

DOWNTOWN MERRIAM CORRIDOR PLAN

A PLANNING SUSTAINABLE PLACES INITIATIVE



AUGUST 2022



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project represents an opportunity to explore design alternatives for improving vehicular and pedestrian movements and aesthetics within the Historic Downtown Merriam. The planning process was structured around considering numerous alternatives and providing opportunities for public involvement, and the results were shaped by the input received from community residents. The recommendations contained herein can serve as an example for how the City of Merriam can approach the introduction of street improvements and future redevelopment scenarios.

Thanks to a grant from the Mid-America Regional Council's (MARC) Planning Sustainable Places Initiative, this project benefited from the participation of numerous residents and stakeholders including the following:

Downtown Merriam Advisory Committee Members

Stoney Bogan	Garick Lair
Jessica Butler	Jacob Laha
Danny Carr	Christopher Leitch
Dave Carroll	Jim MacDonald
Staci Chivetta	David Neal
Brian Dailey	Abel Perea
Bryan Dyer	Jason Silvers
Chris Engel	Whitney Yadrich
Andrea Fair	Sean Zaudke
Chris Evans Hands	Darene Street

City Council Members

Mayor Bob Pape
Jacob Laha - Ward 1
Jason Silvers - Ward 1
Whitney Yadrich - Ward 2
Amy Rider - Ward 2
Christine Evan Hands - Ward 3
Bruce Kaldahl - Ward 3
David Neal - Ward 4
Staci Chivetta - Ward 4

City Staff Members

Chris Engel - City Administrator
Jim MacDonald - Public Works Director
Bryan Dyer - Community Development Director
Andrea Fair - Planner

MARC Staff Members

Patrick Trouba - Transportation Planner II

Planning Consultant Team

CONFLUENCE

Chris Cline
Hank Moyers
Chris Sutterfield
Marshall Allen



Jay Aber
Jared Gulbranson



Vicki Noteis
Bob Collins



Chris Zahas

INTRODUCTION / SECTION ONE



INTRODUCTION

PLAN PURPOSE

Downtown Merriam has unique potential to become a significant destination district to serve not only the Merriam community, but all of northeast Johnson County and the surrounding region. It is the only Downtown area visible from and directly adjacent to Interstate 35, and this section of Interstate 35 carries more vehicles per day than any other roadway in the entire State of Kansas.

The purpose of the Downtown Merriam Corridor Plan is two-fold - to create a Complete Streets planning approach that guides a near-term reconfiguration and enhancement of the existing Merriam Drive alignment, and to create a long-term vision for Downtown Merriam that integrates this initial corridor/infrastructure investment while also exploring more significant changes to enhance the potential for revitalization and economic development investment that will eventually transform the Downtown environment into a vibrant pedestrian-friendly district the community desires. This work includes enhancing the functionality and aesthetic character of the existing Merriam Drive Corridor while also conceiving and integrating the potential for a larger and more complex future vision to take place incrementally, thus informing the decisions and recommendations for initial streetscape improvements.

The study area is bordered by the BNSF railroad and Interstate 35 to the east, the existing Waterfall Park to the north, the Turkey Creek Corridor to the west, and the existing Johnson Drive Corridor to the south. This plan is intended to serve as a conceptual guide for future growth and development along the Merriam Drive Corridor and it includes a framework and vision for integrated streetscape elements such as integrated on-street parking, widened sidewalks, designated shared-use pathways and on-street bicycle facilities, streetscape beautification and Downtown identity improvements, potential land uses, and a collection of public open spaces, community facilities and services.

The planning process included evaluation of existing conditions and the unique history of the area, coordination with the city's recently completed Comprehensive Plan (Merriam 2040), integration of input from existing businesses, property owners and the community, and collaboration with the identified Downtown Merriam Advisory and Downtown Merriam Steering Committees. The planning team met with the Downtown Merriam Advisory Committee (DMAC) seven times during the planning process and solicited feedback from the Steering Committee on plan ideas and concepts. The team actively engaged the DMAC, Steering Committee, and community throughout the planning process to evaluate existing conditions, review potential concepts, offer constructive input to enhance the preliminary design and planning concepts, and refine the final plan recommendations to align with the community's vision for the future of Downtown Merriam.

MARC PSP PROJECTS

The City of Merriam received a grant through the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) to fund this planning effort. This resulting plan is intended to guide the city's effort to improve connectivity through the eventual construction of a new network of sidewalks, trails, and bicycling facilities throughout the community.

MARC is a nonprofit association of city and county governments and serves as the metropolitan planning organization for the Kansas City region. MARC provides a forum for the region to work together to advance social, economic, and environmental progress.

As a part of their efforts, MARC sponsors the Planning Sustainable Places program which works to:

- Promote detailed local planning project development activities that further the creation of vibrant places that offer a mix of options for housing, jobs, services, and recreation
- Connect places with a variety of transportation options
- Support healthy living and a healthy natural environment

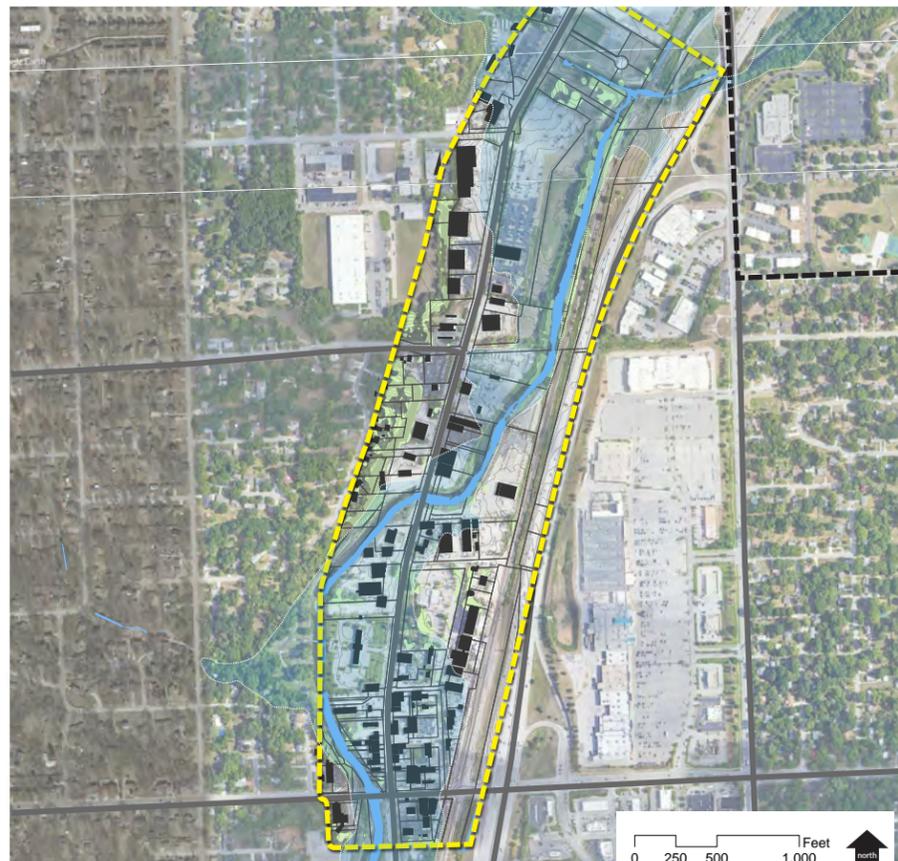


Figure 01 - Downtown Merriam Corridor Plan study area

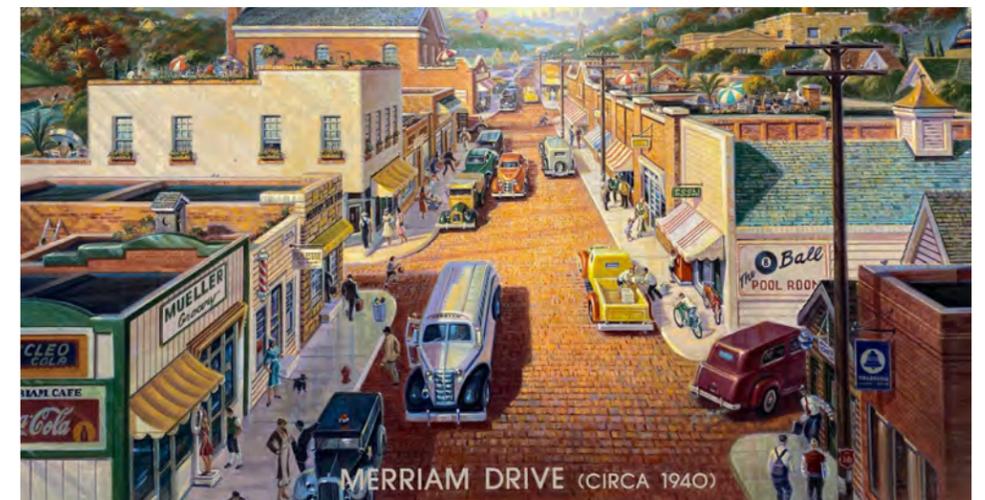


Figure 02 - Downtown Merriam

PRIOR PLANNING EFFORTS

The City of Merriam through previous planning efforts has addressed the Merriam Drive Corridor in three different studies over the past 8 years. These documents serve as a basis for development and direction for the Downtown Merriam Corridor Plan. In addition to the city's comprehensive plan, the Merriam Recreation Facilities Master Plan and 5701 Merriam Drive Master Plan provide additional direction based on community input for the improvements to be incorporated on the former Irene B French Community Center site and how those improvements should directly relate to the Merriam Farmer's Market site on the opposite side of Merriam Drive.

PLAN PROCESS / SCHEDULE

The Downtown Merriam Corridor Plan was completed over a 14-month period from July 2021 to August 2022. It was developed through a 3-phase process that included:

- Part 1 Discovery, Project Kick-off, Research and Analysis
- Part 2 Ideas
- Part 3 Implementation

Phase 1: Discovery - Phase 1 included a kick-off meeting with the DMAC, where discussions over project goals and visioning were completed. A majority of the technical analysis of Merriam's existing conditions was performed during this phase.

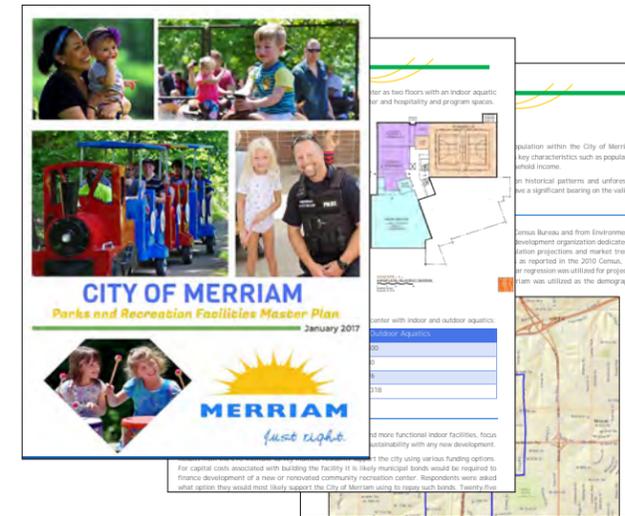
Phase 2: Ideas - Phase 2 included the development of the community's vision for the corridor and the development of design alternatives to capture the vision, goals and ideas from the Downtown community. This phase focused on public engagement and visioning. A robust set of engagement exercises was completed to identify common themes and desires of business owners, property owners and the community at large. This included one-on-one stakeholder interviews, pop-up event booths, a public workshop and an interactive engagement website that included visual preference exercises, mapping activities and surveys.

Phase 3: Implementation - This phase included drafting the planning document and evaluation and review with city staff and the DMAC. The Advisory Committee reviewed and provided edits on the plan draft. This phase also included an additional joint workshop with the Planning Commission and City Council. The last step of this process was a public open house where the plan was fully revealed to the public for review and comment. The last phase included a final review of the draft plan with the DMAC and edits were made based on the feedback received during that review.



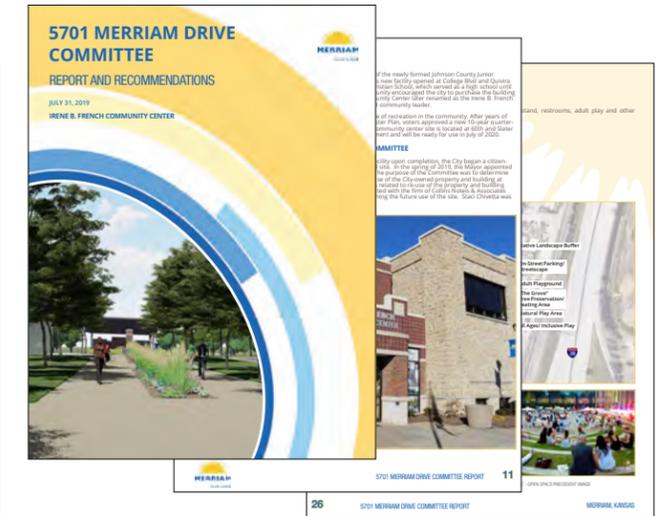
Merriam 2040 Comprehensive Plan (2021)

The Merriam 2040 Comprehensive illustrates a shared vision for the community that was developed through a robust public input process. A summary of the Comprehensive Plan can be found on the next two pages.



Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan (2017)

The 2017 Merriam Parks and Recreation Facilities Master Plan established a vision based on community feedback and analyzing the existing Irene B French Community Center and its ability to be renovated or replaced at the existing 5701 Merriam Drive site or the option to be relocated to the Vavra Park site across from the Merriam City Hall. After identifying the program desired by the community, the Vavra Park site was determined to be the only city-owned site capable of supporting the community desired amenities.



5701 Merriam Drive Committee Report and Recommendations (2019)

Following the recommendation for the Merriam Community Center to be relocated, the 5701 Merriam Drive Committee was established to provide a future direction for the Irene B French Community Center site once the transition to the new site had been made. Through this process, a vision to create a vibrant green space anchoring Downtown Merriam and providing gathering and celebration areas was established.



April - October 2021

- Kick-off meeting: 7/20/2021
- Gathering public input
 - Merriam Farmer's Market
 - Turkey Creek Auto Show
- Steering Committee Meeting #2: 11/17/2022

November 2021 - April 2022

- Progress review meeting - 1/14/2022
- Committee meeting #3 - 2/23/2022
- Public open house - 4/7/2022
- Committee meeting #4 - 4/13/2022

April - August 2022

- City Council acceptance - August 2022

INTRODUCTION

MERRIAM 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Background

Completed in early 2021, the Merriam 2040 Comprehensive Plan brought together a diverse set of voices, thoughts and ideas to help guide development within the city for the next 20 years.

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan was drafted as a result of a robust public engagement process that included several public meetings, multiple meetings with the project's steering committee and virtual engagement through an online platform that allowed interested parties to share their thoughts and ideas whenever was convenient for them. This contributed to a diverse and forward-thinking comprehensive plan that addressed a wide-range of issues.

The themes of the comprehensive plan included:

- Community Character & Identity
- Amenities & Service Enhancements
- Sub Area Plans
- Transportation & Mobility
- Promoting Prosperity
- Sustainable Development
- Creating Place
- Future Land Use

Through a series of best practices, plan recommendations and an implementation strategy, this plan provides action items for the city to consider in order to elevate and improve the quality of life for Merriam Residents.

One of the themes mentioned above is Future Land Use. This is a fundamental and required component of any comprehensive plan in the State of Kansas and is intended to guide appropriate development well into the future that is in harmony with the existing conditions and the long-term vision of the plan. The Future Land Use Plan from the 2040 Comprehensive Plan can be found in Figure 03.

With regards to the Merriam Downtown Corridor Plan, the Future Land Use Plan designates much of the study area as Downtown Mixed-Use. This unique category was developed to help support long-term redevelopment in Downtown Merriam. As described in the comprehensive plan, the category should promote human-scale multi-story buildings with a strong preference for first-floor retail, office or other commercial uses. Other uses will include parks and recreation or other public facilities. Facade and street improvements should be focused on the historic commercial area to enhance the pedestrian experience.

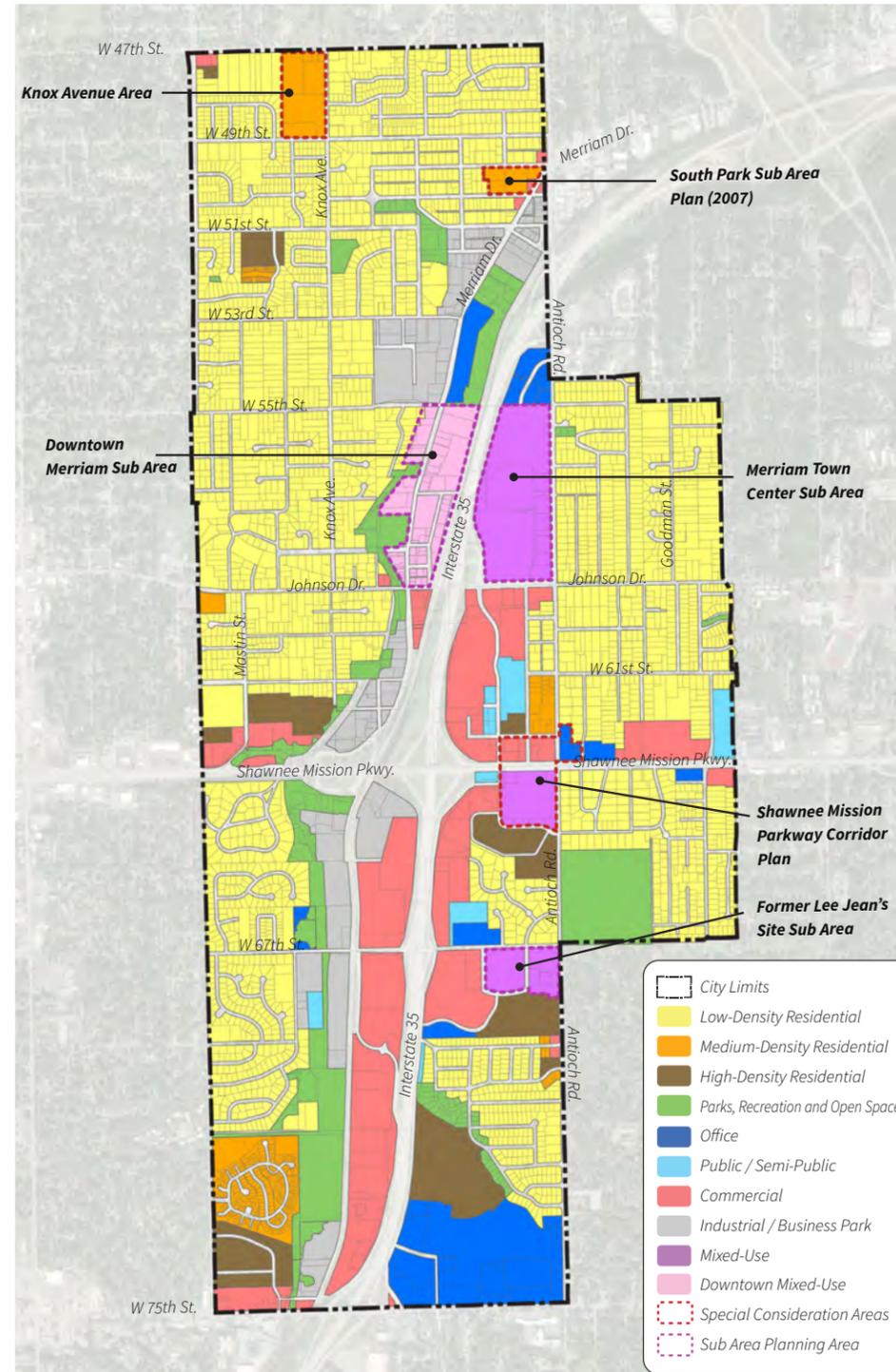


Figure 03 - Merriam 2040 Comprehensive Plan - Future Land Use Plan



Commercial



Office



Low-Density Residential



Medium-Density Residential



High-Density Residential



Parks and Recreation / Open Space



Industrial / Business Park



Mixed-Use



Downtown Mixed-Use



Public

Figure 04 - Examples of Future Land Use categories

Another component of the comprehensive plan is the development of sub area plans for vitally important centers and districts in Merriam from an economic, social and identity perspective. The sub areas include Merriam Town Center, the former Lee Jean's Headquarters site and Downtown Merriam. These areas represent currently underutilized areas that have the potential to face further challenges in the near future.

For the Downtown sub area, two concepts were discussed that approached revitalization of the district in different ways.

Concept 1 looks at retaining the vast majority of the existing Downtown buildings and focusing on enhancing the streetscapes to provide a more cohesive pedestrian network of sidewalks and encourage foot traffic to support Downtown retail and businesses. This concept also fully utilized the 5701 Merriam Drive site to be a destination within Downtown Merriam. Limited development was discussed with this option.

Concept 2 is built off the strengths of Downtown Merriam while reconfiguring large portions of the district to create a unique and iconic center for residents and visitors alike. Much of the historic core is retained in this concept coupled with facade and streetscape enhancements. Merriam Drive is realigned to create a large public open space between the Merriam Marketplace and the 5701 Merriam Drive properties. Realignment of Merriam Drive allows for an expanded Turkey Creek basin and reduces the impact of future flooding events. New multi-story mixed-use developments front Merriam Drive and overlook the expanded park space.

These two concepts provided a baseline as this planning effort began and many concepts and ideas were brought forward to be further refined and analyzed.

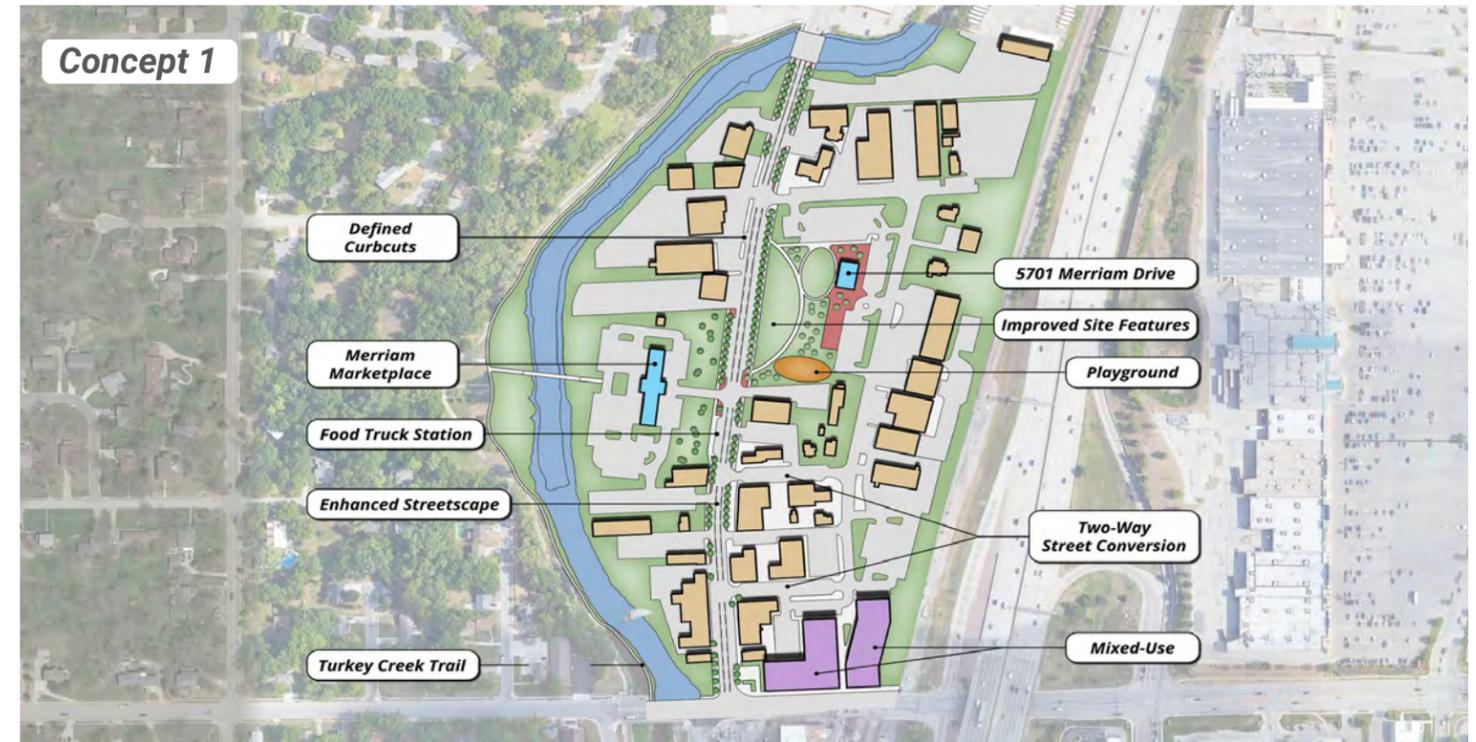


Figure 05 - Concepts for Downtown Merriam - 2040 Comprehensive Plan

INTRODUCTION

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Study Area

The Downtown Merriam Corridor study area extends from Johnson Drive, north to Waterfall Park and from the rail corridor along the eastern edge to Turkey Creek to the west. Turkey Creek travels prominently through the study area north to south and is a major driver for the design implications discussed in this plan.

The Downtown district is comprised of a variety of commercial businesses that range from the notable KC Strings shop to small bars and restaurants, professional offices, service-oriented businesses and industrial-type businesses. Downtown Merriam is home to many auto-oriented businesses that residents who engaged with both this planning process and the comprehensive planning process, feel diminish the charm, inhibit pedestrian access and connectivity and reduce the opportunities for revitalization.

The commercial buildings present are primarily modest one-story buildings that front the street with parking located mainly in the rear and alongside streets. Placemaking elements exist along Merriam Drive and include the pedestrian light poles, pole banners and hanging planters.

Merriam Marketplace is a popular destination located in the heart of Downtown Merriam that brings residents and visitors for the Merriam Farmers' Market, car shows and other community events. The 5701 Merriam Drive property is currently undeveloped and it, along with the Merriam Marketplace, provide ample green space in the Downtown that is largely underutilized.

A description of more specific conditions that this plan seeks to address can be found on the following pages.



Figure 06 - Downtown Merriam: Existing Conditions

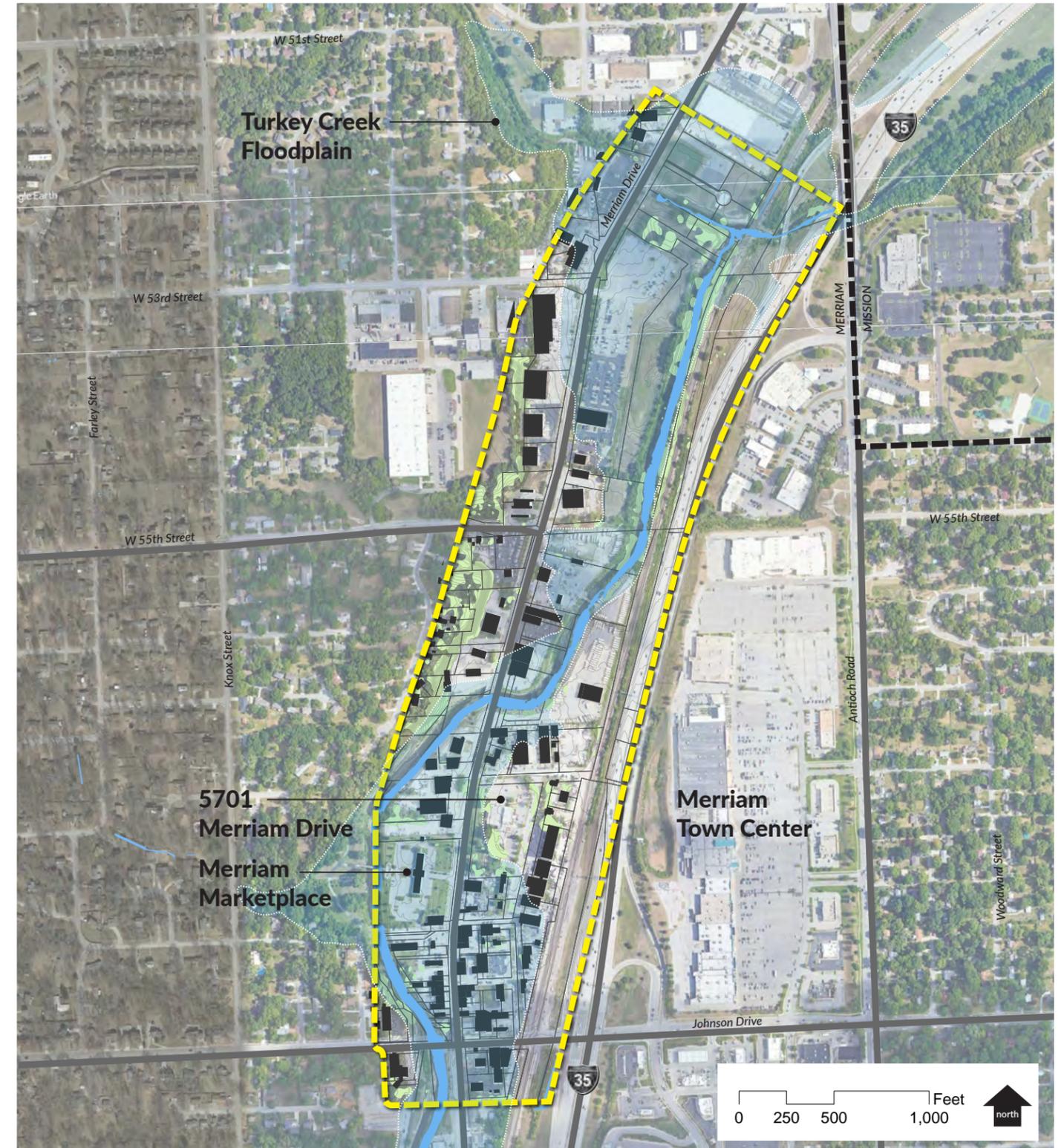


Figure 07 - Study Area

Existing Merriam Drive Alignment

Merriam Drive today consists of a three-lane section extending from Johnson Drive to W 57th Street. In this zone, two 12-foot travel lanes and one 13-foot center turn lane carry 7,000 to 9,000 vehicles per day. North of W 57th Street, Merriam Drive expands to a 4-lane section with no turn lane. This configuration extends north past W 55th Street and transitions to a section with two south-bound travel lanes, a center-turn lane and one north-bound lane. North of W 53rd Street, Merriam Drive transitions back to a three-lane section with a north and south-bound lane and one center turn lane.

Figure 08 focuses on the conditions along Merriam Drive from Johnson Drive to W 57th Street. Section AA demonstrates the typical condition north of Merriam Marketplace. This area consists of a three-lane roadway section with a narrow paver strip, small turf area and adjacent sidewalks. Street amenities and street trees are located within the small paver and turf area.

Section BB, located directly in front of Merriam Marketplace contains larger street trees along the corridor. Some businesses in this location have pavement extending from the building frontage to the street itself.

Section CC remains wide as Merriam Drive approaches the Downtown core from the north. In this location, the large sidewalk space blends with the expanses of pavement extending to the nearby commercial buildings. In addition to the large hardscape sidewalk area, adjacent surface parking lots and minimal street trees make the conditions at this location less desirable from a pedestrian point of view.

Section DD, located in the Downtown core is the only segment of Merriam Drive that contains on-street parallel parking. In this area, sidewalk space is tight due to the proximity of the existing commercial buildings and amenities within the sidewalk space such as light poles and trash receptacles.

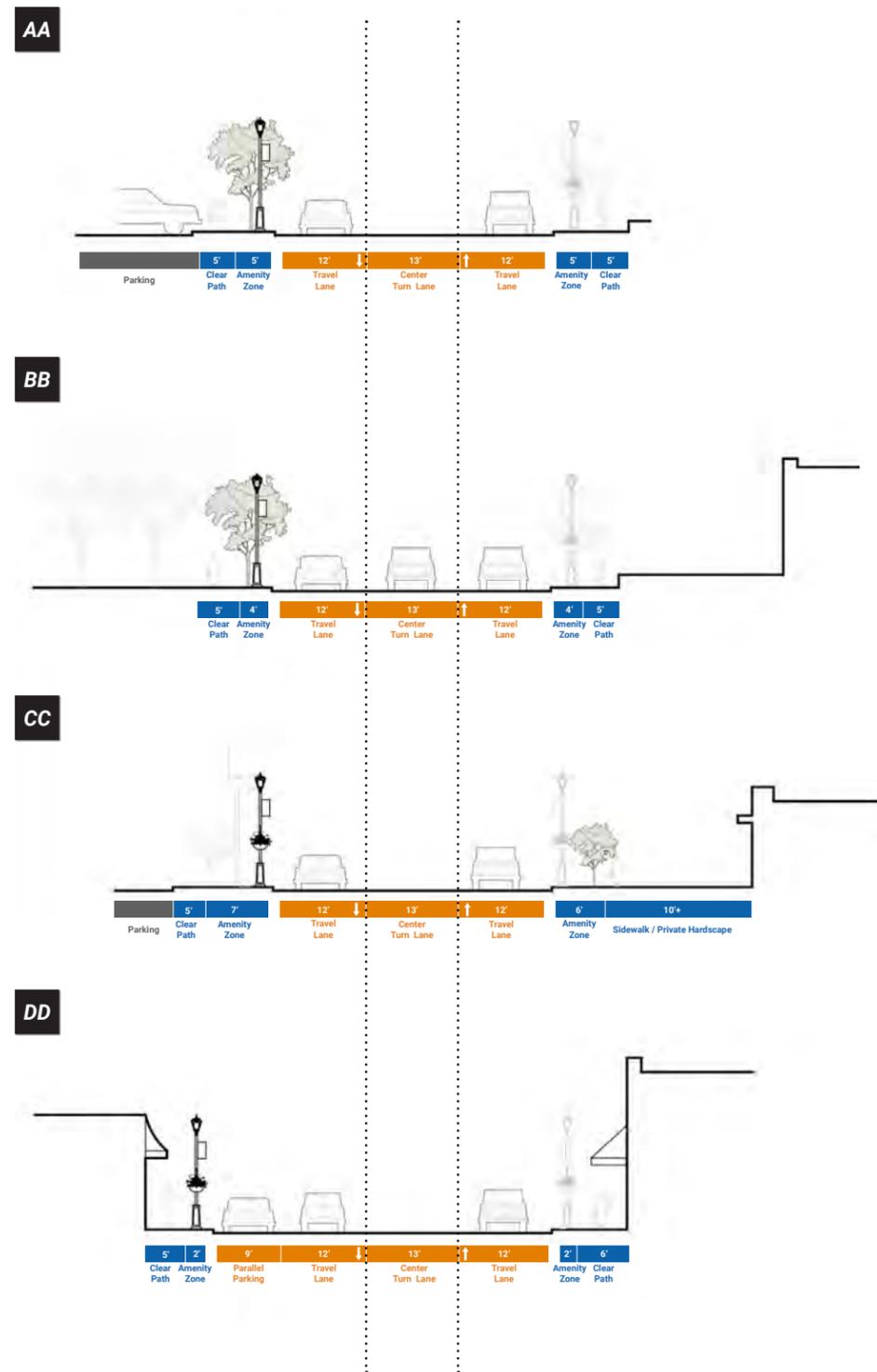


Figure 08 - Existing Sections: Merriam Drive

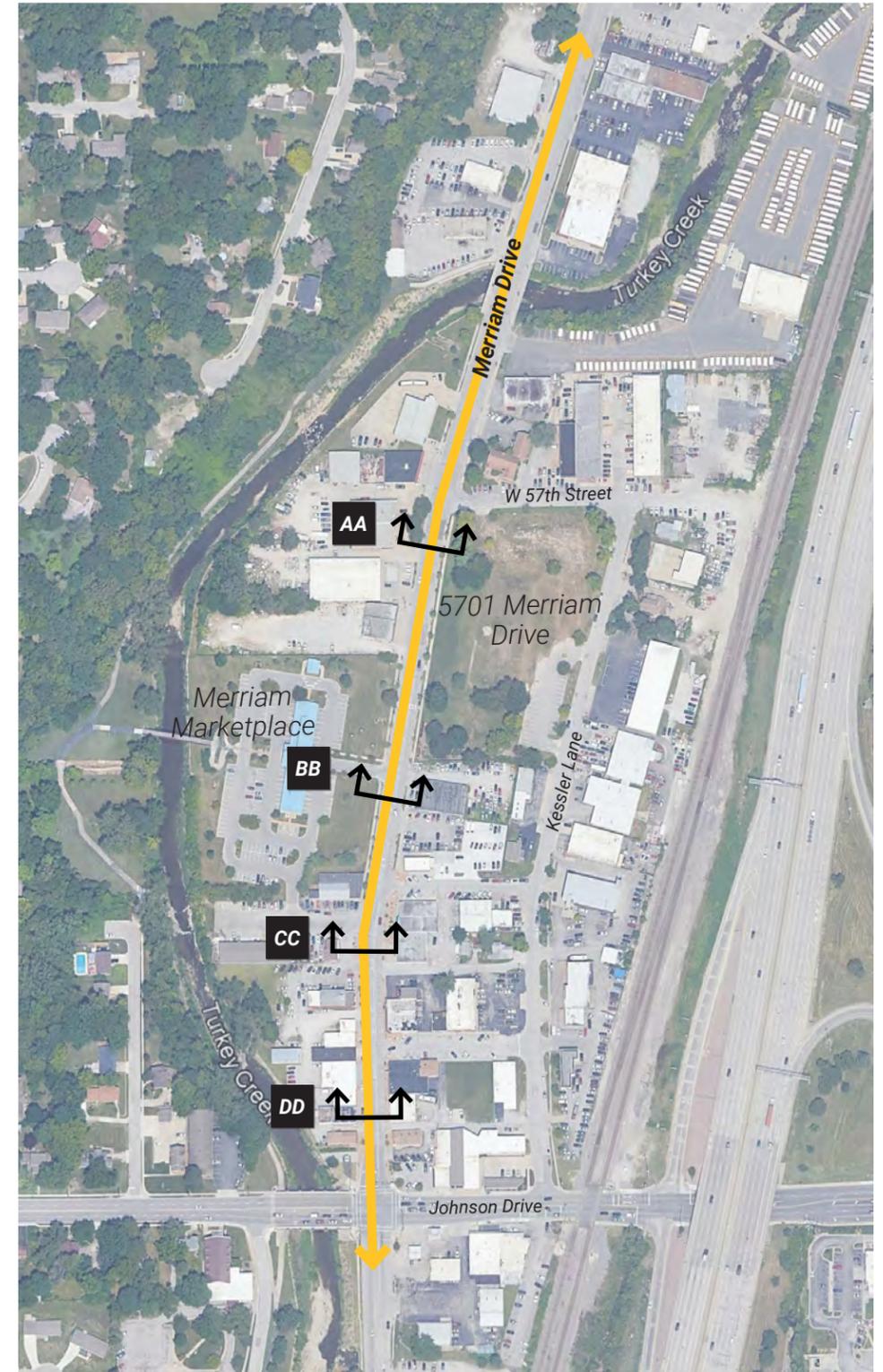


Figure 09 - Existing Merriam Drive alignment

INTRODUCTION

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Site Inventory: Challenges / Opportunities

A Expansive Pavement

Many properties in Downtown Merriam have an abundance of pavement that creates many challenges. Expansive pavement zones blur pedestrian and auto-oriented spaces which results in confusing and undesirable walking conditions for pedestrians. Pavement also increases stormwater runoff by reducing pervious surfaces and increases the amount of polluted runoff that flows into Turkey Creek. Finally, pavement intensifies the urban heat island effect which negatively effects the pedestrian experience.



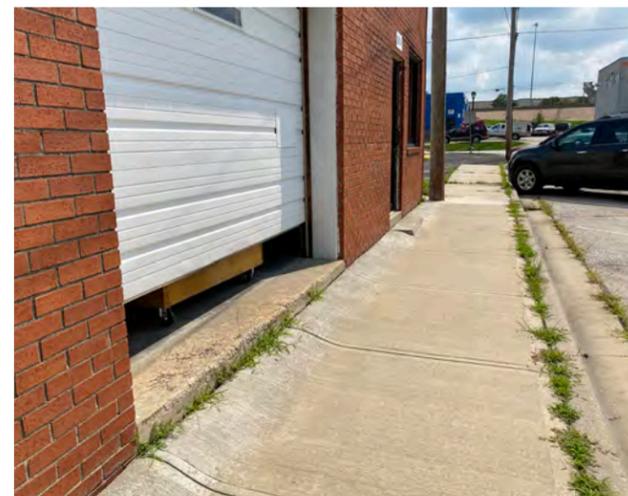
B Inconsistent Sidewalk Network

Several locations in Downtown Merriam lack consistent sidewalk connections. This condition reduces accessibility for all pedestrians, especially those with mobility challenges, and also reduces the potential for sustained economic activity.



C Accessibility Challenges

Accessibility is a major issue in Downtown Merriam. As the photos to the right illustrate, accessibility is hindered by encroaching parked vehicles, deteriorating infrastructure and elevation changes into adjacent businesses.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Site Inventory

D Pedestrian Crossing Enhancement Opportunities

There are several locations in Downtown Merriam for pedestrians to cross Merriam Drive. However, the current conditions do not provide the greatest experience or level of safety. Vanishing pavement markings and visibility issues create a less than safe condition, especially in the Downtown core. Added high-visibility signage both along the curb and within the roadway itself, have helped increase safety but more substantial design solutions should be explored.



E Wayfinding Enhancement Opportunities

With several destination-oriented amenities in Downtown Merriam, wayfinding signage is imperative to help first time and repeat visitors circulate throughout the district. The existing wayfinding signage is small in scale and can easily be missed by passing vehicles. Wayfinding signage should be simultaneously geared towards pedestrian and vehicular activity.



F Building Enhancement / Art Opportunities

Many of the buildings in Downtown Merriam offer opportunities for visual enhancement within the district. Large blank walls are strategic locations for public art and street-oriented windows could be enhanced by architectural treatments such as awnings and cornices.



INTRODUCTION

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Existing Placemaking Elements

The images to the right illustrate the various placemaking elements that existing along Merriam Drive. All of these contribute to a unique sense of place and many will be incorporated into the future vision of the corridor.

A *Hanging planters*



B *Light Poles / Banners*



C *Johnson Drive Bridge over Turkey Creek*



D *Public Art*



E *Merriam Marketplace*



F *Turkey Creek Trail Signage*



G *Wayfinding Signage*



H *Downtown Gateway Signage*



I *Landscape Planters*



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Existing Trails

The Turkey Creek Trail is a major recreational asset in Johnson County that runs north / south through the entirety of the City of Merriam. Located in the Turkey Creek floodplain, this trail is utilized by runners, walkers and bikers alike. All of the major east / west corridors such as Shawnee Mission Parkway, W 67th Street and Johnson Drive intersect with the trail.

In Downtown Merriam, the trail is located on the west side of Turkey Creek and connects to the Merriam Marketplace via a pedestrian bridge. The trail extends north from Downtown, follows Merriam Drive until W 55th Street and again from Waterfall Park to Antioch Road.

The 2040 Comprehensive Plan outlines a strategy to enhance connections to the trail while also bolstering connections to other trails and parks located in Merriam. With these future improvements, the Turkey Creek Trail will be accessible via alternative modes of transportation and be a strategic option for recreational users, and potentially commuters, who travel within Merriam for work and play. Additionally, strengthened connections to the Turkey Creek Trail will increase pedestrian and bike ridership and access to Downtown Merriam.

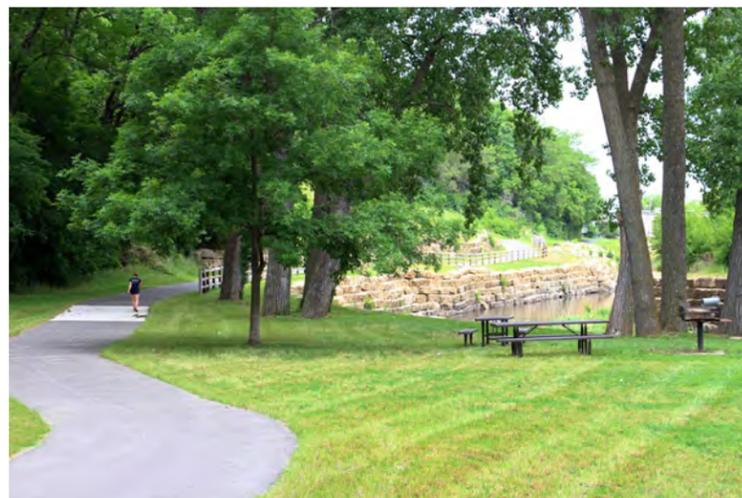


Figure 10 - Turkey Creek Trail - existing conditions

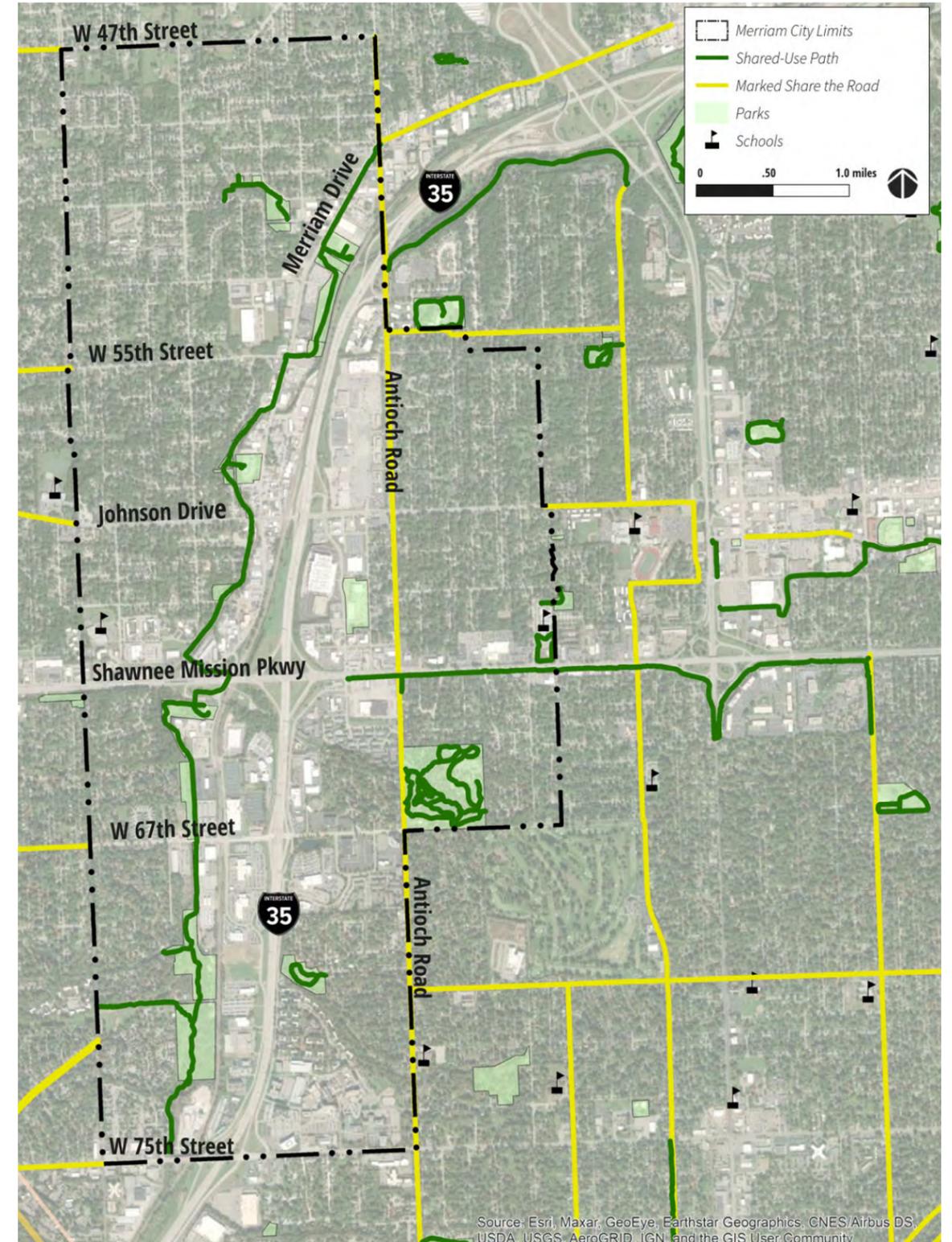


Figure 11 - Existing trails

INTRODUCTION

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Existing Land Uses

The composition of existing land uses in Downtown Merriam is diverse with a strong orientation towards commercial and industrial uses. In general, commercial and office uses front Merriam Drive from Johnson Drive to W 55th Street with industrial uses along Kessler Lane. Merriam Marketplace is designated as Parks and Recreation and along with the 5701 Merriam Drive site and a smaller site at the corner of Merriam Drive and W 57th Street, constitute the public spaces in the Downtown core.

North of 55th Street, there is an increase in industrial land uses with the remaining consisting of commercial and office use. Waterfall Park, located on the east side of Merriam Drive along Turkey Creek is another major public facility.

A few low-density residential parcels are still located within Downtown Merriam with some of the residential buildings having been converted to commercial use.

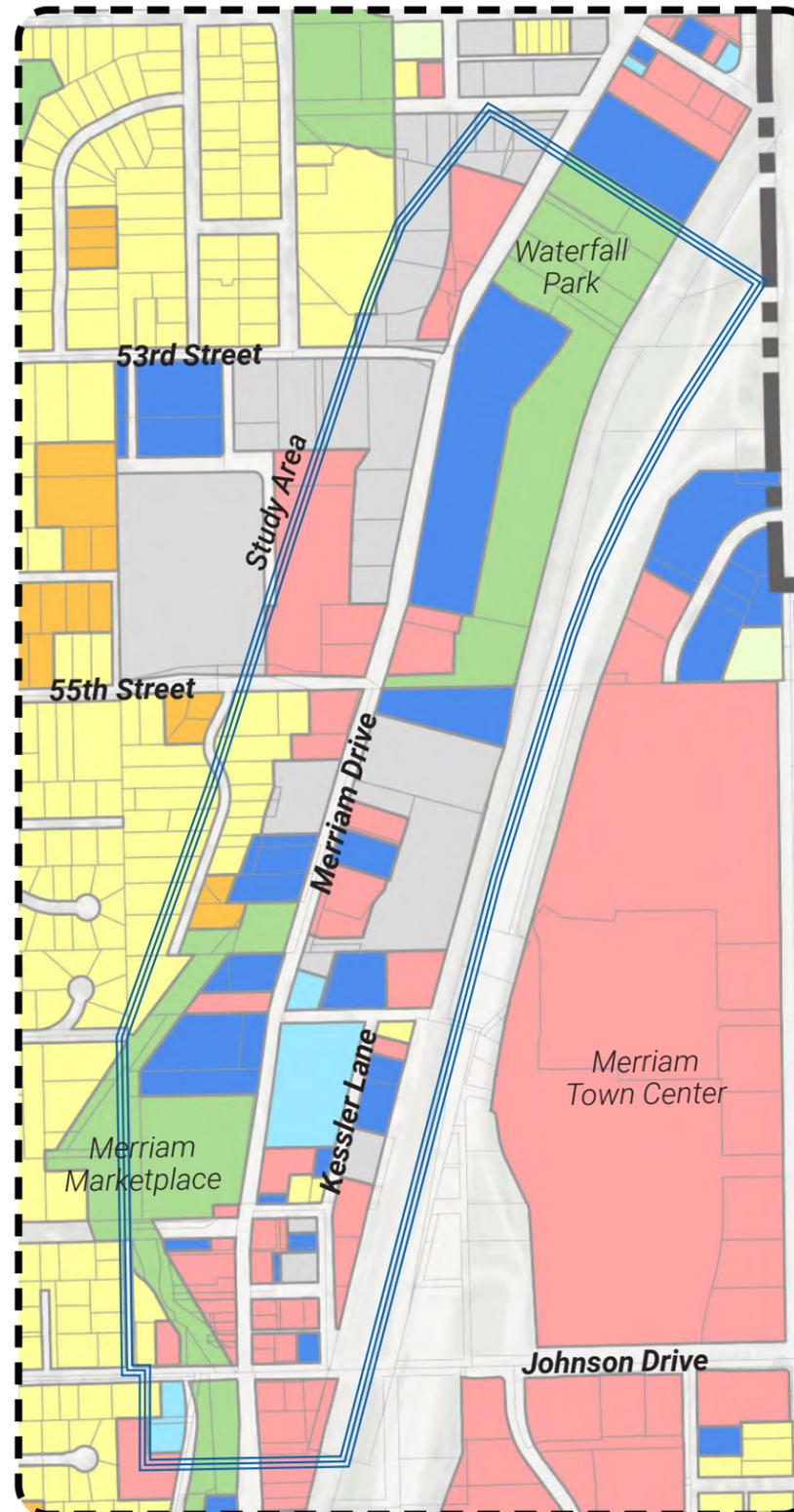


Figure 12 - Existing land use - Downtown Merriam

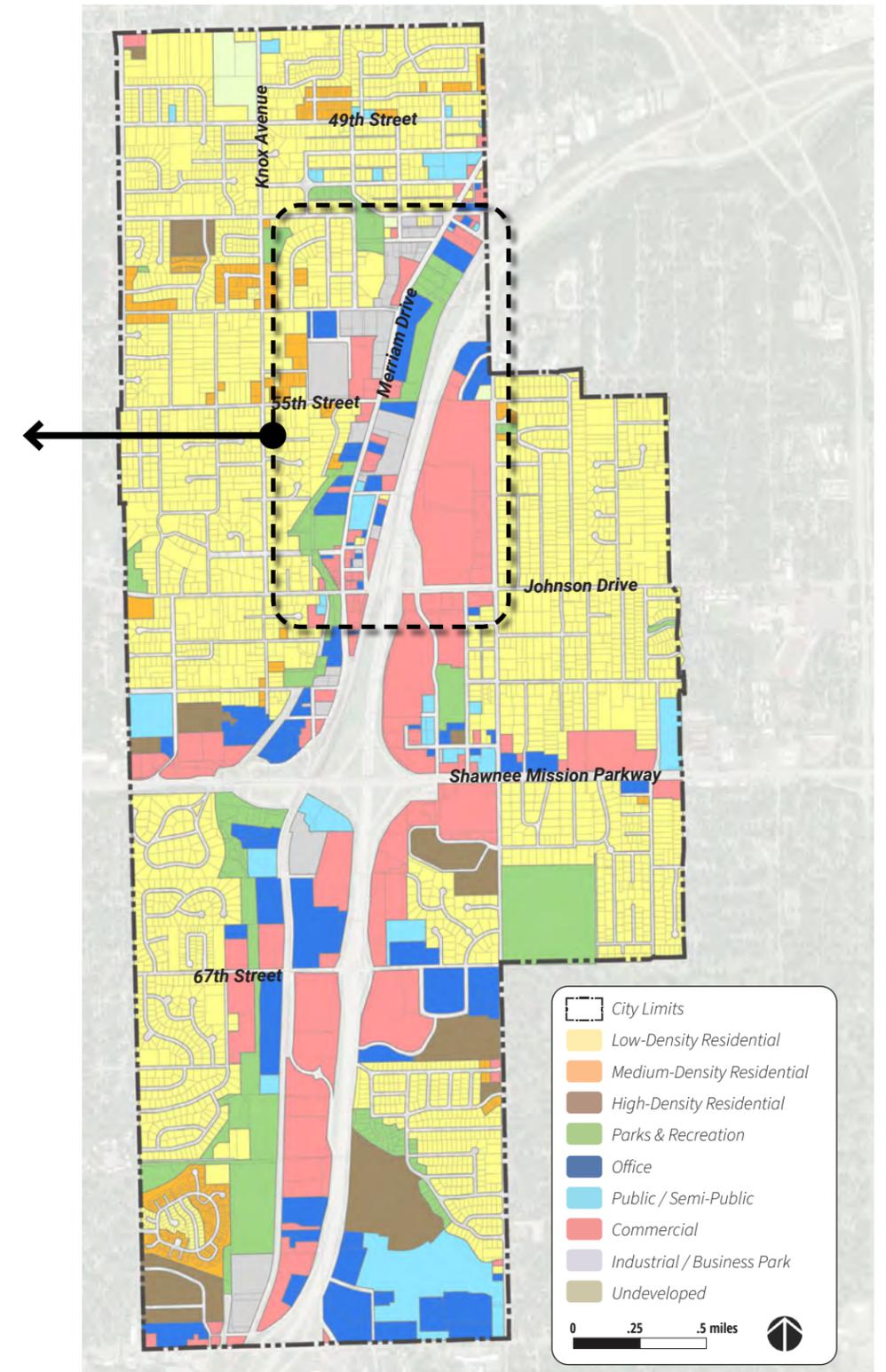


Figure 13 - Existing land use - Merriam 2040 Comprehensive Plan

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Future Land Uses

The Downtown Mixed-Use category is a district created for the historic Downtown Merriam north of Johnson Drive between Turkey Creek and Interstate 35 north to West 55th Street. This special mixed-use district was created to help support long-term redevelopment in Downtown Merriam. As previously stated, the category should promote human-scale multi-story buildings with a strong preference for first-floor retail, office or other commercial uses. Other uses will include parks and recreation or other public facilities. Facade and streetscape improvements should be focused on this historic commercial area to enhance the pedestrian experience.



Figure 14 - Downtown mixed-use land uses

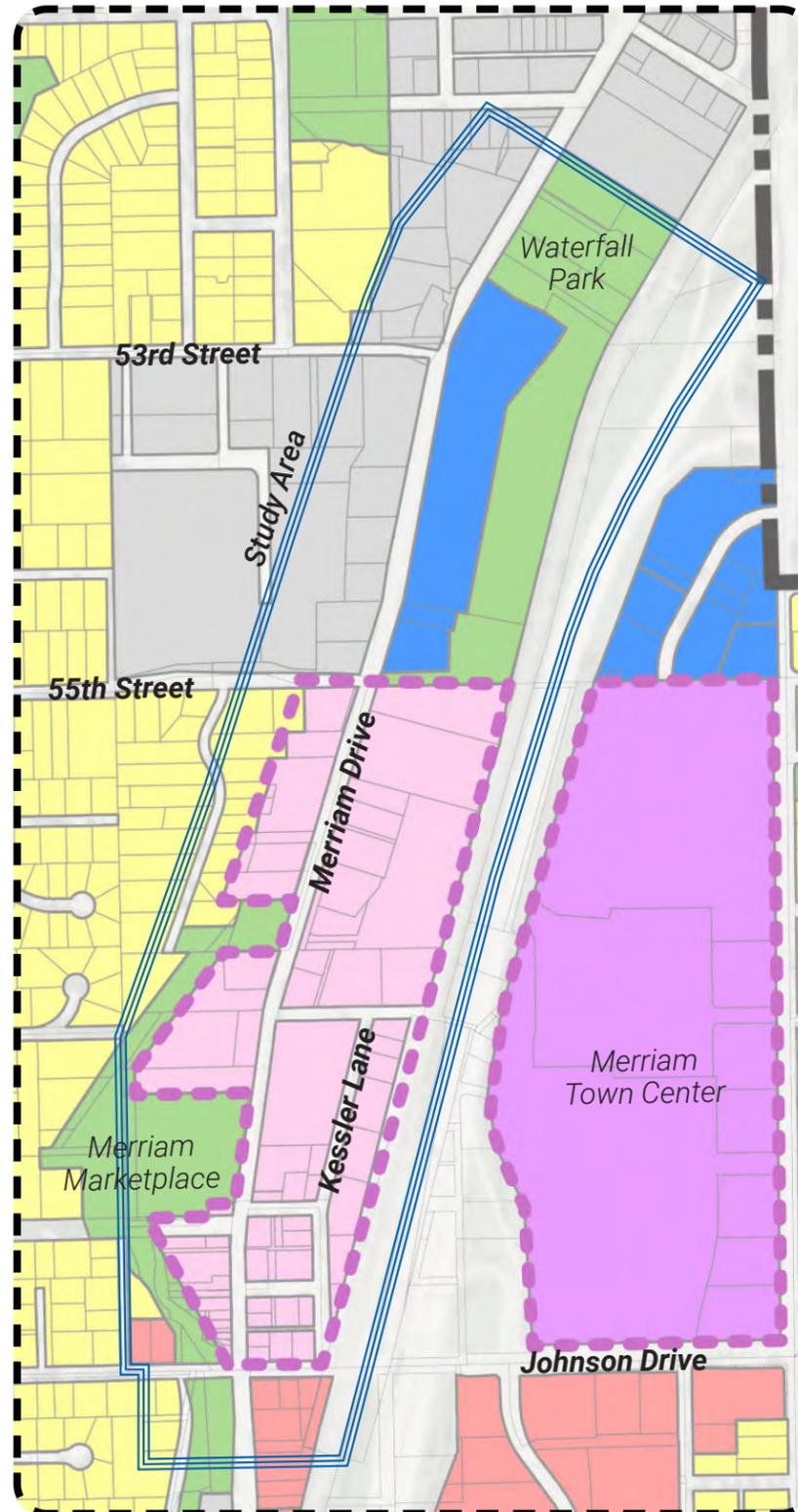


Figure 15 - Future land use - Downtown Merriam

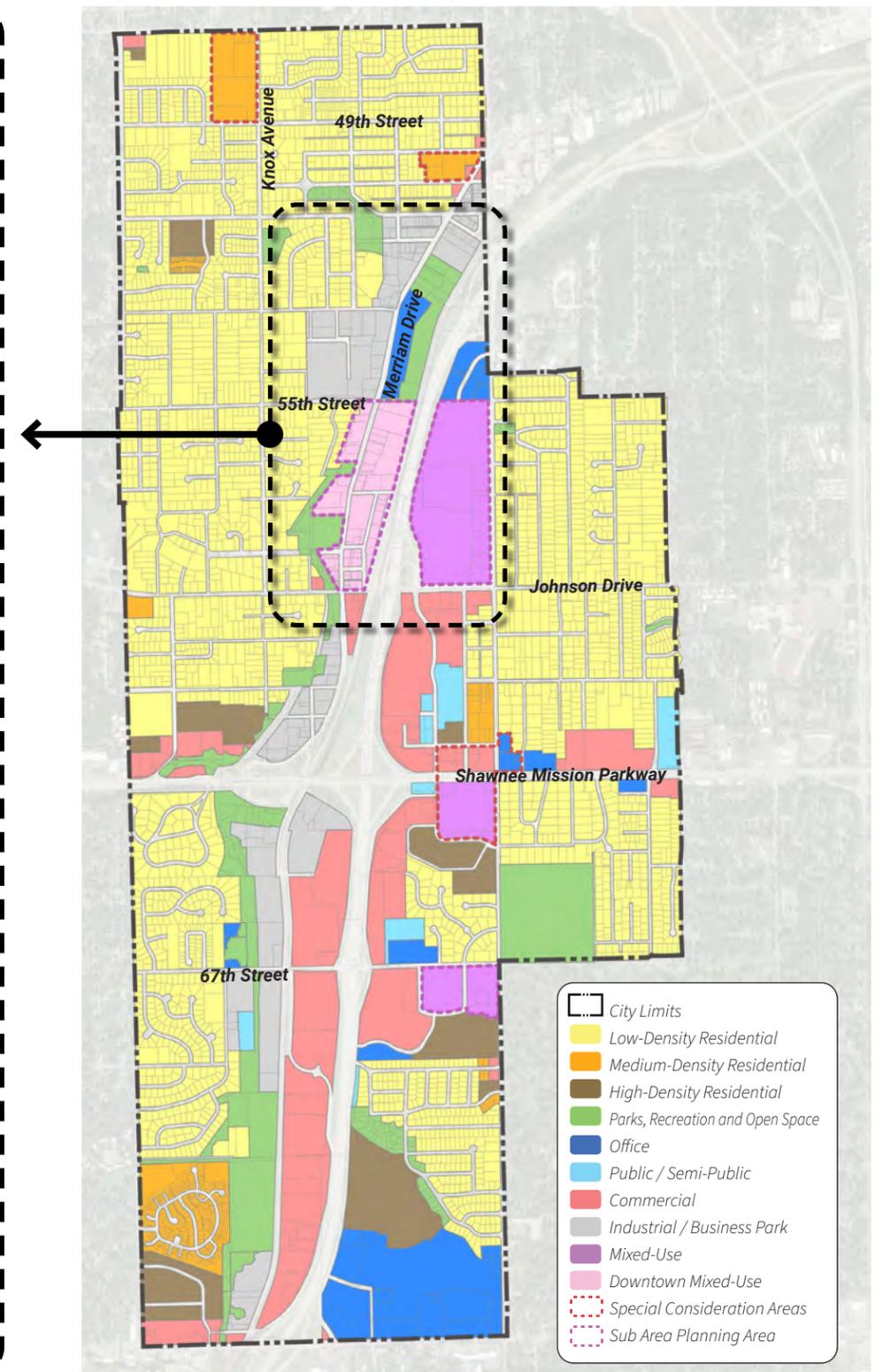


Figure 16 - Future land use - Merriam 2040 Comprehensive Plan

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PUBLIC INPUT REVIEW / SECTION TWO



PUBLIC INPUT REVIEW

OVERVIEW

Downtown Merriam represents the heart of the community and consists of diverse business owners, daily users and visitors, a significant historical context and a variety of community activities. With these factors in mind, this plan's overall success depends on input gathered from the community in order to foster a shared-vision for a Downtown district that works to support the needs of all users today and well into the future.

Plan Steering Committee

The Downtown Merriam Corridor Plan utilized the Downtown Merriam Advisory Committee (DMAC) to assist and guide the plan's development. This committee was composed of key members of the community, appointed officials and city staff.

Public Engagement Website

This project utilized a public engagement website to obtain greater quantities of public input than what would be typical from more conventional events. The website included various engagement portals that allowed visitors to make comments on an interactive map, select visual preferences and indicate their preferred bicycle and pedestrian amenity facilities. The results from the public engagement website are displayed with the other public input summary items in this chapter.

Public Engagement Opportunities

Outside of the public engagement website, members of the planning team also went out into the community at various events to ask community members what they envisioned along Merriam Drive and in the greater Downtown district. Events attended included:

- Downtown Merriam site walk with DMAC members: August 10th, 24th 26th, 2021
- Turkey Creek Auto Show: Saturday, September 11th, 2021
- Merriam Farmers' Market: Saturday, September 25th, 2021

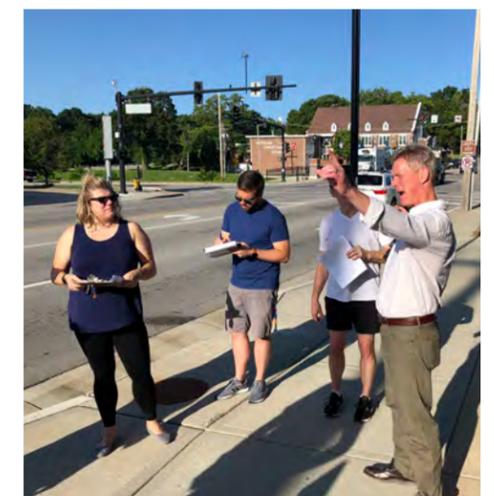


Figure 17 - Public engagement opportunities throughout the planning process

INITIAL VISIONING EXERCISES

Gathering input began early on in the planning process with several engagement activities facilitated at the DMAC Kick-off meeting.

Committee members were asked to place dots along the Merriam Drive corridor and the greater Downtown district to indicate their views toward the existing conditions of the area. The varying color of dots represented the following:

- Things you like about Downtown
- Areas you're not sure about but think there is potential and could use more study
- Places you would like to see a change or different use

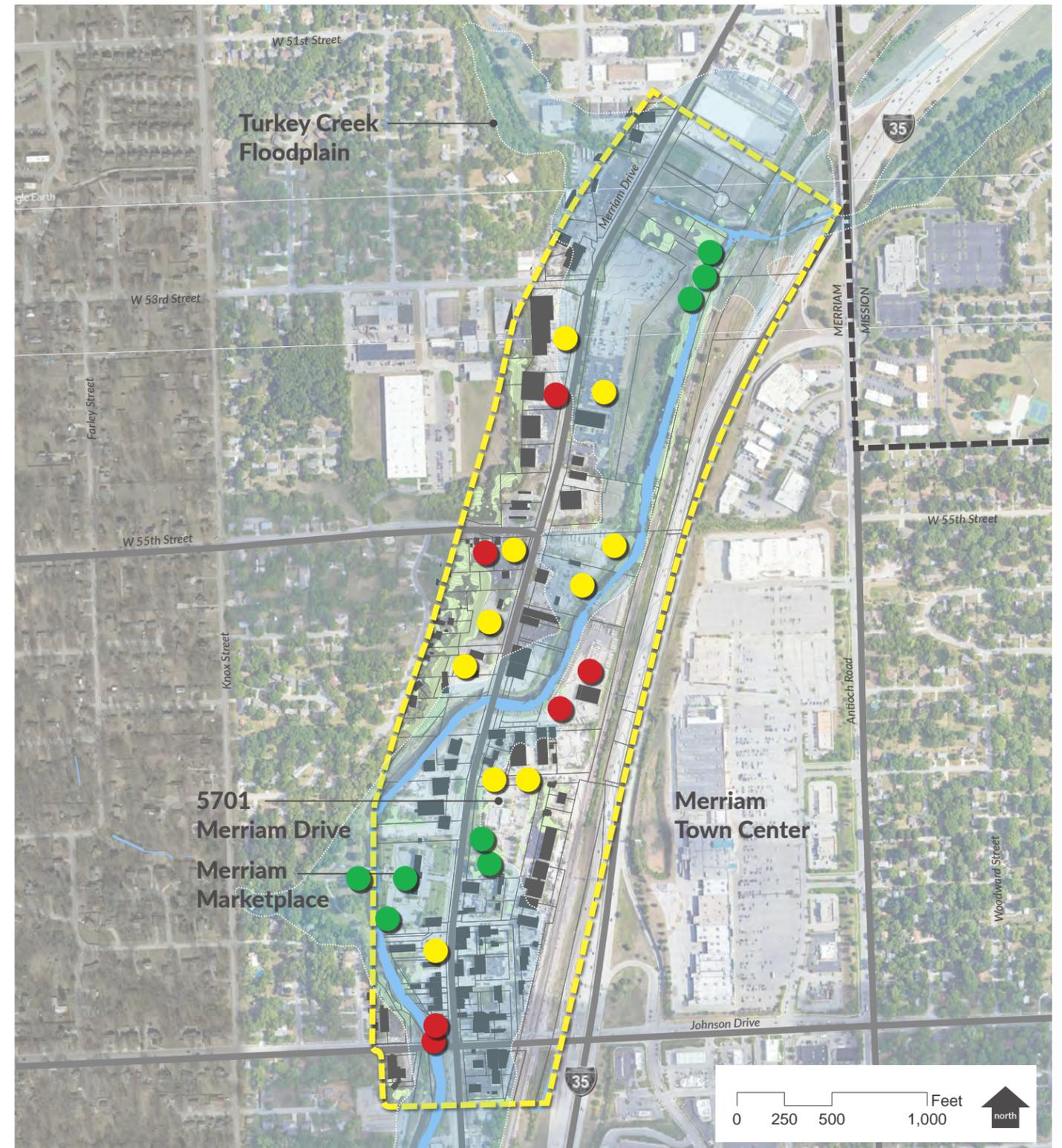


Figure 18 - Initial visioning dot exercise results - DMAC committee

PUBLIC INPUT REVIEW

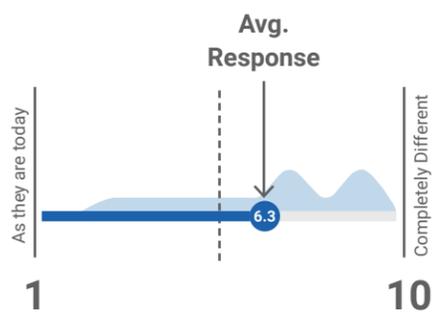
VISIONING QUESTIONS

Members of the DMAC were asked a series of visioning questions. The first question asked if there were other cities / locations that they were aware of or had visited that have a similar character to what they envision for the future of Downtown Merriam. This is helpful to both the planning team and the advisory committee to help visualize physical and spatial characteristics of other places and how they could be translated and applied to Downtown Merriam. The results of this activity can be seen in the word cloud below.



The responses above indicate a vision for Downtown Merriam that reflects a walkable environment with a variety of eclectic businesses, shops and restaurants; a place that residents and visitors alike will want to return to regularly to attend community events and support local businesses.

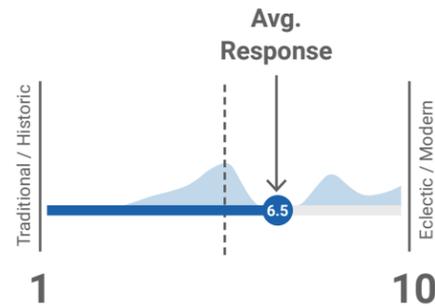
Advisory Committee members were asked about land uses in Downtown Merriam and whether those land uses should remain as they are today or be completely different as the Downtown district develops. Existing land uses can be viewed on the map on page 16 and the future land uses for Downtown Merriam can be viewed on page 17. The responses to this activity can be viewed below.



Ranking	Number of Responses
1	0
2	1
3	1
4	1
5	1
6	1
7	3
8	1
9	3
10	0

With an average score of 6.3, the committee members expressed the need for a change in land use for Downtown Merriam but keeping land uses that do and can continue to contribute to a vibrant Downtown district.

Committee members were also asked about the character of future improvements to Downtown Merriam's streetscape. Currently, light poles, banners and hanging planters provide a more traditional aesthetic.



Ranking	Number of Responses
1	0
2	0
3	1
4	2
5	4
6	0
7	0
8	3
9	1
10	2

Committee members appreciate the traditional character of the streetscape today but feel that elements could be updated to reflect a more contemporary design approach without departing too far from the current look. Important to note that the existing light poles and hanging planters are beloved by the community and should be retained.

When asked to consider how to measure this plan as successful looking back in time 10 years from now, the project steering committee shared the following responses.



The overwhelming response given to this visioning question was a bustling and vibrant Downtown. The committee is confident that if this plan's vision is brought to fruition, Downtown Merriam will be that destination area that visitors come to shop, walk, play and work.

When asked to consider what 5 things this plan needed to address, the responses included:



The top responses for this visioning question spoke to the need for places in Downtown Merriam that attract people from near and far. Places that make Downtown Merriam even more of a destination. Other fundamental elements included an efficient street configuration with more green space, street trees and an appropriate amount of parking.

Committee members were asked how they envision bike and pedestrian facilities being incorporated into the final vision plan for Merriam Drive. The responses to that question can be found below.

- It will be difficult to incorporate in certain areas.
- Widen the roadway - get rid of concrete space in front of businesses and add bike lane.
- Road diet + utilize space for bikes and pedestrians. Include refuge islands where necessary or preferred.
- Bike lanes should not be in traffic lanes - use a walking path - traffic needs to be able to move along this main road.
- Very uncertain on how to accommodate bicycles.
- Bike and pedestrian traffic need to be separate - sidewalks need to be aligned (especially for disabled persons).
- Road diet.
- People need to be able to get to surrounding neighborhoods safely.
- If you give people better options, they will use them!

At the beginning of this planning process, committee members had varied opinions on how best to accommodate bike and pedestrian facilities on Merriam Drive. As the planning process continued, a refined approach was developed.

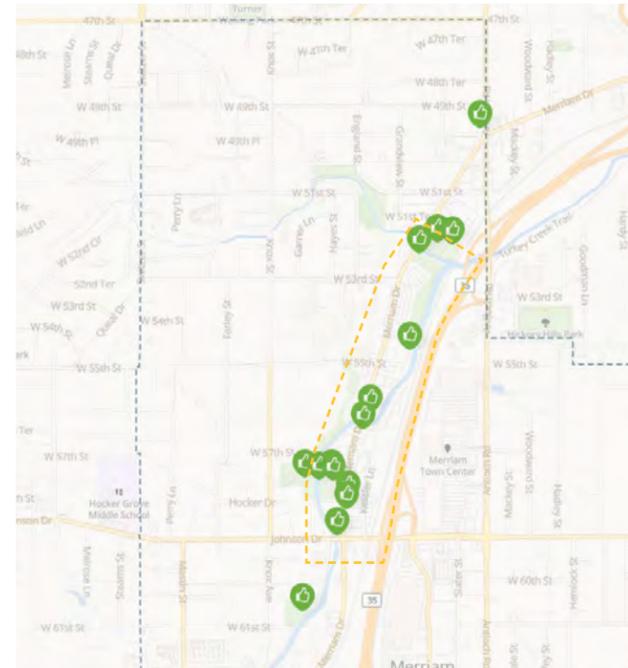
INTERACTIVE MAPPING ACTIVITY

Visitors to the interactive project website were encouraged to participate in the interactive mapping activity. Presented with an overall map of Downtown Merriam, participants were able to leave comments on specific locations to share their thoughts, concerns and ideas. Comment types included:

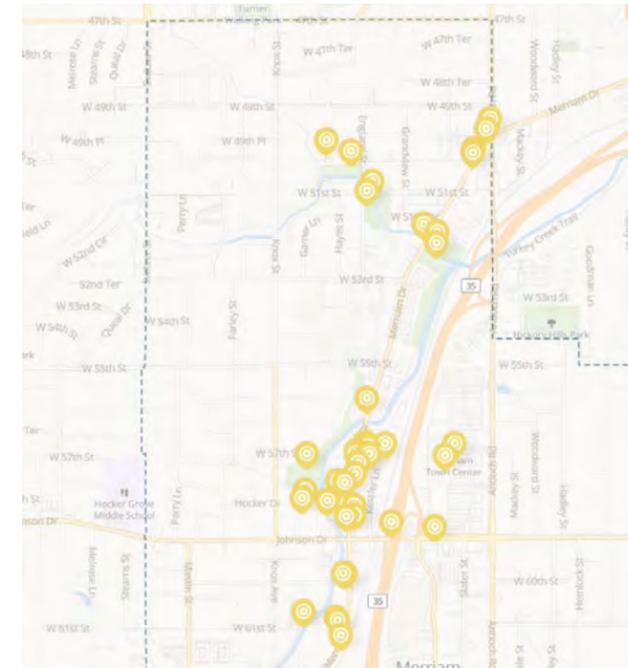


A high-level overview of the comments received can be viewed below. A full list of the comments can be found in the appendix.

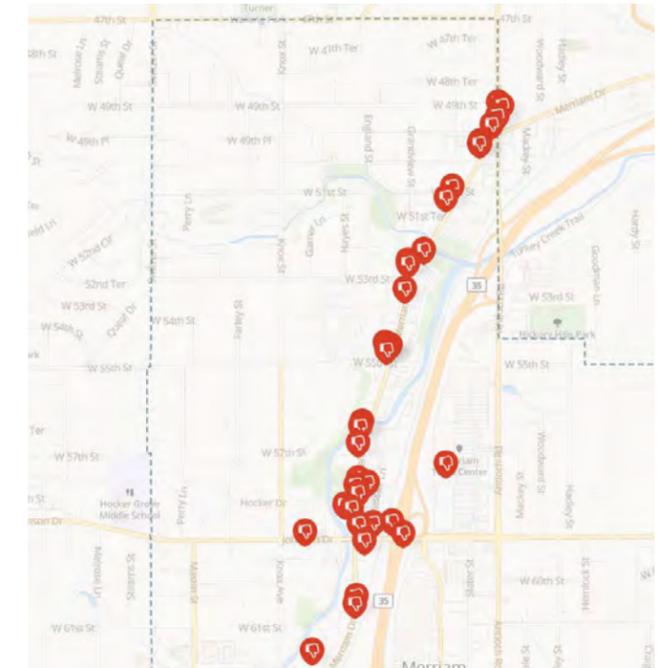
'I like this' comments



'This area has potential' comments



'I don't like this' comments



I love the **Turkey Creek trail** - I take my family on bike rides whenever the weather permits.

Merriam Marketplace and **Turkey Creek Streamway** are great resources for the community!

I enjoy this bridge with the lights, flags and flower baskets. It feels very **hometown** and **welcoming**.

I like the **local restaurants** that are on Merriam Drive. We think they add character and charm and are SO preferable to some of the big chain restaurants.

I love the playground in **Waterfall Park**. The tables are nice and I appreciate the ADA access. One more bench facing the falls would be a welcomed addition.

Downtown Merriam needs **local retailers** (like Downtown Shawnee or OP). Ice cream, coffee, mom-n-pop places--something to draw people in. Also, make parking easier and **reduce some of the used car lots**.

Area by **the Merriam Marketplace** has potential for **small food and beverage businesses**. Instead of bringing in food trucks, consider shipping container type temporary structures that can be used for businesses.

Downtown has so much potential for **public gatherings** and **events**.

Potential to **improve safety for bikes, pedestrians and cars!** Not sure how, but I know that in a car, it is a bit crazy... can't imagine as a biker or pedestrian.

This should be a neat **shopping area** (maybe coffee shops, etc.) but I haven't been there maybe more than once in the 15 years living here. There is not enough there to visit.

One way parking in this area is tight and difficult to maneuver.

The **back side of the shops** are an eyesore from the Turkey Creek Trail. Fencing or shrubs to tidy and clean up this area is desired.

Intersection of **W 55th Street and Merriam Drive** is bad in a car... I can't imagine it on a bike or walking. It's awkward and hard to navigate.

Businesses have **broken down cars** on both sides of the road making things look like a junk yard.

The sidewalk / stormwater inlets at the intersection of **W 53rd Street and Merriam Drive** are not user-friendly, especially for the disabled and the visually impaired.

Way too many used **car shops**.

PUBLIC INPUT REVIEW

VISUAL PREFERENCING

Early on in the planning process, the DMAC members were presented with images that represented ideas or components that could be feasible in the long-term vision of Downtown Merriam. Community members were also able to view these images and indicate their preferences via the interactive engagement website and at the public events. The varying color of dots represented the following:

- Things you like
- Could be good in Downtown Merriam, but not sure
- Things you don't like / aren't appropriate for Downtown Merriam

The results of this engagement are shown to the right and the top responses and have been delineated between the responses given by DMAC members and those by the general public below. The common answers between the two has been highlighted.

Streetscape Aesthetics

Top **DMAC** Responses

1. Hanging pole planters
2. Street trees
3. Landscaped curb bump-outs

Top **Public** Responses

1. Street trees
2. Green medians
3. Hanging pole planters

Art & Identity

Top **DMAC** Responses

1. Local food trucks
2. Murals
3. Modern gateway signage
4. Fountains

Top **Public** Responses

1. Streetside water feature
2. Local food trucks
3. Fountains
4. Sculptural Furniture

Furniture & Safety Elements

Top **DMAC** Responses

1. Decorative benches
2. Decorative crossings
3. Festive lighting
4. Parklets

Top **Public** Responses

1. Festive lighting
2. Traditional lighting
3. Colored crosswalk
4. Parklets

Streetscape Aesthetics



Art & Identity



Light Pole Banners



Modern Gateway Signage



Wayfinding Signage



Traditional Gateway Signage



Street Art Installations



Interactive Public Art

Furniture & Safety Elements



Traditional Lighting



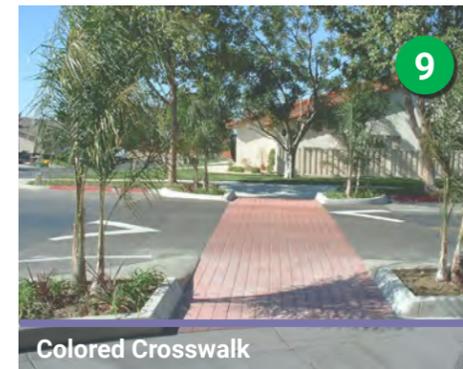
Modern / Traditional Lighting



Modern Lighting



Festive Lighting



Colored Crosswalk



Decorative Crosswalk



Street-side Water Features



Local Food Trucks



Steel-cut Wall Art



Individual Seating



Decorative Benches



Wooden Trash Receptacles



Fountains



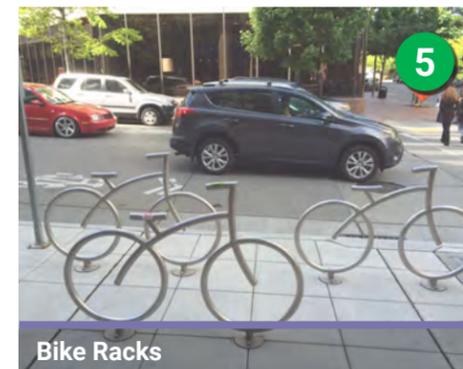
Murals



Sculptural Furniture



Parklets



Bike Racks



Metal Trash Receptacles

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**FLOODPLAIN / SECTION THREE
OPPORTUNITIES
AND CONSIDERATIONS**



FLOODPLAIN OPPORTUNITIES

TURKEY CREEK FLOODPLAIN

To fully assess future redevelopment scenarios in the Downtown Merriam Corridor Plan, the design team took a deeper look at the possibility for floodplain improvements and the ability to pull areas of Downtown Merriam out of the floodplain. This effort is in large part a continuation of the work completed for the Merriam 2040 Comprehensive Plan. Currently, the Turkey Creek floodplain covers a majority of Downtown Merriam (Figure 19), creating a significant challenge for redevelopment opportunities.

A scenario first explored during the comprehensive planning process includes expanding the Turkey Creek Channel in the Downtown area. As Figure 19 demonstrates, approximately 5.1 acres of acquired land north of the Merriam Marketplace is dedicated to expanding Turkey Creek and the capacity of that waterway. This effort would expand the creek channel, increase capacity of the creek and improve water flow. This effort would also require the widening of the Merriam Drive bridge over Turkey Creek to ensure there is not a pinch point at that location.

This approach requires the acquisition of several properties north of the Farmer's Market to allow for increasing the creek floodway capacity. In addition, expanding the profile of Turkey Creek at the Merriam Drive bridge north of Downtown was further studied. Additional upstream improvements and their impact on further reclaiming property from the floodplain in the Downtown district were not studied at this time. The resulting information was provided by BHC Engineering.

Through the floodplain modeling analysis work, the proposed improvements have the potential to improve floodplain conditions in Downtown Merriam. As shown in Figure 20, the reclamation approach has the potential to remove approximately 12.4 Acres of land from floodplain decreasing the amount of floodplain in the Downtown area by approximately 34%. Although the floodplain is not completely removed from the Downtown area, additional upstream improvements south of Johnson Drive would potentially create a scenario where the vast majority of the Downtown area could be reclaimed. As future redevelopment efforts in the Downtown are explored, additional study of potential upstream improvements should be reviewed.

As this planning process was concluding, the US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) announced that Congress had allocated funding for the Upper Turkey Creek (UTC) flood risk management project. The funding allocation is based on the cost estimates provided in the UTC Merriam, Kansas Flood Risk Management Feasibility Study that was approved in 2015. At the time of finalizing this document, Merriam and USACE were in the beginning stages of reevaluating the Feasibility Study to determine if the study needed to be revised or modified based on new information. The new information the city will provide USACE includes this document and engineering data that the city has commissioned for alternative mitigation concepts, such as the one in this plan and the installation of up-stream detention south of the Merriam Public Works facility. One of the city's goals in requesting USACE to reevaluate the 2015 Mitigation Study is a reduction/elimination of the flood walls and berms that the study shows for Downtown Merriam.

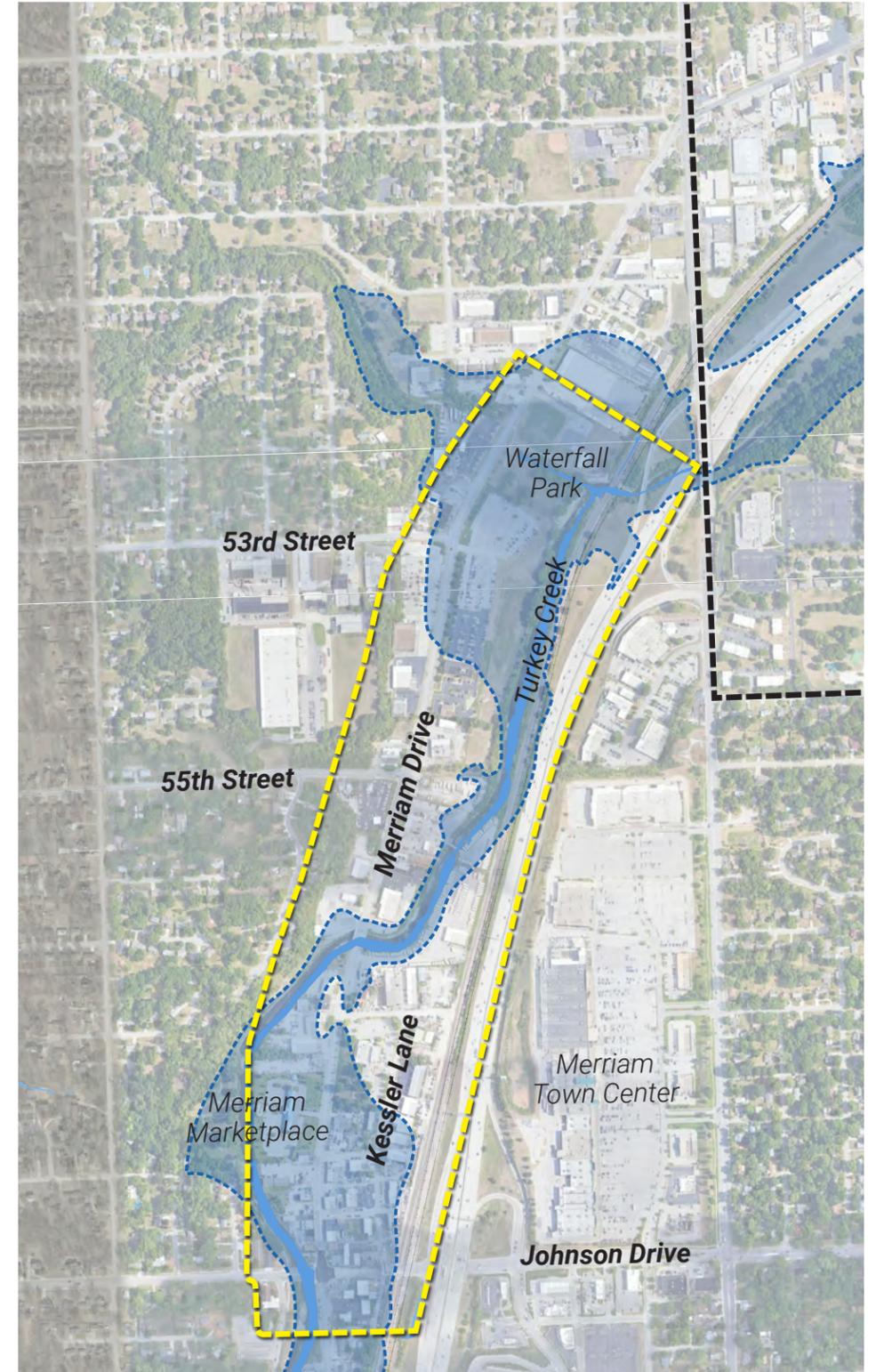
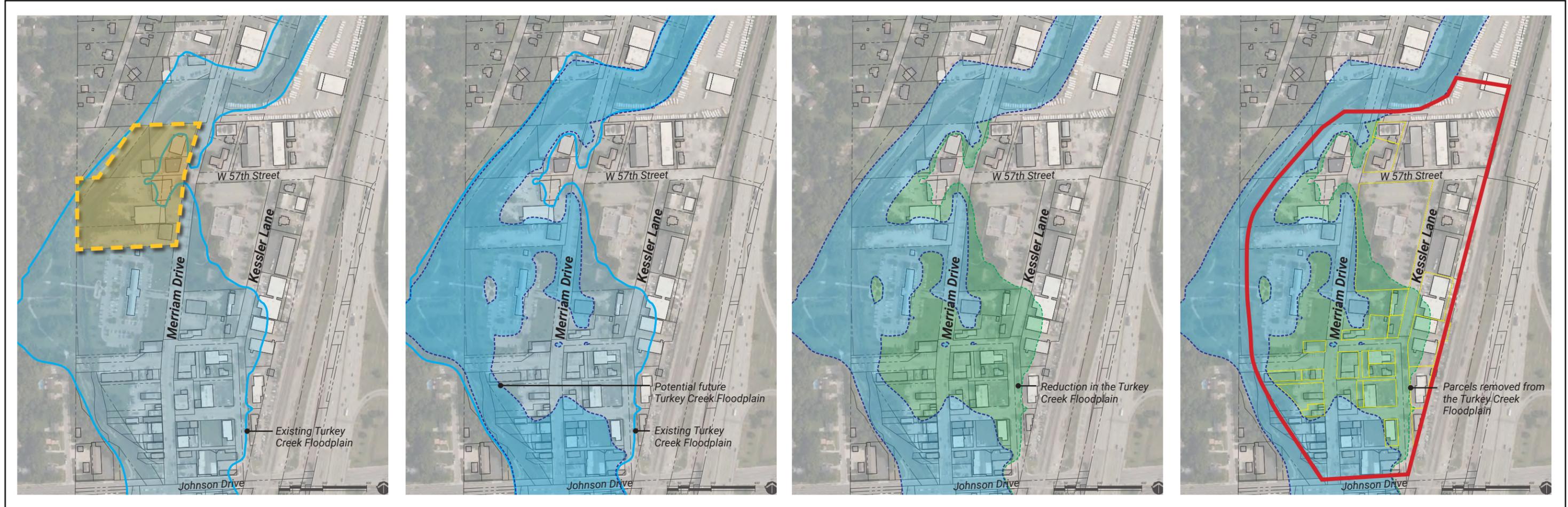


Figure 19 - Existing Turkey Creek floodplain

Figure 20 - Strategy for reducing the Turkey Creek floodplain



Parcels located north of Merriam Marketplace, totaling approximately 5.1 acres, are identified as an area for the potential expansion of the Turkey Creek Basin.

With an expanded Turkey Creek basin, the Turkey Creek Floodplain in Downtown Merriam is considerably reduced in size.

Highlighting the reduced floodplain size clearly shows the beneficial implications this effort would have on the overall ability for redevelopment in Downtown Merriam.

This graphic highlights the parcels that could potentially be completely or partially removed from the floodplain. With the drastically reduced risk of flooding, these parcels would be primed for redevelopment and would contribute to the revitalization of Downtown Merriam.

Within the 36 acres shown above in red, approximately 12.4 acres could potentially be reclaimed from the floodplain. This represents a 34% increase in land area not impacted by floodplain as compared to existing conditions.

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**TRANSPORTATION / SECTION FOUR
AND ECONOMIC
CONSIDERATIONS**



TRANSPORTATION CONSIDERATIONS

OVERVIEW

The transportation network of Merriam today is multi-modal in nature with excellent access to amenities in the city as well as the greater Kansas City metro area. This is on display best along the Merriam Drive corridor. This corridor provides access to businesses, entertainment, natural areas, city amenities, trails and the regional transportation network. The availability of efficient transportation on Merriam Drive impacts the economic development potential of the corridor. Access to active transportation (bicycle and pedestrian) networks contributes to public health and happiness and increases property values. And transportation safety has an enormous impact on the quality of life and ability to use all modes of transportation efficiently and conveniently on Merriam Drive.

These items were identified as important aspects to the community through the Merriam 2040 comprehensive planning process. The Merriam 2040 Comprehensive Plan identified Merriam Drive as a key corridor for improved safety and pedestrian/bicycle access. To achieve this, this plan envisions Merriam Drive as a “complete street.” A complete street is a street that has a configuration that can achieve all of the goals on the corridor. In this case, those goals include revitalizing the business district, creating an inviting and unique experience, providing safe and convenient access for all users, and providing efficient traffic flow. The cross-section, facilities, and amenities on the street all effect these goals. Merriam Drive already is a mostly complete street, especially in Downtown Merriam, but some enhancements could further achieve the goals as a complete street. These enhancements were carefully studied and considered for their impacts to traffic flow, traffic safety, and truck access.



Figure 21 - Complete Street example

TRAFFIC FLOW ON MERRIAM DRIVE

To assess whether the current number of drive lanes and lane configurations on Merriam Drive are ideal, traffic counts were collected and traffic modeling was performed. The key question was whether the current roadway has the ideal layout to most efficiently move cars without providing unnecessary additional capacity in excess of the traffic volume demand. Today, the southern and northern portions of Merriam Drive are “3-lane roads” with one lane in each direction and a center turn lane. In the central section, the road widens out to a 4-lane road with one lane in each direction and no turn lanes. The current traffic volumes suggest that fewer lanes will efficiently accommodate traffic flow (Figure 23), which would provide additional space for other amenities, parking, or bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

To determine the impacts of a reduction in the number of lanes on Merriam Drive, a traffic model was generated using the traffic volumes collected. The analysis scenario included reducing the southern portion from 3-lanes to 2-lanes (i.e., removing the center turn lane) and reducing the central 4-lane section to 3-lanes. The northern 3-lane section remained the same as it is today. Two ways to measure the impact were used—travel time along the corridor and “level of service.” This is a measure of how much time a driver has to wait at the traffic signal using an A – F scale, with A representing the lowest amount of delay and F representing the highest. These two methods of analysis can be seen in Tables 01 and 02.



Figure 22 - Lane reductions on Nieman Road - Shawnee, Kansas

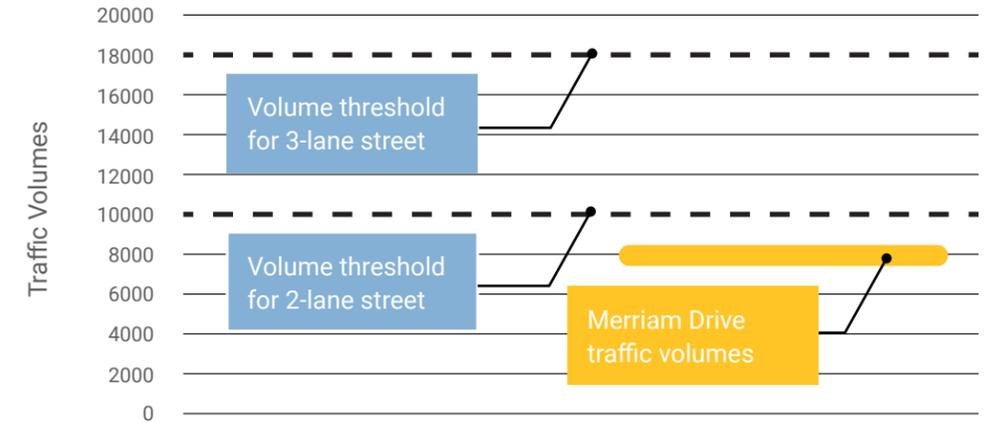


Figure 23 - Traffic volumes and threshold for number of lanes

Direction	Travel Time Today	Travel Time with Proposed Lane Reductions	Travel Time Increase with Proposed Lane Reductions
Driving North on Merriam Drive from Johnson Drive to Antioch Road	3 minutes 45 seconds	4 minutes 7 seconds	22 seconds
Driving South on Merriam Drive from Antioch Road to Johnson Drive	4 minutes 25 seconds	4 minutes 43 seconds	18 seconds

Table 01 - Changes in travel times with proposed lane reductions

Intersection	Peak Hour Level of Service Today	Peak Hour Level of Service with Proposed Lane Reductions
Antioch Road	C	C
W 55th Street	A	B
W 57th Street	A	A
W 58th Street	A	A
W 58th Terrace	A	A
Johnson Drive	C	D

Table 02 - Change in peak level of service with proposed lane reductions

No significant change in traffic is expected. This suggests that the street can be narrowed to provide additional amenities and facilities without any change to traffic flow. Other similar streets in the area with similar or higher traffic volume have recently been converted including Nieman Road in Shawnee, Mission Road in Prairie Village, and Nall Avenue in Overland Park.

TRAFFIC SAFETY ON MERRIAM DRIVE

Traffic safety was identified as a top priority in the Merriam 2040 Comprehensive plan and throughout this planning process for Merriam Drive. Merriam Drive was noted as a top safety priority corridor in the comprehensive plan and the plan identified the intersections of Merriam Drive / Johnson Drive and W 55th Street / Antioch Road as priority intersections for safety improvements. Crash data from the most recent six years (January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2020) was obtained from the Kansas Department of Transportation for Merriam Drive from Johnson Drive to Antioch Road and Johnson Drive from Kessler Lane to Merriam Drive. This data was reviewed at intersections and roadway segments to determine if any crash patterns are present. During the review period, there were 157 total crashes including 118 that were property damage only (PDO) and 39 injury crashes. The crashes were concentrated at Johnson Drive, W 55th Street, W 50th Terrace, and Antioch Road.

Most of the crashes were rear-end crashes occurring at or near the intersections. A majority of these rear-end crashes occurred at Antioch Road & Merriam Drive and Johnson Drive & Merriam Drive. Angle crashes were the second most common crash type, also mostly occurring at or near intersections. The W. 50th Terrace & Merriam Drive intersection specifically represented most of the angle-side impact crashes followed by Antioch Road & Merriam Drive and Johnson Drive & Merriam Drive. These two crash types account for approximately 69% of all injury crashes. These crash types are typical at signalized intersections within proximity of an urban interchange.

To address the identified safety issues, improvements should be considered. These should include bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements and signalized intersection safety improvements. Preliminary countermeasure recommendations to be investigated include:

- Provide dedicated/separated facilities for cyclists/pedestrians protected from motor vehicle traffic
- Provide high visibility crossing locations for cyclists/pedestrians
- Review the signal timing including yellow and all-red clearance intervals, cycle lengths, pedestrian phasing, and left-turn phasing
- Provide retro-reflective back-plates on signal lights. These improve the visibility of the illuminated face of the signal by introducing a controlled-contrast background.
- Reduce speeds through the area by reducing the roadway capacity to match traffic demand
- Review and reduce existing posted speed limits

By implementing these safety recommendations, crashes could be reduced by up to 40% and possibly more.

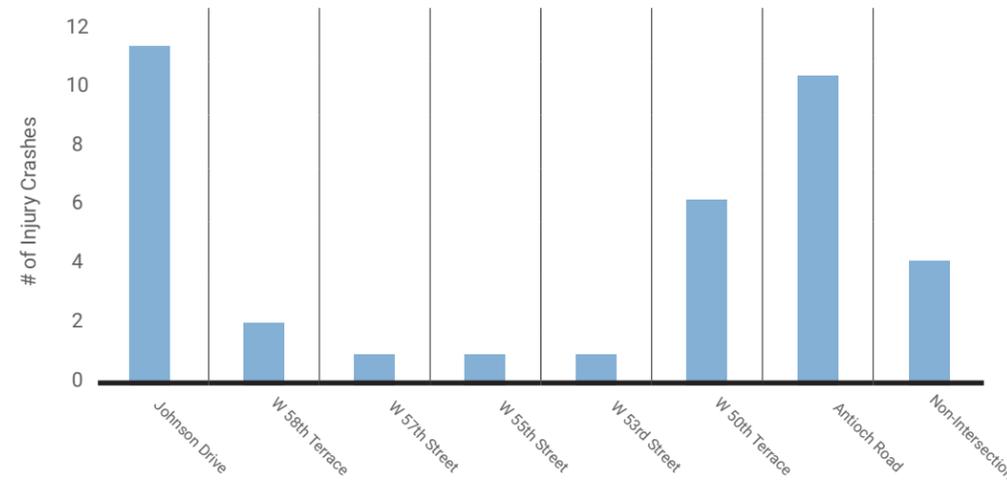


Figure 24 - Injury crashes on Merriam Drive (2015 - 2020)

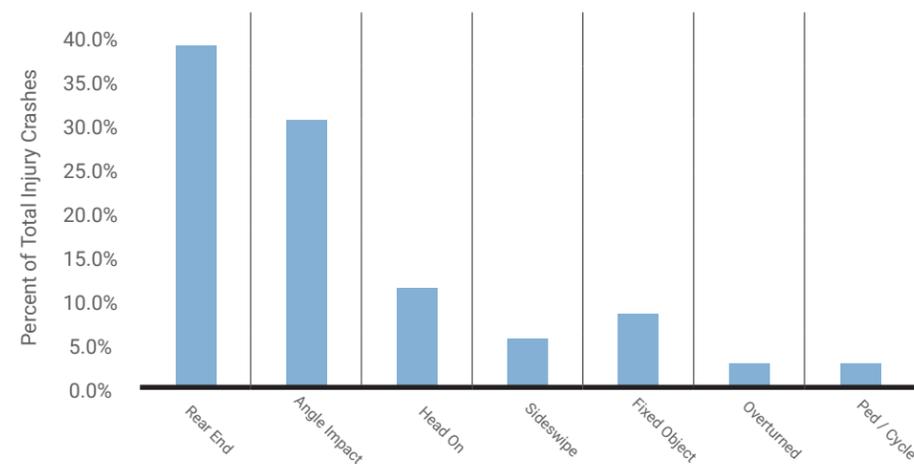


Figure 25 - Percentage of total injury crashes (2015 - 2020)

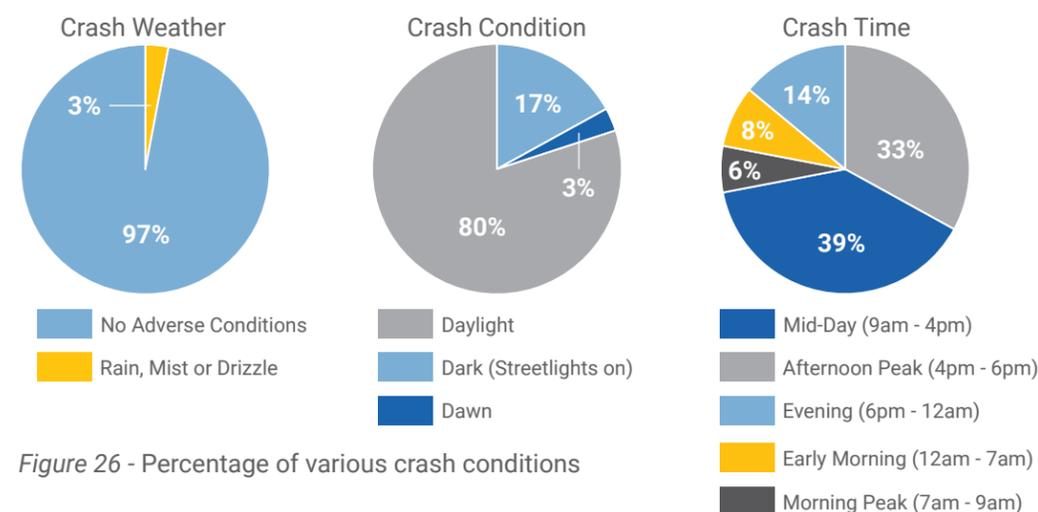


Figure 26 - Percentage of various crash conditions

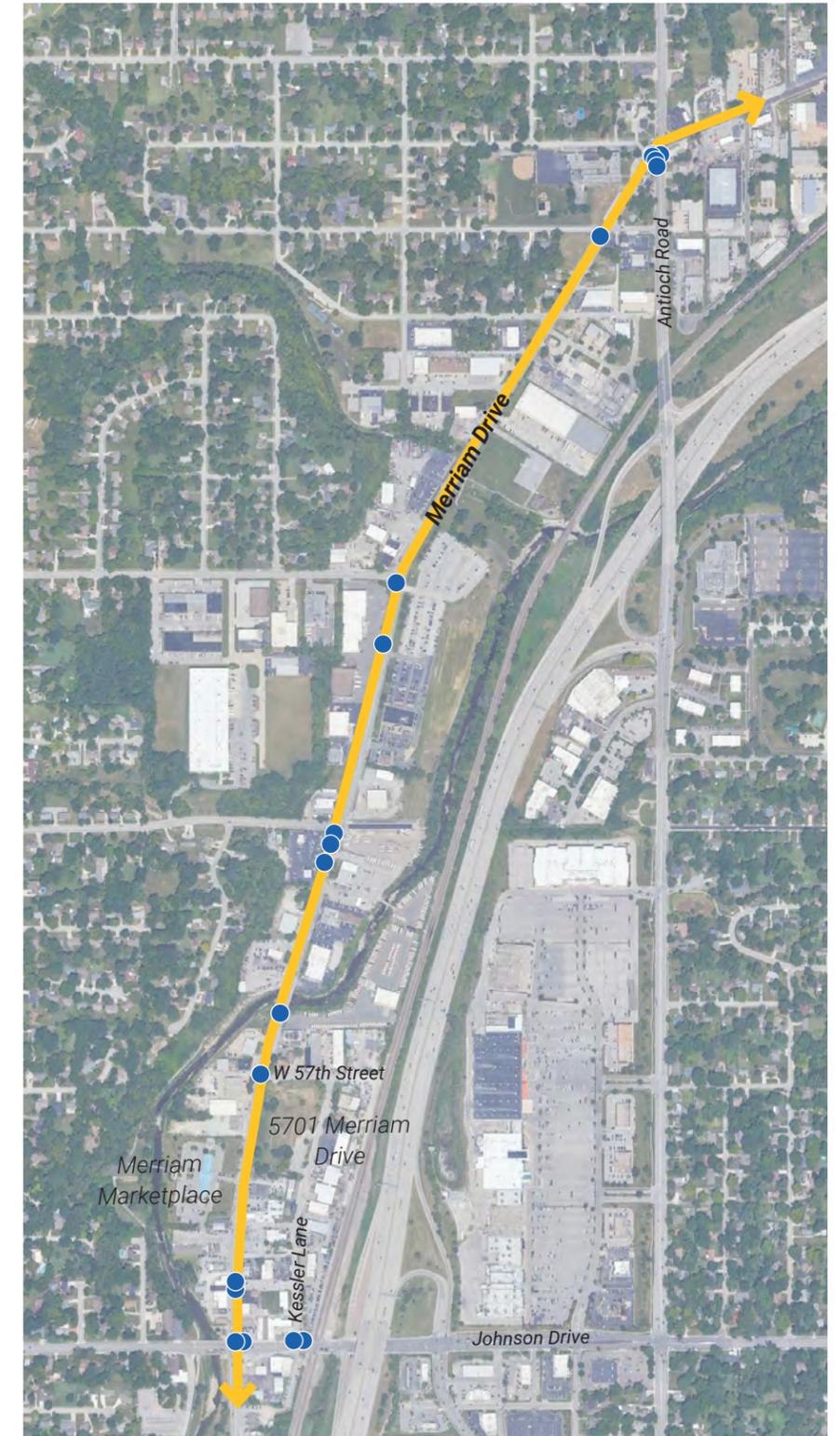


Figure 27 - Injury crash locations along Merriam Drive

TRANSPORTATION CONSIDERATIONS

TRUCK AND SCHOOL BUS ACCESS ON MERRIAM DRIVE

There are a number of light industrial business uses along Merriam Drive that rely on access by larger vehicles and semi-trucks. Narrowing of the streets could impact these property owners, making it difficult to maintain their current business practices and their ability to serve the community and their customers. Of particular concern, are the businesses on the west side of Merriam Drive between the Merriam Marketplace pavilion and Turkey Creek, which have limited access options. To assess the impact of the proposed improvements on truck access, truck turning templates were utilized in AutoCAD software to determine how trucks could turn into and out of businesses.

The initial design for this portion of roadway was to narrow the road to a 2-lane section. It was determined that this would make truck access to these businesses very challenging. To address this concern, the road cross-section in this area was widened to 3-lanes wide (one lane in each direction and a center turn lane). This slightly wider road provided ample truck turning movement to provide access to these businesses. These truck turning paths are shown in Figure 29.

The DS Bus Lines regional school bus storage facility is located on Merriam Drive between Turkey Creek and W 55th Street. When drop-off of students is complete at the end of the school day, many buses return to the storage facility over a short period of time. This is a concern for traffic operations at these times. To help ease congestion related to this, a right turn lane into the storage lot has been added to the recommended street layout.



Figure 28 - Bus traveling along Merriam Drive

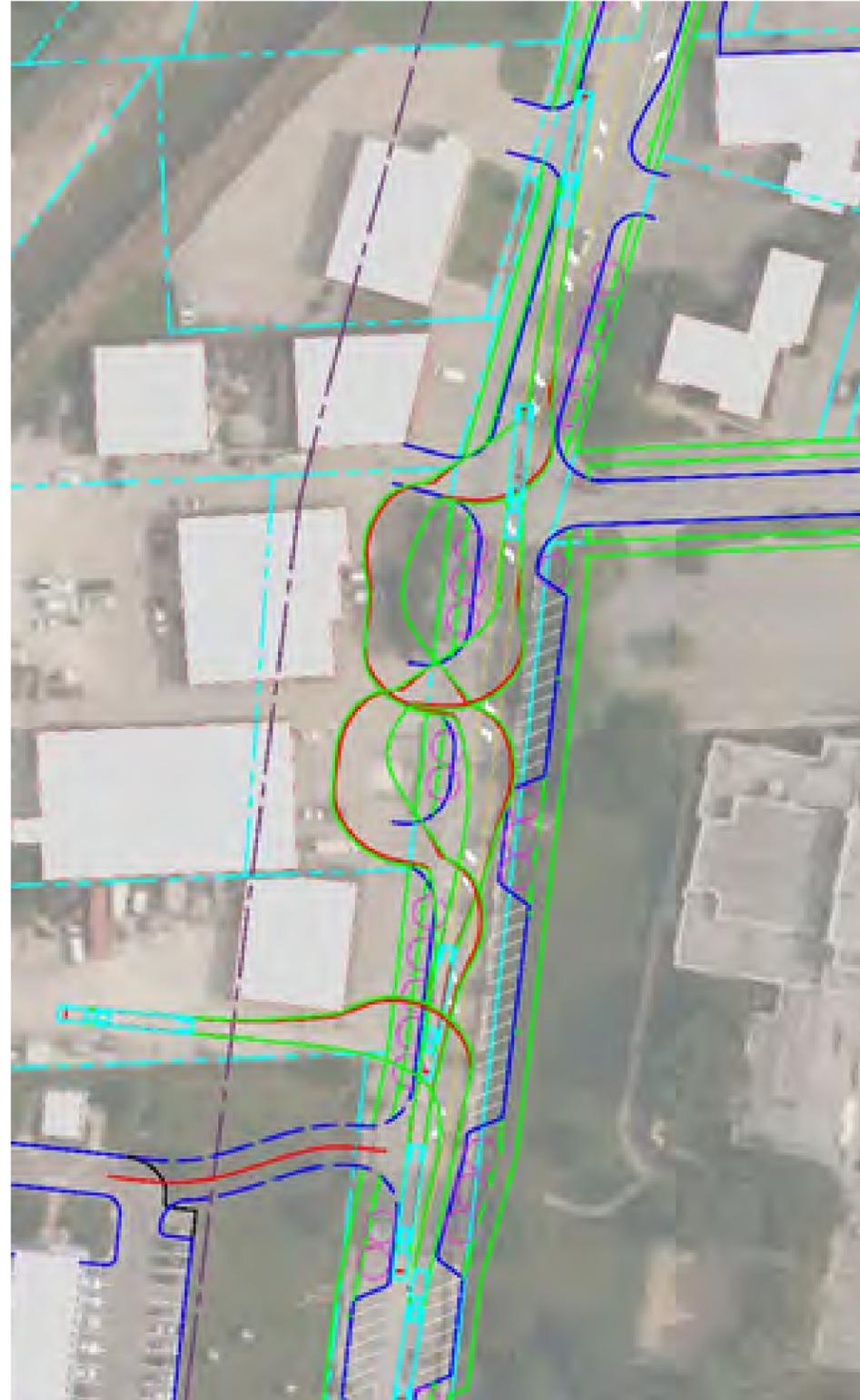


Figure 29 - Truck turning paths

FUTURE TRANSIT AND RAIL POTENTIAL

Transit connectivity from Downtown Merriam with the greater Kansas City Metropolitan region has been challenging, but its location along Johnson Drive, and adjacency to Interstate 35 and existing freight rail lines provide opportunities for increased mobility options to and from the Merriam Drive corridor and the Downtown area that do not necessitate a personal automobile.

Currently, access to the Merriam Drive Downtown area is provided by Johnson County Transit / RideKC (JCT) with limited bus service along Johnson Drive with Route 402 – Johnson/Quivira. Today, this route only runs three morning and three afternoon trips, providing only subsistence levels of transit service to the area. According to the Johnson County Transit Visioning Strategy, JCT plans to expand service on route 402 and all other fixed bus routes in the JCT system in late 2022. These operational improvements will greatly improve transit access with hourly service throughout the day on weekdays and Saturdays. This route provides direct access to Downtown Kansas City, KS, but also provides transfer service at the Johnson Drive Transit Center in Mission, KS. Nearly all of the transit lines in Johnson County stop at this transit center, providing good service to the rest of the metro area transit lines. To further improve the quality of service, Merriam should consider working with RideKC to provide high quality transit stops on Johnson Drive near the Merriam Drive intersection.

Along with fixed-route bus service, the City of Merriam and the Merriam Corridor are within the JCT microtransit zone. Microtransit operates as a blend of app-based on-demand ride-hailing (such as Uber or Lyft) and shared-ride public transit. The JCT microtransit program allows riders to get curb to curb transit service on-demand through the RideKC app to request trips. The microtransit service area is planning an expansion to cover most of the populated areas of Johnson County later in 2022 and provide service seven days a week. These two transit enhancements will provide greatly improve access and mobility options for Downtown Merriam and the City of Merriam.

Other transit alternatives have been studied in the past to increase connectivity between Johnson County and Downtown Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO). One of the alternatives that has been of interest and studied in the past is a commuter rail connection utilizing the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) freight rail line that runs through Olathe and parallels Interstate 35 into Union Station in Downtown KCMO. This proposed alignment passes along the east side of Downtown Merriam. In past studies a commuter rail station was envisioned for this area.

Due to the high cost to construct a commuter system and an unwilling freight rail partner, the project was deemed unfeasible at the time. In the years since the mid-1990's when commuter rail was last assessed, demand for commuter service for transit in the I-35 corridor has declined. Employment centers in the KC region have fragmented away from Downtown KCMO in the past twenty or more years, and the rise of work-from-home have made the commuter transit market decline.

Work and commute patterns have also been radically changed through the COVID-19

pandemic, making work-from-home trends even more impactful for the long-term forecast for commuter demand on public transit. These trends make the need for commuter rail service along I-35 even more challenging. While this ridership demand challenge for commuter rail currently exists, the Downtown Merriam area should maintain a flexible area near the BNSF rail lines along the area’s eastern edge in the eventuality that an unforeseen opportunity for commuter rail service were to arise in a long-term scenario.



Figure 30 - Multi-modal transportation considerations

BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES ON MERRIAM DRIVE

Improving bicycle and pedestrian access on Merriam Drive is a key component of creating a complete street atmosphere. The Turkey Creek trail is a great example of high-quality pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure in Merriam, but it does not provide direct connections to the businesses and properties along Merriam Drive. Because of this, there was a desire to provide high quality facilities directly on Merriam Drive.

Throughout the development of the Merriam 2040 Comprehensive Plan, the public was engaged on desired facility types for walking and biking in the community. The overwhelming preference of the community was for shared use paths/trails adjacent to the roadway rather than on-street bike lanes/cycle tracks. Merriam Drive was included on the high priority trail improvement map with high priority pedestrian/bicycle crossings noted in Downtown Merriam (at Turkey Creek, W 55th Street, W 53rd Street, and Antioch Road). Based on these recommendations, improvement alternates for walking and biking on Merriam Drive were developed accordingly and presented to the public.

The preferred alternate includes widened sidewalks in the Downtown area, and a wide shared use path/trail extending northward to Antioch Road. The improvements will also include a number of enhanced bicycle and pedestrian crossings along Merriam Drive and traffic calming in the Downtown Area to slow traffic and create a safer and more pleasant environment for all users.

COMPLETE STREET ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Complete street improvements have been shown to have major benefits to communities both in quality of life and economically. Many benefits of complete streets such as reduction in car crashes, improved air quality, improved health and increased property value can be quantified in monetary economic terms. In the past, the calculation of these benefits was time intensive and cost prohibitive. However, the Kansas Department of Transportation developed a simplified benefit-to-cost calculation tool for active transportation and complete streets projects. This tool was used for the Merriam Drive project to calculate the potential economic benefit to the community when the recommendations of this plan are implemented. Using this calculator, the estimated economic benefit from Merriam Drive project over 20 years if implemented is \$35.5 million. Major benefit categories include:

- \$22.2 million in safety benefits of prevented traffic crashes
- \$4.9 million in additional property tax levied from property value increase
- \$5.9 million in economic output/jobs from construction
- \$1.9 million in health benefits from more active transportation/avoided health care costs

In addition to the economic benefits, complete streets projects increase the value of residential properties in the area around them. Using the same benefit-cost analysis tool and identifying the residential properties in the area, the estimated property value increase in areas adjacent to Merriam Drive was calculated to be \$27.5 million. This represents a major benefit to homeowners in the area and the city in general.

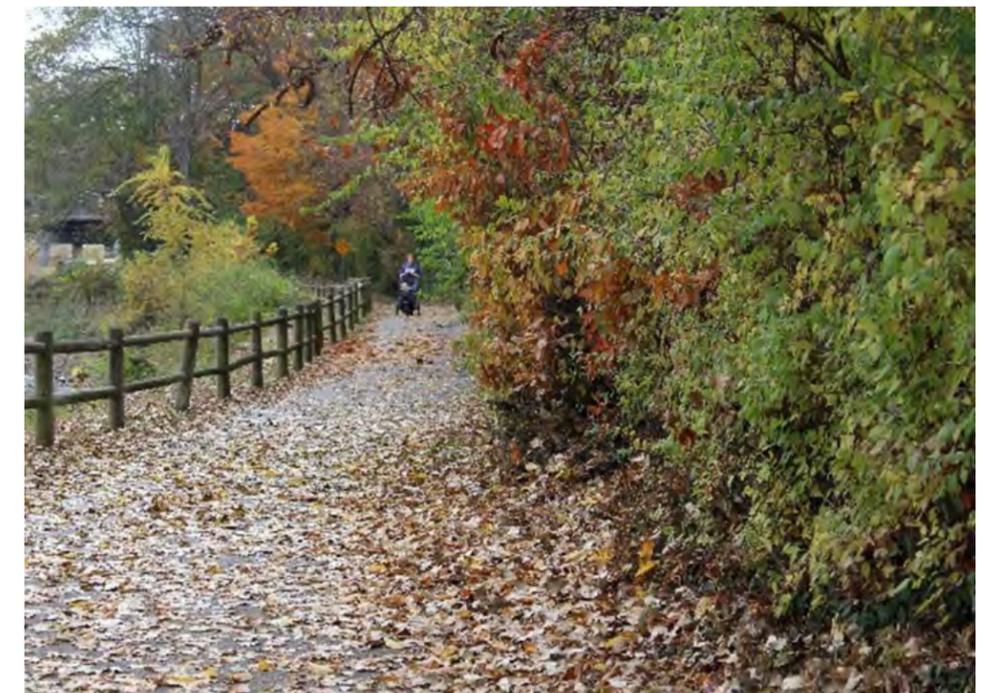


Figure 31 - Turkey Creek Trail

ANALYSIS OF ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

Regarding Downtown Merriam, the recently completed citywide Comprehensive Plan update, completed in 2020, noted both the opportunity and significant challenges for helping the area reach its true market potential.

The following is a more in-depth analysis of assets and challenges related to the prospects for a successful revitalization/redevelopment of Downtown Merriam, followed by a revisiting of the market analysis conclusions for the area.

Assets

- Outstanding visibility and access potential from I-35, with daily traffic volumes of 130-150K vehicles.
- Aesthetics of Turkey Creek and related park, with potential to enhance further.
- Merriam Marketplace facility is attractive and well-located between the creek and south end of Downtown, with a seasonal farmers' market.
- Mix of private sector commercial and industrial uses Downtown is largely fully occupied.
- Built environment includes pockets of quaint, human-scale buildings, sidewalks, and street dimensions typical of small-town Main Street areas.
- Small but passionate community of Downtown owners and operators with a vision for improved appeal and performance.
- Generally strong demographics in the Merriam vicinity (and among daily commuters passing between Downtown KC and Johnson County employment clusters) help bolster market strength of Merriam retailers (an advantage currently enjoyed by IKEA, new car dealerships, and big box retailers).
- Robust regional economy maintaining development interest across the metro area.
- Possibility of significant flood mitigation that could greatly alleviate the uncertainty around reinvestment/expansion and redevelopment potential.
- Related road and parcel realignment possibilities could greatly enhance pedestrian/resident/visitor experience, especially if combined with strong streetscape and wayfinding design.
- Comp plan analysis identified market support for "missing middle" ownership and rental housing (around 160 to 300 units over ten years) and 145,000 to 190,000 s.f. of retail and dining space across Merriam's few infill sites.
- Viability of redevelopment opportunities in Downtown will greatly improve with (well-designed) physical changes associated with flood mitigation, making significant capture of identified demand possible.
- Excellent location for future commuter rail transit – along rail line, centrally located between major employment concentrations.

Challenges

- Flood hazard across much of Downtown limits development possibilities and creates uncertainty about future business viability.
- Merriam, as a whole, is a largely built-out first ring suburb with expansion possibilities limited almost completely to infill sites.
- Highly fragmented ownership Downtown makes land assembly more difficult.
- Downtown land use commercial space almost entirely comprised of lower-value uses and low visitor volumes (including farmers' market) relative to properties outside Downtown and in similar nearby suburban heritage main street areas.
- Legacy used car lots and auto repair businesses with outdoor storage lots interspersed throughout Downtown, taking up potentially valuable parcel acreage, degrading area aesthetics, and interrupting continuity of pedestrian flow – greatly limiting the potential for positive dining/shopping and park/market experience (or residential appeal).
- Shallow lots against railroad tracks and elsewhere not well suited to modern redevelopment standards for retail or residential.
- Few residential land use Downtown, despite potential for compact, walkable mixed-use development.
- Lack of wayfinding or significant signage to help point drivers to Downtown or orient pedestrians within Downtown.
- Departure of community center reduced some positive civic activity generation and amenity value for Downtown.
- Increasing the variety of housing products available in Merriam will help stem departure of young adults in search of smaller, more affordable ownership homes.

Revisiting the 2020 Market Analysis

Merriam’s Comprehensive Plan update identified four areas with short and long-term infill redevelopment potential in Merriam:

- Former K-Mart site on Shawnee Mission Parkway
- Merriam Town Center
- Former Lee Jeans site
- Downtown Merriam

An analysis of demographic, economic and real estate market conditions in the broader region and Merriam vicinity was conducted to quantify the level of demand-supported absorption that would be attainable in Merriam over the coming 10-year and 20-year horizons. Those absorption levels – summarized in Table 03, for residential, retail, office and industrial land uses represented what appeared reasonable for Merriam to capture across those four main sites.

Merriam Demand Totals				
	10-yr		20-yr	
	low	high	low	high
Residential (units)				
Multifamily Rental	120	230	200	400
Multi/attached Ownership	40	70	100	100
Single Family (smaller lot)	30	40	100	100
Single Family (larger lot)	50	70	100	100
Total Units	240	410	400	700
Non-Residential (s.f.)				
Retail	145,000	192,000	260,000	350,000
Office	148,000	207,000	270,000	370,000
Industrial + Flex	50,000	60,000	90,000	110,000

Table 03 - Merriam demand totals

There were also two concept renderings prepared for Downtown as part of the 2040 comprehensive plan. The first showed a modest level of redevelopment activity occurring over time through methodical, opportunistic replacement of current land uses, but no major public investments or aggressive flood abatement. The second was much more ambitious, showing widespread redevelopment and significant reconfiguration of streets and parcels.

At the time of that analysis, most of that demand seemed more likely to occur on the three sites other than Downtown – at least in the short- to medium-term, given the serious obstacles to major redevelopment posed by the floodplain issues, existing incompatible uses, and highly fragmented ownership found Downtown. Upon revisiting the overall numbers for this study, it was determined that the demand totals remain reasonable, if conservative, estimates of Merriam infill development potential. In fact, the market (despite the challenges posed by COVID response) has increased its overall momentum, especially in the area of housing demand, both locally and nationally.

Several mixed-use infill redevelopment projects noted in the plan as being underway in nearby Johnson County communities have been quite successful, with a robust pace of development that has helped to further prove-up the market for such activity. As those projects gain steam in (e.g. in Downtown Overland Park and old Downtown Shawnee on Nieman Road) public sentiment towards the neo-traditional mix of uses and more compact site design seems to be generally positive, with the added vibrancy and quality-of-life appeal allaying some of the initial fears of added density.

Since the initial 2019-2020 analysis did not really contemplate a major, aggressive effort to mitigate flood hazard and make substantial public investment towards catalyzing Downtown redevelopment, the absorption projections may, in fact, have been overly conservative with respect to both the overall pool of demand potential available to Merriam and to the share of redevelopment (across the four identified Merriam sites) that might reasonably be expected to go towards Downtown.

There are four main obstacles to redevelopment currently present Downtown that make desirable redevelopment of any significant scale extremely unlikely for the foreseeable future:

- Extensive flood hazard
- Widespread and interspersed incompatible land uses (with no residential)
- Highly fractured ownership
- Prevalence of irregular and inadequate parcel dimensions

However, should the city undertake the public investment necessary to address the underlying flood hazard issue (including acquisition of land needed for cut/fill earth moving, removing the bridge choke-point for stream flow), in turn, those steps would open up substantial opportunities for positive modifications to street alignment and parcel reconfiguration. Those steps, together with some equitable combination of carrot

and stick policy changes to spur gradual replacement of aging and incompatible auto-oriented uses, could dramatically alter the upside potential for Downtown redevelopment.

Under such a scenario, assigning all of the Merriam-wide absorption projections would be well-justified, if not overly conservative, given the nearly unbeatable combination of visibility and access enjoyed by the site. The potential resulting land use vision could be a compelling combination of a vibrant, convenient walkable amenity for Merriam residents and valuable addition to the city’s fiscal revenue streams, through both sales and property taxes.

As mentioned above, one of the primary land uses in Downtown Merriam is used car lots and auto repair facilities. The prevalence of these types of businesses is largely due to the challenges associated with the current Turkey Creek floodplain and its negative effect on land values. Examples of these auto lots are pictured below. These type of conditions in turn negatively affect the land values of adjacent properties, further inhibiting the ability for redevelopment to obtain a footing. It is recommended that the City of Merriam conduct additional planning efforts beyond this initiative to consider how to better regulate these types of businesses in the area over time. This is a necessary effort in order to avoid negative impacts on the long-term transformation of the Downtown district into a diversified mixed-use environment. This plan recommends the city investigate overlay zoning or a new Downtown District zoning classification that would establish the appropriate uses, design standards, bulk requirements, setbacks, etc. for Downtown Merriam.



Figure 32 - Auto-oriented businesses in Downtown Merriam

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STREETSCAPE THEMING / SECTION FIVE



STREETSCAPE THEMING

STREETSCAPE CHARACTER

Early on in the planning process, the DMAC as well as the general public were asked to provide input on what specific streetscape elements they would like to see in Downtown Merriam and more generally, what the theme and aesthetic quality of the district should be. Elements ranged from lighting to bike amenities, public art to signage. All combined, a well thought out and designed collection of streetscape elements contribute to a unique sense of place, provide a level of comfort and safety and can provide necessary services and amenities. The complete set of results from the visioning exercises can be found on pages 24 and 25 of this document.

Based on all of the input collected, both the DMAC and Merriam residents generally agree that any future streetscape improvements should not greatly depart from what currently exists in Downtown. Given that foundation, two themes presented to the Advisory Committee, Transitional Inspired and Industrial Inspired, both play off existing elements of the Downtown district. Figures 34 and 35 illustrates streetscape elements within those themes. Committee members voted and the Transitional Inspired theme was the preferred design aesthetic.

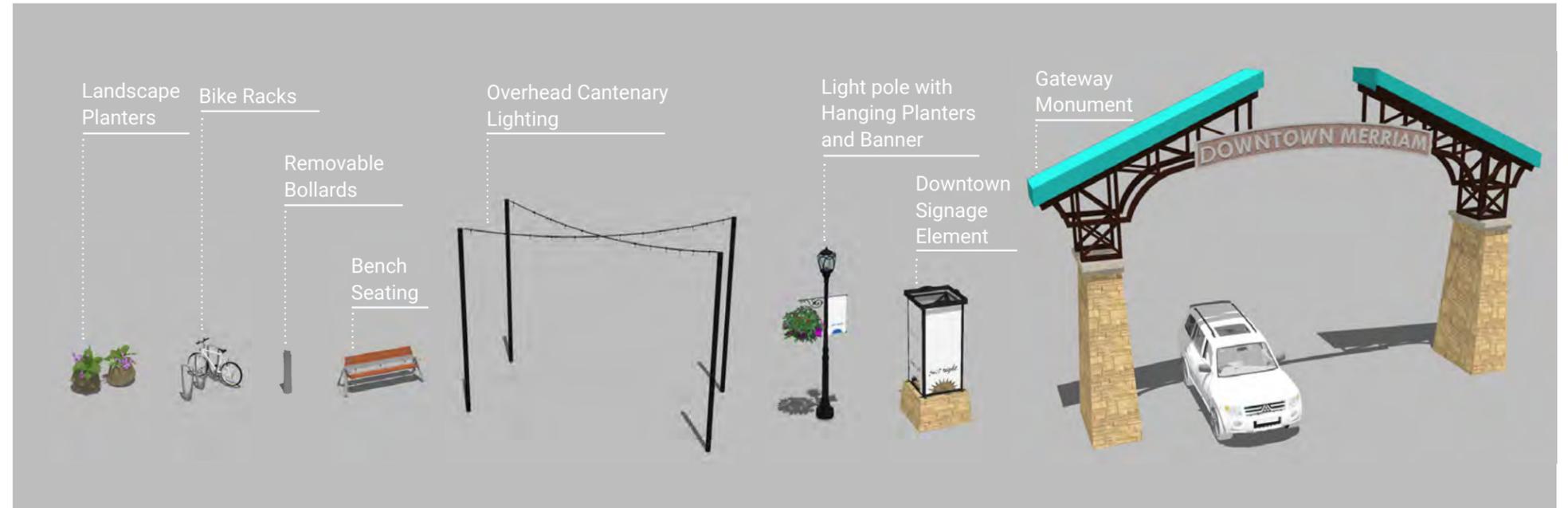


Figure 33 - Kit-of-parts streetscape elements for Downtown Merriam



**INDUSTRIAL
INSPIRED**

Figure 34 - Industrial Inspired streetscape themes



**TRANSITIONAL
INSPIRED**

Figure 35 - Transitional Inspired streetscape themes - the preferred streetscape theme

Below is a list of preferred streetscape elements as identified during the planning process. As the vision for the Downtown district comes to fruition, the City of Merriam should refer to this list of products, or approved equals, to ensure the agreed upon aesthetic quality is maintained.

Landscape Planters	
Product	Paseos Series Planters (or approved equal)
Company	Kornegay Design - A Landscape Forms Company
Product ID	PS-32 PS-48
Color	Natural Gray Concrete
Finish	Sandblast finish

Table 04 - Landscape planter specifications

Bike Racks	
Product	Trio Bike Rack (or approved equal)
Company	Forms + Surfaces
Model Number	SKTRO
Powdercoat Color	Aluminum Texture

Table 05 - Bike rack specifications

Bench Seating	
Product	Rest Bench (Metro 40 Collection) (or approved equal)
Company	Landscape Forms
Style	Backed bench (with or without arms TBD)
Powdercoat Metal Color	Steel
Woodgrains	Domestically Sourced Thermally Modified Ash

Table 06 - Bench seating specifications

Removable Bollards	
Product	Guide Bollard (or approved equal)
Company	Landscape Forms
Order Code	AE-RM-201

Table 07 - Removable bollard specifications



Landscape Planters



Removable Bollards



Bench Seating



Bike Racks



Light Pole

Light Poles	
Company	Sternberg Lighting
Fixture	1190ALED Plaza Series (or approved equal)
Pole	5900 Providence Pole (or approved equal)
Finish	Custom Match to existing poles on Merriam Drive
Banner Arm	DBA (Double Banner Arms, "PM" style mount)
Planter Arm	DHPA (Double Hooked Planter Arm) Parallel to street
Flag Pole	FH

Table 08 - Light pole specifications

An overwhelming sentiment shared with the planning team was the love of the existing streetlights, hanging planters and flags/banners that line the streets of Downtown Merriam. These elements have come to define Merriam and they give the community a great sense of pride. These character-defining elements will remain a fixture in Downtown Merriam throughout the long-term vision presented in this plan. In addition to the accessories outlined in Table 08, light poles should have a power supply near the top and/or the bottom of the pole. These power supplies should be on separate circuits to allow for separate use during the holidays, festivals or other events.

Similarly, tree wells along Merriam Drive should be designed to have a power outlet on a flexible conduit that is spooled around the tree trunk. The conduit should be 6 - 8' in length so that it can be zip tied to the tree trunk and the power outlet can be moved up into the branches of the tree for use in aesthetic lighting.

STREETSCAPE THEMING

STREETSCAPE CHARACTER (CONT.)

Catenary lighting is included in the streetscape kit-of-parts. This type of lighting adds a special aesthetic element to a place and signals to those visiting, that this place is unique and worth spending time in. Catenary lighting can be incorporated into the light pole structures themselves and extend over the roadway while being at a height that does not conflict with passing trucks or buses.

The Downtown signage component is designed to be flexible while also being a substantial physical element within the streetscape environment. Situated on a limestone base, a four-sided metal structure between 12' and 15' will frame alternating panels. Two of the panels are envisioned to be stamped metal that could reflect any number of designs. The example shown in the kit-of-parts graphic on page 40 shows the City of Merriam logo and catch phrase 'Just Right'. The other two sides of the structure could be replaceable vinyl banners that showcase community events, wayfinding components or seasonal banners. An example of this type of sign from Downtown Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is shown in the image to the far right. The Downtown signage element adds another unique element to Downtown Merriam and bolsters the branding efforts of the community.

The gateway element illustrated in Figure 36 evokes the design of the Merriam Marketplace structure, a cherished venue within Downtown Merriam. With limestone pylon bases and metal trusses, this archway sign will be instantly iconic for the Downtown district and provide a true sense of arrival.



Figure 36 - Design and placement of proposed gateway monument on Merriam Drive



Overhead Catenary Lighting



Downtown Signage Element

Another element of the streetscape design is the decorative paving design. Several design iterations were reviewed with city staff before the final design direction was honed. As is illustrated in Figure 37, the paving pattern design is meant to evoke the strings of a violin and emulate railroad tracks. Elements of Downtown Merriam served as the inspiration for this design; GuitarLamp and KC Strings, nationally known businesses based on stringed instruments and the railroad tracks of the adjacent BNSF freight line. The cadence of the paver banding should expand and

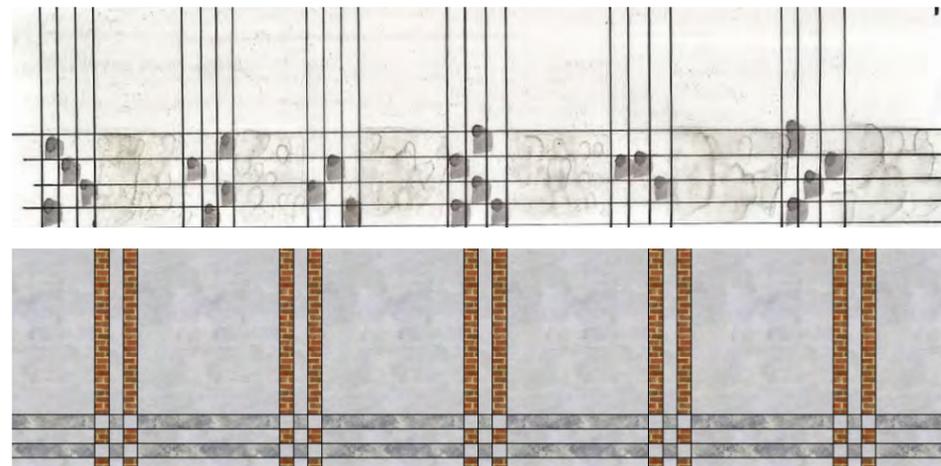


Figure 37 - Original sketch and refined paving pattern for Merriam Drive

contrast along the entirety of Merriam Drive with more intense decorative banding in the historic Downtown core section of the street and a less intensive patterning, with more concrete and limited decorative paving, as the streetscape transitions north of the Merriam Marketplace and extends to the north end of the corridor.



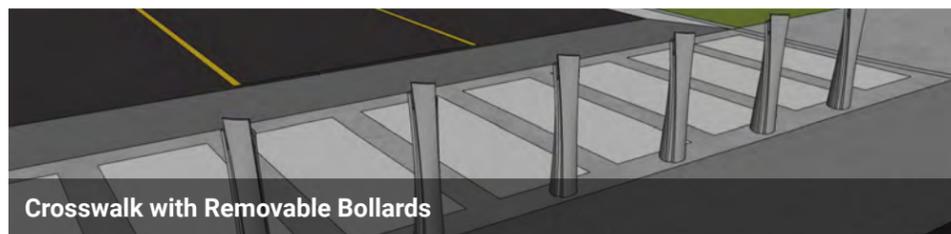
Figure 38 - Pedestrian-oriented view showing proposed paving pattern design

Enhanced pedestrian crossings are a priority for Downtown Merriam. Well-marked and well-designed pedestrian crossings emphasize walkability and visually help to slow down traffic and increase safety. This plan discusses three different pedestrian crossing options:

- At-grade crosswalk with ADA ramp
- Raised crosswalk
- Crosswalk with removable bollards (raised or at-grade)

For all three options, it is recommended that a different paving material be used. This increases the visibility of the crosswalks and adds to the overall aesthetic quality of the district. Raised crosswalks emphasize pedestrian activity by functioning as a large speed bump. Raised crosswalks are also easier to navigate from an accessibility standpoint. Crosswalks at strategic locations could include removable bollards which allow portions of Merriam Drive to be closed off to traffic for festivals and events.

During the planning process, concerns over raised crosswalks on Merriam Drive were shared from members of the community. The main concern revolved around the need for antique and classic cars, some of which have a very low suspension, to travel down Merriam Drive for the annual Turkey Creek Auto Show. If raised crosswalks are determined to be the best option to promote walkability and the safest pedestrian crossing condition, the final design team will need to work through this issue and ensure that they are designed in a way as to not conflict with low-riding vehicles.



CORRIDOR VISION / SECTION SIX



CORRIDOR VISION

OVERVIEW

The vision for Merriam Drive was developed with both near-term recommendations and long-term considerations that collaborate to facilitate a vibrant and forward-looking Downtown district. Near-term funding opportunities grant the city the opportunity to implement shovel-ready ideas to better accommodate multi-modal transportation users along with significant streetscape and placemaking improvements. These near-term enhancements will be implemented with the larger vision in mind and not prohibit future ideas, generated by forthcoming planning efforts, from coming to fruition. This section will clearly outline the near-term improvements and illustrate the longer-term vision as developed by this planning process.

NEAR-TERM IMPROVEMENTS

The near-term improvements envisioned for Merriam Drive can be seen in Figure 39. Bicycle accommodations are provided in the form of a shared street from Johnson Drive to W 58th Street with a shared-use path extending from that point northward. The historic Downtown streetscape is enhanced through strategic amenities that improve aesthetics and also provide users of Downtown Merriam with needed services such as seating, lighting and signage. A proposed gateway marker just north of Johnson Drive provides a front door to the Downtown District and will leave a lasting impression to all who visit.

Angled parking added adjacent to the Merriam Marketplace and the 5701 Merriam Drive site open the door for larger and more frequent events to take place in Downtown Merriam while providing the necessary parking to sustain economic activity. Along with the configuration change to allow for more parking on the street, the market access drive is proposed to shift to the north which allows for the existing drive entrance to be converted to a pedestrian promenade.

Curb bump outs along the corridor act as traffic calming elements while also providing space for landscape plantings and additional street trees. Several enhanced crosswalks are also envisioned for the corridor to facilitate the safe access to both sides of the street for pedestrians. These crosswalks should be designed with different colored pavement and be emphasized either by being raised and/or highly marked and signed.

A further description of all the near-term improvements can be found on the following pages.

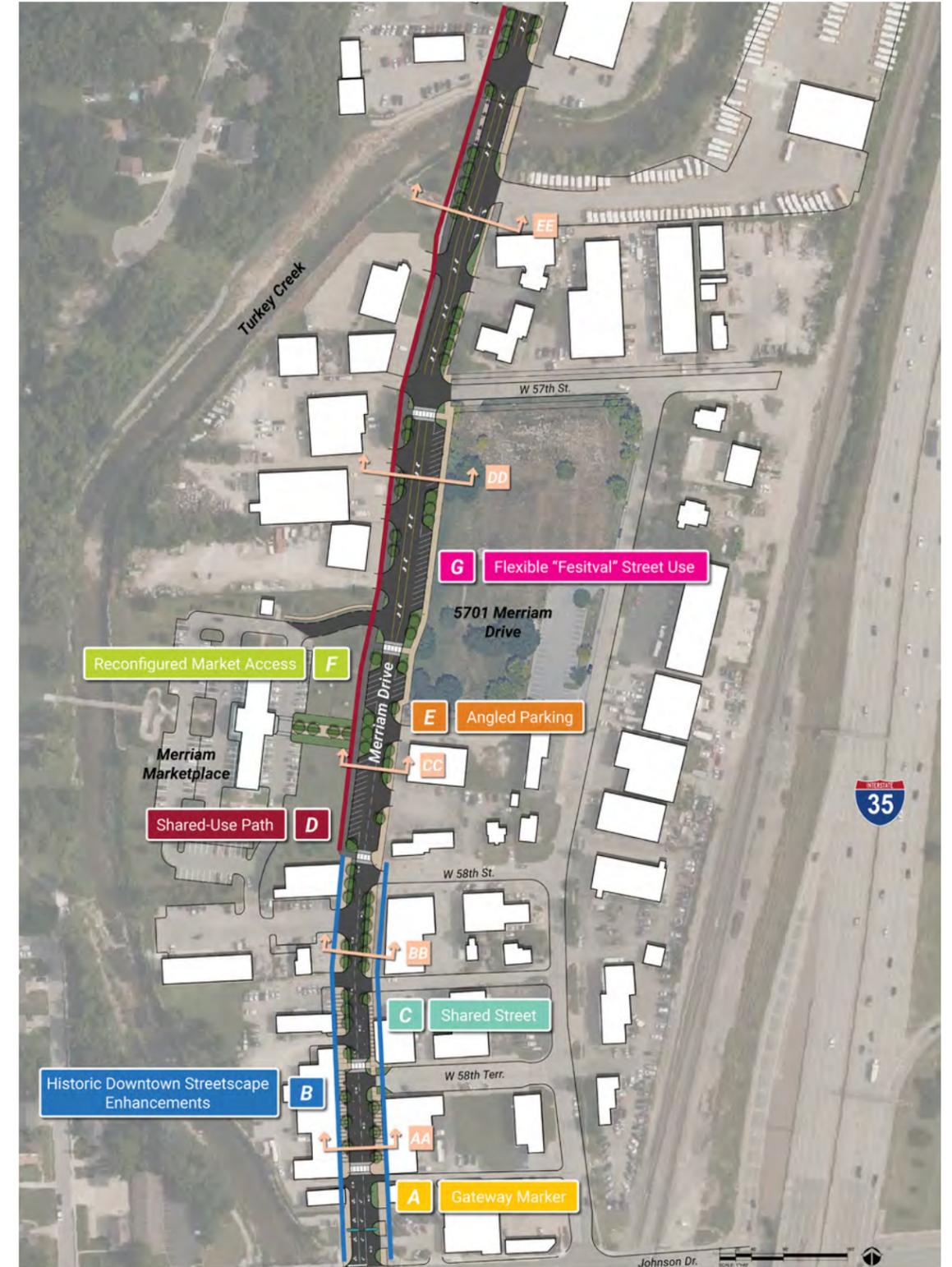


Figure 39 - Recommended Merriam Drive alignment and improvements - near term

Merriam Drive Proposed Cross Sections

Figures 40 - 44 illustrate the proposed sections for Merriam Drive. All proposed conditions put a great emphasis on the pedestrian and bicycle experience along Merriam Drive with a large clear path area to allow for easy and efficient circulation and an amenity zone where the kit-of-parts elements previously discussed are located. The proposed conditions balance the needs of vehicular users by providing parallel and angled parking opportunities while maintaining the necessary lane widths to accommodate a variety of users along Merriam Drive. Added street trees along the corridor provide enhanced visual character and overhead lighting in the Downtown core and transition zone add to the overall aesthetic quality of the Downtown district.

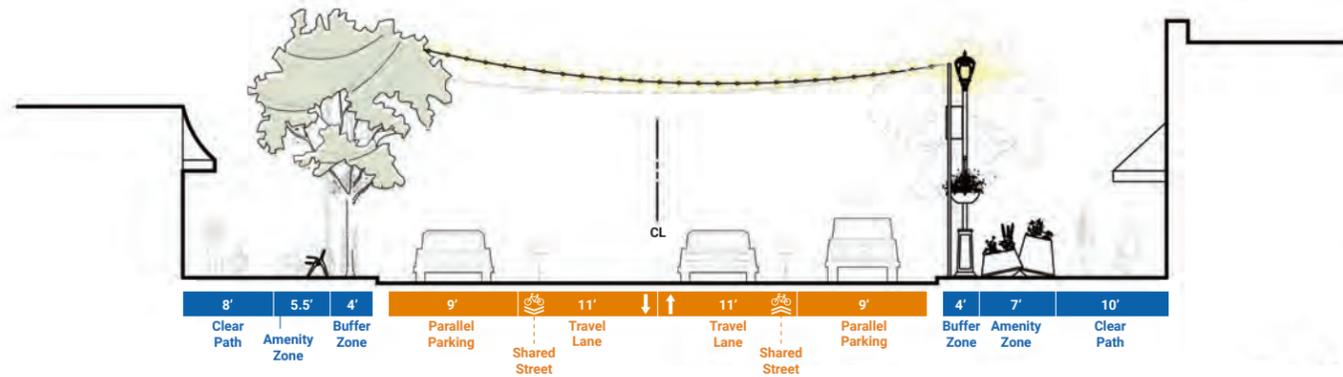


Figure 40 - Section AA: Downtown Core

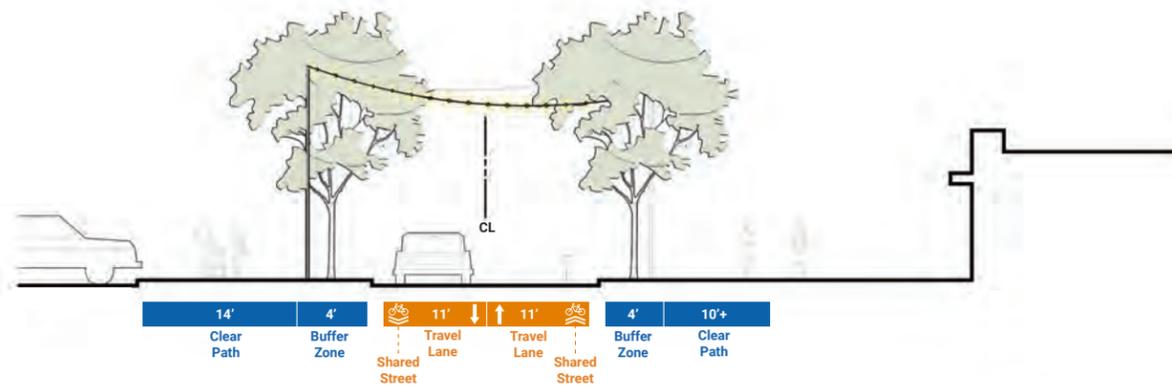


Figure 41 - Section BB: Transition Zone

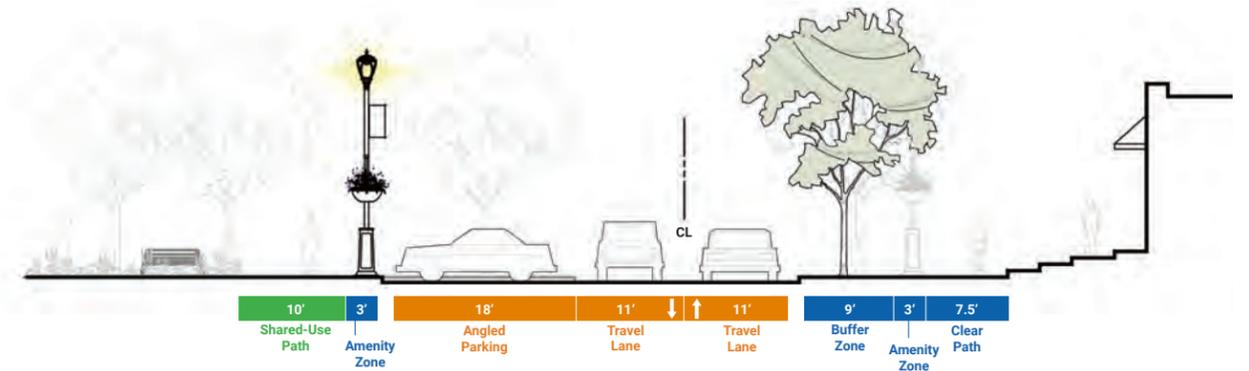


Figure 42 - Section CC: Marketplace

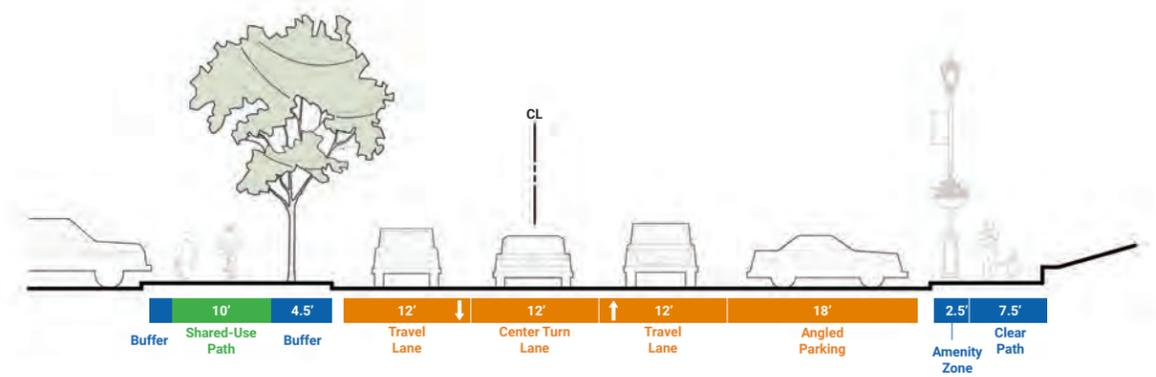


Figure 43 - Section DD: Three-lane Expanded

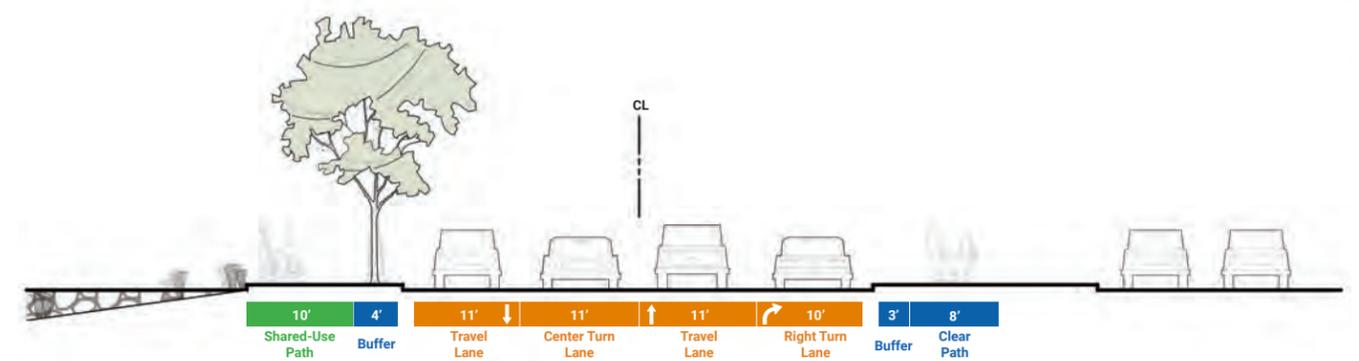


Figure 44 - Section EE: Three-lane with turn lane

CORRIDOR VISION

A Gateway Marker

A Downtown Merriam gateway feature is proposed to be placed just north of the Johnson Drive and Merriam Drive intersection. It draws inspiration from the architectural character of the Merriam Marketplace. With integrated lighting, this proposed placemaking feature is intended to enhance the visibility and identity of Downtown Merriam while creating a stronger sense of arrival.

Recommendation:

This conceptual rendition of a Downtown Gateway needs to be further refined to address proportions, structural considerations, integrated lighting, messaging, and other features that could further enhance the appearance and functionality of this feature as a compliment to the Merriam Marketplace architectural character.

B Historic Downtown Streetscape Enhancements

The historic core of Downtown Merriam has great bones and the streetscape improvements are intended to enhance the aesthetic character and unique charm found in this portion of Downtown Merriam. The design recommendations focus on the public realm, from building face to building face, and are intended to create a cohesive vision for creating a safe and beautiful environment that supports commercial activity. Streetscape elements such as street trees, pedestrian lights, hanging planters, unique paving patterns, bench seating, banners and overhead lighting work together to create a truly unique and special place.

C Shared Street

A primary focus is to provide a complete street approach for integrating pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular traffic into a reconfigured Merriam Drive. This involved extensive engagement with the DMAC as well as public input opportunities during the planning process. With limited space between existing buildings, the design recommendations balance bicycling needs with those of vehicles. On-street parking supports retail and commercial uses, and wider sidewalks support pedestrian activity. Additional streetscape amenities and site furnishings enhance the aesthetic character of the Downtown area.



D Shared-Use Path

From Merriam Marketplace north to the Antioch Road intersection, a 10'-wide shared-use path is proposed along the west side of the corridor to provide connection opportunities for different modes of personal transportation including bicycling, walking, running, roller blading, and more. Without the limited space constraints of existing buildings close to the roadway, the reconfigured street can accommodate angled parking, wide sidewalks and a shared-use path.

Recommendation:

As a way of expanding trail opportunities within the Downtown area, the city should explore the acquisition of modest easements or portions of properties along the eastern side of Turkey Creek, behind the existing businesses on Merriam Drive that abut Turkey Creek (south of the Merriam Marketplace to Johnson Drive). This future trail connection would create a loop for pedestrians to access the artwork and plaza space located on the northwest corner of Johnson Drive and Merriam Drive and provide opportunities for existing buildings and properties to take better advantage of their proximity to the Turkey Creek Corridor long-term. This could become a unique activated edge of the creek in the Downtown area, supporting cafe seating, pop-up food or beverage offerings, and other destination uses - turning what is now a "back door" into a more pleasant and inviting public space with opportunities to encourage commercial activity and pedestrian activation.



E Angled Parking

The new street configuration provides for on-street angled parking along city-owned properties at the Merriam Marketplace and the 5701 Merriam Drive site. Angled parking can act as a traffic calming measure that promotes slower travel speeds along the corridor. These parking spaces are anticipated to be used for hosting car shows and other festivals and events in the future. The curb configurations are designed to allow for efficient street cleaning while providing the city with options for using either head-in or back-in angled parking configurations. A three-lane street section with a center turn lane is also proposed to begin at the realigned north entrance to Merriam Marketplace and will continue north to the Antioch Road intersection.



F Reconfigured Market Access

This new vision for Merriam Drive includes a recommendation to relocate the Merriam Marketplace entrance to the north to provide additional flexibility for the farmers' market to expand if needed into the parking area on the east side of the main structure. It also provides flexibility to accommodate detouring vehicular traffic through the Marketplace site if future festivals or events need to temporarily convert a portion of Merriam Drive to provide safe pedestrian connectivity between the Marketplace and the 5701 Merriam Drive site. Further description for the capability of expanded community events can be found on the following page.

Recommendation:

As part of the Merriam Drive Corridor Streetscape Enhancement project, the city should integrate the relocation of this access drive if the budget allows. The existing Marketplace entry drive should be repurposed as a pedestrian plaza space with landscaping, as a location for additional public art, or as a potential splash pad/play area with seating to compliment the use of the adjacent Farmer's Market.



CORRIDOR VISION

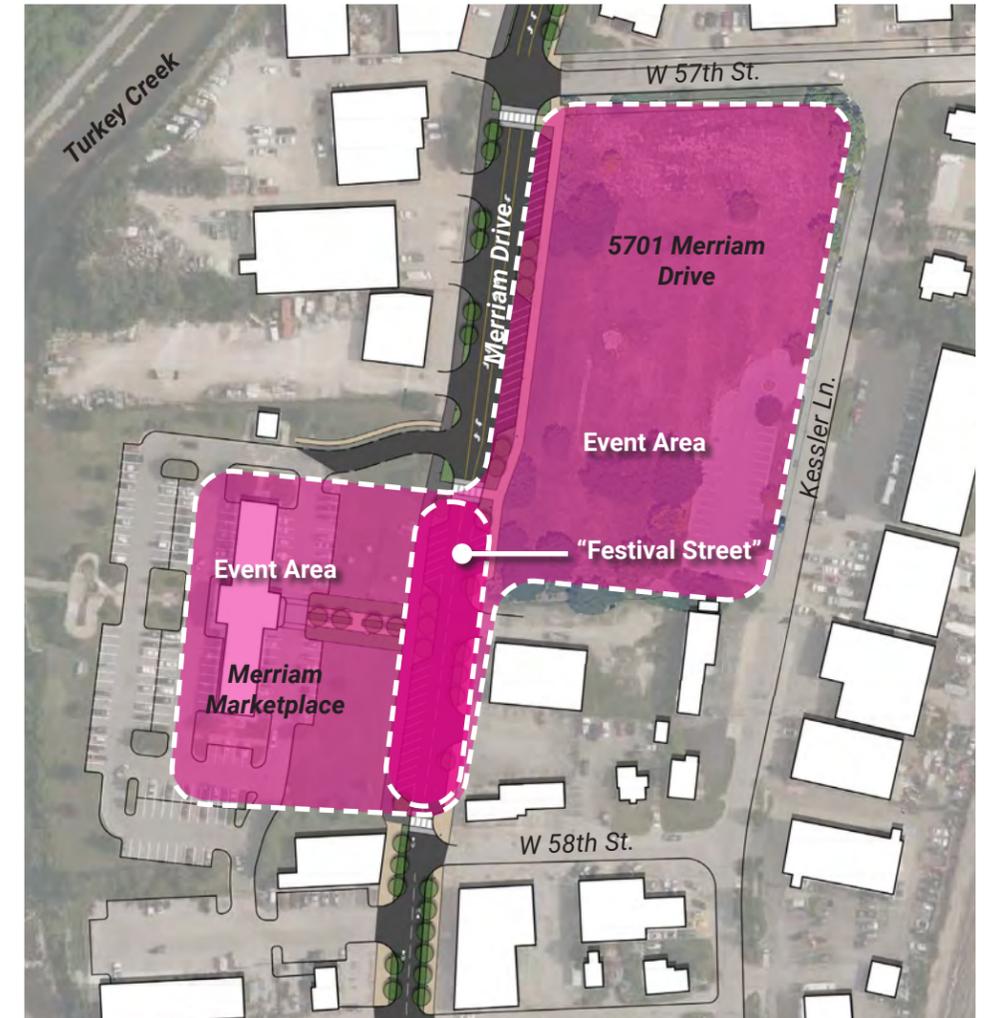
G Flexible “Festival” Street Use

The Merriam Marketplace is already a well-established venue for community events in Downtown Merriam ranging from the regularly-held Merriam Farmers’ Market to the Turkey Creek Auto Show. The 5701 Merriam Drive site also has the ability to function as a community event space with the large open lawn providing for maximum flexibility of use, event type and size. With the Merriam Marketplace facility and the 5701 Merriam Drive property directly across from one another, these two formally physically and functionally separated sites can operate symbiotically with Merriam Drive functioning as a connective conduit between the two rather than a barrier.

With removable bollards in place at W 58th Street to the south and W 57th Street to the north, vehicular traffic would be rerouted to Kessler Lane and/or through the rear of the Merriam Marketplace parking lot. This combined with the relocated entrance to Merriam Marketplace and the transformation of the existing entrance to a pedestrian promenade, creates a walkable environment that can host a variety of events.

Events that could take place in this flexible environment include seasonal festivals, art fairs, food trucks, music events and expanded car shows. The near-term street improvements to Merriam Drive, including angled on-street parking, street trees, lighting with hanging planters and decorative banners, bench seating and trash receptacles, provide the functional and aesthetic infrastructure to foster the necessary elements to make these types of events even more successful and efficient to operate.

As the entirety of the vision that this plan illustrates comes to fruition over the next many years, Merriam Drive is envisioned to be realigned to Kessler Lane with the existing alignment transforming into a pedestrian promenade. With that realignment, the improvements made to Merriam Drive in this near-term phase, can continue to function and support events along that promenade. Street trees planted now can remain in place and mature over time, providing ample shade and a pleasant walking experience. Benches and lighting can remain in place as well as trash receptacles and any underground infrastructure improvements that are made as a part of this initial phase. With some relatively minor hardscape improvements, the investments made now in Merriam Drive will serve the Downtown district for decades to come as new development, new events and more people come to this unique and special place.



A Merriam Drive Improvements

In this illustration, the improvements to Merriam Drive are visualized including angled on-street parking, a realigned vehicular entrance to the Merriam Marketplace, a pedestrian promenade in place of the existing Merriam Marketplace entrance drive and added streetscape elements along the corridor.

Recommendation:

As a next step for creating the type of amenities the community has been requesting for the Downtown area, the city should proceed with programming and design for the destination park amenity feature to be constructed on the 5701 Merriam Drive site. This amenity feature area should consider the planned streetscape enhancements and on-street parking for the Merriam Drive Corridor, the use of this street corridor as a space for hosting community events and festivals, and the future realignment of the Merriam Drive Corridor to the east as shown in these conceptual diagrams.

It is imperative for the city to have a strong understanding of future conditions in order to make informed decisions for proper placement of major elements, thus mitigating the need to remove or relocate infrastructure to serve future park enhancement.

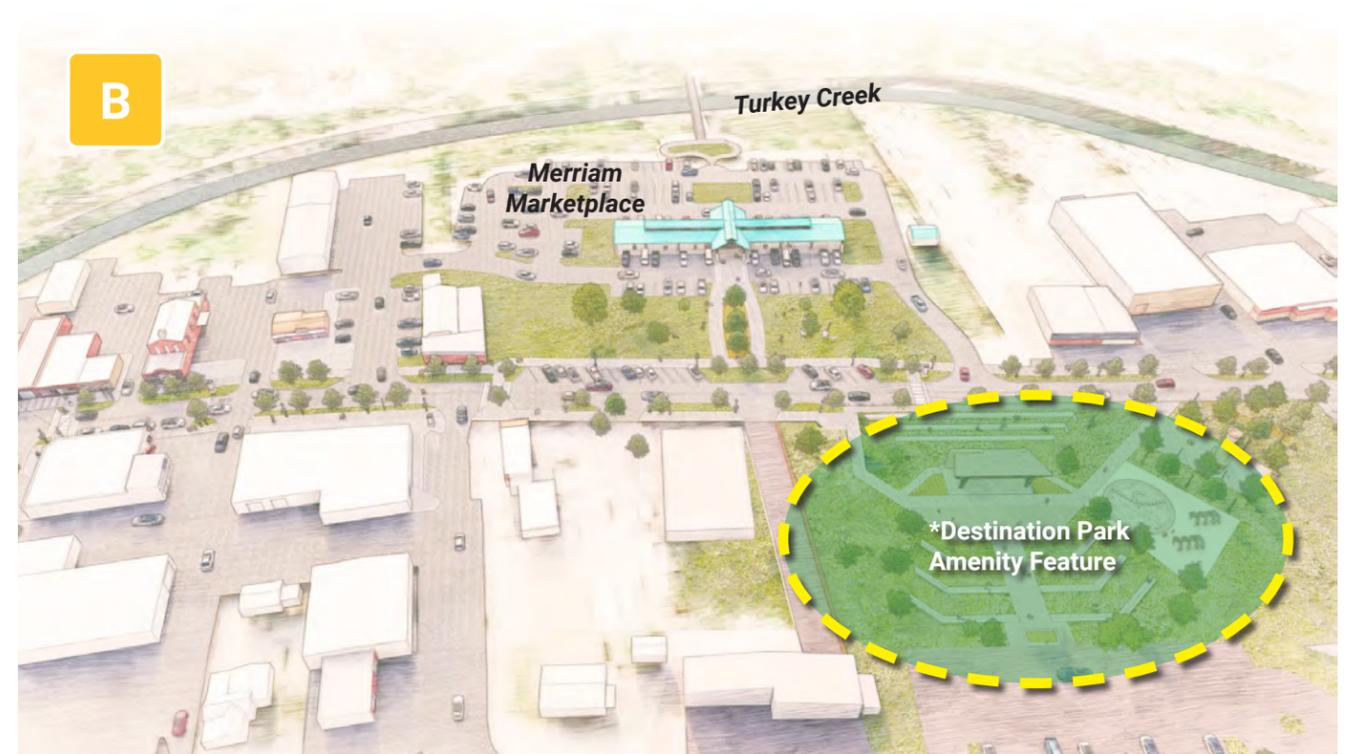
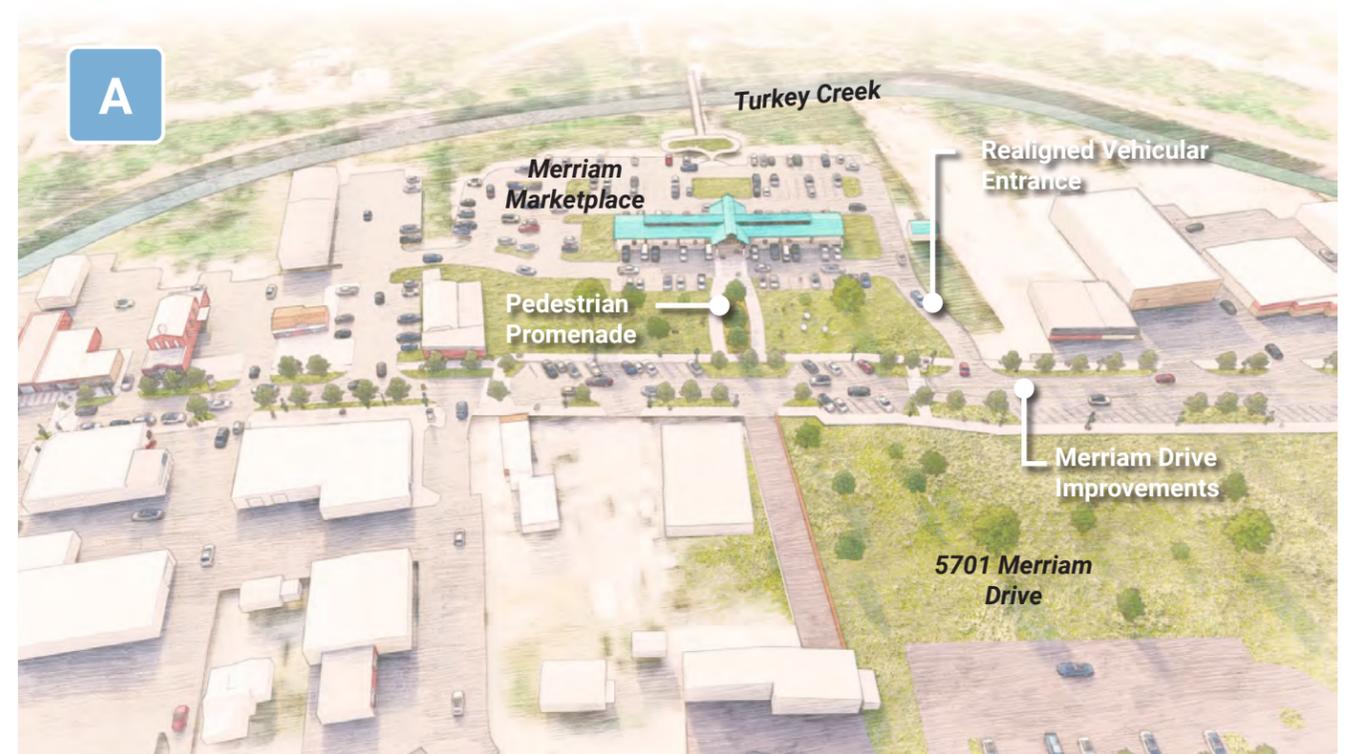
LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENTS

B Destination Park Amenity Feature

The 5701 Merriam Drive property presents a prime opportunity for the development of a destination park. Through this planning process, participants were able to convey their preferred features for a park facility, the specifics of which will be fine-tuned and designed in the coming years.

Recommendation:

In the near future, the city should engage in a process to determine the programming and design for the destination park illustrated in the following exhibits.



CORRIDOR VISION

C Merriam Drive Realignment

The long-term vision of Downtown Merriam includes the realignment of Merriam Drive to the east in order to maximize the potential for future redevelopment and to allow for future public space improvements adjacent to the Merriam Marketplace and the destination park facility. This illustration also visualizes the possible expansion of the Turkey Creek environs, directly north of the Merriam Marketplace. This strategy as previously described, would diminish the floodplain within Downtown and create a new water-oriented amenity along this natural feature.

Recommendation:

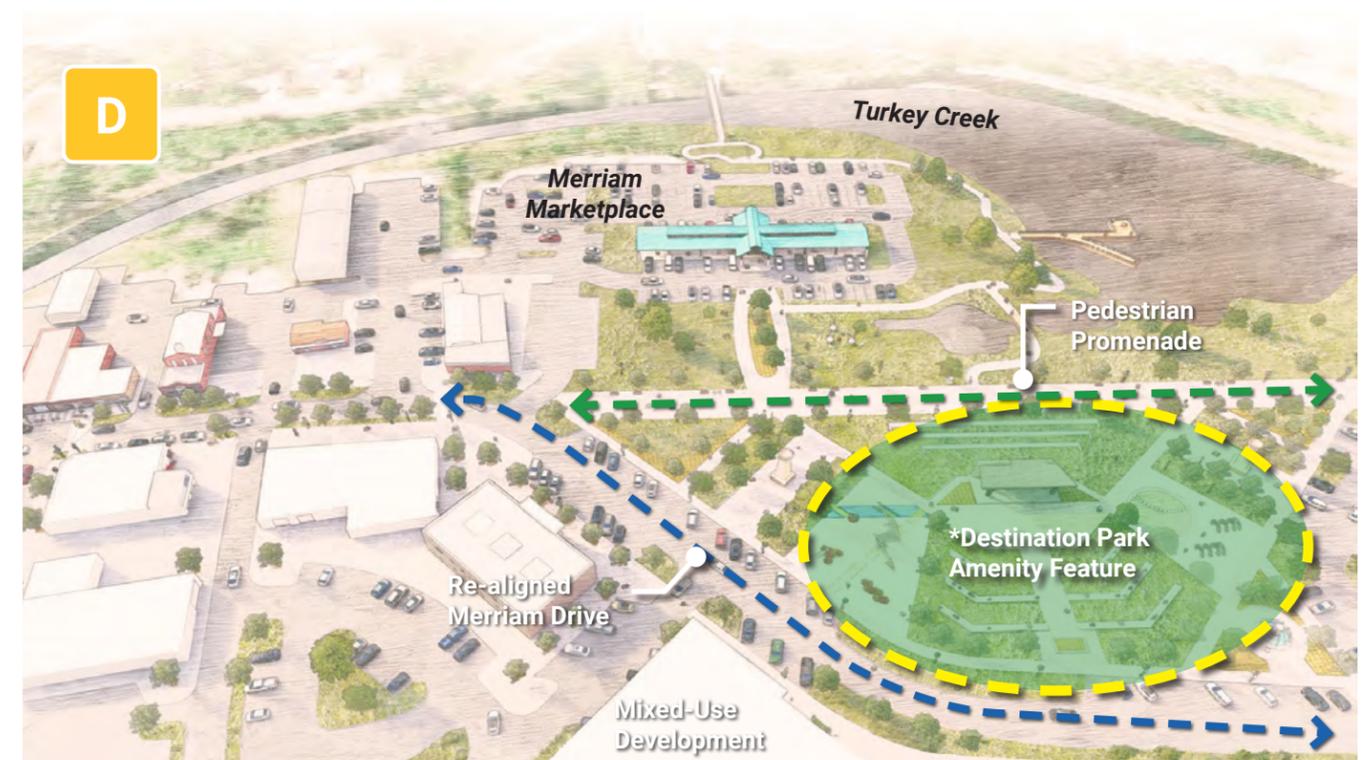
In advance of future redevelopment demand, the city should proceed with the creation of a proactive set of Development Design Guidelines and potentially the use of an Overlay District to guide future growth, redevelopment and revitalization of the Downtown area. These additional planning tools will assist the city in achieving the desired mixture of land uses, building types, architectural character, densities and street activation that is consistent with the type of vibrant, pedestrian-friendly public space the community has expressed a desire to create within the Downtown area.

D Additional Development

Ultimately, it is envisioned for the existing alignment of Merriam Drive to be transformed into a pedestrian promenade. Other than minor hardscape improvements, all previous investments made to infrastructure and streetscape along this section of the corridor can remain to support the pedestrian promenade. This central spine would then seamlessly connect the Merriam Marketplace facility and the destination park amenity into one expansive area that would serve the needs of Merriam and the greater region. Vehicular access into the Merriam Marketplace would shift entirely to the south and a stormwater capture amenity would help collect and store water from the entire Downtown district before entering Turkey Creek. Dense mixed-use development would be encouraged along the realigned Merriam Drive and with impressive views of the destination park facility, this development would be unlike any other in the metro.

Recommendation:

During this phase of development, the city should explore the creation of an overlay district and/or special design guidelines in order to achieve the desired mixture of new and existing architectural features, design aesthetics, land uses and density.



REALIGNING MERRIAM DRIVE (FUTURE)

Extensive analysis was conducted to determine the optimum future realignment for Merriam Drive. The factors considered when evaluating options included:

- The flow and connectivity of each alignment concept with adjacent street network and properties.
- The ability to construct a new alignment while keeping the existing Merriam Drive Corridor in place and operational - minimizing the anticipated future need to shut down the corridor for construction activity.
- The ability to maximize future redevelopment potential for properties adjacent to the existing rail lines and Interstate 35 Corridor. This includes the opportunity to construct efficient structured parking on these parcels while preserving adequate space for adjacent buildings and site amenities.
- The ability to construct significant portions of the newly aligned Merriam Drive within the existing Kessler Lane right-of-way and along the edge of the 5701 Merriam Drive property owned by the city.
- The opportunity to integrate existing buildings with more prominent architectural features and aesthetic character at both the north and south edges of the Downtown area.
- The size and configuration of public green spaces created by the realignment concepts.
- The ability of each concept to support future transit service and connectivity along Merriam Drive and along the rail corridor (future commuter rail potential).

The diagrams to the right illustrate the 6 options that were developed as a result of this analysis. The final vision presented on the following pages most closely aligns with Options 6a and 6b but was further developed with additional input from the project's steering committee.

Recommendation:

The City of Merriam should engage the US Army Corps of Engineers to coordinate future improvements to the Turkey Creek Corridor environs to address flooding, with the intention of implementing the long-term strategies outlined in this plan for the Downtown area. This includes removing the use of levees and flood walls in this section of the creek corridor - and replacing that strategy with one that includes future property acquisition to expand the creek to create additional capacity, reconstruction of the Merriam Drive bridge to widen the creek corridor, and reduction of flooding in the Downtown area while maintaining the community's visual and physical connection to the Turkey Creek environment. This will require additional study of various options outlined in this plan to achieve the right balance of property acquisition, creek expansion, flood mitigation and infrastructure investment that supports the long-term redevelopment vision for Downtown as illustrated in this plan.

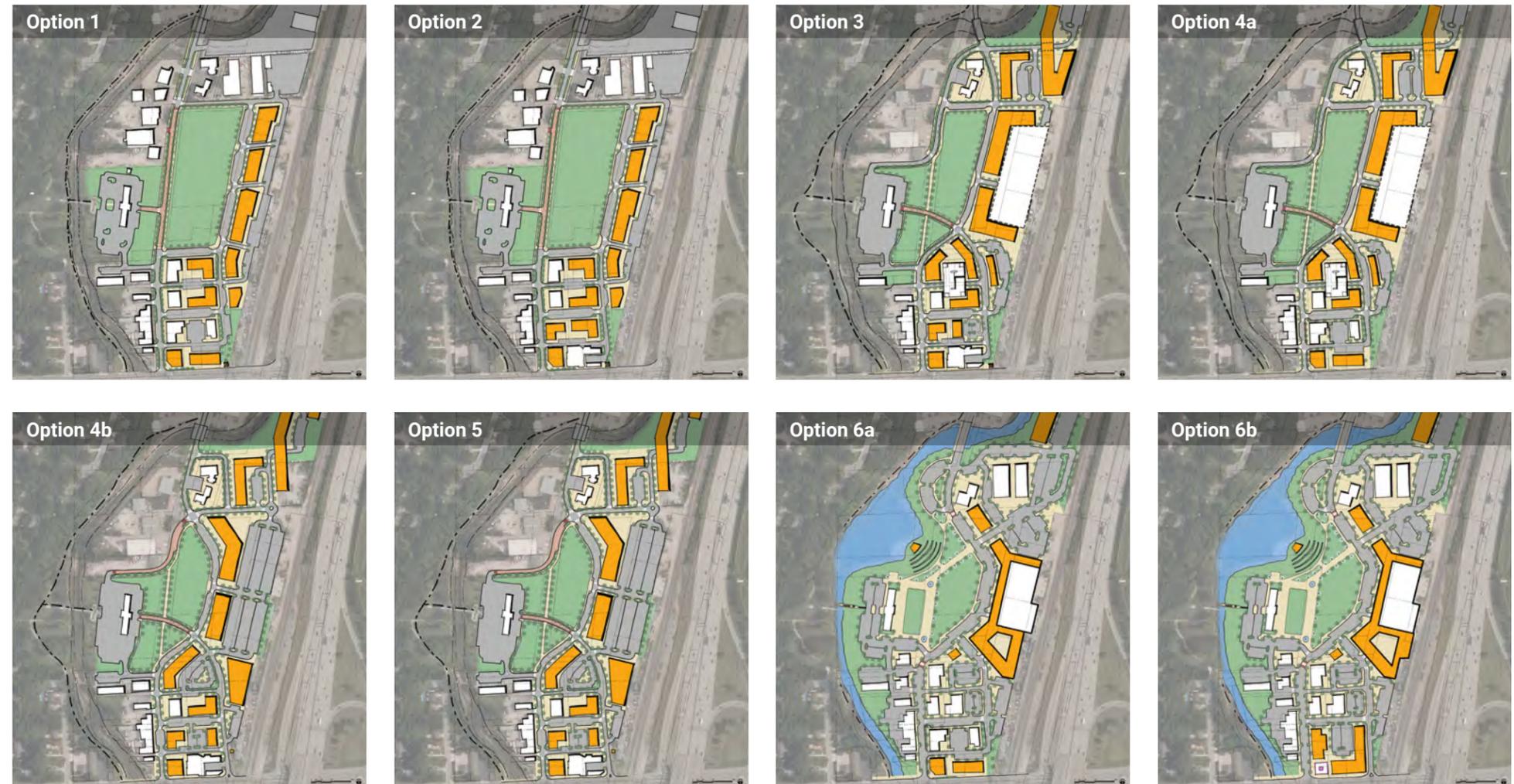


Figure 45 - Merriam Drive realignment concept options and analysis

CORRIDOR VISION

The vision outlined in this plan has the potential to transform Downtown Merriam into an even more vibrant district with diverse businesses, housing options, public spaces and people. The streetscape improvements completed in the near-term will set the stage for an anticipated phased roll-out of improvements that will rely on coordination from the city, business and property owners, economic development partners and the community to bring to fruition. As Merriam Drive is realigned, the streetscape improvements implemented in the first phase of construction should be implemented consistently along the future realigned Merriam Drive and adjacent streets so the public realm throughout the entire Downtown district conveys a unifying aesthetic appearance.

As illustrated by Figures 47 and 48, the long-term vision of this plan encompasses the entirety of Downtown Merriam and has many exciting components that will transform this area of the community. However, due to the complexities of numerous issues including identifying and securing funding opportunities, exploring potential partnerships and property acquisitions, and coordination with the Army Corps of Engineers to address the Turkey Creek floodplain, the vision will likely require several phases and incremental steps of enhancement in order to achieve its full potential. Several factors will drive decisions about how, when and in what order this plan is implemented. It is the intent of this plan to serve as the blueprint for conceptually guiding both near-term and long-term redevelopment plans.

Recommendation:

As the city considers the investment needed along the Turkey Creek Corridor and adjacent areas to remove some/all of Downtown from the existing floodplain impacts, the city should explore the potential for future public-private partnerships with existing property owners and future development interests. The intent is to gauge potential partnership interest and economic development viability of a future urban mixed-use district that would complement the existing Downtown environment while introducing new uses, tenants and residents to enhance and evolve the district's unique sense of place.

The vision outlined in this plan was developed with a broad base of input from the community and it reflects the overall values and desires of the community. Merriam is a special place and it deserves a Downtown that thrives as the heartbeat of the community. Bolstering the positive attributes of Downtown Merriam today with the vibrancy this plan envisions, Downtown Merriam will support the needs and desires of its residents for generations to come.



Figure 46 - Long-term improvements looking east from Merriam Marketplace



Figure 47 - Long-term vision for Downtown Merriam - Plan

DRAFT AUGUST 2022

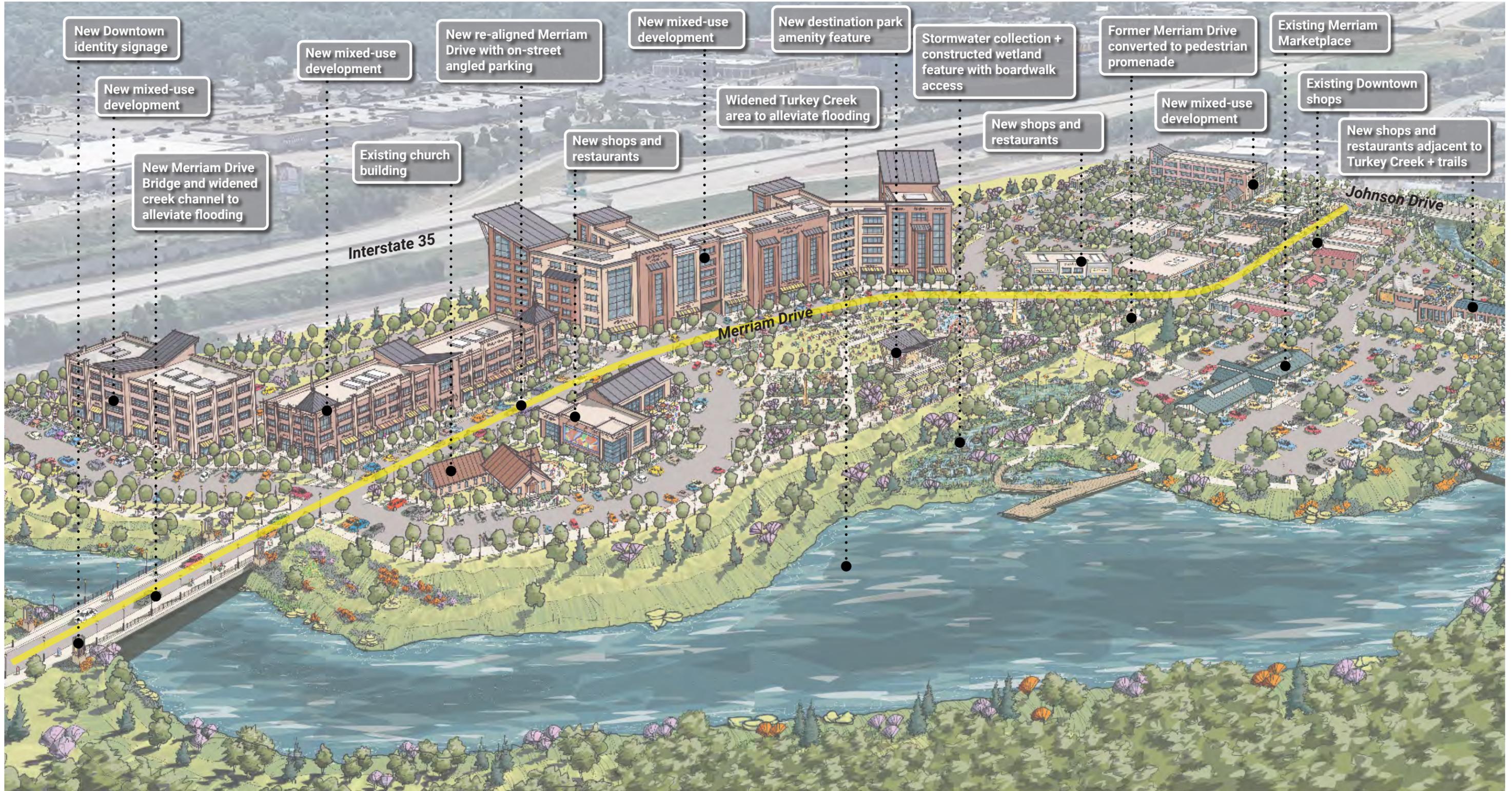


Figure 48 - Long-term vision for Downtown Merriam - Perspective

APPENDIX / SECTION SEVEN



VISUAL PREFERENCING

Art and Identity

Art and Identity Elements	Total Votes
Light pole Banners	14
Modern Gateway Signage	19
Wayfinding Signage	13
Traditional Gateway Signage	7
Street Art Installations	13
Interactive Public Art	17
Street-side Water Features	19
Local Food Trucks	32
Steel-cut Wall Art	3
Fountains	28
Murals	23
Sculptural Furniture	5

Streetscape Aesthetics

Streetscape Aesthetics Elements	Total Votes
Hanging Pole Planters	26
Potted Planters	11
Raised Planters	24
Expanded Sidewalks	31
Traditional Sidewalk Pavers	9
Landscaped Curb Bump-Outs	7
Concrete Sidewalk Pavers	3
Tree Grates	4
Street Trees	14
On-Street Bike Lanes	13
Off-Street Bike Lanes	27
Green Medians	10

Furniture and Safety Elements

Furniture and Safety Elements	Total Votes
Traditional Lighting	21
Modern / Traditional Lighting	5
Festive Lighting	32
Modern Lighting	3
Colored Crosswalks	18
Decorative Crosswalks	25
Individual Seating	3
Decorative Benches	18
Wooden Trash Receptacle	6
Parklets	35
Bike Racks	10
Metal Trash Receptacle	5

If there is one image you really don't like, please indicate that below.

Art and Identity Elements	Total Votes
Light pole Banners	4
Modern Gateway Signage	2
Wayfinding Signage	4
Traditional Gateway Signage	9
Street Art Installations	5
Interactive Public Art	0
Street-side Water Features	0
Local Food Trucks	3
Steel-cut Wall Art	2
Fountains	2
Murals	7
Sculptural Furniture	4

If there is one image you really don't like, please indicate that below.

Streetscape Aesthetics Elements	Total Votes
Hanging Pole Planters	6
Potted Planters	2
Raised Planters	0
Expanded Sidewalks	1
Traditional Sidewalk Pavers	5
Landscaped Curb Bump-Outs	10
Concrete Sidewalk Pavers	2
Tree Grates	10
Street Trees	1
On-Street Bike Lanes	11
Off-Street Bike Lanes	0
Green Medians	4

If there is one image you really don't like, please indicate that below.

Furniture and Safety Elements	Total Votes
Traditional Lighting	6
Modern / Traditional Lighting	1
Festive Lighting	4
Modern Lighting	9
Colored Crosswalks	0
Decorative Crosswalks	7
Individual Seating	6
Decorative Benches	0
Wooden Trash Receptacle	3
Parklets	2
Bike Racks	5
Metal Trash Receptacle	3

RANKING SURVEY

Bicycle and Pedestrian Amenities

Bicycle and Pedestrian Amenities	Responses																				Average Response	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		
Shared-Use Path	2	1	1	1	2	2	5	1	6	6	4	4	1	5	1	6	2	3	6	5	6	3
Buffered Bike Lane	1	2	2	5	4	5	6	5	5	5	5	3	5	6	2	2	3	4	3	6	5	4
Protected Bike Lane	3	3	3	6	1	3	4	6	4	4	1	1	6	4	4	5	5	2	2	4	3	4
Separated Bike Lane	4	4	4	3	5	1	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	4	1	1	1	2	4	3
Protected Cycle Track	5	5	5	4	3	4	2	4	3	2	6	5	4	2	5	1	6	6	4	3	2	4
Separated Cycle Track	6	6	6	2	6	6	1	3	1	1	2	6	2	1	6	3	4	5	5	1	1	3

INTERACTIVE MAP COMMENTS - 'I Don't Like This'

- The sidewalk/stormwater inlets at this intersection are not user-friendly, especially for the disabled and the visually impaired.
- Not an attractive business.
- This crossing is difficult.
- This is a dangerous/annoying intersection. It bears more traffic than it was originally built for. When the exit for Antioch was built off of I-35, it funneled traffic onto this road. This intersection could benefit from an entire redo, combined with the light at Merriam and Antioch, perhaps. During rush hour, the wait for the cross traffic on 50th Terr. is too long, and it's stressful since you can't see the oncoming traffic headed south.
- Agree with another comment that this intersection is difficult. Specifically, it is difficult for bikers trying to continue to the trail. I'd love to see the hike/bike trail moved so that they only have to cross one street instead of two.
- This intersection is bad in a car, and I can't imagine it on a bike or walking. It's just awkward and hard to navigate.
- With the loss of Hen House, this shopping area seems to have gone downhill a bit. Parking is less clean, and not having a good grocery close by is really frustrating.
- This intersection is AWFUL because you can't turn onto Merriam Lane when going north on Antioch. I've almost been hit here multiple times and I have friends who have been in wrecks here.
- These sidewalks are not easy to use.
- There's a creepy business with a peep hole or something and it skeeves everybody out.
- There are way too many of these used car shops, but this one is particularly problematic because they regularly park cars (for sale) at the end of their driveway, causing confusion at the train crossing intersection area.
- These folks are allowed to park an SUV halfway on the curb, across the main entrance to their business. Some of the things the city has cited me (and my business) on since moving here always reminds me of this exact thing.
- This sidewalk thing is the main reason I found this survey - my brother crashed his bike on the "sidewalk" out of confusion trying to figure out what was sidewalk and what was... the road, or a driveway, or whatever. This sidewalk problem is injuring kids.
- This restaurant's PA system (calling people to pick up orders) can be heard a block into the neighborhood. Not sure how they get away with it.
- The railroad and highway crossings need a lot of work so bikes and pedestrians can feel comfortable accessing both sides.
- Johnson Drive needs a road diet and wider sidewalks and bike lanes.
- This is an awkward crossing. It is also dangerous because the cyclist/pedestrian crossing east or west is given a white light to cross at the same time as the drivers are given a green light to turn through the path of the cyclist/pedestrian to the north.
- The signage for the Turkey Creek Trail is almost non-existent and the amount of debris here often makes the trail dangerous. I've noticed most cyclists eschew this part of the trail in favor of the street, further complicating an awkward intersection.
- This portion of the mixed use trail is uneven, narrow and confusing. It would be very difficult for someone in a wheel chair to use.
- Interstates divide communities. Quality pedestrian/cyclist crossings are essential. This one is very poor. It does not have space for bikes going both ways at the same time and is not maintained. Commuters are faced with debris, lots of glass and a lane plowed full of snow in the winter.
- This business is a business that needs to be closed. They have broken down cars parked on both sides of the road making things look like junk yard on the road. No one seems to care enough to close down this chop shop.
- Currently very poor visibility for drivers entering Merriam Drive from east side streets due to present landscaping and raised platform in front of business (feature from a previous "beautification" effort).
- Unsightly bldg usually with inventory in the front lot.
- Unsightly and unkempt lot.
- This end of Merriam Drive is terrible. Messy, unkempt, and gives the public a bad impression of the entire city. There needs to be a way to clean this up, or screen the businesses. Merriam will not be seen as a competitive city until this is done.
- This area is unkempt and unsightly. It gives visitors to Merriam a bad impression and holds Merriam back from competing with other cities.
- More vibrant and clean businesses should occupy this prominent intersection.
- There needs to be a push button cross walk light installed at this crossing for pedestrians. Cars speed along Switzer and never stop at the cross walk.
- Bad intersection.
- Overall to make Downtown attractive there will need to more retail with housing and less services business. Streetscapes etc will on be cosmetic doing nothing to bring pedestrian commerce. Mission is an example. Money will need to allocated to move existing businesses.
- This intersection is difficult. I use it frequently to get onto I-35 North.
- I don't like how this area that is not truly in "Downtown" Merriam goes down to one lane each way. I think after the Downtown this more commercial area should stay 2 lanes.
- Clean up the area around this gas station, possibly making it more inviting and blending it in to the remainder of the Downtown or ease of accessibility going in and out.
- The one way parking in this area is tight and difficult to maneuver.
- The back side of the many miscellaneous shops and other unknown "businesses" are an eyesore from the turkey creek trails. Basically allowed to park or leave anything in the back lots. Fencing or shrubs to tidy and cleanup area desired.
- The cars spilling to the edge of the street make it difficult to use sidewalks and an eyesore.
- Parking a beat up car in front of their door nightly implies security concerns for the neighborhood. If that's the case, that should be addressed. I am surprised that a car parked in the entrance is allowed by fire code or by city ordinance.
- We walk and bike through this area and always stop and turn around here as the traffic patterns and signage do not feel adequate for our safety.

INTERACTIVE MAP COMMENTS - 'I Like This!'

- Great market place for all type gatherings.
- Great trails.
- So awesome that this cool house/building has been renovated and loved! I've loved this building for a couple of decades now and am stoked that it's looking awesome.
- The marketplace and Turkey Creek Streamway are a great resource for the community! Green space, Farmer's Market, etc.
- SUCH a good park for all ages. Would love to see maybe some enhancements of the basketball court, etc. but it's clearly well used and loved no matter what. The updates to the children's' areas have been so good!
- I really like the marketplace and all the various uses it has! The bridge and park beyond that area are great, too.
- I like the small bar & grill restaurants that are on Merriam Lane. We think they add character and charm and are SO preferable to some of the big chain restaurants!
- I think this is where Hurricane Allie's is? I read a profile of the owner, and again, we LIKE the small, independent bar & grill restaurants so much more than big chains.
- LOVE the soda fountain and little coffee bar in the pharmacy!
- This looks like Waterfall Park? We love this place and the trail. Would LOVE to see more bike and hiking trails in Merriam. Antioch Park is super, but a road trail would be wonderful!
- We like all the small parks and the variety they offer, as well as the wonderful concerts and events that were held before the pandemic.
- Chatlain Park has always been lovely!
- I love this trail - I take my family on bike rides on the Turkey Creek Trail whenever the weather permits. Good trail!
- This area is oftentimes just peaceful enough to kill some time outside without having to go too far from home. Sometimes there are needles on the ground though. So that part isn't that great.
- I love the playground—though my own kids are way past using it. The tables are nice and I appreciate the ADA access. One more bench facing the falls would be a welcomed addition. The lone bench is often in use when we are there.
- Love the trail. It need to be resurfaced.
- One of the nicest parts of the trail. I often see folks in wheel chairs using this section and that makes me happy!
- The Gemini store has updated the building and the businesses in that building. The business brings in many different people from all over the Mid-west area who look at this store as a destination place to visit. With all of the improvements yet to come it will be a central gathering place for all.
- I like inclusive swing.
- My family loves walking the trail and often walk to this park. We love the addition of the inclusive swing and believe more inclusive park playgrounds should be available in Merriam. This park could benefit from a bathroom facility.
- I enjoy this bridge with the lights, flags, and flower baskets. It feels very hometown and welcoming.

INTERACTIVE MAP COMMENTS - 'This Area has Potential!'

- So much potential for public gatherings and events - food trucks, festivals etc.
- Would be great if we could figure out how to make both sides of I35 walkable/bike able eliminating all the traffic dangers.
- Would like to see restaurants/deli/dessert here in the historic building area.
- Food trucks, coffee truck here.
- The creek along here could really benefit from being cleaned and having the underbrush cut back. It could be really pretty if given some love. Maybe add a bench as well or a picnic table.
- This building/property should be restored and its rich history promoted. I'd bet most people, including residents in this area, are unaware of its history and significance. Same with the namesake of Brown Park. There is potential for turning this somewhat of an eyesore to a historic stop for people wanting to learn about black history.
- This area could be really cool with major cutting of the trees and underbrush and then trash removal. There is a cool looking old set of stairs here that seem like they could be worked on to create a park or something right here.
- The Downtown area is begging for a refresh, similar to what Downtown Mission had in the past few years. The renovation to Merriam Drive needs to continue from where it stopped further north (that part looks great! keep going!) and some restaurants would be an awesome addition. Also, for existing businesses, a planned refresh of signage and storefronts would be very beneficial. Similar to Downtown Lee's Summit. Merriam is full of potential!
- 3 Wishes - this building/area has so much potential! There is space along here to add other similar businesses that could be a draw to this store. This area could be developed to be a mixed use area with a coffee shop, book store, record store, antique store, etc. It could even be a potential area for a bier garden or open air music venue. The location next to I-35 is very easy to get to, and with the creek and park nearby it really has potential to be a gorgeous draw to Merriam.
- Merriam is begging for another grocery store ever since Hen House left. Could we get an Aldi, pretty please???
- This should be a neat shopping area, maybe coffee shops, etc. but I have been there maybe once in 15 years living here because there's not enough there.
- I think this is where some of the small automotive shops and car dealers are?
- While we love the smaller and independent shops, if you do any restructuring of the buildings on Merriam Drive, we hope that you do NOT do what Downtown OP did and build HUGE multistory buildings that have really ruined the charm and feel of the area. Two or three stories would be okay, but please don't add a bunch of really tall buildings. That would be our preference.
- Seems like there may be potential for an art installation or something like that along the railroad tracks and on the north side of Shawnee Mission Pkwy.
- This all looks VERY industrial and cold. With some additional sprucing up could look much more exciting and inviting.
- Parking for places such as Watts Up, On Point, Total Comfort, etc. is difficult to navigate. Makes me not go there.
- Better bike path/trail access across I-35 here or at anywhere along I-35. The interstate divides the city and there isn't easy access from one side to the other without a car.
- Crosswalk needed across Antioch somewhere between 67th St and Shawnee Mission Parkway. Way too many people cross here for there not to be one.
- When I stopped at this QuikTrip today, they were out of American cheese so I couldn't order a grilled cheese. Try harder, QuikTrip.
- First one to mark the dead Kmart! I know there are weird complications with this lot, but can we at least pretend that we're gonna do something with this? It's starting to combine together with the dead Taco Bell across the street.
- Need to ditch the big box/big parking lot and make a walkable retail environment.
- City should install paths to connect the adjacent neighborhoods to the park/streamway.
- It feels like one side of the interstate gets a lot more attention/safety than the others, and it's hard to cross without a car
- We use this section of the trail a lot and see how much use the soccer fields get. There is no doubt more space for soccer would be useful.
- The soccer fields are such a great feature. There is no doubt we need more. Consider adding a trail to Brown park and a second set of fields there. We would love to see the trail go to Brown Park with good signage.

INTERACTIVE MAP COMMENTS - 'This Area has Potential!' (Continued)

- There is a need for more soccer fields. This space is lovely and so very underused.
- We see so many folks with small children walking here or hanging out while the other parent shops at the market. Please consider adding a playground to draw more families to an area with no car traffic.
- Agree with earlier post. Human-powered paths need human-powered access lanes.
- Love the trail! This section of the trail is heavily used. However, it is in poor shape with crumbling edges and dangerous surface ripples that make for trouble when cyclists going in opposite directions pass each other. The grading is wrong here and directs rain and spring water over the trail. This causes a mess with leaves that become as slick as oil. In the winter the water freezes into sheets of black ice.
- Given the heavy use of the soccer fields at Waterfall Park, perhaps this space could be used for soccer fields with a "first come first served" system.
- Poor grading floods the trail here regularly.
- Poor grading floods the trail here. In the winter it is often solid ice.
- Maybe it looks industrial because it IS industrial? Everything can't be a trendy boutique!
- These automotive businesses support the car dealers, and the automotive sales taxes help keep Merriam property taxes lower than they otherwise would be.
- Amphitheater as an anchor draw for activities, large and small would be great.
- Possible parking or restaurant/entertainment area. Consider elevated buildings.
- Ferris wheel for identity and exposure to I35 with signage. Doesn't have to be an active wheel. Could be static with led lighting and advertising.
- Widen streets to create a local food truck park to support the amphitheater activities, draw people and help create other retail opportunities.
- Merriam Drive needs a bike lane from where the north bound trail runs into Merriam Drive at least to 55th to reconnect to trail. All of business driveways from the businesses along this section make biking on the sidewalk very dangerous due to vehicle traffic not watching for bikes. I ride this route several times a week.
- Merriam Drive needs bike lanes from Antioch to Carter.
- Carter needs bikes lanes.
- There is a natural gas pipeline right-of-way that runs between Edelweiss and Switzer Senior villas part of the land is sadly neglected. It would be nice to install a new connector trail where Edgewood intersects with Switzer and run up to the 71st trail connector.
- The trail is very nice to walking and biking. A yellow line down the center would help encourage walkers to stay to the right. Walkers tend to walk down the center and are often wearing headphone so they don't hear bikers coming. Walkers with dogs on long leashes typically occupy the entire width of trail.
- This area and south needs RETAIL-like Downtown Shawnee or OP--for walk-in traffic. Ice cream, coffee, mom-n-pop places--something to draw people in. Also, easier parking to make it easier--Maybe get rid of some of the tacky used car lots and make them public parking and get some small local businesses like Brookside or Downtown OP--handcrafted goods, non-profits, upscale thrift? for starters.
- This area is in desperate need of a face lift. Downtown Merriam could be the "Go To" place if it did not look so shabby on Merriam Lane south of Johnson Drive. Maybe some of our tax dollars could go to sprucing up the overall look of this part of Downtown. Would be great place for a couple of restaurants and shops. Shawnee is doing it, Overland Park did it, Mission did it. Lets make Merriam a destination instead of an eyesore.
- Turkey Creek itself collects a lot of trash and could use regular clean ups.
- I love the idea of attracted more restaurants, coffee shops, and small businesses on this strip. Similar to Downtown Mission or OP. Since we can walk from our house here, I'd love for there to be more family-friendly places to visit with my kids.
- I like this art sculpture/memorial here, just feel like it could be showcased a bit more. Very pretty area by the water.
- Great Potential to improve safety for bikes pedestrians and cars! Not sure how, but know that in a car it's a bit crazy, can't imagine on bike or pedestrian.
- Area by Merriam Farmers' Market has potential for small food and beverage businesses .instead of bringing in food trucks with their noise pollution from cheap generators consider shipping container type temporary structures that can be used for purpose of coffee shops food etc can be stacked to provide shelter etc. create vibrant stopping point by turkey creek flood plain not a concern as structures can be relocated easily area seems to be used mainly for overflow parking for car yards.