Glenwood Springs Roaring Fork Market Place and CO-82 Corridor

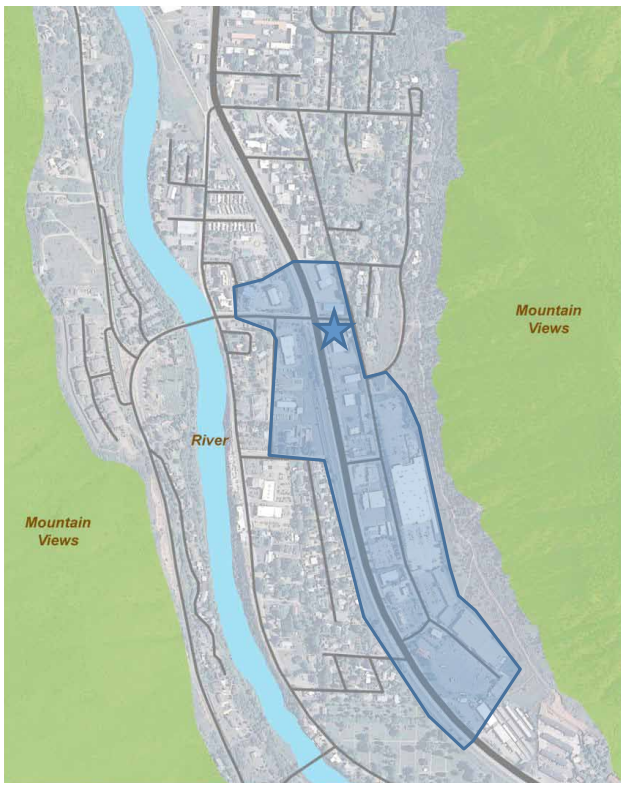
2011 REDEVELOPMENT STUDY

IMPLEMENTING GLENWOOD SPRINGS' COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

In March 2011 the City of Glenwood Springs adopted a new Comprehensive Plan that works to sustain the City's role as a commercial center while emphasizing compact urban form through infill and redevelopment. As well, it supports the City's efforts to provide expanded housing choices and create a pedestrian-oriented environment, despite the challenges created by having a major state highway running through town. Among other things, the Glenwood Springs Comprehensive Plan identifies a handful of areas where significant amounts of future growth can be accommodated. These include the Downtown and Confluence area, the West Glenwood Mall, the Municipal Airport, and the Roaring Fork Market Place, the focus of this study.

Today the Roaring Fork Market Place Study Area is a mostly auto-oriented commercial district. However, as the likely location for the northern terminus of the planned Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service, it is poised for transformation.

Roaring Fork Market Place Study Area and South Glenwood Springs Commercial Corridor



The main uses in the corridor are big-box and strip retail space that includes significant amounts of surface parking. This map indicates the location of the likely northern terminus of the planned RFTA BRT service.

STUDY AREA OPPORTUNITIES

Several opportunities support the City's goal of seeing this area evolve into a walkable, mixed-use center that can accommodate future development while retaining the retail focus of the district. National market trends, suggesting a shift towards more walkable retail, present an opportunity to transform the site with a focus on intensifying retail activity, improving connectivity within the site, diversifying uses and creating a more inviting "Main Street" feel centered on Blake Avenue.

Local and Regional Retail Markets

The regional retail focus of the area and its proximity to existing spending centers and a significant customer base located south of the City suggest potential for increasing revenues for development in the area. Although the current market is slow, projected growth in Glenwood Springs and Garfield County suggests strong potential for mixed-use redevelopment in the future.

Underutilized Land

There is a considerable supply of aging buildings and underutilized land, including many surface parking lots that provide ample room for new growth and development. Parts of the site include large parcel sizes, which would facilitate easier land assembly for redevelopment. While the area is known as a retail stronghold, a mixed-use future for the area could use retail as the anchor with which to bring people to the Roaring Fork MarketPlace.

Blake Avenue

Blake Avenue, an underutilized internal street through the study area, could serve as the backbone around which future development could be oriented. This would create a more walkable "main street" feel while continuing to provide access to existing businesses.

Transit-Oriented Development

The City's Comprehensive Plan states that any mixed-use redevelopment of secondary commercial centers should provide a compact critical population mass that helps make the bus a viable and competitive transportation option.

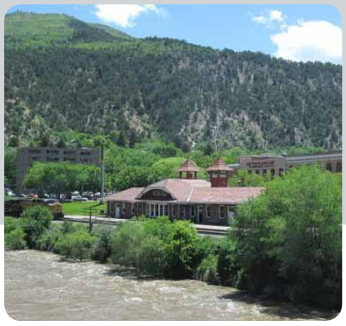
As part of the BRT system that will provide express service between Glenwood Springs and Aspen, the RFTA plans to construct a BRT station in the vicinity of 27th Street and S. Glen Avenue. This will improve to and from access and provide a reliable connection from the study are to the larger region that includes downtown Glenwood, Carbondale, El Jebel, Basalt, Snowmass Village and Aspen. Additionally, a well-designed transit hub could help to catalyze redevelopment and a mix of uses that brings housing and jobs within walking distance of the station. This would support the BRT system and also help further the city's livability and urban design goals.

Connections and Walkability

Currently, the study area's design and uses make a pleasant and desirable walking experience very difficult. Although the nearby Rio Grande Trail is a great multi-use regional trail connection for bikers and pedestrians, the most important opportunities are improving local pedestrian and bicycle connections east of the highway within the study area. This can be done through a mix of urban design improvements, pedestrian and bike infrastructure investments, and encouraging more walkable uses within the area. These strategies can be started concurrently with the BRT station planning and the site design for a mixed-use district.

Scenic and Natural Amenities

The district benefits from proximity to natural and recreational amenities. The study area offers spectacular views of the surrounding mountains and is only a short distance to the Roaring Fork. These amenities can be leveraged to attract both residents and businesses if they are easy to access with sidewalks and pathways.



STUDY AREA CHALLENGES

Along with the study area's many opportunities, there are also major challenges to overcome in order to achieve the corridor's potential. These challenges include the physical conditions of the area – from building configuration to connectivity – and the financial capacity of public and private sectors to implement the desired improvements in the corridor.

Land Uses

The current configuration of land uses and transportation facilities presents several challenges for corridor redevelopment. The existing building stock is aging, auto-oriented pad commercial that is difficult to convert to other uses. Multiple property owners make for fractured land ownership that could require additional stakeholder coordination to assemble areas large enough to stimulate significant redevelopment.

Physical Constraints

The site is squeezed between steep hillsides and Highway 82, which poses physical constraints to large-scale redevelopment. Similarly, the eastern flank of the site sits above the western portion, which presents potential grading challenges. Steep slopes in the corridor may pose erosion and stormwater challenges for new development.

Transportation and Access

Connectivity between commercial properties and access from one area to another is poor, whether by automobile or on foot. Highway 82 is currently a high-speed roadway that forms a significant east-west barrier. Currently there are only three access points to the study area. Blake Avenue has been blocked at the north end of the area, limiting access from Highway 82 only. The current orientation of buildings, parking, and access points are not conducive to walking or non-auto transportation modes. Existing infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians is low quality. Additionally, there is a grade difference of 10-20 feet between Highway 82 and Blake Avenue, the parallel local road.

Market and Financial

Current market conditions such as low demand and low achievable rents, makes developing mixed-use products a challenge. The prototype building analysis, (described in more depth on the next page) concluded that the costs associated with necessary infrastructure improvements and new development are considerable, and would be major even in a strong national economy. In the present slow-market context, the costs of infrastructure investments will be a hurdle for the public and private sectors alike.

A Changing National Development Market

As the nation recovers from the Great Recession and demographics shift, it's expected that several key demographic groups will drive the new housing and retail markets: Baby Boomers, Generation Y and immigrants. These groups will seek housing they can afford, walkable neighborhoods, and options beyond traditional single-family housing. This study's analysis shows that Garfield County will have a significant demand for moderately priced multi-family and mixed-use homes, townhomes, and smaller lot single-family residences. These housing types will complement Garfield County's strong appeal to the key demographics – such as outdoor recreational opportunities well-suited for Generation Y and easy access to services for Baby Boomers. Specifically, Glenwood Springs can plan to capitalize on this future demand for walkable neighborhoods in the Roaring Fork Market Place area.

MARKET FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

To test the relative feasibility of different types of buildings and development types, a customized library of 20 prototypical buildings (including residential, commercial, industrial and multi-story, mixed-use buildings) was created and modeled using the Envision Tomorrow Return on Investment (ROI) Model. The ROI Model was calibrated to reflect local market and regulatory conditions to reveal openings, limitations and, in some cases, opportunities for policy change to foster desired development. Although these prototypes were created for the Garfield County as a whole, the lessons learned are applicable to the Roaring Fork Market Place area.

The analysis first examined the total value (in dollars) of each prototype per acre. The range varied widely from the most valuable, (the 6-Story Mixed-Use Building prototype valued at $11.7 million per acre and the 4-Story Mixed-Use Office Building prototype valued at $10.6 million per acre) to the least valuable (the 2-Acre Single Family prototype valued at about $300,000 per acre and the 6-Acre Single-Family valued at $160,000 per acre). These values translate directly into increases in property taxes collected. In terms of sales tax, which is an important consideration in the Roaring Fork Market Place area, the Main Street prototype generated the most sales tax per acre, followed by the Strip Commercial and Large-Format/Big-Box Retail prototypes. However, the mixed-use prototype buildings with a full level devoted to retail performed remarkably well, generating between 50% and 100% of the sales tax of a Big-Box prototype and generated much higher property taxes.

While increased property and sales tax generation is an important consideration, equally important is development feasibility. In essence, development feasibility is based on the interplay between the costs to develop a project and the income stream or sales price associated with the final development. A steady income stream or property sales require strong demand. If the project does not generate a sufficient return, a developer won't build it. In the near- to medium-term, we found that the prototypes fell along a feasibility spectrum. Focusing on these buildings is important because it can set expectations for the area and help guide the more detailed small area planning process that should form the foundation of the entire district.

FEASIBILITY SPECTRUM

Main Street Retail, Townhomes — 3- and 4-Story Mixed-Use — 6- and 8-Story Mixed-Use

most feasible — most challenging

Main Street Retail

Townhome & Live-Work

2- & 3-Story Mixed-Use Residential

2- & 3-Story Apartments

Most Feasible Prototypes

Main Street Retail – This building type is one story, yet compact and suitable for walkable neighborhoods and districts with a shared parking strategy, such as the potential in the Roaring Fork Market Place.

Townhome and Live-Work – Both of these prototypes are feasible within the current market and are being developed in Garfield County today. This prototype would work well to help transition to the single family neighborhoods near the study area.

2- and 3-Story Mixed-Use Residential – These prototypes can be built for a relatively moderate cost, are useful for ensuring people spend time in the area throughout the day, and are compatible with shared parking between retail and residential uses.

2- and 3-Story Apartments – These prototypes, similar to the low-rise mixed-use buildings, are preferable in areas adjacent to the Roaring Fork Marketplace walkable core. Garfield County has strong demand for workforce and senior housing that can be met through these prototypes.

Feasible with Subsidy

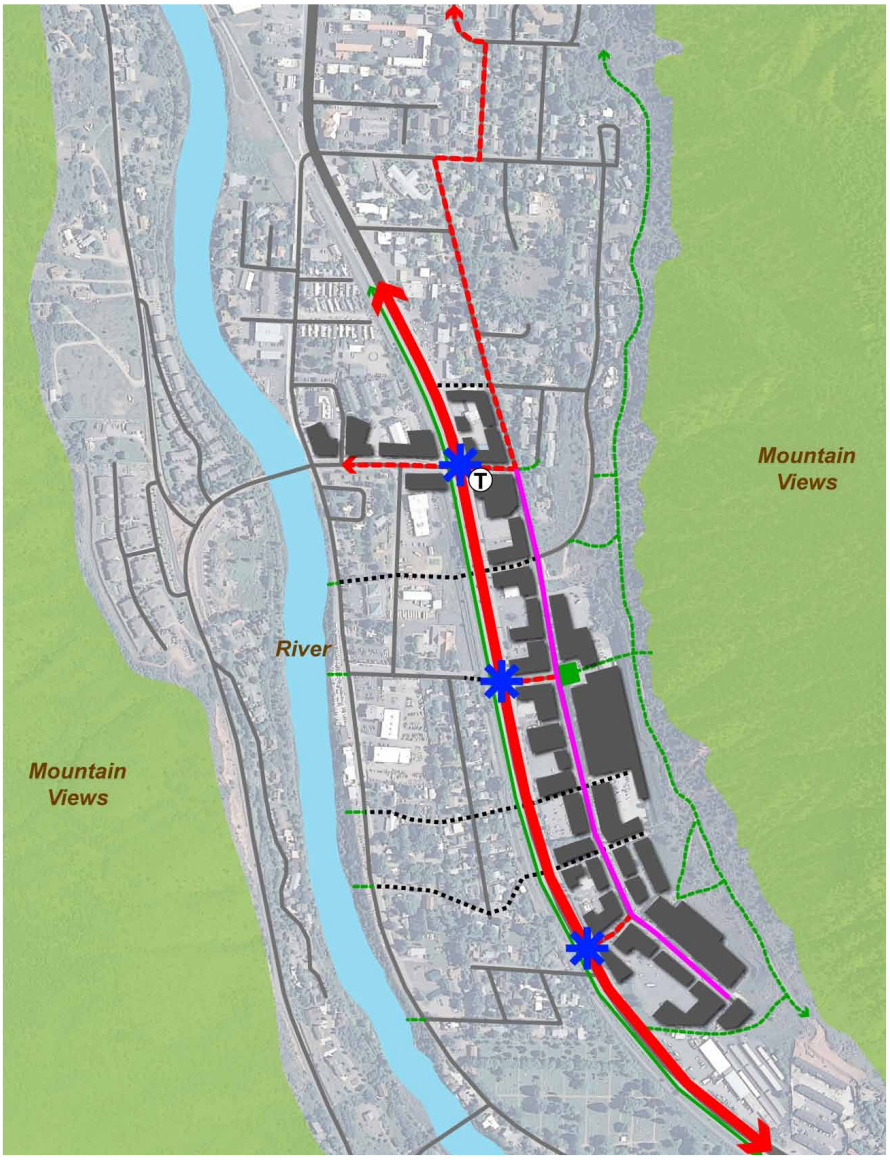
6-Story Mixed-Use Residential Building – Higher development costs associated with tuck-under/internal parking make this prototype more feasible over the longer term or with some subsidy for the parking. This prototype, at over 100 units/acre, is ideal when market demand and absorption rates are high.

4-Story Mixed-Use Residential and Office Buildings – These have less internal parking than the 6-story prototype and are more likely in the nearer term. If the community is comfortable with the scale of development, this is an important aspirational prototype.

3-Story Office – The market research points to a soft office market in Garfield County. The necessary rents to make this prototype feasible are significantly higher than other office buildings available today. This may be more feasible several years down the road.

TRANSPORTATION SCENARIOS

While proximity to Highway 82 provides adequate access for automobiles, the area is generally unsafe and difficult to navigate for pedestrians and bicyclists. Left unchanged, the study area's current urban design and transportation system – including parking options, streets, and pedestrian facilities – prevent the ability to create a walkable, mixed-use center as envisioned by the City. Improving transportation to and within the study area is essential to facilitating quality redevelopment envisioned by the City's Comprehensive Plan. Two potential transportation scenarios were developed to explore options for reconfiguring the area's circulation and road networks.



Scenario A: Highway and Internal Main Street

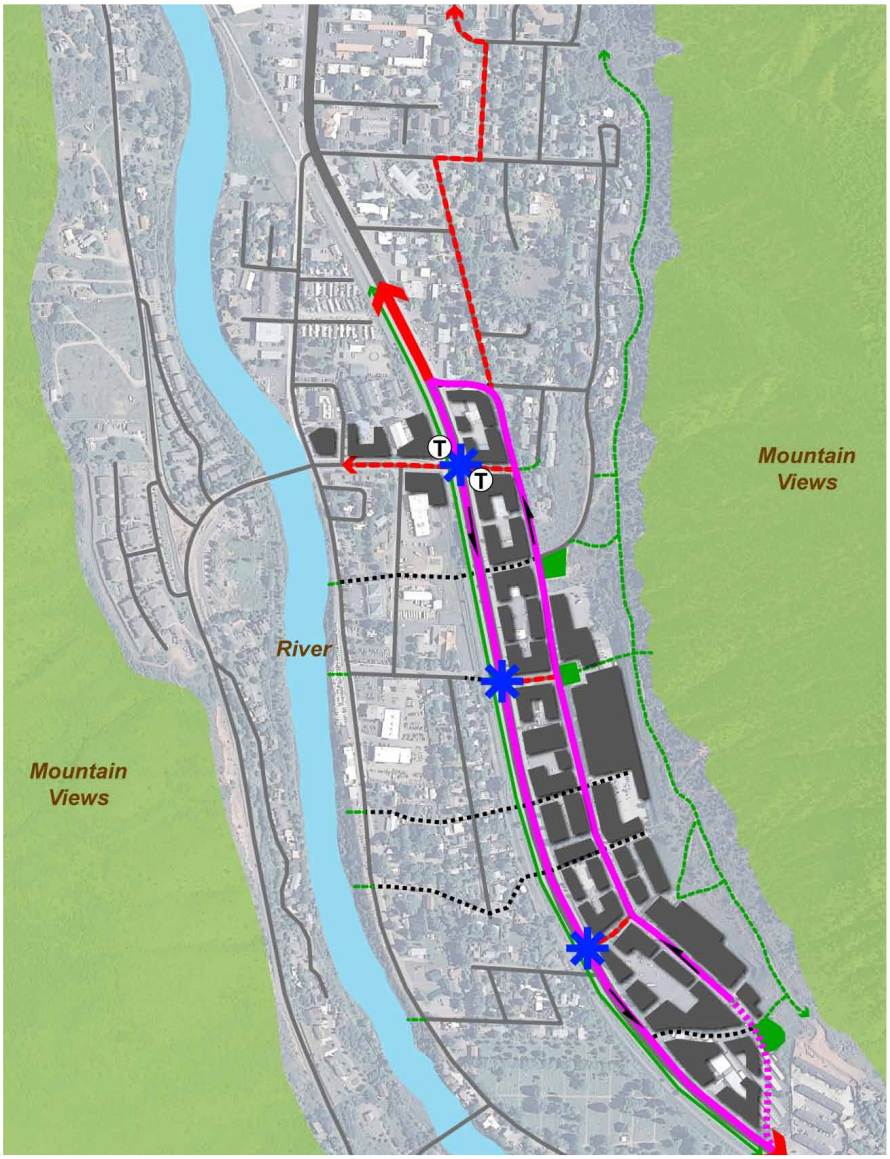
Scenario A maintains Highway 82 as the major regional throughway with two-directional traffic and three access points into the focus area. Additional investments would be made in pedestrian crossings to improve connections within the corridor and to nearby residential neighborhoods. Streetscape improvements would be made along Blake Avenue, transforming it into a pedestrian-oriented internal main street paralleling the highway. In addition, the gate blocking access to the site from Blake would be removed and Blake would become an alternative route to downtown for slower traffic, bicycles and pedestrians. New development regulations could be adopted to encourage buildings oriented toward the internal main street.

Visioning Workshop

During the visioning workshop in May 2011, area stakeholders discussed the challenges of the current road network, access points, and non-auto infrastructure within the study area and their desires for improved connections to surrounding neighborhoods. In order to test the development market feasibility analysis and get feedback on the transportation scenarios, the stakeholders were also tasked with providing an assessment of the prevailing characteristics of the area, including access, circulation and building design and layout. Finally, they provided input regarding alternative development patterns within the area.

Scenario B: One-Way Couplet

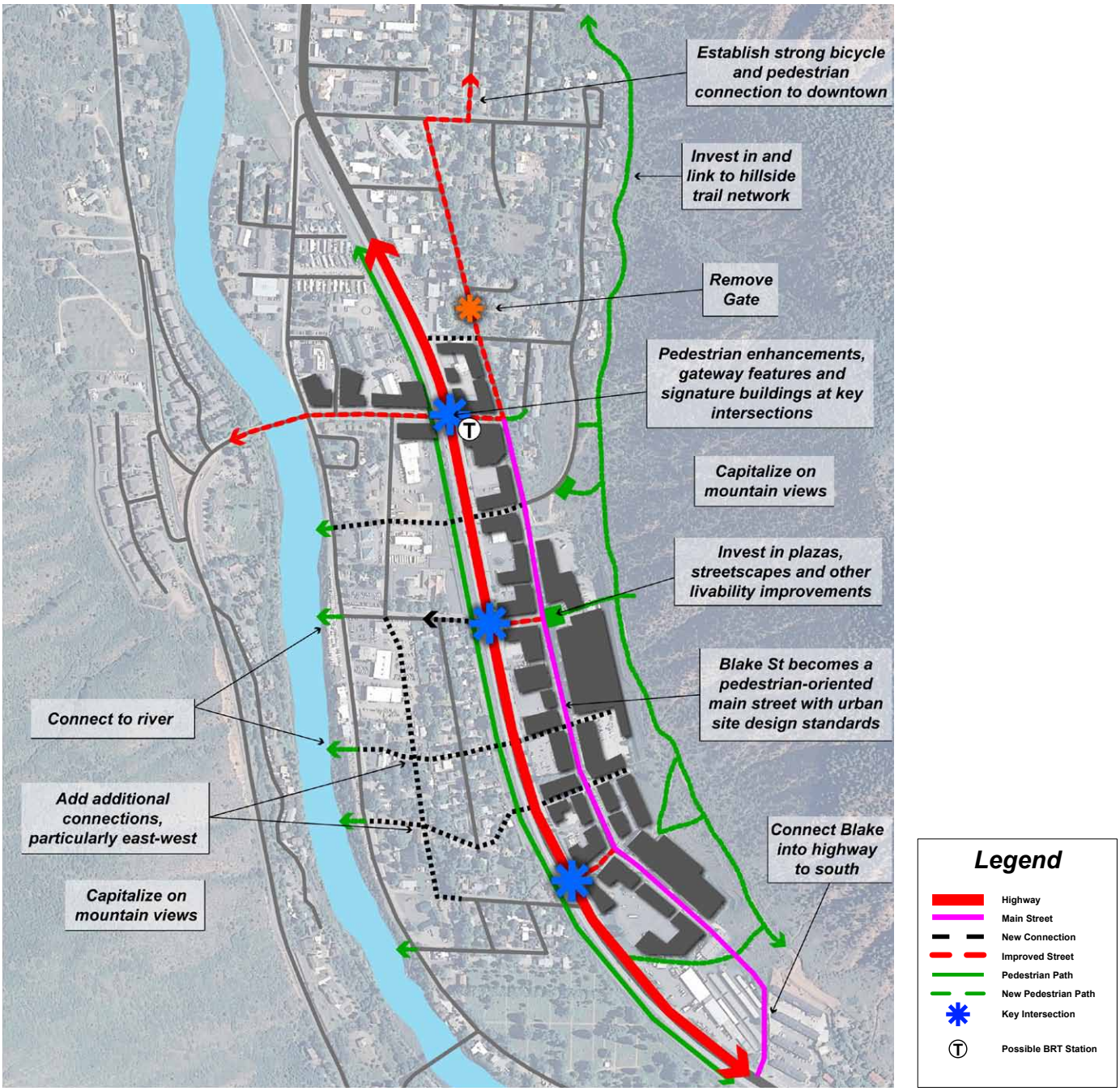
Scenario B imagines Highway 82 transformed into a one-way couplet where auto traffic in one direction is split and diverted to an internal parallel roadway at the southern end of focus area, rejoining two-directional traffic at the north end, at or near 27th Street. The existing highway (currently 5 lanes) could be narrowed, with the possibility of a dedicated BRT lane added to the streetscape. Wide sidewalks, bike lanes and transit facilities could be added to each roadway as part of the reconfiguration, making for improved pedestrian access. A one-way couplet allows buildings oriented toward both streets, and the impact of transit is spread throughout the site.



Workshop Results

The workshop resulted in a vision for development that includes a diverse mix of uses including mixed-use office and retail structures, a newly invigorated Blake Street with pedestrian-friendly streetscaping, the addition of new residential townhomes, small open spaces and other public plazas. Workshop attendants also discussed the potential to orient building frontages toward Blake Street to create a "main street" feel. They designated two more access points to and from the area across Highway 82, connecting the neighborhood and river to the west. In addition, they expressed a desire for improved pedestrian-oriented boulevard treatments along Highway 82 with particular attention to safe intersection crossings. Participants stated that opening Blake Street to the north of the area was important to improve to and from access for bicyclists and pedestrians. These are conceptual ideas and need further refinement through the small area planning process.

VISIONING WORKSHOP MAP



Photosimulation of Potential Pedestrian-Oriented Development in the Roaring Fork Market Place Study Area

Visualizing a Pedestrian-Friendly Corridor

Blake Avenue has the potential to become a walkable neighborhood street lined with 2-3 story retail and residential buildings. The street could be transformed into the spine of a mixed-use Roaring Fork Market Place community.

Potential Pedestrian Crossing at Grade

Potential Pedestrian Flat Crossing

Blake Street – Potential Pedestrian-Oriented Main Street

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

We have identified six key recommendations for redevelopment in the South Glenwood Springs Commercial Corridor.

1. Create a small area plan.

To take advantage of the study area opportunities, it is vital to create a small area plan that includes these elements:

- Land use
- Urban design
- Transportation
- Implementation strategies

2. Prioritize transportation improvements to improve access to and from the study area.

- Ensure that the BRT transit hub is located in the study area
- Remove the gate that blocks Blake on the north side of the site
- Create new and improved east-west connections to link focus area to the river, to adjacent neighborhoods and across Highway 82
- Improve Blake Street with pedestrian-oriented treatments to establish it as a "main street"
- Work with CDOT to determine long-term designs for Highway 82

3. Design a connected and walkable district.

Building better streets is important for walkability: wide sidewalks, short crossing distances at intersections, and multiple route options are necessary for people to walk safely in an area. These elements should be combined with an urban form that provides reasons to walk (i.e. places to go, things to do and other people with whom to interact). These changes will provide a better balance between people getting around by car, bicycle and foot.

4. Create public amenities in the area.

The Roaring Fork Market Place design should include several key public amenities including parks, plazas and fountains – a central gathering place – and trail connections to downtown. Creating these amenities will cost money, but some initial investments can play an important role in catalyzing public sector investment.

5. Focus on public financing to leverage public-private partnerships.

There are a variety of public financing tools available to encourage and seed redevelopment, including urban renewal and tax increment financing. Although the amount of funding provided by each is typically small compared to the project budget, public funding streams can be used in combination and as a means of spurring more substantial private investment. Additionally, low or no cost financial incentives provided by the public sector can be an equal or greater benefit to developers, allowing the prototype projects to "tip" toward feasibility.

6. Create a shared parking strategy.

Where pedestrian-oriented urban form and improved connections make it safe, efficient, and comfortable to get between destinations by foot, the City of Glenwood Springs should consider a shared parking strategy for the corridor which would reduce parking requirements within defined shared parking areas or districts.

NEXT STEPS

Following this initial study, additional planning work on the part of the City will be important to realize the potential of desired redevelopment along the Highway 82 commercial corridor. The first step will be to conduct a full-scale small area plan with public engagement that includes both near- and long-term strategies.

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