

3. Downtown Vision Statement



3.1 DOWNTOWN VISIONS AND GOAL

The following goals were developed to guide all planning and design concepts in a cohesive manner that supports the overall vision for an expanded, connected downtown.

Downtown Sugar Hill is a vibrant place where people gather to create and experience community; where walking the streets and inter-connected gathering spaces is a safe and inviting experience; where landscape and architecture are integrated, authentic, beautiful and functional; where trees as well as buildings define our most important public spaces; where shade and water provide refuge and recreation; and where public art, civic pride, cultural diversity and economic vitality are celebrated.

Downtown Sugar Hill is an attractive place for all to make a home; where neighborhoods are inter-connected and accessible to a wide variety of cultural, recreation, entertainment, dining and shopping resources in a compact walkable area; where the opportunity to connect to regional transit is an option available to residents; and where real estate values appreciate but affordable options remain accessible to a wide variety of household types.

Downtown Sugar Hill is a fertile place to do business; where entrepreneurship is promoted; where business owners are confident to invest and grow; and where the quality of development attracts higher-quality development.

Overall LCI Program Goals

- Provide access to a variety of travel modes
- Encourage mixed-income residential neighborhoods, employment, shopping and recreational options
- Develop an outreach process that promotes stakeholder involvement

Land Use and Development Goals:

- Create a vision for long-term development growth beyond the Central Business District (CBD) boundary
- Create a vibrant downtown core with a variety of dining and shopping options
- Maximize development potential with a mix of uses to create critical mass within a 10-min walk
- Develop “transitional” housing density between the “dense” core and suburban residential areas
- Revitalize aging commercial and residential areas through redevelopment and infill strategies
- Focus on architectural character of the future mixed-use and housing development

Mobility Goals:

- Improve connectivity between downtown core and future growth areas
- Extend pedestrian and bike infrastructure throughout downtown and beyond
- Traffic calming, pedestrian safety improvements, and streetscape enhancements on Highway 20 and PIB

Identity/Branding/Open Space:

- Incorporate a variety of open spaces such as urban plazas, neighborhood parks and pocket parks as part of new development
- Plan more activities for youth and families
- Create cohesive branding for the City by incorporating history and public art

3.2 WALKABILITY ANALYSIS

Following the ongoing trends of creating “urban walkable” real estate in many cities in Gwinnett County and in Metro Atlanta, the City of Sugar Hill is in the process of transforming this portion of its suburban, car-oriented community into a walkable downtown through a mix of land uses in a compact built environment. Using the “network analyst” tool of ArcGIS, the planning team ran walkable service areas in downtown for 5, 10 and 15-min area (about ¼-mile, 1/2-mile, and ¾-mile respectively) using the existing street network (FIG. 6). The analysis determined that the current street network in the LCI area has several gaps and physical constraints such as Highway 20, the railroad, and large undeveloped or topographically challenged areas that result in a disconnected pedestrian network.

As illustrated in FIG. 7, the 5-min walking area mostly covers the existing downtown core located on the south side of Highway 20. The streetscape improvement on West Broad not only improved walkability and pedestrian safety but also created a “main street” branding for downtown. The 10-min and 15-min walking areas go beyond Highway 20 and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard. These two major traffic thoroughfares are huge barriers for pedestrian and bike mobility. All the more, there is a lack of complete street grid on the southwest of West Broad Street with inconsistent north-south connections between Highway 20 and PIB. Other than West Broad Street, most of the major streets lack pedestrian-oriented streetscape and bike amenities.

The walkability analysis informs the connectivity gap in specific areas and the need to extend/improve the existing street network in future development. The City of Sugar Hill considers Downtown Greenville, SC as the precedent for future growth and density. As shown in FIG. 5 the geographic area of Greenville Central Business District (CBD) is similar in size to Sugar Hill Town Center Overlay (TCO) District. The regulatory framework of Greenville CBD has successfully created mixed-



FIG. 6: WALKABILITY ANALYSIS

use development and walkable environment. The City of Sugar Hill’s TCO approach to adding density to the core and the future growth could be based on the walkability shed analysis. The development and mobility projects could be prioritized by walkability tiers, as in focusing on the first tier of the downtown core and progressing in the next tier of 10-min and 15-min walkable areas.

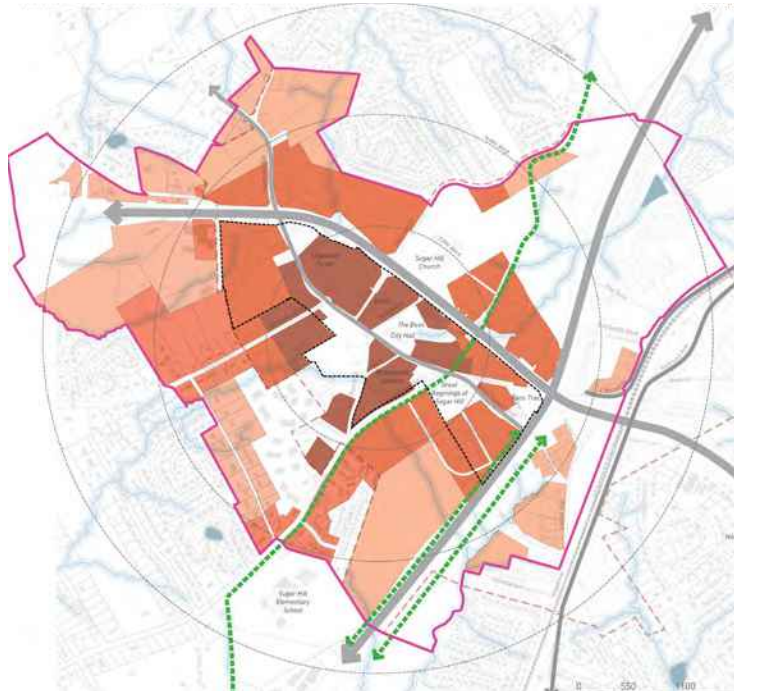
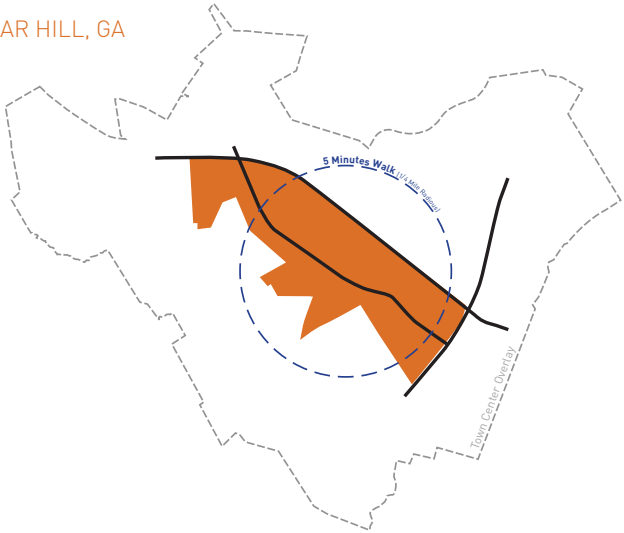


FIG. 7: DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL (+/-310 ACRES OF VACANT AND UNDERUTILIZED PARCELS) IN WALKABLE AREAS

SUGAR HILL, GA



GREENVILLE, SC

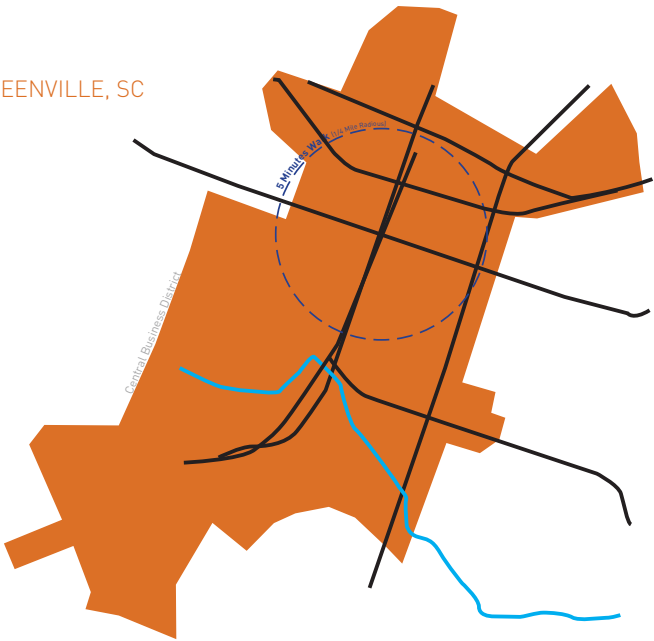


FIG. 8: DOWNTOWN GROWTH PRECEDENT; COMPARISON OF DOWNTOWN SUGAR HILL AND DOWNTOWN GREENVILLE

3.3 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PLAN

The Development Framework Plan is a long-term roadmap for the future growth of downtown Sugar Hill. Building on the vision of “Think Big” and to achieve the goals of creating a walkable mixed-use development with a variety of shopping and housing options, the proposed framework plan responds to the walkability analysis. The development areas illustrated in Figure 9 could be visualized as a pyramid in their density; downtown core with height density with the urban character; as it tapers down the outer rings, there would be lower density with a mixture of suburban and urban character. Since the LCI area is part of the Town Center Overlay district, the city would encourage a mix of uses with the focus on urban design, traditional architecture, and pedestrian experience throughout downtown.

Approach to Future Land Use: As per the current Comprehensive Plan of the city of Sugar Hill, the LCI area is part of the Town Center District character area with a prescriptive description of future development but does not provide specific land use types. This master plan update provides a finer-grained recommendation to future land use in six (6) development areas listed in the Development Framework Plan. Building on current zoning and previous planning studies, the future land use categories will help in achieving diversity of architectural character and housing choices in downtown. This will also inform realistic projections for future population, housing, and development in downtown.

Approach to Future Housing: The above categories of future land use for downtown do not specifically call out “housing” as a stand-alone category since it will be embedded within each mixed-use category. There is a current unmet demand for high and medium density housing, not only to support the future retail in downtown but also for changing demographic profiles such as seniors, millennials and an affluent adult population who would like a variety of housing types in a vibrant downtown. As recommended by the market analysis and the Housing Study by city of Sugar Hill (Sugar Hill Home for Life, 2016), the following housing recommendations are incorporated into this LCI plan:

- **Diversify housing market:** Some potential policy tools for diverse housing could be accessory dwellings, anti-monotony policy, diversity of unit types, universal design, complete streets design requirements, architectural pattern book, form-based code, and foreclosure registry. Provide diverse housing choices to close the gap in the supply of affordable and workforce housing. Develop a niche market for affluent communities who desire smaller homes that are adaptable to their changing needs.
- **Stabilize existing neighborhoods:** Modify code enforcement that works with homeowners to bring them into compliance; consider amendments to current code for commercial and residential landscape to ensure visual interest and diversity in site designs.
- **Maintain and improve visual appeal of neighborhoods:** Provide architectural and development standards, and land development code for the redevelopment of aging housing stock and development of large tracts with open land
- **Address needs of aging and special needs population:** Study the needs of the aging population for assisted living and independent living



Downtown Core:

This area includes the heart of downtown including City Hall, the Bowl, Splash Park, E Center, and planned mixed-use project, Broadstone. The core is located in the Central Business District (CBD) overlay and the current zoning encourages the highest density with a maximum 130 feet building height and mixed-use development with pedestrian-oriented design standards.

Future Land Use: Downtown Core Mixed-Use, High-Density Mixed-Use

Building Height: 8-10 story buildings

Residential Density: 21-40 units/acre

Commercial FAR: 1.0



Precedent Development Character for Downtown Core

5-Min Walking Area:

The majority of this area is part of the CBD overlay. This area includes the planned assisted living and memory care senior living, Dogwood Forest. The smaller single-family homes along Whitehead and Level Creek are within the 5-min walk area that could be potentially redeveloped to add more residential density to support the downtown core. The future Sugar Hill Greenway on Level Creek will attract development along the corridor. A portion of the 5-min walking area extends on the north side of Highway 20 capturing a small portion on Hillcrest Drive. The corner of Hillcrest and Highway 20 has great visibility for potential mixed-use development. Major traffic calming measures and safe pedestrian crossings would be required in order for downtown to grow across Highway 20

Future Land Use: High-Medium density Mixed-Use

Building Height: 5-7 story buildings

Residential Density: 16-20 units/acre

Commercial FAR: 0.5



Precedent Development Character for 5-Min Walking Area

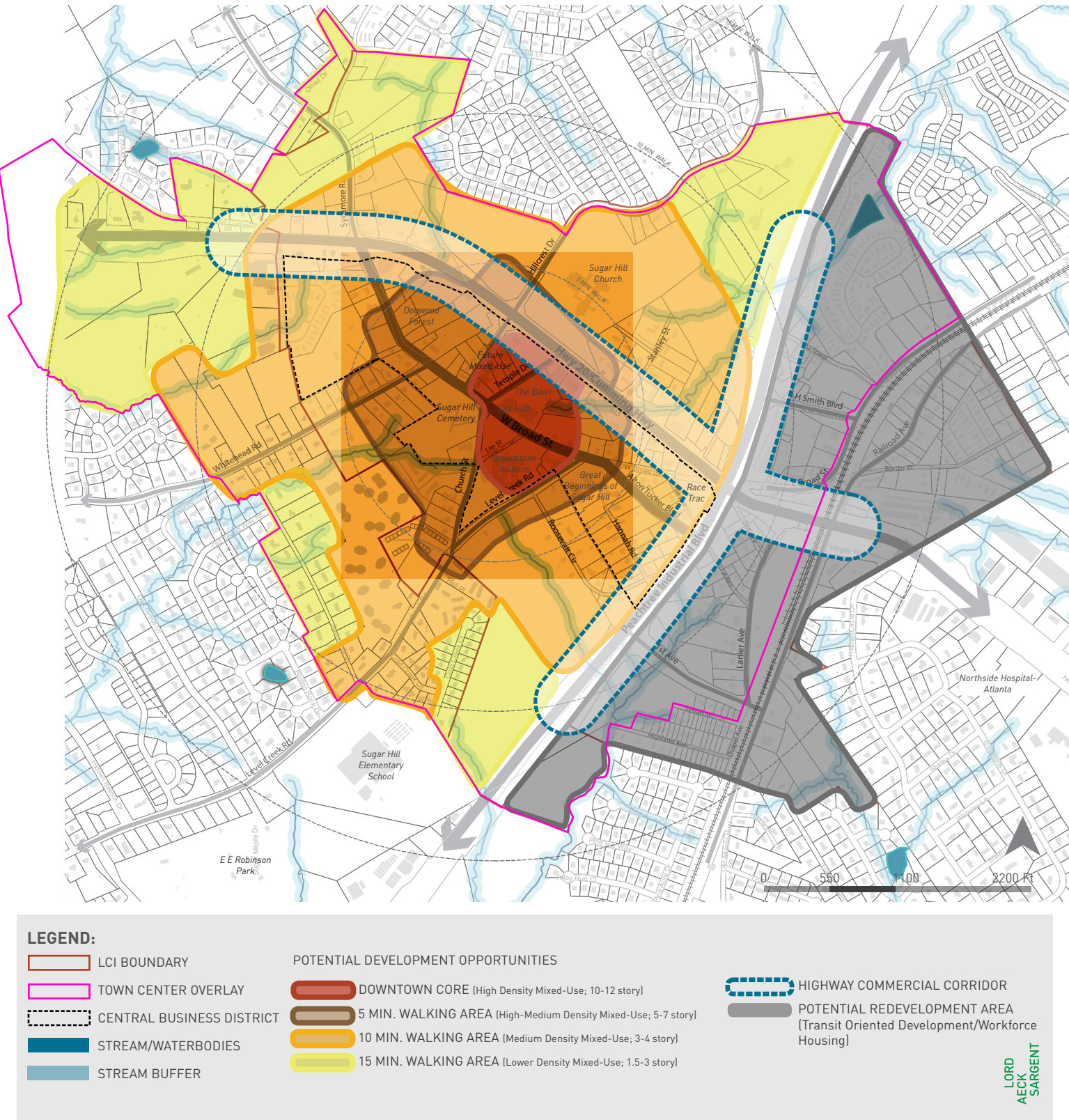


FIG. 9: DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK MAP

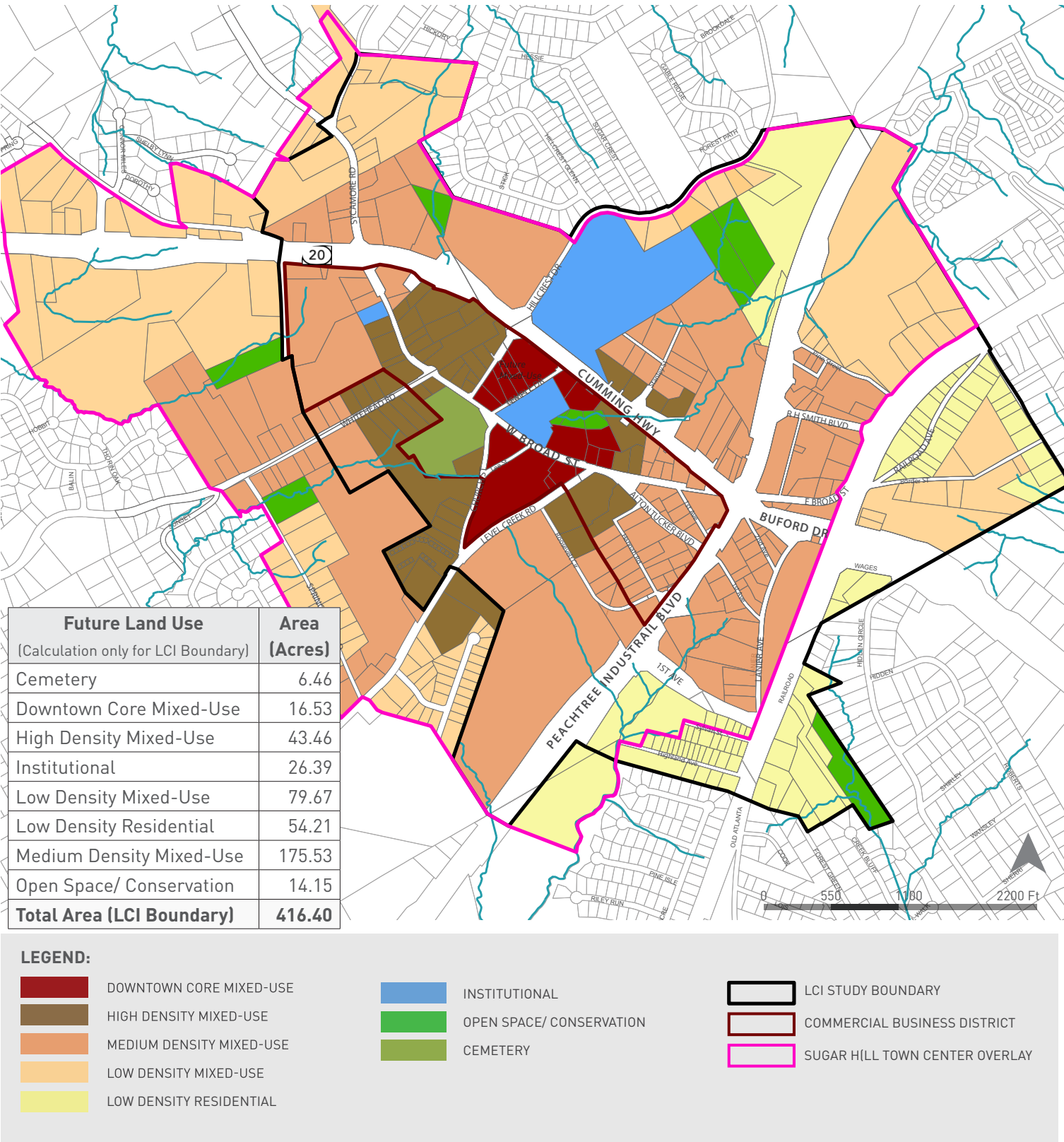


FIG. 10: FUTURE LAND USE MAP

10-Min Walking Area:

The northwest and southeast portion of CBD is located in the 10-min walking area. The rest of the area spans along Whitehead Road, Level Creek Road up to Sugar Hill Elementary School, north of Highway 20, and parallel to PIB on the southeast side. Except for Sugar Hill Church, most existing residential and commercial development are candidates for revitalization. There are several large undeveloped properties. Some existing single-family homes with large lots and multi-family super-blocks do not currently allow for a walkable street grid. In this light, future development and redevelopment should create interconnected streets to provide alternate routes to connect to downtown. This area also has potential to create a mix of “missing middle” housing typologies such as townhomes, duplex’s, quadplex’s, courtyard homes, multiplex’s, and accessory dwelling units. Such development would generate increased residential density to support additional downtown retail/commercial uses. The area fronting Highway 20 and PIB could accommodate highway-oriented commercial uses as a buffer for the adjacent residential development.

Future Land Use: Medium Density Mixed-Use, Live-Work Units, Multi-family, Commercial-Office

Building Height: 3-4 story buildings

Residential Density: 9-15 units/acre

Commercial FAR: 0.02

15-Min Walking Area:

This area is further away from the downtown core and completely outside the CBD; however, it is part of the Town Center Overlay. Although this area is only a 15-min walk from downtown, the lack of a pedestrian environment discourages walkability. Several undeveloped areas have major topographical challenges which further hinders the opportunity for future connectivity. Additionally, this area is adjacent to several suburban residential neighborhoods. Future development in these areas should respond to the current density with lower intensity mixed-use development. The stream buffer within these areas creates opportunities to extend trail connections and open spaces into the community as a way to improve the quality of life and to extend pedestrian connectivity to downtown where feasible.

Future Land Use: Lower Density Mixed-Use, Townhomes, Narrow-lot/Zero-Lot Single-Family, Cottage-Style Housing, Courtyard-Style Housing, Commercial-Office

Building Height: 1.5-3 story buildings

Residential Density: 4-8 units/acre

Commercial FAR: 0.02



Precedent Development Character for 10-Min Walking Area



Precedent Development Character for 15-Min Walking Area

Potential Redevelopment Area:

This area is disconnected from the downtown core by Highway 20, Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and the Norfolk Southern Railroad. Much of the existing development is older and many of the homes and commercial properties require substantial maintenance and repair. Other than the Highway 20 intersection, there are no safe pedestrian crosswalks in this area to access downtown. Several large underutilized areas such as Peachtree mobile home community, an under-performing strip commercial development and a few blighted light industrial properties represent opportunities for redevelopment. A small development of townhomes on Highland Avenue and Sylvan Street and recent real estate activity are indicators that area redevelopment could be on the horizon. The long-term vision is that this area would be a node of mixed-housing types at densities and formats suitable to support transit oriented development and meet market demands for workforce housing. Major revitalization efforts are necessary to overcome the physical and visual separation from the core downtown.

Potential Future Land Use: Medium Density Mixed-Use, Low-Density Mixed-Use, Low-Density Residential, Cottage-Style Housing, Courtyard-Style Housing, Commercial-Office

Building Height: 1.5-4 story buildings

Residential Density: 4-9 units/acre

Highway Commercial Corridor:

In its current built form, Highway 20 and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard are mostly car-oriented in character and contain generally underutilized uses that do not contribute to downtown’s vitality. The City has begun taking proactive initiatives to encourage redevelopment by adding signage, public art, and creating a visual connection to downtown (such as E Center and City Hall) within sight of these vehicular corridors. These two principal arterials lack pedestrian-oriented uses and environments to create downtown presence and identity. The future redevelopment of properties fronting these corridors could accommodate 2-3 story buildings with commercial and office/medical uses in a way that creates a more vibrant edge to the street with a more urban-like feel. The wide right-of-way buffer between the highway and future buildings should have pedestrian amenities in the front and parking in the rear to further emphasize a pedestrian downtown character and help overcome the automobile-centric feel of these corridors today.

Potential Future Land Use: High-Density Mixed-Use, Medium-Density Mixed-Use, Commercial-Office

Building Height: 3-7 story buildings

Residential Density: 4-9 units/acre



Precedent Development Character for Highway Commercial Corridor



Precedent Development Character for Redevelopment Area

Development Buildout Vision

Collectively, the Development Framework Plan described above, community feedback, recent investments, previous planning efforts in downtown, and the Highway 20 Corridor Study have all helped paint a development vision for downtown for the next 10-20 years. The new vision for downtown includes high density mixed use development; wide selection of housing types; inter-connected green spaces; entertainment, shopping and dining options; and increased residential population all within a compact 5-15 minute walking distance. The future buildout is intended to offer a safe and vibrant pedestrian experience in a relatively urban environment in the core but at the same time maintaining a small town feel through the architectural character on the periphery. The design philosophy underpinning this development vision includes:

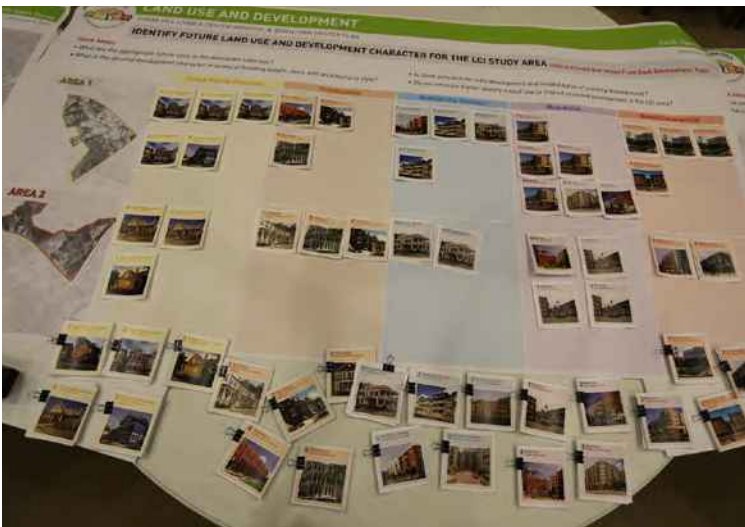
- Building out West Broad Street outside the core as “signature main street” with live-work units, commercial/retail uses, mixed-use, and compact residential development
- Lining Peachtree Industrial Boulevard with commercial and office uses coupled with a continuous multi-use path and locating parking in the rear
- Creating opportunities for medium-density housing with a variety of “missing middle” typologies within the 10-min walking area – around Roosevelt Circle, along Whitehead Road and north of Highway 20
- Building a walkable edge on Highway 20 and creating two new mixed-use nodes at Hillcrest Drive and Sycamore Road
- Framing the signature Bowl with denser development including the E Center, hotel, office, multifamily housing, and new complimentary development along Highway 20
- Connecting both sides of Highway 20 with a pedestrian bridge as a visual gateway into downtown from Highway 20 and an actual gateway for pedestrians and cyclists accessing downtown from the Sugar Hill Greenway. The bridge and the greenway will be a catalyst for revitalizing areas along Stanley Street and north of Highway 20 between Peachtree Industrial Boulevard and Hillcrest Drive



“Missing Middle” housing blocks at Public Workshop #2



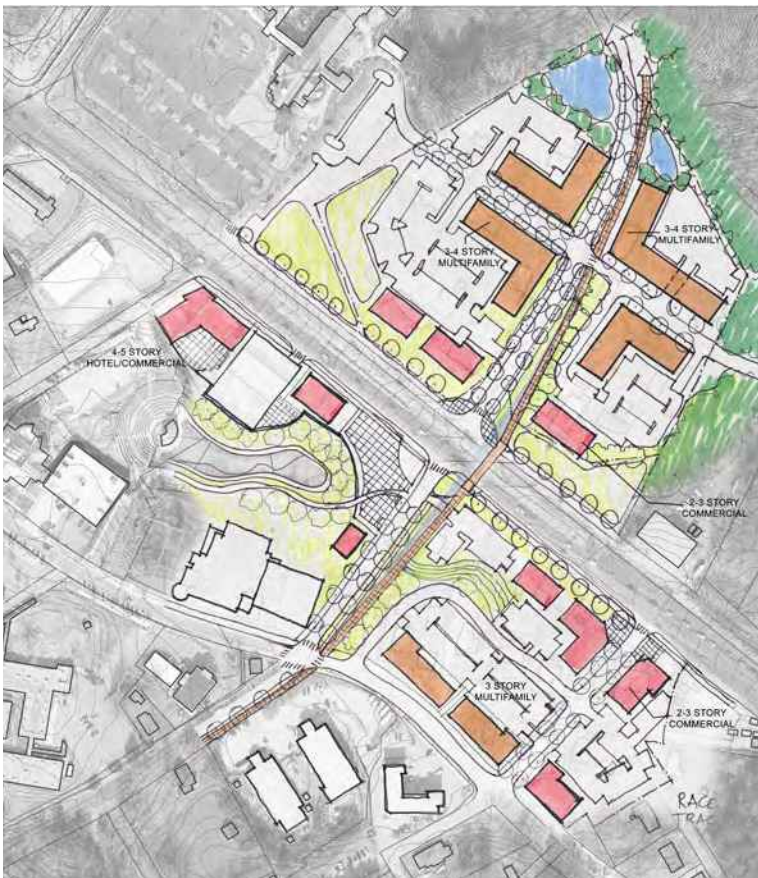
Buildout vision created by participants at Public Workshop #2



Preferred development character images selected at Public Workshop #2



Buildout vision created by Core Team members



Conceptual buildout potential on Highway 20



Conceptual downtown growth vision in 5-min and 10-min walking area

FIG. 11: DEVELOPMENT BUILDOUT VISION FOR DOWNTOWN

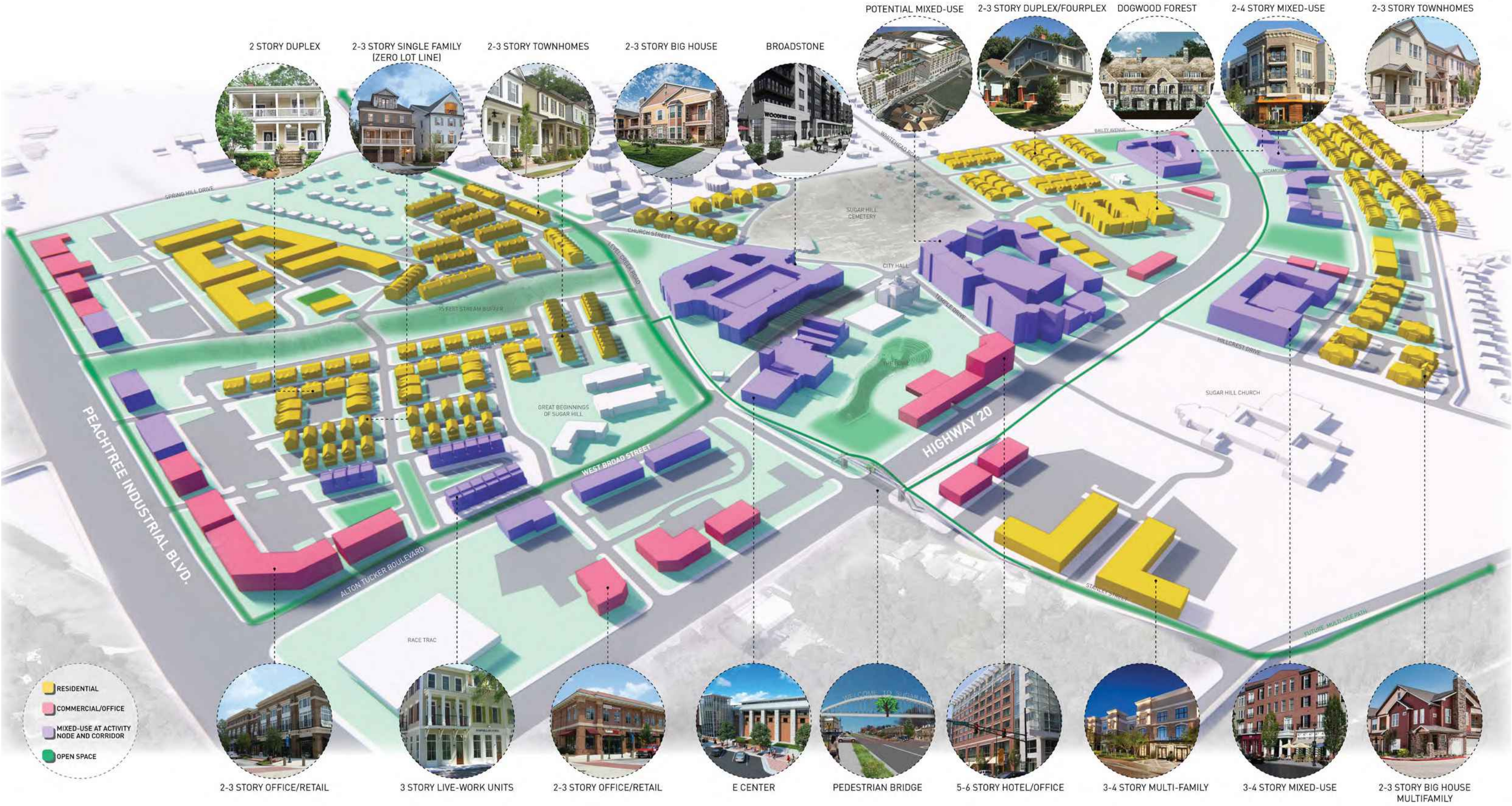


FIG. 12: DEVELOPMENT BUILDOUT VISION FOR DOWNTOWN



3.4 MOBILITY FRAMEWORK PLAN AND CONCEPTS

Based on the connectivity gaps identified in the walkability analysis and considering the mobility goal of creating a complete network between downtown and growth areas, the Mobility Framework (Figure 06) provides several recommendations and conceptual typical street sections for a variety of streets. The framework provides a big picture vision for downtown and will be used as a guide to implement small sections of the proposed streets as parts of future development, either by the City or private developers. The mobility framework strategies are:

- Create smaller walkable blocks (ideally not longer than 500 FT) with an interconnected street grid of primary and secondary streets
- Create internal alleyways as part of future development for rear parking access and to avoid multiple driveway curb cuts on public streets
- Propose new streets along the property line with respect to ownership and proposed development, where feasible in order to facilitate connections among multiple adjacent developments over time
- Streetscape improvements to existing streets in the current right-of-way, where feasible
- Incorporate both pedestrian and bike amenities on primary streets, where feasible
- Traffic calming and intersection improvements for pedestrian safety on Highway 20 and Peachtree Industrial Boulevard, and in the high-intensity growth areas
- Potential new pedestrian bridge on Highway 20 near Stanley Street on the proposed Sugar Hill Greenway alignment
- Potential new roundabouts at strategic locations to slow vehicular movements and create a gateway feel entering downtown
- Amenitize the existing Georgia Power easement as a greenway/multi-use path
- Improve existing “at-grade” crossings and add potential new “at-grade” crossings along Norfolk Southern railroad to improve ped & bike connectivity

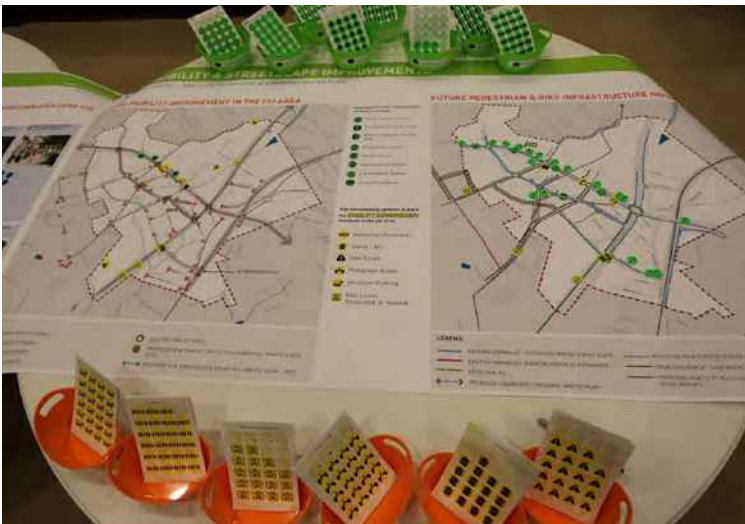
The planning team prepared detailed mobility concepts for a few key streets to illustrate the inclusion of pedestrian and bike amenities (Page 35-36).



Transportation, streetscape, pedestrian and bike infrastructure improvement exercise at Public Workshop #2



Mobility improvement exercise at Public Workshop #2



Mobility improvement input at Public Workshop #2

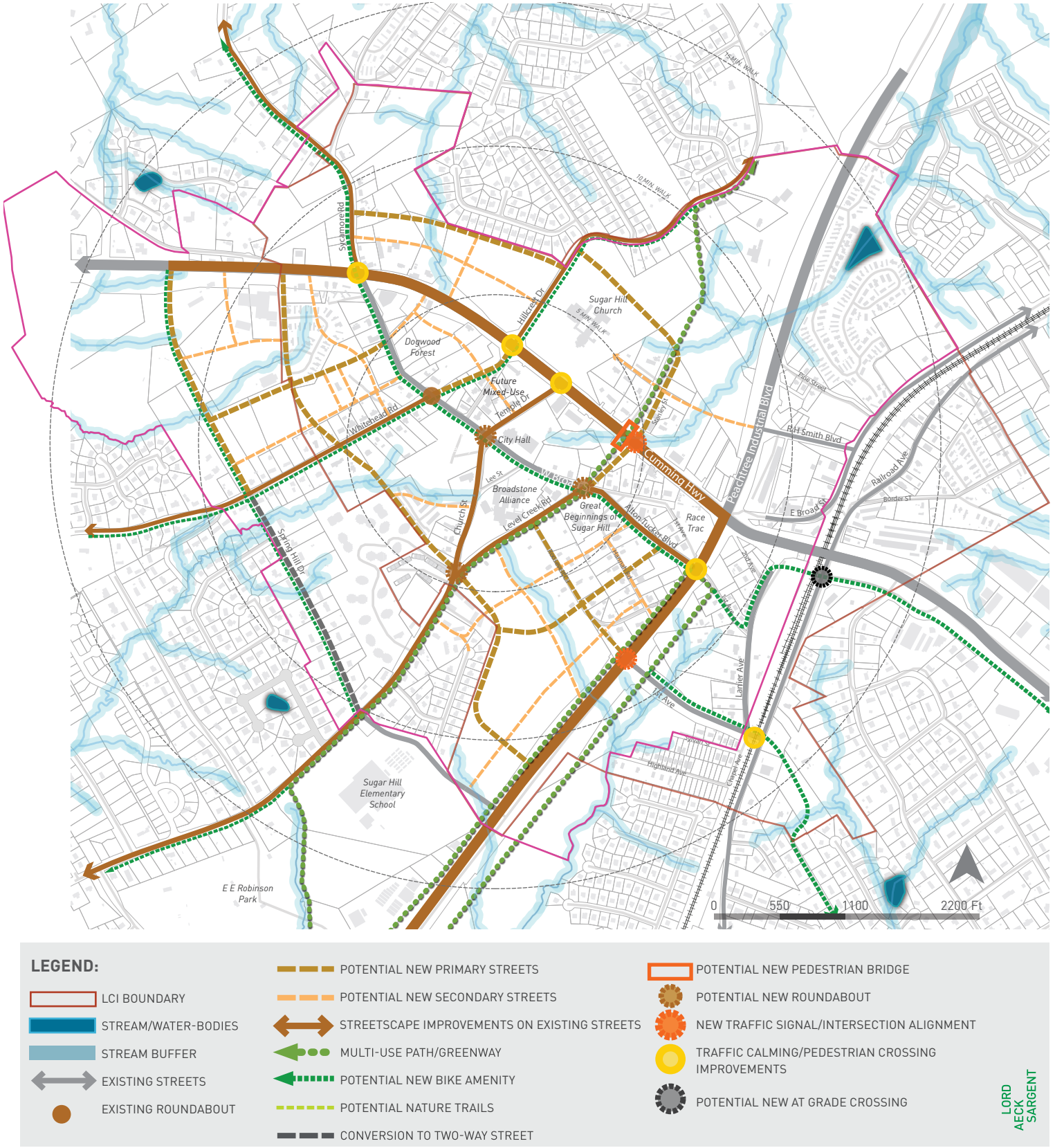
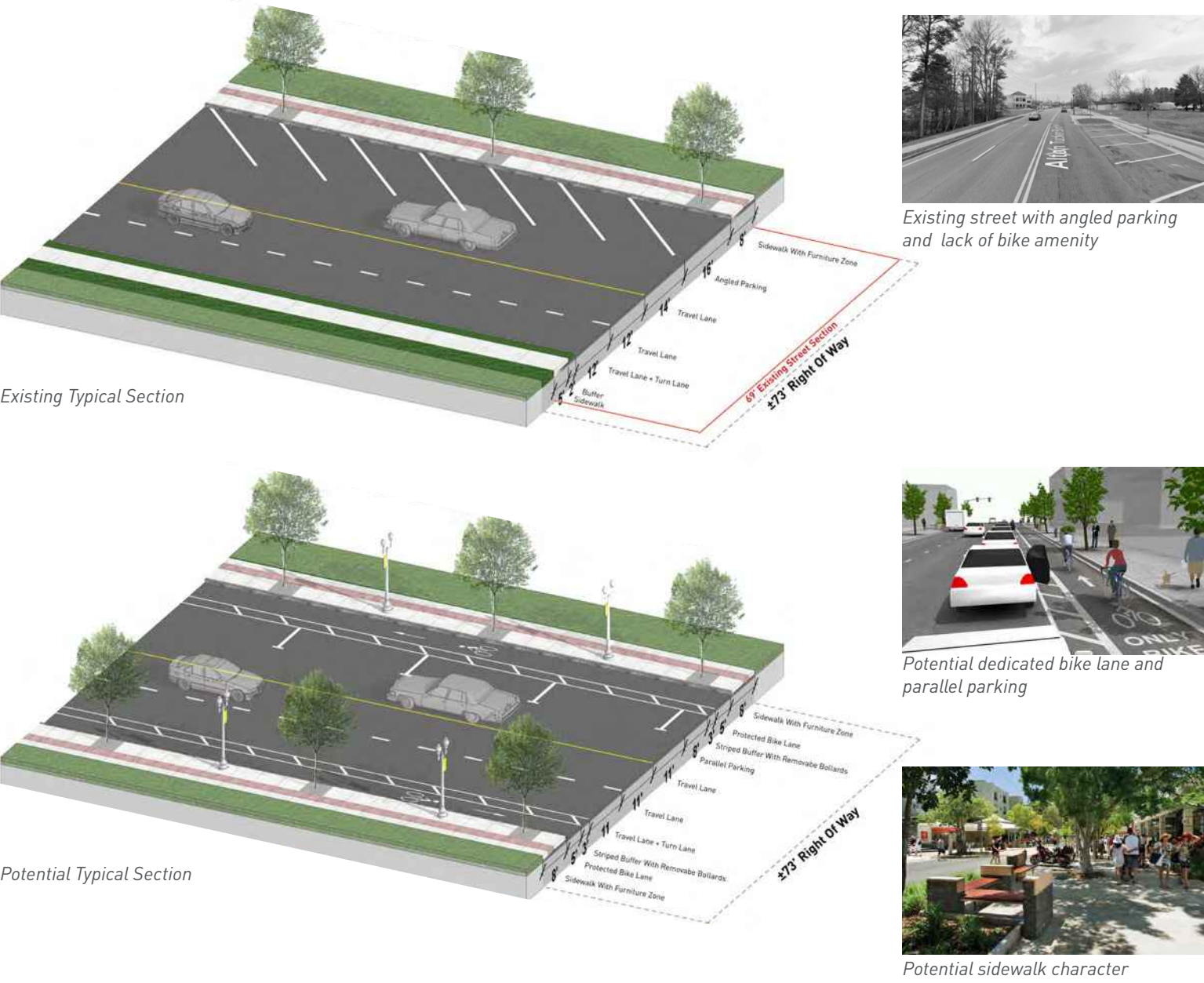


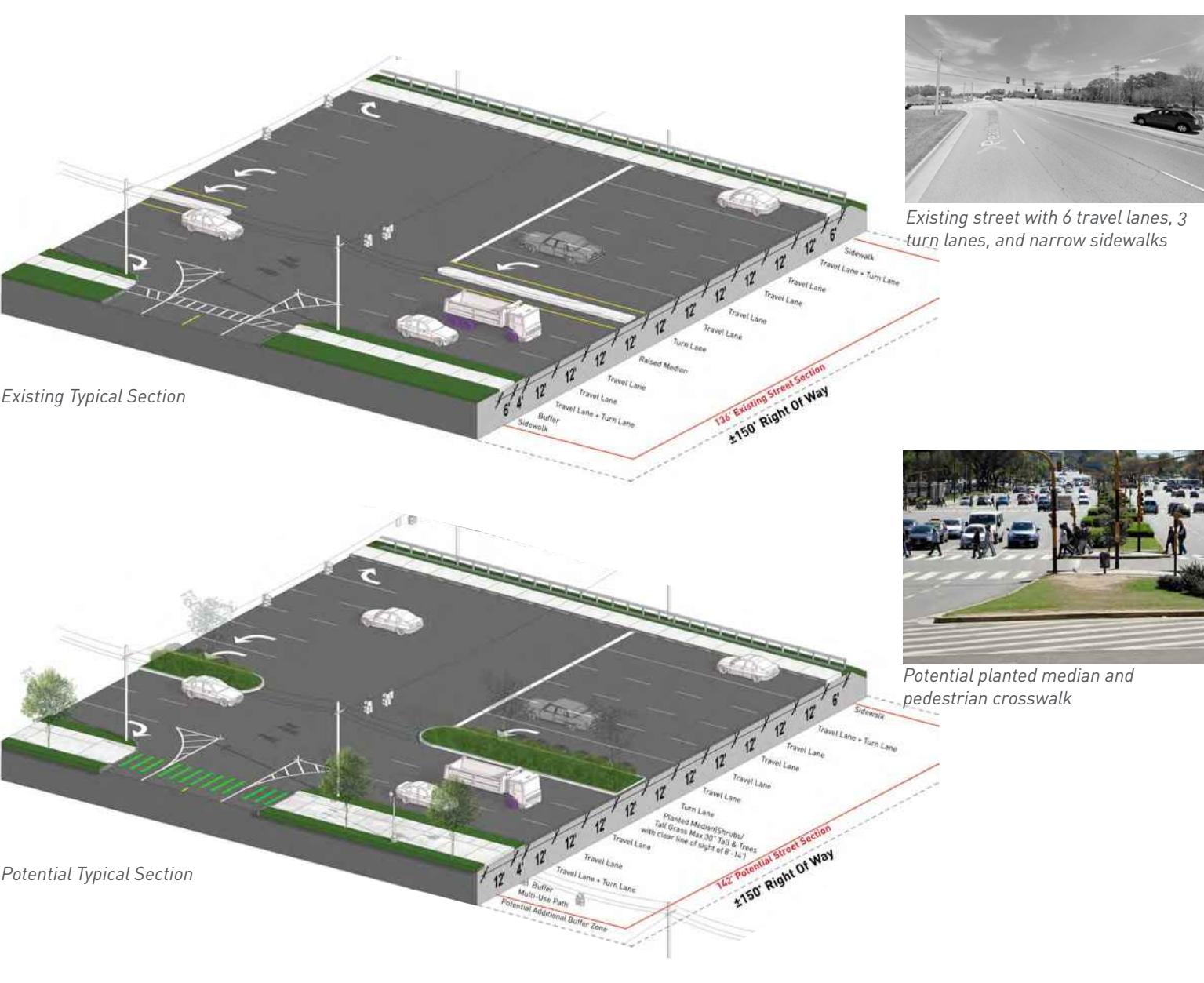
FIG. 13: MOBILITY FRAMEWORK MAP

FIG. 14: ALTON TUCKER BOULEVARD POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENT



- Use existing right of way of +/-73 feet to make future improvements
- Maintain existing sidewalk with furniture zone on north side of the street and create a wider sidewalk on the south side to match the existing
- Adjust the existing travel lanes to be 11 feet consistent width
- Install pedestrian lights and trees in the furniture zone
- Create new 5 feet wide protected bike land on both sides
- Within existing ROW on north side, there is enough space to replace existing angled parking to protected bike lane and parallel parking

FIG. 15: PEACHTREE INDUSTRIAL BOULEVARD



- Use existing right of way of +/-150 feet to make future improvements
- Maintain existing sidewalk on east side but potential major streetscape improvement on the west side as it abuts Central Business District boundary
- Potential streetscape enhancements on the west side to include 4 feet landscape buffer, 12 feet multi-use path to tie with future greenway, and pedestrian lights and streets
- Replace existing concrete median to planted median to tame the traffic thoroughfare character
- Any mid-block crossing or intersection improvements on PIB (Alton Tucker and First Avenue) should be designed for pedestrian and bike safety per Gwinnett County regulations and National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) design guide



Potential boulevard character with planted median and streetscape
Source: NACTO Street Design Guide

FIG. 16: HIGHWAY 20



Existing Typical Section



Potential Typical Section

- Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) recently expanded Highway 20 and added sidewalks on both sides with a buffer
- Based on the GDOT guidelines, the potential streetscape improvements could include adding pedestrian lights and trees behind existing sidewalks to create pedestrian-friendly environment
- Create planted median per GDOT guidelines (trees must be limbed up to a minimum of 7 feet from the ground)
- Any mid-block crossing or intersection improvements on Highway 20 (Hillcrest, Level Creek extension and Sycamore) should be designed for pedestrian and bike safety per GDOT regulations and National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) design guide



Source: NACTO Street Design Guide

FIG. 17: WHITEHEAD ROAD



Existing Typical Section



Option A: Potential Typical Section with Bike Facility



Option B: Potential Typical Section with Multi-use Trail

- Use existing right of way of +/-49 feet to make future improvements
- Streetscape enhancements on both sides to include pedestrian lights, trees, and public art to create neighborhood street character
- Option A with Bike Facility: This option requires moving existing curb to accommodate bike facility and could add more cost to overall improvement. Add minimum 5 feet sidewalk and 3 feet planted buffer/furniture zone on both sides of the street; Create 8 feet wide two-way bike lane/cycle track with 3 feet buffer for bike safety
- Option B with Multi-use Trail: This option does NOT require moving existing curb and could be cost effective proposal. Add minimum 6 feet sidewalk and 4 feet planted buffer/furniture zone; Create 10 feet wide multi-use trail with 3 feet furniture zone



Existing Whitehead Road with narrow sidewalks and lack of bike infrastructure



Potential for protected bike lane with signage



Potential streetscape improvement to create neighborhood street character

FIG. 19: WHITEHEAD ROAD: POTENTIAL STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT



FIG. 18: HIGHWAY 20: POTENTIAL STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS, PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT



FIG. 21: LEVEL CREEK ROAD

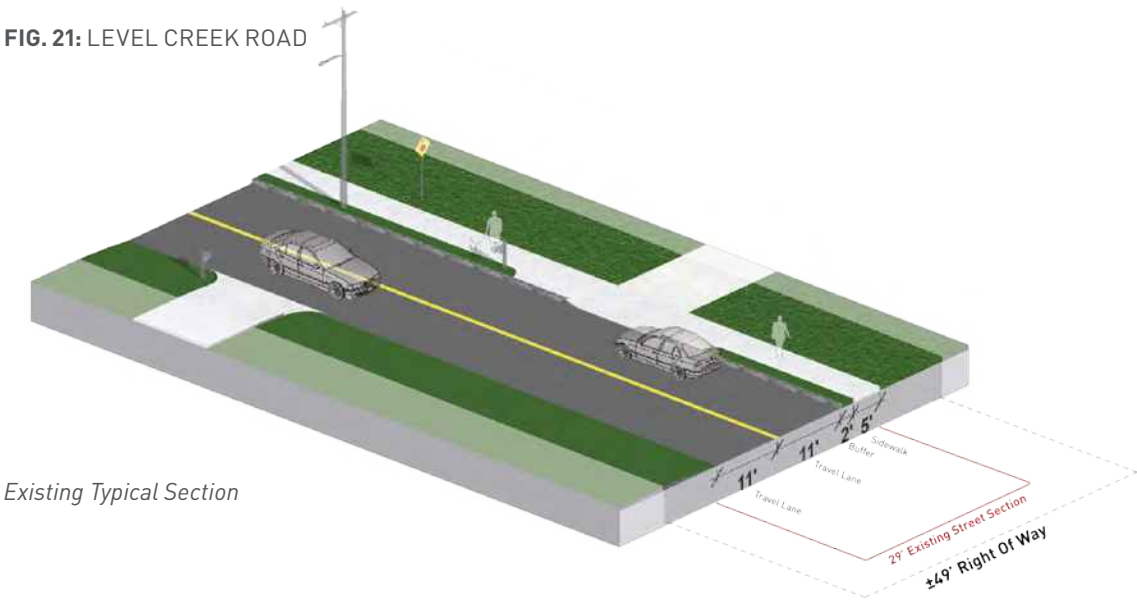


FIG. 20: LEVEL CREEK ROAD: POTENTIAL STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT



- Use existing right of way of +/-45 feet to make future improvements
- Add minimum 6 feet sidewalk and 4 feet planted buffer/furniture zone on north/ west side of the street
- Create 10 feet wide multi-use trail/ Sugar Hill Greenway in addition to a 3 feet wide furniture zone
- Streetscape enhancements on both sides to include pedestrian lights, trees, and public art to create neighborhood street character

3.5 OPEN SPACE FRAMEWORK PLAN

In addition to development growth and mobility improvements, enhancing the quality of life for residents and visitors to downtown is one of the key goals of the master plan. The open space framework plan shown in Figure 06 illustrates a wide variety of potential new open spaces along with new trail connections throughout downtown. The framework plan is based on the following strategies:

- Create open space along existing stream buffer areas (75' on either side of the stream)
- Conserve existing heavy tree canopy and areas with a steep slope to utilize them for passive green space
- Provide nature trails in the conservation areas as a way to connect the existing and proposed open spaces and larger greenway network
- Create pocket parks and neighborhood green space along the proposed Sugar Hill Greenway
- Create new open spaces to accommodate community amenities as part of future development
- Utilize future open spaces for installing public art



Outdoor dining as part of mixed-use development



Walking/biking trails as part of passive parks



Neighborhood parks and plazas as part of future development

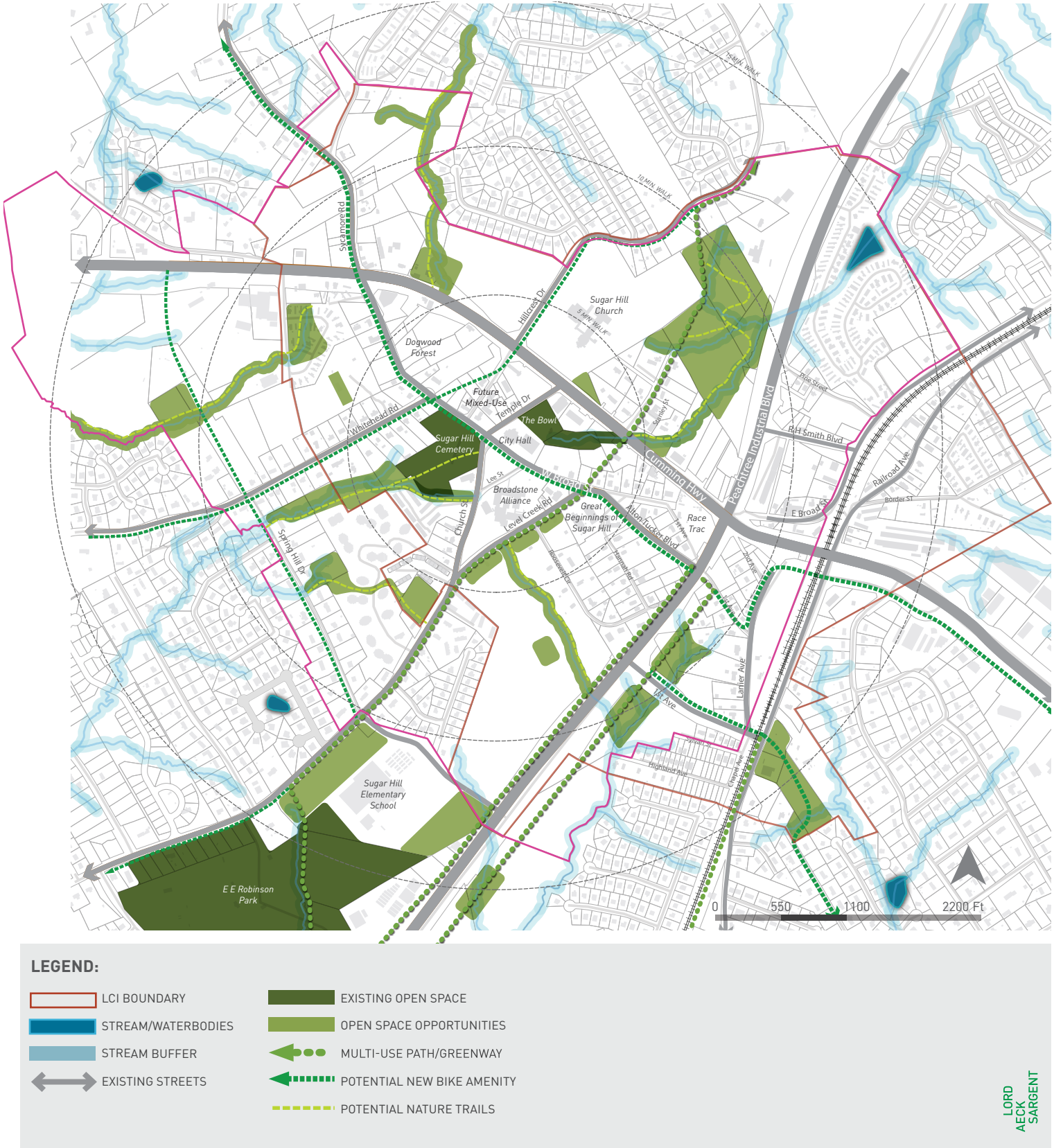


FIG. 22: OPEN SPACE FRAMEWORK MAP