

Stamford West Side NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN



PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

prepared for:
The Town of Stamford

prepared by:
The Cecil Group
Newman Architects
Tighe & Bond

May 2013

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PURPOSE

The West Side Neighborhood Plan has been prepared to articulate a coherent vision and then describe specific actions that will strengthen Stamford's West Side neighborhood. Building upon a series of other City plans and neighborhood initiatives, the Neighborhood Plan provides a vision for the future that will improve the quality of life and create a more sustainable neighborhood economy and environment that serves the residents and the City as a whole. The Neighborhood Plan provides guidance on future development and infrastructure improvements intended to create a more cohesive, attractive neighborhood where land uses are organized and designed to be compatible with one another, where traffic is calmed and where pedestrian and bicycle connections are safe and convenient. Importantly, this Neighborhood Plan is accompanied by an implementation strategy for the vision it describes. This includes a number of zoning tools that could assist in the steady improvement of the area by encouraging increasingly compatible development patterns, along with design guidelines to enhance the value and quality of the neighborhood as a whole.

The West Side Neighborhood Plan is needed to address a range of existing issues within the West Side of the city and anticipate problems that could arise if change is not appropriately managed. It focuses upon the residential and mixed-use blocks that flank West Main Street, starting from the downtown and proceeding to Harvard Street.

The planning concepts have been created with an inclusive process that reflects the input of citizens, stakeholders and the ongoing stewardship of the neighborhood by many organizations and institutions, including the West Side Neighborhood Revitalization Zone and the City of Stamford.

PLANNING AREA

The Planning Area comprises substantial portions of the somewhat larger West Side neighborhood as defined by the City in its Master Plan (2002) and contained within the West Side Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (WSNRZ).

This Neighborhood Plan focuses on those portions of Stamford's West Side that have shared planning and development issues due to the existing character of the neighborhood and that are within well-defined edges. The Planning Area is depicted on the associated diagram. The area is bordered on east by the downtown and the Mill River and Greenwich Avenue. The southern edge is defined by the I-95 alignment, which separates the West Side from the neighborhoods and districts to the south. The western boundary is defined where there is an abrupt change in use and zoning, from mixed use/residential to large scale commercial and industrial use; Harvard Avenue forms part of this boundary. The northern boundary generally parallels Stillwater Avenue. This boundary was chosen because a similar planning and implementation study was recently completed for the Stillwater Avenue corridor along this edge. This West Side Neighborhood Master Plan is intended to complement that effort.

The land and uses within this area have many common issues. Largely residential in character, the district is centered along West Main Street where a collection of businesses and residences have clustered. But the resulting pattern is not a coherent corridor that is well suited to either use. Residential blocks are peppered with inconsistent commercial uses. Parking and open space are both scarce in a district that experiences extensive through traffic, which is a typical problem for urban neighborhoods next to a large downtown.

VISION

This portion of the West Side will be a compact city neighborhood that is largely residential in character, punctuated by an active and attractive mixed-use corridor centered along West Main Street that provides an economically diverse and compatible mix of retail, service, commercial and residential uses. It will be a well-connected neighborhood with a pleasant and safe pedestrian and bicycle network that provides convenient access to shops, services, community institutions and jobs within the neighborhood. As an urban neighborhood, it will enjoy the substantial advantages associated with its adjacency to the downtown and the Mill River corridor and its excellent connections to public transit, including the nearby rail station.

The neighborhood should continue to be composed of subareas of different scales and with different qualities that have emerged within the urban design fabric of varied streets and blocks. Small scale commercial and light industrial establishments that are now scattered through the area will have a designated place where their growth and expansion will be encouraged. Conflicts with less compatible uses on residential blocks will diminish over time, as commercial land converts to more compatible residential uses or is reorganized with site and operational changes to be better neighbors.

Traffic will be calmed along all of the side streets in the neighborhood, so that through-traffic is focused within the West Main Street and West Avenue corridors that are better organized to balance vehicles, pedestrians, parking and aesthetic enhancements. The gateways to the district along these corridors will be enhanced with streetscaping and signage, signalling the arrival into a residentially-oriented neighborhood setting. Jackie Robinson Park and the Yerwood Center will remain the most visible civic core of the community, offering community-oriented programs and recreational opportunities within an increasingly green, attractive setting geared to pedestrians.

As a compact neighborhood with the advantages of close proximity of housing, shops, services and jobs that can be easily reached by foot or by transit, the West Side will be a fundamental part of the City's sustainability strategy. In combination with emerging design, building and site management practices, the vision is of an increasingly environmentally healthy neighborhood.

OVERALL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This Neighborhood Plan seeks to fulfill community goals and objectives that emerged through the participatory process:

- *Present opportunities for a truly mixed use neighborhood* where good jobs and a full range of goods and services are within walking distance to quality homes and apartments, and where the *land use regulations and design standards address issues* when investment priorities for commercial and residential development conflict with adjacent property values and potential improvements.
- *Create an identifiable neighborhood center* that supports pedestrian-oriented commerce and civic activities, with a *character of design* that reflects the best of existing buildings yet also creates a unique statement that will help define the West Side as a valuable destination.
- *Improve safety and accessibility barriers caused by the volumes of traffic* on West Main Street and mitigate the related impacts on the connecting streets through the neighborhood, by *finding opportunities* to invest in roadway and sidewalk improvements to make the streets more attractive and add open space and neighborhood amenities.
- *Apply appropriate land use management approaches* that encourage the continuation of the mix of uses and reinvestment in the properties, without losing the unique character of the neighborhood, with *implementation through zoning and other land use powers* provided to the City, including the application of mixed use and design zoning districts, with the enforcement and incentives possible through the police powers granted to the City.

FIGURE 1 PROJECT AREA



GUIDE TO THE WEST SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

This Master Plan has been organized to facilitate the understanding of neighborhood issues, concepts for improvement, and tools that could be used to accomplish both revitalization and sustainability goals. The organization of the documents and recommendations are compiled within four major categories:

- Neighborhood Character and the Quality of Life
- Land Use and Development
- Traffic, Circulation and Parking
- Neighborhood Environment

Part I: Executive Summary

This executive summary provides an overview of all of the principal elements of the master plan and the process that has been used to assemble it. In these pages you will find:

- The **Planning Area** which is the focus for study and recommendations
- **Vision, Goals and Objectives** that are this Plan's foundation
- A **Guide to Implementation** that lists the tools that can be assembled and employed to achieve the purposes of the plan, as a quick reference
- A summary of the **Planning Process** describing the steps undertaken and the participation of community members
- An overview of the **Planning Context**, organized into the four major topic areas that the Master Plan addresses
- The **Summary of Recommendations**, with information that links planning concepts with the methods that can be used to implement them. Particular emphasis is placed on land use and development patterns, open space and streetscape, zoning tools that could be applied, and observations about how design standards and guidelines could help.

Part II: Background and Analysis

Part II provides background information and analysis of key topics that are a focus of this Plan; it is provided as a useful reference document, with particular emphasis on the land use and development analysis and the concepts for design guidelines.

Part III: Appendices

The appendices consist of the draft language and mapping that could be used to translate the recommendations of this Master Plan into:

- Appendix A: Draft **Amendment to the City's Master Plan**
- Appendix B: **Draft Zoning Amendments**, including:
 - Map and Designation Changes to Certain Parcels
 - Designation of a **VC Zone for the West Main Street Corridor**, including refinements in the Site and Architectural Design Standards that would be applied
 - Designation of a **Urban Mixed Use Zone** to provide for moderate and small scale commercial and industrial uses in a limited area
 - Provision for a **Compatible Use Incentive** to be used within the West Side neighborhood to encourage the conversion of incompatible business and light industrial uses to more compatible residential or mixed-use development.

A GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTATION

A major emphasis of this planning effort has been forging links between the community vision for the future and practical tools to achieve the related goals and objectives. This list compiles the actions that could be taken to revitalize the West Side where improvements are needed and sustain its best qualities in the years to come.

Neighborhood Character and the Quality of Life

- **Stewardship** – The neighborhood will benefit from the continued stewardship of several organizations through their direct engagement in implementing their missions to help accomplish this plan. A principal advocate and coordinating entity will be the WSNRZ through its board, committees and special projects. This Plan should be adopted as a guidance document by the WSNRZ. The Stamford Partnership has actively participated in planning and neighborhood enhancement in this portion of the city, and should be encouraged to continue as a community partner.
- **Code Enforcement** – Overcrowded housing or incompatible uses that have not been properly permitted to meet zoning or building code standards degrade the quality, value and safety of the neighborhood; the City should be a proactive participant in its role.
- **Entrepreneur and Local Business Support** – Stamford has placed an emphasis on supporting the growth and expansion of businesses in the City, and a range of programs and incentives could be tapped. This Master Plan suggests that the City extend its Enterprise Zone to include the cluster of business properties and blocks that are identified as a subarea of the neighborhood, generally along West Avenue between the highway and Annie Place. This could expand the range of opportunities, in addition to the programs and initiatives already available.
- **Social Programs** – The City has a network of social support programs in place that can support the community vision and neighborhood health. The WSNRZ should continue to provide information and advocacy to help ensure coordinated provision of services to reinforce neighborhood goals.
- **Design Reviews** – Design reviews for new projects and major renovations are recommended as part of new zoning measures and are discussed in the section on Land Use and Development. However, informal and advisory design reviews could be instituted for projects throughout the neighborhood, providing owners, architects and builders ideas about how designs can reinforce the character of the entire area, to their benefit. Such advisory design reviews could be provided as part of a City program, or by the WSNRZ through a special committee that would be a resource, rather than a regulatory requirement.
- **Awards Programs** – The City and/or the WSNRZ, perhaps in association with professional associations, could sponsor awards programs to acknowledge projects that contribute to the character and the quality of the neighborhood. Categories could include “compatibility” awards, site or building improvement awards, special community programs and the like.

Land Use and Development

- **Master Plan Amendment** – The City's current Master Plan should be amended to bring it into alignment with the land use and development recommendations provided in this document. Draft language and an associated map are contained in the Appendices.
- **Zoning Changes** – The City should refine the zoning for the area to promote redevelopment that increases compatibility and draws reinvestment that will encourage redevelopment of underutilized properties, in line with the overall qualities of this urban neighborhood. Several specific zoning changes are described in this part of the Master Plan, and specific zoning language and associated design guidelines and standards are provided in the Appendices.
- **Façade Improvement Program** – The City should consider applying for grant sources or allocating future CDBG funds towards façade improvements along West Main Street as a direct incentive for positive change.

Traffic, Circulation and Parking

- **Traffic Calming** – This area will benefit from the City’s established strategy to incrementally implement traffic calming on a neighborhood basis. This Master Plan should be consulted as specific plans are advanced because it suggests some refinements in the approach contained in the concepts prepared in 2004 for the City.
- **Main Street/Route 1 Improvement Strategy** – The planning for the traffic circulation, pedestrian and aesthetic improvements is being advanced with many participants, including recent studies and concepts provided in concert with the regional planning agency. The neighborhood advocates should work with the participating agencies to find locations for street trees and emphasize pedestrian safety and improvements, while preserving or expanding on-street parking where possible because of its critical importance to the businesses along Main Street.
- **Pedestrian Routes and Corridor** – The City’s infrastructure improvement programs should include enhanced pedestrian access along Richmond Hill Avenue, because of its direct connectivity with the regional transit station and the downtown.
- **Bicycle Access and Circulation** – The City’s bicycle circulation plan should also be refined to designate Richmond Hill Avenue as a key connector to this district.

Neighborhood Environment

- **Open Space Improvements** – Because existing public open space is so limited, the City should promote a combination of circulation and open space improvements around Jackie Robinson Park that will provide more open space and a better pedestrian and bicycle environment. At the “gateways to the neighborhoods,” green landscape enhancements should be incorporated. The City should opportunistically obtain small open spaces in the neighborhood for pocket parks and amenities over time.
- **Highway Sound/Visual Barriers** – The City should seek Federal and State funds to install sound and visual barriers to protect the neighborhood from the noise and disruption of the interstate highway.
- **Stamford Sustainable Practices and Policies** – Planning and development activities should comply with the City’s existing and emerging policies and programs that promote healthy neighborhoods and sustainable practices, reduce energy costs, promote alternate transportation modes and reduce hazardous materials.

PLANNING PROCESS

Analyses

The project started with a review of the history of planning and development in the district, including the evolution of zoning regulations and project approvals. A review was undertaken of the many related plans, initiatives and programs already underway to help reposition the West Side neighborhood to improve its economy, built conditions, transportation network and the quality of life in the neighborhood.

An analysis of the neighborhood by block and subarea was included using the City’s GIS database, which provided a comprehensive review of ownerships, values, and other relevant factors. Site visits were completed with photographic recording of many conditions and properties to confirm and illustrate the conditions determined from the data. The physical analyses included findings on development conditions, activities and relationships, and variations in urban design, open space, and streetscapes. These analyses were summarized and presented for continuous public dialogue during the planning stages.

Public Interaction

Participation from the public occurred in several sessions designed to elicit ideas and responses to information and concepts

presented by the consultant team. This participation also was used to identify the critical issues for the residents and business owners. Some property owners and contractors with businesses in the neighborhood participated in a focus group session to discuss issues associated with businesses, local jobs, operations and the neighborhood. The team also met with local high school students at the Yerwood Center to discuss their ideas for open space activities and design of Jackie Robinson Park. To extend additional opportunities for input, an online survey of preferences and posters of two alternative land use futures were used to attract comments and ratings of different development options within the commercial center and the overall vision for neighborhood preservation, adaptation and change.

Alternative Studies

The project designers completed studies of alternative development options within the commercial center and within the mixed use blocks as a way to test redevelopment potential and impacts. These studies also provided a means to determine measures that could be translated into zoning regulations through setback, buffer and building placement standards to preserve the adjacent land values and meet other community goals.

Planning for Regulatory Changes

Zoning regulations from other communities were reviewed to consider methods for managing land use and development in urban neighborhoods with similar issues, and then a unique strategy was crafted to fit within the structure of Stamford’s regulations and the specific needs of the West Side neighborhood.

PROCESS AND PRODUCTS CHART

TASK	Outreach	Deliverable
1 WORK PLAN	Internal Meeting	Protocols, Schedule, Logistics
2 REVIEW CONDITIONS AND CREATE THE BASE MAP	Public Meeting, Other Outreach	Updated Compilation Report and Base Map
3 EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES	Public Meeting, Other Outreach	Neighborhood Connectivity Commercial Corridor Revitalization Land Use Management
4 CONFIRM STRATEGIES	Public Meeting, Other Outreach	Recommended Land Use Plan, Zoning Strategies and Design Guidelines
5 DRAFT AND FINAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN	Public Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master Plan • Zoning • Design Guidelines • Additional Strategies

PLANNING CONTEXT

Neighborhood Character and Quality of Life Today

The West Side neighborhood has a combination of strengths that can be built upon to create an economically diverse, walkable, mixed-use community with compact housing, local jobs and amenities. Factors influencing the ability to achieve this vision reflect the history, demographics, underlying conditions and perception of the area.

There has been a strong focus on the revitalization of this neighborhood over many years. The City of Stamford has commissioned or participated in multiple studies of the conditions of the area. Nonprofit organizations such as the WSNRZ and the Stamford Partnership have created a structure of assistance and commitment to this area.

According to census data, the population of the West Side Neighborhood is more likely to be non-white and/or foreign-born, have lower incomes and are significantly more likely to rent their homes than residents of the City of Stamford as a whole. The population is slightly younger than the City of Stamford as a whole and more people live in each dwelling, reflected in the higher number of people per unit.

The neighborhood residents are less likely to have a high school or other higher degree relative to the statistics for the entire Stamford population. The types of jobs that area residents hold are typically associated with low and moderate incomes – accommodations and food services, retail, construction and healthcare. The median household income in the neighborhood is about 63% of the median income for the City of Stamford as a whole. A majority of the residents work within 20 minutes of their homes; very few work more than forty-five minutes away. This suggests that most workers are employed within the neighborhood and surrounding areas, taking advantage of the convenient location and accessibility to major job centers.

This compact live/work neighborhood is supported by a mix of housing, commercial and light industrial uses. This mix has been present over many decades and is a result of both historical development patterns and changing zoning regulations. While the proximity of uses is advantageous for those who live and work in the area, that adjacency to the downtown and resulting through-traffic brings traffic congestion and pedestrian safety concerns.

Narrow neighborhood streets are congested with traffic travelling to the major roads – the east-west corridors of West Main Street/Route 1, Richmond Hill Avenue and Stillwater Avenue and the north-south corridors of Greenwich Avenue, Fairfield Avenue and West Avenue. On-street parking for the commercial corridor of West Main Street overflows into the residential side streets.

The mix of uses that has emerged includes patchwork patterns with abrupt changes from residential to light industrial or service companies. Zoning complaints are mostly a result of commercial and light industrial uses within residential neighborhoods but include reports of illegal rooming houses – an indicator of a demand for low-cost housing in this area and the potential overcrowding in some buildings. These zoning complaints are the result of improperly permitted uses that are incompatible with the neighborhood character.

The core of the neighborhood is the community center of Jackie Robinson Park, the Yerwood Center and Hatch Park. Additional open space is scarce. The relatively small Carwin Park is within the neighborhood, and Lione Park and the Mill River corridor, including Rotary Park, are within walking distance of the neighborhood.

Deteriorated properties create a strong negative effect on the fabric of a neighborhood. A few properties that are not maintained well or have an incompatible use can create a poor impression of an area, however, targeted improvements to those same properties can make visible and difference to the perception – and economic value – of the neighborhood.

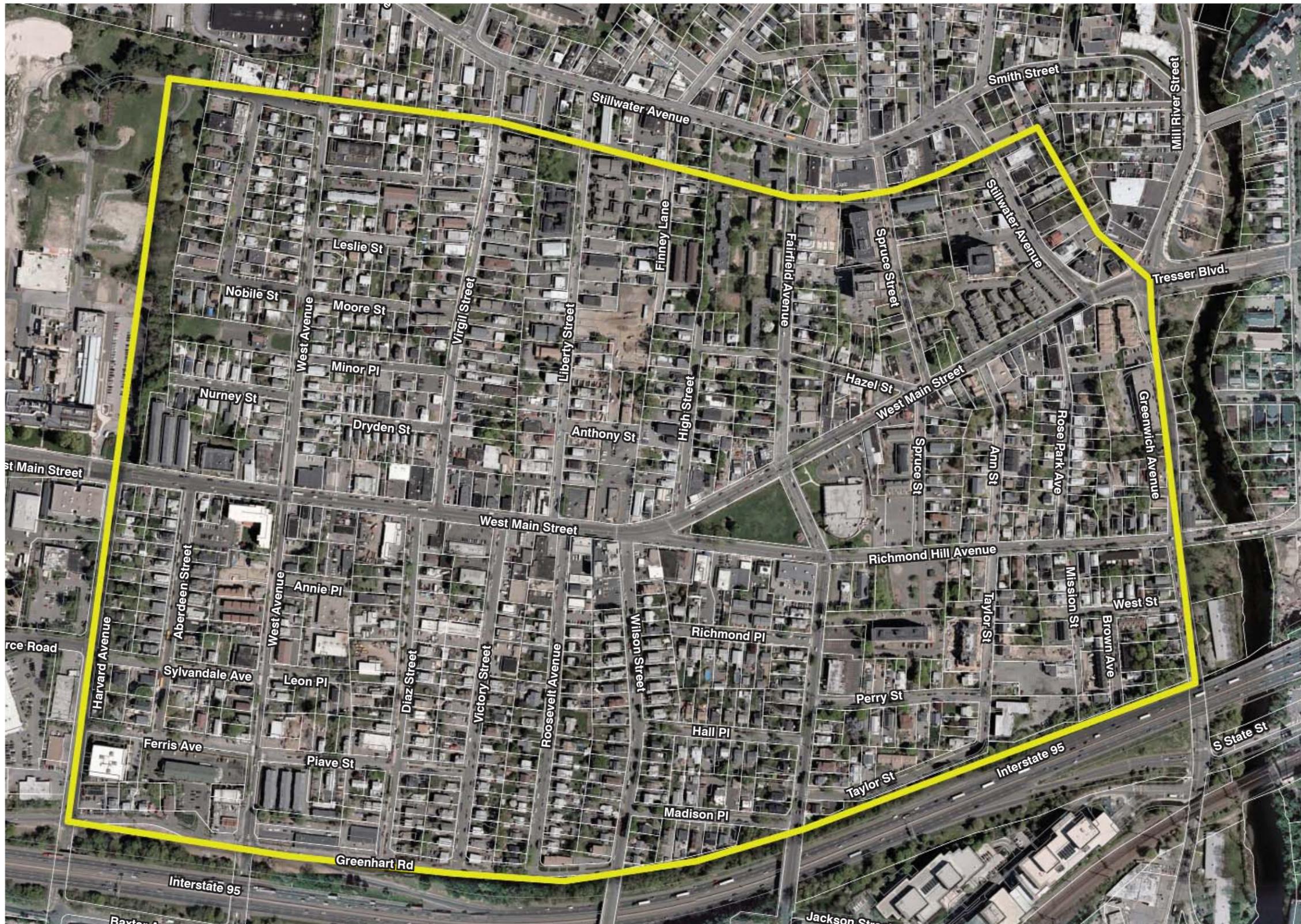
Photos of Current Conditions: Neighborhood Fabric and Open Space



Photos of Current Conditions: Discontinuity in Use and Character



FIGURE 2 AERIAL OF PROJECT AREA



Land Use and Development Context

Land use in the West Side neighborhood has long been a mix of residential, commercial and light industrial uses that have opportunistically located here because of the convenient locations and proximity to employment, employees, transportation and the downtown. Six zoning districts – C-L, C-B, M-L, R-5, R-6 and R-MF – define the neighborhood by the type of use intended by regulation. However, the land uses are not entirely consistent with the zoning districts due to previous zoning and permitting decisions. This has resulted in numerous discontinuities in uses. This is very apparent where commercial and light industrial uses are found within residential zoning districts. These non-residential uses may have been “grandfathered” as an existing use prior to the past changes in zoning or permitting decisions. From a regulatory standpoint, such uses can persist indefinitely but cannot be substantially expanded or improved. As a result, they tend to persist. As noted in the prior section, these nonconforming uses lead to complaints where uses and operations are not good neighbors.

Along West Main Street, the mix of commercial uses is very diverse – automobile-related, retail, services and office – and some of these businesses and sites which are in poor condition or are unattractive. The appearance is somewhat deceiving relative to the economic activity and value as measured by the demand for retail uses and their associated rents, which are higher than might be expected from a casual inspection of the area.

The Harrell-Michalowski Associates report, *Findings and Strategy for the West Side Retail Corridors, Stamford, November 2007*, notes that the retail along the commercial corridors is supported locally by the compact residential neighborhoods on either side. This study notes that businesses that provide goods and services to the local population are able to sustain themselves through demand from the surrounding neighborhood. People who walk to work are more likely to shop at local businesses on their way home.

Other businesses, such as automobile-related uses or contractor yards, are unable to locate in areas with higher land costs or more restrictive zoning. These uses support higher land values in this neighborhood because of the scarcity of suitable land elsewhere.

This combination of locally-supported businesses and those that are unable to locate elsewhere sustains a relatively high land value for parcels in this area. The West Main Street/Route 1 corridor reinforces these uses by providing easy access to the businesses by non-residents. The neighborhood mix of commercial, residential and industrial is stable but not desirable.

The neighborhood can be broken into subareas – the West Main Street Corridor, incorporating all of West Main Street and Richmond Hill Avenue around Jackie Robinson Park; residential neighborhoods that are mostly single-family homes such as those in the northwest and south; residential neighborhoods that include multi-family developments in the east, southeast, northeast and north; and a strongly mixed-use area in the southwest corner that includes residential, commercial and light industrial uses.

Although all of these subareas have challenges related to deteriorated properties or inappropriate land uses, the southwest corner has the heaviest concentration of incompatible uses. As noted above, these properties can have a negative impact on the fabric of nearby residential blocks. Of particular concern are those uses that are not allowed by the current underlying zoning, such as contractors’ yards in residential areas where outdoor storage and repair or light industrial operations occur.

The owners of these non-conforming uses lack an incentive to invest in their properties given current City zoning regulations and processes. Owners might be willing to invest in upgrading the current use or changing the use to one that is more consistent with the surrounding residential uses, if the City were to provide regulatory incentives to do so.

The process of preparing this report included a study of those non-conforming or underutilized properties susceptible to change under a change in zoning and/or provision of incentives. The study considered whether owners or developers would convert properties to conform to the more desirable uses in the district if increased dimensional standards provided a profit incentive. The most likely properties to change were those along West Main Street where there are low-scale and non-compatible uses. Secondary areas of change included non-conforming parcels in the southwest mixed-use subdistrict, parcels in the M-L zone on the south side of West Main Street, and other parcels along West Main Street. The key to this analysis was allowing a developer to assemble parcels adjacent to a non-conforming use.

A “fit” study used six prototypes to estimate the type of development that would be compatible with existing residential and commercial uses. Prototypes along West Main Street included a commercial use on the first floor with residential uses above. Prototypes for residential districts did not include commercial. A common element to both types was the provision of on-site parking – both structured and open – and landscape buffers along property lines shared with residential uses. A financial analysis accompanied the fit studies, comparing current assessed values of the test parcels with the projected assessed values of the prototypes. In all cases, the projected assessed value after the change in use was substantially higher than the current assessed value of the test parcels.

Creating an incentive for a change in use from non-conforming to either mixed use or multi-family would increase the property values of the improved parcels, reinforce the residential fabric of the community, provide needed retail space for local businesses to meet the demand from the surrounding area and provide more housing for an area already experiencing overcrowding. Provision of on-site parking for business and residential use would relieve the residential streets of overflow commercial parking, while landscape buffers would provide relief to existing single-family dwellings. To meet these goals, an investor would need the ability to assemble adjacent parcels and relief from some of the current dimensional requirements.

Sites Evaluated for Redevelopment Potential



Development Scenarios with Potential Prototypes

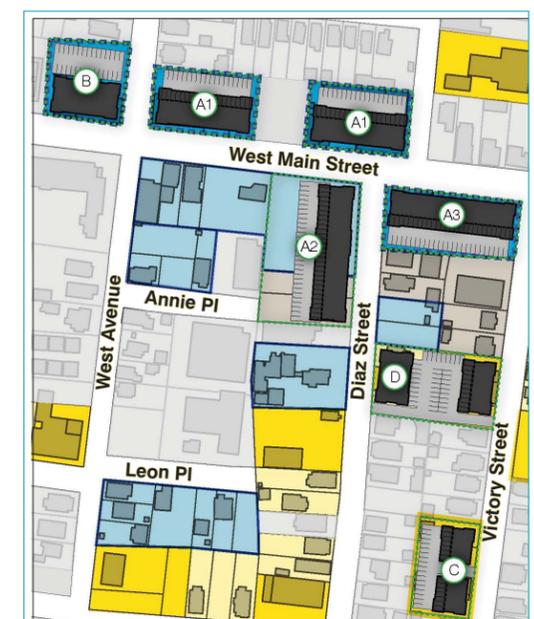


FIGURE 3 EXISTING LAND USE



This map shows the land use of each parcel in the study area as coded within the City of Stamford's GIS system.

Land uses have been updated during the study process if different from the provided information.

Transportation, Circulation and Parking Context

The circulation patterns in the neighborhood reflect its location and history. This is a predominately residential district served by narrow and short streets, but it is crossed by several major arterials and secondary routes that carry significant through-traffic. The rights-of-way are generally narrow, and private development borders the tight streets and sidewalks, so significant widening or reorganization of intersections is difficult. West Main Street and Richmond Hill Avenue provide the only continuous east-west corridors for traffic. West Avenue is a major north/south vehicular route due to its intersection with I-95 and its connections to both West Main Street and Stillwater Avenue. Traffic also finds alternate north-south corridors to move through the neighborhood, particularly along Greenwich and Fairfield Avenue.

The City is participating in a regional effort with the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA) to structure improvements to the east-west West Main Street/Route 1 corridor through the West Side neighborhood. SWRPA has presented options for improving this area, but conclusions have not yet been reached about a preferred approach that would enable the corridor to serve its important role in moving traffic within the City and region, while being more responsive to the neighborhood needs for calmed traffic, a better pedestrian environment and a more attractive corridor.

The City has prepared comprehensive traffic calming for the area in concert with a city-wide initiative to better manage traffic, support residential neighborhoods and provide enhanced routes for walking and bicycling. The recommendations for the West Side are consistent with the vision of this Neighborhood Plan.

There are two major intersections along West Main Street where the existing geometry and design are problematic from a neighborhood perspective. West Main Street, Tresser Boulevard, Stillwater Avenue and Greenwich Avenue all intersect within a very tight area. It is difficult to navigate for vehicles and is not conducive to pedestrians or bicyclists. The intersection of West Main Street and Richmond Hill Avenue is also a problem, due to the odd geometry where the two streets merge.

In general, the neighborhood has excellent public transit access. The Stamford Rail Station is less than a mile from the intersection of Richmond Hill Avenue and West Main Street, and it is within a convenient walking and bicycling radius for many residents and businesses. Three bus routes link this neighborhood to downtown Stamford, Greenwich and the Stamford Rail Station. No bus shelters exist to provide protection in inclement weather or to advertise the location of the stops.

Parking tends to be in short supply throughout the neighborhood. Land is relatively valuable, and the pattern of small parcels has resulted in a pattern of small parking lots and tightly fitted spaces, often with wide curb cuts to accommodate as many spaces as possible. Neighborhood residents, establishments and institutions rely to a significant degree on the availability of curb-side, on-street parking, which is typical and appropriate for urban neighborhoods.

The Neighborhood Environment Today

In broad terms, the environmental conditions in the West Side are associated with the concept of a healthy neighborhood that supports a high quality of life for residents, employees and visitors. There are several environmental issues that can be beneficially addressed by this Neighborhood Plan.

For an area of this size and population density, there is a relative lack of public open space and recreational opportunities within the neighborhood. Two small parks and recreation lots on Spruce Street and along Richmond Hill Avenue provide opportunities for the areas around them. Jackie Robinson Park and the adjacent Yerwood Center represent the largest open

space and recreation facility in the neighborhood, and they also offer various civic programs to the community. The Park is separated from the Yerwood Center by a segment of Fairfield Avenue, which creates concerns about pedestrian safety for the types of activities that occur here.

The proximity of I-95 to a residential neighborhood has significant environment impacts, including the noise and visual interruption that it causes.

There is a strong link between neighborhood health and the degree to which the environment promotes walking. There are a number of conditions today that discourage convenient and safe passage around the district. There is a lack of marked crosswalks and adequate sidewalks in many locations. Blank walls, empty lots and occupied areas can become practical barriers, creating unpleasant edges that do not have the benefit of “eyes on the street,” which promotes a sense of supervision and safety. This occurs in a number of locations, particularly when businesses are not active.

Issues in public safety and a lack of personal security are detrimental to the ability of residents, visitors and employees to move readily around the neighborhood. In this regard, social programs and community policing initiatives exist in the neighborhood to strengthen the sense of security and safety.

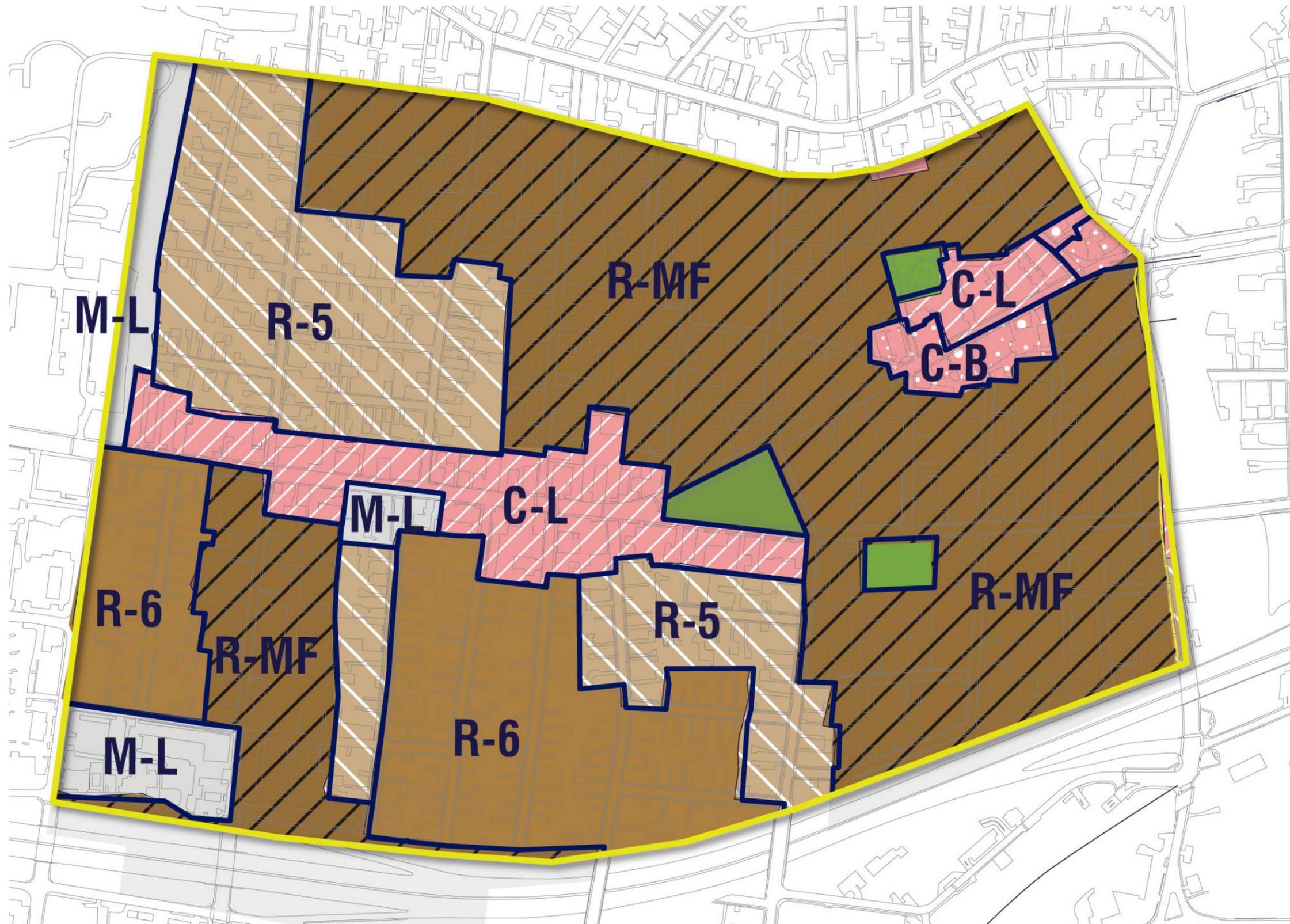
FRAMEWORK OF PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

This Neighborhood Plan is linked to a larger framework of initiatives that will help shape the future of the West Side neighborhood. This planning effort has benefited directly from other studies and plans, and has been tailored to complement other City programs, policies and regulations. Several resources and references should be emphasized:

- *Stamford Master Plan 2002* – This document provides the overall planning framework for the entire City and includes a relevant *Sustainability Amendment* adopted in December, 2010.
- *Zoning Regulations*, City of Stamford – These regulations govern most land use decisions and include important design standards and other dimensional standards that this Master Plan addresses.
- *West Side Story: West Side Vision Action Strategy 2000* – This document articulates important community revitalization goals.
- *Stamford Traffic Calming Study/Master Plan (2007-2009)* – The studies and maps associated with this initiative provide detailed recommendations for specific changes in circulation, parking, streetscape measures and other tools to reduce vehicular impacts within the West Side, as well as other locations in the City.
- *West Side Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Plan Vision and Goals (2008)* – This is a guidance document for the policies, programs and initiatives of the West Side NRZ.
- *Findings and Strategy for the West Side Retail Corridors (2007)* – This study was prepared for the City and provides a very useful profile of some of the market forces within the West Side.
- *Stillwater Avenue Corridor Study: Implementation Strategy (2010)* – This document recommends a program of actions to help implement many of the previous plans and visions for portions of the West Side centered along Stillwater Avenue and Smith Street.
- *US Route 1 Greenwich / Stamford Operational Improvements Study (2010 and 2011 presentations and reports)* – This recent effort, sponsored by the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA), is helping to define strategies to balance the circulation patterns and community needs along Route 1.

A more complete list of resources and referenced documents can be found in this Master Plan within *Part II* of this report.

FIGURE 4 EXISTING ZONING MAP



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Neighborhood Character and Quality of Life

Planners often use the term “neighborhood fabric” to describe the relationships among uses and users, buildings and their occupants, streets and sidewalks and the movement they support, and the open spaces that punctuate an area. There are both physical and social dimensions to this fabric. A number of the recommendations in this master plan focus on improving the physical fabric – repairing or replacing underutilized sites and buildings, and sorting out uses so that a more coherent pattern emerges that is better for the residents and businesses in the area. There should be a substantial emphasis on rebalancing the traffic and pedestrian environment, so that the West Side is increasingly walkable and car traffic is calmed. The invisible network of social services and support for the residents and businesses is a focus of other recommendations, so that the quality of life in the community is improved from this perspective.

The neighborhood character that is sought builds upon the component subareas within the West Side and defines better links to the adjacent districts. The diagram in Figure 5 expresses the concepts that have been assembled to strengthen the positive identity, character and quality of life.

West Main Street should be strengthened as the active urban spine linking the streets and blocks that spread out to the north and south. It will be bordered by a relatively dense mixture of shops, services and commercial establishments along with residential uses – sometimes in combination and sometimes in separate buildings. Pedestrians should move easily to and from the side streets, and the sidewalks and adjacent uses should create a higher quality environment for pedestrians than exists today. Significant volumes of “through traffic” will continue to find their way to and from the downtown along West Main Street, while by-pass and through traffic cannot be avoided between the I-95 highway ramps and the districts to the north. As a result, the intersection of West Main Street and West Avenue will remain the “Corners” in the neighborhood, and should have appropriate attention placed on the streetscape and pedestrian environment to balance the traffic here.

The civic identity of the neighborhood should be focused around an improved Jackie Robinson Park and adjacent Yerwood Center. Portions of Richmond Hill Avenue around the Park should have the same busy, mixed-use character as West Main Street. However, as it heads eastwards, Richmond Hill Avenue should be a calmer corridor, creating a key pedestrian and bicycle link to the transit station and the downtown.

The great majority of the neighborhood should continue to be composed of tightly-lined and varied residential streets and blocks, with a variety of housing types and qualities, small yards and pockets of green space, and facades that vary frequently. There should be limited changes in density and character associated with infill projects except where they replace less compatible uses. Problems of overcrowding or substandard housing, however, need to be consistently addressed when they are identified, and fair but focused code enforcement should be undertaken.

Design guidelines for the entire area – including the residential areas – can be very helpful in communicating the importance of the architecture, scale and other design qualities that make the neighborhood livable and valuable for everyone. Because of the potential role of design in strengthening the character of the area, separate discussions are provided within this Executive Summary and associated Report to expand on this idea.

The West Side neighborhood should be considered as a type of small business incubator, with the idea of finding appropriate locations and providing business support through programs already available within Stamford. An “in-town small business

park” should emerge within a set of blocks that flank West Avenue between the highway and Annie Place, for example.

The City and non-profit institutions should continue to recognize the value of coordinating programs that serve to reinforce a healthy social environment on a neighborhood scale to provide activities and events, promote public safety and help preserve a variety of housing opportunities for the varied incomes and family types that make urban neighborhoods like the West Side distinctive and desirable.

Land Use and Development

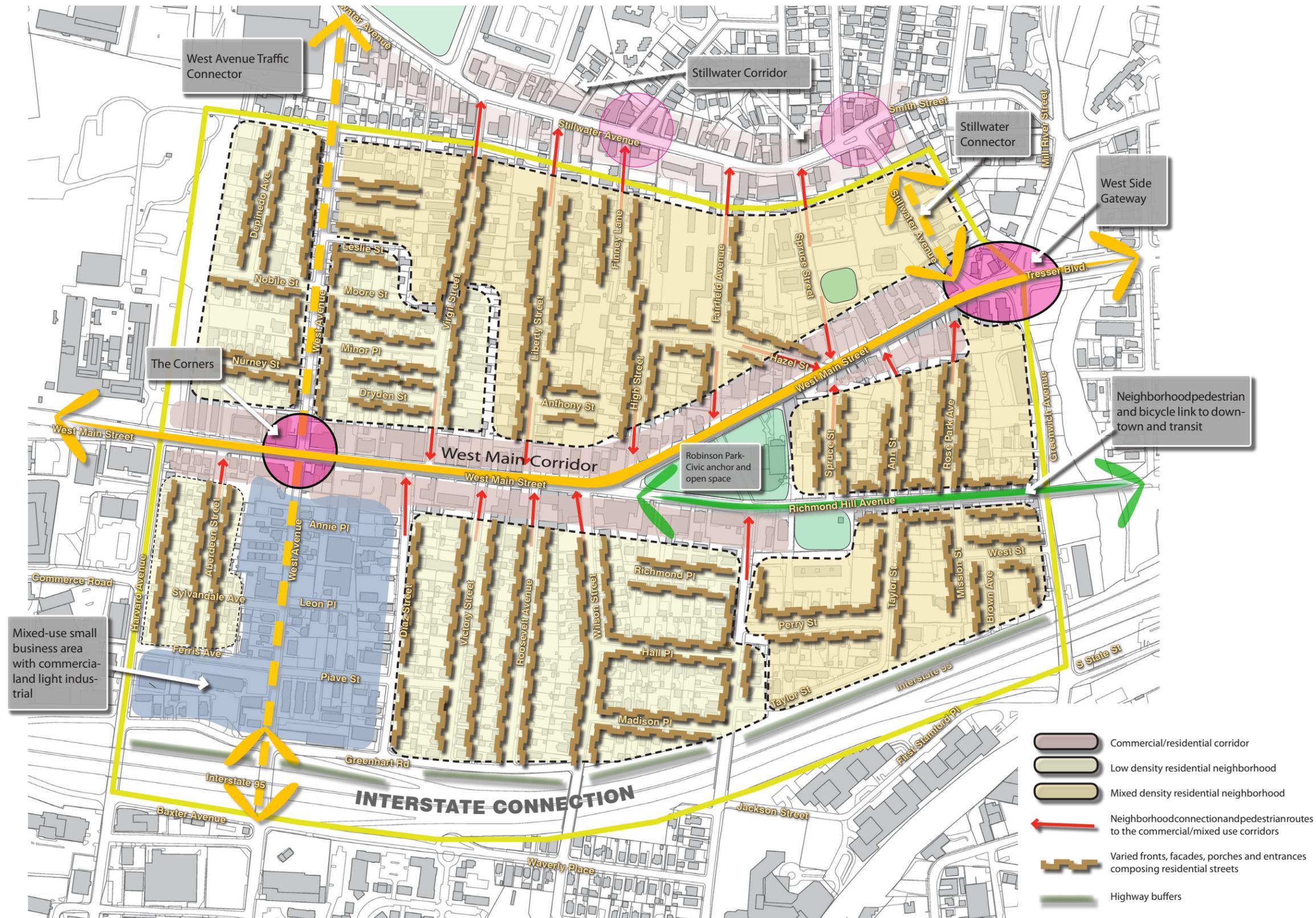
The land use and development recommendations promote reinvestment and new developments with the types of uses, building scales and location that are in keeping with the overall goals for the neighborhood character. The recommendations include preserving the lower scale neighborhood clusters and reducing the degree of non-conformity in areas where residential uses are – and should continue to be – predominant.

The corridor defined by West Main Street and the western portion of Richmond Hill Avenue is an excellent location for expanding neighborhood-serving shops and services, as well as for specialized businesses that can take advantage of the convenient highway and arterial access. Previous studies indicate positive market demand, but several barriers to expanding opportunities must be addressed. The parcels of land along this corridor are difficult to redevelop because they are typically shallow, and most are bordered by residential uses along the connecting side streets.

The corridor has become home to a checkerboard pattern of small shops, services, office and multi-family housing that have been permitted to locate here, in part because of the scarce options for similar uses in Stamford. Many of the owners and tenants can take advantage of existing buildings on small lots by adapting them and do not require high quality renovations for their needs. There is a very little space available for parking, and cars are crowded onto nearby lots, streets and in some cases, onto sidewalks. Property values and rents are high because of the advantages of the location for vehicle access, and there are few incentives to present a more attractive appearance because the district is not oriented towards pedestrian patrons. Façade and signage improvement programs should be focused along the corridor as a means to transform unattractive locations, but without additional incentives, more coherent, high quality redevelopment is very unlikely.

Under these circumstances, zoning can provide incentives to redevelop the land to create a higher value corridor that better serves the neighborhood. By providing opportunities for residential or commercial space above retail and service establishments, the business base along the corridor can be expanded, and the properties can be improved. But expanded use will also require expanded parking in the area, even with increased sharing of spaces that can accompany multiple use development. It is neither practical nor desirable to allow large surface parking lots to spread into the neighborhood, degrading the quality of predominately residential streets. This master plan recommends a balanced type of compact development that provides for four stories of uses, with very efficient parking partly below and next to the buildings. In order to test the viability of such development, prototype buildings and site improvements were fitted to various existing parcels and blocks. The results indicate that – if the right amount of development is allowed – property owners will be financially rewarded to convert underutilized land to this desirable pattern.

FIGURE 5 CONCEPT DIAGRAM



There is a concentration of commercial and light industrial uses within several blocks that are close to West Main Street, but which are not integral to the West Main Street Corridor. The uses gathered here have responded to past zoning designations and market advantages of their urban location and transportation access. These include all or portions of blocks along segments of West Avenue, Diaz Street, Sylvandale Avenue, Ferris Avenue, Annie Place, Piave Street and Greenhart Road.

This area provides an opportunity to support existing businesses and enable expansion and investment that will enhance employment opportunities and economic value for Stamford. Regulations should reinforce the future for commercial and light industrial uses within key blocks and parcels within this portion of the West Side for small business and light industrial establishments. Using this compact area that already has a significant concentration of buildings and sites used in this manner, the City should focus additional development towards these locations and provide business support through programs already available within Stamford. An “in-town small business park” should emerge within a set of blocks that flank West Avenue between the highway and Annie Place, for example.

As described in the discussion on existing conditions, the West Side has an unusually high collection of “non-conforming” uses within the residential zones. Two strategies are recommended to increase compatibility. Redevelopment incentives should be provided through zoning to convert the properties to conforming uses by allowing greater densities than would otherwise occur. The incentives should be available throughout the neighborhood except in the lowest density residential zones and in the new urban mixed use district. Incentives need to be paired with design standards and limits on the overall size of projects so that the results add to the neighborhood character and do not detract from it. An alternative approach to reducing use conflicts would be to allow limited expansion of non-conforming uses if the design and site planning improve the relationship with the surroundings.

The City’s most powerful tool for managing land use and development over time will be zoning, which in turn should be in alignment with the City’s comprehensive Master Plan. Because of the importance of these two mechanisms, expanded discussions are provided within this Executive Summary, and appendices contain specific proposals that would implement these land use regulations. Similarly, design standards and guidelines can play an important role in shaping future development; expanded discussions are provided in the Executive Summary and accompanying Report sections.

The City and non-profit institutions should continue to recognize the value of coordinating programs that serve to reinforce a healthy social environment on a neighborhood scale to provide activities and events, promote public safety and help preserve a variety of housing opportunities for the varied incomes and family types that make urban neighborhoods like the West Side distinctive and desirable.

Transportation, Circulation and Parking

The West Side neighborhood is composed of a network of streets and blocks that should be oriented towards the needs and quality of life of residents and pedestrians, with vehicle traffic de-emphasized except for a few clear exceptions. Traffic and transit must continue to flow east/west along West Main Street as part of the Route 1 system that links Stamford neighborhoods and the downtown to other communities. West Avenue must remain as a practical connecting corridor for north/south traffic and the I-95 interchange located at the southern edge of the neighborhood. Stillwater Avenue will also remain as a key local connection to and from the commercial uses along its length and Stamford Hospital, just to the north of the planning area.

The City is in the process of considering various approaches to re-organizing traffic circulation and parking along

West Main Street. This is being undertaken in conjunction with regional planners and in coordination with the many stakeholders along Route 1. Various options illustrate how the streetscape could be enhanced. Other studies considered methods to reduce turning conflicts by creating a middle “turn” lane in some areas, or to reserve more of the right-of-way for bicyclists rather than motorists. Decisions about possible changes involve complex traffic issues that are beyond the scope of this Master Plan. However, several considerations are recommended as neighborhood priorities along West Main Street/Route 1.

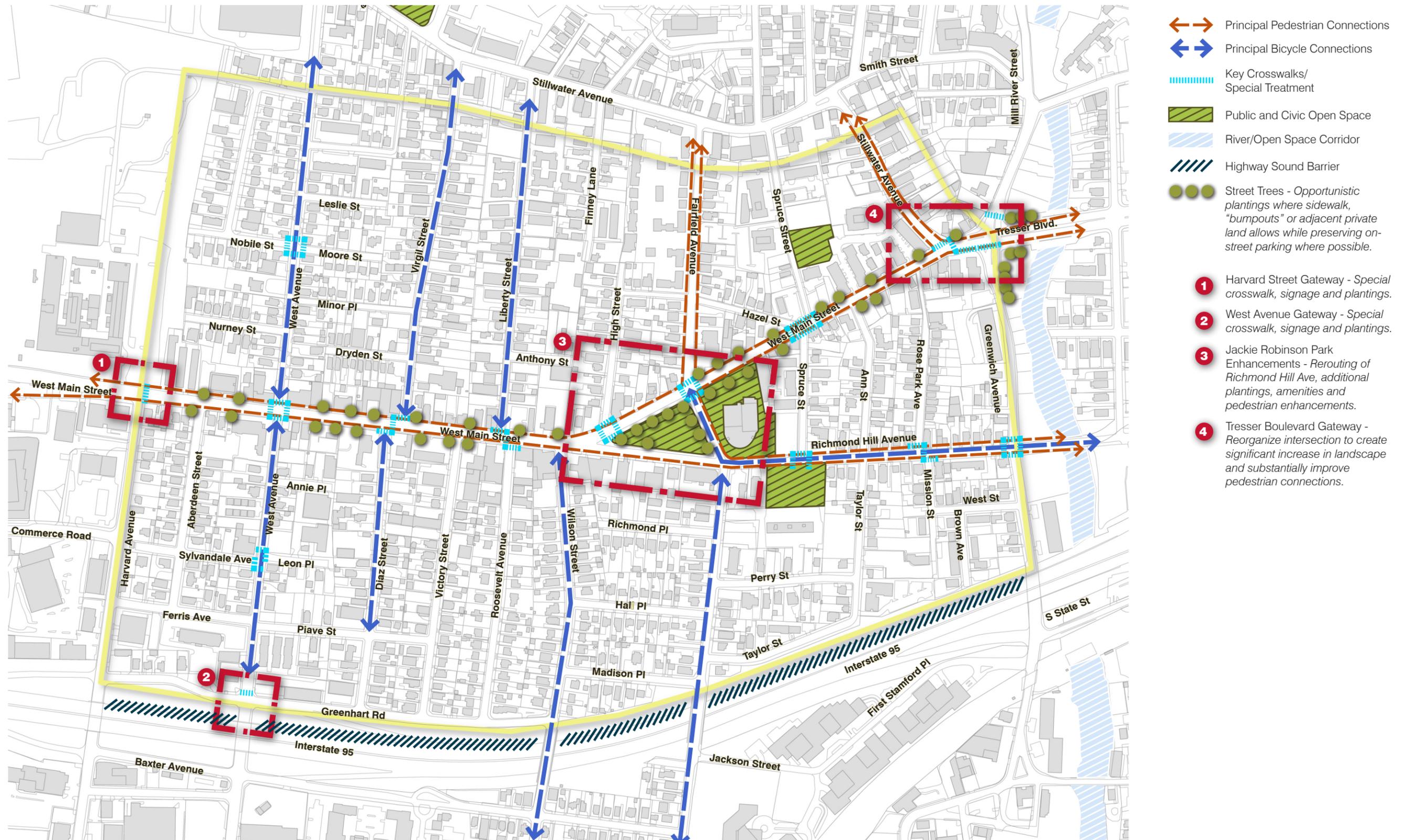
- Pedestrian crosswalks with streetscape enhancements should occur as frequently as practical, taking into account the paths both along and across the street.
- Safe and convenient pedestrian routes should be integral to the redesign of a more safe and functional set of intersections where West Main Street, Tresser Boulevard, Mill River Street, Stillwater and Greenwich Avenues all meet. The Tresser Boulevard bridge is a major pedestrian route to and from the downtown and can be expected to become even more so in the future.
- As described in the recommendations for land use and development, parking spaces along West Main Street are vitally important to the ability to support commercial uses and beneficial redevelopment. Solutions that increase parking by reducing curb cuts or re-organizing intersections should be encouraged, and streetscape solutions should be pursued that enhance aesthetics and safety but also value parking as a neighborhood-supporting resource, rather than forcing parking solutions on residential side streets.
- Where practical, solutions should expand the width of sidewalks; pedestrian routes along both sides of West Main Street should become far more attractive and well-used, over time.

The City established a traffic calming strategy for the West Side over the past few years; its implementation is an important component for achieving the vision contained in this Master Plan. Several additional and complementary concepts should be considered as improvements are designed:

- Enhanced and highly visible crosswalks at gateway locations to the district can serve to distinguish the transition to a neighborhood scale and identity. These should be considered across West Avenue at Greenhart Road, West Main Street at Harvard Avenue, and across Richmond Hill at Greenwich Avenue.
- Stamford’s rail transit station is only a short walk from many parts of the West Side, and it is within convenient bicycling distance. To enhance this area as a transit-oriented neighborhood, Richmond Hill Avenue should be improved with the specific purpose of creating a safe and pleasant walking and bicycling connection to a greater degree than had been identified in the City’s previous traffic calming strategy for the area.

Adequate parking is nearly always in short supply in mixed use urban neighborhoods at the scale of the West Side. The provision of large surface parking lots, however, tends to diminish the quality and value of the fabric of uses that they serve. As described in the zoning recommendations and discussions on land use and development, the City should support shared parking solutions and allow on-street parking wherever it is practical. Imaginative design solutions that provide on-site parking with aesthetic enhancements, screening and buffering should be supported, while removing through enforcement or redevelopment unsightly overcrowding and poorly located lots.

FIGURE 6 STREETScape, OPEN SPACE AND CONNECTIVITY



Neighborhood Environment

From an environmental perspective, the West Side neighborhood can be enhanced to provide improved conditions for its residents and to contribute to broader sustainable goals.

The most important contribution that the West Side neighborhood can make to regional and municipal sustainability is through the efficient use of land and resources associated with a compact, mixed use district. All of the recommendations in this Master Plan directly contribute to a fundamental strategy for sustainability that seeks to intensify compatible uses within a highly walkable neighborhood where residents can easily reach nearby jobs, shops and services. This approach leverages the existing infrastructure, including public transit, transportation and utilities.

Beyond this, development and infrastructure improvements in the district should conform to the sustainability principles and Best Management Practices as promoted or required by the City in line with community-wide public and municipal goals.

Public open space is very limited within the neighborhood as a proportion of the overall land area. As a result, the highly visible Jackie Robinson Park serves a very important role. A combination of street realignments, streetscape and park improvements can serve to strengthen its contributions as green space and a recreational asset. An illustration is included on the facing page to indicate a series of ideas. In this drawing, Richmond Hill Avenue would be re-routed to create a more regularly shaped intersection, aligning it with High Street. This idea has also emerged as part of the parallel planning studies being conducted for the Route 1 corridor. In addition to calming traffic, this arrangement creates an opportunity for enhanced open space that can convert asphalt to landscaping near Wilson Street. Enhanced perimeter sidewalks and tree plantings can be complemented with several areas for seating. The street surface and crosswalks could be reconfigured to be pedestrian friendly “tables” at both ends of Fairfield Avenue as it passes by the Park, providing safer and more attractive connections to the Yerwood Center.

Various strategies need to be used to provide more deciduous trees in the neighborhood. Deciduous trees provide a natural benefit of cooling in the summer, while allowing light to pass through in the dark winter months to adjacent buildings. The program of traffic calming improvements includes numerous sidewalk extensions; these can be used as landscaping opportunities for street tree plantings in some cases. Along West Main Street and Richmond Hill Avenue, additional street trees are highly desirable, but the public right-of-way is narrow, resulting in sidewalks that have inadequate width for healthy plantings. Extensive expansion of planters into the lanes along the street could diminish needed parking. To supplement available locations, the City should consider a program to plant selected species on private property in exchange for maintenance agreements. This approach is often used to complete publicly-used sidewalks where the pavement is partly on private property, and it seems very reasonable to use the same concept as a way to create a far more green edge to the streets. Design standards and guidelines for site improvements should call for attractively spaced trees to shade the asphalt lots and mitigate the visual impact of parked cars.

The City should also consider obtaining additional small lots or portions of land parcels when opportunities arise to create pocket parks and amenities for the neighborhood.

The City, in conjunction with other neighborhood stewards, should advocate for federal and state funding of sound and visual barriers between the West Side and I-95. Properly designed using contemporary technologies, such barriers can dramatically reduce impacts.

FIGURE 7 LANDSCAPE CONCEPTS – CROSSWALKS

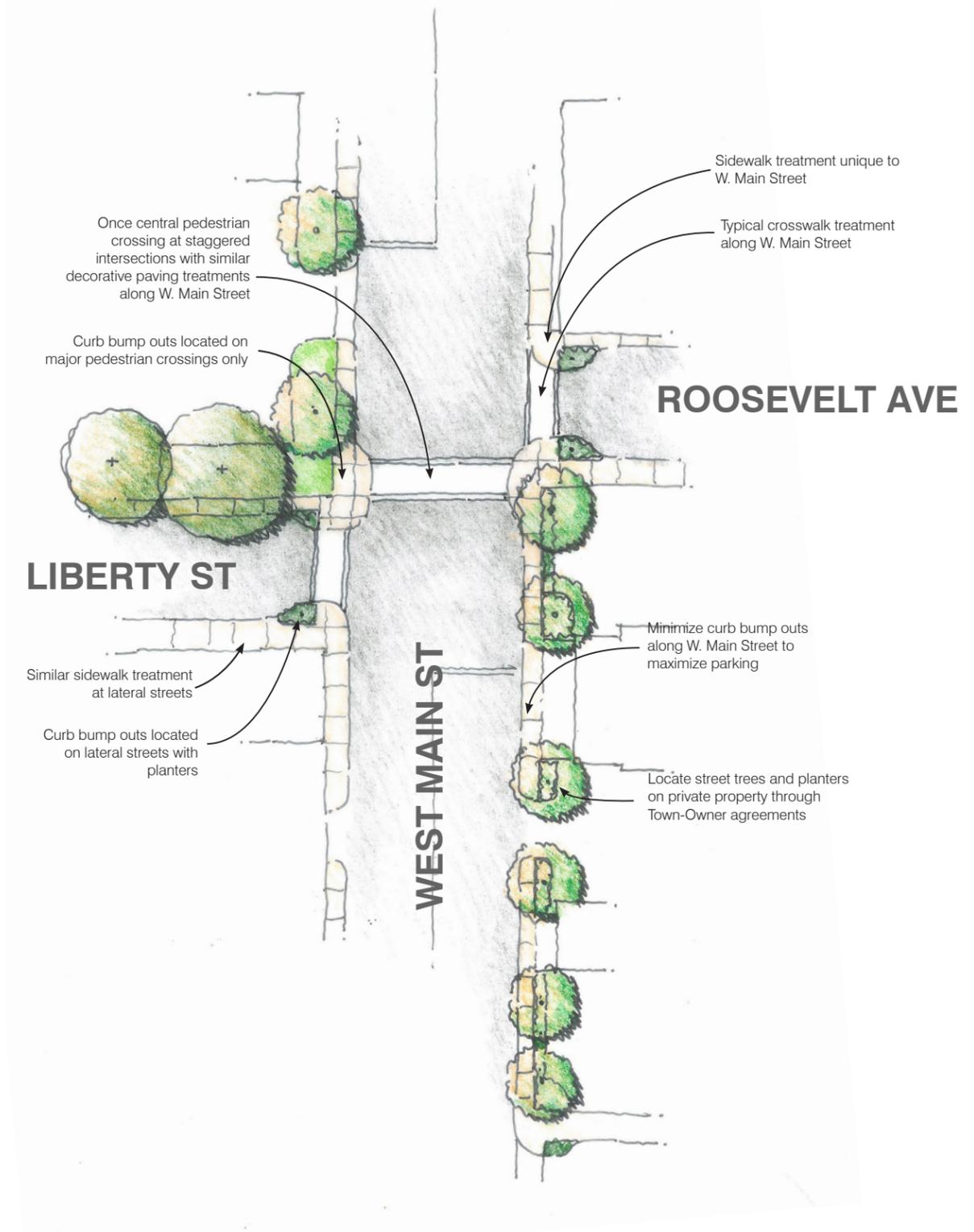


FIGURE 8 LANDSCAPE CONCEPTS – JACKIE ROBINSON PARK



MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT

Implementing key recommendations of this Neighborhood Plan – including revised zoning – will require that the City first adopt changes to the city-wide Master Plan. A draft amendment and associated map are provided within the appendices to this Neighborhood Plan and the principal concepts are summarized below.

The Village Commercial District proposed for the West Main Street and Richmond Hill corridors requires the Master Plan Category #6 Commercial – Neighborhood, to be designated for the areas proposed for neighborhood retail and service uses. This would change areas currently designated as Category #7, Commercial – Arterial, and Category #4, Medium Density Multifamily and link to the existing Category #6 designations on West Main Street and Stillwater Avenue.

The Urban Mixed Use District (UMD) is proposed to provide options for commercial and industrial uses to expand and develop where commercial and industrial uses have remained regardless of the present residential zoning. The area proposed for this rezoning is currently Category #7, Category #4, and Category #3, Low Density Multifamily. The recommendation is to designate the area for this new zoning as Category #15, Industrial – General. This category permits the mixed type of uses proposed in the new district and specifies protection of industrial uses; two of the key goals of this plan.

The final proposed change affects a portion of the block west of West Avenue and north of West Main Street where the lots have been developed with multifamily projects. Currently designated as Category #7, Commercial – Arterial, a Category #4, Medium Density Multifamily is recommended for these parcels to reflect their existing and future use.

OVERVIEW OF POTENTIAL ZONING AMENDMENTS

Four zoning changes are contemplated by this Neighborhood Plan, each of which is described below and all of which are represented on the adjacent Proposed Zoning Map. Complete zoning amendments, map changes and associated site and design standards are provided in Part III of this report as appendices.

West Main Street Village Commercial District with Design Guidelines

A new Village Commercial (VC) District could be created along most of West Main Street and a connecting segment of Richmond Hill Avenue. This is an existing zoning category within the Stamford regulatory framework (Article III, Section 4-AA-11) that can be tailored to the mixed-use goals for the West Side neighborhood, providing incentives to attract new investment. The uses permitted in this new VC zone would be the same as those incorporated into the nearby VC zone along Stillwater Corridor. The VC zoning mechanism is accompanied by design standards and a design review process. The character and quality of West Main Street and Richmond Hill Avenue are directly related to the revitalization goals of the community and contribute to the economic value of the district as a whole.

This change would convert areas currently zoned as Commercial districts (C-L and C-B) as well as several segments of parcels that are zoned for Multi-Family Residential (R-MF). The envisioned development could not be accomplished with the existing zoning, and would not be accompanied with a mandatory design review and approval process. The new zoning would provide somewhat increased building dimensions and provide more flexible site and area requirements. The new zoning would encourage ground floor uses be composed of commercial or retail uses suited to this urban neighborhood. A detailed analysis of the differences between the existing zoning and the proposed VC provisions is provided in Part II of this Report.

Appropriate amendments to the existing Design Guidelines that accompany the City's VC zoning have been prepared to reflect the particular conditions along West Main Street and Richmond Avenue. These amendments are further described in the discussion on Design Guidelines in this document, and in an extended discussion in Part II of this report.

Zoning: New Urban Mixed Use Zone (UMD)

A new zoning category would be created to support an array of small commercial, industrial, service and retail establishments. The area contemplated lies along both sides of West Avenue from Greenhart Road to just north of Annie Place, along western edges of Diaz Street, and within two blocks between Ferris Avenue, Piave Street and Greenhart Road. Called an Urban Mixed Use district, (UMD) this area contains a significant concentration of diverse commercial and light industrial enterprises but is zoned multi-family residential (R-MF) and low density residential (R-5). The existing RMF zoning was created in 1984, replacing previous industrial zoning that had permitted the type of light industrial and commercial uses that have persisted. The residential zoning did not provide adequate incentive for the area to convert to residential uses, resulting in an area that is permeated by uses that remain a valuable employment and economic resource. This condition makes many of the establishments and the businesses they contain non-conforming relative to zoning, and difficult to expand or alter.

To support new businesses and support the ability of existing businesses to expand and improve their properties, this new zoning approach is recommended. There are many other areas in the West Side – including properties within the proposed VC zone – that are more suitable to residential uses. In the interest of expanding employment and the commercial tax base, this new zone is configured to provide an in-town, small business park environment. The proposed zoning includes density and site standards that provide for landscaped buffers and setbacks and other measures to help ensure that the area becomes more attractive, more productive, and more compatible with nearby residential areas.

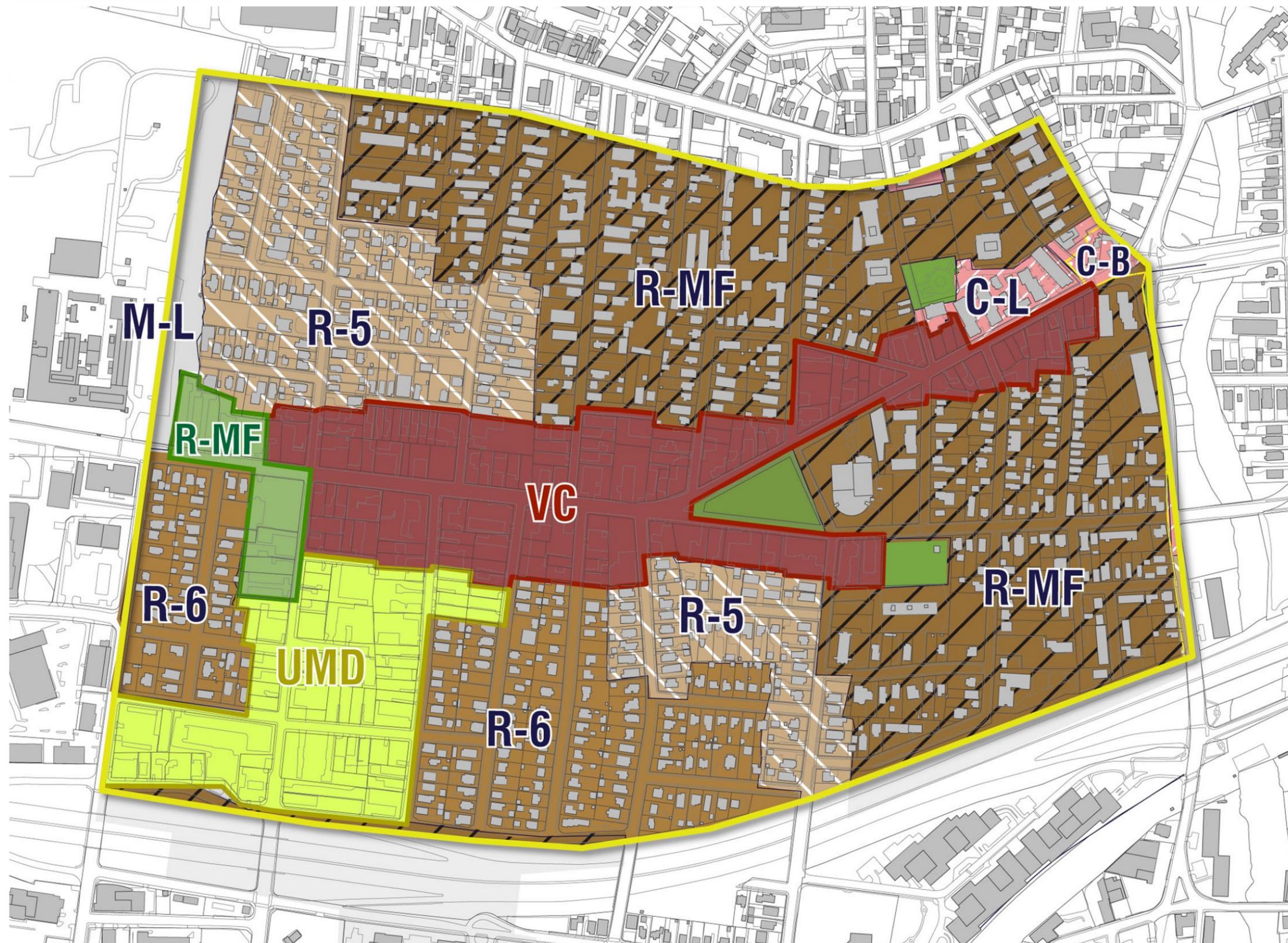
Incentive Provisions to Improve Compatibility

The zoning recommendations also seek to increase the compatibility within the area for uses that are not conducive to the predominately residential or mixed-use village commercial districts proposed. These would be implemented through amendments to the non-conforming use section of the Zoning Regulations under Article IV, Special Regulations, Section 10. Two new subsections are recommended. One would be Special Exception Approval option for certain non-residential uses that are likely to conflict with neighboring residential properties, because they are typically operated with outdoor storage of construction materials. These businesses would be allowed to invest in expansion and other property improvements, when the site design reduces impacts to adjacent properties by way of buffers and setbacks, and conformance with state health and safety regulations. The other measure would be a Use Compatibility Incentive. This provision would allow more intensive redevelopment of a site if it is currently non-conforming in use within categories that are particularly incompatible with residential uses, as long as the resulting project meets the desired use and special site design provisions to ensure that it is compatible with its neighbors. This incentive would not be available in either R-5 districts or within a new UMD district. Analysis of the existing uses, parcels and prospective development suggest that moderately scaled development, could emerge on a handful of sites that meet these criteria. The analysis is described in detail in Part II of this report.

Map Change from C-L to RMF

As a relatively minor adjustment to the existing zoning, several parcels should be changed from a commercial designation (C-L) to multi-family residential (R-MF) on the northern side of West Main Street and west of West Avenue. This change recognizes that the actual land use and development pattern conforms more closely with the R-MF designation.

FIGURE 9 PROPOSED ZONING MAP



The proposed new Village Commercial (VC) District will overlay much of the current C-B and C-L Districts. One exception is the recent multi-family housing development in the north-eastern section of this map, currently in the C-L District.

The new VC District also includes the M-L District along West Main Street.

LEGEND

- █ New District (VC)
- █ New District (UMD)
- █ New District (to R-MF)
- █ Existing Districts

DESIGN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Design standards and guidelines can serve the public purposes for the neighborhood and help increase the value and marketability of the private properties that compose it. A comprehensive approach has been taken within this Neighborhood Plan to describe how the character of development could be directed to create a more compatible, attractive and valuable district. Ideas have been provided for the corridor along West Main Street and portions of Richmond Hill Avenue; these would be implemented through their incorporation in the proposed VC zone. Design concepts have been organized as site planning and site review standards for implementation in the proposed Urban Mixed Use (UMD) zone, to help shape an appropriate and compatible subarea. Similar suggestions are provided for those properties that would be eligible for Compatible Use Incentives, as described in the discussion on Zoning. Finally, recommendations for design within residential districts are provided to provide ideas and guidance on an advisory level within the residential zones in the neighborhood.

Design guidelines should also be developed in the future for the area that extend from the intersection of Tresser Boulevard and West Main Street along Stillwater Avenue as it climbs the hillside towards Boxer Square. The future character of this corridor will be influenced by many factors that extend beyond the confines of this Neighborhood Plan, because it lies at the intersection of multiple adjacent districts that remain under study – the Mill River edge, the downtown, and the upper Stillwater corridor.

Design Guidelines and the VC District

Development in Village Commercial Districts are governed by existing Site Design and Architectural Criteria. As part of this planning effort for the West Side Neighborhood, these guidelines have been reviewed as they relate to the West Main Street Corridor. Several suggestions have been made to clarify or strengthen the language of these existing guidelines, along with additional illustrations that may be helpful in all VC zones. These recommendations are found in both Part II and Part III of this report.

Additionally, several design principles that would specifically apply to the West Main Street Corridor have been prepared and provided in both Part II and in the proposed zoning provisions in Part III of this report. These supplemental design guidelines include criteria to define the relationship to parking and West Main Street or Richmond Hill frontage, landscape buffers, building massing, depth of development from the street and ground floor transparency and entrances. The intention of this set of guidelines is to ensure that the type of desirable mixed use redevelopment that would reinforce an active commercial corridor at West Main Street with strengthened street frontage that would minimize negative impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods and abutting residential parcels.

Site Standards for the UMD District

The design intent for the proposed new Urban Mixed Use District (UMD) is to create a low density commercial and industrial park character compatible with the context and fabric of the nearby residential and mixed use neighborhood. Balancing the commercial and residential edges of this district, particularly at Diaz Street, is a challenge. In terms of neighborhood fabric, the most disruptive aspects of the commercial and industrial uses are scale of the buildings, lack of landscaping, and parking. The design guidelines call for an articulation of building masses along public streets and adjacent to residential zones, so that there is variation and an architectural scale that is attractive and related to the nearby residential areas. The guidelines describe the potential to orient building fronts and entrances towards streets, if this is a practical choice consistent with the intended use. They also direct the placement of parking, service and loading areas and provide for screening,

buffers or sheltering.

Site Standards and Compatible Use Incentives

Design guidelines are suggested as a means to manage projects that are eligible for special zoning provisions intended to increase compatibility within certain areas of the neighborhood. The guidelines would be implemented as site plan review criteria, and are described in both Part II and Part III of this report. The guidelines seek to reduce potential impacts of parking areas, reinforce the pedestrian characteristics of the surrounding streets, and provide for an urban design character along the street frontages consistent with the desirable, existing characteristics.

Design Guidelines for Residential Areas

Infill development in the existing residential zones can strengthen the neighborhood's quality and value if it reinforces a varied character along the street, avoids shifting the apparent scale of development, and provides for landscaping, buffering and well-site parking solutions. Various ideas for accomplishing these goals are included in the expanded discussion and illustrations of design guidelines in Part II of this report, but are not proposed as part of any zoning change.

Selected Design Standards and Guidelines Diagrams

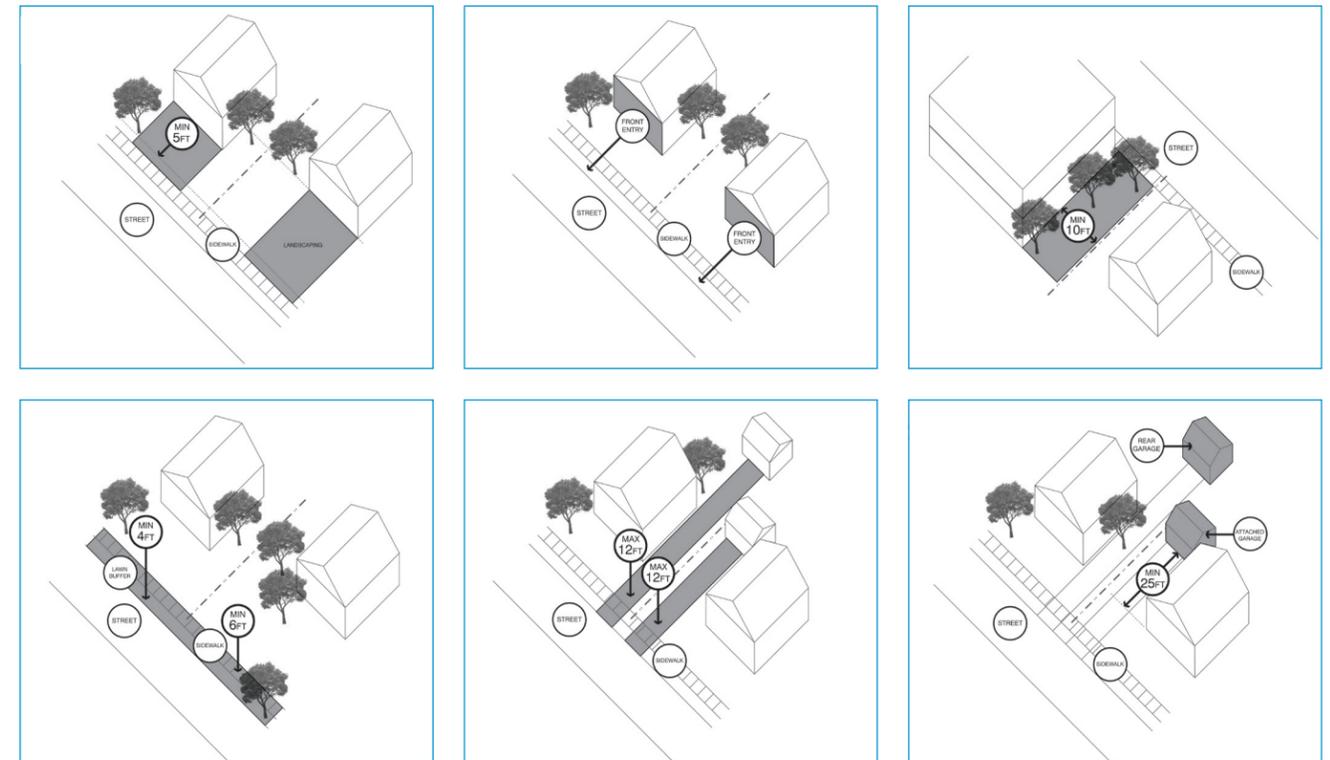


FIGURE 10 DESIGN GUIDELINE DISTRICTS

