



# Williamson Road

**AREA  
PLAN**

Adopted by Roanoke City Council  
October 18, 2004

**ROANOKE  
VIRGINIA**



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Planning Building & Development

# Acknowledgments

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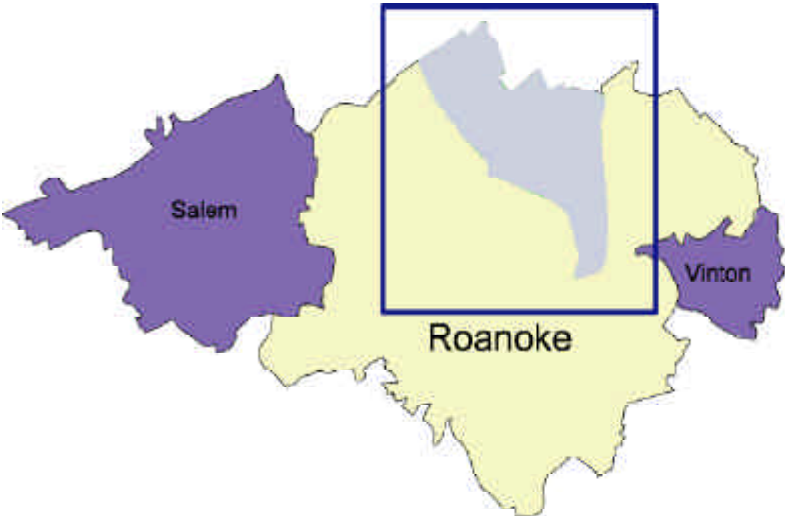
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Thanks to all the residents and business owners who participated in the community workshops. Special thanks to members of the **Williamson Road Action Forum**, **Williamson Road Area Business Association**, and the **Airlee Court Neighborhood Watch Association** for their active involvement in development of the plan.

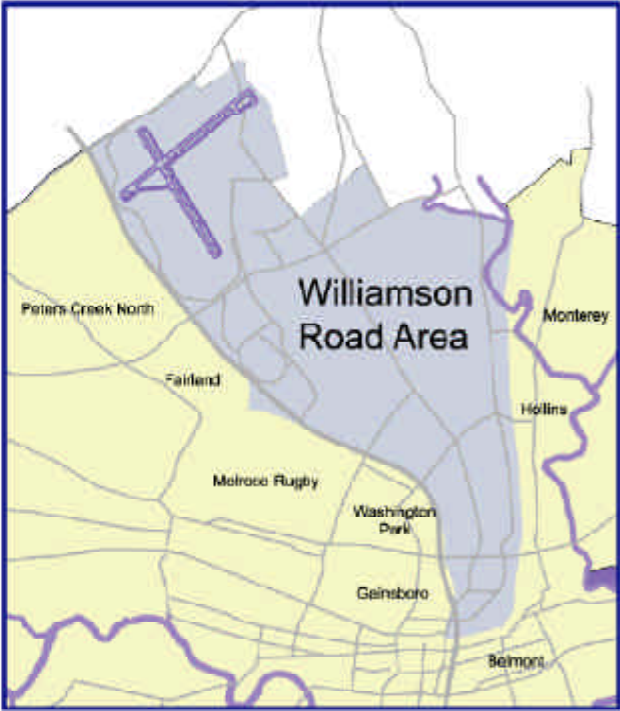
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# Introduction



The Williamson Road area is located in the northern part of Roanoke, stretching from downtown north to the city limits. It is made up of several neighborhoods, but is thought of by residents as a cohesive area because of its clear link to the recognizable corridor that runs its length.

I-581, the northern city limits, and the Norfolk Southern rail line define neighborhood edges. The area includes the airport, the Roanoke Civic Center, several commercial/industrial corridors, and diverse residential areas. Its 6.5 square miles constitute 15% of Roanoke’s land area and nearly 14,000 persons live in the Williamson Road area, representing 15% of the city’s population.

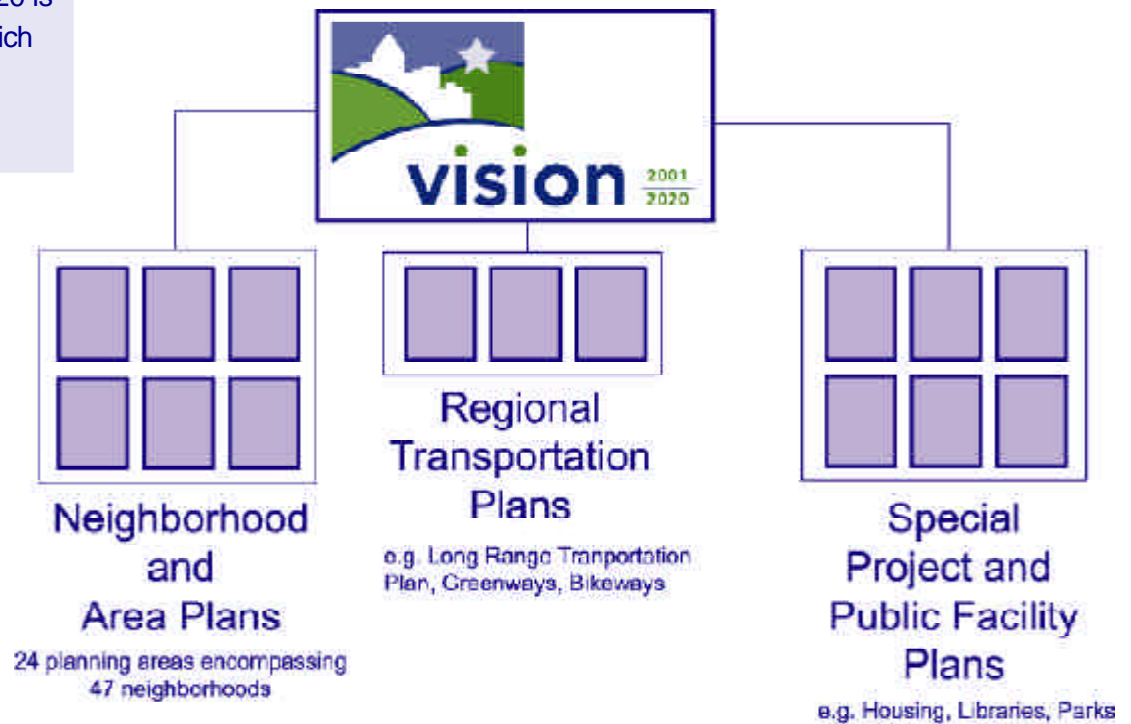


## About Neighborhood Planning

In 1985, *Roanoke Vision*, the City’s comprehensive plan called for the preservation and enhancement of existing neighborhoods and recommended that city policies and actions support neighborhood revitalization and preservation. A major recommendation toward that end was to develop a plan for each neighborhood. *Vision 2001-2020* continues support for neighborhood-based planning for a livable and sustainable city. This plan recommends actions that can be carried out by citizens, the city, neighborhood organizations, and other supporting interests, as well as policies that are used to guide future decisions. Neighborhood and area plans are official documents that are adopted by City Council and become part of the city’s comprehensive plan.

Residents and businesses were involved in the planning process as community stakeholders. Planning staff sponsored three workshops in spring and summer 2003 to work with citizens to identify major neighborhood concerns. Once a draft of the plan was completed, staff sponsored two additional workshops in spring 2004 to review the draft version.

Roanoke’s comprehensive plan is made up of many plans. *Vision 2001-2020* is the umbrella under which component plans are adopted.

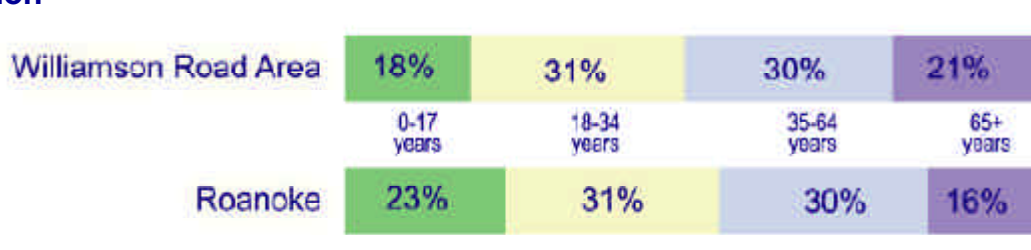


## Population Characteristics

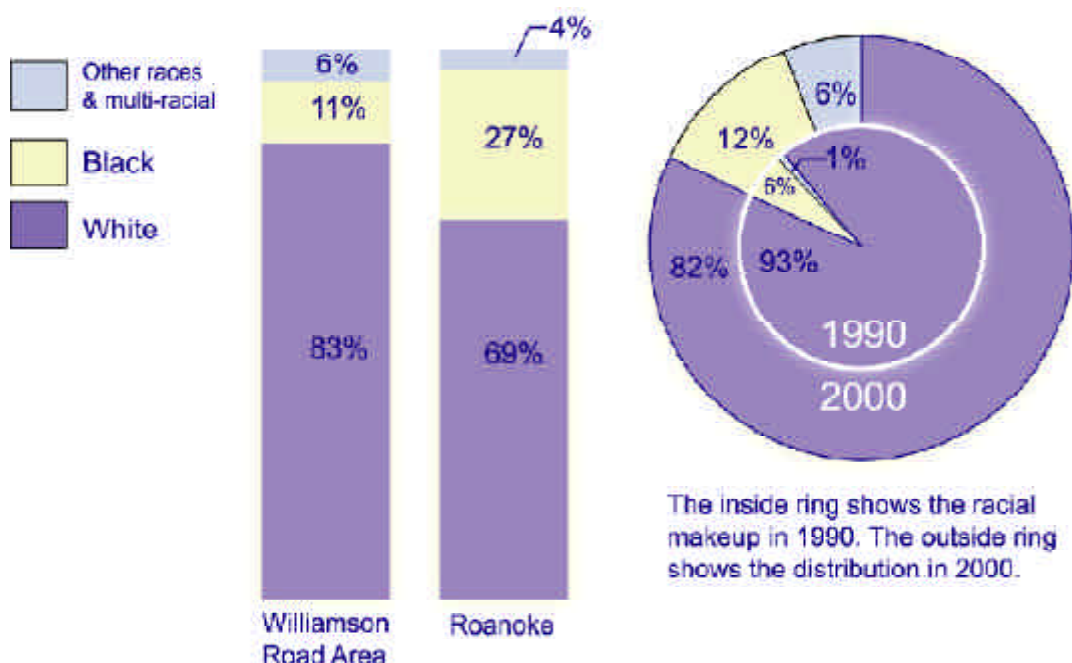
The population of the Williamson Road area is 13,957, and it decreased less than 1% between 1990 and 2000. Though the number of residents remained stable during the 1990s, the population diversified in terms of race. The African American population nearly doubled and people of multiple races or of other races more than tripled.

The area has a smaller percentage of young people and a higher percentage of seniors than the city as a whole.

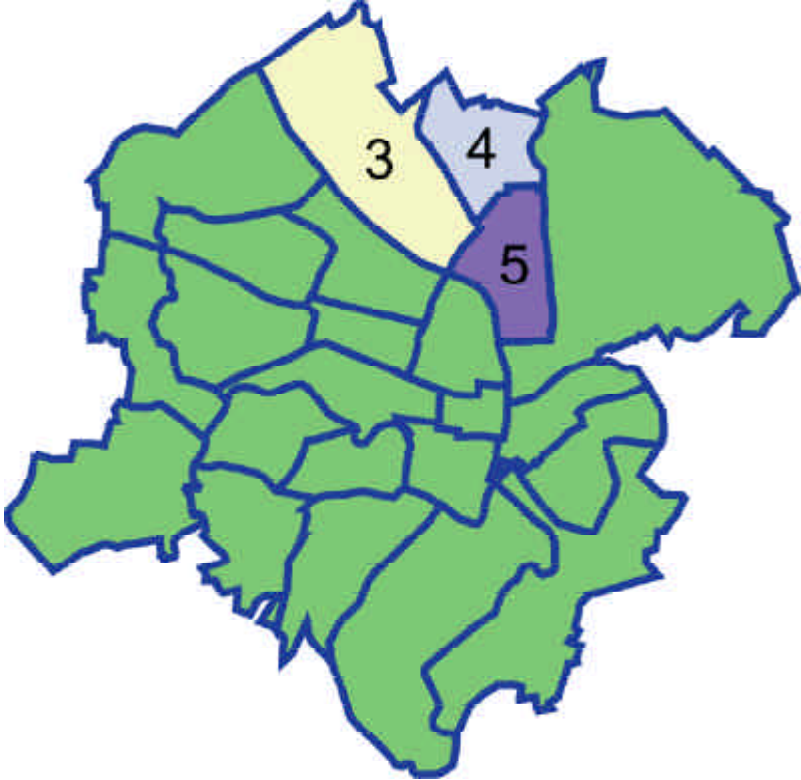
## Age Distribution



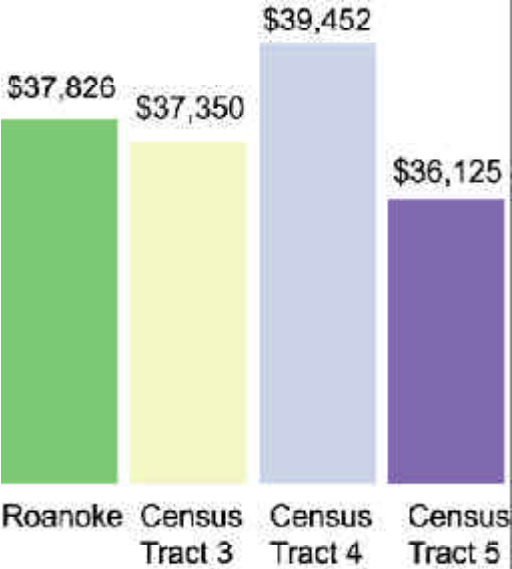
## Racial Distribution



**Census Tracts**



**Annual Family Income**



**Employment by Job Sector**

<u>Employment Sector</u>	<u>Roanoke</u>	<u>Tract 3</u>	<u>Tract 4</u>	<u>Tract 5</u>
Management/Professional	27%	26%	20%	19%
Service	17%	19%	12%	15%
Sales/Office	30%	33%	37%	33%
Construction/extraction/maintenance	9%	7%	11%	11%
Production/transportation/material moving	17%	16%	21%	23%

Some figures may not equal 100% due to rounding.

## Plan Elements

Discussion in this plan is organized into six major **Plan Elements**:

- ◇ Community Design
- ◇ Residential Development
- ◇ Economic Development
- ◇ Transportation
- ◇ Public Services & Facilities
- ◇ Quality of Life

The Community Design element looks at physical design features and land use patterns. Residential Development addresses existing and new housing opportunities. Economic Development deals with commercial and industrial development in the neighborhood. The Transportation element evaluates vehicular and pedestrian transportation systems. The Public Services & Facilities element assesses Fire/EMS, police, libraries, schools, and utility systems. Finally, the Quality of Life element addresses recreational opportunities, historic resources, environmental issues, and community involvement. Each plan element contains information about current conditions and issues.

## High Priority Initiatives

This plan identifies the following **high priority themes**:

- ◇ Creating a network of unique and identifiable places
- ◇ Changing land use patterns to respond to emerging commercial development patterns
- ◇ Improving the appearance and function of streets
- ◇ Improving the design of new buildings and sites

In addition to these priority themes, the following important issues were identified by participants in the community workshops:

- ◇ Code enforcement
- ◇ Library improvements
- ◇ Widening of Plantation Road
- ◇ Stadium traffic
- ◇ Traffic calming
- ◇ Overhead utilities

The plan establishes a framework for future land use decisions and also identifies areas where further detailed planning is necessary.

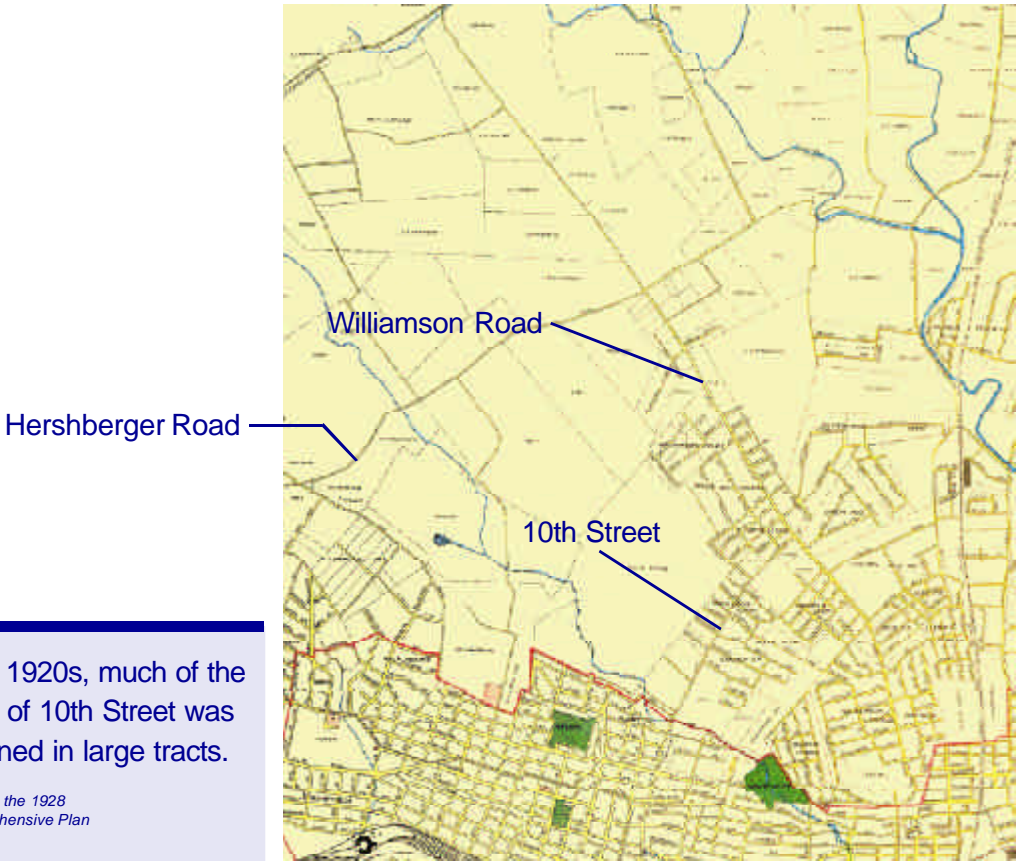


### Development History

The Williamson Road area was settled at the same time as Roanoke, but it developed later in the city's history. Land in the Williamson Road area remained in the hands of just a few owners until the 1850s.

The first landowner in the area was Mark Evans, who acquired most of the area in the mid 1700s. The area was known as "The Barrens." His land was eventually sold by his heirs to several major property owners, including Robert Breckinridge. Tracts generally contained 300-400 acres. By the mid-1800s, tracts were in smaller increments from 150-250 acres. Major landowners were Edward Watts, Elisha Betts, Lucy Carvin, and Alexander Bruce. The Town of Gainsboro was established near the intersection of what is now I-581 and Orange Avenue. Gainsboro never achieved significant settlement as a town and was later absorbed into the City of Roanoke.

By the early 1900s, tracts were being sold in even smaller parcels of under 60 acres. Still, fewer than 100 families owned land in the Williamson Road area. By this time, major neighborhoods had been established around Roanoke's downtown and development began to extend into streetcar suburbs like Raleigh Court and Rugby.





Until 1912, there was no Williamson Road. What is now Tenth Street was the only road of consequence in the area. Residents petitioned Roanoke County for a road that would lead to downtown. Several residents provided the funding, land, and machinery to build the road and the state provided labor. The state had to condemn the property of the Williamson family to acquire right-of-way. Immediately following the hard-surfacing of the road, businesses and residents began to develop along the length of Williamson Road.

Roanoke's real estate assessment records show that settlement was sparse until the 1900s, when widespread automobile ownership made the area more accessible and tracts began to be subdivided and sold as small individual lots. Between 1920 and 1940, about 1,000 lots were developed.

The era following WWII is when the real building boom came. Between 1940 and 1960, over 3,500 lots were developed. Postwar prosperity, housing shortages, new mortgage lending practices, and the automobile all combined to make the area both accessible and desirable to people seeking suburban home ownership. Development radiated out from the intersection of Liberty Road and Williamson Road. Most of the streets were laid out and most land was developed out by 1960, but significant residential development continued through the 1970s.

Commercial development has traditionally located along the Williamson Road corridor and was mixed with residential development. Indeed, many residential structures remain along the corridor. Williamson Road steadily converted over to mostly commercial uses. The *1964 Development Plan for Roanoke* showed that Williamson Road was nearly all commercial. By 1970, the southern end of Williamson Road was anchored by the Civic Center and Sears Town. To the north, Crossroads Mall was built at the intersection of Hershberger Road in 1961.

Williamson Road became a vibrant, thriving commercial corridor lined with businesses, each competing for attention. In the 1960s and 70s, Williamson Road's straight lines and numerous traffic lights made it an ideal place for cruising and drag racing. The street actually became a social center of sorts as teens cruised up and down the road on weekends.

In the mid-1980s, Valley View Mall was built along the western side of the area, solidifying the Williamson Road area's identity as a major regional commercial center. Development in the Valley View Mall area continues and is nearing its full development capacity in terms of vacant land.

# Community Design

## Physical Layout

The physical layout of streets and lots reflects the period in which most of the area was developed. Following WWII, suburban development patterns were gaining acceptance, while vestiges of traditional urban patterns remained. Traditional patterns called for compact lots and narrow streets arranged in a connected grid, while suburban patterns had larger lots that fronted on wide, curving streets. However, the now-common practice of ending a street in a cul-de-sac was not frequently used. Despite its varied development styles, the area has a connected system of streets that provide for even distribution of traffic along many streets. Residential lots generally range in size from 5,000–10,000 square feet.

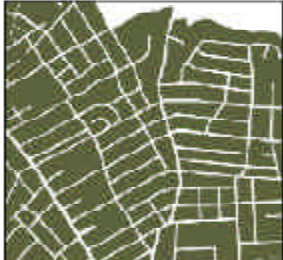
Street patterns have characteristics of both traditional and suburban neighborhoods. Streets are interconnected and blocks tend to be large.

Belmont



Connected streets with small blocks

Williamson Road



Connected streets with larger blocks

Deyerle



Disconnected streets with very large blocks

## Land Use Patterns

The neighborhoods have a diverse land use mix. Though perceived as predominantly commercial, residential uses occupy nearly half the land. The northern and southern edges are dominated by intense commercial uses, but between Liberty Road and Hershberger Road, commercial development is limited to the Williamson Road corridor. Outside this corridor, residential uses are the dominant land use. Industrial uses are concentrated along Plantation Road and Kimball Avenue.

There are few vacant parcels. Though 16% of the land area is classified as vacant, much of it is actually used for parking in conjunction with commercial and industrial land uses. Most other vacant parcels are individual lots scattered around the neighborhood.

# Existing Land Use

## How land is USED

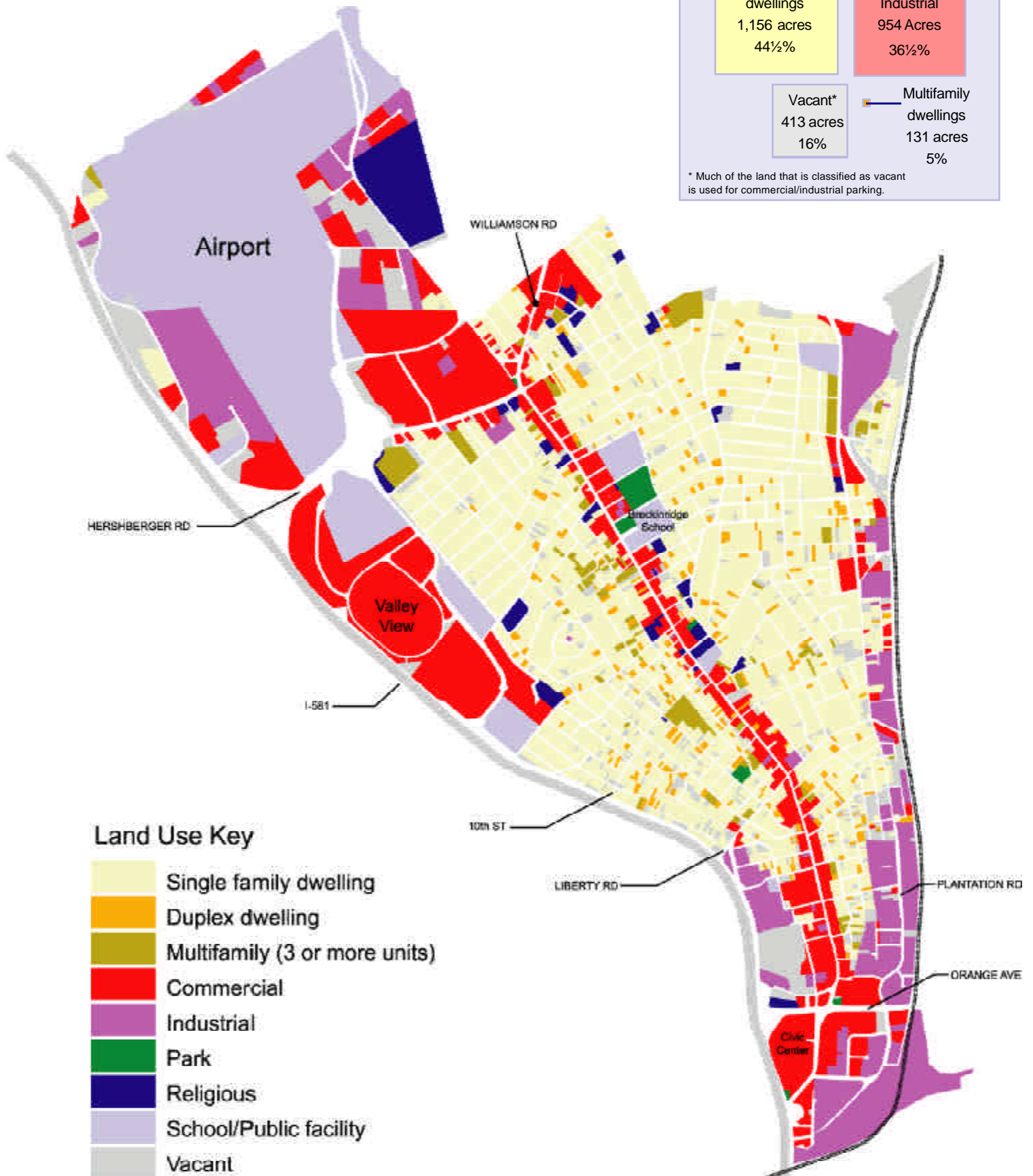
Single-family dwellings  
1,156 acres  
44½%

Commercial & Industrial  
954 Acres  
36½%

Vacant\*  
413 acres  
16%

Multifamily dwellings  
131 acres  
5%

\* Much of the land that is classified as vacant is used for commercial/industrial parking.





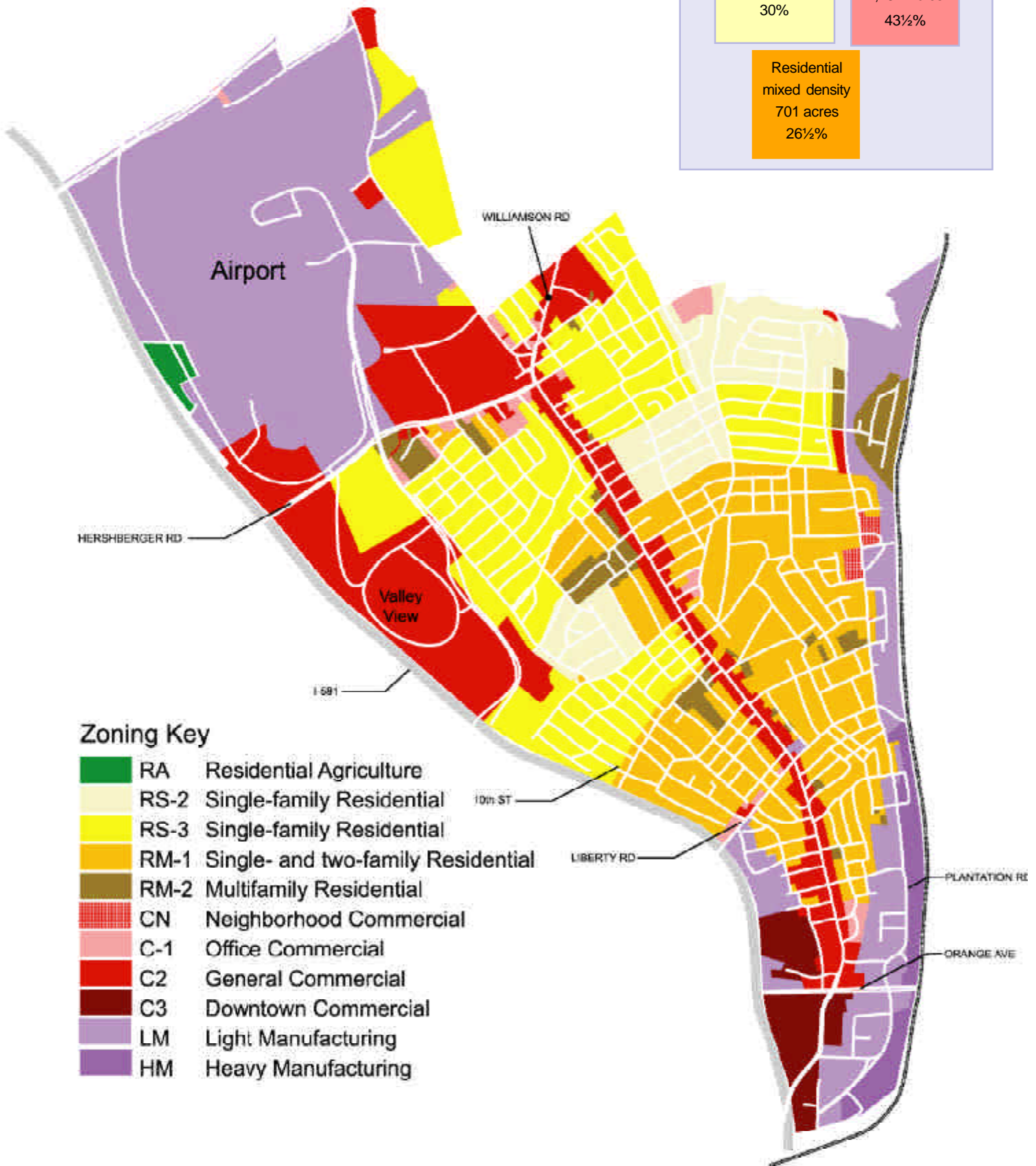
# Existing Zoning

## How land is ZONED

Single-family dwellings  
803 acres  
30%

Commercial & Industrial  
1,151 Acres  
43½%

Residential mixed density  
701 acres  
26½%



### Zoning Key

- RA Residential Agriculture
- RS-2 Single-family Residential
- RS-3 Single-family Residential
- RM-1 Single- and two-family Residential
- RM-2 Multifamily Residential
- CN Neighborhood Commercial
- C-1 Office Commercial
- C2 General Commercial
- C3 Downtown Commercial
- LM Light Manufacturing
- HM Heavy Manufacturing

## Community Design Issues

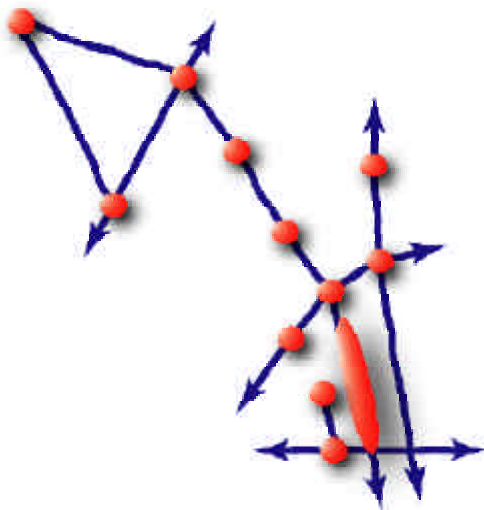
Through the planning process, planning staff identified major issues relating to the overall design of the community.

- ◇ Need for identifiable and unique places
- ◇ Commercial land use policies
- ◇ Relationship between residential and commercial uses
- ◇ Design of major streets

These are interrelated issues that need to be addressed in a comprehensive approach. The commercial corridor is not an inherently bad development form. Rather, it is the character of the development that usually takes place along it. While many communities attack the problem by geographically limiting strips, Roanoke's approach should be to improve the character of the development and "punctuate" the strip with a series of identifiable and unique places. Several such places along Williamson Road should be targeted for development as models for future development patterns. While this plan identifies node areas along Williamson Road, locations and priorities may be adjusted based on consensus of the business community, neighborhood interests, and the City of Roanoke.

## Strategic Initiatives

A key symptom of strip commercial patterns is that there are few identifiable and unique places. To address this issue, this plan identifies eleven **Strategic Initiatives** where master plans should be developed with the intent of creating (or building on) identifiable nodes. Plans should be developed through a charrette process to produce consensus on a vision for each of the areas. Conceptual drawings should be developed to illustrate desired development patterns, building types, and street designs. Each Strategic Initiative listed below is discussed in more depth in the **Recommendations** chapter.



- ◇ Airport
- ◇ Civic Center/Stadium
- ◇ Auto sales & service cluster
- ◇ Oakland School
- ◇ Breckinridge School
- ◇ Crossroads Mall
- ◇ Valley View/Towne Square
- ◇ Plantation and Liberty
- ◇ Liberty Road & Williamson Road
- ◇ Whiteside Village Centers
- ◇ Liberty Road at Courtland Road

## Adapting Commercial Land Use Policies

Regional land use and zoning policies of the 1950s and 60s solidified commercial development patterns along Williamson Road. The *1964 Development Plan for Roanoke* designated the entire corridor for commercial uses. Later changes in the nature of commercial development would work to compromise the viability of older commercial areas.

Between 1970 and 2000, hundreds of acres of new commercial development were created. Valley View Mall, Towne Square, Tanglewood, Route 419, and incremental additions throughout the region all represented major shifts in commercial development patterns. Activity moved to suburban areas near new population centers and the scale of development also increased. As these new commercial areas were created, demand for commercial property diminished in older areas like Williamson Road.

Regional zoning policies did not respond to these changes. Continuous expansion of the region's commercial development is not sustainable because a given population can only support a finite amount of activity. With slow population growth, new commercial areas not only supported new commercial development, but also drew business activity away from older commercial areas such as Williamson Road.

Two factors indicate that a saturation point has been reached: low floor-area ratios and low property values. *Floor area ratio* is a measurement of how intensely a property is developed. It is calculated as the ratio of building area to land area. The C-2 zoning district allows for a floor area ratio of 5-to-1 (five square feet of building can be built for each square foot of land). However, the average floor area ratio for properties along Williamson Road is 0.21-to-1, which is only **4%** of the allowable ratio. This low ratio indicates low demand for existing commercial land. Conversely, high demand for commercial property results in high floor area ratios because developers must maximize the use of the land.

Depressed property values are another symptom of a saturated market for commercial property. Property assessments show that commercial land values are very low along the corridor - averaging around \$4 per square foot. By comparison, land values in downtown average \$16 per square foot. Low land values along Williamson Road have resulted in chronic vacancies because values do not justify investment or spur owners to ensure that buildings produce income. Development tends toward very low-value buildings that are even below typical residential per-square-foot costs. Low land values result in business sites being dominated by asphalt instead of buildings because there is little financial incentive to maximize use of the site.



Some of the corridor's issues relate to zoning patterns that have not responded to sharp increases in the region's supply of commercial property. During the planning workshops, several participants felt the city should expand commercial zoning deeper off of the Williamson Road corridor so businesses could expand to the rear of their existing properties. This approach seems to be a logical way to support business development in the area. However, such action would likely aggravate the problem of a saturated market for commercial property.

This problem is not unique to Roanoke. The Urban Land Institute, recognized as an authority on real estate and land development issues, recommends *reductions* in commercial zoning to encourage revitalization of commercial corridors.

The economic health and sustainability of Roanoke's business environment depends on wise use of its scarce land resources. Improvements in long-term commercial land values will result from limiting, rather than continuously expanding, the supply of general commercial properties. Restricting the supply of commercial zoning will have the long-term effect of improving the quality of commercial development because it will encourage developers to invest more in a given amount of land.

In the Williamson Road area (as well as citywide), Roanoke must seek opportunities to create transitions to a mixture of less intensive commercial types and residential uses. The following types of land uses should be reviewed for possible transition:

- ◇ Small-scale retail, service, and office uses
- ◇ Existing residential uses
- ◇ Vacant properties

The **Future Land Use Plan** (see **Recommendations** chapter) identifies areas for transition to small- and medium-scale commercial activity. In addition, the plan strongly recommends against further piecemeal expansion of general commercial districts. Existing business types and other land uses were considered in developing the **Future Land Use Plan**.

While the amount of commercial land would not be significantly increased, public policies can provide for growth by increasing the development potential of existing commercial properties. One recommendation is to relax or eliminate some setback requirements and abandon setback ordinances, thus allowing many businesses to expand to the front of existing buildings. Another recommendation is to reduce or, in some cases, eliminate parking requirements. The vast majority of businesses provide more parking than is required. With less land devoted to setbacks and parking, most businesses will gain ample room to expand on existing commercial property. Reduced parking requirements would also open up the opportunity to establish common parking lots that serve multiple businesses.

## Residential/Commercial Compatibility

Conflicts between residential and commercial uses have been a long-standing problem along most commercial corridors. Business and residential uses can peacefully coexist beside one another. Many conflicts can be addressed by conscientious business practices, thoughtful site design, and retention of existing transitional land uses such as small scale businesses, offices, open space, and higher density residential uses. There are several general strategies available for improving relationships between business and residential uses:

- ◇ Locate new buildings toward the front of the site, so that objectionable activity is physically moved away from residences.
- ◇ Ensure that noise and lighting stays on the commercial site.
- ◇ Make buildings attractive from all visible sides.
- ◇ Buffering and screening—physical separation with green space, fencing, and vegetation—should be used to complement good site and building design.

This plan advocates creating good relationships between diverse uses rather than strictly separating them from one another.

## Street Design



Portions of major arterial streets like Williamson Road and Hershberger Road are hazardous for pedestrians and should be priorities for new sidewalks.

Another problem common to commercial corridor development is the quality of the street itself. Strip development typically occurs along a busy arterial street that is designed solely to move vehicles efficiently. There were numerous comments in citizen workshops related to making the community more attractive and walkable. Improving the appearance and function of major streets is a fundamental step in cultivating a better image of commercial areas as well as the neighborhoods that border them.

This plan advocates comprehensive improvements to key arterial streets to improve the overall definition of the street, define access points, improve overall appearance, and make walking and biking comfortable means of transportation. Both the business community and residents expressed a strong desire for a continuous sidewalk system along Williamson Road to encourage pedestrian access. However, the means for accommodating bicycles was less definitive. Members of WRABA expressed concern about safety, given traffic volumes and the potential for bike lanes to induce bicycle traffic by less-accomplished riders along the corridor. Bikes currently have the right to use the street and Williamson Road might be a preferred route for a commuter cyclist, while a parallel route would likely be preferred by the recreational cyclist. Moreover, alternative street design features other than bike lanes can work to accommodate able riders.

Ultimately, these considerations should be factored into planning of street improvements, which should involve residents and the business community. The **Transportation Recommendations** provide general guidance for streetscape improvements. Each street segment will need detailed study as to what actual improvements are implemented.

It is important to note that city-sponsored improvements to a right-of-way will not necessarily make for a good street. The design and layout of privately-owned properties and buildings are also crucial elements of an improved streetscape.

## Parking Strategies

Parking emerged as an issue in discussions of the draft of this plan—particularly as it relates to site development with buildings close to the front and parking to the side and rear. Parking is a crucial issue because Williamson Road, like most commercial corridors, lacks on-street parking. Parking is typically provided on each individual site and is often provided in the front. The cumulative effect of this arrangement is that the streetscape becomes dominated by asphalt rather than buildings. In order to ensure ample spaces for customers, businesses often oversize parking areas. Such parking areas are often underused and consume limited land resources to a largely unproductive use. Strategies are needed to adequately meet parking needs while contributing to a better urban form.

First, regulatory constraints must be removed. One barrier is the minimum off-street parking currently required by zoning. Applying the CN (Neighborhood Commercial), which has no parking requirement, is one way to provide flexibility. Providing allowances for available on-street parking is another way to provide flexibility.

Second, street-side parking should be encouraged as a preferred arrangement. Most blocks of Williamson Road have potential for creating new parking areas with direct access to the street. Such parking areas have parallel or angled parking which has the appearance of on-street parking, but would not involve conversion of travel lanes to parking. A good example of this strategy, as implemented, can be found at the former Virginia Hair Academy.

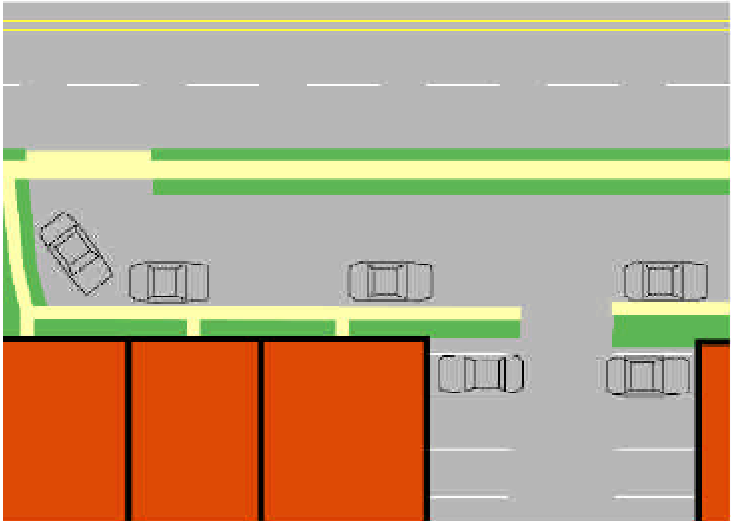


Street side parking on Williamson Road at Burton Avenue

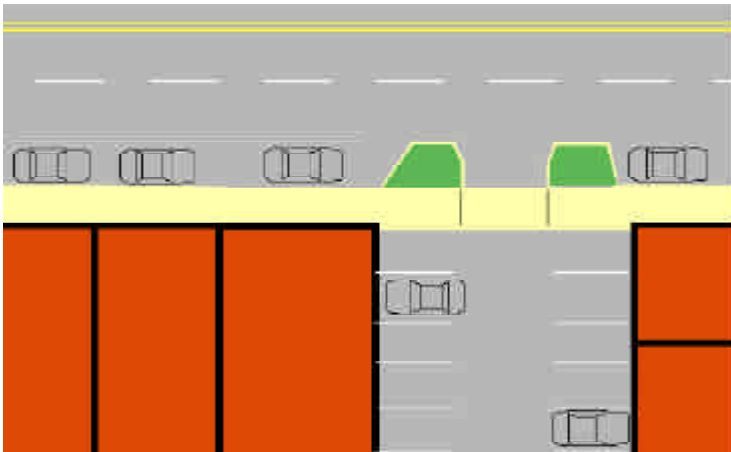
Finally, two types of shared parking lots should be created. **Public-access parking lots** should be created to provide customer parking for multiple businesses. Shared **long-term parking lots** should be developed as a means to move employee parking off-site to open up more convenient on-site spots for customers. Both public-access and long-term employee parking would make more lot area of a commercial site available for a business expansion. Furthermore, varying peak parking demands would reduce the total number of spaces needed, thereby allowing land resources to be used more efficiently.

Such new parking arrangements can be identified in several ways. A project should be initiated to do a block-by-block inventory of opportunities for street-side and shared parking. In addition, arrangements should be explored while planning the Strategic Initiatives.

This example shows a parallel “street” along which parallel or angled parking is created. A shared parking pocket is created between the buildings.



This example shows new street-access parking. A wide sidewalk and parking area become part of the right-of-way and are maintained as part of the street.



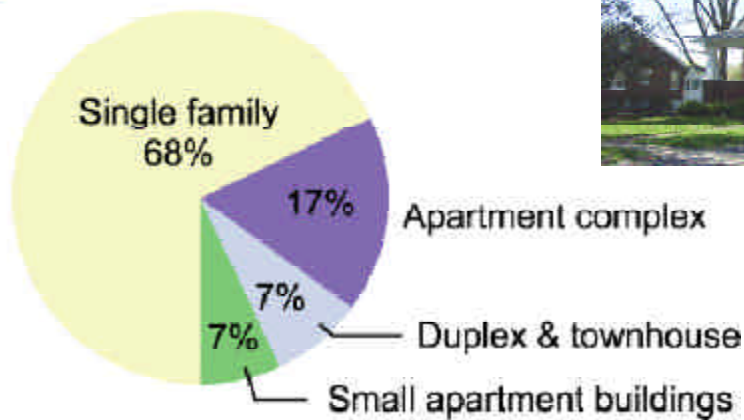
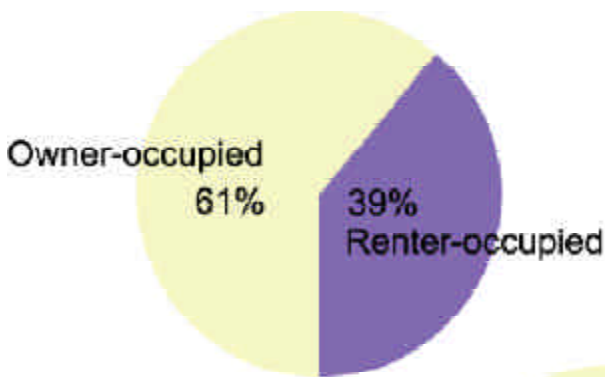
# Residential Development

Williamson Road’s neighborhoods are stable and its housing is generally in very good condition. Many of the houses are brick—a durable material that reduces maintenance requirements. Neighborhoods have a good mix of housing types and price ranges. The housing stock, along with a stable core of home owners, makes for an area of healthy neighborhoods. Participants in planning workshops cited good housing conditions and high home ownership rates as important neighborhood assets.

Housing styles in the Williamson Road area are probably more varied than anywhere else in the city. The area has an eclectic mix of architectural styles, including the American Foursquare, Craftsman Bungalow, and other Prairie-inspired styles. Also common are Tudor Revival houses with steep, complex roof forms. Later development included the familiar Ranch and split-level styles. While difficult to confirm, many houses are likely from the house pattern books by companies like Sears Roebuck which were popular in the early decades of the 20th Century.



The Williamson Road Area has a collection of unique and classic housing styles.



## Residential Density

Established residential density patterns generally decrease in density away from the city's center. Zoning should generally reinforce existing densities throughout most of the neighborhoods. *Vision 2001-2020* recommends higher densities around village centers; the Future Land Use Plan identifies appropriate areas for high density development such as apartments and townhouses. The **Future Land Use Plan** also encourages more residential development along Williamson Road.

## Housing Conditions

Housing conditions have not traditionally been an issue as with other neighborhoods. The Williamson Road area has not been surveyed to record housing conditions, so the assessment of conditions is based on informal staff observations. As mentioned before, housing conditions are generally very good. However, housing in areas south of Liberty Road is showing signs of deterioration which could accelerate if unchecked. In response, this plan recommends designation of a portion of the area as a Rehabilitation District. The Rehabilitation District designation makes special housing programs and incentives available. It also authorizes the City of Roanoke to implement the Rental Inspection Program.

Staff researched Census information on owner occupancy trends, age of housing, and housing values to identify Census Tract 5 as the recommended area for the Rehabilitation District expansion. Census Tract 5 is comprised of the area from 10th Street and Huntington Boulevard south to Orange Avenue.

Many houses in the Williamson Road area are brick veneer—a durable and low-maintenance material.





## Housing Design

At the planning workshops, residents expressed concern about the design of infill housing. A tool that could address this issue is the Neighborhood Design District. This district is an overlay zoning used in traditional neighborhoods to control design of new infill dwellings. Eligibility is based on whether the area has “historic or unique architectural value” and whether it is in a city-designated Rehabilitation District. The area’s neighborhoods are fully developed and there are few opportunities for residential infill development.

While the Neighborhood Design District may not be applicable throughout the neighborhood, builders should be conscientious about design and build houses that are compatible with existing development. Residential Design Guidelines are included in the Appendix. These guidelines can also be linked to development incentives and used to guide decision-making for special zoning requests.

## Deep Lot Subdivisions

Some blocks in neighborhoods in the northern parts of the area have lots that are very deep, creating interior spaces of vacant land. Such areas have the potential for haphazard development as flag lots. A better approach would be for willing owners to work together to create a coherent development pattern that would complement and add value to existing development, such as housing clusters fronting on narrow lanes. Zoning and street standards should discourage flag lot development and encourage a cluster development pattern (if the properties are developed). Such areas are ideal for development of housing clusters promoted by *Vision 2001-2020*. A more preferable option is to develop the interior sections as forested areas (see Quality of Life Chapter).



Aerial view of deep lots  
in the Oakland  
Boulevard Area

# Economic Development

## Commercial Activity Centers

The Williamson Road area contains major centers that have regional importance for entertainment, shopping, auto sales and service, and transportation. Valley View is a major regional commercial center. Valley View, Towne Square, and Crossroads contain three shopping centers and numerous big box retailers. It is the largest concentration of retail activity in the region. Businesses tend to be part of national and regional chains.

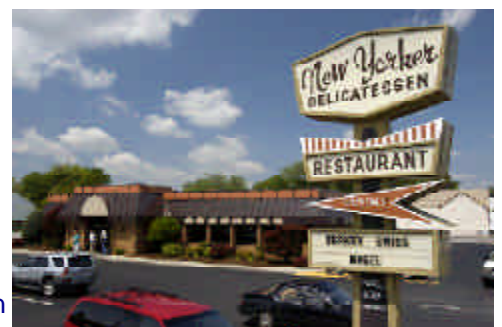
Williamson Road is a continuous strip commercial corridor that contains a considerable amount of Roanoke's economic activity. Though businesses tend to be smaller scale and locally-owned, the corridor has regional characteristics. Many individual businesses have a regional market and the corridor is collectively considered a regional draw.

Most industry is in the south of the area along Plantation Road and Kimball Avenue. Many of the major industrial uses are transportation-oriented (trucking, warehouse, and transfer) or associated with the building trades. CEI, located on Plantation Road, employs about 200 people.

Most of the major centers such as Valley View and Towne Square were established within the last 20 years. While this new development draws from the region, it has also drawn economic activity away from older commercial areas like Williamson Road and Crossroads. This plan will focus on the economic development and revitalization along the Williamson Road corridor.

## Vision 2001-2020

There are two recommendations in *Vision 2001-2020* that are especially applicable in the Williamson Road area. First is the policy of encouraging commercial development in appropriate places (i.e., key intersections and centers). Second is the policy of pursuing the Village Center development form as an economic development strategy to strengthen neighborhoods and the City's economy. Redevelopment of underutilized commercial and industrial sites was noted by *Vision 2001-2020* as a Strategic Initiative. Several sites are underutilized and should be considered for redevelopment. The two most crucial areas for revitalization efforts are the Williamson Road corridor and Crossroads Mall.



The New Yorker:  
a Roanoke institution

## Williamson Road Revitalization

The need for physical revitalization along Williamson Road has long been recognized. The Williamson Road Area Business Association has commissioned several planning efforts to encourage economic development, including the *Urban Design Catalog* and the *Williamson Road Corridor Plan*. The *Urban Design Catalog* recommended streetscape and building/site design improvements. The *Williamson Road Corridor Plan* recommended streetscape improvements and redevelopment of target areas. In 1995, a Virginia Tech Landscape Architecture studio developed conceptual plans for improvements along the corridor. None of the previous plans were adopted by City Council. Few recommendations have been widely implemented, though infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks and stamped crosswalks have been completed between Orange Avenue and Wayne Street.

Investment in public infrastructure can spur revitalization, but meaningful changes in the landscape of the Williamson Road corridor will also require major private investment. Changes in buildings and site development patterns are essential to transforming the corridor into a place that reflects the economic context of today and the future. A new urban form that meets today's economic and commercial needs must be identified and implemented. This plan recommends the following strategies:

- ◇ Change land use and site design patterns.
- ◇ Expand cooperative marketing and business promotion.
- ◇ Improve street function and appearance.



### Land Use Patterns & Commercial Design

The first strategy—land use and site development patterns—is implemented, in part, by the Future Land Use Plan and corresponding zoning patterns. The **Future Land Use Plan** attempts to create identifiable places along the corridor, encourage efficient use of land, and promote high quality development. Zoning patterns that implement the Future Land Use Plan will have limited effect in the short term. Existing uses and buildings are indefinitely grandfathered, so changes due to zoning tend to take place over the long term.

Shorter term change, however, must come from action by private landowners with a commitment to the long-term health of the corridor. To address building and site development, this plan includes voluntary **Commercial Design Guidelines** for building and site development. These guidelines are intended to complement zoning regulations. This plan recommends grants or tax incentives to offset a portion of site or building improvements that implement the Commercial Design Guidelines.

### **Coordinated Marketing**

Since its inception, the Williamson Road Area Business Association has worked to market the area. Coordinated advertising pools the resources of many and is a solid strategy for attracting customers (and new businesses) to the corridor. Such efforts should be continued and expanded.

### **Streetscape improvements**

The appearance and function of Williamson Road are crucial to future economic development. Limited sidewalk improvements have been made in the area just north of Orange Avenue. The segment of Williamson Road near Breckinridge School had a raised center median installed in spring 2004. Recommended streetscape improvements for Williamson Road are contained in the Transportation Recommendations.

The *Williamson Road Corridor Plan* presented several concepts that merit further consideration. First is the recommendation to create front parking areas that mimic the function of a local access street. These parking areas should be considered as an intermediate step for existing buildings set back 50 feet or more from the right-of-way.

Second is the idea for larger street identification signs in nodes and identification of major signalized intersections. These would work to identify nodes and establish landmarks along the corridor.

### **Special Service District**

The Williamson Road Corridor is designated as a Special Service District. Owners in the district pay an additional \$0.10 per \$100 of real estate valuation. This assessment yielded approximately \$64,000 in 2003-04. These funds are passed along to the Williamson Road Area Business Association. This funding covers a portion of staff and administrative expenses and also funds some projects.

On a national level, special service districts have traditionally been used for funding infrastructure improvements that are targeted in a specific area. Current revenues are unable to fund infrastructure projects, though the revenue has enabled funding of planning and consulting costs for infrastructure improvements. An increase in the special service district rate would need demonstrated support from the business community, which may come through clear links to specific benefits.

Business and neighborhood organizations should be active in purchasing strategically-located properties for economic development and neighborhood preservation. Land inventories could be used to develop shared parking, establish commercial-residential buffers, or appropriate transitional land uses.

## Crossroads Mall Revitalization

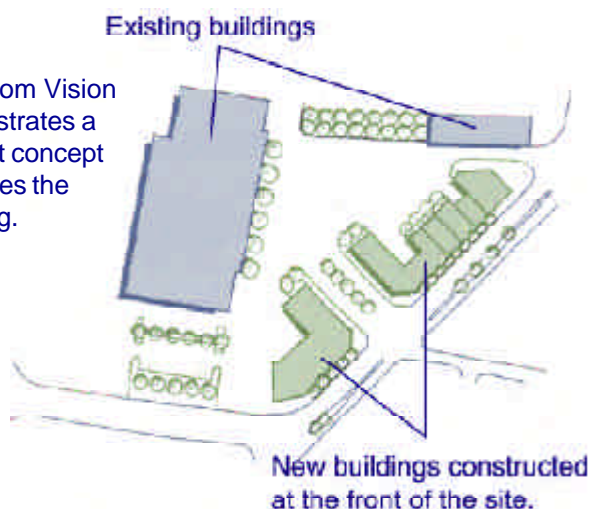
Built in 1961, Crossroads is an aging shopping mall that still has some viable uses, but suffers from vacancies. Its viability for retail seems marginal and office uses have begun to occupy the building.

The large site has potential for a mixture of high density residential, commercial, and even some low-intensity industrial uses. Large expanses of underused parking could be developed as buildings around the perimeters of the site, with new streets developed on the interior for access.

Research reveals that there were numerous malls built around the United States similar in style and function of Crossroads. It is no coincidence that many were actually called “Crossroads” because they tended to locate at major intersections. Many have declined over the years and are now undergoing redevelopment or revitalization. Some strategies suggest that redevelopment start from the outside and work inward until replacement of the original building becomes viable (Eastgate Mall in Chattanooga, TN). Other strategies include a total redevelopment of the site (Crossroads Mall, Boulder, CO). Still others simply rework the business mix and scale so it responds to the consumer market (Crossroads Mall, Seattle, WA).

While the owner (and tenants) have the greatest stake in redevelopment, a successful strategy should be developed with the involvement of neighborhood groups, business groups, and the City of Roanoke, who also have interest in the success of this important site.

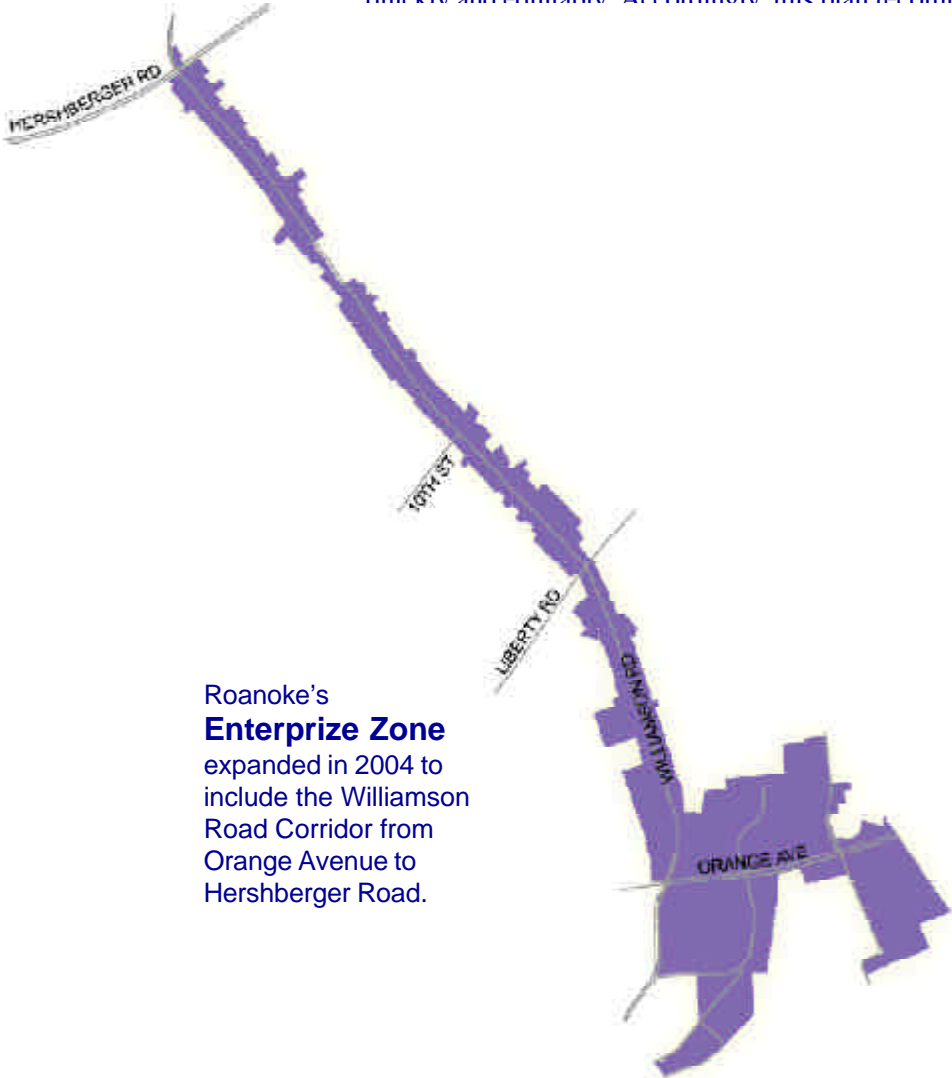
This excerpt from Vision 2001-2020 illustrates a redevelopment concept that incorporates the original building.



Crossroads Mall is an underused commercial site that should be considered for redevelopment

### Industrial Redevelopment

Vision 2001-2020 identified the area between Plantation and Hollins Roads north of Liberty Road as a future industrial development opportunity area. While the area has many active industrial uses, much of the land is underused. In addition, residential uses persist within industrial districts. Past policies to increase industrial land have been to simply rezone residential areas and allow economic forces to gradually convert areas over to industrial uses. However, time has proven this approach to be detrimental for both residential and industrial development. Residential uses that persist endure a low quality of life because of adjacent industrial uses. Residential lot platting patterns and diverse ownership result in awkward industrial development patterns and a lack of land that can be cohesively developed. When a decision is made to convert to industrial uses, the city should pursue proactive and comprehensive strategies to make the transition quickly and equitably. Accordingly, this plan recommends that the city designate



Roanoke's **Enterprise Zone** expanded in 2004 to include the Williamson Road Corridor from Orange Avenue to Hersherberger Road.



# Transportation

## Street System

The Williamson Road area has transportation corridors that are important not just to the immediate area, but to the city and the region. Major streets create a transportation framework. Within this framework, there is a complex system of smaller streets that provide access to residences and businesses.

Orange Avenue, Hershberger Road, and Peters Creek Road are major east-west routes that run through the planning area. Major north-south routes include I-581, Williamson Road, Airport Road, and Plantation Road. Valley View Boulevard runs from the interchange at I-581 north to the airport. This arterial's main function is to provide access to Valley View Mall, but also provides access to the airport and to shopping centers in the Crossroads area. In general, few arterial streets have traffic levels that exceed their capacities. However, some intersections are heavily congested.

I-581 and the Norfolk Southern rail line are major transportation corridors that define the east and west edges of the area. These edges also function as barriers that create broader access and circulation issues for this part of the city.

Plantation Road (south of Liberty Road) is an industrial corridor. Industrial uses appear to have developed along the rail line to take advantage of rail siding. However, few industries seem to actually use rail access in their operations.

Tenth Street, Liberty Road, and Airport Road are minor arterial streets. These streets tend to lack pedestrian accommodations and are priorities for sidewalk construction. Tenth Street is slated for improvements that will include turning lanes in selected locations, bike lanes, trees, and sidewalks.

Local and collector streets provide connectivity throughout the neighborhood. The street system is neither distinctly suburban nor urban, but a hybrid of the two. While there are few of the cul-de-sacs that typify suburban street systems, many streets end without connecting to arterial or collector streets. Still, streets are arranged in a loose version of the urban grid. Because of existing development, there are few, if any, opportunities for connecting streets without removing viable buildings. To help with wayfinding and make the street system more functional, this plan calls for formalizing some of the neighborhood collector streets such as Oakland Boulevard and Preston Road by striping parking lanes, installing trees, and installing sidewalks.



Arterial street network

# Street Framework



## Transportation Planning

Many transportation corridors in the area are important to the city and the region. Transportation planning should focus on the following principles:

- ◇ Encouraging smooth traffic flows at appropriate speeds that support livability and commerce
- ◇ Maintaining a connected system that evenly distributes local traffic among many local streets
- ◇ Increasing capacity by improving intersection operations rather than by street widening
- ◇ Considering appearance and relationship to adjoining land uses
- ◇ Reducing the number of traffic signals where warranted

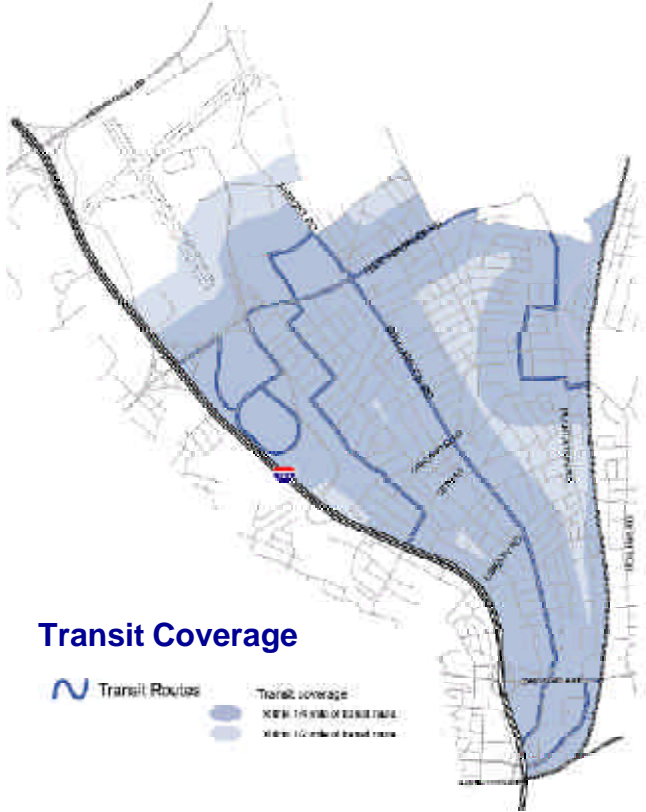
The Transportation recommendations outline proposed transportation improvements for arterial and collector streets.

## Civic Center & Stadium/Amphitheater Traffic

At the writing of this plan, the future of the stadium/amphitheater north of Orange Avenue is uncertain. If constructed on this site, it would combine with the Civic Center to create a major regional entertainment complex, which could create periodic traffic congestion particularly when major events are held simultaneously at both facilities. In response, the City of Roanoke commissioned the *Roanoke Civic Center and Stadium/Amphitheater Traffic Management Plan* by HSMM, Inc. and Wilbur Smith Associates (October 2002) to assess how traffic will be coordinated. The plan recommends management strategies rather than major investment in street widening. Such an approach is appropriate given that high demands will occur only periodically. Likewise, parking demand will be accommodated with new lots next to the stadium/amphitheater and shared facilities with the Civic Center. In addition, shuttles will allow the excess capacity of downtown parking garages and lots to be tapped as evening demands are lower.

**Public Transit**

Access to transit is very good. Valley Metro has regular routes throughout the neighborhood along arterial streets. Most areas are within 1/4 mile of a transit route and all of the area is within 1/2 mile (see map). As nodes are developed, public transportation routes should reinforce them as points for accessing public transportation. Bus shelters should be located in each designated node.



**Pedestrian Accessibility**

Most residential streets lack sidewalks because they developed after WWII, when land developers discontinued the once-customary practice of installing sidewalks in neighborhoods as they developed. Cost would prohibit construction of sidewalks throughout the area, so priorities should be identified for new construction. Priority should be on ensuring that all arterial and collector streets as well as village centers and areas near schools have sidewalks and curbs. Liberty Road, Tenth Street, and Hershberger Road should be priorities for a complete sidewalk system. Safe crossings along Williamson, Hershberger, and Orange are needed.



## Greenways and Bikeways

The *Roanoke Valley Conceptual Greenway Plan* identified greenway routes along all the major arterial streets in the area. The plan also identifies greenway routes along the Lick Run and Tinker Creek corridors. The Lick Run Greenway, which runs from Valley View to Downtown, is expected to be completed in 2004.

Conceptual plans for the Tinker Creek and the Carvin's Creek greenways run through the northeastern edge of the area. The *Tinker Creek Conceptual Master Plan* developed by Virginia Tech students and the Roanoke Valley Greenway Commission identified alternatives for greenway alignment along Tinker Creek. The plan also included a new park south of Palmer Road. This park would serve as a destination along the greenway as well as being an asset to the adjacent neighborhood.

Greenway plans show a connection between Valley View Mall and Oakland Boulevard. Completing this connection would have multiple benefits. First, it would improve neighborhood access to the greenway system. Second, it would help address the limited pedestrian/bike connections to the mall. Finally, it would establish a connection to the Tinker Creek Greenway via Oakland Boulevard.

Oakland Boulevard is not currently identified in the *Roanoke Valley Conceptual Greenway Plan*. This on-street connection would connect the Lick Run and Tinker Creek greenways as well as provide access to Preston Park, two schools, and the library. This connection should be added to the regional plan as an on-street greenway.

The *Roanoke Valley Regional Bikeway Plan* designates a number of routes through the neighborhood along arterial streets. The plan also designates parallel north-south routes on Oakland Boulevard and west of Williamson Road. The area has no designated bike lanes. Greenway routes shown on the map also serve as bike routes.

Designated on-street greenway routes should be evaluated for pedestrian/bike accommodations. Such routes should have features appropriate for an urban street and considered in street projects and repaving.





# Public Services & Facilities

## Public Safety

Fire/EMS Station #2 is located on 55 Noble Avenue. It houses an aerial ladder truck, a fire pumper truck, and an ambulance. It also serves as the office for the Command Battalion Chief. Station #10 is located at the Roanoke Regional Airport and provides response at the airport and to the northern parts of the city. In addition to three airport rescue trucks, it houses a fire pumper, a tanker, and an ambulance that serve the surrounding area. This station also includes the regional Hazardous Materials unit.

As part of Roanoke's Fire/EMS plan, a new station will be located along the northern Williamson Road corridor. Ideally, this facility could replace a non-viable land use. Underused, abandoned, or deteriorated properties should be identified and considered as future locations for this facility. Some equipment will be relocated from the Airport station to this new facility. Station #2 will remain in its current location.

The police department has a satellite office on Williamson Road in the Civic Mall building.

## Schools

**The Williamson Road Area has five elementary schools and one middle school:**

- ◇ Huff Lane MicroVillage Magnet Elementary
- ◇ Round Hill Montessori Magnet Intermediate
- ◇ Monterey Elementary
- ◇ Oakland Intermediate School
- ◇ Preston Park Primary School
- ◇ James Breckinridge Middle School

Students in the Williamson Road Area attend William Fleming High School.



The atrium of Breckinridge Middle School and Oakland Intermediate School



## Libraries

The area is served by the Williamson Road branch library located near Breckinridge Middle School. There was considerable discussion during the planning workshops about the library. Many cited the library as a major neighborhood asset and report that it is heavily used. Library patrons and employees reported that students, particularly those who attend Breckinridge, tend to go to the library after school. While some students go for traditional uses such as study, reading, or research, others use it as a gathering place. The role of this library seems to be expanding and it should be able to respond to such changes by ensuring that space and staffing are provided.

The library system will develop a strategic plan during 2004. This strategic planning process is the most appropriate forum for assessing needs and recommending the appropriate resources to respond to those needs. At the planning workshops, residents and business interests noted that the library is heavily used and expressed a strong desire to see the building expanded to accommodate existing and future demands.

The Williamson Road Branch Library is a heavily used neighborhood asset.



## Utilities

The entire area is served by public water, sewer, gas, telephone, and cable. Fiber optic coverage is very good; the only apparent gaps in service are along a small portion of Hershberger Road and a segment of Plantation Road.

Power, cable television, and phone utilities are generally located above ground except in more recently-developed neighborhoods. Overhead utilities contribute to the visual clutter along streets and this problem is acute along the Williamson Road corridor. During the planning workshops, residents and the business community strongly advocated relocation of utilities underground. While planning staff also advocates underground relocation, past discussions with AEP have led to the conclusion that placing them all underground at once is a cost-prohibitive proposition, even when done in conjunction with a street project. As part of the Williamson Road Corridor Plan, Hill Studio obtained an estimate of \$14 million for relocating utilities underground along the corridor. Planning for relocation of utilities underground remains a high priority for WRABA. AEP has indicated that it is unwilling to relocate utilities unless the City pays the expense.

Notwithstanding past conclusions that underground utilities are too expensive, some believe an independent study of the issue is warranted. Accordingly, this plan recommends independent study of strategies to reduce the impact of overhead utilities, including consolidation, screening, and undergrounding.

Other strategies besides underground relocation can reduce the visibility of overhead utilities. Relocation to the rear of the properties is one option that is less costly and is effective at reducing visual impact along the street. Another strategy is to locate service feeds underground. Much of the clutter is caused by individual service feeds between poles and customers' meters. The new zoning ordinance proposes to require underground service feeds for all new development. A third strategy is to plant street trees. While trees do not remove or relocate lines, they are effective in masking transmission lines and poles. Locations and species should be carefully considered to ensure effective screening, while avoiding interference with utilities that would eventually require significant pruning.



Trees reduce the visibility of utility lines, even during winter months. The photo above shows a street with few trees. Below is the same street with the same overhead wiring.



## Code Enforcement

Code enforcement was cited as a priority issue, particularly junk storage and inoperative vehicles. There was also considerable discussion about abandoned business buildings that have blighting influences. Code enforcement functions are undergoing continuous improvement with better strategies, staffing levels, and strengthened ordinances. Housing maintenance may become an issue in the southern part of the neighborhood. Designation as a Rehabilitation District would allow expansion of the Rental Inspection Program into the area.

## Solid Waste Management



Roanoke's Department of Solid Waste Management indicates there is a citywide problem with residents failing to remove trash containers from the street after collection. City code requires that containers be placed at the curb no earlier than 7:00 PM the day before collection and must be removed by 7:00 PM the day of collection. Complying with this law is important to maintaining neighborhood appearance.

Automated refuse collection and recycling collection are provided on-street throughout the neighborhood. No issues with solid waste management were cited by residents.

Roanoke's Department of Solid Waste Management has identified the need to begin the transition to automated collection of the WRABA litter receptacles located along the Williamson Road corridor. Since most collection throughout Roanoke is performed with automated equipment, the litter receptacles will need to be replaced with a type that can be emptied with automated equipment.

## Stormwater Management

The Williamson Road area has suffered from chronic storm drainage problems. Research reveals that a remarkable 62% of the Williamson Road corridor is impervious surface (44% asphalt and 18% buildings). In most cases, drainage from impervious areas (typically parking lots) is not retained and flows quickly off individual sites. A project in the mid-1980s invested \$10 million in storm drainage improvements along the southern part of the corridor. Despite this major investment, storm drainage problems persist in southern areas of Williamson Road.

Traditional approaches fall short of solving the problem because new impervious surfaces continue to be created. In addition to addressing the capacity of downstream storm drainage systems, it is crucial that upstream sources of runoff be addressed. Stormwater management regulations typically do not require controls when small lots are developed incrementally. The result is that new impervious surfaces are created without stormwater controls.

City and regional policies must limit impervious surfaces, encourage conversion of existing impervious surfaces to green space, and encourage tree planting. Policies should also set standards for the quality of runoff to reduce pollutants entering water courses. Additionally, policies should focus on infiltration systems that encourage stormwater to filtrate into groundwater.

A number of innovative strategies to address the amount and quality of stormwater runoff are available. Products like porous pavement and grass pavers allow stormwater to soak directly into the ground. Infiltration basins create areas that both filter and control runoff and can even become urban wildlife habitats. Rather than simply increasing stormwater drainage capacity, Roanoke should explore innovative techniques that promote sustainable and environmentally sound solutions for stormwater management.

Federal and state mandates are now requiring the City of Roanoke to manage the *quality* of stormwater runoff. The Virginia Pollution Discharge Elimination System (VPDES), and its federal counterpart (NPDES), require Roanoke to develop a five-year plan to improve the quality of water runoff through a combination of education, inspection, prevention and city policies. This program will ultimately result in a comprehensive stormwater quality management program that includes strengthened development regulations.

62% of the Williamson Road Corridor is covered by impervious surfaces. 44% of this coverage is asphalt. Buildings make up only 18% of impervious surfaces.

The EPA's Best Management Practices for urban stormwater management can be reviewed at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/stormwater/>



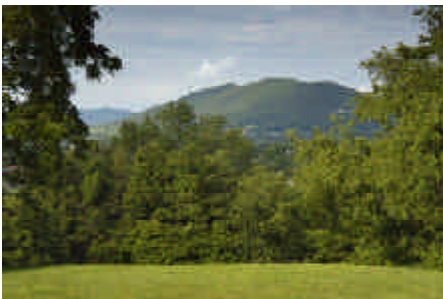
# Quality of Life

## Parks and Recreation

There are three parks in the area. Neighborhood parks range from two to ten acres and are intended to serve as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. Bowman Park, located on Meadow Street, is a 2-acre park that features new playground equipment. Preston Park is a 10-acre park located along Winsloe Drive and Preston Avenue. It is a major park with baseball fields, tennis courts, and basketball courts. Huff Lane Park has softball fields and playground equipment. Monterey School has a playground and park areas — including a great hill for winter sledding.

The Parks and Recreation department operates a fitness center at Breckinridge Middle School, which is available to residents for a nominal fee. There are two mini-parks in the study area. Williamson Road's mini parks are largely decorative and are not usable for recreational purposes. They are intended to provide passive green space. Andrews Park is located on Williamson Road between Hershberger Road and Curtis Avenue. Gateway Park is located on the corner of Orange Avenue and Williamson Road. It showcases three flags: the City of Roanoke, State of Virginia, and United States.

Most of the area has access to a park within one-half mile. The residential areas in the southeastern part of the area are underserved by parks. Bowman Park is fairly close, but practically inaccessible because children have to cross Williamson Road. A small pocket park is therefore needed in the Liberty Road area between Williamson and Plantation Roads.



Mountain vistas are visible throughout the area.



Preston Park Recreation Center



Historic Resources

Though the Williamson Road area is a relatively newly-developed part of Roanoke, there are notable architectural/historic resources, including Huntingdon (c. 1820) and the Harshbarger house (c. 1800; located in Roanoke County just north of the city limits). Both houses are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.

Older neighborhoods appear to contain "pattern book" houses that were popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Pattern books were catalogs of house plans that could be ordered and constructed on site. Sears Roebuck and Aladdin were the most popular purveyors of kit houses. Many of the Foursquare brick houses found in the neighborhood were likely from pattern books (or were inspired by plans from pattern books). A notable architectural type found in the Williamson Road area is the "Cotswold Cottage," a Tudor Revival style that was also featured in pattern books.

Helen Prillaman's *A Place Apart* (1982) provides a detailed history of the northern part of Roanoke from the late 1600s through the 20th Century.



The Tudor Revival style is common in the Williamson Road Area

Huntingdon (ca. 1820) is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.



## Community Involvement

The Williamson Road area has three active community groups. The **Williamson Road Action Forum** was formed in 1980 and has been a very active group representing primarily the residential interests. The **Williamson Road Area Business Association (www.wraba.org)** formed in 1981 to represent the business community. The organization has a full-time executive director. Its activities are funded by a special service district which assesses an additional tax on real estate along the corridor. The **Airlee Court Neighborhood Association (www.airleecourt.org)** represents a residential area north of Hershberger and both sides of Williamson. Formed in 1998, the association has been active in neighborhood watch and represents a balance of neighborhood and business interests. All three organizations are members of Roanoke Neighborhood Advocates.

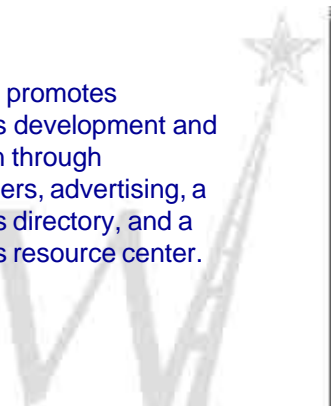


The Williamson Road Action Forum publishes a monthly newspaper with a circulation to 5,600 households.



WRABA and WRAF collaborated to erect this sign at Breckinridge Middle School

WRABA promotes business development and retention through newsletters, advertising, a business directory, and a business resource center.



Airlee Court Neighborhood Watch Association dedicated its new gateway sign in June 2004.





## Environmental Resources

Few, if any, undisturbed natural spaces remain in the area. Tinker Creek runs through the northeastern corner of the area. This resource should be protected by limiting development in its floodway. The Tinker Creek Greenway, when developed, will provide access along this waterway. The greenway should promote preservation of this stream.

Runoff from the area enters both Lick Run and Tinker Creek. Policies should promote improvements to the water quality of these streams by controlling stormwater quality and volume. Vegetated buffers should be established (or maintained) along these streams to filter runoff before it enters the waterway.

Increasing tree canopy coverage is crucial in the urban environment. Policies and programs recommended by the *Urban Forestry Plan* should be implemented to reflect the City's goal of increasing tree canopy coverage to at least 40% by 2013. Increases should come from both City tree planting in parks and along streets as well as on private properties.



Opportunities abound for adding to the neighborhood tree canopy. Open space areas created in the deep lot residential blocks discussed in the Residential Development chapter could create **80-100 acres** of new forested areas. In addition to the benefits of adding more trees to the neighborhood, such natural areas would add value to the properties and would require less maintenance than the current turf grass. Roanoke's urban forestry staff should work with neighborhood groups to introduce this idea to property owners and provide technical assistance on planting strategies. In addition, open areas along I-581 and within access ramps have the potential for adding many new acres of forested area.

# Recommendations

## Structure of Recommendations

Recommendations are presented in the following components:

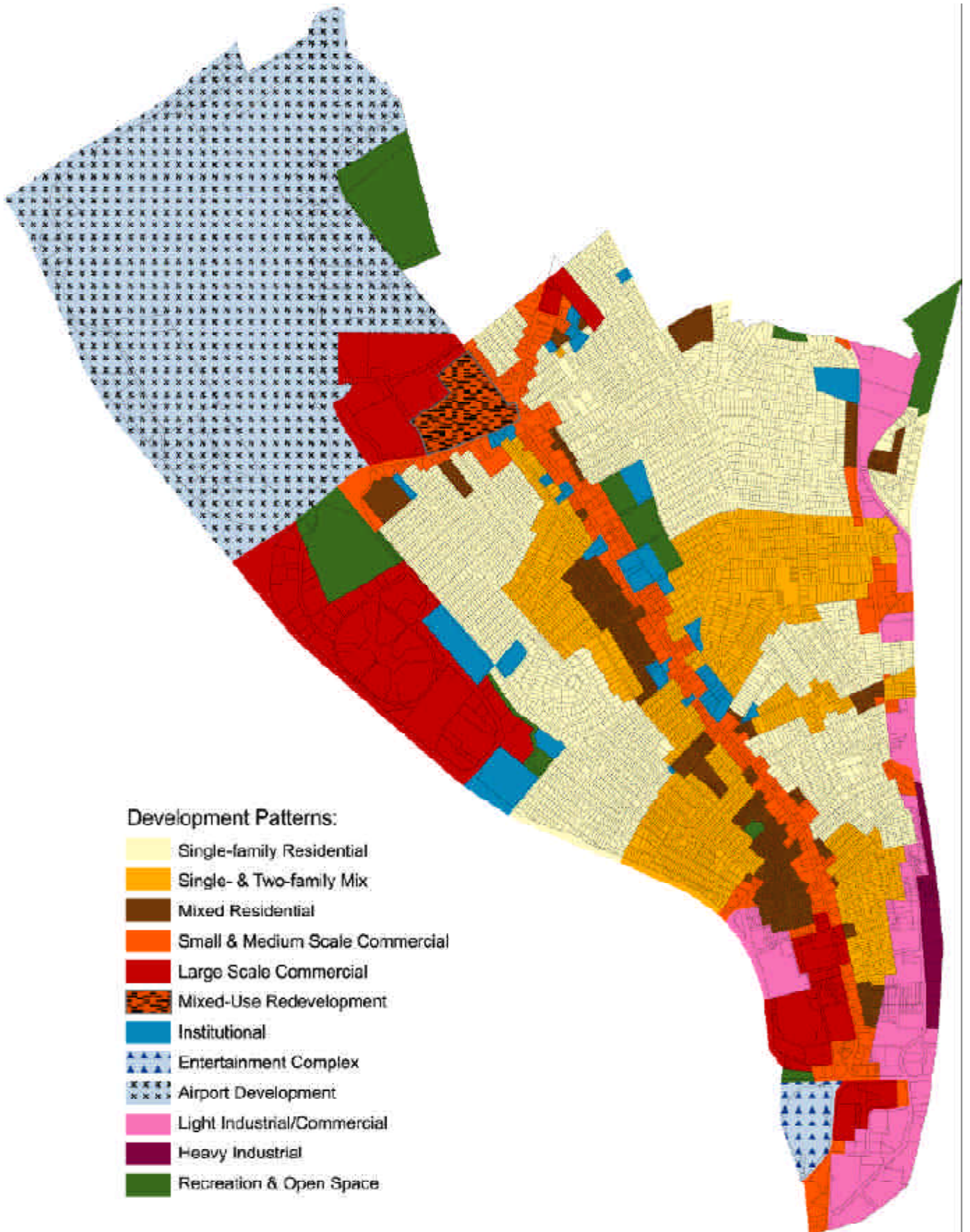
- ◇ **Future Land Use Plan**
- ◇ **Community Design**
  - Policies
  - Actions
  - Strategic Initiatives
- ◇ **Residential Development**
  - Policies
  - Actions
- ◇ **Economic Development**
  - Policies
  - Actions
- ◇ **Transportation**
  - Policies
  - Actions
  - Transportation Improvements
  - Street Design
- ◇ **Public Services and Facilities**
  - Policies
  - Actions
- ◇ **Quality of Life**
  - Policies
  - Actions

The **Future Land Use Plan** on the following page is the most important recommendation of this plan. It specifies how future development should take place. A description of each development pattern is included.

Other recommendations are organized by their respective Plan Elements (Community Design, Residential Development, etc.). Recommendations take the form of either *policies* or *actions*. Policies are principles or ways of doing things that guide future decisions. Generally, policies tend to be ongoing. Actions are projects or tasks that can be completed and have a definite end.



# Future Land Use Plan



## Development Patterns

The following development patterns correspond to the **Future Land Use Plan**. Zoning should reinforce and encourage the development patterns identified by the Future Land Use map. The following general development patterns are identified:

- ◇ ***Single-family Residential:*** established to reinforce existing neighborhoods of single-family dwellings. Minimum lot sizes will range from 5,000 to 7,000 square feet, based on existing lot patterns. New development will be in the form of new houses on existing lots scattered throughout the area.
- ◇ ***Single & Two-family Residential Mix:*** primarily for single-family dwellings, but two-family dwellings will be interspersed throughout the neighborhood, especially on corner lots where more on-street parking is available due to side street frontage. Duplexes should take on the form and appearance of single-family dwellings.
- ◇ ***Mixed Residential:*** encourages a mix of dwelling types. This pattern is mapped in areas with an existing mix of dwelling types and near identifiable nodes. New multifamily dwellings should be integrated into the neighborhood development patterns, rather than isolated into complexes.
- ◇ ***Small and Medium Scale Commercial:*** used in village centers or lengths of a corridor where commercial uses serve surrounding neighborhoods, but also have some uses that draw from regional markets. This pattern will encourage vertical and lateral mixing of business types in small scale buildings 2-4 stories in height. Typical uses are retail, services, offices, and restaurants. Smaller scales and the nature of uses makes these areas ideal for mixing in residential uses, especially on upper floors. Such areas should be designated with neighborhood commercial, office-residential, and general commercial zoning districts as appropriate for the context, scale, and existing land use pattern.

- ◇ ***Large-scale Commercial:*** encompasses Valley View Mall, Towne Square Shopping Center, and limited portions of Williamson Road. Commercial development within this pattern has a regional and super-regional market and includes shopping malls, big box retailers, and large-scale auto sales and service. Retail areas should be well-connected to one another to create a cohesive center. Access to surrounding neighborhoods must be balanced with the need to avoid spillover impacts. Regional commercial areas should primarily be designated with large scale commercial zoning, but may contain limited areas with general commercial districts.
- ◇ ***Mixed-use redevelopment:*** This pattern is applied to the Crossroads Mall site to encourage redevelopment with a variety of uses. A planned unit development zoning would be most appropriate as it would permit a broad range of uses organized in a master planned context.
- ◇ ***Entertainment/sports complex:*** encompasses the Roanoke Civic Center and surrounding areas. Land uses in this area should complement this major civic facility. Special attention must be given to traffic and parking management while improving overall conditions. This complex must be well-connected to Downtown to encourage use of parking structures and encourage activity in Downtown before and after events.
- ◇ ***Light industry/commercial:*** designates appropriate sites for light industrial and commercial uses. This pattern is used in the areas along Plantation Road and Kimball Avenue, where land uses tend to have characteristics of both commercial and industrial uses, such as contracting businesses and flex office-warehouses.
- ◇ ***Industrial:*** designates appropriate sites for either light or heavy industrial uses. The pattern is mapped in the limited places where there is separation from established residential uses— specifically, between Plantation Road and the rail line.

- ◇ ***Airport Development:*** encourages uses that relate to or benefit from close proximity to the airport. Developable land near the airport is a severely limited resource. Properties along Thirlane Road should be considered for future conversion to airport-related uses.
- ◇ ***Institutional:*** designates areas for assembly and public uses. Typical uses include schools, places of worship, community centers, and meeting halls.
- ◇ ***Open Space/Recreation:*** designates parks and passive open spaces. Also includes cemeteries.

## Community Design Policies

- ◇ **Neighborhood form:** Neighborhoods are the basic building block of urban form. The Williamson Road area will be a grouping of neighborhoods that integrate a diversity of residential, commercial, and industrial uses.
- ◇ **Commercial zoning:** General commercial and light industrial zoning will be limited within the area to locations where existing land uses and scale of development reflect the purpose of those zoning districts. In areas between identified nodes/clusters, zoning should be changed to less intense uses such as light commercial or residential. Future expansions of general commercial zoning will be discouraged except where they reinforce identified nodes or strategic initiatives.
- ◇ **Streets and public spaces:** Streets and public spaces must be well-designed both functionally and aesthetically. Parks and public squares will be established and preserved as part of the urban fabric. A public square should be included as an amenity of each village center.
- ◇ **Institutional buildings:** Institutional buildings such as schools and churches will serve as anchors for commercial centers.
- ◇ **Building scale:** Multiple-story buildings will be encouraged in commercial patterns to make efficient use of limited commercial land and to provide for diverse uses.
 

Residential buildings sizes and types vary throughout the area. Height, number of stories, and width should be guided by the context of other housing within the block. Near commercial nodes, apartment buildings of 2-4 stories are appropriate.
- ◇ **Building location:** Zoning regulations will encourage a pedestrian environment and desirable streetscape by allowing future buildings to be located close to the street, with the intent to set in motion a long-range transformation of commercial forms. Storefronts should be limited in width (25'-40') or broken into smaller units by changes in architectural features.
 

Residential buildings should also be placed closer to the front property line to maximize rear yards. In contrast to commercial forms, residential patterns should be reinforced by using existing setbacks to guide placement of infill dwellings.



## Community Design Actions

- ◇ **Parking:** Parking is recognized as a necessity, but must not be allowed to dominate any development. Parking lots should be located to the rear or side of buildings. The number of spaces provided should be limited to that which is needed for typical demands (rather than peaks) and consider the availability of on-street parking spaces. Street-side and shared parking arrangements are strongly encouraged.
- ◇ **Relationships between commercial and residential** uses can and should be harmonious. Businesses, as the more intense of the uses, should design their sites to ensure the necessary activities of commerce do not spill over to residential properties.
- ◇ **Zoning:** Implement zoning that will encourage land use patterns as illustrated by the **Future Land Use Plan** and will encourage positive relationships between commercial and residential uses.
- ◇ **Strategic Initiatives:** Develop site plans for identified Strategic Initiatives, with priority on the Oakland School and Crossroads Mall sites.
- ◇ **Streetscapes:** Initiate streetscape improvement plans for arterial streets.
- ◇ **Design Guidelines:** Communicate and promote the use of **Residential and Commercial Design Guidelines** in new development of buildings and sites. Incentive programs such as facade grants, real estate tax abatements for rehabilitation, or Enterprise Zone tax credits (if applicable) will be linked to conformance with design guidelines.
- ◇ **Explore ways to improve commercial-residential relationships:** Residential and business interests should begin discussion to identify a list of best practices that are conducive to both commerce and residential quality of life. Such practices should focus on strategies to deal with lighting and noise spillover.
- ◇ **Develop on-street parking:** Whenever new sidewalks and curbs are built along Williamson Road, assess opportunities for creating on-street parking areas.
- ◇ **Shared Parking:** Identify potential sites for shared “pocket” parking lots.

## Strategic Initiatives



The following sites are recommended for detailed study for design improvements or redevelopment. Strengthening these sites will create a network of special places that build on unique characteristics of the area.

### **Airport**

Roanoke is unique in that its airport is located within the city. Land around the airport should be reserved for land uses that are dependent upon and complement the airport. The airport is an important gateway to Roanoke. Details such as fencing, trees, signs, and streetscapes should be well designed to create a good first impression of Roanoke. The airport is inherently an interesting destination. Site planning could identify observation points and opportunities for interpretive features related to aviation.

### **Roanoke Civic Center/Stadium/Amphitheater Complex**

Regardless of whether the stadium/amphitheater project proceeds, the Civic Center complex remains a major regional center for entertainment. As a northern extension of Downtown, it should have clear connections with the City Market area. Greenway and sidewalk systems should facilitate easy pedestrian access between facilities and to downtown. By its nature, this area will have periodic traffic stresses during events, so access, traffic management, and parking demands should be carefully considered. Surrounding land uses should be guided toward commercial uses that are both complementary and compatible.

### **Auto sales and service cluster**

Berglund and Magic City Ford are large auto dealerships that have a regional draw. Auto dealers and service establishments benefit by clustering near one another rather than being randomly distributed along the length of the corridor. Within this cluster area, design features can build on Williamson Road's traditional automobile orientation with an emphasis on motion (as recommended by the Hill Studio plan).

Because auto dealerships tend to have buildings that are somewhat secondary to their display space, they generally have a weakly-defined orientation to the street. Design should work to strengthen the streetscape with landscaping, open structures, or other creative treatments.

### **Oakland School**

All of the past plans for the Williamson Road Corridor have recognized this site's potential. This is an ideal location for continued village center development. Oakland School, along with other existing buildings and uses, create the framework for a strong center. Site planning should explore the establishment of a public square beside Oakland School.

### **Breckinridge**

Breckinridge has potential for a strong center. A large park, two schools, and the library give this area an educational and recreational focus. A key land resource is the former Woodson Pontiac property. The City of Roanoke is installing a landscaped center median in this area to improve the streetscape.

### **Crossroads**

A Strategic Initiative of *Vision 2001-2020* is to redevelop underused commercial and industrial sites. A design illustration showing redevelopment of an older commercial center was included in the plan. Crossroads Mall should be considered for revitalization/redevelopment efforts. Work needs to begin on a long-range strategy for revitalizing this important site. Nationally, there are many examples of revitalization efforts specifically related to 60s-era malls. As neighboring developments capture the market for larger-scale uses, the logical course for Crossroads is to transition to a small- and medium-scale land use pattern as designated in the **Future Land Use Plan**.

### **Valley View**

Valley View is an important regional commercial center. It is a complex that clusters a major retail mall, big box retailers, and smaller restaurants and businesses. For the short term, planning strategies should seek to make better connections among regional attractions and provide better connections to surrounding residential areas without inducing cut-through traffic.

This center must be adaptive and diverse to ensure it has the ability to respond to changing markets over the long term. Future land use should consider a diversity of uses including residential and office uses. Because so much of the site is dedicated to surface parking, structured parking could be used to open up space for infill development as development demands warrant.

**Plantation at Liberty Road**

This area is recognized as a key intersection that should build on and improve existing development in support of surrounding residential, commercial, manufacturing, and industrial areas.

**Williamson at Liberty**

Here, a turn in the street's alignment creates an identifiable transition point along Williamson Road. Existing development on the northwest and southeast corners establishes a foundation for future village center development.

**Whiteside**

This is an established linear center along Plantation Road with potential for growth within its existing limits.

**Liberty Road at Courtland Road**

Elements of a small village center are already in place and a large market of high-density residential development is nearby.

# Strategic Initiatives





## Residential Development Policies

- ◇ **Housing diversity:** An appropriate balance of diverse housing types will be encouraged. Residential uses will include single- and two-family dwellings, apartments, townhouses, upper floor residential (above business uses), and live-work spaces.
- ◇ **Residential density patterns:** Generally, residential densities in and around village centers and commercial nodes will be high. Between village centers, residential densities will be lower.
- ◇ **Neighborhood marketing** will be used to maintain a strong market for new and existing housing.
- ◇ **Housing conditions:** Roanoke will encourage continued housing maintenance and will take preventive action to ensure the housing stock is not allowed to deteriorate.
- ◇ **Infill housing design:** New structures must be well-designed and compatible with existing housing (see **Residential Design Guidelines** in Appendix).
- ◇ **Discourage haphazard development** of deep lot subdivisions by ensuring that subdivision regulations prohibit flag lots and permit cluster development patterns.

## Residential Development Actions

- ◇ **Amend zoning map** as needed to implement residential density patterns as illustrated in the **Future Land Use Plan**.
- ◇ **Market the neighborhoods:** Develop materials to market the area's strong neighborhoods to Realtors and potential residents.
- ◇ **Survey housing conditions** in the southern neighborhoods and expand the Rehabilitation District into these areas as warranted to enable Rental Inspection Program, rehabilitation incentives, and Neighborhood Design District.
- ◇ **Implement Neighborhood Design District** in eligible neighborhoods. Conduct an informal survey of houses to identify intact groupings of historic pattern book houses.
- ◇ **Consider subdivision and zoning provisions** that encourage well-designed development of deep interior lots.

## Economic Development Policies

- ◇ **A network of commercial nodes** will be established along major corridors. Areas between these centers will be encouraged to transition to lower intensity commercial uses, high density residential uses, or a mixture thereof.
- ◇ **Clustering:** Encourage clustering of related uses to create special destinations (i.e., auto sales and service, restaurants, ethnic shops)
- ◇ **Commercial zoning:** The supply of commercial zoning along Williamson Road will be limited to encourage more efficient use of Roanoke's scarce land resources. In conjunction, Roanoke will encourage increased lot coverage ratios, multi-story buildings, and reduced setback requirements. Future expansion of commercial districts will be discouraged.
- ◇ **Industrial development and redevelopment** will be actively promoted in the industrial district along Plantation Road.
- ◇ **Public investment in infrastructure** will be linked, wherever possible, to private investment in improvements that are made in accordance with design recommendations of this plan.
- ◇ **Building and site design:** Zoning regulations and incentives will promote development of well-designed commercial buildings that encourage pedestrian activity. Roanoke will promote development in accordance with the Commercial Design Guidelines (Appendix). Incentive programs such as facade grants, real estate tax abatements for rehabilitation, or Enterprise Zone tax credits (if applicable) will be linked to conformance with design guidelines.
- ◇ **Signs:** Sign clutter will be reduced by encouraging signs to be located on buildings rather than on freestanding structures. Where freestanding signs are used, they will be limited to appropriate heights and sizes.
- ◇ **Parking:** Encourage the development of on-street parking, street-side, and shared pocket parking lots as the preferred approach for supplying parking.
- ◇ **Strategic Initiatives:** Implement site-specific planning for Strategic Initiative Areas.

## Economic Development Actions

- ◇ **Zoning:** Change zoning patterns along Williamson Road to encourage transitions to improved commercial development forms.
- ◇ **Industrial Redevelopment:** Consider designating the area between Hollins and Plantation Roads as a Redevelopment Area.
- ◇ **Marketing:** Continue and expand unified marketing of the Williamson Road area as a destination for unique goods and services.
- ◇ **Street design:** Implement streetscape improvements in strategic areas, especially where they support private investment.
- ◇ **Signs:** Implement sign regulations that reduce sign clutter. Enforce regulations that require removal of sign structures of abandoned and vacant properties.
- ◇ **Utilities:** Seek opportunities to reduce overhead utilities through relocation underground or to the rear of properties. Initiate an independent study of strategies for consolidation, screening, or relocating utilities underground.
- ◇ **Street identification and addressing:** Design and install street identification signs and address number signs as recommended by the Hill Studio plan.
- ◇ **Develop shared parking areas and create new on-street parking** along Williamson Road Corridor. Initiate projects to construct local access drives in blocks where existing buildings have setbacks of 50 feet or more.

## Transportation Policies

- ◇ **Street design** will be carefully considered to ensure that design principles of *Roanoke Vision 2001-2020* are incorporated. Functionally, streets must be capable of accommodating pedestrians and bicycles. Trees should be used to create a canopy over streets, so large species of trees should be used whenever possible. Streets that carry higher traffic volumes will be priorities for improvements to pedestrian and bicycle accommodations.
- ◇ A **street framework** with multiple routes will be developed and maintained. The overall street system should be designed to enhance connectivity, but should also discourage induced commuter traffic demand. The transportation network will consist of the following hierarchy of streets:

### **Major arterials**

Orange Ave  
Williamson Rd  
Hershberger Rd  
Valley View Blvd

### **Minor arterials**

Tenth St  
Plantation Road  
Liberty Rd  
Airport Rd

### **Neighborhood Collectors**

Oakland Blvd  
Preston Rd  
Grandview Ave/Rutgers St  
Florist Rd  
Greenland Ave/Huff Ln

### **Local Streets**

All others

- ◇ **Sidewalks and curbing** will be provided on all arterial and collector streets. Roanoke should work to ensure these streets will have a continuous system of sidewalks and curbing.
- ◇ **Public Transportation** will be a convenient and viable alternative. Transit routes and stops will focus on connecting destinations such as commercial centers and population centers. Transit routing will be maintained so that most residents are within a quarter mile of a transit route.
- ◇ **Bikeways and greenways** will provide pedestrian and bike connections to important destinations. While greenways are typically trails, some connections between greenways will necessarily be on-street accommodations designed in a manner appropriate to the existing functions of the street.

## Transportation Actions

- ◇ **Target arterial and collector streets** for streetscape improvements such as pedestrian crossings, sidewalks, street trees, and bicycle accommodations. Arterial streets, collector streets, village center streets, and streets near schools should be priorities for establishing continuous sidewalk and curb systems.
- ◇ **Neighborhood collector streets**: Formalize streets that serve as neighborhood collectors with design features that designate clearly-defined paths. These streets, by definition, will carry more traffic, so extra attention should be paid to the design so that traffic will travel at speeds that are appropriate for residential areas.
- ◇ **Review traffic signal locations** along Williamson Road to determine opportunities for minimizing the number of signals or relocating them to more appropriate locations (such as neighborhood collector streets).
- ◇ **Install transit shelters** and other transit accommodations in village centers and other commercial centers.
- ◇ **Greenways & Bikeways**: Continue development of the regional greenway and bikeway systems.
- ◇ **Review curb cut policies** and amend as needed to encourage reduction in the number and size of curb cuts. Design standards for cuts should be reviewed to ensure that priority is placed on maintaining sidewalk grades.



## Transportation Improvements

The following improvements are supported for **arterial streets**:

- ◇ **Valley View Interchange** - This interchange should be completed to provide access to and from the north on I-581.
- ◇ **Landscaping along I-581** - some segments of this highway have vegetation that buffers adjoining land uses from noise and visual impacts. However, there are some sections where there is little or no landscaping. Both sides of the interstate have a 50-60' strip between the shoulder and the right-of-way line. These areas should be densely planted and allowed to become wooded to provide a vegetative buffer and reduce maintenance requirements. Open areas within exit/entrance ramps could also be landscaped, wooded, or converted to wetlands where they serve a storm drainage function.
- ◇ **Tenth Street** - Tenth Street between Gilmer Avenue and Williamson Road will be reconstructed to include turning lanes, curbing, and sidewalks. This project is obligated in the VDOT Six-Year Plan and engineering is underway.
- ◇ **Orange Avenue Planning Analysis** - This project is a study of demand and capacity in the Orange Avenue corridor that will determine what long-range improvements are needed (new parallel routes, intersection improvements, or widening).
- ◇ **Williamson Road** (Orange Avenue to Angell Avenue) - This project is to improve the appearance, function, and safety of the southern portion of Williamson Road. This project is included in the recent *Roanoke Valley Long Range Transportation Plan*. Specific improvements are to be determined through further study.
- ◇ **Williamson Road** (Angell Avenue to Hershberger Road) - This project, completed in spring 2004, addressed the wider segment of the street by installing a landscaped center median to improve safety for turning vehicles and to improve appearance. The sidewalk and curb system should be completed along this segment.
- ◇ **Williamson Road** (All) - Traffic signals along the entire corridor should be evaluated to identify opportunities for relocation or removal. Signals should be coordinated for smooth traffic flow at appropriate speeds that promote livability and commerce.

- ◇ **Towne Square Boulevard** - Currently, there is eastbound access to this street from Aviation Drive, but westbound access to Aviation Drive is not available. This connection should be made to provide a more direct route to Valley View Mall.
- ◇ **Hershberger Road** (I-581 to Williamson Road) - Improvements on this congested street segment will focus on improving intersections and traffic signal coordination. Completing a westbound connection from Towne Square Boulevard to Aviation Drive will reduce traffic demands on Hershberger Road.
- ◇ **Hershberger Road** (Williamson Road to Plantation Road) - This arterial should be upgraded to an urban street with curb, sidewalks, and trees.
- ◇ **Peters Creek Road** (I-581 to Wood Haven Road) - Improvements along the length of Peters Creek Road should focus on pedestrian and bike accommodations. Landscaping is also needed.
- ◇ **Liberty Road** - Sidewalk and curb is installed along most of this street, but some areas are lacking. Steep terrain west of Williamson Road make this street a priority for pedestrian improvements.
- ◇ **Plantation Road** - Most segments of this street are sized to accommodate traffic demands well into the future. The narrow segment near Liberty Road should be upgraded to urban standards with curb and sidewalk. Turn lanes may be warranted at its intersection with Liberty Road.

A bottleneck exists in the right-of-way near Mohawk Avenue in the blocks immediately north and south of Mohawk Avenue. To provide for a consistent right-of-way width, it is recommended that City Council adopt a setback ordinance for this two-block segment. Such an ordinance would prevent the building of new structures within the setback area.

All designated **collector streets** should be evaluated for sidewalk, curb, and landscaping needs. However, two neighborhood collectors merit special attention:

- ◇ **Huff Lane** - Roanoke's Transportation Division is working with Huff Lane School and nearby residents to explore strategies to address problems associated with high speeds and event parking along this street.
  
- ◇ **Oakland Boulevard** - A traffic signal at the intersection of Oakland Boulevard and Williamson Road may enhance the ability of Oakland Boulevard to function as a neighborhood collector street. The short segment of Oakland between Williamson Road and Birchwood Street is a weak linkage along the street and should be reconfigured to provide adequate width with sidewalk and curbing.

## Street Design

### General principles

- ◇ Street design should promote steady traffic flows at appropriate speeds. Where needed, traffic calming measures should be used.
- ◇ Streets should have green areas with large species street trees. Planting strips between sidewalks and curbs should be at least four feet wide to accommodate trees. Landscaped center medians should be used on major arterial streets.
- ◇ Street design should promote easy and safe pedestrian activity. Planting strips should be used to create separation zones between pedestrians and automobile traffic. Arterial and collector streets should have sidewalks, curbs, and street trees. Streets must be configured so they are easily crossed. Curb cuts should be configured so they maintain the grade of the pedestrian's path.
- ◇ Streets should accommodate bicycle traffic. Ideally, travel lanes should allow safe sharing with auto traffic, but traffic volumes and street configuration may warrant separate lanes for bikes.

### Williamson Road

Because of its varying conditions, this street requires a block-by-block study of streetscape needs. Along its length, a sidewalk system must provide uninterrupted access along the street. Priority for new sidewalks should be on areas where pavement and parking lots meet.

A recently completed project created a landscaped center median from Oakland Boulevard to Hershberger Road. The median is discontinued near Hershberger to provide for turning lanes.

Street trees are a crucial part of a streetscape improvement strategy. Limited right-of-way and street configurations will make this a challenge in some segments.

Streetscape improvement strategies should work to improve the definition of the street's edges. Curb cuts should be reduced (or eliminated) where possible. Paved areas between sidewalk and outside of the right-of-way line should be replaced with landscaped strips.

### Hershberger Road

The segment between I-581 and Rutgers Street needs sidewalks or a pedestrian/bike path on both sides. There is evidence of heavy pedestrian traffic. Because of higher traffic speeds and volumes, there should be considerable separation between pedestrians and auto traffic. Large species trees should be located between the street and the sidewalk/path. This street is a good opportunity to install large species trees in the center median.

The segment from Rutgers to Williamson has little opportunity for improvement because the entire right-of-way is occupied by high-traffic travel lanes and sidewalk. Priority should be on improving pedestrian crossings at intersections with crosswalks and safe haven medians.

The segment between Williamson and Plantation takes on a different character and handles considerably less traffic. This street should be upgraded to an urban two-lane or three-lane street with curb, sidewalk, and street trees.

### Orange Avenue

The section of Orange Avenue between I-581 and Hollins Road is one of Roanoke's busiest streets, second only to Hershberger Road. As it exists, it is unattractive and is dangerous for both vehicles and pedestrians. The *Roanoke Valley Long Range Transportation Plan* recommends a detailed planning analysis of Orange Avenue. Potential streetscape improvements will hinge on the findings of the study and the improvements that are considered.

This street should be configured as a boulevard with center green space and trees. A 150' right-of-way width is the maximum for a major boulevard. Higher speeds, large amounts of truck traffic, and the lack of on-street parking combine to warrant extra separation between cars and pedestrians. Configuring the street to provide for safe pedestrian crossings is also an important design consideration.

### Plantation Road

The segment between Orange Avenue to Kanter Road is used for industrial access for several trucking terminals and thus merits a wider street bed. However, the existing pavement width is excessive for its function (60-70 feet), with only one lane in each direction. Improvement strategies should focus on striping, using pavement for on-street parking, and adding green spaces.

Between Kanter Road and Webb Road, the pavement narrows to 20-22 feet. While this section experiences some congestion during peak traffic, the two-lane configuration is capable of handling projected traffic demand through 2025. The *Roanoke Valley Long Range Transportation Plan* designates this street section as a potential project for upgrade to an urban street with curb and sidewalks. In addition, the intersection with Liberty Road needs improvement.



The section north of Webb Road widens to a four-lane street with 60 feet of pavement. Traffic demands would likely allow for conversion of outside travel lanes to parking or bike lanes, or both.

### **Liberty Road**

Liberty Road is a connection across I-581. Terrain is rolling and some segments lack sidewalks. There are signs of heavy pedestrian traffic. The most pressing need for this street is to complete the sidewalk system. The terrain presents a challenge to installing sidewalk—rock outcroppings are evident on the southern edge of the street.

### **Oakland Boulevard**

This street functions as a neighborhood collector street - retaining a residential feel, but functioning to move traffic from local streets out to arterial streets. The configuration of this street varies. Following the street's path is confusing at times. The street should be formalized as a path through the neighborhood by striping parking lanes, infilling sidewalks/curbs, and installing street trees.

The 3000 block of Oakland Boulevard (just east of Williamson Road) is a weak link in this pathway. The right-of-way should be widened to 50 feet and the street redeveloped with 30' pavement, marked parking lanes, and street trees.

Some segments of Oakland Boulevard are excessively wide, which encourages speeding. The street needs traffic calming designs based on what is appropriate (or possible) for each block.

### **Fleming Avenue and Preston Avenue**

Both streets function as neighborhood collector streets and as east-west connections between Williamson Road and Hollins Road. Both need to have this function formalized by infilling sidewalks/curbs and street trees.

### **Florist Road**

This street connects Hershberger Road with Williamson Road north of the city limits. South of Hershberger, it is a connection to Oakland Boulevard via a short leg of Frontier Road. The traffic light at Hershberger Road encourages south-bound traffic to continue through the neighborhood. To compensate for this additional traffic, this street warrants an upgrade to an urban form with sidewalks, curbs, and street trees.

## Public Services Policies

- ◇ **Public Safety:** Roanoke will continue to provide excellent public safety services to the area and will seek opportunities to improve effectiveness of its services.
- ◇ **Schools:** The existing system of schools will be maintained as important centers for education, recreation, fitness, and community life.
- ◇ **Libraries** are an important neighborhood resource. Facilities will be responsive to community needs.
- ◇ **Overhead utilities:** Roanoke will work in partnership with community interests to reduce the visual impact of overhead utilities.
- ◇ **Code enforcement:** Roanoke will provide responsive and effective code enforcement services to the area.
- ◇ **Stormwater runoff** will be managed with effective and environmentally responsible approaches.

## Public Services Actions

- ◇ **Construct a new Fire/EMS station** along the northern Williamson Road corridor to improve response and service to residential and commercial areas. Preference in site selection should be given to abandoned or underused commercial properties.
- ◇ **Assess library facilities and staffing** as part of the Library Strategic Plan and take necessary measures to ensure they meet needs for traditional functions and future community needs.
- ◇ **Assess overhead utilities** to identify strategies and costs for reducing their visual impact along major streets.
- ◇ **Continue code enforcement** efforts to eliminate junk storage, weeds and trash, inoperative vehicles, and commercial vehicle parking in residential areas. In addition, a proactive sweep should be conducted to compel removal of abandoned sign structures, ensure that parking lots are properly landscaped, ensure that sales display areas do not encroach into the right-of-way, and compel property owners to keep fences in good repair.
- ◇ **Implement automated collection** of litter receptacles along the Williamson Road corridor. This project will require coordination between the City of Roanoke and the Williamson Road Area Business Association to identify a container design that meets the needs for automated collection and contributes to the corridor's appearance.
- ◇ **Explore and implement innovative stormwater management** strategies that address both the volume and quality of runoff:
  - Identify and promote best management practices recognized by the US Environmental Protection Agency.
  - Provide incentives to encourage individuals to participate in improved management approaches.
  - Initiate a demonstration project for pervious paving systems that reduce runoff.
  - Initiate a commercial demonstration project for bioretention of stormwater.

## Quality of Life Policies

- ◇ **Recreational areas** will be accessible throughout the neighborhood.
- ◇ **Neighborhood and business groups** will be important resources for information sharing, volunteerism, and community involvement.
- ◇ **Tree canopy** will be increased to 40%, consistent with the overall goal for Roanoke as established by the Urban Forestry Plan.

## Quality of Life Actions

- ◇ **Develop a small pocket park** in the Liberty Road area between Williamson Road and Plantation Road.
- ◇ **Initiate private and public tree planting programs** along arterial and collector streets. Consider incentives and public-private partnerships to leverage purchasing power for planting trees and related vegetation on private properties.
- ◇ **Maintain open lines of communication** with neighborhood and business groups. Continue neighborhood review of zoning and development changes through the Neighborhood Development Review Team program. Through this program, notices of zoning changes are sent to neighborhood and business groups for review and comment.
- ◇ **Initiate a forestation project** to encourage owners to establish forested areas in centers of deep lot blocks. Tax incentives, such as through conservation easements, could provide financial rewards for property owners who preserve (or reforest) portions of their land that would otherwise be unused.
- ◇ **Explore forestation of I-581**. Areas along the highway and within entrance ramps are opportunities for reforestation. In addition to improving the appearance of this major transportation corridor, it would help mitigate some of the noise and pollution impacts of the highway.



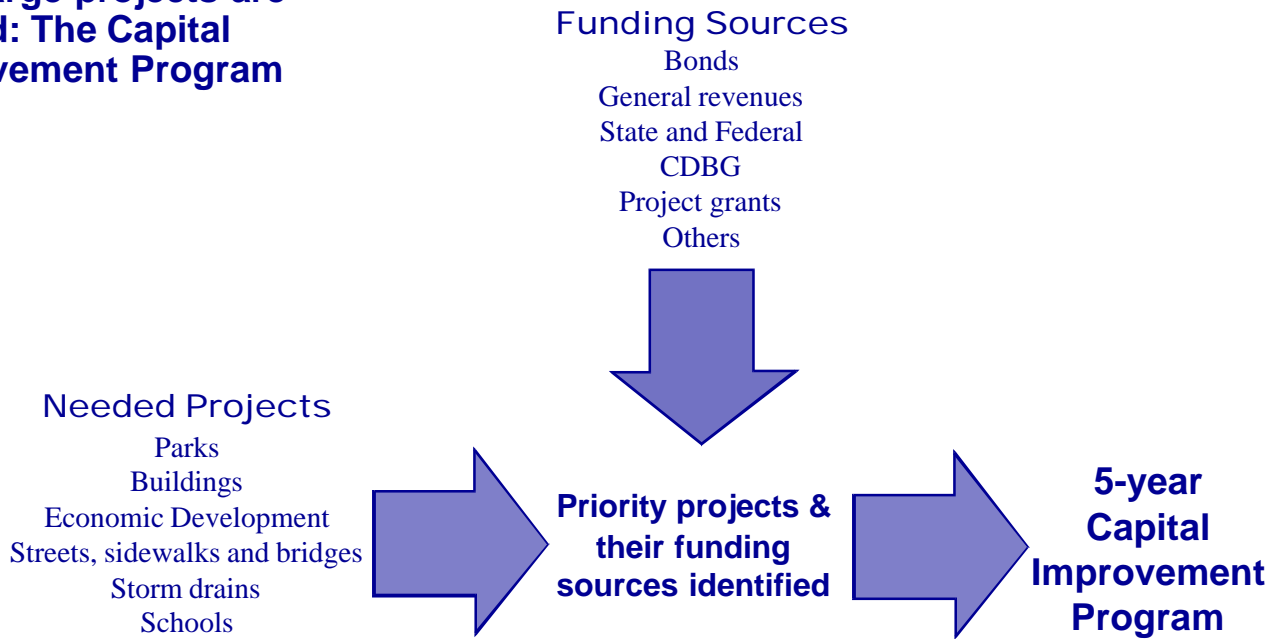
# Implementation

## Funding

Funding for major infrastructure projects is generally provided through the city’s Capital Improvement Program. Funding can come from a variety of sources, including Community Development Block Grants, transportation funding, state and federal funds, and general revenue. The Capital Improvement Program is developed by identifying needed projects and matching them with potential funding sources. Each project is reviewed and ranked in terms of priority.

The chart on the following page identifies major projects, their time frame, the lead agency or department, and potential sources of funding. The cost of most projects such as streetscape improvements cannot be determined until more detailed planning is completed.

### How large projects are funded: The Capital Improvement Program





ACTION	TIME FRAME	POTENTIAL FUNDING	PARTICIPANTS
Zoning changes (CD, RD, ED)	1 year	Operating budget	Planning Building & Development
Strategic Initiatives (CD, ED)	2-10 years	Operating budget	Planning Building & Development
Streetscape improvements (CD, ED, TR)	2-10 years	Capital Improvement Program; Special Service District	Transportation Division
Link incentives to design guidelines (CD)	Ongoing	Operating budget	Planning Building & Dev., Econ Dev.
Identify best practices for commercial-residential relationships (CD)	2 years	n/a	Business/neighborhood groups; Planning Building & Development
Develop alternative parking arrangements (CD, ED)	10 years	Private development, public infrastructure funding	WRABA, Transportation Division
Business and neighborhood marketing (RD, ED)	1 year	Community group operating budgets, project grants	Neighborhood and business groups
Expand Rehabilitation District as warranted (RD)	1 year	Operating budget	Planning Building & Development
Implement Neighborhood Design District (RD)	2 years	Operating budget	Planning Building & Development
Industrial redevelopment	10 years	Capital improvements, redevelopment funds	Economic development, RRHA
Sign regulations and enforcement	2 years	Operating budget	Planning Building & Development
Overhead utility reduction study (ED, PS)	2 years	Operating budget, project grants	WRABA
Street identification and addressing (ED)	5 years	Individuals, operating budgets, project grants	WRABA; Transportation Division

ACTION	TIME FRAME	POTENTIAL FUNDING	PARTICIPANTS
Street improvements (incl. pedestrian and bike accommodations) for arterial and collector streets. (TR)	10 years	Transportation funding	Transportation Division, Planning Building & Development
Review traffic signal locations (TR)	5 years	Transportation funding	Transportation Division
Install transit shelters (TR)	5 years	VDOT funds, individual sponsorship, capital improvements	Transportation Division, Valley Metro
Greenway connection and bikeway development (TR)	10 years	Capital improvements, project grants	Parks & Recreation, Transportation Division, Reg. Greenway Commission.
Review curb cut policies (TR)	1 year	Operating budget Individual businesses	Transportation and Engineering Divisions, Planning Building & Development
New Fire/EMS station (PS)	5 years	Capital improvements	Fire/EMS Department
Assess library facilities (PS)	2 years	Operating budget	Library
Code enforcement sweep (PS)	5 years	Operating budget	Housing & Neighborhood Services
Automated collection of litter receptacles (PS)	5 years	Operating budgets	WRABA; Solid Waste Management Division
Improve stormwater management	10 years	Capital improvements	Engineering Division
Develop a new park (QL)	10 years	Capital improvements	Parks and Recreation
Initiate tree planting and forestation projects (QL)	5 years	Operating budget, project grants, individual sponsorship	Parks and Recreation, Neighborhood and business groups

## Appendix:

# Design Guidelines

## Residential Design Guidelines

The following design recommendations should be considered in the design of new residential structures:

- ◇ ***Align the front of residential structures with existing structures***; where no adjoining structures exist, structures should be located as close to the front property line as is permitted by zoning.
- ◇ ***Include a porch***. Front porches are not universally found in the Williamson Road area; however they are appropriate for any new single- or two-family dwelling. Porches are an important transition between public space of the street and the private space of the house.
- ◇ ***Hide the garage***. If the dwelling will have a garage, de-emphasize it by recessing it behind the front facade of the house or locating the entrance on the side or rear. Parking areas, if any, should be located to the side or rear of the structure.
- ◇ ***Make roof overhangs at least 12"***. An ample roof overhang not only gives the dwelling a more finished look, but also shades windows in the summer to reduce cooling demands.
- ◇ ***Break up the facade of a larger multifamily structure into smaller units of 30 feet or less***. This helps make the larger scale of the building compatible with smaller structures.
- ***Align the foundation*** of a new structure with those of existing structures.
- ◇ ***Face the front entrance toward the street***. The relationship to the street is very important; the front door is a crucial element in establishing this relationship.
- ◇ ***Windows on the front should be vertically-oriented***. That is, taller than wide.
- ◇ ***Windows and doors should relate*** with respect to alignment, sizing, or both. A good rule of thumb for window and door coverage on the front is 15-20%.

- ◇ ***Make porch and deck elements look like part of the house.*** Use top and bottom rails on porch and deck railings and make sure baluster ends are not exposed. Paint or stain wooden elements that are part of the front facade—even if pressure-treated wood is used. In addition to being good construction practices, these design features will ensure that the porch looks like an integral part of the house rather than an addition.
- ◇ ***Install trim around windows and doors.*** At least 3 1/2” wide is recommended. This does not apply to houses with brick or stucco siding. Shutters should not be substituted for trim work.
- ◇ ***Size and install shutters correctly:*** Shutters should be 1/2 the window’s width. They should be installed so that they appear as functioning shutters even if they’re just for looks. Omit shutters if the window is too wide to be covered by them.

## Commercial Design Guidelines

The following design recommendations should be considered in the design of new commercial structures.

- ◇ ***Locate new buildings on or near the front property line.*** Recalling traditional patterns, there should be a close relationship between commercial buildings and the street. A well-designed building close to the street becomes the business's sign - therefore reducing expense, reducing street clutter, and improving overall appearance. Past zoning regulations have forced commercial buildings to the back of the building lot. New regulations should permit development at the front property line.
- ◇ ***Create a street in front.*** Existing buildings with deeper setbacks can be improved by creating a "street" in front, complete with curbing, sidewalk entry, and trees. Configure parking as it would be on a street (angle or parallel). This is especially effective when done with larger buildings or in conjunction with adjoining businesses. This concept was illustrated in the Williamson Road Corridor Plan.
- ◇ ***Break large building fronts up into smaller modules.*** The character of the Williamson Road corridor is one of small scale businesses that people can easily relate to. This scale is not just height, but also the width of the storefront. Large building widths should be broken into modules of 30 feet or less with changes in material, texture, mass, or by offsets in the building face.
- ◇ ***Go vertical.*** In urban areas such as Roanoke, commercial buildings should range from two to four stories, with upper floors being dedicated to less intense uses such as offices and high-density residential. Vertically mixing uses adds to the vitality of an area and consumes less of the city's limited land resources.
- ◇ ***Seek opportunities to connect buildings.*** Clustering uses in close proximity encourages patrons to visit multiple businesses during a single stop. Connecting buildings also uses land efficiently.
- ◇ ***Use durable materials.*** Businesses should use durable materials such as masonry – especially the front. Permanent materials send a message about stability and commercial buildings are expected to transcend generations. Metal can be used as a component of a glass storefront. Corrugated metal shell buildings have the appearance of being temporary.



We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us.

- Winston Churchill

- ◇ ***Include lots of glass on the front of the first floor.*** This usually goes without saying with retail establishments, but should be universal for business buildings. Glass helps the building's relationship to the street, improves pedestrian friendliness, and provides for display of the business's products. In addition, it increases the real and the perceived sense of security by providing for natural surveillance. Blank walls should be avoided.
- ◇ ***Limit the number of parking spaces.*** Base the number of parking spaces on typical, rather than peak, demands. A portion of the lot can be reserved for expansion if there is higher demand. Overflow parking areas can be paved with grass paving systems. In addition to improving appearance, minimizing parking spaces will reduce expense, reduce heat buildup, and reduce stormwater runoff.
- ◇ ***Locate parking to the side or rear of buildings.*** While parking is a necessity, it should never be allowed to dominate a commercial site.
- ◇ ***Use on-street parking whenever possible.*** There are few areas along Williamson Road with on-street parking. However, there are usually opportunities for using on-street parking on side streets when the site is a corner lot.
- ◇ ***Share parking and maneuvering lanes.*** Much of a parking lot's area is dedicated to access lanes. Look for opportunities to share access lanes.
- ◇ ***Put trees within and around parking areas.*** Successful businesses, large and small, spend considerable resources on creating a pleasant environment for their customers (and employees). Strategically planting large trees is the most cost-effective way to improve the typically unpleasant environment of an asphalt parking lot. In addition to improving appearance, trees shade asphalt on hot days and reduce stormwater runoff. Shrubs and landscaped areas can complement trees, but should not be substituted for them.
- ◇ ***Avoid fencing the front.*** In most cases, business properties should not be fenced in the front. Creating a welcoming atmosphere for customers is the priority. Where fencing is used, it should be a sturdy metal material. Consider "living fences" of plant material to limit access, especially where the business adjoins residential uses to the rear. Security should be managed with appropriate lighting and access control.
- ◇ ***Control vehicular access.*** With no on-street parking available, it is expected

that businesses along Williamson Road will have vehicular access to their parking areas. Curb cuts should be limited in number and size. Seek opportunities for shared access points (see illustration). Improve overall safety of corridor. Customers appreciate safe, well-defined access points.

There are several businesses that have paved parking that directly abuts street pavement. These areas are dangerous and unsightly and should be reconfigured to define the transition between the street and the parking area. *The City should make these areas priorities for installing curb and sidewalk with a landscaped area.*

*Actions that can be taken for existing buildings and sites:*

- ◇ **Remove fencing** in front to present a welcoming image and improve appearance. Alternative means should be used for security. Chain link fencing and barbed wire creates the image of an unsafe place.
- ◇ **Expand buildings toward the front or upward.** Getting closer to the street has many advantages, including more visibility and a better business relationship with the street. Multi-story buildings “frame” the street and make efficient use of land.
- ◇ **Plant trees.** Trees are an inexpensive and immediate way to make a positive impact on the appearance of any site.
- ◇ **Remove asphalt** and replace it with landscaping or buildings. Many businesses have far more paved area than is necessary for typical parking demands. The result is that asphalt becomes the dominant element of the landscape rather than actual business operations.



“Buildings and trees  
should shape the City’s  
image rather than  
asphalt and signs.”

*Vision 2001-2020*