

Campus Corridor Concept

A collaborative effort involving the City of River Falls, Wisconsin, Chippewa Valley Technical College – River Falls Campus, and the University of Wisconsin – River Falls

Accepted by Plan Commission 01/07/2020

Accepted by City Council 01/28/2020



Acknowledgements

City of River Falls

Scot Simpson, City Administrator

Brandt Johnson, Assistant to the City Administrator

Sam Wessel, Planner/GIS

Chippewa Valley Technical College

Bruce Barker, President

Dan Lytle, Campus Manager

University of Wisconsin River Falls

Dean Van Galen, Chancellor

Dale Braun, Campus Planner

Ayres Associates

Matt Frisbie, President

Mark Paschke, Architect

Commonweal Development Corporation

Stuart Schaefer, President

Market & Johnson, Inc.

James Hanke, Business Development Representatives

All site concepts in this document were created by Ayers Associates, Inc., 215 N 2nd St #204, River Falls, WI 54022, for the City of River Falls.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction and Background	4
Project Process	7
Site Plan Concepts	7
Central Cascade District	8 - 12
East Cascade District	13 - 16
West Cascade District	17 - 21
Broadway District	22 - 25
Conclusion	26
Appendix A. Relevant City Plans and Studies	27
Appendix B. Downtown Overlay Zoning District	28

Executive Summary

The following series of concepts were designed to depict campus oriented redevelopment opportunities in line with the City of River Falls, Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC), and University of Wisconsin - River Falls (UWRF) goals. The series of concepts take into consideration the location, existing conditions, zoning, assets, deficiencies, and market conditions to target private and private-public redevelopment opportunities. Additionally, each of the concepts highlight a project as a development focus that may require zoning changes and/or the creation of a Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) district to execute the projects. Although these concepts function as a marketing tool for developers, rather than a policy decision making guide, City officials can consider the impact policy decisions will have on the areas identified in this document.

Introduction & Background

River Falls has been home to higher education since UWRF opened its doors in 1874. Since then, UWRF has expanded to accommodate over 6,000 students annually from across the globe studying over 70 academic programs. The campus is known for its affordability and accessibility to first generation college students, along with its economic contribution to River Falls. Near the UWRF campus, CVTC, based in Eau Claire, Wis., operates its River Falls campus, which provides 26 academic programs to the community.

In early 2019, the City Council, CVTC, and UWRF agreed to share resources to hire Ayres Associates to assist in designing the concepts presented in this document for redevelopment in four districts along Cascade Avenue, South Main Street, and South Wasson Lane. Administration and Planning staff from the City, CVTC, and UWRF held several meetings with Ayres to identify future campus and community needs in this area and to review each concept. The resulting concepts consider many of the recommendations found in existing City and campus plans such as the City's Comprehensive Plan (2005), UWRF's Master Plan (2011), the City's South Main Street Corridor Study (2017), and the Kinni Corridor Plan (2019) while leaving much of Main Street to the existing Downtown Design Plan (2002, see Appendix B.) and upcoming Main Street Plan (future). Appendix A. summarizes the implications of each plan's recommendations on the campus corridor. The following list highlights activities that led to the creation of this document:

- The City identified the pursuit of infill development in both its updated 2018-2022 Strategic Plan as well as the City Administration's 2019-2021 Strategic Initiatives, particularly for the area along South Main Street and Cascade Avenue.
- The City has a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) policy specific to infill development.
- The City hired Maxfield Research & Consulting to create the Housing Needs Analysis (2018), which identifies a short and long term shortage of every housing type in the community, including off campus student housing and housing for young professionals and families who may include students, faculty, or employees of the campuses.
- Phase I of UWRF's Master Plan (2011) is complete, with Phase II underway, which includes a planned \$110 million investment for a new Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) facility near Cascade Avenue expected between 2021 and 2023.
- CVTC completed a \$1.5 million renovation of its River Falls campus in 2018 to expand student services. Due to limited space, the campus has expressed interest in working with the City to determine long term campus planning solutions.

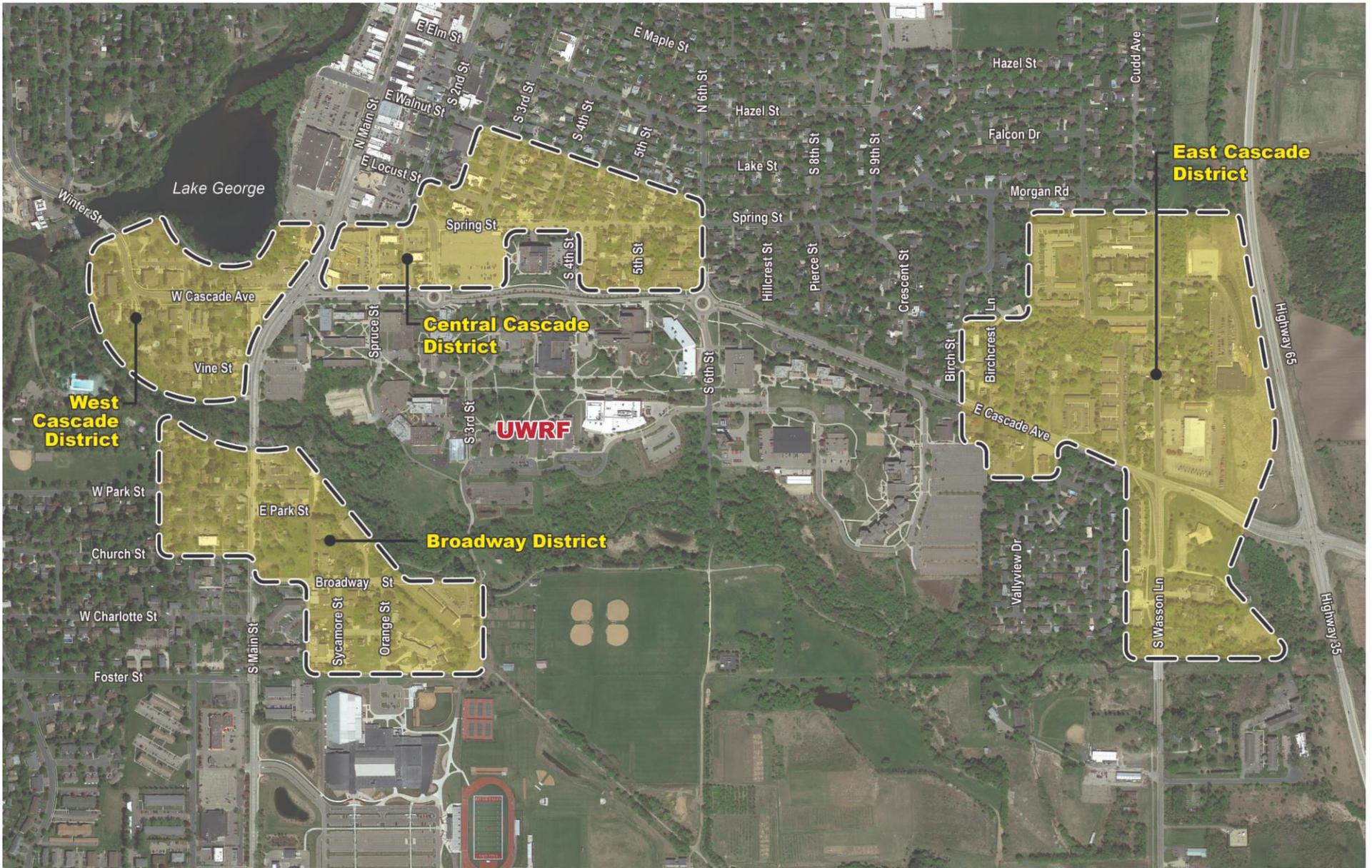


Figure 1. Map of the four Campus Corridor districts, representing over 150 acres of land in the City of River Falls, WI: West Cascade District, Central Cascade District, East Cascade District, and Broadway District.

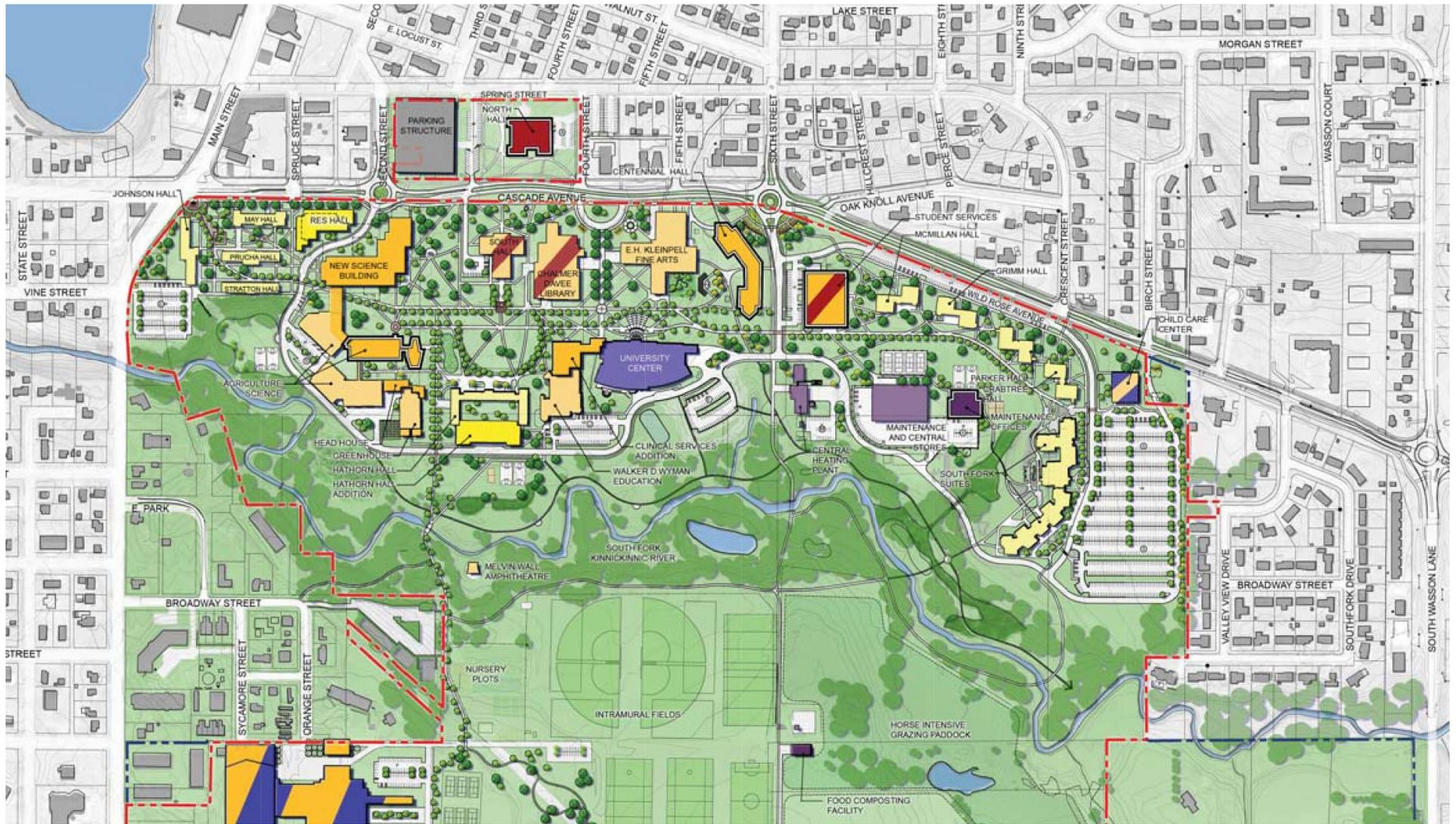


Figure 2. The University of Wisconsin – River Falls Campus Master Plan (2011).

Project Process

The campus corridor project's site plan concepts were refined following monthly meetings during a half year planning process with City, CVTC, and UWRF staff:

- February 27, 2019: Kickoff meeting with data gathering, visioning, project goal identification, and brainstorming
- April 22, 2019: Initial analysis of the planning districts and conceptual site plans
- May 29, 2019: Concept site plan refinement and developer feedback on development ideas community economic considerations
- June 19, 2019: Continued design refinement and review
- July 17, 2019: Begin to finalize package of conceptual site plans
- October 2, 2019: Consultant presented concepts to City of River Falls Plan Commission
- January 7, 2020: Planning staff presented written report containing conceptual site plans to Plan Commission for recommendation for City Council acceptance
- January 28, 2020: City Council acceptance

Ayres Associates investigated market conditions using data from Market & Johnson, a contracting firm, and Commonweal Development, a developer, to measure the type of development in demand and the feasibility of redevelopment under current construction costs. The concepts do not indicate that certain properties have been targeted by developers or the City for redevelopment, but instead provide a vision of what can be accomplished should property owners show interest in redevelopment, while respecting current property owners' desires.

Site Plan Concepts

Since the planning area contains many older structures on small lots, the concepts are an effective marketing tool to encourage high quality, coordinated development, which is preferred over scattered projects that may not address existing issues as effectively. For example, several older single-family homes near the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River could be replaced by a multifamily structure that addresses housing demand in a walkable neighborhood while implementing stormwater management systems that perform more effectively than existing structures. This redevelopment approach expects that a leader, such as the City, one of the campuses, a local business, or a combination thereof, will invest in one or two large projects in each of the districts to encourage further redevelopment in the Campus Corridor and to serve campus and community needs.

Central Cascade District

The following pages depict images of existing conditions followed by site plan concepts for the Central Cascade District. Part of the Central Cascade District is located within the Downtown Overlay Zoning District, which is described in detail in Appendix B of this concept report. The concepts utilize South Second Street as a natural gateway into the UWRF campus by targeting a mixed use development containing ramp parking at the northeast corner of South Second Street and East Cascade Avenue. This gateway is extended as the roundabout at the intersection of South Second Street and East Cascade Avenue is planned for future campus access for the new UWRF Science Building, with the existing Spruce Street access into the campus to be closed.

To alleviate parking concerns in residential neighborhoods to the north of UWRF, a parking ramp at the northeast corner of South Second Street and East Cascade Avenue is one of two targeted developments in the Central Cascade District. Ramp parking is a challenge to develop since it often requires subsidies, and as a result, the concept encourages first floor retail that would not compete with Main Street businesses, such as a childcare facility, along with student housing above the ramp. This site is also ideal for a corporate tenant to locate offices which may provide services and internship opportunities to students, such as Mayo Clinic, Land O'Lakes, or similar healthcare or agriculture companies found in the region.

Potential corporate candidates should be identified by creating a list of companies for the City and developers. Since the property is owned by UWRF, a private-public partnership involving developers, tenants, the City, and UWRF, when combined with a 99-year ground lease, could be utilized to execute the project. Cost feasibility of any project in this concept depend on density, and the City should continually work with developers and campuses to determine the site's highest and best use.

A second targeted development at the northwest corner of South Second Street and East Cascade Avenue involves a combination of retail and mixed use spaces. According to UWRF, there is little need for expanded on campus housing at this time. However, there is opportunity to create off campus student housing, as well as housing for young professionals and international students, professors, and corporate connections with short term housing needs. Constructing new student housing may also free up single family homes in the City that have been converted to multi-unit rentals, freeing up naturally occurring affordable housing for non-students, which is in high demand. Spring Street is also identified in the concept as location for student housing at a scale that provides a transition between higher density campus development to the south and lower density neighborhoods to the north. The following pages depict images of existing conditions and site plan concepts for the Central Cascade District.

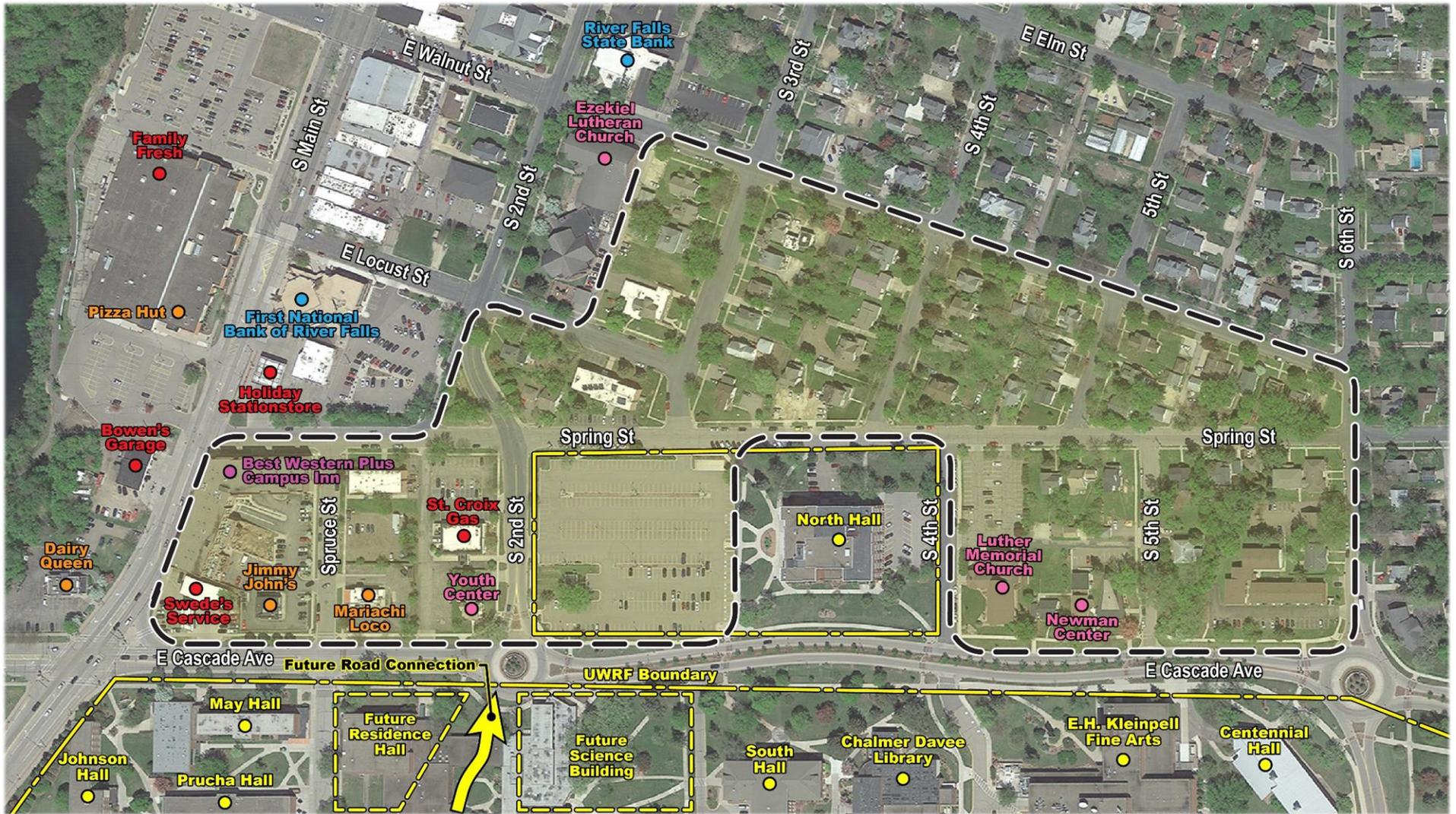


Figure 3. Boundaries and existing conditions for the Central Cascade District.

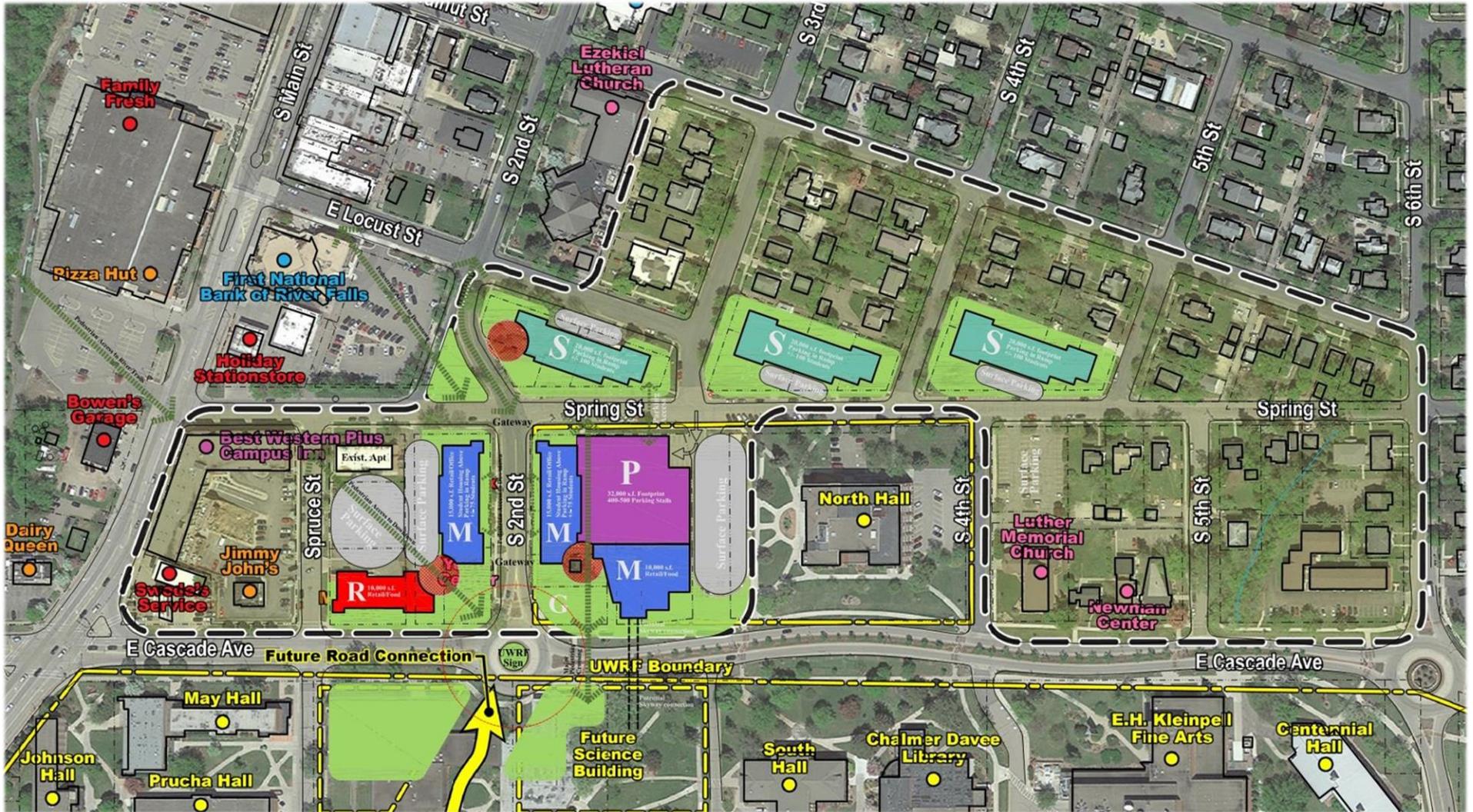
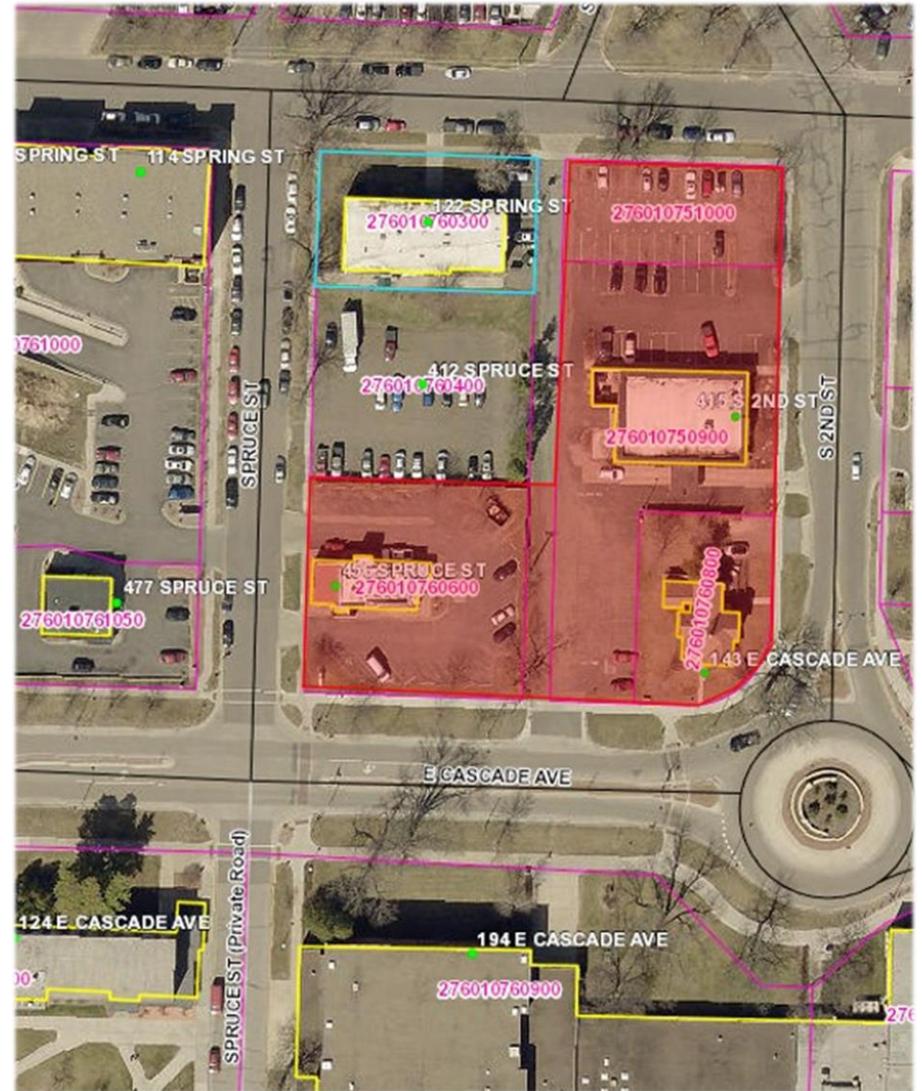
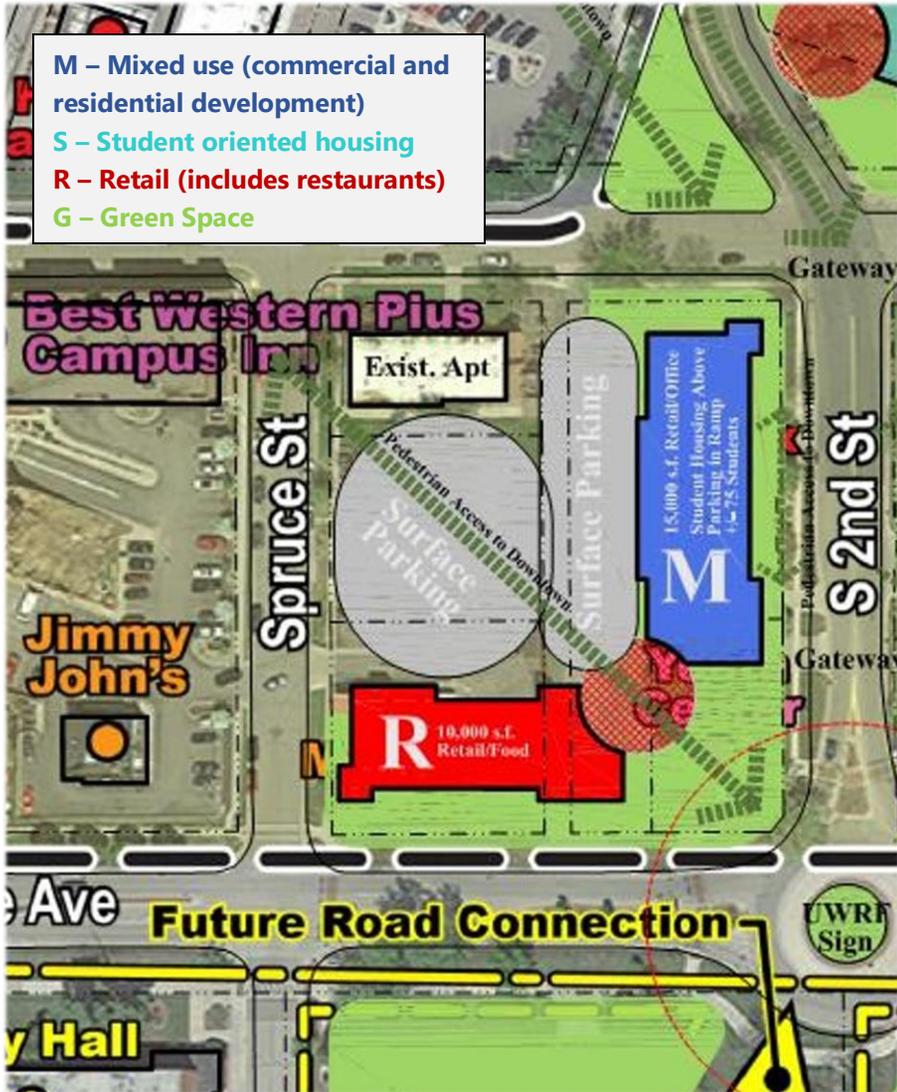
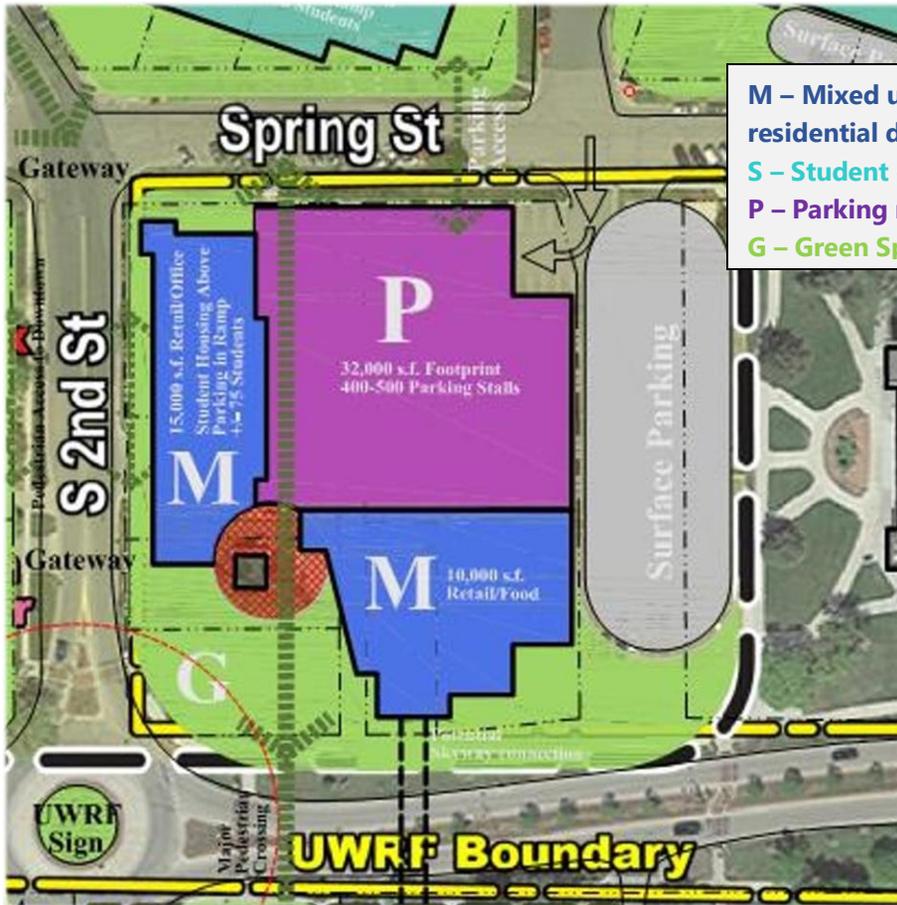


Figure 4. Future development concept for the Central Cascade District.

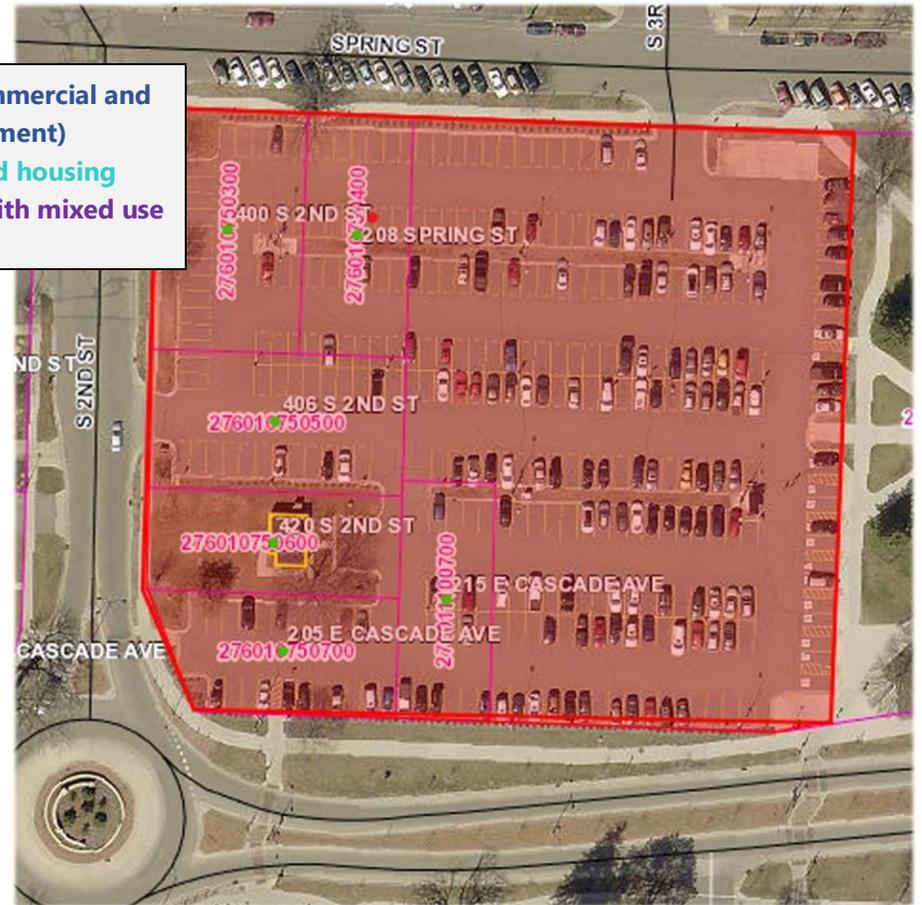
Legend for all development concepts:	P – Parking ramp with mixed use
M – Mixed use (commercial and residential development)	O – Office
H – Multiple family housing	R – Retail (includes restaurants)
S – Student oriented housing	G – Green Space



Figures 5 and 6. Central Cascade District Development Focus One. Green arrows indicate the flow of pedestrian traffic between downtown businesses along Main Street and the Central Cascade District. The site is bordered by East Cascade Avenue, South Second Street, East Spring Street, and East Spruce Street consists of approximately 1.45 acres over four existing lots owned by four separate landowners, as well as an alley that must be vacated. This concept depicts retail, food, and multifamily housing around surface parking lots with a plaza that allows the development to frame the prominent roundabout intersection of South Second Street and East Cascade Ave. Estimated costs for a private developer are \$2 to \$4 million for 25,000 square feet of retail between two buildings (10,000 for a retail only development and 15,000 square feet in a mixed use development) and \$7 to \$10 million for multifamily housing located above the 15,000 square foot retail space.



M – Mixed use (commercial and residential development)
S – Student oriented housing
P – Parking ramp with mixed use
G – Green Space



Figures 7 and 8. Central Cascade Avenue Development Focus Two. The site on the northeast corner of the intersection of East Cascade Avenue and South Second Street consists of surface parking and a City owned well building. The approximately 2.8-acre site is comprised of seven lots with two owners, the City of River Falls and UWRP. The concept retains the City owned well along with some surface parking in addition to a 400 to 500 space parking ramp occupying a 32,000 square foot area behind 25,000 square feet of ground level retail and student oriented housing on upper floors. Office space may also be a component of the mixed use portion of the development. A potential bridge connection to UWRP's future science building crosses East Cascade Avenue. By placing mixed use along South Second Street and East Cascade Avenue, the primary gateways into the UWRP Campus are enhanced while parking is screened by building facades. Estimated costs for a private developer are \$10 to \$15 million for the parking ramp, \$3 to \$5 million for office space, and \$7 to \$10 million for housing.

East Cascade District

The East Cascade District contains a mix of smaller scale, well maintained apartment buildings, with small businesses and organizations. Moody's Corner is located between two prominent East Cascade Avenue intersections with South Wasson Lane and State Highway 65, while CVTC is less visible from the main roads in this district. Should Moody's be renovated, repurposed, or redeveloped, there is an opportunity to increase visibility and access to the CVTC campus. Moody's is also adjacent to right of way acquired for State Highway 65's future four lane expansion, part of which has the potential to address CVTC access concerns. Whether a targeted project is led by a private developer or public entity, shared space arrangements and sale of property for outlots could offset development costs.

Throughout this district, older residential buildings may be replaced with small scale apartments that serve both CVTC and UWRF campuses, as well as CVTC on campus housing. Although walkability is a concern with fewer sidewalks and higher traffic speeds relative to portions of Cascade Avenue farther to the west, East Cascade Avenue will eventually be rebuilt to improve pedestrian and vehicle safety. Housing redevelopment along South Wasson Lane may also provide opportunities for CVTC campus expansion and access improvement. However, referendums that increase funding for CVTC facilities require all additional CVTC campuses to participate (Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls, Menomonee, and Neillsville), with the River Falls campus receiving only a portion of the referendum. The following pages depict existing conditions and site plan concepts for the East Cascade District.



Figure 9. Boundaries and existing conditions for the East Cascade District.

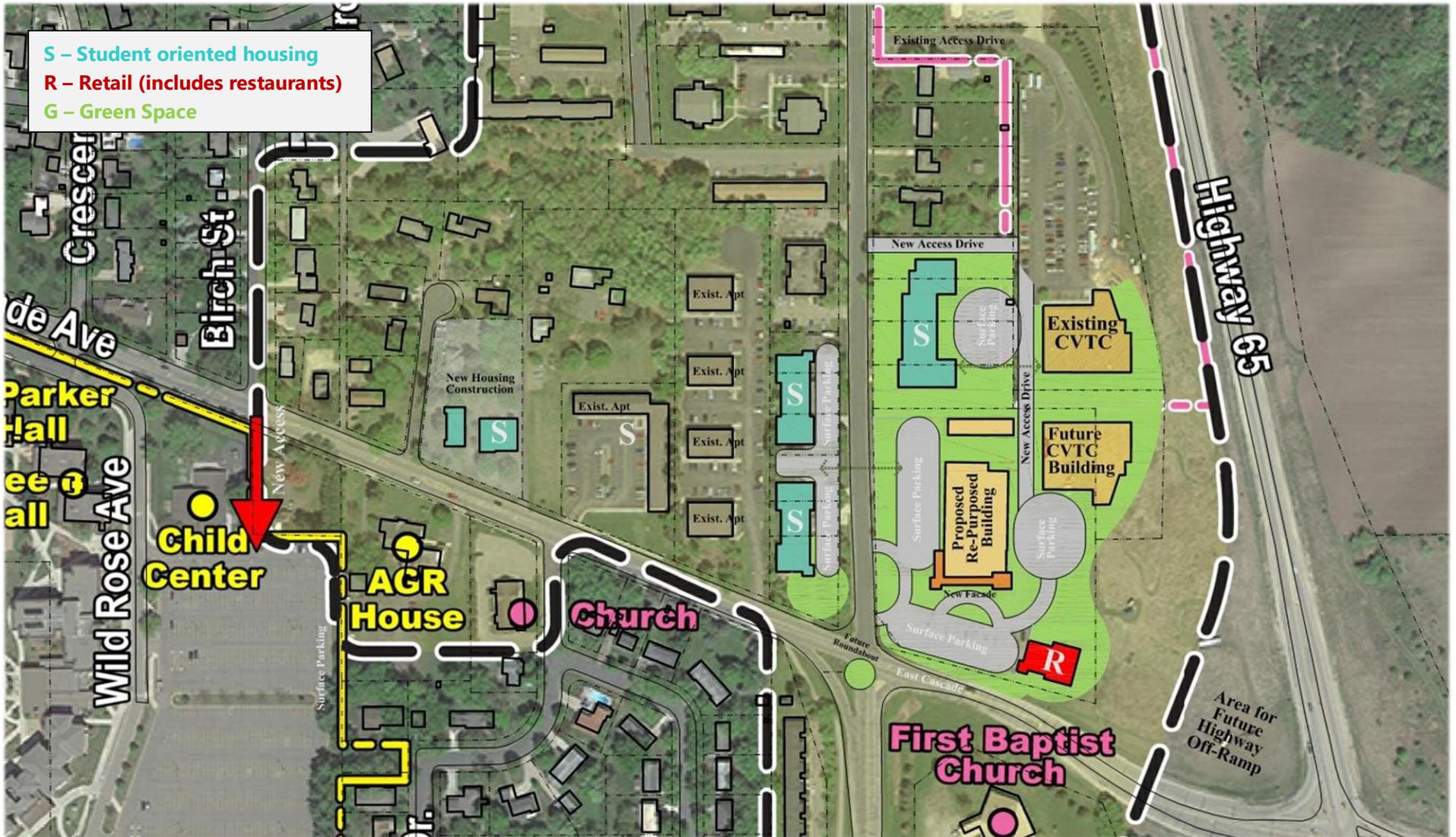
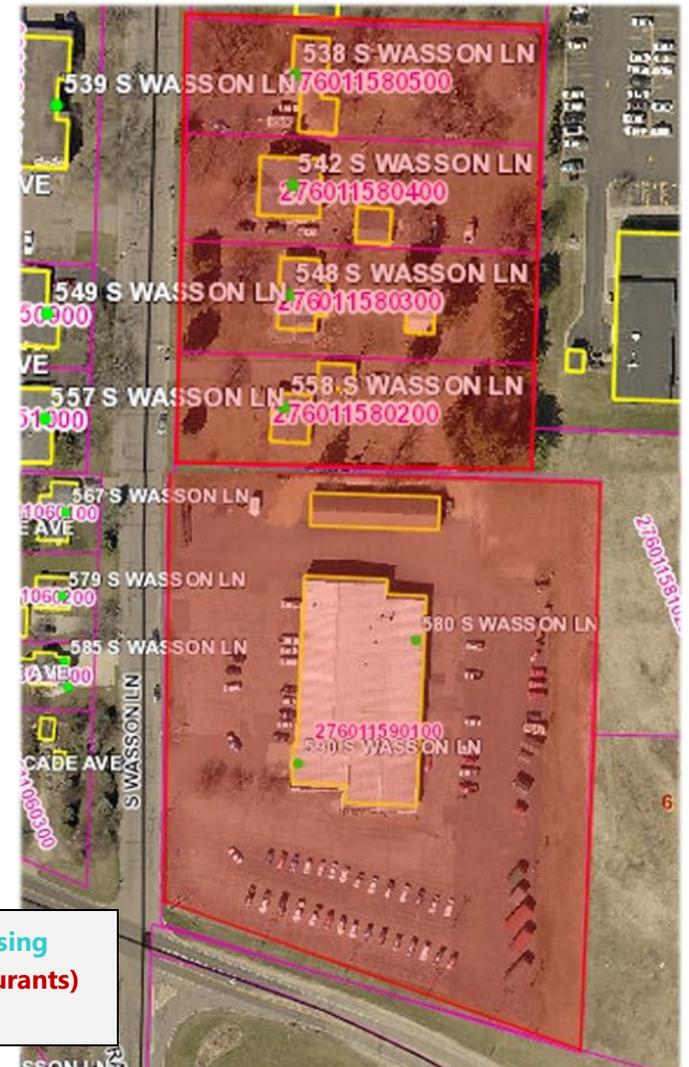


Figure 10. Future development concept for the East Cascade District. CVTC receives \$1.5 million every two years for capital improvements. A repurposed building currently owned by Moody's Corner could enhance CVTC's access and visibility from East Cascade Avenue while providing campus oriented services such as childcare, a fueling station, and/or a corner convenience store. City involvement in development and land acquisition negotiations may be pursued to ensure that the site redevelops in a coordinated manner. Student oriented housing at the corner of East Cascade Avenue and Birchcrest Drive is currently underway, with opportunities for additional student housing redevelopment along the northwest corner of the East Cascade Avenue and South Wasson Lane intersection.



S – Student oriented housing
R – Retail (includes restaurants)
G – Green Space



Figures 11 and 12. East Cascade District Development Focus Area One. The existing 4.65-acre site owned by Moody's Corner may be expanded following the purchase of surplus state owned right-of-way for the future four lane extension of STH 65. The addition of a new façade to the existing building along with repurposing the site is estimated to cost \$2 to \$3 million with an additional \$2 to \$4 million for a new retail building that fronts East Cascade Avenue. Four individually owned lots to the north of Moody's Corner that consist of approximately two acres altogether may be replaced with student housing along with a new access drive into the CVTC property. This project would involve rezoning the property to permit higher residential density and would require an estimated \$200K to \$300K investment in site work for the new access road as well as \$7 to \$10 million for the student housing development.

West Cascade District

The West Cascade District features an array of single family, multifamily, and student oriented housing near green space, water resources, and Main Street businesses. The most considerable change to this district in the past decade has been the redevelopment of a mobile home park to create University Falls apartments. The District which features access to bicycle and pedestrian trails and the potential for a future third University Falls building. In particular, the intersection of South Main Street and Cascade Avenue provides a desirable and highly visible corner on its southwest side for redevelopment with high pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The West Cascade District is partially located within the City's Downtown Overlay Zoning District, which contains additional design requirements that are explained in detail in Appendix B. of this concept report.

The concept involves increasing density to development close to South Main Street while closing access to Vine Street to reduce turning movements and directing traffic to the lighted intersection. Vine Street properties are currently challenging to redevelop due to the large shoreland setback that results from steep cliffs along the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River, although this concern may eventually be alleviated since the City's shoreland zoning ordinance is currently under review as of early 2020. In general, underground parking and modern stormwater controls may be used and may improve stormwater management over existing development, where excessive impervious surfaces are a concern near shoreland areas.

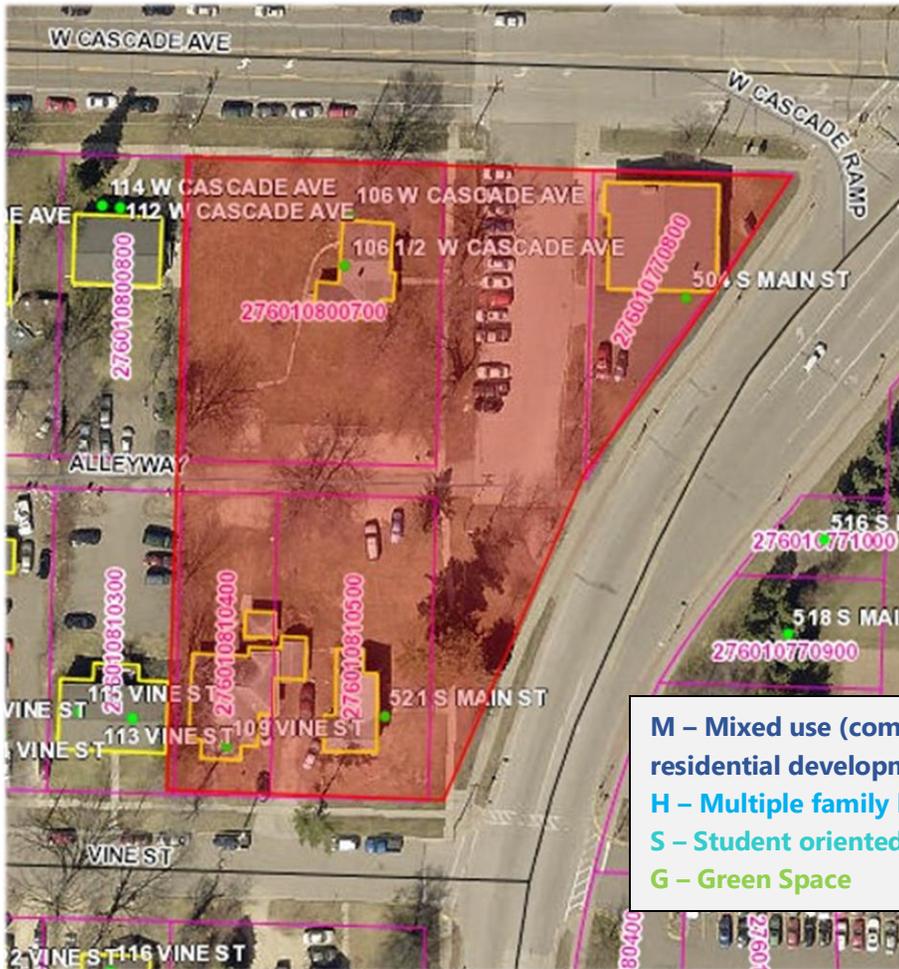
It is important to consider that, although students and young professionals face similar affordability concerns regarding housing, the lifestyles of both groups are different and therefore a mix of housing styles are needed to fulfill each household's preferences. Mixed use development is recommended for this district, resulting in a combination of student and young professional housing, with first floor space for a coffee shop, restaurant, retail, childcare, or offices. The following pages depict images of existing conditions and site plan concepts for the West Cascade District.



Figure 13. Boundaries and existing conditions for the West Cascade District.



Figure 15. Development concept which closes Vine Street at South Main Street to accommodate a 23,000 square foot riverfront multiple family housing development marketed for young professionals and UWRP employees and a 20,000 square foot multiple family housing with attached office space 15,000 square feet in area. The City's shoreland zoning ordinance may influence the site's layout along the South Fork of the Kinnickinnic River.



M – Mixed use (commercial and residential development)
H – Multiple family housing
S – Student oriented housing
G – Green Space



Figures 16 and 17. West Cascade Avenue District Development Focus Area One. The mixed use and multiple family housing development at the corner of West Cascade Avenue and South Main Street involves the redevelopment of four parcels that total approximately 1.65 acres. This development closes access to Vine Street from South Main Street and provides a street connection to West Cascade Avenue. This concept requires City involvement with coordinated street and lot reconfiguration. Due to the site's location on a prominent intersection, uses such as a coffee shop, restaurant, childcare center, or office space are appropriate in the mixed use portion of the development. Anticipated costs are \$3 to \$5 million for the mixed use portion of the development and an additional \$8 to \$12 million for the residential portion of the development.

Broadway District

The Broadway District currently contains a mix of single and multifamily residential properties built at various times, with offset intersections and vacant properties. This district provides an opportunity to redevelop vacant sites, correct unsafe turning movements onto South Main Street, and provide housing and services within walking distance of UWRF's campus and downtown. The planned closure of Park Street to the east of South Main Street eliminates the offset intersection of these two streets. A planned future extension of Foster Street to the east of South Main Street utilizes an existing lighted intersection to address access concerns for future housing development in this area once Park Street access to South Main Street is closed.

This concept identifies the new Foster Street extension as a possible location for office space, particularly for Kinesiology or other athletic services due to its proximity to the UWRF Falcon Center. Vacant properties at 641 and 700 S Main Street are ideal for multifamily and student housing, respectively. Developing these sites will likely require combining several parcels, vacating and reconfiguring streets, and working around zoning restrictions such as open space requirements, multifamily design standards, or shoreland setbacks to allow for density required to make the developments successful. The following pages include images of existing conditions and site plan concepts for the Broadway District.

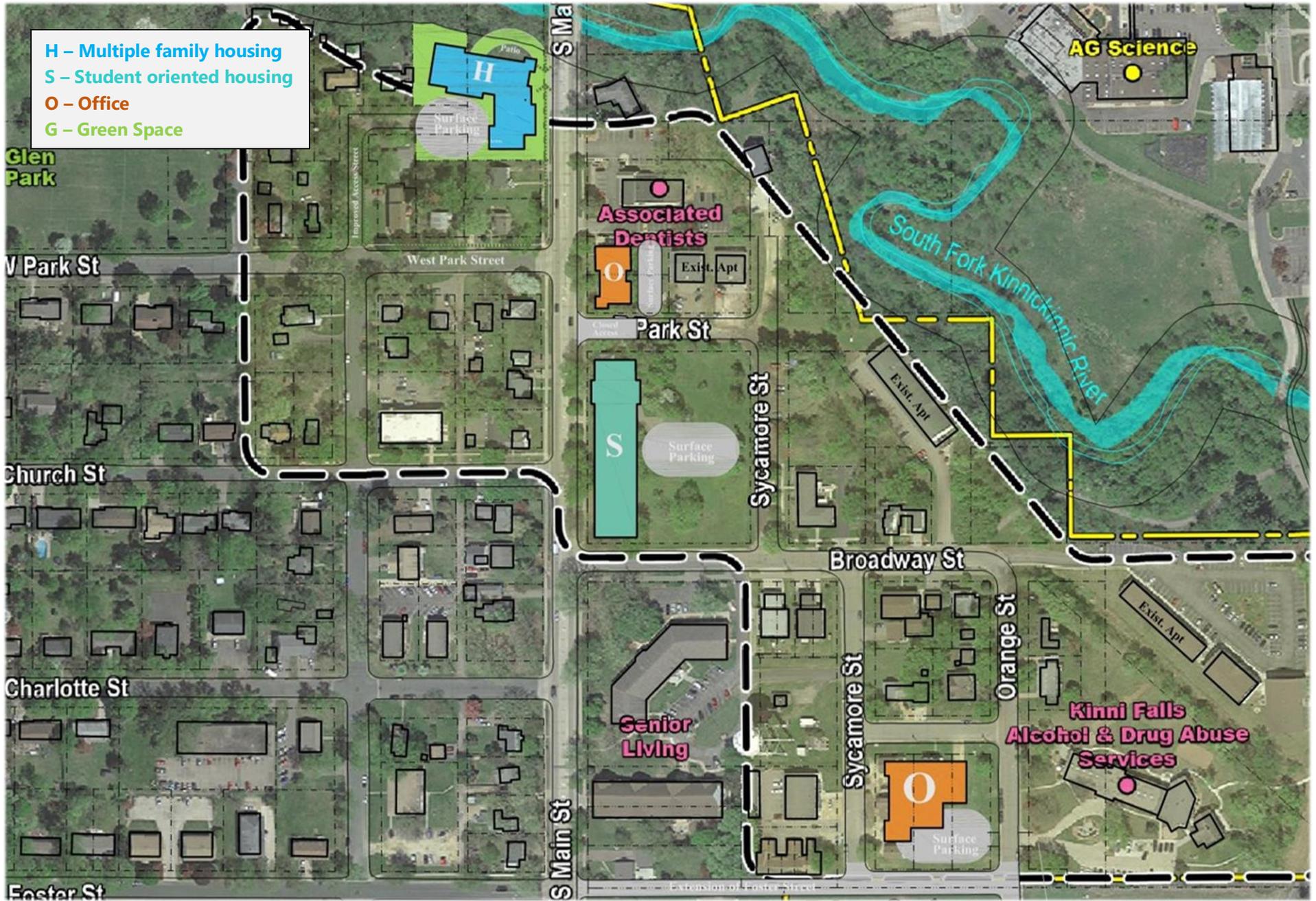


Figure 18. Boundaries and existing conditions for the Broadway District with concept development sites.

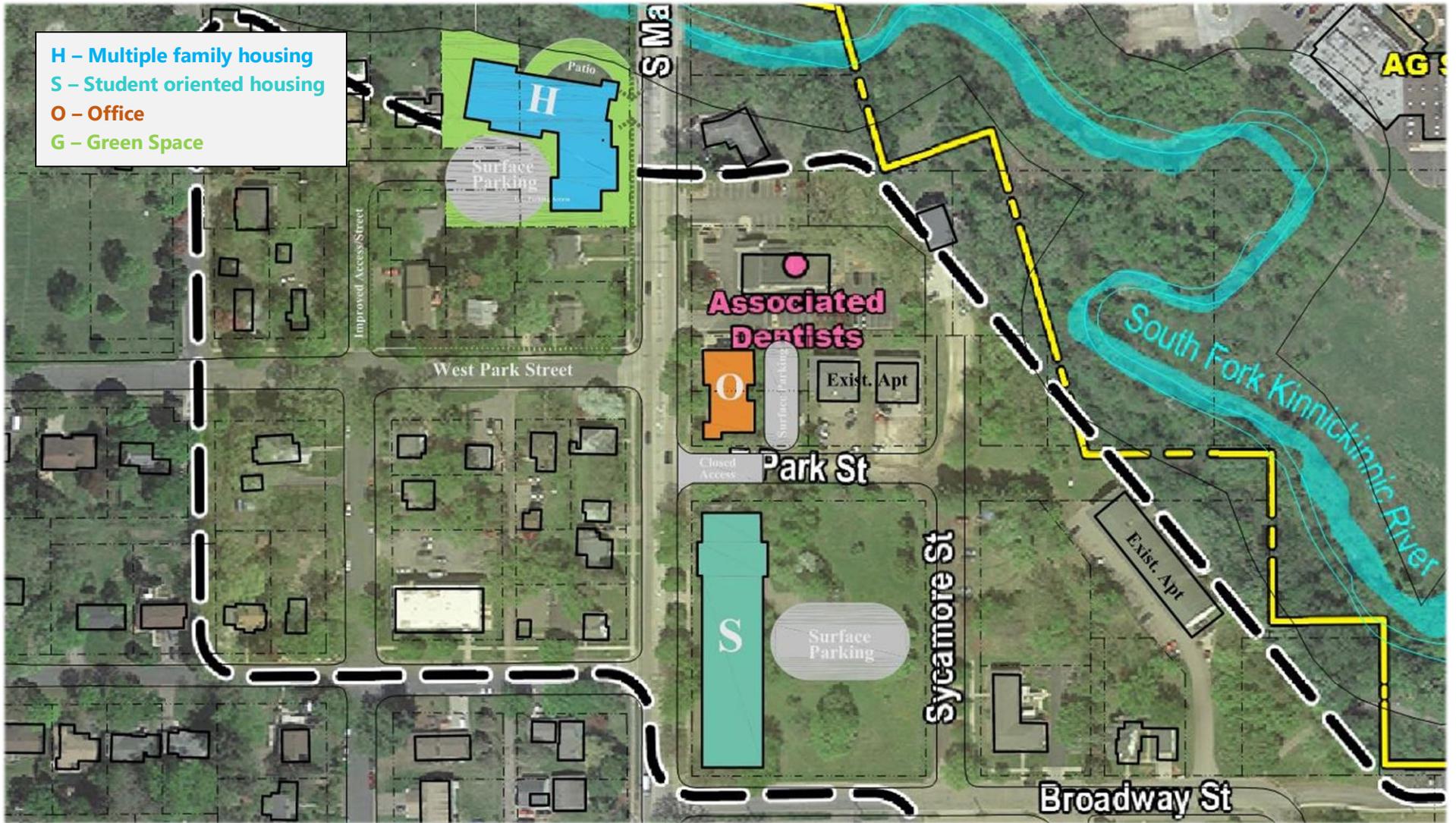
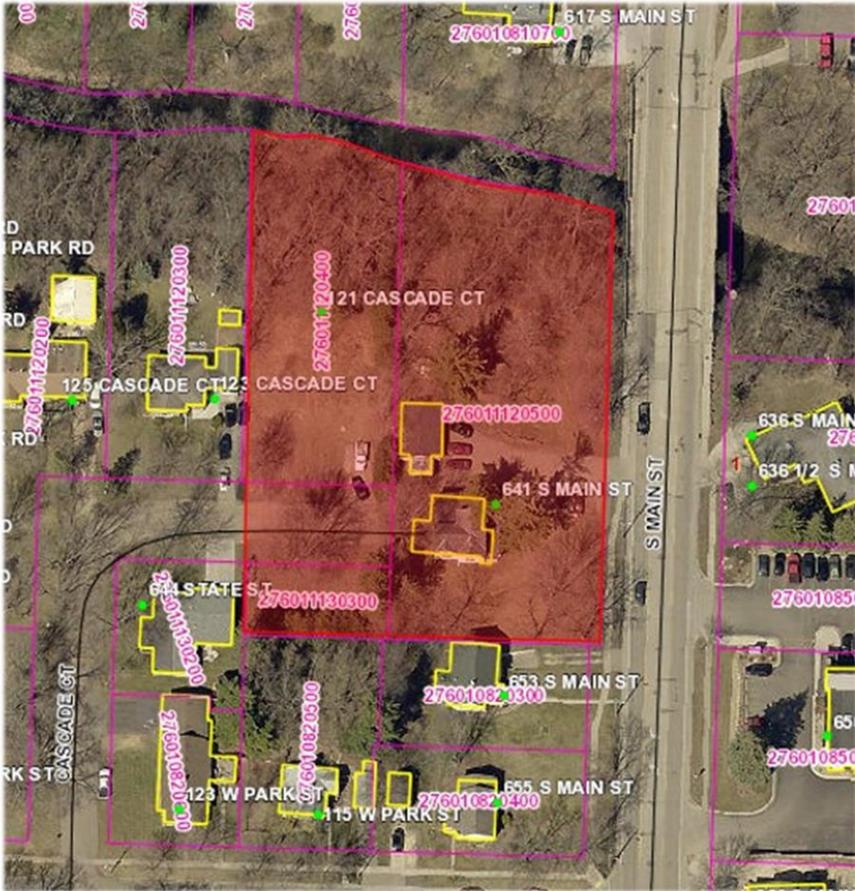


Figure 19. Future development concept for the Broadway District. Additional market rate housing geared towards young professionals and UWRF employees that fronts the South Fork mirrors the apartments depicted in Figure 14. This site's layout is dependent upon the City's shoreland zoning ordinance. Student oriented housing bound by Sycamore, East Park, East Broadway, and South Main Streets enhances the South Main Street's aesthetics while closing East Park Street access for improved safety. Office space to the north of this site also fronts South Main Street and provides a transition between existing office space to the north and newer student oriented housing to the south.



Figures 20 & 21. Future development concept for the Broadway District. The market rate multiple family residential site consists of three existing lots owned by one landowner and is approximately 1.6 acres. A medium scale multiple family development with 30 to 40 units is estimated to cost \$7 to \$10 million at this site, and a small scale multiple family development with 10 to 15 units is estimated to cost \$2 to \$4 million. The project will require City involvement with parcel and street reconfiguration.

Conclusion

The City of River Falls enjoys a high quality of living due to its walkability, abundant green space, thriving downtown, and presence of institutions of higher learning. These assets will continue to draw people to the community, highlighting the importance of maintaining and enhancing infrastructure and neighborhoods to encourage investment in the community. CVTC and UWRF bring many visitors and students from around the state, country, and globe to experience the community's amenities.

Challenges to redevelopment in the campus corridor include relatively high construction prices and a lack of targeted development projects in each of the districts. Often, developing affordable and workforce housing is difficult when weighing affordable rent prices against construction costs. Without large projects driving redevelopment in each subdistrict, smaller retail and office space may be slow to fill. Additionally, residential neighborhoods with parking concerns and pedestrian barriers may only see these challenges increase as neighborhoods densify.

To ensure high quality future development in the campus corridor, it is important that the City, CVTC, and UWRF work together to identify opportunities for potential private public partnerships with the private sector and carefully coordinate redevelopment with the City's Community Development, Engineering, and Utilities staff on older sites involving undesirable street configurations and lot sizes. The City can review redevelopment proposals on a project by project basis for grants and partnerships, and there is existing redevelopment support from the City through the City's TIF policy and other incentives.

These concepts provide City staff with an effective marketing tool for developers who are interested in campus oriented development. Bringing redevelopment to the City's core benefits the community by utilizing existing infrastructure, increasing the City's tax base, and providing economic activity for residents and students alike.

Appendix A. Relevant City Plans and Studies.

Downtown Design Plan (2002)

- Develop parking solutions that prevent UWRF students and staff from parking in surrounding neighborhoods and along Main Street where parking is needed for businesses

Comprehensive Plan (2005)

- Campus corridor concepts entirely located in the area mapped in the Comprehensive Plan as “infill development”
- Investigate the feasibility of a UWRF parking ramp or other parking solutions to alleviate on street parking congestion in residential areas near UWRF
- Control the rates, volume, and amount of sediment in stormwater for redevelopment sites, especially near the Kinnickinnic and South Fork Rivers

South Main Street Study (2017)

- Promote redevelopment near the intersection of South Main Street and Cascade Avenue involving mixed use development that appeals to students, professionals, and seniors
- Study Vine Street access to South Main Street for safety concerns for pedestrian and vehicular movement
- Preserve future access to the river corridor where South Main Street crosses the South Fork to accommodate a wider bicycle and pedestrian trail
- Enhance connectivity between South Main Street and State Street to divert traffic to businesses along South Main Street during peak traffic flow

- Consolidate existing smaller lots containing old homes to redevelop as mixed use commercial and residential development
- Target development for the site at 700 South Main Street to shape the future of the South Main Street corridor with an emphasis on mixed income, medium density, multi story residential units
- Eliminate access points along South Main Street to improve traffic flow and address safety concerns from turning movements

Kinni Corridor Plan (2019)

- Campus Corridor falls within the “Middle Kinni” context area
- Implementation projects recommended by the plan include:
 - Study feasibility of redevelopment opportunities along Main Street and the UWRF Campus
 - Study feasibility of building a parking ramp
 - Shoreland ordinance evaluation (currently under review)
 - Highlight development and redevelopment opportunities near UWRF and along South Main Street
 - Work with developers to encourage river oriented housing and “gateways” into the community and UWRF Campus
 - Encourage medium to high density residential uses fronting the River at the south end of downtown and along Cascade Avenue and Winter Street

Appendix B. Downtown Overlay Zoning District

The City of River Falls' Downtown Overlay Zoning District imposes additional requirements for development within the Central Business and Transitional Districts depicted in Figure 22. Examples of requirements found in this zoning district include locating parking to the rear of businesses, requiring historically compatible finishes and paint colors, and reduced sign area maximums. Development and redevelopment within the area must receive Downtown Design Review Committee approval and grant funding is available from the Business Improvement District for façade and sign upgrades for existing properties. The intent of the overlay and its associated review process and grant funding opportunities is to preserve existing historic buildings while encouraging architectural compatibility in newer developments to preserve Downtown River Falls' traditional Main Street aesthetic.

While much of the concepts are not located in the Downtown Overlay Zoning District, several of the sites identified in this report may be subject to the overlay's design requirements. In 2020, the City will begin the planning process involving an update of the 2002 Downtown Design Plan for this area to prepare for an upcoming full reconstruction of Main Street from Division to Locust Streets.

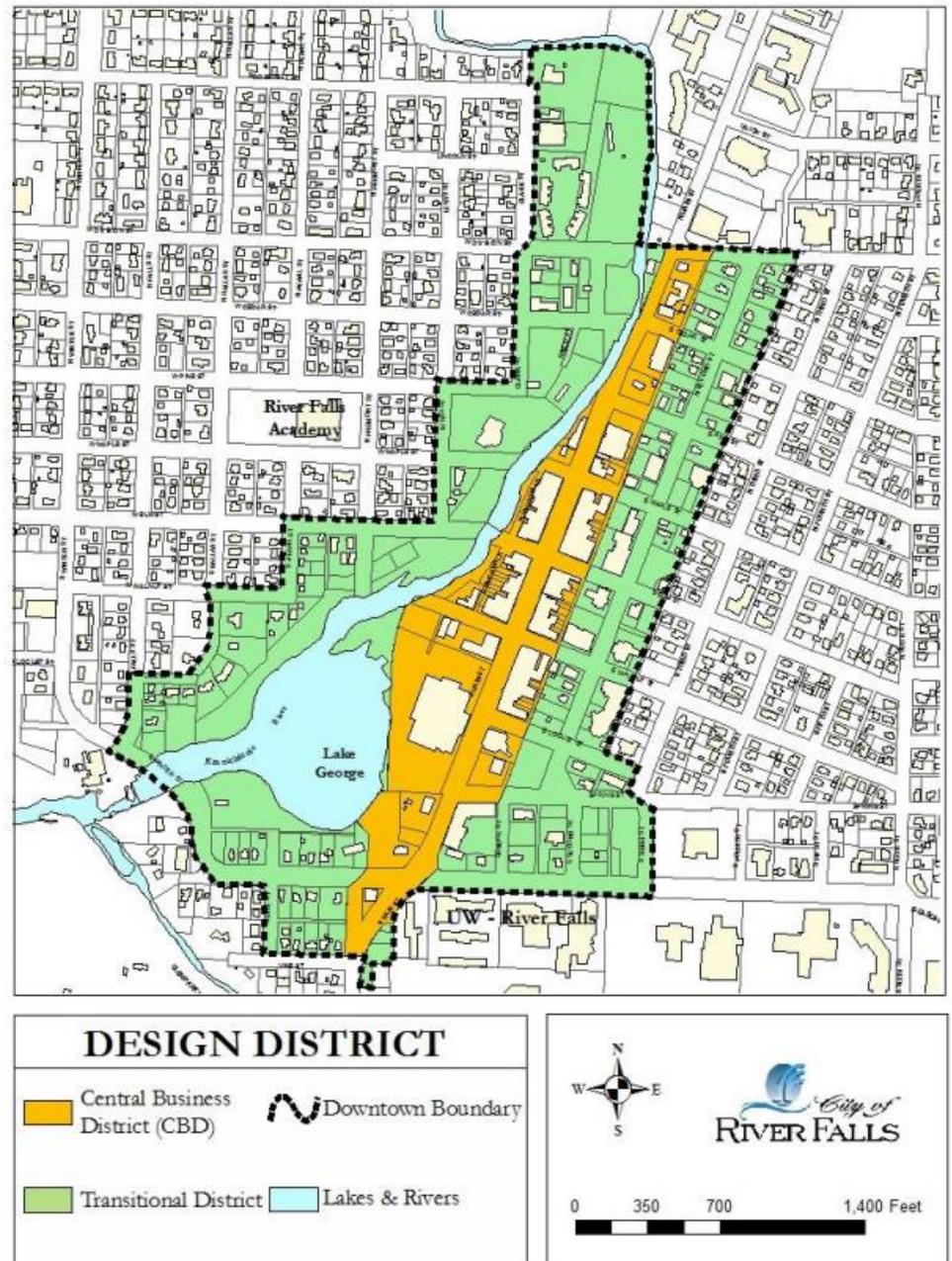


Figure 22 (Right). The City of River Falls Downtown Overlay Zoning District is divided into the Central Business District and the Transitional District, which involves two sets of design requirements for each district.