



## Phase II Focus Area Implementation Plan West End Victory Drive Focus Area Report



### Victory Drive Corridor Study

December 30, 2015



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## Table of Contents

	Page
I. Executive Summary	4
II. Introduction	6
III. Focus Area Assessment	10
IV. Implementation Plan Recommendations	24
V. Conclusion	32

### Appendix:

(Provided Under Separate Cover)

- A1. Stakeholder Feedback – Sign-In Sheets
- A2. Stakeholder Feedback – Comment Cards
- A3. Stakeholder Feedback – Online Survey
- A4. Transportation Memorandum

# I. Executive Summary

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Victory Drive Corridor Study is a multi-phase planning study led by the Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) and championed by several local advocacy groups. Completed in February 2015, Phase I established the overall project goal “to preserve, revitalize and maintain Victory Drive’s historic, commemorative landscape and prominence as a signature boulevard.” The Phase I study included a high-level assessment of the entire 20-mile US 80/Victory Drive Corridor between Ogeechee Road and the south end of Tybee Island.

Phase II of the study, initiated in March 2015, studied in greater detail the West End Victory Drive sub-area, an approximate 0.8-mile long focus area of the corridor from Ogeechee Road to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. This phase of the study developed conceptual design plans with the aim of guiding the revitalization of this “unique expression of Victory Drive as a classic main street to some of Savannah’s oldest historic black urban neighborhoods,” as expressed in the sub-area goal statement.

Each subsequent phase of the Victory Drive Corridor Study will investigate the sub-areas identified and preliminarily assessed in Phase I. Other key areas of this ongoing study include efforts to increase public-private collaboration, the development of implementable plans incorporating sensitive urban design solutions, and strategies that balance transportation and land use demands of the contemporary street.

## PHASE II KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of this study are organized by the assessment framework established in Phase I which categorizes the corridor’s opportunities and constraints according to several themes: **landscape and hardscape improvements, traffic and transportation improvements, and land use and urban design improvements.**

### LANDSCAPE

- Historically, palms and azaleas were planted in the median. Some palms have been removed and not replaced.
- No existing tree lawns. Adding wide (10-foot) tree lawns would allow for palms to be planted next to sidewalks. Smaller tree lawns could accommodate small trees.
- Medians lack mulch and appropriate groundcover. Current groundcover is sparse due to poor plant choice, poor soils and limited maintenance.
- New tree lawns could add more green landscape areas and also serve as locations for “green infrastructure” to manage stormwater.
- Minimal canopy cover. There is no opportunity for canopy shade trees within the narrow, constrained right-of-way.

### TRANSPORTATION

- Physically constrained corridor (narrow right-of-way and travel lanes) with four, nine-foot vehicular travel lanes.
- Underutilized right-of-way. Only a portion (~80%) of the 60-foot right-of-way is in public use, in part, due to apparent encroachment by private property.
- High traffic speeds are reported despite 35 mph posted speed limit.
- Lack of pedestrian connectivity, safe crossings, crosswalk (ADA) ramps and safe routes to school. Current sidewalk conditions are unsafe due to proximity to travel lanes, lack of grade separation from the roadway and encroachment of overgrown vegetation.
- Public transit does not service Victory Drive because of the narrow travel lanes.
- Existing and projected future traffic counts do not require four lanes; a lane reduction is possible and would improve the pedestrian safety and experience, among other benefits.
- Intersection improvements on Victory Drive at Hopkins Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard are a high priority.

### LAND USE / URBAN DESIGN

- The street in this sub-area is primarily residential and lined with historic housing that contributes greatly to the sub-area’s character.
- The street is characterized by sub-standard sidewalk widths, degraded curbs, inadequate pedestrian zone, unsafe crossings.
- Private property encroachment within the right-of-way may be further constraining the already narrow corridor.
- Large numbers of school-age residents walk to the three schools in the community.
- Integrity of the historic landscape is heavily degraded.
- Significant issues with blight, property maintenance and littering.
- Parallel streets offer bike routing alternatives in a portion of the corridor.
- Extensive flooding and drainage issues along this section of the corridor.

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

This study proposes two potential design solutions for the typical roadway section in this sub-area. Option A proposes a travel lane reduction to two lanes for all or much of the length of the corridor. This is the option recommended by the design team because of its potential to calm traffic, provide safer walking conditions and increase the pedestrian level of service (LOS). Option B maintains the four existing travel lanes. The community has expressed some interest in both options and discussion within the community continues relative to which option they would prefer.

To differing degrees, the options provide wider sidewalks, “green street” stormwater solutions, expanded tree lawns, enhanced crosswalks and improved lanes (alleys) .



### OPTION A — LANE REDUCTION



### OPTION B — NO LANE REDUCTION



### KEY ACTIONS

Implementation of the West End Victory Drive corridor-wide enhancement project will require long-term collaboration across multiple public and private sector agencies, organizations and groups. The study team recommends the following near-term actions to address the critical priorities that have surfaced as a result of this study.

1. **Establish the right-of-way by survey** as a tool to analyze potential encroachment issues.
2. **Develop a stormwater management plan and conduct a drainage basin analysis** to identify solutions for the flooding issues and also to identify opportunities for alternative “green street” stormwater strategies to consider in the future.

3. **Hold a neighborhood cleanup event**, such as an Operation Clean Sweep event, to address blight, create momentum and rally residents in the Victory Drive revitalization effort.
4. **Initiate a design and engineering project** to pilot the implementation solutions and strategies outlined in this study.

### NEXT STEPS / IMPLEMENTATION

The future revitalization of the West End Victory Drive largely relies on two factors: the availability of funding and a unified community voice to clearly state the neighborhoods’ needs and desires to policy and funding decision-makers. The strength and viability of these two factors will determine the project’s success.

A corridor revitalization project, such as the West End Victory Drive Project, is a long-term effort. Community leaders must first identify their preferred option as presented in this study and form strong, broad-based grassroots and political advocates to shepherd the vision. As a result of this unified voice, the project may be recognized as a priority among other regional improvement projects vying for public dollars. At this point, several key factors can assist listed projects in competing against other projects. These factors include strong, ongoing community and broad-based support, as well as use of existing resources, such as grassroots volunteer efforts and Clean Sweep activities, to create change in the near-term. Potential funding sources may be federal, state, local or a combination of two or more sources. Federal transportation funding is allocated through the planning process of the Coastal Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (CORE MPO). As long as Victory Drive is part of a state route, the Georgia Department of Transportation, in addition to the City of Savannah, would have a role in designing and building the improvements.

A successful implementation program will require long-term collaboration across multiple public and private sector agencies, organizations and groups. As stated in the West End Victory Drive Goal Statement: “Great streets require great neighborhoods to thrive, therefore the project aspires to catalyze broad revitalization by leveraging grassroots organizations, city planning and other neighborhood organizations to focus and invest in the opportunity that is the West End of Victory Drive.”

## II. Introduction

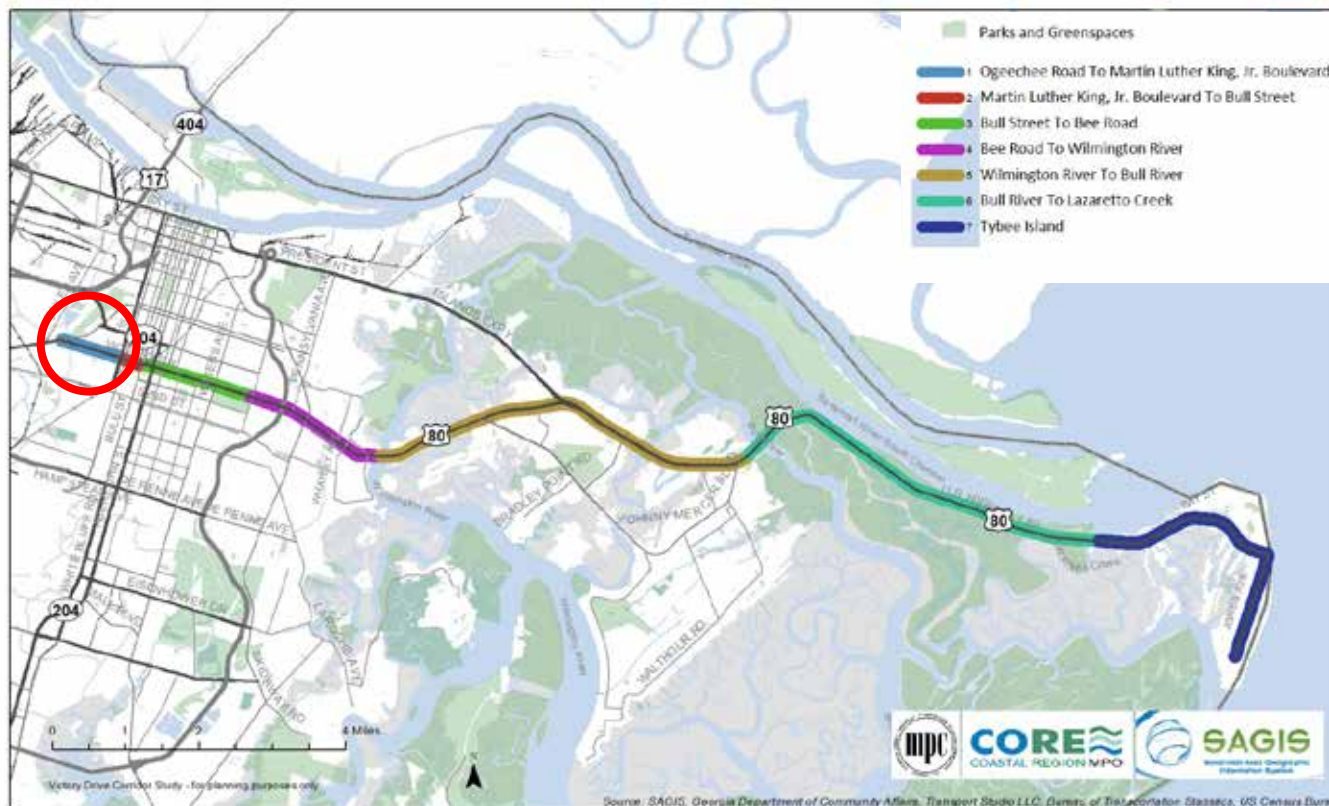
### PROJECT OVERVIEW & PHASE II PURPOSE

In early 2014, the Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), partnered with several local advocacy groups to initiate a multi-phase planning study of the Victory Drive Corridor. Completed in February 2015, Phase I included a high-level assessment of the entire US 80/Victory Drive Corridor between Ogeechee Road and the south end of Tybee Island. Beginning in August 2015, Phase II studied in greater detail the West End Victory Drive focus area presented in this document.

The Victory Drive Corridor Study is conducted by the Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission on behalf of the Coastal Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (CORE MPO), with the goal to “to preserve, revitalize and maintain Victory Drive’s historic, commemorative landscape and prominence as a signature boulevard. Through a public-private collaboration, this study seeks to develop an implementable plan incorporating context sensitive solutions to balance the transportation and land use demands of a contemporary street.”

This second phase of the corridor study concentrated on an approximate 0.8-mile focus or character area of the corridor from Ogeechee Road to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. The intent of this study is to develop implementable solutions to help achieve the overall vision of Victory Drive. This Phase II focus area was identified as an area of the corridor at risk of further degradation and as a section of the corridor with unique opportunities and potential for improvement. This phase of the study developed conceptual design plans with the aim to guide the revitalization of this portion of Victory Drive into a beautiful street that reflects the community’s rich history and vibrancy, and also supports all modes of travel — pedestrians, cyclists, transit and vehicles.

The intent is that the Victory Drive Corridor Study will be a multi-phase, multi-year effort. Future phases will study the remaining character areas along the corridor as identified in Phase I and listed in the graphic below.





## REVIEW OF PHASE I DOCUMENTATION

## ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK SUMMARY

Phase I conducted a high-level overview of the entire 20-mile corridor – stretching from Ogeechee Road, at the western end, to Butler Avenue on Tybee Island, at the eastern end. The corridor undergoes dramatic changes in character as one moves along it from the developed, urbanized western end to the eastern end of island suburbs and beach village developments. As in Phase I, Phase II addresses specific opportunities in the 0.8-mile long study area according to the following themes—**landscape and hardscape improvements, traffic and transportation improvements, and land use and urban design improvements.**

A review of the documentation for the Ogeechee Road to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard character area gathered in Phase I is included here. It reveals issues that were explored in great detail during this Phase II study.



**SUB-AREA 1: OGEECHEE ROAD TO MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BOULEVARD**

## LANDSCAPE

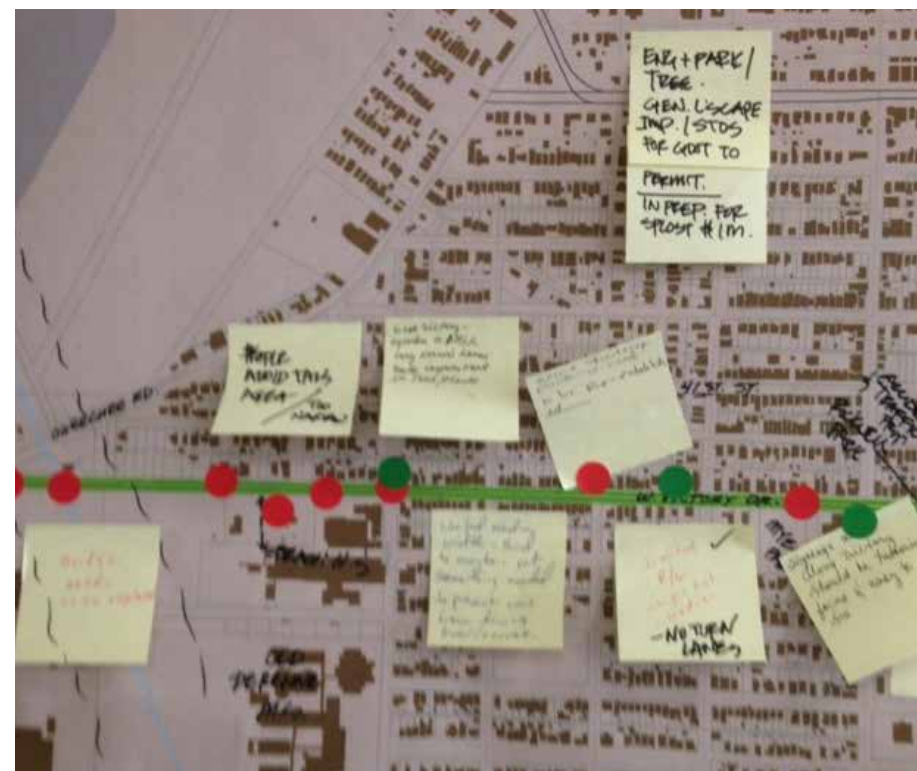
- Park at Martin Luther King, Jr. intersection is an asset
- Median washes out – needs curbing
- Flooding
- Encroachment from private property
- Not sustainable

## TRANSPORTATION

- Ogeechee Road intersection needs work
- Martin Luther King, Jr. & Victory Drive intersection – sight triangle issues
- Narrow lanes
- Heavy school bus use at Hopkins Avenue
- Narrow Median

## LAND USE / URBAN DESIGN

- Single family residential
- Lack of pocket parks
- New High School
- Lack of stormwater infrastructure



## CONCEPTUAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PHASE I

The following were the recommendations for the Ogeechee Road to MLK, Jr. Boulevard character area based on the needs and issues documented in Phase I's high-level assessment.

- ① A roundabout could improve the Ogeechee Road intersection while also acting as a gateway to the corridor and neighborhood.
- ② A pocket park along the Springfield Canal could add to the gateway experience and provide a potential linear park connection to the Laurel Grove Cemetery.
- ③ Pedestrian facilities should connect the corridor to adjacent school campuses.
- ④ A revised cross section with one lane in each direction, reducing the section from four lanes to two lanes, will allow for improved pedestrian or bicycle facilities or a wider median. The hurricane evacuation function of Victory Drive would need to be considered in conjunction with this concept.
- ⑤ Myers Park is a great asset along the corridor and should be enhanced with improved maintenance and upgraded facilities.
- ⑥ The MLK intersection is an important transition zone between character areas. Elements of the Victory Drive palette must continue along the corridor to provide visual unity.
- ⑦ With the increased real estate gained through the road-diet, widen the sidewalk, restore a palm-lined framework to both the sides of the road and, if possible, within the median. Appropriate shrubs and groundcovers should replace pyracantha in the median.
- ⑧ Provide pedestrian crossings including clearly delineated crosswalks and ADA ramps. For major intersections, provide pedestrian signalization and proper north/ south connectivity.

- ⑨ Restore curb to provide safe separation from travel ways and assist in stormwater drainage.
- ⑩ Ensure a unified transition between sub-areas with a common material palette and overlay regulations.
- ⑪ Provide a smooth, safe transition as lane configuration shifts from four lanes to two lanes.
- ⑫ Address localized flooding issues and introduce a continuous system of BMP's within the typical cross section.



This narrow cross section should be explored for potential methods of relief. Current traffic counts do not require the current four-lane section.



A stormwater master plan should be performed to assess potential system wide solutions to manage flooding. Stormwater infrastructure must then be properly maintained to ensure it continues to function as designed.





## PHASE II PROCESS

Focused on the approximate 0.8-mile corridor from Ogeechee Road to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, the Phase II study followed a structure similar to Phase I. This process as documented in this report included the following steps:

- Preliminary mapping and data collection using Savannah Area Geographic Information System (SAGIS) information.
- Site visits, during which the study team assessed the focus area, documented existing conditions and conducted team work sessions, stakeholder meetings and several community meetings.
- Draft recommendations, including summaries of existing conditions and key issues as well as implementation plan recommendations for landscape and hardscape, traffic and transportation, land use and other relevant themes.
- Final recommendations of the above items, including presentations to stakeholders and the community.



### III. Focus Area Assessment

#### COMMUNITY HERITAGE

From the western terminus at Ogeechee Road to the eastern terminus at Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, the Phase II Focus area is a unique expression of the palm-lined, multi-jurisdictional Victory Drive / U.S. 80 corridor. Passing through several historic neighborhoods, including the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District, Jackson Park, Cann Park, and the Feiler Terrace / Beach High School Area, the corridor reveals a rich heritage as it passes through some of Savannah's oldest African-American neighborhoods.

Due to its status on the National Register since 1997, the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District is perhaps the most studied of these neighborhoods. It lies to the north of Victory Drive for the entire length of the focus area. The Beach High School Area / Feiler Terrace neighborhood lies to the south of Victory Drive from Ogeechee Road to Hopkins Street. From Hopkins Street to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, the neighborhood of Cann Park lies along the remaining south side of Victory Drive in the focus area. Though not immediately adjacent to Victory Drive, the neighborhood of Jackson Park also factors strongly into the community's legacy.

According to oral history, some of Savannah's wealthiest African-American families resided in Cuyler-Brownville and Cann Park. These neighborhoods and those adjacent were promoted as the ideal neighborhoods for prosperous African-American families, and were some of Savannah's few neighborhoods where African-American families could buy and build a home in the early 20th century. Owning a home located on Victory Drive at that time was to own a home on one of the few paved boulevards in the city. Residences north and east of Victory Drive and toward Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (then known as West Broad) were home to some of those most prominent and prosperous African-American families of that time. The tight grid of pattern of streets was developed in the late 1800s and formed the dense urban residential area that we see today.

In 1919, a proposal for a palm-lined drive dedicated as a "war memorial boulevard" initiated the idea of Victory Drive. In 1936, the city's formal designation of Victory Drive excluded the segment from Ogeechee Road to Bull Street. Regardless, prior to World War II, Ogeechee Road and the Laurel Grove Cemetery were the western boundary of the Savannah urban area from the Coastal Highway (U.S. Route 17), making West Victory Drive a true gateway into the city. In oral interviews, residents recall that the West End of Victory Drive was paved with asphalt since at least the 1930s. Early memories are of a distinct palm-lined median planted with a beautiful understory of azaleas. Palms were also planted on the outer side of sidewalks for several blocks.

Alfred Ely Beach High School, part of the Savannah-Chatham County School System and located at Victory Drive and Hopkins Street, has a noteworthy presence in the community. Established in 1867, it was one of the first schools in Georgia founded

for the education of freed slaves that remains in operation today. In the 1960s, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, the varsity men's basketball team famously won Georgia's first integrated state basketball championship.

Savannah Civil Rights leader and former chapter president of the NAACP, W. W. Law was one of the focus area's most extraordinary residents. According to a 2011 Savannah Morning News article, Law's house on West Victory Drive was named to The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation's 2012 Places in Peril list, due to the house's comprised structural integrity caused by the weight of Law's personal collection of documents and books. Efforts to restore the house and place it on the national historic register are of great interest to the community.

Over the years, Victory Drive has remained a source of pride, though the physical decline of the corridor and the issues of blight and crime have plagued the adjacent neighborhoods. As part of the Blight to Bright campaign, the City of Savannah compiled the 100 Worst Properties list which included only one Victory Drive address, notably occurring within this focus area. Residents and city planners attribute the blight to the high rate of non-local landlords.





## DATA COLLECTION

In keeping with the Phase I data collection methodology, the study team utilized three approaches to data collection. These approaches work together to verify accurate data is being collected and reinforce areas where further investigation is needed. These include:

- GIS Mapping
- Stakeholder and Community Engagement
- Field Documentation

## GIS MAPPING

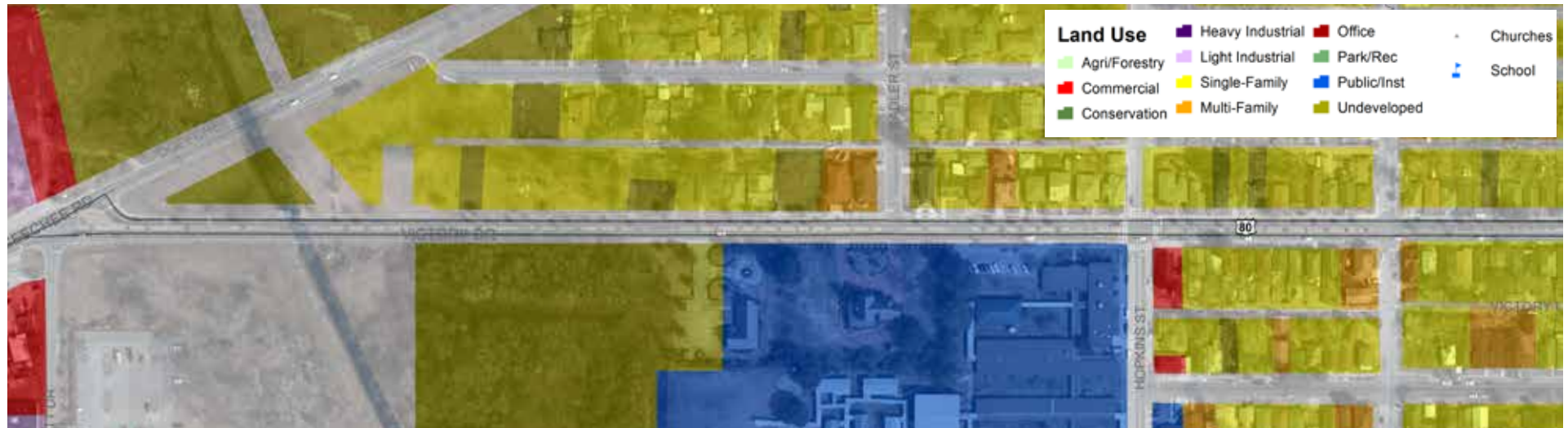
GIS mapping was used to develop focus area maps to better study and analyze this segment of the Victory Drive corridor for specific data sets. The focus area was analyzed in terms of land use, zoning, historic districts and sites of historic significance, flooding and floodplain and public school walk-to-school zones.





## GIS MAPPING (CONT.)

### LAND USE



Western Segment

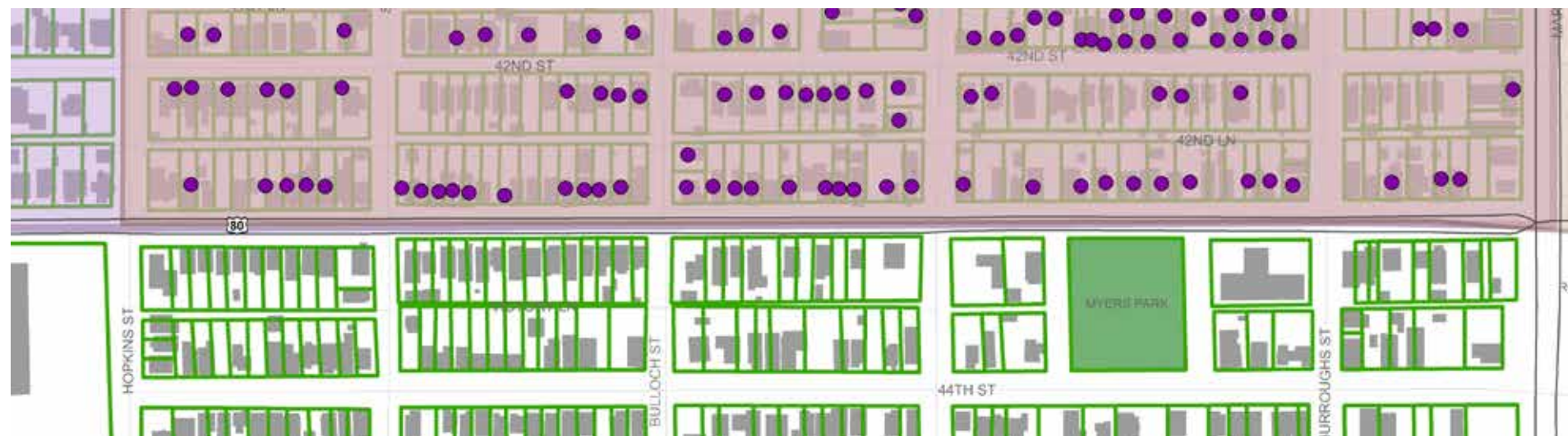


Eastern Segment

## HISTORIC DISTRICTS



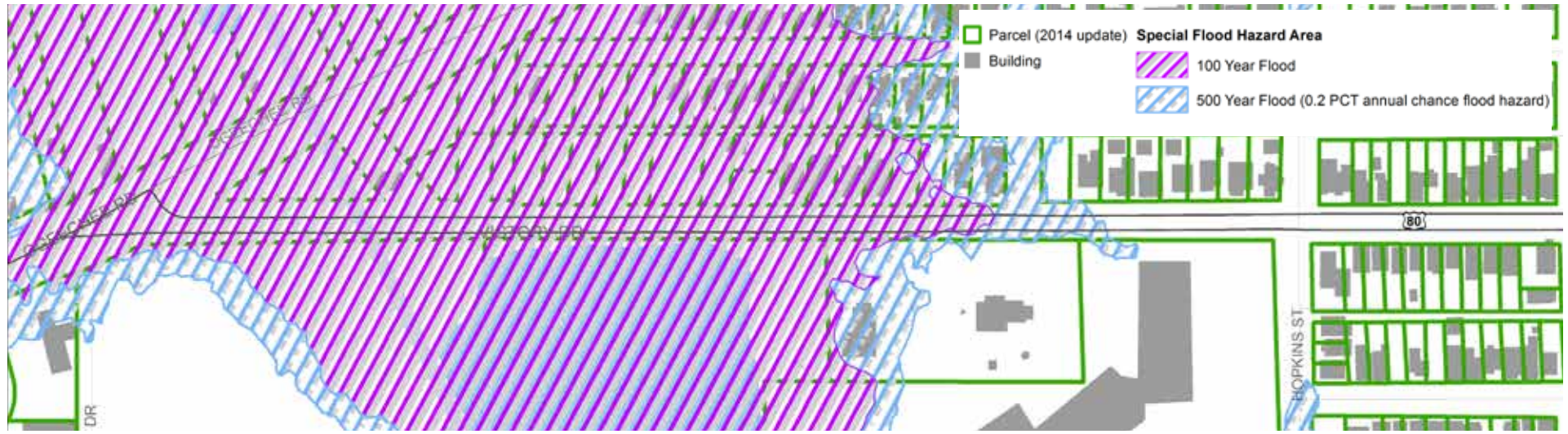
Western Segment



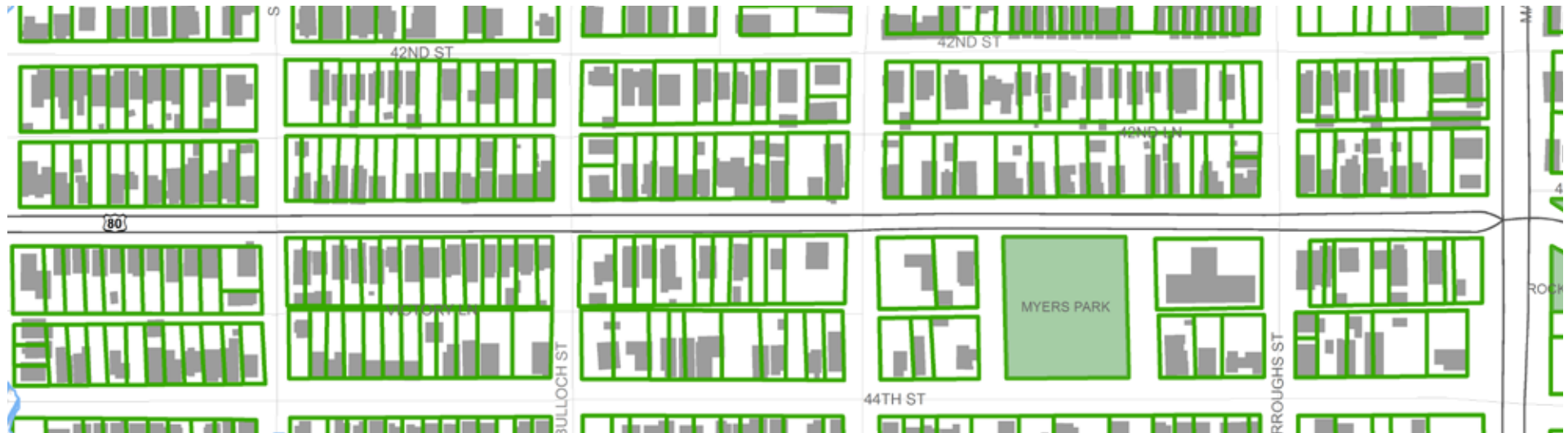
Eastern Segment



## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES



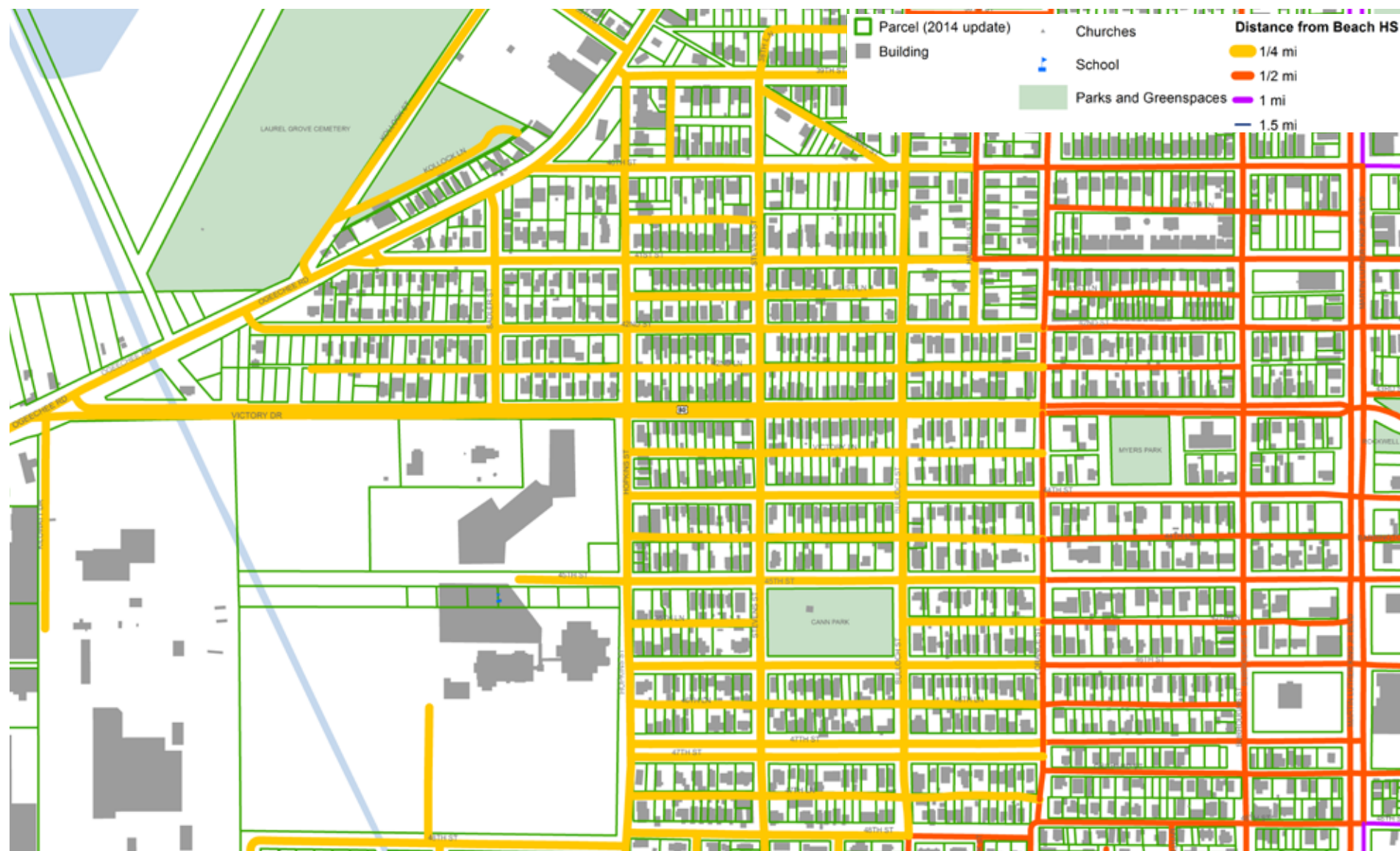
Western Segment



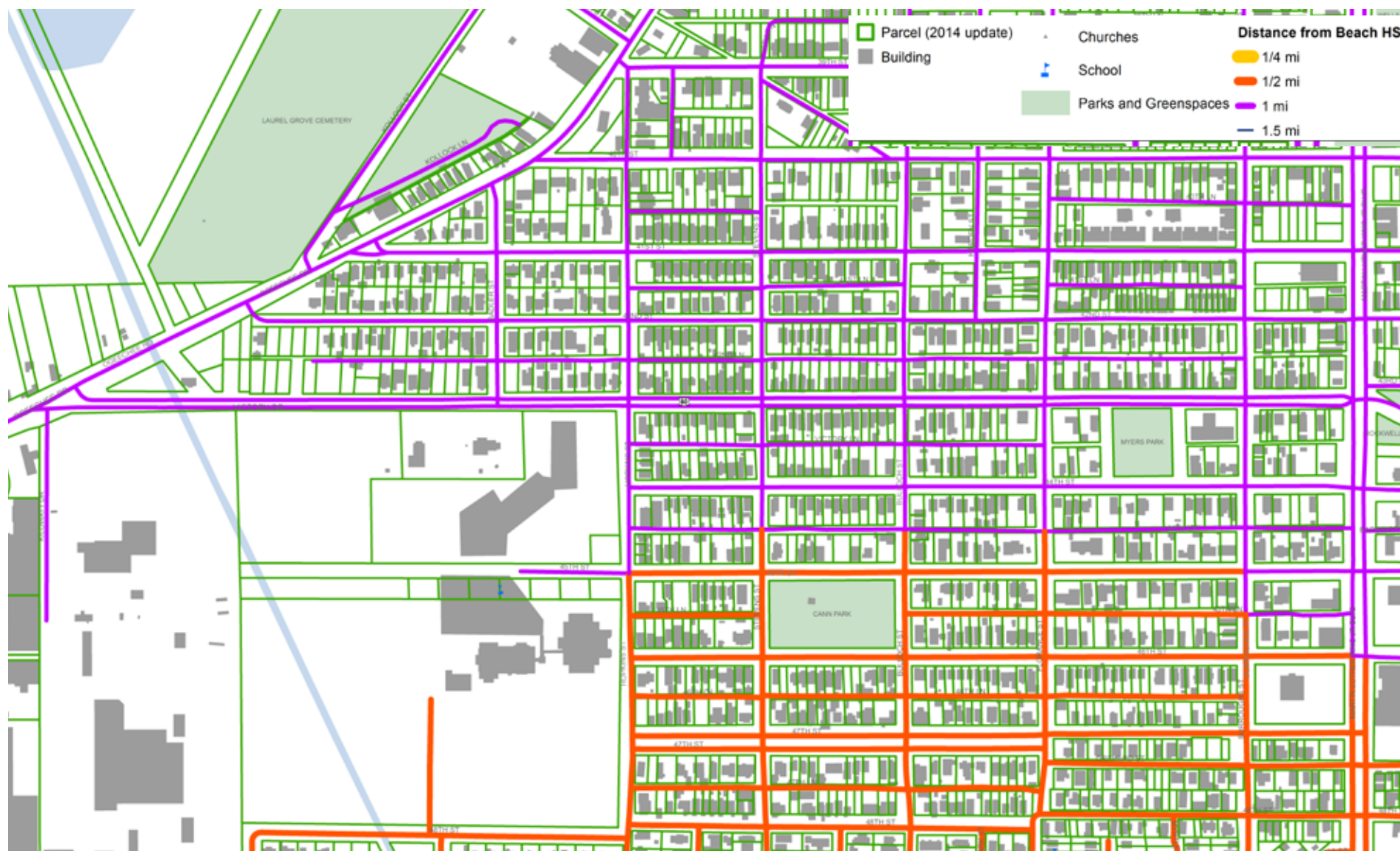
Eastern Segment



## BEACH HIGH SCHOOL WALK-TO-SCHOOL ZONES



# HODGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WALK-TO-SCHOOL ZONES

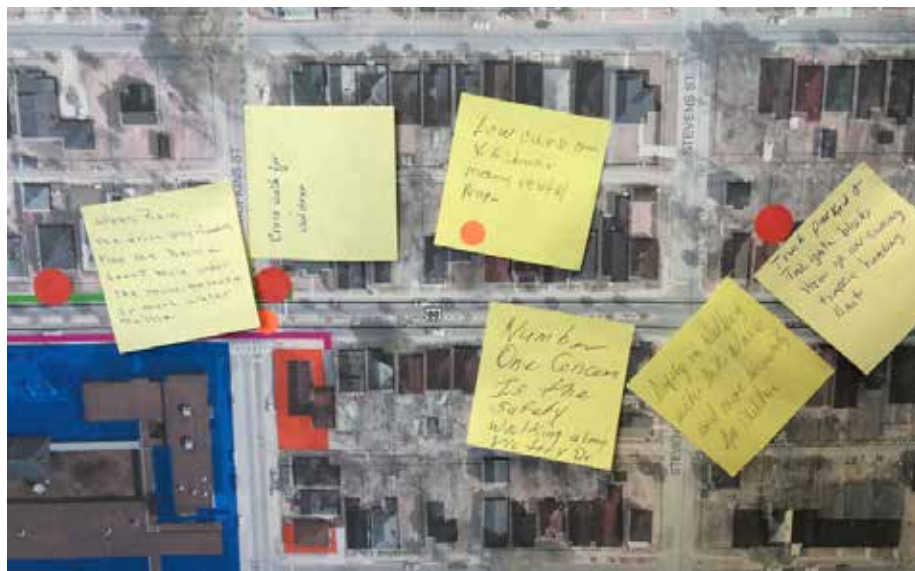


## STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As part of data collection, a series of stakeholder and community meetings were designed to elicit candid responses and targeted feedback on corridor conditions, as well as, issues and potential opportunities along the corridor. A broad range of participants from local businesses, utility providers, public agencies, neighborhood associations, churches, public schools, law enforcement, community organizations and nearby residents came forward to contribute their perspectives on how to preserve the focus area's historic integrity while also improving upon the corridor's safety, mobility and aesthetics.

As in Phase I, the study team conducted a charrette week from August 10 through 14, 2015. During this time, meetings of various formats were held, including formal presentations, informal open-house sessions and small group discussions. Feedback was gathered primarily through formal comment cards, direct interviews and interactive map exercises. In the latter, the study team utilized the red dot/green exercise to have participants attach dots and yellow sticky note comments to mapped areas that represented positive or negative attributes.

As the week progressed, the study team initiated each public meeting with a list of key issues gathered by the various feedback mechanisms, categorized by the project themes of **landscape and hardscape improvements**, **traffic and transportation improvements**, and **land use and urban design improvements**. An 'Other' category was added to include the important issues that fall outside of the Phase II scope. Before each public meeting, the list was edited to include the additional comments.



### Summary of Stakeholder Meetings and Community Engagement Events

#### MARCH 2015

- March 3: Kickoff at Neighborhood Meeting–Mary Flournoy Center

#### AUGUST 2015 (Design Charrette Week, August 10 - 14)

- August 10: Project Overview and Neighborhood Walk–Nazareth Baptist Church
- August 11: City of Savannah Staff Focus Group–Nazareth Baptist Church
- August 11: Community Stakeholders Focus Group–Nazareth Baptist Church
- August 11: Savannah-Chatham County Public School System Focus Group–Nazareth Baptist Church
- August 11: Utilities Stakeholder Focus Group–Nazareth Baptist Church
- August 12: GDOT Coordination Meeting–Nazareth Baptist Church
- August 13: Community Open House–Beach High School Cafeteria
- August 14: Progress Presentation to MPC and Advisory Committee–MPC

#### OCTOBER 2015

- October 26: GDOT Coordination Meeting–MPC

#### NOVEMBER 2015

- November 12: Community Open House–Beach High School Cafeteria
- November 30: Community Stakeholders Focus Group–Butler Presbyterian Church

### Participating Stakeholder Organizations

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Atlanta Gas Light                          | • Georgia Department of Transportation         |
| • Butler Presbyterian Church                 | • Nazareth Baptist Church                      |
| • Cann/Jackson Park Neighborhood Association | • Prayer Temple Church of God                  |
| • Chatham Area Transit                       | • Savannah-Chatham County Public School System |
| • Chatham County                             | • Savannah Development and Renewal Authority   |
| • City of Savannah                           | • United House of Prayer                       |
| • Cuyler-Brownville Neighborhood Association |  |
| • Georgia Power                              |  |



## SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK THROUGH AUGUST 2015 CHARRETTE

A summary of Initial stakeholder feedback gathered through the data collection phase through August 13, 2015 is presented here according to the three project focuses. Comments are generally listed in order of priority with bolded items heard more frequently than unbolded items. The major feedback themes are pedestrian realm improvements, transportation improvements and flooding drainage improvements.

### URBAN DESIGN / LAND USE

- **Design the corridor as a neighborhood main street that fits the community's day-to-day life.**
- **Address drainage as part of the overall design. 1108 Victory Drive, 42nd St properties west of Sadler and MLK Jr. Blvd./Victory intersection all flood when it rains.**
- **Address existing stormwater maintenance issues, i.e. clogged storm drains.**
- **Are you widening Victory? Keep the historic neighborhoods intact.**
- Address adjacent lanes and connecting side streets within design.
- Address dilapidated buildings and property maintenance issues with absentee landlords.
- Seek historic landmark designation for Victory and preserve historic homes.

### TRANSPORTATION

- **Widen sidewalks. Need more crosswalks and better lighting.**
- **Fix the Ogeechee / Victory intersection.**
- **Why are curbs missing? Restore basic street infrastructure: curbs, gutters, medians.**
- **Need things to slow down traffic. Speed limit is 25 mph in school zone and 35 – 40 mph otherwise.**
- Would a lane reduction really work? Show how it would not impact traffic congestion for the worse.
- Some would like to parallel park on Victory. Sunday church-goers park on Victory.
- GDOT / Ogeechee Road Intersection: what is the plan?
- Need more traffic lights.
- Why can't 18-wheelers be banned along Victory?

### TRANSPORTATION (CONT.)

- There are fire hydrants in sidewalks that block mobility.
- Travel lane striping (white, striped lane marker and yellow, dashed lane dividers) is not visible.

### LANDSCAPE

- **Restore the historic landscape of Victory Drive with palms and shrubs in the median.**
- **Maintain / replace any damaged palms and shrubbery in median.**
- **Address existing landscape maintenance issues, such as low-hanging branches blocking sidewalks.**
- Plant palms on the sides of the streets.
- Cut tall grasses on the vacant lots.

### OTHER

- **Address other outstanding neighborhood infrastructure beyond Victory: park amenities, flooding, street lighting.**
- **Public agency follow-through: do what you say you are going to do to help build trust.**
- **Enforce traffic violations (speeding and illegal parking).**
- **Fix the overall flooding issues in the neighborhood, beyond Victory Drive flooding.**
- Involve local residents in any "Friends of" stewardship group.
- Public agency transparency: how is this project related to other major development projects?
- Address gentrification and neighborhood stability in the project.
- Increase Metro Police presence and coordination on Victory Drive project.
- Address "food deserts" in the project.
- Engage local community with Safe Routes to School Program.

## FIELD DOCUMENTATION

Consistent with the Phase I corridor study, the consultant team traversed and analyzed the full length of the focus area by foot and by vehicle. Data collection included site photos, measurement taking, map annotation and experiential analysis. The field verification helped to validate the information received from the GIS mapping and public feedback sessions.

In addition to team-only field investigations, neighbors and stakeholders were invited to walk the corridor with the study team. The well-attended project orientation and “Walk the Corridor” event was held on August 10, 2015. This activity provided the team with valuable information on specific community areas of concern, as well as, a means to observe heavy pedestrian traffic behavior along the busy corridor.



## SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS AND KEY ISSUES

Once the data collection process was complete, the team analyzed the findings and compiled a list of issues as well as opportunities that exist in the focus area. These existing conditions inform the key issues and goals that are proposed in the next section.

### URBAN DESIGN / LAND USE

- From Hopkins to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, Victory Drive has the characteristics and feel of an urban residential neighborhood street. Posted speed limits are 35 mph.
- At four-feet wide, sidewalks are below the city neighborhood sidewalk standard of five-feet wide. It is generally unsafe to walk on Victory Drive sidewalks due to vegetation overgrowth and other debris that sometimes makes them impassable.
- Degraded curbs no longer vertically separate vehicles from pedestrians thereby providing little to no protection from traffic.
- Private property, such as plants, fences and other materials at the outer edge of the sidewalks, may be inadvertently located in the public right-of-way.
- The community's high density of schools is unique along Victory Drive and underscores the need for improved walkability across and along the corridor. As part of district-wide policy, students residing within one-mile of school do not qualify for bus transportation and are encouraged to walk to school. Improved street crossings at Hopkins and Bulloch are needed for students crossing Victory Drive on their way to and from school.
- Historic integrity of the corridor is heavily degraded. While the Cuyler-Brownville Historic District is on the national register, the W. W. Law House and other historic homes along the corridor and in Cann Park, Feiler Terrace and Jackson Park are in need of preservation.
- Dilapidated buildings and property maintenance issues contribute to the degraded aesthetic of the corridor.
- Adjacent lanes (alleys) and connecting side streets may provide a safe alternative for cyclists or pedestrians.
- From Hopkins Street to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, the corridor contains a total of thirteen storm drain inlets, with a minimum of two at each intersection. Storm sewer pipes run north-south across Victory Drive and manholes are also

located in most intersections. More study is required to determine to what extent the partially blocked inlets and/or capacity issues are contributing to the consistent flooding problems experienced along this section of the corridor.

- Flooding and drainage issues are reported to be extensive. On the west end of the focus area, stormwater maintenance issues (i.e., clogged storm drains) and flooding issues relate to the 100 and 500-year Special Flood Hazard Area.
- On the east end of the focus area, clogged storm drains and undersized facilities north of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard intersection may be contributing





## TRANSPORTATION

- Victory Drive from Ogeechee Road to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard is a four-lane divided Urban Principal Street. The corridor is on the National Highway System (US 80) and designated an Evacuation Route.
- Travel lanes are nine-feet wide (two lanes in each direction). The median is four feet wide and sidewalks are four feet wide. There is no gutter or tree lawn. The entire right-of-way is recorded at 60-feet wide, however only an approximate 47-foot width of the corridor is being used for public purposes, leaving the remaining width in unintentional private use.
- High traffic speeds are reported despite the 35 mph posted speed limit.
- There is a lack of pedestrian connectivity and lack of ADA compliant ramps and crossings.
- There is a school zone from west of Sadler Street to midblock between Stevens Street and Bulloch Street.
- There is a lack of safe pedestrian routes to school. A pilot “Walking School Bus” crosses Victory at Bulloch, but child participants walk in the street due to the general lack of pedestrian facilities (sidewalks) in the community.
- There is a lack of public transit along Victory due to the Chatham Area Transit (CAT) buses’ reported inability to travel safely on the narrow nine-foot lanes and to pass over the Springfield Canal bridge due to the current insufficient load capacity. There is also a lack of space for transit facilities along Victory Drive, such as bus lanes and stops.
- Parking is restricted except on Sundays when it is permitted in some locations.
- Based on community reports, eastbound truck traffic has increased in recent years and contributes to the feeling of an unsafe street. According to the GDOT database, five percent of the total vehicular volume is truck traffic.
- Median and elevated sidewalks are poorly maintained, many lacking curbs. The sidewalk is obstructed by utility poles, fire hydrants, landscaping and debris in several locations.
- Traffic counts are determined to be stable when projected into the year 2039 and does not demand four lanes. Analysis confirms that a lane reduction would create improved pedestrian level of service (LOS).
- Georgia Department of Transportation’s (GDOT) proposed widening of SR 26/ US 80/Ogeechee Road (Project ID 521855) will impact the west end of the Victory Drive corridor from Ogeechee Road to Sadler Street.

- In a two-lane scenario, roadway LOS is rated as B or C. Intersection design will determine level of congestion on Victory Drive.
- The intersections at Hopkins Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard are high priority intersections for ensuring adequate LOS in any buildout scenario and can be reconfigured for better traffic flow, pedestrian safety, and drainage.
- Due to the physically constrained corridor and limited right-of-way, cyclists currently use sidewalks or avoid Victory Drive altogether.



## LANDSCAPE

- There are voids where some of the palms in the median have been removed or not replaced. Existing palms should be preserved and those removed should be replaced as standard median maintenance in the right-of-way.
- Due to the existing lack of tree lawns, there is a lack of framing elements such as Southern Live Oaks or Sabal Palms along the corridor.
- GDOT minimal horizontal clear zones will limit the ability to plant new non-frangible (or non-breakable) vegetation, such as oaks, in any new tree lawns that may be recommended in design plans. However, frangible small trees such as Crape Myrtles that would easily yield to sudden impact by oncoming vehicles would be permitted in tree lawns within the clear zone. A wider tree lawn (minimally nine to ten feet) would permit monocot species with trunks that do not add girth, such as a Sabal Palm, to be planted just outside of the clear zone in the tree lawn.
- Medians lack mulch and appropriate groundcover, contributing to soil erosion. New curbs would help contain mulch and groundcover.
- Current groundcover species in the median are sparse, likely due to being inappropriate species that are now a maintenance burden. New groundcover species must be slow-growing and not require constant pruning and maintenance. While desirable, Southern Indica azaleas are not appropriate in medians and tree lawns which are less than ten-feet in width.
- Tree lawns could add greenery and also serve as locations for green infrastructure solutions to help manage localized stormwater.
- There is minimal canopy coverage along the corridor. Existing palms on private property at the back of the existing sidewalks may serve as a template for establishing easements with property owners to further green the corridor.
- Myers Park trees need to be limbed up to open visibility and allow more light.







## IV. Implementation Plan Recommendations

### A GREAT STREET FOR THE WEST END OF VICTORY DRIVE

The Phase I Summary Memorandum laid out the American Planning Association's characteristics of a great street and stated the 21st Century Vision for Victory Drive, as follows:

*As a restored, revitalized and fully modernized "Great Street," the Victory Drive / US-80 boulevard and parkway shall:*

*Be unified through a common theme dedicated to the veterans of all American wars,*

*Be a continuous beautiful but evolving landscape,*



*Offer amenities which support all users, where practical, including pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles and public transportation,*

*Provide a fully functional infrastructure system to include stormwater management and coordinate above and belowground utilities, and*

*Be regulated by a unified, multi-jurisdictional code.*

In the spirit of this vision, the West End of Victory Drive has promise to be returned to its storied prominence as great street that serves as the central spine to a culturally-rich cluster of Savannah's oldest, historic African-American neighborhoods.

### FOCUS AREA GOAL STATEMENT

*The West End Victory Drive Project proposes to create a unique expression of Victory Drive as a classic main street to some of Savannah's oldest historic black urban neighborhoods.*

*By addressing failing infrastructure, historic degradation and a walkable network for this school-rich community, the project aims to improve basic quality-of-life issues such as walkability, personal safety and security, and frequent flooding.*

*Great streets require great neighborhoods to thrive, therefore the project aspires to catalyze broad revitalization by leveraging grassroots organizations, city planning and other neighborhood organizations to focus and invest in the opportunity that is the West End of Victory Drive.*



## CONCEPTUAL DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS & STRATEGIES

The recommendations for the Focus Area's Implementation Plan are guided by the corridor-wide Vision Statement established in Phase I as well as the Focus Area Goal Statement. Each recommendation is organized by the three thematic areas of landscape, transportation and urban design.

### BASIS OF CONCEPTUAL DESIGN

The following basic rationale and assumptions underlie the implementation approach recommended on the following pages:

1. **Context Sensitive Complete Street Approach.** Due to the project's constrained corridor and limited right-of-way, a context sensitive Complete Streets approach is warranted to make the design truly adapt to the corridor's specific challenges and opportunities. While a typically robust urban Complete Street may include on-street parking, 10-foot sidewalks and dedicated bike lanes, physical constraints and community need within the Focus Area point toward alternative priorities.
2. **Alternative Design Strategies.** Due to the project's complexity, the community's ongoing discussion, and the multi-jurisdictional approval process required for implementation, this document contains two alternative typical roadway section implementation options: **Option A - Lane Reduction** and **Option B - No Lane Reduction**. Preliminary transportation analysis by the study team confirms that lane reduction (to two travel lanes, as in Option A) is a viable alternative to a rebuild of the existing conditions (maintaining four travel lanes, as in Option B). Alternatives for detailed design elements, such as tree species and pedestrian light pole styles, are suggested within these options, but final direction should include broad stakeholder review and buy-in from the community.
3. **Pending GDOT Project.** The design alternatives also take into consideration the preliminary project design of the proposed road widening of SR 26/US 80/Ogeechee Road. This project realigns Ogeechee Road with Victory Drive and may impact the corridor from Ogeechee Road to Sadler Street. The hope is that design input from this study can influence the outcome of this project on the corridor.
4. **Level of Right-of-Way (ROW) Improvements.** Both Option A and Option B assume a complete corridor retrofit of the full 60-foot ROW. At a minimum, this would include removal of old asphalt, new asphalt pavement, rebuilt sidewalks and restoration of medians and curbs. Depending on final grading and storm drainage strategies, future site studies may reveal the need for a regraded sub-base and base course in some areas. Based on the minimal vertical separation between curb, sidewalk and roadway, as well as partly blocked storm drains, the historic Victory Drive road bed was several inches lower than its existing condition. The project will restore a vertical separation for the pedestrian zone, proposed to include new sidewalks, granite header curbs (no gutter), curb cuts, ADA ramps, as

well as re-establish a fully functional storm drain system and make way for green infrastructure improvements.

5. **Adjacent Property Implications.** Both Option A and Option B assume the full utilization of the city's 60-foot (ROW). Preliminary field and GIS mapping observations indicate that some adjacent private properties may have landscape or built elements within the public ROW. A complete land survey of the ROW is required to fully understand the implications of future improvements.
6. **State Route Horizontal Clear Zones.** As a state route, minimal horizontal clear zones for the posted speed limit are 8-feet from the face of the curb, requiring any new vegetation in expanded tree lawns within the pedestrian zone to be frangible vegetation or be planted outside of the clear zone. Vegetation in the existing median could be replaced under the GDOT provisions for maintenance.
7. **Anticipated Multi-modal Facilities.** The CORE MPO/MPC has developed and maintains the Non-motorized Transportation Plan, which currently includes plans for bikeways along Ogeechee Road and Hopkins Street, as well as a shared use path along the Springfield Canal. Due to the physical constraints of the corridor, streets parallel to Victory through the Focus Area, such as 42nd Street, may provide other east-west connections for bicycles. CAT buses currently avoid Victory Drive's West End due to the narrow travel lanes, however, this study anticipates that a possible lane reduction and the GDOT widening and bridge improvements would prompt future transit service and facilities.
8. **Supplemental Strategies.** In addition to improvements to the ROW, additional corridor area design, policy and community engagement strategies are detailed in the following pages.





## TYPICAL ROADWAY SECTION IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

As was mentioned earlier, this study is carrying forward two potential design solutions for the proposed typical roadway section. Option A proposes a travel lane reduction for all or much of the length of the corridor. This option is the option recommended by the design team. Option B maintains the four existing travel lanes. The community has expressed some interest in both options and discussion within the community continues relative to which option they would prefer.

### OPTION A - LANE REDUCTION

#### *Maximize Pedestrian Zone*

The proposed lane reduction strategy provides one lane of travel in each direction and allows for an enhanced median and pedestrian zones. It includes the following elements, categorized by the project themes:

#### URBAN DESIGN / LAND USE

- New tree lawns (approximately 9 to 10-foot wide) and wider sidewalks (expanded from 4 feet to 6 feet).
- Occasional transit pullouts within the tree yard area at appropriate intervals along the corridor.

#### TRANSPORTATION

- Lanes (or alleys) at the rear of homes fronting Victory Drive are also improved to reduce congestion on Victory Drive caused by illegal drop-offs and parking. Sidewalks would be extended to lanes on the cross streets.
- Wider travel lanes (increased from 9 feet to 12 feet), one in each direction from Hopkins Street to Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.
- Restoration of the granite header curb (no gutter) found throughout Victory Drive.
- New crosswalks at each intersection; enhanced crosswalks with rapid signalized beacons at key locations.

#### LANDSCAPE

- Tree lawns to include palms every 30 feet and pedestrian lighting every 60 feet. Understory planting are included under palms to not exceed 24-inches in height.
- Tree lawns include midblock and curb-end green infrastructure elements, vegetated areas that capture and infiltrate stormwater and also add greenery to the street.
- Wider median (increased from 4 feet to 6 feet) that includes new curbs, palms approximately every 30 feet, understory plantings and roadway lighting.



## OPTION A - LANE REDUCTION

### *Issues and Opportunities*

Making West End Victory Drive safer for all users, especially pedestrians and residents, calls for a bold redesign of the street. This design alternative poses several unique challenges and opportunities.

Based on several traffic analysis tools, the study team concludes that a two-lane road can accommodate existing and projected traffic volumes, as well as increase the pedestrian level of service (LOS), calm traffic and provide safer walking conditions.

Lane reduction enables an expanded the pedestrian zone, provides a wider sidewalk, green stormwater solutions on the street and expanded tree lawns planted with Sabal Palms. Enhanced crosswalks at each intersection, with rapid signalized beacons at Bulloch and Hopkins, would further prioritize pedestrians. Improved lanes (alleys) behind Victory Drive residences provide multiple benefits, such as residential parking, creating a safe alternative for passenger pick-up/drop-off, draining stormwater with green infrastructure solutions and expanding open space by formalizing alternative walking and cycling routes.





## OPTION B - NO LANE REDUCTION

### *Restore Existing Conditions*

This alternative maintains two travel lanes in each direction and allows for an enhanced pedestrian zone by making full use of the existing 60-foot right-of-way (ROW). It includes the following elements, categorized by the project themes:

#### URBAN DESIGN / LAND USE

- New tree lawns (approximately 4-feet wide) and wider sidewalks (expanded from 4 feet to 6 feet).
- Lanes (or alleys) at the rear of homes adjacent to Victory Drive are also improved to reduce congestion caused by on-street drop-offs and parking. Victory Drive sidewalks are also proposed to be extended north and south to adjacent lanes.

#### TRANSPORTATION

- New crosswalks at each intersection; enhanced crosswalks with rapid signalized beacons at key intersections.
- Restoration of the granite header curb (no gutter) found throughout Victory Drive.

#### LANDSCAPE

- Tree lawns to include small, frangible trees like Crape Myrtle every 25 feet and pedestrian lighting every 60 feet. Understory plantings are included under palms to not exceed 24-inches in height.
- Tree lawns include midblock and curb-end green infrastructure elements, vegetated areas that capture and infiltrate stormwater and also add greenery to the street.
- Reconstructed median (maintained at 4 feet wide) with new curbs, palms approximately every 30 feet, understory plantings and roadway lighting.





## OPTION B - NO LANE REDUCTION

### *Issues and Opportunities*

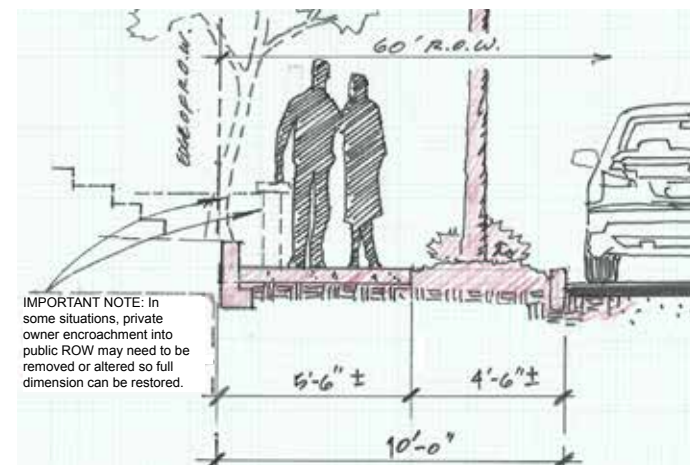
In contrast to Option A, Option B maintains four lanes of travel and makes use of the remaining right-of-way (ROW) for an improved pedestrian zone. Preserving the existing configuration requires a scaled-down Complete Streets approach due to the narrow and physically constrained corridor.

Based on several traffic analysis tools, the existing four-lane road can accommodate projected traffic volumes and would maintain the current vehicular and pedestrian LOS. While some traffic calming and traffic speeds may be improved by providing the updated curbs and landscaping, this option employs fewer traffic calming strategies than in Option A. The perception of pedestrian safety may be improved, however it will likely be to a lesser degree than in Option A. Overall, the aesthetics of the corridor would be improved, however the degree to which Option B would address the community's desire to calm traffic and provide safer walking and driving conditions may be less than in Option A.

Making full use of the 60-foot wide corridor poses several unique challenges for implementation. Preliminary field and GIS mapping observations indicate that some owners of private properties may have landscape or built elements (i.e., small retaining walls, steps, vegetation) within the public ROW. Addressing each potential

ROW encroachment would require evaluation on a case-by-case basis. Strategies such as reducing the proposed sidewalk width or tree lawn could be another solution.

Option B's pedestrian zone provides a wider sidewalk, green stormwater solutions, an expanded tree lawn for small trees, enhanced crosswalks at each intersection, rapid signalized beacons at Bulloch and Hopkins. Improved lanes (alleys) behind Victory Drive residences are recommended similar to Option A.



Typical ROW Encroachment

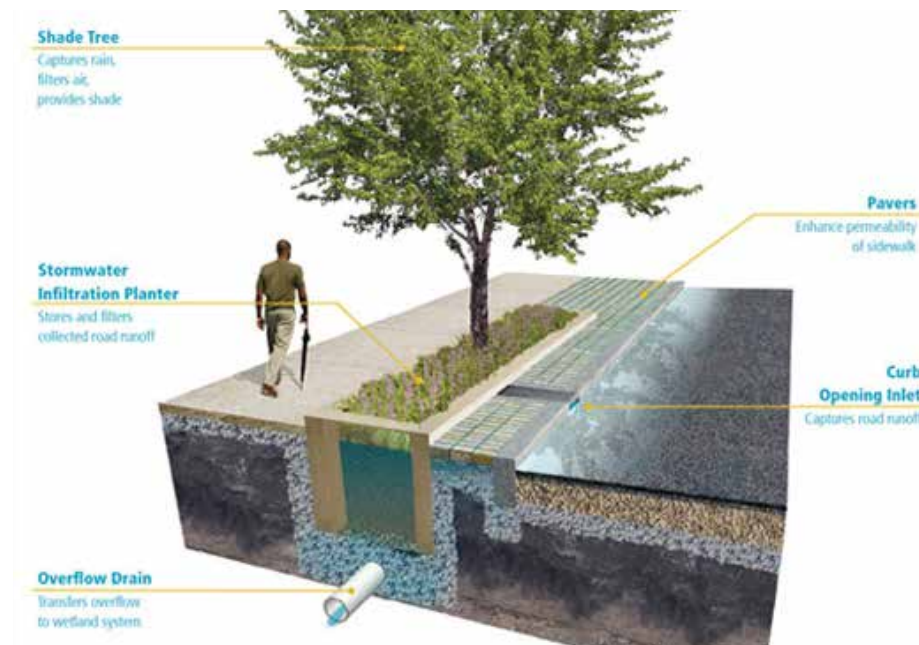
## SUPPLEMENTAL DESIGN STRATEGIES

The findings of this study indicate that improvements to the transportation infrastructure and pedestrian configuration of this section of Victory Drive are only part of the solution in terms of addressing the Complete Street goal of the corridor. Based on community feedback, the following additional corridor area design, policy and community engagement strategies are proposed for further in-depth exploration.

### GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND GREEN STREETS

In keeping with the Phase I recommendation for a corridor-wide stormwater master plan for Victory Drive, the results of the Phase II study confirm the acute need for a comprehensive assessment of potential system-wide solutions to manage flooding and introduce a continuous system of stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) within the final cross-section. Examples include stormwater infiltration planters in the tree lawns, shade trees, permeable pavers, curb openings and overflow drains to convey stormwater to constructed wetland facilities, such as those proposed as an integrated stormwater management and open space approach to the Ogeechee Road and Victory Drive gateway.

Stormwater and flooding issues ranked of great importance to the community in data collection stage of this study and nearly all of the community members surveyed supported Green Street and green infrastructure solutions within the improved right-of-way on Victory Drive.



### INTERSECTION REDESIGN AND SIGNALIZED PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

Based on the study team's traffic analysis, corridor functionality (level of service or LOS) in terms of traffic congestion is based heavily on how well the intersections function. The intersection at Hopkins is a high priority for ensuring adequate LOS in any future improvement and should be reconfigured for better traffic flow, pedestrian safety, and drainage.

Crosswalk markings at each of the West End Victory Drive intersections are recommended by the study team. Based on community feedback, at a minimum, rapid flashing beacon-type crossings are recommended at Hopkins Street and Bulloch Street. These are primary routes for students walking to nearby schools. Other intersections which felt notably unsafe to pedestrians were Stevens, Ogeechee and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.





## PARK AND OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS

Community feedback indicated a strong desire to improve both Cann Park and Myers Park while still preserving the general community functions of the individual parks.

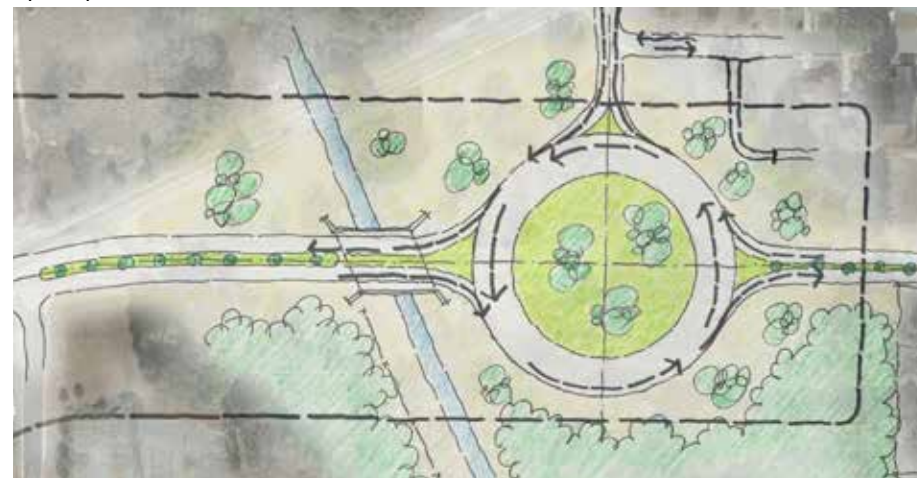
At Cann Park, the community supported more benches and seating, more paths to walk on, more lighting, additional multi-use sport courts and playgrounds. Rule enforcement and routine maintenance were also top concerns. At Myers Park, top improvement priorities included all of the above except multi-use sport courts, due to the park's smaller size and passive nature. Maintenance issues at Myers Park included the need to limb up the large oak trees in order to increase the sitelines across the park, as well as the perception of safety.



## OGEECHEE GATEWAY IMPROVEMENTS

Historically, the Ogeechee Road intersection and junction at Victory Drive serves as a gateway to the corridor, the neighborhood and greater Savannah. Although preliminary project design of the proposed GDOT road widening at this intersection does not currently convey an improved gateway design concept, several general concepts were explored as part of this study.

One concept includes a traffic circle, or roundabout, as a potential design solution for the intersection. Roundabouts offer several benefits including improved traffic operations and reduced maintenance costs. A second solution of a stormwater park at the gateway merges the priority needs of stormwater management and increased open space.





## POLICY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Beyond the physical improvements to Victory Drive's West End, the following potential implementation strategies were identified as having merit for further consideration relative to the long-term implementation of the Victory Drive corridor plan.

### 'FRIENDS-OF' CONSERVANCY GROUP

Since the Phase I study, the structure and format of a conservancy group to support the corridor-wide revitalization effort has been explored by the study team and MPC. While there are many models for "Friends-of" groups, the Victory Drive Conservancy should be tailored to the specific issues and infrastructure needs of the corridor. Several key functions of this group have been mentioned, including the following:

- Uphold the goals and vision of the Victory Drive study.
- Seek public constituency input and support, including philanthropic revenue streams to leverage maintenance and improvement projects.
- Provide information to the public about Victory Drive issues across the corridor.

### EVACUATION ROUTE REDESIGNATION

Another option to consider is the potential to re-designate the US-80 route off of Victory Drive's western segment. As a state and federal highway, US 80 must adhere to strict regulations administered by GDOT and FHWA. These regulations will limit the potential physical design strategies and solutions that might be applied to enhance the Victory Drive / US-80 corridor.

## LEVERAGING LOCAL REDEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

It is clear, based on community feedback, that this is a community with a unique heritage, pride and potential. Several coordinated efforts within the Phase II focus area may serve as catalysts for broader Victory Drive corridor revitalization.

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding.
- Partnering with Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (SDRA) and/or local design organizations and universities for planning efforts.
- Partnering area schools with churches, universities and non-profit organizations to develop and implement enrichment programs.
- Neighborhood and community group collaboration.

## COORDINATED BIKEWAY CONNECTIVITY

While the Phase II focus area recommendations do not include new bike lanes within the revitalized Victory Drive corridor, the GDOT widening at Ogeechee Road will introduce new standard, Class 2 bike lanes on Victory from approximately Ogeechee Road to Sadler Street. This plan recommends considering west and eastbound bike lanes to link with existing Hopkins Street shared lanes within the recommended Hopkins Street intersection redesign. Bike lanes or shared use lanes on streets parallel to Victory Drive, such as West 42nd and West 47th Streets, may serve as cross-neighborhood connectors to existing bike lanes east of the focus area.



## IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE & NEXT STEPS

Implementation of the West End Victory Drive corridor-wide enhancement project will be complex and time-consuming. A successful implementation program will require long-term collaboration across multiple public and private sector agencies, organizations and groups.

Prior to moving forward, continued community conversations on the two options included in this report will be of the utmost importance. The majority of residents at the West End of Victory Drive meetings support strategies to calm traffic and provide safer walking conditions, however not all agree on the optimal design solution to achieve a safer and more beautiful street. Some are supportive of the study team's recommendation to reduce this segment of Victory Drive to two lanes (Option A). Others who prefer no lane reduction (Option B) are primarily concerned that lane reduction would increase congestion by limiting the perceived number of vehicles that can pass through at peak traffic hours. The concern is that increased congestion would then trigger widespread "cut-throughs" on quieter streets, creating an overall negative impact to the community. It is clear that more conversation is needed so that the community can fully digest the options and then arrive at a shared implementation vision for this segment of Victory Drive.

Preliminary transportation analysis by the study team confirms that lane reduction is a viable alternative to a rebuild of the existing conditions, but many more steps are necessary before the vision for the West End of Victory Drive can be realized. Future multi-jurisdictional discussion goals are as follows:

- MPC, City of Savannah Engineering and GDOT collaboration on assessing the issues and opportunities associated with Option A and Option B.
- Creation of 'Friends of' conservancy group that includes neighborhood leaders from the West End Victory Drive area.
- Development of design standards for the corridor to include crosswalk design, shrub, tree and light standard selection.
- Continued community dialogue to develop a consensus preference for Option A or Option B.
- Continued community dialogue and organization to advocate for additional planning and investment within the community surrounding the study area corridor.





## V. Conclusion

### FINAL THOUGHTS

The Phase II Victory Drive Study seeks to advance implementation of the Victory Drive vision outlined in the Phase I effort by focusing on one character area along the 20-mile corridor that is at risk of further degradation. The goal is to return this once great street to a 21st century version of its former status as a place of prominence among the West End neighborhoods. By creating a Complete Street at the West End of Victory Drive that is effective for all users, that balances transportation needs with the desire to restore the historic commemorative landscape framework, Victory Drive can become once again a fully functional and beautiful urban neighborhood street.

In this Phase II effort of the Victory Drive study, the study team began to explore this unique character area using background information and GIS mapping. A weeklong charrette with multiple community meetings elicited a great deal of public feedback based on their intimate knowledge and experiences of the corridor. Based on the data collected, the consultant team generated a series of preliminary implementation design concepts responding to the issues and opportunities identified along the corridor. These findings led to a refined series of design alternatives and recommendations that were presented to the community and summarized in this document. Phase II concludes with a presentation of this summary memorandum to the MPC, CORE MPO and key stakeholders.











## Appendix: (Available Under Separate Cover)

A1. Stakeholder Feedback – Sign-in Sheets

A2. Stakeholder Feedback – Comments Cards

A3. Stakeholder Feedback – Online Survey

A4. Transportation Memo



# Acknowledgements

## COASTAL REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

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James Aberson, CORE MPO Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation

Phillip Claxton, City Manager, City of Port Wentworth

Stephanie Cutter, City Manager, City of Savannah

George Fidler, Director of Engineering, Savannah Airport Commission

Harold Fowler, Mayor, City of Richmond Hill

Ron Feldner, City Manager, City of Garden City

Caroline Hankins, Town Administrator, Town of Thunderbolt

James Hungerpillar, Mayor, Town of Vernonburg

Edna Jackson, Mayor, City of Savannah

Wendall Kessler, Chairman, Effingham County Commission

Curtis Koleber, Interim Executive Director, Chatham Area Transit Authority

Mike Lamb, Mayor, City of Pooler

Pete Liakakis, Chatham Area Transit Board of Directors

Tom McQueen, Asst. State Planning Administrator, Georgia Department of Transportation

Jannine Miller, Director, Center of Innovation and Logistics

Tanya Milton, Chairman, Metropolitan Planning Commission

Ben Rozier, Mayor, City of Bloomingdale

Diane Schleicher, City Manager, City of Tybee Island

Albert Scott, Chairman, Chatham County Commission

Lee Smith, County Manager, Chatham County

Bob Tully, CORE MPO Citizens Advisory Committee

## COASTAL REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

---

### STAFF MEMBERS

Thomas L. Thomson, P.E., AICP, Executive Director

Mark Wilkes, P.E., AICP, Director of Transportation Planning and Project Manager

Jessica Hagan, Transportation Administrative Assistant

Jane Love, Transportation Planner

Stephanie Rossi, Transportation Planner

Wykoda Wang, Transportation Planner

Project Manager on Behalf of CORE MPO/MPC

Denise R. Grabowski, AICP, LEED AP

Principal, Symbioscity

### CONSULTANT TEAM

---

#### jB+a PLANNING AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

John Fish, ASLA, APA, Director of Community Planning

Michael Browning, PLA, ISA, LEED AP, Savannah Office Director

Laura Ballock, Landscape Architect

Luke Love, Landscape Designer

#### TRANSPORT STUDIOS

Whitney Shephard, PE, LEED AP, Principal

Sarah Rayfield, Planner

#### LONG ENGINEERING

David Jackson, PE, Principal

