



*West Main/
Coddington
Development
Center*

About This Document



What's the purpose of this concept plan?

Five concept plans for Growth Centers have been developed as part of RhodeMapRI, a project of the State Division of Planning. Funding for RhodeMapRI comes from a federal Sustainable Communities Initiative Grant, and the project is organized around six key Livability Principles developed by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development:

- Provide more transportation choices.
- Promote equitable, affordable housing.
- Enhance economic competitiveness.
- Support existing communities.
- Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.
- Value communities and neighborhoods

RhodeMapRI focuses on plans to enhance economic opportunities and outcomes, meet housing needs across the income scale, and strengthen the state's Growth Centers policy, first established in 2002, with effective strategies to promote growth and development activity where it can best be supported. Well-aligned with the federal government's Livability Principles, the state's criteria for designating growth centers promote the following conditions:

- Compact development with efficient use of infrastructure
- Mixed land uses
- Diverse housing opportunities and choices
- Transportation choice
- Protection of environmental resources
- Design for sense of place
- Development in existing centers and appropriately scaled new centers.

The five Growth Center concept plans cover the range of rural, ex-urban (or semi-rural), suburban, small main street, and urban locations. These areas have been targeted by their communities as having opportunities for mixed-use, denser, and more walkable development. In some cases, plans already exist for development or redevelopment.

The purpose of these RhodeMapRI concept plans is to test Growth Center criteria and identify Growth Center needs to achieve implementation, and/or to provide options or materials to help these communities move forward toward implementation.

What's in this concept plan?

- Background and summary
- Existing assets
- Existing issues and constraints
- Application of growth center criteria and identification of growth center opportunities
- Concept plan
- Growth center implementation strategies

Overview

Growth history of Middletown

Located between Portsmouth and Newport on Aquidneck Island, Middletown is historically a rural community without a town center. Although the town still has some agricultural areas, as well as conservation land, much of the town is suburban in character. Major military developments and military housing, commercial strip development along arterial roads, and housing subdivisions emptying into arterials are the most salient development characteristics. Residents have long expressed a desire to create a town center or civic center.

Middletown Growth Center

The Town's draft 2013 comprehensive plan notes that the state's Land Use 2025 suggests that the general area around the intersection of West Main and East Main roads could be a designated growth center. Within this area, Middletown has focused on a site it calls the West Main/Coddington Development Center that encompasses residential areas between Navy property and West Main Road between Coddington Highway and Gate 7 Access Road. A "Core Area" has been targeted for the desired town center. A previous site that was in some respects better integrated with the existing commercial area at that intersection was ultimately retained as conservation land when purchased by the Town.

The West Main/Coddington Core Area Site

- Fourteen-acre linear site along the west side of West Main Street from Coddington Highway to Valley Road.
- Existing publicly owned land: former Navy Lodge, expected to become municipal property; a temporary municipal recreation complex; the well-used Middletown Public Library, which needs a new building; and the former J.F. Kennedy Elementary School, now vacant.

- With the transfer of Navy property to the town, expected in 2014-15, the Town will control the entire site.
- West Main (Route 114) is a four-lane arterial road, one of two major arterials in the town, with no parking and poor pedestrian conditions. Traffic levels on the road affect pedestrian conditions on the west side, which has a sidewalk. The east side of the road has poor pedestrian conditions because of the strip commercial streetscape.
- The east side of the street has strip commercial development and signage with multiple curb cuts, buildings set back from the street surrounded by parking, and many utility lines and poles.
- Two master plans for the site have been prepared since 2010.

Relevant Growth Center Criteria

- Compact development with efficient use of infrastructure
- Mixed land uses
- Diverse housing opportunities and choices
- Transportation choice
- Design for sense of place
- Development in existing centers and appropriately scaled new centers

Focus of this Concept Plan

- Review of existing master plans in light of Growth Center criteria and Town goals
- Identification of assets and opportunities relevant to Growth Center criteria
- Visualization of opportunities
- Identification of priority actions

Assets

The assets of the West Main/Coddington Core Area predominantly relate to four characteristics of the location:

- **Visibility of West Main Road**
The road is an established connection that provides access to town commercial destinations.
- **Adjacency to an important employment center**
Navy Station Newport and the Undersea Warfare Center are relatively close to the site and will be served by a new bike lane on Coddington Highway.
- **Adjacency to an important commercial center**
The commercial center at East Main Road and West Main Road lies to the south and southeast of the site within walking distance. Because it already attracts customers, it can help support new retail or other commercial development proposed for the site. It also holds potential for future redevelopment into a more mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly site that would support the overall goal of creating a town center and a Growth Center.
- **Transportation options**
Several bus lines serve the site, it sits within walking distance of retail, and a new bicycle route is planned for Coddington Highway.

In addition to these locational assets, the fact that the Town will have site control over all four Core Area parcels allows for greater influence over site development, and the recent amendment of the zoning ordinance with improved commercial design guidelines represents a positive step.



1 West Main Road (Route 114)
A 4-lane major regional connector road with high visibility and easy access to the new core development site



2 Future municipal control of all 4 parcels

3 Adjacent existing commercial area



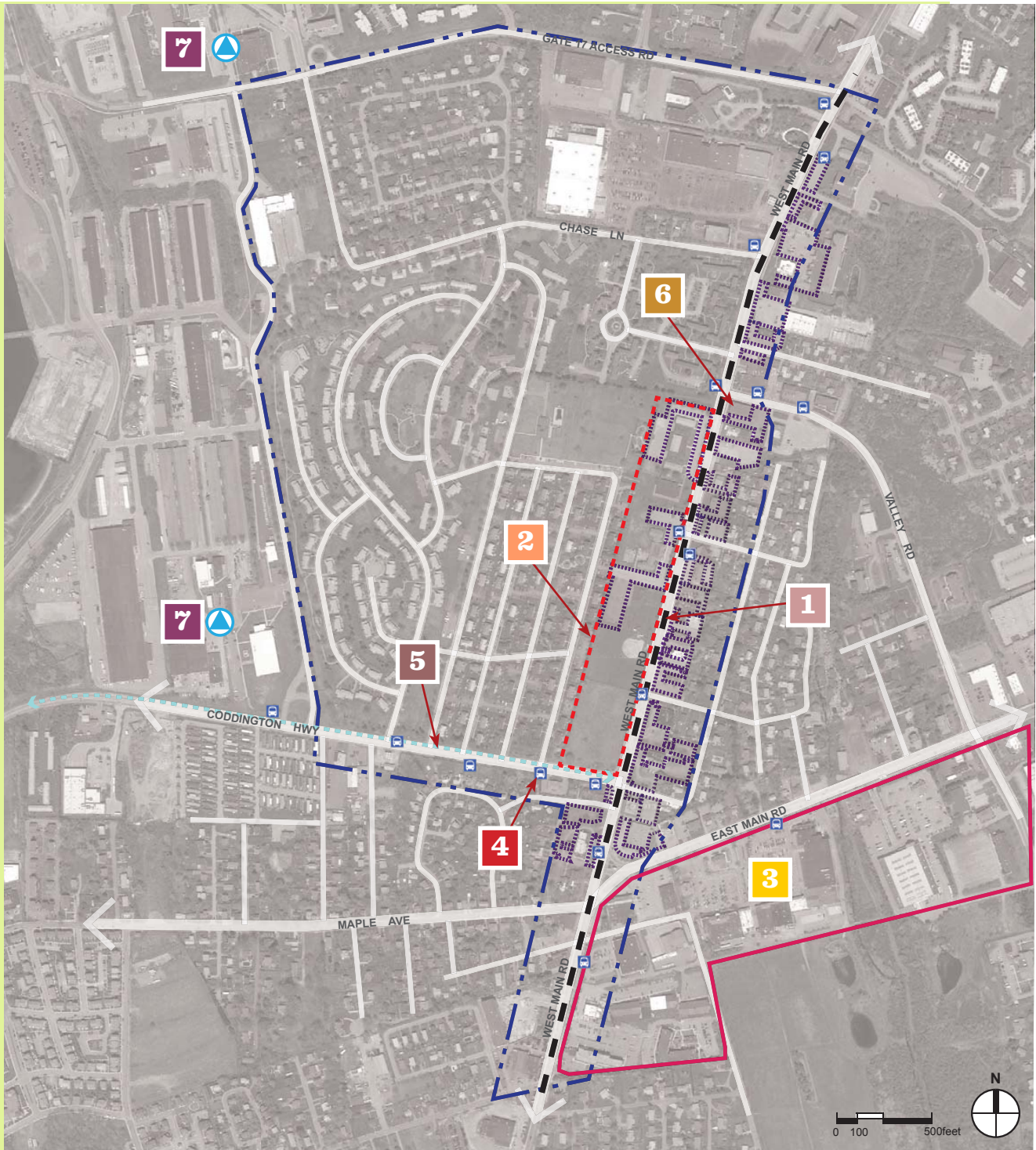
4 RIPTA Bus Routes & Stops
Bus lines 60, 63 and 64 connecting to Providence and Newport

5 Designated bike lane to/from Newport will be added on Coddington Highway.



6 New design guidelines, recommending that buildings line the street and move parking to the back, will set good standards for future development.

7 Navy Station Newport and Undersea Warfare Center is an important employment center.




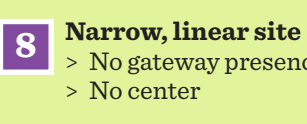


MIDDLETOWN GROWTH CENTER

West Main/Coddington Existing Assets

LEGEND

- West Main/Coddington Development Center
- Development Center core area
- High-volume traffic
- Bike lane
- Commercial area
- Surface parking lot
- RIPTA bus stop
- Employment center

	<p>1 Former Navy Lodge site</p>		<p>5 West Main Road High-traffic volumes, four lanes, no on-street parking</p>
	<p>2 Temporary recreation complex (4 acres)</p>		<p>6 Poor pedestrian experience on West Main</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No buffer between sidewalk and roadway > No marked pedestrian crossing from Valley Road to Coddington Hwy > No street trees on east side of the street > No bike lanes
	<p>3 Public Library (3.5 acres)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > High level of use > Poor building condition 		<p>7 East side of West Main</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Strip retail > Buildings set back 30–70 ft. > Large areas of surface parking > Many curb cuts > Intrusive utility poles
	<p>4 JFK School (closed, 4 acres)</p>		<p>8 Narrow, linear site</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > No gateway presence > No center

Issues and Constraints

The West Main/Coddington Core Area site has a number of issues and constraints that need to be addressed in order to achieve a successful, mixed-use redevelopment that functions as a town center

- **Site form**

This is a narrow, linear site without a center. There is no gateway presence to indicate to motorists that they are entering an area that is different in any way from the suburban-style strip development to the north or the south.

- **Issues along West Main Road**

While West Main potentially offers high visibility for this site, its status as a major arterial creates several constraints.

- > Except at times of congestion, traffic tends to move at relatively high speeds and in significant volumes, a combination that affects the environment along the street edge.
- > Pedestrian conditions are poor on both sides of the street, and there are few pedestrian crossings.

- > Given the amount of traffic that it must accommodate, West Main has relatively narrow, dimensions making it difficult to provide on-street parking or bicycle lanes.

- > As an arterial road, West Main has attracted on its east side auto-oriented strip development with a high percentage of impervious surfaces.

- **Existing buildings**

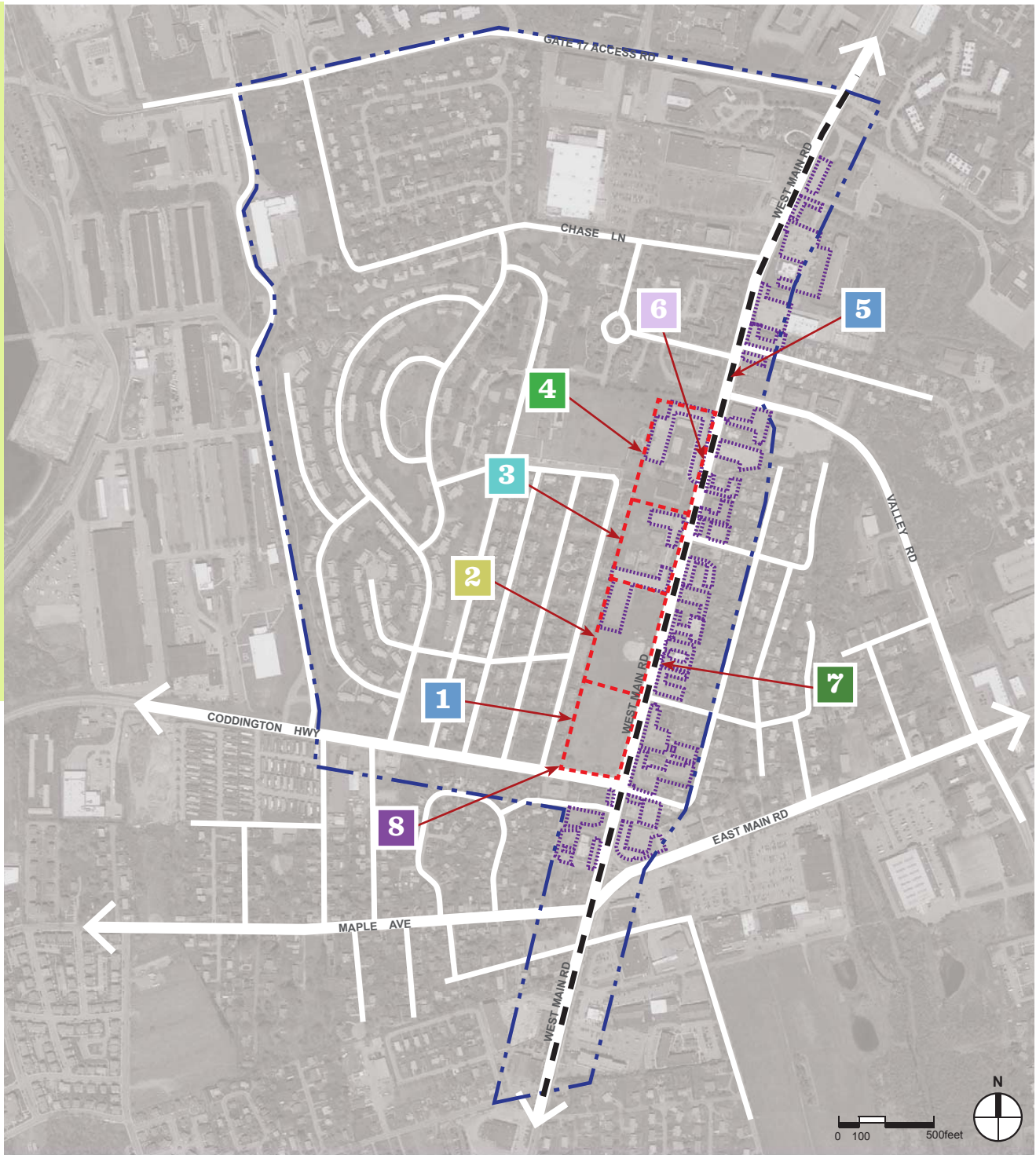
The building that houses the public library is in poor condition; it has been determined that rehabilitating the existing building would not prove cost-effective. The JFK Elementary School, now closed, is not suitable for redevelopment into a town center.

- **Recreation uses**

The athletic fields on the site are intended to be temporary, but a relocation plan for these uses is needed.





- **Infrastructure**

Building out the site will require infrastructure improvements.



MIDDLETOWN GROWTH CENTER
West Main/Coddington Existing Issues

LEGEND

-  West Main/Coddington Development Center
-  Development Center core area
-  High-volume traffic
-  Surface parking lot

Applying Growth Center Criteria and Growth Center Opportunities

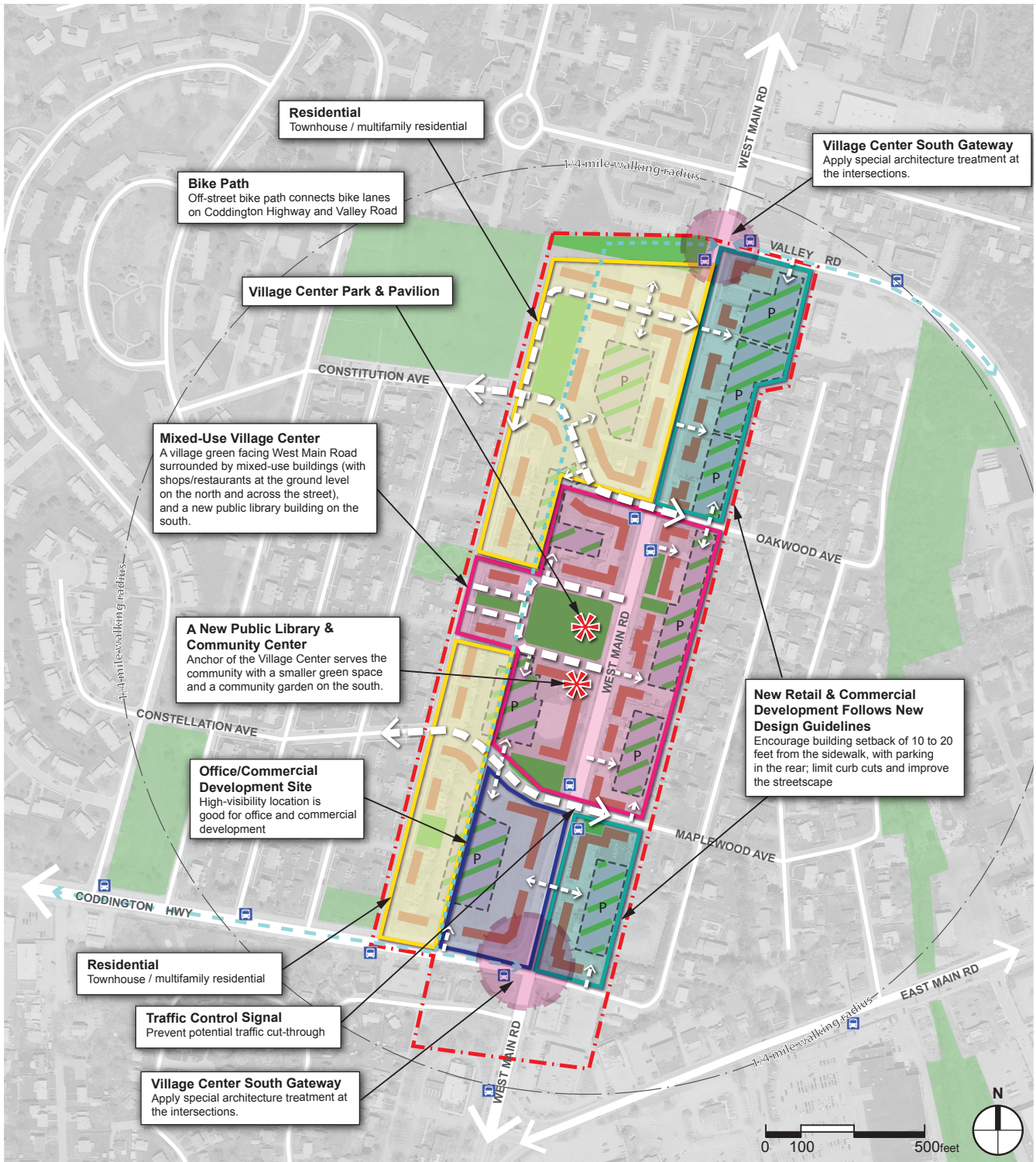
The West Main/Coddington Core Area site has sufficient redevelopment and development opportunities to be a Growth Center site.

- **Compact development with efficient use of infrastructure:** This 14-acre site can accommodate compact development. The previous plans estimated potential for approximately 80,000 sq.ft. of retail space, 45,000 sq.ft. of office space, and 50,000 sq.ft. of civic/municipal space. While infrastructure improvements and extensions will be needed, the location is surrounded by developed areas served by infrastructure.
- **Mixed land uses:** Mixed-use development can be established on this site. As the Town will have site control, it can pursue mixed-used development through a request for proposals. The site is adjacent to existing commercial and residential locations and can be configured to include vertical (within a single structure) and horizontal (within different structures) mixtures of land uses such as office above retail, residential above retail, and possibly, residential above public uses. The site can continue to be the site of the public library and community-oriented destinations.
- **Diverse housing opportunities and choices:** Townhouse and multifamily residential uses can provide new housing options on the site that will help diversify housing options in the community. Similarly, the Town can structure the housing program to ensure inclusion of some scattered-site permanently affordable housing.
- **Transportation choice:** In addition to existing bus lines along West Main and the proposed bike lane on Coddington Highway, the site can be configured so that a bike route can run from Valley Road, where there is a marked bike lane, through the site to connect with the future Coddington Highway bike lane.
- **Protection of environmental resources:** There are no significant environmental resources on this site that need special protection. Design should incorporate green stormwater infrastructure, such as swales, rain gardens, pervious pavement, and trees, that promote on-site infiltration of stormwater, as well as energy-efficient buildings.

- **Design for sense of place:** Site design should position buildings close to the street and parking to the rear on both sides of West Main Road. The public realm should include enhanced streetscape and pedestrian conditions on both sides of the road and internal to the site, as well as a central public park and gathering space co-located with a combined public library and community center. These would provide space for civic activities both in the building and outside in the park.
- **Development in existing centers and appropriately scaled new centers.** The site is located within a matrix of existing development.

Opportunities

- Add the commercial area at Coddington and West Main to the current West Main/Coddington Development Center that includes the Core Area and **designate the entire area a Growth Center in the updated Comprehensive Plan.** The commercial area should be included because such areas typically experience changes and redevelopment on a faster cycle than single-family residential areas. The Core Area can then be designated a Priority Activity Center or Strategic Activity Center—an area of high potential and priority for municipal action—within the broader Growth Center, for which the Town would seek a partnership with the state and with private developers.
- **Include the east side of West Main Road in the Core Area.** The character of redevelopment in this area is critical to creating a successful town center.
- **Establish an overlay district for the entire Core Area,** including the east side of West Main Road, because properties on that side of the road may redevelop before the town-owned property does.
- **Send a message about the desired character of future development/redevelopment** in the entire Growth Center by creating a plan for the commercial area at Coddington and West Main and establishing suitable zoning, design guidelines, and incentives, as needed.



MIDDLETOWN GROWTH CENTER
West Main/Coddington Opportunities

LEGEND

- Development Center core area
- Building frontage
- Public park/open space
- Landscaped surface parking
- Bike lane on existing road
- New bike path
- New street connection and parking access
- ✱ Landmark structure/building
- P RIPTA bus stop

The Concept Plan

Placemaking for Middletown Center/Growth Center

Growth Centers and successful town centers are places—destinations that attract town residents because they are pleasant environments with interesting activities. The West Main/Coddington Core Area site must become a “place” rather than just a collection of land uses in the same location. “Placemaking” means creating spaces where people feel safe, comfortable, and connected to others and to the community. It includes design of the public realm—such as parks, sidewalks, streets—and design of private buildings and spaces as they affect the public realm.

In addition, placemaking requires planning for the kinds of activities that encourage connection and community. Middletown Center will not be based on a traditional New England town center. It must be designed to meet the criteria of a Growth Center in order to create sufficient density and critical mass to provide internal activity and vitality. At the same time, it needs to provide elements that will draw town residents so that they can identify with this location as a civic center.

Key Elements of the Concept Plan

- **Land uses:** Civic, residential and commercial uses should all be incorporated on this site, but to create the density and critical mass needed, single family residential uses should be excluded in favor of townhouse and multi-family development. Ground floor retail or services along West Main near the civic center will bring more activity.
- **Redevelop the library as a multi-use community hub or as part of a mixed-use development:** Communities are increasingly creating multi-use facilities that provide residents with a variety of services and activities. New libraries often include cafés and community meeting spaces. The library could be part of a larger community center with rooms for recreation, arts and crafts, and other activities, or where additional municipal services are available.
- **Public realm:** Design for a connected and integrated site, with public gathering spaces and focal points.
- **Pedestrian and bicyclist conditions:** Create more pedestrian-friendly conditions on both sides of West Main Road, especially in redevelopment of parcels on the east side of West Main Road. Provide options to link existing and planned bike routes.

- **Gateways:** Create gateway treatments through design, signage, or public art at the Valley Road and Coddington Highway ends of the town center.
- **Activities:** Develop programming ideas for the public spaces, such as summer concerts, movies and festivals, and keep these opportunities in mind when establishing criteria for design.

Internal site design

- Create a park as a civic focus area for public gatherings in a central location.
- Create internal connections within the site and through connections at Constitution/Oakwood avenues and Constellation/Maplewood avenues.
- Locate parking on the side and behind buildings in small parking fields.
- Provide a consistent landscape design approach for ground cover, shrub and tree levels for the internal streetscape and parking lot system.
- Create an internal road and connected parking lots at the rear of properties along the east side of West Main Road.

Edge design

- Provide streetscape improvements, including street trees, on both sides of West Main Road. Where possible, move sidewalks to allow for seating and for street trees adjacent to the street.
- Limit curb cuts on the west side of West Main Road and reduce the number of curb cuts on the east side.
- Establish a pedestrian crossing with a pedestrian-activated signal at the central location of the park.

Private development guidelines

- Create small setbacks from the street and public entry to buildings at the front door/sidewalk of West Main.
- Apply gateway design treatment for a building with retail, services, and office uses at West Main/Coddington.
- Employ special architectural treatments for buildings that face the central park.
- Provide for outdoor seating, such as a café/plaza, in a visible but protected spot.



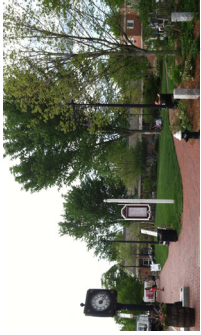
Village Center Gateway South
 > Office/commercial development
 > Building that holds the street corner

Community Center Green Space & Garden

Townhouse/multifamily responds to the residential area to the north

Internal Circulation

New Public Library & Community Center



Central Park & Pavilion
 a community gathering place for concert, films & festivals

Bike Path

Townhouse/multifamily responds to the residential area to the north

Mixed-Use Building: Special architectural treatment



Retail/commercial development design guidelines:
 > Buildings set close to street
 > Parking located in the rear
 > Reduced curb cuts

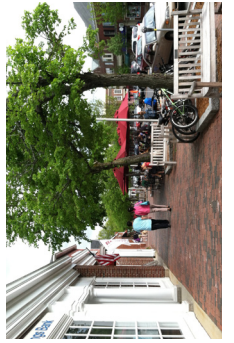
Streetscape improvement on West Main:
 > Plant more street trees on both sides
 > Provide on-street parking where possible
 > Bury utility poles when feasible
 > Accommodate seating areas

Village Center Gateway North:
 Public plaza incorporates bike path, information, rest area and public art



Traffic signal to discourage potential cut-throughs

Clearly marked pedestrian crossings



Implementation Strategies for the Growth Center

The West Main/Coddington Core Area has been a focus for the Town of Middletown for a number of years. With the transfer of the former Navy Lodge property imminent, the Town will soon have site control of the entire area. In order to move the process forward, the Town needs to take steps to be ready for redevelopment of the site.

- **Formally designate a Growth Center and Strategic/Priority Activity Center in the comprehensive plan.** This is the first step in preparing for any assistance that the State may be able to give to Growth Centers.
- **Identify assistance desired from the State.** In designating the Strategic/Priority Center in the comprehensive plan, identify the type of State assistance that might be most useful. In this case, assistance in writing a zoning overlay district and making infrastructure improvements are most needed.
- **Decide on a descriptive name for the West Main/Coddington Core Area and start using it.** A name that reflects what the Town is trying to accomplish can be used for an overlay district, a request for proposals (RFP) from developers, and for communicating with town residents and leaders. Simple options could be “Middletown Town Center,” “Middletown Village Center,” and so on.
- **Develop a zoning overlay district for the Core Area.** The zoning overlay district should include redevelopment and design guidelines more specific than the recent revision of the commercial design guidelines; require consultation with planning staff and the planning board; and make reference to the planning studies and require a statement of how proposed development meets the spirit of these studies. The overlay should include the east side of West Main Road. The overlay district should be completed as soon as possible. Businesses on the east side of West Main Road may want to redevelop before the town center project, and any such improvements will help set the stage for the town center. In addition, developers may seek to buy parts of the site, such as the school site, before the entire area is fully under municipal control. Any piecemeal development of the Core Area without an overlay district in place can damage the potential for creating a successful town center.
- **Complete acquisition of the former Navy Lodge land.**
- **Prepare concepts and identify potential financing for the public library project and the public park.** It is important for the Town to have a strong sense of the required elements for the publicly-owned portions of the Core Area site before developing an RFP for developers. In addition to adding community center functions to the library, the Town should consider the possibility of incorporating the library into a mixed-use project with housing. The award-winning Hollywood Library/Bookmark Apartments in Portland, Oregon, was the first project of this type. With both market rate and affordable apartments, the building also includes a coffee shop. (See library.oregonmetro.gov/files/hollywoodlibrarycs.pdf.) Middletown could explore joint development with a local nonprofit or with a developer.
- **Seek transportation funding.** The Town should seek funding for West Main pedestrian improvements, such as streetscape and pedestrian crossings.
- **Prepare and issue an RFP for developers.** After the Town has established the overlay district and identified its requirements for public buildings and places in the Core Area, it should prepare and issue an RFP or RFI (request for expressions of interest) to developers. The request should set forth a clear understanding of town goals and requirements for the area, provide access to the planning studies, indicate that zoning is in place, and identify what infrastructure or development elements that are expected to be provided by the Town.



RHODE MAP RI

Building a Better Rhode Island

This concept plan was prepared by Stantec for Goody Clancy as part of the consultant team led by Horsley-Witten Group assisting the State of Rhode Island Division of Planning for the RhodeMapRI initiative.