

INDEPENDENCE BOULEVARD

Area Plan



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Adopted by Charlotte City Council
00/00/00

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i	List of Maps and Figures	
Part One: Concept Plan	1	Maps	
Study Area Context	3	Area Plan Boundary	7
Purpose	3	Issues and Opportunities	8
Plan Boundaries	3	Concept Plan	13
Organization of this Document	4	Recommended Future Land Use	14
Planning Process	4	Wedge Areas	15
Policy Framework	4	Corridor and Center Area	16
Key Opportunities and Constraints	9	Southeast Transit Station Area Boundaries	23
Vision Statement	10	Recommended Future Land Use for:	
Guiding Principles	10	Briar Creek Transit Station Area	25
Goals	11	Amity Gardens Transit Station Area	27
Overall Plan Concept	12	Sharon Amity Transit Station Area	29
Land Use Policies	17	Conference Drive Transit Station Area	31
Community Design Policies	36	Village Lake Transit Station Area	33
Transportation Policies	43	Sardis Road North Transit Station Area	35
Infrastructure and Public Facilities Policies	61	Future Transportation Network	45
Natural Environment Policies	65	Future Pedestrian and Bicycle Network	46
Conclusion	69	Potential Regional Stormwater Treatment	61
Part Two: Implementation Guide	71	Proposed Corrective Rezoning	79
Public & Private Sector Responsibilities	73	Figures	
Implementation Strategies	75	Community Design Illustrations:	
Corrective Rezoning	80	Residential Open Space	37
Catalyst Sites	83	Street Network	38
Part Three: Appendix (Under Separate Cover)		Streetscape	39
Existing Conditions Report		Facade Articulation	40
Market Analysis		Parking Lot Design	40
		Driveways and Parking	41
		Transit Station Area Principles	42
		Description of Street Types	49

Executive Summary

Purpose

This document establishes a vision for the Independence Boulevard Plan Area and provides policies to guide future growth, development, and reinvestment consistent with the *Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework*. This plan will update existing plans for the area, including the *East District Plan* (1990); refine the boundaries for any portion of an Activity Center, Growth Corridor, and/or Wedge included in the Plan Area; serve as the official streetscape plan for the area; and include station area plans for six future rapid transit stations.

Plan Boundary

The Independence Boulevard Plan Area consists of approximately 5,856 acres, located roughly between Briar Creek to the northwest and Sardis Road to the southeast (see Map 1). The Plan Area includes a large part of the Southeast Growth Corridor, as well as six proposed transit station areas identified in the *2030 Transit Corridor System Plan*.

Key Opportunities and Constraints

Opportunities

- Strong neighborhoods which are stable and diverse
- Location and access with proximity to Uptown, major highways, and other destinations
- Environmental features like parks and greenways
- Market that has a long-term positive trend for the Charlotte area

Constraints

- Independence Boulevard roadway design presents a challenge to redevelopment along the corridor, especially for retail uses
- Disinvestment in the form of vacant and outdated retail properties
- Market, in the short-term, is relatively limited by a low level of demand for retail and office

Vision Statement

The Vision Statement emerged out of the feedback received from stakeholder interviews, the first public meeting and Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) meetings. A draft of the Vision Statement was presented at the second CAG workshop, where participants were invited to share their thoughts on the vision.

Vision Statement

The Independence Boulevard Plan Area will be a healthy, safe, and attractive area where a wide diversity of businesses can thrive, where a network of greenways connect important ecological places, and where everyone has multiple transportation options. Most of all, it will continue to be a place with strong neighborhoods, where residents and visitors enjoy a high quality of life with ample employment, shopping and recreational opportunities.

Goals

To achieve the future envisioned for the Plan Area, the following goals have been identified. The goals build upon adopted plans and policies.

Land Use

To provide a range of housing, retail, employment, and recreation opportunities while strengthening existing neighborhoods; to encourage the creation of dynamic, compact activity nodes; and to provide a framework for the successful revitalization of properties along Independence Boulevard.

Community Design

To ensure that development/redevelopment is compatible with adjacent uses, while supporting the community's vision of vibrant, pedestrian-friendly nodes surrounded by stable neighborhoods.

Transportation

To increase the viability of all modes of travel—while also reducing reliance on Independence Boulevard for local trips—through creating better street connectivity, providing a safer and more comfortable

walking/bicycling environment, and positioning future transit stations for successful ridership levels and supportive land uses.

Infrastructure and Public Facilities

To encourage redevelopment in the areas that have adequate infrastructure and public facilities already in place, while ensuring that investment in new or improved infrastructure occurs in a thoughtful, strategic manner that leverages other opportunities and investments.

Natural Environment

To enhance important ecological and recreational spaces through expansion of the parks and greenways system, reclamation of “lost” assets such as buried streams, and creation of a comprehensive stormwater management strategy, while also encouraging land use and transportation activities that positively impact land, air, and water quality.



With new pedestrian-related improvements, Monroe Road is envisioned to become a focus of new development.

Key Policies

The major policy recommendations in this plan are summarized as follows: *(Note that this listing does not include all of the policies contained in the plan document)*

Land Use

- Wedge areas and Established Neighborhoods within the Growth Corridor are recommended to remain predominantly lower density residential.
- Density and intensity along Independence Boulevard should be focused around transit station areas, especially those that are designated as regional nodes since they have the most connections to the surrounding community.
- Some areas along Independence Boulevard outside transit station areas are appropriate for remaining as highway-oriented retail uses since these uses provide important services to the area but require less accessibility and pedestrian orientation.
- Monroe Road should feature nodes of activity, where mixed-uses are preferred, while the

areas in between nodes are a mix of retail and office uses.

- Employment areas should continue to be important community-wide locations.

Community Design

- Most development types, especially those in key node areas, should be designed to enhance the pedestrian environment.
- Neighborhoods should be protected from adjacent higher density development through proper design transitions.

Transportation

- Independence Boulevard should be developed within a 250' envelope west of WT Harris Boulevard and a 280' envelope east of WT Harris to the Plan Area boundary.
- Key connections should be established through new development to facilitate redevelopment. Many of these connections should offer parallel access to properties along Independence Boulevard.
- Design of new streets should be consistent with proposed surrounding land uses.



New bike lanes and a median would improve the pedestrian conditions along Monroe Road in more intense node locations.

Infrastructure and Public Facilities/Services

- Regional stormwater facilities should be constructed, especially in redeveloping areas subject to Post-Construction Controls Ordinance, to facilitate both redevelopment and improved water quality.
- Civic infrastructure, like libraries and community centers, should be targeted to node locations.

Natural Environment

- Stream “daylighting,” which means to bring back to the surface, should be a priority activity, especially in redevelopment areas.
- The greenway system should be expanded through both new creek corridor-based connections and overland connections between creeks.

Key Implementation Strategies

Implementation of this plan will be accomplished through a number of key strategies discussed in the Implementation section of the plan document. Highlights of these strategies include:

- Exploring the purchase of parcels along Independence Boulevard with safety-related access issues.
- Reconfiguring the Eastway interchange to allow parallel road connections to Independence.
- Exploring locations for regional stormwater facilities in the western portion of the Plan Area.
- Designing and constructing key connections such as the Shade Valley to Pierson connector street.
- Extending the greenway network along Edwards’ Branch as redevelopment occurs.



Stream daylighting along Edwards’ Branch adjacent to Independence Boulevard can be a functional stormwater improvement as well as an address for new development.

Part One: Concept Plan

Plan Context

Purpose

This document establishes a vision for the Independence Boulevard Plan Area and provides policies to guide future growth, development and reinvestment consistent with the *Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework*. Once adopted, this plan will:

- update existing plans for the area, including the *East District Plan (1990)*;
- refine the boundaries for any portion of an Activity Center, Growth Corridor and/or Wedge included in the Plan Area;
- function as the official streetscape plan for the area;
- provide station area plans for six future transit stations;
- address key land use, transportation, urban design and other development issues identified through the planning process; and
- provide guidance for future land use and infrastructure decisions;

As a Growth Corridor, Independence Boulevard continues to undergo transformation from a major arterial to a limited access expressway with plans for bus rapid transit or light rail transit. Continuing to invest in multi-modal transportation infrastructure is a key component of this plan. The rapid transit recommendations and the highway parameters included in the *2030 Corridor System Plan* for the Southeast Corridor help define the framework for this plan.

Plan Boundaries

The Independence Boulevard Plan Area consists of approximately 5,856 acres, bounded by Briar Creek to the northwest and the City limits to the southeast (see Map 1). The Plan Area includes a large part of the Southeast Growth Corridor, as well as six proposed transit station areas identified in the *2030 Transit Corridor System Plan*. The plan boundaries include properties or neighborhoods that are accessed from Independence Boulevard, as well as those that are primarily oriented towards the roadway. The Plan Area also includes properties along Monroe Road, which is an important parallel facility to Independence Boulevard, and thus will have an integral role to play in terms of potential land use and transportation solutions. Central Avenue is another important parallel facility, but was the subject of a previous land use/transportation study.

The Plan Area includes two major entertainment venues (Bojangles Coliseum and Ovens Auditorium) and several major shopping centers, including the Coliseum Center, Amity Gardens, Independence Shopping Center, Independence Square, and the Galleria. Several large automobile dealerships are also located along the corridor.

The area includes all or parts of ten Neighborhood Statistical Areas (NSAs) as defined by the City: Briar Creek-Woodland, Coliseum Drive, Echo Hills, Oakhurst, Marshbrooke, East Forest, Idlewild South, Idlewild Farms, North Sharon Amity/Reddman Road,

and Eastway/Sheffield Park. Two significant streams run through the area (Edwards Branch and McAlpine Creek), as well as a number of tributaries.

Organization of this Document

This document is organized into three parts. Part I, the Concept Plan, includes the Purpose, Vision Statement, Goals, and Policies. Only Part I will become adopted City policy. Part II, the Implementation Guide, contains action steps identified to carry out plan policies, and will be used primarily to guide staff work. Part III, the Appendix (available under separate cover), provides technical information such as the existing conditions report, trends and forecasts, and other supporting data used to develop the plan.



Typical character of strip commercial and industrial along Monroe Road includes large areas for surface parking.



Typical character of suburban arterial section of Independence Boulevard in the southeastern portion of the Plan Area includes development set back from the road.

Planning Process

The Independence Boulevard Area Plan was initiated at the direction of Charlotte City Council, in response to recommendations in the *Independence Boulevard Land Use and Infrastructure Study* (April 2007). Development of the Independence Boulevard Area Plan occurred over a period of 24 months and included the following public involvement opportunities:

- A wide variety of stakeholders, including business owners, neighborhood groups, City and County staff, and others were interviewed in mid-May 2008.
- Two public kick-off meetings were held on June 24, 2008. Due to high demand, a third kick-off meeting was held on July 14, 2008. In total, over 500 people attended one of these sessions.
- A Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) was created to provide an opportunity for the public to offer regular, detailed feedback throughout the planning process. Approximately 150 people signed up to be a part of the CAG.

The CAG met five times, on July 17, 2008, August 7, 2008, October 14, 2008, April 2, 2009, and April 30, 2009, to assist in developing plan recommendations.

A second public meeting was held on October 28, 2008 to discuss the proposed character areas that formed the basis of the plan. Approximately 200 people were in attendance. A final community meeting was held on May 6, 2010 with approximately ____ people in attendance. Additionally, the public was invited to follow the plan development process via the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department website.

The Planning Committee of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission hears citizen comments on the draft plan and makes a recommendation to the Charlotte City Council. The City Council also hears citizen comments and makes the final decision concerning adoption of the plan.

Policy Framework

The following key documents provided guidance and direction for this plan:

Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework is the overarching growth policy for Charlotte. An update of this policy document is currently underway that revises the original Centers and Corridors concept by establishing a vision for future growth and development for Charlotte. It does this by: 1) identifying three geographic types used to categorize land in Charlotte's "sphere of influence" - Activity Centers,



Participants discuss community issues and opportunities at a public meeting.



Participants review community-outlined values at a public meeting.

Growth Corridors and Wedges; and 2) outlining the desired characteristics of each of these geographies.

This policy intends to help guide growth into areas that can best support it, and away from areas that cannot. Thus, much of Charlotte's future moderate to higher intensity development is targeted within five major Growth Corridors and in designated Activity Centers. This will help maximize existing infrastructure and services. Low to moderate density residential and services supporting neighborhoods is targeted for the areas between the corridors, referred to as Wedges.

Activity Centers are focal points of economic activity, typically with concentrations of compact development. Many existing Activity Centers have the capacity for significant new growth in conjunction with enhancements to the supporting infrastructure. **Growth Corridors** are five elongated areas that

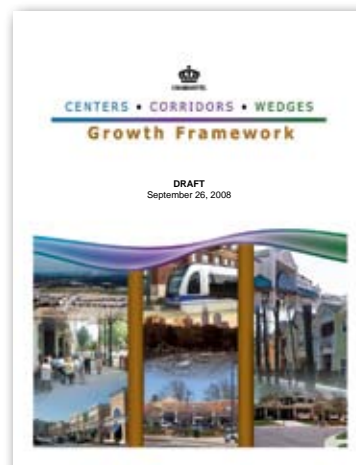
stretch from Center City to the edge of Charlotte. They are characterized by the diversity of places they encompass – from historic neighborhoods, to vibrant mixed-use areas, to significant employment and shopping districts – and by the accessibility and connectivity they provide for these places. Many areas within the Growth Corridors, particularly the transit station areas, are appropriate locations for significant new growth.

Wedges are the large areas between Growth Corridors, where residential neighborhoods have developed and continue to grow. The Wedges consist mainly of low density housing, as well as a limited amount of moderate density housing and supporting facilities and services.

As shown on Map 1, Plan Boundaries, the Plan Area lies within the Southeast Growth Corridor, but also

contains part of the Eastland Activity Center as well as some areas within Wedges.

Six transit stations are also included in the Plan Area. The Growth Corridor area is identified as having the potential to accommodate significant growth in the future and the plan lays out policies and



strategies to help realize this potential. Additionally, through the area planning process, the boundaries of the Growth Corridor were reviewed and adjusted to better reflect existing and future conditions.

General Development Policies are adopted policies on various topics relevant to development and redevelopment in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. In particular, they address residential location and design, retail-oriented mixed/multi-use centers and transit supportive development. Additionally, the *General Development Policies* provide guidance to minimize negative environmental impacts of land development and to more closely link land use and development decisions to the

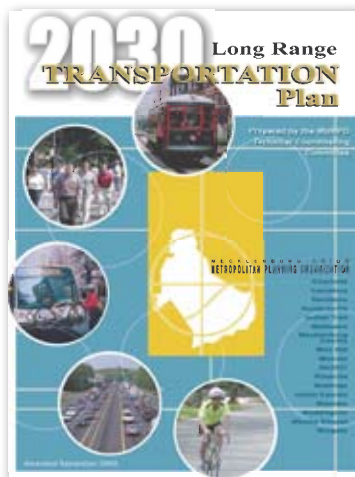
availability of infrastructure needed to support it.

The *General Development Policies* were used in this plan process as the basis for developing the more refined policies unique to the Plan Area.

Adopted land use plans include six geographic districts which make up the City of Charlotte's planning jurisdiction: the Northeast, East, South, Southwest, Northwest and Central districts. Each of these areas have a district plan that addresses a wide range of physical development issues and provides parcel-specific land use recommendations for all properties within that district plan. This plan will update the *East District Plan*.

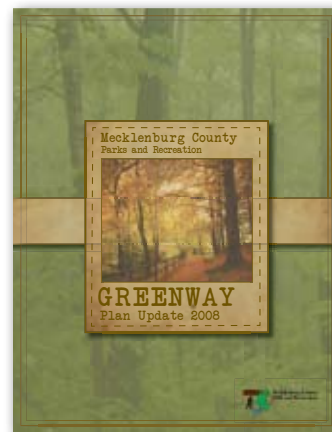


2030 Transit Corridor System Plan, approved in November 2006 by the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), sets the course for rapid transit in Mecklenburg County. The Commission selected Bus Rapid Transit as the transit mode for the Southeast Transit Corridor, which extends 13.5 miles from Charlotte's Center City to I-485 in Matthews, and encompasses the Independence Boulevard Plan Area. However, the Commission also delayed implementation for a minimum of five years to allow a reconsideration of light rail transit for this corridor. Sixteen stations were identified along the Southeast Corridor, seven with park and ride facilities. Six of these stations are located within the Plan Area. *2030 Long Range Transportation Plan* defines the



policies, programs and projects to be implemented over the next twenty years, providing transportation choices in Mecklenburg and western Union County. Several Long Range Transportation Projects have been identified within the Plan Area and were considered when developing this plan.

Transportation Action Plan defines short and long-term policies for accommodating motor vehicles, transit riders, bicyclists and pedestrians together with an implementation "blueprint" for improvements. The *Transportation Action Plan's* comprehensive "toolbox" of transportation programs will help implement the recommendations made in this plan.

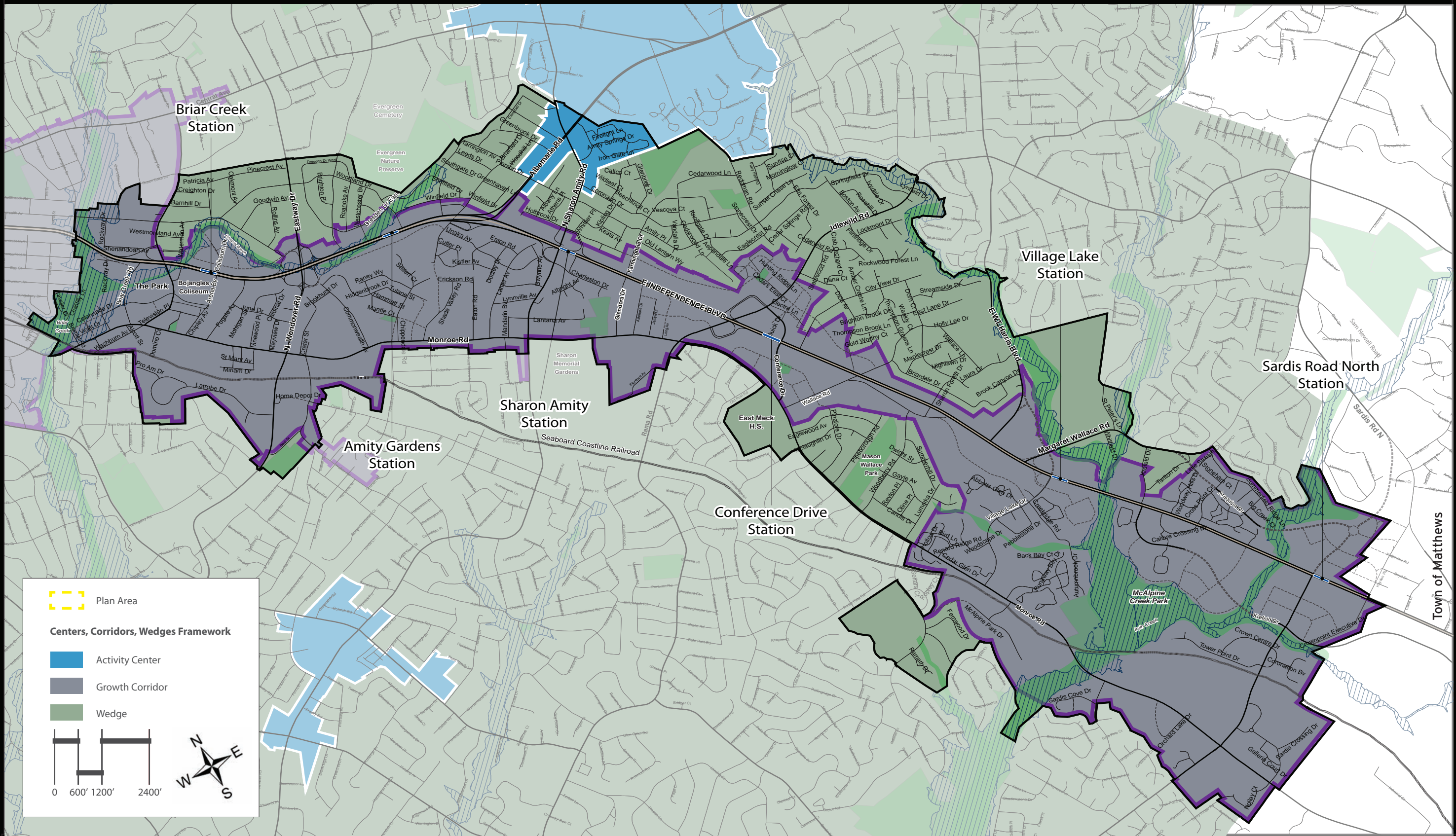


Urban Street Design Guidelines offer a comprehensive approach to designing new and modified streets within the City. They are also a key component of the *Transportation Action Plan*, and were used in developing this plan to assist with street classifications and cross-sections that will guide the design and redesign of streets. The *Urban Street Design Guidelines* also address integrating land use and transportation to create synergy between the streets and the land uses adjacent to them.

Greenway Master Plan update identifies an expanded greenway network and greenway trail system throughout Mecklenburg County. As land is acquired and set aside over time, the greenway system should also improve water quality by reclaiming natural floodplains, protect wildlife habitats and open space, and provide recreational and educational opportunities for residents.

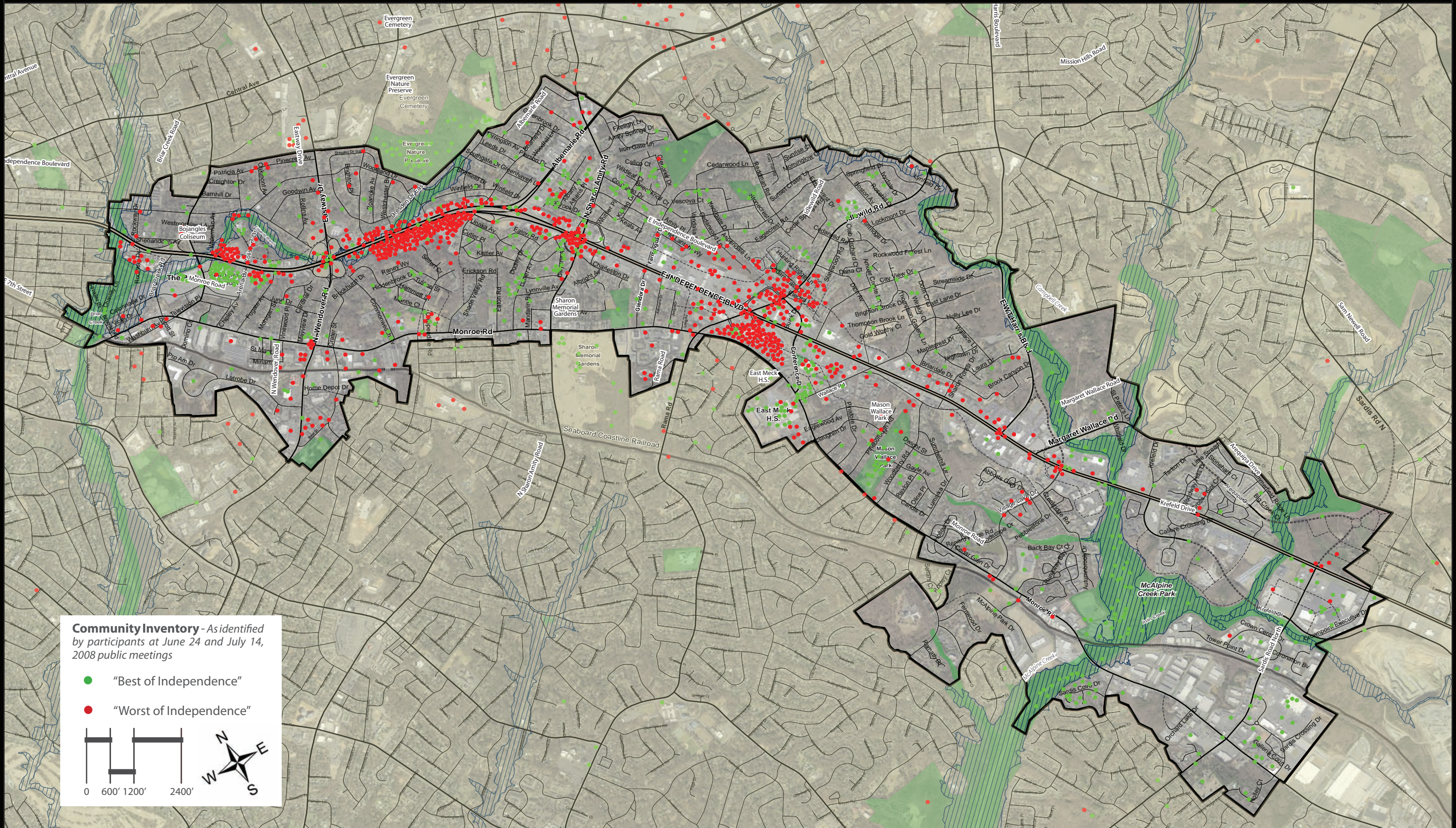
Independence Boulevard Plan Area Boundary

Map 1



Independence Boulevard Opportunities and Constraints

Map 2



Key Opportunities and Constraints

A review of existing conditions, including input from the public during the plan development process, reveals opportunities to build upon and constraints to overcome for the community. These opportunities and constraints were discussed at the public meetings, and formed the basis for the vision statement, goals, and recommended policies.

An inventory of opportunities and constraints was assessed at the initial public workshop. Three values were cited rather consistently by the participants:

- The location of the area, especially in terms of the proximity to Uptown and easy access to the regional highway system;
- The quality of the neighborhoods and their neighbors; and
- Environmental characteristics of the area, including trees, parks, greenways, and other natural features.

Participants were asked to place green dots on the three places they liked the most in the area, and red dots on the three places they liked the least.

As shown on **Map 2**, most of the areas the participants labeled as the “Best of Independence” spots were in the neighborhoods: individual homes, parks, churches, etc. Bojangles Coliseum and some of the shopping centers along Sardis Road North also received some positive marks. In general, the green dots were widely scattered throughout the Study Area.

In contrast, the red dots, or “Worst of Independence” markings, were largely concentrated in a few areas. The Silver Glen Apartments (formerly Castlewood Apartments) on Monroe Road and the largely-vacant retail centers along Independence between Briar Creek and Albemarle were covered in red by the participants. Other areas receiving a “Worst of” designation included some of the other out-dated apartment complexes and, though it sits outside the Plan Area, the Eastland Mall.

Opportunities

- **Strong neighborhoods:** The most important attribute of the Plan Area lies in its stable and diverse neighborhoods.
- **Location and access:** The area’s proximity to Uptown, major highways, and other destinations is a very valuable component of the Plan Area. Additionally, the planned inclusion of rapid transit along the corridor will increase the opportunities for access and mobility.
- **Environmental features:** The Plan Area includes a number of existing parks and greenways that are important to area residents.
- **Market (long-term):** The long-term market for the Charlotte area is positive, as the region is a preferred destination for young professionals. The Independence Boulevard Plan Area also has long-term potential for more retail and residential development, especially as obsolescent facilities are phased out.

Constraints

- **Independence Boulevard:** The hybrid freeway-arterial design of Independence Boulevard presents a major challenge to redevelopment along the corridor, especially for retail uses.
- **Disinvestment:** The vacant and outdated commercial properties along the in-town portion of Independence Boulevard have influenced perceptions of the corridor among potential residents and businesses. Additionally, changing retail preferences will make the “strip” form of development that characterizes much of the Plan Area increasingly less desirable.
- **Market (short-term):** The short-term market for the corridor is relatively limited, due to broader economic conditions as well as limited demand for retail and office space in the Plan Area. (See Part III, Appendix)

Vision Statement

The future for the Plan Area was developed with input and participation from the community and is best expressed in a comprehensive vision statement. This statement describes the kind of place the community envisions for the future; it generates common goals, hopes and aspirations; it offers the possibility for fundamental change and gives the community something to move toward.

The Vision Statement emerged out of the feedback received from the stakeholder interviews, the first public meeting, and the first Citizens' Advisory Group (CAG) workshop.

Vision Statement

The Independence Boulevard Plan Area will be a healthy, safe, and attractive area where a wide diversity of businesses can thrive, where a network of greenways connect important ecological places, and where everyone has multiple transportation options. Most of all, it will continue to be a place with strong neighborhoods, where residents and visitors enjoy a high quality of life with ample employment, shopping and recreational opportunities.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles for the project emerged from the information and ideas gathered at the stakeholder interviews and public workshops, and guided the development of the concept plan.

Principle One: Strengthen and Build Neighborhoods

As the foundation of the Plan Area, existing residential neighborhoods should be strengthened and new neighborhoods created in appropriate places.

Principle Two: Create Nodes

Nodes are areas of more intense uses that help focus infrastructure investments in appropriate places; allow for a more vibrant and interesting level of activity to occur; and emphasize pedestrian-orientation. The creation of new or enhanced nodes is especially important for the future transit station areas.

Principle Three: Reclaim and Showcase Natural Systems

The natural environment is one of the most cherished assets of the Plan Area, and opportunities to protect and enhance the area's greenways, parks, and natural areas should be pursued.

Principle Four: Orient Development Towards Monroe and Central

Monroe and Central—the two main parallel facilities to Independence—should serve a more complete role as neighborhood-oriented places for shopping, amenities, employment, and municipal and educational uses.

Principle Five: Leverage Opportunities

Public investments in the Plan Area must be able to leverage additional private investments to have a far-reaching impact.

Principle Six: Provide Choices

Transportation choices (such as transit, bicycling, and walking), as well as land use choices in appropriate areas should be enhanced, by integrating a wider range of housing, shopping, employment, and recreational opportunities into the community.

Principle Seven: Balance Neighborhood, Community, and Regional Needs

The Plan Area provides for a mixture of neighborhood, community, and regional needs that must be understood and balanced.

Principle Eight: Define U.S. 74

The ultimate future cross-section for U.S. 74 must be determined and addressed accordingly to give developers and land-owners the certainty they need to make redevelopment investments.

Principle Nine: Implement the Plan

The plan must be realistic from economic and physical perspectives.

Goals

To achieve the future envisioned for the Plan Area, the following goals have been identified. The goals build upon adopted plans and policies.

- **Land Use**

To provide a range of housing, retail, employment, and recreation opportunities while strengthening existing neighborhoods; to encourage the creation of dynamic, compact activity nodes; and to provide a framework for the successful revitalization of properties along Independence Boulevard.

- **Community Design**

To ensure that development/redevelopment is compatible with adjacent uses, while supporting the community's vision of vibrant, pedestrian-friendly nodes surrounded by stable neighborhoods.

- **Transportation**

To increase the viability of all modes of travel—while also reducing reliance on Independence Boulevard for local trips—through creating better street connectivity, providing a safer and more comfortable walking/bicycling environment, and positioning future transit stations for successful ridership levels and supportive land uses.

- **Infrastructure and Public Facilities**

To encourage redevelopment in the areas that have adequate infrastructure and public facilities already in place, while ensuring that investment in new or improved infrastructure occurs in a thoughtful, strategic manner that leverages other opportunities and investments.

- **Natural Environment**

To enhance important ecological and recreational spaces through expansion of the parks and greenways system, reclamation of “lost” assets such as buried streams, and creation of a comprehensive stormwater management strategy, while also encouraging land use and transportation activities that positively impact land, air, and water quality.

Overall Plan Concept

Taking the vision and goals into consideration, the concept map illustrates the recommended development pattern for the Plan Area. It is intended to be general in nature and to guide the specific policies outlined in later portions of this plan.

The concept for the Independence Boulevard Area Plan is to concentrate development intensity at nodes, which are the focus of neighborhoods linked together by green connections which are typically greenways, parks, and trails. Regional Nodes are located at the most highly-connected locations in the Plan Area, where Independence Boulevard is crossed by major regional access streets with future rapid transit stations. These occur at the Briar Creek, Conference Drive, and Sardis Road North Stations. Smaller, local-serving Neighborhood Nodes occur along Monroe Road south of Independence and Albemarle Road on the north side of Independence Boulevard.

This repositioned development pattern will help to revitalize the area by creating a more connected, walkable, and green community. Natural features - creeks, greenways, and parks, are able to be used as amenities to spur additional high-quality residential development. By re-orienting development away from Independence Boulevard and toward new side street connections, a more walkable development pattern can be created and maintained over time, creating nodes of commercial activity with elements of higher-intensity, transit-supportive residential, office, and limited commercial areas to link the neighborhood nodes. All of these changes will serve to help maintain and enhance the existing neighborhoods.

Overview of Character Areas

There are seven distinct types of character areas within the Plan Area that help to illustrate the plan concept. Identification of these character areas provided guidance in developing future land use and infrastructure policies for the Plan Area

Green Connections

Places where open space connections are preferred for environmental preservation and/or pedestrian connection. Their application may vary widely, from stormwater facilities, to parks and greenways, to merely widened sidewalks.

Neighborhood General

Residential areas make up the bulk of the Independence Boulevard corridor.

Neighborhood Core

Comprised of moderate office and/or residential area with some neighborhood-scale commercial services.

Neighborhood Node

Include mixed-use buildings or mixed-use blocks of apartments, townhomes, ground-floor retail and office uses which primarily serve the surrounding area with a high level of internal and external connectivity.

Employment District

Characterized by larger industrial and office uses such as manufacturing facilities, warehouses and flex space. These businesses need immediate access to rail and/or highways and are a major contributor to the job base of the community. Some supporting retail or office uses may accompany the industrial use.

Independence Business District

Located directly along Independence Boulevard and are predominantly automobile-oriented commercial uses such as auto dealerships, gas stations and similar facilities. This district provides opportunities for commercial uses that are not appropriate for the mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly nodes, but provide important services and/or jobs for the community.

Transit Node

Characterized by an intense mix of residential and commercial uses oriented around a transit station and/or regional road corridors. The transit node maintains its pedestrian scale with connected streets and walkable block sizes even when building footprints are larger.

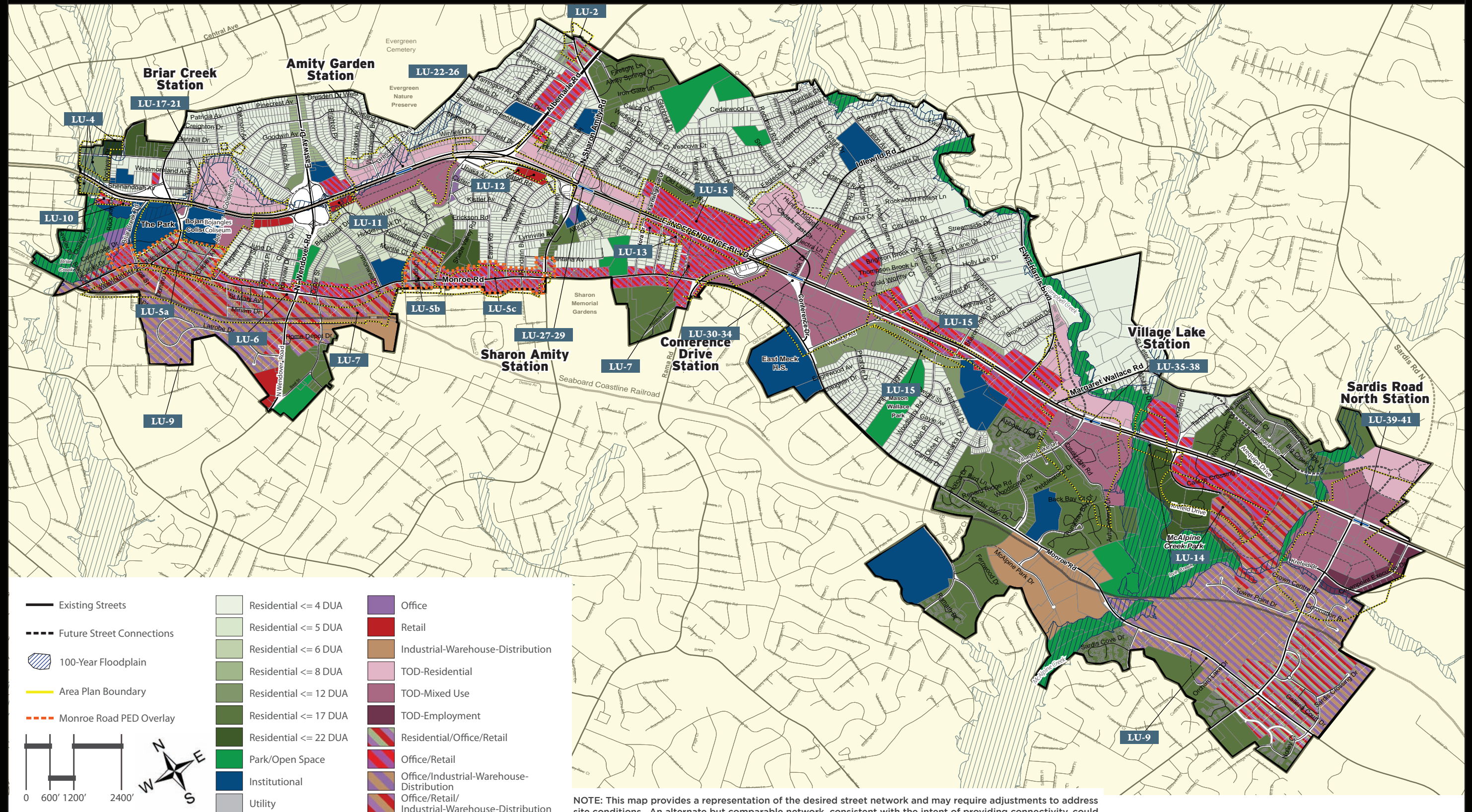
Independence Boulevard Overall Concept Plan

Map 3



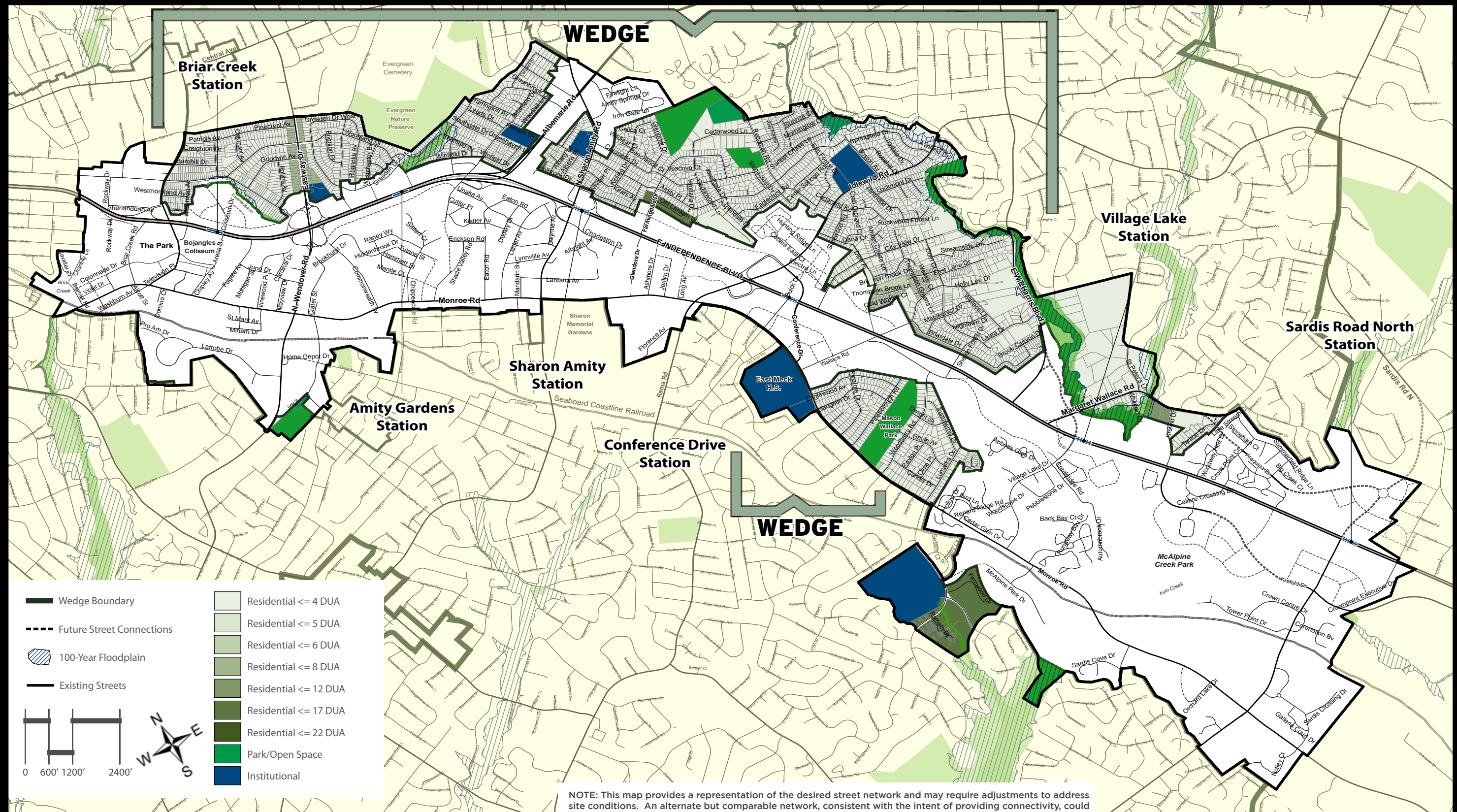
Independence Boulevard Recommended Future Land Use

Map 4



Independence Boulevard Recommended Future Land Use - Wedge Areas

Map 5



Map 6

