



# SUNSET AVENUE CORRIDOR STUDY

A Complete Streets approach to redesigning this key entry point into the City of Rocky Mount, North Carolina



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# Acknowledgments

This Project was made possible by the hard work and dedication of many citizens, business people, officials, and others that gave generously of their time and talents, including the following people:

## City of Rocky Mount

Bob League  
Jordan Reedy  
Steve Yetman  
JoSeth Bocock  
Cynthia Jones  
Candice Kirtz  
Erin Hicks  
Todd Gardner  
Chris Beschler  
W.B. Bullock  
Lige Daughtridge

## Nash County

Michelle Griffin  
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## North Carolina Department of Transportation

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Leah Henry  
David Combs  
Peter Gilliard  
Matt Sperati  
Janie Pittman

# Thank you.

# Executive Summary

## Change is coming to Sunset Avenue.

With the construction of a new interchange at I-95 and Sunset Avenue, this crucial corridor in Rocky Mount is set to become a gateway to Downtown Rocky Mount and, for many visitors, the first introduction to this historic community in Eastern North Carolina. But Sunset Avenue in its current design, fails to serve all members of its community, lacking suitable transit amenities and bicycle facilities. Seeking to transform Sunset Avenue into a Complete Street and a true community gateway, City staff, along with Stantec, began the planning process culminating in the re-envisioned roadway set out in this Plan.

This project evaluates potential retrofit design opportunities to improve pedestrian and bicycle accommodations to multiple users and destinations along the corridor, including such important destinations as the Westridge Plaza and neighborhoods adjacent to Sunset Avenue. In addition to its transportation role, the Plan incorporates placemaking aspects that improve quality of life, protects public value and investment, and increases the economic viability of land and improvements in the corridor.

## PRINCIPLE-DRIVEN

Every street serves a combination of functions, all of which are intimately tied to the travel way, pedestrian, and building realms. For decades Sunset Avenue has been designed to move cars and trucks faster into our community. Once a two-lane road, this busy arterial served vehicle mobility with limited opportunities for those travelers on two feet, two wheels or traveling by bus. As its function has changed, so too should the design. Through extensive engagement, a set of core values was developed to direct the design team along the planning and design process.

**# 1 Redesign to Accommodate a More Complete Street.**

**# 2 The Safety of All Users is Paramount.**

**# 3 Built-In Traffic Calming is a Must.**

**# 4 Support Redevelopment through Quality Urban Design.**

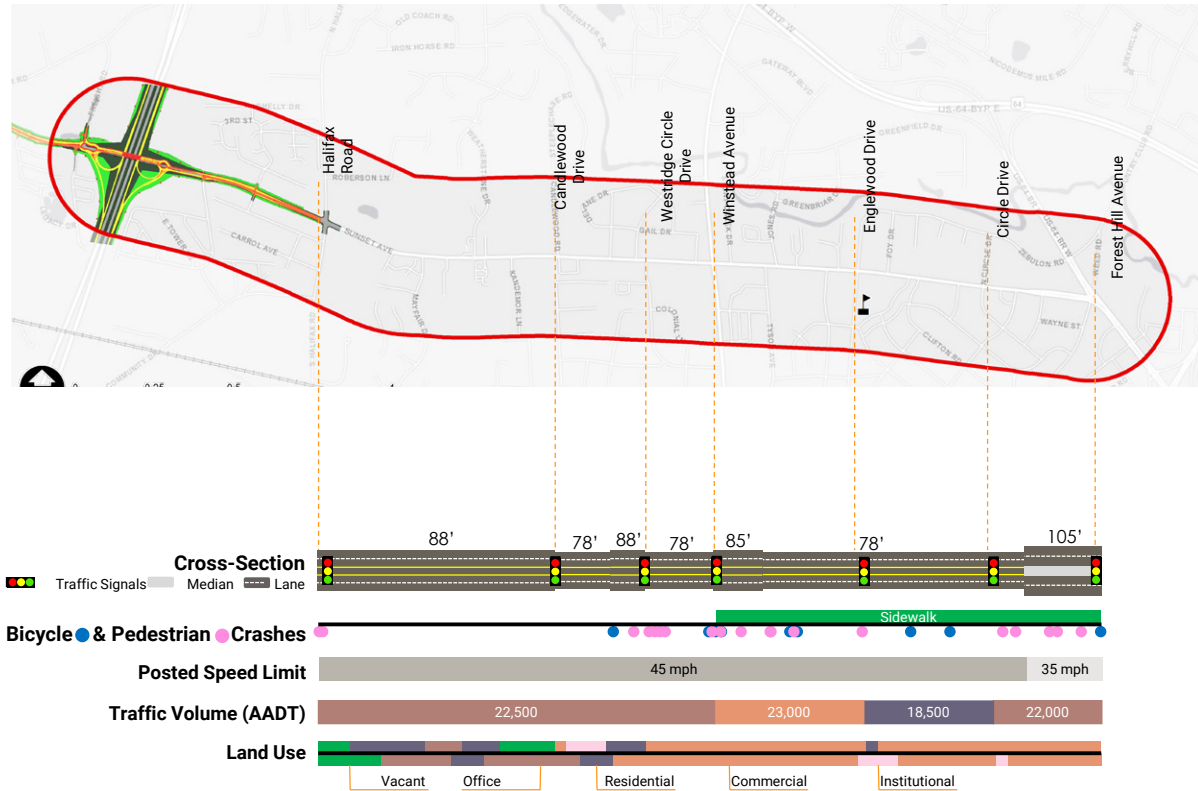
**# 5 Create a Community Gateway through Attractive Design.**



## EXISTING CONDITIONS

How do we move? Rocky Mount residents and users of Sunset Avenue are very car-dependent, with 93% of the corridor's residents using a car to get around, whether alone or shared. By contrast only 1% of the population walks, bikes, or uses transit. With such a large proportion of the population traveling by automobile, crash rates are expectedly higher along Sunset Avenue, with high-frequency crash locations at Winstead Avenue, Halifax Road, and Buck Leonard Boulevard/US 64 Business.

Roadway analyses support the perception that Sunset Avenue does not sufficiently meet the needs of non-motorized travelers. With daily traffic volumes between 18,000 to 23,000, Sunset Avenue operates at level of service C for motor vehicles. However, lacking sidewalks and bicycle facilities for nearly all of the corridor, bicyclists and pedestrians face poor and potentially dangerous conditions when traveling along Sunset Avenue. Cross-street connectivity is nearly non-existent, with only a single pedestrian crossing at Englewood Drive.



### High Frequency Crash Intersections, 2015-2020

Intersection	Count
Winstead Avenue	83
Halifax Road	40
Buck Leonard Boulevard	33
Jones Road	22
Englewood Drive	21

**Table 1.1:** High Frequency Crash Intersections, 2015-2020.  
Source: NCDOT TEAAS.



## COMMUNITY INSPIRED

The community is the heart and soul of any successful plan. Extensive public engagement was conducted throughout the planning process, with multiple strategies used to ensure highest possible engagement from a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Despite a global pandemic restricting in-person gatherings, and requiring innovative approaches to meeting and conversing with residents and community members alike, a combination of virtual public workshops, online surveys, interactive web maps, and focus

groups were used to gather detailed insight on Sunset Avenue's operations, strengths challenges, and opportunities.

Interaction with the Study was strong, with nearly 400 survey responses gathered, 65 comments left on the interactive map, and over 100 combined attendees to the multiple symposium and workshop sessions held. This high level of engagement provided the project team with deep insights on the corridor and helped to refine the Guiding Principles and concept designs borne out of this project.

### 1 Crossing Sunset is dangerous.

The current lack of crosswalks allowing access across the corridor forces risky behavior from pedestrians and bicyclists, such as darting through traffic.

### 2 Bike & Pedestrian Improvements are needed.

Adding bicycle lanes and/or sidepaths, and filling in the large sidewalk gaps, will make non-motorized use of Sunset much more safe.

### 3 Coordinate Development efforts.

Inconsistent setbacks make infrastructure improvements a challenge, while lack of cross-access between parcels forces more cars onto the road.



Above: Summary of interactive map comments.

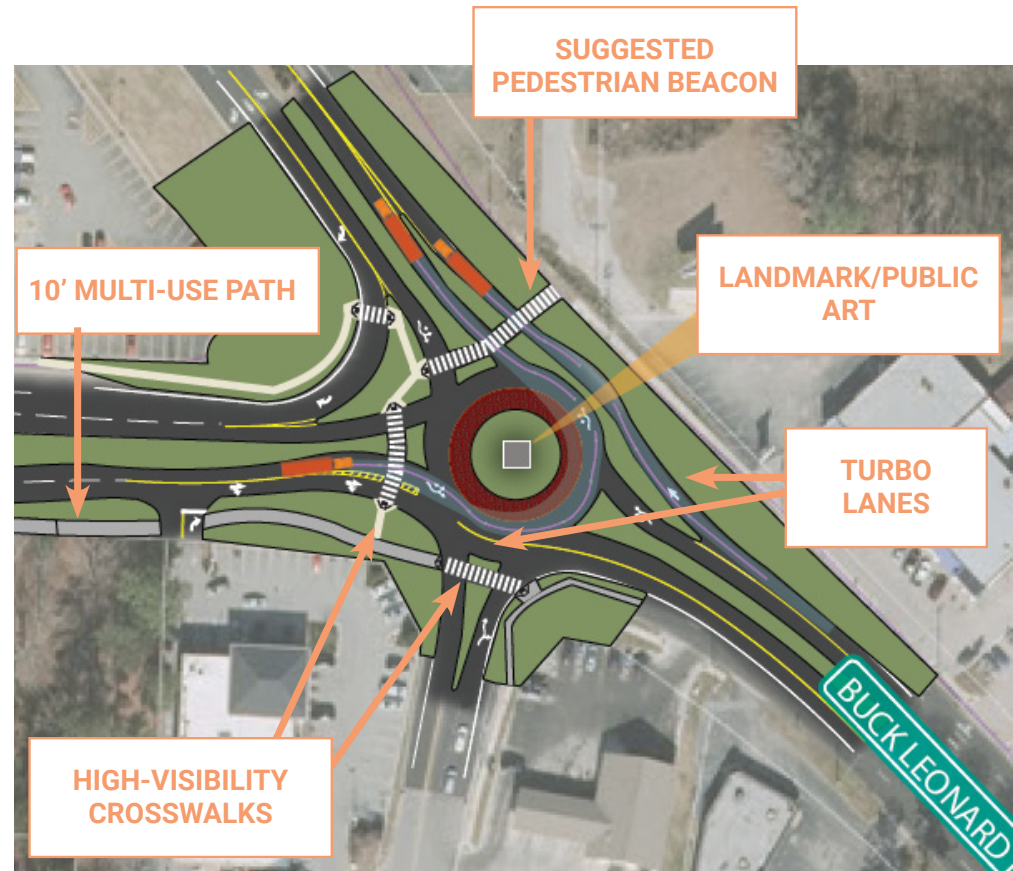
Left: Top issues from stakeholder interviews.



## A COMPLETE STREET

The concept design for Sunset Avenue was developed based on the vision of the Steering Committee in coordination with NCDOT and the engagement process. Recommendations include:

- Construct a one-lane roundabout with turbo lanes at Buck Leonard Boulevard/US 64 Business intersection, with high visibility crosswalks and pedestrian refuges at all legs.
- Construct 12' planted median with roll curb and appropriate vertical plantings to encourage traffic calming
- Install warning flashers for entering vehicles from Englewood Elementary School
- Install separated 8' - 10' sidepath along the south side of the roadway from US 64 Business to Winstead Avenue intersection and along the north side of the roadway from Winstead Avenue to Halifax Road
- Install high visibility crosswalks and pedestrian countdowns at Circle Drive, Englewood Drive, Winstead Avenue, Westridge Circle Drive, Candlewood Road, and Halifax Road intersections
- Install new traffic signal at Weatherstone Drive with high visibility crosswalks and pedestrian countdowns
- Install either brick paved or stamped concrete crosswalks, and mast-arm signals at Englewood Drive, Winstead Avenue, Westridge Circle Drive, and Circle Drive intersections
- Install streetscape improvements including pedestrian scale lighting, community banners, and canopy street trees
- Add pedestrian level lighting along the sidepath
- Consider a community gateway feature at the intersection of Halifax Road to welcome visitors to Rocky Mount
- Encourage and advocate for cross access and collector street improvements be constructed during development/ redevelopment activities



Above: Proposed roundabout at Buck Leonard Boulevard/US 64 Business.  
Left: Rendering of proposed sidepath, Englewood Drive intersection.

## IMPLEMENTATION

In order to realize the new vision for Sunset Avenue, it is imperative that a plan for implementing and funding these changes is fully developed. Making this plan a reality requires the coordination, collaboration and combined efforts of many stakeholders and organizations. To ensure constructability of the design, the corridor design is broken into manageable projects, shown at right.

As project segments were identified, quantities were developed based on the Design Concepts using CAD design software. In turn, construction cost estimates were calculated using NCDOT standard unit costs values. These estimates are for 2020 costs and subject to change.

To see this Plan to fruition, construction design and implementation needs to be financed. The City and/or MPO should take opportunities to leverage local funds to access state, federal, and private funds in order to achieve this vision. Potential sources include:

**Regional Funding:** The Rocky Mount MPO administers the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP). These funds come from the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration, and are used on roadway projects that have been submitted to and ranked by MPO staff.

**State Funding:** The NCDOT allocates funding through its State Transportation Improvement Program, which lists all projects that are candidates for federal funds, and regional projects that do not use federal funding. Other NCDOT sources of funding include the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), which can be used to fix problematic intersections or corridors with safety issues.

**Local Funding:** The City of Rocky Mount can explore local funding mechanisms, such as bond referendum, to fund all or part of the Sunset Avenue corridor, as well as facade improvement programs.

### Sunset Avenue Project Descriptions

Segment	Length (mi)
Halifax Road to Winstead Avenue	1.2
Winstead Avenue to US 64 Business/Buck Leonard Boulevard/ Forest Hill Avenue	1.2
US 64 Business/Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue Intersection	0.1

**Table 1.2:** Project Descriptions, Sunset Avenue. Note: locations for median U-turns and associated curb displacement will be determined during final design stage.

### Sunset Avenue Estimated Construction Costs Summary

Segment/Extent	Total Cost with Transit Stops & Landscaping (Est.)
Halifax Road / Winstead Avenue	\$4,733,498
Winstead Avenue / US 64 Business/Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue	\$3,737,888
US 64 Business/Buck Leonard Boulevard/ Forest Hill Avenue	\$2,201,716
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$10,673,104</b>

**Table 1.3:** Summary of Construction Costs.













This introduction chapter provides a brief overview of why this corridor is important and how the planning process was organized.

Beginning with a description of the Plan purpose and general timeline of the process, this chapter identifies our five (5) Guiding Principles, which were derived from both (a) community input and (b) analysis of data.

In this Chapter:

1. Purpose & Process
2. Principles & Goals



## Purpose & Process

As a gateway from I-95 and a key thoroughfare from western Rocky Mount, Sunset Avenue is one of the most important roads in the city. From Nashville and I-95 to the west, the road leads directly to downtown Rocky Mount, where it crosses the railroad marking the boundary between Nash and Edgecombe Counties, becoming Tarboro Street. The Sunset Avenue Corridor Study focuses on the segment from Halifax Road to Forest Hill Avenue, where Sunset Avenue becomes U.S. 64 Business. The intent of this study is to examine this corridor and make conceptual-level recommendations for multimodal improvements.

### Why This Plan, Why Now?

Sunset Avenue, in its current configuration, serves the everyday needs of businesses and residences that border it, providing an east-west multimodal spine approximately 2.5 miles long through the City's western properties. The roadway is five lanes wide, lacks bicycle facilities, and provides sidewalks along some portions of its northern edge. The interchange at I-95 and Sunset Avenue will shift traffic patterns and see increased volumes on an already busy corridor. New ideas and an improved design is needed to accommodate traffic impacts, meet business and residential needs, and provide for all users.

This project evaluates potential retrofit design opportunities to improve pedestrian and bicycle accommodations to multiple users and destinations along the corridor, including such important destinations as the Westridge Plaza and neighborhoods adjacent to Sunset Avenue. In addition to its transportation role, the project incorporates placemaking aspects that improve quality of life, protect public value and investment, and increase the economic viability of land and improvements in the corridor.

The City of Rocky Mount, together with the Stantec team, began a 10-month planning process to guide the development of the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study, described on the following page. The process encompassed traffic analyses, plan and policy review, market analysis, and robust public engagement to develop a comprehensive multimodal strategy and implementation plan for the corridor. Public engagement was critical to the process, including a design workshop open to the public, through which design concepts were proposed and refined.





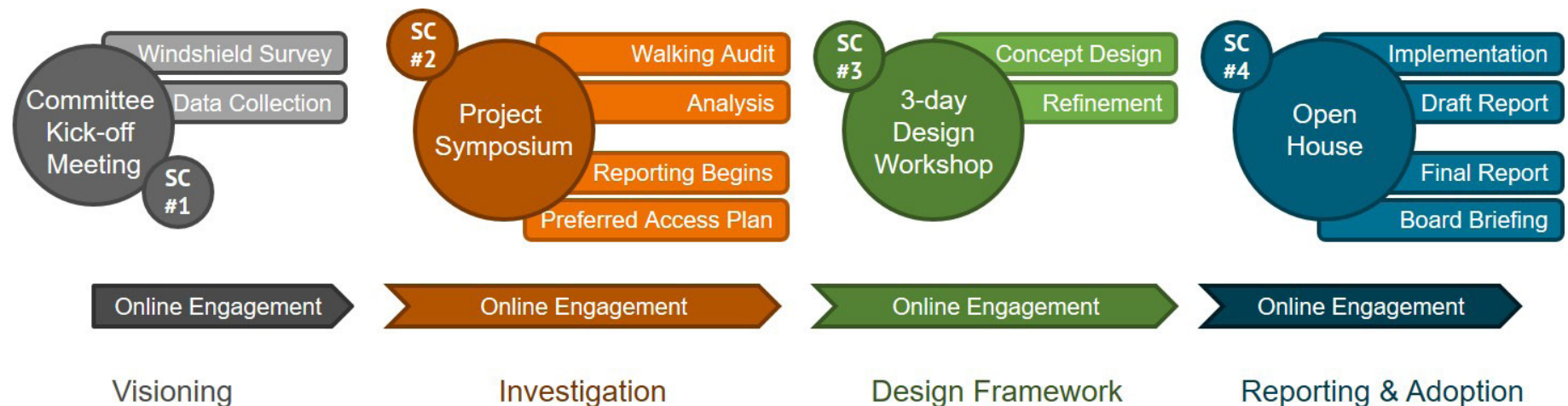
## Project Process & Timeline

The planning process was divided into four distinct phases. The first phase, **Visioning**, centered on the collection of data, preliminary study of the corridor, and development of the public engagement process. During this phase, the project team collaborated with a number of individuals representing the community, as well as local and state planning agencies, to guide the development of the plan while ensuring the interests of all parties were heard. A project web page ([www.SunsetAveStudy.com](http://www.SunsetAveStudy.com)), survey, and mapping tool were launched online to collect feedback throughout the planning process.

The second phase, **Investigation**, focused on analysis. Data and background information collected in the first phase was analyzed and compared with anecdotal information and data provided by early respondents through online engagement. Reporting of these results began, both in the final Plan itself and through public engagement. The first major public event, the Project Symposium, was held in July 2020, and provided direct engagement with the community to present the results of initial analyses. Key takeaways derived from this phase culminated in the development of the Preferred Access Plan.

The third phase, the **Design Framework**, begins immediately following investigation. Feedback, public input, and background information were distilled and used by the project team to begin drafting the planning, engineering, and design recommendations. Many of these recommendations were developed during the Design Workshop, a large planning event that provides interaction and feedback to continually develop design concepts. During this phase, the concept design for the corridor was first developed and refined.

The final phase of this process was the **Reporting & Adoption** phase. Feedback gathered from the public was used, while the proposed concept designs were refined through close work with committees and collaboration of professionals across fields of planning, engineering, and urban design. During this vital period, every item produced came together as a unified Corridor Study to guide the City of Rocky Mount and NCDOT in the coming years. An Open House presenting the final recommendations to the public was held during this period to close the project and further cement the relationship and productive collaboration between the community and local planning agencies.



# Principles & Goals

## Guiding Principles

Though the project carries constraints, it is important to recognize that all streets serve a combination of functions, all of which are intimately tied to the travel way, pedestrian, and building realms.

Through the stakeholder outreach, public involvement and committee collaboration (discussed in Chapter 4), the following Guiding Principles were developed to guide the design team along the planning and design process. It was here that the core values were applied to decisions related to Complete Streets, beautification, multimodal elements, traffic calming, and safety.

With the implementation of the new I-95 interchange at Sunset Avenue, it will be important to recognize that this will create a new entryway to the Rocky Mount community. **Like the front porch of your house, it needs to be attractive, safe and inviting.** For decades, Sunset Avenue has been designed to move cars and trucks faster into our community. Once a two-lane road, this busy arterial serves vehicle mobility, with limited opportunities for those travelers on two feet, two wheels or traveling by bus. Today represents a paradigm shift towards more walkable, safe streets. As the function of this important road has changed, so too should its design. The following Guiding Principles were derived from the continuous input, perspectives, and directions provided by the Rocky Mount community:

1. Redesign to Accommodate a More Complete Street.
2. The Safety of All Users is Paramount.
3. Built-in Traffic Calming is a Must.
4. The Corridor should Support Redevelopment through Quality Urban Design.
5. Create a Community Gateway through Attractive Design.

The recommendations and the action items will be detailed in the final chapters of this plan and further support the principles that have guided the Complete Streets approach to Sunset Avenue.







### Principle #1: Redesign to Accommodate a More Complete Street.

**Some of the most active and attractive streets in the Nation are multi-laned.** Just because a corridor is heavily traveled doesn't mean it can't support other modes and become comfortable and convenient for all users. The Sunset corridor is used on a daily basis by residents of the surrounding communities. The lack of bicycle, transit and pedestrian design elements make traversing Sunset Avenue difficult and undesirable. The vulnerability of these users is high compared to automobile drivers and passengers. It is better to create an environment where walking and biking are not only encouraged but are the priority.

### Principle #2: The Safety of All Users is Paramount.

**The entire Nation has focused on Vision Zero initiatives.** This means that a community no longer accepts the notion that pedestrian fatalities on our streets are acceptable. When creating pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environments, the corridor should be safe for everyone to move across and through. The Sunset Avenue Steering Committee ranked safety improvements and pedestrian crossings as the biggest problem along Sunset Avenue receiving 80% of the votes. Residents and visitors should feel safe and comfortable walking on Sunset Avenue at all hours. Safety measurements should be an aspect of all concept designs. This includes incorporating key safety design features like sight lines, lighting and access management best practices as well as limiting free flow movements at intersections.

### Principle #3: Built-in Traffic Calming is a Must.

**As expressed by the public, there is a renewed focus in creating a safer environment along the Sunset Avenue corridor.** During the Project Symposium, respondents were asked "What is the highest priority need

for the corridor?" Safety improvements received the highest vote at 70%. Of that, speeding vehicles were recognized as the biggest challenge at 40%. To create an environment that is safe and convenient for ALL users will require a redesign of the corridor to include "Built-in" traffic calming. Simply lowering speed limits will not suffice. Increasing the presence of law enforcement is a temporary and costly measure. This can only come through access management improvements, creating a sense of enclosure and making intersections more visible to pedestrians and bicyclists.

**The lack of bicycle, transit and pedestrian design elements make traversing Sunset Avenue difficult and undesirable.**

### Principle #4: The Corridor should Support Redevelopment through Quality Urban Design.

**In recent decades several properties along the corridor have turned over into new businesses or residential communities.** We can expect this trend to continue as it is opened up to I-95 and commercial traffic. Sunset Avenue is more than how fast vehicles can move through the City, it serves as a way of getting

people to jobs, residential neighborhoods, civic uses, upholding land values, and encouraging favored redevelopment. The space limitations and future redevelopment trends of the corridor itself are pushing towards better urban design and placemaking opportunities. As expressed by the public, there is a keen interest in creating a vibrant, active and attractive destinations and public spaces.

### Principle #5: Create a Community Gateway through Attractive Design.

**Sunset Avenue's appearance hasn't changed for a very long time.** In fact, lack of proper maintenance of infrastructure (crumbling curb & gutter, sidewalks, signal upgrades, etc.) is evident throughout. Creating an aesthetic environment and enhanced beautification through the use of improved streetscaping details and repair/maintenance is vital to this objective.

## Key Goals

Early in the planning process, the project team gleaned from interactions with the community, the City, and NCDOT a set of goals that this study should accomplish. These goals were mentioned numerous times in one way or another, directly or indirectly. They are not markers to check off when this plan is adopted, they are goals that, when achieved, will signify that the plan for Sunset Avenue has been realized.

The recommendations and the action items to implement these endeavors will be detailed in the final chapters of this plan, and further support the principles and goals that have guided the Complete Streets Study.

1. Outreach efforts should involve **5% (1,000)** of the population of Rocky Mount through face-to-face and online interaction
2. **Lower the accident rate along the corridor by 30%** following the full implementation of the final design
3. **Increase the walkable area along Sunset Avenue by 50%** through enhanced sidewalks, crosswalks and trails
4. Effectively **lower the travel speed to 30 - 40 mph** through built in traffic calming
5. Build local advocacy in support of the Sunset Avenue project by **securing partial funding** of the project



*Sunset Avenue near the intersection of Forest Hills Drive, looking west*

**"I'd love to see safer traffic patterns to and from businesses. Additionally, I'd like to see more retail and restaurant (not fast food) options. I think accessible and usable green space would be great. Lastly, I think there should be sidewalks and easier access for folks to walk and bicycle. So many people waiting for buses, walking, or bicycling don't have safe space from the traffic of Sunset."**

— Survey Participant



*High-visibility crosswalks can improve overall walkability along Sunset.*



*Better roadway design can help to reduce crashes and improve corridor operations.*











Context is provided in this chapter, including community demographics and travel characteristics for residents along Sunset Avenue. Median home values and median household income for residents near Sunset Avenue are higher than those for the remainder of the City of Rocky Mount.

Land values, housing stock, and land uses are also reviewed to suggest locations that may be 'ripe' for redevelopment.

#### In this Chapter:

1. Community History
2. Community Snapshot
3. Market Assessment



## Community History

### Founding

While Rocky Mount was first incorporated in 1867, its settlement dates further back to the establishment of the first post office, near present-day Battle Park, and Rocky Mount Mills. Agriculture was the predominant industry in the area immediately surrounding the town, and in the late 19th century, the Atlantic Coastline Railroad and the growth of the tobacco industry led to sustained growth and increasing prosperity. Planter's Bank, founded in Rocky Mount in 1899, would become one of the town's first banks; through merger and acquisition, it would eventually become PNC Bank, a global financial institution.

Sunset Avenue began as part of North Carolina Route 90, but became US 64 in the early 1930s, connecting Rocky Mount residents to the Outer Banks as well as Statesville in the west. Continued growth through the mid-1900s pushed the municipal limits beyond the Tar River and into the area through which Sunset Avenue now passes. Tarrytown Mall, at the eastern end of Sunset Avenue, was constructed in the 1960s. As residential development pushed outward along the corridor towards Nashville, supporting land uses popped up as well, including the Westridge Shopping Plaza at the major intersection with Winstead Avenue. While Sunset Avenue and west Rocky Mount are today urbanized, its vicinity still reflects the agricultural roots of its history and the rural character of nearby communities, Nash, and Edgecombe Counties.



# Community Snapshot

## Demographics Overview

As a cross-town connector that traverses much of western Rocky Mount, Sunset Avenue's demographic profile is a microcosm of the town. Its population stabilizing after a period of slow decline, the corridor is characterized both by its potential to serve as a multimodal, Complete Street for a transportation disadvantaged population as well as its currently unmet need.

Sunset Avenue's resident population is projected to increase in the coming years. More than 3,300 residents of Rocky Mount live within ½-mile of the corridor, and its total daytime population swells to just over 6,000 with nearly 4,000 employed in the study area. Projections to 2024 suggest a slight increase in residential population, reversing the previous decade's slight decline. However, residents of the corridor generally work outside of the corridor. Only an approximate 100 residents within ½ mile of Sunset Avenue also work within the same area, meaning most travel a longer distance to and from work each day. Average commute times reflect this: half of the resident population commutes between 10 to 20 minutes for work, and a further 25% averages between 20 to 34 minutes travel time.



Demographics for **Sunset Avenue (SA)** are taken from a 1/2-mile buffer around the study area and are shown at left. Demographics for the City of **Rocky Mount (RM)** are shown at right for comparison.

## Households with No Vehicle:



2.6% 13%

## Travel Mode to Work:



PERSONAL VEHICLE

84% 84%



CARPOL

9% 8%



WORK FROM HOME\*

6% 3%



WALK

1% 1%



TRANSIT

0% 1%



BICYCLE

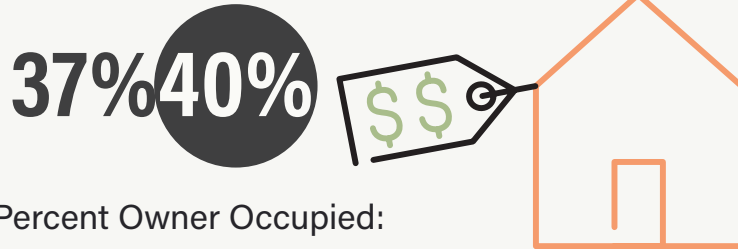
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Source: Esri Business Analyst, US Census, American Community Survey Estimates (2013-2017)



	Sunset Avenue	Rocky Mount
Population:	3,400	56,000
Households:	1,400	22,000
Housing Units:	1,600	26,000
Average Household Size:	2.3	2.4
Family Households:	23%	64%
Median Age:	45	37
Workers over 16:	1,200	26,000

Percent Renter Occupied:



Percent Owner Occupied:



Median Home Value:

\$162k \$105k

Median Household Income:

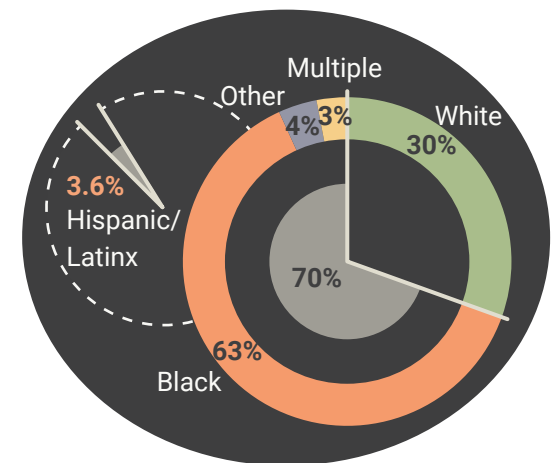
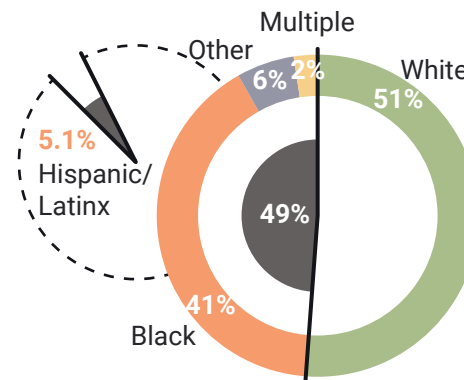
\$49k \$36k

Residents of the Sunset Avenue corridor are generally more affluent than the remainder of the City. Median household income for those living within ½ mile of the corridor in 2019 was \$48,600, compared with \$40,600 for residents of Rocky Mount. The corridor is also home to greater wealth than elsewhere in the town; with a 2019 median home value of nearly \$162,000 for homes located within the corridor, compared with a median value of \$109,500 for the town as a whole. Nonetheless, nearly 30% of the corridor's population falls at or below 150% of the federal poverty level, indicating that many residents are in need of affordable transportation alternatives. Projections for 2024 show a modest increase in household income, along with growth in home values, and Sunset Avenue's development as a multimodal corridor and Complete Street will aid this expected growth.

Despite Sunset Avenue's status as a transit corridor, its residents strongly prefer to commute by car, most likely due to the limited facilities for non-motorized uses. According to survey respondents, 97% commute by car to and from work each day, whether alone or as part of a carpool. Less than 2% of the population reports walking as their primary mode of transportation, reflecting the incomplete nature of the existing transportation facilities for residents and commuters in this corridor. Vehicle ownership is high, and less than 3% of the population does not have ready access to a vehicle. This compares favorably with the population of Rocky Mount, which has a higher proportion of homes without access to a vehicle.

SA RM

Demographics for **Sunset Avenue (SA)** are taken from a 1/2-mile buffer around the study area and are shown at left. Demographics for the City of **Rocky Mount (RM)** are shown at right for comparison.



City of Rocky Mount

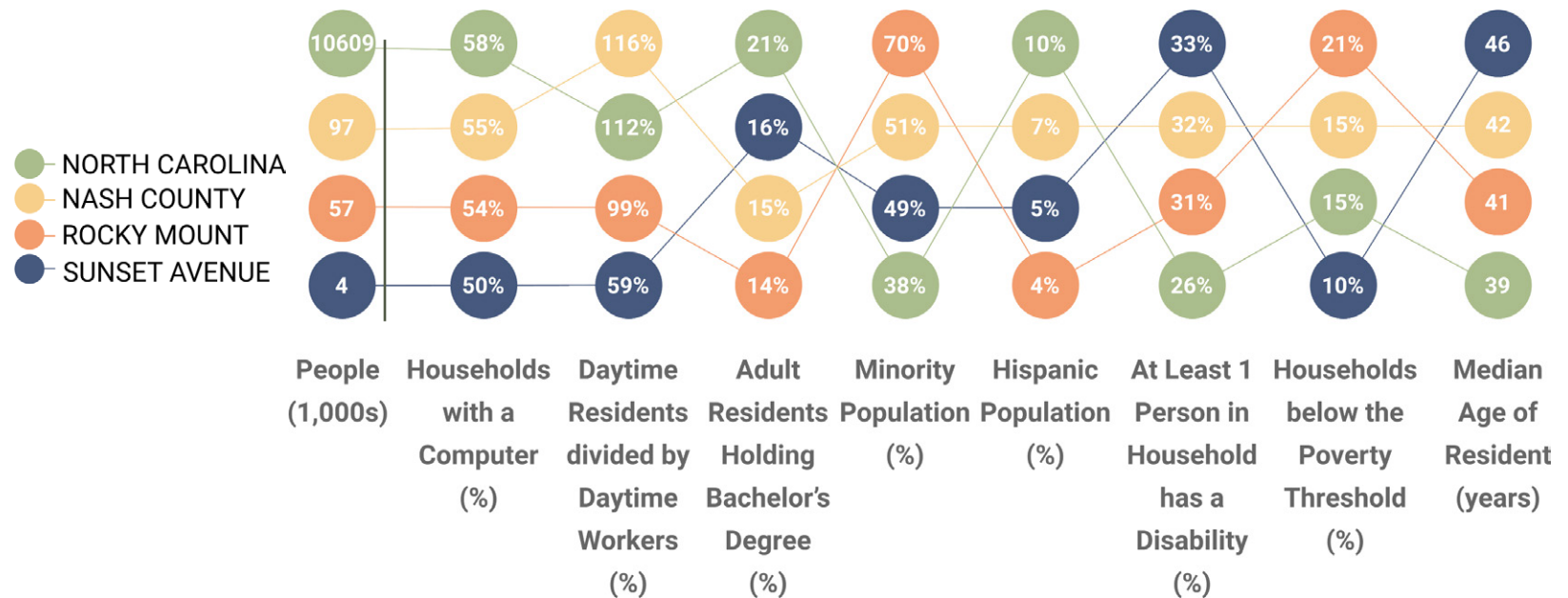


# Market Assessment

The Sunset Avenue Corridor is a diverse place, with different land uses served in different ways from the roadway as well as from connecting roads. The following provides an overview of the existing conditions as well as their implications for engaging the corridor and its residents, visitors, and business operators.

## A Place for People and Businesspeople

Relative to Rocky Mount, Nash County, or North Carolina as a whole, the Sunset Avenue Corridor (areas within one mile of the corridor) is a relatively commerce-oriented place, with considerably more workers coming to the corridor during the day, and leaving about 4,000 residents that live in and near the corridor. While less racially diverse than Rocky Mount or Nash County, the corridor's residents are nearly 50% non-white, older (median age: 46), and less likely to have household incomes below the federal poverty threshold.



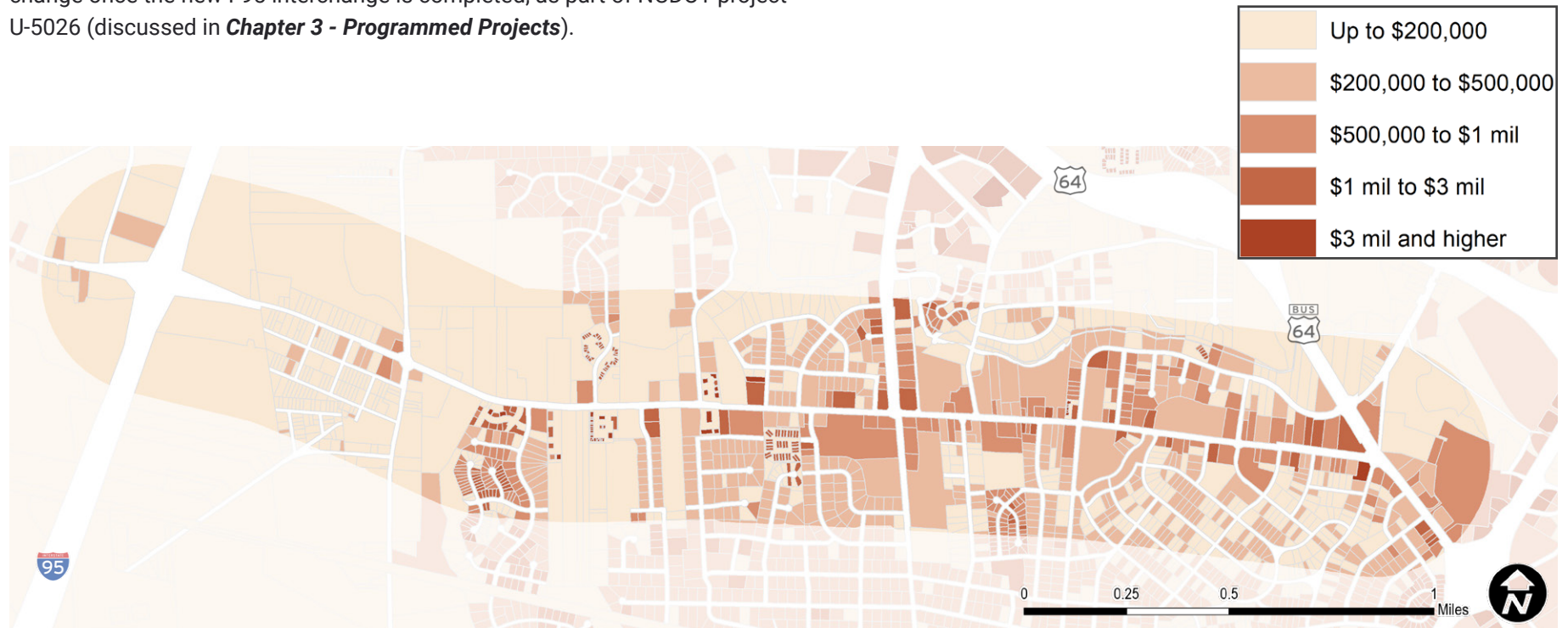
Demographic Base Comparison (source: ESRI Business Analyst Online)



## Appraised Value of Land, Value per Acre

North Carolina law requires the reappraisal of all parcels to be undertaken every eight years. Both land and structures are appraised, providing a consistent means of assigning relative values to property. While individual sale prices may vary considerably from the appraised value, the consistency of methodology used for appraisals creates a better picture of the relative valuations of parcels near Sunset Avenue.

The typical pattern for commercial properties whereby “hard” corners (intersections) are nearly always prized more highly is evident; higher-valued properties abut Sunset Avenue and North Winstead Avenue. The residential character of the corridor at the west end is also evidenced by lower valuations. It is likely that this pattern will change once the new I-95 interchange is completed, as part of NCDOT project U-5026 (discussed in **Chapter 3 - Programmed Projects**).

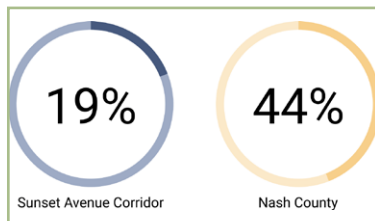


**Figure 2.1:** Appraised Value of Parcels, normalized by Acreage (source: Nash County parcel database obtained June, 2020)

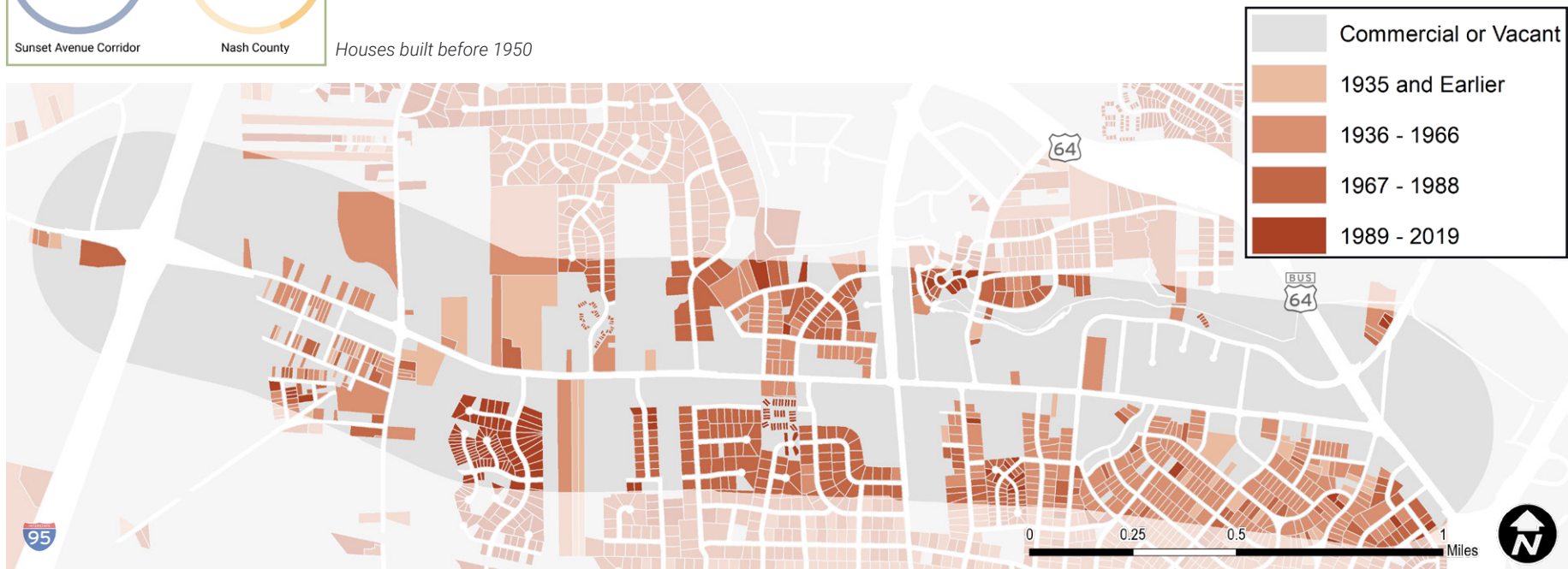
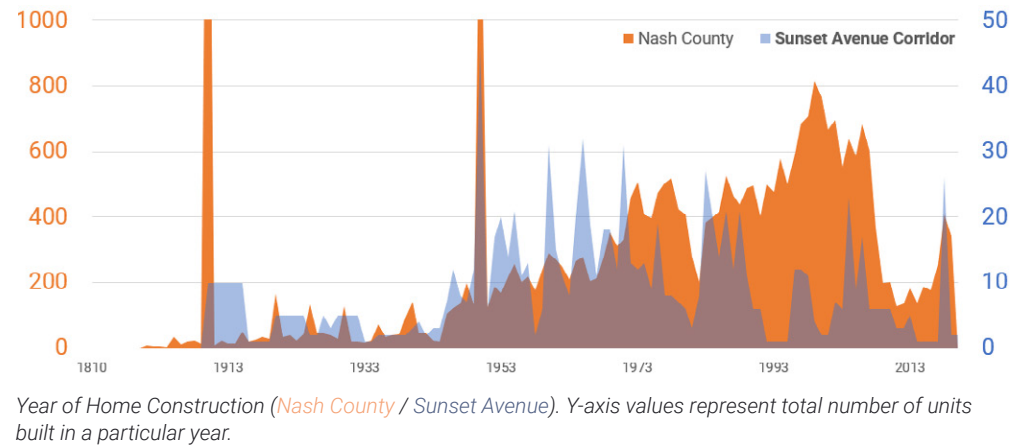


## Housing Stock and Condition

The housing stock in the Sunset Avenue corridor, while largely comprised of single-family detached houses, varies considerably in terms of its age relative to Nash County and even within the corridor itself. Major residential building cycles in the Sunset Avenue corridor adhere to national growth cycles, demonstrating drops during recession/recovery periods to a greater extent than the county as a whole (see chart to the right).



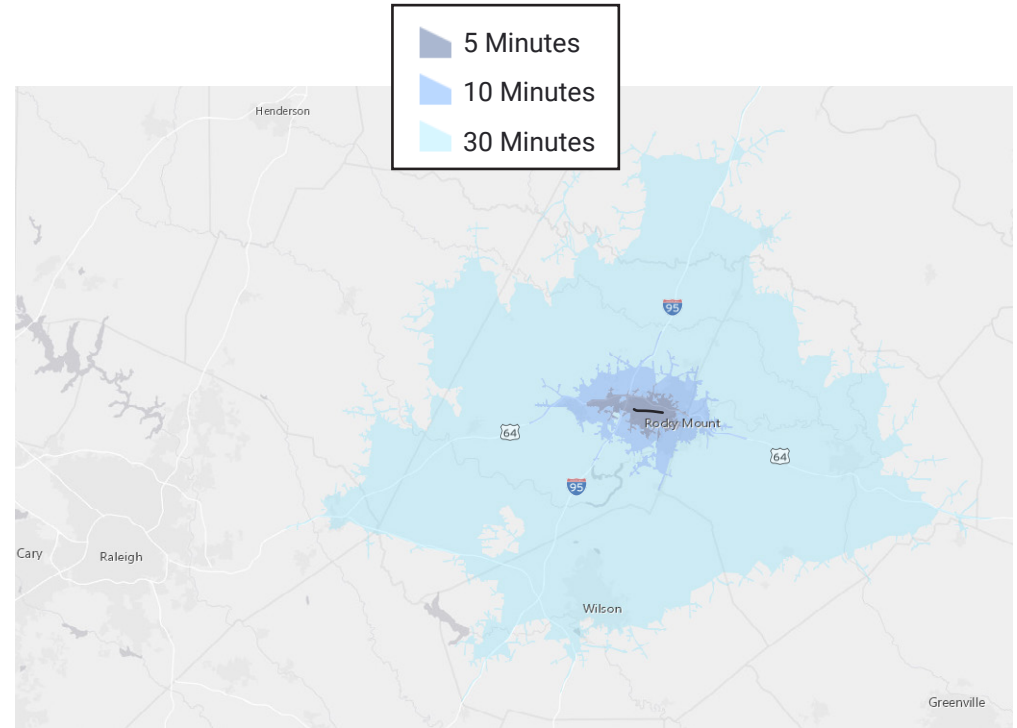
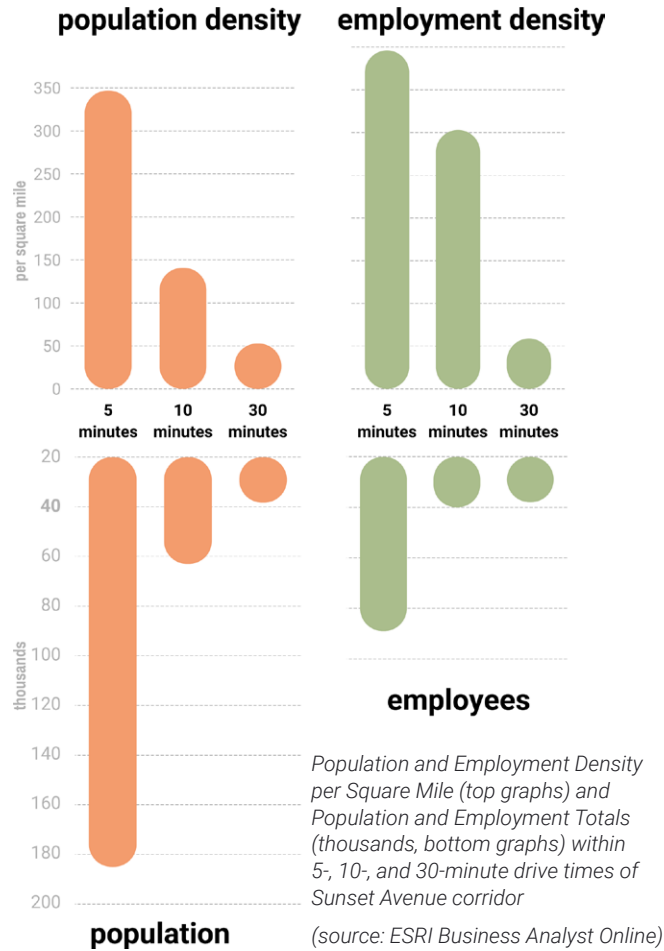
Houses built before 1950



**Figure 2.2:** Year of Residential Construction (source: Nash County parcel database obtained June, 2020)

## Transportation Accessibility by Car

As a worker destination, the Sunset Avenue corridor accesses a considerable land area within a reasonable drive time. The Drive-Time figure to the right suggests that portions of surrounding counties (Wake, Franklin, Edgecombe, and Wilson) are all within a 30-min drive time of Sunset Avenue. The information on this page assumes that the corridor is reached at 9:00am on a typical Tuesday, with traffic appropriate for that time period pre-COVID-19 pandemic.



Drive-Time to Sunset Avenue corridor (source: ESRI Business Analyst Online)



## Current Land Use Categories

Current land uses were examined from the latest Nash County parcel database. Land uses were consolidated into five categories for simplicity. The map below presents a blend of both land use types and potential for property development / redevelopment (similar to the Ripe-and-Firm Analysis on the next page). Commercial properties are shown in red, and residential properties are shown in blue.

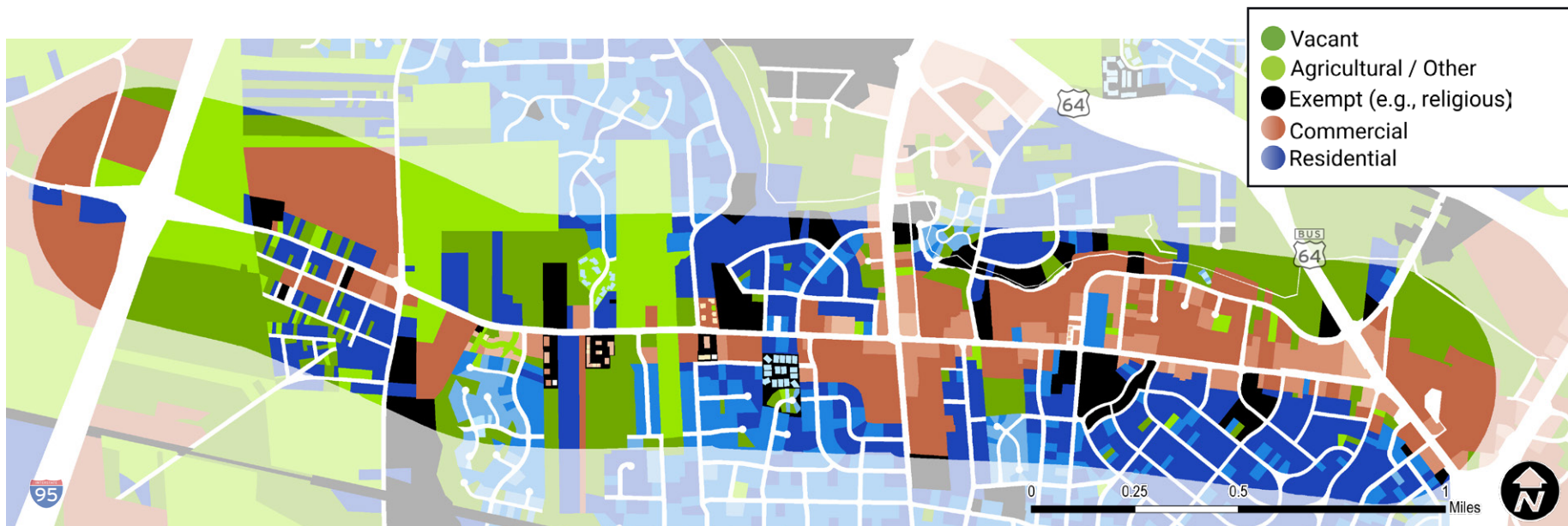
Properties such as churches, schools, and government offices are considered 'exempt' and therefore these are displayed in black. Vacant, open space or agricultural use parcels are displayed in green because their potential for development is relatively high.

*Disclaimer: Assessing properties in this manner is a generalization with assumptions based on property value(s) and future predictions, and in no way indicates a preference or predilection for land use change.*

### *How to Interpret this Land Use Map*

Agricultural and "other" properties are deemed to have a high potential to develop; vacant properties have the highest potential of any property. Conversely, religious institutions and government properties have a very low probability of redeveloping and are shown as "exempt."

Residential and Commercial properties have progressively higher potential for redevelopment as per-acre tax values decrease (i.e., the potential for redevelopment is inversely proportional to the per-acre tax value of the property).



**Figure 2.3:** Land Use and Potential Redevelopment (source: Nash County parcel database obtained June, 2020)



## Ripe-and-Firm Analysis

An initial windshield-review of existing properties along Sunset Avenue was performed for the purpose of (subjectively) evaluating whether properties are *likely for redevelopment* in the near future. This summary was intended to begin the conversation for potential conceptual development opportunities. **“Ripe”** properties in green have a high redevelopment potential, including vacant parcels, currently for sale/rent, or the existing structure is visibly in disrepair or poorly maintained.

**“Opportunity”** properties in yellow have a moderate redevelopment potential, including businesses that may not represent the ‘highest-and-best-use’ for its location or zoning classification, or residential structures that may be inconsistent with the surrounding neighborhood (smaller in size, varying setback, in need of repair, e.g.).

**“Firm”** properties in red have a low redevelopment potential, including public lands (park, school, government offices, e.g.), churches, or developments that represent the ‘highest-and-best-use’ according to the current zoning.



This vacant lot is located next to the CVS at the eastern end of the study area.

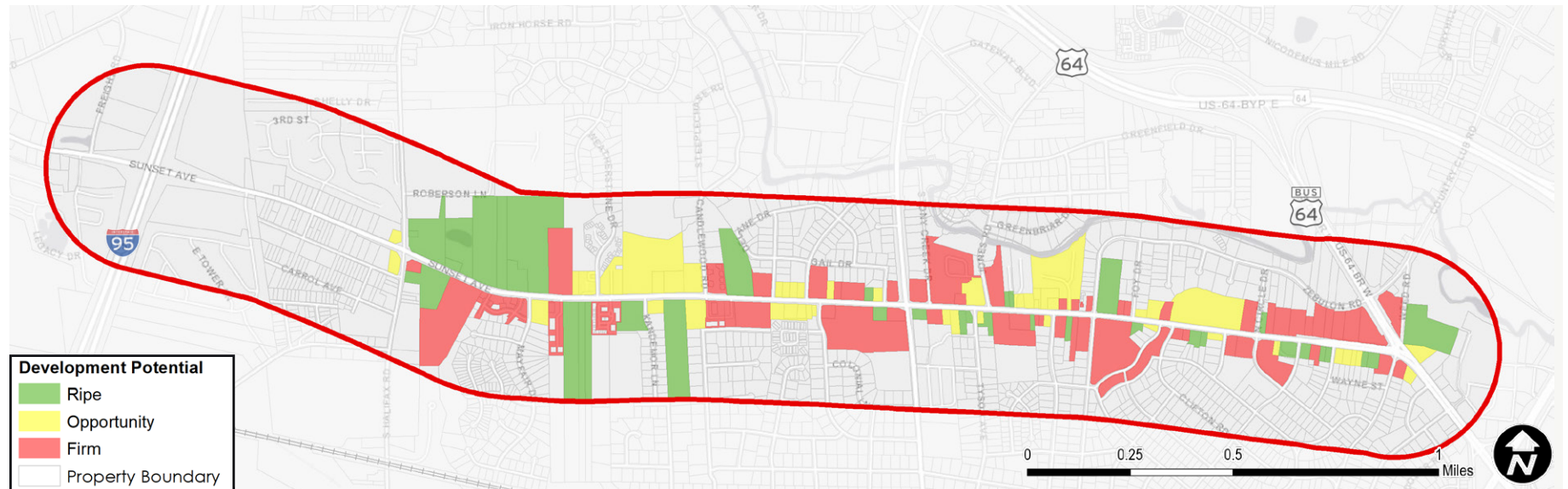


Figure 2.4: Ripe-and-Firm Assessment (source: Nash County parcel database obtained June, 2020)











# EXISTING CONDITIONS 03



The Sunset Avenue Corridor Study seeks to improve the overall mobility of all users through identification and improvement of its current deficiencies. Creating a roadway that is safe and efficient for motorists, transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians ensures a “Complete” street that can foster community cohesiveness, improve quality of living and contribute to the city’s economic development objectives.

This chapter examines Sunset Avenue as it currently stands. Only through understanding its current performance, from the current infrastructure—or lack thereof—to safety and traffic operations, can the challenges and opportunities for this street be properly addressed and recommendations produced.

In this Chapter:

1. Existing Plans & Policies
2. Programmed Projects
3. Corridor Characteristics
4. Corridor Performance



## Existing Plans & Policies

The currently adopted plans for the City of Rocky Mount are summarized below. These plans have had an influence on the built environment throughout the City, and the Sunset Avenue corridor specifically, helping to shape the recommendations contained in this study. Though the adoption of the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study will not translate directly into implementation of the suggested changes, it provides a vision and guidance for successful modifications to the built environment that will help increase the quality of life, comfort, and health of residents throughout the City of Rocky Mount.

Transformative change for roadways begins with careful, cohesive planning. Previous plans, like those discussed here, support the goals Rocky Mount aims to accomplish through this study. With each plan, common themes emerge and are woven together to form a single vision for the corridor’s present and future, shaping the recommendations in this study. These plans and studies are an outline, a guiding framework, towards an improved Sunset Avenue that truly serves all of the people of Rocky Mount.



## 2018 City of Rocky Mount Bike Plan

The 2018 Bike Plan envisions a connected, well-designed network of greenway trails and bicycle-friendly streets where those of all ages and abilities can “safely and conveniently bike to where they live, work, play and learn.” Sunset Avenue is identified as a **high-crash corridor for bicyclists**, and pockets of the study corridor are indicated as **high demand for bicycle-friendly improvements**.

Recommendations specific to the Sunset Avenue corridor include:

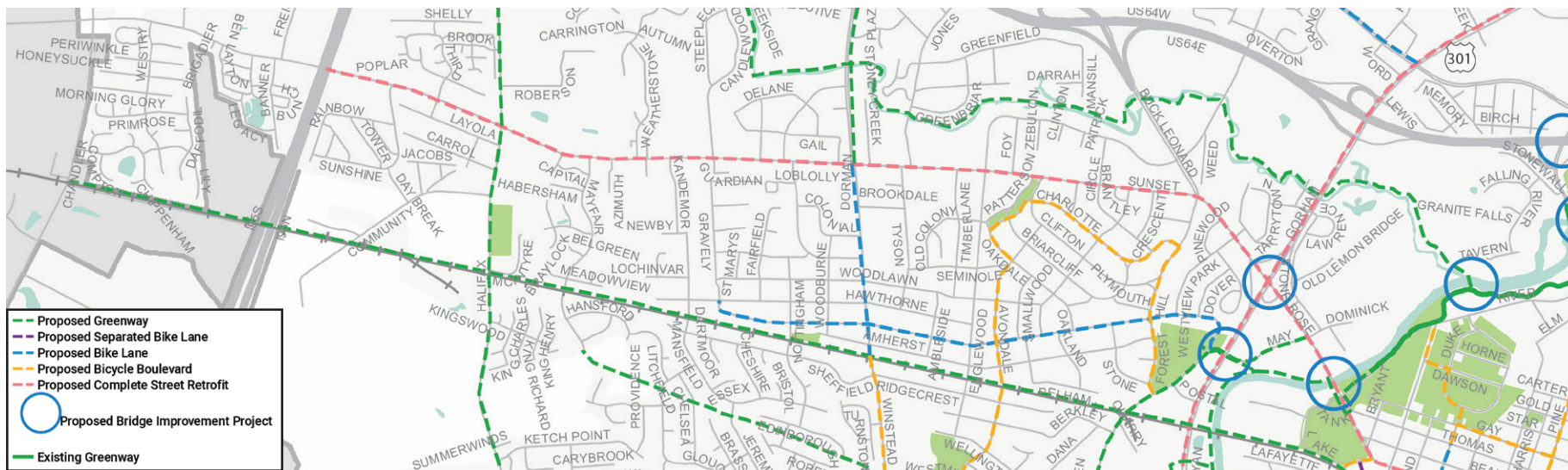
- Proposed **Complete Streets Retrofit** along study corridor
- Proposed **greenways** on Halifax Road and Winstead Avenue.

## 2016 Rocky Mount Urban Area Comprehensive Transportation Plan

The Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) identifies Sunset Avenue as one of five major recommendations for improvements in the long-range plan. The CTP highlights **safety and capacity concerns** for the corridor,

likewise noting bicycle and pedestrian improvements are needed throughout the corridor. Public input indicated Sunset Avenue was of high concern for both needed repairs, as well as bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Specific recommendations include:

- Conversion and/or widening of Sunset Avenue to a four-lane, divided boulevard;
- Travel lanes of 11' with a separating median, 5' bicycle lanes and sidewalks;
- **Sidewalk accommodations** throughout the corridor;
- **Bicycle facilities are recommended** from Halifax Road to Candlewood Road;
- Other strategies for consideration include **access management, signal timing, and intersection improvements**.



2018 Rocky Mount Bike Plan Recommendations Map for the Sunset Avenue corridor. Complete Streets retrofits (pink) extend along the corridor. Source: City of Rocky Mount.

## 2012 Sunset Avenue (West) Corridor Land Development Plan

The 2012 **Sunset Avenue Land Development Plan** updated a 1997 edition of the same and aimed to provide recommendations for land use development along the corridor. The plan's goals were three-fold:

1. To encourage appropriate land development along the major thoroughfare of Sunset Avenue to promote a compatible land use pattern;
2. To protect the traffic-carrying capacity and efficiency of this thoroughfare for public usage; and
3. To maintain the stability of appropriately located existing land uses.

The 2012 update envisions land use development through six land use typologies: Commercial & Related Services; Industrial & Related Services; Mixed Use Office/Residential; Residential – Variable Density; Residential – Single Family; and Offices & Related Services. Recommendations include:

- **Multifamily Residential and Mixed Use Office/Residential** along the corridor between Halifax Road and Winstead Avenue
- **Commercial activity nodes** at Halifax Road and Winstead Avenue intersections
- **Multifamily Residential** uses along the corridor west of Halifax Road and east of I-95 North

## 2012 City of Rocky Mount Pedestrian Plan

The **Pedestrian Plan** defined short- and long-term strategies to improve Rocky Mount's pedestrian network. Sidewalks are recommended along the length of the corridor, from Halifax Road to Forest Hill Avenue, and the (eastern) section from Forest Hill Avenue to Winstead Avenue is given the highest priority.



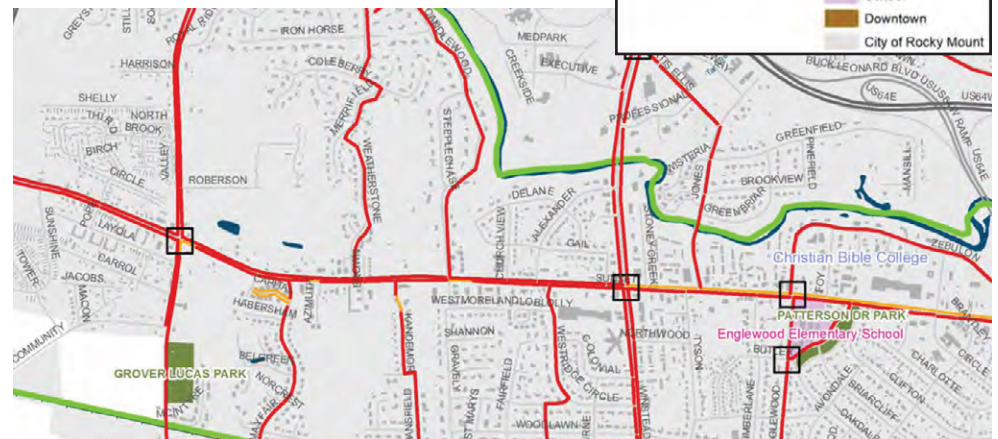
Above: Existing conditions at Winstead & Sunset.



Below: Proposed improvements.

Above: 2012 Pedestrian Plan recommendations for improvements to the Winstead Avenue intersection include pedestrian countdowns and high-visibility crosswalks.

Below: The 2012 Pedestrian Plan recommends sidewalks (red) along Sunset Avenue, and the intersections at Halifax Road, Winstead Avenue, and Englewood Drive are identified for specific improvements.







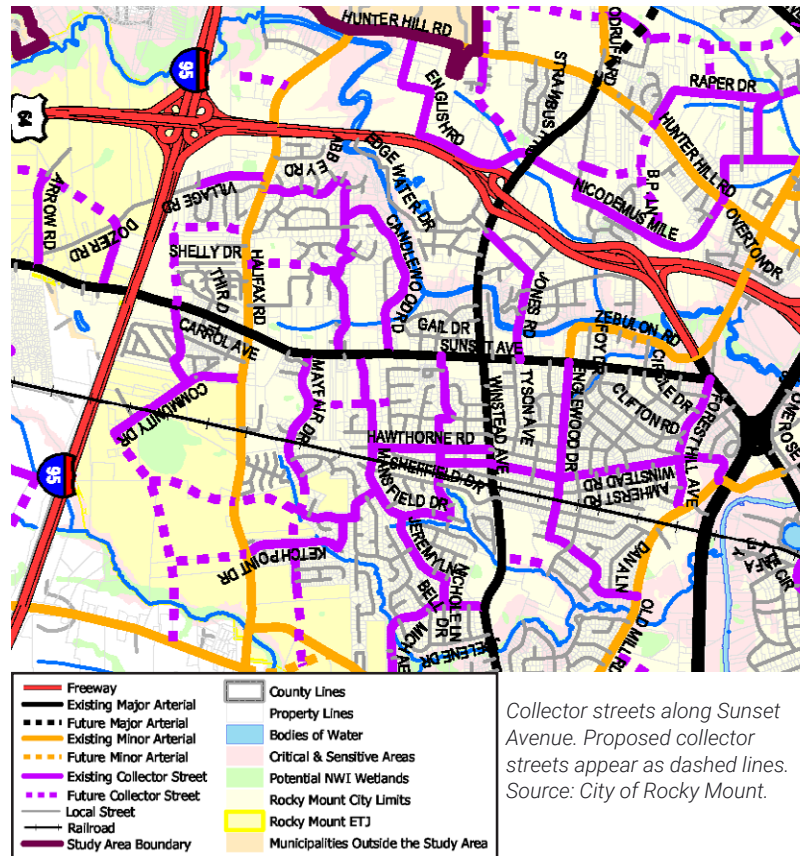
## 2004 City of Rocky Mount Collector Streets Plan

The Collector Streets Plan laid out a collector street system for the city to sustain a high quality of life, accommodate travel throughout the town, and promote the safety of all users. It created functional classification system for existing and future streets as Rocky Mount develops and establishes roadways potentially suitable for designation as collector streets.

Along Sunset Avenue, these collector streets (from west to east) are:

- Mayfair Drive
- Weatherstone Drive
- Kandemor Lane
- Candlewood Road
- Westridge Circle Drive
- Jones Road
- Englewood Drive
- Forest Hill Avenue

The Collector Street Plan recommended that residential collectors include sidewalks, curb-and-gutter, street trees, pedestrian level lighting, left turn lanes at intersections with arterials, traffic calming measures, small curb radii, intersection bulb-outs, and centerline striping within a sixty-foot right-of-way. Commercial collectors should include the same elements, but with a wider right-of-way of sixty-five feet.



## 2003 Together Tomorrow: Tier 1 Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan

The Smart Growth Comprehensive Plan set forth strategies for economic growth and community development for the City of Rocky Mount. The Plan identified the importance of smart growth and emphasizes the connection between land use patterns and transportation choices to produce its intended outcomes. The Plan also called for smart community design, which:

- Pays attention to appropriate use of scale throughout the community, with sensitivity to site context;
- Improves the visual quality of nodes and gathering places throughout the City;
- **Improves the safety and attractive qualities of pedestrian sidewalks and bikeways**, crossings at railroad tracks streets, and provide other pedestrian amenities throughout the City;
- Reduces visual clutter, such as poorly designed and placed signage, above-ground utility lines, improper placement of service areas visible to the public, and poorly placed parking areas which dominate the view; and
- Encourages higher design-quality for all buildings.

# Programmed Projects

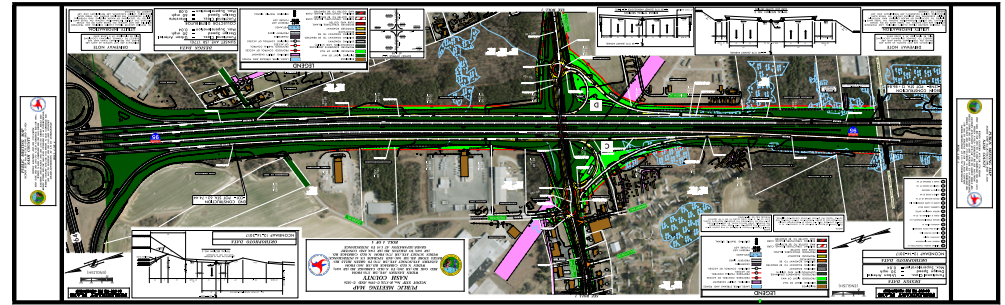
The Rocky Mount Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) identify two projects along or near the Sunset Avenue corridor. These projects are funded and programmed for construction in the near future.

## 1. TIP U-5026 SR 1770 (Sunset Avenue) Convert Grade Separation to Interchange

Anticipated for construction in October 2020 before the beginning of the COVID19 pandemic, funded through the Highway Trust Fund and partially with BUILD NC Bonds, the \$60.5 million dollar project replaces the grade-separated overpass at I-95 with a ramp-and-loop interchange, complementing the widening of Eastern Boulevard in the same area to a four-lane, median-divided thoroughfare extending to Halifax Road. Due to project funding shortfalls, NCDOT has stated that new projects can expect delays beginning in Summer 2020.

## 2. TIP C-5549 Winstead Avenue CMAQ Sidewalk Project

Anticipated for construction in 2022, this project involves the construction of sidewalks along South Winstead Avenue. Funded with Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds, the \$688,000 construction project will add sidewalk to the east side of Winstead Avenue, beginning at the intersection with Sunset Avenue, in addition to installing pedestrian crossing signals and crosswalks at the Winstead Avenue intersection.



**Figure 3.1:** NCDOT 2020-2029 STIP Map showing Sunset Avenue

U-5026 project extents are shown as a dashed orange line. The Corridor Study extents are shown in black. (Source: [NCDOT STIP Map Arcgis Map https://ncdot.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer](https://ncdot.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer).)



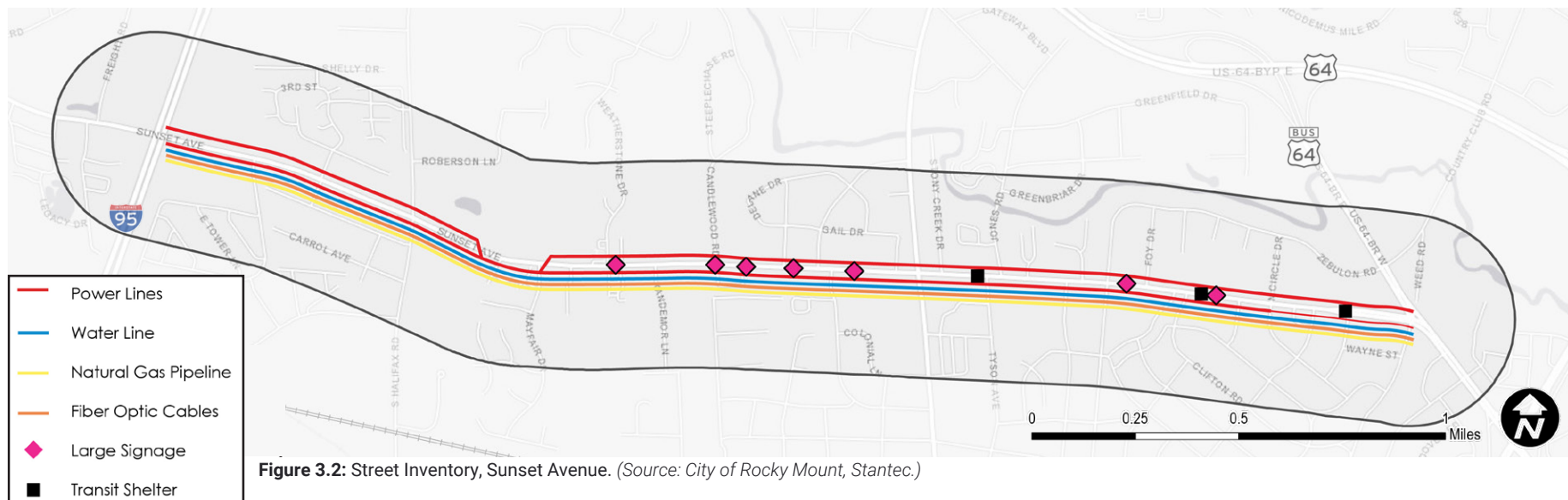
# Corridor Characteristics

This study examines the Sunset Avenue corridor from Halifax Road in the west to its intersection with Forest Hill Avenue in the east, approximately 2.5 miles. As one of the principal east-west streets in Rocky Mount, Sunset Avenue is both a focal point of its urban context and a critical thoroughfare, connecting downtown Rocky Mount to commercial and residential centers in west Rocky Mount, I-95, and neighboring communities. While the roadway itself changes very little throughout the study area, its land use context changes dramatically: at its western end, large parcels of undeveloped land create a rural feel, which gives way to residential and office uses. Further eastward, development density increases with commercial uses lining the roadway up to and beyond its intersection with Buck Leonard Boulevard and Forest Hill Avenue. At its eastern end, Sunset Avenue enters Rocky Mount's central business district, which is developing as a walkable, urban downtown.

## Existing Infrastructure

Sunset Avenue maintains a consistent cross-section throughout the corridor. Beginning with the Halifax Road intersection, Sunset Avenue proceeds as a five-lane, undivided roadway with a two-way left-turn lane separating the travel lanes in each direction. Inner travel lanes are 12 feet wide, with a wide (14 feet) outside lane. At signalized intersections, the two-way left-turn lane transitions to an exclusive left-turn lane. At Crescent Drive, the two-way left-turn lane becomes a raised center median traveling east, with exclusive left turn lanes at Circle Drive, Forest Hill Avenue, and the entrance to the Englewood Square shopping center.

Utilities infrastructure lines Sunset Avenue. Along both sides of the corridor, power lines and utility poles are frequent and in close proximity to the curblane. Water and Natural Gas pipeline facilities are present along Sunset Avenue. Fiber optic cable also runs the length of the study area, largely along the south side of the roadway.







**Left** Offices along Zebulon Drive near the Sunset Avenue intersection.



**Right** Westridge Shopping Plaza, a key commercial center along Sunset.

## Land Use

Residential, office, and commercial uses are present in close proximity throughout the corridor. The less developed western end of the corridor contains vacant parcels and lower-density residential uses abutting the corridor, which gradually transitions to higher-intensity office and commercial uses at the eastern end of the corridor.

Westridge Shopping Center, at the Winstead Avenue intersection, and Englewood Square are both high-intensity commercial centers along the corridor. Setbacks vary widely along Sunset Avenue, with many properties significantly distant from the roadway, which suggests a mixture of old and new buildings have been added under different development ordinance requirements by the City.

There is little adjacent parcel connectivity and nearly all properties have at least one driveway accessing the roadway. Connecting these adjacent parcels through internal driveways may provide an opportunity to improve access and limit the number of vehicles turning onto Sunset Avenue to visit adjacent businesses.

## Corridor Profile

The corridor profile on the following page begins to tell the story of how a road is used by its community. The initial quantitative findings in this profile are supplemented with qualitative feedback from stakeholders and participants throughout the planning process to capture first-hand perspectives.

**Figure 3.3 on page 29** demonstrates a clustering of both vehicle and bicycle & pedestrian crashes between Winstead Avenue and Westridge Circle Drive, influenced both by the higher traffic volumes in this section and numerous driveway curb cuts.

The corridor's vehicle-dominant profile is reinforced by the conspicuous absence of bicycle and pedestrian amenities. Sidewalks are found only along the north side of Sunset Avenue, and only along the eastern section of the corridor, ending at Winstead Avenue. While some pedestrian crossings exist to cross side streets, there is only one pedestrian crosswalk across Sunset Avenue, at Englewood Drive. No crosswalks are present at key intersections such as Winstead Avenue, and no bicycle facilities of any variety are present throughout the corridor.



## Corridor Profile

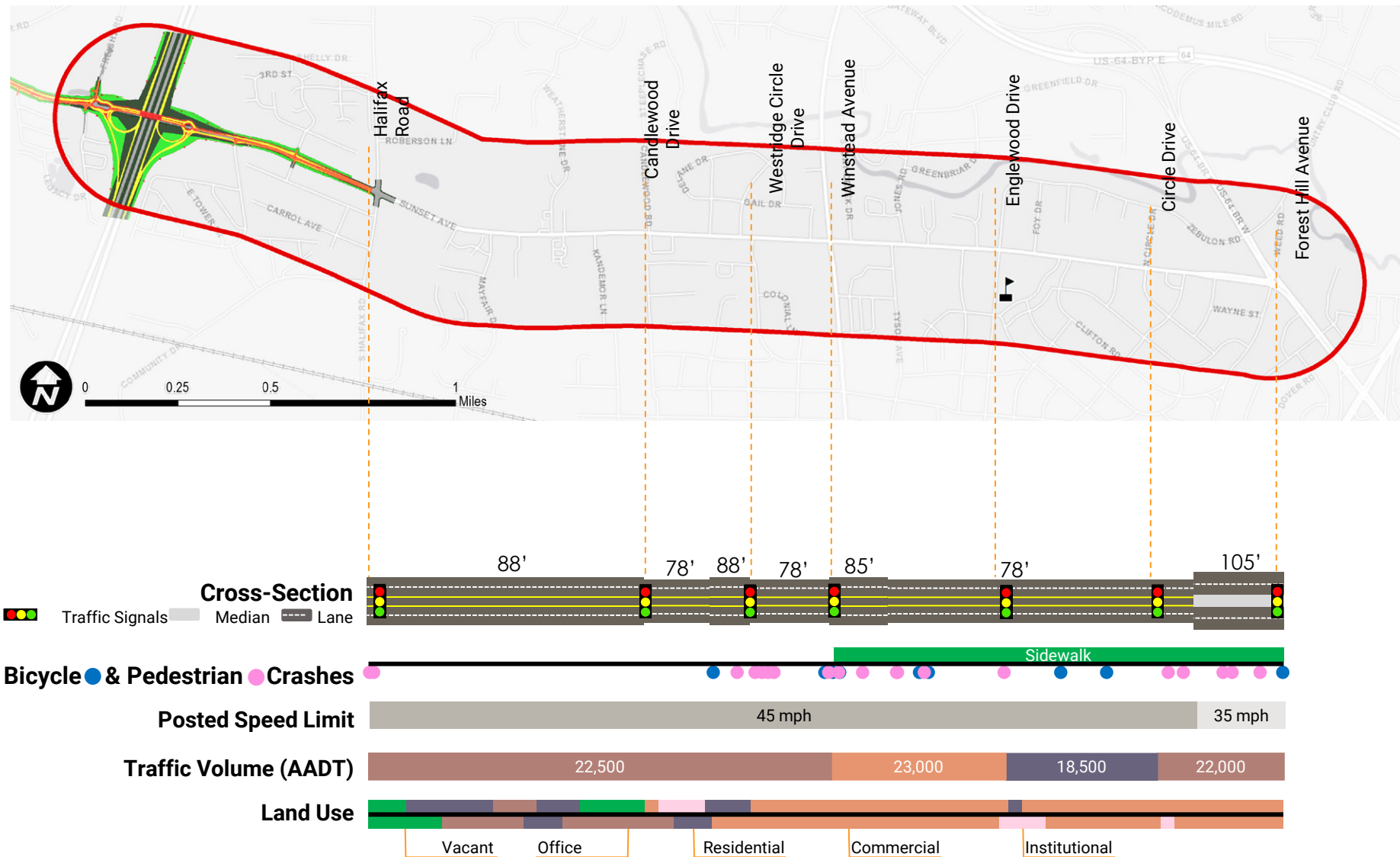


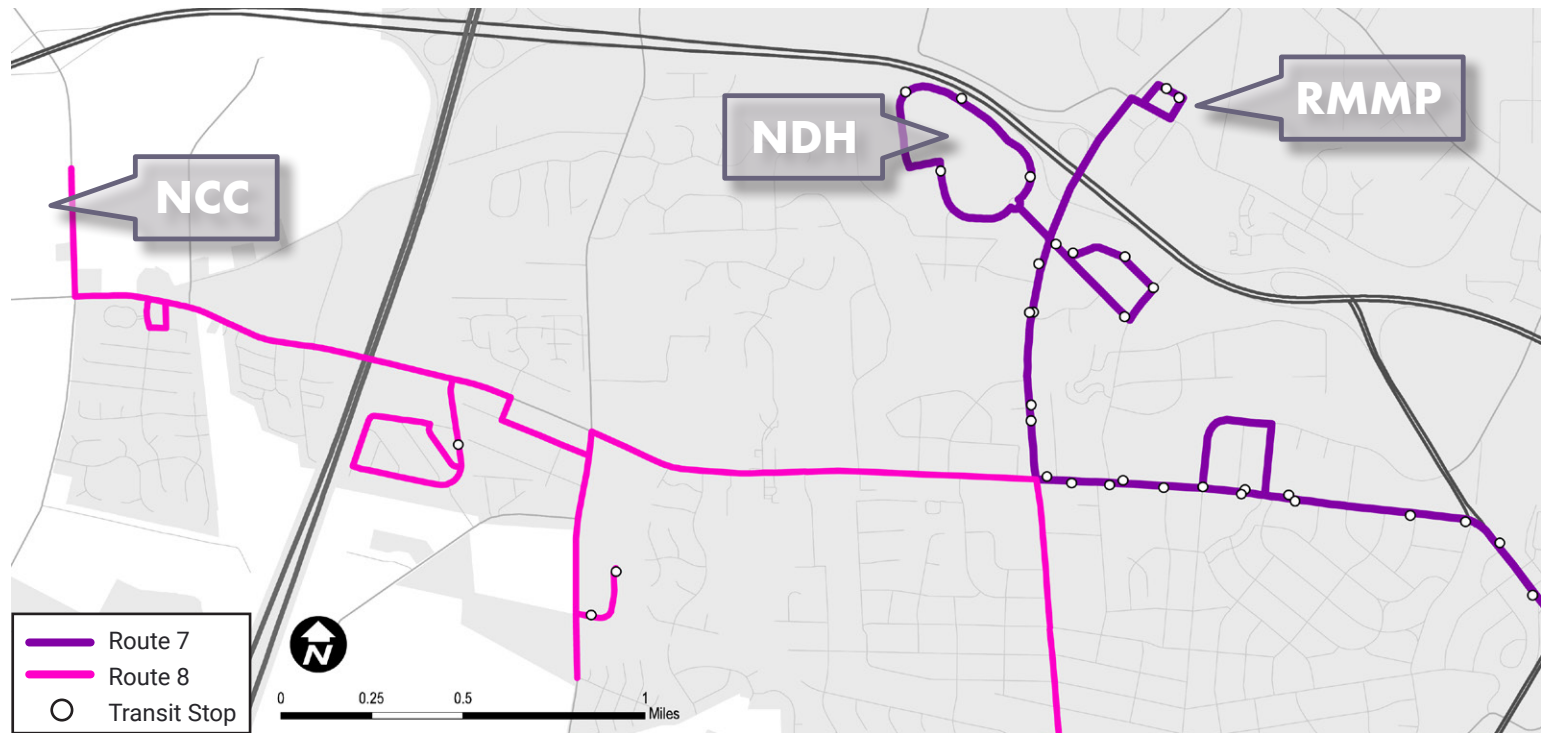
Figure 3.3: Corridor Profile, Sunset Avenue.

## Transit Service

As the public transit service for Rocky Mount, Tar River Transit (TRT) operates two routes that travel along Sunset Avenue within the study area, Routes 7 and 8. The two routes have different service areas despite operating within the same corridor. Route 7 connects the Rocky Mount Medical Park and Nash Day Hospital with Downtown Rocky Mount, travelling along Sunset Avenue within the study area from Winstead Avenue to Forest Hill Avenue. Route 8 connects Nash Community College to Downtown Rocky Mount, travelling along Sunset Avenue within the study area from Halifax Road to Winstead Avenue. This route is also the only TRT route that offers “wave-down” service—potential passengers can stop the bus anywhere on the route in order to board by standing near the edge of the street and hailing the driver. The routes do not overlap on Sunset Avenue apart from

Winstead Avenue, where they each cover opposite legs of the intersection. Transit stops are more frequent along the corridor for the 7 route, and shelters with benches are located at stops near Tyson Avenue, Englewood Plaza, and Crescent Drive.

Buses operating along this corridor are equipped with GPS to enable live tracking. Although route schedules published online indicate 60 minute headways for each stop, Tar River Transit encourages riders to look up bus arrivals at their planned stops using the live Bus Tracker, available as the DoubleMap Bus Tracker App. In addition to fixed-route service, Tar River Transit also offers paratransit service and rural transportation services, as well as half-fare rates for riders with disabilities.



**Figure 3.4:** Tar River Transit Routes along Sunset Avenue.

Nash Community College, Nash Day Hospital, and the Rocky Mount Medical Park are called out. (Source: Tar River Transit, 2020.)





# Corridor Performance

## Safety and Operations

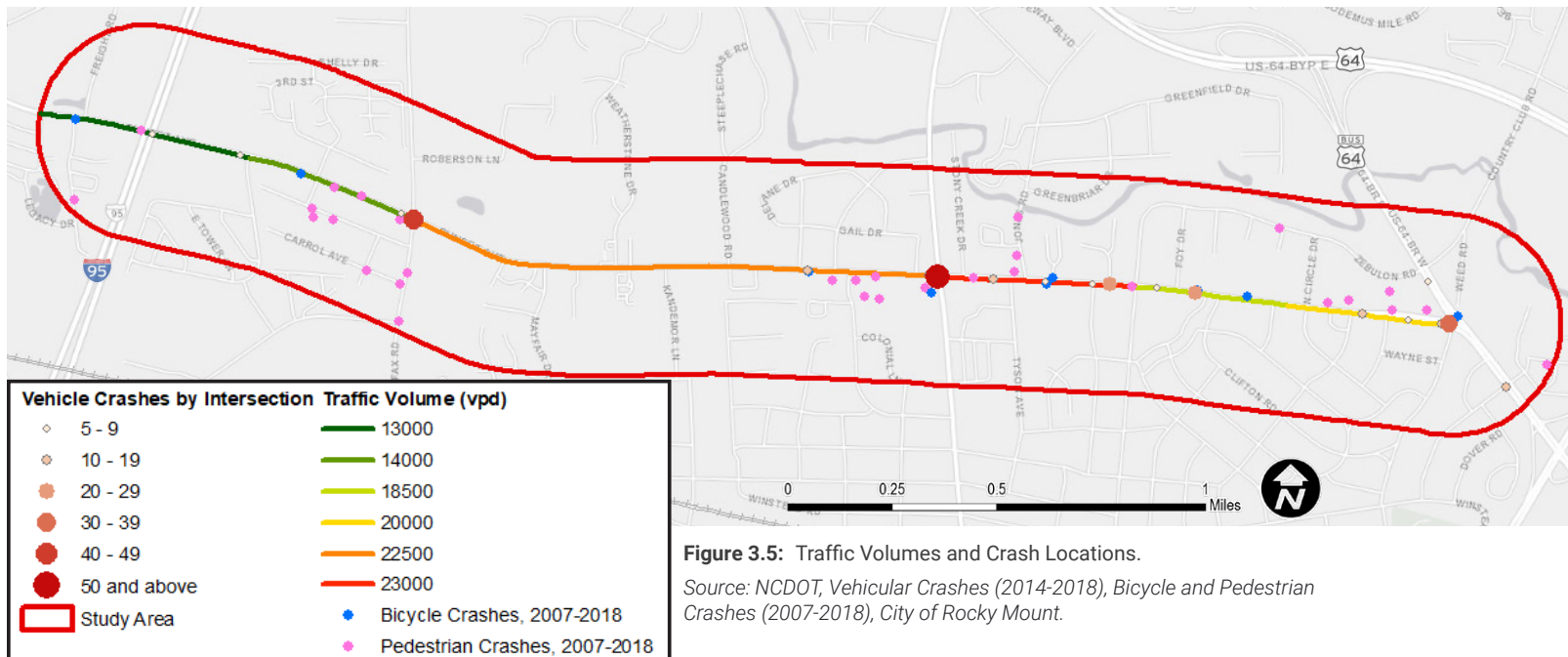
### Signal Timing

Sunset Avenue corridor project has seven signalized intersections at Halifax Road, Candlewood Road, Westridge Circle Drive, Winstead Avenue, Englewood Drive, Circle Drive, and Forest Hill Avenue/Buck Leonard Boulevard. All intersections are fully-actuated and have detection loops on various through movements and left turn lanes; however, the Halifax signal is not coordinated with the others. All minor movement phases have seven (7) second green minimums and, except at Winstead Avenue (ten (10) seconds), all minor movements have twelve (12) second green minimums. This translates to limited turning movement phases for cross streets and longer vehicle queue lengths.

Moreover, no signal contains pedestrian phases or specific peak hour timing. When combined with the lack of crosswalks and the large crossing distances at major intersections, this limits crossing time for pedestrians, encourages darting into traffic and other risky behavior, and contributes to the current vehicle-dominant corridor.

### Crash Analysis

Crash analysis synthesizes crash data from state and local sources to identify problematic segments of the corridor, as well as to serve as a comparison to corridors with similar characteristics across the state. Crash data provides a clear image of areas of concern and assists in the planning process to highlight both general safety conditions for users, as well as areas of acute concern within the study area.



### High Frequency Crash Intersections

Intersection	Count
Winstead Avenue	83
Halifax Road	40
Buck Leonard Boulevard	33
Jones Road	22
Englewood Drive	21

**Table 3.1:** High Frequency Crash Intersections.  
Source: NCDOT TEAAS.

### Vehicle Crashes by Severity, 2015-2020

Crash Type	Count
K or A - Fatal or Disabling Injury	1
B or C - Injury may not be evident	127
O or U - Property Damage Only or Unknown	282
<b>Total</b>	<b>410</b>

**Table 3.2:** Vehicle Crashes by Severity, 2015-2020.  
Source: NCDOT TEAAS.

Crash rate metrics portray a high-crash, low-severity corridor. Crashes along Sunset Avenue are typically less severe than similar urban secondary roads in North Carolina; in the five years studied (2015-2020), only one fatal or disabling injury crash occurred within the study area. However, while crashes are less severe, they occur more frequently along the corridor than on similar roads, at a rate **1.12 times the state average for similar roadways** (urban, State Routes with four lanes and two-way left turn lane). Accidents are clustered at intersections and noteworthy driveways, indicated in Table 3.1.

Bicycle and pedestrian crashes are low throughout Sunset Avenue, and spatial analyses reveals trends similar to that of vehicular crashes. Clusters of crashes are found at Winstead Avenue and the intersections and driveways near Winstead and the Westridge Shopping Plaza. Mirroring the increasing population density and land use intensity, crashes are predominantly found in the eastern section of Sunset Avenue, though a large cluster of bicycle and pedestrian crashes exists just west of Halifax Road, near the planned interchange.

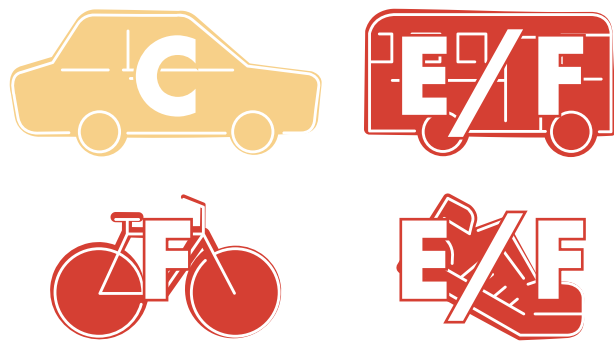
## Vehicle Level-of-Service (LOS)

Vehicular Level-of-Service measures and categorizes the functionality of a corridor for motorists into six letter grades (A-F). Taking into consideration traffic speed and volume, travel times, pavement condition and type, travel lanes and roadway capacity, and signal phasing from both state and local sources, Vehicular Level-of-Service aggregates and synthesizes these data to create a hierarchy of the user's perceived satisfaction with the facility. Level of Service helps transportation planners and consultants to identify specific areas of concern for motorists, understand its differing conditions and how they impact users, determine needs and prioritize improvements, and choose among competing alternatives in planning and decision-making.

Roadway conditions for motor vehicles are consistent throughout the corridor even at peak demand, operating at LOS C, a comfortable traffic flow. Traffic volumes are highest near Winstead Avenue at 23,000 vehicles per day, but vary only slightly throughout the study area, with the minimum daily volume 18,500 vehicles per day near Forest Hill Avenue.



*Sunset Avenue lacks bicycle facilities.*



**Figure 3.6:** Multimodal Level-of-Service Summary by mode.

## Multimodal Level-of-Service

Multimodal users of the corridor face much different conditions than drivers. Conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists along Sunset Avenue are poor, receiving a grade of LOS E or F depending upon the mode of travel. Key to this poor grade are the lack of adequate facilities for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users for all or part of the corridor.

Sidewalks are immediately adjacent along the north side of Sunset, and non-existent on the south side. Sidewalks on either side of the roadway end at the Winstead Avenue intersection. Apart from a single pedestrian crossing at Englewood Drive, there is no connectivity across the roadway, and no pedestrian refuge islands exist in the corridor. Pedestrian lighting and street trees are noticeably absent, although some trees may be found in the center median between Forest Hill Avenue and Crescent drive, and where vacant or residential parcels abut the roadway.

Bicyclists face the poorest of conditions, receiving LOS F. Bicycle facilities are not present along Sunset Avenue which is posted as 45 miles per hour. Current traffic volumes and speeds suggest that separated bicycle facilities would be more appropriate than traditional bicycle lanes. While a wide outside lane with curb and gutter is present, this type of bicycle facility is considered inadequate for the average cyclist.

Transit users face inconsistent conditions, and grade at LOS E or F depending upon location in the corridor. Headways are long along Sunset, with waits of 60 minutes or more. Transit amenities in the form of benches and shelters are found only at three stops: near Tyson Avenue, Englewood Plaza, and at Crescent Drive. All other stops are indicated with signs (Route 8 to Nash Community College allows wave-downs anywhere along the roadway) but facilities are otherwise lacking, including a lack of access via a connected sidewalk network.









# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT04

Public engagement is vital to the planning process, because it is only through engaging the members of the community that the corridor can truly be understood. Travel data can only tell us so much about Sunset Avenue; the local knowledge obtained through daily use of the road completes the full picture of the corridor, calls out its opportunities and challenges in ways not represented through numbers.

This chapter details the comprehensive public engagement process that took place during the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study. The survey responses, pointed questions, and detail-rich comments articulate the public's own vision for Sunset Avenue, as well as the obstacles faced in achieving that vision.

In this Chapter:

1. Stakeholder Discussions
2. Online Engagement
3. Public Meetings
4. Key Takeaways

## The Importance of Engagement

Public engagement plays an integral role in any design or study, as its results will impact the daily lives of community members and local businesses. Planning **for** a community of any size is not as successful as planning **with** the community; meaningful engagement means stronger results, tighter community bonds, and its implementation is harder fought for. Furthermore, engagement provides invaluable feedback to planners, engineers, and designers regarding current conditions and problems that might not be fully understood looking at data alone; the human element and a diversity of perspectives helps to reframe the project team's view of the issues and provide better suggestions for improvement.

In the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study, public engagement was a critical part of every step in the planning process. Despite a global pandemic restricting interpersonal interaction, public outreach included virtual engagement with committees of citizens, business owners and elected officials, a project website, an online survey and interactive mapping exercise, public symposia, a project charrette, and an open house to present the final recommendations. By providing points of engagement throughout the process, residents were encouraged to stay involved and keep up with the project, with the intent that they would see their feedback and conversations realized in the final recommendations of this Study. Without their help, this vision is never defined and never realized.





## Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the development of the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study, our world, nation, and community were struck by the COVID-19 Pandemic, an unprecedented moment in history with profound implications on traditional means of public engagement. Due to the pandemic, our daily routines were brought to a grinding halt. Stay-at-home orders, school and business closures, and working from home became the new normal for North Carolina residents. Social gatherings were restricted with limitations on types of events and attendance, or outright banned, in order to limit the spread of the coronavirus. Large public meetings, such as the project symposia and design workshop, as well as small gatherings, such as advisory committee meetings and stakeholder interviews, would need to find new formats in order to engage the public meaningfully in the planning process.

Like our community, this study adjusted to the new normal and shifted traditionally in-person means of outreach into the virtual realm. Coupling new online capabilities, such as Zoom cloud meeting technology, with familiar methods of online engagement such as interactive web mapping and surveys, virtual public engagement stepped up to meet the needs of this project. While many of the engagement opportunities described herein were initially intended as in-person meetings, innovation borne out of this challenging time provided a virtual format that nonetheless fostered deep engagement and robust participation from a large segment of the community.



HEALTH AND SCIENCE

## North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper orders residents to stay at home order amid coronavirus outbreak

Hannah Miller

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### KEY POINTS

- North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper issued a stay-at-home order Friday and closed the state's nonessential businesses in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The order goes into effect 5:00 pm Monday, but Cooper urged residents to begin staying at home immediately.
- "It's what we have to do to save lives," he said at a press briefing Friday.

# Stakeholder Discussions

## Steering Committee

At the beginning of this process, the City of Rocky Mount worked with the project team to create a steering committee that would lead the progress of the study. This team was crucial in the development of recommendations and the success of engagement that drove the project. This core group of community members, professionals, agency representatives, and advocates worked closely with the project team throughout the planning process to set the meeting and engagement schedule as well as deadlines. The team met or held conference calls regularly during the process to stay up-to-date and on schedule during all phases of the project.

The Steering Committee served not only as a project oversight committee, but also as a decision-making entity throughout the life of the project. They helped to provide venues for sharing information, raised and discussed ideas, increased overall community participation, identified other stakeholders for focus groups, fostered communication between the community and the project team, focused and provided resources, helped to set a direction and priorities, and vetted the study recommendations and action plan. They were present every step of the way to provide their local and specialized knowledge to the project team and were consistent in their advocacy for Sunset Avenue.

## Steering Committee

Bob League  
Jordan Reedy  
Steve Yetman  
JoSeth Bocock  
Cynthia Jones  
Candice Kirtz  
Erin Hicks

**City of Rocky Mount**

Carlos Moya  
**North Carolina Department of Transportation**

David Farris

**Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce**

Ron Green

**Boys & Girls Club, Tar River Region**

Harriett Buss

Sarah Dixon

David Joyner

John Griffin

Nancy Nixon

**Community Representatives**



## Stakeholder Interviews

Following the symposium, stakeholder interviews were held with representatives comprised of community stakeholders, including residents, agency representatives, community leaders, advocates, and elected officials. Meetings were held as a series of one-hour interviews and centered on a single topical theme. Focus group members were identified by members of the steering committee for inclusion based on their ability to provide different perspectives on the topic at hand representing different facets of the community.

Focus group meetings provided an opportunity to obtain qualitative feedback on targeted topics and areas of interest or concern within the study area. In contrast to the volumes of quantitative data produced during the initial investigation phase of the project, face-to-face interaction with community members in a virtual format allowed the project team to verify data with group perspectives, as well as to supplement the same information with local insight and perspective not captured through data.

The project team conducted six focus groups, with a total of 20 attendees over one day in late August 2020. Groups touched on bicycle and pedestrian issues, schools, underserved populations and equity, development and business interests, transit and ADA accessibility, and local government. While each group touched on different, discrete topics, the following key themes emerged from the discussions:

### 1 Crossing Sunset is dangerous.

The current lack of crosswalks allowing access across the corridor forces risky behavior from pedestrians and bicyclists, such as darting through traffic.

### 2 Bike & Pedestrian Improvements are needed.

Adding bicycle lanes and/or sidepaths, and filling in the large sidewalk gaps, will make non-motorized use of Sunset much more safe.

### 3 Coordinate Development efforts.

Inconsistent setbacks make infrastructure improvements a challenge, while lack of cross-access between parcels forces more cars onto the road.



# Online Engagement

## Project Website

Early in the process, the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study website was created so residents, property owners, business owners and other stakeholders could access information and provide input on the discussions surrounding the corridor study. The website featured information on project purpose, dates and locations of upcoming meetings, meeting results, related documents, and ways to get involved with the project. Ahead of major public events, email blasts were sent out alerting the public to updates to the website and new event postings. When combined with the publicizing efforts by the City as well as local news organizations, hundreds of people were able to hear about the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study while it was being developed.

Among the ways to get involved through the website were a comment box, an online survey, and an interactive map tool. The comment box allowed for residents to leave general thoughts or ask questions which the project team could respond to directly. The survey and map were open for interaction for several months and closed when the design recommendations were completed. The results were left viewable on the website and are documented in the digital appendices of this report. Summaries of both are shown in the following figures.

The **Sunset Avenue Corridor Study website** presented the project to the public, provided opportunities for virtual engagement through a map and survey, and served as a clearinghouse for project-related information.

## Sunset Avenue Corridor Study

Planning for a more walkable, bikeable future for this Rocky Mount corridor.

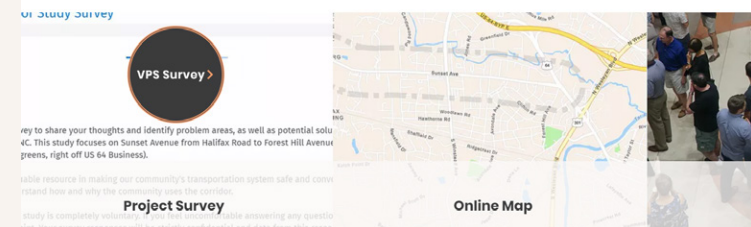
*Interested in learning more about how Complete Streets can impact a community like Rocky Mount? Watch this video:*

### Get Involved

Take the Survey, View the Map, and Participate in Planning Events for Sunset Avenue.

### About

The City of Rocky Mount is working with consultants to propose improvements to Sunset Avenue in Nash County.

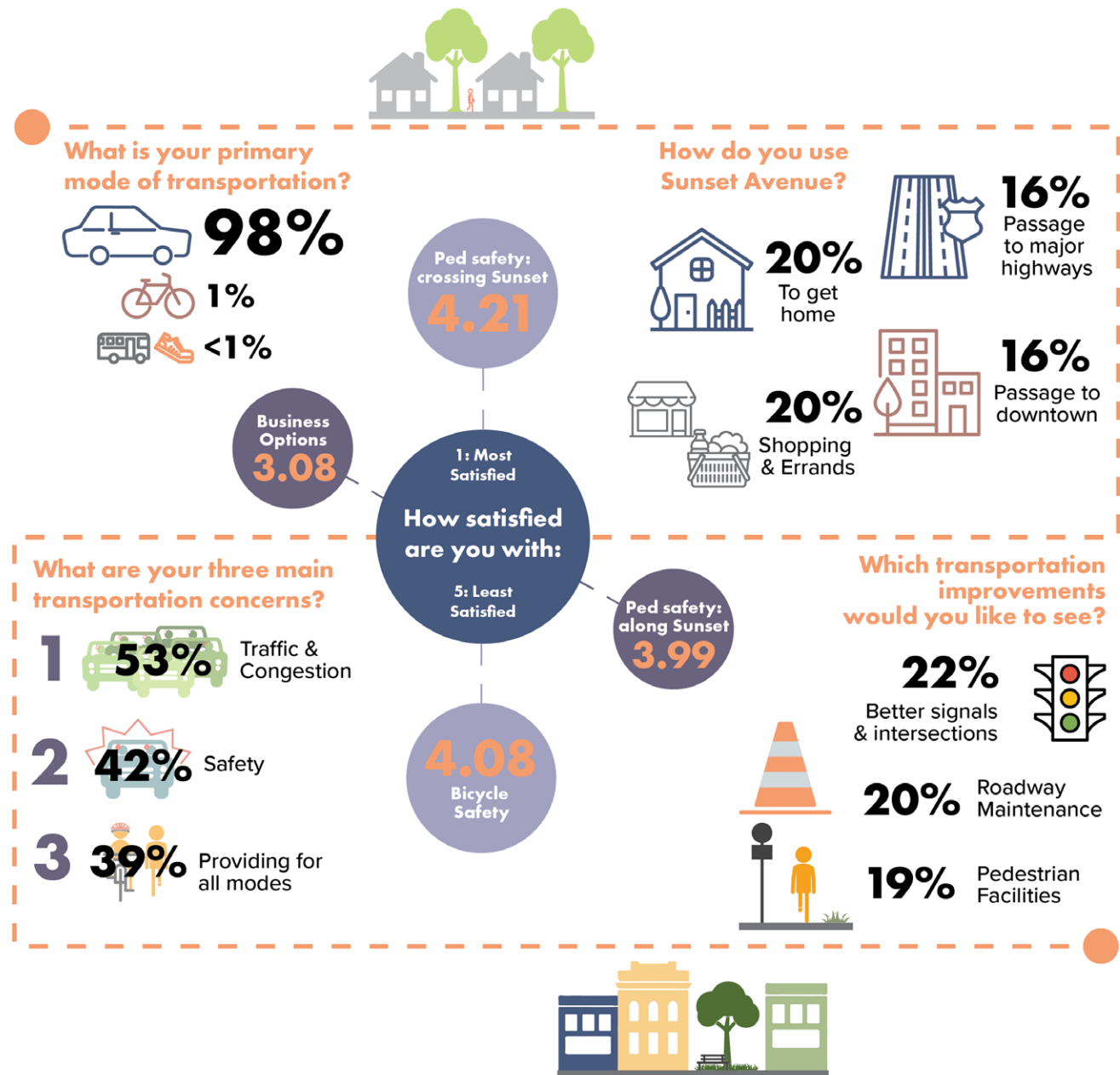




## Online Survey

The online survey was developed at the beginning of the planning process along with the map tool and the website. It featured a set of seventeen (17) questions, fifteen (15) of which were related to traveling conditions, development, and safety along Sunset Avenue, whereby respondents could voice concerns and rank priorities for the corridor. Survey responses provided general feedback, both qualitative and quantitative, that helped the Project team to see the full picture of Sunset Avenue's challenges and opportunities. These high-level, general responses complemented more detailed, first-hand discussions with focus groups and the steering committee. The survey was critical to creating informed consent and reaching the desired broad spectrum of residents in the region.

**Nearly 400 participants responded** to at least one question the survey. Responses were not required for all questions, causing variation in the number of responses between 132 to 153 for each question. Major takeaways are summarized in the infographic at right.



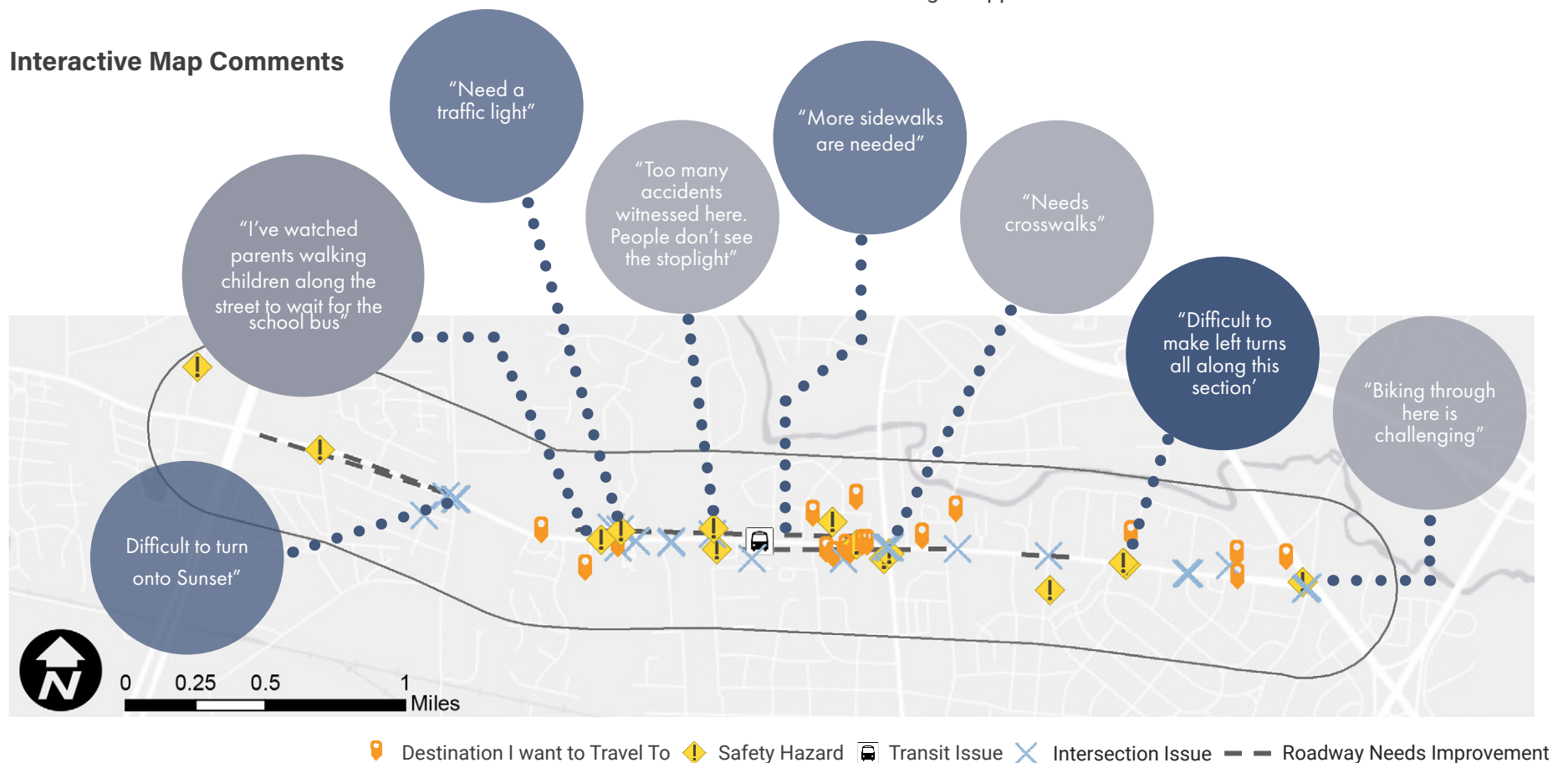
## Interactive Map

To complement the electronic survey, a web-based crowd sourcing and mapping tool hosted by ESRI Online was tailored to Sunset Avenue to gather and calibrate public knowledge on improved and additional transportation infrastructure. Users accessed the tool through the project website and pinpointed where problem areas and/or improvement potential are located. After selecting from a short list of point types, users were able to leave a comment to explain their take on the issue or potential solutions. Clustering comments indicated the importance or severity of the issue to the public. This tool proved invaluable to the project team, as residents were

able to link their comments and ideas to georeferenced data, providing the project team with the exact location and description of their concern. The data received aided the planning process, particular with regards to prioritization, and identified places where bicycle and pedestrian improvements were needed.

The map received much attention from the public, with 65 comments left on the corridor. The bulk of comments addressed intersection issues and safety hazards, and clustered around Winstead Avenue, Westridge Shopping Plaza, and Candlewood Road. The comments shown below do not include all of the comments provided. The full list of comments can be found in the digital appendices.

### Interactive Map Comments







# Public Meetings

## Project Symposium

The Virtual Public Symposium, held online via Zoom, was the first large scale public meeting for the Sunset Avenue Transportation Study. Approximately 70 members of the community were in attendance, along with news organizations reporting on the event. During this meeting the project was introduced, along with conditions inferred from data analysis and discussions with the Steering Committee, and preliminary analysis done by the project team. A survey was given to the audience, and with Zoom's integrated polling capabilities the results were shown in real time, giving everyone the opportunity to see what they said as a community. During this portion of the presentation, members of the community were asked to explain the reasoning behind their answers, allowing everyone to see the perspectives of others. These discussions were facilitated by a member of the project team.

Doing so allowed attendees to discuss the corridor how they wanted to, focusing in on areas they cared about the most, or detailing issues that they felt were most pressing, and coming up with solutions that could be implemented to improve the street. This provided the team with a large amount of public input and comments directly related to the corridor and the areas surrounding it.

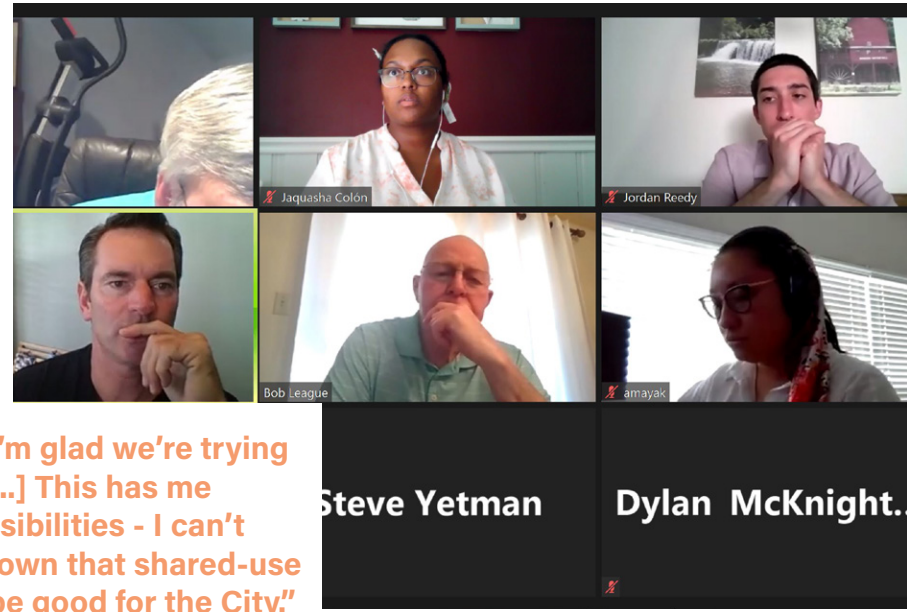
**"People use the middle turning lane as a third lane. If people are turning out of a business and need to cross three lanes of traffic, it becomes very dangerous! [...] It's really not safe and I've almost been in a car accident trying to get into my neighborhood at least once a week. "**

— Survey Respondent, June 17, 2020



**"I think this is great. I'm glad we're trying something different [...] This has me excited about the possibilities - I can't wait to ride my bike down that shared-use path. I think this will be good for the City."**

— Ron Green, CEO, Boys & Girls Club



## Multi-Day Design Workshop/Charrette

The workshop, held in late August 2020, was the biggest and most coordinated push on the project. It included three formal virtual public meetings, effort from every member of the Steering Committee and the entire project team was involved and on location for a three day intense design and engagement effort. This was held from August 25th to 27th online via Zoom and Mural, where the project team, consisting of planners, urban designers, landscape architects, and engineers worked in a collaborative online environment, producing much of the design and graphic work for the recommendations of the project.

Public-facing work sessions were held regularly throughout the three-day workshop to present concepts and receive feedback from stakeholders and the public. Morning sessions with stakeholders allowed the team to

drill down into nuances of design and its effects on targeted groups, such as corridor business owners and emergency services. Three public pin-up sessions were held each evening, wherein the entire public was invited to attend. Here, the proposed design concepts were presented, and questions could be asked by any attendee. Feedback was documented and taken back to the drawing board, where the design team could digest information received and innovate on the concept, or change it completely.

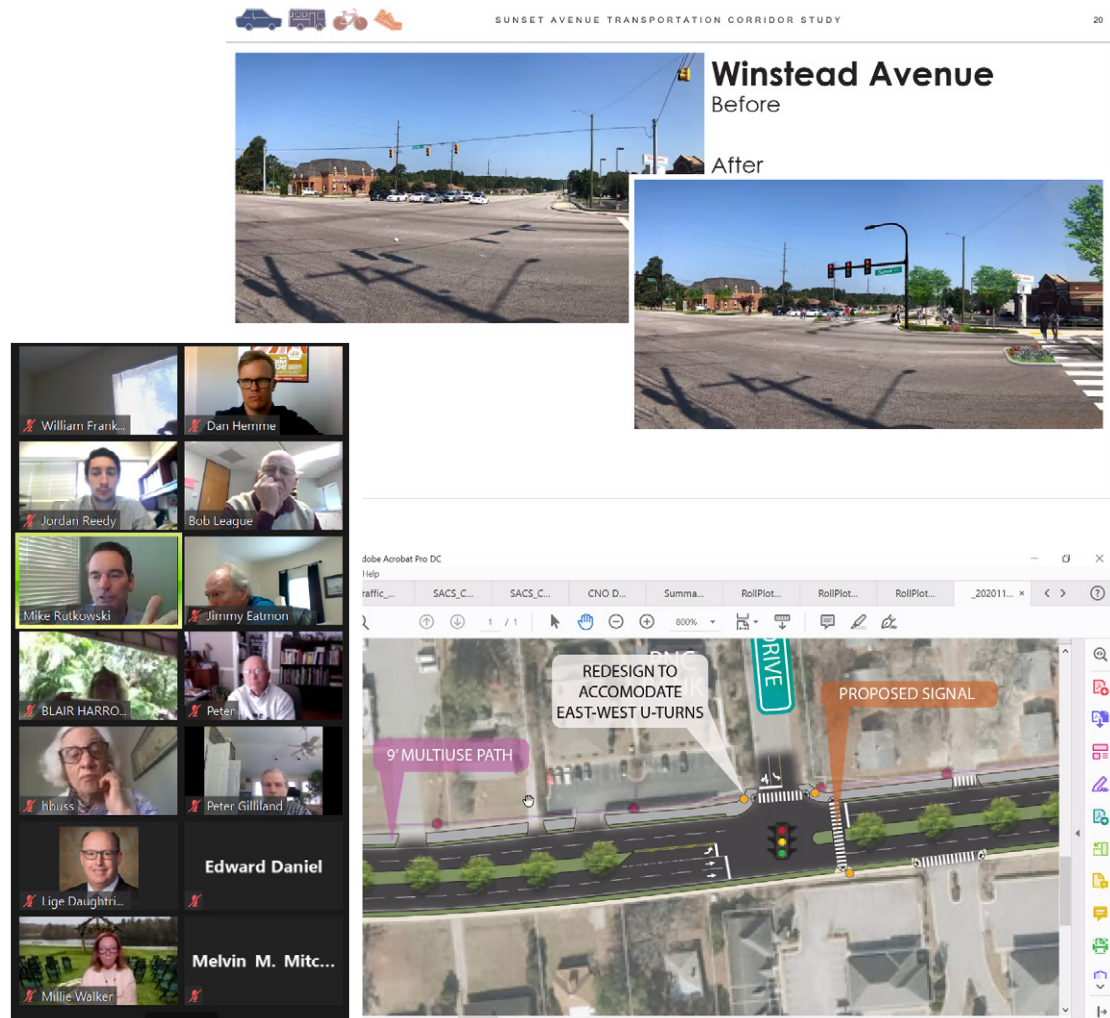
Some of the results of the visual preference survey are viewed here, and directly influenced the recommendations detailed in Chapter 6. During the final meeting, the public was able to view the resulting work produced out of the charrette and see how their feedback was incorporated in the conceptual designs and renderings. Following this meeting, everything produced during the week was viewable on the project website.



## Open House

The final public meeting of the planning process, the Open House, was held November 19, 2020. With the COVID-19 pandemic worsening at the time, the meeting was held, like others, over two virtual meeting sessions on the Zoom platform. Nearly 50 community members attended the two sessions, providing excellent feedback on the final design as well as recommendations for implementation and phasing of the project's completion.

The Open House allowed for community members to meet the project team, other stakeholders, and to view the final concept design for Sunset Avenue. While much of the design was completed during the Design Workshop, the project team continued to refine the ideas afterward into the complete vision.





## Key Takeaways

The planning process for the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study engaged the public throughout the planning process both to understand current challenges and opportunities throughout the study area, formulate design concepts and subject them to scrutiny, and refine the ultimate recommendations borne of this study. Stakeholder discussions, online engagement, and virtual public meetings created an umbrella of means of participation, which brought together a diverse population of Rocky Mount residents and community stakeholders who use and interact with the Sunset Avenue corridor routinely and in unique ways.

From this engagement, a select number of important issues and observations repeatedly become the subject of conversation, survey response, or map commentary. These issues, summarized here, represent the key takeaways from public engagement:

### 1 Residents want bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Sunset Avenue is challenging for non-motorized users -- and residents want that to change. Pedestrian facilities were the third-most requested improvement, and focus group participants highlighted their immediate need.

### 2 Traffic calming measures are a must-have.

Survey respondents and map comments repeatedly highlighted speeding vehicles and poor signals. Safety was the second-highest concern in the survey and focus groups noted that speed limits did not reflect reality.

### 3 Access management is critical to fixing congestion & safety issues.

Many complementary uses and neighboring parcels are not connected to each other, which forces more cars out onto Sunset Avenue.

### 4 More cohesive development is needed.

Many of Sunset Avenue's problems are due to the piecemeal development pattern that occurred. Participants noted that Sunset is currently a corridor to "get through," rather than "get to."



# Guiding Principles

Although this study's Guiding Principles were laid out in Chapter 1, it is worthwhile to revisit the Principles once more at the end of the public engagement process. Intended to reflect the core takeaways both from quantitative analysis of the corridor as well as the many insights drawn from the broader Rocky Mount community, these Principles guide the concept designs and recommendations in the chapters to follow.

## # 1

**Redesign to Accommodate a More Complete Street.**

## # 2

**The Safety of All Users is Paramount.**

## # 3

**Built-In Traffic Calming is a Must.**

## # 4

**Support Redevelopment through Quality Urban Design.**

## # 5

**Create a Community Gateway through Attractive Design.**







# BUILDING COMPLETE STREETS 05

Sunset Avenue's growth has been characterized by piecemeal development and a lack of targeted, principled growth.

Growth is smart when it gives us great communities, with more choices and personal freedom, good return on public investment, greater opportunity across the community, a thriving natural environment, and a legacy we can be proud to leave our children and grandchildren.

In this Chapter:

1. Principles of Smart Growth
2. Complete Streets

## Growing Smarter

Health, schools, taxes, traffic, the environment, economic growth, fairness, opportunity—many of the things we care about—are all affected by development decisions. What, where, and how we build have major impacts on our personal lives, our communities, and our nation.

Growth presents a tremendous opportunity for progress. Communities around the country are looking for ways to get the most out of new development and to maximize their investments. Rocky Mount is no exception and has been making efforts to outline how the city and its neighborhoods want to grow and develop.

Frustrated by development that requires residents to drive long distances between jobs and homes, many communities are challenging rules and policies that make it challenging to put workplaces, homes, and services closer together. Many communities are questioning the fiscal wisdom of neglecting existing infrastructure while expanding new sewers, roads, and services further into the fringe. And in many communities where development has improved daily life, the economy, and the environment, smart growth principles have been key to that success.

When communities choose smart growth strategies, they can create new neighborhoods and maintain existing ones that are attractive, convenient, safe, and healthy. They can foster design that encourages social, civic, and physical activity. They can protect the environment while stimulating economic growth.

Most of all, they can create more choices for residents, workers, visitors, children, families, single people, and older adults—choices in where to live, how to get around, and how to interact with the people around them. When communities do this kind of planning, they preserve the best of their past while creating a bright future for generations to come.

Sunset Avenue's growth has been characterized by piecemeal development and a lack of targeted, principled growth. With this Plan now focusing the City's attention on the corridor, the recommendations that come forth from this effort will help to guide new development for the corridor and provide a firm foundation upon which new policies may be built.





## Principles of Smart Growth

(As applicable to Sunset Avenue)

### Mix Land Uses

Mixing land uses—commercial, residential, recreational, educational, and others—in neighborhoods or places that are accessible by bike and foot can create vibrant and diverse communities. In large part, a mix of uses attracts people to shop, meet friends, and live in urban neighborhoods like Georgetown in Washington, D.C., or small towns like Wiscasset, Maine. **Mixed land uses are critical to achieving the great places to live, work, and play that smart growth encourages.**







## Take Advantage of Compact Building Design

An important part of achieving smart growth, compact building helps create the convenient neighborhood centers that people want. Compact building design also presents opportunities to absorb growth and development in a way that uses land more efficiently. By using smaller building footprints for new construction, compact design leaves undeveloped land open to absorb and filter rainwater, which in turn reduces flooding and stormwater drainage needs and lowers the amount of runoff pollution.

Other benefits accrue as well. Compact communities help achieve the density of population needed to support viable transportation alternatives. It is estimated that people will willingly walk to destinations—services as well as transit stops—located within a quarter to one-half of a mile radius. Thus, a **minimum density of six to eight households per acre around bus stops would support bus service.**

Furthermore, compact neighborhoods require fewer linear feet of utility lines—like water, sewer, electricity, phone service, and others—than dispersed communities do. As a result, local governments find that it is cheaper to provide and maintain many services to compact communities.

## Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

By using smart growth approaches to create a wider range of housing choices, communities can begin to use their infrastructure resources more efficiently, better accommodate the housing needs of all residents, and help aging citizens remain in their homes. Housing is a critical part of the way communities grow, as it constitutes a significant share of new construction and development. More importantly, however, housing is a key factor in determining a household's access to transportation, commuting patterns, access to services and education, and consumption of energy and other natural resources.

Providing quality housing for people of all income levels is an integral component in any smart growth strategy. In addition to improving a household's quality of life, housing can ensure a better jobs-housing balance and generate a strong foundation of support for neighborhood transit stops, commercial centers, and other services, thereby mitigating the environmental costs of auto-dependent development.



## Create Walkable Communities

Before the mid-1900s, urban communities and neighborhoods focused on the pedestrian. They were designed to move people to their destinations. However, in the past fifty years, dispersed development patterns and the separation of land uses have led to an increased reliance on personal automobiles and to an elimination of many characteristics that support walkable communities. Today, engineers' and developers' arguments that sidewalks will not be used leave many new streets without sidewalks or with sidewalks on only one side. The engineers and developers are right in one sense: sidewalks by themselves will not induce walking. Other pedestrian-friendly features must be present, such as an appropriate mix of densities and uses, compact street intersections, and neighborhoods that are scaled to people.



## Foster Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place

Communities that have a strong sense of place represent the values of their residents and reflect the unique historical, cultural, economic and geographical context of the area. They use natural and man-made boundaries and landmarks to create a sense of defined neighborhoods, urban communities, and regions. These communities encourage the construction and preservation of buildings, which prove to be assets over time not only because of the services provided, but also the unique contribution they make to the look and feel of a community.

Beyond the construction of buildings, these communities reflect their unique characteristics in the details – such as landscaping, signs and awnings – that help to further distinguish the area for passers-by and visitors. Guided by their own vision of growth, communities that have adopted smart growth principles can direct investment and development into areas that already reflect a strong sense of place.





## Preserve Open Space, Natural Beauty, and Critical Environments

Open space supports smart growth goals by bolstering local economies, preserving critical environmental areas, providing recreational opportunities, and guiding new growth into existing communities. Preservation of open space can have a profound impact on a community's quality of life, and therefore a region's economic prosperity. Economic analyses from across the country have shown that provision of open space and associated recreational and educational opportunities, environmental and cultural preservation, alternative transit modes, and sprawl-limiting characteristics, all contribute positively to the quality of life. Numerous market analysis studies have reported that owners of small companies ranked **recreation, parks, and open space** as the highest priorities in choosing a new location for their business.

Networks of preserved open space and waterways can shape and direct urban form and at the same time prevent haphazard conservation (which is conservation that is reactive and small scale). These networks, known as "green infrastructure," help frame new growth by locating new development in the most cost-efficient places. Green infrastructure also ensures that the preserved areas are connected to create wildlife corridors, preserve water quality, and maintain economically viable working lands.

## Strengthen and Direct Development Toward Existing Communities

Smart growth directs development towards communities already served by infrastructure, seeking to utilize the resources that existing neighborhoods offer and to maintain the value of public and private investment. By encouraging development in existing areas, communities benefit from a stronger tax base, closer proximity of jobs and services, increased efficiency of already developed land and infrastructure, reduced development pressure in fringe areas, and preservation of farmland and open space. In addition, the process of increasing development in existing communities can maximize the use of existing impervious surfaces, thereby improving local and regional water quality, and can create opportunities for more transportation options, which lower vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and ultimately improve regional air quality. Often existing neighborhoods can accommodate much of the growth that communities require through infill development, brownfields redevelopment, and the rehabilitation of existing buildings. For example, a 1996 study found that brownfields in Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Cleveland could absorb one to five years of residential development, 10 to 20 years of industrial development, or 200 to 400 years of office space.





## Provide a Variety of Transportation Options

The science of traffic management and prediction has begun to catch up with what citizens have observed for years: **new road capacity fills up almost as fast as it is constructed.** Known in transportation circles as “induced demand,” studies now show that as large new roads are built, some people increase their driving to take advantage of the new infrastructure. Some studies suggest that between 60 and 90 percent of new road capacity is consumed by new driving within five years of the opening of a major road. In the short term, people may switch from using transit and car-pools to traveling on the new road, and in the long term, with the increased accessibility of the surrounding land, development patterns shift to create more growth and new traffic in the area. In regions around the country, planners and engineers are concluding that the continuation of current policies and practices is unlikely to alleviate congestion.

In response, communities are beginning to implement new approaches to transportation planning, such as better coordinating land use and transportation; increasing the availability of high-quality transit service; testing of

new technology like connected vehicles, creating resiliency and connectivity within their transportation networks; and ensuring connectivity between pedestrian, bike, transit, and road facilities. In short, they are coupling a multi-modal approach to transportation with supportive land-use patterns that create a wider range of transportation options.

## Make Development Decisions Fair, Predictable, and Cost Effective

For a community to be successful in implementing smart growth, its vision, objectives, and actions must be embraced by the private sector. The private sector is crucial to supplying the large amounts of money and construction expertise needed to meet the growing demand for smart growth developments. If investors, bankers, developers, builders, and others do not earn a profit, few smart growth projects will be built. Fortunately, government policies and guidance can help reduce barriers to profitable smart growth development practices. Since the development industry is highly regulated, the property value and the place desirability are determined in large part by government investment in infrastructure and by government regulation.

## Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration In Decision Making

A key component of smart growth is to ensure early and frequent involvement of all stakeholders to identify and address specific needs and concerns. The range of these stakeholders is broad and includes developers, urban planners, transportation engineers, conservation and environmental groups, community development advocates, historic preservationists, commuters, students, environmental justice advocates, senior citizen organizations, children's advocacy groups, churches, parent-teacher associations, civic associations, and many others. Each can contribute a unique and valuable perspective to both broad community plans and specific project designs.

These perspectives are particularly critical for the construction of the mixed use, compact, walkable, and transit-rich communities that smart growth supports because these varied perspectives may represent a departure from what is conventional and familiar. The means of **engaging the community and stakeholders range from early stakeholder input in community plans to ongoing feedback and evaluation of the plan's implementation** as projects are constructed. Ensuring a high level of public awareness is one of the most fundamental strategies to guarantee that community needs, and possible solutions are fully considered. This strategy can help local leaders better identify and support development that meets those needs.





# Complete Streets

Complete Streets are designed for everyone. According to the National Complete Streets Coalition:

**“They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all user, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities.”**

A Complete Streets version of Sunset Avenue makes it easier to cross the corridor, walk to multiple businesses, and bike to and from locations along the corridor without feeling unsafe. These improvements are beneficial to all, from residents walking and biking to Westridge Plaza, to elderly community members wanting to retain their independence.

The idea of Complete Streets conveys a different image to each individual and, depending on their perspective, this can be fairly good or pretty bad. Drivers who are accustomed to automobile dominated development tend to see complete streets as an idea guaranteed to take away valuable travel lanes for what is perceived to be seldom used bike lanes and bothersome parallel parking. In truth, a complete street policy is not a one size fits all approach; a

complete street redesign of an existing roadway must be tailored to existing and future travel demands, surrounding development and land use, and to that specific town or community. What an enacted Complete Streets Policy might look like in a small town is going to be different from that of a dense, urban center, and it should be. The same can be said for Complete Streets within the same town or city. For example, what might work on the east end of Sunset Avenue near Buck Leonard Boulevard might not be feasible on the west end near the interstate.

Complete Streets considers every aspect of the roadway, from the perspective of both policy and the physical construction. It is not just about what occurs between curb to curb; it matters what happens between and behind the walls of the buildings facing the street. A street that becomes safer to walk along and cross is a street where kids can walk to school safely, older adults can retain independence if their driving ability is impaired, and more people can comfortably walk along. This can be accomplished by improving the conditions on the roadway with facilities like widened sidewalks, standard design crosswalks, street trees, and pedestrian lighting.



## TYPICAL BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN TREATMENTS ALONG COMPLETE STREETS

### RESIDENTIAL SIDEWALKS

- Physically separated from the roadway by a curb or unpaved buffer
- Design for a buffer equal width to the sidewalk
- Standard is five feet in width
- Use colors or textures to demarcate conflict points, intersections
- Permeable pavements and plantings help mitigate stormwater runoff



### SHARED USE PATH

- 8-10' off-road paths made of asphalt or crushed stone surface.
- Shared-Use Paths are located parallel to a roadway and provide a separated space for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other vulnerable users
- Creates a low-stress environment for users of all ages and abilities as compared to on-roadway facilities in heavy traffic environments
- Most appropriate for roads with higher volumes and moderate to high traffic speeds



### PAINTED BIKE LANES

- Located directly adjacent to motor vehicle travel lanes and follows the same direction as motor vehicle traffic
- Provides additional visual cues to drivers that they should expect bicyclists on the roadway
- Useful for conflict points such as on-street parking door swing areas, intersection approaches, turning areas, and busy driveways
- Highlights use of space, slows some traffic, discourages illegal parking
- Budget for additional, minor maintenance costs





## TYPICAL BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN TREATMENTS ALONG COMPLETE STREETS (CONT'D)

### CURB EXTENSIONS/BULB-OUTS

- On-street parking should be setback to allow for curb extensions that improve visibility of crossing pedestrians
- Useful as corridor gateway treatments to caution motorists of changing conditions, speeds, or levels of pedestrian activity
- Combine curb extensions with stormwater mitigation measures such as bioswales, rain gardens



### POCKET MEDIANS

- Raised median barrier island along the road's centerline that makes a roadway appear more narrow to drivers
- Helps with access management by limiting or preventing undesired turning movements
- Located at intersections or midblock crossing locations, medians can shorten crossing distance and create pedestrian refuges
- Opportunity for beautification with street trees, plantings



### INTERSECTION CROSSINGS

- On-Street bicycle facilities need specialized intersection treatments
- “Elephant’s Feet” markings or green paint (shown here) highlighting conflict points with through and turning vehicles reinforce space sharing
- Increases visibility of cyclists and provides additional assurance to cyclists in the delineated space for their travel





Whitstead Ave  
100

set Ave







# MOBILITY RECOMMENDATIONS 06

## COMPLETE STREETS & Urban Design Recommendations

Plan reviews, quantitative analyses of Sunset Avenue, and public engagement have all resulted in a set of recommendations for a newly imagined corridor. These recommendations, however, must be translated to physical infrastructure through a set of conceptual designs that visually depict these values, principles, and recommendations. While the precise details of these designs may change from planning to construction, the core concepts reflected in the ultimate design find their roots here.

This chapter lays out the conceptual designs and planning recommendations for the new Sunset Avenue. Context zones are identified, intersections rendered, and redevelopment catalyst sites identified.

In this Chapter:

1. Complete Streets & Urban Design Recommendations
2. Concept Designs
3. Catalyst Sites

Over the past six months, the Rocky Mount community has been working together to better understand the problems, deficiencies and needs of the Sunset Avenue corridor. It has required the involvement of property owners, bike advocates, emergency services, faith organizations, development community, City department representatives and elected officials. Through this process, key stakeholders and the citizenry have created a holistic vision for transforming this important corridor into a safe and active community asset.

The concept design for Sunset Avenue was developed based on the vision of the Steering Committee in coordination with NCDOT and the engagement process. Overall, there were strong desires for improving pedestrian safety and access, establishing gateway opportunities, making vehicular movement more predictable, encouraging development that suites the needs of the community, and cultivating an aesthetically pleasing sense of place along the corridor. These general ideas were spatially grounded along the corridor after a series of mapping exercises with project leadership, committee members, focus groups, online respondents, and public meeting participants, resulting in the **Preferred Access Plan**.



## Transition Zones

Two transition zones were identified along the corridor to represent changes in development characteristics. These zones were separated by the slightly different character of Sunset Avenue that exists for each segment. However, the typical cross section for Sunset Avenue is a consistent five-lane curb and gutter facility with a future connection (i.e., interchange) with I-95. Once this connection is made, the Sunset Avenue

corridor will serve many functions for the Rocky Mount community. This includes commuter route, gateway, access to residential neighborhoods and commercial destination. The concept design reflects a consistent cross section throughout with built-in traffic calming and bicycle and pedestrian accommodations. It is important to note that though each zone is somewhat unique, the two of them combined make up the Sunset Avenue Corridor and must make mobility of ALL modes safe and convenient.

### RESIDENTIAL TRANSITION ZONE



Extending from Halifax Road to Candlewood Road, the residential transition zone is marked by residential land uses and single-family housing, with some office developments at its easternmost extent.

- Length: 0.8 miles
- 2019 AADT: 22,500 vehicles per day

### COMMERCIAL ZONE



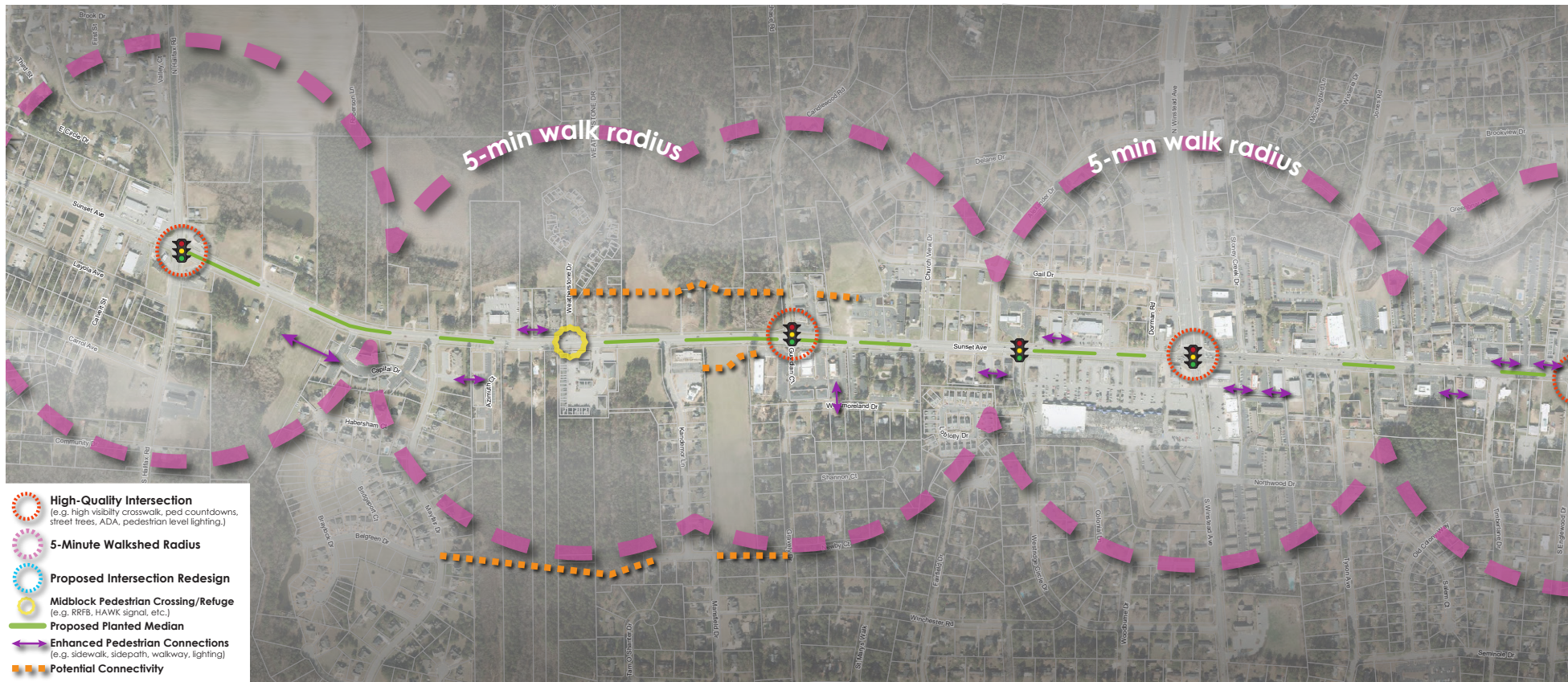
Beginning at the Candlewood Road intersection and continuing to Buck Leonard Boulevard, this zone contains higher-intensity commercial uses, more driveways and connections to collector streets.

- Length: 1.7 miles
- 2019 AADT: 23,000 vehicles per day



## Preferred Access Plan

The Preferred Access Plan (PAP) provided the basis for the design from a broad, overall viewpoint. This perspective reflects how it all works together – connectivity, access management, and key nodal points that allow for five-minute walksheds. Looking at the corridor holistically, the Preferred Access Plan utilized the key takeaways and guiding principles that were gleaned from the engagement process and combined them with the design considerations from the plan and policy review.

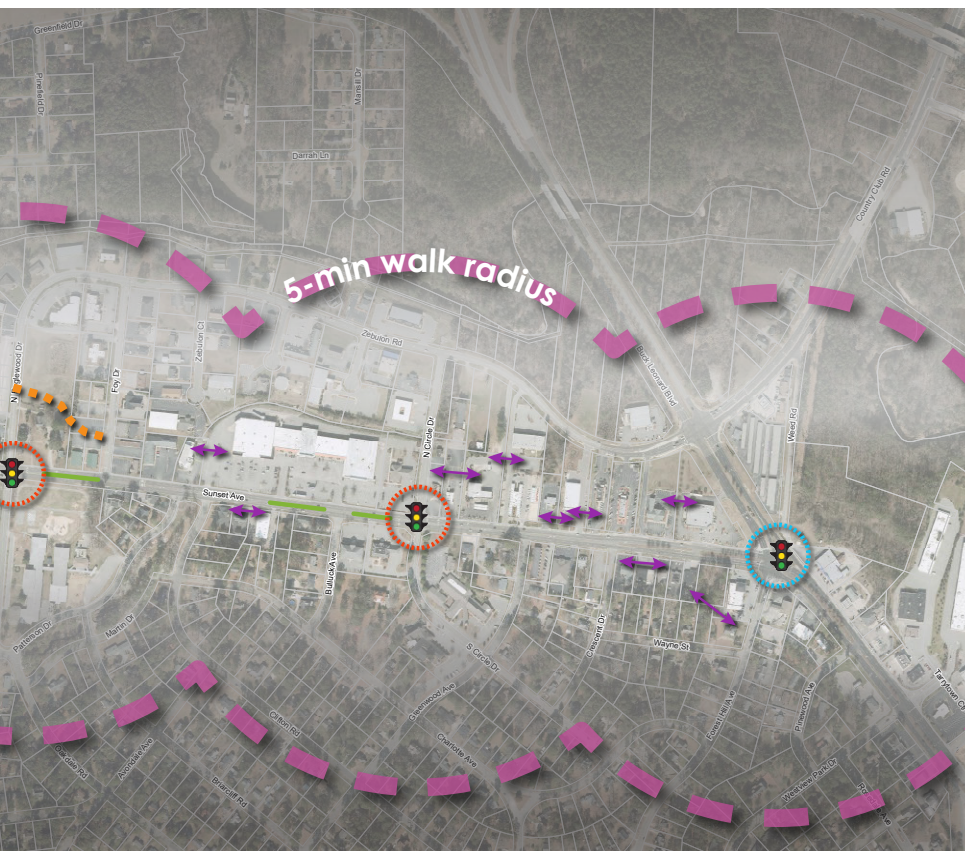






Two primary focus areas for the redesign of Sunset Avenue were to a) improve the pedestrian and cyclist connectivity of the corridor and b) create gateways to set the tone for the aesthetics and functionality of each segment, fostering a sense of arrival and place for users traveling into the City. Additional criteria were used when designing the improvements to Sunset Avenue:

- Current Posted Speed: 35 mph (US 64 Bus. to Circle Drive), 45 mph (Circle Drive to Halifax Road)
- Proposed Posted Speed: 35 mph (US 64 Bus. to Halifax Road)
- Travel Lanes width: 11 ft
- Cross Slope: 2%
- Multiuse Path: 10 ft wide for bicycle and pedestrian use, separated by curb & gutter with planting strip preferred
- Sidewalks: 5 ft minimum, 6 ft standard
- Lighting: Pedestrian scale streetlights spaced 40'-50 feet; Vehicular scale light posts spaced 125'
- Crossing improvements: High-quality intersections and pedestrian crossings at an approximate 1,400' to 2,000' spacing, with mid-block crossings at areas with higher pedestrian activity
- Signal timing: Improved actuated signals (one system)
- Pocket medians to calm traffic and control left turns



It is important to note that the Preferred Access Plan shows median locations. The use of these medians is confirmed to these specific locations with the purpose of controlling turning movements, slowing down vehicle speeds (traffic calming), and improving the predictability of traffic movements, while simultaneously improving crossing conditions by allowing for median refuge crossings. Some median locations will require cross access or “back door” access to allow for proper vehicle circulation.

High-quality intersections include US 64 Business (proposed gateway roundabout), Circle Drive, Englewood Drive, Winstead Ave., Westridge Circle Drive, Candlewood Road, Weatherstone Drive (proposed new traffic signal), and Halifax Road.

# Concept Designs

The design considerations for each section of the roadway are described first followed by the concept designs, engineered using AutoCAD™. This section shows graphically (see cross-section for each Context Zone) how the typical cross sections developed for this project are used to create a context-sensitive and seamless set of design solutions that address the specific needs of the entire corridor. Photo-simulations of what the proposed result might look like, as well as imagery of built examples are provided, where applicable.

## Gateway Roundabout

- Install a one-lane roundabout with turbo lanes (where applicable)
- Ensure proper turning radius for WB-50 tractor trailer, including a 10' taper
- Construct 10' sidepath along south side of Sunset Avenue (west leg)
- High visibility crosswalks and pedestrian refuges at US 64 Business (north leg) and Forest Hill Avenue
- Install gateway monument (i.e., Buck Leonard statue or similar) in center of roundabout.

Note: See alternative intersection design at right for a traditional intersection treatment.



Traditional intersection treatment for Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue..



Concept Designs: Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue

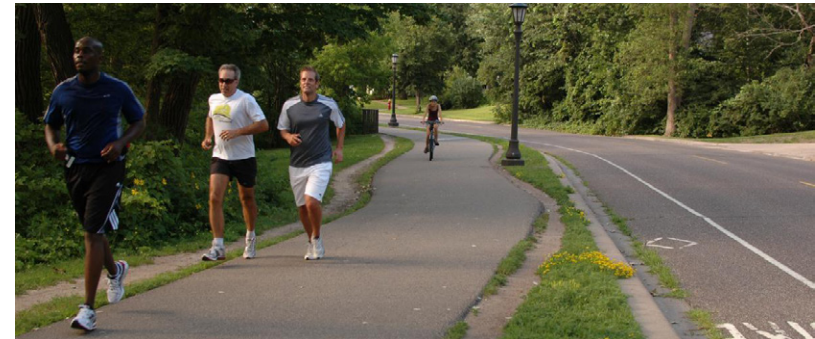




## Commercial & Residential Transition Zones

- Construct 12' planted (grass, bushes, canopy trees, etc.) median (where indicated) with "roll curb" and appropriate vertical plantings to encourage traffic calming on the roadway
- Install warning flashers for entering vehicles from Englewood Elementary School
- Install separated 8' - 10' sidepath along the south side of the roadway from US 64 Business to Winstead Avenue intersection and along the north side of the roadway from Winstead Avenue to Halifax Road
- Install high visibility crosswalks and pedestrian countdowns at Circle Drive, Englewood Drive, Winstead Avenue, Westridge Circle Drive, Candlewood Road, and Halifax Road intersections
- Install new traffic signal at Weatherstone Drive with high visibility crosswalks and pedestrian countdowns
- Install either brick paved or stamped concrete crosswalks, and mast-arm signals at the Englewood Drive, Winstead Avenue, and Westridge Circle Drive, and Circle Drive intersections
- Install streetscape improvements including pedestrian scale lighting, community banners (see insert), and canopy street trees, where possible
- Add pedestrian level lighting along the sidepath, as well as vehicular street lamps along the roadway
- Consider a community gateway feature (i.e., monument, plantings, banners, etc.) at the intersection of Halifax Road to welcome visitors to the City – "The Center of it All"
- Encourage and advocate for cross access and collector street improvements be constructed during development/ redevelopment activities

Note: See right of way and curb & gutter impacts map for specific locations of impact. Also, it is not anticipated that resurfacing Sunset Avenue will be necessary due to it being completed in 2018.



*Joggers on a multi-use path like that proposed in this Plan for Sunset Avenue.*



*A pedestrian refuge island makes busy roadways, like Winstead Avenue, easier to cross.*



*Gateway monuments like the one above can create a sense of place on Sunset Avenue.*





Concept Design: Halifax Road to Winstead Avenue



Proposed typical cross-section for Sunset Avenue east of Winstead Avenue.



Concept Design: Winstead Avenue to Buck Leonard Boulevard



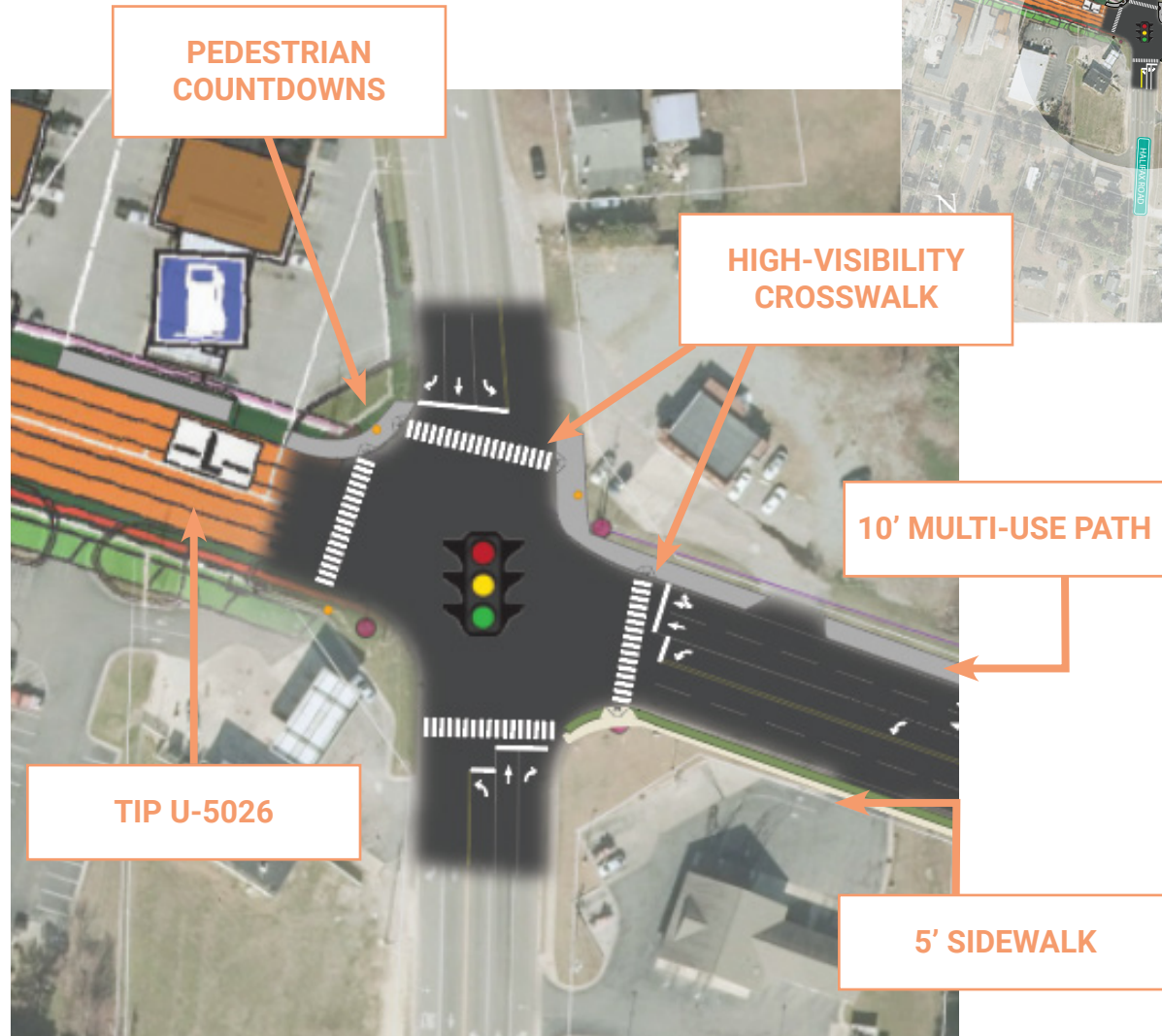


*Proposed typical cross-section for Sunset Avenue west of Winstead Avenue.*





# Halifax Road RESIDENTIAL TRANSITION ZONE



## Proposed Improvements

- 8' to 10' sidepath along north side of road
- 5' Sidewalk along south side of road
- Pedestrian Countdowns
- High visibility crosswalks across all legs of the intersection
- Community Gateway feature (e.g. monument, flags, or similar) welcoming road users to Rocky Mount.
- Lane reduction to four-lane with divided median (12', planted) from east leg
- Posted speed limit reduction to 35 miles per hour





BEFORE



AFTER



## Weatherstone Drive RESIDENTIAL TRANSITION ZONE



### Proposed Improvements

- 8' to 10' sidepath along north side of road
- 5' Sidewalk along south side of road
- New signalized intersection
- Pedestrian Countdowns
- High visibility crosswalks across all legs of the intersection
- Pedestrian Refuge Island at east leg of intersection
- Lane reduction to four-lane with divided median (12', planted)
- Posted speed limit reduction to 35 miles per hour





PROPOSED  
CROSS-SECTION



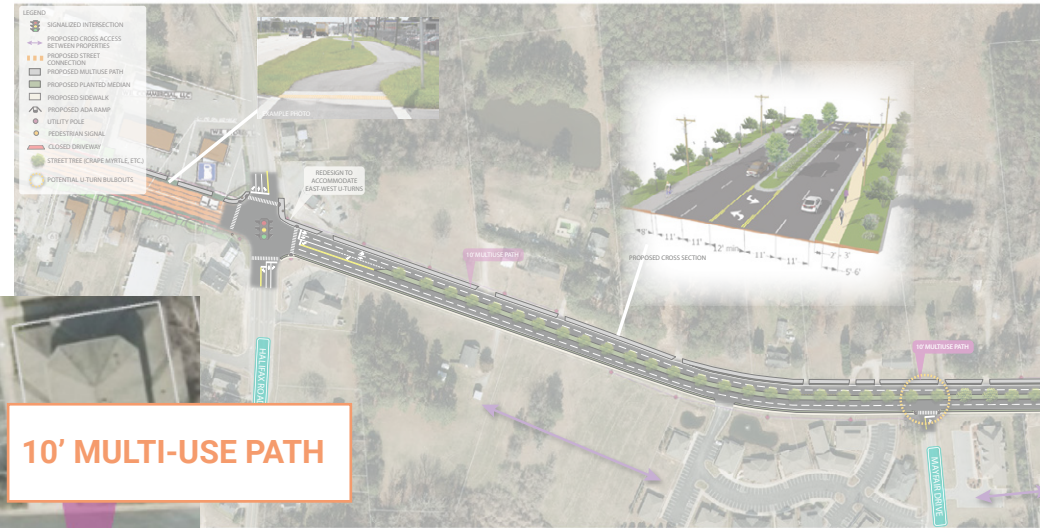
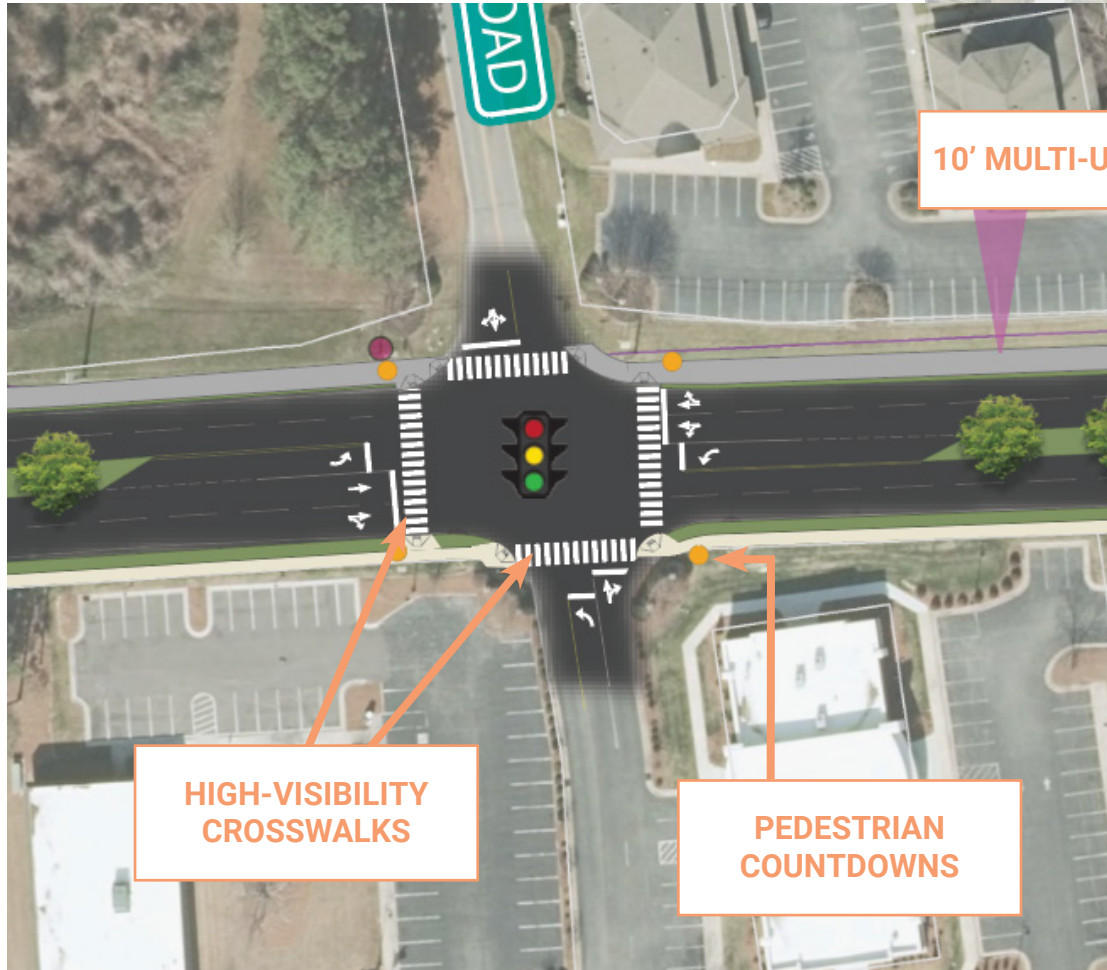
BEFORE



AFTER



# Candlewood Road RESIDENTIAL TRANSITION ZONE



## Proposed Improvements

- 8' to 10' sidepath along north side of road
- 5' Sidewalk along south side of road
- Pedestrian Countdowns
- High visibility crosswalks across all legs of the intersection
- Pocket medians with left turn storage to calm traffic
- Lane reduction to four-lane with divided median (12', planted)
- Posted speed limit reduction to 35 miles per hour
- Pedestrian-level lighting





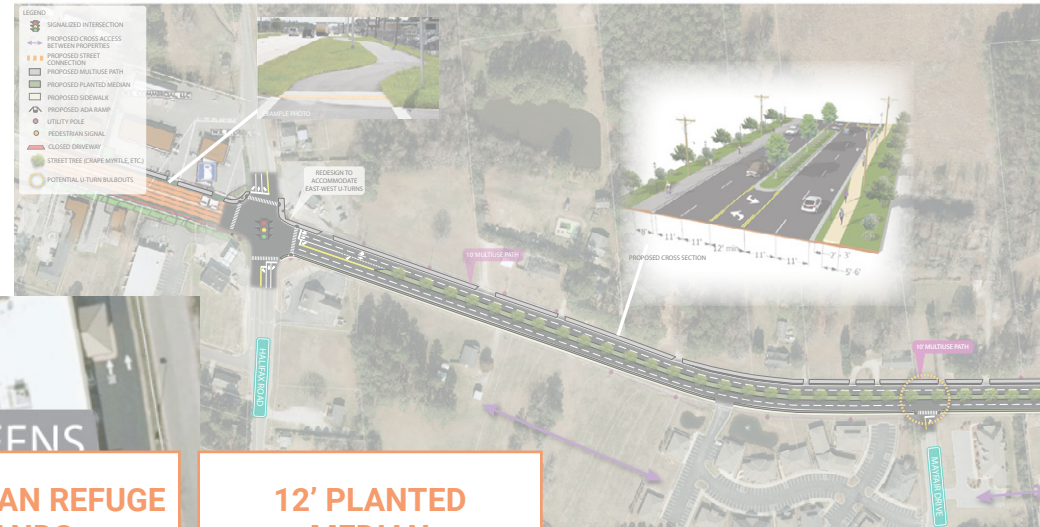
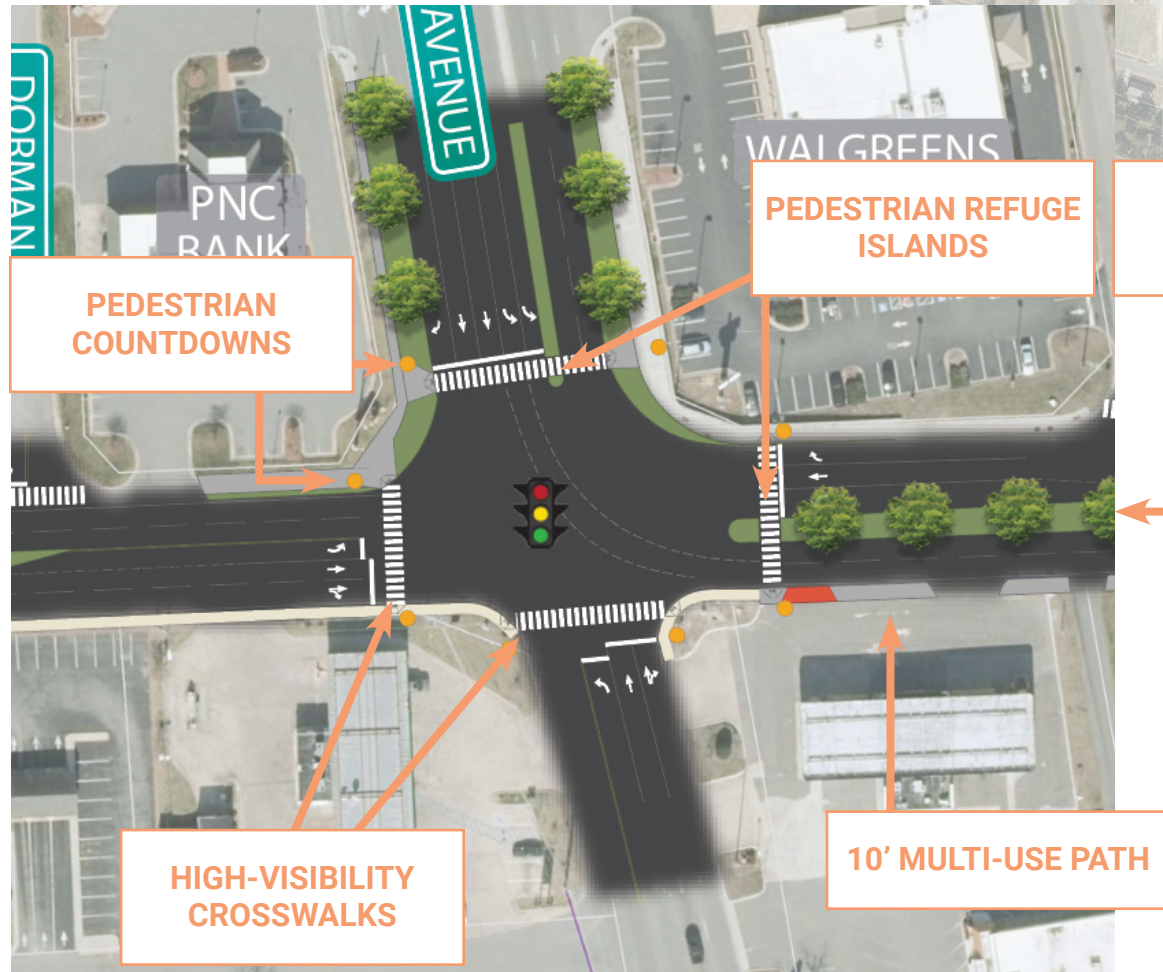
BEFORE



AFTER



# Winstead Avenue COMMERCIAL TRANSITION ZONE



## Proposed Improvements

- 8' to 10' Sidewalk along north side of road at west leg of intersection, transitioning to south side for east leg of intersection
- 5' Sidewalk
- Pedestrian Countdowns
- High visibility crosswalks across all legs of the intersection
- Pocket medians with left turn storage to calm traffic
- Reduce right turn lane from N Winstead Avenue to one lane
- Lane reduction to four through-lanes on all approaches to intersection.
- Mast Arm traffic signals with improved lighting
- Posted speed limit reduction to 35 miles per hour





PROPOSED  
CROSS-SECTION



BEFORE

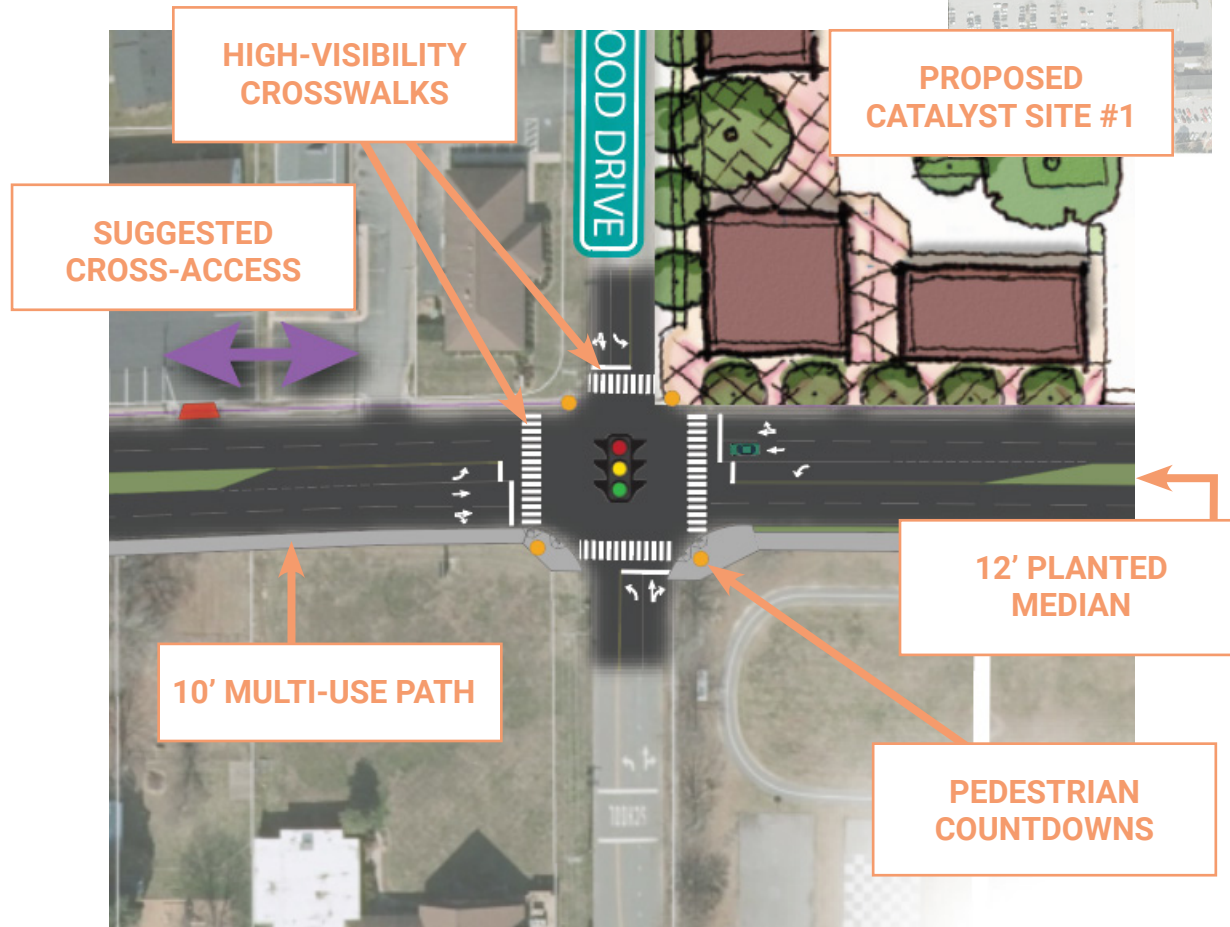


AFTER





# Englewood Drive COMMERCIAL TRANSITION ZONE



PROPOSED CROSS-SECTION

## Proposed Improvements

- 8' to 10' sidepath along south side of road
- 5' Sidewalk along north side of road
- Pedestrian Countdowns
- High visibility crosswalks across all legs of the intersection
- Pocket medians with left turn storage to calm traffic
- Warning flashers for entering vehicles from Englewood Elementary School
- Posted speed limit reduction to 35 miles per hour
- Pedestrian-level lighting





BEFORE

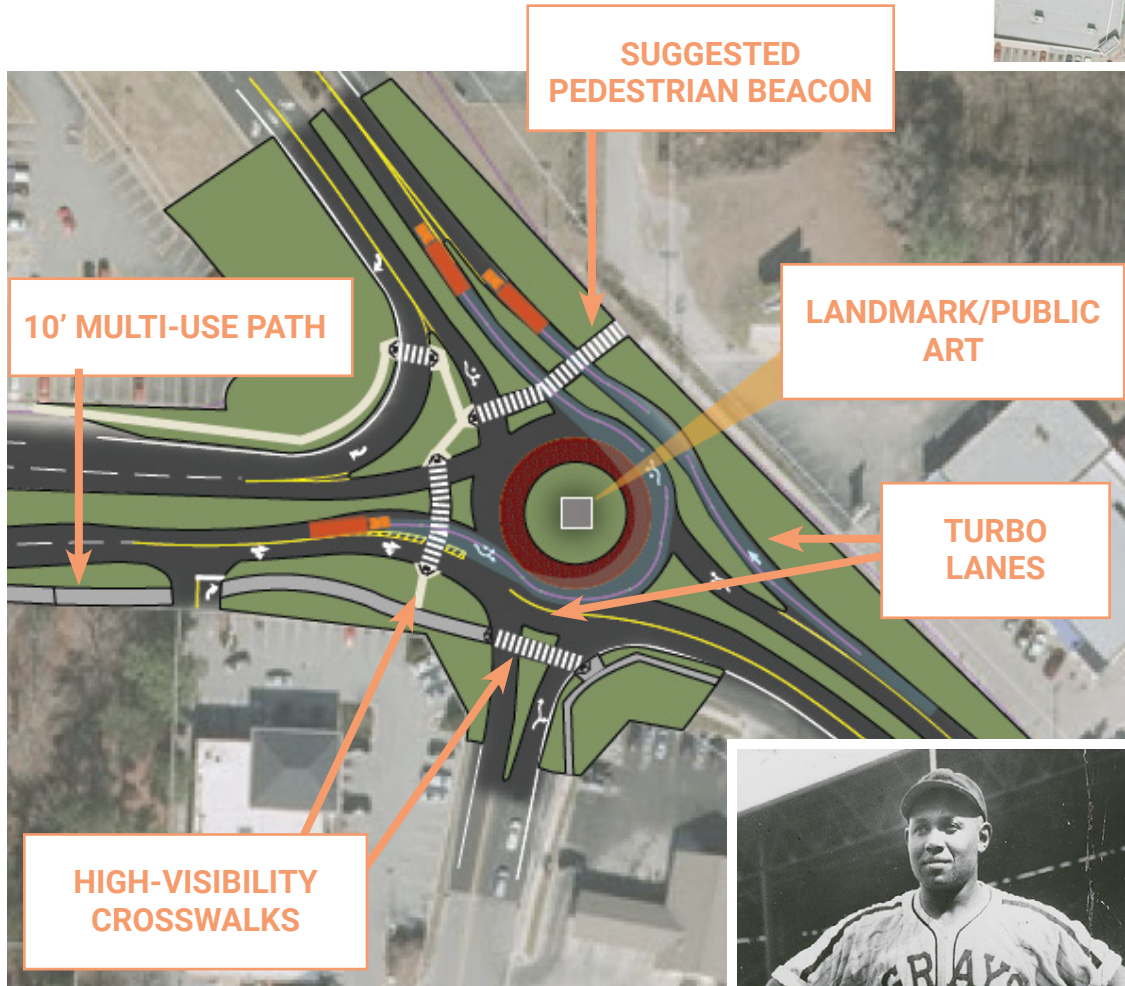


AFTER





## Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue GATEWAY ROUNDABOUT



Right: Buck Leonard, Baseball Hall of Fame inductee and Rocky Mount native.



Traditional intersection treatment.

### Proposed Improvements

- Convert to one-lane roundabout with turbo lanes (where applicable)
- Ensure proper turning radius for WB-50 tractor trailer, including a 10' taper
- Construct 10' sidepath along south side of Sunset Avenue (west leg)
- High visibility crosswalks and pedestrian refuges at US 64 Business (north leg), Sunset Avenue (west leg) and Forest Hills Avenue
- Install gateway monument (i.e., Buck Leonard statute or similar) in center of roundabout.



## Right-of-Way Impacts

Redesigning a roadway always carries the risk of impacts to adjacent properties, businesses, and landowners. From the beginning of the planning process, the vision for Sunset Avenue was to create a new, complete street **within the existing curb width** that minimized impacts to the right-of-way and compatible with the growing Sunset Avenue community. Furthermore, acquiring right-of-way is the most expensive part of redesigning a street; by staying within the existing right-of-way, construction costs are lower, and therefore more likely to be funded – and built.

**Maps 6.8** and **6.9** at right show the potential impacts of this concept design. Identification of these areas early in the planning process helps to inform the final roadway design and construction.



**Map 6.1:** Potential right-of-way impacts along Sunset Avenue, west of Winstead Avenue.



**Map 6.2:** Potential right-of-way impacts along Sunset Avenue, east of Winstead Avenue.

## Catalyst Sites

The primary purpose of the Sunset Avenue Corridor Study is to analyze and recommend mobility solutions for what happens within its right-of-way. However, the reality is that if public investment is made to improve the transportation infrastructure along the corridor, it is expected that private reinvestment will occur through time. The buildings and uses along Sunset Avenue will affect and are affected by what occurs in the roadway. To further the principles and goals laid out in the first chapter of this study, two catalyst sites were selected to provide realistic examples of the urban design characteristics of redevelopment patterns that may reasonably occur along Sunset Avenue.

Using the market assessment and feedback from multiple conversations with community and committee members, the design team produced one conceptual development plan that creates the highest and best use of the property while respecting the context of the surrounding area. Catalyst Site #2 is an example of re-use, where the vacant property (or property that is experiencing high turnover) is repurposed into an attractive and active use (i.e., placemaking).

These sites are shown here as examples of better development possibilities for this area; if realized, they can act as catalysts for positive change, increased investment, and growth for this community.



Left: Catalyst Site #1, at Englewood Drive. Red lines indicate parcel boundaries.

Below: Catalyst Site #2, the former Fire Station between Crescent Drive and Forest Hill Avenue.







## Englewood Drive Mixed-Use Development

### SITE #1

This block of Sunset Avenue is noticeable when driving westbound along the corridor; it is the block surrounded by commercial and office uses with single family rental units sporadically placed within the lot. Dirt pathways interconnect the homes and very little else providing a sense of place. To the rear of the lots appears to be an old foundation where a building once existed before being torn down. Often, these single family homes that run adjacent to the corridor “flip” to become businesses. Based on the need for affordable housing within the region, this may be an opportunity to redefine this property.



*Existing structures on Catalyst Site #1.*

## PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The Englewood Mixed Use Development model aims to ease the transition from stagnant residential reuse to a walkable mix of multifamily/affordable housing with a mix of attractive retail and office to cater to the demands of a changing economy. In this concept design, urban context is created along Sunset Avenue by encouraging development that fronts the street along the block, and supporting neighborhood service retail to activate the storefronts. With this configuration, opportunities to create open plazas spaces or hardscape alleys between buildings, allowing better access to the shared parking and the flexibility for dining or gathering space and public art.

In shifting parking behind the buildings, the shared access lots can also serve two to three story townhomes (or apartments) with rear access garage parking and potential parallel parking along Englewood Drive. The townhomes function as a buffer and transitional zone between the commercial and single family residential fabric of this area. While style providing parking for residents and the customers, the scale of the development still allows for increased walkability and could provide access to small local shops, services, and employment opportunities for this community.



Potential Mixed-Use Redevelopments of Catalyst Site #1. Retail spaces engage the street, with two-story townhomes or apartments buffering commercial and single-family residential uses.





## Old Firehouse Reactivation

### SITE #2

The property at the address of 2621 Sunset Avenue was once the old Fire House for this district. Flooding concerns and fire department requirements led to its closure, and in time what remained was converted to office use over time. The layout of the property makes it difficult to re-use for other office or commercial uses.

Redeveloping this site can help to further place-making opportunities along the corridor. This is the confluence of the proposed roundabout and the Forest Hill community. But, not every business needs to be a franchise investment. In fact, local dollars and investment along the corridor creates opportunities for unique local business investments. Re-use of the property can be done in a meaningful way to include possible restaurant, brewpub or brewery. This could include an eclectic new façade and outside seating with very little investment. The adjacent vacant lot (floodplain) could become an active and attractive pocket park that could be highlighted with historic community story-telling, an active workout/exercise space, a children's playground or a place to rest and reflect.



*The existing property at the old Fire Station. The adjacent parcel is vacant, with trees dispersed on the property.*



*Potential Redevelopment of Catalyst Site #2. The existing structure is converted into a brewery, with pavement converted to outdoor seating. The proposed Multi-Use Path is visible at center-left, providing walk-up access.*









# ACTION, POLICY & BUILDING SUCCESS 07



## IMPLEMENTATION & Action Items

The ultimate success of this Study rests on local and state leaders' ability to carry out the recommendations herein. This effort is made easier by laying out the series of steps -- the action items -- to move the process forward. Defining the cost, identifying potential funding mechanisms, and tailoring phases of construction to develop a suite of cost-effective recommendations will help create an environment conducive to transformational change along Sunset Avenue.

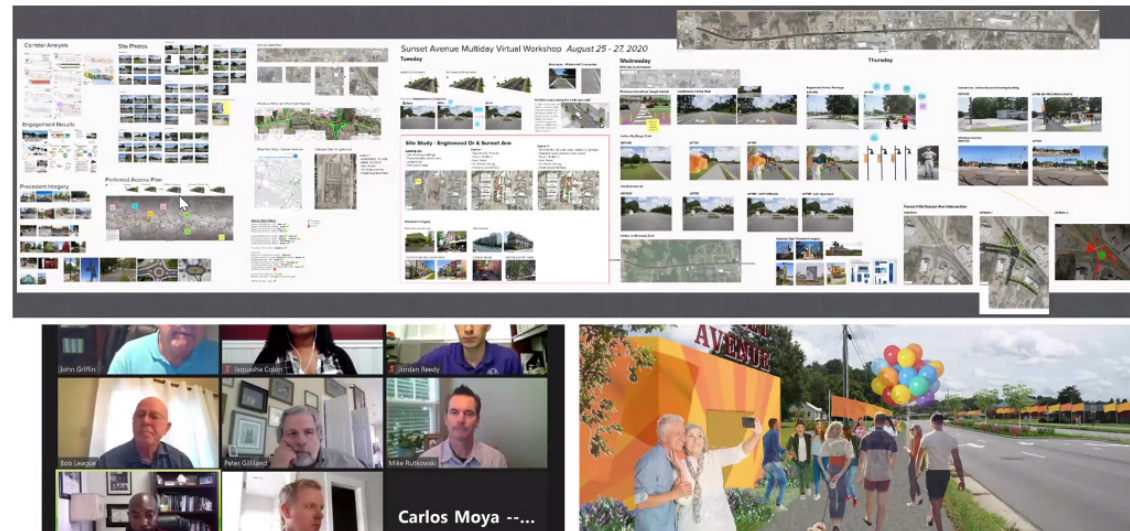
In this Chapter:

1. Implementation & Action Items
2. Policy Action Items
3. Financing & Incentives
4. Moving Forward

The best plans that can be implemented are those that avoid impacts to the surrounding properties and infrastructure. That is, if we can limit impacts to curb and gutter, drainage and utilities as well as limit the acquisition of new right-of-way, we can keep the cost down on the project and shorten the duration of construction.

In order to achieve the goals laid out in this plan and realize the new vision for Sunset Avenue, it is imperative that a plan for implementing and funding these changes is fully developed. Making this plan a reality requires the coordination, collaboration and combined efforts of many stakeholders and organizations. This chapter provides a series of defined steps, or an action plan, to move this process forward through both policy changes and physical improvements. In addition, estimated construction costs and potential funding opportunities will be identified to further build this implementation plan.

*Rocky Mount residents discussing how to implement the recommendations of this Plan.*







## Project List

With any problematic corridor that requires retrofit, the improvements can be implemented all at once or incrementally. To ensure the constructability of the concept design, the project team, along with the City, NCDOT and the Steering Committee worked together to break down the corridor design into manageable projects. By separating this 2.5-mile corridor into sections, it can be constructed on a prioritized timetable that is adapted to the needs of the corridor, the business community, residents, and users of the corridor. The corridor is divided into three segments, reflecting “stand-alone” projects for each section. Table 7.1 details the following segments:

Sunset Avenue Project Descriptions		
Segment	Description	Length (mi)
Halifax Road to Winstead Avenue	Construct 12' pocket median, planted, to create typical four-lane cross-section with divided median. Construct 8' to 10' sidepath along north side of Sunset Avenue. Install high-visibility crosswalks and pedestrian countdowns at Halifax Road, Weatherstone Drive, and Candlewood Road. Install either brick paved or stamped concrete crosswalks, and mast-arm signals at Westridge Circle Drive. Install new traffic signal at Weatherstone Drive.	1.2
Winstead Avenue to US 64 Business/Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue	Construct 12' pocket median, planted, to create typical four-lane cross-section with divided median. Construct 10' sidepath along south side of Sunset Avenue. Install high-visibility crosswalks and pedestrian countdowns at Circle Drive, Englewood Drive, and Winstead Avenue. Install either brick paved or stamped concrete crosswalks, and mast-arm signals at the Englewood Drive, Winstead Ave. Install warning flashers for entering vehicles from Englewood Elementary School.	1.2
US 64 Business/Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue Intersection	Convert intersection to one-lane roundabout with turbo lane where applicable. Construct 10' sidepath along south side. Install high-visibility crosswalks and pedestrian refuges at Buck Leonard Boulevard (north leg), Sunset Avenue (west leg), and Forest Hill Avenue (south leg). Install gateway monument or public art in roundabout.	0.1

**Table 7.1:** Project Descriptions, Sunset Avenue. Note: locations for median U-turns and associated curb displacement will be determined during final design stage.

## Estimated Costs Summary Table

As the project segments were identified, project quantities were developed based on the Design Concepts using CAD design software. In turn, construction costs estimates were calculated using NCDOT standard unit costs values. Right-of-way acquisition costs were not included, and a 10% design fee and 30% contingency were included in the cost assumptions. These estimates are for 2020 costs and subject to change with time.

Sunset Avenue Estimated Construction Costs Summary			
Segment/Extent	Project Construction Cost (Est.)	Cost with Landscaping (Est.)	Cost with Transit Stops (Est.)
Halifax Road / Winstead Avenue	\$3,572,222	\$4,659,722	\$4,733,498
Winstead Avenue / US 64 Business/Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue	\$2,576,613	\$3,664,112	\$3,737,888
US 64 Business/Buck Leonard Boulevard/Forest Hill Avenue			\$2,201,716
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$10,673,104</b>

**Table 7.2:** Summary of Construction Costs.





# Policy Action Items

Policy recommendations are included to provide guidance to practitioners and policymakers so they may be mindful of the new vision for the Sunset Avenue corridor. The corridor is changing fast and it is expected to be further impacted by development in the area, while embracing the history of the community. Private and public development actions must be designed to coordinate with these objectives for the corridor to work in the ways that the public and stakeholders suggested. The following policy measures outline potential tools that can be used by the City and County to guide future development along this corridor. Applying these recommendations, whether through ordinance, design standard, or policy modifications, would typically require partnership between landowners, developers, the City of Rocky Mount, the MPO, and NCDOT.

## General Policy Measures

- Work with the development community to create **higher density housing options** in the area around the Englewood Square and Westridge Shopping Centers.
- Encourage the development of a hotel and/or amusement park near the proposed I-95 interchange to **support local tourism and interstate commerce**; ensuring that multimodal transportation access is provided to Sunset Avenue and other amenities.
- Support corridor connectivity by **requiring collector street connections, stub-out requirements and cross access** for adjacent complimentary new development and redevelopment projects.
- As Sunset Avenue becomes more walkable and bikeable, addressing **pedestrian and cyclist level signage** (wayfinding) will be key for people trying to navigate the transportation system throughout the corridor. The system should be uniquely Rocky Mount, and on a personal scale. **Lettering should be highly visible**, with consideration given to people with disabilities.
- Update language in the City development ordinances to **require direct greenway and/or sidewalk connections** or easements for all new development fronting the Sunset Avenue corridor.
- **Adopt a Gateway Overlay District** (for Sunset Avenue) and **a city-wide Complete Streets Policy** to help guide quality design and support safe mobility for all ALL users.
- Implement a **financial incentives program** to encourage businesses to relocate or stay along the corridor. Local investments usually attract local businesses that are sustainable over time. Providing tax incentives and facade grant programs may be a catalyst for such investment.

## Zoning Changes

Properties along the Sunset Ave corridor fall within the City's zoning jurisdiction. The City of Rocky Mount uses a traditional zoning model with large portions of the corridor zoned as either a) O-I Office and Institutional; b) B-2 Commercial Corridor; or c) R-6MFA Multifamily Residential. A dozen properties are designated as CU Conditional Use Overlay, with individually specified exemptions.

## Corridor Overlay District

The intent of the overlay ordinance is to regulate the built environment in a way that values form. Generally speaking, buildings should front onto streets and parking should be hidden from view to enhance the walkability of the corridors. This promotes pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use redevelopment with strong historical connections that minimizes vehicular traffic volumes and speeds.

Areas identified as commercial nodes should have specific requirements adopted as part of this overlay district, with the specific purpose of creating high-quality, integrated development patterns that support the objectives of improving walking/bicycling environments; improving safety; and increasing the quality of the aesthetics along the corridor. Potential provisions that could be pursued under the overlay district include: Frontage Design, Retail Frontage, Awnings and Galleries, Vista, Cross-Block Passage, Building Preservation, Corner Lot Frontages, Height, Off-Street Parking, Bicycle Parking, Signage, Building Aesthetics, Pedestrian-Scale Lighting, Street Trees, and Driveway Spacing.

The following standards and overlay district requirements should apply to properties with any frontage abutting Sunset Avenue right-of-way:

**Development Process.** Creativity in meeting the standards outlined in the Corridor Overlay District are strongly encouraged and supported by the City. The applicant is therefore recommended to present a preliminary sketch plan to review with the City staff early in the design and planning process to work collaboratively to meet or exceed these minimum standards.

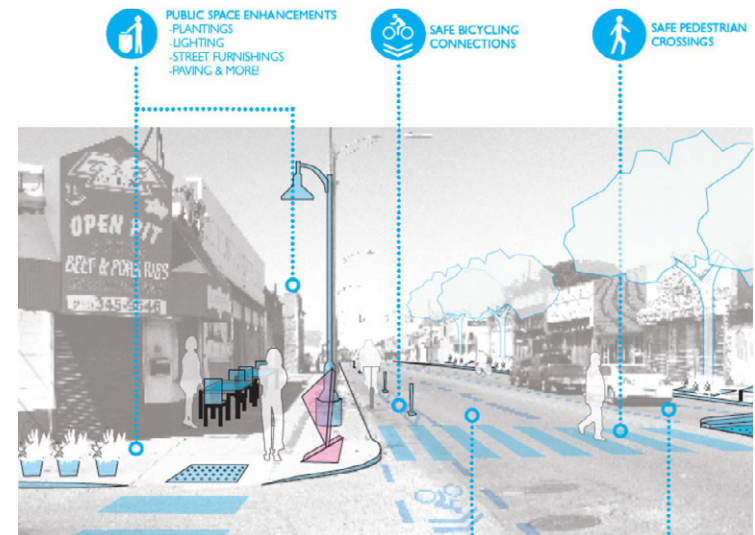
**Building Design.** Building Design standards-appropriate to the corridor-should be developed and regulated by City and MPO staff, the City Planning Board, and Design Review Board. They help guide development size, density, and appearance to ensure compatibility with high-value and historic architectural standards associated with the City.

**Parking.** Generally, parking shall be provided to the rear and sides of buildings.

**Streetscaping.** Generally, property owners and developers should be responsible for installing and maintaining street trees, benches, and other facilities.

*Detroit's streetscaping plan identifies the location and standards for amenities in the furnishing zone.*

*Source: City of Detroit.*







**Signage.** Signage standards should be developed for the entire corridor; signs should be as unobtrusive as practicable, and complimentary with the City's historic character.

**Driveways.** Generally, streets in the Corridor Overlay District are to be oriented towards both pedestrian traffic and persons in motorized vehicles that park and walk to their destinations. Limitations on the number of driveways is crucial to maintaining continuity of streetscaping and reducing vehicular conflicts and crashes. Shared driveways for complimentary uses should be highly encouraged.

## Landscaping and Green Infrastructure Policy

Currently, the City of Rocky Mount does not have a Landscaping Plan or Green Infrastructure Policy. By incorporating such requirements into the policy changes, the community and the city can both reap the benefits of an improved environmental system.

The US Environmental Protection Agency has several policy guides available to assist local governments in developing policy that promotes green infrastructure and case studies available for review. Several options that would be easily applied to Sunset Avenue and the City of Rocky Mount through the implementation of a policy or program are summarized here.

**Development Incentives: New development and redevelopment are occurring around the City.** The Sunset Avenue corridor has already seen new construction and will continue to do so. In preparation for this, writing new policies that include development incentives for incorporating green infrastructure in site plans should happen quickly. Incentivizing stormwater regulation and infrastructure encourages developers to creatively address on-site management. In exchange for improvements, the standards and requirements of which must be determined by the City for rewards, can include benefits like zoning upgrades, expedited permitting, and reduced stormwater requirements. Portland, Oregon has seen success with their development incentive program: Portland's Ecoroof Floor Area Ratio Bonus saw 130 projects constructed between 2008 and 2012 creating more than 8 acres of ecoroofs. Capitalizing on this success, Portland included an ecoroof requirement for all new buildings larger than 20,000 square feet in their Central City 2035 Plan.



*Ecoroofs, also known as green roofs, can capture and use rainwater before it enters the city stormwater system, reducing runoff and environmental impacts.*

**Rebates & Installation Financing:** Individual property owners can be encouraged to add green infrastructure projects to their property by submitting for a City sponsored rebate and installation financing program. Homeowners can be directly refunded for the cost of installing rain barrels or rain gardens, or they can be given incentives for adding rain gardens or disconnecting downspouts. This approach can be fitted to the specific needs of the City and can identify areas or properties where on-site management would be most beneficial to the maintenance of the stormwater system and offer larger incentives for property owners in those areas, in addition to specifying the type of infrastructure that is applicable and appropriate design and planting standards. As an example, Santa Monica offers the Cash for Grass Rebate program to encourage property owners to plant climate appropriate plants and incorporate rain harvesting infrastructure on their property. The city provides free consultations and the program is set up for applicants to apply prior to starting their project and schedule a final inspection after it is completed.

**Green Alleys and Buffer Areas:** One interesting project worth noting is the city of Chicago's Green Alley Program. The Green Alley Program was created to mitigate flooding in the alleys without costly connections to the extensive sewer system. Green Alleys incorporate a number of techniques including proper pitching and grading, permeable pavements, reflective pavement, recycled construction materials, and dark sky compliant light fixtures. Benefits of such improvements include reductions in stormwater runoff, stress to the sewer system, urban heat island effect, waste hauled to landfills, and light pollution. Through 2017, over 300 Green Alleys were completed.



### Cash for Grass Rebate Program

*A guide to creating a successful sustainable landscape*

January 2019



*Santa Monica's Cash for Grass rebate program is among the city's most successful incentive programs.*



*A green alley in Dubuque, IA.*





# Financing & Incentives

In order to see this Plan to fruition, construction design and implementation needs to be financed. The City and/or MPO should take opportunities to leverage local funds to access state, federal, and private funds in order to achieve this vision. The following are several funding sources to help with moving this effort ahead.

## Funding Opportunities

### Rocky Mount Metropolitan Planning Organization (Regional Government Funding)

The Rocky Mount MPO administers the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP). The funds for these programs come from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and are used on roadway projects that have been submitted to and ranked by the MPO staff. The TIP process is updated every two years by the MPO. Once considered and approved by the Policy Committee, the funds are committed for project implementation.

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) provides the mechanism for scheduling funding for transportation projects in the short term. It specifies the source of the funding and distributes monies based on need and availability, and in addition, it provides information on transportation projects that are not federally eligible.

STBGP funding is used for roadway-focused projects, such as corridor redesigns, intersection improvements, realignments, and other similarly defined projects. Part of this funding can be used for projects or programs that are defined as transportation alternatives, such as on- and off-road pedestrian and cyclist facilities (i.e., sidepath), infrastructure projects to improve sidewalk connectivity, safe routes to school projects, recreational trail programs, and other similarly defined projects.

## North Carolina Department of Transportation (State & Federal Funding)

State and Federal transportation funds are often administered together, with the federal government releasing funds to each state based on need and availability. Statewide roadway improvement funds are allocated through the **State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)**, which is federally required and covers a six-year period, though updated annually. The STIP lists all projects that are candidates for federal aid, as well as regionally significant projects that are not using federal dollars.

<https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/State-Transportation-Improvement-Program.aspx>

NCDOT also manages several grant programs through the **Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP)**. These programs include the Spot Safety Project, Hazard Elimination Project, and others. These funds, in addition to local division discretionary funds, can be used to fix problematic intersections, interchanges or small corridor segments that are experiencing safety issues.

- Hazard Elimination Project
- Safe Routes to Schools
- Watch for Me
- Spot Safety Project

More information on each of these projects can be found on the [Connect NCDOT](#) website.

## City of Rocky Mount (Local Government)

Local government officials are committed to the improvement of their municipality, and the City of Rocky Mount has been working tirelessly to create positive change. This has been recently evident in the Rocky Mount Event Center and the continued growth of the Rocky Mount Mills complex.

Rocky Mount can choose to support Sunset Avenue's transformation through a bond referendum. Complete Streets projects are a good candidate for funding through a bond initiative, as they generate positive economic and social returns within their community at a fraction of the cost of typical roadway construction. Bonds can fund the entirety of a project or contribute to the local match portion of funding through the STIP mentioned above.



**ROCKY MOUNT, NC**  
THE CENTER OF IT ALL





## Additional Funding Sources

The City and community organizations have the opportunity to seek additional funding or create more funding opportunities to further support the desired development and redevelopment along Sunset Avenue.

### Facade Improvement Incentive Grants and Loans

Facade Incentive programs are in effect across the country and showing success in communities with areas that had fallen into disrepair. Property owners or business owners can apply with the city for funding, often in matching grants up to a specified amount, to be used for painting, repair, maintenance, and visual restoration of a building facade. These programs are often begun with the adoption of a revitalization effort or downtown plan and should include clearly defined goals, target areas, criteria for participation, defined eligible and ineligible activities, design and signage standards, and a clear application and selection process. Greenville, North Carolina operates a [facade improvement program](#), wherein the City provides \$1 in matching funds for every \$2 expended by the property owner, up to a maximum of \$5,000 per facade. Applicants must invest a minimum of \$10,000 to receive the maximum amount from the City. Proposed designs must be submitted in advance and reviewed by the Community Development Department.

### Small Business Loan Revolving Loan Fund

The City of Rocky Mount should consider the creation of a revolving loan fund for small businesses. Federal and state funds are often available to assist in funding this type of program which is set up as a competitive, low interest loan program. New or expanding small businesses that employ individuals that meet established goals and criteria would be eligible. The [U.S. Small Business Administration](#) (SBA) offers federal funding through its grants and loans programs and offers assistance in securing private, state, or federal funding and resources like dedicated business coaches.

### Public Private Partnerships

Public/Private Partnerships are designed to accomplish a combination of goals related to economic and community development efforts, some of which have been identified in this plan. Public funds must only be made available to those projects determined otherwise unfeasible or unachievable “but for” the combined efforts of public and private participation. The projects must comply with community adopted standards and program guidelines established for that area.



*Facade improvement grants can help to dramatically alter the visual appearance of Sunset Avenue buildings.*



*The recent CSX Intermodal Hub is one example of a successful public-private partnership.*

## Moving Forward, Together

With the implementation of the new interchange at Sunset Avenue and I-95 comes the challenges of traffic and speed control. However, it also provides an opportunity to transition this suburban-type development style corridor into a true gateway to the City, with active and attractive uses and safe mobility for all modes. The North Carolina Department of Transportation, the City of Rocky Mount, and the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Planning Organization saw the value of working closely together with community representatives, business leaders, and other vital agencies in this region from the beginning to the end of this planning process, culminating in this completed study.

A more walkable and bikeable Sunset Avenue is more supportive of development. Backed by policy, incentives, and streetscape guidelines, the quality of development and redevelopment can improve, transforming the corridor beyond the curb.

Moving forward, the regional leaders have a concept design that shows a new Sunset Avenue that is no longer solely for cars, but rather for people and visitors alike. It is no longer a barrier or an arterial, it is a community asset and a place for daily life to happen. It is a street for everyone.

The completion of the plan marks the beginning of action. **Yet the hard work is not done.** To keep this momentum going, continued engagement, open transparency, and proactive involvement will be needed from all involved. It will require champions and advocates to bring this vision to reality. Through this collaboration, Sunset Avenue can become a healthy, attractive, livable corridor that truly is a gateway for the City of Rocky Mount and a community asset for the residents of the region.







