

Portsmouth Master Plan Update

Draft Plan Overview
Spring / Summer 2026



Agenda

Draft Plan Overview
Spring / Summer 2026

1. Purpose & Process Overview (5 min)

2. Draft Plan Framework (5 min)

- Vision
- Values
- Goals

3. Cultivating Neighborhood Centers (5 min)

Promoting Adaptation to Reinforce and Cultivate Gateway Neighborhood Centers

4. Spatial Development Framework (10 min)

- Degree of Change Framework
- Future Place Type Vision & Zoning Changes
- Infrastructure & Capital Investments

What a comprehensive “master plan” is and isn’t

Think of it like a strategic plan for where and how the City should develop and invest over the next 10 years. Master Plans are powerful tools to align development regulations and investments in infrastructure and quality of life with a unified vision.

The planning process will help us shape and create:



A statement of shared values



A strategic vision and roadmap for the future of the city



A framework for implementation

The final plan will establish:

Growth Framework
(Preserve, Enhance, Adapt)

Foundation for changes to land use and zoning regulations

Capital investment priorities

Policy and program priorities

Framework for more detailed district and topic-specific plans

The plan will NOT:



Provide a zoning rewrite



Generate detailed topic-area or place-specific plans

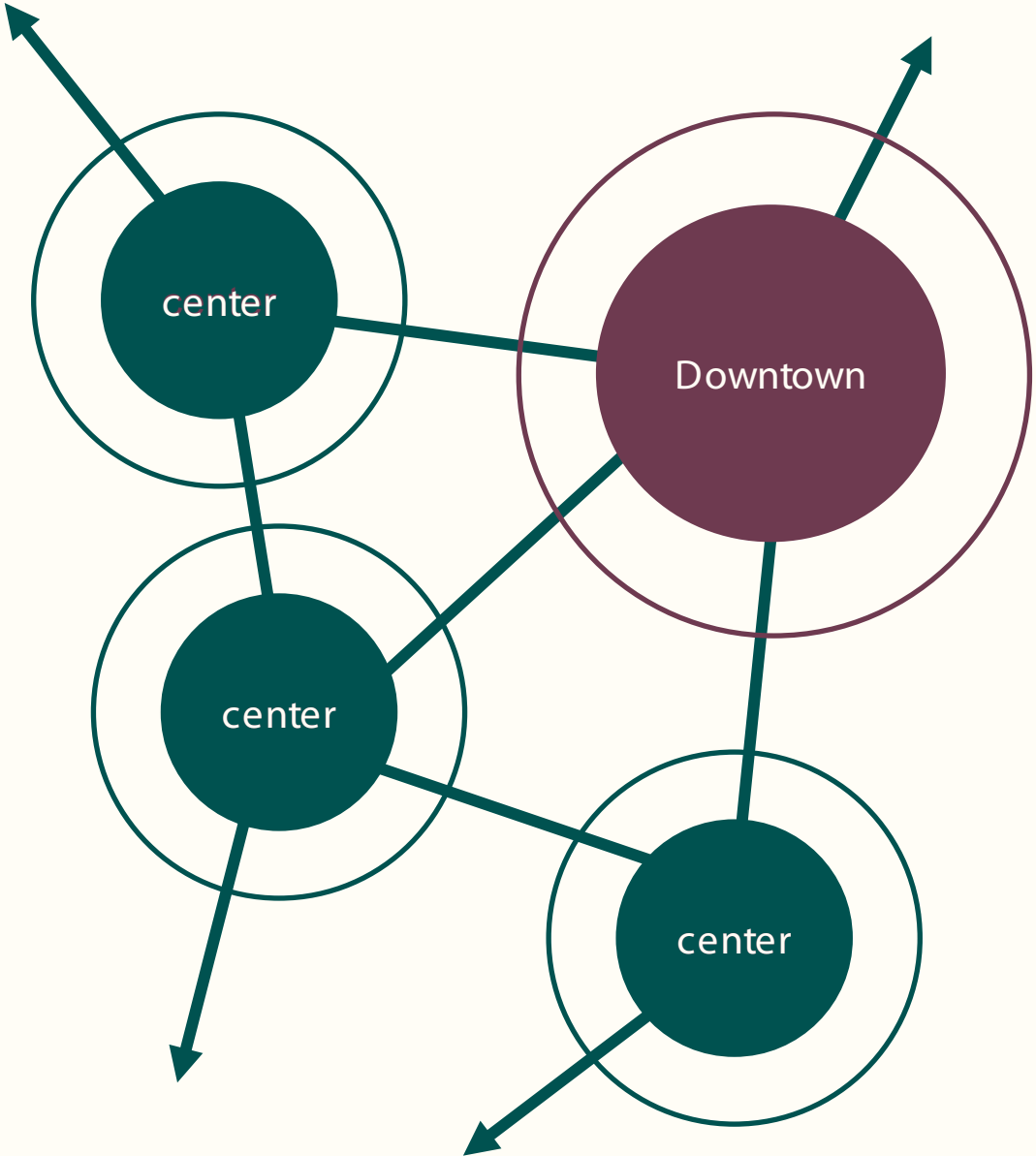


Decide exactly how local resources will be spent

Plan Focus

In addition to baseline obligations, the Master Plan will focus on **filling gaps and making connections** between the City's many recent topic- and area-specific planning efforts. The following key issues will be the primary focus of this plan due to the urgency with which they need to be addressed and a need for more analysis and community conversation around these important topics:

- **Housing** What are Portsmouth's housing needs? What types and price points will best support the City's workforce and the evolving age and household size of residents? How can we best enable and encourage these types of housing in the City?
- **Economy** Where is Portsmouth's economy headed over the next decade? What types of industries and jobs support it now, and which are best positioned to support it in the future? How does this impact workforce housing and training needs? What can Portsmouth do to encourage and support the kind of economic opportunities that make the community stronger, more stable, resilient, vibrant, and desirable?
- **Development Patterns & Urban Form** How and where should Portsmouth grow? What is the right scale, location, and form of future development? How should this relate to investments in mobility, infrastructure, recreation, and community services that support a high quality of life for City residents? How should this respond to and reflect climate resilience, environmental conservation, and sustainability priorities?



What topics does a comprehensive “master plan” focus on?

The Master Plan will focus on **filling gaps and making connections** between the City's many recent topic- and area-specific planning efforts.

The **Foundational Topics** will be the primary focus of this plan due to the:

- lack of recent plans addressing these topics holistically
- urgency of needs
- need for more analysis and community conversation

The **Cross-Cutting Topics** will be integrated throughout based on existing plans.

Foundational Topics

*A **unified strategy** for land use, zoning and community design, integrating:*

Economy

Housing

Transportation & Mobility

Land Use & Built Form

Cross-Cutting Topics

*Topics that are **integral to and woven into** the unified strategy articulated for the foundational topics.*

Sustainability & Resilience

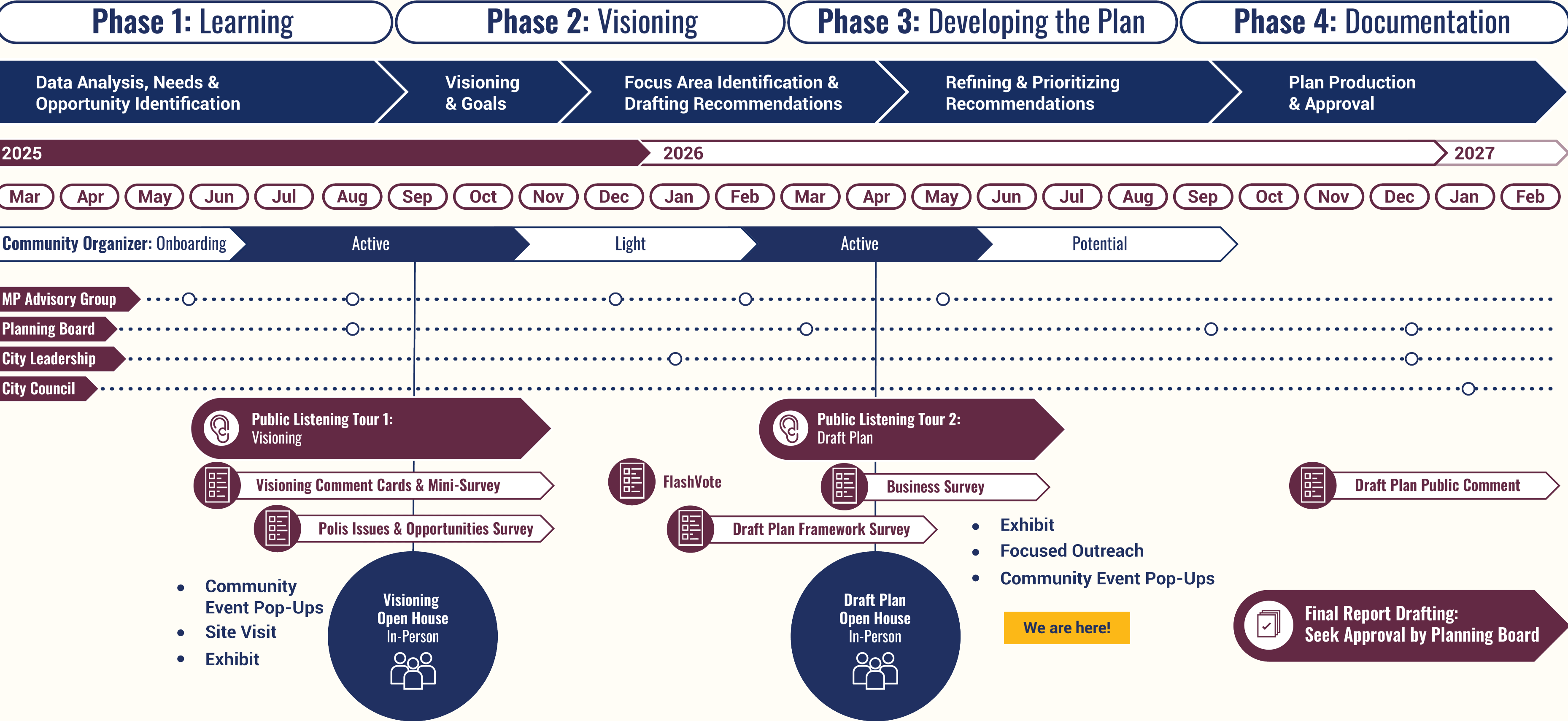
Public Utilities, Services & Facilities

Natural Resources & Conservation

Arts, Recreation & Amenities

Culture & Historic Preservation

Planning Process



Visioning Engagement Update from **Anne Weidman**, our Community Organizer!



The numbers so far....

28+ events attended

796+ 1:1 conversations & visioning comment cards

592+ polis issues & opportunities survey respondents

General Events

- Market Square Day (6/14)
- Juneteenth (6/19)
- Pride Festival (6/21)
- Prescott Park Festival Shows (7/2, 7/23)
- Farmers' Market (7/12, 8/2, 9/13)
- National Night Out (8/5)
- BIPOC Festival (8/17)
- PorchFest (9/20)
- Westival (9/20)
- Gather Mobile Food Market (9/29 at Senior Center, 10/15 at PHA Gosling Meadows, 10/27 at PHA Margeson Apt)
- Fall Family Fun Fest (10/25)

Targeted Outreach

- 100 Club member social (6/11)
- Plan NH lunch (6/17)
- Seacoast Online/Portsmouth Herald Reader Advisory Group (8/22)

Business Community

- Portsmouth Chamber Collaborative Board Meeting (7/17)
- StreetLife / Portsmouth Chamber (8/13)

Seniors & Accessibility

- PHA Senior Summer Cookout (7/24)
- Krempels Brain Injury Center (8/27)
- Wentworth Senior Living (9/2)
- Senior & Accessibility Focus Group (9/29)

Youth & Students

- Soul Models (8/12)
- Portsmouth Public Library Kid's Book Launch Event (9/29)
- New Franklin School Civics Class

Draft Plan Framework Engagement Update from **Anne Weidman**, our Community Organizer!



The winter holiday season was deliberately a quieter time for engagement while we synthesized everything we had learned.

Our focus has been on:

- **Draft Plan Framework Survey**
(a.k.a. Vision and Goals Survey)
- **Business Mini-Survey**
(Arts, Culture, Entrepreneurship)
- **April 22nd Draft Plan Open House**

We will be doing targeted outreach through the remainder of spring and summer to get feedback on draft recommendations following the Open House.

The numbers so far....

362 FlashVote Responses
(statistically representative sample)

169 Vision and Goals Survey
Responses

50+ Business Mini-Survey
Responses (still live)

Draft Plan Framework

Written Component

- Vision
- Values
- Goals

Draft Vision Statement

Portsmouth will continue to cultivate our role as the Seacoast region's cultural and economic hub, protect the places that anchor our shared identity and historic character, and invest in sustainability, resilience and environmental justice.

As the *City of the Open Door*, we will support the people who create our community, expand attainable housing options for residents at every stage of life, and ensure our City is accessible and inclusive.

Together we will work to keep Portsmouth a beautiful, vibrant, and welcoming home for all people for generations to come.



According to [Seacoast Online](#), Portsmouth's slogan "The City of the Open Door" first appeared in a series of promotional pamphlets issued in the 1920s by the recently established Chamber of Commerce.

Draft Core Values

We value.....

Vibrancy

Our rich variety of organizations, businesses, and activities.

Authenticity

Our City's historic character and our ability to contribute to the City's ever-evolving identity through self-expression.

Inclusivity

Welcoming and supporting the full range of ages, incomes, abilities, and identities of Portsmouth community members.

Connectivity

Transportation and communication systems that work for everyone and bring our City together.

Sustainability

Our commitment to being an Eco-Municipality by ensuring our actions protect and reduce our impact on the environment while supporting the needs of all people in Portsmouth today and for generations to come.

Resiliency

The capacity of our residents, built, and natural environment to adapt to a changing climate.

Draft Goals

1

Invest in Quality of Place

Improve the everyday lives of residents and visitors and fulfill the community's desire for a sustainable future by investing in and connecting them to Portsmouth's environmental and cultural amenities.

2

Retain and Create Diverse Housing

Enable, incentivize, and support diverse and attainable housing for all ages and incomes that will support current residents and welcome newcomers.

3

Promote Fiscally Responsible Development

Promote "smart growth" development patterns and processes that contribute to fiscal health and manage residential property tax burden through aligned land use policy and municipal capital investment.

4

Cultivate Our Economy

Support the local artists, small businesses, and anchor employers that enrich Portsmouth and its regional importance.

5

Protect Core Identity

Safeguard the cultural, historic, and environmental assets that make the City unique and beautiful, and ensure that future development contributes to Portsmouth's character.

*will be
aligned with
Housing
Action Plan*

Neighborhood Centers

Cultivating neighborhood centers for Portsmouth's gateway neighborhoods.

A mature, built-out downtown that is stable and well-loved

Over the last decade, Portsmouth's downtown has expanded with residential and hotel projects, concentrated in the North End. The remaining focus Downtown should be about preserving and surgically fine-tuning to keep it at its best and make sure it continues to be accessible to all.



Ongoing North End construction, Seacoast Online



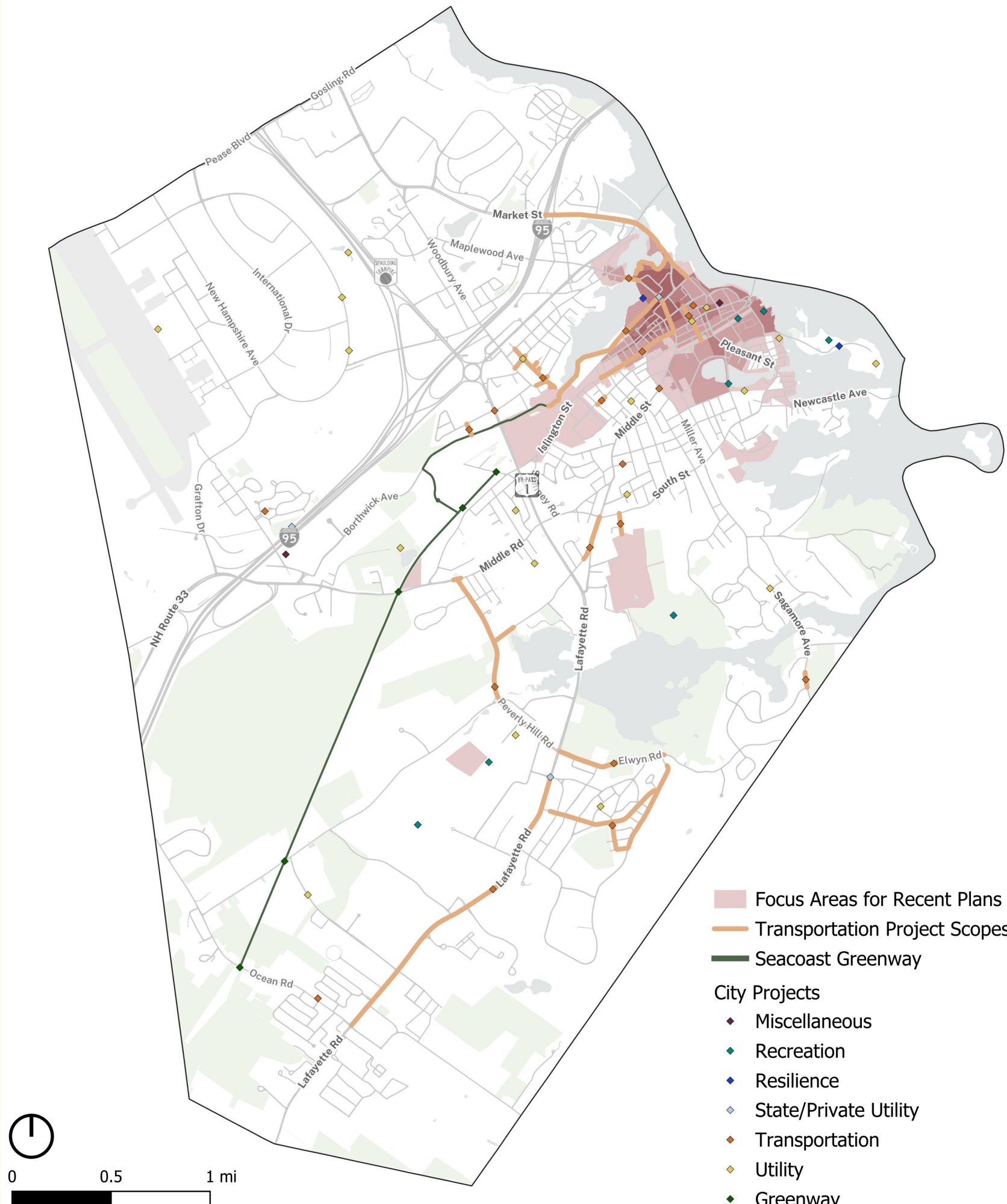
Downtown Aerial Photo, southernmainecoast.com

Planning for Gateway Neighborhoods

The majority of district-level planning has been focused on Downtown. Gateway neighborhoods need help tying transportation and recreation investments to land use and development planning so that the whole adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

Apart from citywide plans, a majority of district and neighborhood-specific plans focused on **Downtown or areas immediately abutting Downtown.**

- Market Square Master Plan (2025)
- Historic Properties Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (2018)
- Prescott Park Master Plan (2017)
- Vaughan Worth Bridge Revitalization Strategic Planning Committee Final Report and Recommendations (2017)
- Deer Street Parking Garage & Deer Street Associates Development Traffic Impact and Access Study (2016)
- North End Vision Plan (2015)
- West End Vision Plan (2015)
- Maplewood Avenue Complete Street Study (2014)
- Parking Supply and Demand Analysis + Strategies (2012)
- Downtown Parking Focus Group Report (2010)
- Islington Street Corridor Improvement Action Plan (2009)
- Market St Extension Gateway Streetscape Improvements Study (2008)



Prices are driving locals to gateway neighborhoods

Local residents and businesses are getting priced out of downtown. Many must look beyond areas that are walkable to downtown to find affordable space.

What Can Typical Households Afford?

Low-Income Senior

A retired senior living on their own, dependent on social security for income.

Household Income	\$45k
Affordable Rent	\$1,100
Affordable For Sale	\$180k

Potential Housing

Connors Cottage: low-income senior housing owned by the Portsmouth Housing Authority

1BR rent at \$926 per month



40% AMI

Food Service Workers

Two food service workers earning \$34k per year, with one child at home.

Household Income	\$67k
Affordable Rent	\$1,700
Affordable For Sale	\$270k

Potential Housing

Ruth's Place: affordable and workforce housing owned by the Portsmouth Housing Authority

2BR rent at \$1,298 per month



60% AMI

Office Workers

A business analyst earning \$85k annually married to an office administrator earning \$40k annually.

Household Income	\$125k
Affordable Rent	\$3,100
Affordable For Sale	\$500k

Potential Housing

Brewery 145: recently-built apartment complex in the up-and-coming West End neighborhood

2BR rent at \$3,325



120% AMI

Management

A manager earning \$160k married to a professional earning \$80k annually, with two children.

Household Income	\$240k
Affordable Rent	\$6,000
Affordable For Sale	\$960k

Potential Housing

163 Ocean Rd: A four-bedroom single family home along Lafayette Rd with 2,800 square feet

Listing price \$975,000



240% AMI

Who can buy Downtown?

Business Owner

A successful local business owner earning \$400k per year is married to a teacher earning \$50k annually.

Household Income	\$450k
Affordable Rent	\$11.2k
Affordable For Sale	\$1.8M

Potential Housing

199 Gates St: historic 3-bedroom, 1800 sqft single-family home in Portsmouth's South End

Listing Price \$1.85M



430% AMI

Boston Area Empty Nesters

Two doctors from suburban Boston are downsizing and moving into Portsmouth. They have \$2M in home equity.

Household Income	\$550k
Affordable Rent	\$13.8k
Affordable For Sale	\$2.5M+

Potential Housing

115 Court St: Victorian era 4-bedroom, 2300 sqft single family home in downtown Portsmouth

Listing Price \$2.23M



520% AMI

Buying a home, condo, or townhome in downtown Portsmouth is generally far out of reach for residents working locally, requiring an income more than 4x the local median.

Many downtown Portsmouth homebuyers are likely new to the area, having earned high incomes elsewhere and accumulated home equity in other expensive markets.

Data Sources:
Portsmouth Housing Authority, Zillow

Emerging public and private investment hubs beyond downtown

West End + Senior Center, Portsmouth Green + Community Campus, Outer Woodbury/Gosling



West End Yards, 2022



The Veridian at Portsmouth Green, 2017



The Residences at Durgin Lane, In-Progress



Senior Activity Center, 2020



Community Campus, 2022 - '25



Chris Rice Skate Park, 2024



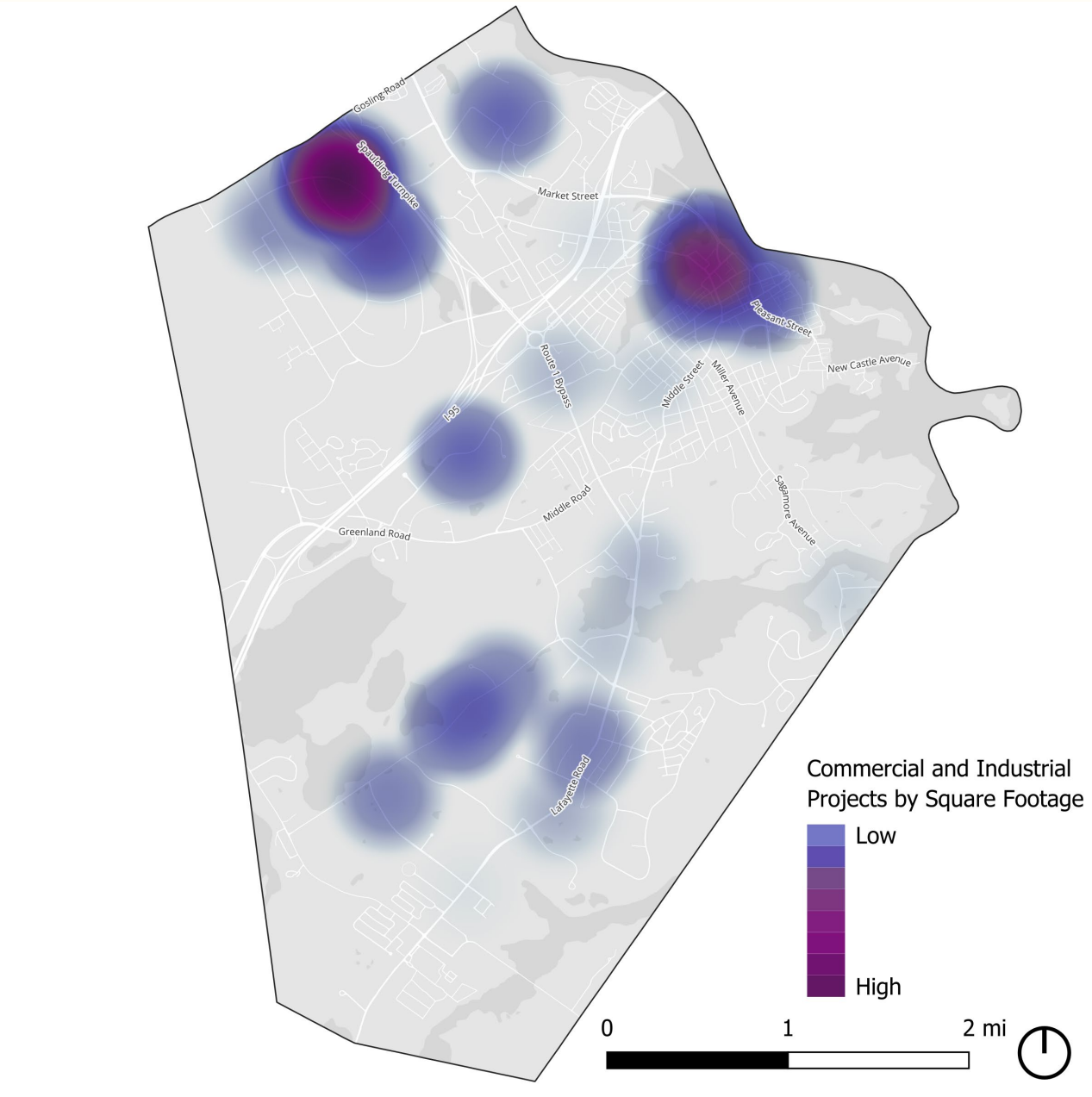
Rail Trail / Seacoast Greenway, 2024

Emerging public and private investment hubs beyond downtown

West End + Senior Center, Portsmouth Green + Community Campus, Outer Woodbury/Gosling

Recent development activity hot spots that stand out:

- Downtown’s North End (comm + resi)
- Pease (comm)
- West End (resi)
- Lafayette / Rt 1 (comm + resi)



Development Hot Spots
Commercial and Industrial (by square footage)



Development Hot Spots
Residential (by dwelling units)

Planning for Gateway Neighborhoods

The Gateway Neighborhood Districts, adopted into the City's zoning in 2017 to address the need for increased supply and diversity of housing in Portsmouth, have generated a strong response from the real estate development market. Now that we can see what the market is doing on its own, we can see what gaps and rebalancing might be beneficial.



Gateway Corridor (G1)

Gateway Neighborhood Mixed Use Corridor

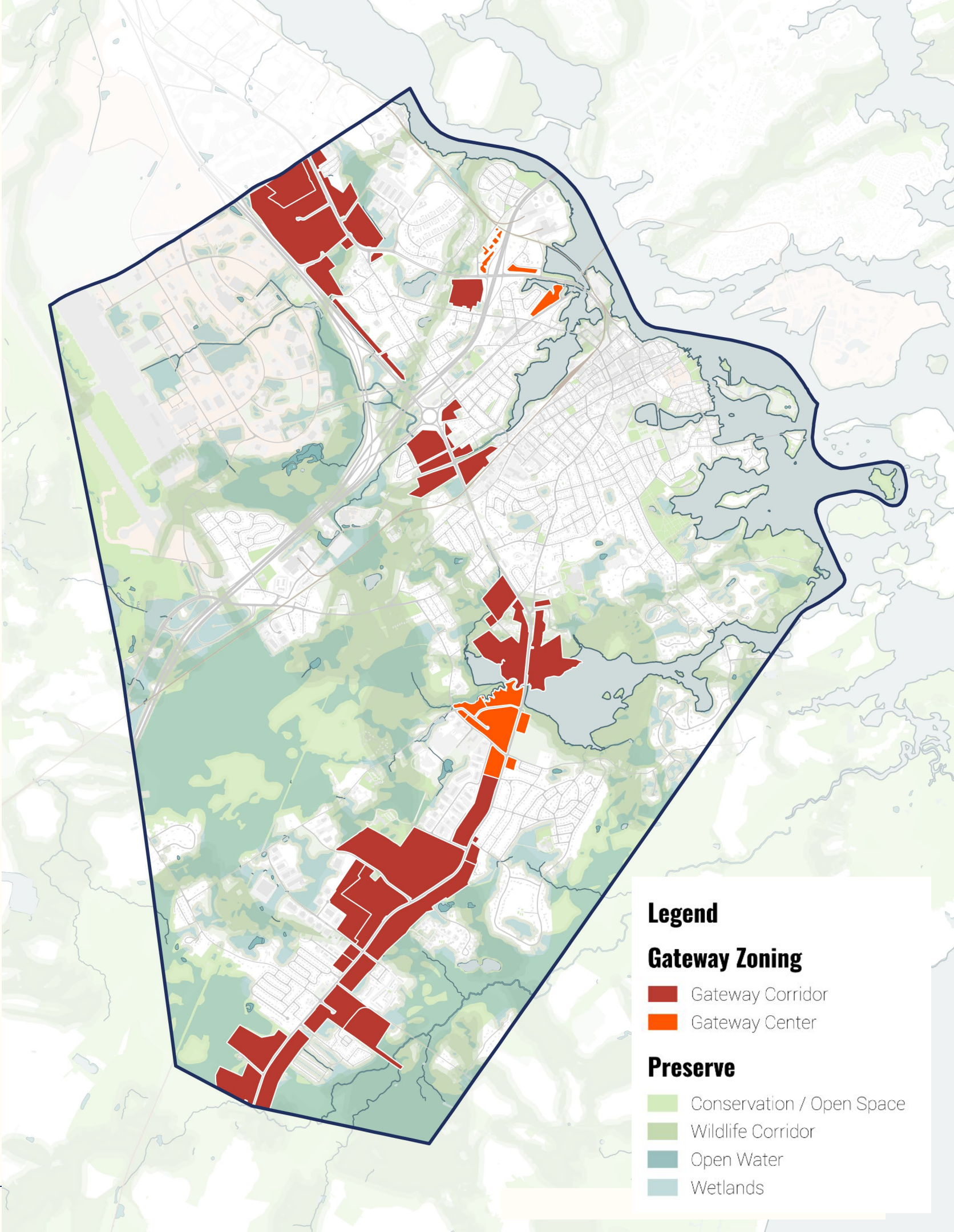
Purpose: to facilitate a broad range of housing types together with compatible commercial, fabrication, and civic uses in a high-quality pedestrian environment with moderate to high density.



Gateway Center (G2)

Gateway Neighborhood Mixed Use Center

Purpose: to facilitate a broad range of residential and mixed use development at a pedestrian scale and moderate density providing commercial uses that benefit residents of the district and surrounding neighborhoods along major corridors.



Cultivating Gateway Neighborhood Centers

Adaptation requires more comprehensive tools that blend public and private investment.
This plan can help create a shared framework for adapting the gateway neighborhoods to better serve what Portsmouth needs today and tomorrow. This is fundamentally about tying land use and development to the capital investments that support quality of life and environmental health.



Western Ave Bikeway, Cambridge, MA



Weston Town Center Plaza, Weston, MA



Latest phase of Tuscan Village in Salem, NH.

Infrastructure + Mobility

- Water supply + service network
- Wastewater treatment + service network
- Stormwater management
- Connected, walkable street network
- Transit priority infrastructure
- Bike and micro-mobility infrastructure
- Sidewalks + crosswalks
- Safe multi-modal intersection design

Civic, Recreation + Amenities

- Critical Commercial Services (grocery and pharmacy)
- Schools
- Libraries
- Recreation Centers
- Parks
- Open Spaces + Natural Areas

Density + Vibrancy

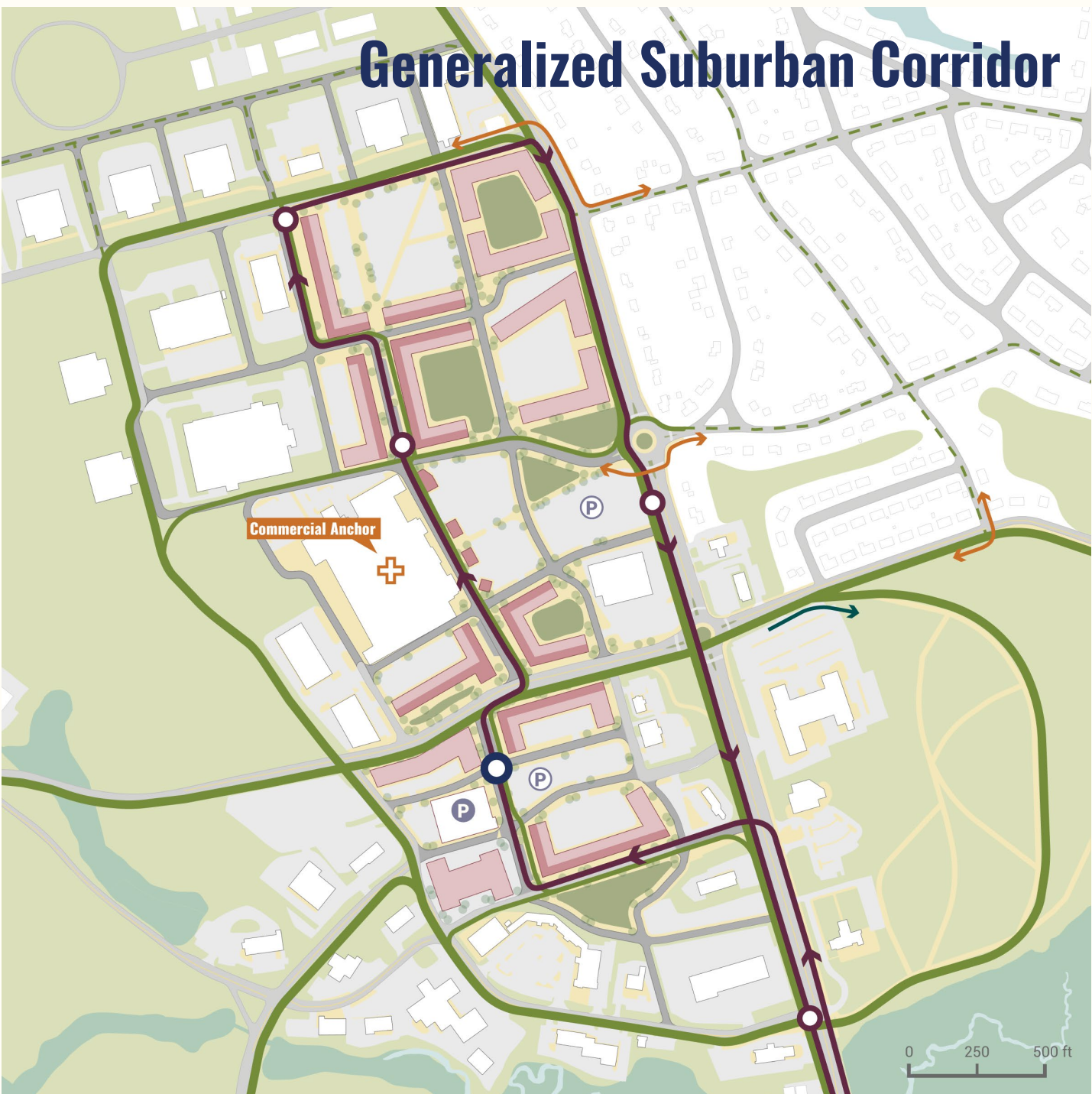
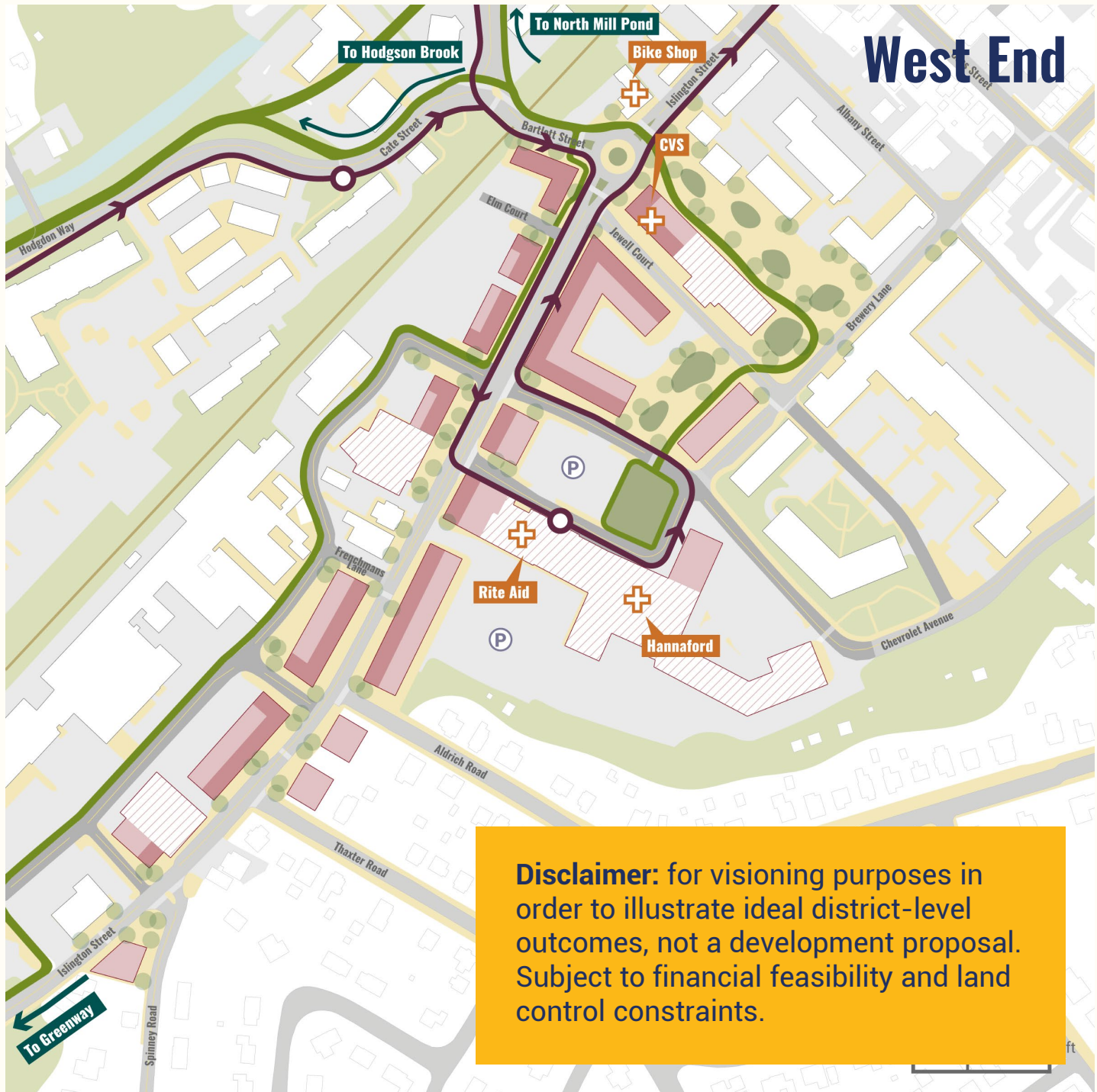
- Mixed-use core with varied businesses
- Dense multifamily surrounding core
- Thoughtful, place-specific economic development and cultural sector strategy
- Public realm and streetscape standards

Strategies to Cultivate Gateway Neighborhood Centers

 **Compact:** Mixed Use, Active & Inclusive

 **Connected:** Walkable & Accessible

 **Supported:** Healthy, Sustainable & Resilient



Spatial Framework

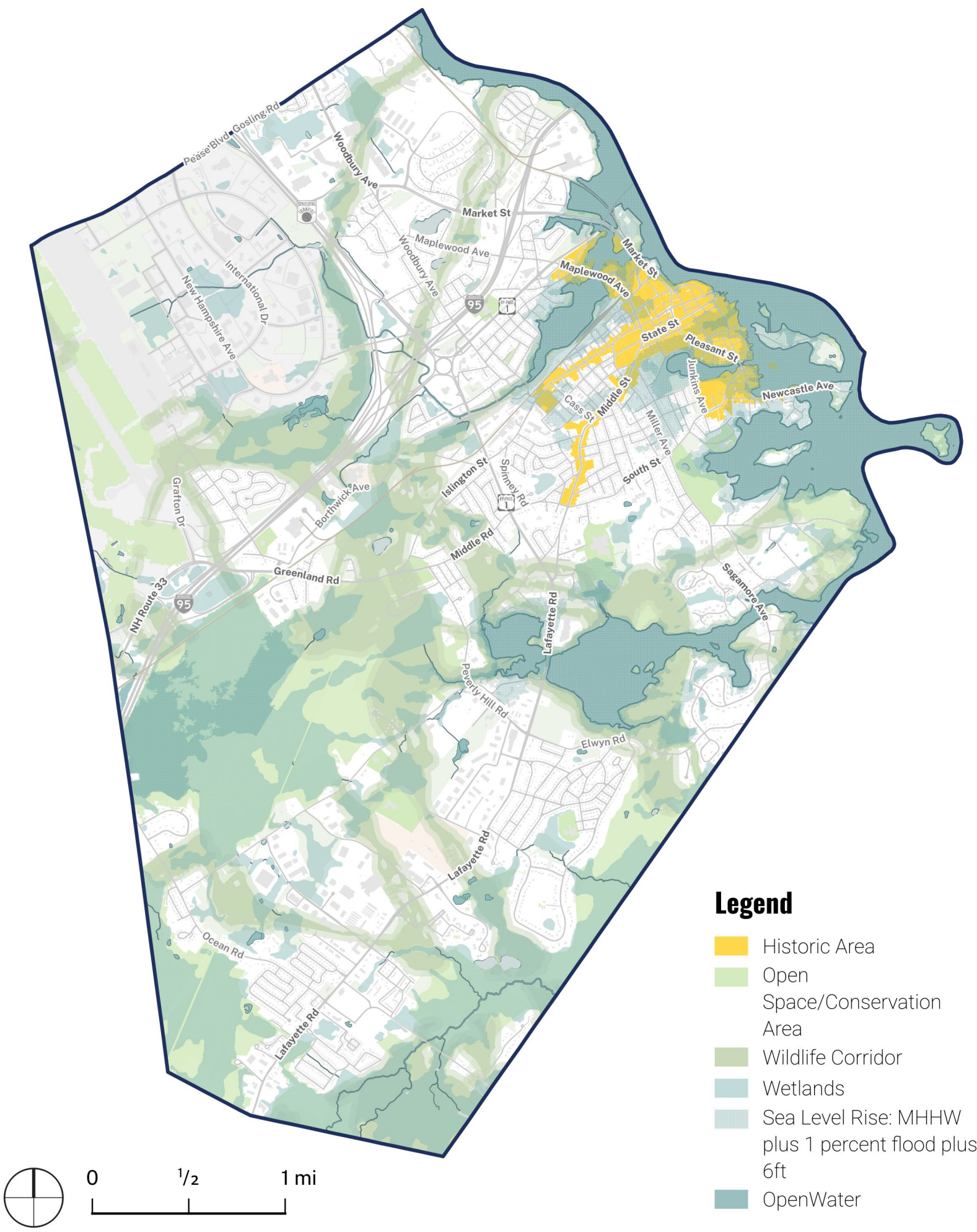
- Development Constraints
- Degree of Change
- Future Place Type Vision
- Adaptation Focus Areas

Development Constraints

The Master Plan spatial framework identified where there is existing capacity or future potential to support additional development based on current constraints to development in Portsmouth:

- **Environmental**
 - Coastal flood risk
 - Wetlands
 - Conservation Areas & Open Space
 - Ecological & Wildlife Migration Corridors
- **Historic Designation**
- **Infrastructure**
 - Water
 - Sewer

Development Constraints



Degree of Change

This map from the Public Visioning Open House shows a vision for how Portsmouth will shape and direct changes in the existing development patterns of the City.

- Preserve** – encourage adaptive reuse, restoration, conservation
- Characteristics: significant collective ecological and historical value to Portsmouth’s identity, quality of life, sustainability, and resilience
 - Investment: focus on functional and experiential improvements within environmental, infrastructural, and cultural resource constraints
 - Regulation: align allowable future development to constraints

- Enhance** – targeted improvements for flexibility and quality of life
- Characteristics: built out and have strong existing development patterns and norms, capable of supporting Portsmouth's needs in the coming decade
 - Investment: enhance mobility, public realm, and amenities and services for quality of life
 - Regulation: calibrate zoning to support diversity and flexibility where needed

- Adapt** – promote a shift in development pattern
- Characteristics: single-use or mobility-limited areas where the development pattern is more fragmented or less versatile and flexible in supporting the full range of Portsmouth's needs (these tend to be more auto-oriented with disconnected street networks)
 - Investment: promote connected street and trail networks, with supportive utilities, services, recreation, and open space amenities
 - Regulation: promote denser, clustered development at a pedestrian scale with clear mixed-use commercial cores, priority natural resource protection or enhancement, and diverse housing types

Legend

Preserve

- Historic Designation
- Conservation / Open Space
- Wildlife Corridors
- OpenWater
- Wetlands
- Flood Risk with Sea Level Rise*

Enhance

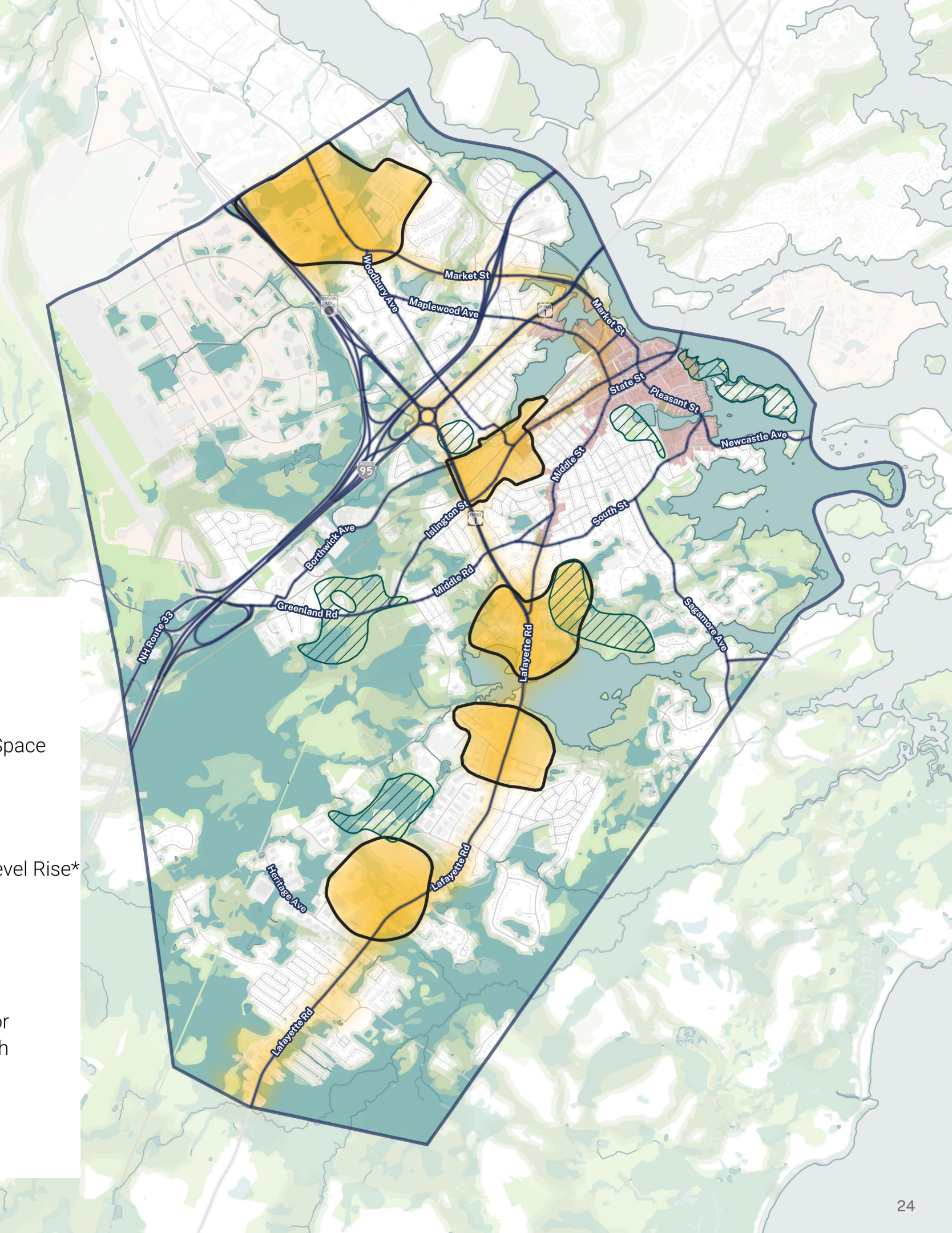
- Established Patterns

Adapt

- Areas with Capacity for Adaptation and Growth
- Focus Areas

Hubs

- Recreation Hubs



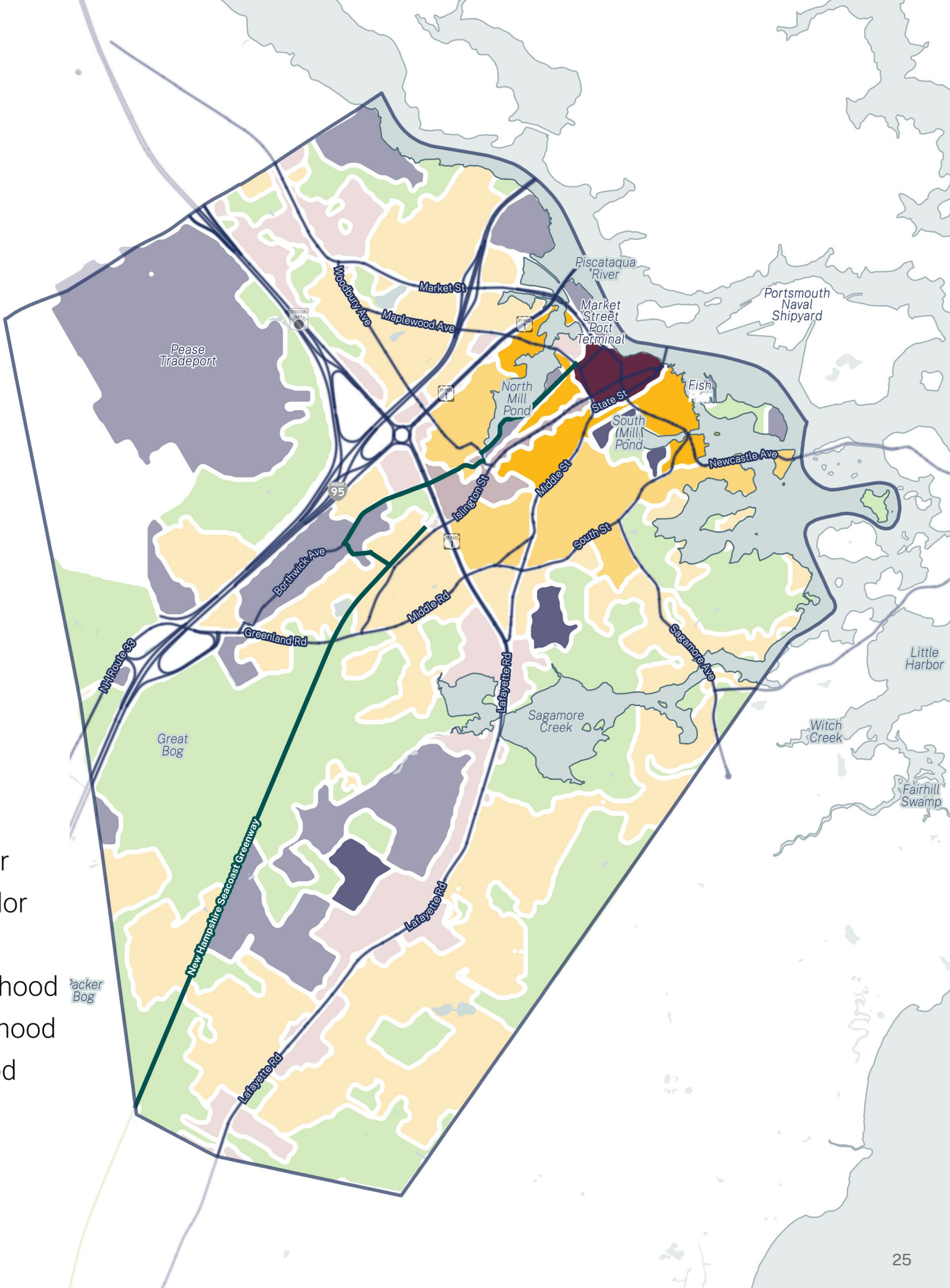
“Mental Map” of Place Types Today

This mental map blends form, network connectivity, and land use patterns.

- This hybridizes form-based development patterns by also considering use, network connections, and role in neighborhood structure and experience.
- This is the starting point for thinking about how Portsmouth wants to shape these places

Place Types

- Downtown
- Neighborhood Center
- Neighborhood Corridor
- Suburban Corridor
- Downtown Neighborhood
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Garden Neighborhood
- Civic Hub
- Employment Hub
- Open Space



Place Type Definitions

Centers & Corridors

Centers and corridors are the mixed-use activity hubs of Portsmouth.

Downtown

Regional destination with dense and dynamic mix of housing, commercial uses, public spaces, institutions, and infrastructure.



Civic Hub

Citywide hubs of civic activity, including places like City Hall, government departments, schools, libraries, nursing homes, and community centers.



Neighborhoods

Portsmouth's residential neighborhoods offer distinctive lifestyles and patterns.

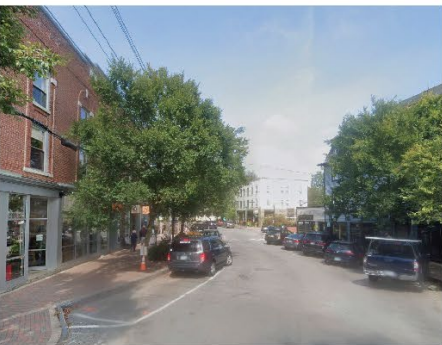
Downtown Neighborhood

Residential neighborhoods characterized by walkable street networks with compact buildings close the street, often with no front yard and minimal if any space between buildings. Current examples are mostly historic from the colonial era.



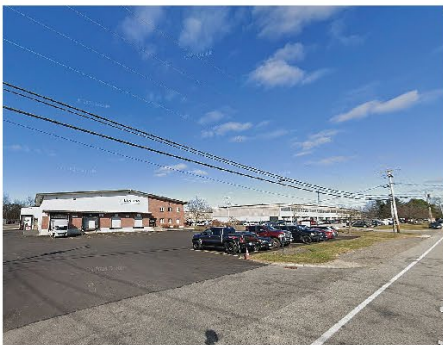
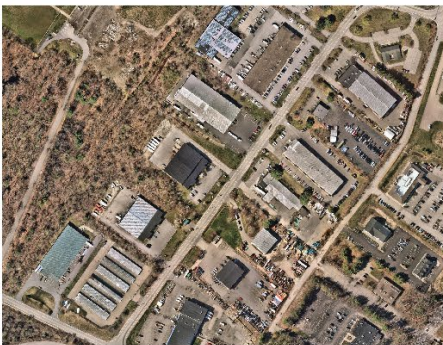
Neighborhood Center

Local destination with a dynamic mix of housing, commercial uses, public spaces, institutions, and infrastructure serving the immediate neighborhood surrounding it.



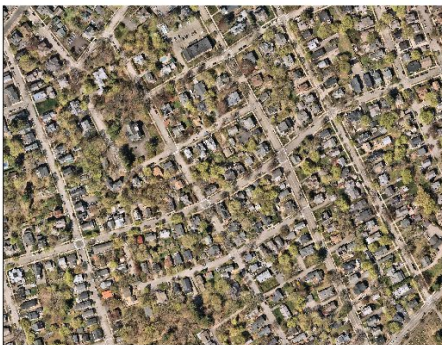
Employment Hub

Regional hubs of governmental, industrial, and commercial jobs and services that support the region.



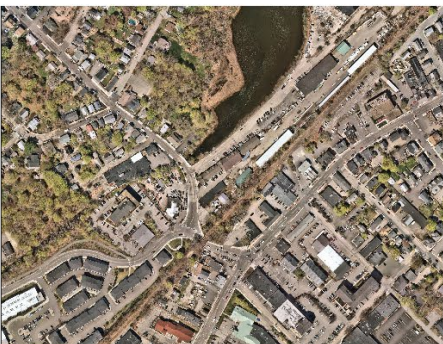
Traditional Neighborhood

Residential neighborhoods characterized by small front yards, modest spacing between buildings, and a network of generous streets for transit, driving, biking, and walking. Current examples are mostly from before WWII, commonly referred to as "pre-war" neighborhoods.



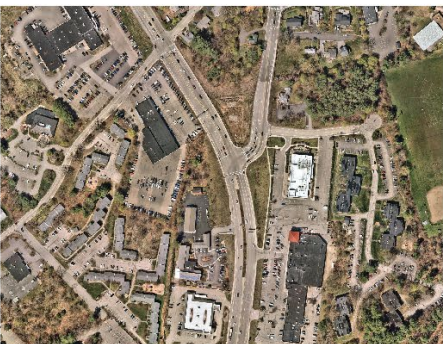
Neighborhood Corridor

Mixed-use, linear local destination of limited length that is a hub of social and commercial activity with resident-oriented services, amenities and small businesses, mixed in with compact multi-family housing.



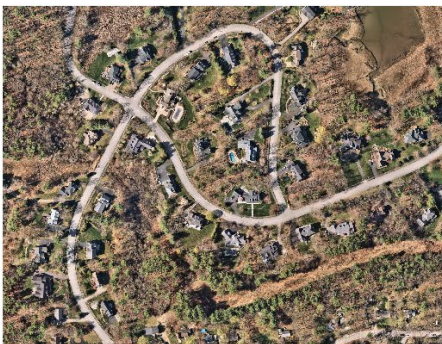
Suburban Corridor

Mixed-use, linear regional destination for recreational, commercial, and industrial businesses that rely on automobile access mixed in with compact multi-family housing.



Garden Neighborhood

Residential neighborhoods characterized by larger lots with more generous landscaped front yards, off-street parking, and larger blocks interspersed with conservation and natural areas. Current examples are mostly from after WWII, commonly referred to as "post-war" neighborhoods.



Future Place Types Vision

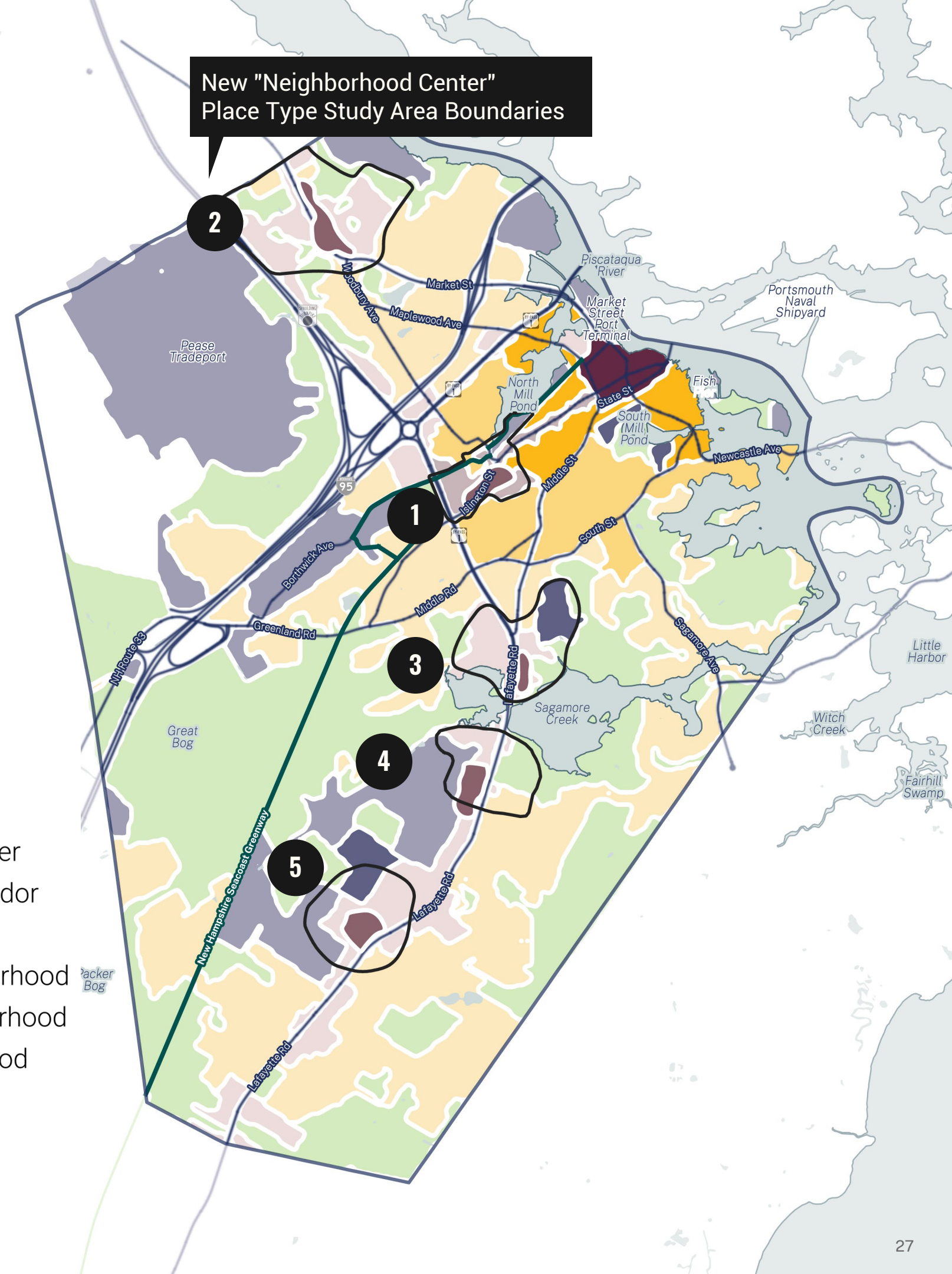
A mental map of the future land use and development vision that blends form, network connectivity, and land use patterns.

- In most cases, we suggest that municipal capital investments and development regulations reinforce the development and use patterns of existing Place Types, while allowing for greater use flexibility and promoting non-vehicular modes of travel.
- The primary shift is the identification of emerging and potential **"Neighborhood Center"** Place Types study areas throughout the "Gateway Neighborhoods" of Portsmouth to encourage more compact, connected, and sustainable development capable of supporting a high quality of life.

*A **Neighborhood Center** is a local destination with a dynamic mix of housing, commercial uses, public spaces, institutions, and infrastructure serving the immediate neighborhood surrounding it.*

Place Types

- Downtown
- Neighborhood Center
- Neighborhood Corridor
- Suburban Corridor
- Downtown Neighborhood
- Traditional Neighborhood
- Garden Neighborhood
- Civic Hub
- Employment Hub
- Open Space



Gateway Neighborhood Center Study Areas

(Adaptation Focus Areas)

Note: adaptation in this context is not referring specifically to climate change adaptation, but rather a more general adaptation of urban development patterns.

- The Gateway Neighborhood Center Study Areas are **Adaptation Focus Areas** because they have unmet potential or unaddressed issues and need more guidance and direction to effectively shape future development and/or investment in infrastructure and quality of life amenities and services.

NOTE: Generally, these are areas that have already been experiencing market-driven redevelopment or transition of uses and have been mapped as Gateway Corridor and Gateway Center districts in recent rezoning. In this context, the Master Plan can be an effective tool to address the pressures and feeling of being in flux by providing clear vision and direction for these areas.

Legend

Preserve

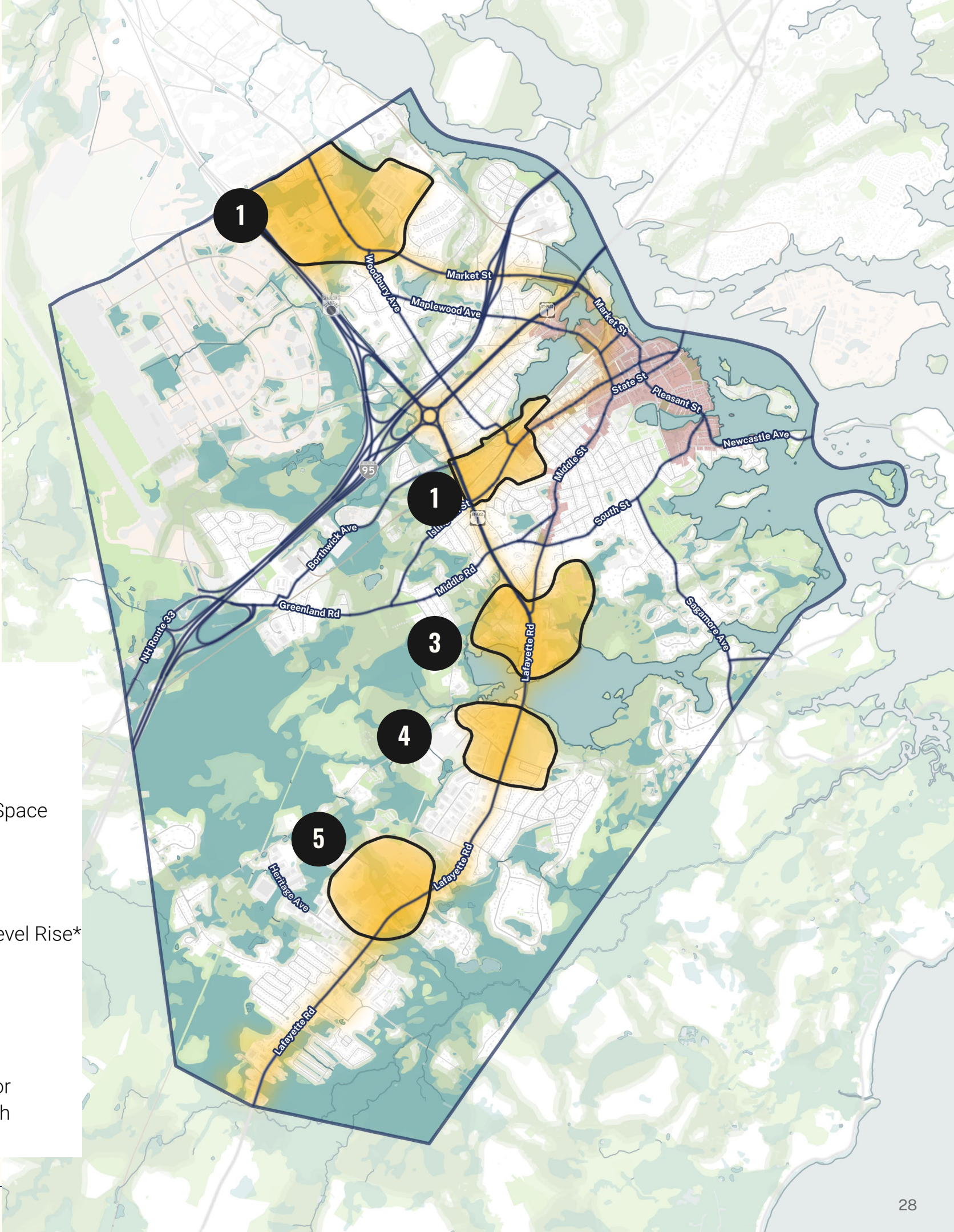
- Historic Designation
- Conservation / Open Space
- Wildlife Corridors
- OpenWater
- Wetlands
- Flood Risk with Sea Level Rise*

Enhance

- Established Patterns

Adapt

- Areas with Capacity for Adaptation and Growth
- Focus Areas



Degree of Change >> Zoning

Across the board, there is a need to streamline the Portsmouth zoning ordinance and map to clearly communicate priorities to developers and landowners.

Preserve – limited, conservation-focused investment/development

align allowable future development to constraints

>> **Simplify Downtown Zoning**

>> **Enhance Resilience Zoning**

Enhance – targeted improvements for flexibility and quality of life

calibrate zoning to support diversity and flexibility where needed

>> **More Flexible Existing Residential Districts**

Adapt – promote a shift in development pattern

promote denser, clustered development at a pedestrian scale with clear mixed-use commercial cores and diverse housing types

>> **Refine Gateway Neighborhood Districts to Support Visions**

Legend

Preserve

- Historic Designation
- Conservation / Open Space
- Wildlife Corridors
- Open Water
- Wetlands
- Flood Risk with Sea Level Rise*

Enhance

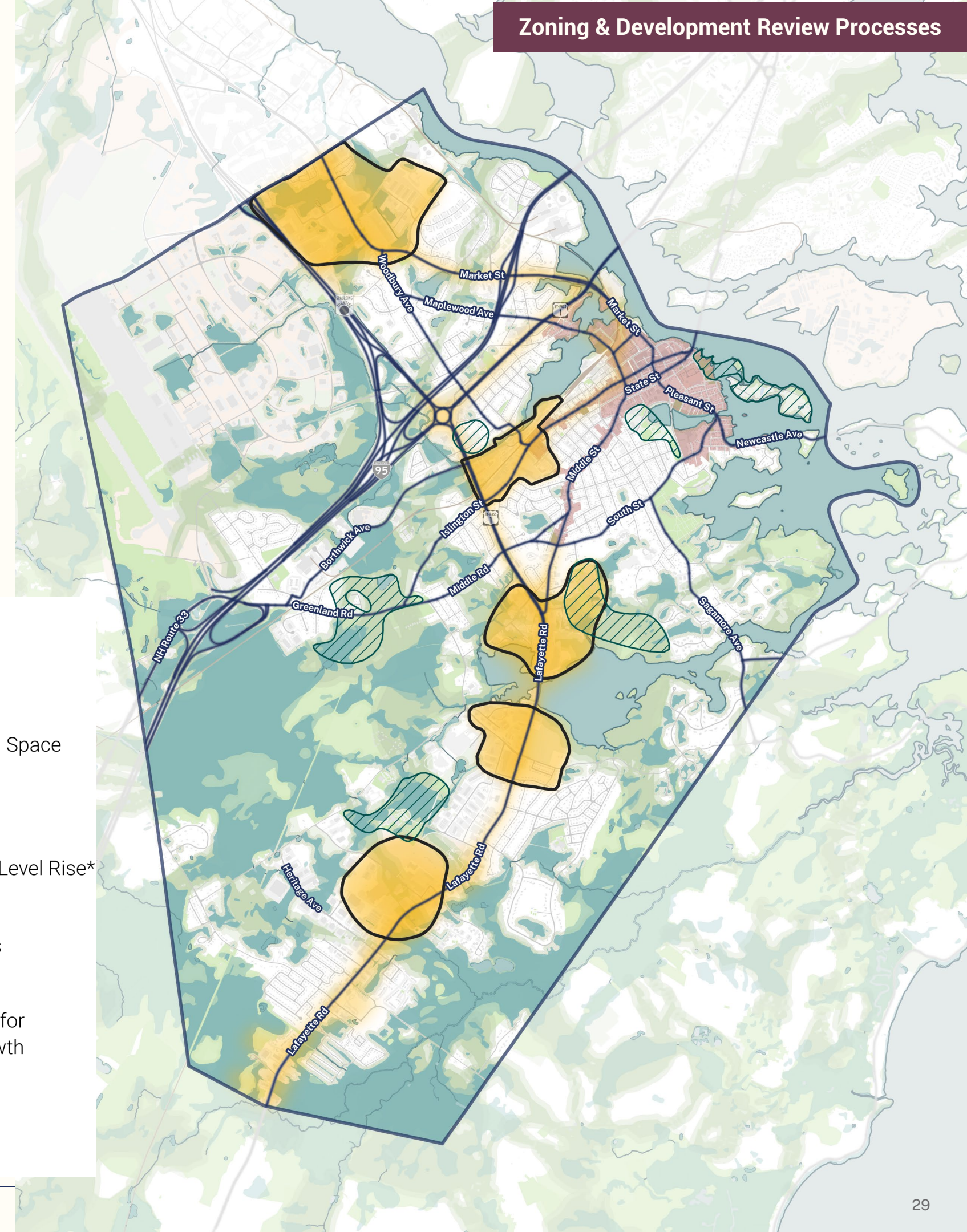
- Established Patterns

Adapt

- Areas with Capacity for Adaptation and Growth
- Focus Areas

Hubs

- Recreation Hubs



Strengthening Mobility Alternatives

- **Walkability & Intersection Safety** prioritizing pedestrian experience and accessibility for all ages and abilities, especially where the Transit and Bike Priority corridors interact with the rest of the road network.
- **Bike Priority Network** connecting key employment and recreational destinations to neighborhood centers (based on Bike/Ped Plan)
- **Motorized Micro-Mobility Framework** planning and policy to encourage use and promote good behavior.
- **Transit Priority Routes & Stops** connecting downtown to outer neighborhood centers with higher frequency service.

Legend

Mobility

- Transit Priority Stops
- Transit Priority Routes
- Seacoast Greenway Trail
- Bike Priority Corridor
- Bike Priority Connector

Preserve

- Historic Designation
- Wildlife Corridors
- Wetlands

Enhance

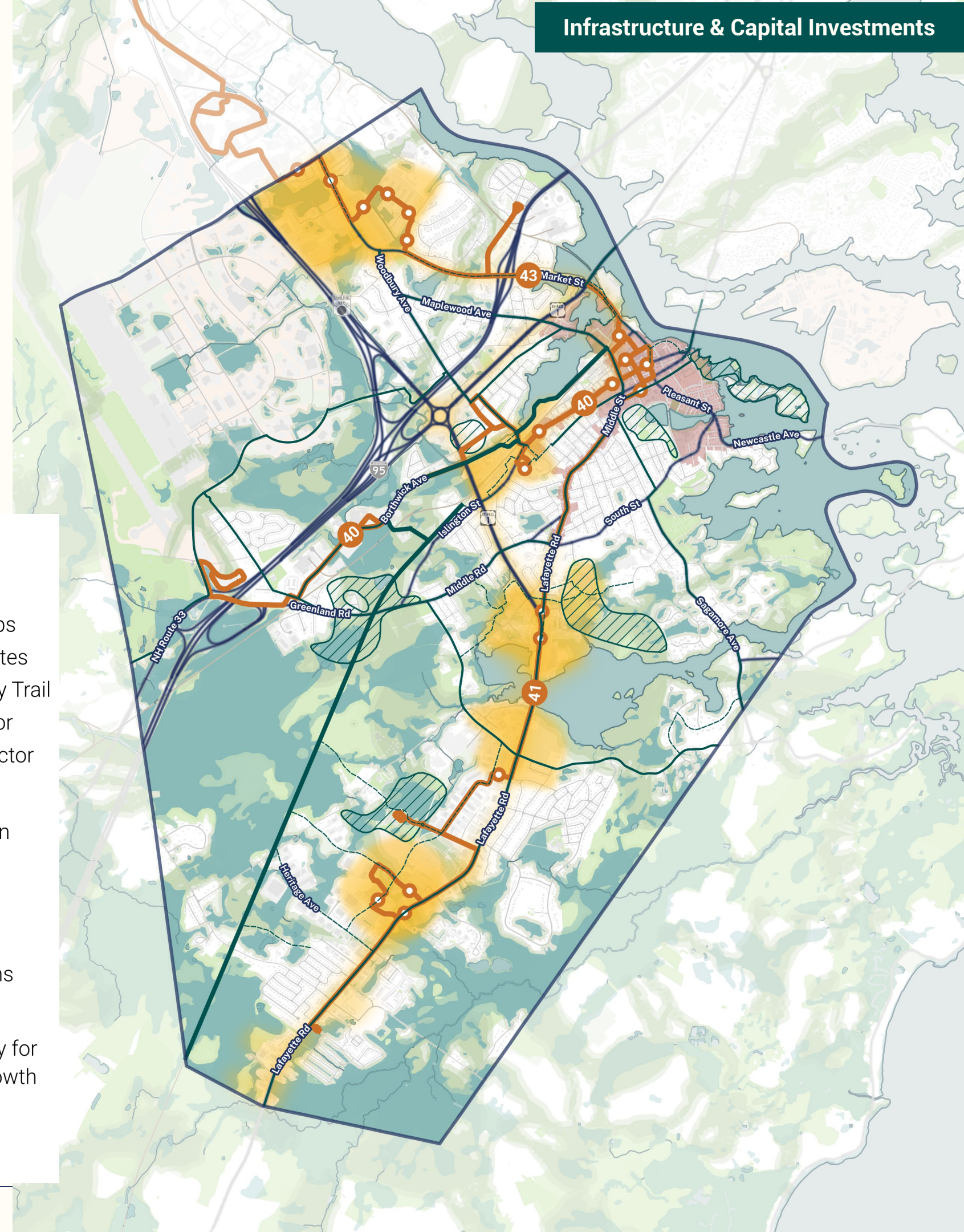
- Established Patterns

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- Recreation Hubs



Crossroads (Key Intersections)

- Crossroads** are key intersections that are important areas of transition, and access points that would benefit from safety, wayfinding, and public space enhancements to address the complexity of use and overall experience. These are often characterized by a change in character from one Place Type to another or traversing a transportation barrier such as a highway or rail line.

NOTE: Generally, these transitional areas were chosen because they have an outsized impact on citywide perceptions and behavior and play an important role in connecting the transit and bike priority corridors to key destinations throughout the City.

Legend

Preserve

Historic Designation

Wildlife Corridors

Wetlands

Enhance

Established Patterns

Adapt

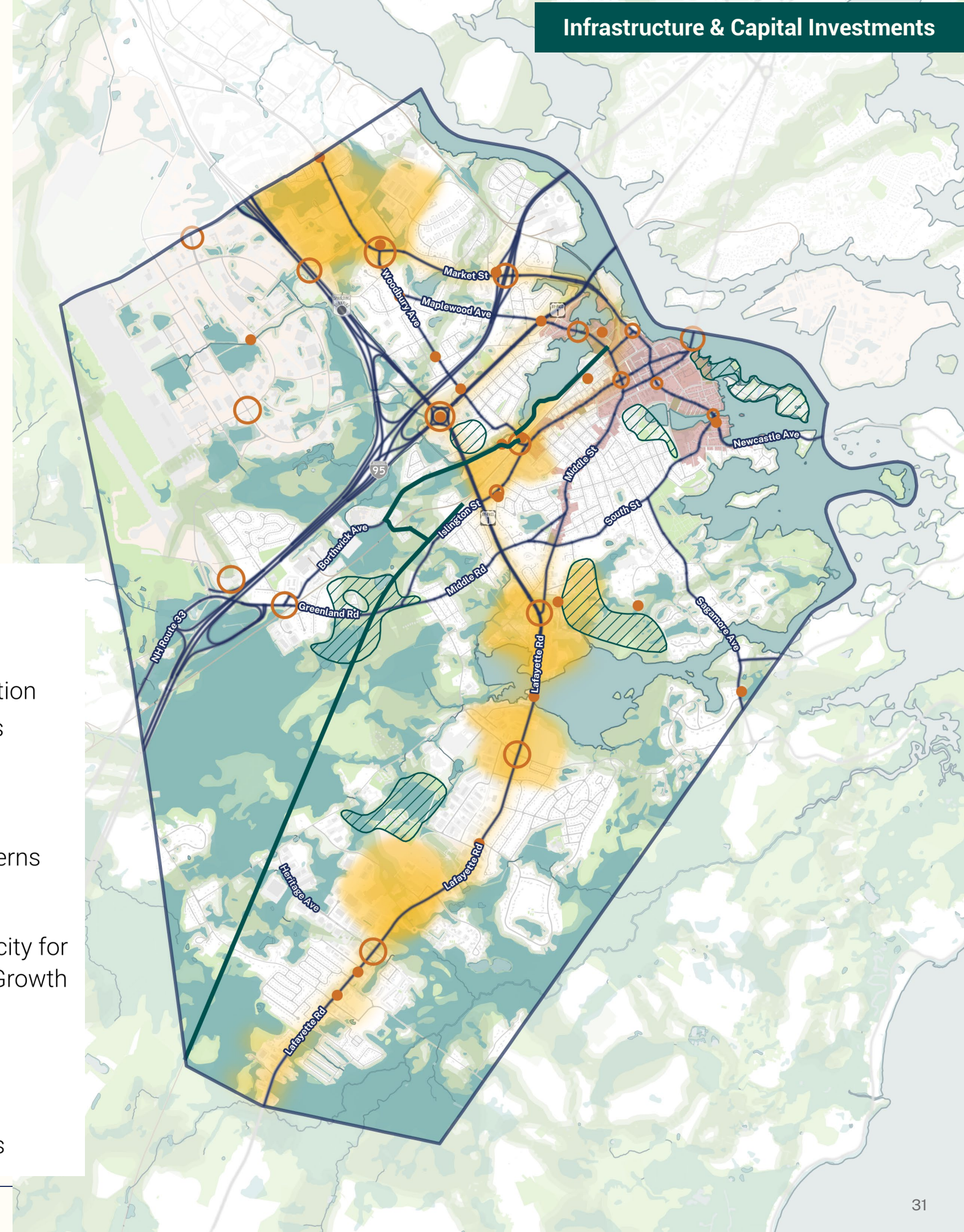
Areas with Capacity for Adaptation and Growth

Hubs

Recreation Hubs

Crossroads

Key Intersections



Next Steps

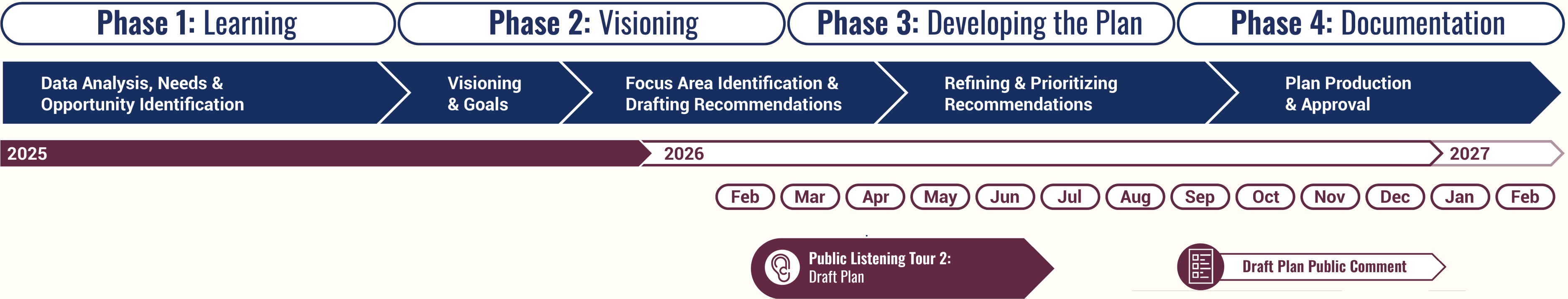
1. Comment on Draft Plan Recommendations

April Open House boards, draft recommendations
General Draft Plan Comment Form (closing end of July)

2. Comment on Draft Plan in the Fall



Scan QR code to visit the Portsmouth Master Plan website.





Thank You!

Stay in touch with our outreach leads:

Anne: weidman@utiledesign.com

Monte: mrbohanan@portsmouthnh.gov

Let us know if you notice something we can be doing better to promote understanding and participation.



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