

VILLAGE CENTER AT GREEN BROOK VISION REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



AUGUST 2018

GREEN BROOK PLANNING FOR EMERGING CENTERS



Report prepared for the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority and the Township of Green Brook by:

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BACKGROUND



BACKGROUND

Green Brook Township applied to NJTPA’s Emerging Centers program for technical assistance to undertake a rezoning effort for the Village Commercial District (**See Figure 1 for boundary**). The goal of this project was to amend the existing Village Commercial District ordinance and adopt other regulatory changes that would facilitate successful development within the district that is consistent with community’s vision for the Study Area.

As part of this effort, the township also sought recommendations for how to better leverage access to the existing bus route on Route 22, improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and reduce traffic and congestion along Washington Avenue and Greenbrook

Road. To help the township complete these tasks, NJTPA hired a consultant team of planning, transportation, and economic development specialists.

STUDY AREA

As originally scoped, the project study area was to be the boundary of the Village Commercial Zoning District. The study area was expanded to include areas that are within 1/4 mile of the intersection of Greenbrook Road and Washington Avenue (**Figure 1**). This 1/4-mile radius encompasses development within an approximate 5-minute walk of the intersection.

Figure 1: Study Area Map



-  Village Commercial District Boundary
-  Study Area

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The consultant team, with the support of the township, county, state, and NJTPA, undertook a market, circulation, land use, and regulatory analysis within the larger study area boundary. The following are the key mobility, market, and land use findings from the Existing Conditions Report:

- › There are many amenities in the study area, especially civic amenities, including Irene E. Feldkircher (IEF) Elementary School, Green Brook Middle School, the Municipal Building, and the future Arthur Lewis Park, which support the idea that this area could be a commercial and civic core of the township.
- › The size and condition of lots are not generally conducive to redevelopment that is in line with the vision identified by the township in their zoning ordinance. Lot aggregation will likely be needed to accommodate new development.
- › Should the township be willing to include more dense residential development in the Village Commercial District, it also may have to investigate the use of Area in Need of Rehabilitation or Redevelopment designation.
- › High traffic volumes on Washington Avenue are a key challenge for creating a village center in this area. Any new development will have to mitigate the impacts of developing along the heavily trafficked Washington Avenue while capitalizing on the visibility that such traffic generates.
- › While there is a decent sidewalk network, the quality of that network does not feel inviting or safe for pedestrians.
- › The intersection improvements at Greenbrook Road and Washington Avenue improved vehicular and pedestrian safety, but exacerbated resident concerns about traffic congestion. The public realm around this intersection also still needs improvement.
- › Bus stops on Route 22 lack amenities and connections to the Village Commercial area.
- › Parking within the study area is sufficient to meet the needs of local businesses, but could be consolidated and connected to reduce the number of access driveways on Washington Avenue.
- › There could be demand for between 75 and 100 housing units in the township by 2022. Demand will largely be driven by millennials and empty-nesters, therefore residential development should cater to their housing preferences for studio to two-bedroom apartments.
- › There is support for approximately 6,000 square feet of retail space based on 2017 figures.



LOW-QUALITY PEDESTRIAN REALM

Narrow sidewalks are very close to the roadway. The lack of pedestrian amenities (such as lighting, benches, and street trees) and proximity to the roadway are both factors that deter walking in and around the Village Commercial District.



MULTIPLE PARKING LOTS AND DRIVEWAYS

Most businesses have their own parking and ingress/egress driveways, creating multiple points of conflict with pedestrians and additional traffic on Washington Avenue.



INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS

The county recently reconfigured the intersection at Washington Avenue and Greenbrook Road. Pedestrian improvements were focused on safety features such as new crosswalks, signals, and bollards.



LOT SIZES AND REDEVELOPMENT

Many of the lots in the study area are not large enough to accommodate new development and parking without lot aggregation, with the exception of the banquet hall site.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The public outreach process revealed the desire to see the Village Commercial District develop into a more commercially viable and walkable downtown without substantially changing the character of the township. These desires coincided with concerns about the traffic impact that any new development would create as well as the concerns of neighbors that new development would adversely affect their properties. As part of the outreach process, the public was in general consensus that:

- › The study area was unattractive (dull, boring, and ugly were the adjectives most used to describe the area as it sits today)
- › The area was not a safe place for pedestrians, and
- › There was a need to improve traffic circulation through the intersection of Greenbrook Road and Washington Avenue.

There was considerable agreement regarding the scale of development and types of uses that should be developed in the Village Commercial District. Through a visual preference survey and open house activities, one- to two-story pedestrian-oriented development emerged as the most preferable style of development. In the public outreach process, aesthetics of the site (including building massing and location and type of parking) were consistently mentioned as a priority.

Whether the township should allow residential uses, especially multifamily residential uses, was the greatest point of contention. Some residents were very opposed to new residential development because of the belief that it would increase traffic, taxes, and/or the number of children in the schools. Others were more open to residential development, mainly as part of a mixed-use development to support new, local-serving retail in the Village Commercial District.

SUMMARY VISION

The existing conditions analysis and public outreach laid a strong foundation for the creation of a new vision for the downtown. This new vision articulates the aspirations of residents, stakeholders, and township leaders and is

intended to guide future planning and development in and around the Village Commercial District. A summary of that vision follows.

The Village Center at Green Brook should be a pedestrian-oriented commercial, residential, and civic center for Green Brook Township. The Village Center should provide the downtown-like atmosphere that Green Brook currently lacks, welcoming residents from all parts of the township to a central, locally-serving mixed-use district. The township should encourage the concentration of uses that will create vibrancy, while the scale and quality of development will compliment Green Brook's small-town character. Unique retail, restaurant, and residential amenities should serve and attract people of all ages. Lush landscaping, wide sidewalks, streetscaping, and active ground floor uses should be constructed to increase walkability and enhance the pedestrian experience.

To balance new development with the existing residential fabric of nearby areas, the Village Center should be divided into three distinct districts. Each district should have a different set of permitted uses, but with similar regulations for public realm and building design to provide a unified look and feel for the Village Center.

Significant capital investments in the public realm can create a high-quality pedestrian environment that is not only desirable to residents, but attractive to developers. Additional public realm amenities including wide sidewalks, street furniture, outdoor cafés, colorful awnings, and bistro lighting should be permitted to add vibrancy to the street and give the Village Center a distinct character. Parking should be restricted to side and rear yards to further prioritize pedestrian traffic over cars. These improvements would transform the Village Center area from a high-traffic, vehicular corridor to a pedestrian-oriented commercial center.

New non-motorized linkages between the Village Center and nearby civic and cultural amenities should be established to create a strong bike and pedestrian network in the Village Center area. Sidewalk improvements should be made to provide wide, safe connections to civic and commercial areas as well as the NJ Transit bus stops on Route 22. Traffic management solutions should also be implemented to supplement bike and pedestrian improvements to help mitigate the traffic impacts of new development in the Village Center.

Figure 2: Vision Map



Mixed-Use Commercial



Pedestrian-Accessible Commercial



Home and Office

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are organized by topic into the following categories: branding, new zones, regulatory changes, high-quality public realm improvements, bike and pedestrian improvements, and traffic management.

Figure 3: Branding Signage



BRANDING

Branding matters, and currently the commercial area in Green Brook has little identity. The township should create a strong brand for the area to help market it to potential developers, businesses, and new residents. To do so, it is recommended that the township:

1. Re-brand the area as the Village Center at Green Brook.
2. Create branded signage for the Village Center.

NEW ZONES

The primary goal of this planning effort was to create a new regulatory framework for the Village Center that would encourage new development that is consistent with the township's vision. It was clear from the public outreach that the existing Village Commercial District regulations needed to be modified to allow a more fine-tuned approach to regulating different parts of the Village Center differently. This approach will help ensure development is consistent with the scale, quality, and character that most residents and stakeholders wanted to see in each area.

To address these concerns, it is recommended that the township create two new zoning districts and substantially shrink the existing Village Commercial District (**Figure 4**). The three districts would be the:

1. **Village Commercial District:** A mixed-use pedestrian-oriented commercial district.
2. **Village Gateway District:** A pedestrian-accessible commercial gateway.
3. **Residential/Office District:** A transitional district for single family homes and offices.

Figure 4: Proposed Zoning Districts



	Village Commercial	Village Gateway	Residential/Office
Permitted Uses	Commercial Residential Mixed-Use Public	Commercial	Single Family Residential Professional/Home Office
Building Height	2-3 Stories	1-2 Stories	1-2 Stories
Build-to Line/Front Yard Setback	40'	40'	50' min
Frontage Type	Commercial or Neighborhood	Commercial	Neighborhood

REGULATORY CHANGES

The proposed zoning updates should be combined with other regulatory changes and tools to provide a clear path forward for development in the Village Center. In addition, strategies are needed to address unique development challenges that zoning alone may not be able to address. The following regulatory changes are recommended:

1. Update the Master Plan to reflect the recommendations in the report.
2. Adopt the new Village Commercial, Village Gateway, and Residential Office District ordinances included with this report.
3. Increase minimum lot sizes to encourage lot aggregation in the Village Commercial and Village Gateway districts. The minimum lot size, width, and depth in the new ordinances are set large enough to encourage aggregation without substantially inhibiting development potential in the area.
4. Move definitions to the front of the zoning ordinance.
5. Consider Rehabilitation and Redevelopment designation for the banquet hall site. It is large enough to accommodate multiple uses, but the unique characteristics of the property will likely require a tailored regulatory approach best articulated in a specific redevelopment plan. Should the township proceed, the following key standards are recommended for this area:
 - › Adhere to the same frontage requirements as the rest of the Village Center.
 - › Allow development up to four stories if mixed-use or commercial uses are provided along Washington Avenue.
 - › Require less intense development types and/or buffering along School Street.
 - › Design traffic and parking to mitigate the burden on Washington Avenue and School Street.
 - › Manage stormwater on-site through green infrastructure techniques.
6. Consider Rehabilitation or Redevelopment Designation for the entire Village Commercial District if development proceeds too slowly.

Figure 5: Banquet Hall Site Redevelopment Recommendations

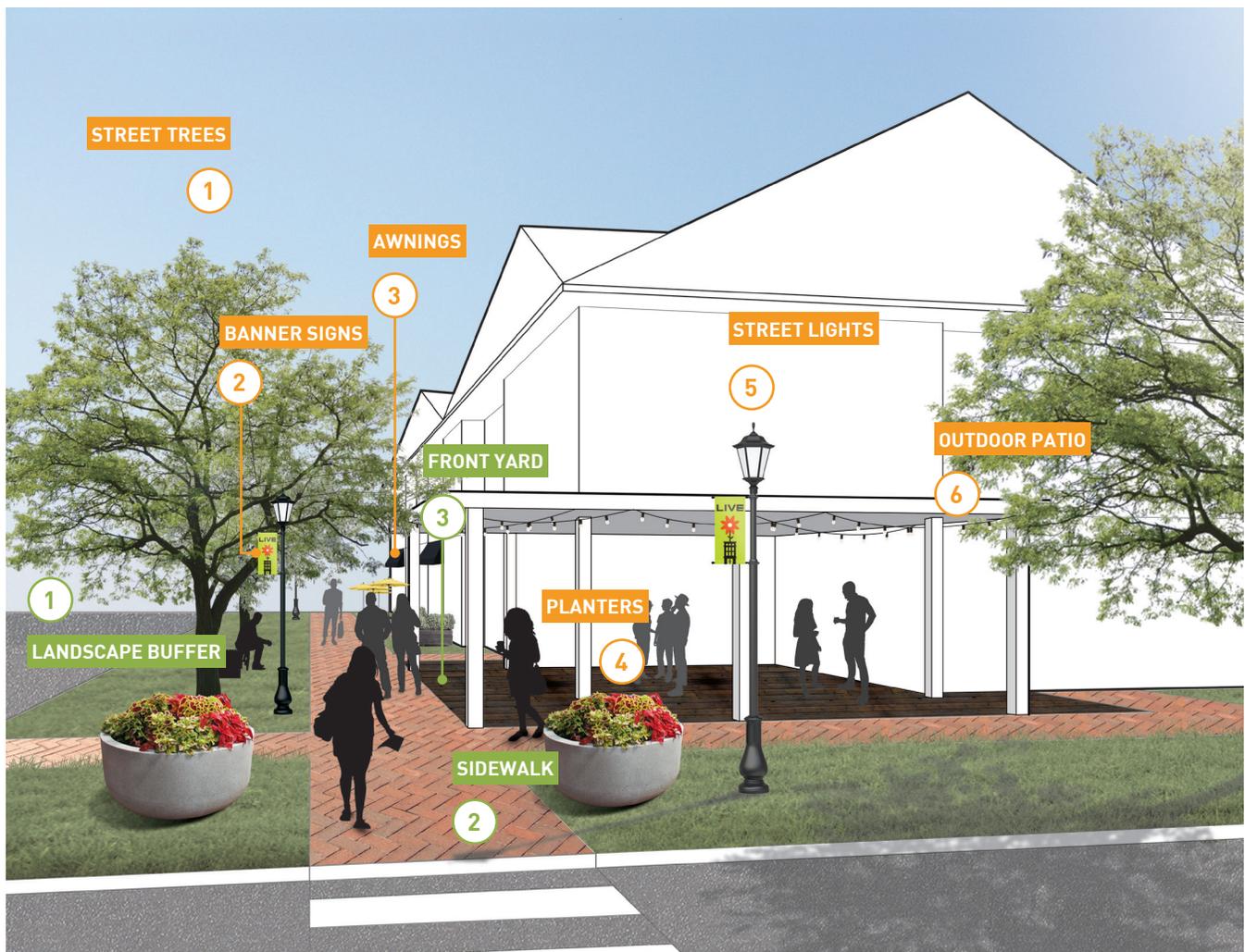


FRONTAGE IMPROVEMENTS

The poor pedestrian experience along Washington Avenue is one of the most significant obstacles that the township needs to overcome to attract businesses and visitors to the Village Center. Creating an attractive and safe pedestrian realm along Washington Avenue would be a transformative improvement, even without other significant redevelopment. The township should create frontage standards to unify the public realm in the Village Center. The recommended frontage requirements provided in each of the new zoning district ordinances generally consist of:

- › A landscaped buffer to set back the sidewalk from the street,
- › A 10-foot sidewalk, and
- › A 10-foot front yard, for landscaping, hardscaping, outdoor cafés, or other active uses.

Figure 6: Recommended Commercial Frontage in the Village Commercial District

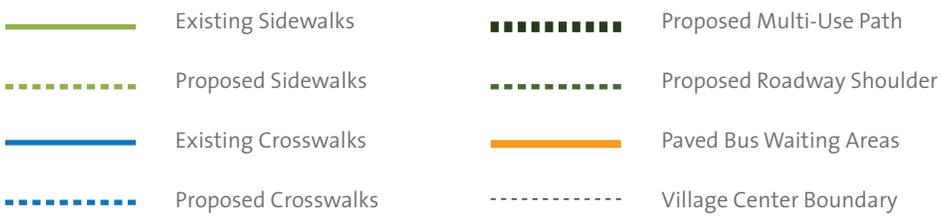


CIRCULATION IMPROVEMENTS

There is also a need to improve vehicular, pedestrian, and bike circulation throughout the Village Center. Washington Avenue has issues with congestion, and new development without careful planning may exacerbate those traffic issues. At the same time, expanding the pedestrian and bicycle network can help relieve traffic by encouraging people to make local trips by bike or foot rather than by car. To address these concerns, the township should:

1. Develop a strong bicycle and pedestrian network throughout the Village Center (**Figure 7**) by:
 - › Expanding the existing sidewalk network
 - › Creating new pedestrian paths to connect to civic and recreational amenities
 - › Accommodating bicycle circulation on roadways and sidewalks
 - › Creating new crosswalks at the bus stop and Arthur Lewis Park entrance
 - › Improving bus stop waiting areas
 - › Lowering the speed limit on Washington Avenue
2. Manage access on Washington Avenue to minimize pedestrian conflicts and turbulence caused by the high number of ingress and egress points.
3. Consider options for connecting streets to provide some relief for traffic congestion on Washington Avenue. This is particularly important to help manage traffic from potential new development.

Figure 7: Recommended Pedestrian and Bike Network Improvements



IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several ways the proposed circulation improvements may be implemented. The township will need to work closely with property owners as well as relevant county or state agencies to realize the projects proposed in the report. The report outlines two different strategies for improving circulation in the near- and long-term. The report outlined two distinct strategies for how the township could move these recommendations forward.

Figure 8: Near-Term Improvements



Near-Term Improvements

1. Connect storefront sidewalks
2. Provide a sidewalk connection between Washington Avenue and the Capital Lighting site
3. Build a pedestrian bridge connecting CVS and the adjacent shopping plaza
4. Other priorities in the short-term include:
 - › Providing sidewalk connections to the Route 22 bus stops
 - › Closing and consolidating driveways on Washington Avenue
 - › Providing pedestrian amenities such as street lighting and street trees

Figure 9: Long-Term Improvements



Long-term Improvements

The township could approach implementation of long-term improvements in two different ways:

1. **Regulatory/Piecemeal Approach:** Properties implement the pedestrian realm improvements required in the new zoning ordinances as they redevelop.
2. **Capital Improvements Approach:** The township makes a significant initial investment to implement the pedestrian realm envisioned in this report in one single effort, including a pedestrian only connection from Washington Avenue to Lenox Avenue. This would not only dramatically transform the area for residents, but provide a positive signal to the development community.

GREEN BROOK

Planning for Emerging Centers



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