Steele Creek Development Response

October 2, 2017

What is a Development Response?

The Development Response Study process is designed to provide the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department with a focused method to evaluate and work with development proposals that call for unanticipated development activity or significant changes to existing area plans or zoning. This process is intended as an internal and advisory exercise that allows Planning staff to test and consider the impacts of proposed development in order to formulate recommendations regarding zoning or development applications. It is not intended to be comprehensive and therefore is organized around selected stakeholder involvement. This focused process includes initial stakeholder interviews followed by a multi-day design workshop. The intent is to quickly uncover the critical issues and utilize the design workshop to develop and test ways they might get resolved, identifying next steps and unresolved issues along the way. The design ideas, illustrative plans, and land use concepts are advisory only and do not represent official policy changes to existing zoning or adopted area plans.

Why Now?

This Development Response is focused on the southeast quadrant of the Steele Creek Road/I-485 interchange currently governed by the Steele Creek Area Plan, adopted February 27, 2012. The Study Area encompasses a collection of contiguous and privately owned parcels totaling 370 acres. Large parcels adjacent to Steele Creek Road and Brown Grier Road have been drawing development interest and proposals that are inconsistent with the adopted area plan. Significant changes have occured in the area since the plan's adoption, including the development of a large outlet mall and the expansion of the airport. This development response allows an overall review of this area and consideration of alternative development scenarios to help inform review of future rezoning applications. Key issues include:

- **Pressure for land use change.** The development of the outlet mall and the expansion of the airport have occured since the adoption of the Steele Creek Area Plan. These projects have attracted a significant amount of retail and commercial development to the area. Consistently, recent landowner and development interest has advocated for additional retail, office, and high density residential uses focused along Steele Creek and Brown Grier Roads. These land uses are not supported by the Steele Creek Area Plan. Large scale parcels will continue to draw significant development interest.
- **Large, multi -acre development sites.** Most of the parcels in the Study Area are large, multi-acre development sites (100 acres +), some that are currently listed for sale. Recently these parcels have been targeted for large-scale master planned development. The large parcel ownership pattern provides an opportunity to foster a coordinated master plan, creating a truly mixed-use and walkable community.
- **Impacts on existing neighborhoods.** Residents in the Clearview Acres neighborhood, adjacent to the I-485 and Steele Creek Road Interchange, and at the Freeman Farm on Steele Creek Road, find living adjacent to Steele Creek Road and fast food restaurants difficult. They have sited traffic speed, light and noise, reduction of building setback, and limited access as issues and expressed a sense of urgency to combine parcels and sell large amounts of land as soon as possible.
- **Incremental, multi -parcel coordination.** Without an area-wide framework for streets and connectivity, this significant undeveloped gateway area (encompassing approximately one square mile) has the potential to be incrementally carved up into small disconnected fragments that limit later development phases, constrain overall open space protection, and negatively impact traffic patterns. These are critical issues to the long-term development of the Study Area. A Development Response can provide a long-term strategy to ensure development is consistent with long-term priorities for this area.

The Process

The Development Response was completed after an intense public outreach process. A site analysis that studied the context, ownership pattern, adopted land use, existing zoning, environment and site constraints, transportation and access, capital projects and development activity of the Study Area was completed to fully understand the current conditions and issues of development. Stakeholder interviews with property owners, development teams, resident groups, and public agencies took place before a week-long design workshop (March 7-10, 2017). The public design workshop took place adjacent to the Study Area at Robert F. Kennedy Middle School. The week kicked off with a public meeting that introduced the project and gathered information on the public's preferences for development and public facility design, as well as their vision for the site in 20 years. This information was incorporated in the designs that were produced during the design workshop. The design studio provided an opportunity for residents to drop in throughout the week to provide input on design, and an area for students of Kennedy Middle School to participate in some of the design activities. The week culminated with a public presentation documenting the main design concepts proposed as a result of the workshop.

The Steele Creek Development Response Recommendations fall into 4 main categories:

Street Framework
Creating a connected street network that provides for a walkable environment and improved regional connections

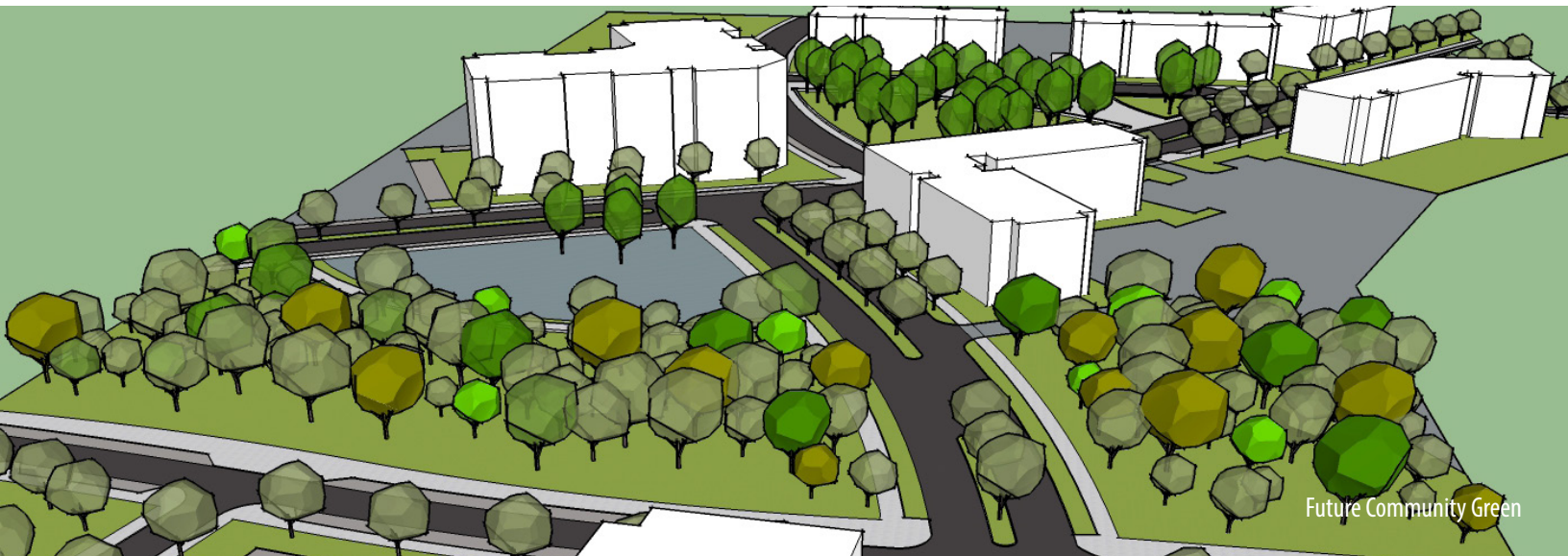
Development Intensity
Varying the intensity of development throughout the site based on surrounding buildings and transportation network

Open Space Network
Creating a series of open spaces that encourage community gathering and preserve the natural environment

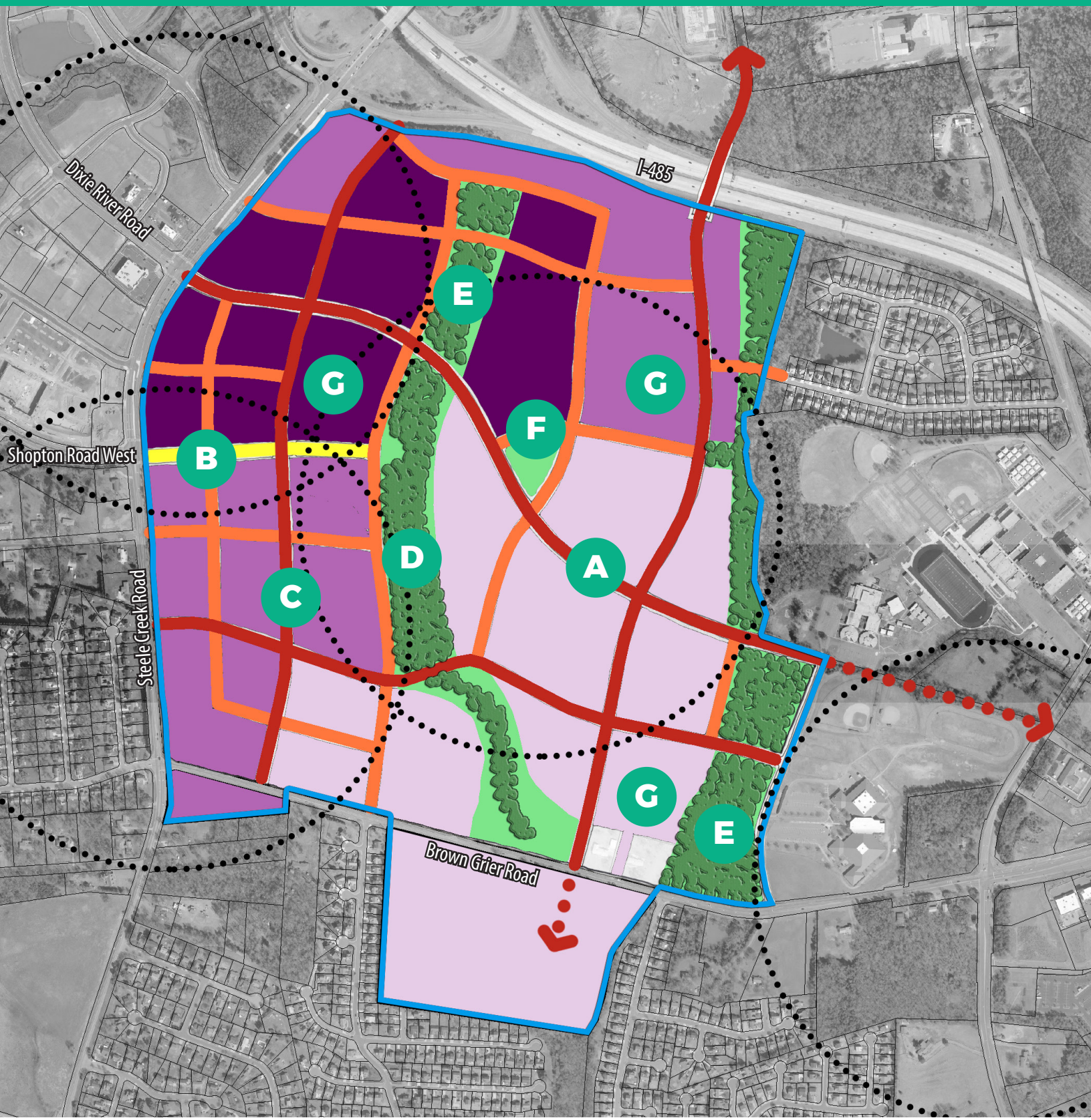
Design Standards
Ensuring high quality design that complements adjacent development and creates a walkable environment

Recommendations:

- **A** Dixie River Road Extension - connecting development to the north and west
- **B** Shopton Road West Main Street - designating a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use Main Street.
- **C** Parallel Street to Steele Creek Road - providing an alternative to Steele Creek Road and creating a walkable environment
- **D** Creek Environment - preserving Steele Creek and open space spine throughout the area as an amenity
- **E** Common Tree Save - apply to the entire Study Area to preserve mature tree canopy
- **F** Community Green - including a large open space at the heart of the development to host gatherings
- **G** Development Intensity - focusing the most intense development north of Shopton Road West and nearer to Steele Creek Road
- **H** High Quality Design Standards - providing design standards to ensure high quality development



Steele Creek Development Response Recommendations



Study Area Boundary
Avenue Streets
Local Streets
Main Street
Open Space
Woodland
1/2 Mile Radius
High Intensity
Moderate Intensity
Low Intensity

A : Dixie River Road Extension

Dixie River Road will provide a direct connection between Steele Creek Road and Sandy Porter Road, running parallel with I-485. With wide sidewalks and bicycle lanes, Dixie River connects to the Charlotte Premium Outlets, the River District, and the heart of Berewick Town Center.

Dixie River Road will continue a four lane section on the eastern side of Steele Creek Road if needed to support future development. If it is appropriate to serve future development with fewer lanes, it will transition to a two-lane complete street easily navigable for all mobility modes.

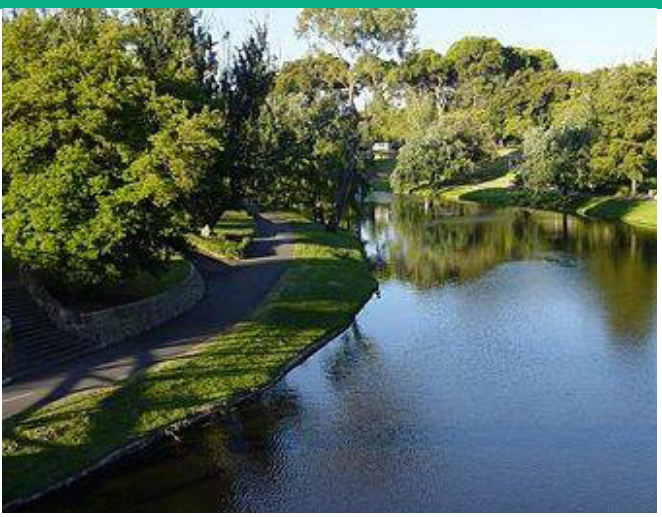
B : Shopton Road West Main Street

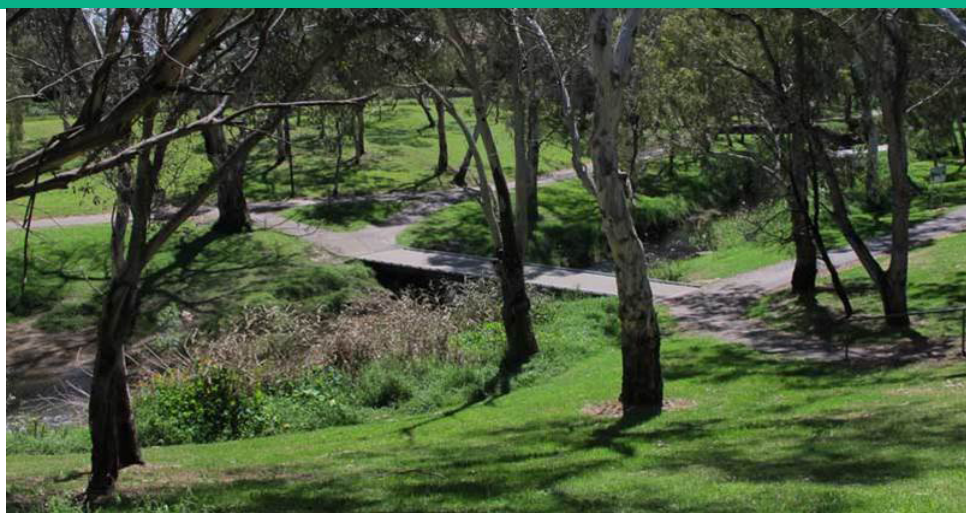
Shopton Road West Extension, to the west of the creek, should be a Main Street designed to be highly pedestrian-oriented. Buildings should front on the street and have primary and frequent entrances to the sidewalk. On-street parking should be a priority and traffic should move slowly. Wide sidewalks with tree grates to complement the businesses and outdoor dining should be encouraged.

C : Parallel Street to Steele Creek Rd.

The street that runs parallel to Steele Creek Road will connect Brown Grier Road with Shopton Road West Main Street, Dixie River Road Extension, and the rest of the street network - all the way to the I-485 interchange. This will provide an alternative to busy Steele Creek Road, while allowing drive-by visibility for retail and other businesses. Because this street will be able to remain a narrower right-of-way than Steele Creek Road, it will provide a more walkable context. This will allow a more appropriately sized buffer and frontage along Steele Creek Road. Development at the corners of the parallel street and Dixie River Road and Shopton Road should include buildings that frame the corners, entrances, and a highly walkable environment.

D : Creek Environment



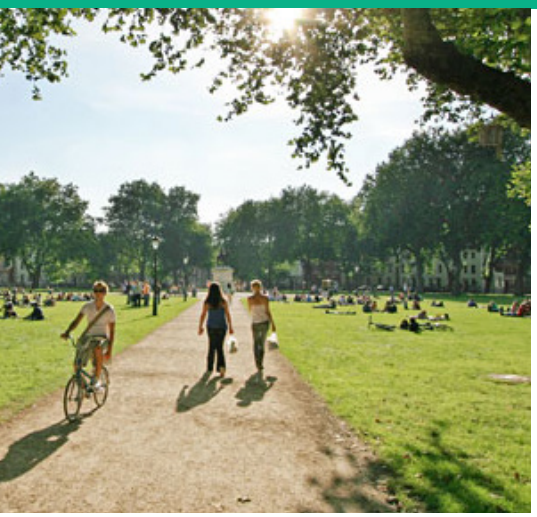


Steele Creek runs on the eastern edge of the Study Area and its tributary traverses through the center. Along the creek system is steeper topography, a mature tree line, and natural habitats. This land is difficult to develop because of changes in elevation and expense to cross the creek with bridges. This encourages the preservation of the natural environment that can become a recreational and visual amenity to the development. The creek should be enhanced with context sensitive, wide walking and biking trails and small gathering spaces. Additionally the preserved creek and the adjacent land will provide a creek edge that will enhance adjacent development.

E : Common Tree Save

The Study Area benefits from 228 acres of existing woodland. This creates an opportunity for a common tree save area for the entire area, allowing for the preservation of the healthiest and most mature trees to be used as an amenity for residents, workers, and visitors to the site. Additionally, there are parts of the site more appropriate for higher density development because of their access and visibility. Other parts of the site are less appropriate for development and more appropriate for the preservation of the natural environment. A common tree save will allow the entire Study Area to develop in a way that makes the most sense for creating an economically and environmentally sustainable community.

F : Community Green



A visual preference survey of over 700 hundred people indicated the most wanted type of open space in the Steele Creek area was a community green. A large open space can be flexible and host a range of activities. These could include a farmer's market, entertainment like movies and music, recreation and games for children, or picnicking, lounging, and reading. New buildings should front on the green and create a sense of enclosure and activity with entrances and active uses. A community green could provide opportunities for the entire residential and business community of the Study Area to come together.

G : Land Uses & Development Intensity

The Steele Creek Area Plan recommended predominately low density residential development for the Study Area. However, given the size of the area, 370 acres, and the changes that have taken place since the area plan was adopted in 2012, including the development of the 500,000 square foot outlet mall, airport expansion and continued growth of population and jobs, a mix of land uses and intensities is more appropriate to best address existing and future needs in the area.

The larger Steele Creek area has approximately twice as many jobs as households, with nearly all employees commuting into the area. This situation taxes the transportation network and points to the need to improve local mobility and diversify the land use and housing mix. A mix of land uses allows people to live, work, shop and recreate in close proximity, lessening the need for long car trips using the busy major thoroughfares and increasing the likelihood of walking, bicycling and using transit in the future. Additionally, introducing employment, retail/services, open space/recreation and civic uses in key locations, along with establishment of a more connected street network, will result in a more walkable community.

In addition, this portion of the Steel Creek area is located directly south of the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport and in the direct flight path of arriving and departing air traffic. While outside the Airport Noise Overlay which regulates residential and institutional uses based on Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) guidelines, the Study Area experiences regular aircraft noise due to the pattern and volume of air traffic.

This noise impact can be especially difficult and incompatible with residential uses. Reducing the amount of long-term residential development in this area will minimize the land use incompatibility. Therefore, instead of only single family residential development, this study recommends providing a mix of uses that are more compatible with the airport, while still accommodating the expanding need for housing.

Based on the existing conditions and context of the Study Area, future land uses and intensities are envisioned as follows:

- **North of Shopton Road West Main Street and west of the Steele Creek Tributary** is envisioned as the best location for introducing retail and mixed use development into the Study Area, particularly along both sides of Shopton West Road Main Street, as well as the new Parallel Street and Steele Creek Road. This area has good visibility and/or access to the I-485 interchange and if designed appropriately (see design guidelines), can accommodate the highest intensity of development in the Study Area, generally up to 8 stories, if an appropriate street network is provided.

- **Southern end of Steele Creek Road and also the area adjacent to I-485** is appropriate for moderate intensity development, generally up to 3 stories, if designed appropriately (see design guidelines). The area adjacent to I-485 offers visibility to the interstate and non-residential uses such as office and other employment uses would complement the retail and residential uses envisioned for other parts of the Study Area. The area along the southern end of Steele Creek Road would also be appropriate for office and other employment uses, as well as residential development. Office uses 1-2 stories in height may also be appropriate as a transition between residential and higher intensity uses. Street network connectivity must be provided to accomodate this intensity of development.

- **Southeast corner of the Study Area near existing single family uses** is envisioned as primarily lower intensity residential development, generally at an overall density of up to 6 dwelling units per acre. However, individual sites closer to Brown Grier Road or adjacent to office uses may be appropriate for increased density. If proposing increased intensities, network connectivity must be provided to support it. Incorporating open space into future development in this area will be key to enhancing the adjacent development and creating a sense of community. (See design guidelines)

H : Design Guidelines

Ensuring that a high quality of architectural form and design is incorporated into future development is important to residents and local stakeholders of the Study Area. The framework established as part of this project will only reach its full potential if each development implements consistent urban design standards that will create a more walkable environment conducive to a mix of uses. The adopted area plan includes policies and best practices regarding community design. The Design Guidelines included below supplement the language in the area plan and add specific recommendations for building types appropriate in the Study Area.

Streetscapes & Sidewalks

Priority Streets:

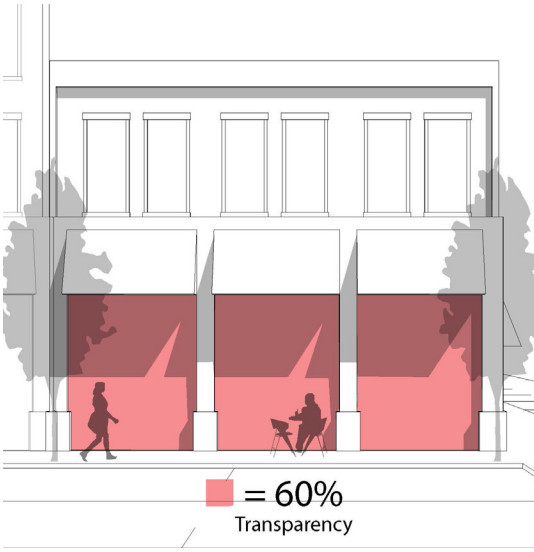
- Shopton Road (Main Street)
- Dixie River Road
- New Parallel Street

In these locations, on-street parking, and wide sidewalks (a minimum of 16 feet) with tree grates instead of landscaped buffers or raised planters should be provided. Street furniture, such as benches and bike racks, should be included.

Steele Creek Road: Should include a wide landscaped buffer that matches the existing buffer along the street to provide ample separation between the development and the fast moving traffic.

Other Streetscapes: Should include a minimum sidewalk of 6 feet and an 8 foot planting strip to adequately separate moving traffic and pedestrians, as well as provide ample tree canopy.

Ground Floor Activation



Development along priority streets (Shopton Road, Dixie River Road, and the New Parallel Street) should have:

- A minimum ground floor height of 14 feet for all non-residential buildings;
- A minimum of 60% transparency on the ground floor façade of all retail ;
- A minimum of 30% transparency on the entire façade of all office and residential uses ;
- All glass in windows or doors should be clear;
- No blank walls greater than 20 feet in length; and
- A prominent building entrance on corner (when applicable).

In all other non-residential and mixed use projects, the ground floor of each building should have retail along at least 30% of the length of the street facing facade; all businesses and/or other community services on the ground floor should be accessible directly from sidewalks along a public space (not including parking lots).

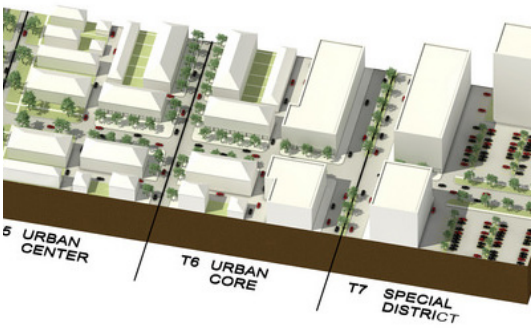
Building Placement

Development along priority streets (Shopton Road, Dixie River Road, and the New Parallel Street) should have:

- Buildings located with their primary facade facing the street. Where these roads intersect, the primary facade should be facing the more dominant road as specified by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department.
- Mixed use, retail, and office buildings should be placed at the back of the sidewalk. Larger setbacks should be provided only for enhancing the public realm with elements such street furniture, outdoor seating, pedestrian lighting, and bike parking.
- Frequent entry points. Every facade facing a public street should have a prominent entrance with architectural features. If the building is over 300 ft. in length, it should have multiple entrances on the same facade.

Height, Mass, & Transitions

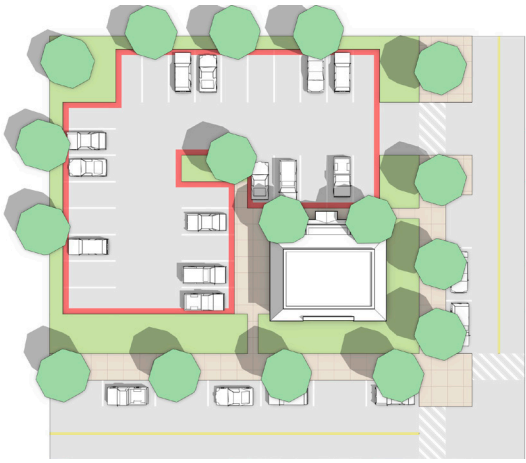
The Study Area is large enough to accommodate a wide variety of development intensities. It is important, therefore, that height and massing of buildings is sensitive to the surrounding development.



Development in the Study Area should:

- Step down/transition from higher intensity developments such as office and multi-family to lower intensity developments such as single family. As an example, townhouses or courtyard apartments could be used as a transition between single family neighborhoods and higher density employment and office uses.
- Provide landscape buffers of at least 10 feet to separate single family housing from mixed use or mixed residential areas. Additional buffer could be needed depending on the height and mass of larger buildings.
- Ensure that the height of two buildings adjacent to one another does not differ by more than 3 stories.
- Include recesses and projects for all buildings exceeding 120 feet in length.
- Have building elevations designed with vertical bays or articulated architectural facade features.
- Have garage doors visible from public or private streets setback 2 feet from the front wall plane.

Parking



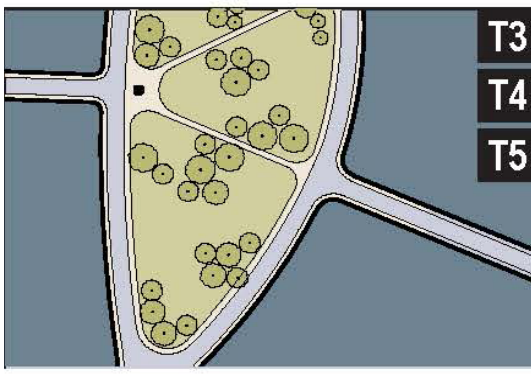
Development on priority streets (Shopton Road, Dixie River Road, and the New Parallel Street) should have:

- No parking between the building and the right-of-way;
- Any surface parking lots located behind building with access from a connected side street, when there is a side streeet. No more than 35% of the parking lot should be visible from the street. Access from a primary street is permitted when there is no access from a side street.
- Shared access points between developments when feasible.

Along Steele Creek Road, parking may be to the side of the building and even in some cases in front of the building, but a substantial landscape buffer between the sidewalk and building should remain.

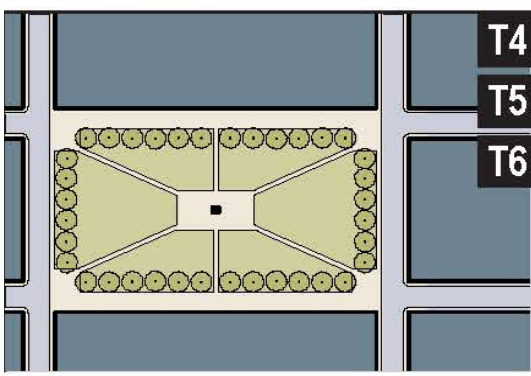
Single family attached units or any multi-family units with garages, should have garages face internal to the overall development or open to alleys. They should not face any public street.

Parking structure facade should blend with nearby buildings by incorporating architectural treatments to provide visual interest.



Open Space

A variety of open space types should be included in the Study Area. Linear parks, community greens, natural areas, plazas, etc. that can be programmed provide flexibility that can create new opportunities to have a broad palette of parks and green spaces.



Each development should have:

- All buildings within 1/4 mile walk of an open space;
- Open space amenitized with seating and lighting as appropriate;
- An agreement for the maintenance of open space in place before occupancy; and
- At least one pedestrian and cycling connection to the Steele Creek Greenway and its tributary loop .

Development adjacent to Steele Creek and its tributaries should front on and have a primary entrance facing the trail. Raised individual ground floor entrances for residential units should be provided. When not possible, a prominent ground or first floor entry, such as a highly visible lobby or atrium should be provided.

The above conceptual, illustrative plan shows the preferred form and site layout to create a walkable commercial environment for the northwest corner of the Study Area. This concept embodies the 8 recommendations presented in this document. Locating buildings up along the street with parking behind, connecting pedestrian retail streets with natural, open space, and creating a buffer between Steele Creek and adjacent development can help create an economically and socially sustainable neighborhood.

The Steele Creek Development Response Study will be a tool that will inform and guide the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department with a focused method to evaluate development proposals. These 8 recommendations are intended to serve as the guiding framework for future development.

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