RHODE ISLAND AVENUE PLANNING STUDY

FINDINGS AND DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

April 11, 2025







District of Columbia
Office of Planning

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Rhode Island Avenue NE has played a vital role as a gateway to the District since the city was first established, and thousands of people use the corridor every day. The corridor hosts a rich variety of local businesses, residences, community institutions, cultural assets, and places of worship that support the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Rhode Island Avenue Planning Study focuses on a portion of the corridor between 13th Street NE and Eastern Avenue NE at the Maryland border. The study identifies the corridor's land use and market potential and examines opportunities for public realm improvements and strategies that better meet community needs and catalyze future investments.

This document highlights key findings from the market and land use analysis to-date and introduces draft recommendations to be shared with the community for feedback.

The study recommends three catalytic nodes that have the potential to strengthen corridor vibrancy. These nodes were chosen based on their opportunity to generate public activity, drive economic impact, support the District's housing goals, improve connectivity and accessibility, and address community needs. For areas between nodes, recommendations focus on enhancing walkability and determining the right mix of housing types and densities to foster sustainable and thriving commercial activity at key locations.

The findings and draft recommendations in this report were developed through conducting an analysis of land use and market conditions on the corridor; evaluating the public realm including pedestrian assets and needs; and engaging with community members and stakeholders.

The Office of Planning (OP) will continue to develop the analysis and recommendations and release a final report in September 2025. Details on next steps and timeline for the project are at the end of this document.



Homes at Rhode Island Avenue NE and Monroe Street NE



Storefronts at 2204-2214 Rhode Island Avenue NE



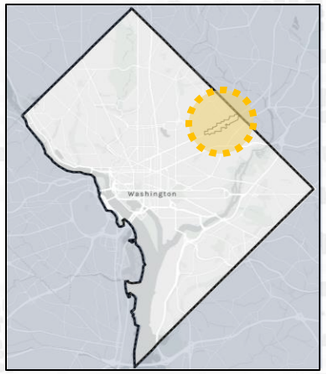
Saint Francis de Sales Church 2015 Rhode Island Avenue NE



Apartments at 1601 Rhode Island Avenue NE

PROJECT STUDY AREA

The study area includes the approximately 1.5-mile segment of Rhode Island Avenue NE, between 13th Street NE and Eastern Avenue NE at the Maryland border.



NODE 1
13TH-16TH STREET NE

NODE 2
18TH-24TH STREET NE

NODE 3
28TH STREET-EASTERN AVENUE NE

FINDINGS

POPULATION

- The 5-year population growth in the study area (1%) slightly trails the city's recent growth rate, which reached 2% in 2023-2024.
- The racial composition of the population in and around the study area is diverse with a predominantly Black population (61%) followed by white (24%), while 13% identify as Other. 9.5% of residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, slightly lower than the District-wide percentage of 12%.
- The median age of residents in the study area (40 years) is older than the District as a whole (35 years).

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

- Study area residents primarily work in the following industries: professional, scientific, and technical services (20%); healthcare (15.4%); and public administration (15%).
- Median earnings for workers in and around the study area are $74,316, comparable to District-wide median earnings for workers, which are slightly higher at $79,471.
- Median household income ($110,250) in and around the study area is slightly higher than the District-wide median household income ($106,287).

RENTER/OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING

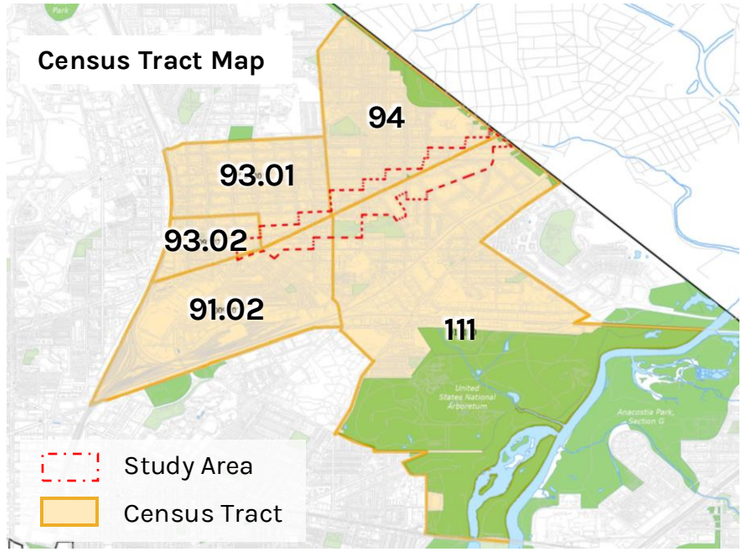
- 59% of households in and around the study area are owner-occupied, while 41% are renter-occupied. Of the owner-occupied units, 58% are owned by Black residents and 31% by white residents, compared to the District-wide ownership mix of 35% Black-owned and 48% white-owned.

Residents
19,512

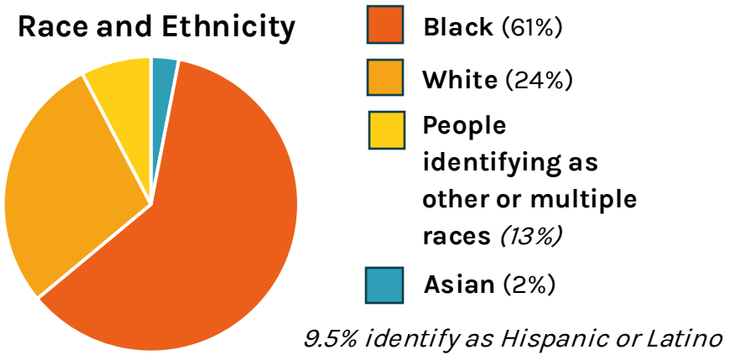
Median Age
40 Years

Median
Household Income
$110,250

COMMUNITY PROFILE



Census data was compiled using the American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates from 2019-2023. The ACS data for the "study area" is comprised of Census Tracts 91.02, 93.01, 93.02, 94, and 111 as depicted in the map above.



9.5% identify as Hispanic or Latino

The District-wide White and Black population are 39% and 43% respectively

FINDINGS

PUBLIC SPACE

The corridor is anchored by popular destinations such as Chuck Brown Memorial Park and the Woodridge Neighborhood Library where residents can recreate and engage with community programs. However, Rhode Island Avenue NE still has limited opportunities for gathering, placemaking, multi-generational and family-oriented amenities, and events. While there are several triangular parks and areas with wide sidewalks along the corridor, limited street furniture, such as benches and outdoor dining, and lack of shading discourage prolonged use of public space.



Chuck Brown Memorial Park statue commemorating "The Godfather of Go-Go" Chuck Brown

WALKABILITY & CONNECTIVITY

The corridor benefits from transit service by multiple bus routes and the Rhode Island Ave-Brentwood Metro station, which is within a half-mile of the western end of the study area. Additionally, several areas benefit from wider and higher quality streetscapes particularly on the north side of the avenue between 22nd and 24th Street NE, which also has the highest foot traffic on the corridor.

Community members have expressed concerns regarding pedestrian comfort and safety along Rhode Island Avenue NE. The six-lane-wide roadway, high vehicle speeds, and cross streets that intersect at sharp angles create safety challenges at pedestrian crosswalks and make the avenue perform as a barrier between neighborhoods. In many areas throughout the corridor, inconsistent streetscape conditions, such as narrow and uneven sidewalks with no planted buffers, limit pedestrian connectivity and accessibility.

CORRIDOR IDENTITY

The corridor has a rich local history and culture that lacks visual expression through elements such as wayfinding, public art, or historic commemoration. Placemaking strategies that contribute to the corridor's civic and community identity could better distinguish it as a unique destination.

The eastern end of the corridor is positioned as a key gateway to Northeast DC with great potential to celebrate the corridor and city. However, the DC/MD boundary lacks an attractive, visually engaging feature that welcomes passage into the corridor. Threshold markers can create a sense of arrival while future development opportunities can generate meaningful social connections with neighboring areas in Maryland.

FINDINGS

HOUSING MARKET

- The corridor has several vacant lots with development potential, but barriers to redevelopment exist, including narrow and shallow lot sizes, complex permitting, high construction costs, and fragmented property ownership.
- There are approximately 1,470 housing units in the study area, including more than 570 single-family homes and 900 multifamily units.
- Average rental rates of $2.09 per square foot per month for both single-family and multi-family units are 27% lower than citywide averages of $2.85 per square foot per month.
- Average home values of $699,000 in the study area are 10% more affordable compared to regional averages of $770,000.
- There are approximately 100 dedicated affordable housing units along the corridor, with more being added through inclusionary zoning in new projects.

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

- Since 2010, approximately 730 units have been added to the corridor, the majority of which were built in the last decade. This reflects an 80% increase in multifamily units, a construction pace that exceeds DC's overall growth of 24% during this period.
- There are 435 units under construction or planned across 10 upcoming development projects. Approximately 160 of those units are expected to be delivered by 2026.
- Over the next 15 years, an estimated 950 new units could be absorbed on the corridor, with the potential for 3,000 units if all available sites are redeveloped.

SUPPORTABLE RETAIL FROM NEW DEVELOPMENT

- The households expected to move into multifamily development units (950 projected over the next 15 years) can support between 5,300-15,750 square feet of local retail space, with a portion likely to be built within the next 15 years.
- Much of the development of multi-unit buildings over the last decade is fully residential, despite an allowance for ground-floor retail. However, some of the most recent development projects do incorporate retail, predominantly clustered around the middle of the corridor.



Cluster of multifamily buildings at 16th Street and Rhode Island Avenue NE, including a new 49-unit multifamily building at 1544 Rhode Island Avenue NE built in 2024.

FINDINGS

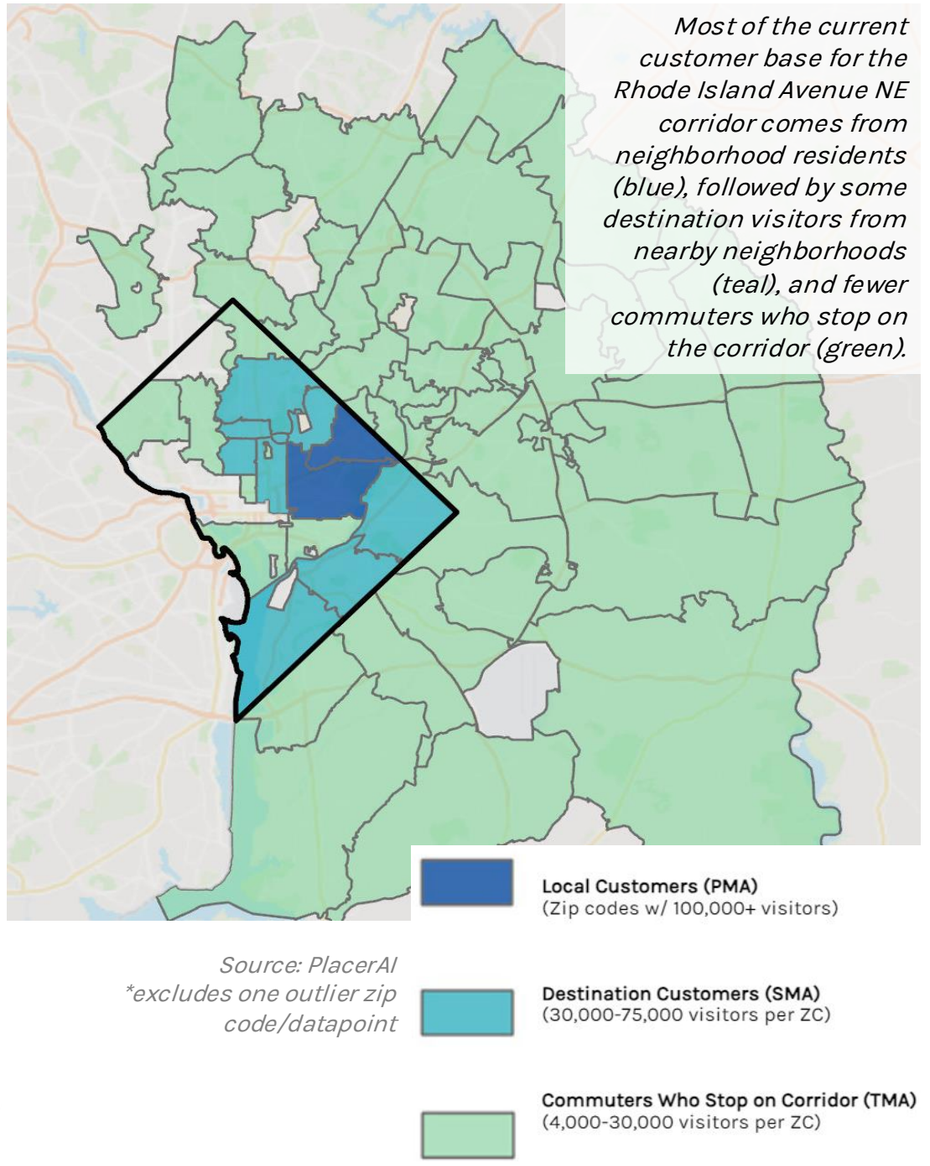
RETAIL MARKET

- The retail mix predominantly features service-based establishments, nonprofits, and places of worship, but notably lacks major anchor businesses that stabilize the market and draw customers.
- Average asking rent of $27.97 is almost 25% lower than the DC average of $37.00.
- Overall visitor traffic dropped 5% in 2024 and 7% over the past three years.
- There is 17,000 square feet of vacant retail space actively listed, a 4.4% vacancy rate, compared with DC's average of 4.2%. Actual vacancy may be higher than the formal estimate, as reporting does not always account for owners that list their space through informal means or have active leases but vacant storefronts.
- Empty buildings could provide opportunities for repurposing and adaptive reuse for non-profit uses, arts and cultural spaces, co-working or maker spaces, or shared commercial kitchens at a potentially more affordable price point than new development.
- Arts and cultural uses are clustered between 20th and 24th Street NE, supplemented by the growing number of food and beverage establishments in this node. This area has the highest visitor count on the corridor, seeing 100,000 visits in 2024; almost double the areas with moderate visitation.

GROCERY STORE VIABILITY

- There are large grocery stores (Giant, Yes!, Mom's) in the vicinity outside the study area, but access to fresh food within the study area is more limited. The closure of a few smaller grocery providers leaves the eastern part of the corridor without grocery stores of any scale within a walkable distance, and project outreach revealed interest from residents in more close-by grocery options. However, the presence of nearby larger stores limits the economic viability of a large-format grocery store.
- If a new grocery use is attracted to the corridor, it may be a smaller format, discount, or other alternative model, due to the corridor's proximity to full-service grocery stores. Additional residential density is likely needed to attract new grocers.

Retail Trade Area Overview



Source: PlacerAI
**excludes one outlier zip code/datapoint*

NODE 1

13TH STREET NE – 16TH STREET NE

Node 1 is in walkable proximity (½ - 1 mile) to the Rhode Island-Brentwood Metro Station, and includes a firehouse and retail spaces, some of which are vacant and have large surface parking lots. This area is currently underutilized and lacks cohesive streetscape elements, limiting its functionality and appeal.

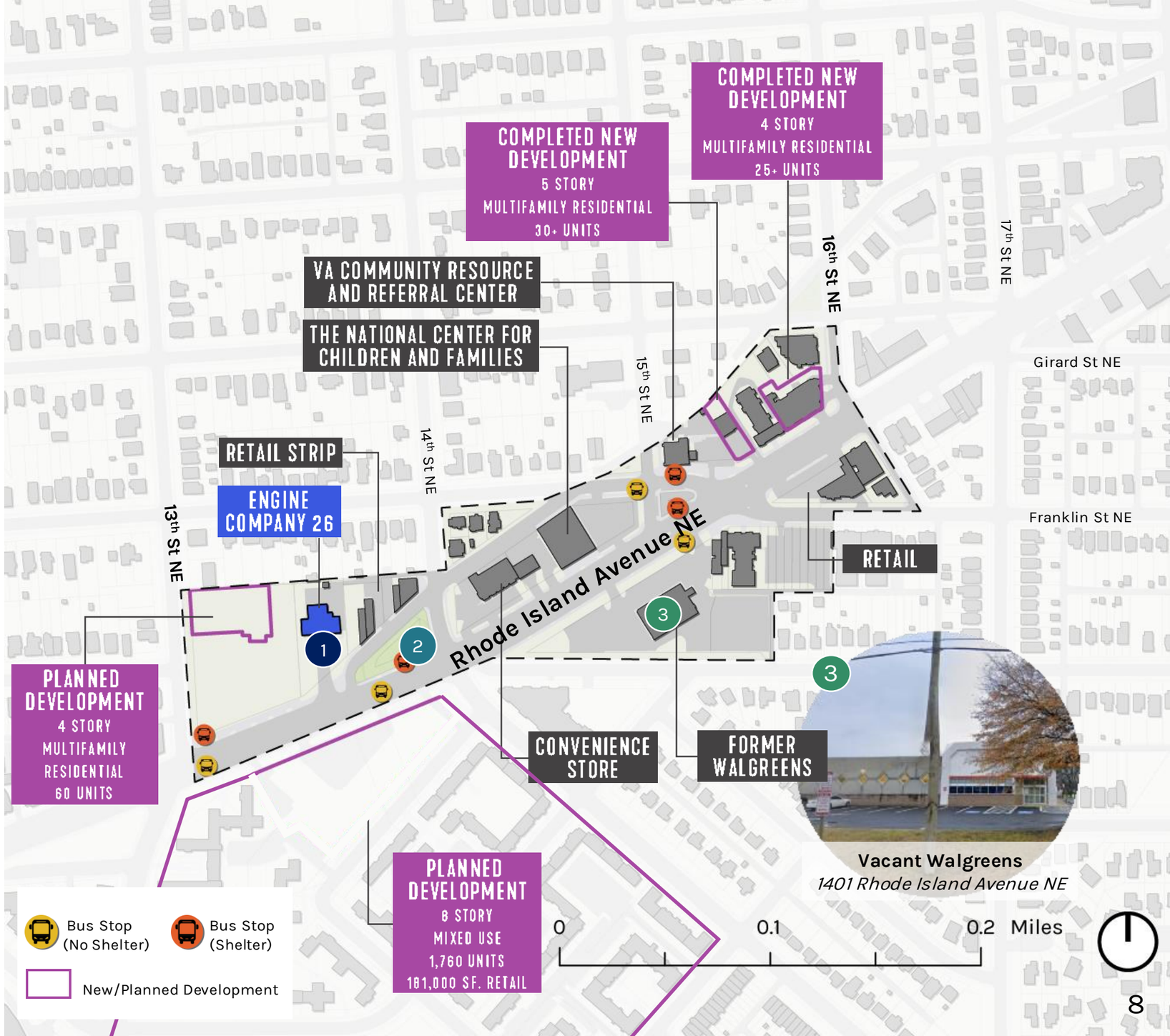
The blocks between 13th and 15th Street include one-story commercial properties with surface parking lots, planned multifamily development sites, and a triangular open space (#2). The Fire and Emergency Services Department is currently considering the relocation of Engine 26 (#1). This node also includes the former Walgreens, consisting of a vacant retail site and a large surface parking lot (#3).



Engine Company 26
1340 Rhode Island Avenue NE



Triangle Park
2700 14th Street NE



Vacant Walgreens
1401 Rhode Island Avenue NE

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

NODE 1 – MIXED-USE CENTER

13TH-16TH STREET NE

1.1. Identify appropriate land use policies in the final report to encourage higher-density multi-family residential and mixed-use development.

1.2. Incorporate public realm improvements into future redevelopment, particularly between 15th Street NE and 13th Street NE. Enhancements should include a public gathering space with amenities like seating, public art, shade trees, and placemaking.

1.3. Pursue catalytic investments for the redevelopment of properties between 13th and 14th Streets NE with expanded pedestrian space that integrates the triangle park at 14th Street NE. Incorporate a commemorative art installation as part of public space improvements and placemaking strategies for this location.

1.4. Explore approaches to attract a grocery store or other shopping/entertainment anchor to the corridor, with special focus toward larger sites such as the former Walgreens. Development and incentive approaches could include increased allowable height or floor area ratio, tenant improvement support, the supermarket tax incentive, or community benefit agreements as part of a Planned Unit Development.



NODE 2

18TH STREET NE – 24TH STREET NE

Node 2 is a community hub and retail destination with civic, arts, and food/beverage uses. It offers the most vibrant public space conditions along Rhode Island Avenue NE, largely due to the high density of businesses and strong pedestrian activity. The Woodridge Library (#1) and nearby Chuck Brown Memorial Park are located at this node.

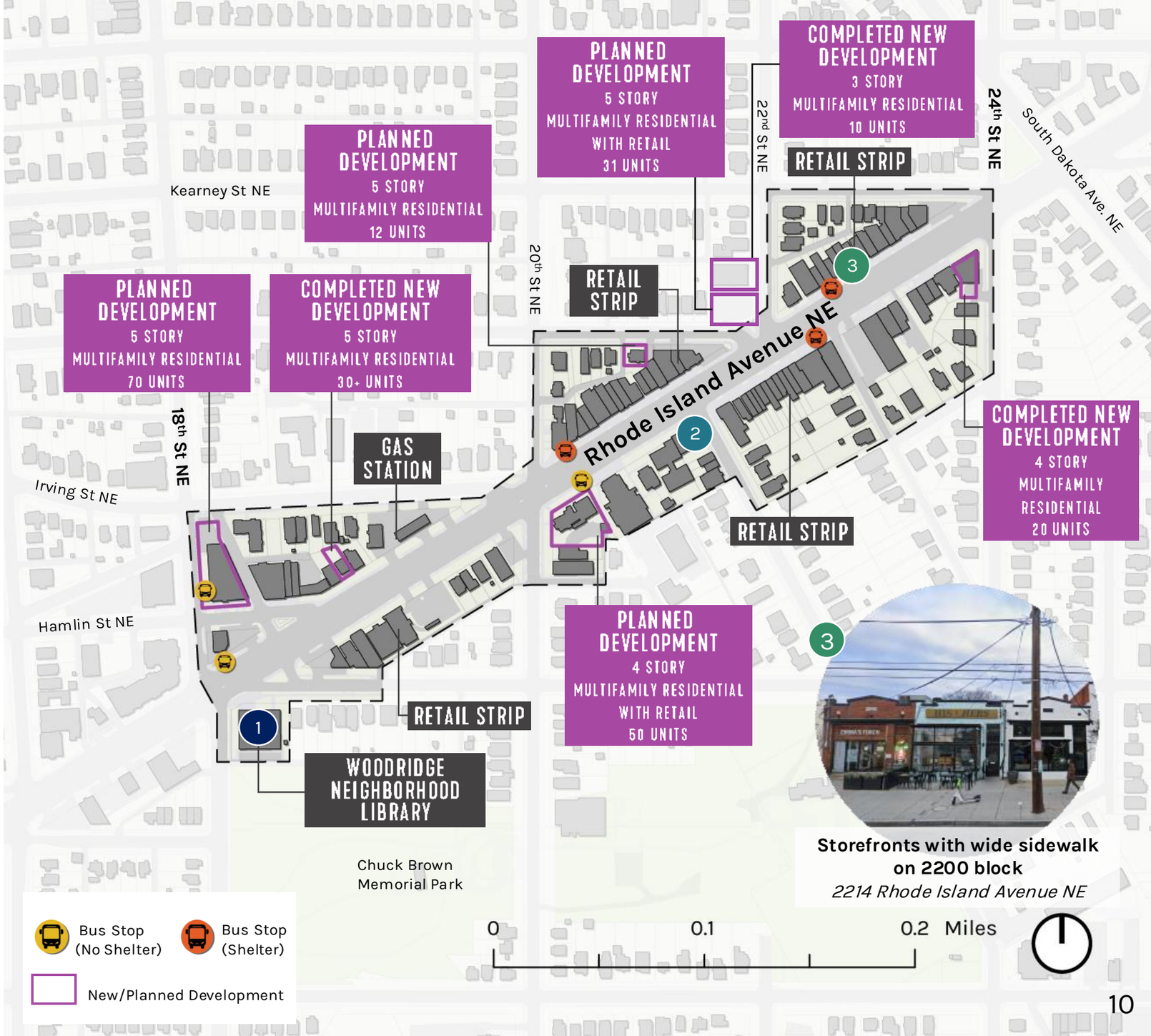
Challenging pedestrian crossings at major intersections and inconsistent streetscape conditions – with narrow sidewalk widths between 18th Street NE and 20th Street NE, but wider ones from 20th Street NE to 24th Street NE (#3) – create a disconnection between the east and west segments of the node.



Woodridge Neighborhood Library
1801 Hamlin Street NE



Dudley Beauty College
2031 Rhode Island Avenue NE



Storefronts with wide sidewalk on 2200 block
2214 Rhode Island Avenue NE

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

NODE 2 – CULTURAL AND CIVIC CENTER

18TH-24TH STREET NE

2.1. Identify appropriate land use policies in the final report that encourage multi family infill housing.

2.2. Prioritize retail, commercial, and cultural uses between 20th Street NE and 24th Street NE as part of updating the land use designations.

2.3. Build on the arts and cultural presence through branding and wayfinding elements in public spaces.

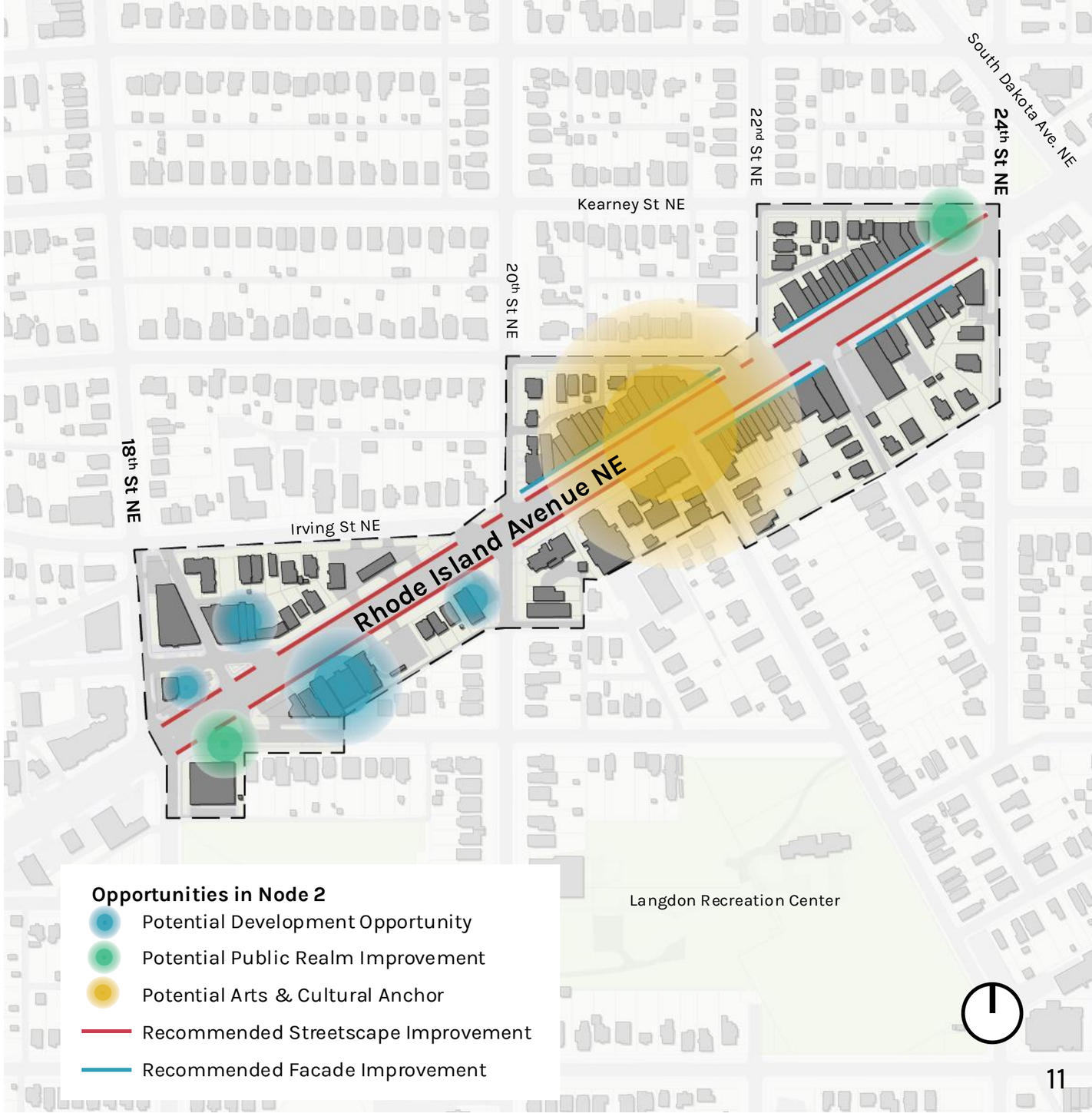
2.4. Continue to encourage and support existing local arts-based events such as Art All Night and The Fest in collaboration with the Main Street Organization and community partners.

2.5. Encourage outdoor cafes, interactive displays, murals, signage, and engaging architectural features on storefronts through the façade improvement program and/or as part of new development.

2.6. Enhance streetscape and create public space improvements to support outdoor gathering areas such as outdoor seating, shade trees, and public art.

2.7. Enhance the entrance to Chuck Brown Memorial Park from 18th Street NE with signage, enhanced ADA accessibility features, and other visual markers that improve integration with the library.

2.8. Leverage offerings at the Woodridge Library and Langdon Park Recreation Center to support retail and cultural uses.



NODE 3

28TH STREET NE – EASTERN AVENUE NE

Node 3, located at the DC-Maryland border, serves as a transitional area between the two jurisdictions but lacks the development and cohesive identity seen in other nodes and across the border.

This segment is dominated by surface parking lots and auto-oriented businesses, creating a fragmented streetscape with limited pedestrian activity.

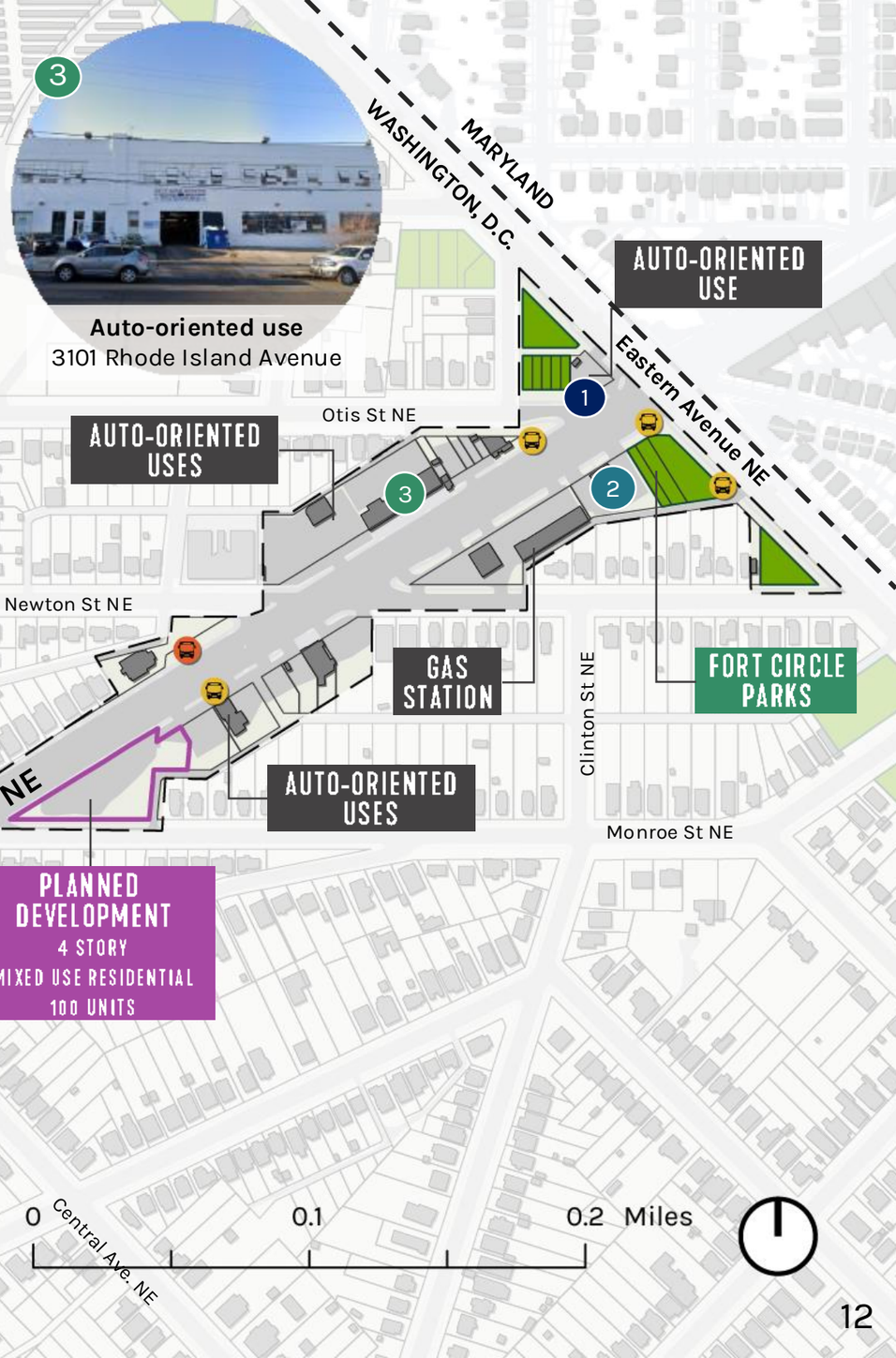
Along the DC side of the border are several open-space parcels owned by the National Park Service (the historic Fort Circle Parks) and a small used car dealer lot. Node 3 lacks a welcoming gateway feature or significant marker at the DC-Maryland border (#1). The neighboring City of Mount Rainier offers neighborhood retail close to Node 3 and connects to Prince George's County Gateway Arts District.



Gateway signage
DC/MD border



Vacant restaurant
3131 Rhode Island Avenue NE



DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

NODE 3 – DISTRICT GATEWAY

28TH STREET NE - EASTERN AVENUE NE

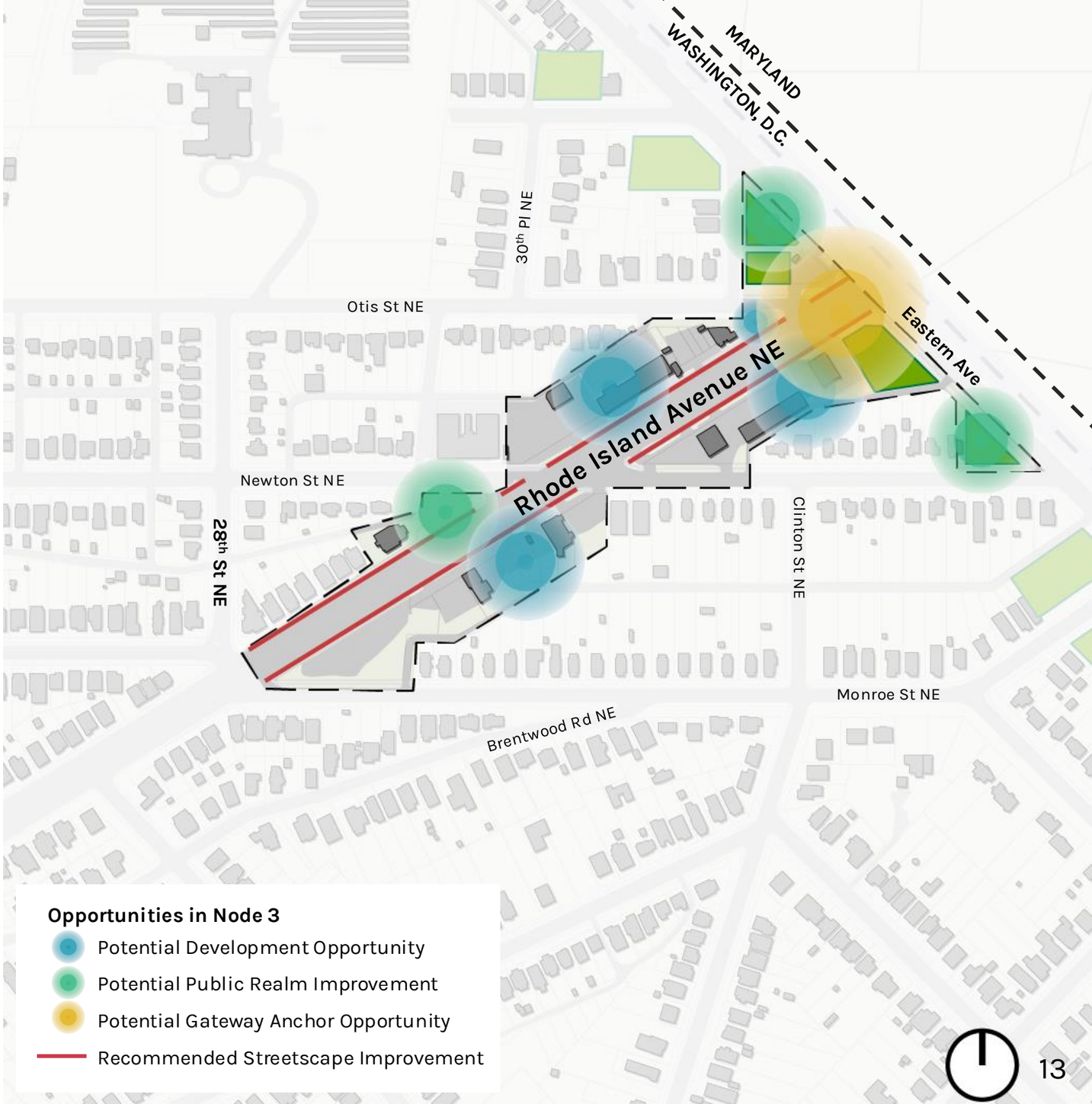
3.1. Identify appropriate land use policy for redeveloping underutilized properties into mid-sized apartments and small condo-style housing as part of the final report.

3.2. Explore the feasibility of incorporating arts, incubator, and maker spaces to connect with the Mt. Rainier Arts District and attract artists and creative businesses. Consider developing a makerspace seed funding or start-up assistance program (Maryland's TedCo Makerspace Program is a successful example).

3.3. Establish the intersection of Rhode Island Avenue NE and Eastern Avenue NE as a visually significant gateway to the District, featuring expressive artwork that commemorates the identities and histories of the corridor.

3.4. Extend streetscape improvements east along Rhode Island Avenue NE to improve walkability and create a more pedestrian-oriented environment.

3.5. Encourage incorporation of a community gathering space with amenities and placemaking strategies as part of new development.



DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERALL CORRIDOR

4.1. Examine ways to improve and strengthen existing grant programs and resources for small businesses, such as the Storefront Façade Improvement Program and Neighborhood Prosperity Fund, in collaboration between property and business owners and the Main Street Organization.

4.2. Develop and implement a program in coordination with property owners and the Main Street Organization that supports pop-up and temporary uses by activating vacant storefront spaces along the corridor.

4.3. Develop and implement a program in collaboration between local businesses and faith-based institutions to create shared commercial kitchens.

4.4. Explore pedestrian safety improvements along the corridor through measures such as the Bus Priority program, traffic calming, and sidewalk and crosswalk improvements, in coordination with the District Department of Transportation.

4.5. Leverage streetscape design guidelines in the development review and public space permitting processes to obtain wider sidewalks, street trees, and higher-quality streetscapes at new development sites.



Local Storefronts at 2109 – 2129 Rhode Island Avenue NE (between Mills Avenue NE and Thayer Street NE)

FUTURE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Over the last 15 years, the study area has experienced a surge in residential development, with approximately 730 units constructed since 2010. In 2025, there are an estimated 435 units under construction or planned for the corridor.

In the future, the study area has the market potential to support approximately 950 to 3,000 new housing units. New units could be accommodated through a range of building types, including large mixed-use projects, mid-sized residential buildings, and small residential buildings. Additional housing will further District housing goals, increase commercial activity at each catalytic node, and boost the social vibrancy desired for the corridor. The three building typologies identified below are viable at various locations along the corridor depending on lot sizes, depths, and adjacency to other land uses.

The feasibility and retail spending implications of the following three residential development typologies will be further examined to inform more specific recommendations on land use in the final report.

TYPE 1: LARGE MIXED-USE PROJECT

Mixed-use multifamily building, 5-6 stories, with multiple retail bays and structured parking.

(*Ex: 3830 Georgia Avenue NW*)



- Potential Location: Node 1
- This larger mixed-use type is likely to be located along the western end of the corridor, closer to high-capacity transit.

TYPE 2: MID-SIZED RESIDENTIAL BUILDING

Mid-sized multifamily building, 4-5 stories, with or without retail bays.

(*Ex: 1400 Montana Avenue NE*)



- Potential Location: Nodes 2 and 3 and between nodes
- This residential development typology is common in recent development on the corridor.

TYPE 3: SMALL RESIDENTIAL BUILDING

Small-scale apartment buildings, condos, and multiplexes, 3-4 stories, with no retail.

(*Ex: 1507 Rhode Island Avenue NE*)



- Potential Location: Nodes 2 and 3 and between nodes
- This typology is appropriate for smaller lots and provides opportunities for middle housing supply, which can provide family-sized units at more affordable prices.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

STAKEHOLDER MEETING

On January 30, 2025, the project team held a stakeholder meeting at the Woodridge library that included representatives of local small businesses and community organizations along the corridor. Over 20 participants learned about the project and engaged in an interactive exercise indicating elements of the corridor that they wanted to preserve, enhance, or transform, followed by a group discussion of key themes and issues that came up during the exercise.

Stakeholder Meeting



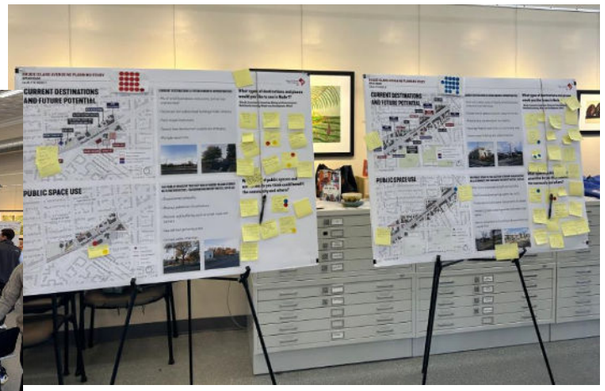


OPEN HOUSE #1

On March 1, 2025, the project team held a Community Open House at Art Enables to engage residents and stakeholders on the project and gather feedback and ideas through a series of interactive boards and discussions. Over 60 attendees learned about the work-in-progress and shared comments about their favorite places along the corridor, destinations, activities they would like to see in the future, and desired public space enhancements. An online feedback survey was open for two weeks following the meeting for those who were not able to participate in-person.

Community Open House #1





OPEN HOUSE #2

A second open house is planned for April 22, 2025. Community members are invited to join an interactive, open house-style meeting to view progress made on the planning study and provide feedback on the draft recommendations for incorporation into the final report.

More information about past and future engagement activities can be found on the project website, publicinput.com/riaps.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

IMPROVED WALKABLITY & PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Community members frequently mentioned the need for safer pedestrian crossings, better sidewalks, street lighting, and street trees. Many expressed concerns about speeding traffic and discomfort navigating around as a pedestrian or bicyclist. Comments noted that low foot traffic affected businesses and sense of safety and shared a desire for increased ground level commercial activity and public space improvements that would encourage more foot traffic.

DIVERSE RETAIL & AMENITIES

Community members highlighted a desire for a broader variety of businesses and destinations, including more food and drinking establishments, grocery stores, and entertainment venues. Some specific mentions included breakfast spots, bars, movie theatres, museums, and toy stores. Some noted that existing retail is limited and does not fully meet the neighborhood needs. Many in the community emphasized the lack of fresh food access and the need for a full-service grocery store closer to residents.

PUBLIC SPACE ENHANCEMENTS

There was strong interest in improving and creating parks and public gathering spaces, as well as greening and beautification of the corridor, to create a pleasant community environment. The Woodridge Library and the retail core with Zeke's Coffee, Art Enables, and Emma's Torch were referenced as some favorite spots on the corridor. Residents suggested adding more trees, public seating, and spaces with multi-generational and family-oriented functions. A variety of specific amenities were suggested, including murals, playgrounds, checkerboards, and gardens. Community members also envisioned recognizing the corridor's history (such as the trolley that used to run on the corridor) in public spaces.

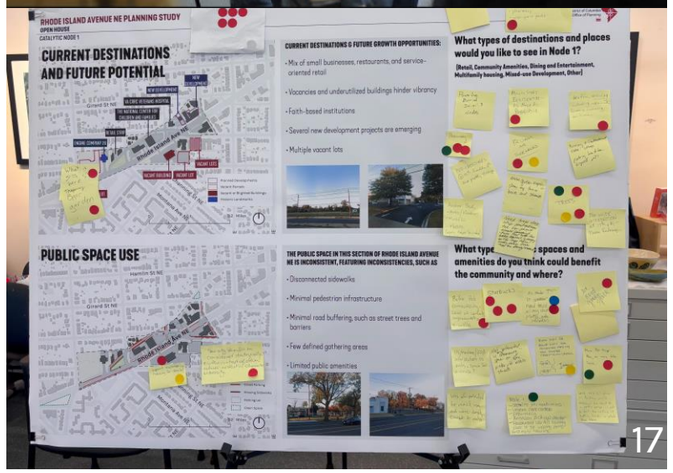
HOUSING AFFORDABLITY & DEVELOPMENT

Several community members were interested in new multifamily housing to bring residents and support retail. Comments emphasized the importance of policies that increase affordable housing options and expressed interest in mixed-use development. Some residents suggested density should be considered strategically in the context of its surroundings, and wanted to ensure the corridor would retain and support existing residents and businesses amidst change.



Photo Credit: Lionel Foster


Photo Credit: Lionel Foster



NEXT STEPS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

FINAL REPORT DEVELOPMENT

Develop a final report with detailed analysis and recommendations for release in September 2025. The final report will be supported by:

- Continuing community engagement efforts to gather feedback and inform the final recommendations.
- Assessing the appropriate mix and density of residential development and the implications on retail spending to support viable commercial activities at each catalytic node.
- Identifying land use policy recommendations to inform DC 2050, the District's next Comprehensive Plan.
- Developing corridor-wide streetscape design guidelines to inform future public realm improvements, in coordination with the District Department of Transportation.
- Creating illustrative renderings of the catalytic nodes that show potential development and public realm improvements.

APRIL 22 COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE

Please join us for the next interactive open house to view progress and provide feedback on the project. Register to attend on the project website, publicinput.com/riaps.

When: April 22, 2025, 5:30-7:30 pm.

Where: Art Enables, 2204 Rhode Island Avenue NE

COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

This report can be viewed on the project website.

OP is soliciting public feedback on this report through the online survey opening on **April 18, 2025**, also available on the project website.

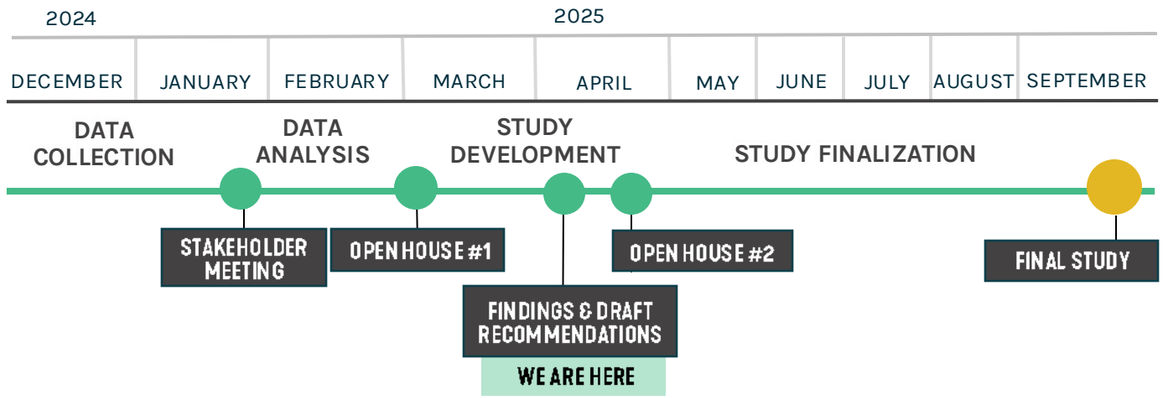
Visit the project website using the QR code or at publicinput.com/riaps

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TIMELINE



District of Columbia Office of Planning

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