

TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

EAST FRANKLIN STREET

CORRIDOR STUDY II

OCTOBER 16, 1996

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I. Introduction

Overview

East Franklin Street is one of Chapel Hill's most significant entranceways, serving as a major route from U.S. 15-501 to the Town Center and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In particular, the portion of East Franklin Street between Elliott Road and WCHL can be described as the "Gateway to the Town," representing an area that serves as a transition point between two patterns of land use.

As with any gateway, the colors, rhythm of spacing, location of structures, landscaping and general design all contribute to the special sense of place that is often associated with the East Franklin Street Corridor.

Background

In April 1991, the Town Council authorized a design study of certain properties on East Franklin Street between Estes Drive and Elliott Road. The study looked at historical patterns of development and explored ways to encourage high-quality design in the area. The focus of the study was undeveloped land fronting Franklin Street.

The study brought together property owners and the Design Review Board at a Design Charette in May 1991, to explore these issues. The Board subsequently recommended a plan to the Town Council in July 1991. The Council held a public hearing on the Corridor Study in September 1991, and after making some revisions, proceeded to adopt the East Franklin Street Corridor Study as a component of the Town's Comprehensive Plan on October 14, 1991.

Revisiting the 1991 Corridor Study

Since the adoption of the 1991 Corridor Study as a component of the Town's Comprehensive Plan, significant development has occurred in this corridor with the construction of the Ballet School, the Hershey Building and the present construction of Franklin Park. In each of these cases, development applications were compared to the Comprehensive Plan as part of the Town's evaluation.

Now changes are beginning to occur east of Elliott Road. In the fall of 1995, the Town Council's attention turned to an undeveloped lot (the Koman property) on East Franklin Street between Elliott Road and WCHL. Across the street from this site is the existing Lowes store (located on the Little property), which is planning to move to a new site on U.S. 15-501 in 1997. Responding to these pending changes, the Town Council charged the Planning Board with the responsibility of making recommendations on expanding the 1991 East Franklin Street Corridor Study to include the blocks from Elliott Road to WCHL.

1996 East Franklin Corridor Study

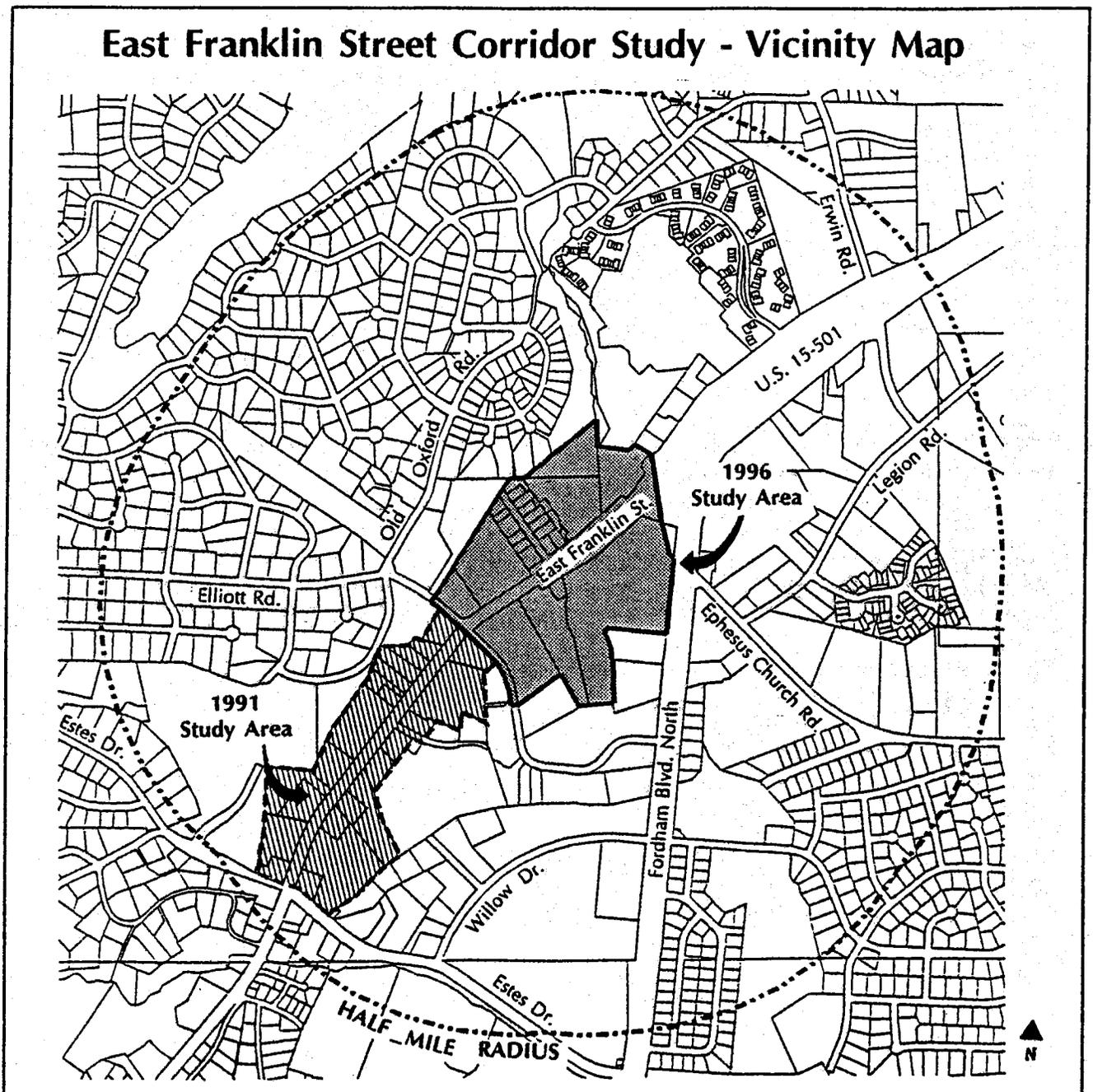
The Council has requested that the 1996 East Franklin Street Corridor Study address the following objectives:

- Review current land use policies.
- Consider access, circulation, parking and pedestrian connections.
- Enhance the entranceway and streetscape.
- Encourage quality design.

A Planning Process

The Planning Board received the Council's charge on December 19, 1995, and proceeded to adopt a schedule for the Corridor Study. The Board also notified all residents within 1/2 mile of the study area of the schedule for the Corridor Study planning process.

The Board reviewed current policies and issues on January 23, 1996, and then began developing a draft of recommendations at the Board's meeting on February 20. The Board held a Neighborhood Meeting on February 27, 1996, that was attended by approximately 100 people. The Board met on March 19, 1996 and on April 23, 1996, and recommended a draft report to the Town Council.



II. Goals and Objectives

"Gateway to the Town"

Objective:

Enhance the village-like character of Franklin Street as a major gateway into Chapel Hill.

Strategies:

- Through landscaping, site design and architectural design, develop a sense of arrival that expresses the village-like character of Chapel Hill.
- Preserve the view into the meadows surrounding the radio transmission tower by WCHL.
- Preserve significant trees within the corridor whenever possible.
- Restrict the visibility of parking lots by placing parking in the rear of buildings or screening them from view.
- Develop a consistent pattern of planting new shrubs and trees (including evergreens and flowering trees) in order to enhance the overall image on both sides of the roadway.
- Achieve additional screening for the entire southern side of East Franklin Street in this corridor, including the Amoco Gas Station, the Exxon Gas Station and the Village Plaza Shopping Center.
- Supplement existing pink crepe myrtles ("Near East") along Franklin Street with additional crepe myrtles, evergreens and hollies where new areas of planting are needed.
- Locate sidewalks as far away from the road as possible, using the existing right-of-way on both sides of Franklin Street to plant trees between the curb and the sidewalk in order to reestablish the street tree character and to provide pedestrians more separation from the vehicles and noise of the street.
- Install decorative street lighting and plantings on both sides of the street to promote the character of this gateway.
- Utilize visual techniques as appropriate to slow traffic down as it enters this corridor from U.S. 15-501.
- Provide a safe pedestrian connection across East Franklin Street at WCHL and the Eastgate Shopping Center traffic signal.
- Place power lines underground.

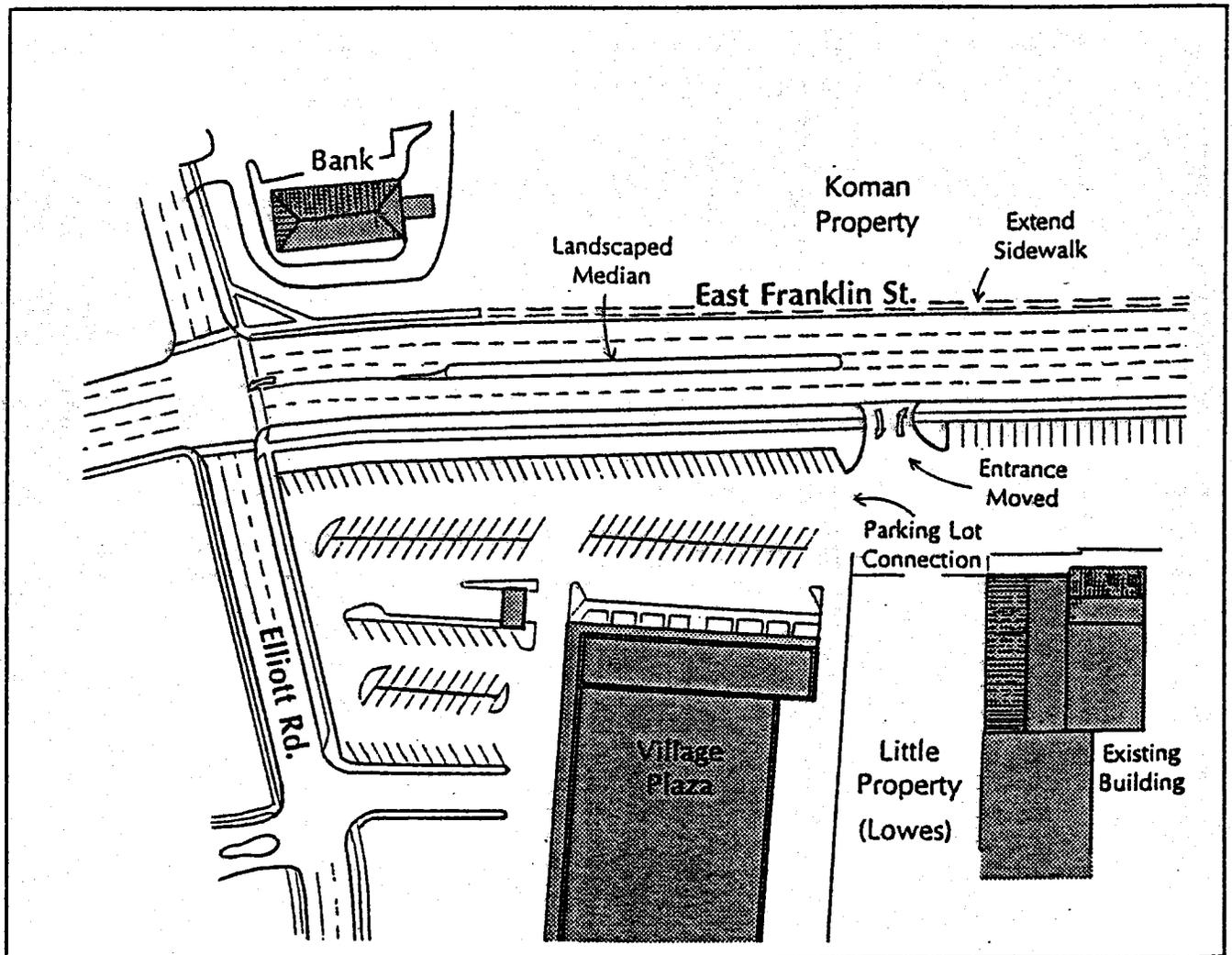
Access, Circulation and Parking

Objective:

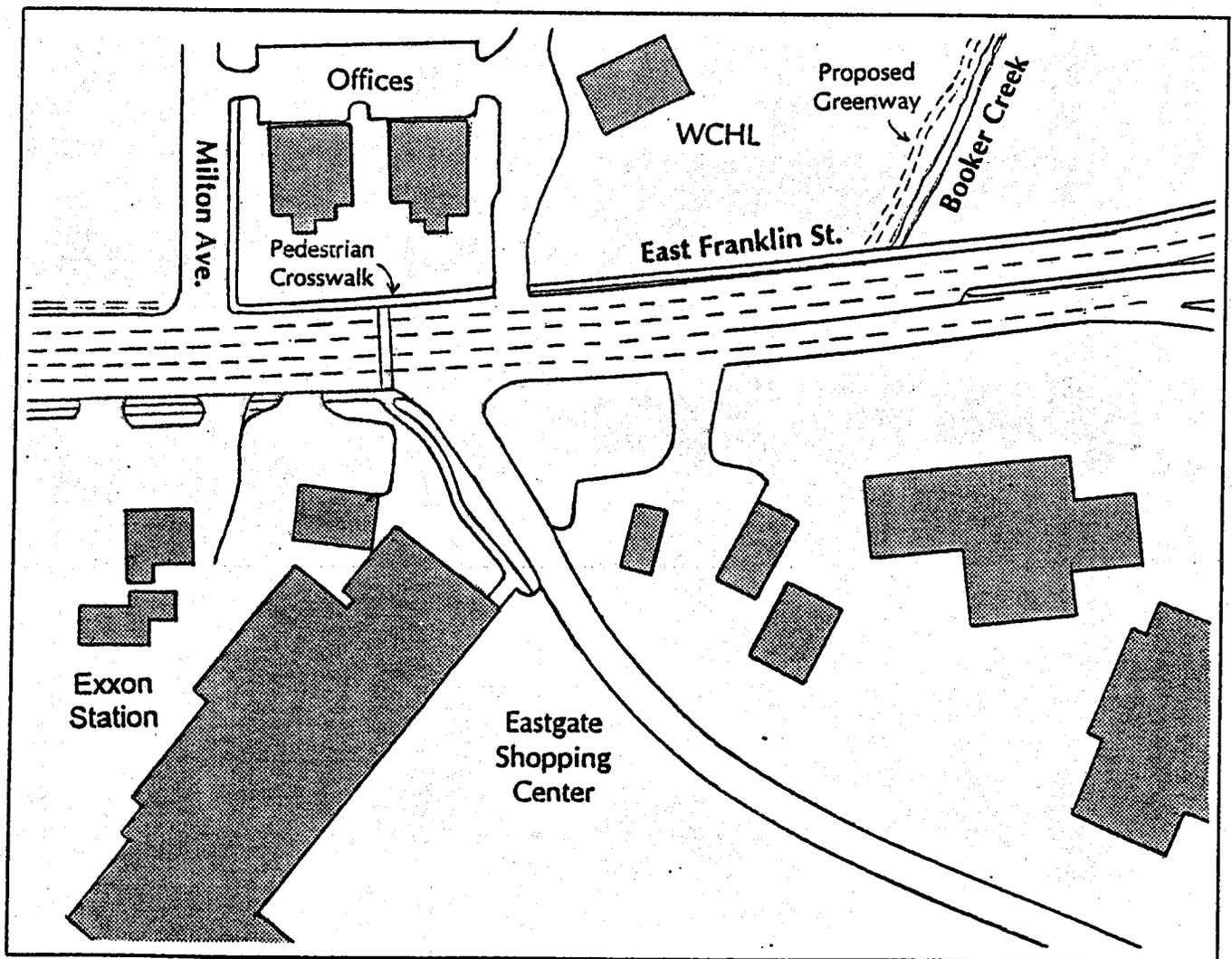
Develop a coordinated system of access for cars, bicycles and pedestrians.

Strategies:

- Minimize curb cuts onto Franklin Street, a major arterial for the area.
- Provide pedestrian crosswalks across Franklin Street.
- Develop an internal circulation system among individual properties which connects multiple properties into one access point.
- Connect existing vehicular circulation systems, particularly including the Little Property (Lowes) and the Village Plaza Shopping Center.
- Provide an interior bicycle and pedestrian system on both sides of Franklin Street.
- Improve the pedestrian-friendliness of the corridor. In particular, improve the timing of the lights to provide adequate time to cross the street.



- Encourage land uses to be transit-supportive and provide adequate bus stops and shelters.
- In order to reduce cut-through traffic in the Eastgate Shopping Center, improve East Franklin Street ramp access and provide additional signs for traffic traveling south onto Fordham Boulevard.
- Provide pedestrian and vehicular access from the Village Plaza Shopping Center to the Little Property and the Eastgate Shopping Center.
- Develop a landscaped median from Elliott Road to the Eastgate light in order to control vehicular circulation, improve pedestrian-friendliness and to promote the entranceway appearance of the corridor.



Neighborhood Protection

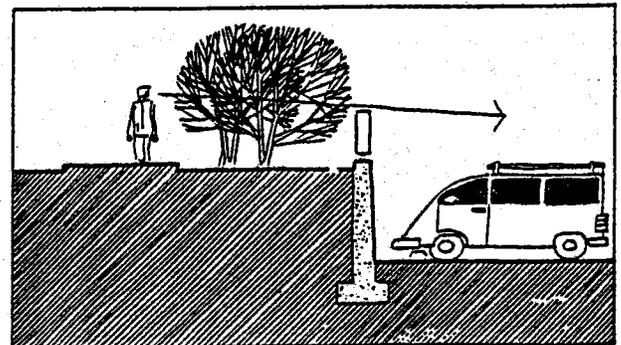
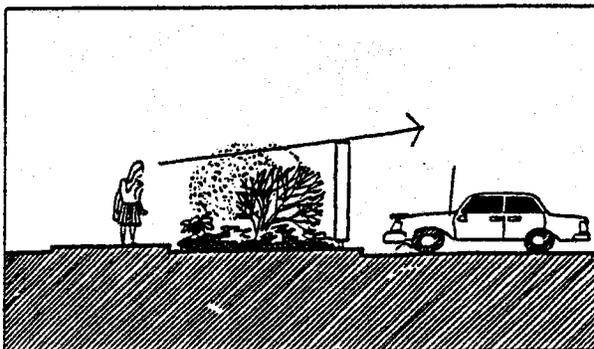
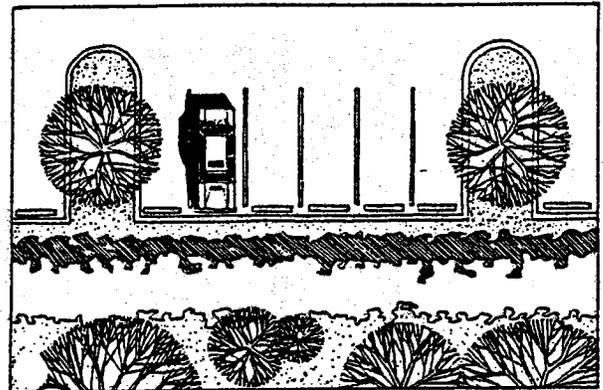
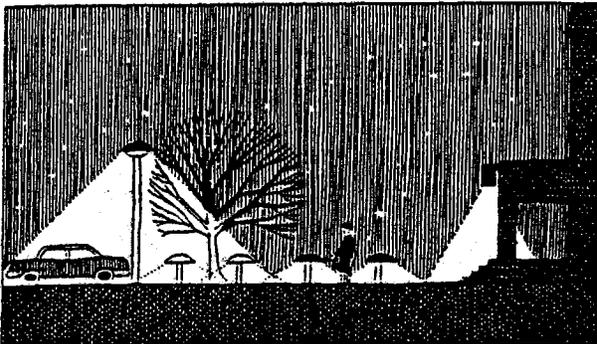
Objective:

Be sensitive to maintaining the privacy and quietness of the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Strategies:

- Encourage land uses that are compatible with residential uses.
- Avoid the negative impacts of noise and lighting on neighboring residential areas.

- Provide adequate buffers between development along East Franklin Street and established residential neighborhoods through the use of setbacks, berms and other design techniques.
- Recognize that the most appropriate neighborhood edge would consist of a vegetated buffer, trees, brick walls and pocket parks.
- Encourage land uses that have limited hours of operation and support the public safety of adjacent residential neighborhoods.
- Avoid vehicular access from commercial properties directly onto adjacent residential streets.



Land Uses and Intensity

Objective:

Provide for a mixture of uses that are organized around a "village concept."

Strategies:

- Recognize that East Franklin Street serves as a dividing line in this corridor between community commercial uses on the south and smaller-scale, neighborhood-oriented uses to the north.
- Develop uses that support the use of transit and alternatives to the automobile.
- Provide incentives for residential uses on the upper floors of buildings.
- Design small-scale buildings that create and express a sense of village (such as the Franklin Square office development off of U.S. 15-501).
- Allow primarily a mix of office and residential uses on the north side of Franklin Street, with some limited supporting retail uses (such as a small cafe, coffee shop or specialty shop).
- Limited supporting retail land uses on the north side of Franklin Street would have a pedestrian orientation and would be designed as an integral part of a development to primarily provide on-site services for employees and/or residents who live or work in the area.
- Where possible, organize retail uses around a public green that would function as open space (such as in front of Weaver Street Market at Carr Mill Mall).
- Avoid uses that are generators of high levels of automobile trips. Fast-food restaurants, convenience stores and gas stations are general examples of more intensive retail uses that are not appropriate for the north side of Franklin Street between Elliott Road and WCHL.

Building Design

Objective:

Design and locate buildings to provide a sense of visual interest, and to provide a sense of harmony along the street.

General Strategies:

- Utilize the Key Design Objectives noted in the Town's Comprehensive Plan Design Guidelines.
- Buildings should express human scale facades and a sense of public space to be enjoyed. Design should encourage people to walk, ride bicycles and use public transit as an alternative to the automobile.
- Promote a village-like flavor by developing medium-size buildings that are broken into smaller scale components at the ground level.
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas including the floodplain, resource conservation district and steep slopes.

Landscaping Strategies:

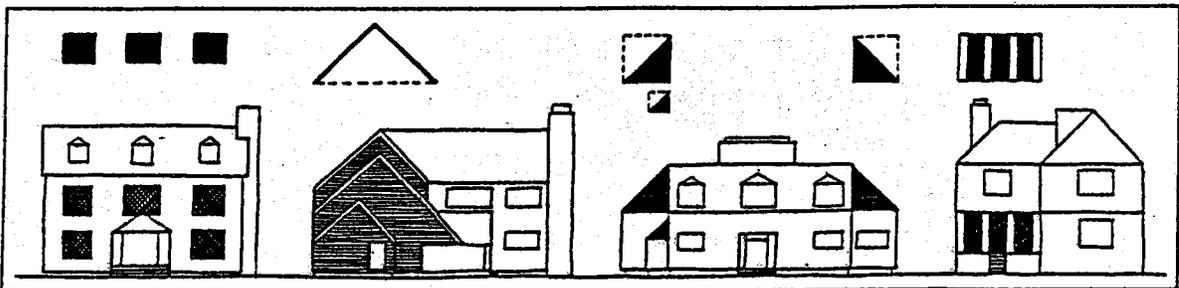
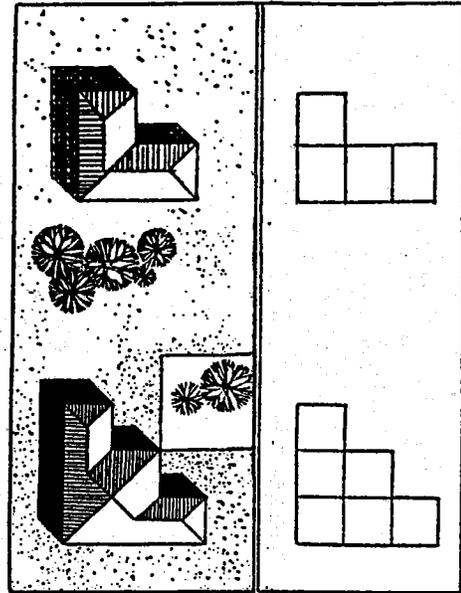
- Blend building design with natural terrain by use of terracing or other techniques that minimize grading.

Location/Setback Strategies:

- Design and locate buildings so that they provide visual interest and create enjoyable, human-scale spaces.
- Locate buildings close to the street where possible, to make them pedestrian-friendly. On the north side of Franklin Street, provide a rear buffer to existing residential neighborhoods.

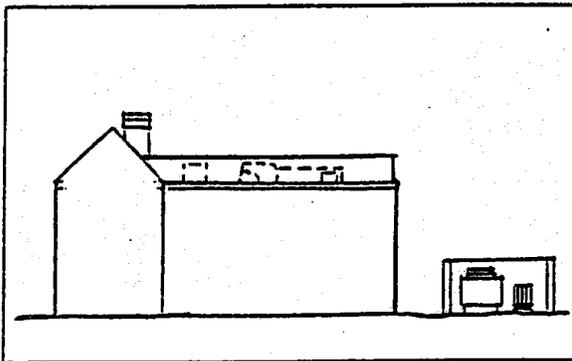
Facade Treatment Strategies:

- Building design should have offsets in walls and building masses to lend visual interest and to achieve a sense of "village."
- Give attention to the design compatibility of new structures with other existing structures on the same respective side of Franklin Street. In particular, review the size (footprint), height, proportion and scale, roof shapes, arrangement of windows setbacks, rhythm, materials, color and texture of structures.
- All elevations of a building's exterior design should be coordinated with regard to color, materials, architectural form and detailing. Avoid bright colors.
- Encourage the use of natural soft-color brick.



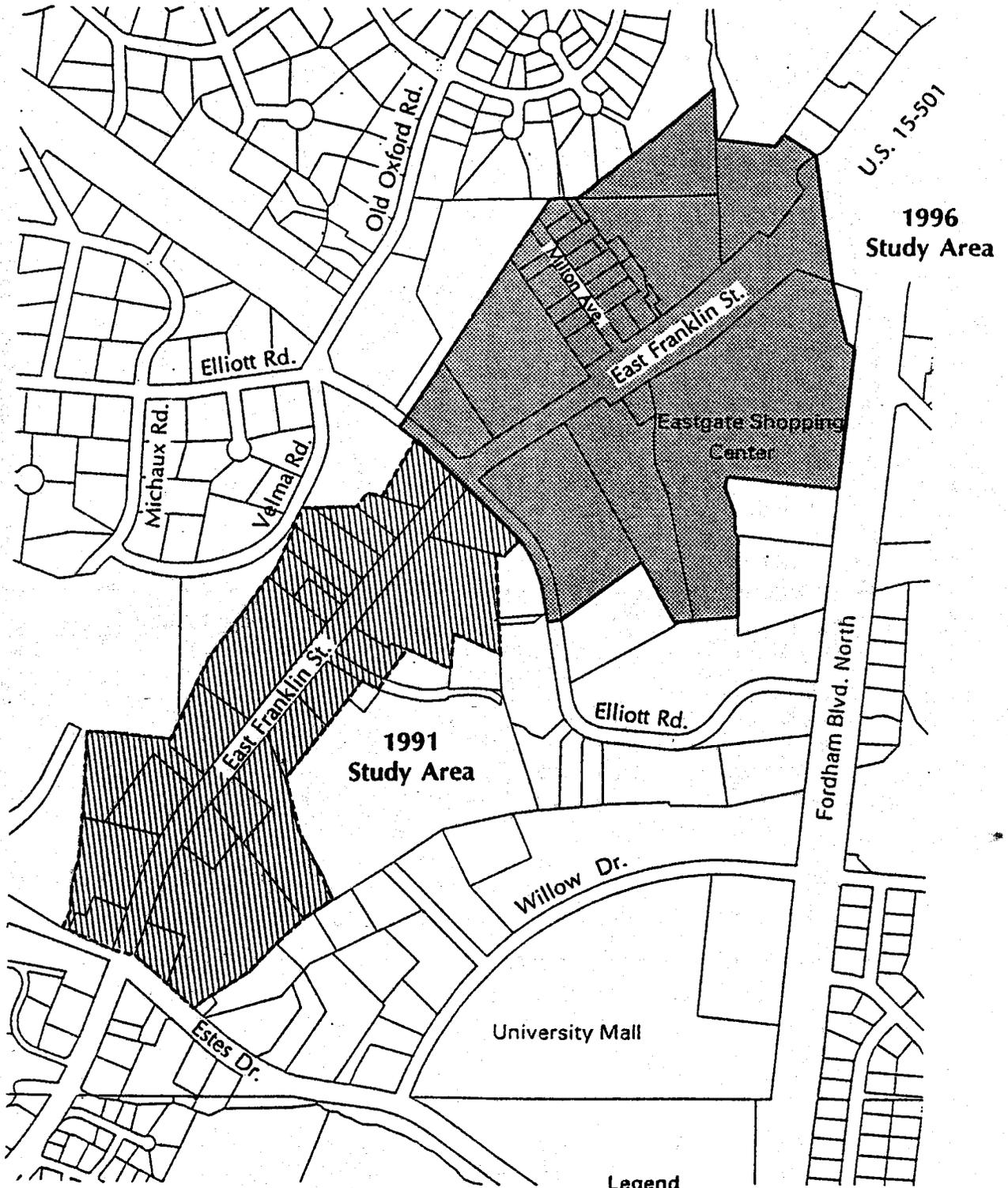
Roof Design Strategies:

- Roof shape, color and texture should be coordinated with treatment of the building's perimeter walls.
- Roof design should minimize the negative impact of roof protrusions by grouping vents, ducts and other utility structures together.
- All rooftop equipment should be screened from the view of people on the street.



East Franklin Street Corridor Study

Study Area



Chapel Hill GIS 1/96

- Legend**
-  1996 Corridor Study Area
 -  1991 Corridor Study Area

III. Property-Specific Guidelines

Little Property

This property is presently leased from the Little family by Lowes. The Lowes store is planning to move to a new location on U.S. 15-501 in 1997.

This section seeks to provide guidance on the future redevelopment or reuse of the Little property.

Guidelines for the Little Property:

Access issues are important for this property. Specifically, this study recommends that redevelopment of this site connect the parking lot on this site to the Village Plaza parking lot, providing vehicular circulation between this development and the shopping center. There should be just one curb cut onto Franklin Street. Shifting the curb cut on this site to the west so as to provide access to both the Little Property and the Village Plaza Shopping Center would improve access in this area.

As part of the "Gateway to the Town," redevelopment of this site should incorporate significant landscape plantings along Franklin Street. Planting new shrubs and trees (including evergreens, hollies and pink crepe myrtles) would serve to enhance the overall entranceway image of this corridor.

Extending the existing Village Plaza sidewalk and vegetated buffer between the sidewalk and the curb along the frontage of the Little Property would promote this property's entranceway

image. The intervening buffer and right-of-way between the sidewalk and curb could also be used to establish street tree character and provide pedestrians with more separation from the vehicles and noise of the street.

The Little Property is long and narrow in shape. Accordingly, the visibility of parking lots should be minimized by placing parking in the rear of the building or along the side of the building. Plantings and landscaping should be utilized to screen parking space from the view of the street. A small southern portion of the property is located in the 100-year floodplain and the Town's Resource Conservation District. The location of the building and parking should be designed to leave these areas undisturbed.

Pedestrian access is recommended to both the Village Plaza Shopping Center and the Eastgate Shopping Center. Encouraging uses that support the use of transit and alternatives to the automobile would be preferable, since two bus lines serve this corridor.

Redevelopment should seek to utilize the key design objectives noted on pages 8 and 9 of this study and further discussed in the Town's Comprehensive Plan Design Guidelines. In general, buildings should be designed to incorporate offsets in walls and building masses to lend visual interest while providing a pedestrian orientation.

Buildings should be broken into smaller scale components at the ground level. To break facades into smaller components, use cornices, canopies, balconies or arcades to delineate between the ground floor and upper levels.

Koman Property

This property is presently owned by Koman Properties which is located in St. Louis, Missouri.

This section seeks to provide guidance on the future development of the Koman property.

Guidelines for the Koman Property:

As the last significant undeveloped property on this portion of East Franklin Street, the Koman Property represents a key part of the "gateway" image associated with this corridor. The majority of the property rises above Franklin Street, gently sloping down to the road. Development on the property will be a prominent component of the view as people enter Chapel Hill. Therefore, as with any gateway, the location and spacing of structures, landscaping and general site design will all contribute to this property's special sense of place in this corridor.

This property's image will largely be influenced by its appearance from the street. This appearance will consist of both the property's frontage along East Franklin Street as well as the view into the site from Franklin Street.

The most visible feature of this site is the wide stand of mature trees along Franklin Street that serves as an integral part of this corridor's entranceway image. Any development of this property should include preservation of these important trees. It is possible that, as a trade-off for this preservation, more concentrated use of the central part of the property may need to be accommodated.

New plantings and sidewalks would serve to promote the entranceway image of the property's frontage along East Franklin Street. Development should supplement the existing pink crepe myrtles along Franklin Street with additional crepe myrtles, evergreens, hollies and flowering trees.

Sidewalks should be located as far away from the curb as possible, with the intervening space between the sidewalk and the curb being used to plant new trees and to enhance street tree character. Since the property's street frontage slopes down to the road, placing a sidewalk away from the curb so that it meanders through the trees at the top of the hill would best promote entranceway character while also providing pedestrians with more separation from the vehicles and noise of the streets.

The view into this site from Franklin Street will be most influenced by the preservation of significant trees, the placement of parking and building design. Maintaining the forested edge along the hillside at the front of this property would preserve a vista that is a significant part of this corridor's entranceway character.

The visibility of the parking on this site should be restricted by placing parking areas on the side and in the rear of the building(s) and screening the spaces from view.

Development should seek to utilize the key design objectives noted on pages 8 and 9 of this study and further discussed in the Town's Comprehensive Plan Design Guidelines. In particular, development should incorporate small-scale buildings that create and express a sense of village and have a residential flavor. Building heights could exceed two stories in order to preserve open space.

Buildings should be broken into smaller scale components at the ground level. To break facades into smaller components, use cornices, canopies, balconies or arcades to delineate between the ground floor and upper levels.

Buildings should be located behind the edge of trees at the front of the property, while still being close enough to the street to be pedestrian-accessible while also providing a rear buffer to existing residential neighborhoods. Special attention should be given to the design compatibility of new structures (materials, building

details and the arrangement of windows) with other structures in the study area. Building design should also blend with natural terrain by use of terracing or other techniques that minimize grading.

The development should minimize curb cuts onto Franklin Street while avoiding vehicular access to Elliott Road. An interior bicycle and pedestrian system should be provided. Development should incorporate adequate bus stops and bus shelters to support transit use.

Development should incorporate land uses that are compatible with residential uses and avoid the negative impacts of noise and lighting on neighboring residential areas. Development should provide significant buffering through the use of setbacks, a vegetated buffer, trees, berms,

brick walls, parking areas and pocket parks in order to protect surrounding adjacent residential neighborhoods.

This site could incorporate a mix of office and residential uses, with some limited retail uses (such as cafes, coffee shops and specialty shops). A key design element should be the creation of a public green, in the area of the mature stand of trees along the property's Franklin Street frontage. Retail uses should be designed as an integral part of a development for use by people living or working in the area and have a pedestrian flavor.

Land uses on this property should support the use of transit and alternatives to the automobile. Uses that are generators of high levels of automobile trips should be avoided.



United Carolina Bank Property

This property is presently owned by the United Carolina Bank. The Bank operates a building located on the southern portion of the lot. The northern portion of the property remains undeveloped.

This section seeks to provide guidance for development on the remainder of the United Carolina Bank property.

Guidelines for the United Carolina Bank Property:

Access to the northern portion of this property should be provided by the existing Bank curb cut onto Elliott Road. The visibility of parking lots should be restricted by placing them in the rear of the building and screening them from view.

Office uses are most appropriate for this site; however, care should be taken to avoid the negative impacts of noise and lighting on neighboring areas. Buffers should also be provided between development on this parcel and the Elliott Woods neighborhood.

Development should seek to utilize the key design objectives that are noted on pages 8 and 9 of this study and that are further discussed in the Town's Comprehensive Plan Design Guidelines. Building design should be compatible in form, proportion and spacing with the existing bank structure.

McClamroch Properties

These properties are presently owned by the McClamroch family. One of the lots is occupied by the WCHL building and the other lot is a meadow that includes the WCHL radio transmission tower.

A portion of the meadow is located in the Booker Creek Floodway (the portion of the creek that floods every year), and the majority of the remainder of this lot is located in the Booker Creek 100-year floodplain.

Guidelines for the McClamroch Properties:

These properties are recognized in the Town's 1988 Master Landscape Plan - Entranceway Corridors as being components of a key entranceway vista that the Town would like to preserve. The Town's Comprehensive Plan specifically calls for the view into the radio transmission tower meadows by WCHL to be preserved. Based on this goal and a large portion of the meadow being located in the 100-year floodplain and the Town's Resource Conservation District, development (including buildings or parking lots) should be avoided in this meadow.

Access to the WCHL building should be improved if redevelopment occurs. Parking should remain located behind the building, screened from Franklin Street.



IV. Implementation

These land use and design concepts are recommended as a guide for development and redevelopment in the East Franklin Street Corridor. The implementation of these concepts will require a cooperative effort between property owners, developers and the Town.

Comprehensive Plan

The first step is to consider adoption of these land use and design recommendations as a component of Chapel Hill's Comprehensive Plan. This would represent a part of Chapel Hill's continuing effort to update its plan and provide fine levels of detailed guidance for small areas.

Development Requests

Once adopted as a component of the Comprehensive Plan, these guidelines would become the basis and justification for requests for Conditional Use Zoning and Special Use Permits for properties in this corridor. Development is intended to be designed in a manner that is consistent with these guidelines.

Several of the undeveloped properties on the north side of Franklin Street are presently zoned for high-density residential development (Residential 4 and Residential 5). If one or more of these tracts becomes the subject of a development proposal and the land use(s) and site design conform with the recommendations suggested in this document, then the owner could request that the properties be rezoned to a Conditional Use zoning district that allows office and retail uses.

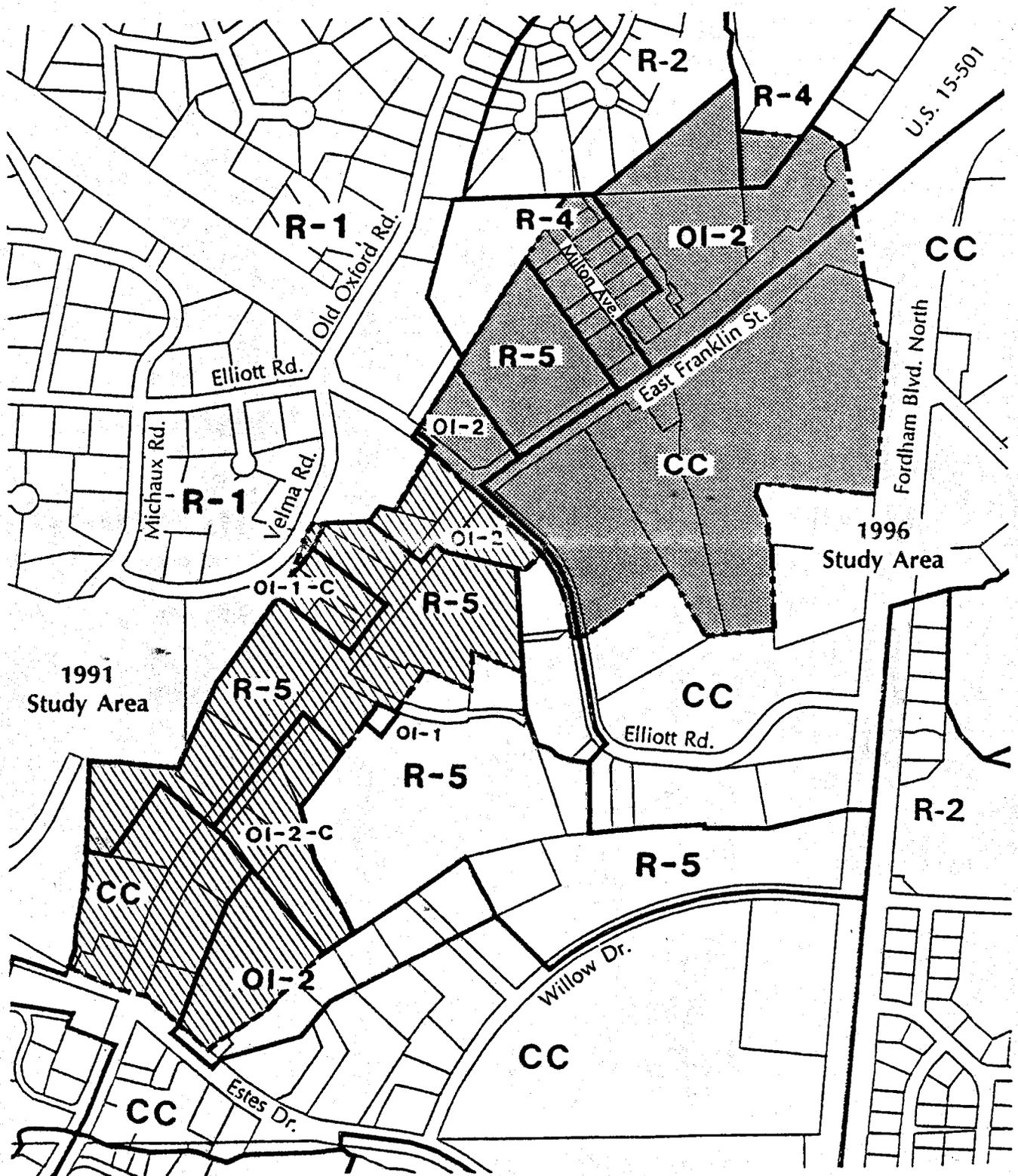
Simultaneous with the rezoning application would be submittal of a Special Use Permit application that would show exactly how the site would be designed. If the proposal were to demonstrate that it meets the objectives set forth for this corridor in the Comprehensive Plan, the Town Council would then be in a position to consider approving the rezoning and Special Use Permit.

Once conformity with the Town's Comprehensive Plan has been established, development could proceed with the assurance that it would enhance the gateway character of Franklin Street while protecting surrounding residential neighborhoods and preserving significant trees and entranceway vistas.



East Franklin Street Corridor Study

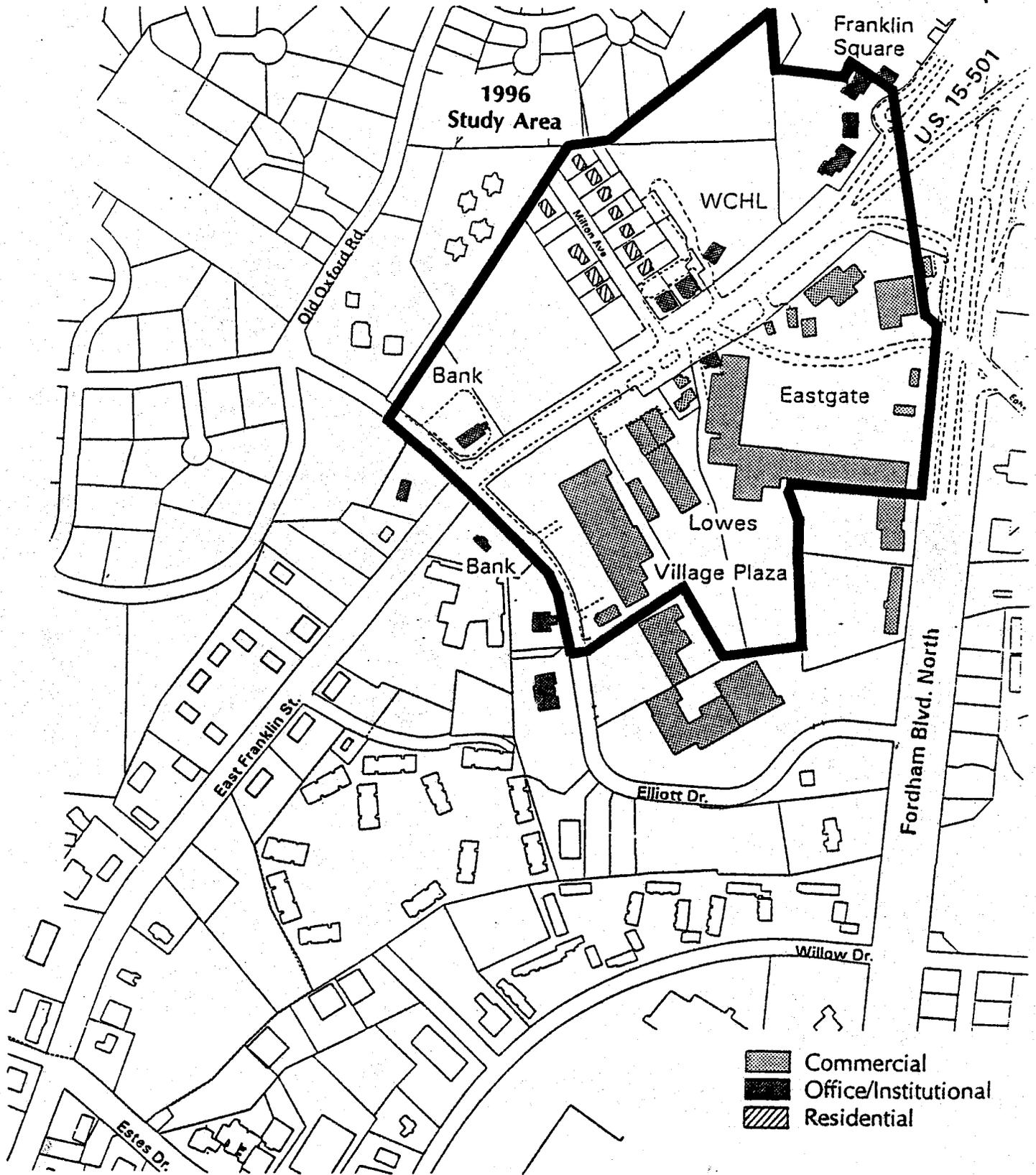
Study Area with Existing Zoning



Chapel Hill GIS 2/96

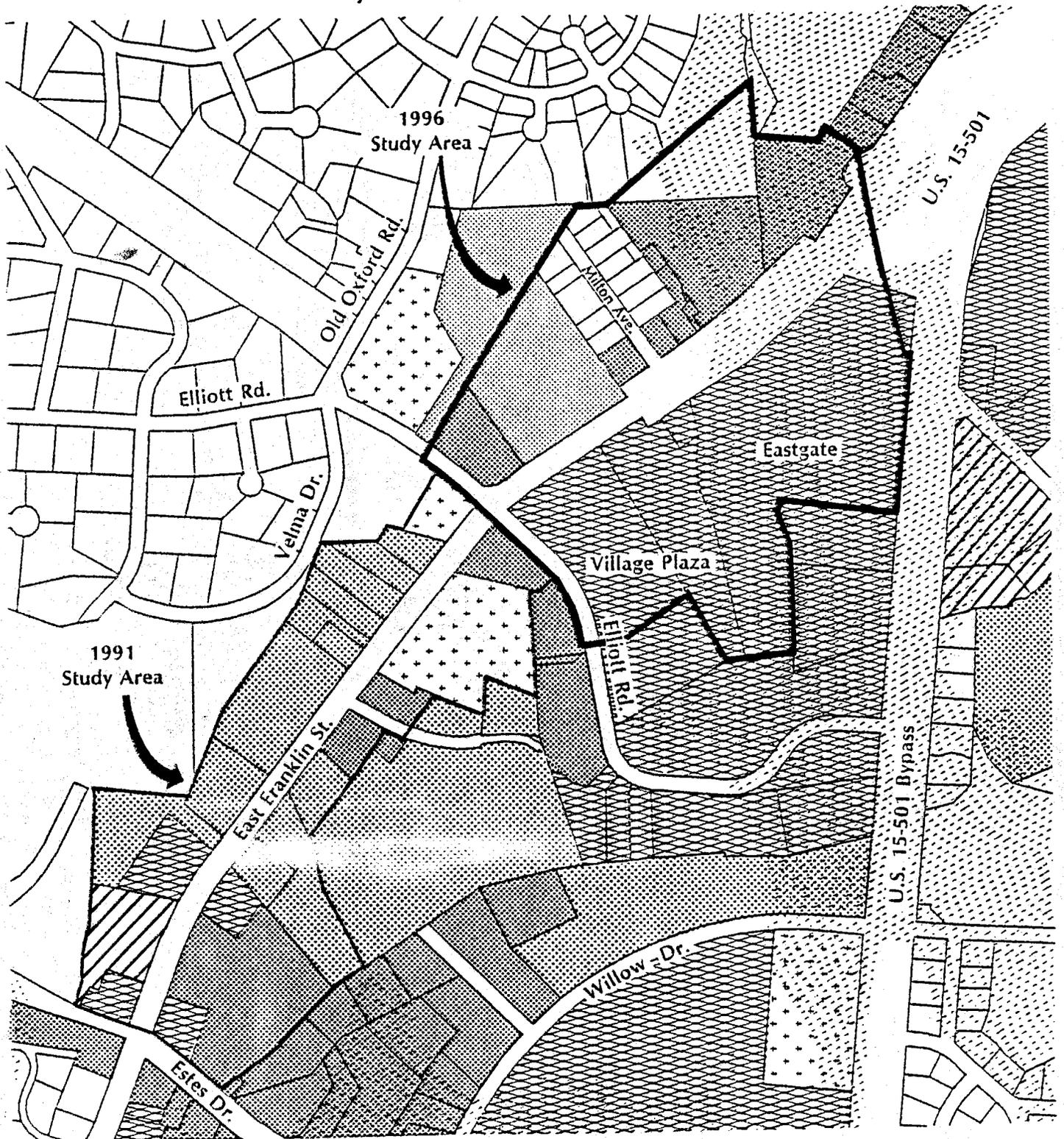
East Franklin Street Corridor Study

Study Area with Existing Land Use

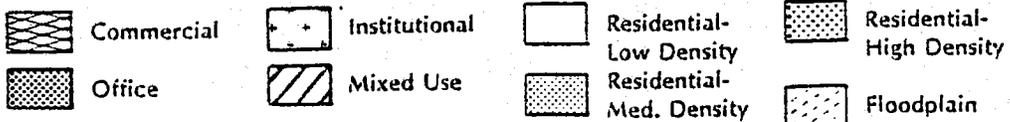


East Franklin Street Corridor Study

Study Areas with Land Use Plan

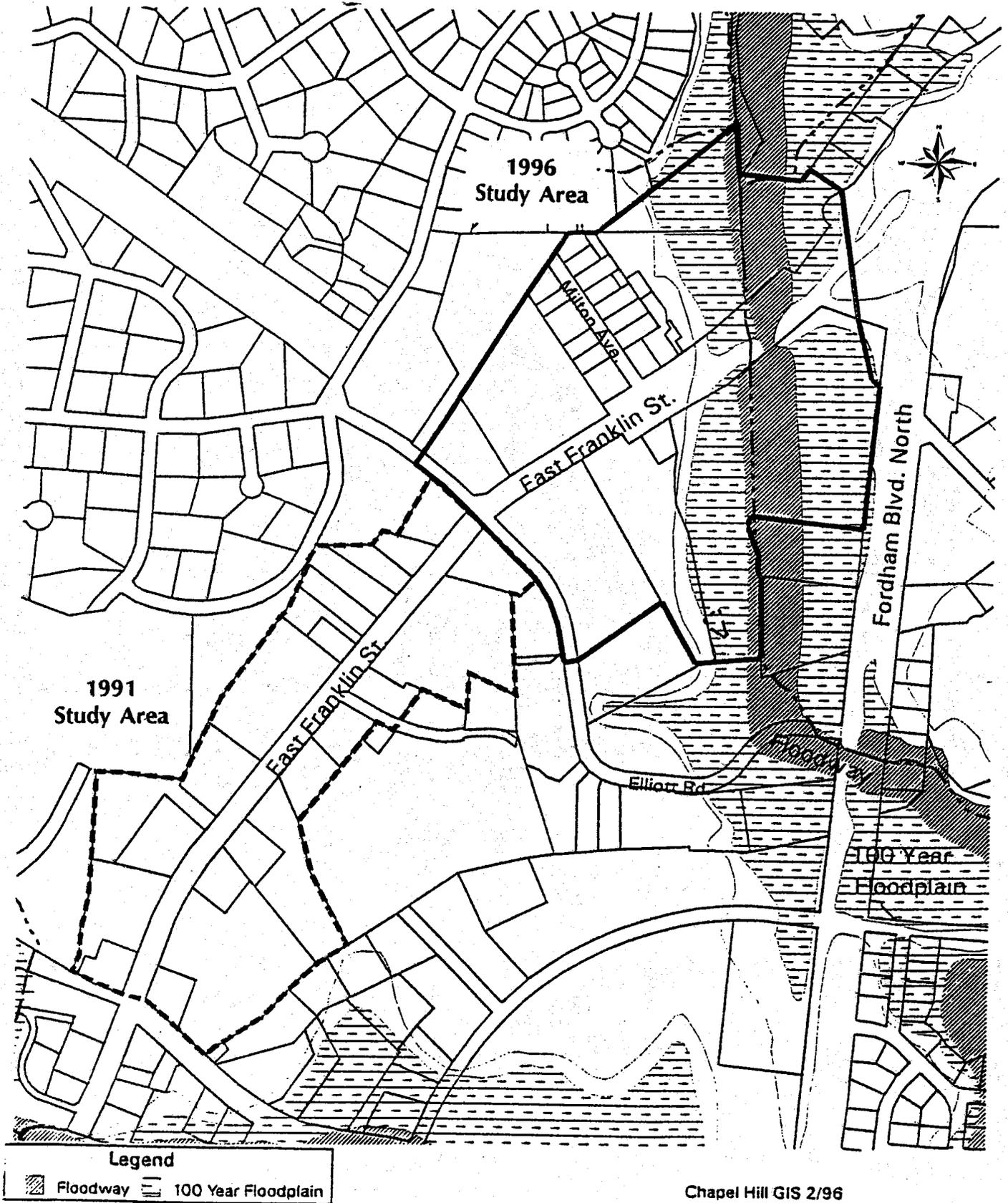


Land Use Categories:



East Franklin Street Corridor Study

Study Area with Floodplain



East Franklin Street Corridor Study

Conceptual Booker Creek Greenway

Phase II

