

Saugatuck

A Gateway for Westport

December 2017

Acknowledgements

The Town of Westport, through a grant administered by the State of Connecticut Office of Policy & Management, engaged a Consultant team to generate a Transit Oriented Development Plan outlining a vision for the Saugatuck Neighborhood. First Selectman Jim Marpe and Co-Chairs Craig Schiavone, Citizen of Westport, and

Mary K. Young, Planning and Zoning Director for the Town of Westport selected a committee of stakeholders and residents of Saugatuck to guide the study and provide valuable feedback to the Consultant Team. This committee, officially titled the Saugatuck Steering Committee (SSC), are listed below:

SAUGATUCK TOD MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

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- Al DiGuido
- Marty Fox
- Ward French
- Leigh Gage
- Peter Gold
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- Cathy Walsh
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Executive Summary



Executive Summary



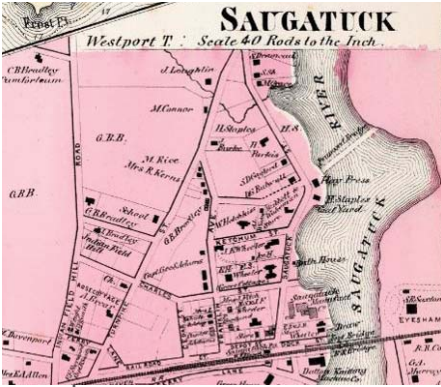
INTRODUCTION

The Saugatuck neighborhood of Westport is, and always has been, linked with its transportation infrastructure throughout its history. Serving as a port, and sitting near the mouth of the Saugatuck River, where it empties into Long Island Sound, the Saugatuck neighborhood was one of the earliest areas settled in Westport, and served as its first “town center”.

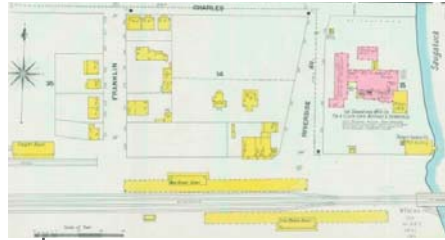
In 1848, the New York and New Haven Railroad was constructed, bisecting Saugatuck, and setting the stage for what would eventually become a transportation hub, with a commuter line established in 1880, connecting Westport to New York City. Today, that railroad is both the busy Northeast Corridor served by

Amtrak, and more specifically for Westport, the Metro North New Haven Commuter Rail Line, providing frequent service to Grand Central Station in New York City.

For almost 100 years, Saugatuck thrived as a working-class neighborhood, home to Irish immigrants, and then as the home of a bustling Italian neighborhood. Then, in 1953, The Connecticut Turnpike (now Interstate 95) was constructed, further bisecting the neighborhood, and cementing its physical transformation from a pedestrian oriented village where commerce, residents, and industry seamlessly mixed, into an automobile oriented district. Since that time, land



1867
Beers Saugatuck



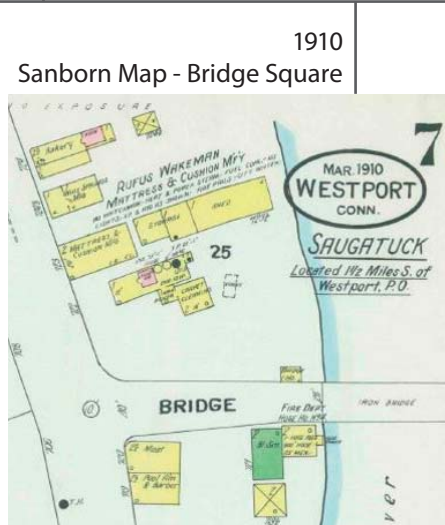
1901
Sanborn Map - Railroad Place



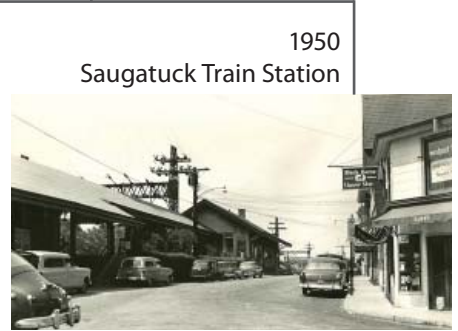
1915
Old Saugatuck Post Office



1880
Saugatuck Manufacturing Co.



1910
Sanborn Map - Bridge Square



1950
Saugatuck Train Station

area within Saugatuck has increasingly been sacrificed to accommodate automobile traffic and the parking demands of the commuter rail station, especially to the south of I-95.

While recent revitalization has occurred north of I-95 with the construction of the mixed-use Saugatuck Center consisting of retail, rental apartments, a small marina, a boardwalk, and the clever placement of parking away from the public realm, much of the remainder of Saugatuck, especially south of I-95 has taken on the appearance of a park and ride district, with a scattering of historic structures, as well as several unfortunate more modern buildings dotting

the landscape. Indeed, the first view of Saugatuck (and Westport) upon arriving at the train station or exiting I-95 from the south is a vast surface parking lot.

In fact, there are a total of eight commuter-oriented surface parking lots distributed throughout the southern portions of the study area, from just south of the railroad station to the north side of I-95. Automobile ingress and egress, as well as car storage (parking) are the dominant land uses in the neighborhood, while open spaces and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes have largely been overlooked. Saugatuck's transformation from a village oriented neighborhood into a regional park and ride, with

commensurate traffic congestion can be directly attributed to these issues.

SAUGATUCK CENTER TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT PLAN - RFP

In late 2016, The Town of Westport was awarded a grant from the State of Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to prepare a Transit Oriented Development Plan for the Saugatuck Station Neighborhood. The Grant totaled \$265,000, with an additional \$175,000 intended to provide the basis for implementation of the plan, including a detailed topographical survey as well as more detailed streetscape design for a portion of the plan.

In November 2016, RFP 17-866T was issued for a consultant to provide the associated services associated with the OPM grant. First Selectman Jim Marpe established a steering committee composed of a diverse cross section of the citizenry of Westport, all with a stake in the future of Saugatuck. The committee, officially called the Saugatuck Steering Committee (SSC) was comprised of 13 members and 7 ex-officio members (mostly employees of the Town) was chaired by Mary K. Young, AICP, Planning and Zoning Director for the Town of Westport and Craig Schiavone, a resident of Westport. In early 2017, a team led by BartonPartners Architects Planners, Inc. with Langan Engineers and 4Ward Planning were selected to conduct the study and produce this report.





STUDY AREA

Upon selection, the BartonPartners team worked with the SSC to refine the study area to include approximately 68.5 acres, stretching from the five-way intersection of Riverside Avenue, Saugatuck Avenue and Treadwell Avenue in the north, generally following Saugatuck Avenue to the west, Ferry Lane in the south and the Saugatuck River to the east. All commuter parking areas were included within the primary study area.

In addition, a secondary area, called an “Area of Influence” was defined using a conventional 2000-foot radius (a standard TOD measurement) from the center of the railroad platform. A critical element within this geography is the inclusion of the Cribari Bridge (Bridge Street) within the area of influence.

INITIAL FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

As is common in most older communities in the Northeastern United States planned prior to the dominance of the automobile as the primary mode of transportation, the streets of Westport are relatively narrow, with older structures pulled close to the sidewalk. With priority given to travel lanes, as well as copious parking lot access, Saugatuck’s sidewalks have suffered. Curbs, separating sidewalks from street cartways, are often missing or in poor condition, and when defined sidewalks do exist, they are thin and certainly not welcoming or comfortable to walk on. Few of the sidewalks are wide enough to support street trees or pedestrians and much of the front yard landscaping that would have typified this New England village has been replaced by asphalt pavement.



NARROW SIDEWALKS ARE TYPICAL



HISTORIC STOREFRONTS ALONG RAILROAD PLACE



A LACK OF LANDSCAPING ALONG RIVERSIDE AVENUE

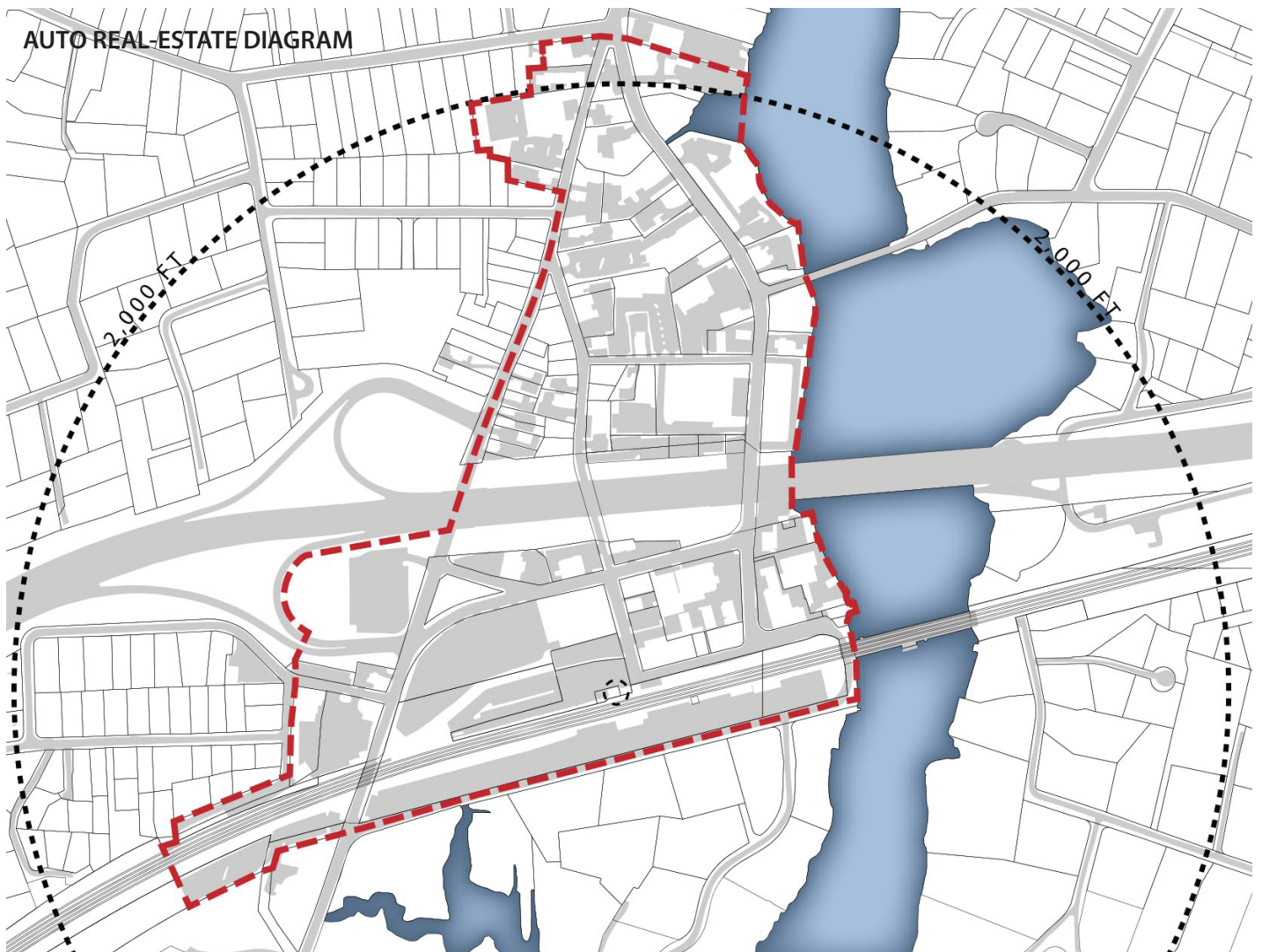


COMMUTER PARKING DOMINATES THE SAUGATUCK AREA

Indeed, much like the initial impression one gets of Westport upon exiting I-95, the signature street adjacent to the railroad station, Railroad Place, is composed of a one-way cartway, with parking on both sides, leaving a 4-foot-wide sidewalk to serve the quaint shops and cafes along this iconic street. This busy area, serving as a primary gateway to Westport from the train, has some of the most charming architectural elements within Saugatuck, and is certainly consistent with the village feel desired. However, the Railroad Place sidewalk, in order to accommodate on street parking spaces, is severely lacking in width, prohibiting its use

for al fresco dining or other activities consistent with a thriving mixed-use transit village.

This condition is prevalent throughout Saugatuck, with parking areas and curb cuts encroaching on sidewalks, making the pedestrian experience unsafe and unpleasant. In certain places, the distinction between what is a street and what is a parking lot is unclear. Quite often the sidewalks feel less safe due to a lack of on-street parking serving as a protective barrier between moving vehicles and pedestrians. While distances within the study area are not large,



the pedestrian experience leaves much to be desired, leaving the impression that distances from parking to area businesses are larger than they really are.

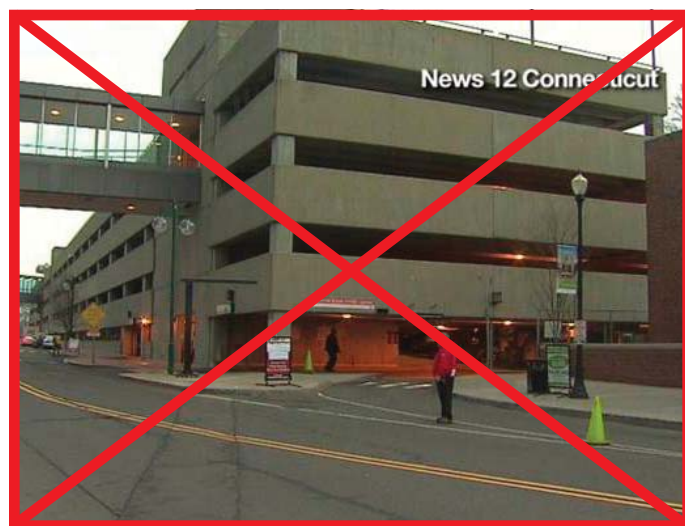
Perhaps the most telling drawing of Westport is the diagram to the left. Prior to obtaining a more detailed survey, and using the town's quite comprehensive Geographic Information System (GIS), the BartonPartners Team was able to create this diagram of the spaces within the study area that are dedicated to the automobile. The land use imbalance is staggering. As will be presented, the reasons for this are many, with the primary cause being a regulatory environment that favors parking lots while discouraging redevelopment. Additionally, though the parking demand and multi-year waiting list for the Transit Station parking lots are substantial, stakeholders and committee members were almost unanimously opposed to the introduction of multi-story parking garages like those present at other Metro North Transit nodes along the Northeast Corridor. The committee is concerned both about aesthetics of large parking structures as well as the potential traffic that could be generated by increasing commuter parking capacity.

In short, preservation of the Village Character of Saugatuck was of tantamount concern as was the notion, suggested by the consultants, that Saugatuck should serve as the primary gateway to Westport. Hence the study was retitled as "Saugatuck – A Gateway for Westport."

As the OPM Grant was applied for and awarded to the town to generate a Transit Oriented Development Master Plan, site specific redevelopment opportunities and the capacity for the market to absorb new

development is a key element in the study. Market capacities for residential, retail and commercial uses are explored and will be presented in detail within this report.

While the market capacity was identified as healthy, the numbers presented by the consultant team for Saugatuck quickly became irrelevant, as the fear of increased density and the assumed traffic generation that any new development would bring was of tantamount concern to the committee and the greater citizenry of Westport. As a result, the existing regulatory barriers (zoning, etc.) to development in the neighborhood are quite severe. The community outreach aspect of the study therefore focused on education, with the consultants learning as much from the committee and stakeholders about the unique aspects of Westport and Saugatuck, as the committee learned from the consultants about Transit Oriented Development. The result was the formulation of a custom set of Design Principles to guide the Saugatuck Center Transit Oriented Development Masterplan – A Gateway for Westport.



MULTI-STORY PARKING GARAGE IN STAMFORD, CT

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

After an extensive community outreach effort, including individual meetings with committee members, an online survey, as well as group discussions with identified stakeholders, the BartonPartners Team proposed a set of Design Principles to guide the study.

In close collaboration with the Steering Committee, the following Design Principles were established:

1. Enhance the pedestrian experience in Saugatuck with emphasis on:
 - Waterfront Access
 - Additional Civic/ Park Space
 - Sidewalk/ Streetscape/ Landscape/ Lighting Improvements throughout
2. Encourage and enhance multi-modal choices, including local transit service to the station, to reduce the demand for additional commuter parking.
3. Provide parking strategies to support both commuters and local businesses while reducing the appearance of parking as the primary land use in Saugatuck.
4. Enhance the gateway experience to Saugatuck and the Town of Westport.
5. Promote a mix of uses that protects the resiliency, vibrancy and character of Saugatuck.
6. Reduce traffic congestion and discourage cut through traffic.
7. The Cribari Bridge's existing function and structure shall be preserved.
8. Establish a regulatory framework for implementation of development plan recommendations that:
 - Recognizes the importance of Saugatuck's transportation infrastructure
 - Celebrates and integrates the existing historic resources of Saugatuck
 - Enhances the unique character of Saugatuck



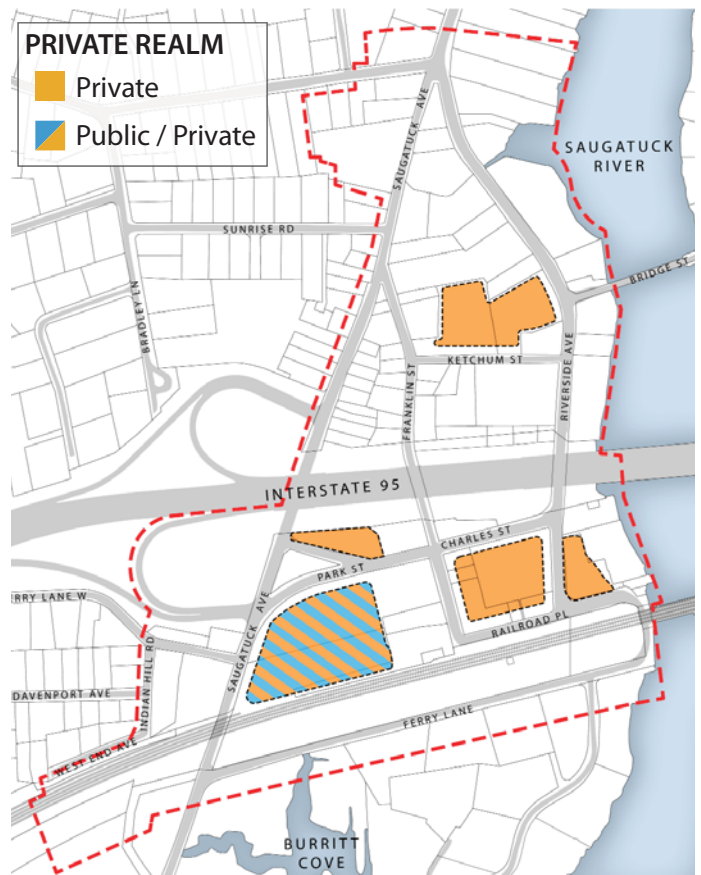
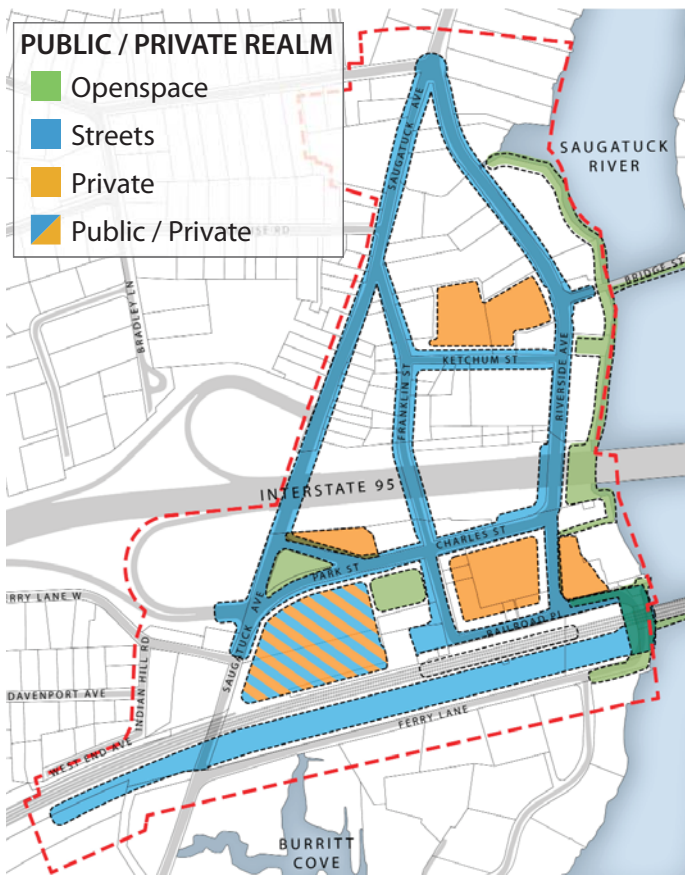
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

After Review of copious prior reports, including both the 2007 Plan of Conservation and Development as well as the in progress (during the Spring) 2017 update, the BartonPartners Team devised a TOD plan, broken into public realm improvements as well as potential targeted private parcel redevelopments. The combination of these two plans serves as the project’s formal Illustrative Plan Proposal.

The Illustrative Plan shows a 10 to 12-year buildout of public realm and private parcel improvements. The governing principle is the enhancement of the public realm, meaning the areas devoted to pedestrian environment, in conjunction with the reestablishment of the village character of Saugatuck. The plan shows a

relatively low intensity of new development, compared with more typical Transit Oriented Developments, offering between 150 and 200 new multi-family residential units proposed over this time period, along with between 36,000 and 50,000 square feet of new shops and restaurants, and between 20,000 to 35,000 square feet of new commercial office space. These numbers represent a fraction of the market capacity for Saugatuck. Given the study area’s size, this represents an increase of between just 2 and 3 dwelling units to the acre over existing conditions.

Public realm improvements focus on both streetscapes throughout the district as well as plazas and green spaces and gateway treatments at prominent entrances.



ILLUSTRATIVE PLAN



These gateways include a reconfigured Strofolino Park at the western entrance, the intersection of Treadwell, Saugatuck and Riverside Avenues at the northern entrance, and the Bridge Street at Riverside Avenue node as the eastern entrance.

Streetscape improvements focus primarily on the area south of I-95, with on-street parking reconfiguration and formal drop-off and pick-up locations at the southern end of Riverside Avenue as well as at the junction Railroad Place and Franklin Street. More specific improvements are presented in the body of the report, with the primary goal being the improvement of the pedestrian experience by enhancing the streetscape, landscape and architectural enclosure of streets and civic spaces within the study area.

Other public realm improvements include the re-imagining of Luciano Park into a multi-use civic open space, which can be utilized both as an active public gathering space for events, and as well as a passive neighborhood park. The sidewalk along Railroad Place is also doubled in width, to eight feet, with the re-organization of on-street parking throughout the southern portion of the study area.

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

Specific targeted traffic improvements can have a positive mitigating effect on both the existing and future conditions in Saugatuck. These improvements will also address the nominal increases in traffic over the 12-year phase-in of the proposed development program. Specific initiatives will be outlined further in this document, inclusive of parking lot rationalization discussed below.

However, in Saugatuck, it will be Transportation Demand Management policies that will be the key to addressing traffic conditions in the district. Additional roadway capacity is simply not possible through expansions of right of ways.

Transportation Demand Management involves implementation of policies and procedures that shift behavior away from the single use automobile. These include investigation of parking fees, enhancing multi-modal connectivity (and ease of connectivity) as well as regulatory changes in the zoning that currently exacerbate the reliance on automobile use.

PARKING

As with all Transit Oriented Development districts, the heavy parking demand of the transit station and the desire for pedestrian-friendly streets and open spaces often conflict with one another. In Saugatuck, the desire to maintain a small New England type village character while simultaneously accommodating the necessary regional infrastructure exacerbates this challenge.

During the outreach process, feedback on parking issues within Saugatuck were quite varied. Some stakeholders would welcome a reduction in the amount of permit parking around the station. Others, advocated for more business supportive parking, specifically closer to the shops and restaurants within the study area. Common to all feedback was the relative discomfort associated with the perceived distance from parking areas and the ultimate destination (whether the train station or a business). Indeed, while the actual distances are not great, the general lack of storefronts to maintain visual interest in the pedestrian experience

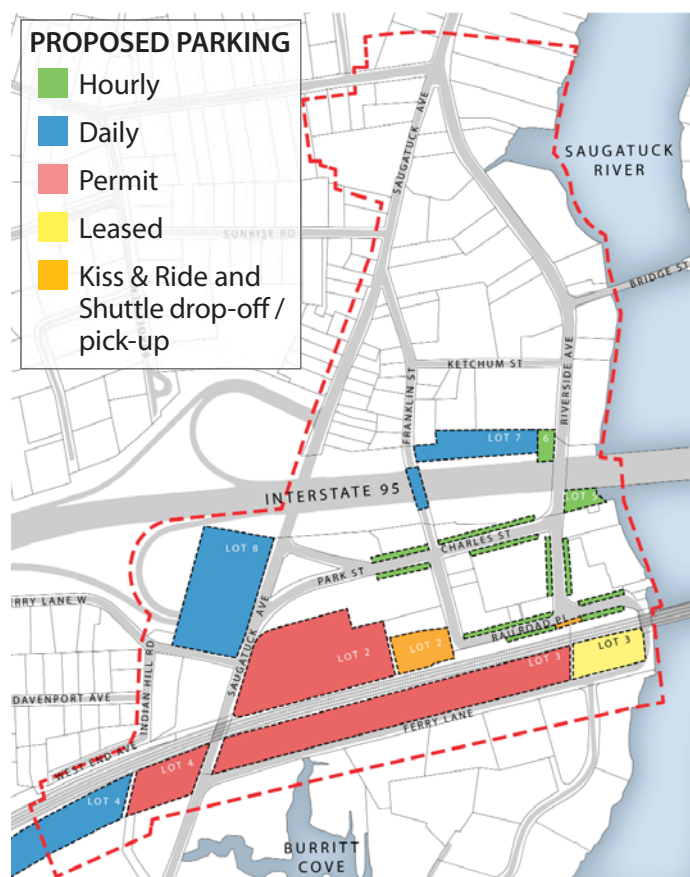
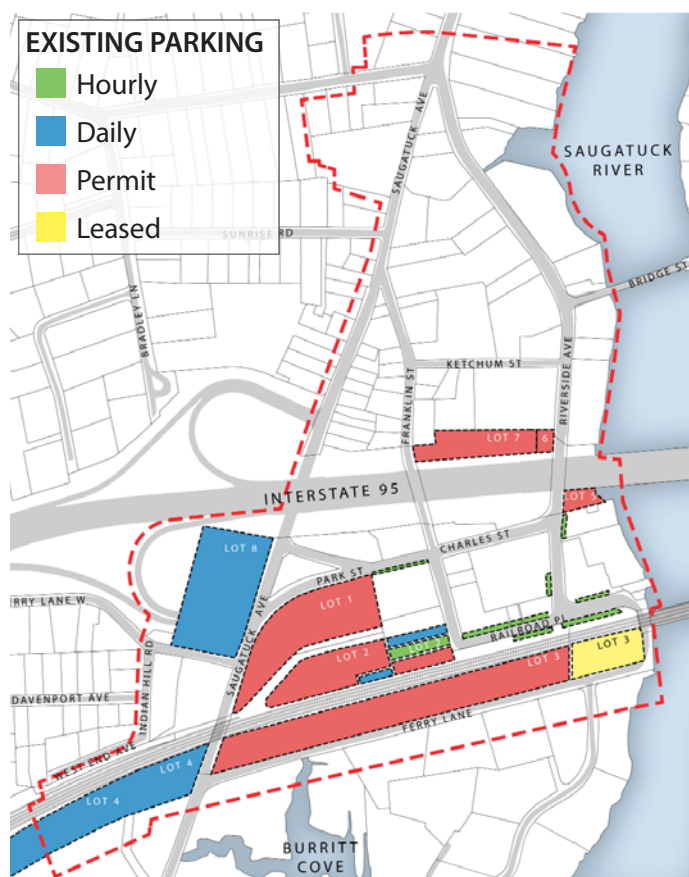
and the poor condition of the sidewalks and public realm play a definitive role in this perception.

Fortunately, the existing parking lots immediately adjacent to the transit station, and specifically their topographical conditions, allow for a solution that consolidates the permit parking program, freeing up other parking areas for business-supportive use, as well as consolidation of the overall parking footprint within the district. This speaks specifically to the third design principal, regarding the appearance of parking as the primary land use in Saugatuck.

By using the existing grade change between lots 1 and 2, as well as the drop in grade on the western third of Lot 3 and Ferry Avenue, two, single story, bi-level parking decks can be inserted into the landscape

with minimal visual impact. Along Park Avenue, the placement of buildings along the street edge obscuring the parking structure further reinforces the sense of “place” so necessary to de-emphasize parking as the primary land use in Saugatuck. These solutions will need to be carefully regulated through zoning to prohibit future expansion, though their configurations, as designed, do not allow for additional vertical circulation or additional levels to be added. This is consistent with the near universal dismissal of the kind of multi-story parking garages prevalent in other communities on the rail corridor.

The benefit of this reorganization, as outlined in the diagrams below, consolidates the permit parking program immediately adjacent to the train station. From a traffic perspective, this reorganization consolidates the



ingress and egress scenarios associated with the existing parking lots. These proposals endeavor to maintain the overall permit parking count. Daily parking is relegated to the perimeter, with a slight increase in capacity. More importantly, hourly and business supportive parking is significantly increased by 60%, and distributed more evenly throughout the district.

More detailed parking analysis, including discussion of the fee structure for parking within Saugatuck will be provided within the made body of this report.

IMPLEMENTATION

Given the tight regulatory environment, specifically regarding the zoning within Saugatuck, the Town of Westport and the Planning and Zoning Board have the final say in any implementation of the vision outlined within this study. Indeed, the primary enabling framework for this plan will be a recommendation that a comprehensive re-write of the zoning ordinance within Saugatuck be performed. This includes not only an expansion of the GBD-S zoning district to include parcels mainly south of I-95, but also a rather significant re-write of the GBD-S regulations themselves.

Secondly, for the GBD and RORDS districts that encompass much of the rest of Saugatuck, our recommendation is to establish a series of Village District Overlays, one entitled Village Center Overlay, and the other Village Edge Overlay. These two overlay districts are intended to protect the historic fabric of Saugatuck as the current zoning regulations covering the majority of Saugatuck would not permit the existing physical building fabric to be replaced if some natural disaster were to befall the community.









In fact, the existing zoning throughout Westport is written with standards that effectively prevents economically viable development from occurring. The defensive nature of this zoning is understandable given the types of buildings and developments constructed during the latter half of the 20th Century in Westport. However, more sophisticated, form-based zoning regulations can be applied to the Westport code to protect the beloved character and scale of the Village.

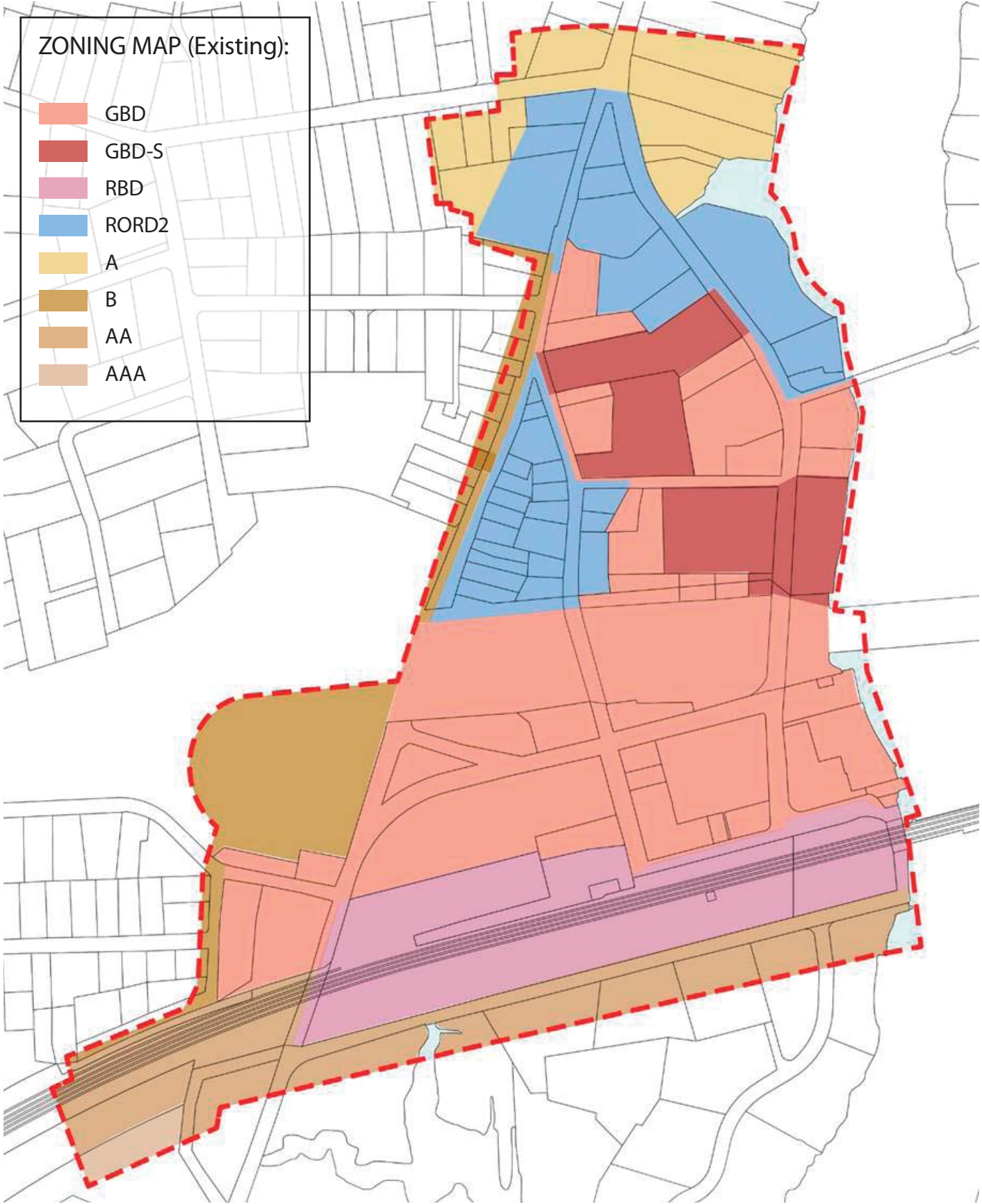
We also recommend implementation of the historic district as outlined in the Public Archaeology Laboratory report to protect the character of existing structure while promoting the use of historic rehabilitation tax credits. This will assist property owners as they seek to underwrite a portion of the costs associated with adaptive reuse and preservation of key architectural elements so important to the essential character of Saugatuck.

Finally, the intensity of the development proposed within this vision plan does not support extractions from developers that can have a meaningful effect on the public realm. The financial returns on all proposed development within this document are marginal at best, and could most likely only be executed through existing ownership entities serving as developer. In short, likely land values cannot support the development yields proposed within this document, even with the revised zoning regulations proposed.

Therefore, short of additional state grants to support streetscape improvements, the consultant team proposed the creation of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to support the public realm improvements proposed within this vision document.

ZONING MAP (Existing):

-  GBD
-  GBD-S
-  RBD
-  RORD2
-  A
-  B
-  AA
-  AAA





CONCLUSION

If the political will to re-evaluate the restrictive zoning regulations within Saugatuck can be secured, as well as recognition that a change in the parking policy in and around the station is warranted, the establishment of a 21st Century Transit Oriented Village at a scale conducive and consistent with the history of Saugatuck can be realized. Presently, the zeal to squeeze as many commuter parking spaces into the district, while discouraging and preventing the kind of mixed-use smart growth development usually associated with transit infrastructure, has certainly exacerbated the decline of the public realm in Saugatuck. There is a clear desire for a reversal of this decline, and the reestablishment of a true pedestrian friendly Village environment. Today, this characteristic does not seem present within the confines of the study area, especially south of I-95. Current conditions are unsafe, congested, and not sustainable. While there are no magic bullets to alleviate the traffic congestion in Saugatuck, the

over-emphasis on parking as the primary land use within the district has only made conditions deteriorate.

Through the implementation of a series of transportation demand management strategies and transportation improvements outlined in this report, we believe this district can realize Saugatuck's potential as a transit-oriented village offering a full array of multi-modal transit alternatives while integrating the recommended development program and successfully mitigating the potential impact. Through the coordinated implementation of traffic enhancements, transportation demand management strategies, parking reconfiguration, historic preservation standards, form-based code standards, streetscape design recommendations and Tax Increment Financing policies, Westport can realize its goals for Saugatuck.