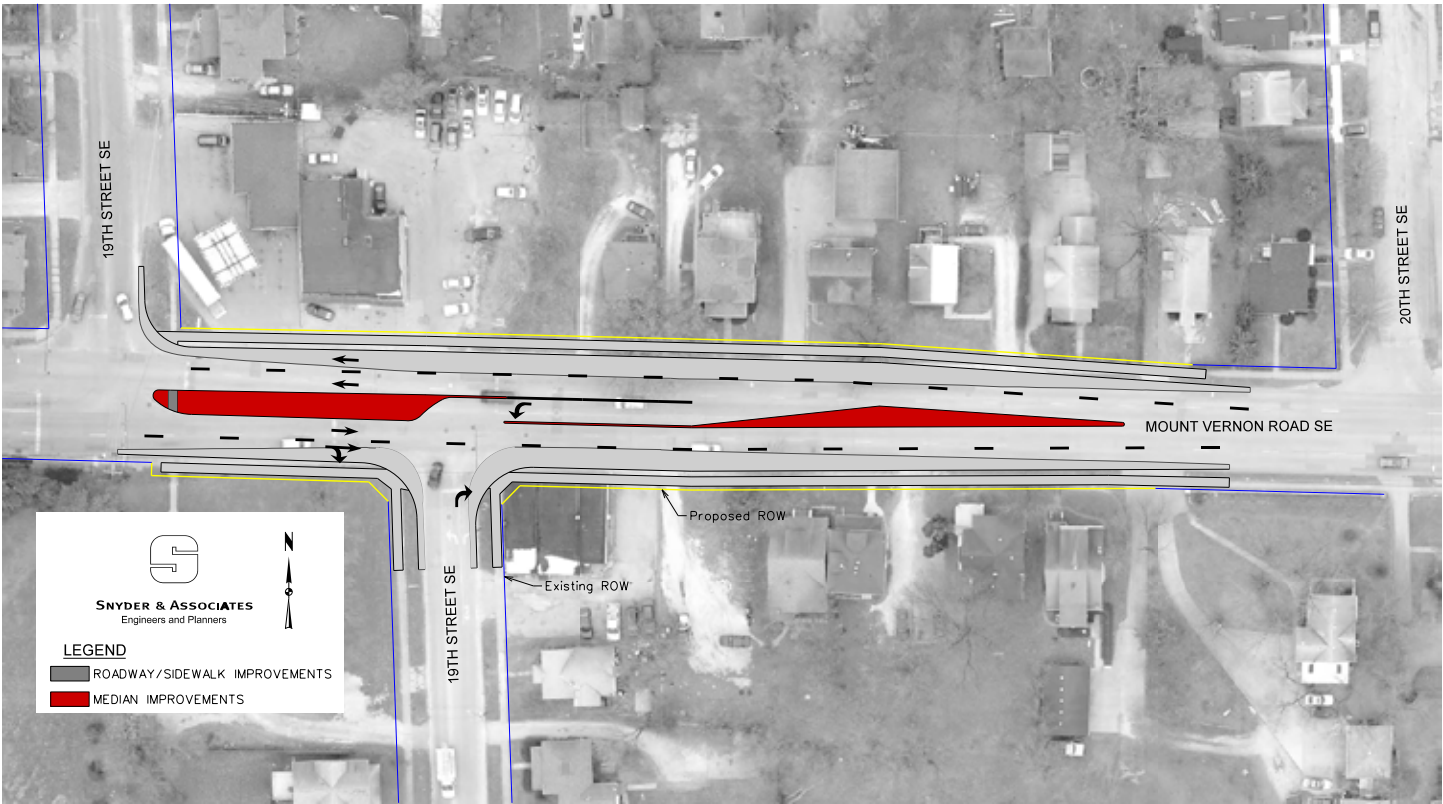


Figure 21: Long Term 19th Street Intersection Improvements

2.03 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CIRCULATION)

additional buffer of parkway pavers between the edge of Mt. Vernon Road and the pedestrian walkway will provide a sense of safety and a more pleasant walking experience for the pedestrian. This extra space along with the center median will provide area for snow storage. Finally, improving other modes of transportation experiences such as public transit, and developing a more walkable, pedestrian friendly corridor’s have the potential to relieve some of the burden from the corridor while making it a safer and more pleasing environment.

The following goals were created based on the public input received during the development of the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor Action Plan

SUMMARIZED PUBLIC INPUT	ACTION ITEMS	DOT VOTING
• Too much truck traffic	<div>A</div> Analyze and make improvements to reduce the number of and/or impact of the existing off-set street intersections. <div>B</div> Reduce the number of commercial driveways that directly access Mt. Vernon Road and restrict left turns with a center median. <div>C</div> Establish a minimum standard street profile and right-of-way that accommodates 4 travel lanes, turn lanes, center median, sidewalks, and snow storage. <div>D</div> Create a plan to improve access to and use of public transit including bus stop locations and minimum necessary improvements to bus stop locations such as sidewalk accessibility, signage, benches and shelters. <div>E</div> Develop a plan to phase roadway, median, turn lane, sidewalk, and crosswalk improvements with priority given to areas with the most congestion. <div>F</div> Require right-of-way dedication, street and sidewalk improvements, and driveway relocations at the time of development or redevelopment of adjoining properties. <div>G</div> Provide signage to delineate the preferred bicycle routes through and around the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor.	<div>A</div> 10
• Reduce truck traffic		<div>B</div> 19
• Speeding		<div>C</div> 32
• Traffic congestion		<div>D</div> 19
• Lack of turn lanes		<div>E</div> 60
• Not walkable		<div>F</div> 13
• Lack of pedestrian crosswalks		<div>G</div> 39
• More sidewalk connectivity		
• No room for/not safe for bikes		
• Keep bikes off the roadway		
• Improve road and sidewalk maintenance		
GOALS		
• Improve traffic circulation and safety.		
• Increase walkability and safety for pedestrians and bicycles.		

Figure 22: Circulation Voting Summary

- Improve traffic circulation and safety
- Increase walkability and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists

CIRCULATION ACTION ITEMS

Through careful analysis, the following action items were developed and presented to the public for prioritization and comment. An illustration of the voting and prioritization can be found in **Figure 22**.

1. **Develop a plan to phase roadway, turn lane, median, sidewalk and crosswalk improvements with priority given to areas with the most congestion.**

The City’s Public Works and Community Development Departments should coordinate Mt. Vernon Road improvements with other city efforts such as with Paving for Progress projects and previously planned improvement projects already identified in the City’s capital improvement plan, to efficiently implement phased improvements based on funding and greatest impact to reduce congestion. Areas of greatest need and currently identified project phasing are illustrated in **Figure 23**.

Key intersections already identified in EnvisionCR and the 2040 Corridor MPO Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) should be placed high in priority with special consideration to the offset intersections at 15th Street, 19th Street and 34th Street where traffic volumes are high and where accident rates are the most frequent in the corridor. This phased plan should be part of the comprehensive corridor Streetscape Master Plan documents, referenced on page ten, and should provide a targeted installation schedule.

2. **Establish a minimum standard street profile and right of way that accommodates 4 travel lanes, turn lanes, center median, sidewalks and snow storage.**

Right-of-way in the west portion of the Mt. Vernon Road corridor is limited and does not meet the current minimum City standard of 80’. Providing additional travel and turn lanes, accommodating pedestrian traffic, snow storage and planting buffer to bolster character also takes space. To meet the goals of the City and the desires of citizens as expressed through prioritization, the City should, when practical, strive to provide a standard right-of-way width of 82’ as shown in **Figure 24 on page 15** to allow implementation of turn lanes, improved crosswalks, paved and landscaped medians, and parkway buffers. One exception to this is the segment from 38th Street SE to East Post Road. Conditions such as traffic volume and issues with crashes make a road-diet (conversion from four lanes to three) in this area feasible.

To minimize neighborhood impact, right-of-way should be acquired on the south side of Mt. Vernon Road where necessary to meet minimum standard profile.

2.03 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CIRCULATION)



Figure 23: Critical Intersections

2.03 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CIRCULATION)

3. Provide signage to delineate the preferred bicycle routes through and around the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor.

The current hazards of the road pose a danger for cyclists who ride along Mt. Vernon Road. High vehicular traffic totals, fast speed, congestion and countless curb cuts create unmanaged access and multiple conflict points for the bicyclist. Alternatively, encouraging bikes on walks or shared use paths in the corridor's would not eliminate the conflict with drives and alleys and would increase potential conflict with pedestrians. Because of these conditions, a shared use path is not recommended along Mt. Vernon Road and the predominant public sentiment concurs that cyclists should not be encouraged along this major thoroughfare.

Therefore, signage should be installed to clearly identify and direct bicyclists to the nearby bikeways that parallel and cross the corridor as seen in **Figure 25**. It is important to note that on-street (bike lanes or sharrows) bicycle facilities will be completed as part of road improvement projects or as standalone projects. This means that some parts of the parallel network may be done before others and full completion of the system may take many years.

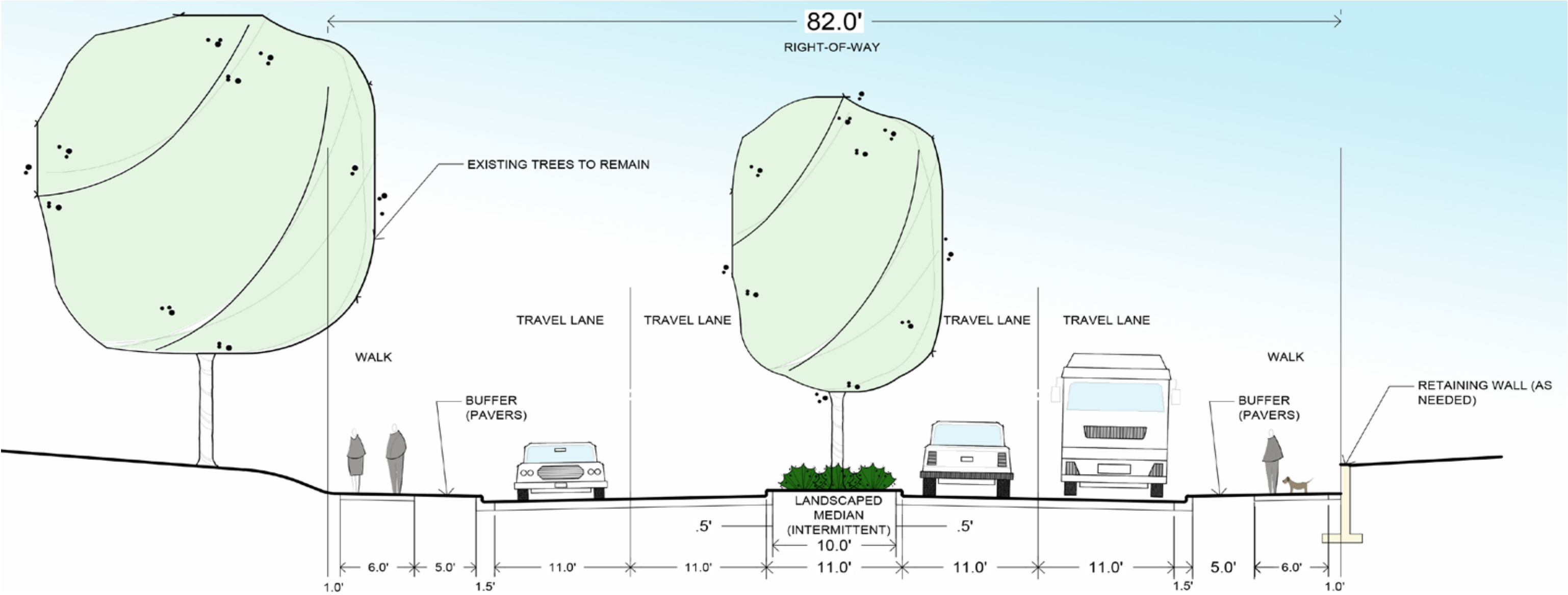


Figure 24: 82' Street Cross Section



Figure 25: Bicycle Routes Near Mt. Vernon Road

2.03 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CIRCULATION)

4. Reduce the number of commercial driveways that directly access Mt. Vernon Road and restrict left turns with a center median.

Mt. Vernon Road is one of the more dangerous roads in the city for vehicular traffic with 282 accidents along its length over the past five years. A number of strategies should be employed to reduce this danger. First, as a tactic to reduce potential conflict points, improve safety, flow of traffic and enhanced corridor’s appearance, the City should institute the regulation of direct access to Mt. Vernon Road in commercial areas. Regulations should encourage the reconfiguration of parking lots and commercial driveways to be primarily off local and collector roads and when possible, consolidate driveways. Secondly, the City should improve access management by controlling left turn movements through the use of strategically placed medians.

5. Continue to improve access to and use of public transit including bus stop locations and minimum necessary improvements to bus stop locations such as sidewalk accessibility, signage, benches and shelters.

The following design standards and recommendations are based in part on the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority’s recently developed design standard Bus Stop & Amenity Design Guidelines (January 2014). Based on the current and anticipated densities in the corridor the bus stop spacing standards should follow the “General Urban” standards for the Mt. Vernon Road corridor. The General Urban land category usually falls on the border between urban and suburban areas. Street patterns may follow the grid network commonly found in urban centers, but have the beginning signs of more suburban street patterns with curved roads and fewer access point to main collector streets and arterials. Bus stops should be placed around 1,000 feet apart to provide efficient service in these regions.

The City should continue its practice of reviewing bus stop locations to ensure that they are located to support large employers, community and retail centers, be spaced in a manner that ensures appropriate and equitable distribution throughout the corridor and maximizes the efficiency of transit service operations.

All basic bus stops in the corridor should consist of an accessible area and easily identifiable and consistent signage. Bus stops should be clearly and easily recognizable with up-to-date information for riders about services at the bus stop.

Current bus stop locations and placement should be reviewed for safety and convenience. To provide both safety and convenience for customers, pedestrians, bus operators and other vehicles existing bus stops deemed unsafe or inconvenient should be improved or relocated.

The City should review all bus stop locations to ensure they support the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

All stops should contain a landing pad – along with a hard surface pathway that connects the sidewalk to the landing pad and curb. Landing pads are generally 5 foot by 8 foot and must meet all ADA requirements for surface and slope.

In addition, a shelter and seating should be provided at sites identified as major bus stop locations. Shelters should be lit and benches ranging from four (4) feet to eight (8) feet should be provided for use by passengers waiting for a bus to arrive. No signage should be permitted on these benches and they should either match the city standard or match the amenity design designated for the streetscape corridor. Trash cans routinely emptied and maintained by the City may be justified at certain key bus stops. These containers should also match the city standard or match the amenity design designated for the corridor’s.

6. Require right-of way dedication, street and sidewalk improvements, and driveway relocations at the time of development or redevelopment of adjoining properties.

Impending improvements associated with this action plan are intended and likely to spur development or redevelopment in the corridor. With a long range vision for the corridor’s in mind, the City should consult and follow the recommendations contained in this plan, as well as other City plans, when reviewing development and redevelopment proposals. This will help ensure that projects meet the goals and recommendations of the plan.

7. Analyze and make safety improvements to key intersections and reduce the number of and/or impact of existing offset street intersections.

Properly designed intersections are integral to the efficiency and safety of the Mt. Vernon Road corridor, not just for motorists but pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders as well. Offset intersections are especially hazardous and the project area has a total of eight of them. Three key intersections, including 19th Street, Memorial Drive, and 34th Street stand out in particular because of their higher traffic volumes and safety issues. The 19th Street intersection is offset, has a double light configuration, obstructed sight lines and no sidewalk crossings. Memorial Drive has sight line issues due to steep approaches and 34th Street suffers from disparity in traffic volumes and sheer size of the paved region within the intersection. The other problematic intersections are the 10th Street and 8th Avenue juncture at the western most end of Mt. Vernon Road, and between the two offset 15th street intersection crossings where 27 separate crashes occurred in the past five years. Determining the appropriate corrective measure will require further study, but these intersections should be of highest priority for remediation.

ADDITIONAL CIRCULATION COMMENTS

Site obstructions

The technical assessment found in **Appendix E** revealed additional safety concerns and recommendations in the corridor’s not specifically noted in this report. The first is site obstructions; landscape obstructions and poor site visibility due to landscape foliage were found in a couple of locations on Mt. Vernon Road east of 21st Street. The City should address existing site obstructions by requiring trimming or removal of overgrown landscaping by the owner where the obstruction overhangs or is in the ROW or clear zone.

2.04 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (LAND USE)

LAND USE OVERVIEW

Throughout the planning process, community members have made clear their desire for the development of new commercial uses that will benefit and enhance the neighborhood, such as sit-down style restaurants, coffee shops, and small specialty retail shops. The need for vacant and older commercial sites to be redeveloped was also clearly stated. Community members also communicated their concerns with the negative impacts from less neighborhood friendly uses, such as liquor stores, tobacco shops, tattoo parlors, automotive related businesses, and certain more industrial uses, and their desire that these types of uses be restricted.

The size and scale and general quality of commercial uses were further raised as an issue. Some comments from community members included that additional big-box type retail stores were not desirable within their neighborhood due to the impact from the traffic they generate. Community members further commented that there is a need for better transitions and buffering between residential and commercial uses and that residential and commercial properties should be separated within their neighborhood.

The Mt. Vernon Road corridor includes a wide variety of land uses including a neighborhood hardware store, a large grocery store, several gas/convenience stores, banks and credit unions, professional offices, restaurants, bars, and various specialty, variety, drug, auto parts, auto repair, and discount goods stores. The corridor also includes schools, churches, a residential care center, a fire station, and a cemetery. However, the dominate land use is single family residential with just a few multi-family residential properties sprinkled throughout the corridor.

There are several quick-serve and fast food restaurants but few sit-down style restaurants. There are vacant properties along the corridor and some occupied commercial sites that are dated and/or in need of renovation and maintenance. There are also several retail uses that are typically not considered neighborhood friendly including tobacco shops and liquor stores.

It appears that over time, single family homes that fronted along Mt. Vernon Road or were located at the corner of the major street intersections were assembled and demolished for redevelopment into commercial sites. Many of the commercial and retail uses are situated very close to residential properties with little separation between the differing properties. Most commercial sites are very shallow and many may not contain the lot depth or size typically desired for retail development. Certain existing City regulations and requirements, such as minimum parking requirements and buffer yards, may further hinder the development or redevelopment of commercial properties along this corridor.

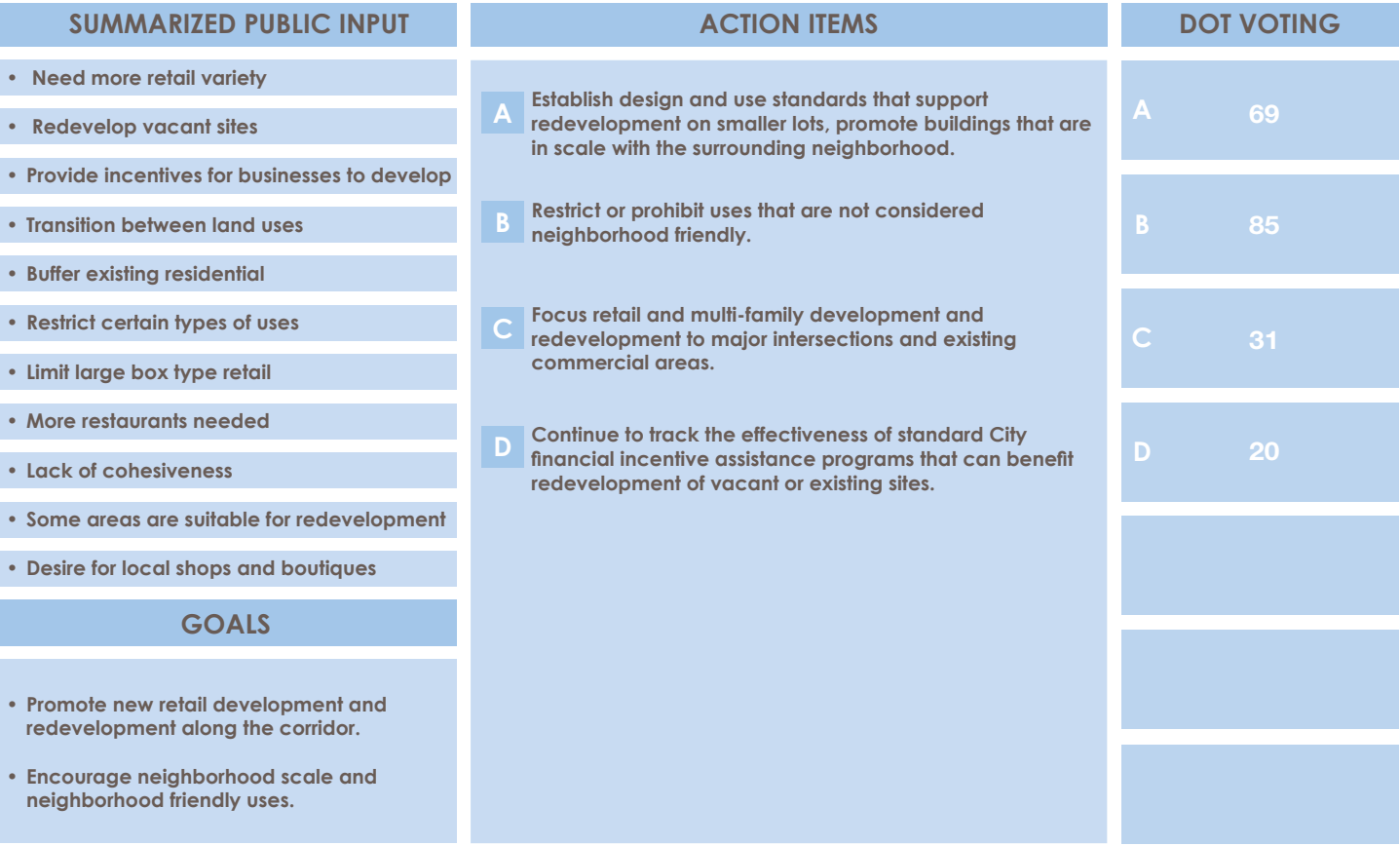


Figure 26: Land Use Voting Summary

The following table shows the anticipated schedule for when efforts will be intitiated on each action item.

Action Item	Timeframe
Restrict or prohibit uses that are not considered neighborhood friendly.	Within 1 Year
Establish design and use standards that support redevelopment on smaller lots, promote buildings that are in scale with the surrounding neighborhood.	Within 1 Year
Explore strategies to focus retail and multi-family development and redevelopment to major intersections and existing commercial areas.	Within 1 Year
Evaluate the effectiveness of standard City financial incentive assistance programs that can benefit redevelopment of vacant or existing sites.	2 to 3 Years

2.04 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (LAND USE)

The following goals were created based upon the public input received during the development of the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor Action Plan.

- Promote new retail development and redevelopment along the corridor.
- Encourage neighborhood scale and neighborhood friendly uses.

From these goals, the following action items were developed and placed in order of priority by the community during the September 12, 2016, public open house. See Figure 26 for voting results from that meeting.

These four (4) Action Items were developed to address the concerns and comments raised by the community and manage the constraints found in this corridor all related to establishing appropriate land uses, creating transitions between uses, and supporting and focusing development and redevelopment.

LAND USE ACTION ITEMS

1. Restrict or prohibit uses that are not considered neighborhood friendly.

As part of ReZone Cedar Rapids, the City should evaluate the appropriate mix of land uses and tools to ensure quality development.

The following uses should generally be permitted and encouraged along the corridor:

- o General retail including grocery stores, drug stores, bakeries, auto supplies (no repair service), and hardware stores.
- o Sit-down restaurants and coffee shops without drive-thru service.
- o General office uses including professional office services such as insurance agents, doctors, and dentists.

The following uses should be restricted along the corridor:

- o Retail stores larger than 50,000 sq. ft. GFA per tenant space should be restricted to the east end of the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor and require screening from any adjoining residential properties.
- o Restaurants and other businesses with drive-thru service (fast-food and quick serve restaurants) should be restricted to major street intersections. The parking lot and drive-thrus should be screened from any adjacent residential properties.
- o Fuel sales (convenience stores with fuel sales) should be restricted to major street intersections and not be located adjacent to existing single family residential or otherwise heavily buffered.

The following uses should be prohibited along the corridor:

- o Automotive repair and service businesses including tires.
- o New or used automotive, truck, motorcycle, RV, or boat sales.
- o Delayed deposit credit institutions, payday loan and/or car title loan establishments
- o Pawn shops
- o Tobacco and e-cigarette (vape) shops (defined as any establishment where more than 40% of its sales come from the sale of tobacco e-cigarette related products.
- o Liquor stores (defined as any established where more than 40% of its sales come from the sale of alcohol for off-site consumption).
- o Adult entertainment businesses
- o Bars (defined as any establishment where more than 40% of its sales come from the sale of alcohol for on-site consumption).
- o After-hours businesses (defined as any business open during any time between the hours of 2:00 A.M. to 6:00 A.M. any day of the week and where patrons are allowed to bring their own beer and wine onto the business premises).
- o Contractor offices with indoor or outdoor storage.
- o Warehousing, distribution, or self-storage facilities or lots.

2. Establish design and use standards that support redevelopment on smaller lots, promote buildings that are in scale with the surrounding neighborhood.

The City should utilize the ReZone Cedar Rapids project to explore the development of form-based zoning districts that align with the goals and vision of the plan and encourage mixed-use, retail and residential development and redevelopment along the corridor.

The City should further consider creating special comprehensive design manual for the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor. This manual can summarize the design guidelines and standards for mixed-use, retail and multi-family development and redevelopment, the development review process, and any economic incentives or assistance that may be available within this corridor. Creating a comprehensive guide for development will help increase the rate and quality of new development within the corridor by removing unknowns from the review process, clearly communicating the development expectations and requirements, and advertising the economic incentives or assistance that may be available.

Form-based zoning standards should focus on addressing the following:

- o Promoting neotraditional site design with buildings facing the street and pedestrian circulation emphasized.
- o Limiting building height to no greater than 3 stories.
- o Reducing building and parking lot setback standards to allow for greater flexibility.
- o Providing options for buffering, based upon building and parking lot placement and building design, such as allowing a fence and landscaping in lieu of a 30 ft. wide buffer area.

2.04 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (LAND USE)

- o Reducing individual driveways onto Mt. Vernon Road and requiring shared parking lot driveways and cross-parking lot connections.
- o Reducing off-street parking requirements and credit for shared parking.
- o Establishing minimum streetscape and general site landscaping standards.
- o Creating special signage standards that include a focus on higher quality wall signage and ground monument signs in lieu of pole signs.

3. Explore strategies to focus retail and multi-family development and redevelopment to major intersections and existing commercial areas.

In order to preserve existing single family neighborhoods, new retail and multi-family development should only be approved near major street intersections and areas with significant existing commercial development. **Figures 27, 28 and 29 on page 22** identifies several areas that may be appropriate for future redevelopment if so desired by the property owner(s). The City may wish to consider modifying the future land use map from the EnvisionCR plan to ensure that this intent is clear. Specifically, the existing single family residential areas north and south of Mt. Vernon Road that are not near major street intersections but that are currently designated in the adopted future land use map as “Urban Medium Intensity” should be changed to the “Urban Low Intensity” or the “Urban Large Lot” land use designations. Doing so will clarify that it is the City’s intent that these existing single family neighborhoods be preserved and not redeveloped with more intense uses.

4. Evaluate the effectiveness of standard City financial incentive assistance programs that can benefit redevelopment of vacant or existing sites.

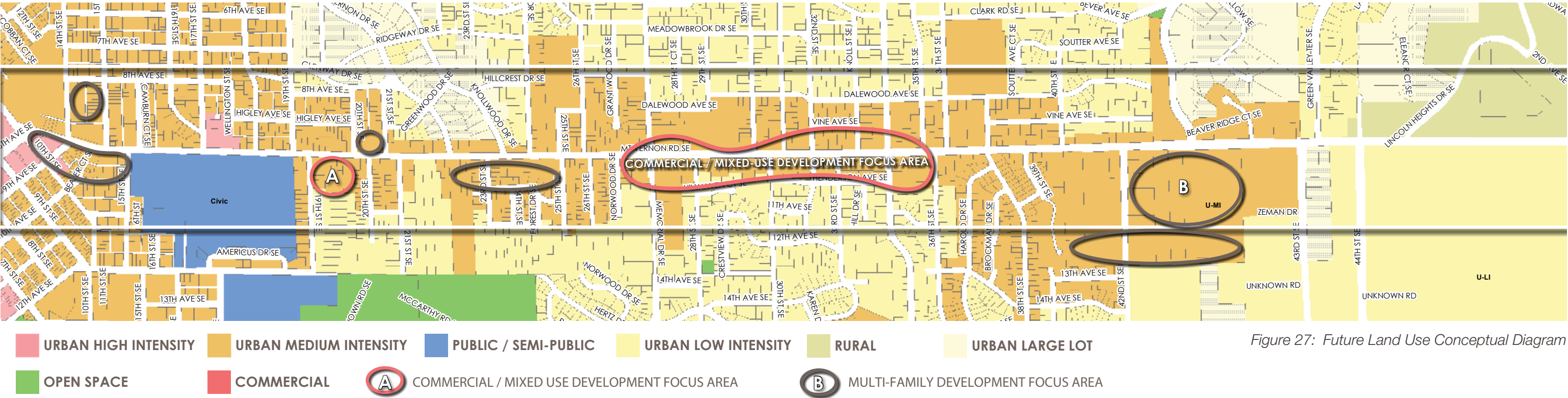
The original title of this action item started with “Continue to track” but was changed after the third open house to “Evaluate”. This indicates that the City will not only track the effectiveness of programs but also modify them if need be. The community has stated a clear desire that additional restaurants and quality neighborhood retailers be added and retained within the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor. The City should consider providing a guide detailing the incentive programs that are available for redevelopment of sites within the corridor (potentially a part of a comprehensive design manual as referenced in Land Use Action Item #2). These programs should be periodically evaluated to determine their effectiveness in attracting new desired retailers. Additional programs and incentives may be warranted to help offset the costs associated with redevelopment and in-fill development.

ADDITIONAL LAND USE COMMENTS

Implement stormwater best management practices as phased roadway construction projects take place.

Stormwater management analysis revealed few existing drainage concerns along the corridor. However, in an effort to reduce flood risk and lessen the corridor’s environmental impact, the City should endeavor to apply stormwater best management practices (BMP’s) to future paving projects, consider implementing BMP’s at All Saints and Erskine schools as educational demonstration sites as well as consider possible incentives for commercial property BMP’s through the City’s cost share program, stormwater utility, or State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs. Stormwater BMPs include using rain gardens, bioswales, and permeable pavers, which also can improve the aesthetics of an area. Stormwater BMPs can be included in the roadway median or along the edge of the ROW. Since the east end of the corridor drains into Indian Creek, which has a Master Plan, (see <http://indiancreekwatershed.weebly.com/the-plan.html>) any improvements in this region should be planned according to the goals of the Indian Creek Master Plan.

2.04 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (LAND USE)



2.05 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CHARACTER)

CHARACTER OVERVIEW

The Mt. Vernon Road Corridor, like many commercial corridors in the United States, is a physical representation of growth spanning nearly two and a half centuries of American history. It is simultaneously a celebration of one of the earliest transcontinental highway systems and of residential and commercial growth over time. It is both urban and rural. It is a thoroughfare and neighborhood connector.

The complexion of the road changes significantly from one end to the other. On the western end of the corridor, the road is decidedly urban in character, its beginning marking a transition from the urban core to residential neighborhood. The east end of the corridor is decidedly rural by contrast. A clear reflection of the corridors past as a highway. In between, the corridor is a mix of residential and commercial land uses in various states of prosperity.

Mt. Vernon Road connects local residents to their work in downtown Cedar Rapids but it is also a major industrial transportation corridor connecting grain processing companies to their rural supply chain. This contrasting use adds diversity to the district, but also creates challenges.

Throughout this planning process there has been much discussion with the public about the aesthetic character of the corridor. At present, it lacks the finish and luster of new, more thoughtfully developed and controlled areas of town. It is not homogenized in either its architectural style or streetscape character nor would one expect it to be, given the development time frame. It is very much a reflection of its time evidenced by historic homes close to downtown, transitioning to post-WWII builder homes along its “middle” stretch finally transitioning to commercial development near the east end of the study area.

The “character” of this development pattern is difficult to define and that is, perhaps, the greatest challenge of this plan. Homes and businesses deteriorate over time with lack of maintenance and upkeep and are eventually replaced by new construction utilizing building technologies of the time. Along a corridor like Mt. Vernon Road, this results in a visual cacophony of architectural styles and scale. Not only is it difficult to describe this character it is difficult to stitch it together with modern planning and design without losing some of the variety that makes it unique and interesting.

The primary goal of any aesthetic or character improvement in an area with the chronological development pattern of Mt. Vernon Road is unification. It is desirable to introduce elements, materials and places along the corridor that serve to unify existing entities while also guiding future development in a way that mitigates (to some degree) the existing idiosyncrasy.

Public input has been integral to this planning process. Streetscape character and aesthetics have been a popular topic of discussion and has yielded numerous excellent ideas for improving the Mt. Vernon Road experience.

The following goals were created based upon the public input received during the development of the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor Action Plan.

- **Improve the aesthetic appeal of the corridor**
- **Celebrate the historical significance of the corridor**
- **Reduce visual clutter along the corridor**

SUMMARIZED PUBLIC INPUT	ACTION ITEMS	DOT VOTING
• Improve aesthetics	<div>A</div> Provide a unique sense of place through streetscapes, gateways, and signage. <div>B</div> Identify future funding resources for enhanced maintenance and joint marketing opportunities such as a Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement District (SSMID). <div>C</div> Incorporate unifying plant materials throughout the Mt. Vernon Corridor. <div>D</div> Include Lincoln Highway identity as part of aesthetic improvements. <div>E</div> Provide educational signage and/or landmarks at historical sites along the corridor. <div>F</div> Identify established neighborhoods and provide signage to celebrate these neighborhoods. <div>G</div> When possible, bury overhead feeder lines and remove timber poles. <div>H</div> Reduce the quantity and size of commercial signage along Mt. Vernon Road. Consider eliminating pole signs as a sign option. <div>I</div> Plant additional street trees to unify appearance of Mt. Vernon Road where possible. <div>J</div> Evaluate the need for regular sidewalk and crosswalk inspection process and maintenance plan.	<div>A</div> 35
• Unattractive area		<div>B</div> 5
• Visible utilities		<div>C</div> 6
• Improve property maintenance		<div>D</div> 17
• Need district signage		<div>E</div> 6
• Build on Historic Lincoln Highway		<div>F</div> 8
• No cohesive architectural style or design		<div>G</div> 54
• Lack of character		<div>H</div> 31
• Losing sense of place		<div>I</div> 17
		<div>J</div> 23
GOALS		
• Improve the aesthetic appeal of the corridor.		
• Celebrate the historical significance of the corridor.		
• Reduce visual clutter along the corridor.		

Figure 30: Character Voting Summary

The following table shows the anticipated schedule for when efforts will be intitiated on each action item.

Action Item	Timeframe
When possible, bury overhead feeder lines and remove timber poles as part of current projects including Paving for Progress projects.	2 to 3 Years
Explore and draft policy for the undergrounding of utilities as part of future projects and franchise agreements.	2 to 3 Years
Provide a unique sense of place through streetscapes and unifying elements	4 to 5 Years
Implement a streetscape master plan.	Within 1 Year
Reduce the quantity and size of commercial signage along Mt. Vernon Road. Consider eliminating pole signs as a sign option.	Within 1 Year
Evaluate the need for regular sidewalk and crosswalk inspection process and maintenance plan.	2 to 3 Years
Include Lincoln Highway identity as part of aesthetic improvements included in a streetscape master plan.	2 to 3 Years
Plant additional street trees to unify appearance of Mt. Vernon Road where possible.	Beyond 5 Years
Identify established neighborhoods and provide signage to celebrate these neighborhoods	2 to 3 Years
Incorporate unifying plant materials throughout the Mt. Vernon Corridor.	4 to 5 Years
Provide educational signage and/or landmarks at historical sites along the corridor.	2 to 3 Years
Identify future funding resources for enhanced maintenance and join marketing opportunities such as Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement District (SSMID).	2 to 3 Years

CHARACTER ACTION ITEMS

From the goals listed above, the following action items were developed and prioritized by the community during the September 12, 2016 public open house. See Figure 30 above for voting results from that meeting. As part of a broader discussion throughout the project and at the open houses, additional character recommendations and insight for the corridor were developed beyond the 10 action items listed and are incorporated below.

1. When possible, bury overhead feeder lines and remove timber poles as part of current projects including Paving for Progress projects.

Architectural style and building type alone are not responsible for the chaotic appearance of the Mt. Vernon Road corridor. Within the study area, public and private utility structures are a major contributor to the visual clutter that, if absent, would dramatically change the feel of the roadway. It may not be feasible for many reasons, not the least of which is cost, to remove, relocate or bury the overhead utility lines that parallel the road along its southern edge. We must accept that the overhead utilities may remain in place for the foreseeable future.

It is, however, the planning team’s recommendation that all overhead electrical transmission and distribution lines be removed, relocated or buried when it is feasible to do so. This will, more than any other aesthetic enhancement, alter the character of the roadway for the better.

This action item was modified after the third open house into two phases in order to address overhead utilities. This action item addresses planned improvement projects.

2. Explore and draft policy for the undergrounding of utilities as a part of future projects and franchise agreements.

As noted in the previous action item, the original action item regarding overhead utilities was split into two. While the first action item addresses currently planned improvement projects, there is a need to look at this issue from a regulatory standpoint. To achieve this, the City will explore ways to require undergrounding utilities through city codes, policies, or franchise agreements.

3. Provide a unique sense of place through streetscapes and unifying elements

Planning is an important mechanism when working to make cohesive physical improvements across a diverse mix of existing architectural and development patterns. This corridor action plan lays the ground work for several subsidiary planning efforts that, when complete, will do the difficult work of guiding redevelopment in a clear, concise and meaningful way.

- Form-Based Zone Districts established through ReZone Cedar Rapids will help the standards for development within a specific area of the city. Form-based zone districts on Mt. Vernon Road would address basic site design requirements for new residential, mixed—use and commercial construction. These requirements may also apply for major renovation projects. Form-based zone districts will further define streetscape and site standards that address drive, building and parking placement, screening, signage, lighting, and plant materials. Form-based zone districts can aid in the detailed design of projects to ensure compatibility with the surrounding area. Without such guidance, development may occur haphazardly and results in a physical realm that lacks the appropriate scale, character and amenities that make for great places.
- Incorporate unifying elements
 - Within and adjacent to any public right-of-way (ROW) there are any number of elements that contribute to (or detract from) the roadway’s function, safety, efficiency, and aesthetic appeal. The attention one pays to these elements will change depending on how they are using the road. Pedestrians have very different needs than motorists; through-travelers have very different needs (and experiences) than destination seekers whether they are operating a motor vehicle, utilizing public transportation, riding a bike or walking. Regardless of the mode of transport, the common elements that affect one’s experience are similar and can be categorized very generally into two categories. Vertical elements are those which protrude from the ground and have the potential to obstruct views and/or alter paths of travel and included everything from trees, to light poles, to signs, traffic signals, and street furnishings. Horizontal elements are those that affect and guide one’s path (and mode) of travel and include pavements, ground covers (grasses, mulch beds, etc.) and bodies of water. Topography, regardless of whether it is paved or landscaped, may alter the path of travel.
 - Where many competing architectural styles and scales exist along a roadway we must look to those common elements for unification. Linear spaces, like roadways, are defined by the buildings on either side and accentuated by the elements and materials in between. Repeating elements within a corridor that are consistent in type, style, color, and height serve to reinforce that the space is special or unique or, at the very least, that it is well considered. Along Mt. Vernon Road, introducing a standard roadway and a standard pedestrian light fixture is one way to create a unified look.
 - Many of the properties, both residential and commercial, along Mt. Vernon Road sit higher than the roadway itself and utilize a steep slope or retaining wall to mitigate grade change between the building and the street. Regardless of which is utilized it is most common for the wall or slope to be situated immediately adjacent to the public sidewalk to preserve as much “flat” ground as possible closer to the building. Though this is most common along the predominantly residential stretches of the road, there are a few areas within the commercial sectors that employ the same approach. Introducing a common material for all the retaining walls is an improvement that would have a dramatic effect on the overall aesthetic character of the corridor. Where a steep slope affects the grade change a wall should be constructed in its place. In addition to using a common material, all walls should be constructed to a minimum height to insure a consistent visual appearance is achieved.

2.05 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CHARACTER)

- In commercial areas where no grade change device is needed and parking abuts the property line, a similar wall type should be constructed to partially screen parking areas from view of passing motorists. The net effect will be a reduction of visual clutter and a reinforcement of the common aesthetic elements in both the residential and commercial corridor'ss.
- Markers and gateways at key locations along the corridor would serve to both identify the corridor as special place and reinforce the brand or identity defined during a branding study. Though not as common or repetitious as other potential unifying elements, markers and gateways are strong symbols and important wayfinding elements. See **Figure 31** for gateway and marker precedent images.
- Standardize Facilities
 - Transportation corridors are, fundamentally, linear experiences connecting two or more points. Motorists, for better or worse, desire (demand) an experience that is short in both duration and length and devoid of conflict. Pedestrians desire the same. When forced into the same space, it is nearly impossible to avoid some conflict between the two. The goal then becomes, conflict minimization. One way to achieve the goal is to standardize and identify facilities in a way that clearly indicates which user has the right-of-way. Signage is the most common device employed to do this but other devices can be used to reinforce or prioritize one user experience over another.
 - One common area where this is done is at roadway intersections. Here, pedestrians and motorists are most likely to experience conflict as pedestrians are crossing the roadway. Introducing circulation patterns and materials that clearly identify their purpose is important to setting expectations for safe passage regardless of the mode of transportation.
 - Installing brick pavers at high traffic cross-walks is one improvement that is commonly used in urban areas. The texture and color difference between the crosswalk and the travel lane is a visual cue to let the motorist know that they are in an area that is different while reinforcing that the crosswalk is a “safe-space” for the pedestrian within the roadway. Shortening the distance from one side of the street to the other further increases pedestrian safety. Doing this consistently along a corridor will let motorists know that pedestrians have not been forgotten but will typically result in heightened awareness of their presence which results in slower traffic speeds and fewer motorist/pedestrian accidents.
 - Expanding on the idea of paving crosswalks with brick, paving whole intersections in brick or a similar material is not only attractive but has the net effect of slowing traffic speed through the entire intersection through increased awareness of other motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.
 - Crosswalks and intersections are components that contribute to slower traffic speeds along the corridor but they do not work by themselves. The most effective approaches incorporate many other standardized elements including plant material, lighting and light poles, bus stops, and other street furnishings. These elements, when thoughtfully designed and appropriately placed within and along the corridor provide much needed facilities, improve the overall look and character, and most importantly, increase safety and comfort for all.

4. Implement a Streetscape Master Plan

A Streetscape Master Plan is one such subsidiary effort that will take the big ideas generated by this plan and give them purchase in the physical realm. Its purpose is to define the actual streetscape improvements that can be made along the corridor. Products, materials and details will be identified and reviewed for appropriateness at the same time as their actual location will be defined. This Streetscape Master Plan would differ from the corridor action plan by applying the recommendations to a scaled conceptual Streetscape plan for the corridor. It would allow planning, decision making and conceptual design to occur ahead of time for many of the roadway elements to ensure a uniform and cohesive aesthetic for the long-range vision. This document would conceptually address and locate not only engineering features such as turning lanes, medians and access points, but also aesthetic and character building features such walks and gateway treatments, landscaped medians, ground plane materials, walls, parking lot screening, bus stop treatments and landscaped areas. In addition to locating the various elements along the corridor this plan would provide a “Kit of Parts” containing recommended elements such as materials for pavement, walls, branding efforts, signage and gateway styles, architectural screening and specific site amenities such as benches and pedestrian lighting to be used along the corridor. Because the minimum right-of-way will be acquired over time through the redevelopment process and the full vision of the corridor will take many years, it is recommended the City consider establishing a well-planned and engineered graphic Streetscape Master Plan prior to phased implementation of corridor improvements. This Streetscape Plan could be reviewed and updated periodically. Once complete, the City will possess a guide for phased reconstruction that can be shared with multiple consultants to ensure that detailed design for each phase of the work is consistent with the next and, most importantly, the overall vision of the corridor.

5. Reduce the quantity and size of commercial signage along Mt. Vernon Road. Consider eliminating pole signs as a sign option.

- Study the City's sign ordinance as part of ReZone Cedar Rapids.
 - Signage, especially commercial/business signage is a significant contributor to (or detractor from) the character of any neighborhood or commercial corridor's. Signage standards have long been employed by municipalities to balance the competing interests of business clamoring for attention with those of neighborhood residents who wish to reduce the clutter and confusion that results when signs are frequent and overwhelming in size. More and more, cities have found that reducing the allowable sign size while at the same time regulating the materials that can be used in their construction makes for nicer streetscapes without adversely affecting local businesses.
 - In new, suburban, development and in progressive cities is very common to see business signage limited to ground-mounted monument signs built of high-quality materials like brick and stone.
 - Along Mt. Vernon Road it is easy to imagine that a similar treatment would significantly improve the character of the corridor's. While this cannot be applied retroactively, it is possible to make changes to the City's Sign Ordinance that would restrict size, placement and material for any new business signage. Over time, as redevelopment occurs, existing signs could be replaced with compliant ground-mounted signage that would dramatically improve the overall aesthetic of Mt. Vernon Road.

6. Evaluate the need for regular sidewalk and crosswalk inspection process and maintenance plan.

Developing and maintaining a consistent width sidewalk along both sides of the street is a way to create a unified pedestrian experience. Using a higher quality paving material in select places along the roadway and even following a regular sidewalk and crosswalk inspection and maintenance plan are ways to elevate the pedestrian experience and should be considered.

Repaving and restriping the roadway would go a long way towards improving both the look and feel of the corridor. Installing traffic signals and signage that use similarly (identically) colored poles will help to unify the aesthetics from one end of the corridor to the other. Adding banner signs and decorative elements to common lighting elements will further contribute to the aesthetic enhancement.

7. Include Lincoln Highway identity as part of aesthetic improvements in a Streetscape Master Plan.

- Consider a branding study to determine an appropriate brand for the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor.
 - Mt. Vernon Road, as discussed previously, was a part of one of the United States’ first transcontinental highway systems. Mt. Vernon Road was technically added to the Lincoln Highway system in the Highway’s third generation realignment effectively routing transcontinental and cross-state traffic away from Marion to the north. While not part of the original roadway, elements along Mt. Vernon Road bear the Lincoln Highway markings and brand.
 - Throughout Iowa, the Lincoln Highway is a source of pride that has been preserved and celebrated to varying degrees. This is something that hasn’t been explored along Mt. Vernon Road and could be. A Branding Study would look at the corridor’s history and current character as means of uncovering a potential new identity for this area of town. Developing and reinforcing this identity will help to establish Mt. Vernon Road as a unique place in Cedar Rapids that is a source of pride for local residents while also encouraging growth from private development interests.

8. Plant additional street trees to unify appearance of Mt. Vernon Road where possible.

Additional street trees would provide a unifying element across the various street conditions and land uses and soften the look of the corridor.

9. Identify established neighborhoods and provide signage to celebrate these neighborhoods.

In the same way that improvements in the commercial signage impact the corridor, quality signage identifying established neighborhood can enhance the corridor and celebrate neighborhood character and history giving the corridor a unique sense of place.

10. Incorporate unifying plant materials throughout the Mt. Vernon Corridor.

Introducing common plant materials on either side of or within the right-of-way is another way to improve the aesthetics of any transportation corridor. In new roadway design and construction, common plantings are one of the least expensive but most effective aesthetic enhancements. Given the constraints in width of the available ROW it does not seem likely that a replanting approach except for an occasional center median, will be feasible along Mt. Vernon Road.

11. Provide educational signage and/or landmarks at historical sites along the corridor.

Corridor character can be bolstered through signage that identifies important landmarks, gateways and historical sites along the corridor. This is best accomplished as part of a branding effort that ties the character of site elements and style of signage together for the entire corridor’s. Reinforcing character and brand in this way contributes to a unique sense of place.

12. Identify future funding resources for enhanced maintenance and joint marketing opportunities such as Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement Corridor’s (SSMID).

Corridor enhancements such as recommended for the Mt. Vernon Road Corridor require funding for planning, implementation, and maintenance. Tools such as SSMID can aid in providing those needed sources of income and provide resources that can perpetuate success of the corridor and should be explored as part of this effort. A SSMID is a defined area, or district, where property owners have agreed to an additional tax to be used for funding improvements or additional services.

ADDITIONAL CHARACTER COMMENTS

Continue to evaluate and work on managing odor generated by the Water Pollution Control facility.

Public survey responses relayed numerous complaints regarding the foul odor that is occasionally evident in portions of the corridor – particularly the east end. This part of the corridor is in closer proximity to the Water Pollution Control (WPC) facility, which is the City’s sewer treatment facility that provides this service to not only Cedar Rapids but also the cities of Robins, Hiawatha, Marion, and parts of Linn County.

The City is sympathetic to odor concerns and continually strives to reduce odorous air emitted from WPC. With the goal of minimizing odors, the City began a two-year long project to build two new bio towers in addition to rehabbing two existing bio scrubbers. This project will provide additional ways to manage odor at the facility; however, even after these improvements, certain meteorological conditions may still generate noticeable odors.

2.05 CORRIDOR ACTION PLAN (CHARACTER)



Stacked Stone Wall Facade



Form Liner Wall Facade



Segmental Retaining Wall



Site Furnishings



Site Furnishings



Bus Shelter



Special Paving at Selected Areas



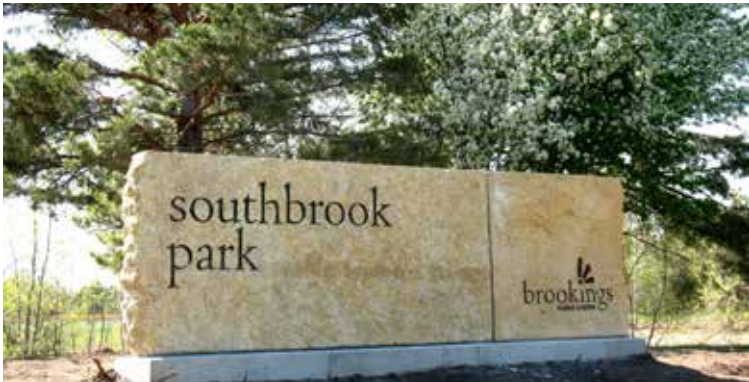
Landscaping at Center Median



Landscaping at Center Median



Gateway Signage



Gateway Signage



Branding Signage



Branding at Center Median



Figure 31: Character Gateway Plan and Precedent Imagery