Like many Salem residents, I can remember when Caldor, Rich’s, Kelly Nissan, Vincent’s Potato Chips, Hillcrest Chevrolet, Purity Supreme and the Moose Club were located on Route 107. Over the years all of those parcels have been repurposed into other uses and Route 107, Highland Avenue, continues to be an active commercial corridor for our City. There is growing interest from private builders and commercial enterprises in several privately owned parcels along and nearby Highland Avenue. With all this in mind, the launched the Highland Avenue Corridor Study to more comprehensively outline a strategic approach that can serve as a guideline for fostering and managing future growth along Route 107.

The planning process that took place to develop this study involved community meetings guided by a steering committee of stakeholders. Through this process we heard from residents and business owners that traffic is the leading concern. But we also heard that residents who live along Highland Avenue often feel disconnected from their neighbors and the community at large. We heard that there is a desire for better community networks through mixed use projects that more fully incorporate outdoor spaces and multi-modal connections. The feedback from residents and business owners was combined with a market analysis that evaluated the kinds of uses and scales that the private market could support on Route 107.

With intentional and transparent actions, change on Highland Avenue can be guided appropriately in order to serve the greatest number of people who live in, work in, and visit this essential corridor and vibrant neighborhood. This study provides the framework to guide future policies and strategies to manage growth in a thoughtful and positive way.

Sincerely,

Kimberley Driscoll
Mayor
City of Salem
Participants

The City of Salem assembled the Working Group indicated below, which included the two local ward councilors, local business leaders and residents, and the City’s leaders of the project. Watertown-based Sasaki was the prime consultant for the study, responsible for visioning, stakeholder outreach, planning, and urban design. Sasaki worked closely with their subconsultant, Landwise, a Boston-based real estate advisory firm, for the creation of a market scan and analysis, as well as the generation of suggestions for future uses within the Corridor.

City of Salem
Tom Daniel, Director of Planning and Community Development
Amanda Chiancola, Senior Planner, Project Lead

Working Group Members
• Becky Christie
• Beth Debski
• Timothy Flynn (Councilor)
• David Hark
• Patricia Morsillo (Councilor)
• DJ Napolitano
• Lorelee Stewart
• David Surface

Sasaki
Tyler Patrick, Principal-in-charge
Paul Schlapobersky, Associate Principal, Project Manager
Diane Athaide, Urban Designer
Gwendolyn Sands, Planner

Landwise
Jon Tremontozzi, Principal
Brian Gridley, Strategic Planner
Introduction
Commissioned by the City of Salem in mid-2020, the purpose of the Highland Avenue Corridor Study is to proactively create a vision for the future of the Corridor within a context of market dynamism in Salem. The study is intended to function as a starting point for a conversation with numerous stakeholders regarding the future of the Corridor, with a general goal for the study of arriving at an overall vision for the future, from which other action can be taken to realize this vision. The stated goals of the study at community meetings were:

- Stakeholder dialogue on the future of the Corridor
- A community vision for the Corridor
- Representation of vision by the consultant team
- Final report of the study (as a basis for further action)

The study spanned a period of approximately six months, following a timeline that was intentionally spaced out to enable a high-degree of community and Working Group consultation.

The Sasaki and Landwise consultant team was charged with highlighting key existing issues and opportunities within the Corridor, engaging stakeholders in dialogue, and providing suggestions for future directions for the Corridor on the basis of that analysis and outreach. The Highland Avenue Corridor fills a unique and important role in the life of the City of Salem; the Corridor functions as the “big box” store retail zone of the City (also attracting people from the surrounding region), as well as accommodating numerous smaller local businesses, and single-family residences. Several of the businesses along the Corridor are focused on medical-related services, due to the presence just north of the study area of the North Shore Medical Center - Salem Hospital, a large regional attractor. Importantly, the Corridor is, and has been in the past a place where great change occurs on an ongoing basis, due to the commercial opportunities the Corridor affords to businesses. The result is that the Corridor has differing characteristics from generation to generation. Knowing this may help stakeholders understand that what seems fixed is in fact malleable, and that malleability should lead stakeholders to examine how the Corridor can be made better in the future. Whatever the future direction, this study has laid the groundwork for moving the Corridor in directions that can offer positive outcomes for multiple stakeholders.

Covid-19 Impacts: Current and Future

The study was carried out completely within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. While this created several challenges, it also generated unexpected opportunities, particularly in regard to receiving feedback at community meetings.

The team was able to tour the Corridor in a socially-distanced manner with Amanda Chiancola of the City, to gain an understanding of the context. Stops were made at several points along the Corridor, where it was possible to take photos and discuss challenges, opportunities, prior initiatives, stakeholder concerns, and other factors.

The City and the consultant team were able to carry out comprehensive community and Working Group consultation using available technology for video calls, webcasts, screen sharing, and online polling. These technologies were successfully utilized, to the extent that the project team felt that they afforded the opportunity for stakeholders who may have remained quiet at in-person workshops and presentations, to make their voices heard.

The potential future impacts of Covid-19 to market conditions were discussed during the course of the study, but given the ongoing nature of the pandemic, and a resulting lack of critical distance from its impacts, it was difficult, if not impossible, to discern future patterns that may emerge. There was, however, helpful discussion of the possibility that locally-based office space, for example, may become more desirable (where demand has been soft in the past) due to a potential increased desire for people to “remain local” after pandemic, adjusting their lifestyles to reduce commutes. The study has suggested frameworks that would be flexible enough to accommodate such societal shifts, many of which could be positive overall for the future of the Corridor, in the form of decreased commuter traffic, an enhanced expectation for local identity and quality-of-life within peoples’ residential areas, and a need for more multi-generational and full-spectrum housing product in neighborhoods.
The Current Study: Rationale, and Objectives

Highland Avenue Corridor is highly successful in its ability to convey large volumes of vehicular traffic towards Route 128 and towards neighboring towns, and to provide access to local and regional commercial and retail amenities through the numerous businesses that line the Corridor. These are important functions that the Corridor fulfills. In addition, the Corridor is also home to many households within Salem. Forming an important part in a regional network of roadway connectivity, and retail and commercial successes have, however, simultaneously created some long-term challenges for the Corridor itself, and for Salem. Heavy traffic, and potentially dangerous road conditions along the Corridor, challenges for residential stakeholders surrounding and on the Corridor, and an overall lack of a sense of place surrounding the Corridor, and aesthetic challenges stemming from the nature of highway-side businesses (uniform low-scale architecture, widely varying signage, large parking lots, etc.), and increased stresses for local residents, are all issues that the Corridor confronts.

The intention of the current study is to draw out these and other issues, and to identify potential solutions that will be workable within the strictures placed upon the Corridor. These solutions are, at this initial stage, high-level propositions relating to potential future scenarios for the Corridor based on existing conditions and market analysis. The goal of the study is to create a foundation for additional steps that reflect a community-based vision for the Corridor’s future.

PROJECT VISION:

The Highland Avenue Corridor will:

- Be a place where neighborhoods are connected to each other to increase a sense of community
- Become more than just a means to get from one place to another
- Have an identity as a district
- Become its own place to be, with different ways to get there

Project Schedule

Phase 1: Existing Conditions Analysis and Market Scan
1.5 Months

- Kick Off Meeting
- Establish Project Goals
- Corridor Visit
- Data Collection
- Base Materials Mapping
- Opportunities and Constraints
- Market Scan
- Development Program Scenarios

Phase 2: Corridor Framework and Development Scenarios
2 Months

- Development Framework
- Land Use Program Scenarios

Phase 3: Action Plan and Final Report
1.5 Months

- Selection of preferred Scenarios
- Development of Preferred Scenarios
- Draft Report
- Final Report
Reference Materials

Past Studies and Plans

Several past studies for Salem overall and for areas near the Highland Avenue Corridor were reviewed as part of the study.
Site Analysis
Site Analysis

Project Physical Context

The current study focuses on the length of Highland Avenue that is a four lane (two lanes in each direction), divided highway, within the boundaries of the City of Salem. This coincides with a stretch of Highland Avenue that generally begins at its southern end just southward of the Walmart property, and extends at the northern end roughly to the high school. In an eastward and westward direction, the study area generally encompasses residential zones lying east and west of the Corridor, and is expanded in the east to encompass the large 120 Swampscott Road property.

A starting point for the study was the consideration of several large and medium-sized properties within the Corridor that are, or may become available in the future, for redevelopment. This list of properties was by no means comprehensive nor determinative; the study was intended to generate a vision framework that is flexible enough to accommodate future availability of these and other properties. The properties that formed this starting point, with one or two additions, had been identified in the 2018 “What’s Happening On Highland?” document created by the City.

Challenges

The primary challenges for the Corridor are as follows:

A Business-As-Usual Approach

As with any established zone of this type, there is understandable inertia regarding change, due to familiarity with the existing condition. An approach to the future that derives from this approach would see incremental by-rights development occurring opportunistically within the Corridor, or with small, localized changes to zoning (or approval via zoning board of appeals for individual initiatives) on a property-by-property basis. In the absence of a vision, this is what occurs naturally in all cases, not just along the Highland Avenue Corridor. This can already be seen along Highland Avenue with the advancement of larger current projects, such as the Trader’s Way and Overlook Acres residential developments, as well as recent initiatives to convert other big sites directly along the Corridor to purely residential uses. While the provision of additional residential product in the metro Boston area is positive overall, questions arise about whether a future prevalence of these types of projects directly on the Corridor is desirable.

Three concerns with such an approach, overall, are: 1) Sites along the Corridor - in particular, large sites - if developed individually without thought for the larger composition, may degrade the Corridor’s retail and commercial offerings; 2) There is no synergy of action between efforts, leading to missed potential opportunities to leverage larger projects in particular for the betterment of the Corridor overall and the creation of a sense of place; 1) It does not fundamentally address any of the large, pressing issues facing the Corridor, many of which are safety and quality-of-life related (traffic).

Highland Avenue (Highway 107) Right-Of-Way (R.O.W.)

In online polling of community members, and in general conversations with the City and Working Group, traffic within the Corridor consistently rose to the position of being the single largest issue. The complexity of the this subject in this study area cannot be overstated, due to the fact that large vehicle volumes are simultaneously the lifeblood of the Corridor - generating opportunity for the businesses along the Corridor, as well as responding to the Corridor’s role as a conduit for commuting - and the greatest challenge towards achieving a sense of place or a sense of neighborhood for the numerous residents living within the study area. Adding to the complexities of traffic management on Highland Avenue in the Corridor, the road’s right-of-way is within the purview of MassDOT, and not that of the City of Salem. The practical impacts of this are that most decisions relating to the character of the roadway cannot be made locally.

Surrounding Road Network

Highland Avenue is, for the duration of its length through the Corridor, a major arterial road that has highway characteristics due to the fact that it is divided by a barrier. The roads that connect directly into Highland Avenue at signalized intersections are minor arterial or collector roads that typically connect to elsewhere in the City of Salem, and to other locations (Route 128, Swampscott, etc.). All additional roads within the study area are local roads that do not form part of an interconnected network. This last condition means that there are very limited alternatives for traffic flow to Highland Avenue itself - all traffic within its “catch basin” is channeled onto and across it. This creates challenges in particular for local residents, who cannot typically drive from the streets they live on to other places without engaging with Highland Avenue.
Parcelization

Parcelization of properties within and surrounding the Corridor is a legacy of decisions made decades, if not centuries, before. This leads to a condition of very broad and diverse ownership of mostly small to medium-sized parcels. Notable exceptions to this are the sites accommodating the “big box” retail businesses. A patchwork quilt of ownership presents challenges for land assembly and the creation of future projects that can create their own centers of gravity within the Corridor. These issues are not insurmountable, but are a factor in any considerations of future directions for the Corridor.

Overall Basic Nature of The Corridor

The basic nature of the Corridor immediately to either side of Highland Avenue is highway-side retail and services businesses (with some residential mixed in), many of which are regional as well as local attractors. Zoning has been created over time to support these uses, as they have been deemed essential to the well-being of the broader City of Salem; the success of certain businesses along the Corridor bears this out. The fundamental basic nature of the Corridor, therefore, has historically elevated practical usage - easy access, ample surface parking, large retail stores, drive-through eateries, small office suites, etc. - above other considerations. These amenities are not insignificant, and this translates into challenges for “changing the face” of the Corridor to be more of a “place” that anchors the area it serves. These realities impact everything from traffic volumes to aesthetics along the Corridor.

Opportunities

Current and future opportunities for the Corridor are:

Housing Demand

Strong demand exists for housing in Salem, as a result of larger regional forces in the residential market. There is broad demand for all housing types. Private developer interest in sites on and around the Corridor reflects this demand. While not all sites are suitable for residential use, accommodation of this demand on appropriate sites supports the success of local businesses, schools, and the creation of neighborhoods. While there are legitimate concerns about increased traffic on roads in and around the Corridor, aligning residential growth with other initiatives (such as a potential South Salem MBTA Commuter Rail Station, walkable neighborhoods, Salem Skipper, and the City’s upcoming municipal car share program), supports the creation of residential opportunities for a broad spectrum of people.

Potential Demand For Other Uses

Particular types of regional “big box” and local convenience retail and services predominate along the Corridor, but there is potentially demand in the market for the accommodation of other uses. These might include increased office space (as mentioned in “Covid-19 Impacts”), full-spectrum residential supporting diverse household types (including seniors), destination restaurants, and even a “lifestyle center” that combines a number of uses with outdoor amenity space. These uses are growing along other similar corridors in the region and nationally, and aside from broadening economic opportunity, they contribute to enhanced “sense of place.”

Regional Medical Center

The North Shore Medical Center - Salem Hospital, located on Highland Avenue a short distance north of the Corridor study area, is a regional attractor. As such, several medical-related businesses have located along the Corridor. There is potential for the future co-location of such affiliated businesses within the Corridor, in one or more medical office park-type arrangements. This is an ongoing opportunity for growth in the Corridor.

Changes in Attitudes

When the current configuration of Highland Avenue was conceived, in the mid-to-late 20th century, emphasis was on moving as much traffic as efficiently as possible. This led to the highway-like appearance of Highland Avenue today. While it is still important to convey traffic efficiently through the Corridor, and will continue to be so, there is increasing demand regionally and nationally for the balancing of this need with others. Initiatives in this realm include the accommodation of pedestrians, cyclists, transit, and the general calming of areas impacted by major roadways.
Existing Conditions

The Corridor occupies a zone of gentle, wooded hills characterized by large quantities of rocky ledge. Single family and town home neighborhoods nestled into the wooded landscape surround the Corridor, while the zone most proximate to Highway 107 accommodates additional multi-family residential buildings. Along the Corridor itself, single family homes - vestiges of when the road was narrower and slower in speed - are interspersed with small and mid-size convenience businesses, medical office buildings, and large “big box” stores. The right-of-way of Highland Avenue consists of two lanes in each direction, separated by an armco-type steel traffic barrier in the middle. Pedestrian sidewalks line either side of the roadway. Turning opportunities are limited by the continuous barrier to a small number of signalized intersections that see a large volume of turning movements due to this condition. Buildings along the Corridor, with the exception of multi-family residential, are predominantly single-story.
North and South of the Corridor, Highland Avenue is a single lane in either direction, without any center barrier. It is only for its duration in the actual Corridor that it is two lanes in either direction, with a center barrier, for approximately 1.6 miles total.

This condition is somewhat unusual, as the more normal arrangement of roads would be a progression from narrower to wider, to freeway, rather than a reversion to the narrower state again. The condition at Highland Avenue reflects a need to absorb a large number of vehicles on the road at any given time along this specific stretch of road.
Ecological Conditions

This plan shows the extent of natural elements in and around the Corridor. These are not readily apparent from Highland Avenue itself, but become more visible a short way in from either side of Highland Avenue. The geology of large amounts of rocky ledge combines with streams and their buffers, as well as large amounts of wooded land, to create a complex tapestry of natural elements. These elements can be brought more to the fore in the future life of the Corridor, as suggested in this study, to enhance identity and amenity. Two of the most commonly expressed desires for the Corridor were “greener” and “calmer”; leveraging of these elements will assist with achieving both of those goals.

Zoning

Current zoning for the Corridor reveals the patchwork nature of the Corridor’s identity. The largest impact to the character of the Corridor is the “Business Highway” category, which lines either side of the Highland Avenue right-of-way for most of its length, as well as the “Industrial” category, within which the big box stores at the northern end of the Corridor are accommodated. Selective rezoning will assist with attaining the goals that support the vision articulated in this study for the future of the Corridor.
The starting point for studying opportunities for the future within the Corridor was a variety of sites within the Corridor that were generally identified in the 2018 “What’s Happening on Highland?” document. This is by no means a comprehensive list, but was intended to catalyze exploration and discussion. As such, this list is not intended to suggest that other properties are not candidates for future redevelopment, or that identified properties necessarily will be redeveloped. Some of the properties, such as the Transfer Station site, “Cinemaworld” and “Overlook Acres” may require significant environmental remediation due to ground and/or water conditions affected by prior uses.

An overlay of the key opportunity sites with environmental constraints reveals a complex picture of future opportunities for the Corridor. The combination of these elements - sites plus natural elements - provides many clues to the future potential for the Corridor.

Key properties either under development or that may be available for future redevelopment:
3.0
Market Scan
Market Overview

Framework

Landwise conducted a market scan and analysis as part of the study. For the purposes of categorization of uses, the following terms were utilized:

- “Retail”: Supermarkets, stores, restaurants, services (gas stations, etc.)
- “Commercial”: Offices, light manufacturing/workshop (eg. Technology Way businesses)
- “Residential”: All types – single family to townhomes to mid-rise multi-family

The market scan is important for ensuring that the planning effort is grounded in market reality. Plans that respect and respond to market forces are more likely to be implemented and achieve success than those that chose to ignore economic forces at play in the community.

A market scan has three essential components:

Economic and Demographic Context

It is important to understand the economic and demographic forces at play within the subject site community. This includes looking at employment growth which creates economic opportunity and "spin-off" demand for housing, services, and goods. Additional factors such as growth in households, income levels, educational attainment, commuting patterns, will also impact which asset classes are in the highest demand, and how resources are likely to be allocated to them.

Supply/Demand Balance

Understanding whether the supply and demand balance of various asset classes is a critical component of the market study. If there are gaps between the level of supply and demand the market is likely to respond to them over time by adding additional supply, adjusting price levels, or converting underutilized assets to alternative uses over time. Understanding the balance is important before investing in the construction of new buildings.

Market Trends

Real estate is notoriously cyclical, and each land use can peak, plateau, and bottom out at different points in time. Being attune to the cycles and understanding the factors that may cause a particular asset class to quickly heat up or fall out of favor is important for making informed real time decisions about future allocations of capital.
Over the past year Covid-19 has accelerated a number of trends that were already percolating in the marketplace causing certain land uses to move faster than usual through cycles of boom and bust. Of note is the strength in fulfillment, warehouse, and distribution uses caused by the uptick in online commerce, a trend that has been rapidly accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The flip side of the coin is that regional malls and shopping centers of all stripes have suffered immensely as shops and restaurants have been forced to reduce capacity, alter business models, or close altogether due to state public health restrictions. Additional land uses that have been negatively impacted include hotels due to severe reduction in business and leisure travel, and office uses, due to most white-collar employers shifting to "work-from-home" platforms during the majority of 2020.
Summary Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use</th>
<th>Market Strength</th>
<th>Site Suitability</th>
<th>Economic/Tax Impact</th>
<th>Low Level of Competition</th>
<th>Low Level of Traffic Impact</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Office</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial / Light Manufacturing</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail/Restaurant</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Low Score  ** = Medium Score  *** = High Score

**Market Strength** – Landwise judgment of how healthy the market is for the given use in the Boston Metro and along the Corridor

**Site Suitability** – How appropriate the use is for a typical site located along the Corridor factoring in zoning, market requirements, visibility, site needs

**Economic/Tax Impact** – The ability for the use to create jobs and generate a net positive fiscal impact

**Low Level of Competition** – The level of competition in the local market/submarket for the specific use

**Traffic Impact** – The amount of traffic that will be generated from the target use

**Takeaways**

**Existing Conditions**

- Medical employment clustered around the NSMC Salem Hospital is the primary driver of economic activity along the Corridor
- Big box retailers continue to draw significant activity along the Corridor and these users appear to be healthy relative to national trends
- The Corridor features a number of chain restaurant options but lacks options for independent and ethnic categories
- The Corridor is made up primarily of middle-income households and it is experiencing positive household growth and meaningful growth in income levels

**Future Conditions**

- Recent expansion in the NSMC Salem Hospital cluster and the closing of a hospital facility in Lynn indicate that future growth in the medical space is likely to occur.
- Retail and restaurant uses are likely to continue to face headwinds from the Covid-19 disruption and the rise of e-commerce and so expansion of these uses will be challenging in the near term.
- The growth in advanced manufacturing, logistics, warehousing uses is likely to continue so sites that are well suited for these uses may have an advantage
- The need for affordable/workforce housing is likely to remain strong in the Salem area due to the lack of supply
Case Studies

Office

Century Bank headquarters
400 Mystic Ave, Medford
- Class A Office Building
- Year Built: 2005
- Building Space: 88,000 square feet, 5 stories
- Lot Size: 4.87 acres
- FAR: 0.42
- Parking Ratio: 3.0 / 1,000 SF
- Traffic Count: 22,000 VPD (2018)

A new 5-story, 50,000 square foot building was built adjacent to the existing 3-story building. This building is located on Mystic Ave. in Medford, a similar corridor that is highly trafficked with a variety of uses.

Medical Office

Route 3A Medical Office Complex
221 Boston Rd, Billerica
- Year Built: 2019 (renovated)
- Building Space: 12,500 square feet, 2 stories
- Lot Size: 1.64 acres
- FAR: 0.17
- Parking Ratio: 5.5 / 1,000 SF
- Traffic Count: 32,000 VPD (2018)

This medical office building has 6 separate suites that can be combined for larger spaces if needed. It underwent extensive renovations in 2019, including an entire new façade. It is located on Route 3A in Billerica, a similar corridor with almost identical traffic counts to Highland Avenue. (35,000 VPD).

Light MFG / IND

Salem Glass
3 Technology Way, Salem
- Year Built: 2002
- Building Space: 64,000 square feet
- Lot Size: 4.4 acres
- FAR: 0.33
- Parking Ratio: 1.3 / 1,000 SF
- Traffic Count: 35,000 VPD (2020)

One of the most successful companies on Technology Way. Their success has inspired other similar companies to move, creating an industrial cluster at Technology Way.

Retail

St. Jean’s Credit Union
370 Highland Avenue, Salem
- Year Built: 2018
- Building Space: 7,200 square feet
- Lot Size: 1-acre lot (this building shares a lot with the neighboring Puleo’s Dairy building. The 1-acre is an estimate of the land that St. Jean’s sits on)
- FAR: 0.17
- Parking Ratio: 5.5 / 1,000 SF
- Traffic Count: 35,000 VPD (2020)

Built by Groom Construction (a Salem-based company).
Housing Precedents

Residence in Vinnin Square, Swampscott

Clarendon, Arlington VA

Westside at Shady Grove, Rockville MD

Vardarda Housing, Sweden

Gunbarrel District, CO

Retail and Restaurant Precedents

The Domain Rock Rose, Austin TX

The Avenue, Washington DC

Branchline Restaurant, Watertown MA

Legal Seafoods, The Street, Chestnut Hill MA

Recess, Chicago IL

Semolina, Medford MA
Medical Office Precedents

Dental Office, Mesa AZ

Visions Healthcare, Dedham MA

Carriage Animal Hospital, Lombard IL

Apollo Medical Office, Cary NC

Band and Wire Orthodontics, Illinois

St. Vincent Medical Center

Public Transit

Bus System
To increase activity in the Corridor without further contributing to existing traffic issues will require implementation of several progressive bus initiatives, such as increased frequency, GPS tracking supported by cellphone apps, and even provision of a dedicated bus lane.

Commuter Rail
If the South Salem MBTA Commuter Rail Station is implemented, it would be a game-changer for access to and from the Corridor, particularly if it is combined with “back route” pedestrian and bicycle trails proposed in this report. This would allow a non-vehicle dependent lifestyle for residents of the Corridor.
Engagement
Engagement

During the course of the study, three Working Group meetings and two community meetings were held virtually, in webcast format. Input was solicited using online polling. Miro boards (digital work boards where comments were collected during the webcasts, and posted via digital sticky notes to the boards). Meetings were led by Sasaki, with input from Landwise and the City.

Working Group meeting dates were:
Meeting 1: September 29, 2020
Meeting 2: December 16, 2020
Meeting 3: February 3, 2021

Community meeting dates were:
Meeting 1: October 28, 2020 - Corridor Analysis, Market Scan, Findings
Meeting 2: January 12, 2021 - Framework, “Big Picture Ideas” (Future Scenarios)

The “sliders”, shown to the right, were a way of getting the Working Group and Salem community members to think about what environment they would like for Highland Avenue. Using the idea of the slider conveys the different spectrums that Highland Avenue operates on, and the ways that different improvements could change the nature of the Corridor.

“Walking (along Highland Avenue) feels very dangerous due to speed of cars.”

“The ability to turn around on Highland Avenue is important.”

“Improving (the big box zone) would make a big difference because there are a lot of people who live nearby.”

What is right for Highland Avenue?

Pedestrian

Experience at Ground Level – Sense of Place

Local

Overall Function, and Look and Feel

Commercial / Institutional

Program, Uses – Sense of Place

Regional

Residential
Community Meeting Analysis

Community Meeting 1 - October 28, 2020

During the first virtual community meeting, residents provided insights into the way they currently use Highland Avenue, and the challenges and opportunities they see in it. Multiple forms of engagement were used to provide the residents diverse opportunities to think about the Corridor and give feedback. The virtual nature of the meeting meant that all participants were engaging solely through digital platforms, which while different from a traditional public meeting, still yielded significant amounts of engagement.

During Community Meeting 1 Sasaki and Landwise presented on the initial analysis completed on Highland Avenue, and then the majority of the meeting was used for residents to provide comments and feedback. The first activity was conducted using PollEV, a system that allows for a survey question to be answered and analyzed in real time. The questions and analysis of the residents were then shown boards in Miro that asked them to provide thoughts on the current challenges of Highland Avenue, the opportunities of the Corridor and then their aspirations for what an ideal corridor would look like. Those boards and comments are displayed on the following spread.

What are the current challenges for the corridor that you would like to see addressed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkability / Bikeability</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient amenity options (e.g., dining, retail, services)</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient residential options</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above chart shows community member responses to the question: “What are the current challenges for the Corridor that you would like to see addressed?” Traffic stands out as the most important challenge - an issue that was made very clear by the community must be improved for any other new projects to be successful.

How do you interact with Highland Ave today?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passing through (Commuting)</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping or Dining</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services (Medical, Automotive, etc.)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above chart shows community member responses to the question: “How do you interact with Highland Avenue today?” The most common response was resident at 34% of responses, and then passing through/commuting close behind at 31% of responses.

The above graphic displays a word cloud created by community members responses to the question: “What one word best describes your ideal corridor for the future?” The biggest words (walkable, calmer, greener, slower, restaurants, housing, affordable, etc.) used by the most by participants. From this grouping of words we can begin to image the future environment of Highland Avenue. These key characteristics were used to create the proposed scenarios later on in the process.

Shopping, dining, entertainment and other services make up a total of 33% of responses, which signals that in Highland Avenue’s current condition it does not function as a destination for much of the community.
The feedback received during community meeting 1 revealed four key improvements the community would like to see on Highland Avenue: traffic, walkability and bike-ability, housing and general neighborhood. The level and speed of traffic is a concern for many residents, it is a safety concern and often causes backups. The existing road structure of Highland Avenue feels unsafe and unwelcoming to pedestrians and cyclists. The residents would like improvements that would allow for these mobility options to be integrated into the Corridor. The community has a desire for affordable, small scale, multi family and senior housing to be included along the Corridor. And finally, there was a general desire for the Corridor to have an enhanced sense of place, more greenspace options and have a clean and well cared for nature.

Following the community meeting, the design team analyzed comments from residents to determine the main themes of feedback. These themes informed the following steps of the process which was creating potential scenarios for the Corridor. Each scenario took great care to address the main concerns and desires of the residents.

* Full comments can be found in the appendix
Community Meeting 2 - January 12, 2021

Community Meeting 2 gave residents of Salem an opportunity to comment on the initial scenario options developed by the design team. The gathering took place as a virtual meeting, and used some of the same technology as community meeting 1 to engage with the residents.

The meeting began with presentations from the design team about each of the three proposed scenarios. The team went into depth on the key attributes, pros and cons of each scenario, as well as the commonalities between them. The participants were then asked to reflect on the three scenarios through a Miro Board; which one they liked best, which attributes they were most excited about and anything that was left out completely that they would like to see. The boards and comments are seen in the graphics below.

Five main themes of feedback emerged from this second community meeting: An interest in greenspace, trails, and sustainability overall; support for affordable and senior housing; support for a mixed use district; desire for a well functioning local transit system; and for a family friendly neighborhood feel. These themes greatly aligned with the feedback from the first meeting, and provided greater insight into the scenario that would work best for the Highland Avenue Corridor.

The feedback from community meeting 2 was synthesized and then presented to the working group for consideration. The themes developed from the meeting helped to determine which pieces of each scenario were most desirable, and should be recommended. The commonalities between all of the scenarios were aligned with the feedback received.
5.0

Future Development Scenarios
Big Picture Ideas Approach and Overview

The three Big Picture Ideas were developed to draw out issues for discussion, and potentially to create a consensus vision. All three scenarios share the ability to make use of the common framework elements that were explored as part of the study. Each, however, looks at different possible outcomes for the Corridor in the future. None of these outcomes is intended to be rigid; it is expected that certain aspects of a given scenario may be adapted alongside aspects of other scenarios, and that some but not all of the framework elements may be implemented. The result would then be a wholly new scenario.

Some key features of the Big Picture Ideas are:

- They are intended to be broad brushstrokes – the consultant team is not suggesting mandated relocation of existing uses to achieve a vision;
- Existing conditions (business uses, topography, etc.) are an important factor;
- Private land ownership is a factor – Options can provide guidance for future development based on a vision for the Corridor;
- Options are meant as catalyst for discussion, drawing out issues and possible solutions.

Ideas from one option may be applicable to others, with a different consensus option emerging.

The scenarios range from least (Big Picture Idea 1) to most (Big Picture Idea 2) aspirational, in terms of the amount of coordinated effort that would be required to achieve the vision described in each. In Idea 1, very little or no coordinated action is required between parcel holders in the baseline scenario (coordinated action would, however, be required to implement the lifestyle center retrofit to the big box store zone if that framework element were included). For Idea 3, a considerable amount of coordinated action and even amalgamation of parcels may be required to achieve the vision.

There are similarities and overlaps between the scenarios due to the mature nature of the Corridor; there is limited scope overall – at least in the short to medium term – for radical alteration of roadway pattern, and possibly not even for consolidation of parcels to create larger parcels that would be available to create new mixed-use development within the Corridor (example: retail below residential with walkable internal streets). However, if a vision is established, and it gains stakeholder support, that vision can be something the City and community work towards over the medium to long term.
**Big Picture Idea 1**

"Christmas Lights"

This scenario was lightheartedly named "Christmas Lights" due to its appearance as a string of "lights" (available development parcels), each connected to the electric "string" (Highland Avenue). This scenario assumes that parcel boundaries generally remain as they are today, and that changes in the Corridor occur much as they have been occurring, through mostly isolated action by individual land owners. This scenario could be made more aspirational by the inclusion of any or all of the Common Framework Elements.

Features of Big Picture Idea 1 are:

- It is the baseline option, it accepts current basic nature of the Corridor, and seeks incremental improvements (eg. Corridor right-of-way improvements, best uses of key sites along Corridor);
- It suggests an opportunistic, by-right growth strategy on major sites, within current zoning, or moderately modified zoning;
- It is not contingent on larger connections across parcels, or on land assembly.

**Big Idea 1 - Build 1**

**Big Idea 1 - Build 2**

An outer band of residential developments surrounds the inner band of retail. Side streets connect the residential zone to the retail zone.

**Big Idea 1 - Build 3**

This scenario establishes an inner band of retail space that hugs Highland Avenue on both sides. Commercial, retail and residential spaces are added along the Corridor.
Big Picture Idea 1

**Future Development Scenarios**

**Big Idea 1: Christmas Lights**

- **Commercial**
- **Retail**
- **Residential**
- **General Retail** / **Commercial “Inner Band”**
- **General Residential “Outer Band”**
- **Right of Way Improvements**
- **Side Streets**
- **Trails**
- **Crossings**

**LEGEND**

- **Public Facing Office Building**
  - Public facing offices and services are proposed along the Corridor in the inner retail zone.
- **Apartments / Condos**
  - Residential apartments and condos are proposed as the key features of the outer residential zone.
- **Nature Trails**
  - Connections to new and existing nature trails are proposed along Highland Avenue to provide pedestrian connections to the retail zone, and across Highland Avenue.
- **Office Building**
  - Private office buildings are proposed to be located in the surrounding area, but not in the primary retail zone along the Corridor.
Big Picture Idea 2

Distinct North and South Character Zones

This scenario identifies and builds upon distinct characteristics of the Corridor to the north and the south of the Swampscott Road intersection with Highland Avenue. This scenario is more aspirational than Idea 1, as it posits a gradual transformation of the southern part of the Corridor into a zone of increased office presence, while transforming the existing big box store zone in the northern part of the Corridor into more of a lifestyle center (still anchored by the big box stores).

Features of Big Picture Idea 2 are:

- It generally distinguishes between Corridor south and north of Swampscott Road for future identity;
- South of Swampscott Road: Greater emphasis on office and other employment uses, with select retail and residential mixed in;
- North of Swampscott Road: Strengthening and reinforcing this area as the retail zone with select other uses.

Big picture idea 2 suggests two distinct north and south zones along Highland Avenue: one commercial zone and one general retail zone. The two zones can be seen here.

Right of way improvements and side street connections center on the retail zone, to foster a destination zone. Residential spaces are added in both zones and in the surrounding area.
Future Development Scenarios

Big Picture Idea 2

**LEGEND**
- Commercial
- Retail
- Residential
- General Retail Zone
- General Commercial Zone
- Right of Way Improvements
- Side Streets
- Trails
- Crossings

**Public Facing Office Building**
Public facing office buildings are proposed within the general commercial zone on the Corridor.

**Apartments / Condos**
New residential spaces are proposed in both the commercial and retail zones along Highland Avenue.

**Nature Trails**
Connections to new and existing nature trails are proposed along Highland Avenue to provide pedestrian connections to the retail and commercial zones, and across Highland Avenue.

**Office Building**
Private office buildings are proposed to be located in the surrounding area, but not in the primary zones along the Corridor.
Big Picture Idea 3

Integrated Commercial District

The most ambitious of the three scenarios, Big Picture Idea 3 identifies the Highland-Marlborough-Swampscott intersection as the main intersection of this entire part of Salem, and suggests that the intersection’s existence alone can catalyze dramatic change radiating out from it. This vision offers the opportunity for property owners adjacent to this superintersection to conceive of their parcels as potentially having different, possibly denser uses in the future, and, importantly, uses that are connected strongly to adjacent uses via pedestrian and bicycle pathways.

Features of Big Picture Idea 3 are:

- It treats Highland-Swampscott-Marlborough intersection zone as the “State and Main” of the Corridor, with future commercial activity leveraging that intersection.
- It creates an opportunity to create a mixed use (retail and residential) development on the Cinemaworld and/or Transfer Station sites, with “back street” links (pedestrian, bicycle, and - subject to detailed analysis - even vehicle) to the existing retail nexus to the north; this would allow for a high degree of connectivity that is not dependent on Highland Avenue.

Big Idea 3 - Build 1

- It treats Highland-Swampscott-Marlborough intersection zone as the “State and Main” of the Corridor, with future commercial activity leveraging that intersection.
- It creates an opportunity to create a mixed use (retail and residential) development on the Cinemaworld and/or Transfer Station sites, with “back street” links (pedestrian, bicycle, and - subject to detailed analysis - even vehicle) to the existing retail nexus to the north; this would allow for a high degree of connectivity that is not dependent on Highland Avenue.

Big Idea 3 - Build 2

- Both retail and residential developments are proposed within core retail zone, as well as some commercial space within a mixed use development.
- Commercial offices would be located outside of the retail zone.

Big Idea 3 - Build 3

- Both retail and residential developments are proposed within core retail zone, as well as some commercial space within a mixed use development.
- Commercial offices would be located outside of the retail zone.
Big Picture Idea 3

Apartment / Condos
Residential developments are proposed in the core mixed use district, within the retail zone, and in the surrounding area just outside of the retail zone.

Bike Paths
Bike paths are proposed along Highland Avenue and on trails that would connect to Highland Avenue in the crossing zones.

Nature Trails
Connections to new and existing nature trails are proposed along Highland Avenue to provide pedestrian connections to the retail zone, and across Highland Avenue.

Office Building
Private office buildings are proposed to be located in the surrounding area, but not in the primary retail zone along the Corridor.
6.0
Common Framework Elements
Common Framework Elements: Transformation For The Future

Following the analysis and market scan phases of the study, the team focused on creating a framework that can be used to guide future thinking and development along the Corridor. Given that the basic nature of the Corridor is already determined as a result of roadway alignments, parcelization, and established uses on many sites, the framework is by its nature restricted to improving what already exists. This notwithstanding, some major ideas emerged in the course of the creation of the framework, and these were determined (by the conclusion of the study) to be applicable to all “Big Picture Idea” scenarios that were developed.

Fundamental to the development of a framework is the incorporation of feedback received from stakeholders at community and Working Group meetings. This includes the following:

**Increased Walkability/bike-ability:** There is a strong desire to be able to move around the area by means other than an automobile, and to do so in a pleasant manner;

**Calmer:** The Corridor is a commuting corridor and a regional attractor (big box stores), which is a challenge for achieving this goal. Also, many of the impacts on a study area-wide level that affect the perception of “calm” are related to the MassDOT R.O.W. and how that is altered going forwards. Because this element is controlled by a state agency, it is not in purview of this study. The study nevertheless makes strong suggestions about how the R.O.W. could be improved;

**Greener:** Again, as with “Calmer”, much of the ability to impact at least the perception of increased green-ness (in the form of street trees) resides within the MassDOT R.O.W. The framework does make suggestions, however, about connecting within the Corridor through a “green network” of trails;

**More Housing:** There is a strong desire for broad-spectrum housing, including senior housing;

The elements that stay the same throughout all three Big Picture Ideas are:

**Retail Nexus Enhancement**

Potential exists for the evolution of the retail nexus at the northern end of the Corridor into more of a “lifestyle center” anchored by big box retail, where people can connect to the nexus itself, and within it, on foot, and can spend time in pleasant outdoor spaces.

**Improved Connectivity**

Identifying future potential crossing points for pedestrians along Highland Avenue, as well as creating alternate means (pedestrian and bicycle routes) to access those crossing points.

**Right of Way Improvements**

Engaging with MassDOT to create the best possible future for the Highland Avenue right-of-way, with additional turning opportunities, safe bicycle lanes, etc. Equally, creation of bicycle lanes on secondary roads will be beneficial.

Overview

Common Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential exists for the evolution of the retail nexus at the northern end of the Corridor into more of a “lifestyle center” anchored by big box retail, where people can connect to the nexus itself, and within it, on foot, and can spend time in pleasant outdoor spaces.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying future potential crossing points for pedestrians along Highland Avenue, as well as creating alternate means (pedestrian and bicycle routes) to access those crossing points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging with MassDOT to create the best possible future for the Highland Avenue right-of-way, with additional turning opportunities, safe bicycle lanes, etc. Equally, creation of bicycle lanes on secondary roads will be beneficial.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enhanced Sense of Neighborhood: This item is supported strongly by the above four, but goes beyond being merely the sum of those items. It is a desire to have full-spectrum services and amenities within the Corridor to create a sense of a complete neighborhood.

The key framework elements that can be common to any future development scenario, were developed to incorporate and support the above goals. These are:

**Transform The Big Box Retail Zone**
Reduce the amount of open asphalted lot visible to Highland Avenue
Create an "outer line" of programmed built space (between Highland Avenue and the parking area) to create a lively, aesthetically pleasing street edge to Highland Avenue
Create open spaces and protected walkways/bikeways that connect elements of this shopping nexus with one another, and with residential areas surrounding

The above steps describe the creation of a "mini lifestyle center". These transformations of existing "big box" retail clusters are becoming increasingly common throughout the United States. This is projected to increase post-Covid (as these retail areas have weathered the pandemic financially much better than other types of retail, and because there will be increased demand for lifestyle retail that is local to where people live). Within the metro Boston area, a successful example of this is The Street, along Route 9 in Chestnut Hill, where office space has been constructed over street-edge retail that is surrounded by outdoor amenity spaces (seating areas, play areas, etc.)

**Create a Connected Trail Network**
Utilize existing wooded areas, whether on private or public land, to create trails that connect various areas within the Corridor;
Connect the trails across Highland Avenue (at appropriate crossing points) to create an increased sense of connectivity between residents and businesses on the east and west sides of the Corridor.

This initiative would enable pedestrians and cyclists to make connections to key places within the Corridor without having to engage with Highland Avenue (while the hope is that MassDOT will improve pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on Highland Avenue when the roadway is re-done, it is still a busy thoroughfare; other connections will facilitate the creation of greater "calm" that was called for by community members in community meetings).

**Influence and Leverage Improvements to The MassDOT Right-of-Way**
While changes to the MassDOT right-of-way are not within the purview of this study, it is such a central feature and factor in any plans for the future, that the City and community must be prepared to engage with MassDOT to influence its future. There are numerous ways to achieve this, from contacting one’s local representatives, to writing to MassDOT directly, to staying involved with the consultative process as MassDOT begins to advance projects.
One of the key understandings gained during the study period was that Highland Avenue receives so much vehicular pressure because there are so few secondary networks surrounding it. The enhancement and accentuation of roads that do exist would support the goal of de-pressuring Highland Avenue, and would provide users with alternative ways of connecting to elements within the Corridor.

Further study is required to assess the ways in which the existing secondary road network can function in additional roles (eg. potential for bicycle lanes, or potential for connectivity to sites identified for future development).

The large amount of wooded land surrounding the Corridor offers the potential to consider connections for pedestrians and cyclists along trails that could cross Highland Avenue at select points. The purpose of these trails, as with the “Secondary Road Connection Network,” is to provide people with additional options for getting from place to place within the Corridor without having to move along Highland Avenue itself.

Note:
Potential trails shown on the accompanying diagram are indicative only, and are not intended to represent an actual, proposed network of trails. A goal should be to eventually identify a limited number of trails that are practical to implement and that connect important elements.
Big Box Retail Zone

The size and composition of the retail nexus at the northern end of the Corridor makes it a good candidate for an “overlay” of other uses. This would serve the purpose of providing this part of the Corridor with a great sense of place, through a combination of indoor and outdoor program elements.

Successful examples of this type of retrofit to a legacy center are becoming increasingly common in the United States. In addition, emerging data is showing that these types of “lifestyle centers” have been weathering the Covid-19 retail downturn more successfully than other types of retail, due to their outdoor public space offerings in tandem with food and beverage and big box retail elements.

* This diagram depicts an aspirational plan for a mixed use zone along Highland Avenue. It does not display an approved plan or project.
The proposed big box retail zone would be the heart of the Highland Avenue Corridor. This zone would include restaurants, retail, office space and residential space. The zone would center around a public plaza, be connected to a major pedestrian road crossing, and have a surface level parking lot. The big box retail zone would be designed to serve as a local destination for community members, and a vibrant gathering space.
Big Box Retail Zone Transformation Scenarios

The big box retail zone options show various possibilities for enriching this zone in the future as more of a place for people. This could be either as phases within a longer-term development process, or the as final scenarios for adding elements to the zone. The scenarios are intended to highlight different areas within big box zone that could be the focus areas of the zone, showing that growth could be incremental, or finite (ie. that the vision is not an all-or-nothing proposition).

**Scenario 1**

Construction of stand-alone destination restaurants within the parking lots of existing retailers. This is a common feature in big box retail areas, and would provide a type of restaurant offering that is absent in the Corridor today. Ideally, these additions would have outdoor seating areas, combined with landscape buffers and tree-planting zones, to create outdoor amenity space that is visually and physically protected from the parking areas.

**Scenario 2**

This scenario indicates a combination of destination restaurants and a limited amount of “liner” building program along Highland Avenue. This would enable attainment of the goal of making the edge of Highland Avenue more visually appealing, while continuing to allow views from Highland Avenue to the parking areas of the big box retailers. The building along Highland Avenue could house office or residential above retail.

**Scenario 3**

This scenario builds on Scenario 2 to propose a more comprehensive edge to Highland Avenue, creating a more urban feel for the Corridor in this location. Further study regarding required parking capacity for the existing big box stores will be necessary.

**Scenario 4**

Scenario 4 suggests that the successes of implementing a mini lifestyle center on the site of most of the big box stores of the Corridor might catalyze further change. Consolidation of parcels on the south side of Trader’s Way is indicated, with pedestrian connections between these and the lifestyle center north of Trader’s Way.
Potential Highland Avenue Transformation

- Buildings framing street edge
- Public outdoor space adjacent to retail
- Signalized pedestrian crossings
MassDOT Right-of-Way

Existing Conditions

Important steps that can be taken to improve Highland Avenue (some of which are contained in MassDOT’s Route 107 report) are:

- Removal of the center-line armco barrier: This will achieve the following:
  - Changes to the visual and psychological impression that the road is first and foremost a high-speed highway;
  - Removal of a literal and psychological barrier to connection between areas east and west of Highland Avenue; pedestrian crossings may be feasible at additional locations;
  - Creation of the opportunity for a center zone of protected left turn pockets, for both directions of traffic, which will in turn decrease pressure on the existing signalized intersections within the Corridor, where all turns currently must occur

- Creation of wider sidewalks on either side, and that are potentially buffered from the traffic lanes by a green strip (which can also contain stormwater management measures);
- Creation of a bicycle lane on either side, potentially separated from travel lanes by a mountable curb and/or plastic pylons.

Current Project Status:

MassDOT intends to implement the more far-reaching items in its report on Route 107 (removal of barrier and general redesign of the right-of-way) in the medium to long-term, and in the short-term to resurface the roadway.

The vision elements articulated as part of the Corridor Study are aspirational, and are intended to assist the City and community with engagement on the subject of the right-of-way’s design with MassDOT, when that occurs in the future.

Constituents can contact State Government agencies to advocate for MassDOT Right-of-Way improvements. Contact options are provided below.

MassDOT
MassDOT Secretary (Current Acting Secretary - Jamey Tesler)
Address: 10 Park Plaza Suite 4160, Boston MA 02116

Governor Baker Office of Constituent Services
Mass State House, 24 Beacon St, Office of the Governor
Room 280
Boston, MA 02133
(617)725-4005
Aurora Avenue in Shoreline, Washington is a commuter and retail highway that is similar in nature and function to Highland Avenue in Salem. Recent improvements to the right-of-way of Aurora Avenue included:

- Creation of pocketed turning lanes, which allow vehicles waiting to turn feel safe on a busy highway (safe from being rear ended) and therefore to not make dangerous cross-traffic turning movements before it is safe to do so;
- Creation of strongly demarcated pedestrian crossings;
- Planting of trees along the right-of-way, and placement of light standards that contributed to sense of place;
- Creation of sidewalks buffered from the roadway by a planting zone that also assists with stormwater management.
Aspirational Right-of-Way Transformation

The “before” photo and “after” diagram on this spread illustrate a vision of what Highland Avenue can become. Removal of the armco-type barrier will give a strong visual cue to traffic that this is not intended to be a high-speed traffic chute; pocketed turning lanes will de-pressure existing signalized intersections and increase custom at roadside businesses; tree plantings will beautify the Corridor; improved sidewalks and creation of bicycle lanes will provide amenity for non-vehicular Corridor users.

Proposed Right-Of-Way Modifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROTECTED TURNING LANE</th>
<th>TRAVEL LANE</th>
<th>TRAVEL LANE</th>
<th>BIKE LANE</th>
<th>SIDEWALK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16’</td>
<td>11’</td>
<td>11’</td>
<td>5’</td>
<td>5’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Existing

Protected turning lane
Green divider
Public Transit

Bus System
To increase activity in the Corridor without further contributing to existing traffic issues will require implementation of several progressive bus initiatives, such as increased frequency, GPS tracking supported by cellphone apps, and even provision of a dedicated bus lane.

Commuter Rail
If the South Salem MBTA Commuter Rail Station is implemented, it would be a game-changer for access to and from the Corridor, particularly if it is combined with “back route” pedestrian and bicycle trails proposed in this report. This would allow a non-vehicle dependent lifestyle for residents of the Corridor.

Intracity Micro-Mobility
Salem has recently been filling the regional public transit gaps within the City with an unusually diverse set of affordable and accessible intracity micro-mobility options. These options include the Salem Skipper; a municipal ridesharing service; and a municipal bicycle share. The Salem Skipper works like a minibus that goes to the rider when they want it. In addition to the Salem Skipper, a community car share program; and a new municipal bicycle share program will be launched in early 2021. Salem’s intracity micro-mobility options allow residents, visitors, and employees to string together different mode choices where appropriate. Salem should continue to make investments in micro-mobility options as they provide opportunities for a care-free or car-light lifestyle and thus relieve the strain of traffic congestion.
7.0

Next Steps
A View To The Future

As Mayor Kim Driscoll noted in her remarks at the second community meeting for this study, the only constant on the Highland Avenue Corridor has always been change; businesses that are here today, were not here in decades past, and in the future there will be other uses on sites within the Corridor. For this reason alone, there is an opportunity for the future of the Corridor to be guided by a vision. Change will inevitably come to the Corridor, and if there is concerted action, that change can be guided to serve the greatest number of people who live in, work in, and visit the Corridor.

From numerous comments received in the community and Working Group meetings, the City and the consultant team fully understand concerns that added growth in the Corridor will bring added congestion, noise, pollution, and possibly gentrification. The current developments on the Trader’s Way and Overlook Acres sites demonstrate, however, that change is occurring nevertheless; it occurs in a by-right manner (ie. within current zoning or through Zoning Board of Appeals approvals). Salem has become a highly desirable city for millennials and other demographic groups within the metro Boston area.

If a South Salem MBTA Commuter Rail station is implemented in the future, and if Highland Avenue is restructured by MassDOT to accommodate progressive, safety and amenity-oriented features, these two occurrences alone will have profound, positive implications for the Highland Avenue Corridor.

Due to attention from the City and from MassDOT, the future of the Highland Avenue Corridor is bright. Residents should have hope that their community can begin to offer walkable solutions. Businesses should be able to expect that they will continue to prosper - even prosper more - along the Corridor as change occurs.

This study will in large part have succeeded if the seeds of positive, concerted and organized change are sowed in the minds of stakeholders, such that those stakeholders motivate vigorously with the appropriate authorities and property owners to have a community-based vision implemented.

The next steps after this study, if the ideas contained within it gain traction, will be:

- For the City: to examine what changes to current zoning may be necessary to make elements of the vision attainable
- For the community: to become involved in motivating with MassDOT for the transformation to the Corridor’s right-of-way and key intersections that the community desires; and to remain involved in dialogue with the City to attain a vision that meets the needs and aspirations of the greatest number of stakeholders possible.

Concrete Steps Forward

The following goals (shown at left) were identified through community engagement as being representative of the key Common Framework Elements that were subsequently developed. These can be implemented in any future development scenario for the Corridor. They are cross-reference below with several of the practical measures identified during the course of the study (shown at right) to demonstrate concrete steps that can be taken for attaining a vision for the Corridor’s future.

Framework Goals

- **Increased walkability/bike-ability:** For residents and visitors alike; decreased reliance on automobiles for shorter, local trips; decreased reliance on using Highland Avenue only as a means of making local trips.
- **Calmer:** Changes to right-of-way to create more turning opportunities, lower overall speed, increased pedestrian crossing locations, lower vehicle speeds overall.
- **Greener:** Planting of trees along Highland Avenue and elsewhere within the Corridor; planted stormwater swales; planted strip between sidewalk and roadway to provide greater pedestrian sense of distance from traffic; greater visual amenity through plantings.
- **More Housing:** Full spectrum residential accommodating diverse household types; more senior housing; more housing in walkable locations.
- **Enhanced Sense of Neighborhood:** Bringing together all of the above measures to create a greater sense of “neighborhood”

Implementing The Goals

- Further study changes to zoning to encourage projects that will have positive transformational impacts on the Corridor (such as changes to the big box retail zone at the north of the Corridor)
- Engagement and dialogue with existing property owners and businesses to elaborate the Common Framework Elements and goals
- Implementation of progressive measures on streets controlled by the City (ie. streets connecting into Highland Avenue), such as increased bike lanes
- Collaboration with MassDOT for the transformation of the Highland Avenue right-of-way
Conclusion of The Study - Looking To The Future

The primary objective of this study was to create the basis for future action regarding Highland Avenue Corridor, whether that action is amendments to zoning to permit some of the objectives of the study, or partnering with MassDOT to insure a better future for the Corridor’s right-of-way on Highland Avenue, or development of overall strategies for “opportunity sites within the Corridor, or all of these elements. Many of these are medium and long-term objectives.

In the short term, one value of the study is to bring to attention to challenges the Corridor confronts - congestion, danger to pedestrians, degradation of quality-of-life for residents, decreased sense of place - even as it serves as a local and regional retail and commercial destination and commuter corridor. A second value is to create for people a sense of what can be achieved for the Corridor, in the near and more distant future. It may not be feasible to implement all aspirations gathered through the community outreach process, and those described in this report, but once the idea of a better future for the Corridor is in the public realm, the hope is that support will grow for concerted action by all stakeholders to make some of those visions real.

Strategies and Next Steps

The City will begin to examine how zoning changes can be implemented to facilitate future opportunities that are consistent with community feedback received during this process, and consistent with the vision laid out in this report. While no specific timeline has been established for these tasks, they can now be clearly identified and prioritized.

Many of the recommendations of this report will require concerted action on the part of individual property owners. Creation of trails across private property boundaries will require that property owners, residents, and the City agree to further study of how and where these can occur.

Given the importance to MassDOT’s involvement in the broader process for the Corridor’s future, ways of contacting MassDOT are included in this report, as are suggestions for citizens to remain engaged with MassDOT as they carry forward their own studies and projects for the Corridor.

This report has laid out a vision for a connected, calmer, greener Highland Avenue Corridor; one that also has more broad-spectrum residential accommodation in the appropriate place (i.e. that is not implemented opportunistically in ways that degrade the commercial role that the Corridor plays in the life of Salem). Ways of leveraging the regional medical presence on the Corridor are also explored as an opportunity for future business location and consolidation. Improvements to the big-box retail nexus at the northern end of the Corridor are described, as being one implementable way to improve aesthetics along the roadway itself, and amenity for residents of the Corridor area, and visitors, without disrupting existing business viability. These changes will lead to a greater sense of place for the Corridor, which will benefit all stakeholders.

The Highland Avenue Corridor is home to many people, in addition to being a local and regional retail and services destination, and a commuter corridor. The feedback that was received in the course of this study was that “local” considerations - creation of a sense of place, a calmer, greener environment, greater privileging of the needs of residents - need to be elevated overall. This can be done without damaging the prospects for continued business success along the Corridor. That is really the primary task for the future; establish a sense of place, balancing opportunistic growth with cohesion.
Communit...
The second board at Community Meeting 1 prompted participants to consider what opportunities they saw in the current conditions of the Corridor. These comments can be seen here.
The third board at Community Meeting 1 asked community members to share what their aspirations are for the Corridor. Those comments can be seen here.
Community Meeting 2

Jan. 12, 2021 - Miro Board Comments

Community Meeting 2 focused on three proposed scenarios for the Corridor, and getting feedback from community members on these scenarios. The meeting began with a presentation explaining each scenario, and then again used Miro boards to gather comments from the participants. Comments received can be seen here.

Potential Retail Zone Improvements

Really liked the overlay photo! Helped to visualize how much better it could be.

I like the vision in the 4th ‘vision’.

Big Picture Idea 1: "Christmas Lights"

-Baseline option. Accepts current basic nature of the Corridor, and seeks incremental improvements (eg. Corridor right-of-way improvements, best uses of key sites along Corridor)

-Oppportunistic, by-right growth strategy on major sites, within current zoning, or moderately modified zoning

-Not contingent on larger connections across parcels, or on land assembly

To consider:
What do you like or dislike about each option?
Is there anything you would like to see that is not included in these options?

Big Picture Idea 3: Integrated Commercial District

-Treats Highland-Swampscott-Marlborough intersection zone as the "State and Main" of the Corridor, with future commercial activity leveraging that intersection

-Opportunity to create a mixed-use (retail and res.) development on Cinemaworld site with "back street" links (ped, bike, even vehicle) to the existing retail nexus to the north

To consider:
What do you like or dislike about each option?
Is there anything you would like to see that is not included in these options?
Community members engaged in a lively discussion around what they would like to see on Highland Avenue. Comments that were not in response to a particular scenario options were collected together and can be seen here.

### Appendix

#### Jan. 12, 2021 - Miro Board Comments

Community members engaged in a lively discussion around what they would like to see on Highland Avenue. Comments that were not in response to a particular scenario options were collected together and can be seen here.

### General Feedback

#### Sustainability/Green Space/Livability

- I would like to see more options for use of renewable resources (ex. solar panels and greenery) also. However, as a resident of Marlborough Road near the intersection with Highland Ave, the traffic is the number one headache.
- I like the walking paths.
- Preserving what little open space and wooded areas remain is crucial.
- And I strongly agree with the person who said maintaining greenpace is crucial — I love my coyotes!
- I like the idea of walking/pedestrian paths and bike lanes.
- I have the idea of making the area more walkable; however, some come with crime and yes I see a walking trail to observe nature and not just to connect the various commercial areas.
- I would like to see some sort of a 55+ community development space.
- I would like to see walkability to a "State and Main" area, but how would that option impact traffic and what would be parking considerations?
- The super bowl sized parking lot at Home Depot any chance that the half of the lot never used be reconfigured to a more sustainable (i.e. non- asphalt) purpose?
- I like the walking paths.
- We have to go to downtown Salem to enjoy amenities like this. It would be nice to have these within walking/biking distance.
- I like the idea of pathways. I’m fairly new to Salem and I am very impressed by the paths and rail-trails you have here. The more the better.
- Community members engaged in a lively discussion around what they would like to see on Highland Avenue. Comments that were not in response to a particular scenario options were collected together and can be seen here.

#### Questions/Considerations/Infrastructure and Transit

- Is part of the planning process to identify broad city efforts needed to subsidize affordable and senior housing? The aspirational plans are good.
- I am part of the planning process to identify broad city efforts needed to subsidize affordable and senior housing. The aspirational plans are good.
- Is there consideration about better public transportation (buses/shuttles) to connect amenity points with the important institutions along Highland Ave— the hospital, the high school— might help create the sense of place/neighboorhood.
- Do you see a functioning local transit system that minimizes the need for parking? Or an economic incentive that makes large expenses of parking inefficient?
- Development of 120 Swampscott would be difficult because of the seismic and accessional disturbances of the vicinity.
- Have you taken into consideration the bottlenecks at Swampscott Rd, Marblehead Rd, and Traders Way? Its frightening when one of the many ambulances from Lynn tries to get through.
- Do you see a functioning local transit system that minimizes the need for parking? Or an economic incentive that makes large expenses of parking inefficient?
- Aging sewer and water infrastructure must be improved before more development happens. There have been serious and disruptive water breaks on Highland Ave over the last year.
- Have you taken into consideration the bottlenecks at Swampscott Rd, Marblehead Rd, and Traders Way? Its frightening when one of the many ambulances from Lynn tries to get through.
- I am part of the planning process to identify broad city efforts needed to subsidize affordable and senior housing. The aspirational plans are good.

#### Residential

- Residential developments bring less traffic.
- This area is already pretty busy and successful in terms of commercial/retail. What about using a different area to develop from scratch? Adding an additional place that is not yet developed could create an additional point of interest.
- I am part of the planning process to identify broad city efforts needed to subsidize affordable and senior housing. The aspirational plans are good.
- I think we need more food options in the Highland Ave area than just best food.
- I like that mixed-use idea — eateries, restaurants and pedestrian friendly.
- I love the mixed-used concept. Potential center of activity. Pretty ambitious?
- Community members engaged in a lively discussion around what they would like to see on Highland Avenue. Comments that were not in response to a particular scenario options were collected together and can be seen here.

#### Mayors Comments

- Mayor Driscoll - Happened to in the process of adding this topic in a conversation with Jan. I think as a small station just to service the neighborhood and nearby pedestrian. I think there is a lot of interest in the neighborhood and nearby pedestrian. I think there is a lot of interest in the neighborhood.
- Jan Lynne

#### Mixed Use/Commercial and Retail Dev

- I am part of the planning process to identify broad city efforts needed to subsidize affordable and senior housing. The aspirational plans are good.
- I like the idea of getting rid of the 107 median — excellent point about the speed ups.
- As citizens/residents, can we advocate directly with MassDOT for improvements to 107? If so, what is the most effective way to do so? Through our council representatives? Email? Thanks for any suggestions.
- Speaking of lots of asphalt that’s never used! What about the super-sized Home Depot parking lot?

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**Mayor Driscoll** - It is not going to be the same! We are advocating for positive improvements. Considering the neighborhoods off the road is very important. Many parcels along the road are not owned by the city. The purpose of this work is how should we be trying to incentivize and impact the way change and growth happens on the corridor.

### How to get people around the need to own a train car —

- Mayor 2nd train sh., ferry service, bike share, ride share. Public transit also good for climate change, resiliency.

### Consolidate some of the housing, restaurants here on the asphalt — Mayor!
Working Group Meetings

Working Group Takeaways - Meeting 1, Sep. 29, 2020

- Condos on traders village - they drive everywhere. Would love to see more local restaurants and shops. Otherwise they have to drive to Swampscott. Love to see more bus service in the area.
- Don’t think Highland is long enough for bus lane. People feel blocked in by Highland Avenue, lots of congestion. Voted to try to support zoning change for Cinemaworld but unsuccessful. They wanted housing with a restaurant (less disruptive).
- Barcelona and Highland intersection hard to attract because how do you even get there?
- Take out divider - make it boulevard with trees and flowers. Trees in the center. (This would attract more retail of restaurants on the Corridor)
- Many restaurants closed - but opportunities for more to come in within 6 months after covid dies down.
- Dialysis site is difficult to develop. (unattractive)
- Hospital is the anchor - customers from there.
- Cut through from Marlboro to Swampscott is really bad.
- Opportunities to create moments of local character. Keep businesses in Salem!
- Traffic is problem number 1
- Pressure for more housing stock helps with affordability
- Would love to be a local space! But will still have regional traffic.
- Pedestrian and Bikes should be able to be used on Highland Avenue. Need safety.
- There is lots of opposition to development.
- There is a worry that retail will cause more traffic. Attractive retail will attract more business but cause more congestion.
- Economic, balance, attractive.
- Use the vacant properties to relieve some of the issues in the short term of then other developments in the longterm.
- Highland Avenue is underserved in terms of restaurants.
- Major intersections are so difficult to navigate and turn around. Restaurants like to be at locations east to get in and out.

Working Group Takeaways - Meeting 2, Dec. 16, 2020

- Mass DOT improvements are an important value added to Highland Avenue, but they are not required for any of the scenarios.
- The state prioritizes improvements based on crash and safety data.
- There is hope that the working group will draw on their connections. Encouraging people to attend the meetings or listen to the recordings.
- Like the idea of getting secondary roadway off of Swampscott road, would alleviate traffic concerns.
- The ability to turn around on Highland Avenue is important.
- Various options provided are helpful for visualization.
- Improving the integrated commercial district would make a big difference because there are a lot of people who live nearby.
- Repairing right of way would make a big difference!
- Walking along Highland Avenue feels very dangerous due to speed of cars.

Public Comments Received after Jan 12th Meeting

- Of the three options presented the integrated commercial district was by far the worst. Since that is the most congested section of the 107 Corridor, making that ‘state and main’:
- By at least spreading out any development, it would not be loading more traffic to the road at a single section. I think about ambulances trying to get to the medical center from Lynn.
- The idea of creating a road from the southern portion of 107 to connect with Swampscott Rd might eliminate some of the traffic heading south on Swampscott road, but at many meetings I’ve been to (Overlook, Cinemaworld, etc) it has been made pretty clear that there is no way to put a road through there - too much rock, too much wetland area, etc. Bike paths/sidewalks which certainly wouldn’t help out on the traffic. Before we start talking about developing the Corridor, there has to be some plan on alleviating the traffic issues (bike lanes may help with bikes but will not eliminate the increasing traffic on that corridor) that will only be increasing with Trader’s Row and Overlook Acres. I truly cant see where there might be ‘back streets’ going to retail areas in the north.
- With all the development of large residential complexes, the neighborhoods have become crowded urban areas.
- By adding more buildings in this already built up area dismisses any semblance of peace, quiet, and gentle living. Therefore, the best option would be the Christmas light scenario - at least here the commercial look of the area would be spread out along the road, rather than concentrated all in the Hawthorne Plaza area. That way, there will be more ‘sense of place’ rather than look like blocks and blocks of what looks like a mall. High rise buildings of all types have a smaller footprint, but they certainly don’t provide any enhanced sense of place, greater visual and experiential quality.
• One thing that the City seems short of is business that provide some tax revenue to the City. Several of the bigger employers have left the area, which puts more and more burden on homeowners property taxes. It would be good if development could include additional sources of revenue for the City, as well as offering employment opportunities.

• As is obvious, with or without this specific survey, there is a need for a ‘nice’ restaurant where locals can get a glass of wine and a decent meal (does not need to be high end though Olive Garden may NOT be the answer - not a chain, please!)

• A mixed use development is completely unappealing visually, but the concept of cramming in so many residences and shops together is not my idea of ‘sense of place’. While the concept may be appealing, in practice I’m not sure how well it actually plays out. Salem is a historic city, and trying to build up the outskirts to look like urban sprawl just doesn’t seem to fit the culture and feel for our city.

• Not enough consideration for the Forest River and its tributaries that are impacted by continued development.

• Transfer Station parcel development implies going across wetlands and the river.

• All the green pathways? Across wetlands, conservation land, train tracks? While I support trails, walking and biking but will not feel safe unless bike path and sidewalk are separated from the traffic by vegetation strips - slides about Aurora Ave WA. Look at Harmony Grove Road – North River bike and walking study.

• Both the police station and Lafayette/New Derby fire station on in future flood risk areas. Police station has flooded before and no flood proofing has been done to my knowledge. These stations may remain but should not remain as the headquarters and need to identify alternatives soon.

• Closer example of pleasing development is Market Street, Lynnfield.

• Must have language requiring low impact development. Especially for trees! I am so tired of seeing new trees and sidewalks going in with no access to the street stormwater.

• Green roofs might be good here too.

• Liked ideas about Highland Avenue safe walking and biking but will not feel safe unless bike path and sidewalk are separated from the traffic by vegetation strips - slides about Aurora Ave WA. Look at Harmony Grove Road – North River bike and walking study.

Working Group Member Comments - Meeting 3, Feb. 3, 2021

Draft of the report was circulated to working group members prior to the meeting. Following presentation of the draft report by Sasaki these were the comments received from working group members. (Including email follow up to the City)

• Missing a discussion in next steps of a need for better public transportation. Along Highland Avenue and into Boston.

• Fear that we are not addressing the traffic issue. People are worried about adding more to Highland Avenue.

• During the meetings many people mentioned additional retail and dining, shouldn’t that be a goal?

• Good ideas! Not too aspirational. All comes back to the traffic - if we can’t fix that we can’t do anything.

• Are you looking at bringing medical businesses onto Highland Avenue? People like this idea.

• People who live off the secondary streets (i.e. First street) don’t want their streets used as major traffic streets.

• The T owns a lot of land around the stop, so there is an opportunity to create a whole new area/neighborhood there.

• When you look at businesses that people are in and out all day, that underscores the need for public transportation.

• The idea of having more local office space on Highland Avenue is intriguing but adds more traffic as well.

• Having a connection to downtown/being able to walk is a great benefit! Builds community.

• Addressing the residential. Lets be very aspirational. Likes the trails.

• Want to underscore that these options are hard to imagine when thinking about the reality of all the traffic on this road.

• Living on this road am really able to see the true amount of traffic, and that it is there at all times of day.

• We want it to be its on place, not just a pass through. It should have its own identity.

• There would be a better sense of community if people on opposite sides of Highland Avenue could connect.

• Like the idea of connecting the neighborhoods that are around Highland Avenue.

• Nicer accessibility to neighborhoods.

• Westbridge, Virginia - Commuter rail station plus many trails and paths.

• There are footpaths somewhere (near target?). Would be helpful to show in diagrams.

• Mid block turning pockets could provide some better options for reversing direction (at a minimum, a center turning lane would be a huge help) as long as existing traffic lanes are not removed.