

2025

STATE ROUTE 44 CORRIDOR PLAN



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the steering committee members, stakeholders, community members, staff, and officials who invested their time and expertise in the creation of the State Route 44 Corridor Plan for the future of Rootstown Township.

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1

Introduction

1

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A CORRIDOR PLAN?

A corridor study is a planning tool that helps communities evaluate how a roadway functions today and how it can better serve the future. It looks not only at traffic flow, but also at safety, access, land use, and character. The State Route 44 Corridor Plan is a framework for future development along one of Rootstown Township's main commercial corridors. As new growth occurs, the Township must respond with strategies to address traffic issues, improve pedestrian connectivity, enhance sense of place, and guide economic growth. These strategies provide the foundation for the priorities and objectives that guided this plan.

FIGURE 1-1: State Route 44 Corridor



STUDY AREA

The study area focuses on State Route 44 from the I-76 interchange south past Tallmadge Road. This corridor includes several major institutions and destinations, including NEOMED; the Rootstown Local School District, which encompasses the elementary, middle, and high schools and associated athletic facilities; the Township Hall; and a range of commercial retailers.

According to traffic counts from the Akron Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (AMATS), State Route 44 carries more than 13,000 vehicles per day within the study area. Due to the concentration of academic, civic, and employment centers along the corridor, a significant portion of daily activity within Rootstown Township occurs within these limits.

FIGURE 1-2: State Route 44 Study Area



PLANNING PROCESS

The State Route 44 Corridor planning process spanned approximately one year, and included both technical analysis and public involvement. The result is an intuitive, informed, and proactive document. The planning process was developed at the beginning of the project.

Launch

During this initial step in the planning process, the scope of services was defined for the planning team, which consisted of contracted planning consultants and key Rootstown/Ravenna Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) members. The team met to establish the project's goals and identify the preliminary priority projects.

Discovery

Throughout the summer and fall of 2024, the planning team collected and analyzed data about all aspects of the corridor. This information provided an understanding of the current conditions along the corridor and informed the recommendations.

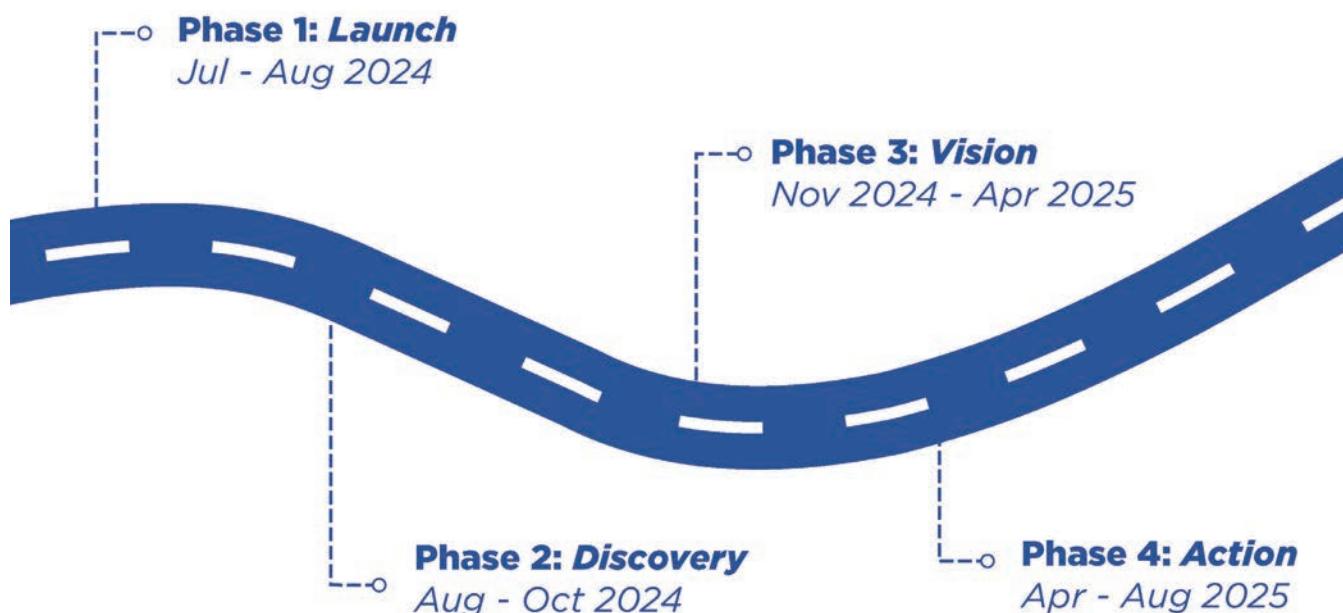
Concurrently with the existing conditions assessment, public engagement was conducted and input collected through public comment at Steering Committee meetings, focus group discussions, public open houses, and the community survey.

Vision

This step in the planning process involved developing recommendations for improvements along the corridor. The Steering Committee and major stakeholder groups provided feedback on concepts and initiatives. There was also an iterative process allowing the Steering Committee and the general public an opportunity to review and provide feedback on a draft version of the corridor. This was a key step in ensuring the plan was supported by the public and that its recommendations are successfully implemented in the future.

Action

Once the plan components were completed, the compilation of the plan document began. The final plan is a concise, coherent, and easily understandable document. It is meant to be read and used by any Rootstown Township community members and aid in the implementation of its recommendations.



USER GUIDE

This planning study provides a shared framework for guiding decisions and managing long-term growth along Rootstown Township’s State Route 44 commercial corridor. It is intended to align public investment, private development, and day-to-day decision-making around a common vision.

For Township officials, staff, and partner agencies, the plan serves as a compass for transportation and infrastructure investments that support economic opportunity and improve coordination with regional and institutional partners.

For property owners, developers, and businesses, the plan communicates the community’s vision for the corridor and offers guidance on how future investment can align with that vision. It can be used to inform site planning and support early, productive conversations with the Township and partner agencies.

While the plan establishes clear goals and direction, it recognizes that conditions, markets, and opportunities will evolve over time. Accordingly, it provides a flexible framework that can adapt to the corridor’s changing needs while remaining grounded in the community’s long-term objectives.

IMAGE 1-1: Roots Town Sign



PROJECT GOALS



Address Traffic Issues and Plan for Future Demands on the Corridor



Improve Pedestrian and Non-Motorized Connectivity and Safety



Feature and enhance Rootstown’s Sense of Place



Guide Economic Growth in Line with Community Desires



2

Existing Conditions

2

EXISTING CONDITIONS

OVERVIEW

The Existing Conditions assessment establishes a baseline understanding of the SR 44 corridor and the physical, operational, and contextual factors that shape how it functions today. This chapter documents current transportation patterns, land uses, environmental considerations, community character, and major destinations that influence daily activity along the corridor. These findings form the foundation of the plan so that future recommendations directly respond to observed conditions, local values, and the physical realities of the corridor.

FIGURE 2-1: Median Age & Population Data

Source: 2024 Esri Business Analyst



MEDIAN AGE
Portage County - 40.3
Ohio - 40.2



**2025
POPULATION**

IMAGE 2-1: State Route 44 Looking South



IMAGE 2-2: Historic New Milford Post Office

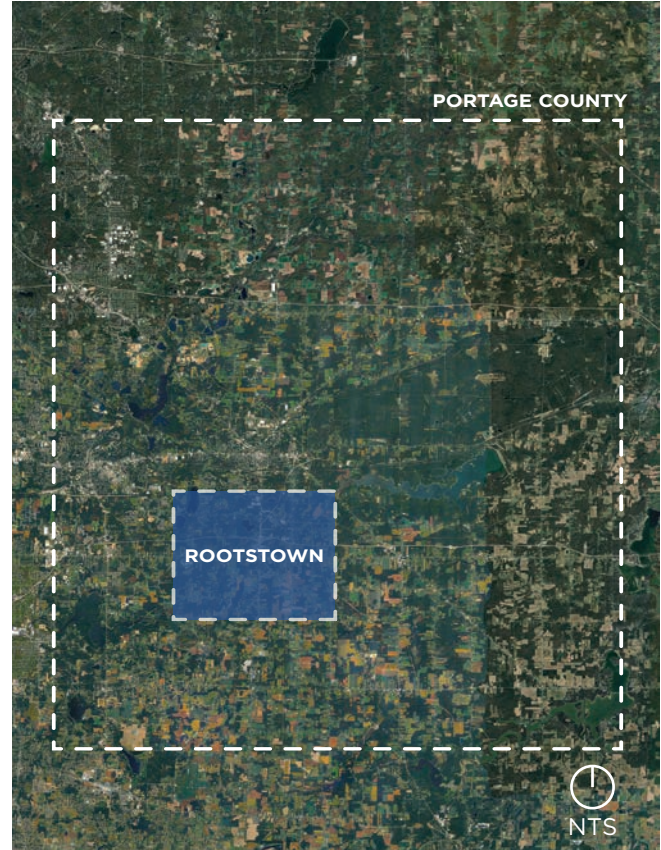


Regional and Local Context

The project area is located within Rootstown Township in Portage County, just east of Akron. State Route 44 functions as the Township's primary north-south corridor, linking the community to I-76, NEOMED, Rootstown Local Schools, the Township Center, and nearby residential neighborhoods. Its proximity to major institutional anchors and regional highway access makes the corridor a critical route for local, commuter, and visitor traffic. Daily activity reflects this blend of users, from parents traveling to and from school during arrival and dismissal to regional traffic passing through the Township.

The project area also includes properties that have joined the recently formed Rootstown-Ravenna Joint Economic Development District (JEDD). The JEDD was established to pursue coordinated economic development and quality-of-life improvements for residents and businesses, and this corridor study represents its first major initiative.

FIGURE 2-2: Location Map

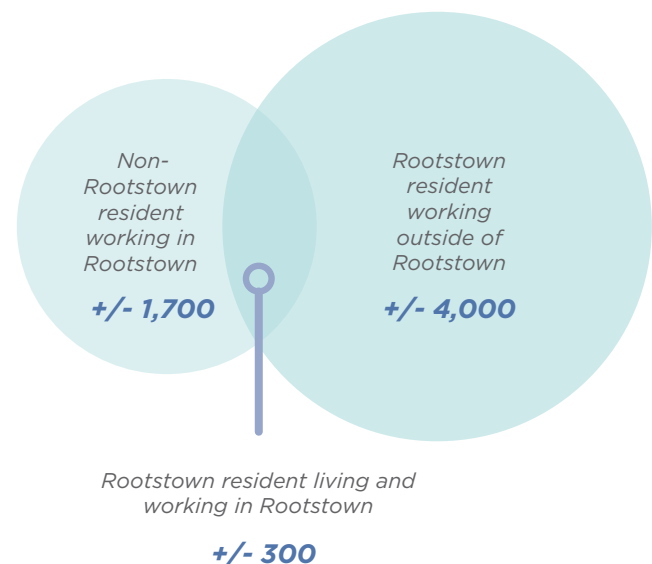


Commuting Patterns

The US Census Bureau's OnTheMap tool visualizes commuting patterns, providing three key workforce characteristics which include; non-resident working in Rootstown, Rootstown resident working outside of Rootstown, and Rootstown resident and working in Rootstown. The numbers indicate around 4,000 residents who are working outside of their community, while around 1,700 non-residents are working within Rootstown. These findings suggest there is a local workforce that is commuting outside of the community to seek employment in neighboring areas. Despite losing most of the local workforce to other job hubs, Rootstown attracts a sizable 1,700 workers, likely due to the employment opportunities at NEOMED.

FIGURE 2-3: Location Map

Source: Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2022



EXISTING CORRIDOR CONDITIONS

Near the I-76 interchange, the corridor is characterized by sporadic development influenced by environmental constraints, including regulated wetlands that limit buildable area. This segment contains several closely spaced curb cuts that create turning conflicts and make access particularly difficult near August Avenue.

The middle portion of the corridor features two signalized intersections that provide primary access to NEOMED and Rootstown Local Schools. While both intersections include marked crosswalks, they lack connected sidewalks, resulting in incomplete pedestrian routes. No additional access points are present in this segment, and institutional traffic dominates daily activity.

Approaching the Tallmadge Road / SR 44 intersection, the corridor transitions into the Township's primary commercial area. Sidewalks and crossings appear intermittently, but a notable lack of a marked crossing exists between the middle school and adjacent commercial businesses. Development in this area has occurred incrementally, resulting in numerous uncoordinated access points that contribute to congestion, turning conflicts, and inconsistent driver behavior.

The typical cross section along the corridor consists of one travel lane in each direction with a continuous center turn lane. Roadside swales are common, with intermittent sections of curb. Overhead power lines run along both sides of the roadway, and sidewalks are largely absent, leaving limited accommodation for pedestrians and creating a vehicle-dominated environment.

FIGURE 2-4: Existing Conditions

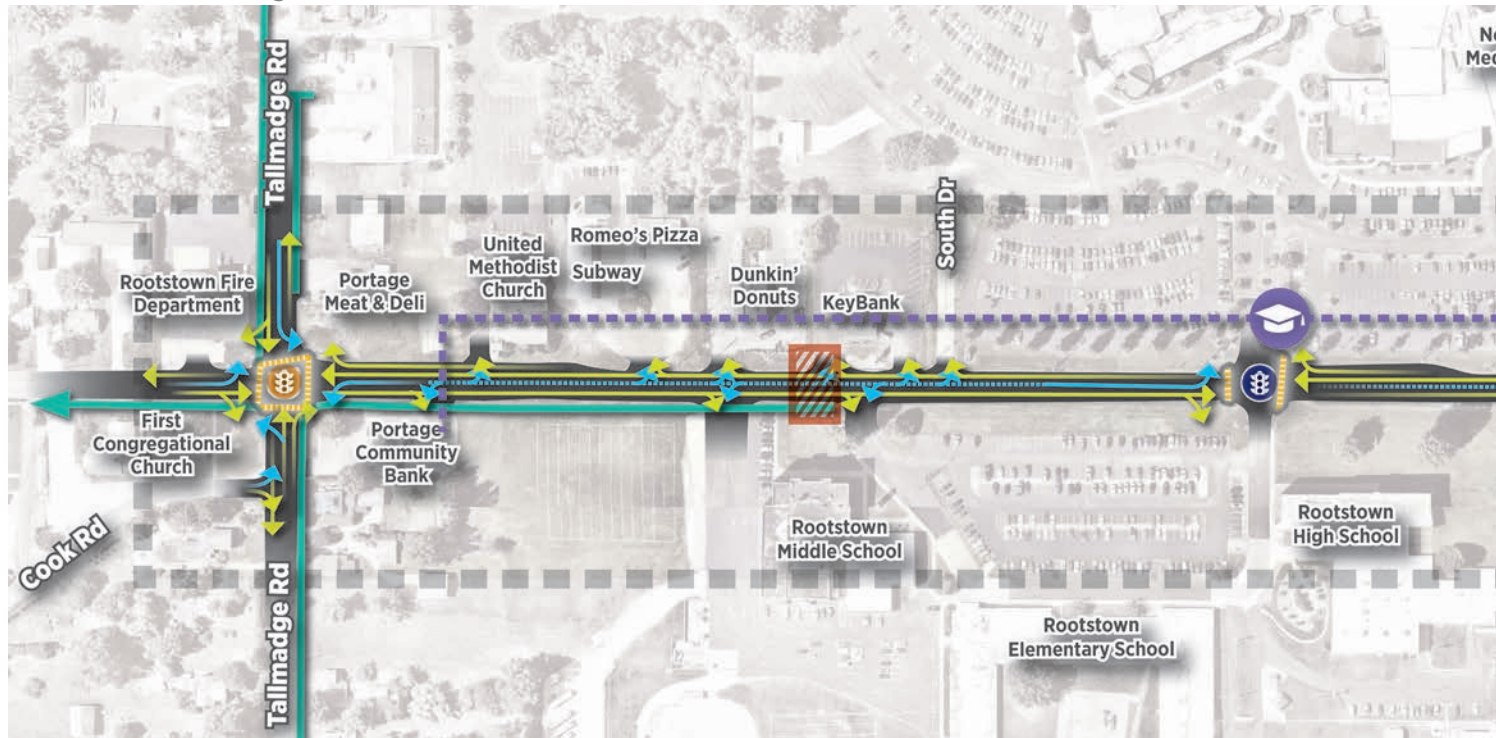


FIGURE 2-5:
Typical Cross
Section

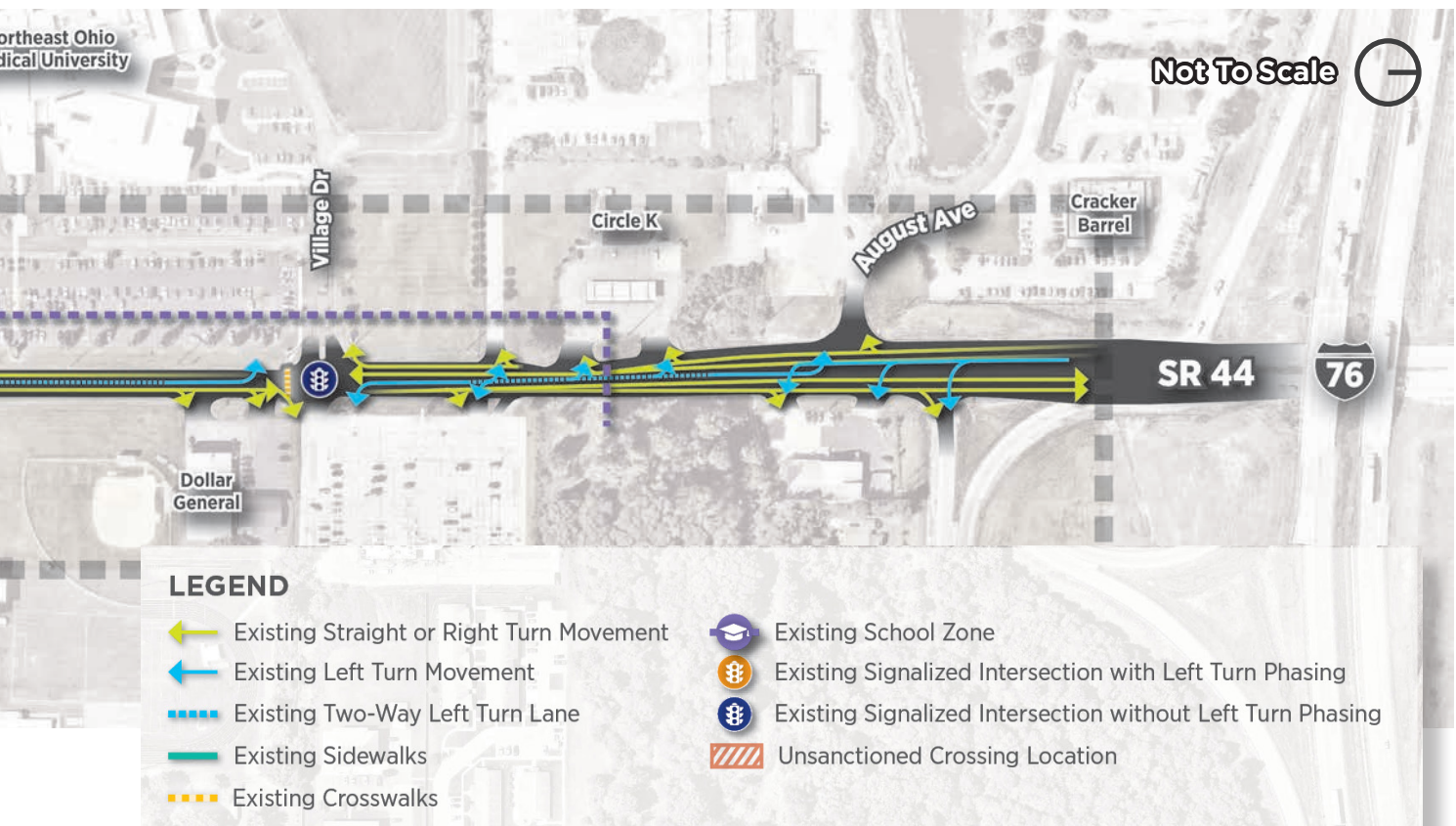
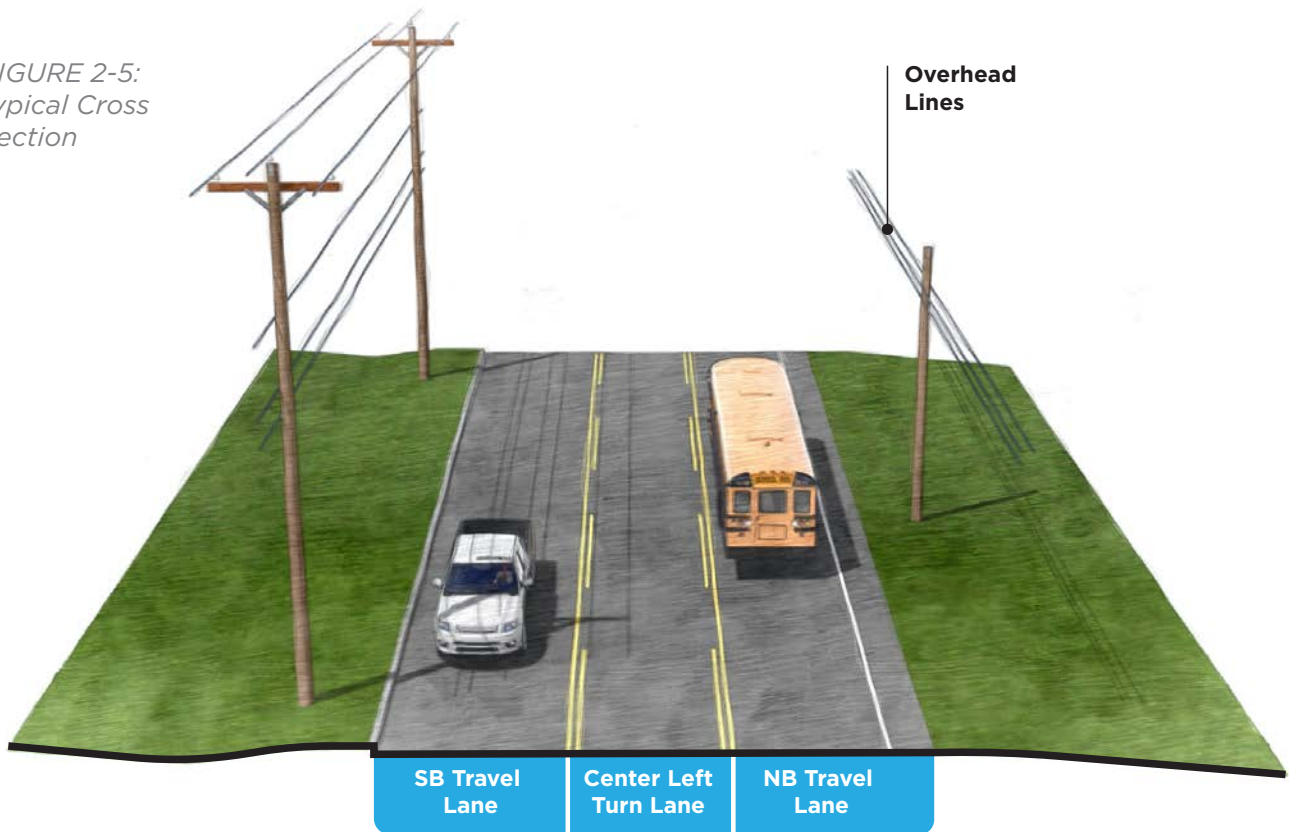
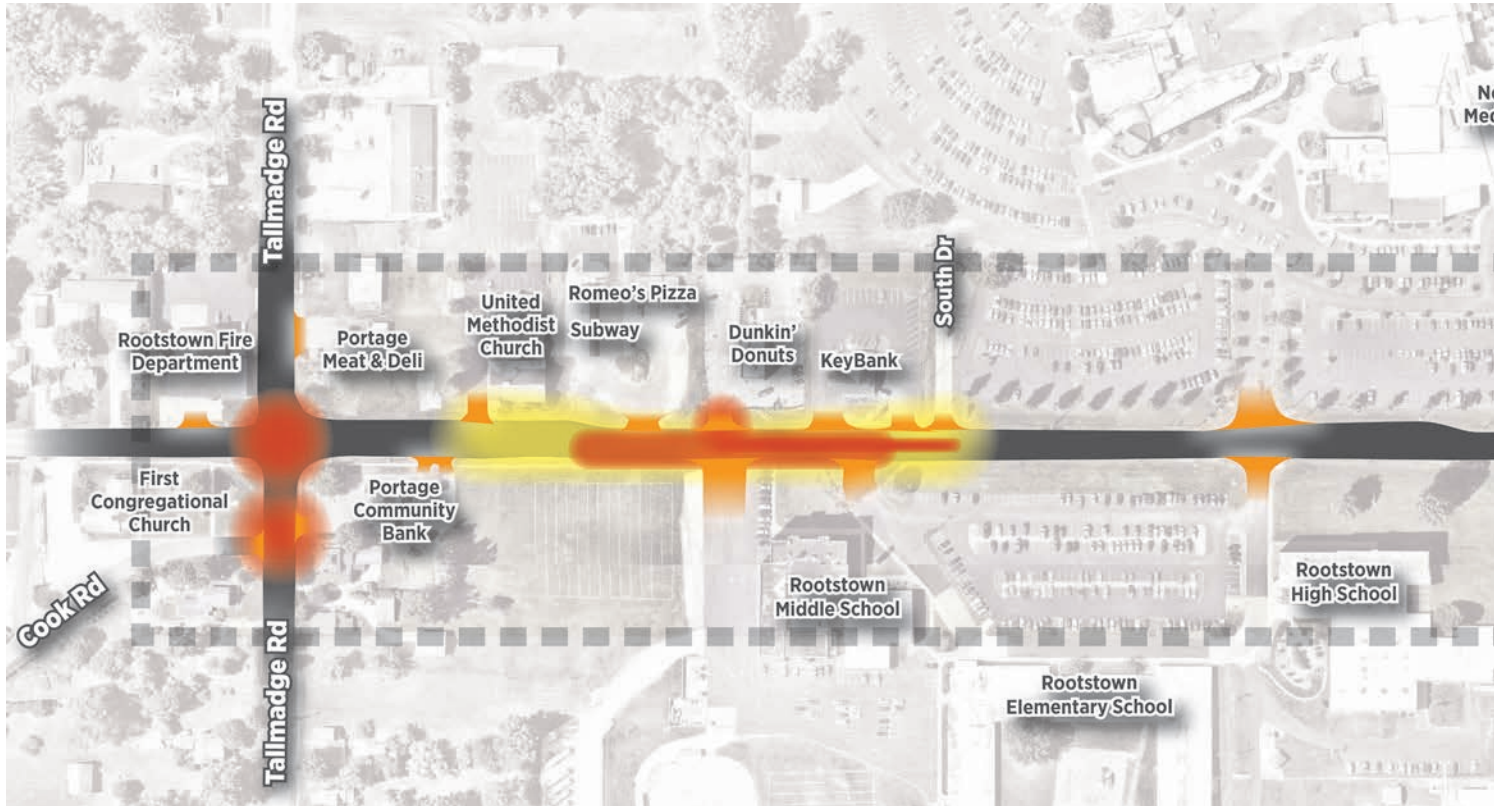


FIGURE 2-6: Crash Map

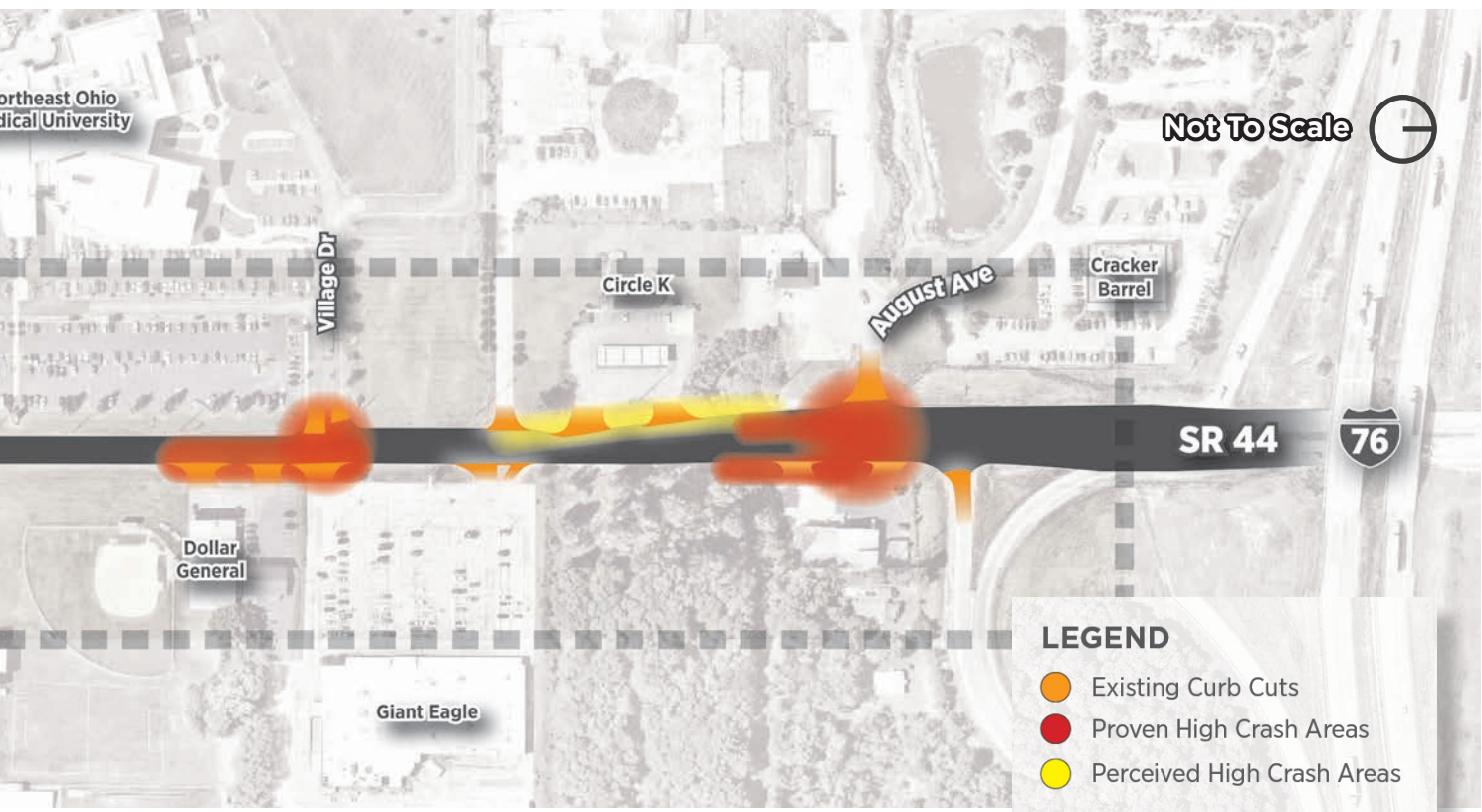


Crash Map

Crash data was collected and analyzed from 2020 through 2024 through the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Crash Analysis Tools.

The studied area was along SR44 from the Tallmadge intersection to the southern ramps for I-76. Crashes on I-76 ramps were not included in the analysis. The crash data showed a total of 84 crashes, averaging 17 crashes per year along the corridor. There were no serious or fatal injury crashes recorded, but the injury rate was 31%. The predominant crash type was rear end crashes which made up 50% of the data. Sideswiping (19%) and angle (17%) were the other frequently occurring crash types.

The top contributing factors for crashes were following too closely (50%), failure to yield (19%), and improper lane change (11%). As shown on the crash map, many of the crashes were intersection related (50%). There was no standout intersection for crash frequency. The crashes were scattered along the corridor. Crashes occurred most often from 7 to 8 AM and 4 to 5 PM. The crash map shows a need for access management at commercial and school driveways as well as traffic calming along the corridor to reduce the rear end crashes. The public input noted experiences with crashes in the area near Dunkin Donuts and the school driveways. This was backed by the crash data. The public also noted perceived safety risks at the Circle K driveways. While the crash data did not show recorded crashes in that area, it still is a perceived safety risk to users.



Traffic Volumes

Traffic volumes were analyzed looking specifically at AM and PM peak traffic. For both AM and PM time ranges, most vehicles were making a through movement along the corridor, and with both times, there was a higher concentration of traffic near the interstate. The PM peak volumes showed higher vehicle volumes in the southern part of the corridor compared to the AM peak. The AM peak had a notably higher volume of traffic at the Dunkin Donuts drive, middle school drive, and the NEOMED drives. The PM peak had notably higher traffic volumes at the Giant Eagle drives.

Pedestrian counts were recorded from north of Tallmadge to south of August along the SR44 corridor. There were a high amount of crossings (73 overall) at the intersection of SR44, the elementary/high school exit, and NEOMED Drive. Most of the movements (46) here were pedestrians crossing SR44 at the northern existing crosswalk. There also were 31 pedestrians recorded crossing SR44 between Village Drive and the southern Giant Eagle driveway at the existing marked crosswalk. There were also multiple (23) pedestrians recorded in the area of Dunkin Donuts and the middle school. 2 pedestrians were observed crossing SR44 without a crosswalk, which was a common concern during public engagement discussions.

FIGURE 2-7: AM Traffic Volumes Per Hour

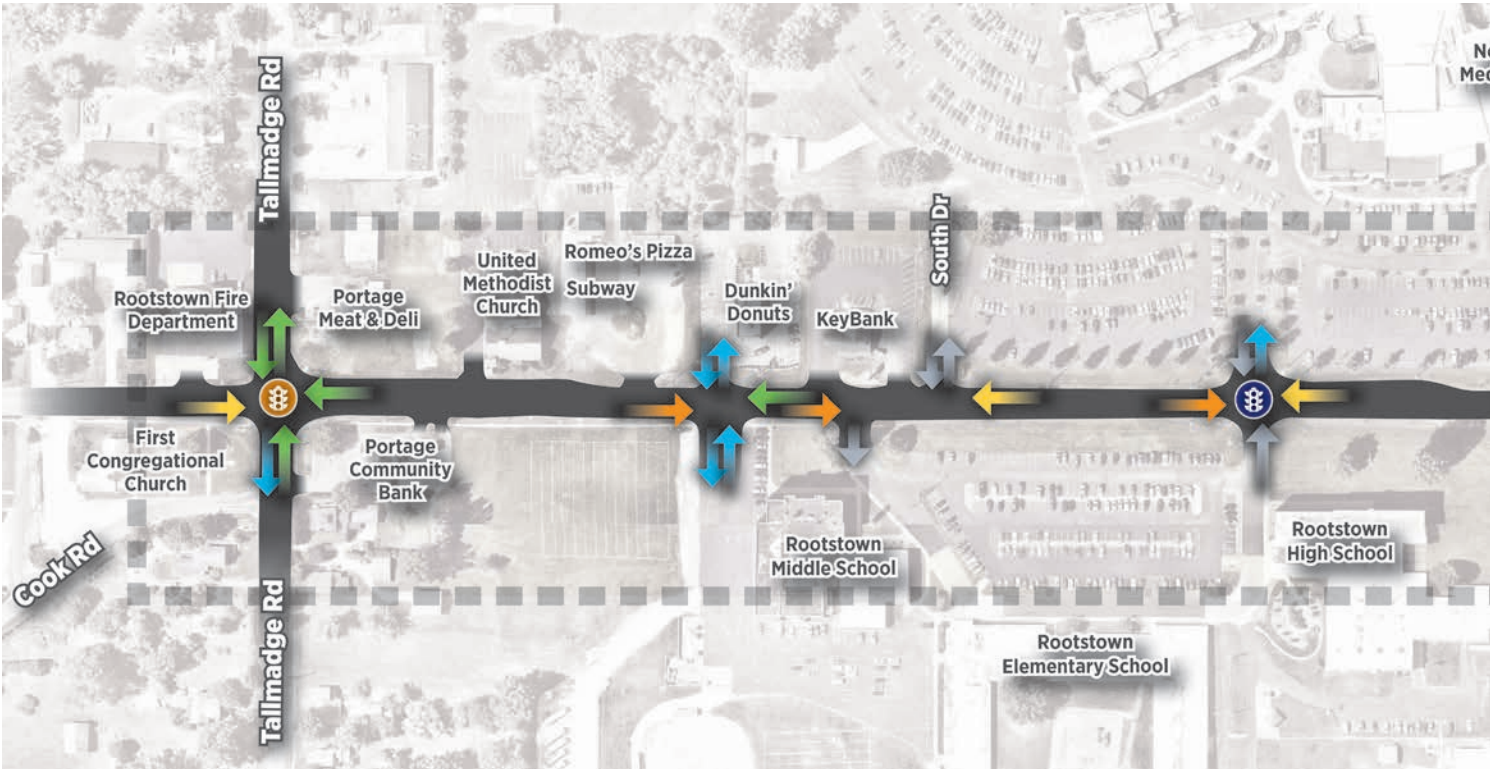
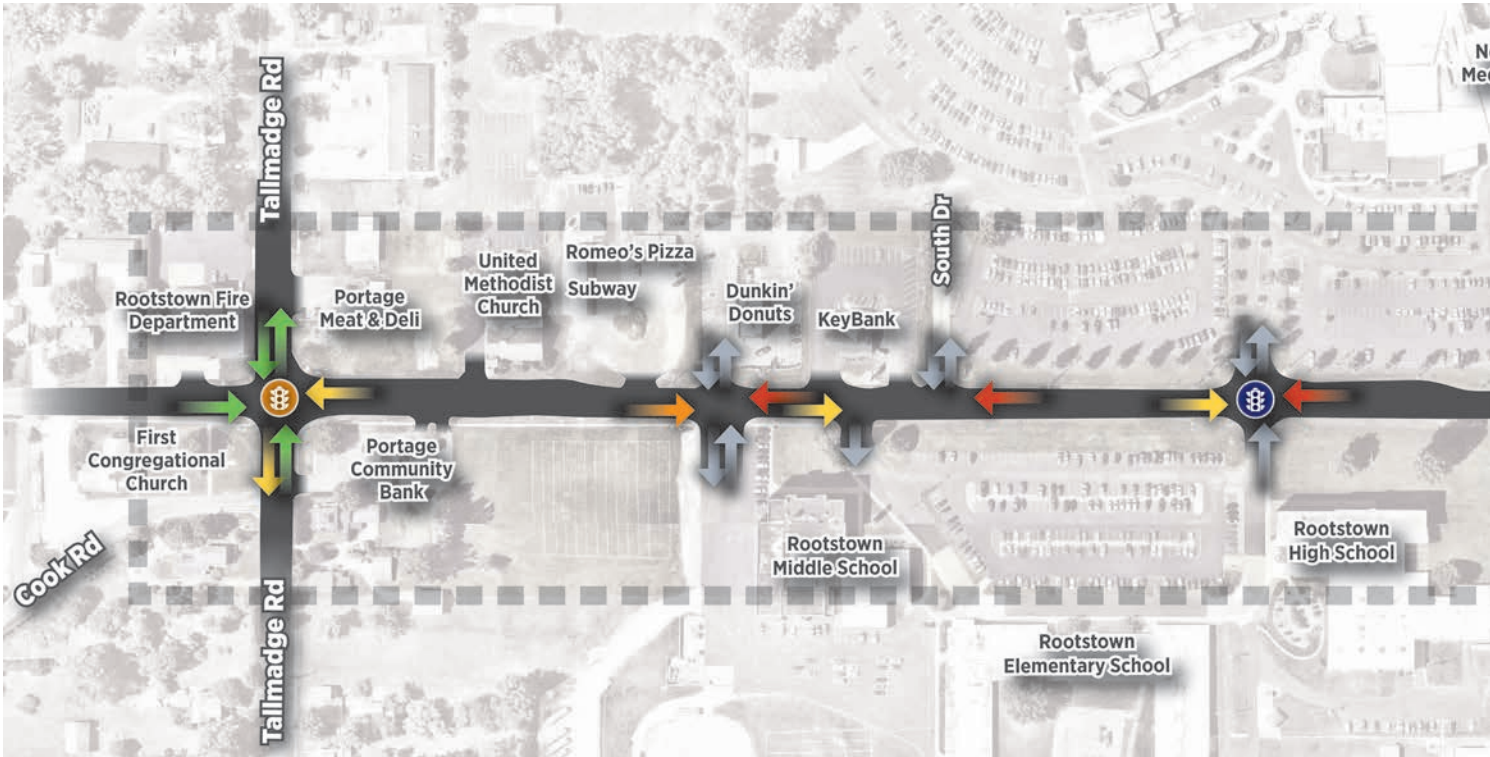


FIGURE 2-8: PM Traffic Volumes Per Hour



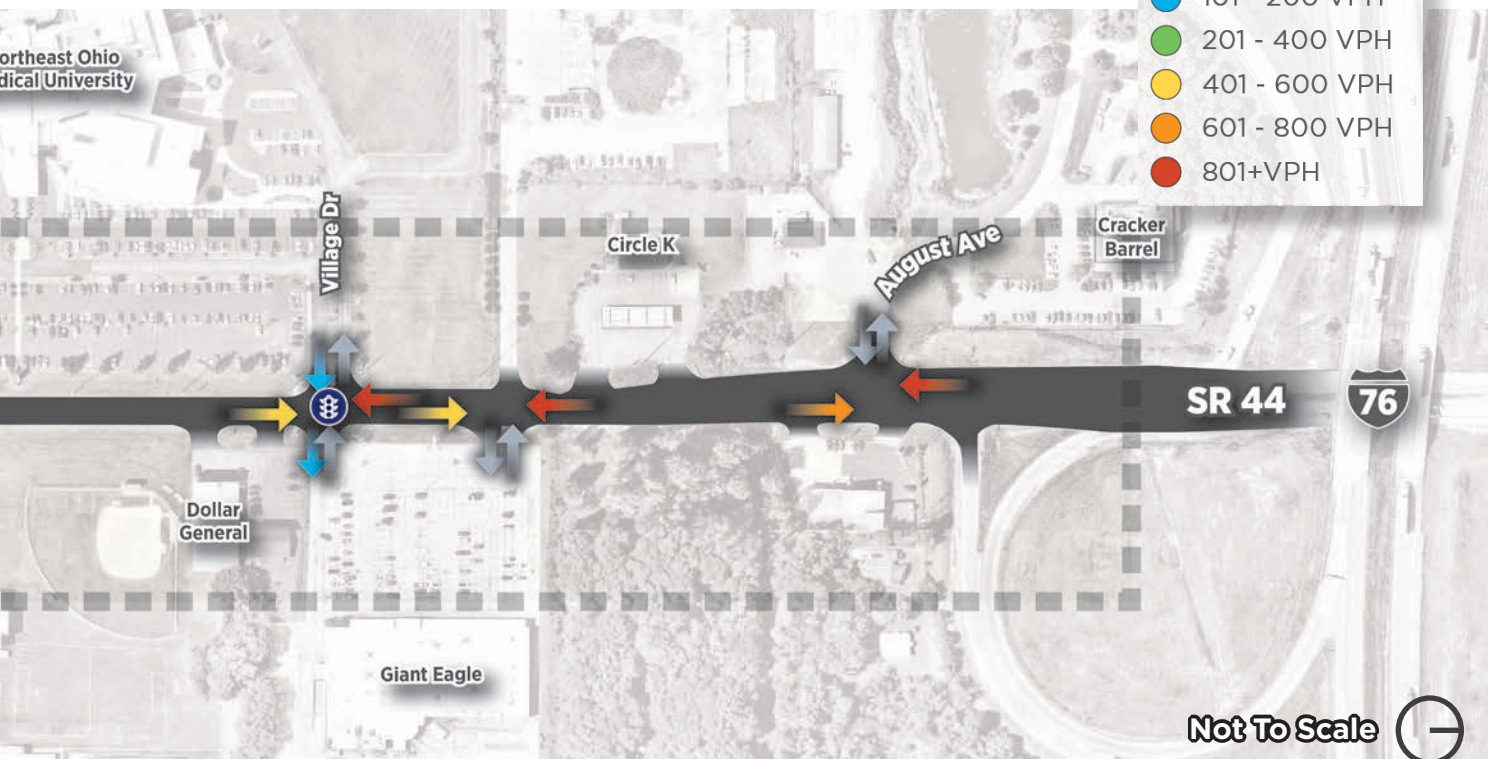
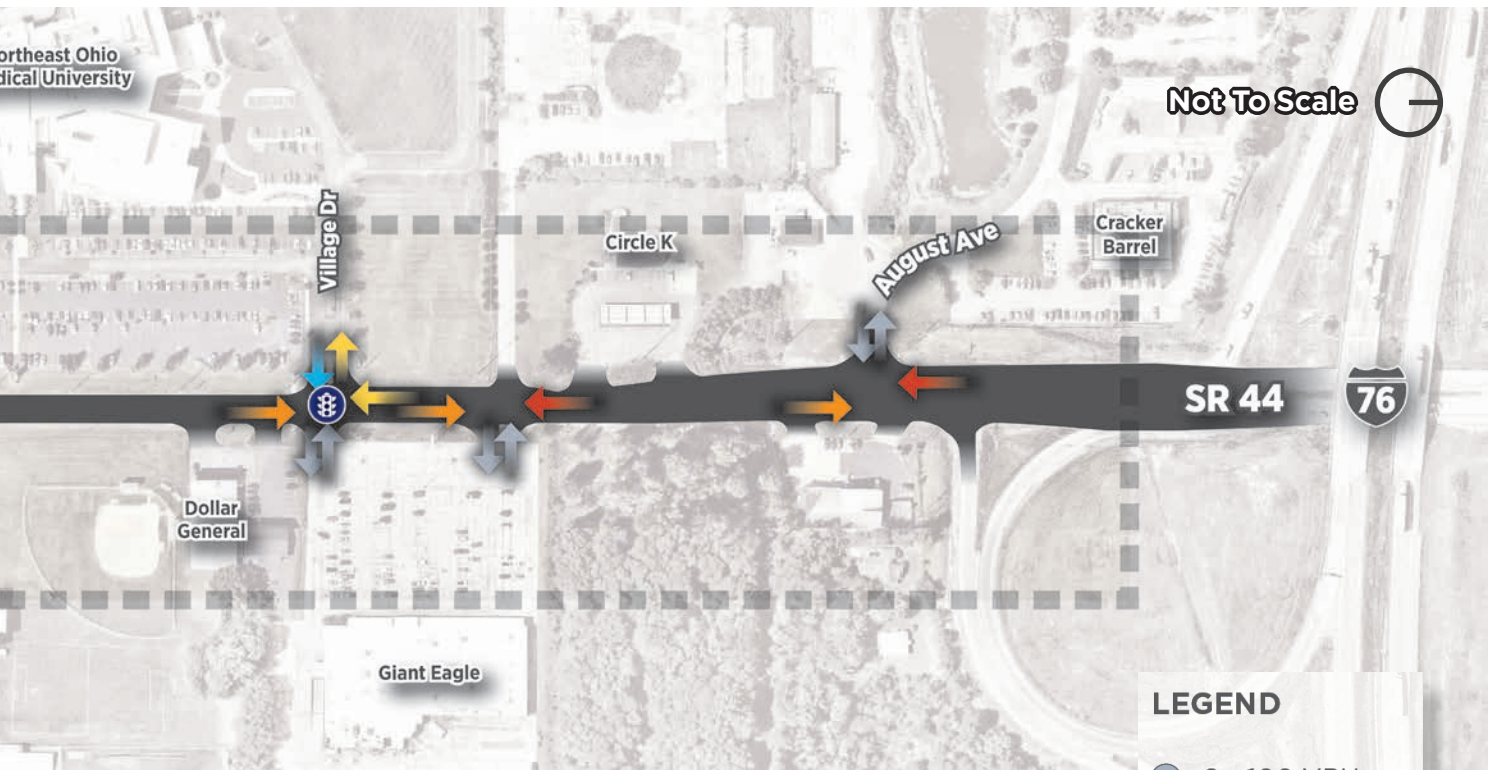
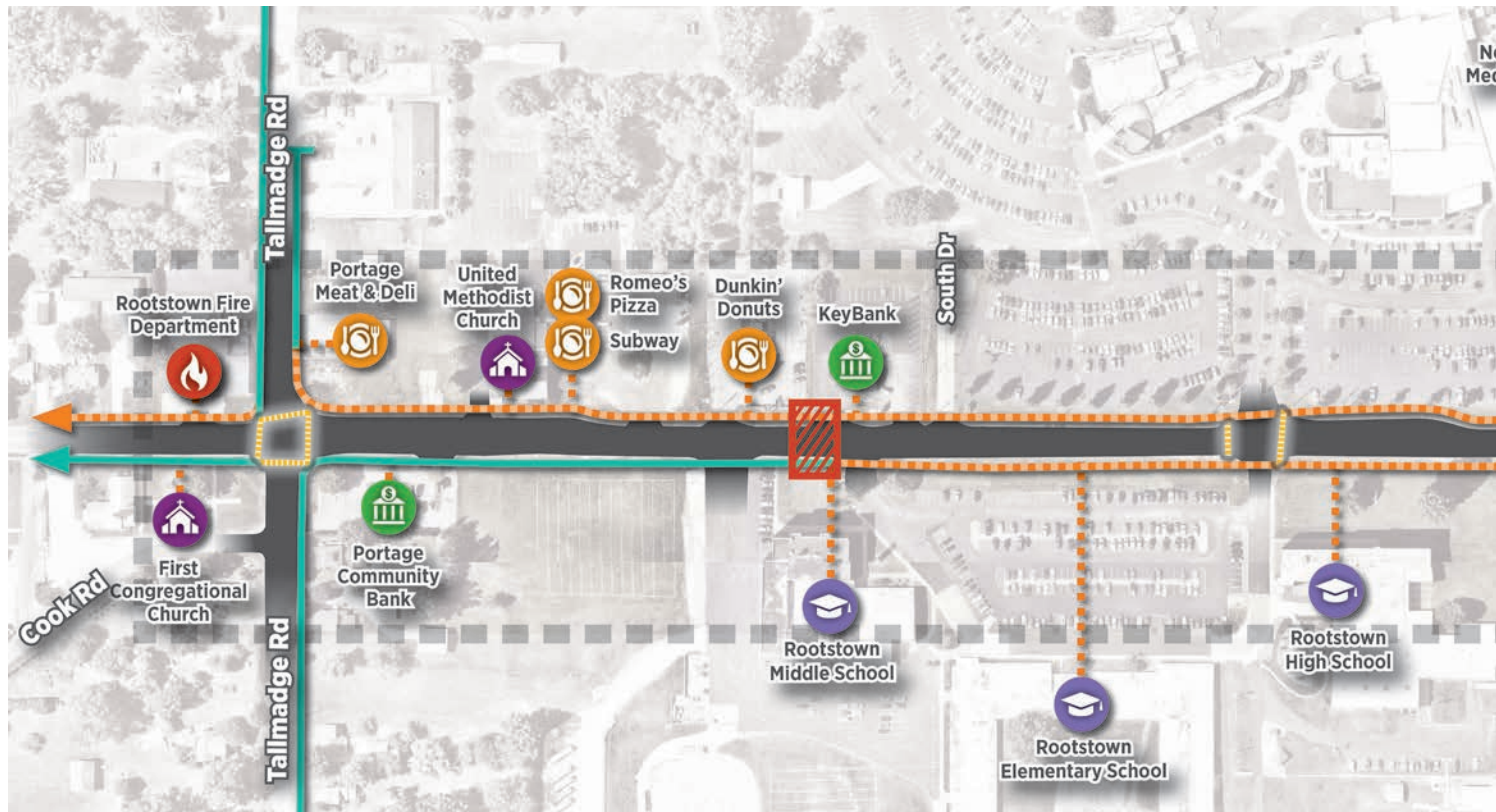


FIGURE 2-9: Non-Motorized Connections



Pedestrian Connectivity

The lack of pedestrian infrastructure along State Route 44 creates significant barriers to the corridor functioning as a truly connected Town Center, despite the presence of community-oriented businesses and institutions. Sidewalks terminate at Rootstown High School, leaving students without safe or continuous routes to nearby commercial destinations. The absence of demarcated or controlled crossings further contributes to unsafe conditions, particularly for students attempting to reach businesses located directly across SR 44. Mid-block crossings occur out of necessity rather than choice, underscoring the need for improved pedestrian accommodations.

Corridor residents and NEOMED on-campus housing are within close proximity to commercial services and daily-needs amenities, yet lack clear or protected pedestrian routes to reach them. As a result, even short

trips that could be made on foot often require a vehicle, adding unnecessary traffic to the corridor and limiting mobility options for those without access to a car.

Beyond basic connectivity, the corridor offers no dedicated accommodations for cyclists. Narrow shoulders, uneven pavement edges, and higher vehicle speeds create conditions where bicycling is feasible only for the most confident riders.

Finally, the lack of continuous sidewalks, ramps, crossing treatments, and accessible paths creates substantial obstacles for people with mobility limitations. Without ADA-compliant facilities, the corridor remains difficult to navigate, including seniors, individuals using mobility devices, families with strollers, and students with physical disabilities.



IMAGE 2-3: SR44 Sidewalk Conditions



IMAGE 2-4: SR44 Sidewalk Conditions

Community Character

The SR 44 corridor reflects a transition from larger highway-oriented and business parcels near I-76 to the finer-grained, rural character of the Township Center. Convenience businesses, civic institutions, and long-established local services create a setting that functions as the center of community life within a predominantly rural township.

Historic homes and older structures remain prominent along the Tallmadge corridor and are interspersed with small businesses, giving the Township Center a distinctive mix of heritage and everyday activity. This blend of uses reinforces a sense of continuity, that serve longtime residents, students, and visitors in a way that feels authentically Rootstown.

Several community icons anchor this portion of the corridor, including Rootstown Middle School, Township Hall, and the First Congregational Church. Together, these elements contribute to a corridor identity that is both functional and deeply rooted in the Township's history and civic life.

Existing Zoning

Zoning in the study area includes two distinct districts that front State Route 44 and Tallmadge Road. C-3 (Highway Interchange District) accommodates higher intensity commercial development and has a minimum lot area of one acre. Developments in this district use the locational advantages of the adjacent interchange to maximize visibility and accessibility.

The V-C (Village Center) district ensures new development mirrors the existing character of the town center and prioritizes historic qualities. It also supports a mix of uses and infill development or the reuse of existing structures. The minimum lot area is 30,000 SF with a minimum street frontage of 100 ft.

Additional districts within the study area include R-1 (Single-Family Residential), R-2 (Planned Residential Development), R-3 (Multi-Family Residential), and Open Space & Conservation.



IMAGE 2-5: First Congregational Church



IMAGE 2-6: Historic Sign

FIGURE 2-10: Existing Zoning

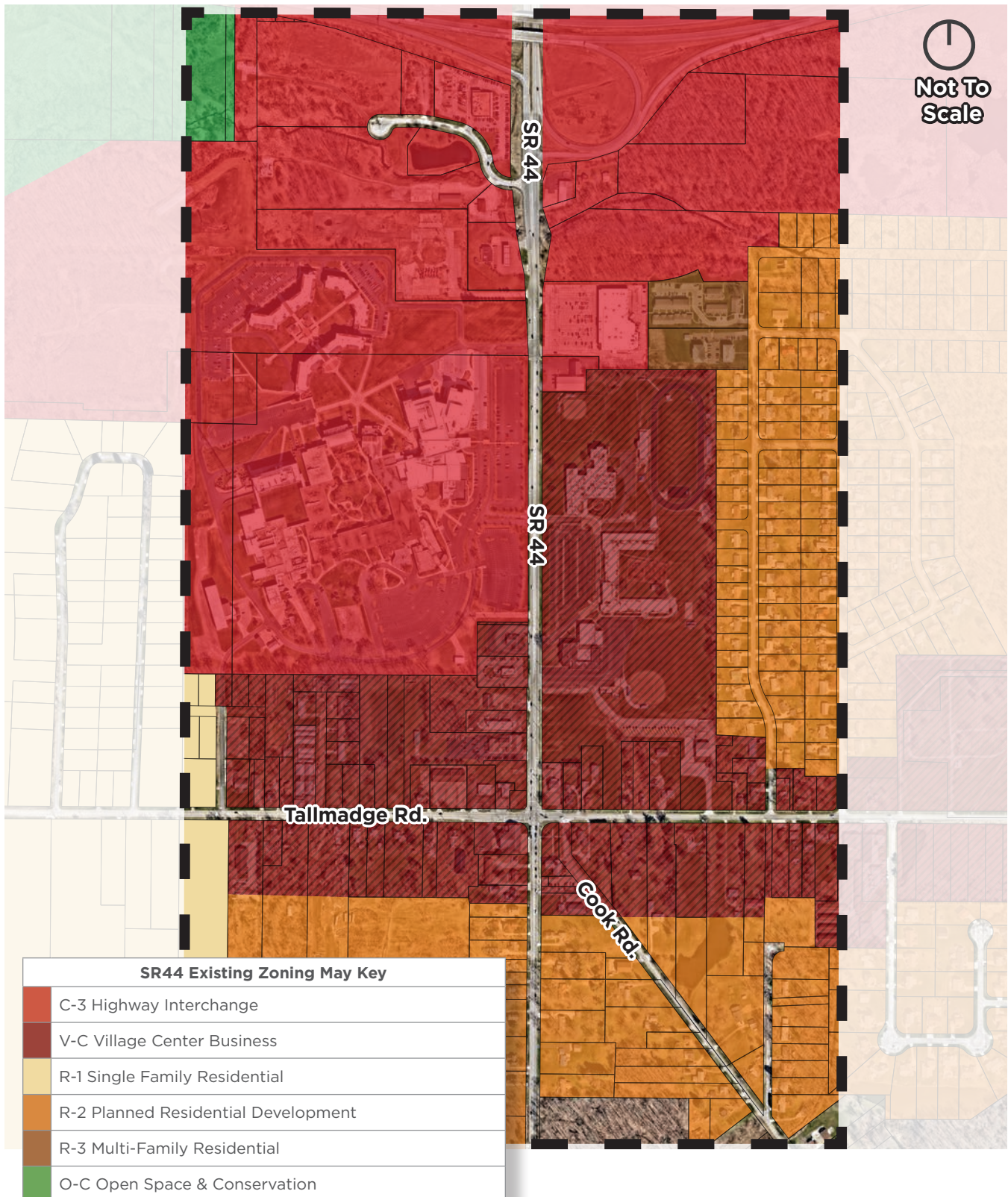
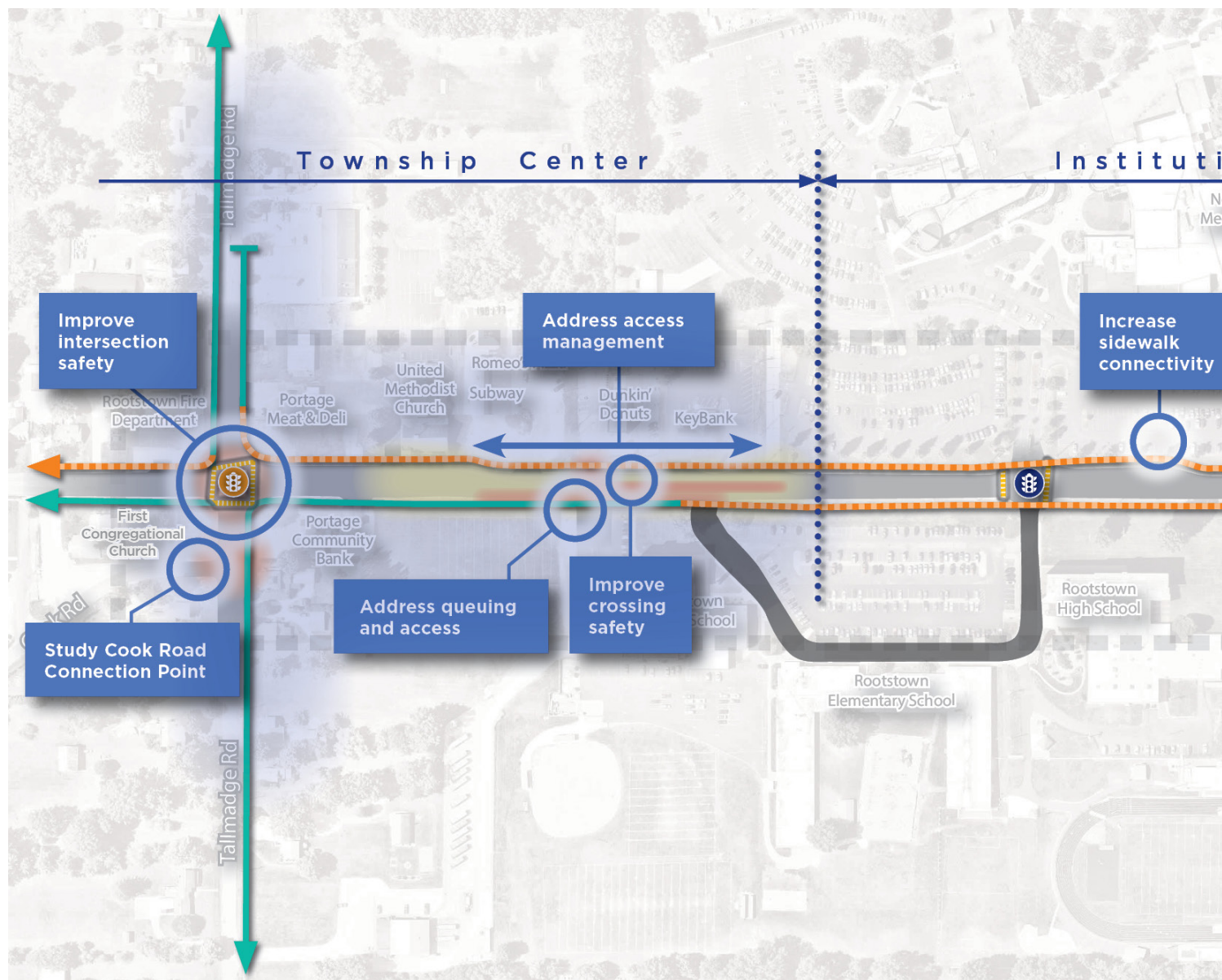


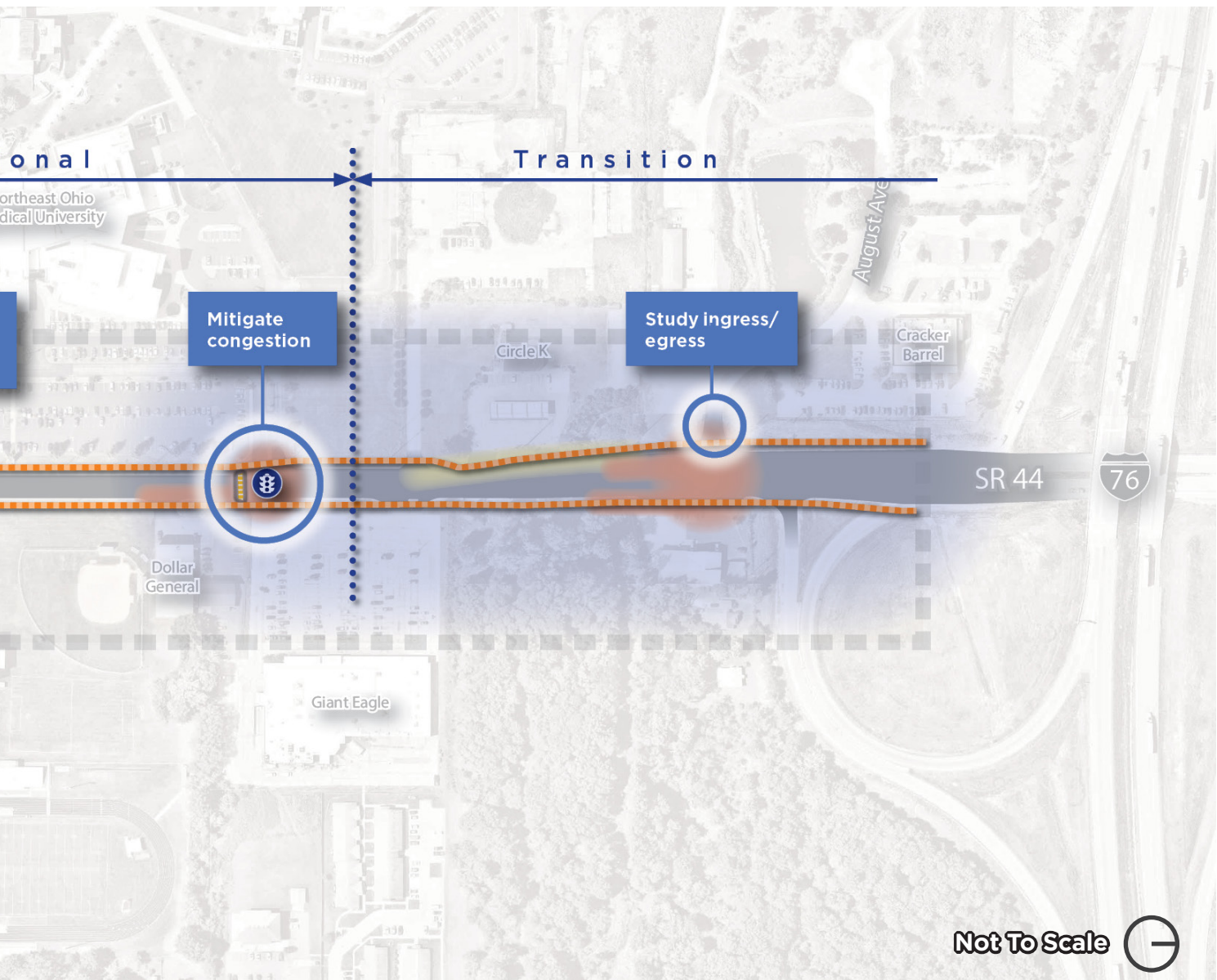
FIGURE 2-11: Key Takeaways



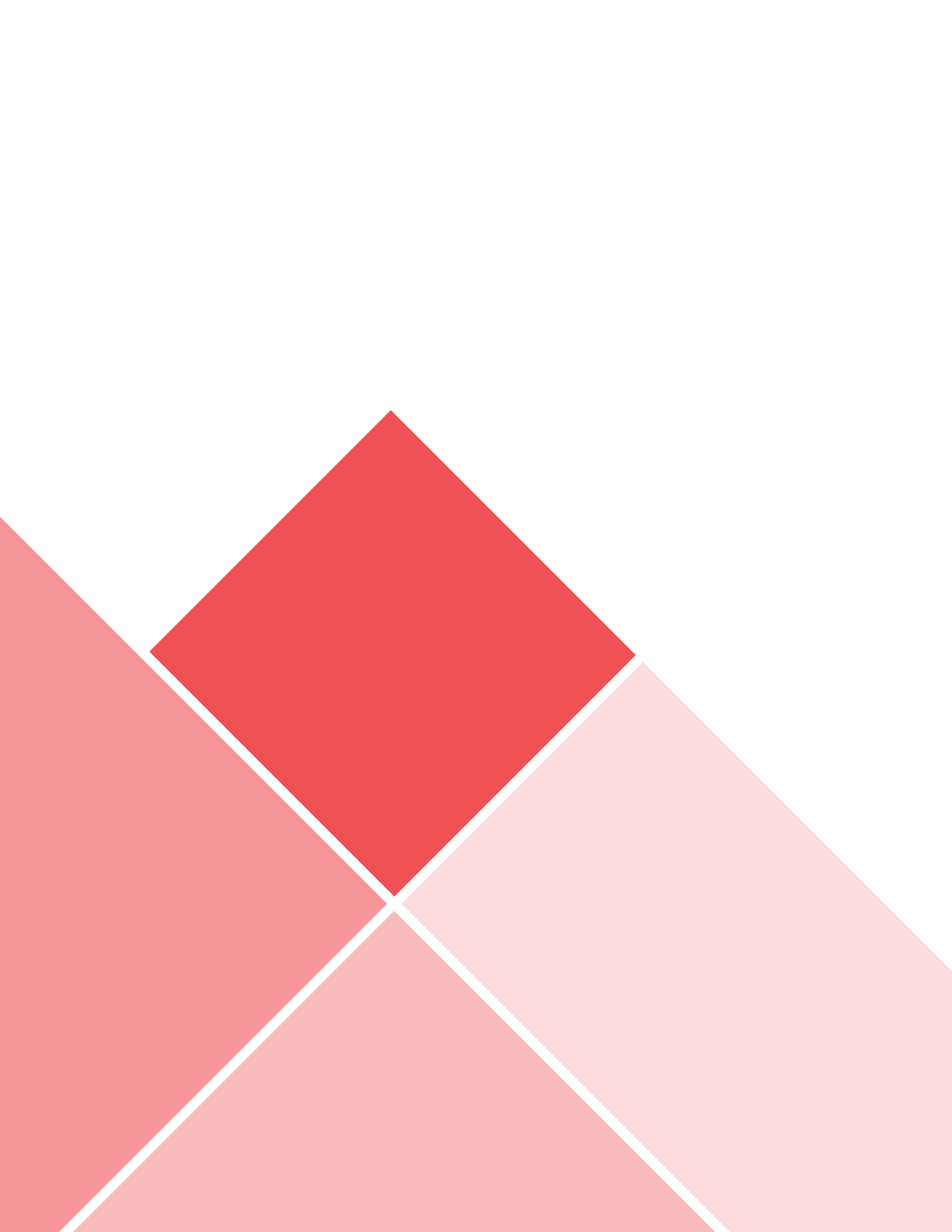
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Technical analysis of the SR 44 corridor, combined with the project's goals, highlights several priorities that future improvements must address to create a safer, more connected, and more intuitive environment:

- **Reinforce and align enhancements with established Character Zones.** Drawing from both the physical and regulatory context, improvements should further integrate the roadway corridor with its surroundings and support the intended identity of each zone.
- **Establish a continuous sidewalk network with safe, intuitive pedestrian crossings.** Consistent, ADA-compliant facilities are essential for students, residents, and visitors who rely on walking to reach schools, businesses, and community destinations.



- **Evaluate existing intersection configurations for opportunities to improve safety and function.** Intersection refinements should reduce conflict points, improve visibility, and support predictable movements for all users.
- **Improve access management to reduce turning conflicts and enhance corridor operations.** Consolidating or reconfiguring driveways, paired with strategic median treatments, will create safer and more organized entry points to corridor businesses and institutions.
- **Explore alternative routing for ingress and egress.** This is especially important in areas where constrained access, school traffic patterns, or existing development create bottlenecks and operational challenges.



3

Community Engagement

3

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

OVERVIEW

The engagement process for the State Route 44 Corridor Plan combined online and in-person outreach to capture diverse community perspectives. A seven-week online survey received 560 responses, providing valuable insights into traffic flow, safety concerns, non-motorized access, and community character. Additional input was gathered through stakeholder interviews, focus groups, four steering committee meetings, a second survey, and two community open houses, ensuring the plan reflects both technical analysis and community values.

560

**Survey
Responses**

15

**Steering Committee
Members**

70+

**Open House
Participants**

5

Focus Groups

Steering Committee

The project team convened four steering committee meetings during the planning process to guide the development of the State Route 44 Corridor Plan. These meetings served as key checkpoints to share progress, gather feedback, and build consensus around project priorities and recommendations.

Focus Groups

In addition to the steering committee meetings the project team hosted focus group sessions to gather more detailed input from different user groups along the State Route 44 corridor. These groups included Portage County engineering, Portage County Chamber of Commerce, Rootstown Local School District, Rootstown high school students, and local business owners.

FIGURE 3-1: Portage County Chamber of Commerce Focus Group Session Word Cloud Results

What Words Describe State Route 44?



IMAGE 3-1: Community Workshop



COMMUNITY SURVEY

The consultant team drafted a 22 question community survey which was reviewed by the steering committee and published online, opening September 3, 2024 for input from local residents. Open for 7 weeks, the consultant team advertised to the public via social media and flyering throughout the community.

The following page shows a snapshot of key questions and results from the community survey. The in-depth results with public comment are included in the report appendix.

FIGURE 3-2: Community Survey Flyer



FIGURE 3-3: Community Survey Feedback Charts

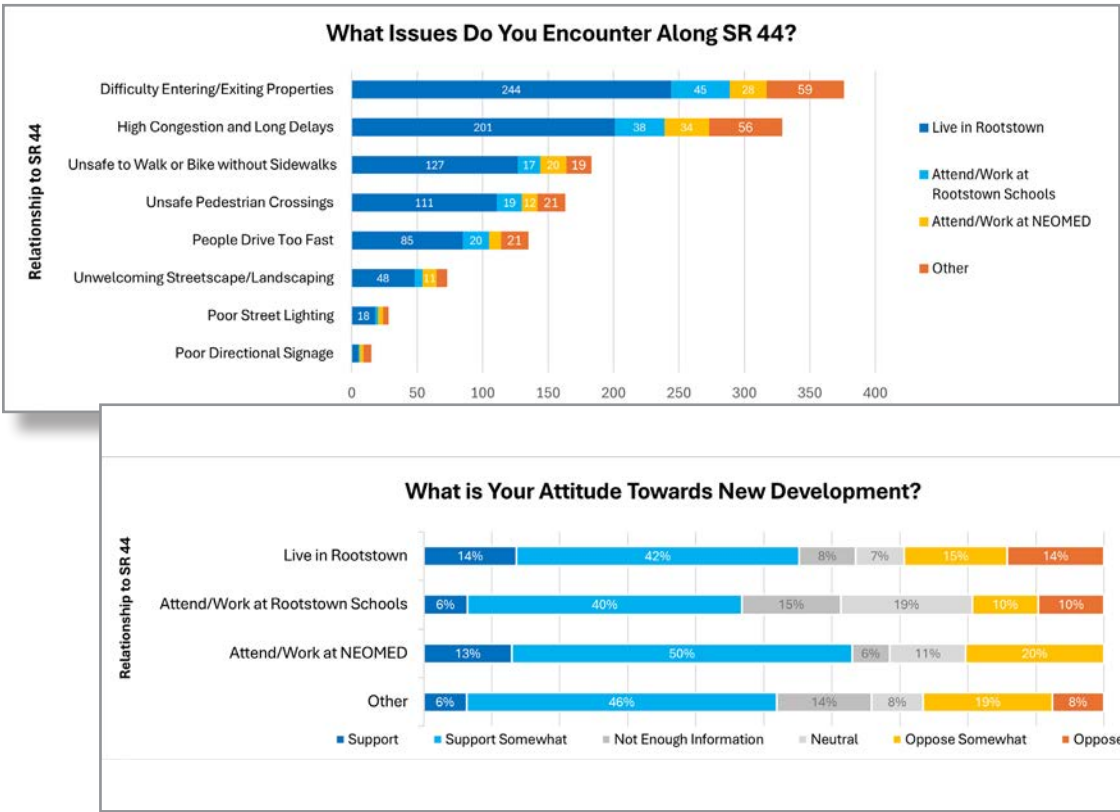


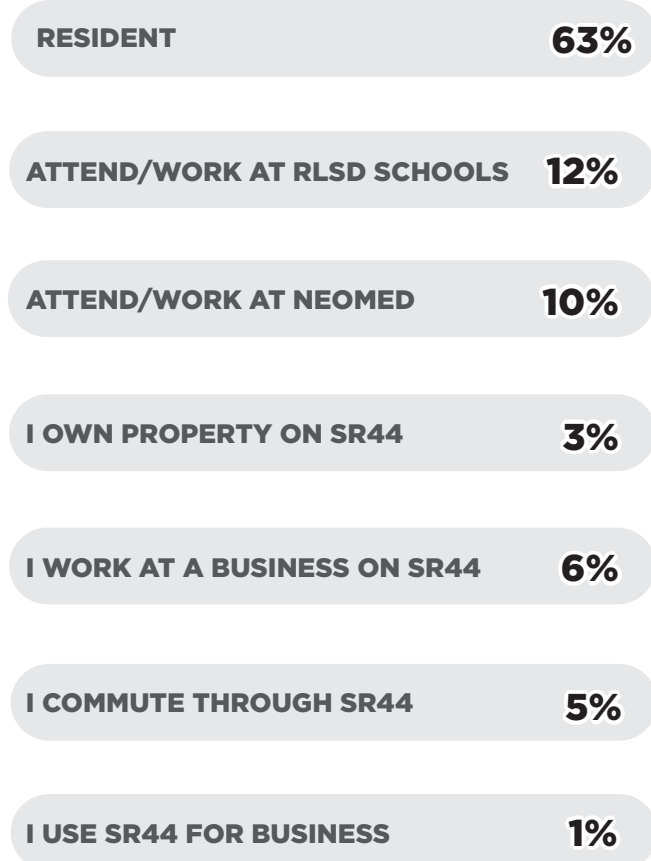
FIGURE 3-4: Community Survey Results

What issues do you encounter within this stretch of State Route 44?

Top 5 responses below:



What is Your **Relationship** to State Route 44?



Percentage of Respondents who **Travel the Corridor Daily**

68%

94%

Of Respondents on Corridor
Drive a Car as Their Means of Transportation

Percentage of Respondents Who Feel **No New Housing is Needed in the Study Area:**

63%

Open House #1

A public community workshop took place on September 30th, 2024 from 6-8 p.m. at Rootstown Middle School, and 30+ people attended. The consultant team recorded public comments and spoke to community members about the planning process and purpose. Participants were invited to give feedback on a series of engagement boards that included critical questions from the survey and a few new questions based on survey responses. Additionally, a 16 foot print out of the State Route 44 corridor garnered interactive engagement regarding traffic and circulation. These boards were designed to solicit feedback that would help inform the development of the corridor plan. The following are the results of these activities.

IMAGE 3-2: Community Open House #1



Corridor Priorities Board

Attendees were asked if economic growth or preservation of community character were more important:

- Most feel that they are equally important
- Attendees are open to new development with careful consideration of community impact

FIGURE 3-5: Open House Board

Which is more important...
Economic Growth OR Preservation of Community Character?

Place a dot here to leave your response!

Economic Growth



Grid of dots for response.

Preservation of Community Character



Grid of dots for response.

LET US KNOW WHY?
 LEAVE A POST-IT NOTE

Post-it notes with handwritten feedback:

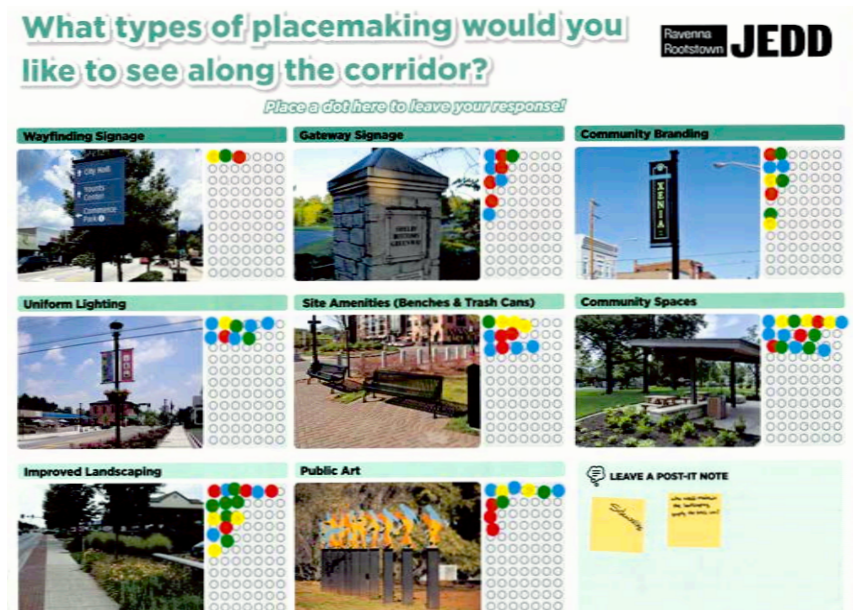
- Little home town shopping district
- More like historic neighborhood
- Both
- Keep small town feel
- Don't lose the historic feel
- Balance of both
- Green space
- Some of both
- A little of both

Placemaking Board

Eight different placemaking elements were presented on an engagement board, and attendees were asked to select which elements they would like to see implemented along the SR 44 corridor; the following summarizes the top three placemaking elements selected.

- Improved landscaping
- Community spaces
- Site amenities (eg. benches)

FIGURE 3-6: Open House Board

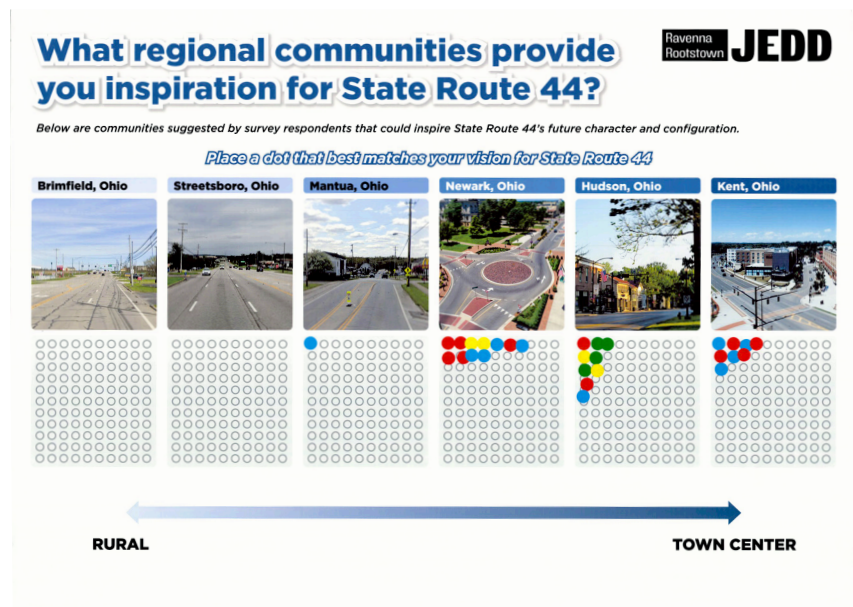


Regional Communities Board

Several regional community examples were presented on an engagement board, and attendees were asked to place a dot next to the community that best matches their vision for the future character of State Route 44; the following summarizes the top community precedents selected.

- Newark, Ohio
- Hudson, Ohio
- Kent, Ohio

FIGURE 3-7: Open House Board



Draft Plan Open House & Survey

Once a development strategy was created alongside the steering committee and client representatives, draft improvements were shared with residents at an open house. It is estimated that more than 50 stakeholders attended in person and participated in discussion around the proposed concepts. Conversation centered on how the improvements would help meet the project's stated goals related to safety, mobility, economic vitality, and community character. General feedback was positive and underscored the need for continued engagement and ongoing public education as the project moves from concept development into design.

To broaden participation, a follow-up survey was released and the open house display boards were posted on the JEDD's website. More than 120 responses were received, offering considerations and guidance for the project's next phases. Respondents emphasized:

- Continuing to prioritize safety around the school campus, including access, circulation, and traffic management.
- Maintaining accessible and transparent engagement and communication that clearly explain how improvements operate and their benefits.
- Ensuring the scale and character of proposed improvements, particularly access management, traffic control, and future development patterns, remain appropriate to Rootstown's context.

Taken together, the open house discussions and survey responses highlight clear priorities for advancing the plan. They reinforce the importance of sustained engagement in design development, clear public communication around technical elements, and continued attention to ensuring that final improvements remain technically sound, publicly understood, and appropriately scaled for the community.

FIGURE 3-8: Open House Flyer

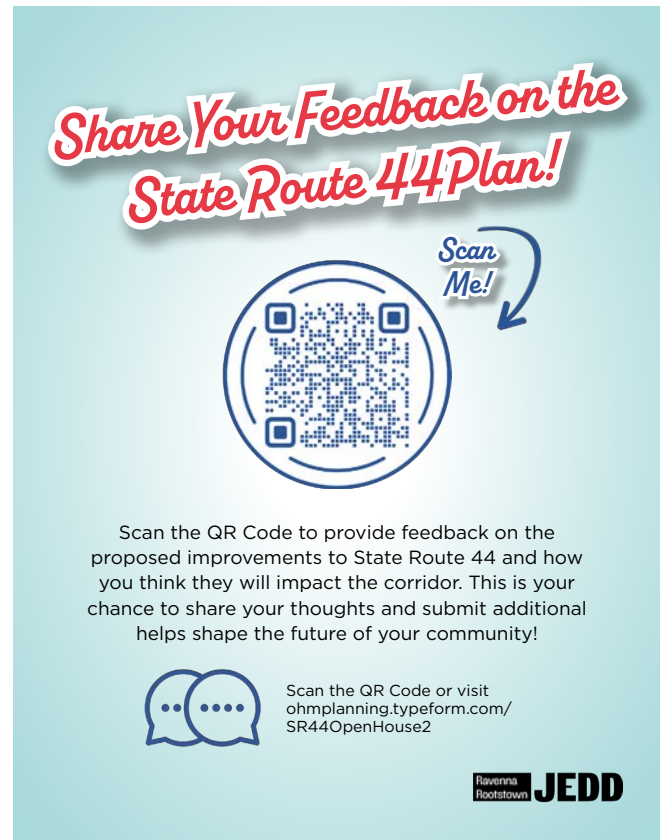


IMAGE 3-3: Community Open House #2

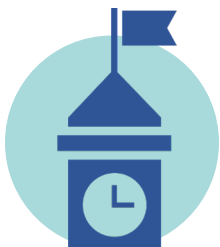


COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT KEY TAKEAWAYS

This page summarizes the key takeaways from the feedback generated from the community survey, steering committee meetings, and the Open House. These takeaways, together with the existing conditions and trends research, and information from previous community plans, inform the development of the corridor recommendations.



Respondents favor a **safer corridor** with **more efficient access management** to businesses and institutions.



Residents are interested in developing a **sense of place in their town center that includes community space.**



Respondents envision the **creation of new business and the growth of existing business that reflect the township's values.**



Residents desire **restaurants and bars, entertainment venues, and mixed-use options** along the corridor.



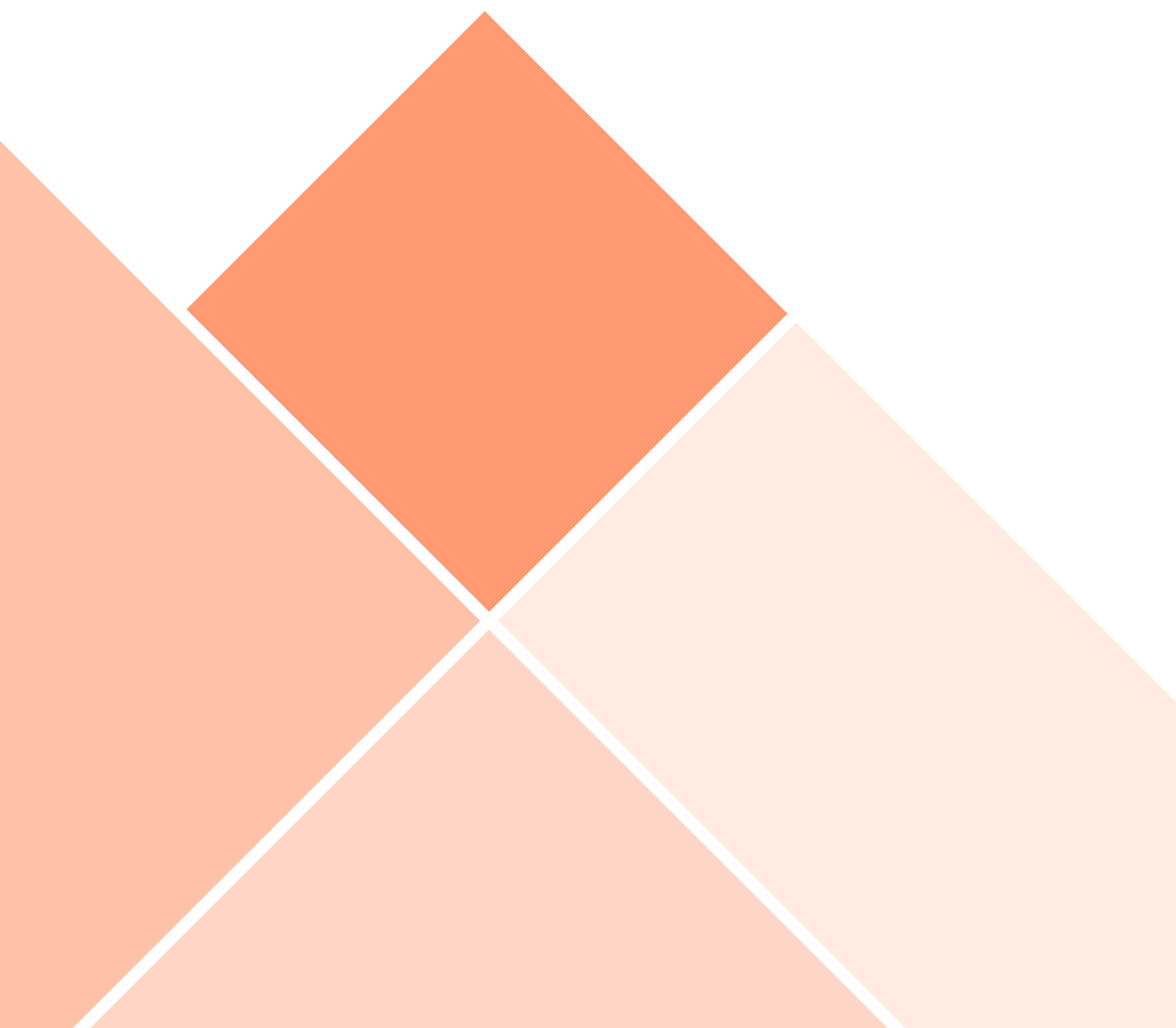
Respondents agreed that **new development** should be **balanced** and **align with project goals**.



Respondents support **sidewalks and non-motorized connectivity**, including **safe pedestrian crossings**.



Residents would like **more placemaking improvements such as landscaping, community branding, site amenities, and public art**.



4

Corridor Framework

4

CORRIDOR FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

The State Route 44 Corridor Framework outlines how the corridor should evolve to better support Rootstown's long-term needs. Goals for the corridor were established at the outset of the project; however, through engagement and technical analysis, a clearer understanding of the priorities underlying those goals emerged. This led to a refined framework that places community needs and aspirations first and then tailors a transportation strategy to support, rather than displace them.

Together, these frameworks establish how the corridor's identity, land use patterns, and mobility systems should work in concert. They set the foundation for the specific improvements and action steps presented in subsequent chapters.

IMAGE 4-1: State Route 44



CORRIDOR VISION

State Route 44 will evolve into a corridor that strengthens Rootstown Township’s character while improving safety, connectivity, and long-term economic resilience. The corridor will form a continuous network linking schools, NEOMED, neighborhoods, and the Township Center through well-designed pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

New development will reinforce walkable, human-scaled patterns in the Township Center and support institution-serving uses near the interchange, creating a sequence of distinct but connected places. Infrastructure improvements, character zones, and coordinated site design will work in concert to create a corridor that is welcoming, intuitive, and aligned with the community’s values.

The corridor vision is realized through the project’s four goals. Each goal is supported by a framework diagram that organizes the corridor’s structure into clear, actionable components. Together, these goals guide how the vision will be implemented throughout the rest of the plan.

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT



Goal: Feature and Enhance Rootstown's Sense of Place

The corridor's character shifts noticeably from north to south, reflecting Rootstown's mix of campus, commercial, and neighborhood environments. The Character Zones identify these distinct areas and provide a foundation for design and development strategies that strengthen Rootstown's sense of place. By clarifying the corridor's structure and reinforcing the identity of each zone, future roadway improvements can respond to these differences and create a more intuitive, memorable, and community-oriented experience.

Transition Zone

Accommodate larger-scale and more auto-oriented uses while minimizing their impact on the surrounding community. Design strategies should help organize access, improve site cohesiveness, and establish a northern gateway that clearly signals entry into the campus-oriented segment of the corridor.

Institutional Zone

Create a connected, high-quality streetscape that links NEOMED, Rootstown Local Schools, and Bio-Med Science Academy with the broader community. This zone should highlight Rootstown's cultural and educational identity and serve as a central anchor within the corridor, with transition nodes to both the north and south.

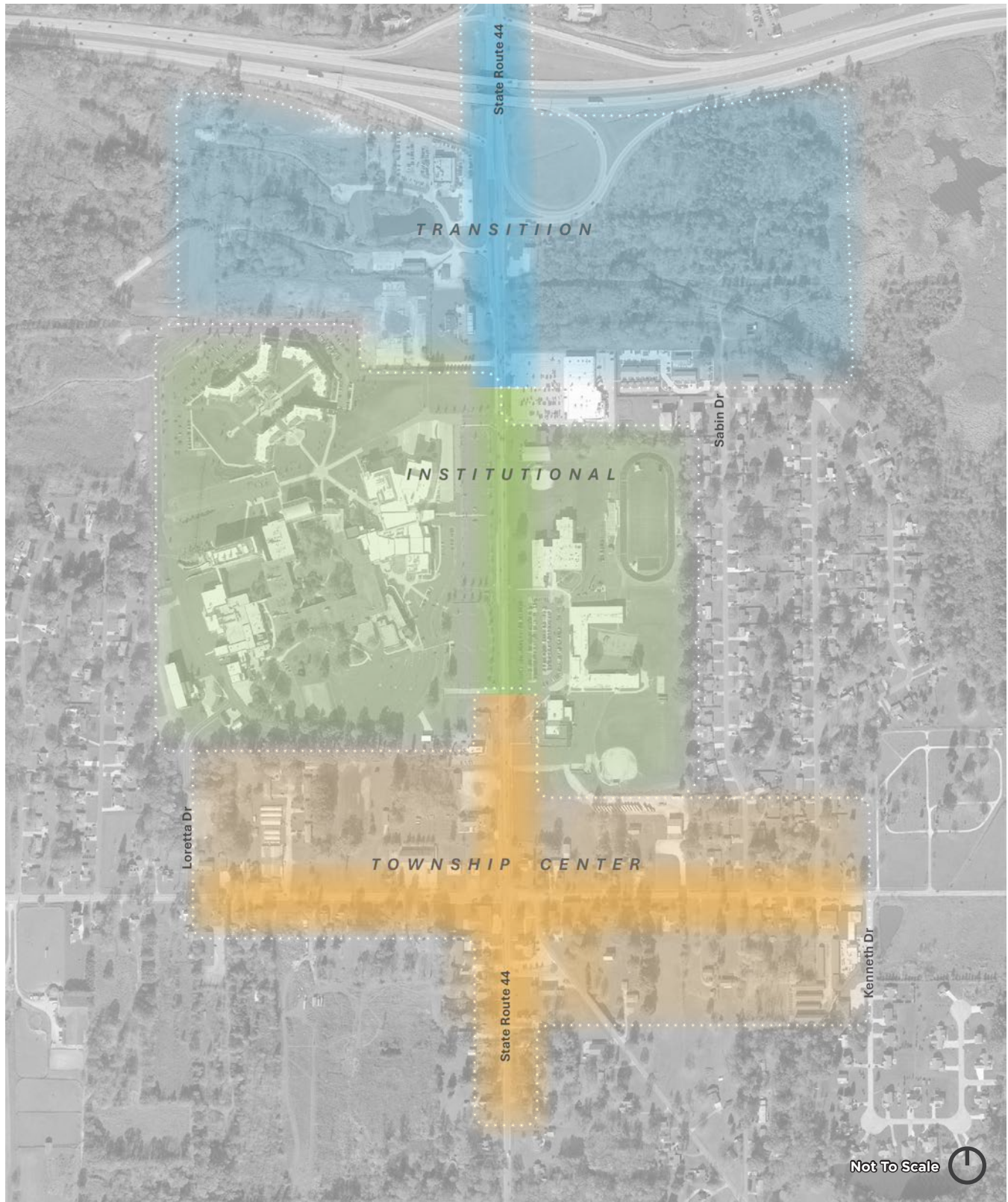
Township Center Zone

Foster a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented main street environment that reflects Rootstown's small-town character and supports local businesses. Improvements should enhance walkability, reinforce community identity, and define a clear southern gateway to the corridor.

Key Nodes

The boundaries between the Transition, Institutional, and Township Center Zones form key nodes that help define corridor identity. Targeted improvements at these locations, such as enhanced crossings, intersection design, landscaping, or signage, can emphasize thresholds, calm traffic, and create visual cues that distinguish each zone. These nodes are essential tools for expressing Rootstown's sense of place throughout the corridor.

FIGURE 4-1: Character Zones



Goal: Improve Pedestrian and Non-Motorized Connectivity and Safety

Residents emphasized that the lack of pedestrian infrastructure limits use of the corridor and creates unsafe conditions. Of particular concern is the conflict created by students from Rootstown Local Schools crossing at uncontrolled locations to reach nearby commercial establishments. A primary outcome of work along the corridor should be the creation of a safe, continuous pedestrian network that links major community destinations.

Pedestrian Pathway Connectivity

A continuous sidewalk system should extend along State Route 44 and across the Tallmadge corridor, forming the primary north–south and east–west spines shown in the Pedestrian Network map. These Priority Pedestrian Pathways should connect Rootstown Local Schools, NEOMED, Bio-Med Science Academy, nearby neighborhoods, Township Hall, and local businesses to create a complete and accessible walking network.

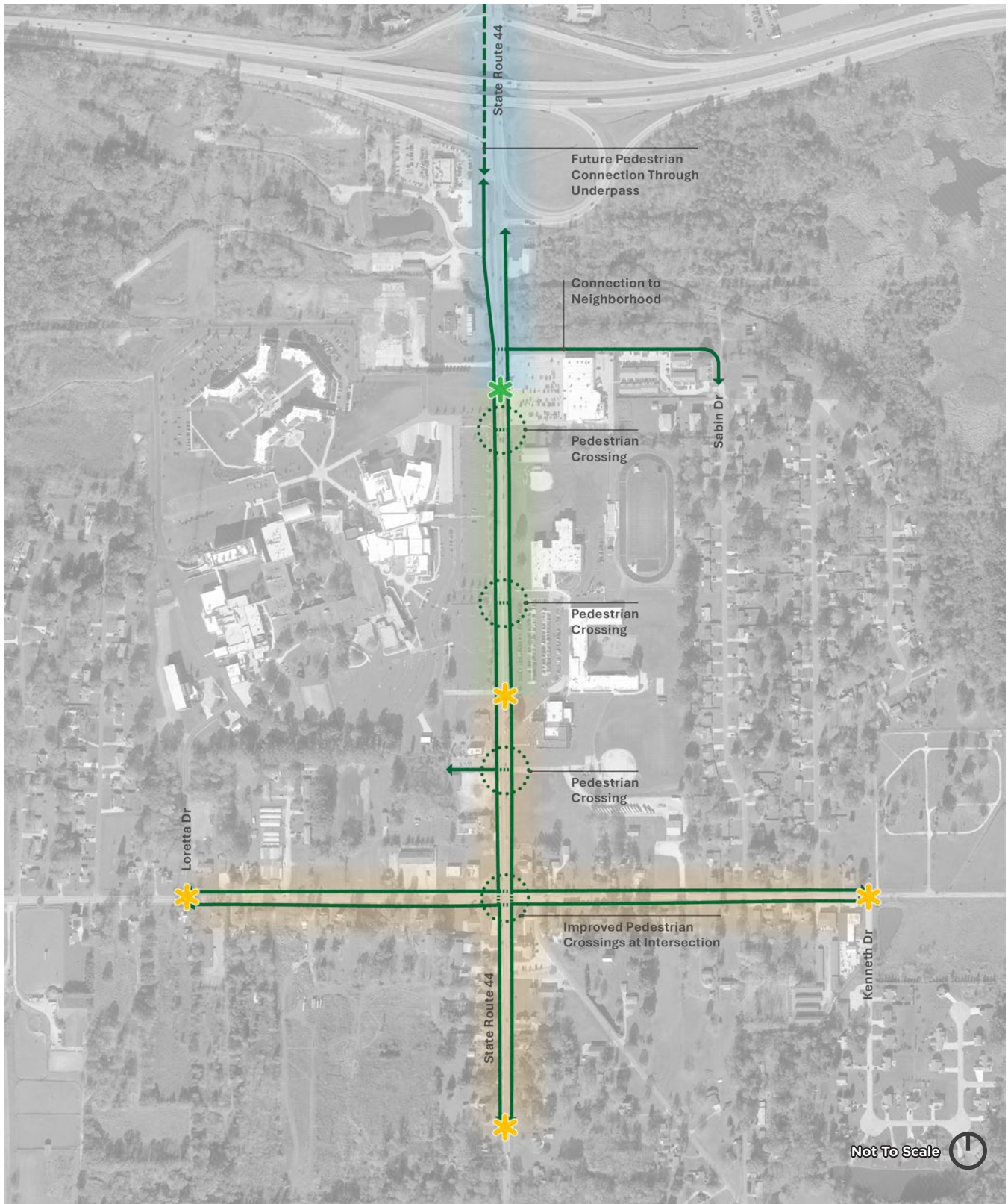
Pedestrian Crossing Improvements

Safe, clearly defined pedestrian crossings are needed along the corridor’s highest-activity areas, with particular focus on the school campus area. Crossings should be strategically located to match pedestrian desire lines while improving visibility and reducing mid-block crossings made out of convenience. These locations are illustrated as Pedestrian Crossing Improvements in the map.

Future Planning and Connectivity

While the project area focuses on one segment of State Route 44, long-term success depends on extending pedestrian facilities beyond the study limits. The most critical future extension is north under I-76 toward Lynn Road. The current overpass configuration lacks pedestrian accommodations and any future redesign should incorporate the opportunity to carry the Priority Pedestrian Pathway across this major barrier.

FIGURE 4-2: Pedestrian Network



Goal: Guide Economic Growth in Line with Community Desires

Throughout the project, stakeholders identified examples of corridor development across the region that they hoped to emulate, and others they hoped to avoid. The most discouraged patterns included high-traffic-generating uses with poor coordination between parcels and weak relationships between buildings and the street. In response, this study reviewed undeveloped parcels within the study area and paired them with stakeholder insights to identify locations that can support appropriate, well-integrated development over time.

Highway-Adjacent Development Areas

Several larger undeveloped sites lie between I-76 to the north and NEOMED and Rootstown Local Schools to the south. Given their proximity to both highway access and major institutional anchors, these areas are well-positioned for uses that serve both highway institutional patrons, such as hotels, restaurants, or research and development office space. Because these uses may generate notable traffic, site design must carefully manage access and minimize impacts on State Route 44. These sites also contain a concentration of regulated wetlands, which will influence developable yield and may require coordinated, multi-parcel approaches to mitigation.

Township Center Development Areas

Within the Township Center Zone, new development should reinforce the existing character by using traditional development forms, such as low-rise mixed-use buildings with strong urban edges and activated frontages. Ground floors should prioritize public-facing commercial or service uses, while upper floors may include residential or office uses. This flexible framework allows development to respond to evolving market conditions while maintaining forms that enhance the Township Center and reflect community aspirations.

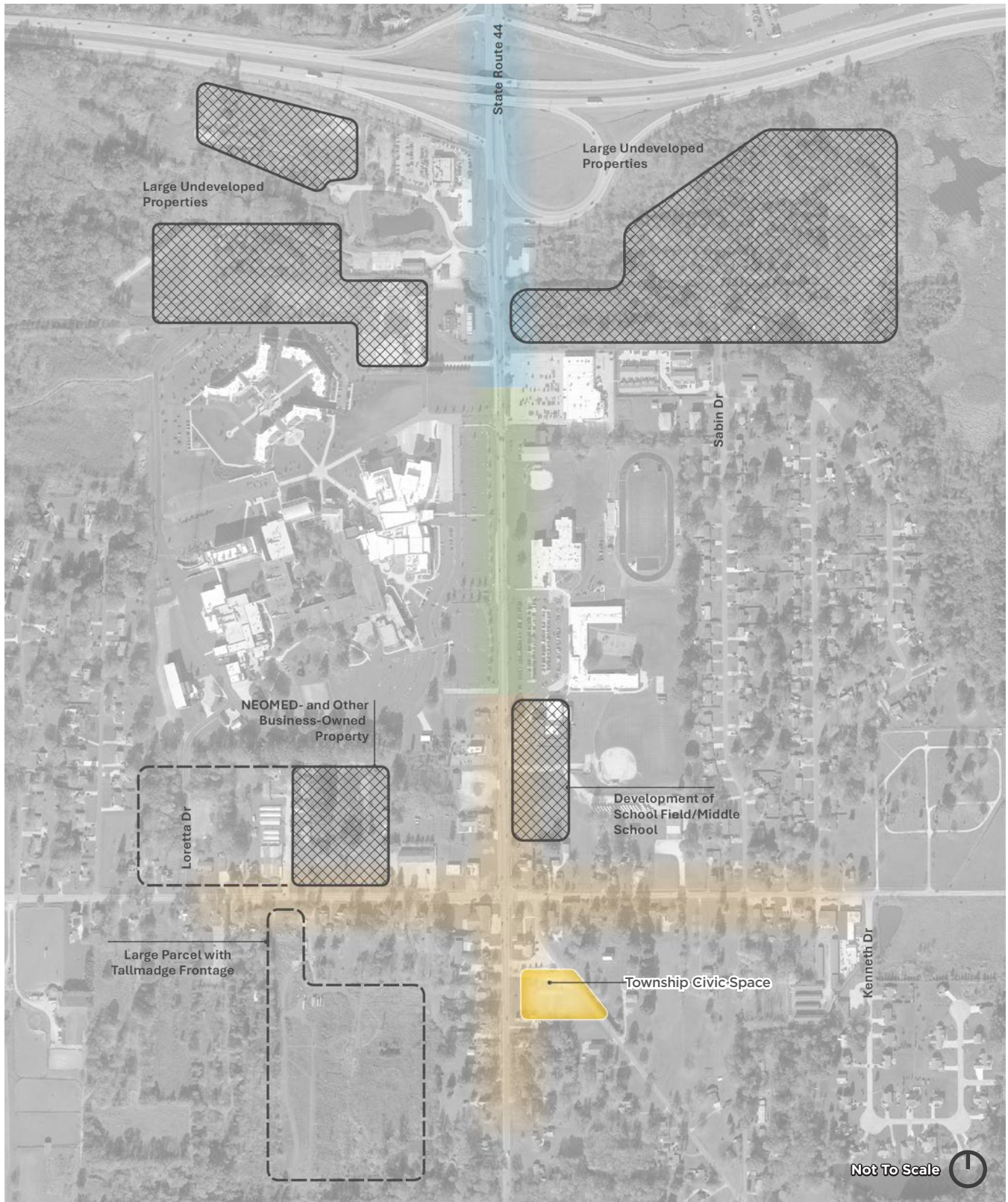
Township Hall Site

Located at the heart of the Township Center and serving as a primary civic destination, the Township Hall site will benefit from corridor improvements that enhance access, visibility, and public realm quality. Relocating the DPW garage and expanding or reconstructing the Township Hall could strengthen its role as a civic anchor and further elevate the Township Center's character.

Long-Term Development Areas

The framework also identifies additional development and redevelopment sites that may become viable in the longer term. While these areas may not be immediate opportunities, they should be monitored over time as the corridor evolves and market conditions shift.

FIGURE 4-3: Potential Development Areas



Goal: Address Traffic Issues and Plan for Future Demands on the Corridor

With the Character Zones established, the preferred development patterns identified, and the Priority Pedestrian Network defined, the Vehicular Framework represents the coordinated roadway strategy that aligns all three preceding frameworks into a unified approach for how the corridor should function.

This framework translates corridor needs and community priorities into a set of roadway improvements that reinforce character, support desired development types, and ensure that State Route 44 and Talmadge Road can safely and efficiently accommodate future demand. The result is a connected, legible, and resilient circulation system that supports Rootstown's long-term growth while improving everyday operations.

Primary Corridor Improvements

Upgrades along State Route 44 and Talmadge Road form the spine of the network. Sidewalks, medians, targeted access management, and coordinated landscaping all support smoother traffic flow and reinforce the distinct character of each zone. As the corridor transitions from the highway-adjacent environment to the institutional campus and into the Township Center, the scale, design, and amenities of these improvements will adjust accordingly. This ensures that roadway elements not only reduce conflict points and organize turning movements but also strengthen the sense of place and provide a safe, predictable experience that evolves naturally along the corridor's length.

Intersection Improvements

Key intersections align closely with the transitions between Character Zones. Improving these locations strengthens corridor legibility, reduces conflicts, and improves safety. These upgrades also set clear thresholds for entering and exiting each zone, reinforcing the role of Character Zones as both placemaking tools and functional organizing elements for traffic movement.

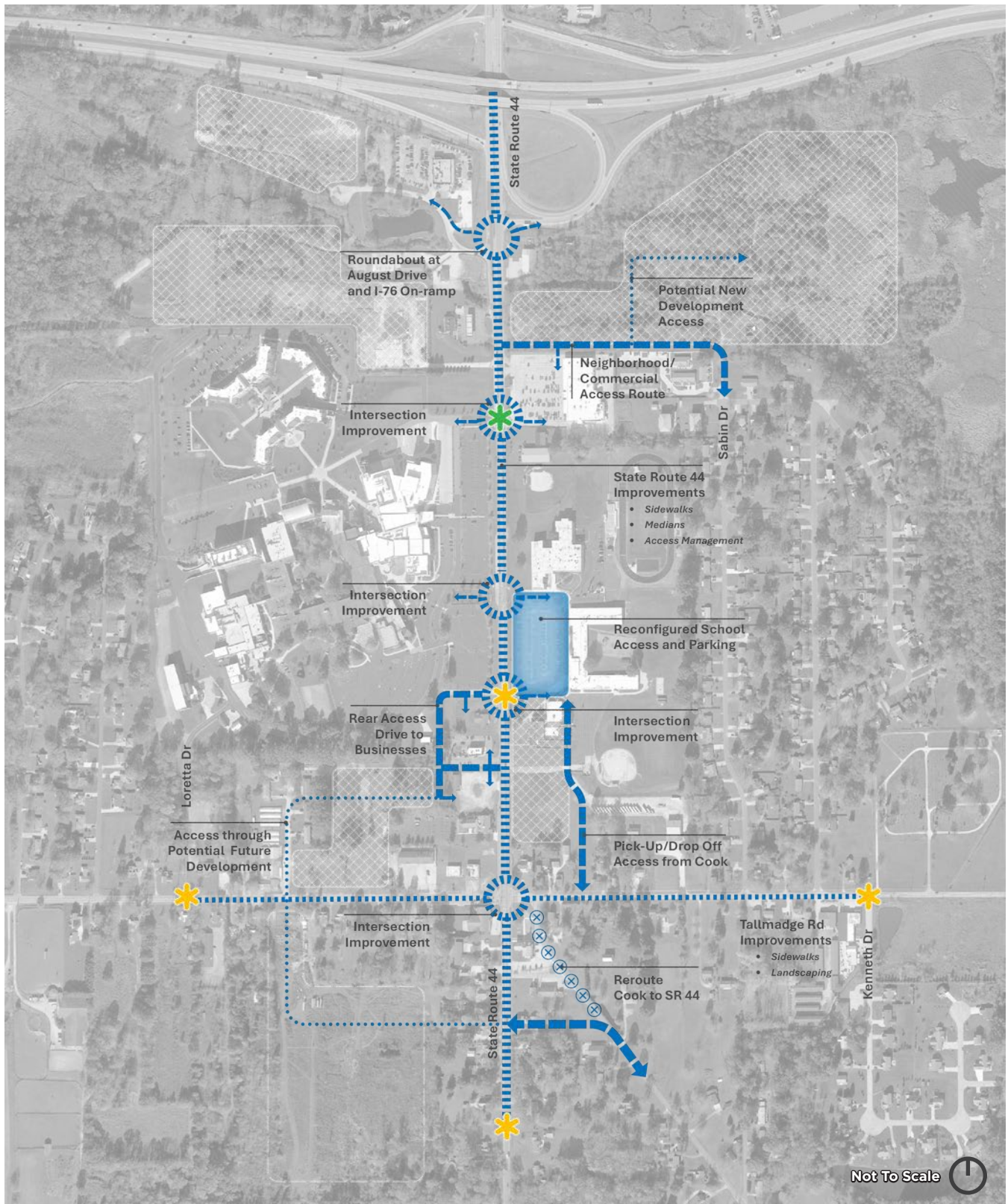
Short-Term New Roadway Connections

Many immediate needs along the corridor relate to circulation inefficiencies near the school campus and Township Center. Short-term connections, such as improved school access routes, rear business drives, and internal commercial circulation, relieve existing congestion and reduce unnecessary turning movements onto State Route 44. These improvements operationalize the development and pedestrian objectives introduced in earlier sections.

Long-Term New Roadway Connections

As development expands in areas identified in the Economic Growth framework, new roadway segments will be needed to support circulation and distribute traffic more evenly. These long-term improvements create options for future access, support multi-parcel development, and provide flexibility as growth occurs over time. Their alignment responds directly to the Character Zone structure and anticipated development patterns. They may not be immediate opportunities, they should be monitored over time as the corridor evolves and market conditions shift.

FIGURE 4-4: Vehicular Framework



CONCLUSION

Taken together, the framework presented in this chapter define the corridor's identity and clarify how land use, mobility, and public realm improvements should reinforce one another. They provide the lens through which future decisions can stay aligned with Rootstown's values. The following chapter builds on this foundation by detailing the roadway improvements that implement the vision, turning the community's goals into a coordinated set of on-the-ground solutions.



IMAGE 4-2: Rootstown, OH



5

Corridor Improvements

5

CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS

OVERVIEW

This chapter grounds the project goals and framework in a corridor plan that outlines improvements to make the State Route 44 corridor safer, more intuitive, and aligned with the desired community character. These improvements are illustrated through sections, plans, and perspective renderings. The chapter also identifies design strategies that can be applied consistently across the corridor and highlights implementation considerations that will require additional coordination during final design and engineering.

It is important to note that this corridor plan represents a snapshot in the broader timeline of corridor development. As the project advances, individual components may evolve to respond to existing conditions, detailed traffic analysis, or funding availability. The recommendations presented here offer a clear vision for one cohesive approach to achieving the community's desired outcomes while allowing for adjustment as new information emerges.

FIGURE 5-1: Framework Plan - Corridor

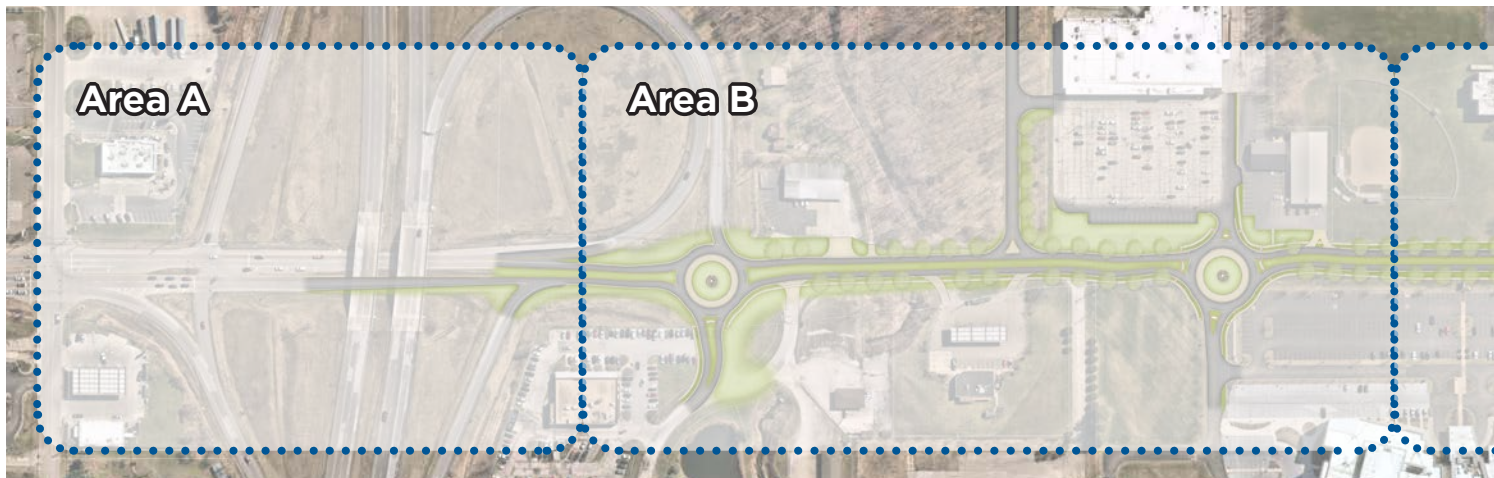
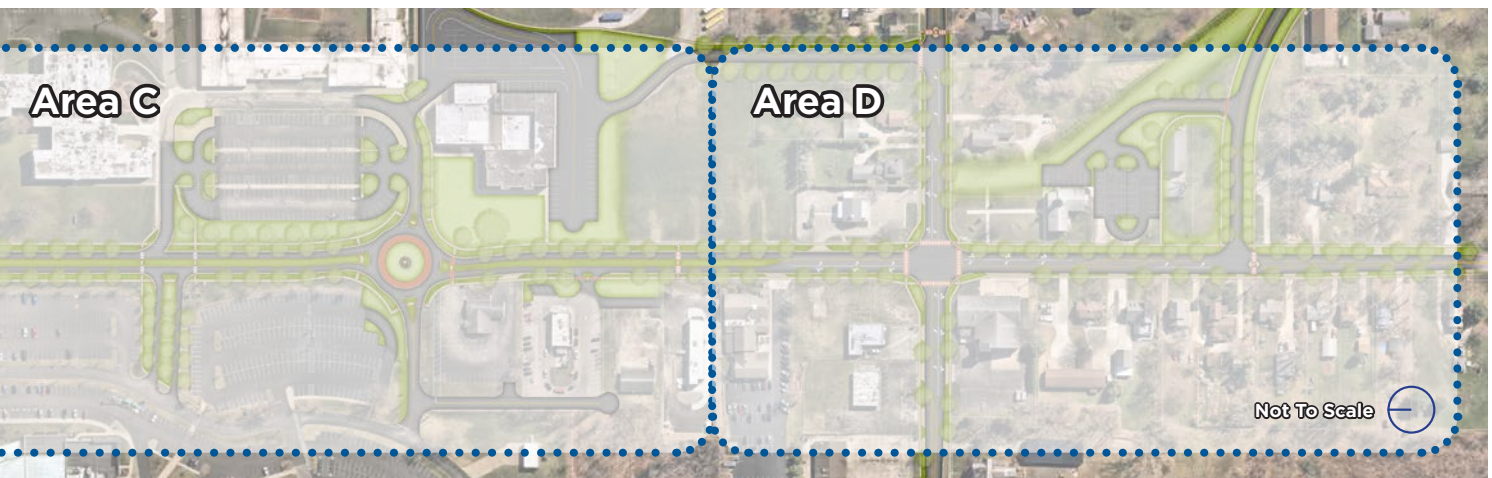
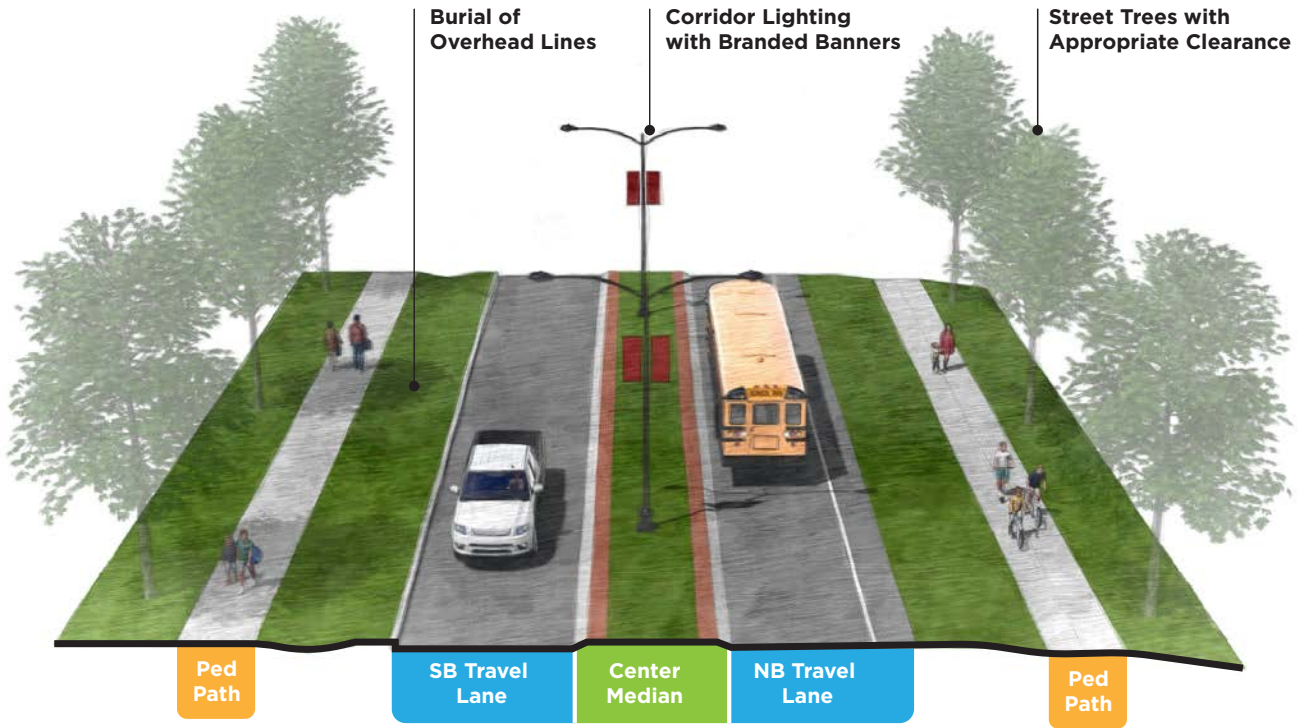


FIGURE 5-2: SR44 Cross-Section



CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The following pages enlarge portions of the key plan to illustrate the Corridor Plan in greater detail. Annotations highlight the design moves that will most meaningfully improve safety, circulation, and overall corridor character.

Areas A, B, C, and D are used solely to connect the key plan to the corresponding corridor enlargements. They are a graphic organizing tool for this chapter and are not intended to replace or reinterpret the Character Zones established earlier in the plan.

FIGURE 5-3: Framework Plan - Area A

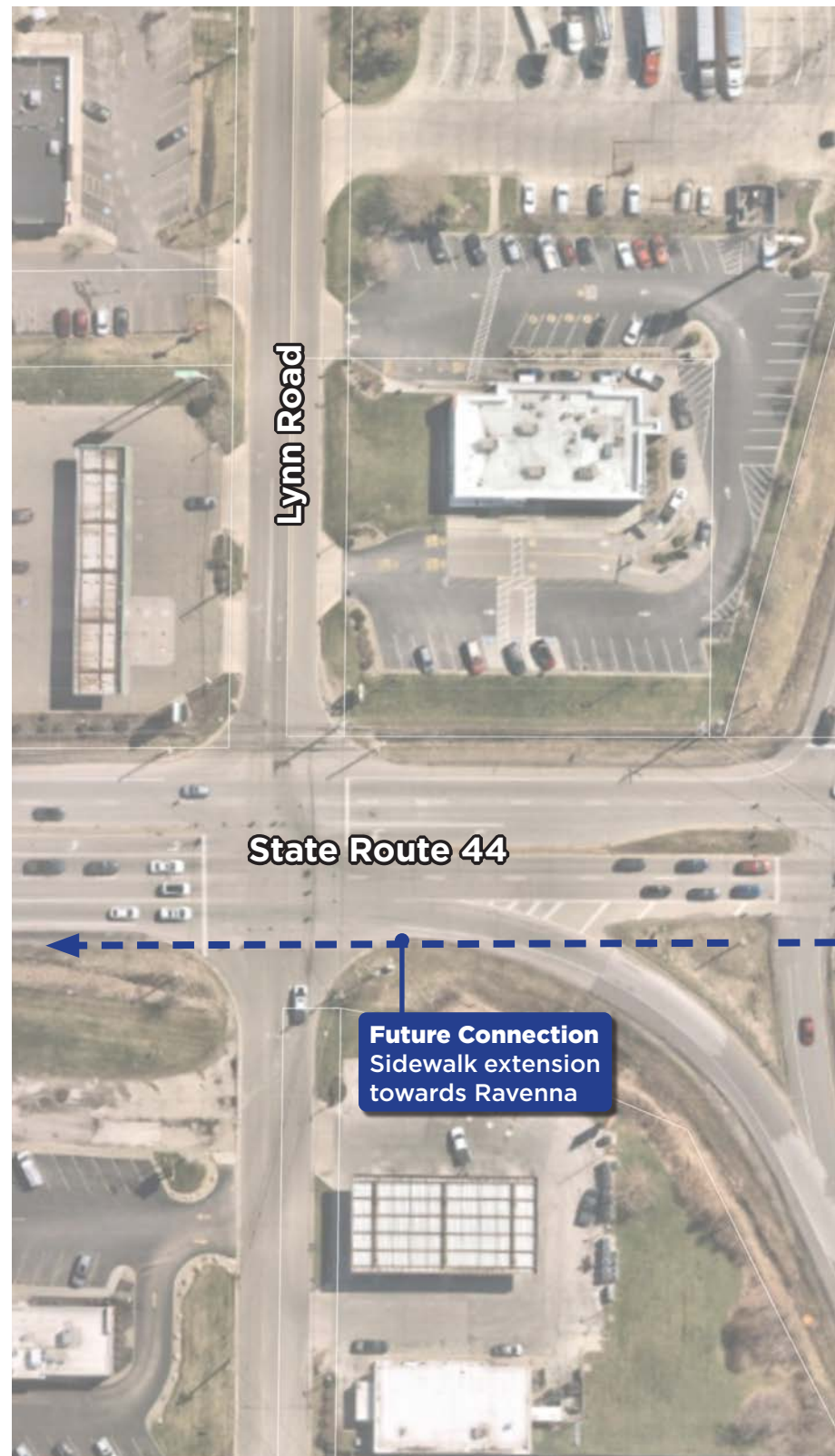




FIGURE 5-4: Framework Plan - Area B

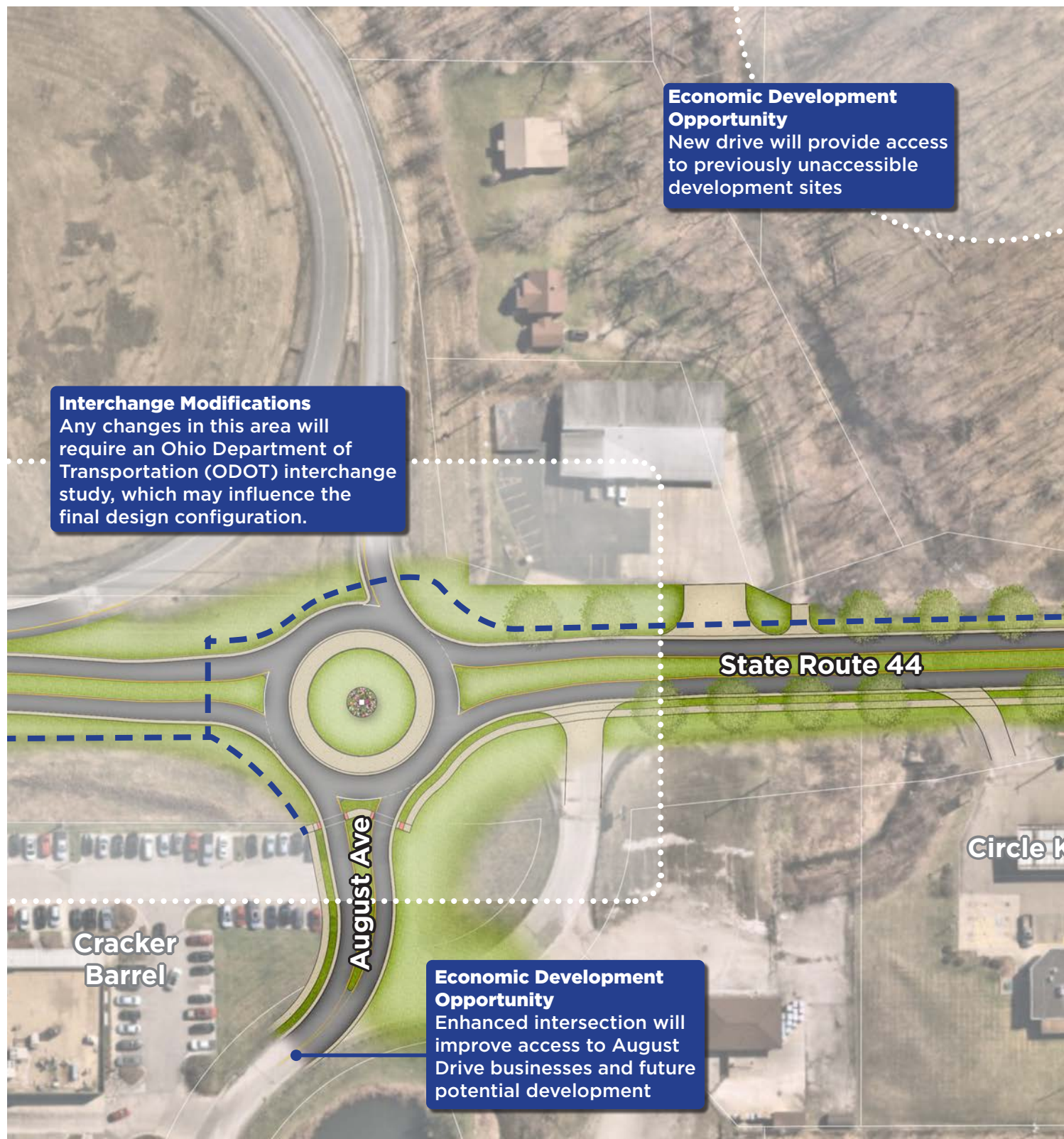




FIGURE 5-5: Framework Plan - Area C



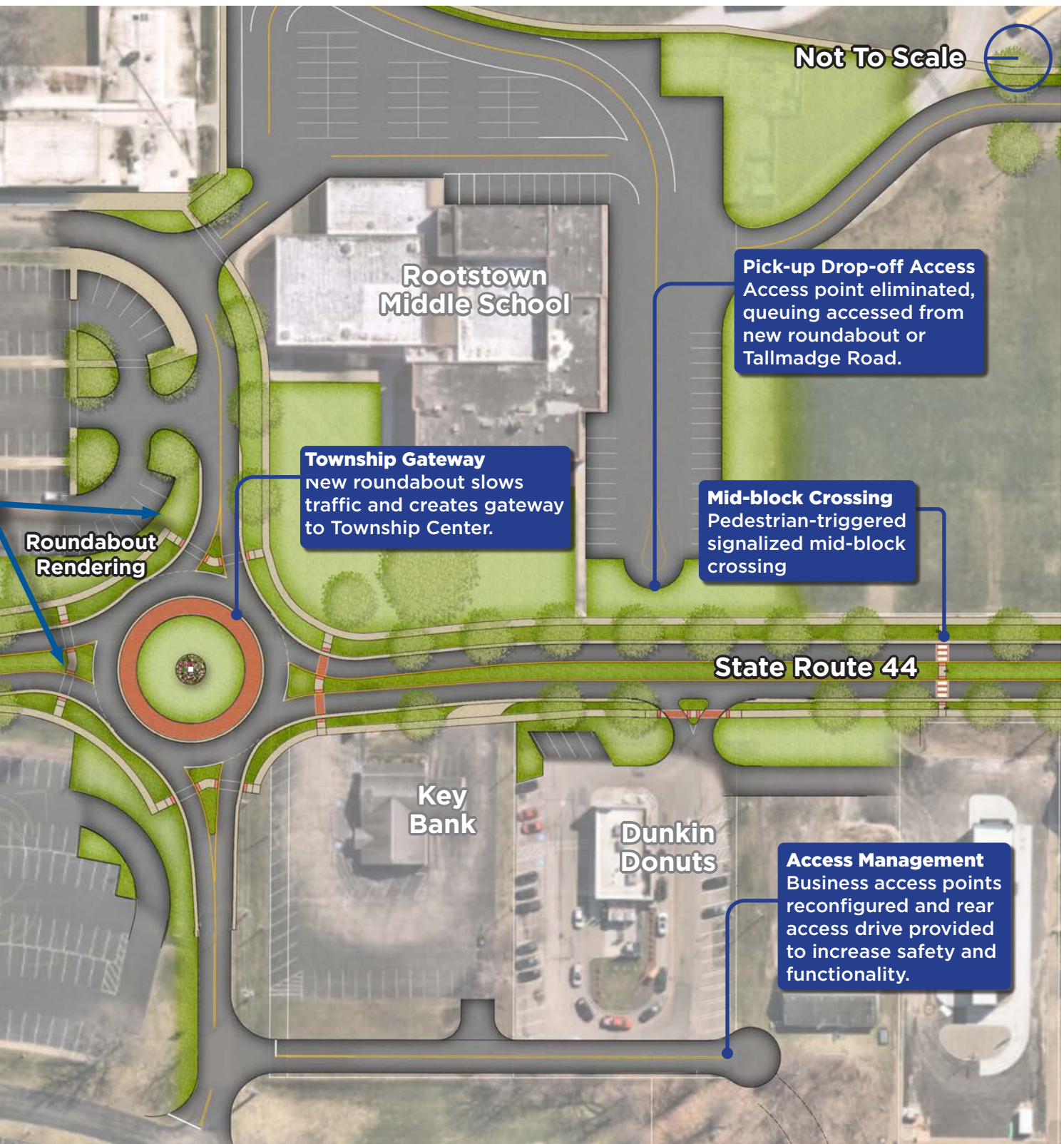
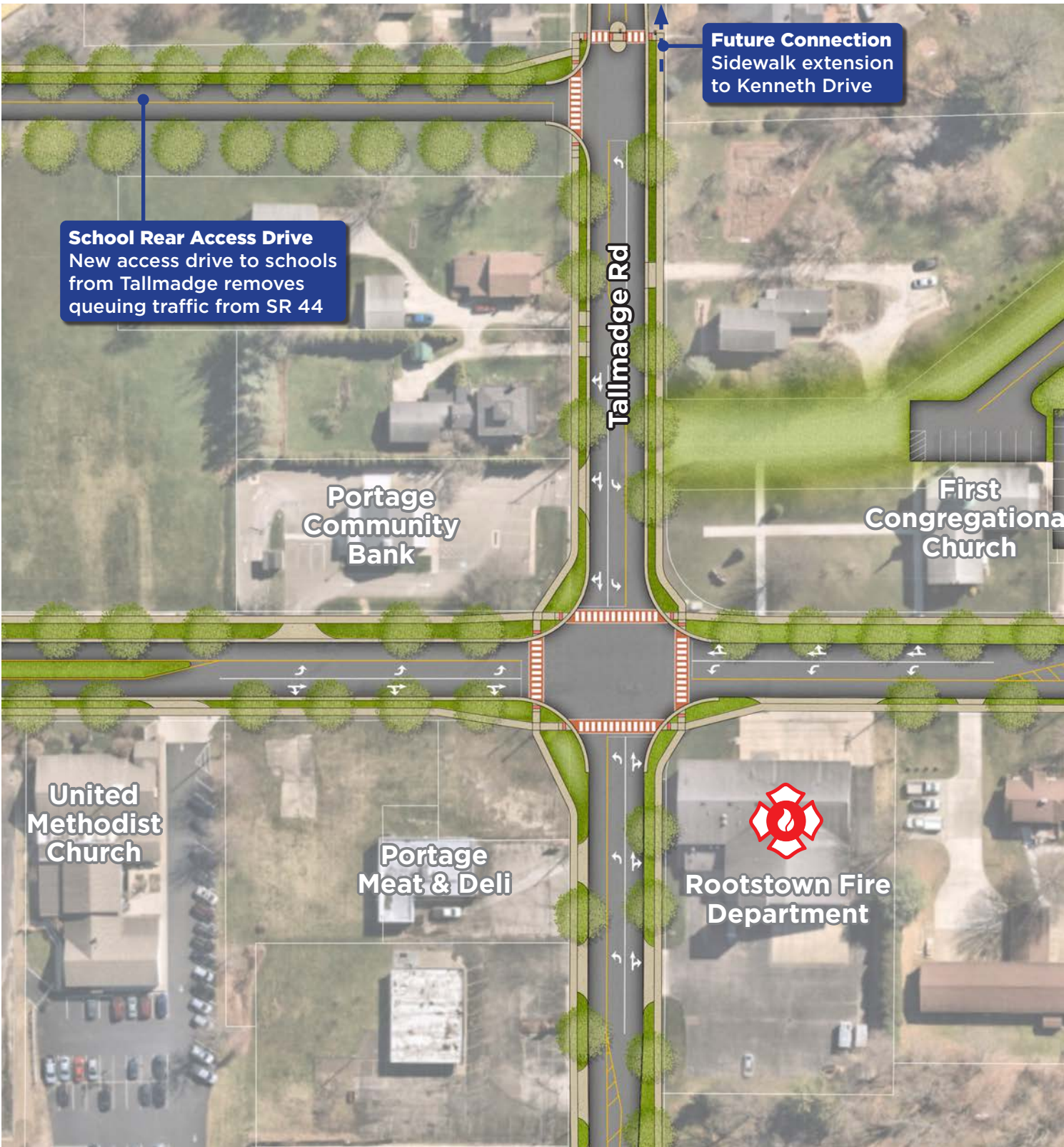
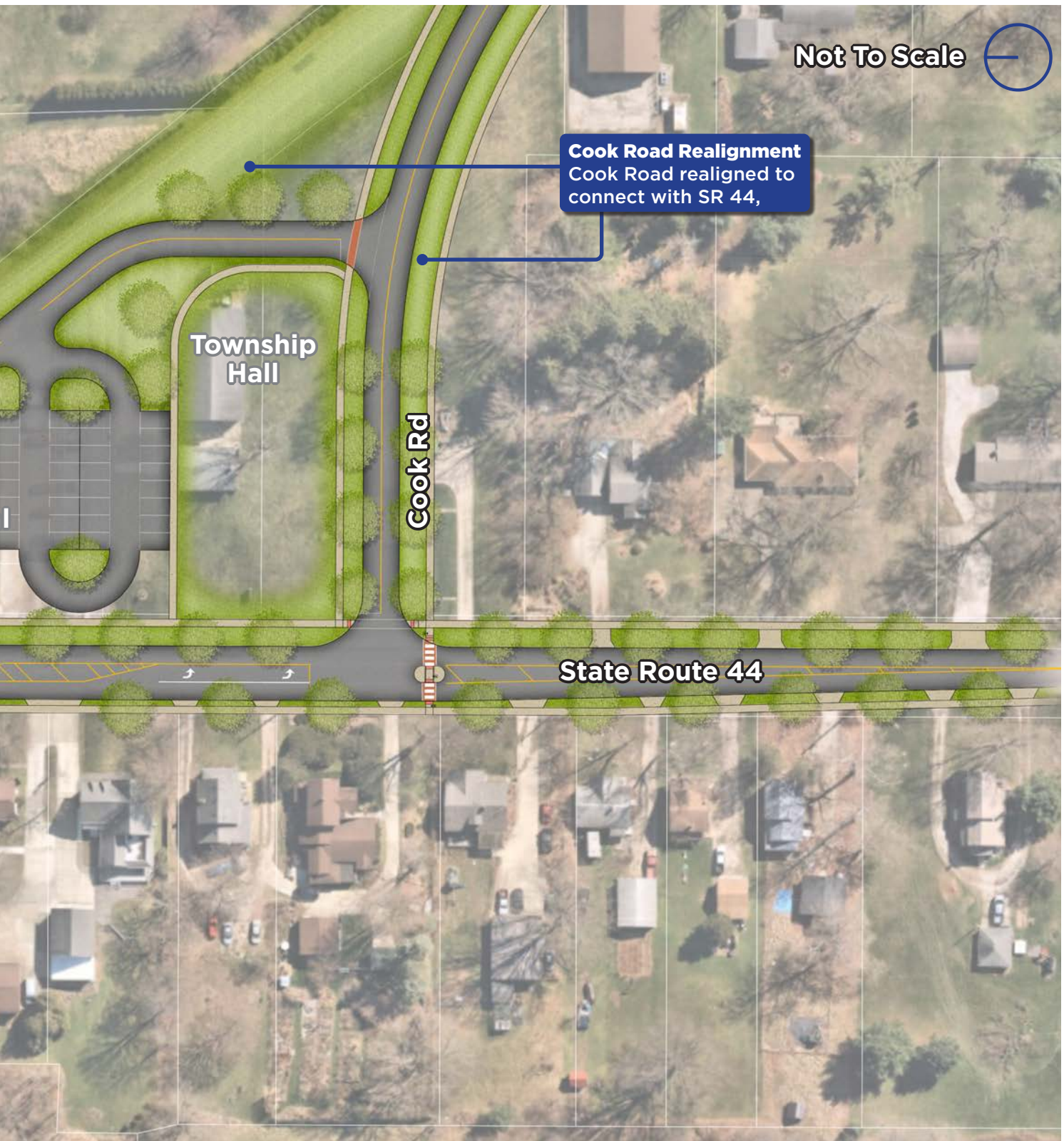


FIGURE 5-6: Framework Plan - Area D





SYSTEM-WIDE IMPROVEMENTS

Several improvements apply consistently along the corridor, ensuring continuity of experience while allowing for localized refinement based on context. These systemwide elements help unify the corridor visually and functionally, establishing a baseline of safety, comfort, and aesthetic quality across all zones.

Intersections and Roundabouts

Implementation of roundabouts along the SR 44 corridor will reduce conflict points, improve decision-making for drivers, and strengthen multimodal safety. Key components of the systemwide strategy include:

- Improved Vehicular and Pedestrian Safety**
 Simplified turning movements, controlled vehicle speeds, and clearer sightlines reduce the likelihood and severity of crashes. Shorter crossing distances, refuge islands, and high-visibility markings create safer crossings for pedestrians.
- Access Consolidation and Turn Management**
 Intersection designs coordinate with corridor-wide access management strategies to reduce congestion and improve predictability. Consolidated driveways, directional control, and well-defined turn movements help maintain traffic flow while ensuring reliable access to key destinations.
- Character Zone Reinforcement**
 Roundabouts are strategically placed where the corridor transitions between character zones. These locations act as gateways, using geometry, landscaping, and lighting to signal entry into the Township Center, the Institutional Zone.

FIGURE 5-7: Roundabout Rendering



Note: Renderings are conceptual and do not represent final design treatments.



Pedestrian Connectivity and Crossings

A safe, connected pedestrian network is central to the corridor's long-term vision. Improvements focus on creating predictable, intuitive, and accessible routes that link schools, NEOMED, Township Center destinations, and adjacent neighborhoods.

Key elements include:

- Continuous sidewalks and shared-use paths on both sides of SR 44 where feasible, ensuring comfortable year-round access.
- Strategically placed crossings located at desire lines and high-activity areas, with clear sightlines and consistent design.
- Enhanced crossing treatments, including ladder markings and refuge islands to improve visibility and reduce crossing distances.
- ADA-compliant curb ramps and surfaces to support universal access.

IMAGE 5-1: Brick Crosswalk Example



Access Management and Medians

Access management strategies help organize vehicle movements, reduce turning conflicts, and support a safer multimodal environment. These improvements also reinforce desired development patterns by clarifying how vehicles enter and exit properties along the corridor.

Key elements include:

- Driveway consolidation and alignment to reduce conflict points and improve operations.
- Raised or flush medians where appropriate to manage left-turn movements and calm traffic.
- Shared rear access drives that relieve pressure on SR 44 and improve circulation to businesses and institutional uses.
- Refined curb radii and turn lanes that encourage slower speeds and increase predictability.

IMAGE 5-2: Landscaped Median Example



Lighting

A coordinated lighting strategy enhances visibility, reinforces corridor identity, and supports pedestrian comfort during evening and early morning hours. Lighting varies in scale and character based on adjacent land uses and activity levels.

Key elements include:

- Pedestrian-scale fixtures in the Township Center and around school and campus areas to create a walkable, human-scaled environment.
- Vehicular-scale lighting in transition areas to maintain consistent roadway illumination and driver comfort.
- Improved lighting at crossings to enhance visibility for students and pedestrians.
- Energy-efficient fixtures that reduce long-term operational costs.

IMAGE 5-3: Brick Crosswalk Example



Hardscape and Landscaping

The corridor's landscape and hardscape framework establishes a robust, low-maintenance foundation for long-term beautification and environmental performance.

Key elements include:

- Durable paving materials that signal pedestrian priority in key areas and allow consistent application across the corridor.
- Regionally appropriate plantings that offer year-round structure while minimizing maintenance demands.
- Street trees and landscape buffers that enhance comfort, provide shade, and visually reinforce the corridor's character.
- Opportunities for low-impact stormwater treatments such as bio-swales or planted basins where space and maintenance capacity allow.

IMAGE 5-4: Landscaped Median Example



Site Furnishings

A coordinated set of site furnishings helps create a unified look and feel across the corridor while supporting day-to-day comfort for pedestrians, students, and visitors. Furnishings should be durable, low-maintenance, and consistent with the corridor's overall design palette.

Key elements include:

- Benches and seating placed at logical rest points using materials and forms that complement the corridor's streetscape palette.
- Trash and recycling receptacles selected for durability and ease of maintenance, with placement focused on high-use areas.
- Bicycle racks located near schools, NEOMED, and local businesses to support short trips and encourage active transportation.
- Planters and decorative elements used selectively to enhance key nodes without creating maintenance burdens.
- Consistent design language across all furnishings to reinforce corridor identity and support a cohesive public realm.

IMAGE 5-5: Site Furnishing Example



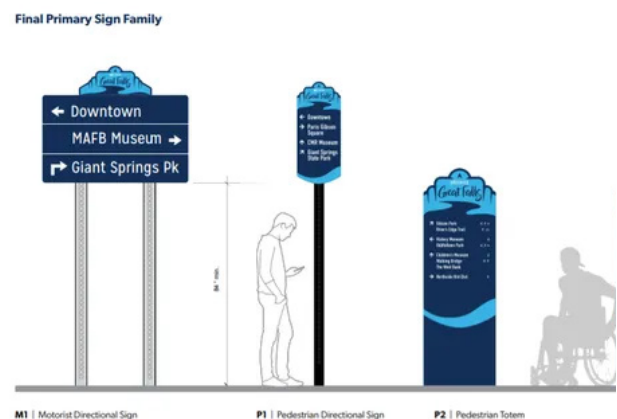
Wayfinding and Signage

A clear, intuitive wayfinding system supports user comfort and strengthens the corridor's identity. Wayfinding can help visitors reach key destinations, Township Hall, Rootstown Local Schools, NEOMED, and businesses, while reinforcing a unified brand for the corridor.

Key elements include:

- Directional signage at key intersections and decision points for both drivers and pedestrians.
- Consistent visual language that reflects Township branding and ties to site furnishings for a cohesive look.
- Trail and pedestrian route markers that strengthen the Priority Pedestrian Pathway and guide students and residents along safe, preferred routes.
- Gateway sign enhancements at major entry points to create strong arrival cues.

IMAGE 5-6: Wayfinding Signage Example



Public Art and Corridor Identity

Public art offers an opportunity to express Rootstown's character and create memorable moments along the corridor. Integrated thoughtfully, art installations can highlight key destinations, reinforce the identity of the Township Center, and enhance the everyday experience for residents, students, and visitors.

Key elements include:

- Small-scale installations, such as sculptural elements, murals, or decorative panels, placed at civic locations, crossings, or pocket spaces.
- Collaborative projects with local schools and NEOMED that reflect community values and celebrate educational identity.
- Durable, low-maintenance materials that fit within the corridor's operational capabilities.
- Integration with lighting and furnishings to create subtle but cohesive placemaking features.

IMAGE 5-7: Public Art Example



Gateway Treatments

Gateway treatments mark transitions into important segments of the corridor and signal shifts in character and activity level. These elements help drivers and pedestrians recognize when they are entering the Township Center, Institutional Zone, or community destinations.

Key elements include:

- Monument or low-profile signage integrated with landscaping or seating elements at major entry points.
- Signature lighting or banner poles that reinforce identity and draw attention to key transitions.
- Landscape accents or plantings that provide seasonal interest and reinforce corridor character.
- Coordination with roundabouts where central islands offer natural opportunities for gateways.

IMAGE 5-8: Gateway Lighting Example



DESIGN PERFORMANCE

Prior to analysis of the corridor, vehicular and pedestrian volume count data was collected at the following intersections:

- SR 44, NEOMED north entrance, and Giant Eagle south entrance
- SR 44, NEOMED central entrance, and Rootstown Elementary and High Schools north exit
- SR 44, NEOMED south entrance, and Rootstown Elementary and High Schools south entrance
- SR 44, Dunkin Donuts drive, and Rootstown Middle School entrance
- SR 44 and Tallmadge Road

For this study, four distinct peak periods were identified and analyzed: the traditional AM and PM peaks, based on maximum intersection volumes, and two additional peaks aligned with the Rootstown school bell schedule. These periods were selected to capture both typical commuter traffic and school-related travel patterns, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of corridor operations.

Once the peak hours were established, intersection operations were analyzed using Highway Capacity Software (HCS) Version 2024. Performance was evaluated in terms of Level of Service (LOS), which ranges from A (best conditions, minimal delay) to F (worst conditions, severe delays and limited gaps). LOS thresholds are based on average control delay per vehicle, as shown below:

An intersection operating at LOS ‘D’ is generally considered the minimum acceptable condition in urban and suburban areas. However, the target LOS can vary depending on roadway characteristics, traffic volumes, and project location, with higher standards often applied in rural or high-speed environments.

The capacity analysis for existing (‘No-Build’) conditions showed that all study intersections operated between LOS ‘A’ and ‘C’ during the analyzed peak periods. However, certain movements, particularly east-west, experienced LOS ‘D’ and ‘E’, which is expected given the priority progression along the SR 44 mainline.

The proposed improvements along the SR 44 corridor focus on access management, traffic calming through the introduction of roundabouts, and removal of unwarranted signals. These measures aim to consolidate existing access points and eliminate unnecessary ones to improve safety and efficiency. Following these changes, traffic volumes were redistributed along the corridor, and a supplemental HCS analysis was conducted to compare proposed conditions with existing conditions during the previously identified peak periods.

The capacity analysis for proposed (‘Build’) conditions showed similar overall results to the ‘No-Build’ scenario, with intersections operating between LOS ‘A’ and ‘C’ and individual movements ranging from LOS ‘A’ to ‘D’. The key improvement is a more balanced distribution of delay between mainline (north-south) and side-street (east-west) traffic, enhancing overall corridor efficiency.

The proposed pedestrian enhancements throughout the corridor, particularly near the schools, will provide significant safety benefits in addition to the traffic-calming effects of the roundabouts. Pedestrians will be able to cross one lane of traffic at a time using refuge islands, reducing exposure to moving vehicles. South of Rootstown Schools, a new midblock crossing with rectangular rapid-flashing beacons (RRFBs) and a refuge island will improve connectivity to nearby commercial businesses where pedestrians are already crossing.

CONSIDERATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

While the recommended improvements establish a cohesive vision for the corridor, several physical, operational, and user-related constraints must be considered during design and engineering. These factors do not limit the feasibility of the project, but they will influence detailed design, sequencing, and coordination with partners.

User Considerations

A top priority for design is protecting vulnerable users of the corridor. Given the presence of Rootstown Local Schools and NEOMED, improvements must address the unique needs of students of all ages—from kindergarten through high school and into post-secondary education. Younger users may be less experienced or more unpredictable, requiring design responses such as increased sight distances, physical guides and barriers that promote intuitive behavior, and education or training on proper use of new facilities.

The corridor also serves a wide range of vehicular users, including school buses, semi-trucks, visitors to NEOMED, and parents engaged in routine pick-up and drop-off activity. While the recommended improvements account for these users, continued attention to end-user experience is essential to ensure a safe, predictable, and comfortable environment for everyone.

Right-of-Way Coordination

Right-of-way (ROW) varies along the corridor, with some locations where private property encroaches into the ROW or where ROW limits are irregular. These conditions must be evaluated carefully if space allocations change during final design. Some improvements—particularly roundabouts—may require additional ROW acquisition from adjacent property owners, necessitating early coordination

Utility Conflicts

Overhead utility lines on both sides of State Route 44 may conflict with proposed sidewalk and streetscape improvements and detract from visual quality. Coordination with utility providers will be required to determine feasible strategies for burying or relocating overhead lines to achieve the desired design outcomes.

Roadside Drainage

Existing roadside drainage patterns must be integrated with proposed roadway and sidewalk improvements. Ditch profiles, culverts, and inlets vary throughout the corridor, especially where open drainage systems are present. Final design should maintain or improve drainage conveyance through redesigned profiles, incorporate curb-and-gutter sections where appropriate, and explore opportunities for green infrastructure where ROW and maintenance capacity allow.

Corridor Maintenance

Improvements that differ from ODOT standard construction practices may require an organization such as the JEDD to assume full maintenance responsibilities. This must be carefully considered when selecting surface treatments and streetscape materials to ensure that long-term maintenance capacity and commitments are appropriately aligned with the final design.



6

Corridor Development

6

CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT

OVERVIEW

Development along the SR 44 corridor is deeply connected to the Rootstown community's goals of improving pedestrian and non-motorized safety, strengthening Rootstown Township's sense of place, and guiding growth in line with community desires. These priorities shape the transportation recommendations in this plan and form the foundation for targeted, community-aligned development strategies.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify opportunities and present actionable strategies that reinforce the Township's identity while supporting long-term corridor vitality.

Context

The SR 44 corridor benefits from strong regional access and several institutional anchors that generate stable economic activity. Its direct connections to SR 44 and I-76 provide convenient access to Akron, Cleveland, and the broader region, positioning the corridor as a natural location for institutional, commercial, and local-serving uses.

NEOMED, the Bio-Med Sciences Academy, and Rootstown Local Schools anchor the corridor with a consistent base of students, employees, and visitors. Their presence creates significant opportunity for a business ecosystem that builds on the corridor's strengths in education, health, wellness, and innovation—offering a foundation for future growth in complementary commercial, professional, and service-oriented uses.

Rootstown Township's existing Township Center offers essential daily-needs destinations, including restaurants, grocery, coffee, banking, and civic uses, and already functions as a recognizable community hub. Targeted infill and redevelopment can reinforce this identity, enhance safety and walkability, and support the community's broader goal of strengthening Rootstown Township's sense of place.



POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

A key component of the study was identifying properties with development potential that align with the community's goals. This analysis offers a high-level estimate of what could be supported if supported by strategic investment.

Site Selection

Most frontage along State Route 44 is already developed. The remaining vacant or underutilized sites were evaluated based on access, environmental constraints, and alignment with community vision. Properties were selected in collaboration with civic leaders and the project Steering Committee.

Scenario Modeling

Using property data from the Portage County Assessor, buildable areas were identified by removing portions of sites constrained by steep slopes, floodways, and regulated wetlands. The consultant team used UrbanFootprint to model development scenarios using typologies that reflect the community's expressed priorities.

These scenarios provide early insight into what each site could reasonably support in terms of housing, commercial space, and job creation if accompanied by the right infrastructure improvements. Urban Footprint outputs are based on available data and assumptions at the time of analysis. Results are not definitive forecasts.

Opportunity Areas

Beyond traffic and transportation issues, this study also considers what the corridor can become and how development can reinforce the community's goals. This requires visioning the potential for development along the corridor. These opportunity areas, each with distinct strengths and constraints, form the foundation for a long-term development framework that aligns with Rootstown Township's goals.

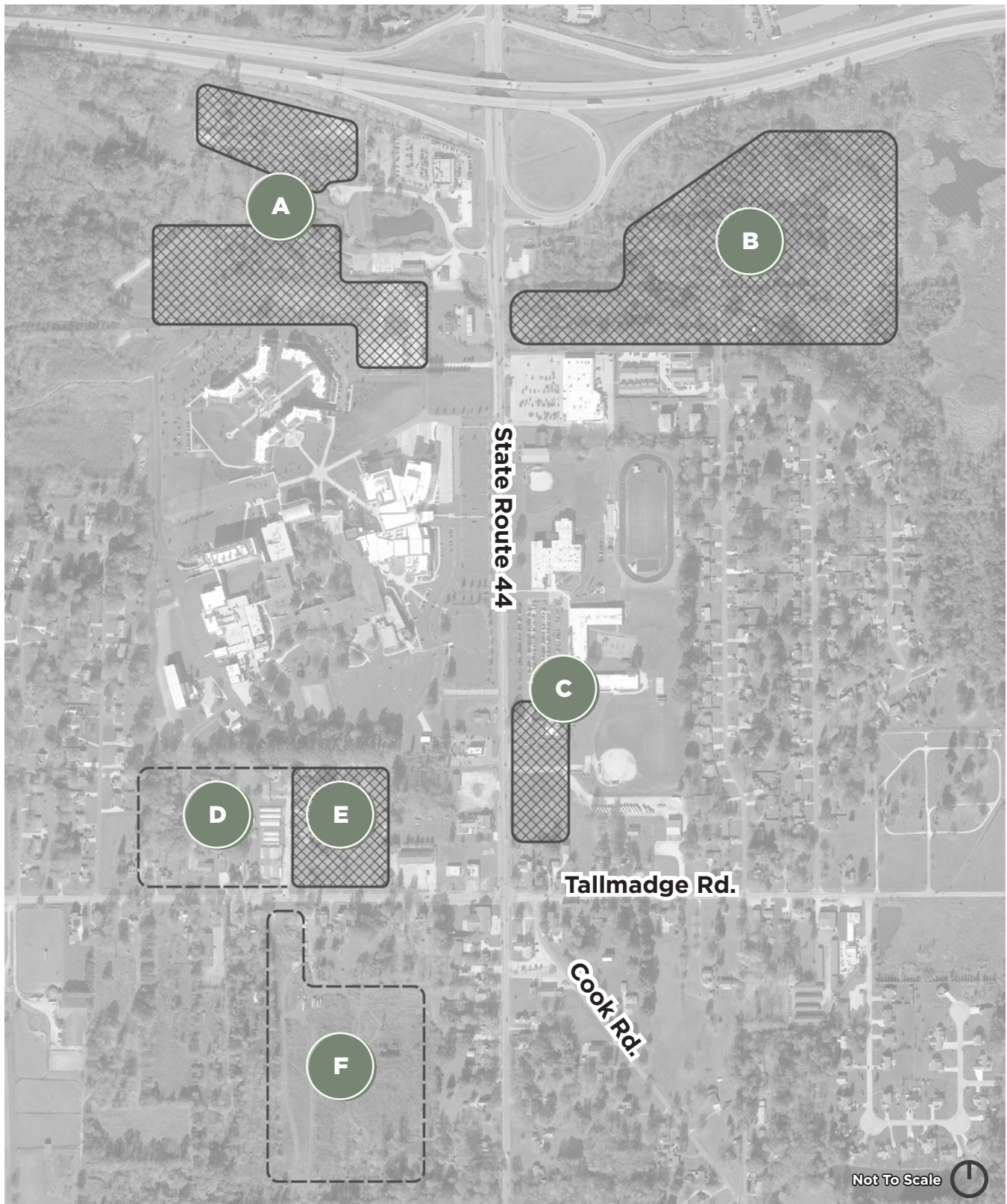
Opporuntunity Areas reference Figure 6-1:

- A** INTERCHANGE WEST
- B** INTERCHANGE EAST
- C** ROOTSTOWN SCHOOL
- D** TALLMADGE ROAD #1
- E** TALLMADGE ROAD #2
- F** TALLMADGE ROAD #3

Capacity Modeling

To help illustrate the potential scale of development in each opportunity area, capacity modeling was completed using UrbanFootprint software. While the results should be interpreted as conceptual rather than precise projections, the modeling provides a useful tool for communicating the potential capacity of subject sites and for informing discussions with landowners, agencies, and potential partners.

FIGURE 6-1: Potential Development Locations



Highway-Adjacent Development Areas

The northern parcels adjacent the highway includes the largest greenfield parcels, offering potential to support new commercial or institutional uses. These parcels offer excellent visibility and proximity to I-76, serving both corridor activity and NEOMED-related demand. Greenfield conditions allow site planning that fully supports the Township’s long-term vision of walkability, safe access, and high-quality design.

Constraints include the presence of wetlands, which require delineation and mitigation, as well as limited direct access to SR 44. Coordination across landowners and stakeholders is needed to ensure cohesive development patterns.

Jobs
+1,000

Square Footage
+650,000

Tax Revenue
\$575,000



Township Center Development Areas

The Township Center is Rootstown’s center of commercial activity, and development here provides the strongest opportunity to reinforce sense of place. The existing base of daily-needs businesses position this area for infill that supports small commercial users, flexible office or co-working spaces, wellness services, and NEOMED-linked professional activity.

Constraints include small parcel sizes, the need for coordination among property owners, and the importance of aligning building form, placement, and parking with walkability goals. Redevelopment must be scale-appropriate and reinforce Township Center character.

Residents
+400

Jobs
+350

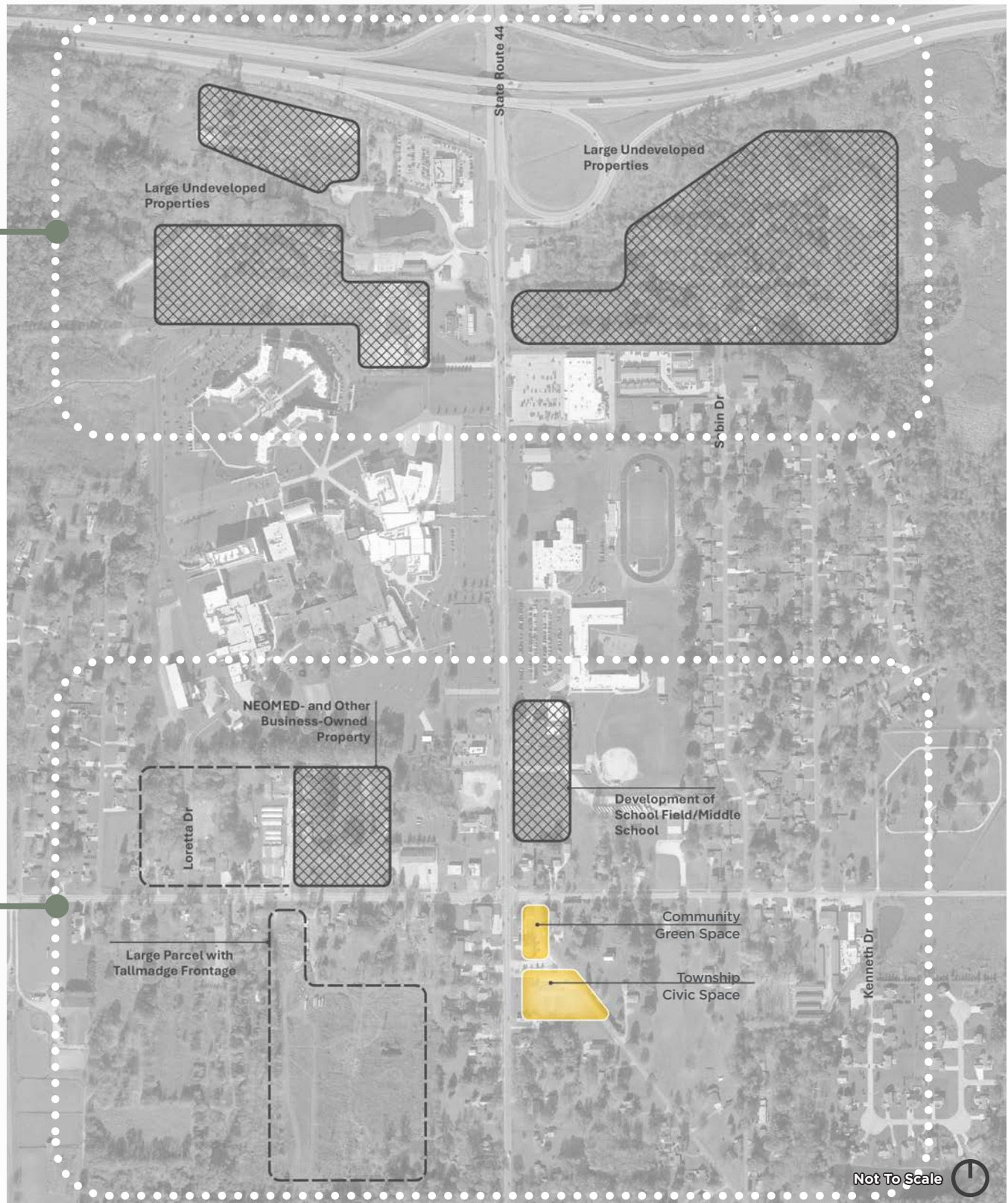
Housing Units
+200

Square Footage
+477,000

Tax Revenue
\$575,000



FIGURE 6-2: Development Areas



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

This section outlines targeted strategies that align with community goals and support reinvestment in both the northern greenfield sites and the Township Center. Each strategy is structured to reinforce walkability, enhance Rootstown Township's sense of place, and guide appropriate economic growth along the corridor.

Land Use Regulation

Land use policy and zoning updates establish a regulatory framework that ensures new development advances the corridor's vision.

- Update zoning to reinforce walkable, human-scaled development patterns.
- Develop design and facade guidelines to strengthen Township Center character.
- Encourage flexible upper-story uses (co-working, small offices, innovation uses, light R&D, wellness, or education space).
- Guide parking to rear or shared locations to support safe, continuous pedestrian connectivity.
- Enable mixed-use or small-format commercial in appropriate locations.

Infrastructure and Public Realm

Infrastructure and public realm improvements can unlock development potential and advance goals related to connectivity and placemaking.

- Improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between the Township Center, NEOMED, and surrounding communities.
- Enhance streetscape elements to reinforce Township identity, including lighting, sidewalks, crosswalks, landscaping.
- Invest in reliable high-speed internet as core infrastructure supporting knowledge workers and small enterprises.
- Coordinate infrastructure upgrades that directly support redevelopment feasibility.
- Implement public realm branding and beautification that signal corridor revitalization.

Site Readiness

Preparing key sites reduces uncertainty for future development and positions the corridor for orderly, predictable growth.

- Conduct wetland delineation and mitigation planning for northern greenfield sites.
- Verify utility capacity and coordinate necessary expansions or upgrades.
- Explore district or shared stormwater strategies to reduce costs and support compact development.
- Complete environmental due diligence primarily in the Township Center where redevelopment is likely.

Redevelopment Support Tools

Strategic tools and partnerships can accelerate redevelopment and leverage available resources.

- Utilize targeted incentives where appropriate and supportive of community goals.
- Pursue public-private partnerships (P3s) to advance key infill or infrastructure projects.
- Coordinate with county and state programs to leverage funding for strategic investments.
- Implement branding and marketing efforts to position Rootstown Township as a vibrant, connected corridor.

Business Retention and Attraction

Supporting existing businesses and attracting new, community-aligned uses strengthens the corridor's economic foundation.

- Continue regular outreach to existing corridor businesses through the Chamber of Commerce and community engagement.
- Focus attraction efforts on desired business types—professional services, wellness uses, small medical practices, specialty retail, food and beverage, and co-working or flexible office space.
- Encourage façade and storefront improvements to enhance Township Center character.
- Promote flexible spaces that support knowledge workers, small enterprises, and NEOMED-adjacent innovation.

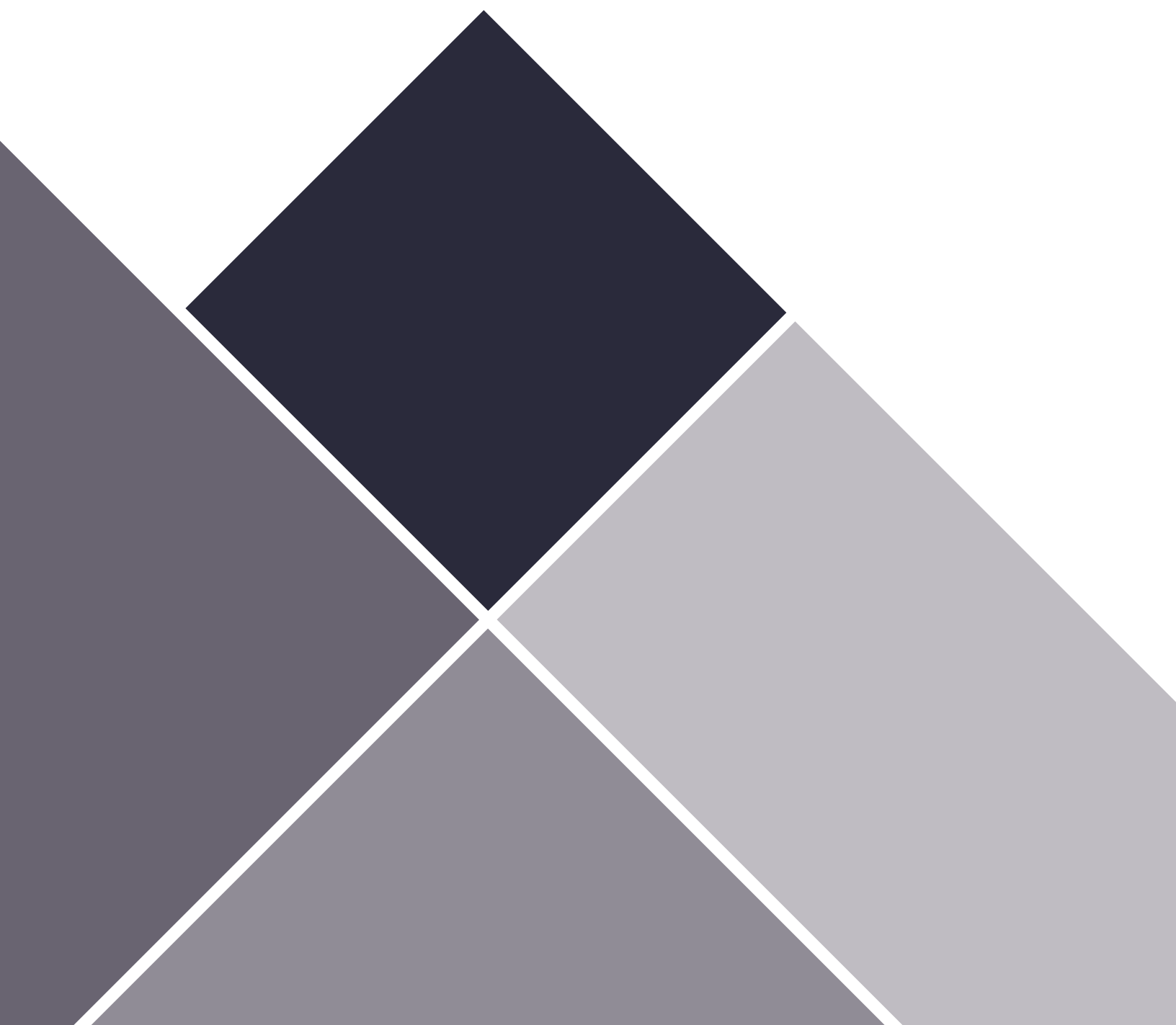
ALIGNMENT WITH PROJECT GOALS

The strategies in this chapter directly support Rootstown Township’s community goals. Pedestrian and bicycle improvements, combined with careful parking placement and walkable site design, reinforce safety and non-motorized connectivity.

Public realm enhancements, design guidelines, and redevelopment of the Township Center strengthen Rootstown Township’s unique character and sense of place. Business attraction and land use strategies guide growth toward community-supported uses, ensuring that economic development reflects local values and contributes positively to the Township’s identity.

Together, these actions create a corridor that is safe, connected, and economically resilient, advancing the Township’s long-term vision and reinforcing the relationship between economic development and transportation planning.





7

Implementation

7

IMPLEMENTATION

OVERVIEW

The implementation strategy provides a practical roadmap for advancing the SR 44 corridor vision. It bridges the physical improvements outlined in the corridor concept plan with the broader organizational, regulatory, and economic actions needed to make those improvements meaningful. The approach is intentionally strategic rather than prescriptive, recognizing that development readiness, funding cycles, and partnership dynamics will evolve over time.

The recommendations in this chapter are built around five core principles:

- **Prioritize safety** across all phases, especially for the daily student population.
- **Reinforce Rootstown's identity** through public realm and design decisions.
- **Guide development toward community-aligned outcomes** that support, rather than conflict with, Township values.
- **Phase infrastructure** in a way that matches development readiness and maximizes the impact of public investments.
- **Sustain strong partnerships** between Rootstown Township, NEOMED, the Schools, Portage County, ODOT, and local businesses.

This chapter translates those principles into sequenced actions that build momentum and ensure the corridor improvements and economic development opportunities reinforce one another.

IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

Delivering this plan will require coordination among several partners, each with a unique role in stewarding both public improvements and private investment.

Joint Economic Development District (JEDD)

The JEDD is the central coordinating body for implementation. It should continue to convene partners, track progress, and connect infrastructure decisions with development opportunities. The JEDD is best positioned to steward the long-term vision and maintain alignment across participating jurisdictions.

Institutional Partners

NEOMED, Rootstown Local Schools, and the Bio-Med Sciences Academy are major generators of corridor activity. Their participation is essential for coordinated development across the corridor that delivers multi-user.

ODOT and Portage County Engineering & Economic Development

These agencies support funding, permitting, and roadway coordination. Their role is especially important in securing state and federal resources for safety, mobility, and site access improvements.

Business Community & Chamber of Commerce

Local businesses help shape corridor identity, support district activation, and provide direct insight into day-to-day operational needs. The Chamber can amplify marketing efforts, guide storefront improvements, and engage new business prospects.

Property Owners & Developers

Property owners and developers will deliver most of the private investment along the corridor. Clear zoning, predictable processes, and site readiness efforts will reduce uncertainty and accelerate desirable projects.



IMPLEMENTATION PHASING STRATEGY

Physical improvements form the backbone of the corridor strategy. Phasing ties the corridor concept plan to realistic funding pathways and development sequencing.

Phasing provides a practical path forward that addresses immediate safety concerns, supports multimodal access, and reinforces community identity, while also aligning with available resources and development pressures.

Each phase builds on the success of the previous one, creating momentum and continuity across the corridor. This approach balances near-term action with long-term strategy.

Phase 0 - Priority Safety Improvements

This initial phase of work addresses the most important pedestrian safety issues along the corridor and sets the stage for future improvements. Work includes:

- Eliminate conflicts between overhead lines and future sidewalks through burying overhead utilities.
- Constructing access drive from Tallmadge to Rootstown Local Schools.
- Eliminating Middle school access point at SR 44.
- Constructing sidewalks along full length of study area.
- Add rectangular rapid flashing beacon as an interim measure for safe pedestrian crossing on SR 44.

Funding Sources: Self-funded or State earmark.

Phase 1A - Township Center (North)

These improvements build from the initial phase to create improved access and circulation to corridor institutions and businesses. Additionally, the placement creates a community gateway to the Township Center's north side. Work includes:

- Construction of southern-most roundabout.
- Reconfiguration of the Rootstown Local Schools' frontage.
- Creation of a rear access drive on the corridor's west side and associated access management improvements.

Funding Sources: STBG, State economic development funds, State earmark, or self-funded.

Phase 1B - Township Center (South)

The second half of this phase focuses the southern project area to mitigate congestion and improve circulation at the Tallmadge / SR 44 intersection. Work includes:

- Realignment of Cook Road to intersect with SR 44.
- Recapturing of property at the Township Hall site and First Congregational Church to be used for open space and parking.
- Lane reconfigurations and streetscape improvements to the SR 44 / Tallmadge Intersection.

Funding Sources: STBG, Highway Safety, State earmark, or self-funded State earmark, or self-funded.

FIGURE 7-1: Implementation Phasing Strategy



Phase 2 - Institution Transition

These improvements increase circulation and access to NEOMED, Giant Eagle Plaza, and future roadways that access undeveloped property. Work includes:

- Installation of roundabout at SR 44 / NEOMED's north entrance.
- Access drive and associated walks east of SR 44.

Funding Sources: STBG, Highway Safety, State economic development funds, developer contribution or self-funded.

Phase 3 - I-76 Interchange Enhancement

The final phase of this plan engages with the I-76 interchange to modify in ways that provide safety and access benefits to the corridor. This study and associated modifications are not currently scheduled and necessitate continued engagement ODOT. Work includes:

- Installation of roundabout at August Drive.
- Sidewalk access under the I-76 overpass.

Funding Sources: ODOT-funded.

ADDITIONAL ACTIONS

The following are additional initiatives that can be undertaken in the next three years to catalyze investment in the corridor:

Extend Corridor Study North

Expanding the corridor study toward Ravenna allows the JEDD to understand the broader mobility and development context and unify planning across its membership. A specific next focus could include the Lynn / SR 44 intersection and SR 44 access from Tonsing Drive.

Update the Zoning Ordinance

Clear, aligned zoning signals the community's vision to investors and provides predictability for site development. Updates should reflect the plan's land use and design frameworks.

Conduct Site Readiness Audits for Target Parcels

Key parcels require additional due diligence, especially those with wetlands or utility limitations. Site readiness assessments help quantify development yield and strengthen pitches to potential partners.

Develop an Economic Development Plan

While this plan includes strategies that will help strengthen the local economy, a comprehensive Economic Development Plan will further accelerate local business development and attraction. Further study will help with the following:

- Identify priority business sectors
- Develop marketing and recruitment strategies
- Align incentives with corridor goals
- Support business retention and expansion

This will require continued coordination with Portage County Economic Development, the Rootstown Chamber of Commerce and other partners engaged in economic development that can help inform a suitable strategy.

Develop a Branding, Wayfinding, and Signage Package

A cohesive visual identity that can be applied across banners, signage, digital media, and corridor gateways signals seriousness to potential partners and enhances sense of place.

Create an Organizational Structure for Ongoing Coordination

Implementation is a long-term effort. Establishing regular (e.g., quarterly or semiannual) JEDD partner roundtables will help maintain alignment, monitor progress, and respond to emerging opportunities.

Expand JEDD Membership

As the JEDD continues to formalize its role, priority should be given to expanding membership among businesses and property owners that benefit from and contribute to the district. Broadening participation will increase revenue capacity and support additional reinvestment within the corridor, strengthening both economic development efforts and quality-of-life improvements in the immediate area.

FUNDING SOURCES

The following funding sources are limited opportunities to apply for; other funding sources not mentioned can also be

AKRON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY (AMATS)*	
Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program: The purpose of the CMAQ program is to fund transportation projects or programs that will contribute to attainment or maintenance of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter. The CMAQ program supports two important goals of the U.S. Department of Transportation: improving air quality and relieving congestion. The CMAQ program provides funding for a broad array of tools to accomplish these goals.	Maximum Funding: 80% Minimum Match: 20% Eligible Applicants: Local governments, regional transit agencies, port authorities, and state agencies, with projects or programs located in the AMATS region of Summit and Portage Counties. Project Category: Congestion Reduction, Traffic Flow Improvements & ITS, Bicycle/Pedestrian facilities, Travel Demand Management, Transit Facility Upgrades, and other transportation control measures and activities Website: https://www.amatsplanning.org/funding
Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG): Provides flexible funding for a wide variety of projects including highways, transit and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.	Maximum Funding: 80% Minimum Match: 20% Eligibility: Most versatile and may be used for any project that is recommended in or consistent with the AMATS Regional Transportation Plan. Project Category: Highway projects and bridge improvements (construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, resurfacing, restoration, and operational), transportation system management, public transit capital improvement projects, commuter rail, carpool projects, bus terminals and facilities, bikeways, pedestrian facilities and planning studies. Website: https://www.amatsplanning.org/funding
Transportation Alternatives Set Aside (TASA): Provides funding for bicycle and pedestrian facilities.	Maximum Funding: 80% Minimum Match: 20% Eligibility: Projects must relate to surface transportation and must address a transportation need, use, or benefit. Project categories include pedestrian and bicycle facilities including Safe Routes to School infrastructure projects. Preliminary engineering, right-of-way and construction are eligible project costs. Planning is an eligible project phase only for SRTS District-wide Travel Plans and only if the sponsor has first pursued and secured funding from ODOT's SRTS program. Website: https://www.amatsplanning.org/funding
Project Delivery Incentive Program (PDIP): Incentivize project sponsors to deliver their projects in a specified time window. <i>Note: PDIP program only applies to STBG and TASA</i>	If projects are delivered within in a specified time window their local match will be reduced to 10% of the amount of federal funds awarded by AMATS (instead of the traditional 20%). The maximum reduction shall be capped at \$100,000.

*For additional information, review AMATS Funding Policy Guidelines

OHIO PUBLIC WORKS COMMISSION (OPWC)	
State Capital Improvement Program (SCIP): Provides flexible funding for a wide variety of projects including highways, transit and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.	Funding: Provided through grants, loans, and loan assistance. Grants are available for up to 90% of the total project costs for repair/replacement, and up to 50% for new/expansion. Loans can be provided for up to 100% of the project costs. Grant/loan combinations are also available. The interest rate is 0%. Eligibility: Counties, cities, villages, townships, and water and sanitary districts. Project Category: Improvements to roads, bridges, culverts, water supply systems, wastewater systems, storm water collection systems, and solid waste disposal facilities. Website: https://publicworks.ohio.gov/districts/districts-1-19/district-8
Local Transportation Improvement Program (LTIP): Provides funding to local governments for road and bridge projects	Funding: Covers up to 100% of eligible project costs Eligibility: Counties, cities, villages, and townships. Project Category: Improvements limited to roads and bridges only.

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (ODOT)

Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP): The purpose of the program is to reduce traffic deaths and serious injuries on all public roads.	Maximum Funding: Request up to \$2 million for pedestrian and \$6 million for roadway departure safety improvements for all project phases. Minimum Match: 10% Eligibility: Must be on an arterial or collector. Should focus on Critical, High, and Medium priority segments. Applicants must demonstrate a safety need, typically with a minimum of 3 crashes per year and 30% resulting in fatalities or injuries. Website: https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/programs/highway+safety/highway-safety-improvement-program
Transportation Improvement Districts (TID): Provides funding for transportation projects that promote economic development in terms of job creation, job retention, and private sector capital investment.	Funding: The funding provided for each project is limited to \$500,000 per fiscal year. TIDs are permitted to submit multiple applications per funding round. TIDs co-sponsoring a specific project may individually apply for up to \$500,000 for that project. Co-sponsoring TIDs are registered TIDs that have adjacent county lines. Eligibility: TID program funding can be used on all publicly owned roadways in Ohio. TID program funding can be used for preliminary engineering, detailed design, right-of-way or construction of transportation improvements. TIDs must be registered with ODOT to apply for funding and meet the criteria established in House Bill 74 Section 203.40.
Urban Paving Program: Provides funding for resurfacing projects on state and U.S. routes within municipalities to maintain roadway conditions and extend pavement life.	Maximum Funding: 80% Minimum Match: 20% Eligibility: Applies to state and U.S. routes within city or village limits (excluding interstates). Projects are programmed by ODOT in coordination with municipalities, typically on a 7-year paving cycle. Website: https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/programs/urban-paving