



COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS REPORT

**Proposed Interchange Project, TIP No. U-4013, WBS No. 40340.1.1
US 25 (Merrimon Avenue), King Street to Maney Avenue: Operational Improvements
City of Asheville, Buncombe County**

Submitted by: The Louis Berger Group, Inc.
Contact: Don Kostelec, AICP
dkostelec@louisberger.com; 828-989-0591

December 23, 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context Summary

Transportation Improvement Program Project No. U-4013 is for proposed operational improvements along US 25 (Merrimon Avenue) from King Street to Maney Avenue in Asheville, North Carolina. The proposed improvements, along approximately 0.5 miles of US 25, based on preliminary information provided by NCDOT, includes the addition of left turn lanes at the intersections of W.T. Weaver Boulevard and Edgewood Road, both of which are signal controlled.

The east side of the project area along the corridor consists almost exclusively of commercial land uses, including four parcels fronting US 25 that are part of the Grove Park Historic District. Weaver Park, a potential 4(f) resource, is also located along the east side and contains a greenway connection. The west side is a mix of commercial and residential uses, with one large estate lot and a large apartment complex comprising most of the residential uses.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT, DIRECTION, AND NOTABLE FEATURES

- The corridor and neighborhoods adjacent to US 25 have experienced an increase in infill commercial and residential development as the Asheville region has grown. The new development has been designed in a manner to promote travel by pedestrian, bicycle and transit in addition to automobile traffic.
- Many of the residential areas near US 25 are buffered from the corridor by commercial land uses that serve the neighborhoods and the UNC Asheville campus.
- Weaver Park is a potential 4(f) resource containing numerous recreation facilities located on the east side of the U-4013 project south of Murdock Avenue. The Park includes a greenway that connects to a sidepath running along W.T. Weaver Boulevard. It is not a 6(f) property according to the City's Parks and Recreation Department.
- US 25 is served by two City of Asheville Transit routes (#2 Merrimon Avenue / UNCA and #3 Bulldog Express / UNCA) with six stops located within the project area.
- Asheville Transit Route #2 is one of the most heavily patronized routes in the system.

- During the school year twenty-four school bus trips pass through the project area each weekday.
- The Grove Park Historic District is east of the corridor and includes four parcels that have direct access to US 25 at Farrwood Road.
- UNC Asheville is 0.5 miles west of the corridor and US 25 is one of the primary routes to the campus.
- The existing sidewalk system is in disrepair along the east side of the corridor and incomplete along the west side of the corridor.
- The City has invested in multiple streetscape improvements to the section of Murdock Avenue adjacent to Weaver Park for traffic calming.
- The Pinnacle Ridge Apartment Complex along Edgewood Knoll Road and Merrimon houses a large population, including many UNC Asheville Students.
- Clearview Terrace is the sole access road to US 25 for several residential properties.

POTENTIAL COMMUNITY IMPACTS

- Parking and landscape buffers may be eliminated or reduced for some commercial properties fronting US 25 as a result of shifting the centerline of the roadway east to accommodate center turn lanes at signalized intersections and sidewalks.
- The reduction of parking in the northwest and northeast quadrants of the US 25 / Edgewood intersection is of particular concern to the City of Asheville due to existing parking problems that have arisen at commercial developments within these quadrants.
- The proposed realignment and direct connection of Murdock Avenue to W.T. Weaver Boulevard could create increased traffic volumes on Murdock Avenue, which has been the subject of traffic calming and Safe Route to School projects by the City of Asheville due to traffic speed and volume along this residential street .
- The elimination of direct access to US 25 from Clearview Terrace will require the completion of a new connection to Edgewood Knoll Drive, a private street within the Pinnacle Ridge Apartment complex.
- A rock retaining wall and entryway along US 25 along the frontage of a residential estate lot at 456 Merrimon Ave. may be impacted by the project, however, the City of Asheville prefers that the retaining wall and entryway be preserved even if it means additional acquisition from Weaver Park property. The property was acquired by UNC – Asheville in late 2009 and may be subject to redevelopment or other uses.
- The addition of left turn lanes at signalized intersections along US 25 will likely increase mobility and access along this section of the corridor.



The City of Asheville would like to avoid any impacts to this potentially historic rock retaining wall and entryway to 456 Merrimon Avenue

FINDINGS / NEXT STEPS

- NCDOT should work closely with local businesses during the design process to identify options and alternatives to the impacts on parking spaces and landscape buffers that may cause non-conformance with current zoning regulations and associated ordinances.
- NCDOT should work with the City of Asheville to identify project options and mitigate potential impacts to numerous components of the transportation system, including:
 - Options for completing the sidewalk system along the west side of the corridor;
 - Acquisition of property for construction of buffered sidewalks, where feasible;
 - Acquisition of property and construction of bus stop pads;
 - Potential impacts to traffic volumes and speeds along Murdock Avenue;
 - Specialized intersection treatments at W.T. Weaver Boulevard to facilitate multi-use pathway travel through the intersection;
 - Potential that turns to and from Chatham Road to US 25 be converted to right-in/right-out if there is no signal at that intersection;
 - Adding a replacement pedestrian crossing somewhere between W.T. Weaver and Edgewood Knoll Road if the signalized intersection at Chatham Road is removed;
 - Adding crosswalks on all 4 legs of the Edgewood Road and Merrimon Avenue intersection;
 - Options for making driveways and parking lot entrances along Merrimon Avenue right-in/right-out due to difficulties and delays posed by left turns on this busy road (perhaps even add center median as left-turn barrier);
 - Options for adding bicycle facilities to Merrimon Avenue such as shared lane markings and climbing lanes which are recommended in Asheville's Comprehensive Bicycle Plan;
 - Preservation of the rock wall and entryway to the estate lot at 456 Merrimon Avenue south of W.T. Weaver Boulevard; and
 - Relocation of greenway trail within Weaver Park.
- NCDOT should work with area business owners and the City of Asheville to identify potential consolidation of access points or elimination of direct access to US 25 where existing businesses have access from a side street that connects to US 25.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

TIP Project U-4013 is the proposed construction of operational improvements to the existing four-lane section of US 25 (Merrimon Avenue) between King Street and Maney Avenue. The project is adjacent to the Norwood Park, Jackson Park and Grove Park Neighborhoods, as well as the Grove Park Historic District and Weaver Park. The improvements, as identified by PDEA, include the addition of center turn lanes at the intersections of W.T. Weaver Boulevard and Edgewood Road, both of which are signal controlled. The project also includes the completion of the sidewalk system which is currently discontinuous along the west side of the corridor; the realignment of Murdock Avenue to align with W.T. Weaver Boulevard; and the potential closure of the Clearview Terrace access to US 25 with a new connection to Edgewood Knoll.

The project is programmed only for a feasibility study at this time according to the 2009-2015 STIP.

Existing Conditions

US 25 (Merrimon Avenue) is a four-lane corridor through the project area and is the primary north-south route through the north side of Asheville (2006 estimated Census population: 73,000) and connects the neighborhoods along the route to Interstate 26 (future) to the north and Interstate 240 to the south. Downtown Asheville is located south of I-240. South of downtown, US 25 connects to Biltmore Village and points south in Buncombe County (2008 estimated Census population: 229,000).

The four-lane configuration of US 25 has created capacity and operational constraints at signalized intersections along the corridor due to the absence of left turn lanes. Existing signal-controlled intersections within the project include W.T. Weaver Boulevard, Chatham Road / Murdock Avenue, and Edgewood Road. The north legs of the Merrimon Avenue intersections with Weaver Boulevard and Chatham Road/Murdock Avenue have crosswalks and pedestrian signal heads, as does the east leg of the Murdock/Merrimon intersection. The south and east legs of the Merrimon/Edgewood intersection have crosswalks and pedestrian signal heads.

W.T. Weaver Boulevard is an urban arterial that runs east-west through north Asheville and connects US 25 to the University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA) campus and Broadway Avenue. Edgewood Avenue also connects Merrimon Avenue to UNCA and neighborhoods along the corridor. Other local streets with access to Merrimon Avenue connect to residential areas and the Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa.

NCDOT Traffic counts from 2006 show the following average daily traffic figures for US 25 (Merrimon Avenue).

- North of Edgewood: 23,000 vehicles per day (vpd)
- North W.T. Weaver: 23,000 vpd
- South of King: 22,000 vpd
- North of Maney: 21,000 vpd

Proposed Modifications

The primary modifications included in the U-4013 project are the addition of center turn lanes at the signalized intersections at W.T. Weaver Boulevard and Edgewood Road. The taper lengths required to construct the intersections improvements run nearly the entire length of the project, approximately 0.5 miles.

Two existing street connections are proposed to be realigned as a result of the project:

- 1) **The Murdock Avenue connection**, which currently aligns with Chatham Road signalized intersection and connects to Murdock Avenue, will be realigned to connect directly to W.T. Weaver Boulevard, thus eliminating the Chatham Road signal; and
- 2) **The Clearview Terrace connection** to US 25 is situated immediately north of the intersection with Chatham Road and is currently configured in a manner that right turns from US 25 and left turns to US 25 are difficult to maneuver due to the acute angle at which the streets intersect. Additionally, Clearview Terrace traverses a slope parallel to US 25 to access the residential properties along the street. City of Asheville staff confirmed the existence of a “paper” right-of-way that connects Clearview Terrace to Edgewood Knoll that would allow for the removal of the existing US 25 access, but noted that Edgewood Knoll is currently a private street within the Pinnacle Ridge Apartments complex.

Additionally, the project will replace existing sidewalks and curb ramps along the east side of the corridor and complete the sidewalk system along the west side of the corridor. The existing greenway in Weaver Park may need to be relocated based on preliminary project drawings that show the corridor expanding east into the park, thus re-configuring the greenway that climbs the slope adjacent to the roadway.

METHODOLOGY

This report outlines the existing conditions and trends of the area around project U-4013. The staff of The Louis Berger Group, Inc. (Berger) has conducted a site visit; researched local and regional demographic trends; and conducted a facilitated meeting with several City of Asheville planning, engineering, emergency services, water, school and transit officials. In addition, Berger has inventoried community resources and gathered salient information on issues and concerns that the project may affect or impact. The report includes data gathered from various sources such as the US Census, local planning documents, multi-modal service documents such as mass transit route maps, municipal policies, maps, greenway plans, watershed plans and regulations. This report also maps community attributes and areas geographically to assist NCDOT in project decision-making.

COMMUNITY STUDY AREAS

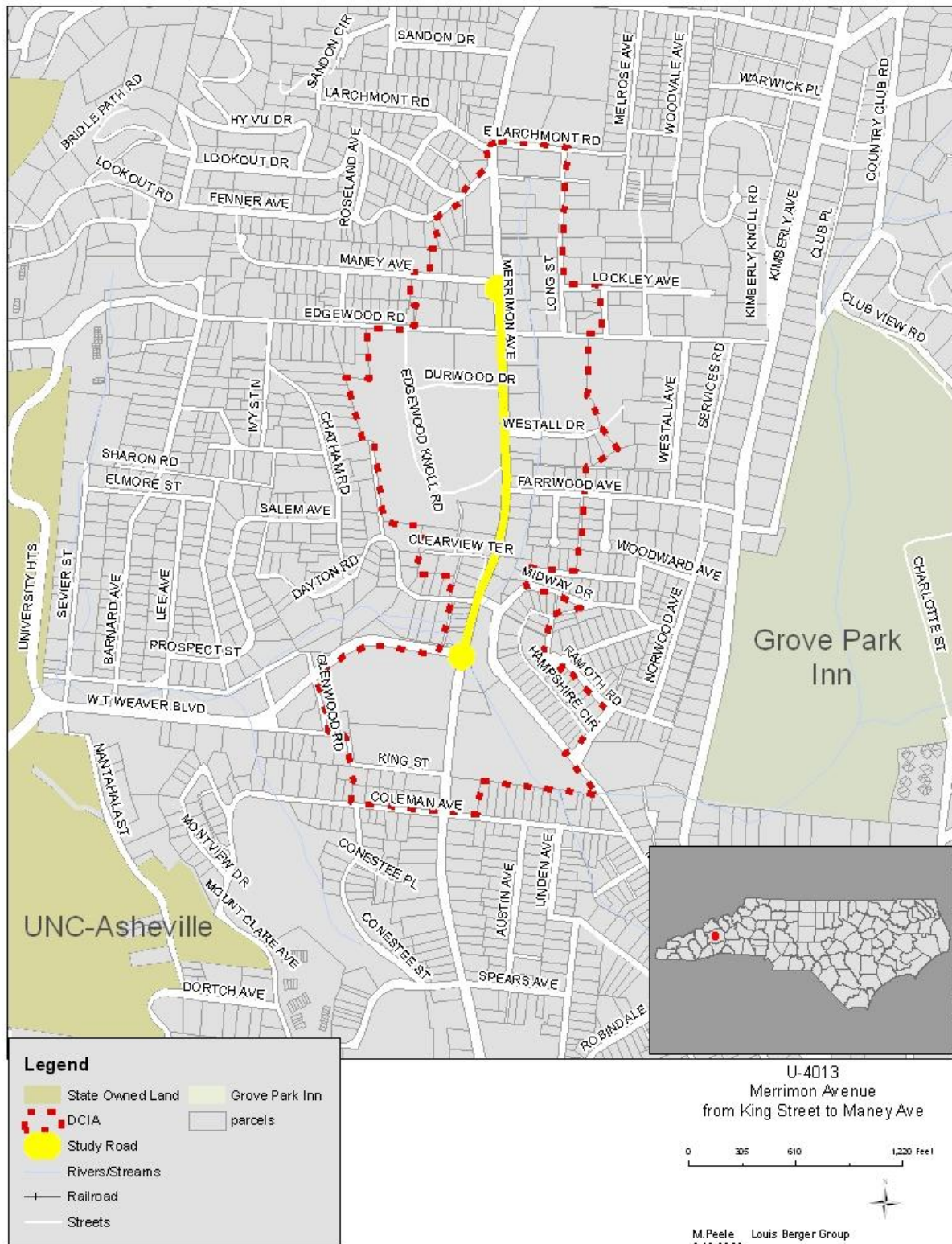
Direct Community Impact

The Direct Community Impact Area (DCIA) is the area surrounding a construction project that is likely to be directly affected in any way during, throughout, and after project completion. The area outlined in red on Figure 1 has been chosen as the DCIA. The DCIA chosen for this project is generally confined to the area between Coleman Avenue (approximately one block south of King Street) and Larchmont Road (approximately one block north of Maney Avenue), and extends east and west of US 25 to include parcels with direct access or frontage to the roadway and properties generally within one-block of the roadway.

Demographic Study Area

The Demographic Study Area is defined to provide demographic characteristics for the community surrounding the project (Figure 2). It is the smallest statistical area of the 2000 census that includes the DCIA. The demographic study area for this project in the City of Asheville, Buncombe County is comprised of five block groups:

Figure 1: Direct Community Impact Area



[illegible]

- Census Tract 4, Block Group 1;
- Census Tract 4, Block Group 2;
- Census Tract 4, Block Group 3;
- Census Tract 5, Block Group 3; and
- Census Tract 16, Block Group 2.

REGIONAL/ COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Asheville and Buncombe County have experienced tremendous growth since 1990 and that trend has continued in the 2000s, as Buncombe County's population grew by 9.9 percent between 2000 and 2007. Asheville grew by 2.3 percent in that same timeframe.

The cooler summer climate and four distinct seasons of the area have attracted vacationers and retirees since the 1800s; however the growing trend of second home acquisitions and relocation from northern cities has sustained Asheville and the region's growth over the past decade. Asheville has emerged as a North Carolina center for cultural arts and other related activities, as the city regularly hosts festivals geared toward the arts.

The neighborhoods surrounding the US 25 (Merrimon Avenue) corridor reflect this growth and attractiveness of the region. The UNC Asheville campus is located approximately ½-mile west of the corridor and the surrounding residential areas consist of apartments and rental properties that are, in part, marketed toward college students. The neighborhoods east of the corridor contain some of Asheville most prominent addresses, due in large part to these homes surrounding the Grove Park Inn & Resort.

US 25, in the project area, has transitioned over the last 50 years from what was primarily a residential corridor with large homes to one of Asheville's primary commercial corridors. Remnants of these homes are now occupied with businesses and some have been replaced with urban and suburban commercial development. One estate property exists along US 25 (456 Merrimon Avenue) in the project area and is located adjacent to Weaver Park.

Several of the surrounding neighborhoods experienced a decline in the 1970s and 1980s. Properties where structures fell into disrepair or were torn down have now experienced a re-birth through infill development. This is also true for some of the first generation of commercial properties along the corridor that have been redeveloped in recent years and reflect the City of Asheville's desire for more walkable instead of auto-oriented development.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT, DIRECTION AND NOTABLE FEATURES INVENTORY

The community context noted in this section of the report generally refers to the area depicted in Figure 3. The primary focus of this section is on those areas within the DCIA, however, salient land uses and neighborhood features outside of the DCIA were also identified for purposes of documenting community cohesion.

This section of the report has analyzed the US 25 corridor between King Street and Maney Avenue in two segments:

1. Coleman Avenue to Farrwood Avenue (roughly the southern half of the project); and
2. Farrwood Avenue to Larchmont Road (northern half).

The land uses along US 25 are primarily commercial and residential, with most of the residential uses consisting of a large apartment complex (Pinnacle Ridge Apartments) along the west side of the corridor north of Farrwood Avenue. The design of development along US 25 is a mixture of old residences that have been converted to commercial uses, some vacant commercial properties, an old “Main Street” frontage near W.T. Weaver Boulevard, and new or remodeled commercial buildings.

The road network along US 25 between King Street and Maney Avenue consists primarily of local residential streets, with corridors such as W.T. Weaver Boulevard and Edgewood Road providing connections east and west across north Asheville.

With the exception of Weaver Park and the attraction to businesses along US 25, there appears to be little synergy between the east and west sides of US 25 due to the notably higher housing prices in the Norwood Park and Grove Park Historic District neighborhoods versus Jackson Park, which includes a larger proportion of student and middle income housing.

Coleman Avenue to Farrwood Avenue Segment. The most prominent features within this section of the project are located between King Street and W.T. Weaver Boulevard. In this block, the west side is a large wooded estate lot with much of the parcel buffered by trees that make it difficult to view the house. There is a potentially historic stone retaining wall and entryway to the estate lot at 456 Merrimon Avenue. The City of Asheville staff noted their desire to preserve the retaining wall and entryway and acknowledged that this would likely require acquisition of property from the City’s Weaver Park, which is directly across the street and is the other key feature of this segment.

Weaver Park is a multi-use facility that contains a greenway path, tennis courts, a baseball field, a pavilion, a playground and parking areas. Weaver Park is the primary recreation facility for north Asheville and connects via the W.T. Weaver Boulevard to a greenway trail / sidepath to UNC Asheville, Broadway Avenue and the Glens Creek Greenway. According to the City of Asheville, the park is not a 6(f) resource and has not been subject to acquisition or improvements through Federal funding programs.

South of these features within the DCIA (between King Street and Coleman Avenue) are miscellaneous commercial properties, most notably a gas station / convenience store in the northeast quadrant of the US 25 / Coleman Avenue intersection.

North of W.T. Weaver Boulevard uses include an old “Main Street” section of two-story buildings with direct front door access to US 25 in the northwest quadrant of its intersection with US 25. Many of the structures are in disrepair, including one that collapsed after a car ran through the façade. One of the buildings contains a tattoo parlor.

The northeast quadrant of the US 25 / W.T. Weaver Boulevard contains two buildings that are both vacant. One is a modern restaurant facility that would likely be the subject of a buyout based on the plans for realigning Murdock Avenue to create a new connection to US 25 to align with the signal at W.T. Weaver Boulevard. The other structure is an art deco-style building that had been a gas station before being converted to a drive-in and ice cream shop that is now out of business. It appears these two buildings share parking.

Further north along the west side of US 25 to Farrwood Avenue are an optometrist's office; residences along Clearview Terrace; an office complex containing a lawyer's office and chiropractor's office; and the southernmost building within the Pinnacle Ridge Apartments.

The east side contains a recently constructed car wash in the northwest quadrant of US 25 and Murdock Avenue. Other uses along the east side to Farrwood Avenue include a small strip commercial development that includes various businesses.

The southeast and northeast quadrant of the US 25 / Farrwood Avenue intersection contain four commercial properties that are located within the Grove Park Historic District. Three of the four structures have been preserved or renovated to reflect the building styles consistent with residences in the Historic District. Currently, these properties include a financial service company, a wine shop, a tailor, an insurance agency and other miscellaneous retailers.



Raymond James Financial Svcs.
545 Merrimon Ave



Miscellaneous Retail Structure
(Currently For Lease)
between 545 and 555 Merrimon



The Wine Guy and Mary's Magic
Tailoring
555 Merrimon Ave



Western Heritage Insurance
565 Merrimon Ave

Farrwood Avenue to Larchmont Avenue Segment. The prominent feature in this segment along the west side of US 25 is the Pinnacle Ridge Apartments, which contain more than 20 separate buildings along Edgewood Knoll Road (private) and Durwood Drive (private). Edgewood Knoll connects to both US 25 and Edgewood Drive.

The southwest quadrant of the US 25 / Edgewood Drive intersection contains a recently renovated CVS pharmacy. The northwest quadrant of the intersection is a mixed-use two-story strip commercial complex that has seen a recent transition from office and commercial uses to restaurants. According to the City of Asheville, this transition has created limitations on the availability of parking during peak periods. Directly north of this development is another small strip commercial structure and a new development containing a bank and sandwich shop.

The east side of US 25 in this segment contains several small lot commercial developments with direct access to US 25. These include: a video production business; a foot clinic; a Wendy's restaurant; a paint store; and a bank. The northeast quadrant of the US 25 / Edgewood Drive intersection contains a recently constructed commercial development with an Atlanta Break Company restaurant being the primary tenant. While this site is configured in a manner to place the buildings as close to the street as possible to make them pedestrian-friendly, the City of Asheville noted that parking is also an issue and has created queuing along US 25 due to ingress and egress during the lunch hour. Further north are a restaurant and an oil change business.

The City of Asheville expressed concern over the potential impacts to parking in the aforementioned developments in the northwest and northeast quadrants of the US 25 / Edgewood Drive intersection, which is planned for the addition of center turn lanes.¹

Other Nearby Features / Influences

- **UNC Asheville:** UNCA is the only designated liberal arts college among the 16 campuses that are part of the University of North Carolina System. The main part of campus is located 0.5 miles west of the US 25 / W.T. Weaver Boulevard intersection. W.T. Weaver Boulevard is one of the primary gateways to the campus. UNCA has 2,800 full-time and 600 part-time students, with approximately 1/3 of those students residing off-campus.²
- **Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa:** The resort is one of the premier vacation destinations in the southeast and has been in operation since 1913. The resort contains a hotel, golf course, condominiums and several other resort-based facilities. The hotel is located approximately ¾-mile east of US 25 through indirect local street connections. The Grove Park Inn hosts several music and cultural events throughout the year.³
- **Downtown Asheville:** The central business district of the City is located immediately south of the project area and the US 25 interchange with Interstate 240. Asheville's downtown consists primarily of boutique shops, restaurants, office buildings and municipal service buildings. US 25 is the primary north-south corridor providing direct connectivity to downtown from residential and commercial areas north of Interstate 240.

Pedestrian Activity

Pedestrians were observed during the site visit on May 1, 2009. The US 25 corridor is densely settled with a mixture of commercial establishments and apartment complexes that are poorly linked together with the existing sidewalk network which has large gaps in some places (particularly along the west side of the corridor) and is patchy in others. Existing sidewalks are in disrepair in places, especially along the east side of the corridor. Sidewalks along much of the study corridor tend to be rather narrow with no buffer between the sidewalk and the street. Many of the curb ramps in the corridor are non-ADA compliant.

Lack of sidewalk and non-ADA-compliant curb ramp at intersection of Merrimon Avenue and Edgewood Knoll Road which lies on the Western side of the Study Corridor



A meeting with City officials on May 1, 2009 revealed that the City would like to encourage multi-modal access to the Merrimon Avenue corridor and would want any projects executed on the road to improve conditions for achieving that objective. City officials said they would like to see improvements in the sidewalk network in the study corridor, including buffered sidewalks where feasible. The Planning Department, through citizen involvement, has studied the Merrimon Avenue corridor by looking at adding a green strip with trees between the street and sidewalk. The ideal that was determined would be a five-foot buffer, but there may be constraints to achieving this width in some parts of the corridor; in those cases, they would be willing to see a three-foot grass buffer with trees on the other side of the sidewalk. In general, the City has pushed for new developments in Asheville to include sidewalks with buffers whenever possible. US 25 is a busy corridor with fast moving traffic making buffers (such as green planting strips) between sidewalks and the road a large factor in pedestrian safety and comfort.⁴

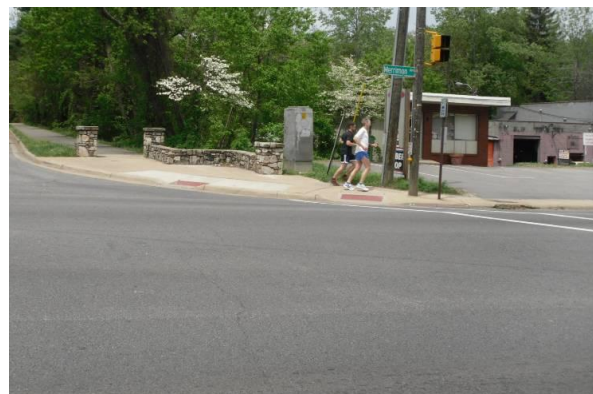
The City would not like any of the project improvements to result in a six-lane cross-section being created anywhere on the corridor as they feel it would create an east-west barrier to pedestrians. If the project creates a four-leg intersection between Merrimon, Murdock and Weaver, the City would like pedestrian signal heads and marked crosswalks on all four legs. They would also like to see crosswalks on all four legs of the Edgewood Road and Merrimon intersection.

The City has constructed multiple greenways throughout Asheville, including the Glenns Creek Greenway which falls in the project area. Plans made by the City to expand the greenway network will eventually offer a minimum of 14 corridors and 29 miles of trails with the goal of increased connectivity throughout the City. The Asheville Greenways Master Plan was created in 1998 and has been updated with addendums and an action plan in 2003 and 2005.⁵

The Southern end of the project corridor intersects with the Glenns Creek Greenway which runs along W.T. Weaver Blvd. This greenway runs from UNC Asheville into the project area and draws a great number of walkers, joggers and cyclists into the project area. Glenns Creek Greenway continues through Weaver Park on the east side of Merrimon. The City plans to extend the Glenns Creek Greenway to connect to the neighborhoods along another planned greenway, the Kimberly Greenway. Such a connection would greatly enhance the east-west pedestrian experience in this part of Asheville and help to better connect the UNC Campus with the community to its east. Road improvements near the intersection of W.T. Weaver Blvd. and Merrimon Ave. should be sensitive to the City's wishes to connect the greenway across this junction and improve east-west connectivity.⁶



Glenns Creek Greenway



Joggers Turning from W.T. Weaver (Glenns Creek Greenway) onto Merrimon Ave.

Bicycle Facilities

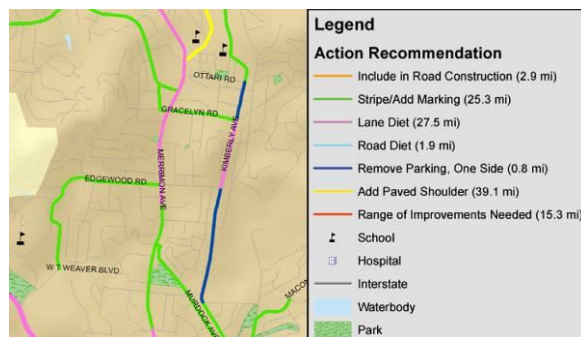
Bicyclists were observed during the site visit on May 1, 2009, most of them coming and going from the Glenns Creek Greenway which runs along W.T. Weaver Boulevard. During the site visit there were not many cyclists observed riding along US 25 (Merrimon Avenue) itself, probably because there are no bicycle accommodations along US 25 at this time. College students were observed during the site visit and may be considered to be “special users” in the study area. The college has more than 3,400 students, and 341 full- and part-time faculty.⁷ The Glenns Creek Greenway connects to the UNC Asheville campus, to and from which a great number of students, faculty and staff travel daily. According to city officials, students often bike down W.T. Weaver, cross US 25 and bike down Murdock Avenue in order to get downtown. Students rarely bike along US 25 itself, however.

In February, 2008, the City of Asheville adopted their official Bicycle Plan (*City of Asheville, NC, Comprehensive Bicycle Plan*). The Plan was created with extensive public participation in order to help “develop a safe, accessible and comfortable network of bicycle facilities” in the City. It attempts to address challenges that bicyclists face, such as access, connectivity and safety. It strives to improve bicycle conditions on all roads, including large commercial arterial roads. The primary goal of this Plan is to provide “transportation alternatives and to enhance quality of life by creating continuous linear bicycle connections, providing bicycle facilities for the full range of users, and increasing safety and mobility of bicyclists in Asheville.”⁸

Asheville’s Comprehensive Bicycle Plan includes short-, medium, and long-term recommendations. The Plan’s recommended accommodations for Merrimon Avenue fall within the medium-term recommendations and consist of adding shared lane markings and climbing lanes to Merrimon Avenue.



Close-up of Study Area on the Bicycle Network Map from Asheville’s Comprehensive Bicycle Plan. “The Bicycle Network Map is the long range vision for a safe, accessible and comfortable network of bicycle facilities throughout Asheville.”



Close-up of Study Area on the Bicycle Action Map from Asheville’s Comprehensive Bicycle Plan. “In order to create the bicycle route network, a range of actions will be required depending on the facility that is being created and the character of the existing road.”

The Plan’s short-term recommendations included many suggestions that could be applied to the study area, particularly those concerning greenway connectivity and encouraging bicycling to and from college campuses. Recommendations include: “Opportunities to enhance the relationship between greenways and on-road bicycle facilities should be pursued;” “Work with the University of North Carolina-Asheville, Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, and other local schools to identify, evaluate and prioritize the most cost effective strategies to support bicycling to and from campus. These schools generate a substantial number of vehicle trips and many of their students live in close proximity. This captive student population presents an enormous opportunity to reduce congestion and increase student health by replacing vehicle trips with bicycling trips. A “corridors-to-campus” initiative focused on improving bicycle

connections between the University of North Carolina-Asheville campus and surrounding areas would be a good initial project.”

Transit

US 25 is served by two City of Asheville Transit routes (#2 Merrimon Avenue / UNCA and #3 Bulldog Express / UNCA) with Asheville Transit Route #2 being one of the most heavily patronized routes and Merrimon Avenue being the fifth most heavily traveled corridor in the bus system. Routes #2 and #52 turn left from US 25 onto W.T. Weaver Boulevard and city transit officials noted that these are 35-foot buses with large turning radii.⁹

Within the project area there are six designated transit stops at the following intersections with US 25:

- Coleman Avenue;
- W.T. Weaver Boulevard;
- Farrwood Avenue;
- Durwood Drive;
- Edgewood Road; and
- Maney Avenue.



Coleman Avenue Bus Stop

Representatives from the City’s transit department in a May 1, 2009 meeting indicated that they would like to see crosswalks added near the bus stops un-signalized intersections along the corridor. Ideally these would be crosswalks with pedestrian activated signals. They also noted that many riders on the Merrimon corridor are coming and going from the Pinnacle Ridge Apartment Complex and some of the residents there are people with disabilities. Transit officials also said that cars turning left out of parking lots along Merrimon Avenue caused many delays to buses. They suggested eliminating parking lot entrances along Merrimon Avenue or at least making all driveways and parking lot entrances as right-in/right-out and perhaps even adding a center median as a left-turn barrier.¹⁰

Schools

Claxton Elementary School is located along Merrimon Avenue at Hillside Street, approximately 1/3-mile south of the W.T. Weaver intersection. Ira B. Jones Elementary School is located one block east of Merrimon Avenue on Kimberly Avenue, approximately ¾-mile north of the Edgewood in intersection. Asheville Catholic School is also east of Merrimon at Beaverdam Road, near Jones Elementary.

Asheville City Schools do not have neighborhood schools; they have Magnet Schools, which means a child is eligible to attend any one of their five elementary schools regardless of where they live. The bus routes running through the project area serve students at the following schools:

- Asheville Middle School;
- Asheville High School;
- Vance Elementary School;
- Hall Fletcher Elementary School;
- Isaac Dickson Elementary School;
- William Randolph Elementary School;
- Claxton Elementary School;

- Ira B Jones Elementary School; and
- Asheville City Schools Preschool.

Community Cohesion

There has been a rebirth in the area of both commercial and residential properties as reinvestment has occurred in the neighborhoods along the US 25 corridor in north Asheville. This has created a heightened sense of community identity for the residential areas east and west of US 25, although the two sides of the corridor do not appear to be connected from a physical and lifestyle perspective due to the barrier effect of US 25 and differences in housing types and income levels. The businesses along US 25 that rely on a combination of neighborhood foot, bike and bus traffic in addition to vehicle traffic. Efforts in the past to complete the sidewalk system along the east side of the corridor have enhanced the connectivity between businesses and nearby residential areas.

The corridor, particularly in the U-4013 project area, is the closest commercial area to the UNC Asheville campus and, as a result, has become a generator of student traffic of all modes due to the variety of shops, banks, and restaurants.

Local Area Plans/ Goals

The City of Asheville has been working with developers along the corridor to create a more pedestrian-friendly corridor. The fruits of these efforts have been realized in the design of the new commercial developments along the west side of US 25 between Maney Avenue and Larchmont Road, as the structure includes a wide pedestrian space along US 25, includes front doors to businesses that face the street and has parking located along the side of the building instead of in front of it.

The continuation of this practice is a goal of the City of Asheville's Comprehensive Plan, however the City has yet to undertake a corridor-specific area plan as was done on the nearby Charlotte Street Corridor.¹¹

Water and Sewer Infrastructure

According to Mike Berkshire with the City of Asheville Water Department, the City would like to upgrade the existing water lines that are located within the US 25 right-of-way. Currently, there are two parallel water lines beneath the pavement and the City would like to upgrade the size of these lines during construction of the U-4013 project.¹²

The Metropolitan Sewerage District (MSD) of Buncombe County has authority over the sewer lines that run along US 25 in the project area. According to data available from the District's web site¹³, there are sewer lines that cross US 25 south of Chatham Road. North of Chatham, MSD has facilities along US 25 to serve adjacent properties. Based on MSD mapping, the gravity main lines run along an easement along the back side of parcels fronting the east side of US 25.

Area / Community Controversy

As noted in the Community Characteristics Section, the City of Asheville believes the primary controversy associated with the U-4013 project will be the potential impacts to parking at developments in the northwest and northeast quadrants of the US 25 / Edgewood Drive intersection.

City of Asheville staff also noted the desire for special considerations in the Murdock Avenue realignment and connection to US 25 at W.T. Weaver Boulevard. The City has made several

investments in recent years along this neighborhood arterial to slow traffic speeds, particularly along its frontage with Weaver Park. The prospect of a direct connection to W.T. Weaver Boulevard could create additional traffic demand along Murdock Avenue. There are several children that use this street as a walk-to-school route.¹⁴

Water Supply/Watershed

The project is located within the French Broad River watershed, subbasin 04-03-02. The section of the French Broad River that lies closest to the study area, about one and a quarter miles to the east, is not impaired. Reed Creek passes through the study area. It is not rated on the NC DWQ's 303(d) list and is classified as Surface Freshwater by NCDENR. Merrimon Avenue crosses over Reed Creek via a culvert at the intersection of Merrimon and W.T. Weaver Blvd.¹⁵



Culvert over Reed Creek at the Intersection of Merrimon Avenue and W.T. Weaver Boulevard

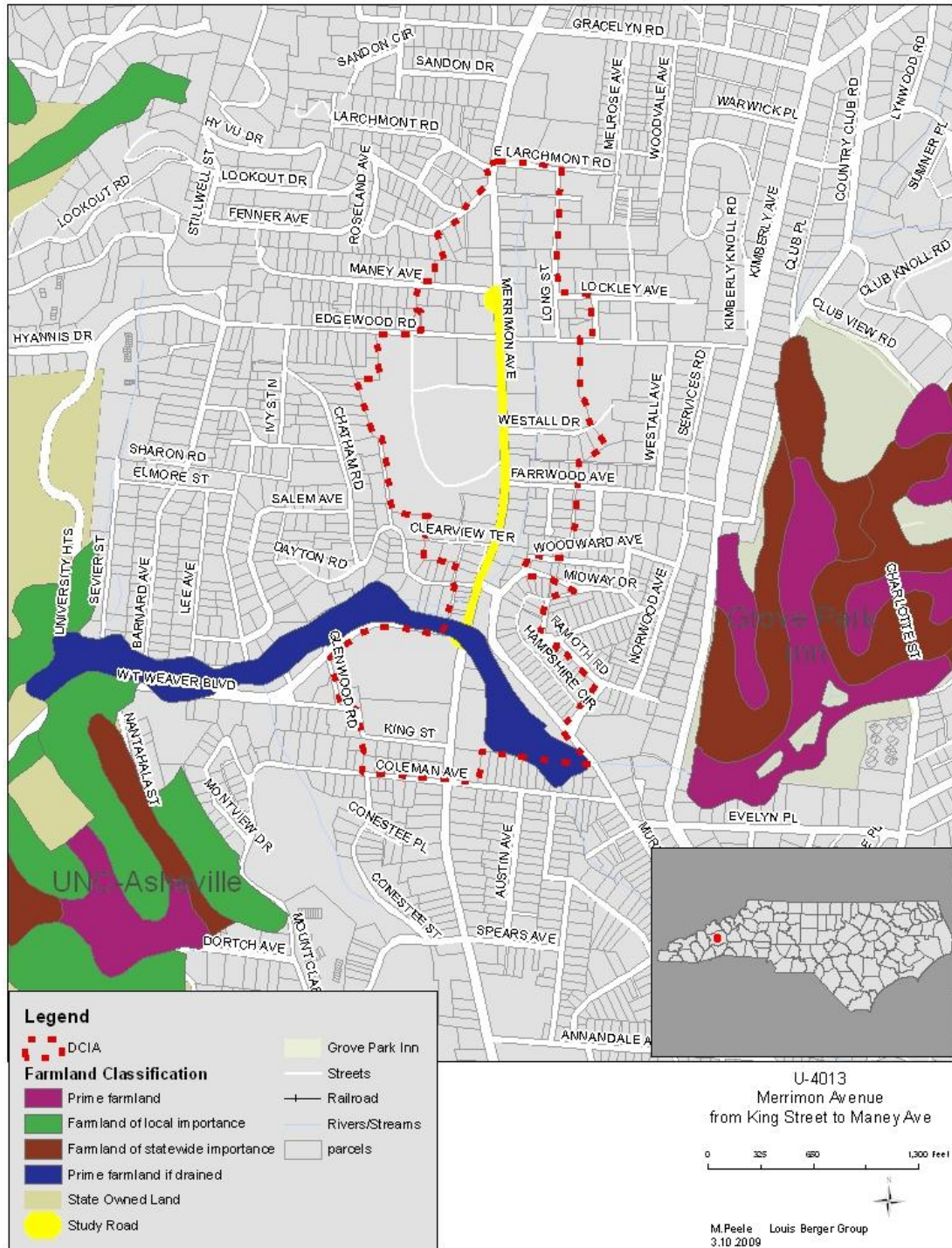
The French Broad River basin includes three major watersheds in North Carolina: the French Broad River and two of its tributaries, the Pigeon and Nolichucky Rivers. The basin's landscape has seen significant change over the last three decades, as previously undeveloped and agricultural land were developed, often redirecting storm water which has increased flooding and erosion. The largest changes have happened in the upper French Broad region. Our study area, falling within an already developed section of the City of Asheville, did not see such extreme shifts during this period.¹⁶

The Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973 identifies the use of disaster relief funds for acquisition and relocation of flood damaged property. The local community, where the property is located, uses grants authorized by FEMA, to purchase the properties. Properties that have been acquired using the grants are required to be used as open space and can not be re-sold to individuals nor can they be developed. According to Nikki Reid, Real Estate Manager in the Office of Economic Development with the City of Asheville, no properties along the corridor of the study road for this project have been purchased or identified by the FEMA Buyout Program.¹⁷

Farmland

The Direct Community Impact Area (DCIA) and the area surrounding it all fall within an urbanized area of the City of Asheville and thus there is no farming in the immediate area. Based on soil data, the DCIA contains approximately five acres of land categorized as "prime farmland if drained," although this land is not in agricultural use at this time.

Figure 3: Farmland Soils



Community Demographics

Population—Trends and Composition

The demographic study area experienced a population decrease of -55 residents from 1990 to 2000. The total 2000 population of 7,167 represents a small drop of -0.76% from 1990, which differs greatly from the 18.02% growth experienced by Buncombe County in the same period.

Racial Makeup

The racial character of the demographic study area in the 2000 census was fairly similar to that of Buncombe County. Whites were a strong majority in the demographic study area, accounting for 87.3 percent of the population, only slightly less than the County's 89.1 percent. The racial group with the second largest share of the study area's population was African Americans, who made up 9.7 percent. This is slightly higher than the County's African American population, which accounted for 7.5 percent of Buncombe County residents in the 2000 census.

Combined, African Americans and Whites made up 97 percent of the study area's population. The only other racial group that constituted at least one percent of the study area's population were those residents of "two or more" races, which accounted for 1.2 percent of the total population. Interestingly, certain racial groups were on the decline in the study area (such as Whites, African Americans and Asians), while others grew notably in population from 1990 to 2000 (such as American Indians).

Table 1: Population and Race in the Study Area and Buncombe County

		1990		2000		1990-2000	1990-2000	1990-2000
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Numeric Change	% Change	Annual Rate
Demographic Study Area	Total Population	7,222	100%	7,167	100%	-55	-0.76%	-0.08%
	White	6,379	88.3%	6,257	87.3%	-122	-1.91%	-0.19%
	Black or African-American	696	9.6%	693	9.7%	-3	-0.43%	-0.04%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	17	0.2%	20	0.3%	3	17.65%	1.64%
	Asian	59	0.8%	58	0.8%	-1	-1.69%	-0.17%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0.0%	1	0.0%	1	0.00%	0.00%
	Other	14	0.2%	51	0.7%	37	264.29%	13.80%
	Two or More	57	0.8%	87	1.2%	30	52.63%	4.32%
County	Total Population	174,821	100%	206,330	100%	31,509	18.02%	1.67%
	White	157,281	90.00%	183,761	89.10%	26,480	16.84%	1.57%
	Black or African-American	14,251	8.20%	15,425	7.50%	1,174	8.24%	0.79%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	486	0.30%	803	0.40%	317	65.23%	5.15%
	Asian	743	0.40%	1,368	0.70%	625	84.12%	6.29%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	22	0.00%	79	0.00%	57	259.09%	13.64%
	Other	255	0.10%	2,365	1.10%	2110	827.45%	24.95%
	Two or More	1,783	1.00%	2,529	1.20%	746	41.84%	3.56%

Ethnic Makeup

People who identified themselves as Hispanic in ethnicity represent 2.43 percent of the population in the demographic study area, according to the 2000 Census. Similarly, Buncombe County's Hispanic population represented 2.78 percent of the total population in 2000. The State had a higher overall percentage of Hispanic residents than both the County and the study area, with Hispanic residents representing 4.7 percent of the total statewide population. Despite its relatively small Hispanic population, the study area experienced a large uptick in persons of Hispanic ethnicity from 1990 to 2000, increasing by 168 percent and growing from 65 persons in 1990 to 174 persons in 2000. The County's increase was even greater, growing by 388.5 percent which moved the Hispanic share of the Buncombe County population from 1,173 persons in 1990 to 5,730 persons in 2000.

Commuting

The study area's percentage of commuters traveling 25 minutes or more to work was 15.57 percent in the 2000 census, which was notably lower than Buncombe County's 29 percent and lower still than the State of North Carolina's 36.5 percent. While the State and the County experienced notable increases from 1990 to 2000 in the percentages of these commuters, the study area saw a much smaller increase. The study area's percentage of long-distance commutes grew from 15.02 percent in 1990 to 15.57 percent in 2000, only a 13.65 percent change over time. Comparatively, the County's long-distance commutes grew from 25.5 percent in 1990 to 29 percent in 2000, a 33.68 percent change over time, while the State's long-distance commutes grew from 29.43 percent to 36.49 percent, a 43.41 percent change over time. Along a similar vein, the study area experienced only a 0.3 minute increase in average travel time to work between 1990 and 2000, moving from 14.8 to 15.1 minutes. The County experienced a 2.5 minute increase, from 18.6 minutes to 21.1 minutes. The average travel time to work across the State grew from 19.8 minutes to 24 minutes, a 4.2 minute increase in the same period.

Table 2: Number of Commuters Traveling 25 Minutes or Greater to Work

	Number of Commuters	1990 Number Commuting 25+ Minutes	Percent	Number of Commuters	2000 Number Commuting 25+ Minutes	Percent	1990-2000 Numeric Change Commuting 25+ Mins	1990-2000 % Change Commuting 25+ Mins	Average Travel Time to Work (in minutes) 1990	Average Travel Time to Work (in minutes) 2000
Demographic Study Area	3,270	491	15.02%	3,584	558	15.57%	67	13.65%	14.8	15.1
Buncombe County	84,388	21,522	25.50%	99,133	28,770	29.02%	7,248	33.68%	18.6	21.1
State	3,229,522	950,332	29.43%	3,734,822	1,362,884	36.49%	412,552	43.41%	19.8	24

Note: Percent reflects the percentage of the total number of 16+ Workers who commute to work (do not work at home) and have commutes of 25 minutes or longer

Housing

The housing in the area is a mix of single family residences and a large apartment complex (Pinnacle Ridge Apartments). In 2000, there were 3,239 housing units in the demographic study area, a 1.79 percent decrease over the 1990 number. This decrease is incongruent with Buncombe County's 20.5 percent increase in housing units in the same period. According to the 2000 Census, the median home value in the demographic study area was \$135,507, which is notably higher than the 1990 median value of \$73,552. The County also experienced a large

increase in median home value. In 1990 the median home value was reported at \$64,393 for Buncombe County, where it jumped to \$119,582 in 2000.

The decrease in the overall number of housing units in the Demographic Study Area is likely contributed to by the expansion of the UNC Asheville campus, the transition of several residences to businesses and the acquisition of some properties by the Grove Park Inn to expand their facilities. The difference in median home values is attributable to the homes located in the Grove Park Historic District that are some of the most expensive addresses in the City of Asheville.

Economics

According to the 2000 Census, the demographic study area and the County rated similarly in terms of economic indicators including median household income, unemployment and poverty rates (Table 3). The median household income for the demographic study area was slightly less than the County, according to the 2000 Census. The study area's median was \$33,638, which was \$3,044 less than the Buncombe County median household income of \$36,682. Both the study area and the County median household incomes were less than the State's median of \$39,190 in 2000. All three areas experienced a net increase in median household income from 1990 to 2000, with the study area's household income figures growing slightly faster than the County, as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Median Household Income Data for Aggregated Study Area, County and State

	1990 Number	2000 Number	1990-2000 \$ Change	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Annual Rate
Demographic Study Area	\$23,321	\$33,638	\$10,317	44.24%	3.73%
County	\$25,847	\$36,682	\$10,835	41.92%	3.56%
State	\$26,647	\$39,190	\$12,543	47.07%	3.93%

The employment figures for the study area show a notable disparity from the County and the State. The unemployment rate increased notably for the study area from 1990 to 2000, growing from 2.9 percent in 1990 to 5.3 percent in 2000, a 90.34 percent increase over time.

Comparatively, Buncombe County's unemployment rate grew from 2.7 percent in 1990 to 3.0 percent in 2000. The State's unemployment rate grew from 3.1 percent in 1990 to 3.4 percent in 2000. Due to the recent economic downturn, unemployment has worsened considerably. The NC Department of Commerce reports an annual average 4.8 percent unemployment rate for Buncombe County in 2008.

Table 4: Unemployed Persons who are 16+ Data for Aggregated Study Area, County and State

	1990		2000		1990-2000 Numeric Change	1990-2000 % Change	1990-2000 Annual Rate
	Number	%	Number	%			
Demographic Study Area	176	2.9%	335	5.3%	159	90.34%	6.65%
County	3,762	2.7%	5,041	3.0%	1,279	34.00%	2.97%
State	163,081	3.10%	214,991	3.40%	51,910	31.83%	2.80%

According to Census reports, 11.6 percent of the residents of the demographic study area had household incomes below the poverty level in 2000, as compared to 13.8 percent in 1990 (Table 5). The poverty rate for Buncombe County was similar at 11.5 percent in 2000, a decrease from 12.5 percent in 1990. The study area has seen an overall decline in poverty levels in the last ten years, while the County has experienced a positive change over time of 11.66 percent during the ten year period. However, this differential could be attributed to the decreased population of the study area, as opposed to net increase in population for Buncombe County. Similar to the County, the State also experienced an overall increase in poverty levels relative to population growth.

Table 5: Households Below Poverty Level Data

	1990		2000		1990-2000	1990-2000	1990-2000
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Numeric Change	% Change	Annual Rate
Demographic Study Area	420	13.8%	355	11.6%	-65	-15.48%	-1.67%
County	8,849	12.5%	9,881	11.5%	1,032	11.66%	1.11%
State	351,770	14.00%	387,024	12.40%	35,254	10.02%	0.96%

The NC Department of Commerce reports the following sectors of major private workforce employment in Buncombe County:

- Healthcare/Social Services: 18.65 percent
- Retail Trade: 13.75 percent
- Accommodation/Food Service: 12.93 percent
- Manufacturing: 11.3 percent
- Administrative/Waste Services: 6.8 percent

Additionally, the NC Department of Commerce reports the following top employers for Buncombe County.

Rank, Company (Industry and Employment range)

1. Memorial Mission Hospital Inc (Educational & Health Services; 1,000+)
2. Buncombe County Board Of Education (Educational & Health Services; 1,000+)
3. Ingles Markets Inc (Trade, Transportation & Utilities; 1,000+)
4. State Of North Carolina (Public Administration; 1,000+)
5. County Of Buncombe (Public Administration; 1,000+)
6. Veterans Administration Hospital (Educational & Health Services; 1,000+)
7. City Of Asheville (Public Administration; 1,000+)
8. The Biltmore Company (Leisure & Hospitality; 1,000+)

9. The Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa (Leisure & Hospitality; 1,000+)
10. Cutler Hammer Inc. (Manufacturing; 500-999)
11. Community Carepartners Inc. (Educational & Health Services; 500-999)
12. Wal-Mart Associates Inc. (Trade, Transportation & Utilities; 500-999)
13. Asheville-Buncombe Technical College (Educational & Health Services; 500-999)
14. Asheville City Schools (Educational & Health Services; 500-999)
15. Borgwarner Turbo Systems (Manufacturing; 500-999)
16. US Postal Service (Trade, Transportation & Utilities; 500-999)
17. Kendro Laboratory Products LP (Manufacturing; 500-999)
18. Arvato Digital Services LLC (Manufacturing; 500-999)
19. Employment Control Inc. (Professional & Business Services; 500-999)
20. VME Americas Inc. (Manufacturing; 500-999)
21. US Airways Express (Trade, Transportation & Utilities; 500-999)
22. Lowes Home Centers Inc. (Trade, Transportation & Utilities; 250-499)
23. MB Haynes Corp. (Construction; 250-499)
24. Kearfott Guidance (Manufacturing; 250-499)
25. K-Mart Corporation Intl. (Trade, Transportation & Utilities; 250-499)

The NC Department of Commerce annually ranks the state's 100 counties based on economic well-being and assigns each a tier designation (Tier 1: Most distressed to Tier 3: Least distressed) to determine which counties' eligible businesses qualify for larger tax credits. Buncombe County has a Tier 3 status along with 19 other counties in the state. The rankings are based on factors such as unemployment rates, median income, population growth and property values, and replace the previous five-tier designations.

COMMUNITY CONTEXT DIAGRAM

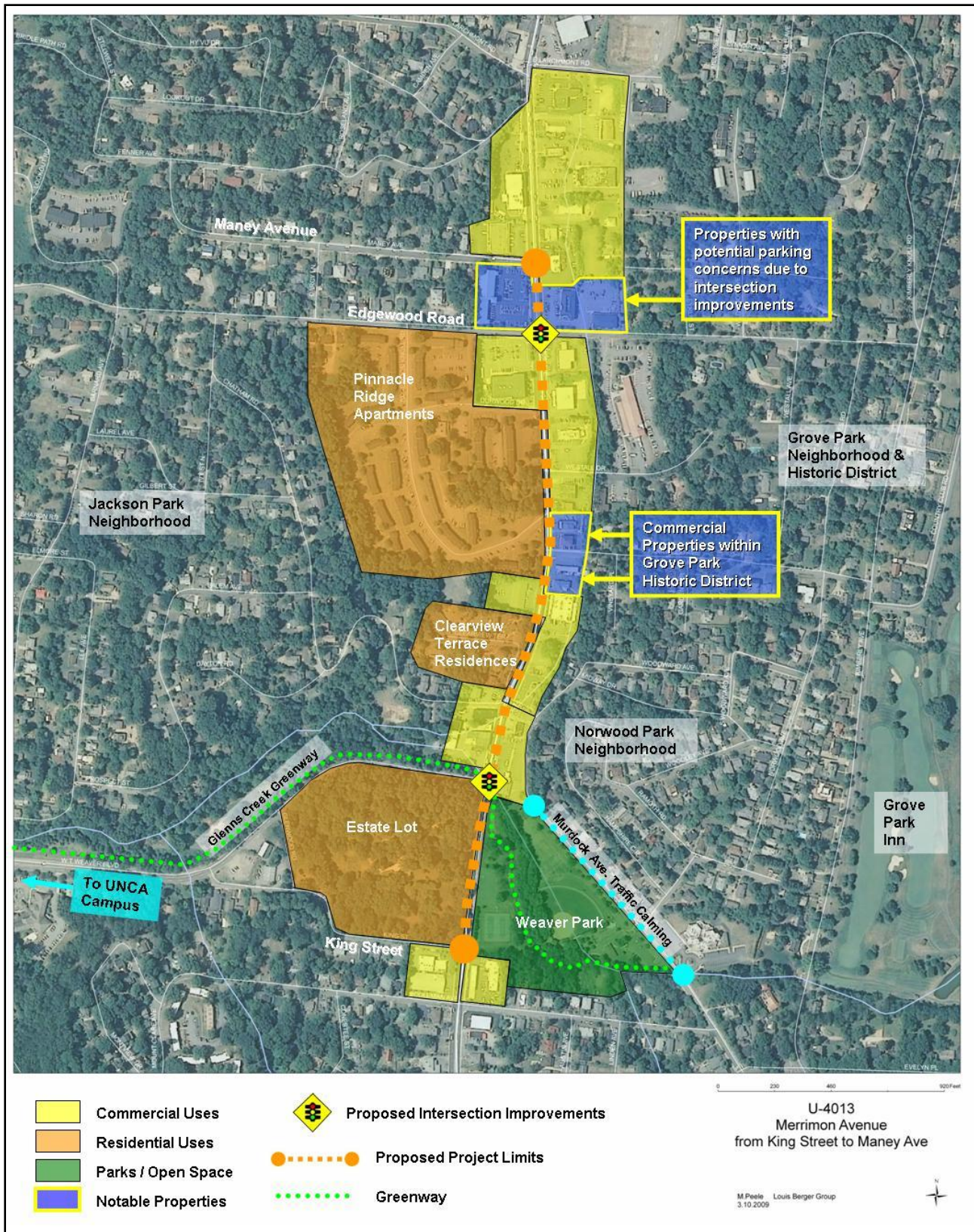
The Community Context Diagram (Figure 4) for project U-4013 was developed following site visits and discussions with City of Asheville and NCDOT staff to identify notable community features and land uses that may have an impact on project design and implementation. The Community Context Diagram also identifies notable features that are identified in the recommendations and context of this report.

POTENTIAL COMMUNITY IMPACTS

a) Physical

Direct property impacts are anticipated along the entire project due to the taper lengths required to construct the center turn lanes at W.T. Weaver Boulevard and Edgewood Road. The completion of the sidewalk system and potential location of buffered sidewalks along the corridor will likely lead to more impacts than if they road was shifted east and re-constructed with its current pedestrian system configuration.

Figure 4: Community Characteristics Diagram



While this shift in the centerline of the roadway may not necessitate the removal of existing buildings, there is likely to be notable impacts to landscape buffers and parking associated with commercial properties along US 25. Particularly noted by the City of Asheville is an altering or removal of parking in the northwest and northeast quadrants of the US 25 / Edgewood Road intersection.

The connection of Murdock Avenue to W.T. Weaver Boulevard will require the buyout of the now-vacant “Gusmos Mojo Café” restaurant that sits in the middle of what would be the east leg of a four-way W.T. Weaver Boulevard / Murdock Avenue and US 25 intersection.

The proposed improvements are likely to have an impact on Weaver Park, which is a 4(f) resource. The improvements would probably require the reconstruction of the slope leading to the creek basin and a relocation of the greenway path that runs parallel to US 25. The park’s parking lot with direct access to US 25 may also be impacted. The City of Asheville recognized this potential impact and noted they were amenable to these impacts as they would like to preserve the rock wall and entryway to the estate lot at 456 Merrimon Ave. located directly across from the impacted area within Weaver Park.

b) Community/ neighborhood cohesion and stability

The addition of left turn lanes along the corridor will not likely result in negative impacts in terms of community cohesion and stability. The proposed completion and potential upgrade of the sidewalk system along the corridor will likely increase community cohesion and provide for greater neighborhood stability as these pedestrian facilities will connect the area to local businesses, bus stops, Weaver Park and the greenway.

As noted previously, the City of Asheville is concerned about the potential impacts of increased traffic with the the direct connection of Murdock Avenue to W.T. Weaver Boulevard. The City has invested heavily in traffic calming measures along this street in an attempt to provide for greater safety, neighborhood cohesion and stability in the residential areas east of US 25.

c) Economic and business resources

As noted above, there could be notable impacts to the existing parking associated with several businesses along US 25 in the project area. This combined with the removal of landscape buffers could create non-conforming uses within the city’s codes and ordinances and have the potential to negatively impact the value and viability of these properties.

US 25 within the project area currently experiences several disruptions in traffic flow throughout the day due to the lack of center turn lanes. The addition of these turn lanes, as well as the addition of sidewalk facilities, could lead to positive impacts on the adjacent businesses once the project is complete and several vehicle and pedestrian barriers and conflict points will be eliminated.

d) Local land use, character, and development plans

The tact taken in approaching this project will determine if there will be any notable visual, character and aesthetic effects to the project area, and whether any effects that do result will be a benefit or a detriment. The project’s intersection improvements, road realignments and sidewalk additions are likely to improve the area’s character by facilitating the needs of multiple types of users and improving connectivity. Still, the level of engagement with City officials and members of the public will effect how the project impacts the character of the corridor. Merrimon Avenue can either continue down its current path towards being a high-speed, auto-centric

thoroughfare, or it can move in the direction of a true multi-modal facility, accommodating walkers, bicyclists and other users. Any additions and improvements to pedestrian and bicyclist amenities done in the course of this project would be welcome by the City.

The section of US 25 within the study area lies in close proximity to walkable, historically significant neighborhoods to the east and a large university, UNC Asheville, to the west. The corridor is populated with many commercial establishments and there is a large scale apartment complex just off the road. All of these ingredients could come together into a multi-modal corridor that would help draw the huge number of people living and attending school in the immediate area to the commercial enterprises up and down the road.

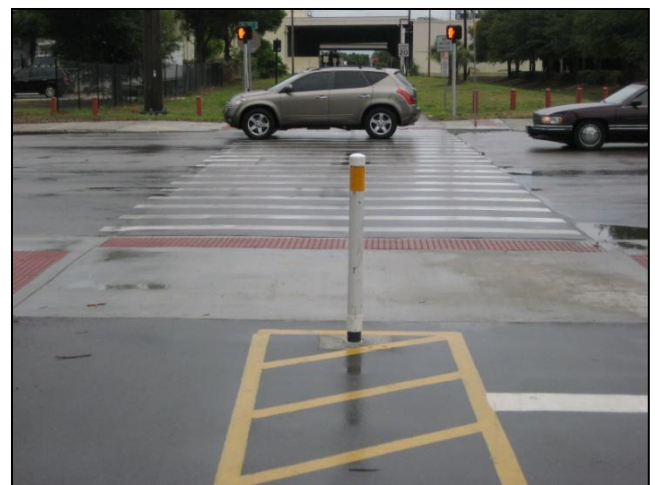
At the moment, the corridor and the neighborhoods adjacent to it are very poorly integrated. The road creates an east-west barrier effect and does not attract as much non-motorized traffic from neighboring areas as it clearly could. A lower design speed along the corridor accompanied by better pedestrian facilities such as sidewalk buffer zones and more crosswalks would go a long way towards bridging this divide.

e) Mobility and access

Mobility and access within the corridor have been hampered by its current configuration as a four-lane facility. The absence of sidewalks along the west side of the corridor has created a pedestrian barrier to access businesses and transit stops on this side of the street. The addition of center turn lanes will improve vehicle operations along the corridor and the completion of the sidewalk system will improve access for pedestrians. The addition of center turn lanes will create additional distance and time needed for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross these intersections.

The City of Asheville noted their desire to coordinate with NCDOT to consolidate or eliminate duplicate driveways to improve mobility and access, as well as reduce conflict points between pedestrians and motorists. The City also noted a desire for mid-block pedestrian crossing and possibly pedestrian signals between W.T. Weaver Boulevard and Edgewood Road at existing bus stop locations. The City also stated they would be willing to cooperate on the acquisition of property to install ADA-compliant bus stop pads and shelters within the project area to increase mobility and access for bus riders.¹⁸

The intersection crossing treatments at US 25 and W.T. Weaver Boulevard will require special design considerations to accommodate the at-grade crossing of the greenway trail. The City of Asheville noted their desire for crosswalks along all four legs. To properly accommodate multi-use pathway traffic and meet



Example of crossing treatments at intersection of roadway and greenway trail.

Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, the crossing treatments on at least two connecting legs of this intersection will require wider sidewalk widths, curb ramps to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and pedestrian/bicycle activated buttons that are not typically part of NCDOT's standard drawings for these facilities. The photo (right) is an example of a crossing treatment for a greenway trail at a signalized intersection that

included detectable warning devices (aka truncated domes) covering the full required width of a greenway trail, a 10' minimum.

f) Environmental justice

No impacts to any special populations identified in the environmental justice requirements as outlined below are expected on this project.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, protects individuals from discrimination on the grounds of race, age, color, religion, disability, sex, and national origin. Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations" provides that each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations. Additional special populations traditionally underserved may also include the elderly, children, the disabled, low-income areas, American Indians and other minority groups. Executive Order 12898 requires that Environmental Justice principles be incorporated into all transportation studies, programs, policies and activities. The three environmental principles are: 1) to ensure the full and fair participation of all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; (2) to avoid, minimize or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority or low income populations; and (3) to fully evaluate the benefits and burdens of transportation programs, policies, and activities, upon low-income and minority populations.

g) Recurring community / neighborhood impacts

The completion and enhancement of pedestrian facilities along US 25 has been a recurring issue in the project area. Demand has increased as the City has completed the sidepath along W.T. Weaver Boulevard to connect the UNCA campus and Broadway Avenues to the commercial district and neighborhoods along US 25. With that, a need for pedestrian access to the existing bus stops in the corridor has also become an issue.

As noted, the need for traffic calming along Murdock Avenue has also been a recurring community concern.

h) Important natural features, open space and parkland

The most prominent natural and park feature within the project area is Weaver Park, which provides numerous community recreation facilities as well as a greenway connection to the Reed Creek Greenway that traverses much of north Asheville.

FINDINGS / NEXT STEPS

- NCDOT should work closely with local businesses during the design process to identify options and alternatives to the impacts on parking spaces and landscape buffers that may cause non-conformance with current zoning regulations and associated ordinances.
- NCDOT should work with the City of Asheville to identify project options and mitigate potential impacts to numerous components of the transportation system, including:
 - Options for completing the sidewalk system along the west side of the corridor;
 - Acquisition of property for construction of buffered sidewalks, where feasible;
 - Acquisition of property and construction of bus stop pads;
 - Potential effects on traffic volumes and speeds along Murdock Avenue;
 - Specialized intersection treatments at W.T. Weaver Boulevard to facilitate multi-use pathway travel through the intersection;
 - Potential that turns to and from Chatham Road to US 25 be converted to right-in/right-out if there is no signal at that intersection;
 - Adding a pedestrian crossing somewhere between W.T. Weaver and Edgewood Knoll Road if the signalized intersection at Chatham Road is removed;
 - Adding crosswalks on all 4 legs of the Edgewood Road and Merrimon Avenue intersection;
 - Options for making driveways and parking lot entrances along Merrimon Avenue right-in/right-out due to difficulties and delays posed by left turns on this busy road (perhaps even add center median as left-turn barrier);
 - Options for adding bicycle facilities to Merrimon Avenue such as shared lane markings and climbing lanes which are recommended in Asheville's Comprehensive Bicycle Plan;
 - Preservation of the rock wall and entryway to the estate lot at 456 Merrimon Avenue south of W.T. Weaver Boulevard; and
 - Relocation of greenway trail within Weaver Park.
- NCDOT should work with area business owners and the City of Asheville to identify potential consolidation of access points or elimination of direct access to US 25 where existing businesses have access from a side street that connects to US 25.

APPENDIX

Appendix documents will be submitted with the Final Community Characteristics Report and will include:

- Site visit summary;
- Community impact response forms and interview notes;
- Meeting notes from discussion with City of Asheville staff;
- Demographics summary tables; and
- Photolog.

SOURCES

-
- ¹ Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.
- ² About UNC Asheville. <http://www.unca.edu/aboutunca/>. Accessed on June 2, 2009.
- ³ Grove Park Inn History. <http://www.groveparkinn.com/Leisure/TheResort/History/>. Accessed on June 2, 2009.
- ⁴ Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.
- ⁵ Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.
- ⁶ City of Asheville Parks and Recreation website. http://asheville.nc.us/residents/parks_rec. Accessed on June 2, 2009.
- ⁷ University of North Carolina Asheville website. <http://www.unca.edu/aboutunca/>. Accessed on June 2, 2009.
- ⁸ City of Asheville, NC, Comprehensive Bicycle Plan. City of Asheville, NC. 2008.
[ftp://www.ashevillenc.gov/Web/TransportationEngineering/Transportation/Asheville_Plan_Final_Adopted_022608.p](ftp://www.ashevillenc.gov/Web/TransportationEngineering/Transportation/Asheville_Plan_Final_Adopted_022608.pdf)
df. Accessed on May 1, 2009.
- ⁹ Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.
- ¹⁰ Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.
- ¹¹ Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.
- ¹² Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.
- ¹³ Metropolitan Sewerage District of Buncombe County. <http://www.msdbc.org>. Accessed on June 2, 2009.
- ¹⁴ Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.
- ¹⁵ French Broad River Basinwide Water Quality Plan, 2005: Subbasin 04-03-02. North Carolina Division of Water Quality. 2007. <http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/basinwide/documents/Chapter2Subbasin04-03-02.pdf>. Accessed on June 1, 2009.
- ¹⁶ French Broad River Basin. N.C. Office of Environmental Education. 2007.
<http://www.ee.enr.state.nc.us/public/eoaddress/riverbasins/frenchbroad.150dpi.pdf>. Accessed on June 1, 2009.
- ¹⁷ Conversation with Nikki Reid, Real Estate Manager, Office of Economic Development, City of Asheville. June 5, 2009.
- ¹⁸ Meeting with City of Asheville Staff. April 30, 2009.



THE LOUIS BERGER GROUP, INC.

48 Waynesville Avenue | Asheville, NC 28806
Tel (828) 989-0591 www.berger-nc.com

To: U-4013 Project File
From: Don Kostelec & Tanya Paglia
Date: May 1, 2009
Subject: U-4013 Meeting with City of Asheville Planning, Engineering and Transportation Staff

Meeting Notes

DOT Project U-4013, Merrimon Avenue from King Street to Maney Avenue
Friday, 1 May 2009

Attendees:

Mariate Echeverry, City of Asheville, Transportation and Engineering
Barb Mee, City of Asheville, Transportation and Engineering
Ken Putnam, City of Asheville, Transportation and Engineering
Dan Baechtold, City of Asheville, Transportation and Engineering
Bobby Croom, City of Asheville, Transportation and Engineering
Greg Shuler, City of Asheville, Transportation and Engineering
Edna Johnson, Asheville Transit
Shannon Tuch, City of Asheville, Planning
Robert West, Asheville Street Division
Bill Allen, Asheville Transit
Mike Brookshire, City of Asheville, Water Resources Department

Notes:

Section between King and Chatham Rd.

- Wall at 456 Merrimon is historic
- Concern that making it easier to turn onto Edgewood
- Street Division has concerns about widening in the interest of pedestrians crossing the road. Crossing 6 lanes of traffic
- Businesses often express concerns about losing parking lot space when city calls for sidewalks during redevelopment—the businesses usually ask for “back of curb” sidewalks
- Public has said in meetings that 5-laning the entire road not desirable but fixing up key intersections might be useful
- City Bus Routes 2 and 54 turn left from Merrimon onto WT Weaver (35 foot buses and they have a large turning radius)



U-4013 Meeting with City of Asheville Planning, Engineering and Transportation Staff

- The vision for the corridor is to encourage some multi-modal opportunities, so any changes done in the area they would like to see changes that encourage multi-modal.
- Students from UNC Asheville don't bike on Merrimon much due to safety concerns—city departments don't want students biking on that corridor in its current configuration as they feel it is not safe.
- Students often bike down WT Weaver and then cross Merrimon Ave. and bike down Murdoch Ave. on route to downtown.
- Old stone wall in front of 456 Merrimon is old and historic and the city would rather shift the corridor more towards the park side of the street if widening with sidewalks on both sides.
- Please don't mess up Murdoch Ave...there are many children living there—don't encourage more cars to travel along Murdoch—more connectivity between Merrimon and Murdoch might be good, but they also don't want to see more cars driving down Murdoch
- If a 4-way intersection is created between Merrimon, Murdoch and Weaver, should add cross walks and signalization on all 4 legs
- Many children using Weaver Park

Section between Chatham Rd. and Pinnacle Ridge Apartments

- Clearview Terrace is the sole access for several properties
- Historic district is not a local historic district – it is a national one, and is thus not subject to as tight controls
- Chatham Road does not have sidewalk on it
- If the signal is removed at Chatham Road, you might as well make Chatham right turn only because it would be hard to make a left out of Chatham without a light there
- Some type of a pedestrian crossing should be added somewhere between Weaver and Edgewood if the signalized intersection at Chatham Road is removed—maybe a high-visibility crosswalk or a pedestrian refuge island

Section between Pinnacle Ridge Apartments and Maney Ave.

- A great deal of students living in the Pinnacle Ridge Apartments



U-4013 Meeting with City of Asheville Planning, Engineering and Transportation Staff

- Some people with disabilities also living in there
- Merrimon Ave is a heavily used bus corridor—many passengers board and alight there
- 4 way intersection at Edgewood and Merrimon Ave. –city would like to see cross walks on all 4 legs
- Atlanta Bread is not going to want to lose any of their parking in front facing Merrimon
- Shopping center with IHOP and pizza place and burrito place (on Merrimon between Edgewood and Maney) heavily uses its parking lot—always full

Entire Corridor

- Could the driveways along Merrimon be right-in only?
- Could there even be a center median along Merrimon to prevent left turns out of driveways? Left turners really get in the way of city buses
- In general, eliminating driveways along Merrimon would be very helpful.
- Planning Department has done a study along Merrimon Avenue with citizen participants looking at adding a green strip with trees between street and sidewalk. They are worried that there will be utility conflicts for trees, so 5 foot buffer is preferable, but even just 3 feet of grass with trees on the other side of sidewalk. Anything is better than the back-of-curb sidewalk they have now
- There are narrower lanes in a few places in Asheville like in front of the high school
- A wide outside lane for the bike plan would be good
- In general the city likes to have on-street parking to encourage traffic calming
- Merrimon is the fifth most heavily traveled corridor for Asheville's bus system
- Most of the ridership tapers off at WT Weaver for buses coming from downtown

Other People With Whom We Should Talk

- **Sewers are under MSD (maybe talk to Kevin Johnson or Stan Boyd)**

Nearest Schools



U-4013 Meeting with City of Asheville Planning, Engineering and Transportation Staff

- Claxton Elementary—is a regular city magnet school (if you live in the city, you can go to any one of these city magnet schools—attendance is therefore citywide—you have to live in the city school district limits)
- Merrimon Avenue Baptist school was next to Claxton, but they think it might have relocated.
- Mackaby school over by Weaver Park—small, private school with perhaps 20 kids, but they are growing and they will probably relocate

Water

Mike Brookshire, City of Asheville, Water Resources Department

- There are definitely 8 inch pipes along Merrimon and probably 6 inch. These lines are probably 50 or 60 years old. He thinks they would be looking for some sort of up-grade to larger pipes during the development process if this project goes forward.

#



THE LOUIS BERGER GROUP, INC.

1001 Wade Ave. Raleigh, North Carolina 27605
Tel (919) 866-4400 Fax (919) 755-3502 www.louisberger.com

NC Department of Transportation

School Impact Form

**US 25 (Merrimon Avenue), Operational improvements from King street to Maney avenue,
Asheville, Buncombe County**

TIP No. U-4013; WBS No. 40340.1.1

Using the project maps and project summary on the next two pages, please respond to the questions below by typing the answers in the gray boxes below. Then save (Using the **Save As** command) this file with a new file name for your records and e-mail the *new* file back to the original sender's e-mail address or to tpaglia@louisberger.com.

Note: The gray boxes will expand to allow as much information as necessary to be included. Please respond to all questions – use “N/A” or “Non-known” if no relevant information to question is available. If you need additional information or mapping for this project please contact us.

If you would prefer to print this form and return it to us please send it to the above address.

1. How many School Buses pass through the project area per day? (# of busses, # of trips)

24

2. Which specific schools are the above buses serving?

AMS, AHS, Vance, Hall Fletcher, Dickson, Randolph, Claxton, Jones, Preschool

2. Please rate the impact on service if any of the roads in the area (especially US 25) or lanes on roads were closed temporarily.

☐ No Concerns

☐ Moderate Concerns

☒ Major Concerns

3. If concerns were identified, please specify what they are below, be as specific as possible (Conditions of detour route, location of students, new development expected, weight restrictions, etc.)

Rerouting of buses, some of the side streets identified for rerouting of buses are not appropriate for buses

4. Do you think construction will cause any delays with getting children to school?

Yes

5. Are there any future time periods or events that you know of where road closures would be of particular concern? Please note the event and any details you are familiar with.

No

6. Is there anyone you feel we should contact specifically regarding this project? Please note their name, phone number, and reason we should contact them?

Terry Rafinski, 828-350-6152, Transportation Director/Asheville City Schools

7. Are there any additional comments you have regarding the project? Are the road names referenced the names the locals would use?

No

Form Completed by (Include Title): Terry Rafinski, Transportation Director/Asheville City Schools

Date: 5/14/09



THE LOUIS BERGER GROUP, INC.

48 Waynesville Avenue | Asheville, NC 28806
Tel (828) 989-0591 www.berger-nc.com

To: U-4013 File
From: Don Kostelec & Tanya Paglia
Date: June 3, 2009
Subject: U-4013 Photolog from Site Visit

The site visit for project U-4013 was conducted in May 2009. Below is a summary of the pictures contained in this document:

- Photo 1: Weaver Park, looking toward US 25 / Merrimon Avenue
- Photo 2: Weaver Park frontage along US 25 / Merrimon Avenue
- Photo 3: 456 Merrimon Avenue, driveway and retaining wall
- Photo 4: Traffic Calming on Murdock Avenue, across from Weaver Park
- Photo 5: US 25 / Merrimon Avenue & Weaver Blvd Intersection & Business
- Photo 6: US 25 / Merrimon Avenue & Weaver Blvd Intersection & Greenway
- Photo 7: US 25 / Merrimon Avenue & Murdock Avenue Intersection
- Photo 8: Businesses along Merrimon Avenue, north of Murdock
- Photo 9: Entrance to Pinnacle Ridge Apartments
- Photo 10: US 25 / Merrimon, looking north to Edgewood Intersection
- Photo 11: US 25 / Merrimon, looking south to Edgewood Intersection



U-4013 Photolog from Site Visit

Photo 1: Weaver Park, looking toward US 25 / Merrimon Avenue



Photo 2: Weaver Park frontage along US 25 / Merrimon Avenue





U-4013 Photolog from Site Visit

Photo 3: 456 Merrimon Avenue, driveway and retaining wall



Photo 4: Traffic Calming on Murdock Avenue, across from Weaver Park





U-4013 Photolog from Site Visit

Photo 5: US 25 / Merrimon Avenue & Weaver Blvd Intersection & Business



Photo 6: US 25 / Merrimon Avenue & Weaver Blvd Intersection & Greenway





U-4013 Photolog from Site Visit

Photo 7: US 25 / Merrimon Avenue & Murdock Avenue Intersection



Photo 8: Businesses along Merrimon Avenue, north of Murdock





U-4013 Photolog from Site Visit

Photo 9: Entrance to Pinnacle Ridge Apartments



Photo 10: US 25 / Merrimon, looking north to Edgewood Intersection





U-4013 Photolog from Site Visit

Photo 11: US 25 / Merrimon, looking south to Edgewood Intersection



#