

OUR BELMONT



WILKINSON BOULEVARD SMALL AREA PLAN

Plusurbia Design
MEND Design Collaborative

Submitted
July 2025

PREPARED FOR
City of Belmont, North Carolina

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A map of the Belmont area, showing the city of Belmont and surrounding areas like Lowell, McAdenville, Mount Holly, Gastonia, Cramerton, and Charlotte. A blue shaded region highlights the area around Belmont, and a thick orange line traces the path of Wilkinson Boulevard through the region.

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01 INTRODUCTION

Belmont’s 2018 Comprehensive Land Use Plan includes a focus on the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor in Chapter V, “Belmont’s Future.” This consists of a brief statement that refers the reader to the **2015 *Build a Better Boulevard Study***, which was formally adopted by Belmont in January of that year. At over 80 pages in length, **that document stood as the de facto Small Area Plan for a Study Area extending along approximately 4.2 miles of the Corridor**, stretching from the Catawba River in the east, across to the South Fork River in the west, and directly adjacent to Belmont, Cramerton, and McAdenville. The former Comprehensive Plan incorporates this document in its entirety by reference to it as an appendix.

As such, **very little interpretation, evaluation and commentary on this document is offered** within the 2018 Comprehensive Plan itself, and the 2015 Build a Better Boulevard Study is assumed to be taken at face value.

For the 2025 edition of the Comprehensive Plan, **one key focus is a more in-depth examination of the portion of the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor within Belmont’s Planning Area**. This considers the previous studies as important context, as well as more current planning and analysis. As such, this Small Area Plan serves as a **bridge between the Comprehensive Plan itself –and any additional, more intensive planning and analysis that may occur in the future.**

It is the intent of this Small Area Plan to **offer substantive new analysis, formulate a focused future land use vision, and provide actionable recommendations** that aim to truly make the Corridor a “Better Boulevard.”

Image: Wilkinson Boulevard in Belmont (source: Crexi)

PLANNING WILKINSON BOULEVARD: A BRIEF HISTORY

The Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor (“the Corridor”) has been the subject of many intensive public engagement sessions, stakeholder meetings, analysis, and debate over the years. As one of the two major east-west thoroughfares serving the area, Wilkinson Boulevard remains a vital conduit to and through Belmont. It serves a necessary function as a transportation route providing mobility and access to goods and services.

However, the Corridor has also experienced lagging investment in recent years, even as other parts of Belmont confront rapid development. This scenario is not uncommon in cities across the country, where automobile-centric development along heavily trafficked corridors is at odds with the desire for a walkable, connected built environment with a mix of land uses. See Section 02, “Wilkinson Today,” for details on how this has impacted the Corridor’s condition.

Over the past 30 years, there have been several studies that acknowledge the **critical role** of the Corridor as well as **ways in which it can be improved and readied for the future**. Of these, four important documents have been completed

in the past, each leading to the next in succession. They are as follows:

- *1994 Belmont Peninsula Study*
- *2012 Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor Committee Report Study*
- *2015 Build a Better Boulevard Study*
- *2023 CATS Silver Line TOD Study*

These studies are comprehensive but are primarily focused on the thoroughfare itself. That is, there is more emphasis on the thoroughfare cross section(s), speeds, levels of service, and intersection design, and less conversation about land use, placemaking, and redevelopment strategies on the land that flanks the Corridor.

This Small Area Plan generally supports the conclusions of these studies, but **strives to chart a more detailed path to revitalization and improvement through a focus on image, built form, and multiple obstacles**. Special attention is paid to the central portion of the Study Area, which overlaps with the Montcross Small Area Plan and is coordinated with its vision.



WILKINSON IN THE REGION

Wilkinson Boulevard - Highway 74 (US-74) is vital to Belmont’s future growth, identity, and regional position. This primary east-west route serves as both a key traffic artery within Belmont and a regional link connecting it to Charlotte, Gastonia, and Interstate 85 (I-85). In fact, it represents just one of four vehicular routes across the Catawba River between Gaston and Mecklenburg Counties, despite their extensive, 27-mile border. Opened in 1926, it served as the primary connection between Charlotte and the emerging communities to its west until the completion of I-85 in 1965.

Throughout the decades, the Corridor became a spine of suburban, auto-oriented development, offering new businesses, services, and conveniences to the communities it passed through. Decades later, it grew downtrodden while traffic bypassed the Corridor on I-85 and a period of economic decline created ripple effects throughout Gaston County (1970-1980). Despite the Corridor’s slow, market-driven march back to relevancy, it remains one of Belmont’s greatest areas of underinvestment.

For a community experiencing so much growth, there is no better time to update and double down on plans to improve the Corridor, its multifaceted functionality, and what it communicates to the outside world about Belmont.

Indeed, Wilkinson Boulevard stands at a pivotal moment. The Corridor is experiencing increasing change, including rising traffic volumes, escalating land development interest, and growing recognition of its role in shaping Belmont’s future. As a result, the Corridor is no longer defined solely by its historic role as a state highway. Through careful planning, it can emerge as a site of strategic transformation, where decisions made today will influence the land use patterns and identity of Belmont decades into the future.

The Corridor’s vitality and people’s perception of it are, in many ways, a direct reflection of Belmont itself. It is the City’s front door and a gateway for many. As residential growth continues and regional commuting patterns intensify, the Corridor’s capacity to support multiple modes of travel,

accommodate a range of land uses, and foster a coherent sense of place will directly influence quality of life and development outcomes. In other words, the future of the Corridor is closely tied to the future of Belmont as a whole. As such, planning for it is not just about managing traffic. Rather, it is a means of reshaping Belmont’s identity.

This Small Area Plan defines a Study Area composed of all Belmont Planning Area parcels within one-quarter mile of Wilkinson Boulevard (dark red). This same corridor depth is also highlighted in neighboring communities (light red), representing the relationship between the Study Area and its position in the region.

Map: Wilkinson Boulevard in Belmont and the greater region (data sources: City of Belmont, US Census Bureau TIGER, design: Plusurbia Design)

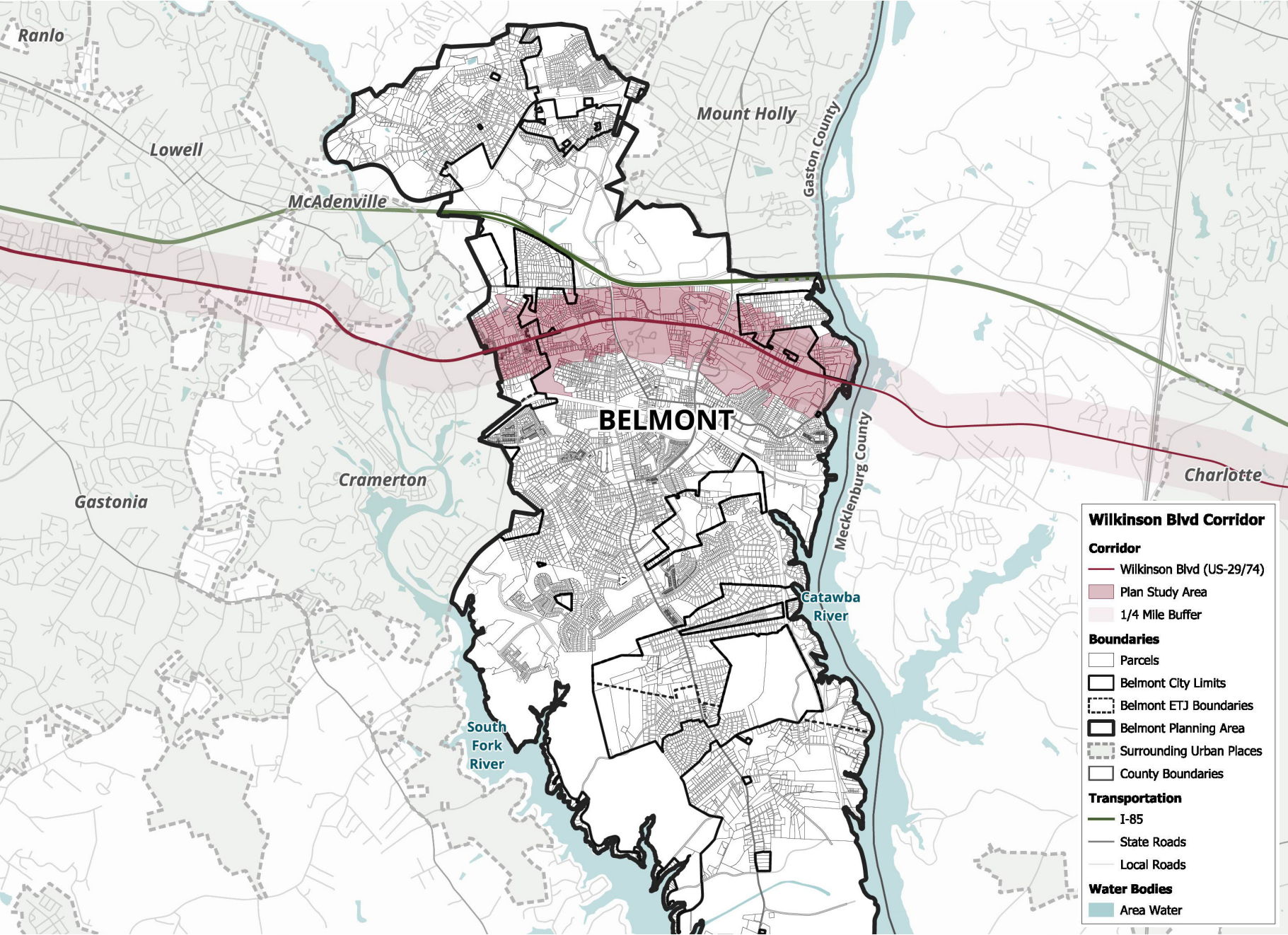




Image: South Fork Station, a retail development fronting Wilkinson Boulevard (source: Showcase.com)



Image: Reverie Belmont, a recently completed project off Wilkinson Boulevard (source: Axiom Architecture)

WHY NOW?

Regular updates to land use plans, zoning ordinances, and related public policies are good practice, especially when developed concurrently with that community’s Comprehensive Plan. It has been over 10 years since the last substantive City-sponsored Wilkinson Corridor planning effort, and this study has not been significantly revisited since it was completed.

More is known today than even 10 years ago about traffic analysis, transportation planning, and zoning and land use strategies –not to mention the tools and methods available to implement proactive and positive change. As such, this Small Area Plan presents refreshed data and strategies for the

Corridor’s revitalization and capitalizes on the vision and priorities set forth in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan.

Parallel to this effort, Belmont has hired professional outside consultants to attract new retailers to the City, with a special focus on marketing investment opportunities along Wilkinson Boulevard. If a number of businesses open new locations along the Corridor while the City works to implement corresponding upgrades to the public realm, it can result in a flywheel effect of new interest and reinvestment, attracting others to Wilkinson Boulevard and gradually implementing the vision of this Small Area Plan.

Utility upgrades, most notably the expansion of water and wastewater service capacity, will be essential to supporting this incremental redevelopment. To stay ahead of new demand, Belmont is studying these systems on a Citywide basis, offering insights on the areas of most dramatic need within the Corridor.

Early results have determined that the Abbey Place, Lincoln, and Clay pump stations that serve the Study Area are adversely affected during storm events, where runoff infiltration into the sewer system overwhelms this infrastructure that is already near capacity during dry weather. Addressing these infiltration issues north of Keener Boulevard and

installing upgrades to the Abbey Place and Clay pumps may be necessary to support revitalization, but could be paid for through partnerships with the private developers it will directly benefit.

Outside the Corridor, Belmont has recently undertaken several other initiatives demonstrating the City’s tenacity and proactive approach to solving problems and promoting success. Among others, examples include a Housing Choices Study and Vision Zero Safety Action Plan, both completed in 2024. To be sure, tackling all of the complex issues regarding the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor is a daunting prospect, and requires special, intensive consideration.

Belmont is also facing uncertainty with regard to long(er)-range transportation and mobility agendas. More specifically, the future of high-capacity mass transit connectivity is in question as conversations continue regarding modality, funding, mobility hub planning, and more. Similarly, the reality of the Catawba Crossings project –which proposes an east-west boulevard connection into the middle latitudes of Belmont’s peninsula– is still speculative at this time. Catawba Crossings would also serve Charlotte’s River District, potentially resulting in as many as 5,000 new residential units, 8 million square feet of office space, and 1,000 hotel rooms south of the international airport.

If either of these connectivity projects were to materialize, the future of the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor would likely evolve differently.

Lastly, the *2015 Build a Better Boulevard Study* calls for specific Comprehensive Plan and zoning updates that should be examined and brought forward if they can be determined valid. Those that remain most relevant have been promoted in the 2025 Comprehensive Plan, as well as herein.

02 WILKINSON TODAY

As the City of Belmont looks toward the future, one thing is certain. The Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor is paramount for shaping the City's growth, connectivity, and identity.

Once defined primarily by its role as a vehicular thoroughfare –simply moving people from one place to another– the Corridor now reflects a more complex urban condition. Presently, it serves as a spine of suburban businesses, as well as a regional connector, particularly as metropolitan growth has resulted in recent year-over-year traffic volume increases. The Corridor is both a reflection of Belmont's current trajectory and an embodiment of its potential to support significant economic, social, and spatial transformation as the City continues to evolve.

The following pages examine the Corridor's current condition, situations that have shifted since prior studies, and the impacts increased traffic, existing land use, image, and zoning have left on the Corridor's functionality. This foundation underscores that planning for the Corridor's

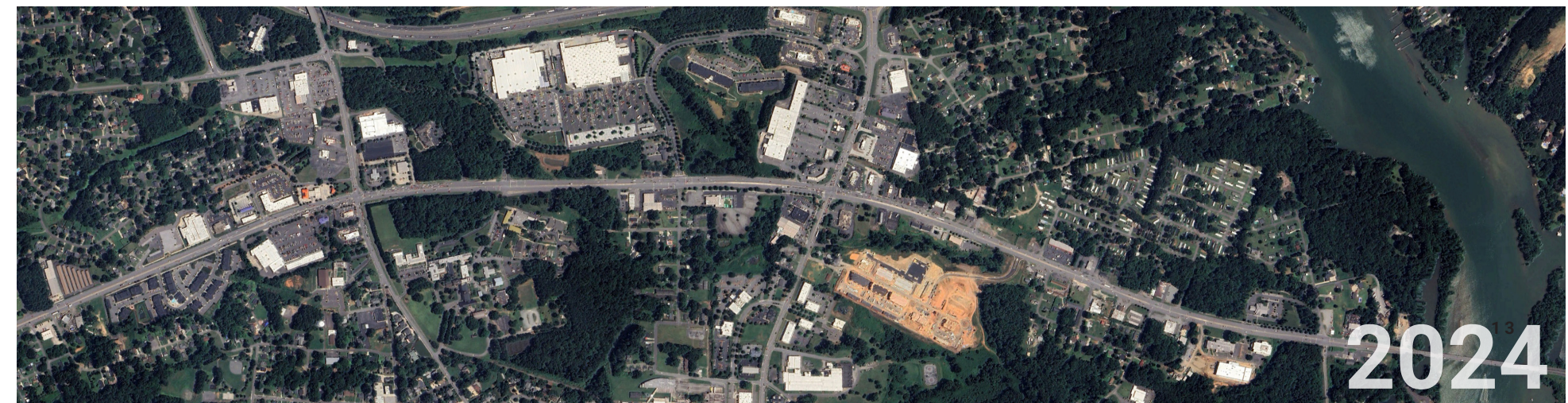
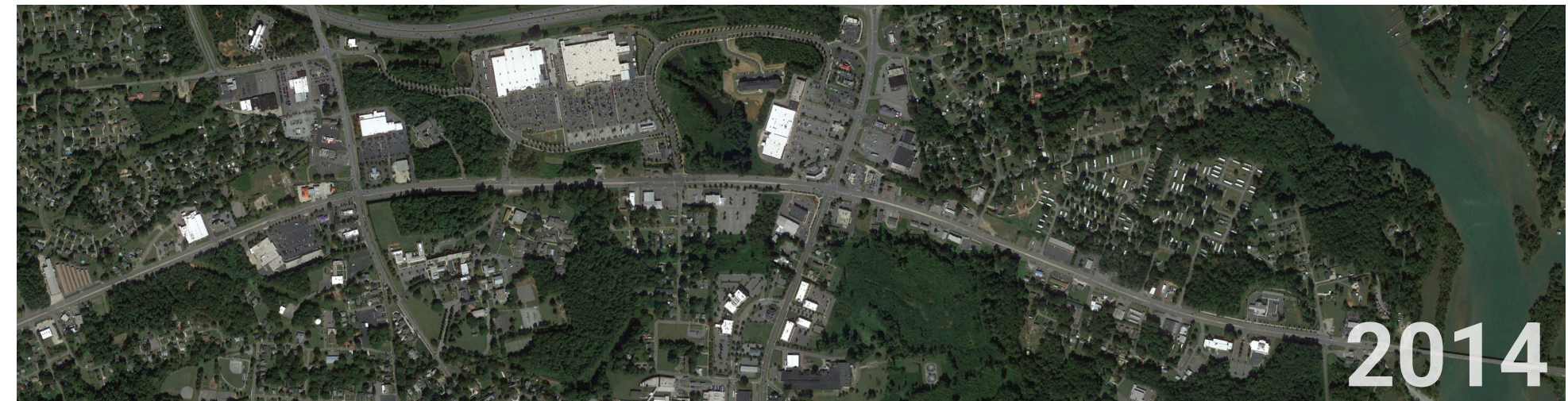
future is not an isolated initiative, but is actually part of a broader conversation about the dynamic between Wilkinson Boulevard's form, functionality, and relationship to the rest of the City.

“The narrow depth of most of the existing properties and the grade changes . . . beyond the fronting [parcels] make new construction difficult without significant property assembly.”

2015 Build a Better Boulevard Study

Image: Wilkinson Blvd aerial in Belmont across two decades (source: Google Earth)

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ONE CORRIDOR: DIFFERENT STORIES

Wilkinson Boulevard functions as a continuous corridor with subtle but meaningful differences along its length. The identification of three primary segments and two key gateways provides a framework for evaluating the Corridor and organizing future planning efforts. These divisions reflect observable shifts in parcel configuration, land use intensity and adjacent road networks.

WESTERN GATEWAY

On the opposite end, Wilkinson Boulevard's Western Gateway, bordering the Town of Cramerton, functions as a transitional space between municipalities. Beyond City Limits and bound by annexation agreements, it lacks visual definition and remains loosely developed, with scattered commercial sites and limited pedestrian infrastructure. However, enforcement of design standards within Belmont's Extra-territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) and coordinated planning efforts with Cramerton and Gaston County can help ensure this portion of the Corridor transforms into a more cohesive urban experience that better serves both communities.

EASTERN GATEWAY

The Eastern Gateway, located where Wilkinson Boulevard crosses the Catawba River, marks

one of Belmont's most prominent entry points. It connects directly to Charlotte and is situated near the region's international airport, making it a high-profile area in terms of regional access. Despite this strategic location, the surrounding development is fragmented and lacks a strong visual identity. These conditions present an opportunity for Belmont to establish a clearer sense of arrival at its eastern edge for both residents and visitors alike. Cultivating redevelopment that creates connections to existing riverfront access and public space (such as Kevin Loftin Park) through City land acquisition and policy changes could help reshape this area into a more intentional gateway that supports both local and regional functions.

THREE SEGMENTS

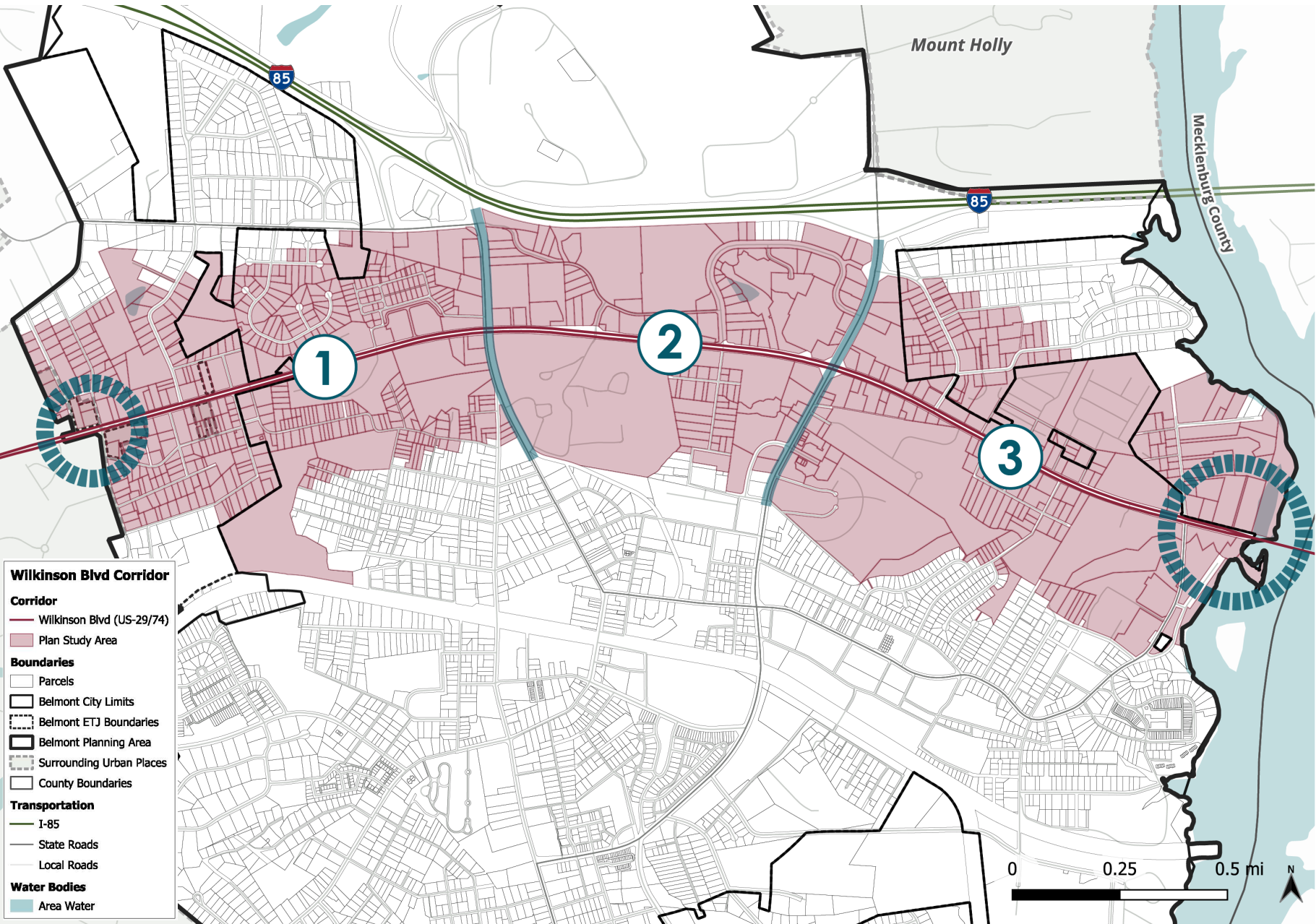
Between these gateways, three distinct segments of the Corridor reveal differences in form, function, and land use, separated by key intersections with Main and Park Streets.

Within the ETJ, the western portion is shaped by a blend of general commercial and industrial uses, along with scattered residential areas. The built environment is dominated by wide setbacks, surface parking, and limited pedestrian infrastructure. Small parcels near Cramerton's City

Limits pose challenges to broader, larger-scaled redevelopment.

Perhaps the most unique, the central segment is dominated by Montcross, LLC's landholdings, where significant portions of the Corridor's frontage remain undeveloped, flanked by the set back Sisters of Mercy campus and Walmart/ Lowe's retail development. All Montcross sites are developed on longterm land leases according to the Montcross Small Area Plan and represent the best opportunity to shift Corridor form over time. Under unified ownership, parcels can be redrawn and developments permitted carefully to implement a shared long-term vision.

Finally, the eastern portion introduces an eclectic mix of aging commercial sites and residential uses that vary from mill housing to manufactured home parks. The Reverie (newly developed apartments) and adjacent Abbey Creek Greenway represent the most significant ongoing development along the Corridor, offering varied housing and mobility options away from the City's traditional core. Overall, this segment presents a significant opportunity for the City to strengthen its identity and establish a more cohesive built form as land is assembled and older properties are redeveloped.



Map: The different sections and gateways of Wilkinson Blvd (data source: City of Belmont - 2024, design: Plusurbia Design)

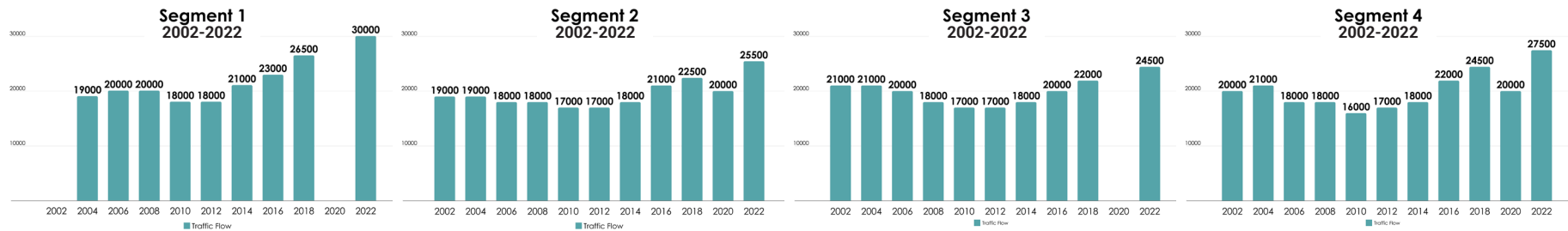
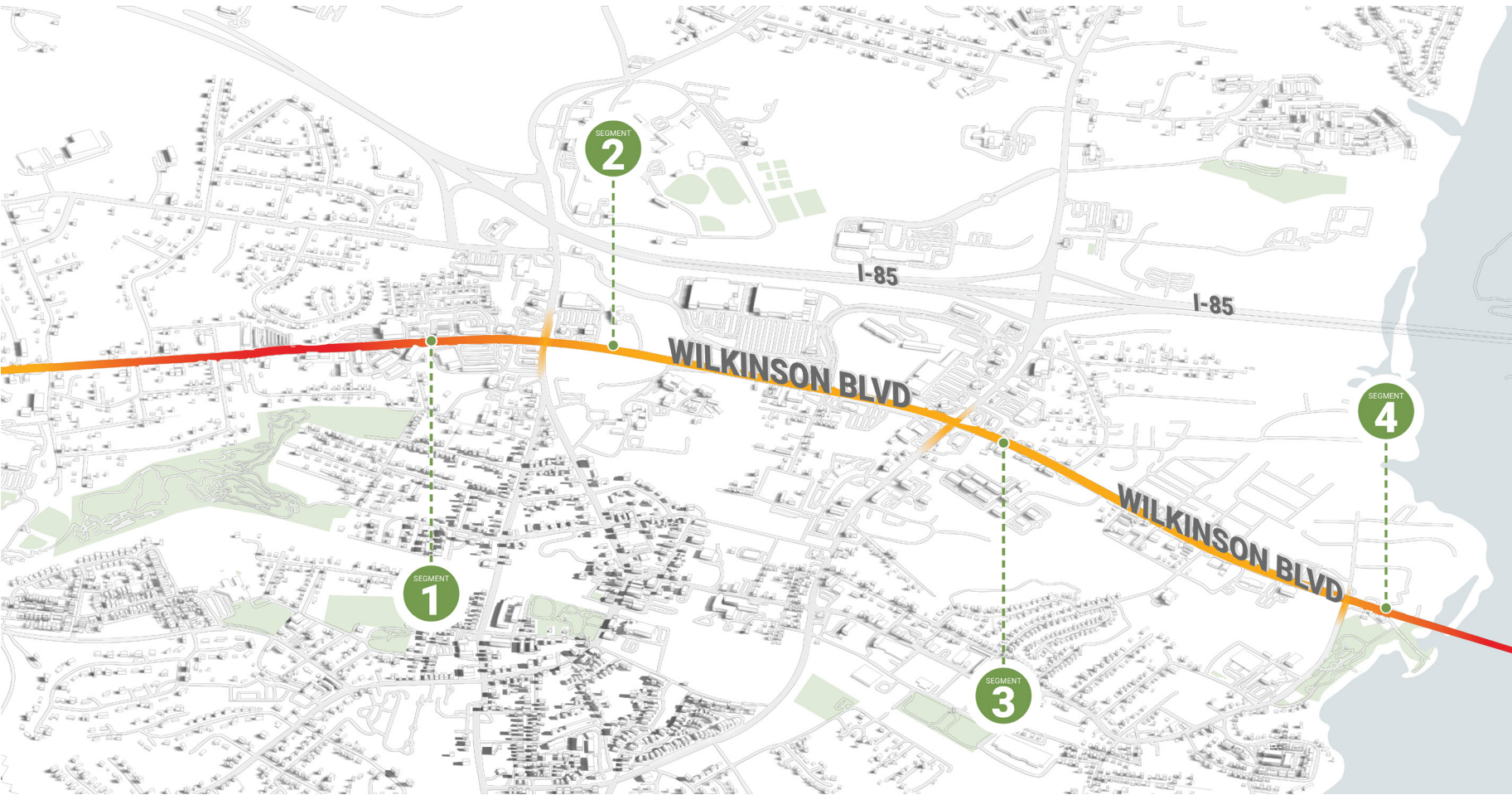


Figure: Traffic volumes at measurement points along Wilkinson Blvd (data source: NCDOT, design: Plusurbia Design)

TRAFFIC: INCREASING AGAIN

Since 2015, traffic volumes along Wilkinson Boulevard have experienced a sustained increase that has diverged significantly from prior planning projections. The *2015 Build a Better Boulevard Study* anticipated that Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) along the corridor would continue a gradual downward trajectory. This projection was based on earlier analyses conducted by the North Carolina Department of Transportation and was grounded in assumptions about regional travel behavior and anticipated shifts in development intensity. However, the actual trajectory of traffic volumes has not followed this pattern. Instead, AADT along the Corridor has steadily increased in the years since 2015 (aside from 2020-2021), with particularly sharp growth occurring after 2021.

This increase in vehicular traffic is the result of multiple inter-related trends. Foremost, Belmont's population has grown steadily over the past 15 years, contributing to increased travel demand. This is explored more in the Comprehensive Plan, where it is noted that Belmont's entire workforce, except for 337 individuals, leave the City for work, while local jobs are almost entirely filled by commuters. As just one of four connections between Gaston and Mecklenburg Counties, the Corridor has become an increasingly crucial artery

linking Belmont with Gastonia, Charlotte, and the I-85 corridor. This position cements its supportive role in regional commuting patterns.

Following 2015, Belmont has also experienced a rise in both commercial and residential development, especially in areas within or directly adjacent to the Corridor. This intensification of nearby land use has, of course, placed pressure on the transportation network. Coupled with long drives from the southern end of the Peninsula, North Belmont, and outside residents with access to little or no retail options closer to home, mixed destination and through traffic on the Corridor has become an issue.

The growth in local AADT from an average of 17,000 (2010) to 26,875 (2022) Corridor-wide reflects not only changing travel patterns, but also an increasing safety challenge –especially for pedestrians. Belmont's 2024 Vision Zero Plan named Wilkinson Boulevard as the number one priority corridor in the City's High Injury Network (HIN), with its intersections at Catawba and N. Main Streets ranking as the most dangerous Citywide. Implementing proven safety solutions and creating alternative multimodal infrastructure will be critical to create a better Corridor.

Overall, the Corridor's prominence as a regional connector creates a platform for investment in multimodal infrastructure, streetscape enhancements, and coordinated land use strategies that can transform it into a more functional and inviting environment. In other words, more traffic translates to more eyes and wallets, providing the unique opportunity to improve Belmont's image with better development that hosts more local retail and other mixed use functions. Alternatively, without effective planning, higher volumes threaten to degrade the pedestrian experience, constrain redevelopment potential, and exacerbate peak hour congestion.

UPCOMING INTERSECTION CHANGES

Outlined in the region's Metropolitan Transportation Plan, two highly consequential intersections (Main and Catawba Streets) will eventually be converted to RCI (Reduced Conflict Intersection) designs, adding pedestrian bulb-outs and median protections for left turn movements. This project is coordinated with planned widening efforts on I-85, scheduled between now and the end of the decade. These changing traffic and access points may trigger a shift in local vehicular movement.

EXISTING LAND USE: A BIT OF EVERYTHING

The current conditions along Wilkinson Boulevard reflect a mix of older development patterns and newer growth pressures. The land uses along the Corridor are varied, with the primary theme being large parking lots, drive-thru businesses, and car-centric planning that leave the area feeling disconnected and spread out.

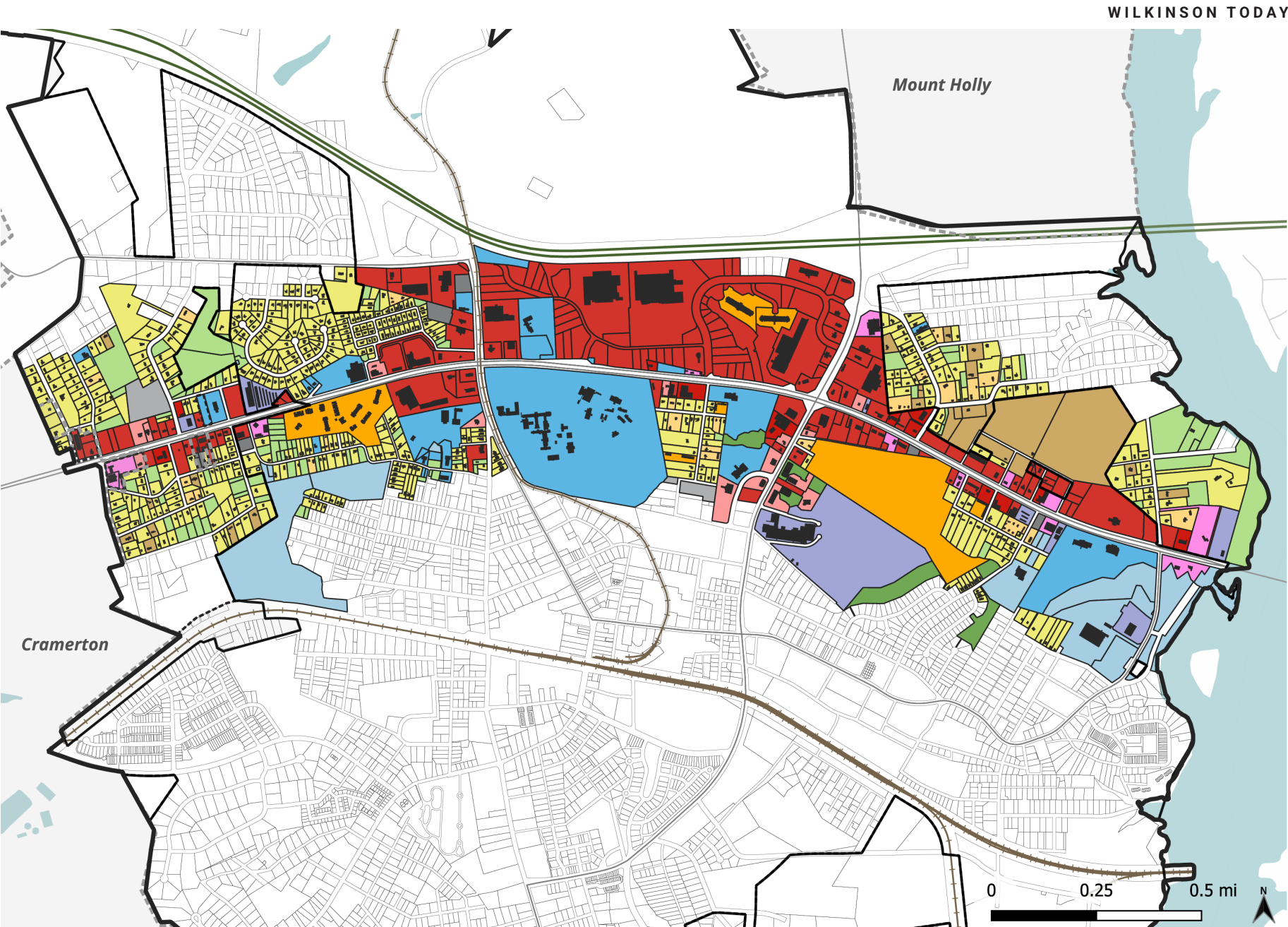
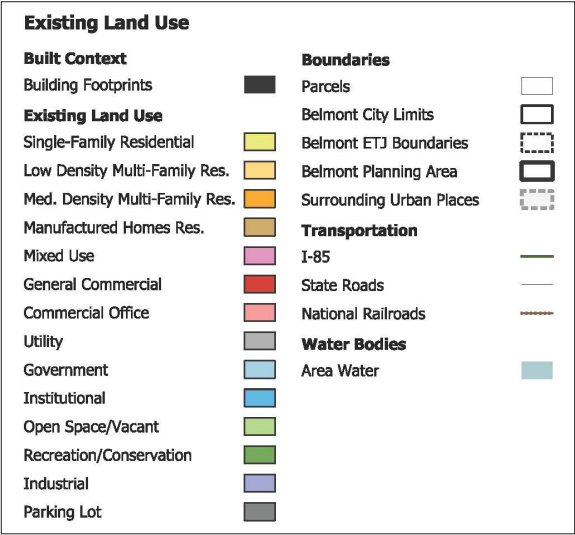
Within the Study Area, commercial uses dominate, particularly retail stores, automotive services, and fast food restaurants. A mark of reinvestment, within the last 10 years, three moderate density multi-family projects have been built, adding to Belmont’s residential options. Also within the Study Area are established neighborhoods, a manufactured home park, and several vacant lots. Finally, large civic, institutional, and even industrial land uses interject along the Corridor’s length.

These uses are not always well integrated with one another, and transitions between them are often abrupt, resulting in a Corridor that lacks spatial coherence and a defined identity. Perhaps most critically, parcel sizes along the Corridor tend to be small and irregularly shaped, which further complicates redevelopment and contributes to the fragmented land use pattern.

Throughout the Corridor, aesthetic conditions are generally utilitarian. Streetscape elements such as street trees, bike/pedestrian infrastructure, and other public realm improvements have been provided by newer redevelopments, but are limited elsewhere. For the same reason, sidewalk coverage is fragmented. In several places, they are often narrow and placed directly alongside high-speed traffic with little to no physical or visual buffering. These conditions not only discourage and reduce walkability but they also reinforce the perception of the Corridor as a space intended for vehicle movement rather than a place for people. In several locations, the sidewalk network ends abruptly or fails to connect key destinations, forcing pedestrians to navigate along unpaved shoulders or across driveways. In these gaps, informal paths have emerged, cutting through grass to indicate the routes pedestrians are choosing, despite the absence of formal infrastructure.

Like most suburban highways, the Corridor lacks a consistent architectural design language. Building styles vary widely, often reflecting the incremental and uncoordinated nature of growth that has occurred over the past several decades. Many structures are single-story, box-style buildings set back from the street, with little articulation or

engagement with the public realm. These buildings are typically oriented around automobile access, featuring prominent driveways and curb cuts. By contrast, newer development has responded to Belmont’s form-based Development Code, facing the street with a higher standard of architectural detail and shared ingress/egress points. Strategic action to accelerate private redevelopment and adjustments to the standards it follows will promote better visual cohesion as aging properties see reinvestment and the corridor transitions to a more compatible mix of uses.



Map: Wilkinson Blvd Corridor existing land use, 2025 (data source: City of Belmont, design: Plusurbia Design)

CURRENT ZONING

Most of Wilkinson Boulevard (within the City Limits) is governed by the Highway Commercial (H-C) zoning district, much of which is further regulated by the Highway Corridor Overlay (HC-O). These two zoning designations work together to define the land use, access, and design characteristics of the Corridor. While there are occasional exceptions, including parcels zoned for institutional campus and residential development, the prevailing zoning structure emphasizes commercial activity.

These districts permit a broad array of uses including retail shopping centers, automotive services, restaurants, hotels, and entertainment venues. Also included are functions that must be permitted in at least one City zoning district, such as pawn shops or title loan businesses. While residential and civic building types are also allowed, they have not been constructed to the same degree as commercial buildings.

In an effort to create a better pedestrian environment, H-C site design standards require that new developments front public streets, unless otherwise constrained by site conditions, and require parking to be located in side or rear yards unless this arrangement is impracticable. Additionally, developments over 50,000 square feet must receive a special use permit to ensure compatibility with the area’s future vision.

Although new projects have become better aligned with community goals, private development in the H-C district continues to favor large parcels, multiple access points and continued land use segregation, which together reinforce an auto-centric development pattern. In spite of the Code, the resulting built environment is one where pedestrian movement is often secondary, and architectural and spatial cohesion remains limited.

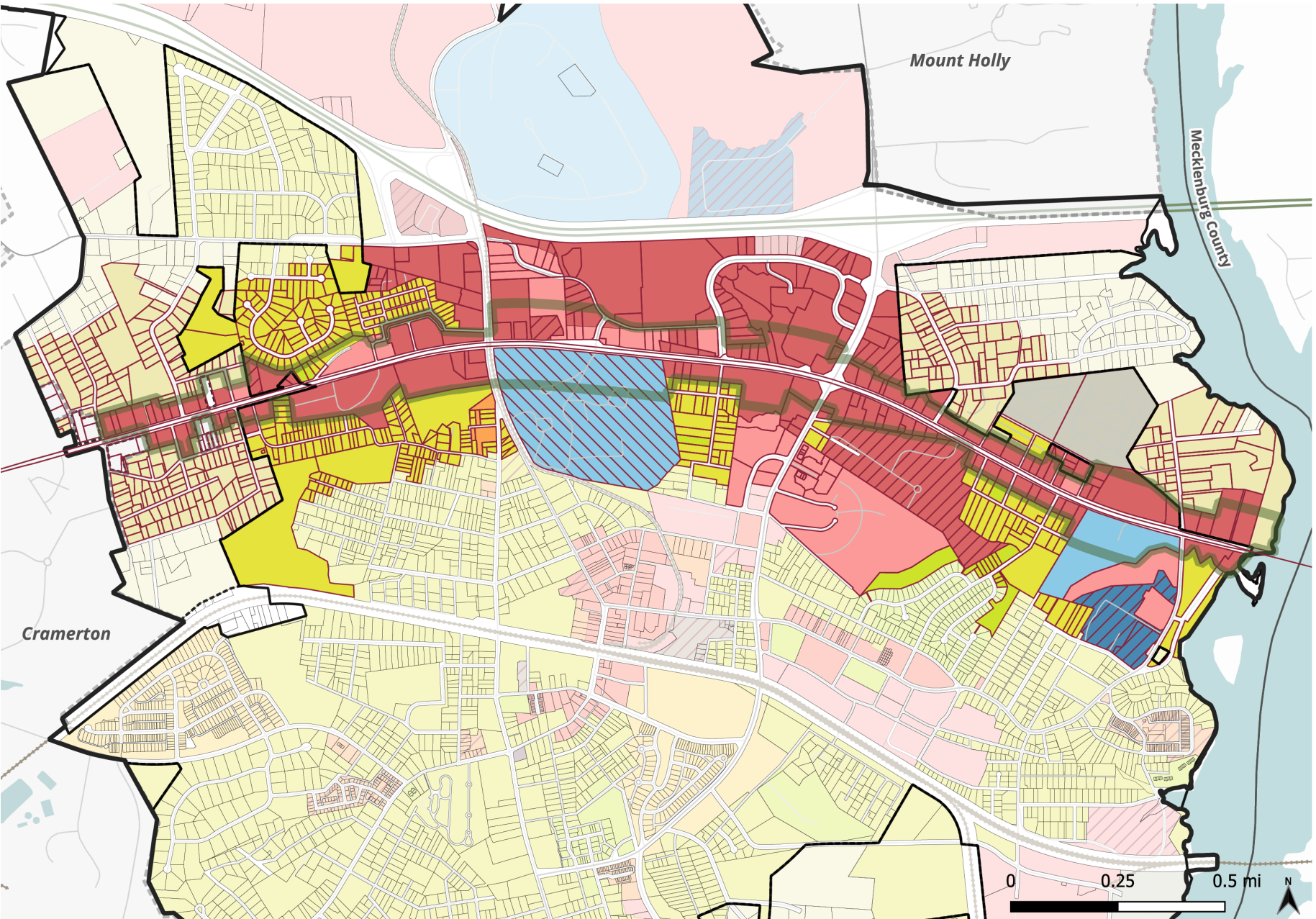
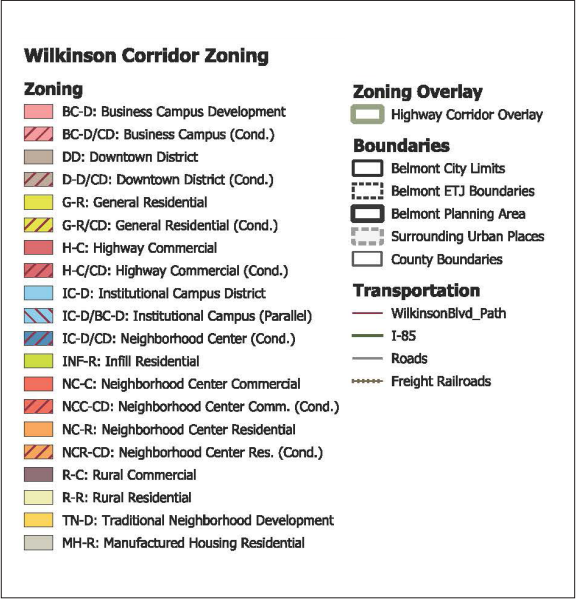
HIGHWAY CORRIDOR OVERLAY

The Highway Corridor Overlay, which encompasses virtually all parcels fronting the Corridor, establishes supplemental design and access standards. It requires new development to include a 10-foot-wide multi-use path, flanked by two 10-foot-wide landscaped strips –one on each side. Additionally, canopy trees must be planted every 40 feet on both sides of the path, staggered to create a continuous and shaded streetscape. The overlay also regulates curb cuts by limiting their number and spacing in order to reduce vehicle conflicts and promote a safer, more organized flow of traffic.

The primary goals of the overlay are to improve the Corridor’s function and appearance, particularly for pedestrians and bicyclists, while still supporting its role as a major transportation route. Ultimately, it is intended to foster a more consistent streetscape,

better access management, and safer conditions for both drivers and non-drivers.

While the goals of the existing zoning framework include shifting Wilkinson Boulevard into a better multimodal corridor, the built result does not fully reflect the evolving needs or aspirations of the community. As development pressures increase, regional mobility patterns shift, and residents demand additional retail opportunities, tactical regulatory adjustments and even City installation of missing infrastructure and aesthetic upgrades can be used to both strengthen and accelerate redevelopment and revitalization.



Map: Wilkinson Blvd Corridor zoning with overlay outline (data source: City of Belmont - 2024, design: Plusurbia Design)

03 WILKINSON TOMORROW

The overarching goal of this Small Area Plan is to guide Belmont’s portion of the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor toward revitalization, in order to better reflect the City’s identity and high quality of life. Behind this goal is not only a desire for visual improvements that leave those traveling through with a positive impression, but also for dramatic changes to built form and mobility that create a more functional Corridor for Belmont residents.

Referenced in the introduction, several prior efforts have thoroughly studied the Corridor and its future in Belmont, but this is the first to be correlated with the development of a new Comprehensive Plan. This section translates that document’s broad ideas to the Corridor level, offering additional guidance on land use, development types, mobility improvements, visual enhancements, cultivating boosterism, and more. Recommendations are organized by implementation time frames.

“Coupled with a Comprehensive Plan revision that encourages property assembly and some modifications to the existing zoning..., the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor can [finally] become an attractive gateway for Belmont...”

2015 Build a Better Boulevard Study

REVITALIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS

SHORT TERM

Short term recommendations are designed to be the most easily implemented, offering lower budget and less politically challenging interventions to start realizing meaningful Corridor improvement. These include:

1. Introduce new Belmont monument signs at gateways.
2. Strengthen the existing Highway Commercial Overlay zoning district that defines how the Corridor will evolve over time.
3. Host design charrettes to regularly update this Small Area Plan and coordinate its development with the Montcross Small Area Plan.

MID TERM

Mid term recommendations will require broader coalition building, but are less fiscally taxing to implement than long term strategies. These include:

1. Partner with NCDOT and other groups to invest City funds in Corridor beautification, such as intersection improvements and improved streetscaping.
2. Create a specific “Boulevard District” zoning category for the entirety of Wilkinson Boulevard that focuses on desired form over uses.
3. Find partners to support the creation of an independent Development Corporation or Business Improvement District that will advocate for and help deploy the Corridor’s revitalization

LONG TERM

These long term recommendations represent goals Belmont should work toward to fundamentally shift the Corridor’s built form and functionality. Each improvement will likely take several years, or even decades, but will allow the City to implement desired generational change. These include:

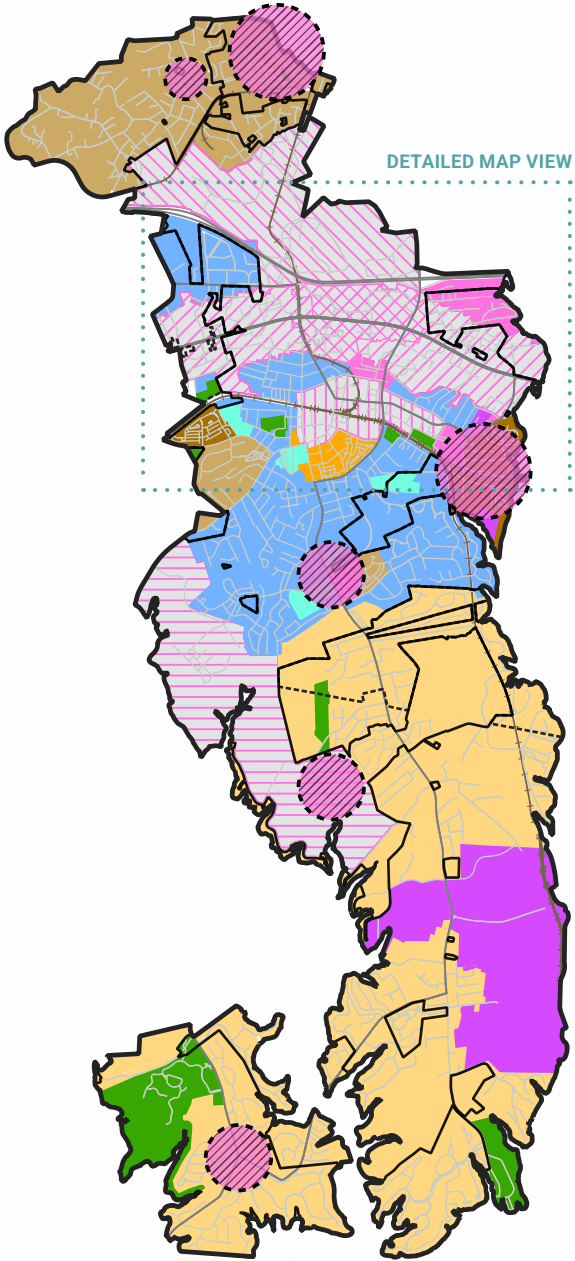
1. Implement multimodal upgrades throughout the Corridor area, including 10’ shared-use paths on either side of the Boulevard and a parallel greenway route.
2. Publicly assemble strategic parcels to accelerate private redevelopment of small lots and enhance gateway areas.

PART OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

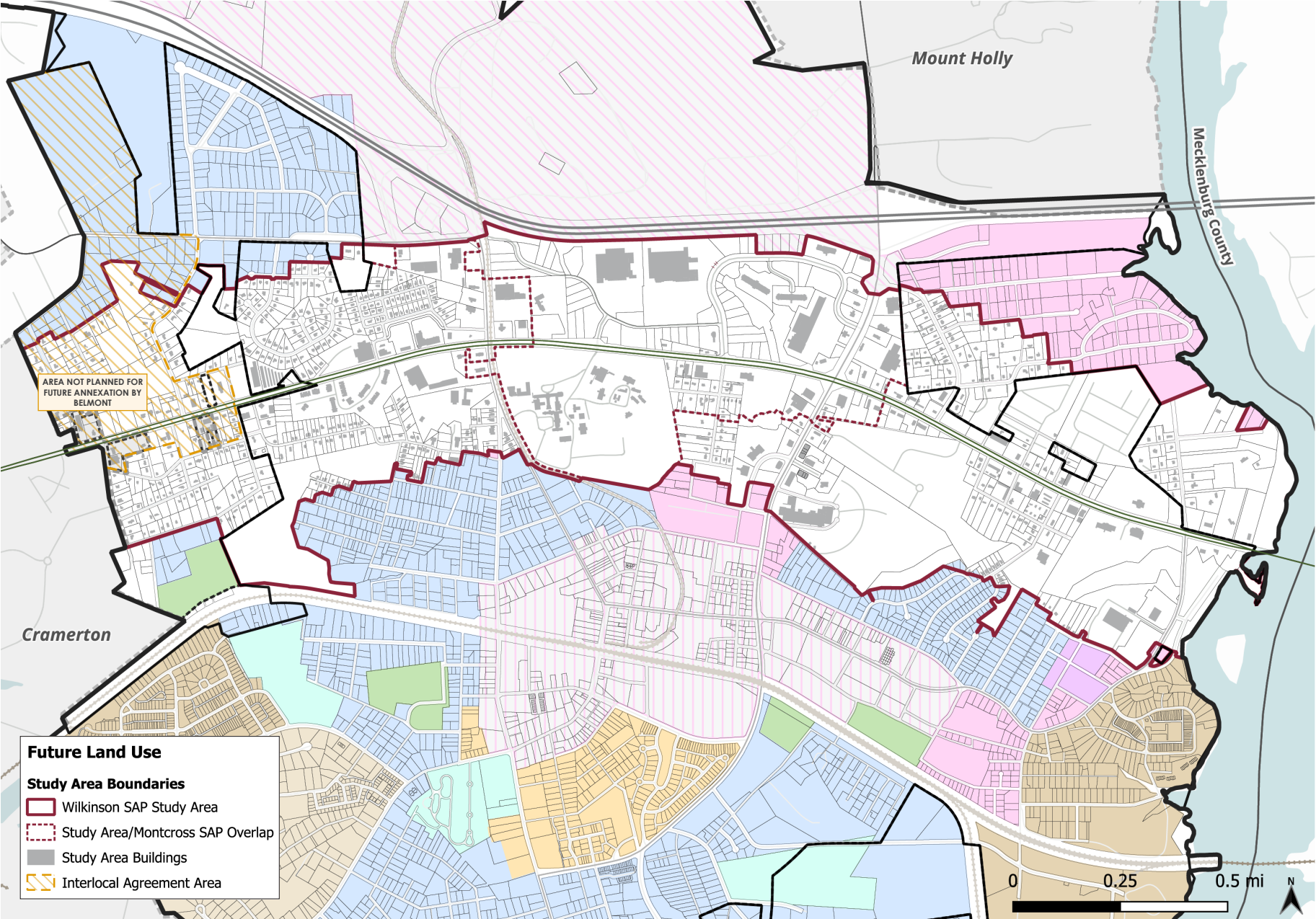
Belmont’s Comprehensive Plan guides the future land use vision for the entire community, including the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor. This vision serves as the basis for the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) presented here, which was developed through extensive public engagement, data analysis, and coordination with constraining factors, including infrastructure capacity.

Examining the community-wide FLUM, the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor is classified under one of several Small Area Plan (SAP) designations, which are used for districts that require more detailed planning based on their context and existing conditions. Each includes a separate SAP map to guide the build-out of future land use and development types at a more focused scale. Located in this section, the Wilkinson SAP map overlaps with parts of the Montcross SAP, although both share a unified vision. This is due to Montcross, LLC’s ownership of land within the half-mile-wide Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor.

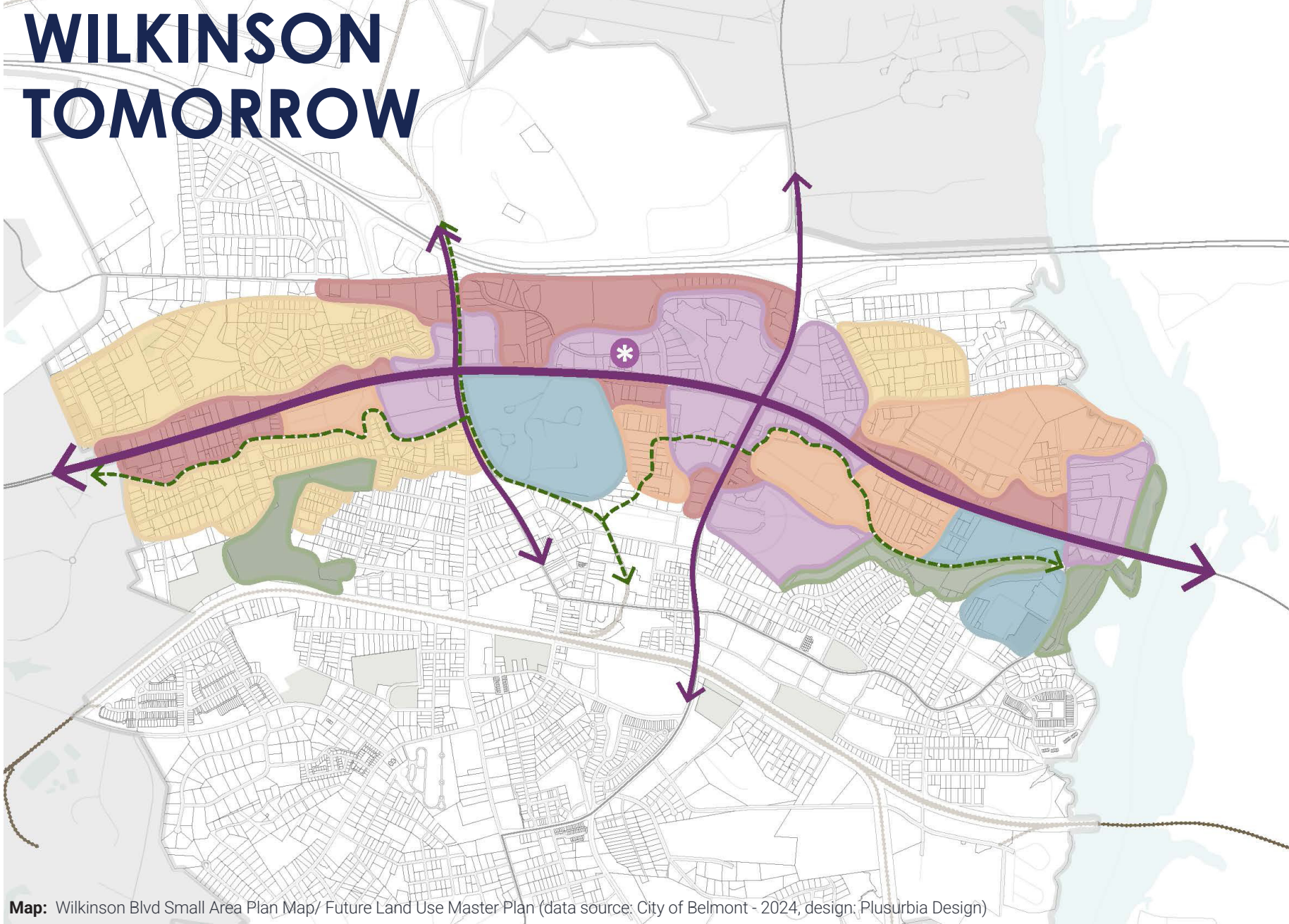
In the future, the Corridor should accommodate a wider array of commercial, residential, and mixed uses that respond to market demands, capitalizing on the Boulevard’s transportation capacity and a desire to elevate its image through redevelopment.



Map: Belmont Future Land Use Map (data source: City of Belmont, design: Plusurbia Design)



Map: Belmont Future Land Use Map, focused on Wilkinson Corridor (data source: City of Belmont - 2024, design: Plusurbia Design)



Map: Wilkinson Blvd Small Area Plan Map/ Future Land Use Master Plan (data source: City of Belmont - 2024, design: Plusurbia Design)

LEGEND

COMMERCIAL MIXED USE

INSTITUTIONAL

PARKS & NATURAL AREAS

LOW-MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

MEDIUM-HIGHER DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

MASTER PLANNED MIXED USE

PRIMARY MULTIMODAL CORRIDORS

GREENWAYS

PROPOSED MOBILITY HUB



THE VISION: FUTURE LAND USE

The future Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor should be defined by broad, mixed use redevelopment underpinned by critical multimodal improvements.

With shared-use paths installed along either side of the Corridor, as well as Main and Park Streets, over time, underutilized lots could be redeveloped into more urban commercial, residential, and mixed use spaces that front the street and bolster the public realm. Through joint public-private investment, there is potential for a completed Carolina Thread Trail to span the entire distance of the Corridor, offering an off-street, recreation-oriented experience for pedestrians and bicyclists. Additionally, the new greenways will unlock the opportunity for Trail Oriented Development just off the Corridor, activating both sides of several lots.

Considering the greater transportation capacity offered by Wilkinson Boulevard over other corridors (such as South Point Road), the area is one of the best suited in Belmont to accommodate medium to higher density multi-family development. With communities like The Reverie, The Palisades, and Loftin at Montcross, the area has already proven to be an effective place to accommodate this demand, with density allowing for partnerships to upgrade City infrastructure. In the future, other large underdeveloped areas behind the Corridor's

frontage will be reshaped in a similar way, housing young professionals, seniors, and diverse families.

Anchoring the vision, the Corridor's two key intersections will accommodate three to four-story mixed use development on as many sides as possible, creating distinct, well-connected nodes on either side of a proposed mobility hub. Composed of new buildings, largely with ground floor retail and upper story residential spaces, the redeveloped intersections will improve the Corridor's functionality and image. Balancing the Boulevard's vehicular needs, these areas should be master planned around the pedestrian realm and contextually scaled to adjacent lower density uses. Other opportunities for mixed use nodes include aging industrial sites and a collection of large parcels near the Catawba River (eastern gateway).

While Wilkinson Boulevard offers many sites appropriate for new development, the character of existing neighborhoods should be preserved, creating a context-sensitive balance. As part of this strategy, the majority of low density residential areas will remain, adapting to include compatible missing middle housing types and benefiting from the revitalized corridor's new amenities.

Finally, other lower density land is envisioned as commercial mixed use (largely pedestrian oriented retail), institutional and civic uses, and park space.

FUTURE LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

COMMERCIAL MIXED USE



Image: Ped-focused retail (source: Post and Courier)

Today, standalone retail uses dominate Wilkinson Boulevard. Conventional shopping centers and major intersections host national retailers that provide essential goods and services. As the Corridor evolves, these uses will remain important.

While retail is located directly along most of the highway frontage today, in time, key areas will give way to master planned mixed use redevelopment. Standalone retail-focused areas will adopt the Commercial Mixed Use (CMU) development type and shift toward the west, behind mixed use projects, as well as east of Park Street.

Though new CMU projects may still include small, independent buildings, each storefront should provide pedestrian space fronting the new multi-use paths and trail corridors with parking in the rear.

INSTITUTIONAL



Image: University building (source: Ball State Univer.)

Institutional uses, including private campuses, civic facilities, and public buildings play a foundational role in supporting a complete and inclusive community. Along the Corridor, the eastern gateway area includes Belmont’s CityWorks and Recreation Center, as well as Gaston College’s Kimbrell Campus. Integration with nearby parks is a key opportunity. The central Corridor contains the Sisters of Mercy Campus. Portions of the site that front future trails or multi-use paths could one day host new buildings with expanded organizational or compatible functions (such as childcare and other neighborhood services). As the Corridor redevelops, these institutional areas will remain key places to co-locate public and other special uses, serving the broader community.

PARKS & NATURAL AREAS



Image: Trail (source: Rails to Trails Cons.)

Green space is a vital component of the Corridor’s future, offering significant benefits, such as recreational opportunities, improved image, natural buffering between incompatible land uses, and enhanced environmental quality.

Existing public green spaces within the Study Area include Reid, Rocky Branch, and Kevin Loftin Riverfront Parks. Opportunities to expand this portfolio exist, including the vacant land along Belmont’s eastern shoreline and between Wilkinson Boulevard and the East Belmont neighborhood.

Greenways should also be considered a recreational asset to bridge these spaces into a continuous experience and support alternative mobility choices. All envisioned segments should be integrated into the Carolina Thread Trail system.

LOW-MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL



Image: Cottage court (source: Kerney Homes)

Low to medium density neighborhoods exist throughout the Corridor, primarily located one to two streets from the Boulevard frontage. This residential pattern is most prevalent on the east side of the Corridor, toward Cramerton. With preservation and stewardship in mind, these neighborhoods will continue to be a fundamental part of the Corridor’s future. As these areas evolve with the market, they will eventually include a broader array of similar density housing types, built incrementally alongside existing single-family houses. To align with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, these should include “missing middle” housing types favored by the community, such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs), cottage courts, and other solutions designed to integrate with the established character.

MEDIUM-HIGHER DENSITY RESIDENTIAL



Image: Brick rowhouses (source: Apartment Home Living)

Even today, medium to higher density residential areas serve as an effective land use transition between Belmont’s low density neighborhoods and the more intensive commercial activity along Wilkinson Boulevard. As the Corridor continues to evolve and incorporate more mixed use development, these medium density residential uses will become even more essential. Three to four story multi-family buildings and “missing middle” housing options (such as rowhouses, townhomes, and courtyard buildings) will be critical to broadening residential options while maintaining walkable, human-scaled development patterns. Future planning efforts should include design standards to ensure compatibility with adjacent uses and a more carefully curated public realm.

MASTER PLANNED MIXED USE

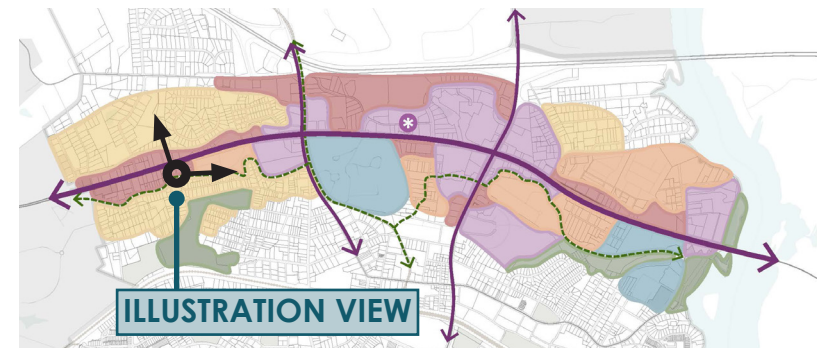


Image: Mixed use center (source: Enjoy Illinois)

Cultivating true mixed use development along Wilkinson Boulevard will be crucial to achieving a more functional, flexible, and attractive Corridor. Included buildings should vertically integrate uses to encourage pedestrian engagement, activate the streetscape, and promote a live-work environment that reduces dependence on automobile trips.

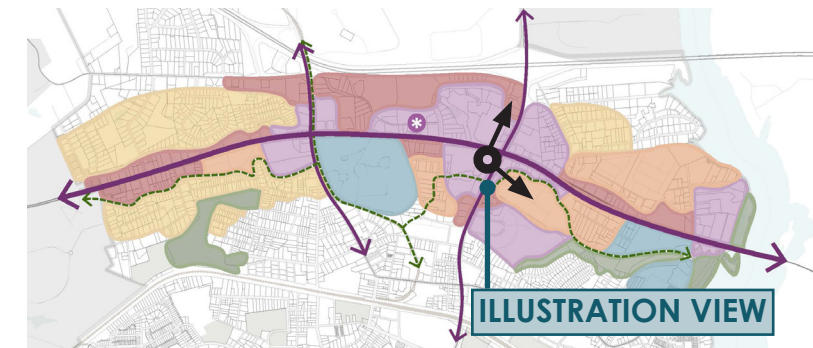
Sites with large parcels, especially those with vacant or underutilized land, represent the best opportunities for master planned mixed use projects. Designed as collections of buildings, these developments will form walkable nodes to support both greater economic activity and housing choice.

Eventually, the Park and Main Street intersections should also include mixed use development, supporting pedestrian activity at these key points.



TRAIL-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

This illustration imagines the rear side of a small Commercial Mixed Use site along Wilkinson Boulevard that has been redeveloped to include a pedestrian-oriented restaurant and outdoor space. By routing the Carolina Thread Trail along Orchard Lane at the western end of the Study Area, formerly auto-oriented sites like this can continue to support low density commercial development, but focus their attention on trail users. The trail could also increase the effectiveness of Corridor-adjacent shared use paths and significantly raise property values.



WILKINSON BOULEVARD + PARK STREET INTERSECTION

This concept represents a potential future for the intersection of Wilkinson Boulevard and Park Street as one of the higher density Master Planned Mixed Use nodes along the Corridor. With the largest structures fronting the routes with heavier traffic, two to four-story buildings are organized around a network of calm interior streets. This scale of development could create opportunities to partner with private developers to upgrade City infrastructure. However, intersection improvements are imperative at this location for a concept like the one envisioned above to be successful.

SHORT TERM

Short term recommendations are designed to be the most easily implemented, offering lower budget and less politically challenging interventions to start realizing meaningful improvement along the Corridor.

1. Introduce new Belmont monument signs at gateways.

Today, Belmont’s eastern entrance on Wilkinson Boulevard is marked by a red brick monument sign, emblazoned with the crimson and white City seal. Positioned between the highway and a line of ornamental trees, more than 27,000 people pass by the installment daily. While this represents a key investment already made by the City, the increasing traffic volume and accelerating desire for physical change along the Corridor present an opportunity to create an even greater statement.

Communities of all sizes have adopted bold gateway monument signs, many large in scale and paired with decorative landscaping. When designed to reflect the unique heritage of the community, these signs contribute to a stronger sense of place for both residents and visitors. More than boundary markers, gateway elements help shape first impressions and can be used to express Belmont’s identity. Strategically installing larger, more visible monuments at each of Wilkinson Boulevard’s entry points into the community can be used as a tool to both demonstrate the City’s commitment to the corridor’s revitalization and better market itself as a place for private investment.

Gaston County is already planning to add its own gateway monument along Interstate 85, so Belmont should turn its attention to Wilkinson Boulevard, where drivers receive a more significant glimpse of the City. Particularly to signify the forces of revitalization are underway, Belmont’s gateways along this Corridor are far more important. While the Catawba River creates a very distinct transition, more vehicles actually enter Belmont via Cramerton, so new monuments should be situated at both entrances to the City.

The upcoming replacement of the Wilkinson Boulevard bridge over the Catawba River and reconfiguration of the adjacent intersection provide a prime opportunity to install a new gateway sign near the shore. Strategic land acquisition would be required for placement on the right (north) side, but public land is available to the south. Similarly, the upcoming replacement of the South Fork River bridge could offer the right occasion to partner with Cramerton on a shared, two-sided monument.

If physical space within or near the right-of-way is a constraint, Belmont should explore columnar or overhead signage options, ensuring the design selected best represents its identity.



Image: *Top Left:* Hickory, NC gateway monument (source: City of Hickory), *Top Right:* Iowa State University gateway (source: RDG Planning & Design), *Center Right:* Dunwoody, GA sign at night (source: TSW Design), *Center Left:* Fountain Inn, SC monument sign and flags (source: Nextdoor), *Bottom Left:* Snellman, MN gateway sign (source: Facebook), *Bottom Center:* Baltimore, MD median monument (source: Ashton Design), *Bottom Right:* Tulsa, OK overhead gateway (source: Visit Tulsa, OK)



Image: Multimodal corridor with landscaping (source: Parametrix)



Image: Scenes from charrette workshops (source: Plusurbia Design)

2. Strengthen the existing Highway Commercial Overlay zoning district that defines how the Corridor will evolve over time.

Belmont's Highway Commercial Overlay (HC-O) zoning district extends along Wilkinson Boulevard, including into Belmont's broader Extra-territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). It applies to lots fronting the Boulevard, with a depth measured from the centerline of the right-of-way to the rear of the property, for a distance of up to 500 feet. This overlay district is designed to regulate development along the Corridor as an added measure to each parcel's underlying zoning classification.

By definition, "this district is coded to preserve and improve the transportation efficiency, non-motorized mobility, and aesthetics of the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor. All provisions of the underlying district shall be effective except those specifically stated..."

As previously mentioned in this Small Area Plan, the existing overlay zoning district acts as a patch that helps Planning Staff enforce slightly better provisions related to streetscaping, lot or parcel size requirements, and property access (such as driveway curb cuts). Currently, the overlay does little else to guide aesthetics, growth patterns, and placemaking. It also does not factor in best practices pertaining to the multiple aspects

of mobility (traffic, transportation, pedestrian, greenway, and blueway networks).

A revised and expanded version of the existing overlay district –or a full replacement– should consider a wider coverage area for the district, geographically speaking. While it may vary in dimension and change over time, the overlay should be redrawn as approximately one quarter-mile (1,320 feet) wide on either side of Wilkinson Boulevard. This dimension would align with the Corridor as identified in this Small Area Plan and allow for two primary placemaking advantages.

First, this distance is considered a reasonable five-minute walk under normal conditions. Second, the

expanded scale allows for cohesive development to occur within a framework of two to three block lengths from the centerline of the Corridor, paving the way for a more positively dramatic shift that recognizes Wilkinson Boulevard's impact on land use patterns beyond the immediate frontage.

Depending on community and political support, this short term recommendation could be expanded into the creation of a full new Corridor zoning district that allows for a broader array of Building Types and design regulations. See Mid Term – Recommendation 02.

3. Host design charrettes to regularly update this Small Area Plan and coordinate its development with the Montcross Small Area Plan.

The stakeholders representing the Montcross area of Belmont are very well-organized and proactive with regard to protecting their interests and planning for the area's future. This district is generally north of Wilkinson Boulevard and extends across Interstate 85.

Montcross, LLC, the primary land owner within the Montcross Small Area Plan, is an entity comprised of the Southern Benedictine Society of North Carolina, R.L. Stowe Company, Parkdale Mills, and

Pharr Yarns. This LLC has collaborated on a long-range land use plan for land owned by those entities –754 acres of which are located within Belmont's Planning Area.

Given the potential for redevelopment in both North Belmont and along the Wilkinson Blvd corridor, it is strongly recommended that this Wilkinson Boulevard Small Area Plan be regularly updated in collaboration and/or coordination with the Montcross Small Area Plan, –using open design workshops (charrettes) to explore ideas and best practices, as well as how the policies, projects, and programs inherent in the current Comprehensive Plan can be applied to the Corridor.



WILKINSON BOULEVARD SMALL AREA PLAN

Image: Concept to retool a suburban corridor in Tamiami, FL (source: Plusurbia Design)

In addition to the participation of existing residents and at these events, local businesses as well as the Montcross Chamber of Commerce and Gaston Business Association should be invited as key stakeholders when discussing how the future of these two areas could compliment one another to balance commercial demand with the residential inventory required to support them within our community.

Established in 1960 as the Belmont Chamber of Commerce, the Montcross Area Chamber of Commerce works across eight communities in eastern Gaston County and champions those who have interests along the I-85 and US-74 (Wilkinson

Boulevard) Corridors. By its own definition, the group is “an association of businesses, entrepreneurs, and organizations committed to improving its bottom lines and its communities.”

Similarly, the Gaston Business Association, established in 1913 as the Gaston Regional Chamber, works diligently to drive business success and economic growth within Gaston County by addressing critical business needs with innovative, impactful, and inclusive strategies. They also focus on enhancing workforce capacity through the attraction, development, and retention of critical talent.

With recurring design-focused community participation, proposed regulatory changes can be fine-tuned and conceptual renderings can be updated as redevelopment progresses according to the desires of those that live and work in Belmont in a manner that allows us to attract and retain new redevelopment along the corridor.



Image: Sheridan Boulevard Master Plan (source: The Bronx Daily)

SHERIDAN EXPRESSWAY (NEW YORK, NY)

The Sheridan Expressway (I-895) in the Bronx, New York was built as part of the interstate system in 1963. Beginning in June 2011, New York City conducted an extensive interdisciplinary planning process focused on creating a holistic vision for the adjacent Sheridan-Hunts Point area. The process was grounded in the understanding that inter-agency cooperation and the engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders were crucial to comprehensive planning and consensus building.

Today, phase one of this \$1.8 billion project is complete with the former highway converted into a pedestrian-

friendly boulevard that still moves traffic through the area efficiently. This project helped give rise to the federal Highways to Boulevards movement, which seeks to replace aging limited-access highways out of context with their urban surroundings with city streets and boulevards that include cars, but do not make them a priority. These streets serve a wider variety of users and act as places of commerce and gathering, as well as networks for transportation.

MID TERM

Mid term recommendations will require broader coalition building, but are less fiscally taxing to implement than the long term strategies.

1. Partner with NCDOT and other groups to invest City funds in Corridor beautification, such as intersection improvements and improved streetscaping.

With several transportation infrastructure projects already planned and/or funded along Wilkinson Boulevard in the coming years, such as bridge replacements, intersection redesigns, and widening, it is an ideal time for Belmont to push for additional safety and visual enhancements that will help accelerate revitalization. Upgrades beyond vehicular-focused State standard designs will necessitate City financial contributions and maintenance considerations, but these investments will be worthwhile to improve Corridor image and functionality for all users.

To extend the aesthetic tone set at each gateway throughout the entire Corridor, Belmont should explore adding medians with decorative shrubs or ornamental trees, street furniture at intersections, and even art installations outside of visibility triangles. Intersections with greenways should be visually celebrated to entice movement between these routes and the future shared use paths on either side of Wilkinson Boulevard. These types of

enhancements will be the City's responsibility and require coordination with NCDOT and GCLMPO to be incorporated into funded plans.

While regulatory shifts and partnerships with the development community (which are other recommendations of this plan) may drive greater change, visually impactful investments in the public realm show commitment on the part of the City to achieving the established vision. Furthermore, they can also cue the development community in on Wilkinson's future identity and forward motion, subtly shaping new projects beyond the Land Development Code's requirements. This concept, called Complete Districts, posits that the public realm must evolve with the private realm to accomplish meaningful placemaking. That is, a Corridor like Wilkinson Boulevard is unlikely to experience measurable and meaningful revitalization without the guidance and impact of similar changes to the right-of-way itself.

The city should also investigate available state and federal funding sources, such as those documented in the adopted Multimodal Plan, to fund intersection and corridor improvements that facilitate the mix of land uses and the aesthetic elements envisioned along the Corridor in this plan.



Image: Treed median (source: FL Urban Forestry)

2. Create a specific “Boulevard District” zoning category for the entirety of Wilkinson Boulevard that focuses on desired form over uses.

Building on Short Term – Recommendation 02, while likely faster to implement, a revised and enhanced overlay district may ultimately be determined ineffective at achieving the full goals of the Comprehensive Plan and this Small Area Plan. In that case, the more robust strategy of creating a new zoning classification –and incentivizing its use as the area evolves– may be required. This is not without precedent in cities across the country.

Several items should be considered in the creation of this new, Corridor-focused zoning district.

The salient aspects of the Montcross Area economic framework (derived either from published reports



Image: Art in median (source: Art Makes Columbus)

or anecdotally) and the latest recommendations of any current comprehensive economic analysis should be taken as a guide with regard to anticipated development potential and specific land uses supported by the market.

If not revised prior to the creation of this district and in a way that supports it, the Land Development Code should be calibrated and updated in parallel to ensure proven placemaking and mobility principles are promoted and that the two policies work hand-in-hand.

This new district should include properties beyond those immediately fronting Wilkinson Boulevard and emphasize building, streetscape, landscape, and other forms of improvement over simple designations of uses. Put another way, **the priority should be on shaping “what something looks like instead of what something is.”** This is very much



Image: Decorative crosswalk (source: Adobe Stock)

in keeping with Belmont's history of being the first municipality to implement a form-based code.

Because the Wilkinson Boulevard Corridor is effectively a “catch-all” with regard to the kinds of development it has spurred, care should be taken to guide the built environment to a cohesive, intelligible, and place-oriented result. This is not to argue for homogeneity, by any measure. However, the specific zoning district should be crafted with an understanding that great and memorable places do not evolve out of random acts of planning and design. This must be guided.

A purposeful zoning district is advisable given the amount of land associated with the Corridor and its potential impact on Belmont's future. Special care must be taken. Neither the Corridor nor Belmont is going anywhere and development will not stop and wait while new regulations are adopted.



Image: Multimodal corridor with landscaping (source: NY Street Design Manual)

3. Find partners to support the creation of an independent Development Corporation or Business Improvement District that will advocate for and help deploy the corridor's revitalization.

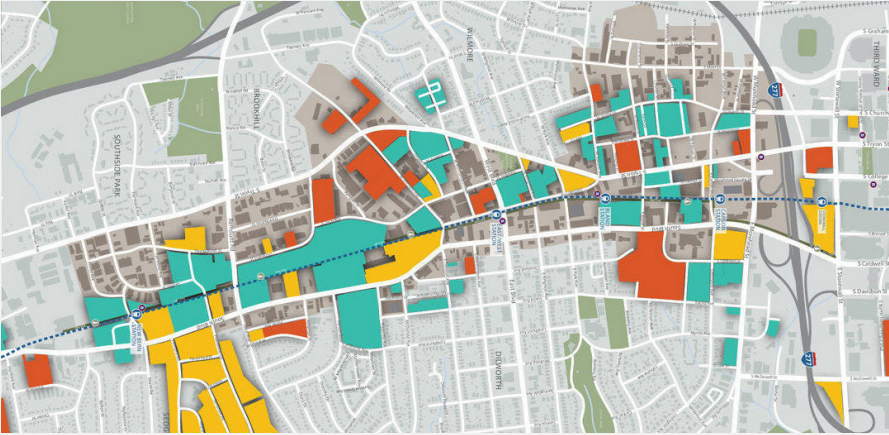
This recommendation may, initially, be seen as controversial. Given that the Montcross Chamber of Commerce exists and champions economic development interests along the Corridor, one might argue that this need is being met. However, this group's interests are broader and, in fact, not necessarily specific to Belmont or Wilkinson Boulevard. It is therefore possible to have an organized group whose charter and specific purpose

is the stewardship of the Study Area recommended by this Small Area Plan for the Corridor.

In addition to advocating for existing landowners, businesses, and stakeholders along the Corridor, this independent group could ensure the best interests of everyone (including the City of Belmont, the Montcross Chamber of Commerce, NCDOT, and others) are considered.

Depending upon its organizational rights, resources, and ability to coordinate as well as lead, this group could be the "boots on the ground" contingent that administers improvement grants, promotes and adjudicates tax incentives, provides design and

development assistance, acts as a liaison with Planning Staff and other agencies, and identifies opportunities to improve the district at every level.



Map: Southend Vision Plan (source: Congress for the New Urbanism)

SOUTH END DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (CHARLOTTE, NC)

One example of an active community development corporation can be found next door in Charlotte, where, in 1994-1995 the South End Development Corporation was organized to lead the district towards the thriving, urban area that it is today.

Its creation was purposeful –to create a special taxing district (in addition to, and separate from, that of the City and County) to fund its activities and to work with the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, as it was known at the time, to coordinate regarding growth in the Uptown area. Revenue generated from this special taxing district has been earmarked for many purposes, including sponsoring traffic impact

analysis, funding facade grants, and developing the overall district branding.

Now called Historic South End, the South End Development Corporation has been absorbed into Charlotte Center City Partners –a 501(c)4 nonprofit organization that guides the growth, development, and decision-making for Charlotte's center urban district. Like Charlotte Center City Partners and Historic South End, a similar new and aptly-titled "Wilkinson Corridor Development Corporation" could be governed under North Carolina's municipal service district statute and by an independent board of directors that reports regularly to City Staff and its boards and Council.

WILKINSON TOMORROW



Image: Whittier Boulevard Looking Southeast (source: Crexi)

WHITTIER BOULEVARD (WHITTIER, CA)

The Whittier Boulevard Specific Plan (WBSP) in the City of Whittier, California was originally adopted in 2005 and updated most recently in July 2015.

The Specific Plan represents the zoning along Whittier Boulevard that consists of five land-use districts: the Gateway Segment, Workplace District, Shopping Cluster District, Center District and Neighborhood Spine District.

The zoning clusters specific land uses into distinct districts. For example, within the Neighborhood Spine, in east Whittier, multi-family housing is permitted along Whittier Boulevard.

The Plan also includes street and landscape design enhancements to Whittier Boulevard.

LONG TERM

These long term recommendations represent goals Belmont should work toward to fundamentally shift the Corridor’s built form and functionality. Each improvement will likely take several years, or even decades, but will allow the City to implement desired generational change.

1. Implement multimodal upgrades throughout the Corridor area, including 10’ shared-use paths on either side of the Boulevard and a parallel greenway route.

Documented in the Multimodal Network Plan, Belmont’s mobility goals emphasize the need for a transportation network that supports all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. For Wilkinson Boulevard, this will require City collaboration with NCDOT to incorporate key multimodal improvements, such as the installation of 10-foot shared use paths on either side of the right-of-way. Simultaneously, strengthening connections to Belmont’s broader greenway system will help to encourage their use and effectiveness.

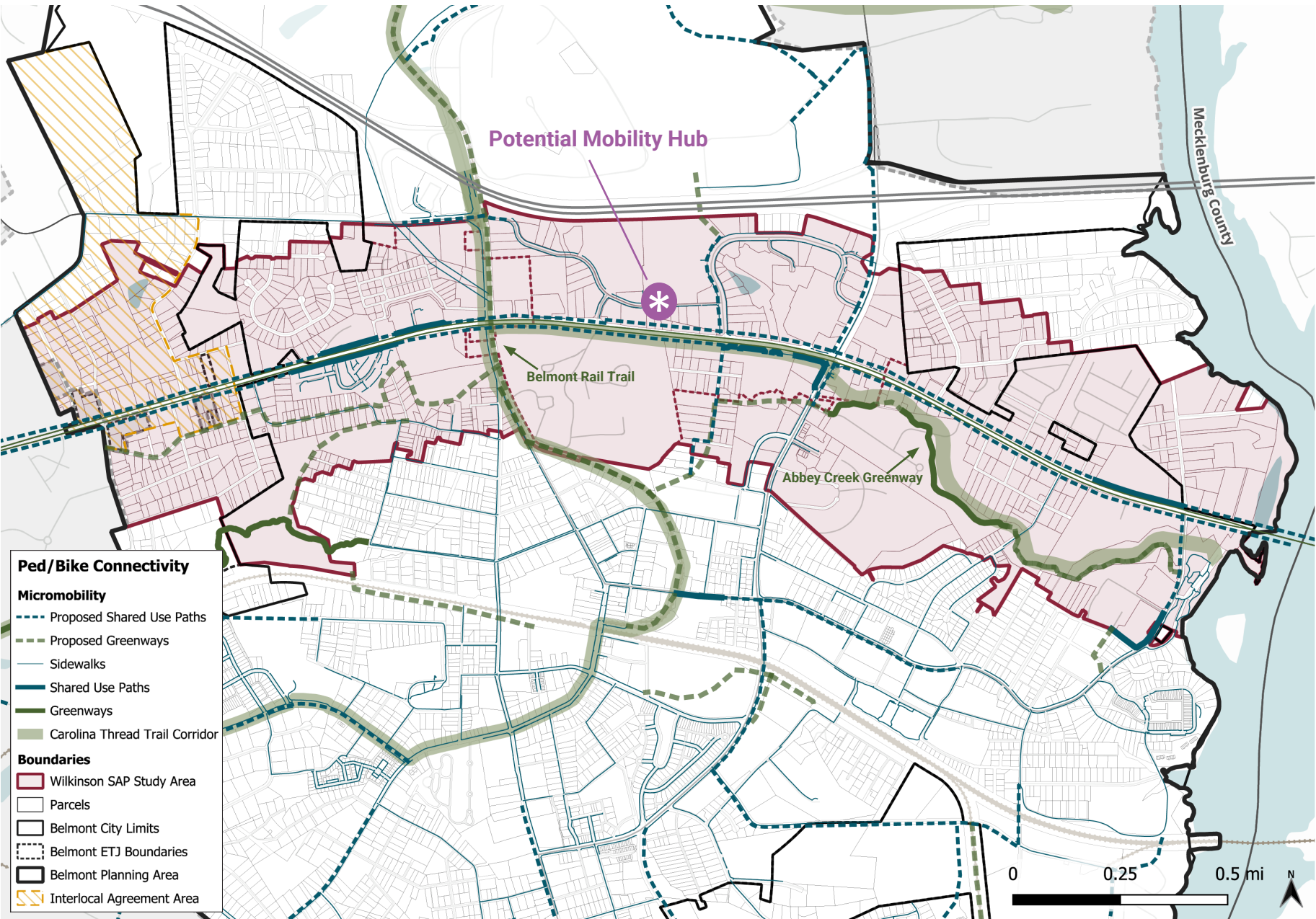
Both these recommended greenways and buffered shared use paths will also help to provide a safer and more inviting place for non-vehicular Corridor users to walk and roll. Implementation is part of a larger goal outlined by Belmont’s Vision Zero Plan to reduce the hazards and crash rate that have made Wilkinson Boulevard the number one ranked Corridor in the City’s High Injury Network (HIN).

Partially complete today, Belmont’s Abbey Creek Greenway will play a significant role supporting

mobility along the Corridor. Currently stretching east-west through The Reverie multi-family community, this trail will eventually continue through undeveloped wooded areas to Kevin Loftin Riverfront Park. To the west, another connected greenway could be developed, following plans for the Carolina Thread Trail. This route could follow easements and share established City rights-of-way, such as Orchard Lane, to reach the other end of the Wilkinson Corridor, near Cramerton.

Perpendicular to the Boulevard, the Belmont Rail Trail will be a key part of this broader system, which will one day provide a continuous north-south route through the City, connecting neighborhoods in North Belmont and Belmont Abbey College with Downtown, passing through the Corridor. By tying these areas to neighborhoods, parks, schools, businesses, and destinations along Wilkinson Boulevard, the trail will improve everyday mobility. Additionally, if visions to use the adjacent tracks for the Belmont Trolley are realized, this impact will be even further amplified.

Beyond mobility, over time, greenways can also influence how development takes shape. For example, in areas with active trails, new buildings often shift their orientation to face these public



Map: Proposed greenways and shared-use paths in and around the Study Area (data source: City of Belmont - 2024, design: Plusurbia Design)

spaces or offer dual frontages, improving pedestrian access and encouraging better site design. This is particularly true when paired with design guidelines. Additionally, the new investment by the City may encourage the private sector to assemble vacant or underutilized sites, which could spur significant increases in adjacent property values and land uses better aligned with the City's vision.

Particularly along the Carolina Thread Trail and Abbey Creek Greenway, the route will line the rear of many parcels fronting Wilkinson Boulevard, unlocking these small commercial and residential sites for trail-oriented development. Despite their adjacency to the highway, connectivity to the greenway at the opposite end of each site could encourage new development to create a more pedestrian-focused realm with shopfronts, patios, decks, and other outdoor areas to draw people off the trail.

Together, the proposed greenway and shared-use path installations along Wilkinson Boulevard can lay the foundation for a Corridor-serving multimodal network. This framework will help support revitalization, attract investment, and reinforce Belmont's accessibility and quality of life.

2. Publicly assemble strategic parcels to accelerate private redevelopment of small lots and enhance gateway areas.

Targeted land acquisition offers Belmont a bold tool for catalyzing transformative redevelopment along the Corridor. Rather than simply envisioning change, retooling regulations in favor of it, and waiting, direct land acquisition by the City provides an opportunity for faster, more focused results.

This is particularly important along Wilkinson Boulevard, where one of the greatest obstacles to redevelopment is the predominance of small parcels with disparate ownership. With a choice between a limited building envelope or the time investment required to procure several adjacent sites, these conditions make it challenging for the private market to develop impactful projects.

Instead, the City can play a more active role in the area's redevelopment by identifying and assembling underutilized parcels when they come onto the market, consolidating small sites with limited individual potential into larger holdings under public control. Once sufficient land is acquired, Belmont can leverage each assemblage into the best use for the public.

In some cases, this may mean holding wooded or natural areas to reserve for green space, while in other scenarios, the City could collaborate with a developer on a visionary project made possible through public-private partnership. For the City, acquisition of key locations along the Corridor, especially at Belmont's eastern gateway and around the primary Main and Park Street intersections should be prioritized.

At the Catawba River gateway site, the City could use newly acquired parcels as additional public green space, connecting to Kevin Loftin Riverfront Park and unlocking land for larger gateway signage or a signature art installation. Farther inland, assembling sites at the largest intersections can accelerate the vision for master planned mixed use nodes in those areas, as outlined by this plan.

Though this powerful redevelopment strategy can face challenges, such as competing on purchase price against private interests, it ultimately allows for the greatest influence over land use and design outcomes for the most critical sites along the Corridor. Reaching beyond the adoption of planning and regulatory structures, it is the best way to ensure new development aligns with community benefits, character, and long-term goals.



Image: Swamp Rabbit Trail and The Commons (source: GMC Engineering)

SWAMP RABBIT TRAIL (GREENVILLE, SC)

The Swamp Rabbit Trail in Greenville, South Carolina provides an excellent example of greenway infrastructure driving long-term reinvestment along a 28-mile corridor. Built along a former rail line, its primary section links Downtown Greenville to the nearby community of Travelers Rest, activating underutilized cross streets, empty industrial buildings, and vacant land along the way.

A clear sign of its impact includes The Commons, a group of former railroad docks and warehouses that have become a vibrant mixed use destination with nearly 1,000 feet of shopfronts, decks, and patio areas now facing the trail.

The trail initially relied on hospitality tax (occupancy tax) revenues for funding, with later phases fueled by support from city-issued bonds, private investors, philanthropists, and corporate sponsors. As the trail increased in popularity, it grew to reach across Greenville and into surrounding communities, generating an annual economic impact of over \$7 million.

Representing ideas for Belmont, this example demonstrates the power of greenway investments to encourage adjacent trail-oriented development, attract private capital, and create lasting value in downtrodden commercial and industrial areas.



Image: FUSE District under development (source: Google Earth)

FUSE DISTRICT (GASTONIA, NC)

Between 2016-2017, the Gastonia City Council voted to purchase four properties on the edge of Downtown in an effort to reactivate an ailing cluster of abandoned properties and support a baseball stadium-anchored infill development inspired by Durham, Fayetteville, and other cities. By 2019, the City controlled 16 contiguous acres –a total investment of \$4 million.

After completing a study, a former motel and Sears on City-held land were torn down, but a historic Coca-Cola bottling plant and the Trenton Mill were retained. With the stadium designed and construction underway, Gastonia released a Solicitation

for Development Partners in 2019 in search of private partners to redevelop and revitalize the adjacent sites. As of 2025, development was underway or had been completed on all sites, helping to build out a vibrant entertainment district.

This process was guided through a partnership between the City and UNC School of Government's Development Finance Initiative (DFI). DFI completed significant predevelopment work that helped connect the City to private partners by reducing the outside time, effort, and expense required to market and investigate this opportunity, while City land purchases accelerated its implementation.

OUR BELMONT

WILKINSON BOULEVARD SMALL AREA PLAN
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