Southside Hickory Area-Wide Plan
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CONTENTS

Introduction .............................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 1
  Background ........................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 1
  Study Area ......................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 2
Community Engagement ....................................................................................................................................................................................................... 5
  Planning Principles ............................................................................................................................................................................................................ 5
    Inclusive Collaboration ................................................................................................................................................................................................. 5
    Market Based Strategies ............................................................................................................................................................................................. 5
    Local Economic Development ...................................................................................................................................................................................... 5
    Quality of Life ............................................................................................................................................................................................................... 5
    Environmental Restoration ....................................................................................................................................................................................... 5
    Community Revitalization ...................................................................................................................................................................................... 5
    Implementation Focus ................................................................................................................................................................................................... 5
Community Engagement Techniques .............................................................................................................................................................................. 6
  Brownfield Advisory Group ........................................................................................................................................................................................ 6
  Stakeholder Interviews ................................................................................................................................................................................................ 7
  Public Workshops ......................................................................................................................................................................................................... 8
Community Issues and Opportunities .............................................................................................................................................................................. 8
Brownfield Site Prioritization ...................................................................................................................................................................................... 9
  Site Identification Criteria ................................................................................................................................................................................................ 9
  Table 1- Preliminary Criteria and Scoring Matrix ................................................................................................................................................ 9
Study Area Brownfield Sites ................................................................................................................................................................................ 10
Existing Conditions and Infrastructure Assessment ................................................................................................................................................ 16
  Water Resources ............................................................................................................................................................................................................. 16
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restore Village Life</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Development Patterns</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure Improvements</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalyst Brownfield Sites</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site A: South Center Street @ Highway 127</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site B: Former Joan Fabrics Site</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site C: Former Pet Dairy</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site D: Former Contract Seating</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing the Plan</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure Work Program</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownfield Financial Planning and Strategy – Southside Hickory Planning Area</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Community Engagement</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Community Engagement Documentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Southside Planning Area Real Estate Market Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Catalyst Sites Financial Feasibility Analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURES

Figure 1 - Study Area ........................................................................................................................................................................................................... 3
Figure 2 - Neighborhoods .................................................................................................................................................................................................... 4
Figure 3 - Study Area Brownfields ................................................................................................................................................................................. 15
Figure 4 - Water Resources .......................................................................................................................................................................................... 17
Figure 5 - Topography and Steep Slopes ................................................................................................................................................................. 18
Figure 6 - Community Facilities .................................................................................................................................................................................. 20
Figure 7 - Water and Sewer Infrastructure .......................................................................................................................................................... 21
Figure 8 - Traffic ................................................................................................................................................................................................................ 23
Figure 9 - Sidewalks .......................................................................................................................................................................................................... 25
Figure 10 - Bicycle / Pedestrian Crashes ............................................................................................................................................................ 26
Figure 11 - Vacant Buildings and Undeveloped Land ........................................................................................................................................ 28
Figure 12 - Zoning .............................................................................................................................................................................................................. 29
Figure 13 - Future Land Use .................................................................................................................................................................................... 30
Figure 14 - Future Development Concept ........................................................................................................................................................ 36
Figure 15 - Proposed Catalyst Projects ............................................................................................................................................................ 41
INTRODUCTION

The Southside Hickory Area-Wide Plan is a strategic plan for the redevelopment of multiple brownfield sites along the US-70 corridor in southwest Hickory. The plan also highlights opportunities and barriers that extend beyond individual properties, promoting area-wide revitalization through the cleanup and redevelopment of targeted brownfield sites. Recommendations include projects that can be initiated or facilitated by the City or affiliated agencies in the near term to promote future redevelopment activities by private developers and non-profit entities. The study has been funded through a grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (BF AWP) Program, which assists communities in planning for the redevelopment and reuse of potentially contaminated properties known as brownfields.

BACKGROUND

The City of Hickory has been working for several years to identify contaminated properties and plan for environmental remediation and redevelopment throughout the city. Between 2007 and 2015, the City of Hickory received four grants through EPA’s Community Wide Brownfields Assessment Grant Program. These funds have been used to conduct environmental site assessments, develop cleanup plans, and assist in the redevelopment of the suspect brownfield sites.

The focus area of the assessment grants was the city’s Urban Revitalization Area (URA) as outlined in the Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan and approved by the Hickory City Council. The URA incorporates the city’s rail corridor, surrounds several disinvested roadway corridors, and incorporates several older and predominately minority neighborhoods.

Through the course of the assessment grants, such sites as the former Piedmont Wagon, Moretz Mill, Simmons Hosiery, Hollar Hosiery, Lyerly Mill sites were assessed, remediated and redeveloped through a strong public/private process. These newly redeveloped sites have expanded the city’s tax base, created hundreds of jobs, and repurposed historic and architectural icons in the City of Hickory.

In May 2015, the City of Hickory was awarded a Brownfields Area-Wide Planning Grant by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for its Southside project area along the US-70...
corridor in Southwest Hickory. EPA’s Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (BF AWP) Program enables a local community to develop a plan for assessing, cleaning up and reusing high priority brownfield sites. The area-wide plan addresses local environmental and public health challenges related to brownfields and benefits underserved or economically disadvantaged communities.

STUDY AREA

The Southside Hickory Planning Area is centered on US-70 between US-321 and Hwy 127. (See Figure 1 - Study Area) The US-70 corridor includes older strip commercial centers with some office/institutional uses on the northwest and a cluster of car dealerships on the southeast. The current U-Haul storage facility was originally developed as a shopping mall in the 1960’s. However, in the 1980’s the new Valley Hills Mall was developed approximately 3 miles east of the old mall, drawing new commercial activity away from the Planning Area. Older shopping centers, such as Midland Plaza and Hickory Plaza have experienced increased vacancy.

The Planning Area was delineated based on the presence of a concentration of brownfield properties and vacant commercial buildings. Several contaminated former industrial properties are located along S. Center St and 4th St Drive SW. In addition, there are several properties within the Planning Area that were used as landfills or unofficial dumping grounds. The old Hickory landfill was located between 4th St SW and 6th St Drive SW. Land located off 4th St Drive SW was formerly used as a landfill for large appliances. Likewise, land off Southgate Corporate Park is suspected of being the site of unofficial dumping activity.

EPA BROWNFIELDS AREA-WIDE PLANNING PROCESS

The Brownfields Area-Wide Planning (BF AWP) was initiated in 2010 to assist communities in planning for brownfield assessment, cleanup, and reuse. The resulting area-wide plans are intended to protect public health and the environment; identify economically viable reuse strategies; and reflect the community’s vision for the area.

Core elements of brownfield area-wide planning include:

- Community engagement to identify local issues, goals, and partnership opportunities
- Identification of priority brownfield sites and environmental conditions
- Evaluation of local market potential and infrastructure improvement needs
- Identification of potential catalyst projects and related brownfield cleanup needs
- Development of implementation strategies to leverage public investments and create partnerships

Residential uses within the Planning Area are located primarily north of US-70. The established neighborhoods of Green Park and Ridgeview extend into the study area, as do smaller portions of Westmont/West Hickory and Kenworth. (See Figure 2 - Neighborhoods) Residential areas include a mixture of single family and multi-family development, as well as scattered instances of manufactured housing. A concentration of public housing is located along S Center St.
FIGURE 1 - STUDY AREA
FIGURE 2 - NEIGHBORHOODS
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PLANNING PRINCIPLES
Throughout the development of the Area-Wide Plan several general planning principles were applied to ensure that the planning process and final product are representative of the needs and goals of the community.

INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION
The public outreach process has been designed to engage with a diverse set of citizens and stakeholders. In addition to community leaders, extra efforts have been included to gather input from low and moderate income residents. Planning workshops, focus groups, and advisory group meetings have been designed to encourage interaction and collaboration between participants. The planning team has provided multiple opportunities for comment and feedback on both the planning process and the final recommendations.

MARKET BASED STRATEGIES
While the planning process incorporates the aspirations of the community, recommended strategies and redevelopment concepts are based on a realistic market analysis. This ensures that the plan can be implemented and lead to positive change for the community.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Economic development strategies and future development concepts are intended to bring jobs that benefit the local community.

QUALITY OF LIFE
In addition to jobs, the plan seeks to identify key amenities that are necessary to enhance the quality of life within the community. Examples include walkability/connectivity, pedestrian safety and recreation opportunities.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION
As a study to address brownfield issues, the Southside Hickory Area-Wide Plan identifies issues and implementation steps needed to remediate, clean, and reuse contaminated properties. Furthermore, economic development initiatives identified favor clean industries over activity that may generate more pollution and contamination.

COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION
Future development strategies are intended to incrementally revitalize the community through the combination of public sector infrastructure investment and privately funded/financed development.

IMPLEMENTATION FOCUS
The plan is focused on concrete steps that can be undertaken to implement future development concepts. A short term work program has been included to identify planning actions, responsibilities, and anticipated costs. In addition, a long range vision for future redevelopment has been created to unify community goals and inspire change beyond the near term implementation tasks.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Community-based involvement is an important element of the planning process. Public input has been used to identify community priorities for near and long-term cleanup and reuse of brownfield sites. A variety of outreach techniques have been employed to gather input from both stakeholders and residents of the Southside Hickory Planning Area.

At the outset of the planning process a Community Engagement Plan (see Appendix) was created to serve as a guide for public outreach efforts in the project study area. A flexible approach to public outreach was taken to allow for adjustments in engagement techniques. For example, additional stakeholder interviews were conducted to build trust in the planning process and allow for direct input outside of workshops. The following section describes public participation tools and techniques used during the study process.

BROWNFIELD ADVISORY GROUP

Hickory's previous Brownfields Assessment Grants (awarded in 2007 and 2012) were guided by a Brownfields Advisory Group (BAG) made up of community and neighborhood leaders that were appointed by City Council. The BAG helped prioritize brownfields for assessment and redevelopment potential.

The BAG was reconvened for the Area-Wide Plan. Membership was adjusted to include representatives from local community associations, business and property owners, youth groups, the Chamber of Commerce, the Hickory Housing Authority, and other community partners in the project area. The following organizations are represented on the steering committee:

- Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG)
- Hickory Housing Authority
- Paramount of Hickory
- Moss Marlow Construction
- Hickory Board of Education
- City of Refuge Community Development Center
- Hickory Chamber of Commerce
- Exodus Homes
- Concerned Citizens of Ridgeview
- Friendship Baptist Church
- Local realtor/appraiser
- Centro Latino
- Green Park Neighborhood Association (GPNA)
The role of the Brownfield Advisory Group is to:

- obtain advice on the most effective and appropriate outreach methods,
- identify stakeholders and groups for participation,
- gain feedback on the process, and
- serve as project liaisons to the community

The BAG committee met five times during the AWP planning process at key milestones during the study process.

**Stakeholder Interviews**

Stakeholder interviews and focus groups were used as one-on-one and small group discussions, respectively, with an individual or organization recognized as a community leader, elected or appointed official, agency staff member, or neighborhood activist to provide input on the issues and process of the study effort. The stakeholder interviews and focus groups were identified in concert with city staff and BAG to represent a variety of perspectives. Additional interviews and follow-up discussions were conducted based on issues that arose during the planning process. The main purpose of the focus groups and interviews was to provide an early exchange of information on project goals, objectives, and the study process. Agencies and organizations interviewed include:

- Southside Heights Neighborhood Association
- West Hickory Neighborhood Association
- Concerned Citizens of Ridgeview
- Ward 4 Faith Leaders Group
- Hickory Branch NAACP
- Hickory School Board
- Youth groups
- Hmong community
- Habitat for Humanity
- Hickory and Catawba Home Builders Association Board of Realtors
- Major commercial realtors
- Owners of large properties in the study area
PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

The project included a multi-day charrette/design workshop, held at the Ridgeview Recreation Center on August 23, 24, and 25, 2016. Several community engagement activities were programmed throughout the workshop, including a kick-off community event, study area bus tour, open focus group meetings during the day, evening pin-up sessions, and community presentations.

This multiday time period allowed for the most efficient opportunity to meet with a large number of interest groups and citizens, gather their vision, and produce a detailed series of recommendations, plans and renderings that accurately reflect the vision of the community. Also, by setting up the workshop in the vicinity of the project area, it provided easier access to the businesses and the residents and allowed the team direct access to the catalyst brownfield sites during the design stage of the project. Another benefit of this method is that it captures and maintains the public’s attention in a collapsed timeframe which generates quality input and feedback.

A final public meeting presented the preliminary results of the multi-day activities. The planning team summarized the following: local issues and opportunities identified by community members; an illustrative depiction of the workshop attendees’ long-range vision for the area (see at right); and, short-term strategies that can encourage the incremental revitalization of the area.

Advertising for all workshops and meetings included a variety of media techniques including flyers, stakeholder notifications, e-mail, and website. Members of the BAG were also asked to assist in bringing awareness to scheduled events.

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Through individual stakeholder discussions, Brownfield Advisory Group meetings and public meetings, several key themes were emphasized by members of the community. The highly-accessible location of Southside Hickory and rich history of its communities is a point of pride and emphasis. But numerous factors have contributed to the current state of decline, including high vacancy rates in housing and commercial, havens for criminal activity, lack of investment in commercial property, insufficient infrastructure to promote walkability and connectivity, few amenities and contaminated properties due to past industrial activity and illegal dumping. These and other issues and opportunities are documented in more detail in the appendix.
BROWNFIELD SITE PRIORITIZATION

The Brownfield Area-Wide Planning process is intended to identify high priority, or catalyst, brownfield sites for assessment, cleanup, and reuse. Priority brownfields can be identified based on a range of criteria, including community interest, owner interest, environmental or health concerns, development potential, and local economic conditions. For the purpose of this study, catalyst brownfield sites are properties with the greatest potential to stimulate additional revitalization within the project area or improve community health and quality of life.

SITE IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA

The City of Hickory received several EPA grants to identify and assess environmental contamination at suspected brownfield sites. Between 2007 and 2015, planning staff and environmental engineering consultants identified over 100 known or suspect brownfield sites within the city. The grants were then used to assess approximately 50 individual properties suspected of petroleum and/or hazardous material contamination.

As part of the Brownfields Assessment Grant process, a series of criteria were applied to score and rank the city’s brownfield sites. Table 1- Preliminary Criteria and Scoring Matrix provides a description of each scoring factor applied. These criteria were developed and refined through consultation with the Brownfield Advisory Group.

The Southside Hickory Planning Area was then identified based on a concentration of brownfield properties within a low income community that is experiencing disinvestment and economic decline. The initial list of Planning Area brownfields was then prioritized in the Area-Wide planning process through community engagement and market analysis to identify potential catalyst projects that can spur revitalization and improve quality of life.

**Table 1- Preliminary Criteria and Scoring Matrix**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Scoring</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</table>
| Proximity to Success Sites| Scale 1 to 10 | 1 = Adjacent to Greenspace  
10 = Adjacent to Redevelopment |
| Environmental Concerns    | Scale 0 to 10 | 0 = No Known Issues  
5 = Suspected Contamination  
10 = Known Contamination, Proximity to Water |
| Existing Buildings        | Scale 0 to 10 | 0 = Substandard Building  
5 = Re-adaptable Building  
10 = Vacant lot |
| People Factor             | Scale 1 to 10 | 1 = Negative Impact  
5 = No Impact  
10 = Positive Impact |
| Development Potential     | Scale 1 to 10 | 1 = Low development potential  
10 = High development potential |
| Owner Interest            | 0, 5, or 10 | 0 = No owner contact or owner contacted but not interested  
5 = Owner contacted and possibly interested  
10 = Owner interested |
| Community Interest        | 0, 5, or 10 | 0 = No community interest or interest unknown  
5 = Community contacted and possibly interested  
10 = Community interested |

Notes:
1. Impact defined as: public receptors, crime rate, public health concerns, proximity to residential
2. Potential defined as: located in corridor (rail, visibility), available infrastructure, traffic count

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STUDY AREA BROWNFIELD SITES

Following the citywide inventory of brownfields, a cluster of potentially contaminated properties was identified along US-70 and S Center St. This concentration of brownfields was used as the basis for the Southside Hickory Planning Area.

Figure 3 - Study Area Brownfields shows the location of each of these properties. A brief synopsis of each property is provided in the following section.

1. Former Max Mexican Restaurant (Old Hickory Landfill)
   - Address: 535 7th Av Pl SW
   - Parcel ID#: 370210267099
   - Acres: 0.55
   - Zoning: C-3
   - Land Value: $32,300
   - Building Value: $47,700
   - Total Value: $80,000

2. Former Pet Dairy
   - Address: 461 Hwy 70 SW
   - Parcel ID#: 370214347658
   - Acres: 7.62
   - Zoning: C-3
   - Land Value: $795,800
   - Building Value: $182,000
   - Total Value: $977,800
3. **Midland Plaza**

- Address: 356 Hwy 70 SW
- Parcel ID#: 370214447865
- Acres: 11.62
- Zoning: C-3
- Land Value: $1,466,400
- Building Value: $1,012,100
- Total Value: $2,478,500

4. **Korean Baptist Church**

- Address: 934 S Center St
- Parcel ID#: 370211558254
- Acres: 0.17
- Zoning: NC
- Land Value: $4,400
- Building Value: $38,700
- Total Value: $43,100
5. Former Cranford Woodcarving

Address: 1014 S Center St
Parcel ID#: 370211558034
Acres: 1.45
Zoning: IND
Land Value: $37,900
Building Value: $137,500
Total Value: $175,400

6. Industrial Building - 1073 S Center St

Address: 1073 S Center St
Parcel ID#: 370215640587, 370215643703
Acres: 0.45, 1.83
Zoning: NC, R-4
Land Value: $23,500; $10,900
Building Value: $16,300
Total Value: $50,700
7. Former Gas Station
   Address: 1110 S Center St
   Parcel ID#: 370215549376
   Acres: 0.37
   Zoning: NC
   Land Value: $27,400
   Building Value: $51,200
   Total Value: $78,600

8. Auto Parts Warehouse
   Address: 1103 S Center St
   Parcel ID#: 370215641459, 370215643560
   Acres: 0.19, 1.57
   Zoning: NC
   Land Value: $9,900; $95,700
   Building Value: $59,500
   Total Value: $165,100
9. **Former Joan Fabrics** (two parcels)

- **Address:** 1125 S Center St
- **Parcel ID#:** 370215644254
- **Acres:** 2.33
- **Zoning:** IND
- **Land Value:** $88,200
- **Building Value:** $26,900
- **Total Value:** $115,100

- **Address:** 1152 2nd St. SE
- **Parcel ID#:** 370215646239
- **Acres:** 1.75
- **Zoning:** IND
- **Land Value:** $65,000
- **Building Value:** $58,500
- **Total Value:** $124,000

10. **Former Contract Seating**

- **Address:** 1280 4th St Dr SW
- **Parcel ID#:** 370214333509
- **Acres:** 5.98
- **Zoning:** C-3
- **Land Value:** $127,400
- **Building Value:** $208,700
- **Total Value:** $336,100
EXISTING CONDITIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE ASSESSMENT

This section of the Area-Wide Plan examines the existing conditions and infrastructure within the study area in order to identify constraints and resources related to future development potential.

WATER RESOURCES

Sensitive natural resources within the study area include some water and drainage features. Figure 4 - Water Resources shows the streams and floodplains running through the study area. The Geitner Branch runs through the west side of the study area, and the Barger Branch along the east side of the study area. Both of these streams feed into the Henry’s Fork tributary of the Catawba River. There are relatively few floodplains in the study area, with one notable flood prone area in the northwest corner of the study area at the Valley Rental Centers distribution warehouse.

No significant wetlands have been identified within the study area.

TOPOGRAPHY AND STEEP SLOPES

Topography and steep slopes present a challenge for development within some portions of the study area. Figure 5 - Topography and Steep Slopes shows contour lines and a calculation of slope by percentage grade within the study area. Some significant steep slopes are located around the Geitner Branch stream on the west side of the study area.

The elevation and slope data sets used to calculate slope were limited to the areas within the Hickory City Limits. Therefore, the unincorporated portions of the study area are not included within the slope calculation. The landfill behind the Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market (Parcel ID#: 370214246271) and the borrow pit off 2nd St SW/NC-127 (Parcel ID#: 370215532573) are both within these unincorporated areas. The borrow pit parcel currently owned by Exodus Outreach Ministries is currently being improved, with fill soil from a city sinkhole repair project being used to improve grades and construct an access road. Following these improvements the property will be more readily developable for appropriate uses.
FIGURE 4 - WATER RESOURCES
FIGURE 5 - TOPOGRAPHY AND STEEP SLOPES
COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Figure 6 - Community Facilities displays the public and civic facilities within the study area. Taft Broome Park, Ridgeview Library, Brown-Penn Senior Center, and the Hickory Ridgeview Recreation Center serve as a key recreation and public/institutional node on the northeast corner of the study area.

There are no schools within the study area. Students who live in the study area are bussed to schools throughout the city.

There is a concentration of public housing properties within the study area, with units located off S Center St and 2nd St SW. The presence of these properties has contributed to a concentration of low-moderate income residents in the study area.

Several small churches are located along S Center Street serving the local community. The Harvest Bible Chapel of Hickory is a large religious institution located off US-70 at US-321.

Some small nonprofit community development organizations are located in and around the study area, such as the Catawba County Partnership for Children at 738 4th St SW. Immigrant support organizations, such as the United Hmong Association office and Centro Latino office are located just outside the study area adjacent to Longview Elementary School.

WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

Figure 7 - Water and Sewer Infrastructure shows water and sewer lines within the study area. The City of Hickory provides both water and sewer service to the study area. Water and sewer capacity is sufficient for serving development in the area.
FIGURE 6 - COMMUNITY FACILITIES
FIGURE 7 - WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE
TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation infrastructure is both an important asset and challenge for the Southside Hickory Planning Area. The area has accessibility to several major regional transportation facilities. The Planning Area is adjacent to the interchange of two major expressways, Interstate 40 and US-321. This proximity to expressways provides the potential for regional logistics, warehousing, and office development. Likewise, as a major commercial thoroughfare, the US-70 corridor draws customers from regional traffic. However, the area also has relatively poor amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists. This auto-dominated landscape can negatively impact quality of life for residents and detract from the redevelopment potential of the area.

TRAFFIC

Interstate 40, forms the eastern boundary of the Planning Area and carries the greatest traffic volume, with an average of 67,000 trips daily. (See Figure 8 – Traffic) Similarly, US-321 forms the western boundary and carries approximately 39,000 daily trips. Both of these roads are developed as grade-separated limited-access expressways. Two major corridors running through the study area, US-70 and NC-127, are classified as principal arterials, under the NCDOT roadway functional classification. Roughly 17,000 cars pass through US-70 on a daily basis. US-70 is 4-5 lanes through the study area with a center turn lane or median. NC-127 is 4 lanes through the study area, but carries a lower traffic volume of 13,000-14,000 daily trips. It is currently operating under its design capacity.
FIGURE 8 – TRAFFIC
PEDESTRIAN / BICYCLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Much of the Planning Area has limited or poor pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Despite the high traffic volume on US-70, there are only a few segments of sidewalks along the corridor. (See Figure 9 - Sidewalks) Furthermore, the lack of crosswalks and pedestrian signalization on US-70 contribute to potentially dangerous conditions for pedestrians and transit users. More continuous sidewalks are located along S Center St, NC-127, 1st St SW, and 4th St SW.

There are currently no bicycle facilities within the study area, such as on-street bicycle lanes or multi-use trails. However, bicycle lanes have been proposed on 7th Ave SW west of 4th St SW.

Figure 10 - Bicycle / Pedestrian Crashes shows traffic incidents within the study area involving bicycles and pedestrians between 2007 and 2013. During that time period there were several bicycle crashes along S Center St. In 2016 a pedestrian was killed while attempting to cross US-70.
FIGURE 9 - SIDEWALKS
FIGURE 10 - BICYCLE / PEDESTRIAN CRASHES
LAND USE

The land use analysis focused on identifying developable land as well as potential redevelopment areas. Likewise, the zoning and currently adopted plans for the study area were reviewed to assess development potential and consistency with redevelopment concepts.

VACANT BUILDINGS AND UNDEVELOPED LAND

There are a significant number of vacant and underutilized buildings within the study area. (See Figure 11 - Vacant Buildings and Undeveloped Land) Several of the older strip shopping centers in the study area have experienced increased vacancies, including Midland Plaza and Hickory Plaza. These older shopping centers, including the former Mall site (currently U-Haul storage facility) also have significant amounts of large underutilized surface parking that could serve as a redevelopment opportunity. Several of the brownfield sites included in the Area-Wide Plan are vacant industrial sites, such as the former Pet Dairy, Contract Seating and Joan Fabrics properties.

ZONING

Zoning within the study area is primarily C-3 Regional Commercial along the US-70 corridor. (See Figure 12 - Zoning) Two smaller NC Neighborhood Commercial nodes are located along S Center St. Likewise, there are two nodes zoned for IND Industrial located along S Center St adjacent to the NC properties.

CURRENT PLANS

The Hickory by Choice 2030 Comprehensive Plan includes the city’s currently adopted future land use map. Figure 13 - Future Land Use provides a close up version of this map focused on the study area. The US-70 corridor between US-321 and NC-127 is designated as a Revitalization Area. The intent of this designation is to promote redevelopment and increased economic activity by applying flexible standards and targeted incentive programs. In order to provide flexibility for redevelopment, this future land use category is potentially compatible with a range of zoning categories, including C-2, C-3, OI, R-4, and IND. The study area also includes Neighborhood Mixed Use along 4th St SW and at the intersection of S Center St and NC-127. This designation is generally compatible with small scale NC Neighborhood Commercial. The Ridgeview neighborhood is planned for High Density Residential, which can allow for R-4 High Density Residential and OI Office Institutional.
FIGURE 11 - VACANT BUILDINGS AND UNDEVELOPED LAND
FIGURE 12 - ZONING
FIGURE 13 - FUTURE LAND USE
REAL ESTATE ANALYSIS SUMMARY

In order to determine the feasibility of various types of new development, a real estate market study was conducted. The primary market area for the study – the area from which the majority of real estate demand will emanate – included a 1 mile and 3 mile radius of the project area.

Based on local population, housing, and employment data as well as retail, office and industrial market conditions, the analysis identified potential future real estate demand over the next ten years. Key findings are presented here, with the full analysis presented in the Appendix.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Households in the local market area that surrounds the Southside Hickory Planning Area can be generalized as follows: slightly younger, more racially diverse and less affluent than households in other portions of Hickory. These characteristics will help to determine the future demand for real estate in the local area. However, given the proximity to major vehicular corridors, as well as a future greenway, demand for real estate in the Planning Area should also come from outside the local area to some extent.

HOUSING

Overall in Hickory there appears to be a potential lack of housing supply for the two growing age groups in the area: households age 25 to 34 and households age 65+. National trends show that these two age groups often seek similar housing options. Those options tend to include smaller (often attached) housing units in the form of townhomes and/or multifamily housing. Further, because these growing age groups are outside the typical highest-earning years for households, they often seek housing that is less expensive than they would during their late-30s, 40s and 50s. This home affordability is often found with smaller housing units, which fit the lifestyle of these groups, who generally have fewer children in the home. These groups are both increasingly seeking homes in walkable, higher density, locations. While the Planning Area is not characterized by its walkability in its current form, potential exists to insert higher-intensity housing in key locations. If executed properly, the Planning Area could attract housing that would be desirable to the growing age groups, creating a market opportunity in the area.
EMPLOYMENT

The Hickory economy has shown growth over the past five years, particularly in certain employment sectors. These higher-growth sectors include: Wholesale, Real Estate, and Professional/Technical Services, which are typically characterized by higher income jobs. The recent past and expected future growth in the Wholesale sector could create employment opportunities in the Southside Hickory Planning Area, as those jobs tend to locate in areas near interstates and other major transportation corridors. Currently, the Planning Area lacks modern buildings that would likely attract these types of jobs, but an opportunity likely exists to build new buildings on vacant land and/or to retro-fit existing structures in the area to meet the needs of Hickory’s growing employment sectors.

MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

While the best market opportunities in the Study Area, as described above, are likely the development of higher-intensity housing and/or wholesaling operations, an additional opportunity may exist. A smaller-scale mixed-use/mixed-income development could likely find success north of US-70, specifically at the intersection with Hwy. 127, which is also the location of the highest concentration of brownfield sites. This type of development would likely need subsidies and/or the cooperation of the Hickory Housing Authority to fully succeed, but could fit into the plans for the redevelopment of public housing units in the Ridgeview neighborhood. This type of development could serve Ridgeview and the broader Southside Hickory area as a new walkable residential/commercial node.

While the opportunity for new retail in the area is likely very limited, new retail could find success if targeted properly to meet the needs of the local consumers in, and near, the Planning Area. The development of the Walmart Neighborhood Market is an example of this type of “targeted” retail development. Future retail development in the area could come at a smaller-scale as part of the aforementioned mixed-use/mixed-income scenario.

STRATEGIES

In order to attract the attention of the development community to the market opportunities in the Southside Hickory Planning Area, three “big picture” strategies could be employed:

a) Build-upon and highlight the unique/authentic/historical elements of the local area such as historic locations in Ridgeview, the mid-20th century architecture and “commercial hub” history of the US-70 corridor.

b) Develop and enhance “active transportation” amenities in the area, such as bike/pedestrian linkages to downtown Hickory and the river, including solutions for crossing US-70 on foot and/or bike.

c) Seek Brownfield redevelopment funding to act as a “market enhancer” for development. That is, there may be a gap between the actual financial returns achievable for development in the area and the type of returns developers would seek. Thus to attract private development, funding from a Brownfield revolving loan fund, or other funding or subsidy mechanism, may be necessary.
FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT

The Future Development Concept for the Southside Hickory Area-Wide Plan includes a general vision for redevelopment as well as specific projects recommended to implement the plan. First, the Future Development Concept map outlines the overall, long-term vision for land uses and general development patterns within the Planning Area. (See Figure 14 - Future Development Concept). Next, specific short-term (five years or less) projects have been identified that are intended to catalyze redevelopment of brownfield sites and the surrounding community (see Figure 15 – Proposed Catalyst Infrastructure Projects).

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

BOULEVARD THE HIGHWAY

- Change the character of US-70 from a uniquely auto-oriented corridor to a “complete street” boulevard
  - Install streetscapes, including sidewalks and crosswalks at key intersections
  - Install street trees and a median along a key section of the US-70 corridor where mixed use redevelopment is recommended

CONNECT TO CITYWALK

- Plan for pedestrian and bicycle oriented streetscape improvements linked to the CityWalk greenway initiative
- Create a network of “Complete Streets” that accommodate multiple modes of transportation, including bicycles, pedestrians, cars, and transit

- Plan for traffic calming, such as roundabouts at key intersections

PLAN FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

- Counteract the perception of unhealthy conditions related to environmental contamination
- Create additional greenspace/parks in the area with fitness facilities and fitness related event programming
- Provide better bicycle/pedestrian connectivity among neighborhoods, parks and commercial/employment centers

CLEAN THE ENVIRONMENT

- Continue to pursue EPA grant funding for testing and cleanup of suspected brownfield properties
- Encourage environmentally friendly building design and construction with LEED certification for new development

CREATE A SENSE OF PLACE

- Improve the image of the community and create a sense of place.
  - Install gateway signage near US-70 @ US-321 and 4th St. DR SW @ Hwy.127
  - Create a rebranding campaign and specialized signage for the corridor
  - Install landscaping and street trees to improve aesthetics along the corridor

CREATE JOBS

- Encourage economic development in the study area that benefits the local community.
Southside Hickory Area-Wide Plan

- Plan for industrial development opportunities, including the new warehousing and manufacturing uses
- Plan truck routes that would provide access to industrial sites without impacting neighborhoods or proposed mixed use redevelopment
  - Attract new professional employment in the study area
    - Plan and zone for office / professional land uses
    - Work with the City of Refuge to develop headquarters office space in the study area
    - Stabilize existing office development and address potential sick building issues
      - Apply EPA grant funding to test sick buildings suspected of vapor intrusion issues related to past dumping activities

Provide Housing Options

- Create a new housing options connected to or integrated with the mixed use redevelopment of older shopping centers
  - Encourage a blend of housing types, including single family residential, townhomes, condominiums, and apartments
  - Include higher density housing near mixed use commercial, with lower density townhomes and single family residential located adjacent to established neighborhoods
  - Encourage lifestyle housing concepts of active retirement and young singles
- Provide affordable housing options that can benefit the community

- Encourage mixed income redevelopment of public housing complexes
- Encourage the inclusion of an affordable housing component in new development, through tax credits
- Discourage concentration of public housing and Section 8 properties within any one neighborhood

Restore Village Life

- Provide land use, zoning and design flexibility that may encourage future redevelopment of older shopping centers into pedestrian oriented mixed use environments
  - Encourage the colocation of walkable “Main Street” retail with new high density condominiums and townhomes
  - Leverage public investments in streetscapes, parks, and plazas to encourage mixed use redevelopment
  - Plan for connectivity by breaking up large superblocks and reconnecting the urban grid
  - Encourage new buildings to be oriented close to the street with parking placed in the rear or side of the development
- Conduct community events and demonstration projects to build interest and support for redevelopment initiatives, proposed streetscapes, and new greenspace
  - Use large underutilized parking areas to hold events such as seasonal fairs and temporary park installations
Install temporary streetscape elements to demonstrate and test potential reconfiguration of streets and intersections

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

From a future land use and development planning standpoint, key emphasis should be placed on flexibility. The City land use plan and zoning regulations should be used to protect the Southside Hickory Planning Area from future uses and development that would be expected to negatively impact existing residents and the area as a whole. However, there is much to be gained by streamlining the process for approval of the wide variety of developments that would be considered compatible with the vision for revitalization. To this end, the core of the Planning Area is recommended for a “Mixed Use Center” future development pattern, with surrounding areas recommended for residential, commercial and office/industrial uses that are generally consistent with current uses.

To achieve a true Mixed Use Center over time, as is envisioned for the US-70 corridor between approximately 4th Street Drive and the Highway 127 overpass, a significant amount of infill development and redevelopment will be required. The prevailing existing development pattern of commercial shopping centers with expansive surface parking lots lends to a variety of creative approaches to redevelopment. Existing buildings can be adaptively reused for different types of uses than traditional retail commercial, including recreation/entertainment uses, “back office” employment centers or even light manufacturing. Parking lots can be subdivided into blocks to support construction of infill residential or other uses. It is not expected that the market will drive a consistent type of redevelopment in this Mixed Use Center; rather there will be a wide variety of approaches to redevelopment that should be supported by flexible planning and regulations.

On the north side of the US-70 corridor, beyond Mixed Use Center areas, the emphasis should be on neighborhood preservation, enhancement and residential infill development. Specific locations are identified for Multi-Family Residential either where higher density currently exists or where there is opportunity for compatible higher density housing, particularly at the neighborhood edge. A balance of many smaller (e.g. single-family parcel size) infill housing investments and a few major multi-family housing developments can result, over time, in a more dense and vibrant neighborhood environment.

To the east/southeast of the Highway 127 overpass, and also adjacent to the east of the US-321 interchange, recommended land uses are Commercial/Retail and Office/Industrial, generally consistent with existing conditions and uses. The automobile retail sales and service corridor that extends along US-70 from the Highway 127 overpass to well beyond I-40 is a true regional automotive commercial hub, important for the Hickory economy. And business park land along the east side of US-321 provides some employment and space for new job-creating businesses. These areas should be promoted for future economic development opportunities, and they will be bolstered by successful achievement of catalyst projects for infrastructure enhancement and brownfield redevelopment.
FIGURE 14 - FUTURE DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT
CATALYST INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Public-funded infrastructure investments are one means to encourage private investment and revitalization. They are also important for general maintenance and upgrade of the systems and routes that serve the broader city-wide population. Drawing from the previously described Southside Hickory Planning Area analyses and public input, several infrastructure improvement project recommendations are included in this Area-Wide plan. It is not intended or expected that these infrastructure project recommendations are comprehensive in addressing infrastructure needs in the Planning Area. It is intended that they serve as catalysts, providing visible evidence of community improvement and, in most cases, amenities to support and enhance quality of life in the Planning Area.

GATEWAY SIGNAGE

There is a major Southside Hickory (and city of Hickory) gateway location at the US-321 and US-70 interchange. A project is currently underway to complete design of gateway monument and associated landscape improvements oriented to traffic exiting US-321 onto US-70 eastbound. This planned improvement project is complementary to the objectives of the Southside Hickory Area-Wide Plan. Additionally, there is a gateway location at the intersection of Highway 127 and 4th Street Drive SW (south of the U-Haul facility). Future gateway signage, landscaping and monuments at this location should be compatible with the gateway design for US-321 at US-70.

CROSSWALK ENHANCEMENTS

A short range recommended project to improve walkability across the wide US-70 corridor is improvement to and/or addition of new crosswalks, including striping and pedestrian signals. Due to the width of the crossing distance, a design that includes pedestrian safety islands would be preferable. The most important factors are highly visible reflective striping, signage and user-friendly signals. Crosswalk enhancements are appropriate at the intersections of US-70 with 6th Street Drive, 4th Street Drive, and South Center Street, as well as the intersection of Highway 127 with South Center Street.
**BICYCLE ROUTE**

Bicycle route designation is recommended for a loop extending into the Southside Hickory and connecting north to downtown Hickory. Included streets are 3rd Street Drive, 4th Street, 8th Avenue Drive and 1st Street. The project would involve coordination for designation as a bicycle route, installation of signage, addition of “Sharrows” to pavement (where appropriate), and integration into coordinated streetscape and multi-use path plans.

**BICYCLE LANES**

Where adequate road width either exists or can be created through modification, the option of adding bicycle lanes enhances the environment for cyclists. Recommended streets for bicycle lane additions include 7th Avenue Place, South Center Street, Highway 127, 4th Street Drive, Hickory Plaza, 6th Street Drive, and 7th Avenue Place. In total approximately 4 miles of bicycle lanes are recommended within the Southside Hickory area, and should extend to connect northward into downtown Hickory via 4th Street and South Center Street.

Examples of Bike Route and Bike Lane signage and striping
STREETSCAPE DEMONSTRATION

As the key connection between Southside Hickory and downtown, 4th Street is recommended to receive an improvement project to establish a “Complete Street” environment, inclusive of travel lanes, bicycle lanes, sidewalks, landscaping and furnishings with associated signage. Notionally, a demonstration project would extend for approximately 0.25 miles, centered on 7th Avenue. Further project definition would be required to determine logical termini and specific complete street roadway section to be implemented.

SIDEWALKS

Where gaps exist, and in particular along US-70, sidewalks should be added to promote basic walkability in the Southside Hickory Planning Area. A total of approximately 2.5 miles of sidewalk construction is recommended for US-70 (north and south sides), South Center Street (between Highway 127 and US-70), and Highway 127 (across the bridge over US-70 and extending to the intersection with South Center Street.)
**LANDSCAPED MEDIAN**

To the extent possible, addition of a landscaped median to US-70 in Southside Hickory would greatly enhance the attractiveness and walkability of the area, including traffic calming and safety enhancement. Addition of medians is generally recommended for the stretch between 4th Street and the Highway 127 overpass. Design of median sections should be coordinated with plans for crosswalk improvements, and should be aesthetically coordinated with gateway design in terms of landscape planting.

**MULTI-USE TRAILS**

In conjunction with bicycle lanes and streetscape improvements, multi-use trails can provide enhanced pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that extends from streets to parks/greenspaces and to adjacent neighborhoods. Multi-use paths range from 10 foot wide to 12 foot wide pavement sections, either concrete or asphalt, for 2-way bicycle and pedestrian traffic. Conceptually, an approximate 2 mile multi-use trail system is mapped for Southside Hickory, including trails within the proposed passive park in the southwest portion of the Planning Area to 4th Street at a point connecting to the 4th Street bicycle route.

**PASSIVE PARK/GREENSPACE**

The City of Hickory owns property in the southwest portion of the study area. With property acquisition and improvements, a passive park can be created on land that is, generally speaking, the least suitable for development in the Planning Area due to its topography and a creek/drainage corridor. In the long term, a passive park with multi-use trail connectivity to area commercial property and neighborhoods can be a key asset for the Southside Hickory area.
FIGURE 15 – PROPOSED CATALYST INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

PROPOSED CATALYST PROJECTS

CATALYST PROJECTS
1. Gateway Signage
2. Crosswalks
3. Bicycle Route
4. Bicycle Lanes
5. Streetscape Demonstration Event
6. Sidewalks
7. Landscaped Median
8. Confirm / Complete Brownfield Assessments
9. Multi-Use Trails
10. Lifestyle / Fitness Park

Legend:
- Gateway
- Bicycle Route
- Bicycle Lane
- Sidewalks
- Trails
- Median
- Crosswalks
- Brownfield Assessment
- Parks and Greenspace

Scale: 0 - 0.5 Miles
CATALYST BROWNFIELD SITES

The term “catalyst site” is used to describe specific property, or grouping of properties, perceived to have potential for redevelopment in the short term and, due to a variety of factors, added potential to inspire further redevelopment in the vicinity. Ten potential catalyst sites for brownfield redevelopment projects were identified through the Area-Wide Plan process (see Figure 3 - Study Area Brownfields). Of those ten, four have been studied further to determine feasibility as primary short-term opportunity catalyst sites. The following map shows location of all identified potential catalyst sites, and subsequent discussion presents additional detail about the four sites.

A financial feasibility analysis (see Real Estate Market Study: Catalyst Sites Financial Feasibility Analysis in the Appendix) considered a wide range of development and reuse alternatives for each of the four catalyst sites in the Southside Hickory Planning Area including:

- For-sale Residential
- Rental Apartments
- Senior Housing
- Retail
- Office
- Industrial

The analyses included creation of pro forma models for each site. Pro forma analysis includes the following factors:

- Evaluation of Costs vs. Revenues over time
- Testing of development scenarios
- Illustration of the financial feasibility of developing the suggested prototypes for a catalyst site
- Illustration of the impacts of market realities of development and the cost of the environmental cleanup on overall financial feasibility of the projects

Overall, the catalyst site financial feasibility analysis findings including a few key points. Overall, expected development costs make the proposed redevelopment concepts difficult to achieve given the revenue potential. Environmental cleanup costs makes the projects more difficult. Therefore, ways to mitigate costs through development incentive programs and other innovative strategies are likely to be needed for redevelopment of most sites.

Additionally, and of great importance to the potential for revitalization of the broader Planning Area, the potential to create jobs through redevelopment exists in two portions of the Planning Area. North of US-70 there is potential to create community-oriented jobs, possibly in partnership with outside philanthropic initiatives. South of US-70 there is potential to create larger-scale, regionally attractive jobs through redevelopment of larger sites for modern manufacturing, warehousing and distribution businesses. Successful brownfield redevelopment that results in job creation has the greatest catalyst potential in the Planning Area.
SITE A: SOUTH CENTER STREET @ HIGHWAY 127

Adjacent parcels on the north side of Highway 127 and on the east and west sides of South Center Street comprise Site A. Specifically, these properties can be described as the former gas station at 1110 S. Center Street, the industrial building at 1073 S. Center Street, and the auto parts warehouse at 1103 S. Center Street. The tested scenario is redevelopment for mixed-density residential use. Coordinated redevelopment of these properties would be expected to achieve multiple benefits, including correcting blight, addressing public safety concerns, adding quality affordable housing, and enhancing the adjacent community through designed compatibility. There is potential for phased development of a redevelopment concept, and potential for a partnership approach that helps meet public housing needs.

The illustrated redevelopment scenario results in 125 new mixed-income apartments on the total 4.4 acres of property, including amenities and a leasing office. Environmental clean-up requirements are estimated to be significant with removal of underground tank(s), removal of impacted soil, demolition of existing structures, and installation of vapor intrusion systems in new structures. Pro forma analysis suggests that, if approached as a standard market-based redevelopment project, the internal rate of return would be in the range of 6% which is generally considered to be financially infeasible from an investment standpoint. A variety of incentives, including funding for environmental clean-up as well as tax credits associated with housing programs, would be required to achieve an internal rate of return adequately close to standards (approximately 15%).

SITE B: FORMER JOAN FABRICS SITE

The Joan Fabrics site is a 4 acre parcel located along the south side of Highway 127, east of its intersection with South Center Street. There are existing industrial buildings on the property. The tested scenario is redevelopment for industrial use, including reuse of the existing building. Successful industrial redevelopment of this property for the long-term (recognizing that there is current short-term use) would be expected to provide local jobs, enhance local market for wholesale business activity, and have minimal impacts or impediments due to good roadway access, existing use and zoning.

The illustrated redevelopment scenario results in over 40,000 square feet of renovated industrial building space appropriate for warehousing or light manufacturing. It is
SITE C: FORMER PET DAIRY

The Pet Dairy site is a 7.6 acre parcel located along the south side of US US-70 with address of 461 US-70 SW and frontage on 4th Street. There are existing industrial buildings on the property. The tested scenario is redevelopment for industrial use, including reuse of part of the existing building (high-bay portion). The site is highly visible, has strong access and potential for phased redevelopment. Successful redevelopment of this site can have the benefit of expanding local employment by helping to establish the area south of US-70 as a desirable location for distribution, warehousing and modern light manufacturing.

The redevelopment scenario results in over 130,000 square feet of warehouse/light manufacturing/flex space in a highly visible and accessible location. It is estimated that environmental clean-up requirements would be primarily associated with demolition of portions of the existing structure (asbestos, hydraulic equipment, etc.) as well as vapor membrane barrier and vapor intrusion depressurization system installation. Pro forma analysis suggests that expected rental rates would not likely result in an internal rate of return that would be considered financially feasible, but achieving higher than anticipated rental rate or reducing redevelopment cost with incentives to reduce costs for acquisition, environmental clean-up, and construction cost could bring a project into financial feasibility range. Use of North Carolina Brownfields Program Tax Abatements program and other programs such as North Carolina Job Development Investment Grants would be critical to success.

SITE D: FORMER CONTRACT SEATING

The former Contract Seating site is an approximately 6 acre property on 4th St. Drive SW, to the south of the U-Haul facility on the former Hickory Mall site. The existing 23,000 square foot building is currently occupied by a light industrial/warehousing business. The tested scenario is redevelopment of the site with a larger industrial structure. The site has good access, appropriate zoning and is in an appropriate location to attract wholesale business development, or similar.

The redevelopment scenario results in a 70,000 square foot new warehouse/distribution facility on the 6 acre property. Though the existing 23,000 square foot structure is currently

estimated that environmental clean-up requirements would be limited to installation of a vapor intrusion depressurization system. Pro forma analysis suggests that reasonable rental rates would create a net operating income that would be adequate to cover estimated costs for a developer to acquire and renovate buildings and maintain a 15% internal rate of return. Thus the redevelopment scenario is estimated to be financially feasible.
in use and has potential for longer term use, the site is capable for a greater amount of development in the long term. A phased approach to redevelopment could maintain the existing building and add a second building, or maintain existing building to the end of its useful life then demolish and build a larger new structure. It is estimated that environmental clean-up costs would be very limited. As studied, the project is marginally feasible at rental rates assumed to be reasonable. Either higher than expected rental rates or incentives to offset development costs would be required to achieve industry standard internal rate of return levels.
IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

INFRASTRUCTURE WORK PROGRAM

Programmatic level budgeting for infrastructure improvements is an appropriate first step to realize the opportunity of catalyst projects. Some recommended catalyst infrastructure projects are already planned or underway; this table captures those as well as recommended infrastructure enhancements that may not have been previously considered.

From a design standpoint, all recommended infrastructure enhancements should be viewed as highly visible projects, and a unifying design theme should be implemented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Responsible Party</th>
<th>Estimated Cost</th>
<th>Funding Source</th>
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<td>Gateway Signage (US 321 @ US 70, 4th St. Dr. SW @ Hwy. 127)</td>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>City Bond</td>
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<td>Crosswalk Enhancements (US 70 @ 6th St., 4th St., S. Center St.; S. Center St. @ Hwy 127)</td>
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<td>City, NCDOT</td>
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<td>Bicycle Lanes (7th Ave., S. Center St., Hwy 127, 4th St., Hickory Plaza, 6th St., 7th Ave. Pl. SW)</td>
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<td>$100,000*</td>
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<td>Streetscape Demonstration (4th St.)</td>
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*Note: Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) Estimates are for planning level budgeting purposes, are not inclusive of potential right-of-way (ROW) acquisition requirements, and are not based on a design concept. Updated ROM estimates for each project should be developed following preparation of a detailed design concept and assessment of ROW requirements.
BROWNFIELD REDEVELOPMENT FINANCIAL PLANNING AND STRATEGY

The potential for successful redevelopment of key properties within the Southside Hickory Planning Area would be enhanced through supportive public-private partnerships. These partnerships could aid in several ways, from financing cooperation to regulatory assistance. There is a range of public agencies that could partner with private developers to enhance development opportunities including, but not limited to, the City of Hickory, the State of North Carolina, the federal government, the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation, the Catawba County Chamber of Commerce and the Western Piedmont Council of Governments.

Barriers to redevelopment in the Southside Hickory area are primarily market driven, secondarily cost driven. Regardless of brownfield impacts, in the current market the potential redevelopment projects in the Planning Area may not generate a return on investment adequately comparable to other areas. Achievable revenues for end products (rents or sale prices) are typically lower in the Southside Hickory Planning Area and trends suggest there is less potential for long-term appreciation. Financial assistance to address brownfield cleanup costs is important for specific sites, but will not necessarily improve the short term redevelopment prospects relative to the much broader market conditions that may discourage private investment in the area.

Layering on brownfield complications makes redevelopment in the area more difficult, but public-private partnerships can help to mitigate some of these challenges. It can be difficult for a developer to secure acquisition financing for a brownfield site until liability and the regulatory burdens are fully quantified.

From a developer’s perspective, added uncertainty regarding remediation costs, the increased time required to address environmental impacts, and the inability of individual projects to change the market settings around them are key barriers to investing in smaller projects in a marginal market location, as is the current condition of sites under consideration in this study. If comparable investment alternatives exist in the local area that do not require the added time and risk associated with brownfield sites, investment capital will seek lower-risk alternatives first.

State tax incentives for brownfield cleanup are helpful, but in some cases they do not flow to the entity that is incurring the added cleanup costs. In any case, more and improved financial incentives are likely needed to attract private equity and investment for catalyst sites redevelopment. These incentives may include:

- Federal Grants, including Community Development Block Grants,
- North Carolina Job Development Investment Grants,
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF),
- New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC),
- Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC).

It may be necessary to create a well-capitalized development authority that can acquire sites, assume environmental liability from property owners, begin to change the market perceptions of the area and create the potential for developers to achieve adequate financial returns. Often TIFs provide opportunities to offset hard development costs and this strategy, among others,
could directly incentivize early catalyst redevelopment projects in the area.

A complicated and bureaucratic approval process can impact the redevelopment potential for a site, particularly if brownfield clean-up is necessary. To overcome these challenges a range of solutions should be explored. Expedited regulatory review process with fast track approval for particular sites or a larger area may spark interest from the private sector. Further, local governments that provide a clear outline of the existing policy framework regarding local entitlements and assistance with state and federal regulatory requirements can ease the bureaucratic burdens, real or perceived, for potential brownfield redevelopment.

Local leaders may consider the creation of a state and/or local government sanctioned agency that is charged with redevelopment of the Southside Hickory Planning Area. Such an agency, which may include both public and private sector members, could facilitate acquisition of property by state and local legislation, purchase of sites on the free market, the formation of a “land bank” through parcel assemblage, and/or parcel clean-up or a revolving loan fund for redevelopment. The redevelopment agency could assume environmental liability on brownfield properties with the goal to get sites to the point where existing structures are abated and/or demolished and soil remediation is complete.

Other possibilities include an overlay district and/or a Community Improvement District (CID) in which property owners in the area pay into a fund for public safety, lighting, public property cleanup and implementation of other community improvement programs that could in turn, help to attract additional private sector investments. Overall, a combination of multiple strategies and “tools” will be required to accomplish redevelopment of brownfield sites in the Southside Hickory Planning Area, and the correct combination will differ according to site and market conditions at the time.

ONGOING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Continued outreach and communication by the City within the community is key to the future implementation and success of the Southside Hickory Area-Wide Plan. During the planning process, strong interest was shown by members of the community to have consistent engagement and opportunities to learn about and influence planning outcomes. Ongoing communication will instill a sense of stability and help members of the community maintain awareness and track progress of future plans. Following are community engagement recommendations for consideration.

- Expand the membership of the BAG committee to include broader perspectives that can inform planning outcomes. Many agencies, organizations and individuals have both a direct and indirect impact on the future of the Southside Hickory area and could assist with and benefit from being involved with the Advisory Committee. Additional resources could be leveraged by involving local, state and regional agencies as well as institutions in the future of the area. Recommendations for additional members should be coordinated with the City.

- Conduct quarterly BAG committee meetings with updates to the progress of Area-Wide Plan implementation. If possible, establish set dates and times for early coordination. Additionally, extend invitations to elected officials including local, state and
federal to learn more about the Brownfields program and redevelopment initiatives and, where possible, to assist with resources.

- Explore with active and interested community members the opportunities and benefits of establishing a non-profit community housing development organization (CHDO) that will enable local stakeholders to manage neighborhood level projects and programs. Such an organization will require extensive training and capacity building through possible resources from area institutions and agencies. Many examples of prototypes exist and can be initially coordinated with direction from the City.

- Conduct annual (or more frequent) community public meetings with updates to the progress of the Area-Wide Plan. If possible, establish set dates and times for early coordination. Additionally, extend invitations to elected and appointed representatives including local, state and federal to learn more about the Brownfields program and redevelopment initiatives.

- A communication database was established during the planning process and includes contact information residents and other stakeholders who participated. The database should be expanded as involvement grows. Additionally, add all elected and appointed officials from the local, state and federal levels to the list. This will ensure greater awareness with representatives who may not otherwise be engage