



RIB MOUNTAIN DRIVE / TID NO. 1

Corridor Study and Master Plan

Adopted Sept. 7, 2021

TOWN STAFF

Gaylene Rhoden, Administrator

Jared Wehner, Director of Community Development/Zoning Administrator

Paul Kufahl, Building Inspector/Deputy Zoning Administrator

Scott Turner, Superintendent of Streets and Parks

THE PLANNING COMMISSION

Jay Whittman, Chairman, Plan Commission

Thomas Steele, Commissioner

Mary Kate Riordan, Commissioner

Carrie Edmondson, Commissioner

Tonia Westphal, Commissioner

Ryan Burnett, Commissioner

Jim Hampton, Commissioner

TOWN BOARD

Allen Opall, Chairman, Town Board of Supervisors

Fred Schaefer, Supervisor

Dan Fiorenza, Supervisor

Brad Conklin, Supervisor

Gerry Klein, Supervisor

acknowledgments



chapter one: introduction 1

chapter two: community involvement 9

chapter three: vision and goals13

chapter four: existing conditions19

chapter five: placemaking39

chapter six: recommendations45

chapter seven: implementation63

executive summary

Rib Mountain Drive is the primary commercial corridor in the Town of Rib Mountain, Wisconsin. It is home to national retailers and chain restaurants. It draws shoppers from around the region and provides services for Rib Mountain residents. However, with more people utilizing online services in place of these once-destination commercial centers, the Town became concerned. The COVID-19 Pandemic compounded the concerns, and the Town took the action of creating its first TIF district and hiring Ayres to create a master plan for the Rib Mountain Drive corridor.

Many questions needed to be answered: What happens if a major retailer leaves the corridor? What happens to these buildings as they age? What can be done to make the corridor unique?

The Rib Mountain Drive/TID 1 Master Plan & Corridor Study addresses many of these issues, but change will be incremental and brought about by many people and sequences of events. A reinvented dynamic destination is not created overnight.



THE TOWN LEADERSHIP FELT A PLAN WAS NEEDED TO:

- **Enhance the resiliency and success** of the corridor through well-planned and high-quality development.
- **Encourage new and unique uses** that would serve employment, shopping, hospitality, and entertainment needs.
- **Develop a plan to retrofit the corridor** to enhance multimodal transportation.
- **Facilitate redevelopment** in areas where existing land uses are past life expectancy and no longer consistent with neighboring uses.
- **Integration of the residential neighborhoods** to the east and west

It's likely that property will turn over and be redeveloped, and when it does the Town can use the master plan to guide what it would like to get out of new development. The creation of a place where people want to be will take the right mix of businesses, an environment that is easy to get around in, high quality architecture and site design, and beautification. The Town can set expectations and a vision, which this document provides. It can also invest in public infrastructure improvements that will draw more people. Some of those improvements are outlined in the plan. Ultimately, the existing business community will have to take on a larger role, and together with developers, an improved, more economically resilient corridor can be created.

This plan is the launchpad for a series of initiatives the Town will be taking on in the near future to transform Rib Mountain Drive from an ordinary commercial corridor to a unique main street-like destination.

chapter one: introduction

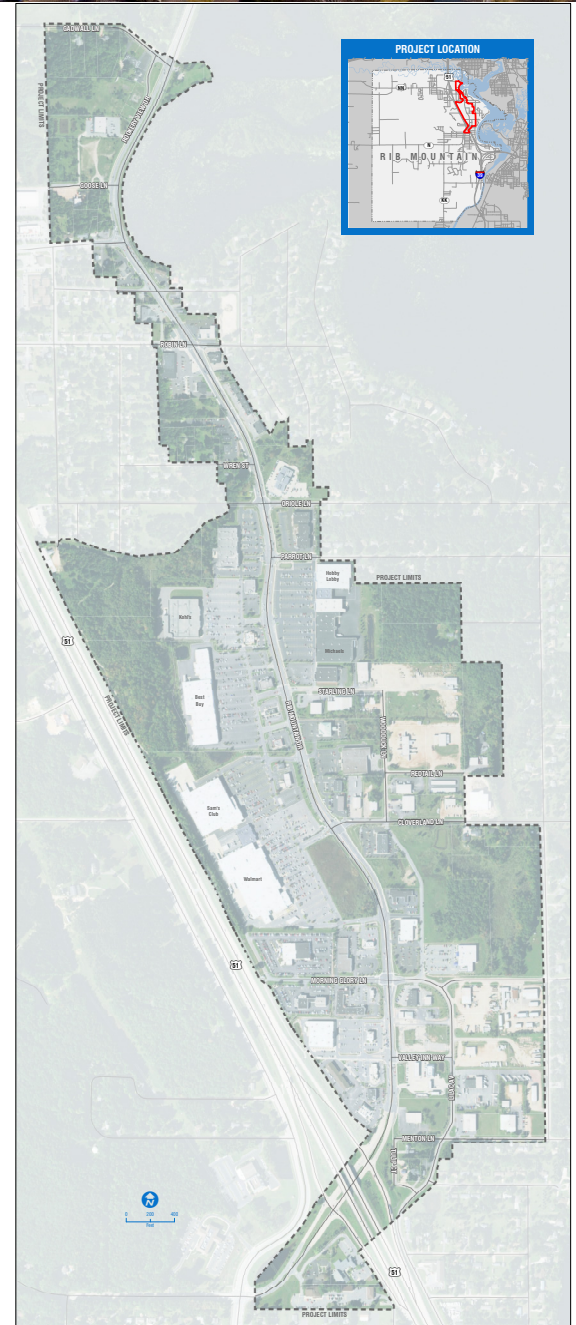


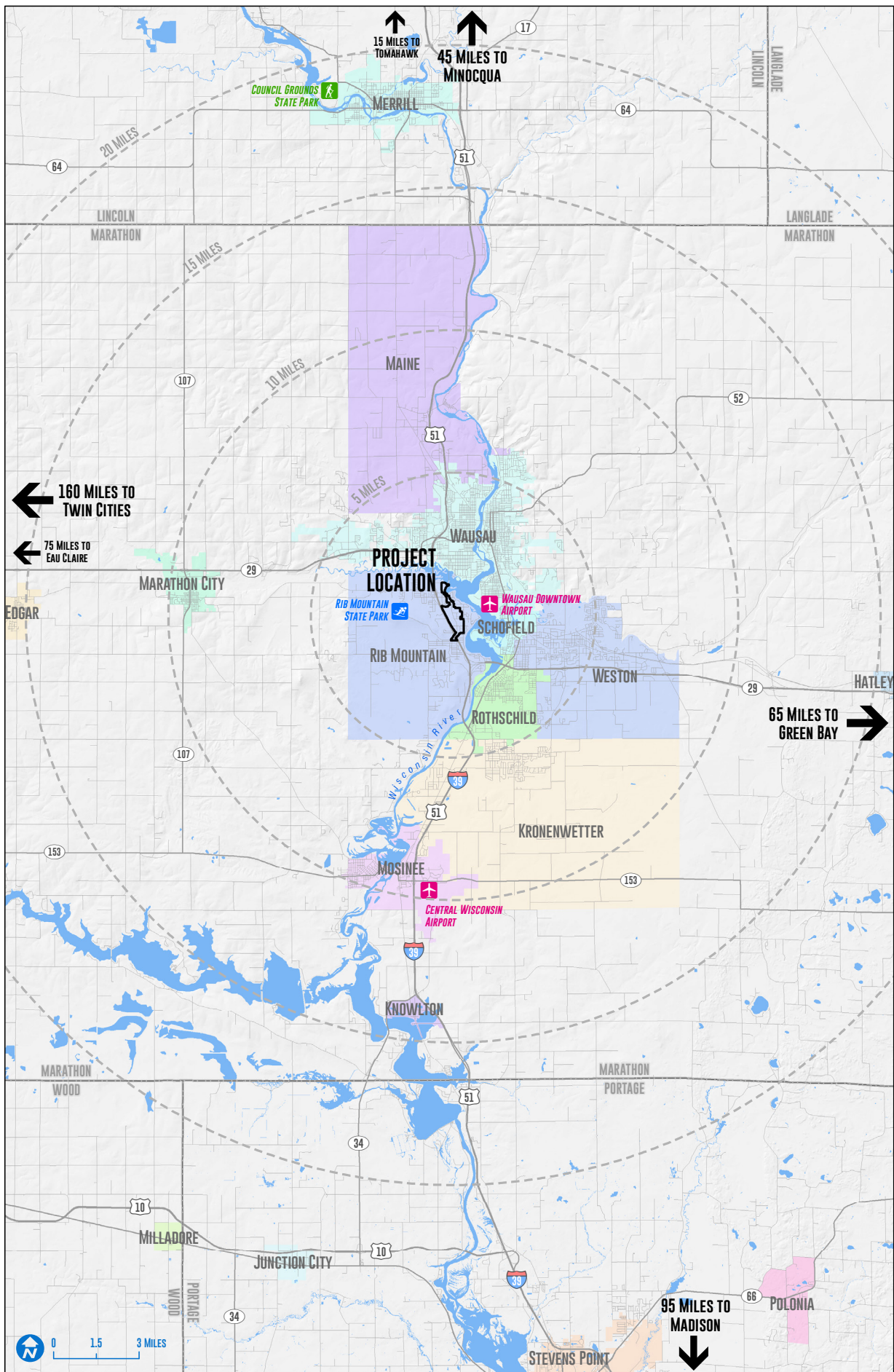
introduction

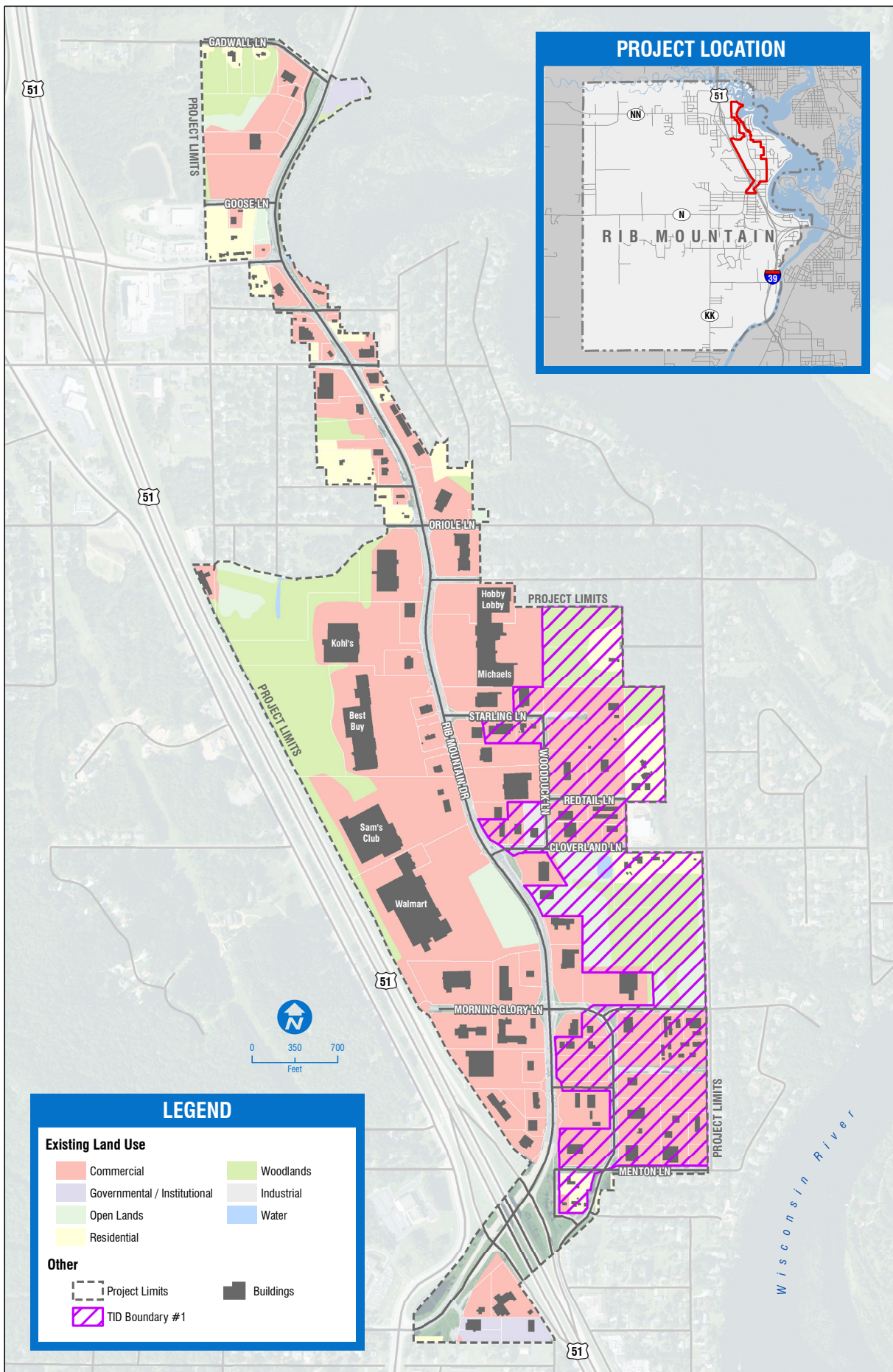
In February of 2021 the Town of Rib Mountain contracted with Ayres to produce a corridor study and master plan for Rib Mountain Drive and the adjacent tax increment finance district.

The Town of Rib Mountain is located in eastern Marathon County along the STH 29/I-39 corridor adjacent to Wausau, and Rib Mountain Drive is the primary road running through the community. Because of its location in the upper middle of the state, Rib Mountain is a convenient place to stop when people are driving to and from the Twin Cities to Madison or Green Bay. The greater Wausau area is also the last big urban area before people head to the northwoods. Subsequently, Rib Mountain Drive has become a major commercial destination with a variety of big box retailers, numerous fast-food restaurants, and gas stations and other car-oriented businesses. The 2020 population of the Town is estimated to be 7,001, and the large metropolitan area 2020 population estimate is 77,218.

Walmart was the first large retailer to locate on Rib Mountain Drive in 1994. Since that time, development has spread. The land uses on Rib Mountain Drive are almost completely commercial. There is a large amount of parking, many drive thrus, and overall the development is not connected or cohesive. Rib Mountain Drive is a destination, but only for focused shopping, not a place to enjoy or hang out.









The road, which is a four-lane cross section, was originally a county road (County Road "N"), but it is now controlled by the Town. The Rib Mountain corridor, which is just over two miles long, has an average daily traffic count of 14,200. The road was reconstructed in phases in 2011, 2016, and 2017, so it is in good condition, but it does not function well due to a large number of access points. There are no bicycle accommodations on the road, and the sidewalks are intermittent.

did you know?

- Rib Mountain Road was rebuilt between 2011-2017
- The average daily traffic is 14,200 cars
- Traffic counts have been relatively flat since 2007
- There are 6,000 more cars on the south end than the north
- The speed limit is 35 MPH





what is tax increment financing (TIF)?

Tax Increment Finance (TIF) is a financing tool that allows municipalities to invest in infrastructure and other improvements and pay for these investments by capturing property tax revenue from the newly developed property. As property values rise, the property tax paid on that private development is used by the municipality to pay for the projects. The tax paid to the schools, county, and technical college districts (the overlying taxing jurisdictions) is also used by the municipality to pay for the improvements. After the costs of the projects are paid off, the Tax Increment Finance District (TID) is closed and the value of all the new development gets dispersed.

In Fall of 2020, the Town adopted its first Tax Increment Finance District. The primary function of the TID is to complete various public works projects and to spur secondary development along the southern portion of the Rib Mountain Drive Corridor. So far, no TID funds have been spent.

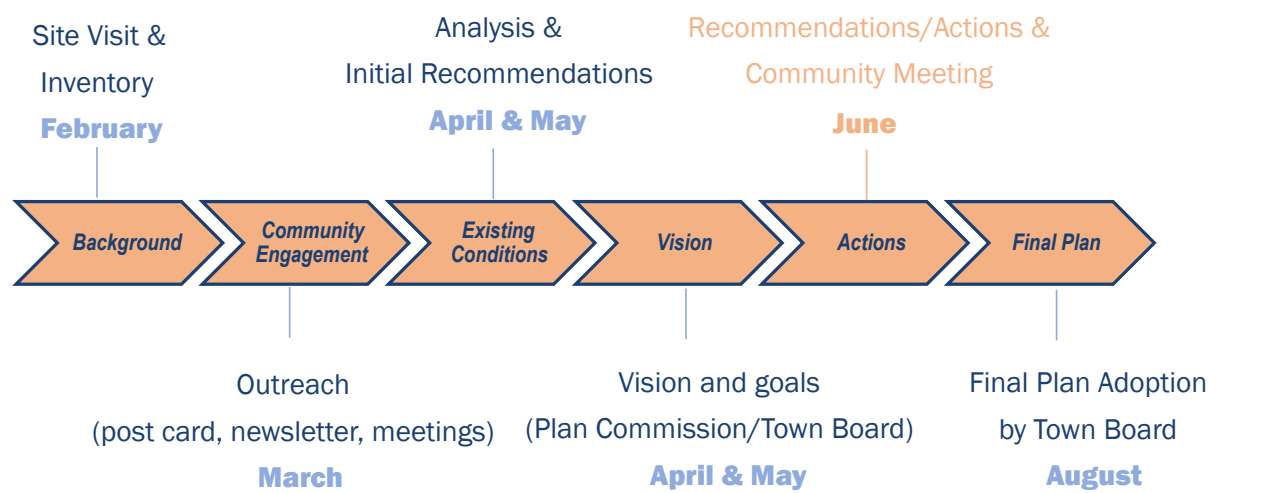
With the aging of many of the structures on Rib Mountain Drive, and the shift to online shopping, the Town became concerned about the future of Rib Mountain Drive. The Town leadership felt a plan was needed to:

- **Enhance the resiliency and success** of the corridor through well-planned and high-quality development.
- **Encourage new and unique uses** that would serve employment, shopping, hospitality, and entertainment needs.
- **Develop a plan to retrofit the corridor** to enhance multimodal transportation.
- **Facilitate redevelopment** in areas where existing land uses are past life expectancy and no longer consistent with neighboring uses.
- **Integration of the residential neighborhoods** to the east and west.



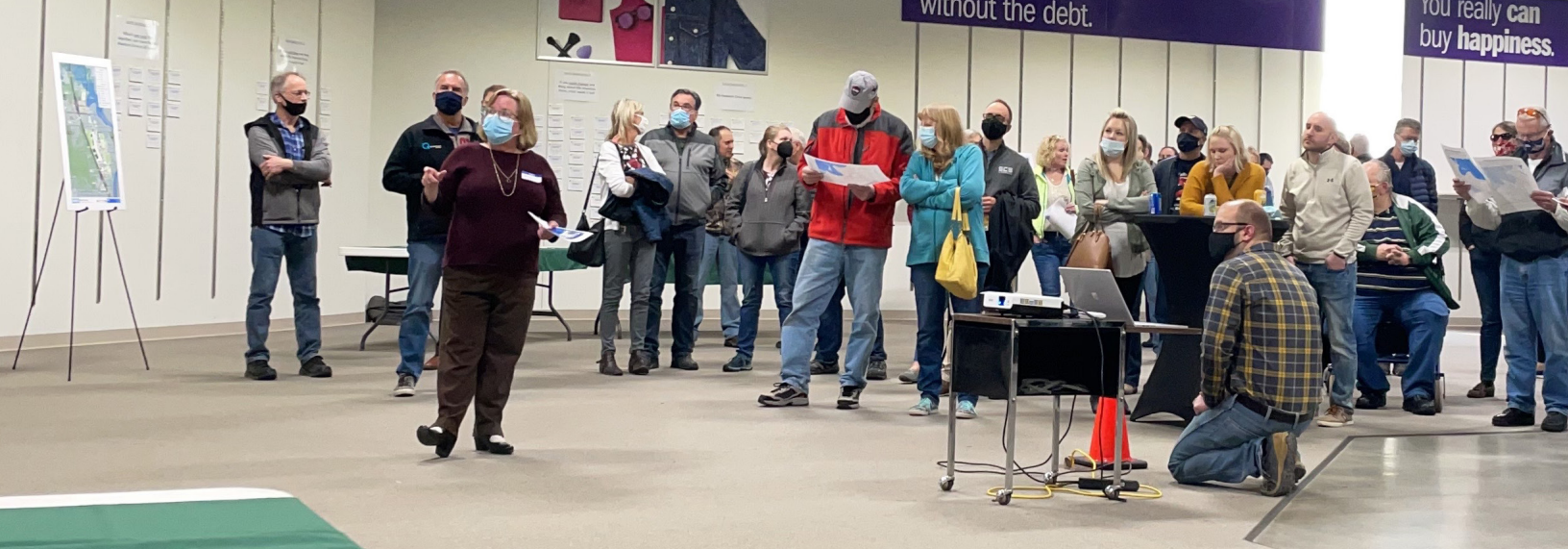
Site visit on February 8, 2021, with Paul Kufahl, Building Inspector; Gaylene Rhoden, Administrator; and Jared Wehner, Community Development Director.

Planning Process



Ayres began the planning process in February with a site visit and assessment. Over the following months, two community meetings were held and a variety of outreach done. Ayres and Town staff worked closely with the Town Board and Plan Commission to develop a vision and goals for the corridor. This plan will present a variety of recommendations that address the existing conditions and can shape the future of the Rib Mountain Drive area.

chapter two: community involvement



community involvement

Because Rib Mountain Drive is the main roadway through the Town of Rib Mountain, it was important to involve businesses, property owners, and the community at large in the discussion of the future of the road. In addition, the Town Board and Plan Commission were consulted throughout the process.

The process involved two key community meetings. The first one was held on March 25th in the vacant Gordmans store. Postcards were sent to all property owners in the study area, and the event was featured in the Town's newsletter. People were invited to come discuss the corridor, see samples of model development, participate in surveys, and do mapping exercises. Over 200 people attended the event which was a fun-filled drop-in session dubbed "Planning and a Pint." People were welcome to have a beer and brat and share their concerns and hopes for Rib Mountain Drive. Participants were asked the following key questions and here were some of the most common responses:

Rib Mountain needs.... (fill in the blank)

- More restaurants, more retail
- ATV access, bus service
- Better sidewalks
- Bike lanes
- Green space

What's one word that describes your vision for Rib Mountain Drive in 20 years?

- A destination
- Booming/thriving
- Charming
- Beautiful/scenic

If you could keep one thing along Rib Mountain, what would it be?

- Restaurants
- Lamb's Market
- Variety of businesses
- Clothing stores

If you could change one thing about Rib Mountain, what would it be?

- Create a common theme, cohesive, aesthetically pleasing
- Create green areas/sitting spaces
- Make more bicycle and pedestrian friendly
- Traffic patterns, add frontage roads
- Less big box, more small businesses

Top image is from community meeting held in March 2021.



The number one theme was that people wanted Rib Mountain Drive to be a destination with a variety of shopping and dining options. People expressed a vision for a corridor that had green spaces and places for people to gather; a place that is comfortable to walk and bike to.

Throughout the process, meeting materials and presentations were posted to a “Community Comment” site linked to the Town website.

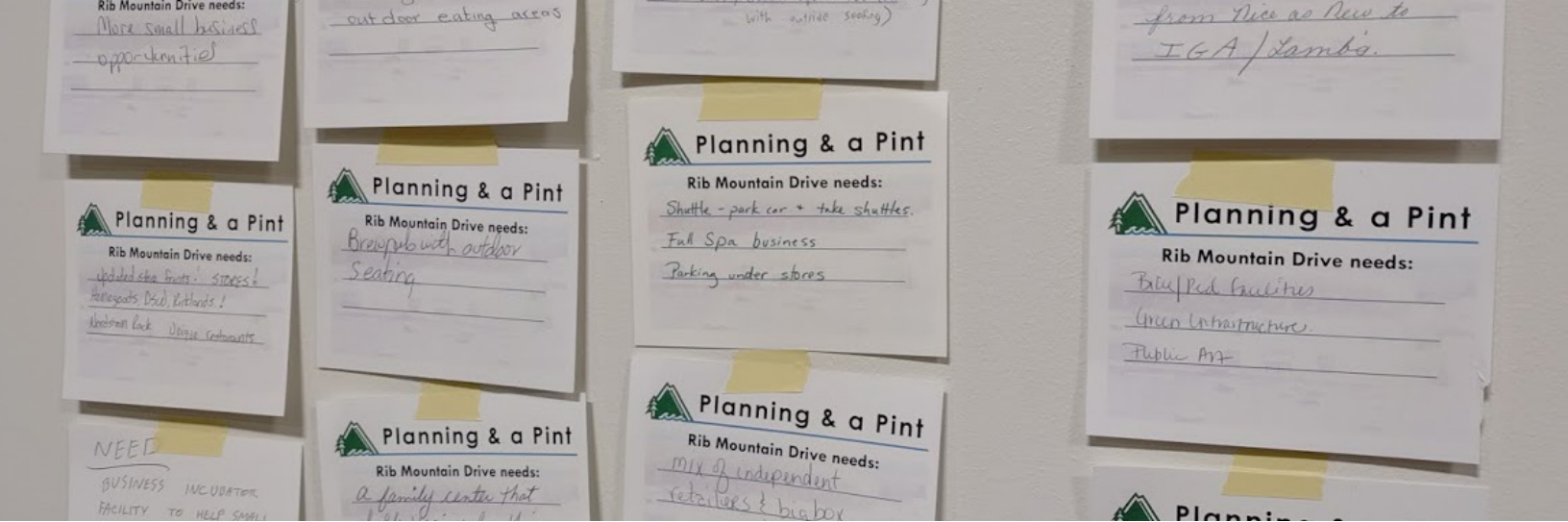
A second community meeting was held on June 17th. This meeting was held at the Town Hall and once again people could enjoy food and drink and mill around, look at maps, and talk to Town staff and the consultant team. Approximately forty people attend this meeting where case studies and recommendations were reviewed.



Images from community meeting held in June 2021.

Top image is volunteers providing refreshments at the March 2021 community meeting.

chapter three: vision and goals



vision and goals

Ayres and the Town staff worked closely with the Town Board and Plan Commission to craft a vision and goals to guide the plan and recommendations. The vision and goal also built on what was heard from people at the first community meeting.

Vision

Rib Mountain Drive will be a desirable destination for residents and users alike that elicits an experience unique only to Rib Mountain through emphasis of the area's natural beauty and the high-quality built environment.

Strategy

Efforts will promote the economic viability of the corridor as well as the prosperity of the surrounding neighborhoods, ultimately transforming Rib Mountain Drive from a main road to a "Main Street."

Goal 1 Destination

Retain Rib Mountain Drive as a regional destination while enhancing the usefulness and accessibility to residents.

Goal 2 Multi-Modal

Make Rib Mountain Drive pedestrian and bicycle friendly while also managing traffic to make the corridor more inviting and safer for all users.

Goal 3 Function/Appearance

Keep the existing footprint of Rib Mountain Drive but improve its function and appearance through better site layout, improved building design, and limited access to the Drive.





Goal 4 Economic Development

Ensure the economic vitality of the corridor into the future.

Goal 5 Best Use

Improve the efficiency of land use through improved policies which promote creative and unique site design and the highest and best uses (including mixed uses) for future development throughout the corridor.

Goal 6 Gathering

Create green spaces or “third places” (places that people want to linger) along the corridor in order to make it more inviting.

Top image shows an example of a two-story retail building with parking below.

Images below show examples of public spaces in commercial developments.

“Third place” refers to a place that is not your home or work (first and second place) – it is where you want to hang out.





Goal 7 Natural Beauty

Establish a comprehensive approach to design that reflects the natural beauty of Rib Mountain and character of the Town of Rib Mountain to create a unique sense of place.

Goal 8 Partnership

Establish a public/private partnership with the goal of empowering business and property owners to lead improvements to Rib Mountain Drive and build ongoing enthusiasm for implementation of the plan.

Goal 9 Place

Make Rib Mountain Drive and the surrounding neighborhoods a place where people can live, work, and play.



chapter four: existing conditions



existing conditions

The Rib Mountain Drive corridor is a typical commercial strip, not unlike ones found in other communities throughout the county. What is unique about Rib Mountain is the community and the natural beauty. Rib Mountain Drive is located between the Wisconsin River and Rib Mountain State Park. The commercial corridor is adjacent to single-family neighborhoods on the east and northwest. Highway 51 intersects with the south end of Rib Mountain Drive, and on the north end, the drive crosses the Wisconsin River and heads into Wausau.

Land Use

Rib Mountain Drive began to develop as a central location for big box and auto-oriented retail with the development of the Walmart in 1994. Since that time, more and more national chains have located along Rib Mountain Drive. Unfortunately, there was not a vision for the corridor early on, and each parcel has been developed without fitting into larger context. In addition, the Town of Rib Mountain codes have not required the level of building and site design standards that are now common. The result has become a corridor that lacks green space, has an excess of parking, and is inefficiently designed.





The commercial uses along Rib Mountain Drive are designed for people coming and going in cars, not staying and walking.



There are many access points, or “curb cuts” on Rib Mountain Drive. Because each site has been designed without a larger context, this makes traffic congested.

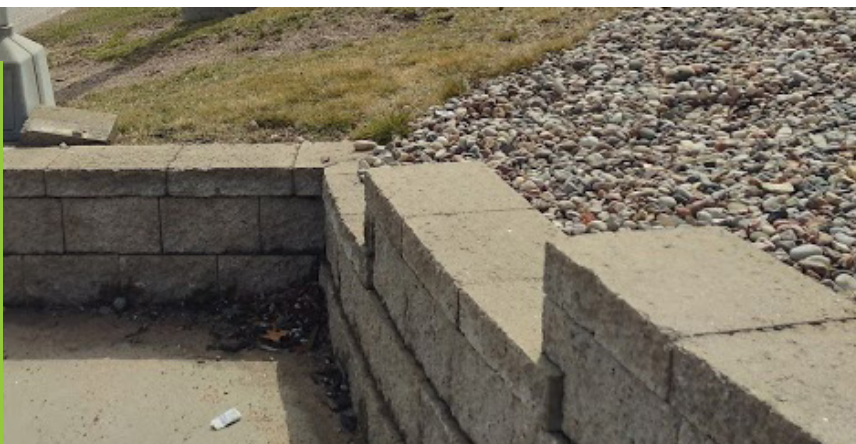


There is a bike path that parallels Rib Mountain Drive, located along Highway 51 behind the commercial development on the west side of Rib Mountain Drive. This is an asset, but it can be hard to find, and it doesn't have good connectivity to the stores or locations to the west.



Most of the signage on Rib Mountain Drive is designed to be seen from a car. This makes it generally less attractive, and in many cases, the signage is located in locations that block views for cars pulling out on to Rib Mountain Drive.

There is a lack of “connectivity” along the corridor. In many cases, sidewalks end abruptly or are only located on one side of the street, and are not connected by crosswalks. In addition, in some locations the sidewalk is right next to the road, which makes walking feel dangerous because the pedestrian is not protected by a buffer between the road and sidewalk.



Each commercial use along the corridor has its own parking, rather than shared or municipal parking. The result is a very large amount of paved surface, much of which sits empty most of the time.



Many of the buildings along Rib Mountain Drive were not built to last. As maintenance becomes more of an issue, buildings will be torn down and replaced. Building design is also an issue as many of the buildings were designed to attract drivers and are not attractive at the pedestrian level.



There is a lack of planned green space along Rib Mountain Drive. There are small islands, but many of them are poorly maintained and lack quality plantings.





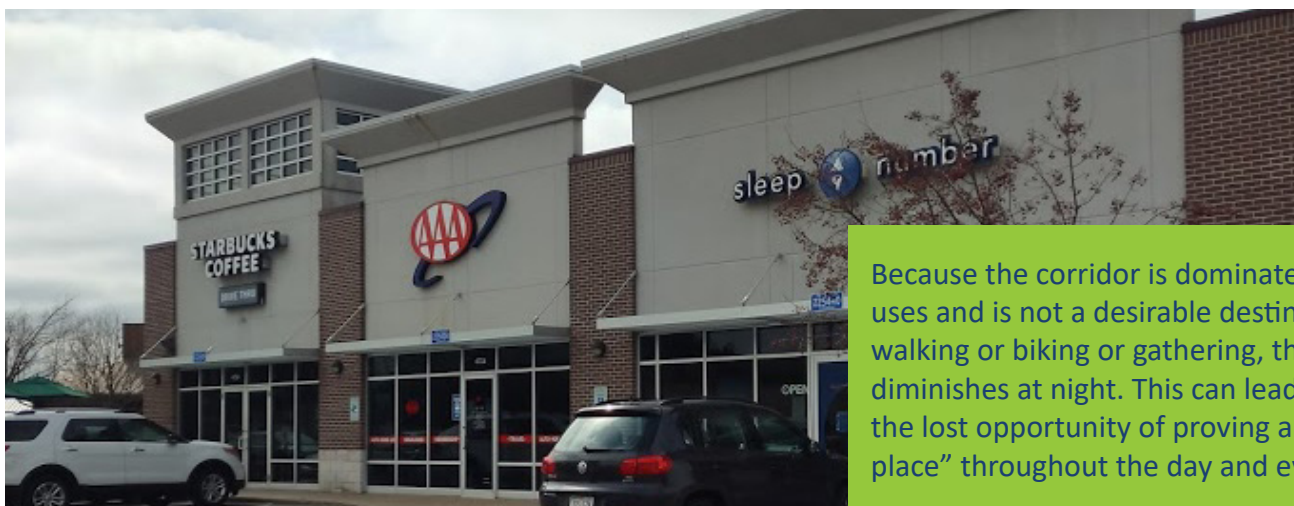
Rib Mountain State Park can be seen from the corridor, but the buildings do not allow the uniqueness of this landscape to shine. The park brings a great amount of tourism revenue to the area, but the corridor doesn't have anything that makes visitors feel connected to it as well.



People enjoy living in Rib Mountain, but many people explained that they avoid Rib Mountain Drive. The commercial uses along Rib Mountain Drive should be an enjoyable destination for the residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. Also, as development continues, the transition between commercial and residential uses needs to be planned and well designed.



Many of the uses along the corridor are the same, mainly big box retailers. That market is changing with online shopping, and vacancies are increasing. The economic mix of Rib Mountain Drive should be diversified.



Because the corridor is dominated by daytime uses and is not a desirable destination for walking or biking or gathering, the activity diminishes at night. This can lead to crime and the lost opportunity of proving a "sense of place" throughout the day and evening.



Existing Land Use Policy

The Town of Rib Mountain's land use is guided by the Comprehensive Plan, which was adopted in July 2020. The creation of this plan fulfills an objective outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Transportation Chapter. Other primary directives related to Rib Mountain Drive include:

- As the face and economic heart of the Town, maintaining the public infrastructure associated with Rib Mountain Drive is essential. However, maintenance and improvement projects are challenging from both a logistical and financial perspective. Creative funding and improvement alternatives are necessary for continued success throughout the corridor.
- The Rib Mountain Drive commercial corridor is maturing and limited greenfield development opportunities exist. The Town remains vigilant in monitoring the effects of current commercial/retail trends on the corridor. Responding to changing retail trends and commercial developer, along with determining what can be done to maintain the vitality of this corridor as a core commercial area, is the Town's principle economic development concern moving forward.

direct recommendations in the comprehensive plan include:

- Contain regional commercial to Rib Mountain Drive.
- Create design overlay districts for the Rib Mountain Drive commercial corridor.
- Continue to support, yet contain regional-oriented commercial development along Rib Mountain Drive.
- Continue to work with Marathon County and the WisDOT to implement adequate access management improvements along Rib Mountain Drive to support current and anticipated regional traffic.
- Work with Marathon County and Wisconsin DOT to evaluate, fund and develop safe bicycle and pedestrian crossing(s) of Rib Mountain Drive.
- Explore opportunities for redevelopment around major intersections, including along US Highway 51/State Highway 29 at Rib Mountain Drive (County Road "N") and County Road "NN".
- Rib Mountain Drive continues to see redevelopment. Older commercial buildings are being converted or demolished for new retail and restaurant uses throughout the corridor. As the corridor nears complete build-out, redevelopment projects become vital to continued success.
- Town officials identified the need to maintain the viability of Rib Mountain Drive as a strong commercial corridor. A concerted effort to plan for the future of the corridor is needed in light of the ever-changing retail market to ensure an ability to adapt. Since 1993, Rib Mountain Drive has undergone major land use changes and traffic volumes have burgeoned and are expected to continue to increase in the future.
- The ultimate goal is to connect the various Town destinations (e.g. State Park, Lake Wausau, Nine Mile, Rib Mountain Drive Commercial Corridor, etc.), through multi-use paths, creating loops throughout the community to provide better access to residents and visitors while providing alternatives to dangerous routes like County Roads "KK," "N," and "NN" while addressing barriers like crossing Rib Mountain Drive.

This plan supports and builds on the direction in the Comprehensive Plan and will be adopted as an amendment to the 2020 Plan.

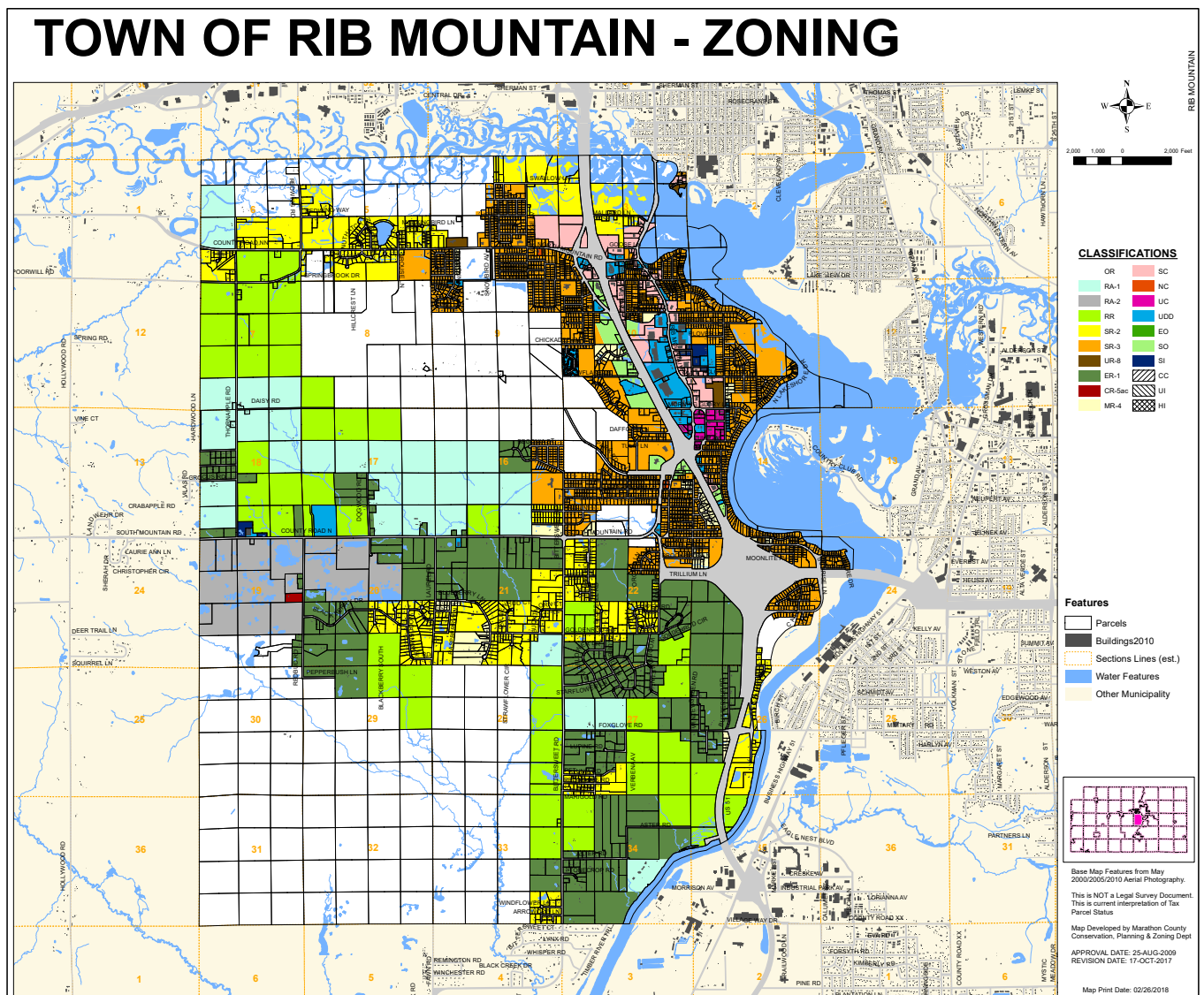
Existing Zoning

The Town of Rib Mountain zoning code has been updated periodically, but it does not contain the types of standards that are appropriate for a developed commercial area. Mixed-use development is technically allowed, but not clearly outlined in the code. While there are landscaping and sign standards, they do not create the desired results, and there are no design standards. Development along Rib Mountain Drive is typically approved with conditions, which can be difficult to manage and monitor over time.

Zoning districts that are common along Rib Mountain Drive include Suburban and Urban Commercial. Some Suburban Industrial zoning, Urban Residential and Suburban Residential is also present. There is also an Urban Development District which allows more flexibility in turn for coordinated area site planning, and this district covers several large lots along the corridor.

TIF District

In the fall of 2020, the Town adopted a Tax Increment Finance District (TIF) which covers a 98.5-acre area east of Rib Mountain Drive, bound by Menton Avenue to the south, Swan Avenue to the east, and Parrot Lane to the north. The purpose of the district is to support development, primarily through investment in public infrastructure. At this point, the Town has not yet invested in projects in the TIF district.



Transportation System

As mentioned, Rib Mountain Drive is a major transportation corridor in the region. Rib Mountain Drive was reconstructed in phases between 2011 and 2017, but unfortunately right-of-way and cost constraints limited the pedestrian and bicycle amenities. The road draws local and regional traffic as well as traffic from tourists visiting the local attractions including Rib Mountain State Park and the Granite Peak Ski Area.

Traffic counts from 2019 indicated volumes range from 14,200 vehicles per day at the north end of the corridor (near Rookery View Park) to 20,200 vehicles near the I-39/US 51 interchange. A sampling of traffic count sites along the corridor indicate traffic volumes have remained relatively flat since 2007.

There is a prevalence of access points within the commercial segment of Rib Mountain Drive. Many of the primary access points and side roads intersect Rib Mountain Drive under traffic signal control. The remaining access points use a combination of minor-road stop control and right-in/right-out access.

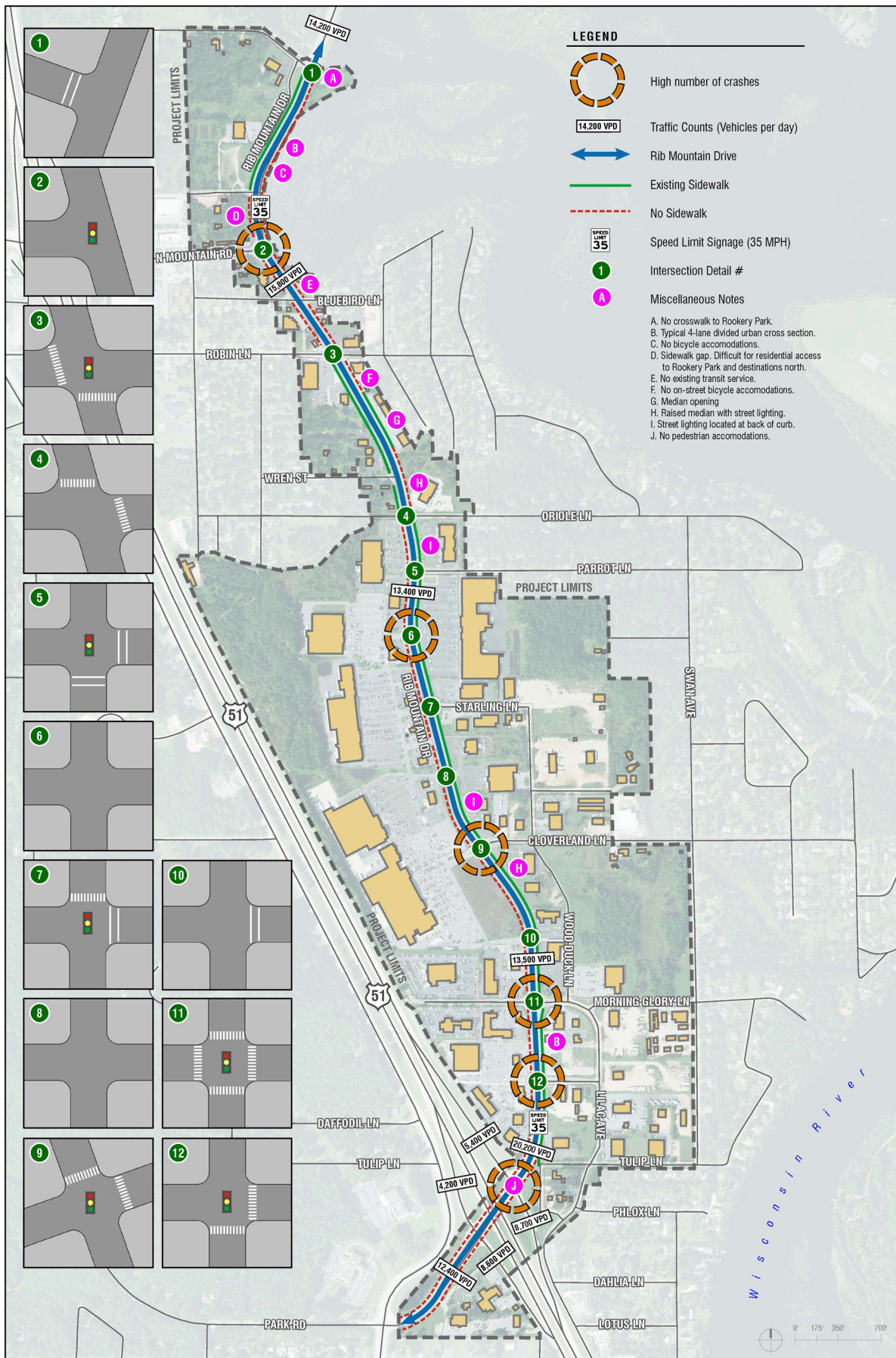
The interchange of I-39/US 51/STH 29 and Rib Mountain Drive operates under traffic signal control. Intersection traffic operations were not evaluated as part of this effort, but additional capacity improvements would likely involve traffic signal capacity improvements, roundabouts, or an innovative interchange design.

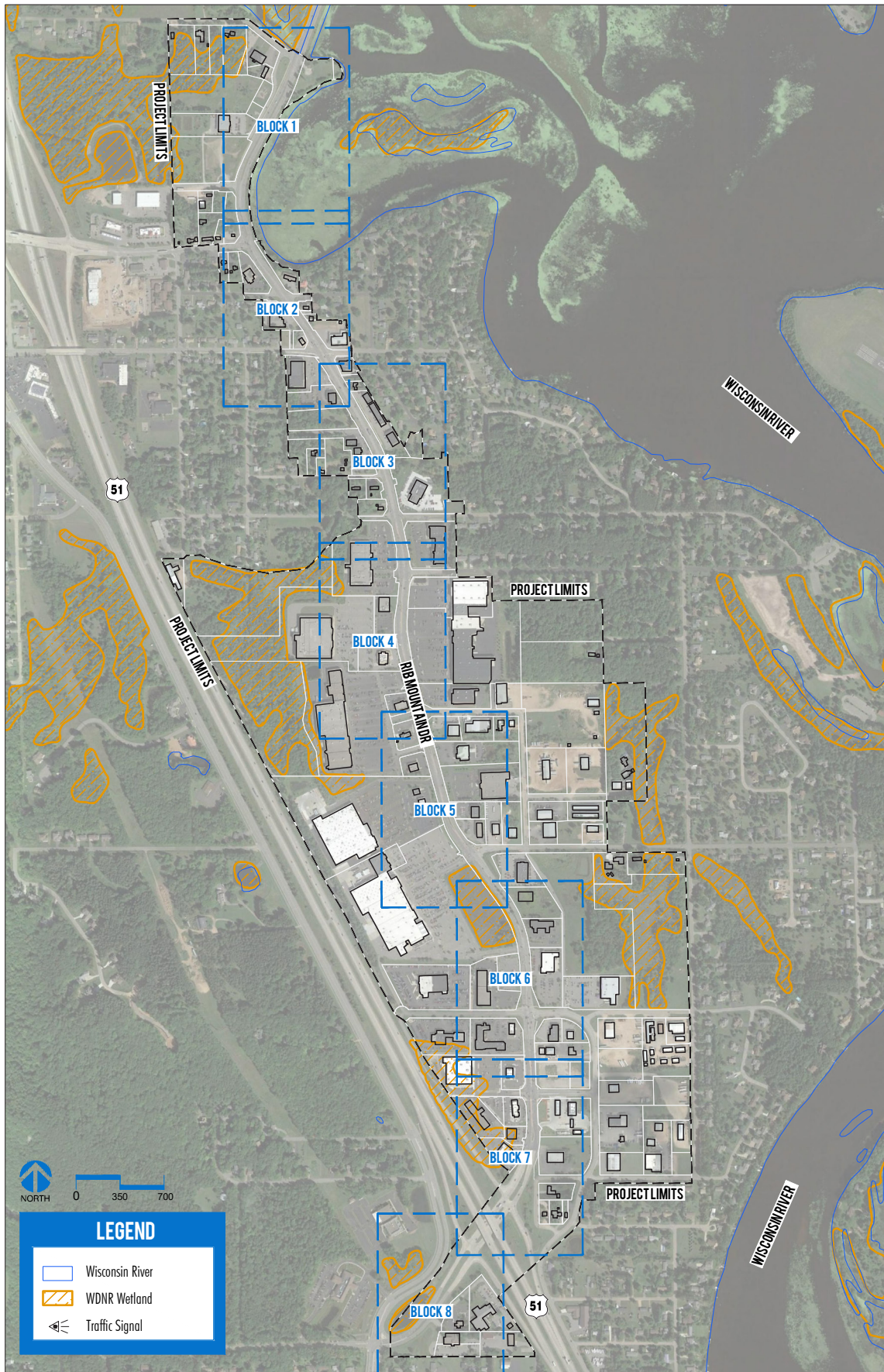
A review of the most recent five-year crash history shows a significant number of crashes along the corridor. Crashes are prevalent at the following intersections with Rib Mountain Drive (the review did not indicate any fatalities over the previous five years):

- I-39/US 51/STH 29 interchange
- Valley Inn Way
- Morning Glory Lane
- Cloverland Lane
- Access points between Parrot Lane and Starling Lane
- CTH “NN”

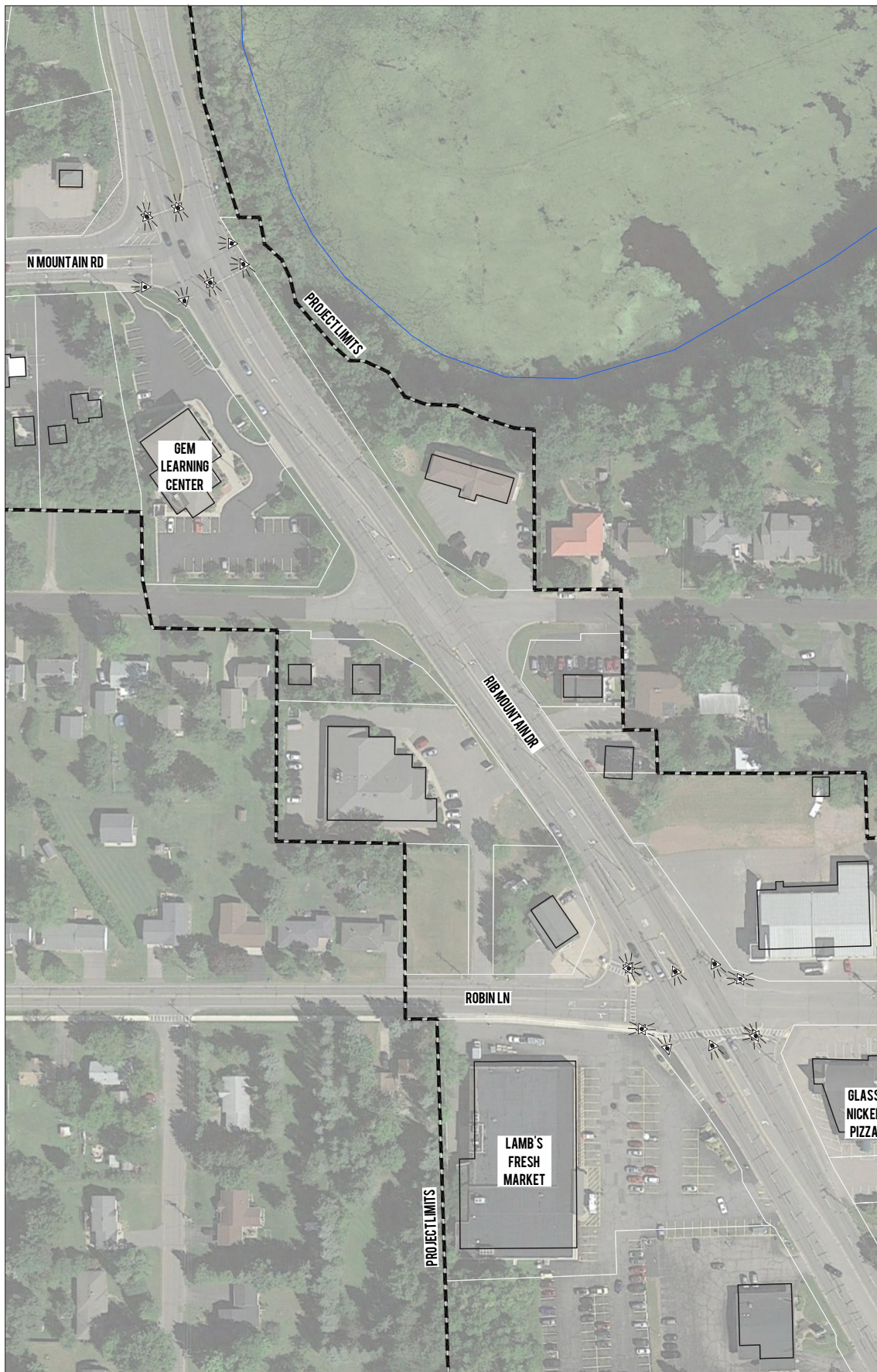
Sidewalks are predominantly provided along the east side of Rib Mountain Drive, although very little sidewalk is provided in the northern, residential area, north of Robin Lane. There are on-street bicycle accommodations, but the 51/29 trail is provided along the east side of I-39/US 51/STH 29 behind commercial developments. There is no transit service along Rib Mountain Drive.

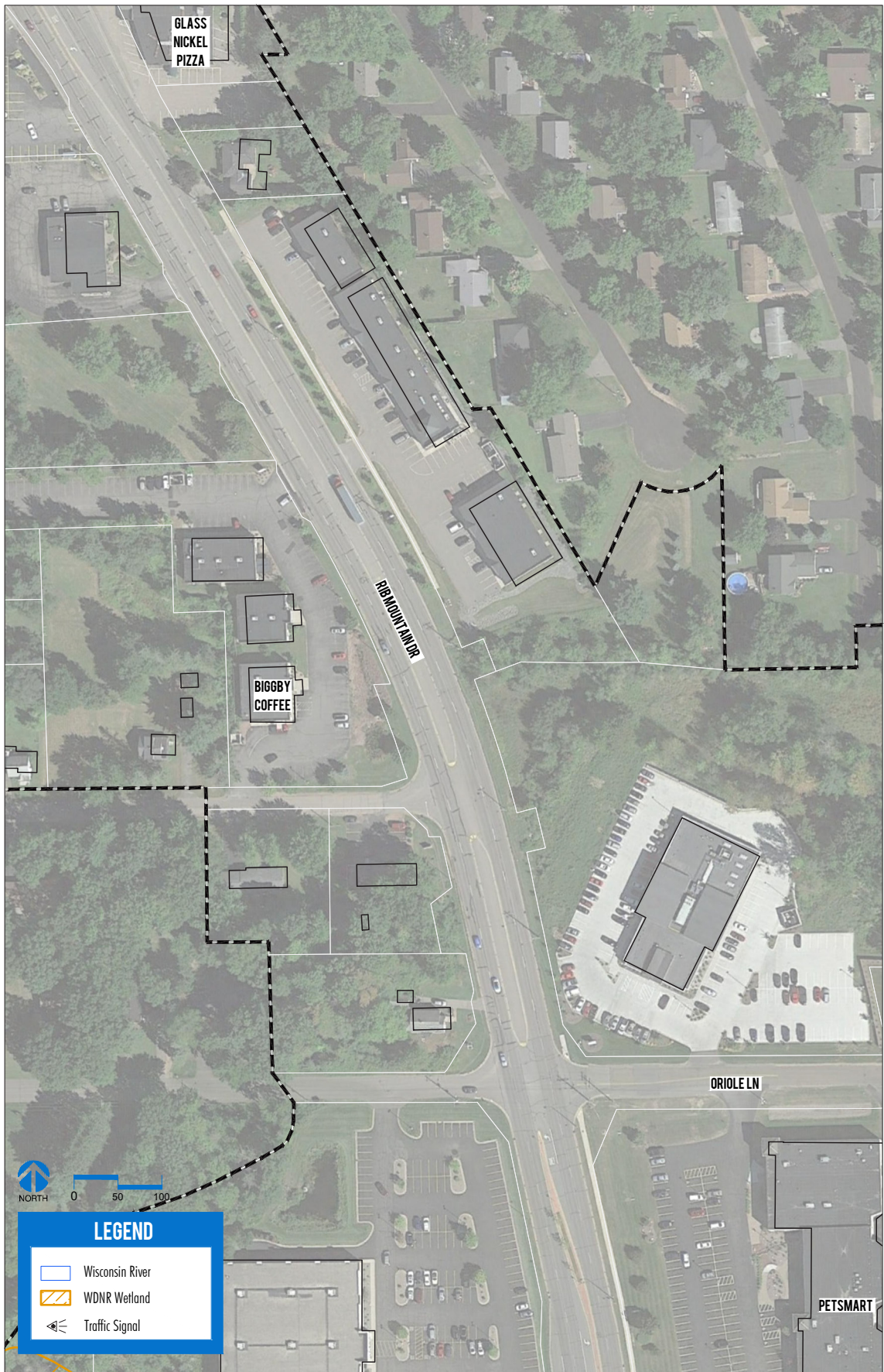






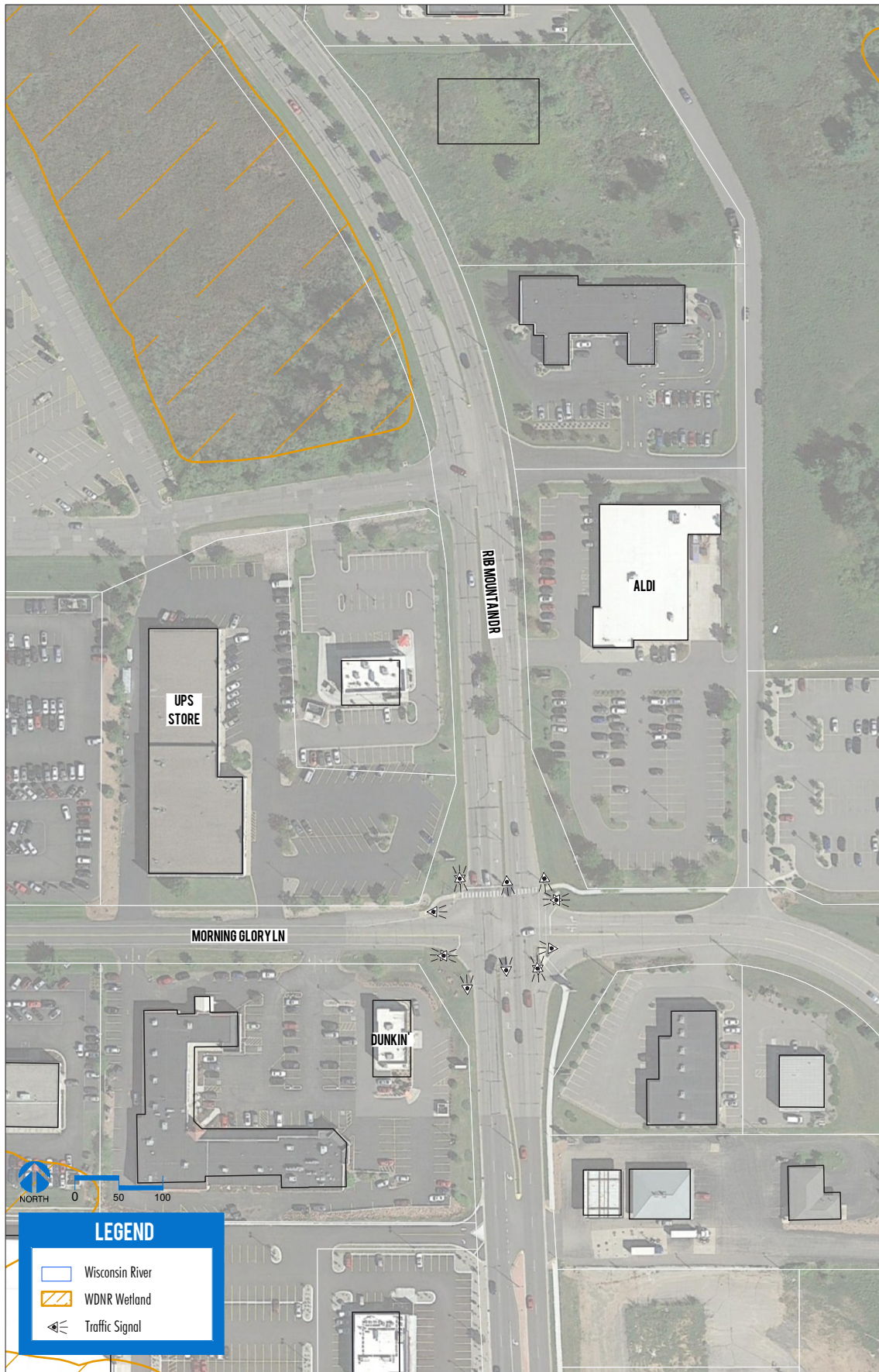








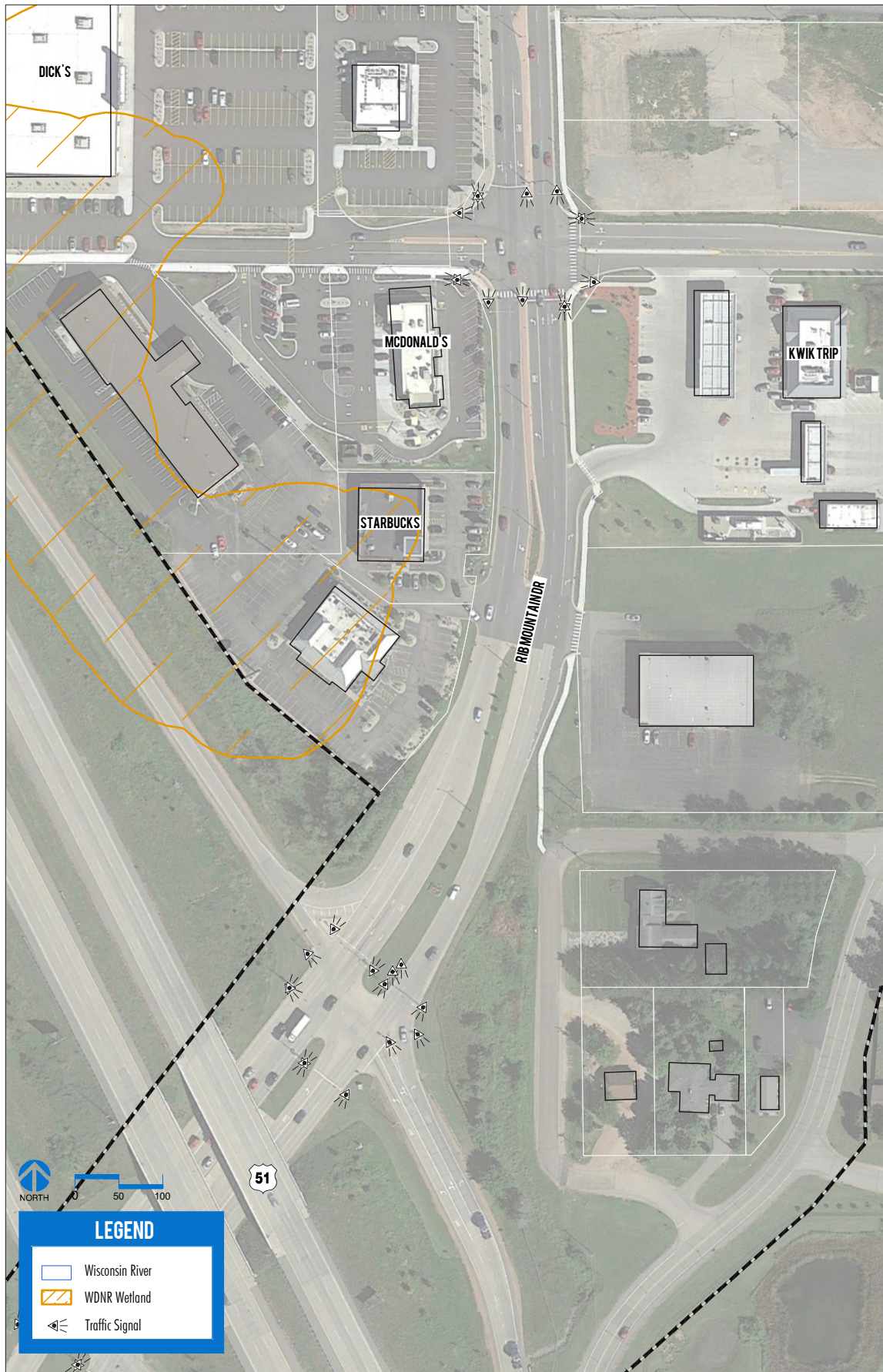




EXISTING INTERSECTIONS
Rib Mountain Drive Corridor Study



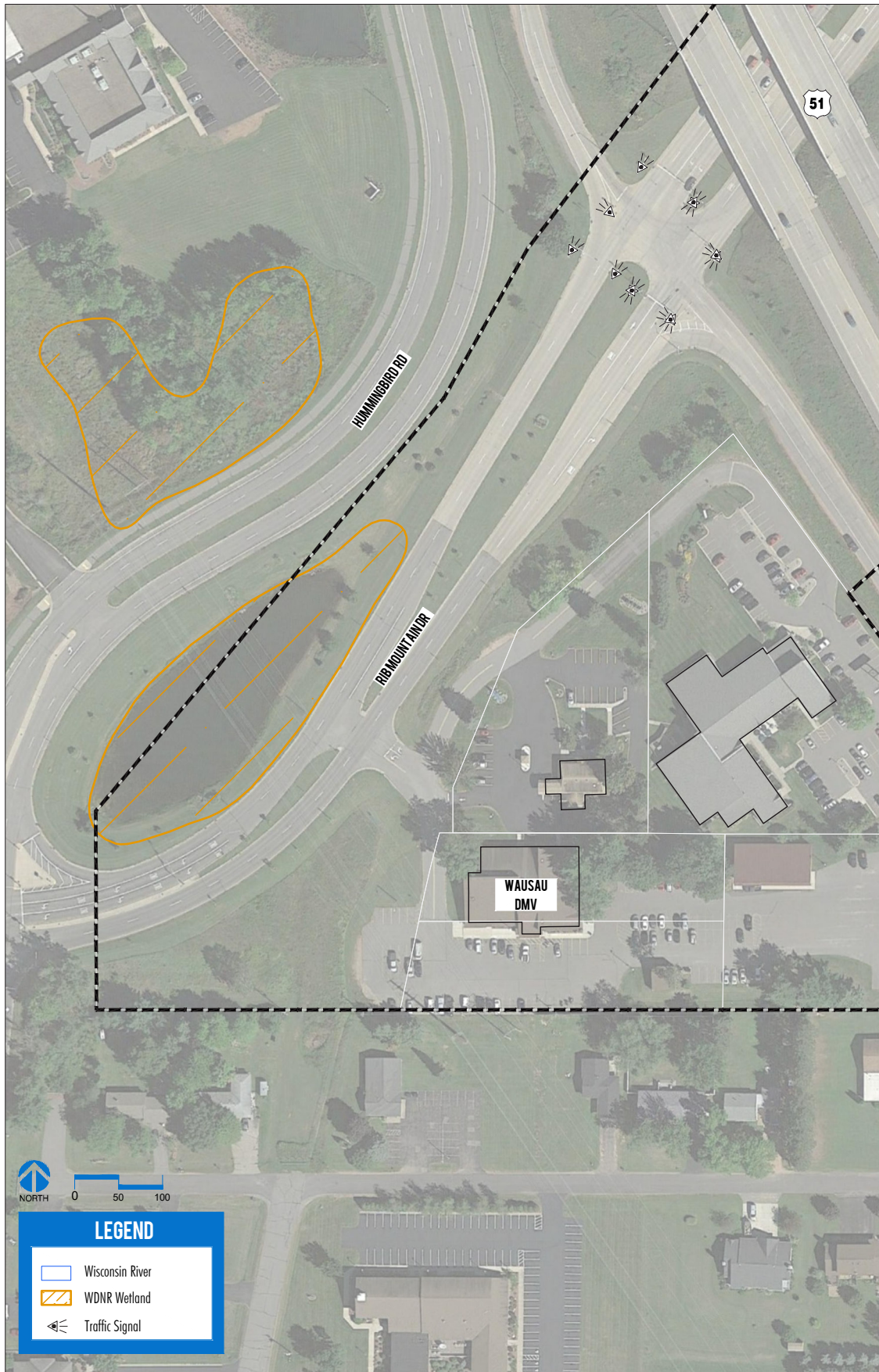
BLOCK 6



EXISTING INTERSECTIONS
Rib Mountain Drive Corridor Study



Block 7



EXISTING INTERSECTIONS
Rib Mountain Drive Corridor Study



BLOCK 8



chapter five: placemaking

placemaking

Before presenting a series of recommendations, it is important to consider what the Town of Rib Mountain wants the corridor to be. As described in the vision and goals, the Town of Rib Mountain citizens and leaders have expressed a desire to have the corridor be a destination where people can enjoy shopping, dining, and entertainment. To do this, the approach must be more than just creating new development, it needs to be Placemaking. Placemaking happens through creating well planned development with a variety of things for people to enjoy.

This will be a drastic change from what the corridor is like today. The need to create a place is made even more urgent by the impacts that online shopping and other dynamics will have on the existing big box, auto-oriented development on Rib Mountain Drive.

Recent COVID restrictions helped accelerate the shift in consumer behavior toward online shopping, causing major disruptions in the retail industry. Brick-and-mortar retail stores are under intense pressure to adapt to an uncertain market and any new retail construction is facing strong headwinds. For the Town to continue to thrive, it is important to recognize the changing retail landscape and provide much-needed flexibility in future development along the corridor.

Rib Mountain Drive is the primary commercial corridor serving the region boasting the only Walmart Supercenter along with several junior box stores including Kohl's, TJ Maxx, Hobby Lobby, and PetSmart. While there are other centers, notably the retail at the crossroads of Highways 51 and 29 in Wausau and the Target anchored plaza to the east in Weston, the corridor has distinct advantages in adapting to future retail needs. The scale of the retail development along the corridor greatly exceeds the singular needs of Rib Mountain residents and draws from a much larger trade area including Wausau, Weston, Schofield, and even Mosinee to the south.

This is reflected in the revenue the corridor generates for the Town. However, what the corridor has in retail, it lacks in employment opportunities. Most high-paying jobs are outside of Rib Mountain. This is evident in the community patterns where roughly 74 percent of the residents work outside of Rib Mountain. The biggest employer in Rib Mountain is the Walmart Supercenter.



Images above show sample site amenities that can create a sense of place.

the new retail buzzwords are:

FLEXIBILITY

More and more retailers are seeking to incorporate upper story housing opportunities and integration with adjacent residential neighborhoods for easy access. Having flexible standards that right-size parking requirements, provide some allowances for upper story housing, and allow for unique amenities is important. Four walls surrounded by a sea of asphalt parking is no longer a desirable option.

CONVENIENCE

Retailers need to make things easy for consumers. This means having easy curbside pick-up options and avoiding hassles. Today, it is unheard of for a grocery store to not offer online ordering with curbside pick-up options. As an example, with things like family meal kits becoming the norm, consumers are willing to pay a premium for ease of service.

EXPERIENTIAL

Retail has become a form of entertainment and consumers want to have fun. This means building in walkability and providing for the “unexpected” to create a more lasting impression. More and more, consumers are looking for authentic experiences that are unique to that community.



Outlook for Big Box

Big box retail is at a crossroads, though the major players such as Walmart, Target, and Costco appear to be in strong positions for post-pandemic growth. However, challenges do remain. Online retail is accelerating into every facet of shopping including groceries. Coupled with the cost of building, leasing, and operating 100,000 square feet or more of retail space, big projects are becoming riskier for developers and investors. The marketplace for new big box will be highly competitive with developers reaching out to local communities for incentives in support of these types of projects.

In addition to these changes, shifting demographics are affecting retail. Baby Boomers are becoming less mobile and Millennials are seeking experiences over purchases. Retail is becoming more dynamic with a focus on shifting consumer demands. Retailers want proximity to homes and residences, which means mixed-use project.

Design Principles

So how does Rib Mountain transform to keep up with changing demands? Most of the change will be incremental as individual properties redevelop, but the Town can shape new development by applying design standards and investing in improvements that can create a sense of place. To create a “place” the environment needs to be comfortable, identifiable, and connected. Some ways to create that environment include:

- **Encouraging a mix of uses** – This can be accomplished by simply having a mix of housing and retail in an area, or housing and retail can be on the same site. In addition, adding office or institutional use to an area can increase the number of people and create more of a market for restaurants and service related businesses.
- **Decreasing and consolidating parking** – People want to get out of their cars and into a walkable, enjoyable space. By decreasing the amount of parking that people have to traverse, consolidating parking, and placing it behind buildings, a more pedestrian focused environment can be created.
- **Bringing buildings to the street** – When buildings are built next to the street, they create a wall to an outdoor room. They also allow people to walk next to shops and experience shopping in a better way than parking and walking up to a big box.
- **Creating green spaces** – The value of green space is often lost in the planning of retail spaces. Simply allowing space for quality planting and seating can enhance the retail experience and draw more people to an area. Even spaces that are sometimes “afterthoughts” such as stormwater detention areas can be enhanced to be an asset to an area. Better yet, the small parks can be added to commercial areas and street trees and other amenities can create the feel of a linear park.
- **Branding** – It is important for people to be able to identify one place from another. Right now Rib Mountain Drive could be anywhere, but with more branding throughout the corridor, a sense of place can be created. This branding can also help relate the commercial district to the natural environment.
- **Wayfinding** – Rib Mountain is currently built for cars going to set destinations. Leading people to different locations can help them learn a place and enjoy more of what it offers. Pedestrian-level signage can lead people through a development and on to other amenities in a community.



Images above show mixed-use development and wayfinding signage

Ultimately, it’s people that make a place, so creating an environment that is inviting to people and makes them want to stay and do different things throughout the day is the key to placemaking.

chapter six: recommendations



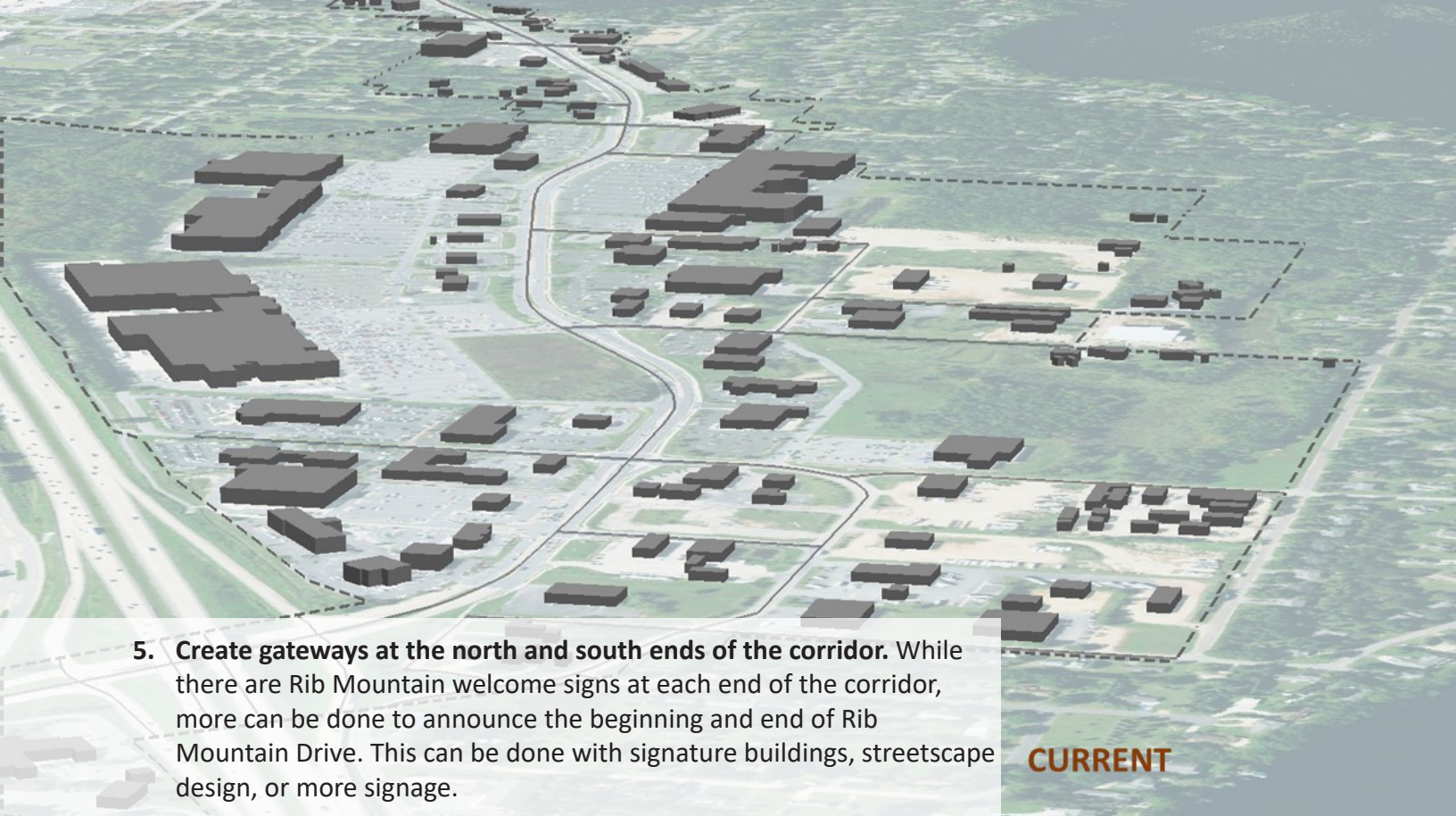
recommendations

The Ayres team and Town staff worked diligently over the plan process to develop a series of recommendations designed to transform the Rib Mountain corridor into the environment described in the plan goals. The recommendations are broken down between land use, transportation, and placemaking, but the three work together. Change in the Rib Mountain corridor will be incremental, but the Town can shape and encourage that change.

Land Use Recommendations

The overall land-use goal is to encourage development that is more human scaled and that offers a variety of activities. The Town can do this through land-use policy, but some recommendations will have to be implemented by developers, property owners, and businesses. To help provide guidance on how development can transform the corridor, three case studies are presented after these overall recommendations:

1. **Update the future land-use map to allow for more mixed use and a larger variety of uses along the corridor.** The Future Land Use map (page 49) suggests that several areas that are currently commercial, be designated as mixed-use. While the market rather than the Town will determine what uses are developed, allowing for mixed use opens up opportunity for developers to build housing, a variety of commercial uses, and even office and institutional uses.
2. **Update the zoning code.** The current zoning code does not contain the standard needed to create quality development. Rather than making a series of edits, the code should be rewritten to focus on form based (or design related) requirements. The allowed uses should be re-examined, and the site design and signage standards strengthened.
3. **Prohibit auto-oriented use on the north end of the corridor.** More intense commercial development should be focused south of Oriole Lane, and the smaller more residentially oriented feel to the north should be preserved. The development of more drive-thrus or auto-related uses to the north could jeopardize the existing character. Thus, it is recommended that an overlay district be added to the zoning code. This overlay district could add additional design requirements and prohibit auto-oriented uses in the area it covers.
4. **Encourage residential to the north and office and institutional to the south.** Currently, there are no “districts” or individual character areas along the corridor. Residential uses should be encouraged on the north end, close to the amenities of Rookery View Park and the Wisconsin River. At the south end of the corridor, office or institutional uses should be encourage to create a unique gateway that makes the corridor more of a signature destination, rather than a typical commercial corridor.



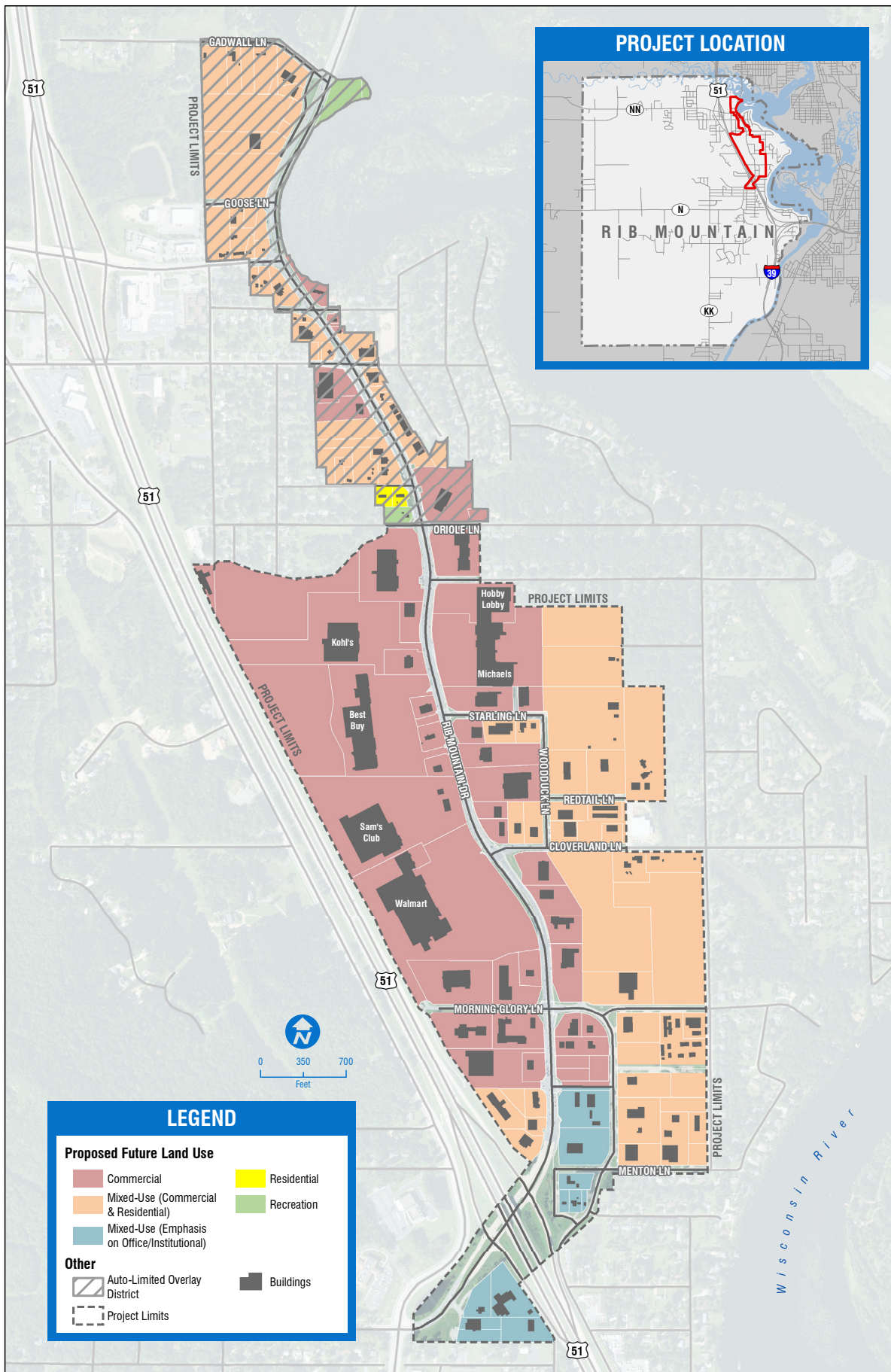
5. Create gateways at the north and south ends of the corridor. While there are Rib Mountain welcome signs at each end of the corridor, more can be done to announce the beginning and end of Rib Mountain Drive. This can be done with signature buildings, streetscape design, or more signage.

6. Encourage land assembly. There are a mix of lot sizes along the corridor. For quality mixed-use development to be proposed, developers need larger lots. While the Town can only advise on land assembly, as concepts are presented, the Town should consider whether a development proposal could be improved by the assembly of adjacent properties.

7. Pursue developers for key sites. Rib Mountain Drive needs a major, high-quality development to be a catalyst for change along the corridor. To get this kind of development, the Town should work directly with property owners and be proactive in marketing the type of desired development.

8. Create incentive for quality public spaces. As mentioned, change will be incremental. However, at every opportunity the Town should negotiate with developers to create quality outdoor spaces. Outdoor dining, the dedication of right-of-way for bike and pedestrian enhancements, and high-quality site design should be pursued. In some cases this can be required. In other cases, developers may do it voluntarily, and in others the Town may have to negotiate by providing flexibility on other requirements.

9. Reduce parking requirements and encourage shared parking. As part of an overhaul of the zoning code, parking requirements should be re-examined. With more online shopping happening, the requirements are likely outdated. It is apparent that the current parking supply is underutilized. Where possible, shared parking should be encouraged rather than a quota on each parcel. Ultimately, with reduced need, some infill on existing parking lots may be possible.



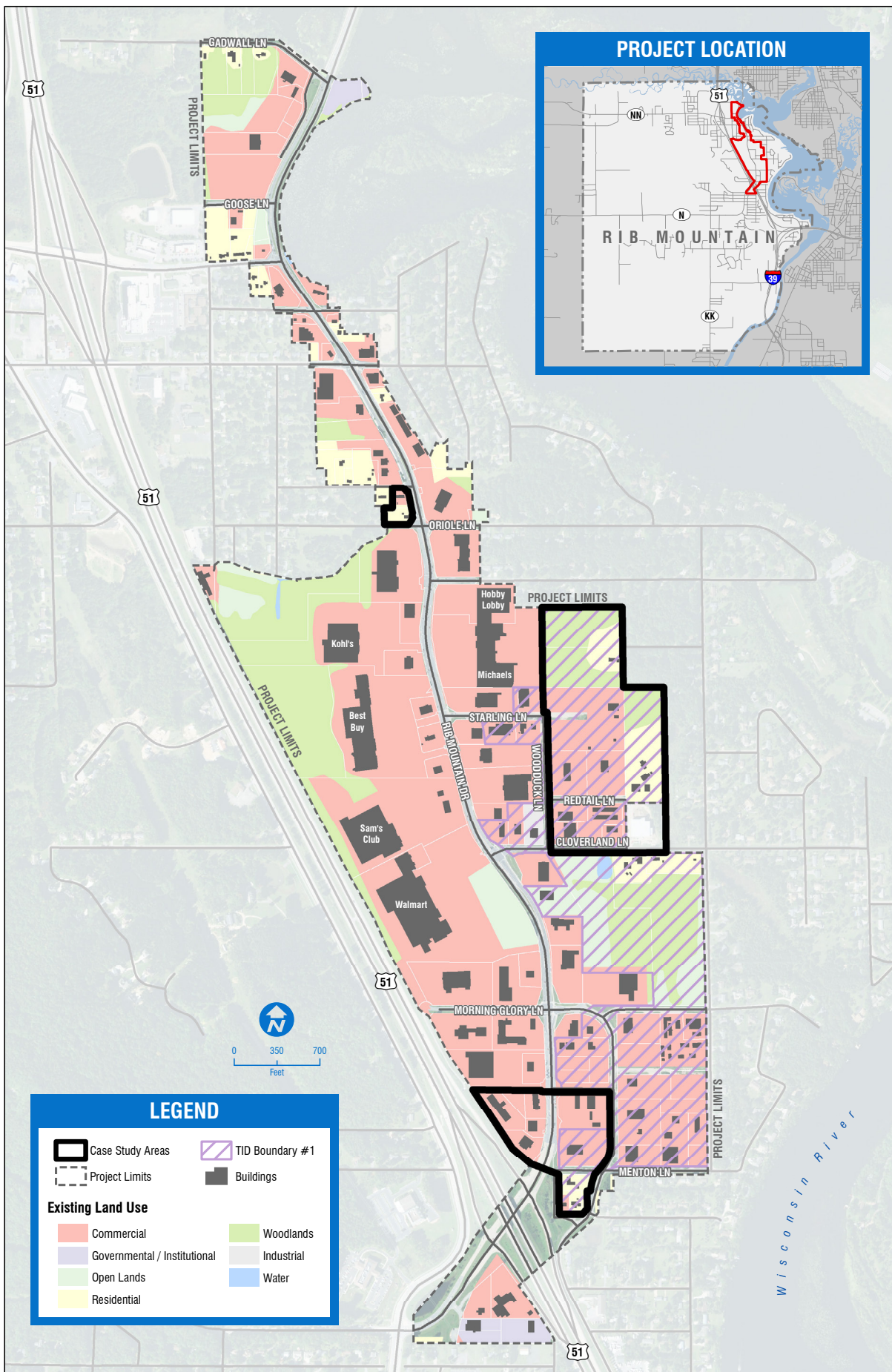
Proposed Future Land Use
Rib Mountain Drive Corridor Study



TOWN OF RIB MOUNTAIN
Where Nature Joins & Inspires Your Day

MAP 10

TOWN OF RIB MOUNTAIN
227800 Snowbird Avenue
Wausau, WI 54401
Project 52-0636 • 6.9.2021



case studies

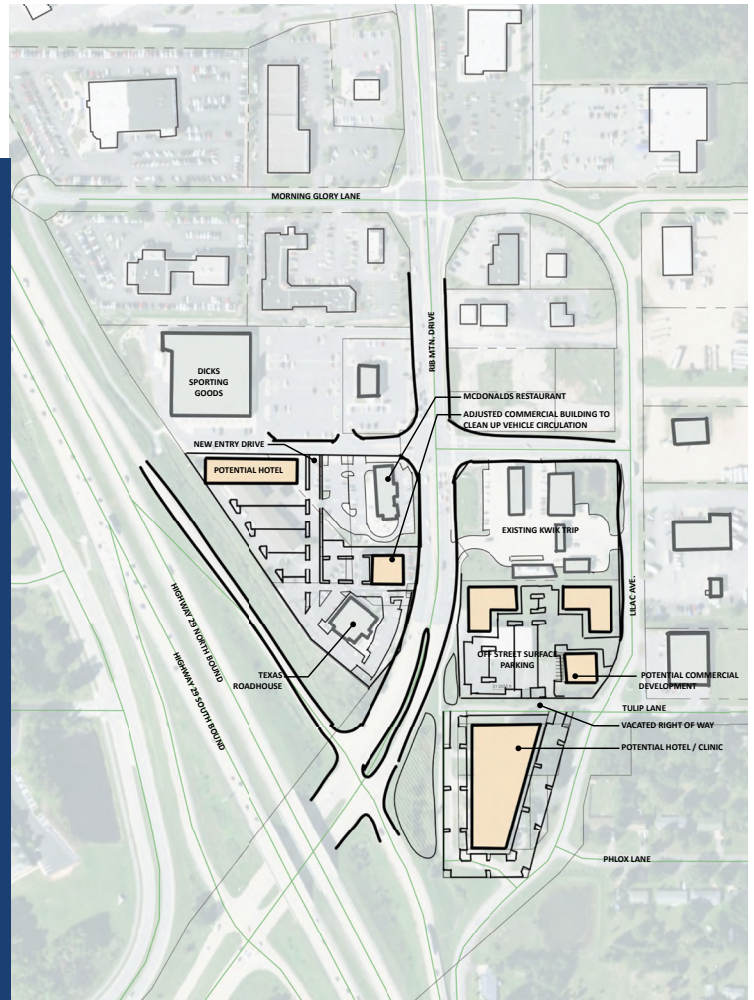
Three case studies were done to show what some of these recommendations could foster (see map on previous page for case study locations).

Case Study #1: Southern Gateway

This case study examined the area just north of the Highway 51 interchange near Valley Inn Way. This is the gateway to Rib Mountain, but it is full of traffic congestion and lacks cohesiveness. On the western side several commercial uses share one access point, but it is designed in an awkward fashion. On the eastern side, property is aging and underutilized.

As the following conceptual image shows, with incremental change over time, the area could be improved. Property could be assembled, and a signature building constructed. Other buildings could be arranged to make more of a street wall, and access could be improved.

In conjunction with developers and the DOT, a gateway pedestrian bridge over Rib Mountain Drive could be considered in the future.



AYRES  TOWN OF RIB MOUNTAIN

RIB MTN. DRIVE- RIB MTN., WI | DAYS INN & OLSON

Ayres Associates Inc. | 5201 E. Terrace Drive, Suite 200 Madison WI 53718 | 608.443.1200 | www.ayresassociates.com | # 520896.00



Conceptual image of a signature building

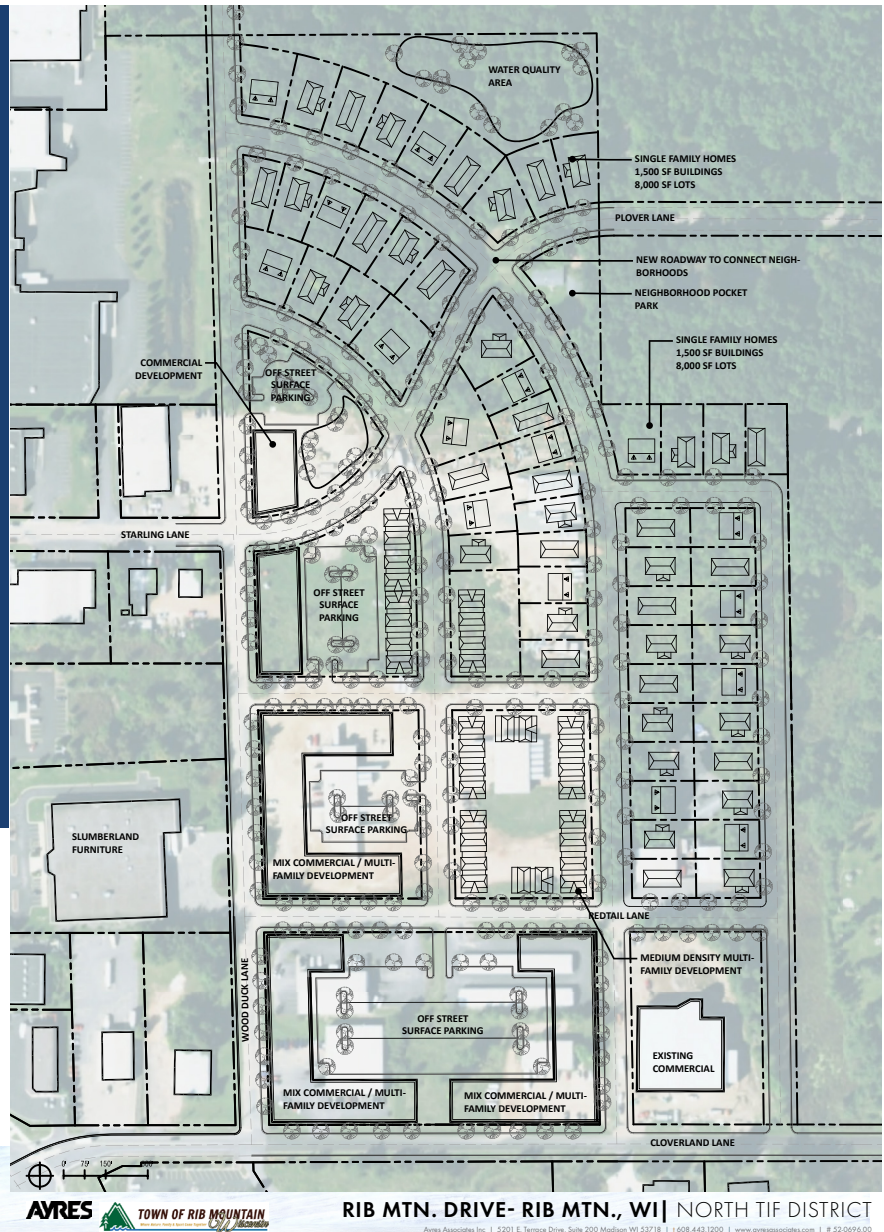
Case Study #2: Red Tail Fields

This case looked at a large area to the north and east of Wood Duck Lane and Cloverland.

In this location there are aging industrial uses and growth pressures pushing commercial uses to the east. This has the potential to create issues with the transition between commercial uses and homes.

The concepts presented show how a master development could re-route roads and create uses that “step down” in scale and intensity.

It shows mixed use or neighborhood serving commercial along Wood Duck, and then multi-family residential with open space in the middle. Twin homes or townhomes could then be built as a buffer to established residential area.



Conceptual image showing a transition in use and scale

Case Study #3: Oriole Park

This case examines an underutilized lot at Oriole Lane with an aging home on it.

Developing this lot is a challenge because of a creek that runs through it. If this parcel could be purchased by the Town, it would make an ideal small community park. This location could become a focal point. Small community events could be held there and there could be informational signage about Rib Mountain.



Representative image - Orfan Park Crossing, Sun Prairie, WI



TIF District

As mentioned, a Tax Increment Finance District has been established to cover 98.5 acres east of Rib Mountain Drive. While some jurisdictions use TIF to directly aid specific development projects, this area is in need of several infrastructure improvements that will help get the area shovel ready.

Projects that would be good candidates for TIF expenditures include:

- Development that furthers the vision of this plan and promotes the highest and best use of property
- Improvement of the public realm or public infrastructure to support high-quality development
- Management of systems and enhancement of the environment such as high-quality stormwater management
- Provision of public open space



TIF can be used for streetscape improvements

Transportation Recommendations

As mentioned, Rib Mountain Drive was recently reconstructed. Thus, some recommendations are longer term ones that would be implemented when the road needs another upgrade. Other recommendations, particularly those on the individual intersection level, could be done as opportunities arise.

There are some limitations that have shaped the recommendations. For example, currently there is not enough space for the addition of on-street bike lanes. The reduction of lane widths to accommodate bikes was considered, but if more development is to be added, reduced lanes would not be able to accommodate the traffic. Likewise, the addition of transit was considered, but that is a regional decision with cost and benefits that cannot be easily resolved at this time.

As with the land use recommendations, a case study was done for a major transportation option. There are vast parking lots on the western side of Rib Mountain Drive. As shown on the Proposed Right-of-Way Map #7 (page 58), the potential exists for a road to be developed through this area. This road could serve a function similar to an interior road in a mall development. This roadway would help to keep linked trips inside the shopping areas and not circulating out onto Rib Mountain Drive. It would allow for access points to be rearranged and open up potential redevelopment opportunities. Further study would be needed, and negotiations would have to take place with property owners, but the concept could improve traffic, re-purpose underutilized parking lots, and create redevelopment opportunities.

A new access road should have sidewalks, but that won't resolve all the pedestrian issues. As a complementary concept, it is recommended that the dedication of 8 to 10 feet of right-of-way be negotiated as properties redevelop on the eastern side of Rib Mountain Drive for the development of a multi-purpose path. These major recommendations are summarized with others below:

- 1. Conduct a formal feasibility study of a new access road to the west and a multi-use trail to the east.** This study found these concepts to be feasible, but the next steps would be to look at properties in more detail and to discuss the options with the property owners. There is the potential for the Town to purchase property for the road development, or a private road could be constructed. For both the road and the multi-purpose trail, another option is the property dedication could be negotiated.
- 2. Conduct a parking inventory/encourage shared parking.** As mentioned, it appears that there is an overabundance of parking. Understanding parking demand would inform further studies of the access road concept. In addition, if parking could be condensed or even shared between uses, access points could be redesigned and that could improve traffic.

3. **Improve Lilac and Woodduck Lanes.** Between Starling Lane and Menton Lane, a north/south route using Lilac and Woodduck could potentially be developed to connect these business and relieve circulating traffic demand on Rib Mountain Drive. Intersection reconfigurations would likely be needed to make the connection a primary route.
4. **Consider roundabouts.** Another long-term improvement to Rib Mountain Drive could be the addition of roundabouts. Given the average daily traffic along the corridor, roundabouts are likely a feasible intersection control at all locations along the corridor. More detailed operational analysis would be required, but roundabouts would provide a traffic calming impact as well as a safety improvement, especially at the intersections that have been identified as having a high number of crashes. In addition, they allow for safer bike and pedestrian crossings and they can be signature designs that allow for unique signage and even art in the middle of the roundabout.
5. **Initiate conversations with the DOT about the long-term plans for the interchange at Rib Mountain Drive and Highway 51.** Ultimately, this interchange will need to be redesigned. Because it is the gateway to Rib Mountain Drive, the Town should initiate conversations with the Department of Transportation to discuss future options. This is also important because the land around the interchange is potentially the most developable and any future potential impacts should be understood now in order to plan land uses.
6. **Improve connections/signage to existing bike routes.** While long-term bike facility improvements are envisioned, near-term signage to the existing bike path should be improved and east-west connections on Parrot Lane and Cloverland Lane enhanced to move people east and west across Rib Mountain Drive to the 51/29 Trail.
7. **Improve intersections incrementally over time.** The following enhancements are recommended as opportunities arise.

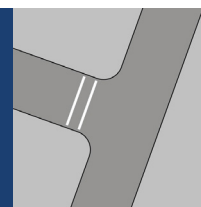
Gadwall Lane

Short-term improvement:

- Preference is for continental-style crosswalk marking found in most other locations along the corridor. Consider re-stripping the west leg crosswalk.

Long-term improvement:

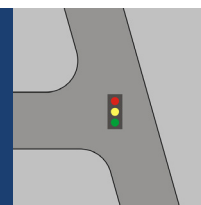
- A pedestrian crossing of Rib Mountain Drive would provide connectivity to/from Rookery View Park. Consider a pedestrian crossing on the north side of the intersection to avoid conflicts with the north-bound left-turn traffic. The existing median provides opportunity for a pedestrian refuge area and a two-stage crossing. As an un-signalized intersection, consideration could be given to a rectangular rapid flashing beacon to increase driver awareness of the presence of pedestrians. This would require a short path/sidewalk on the east side from crosswalk to Rookery View Park. Crosswalk could be a stamped concrete or slightly raised crossing which could double as an indication to drivers they are reentering a residential/commercial area.



County Road NN

Long-term improvement:

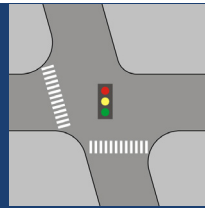
- Provide sidewalk accommodations between County Road NN and Goose Lane. The challenge with accommodating sidewalks appears to be the grade in the northwest quadrant. A long-term solution of a retaining wall as opposed to the current sloped rock is recommended. With the addition of a sidewalk, provide continental-style crosswalk on the west leg with pedestrian crossing indicators.



Robin Lane

Long-term improvement:

- Provide sidewalk accommodations between County Road NN and Robin Lane along west side of roadway.
- In the northeast quadrant, push the driveway curb cut as far north as possible to move farther away from the influence area of the intersections. Consider the same on the east on both the north and south sides of the roadway; consider providing a single curb cut as far east as possible.



Oriole Lane

No recommendations.

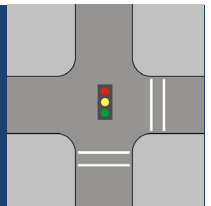
Parrot Lane

Short-term improvement

- Adjust signal timings to provide single stage pedestrian crossings on the south side. The current refuge area is too narrow to safely accommodate wheelchairs, making a two-stage crossing undesirable.
- Replace existing crosswalk markings with continental-style markings.
- Make sidewalk extension in the southwest quadrant accessible to parking lot.

Long-term improvement

- Widen the median so that refuge area on south is a minimum 4' wide (8' desirable).
- Consider sidewalk addition along west side of road so that sidewalk connects to crossing at the store instead of dropping pedestrians into a parking lot.



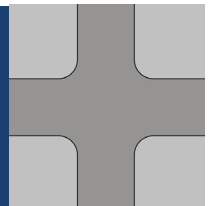
Kohl's Shopping Center Entrance

Short-term improvement

- Provide crosswalk on east side of the intersection.

Long-term improvement

- Evaluate the need/warrants for signalization. If warrants not met, consider a right-in/right-out access with primary access to shopping centers via signalized intersections to the north/south.
- Sidewalk on the west side would be desirable but grades in the northwest quadrant present a challenge.



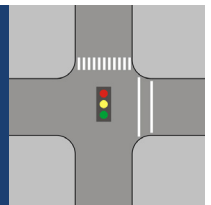
Starling Lane

Short-term improvement

- Remark crosswalk on east leg to continental-style markings.

Long-term improvement

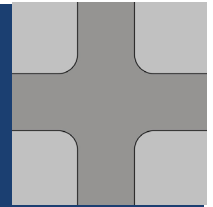
- Add sidewalk facilities to west side of roadway.
- Consider closing first access point on west side south of Starling Lane as it seems unnecessary with adjacent full-access intersections.



Sam's Club Entrance

Long-term improvement

- o Reconstruct as right-in/right-out with a southbound left-turn in.
- o Add sidewalk to west side of roadway.



Cloverland Lane

No recommendations.

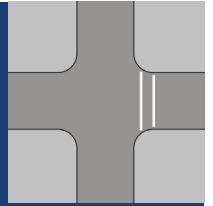
Driveway Near Aldi's

Short-term improvement

- o Remark crosswalk on east side to continental-style markings.

Long-term improvement

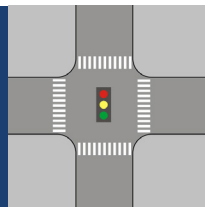
- o Consider evaluating as a right-in/right-out with median closure. This would also allow for narrowing of side road widths to reduce pedestrian crossing distance on east.



Morning Glory Lane

Long-term improvement

- o Provide sidewalk along the west leg of Morning Glory Lane to connect Rib Mountain Drive sidewalk facilities with the 51/29 trail at this location. Add crosswalk to the west side of the intersection.



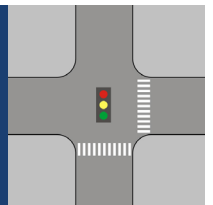
Valley Inn Way

No recommendations.

US 51 Interchange

Long-term improvement

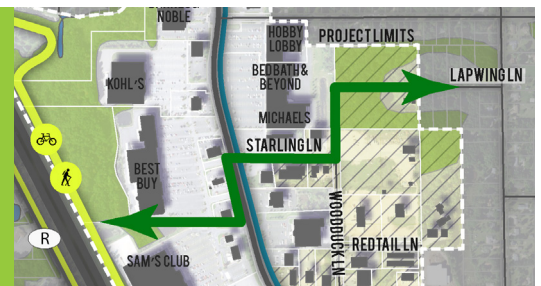
- o Consider adding sidewalk along either side of roadway. Extend it to the south to connect with the mixed-use path along Hummingbird Road (CTH "R").



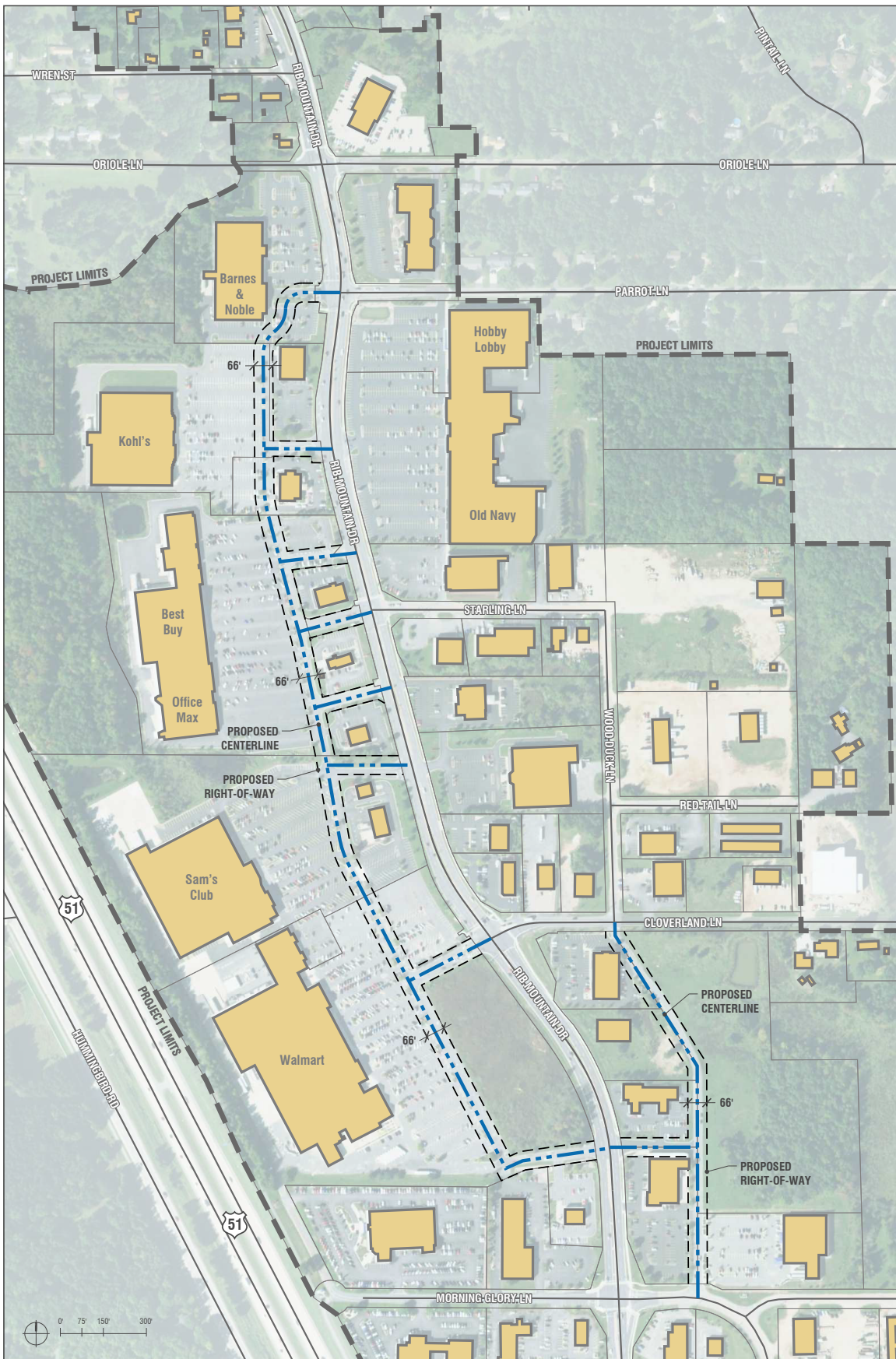
Bike/Ped Corridor

Long-term improvement

- o Create a bicycle and pedestrian corridor from the Highway 51/29 trail north of Sam's Club to connect to Starling and Lapwing Lanes as well as the Case Study #2 area. Include recommendation on the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.



Note: Map 8 - Traffic Analysis - with all locations can be found on page 29.

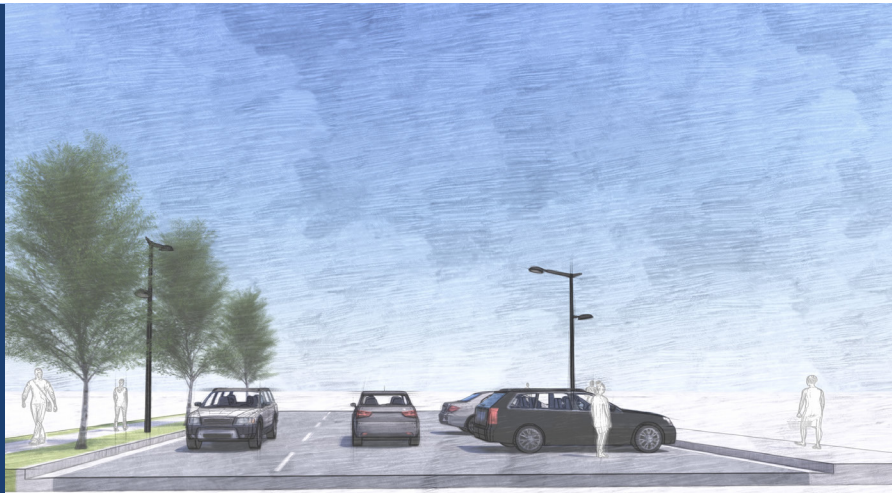


Case Study #4: Yach Parkway

This transportation case study explores the transformation of almost a mile of parking lots into a pedestrian-friendly parkway that could alleviate traffic on Rib Mountain Drive and promote redevelopment. There is room for a 66-foot right-of-way that could accommodate two lanes of traffic and landscaping and sidewalks.

The final design and parking configuration are to be determined, but creating a road that allows for people to walk from store to store comfortably, and for parking to be reconfigured, could greatly enhance the western side of Rib Mountain Drive.

Images reflect sample access roads and potential road profiles.



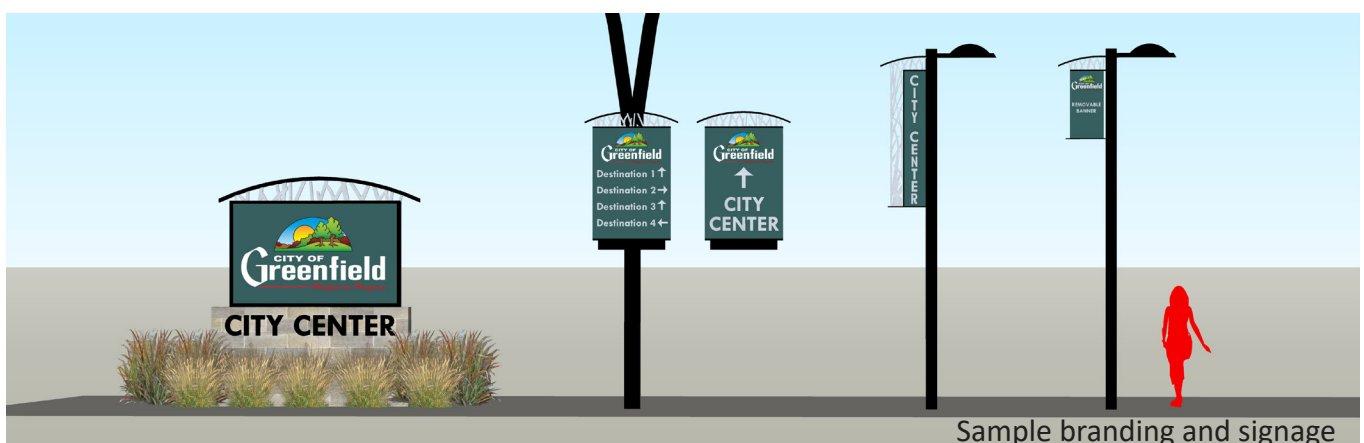
Placemaking

As discussed in the Placemaking chapter, creating a destination takes more than standard physical improvements. Efforts need to be taken to market Rib Mountain Drive as a place people want to be. The following recommendations are oriented to design and imagery:

1. **Install gateway treatments at the north and south ends of the commercial segment.** Efforts should be made to slow traffic when motorists feel like they are entering a “place” as opposed to continuing down a highway. This can be done with roadway and pedestrian crossing design, signage, and even land use.
2. **Build a Rib Mountain corridor brand to make people know they are in a unique place.** While the Town has an image and slogan, branding unique to Rib Mountain Drive should be developed and promoted through signage, banners, and advertising.
3. **Improve municipal and business signage.** Municipal signage was mentioned in the zoning code recommendations. Businesses should be encouraged to embrace the imagery and brand of Rib Mountain Drive in their private signage. In addition, the Town should enhance the municipal wayfinding signage all on the corridor.
4. **Create streetscape and building design guidelines.** In order to create a cohesive image, individual property owners should be given design standards to follow when redevelopment occurs. Standards for outdoor furnishings, fencing, landscaping, and façade design should be established.
5. **Build business involvement.** The Town cannot create a quality destination on its own. Much of the implementation of the vision of this plan will come through the actions of property owners and businesses. The Town should begin implementation of this plan by calling together business and property owners to discuss the creation of a business district or coalition. This could take several forms. On the most basic level the Town could simply call meetings and discuss issues. A second level of involvement would be for the Town to appoint an Ad Hoc Committee to move recommendations forward. A third, and most advanced option, is to establish a Business Improvement District which would be a stand-alone organization, funded by the business and others, with the mission of leading physical improvements along Rib Mountain Drive.

Summary

Ultimately, all of these recommendations will work in concert to create a new environment along Rib Mountain Drive. The changes will likely be incremental, but armed with vision and goals set forth in this plan, the Town, property owners, developers, business owners, and residents can be prepared to react to market forces and make sure that Rib Mountain remains a destination.

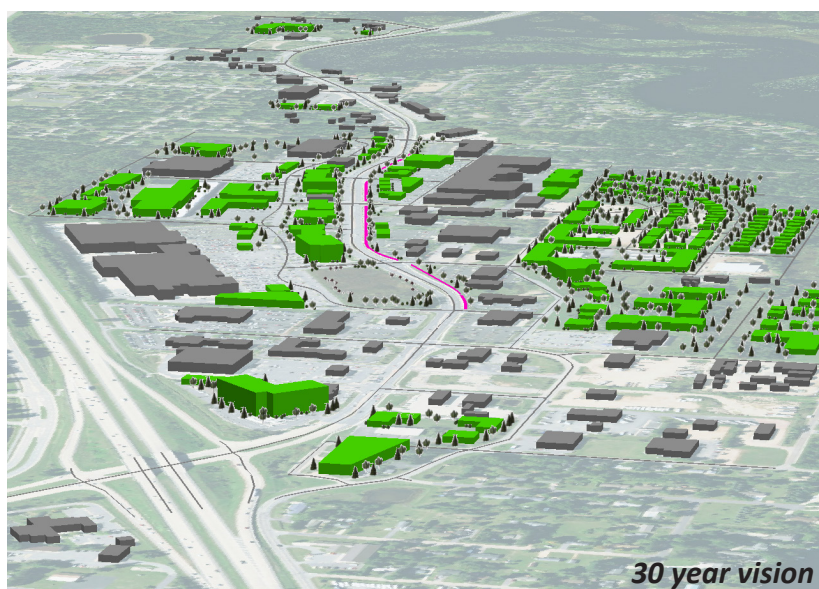
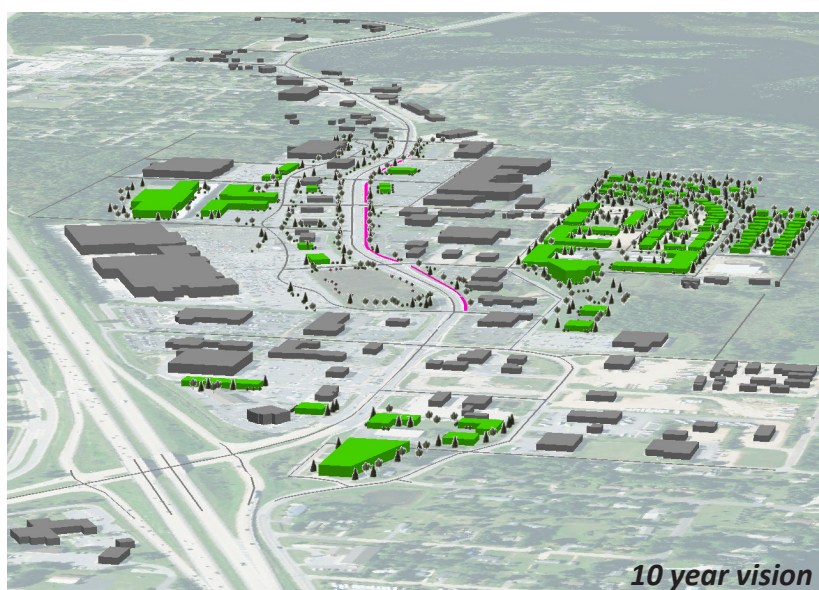
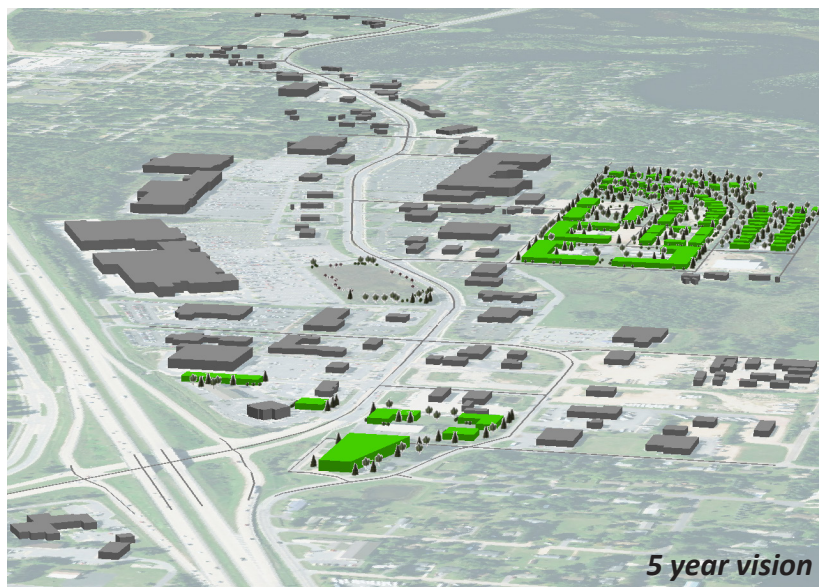


5 - 10 - 30 Year Visions

Within five years Rib Mountain could see redevelopment similar to what is described in the case studies. Property east of Rib Mountain Drive is ripe for development, and there is development interest at the intersection of Rib Mountain Drive and Highway 51.

Within 10 years Rib Mountain could develop an access road on the east side of Rib Mountain Drive and a multi-use trail on the east side of the road. This could spur redevelopment on key sites along the access road and other locations.

In a 30-year vision, much of the property along Rib Mountain Drive has been redeveloped. Auto-oriented, big box buildings have been replaced with mixed-use multi-story buildings and parking lots have been converted into infill development. Transitions to the east are carefully planned to provide more housing options while creating a transition between commercial and single-family development.



chapter seven: implementation



implementation

The recommendations chapter contains a variety of undertakings that range from small to large. Some need to be done by the Town alone and others involve participation from other groups. In addition, some recommendations will be implemented through daily decisions over time, while others are unique action items.

In order to make implementation an easy step-by-step process, **the unique action items are listed in the following table from the simplest to the most complex.**

Land Use		
Recommendations	Parties Involved	Notes
Amend the future land use map	Town of Rib Mountain with citizen notification	Adopting this plan as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan will update the future land use map for the Rib Mountain study area.
Encourage land assembly and reach out to developers for key sites	The Town of Rib Mountain	The Town should examine the most likely options for combining properties to make sites more inviting to developers. The Town should work with property owners to market sites to developers known for high-quality, mixed-use development.
Reduce parking requirements and encourage shared parking	Town of Rib Mountain, a consultant, and property owners	This work should begin with a parking inventory. Then property owners should be approached about potential repurposing or sharing of parking. Parking requirements should be reduced in a zoning code update.

Land Use, cont.		
Recommendations	Parties Involved	Notes
Update the zoning code	Town of Rib Mountain and a consultant	This work should begin with a parking inventory. Then property owners should be approached about potential repurposing or sharing of parking. Parking requirements should be reduce in a zoning code update.
Prohibit auto-oriented uses north of Oriole Lane	Town of Rib Mountain and a consultant	This can be done with the addition of a zoning overlay district and should be done as part of the zoning code update.
Create incentives for quality public spaces	Town of Rib Mountain	Incentives can be built into a zoning code update. In addition, the Town can negotiate public space with each new development. The Town can also provide guidelines for the type of desired site furnishings, materials, and design.

Transportation		
Recommendations	Parties Involved	Notes
Initiate conversations with the DOT about the Rib Mountain Highway 51 intersection	Town of Rib Mountain	Due to the prominence of this intersection, the Town should become aware of any future reconstruction concepts.
Improve connections/signage to existing bike routes	Town of Rib Mountain	Improve east west connections at Parrot and Cloverland Lanes to connect with the 51/29 Trail. Enhance bike route signage.
Individual intersection improvements	Town of Rib Mountain	As the budget allows, the Town can improve individual intersections as outlined in the recommendations.
Improve Lilac Avenue and Woodduck Lane	Town of Rib Mountain and a consultant	The Town should contract with a consultant to explore the reconfiguration of the Lilac Avenue and Woodduck Lane intersection to move traffic more smoothly and create a stronger alternative to Rib Mountain Drive.
Establish plans for a multi-use path on the east side of Rib Mountain Drive	Town of Rib Mountain and a consultant	Further examine the amount of additional right-of-way needed to construct a multi-use path on the east side of Rib Mountain Drive. Set up procedures for land dedication or purchase.
Conduct a feasibility study for the proposed access road west of Rib Mountain Drive	Town of Rib Mountain, a consultant, and property owners	This study found merit in the idea of an access road through the parking lots on the west side of Rib Mountain Drive, but more study is needed. The Town should contract with a consultant to draw more detailed plans, work with property owners on potential access issues, and formulate a plan for land purchase or dedication.

Transportation, cont.		
Recommendations	Parties Involved	Notes
Consider roundabouts	Town of Rib Mountain and a consultant	This study found merit in the idea of installing roundabouts throughout Rib Mountain Drive. The Town should contract with a consultant to further outline the costs and benefits.

Placemaking		
Recommendations	Parties Involved	Notes
Build business involvement	Town of Rib Mountain and business and property owners	Many of the recommendations in the report will be implemented more successfully with business and property owner involvement. The Town should call a meeting of business and property owners immediately after the plan adoption. The form of business involvement, through an ad hoc committee, or eventual Business Improvement District can follow.
Build business involvement Build Rib Mountain brand	Town of Rib Mountain, a consultant, and business and property owners	The Rib Mountain Corridor needs a brand of its own. The Town should hire a consultant to work with the Town and business owners to develop a brand and implementation strategy.
Improve municipal and business signage	Town of Rib Mountain, a consultant, and business and property owners	After developing a brand, the Town should hire a consultant to help with signage and wayfinding using the new brand. In addition, new signage standards should be part of the zoning code update mentioned above.
Develop a public park along the corridor	Town of Rib Mountain and a consultant	The second case study recommends the development of a municipal park along the corridor to set a standard for an initiate additional greenspace. The Town should plan for the purchase of property and develop a signature park design.
Create streetscape and building design guidelines	Town of Rib Mountain and a consultant with input from business and property owners	The Town can adopt advisory guidelines or include some regulatory design guidelines in the zoning code update.
Install gateway treatments at the north and south ends of the corridor	Town of Rib Mountain	This recommendation has many levels. It can be done with a combination of signage, streetscape and new development. The Town should pursue all three.