

West Highway 25/70 Corridor Study

DRAFT

City of Newport, TN
September 2019



Prepared by



*Funded through the Community
Transportation Planning Grant Program*



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CITY OF NEWPORT, TN

West Highway 25/70 Corridor Study

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) established the Community Transportation Planning Grant (CTPG) program to assist Tennessee's small and rural communities in developing transportation plans to address transportation, land use, and growth management issues. The program is designed to better integrate multimodal transportation systems with local land use objectives and achieve statewide transportation goals.

The City of Newport is one of the grant recipients during the CTPG program's 2018-2019 grant cycle. This report documents the findings and recommendations of the City of Newport's West Highway 25/70 Corridor Study.

Section 1.0

Overview

West Highway 25/70 (Figure 1), which runs east to west through the City of Newport and Cocke County, is a crossroads of regional connectivity in East Tennessee. The highway currently connects Interstate 40 (I-40) travelers heading east to downtown Newport and onward to North Carolina, as well as westbound travelers to Douglas Lake in Jefferson County and farther west to Sevier County and the Knoxville region. The highway is a vibrant transportation hub and will only continue to increase in local and regional importance as planned improvements to US-321 are completed.

Given the potential of this key corridor, the City of Newport has a unique opportunity to identify improvements and establish development standards that will shape the corridor's future for years to come. As the report highlights, among many other tools and strategies, coordination between the City of Newport, Cocke County, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation will play a pivotal role in the corridor's future.

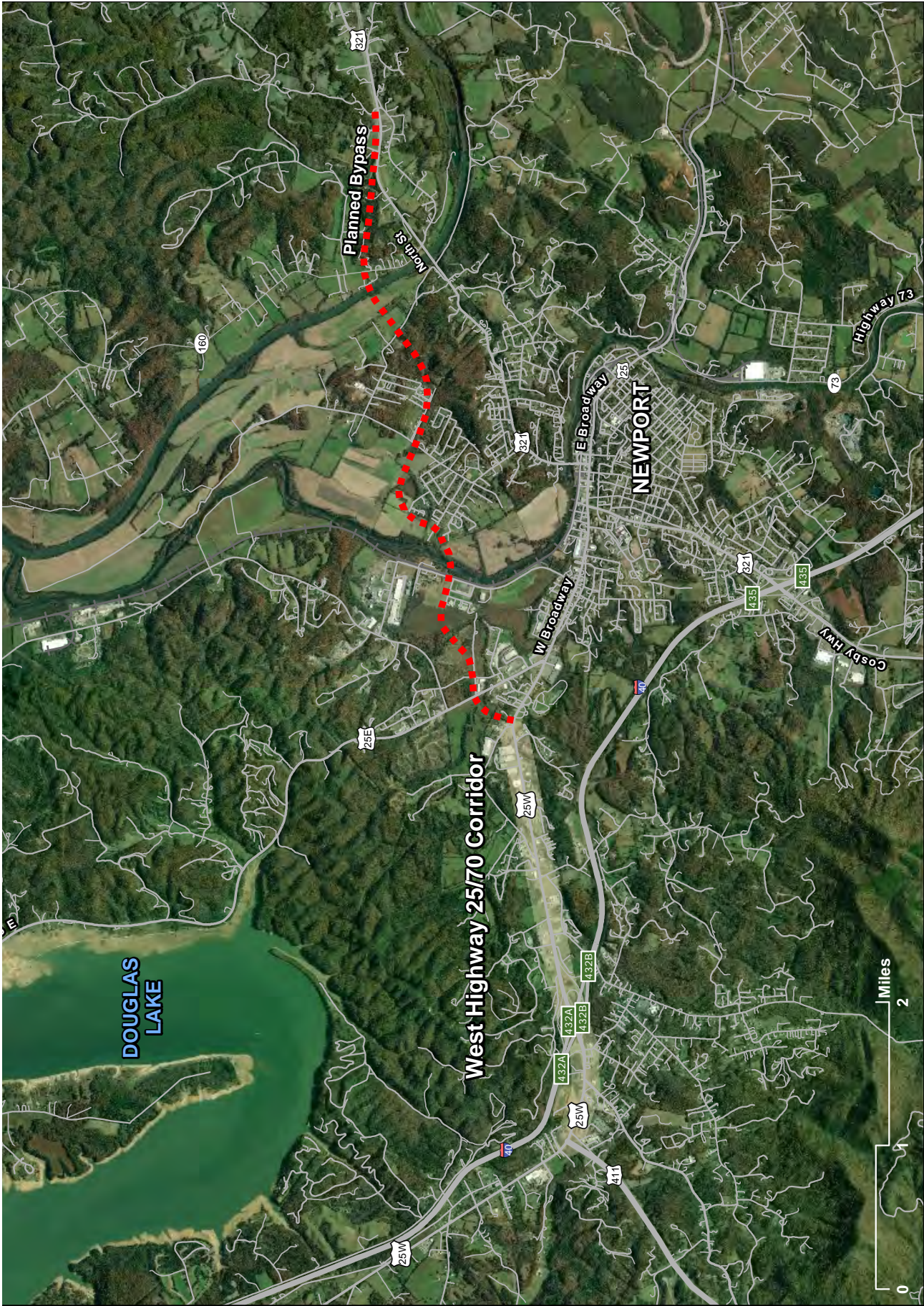


Figure 1. Study Area

Section 2.0

Issues & Opportunities

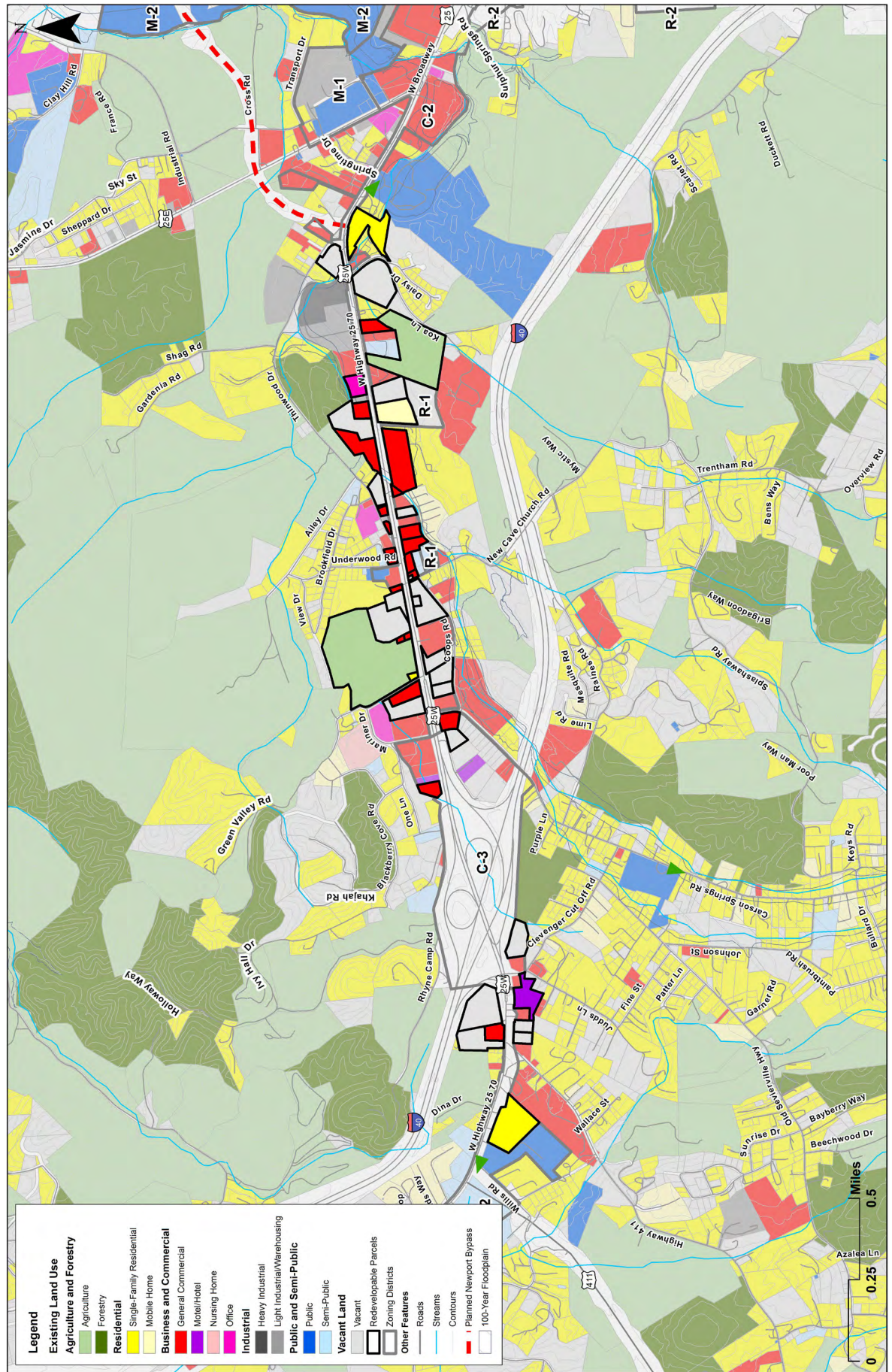
With its direct access to I-40 and the future US-321 Bypass, the importance of the West Highway 25/70 corridor in the regional transportation system will only increase, offering significant growth and development opportunities for both the City of Newport and Cocke County. Indeed, an important theme throughout this study has been how the corridor's future will depend, in large part, on actions taken by the city and county. While the study was initiated by the City of Newport, approximately three-fourths of the property frontage along the highway is in the county.

For the City of Newport specifically, the West Highway 25/70 corridor represents a critical element in the city's growth plans. In many respects, a thriving and successful West Highway 25/70 corridor is the missing piece in Newport's development with the potential to complement downtown Newport and Cosby Highway (US-321). Based on input and guidance from city officials, stakeholders, and the public, the key issues and opportunities in the corridor include:

- A. Focus More Intense Development Near I-40 and the Future Bypass;
- B. Plan for New Residential Development in the Highway Corridor;
- C. Ensure the Corridor is a Safe and Attractive Place to Visit and Shop; and
- D. Attract and Retain Young Working Age People, Families, and Retirees.

Each of the issues and opportunities is discussed in greater detail on the next pages.

Figure 2. Existing Land Use



A. Focus More Intense Development Near I-40 and the Future Bypass

A driving force behind the West Highway 25/70 Corridor Study is the opportunity to promote development in the area around the West Highway 25/70 and I-40 interchange (Exit 432) and the future intersection with the new US-321 Bypass. Accordingly, one of the central questions in the study has been, “How should the corridor grow?” Today, approximately 62 percent of the corridor has redevelopment potential – defined as property with an assessed improvement value equal to or less than the assessed land value (Figure 2). The character of development – its uses, intensity, and location – can be uniform throughout the corridor, or it can be tailored to its context – for example, development near the interstate compared to development adjacent to neighborhoods.

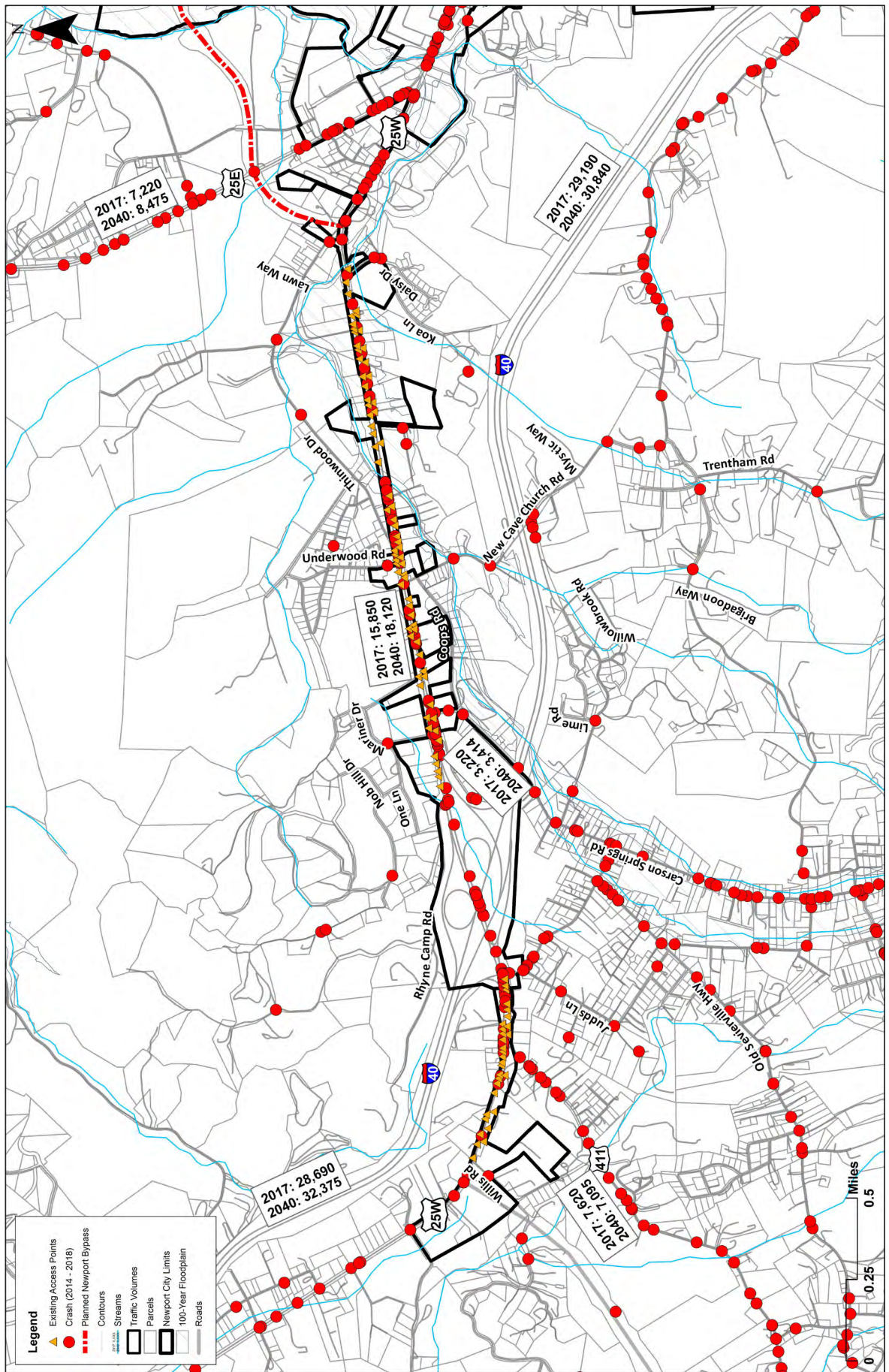
B. Plan for New Residential Development in the Highway Corridor

Complementing the potential commercial development along the highway is the opportunity for substantial residential growth in the corridor, especially north of the highway between Green Valley Road and Shag Road. Similarly, new residential development or redevelopment is possible south of the highway, both east and west of the I-40 interchange, although it is more constrained by natural features. In either case, access to and from residential neighborhoods to new commercial development on West Highway 25/70 will play an important role in the overall safety, efficiency, and livability of the corridor (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Underwood Road at West Highway 25/70



Figure 4. Traffic and Safety Conditions



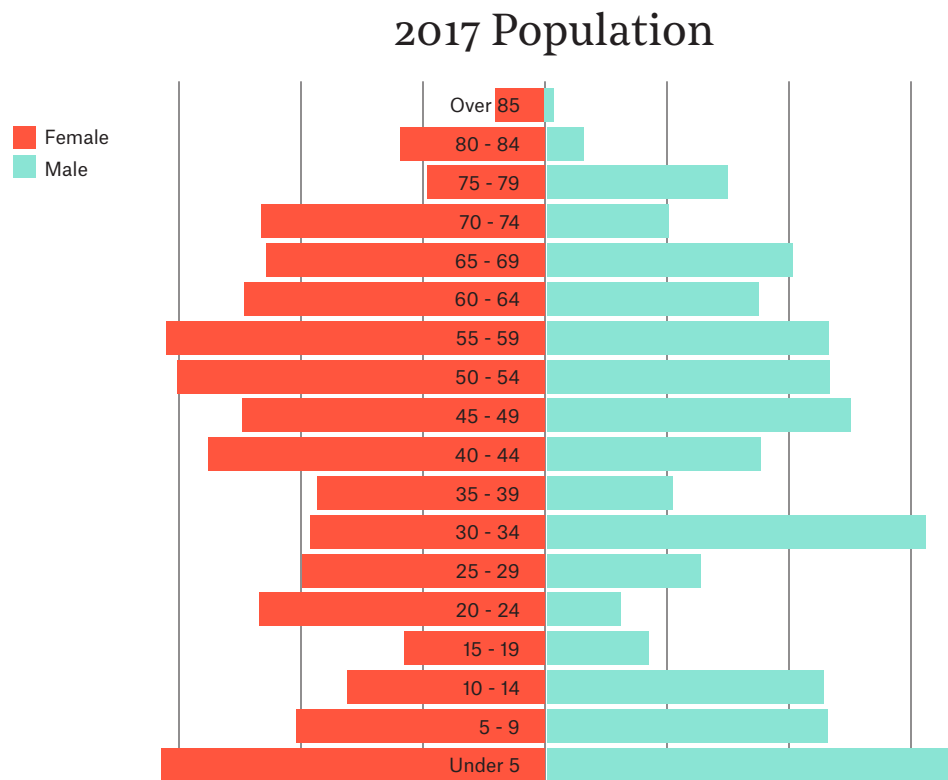
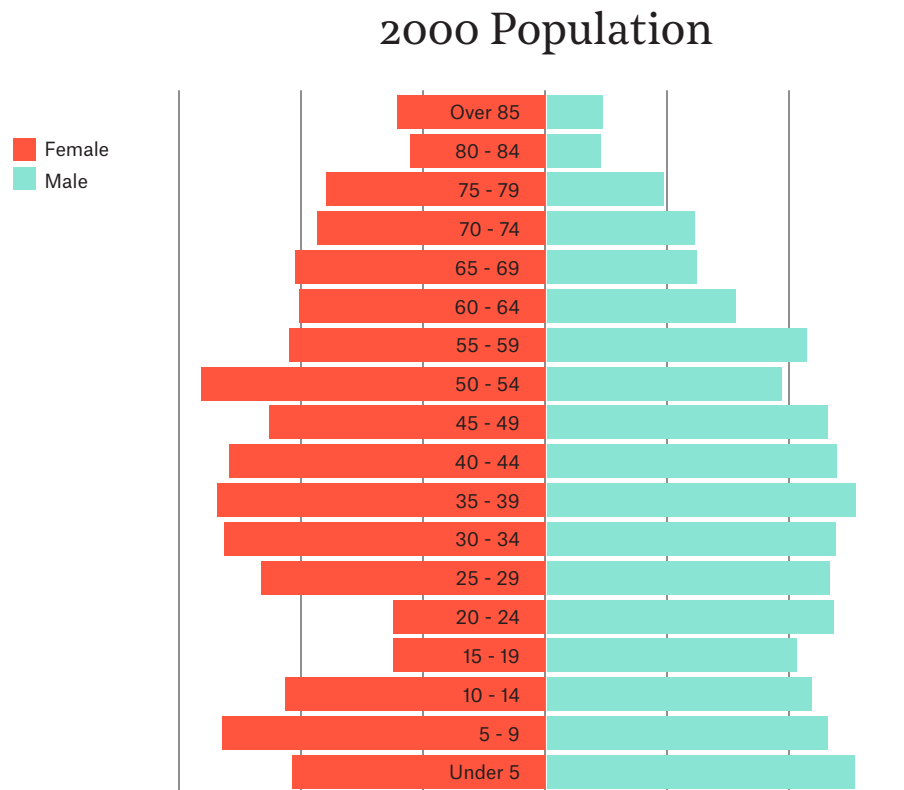
C. Ensure the Corridor is a Safe and Attractive Place to Visit and Shop

Over the next 20 years, vehicle traffic is projected to grow approximately 14 percent on West Highway 25/70, from 15,850 vehicles per day to 18,120 vehicles per day. Of course, the projections could increase significantly if many of the properties on the highway develop or redevelop and if residential development in the broader corridor occurs. With that in mind, traffic safety will become an increasingly important issue. Between 2014 and 2018, there were 167 vehicle crashes on West Highway 25/70 (Figure 4). With a posted speed of 45 miles per hour (mph), average driveway spacing on the 5-lane arterial is 180 feet, roughly 50 percent below national guidelines, resulting in a high number of conflict points among vehicles. Moreover, while the highway currently has wide shoulders in places, walkways and bikeways do not exist limiting opportunities for safe and convenient walking and bicycling.

D. Attract and Retain Young Working Age People, Families, and Retirees

Like many small cities and towns, attracting and retaining people across generations is essential for long-term success. Between 2000 and 2017, the prime working age population (defined as people between the ages of 25 and 54 years) in Newport has declined 10 percent with notably sharp declines among men in the 20-24 age group and the 35-39 age group. Expanding and diversifying Newport's employment base through the development of the West Highway 25/70 corridor can help stem the loss of population generally and working age people in particular.

Figure 5. Population Trends



Section 3.0

Development & Evaluation of Alternatives

In many communities, principal highways serve multiple functions – from regional transportation corridor and commercial center to community gateway and neighborhood hub. Left to their own devices, unmanaged highway corridors typically fall into a cycle of transportation improvements and land use changes followed by safety and operational issues resulting in a new round of transportation needs (Figure 6). By taking steps today to plan for growth in the corridor, the City of Newport and Cocke County can strategically guide development in the corridor relative to public infrastructure investments.

In addition to the corridor-wide issues and opportunities identified, two public meetings provided the basis for answering the following two questions:

- What goals are important to you for the West Highway 25/70 corridor? and
- How do you want to see the West Highway 25/70 corridor grow?

The first public meeting, held on April 9, 2019 at Newport City Hall, was supported by an online survey distributed by the city. In total, more than 240 people provided comments and input. Table 1 summarizes the feedback on community goals for the corridor. Specifically, developing new parks and greenways and focusing more intense development around major intersections had the highest percentages of responses indicating that those goals are “More Important.” Table 2 highlights preferences for development character. “Sidewalks,” “Retail/Commercial with Parks and Plazas,” “Sidepaths for Walking and Bicycling,” and “Greenways by Creek” all received strong support among participants (Figures 7-10), indicating a clear preference for quality public spaces. A second public meeting on August 13, 2019, presented the study’s draft recommendations.

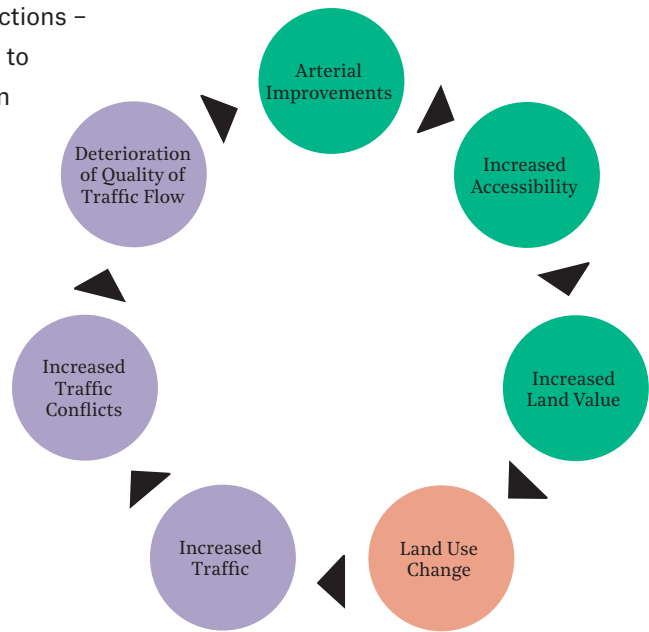


Figure 6. Transportation and Land Use Cycle

Table 1. Corridor Goals

Goals/Objectives	More Important		Important		Less Important	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Focus more intense development near I-40 and the future Newport Bypass intersection	121	50%	87	36%	32	13%
Provide safe bicycle and pedestrian facilities for users of all ages and abilities	69	28%	95	38%	86	34%
Create a unified design theme for the corridor with street trees, lighting and signage	71	29%	126	52%	47	19%
Ensure land use policies and development standards support the vision for the corridor	100	40%	120	49%	27	11%
Establish a connected street network to provide alternatives to West Highway 25/70	72	30%	121	50%	47	20%
Protect and preserve existing and planned neighborhoods	105	43%	98	40%	43	17%
Develop new parks and greenways to support future growth and development	136	54%	88	35%	27	11%

Table 2. Preferred Corridor Character

		Total	% of Category
Retail/Commercial	Retail/Commercial with Parking in Front	88	37%
	Retail/Commercial with Parking on Side or Behind	41	17%
	Retail/Commercial with Parks and Plazas	112	46%
Mixed Use	Retail Below/Office Above	71	34%
	Retail Below/Residential Above	72	35%
	Retail/Office/Residential Side by Side	65	31%
Residential	Single Family Homes	91	41%
	Townhomes	54	25%
	Garden Apartments	75	34%
Parks/Greenways	Small Public Plazas	67	29%
	Large Public Squares	61	27%
	Greenways by Creek	102	44%
Walking/Biking	Sidewalks	114	48%
	Buffered/Separated Bikeways on Highways	20	8%
	Sidepaths for Walking and Biking Next to Highway	104	44%

Figure 7. Corridor Character: Sidewalks



Figure 8. Corridor Character: Retail/Commercial with Parks and Plazas



Figure 9. Corridor Character: Sidepaths for Walking and Bicycling





Figure 10. Corridor Character: Greenways by Creek

Section 4.0

Recommendations

Taken together, the study's recommendations establish a framework for growth and development in the West Highway 25/70 corridor. In particular, the study's recommendations are organized around three core elements:

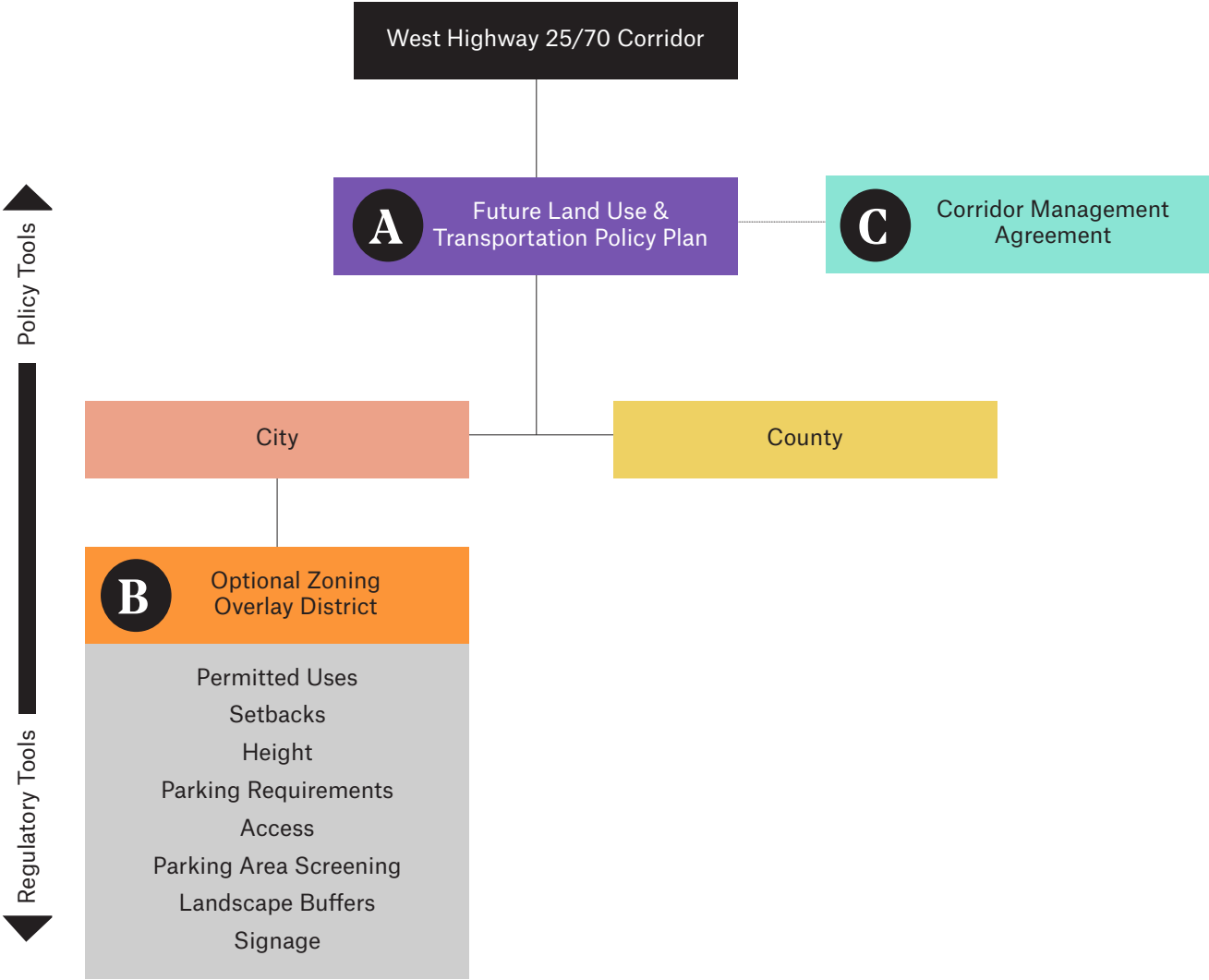
- A. Future Land Use & Transportation Policy Plan;
- B. Optional Zoning Overlay District; and
- C. Corridor Management Agreement.

Before describing the recommendations in greater detail, it is important to differentiate among the intent and purpose of each recommendation. Figure 11 outlines the corridor plan's framework, principally distinguishing between policy and regulatory tools. Because the highway corridor falls in both the city and county, which does not have zoning, it will be important to establish and approve a common set of policy goals between the jurisdictions. The "Future Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan" is a policy tool that can be approved by the city and the county and serve as a blueprint for growth and development.

The City of Newport, which has a zoning ordinance, can further advance the corridor goals by adopting an "Optional Zoning Overlay District." The overlay district, purely voluntary for a property owner, simply augments the existing base zoning districts by introducing several alternative district regulations. In effect, a property owner who chooses to develop under the optional overlay district is able to secure greater and more flexible development rights in exchange for helping to achieve community goals – in this case, a more pedestrian friendly corridor.

The final element in the corridor plan's framework is the "Corridor Management Agreement." Established in 2013 by the State of Tennessee, corridor management agreements (CMA) are an intergovernmental agreement that allows the state, counties, and cities to formally adopt strategies and tools to guide the growth and development of a transportation corridor. The primary purpose of a CMA is to preserve and optimize the safety, operational efficiency, and economic development of a transportation asset. CMAs are also entirely voluntary, but when pursued, can provide an important mechanism for coordinating public and private improvements in a highway corridor.

Figure 11. Corridor Plan Framework



A. Future Land Use & Transportation Policy Plan

The “Future Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan” (Figure 12) describes the desired long-range development pattern for the corridor. Consistent with community input, the plan concentrates commercial development near the I-40 interchange and future US-321 Bypass, and importantly, encourages mixed-use development in the corridor’s center – between roughly New Cave Church Road and Rocky Bluff Way. Encouraging mixed-use development (a combination of commercial and residential uses) in the corridor’s center will allow West Highway 25/70 to function as place to visit and live – a neighborhood hub, instead of simply a highway to pass through. While not regulatory, the future land use policy plan and policy areas, denoted by the different categories and colors in the plan, will help guide discussions about future development. The policy plan also includes recommended street network connections to provide options to driving, walking, and bicycling on the highway, and a proposed greenway linking both ends of the corridor.

Figure 13 and Figure 14 illustrate the generalized existing street cross section and proposed street cross section for West Highway 25/70. Because the roadway alignment varies within the right-of-way (ROW), the proposed cross section includes a 10-foot sidepath that would alternate sides of the highway depending on the available ROW behind the existing curb. The sidepath would run along the north side of the highway from the new US-321 Bypass to Rocky Bluff Way and then on the south side to New Cave Church Road before following Coops Road going west (Figure 12). The proposed cross section also relies on the City of Newport’s existing sidewalk ordinance. Finally, the intersections at both New Cave Church Road and Rocky Bluff Way would need pedestrian crossing improvements to provide safe connections between the north and south sides of West Highway 25/70. Figures 15 and 16 illustrate the existing conditions and proposed improvements at the New Cave Church Road intersection with West Highway 25/70.

Figure 12. Future Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan

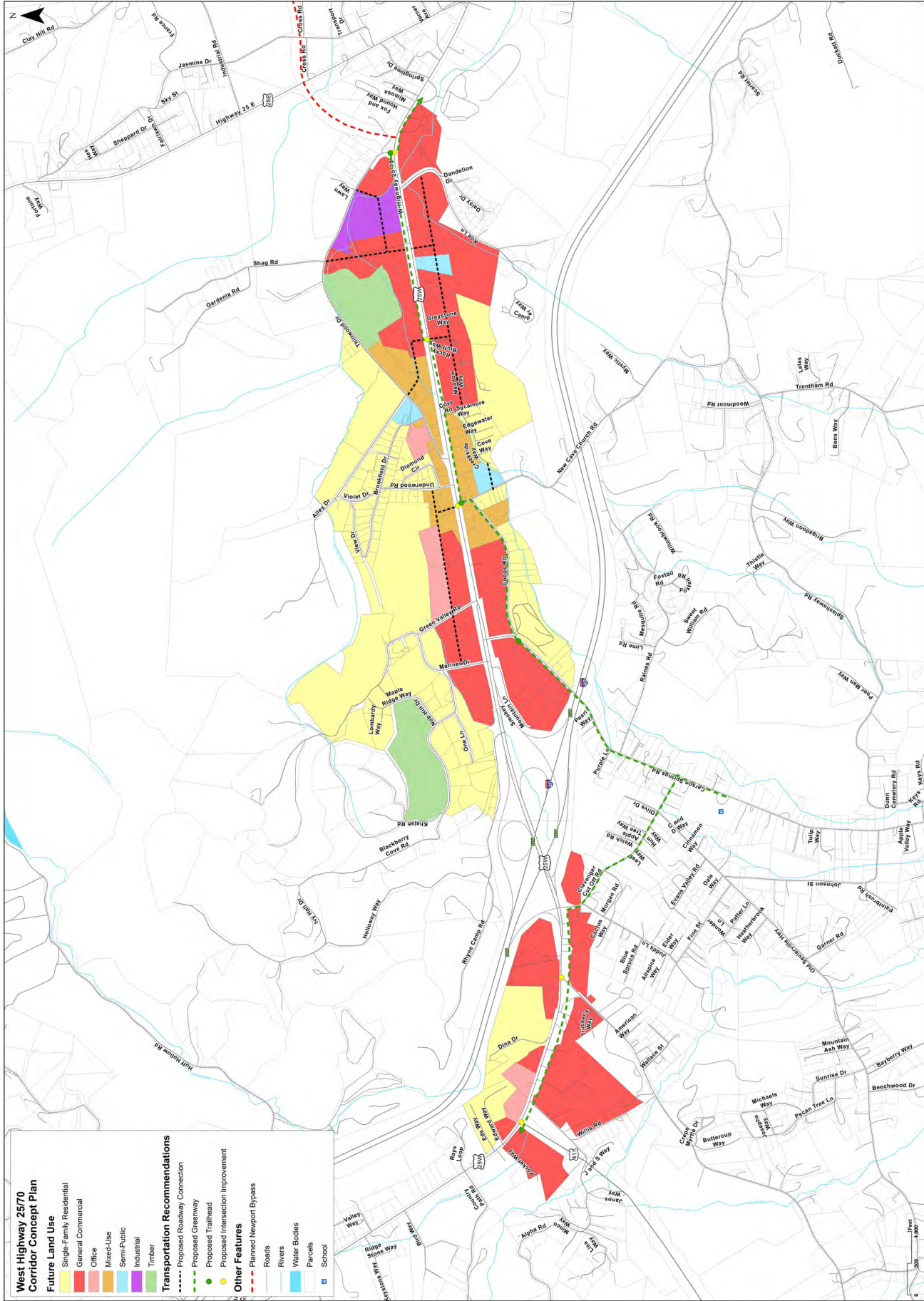


Figure 13. West Highway 25/70: Existing Street Cross Section



Figure 14. West Highway 25/70: Proposed Street Cross Section



Figure 15. West Highway 25/70 at New Cave Church Road: Existing Conditions



Figure 16. West Highway 25/70 at New Cave Church Road: Proposed Improvements



B. Optional Zoning Overlay District

The purpose of the “Optional Zoning Overlay District” (Table 3) is to provide land development regulations that support the community’s vision for the corridor. As proposed, the overlay district modifies or introduces a total of nine development standards focused on setbacks. The City of Newport’s zoning ordinance currently relies on minimum setbacks – front, side, and rear, and precludes development that is pedestrian-oriented in the “General Business District (C-2)” and “Interstate Highway Business District (C-3).” By establishing a system of minimum and maximum setbacks, the optional overlay district encourages development that engages the street and sidewalk and begins to create a distinct neighborhood center (Figure 17). Assuming some property owners will elect to use the optional overlay district while others will not, Figure 18 illustrates how the corridor around New Cave Church Road might develop over time.

Table 3. Optional Zoning Overlay District

	Existing Zoning Districts	Interstate Highway Business District (C-3)	General Business District (C-2)	Proposed Optional Overlay District
District Regulations				
Setbacks	Front (min.)	30 ft (\$701)	30 ft (\$701)	10 ft
	Front (max.)	n/a	n/a	80 ft
	Side (min.)	15 ft (\$701)	15 ft (\$701)	10 ft
	Side (corner, min.)	22.5 ft (\$403)	22.5 ft (\$403)	10 ft
	Side (corner, max.)	n/a	n/a	80 ft
	Side (interior)	n/a	n/a	0 ft
	Rear (min.)	25 ft (\$701)	25 ft (\$701)	5 ft
	Rear (abutting residential district, min.)	25 ft (\$701)	25 ft (\$701)	25 ft (\$701)
	Rear (abutting alley, min.)	n/a	n/a	5 ft
Height (max.)		35 ft (up to 55 ft) (\$701)	35 ft (up to 55 ft) (\$701)	35 ft (up to 55 ft) (\$701)
General Provisions				
Off-Street Parking (min.)	General Office (sf)	1/400 (\$302.1)	1/400 (\$302.1)	1/400 (\$302.1)
	Retail (sf)	1/250 (\$302.1)	1/250 (\$302.1)	1/250 (\$302.1)
	Restaurant	1/2 customers (\$302.1)	1/2 customers (\$302.1)	1/2 customers (\$302.1)
	Dwelling - Multifamily	2/dwelling unit (\$302.1)	2/dwelling unit (\$302.1)	2/dwelling unit (\$302.1)
Access Control	Driveway spacing - from intersection (Level A street)	> 100 ft (\$306.3)	> 100 ft (\$306.3)	Future Corridor Management Agreement
	Driveway spacing - from lot line (Level A street)	> 40 ft (\$306.3)	> 40 ft (\$306.3)	
	Joint access	permitted (\$306.3)	permitted (\$306.3)	permitted (\$306.3)
	Cross access	permitted (\$302.2)	permitted (\$302.2)	permitted (\$302.2)
	Number of Driveways (max.)			
	Frontage < 100 ft	1 (\$306.4)	1 (\$306.4)	Future Corridor Management Agreement
	Frontage >=150 ft and <=800 ft	2 (\$306.4)	2 (\$306.4)	
Frontage >800 ft	3 (+1/400 ft) (\$306.4)	3 (+1/400 ft) (\$306.4)		
Parking Area Screening		5 ft (\$304.2, \$310.2)	5 ft (\$304.2, \$310.2)	5 ft (\$304.2, \$310.2)
Landscape Buffers (adjacent to residential districts)		10 ft (w), 6 ft (h) (\$204.7, \$607)	10 ft (w), 6 ft (h) (\$204.7, \$607)	10 ft (w), 6 ft (h) (\$204.7, \$607)

C. Corridor Management Agreement

Just as cities and towns establish “Main Street” programs to manage their downtown commercial centers, corridor management agreements offer a similar mechanism for operating and maintaining commercial highways. Commercial highways, however, are typically owned and operated by the state department of transportation, and because of their length, span multiple jurisdictions. Accordingly, a CMA is fundamentally an agreement among public agency stakeholders to preserve the long-term value of a transportation corridor by actively coordinating and implementing improvements. A corridor management agreement may address some of all of the following strategies:

- Roadway design and capacity;
- Multimodal transportation planning;
- Traffic management and operations;
- Access management;
- Land development regulations;
- Urban design;
- Intergovernmental coordination; and
- Funding.

For the West Highway 25/70 corridor, a CMA is especially relevant for developing transportation improvements, policies, and standards among TDOT, Cocke County, and the City of Newport. Without an agreement, for example, driveway access to the highway will continue to be granted in a largely unpredictable manner compounding current safety and operational issues. While a CMA requires an ongoing commitment from each of the stakeholders, if managed well, the CMA can generate long-term value for each of the participating jurisdictions.

Figure 18. Optional Overlay Zoning District: Corridor Development Concept



Section 5.0

Implementation

Consistent with the framework described earlier (Figure 11), implementation of the West Highway 25/70 Corridor Study's recommendations centers on three key steps.

- **Step 1:** Approve the "Future Land Use & Transportation Policy Plan" as a policy document;
- **Step 2:** Adopt the "Optional Zoning Overlay District" into the city's zoning ordinance; and
- **Step 3:** Initiate discussions with TDOT and Cocke County about a corridor management agreement, addressing important issues such as access management, bicycle and pedestrian facilities (e.g., sidewalk requirements, local funding match for greenway development), and local street network improvements.

The City of Newport has put in place a number of initiatives to strengthen its economic base, and the future US-321 Bypass will help reshape the western end of the city and, in particular, the West Highway 25/70 corridor. By proactively planning for new development in the corridor, both immediately on the highway and to the north and south, the City of Newport and its partners, TDOT and Cocke County, can take the steps necessary to achieve the long-term vision for the corridor.



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