



Richmond Growth 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 Richmond

Located In the center of South County, Richmond shares the semi-rural character of its neighbors, with a mix of small centers and large swaths of farm and forest land. As it has grown from 2,625 people in 1970 to 7,700 in 2010, the town experienced scattered suburban residential growth. With some 26,000 acres for residents to spread out on, however, Richmond retains much of its historic rural character. Growth slowed during the recession, but will likely increase, in part do to approval of Richmond Commons, a Planned Unit Development Village Center in a former gravel operation at the edge of the village of Wyoming.

Richmond Growth Center

The Town's 2012 Comprehensive Plan identifies a preferred development strategy focused on concentrating growth in existing centers and implementing conservation strategies to protect forests, fields and farmland. The plan also identified public support for a growth center at the intersection of Route 138 and 112. The plan called for additional study to consider the extent of new development, density, allowable uses, transportation and traffic. In 2013 the town worked with several university classes to explore options for the site, focused on development of recreational uses on a 48-acre parcel the town recently acquired from the developers of Richmond Commons.

The Growth Center Site

- The core of the site includes the Town Hall site, the Richmond Elementary school, the golf course, and half a dozen private parcels.
- The golf course itself is not likely to change, but the owner is interested in adding some residential units at one edge, and developing two commercial parcels north

of 138.

- The YMCA is interested in locating in the area, and would become the de facto community center.
- The town is beginning to plan for a new library, which could be located in the center.
- Chariho Furniture and several neighboring businesses have little room to expand.
- Traffic is a major consideration, with almost a dozen access points to Route 138 in a small area and a history of accidents.

Relevant Growth Center Criteria

- 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

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

1 Potential relocation of club house.

2 Rhode Island North-South Trail traverses the center.

3 Recent improvements to Meadowbrook Golf Course have raised it to PGA standards and draw golfers from across the region.

4 Small open spaces create an attractive focus.



5 Historic Bell School House

6 Recently renovated Richmond Town Hall is a landmark and center of activity

7 Chariho Furniture is a well known business in the region

8 Developable parcel across from Town Hall has good access and visibility from the center

9 Views of farm create a pleasing context for the center. Also creates a potential tie-in with farm products/activities.



10 Town Hall, park and gazebo

11 Richmond Elementary is a center of community life.

12 Ballfields and lawn areas bring people to the center.

13 Parcel for sale could be a link between town-owned parcels

14 Recently acquired property opens up possibilities for new town recreation facilities.

15 Parcels owned by Meadowbrook Golf Course have good access and visibility from Rt. 138.

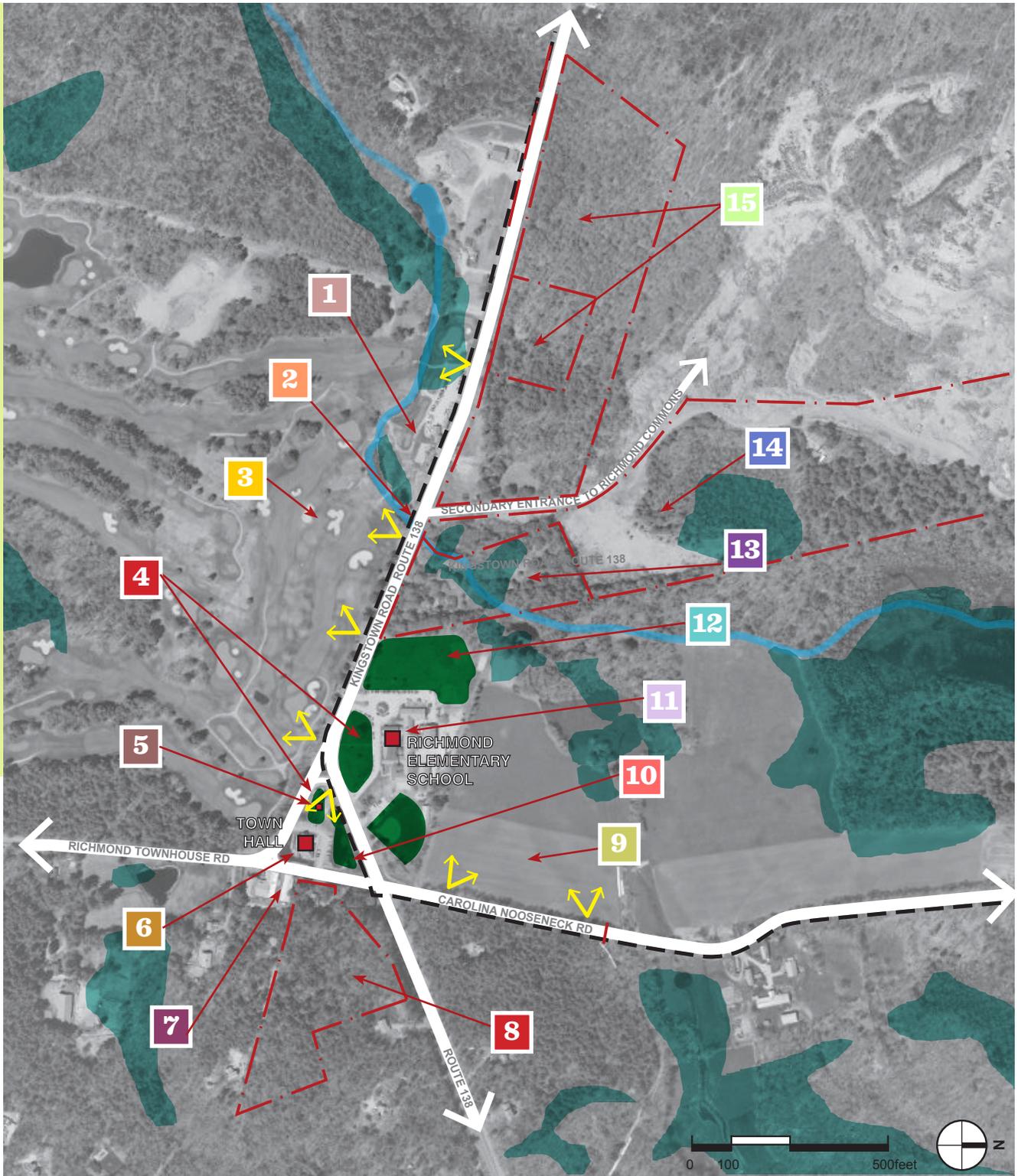
Assets

The assets of the Richmond Growth Center site include four key themes:

- **Location at the Community Crossroads**
Kingstown Road (Route 138) and Richmond Townhouse Road (Route 112) are the two principal north-south and east-west routes through Richmond.
- **An Existing Center of Community Life**
With the Richmond Town Hall, Elementary School and their associated parks and playing fields, the area is already an active center.
- **Vacant Parcels Available for redevelopment**
While the golf course will likely remain in its current use, vacant or underutilized land is available to the east and west of the town hall and elementary school. The town recently acquired a strip of land west of the school

from the developers of Richmond Commons, which may be suitable for playing fields or other recreational use.

- **Extraordinary Landscape Context**
With the golf course on one side, a farm on the other, and forest in between the site has a quintessential rural location that adds immeasurably to its value for future development. By protecting these open space resources as a green belt surrounding the growth center, the town can also maintain that classic rural experience of driving through the countryside and arriving at a dense, walkable village.



RICHMOND GROWTH CENTER
Existing Assets

LEGEND	
	Core Parcels
	Stream
	Wetland
	Attractive Views
	North-South Hiking Trail
	Existing Parks & Ball Fields

1 Provision of food and other services within the golf course limits potential that golfers would patronize new businesses in the new center.

2 Curve has been site of accidents.

3 Recent golf course improvements make redevelopment at corner unlikely.

4  **Lack of sidewalks or cross walks** makes pedestrian circulation difficult.

5 Cut off from 138 to 112 speeds traffic through south side of the site.

6 Existing residential neighbors worried about impacts of increased traffic and noise.

7 Chariho Furniture has little room to expand within existing property boundaries.

8 Downhill grade entering the center increases vehicle speed.

9  **Wide state highway right-of-way** limits developable land along the roadside.

10 Existing school use and ownership limit redevelopment options.

11 Desire to preserve farmland creates possible conflict with future expansion of growth center.

12 Meadow brook wetlands divide west side of the site and limit suitability for development.

13 Configuration of new town property makes it hard to create a direct physical or visual connection to the center.

14 Distance to future Richmond Commons development makes connection to village difficult.

Issues and Constraints

The Richmond Growth Center site has a number of issues and constraints that need to be addressed in order to achieve a successful, mixed-use redevelopment.

- **Site Configuration**

The golf course and the Richmond Elementary School occupy much of the potential development land north and south of the center, limiting growth to parcels to the east and west. There is ample space, but uses will be spread out along the 138 Corridor.

- **Route 138**

A major east-west arterial across South County, Route 138 is designed for speed, which is amplified through the center by the downhill grade from the East. The cut-off road South of Town Hall further allows drivers to turn off the Eastbound lanes at a high rate of speed.

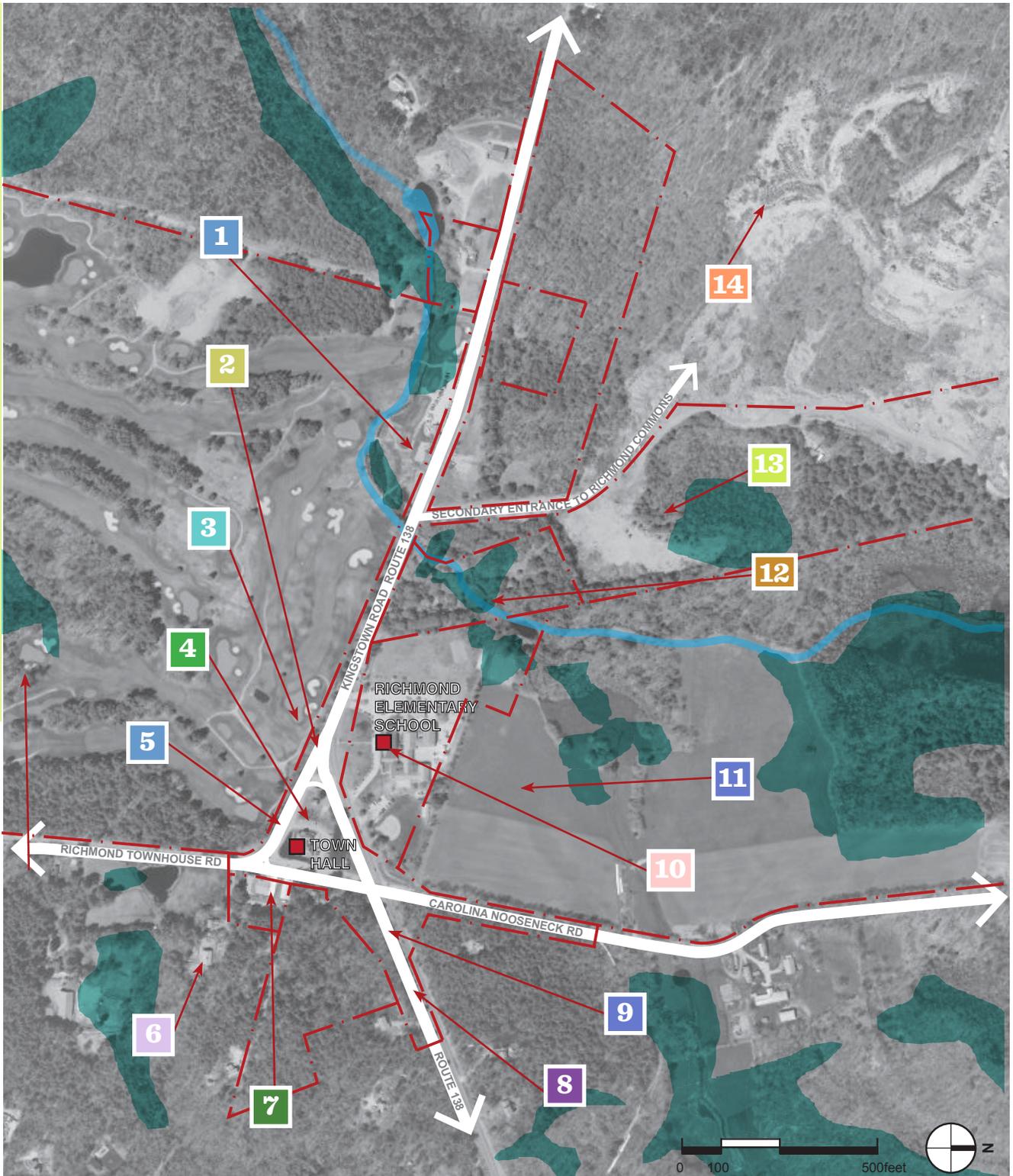
The side state highway layout will make it difficult for private developers to bring buildings close to the road, limiting the possibilities for creating a traditional village around the intersection.

- **Competing Commercial Centers**

The economic potential of the Growth Center is limited by the existing commercial district a few miles West on 138 at the Wyoming interchange off I-95. The approved plan for Richmond Commons, which extends nearly from Wyoming to the edge of the potential growth center, includes commercial and residential uses that will absorb additional market demand.

- **Potential Impacts on Open Space Resources**

The form north of the site is a valuable community asset, limiting the attractiveness of expanding the center in that direction. Meadow Brook and its associated wetlands fragment the western end of the potential growth center and further separate the western development parcels from the core area around Town Hall.



LEGEND

-  Core Parcels
-  Stream
-  Wetland

RICHMOND GROWTH CENTER
Existing Issues

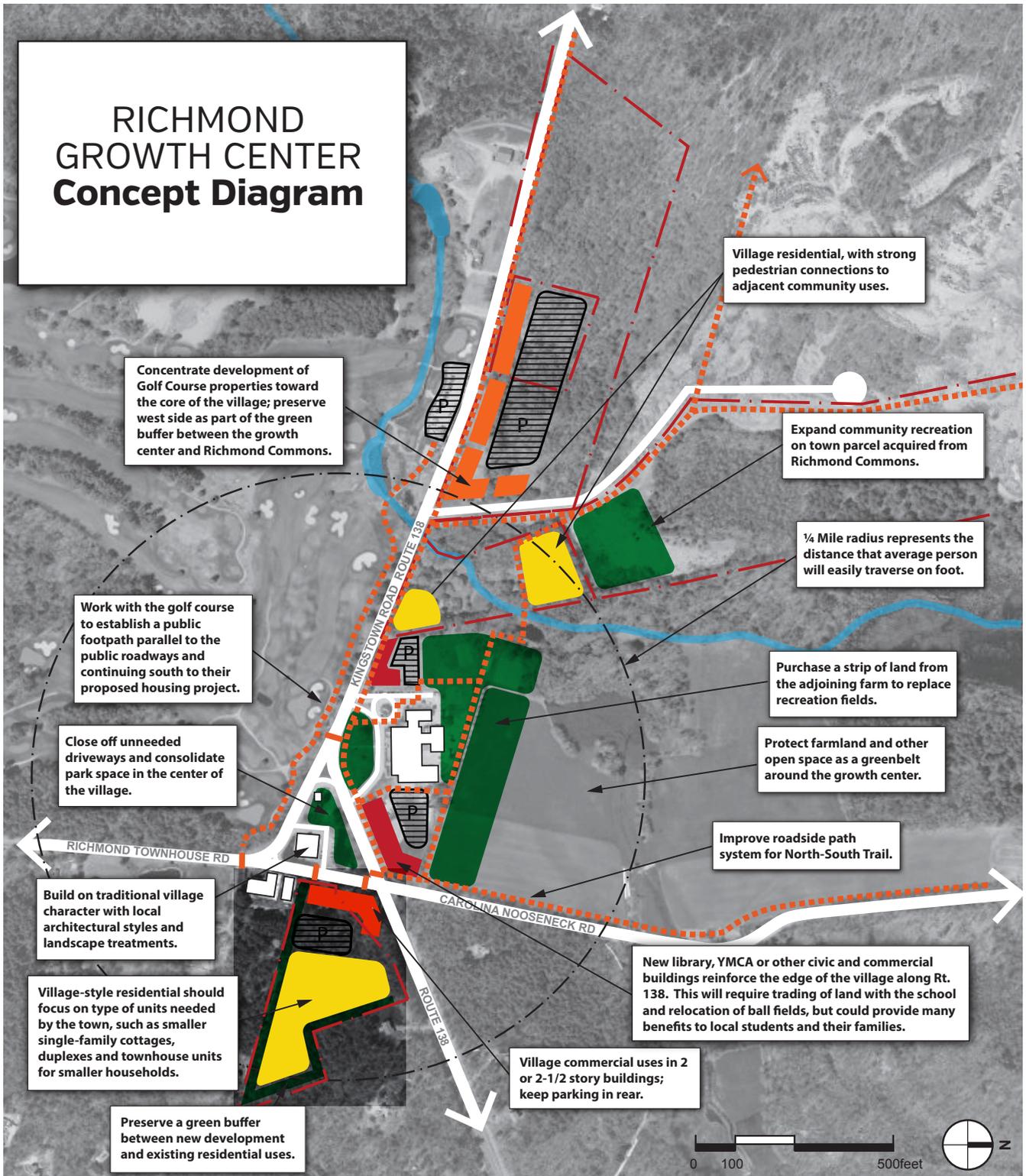
Applying Growth Center Criteria

The Richmond Growth Center already functions as an important town hub, and its location at the town's central crossroads provides a potential market for additional civic, commercial and residential use. This location and land use history also make the location ideal for a more sustainable form of growth that aligns well with the growth center criteria:

- **Compact development with efficient use of infrastructure:** Location and road access provide a site that needs little in the way of additional road infrastructure. Adding more intense uses will require shared water and sewer systems that do not now exist, but they could also help pay for the development of those utilities.
- **Mixed land uses:** Much of the existing development in Richmond is segregated into separate residential, commercial and civic districts. This site provides an opportunity to mix all of the uses together.
- **Diverse housing opportunities and choices:** Residential uses within the core of the growth center can include village-style residential with traditional single-family homes, as well as cottages, duplexes and townhouse units for smaller households.
- **Transportation choice:** Route 138 is served by RIPTA buses, with links to the West Kingston rail station and URI. The site is an ideal hub in a potential future network of bike trails.
- **Protection of environmental resources:** There is ample room to expand the growth center while still preserving the surrounding woods, fields and golf course. By building at higher densities in the center, the project could help provide funding to permanently protect a greenbelt of open space around the site.
- **Design for sense of place:** By enhancing the presence of new buildings on both sides the Route 138 /112 intersection, the development concept (opposite page) creates a sense of arrival. New structures would front on a continuous sidewalk linking to the Town Hall, School and residential areas. Unnecessary driveways and road connections could be eliminated, allowing for expansion and redevelopment of park areas.
- **Development in existing centers and appropriately scaled new centers.** The site has long served as the town's civic center, and is a perfect location for some additional growth.



RICHMOND GROWTH CENTER Concept Diagram



Concentrate development of Golf Course properties toward the core of the village; preserve west side as part of the green buffer between the growth center and Richmond Commons.

Village residential, with strong pedestrian connections to adjacent community uses.

Expand community recreation on town parcel acquired from Richmond Commons.

1/4 Mile radius represents the distance that average person will easily traverse on foot.

Work with the golf course to establish a public footpath parallel to the public roadways and continuing south to their proposed housing project.

Purchase a strip of land from the adjoining farm to replace recreation fields.

Close off unneeded driveways and consolidate park space in the center of the village.

Protect farmland and other open space as a greenbelt around the growth center.

Build on traditional village character with local architectural styles and landscape treatments.

Improve roadside path system for North-South Trail.

Village-style residential should focus on type of units needed by the town, such as smaller single-family cottages, duplexes and townhouse units for smaller households.

New library, YMCA or other civic and commercial buildings reinforce the edge of the village along Rt. 138. This will require trading of land with the school and relocation of ball fields, but could provide many benefits to local students and their families.

Preserve a green buffer between new development and existing residential uses.

Village commercial uses in 2 or 2-1/2 story buildings; keep parking in rear.



RICHMOND GROWTH CENTER Opportunities

LEGEND

- Core Parcels
- Stream
- Green Space
- Civic Uses
- Commercial Uses
- Residential Uses
- Pedestrian Circulation
- 1/4 Mile Radius from Growth Center
- P Parking

The Concept Plan

This concept for the Richmond Growth Center revolves around the expansion of community uses at the site, with the addition of compatible commercial and residential uses. The best way to do this is to work with the school department to locate some of these uses on school property along the edge of Route 138. Whether a new YMCA, community center or library, new buildings should be close to the roadside, with parking hidden behind. This will help define the center of the village, helping people find their way and reducing traffic speeds. New mixed use commercial and residential development can expand beyond the civic core, adding vitality to the center. Continuous pedestrian connections via sidewalks and paths, especially within 1/4 mile radius of Town Hall, ensure that residents and visitors can comfortably walk between uses.

Key features of the concept plan include:

Landuses and Overall Design Concept

- Uses would focus on community buildings such as a new library and YMCA, which would ideally be located on school property close to the center.
- Retail and/office uses would be located on privately-owned parcels east of the town hall and west of the school.
- Residential uses would be clustered east of the town hall and on parcels adjacent to Meadow Brook.

Streets, Access and Parking

- Most of the development is lined up along the existing roadways, minimizing the need for new roads..
- A new traffic light at the 138/112 intersection could provide for safe vehicular turns and pedestrian crossing.
- Large common parking lots behind the buildings are accessed from a limited number of clearly-marked entrances.

Buildings

- Building types can include two or three story wood frame structures building on the style of the Town Hall and traditional homes in the community.
- The potential library, YMCA and other community uses should be design to serve as landmarks that are easy to identify from the road and help to establish a sense of place.
- In general , buildings should be designed to last for

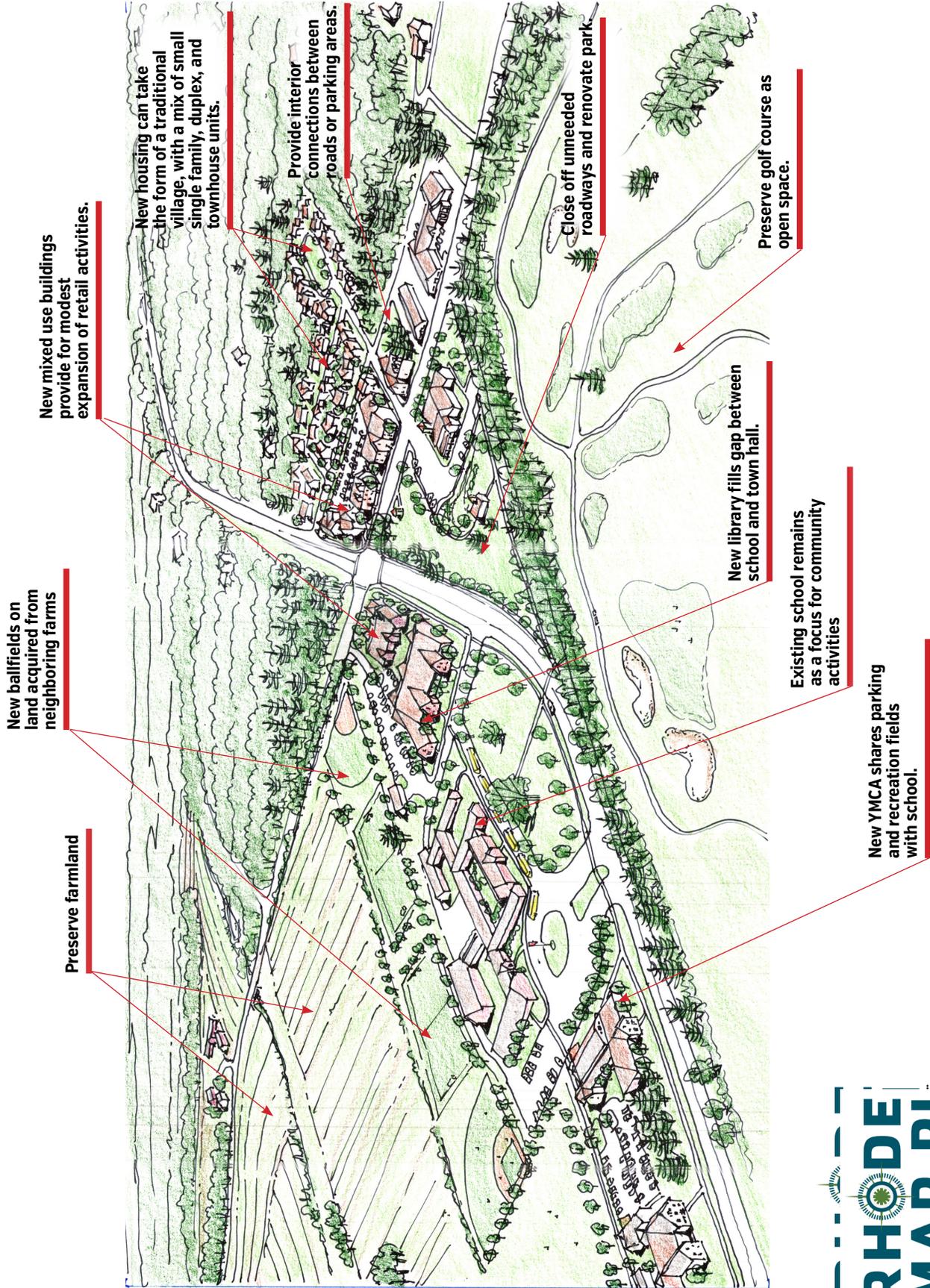
many years, with a floor plan that allows uses to change over time as the market demands.

Design of the Public Realm

- The focus of the growth center is the public realm of streets, sidewalks and parks. Buildings and landscaping should enclose and shelter these public spaces, creating a comfortable environment for walking, sitting and gathering for work or pleasure.
- To the extent possible, streets should follow a “complete streets” approach, where travel lanes for vehicles are accompanied by space for parking, broad sidewalks, and accommodations for public transit.
- Bike lanes or off-street bike paths should be provided, easing connections to quieter roads north and south of the sit

Parks and Public Spaces

- Ball fields and other open space given up by the school department should be replace by new fields acquired from the adjacent farm.
- By closing off unnecessary driveways, park spaces in front of the school and town hall can be more useful and attractive.
- A series of trails, including a link in the state’s North-South trail, connect provide a continuous pedestrian system linking each part of the growth center.



New mixed use buildings provide for modest expansion of retail activities.

New ballfields on land acquired from neighboring farms

Preserve farmland

New housing can take the form of a traditional village, with a mix of small single family, duplex, and townhouse units.

Provide interior connections between roads or parking areas.

Close off unneeded roadways and renovate park.

Preserve golf course as open space.

New library fills gap between school and town hall.

Existing school remains as a focus for community activities

New YMCA shares parking and recreation fields with school.

Implementation Strategies for the Richmond Growth Center

The Route 138/112 intersection has long been identified by the town as a potential growth center. Limitations on available land, ownership patterns and the real estate market make any short-term changes unlikely. However, by moving forward with certain implementation actions the town can be ready when opportunities arise to move things forward.

- **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.

- **Pursue a stakeholder-driven masterplanning process.**

Most of the objections raised to a potential growth center are rooted in uncertainty about the outcome - including neighbors worried about traffic, noise and other impacts, as well as landowners, including the school department, who are happy with what they have and unsure about whether any change is necessary or desirable. A consensus-driven masterplanning process would get all the stakeholders together to develop and review options, with opportunities to work out any conflicts and identify approaches that could benefit all parties. The more detailed the plan is -- including future roads, building locations, entrances and parking lots, parks, trails and open space elements -- the easier it will be to implement.

- **Modify zoning to encourage the desired layout and mix of uses.** A new zoning district or overlay should be established, using the masterplan as the source for the size and shape of the district, the allowable uses and dimensional requirements for roads, buildings, parking, setbacks, etc. The town could consider a form-based code for the area which would go one step further by turning the masterplan into a regulating plan showing the location of buildings, roads, parking lots and public spaces. The location of new buildings would be restricted to designated building envelopes, and the buildings themselves would follow a common set of architectural guidelines. While all of this would seem to be restrictive compared with “normal” zoning, in fact it creates a great deal of clarity and certainty as to what is required and what the outcome would be. The result

is quicker approvals and a higher quality of design.

- **Prepare concepts and identify potential financing for the public library, YMCA and other community projects.**

Development of public and quasi-public uses can lead development of the growth center, and add to the value of the remaining land for commercial and residential use. By coordinating planning for the future of the school with plans for library and YMCA, the town can foster development of a wonderful complex of buildings set within an attractive and walkable village. The danger of pursuing these plans separately is that the natural barriers to working together within a small area with a mix of owners will push the potential library and YMCA out of the village to a sites that everyone has to drive to.

- **Work with RIDOT to plan for needed road, intersection and sidewalk improvements.**

The Town should seek assistance in planning improvements to 138 and 112, including a possible traffic light at their intersection. While the roads work well for through-traffic, there is ample space to include sidewalks, landscaping and other improvements that can allow for development of a pedestrian-friendly center.

- **Explore options for water and wastewater services.**

Recent extension of town water mains to the elementary school provide a nearby source that should be studied for use by other uses in the growth center. Provision for community wastewater systems should also be investigated, which will allow for increased density in the center without having to reserve space within the village for drain fields.



RHODE MAP RI

Building a Better Rhode Island

*This concept plan was prepared by Dodson & Flinker
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Group assisting the State of Rhode Island Division of
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