Agenda Item: Eastern Gateway Small Area Plan

DATE: October 11, 2021
FROM: Nadine Bennett, Senior Planner

Background/Issue:

The area at the Eastern tip of Matthews, bordered by I-485, Idlewild Road, and the Springwater and Windrow neighborhoods, is one of the few remaining sizable, largely undeveloped sites within Town limits. The area also serves as a gateway to Matthews from both Union County and I-485.

The approximately 120-acre study area is divided into 25 parcels with 14 different owners and currently contains a number of single-family dwellings, a Duke Energy substation, large wooded areas, and open fields. A number of the larger tracts are currently for sale or under contract or have recently been sold to development groups, and Town Planning staff has been fielding multiple questions from multiple groups wanting to know what can be done in this area. A large portion of the area was rezoned to R-VS in 2007, but the remainder is zoned R15 (minimum 15,000 square foot lots).

The most recent Matthew Land Use Plan, adopted in 2012, calls for the land to remain residential but notes that “infill opportunities such as townhomes, multi-family communities and coordinated R-VS developments are encouraged.”

Because of the heightened interest in the area, as well as the age of the land use plan and shifting demographics and development trends, the Town felt that it would be appropriate to take a holistic look at the entire area to determine if the 2012 recommendations are still relevant and appropriate for meeting the needs of the Matthews community of tomorrow.

Proposal/Solution

The Matthews Eastern Gateway Plan makes a number of recommendations for the area and includes a proposed site plan that Staff believes contains an appropriate mix of uses that will create additional (and much needed) housing for Matthews, as well as neighborhood-serving uses that will enhance the surrounding area. Among the recommendations are:

- Provide a mix of housing types, including single-family detached residential, townhomes and duplexes, and multi-family apartments in proximity to I-485.

- Single-family detached homes should be closest to the existing Windrow and Springwater neighborhoods to create a buffer between these neighborhoods and higher density housing.

- Recognize the importance of the public realm (including green spaces, street trees, public art, and street furniture) in creating a sense of place for the community.
• Focus on multi-modal transportation options. Make the area safe for pedestrians and cyclists as well as cars.

• Provide pedestrian access only to the Springwater and Windrow neighborhoods via Creekside Drive.

• Work with NCDOT to provide a traffic signal at the intersection of Idlewild and Davis Trace Drive.

• Focus on appropriate architecture for the area. (The final draft will include an appendix with further visual guidance on appropriate architecture.)

• Provide a central gathering place that will form the heart of the community.

• Encourage branding for the community to set it apart as a unique destination within Matthews.

Staff is continuing to add recommendations to the plan. By the time of the meeting, we should also have draft illustrations that will provide a feel for the type of development that is appropriate for the Eastern Gateway.

**Recommended Motion:**

No action is necessary, as this is a public hearing.
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## Introduction

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With its vibrant downtown, small-town feel, and access to big-city amenities, the Town of Matthews is one of the most highly-desired locations in the greater Charlotte region. As the Millennial generation settles down and smaller communities and suburbs with a more urban feel become even more popular, Matthews’ popularity will only continue to grow. Development pressure will likely increase, as demand for housing is already outpacing supply.

While interest in the Town is growing, and there is a need for additional housing, the supply of available undeveloped land is dwindling. The area at the Eastern tip of Matthews, bordered by I-485, Idlewild Road, and the Springwater and Windrow neighborhoods, is one of the few remaining sizable, largely undeveloped sites within Town limits. The area also serves as a gateway to Matthews from both Union County and I-485.

The approximately 120-acre study area is divided into 25 parcels with 14 different owners and currently contains a number of single-family dwellings, a Duke Energy substation, large wooded areas, and open fields. As of the time of this study, a number of the larger tracts are for sale or under contract or have recently been sold to development groups, and Town Planning staff has been fielding multiple questions from multiple groups wanting to know what can be done in this area. A large portion of the area was rezoned to R-VS in 2007 (see p. 7), but the remainder is zoned R15 (minimum 15,000 square foot lots).

The most recent Matthew Land Use Plan, adopted in 2012, calls for the land to remain residential but notes that “infill opportunities such as townhomes, multi-family communities and coordinated R-VS developments are encouraged.”

Because of the heightened interest in the area, as well as the age of the land use plan and shifting demographics and development trends, the Town felt that it would be appropriate to take a holistic look at the entire area to determine if the 2012 recommendations are still relevant and appropriate for meeting the needs of the Matthews community of tomorrow.

During the planning process, Town staff engaged the local community through a visual preference survey and a neighborhood open house; sought input from the development community; researched best practices in planning; analyzed trends in Matthews; and worked with a landscape architect/land planner to establish the right mix of uses for the area. The following pages address existing conditions in the Study Area and the Town, including demographic information. Later chapters will look at trends and best practices in planning. In the final chapter, there is a proposed site plan with specific recommendations.

While the Town understands that the study area may not develop exactly as portrayed on the site plan, it is important to be proactive and have a vision in place so that we are not reacting blindly to any opportunity that may arise. This Plan establishes that vision.
In 2007, a portion of the study area was rezoned to allow 38 single-family homes and 96 “pinwheel” style patio homes. The original plan submitted for rezoning included a connection to Creekside Drive in the Springwater neighborhood. Opposition from the Springwater and Windrow neighborhoods centered on this connection, and as a result, it was removed and replaced with a proposed covered pedestrian bridge with bollards on either end. The approved plan had two entrances: one on Stallings Road and one at Davis Trace. Approval of the plan was followed by the onset of the Great Recession in late 2007, and the neighborhood was not built. An attempt to change the conditions of the rezoning in 2010 to allow 64 single-family homes and 131 townhomes failed. Without a rezoning, only the exact layout approved in 2007 can be built on the property.
TRANSPORTATION OVERVIEW

IDLEWILD AND STALLINGS ROADS

PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

With the exception of a half-mile stretch of four-lane roadway crossing I-485, both Idlewild Road and Stallings Road are two-lane, undivided roadways. Both are maintained by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). Every two years, the NCDOT updates its State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP), a multi-year capital improvement document that outlines scheduling and funding of construction projects across the state. All proposed plans for State-maintained roads are included in this document.

The original plan for improvements to Idlewild Road (STIP Project Number U-4913) included widening from Stevens Mill Road in Stallings to the I-485 interchange in Matthews. The plan was extended to include road widening from I-485 to Barney Drive. This extension incorporated the relocation of Stallings Road to align with Hooks Road and added a roundabout at the new intersection of Idlewild and Stallings. The purpose of the project was to provide additional traffic carrying capacity along Idlewild, as well as to improve safety by providing a new, safer intersection for Stallings Road with Hooks Road. The plan was expected to incorporate a 10-foot wide sidepath with a landscaped buffer on the Matthews side of Idlewild, with sidewalks on the Mint Hill side. The I-485 interchange would be reconstructed as a “Diverging Diamond” interchange (DDI) at I-485. (See p. 32)

As a result of funding constraints, in early 2021, the improvements from I-485 to Barney Drive were eliminated from the project. This includes the relocation of Stallings Road, the roundabout, and any pedestrian improvements. The project will now end with the Diverging Diamond at the I-485 interchange. Any improvements recommended in this document would be the responsibility of the developer.

TRAFFIC COUNTS AND CRASHES

A major concern for people in neighborhoods surrounding the study area is traffic. The most common measure of traffic is the Annual Average Daily Traffic volume (AADT). This is the 24-hour count of traffic moving in both directions on a segment of road for an average traffic day. For NCDOT, these counts are collected on a two-year cycle. The Traffic Survey Group collects data using Portable Traffic Count monitoring stations over a two-day period.

As shown on p. 9, the most recent AADT on Idlewild between Thompson Road and I-485 is 13,000 vehicles per day. Between I-485 and Marshall Hooks Road in Union County, the traffic count is 24,500 vehicles per day. (For comparison purposes, Independence Boulevard between Sam Newell and Highway 51 has a traffic count of 58,500; Highway 51 between Independence Pointe Parkway and Independence Boulevard is 29,000; and Trade Street through downtown sees 15,500 vehicles per day.) As the traffic counts show, there are significantly more vehicles traveling Idlewild on the Union County side of I-485.

Crashes were also a concern for the community, particularly turning from Stallings onto Idlewild. Many people noted the poor visibility at this intersection. The illustration on p. 9 also shows the number of crashes at major intersections in the vicinity of the study area between 2016 and 2020.

STEVENS CREEK SUBAREA STUDY

In keeping with the Matthews vision of having a well-planned, multi-modal transportation system, in 2020, the Town adopted the Stevens Creek Subarea Study. After an extensive review of existing conditions, the study identified multiple projects to improve walking and bicycling connections from neighborhoods along Idlewild Road to the Stevens Creek Nature Preserve. While the recommendations rely heavily on working in conjunction with NCDOT on the U-4913 improvements, the recommended outcomes are still valid goals for connectivity in the area.

Among the recommendations were:

- A bicycle and pedestrian crossing with a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB, see p. 30) at the Idlewild/Hooks intersection
- 10-foot-wide Idlewild Road sidepath
- 12-foot-wide Stallings Road sidepath
- Greenway connection from Idlewild Road to Creekside Drive with pedestrian bridge
ENVIRONMENTAL OVERVIEW

WATER QUALITY BUFFERS

Water quality buffers are naturally vegetated “no build” zones along the banks of streams and lakes. These buffers help to decrease erosion of stream banks, reduce some flood risk by storing excess storm water runoff, and provide places for wildlife to build nests and find food.

Effective buffers have:

- A healthy, undisturbed cover of vegetation
- Native plants that are well-adapted to the local climate, pests, and disease
- A tree canopy that shades surface water and moderates water temperatures
- A dense root mass for reducing soil erosion
- Little need for maintenance, as the buffer mimics natural conditions
- No buildings; no construction; no asphalt, concrete, brick surfaces; and no fill dirt

The study area includes both Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) buffers and Post Construction Controls. The width of a water quality buffer and the activities that are allowed in that buffer can vary, depending on which rules apply. For specific rules related to water quality buffers, refer to the Town of Matthews Unified Development Ordinance.

Because of these regulations, the creek that divides the study area from the Windrow and Springwater neighborhoods provides a natural buffer between these existing neighborhoods and any new development.

FLOODPLAIN

A significant portion of the lower half of the study area is covered by floodplain along the North Fork Crooked Creek Tributary. This further restricts uses in the area.

MATTHEWS TRENDS

Trends in Matthews are consistent with those on the national level for the past decade. Nationally:

- Households with children are decreasing
- The Population 65+ is increasing
- The share of single-family housing is decreasing
- The share of multi-family units is increasing

8.2% Population Increase Since 2010

34.3% 2010
29.0% 2019
12.3% 2010
17.0% 2019

% of Households with Children under 18 is Decreasing
% of Population 65+ is increasing

$380,000
Median Home Selling Price, July 2021 per Realtor.com

$1,337
Average Rent, July 2021 per RentCafe.com

10,783 2010
12,512 2019

Occupied Housing Units

71.5%

While the share of single-family detached homes is decreasing in Matthews, they still make up more than 70% of the market

Unless otherwise noted, information comes from the 2010 and 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates.
Planning Process

Because of the intense development interest in the study area, the Town committed to completing the small area planning process in a timely manner.

The plan kicked off in May of 2021 with interviews with members of the Matthews Board of Commissioners. This was followed by a meeting of stakeholders, including Town staff; members of the Planning Board; a planner from the Town of Stallings; and a representative of the Windrow neighborhood.

An essential element of the planning process began in June with a visual preference survey. The survey was open to the entire Matthews community, but an announcement was also targeted to the nearby Windrow and Springwater neighborhoods. The survey was followed by an Open House at the Windrow Clubhouse. The viewpoints of the neighbors in Windrow and Springwater were particularly important to the Town. These established neighborhoods were largely built in the 1970s, with larger lots that were common for that time period. Residents are protective of their neighborhood and proud of their miles of equestrian and walking trails.

While some residents expressed opposition to any development in the area, others acknowledge that change is inevitable, and the key is to make sure that the change results in positive outcomes for Matthews and its residents. Still others are excited about the potential for access to nearby amenities.

The primary concerns expressed by neighbors were increased traffic on Idlewild, the possibility of cut-through traffic resulting from a connection to any new development, and negative impacts on the environment.

**OVERVIEW**

**PLAN TIMELINE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Plan Kick-Off/ Stakeholder Interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Community Outreach/Open House</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Draft Plan</td>
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<td>Aug</td>
<td>Work Session with Commissioners</td>
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<td>Sept</td>
<td>Planning Board Review/Public Hearing</td>
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<td>Oct</td>
<td>Adoption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Community Outreach/Survey</td>
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The visual preference survey included 11 sets of images. Respondents were asked to rank each set in order of preference and to comment on their choices. The final question asked respondents to share their vision for the study area. Preferred images are shown below. Full results can be found in the Appendix.

**RESULTS**

The on-line visual preference survey was open from June 14 to June 21. It was advertised on social media, through the Windrow Neighborhood NextDoor, and by word of mouth. We received 127 responses to the survey, with many thoughtful comments on architecture and development options.

**Representative Comments:**

- “We need single-story homes to accommodate retirees and others who don’t want two stories.”
- “The charm of this area is that each house is different and every property unique.”
- “Lots of green space, trees, and walkable with outside eating/seating areas.”
- “I like the idea of commercial shopping, coffee house, restaurants, bar—and I prefer single-family homes.”
- “Leave the land as it is!”
- “I’d like to see shops and single-family or townhomes. It would add to the enjoyability and sense of community to have places where people can spend time as families and neighbors.”

Of the 90 residents who offered a vision for the study area:

- 100% support some type of mixed use
- 75% leave the area as is or only single-family residential
- 25% of respondents live within the general vicinity of the study area

Responses include those who want no additional development of any kind in the area (“keep it green”), those who chose the area specifically for the lack of development, and those who support only single-family residential (preferably on large lots).

Responses include those who want a limited amount of retail/restaurants surrounded by single-family residential, as well as those who fully support a mix of uses and housing densities, including townhomes and apartments. Many specifically noted being able to walk to amenities.
On July 29, 2021, the Town hosted a Community Open House at the Windrow Neighborhood Clubhouse, providing an opportunity for the community to learn about the planning process, offer insights to Town staff, and react to draft site plans for the area.

The event was advertised over social media, through the Windrow neighborhood NextDoor, and with signs around the neighborhood. In addition, postcards were sent to property owners within a third of a mile of the study area.

In order to accommodate different schedules, there were two drop-in events during the day—one in the morning and one in the early evening. The two sessions were equally well-attended, with nearly 100 people passing through throughout the day.

Attendees were able to see results from and react to both the visual preference survey and early drafts of a suggested site plan for the area. In addition, Town staff was on hand to answer questions about a variety of issues.

While some people expressed concern about any development in the area, others supported some type of mixed use that would allow the possibility of shopping and dining without traveling far from home.

Traffic on Idlewild Road was a major concern for the neighborhood, and a majority of attendees were opposed to any street connection from the new development to Creekside Drive (as was shown on the draft site plan).

For more detailed results from the Open House, see the Appendix.
Open House attendees were presented with two possible site design options for the study area. The plans were designed based on the existing Matthews Future Land Use Plan calling for “infill opportunities such as townhomes, multi-family communities and coordinated R-VS developments” in the area, as well as interviews with stakeholders and the visual preference survey both showing support for a mix of uses. The design options were similar, with single-family detached residential closest to the existing neighborhoods.

Density increases with proximity to I-485, and there is a mix of retail and office uses in the central area. Both options include a road connection from Creekside to the new development, with a light at Davis Trace for easier access to Idlewild Road. Many attendees liked the idea of having small restaurants or shops nearby, but there was near unanimous opposition to the road connection to Creekside. As a result of this feedback, the road connection to Creekside was eliminated, leaving a pedestrian connection only.
BEST PRACTICES & TRENDS

In an effort to make the most appropriate recommendations for the Eastern Gateway, Town staff researched ongoing trends that will continue to influence housing choices in Matthews in the future. With a better understanding of the forces shaping current and future community needs, staff then researched best practices for better communities. The following is a summary of these trends and best practices.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Over recent decades, demographics in the US have been changing and influencing where and how people live. What we once thought of as the traditional American family—two parents and children—is no longer the primary type of household in the United States. Marriage rates have been declining since 1980, and fertility rates are currently at an all-time low. The structure of American households is shifting. Fewer than half of children today are growing up in a household with two married parents. Single-parent households are on the rise, and multi-generational and mixed family households are becoming more common. While the average family size is decreasing, the average household size has actually increased in the past ten years, due in part to housing costs and student debt leading to more need for unrelated roommates. The population is also aging. The youngest of the Baby Boomers are in their late 50s, and the percentage of Americans over 65 continues to increase. The Census predicts that people over the age of 65 will outnumber those under 18 by 2034. Older Americans are increasingly choosing to age in place—and if they’re not staying where they are, they’re downsizing.

According to the Brookings Institute, while demographics are shifting, and needs and preferences are changing, the housing industry is still catering to the traditional nuclear family with large single-family homes. However, for the up and coming generation of home-buyers, purchasing a large, new single-family home is increasingly out of reach. This means that in coming years, young people will be battling over the few available homes that suit their needs, preferences, and price points, while older adults will be unable to sell their larger homes.

WALKABLE COMMUNITIES

There is a growing demand for walkable communities in the US. The National Association of Realtors (NAR) conducts a semi-yearly Community and Transportation Survey to identify emerging trends in community preferences. One of the key takeaways from recent surveys is that people like to walk. Older Americans in particular are increasingly interested in walkable communities, and people who live in areas where there are places to walk express more satisfaction with their quality of life. As many urban dwellers of the Millennials generation begin having families and settling down, they seek more space than they had in city centers, but they also want walkable communities with the same access to services, restaurants, and entertainment they had in more urban areas.

WHAT IS A WALKABLE COMMUNITY?

A walkable community is one where there are options for different modes of transportation and a balance between pedestrians, bicyclists, cars, and transit. The car doesn’t have to always be the first and only choice. Walking should be comfortable and safe—and there needs to be a place to walk to. Successful walkable communities generally have a mix of uses so that people have an opportunity to live, shop, dine, play, and even work without having to rely solely on their car. These are the types of neighborhoods that were common before World War II but fell out of fashion as single-family, auto-oriented neighborhoods began to dominate the landscape.
EXAMPLES OF WALKABLE/MIXED-USE COMMUNITIES

There are a number of successful mixed-use, walkable communities in North and South Carolina. Some have developed as planned communities, while others have evolved more organically over time. The communities are of varying sizes—some far larger than would be appropriate in this area of Matthews—however, there are elements that are common to all of them. Neighborhood businesses are designed to meet the needs of the residents; there is a diversity of housing options; and there is enough density to support the businesses and amenities. These communities generally have access to some type of open space; a place for the community to gather; and wide sidewalks to accommodate outdoor dining, street furniture, and pedestrians. Most importantly, they each have a distinct sense of place and community.

BAXTER VILLAGE, FORT MILL, SC

Baxter Village was built on a portion of 7,000 acres of land formerly owned by Fort Mill’s Close family. The family was interested in building a compact, traditional community unlike typical, sprawling suburbia. Begun in 1998, Baxter Village is now an award-winning and nationally-recognized community. Baxter Village Town Center houses shops, restaurants, offices, and civic spaces, and the entire community now contains 1,400 homes, including single-family residential, townhomes, and senior living.

PATRICK SQUARE, CLEMSON, SC

The 179-acre mixed-use development was begun in 2009 and provides diverse housing opportunities, including single-family homes, townhomes, duplexes, single-story villas, and senior housing—all with historically-inspired Southern architecture and access to open space. All of the homes are within easy walking distance of the Town Center, which makes up approximately one-third of the development. Patrick Square Town Center is home to restaurants, retail, office space, and a boutique hotel. In 2015, the South Carolina Homebuilders Association named Patrick Square the “Community of the Year.”
ANTIQUITY, CORNELIUS, NC

Antiquity sits on approximately 120 acres near downtown Cornelius. The community contains single-family detached residential lots, along with townhomes, apartments, retail, office, and restaurants. Single-family lots are around a tenth of an acre, but many of them front on HOA-maintained green spaces. There are two entryways to Antiquity, including a covered bridge with a pedestrian path to the Antiquity Greenway. There are also a number of stub streets to increase connectivity when the neighboring properties develop.

NORTH END, MATTHEWS, NC

On a smaller scale and closer to home is Matthews’ own North End. The area includes retail and services, as well as both apartments and townhomes—all within walking distance of downtown’s additional amenities. The North End area did not arrive fully formed as a single development. One project built upon the next (with a lot of guidance from the Town) until a true neighborhood was created.
RENTAL TRENDS

In 2019, approximately 36% of housing units were renter-occupied—the highest share of renters since 1960. While overall growth in the rental population seems to have plateaued in recent years, the share of non-traditional renters continues to grow. While the Great Recession forced many to rent out of necessity, in the past decade, there has been an increase in the number of households who rent by choice.

WHO ARE THE NEW RENTERS?

Traditionally, older Americans have been less likely to rent. However, the number of renters in their early 60s has increased dramatically in the past decade—the biggest increase of any age group. Many Baby Boomers are downsizing and leaving behind their big yards and houses and the burden of maintenance that comes with them. They need less space, and they want someone else to take care of it. In addition, apartments are often located in areas that are either walkable or a short drive to services, and many contain on-site amenities.

Millennials, born roughly between 1980 and 1996, are far less likely to be homeowners than previous generations. They are delaying marriage, family, and homeownership and often live in higher-priced urban areas where they are priced out of the housing market. As the oldest Millennials enter their 40s, their homeownership rates will increase but are still expected to lag behind previous generations.

High-income households represent the fastest-growing segment of the rental housing market and are most prevalent in mid-size, up-and-coming metropolitan areas. This growing share of high-income renters looks like what would traditionally have been homeowners: college educated, young married couples, and families with children. Because of the increase in housing costs and mortgage credit requirements, even households making six figures are being priced out of the market.

RENTAL STOCK ISSUES

After the Great Recession, investors took advantage of single-family housing vacancies for purchase as rental units. Since that time, to meet the increasing demand from high-income rentals households, construction of new units has shifted to large apartment buildings. These two trends have led to a reduction in units in small and mid-sized buildings, which tend to be older and generally more affordable. In addition, in some cases, high-income renters are choosing rental units that would otherwise be affordable to those with lower incomes, further reducing the stock for middle- and lower-income households. This dynamic also drives up rents. As a result, while the overall share of cost-burdened renters has decreased in the past decade, it is again on the rise, particularly among middle- and lower-income households.

BUILD TO RENT (BTR) COMMUNITIES

In a time when even households making six figures may be unable to afford a home, single-family rentals are one of the fastest growing sectors of the U.S. housing market. BTR communities appeal to those who want the yard and additional space associated with a single-family home, but don’t have the savings for a downpayment. They also work for renters-by-choice, who want freedom from the maintenance, upkeep, and costs that come with being a homeowner or are unwilling to commit to one place long-term.

Since the Great Recession, investors have been buying individual single-family homes as rental properties. The new twist with BTR is that entire communities are being built specifically for the rental market. These communities have the look and feel of “real” subdivisions, with backyards, sidewalks, and locations in the suburbs. Among the advantages (apart from not needing a downpayment on the mortgage) are shared amenities, on-site property management and maintenance, larger living spaces than traditional apartments, and predictable costs.

Among the disadvantages are that residents aren’t building equity. The national homeownership rate is considered to be one of the most important indicators of how well the country’s socioeconomic system is working for the typical American family. A high homeownership rate shows that many families have a large enough income to both cover monthly living costs and have enough left over to save for a downpayment. In addition, home ownership is seen as one of the primary means of wealth building, through home value appreciation and increased equity. This wealth generation generally increases the quality of life for families; provides major social and economic benefits; has intergenerational repercussions; and is particularly important for low-income households and households of color.

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A SENSE OF PLACE

Sense of place stems from a community’s unique qualities and characteristics. Distinctiveness comes from streetscapes and architecture; cultural events; parks and open space; and the natural environment—and the way the community interacts with all of these elements. Making a great place doesn’t happen by accident. There are many key attributes and design features needed to create successful places, but as described below, the Project for Public Spaces defines four essential elements of successful places. Taken together, these four, broad categories create the memorable identity and sense of community that the people of Matthews value.

PLACEMAKING

SOCIALITY

When people are able to meet and greet their neighbors, mingle with friends, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, they tend to feel a stronger sense of attachment to their community.

USES AND ACTIVITIES

The area should provide unique experiences and settings for gathering and fun. Activities are the foundation of great places. Places should be about people, and people need something to do. Activities can include walking, eating, meeting friends, or shopping. The area should promote active engagement of people of diverse backgrounds and ages.

COMFORT AND IMAGE

The area should be attractive and inviting and also foster a sense of safety and security. For a place to be used, people have to feel comfortable. There should be places to sit, and walking should feel protected and safe.

ACCESS AND LINKAGES

Destinations should be convenient and safely connected. Successful places are easy to get to and around—by foot, by bike, and by car.

THE PUBLIC REALM

The “Public Realm” is the portion of the Town that is shared by members of the community. It encompasses public streets, sidewalks, and outdoor spaces, including parks, greens, plazas, public art, and street furniture. These elements contribute to the character of a place and foster interaction among community members.

ARCHITECTURAL BUILDING DESIGN

Buildings frame our public spaces, and architectural design is a major contributor to our experience of place.

PUBLIC ART

Public art humanizes the built environment and invigorates public spaces. It adds a sense of fun and encourages people to pay attention to their environment. Public art can become a unique identifier for a place and set it apart from other spaces.

STREET FURNITURE

Street furniture is more than just a place to sit. Street furniture sends the message that visitors are welcome and encouraged to stay.

GREEN SPACES

Preserved tree stands, streams, and wetlands are good for the environment, and they’re good for people, too. Access to open space can promote both mental and physical health.

Green spaces aren’t just those that are preserved in their natural state. Urban green spaces—parks, squares, playgrounds, walking trails, gardens—can encourage activity and relieve stress at the same time.

STREET TREES

Tree-lined streets provide order to public spaces. A mature tree canopy is like the ceiling of the shared public realm. Trees are decorative, but they also provide shade for a more comfortable environment and a barrier between pedestrians and the street.

PUBLIC STREETS

Streets serve as the connectors between spaces and should be designed with more than the car in mind. Streets should be designed to enable safe and convenient access for users of all ages and abilities, regardless of their mode of transportation.
PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Traffic calming uses a combination of measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for non-motorized street users. Traffic calming consists of physical design and other measures put in place on new and existing roads to reduce vehicle speeds and improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

RAISED CROSSWALK

A raised crosswalk is a higher section of pavement with a marked crosswalk. It is placed across the street to encourage drivers to slow down. The crosswalks usually have sloped ramps for the driver leading and following the flat raised-crosswalk section. Raised crosswalks reduce vehicle speeds and increase pedestrian visibility and can be used on minor collector streets or residential streets with moderate traffic.

RECTANGULAR RAPID FLASHING BEACON

The rectangular rapid flash beacon (RRFB), is a traffic control device designed to increase driver awareness of pedestrians crossing roadways at marked midblock crossings or uncontrolled intersections. The beacons consist of rectangular shaped amber LEDs that flash in a rapid flickering pattern. The unique flash elicits a greater response from drivers than traditional methods. The lights supplement warning signs and are activated by the pedestrian or cyclist.

PEDESTRIAN HYBRID BEACON (PHB)

A Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon (PHB) is a traffic control device used to stop road traffic and allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross safely, stopping traffic only as needed. The signal head has two circular red lights over a single yellow light. Signals are faced in both directions. Overhead signs labeled “Crosswalk” and “Stop on Red” indicate that the location is associated with a pedestrian crosswalk. Unlike a traffic signal, the PHB remains dark until a pedestrian or cyclist activates it via pushbutton. When activated, the beacon displays a sequence of flashing and solid lights that indicate the pedestrian walk interval and when it is safe for drivers to proceed. A solid red light requires drivers to stop while pedestrians have the right-of-way to cross the street. Drivers may proceed if the crosswalk is clear.

The PHB is often considered for installation at locations where pedestrians need to cross and vehicle speeds or volumes are high, but traffic signal warrants are not met. These devices have been successfully used at school crossings, parks, churches, and other pedestrian crossings on multilane streets. PHBs are typically installed on mast arms over midblock pedestrian crossings.
BULB-OUTS/CURB EXTENSIONS
Bulb-outs (also known as curb extensions) visually and physically narrow the roadway, creating safer and shorter crossings for pedestrians, while increasing the available space for street furniture, benches, plantings, and street trees. Bulb-outs increase the overall visibility of pedestrians by aligning them with the parking lane and reducing the crossing distance.

DIVERGING DIAMOND INTERCHANGE
Diverging Diamond interchanges are built to move high volumes of traffic without increasing the number of lanes or traffic signals and provide easier access to an interstate. If designed correctly, the interchanges can also make crossings easier for pedestrians and cyclists by providing signalization and a protected center island in the middle of the road.

LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT
Low Impact Development (LID) is a stormwater management technique that attempts to mimic natural systems, primarily through gardens and landscaping, while also creating a functional stormwater run-off system.

The Matthews Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) defines LID as “the integration of site ecology and environmental goals and requirements into all phases of urban planning and design from the individual residential lot level to the entire watershed.”

Examples of the LID approach include reducing impervious surfaces; managing storm water closer to the source and avoiding large centralized management devices; phased grading; and vegetated conveyances instead of storm drain piping.

Below are just a few of the many possible LID approaches.

- Permeable pavers break up impervious surfaces to allow for more natural infiltration. They can control water quantity in areas that typically experience flooding—like parking lots.

- Bioswales are shallow depressions that allow for increased water storage capacity, which can significantly slow down the rate of runoff during large storms. Native plants can act as natural absorbers. Bioswales are frequently used in or near parking lots.

- Rain gardens function as bioretention systems that collect rainwater and allow infiltration of stormwater runoff. They can be used in parking lots but are also effective in residential areas.

- When planted with grasses and flowering perennials, rain gardens can help to reduce residential property runoff, help filter out pollutants, and provide an area for birds, butterflies, and other wildlife.
Because of the Duke substation, floodplain in the area, and a number of property owners who intend to stay in place in the southern portion of the study area, the site plan focuses on approximately 80 acres in the northern portion of the area. Should the remaining portion of the study area open for development in the future, the general design guidelines outlined here should be followed.

The recommended design concept emphasizes a diverse mix of land uses within walking distance of each other. The community offers a variety of housing choices, including single-family detached homes, townhomes, duplexes, garage apartments, apartment complexes, and apartments over shops. Ideally, the houses and apartments will be of assorted sizes and price points to accommodate a wide variety of people of different backgrounds, stages of life, and economic status. The entire area is connected by a comprehensive street and walkway system and includes public gathering spaces where people can socialize and connect with the larger community.

It is understood that with multiple potential property owners and differing timelines, the area will not develop exactly as shown in the recommended site design. However, there are a number of elements of the plan that are considered essential to creating a successful community. Specific recommendations and strategies are outlined in the following pages.

**OVERVIEW**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**
OVERVIEW
The recommended layout combines vertical mixed-use (a combination of different uses within a single building) and horizontal mixed-use (a mix of uses in close proximity but in their own, separate buildings). Residential density will generally increase from single-family detached homes abutting the existing Windrow and Springwater neighborhoods to single-family attached residential uses in the central area, and finally, the highest density residential uses closest to I-485. This increased density is necessary to support non-residential uses.

The heart of the community is a public green, surrounded by a mix of mostly non-residential uses, with some residential over retail. The layout of the entire area places a focus on walkability both within the development and from the surrounding neighborhoods.

SITE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS
1. A primary concern expressed during the public outreach portion of the planning process was traffic on Idlewild Road. The success of this plan—of any future development in this area—hinges on the ability to mitigate traffic impacts. NCDOT has noted in discussions with the Town that Davis Trace Drive is the closest they would allow a new traffic signal to the existing signal at the I-485 interchange. This is an essential element of the plan.

2. Non-residential uses in the Eastern Gateway should be internally focused, rather than fronting on Idlewild Road. Parking areas will be screened from the road.

3. A common central gathering place will be an essential element of the area. The space should be faced on at least two sides by active uses to provide a sense of safety and a feeling of activity within the space. The space should be inviting to all—visitors and residents alike.

4. High quality pedestrian crossings should be provided at strategic locations throughout the area, including along Idlewild and Stallings Roads. Possible options include Bulb-outs, raised crossings, Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB), and Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHB). For a detailed description of these options, see pages 30-32. Specific locations and treatments will be determined as part of the development process.

5. Water quality buffers in the area provide an opportunity for undisturbed open space.

6. The site should include pedestrian access to Creekside Drive in the Springwater neighborhood, as was previously approved in the Silver Oaks rezoning. This provides access to the neighborhood-serving uses without additional traffic in Springwater and Windrow.

7. While the Springwater and Windrow neighborhoods continue to oppose an extension of Creekside Drive, and it is not recommended as a part of this plan, there may come a time in the future when such a connection makes sense. In order to keep this possibility open, street networks and building configurations should leave open the potential.

8. Recommendations from the Stevens Creek Sub-Area Study should be followed, including a 10’-wide multi-use path along Idlewild Road and a 12’-wide multi-use path along Stallings Road.

9. While I-485 is not a part of the study area, planned reconstruction of the Idlewild interchange will have an impact on surrounding neighborhoods. The planned Diverging Diamond should provide safe pedestrian accommodation, including a protected center walkway.

10. There should be a substantial tree save/buffer between the site and I-485.
SENSE OF PLACE

As a gateway into the Town, the area should be developed in a manner that presents a positive image of Matthews. The mix of uses, the quality of architecture and open space, and the integration of public art will not only make a statement about the Town as people arrive or pass through, but leave a positive impression on those regularly shopping, dining, working, and living in the area. Attention to detail can ensure this interchange becomes a welcoming entryway, while creating a destination distinguished from the rest of the town.

- Typical highway interchange uses (including gas stations and drive-through restaurants) should be prohibited.
- Developers should consider coordinated branding for the neighborhood to present it as a unique destination.
- The neighborhood should incorporate public art to enrich the physical environment and engender community pride.
- Non-residential uses in the area should be low-intensity, unobtrusive, and at a scale and design compatible with nearby residential development.
- Architecture is a fundamental element in creating a sense of place and community. It should be inviting and in harmony with the character of Matthews. This has traditionally been accomplished by incorporating brick or stone into building facades, emulating architectural styles commonly found in the region. However, creating new buildings that are in harmony with the character of Matthews does not have to limit architectural design to older or traditional building styles. Materials and architectural elements similar to those found throughout Matthews may be organized in ways that put a unique stamp on this area. (Additional guidance on preferred architectural styles can be found in the appendix.)
- Recognize the importance of the public realm in creating a sense of place in the community. The public realm should incorporate public art; wide and inviting sidewalks to accommodate street furniture and outdoor dining; street trees; and public green spaces.
- Retail uses should be street and pedestrian oriented.
- There should be a centrally located green space to serve as the organizing element around which nonresidential uses are located.

HOUSING

Housing should be available for people in all economic situations and stages of life to create a vibrant and diverse community.

- Home types should include single-family (both attached and detached), as well as apartment over retail uses, and multi-family apartment buildings. Neighborhoods that include a mix of housing types provide more opportunities for residents to age in place.
- Single-story home options should be available to seniors and others for whom this is the preferred choice.
- Housing options should be available at a wide range of price points. Developers should consider setting aside a percentage of homes for workforce housing.
- Residential units should be incorporated into upper floors of buildings when the mix of uses are compatible.

MOBILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- Streets often make up the largest portion of the public realm. Streets should be attractive, inviting, accessible, safe, and comfortable for all users. Great streets place people first, whether they’re in cars, on a bike, on a scooter, or walking.
- Provide safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access to the neighborhood center from surrounding residential areas, as well as to the Stevens Creek Nature Preserve. Specific techniques for addressing pedestrian safety are discussed on p. 30-32.
- Street networks should provide multiple route options. An interconnected system helps to disperse traffic and limit congestion.

ENVIRONMENT

- Any new development within the area will be required to meet storm water detention regulations. Consider using Low Impact Development techniques to meet these requirements.
- Land in water quality buffers should be preserved in its natural state.
- Open spaces should be well integrated into the community and should serve a variety of functions.
- Tree save for the overall area should be substantial. (XX%)
Reserved for concept drawings
Reserved for concept drawings
VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY RESULTS

The following pages show the images from the survey in ranked order of preference, with representative comments for each image.

APARTMENTS

1. "I like the tree-lined streets and wide sidewalks."
   "Retail space could be available below."
   "I like the different heights and textures."
   "Looks more high end."

2. "Uses different materials and articulation to break up the facade."
   "Looks more residential and less like an office/hotel."
   "The smallest building. The most tree/nature."
   "Complements historic architecture more."

3. "Reminds me of a hotel."
   "Looks like a nursing home."
   "Seems cold and generic."

4. "Looks too imposing."
   "Looks like an institution."
   "Too urban."
**APARTMENTS**

1. "Looks like a home"
   - "Traditional/transitional, yet still somewhat residential feel"
   - "Prefers smaller/three story x 4+ stories"
   - "Compact and walkable"

2. "I like the yard area for families"
   - "Too big"
   - "Like the green space"

3. "Looks interesting with roof line and colors"

4. "Looks dated"
   - "Looks like cheap construction"
   - "Doesn’t fit in with this area"

**MULTI-FAMILY**

1. "Looks more appropriate for suburban design"
   - "Has more of a single-family residential feel"
   - "The front porches are inviting"
   - "Looks like a home"

2. "Like the brick"
   - "Brick will stay nice looking longer"
   - "More traditional family feel"

3. "Looks to be more pedestrian"
   - "Like the green space"
   - "Too institutional"

4. "Lacks uniformity"
   - "I like the different architectural details"
   - "Looks crowded"
MULTI-FAMILY

1. "They look like individual homes"
   "I like the garages"
   "Looks the most upscale"
   "Looks more reflective of our area"

2. "I like the traditional bungalow style"

3. "Love the ranch-style design. These are needed as senior citizen's downsize"
   "Similar to existing homes, yet slightly more modern"
   "Single floor villas for seniors"

4. "Looks cheap"
   "Too monotone"
   "Looks like a motel"

SINGLE FAMILY

1. "Looking for unique details"
   "Not as close to the road"
   "Good yard space"
   "Driveways are good—no on-street parking"

2. "Quaint and has character"
   "Historic and charming"

3. "Porches and pocket parks make it attractive"

4. "Too cookie-cutter"
SINGLE FAMILY

1. Love for brick houses set farther apart.
   • Most traditional and neighborhood
   • Looks like a real neighborhood
   • Looks inviting

2. Exterior appeal
   • Traditional single-family residential
   • I like the larger houses and lots to help property values
   • Upscale suburban homes

3. Homes too close together
   • Like the more urban feel
   • Less yard means less maintenance

4. Too cookie-cutter
   • Too boxy and cheap
   • Looks very dated

NON-RESIDENTIAL

1. I like the neighborhood feel
   • I would love restaurants and shopping to serve the community
   • Mixed use would probably be well received in the area
   • Outdoor seating, unique architecture

2. We need more businesses & restaurants, not gas stations & fast food
   • Complements a historic architecture
   • The stonework helps blend commercial buildings with the surroundings

3. No to fast food and gas stations
   • Small-town, family-owned businesses preferred over fast food/gas stations

4. Another gas station would not be ideal for this area
   • We already have gas stations in all directions
NON-RESIDENTIAL

1. More traditional, like the surrounding neighborhood
   - "It's a reminder of the charm. Make it interesting!"
   - "Has no character"
   - "Boring"

2. Having a cute, walkable business area would be great (restaurants, shops)
   - "Upright and classy looking"
   - "Has a local, downtown feel"
   - "I love the small town feel of walking down the sidewalk to stores"

3. "Hometown small business feel"
   - "I like the charm. Make it interesting!"
   - "Has no character"
   - "Boring"

4. "The building doesn’t fit the rest of the surroundings"
   - "Too modern for suburbia"
   - "Too industrial looking"

NON-RESIDENTIAL

1. "Looks safe and inviting"
   - "Develop and cultivate a look that is unique to this area"
   - "Traditional look"

2. "Would love to see stores/restaurants that also do well with planting (native plants to benefit wildlife) and large open grassy areas to relax and play"
   - "I love the open space"
   - "Has outdoor friendly areas"

3. "We need no more grocery stores!"
   - "There are so many grocery store options in this area. No need for more"

4. "We don’t need gas stations"
   - "No gas stations or fast food"
**MIXED USE**
Office/Retail/Residential

1. “Interesting architecture always wins.”
   “I like all of them, but the wider path and the character make this the best.”
   “More sidewalks and landscaping.”
   “Brick, sidewalks, open area.”

2. “Love the brick!”
   “Has a lot of character.”
   “Nice brick buildings and walkway.”

3. “Too much glass can appear too modern (versus classic) and can quickly become outdated.”
   “May be too modern for the character of Matthews.”

4. “Suits the surroundings.”
   “Belongs more in a downtown setting.”
   “Not terrible but a bit bland.”
   “Bland.”

**OPEN SPACE**

1. “Looks like it could benefit the entire community.”
   “Open space with quality details.”
   “Love the street lights and seating.”
   “More usable to all.”

2. “Lots of green space.”
   “I like the community feel.”
   “Empty open space that needs to be maintained is the least attractive.”
   “Love an open green for picnics, lawn sports, or walking.”

3. “Bike trails are needed, but the area in question is not the place to start.”
   “Would love true bike paths connecting different parts of Matthews.”
   “Do NOT want bike lanes going through our neighborhood.”

4. “Would only benefit the development, not the surrounding community.”
   “Avoid open courtyards without structures for shade or gatherings.”
   “Need something more usable.”
OPEN HOUSE FEEDBACK

Attendees were given three green dots and asked to place them next to statements they agreed with. They were also give space for new comments, and there were comment cards at each of the tables.

WHAT WE’VE HEARD SO FAR...
Place your dot in the box if you agree with the statement

1. I like the idea of commercial shopping, coffee house, restaurants, bar—and I prefer single-family homes

2. We need single-family homes on larger pieces of property

3. I’d like to see shops and single-family or townhomes. It would add to the enjoyability and sense of community to have places where people can spend time as families and neighbors

4. Lots of green space, trees, walkable with outside eating/seating areas

5. I’d like to see a focus on outdoor dining, coffee shops, parks, and elegant charm. This area really needs places to walk and bike

6. I need something I can take my kids to without having to drive all the way to 74 or Monroe

7. When someone gets off at this exit, they should see something unique and be left with a nice impression

8. We need single-story homes to accommodate retirees and others who don’t want two stories

9. We need to keep lots of trees, in keeping with the current rural atmosphere

10. I think mixed-use is appropriate—if it’s done correctly

11. Leave the land as it is!

WRITTEN COMMENTS RECEIVED AT THE OPEN HOUSE

1. Generally, Single-Family residential and open space. Minimal development to stop traffic.

2. Would love to see Thread Trail to Lawyers and 218. Paved for families to bike with young children.

3. Please, no connector for cars in residential neighborhoods, particularly Creekside Drive.

4. Our neighborhood is well established. We already have excessive traffic on Springwater. There is no reason to connect a new residential neighborhood to our neighborhood. They should be connected to Idlewild, Stallings, or Phillips. We do not need over 700 homes with double that amount of traffic cutting through our neighborhood with no sidewalks and families frequently in the road. Do not need apartments and businesses taking over the area with shopping centers at 485 & Idlewild with empty storefronts at 51 & Idlewild.

5. Open space needs to be connected between the new development and to two new area parks, but NOT through existing neighborhoods.

6. No connecting roads through Creekside or any other points in existing neighborhoods.

7. Option A, if anything.

8. Leave it alone so the poor animals will have a place to live too!

9. Leave it like it is!

10. A street connection with the end of Creekside Road would have huge opposition. There is no need for more gas stations stations or supermarkets. Mixed use and park setting are most desirable. This will add a lot of traffic to Idlewild. Widening is needed.

11. Shift Stallings Road closer to Hooks Road to increase the line of sight for turning left or right onto Idlewild Road. If the State can find the money in the future for a roundabout, this would make it possible.

12. Whatever you decide, limit the number of people.

13. Something similar to Birkdale in Huntersville, but a more tasteful version.

14. Turn the land into a permanent easement for habitat using funds from local, state, and federal government.

15. Trader Joe’s, coffee, non-chain restaurants, neighborhood center, walking, biking, greenway.

16. Think Rock Hill community mixed-use. Hometown feel, not industrial. Quaint
17. Please consider where water from rain will go. Our lots in Windrow can’t handle rain coming from Phillips Road. There is not enough land to absorb bad rainfalls.

18. Please consider how to fix or update the power lines on the farmer’s land. Part of Connemara, Andalusian, Windrow Lane go out with bad storms, ice, snow, or wind.

19. Community green space is a great asset. String light seating and eating area would also be great.

20. I care about green space, quality of commercial, and housing. Focus on fixing traffic. Through the years, traffic is getting worse. Shouldn’t it be getting better? Shouldn’t the backdrop of Matthews look better, too? Fewer buildings, more green.

21. Provide the infrastructure to accommodate the growth! Schools, roads, water, sewer, sidewalks, connectivity, bike lanes, walking infrastructure to businesses…

22. Need to show full wetlands on all maps.

23. We don’t need more traffic. We need parks and green space. 485 is traffic enough.

24. Develop in existing spaces. Put new shops where others have closed (JC Penny, Texas Roadhouse, etc.)

25. Between Windrow and Stallings Road, single family. From Stallings to 485, small offices.

26. Need more neighborhood participation in the process. e.g., Focus group.

27. Plan A/B proposals look appropriate for the area. Interstate exit and Idlewild Road are not “rural.”

28. Already too much traffic and loss of green space. Utilize existing shopping areas to increase shops, higher density development.

29. I would like to see vacant commercial real estate being used before new CRE is built on vacant land. Please use first existing buildings before building new.

30. I do not want to see new development driving through Windrow. We are equestrians and have a large number of residents who walk for exercise. It will destroy Windrow.

31. If new houses, affordable only.

32. Leave the land as it is!

33. We moved 485. Don’t mess with Windrow!

34. No hotels.

35. Leave a buffer for existing homes on Horseback Circle.

36. No connectors for automobiles. Foot and bike traffic only.

37. Prefer Option B but incorporate Option A larger greenway/park. (P.S., postcards and signs were a great way to let us know about the meeting. Thank you!) Keep Windrow and Springwater unconnected. We like our quiet. No new traffic. No connectors.

39. Do not slam this down our throats.

40. Lower density, higher value.

41. Make infrastructure primary concern.

42. We need local transportation!

43. Only single-family homes, Trader Joe’s and outside dining, natural areas. No more than 250 houses. No cut through Windrow. Only foot bridge, please.

44. Windrow does not need more homes, offices, or stores. Leave the land alone. The animals need their land. I see too many dead animals as it is. We do not need more traffic/accidents. Traffic is getting so congested on Phillips and 51 because of the new construction. No more building.

45. No apartments! No big development. The roads can’t handle any more traffic. Have you been on Idlewild or Phillips at rush hour?!