



**WORK SESSION
VIRTUAL MEETING HELD VIA WEBEX
APRIL 21, 2021
6:00 PM**

Call to order

1. Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations for the Portland Gateway area to Richfield and Bloomington City Councils by Sarah McColley and Tom Walsh of TSW Planners and Architects. This project is a Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) Legacy Project, originally intended as part of the 2020 CNU National Conference.

Adjournment

Auxiliary aids for individuals with disabilities are available upon request. Requests must be made at least 96 hours in advance to the City Clerk at 612-861-9738.



WORK SESSION

4/21/2021

REPORT PREPARED BY: Melissa Poehlman, Asst. Community Development Director

DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR REVIEW: John Stark, Community Development Director
4/13/2021

OTHER DEPARTMENT REVIEW:

CITY MANAGER REVIEW: Katie Rodriguez, City Manager
4/21/2021

ITEM FOR WORK SESSION:

Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations for the Portland Gateway area to Richfield and Bloomington City Councils by Sarah McColley and Tom Walsh of TSW Planners and Architects. This project is a Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) Legacy Project, originally intended as part of the 2020 CNU National Conference.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In 2019, the cities of Richfield and Bloomington submitted a joint application to the CNU for participation in the 2020 Congress Legacy Project program. Legacy Projects offer municipalities, community-based non-profits, neighborhood organizations and others in the area of the National CNU Annual Conference, the opportunity to host a four-day neighborhood design workshop with leading national urban design firms for projects related to the mission of CNU. Over \$100,000 in pro-bono design assistance is available to selected organizations.

The Portland Gateway area straddles Interstate 494 and serves as a major point of entry to both Bloomington and Richfield. The area is characterized by auto-oriented strip development, but is immediately adjacent to dense residential areas. The cities' application focused on the need for context-sensitive revitalization that would take into account the significant transportation changes anticipated with the addition of the D-Line Bus Rapid Transit and 494 access changes. The Portland Gateway Project was selected by CNU, and the cities worked with national design consultants from TSW Planners and Architects (TSW), as well as Toole Design Group, to plan for the four-day workshop in March 2020. Plans were well underway when the Covid-19 Pandemic brought everything to a halt.

Knowing that this project could provide important direction for upcoming transportation infrastructure projects, plans were revamped for a virtual event, virtual roundtable discussions, and online engagement this spring. Drawing on their pre-pandemic site visit, virtual meetings and conversations with stakeholders, as well as online feedback, representatives from TSW and the cities will present findings and preliminary recommendations for the I-494 and Portland Avenue area at a joint meeting of the Richfield and Bloomington City Councils.

Additional project information is available at: <https://www.bloomingtonmn.gov/plan/portland-legacy> and the original application to CNU is attached to this report.

DIRECTION NEEDED:

Presentation and open discussion item.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

A. **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

None

B. **POLICIES (resolutions, ordinances, regulations, statutes, etc):**

None

C. **CRITICAL TIMING ISSUES:**

The findings and recommendations of the CNU work will offer support for policy direction on the reconfiguration of Portland Avenue and future investment in Richfield and Bloomington.

D. **FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

None

E. **LEGAL CONSIDERATION:**

None

ALTERNATIVE(S):

PRINCIPAL PARTIES EXPECTED AT MEETING:

Bloomington City Council Sarah McColley & Tom Walsh, TSW Planners and Architects Julie Farnham, City of Bloomington Senior Planner

ATTACHMENTS:

Description		Type
<input type="checkbox"/>	Legacy Project Proposal	Exhibit
<input type="checkbox"/>	CNU Legacy Draft overview	Exhibit

Legacy Project Proposal: Portland Gateway (Bloomington/Richfield)

The cities of Bloomington and Richfield are pleased to submit this proposal for the **Portland Gateway** as a candidate for the Congress for New Urbanism's 2020 *Congress Legacy Project*. We are excited to participate in the Legacy Project and are prepared to champion and fully support this endeavor through commitment of staff and funding resources to ensure the design workshop successfully engages community stakeholders. We also commit to work proactively and collaboratively to implement the action plan developed through the workshop.

Legacy Project Champion – The primary points of contact for this project are:

- Barb Wolff, Special Projects & Initiatives Manager (bwolff@bloomingtonmn.gov; 952-563-4706);
- Julie Farnham, Senior Planner (jfarnham@bloomingtonmn.gov); and
- Melissa Poehlman, Assistant Community Development Director (mpoehlman@richfieldmn.gov; 612-861-9766)

Executive Summary

The Portland Gateway area straddles Interstate 494 and serves as a major point of entry to both Bloomington and Richfield; neighboring suburbs located south of downtown Minneapolis. The two cities share a border along I-494 and both abut the MSP International Airport. Both cities experienced significant growth between 1950 and 1970, characterized by auto-oriented strip development located along major arterial roadways, including Portland Avenue. Like many post-World War II suburbs, Bloomington and Richfield are focusing attention on revitalizing aging commercial centers and corridors to create attractive, vibrant places that better serve our changing demographics and community needs.



MnDOT is in the process of evaluating access modification along I-494 that will result in substantial upgrades to the interchange at Portland Avenue. This presents a unique opportunity to integrate public realm improvements early in the design process.

A key goal is to transform this aging commercial area into an attractive gateway serving both cities and enhance connectivity between the businesses and neighborhoods on either side of I-494. Relatively high pedestrian and bike counts in the area indicate demand for improved pedestrian/bicycle amenities. Increased access and visibility can also stimulate reinvestment in this area, which has not attracted significant redevelopment interest in many years.



Study Area and Desired Project Outcomes

The project area developed in the 1950s and 60s and is characterized by older commercial buildings and strip centers, surface parking lots, and a significant amount of affordable rental housing surrounded by established, single family neighborhoods. These centers historically, and still today, provide a variety of convenient retail, service, and food outlets to the surrounding area, which is highly diverse and more economically challenged than many other areas of Bloomington and Richfield. Engaging area residents and businesses in the design process and ensuring sensitivity to displacement will be essential.

The project area has been roughly defined as the area within a quarter to half mile of the I-494 and Portland Avenue interchange. This area is characterized as younger and significantly more racial diverse than Bloomington and Richfield overall. About 19% of households report limited English proficiency and about 43% are housing cost burdened. Household incomes are lower than median incomes in both cities, reflected in a poverty rate of over 15% in the project area.

Many redevelopment challenges in this area are common to those in older, developed suburbs. Solutions that work in this area could serve as replicable models for redevelopment in other suburbs. Specific challenges and desired outcomes are described below. Key aspects of the area are annotated on the map on the next page.

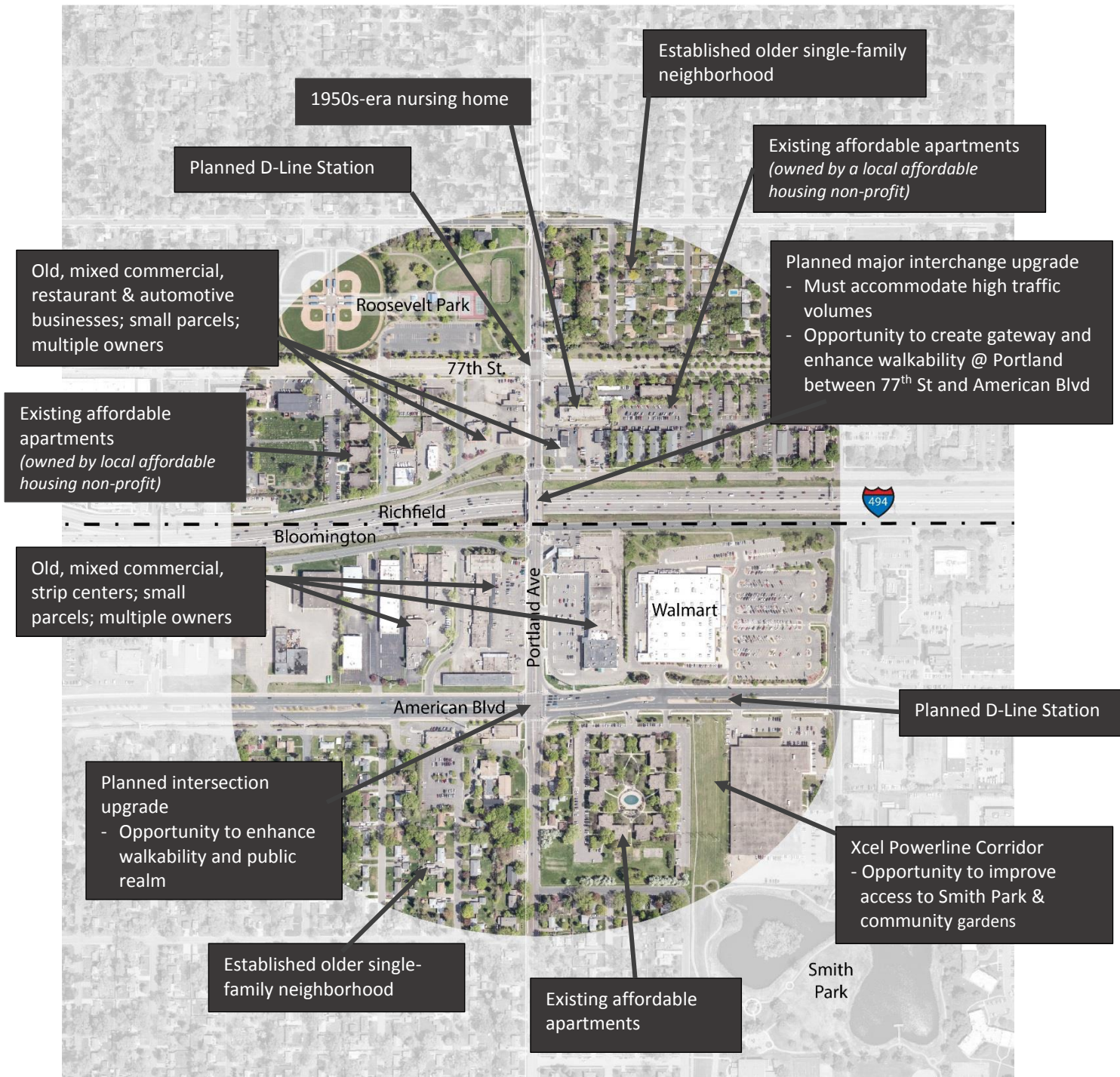
Challenges & Outcomes

- Create a mixed use gateway node that establishes a sense of identity and community for the surrounding neighborhood.
- Retrofit old commercial strip centers/nodes to improve design, utilization, walkability, and transform the area into an attractive, connected, and vital neighborhood amenity.
- Enhance market viability while minimizing displacement of existing businesses; several of which are small, locally-owned independent establishments.
- Engage local residents and businesses in the process to ensure recommendations reflect their needs and desires and build support for successful implementation.
- Facilitate redevelopment through coordination with multiple property owners. This might involve parcel consolidation and creation of new internal circulation that improves accessibility, access management, and public realm enhancements.
- Improve the safety, walkability and aesthetics of busy intersections and high volume roads that provide access to a regional freeway (I-494). The Portland/494 interchange is planned for substantial upgrades to become a major entrance to Bloomington and Richfield from I-494. Careful attention to road design, streetscape, and public realm will be critical to achieve vehicle capacity and circulation requirements while enhancing walkability and pedestrian/bicycle safety and access.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to transit stations along a planned new Rapid Bus Line (D-Line BRT). Two D-Line stops are planned in the area: one on American Boulevard just east of Portland Avenue and another at 77th Street in Richfield. The D-Line will extend along American Boulevard and Portland Avenue; travelling through the heart of the project area.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to nearby parks: Smith Park (Bloomington) and Roosevelt Park (Richfield).
- Enhance the public realm and integrate placemaking elements to accentuate the function of the area as a gateway and neighborhood amenity.

Needed Expertise

Achieving the outcomes described above will require a multi-disciplinary team with expertise in: urban design and landscape architecture, traffic engineering; real estate and development economics; small business assistance; creative placemaking; community engagement; and communication and marketing.

Project Area Highlights



Support

The Bloomington Strategic Plan, Bloomington Comprehensive Plan, and Richfield Comprehensive Plan emphasize each city's commitment to renewal, community image, sustainability, and equity. These priorities align well with the CNU Legacy Program goals and focus. Our specific commitment to the *Congress Legacy Project* includes:

- **Financial Support** – The cities will commit funding to cover the required \$15,000 matching funds and costs related to supporting and staffing the design workshop (e.g., accommodations, refreshments, materials, engagement, outreach, and publicity).
- **Organizational Support** – The Bloomington and Richfield City Council's have adopted resolutions of support (attached) to commit resources toward participation in the *Congress Legacy Project* and implementation of recommendations. If selected, the cities will sign a Participation Agreement. We will also convene a multi-disciplinary steering committee of relevant stakeholders and provide administrative and logistical support, including meeting space. In addition to leading community outreach efforts, the cities have solicited support from other agencies directly impacted by the project and coordinate their participation in the Legacy Project. These include: MnDOT, Hennepin County, and Metro Transit.
- **Outreach and Engagement** – In recent years, the City of Bloomington has taken steps to prioritize proactive engagement and outreach. A new Division of Community Outreach and Engagement was established to intentionally focus on integrating equity and inclusion into the City's services and decision-making processes. Staff in this division have established relationships with leaders of many underrepresented groups in Bloomington who will be a valuable resource to this project. Numerous city staff are trained in facilitation and frequently bring these skills to both external and internal projects. Bloomington also is taking proactive steps to integrate creative placemaking into its redevelopment efforts; recognizing its potential to engage the community in new and authentic ways, celebrate existing assets and place history, and work with artists to develop creative approaches to contribute to the built, cultural, and social environment. The City of Richfield recently hired additional communications staff that will aid in our outreach efforts.

Both cities will commit the necessary staff resources to assist in outreach and engagement efforts. We will take the lead in reaching out to area residents, businesses, and affected agencies prior to, during, and after the design workshop to ensure broad awareness of project activities and opportunities for participation and engagement. We will use multiple approaches and tools to publicize events and highlight the project, including community newsletters, cable TV, online videos, our websites, and social media.

Implementation

The cities of Bloomington and Richfield are committed to maintaining the momentum generated from the *Congress Legacy Project* and will take steps to advance identified strategies. Some potential near-term implementation steps may include:

- **I-494 interchange improvements (MnDOT project)** – Required environmental reviews are underway and expected to conclude in the summer of 2020 with selection of a preferred alternative. This should define the right-of-way needs for the project. Final design is planned to occur in 2020 and 2021 and will provide an opportunity to define specific enhancements to the public realm within the project area. The cities will continue to work with MnDOT and other agency partners (Hennepin

County, City of Richfield, and Metro Transit) to ensure public realm enhancements to improve the walkability and appearance of the area are included in final design.

- **Convene meetings with stakeholders** – We anticipate the initial focus will be on properties abutting Portland Avenue. Once right-of-way needs are identified for the I-494 project, impacts on adjacent properties will be clear and will help define redevelopment potential and constraints. The cities will work with other agency partners and affected property owners to foster property consolidation and preparation of redevelopment plans. We will also make a concerted effort to engage area residents to explore neighborhood needs, desires, and connections.
- The cities will continue to work with Metro Transit to implement D-Line transit station improvements and related pedestrian-enhancements to facilitate safe access to the transit stop from the surrounding neighborhoods. The City of Bloomington will also reach out to Xcel Energy to encourage their participation in the design workshop and explore opportunities to obtain access through the powerline right-of-way to create an attractive public connection between American Boulevard and Smith Park.
- **Proactive rezoning** – Both Bloomington and Richfield typically initiate zoning amendments in conjunction with planning studies. We would take the same approach with this project and implement zoning regulations that will facilitate realization of the Legacy Project vision. Both cities zoning codes allow mixed uses, encourage building and site design that is more urban and pedestrian-oriented, and offer flexibility and incentives to achieve density and design objectives. We are open to, and welcome, guidance on additional code modifications that would improve our ability to achieve desired outcomes and overcome regulatory barriers.
- **Funding support** – Both cities will proactively seek funding to implement Legacy Project recommendations. The City of Bloomington recently established the “Gateway Development District” to facilitate redevelopment and private sector investment in underutilized properties in this area; mostly located between TH 77 and I-35W. The Portland Gateway area is located in the north-central part of the Gateway District. Bloomington’s intent is to offer financial tools and other incentives in the Gateway District to encourage renewal of aging commercial centers and corridors, create affordable housing opportunities, and improve access to goods, services, and amenities to meet changing demands, and improve the quality of life. The City of Richfield regularly uses Tax Increment Financing to aid in redevelopment and is currently exploring the creation of a Business Assistance Program.

Endorsements

In addition to our City Councils’ Resolutions of Support, if selected, we will solicit and submit letters of support from MnDOT and Hennepin County, Metro Transit, and owners of key properties prior to November 15, 2019. At this time, both MnDOT and Hennepin County have been contacted and expressed support for this proposal and are willing to participate in the design workshop.

Site Context

- Developed in 1950s and 60s
- Characterized by aging commercial buildings and strip centers, surface parking lots, and affordable rental housing
- Surrounded by established, single-family neighborhoods
- Commercial centers provide a variety of convenient retail, service, and food outlets
- Highly diverse and more economically challenged than other areas in Bloomington and Richfield

The Walkability & Streetscape Enhancement Zone (1/2-mile from Portland Avenue and I-494) considered for broader connectivity opportunities.

The Redevelopment Zone is the area for design and redevelopment criteria.



Connectivity

- Surrounded by **well-connected, established** single-family neighborhoods
- Connectivity **breaks down due to I-494**
- MetroTransit proposed D-Line BRT Route along American Boulevard and Portland Avenue w/2 stops
- Proposed bike facilities on Nicollet, Portland, and American
- MnDOT proposed interchange closures and expansions

- Proposed Bike Facilities (from previous plans)
- Existing Bike Facilities
- Proposed D Line Route (MetroTransit BRT)
- Current Bus Routes
- Existing Bus Stops
- Proposed D Line Station (MetroTransit BRT)
- ▨ Redevelopment Zone
- ★ Potential Closed Interchange (per MnDOT's proposed Vision Plan)
- ★ Potential Expanded Interchange (per MnDOT's proposed Vision Plan)

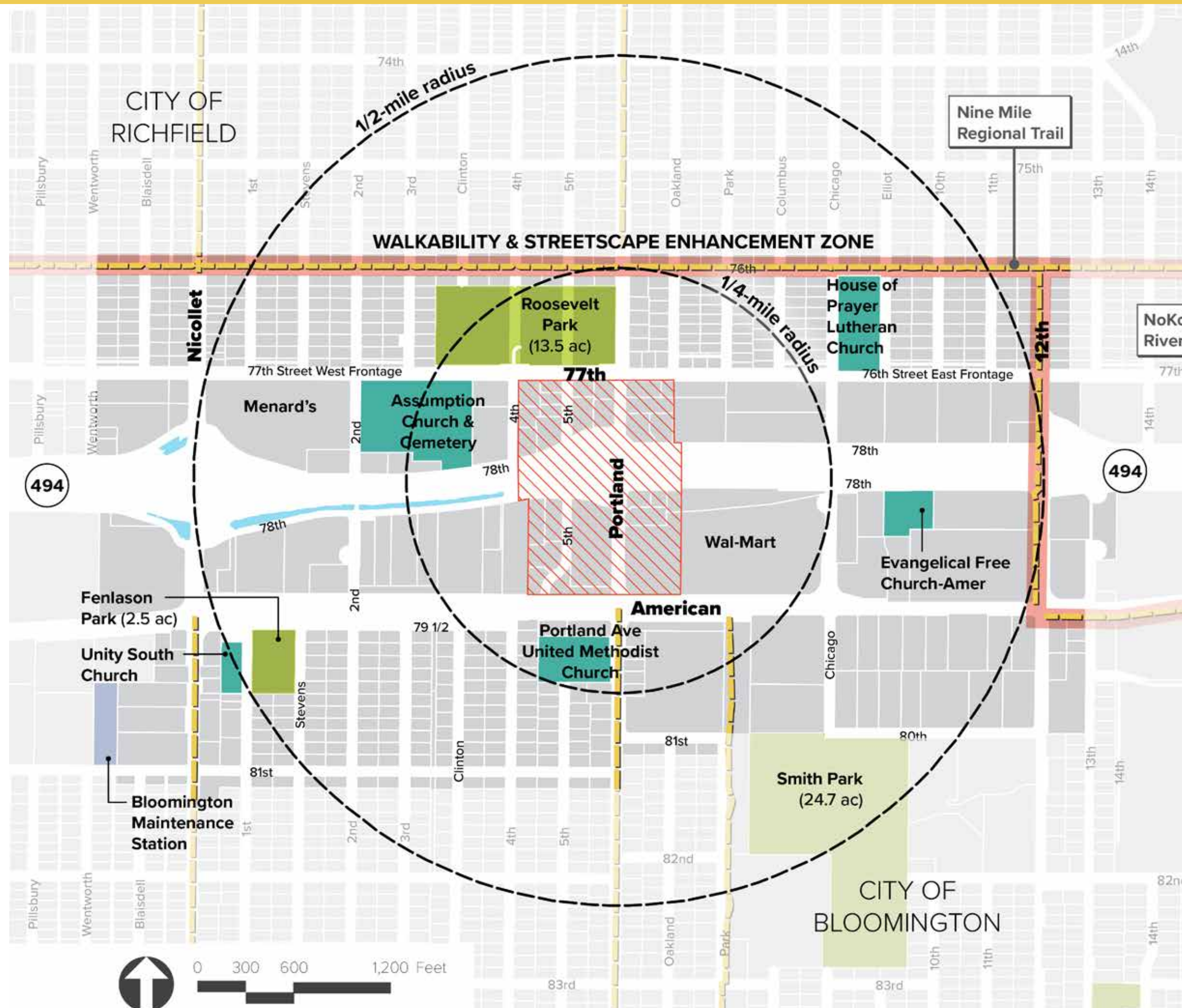


Resources

Public places / places that people gather.

- Five (5) places of worship
- 3 parks within the 1/2-mile radius, (40.7 acres total)
- City of Bloomington Maintenance Station
- Existing on-street or off-street bike facilities that connect the Portland Gateway to residential areas, but that do not connect destinations **within** the study area

- Existing Bike Facilities & Local Connections
- Regional Trails
- Redevelopment Zone / Portland Gateway
- Parks



Zoning

Bloomington

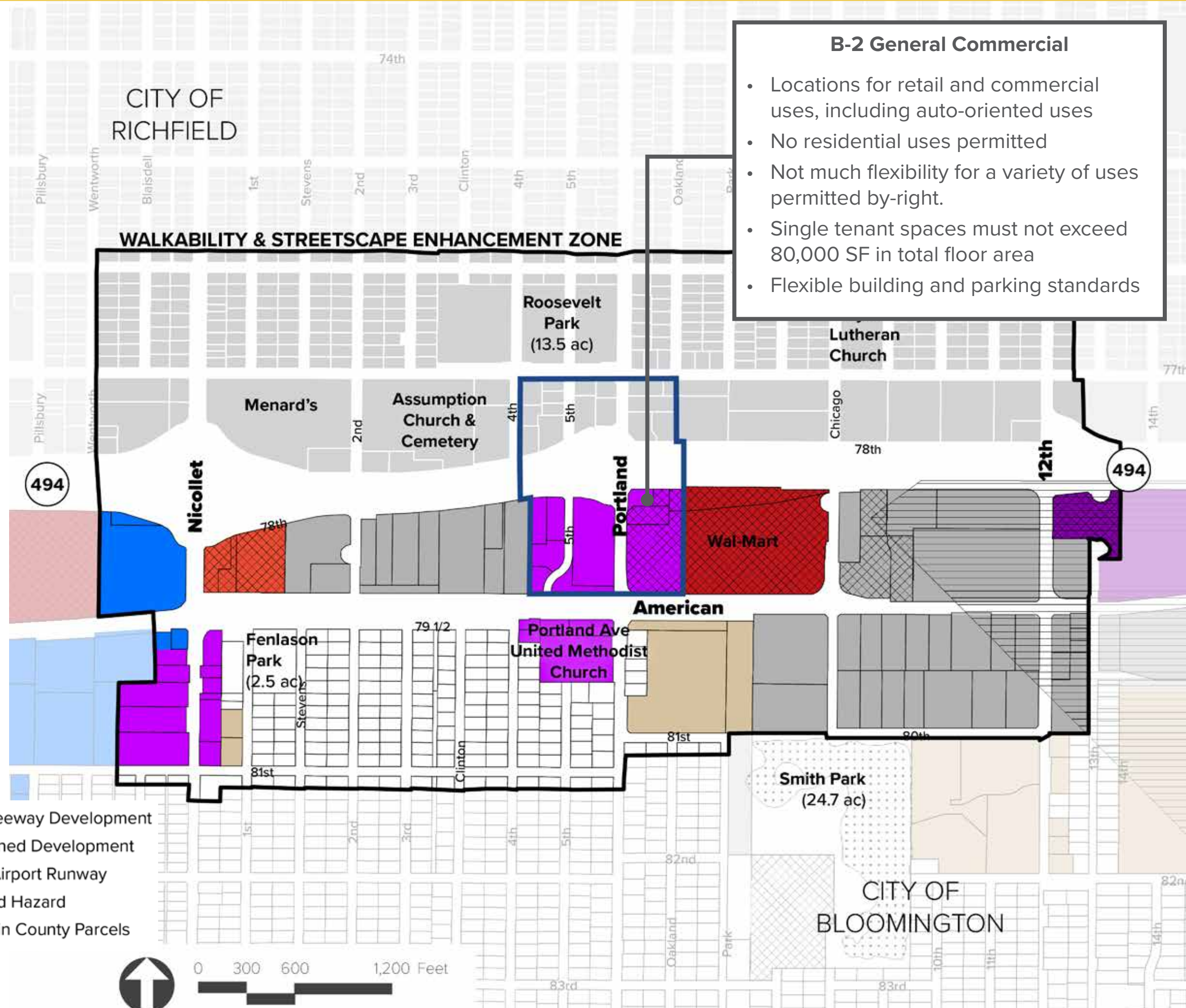
- Complicated zoning ordinance with multiple references
- Sites in the **Redevelopment Zone** are “**B-2 General Commercial**,” which does not allow residential (see right).
- Multiple “**Freeway**” **designations**, which include aging shopping centers and some industrial land uses.
 - Areas near freeway corridors and interchanges for medium- to large-scale development.
- **FD-2** is the majority of the land.

- Redevelopment Zone
- R-1 Single Family
- R-4 Multiple-Family Residential
- B-2 General Commercial
- C-2 Freeway Commercial
- C-4 Freeway Office
- CR-1 Regional Commercial
- I-3 General Industry

- FD-2 Freeway Development
- PD Planned Development
- AR-22 Airport Runway
- FH Flood Hazard
- Hennepin County Parcels

B-2 General Commercial

- Locations for retail and commercial uses, including auto-oriented uses
- No residential uses permitted
- Not much flexibility for a variety of uses permitted by-right.
- Single tenant spaces must not exceed 80,000 SF in total floor area
- Flexible building and parking standards

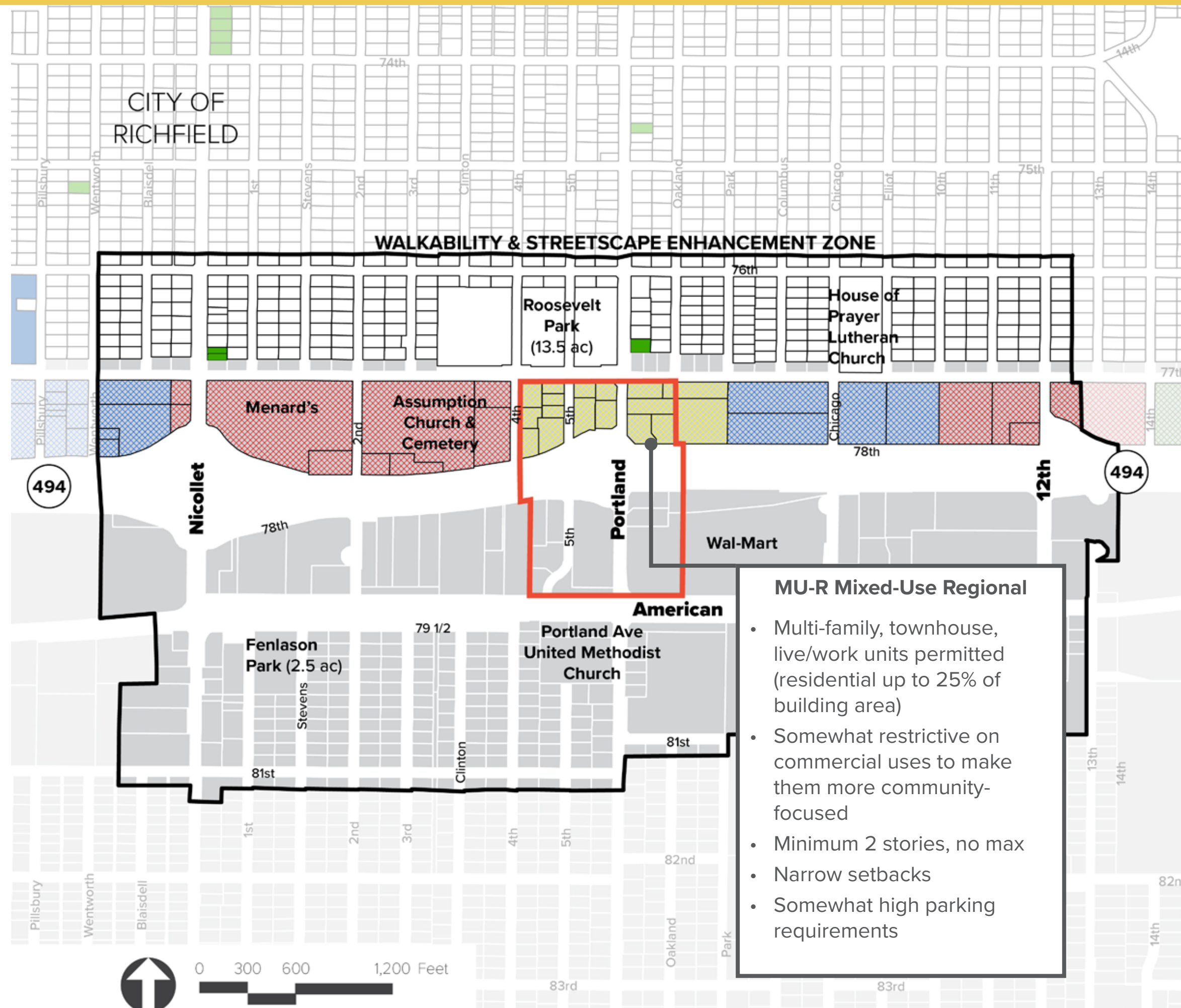


Zoning

Richfield

- Multiple “Mixed-Use” designations that include the current shopping centers and apartment communities
- Single-Family residential makes up the northern part of the study area
- Sites in the **Redevelopment Zone** are “MU-R Mixed-Use Regional” (see right)

- Redevelopment Zone
- R Single Family
- MR-1 Two-Family
- MR-2 Multi-Family
- MR-3 High-Density Multi-Family
- PMR Planned Multi-Family
- C-2 General Commercial
- PMU Planned Mixed-Use
- MU-N Mixed-Use Neighborhood
- MU-C Mixed-Use Community
- MU-R Mixed-Use Regional
- Hennepin County Parcels



Goals & Principles



1► Create a mixed-use gateway that establishes a sense of identity

- Provide housing, retail, and office uses to create a vibrant mixed-use node serving the neighborhoods
- Integrate placemaking elements to accentuate the function of the area as a gateway
- Develop zoning amendments to achieve the desired mixed-use redevelopment

2► Provide redevelopment alternatives for aging commercial strip centers

- Enhance market viability of existing properties for redevelopment
- Minimize displacement of existing businesses
- Facilitate opportunities for redevelopment through potential parcel consolidation, public realm enhancements, and internal circulation

3► Preserve and provide affordable housing options

- Preserve existing affordable housing developments
- Preserve single-family neighborhoods
- Recommend a variety of new housing options that meet multiple price points

4► Improve mobility access for all modes of transportation

- Establish a network of connected streets that link to adjacent neighborhoods and I-494
- Improve the safety, walkability, and aesthetics of intersections and streets for all users
- Simplify access along major streets through driveway consolidation, side-street access for commercial properties, and use of alleys for loading
- Achieve vehicle capacity requirements
- Consider MnDOT's Nicollet, 12th, and Portland interchange reconfigurations in all mobility recommendations on connecting streets
- Integrate existing bus stops and future transit stations along MetroTransit's planned D-Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route in streetscape designs

5► Enhance parks, open space, and the public realm

- Improve access to parks in and near the study area: Smith Park and Roosevelt Park
- Recommend additional parks, plazas, and open spaces
- Identify new multi-use trail connections
- Design streetscapes that accommodate all users and appropriately integrate sustainable infrastructure

Framework

The **Framework Plan** shows the **overall recommendations that meet the goals and principles**.

- Portland Redevelopment Zone is the **main focus**
- The Secondary Redevelopment Areas could potentially develop into **mixed-use nodes** if the interchanges are also changed
- Key streetscapes are improved with bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Affordable rental and senior housing stock should be preserved

- Proposed Streetscape Improvements
- Proposed D Line Route (MetroTransit BRT)
- Proposed D Line Station (MetroTransit BRT)
- ▨ Portland Redevelopment Zone
- ▨ Secondary Redevelopment Zones
- ★ Proposed Closed Interchange (MnDOT)
- ★ Proposed Expanded Interchange (MnDOT)
- Parks
- Affordable Rental Housing to Preserve

