

SMITHFIELD GROWTH CENTER CONCEPT PLAN



*Smithfield
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 Smithfield

Located between the more urban communities of Johnstown, North Providence and Lincoln, and the rural towns of Glocester, Burillville, and North Smithfield, Smithfield is seen as having the best of both worlds. For centuries the town was a mix of rural farms and mill villages, and through the 19th Century most growth was concentrated in Greenville, Esmond, Georgiaville and other centers. With improvements in the regional road system, however, Smithfield saw a suburban boom, growing from a population of 5,000 in the 1940s to more than 21,000 today.

Smithfield Growth Center

Smithfield's 2006 Comprehensive Plan Update promote the objective of focusing growth in existing urban services areas and potential growth centers, including the Routes 7 and 116 Planned Corporate District (PCD). Established in 1990, the PCD incorporates 1,500 acres (700 acres useable) extending from I-295 north to include the existing Fidelity office campus. In 2012 the town's Economic Development Commission worked with Bryant University to explore a strategy for the PCD focused on industry and/or corporate clusters. With the high-tech regions of Massachusetts' 128 Corridor, the Silicon Valley, or North Carolina's Research Triangle Park as models, the approach would build on the presence of Fidelity and Bryant University. In part, the PCD is designed to ensure that land in the area is protected from incompatible development.

With little corporate development in the offing, in 2014 the town began working with a group of landowners at the intersection of Routes 7 and 116 who are interested in broadening the allowed uses in the zone to include a range of retail, hotel, sports and restaurant uses, as well as multifamily residential. As planning for the area continues, the question is how best to balance the unique opportunities of the corporate cluster approach with the need to provide services, housing and other needs.

The Route 7/116 Corridor

- The core of the area focuses on parcels southeast of the 7/116 intersection, including the Smithfield Peat property, but it includes parcels on both sides of 7 and 116 and extends to I-295.

- For the purposes of planning the Growth Center, the entire Planned Corporate District zone is part of the picture, but the area within 1/4 mile of the core, about 125 acres, is the focus.
- There are many existing corporate, light industrial and service businesses in the area, but they are spread out in a typical suburban highway pattern, each with its own entrances and parking lots.
- Route 7, with 12,000 vehicles per day, and Route 116, with 16,000, are managed by the state as regional arterials. Planning for the potential growth center must incorporate the need to support heavy through-traffic.

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 comprehensive plan strategies and zoning for the site.
- Identification of current issues surrounding redevelopment of the site.
- Identification of key assets and opportunities for redevelopment.
- Visualization of opportunities
- Identification of priority actions

Assets

The study area is already an important activity and employment center for Smithfield and the surrounding region. It enjoys several assets shared by few other locations in Northern Rhode Island:

- **Location and Access**

Only 15 minutes from Providence and less than an hour to Boston, the site sits at the crossing of two major local roads, with easy access to Interstate 295 off Route 7. A potential additional off-ramp from 295 could provide direct access to the highway from Route 116. Even with more than 16,000 vehicle trips per day on Rt. 116, and more than 12,000 trips per day on Rt. 7, there is some capacity within existing roads and intersections to accommodate additional growth. An access management plan prepared in 2011 found that a 50-75% increase in current traffic levels could be accommodated with relatively minor widening and re-striping. The plan proposed a range of access management strategies that could increase capacity further as redevelopment occurs.

- **Nearby Employment and Activity Centers**

The site is the gateway to the Fidelity Office Campus, which brings more than 3700 workers to the area, as well as Bryant University, which hosts more than 4,000 faculty, staff and students. The Lincoln Mall and related business uses are just three miles away on Rt. 116.

- **Current Land Use and Zoning**

The site is already home to many corporate, retail and light industrial uses. Active convenience, food, lodging and banking facilities currently bring people into the center. The site is designated for Planned Corporate use in Smithfield’s Future Land Use Map and Zoning Ordinance, paving the way for redevelopment. There is ample available land and former uses, such as the Smithfield Peat operation, that are ripe for redevelopment.

- **Natural Context**

While close to the city, the site is located within a suburban part of Smithfield with significant open space. Protected lands along the Woonasquatucket River, to the South, and conservation land to the north owned by RI Audubon and the Smithfield Land Trust could anchor a permanent green belt surrounding the growth center. Largely cleared and already in active use, with public sewer and water, the site could absorb significant new development without impacting Smithfield’s natural resources.

1 Fidelity Office Campus, now including facilities of Alexion Pharmaceuticals, brings more than 3700 workers to the area every day.

The presence of these regionally-significant facilities raises the possibility of attracting additional corporate offices in the financial services and medical industry clusters.

2 Bryant University represents a community of around 4,000 faculty, staff and students. While largely self-contained, students and visitors also patronize off-campus food, lodging, entertainment and shopping establishments.



Existing office and industrial uses provide hundreds of jobs and considerable buying-power.

4 The site is **15 minutes from Providence** and less than an hour from Boston, with easy access to I-295.

5 **Many existing businesses** are within 1/2 mile of core of the growth center.

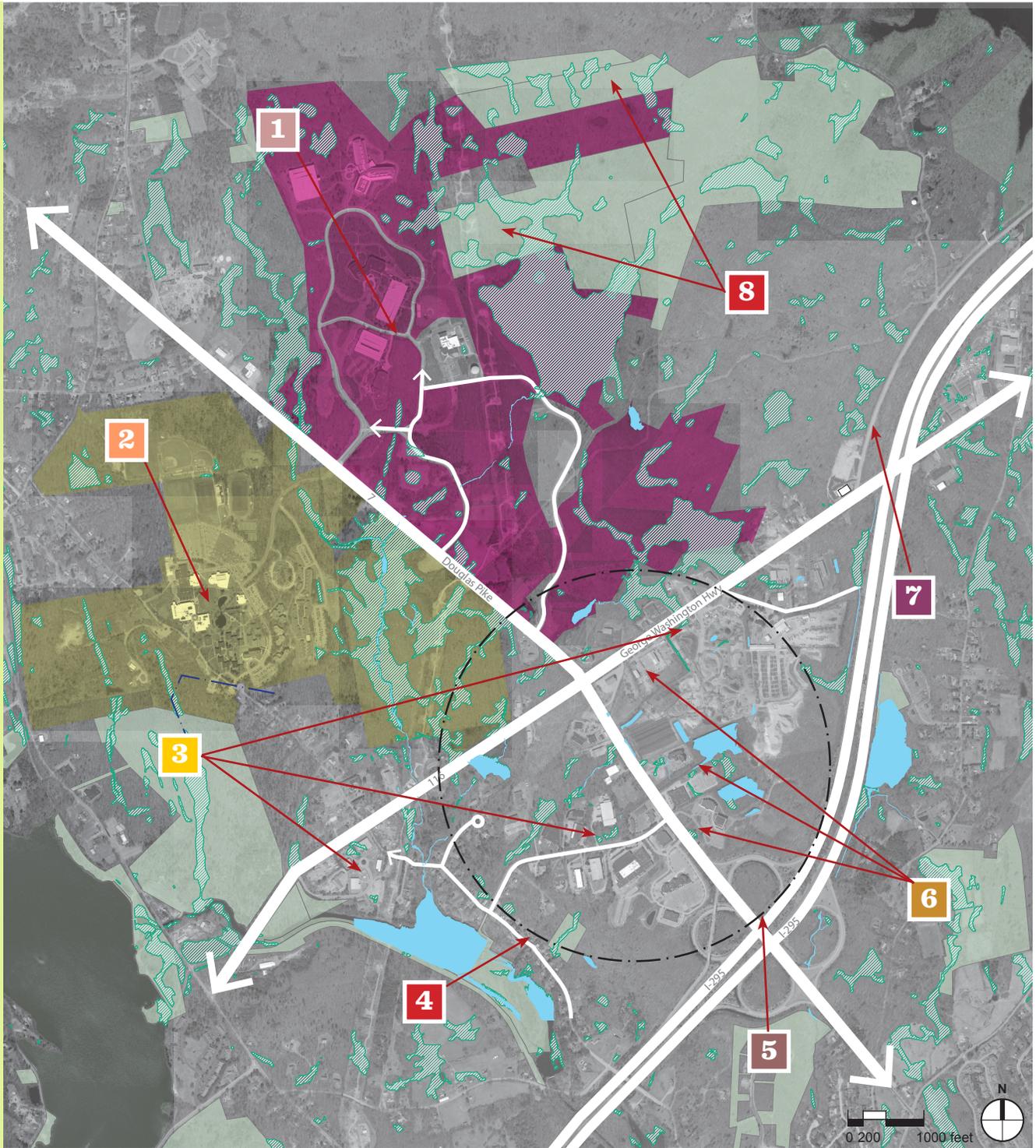


Current food, lodging, retail and banking uses already bring people into the center for convenience shopping and services.

7 **Potential for additional off ramp from I-295** could provide direct access to corporate office sites fronting on the highway.



Conservation land preserved by the State of Rhode Island, RI Audubon and the Smithfield Land Trust, together with other undeveloped forest areas, creates an attractive belt of open space that surrounds the area.



LEGEND

- . - . - . 1/4 Mile Radius
- Blue line Lake/Stream
- Blue hatched area Wetland
- Yellow area Bryant University
- Pink area Fidelity
- Green area Conservation Land

SMITHFIELD GROWTH CENTER
Existing Assets



1

The **relative isolation of the Bryant University** campus limits interaction of students and staff with the surrounding town.

2

Wetlands and steep slopes fragment many of the wooded areas surrounding the site, limiting development potential and complicating new road connections.

3

The **industrial character** of many of the uses within and surrounding the center will reduce demand for more upscale uses to locate in the growth center.

4



Office and light industrial uses predominate, making the area vulnerable to changing economic factors. Closure of a single business can have a big impact.

5

Both **Route 7 and Route 116** are designed to promote relatively high speeds, favoring through-traffic. As state highways with wide right-of-ways, it is difficult for the town or landowners to make changes appropriate to a growth center.

6



Existing buildings are typically surrounded by parking lots, with little relationship to the street frontage.

7

Existing development follows a commercial strip pattern, with each lot having its own curb cut and few connections between adjoining uses.

8

Current **“planned corporate” zoning limits ability to add retail and restaurant uses** and forbids residential uses entirely.

9

The Fidelity Campus is laid out as a suburban office park, with winding roads, fields and forest. While attractive, the low density and sprawling layout limit the ability to connect easily with the potential growth center.

Issues and Constraints

The Rt.7/116 Growth Center has a number of issues and constraints on redevelopment, some of which stem from its history as a successful suburban economic center. In general these fall in to three categories:

- **Physical Constraints**

Much of the undeveloped land surrounding the study area is fragmented by permanent streams, intermittent water courses, wetlands and steep slopes. These will serve to restrict the ability to build new roads and connect adjacent uses to the center.

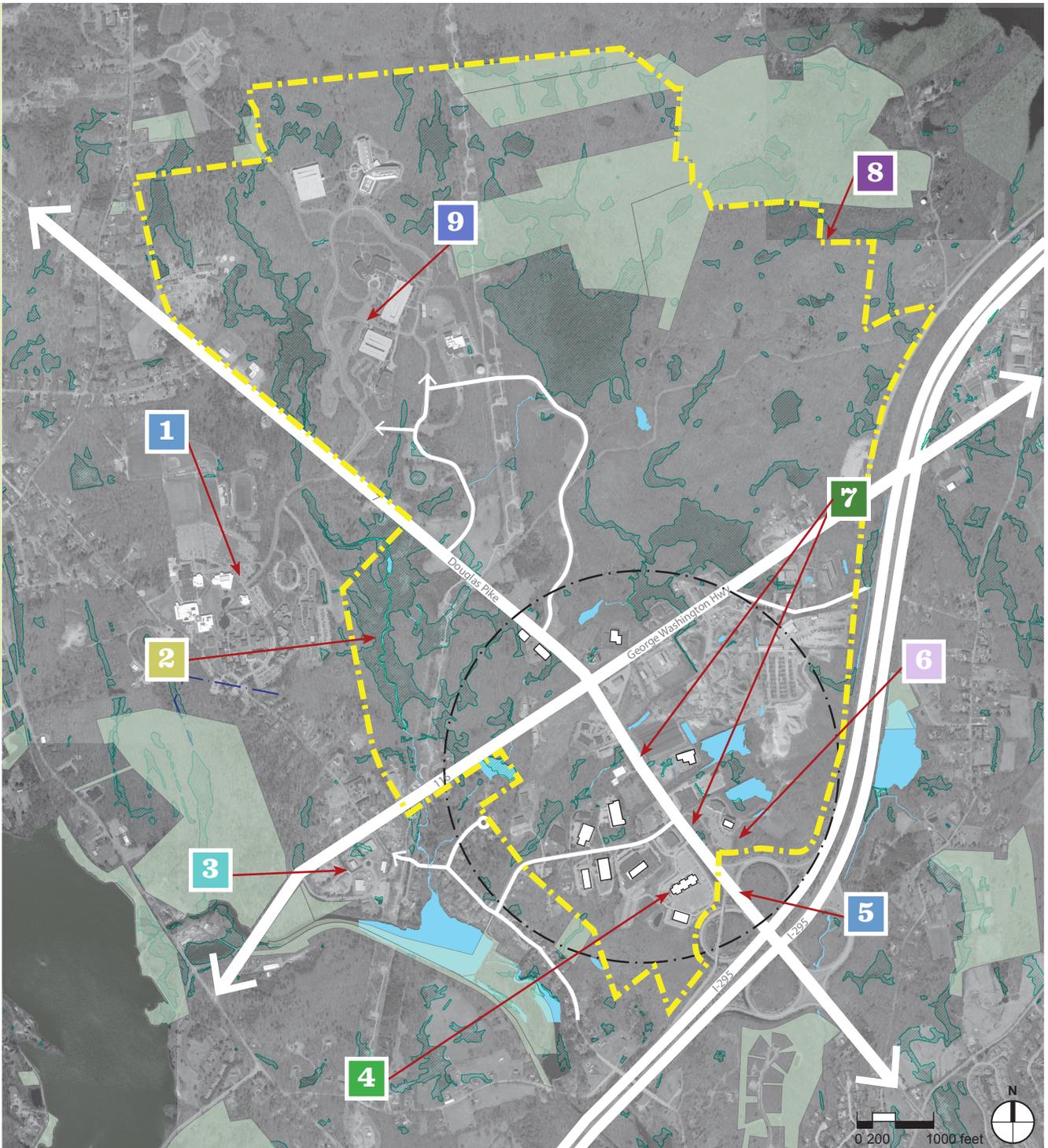
- **Existing Suburban Land Use Patterns**

The winding roads of the Fidelity office park and the isolation of the Bryant University Campus limit potential connections to the growth center and will continue to favor dependence on the automobile. Within the growth center office and light industrial uses predominate, typically with a single large building on each lot, surrounded by parking. Retail uses follow a strip commercial model, with each lot having its own

curb cut and few direct connections from one lot to the next. Designed as regional collectors, both Rt. 7 and Rt. 116 are laid out to promote relatively high-speed through-traffic.

- **Zoning and Ownership**

Zoned “Planned Corporate,” the site is an important economic generator for the town, and no one wants to see its potential diminished. At the same time, the zoning limits the ability to add retail and restaurant uses, and forbids residential uses entirely. Each of these could play an important role in bringing vitality to the growth center and providing a more resilient selection of real estate offerings. The planned corporate zoning could put the site at a disadvantage compared to traditional downtowns and other areas that allow mixed uses.



LEGEND

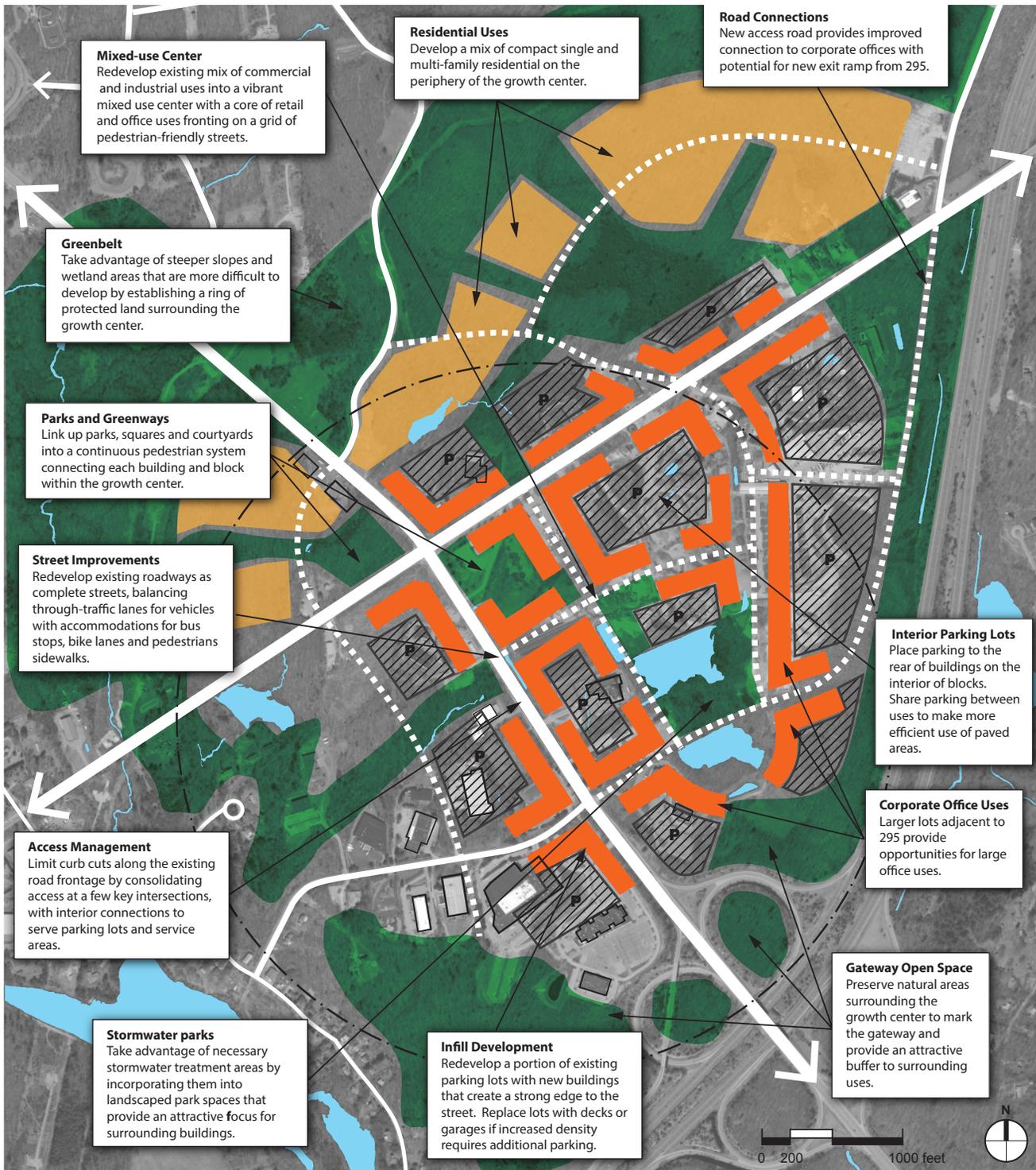
- Opportunities Area
- Lake/Stream
- Wetland
- Planned Corporate Zoning District
- 1/4 Mile Radius
- Conservation Land

SMITHFIELD GROWTH CENTER
Existing Issues

Applying Growth Center Criteria and Growth Center Opportunities

The Smithfield Growth Center has extraordinary growth potential under the current Planned Corporate district. A corridor access management plan prepared by VHB in 2011 identified the potential for more than 6 million square feet of new development, which could generate an additional 66,900 trips per day. While such a scenario is unlikely given the limited market for new office development, it illustrates the capacity of the site to absorb future growth. Regardless of the ultimate level of that growth, following the more sustainable model promoted by the growth center criteria will foster a center that can thrive amid ongoing social, environmental and economic changes.

- **Compact development with efficient use of infrastructure:** Already served by excellent roads as well as sewer and water lines, the density of buildings and other uses can be increased without expanding into the surrounding woods. Much of the area has been disturbed in the past by mining and materials processing, providing an opportunity for increasing growth without a corresponding loss of green space.
- **Mixed land uses:** A key part of a more compact, efficient growth pattern is fostering a mix of uses that take advantage of adjacencies and the ability to share structures, parking lots and open space areas. For example, buildings with ground-floor commercial and upper-floor office and residential space provide a higher level of use on a given footprint, increasing revenue and reducing shared costs for construction, heating/cooling and maintenance. Retail uses are supported by office workers and residents, and parking can be shared – with some residents leaving for the day and office workers taking their place.
- **Diverse housing opportunities and choices:** Residential uses within the core of the growth center can include upper-level flats or free-standing apartment buildings, while north of Rt. 116 there is room for a mix of compact single and multi-family homes within walking distance of the center.
- **Transportation choice:** Current RIPTA bus lines traverse the site, and there is room for bike lanes or an off-road bike path along each corridor. It would be a great advantage to establish a safe, off-road multi-use trail north to link the center to Bryant University and the Fidelity Campus.
- **Protection of environmental resources:** Much of the undeveloped land surrounding the core of the growth center is cut up by small streams, wetlands and steep slopes. Protecting these areas as part of a greenbelt surrounding the center can create an attractive green setting while expanding existing blocks of conservation land along the Woonasquatucket to the southwest and across the hills to the north.
- **Design for sense of place:** By enhancing the presence of new buildings on both sides of Routes 7 and 116, the development concept (opposite page) creates a sense of arrival. A loose grid of new streets divides the center into a series of blocks, with buildings along the street edge and parking lots hidden behind them. Streets would be designed to encourage walking, with on-street parking, wide sidewalks, plentiful shade trees, outdoor cafes and paths that cut through the blocks to reveal courtyard parks.
- **Development in existing centers and appropriately scaled new centers.** The site represents the core of a 700 usable acre area zoned for Corporate uses. While there are dozens of existing businesses in the area there is ample vacant or underutilized land available for redevelopment.



LEGEND

- 1/4 Mile Radius
- Lake/Stream
- Open Space and Corridors
- New Parking
- Building Zones
- Residential Areas

**SMITHFIELD GROWTH CENTER
Opportunities**

The Concept Plan

This concept for the Smithfield Growth Center is designed to promote development of the corporate park concept by creating at its core a vibrant mixed-use center with a combination of office, retail, entertainment and residential uses. Uniting the entire project is a focus on the public realm of beautiful, pedestrian friendly streets, parks, squares and other gathering places.

A key concept is adherence to a common masterplan that ignores lot lines, to the extent possible, and treats the entire site as if it were being developed by a single entity. By working within a shared concept, all landowners can enjoy a higher quality and character in the final product.

Key features of the concept plan include:

Landuses and Overall Design Concept

- A grid of new streets provides access to the interior of the site, and divides the area into a series of blocks that can be developed in phases.
- Each block has buildings lining the edge of the street at its periphery, with parking behind the buildings.
- Landuses can include corporate and professional offices, light industrial, commercial services, retail, restaurants, sports and entertainment, as well as multifamily units on upper floors and in free-standing townhouses and apartments.
- Unified by consistent streetscape pattern and building location close to the sidewalk, uses can vary to meet the needs of the market.

Streets, Access and Parking

- Access is controlled by establishing a limited number of new streets that divide the site into blocks.
- Where principal streets intersect with Routes 7 and 116, turning lanes and traffic signals ease movement.
- Large common parking lots behind the buildings are accessed from a limited number of clearly-marked entrances.
- On-street parking provides convenient short-term access to shops and restaurants on the ground floor of buildings.

Buildings

- Building types can include three and four-story corporate offices as well as mixed-use buildings with shop fronts on the ground floor and offices and apartments above.
- Key locations at intersections, gateways, parks and

squares can host taller buildings, with a focus on gathering places: lodging, entertainment, conference center, retail, etc.

- 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

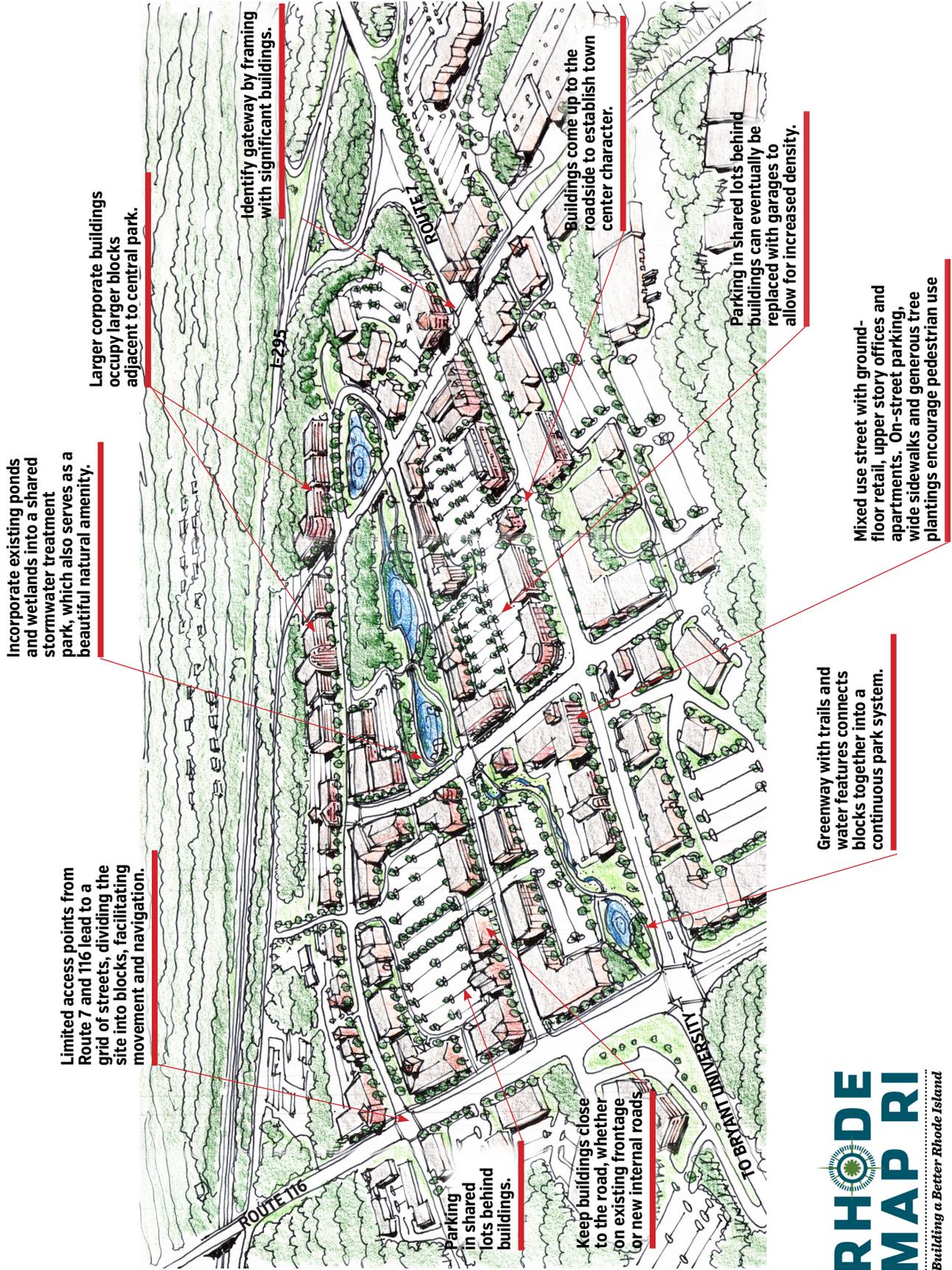
- The focus of the growth center is the public realm of streets, sidewalks, parks and plazas. Buildings and landscaping should enclose and shelter these public spaces, creating a comfortable environment for walking, sitting and gathering for work or pleasure.
- Streets should follow a “complete streets” approach, where travel lanes for vehicles are accompanied by space for parking, broad sidewalks, and accommodations for public transit.
- Bike lanes and other accommodations should be provided along some streets, coordinated with bike paths linking the growth center with Bryant University, the Lincoln Mall and other destinations.
- All sidewalks and other pedestrian areas should be lined with large shade trees.
- Landscape plantings, gardens, fountains and other amenities should be provided throughout the project, with a focus on outdoor gathering places.

Gateways

- Clear gateways into the growth center should be established from each direction on Routes 7 and 116.
- Buildings at the gateways should be designed and located to help define the entrance to the growth center.
- Landscaping, plantings and public art installations can reinforce the gateways and create a setting for necessary signage.

Parks and Public Spaces

- Small parks and gathering places within each block should be linked together with continuous paths and landscaping to form a single park system.
- Paths lead from each block to larger parks at the center of the site, which can include recreational fields as well as natural areas with trails.
- Existing ponds and wetlands are incorporated into a series of stormwater parks that help to capture and treat runoff while creating a beautiful focus for the development.



Incorporate existing ponds and wetlands into a shared stormwater treatment park, which also serves as a beautiful natural amenity.

Limited access points from Route 7 and 116 lead to a grid of streets, dividing the site into blocks, facilitating movement and navigation.

Larger corporate buildings occupy larger blocks adjacent to central park.

Identify gateway by framing with significant buildings.

Keep buildings close to the road, whether on existing frontage or new internal roads.

Parking in shared lots behind buildings.

Buildings come up to the roadside to establish town center character.

Parking in shared lots behind buildings can eventually be replaced with garages to allow for increased density.

Greenway with trails and water features connects blocks together into a continuous park system.

Mixed use street with ground-floor retail, upper story offices and apartments. On-street parking, wide sidewalks and generous tree plantings encourage pedestrian use

Implementation Strategies for the Smithfield Growth Center

The Routes 7 and 116 Growth Center has long been seen as a vitally important opportunity to expand Smithfield's economic base. With the nearby campuses of Bryant University and Fidelity, it could provide a site where similar institutions and corporations could build facilities that would benefit from being in close proximity. While the market potential for such uses represents one unknown, another question is how best to manage the transition from existing retail, service and industrial uses to more of a corporate campus. While it may be impossible to predict the mix of future uses, a clear masterplan for the site can create a unified structure to organize the redevelopment of the area over time.

- **Formally designate the Growth 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.** Before changing zoning for the site, seek consensus on the desired future uses, the size and shape of the growth center, and the detailed layout of streets, blocks, parks and other elements. The more detailed and clear the masterplan is, the easier it will be to establish clear rules within zoning to implement it.
- **Revise the zoning ordinances for the growth center.** While the Planned Corporate Zoning District may continue to exist, the core of the growth center will likely benefit from a different designation designed to encourage a mix of compatible uses.
- **Explore form-based zoning.** A form-based zoning approach would take the agreed masterplan showing streets, parks, building blocks and parking areas and turn it into a regulating plan. A developer for any particular part of the center would build their section of streets, parking lots, parks, etc. as shown on the regulating plan. 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.
- **Work with the State Department of Transportation (DOT) Early and Often** Plans for the Growth Center will not succeed without the help and support of the Rhode Island DOT, which manages Routes 7 and 116. This includes participation in redesigning the roadway cross section to make it more compatible with a pedestrian-friendly center, as well as helping with planning for public transit improvements.
- **Consider establishing a town redevelopment agency.** A major complication of redeveloping the site is the existing number of parcels and landowners. By creating a redevelopment agency, as allowed under state law, the town could participate in assembling parcels, developing plans and perhaps most important, issuing bonds to build roads and other infrastructure. This approach was used successfully by the town of Burrillville to manage redevelopment of the Stillwater Mill and other sites in Harrisville.



RHODE MAP RI

Building a Better Rhode Island

*This concept plan was prepared by Dodson & Flinker
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