

ENHANCE VILLAGE CENTERS

4

Overview

As much as the natural and scenic assets of Washington define the community, the historic and social importance of the four village centers also establish the community character that makes Washington a special place.

Residents are proud of their village centers, recognize their importance, and want to enhance them. Therefore, this Plan proposes a set of strategies to implement this community objective.

“Washington’s villages exude character because of their scale and the fact that they are surrounded by open space.”

Public meeting comment

Washington Depot



New Preston



Marbledale



Washington Green



Village Plan

Washington would benefit from a detailed study of the Washington Depot area.

Any such study should:

- identify the important characteristics of the Depot,
- identify the needs of present business occupants in the Depot,
- seek ways to enhance and preserve the essential elements of the Depot area,
- seek ways to encourage appropriate mixed uses and maintain an appropriate balance among different uses,
- address parking and traffic circulation issues,
- enhance pedestrian circulation inside and outside the area with sidewalks, pedestrian walks, and trails, and
- promote the compatible development of this area.

The study should evaluate the residential and business zoning and institutional uses in and around the Depot area and consider whether alternative zoning patterns might offer some advantages.

Washington Depot

Washington Depot is the institutional, social, commercial, and cultural center of the community. Much of Washington's history is grounded in the Depot and, appropriately, much of the community's future will also begin here. This Plan recommends strategies to ensure continuation of the Depot's contribution to the community's vitality, while protecting the qualities that are treasured by residents and visitors.

Undertake a Special Study

Several studies of Washington Depot have been conducted over the years to consider identified issues and concerns. The most recent studies have been related to the parking layout and traffic circulation in the area around Bryan Memorial Plaza. Past recommendations have not been implemented due to concern that the proposed changes (parking reconfiguration, streetscape improvements) would change the character of the Depot.

A focused, state-of-the-art study of design, traffic, access, character, and commercial use issues should be undertaken to develop a consensus on what needs to be done to preserve and enhance the Depot. It should include consideration of adjacent areas extending from the intersection of Lower Church Hill and River Roads at the entrance to Steep Rock Reservation through the Depot and to the Route 47 crossing of the Shepaug River at Bee Brook.

Technology now allows for the creation of an interactive three-dimensional visual design study model of the Depot area. This would allow Washington residents and officials to evaluate how specific improvements will look and how the Depot will function once improvements are made. Washington should investigate the potential of such technology and other analytical techniques to address issues in the Depot, including:

1. Alternative build-out scenarios (including reuse of the former Town Garage site off Titus Road).
2. Roadway network and traffic circulation.
3. Establishing an appropriate sidewalk system in the core village area enhanced by a "river walk" along the Shepaug River, including possible pedestrian river crossings.
4. The potential for on-street parking in the Depot, appropriate parking requirements in a mixed use village, and a fee-in-lieu-of-parking regulation, as authorized by Connecticut General Statutes Section 8-2c, that would provide funds for the establishment and use of public on-street and off-street parking areas.
5. Mixed residential/commercial uses.
6. Standards for lighting, landscaping, and other streetscape elements appropriate for the Depot (including promoting underground utilities).

Washington Depot



Bee Brook



Village Districts

Establishment of a “village district” is authorized by section 8-2 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

A Village District may be established where a Plan of Conservation and Development identifies and defines an area of distinctive character, landscape, or historic value.

Regulations to protect such areas may regulate new construction, reconstruction, and rehabilitation with consideration of:

- Design and placement
- Public views
- Roadways
- Character
- Lighting

Regulations may consider design, relationship, and compatibility of structures, plantings, signs, roadways, street hardware, and objects in public view.

Administration of a village district requires the input of an architect, landscape architect, planner, or other qualified professional.

Previous Plans

The 1974 and 1993 Plans also recognized the need to avoid “strip” development patterns along Bee Brook Road.

Modify Zoning Districts

There are effectively two parts of the Washington Depot Business District, each with distinct land use patterns, challenges, and potential. The areas west of the Shepaug River (around Town Hall and Titus Road) have a village flavor where the pedestrian-scale character should be encouraged and enhanced. Areas to the north of the Shepaug River along Bee Brook Road have more of an automobile-oriented character where a pedestrian-scale village may not be possible and where the potential exists for undesirable strip development patterns.

Currently, all of the Washington Depot area is zoned B-2, which treats all of the land areas in the Depot as the same from a zoning perspective (permitted uses, dimensional standards, etc.). This Plan recommends that the study discussed above clearly define these distinctions by designating a Depot Village Business District and a Bee Brook Gateway Business District, as illustrated on page 5.

New district designations and standards would direct future uses and development appropriate to each area. The evaluation process should also consider the adoption of statutory “Village District” designation, to give the Zoning Commission more authority over design issues (see sidebar).

Finally, this Plan recommends that the boundaries of these zones be adjusted to reflect areas where business development is considered to be appropriate. These zoning boundaries should follow property lines when possible.

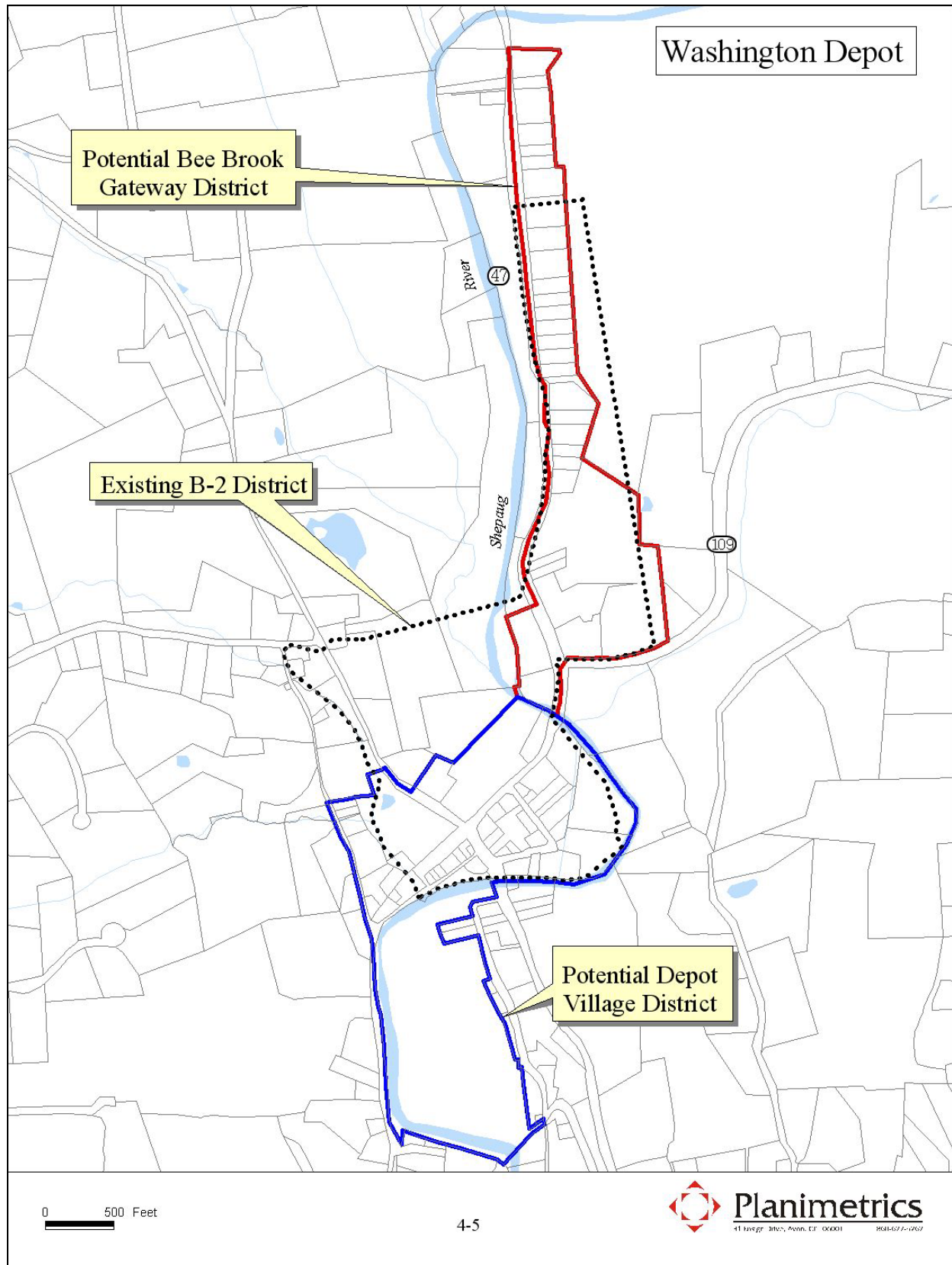
Modify Zoning Requirements

Based on the findings of the study recommended above, particular consideration should be given to zoning standards for the Depot Village area that further the goals of retaining village character, managing for appropriate development, and maintaining the pedestrian scale of this area.

Typical standards for special use areas such as the Depot include

- encouragement of two or three story, mixed use buildings with retail or pedestrian-friendly uses on the first floor and residential or office uses on upper floors,
- establishment of a “build-to-line” or a *maximum* setback, rather than a *minimum* building setback from the street,
- requirement of parking areas located to the rear of buildings and interconnected with a minimum of driveways to allow pedestrian orientation, and
- use and dimensional standards that reduce non-conforming situations and provide flexibility under a Special Permit review process similar to that adopted by the Zoning Commission for the Marbledale Business District.

In the suggested Bee Brook Gateway Business District, this Plan recommends that standards be adopted to control or manage building location, parking location, lighting and access to Route 47 so that it does not become an area dominated by the perception of curb cuts and unconnected parking areas in front of buildings. This strategy would be aided by the acquisition, if possible, of the old Shepaug Railroad right of way that runs along the east side of Route 47.



Transitional District

A transitional zone is a special development district with a zoning designation that allows a specific area to be approved for a specific development plan.

Several communities around the state have adopted such provisions to avoid a situation where a rezoning might open up a site for other uses that are permitted in the zone but are not considered appropriate for the transitional site.

Special Permit

Connecticut General Statutes authorize zoning commissions to provide that “certain classes or kinds of buildings, structures, or uses of land are permitted only after obtaining a special permit...subject to standards...necessary to protect the public health, safety, convenience, and property values.”

Examples of Special Permits currently available in the R1 residential district in Washington are

- schools,
- churches,
- shop and storage, and
- professional offices.

Marbledale

The Marbledale Business District along Route 202 abuts neighboring New Milford. This area of the community has some village development characteristics associated with older structures and properties immediately adjacent to the Town border. East of this area is a more recently developed area characterized by diverse uses including automobile related or dependent businesses and some strip type development.

Challenges and opportunities are both found in this area, and this Plan proposes a set of strategies to define appropriate commercial uses based on existing characteristics and future potential.

Modify Zoning Districts

This Plan recommends that consideration be given to revising the boundaries of the B-3 zoning district in Marbledale to reflect desirable development patterns, as shown on the facing page. These patterns could include delineation of a Marbledale Village Business District, with standards similar to those that are suggested above for the Depot village business district, running from the New Milford border to east of the intersection of Route 202 and Wheaton Road as shown on the facing map.

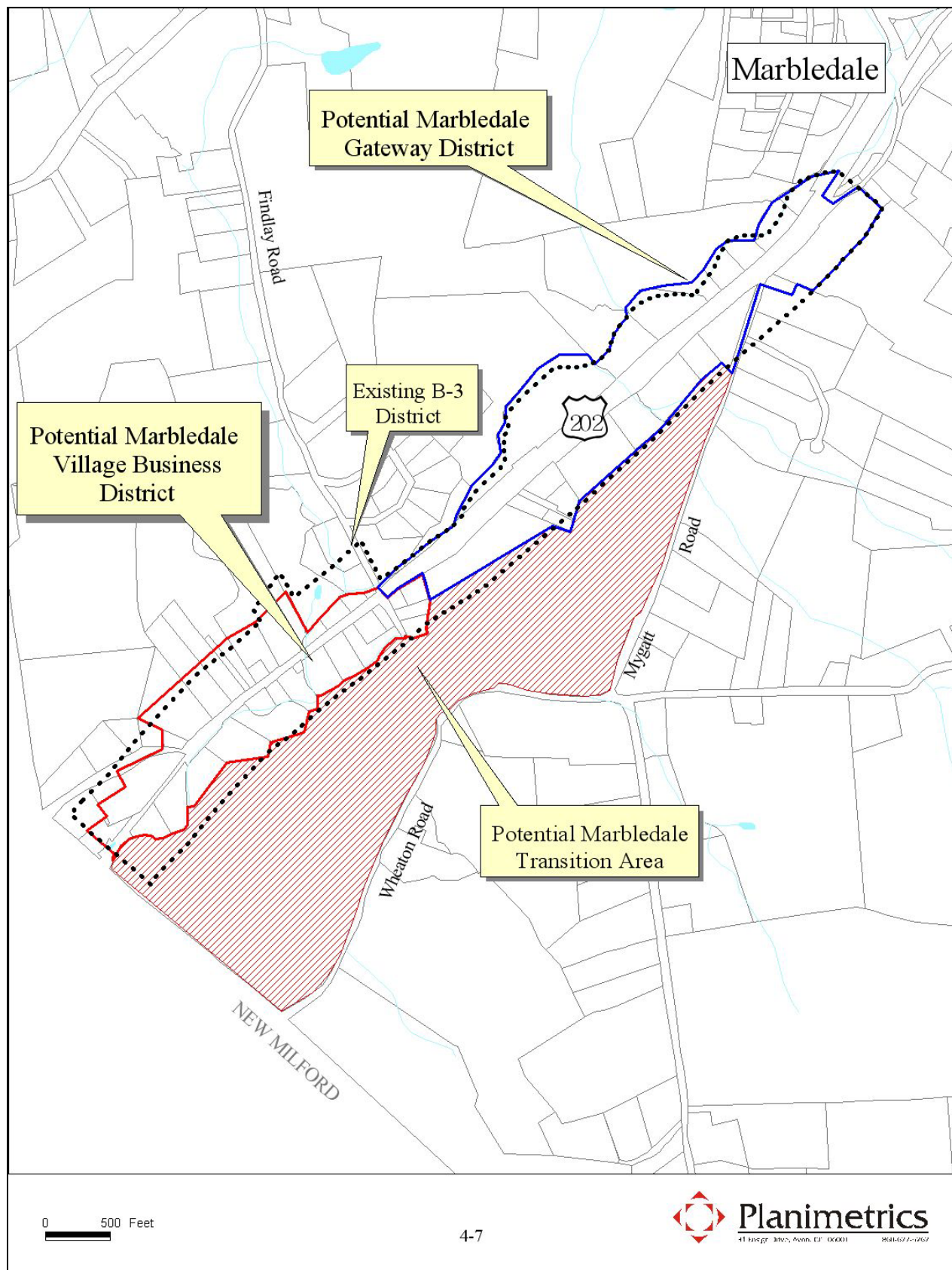
The balance of the current B-3 Marbledale Business District could be redrawn to follow property lines as closely as possible and renamed the Marbledale Gateway Business District, to distinguish it from the Marbledale Village Business District. The Zoning Commission recently developed standards that remain appropriate to a newly defined Gateway portion of Marbledale.

The Zoning Commission could consider creating a transitional zone within which restricted uses could be approved by Special Permit (see sidebar). Designation of all or part of the area between Route 202 and Wheaton Road / Mygatt Road to allow low intensity and other transitional uses, defined and controlled by Special Permit regulations, would support the evolution of the Marbledale area.

Review Zoning Requirements

The Zoning Commission recently modified the B-3 Marbledale zoning regulations in order to encourage more appropriate development patterns and building styles in the future, eliminate inappropriate uses, and protect Route 202 from emerging development pressures. These regulations now provide regulatory flexibility for yard and bulk standards in this district.

The Zoning Commission could further strengthen these regulations to avoid additional strip development patterns along Route 202 by adopting access management and consolidated parcel regulations (allowing the sharing of driveways and parking areas). Additionally, the same standards listed on page 4-4 pertaining to Washington Depot should be considered for a Marbledale Village District.



New Preston

As another of the oldest neighborhoods in Washington, New Preston displays a unique village character that complements the nearby, and different, Marbledale business district. Unlike the Depot and Marbledale, very little additional development potential exists in New Preston. Therefore, the focus of this Plan's recommendations is to refine the applicable standards and district boundaries to ensure that the historic and cozy atmosphere of this village remains.

Modify Zoning District

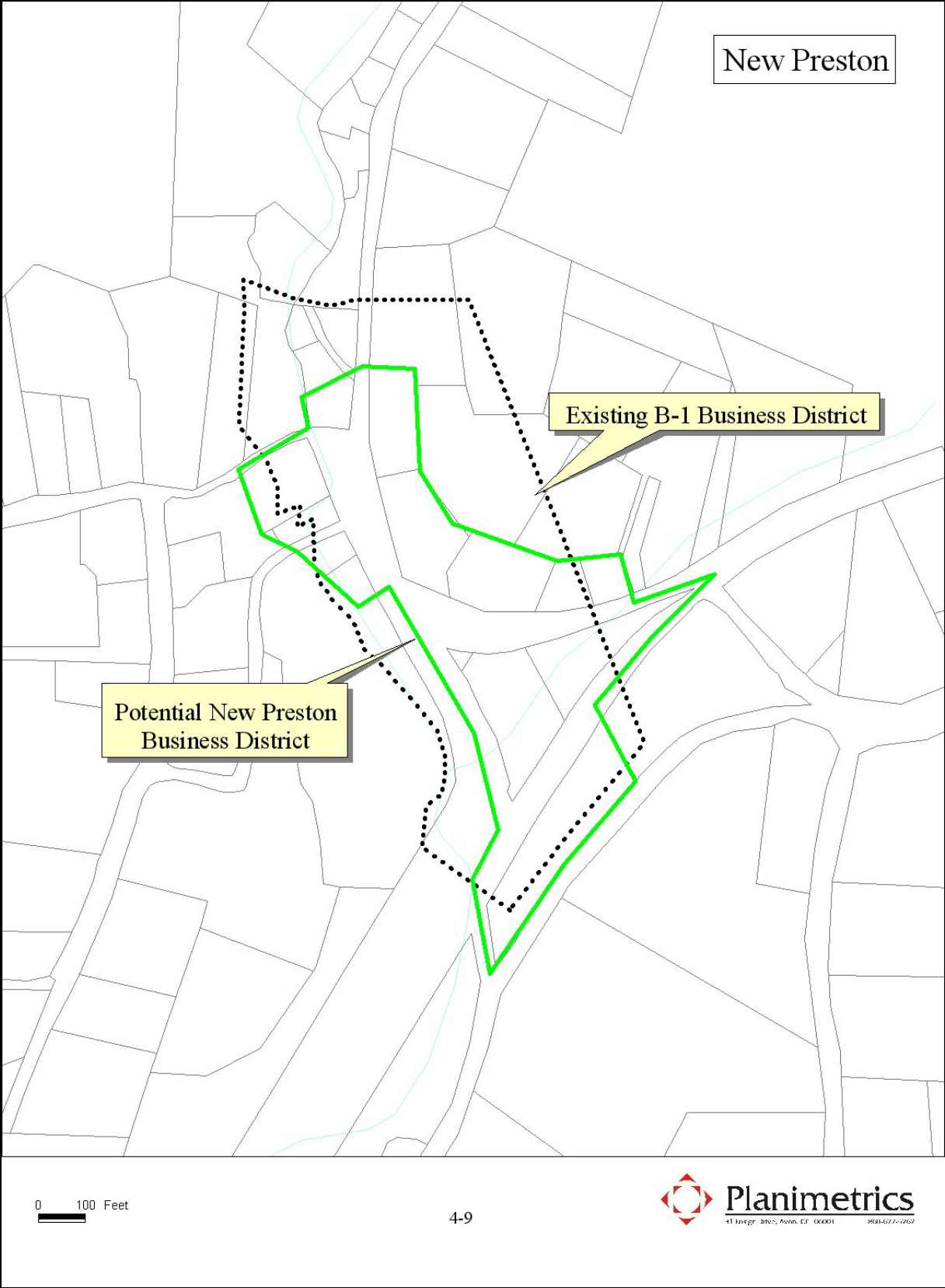
This Plan recommends that the Town consider modifying the B-1 zoning district boundaries in New Preston to reflect existing and desirable development patterns and to follow property lines as nearly as possible, as shown on the facing page. The revised boundary line should also consider additional land that may provide for additional, pedestrian-friendly parking for this area, as recommended in the 1993 Plan.

Modify Zoning Requirements

In the New Preston Business District, this Plan recommends that standards similar to those discussed for the Washington Depot Village Business District be considered (multi-story buildings, mixed use buildings, a "build-to-line" requirement, use and dimensional standards for special permits). Any such revisions should also seek to reduce or eliminate existing non-conforming situations. Such considerations would also benefit from the lessons learned in the recommended Depot study.

Consider Special Study

While New Preston would also benefit from a more detailed village plan, this is a lower priority than the study for Washington Depot. Since any study of New Preston would consider the same types of issues as recommended for the Depot study, the results of that study, if undertaken, should be considered as applicable to the New Preston village, including the potential benefits of formal Village District designation.



From the Natural Resource Inventory Report:

“Until the arrival of the railroad in 1872, the Green was the spiritual, commercial and political center of the Town, ringed by shops, a slaughterhouse, stores, schools, and the residences of some of the town’s early ministers, judges and merchants. The 18th and early 19th century green was probably used for grazing animals as well as a training ground for the local militia.”

Washington Green

Washington Green is a special residential district that is dominated by a number of institutional uses, such as Gunn Memorial Library and Museum, The Gunnery School, and local religious institutions. It is also within a local historic district where exterior improvements are subject to a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission.

Permitted and special uses are more restrictive within the Washington Green residential district. Some of the properties in the Washington Green areas are presently non-conforming with regard to requirements of either the R-1 or R-2 zoning designations. This Plan recommends some zoning modifications in this area to balance the institutional and residential activities that make the Washington Green such an interesting and vital part of Washington.

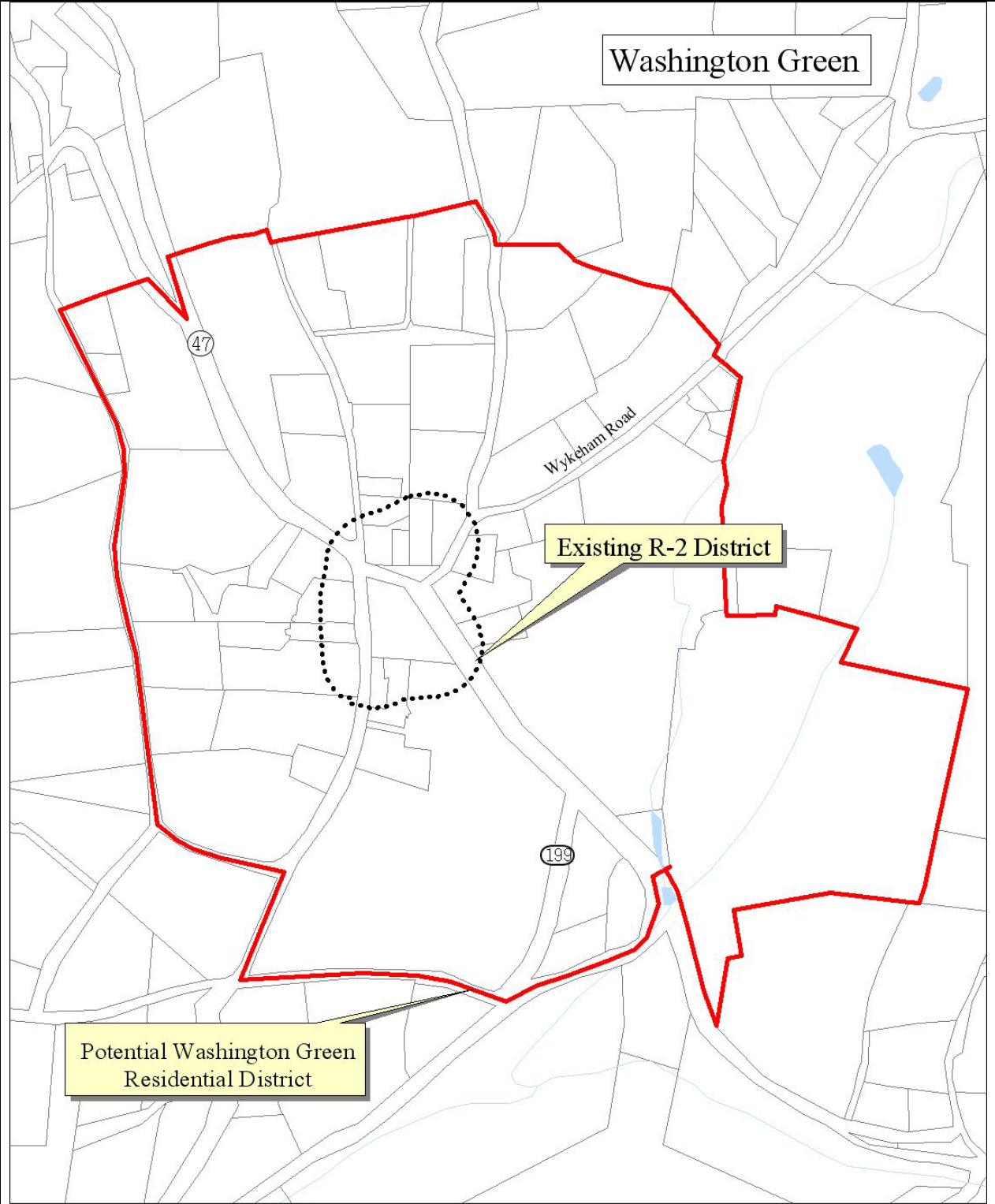
Modify Zoning District

The Plan recommends that the Zoning Commission evaluate revisions to the boundaries of the R-2 zoning district in Washington Green, as shown on the facing page, to incorporate more areas around the Green. When coupled with the zoning regulation modifications discussed below, this would offer some future flexibility for consideration of institutional and other appropriate and compatible uses. Since an historic district exists in this area, it is not necessary or desirable to consider designation of this area as a statutorily defined Village District.

Modify Zoning Requirements

Once the new zoning district boundaries are established, this Plan recommends that the standards in the R-2 District be reviewed, as needed, to continue to encourage the most appropriate development of this area. Considerations are:

- allowing general home occupations by special permit, with appropriate protections for residential properties,
- allowing higher lot coverage in the R-2 district (given the smaller lot sizes in this area), and
- developing coverage standards to apply to institutional and other non-residential uses.



0 300 Feet

Woodville

The Zoning Commission recently modified the boundaries of the Woodville business district to guide the development of this area.

Woodville does not have the size, location, history, and other characteristics that create the village character found in the other business districts. Therefore, this Plan recommends that the B-4 District be maintained as presently configured for the foreseeable future. If community growth and the economic health of other business areas suggest that another village node is desirable, the boundaries and standards for the B-4 zone could be re-evaluated, based on the work of the Zoning Commission in revising the Marbledale regulations.

Any use proposed in this area should avoid creating a “strip development” pattern along this section of Route 202. As with other business districts, development standards should include access management and consolidated parcel regulations, and any development proposals should be carefully evaluated to minimize negative impacts on adjacent residential uses.

Summary

As much as by its open spaces and beautiful natural assets, Washington is defined by the several village centers that are spread across Town. Continued evaluation and refinement of the districts, uses, and standards that apply to these areas is an appropriate strategy for the Town to follow.

Enhance Village Centers – Strategies Summary		Responsibilities*	
A. Washington Depot		Primary	Others
1. Conduct a special study of Washington Depot		BOS, PC	ZC CC
2. Consider separating current business district into two distinct districts		ZC	
3. Consider revised zoning requirements to reflect newly defined districts and village business character		ZC	
B. Marbledale			
1. Consider modifying zoning district boundaries to establish distinct Village Business District and Gateway Business District		ZC	
2. Considering establishing a transitional special use district between the current district and Wheaton Road/Mygatt Road		ZC	
3. Consider revised zoning requirements to reflect village business character		ZC	
C. New Preston			
1. Consider modifying zoning district boundaries		ZC	
2. Consider need for special study		PC	ZC
3. Consider revised zoning requirements to reflect village business character		ZC	
D. Washington Green			
1. Consider modifying zoning district boundaries		ZC	
2. Consider revised zoning requirements to reflect special uses in the district		ZC	
E. Woodville			
1. Monitor commercial activity; consider changes to B-4 district as appropriate.		ZC	

*For key to abbreviations see page 7-4

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