

Chapter Nine: Urban Design

Concurrently with the development of this Comprehensive Plan, the City contracted with Torti Gallas and Partners, CHK Inc. to prepare a "Corridor Study". This study looked at commercial corridors and the downtown mall and provided recommendations for economic and urban design improvements. The following are the description of the various corridors taken from the report. These descriptions speak to the existing conditions in each of these corridors and in some cases the neighborhoods they border.

Downtown Mall

Employment and Entertainment District

Extent of Study Area

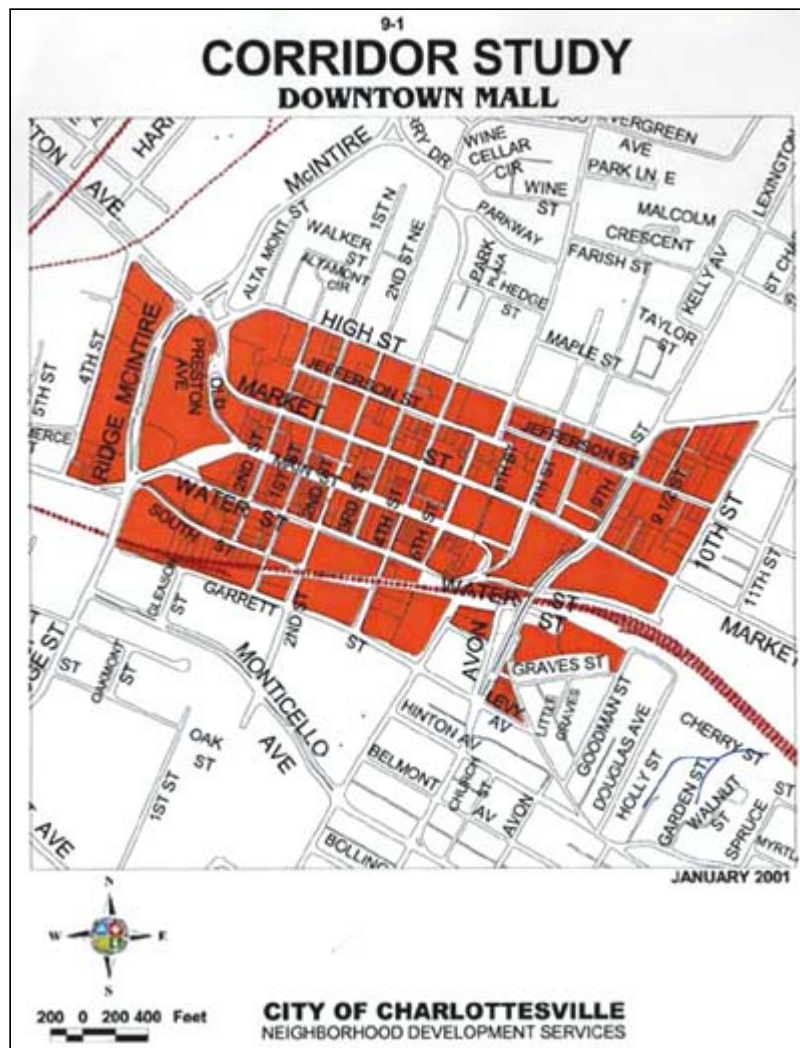
Centered on the Downtown Mall, the study area is bordered on the south by the CSX Rail lines, on the east by the Avon Street Bridge, on the north by Market Street and on the west by Southern Rail lines at the edge of the City Yard.

Background

As the historic center of Charlottesville, the Downtown Mall continues to serve as the economic, cultural and civic center of the city. Following a national 1970's trend, Charlottesville's "Main Street" was reconstructed with brick pavers and prepared exclusively for pedestrians. Since then, it has worked its way into the city's consciousness as a 6 block long piazza and has bucked a more recent national phenomenon of reopening such pedestrian streets to automobile traffic. It is one of the few remaining pedestrian streets in the nation and of fewer still, one that allows no crossing vehicular traffic (with the exception of a somewhat controversial reopening of 2nd street to crossing traffic).

The transformation from "Main Street" to piazza has not been easy. Fashion Square Mall opened around the same time as the closing of the street to vehicular traffic and had a devastating effect on retail trade downtown, which has taken years to overcome. While the opening of the Omni Hotel in the mid-1980's brought promise, it has not had the effect of energizing the space to any real extent. Its insular architectural design actually divorces it from the Mall instead of helping to define it. The closing of familiar businesses (victims of suburban competition) and the lack of any serious entertainment venues, save for a few restaurants, plagued the area for years. Add to this a perception that crime rates were higher in the city, as well as little or no centralized coordination or management (such as standardized closing times), and it was clear in the late 1980's that Mall was in trouble.

In the 1990's, the Downtown Mall has witnessed something of a turnaround. A new six-screen cinema, an ice rink and the opening of several new restaurants and coffee shops have begun to make the Downtown Mall an entertainment destination, particularly at its West End. In addition, the rediscovery of the second and third floors of Mall buildings as residences and as office space for start-up companies and professional services firms promises long-term benefits. This raises the base population on the Mall during the day and evening hours, which increases the actual safety. This reinforces its popularity and reduces the perceived threat of crime.



The Mall appears healthier than ever. Programming, or creating events to draw visitors, has helped the Mall considerably. The "Fridays After Five" event is enormously popular, bringing thousands to the Mall to kick-off the weekend, and the Saturday Farmer's Market on Water Street has also helped retailers by bringing customers downtown on a non-work day. Unfortunately, except for Fridays after Five, there are few programmed opportunities to draw visitors to the East End of the Mall. Currently, the anchors on the western end have greater attraction.

On top of this difficulty, the Mall is beginning to deteriorate, physically and visually. The trees have grown to block any views down the street, the bricks and mortar are cracked, and decades of café, restaurant and business transformations have left the mall cluttered with a collection of mismatched paraphernalia. Café furniture, service stations, utility provisions, unused kiosks, unmatched landscape elements, and broken or incomplete light fixtures are all responsible for the unkempt appearance of the mall.

Improvements on Water Street coincide with the renaissance on the Mall. Historically, Water Street has functioned as an alley, or backdoor to the mall, but recently has begun to develop its own scene. A number of restaurants have opened and other businesses are reusing former automobile service buildings. Opening Water Street to two-way traffic will help this trend, and the next opportunity for revitalization lies in the two city-owned surface parking lots. Designed properly and redeveloped, these could complete the street and encourage continued revitalization. It is important that these two blocks are developed carefully following the urban design plan and the guidelines set forth in this document.

Since the removal of the Vinegar Hill Neighborhood nearly thirty years ago, McIntire Road (between West Main Street and Preston Avenue) has been perceived as the western edge of Downtown Charlottesville. The design of McIntire Road has reinforced this idea. It is a wide vehicular thoroughfare prepared for through traffic and little

local use. The Federal Building, the Omni Hotel, and the One Valley Bank Building, designed and built isolated from the street, ostensibly create an inhospitable wall, and amplify the void. On the West Side of McIntire Road, a suburban style grocery store sits vacant within a large parking lot. This lot offers the only opportunity to cross from West Downtown (the West Main Street area) to the Downtown Mall. Historically, the neighborhoods of West Main, Starr Hill, Vinegar Hill and Downtown were seamlessly connected; the current pattern defies traditional neighborhood relationships.

West Main Street

Urban Main Street

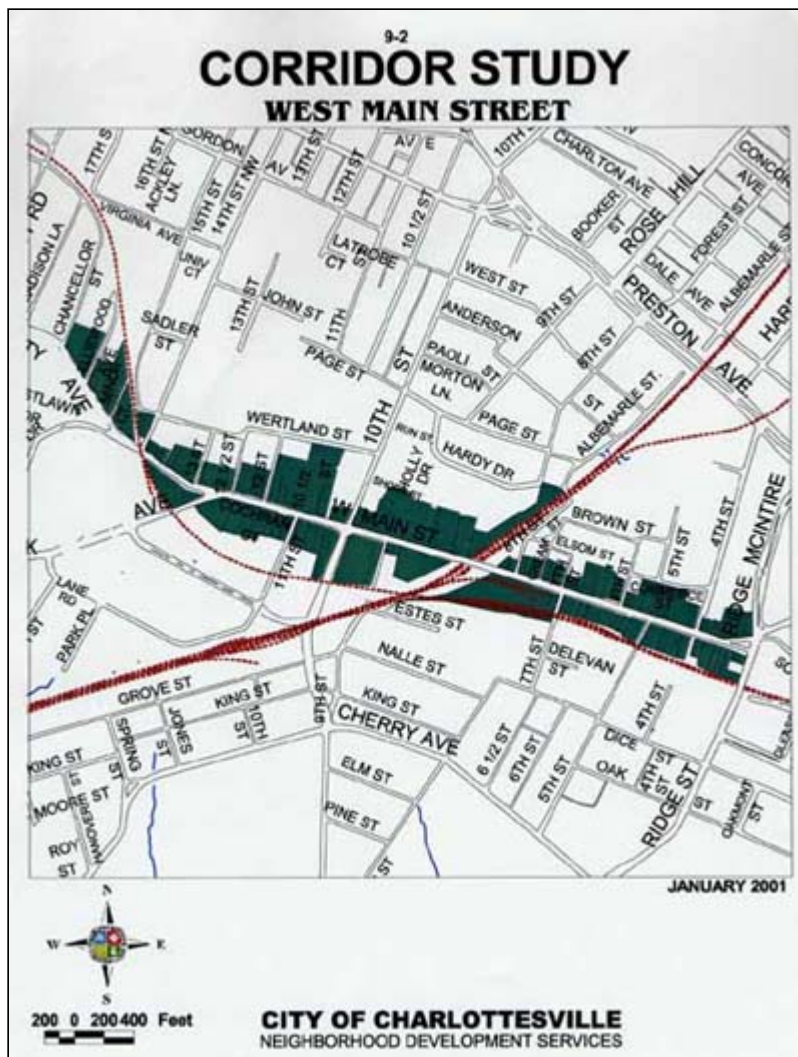
Extent of Study Area

The West Main Street study area extends from McIntire/Ridge Road on the eastern to Elliewood Avenue on the west. The Corridor Study also includes a recommendation for University Avenue west of Rugby Road.

Background

The West Main corridor is the most important link between downtown Charlottesville and The University of Virginia, between "Town and Gown". West Main Street links extraordinary physical, social and economic variety. The corridor ranges from a physically intact retail street to open parking lots and abandoned auto-oriented, service facilities. Though originally part of a continuous route into downtown Charlottesville, modern highway engineering and 1970's urban renewal has cut West Main Street off from what is now Downtown. There is near universal appreciation in the community for the recent pedestrian streetscape improvements and the reconstruction of the Drewary Brown Bridge. However, the corridor's long promised overall redevelopment has been beset by fits and starts, with only a modicum of benefits to show for decades of effort, the bridge not withstanding.

Yet, West Main Street is poised for change. Prospects for substantial redevelopment are real. The growth of the University's research activities at one end of the corridor, and the resurgence of Downtown at the other, spark this optimism, which is further fueled by the development of high-tech and bio-tech businesses within the region. Unlike the economic situation that existed in 1988 and 1993 when previous corridor plans were completed, the current market for office and research space as well as new housing is substantial.



Certain reversible obstacles to this economic resurgence remain. As in the downtown area, West Main Street is burdened with a parking deficiency. Congestion is created by visitors in search of parking and is compounded by a low clearance railroad bridge at 14th Street that often forces tall, eastbound trucks to make U-turns in the road. These two factors are negatively affecting the business conducted by many of the merchants in the area. In addition, there is a perception that a lack of parking will result in fewer customers.

Perceived economic and social disparities between the two ends of the corridor linger, resulting in very real physical differences. As University Avenue becomes West Main Street, it evolves into an inconsistent mix of storefront businesses and raggedy holdovers from earlier days, when auto dealers and tire merchants thrived here. Sidewalks are narrow, proper storefronts infrequent, and a perception exists that crime is a real concern. While this perception is unfounded, there is a noticeable difference between areas west of Drewary Brown Bridge and areas east. The area to the west has undergone a somewhat mild resurgence marked by the construction several new buildings (capped recently by the construction of a new hotel), yet the area east has received far fewer investments. This, however, may soon change if plans for a mixed-use development between 7th Street and Union Station are realized.

Other Studies

No other corridor in Charlottesville has been studied as well and as often as West Main Street. These studies were reviewed particular attention paid to the West Main Street Corridor Study (William Rawn Associates, 1993) and The Urban Design Plan (Carr Lynch, 1988). Other studies reviewed were: The Task Force Report – Visions of the Future for West Main Street (West Main Street Task Force, 1993); Master Plan of The University of Virginia (Office of the University Architect, 1999); "Charlottesville Urban Design" (Ken Schwartz, 1995). Also, an urban

design graduate student thesis was observed; "A Proposal for the Redevelopment of Preston Avenue and Vinegar Hill" (Gaither Pratt, University of Miami, 1999).

The Rawn study, which reflected the aspirations of the West Main Street Task Force, targeted specific infill efforts on vacant and underutilized sites from Jefferson Park Avenue to

McIntire/Ridge Street. Many of Rawn's recommendations, while not yet implemented, continue to be relevant and are included in the recommended alternative illustrated in this report. Some of these ideas include re-aligning the Jefferson Park Avenue (JPA) intersection, redeveloping the adjacent senior living building, and orienting mixed-use development to the street over structured parking at Union Station. Infill development on the surface parking lot adjacent to the old Sears building completes Rawn's overarching urban design strategy of continuous, street-oriented, mixed-used development along the corridor; this strategy is continued here.

The Carr Lynch effort included additional relevant recommendations, including a proposal for a traffic circle, or roundabout, at the intersection of West Main Street with Ridge Road. This provision would create a place, or a center space, where there is now a barrier.

Preston Avenue

Research Boulevard

Extent of Study Area

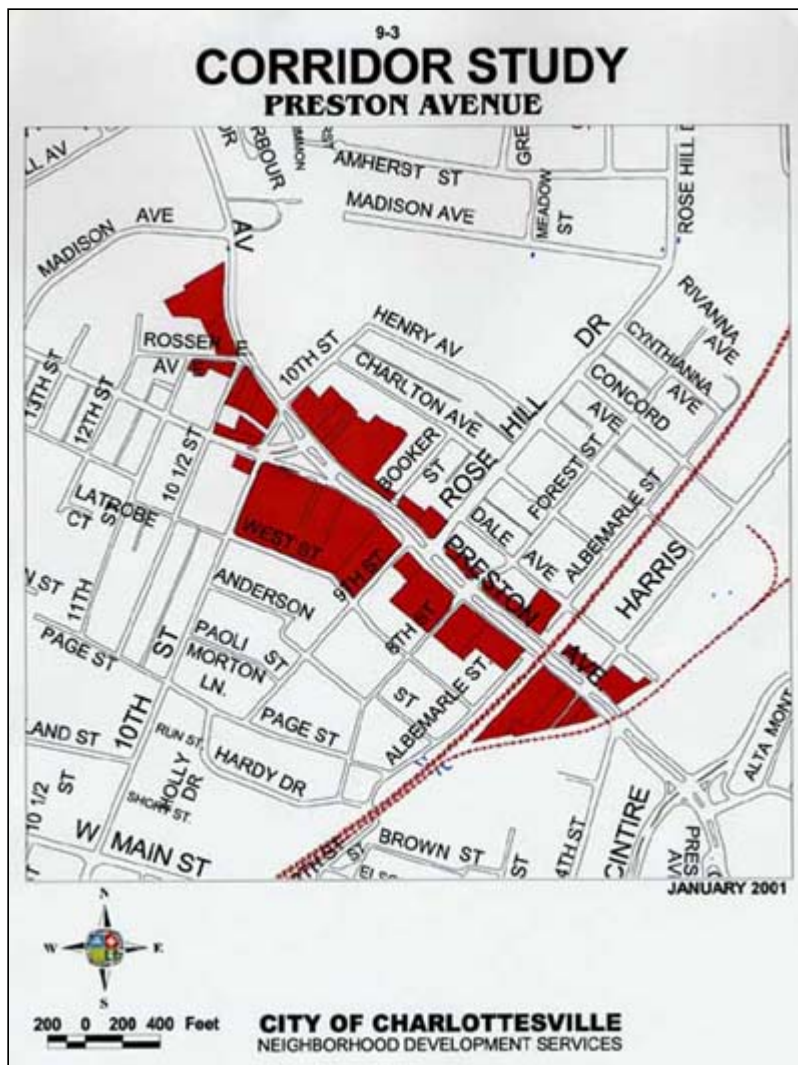
Preston Avenue is the extension of Barracks Road and Rugby Road heading into Downtown. The area of concentration lies between McIntire Road in the southwest and Madison Avenue in the northeast.

Background

Preston Avenue is a corridor engineered to quickly move vehicles between Downtown and Barracks Road Shopping Center or the University Arts Quad. Currently lined with a mixture of warehouse and light industrial facilities, small-scale suburban-style neighborhood retail and vacant former auto dealerships, the corridor presents an uneven image for travelers to Downtown. This disparity persists despite attempts at landscaping the road's excessively wide median and the presence of sidewalks throughout the corridor

From an urban design perspective, improvements to this corridor will require overcoming a number of challenges. Many lots on the north side of the roadway have unnaturally steep slopes resulting from the widening and regrading of Preston Avenue. At least one street was cut-off from the roadway completely, reducing vehicular movement options in the neighborhood. The roadway's abrupt transition at Tenth Street, where it splits into Grady Avenue and Barracks Road (the result of an aborted project to extend it westward), has been configured into a series of turning lanes. All of this reengineering has resulted in awkward and inhospitable leftover spaces. The most blatant of these is the triangular space left in the road's center – impossible to enjoy.

Yet the corridor also has a number of assets. Most notably, on the south side it is comprised of large buildings and even larger parcels of land. These represent tremendous opportunities for reuse and redevelopment, and may be particularly valuable to organizations seeking less expensive, "funky" space. Such space is often a requirement of high-tech and research-oriented corporations. The large right-of-way around Preston Avenue, partially consumed by an unusually wide center median, another asset which could be reconfigured to allow greater pedestrian access along its edges.



Other Studies

The Roundabout Study focused attention on the complex intersection of Preston Avenue with McIntire Road, its continuation into Market Street, and its intersection with High Street. The study examined the possibility of a double circle at this location (resembling two fried eggs). This concept was, however, ultimately rejected.

There are no other official studies of the Preston Avenue Corridor. However, a well-circulated urban design graduate thesis, "A Proposal for the Redevelopment of Preston Avenue and Vinegar Hill" (Gaither Pratt, University of Miami, 1999), did focus attention on Preston Avenue. It aimed at re-urbanizing the corridor with new buildings oriented to the street, establishing new street connections, providing a Farmer's Market in the 'triangle' (now occupied by turning lanes), and establishing a single traffic circle at the intersection of Preston and McIntire.



Fontaine Avenue

Neighborhood Village Center

Extent of Study Area

Beginning at the city-county line on the west end of Fontaine, the area of study extends eastward to the intersection of Jefferson Park Avenue (JPA) and Maury Avenue.

Background

Fontaine Avenue is known locally and historically as the Fry's Spring area of Charlottesville. This name comes from a warm spring, a focus of this community, located south of the area in this study. The name "Fry's Spring" survives only in the name of the old column-canopied filling station, still serving the community, now as a service garage. A shiny new Exxon has taken root across the street. Fontaine continues west as an extension the road named Jefferson Park Avenue (JPA), while JPA turns south toward Fry's Spring. Relics, like the old gas station, of an early crossroads retail area remain where road edges meet asphalt parking areas with no distinction; they tend to flow in and out of one another without beginning and end. The result of this massive paved area is an environment unfriendly to pedestrians and passers by alike. With a good amount of fairly outdated neighborhood service buildings and convenience and liquor stores, this area has an 'unclaimed' feel, in sharp contrast to the well-kept surrounding residential neighborhoods.

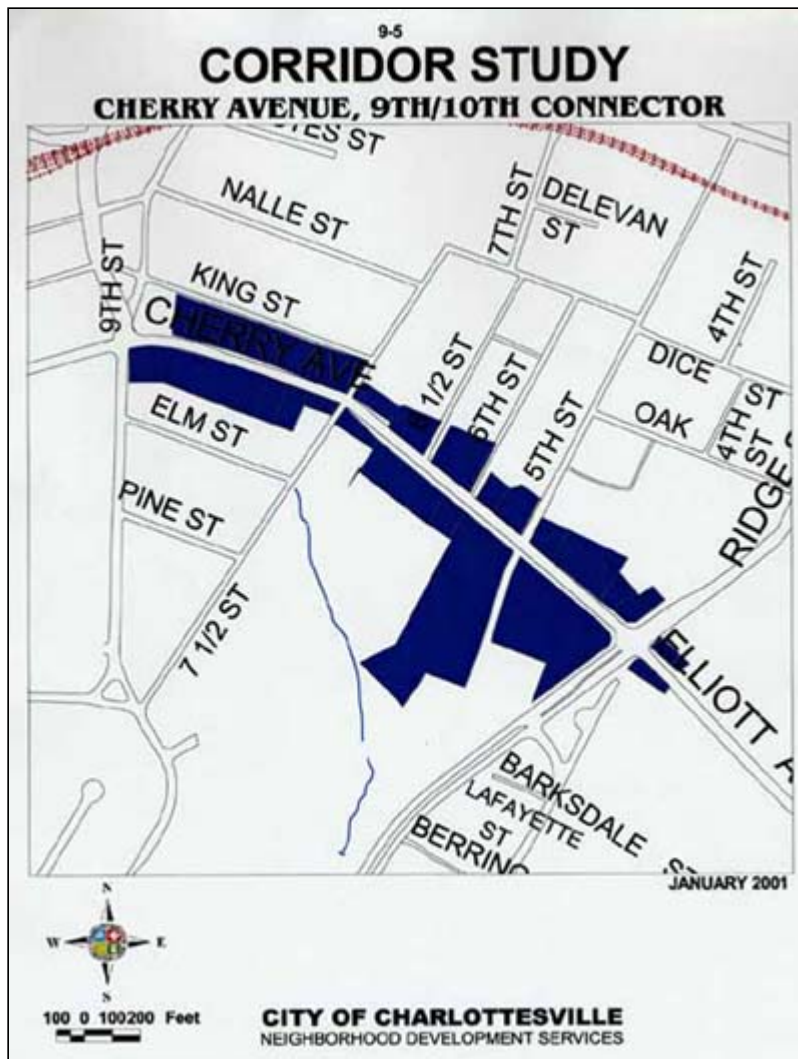
North of the JPA and Fontaine intersection there is a concentration of high-density, University-built student housing. This 'sponsored' growth, as well as the influx of students moving off-campus, has created some understandable tension within residential neighborhoods surrounding the University.

Fontaine Avenue itself is lined with single family homes on the north side and a hodge-podge of reused homes and boarded up restaurants on the south side. The road surface is deteriorating and there are no curbs or sidewalks along its length. VDOT has plans to rebuild Fontaine Avenue and the bridge crossing the railroad tracks on JPA. These road improvements will change the road alignments slightly, but will enhance its image considerably. The city and its residents fought hard to include street tree plantings and new sidewalks into this plan.

Cherry Avenue, 9th/10th Connector, Fifeville "Main Street"

Extent of Study Area

The area studied for Cherry Avenue is its length beginning from the 9th/10th connector in the west, and ending at Ridge Street in the east. Cherry Avenue is the northern edge of the Fifeville neighborhood.



Background

Cherry Avenue is the heart of the Fifeville neighborhood, so named for Rev. James Fife who owned the Oak Lawn estate from which most of the neighborhood was carved. Mr. Fife's descendent, Mr. Francis Fife, still lives in the manor house on the property at the corner of Cherry Avenue and 9th Street. Cherry Avenue has been re-born with the completion of the new 9th/10th connector, built to connect Fifeville with West Main Street. This new street provides much needed access to the University Hospital from the residential areas to its south and west. Cherry Avenue meets Ridge Street at Tonsler Park, a 7.4 acre city park that has been recently and beautifully renovated, and 10th Street at the intersection with the new 9th/10th connector. Cherry Avenue is dominated by neighborhood retail uses surrounded by single family homes. There is considerable topography rising on the south

side of the road and a large amount of vacant land available along those steep roads. Habitat for Humanity is currently building some new houses above Cherry Avenue across from Buford Middle School.

McIntire Road/Ridge Street/5th Street

Gateway to Downtown/Residential Boulevard

Extent of Study Area

McIntire Road/Ridge Street/Fifth Street is a major vehicular entrance and throughway to the city from I-64, continuing through the city and on to connect with the 250 by-pass to the north. This continuous road serves as the primary access to the City from the development areas of Albemarle County in the south and into downtown from Route 29 to the north. The road is comprised of four continuous, yet unique sections from south to north, respectively: Fifth Street, Ridge Road, McIntire Road (between West Main Street and Preston Avenue) and McIntire Road from Preston Avenue to the 250 by-pass. This section will start in the north, with McIntire Road from the 250 by-pass, and move south. The area of McIntire Road between Preston Avenue and West Main Street will be discussed in the sections on the Downtown Mall, Preston Avenue and West Main Street.

Background

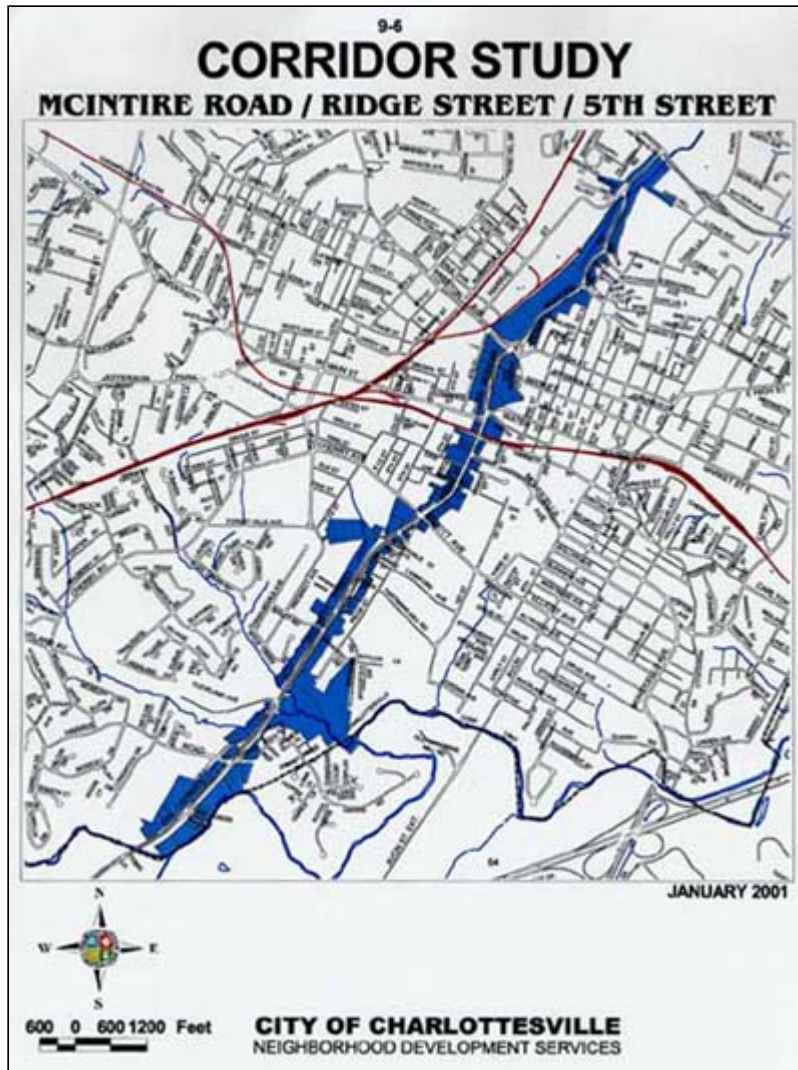
McIntire Road is a primary entrance to Downtown from the 250 by-pass, a status that will likely be reinforced by the construction of Meadowcreek Parkway. In its current state, it has two distinct characteristics. North of Preston Avenue, McIntire Road is a meandering two-lane road with parallel parking on each side. It flanks a park highlighted by Lane Field along much of its western edge. The eastern edge is lined with blocks of single family homes atop an escarpment. Its northern end is composed of a parking lot, a skateboard park, and a rescue squad facility that has poor access at both McIntire Road and the 250 by-pass. Large surface parking lots, located at the southern end of this stretch (Preston Avenue), dominate the land adjacent to the Albemarle County Office Building.

Fifth Street is a fairly new street connecting to existing Ridge Street at Cherry Avenue. This new street travels relatively parallel to the old Ridge Road, connecting downtown to I-64, but is engineered wider and through the existing topography, where old Ridge Road could not be changed. This new Fifth Street was engineered for faster moving traffic and larger, heavier vehicles. At West Main Street, Fifth/Ridge Street becomes McIntire Road and is one of the few corridors that continues through the city center and connects to the 250 by-pass. This juncture of McIntire Road and the 250 by-pass would be the terminus of the proposed Meadowcreek Parkway. This latter point should be emphasized: the construction of the Meadowcreek Parkway could considerably change the nature of this road. Facilitating the additional traffic from this proposed parkway could have a profound effect on the character of this cross-town road. In essence the only north/south thru-road in all of Charlottesville, this road could turn into a cross-town highway similar to the 250 by-pass or Preston Avenue. Additional traffic burdens will also be felt along Fifth Street if a regional shopping center is ultimately built on land in Albemarle County just outside the city limits. While County officials previously rejected a proposal for such a center, it is likely that a redesign will be offered in the future.

While the development pressures cited above suggest significant difficulties ahead for the City's planners and residents, existing conditions offer more challenges. Comprised of four traffic lanes and a wide median, Fifth Street's terrain has been leveled or regraded to modern highway standards. Development possibilities along Fifth Street are challenging in some areas and impossible in others. Though lined with street trees, it is not particularly hospitable to pedestrians; the traffic moves too fast and there are no buildings or services of visual interest along its edge. At its southern end, Fifth Street is dominated by "highway commercial" style development, intended to capture traffic off I-64, as well as from Fifth Street itself. This development, which provides a much needed supermarket in the southern half of the city, is visually and spatially impoverished, dominated by blank sides of commercial structures. Overly large signage competes for attention with the vast amounts of parking.

If these challenges are daunting, the northern end of Fifth Street, where it becomes Ridge Street, is something else altogether. A local historically sited, residential ridgetop thoroughfare, Ridge Street passes Tonsler Park and

concludes in a gateway to Downtown. This gateway at the top of Vinegar Hill joins West Main, Water and South Streets, becoming essentially the downtown transition zone.



Other Studies

The area of McIntire Road between Preston Avenue and the 250 by-pass was included in a recent study for Meadowcreek Parkway (Reilly Assoc., 2000). This study suggests a pedestrian tunnel under the 250 by-pass, as well as the creation of bike lanes on McIntire Road.

Fifth Street was a subject in the Charlottesville Urban Design Plan (Carr Lynch, 1988). This study effectively divided the corridor into four zones characterized as: the interstate commercial zone from Moore's Creek to Harris Street; the boulevard residential zone from Harris Street to Cherry Avenue, the Ridge Street Neighborhood zone, bordered by Cherry and Monticello Avenues and the Downtown entry zone.

Fifth Street, in the Entrance Corridor Study (1995), is identified as providing major downtown access. The character of its uses is defined as "urban residential" along Ridge Street, and includes "suburban residential," "suburban commercial" and "undeveloped areas." This study has a series of recommendations for setbacks, parking and landscape elements relevant to their description of Fifth Street.

Monticello Avenue

Tourist Gateway

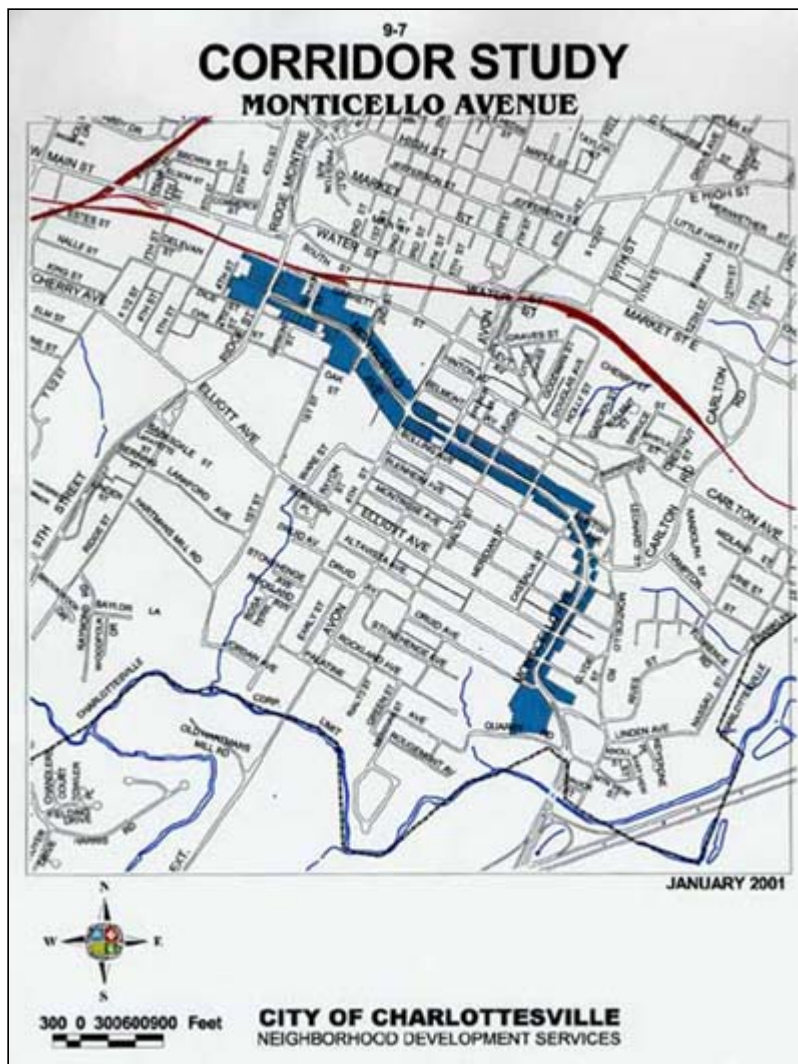
Extent of Study Area

Extending from I-64 and Moore's Creek to Avon Street, Monticello Avenue can be understood as having two distinct characters: 'Entrance Corridor - Moore's Creek to Avon Street,' and the edge of the potential new 'South Downtown.'

Background

To the hundreds of thousands of visitors each year at Monticello, this corridor serves as the primary route into Downtown Charlottesville as well as the historic Belmont neighborhood. At the same time, this portion of Monticello Avenue is a neighborhood street, lined with single family houses, churches and a public elementary school. Monticello Avenue as a gateway to the city and as a neighborhood must both be considered as this corridor evolves.

As the historic Downtown core is nearing built capacity, the area south of the CSX railroad tracks and north of Monticello Avenue provides the opportunity for downtown's future expansion. As a four-lane "improved" street, this portion of Monticello Avenue defines the edge to "South Downtown," and provides easy access to the numerous businesses located here, and those targeting this area. A number of existing industrial users will likely remain for many years, however, a number of sites (including the Ix building) are currently underutilized. Other sites could be available for redevelopment within a few years. Garrett Square, a low-density affordable housing development with eighteen years remaining on a Section-8 contract is included in this assessment. If redevelopment were to occur at Garrett Square, a plan to relocate current residents on-site would be required.



Other Studies

Two studies have focused significant attention on this route: The Urban Design Plan (Carr Lynch, 1988) and the Belmont Neighborhood Study (LDR International, 1995). Both indicate the need to provide continuity along the corridor by utilizing continuous street tree planting, and streetscape amenities (low walls, fences and hedges). They also recognize the 'gateway opportunity' that exists where Monticello Avenue crosses into the city at Moore's Creek. Adjacent to this 'gateway,' the Belmont Study suggests placing a hotel and restaurant to respond to the likely volume of tourist traffic, on the Charlottesville Oil Company parcel. This parcel is visible from I-64, although recessed from the Moore's Creek floodplain, and highlights the opportunity to connect a portion of the Moore's Creek Greenway to the larger citywide greenway system and the proposed hiking trail to Monticello Avenue. This portion of Monticello Avenue was also identified on the City's 1994 Bicycle Plan as first and second priorities for a bicycle route.

Monticello Avenue was addressed in the Entrance Corridor Study (1995), where it is identified as providing major access to Downtown Charlottesville, and serving state traffic. Its character is defined as "urban residential."

Avon Street

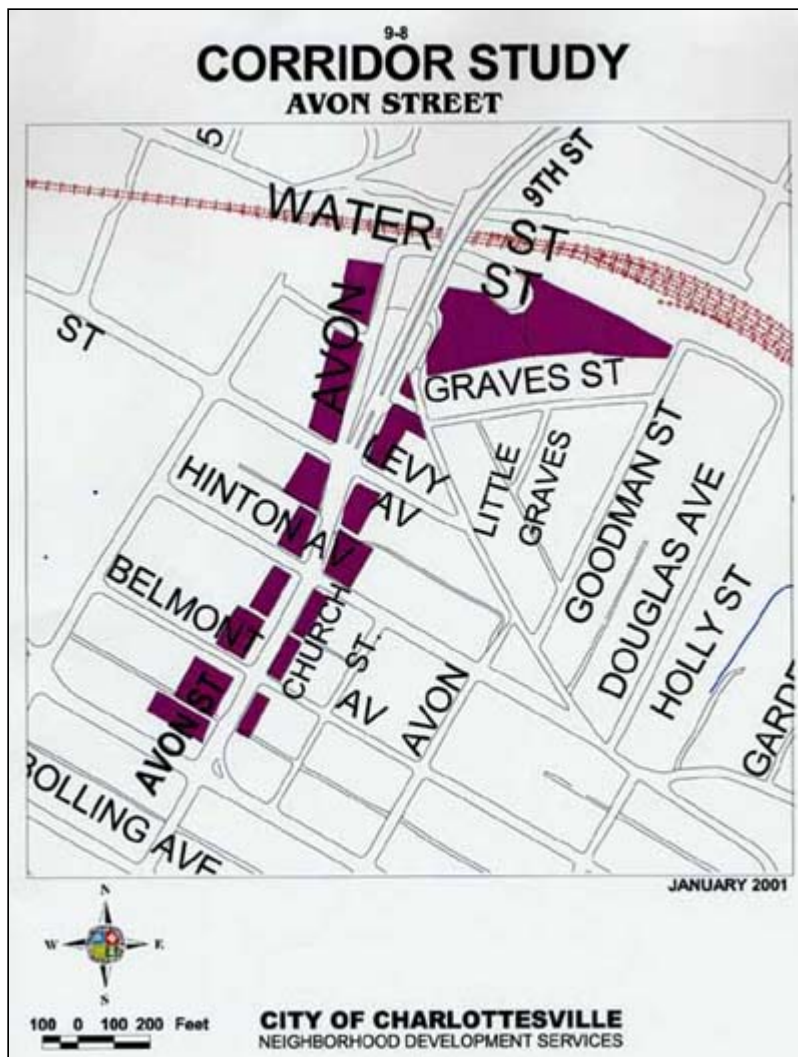
Downtown Gateway

Extent of Study Area

This study covers the length of Avon from Monticello Avenue to High Street, at Martha Jefferson Hospital (also discussed within the "High Street" and "Downtown" sections).

Background

Extending north from Monticello Avenue, across the CSX rail lines to Downtown Charlottesville and on to High Street, Avon Street serves as a primary tourism entrance into the City. Not only a gateway, Avon Street is an important link to between the historic Belmont neighborhood and downtown. Currently, this portion of Avon Street acts both as a neighborhood, street lined with single family houses, and as a commercial corridor with several convenience retailers and service businesses. Because of its proximity to Downtown, several new high-tech businesses have also moved into the corridor. Recognizing Avon Street's potential, the city has invested in some streetscape and traffic calming improvements, including crosswalks and sidewalks at the Levy Avenue intersection. These improvements have given greater visibility and prominence to this section of Avon Street, before the bridge. The Avon Street bridge provides vehicular and pedestrian crossing over the rail lines on the east end of downtown. There is a pedestrian connection under this bridge, as well, linking the downtown amphitheater to the businesses and walkways to the east.



Other Studies

Both the Urban Design Plan (Carr Lynch, 1988) and the Belmont Neighborhood Study (LDR International, 1995) focused some attention on Avon Street. Those studies suggested streetscape improvements for Avon Street. The Belmont Neighborhood Study recommends relocating the Farmer's Market to a space under Avon Street Bridge, (an idea that has been examined and rejected).

In the Entrance Corridor Study (1995), Avon Street was identified as 'secondary' access to Downtown Charlottesville, as well as a carrier of local traffic. The character of its current state is defined as "urban residential and neighborhood commercial." This study has a series of recommendations for building setbacks, parking and landscape elements that are relevant to Avon Street.

Belmont Business District

Historic Village

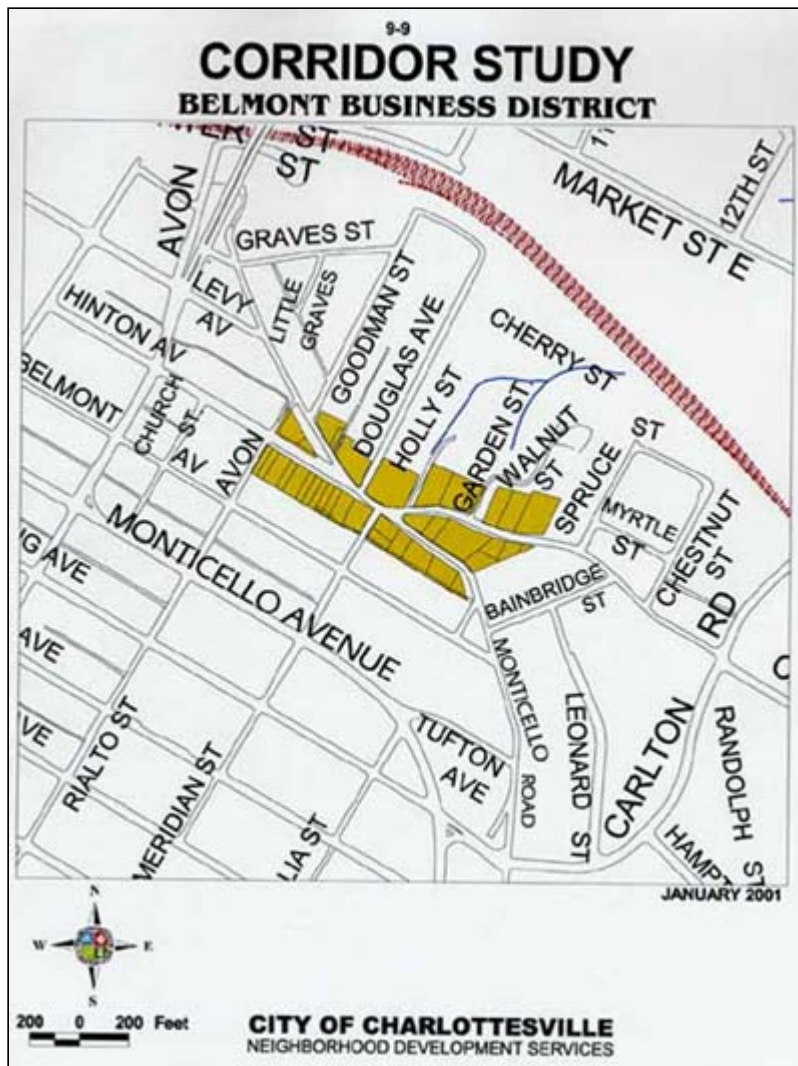
Extent of Study Area

The Belmont Business District was studied within and along the extended intersection(s) of Monticello Road, Hinton Avenue, Carlton Avenue, Douglas Avenue and Holly Street.

Background

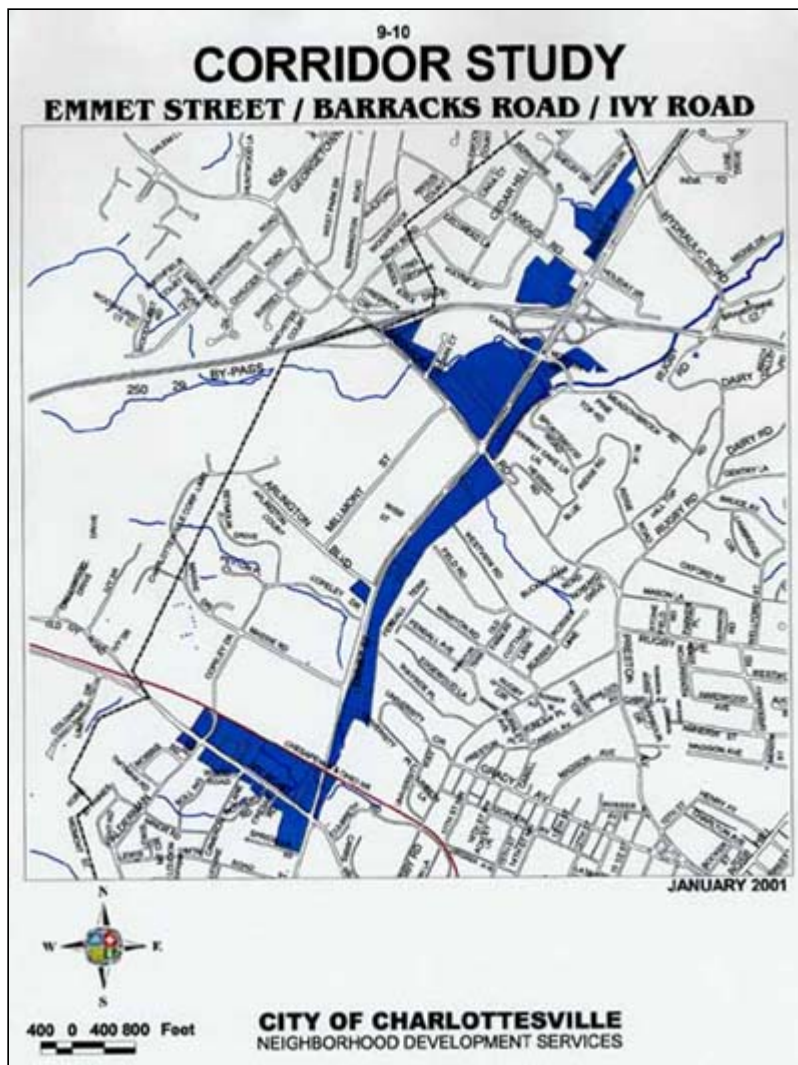
Nestled just off of Monticello Avenue and Avon Street, high on the eastern bluff of Charlottesville, the Belmont Business District is a thriving center of both local commerce and state industry. The district is home to a large

local HVAC company and the State's Industry for the Blind. Businesses in the district range in performance levels, but all are respected and are identified as necessary pieces to keep the neighborhood strong.



Other Studies

The Belmont Business District was studied in the Charlottesville Urban Design Plan (Carr Lynch, 1988), and the Belmont Neighborhood Study (LDR International, 1995). The Belmont Neighborhood Study addressed issues raised throughout the entire Belmont Neighborhood (a much larger area than the business district studied here), and had many good ideas for the area as a whole. The LDR study suggests reinforcing "Downtown Belmont" as the primary commercial and retail focus of the neighborhood, by using vacant and under utilized properties, providing additional on and off-street parking, building traffic calming measures into existing streets, providing opportunities for housing, and initiating streetscape and pedestrian enhancements. The study also suggests turning Monticello Road into a one way street to allow for parallel parking on both sides of the street.



Emmet Street/Barracks Road/Ivy Road

Retail Boulevard

Extent of Study Area

The study includes Emmet Street from University Avenue/Ivy Road at the South, to the Charlottesville City Limit at Hydraulic Road, where Emmet Street becomes Seminole Trail. Here, the road takes on a somewhat different character. The Seminole Square Shopping Center on the east, within the City Limits, is also included in the study.

Ivy Road and Barracks Road are also included between Emmet Street and the City's western border with Albemarle County.

Background

Parallel to the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Emmet Street traces the original alignment of US-29 through the City of Charlottesville. As a two lane north-south highway connecting the cities of the Virginia Piedmont, US-29 has always carried significant long-distance car and truck traffic. Recently expanded, the route now has the character of a suburban arterial highway providing opportunities for strip-style shopping centers and smaller pad-site retail. A series of suburban style office buildings, occupied in part by the University of Virginia, complete the ensemble, as well as small, dated motels, dormitories and the eastern edge of the University's North Campus. Construction of the US-29/250 by-pass did reduce the amount of through traffic in the area.

The Emmet Street corridor is characterized by aging suburban-style development south of the by-pass, yet it is also home to the most successful retail center in the region: Barracks Road Shopping Center. The owners of this

retail center, Federal Realty of Bethesda, Maryland, have clearly demonstrated interest in maintaining the dominance of their asset despite ever-increasing competition from outlying retail areas. Their latest renovation at Barracks Road has attracted some of the most sought-after national retailers in the country. This feat is most impressive given that the structure is an open air, 1960's style shopping center, a relative dinosaur in specialty retailing.

North of the 250 by-pass, the K-Mart shopping center has a vacant movie theater, and the future of Kroger's on Hydraulic Road is uncertain, given its proximity to a newer Kroger's at Barracks Road. Built in the 1980's, Seminole Square Mall is relatively new to the corridor, but has demonstrated a strong market position. Presently, the mall backs up to a park on the south side, weakening its appeal and damaging possibilities for access. The urban design plan suggests that developing the land behind this Mall would improve integration with nearby sites and transform the area into a richer mix of uses.

Ivy Road is the principal entrance corridor to the city from the west and is the link between the University's research facilities near Birdwood, and the community of Crozet in Albemarle County. Within the City, Ivy Road is mainly occupied by small retail businesses with parking lots disconnected from one another. The lack of inter-parcel connectivity results in a large number of curb cuts, which frustrates traffic flow in this area. Ivy Road is an important shopping area for the Lewis Mountain neighborhood as well as adjacent communities in the county.

Other Studies

The Consultant Team reviewed the Master Plan of the University of Virginia (a major landowner along the corridor and a significant shaper of its future). The University's plan to build a new sports arena on Massie Road and to develop student housing on the northwest corner of Emmet Street at Ivy Road is of particular interest. The pedestrian and bicycle trail through the campus has been noted, including a new bridge over Emmet Street, between the existing CSX railroad bridge and Massie Road. The University's probable sale of Caruther's Hall is also factored into the recommended alternative discussed below.

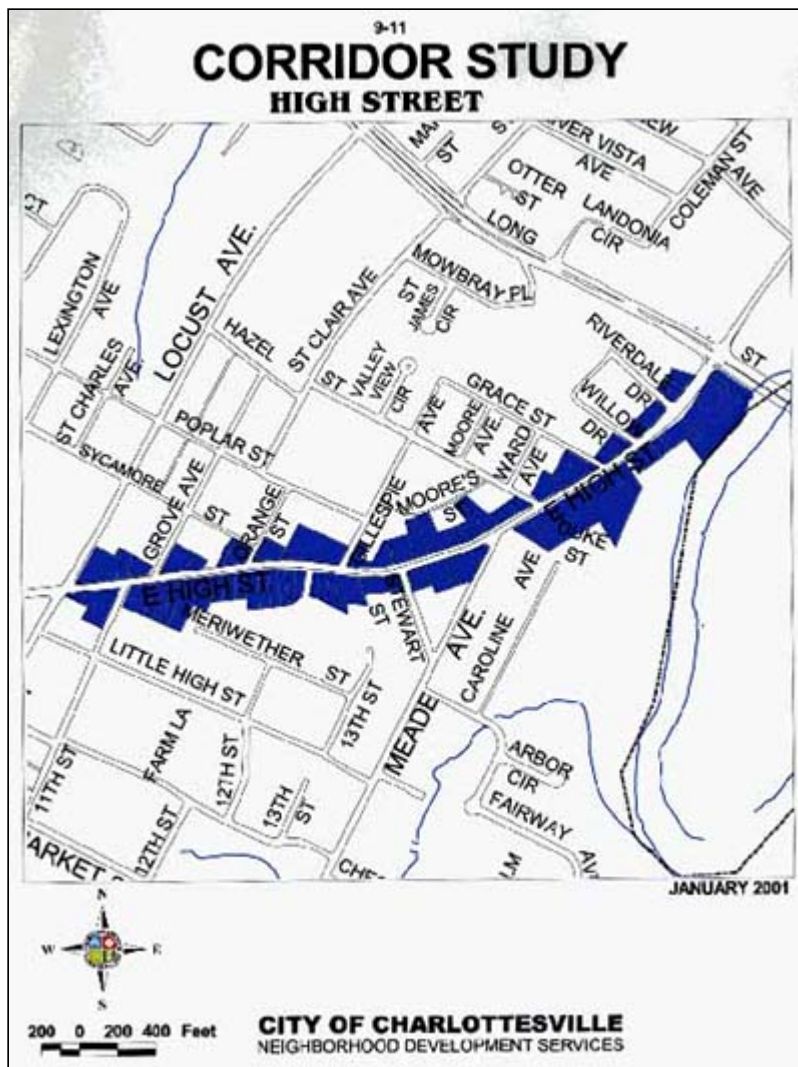
The Ivy Design Road Study (Lardner Klein, 1994) was also reviewed. The study recommended widening Ivy Road into four lanes.

High Street

Medical Office Cluster/Rivanna Place

Extent of Study Area

The area studied for High Street begins south of High Street at the intersection of 10th Street and Water Street. It includes the portion of 10th Street between its intersection of Water Street and High Street. Continuing east from the intersection of High Street and 10th Street, the area studied terminates at the intersection of High Street with Long Street and River Road.



Background

To the thousands of visitors that approach Charlottesville each week from the east, High and Long Streets represent the continuation of a route that includes both a spectacular vista — the view of the City from the summit of Pantops Mountain – and a natural threshold of great beauty, the Rivanna River. Unfortunately, neither the route into town along East High Street, nor the current status of the Rivanna River bank live up to the potential that such an entry portends. Lower East High Street is a confused, ill-defined and scrappy commercial strip at present, while the riverbank is virtually cut-off from public access with little or no amenity value. Frequent curb cuts, traffic bottlenecks, and discontinuous sidewalks are just a few of the details that need to be addressed on this part of High Street. Also of concern is the lack of any real connection between the buildings and vacant areas along High Street to the river bed. (Long Street is reviewed in the River/Long Street section). As East High Street becomes Ninth Street (closer to downtown) the character changes considerably. Martha Jefferson Hospital is the major institution anchoring this end of the corridor, and has prompted redevelopment of many sites and existing residences into medical offices. Further expansion of such uses is likely in this part of the corridor. Tree planting and consistent sidewalks in this area have started to create a more pedestrian oriented environment.

Other Studies

The Urban Design Plan (Carr Lynch, 1988) and Entrance Corridor Study (1995), focused significant attention on this route. High Street is identified as an entry providing interstate traffic and major downtown access. It is described as serving the emerging city/county growth and regional traffic, while its character is defined as "neighborhood commercial" and "urban residential."

The Carr Lynch Urban Design Plan identifies four distinct sub areas of the corridor: the Ninth Street Entrance Corridor extending from Market to Lexington Avenue, the Medical Center Corridor from Lexington Avenue to Locust Avenue, the Neighborhood Transition Corridor from Locust Avenue to Gillespie Avenue and the East High Street Commercial Corridor. The recommendations for the first three corridor areas include strengthening the street edge with formally planted trees (where necessary), discouraging parking in front yards, burying utilities, continuing sidewalks and encouraging, small, low signs for identification. These recommendations also included building stone retaining walls or landscaped slopes on the north side of the road and providing a small park at the Meade Avenue intersection.

Additional studies or references, reviewed included the Rivanna River Basin Project (Rivanna River Basin Roundtable, 1998) and the Charlottesville Greenbelt Plan, which depicts a park along the Rivanna River.

River Road/Long Street

Eastern Gateway/Urban Industrial Park

Extent of Study Area

The study area on River Road extends northwest from the intersection of Long Street, East High Street and Free Bridge to the intersection with River Court.



Background

River Road parallels the Rivanna River on the east side of Charlottesville, and this area is one of the heavy industrial areas in the city. The businesses along River Road are mostly owner occupied businesses requiring open

garage space, loading docks, large item storage and some public receiving space. Much of the area is paved, but not developed. These paved areas facilitate storage of heavy equipment (cranes, dump trucks, etc.), asphalt and concrete manufacturing materials, while providing flame retardant areas needed for large item welding. Contractors and distributors needing space for large equipment and supplies make up the majority of the users located here. Many of these businesses are well kept and have appropriately screened their property, although others have not. Currently, there is an unoccupied grocery store and large parking lot on the west side of River Road that would be an ideal location for a switching station, if not other redevelopment.

The west side of River Road is slightly higher than the road level, sitting barely above the current flood plain. This side of the road is built out fairly densely and has seen some new construction in recent years. Most of the new buildings provide "flex space" which creates areas for storage, loading docks, and some amount of retail or office space. Generally, these buildings are architecturally non-descript and inexpensive to build.

The east side of River Road overlooks the Rivanna River, which is currently hidden behind chain link fences, large construction equipment, and dense trees to the east. The properties on the east are roughly 600' deep and are characterized by a sharp drop-off down to the river 300' from River Road. This decline is steeper to the north but becomes a gentler slope toward the Long Street intersection. Much of the area beyond, or below the bluff is characterized by years of disinterest and neglect. Overgrown scrub trees and weeds make it nearly impossible to view the Rivanna River in the distance. Most, if not all, of these properties are located within the floodway. It is quite possible that many of these businesses would require some form of brownfield clean-up before redevelopment of this area could begin.

The local VFW is also located along River Road, with its clubhouse on the northern end of River Road. This clubhouse and parking lot are on the top of the bluff, and a softball field, available for recreation league games, is located adjacent to the river below. A connection to the regional trail system going north along the river is accessible through one corner of the VFW parking lot in one corner.

There are plans to extend this regional trail along the river to connect it into the Charlottesville greenway trail, which currently runs along the Rivanna River and ends just south of the Free Bridge. At the moment, there are some funds available to complete this trail, which raises mixed responses concerning its current incomplete state.

Harris Street

Urban Research Park/Home Improvement Central

Extent of Study Area

The length of Harris Street was studied from McIntire Road, to the north, to Preston Avenue, on the south.

Background

Lined by industrial uses, Harris Street enjoys a strategic location near Downtown Charlottesville, as well as an infrastructure providing excellent truck access. Though isolated by the railroad tracks and challenging topography, the corridor has managed to attract Allied Concrete, the City's largest taxpayer. An active industrial base featuring a steel fabricator, several materials suppliers, and numerous startup high-tech companies forces Harris Street to play a crucial role in supporting the City's economic vitality. Several designers, architects, printers, and other service businesses have recently located in newly built and renovated structures at the southern end of the corridor (near Preston Avenue and Downtown).

These businesses add diversity to this micro-economy and contribute to its overall economic health. However, challenges for its future development remain. Harris Street displays what could be referred to as a "messy vitality." The absence of mid-corridor connections between Harris Street and McIntire Road and limited connectivity to the west isolate the corridor. As businesses (particularly high-tech and bio-tech industries) look to Harris Street to attract top employees and benefit from its proximity to downtown, isolation could detract from the area's appeal; it could seem farther away than it is.

