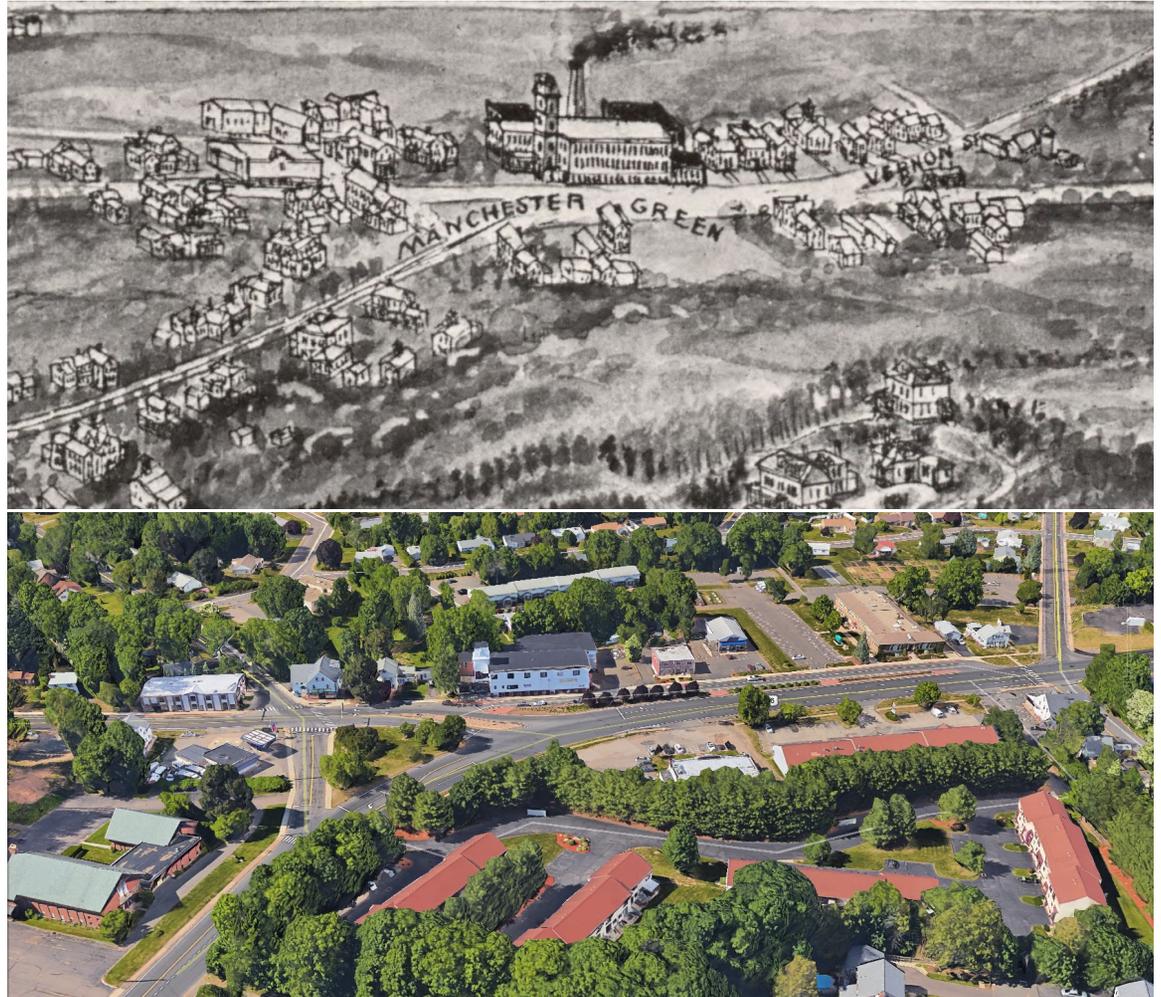


Manchester Green Corridor Study

Preliminary Findings &
Recommendations for
Future Study

August 2016



Top: An aerial panoramic map of Manchester, dated 1914, (Library of Congress)

Bottom: The western edge of the Manchester Green corridor study area, 2016.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Manchester 2020, the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development, is a policy guide for the Town's boards and commissions and contains the community's aspirations, goals, and the recommended actions to achieve them. Among those recommendations is to redevelop and invest in existing and potential corridors and activity nodes. The Planning and Zoning Commission and Town has embarked on a series of studies to identify the various challenges, opportunities and recommended strategies for strengthening these important activity centers in Manchester.

Manchester Green, the primary eastern gateway to Manchester, was the first area chosen for study because of its compact size, mix of residential, commercial and institutional uses, and its location on a major arterial street served by public transit. This report summarizes the staff's reconnaissance work and comments and observations that arose from a public workshop. It includes a possible vision for a revitalized Manchester Green, including recommendations and suggested topics for more detailed study.

Study Area Boundaries



The study area for the Manchester Green corridor is defined as the parcels fronting Middle Turnpike East between the intersection of Woodbridge Street and East Center Street on the western edge and Greenwood Drive on the eastern edge. This mixed-use corridor is surrounded by residential uses and zoning districts.

Staff Presentation — Summary Observations



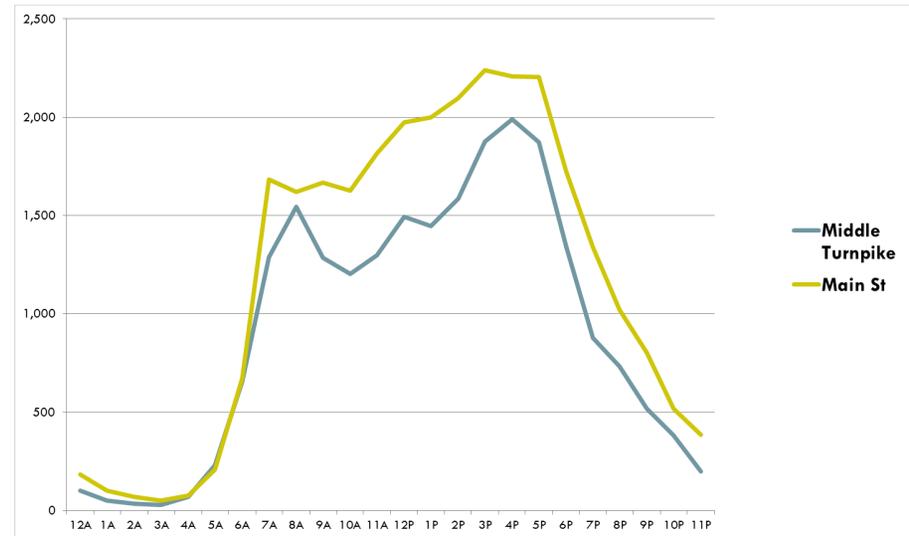
An Area of Significant Potential

The Manchester Green corridor is functional but underutilized, when its potential for activity is taken into account. As the primary eastern gateway to the Town from neighboring communities, and considering the relative prosperity and proximity of the surrounding neighborhoods, a more robust marketplace and level of activity is possible. Several sites, if properly redeveloped have the potential to transform the corridor. Enhancing the area's existing walkability with improved streetscapes will further allow the over 4,000 residents within walking distance of Manchester Green to enjoy the existing businesses and services, while increasing the sense of vitality. Creating a more inviting pedestrian environment while maintaining Middle Turnpike East's function for automobile traffic will help make Manchester Green a more active and enjoyable place for residents, visitors and prospective businesses.

Activity & Accessibility

Traffic Volumes: Manchester Green vs. Downtown

Located on a major arterial street and the Town's primary eastern gateway, the Manchester Green corridor has similar traffic volumes to Downtown Manchester, indicating the Green is also a major commuter corridor. As a result, the Green has a high degree of visibility not only to residents, but commuters and visitors from neighboring communities. The Green's location and activity also represent a potentially untapped market for businesses and service providers.



Traffic Counts:

Middle Turnpike: Intersection of Woodbridge & Center Street

Main Street: Intersection of Main Street & Center Street in Manchester's' downtown core.

Accessible by Transit

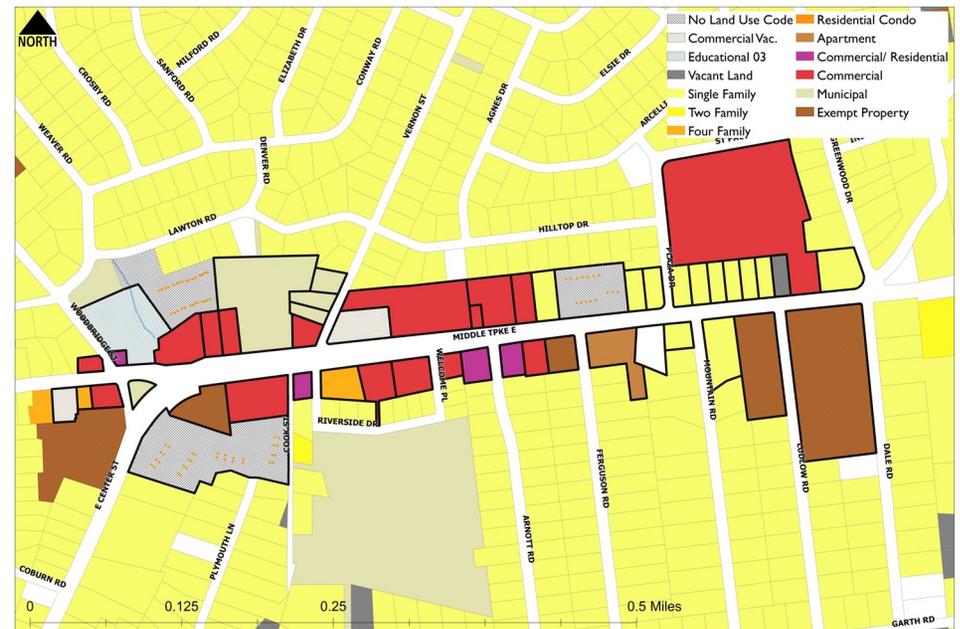
Manchester Green is well-served by public transit, with two bus routes running directly through the corridor along Middle Turnpike, with multiple stops throughout the day. The presence of public transit allows a broader segment of people to access the businesses and services in Manchester Green.



Land Use & Zoning

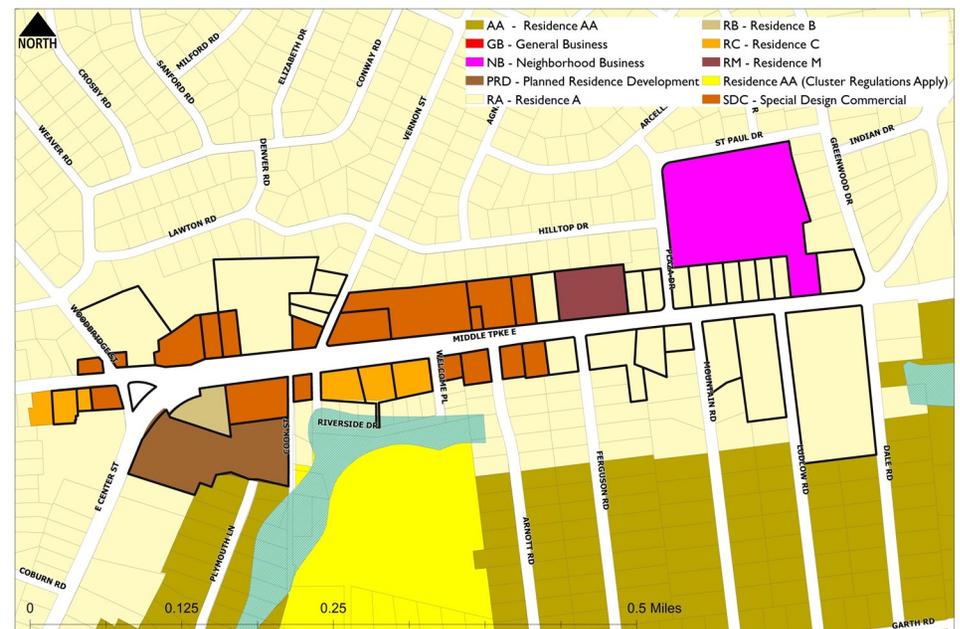
A Mix of Land Uses & Activities

Land use in the immediate area surrounding Manchester Green is nearly all detached single-family housing. Along the corridor, commercial, institutional, or residential condominiums are the predominant uses. Among the specific uses include convenience retail, personal services, restaurants, dry cleaners, churches, human service agencies, the Woodbridge Farmstead, and the Town Senior Center.



Zoning Consistent With Actual Uses

Zoning surrounding Manchester Green is some variety of single-family residential, while along the corridor the residential zones consist of both single-family and multi-family districts. Special Design Commercial (SDC) zoning regulations apply to the commercial properties. This zone is intended to enhance the quality of new development while preserving the special character of the existing neighborhoods. The SDC zone was recently amended in 2014 to allow residential uses above the first story.

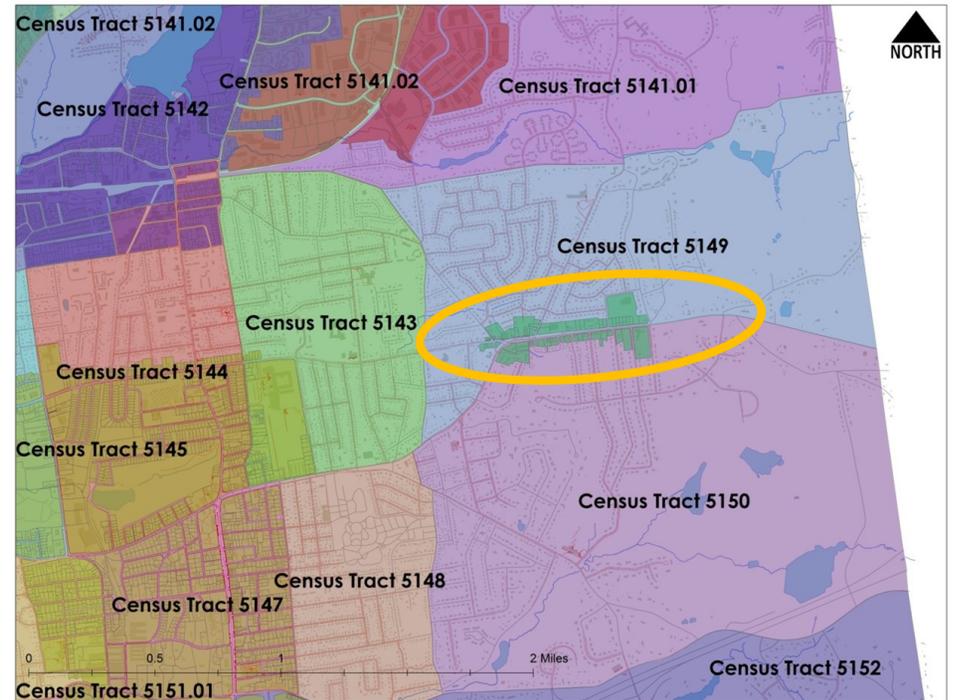


Neighborhood Context

Data from the census tracts to the immediate north and south of Manchester Green was examined to provide detail on the study area's socioeconomic context. The Manchester Green corridor bisects the two tracts, functioning as a sort of 'spine' between the two neighborhoods. The neighborhoods to the north generally feature older, smaller homes and lot sizes with more moderate prices. Neighborhoods to the south feature newer, larger homes and lot sizes and higher home prices. In both census tracts, there are some multi-family residential units as well.

When considered together, the census tracts adjacent to Manchester Green have a higher degree of detached owner-occupied housing, higher household incomes, and an older median age of residents than the Town as a whole. Half of the residents have lived in the area for at least fifteen years, a tenure significantly longer than the Town average, indicating stable neighborhoods.

These neighborhoods constitute a relatively affluent customer base for commercial development along the corridor. Better connecting residents to business and services along the corridor will benefit both the neighborhood and Manchester Green.



Subject	Manchester Green	Town
Owner-occupied	85.5%	56.1%
Pre-1980 housing stock	88%	73.4%
Median HH income	\$81,000	\$63,198
Detached Single Family Home	85%	47.1%
Post HS education	72.4%	68.8%
Pre-2000 tenure	50%	31.3%
Age of HH (65+)	25.7%	19.4%
Median Age	45	35

Property Conditions



Property Rating Criteria

- Deteriorating (1):** The structure is unsound and substandard. Windows and doors boarded or missing, roof is missing shingles. Exterior walls have large cracks, large section of paint or trim are missing. Landscaping is not maintained and/or blighted, significant growth through pavement and sidewalk. Sections of roof missing.
- Poor (2):** Significant wear is noticeable, structure, roof and/or foundation has cracks, holes, breaks. Paint is peeling or blistered. Windows and doors in need of replacement. Signage is absent, sidewalk is cracked, parking lot is in disrepair and parking spaces are not clearly marked and there is inadequate parking. Landscaping is not well maintained, contains weeds or foreign species.
- Fair (3):** Structure is reasonably sound, maintenance is needed, however not immediately. Parking is adequate, lines are present, minor cracks in pavement and sidewalks related to normal wear and tear. Signage is visible, and landscaping is maintained
- Good (4):** Structure looked sound, in need of minor maintenance
- Excellent (5):** is recently built or newly renovated

Town staff undertook a visual assessment of properties in the study area. Properties were rated on a 1-5 scale, with 5 representing "like-new" condition and 1 representing a significantly deteriorated property appearing unsound and substandard in some way. To be rated as deteriorating, a property needed to demonstrate characteristics such as boarded or missing windows and doors, missing shingles on the roof, large cracks in exterior walls large section of missing paint or trim or poorly maintained landscaping or parking lots.

The majority of the properties in the study area were rated good to excellent, while a dozen or so were rated fair, mostly for the typical wear and tear associated with occupied housing. Three sites were rated poor, while only one was rated deteriorating.

Parking

Nearly all of the commercial properties along the corridor from Vernon Street to Greenwood Drive appear to have sufficient on-site parking. These properties for the most part are more recently developed, nearly all of them subsequent to the adoption of zoning regulations. Between Woodbridge Street and Vernon Street, the oldest section of the Manchester Green corridor, the parking situation is more constrained. In particular sites like Woodbridge Pizza(489 Middle Turnpike), the Woodbridge Farmstead (495 Middle Turnpike) and the former mill building at 501 Middle Turnpike have very little open land available. This is primarily due to the age of some of the buildings, much of which were built prior to zoning and the era of automobile dependence. Other private properties may also be able to share parking if the uses have different peak hours. However, the lack of on-site parking limits new development and investment and may affect the success of businesses here.

The Town-owned and operated Senior Center at 549 Middle Turnpike has a significant amount of parking to accommodate the various programming and events at the Center. While much of the lot appears occupied during peak programming hours, the lot is largely vacant when the Center closes at 4:30 pm. Given the size and location of the lot, there is potential for the site to be used for shared parking with neighboring properties.



Opportunity Sites

The staff identified two sites that in its view, were prime candidates for additional development or redevelopment.



501 Middle Turnpike East

501 Middle Turnpike East is a landmark building, its tower and size making it the most visually prominent structure along the corridor. Its deteriorating exterior condition and obvious vacancy detracts from the adjacent properties and casts an overall unfavorable image on the Green. A successful redevelopment of this site, including building improvements and an appropriate use, would significantly improve Manchester Green both aesthetically and in terms of activity.



699 Middle Turnpike East

The building at 699 Middle Turnpike is currently leased for office space by the State Department of Social Services. The older commercial building and its façade are non-descript and do not have frontage or visibility from Middle Turnpike. This location may account for the failure of previous retail use to survive at this site. A significant portion of the site is not used. As illustrated above, the 6.8 acre property is situated among single-family homes, suggesting residential development could be a better fit with the existing neighborhood fabric.

Public Workshop: Comments & Observations



Over thirty residents attended a workshop to hear staff's observations and offer feedback. The participants identified opportunities for strengthening the Manchester Green corridor and node, including their own observations on some of the problems and possible solutions that would make the corridor function better for pedestrians and vehicles.

Importantly, a general vision for the future of the Manchester Green corridor emerged from the discussion. The following section provides summaries of resident comments, organized into the categories on the right which identify areas of opportunity and further study.

- **Vehicular Circulation & Traffic**
- **Pedestrian Circulation**
- **Parking**
- **Opportunity Sites**

Vehicular Circulation & Traffic

Middle Turnpike East's status as a high traffic arterial road was a source of concern for residents. High speeds on Middle Turnpike East are a concern for pedestrians and motorists exiting cross streets. Many residents expressed concern about the existing five-way intersection at Middle Turnpike and Woodbridge. The intersection is generally considered confusing because its current configuration introduces multiple potential conflict points between vehicles and pedestrians.

The adjacent service road along the northern portion of Middle Turnpike between Vernon Street and Woodbridge Street was also mentioned as a cause of circulation problems. As a one-way road, with a single narrow entrance just beyond Vernon Street, it is easy for motorists on Middle Turnpike looking for destinations off of the service road to miss the entrance, requiring them to make a U-turn or circulate through the Green Manor neighborhood and back out to Vernon Street. This also causes some patrons of the Senior Center to enter the lot from the service road, ignoring the "Do Not Enter" signs.



Above: The intersection at East Center Street, Woodbridge Street, & Middle Turnpike East. The intersection was cited by residents at the public workshop as problematic for both pedestrians and drivers.



The one-way pattern on the service road north of Middle Turnpike (white arrow) often causes confusion and circulation difficulties. Many patrons of the Senior Center heading east on Middle Turnpike perform a U-turn (red arrow) and enter the parking lot from the service road rather than enter from Vernon Street (yellow arrow)

Possible Intersection Improvements



Three of the four crosswalks at the Middle Turnpike East/Woodbridge Street/East Center Street intersection are marked. With traffic coming from multiple directions, pedestrians may be confused or feel unsafe at this crossing.

Possible solutions here might include enhanced pavement markings and pedestrian signalization and timing.

Introducing street trees or other landscaping features along this section of Middle Turnpike would provide a buffer for pedestrians and likely reduce average vehicle speeds, as motorists would perceive the road as slightly narrowed.

Simplifying the intersection to a four-point intersection or converting it to a roundabout is a possibility to move traffic while also enhancing pedestrian safety.

Above: The intersection at East Center Street, Woodbridge Street & Middle Turnpike East. The intersection was cited by residents at the public workshop as problematic for both pedestrians and drivers.

Pedestrian Circulation

Residents were concerned about the pedestrian environment in Manchester Green, particularly along Middle Turnpike. The high vehicular speeds on the road creates an inhospitable walking environment for pedestrians even where there are sidewalks. There is little in the way of a physical buffer such as fence, berm, or landscaping to enhance the actual or perceived separation of vehicles and pedestrians.

The width of Middle Turnpike East and the scarcity of marked crosswalks effectively isolate pedestrians in neighborhoods to the south of the Manchester Green corridor. Encouraging pedestrian activity along the Green will require examining whether there are opportunities to shorten crossing distances, use additional stop or caution signals, or introduce markings to alert motorist to possible pedestrian activity and make pedestrians feel more comfortable crossing in these locations.

The five-way intersection makes crossing Middle Turnpike East particularly difficult. Three of the four crosswalks at the Middle Turnpike East/Woodbridge Street/East Center Street intersection

are marked, creating some pedestrian confusion and unease, as traffic comes from multiple directions including the service drive. This is especially true when attempting to cross Middle Turnpike East east of Manchester Green. Possible solutions here might include enhanced pavement markings and pedestrian signalization and timing. Another alternative may be to somehow simplify the intersection either through a roundabout or by creating a four-point intersection to maintain the flow traffic while enhancing pedestrian safety.



Top: The southern side of Middle Turnpike East from Center Street to Vernon Street could feature street trees or other landscaping features to create a more hospitable pedestrian environment.

Bottom: The width of Middle Turnpike East makes crossing difficult. Additionally, the lack of physical separation between sidewalks and the road creates an inhospitable environment for walking.

Pedestrian Circulation (cont'd)

There are few street trees on the northern side of the service drive and limited street landscaping on commercial properties on the southern side of Middle Turnpike East from Center Street to Vernon Street. Additional shade trees and landscaping would enhance the aesthetics of the corridor and make a more comfortable pedestrian environment. This is especially important on the northern side of the of the Green if the Senior Center parking lot or other shared parking arrangements are to be pursued to encourage use and activity at the Woodbridge Farmhouse and museum, 501 Middle Turnpike East, and the Woodbridge pizza property.



Enhanced landscaping on the north and south of Middle Turnpike between Woodbridge Street and Vernon Street would increase the aesthetic appeal of the corridor.

Opportunities & Areas for Future Study

- As a State road, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) should be contacted to discuss possible changes along Middle Turnpike East. The Town should begin dialogue with the appropriate personnel at DOT to identify opportunities to improve its function as a gateway corridor in Manchester and to enhance the pedestrian experience along Middle Turnpike
- The five-way intersection at East Center, Woodbridge and Middle Turnpike East should be analyzed in more depth to determine whether a realignment is beneficial.
- Incorporate streetscape improvements, including street trees, landscaping, crosswalks and other features to improve the pedestrian experience.

Parking

While the more recently development properties in Manchester Green east of Vernon Street have adequate parking, the western edge between Woodbridge Street and Vernon Street has inadequate parking given the lot and building sizes. 489 Middle Turnpike (Woodbridge Pizza), 495 (Manchester Historical Society building), and 501 (the former Hanshaw furniture store building) have little land available for on-site parking, limiting the marketability for new investment or uses.

The possibility of shared parking arrangements between businesses was discussed as a possible solution, as was more fully utilizing the existing capacity of the Senior Center's parking lot. As some businesses already use the Center's parking, further exploring a broad-based mutual parking policy clarifying the roles of the private and public sector would be beneficial. Devising shared parking agreements offers the potential for a mutually beneficial arrangement between property owners with ample parking and nearby businesses with insufficient capacity or inability to expand. In order to execute these arrangements, related matters such as the duration of the agreement, insurance, liability and fees or rent would need to be negotiated.

Opportunities & Areas for Future Study

- Businesses and other property owners in the area should convene to discuss possible shared parking arrangements and other approaches to their parking challenges. Town staff and the Planning and Zoning Commission could consider zoning regulation amendments that would allow shared parking arrangements between private property owners.
- Utilization patterns of the Senior Center Parking lot and other lots in the study area should be further studied to fully account for differences in time of day, time of year, programming peaks and other issues impacting parking usage.
- The Town in consultation with the Senior Center staff, should investigate the possible use of the Senior Center lot as a municipal lot to serve Manchester Green, in particular to complement uses along the service drive.



The Senior Center's significant amount of parking is often underutilized, making it a potential resource for shared parking among local businesses and services.

Opportunity Sites

Concerns about property conditions in the study area were generally limited to a few specific sites. The former Hanshaw furniture store building at 501 Middle Turnpike was frequently cited as an eyesore. Residents agreed with Town staff's assessment that a successful redevelopment of the site was critical for strengthening the Manchester Green corridor. The visual prominence of the building and its current substandard appearance unfortunately creates a negative perception of the area. Its on-site parking is likely insufficient for all but a few possible uses while its unique status as a former mill building with a brook running through it creates additional redevelopment challenges.

The adjacent Woodbridge Farmstead property to its immediate west, owned by the Manchester

Historical Society, is another site of opportunity. The Historical Society has indicated a desire to open an agriculturally themed museum at the site, but is limited by the severe lack of parking. Both 501 Middle Turnpike and the Woodbridge Farmstead are historically significant properties at the Green. The Woodbridge property would provide a major cultural and public space and attract additional visitors to the corridor. 501 Middle Turnpike, if converted to a mix of commercial and residential uses, could add activity and customers to the site. Its location on a bus route is another attractive feature for potential tenants.



Opportunity Sites: A– 485 Middle Turnpike; B–Woodbridge Farmstead; C– 501 Middle Turnpike; D– 699 Middle Turnpike

Opportunity Sites (cont'd)

485 Middle Turnpike East is another 1900's era mill building which like the other older historic buildings on the Green, covers most of its lot and has extremely limited parking. It may be a candidate for adaptive reuse in the future and as an old industrial building may face environmental challenges as well. Still, as part of the grouping of historic structures at the western edge of the corridor, it should be considered as an opportunity for conversion to residential or mixed-use.

At the eastern edge of the study area, 699 Middle Turnpike also has significant potential. The building is privately owned and currently leased by the State Department of Social Services. The facade of the building and parking areas are in poor to fair condition and the limited visibility from Middle Turnpike somewhat isolates it as a destination use. These factors inhibit the site from generating additional activity to the commercial sections of Manchester Green. The site appears well-suited for residential uses, as it is currently surrounded by housing and the poor visibility from Middle Turnpike will continue to inhibit commercial or service uses. A conversion to residential use or development of a residential component on the site should be considered. However, traffic circulation into and out of the site and the potential impact on the adjacent neighborhood, specifically Hilltop Drive, should also be carefully examined. The scale and design of any redevelopment should complement the existing neighborhood.

All three sites are privately owned, limiting Town-driven initiatives for those particular properties. However, workshop participants and staff discussed broader-based policies that may incentivize building and site improvements, including façade improvement programs, financial incentives for redeveloping historic properties, and standards for integrating newer buildings with older properties.

Opportunities & Areas for Future Study

- The property owners of these opportunity sites should be contacted to learn more about their specific challenges. Where appropriate, the Town can help connect them with necessary resources. The Town could also identify possible local resources or incentives to encourage redevelopment.
- Explore possible revisions to the Special Design Commercial zone to facilitate redevelopment, including possible expansion of the types of residential uses, shared parking, streamlined approval process and architectural design standards.

Preliminary Vision for Manchester Green

While the discussion at the public meeting tended to focus on specific properties or specific functions (for example, traffic circulation or walkability), as the workshop progressed a theme and vision began to emerge. Residents focused on the historic architecture and buildings in the Green; their role as possible anchors to an industrial village at a major crossroads and the remnants of an agricultural era.

The physical layout at the western edge of the corridor provides the framework to recreate a village center with restored Colonial and Victorian era residential and industrial architecture. There was also interest in creating a new “Green” - a public space where people could gather, socialize and relax. Perhaps creating a small greenspace or pocket park at the Senior Center or Woodbridge Farmstead could serve such a purpose.

The desire for a village-like character and the inhospitable pedestrian environment along Middle Turnpike is one of corridor’s most interesting and challenging dynamics. Improving the pedestrian experience and those connections could help attract people to a revitalized Green, making it a more attractive area for existing residents, visitors, investors, businesses and the larger community. The opportunities and areas for future study identified in this report suggest several paths for helping reshape Manchester Green into a more vibrant and pleasant environment for everyone.