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NEIGHBORHOOD ANALYSIS : KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 CURRENT LAND USE

Currently, almost the entire length of the corridor consists of commercial use (fig. 4.1). A variety of commercial activities have come to characterize the corridor over the years ranging from small scale auto-dependent (strip) businesses to larger “big box” stores primarily at the west end of the corridor near the Highway 151 intersection. Commercial uses also include banks, offices, a motel, fast food restaurants, and other retail operations. At a few locations along the corridor, multifamily residential land uses are zoned, including the Hamilton Place apartments and several smaller multifamily structures toward the eastern end of the corridor adjacent to the Downtown. Single family residential is found in several areas, primarily near the Downtown.

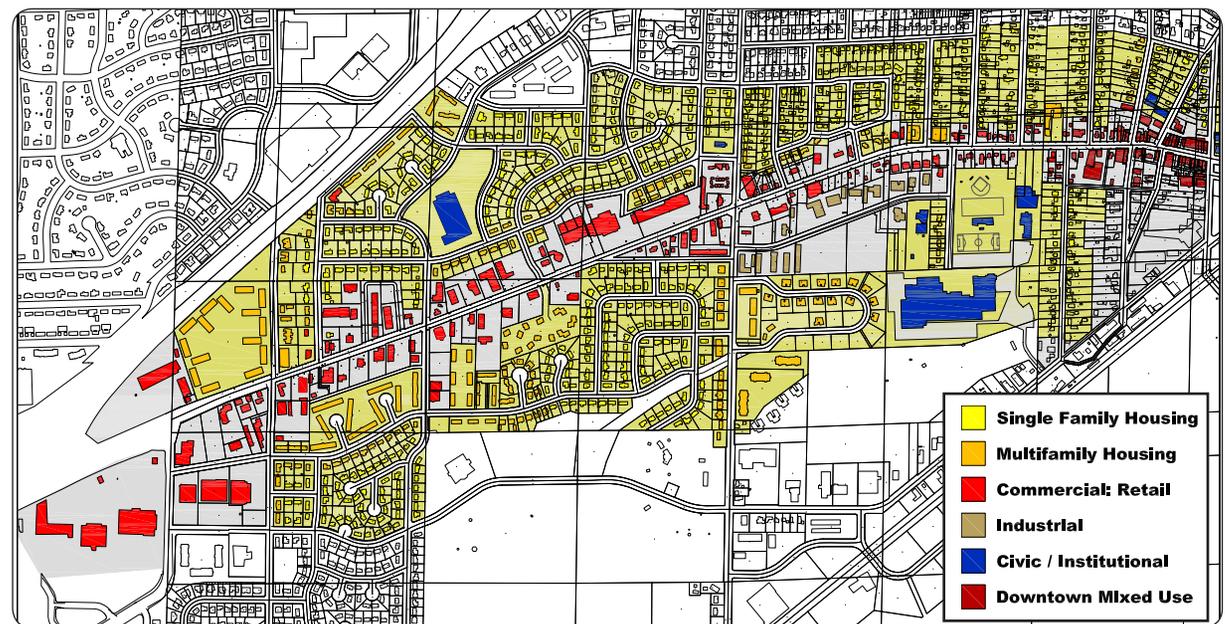


fig. 4.1 Existing Land Use

Adjacent land uses, located just to the north and south of the corridor include mostly residential areas. In most areas, or with a few exceptions, multifamily residential uses are directly adjacent to the commercial uses transitioning to single family further away from the corridor itself. Light Industrial uses are found along Commercial Avenue just south of West Main Street. Institutional uses are also present, including of the Westside Elementary School and the Sun Prairie High School.

As redevelopment occurs along the corridor, the configuration of the existing patterns suggest a number of issues to consider, including:

Transitions between adjacent uses:

In some portions of the corridor, single family directly abuts commercial uses such as along portions of Walker Way and Rickel Road. Redevelopment guidelines should acknowledge the need for careful transitions in building scale and site layout between new commercial development and residential lots.

Potential for mixed use:

In many communities, including some parts of Sun Prairie, redevelopment is occurring in which residential uses are closely integrated

with commercial development. For example, residential units can occupy the upper floors of a building while the ground level is designated for retail uses. Consideration should be given for encouraging such integrated projects along

the West Main Street corridor. Compatible uses along the corridor include professional and small office, financial services, retail, restaurant and food service, and multifamily residential.

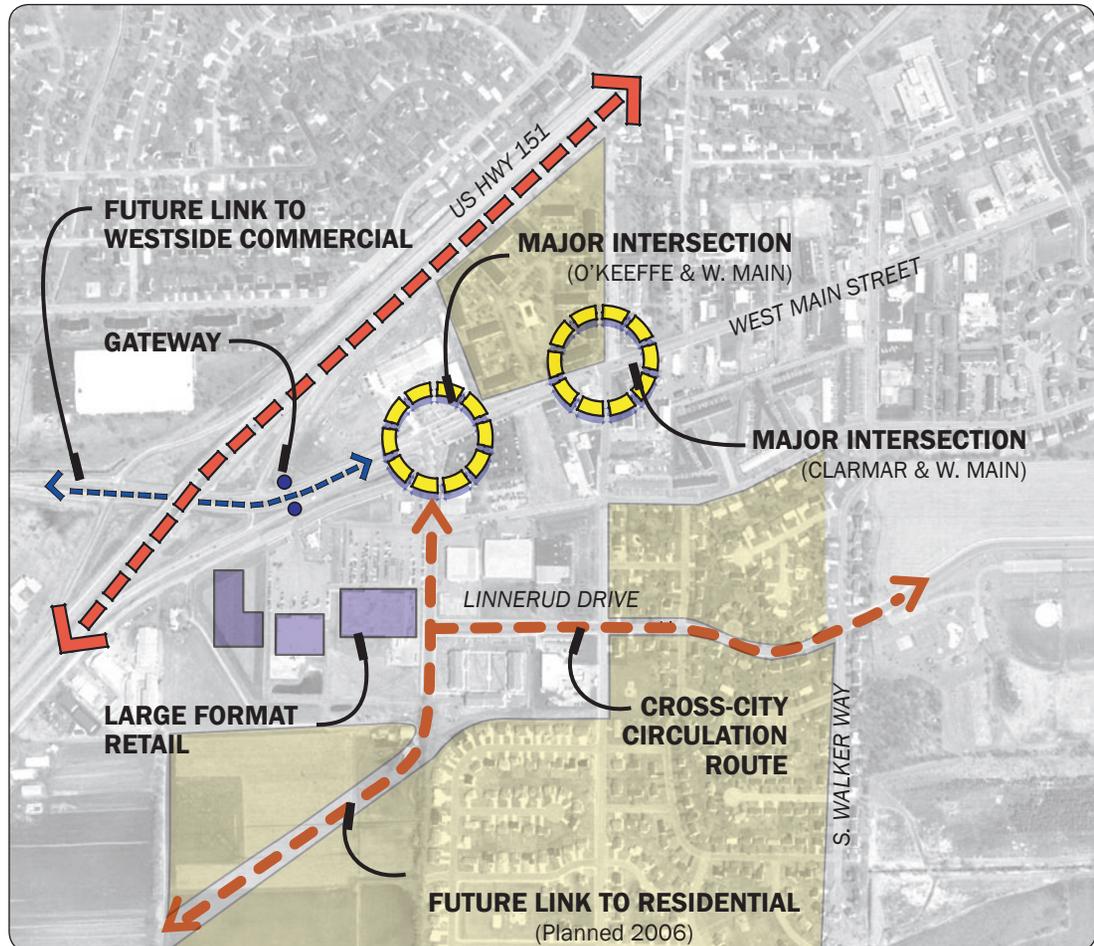


fig. 4.2 West Study Area



fig. 4.3 Big box commercial

4.2 WEST STUDY AREA: KEY ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Social and Economic Activity

The West Study Area (fig. 4.2) is characterized by commercial functions that serve a regional customer base. Several large format “big box” stores are clustered at the intersection of Highway 151 and West Main Street, resulting in a concentration of retail activity and traffic at this location. Many of the uses require large parking lots and the need for clear vehicular circulation and access in order for the customers to locate and access the businesses (fig 4.3). For many of the businesses, proximity to Highway 151 is an important consideration in their choice of locating in this area.

One large multi-family residential project, Hamilton Place, occupies a key location along Main Street. This development has an internalized focus around a series of parking lots and green space.

As in many metropolitan areas, there is a concern with how big box development will evolve over time. Planning efforts should examine how this area can accommodate new and re-configured retail operation, possibly adding buildings and functions that better integrate the center with the developing adjoining neighborhoods. Structured parking should be considered by property owners as an option in future redevelopment.

Another important factor to consider is how this center will relate to the planned commercial districts envisioned as part of the Westside plan. “Main Street” retail is planned to the west of Highway 151 offering both a challenge and an opportunity for this center to reposition itself as one of several retail/commercial districts along the length of Main Street. All along the corridor, the key will be for each center to offer businesses that provide complementary, rather than competitive, goods and services.

Access: Vehicular

The Highway 151/Main Street intersection is one of the most important entrance points into the city. Access issues in this vicinity not only concern how individual parcels and businesses are reached, but also how traffic flows through the area to reach other parts of the city.

One major conflict occurs where the Highway 151 off-ramp meets eastbound traffic on Main Street. Traffic merging onto Main Street must cross against traffic heading east that is



fig.4.4 Intersection of West Main Street and O’Keefe Avenue

attempting to get into the right lane to make a turn at O’Keeffe Avenue. Consideration should be given to improve this intersection to alleviate conflicts.

The intersection of O’Keeffe Avenue and Main Street is a major traffic junction in the area (fig 4.4). Many of the large format retail properties are accessed by driving through this intersection and turning onto McCoy Road (a frontage road). The intersection of O’Keeffe Avenue and McCoy Road is very close to the intersection of O’Keeffe Avenue and West Main Street. The proximity of these two intersections creates traffic problems, especially for drivers turning from West Main Street onto O’Keeffe Avenue, and then



fig. 4.5 Pedestrian crossing

onto McCoy Road. In general, this area would improve with more access points and circulation routes that disperse traffic and allow multiple ways to circulate around and through the area. This area will also be significantly impacted by future development to the west and south, which could increase traffic levels.

Linnerud Drive currently functions as a secondary collector street that leads from Downtown to the West side. Studies should be made as to whether traffic improvements can be made to facilitate traffic movements from Linnerud to both Main Street and the businesses in the area.

Several residential developments constructed to the south of the planning area are in close proximity to the retail destinations yet there are no street connections between these major land uses. Consideration should be given to future linkages between the retail and housing developments.

Access: Pedestrians

As more residential development occurs in the area, pedestrian accommodation will become an increasingly important consideration. Currently, the area is not

particularly welcoming to pedestrians. Pedestrian approaches to buildings often involve walking through parking lots or along busy vehicular ways.

Sidewalks are present along Main Street, yet provide little comfort to pedestrians. The lack of streetscape elements, incongruous placement of buildings, and the fragmented landscape create an unfriendly experience for pedestrians. As with most of the West Main Street Corridor, it is difficult to cross Main Street (fig 4.5) as there are only a few official intersections which are widely spaced apart. In addition, there are few traffic signals adjacent to housing areas that provide for safe pedestrian crossings. The sidewalk tree “terrace” along the north side of West Main Street is wider and allows some flexibility and opportunity in planning future streetscape options. While sidewalks are generally provided along streets in the area, there is often no pedestrian connection into the individual development parcels. Typically, pedestrians must walk through long expanses of asphalt to reach the front door of the businesses. The presence of multiple driveways along West Main Street also contributes to a lack of pedestrian comfort.



fig. 4.6 Hamilton Place

Given that more retail and residential development will occur west of Highway 151, the character of the pedestrian environment under the Highway 151 bridge and through the interchange will become important if this commercial district will become a successful destination attracting pedestrians from the future west side developments. Currently the 151 bridge and the O’Keeffe/Main intersection are significant barriers to pedestrians. Pedestrian connections must also be established between the retail area and the developing neighborhoods to the south, along O’Keeffe Avenue, and further south at the Smith’s Crossing development.

Physical Form and Character

In general, the area suffers from a lack of visual cohesion that contributes to a sense of disorientation and fragmentation. On the north side of the street, the Hamilton Place housing development offers many positive elements. Hamilton Place has a residential “front yard” character along Main Street (fig. 4.6), an attractive fence, and landscape that establishes a pedestrian scale along this portion of West Main Street.

On the south side of the street the image is very different due to the existence of several large format retail structures (big boxes). In this area, the large buildings are set back from the street, with spacious surface parking lots acting as the predominant image from the street. Several auto-dependent businesses



fig. 4.7 Auto-oriented businesses

contribute to an “auto strip” character to this part of the corridor (fig. 4.7). As one moves east along the south side of West Main Street, a gradual transition occurs, as the typical building position on the site becomes somewhat closer to the street.

Landscape/Streetscape Character

The character of the streetscape in this portion of West Main Street is “highway-like” and lacks visual order. There are wide expanses of asphalt surfaces unrelieved by landscape. In addition, there are utility poles, lines and a profusion of signage scaled to highway speed drivers. The 151/West Main Street interchange structure is also a negative visual element within the district which could be enhanced by landscape or streetscape elements.

The West Study Area is a very important entrance point into the City, but it currently presents a negative first impression. Improving the visual quality of this area will also become important as this zone will be the linkage point between the West Main Corridor and the new commercial core development further west, as designated in the Westside Neighborhood Plan.

4.3 CENTRAL STUDY AREA: KEY ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Social and Economic Activity

The business mix along this portion of the corridor (fig. 4.8) is diverse, including office and professional services, financial institutions, restaurants, and a variety of

retail establishments. Several strip malls are located along the corridor, as well as industrial uses and some multifamily residential. The residential uses are typically located just behind the layer of commercial uses that align Main Street. There are several properties along this portion of the corridor that are

“properties susceptible to change.” In a general sense, the term refers to parcels that are either underutilized, or have businesses that may be considering relocation. In this study several properties were identified based mainly upon discussions with steering committee members.

Access: Vehicular Circulation and Parking

This portion of West Main Street is a busy vehicular route, with several major intersections and many curb cuts leading into numerous driveways and parking lots (fig 4.9). Major intersections occur at Clarmar Drive, Walker Way, and Bird Street. These intersections are not only important nodes along Main Street but are also entrance points into residential neighborhoods that parallel West Main Street on either side. Because of the abundance of curb cuts along the street, there are many opportunities for vehicular conflicts because of the many turning movements occurring along the corridor. In general, there is a lack of cross parcel access between properties which exacerbates the situation. Parking lot location varies from parcel to parcel with lots located in the front, side, and back.

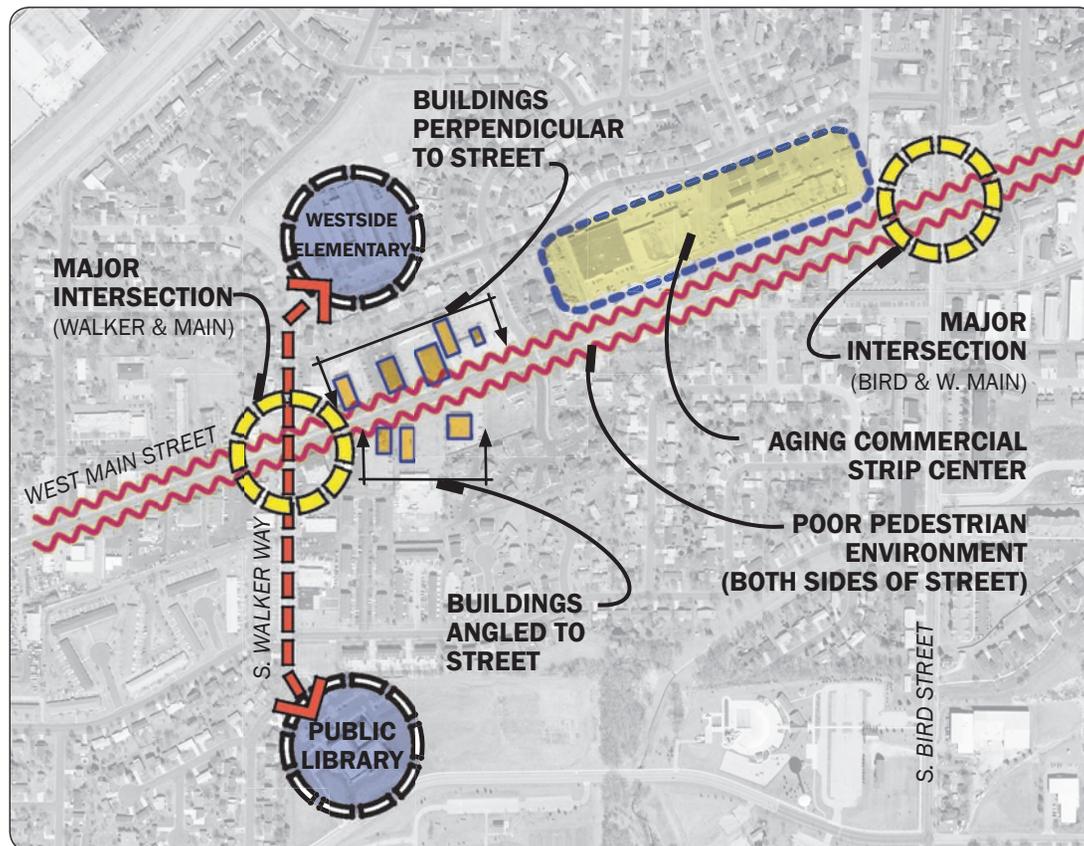


fig. 4.8 Central Study Area



fig. 4.9 Character of intersection along West Main Street

Access: Pedestrians

Pedestrians find themselves in daunting situations in many places along this part of the corridor. The width of the sidewalk is narrow with only a 2 to 3 foot grass strip



fig. 4.10 Pedestrian area along West Main Street

between the curb and sidewalk (fig 4.10). With the many curb cuts it is difficult to walk very far without encountering a vehicle that is either pulling in or out of a driveway. There are not many pedestrian friendly features such as landscape or interesting storefronts to create an attractive and inviting environment for pedestrians. As in other locations along the West Main Street Corridor, it is also very difficult to cross Main Street, even at intersections. The intersection of Walker Way and West Main Street is particularly problematic as this intersection is one utilized by children crossing the street in order to get to the elementary school. Crossing guards are present to assist before and after school at the present time.



fig. 4.11 Recently completed building placed near street



fig. 4.12 Buildings angled to the street (right side of photo)

Physical Form and Character

Buildings are set back at varying distances with newer structures placed closer to the street (fig. 4.11). A peculiar effect is caused by the fact that the buildings on the north side of the street are aligned with the street while those on the south are angled to the street (fig. 4.12) causing a disconnect between the two sides of the street. Buildings on the south side therefore have their side elevations showing, often displaying service areas, and less attractive building facades. There is a mix of building sizes, with some large strip centers as well as many smaller commercial buildings. Most buildings are one story in height.

Streetscape/Landscape Character

While an attempt has been made to control signage by requiring lower signage heights, the area suffers from an overload of visual information. In addition, the overhead utility poles and utility lines create visual clutter. Often, the visual character of strips can be significantly improved with street trees and carefully coordinated landscape treatments. While some newer buildings have landscape features as required by ordinance, the overall effect does not create the necessary linkages. The regulating plan and design guidelines, to be described later in this document, indicate how landscape elements can be positioned to edge parking lots, frame entrances, and define “outdoor rooms” which enhance pedestrian accommodation.

4.4 EAST STUDY AREA : KEY ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Social and Economic Activity

This portion of West Main Street (fig. 4.13) is an interesting transitional zone where the strip quality of the corridor changes to resemble the downtown as one progresses east. Small businesses mix with residential properties, with some businesses located in

converted homes. Parking lots are smaller and disappear altogether at the east end of the zone where street parking is provided along both sides of West Main Street. The Hanley hardware store is the largest business here, yet there are many small and diverse commercial establishments that provide services for the local community. Several auto repair stations are located here, providing convenient service to local residents. A

fenced area in front of the YMCA provides green space along the corridor.

The high school currently presents some challenges to the neighborhood concerning traffic and pedestrian crossings. The School District is considering alternative scenarios concerning the future of the high school site including the possibility of converting it into a middle school. Such a change could have

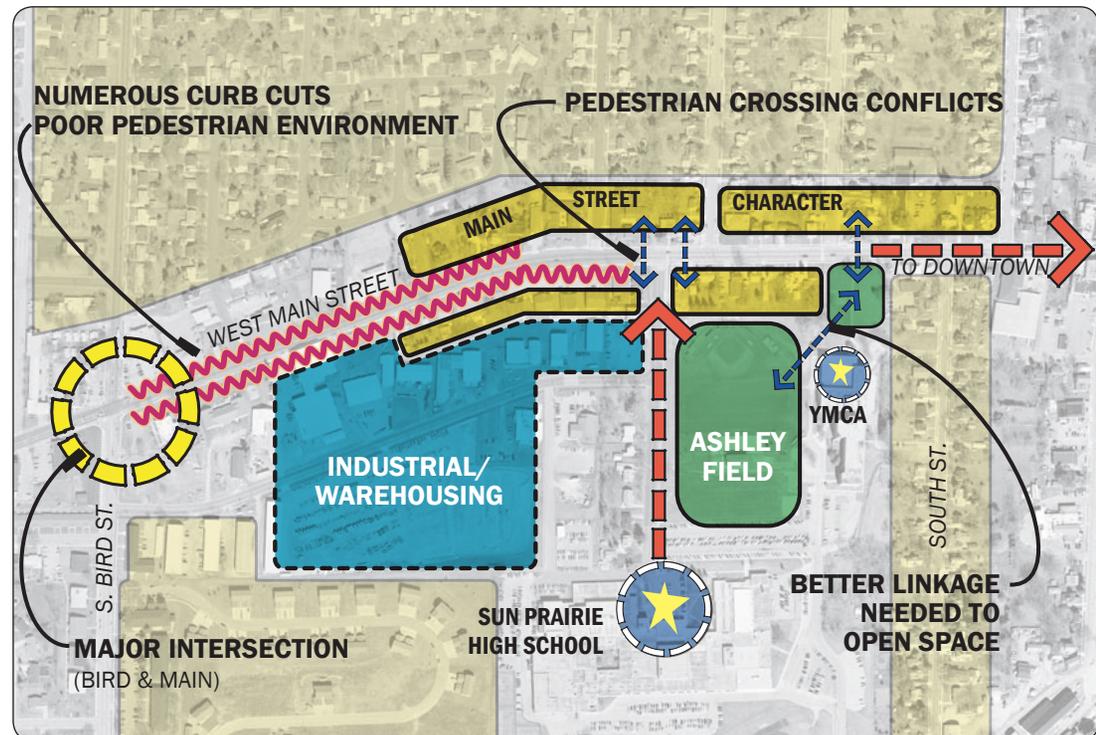


fig. 4.13 East Study Area

an impact on the area as there would be less vehicular traffic generated by the school and less need for parking. Some businesses in the area that are patronized by students could be affected by the change.

Access: Vehicular Circulation and Parking

The character of Main Street changes in this section which has lower traffic volumes than the other districts. Parallel parking is provided along portions of the street and some businesses rely on this for their main source of parking. High School traffic creates surges at the beginning and end of the school day. During discussions on this situation, it was suggested that if the High School is converted to a middle school, vehicle traffic should become less of a concern, but will not disappear.

Access: Pedestrians

The east study area offers the most pleasant spot along the entire corridor for pedestrians. The width of the sidewalk and tree terrace provides a comfortable place for walking. Parallel parking buffers the pedestrians from traffic. Attractive homes and small business create an environment where pedestrians can stroll and see shop windows or interesting

architectural details (fig. 4.14). Because of this area's proximity to downtown, potential exists to entice greater pedestrian activity to and from the revitalized downtown.

Physical Form and Character

Between Bird Street and the Hanley hardware store, West Main Street continues to exhibit a commercial strip-like character. However, just east of the Hanley property the character of the street transitions to a more "downtown" character with a mix of residential structures and small businesses. Structures are generally smaller, with domestic-scaled features like porches and varied roof forms (fig 4.15). The buildings on both sides of the street are oriented perpendicular to the street, creating



fig. 4.14 Architectural character



fig. 4.15 Architectural character

a positive and direct relationship between structure and street. Many properties have front yards or landscape spaces between building and road.

Streetscape/Landscape Character

This portion of the West Main Street Corridor generally has a pleasant street character, where one feels connection to the downtown. The residential scale and lack of large parking lots also contribute to this sense. The small park near the YMCA is a pleasant space, but is currently fenced off from Main Street.

4.5 PROPERTIES SUSCEPTIBLE TO CHANGE

During the planning process, several properties along the corridor were identified by the steering committee, property owners and city staff as parcels that could be redeveloped in the near future. These properties may be changing ownership or use. In planning terms, these are “properties susceptible to change” as shown on the map below

(fig. 4.16). Proposed site designs for these parcels illustrate the type of development to be encouraged along the corridor.

While these particular properties have been identified for the sake of allowing design possibilities to be illustrated, it is important to note that any site along the corridor is a potential redevelopment area under the regulating plan. The intent of the plan is

that redevelopment occurs piece by piece as individual property owners respond to the dynamics of market opportunity and change. The intended character of the corridor emerges over time in a kind of “connect the dots” manner with each individual development adding to the continuing enhancement of the corridor.

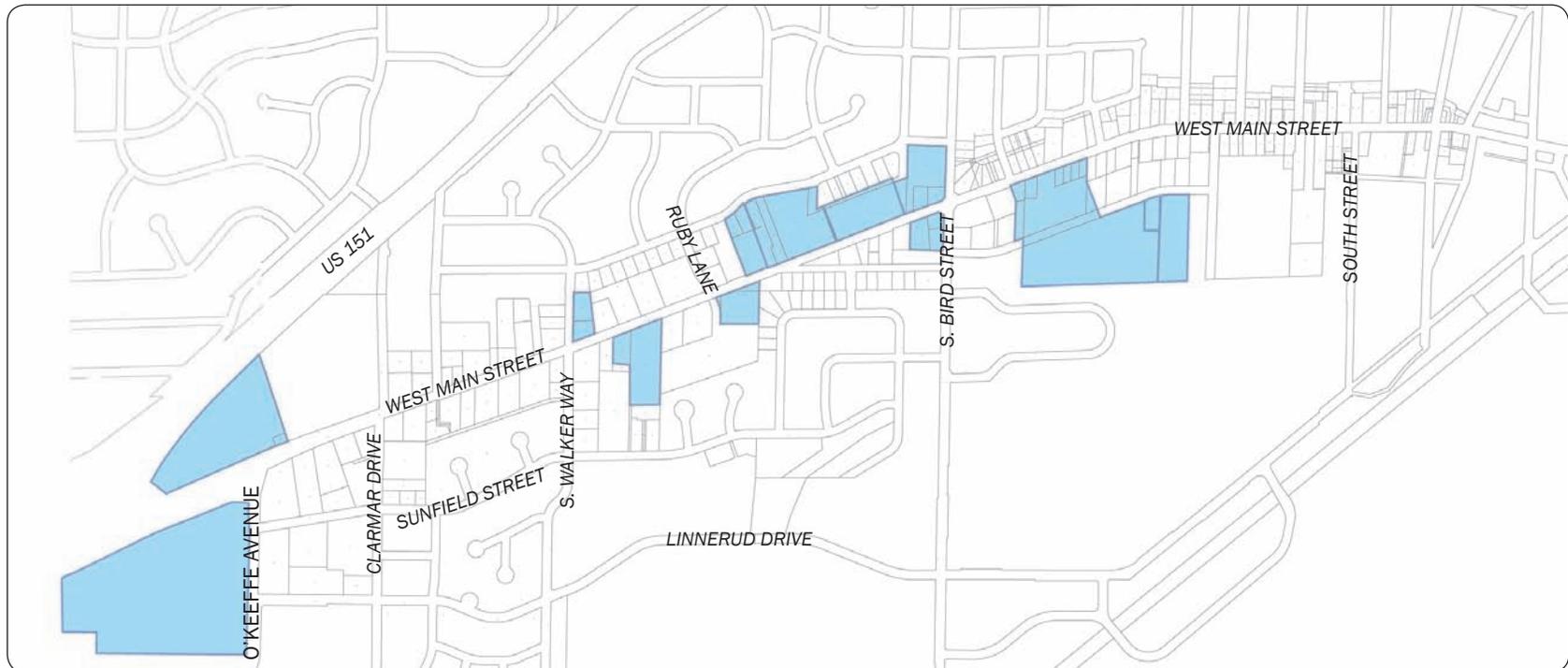


fig. 4.16 Properties susceptible to change

