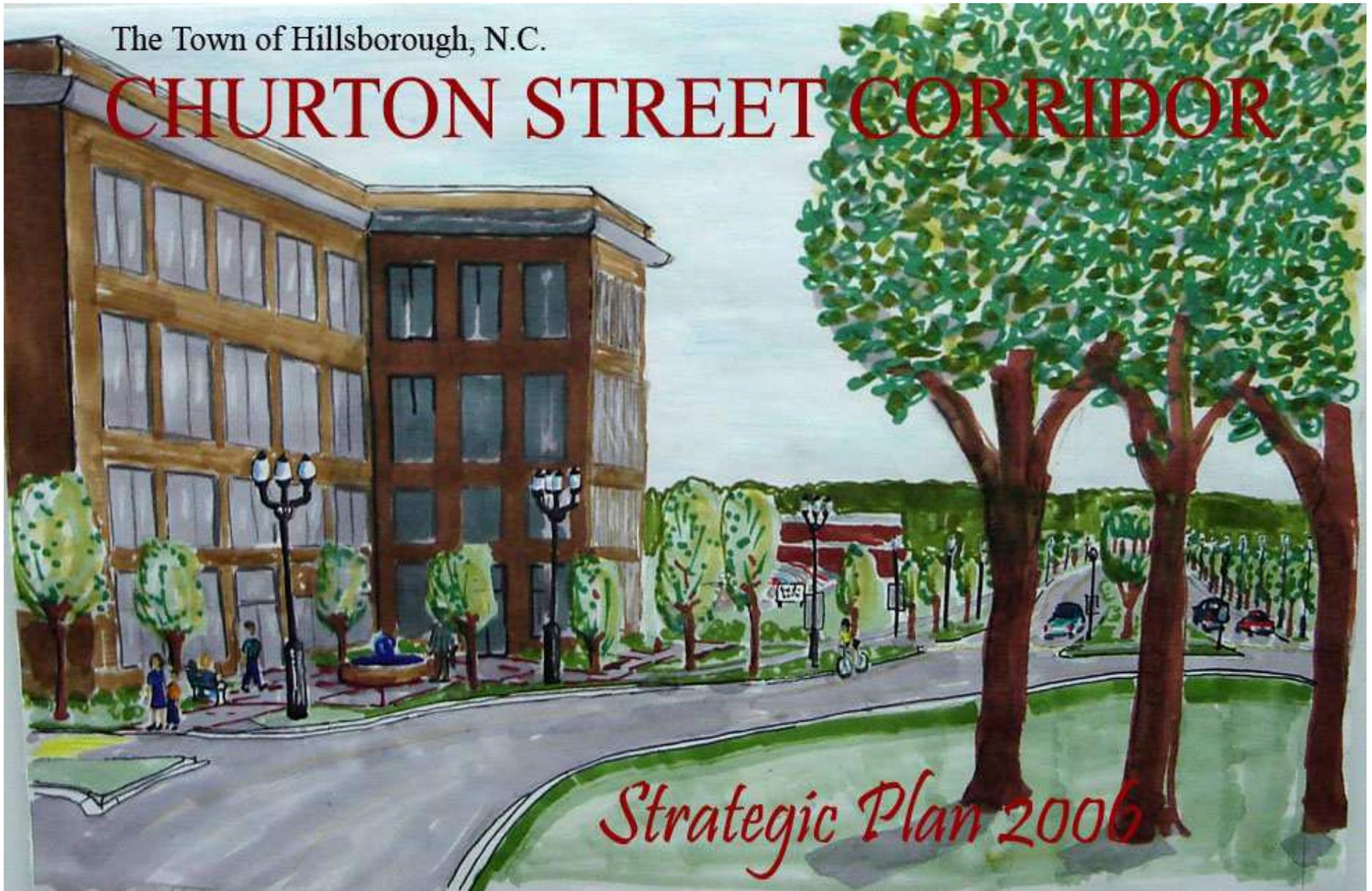


The Town of Hillsborough, N.C.

# CHURTON STREET CORRIDOR



*Strategic Plan 2006*

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE - DIVISION OF COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

ASHEVILLE - WINSTON-SALEM - RALEIGH - FAYETTEVILLE - WASHINGTON



CHURTON STREET STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

Lauri Michel, Chair, Tourism Board  
Richard Silverman, Board of Adjustment  
Mike Gering, Town Board  
Robbin Taylor-Hall, Chamber of Commerce  
David Remington, Bryant Warren, Planning Board

Cathleen Turner, *Alliance for Historic Hillsborough* (staff)  
Margaret Hauth, *Planning Director, Town of Hillsborough* (staff)

Developed with assistance from the

***North Carolina Division of Community Assistance, Community  
Planning Program***

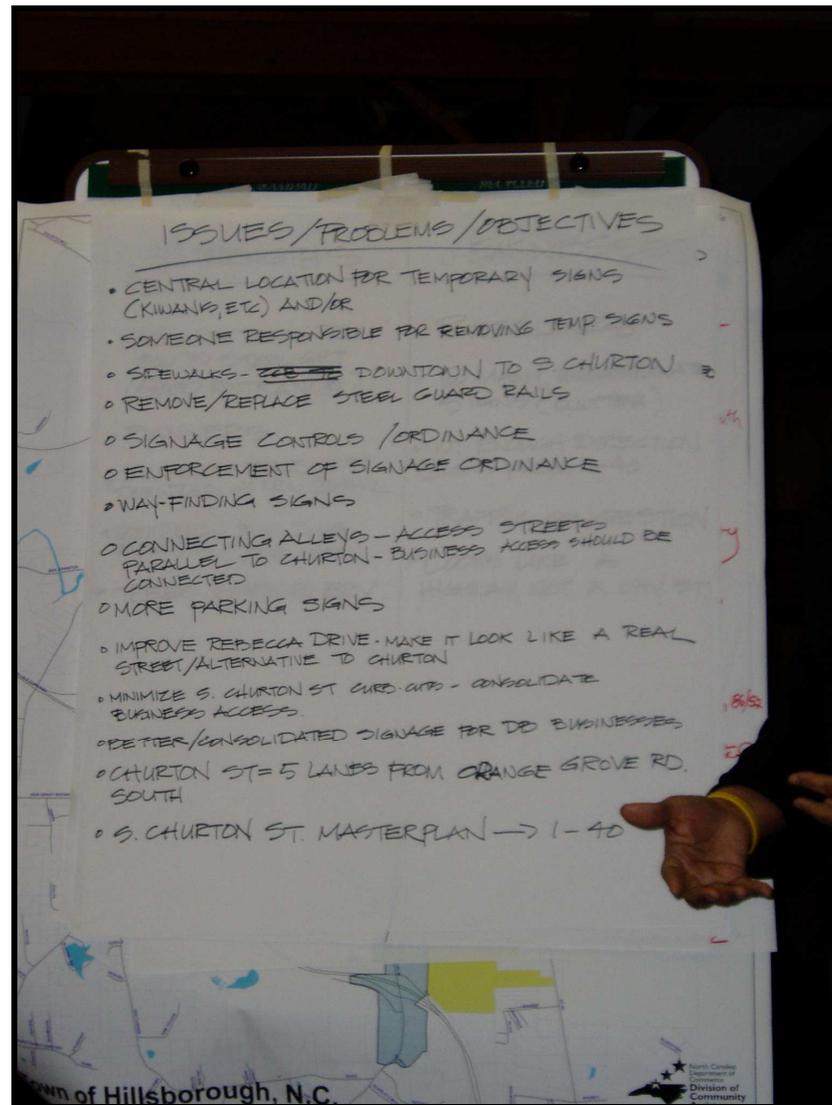
Anne K. Morris, Community Development Planner  
Susan J. Suggs, Landscape Architect

A special thanks is due to all of the community members, business  
and property owners and interested individuals not listed here who  
contributed their time, effort and great ideas during workshops  
and other public input sessions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: PLAN DEVELOPMENT	6
Introduction	7
Current Uses and Functions.	9
Planning Process	13
Citizen Input	15
Corridor Assessment	21
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL PLAN	27
Plan Overview	28
Transportation Improvements	29
Corridor Revitalization	62
Signage Along the Corridor	77
CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN	85
Overview	87
Implementation Tools	88
Action Plan	91





# Chapter 1: Plan Development



The Churton Street Strategic Plan was initiated with the goal of developing a strategic plan for the future design and development of the Churton Street Commercial Corridor in Hillsborough, North Carolina. The process came about as a result of a successful student design competition in 2003, sponsored by the Hillsborough Tourism Board. The competition generated many interesting ideas and excitement within the community. Tourism board members sought to carry this momentum forward and to develop a comprehensive plan that would include workable solutions the Town could implement. They asked the NC Division of Community Assistance (NC DCA), Community Planning Program for facilitation and plan development assistance.

## Plan Mission

Recognizing the important role Churton Street plays in the civic, cultural and economic life of Hillsborough, this plan aims to:

- improve the appearance and economic vitality of the Churton Street Corridor,
- to protect and celebrate the diverse historic and cultural identity of the town,
- to promote environmental stewardship, and
- to encourage and support an active lifestyle.

## Planning Area

The planning area encompasses those parcels of land that directly front onto or have access to Churton Street from the I-40 interchange, north to the Highways 57/86 split, as well as greenfield parcels that as a result of planned development or transportation improvements will have direct access to and impact on Churton Street. It is 4.25 miles in length from just south of the I-40 interchange to just north of the 57/86 split.

## Vision of Churton Street

*We* envision a future where Hillsborough is an innovative, future-focused town that daily celebrates its diverse and storied heritage.

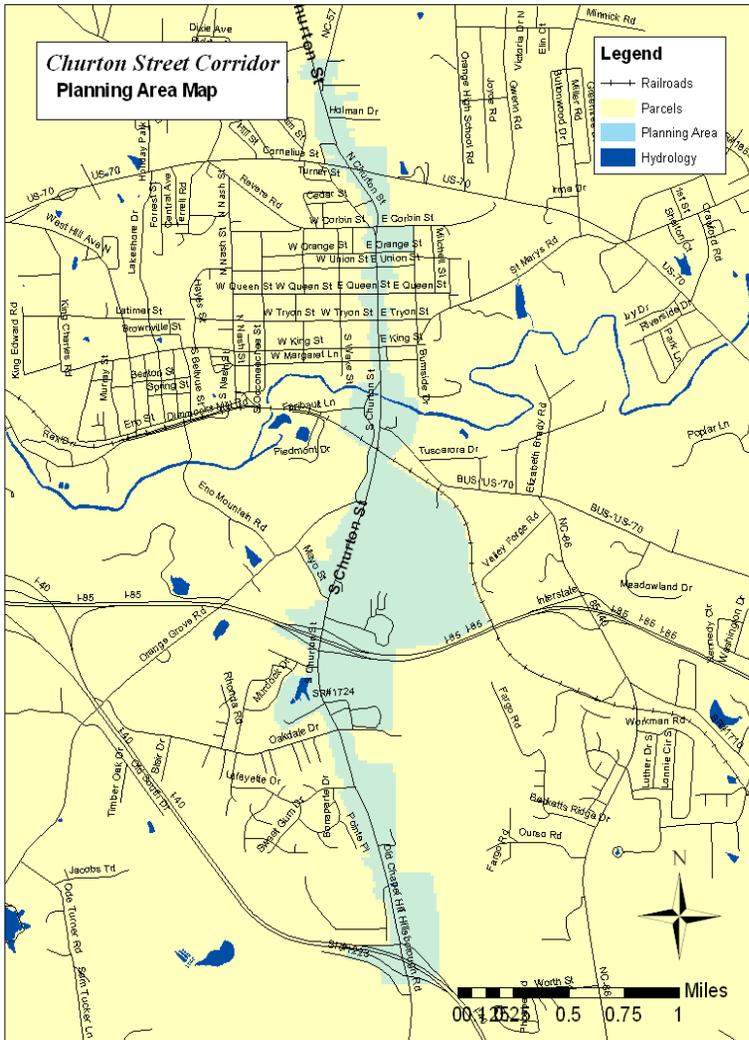
Well-landscaped and attractively signed entryways will signal to visitors that they have arrived at a special, historic place.

A planted median lined with flowering trees turns a car trip into a journey by slowing traffic and allowing visitors to enjoy Hillsborough's historic charms. Residents and visitors alike can easily enjoy all that Hillsborough has to offer, as both the southern and northern districts are well-connected with sidewalks and bike paths. A canopy of trees shades the wide sidewalks and on-street and off-street bicycle routes have been thoughtfully planned and signed.

Well-placed signage enhances the visitor's overall experience. Public parking is easy to locate, and shops, restaurants, and other destinations are easily located through the use of a wayfinding system that guides visitors through Hillsborough.

The historic downtown is the cultural and economic center of a vibrant community that bustles with tourists, entrepreneurs, artists and residents. It continues to serve as the hub of town and county government, and civic life.

The neighborhood districts north and south of the historic district have come to life, creating working and living environments that support the unique character of Hillsborough. The Riverwalk along the Eno, part of the Mountains to Sea Trail, is a natural and cultural heritage site that has become a popular destination.



## Plan Objectives

The recommendations and strategies outlined in this plan will help the Town achieve the following objectives:

1. Foster the development of an urban environment along Churton Street that complements the historic character of downtown Hillsborough, welcomes visitors, and is a desirable destination in which to live and work.
2. Identify and plan for districts within the Churton Street Corridor that display a common character or types of land uses.
3. Develop community entrances that convey a sense of arrival and reflect the character of Hillsborough.
4. Improve the appearance of Churton Street and the properties adjacent to Churton Street.
5. Encourage private investment along the corridor.
6. Improve mobility and access for users of the corridor, including automobiles, pedestrians and bicyclists.
7. Improve the appearance and effectiveness of signage throughout the corridor.

Churton Street forms the central transportation corridor serving Hillsborough and its environs. A state-maintained highway, it is known as NC Highway 86 outside of Hillsborough's city limits. It connects Hillsborough to Chapel Hill/Carrboro and I-40 to the south and to Caswell County, and Person County via Hwy 57, to the north. An I-85 interchange in the southern portion of the corridor, just south of the Shoppes at Daniel Boone, between US 70A and I-40, also provides a key commuter route to Durham and Greensboro and is an entry point for visitors to Hillsborough. The corridor is intersected by US Hwy 70 at two points, 70A or Business at the south entrance to the historic downtown and the Hwy 70 Bypass at North Hills.

## *Historic Downtown*



In addition to serving as a key transportation link for commuters and visitors from all directions, Churton Street serves as “Main Street” for historic downtown Hillsborough, which boasts an attractive commercial district that increasingly

attracts interesting small shops and high quality dining venues. The local historic district encompasses both the commercial district and vital residential neighborhoods that include many fine examples of historical building styles common to central North Carolina. Hillsborough serves as the seat of the Orange County government complex. Thus, the county is a key user of downtown land and much daily activity in downtown centers around the functions of the courthouse and other city and county government activities, providing a stable weekday population base. The Eno River forms the southern boundary of the historic district. The town has plans for a recreational path along the river that ties into the statewide Mountains to Sea trail. Also located along the river, a

reconstructed Occaneechee palisade acknowledges the region's Native American heritage. Large swaths of open space lie adjacent to the river and the county government complex, contributing to the natural feel of the river area. This plan endorses all the improvements recommended for downtown in the Downtown Hillsborough Appearance Improvements Plan of 1998. It was this plan that inspired a discussion of the entire Churton Street Corridor.

## *South Churton*

Outside of the historic district, the development along the corridor has developed in a seemingly ad-hoc manner over time. The majority of land use in the southern portion of Churton is auto-oriented and includes such uses as manufactured home dealers, automobile dealerships, restaurants (both sit-down and drive-in or fast food types), grocery stores, banks and many other small retail and service establishments that serve the daily needs of residents. Parcels are divided into a number of aging shopping centers as well as businesses on individual parcels. Many of the land uses surrounding the I-85 interchange are oriented to serving the needs of the traveler. Businesses include drive-in restaurants, hotels, a car-wash and the Shoppes at Daniel Boone, which has functioned for several decades as a regional hub for antiques dealers and other tourist-oriented businesses and attractions. Today, the center encompasses many small retail tenants that serve local needs as well.



The neighborhood of Cornwallis Hills marks the transition point between urban and rural development along Churton Street. Much of the land use south of Cornwallis Hills is rural in character. Some residential

development exists at rural densities, but much of the land is currently vacant. This will soon change, however, as plans for a large scale mixed-use development called Waterstone are in the development pipeline. Waterstone will encompass 337 acres and include 184 single family homes, 334 apartments, and 66 townhomes; approximately 693,000 square feet of office space, 695,000 square feet of retail space, 130 room hotel with an 8,000 square foot restaurant, as well as a community college adjacent to the I-40 interchange along Churton Street. This development will greatly change the character of south Churton and will be a catalyst for new development and redevelopment of existing properties along Churton Street and in Hillsborough as a whole.



In addition to commercial uses of land, a number of institutional and government uses occupy a significant portion of land along south Churton Street. The North Carolina Department of Transportation operates a maintenance facility between I-85 and I-40. The North Carolina Department of Prisons operates a minimum security prison adjacent to the NC DOT site. Across Churton Street from these uses is a large apartment complex.

Other single family neighborhoods lie adjacent to the corridor and these residents are important users of the corridor.

## *North Churton*

The area between Queen Street and Corbin Street functions as a transition from the historic downtown and the North Hills area. This transition zone is part of the historic district and is residential in character. The Corbin/Churton intersection is a gateway between the historic district North Hills and is bordered by The Town office complex to the southeast and on the southwest corner by an recent renovation of an older service station, which has been converted into an attractive office building.

The North Hills shopping area serves the everyday needs of low to moderate income neighborhoods of residential areas to the west of Churton Street. It includes a mix of retail businesses, offices, services on the east side of Churton Street south of Highway 70 and a residential area located on the west side of Churton Street between Corbin Street



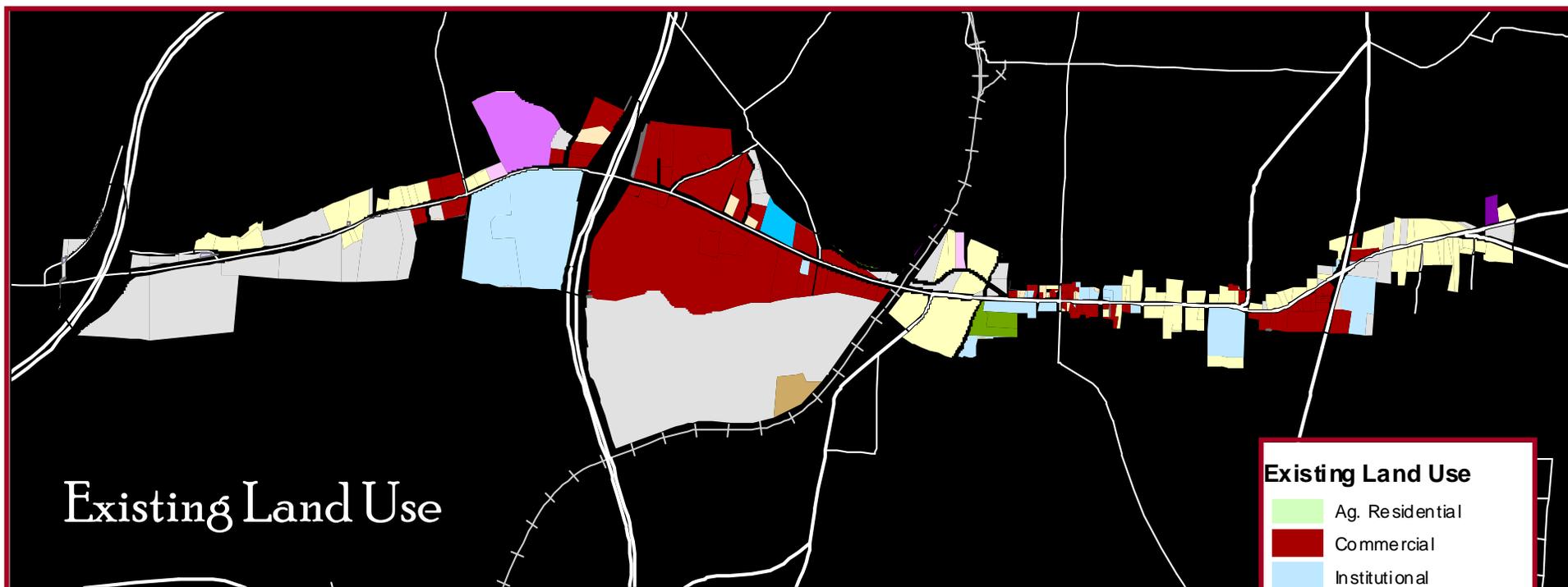
*North Hills shopping center at Churton and US 70 Bypass.*

and Highway 70 Bypass. Development patterns in this area have

evolved in an ad-hoc manner. The 1960s-era shopping center consists of the original strip of stores as well as a number of outparcels. The center occupies a prominent site at the corner of Churton and US 70. While much of the center is ripe for redevelopment, new development has occurred along Churton Street on the outparcels, which cut off the main part of the shopping center from Churton Street.

The Churton Street/US 70 Business intersection currently functions as the rural transition point between Hillsborough and the more rural and residential uses to the north. Two gas/convenience stores occupy the northwest corner of the Churton/US 70 Business intersection. Across from these sits a small cemetery on the northeast corner of this busy intersection.

The area from the Hwy 55/Hwy 86 split south to the intersection of Churton Street and Hwy 70 forms the northern most section of the planning area. Currently, this area is rural residential in character and serves as a transition between the countryside and the Town of Hillsborough. Minimal commercial development exists in this part of the corridor. The intersection of Hwy 70 and Churton is a prominent gateway along the corridor.



DCA consultants conducted a windshield survey of current uses of land\*\* in the corridor. The table below shows the percentages of various uses of land within the planning area as of May 2005.

Land Use Type	Acres	%
Commercial	171.0	44.0
Single Family Residential	96.8	24.9
Institutional	82.1	21.1
Multi-Family Residential	22.0	5.7

Land Use Type	Acres	%
Recreation	5.3	1.4
Office	4.7	1.2
Industrial	1.7	0.4
<b>Total*</b>	388.6	100

\*Excludes vacant parcels (256 acres or 40% of total planning area of 644 acres as shown on map).

\*\* Excludes ROW

## Overview

The table below shows a timeline of planning process with key tasks and events. The items in red were planned community involvement events. The planning committee met on a monthly basis at the Hillsborough Town Barn to work through the process. The planning committee was composed of members of identified stakeholder groups who worked with NC DCA to develop a short and long range plan for the Churton Street Commercial Corridor. The public was invited to attend these open meetings, and individuals who attended were included in the ongoing discussion and decision-making process. The committee used electronic media, including a website and email to communicate within the planning committee and with the general public on the progress of the plan.

### *Process Timeline*

#### **Initial Public Participation – January 05-April 05**

- Public Workshops
- Open House
  - Workshop Voting
  - Development Types Survey

#### **Corridor Analysis – April 05-October 05**

- Pedestrian Safety Roadshow
- Analysis of Development Potential
- Corridor Assessment

#### **Plan Formulation – October 05 to May 06**

- Visioning, Development of Goals, Objectives
- Signage Discussion
- Plan Recommendations
- Presentation and feedback from elected boards

#### **Implementation Planning – April 06 to June 06**

- Development of Design Guidelines
- Action Plan
- Open House events

## Corridor Analysis

Plan development included an assessment of the corridor to identify strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats and key issues to be addressed in the plan. Also presented is a development analysis of the corridor that was used to identify development and redevelopment opportunities. Assessment of the Churton Street Corridor included several methodologies; these included public input, field assessment, and review of existing plans and studies. These methodologies informed the corridor assessment and formed the basis for the plan.

## Plan Formulation

Based on the corridor assessment, the committee with the assistance of NC DCA, developed a corridor conceptual plan, an implementation plan and recommended design guidelines. These are the main components of this plan.

### *Public Input*

The committee provided several opportunities for public input throughout the planning process. These included:

- two initial **Public Input Workshops**,
- an **Open House** that invited response to the workshop ideas and included a pictorial survey of development types,
- a **Pedestrian-Safety Roadshow** that taught pedestrian safety concepts and including a walking assessment of north Churton Street, and,
- a **Community Meeting** that focused on signage in the corridor.
- Two **Open Houses** to present plan results.
- Presentations to Town Board, Planning Board and Chamber of Commerce

In addition, a website for the project was established and result of public input meetings and upcoming events were published on the project site as well as the town’s website. Also, several newspaper articles featured information about the development of the plan. Brief summaries of the public participation events are provided below. The appendices at the

back of the plan include complete reports of the event proceedings and results.

### *Plan Development*

The committee worked with the DCA consultants to process the information gathered during the first part of the planning process and developed goals and recommendations for each major section of the plan and for the four main corridor districts, with more emphasis on those south of the historic district and north of the historic district.

Meetings were open to the public and advance notice was provided to a key group of stakeholders, including property owners and others who had expressed interest. The planning board was given regular updates and two feedback sessions in March and May 2006 were held to get detailed feedback from elected and appointed boards and other interested parties.

Additional public input was obtained at a follow-up Open House in June and a full presentation of the plan before the Town Board is anticipated in June 2006. Plan development followed a community-driven approach that began and ended with broad citizen involvement. The ideas and preferences that emerged from the various workshops, open houses and discussion sessions formed the basis for the recommendations of the plan.

Below is a summary of the top priorities that were developed and voted on by citizens, property and business owners, residents and other stakeholders. They are followed by brief summaries of the main public involvement meetings: the initial public workshops and the initial Open House that offered an opportunity to vote on these ideas and to participate in a Development Types survey.

### The Public's Top Issues:

- Emphasize walkability, pedestrian safety, and trail links throughout the corridor.
- Bury utility lines.
- Develop strategies for managing traffic flow and congestion along Churton Street.  
*(consolidate curb cuts, provide way-finding, develop secondary access roads)*
- Reduce sign clutter.
- Develop and implement clear building design and sign guidelines that emphasize local design cues over corporate identities.
- Make landscaping a prominent component of Churton Street roadway and streetscape design.
- Ensure proper maintenance of landscapes.
- Plan for the redevelopment of existing commercial development.
- Provide public transportation links between Chapel Hill and Hillsborough.

## Public Workshops

Two opportunities for initial citizen input were scheduled at the outset of the planning process. The planning group identified a list of property owners, business owners and citizens that live along the corridor and invited them through a letter and follow-up telephone calls to participate in the workshops. Additionally the workshops were advertised to the general public in local papers, on the town's website and on the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough website.

The first workshop was held January 24<sup>th</sup> at the Daniel Boone Big Barn Convention Center at 2 pm. Due to adverse weather the first workshop, originally scheduled for January 22, was rescheduled for February 21<sup>st</sup>, at 6 pm in the Town Barn. Each workshop began with an open house and a chance to review the design competition entries from 2004. Then, following a brief orientation, each workshop broke up into small groups and examined maps, aerial photos, and detail photos of a portion of the Churton Street Corridor.



*A participant in the first workshop examines a still photo of Churton Street*



*A group of participants in second workshop discusses the strengths and weakness of the corridor.*

Each group identified strengths and weaknesses of the assigned section and then they brainstormed issues the plan should address and potential solutions. Each group then presented their results to the larger group and had a chance to ask questions.

The first workshop was held January 24<sup>th</sup> at the Daniel Boone Big Barn Convention Center at 2 pm. Due to adverse weather the first workshop, originally scheduled for January 22, was rescheduled for February 21<sup>st</sup>, at 6 pm in the Town Barn.

Each workshop began with an open house and a chance to review the design competition entries from 2004. Then, following a brief orientation, each workshop broke up into small groups and examined maps, aerial photos, and detail photos of a portion of the Churton Street Corridor. They brainstormed solutions which were voted on at the Open House. Results of the voting are discussed on the following page.

**Workshop participants identified the following strengths and weakness of the corridor:**

**Strengths: North Churton**

Town Hall  
View of Town  
Blend of commercial and residential uses – nice transition  
Existing Retail and Services  
North Hills: convenient shopping  
Opportunities for landscaping  
Good traffic flow  
Redevelopment of Sinclair Station and Neighbour's Accounting  
Potential for Dev./Redevelopment  
Good mix of businesses  
Pending new development

**Strengths: South Churton**

View into Town from 86/70 stoplight (good entrance)  
Eno River  
Improved Traffic Flow  
Banners  
Transition zone – Historic Downtown à New Commercial  
Trees and Greenery  
Good destination for retail/antiques  
Daniel Boone Village has character, yet not cohesive  
Retail Mix  
Cluster of restaurants  
Accessibility

**Weaknesses: North Churton**

Signage clutter, looks cheap  
Looks run-down, ugly, out of character with Hillsborough  
Needs more redevelopment; high vacancy rate  
Hodge-podge architecture  
No standard of quality for buildings  
Junkyard and abandoned property @ town entrance  
Needs curb and gutter  
Lack of continuous sidewalks  
Too many curb cuts  
Turn lanes – too short  
No parks/landscaping/trees  
Lack of commitment to landscape maintenance

**Weaknesses: South Churton**

Clutter of power lines  
Too many, uncoordinated signs – creates clutter  
Not enough direction signs from I-40  
Traffic congestion  
Looks like a highway not a city street  
Ad-hoc road widening, turn lanes  
Dated shopping centers  
Need something to pull folks into Hillsborough  
“Welcome” sign doesn't stand out  
Commercial lots need design that's more in keeping with Hillsborough and better landscaped  
No turn lane at 70A = traffic backup

## Open House

An Open House was held on May 27, 2005 in downtown Hillsborough during a Last Friday downtown event. Open House participants were asked to consider the ideas that emerged from the earlier workshops and vote for those they felt were most important for Hillsborough. The ideas developed in the workshops were divided into five categories that generally corresponded with the categories of the picture preference survey, described below. These included: street edges, overall street image, signs, landscaping and gateways, and shopping environments.



*The community showed great interest in the development types survey.*

- **Street edges:** ideas that emphasized walkability and pedestrian safety, including the installation of sidewalks and crosswalks received the most votes, followed by ideas for managing traffic flow, including consolidating curb cuts, including way-finding signs and providing access roads to take traffic pressure off of Churton Street.
- **Overall street image:** raters felt that burying utility lines would make the most impact, followed by a desire again, to emphasize walkability on Churton Street and provide trail connections. Providing public transportation between Chapel Hill and Hillsborough also rated highly in this category.

- **Signs:** raters overwhelmingly felt that the most important consideration was that signs reflect Hillsborough and that the style of signs should be consistent with the town. The need for clear sign guidelines and the enforcement of sign ordinances were also priorities for raters.
- **Landscaping:** raters voted overwhelmingly for the idea of “integrating road with the landscape (trees, perennials, etc.). Maintenance of those plantings was the second most important consideration, followed by the development of gateways with enhanced plantings.
- **Shopping environments:** raters overwhelmingly felt that the town should develop a “comprehensive, long range growth strategies plan.” This was followed by the desire that retail establishments and franchises should not use corporate design, but rather follow local design cues. Again, pedestrian connectivity was reinforced under this category. Indicating that respondents wanted to see walkability not just from one part of the corridor to another, but within shopping districts. Redevelopment of existing commercial development was also seen as an important idea.



*Open House participants enjoyed pie as a thank-you*

Participants in the May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2005 Open House were given an opportunity participate in a pictorial survey of development types and to vote for their favorite ideas that emerged from the two initial public workshops.

*Development Types Survey*

The survey contributed to the planning process in a number of ways including informing the public about the planning process, obtaining a broad level of public participation and input and providing public education regarding different aspects of urban design and corridor planning. A total of 116 picture preference surveys were returned and completed. The crowd exhibited a high degree of interest and enthusiasm regarding the survey and the planning process for Churton Street. The planning team served pieces of pie as a reward for completing the survey, which was a big hit with just about everyone.



Um, Pie!

The survey consisted of the following six categories of pictures, with ten pictures each:

- overall street image
- gateways
- commercial signs
- directional signs
- shopping environments, and
- street edges.

An effort was made to display a variety of examples of each type of development, including local examples where possible. Participants were asked to respond to each picture individually and score them on a ten point scale from +5 to -5 where +5 = love it and -5 = hate it. A brief overview of rater preferences is described below. A complete report of the survey results can be found in the technical appendix.

**Overall Street Image**



that will provide shade.

Highly rated images depicting an overall street image featured vibrant pedestrian-scaled environments and people using that environment. They included well-shaded sidewalk cafes, wide sidewalks and street trees



The image shown at right is representative of low-rated street images. Note the out of date and temporary signs, lack of delineation between the roadway and adjacent properties, lack of landscaping and total lack of pedestrian facilities.

**Gateways**



Raters preferred smaller, painted signs to other types of community entryway signs. They particularly liked colorful landscaping like that shown here.

**Commercial signs**



The sign shown at right is typical of the types of commercial signs raters preferred. They exhibited many of the same characteristics: low monument style, use of natural materials such as wood and brick, limited information and they were placed within colorful planting beds.



This grouping of commercial signs is typical of those that received low marks. Sign clutter, poor landscaping and tall pylon signs were negatively rated.

**Directional Signs**



Raters preferred directional signs that blended into their environment, kept information to a minimum and were easy to read.

**Shopping Environment**



In general, respondents preferred shopping environments that were well landscaped, neat and clean and included attractive signage and pedestrian facilities.

**Street Edges**



Respondent's preferred street edges that were well-landscaped provided for and protected pedestrians and looked as if they are cared for. Comments showed support for striped bike lanes.

## Signage Plan Development

These results of the Development Types Survey were discussed at a public input meeting on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The most highly and most negatively rated signs from the survey and some of the observations that emerged from the community discussion on signage are shown below. This discussion informed the development of the signage portion of the plan.

### Characteristics of Highly Rated (Desired) Signs:

- The sign is down where everyone can see it
- Coloring of sign blends with the landscape
- Use of natural materials, brick, wood...they are not heavily plasticized.
- They are placed within attractive landscaping
- All of them are placed near sidewalks
- They are monument type signs, not pylon signs
- They are not internally lit.
- They are all placed on landscaped berms, which increase the visibility of the sign without increasing its height.

### Characteristics of most Negatively Rated Signs:

- They display a grouping of many messages, the area seems congested.
- The clutter factor makes the sign inefficient
- They are internally lit.
- They display the opposite characteristics of those signs that were rated most highly:
  - They make use of few natural materials.
  - The others simply displayed the name of a place rather than logos or other information about the services offered.
  - None of the pictures show sidewalks.

### Citizen Comments on Role of Signage in Hillsborough

- “Businesses need to ask themselves: ‘Are we using our street as the primary avenue of advertising? Is that what we want to do?...are you trying to help the person find you or are you just grabbing drive-by customers?’ “
- “The sign might get them there once, but it won’t keep them coming back.”
- The town should ask themselves, “what *form* are we putting out to attract businesses? I think the town is in a position to dictate that.”
- “The smaller the signage is, the classier the environment.”
- “The high-end look shops look that way because high-end people like that.”
- “What (kind of businesses) are we trying to attract?”
- We need to develop standard town-branded signs for off-street parking.
- Break signs down by category: Identify the main destination. Develop some standard terminology, like “shopping district or center”
- If the road edges looked cared for, maybe people would be less likely to place...temporary signs. You don’t see them in places with sidewalks and landscaping.
- Develop the concept of “stepping down...generic to unique, small signs.
- Signs should “walk them through town.”
- Are DOT signs appropriately placed?

The Corridor Assessment represents a synthesis of the public input that occurred through the planning process; the field assessments conducted by the planning team and NC DCA consultants; and a review of previous plans and studies, including the design competition entries completed in 2003. Key Issues were developed from comments at workshops, results of the development types issues and voting on workshop issues. Full reports of these activities are found in the appendices.

## Strengths

- **Historic District:** The historic district is an attractive destination that draws people for many different reasons:
    - it is the hub of the county government,
    - it features many interesting shops and restaurants,
    - its features well developed historical sites and visitor center and many popular festivals and events.
    - It includes green space and connection to Eno River and future River Walk.
  - **Development Mix:** The corridor currently has a mix of commercial and residential development, which should continue with planned developments and potential development.
  - **Location, Location, Location:** The corridor is well connected to commuter and interstate transportation systems with links to employment centers in the Triangle and the Piedmont.
- **Established Centers:** The Shoppes at Daniel Boone and related properties provide a sizeable portion of tax base for the town.
  - **Landscaping/Sidewalks Required:** The Town has regulations in place that require new development to install sidewalks and landscaping that creates attractive streetscapes for these properties.



*Outdoor cafes line historic downtown's sidewalks*

## Weaknesses

- **Un-scenic Route:** Visitors to historic downtown must travel a considerable distance through congested strip development to reach Hillsborough's many historical sites and amenities.
- **Sign Clutter:** Commercial signage along the corridor creates a cluttered look, is over-sized, and much of it looks dated and needs maintenance.
- **Traffic Congestion:** Considerable traffic congestion along Churton Street frustrates local drivers, contributes to noise and environmental pollution.
- **Is this my turn?** Sign clutter and lack of well defined entrances to major developments along Churton Street make it difficult for travelers to locate their destination.
- **Where the Sidewalk Ends:** Lack of pedestrian facilities/accessibility along north and south Churton Street keeps people in their cars, increases traffic congestion and contributes to an unhealthy lifestyle.
- **Lack of Landscaping:** Aesthetic quality of the corridor suffers due to lack of adequate and appropriate landscaping.
- **Aging Properties:** Lack of maintenance and investment in some commercial properties negatively impacts the image of the corridor and of Hillsborough.



*Attractive landscaping and pedestrian facilities would improve the appearance and function of Churton Street*



*Excessive signage along South Churton Street*

## Opportunities

- **I-85 Interchange:** Planning for the replacement of I-85 interchange is underway as project I-0305 on the approved TIP and calls for the reconstruction of interchanges and structures.
- **South Churton Roadway Improvements:** Project R-2825 on the DCHC MPO TIP call for widening South Churton between I-40 and the Eno river to multi-lanes and replacing the bridge over Southern Railroad. At this point it is an unfunded project that is scheduled for post years of the TIP. The DCHC MPO regional priority list for FY 2007-2013 for this project calls for congestion management, limited access, aesthetic and capacity improvements, from US 70 Business to I-40. It was ranked #4 in terms of points in the regional priority list.
- **Riverwalk:** Construction by the town of Hillsborough of the Riverwalk along the Eno River adjacent to downtown.
- **Road Network Changes:** Elizabeth Brady Road Extension and a new alignment of US 70A are included in approved Division 7 TIP. Construction of these roads would lessen traffic congestion on Churton Street. In regards to the Elizabeth Brady Road Extension, the State is currently studying four potential alignments, including a “no build” option.
- **Major New Development:** The development of Waterstone along South Churton will raise the profile of Hillsborough as a viable location for new enterprises and new residents. It will likely create pressure for redevelopment in other areas of the corridor.



*South Churton Street near I-40 is currently rural in character, though intensive new development is under construction.*

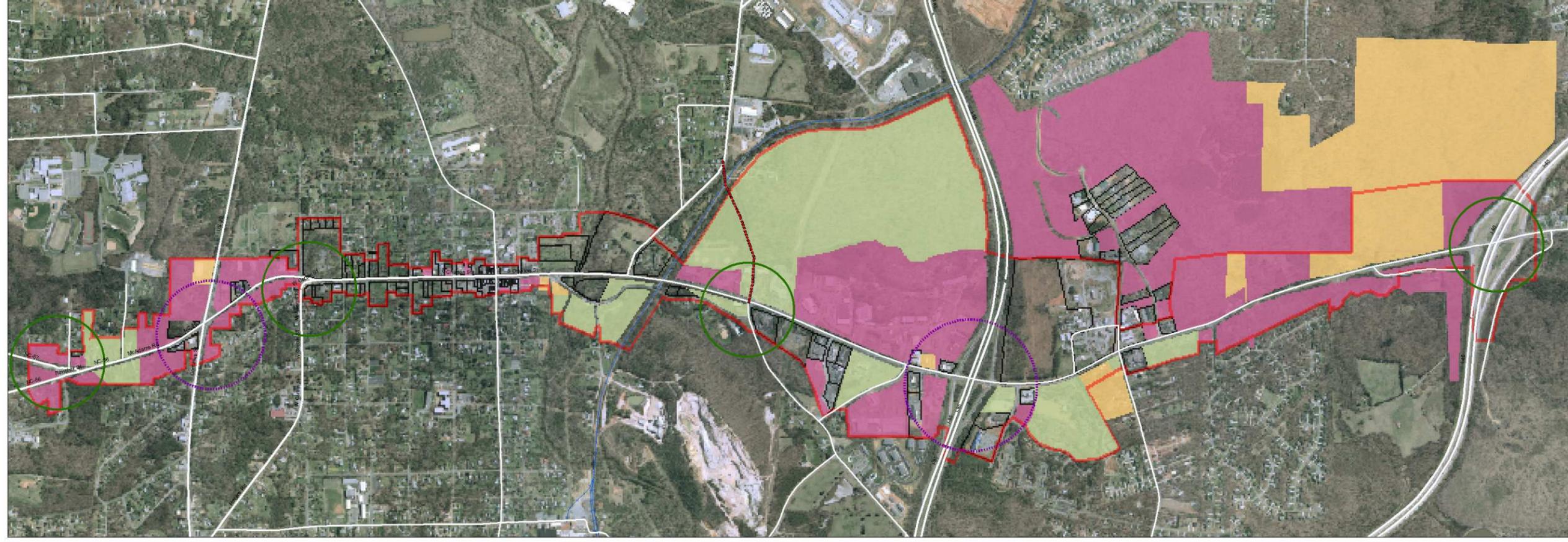
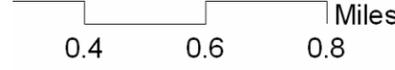
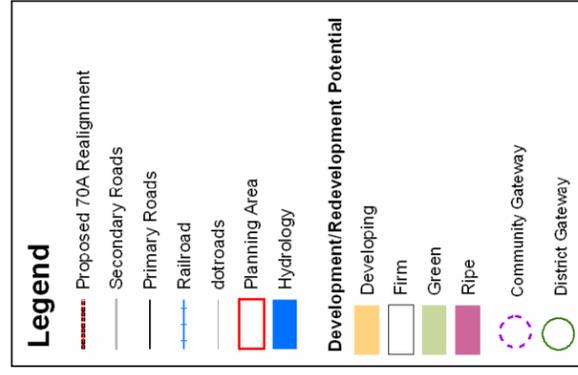
- **Redevelopment Opportunities:** Vacant and underutilized properties represent an opportunity for redevelopment and future investment in the corridor.
- **Undeveloped Parcels:** The largely rural, undeveloped character of south Churton between I-40 and I-85 and of North Churton between US 70 Bypass and the NC 86/57 split provides an opportunity to guide the future character of these areas through the strategies proposed in this plan.

## Challenges

- **Congestion projected to increase:** The Churton Street Corridor currently experiences a high degree of traffic congestion. Churton Street (from Revere to Us 70A/NC 86) is included in a list of the most notable areas of congestion expected in 2030 in the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO Long Range Transportation Plan for 2030. The plan identifies areas of highway deficiencies, and predicts that, “congestion levels will, for the most part, expand and intensify throughout the DCHC MPO area in the future.”
- **Limited Right-of-Way:** The right of way along some portions of Churton Street is currently 60 feet. This width presents some challenges for incorporating desired streetscape improvements. In some areas, more right-of-way could be purchased, however further expansion in the historic downtown is not possible. Increasing traffic capacity of the southern portion of Churton Street will be necessary near I-40 and Waterstone. However, there are concerns about a traffic bottleneck at the Eno River Bridge, as the road must narrow to three lanes as it travels through downtown.
- **Above ground utility lines:** Utility lines along the corridor are located above ground and contribute to the cluttered look of the corridor. Citizens express support for the idea of burying them but doing so is an expensive undertaking.



*Traffic congestion along Churton Street is expected to increase.*



### Legend Key:

**Developing:** Parcel is currently in the permitting or construction phase.

**Firm:** Parcel is most likely in its highest and best use and/or is not likely to see development or redevelopment in the near future.

**Green:** Parcel has development or redevelopment potential but will likely not develop until a later date.

**Ripe:** Parcel has high development and/or redevelopment potential and could likely see development activity within the near future.

The development analysis was conducted to determine where development or redevelopment opportunities exist within the corridor. The legend above explains the categories, which describe a parcel's likelihood of experiencing development or redevelopment. The analysis was conducted through an initial windshield tour, supplemented by examination of tax records and discussions with Town staff and committee members. An examination of the map reveals that while almost all of the historic district is in its highest and best use, at least in terms of building infrastructure, many opportunities for development and redevelopment exist both north and south of the downtown. Near I-40, the Waterstone development, currently under construction dominates the southern corridor gateway area. A large greenfield area just south of downtown, bordered by Daniel Boone to the west, I-85 to the south and the railroad to the north and east will present development opportunities when U.S. 70 is realigned with Orange Grove Road.

# Development Analysis





## Chapter 2: Conceptual Plan



## Introduction

The key issues (listed at right) identified through the public participation process directly informed both the plan structure and the committee’s recommendations. The Corridor Concept Plan is broken into four main categories of recommendations:

- Transportation Improvements
- Corridor Revitalization
- Signage Improvements

These four categories provide an organizing structure for the plan and its implementation. However, they are not stand-alone components. They are inter-related in their functions and in some instances, will need to be implemented concurrently for each to be successful. For example, corridor revitalization may in some part depend on both the implementation of the recommended streetscape improvements, new signage regulations and installation of attractive landscaping throughout the corridor. The signage section of the plan has two main components: commercial signage and community wayfinding. These two systems, while independent in their specific function and methods of implementation, cannot be successful without the other. Without attractive, easy to use wayfinding, visitors and customers will not find their shopping and tourist destinations. Without a streamlined, attractive system of commercial signage, any new wayfinding signs will get lost in current environment of sign clutter.

Key Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Emphasize walkability, pedestrian safety, and trail links throughout the corridor.</li> <li>▪ Bury utility lines.</li> <li>▪ Develop strategies for managing traffic flow and congestion along Churton Street. (<i>consolidate curb cuts, provide wayfinding, develop secondary access roads</i>)</li> <li>▪ Reduce sign clutter.</li> <li>▪ Develop and implement clear building design and sign guidelines that emphasize local design cues over corporate identities.</li> <li>▪ Make landscaping a prominent component of Churton Street roadway and streetscape design.</li> <li>▪ Ensure proper maintenance of landscapes.</li> <li>▪ Plan for the redevelopment of existing commercial development.</li> <li>▪ Provide public transportation links between Chapel Hill and Hillsborough.</li> </ul>

This corridor concept plan is intended to explain and illustrate how each of the plan components needs to be implemented and why they are important to transform the corridor into an attractive environment for renewed commercial activity that will contribute to the overall character and economic standing of Hillsborough.

**Goal:** Pursue roadways improvements along the corridor that will manage traffic flow, incorporate pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and provide an attractive streetscape.

The key issues identified and prioritized through the citizen involvement process (see box on page 28) provided direction for our recommendations.

“It feels like a highway not a city street,” was the assessment of one of the workshop participants. Improvements to the design of Churton Street can have the effect of not only improving traffic flow, and increasing safety, but can also help to create a sense of place for the areas through which Churton Street passes. Traffic calming measures coupled with access management will accomplish this and help make the areas north and south of the historic district into places in their own right. Cities all over the U.S. are discovering that adding lanes does not solve their traffic problems (*Road Diets: Fixing the Big Roads*. D Burden and P Lagerwey. Walkable Communities Inc., March 1999). In many cases these cities have successfully removed lanes, converting five lane strips into two or three lane boulevards. Hillsborough can avoid the costly mistakes of others by avoiding the temptation to add lanes unnecessarily; and instead add functionality by creating a multi-modal street that includes an attractive planted median, bike lanes and sidewalks and full service intersections. Other traffic calming measures such as modern roundabouts are proposed for key transition areas, such as the Churton/Corbin intersection and near the I-85 interchange. These devices have been proven to slow traffic, decrease accidents and also to aid in traffic flow, decreasing stop and go traffic (*Synthesis of Highway Practice 264: Modern Roundabout Practice in the United States*. National Cooperative Highway Research Program, Washington DC, 1998.). Consolidating the many curb cuts throughout the corridor will also make a significant difference in traffic flow, by giving drivers specific landmarks and aiding in their decision-making.

## Objectives of Churton Street Transportation Plan

- Decrease traffic congestion (stop & go traffic).
- Increase street safety for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Slow traffic speeds.
- Create a pleasant streetscape that will attract people and new commerce.

## Key Recommendations of Transportation Plan

- Boulevard treatment with planted median, where feasible north and south of downtown.
- Minimized curb cuts, traffic signals, and left turns
- Modern roundabouts at key intersections
- Secondary access roads to remove local shopping traffic from Churton Street.
- Connected rear parking lots.
- Striped bike lanes where feasible
- Continuous sidewalks along corridor
- Corner and mid-block crosswalks with contrasting pavers
- Improved landscaping at street edges
- Replace overhead utility wires with underground utilities and decorative light poles.
- Encourage a planned location of transit station and park and ride lot at newly realigned US 70 Business and Orange Grove Rd.

*Elements of Transportation Plan*

The transportation portion of this plan includes plan view conceptual drawings that illustrate the proposed changes to the roadway. These drawings show:

- proposed roadway widths and lanes
- location of medians
- curb cuts
- modern roundabouts
- traffic signals
- sidewalks
- crosswalks
- bike lanes

The before and after drawings which follow on pages 37-45, the plan view drawings on 45-48, and the cross-sections beginning on page 52 are all conceptual. Landscaping along NCDOT rights of way will have to conform to their manual for plantings within public rights of way.

The plan view drawing spans the entire corridor and is broken up into a number of sections, labeled according to their location in the corridor. They are found on pages 45-48. Key elements of each section are briefly described.

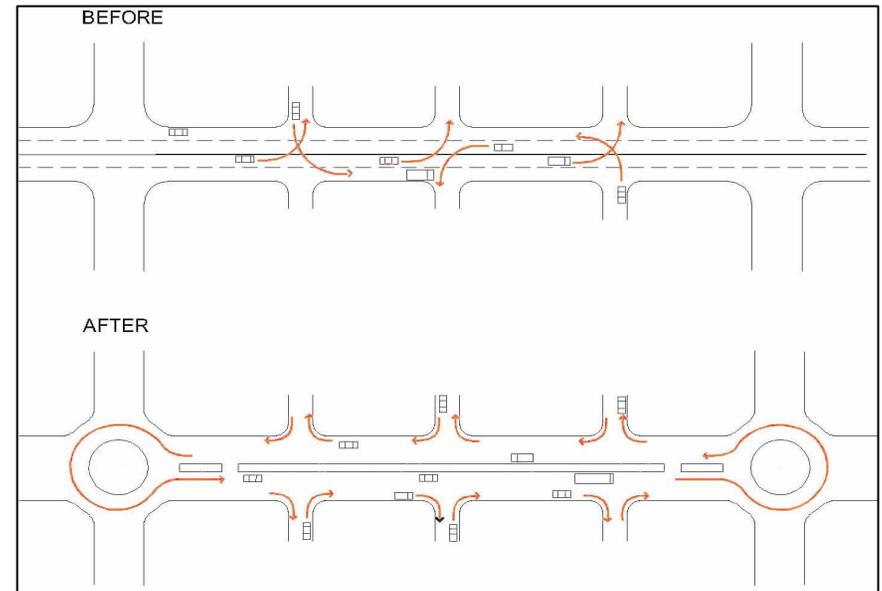
In addition to the plan view drawings, the plan presents the relevant cross-sections, beginning on page 52.



Examples of two-lane (one in each direction) and four-lane (two in each direction) cross-sections similar to those proposed for Churton South and Waterstone districts, respectively.

*Traffic Flow*

This plan recommends limiting signalized intersections along the corridor to improve traffic flow by replacing key intersections, some of which function as community or district gateways, with modern roundabouts and limiting others to right-in, right-out turns through the use of landscaped medians and traffic diverters. The illustration below shows how this arrangement reduces conflict points, increasing driver safety, and how it aids traffic flow by safely facilitating left turns at roundabouts. This approach is recommended in the area of south Churton between I-85 and the Eno River, and to some extent, in the area north of the historic district and the US 70 Bypass. In the area south of I-85, this plan recommends a four-lane cross-section, due to expected traffic demand and a two-lane expandable cross-section in the Churton South area that will encourage slower speeds while improving traffic flow.



*A New Traffic Pattern: “Eliminating signalized intersections, installing roundabouts at key intersections and restricting some turns to right-in/right-out, aids traffic flow and improves safety.”*

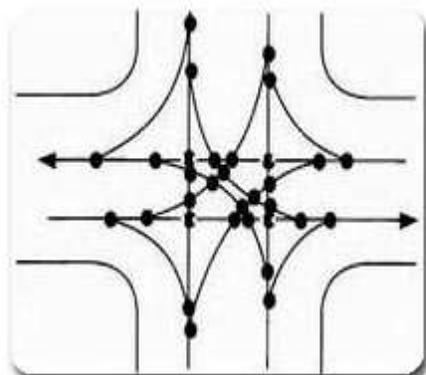
*Roundabouts*

Average Annual Crash Frequencies at Eleven (11) Signalized Intersections Converted to Roundabouts				
Percent Change				
Type of Roundabout	Roundabout Sites	Crash Reduction	Injury Reduction	Property Damage Only Crash Reduction
Single-Lane Roundabout	8	-51%	-73%	-32%
Multi-Lane Roundabout	3	-29%	-31%	-10%
Total	11	-37%	-51%	-29%

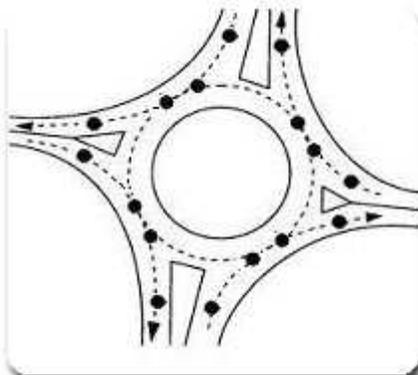
Source: Synthesis of Highway Practice 264: Modern Roundabout Practice in the United States. National Cooperative Highway Research Program, Washington DC, 1998.



The roundabouts proposed for Churton Street would be similar in size to this roundabout in a residential subdivision in Rolesville, NC, approximately 100 feet in diameter.



In a traditional four-legged intersection, over 30 potential conflict points are created when through, right, and left turning movements are considered



In a roundabout, there are half as many potential conflict points as compared to a traditional four-legged intersection.

*Secondary Access Routes*

Limiting the need for local shopping traffic to access Churton Street will also aid traffic flow. Workshop participants discussed improving Rebecca Drive, which currently provides secondary access between the Food Lion grocery store lot and the Shoppes at Daniel Boone. This is a private road. However, improving it through the Shoppes at Daniel Boone so that it feels more like a city street and including signage will encourage shoppers to use this route for local trips. Also, as property develops or redevelops, the town should encourage developers to locate parking at the rear of buildings and to provide stub-outs or connections to adjacent lots. This too, will lessen traffic congestion along Churton Street.

## *Pedestrians and Bicycles*

Expanding the function of Churton Street from an automobile route to a multi-modal street is one of the key recommendations of this plan. Citizen input reflected a strong desire to be able to walk from one end of the corridor to the other and to connect parks, open spaces trail links through bicycle routes and sidewalks. The plan includes striped bicycle lanes, shown on the various cross-sections, throughout the majority of the corridor. The exception is the transition from the Churton South district to historic downtown Hillsborough. The roadway leading into downtown is presently too narrow to offer a safe, comfortable passageway for either pedestrians or bicyclists. We propose improving Exchange Park Lane as the primary pedestrian and bicycle route. A 10-foot shared use path is proposed. Automobiles will not be restricted from this route, but signage and posted speed limits will discourage it to be used for through traffic.

The Exchange Park Lane bicycle path will connect to the planned Riverwalk, which connects to the statewide Mountains to Sea trail and the recently funded Gold Park that is planned. Other pedestrian and bicycles links should be considered to connect Collins Field and any future recreational or park land that might develop in that area of South Churton.

Sidewalks are recommended for the entire length of the corridor, connecting residents of nearby neighborhoods to downtown, recreational opportunities, shopping and dining in South Churton and in the North Hills area, as well as a planned county recreational area in the northern part of the corridor, near the NC86/57 split.

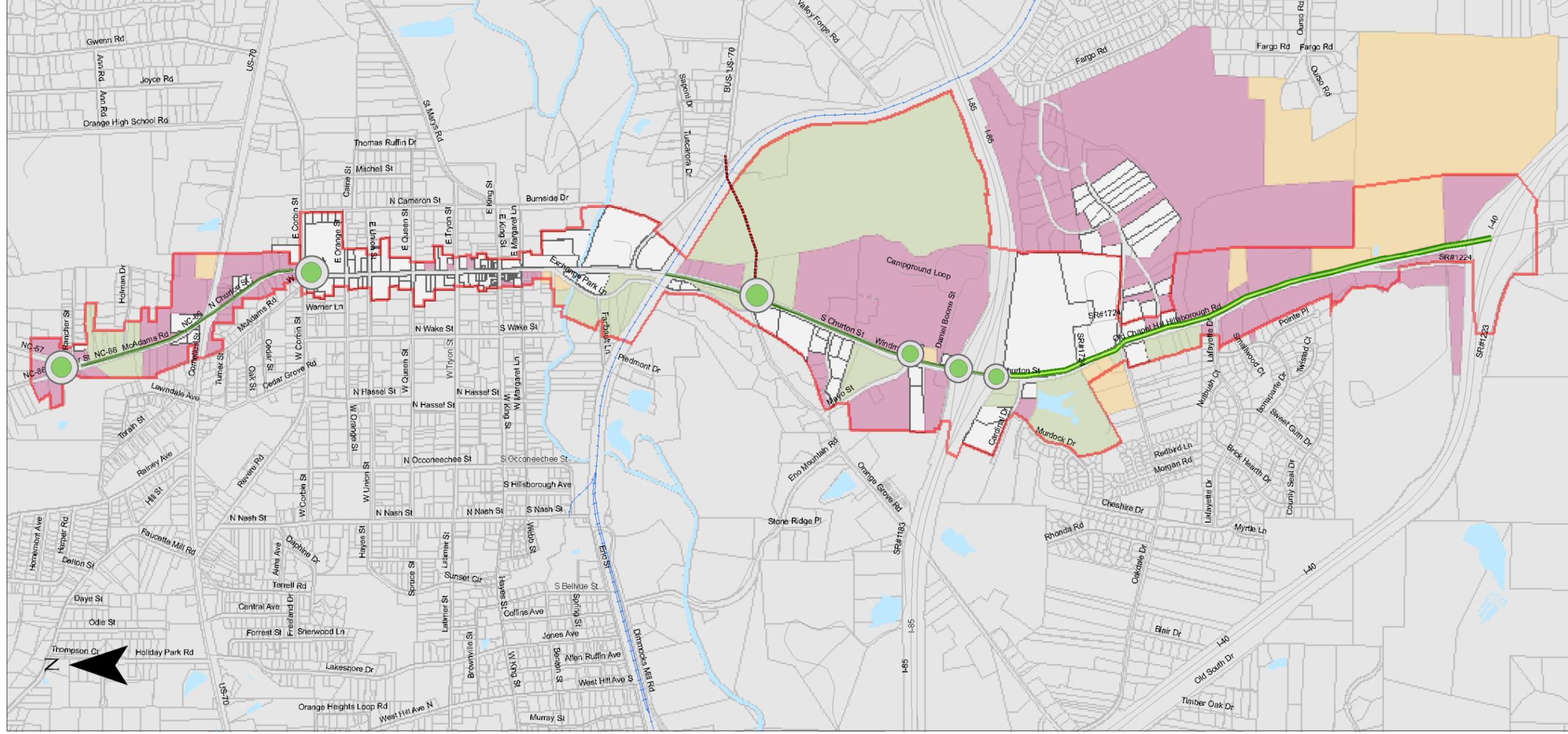


*Exchange Park Lane: Before*



*Exchange Park Lane: After*





- Legend**
- Modern roundabouts
  - Four lane divided cross-section with planted median
  - Two lane divided cross-section with planted median
  - Proposed 70A Realignment
  - Railroad
- Development Evaluation**
- Developing
  - Firm
  - Green
  - Ripe
  - Planning Area



Map: Anne K. Morris  
 NC Division of Community Assistance  
 Central Regional Office  
 Raleigh, NC 27616

# Transportation Improvements



## Before and After Illustrations



*Before: South Churton Street, looking north towards I-85 interchange.*



*After: View of South Churton, looking north towards I-85 interchange with roundabout.*



*Before: Current traffic pattern along South Churton Street. View looking south from just north of Orange Grove Road .*



*After: Churton South District: View from proposed roundabout at Churton and Orange Grove Road, looking south towards I-85.*



*Before: View of North Churton, looking south from US 70 Bypass.*



*After: View of North Churton, looking south from US 70 Bypass.*



*Before: Entering downtown Hillsborough via the bridge over the Eno River (looking north along the corridor)*

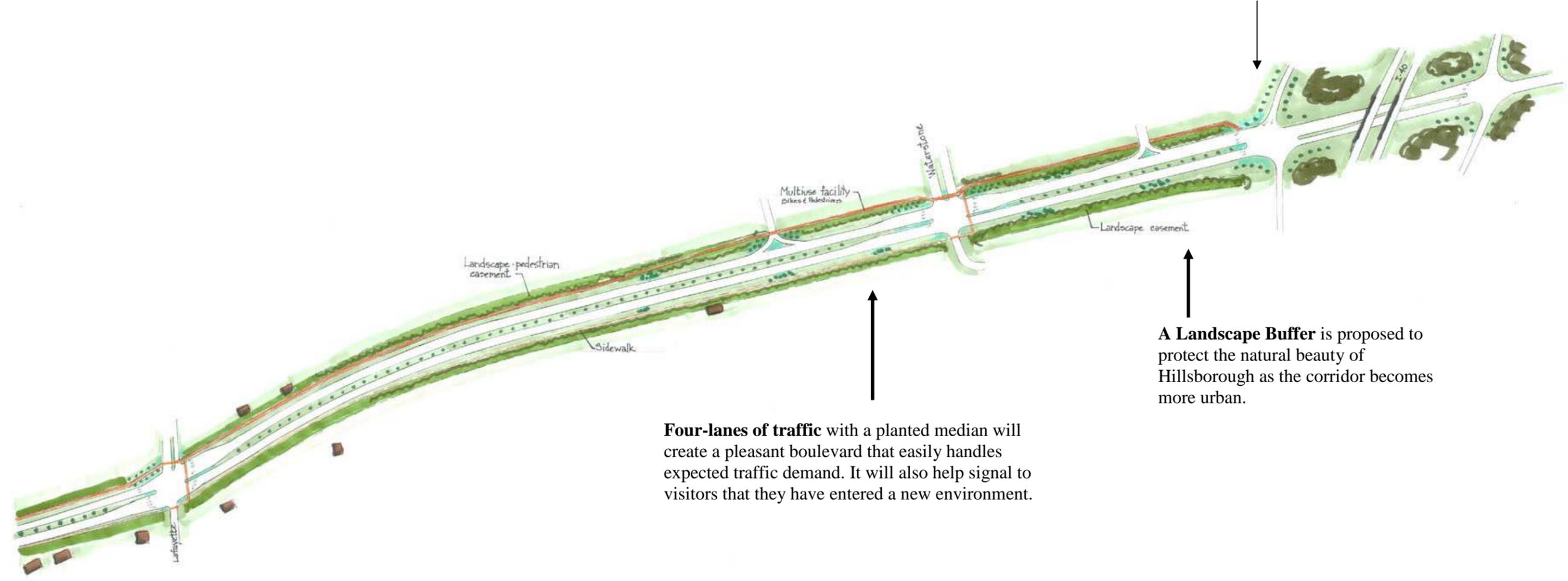
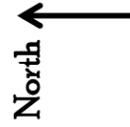


*After. The use of ironwork railings and brick monuments to support Victorian style lighting along the entire corridor will create a cohesive streetscape and connect the new with the old.*



Churton Street Corridor  
Conceptual Plan  
The Town of Hillsborough

Waterstone District, including I-40 Interchange



**Signalized intersections** are proposed for this segment of the corridor. They will help accommodate the expected number of trips Waterstone and adjacent development will generate.

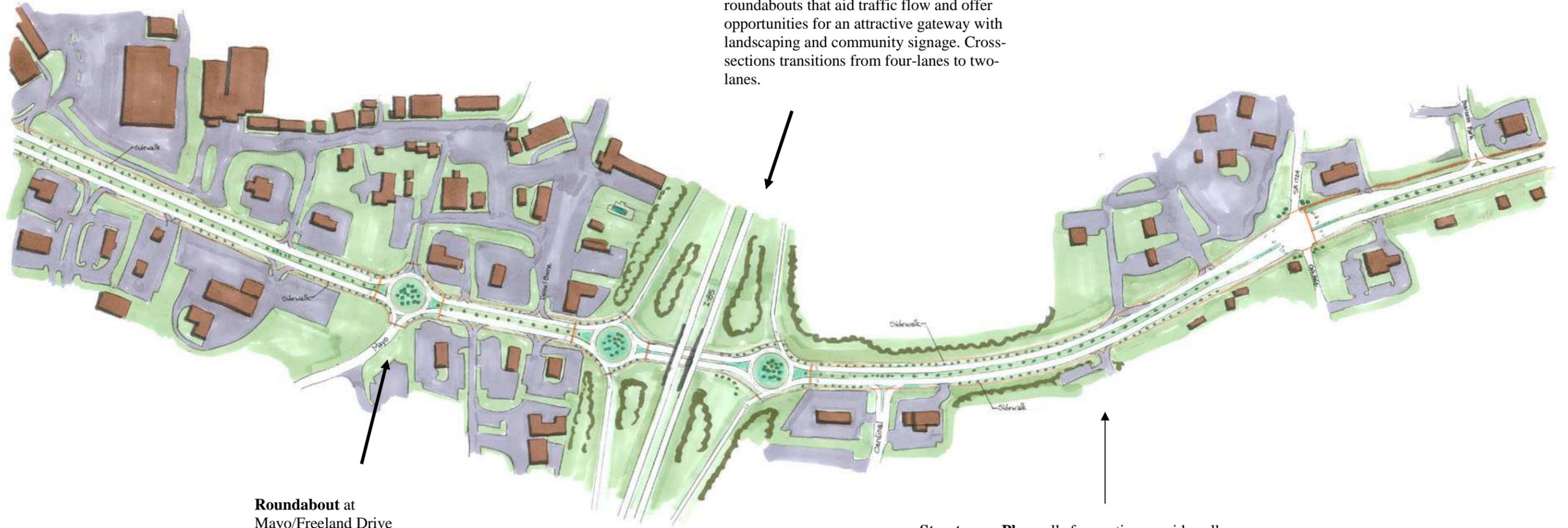
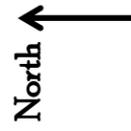
**Four-lanes of traffic** with a planted median will create a pleasant boulevard that easily handles expected traffic demand. It will also help signal to visitors that they have entered a new environment.

**A Landscape Buffer** is proposed to protect the natural beauty of Hillsborough as the corridor becomes more urban.



Churton Street Corridor  
Conceptual Plan  
The Town of Hillsborough

Churton South District,  
including I-85 interchange



**I-85 Roundabouts:** New I-85 interchange eliminates four signals, replacing them with roundabouts that aid traffic flow and offer opportunities for an attractive gateway with landscaping and community signage. Cross-sections transitions from four-lanes to two-lanes.

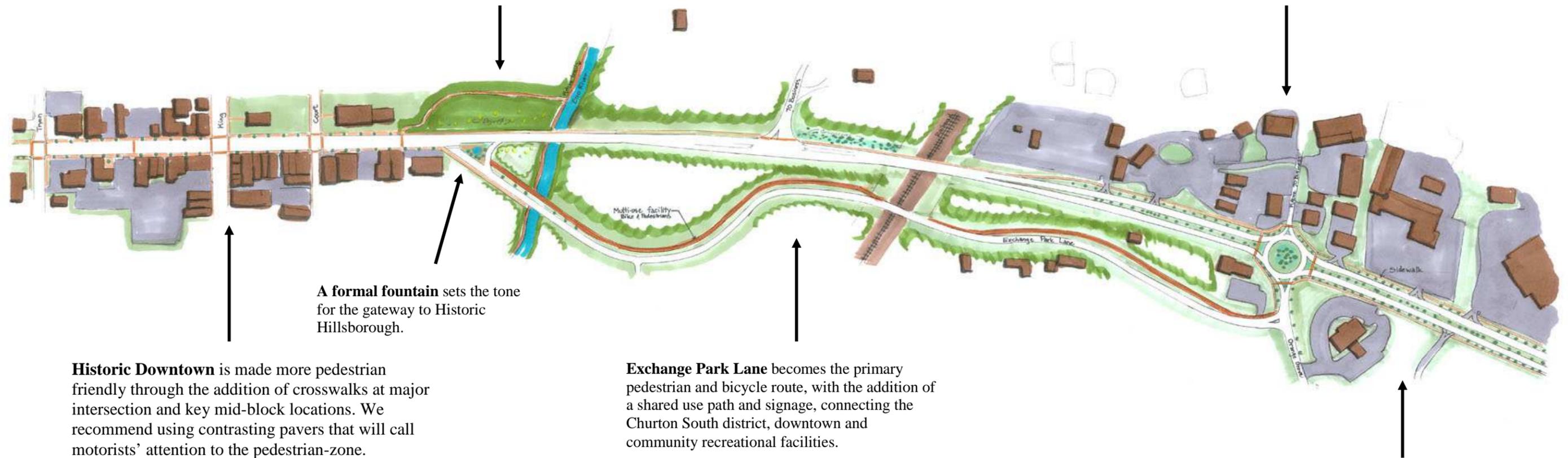
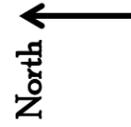
**Roundabout at Mayo/Freeland Drive** keeps traffic flowing.

**Streetscape Plan** calls for continuous sidewalks, bike lanes and planted medians in all areas except the Historic District; with street trees, historic lighting and ultimately, underground utilities.



**Churton Street Corridor**  
**Conceptual Plan**  
The Town of Hillsborough

Transition from Historic District  
to Churton South District



**Historic Downtown** is made more pedestrian friendly through the addition of crosswalks at major intersection and key mid-block locations. We recommend using contrasting pavers that will call motorists' attention to the pedestrian-zone.

**A formal fountain** sets the tone for the gateway to Historic Hillsborough.

**Dogwoods** are added to the natural areas.

**Exchange Park Lane** becomes the primary pedestrian and bicycle route, with the addition of a shared use path and signage, connecting the Churton South district, downtown and community recreational facilities.

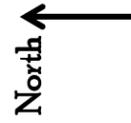
**Roundabout at Orange Grove Road** and re-aligned US 70 Business reduces traffic backups into downtown and acts as a districts gateway that anchors the Churton South District, imagined as a higher density mixed use development, designed around a future transit stop for high speed rail and that incorporates community recreational facilities.

**Boulevard Treatment:** A landscaped median and access management will increase predictability for drivers, decrease stop and go traffic and improve safety by reducing left turns across traffic.

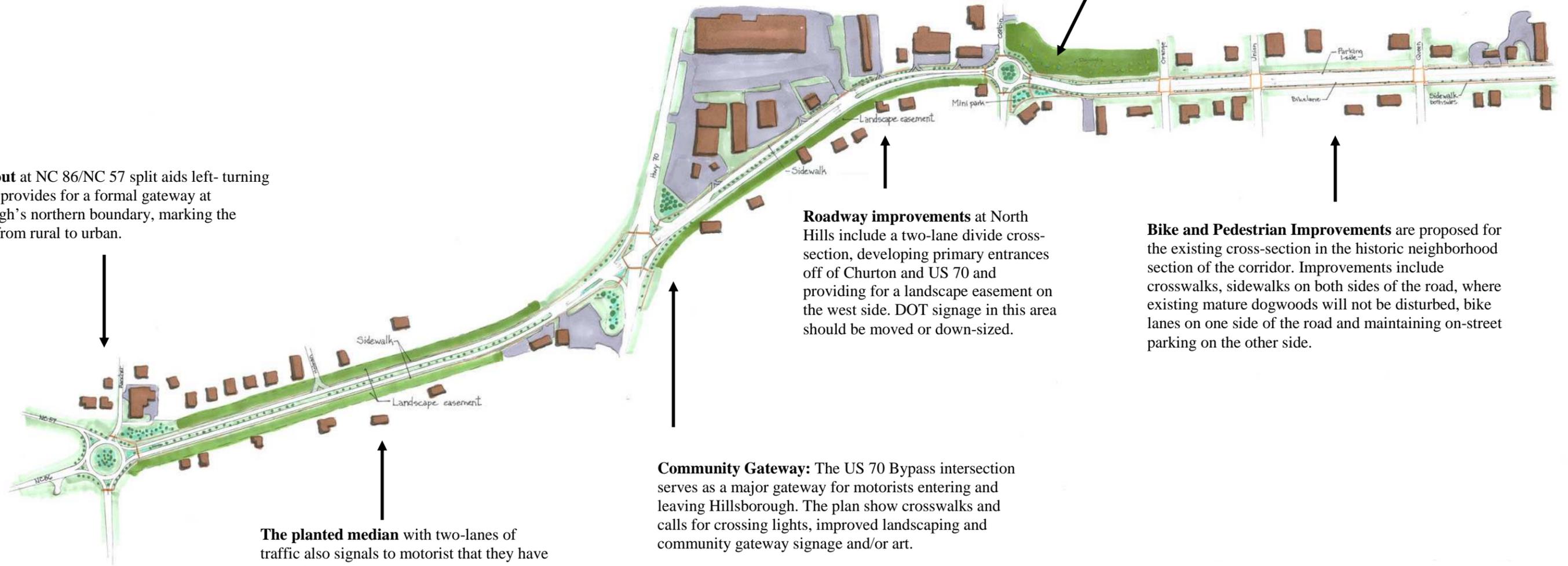


**Churton Street Corridor  
Conceptual Plan**  
The Town of Hillsborough

North Churton Area



**Roundabout** at NC 86/NC 57 split aids left-turning traffic and provides for a formal gateway at Hillsborough's northern boundary, marking the transition from rural to urban.



**The planted median** with two-lanes of traffic also signals to motorist that they have entered a new environment.

**Community Gateway:** The US 70 Bypass intersection serves as a major gateway for motorists entering and leaving Hillsborough. The plan show crosswalks and calls for crossing lights, improved landscaping and community gateway signage and/or art.

**Roadway improvements** at North Hills include a two-lane divide cross-section, developing primary entrances off of Churton and US 70 and providing for a landscape easement on the west side. DOT signage in this area should be moved or down-sized.

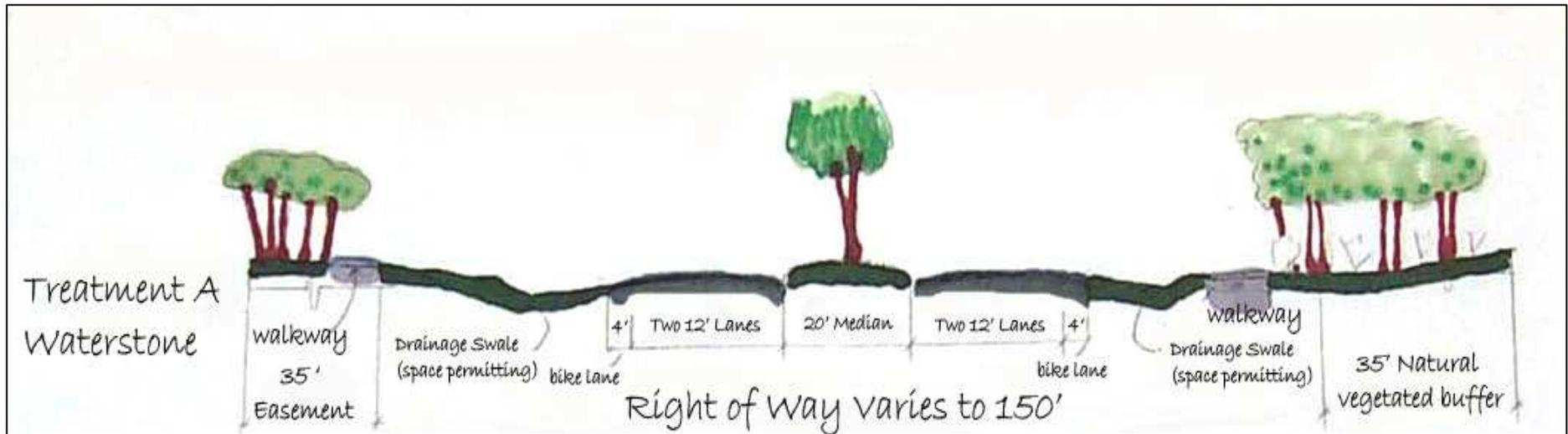
**Bike and Pedestrian Improvements** are proposed for the existing cross-section in the historic neighborhood section of the corridor. Improvements include crosswalks, sidewalks on both sides of the road, where existing mature dogwoods will not be disturbed, bike lanes on one side of the road and maintaining on-street parking on the other side.

**Historic District Gateway:** The proposed roundabout at Churton and Corbin will improve traffic and pedestrian safety for this intersection which sits at the top of a rise. Reconfiguration of the intersection opens up room for a mini-park/plaza in from of Sinclair Station.

**Dogwoods:** In the spring, mature dogwoods in the Historic District are a signature element of Hillsborough. We propose increasing their numbers in existing natural areas along the corridor to continue the dogwood theme throughout the corridor.



*Cross-sections*



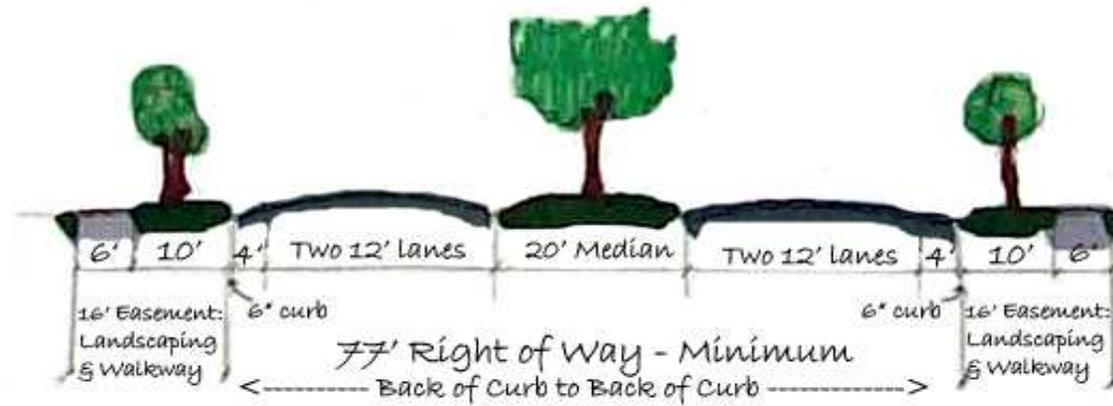
**Treatment A Details:**

- Four -lane divided cross-section with 20 ft planted median
- Four foot striped bike lane
- Six foot sidewalk and 6 foot easement strip
- Natural vegetated buffer behind Right of Way (with option to locate sidewalk on easement)
- Signalized Intersections
- Treatment B and C for variations to accommodate differences in ROW

Treatment B  
South Churton

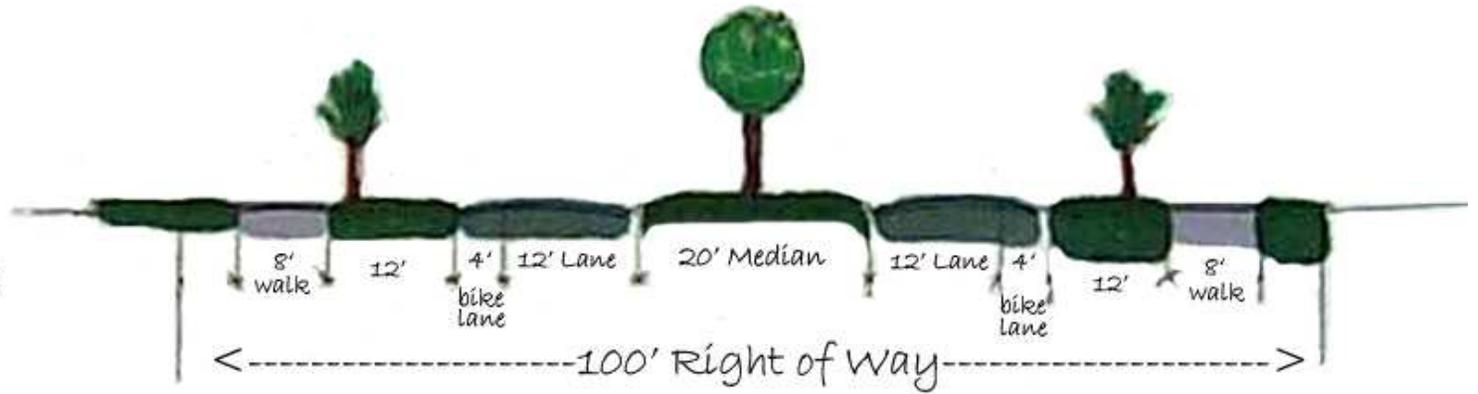


Treatment C  
South Churton

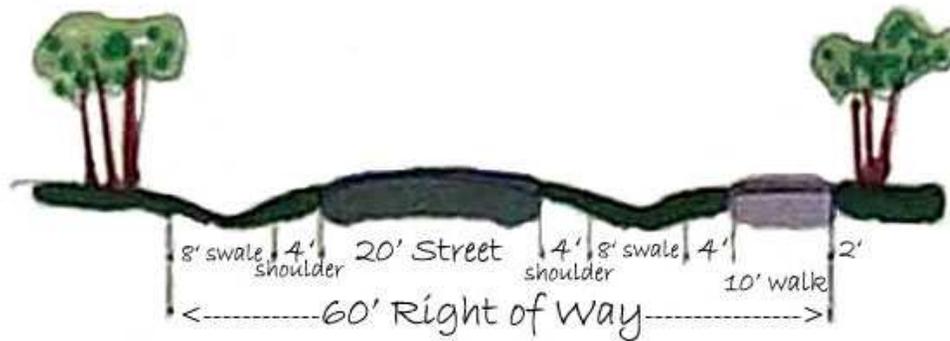


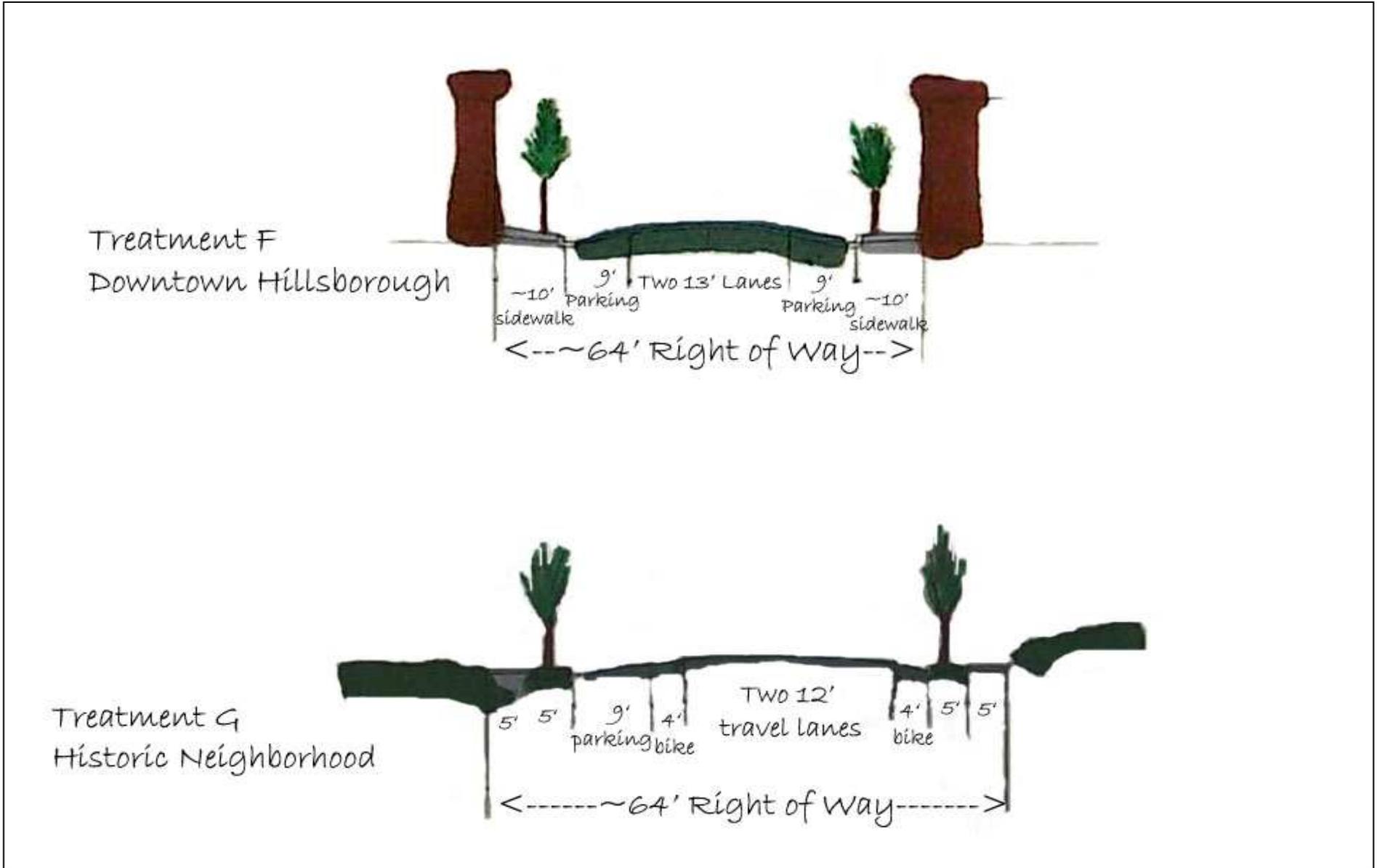
Alternative cross-sections for south Churton, between I-40 and I-85, to accommodate variations in ROW.

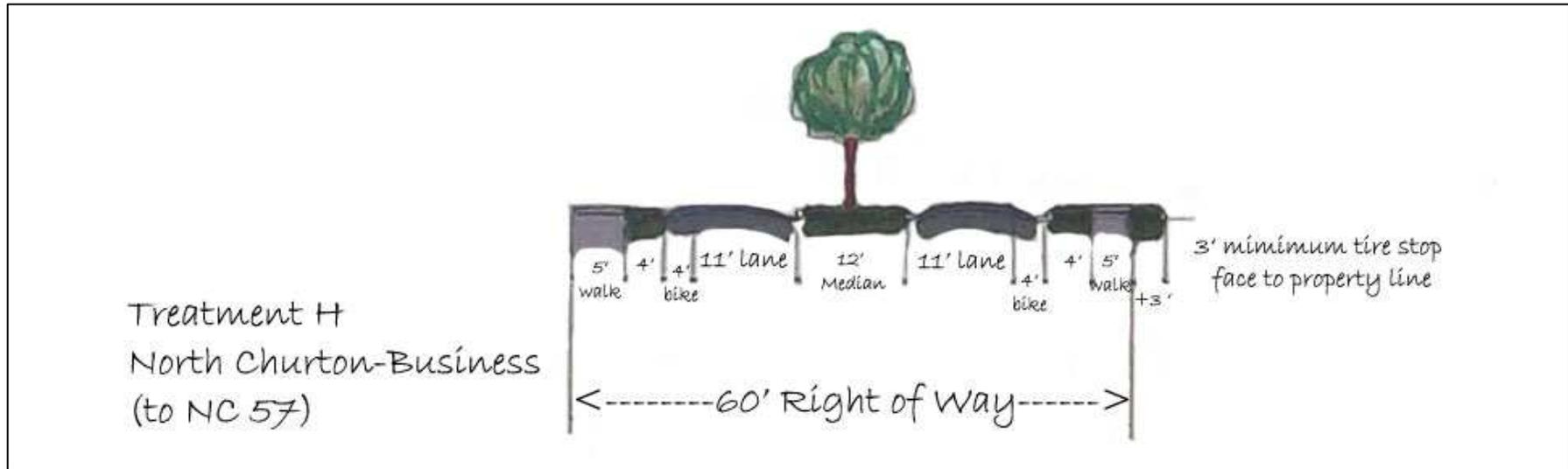
Treatment D  
I-85 to Railroad



Treatment E  
Exchange Park Lane







*Streetscape Elements*

This plan includes recommendations for siting of street trees, tree and plant species appropriate for corridor plantings and design of street lights, benches, and crosswalk pavers.

**Street Trees**

The plan calls for the planting of street trees along the pedestrian edge of Churton Street and within a planted median. Street trees should be planted 35 feet on-center and staggered every 20 feet. Street trees should be planted within the easement strip between the roadway and the sidewalk, as shown in the cross-sections above. The landscape easement may be located within the right of way or located behind it, depending on its location in the corridor and available right of way.

One option involves planting small, flowering trees that can be installed without encroaching on existing power lines. Another option is to plant larger, upright trees that will provide shade and an attractive streetscape

for years to come. These trees would not be compatible with existing power lines and their planting would need to be coordinated with power line relocation.

Plant materials shall be selected from the Tree Board’s recommended tree list and will conform to NCDOT landscaping requirements, when in the NCDOT right of way.

**Pedestrian Amenities**

Successful commercial corridors include a number of elements that make them comfortable places for people to spend time. These elements include wide shaded sidewalks, pedestrian scaled lighting, places to sit, and safe places to cross the street. We recommend that the town install durable pedestrian-oriented features that will blend in with the natural environment and be attractive additions to the streetscape. Developers should be encouraged to include open space elements such as pedestrian plaza or mini parks. The town should invest in benches, trash receptacles and improved lighting. We also recommend that the town encourage the use of stacked or rubble stone low walls to stylistically connect new landscapes with existing landscapes in the historic district.



*Incorporate gathering spots with places to sit into the streetscape.*



*These benches and companion trash receptacles made of stainless steel and cast iron with a polyester powder finish would be attractive additions to the Churton streetscape.*



*Recommended lighting style. This example is from Union Metal, Imperial style. Single light recommended for street edge and double light recommended for gateway areas.*

## Paving Materials

We recommend that crosswalks be installed along the corridor at all intersections and at mid-block locations in the historic district, North Churton, Waterstone and South Churton districts. Crosswalks should be of a contrasting color and material to the surrounding pavement and should be made of durable materials.



*Changes in material texture and color clearly delineate pedestrian crossing areas. Also note the pedestrian refuge island (left) located within the landscaped median. This provides a safe place for pedestrians to wait as traffic clears.*

Initial workshop participants listed the corridor's rundown, aged appearance as one of its greatest weakness. However, another point they wanted to get across centered on the idea of improving the economic outlook of the areas of the corridor both north and south of the historic district. As one participant put it. "Aesthetics without economics won't work." This statement is very true: beautification alone will not make the corridor a commercial success.

Many of the recommendations of this plan do focus on ways to improve the appearance of the corridor. In many cases, implementing the recommendations that will improve the appearance of Churton Street, will also improve the functionality of the corridor; and more importantly, they will act as magnets for private investment. This has been proven time and again in other communities. But without focused revitalization efforts, improving landscaping, signage and traffic flow will simply make for a pretty drive on the way to other shopping destinations. Because of this, this plan concludes with recommendations for encouraging economic revitalization of the commercial areas along North and South Churton Street.

### *Plan for Future Development Patterns*

**Recommendation:** Identify future development and redevelopment opportunities along the corridor. Consider future land uses that will break up the existing pattern of commercial strip development.

The current pattern of development both north and south of the historic district is a typical automobile oriented strip of continuous commercial and retail development. Uses include aging shopping centers that feature small, locally owned shops. The Shoppes at Daniel Boone is one example of a large complex of retail outlets oriented toward tourists and day—trippers. It features many antique and specialty dealers. However, increasingly many of these and other outlets are oriented to serve the needs of local citizens. Other prominent uses include sales of automobiles and manufactured homes, restaurants, banks, grocery stores and service stations.

### Key Recommendations for Corridor Revitalization

- **Plan for Future Development Patterns:** Identify future development and redevelopment opportunities along the corridor.
- **Create Pulses of Development** Consider future land uses that will break up the existing pattern of commercial strip development and create pulses of development at more urban densities. Create a development pattern that brings buildings to the front and relegates parking to the side and rear. A number of changes will need to be made to existing land use and development regulation policies and ordinances to encourage revitalization of the corridor.
- **Establish Districts:** Establish distinct district identities for portions of Churton Street with discernable edges and functions. Encourage property and business owners to work together to develop a district identity and to market themselves.
- **Develop Gateways:** Develop improved gateways that provide attractive, entranceways that reflect the identity of Hillsborough.
- **Apply the Four Point Approach:** Expand the use of the Main Street Four Point Approach for downtown revitalization to the rest of the corridor.

### Development Analysis

As part of the corridor assessment, the planning consultants conducted a *Development Analysis* to gauge the development and redevelopment potential of the parcels within the corridor. The planning committee considered these areas of opportunity and developed general considerations for types of uses they would like to see within the corridor. These *Land Use Considerations* are broad in nature and are intended to be used in future planning efforts that will consider future land uses in Hillsborough in more detail.

**Creating Pulses of Development**

The retailing environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has moved away from traditional strip shopping corridors that create a nondescript landscape, indistinguishable from the one in the next town. Restructuring these fading strips with pulses of higher density development creates a more interesting environment and introduces opportunities to include a mix of uses in upper stories. As redevelopment occurs on Churton Street, this strategy will be a key component to creating a more urban environment that builds on the strengths of Hillsborough’s downtown.

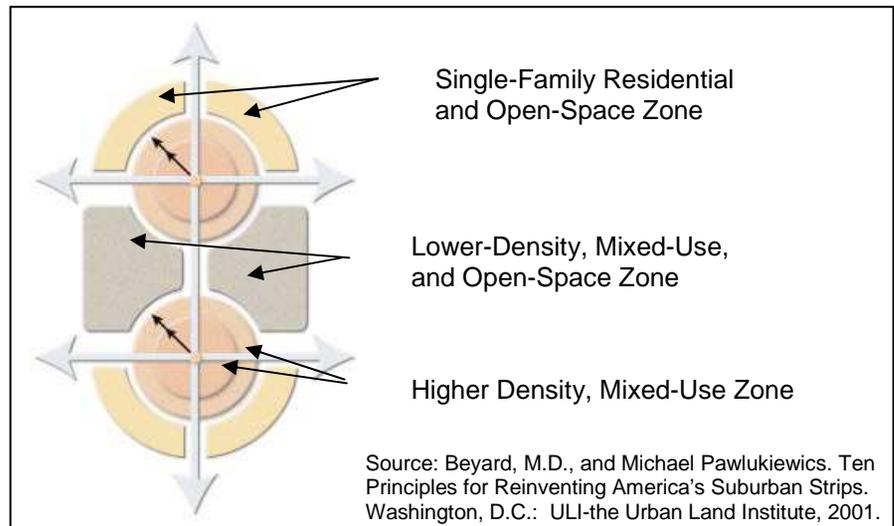
Another important aspect in redeveloping commercial strips entails transforming the form of development. The auto-oriented character of the current strip is due in part to large expanses of parking in the front of buildings, at the street edge. To create a street character more in keeping with Hillsborough’s Historic District, new development and infill should bring buildings to the front of the lots, to create a street frontage, and should locate parking to the side and rear.

Implementation will involve updating future land use maps and amending development regulations. Specific recommendations include the creation of an overlay design district for the corridor that includes specific regulations for things like height and number of commercial signs, distances between driveways, setbacks, specific types of land uses permitted, landscaping requirements, undergrounding of utilities, and bulk regulations that specify minimum and maximum height requirements. Also, the development along the corridor currently is 41% retail. We recommend that the zoning maps be updated to shift some of this to more mixed uses.

We recommend that new development and substantial redevelopments within the overlay district are subject to review by a Technical Review Committee (TRC), to be appointed by the Town Board. Adopted design guidelines would aid property owners and inform the decisions of the TRC.

**Planning for Future Development Patterns~  
Recommendations**

- Identify and market development and redevelopment opportunities within the corridor.
- Put limits on sprawl-type development at the community’s edge while opportunities to redevelop areas with existing infrastructure remain.
- Transform the physical character of developments along Churton Street through the use of zoning and development guidelines that encourage development to mix uses vertically, bring buildings closer to the street edge and to locate parking to the rear and sides.
- Put in place policies to require that rear parking lots be connected to one another.
- Encourage high quality commercial landscaping through design guidelines and incentive programs.



### *Future Land Use Considerations*

The planning committee discussed potential future uses of land in each section of the corridor.

#### **Waterstone Area**

The southern most section of the corridor is currently in transition from a rural environment to a more urban environment as a large planned community, Waterstone, is under construction. Development pressures in this area will fall on the land directly fronting Churton Street that is currently vacant or in residential use. Developing design guidelines and recommendations for buffers and setbacks will allow the town to influence the character of this area. This is the only section of the corridor where a four lane cross-section is initially proposed. This is because of the large projected increase in traffic volume due to Waterstone.

#### **Churton South**

We propose that the section of the corridor south of the downtown and north of I-85 maintain its focus as a regional draw for shoppers and tourists. This will entail continued investment and planning for those businesses oriented towards tourists, such as antiques dealers. We encourage the development of small area plans for the redevelopment of the old Wal-Mart site into a more mixed use shopping and entertainment center. We envision and transit-oriented development for the tracts of land that will border the new alignment of US 70 Business and Orange Grove Road. This area could evolve as a work-live-play district that will support the historic downtown by offering living and working environments in an urban setting that is connected through bicycle and pedestrian links to the historic district, community recreational amenities such as ball fields, walking trails, the future Gold Park and regional trail systems such as the planned Riverwalk that will be park of the Mountain to Sea trail.

#### **Land Use Considerations – Recommendations**

- Plan for expected future development in the Waterstone area.
- Maintain and expand regional focus of I-85 area to revitalize tourism potential.
- Plan for redevelopment of old Wal-Mart site into a mixed use center.
- Work with TTA and NC DOT Rail Division to locate a transit stop and park and ride lot on the planned high speed rail corridor in Hillsborough.
- Plan for the redevelopment of northern part of Churton South district into a transit-oriented community.
- Plan for active recreation as part of the Churton South district.
- Maintain the neighborhood commercial character of North Churton.

The Southern Railway line is slated to carry high speed rail services between Greensboro and Durham. We propose that TTA be approached about including a commuter stop in this area in future plans. We envision a transit oriented village occupying this area that would include a transit stop, a park and ride lot, offices, shops and restaurants as well as higher density living arrangement and work-live units. We also propose that the existing ball fields at Collins field be incorporated into a larger town-wide recreation facility that would include baseball fields, soccer fields, basketball and a running track and/or walking trails.

**North Churton**

We recommend that the area north of the historic district, known as North Hills retain its character as neighborhood retail. Pedestrian connectivity and access should be enhanced to make reaching the shopping destinations on foot easier. The recommendations for crosswalks and signals in the transportation plan should accomplish this. Façade grant programs and improved landscaping will improve the appearance of the district. Public transit stops should also be located in easily accessible locations. New development/redevelopment on the west side of Churton should provide access off of Revere Road. We recommend closing some driveways in this area. Entrance for parking at the development on the northeast corner of Corbin and Churton should be relocated to Corbin, with right-out egress located on Churton, as shown in the plan drawing.

The area north of US 70 Bypass will likely experience development pressure in the future. Buffer requirements will help preserve the natural landscapes. We recommend that the area to develop in a manner that is appropriate for a community entrance



*Churton South: Example of a mixed-use building that would be an appropriate type for the live-work-play district imagined in the Churton South area. Note that the parking is internal to the site, shops are located at ground floor with condos above, materials reflect those found in the Historic District and buildings are brought to the street edge, to create a coherent, pedestrian friendly streetscape.*

**Historic District**

Plan recommendations for the historic district are kept to the minimum, as the main focus is on improving the appearance and function of the northern and southern ends of the corridor. The planning committee supports the recommendations of the Downtown Hillsborough Appearance Improvements Plan adopted in 1998. We suggest installing mid-block and corner crosswalks in contrasting pavers, relocating utilities behind buildings or burying them as is feasible, continuing to improve landscaping installations, and continuing to work towards improving the retail/office mix. Stewardship of street edges is also important. Litter pick up along with weed elimination would improve the appearance of the downtown business district. In the historic neighborhood, we recommend installing sidewalks on both sides of the street, as is feasible. Existing mature vegetation should be maintained.



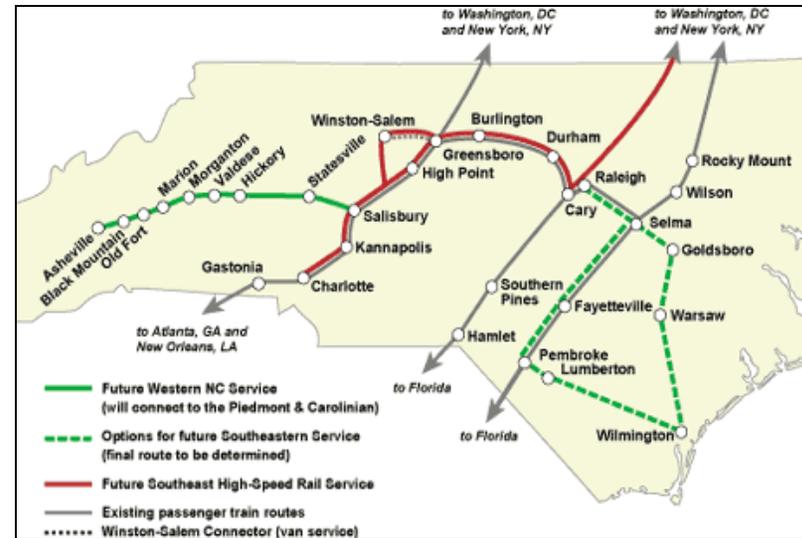
*Reviving Wal-Mart: This shopping center was created by reinventing and abandoned big box store. Flanking wings were added onto the main store site to create the green shown in the picture. The old west theme is appropriate for this centers Montana location.*



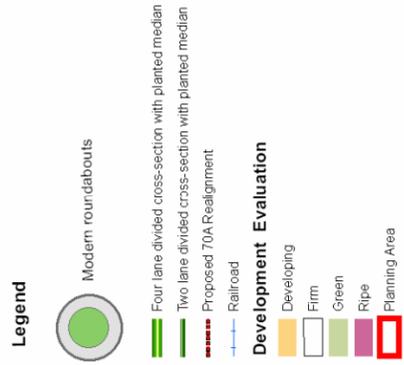
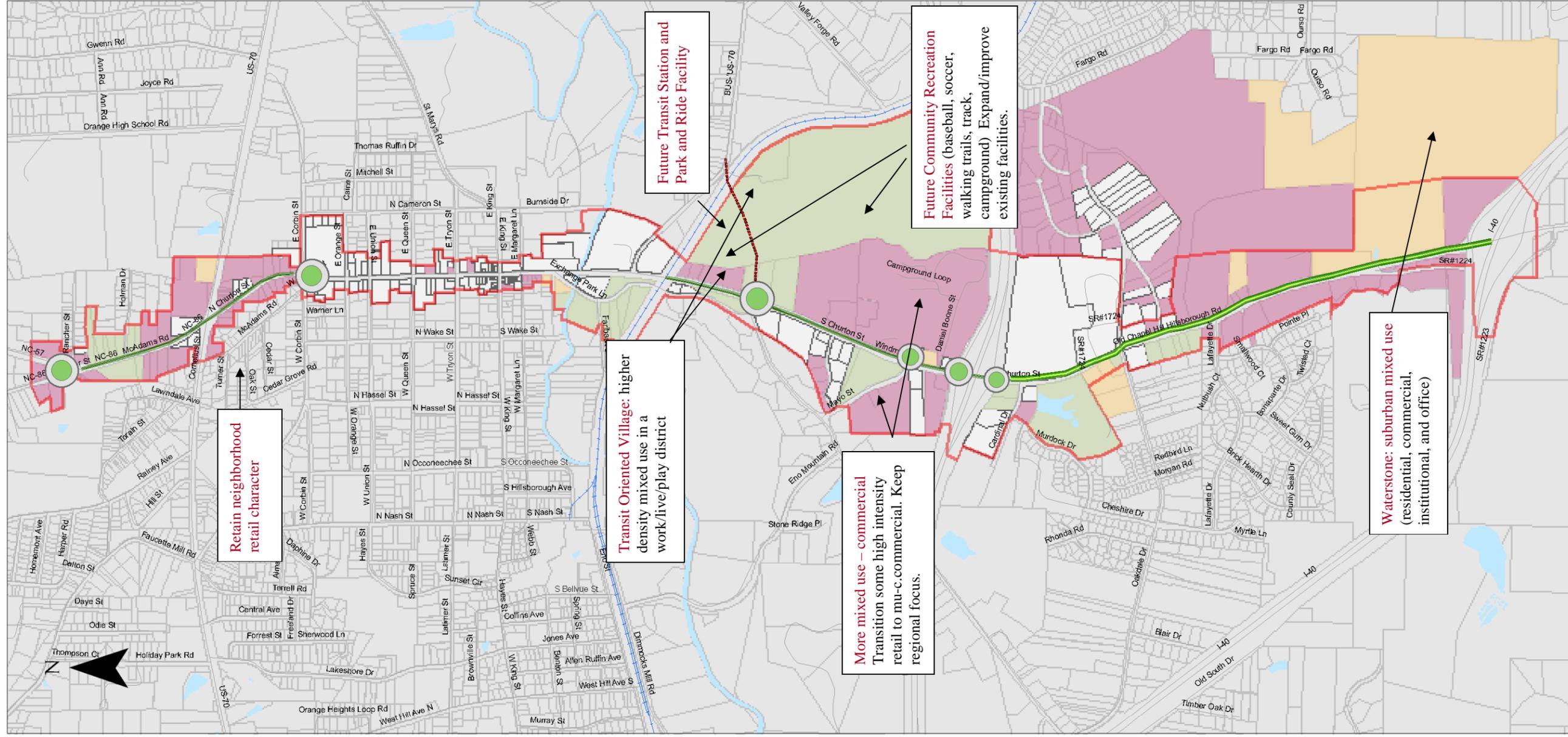
A transit station, like this one, is proposed for the Churton South district, adjacent to the high speed rail corridor. The district, both in its design, and uses should complement, not compete with, the Historic District.



Churton South: Transit-oriented development centered around a regional rail stop could include live/work units, like these, to provide living and working environments that would be attractive to those wishing to live in close proximity to Hillsborough's Historic District.



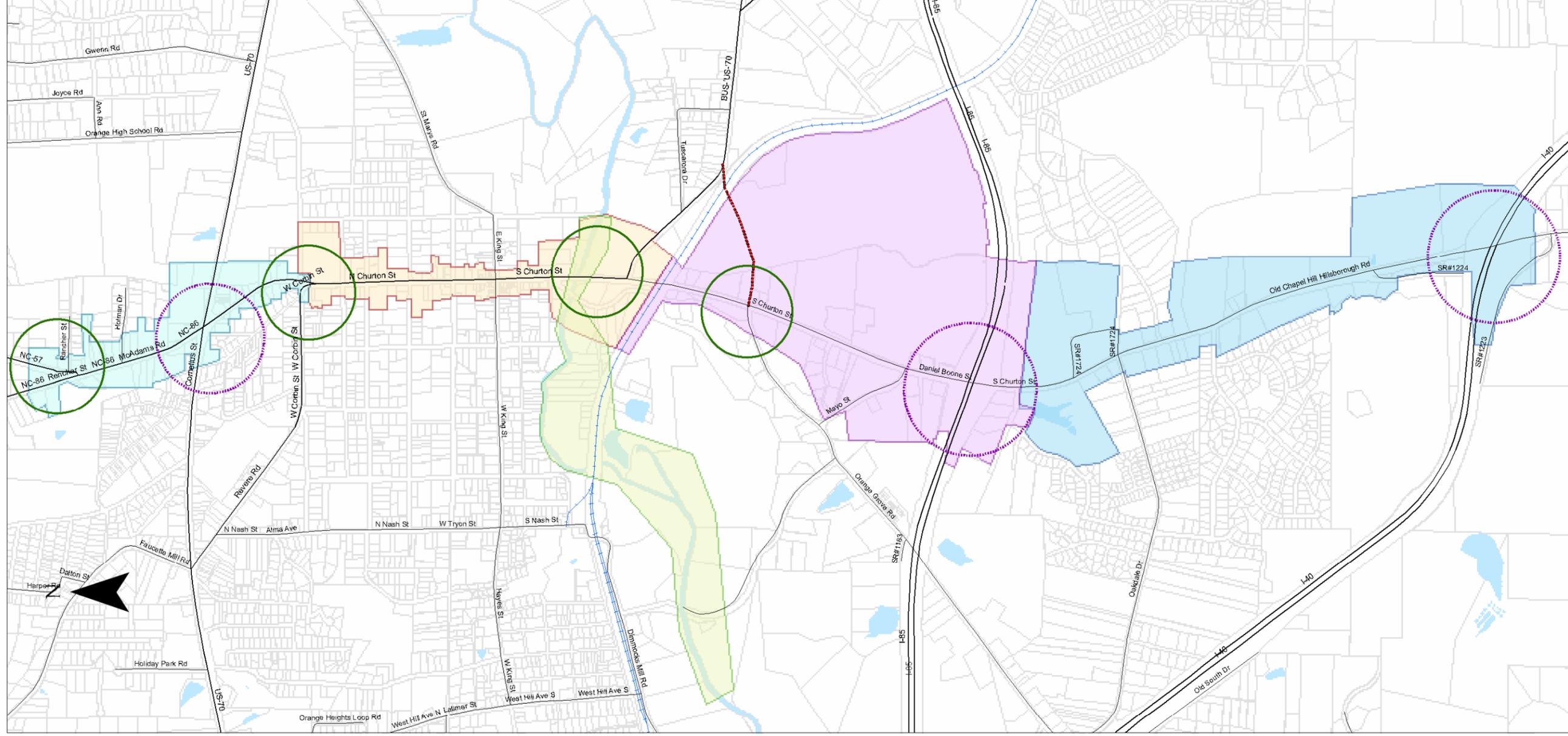
From Regional Transit Plan/Regional Rail Project Overview, Triangle Transit Authority



Map: Anne K. Morris  
 NC Division of Community Assistance  
 Central Regional Office  
 Raleigh, NC 27616

# Land Use Considerations





**Legend**

- North Hills District
- Historic District
- Churton South District
- Riverwalk Area
- Waterstone District
- Secondary Roads
- Primary Roads
- Proposed 70A Realignment
- Railroad
- Community Gateway
- District Gateway



Map: Anne K. Morris  
 NC Division of Community Assistance  
 Central Regional Office  
 Raleigh, NC 27616

# Districts and Gateways



### *Districts and Gateways*

**Recommendation:** Develop community entrances that convey a sense of arrival and reflect the character of Hillsborough.

#### *Community Gateways*

- A. The I-40 interchange (south Churton)
- B. the I-85 interchange (south Churton)
- C. the US 70 Bypass intersection (north Churton)

#### *District Gateways*

- D. US 70A-Churton intersection area (historic district/south Churton transition). Extends to future Orange Grove Road alignment of US 70A.
- E. the Corbin/Churton intersection (historic district/north Churton transition)
- F. The NC 86/57 split (rural transition)

During the public participation portion of the planning process, concerns regarding the appearance of the areas of Churton Street both north and south of the historic district arose repeatedly. Citizens expressed concerns that these areas did not reflect Hillsborough's historic character, that their piecemeal development did not provide for attractive entrances into town, and that they feared that visitors to Hillsborough were deterred by the appearance of these areas. Churton Street is intersected by a number of major transportation routes throughout the planning area. These interchanges define district boundaries and provide a transition from one district to another.

The map on the previous page shows proposed districts and gateways. Both are concepts whose implementation will help to create sense of place in areas of the corridor that currently exhibit the monotonous character typical of aging commercial strips. Districts, through the use of landscaping, architectural themes, signage, and merchant collaboration, enable visitors and citizens to know where they are within the town. They provide a sense of identity and purpose for distinct geographical areas.

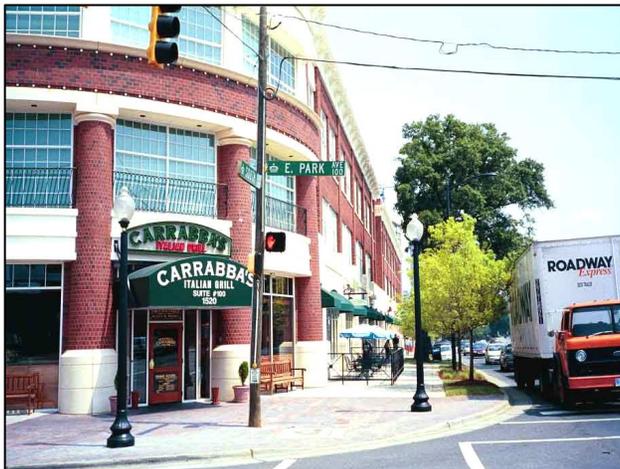
Gateways, usually centered on key intersections, function as either entrances to the community or transition points between one district and another or one type of environment and another. The plan distinguishes between *community gateways* and *district gateways*. Community gateways are areas identified by the town as the community entranceways. Through special landscaping, signage and community art, they communicate to visitors that, "You have arrived in Hillsborough." It is the beginning of a different kind of environment. District gateways function as transition points between one district and another or from Hillsborough's urban environment to a more rural context. This plan recommends that the town develop design guidelines to encourage developers of projects at these key locations to design buildings that will become future community landmarks. The architectural design should reflect the buildings location at a prominent site along the corridor. Buildings should be two or three stories, should address both streets and should include pedestrian plazas, landscaping or public art as is appropriate. These treatments help orient visitors to their location within the corridor and will signal that they are leaving one district, or type of environment and arriving in another.

*Gateways serve as community entranceways and feature community signage and attractive landscaping that help to establish the community's image in the mind of visitors.*

The plan recommends roundabouts as the preferred intersection treatment for a number of the gateways listed above, including the I-85, Orange Grove Road, Corbin and 86/57 split interchanges. Roundabouts, in addition to providing improved traffic flow and reduction in crash rates, can also serve as attractive backdrops for community gateway signage, landscaping and public art. The aesthetic potential of roundabouts appealed to many citizens who commented on drafts of the plan.



*Community gateways serve as community entranceways and feature community signage and attractive landscaping that help establish the community's image in the mind of visitors.*



*District gateways mark the a transition between districts. They may indicate a change in character and are often at key intersections. Buildings located at these key intersections should provide architectural detail that reflects this transition and their position of prominence along the corridor.*

### District Recommendations

- Establish districts along the Churton Street Corridor as a way to promote the concept of “place-making.” Encouraging districts will help distinct areas begin to establish a recognizable identity.
- Encourage property owners to work together to develop a district identity, improve property appearance and market their district as a desirable shopping and/or business location.
- Use the district concept as an element in a coordinated wayfinding system and in related visitor brochures and maps.

### Gateway Recommendations

- Establish gateway character areas and provide guidelines for the development of landscaping and hardscaping of these gateways in a manner will provide some consistency and identity as part of Hillsborough.
  - Hardscaping materials typical of Hillsborough, including: low stacked stone or rubble stone walls, red brick, wrought iron
  - Develop community signage that is part of a coordinated wayfinding system.
  - Native woodland plants, evergreen and perennials that reflect the lush natural setting of Hillsborough.
  - Consider public art, fountains, clock tower or other elements selected by the community as representative of the character of Hillsborough.
  - Add features such as roundabouts and planted medians, as well as enhanced roadway landscaping to welcome visitors and signal to them that they have entered the Town of Hillsborough.
- Encourage developers of projects located at prominent intersections, such as district gateways to include architectural features that convey the buildings prominent location along the corridor.

### *Apply the Four Point Approach*

We recommend that corridor revitalization for Churton Street employ the use of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's *Main Street Four Point Approach* for downtown revitalization to the rest of the corridor. In North Carolina alone, this approach has generated over \$1.0 billion of new investment in 53 local communities, since 1980. This investment has resulted in over 2700 renovated buildings and the net creation of 11,500 new jobs and 2800 new businesses. The approach includes identifying and pursuing opportunities to *organize* for corridor revitalization, *promote* the corridor as an attractive business and shopping destination, improve the *design* aesthetic of landscapes and properties, and consider *economic restructuring* to recruit and maintain business that will be successful given Hillsborough's market. The Main Street Program is run out of the Office of Urban Development in the NC Division of Community Assistance. Hillsborough is not an official Main Street community but has successfully used the approach to revitalize its Historic Downtown. Increasingly, Main Street managers are applying the proven approach to downtown revitalization to the commercial corridors that lead visitors from nearby freeway to their downtowns.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that Hillsborough join this trend and develop a program for corridor revitalization. This will involve all four points of the approach: Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring. Many of the recommendations of this plan fall into these categories.

### The Main Street Four Point Approach (as applied to a commercial corridor)

**Organization** may involve:

- developing a committee that will shepherd implementation of the plan
- establishing a Business Improvement District, and/or
- developing district-level merchant's associations.

**Design** related activities include:

- adopting and promoting design guidelines
- providing incentives for façade, signage and landscape improvements, or
- undertaking corridor beautification programs by installing new landscaping.

**Promotion** encompasses activities designed to encourage shoppers and investors to discover the districts and shopping destinations. They might include:

- promotional sales events
- music festivals
- advertising of available properties and other public relations activities.
- build support for plan vision and recommendations among various stakeholder groups.

**Economic restructuring** involves changing the economic makeup of the corridor by encouraging new business sectors or types of land uses. Activities might involve preparation of market studies, recruitment of businesses and fostering of entrepreneurship.

### *Landscaping, Parks and Open Spaces*

A number of the highest ranked priorities identified through the community involvement process, as well as many specific citizen comments, related to incorporating quality landscaping and recreational opportunities throughout the corridor. The items below summarize the public's priorities:

- Emphasize walkability, pedestrian safety, and trail links throughout the corridor.
- Make landscaping a prominent component of Churton Street roadway and streetscape design.
- Ensure proper maintenance of landscapes.



*Attractive landscaping adds to the appeal of the corridor.  
Source: Frazier and Associates, 2006.*

### **Landscaping for Commercial Corridors**

Roadway landscapes present a number of challenges.

Installed landscapes must:

- be attractive when installed,
- be able to withstand the harsh conditions of a road-side setting characterized by poor drainage, excessive wind, heat in summer and, in many cases, constricted planting areas;
- thrive with little maintenance and still look attractive,
- meet public expectations for a continuous healthy display that will not grow too large for their setting,
- be attractive year round.

These same challenges are true to most developed properties where plants are relegated to locations with conditions far from a natural or garden setting.

Since Churton Street is a North Carolina Department of Transportation right of way, landscaping on the public right of way must meet *NCDOT Guidelines for Planting within Highway Right-of Way* and be permitted with an encroachment agreement. These guidelines stipulate the minimum distance from the travel lane vegetation must be located, keeping sight distances clear of vegetation and maintaining drainage. Following these guidelines results in a safe roadway system for vehicles and pedestrians.

Above ground and underground utilities also impact plant locations and the size of plant materials.

The plan recommends both softscape and hardscape materials as well as ways to involve citizens and business owners in beautification efforts.

### Key Recommendations of Landscaping, Parks and Open Spaces within the Corridor

- Plan for and implement attractive landscaping along the entire length of Churton Street corridor that beautifies the corridor, softens the edges between the roadway and the planned pedestrian network, and results in attractive properties along the corridor.
- Encourage the use of plant materials that are in keeping with Hillsborough's overall character and that are well suited to the harsh conditions of a roadway setting and the urban environment. These may include newer varieties with similar characteristics that perform well in these conditions.
- The landscape should include a variety of plants of different sizes and aesthetic attributes to create a landscape with visual interest and appeal. The landscape should include evergreens and deciduous trees with appealing form and structure for winter beauty.
- Encourage project developers to include small open spaces such as courtyards or plazas in their plans.
- Develop opportunities for the community to be involved in beautification projects along the corridor.

The public overwhelmingly called for making landscaping a prominent component of Churton Street roadway and streetscape design. In response to this, the conceptual plan indicates opportunities to beautify the corridor through roadway plantings. One idea is to expand the planting of dogwoods, which are a defining characteristic of Hillsborough in the spring, in existing wooded areas along the corridor. Other areas of the corridor need ground covers on steep banks to help prevent erosion. These areas currently look unkempt and weedy.



*Dogwoods in bloom in Spring in Hillsborough's Historic District.*

Daylilies are a popular roadside planting that can be seen throughout the state. Typically, NC DOT and communities rely on the popular bright yellow Stella d'Oro and its orange counterpart. Daylilies can be purchased in an amazing variety of color combinations and can easily be cross-bred to develop new varieties. We recommend that the town, in collaboration with local garden clubs sponsor a community daylily exchange once a year to share interesting daylily varieties and to create interesting roadside plantings in a number of areas along the corridor. Daylilies have the advantage of being beautiful, durable, excellent for erosion control as well as bountiful: they multiply each year, making them a cost-efficient addition to roadside landscaping.

Getting the public involved in corridor beautification will also help create a community of stewards for the corridor whose roles can be expanded beyond landscaping to keeping properties along the corridor attractive on an ongoing basis, through activities such as grounds maintenance, litter pick up, paint and repair work and façade improvement.



*Daylilies come in a multitude of colors and can be easily crossbred.*

*Getting the public involved in corridor beautification will also help create a community of stewards.*



*Oakes Daylilies: A scene from the Ameriflora Exposition, held in Columbus, OH in 1992. Photo source: Oakes Daylilies 1993 catalog, page 13; photo by Sharon Fitzpatrick.*



*Objectives:*

- To enhance the visitor's experience in Hillsborough by improving the signage along the Churton Street Corridor in a way that makes reaching desired destinations simpler.
- To develop a coordinated system of signage that minimizes the number and types of signs necessary to easily find destinations.
- To improve the aesthetic appeal of the corridor by decreasing sign clutter and allowing the natural beauty of Hillsborough become the dominant characteristic of the corridor.
- To increase the effectiveness of signs by creating an environment with a more streamlined, predictable appearance

One of the primary motivations for undertaking this planning process centered around the desire to improve the visitor's overall experience and to transform the areas of the Churton Street Corridor outside of the historic district into environments that would reflect the town's character and be readily identifiable as part of Hillsborough. Subsequent public comment revealed that many citizens felt the existing signage was ineffective in guiding travelers to desired destinations and that the overabundance of various types of signage contributed to a cluttered environment.

The following priorities regarding signage emerged from the workshops and were voted on by Open House participants. They are presented in rank order:

1. Signs should reflect Hillsborough
2. Update sign ordinance
3. Make sign enforcement a priority/remove temporary signs
4. Develop "town-scale" wayfinding/sign directories in shopping centers
5. Height of signs should be addressed
6. Develop better or consolidated signage for [older shopping centers]

## Key Recommendations for Signage

- **Reduce Sign Clutter:** Implement strategies to remove illegal temporary signs.
- **Plan and Install Way-finding Signs:** Establish a coordinated way-finding system that helps the user find their destination and understand where they are in the system.
- **Implement Commercial Signage Plan:** Plan for and implement low-key commercial signage along the corridor that reinforces Hillsborough's identity and the concept of "place-making."
- **Highway Guide Signage:** Work with NC DOT to replace and relocate when necessary outdated and excessive highway directional signage.



*The impact of implementing the above signage recommendations is evident in this revitalized corridor.  
Photo: Frazier and Associates.*

### Wayfinding Program

We recommend that the Town initiate a planning process to develop a coordinated system of directional signage that will have the following characteristics.

The images below and on the following page are examples of way-finding systems. They show how the signs relate to one-another and explains their function. It is anticipated that Hillsborough will seek to develop a similar program. Implementing such a system will take about two years. In year 1, activities will focus on hiring a consultant firm and planning for the signage, including determining the preferred design, sign locations and key destinations. In year two, activities will focus on fabricating and installing the signs.

The wayfinding system is designed to work with a commercial signage plan that emphasizes low, monument style signs. These two programs should be implemented concurrently to emphasize the benefits each provides to the visitor and the corridor's appearance. The two systems complement each other in that the trailblazer and district signs are mounted on poles at eye level, while commercial signage would be at a lower level, closer to the ground. By consistently implementing these height guidelines, travelers will learn to look up for directional signage and lower for site signage. Additionally, one type of signage will not block the other and will reduce the overall sense of "sign clutter" that characterizes the corridor.

*Wayfinding is designed to work with commercial signage...one type of signage will not block the other and will reduce the overall sense of "sign clutter."*

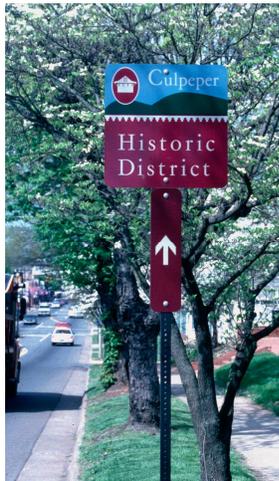
### Characteristics of a Wayfinding Program

- Signs will be readily identifiable with Hillsborough
- Exhibit common characteristics that will help create a "brand" for Hillsborough
- Includes new community gateway signs that welcome visitors to Hillsborough and reflect the unique character of Hillsborough.
- Incorporates trailblazer signs that reinforce "place-making" by directing visitors to major attractions and shopping districts
- Customizes street-level signage to orient the visitor to their location
- Places public parking signs and pedestrian level signage so that they work together to make public parking easy to find and then provides more detailed information to help them find their specific destination.



*It is important to get a handle on sign clutter to maximize the effectiveness of a wayfinding system. Photo: Frazier and Associates*

Example Wayfinding Systems



© Frazier and Associates, 2006.

*Commercial Signage Plan*

**Recommendation:** Plan for and implement low-key commercial signage along the corridor that reinforces Hillsborough’s identity and the concept of “place-making.”

The pictures below show those images from the Development Types survey which were most highly rated. Participants preferred lower, monument style signs to higher signs. They also rated those pictures that showed temporary signs very negatively and those with a neat appearance very highly. Participants also rated an internally-lit box style signs negatively compared to those that appeared to be of more traditional materials.

The Churton Street Planning team held a follow-up discussion on signage where community members looked at the results of the survey and identified elements that differentiated highly rated signs from poorly rated signs.



**Key Elements of Commercial Signage Plan**

- **Strengthen ordinances**
  - Consider shortening amortization: 3 yrs for existing nonconformities, 6 yrs for previously conforming signs
  - Height Limit: 5 feet
  - Number Limit: 1 per entrance
  - Place names only
- **Design guidelines**
  - Monument signs preferred
  - Externally lit rather than internally lit
  - Landscaping critical
- **Incentives for early compliance**
  - Plywood mockups
  - Public-private partnership
  - Signage grants –50-50 match. Provide a limited time frame for participation.
- **Code enforcement**
  - Fine system for violators
  - Get creative – hire intern
  - Public education program-website, brochures

*Survey participants preferred lower, monument style signs to higher signs.*

*Commercial Signage Improvements*

**Before:**

Internally lit tall pole sign, temporary signage, poor landscaping, undefined curb cuts



**After:**

Attractive landscaping, monument-style signs, more defined site entrance



They also discussed the role they felt commercial signage should play within the corridor. In general, participants agreed that commercial signage should be used to foster “place-making” by identifying the commercial center or development instead of being used for detailed advertising of multiple tenants or daily specials. Signs should identify the place. Specific comments can be found in the citizen involvement section of the plan.

*“Businesses need to ask themselves, ‘Are we using our street as the primary avenue of advertising?’ Is that what we want to do? Are you trying to help the person find you or are you just grabbing drive by customers?”*

*–quote from local business owner*

*Improving NC DOT Guide Signs*

The Churton Street Corridor is intersected by multiple commuter and interstate transportation routes. As Churton has grown from a rural state highway to become more of an urban ‘main street,’ the NCDOT guide signage has not been updated. The current signs are too large for their current context and are showing some age. We recommend that they be replaced with smaller signs that are grouped in a cohesive manner. The signs below from Williamsburg, Virginia, show how highway shield signs can be grouped to provide easily readable directional signage for visitors. We recommend that the town work with NC DOT to bring this approach to North Carolina. The pictures on the following pages give examples of how this approach would look along the corridor and what some of the signs might look like.



*Williamsburg, VA. Example coordinated shield signage*



*Example of recommended timber guardrails as installed on Merritt Parkway. These steel reinforced timber guardrails are approved by NC DOT and have been used on the Blue Ridge Parkway and on the award-winning Paris to Lexington Pike, in Kentucky.*

**Updated DOT guide signage**



*Southern Railroad Bridge in winter: Before*



*Southern Railroad Bridge in winter: After  
Removing sign clutter, overhead utility lines and adding attractive timber guardrails add up to subtle changes that allow the natural beauty of Hillsborough to come into focus*



*Close up view of Southern Railroad Bridge in Spring*



*Close up view of new signage at Southern Railroad Bridge in Spring  
Other changes include removing the traffic signal at the US 70 Business intersection and installing a diverter to prevent left turns and placing utilities underground. (This would happen in conjunction with the realignment of US 70 Business at Orange Grove Road.)*

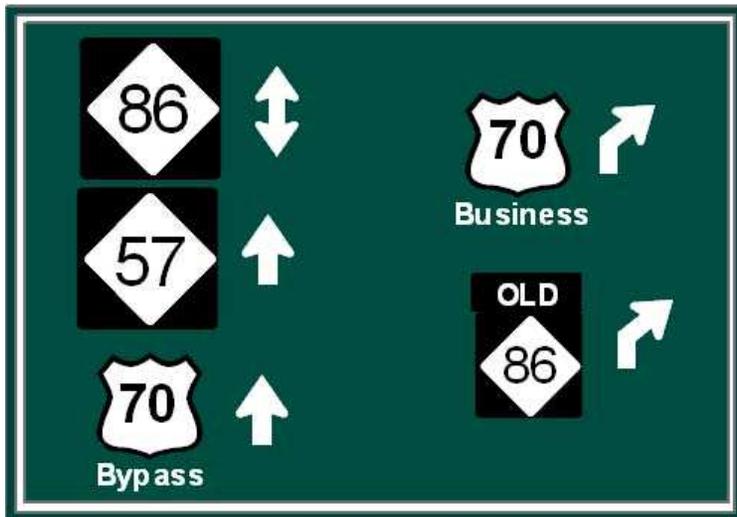
Mock up of shield signs recommendations



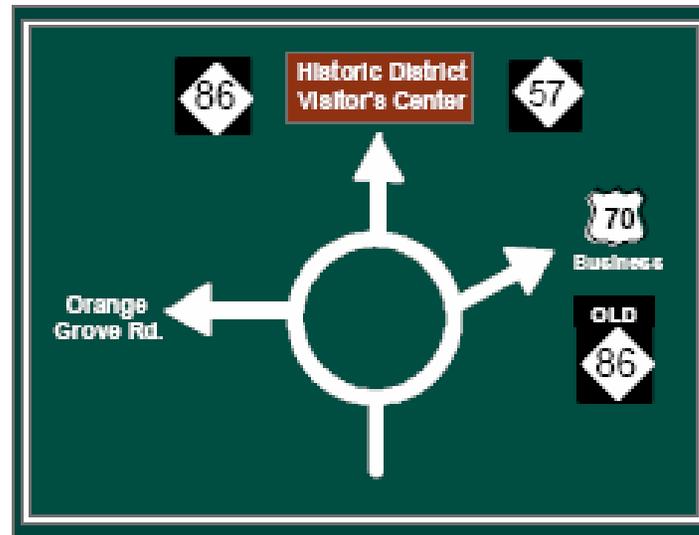
Improved signage at junction of Us 70 Business at Churton Street.



South Churton, north of Railroad Bridge and just south of Churton/70 interchange



Improved signage for South Churton. Replaces shield Signs south of railroad bridge and north of Orange Grove Road.



Future roundabout signage at Orange Grove Road, heading north.



## Chapter 3: Implementation Plan

## IMPLEMENTATION: RECOMMENDATIONS

---

The Churton Street Corridor Redevelopment Task Force has compiled a list of recommendations and tasks that are necessary for the achievement of the vision for Churton Street.

Carrying out the recommendations will depend on a variety of factors. Factors to consider include:

- The availability and prioritization of staff time and resources;
- Coordination of schedules and timelines with partner organizations;
- The market forces driving development and redevelopment in the Corridor;
- The availability of resources and the scheduling of other key organizations (for example: the NCDOT)

These factors preclude a precise timeline for implementation. The priority of items will be described as:

**Short:** 6 months to 2 years. Resources should be immediately allocated to address this strategy.

**Mid-range:** 2 to 5 years. These tasks require phasing or are dependent on the completion of short-term tasks.

**Long:** 5 years or more. No urgency required. These tasks may be completed as resources and timing allow.

The following section outlines the specific actions recommended by the Task Force.

**We recommend that the Town take the following specific actions:**

1. Adopt the Churton Street Corridor Strategic Plan. SHORT
2. Share the Churton Street Corridor Strategic Plan with the NCDOT, the Strategic Growth Plan Steering Committee, and

other regional planning bodies to ensure that future planning projects incorporate the recommended transportation improvements, land use considerations, and design principles

- Continue to involve interest groups and civic groups in implementation to build broad based support. SHORT
  - Encourage NCDOT to replace existing guide/informational signs (shield signs) with recommended consolidated signs. SHORT
  - Encourage NCDOT to relocate mileage sign and town limits signs outside existing town limits. SHORT
  - Encourage NCDOT to improve landscaping and appearance of their property along corridor. SHORT
  - Discuss the potential of future high-speed rail through Hillsborough with the NCDOT Rail Division. LONG
  - Work with Duke Power to develop a policy that will facilitate the burying of utility lines as substantial development and redevelopment takes place in the corridor. LONG
3. Hire a consultant to guide the process of developing a wayfinding signage system that includes public involvement and is coordinated with the results of the community branding process undertaken by the Tourism Board. SHORT
  4. Hire a traffic engineer consultant to review the transportation plan before seeking NCDOT endorsement. SHORT
  5. Direct planning staff to draft a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance that institutes new sign regulations and enforcement mechanisms, as recommended by the Conceptual Plan, for freestanding, temporary, and non-conforming signs. SHORT
    - Update signage ordinance with recommended revisions for height, placement, number and materials, etc. SHORT
  6. Direct planning staff to develop design standards for new development and redevelopment in the Corridor. SHORT
    - Amend zoning classifications within overlay as recommended to reduce amount of retail and encourage

## IMPLEMENTATION: RECOMMENDATIONS

---

- more mixed-use development during the comprehensive ordinance rewrite. SHORT
  - Develop a small area plan for the Churton South district that is based on public participation. SHORT
  - Direct Parks and Recreation Board to include the Churton Street Corridor in the Master Plan Update. SHORT
  - Incorporate the Downtown Streetscape Plan into design standards. SHORT
  - Develop Capital Improvements Plan for development along the Corridor. SHORT
  - Develop a phased landscaping plan for Gateways. SHORT
  - Develop a plan for landscaping of roundabouts. MID-RANGE
  - Consider incentives for extending sidewalks on currently developed properties. MID-RANGE
7. Direct planning staff to research and recommend options for development review process changes. SHORT
8. Direct planning staff to research and recommend specific incentives available for façade and landscaping improvements and signage compliance. SHORT
- Develop incentives aimed at encouraging landscaping improvements, extending the sidewalk network, and replacing non-conforming commercial signs. SHORT
  - Develop a signage grant program. This program could provide town-financed on-site wayfinding or directional signage in exchange for replacement of non-compliant commercial signs with appropriately scaled monument signs. SHORT
  - Investigate DOT Enhancement Grant funding. SHORT
  - Develop a facade grant program to provide incentives for property owners to improve their properties. MID-RANGE
    - Develop a landscaping grant program to provide incentives for property owners to improve their properties. MID-RANGE
    - Investigate feasibility of funding assistance Self Financing Bonds. MID-RANGE
9. Establish an Implementation Team that includes members from the Town Board, the EDC, the Chamber of Commerce, the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough, the Tourism Board, and planning staff to meet at least twice a year for the next three years to oversee short and mid-range implementation. SHORT
- Encourage business owners in each district to work together to market their district. SHORT
10. Ask the Economic Development Commission to recommend specific economic development tools and marketing strategies for properties in the Corridor. MID-RANGE
- Ask the Economic Development Commission to assist in business recruitment for properties located in the Corridor. SHORT
  - Ask the Economic Development Commission to utilize their website to highlight available properties along the Corridor. SHORT
  - Facilitate the development of merchants' associations in areas of the corridor where none currently exist. SHORT
  - Work with merchants' associations to develop promotional events. Promotion is a key component of any revitalization effort. SHORT
  - Undertake a market study for the corridor to reveal specific opportunities for economic development within the corridor and help the town focus recruitment efforts and infrastructure investments effectively. MID-RANGE
11. Direct planning staff to develop an information packet about the Churton Street Corridor Strategic Plan to be distributed to new and existing property owners and tenants by such entities as the Chamber of Commerce and the EDC. SHORT
- Publish the Churton Street Plan, design standards, and collateral documents on the town website. SHORT

Develop public information documents and an executive summary of the Churton St. Corridor Plan. **SHORT** An implementation tool is a means to execute a strategy and enforce a development policy. It includes regulatory and non-regulatory measures to direct or influence the immediate physical development of land. The use of any implementation tool must be authorized by the General Assembly—either through the General Statutes or special legislation. In addition, Hillsborough must consider the costs associated with the administration and implementation of a tool.

Each implementation tool should be carried out as part of an integrated growth management program, which is a schedule of complementary ordinances, regulations, programs, and actions designed to reinforce the Town’s land use policies. The most commonly used implementation tools are zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and building codes. Below is a brief summary of some of the tools available to local governments to implement the Corridor plan:

### *Zoning Ordinance*

The zoning ordinance is one of the primary tools used to implement land development plans. The zoning ordinance and map set forth standards on the use of land within a town’s planning jurisdiction. The zoning ordinance can also include supplemental regulations on building setbacks, driveway cuts, buffering and landscaping, signs, and other development codes that are applicable to corridor enhancement. Implementation of many of the recommendations in this plan will require amendments to the Town of Hillsborough Zoning Ordinance and zoning map.

### *Subdivision Regulations*

Subdivision regulations are regulatory tools that set standards and procedures for dividing land and installing public improvements. Subdivision regulations are useful in implementing policies related to the environment, public facilities, and the land development plan. They typically include provisions for installing or paying for public improvements and community amenities, providing open space and land dedications, and for designing the layout of streets, sidewalks, and lots.

### *Inter-local Agreements*

Inter-local agreements or contracts are entered between two or more governmental entities to address local growth and development issues. These agreements offer local governments the opportunity to pool resources (physical and financial) to the mutual benefit of both parties. Inter-local agreements can be used to make public improvements, provide for the joint use of public facilities, or establish urban growth areas.

### *Design Manuals and Design Guidelines*

Although closely related, a Design Manual functions differently than Design Guidelines. Although both tools regulatory and contain design criteria, which is used to determine the appropriateness of a project, the administrative process of each tool differs. The following section describes the purposes of each of these types of design regulation.

A Design Manual is a document, which contains performance standards or design criteria, that is intended to be prescriptive. The design criteria and performance standards take the form of measurable regulation to be applied to development and redevelopment proposals during the site plan review process. Design manuals generally include standards for architectural design, landscape design, vehicular circulation, bike and pedestrian facilities, service and storage areas, signage, as well as lighting and noise regulations.

Design Guidelines are a set of discretionary statements aimed at guiding land development toward the achievement of stated community goals. Design guidelines can be integrated into the zoning ordinance or implemented as a stand-alone document. Guidelines generally include a set of development principles that outline local design priorities and concerns. Guidelines are meant to advise and assist property owners as development or redevelopment occurs. They can be designed to accomplish specific goals such as promoting a sense of place or community identity, or higher quality development standards along commercial corridors. Design guidelines can be voluntary or mandatory regulations.

### *Capital Improvement Program*

A capital improvement program (CIP) is a process for identifying and prioritizing short-term capital facility and infrastructure needs and details a plan for financing them. Hillsborough currently has a CIP. Many of the recommendations presented in this plan will need to be incorporated into the Town's existing CIP.

### *Self-Financing Bonds: Tax Incremental Financing*

In November 2004, the voters of North Carolina approved an amendment to the North Carolina Constitution, which allows Self-Financing Bonds, otherwise known as Tax-Increment Financing. TIF captures the future tax benefits of real estate improvements in a designated area to pay the present cost of those improvements. It is designed to channel funding, or tax increment, toward improvements in distressed or underdeveloped areas where development would not otherwise occur.<sup>1</sup> TIF can be used to finance public infrastructure, land acquisition, demolition, utilities and planning costs, and other improvements. This revitalization tool gives local governments the authority to designate tax increment financing districts for a designated amount of time over which bonds issued to fund improvements can be repaid. Commonly a city government division, or quasi-public authority, assumes the administrative role. This entity is governed by a city council or appointed commission, which makes decisions about how and where the tool is applied.

### *Business Improvement District*

A business improvement district is a key tool used by many communities focused on improving both downtown and commercial redevelopment areas. Also known as municipal service districts, they are public/private sector partnerships in which property and business owners of a defined area elect to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development and marketing/promotion of their commercial district. In some ways, they are similar to a residential community association, but an appropriate analogy would be that of a suburban shopping mall, from which the idea for BIDs is, itself, modeled. Malls are generally single properties managed by one entity

that rents out retail spaces to various tenants. Tenants pay a common maintenance fee to pay for services that enhance the appearance of the mall's common areas and provide cooperative advertising for the mall and its various stores. BIDs operate in much the same way.

BIDs are grassroots organizations that are driven by community support and require legislative authorization by the municipality in which it resides, in order to be established.

BIDs typically provide services such as street and sidewalk maintenance, public safety officers, park and open space maintenance, marketing, capital improvements, and various development projects. The services provided by BIDs are a supplement to the services already provided by the municipality. The most common services provided by BIDs, nationwide focused on consumer marketing, followed by maintenance, capital improvements, and policy advocacy.

#### **Some of the services provided by BIDs include:**

- **Capital Improvements:** installing pedestrian scale lighting and street furniture; planting trees and shrubbery.
- **Consumer Marketing:** producing festivals and events; coordinating sales promotions; producing maps and newsletters.
- **Economic Development:** offering incentives (such as tax abatements or loans) to new and expanding businesses.
- **Maintenance:** collecting rubbish; removing litter and graffiti; washing sidewalks; shoveling snow; trimming trees.
- **Parking and Transportation:** managing a public parking system; maintaining transit shelters.
- **Policy Advocacy:** promoting public policies to the community; lobbying government on behalf of business interests.

BIDs are funded through special assessments collected from the property owners in the defined boundaries of the district. The assessment is levied on the property owners who can, if the property lease allows, pass it on to their tenants. BIDs are overseen by a Board of Directors that is elected by the members of the district.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> What is Tax Increment Financing? Wikipedia. Retrieved August 8, 2006. URL: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax\\_increment\\_financing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax_increment_financing)

<sup>2</sup>BID Resource: J. Mitchell. *Business Improvement Districts and Innovative Service Delivery*. (1999). The Pricewaterhouse Coopers Endowment for The Business of Government. <http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/Mitchell.pdf>

### *Facade Grants Program*

Many North Carolina communities use façade grants as a key tool for downtown revitalization and rehabilitation of historic buildings. Funding is only available for improvements to the exterior of the building, such as removal of false fronts, window and door repairs, sign replacement, and repainting. Façade grant programs are typically operated as a 50-50 matching grant program between the property or business owner and the municipality. Funds may be capitalized on in a number of ways. Some jurisdictions have made façade grants a dedicated line item in the budget. Other municipalities have used hotel taxes to fund the programs. The Town of Scotland Neck instituted an innovative “Round-Up” program that encourages citizens and businesses to “round-up” their water bill to the next dollar and donate the difference to the façade grant fund. Salisbury, Burlington, Scotland Neck, Concord, Mooresville, Morganton, Shelby, Lexington have all instituted façade grant programs.

### *Landscaping Grants Program*

Some communities, like Salisbury, North Carolina, have expanded their façade grants program to include landscaping grants. Like façade grant programs, landscaping grants operate on a matching funds basis and require improvements to the exterior of a building, including street and parking lot landscaping.

### *Signage Improvement Grants Program*

Matching grants programs can also be developed for commercial signage. These grants would work much the same way, except that they would be applied to business owners’ efforts to bring non-compliant commercial signage into compliance. Other communities have installed plywood mockups of the proposed new signs for a limited time period to convince business owners that they would be visible and to demonstrate the aesthetic benefits. Photo-simulations may also be used to help

business owners and citizens understand what the corridor would look like with new, lower signage.

### *Powell Bill Funds*

Annually in North Carolina, state street-aid (Powell Bill) allocations are made to incorporated municipalities that establish their eligibility and qualify as provided by G.S. 136-41.1 through 136-41.3. The general statutes require that a sum be allocated to the qualifying municipalities equal to the amount produced during the fiscal year by 1-3/4 cents on each taxed gallon of motor fuel. Powell Bill funds shall be expended only for the purposes of maintaining, repairing, constructing, reconstructing or widening of local streets that are the responsibility of the municipalities.<sup>1</sup>

### *NC Department of Transportation Enhancement Program*

The North Carolina Transportation Enhancement Program funds eligible activities in twelve (12) categories, including the following: the transportation museum, environmental mitigation, landscaping and other beautification, archaeological, preservation of abandoned rail corridors, bicycle and pedestrian safety, renovation/restoration of historic structures, historic preservation, acquisition of scenic easements, control of outdoors advertising, scenic or historic highways, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The Transportation Enhancement Program is part of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the new transportation legislation passed by the United States Congress in 2005. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is responsible for administering the Transportation Enhancements portion of SAFETEA-LU and funds are made available to communities through the North Carolina Department Transportation. The next regularly schedules call for Transportation Enhancement Project in North Carolina will be in 2008.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Source: North Carolina Department of Transportation

<sup>2</sup>Source: North Carolina Department of Transportation

