

# Old Saybrook Route 1 Corridor Study



Yale Urban Design Workshop  
December 2005

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**Yale Urban Design Workshop**

Alan Plattus, Director

Report Prepared by: Jacob Reidel  
with Andrew Lyon, Anthony Goldsby,  
Michael Grogan, and Surry Schlabs

In cooperation with:

**Old Saybrook Land Use Department**

Christine Nelson, AICP, Director

Study Commissioned by:

**Old Saybrook Board of Selectmen**

Michael A. Pace, First Selectman

William A. Peace, Selectman

Velma Thomas, Selectman

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# Old Saybrook Route 1 Corridor

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# Introduction

The Town of Old Saybrook prides itself on the fact that it has not undergone the large-scale industrial urbanization and growth such as has been the experience of some other settlements along the Connecticut shoreline. In large part due to the fact that the town's location at the mouth of the Connecticut River is surrounded by extensive tidal marshes and shallow sandbars, Old Saybrook was never an attractive candidate for major shipping or manufacturing. Consequently, the town center maintains an historic environment that the town's residents have justifiably sought to preserve for years through the creation of an architectural review board, zoning regulations, design guidelines, and municipal streetscape improvements such as granite median planters, light posts, consistent street trees, landscaping, and brick sidewalks.

However, suburban sprawl, strip shopping, and the ubiquitous "big" box store have encroached upon Old Saybrook. This brand of development has, in particular, been establishing a foothold along the stretch of Route 1 – otherwise known as the Boston Post Road – which passes through Old Saybrook beginning in the west at Spencer Plain Road and continuing eastward toward Main Street. Characterized by largely undistinguished architecture set back from the street by sun-drenched seas of parking, traffic congestion, unused sporadic sidewalks, and the myriad attendant features of automobile-oriented sprawl, Route 1 is becoming increasingly hostile not only to the pedestrian, but to the very civic design fundamentals that have shaped Old Saybrook for hundreds of years. It is with good cause that the Town has chosen to set in place new design guidelines to counter this growing trend, and it is for this reason that the Yale Urban Design Workshop was commissioned to carry out the following report.

While the Town's intentions are entirely positive, as a glance through Old Saybrook's comprehensive plan of zoning and functional design guidelines will immediately make apparent, the strict implementation of the written regulations does not always yield the stated aims of the zoning and design review boards. Indeed, in the case of required building setbacks, strict interpretation of the well-intentioned regulations produces exactly the type of suburban strip development with which so many of Old Saybrook's residents have specifically expressed their displeasure. Consequently, the following endeavors to provide a new framework within which to shape future development along the Route 1 corridor that is more in keeping with the already-expressed desires of Town residents. Through specific design strategies and recommendations, this report depicts an alternative future for Old Saybrook's Route 1 which, if the Town so chooses, may be realized through the force of new zoning regulations and design guidelines. Ultimately, how such design recommendations are specifically written into law is for the Town to determine, but it is our hope that the following recommendations provide a suitable indication of what is, in our professional opinion, the best path for the Town to take.



*Main Street today, comfortably accommodating both the pedestrian and the automobile*








*In contrast, the Benny's parking lot is representative of auto-oriented development along Route 1*



*The future of Old Saybrook need not look like this*



-  Boston Post Road / Route 1
-  Railroad Station
-  Main Street
-  North Main Street

 1/4 Mile

# Boston Post Road / Route 1 Today

Currently, the stretch of Route 1 through Old Saybrook is broken up into five zoning districts by the Zoning Map. Moving eastward from Spencer Plain Road along the corridor the zoning districts transition from B-4 to B-3 to A to B-2 and back to B-4. The stated intention of this district configuration is to provide appropriate transitions from one format of permitted land use to the next. However, as observed through numerous site visits and discussions with local residents, this well-meaning original intent is not discerned by the driver or brave pedestrian who experiences Route 1 on a daily basis. Rather, Route 1 is characterized by, as mentioned already, traffic congestion, endless parking, and branded architecture – a generally unappealing environment. There is no designated lane for cyclists along the corridor; sidewalks are discontinuous along its length, and often overgrown, narrow, and not-surprisingly, largely under utilized. Many intersections are difficult for the pedestrian to cross, with pedestrian crossing activation buttons difficult to locate (if they exist at all). If such buttons do exist, marked cross walks are relatively rare along the Boston Post Road and only run *perpendicular* to the road, affording no protection to pedestrians crossing intersecting streets. In short, Route 1 is at this time a thoroughly automobile-oriented landscape. The forthcoming “Big Y” box store, about which there is presently a fair amount of mixed anticipation and anxiety within the community, is simply the natural inhabitant of such an environment. In Old Saybrook, however, this state of affairs is not unchangeable. Indeed, through relatively simple efforts, an entirely new landscape could be created over time.



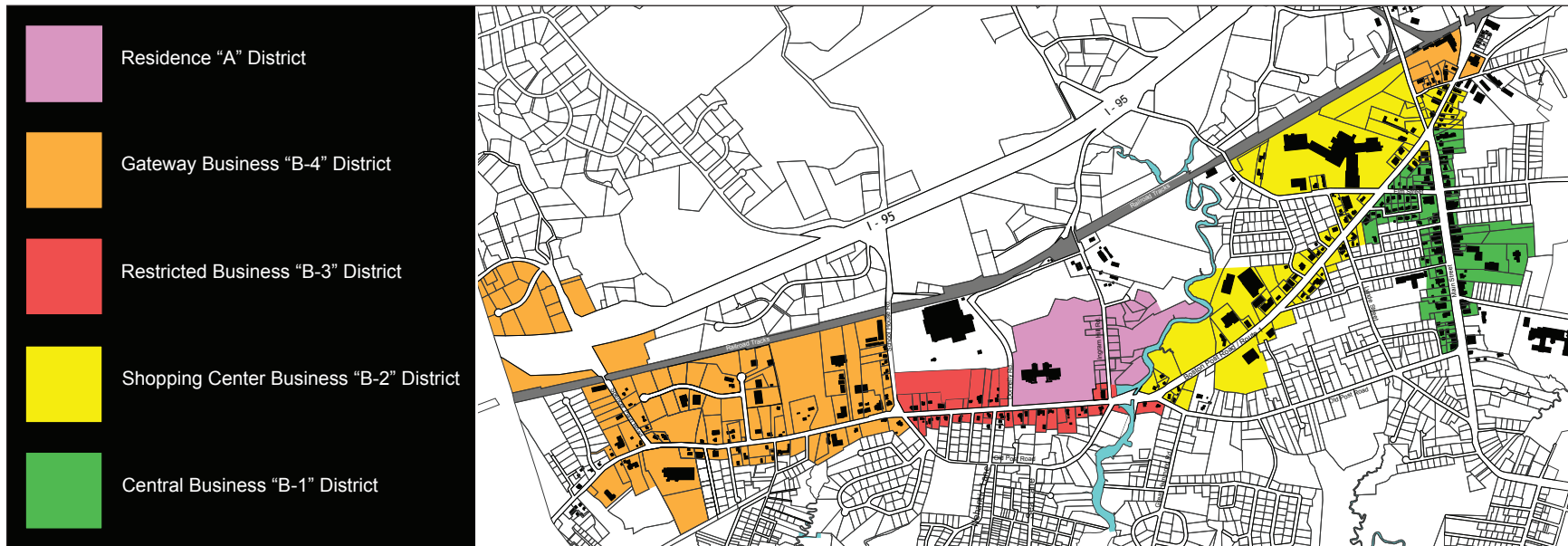
*This pedestrian crossing signal button at the corner of North Main Street and Route 1 indicates the priority (or lack thereof) currently given to pedestrian travel along the corridor.*

## **Central Business B-1 District (Section 31):**

“To sustain and enhance a pedestrian-oriented village center with on-street parking, wide shady sidewalks, and mixed-use buildings, containing street-level stores with businesses, offices and residences above, forming the street wall. Applicable standards define and enhance the unique village character and encourage the conversion, conservation, and preservation of existing buildings and sites that define the historic character of the District.”

## **Shopping Center Business B-2 District (Section 32):**

“To sustain and enhance the existing central shopping center areas consisting of anchor retail shopping with small attached complementary stores and combined parking. Applicable standards require new business development and renovation of existing business sites to improve and enhance the overall aesthetic context of the existing centers in scale and character with the Town of Old Saybrook.”



*As the map above and the zoning district purpose statements below taken from Old Saybrook's Zoning Regulations demonstrate, a great deal of productive thought has been dedicated to the question of how best to organize development along Route 1 in Old Saybrook. The challenge thus becomes how to best realize and build upon these ideas to generate development along Route 1 in keeping with the interests of the Town.*

**Restricted Business B-3 District (Section 33):**

“To allow for the orderly transition from residential areas to business areas in a way that will maintain the residential character of the area and achieve harmony with the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Applicable standards protect those neighborhoods by limiting the type and intensity of business *uses*, as well as the size and character of *buildings* and the layout of the site.”

**Gateway Business B-4 District (Section 34):**

“To allow for the development of regional businesses that requires easy access to major highways. Applicable standards require building and site layout of appropriate character as the gateways to the Town of Old Saybrook. These Regulations pay particular attention to ensure that traffic congestion caused by these developments will not degrade or impede access to the Town itself.”

# Opportunities & Constraints

Before embarking headlong into how Old Saybrook can improve its Route 1 corridor, however, we should take a moment to acknowledge those forces that are beyond our control, thus ensuring that future efforts are deployed to their greatest effect. To begin, it is unreasonable to assume that people will stop using automobiles as primary modes of transportation over distances greater than ¼ mile. Furthermore, the international trend amongst retailers towards the big box model is not going to disappear in the foreseeable future. These two facts alone dictate that any attempt to convert the entirety of Old Saybrook's Route 1 corridor to a pedestrian "Main Street USA" would be both misguided and a failure.

We acknowledge this constraint though, and still maintain that the Route 1 corridor can be better than is currently the case. Instead of fantasizing about replicating the town center of Old Saybrook along the entirety of Route 1, what we rather envision is a "divide and conquer" approach to future development. It has been demonstrated that within a ¼ mile radius it is often easier and more efficient for people to park once and then walk from place to place than it is to continually get back in the car, drive a short distance, and park again. Nevertheless, when the

surrounding environment is specifically designed for automobile travel and little else, pedestrians are often justifiably uncomfortable walking *anywhere*, even if the destination is directly across the street. Hence the not-uncommon sight of the shopper who pulls into the parking lot of a store on one side of the street, conducts her business, and then gets back into the car,

drives directly across the street, and parks once again to go to another store. Not only is such activity wasteful of time and fuel, but it also contributes to the traffic congestion typical of the Route 1 corridor. This inefficiency is a direct result of design and is within the power of the Town to change if its residents are thus committed.

*Where does the pedestrian walk in an environment such as this?*







— Boston Post Road / Route 1

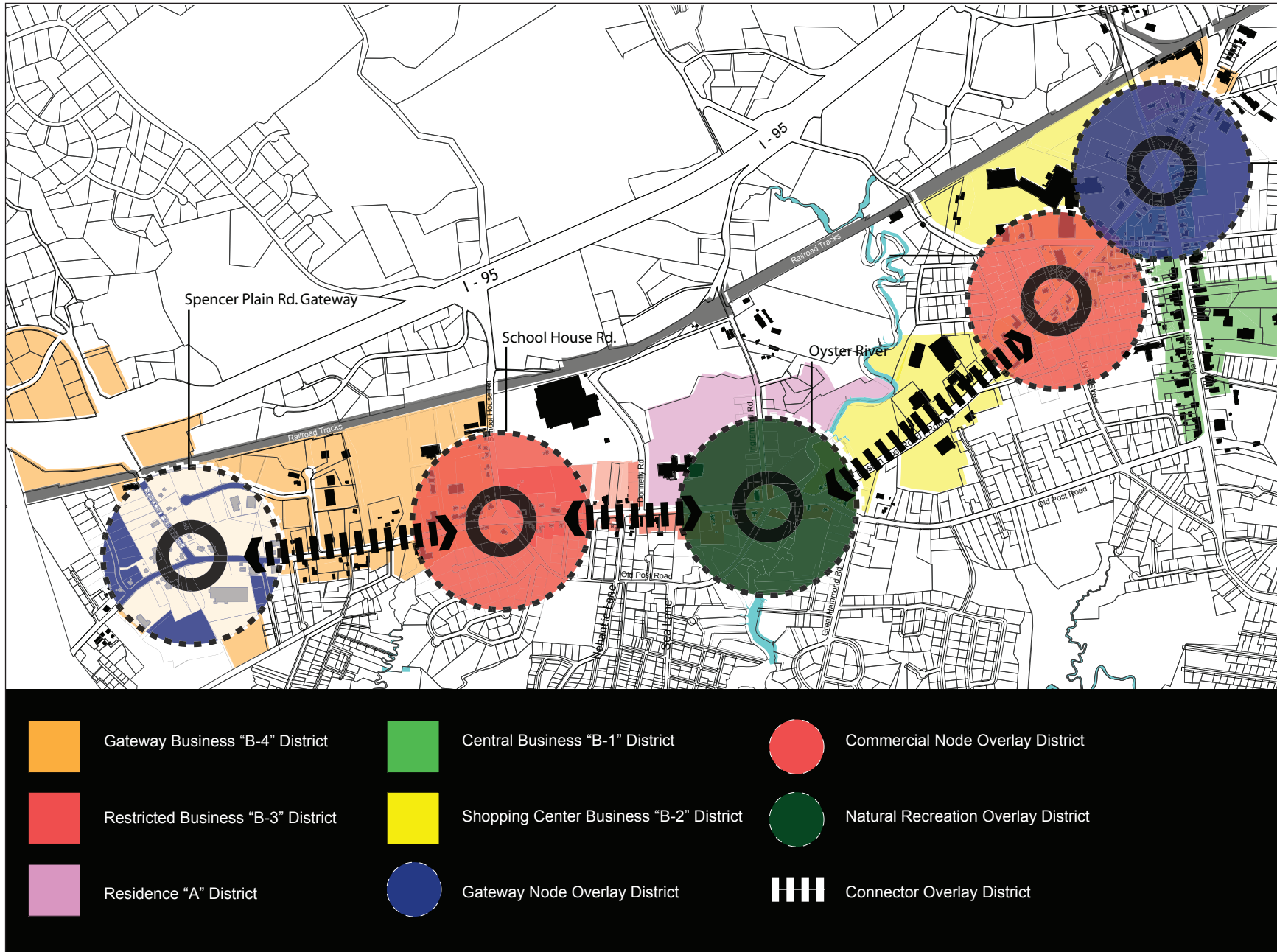
— Main Street

— North Main Street

\* 1/4 Mile Walking Radius

— 1/4 Mile

# Route 1 can be improved through the creation of overlay zones.



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What we propose is that Old Saybrook begin to view Route 1 as a collection of strategic “nodes” located at key intersections with cross streets along its length. These nodes would serve as centers of commercial and recreational activity, around which pedestrian-scaled development would be encouraged within a ¼ mile radius through the creation of special overlay zones. These nodes should be centered at the intersections of Route 1 and the following cross streets moving from west to east:

- 1) Spencer Plain Road
- 2) School House Road
- 3) Oyster River
- 4) Lynde Street & Elm Street
- 5) Main Street / North Main Street

Due to their locations at major I-95 exits two of these nodes – Spencer Plain Road and Main Street – would serve as “gateway nodes”, appropriately marking entry to the town of Old Saybrook. The Oyster River Node, meanwhile, would serve as the center to the whole Route 1 corridor, geographically located at such a point and also offering a rich potential for public recreational use if appropriately developed by the Town. Between each of the five nodes would exist “connector zones” which, while perhaps not explicitly designed with the use of the pedestrian in mind, would nevertheless correspond

to overarching design guidelines thus ensuring an appropriate continuation of the streetscape from node to node. The connectors would also make provision for automobile transportation alternatives through such measures as the introduction of bicycle lanes.

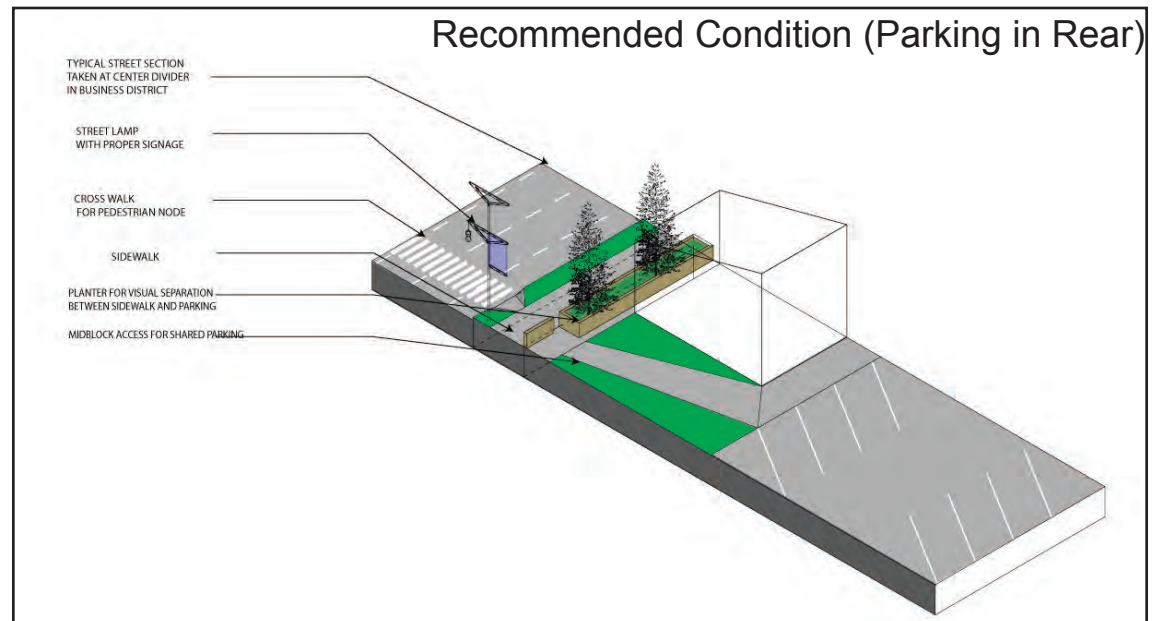
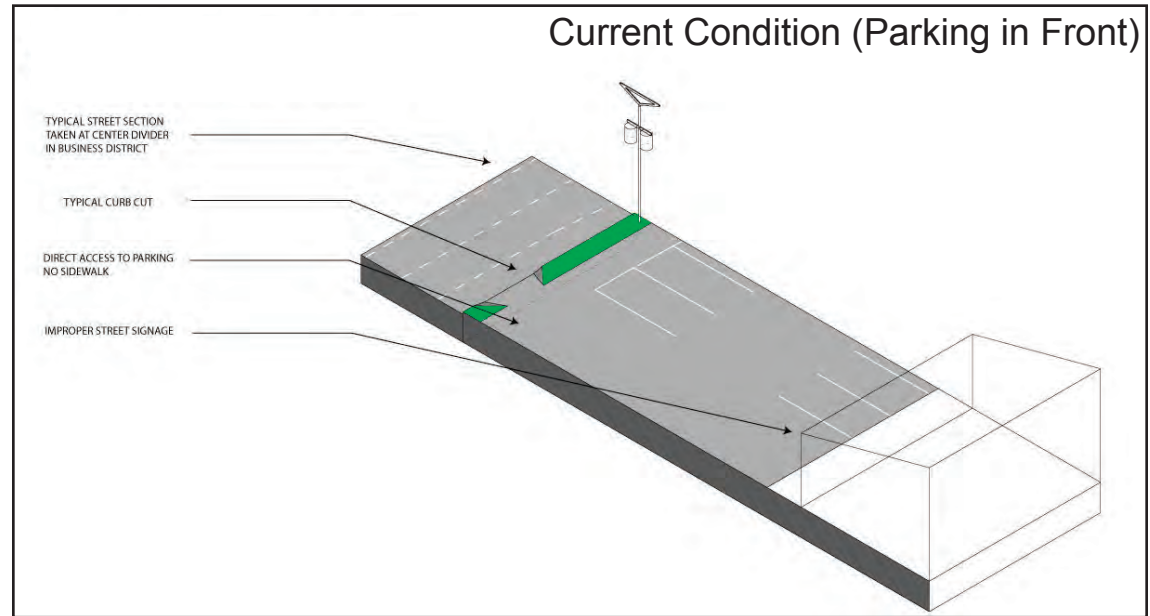
What is important for the Town to recognize is that while it cannot force Route 1 into becoming a larger version of the beloved Main Street, it certainly can break up the corridor into what is, in effect, a series of Main Streets insofar as each node would become host to pedestrian-scaled development. By intensively focusing pedestrian-scale development to those defined areas within the nodes, connectors are left to allow the smooth flow of automobile traffic from node to node, thus streamlining car travel through Old Saybrook along Route 1. This development can be achieved through the implementation of specific design practices, which the following section will serve to outline.

# Overall Design Recommendations

In the effort to create a more beautiful, functional, and pedestrian-friendly environment along the entirety of Old Saybrook's Route 1 corridor, the following design actions are recommended for both nodes and connectors:

**Require a majority of the parking to be located at the rear of buildings as opposed to up in front within the nodes.**

Businesses will still require parking. However, there is no reason why it cannot be located to the rear, thus allowing for the building to be brought to the street line. Such an arrangement is far more amenable to pedestrian use, and also makes for a more attractive streetscape as demonstrated in the two diagrams at right. Alternatively, when limited amounts of parking are needed, single-row diagonal street side parking may be used (as it is on Main Street), as long as protected pedestrian sidewalks are to the inside, free of automobile interference.

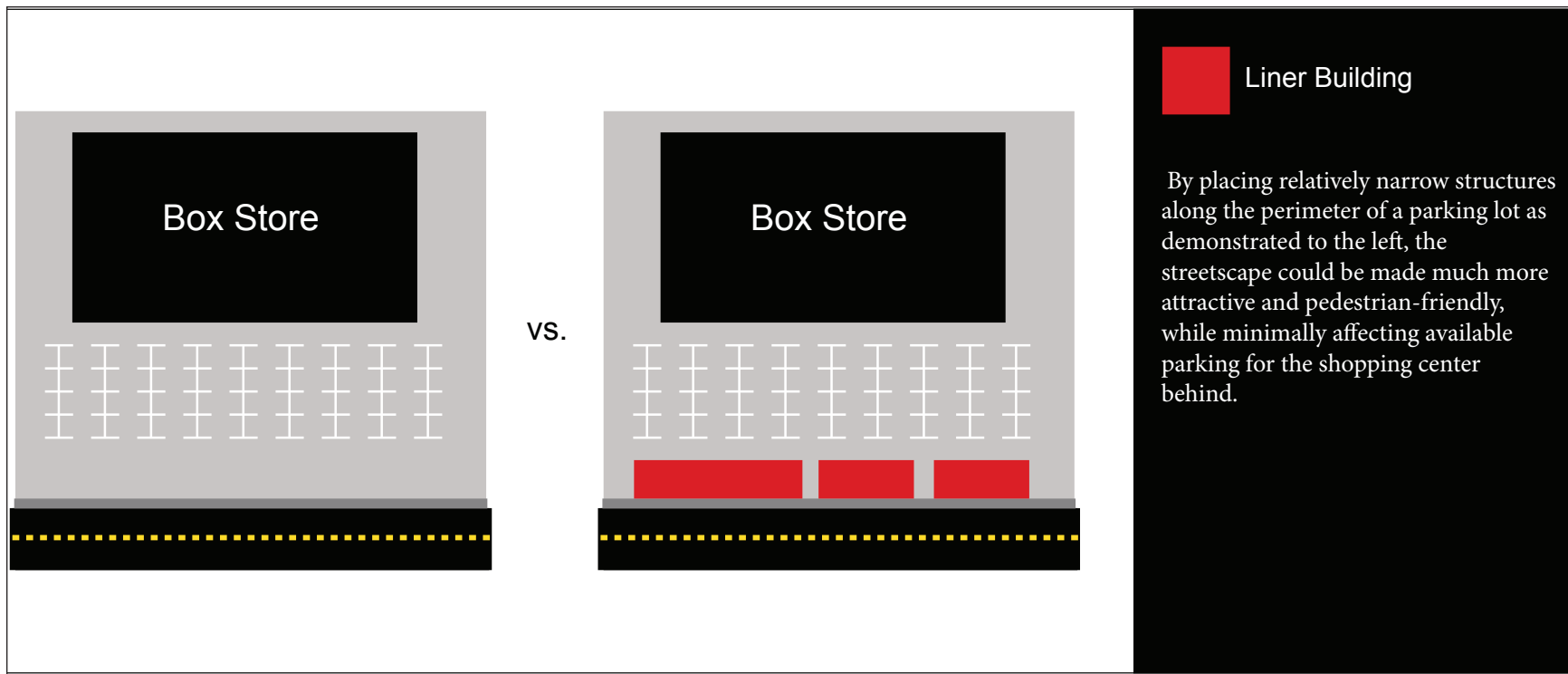


**Allow the construction of *liner buildings* within the nodes.**

In the case of large businesses that require significant amounts of parking and paved surfaces, *liner buildings* can be constructed at the street line with parking and the larger box store located behind. This arrangement is essentially a variation on the “sea of parking” model, however the parking is hidden from the street by the liner buildings. These liner buildings, far from being mere visual screens, would contain businesses as well, thus contributing to an active, pedestrian-friendly streetscape.



*In this example, a liner building is used to screen a gas station from the street. Note how streetfront commercial space is incorporated at the ground floor, enhancing the pedestrian environment and providing space for additional business.*



**Encourage the use of *shared parking between businesses*, expanding upon Section 62.6.1 and 62.6.2 of the Zoning Regulations.**

There is absolutely no reason why adjacent businesses should build parking lots that will seldom, if ever, be full. Rather, the Town should encourage the construction of *shared parking facilities*, which would effectively pool parking across multiple businesses. This approach is particularly useful when adjacent uses take place at different times of day. For example, a movie theater, which is typically most busy at night, and a hardware store, which is only open during the day, have no need to construct entirely separate adjacent parking lots, as parking demands will rarely overlap.

Section 62.6.1 and 62.6.2 of the Old Saybrook Zoning Regulations currently allow for shared parking in the case of mixed-use developments or in the event that the shared parking lot provides the total number of spaces required by each business combined. While such development is sound and should be encouraged, the Town should consider the reasonability of some requirements. Need all shared parking facilities provide full capacity for both businesses at the same time? What is the likelihood that two adjacent businesses will ever



*By pooling parking space and resources, both the Town and businesses can focus on making a few parking lots that are truly pleasant places in which to walk and perhaps relax. This happy consolidation is far more preferable than spreading resources thin across a plethora of inhospitable and bleak asphalt deserts.*



be at full capacity simultaneously? Is this possibility worth creating the additional acres of asphalt such requirements entail? In addition, careful consideration must be paid to pedestrian connections to, from, and through this parking, or else it simply becomes yet another busy and dangerous street to cross.



*In the rendering above, the introduction of landscaping, lighting, and clear pedestrian entrances greatly enhances not only the shared parking lot itself, but also the entire look and feel of this typical stretch of Old Saybrook's Route 1.*

**Replace continuous curb cuts with *single shared curb cuts*.**

Continuous curb cuts are highly problematic. They result in an automotive free-for-all where no one knows exactly where he or she is supposed to enter and exit the parking lot. As a consequence, it is not uncommon to see multiple cars lined up alongside one another attempting reënter Route 1 simultaneously. Such a situation is not only confusing, but dangerous. In addition, continuous curb cuts provide no defined safe space for pedestrians. Walking across one is the same as walking across the street without a cross-walk or crossing light to protect you. In short, they should not exist.

In the event that curb cuts do exist on State roads, such cuts should allow traffic to enter *by right turn only* and back out in the same direction by right turn only. Left hand turns should occur onto side streets perpendicular to Route 1 where traffic signals can meter out traffic systematically to reduce stop-and-go along Route 1.



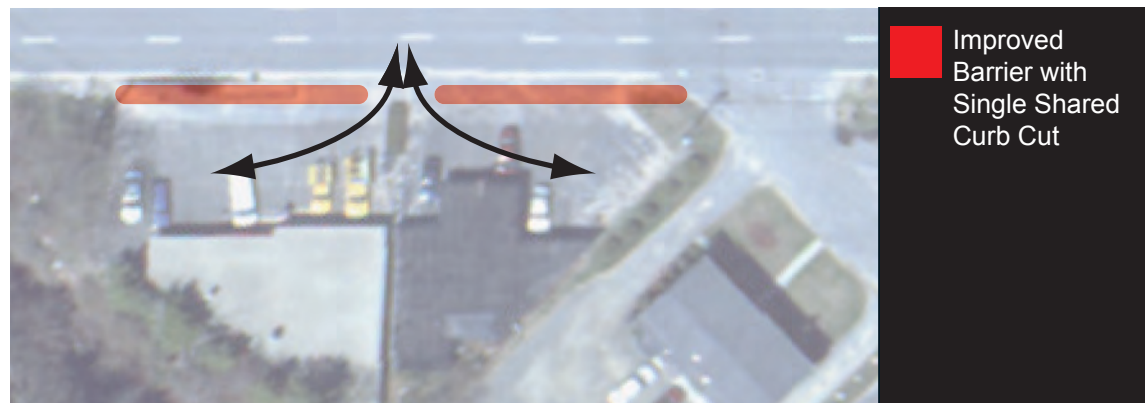
*The above example is typical of the many continuous curb cuts along Route 1 in Old Saybrook. As can be seen in the images below, such a landscape is inhospitable to pedestrian traffic.*







*Old Saybrook should encourage instead streetside curbs as demonstrated by the plan at right and in the rendering above. This allows both businesses to share a single curb cut, while helping to define the street line clearly. Both cars and pedestrians now know where they belong, and the results are safer for all.*



**Prohibit the construction of *branded architecture* along the Route 1 corridor.**

In numerous meetings and design workshops with the residents of Old Saybrook, virtually unanimous opposition has been voiced with regards to *branded architecture*. Such “building as a sign” design should be prohibited within the new nodes and connectors. Instead, businesses – especially, large national corporations and franchises – should be required to construct buildings in keeping with the local architecture. There are countless examples of this taking place throughout the country today, and the residents of Old Saybrook have every right to demand an equally considerate level of design from companies wishing to conduct business in the Town.



*“Branded Architecture” at Oyster River. On the other hand, the McDonald’s pictured below from Burlington, Vermont, while hardly a masterpiece, nevertheless makes some effort to be contextual. Old Saybrook can and should demand at the very least an equivalent degree of effort from would-be developers along Route 1.*



## Introduce *bicycle lanes* along Route 1 corridor.

As the number of cars on the road increases yearly, traffic congestion will only rise accordingly. Bicycles can and do provide a viable transport alternative, especially within the boundaries of Old Saybrook. In addition, cycling remains an excellent health and recreational activity for young and old alike. Many segments of the Town's Route 1 corridor already have enough space to the sides to allow for a bike lane, which could potentially require nothing more than signage and clear surface marking. Investing in bicycle lanes would also make the entire Route 1 corridor more pedestrian-friendly, allowing for an efficient and safe means of connecting each node without total reliance on cars. Old Saybrook should reconsider how Route 1 fits into the life of the Town, and by constructing bicycle lanes, the corridor could move in the direction of becoming the Town's "Recreational Main Street" along which all residents could jog, bike, and walk while at the same time conduct daily chores and business. This would be a vast improvement upon the current car-choked highway which presently exists.



*As shown in the three above images, people already cycle along Old Saybrook's Route 1. Unfortunately, cyclists must ride along worn paths through grass as they do after crossing the Oyster River Bridge, or navigate confusing and dangerous intersections such as that at Main Street. Bicycle lanes such as that pictured here from Tucson, Arizona not only serve to provide ample and safe space for cyclists, but also assist in traffic calming by reducing roadwidths.*

**Introduce / Expand / Repair *sidewalks* within each node.**

The presence of sufficiently wide (no less than 12-feet), lit, and well-maintained sidewalks within each node are critical to making these zones viable centers of pedestrian-scale development. Currently sidewalks are missing along sections of Route 1 or are overgrown, narrow, in disrepair, or otherwise neglected. Sidewalks in this condition will only be used by those who absolutely have to do so. When necessary, the Town must either use eminent domain to claim privately-held land for conversion to sidewalk, or require through zoning the construction and maintenance of public access sidewalks by private landowners. Within the interstitial connectors between each main pedestrian node the Town may consider forgoing sidewalk construction, relying on bicycle lanes and automobiles to transport people over these longer distances.



*Main Street provides ample and safe sidewalks for pedestrian use, as can be seen at far left. Route 1, however, does not, as the image immediately to the left demonstrates. With relatively simply improvements in pedestrian crossings, street lighting, and sidewalks, a far better environment such as that depicted in the image above could be realized.*



*One of the few cross walks on Route 1 in Old Saybrook located at the corner of North Main Street. Finding the crossing button, however, can still be difficult.*

**Improve *pedestrian crossing signage* throughout the corridor.**

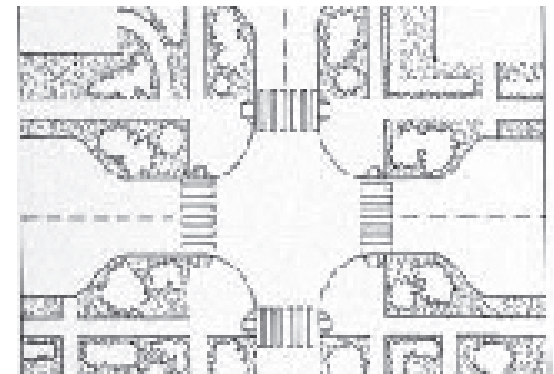
In addition to providing sidewalks, the Town must work to make crossing the Route 1 corridor less intimidating for pedestrians. This may be accomplished through various means. Obviously, crossings must be clearly marked. This can be accomplished through such simple means as painted lines on asphalt or through more elaborate changes in surface paving material. Furthermore, crossings should be provided with push-button signal activation. Some residents of the community have noted that where these buttons exist along the corridor, some are very difficult to locate. This should not be the case, and buttons should be placed clearly at the corner in an unobstructed spot. It is also important to slow down traffic at points where pedestrian crossings exist. This may be accomplished through the introduction of traffic calming practices such as narrowing the width of the roadway itself at crossing points, which forces cars to slow down in order to pass close-proximity oncoming traffic, and raising grade slightly at crossings, in effect creating speed bumps.



*Clearly marked cross walks incorporating a change in surface material such as above and to the right not only make cross walks easier to locate, but also serve to slow down vehicles, making the crossing safer for pedestrians and calming traffic in general.*



*Traffic “chokers”, such as this, narrow the vehicular lane at intersections, thus forcing automobiles to slow down at pedestrian crossings.*

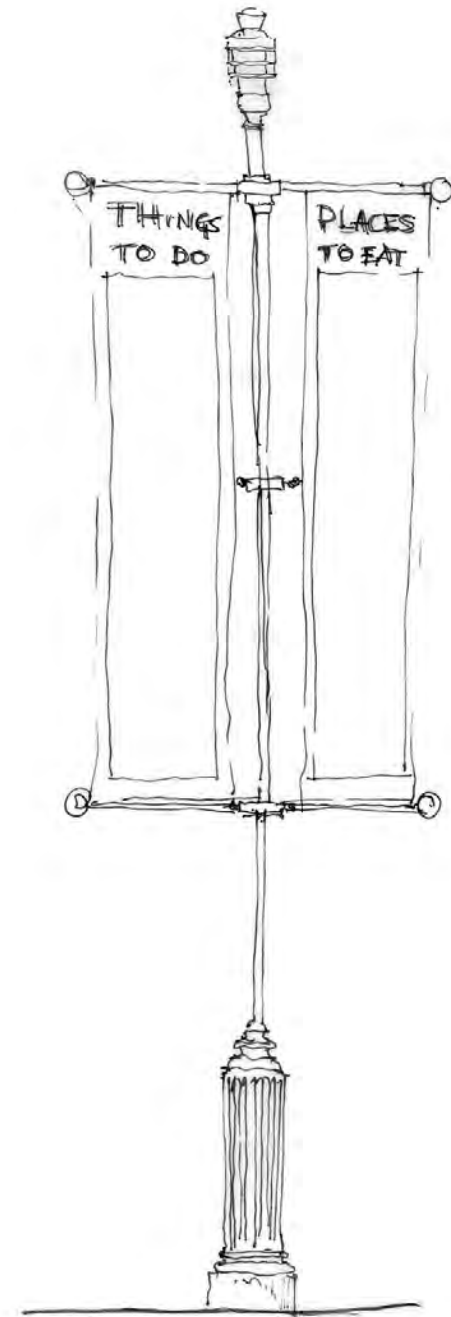


The map below indicates where sidewalks and crosswalks currently exist along Route 1. This is not sufficient if Route 1 is ever to be more than a highway strip. By following the recommendations as outlined on the previous pages and those to follow, something can be done to change this.



## Introduce *uniform, attractive lighting* along Route 1

Distinctive and uniform lighting should be introduced along the entirety of Old Saybrook's Route 1 corridor. This would not only serve to visually tie together the nodes along the chain, but could vastly improve the appearance of the corridor both at night and by day, making it more attractive not only to motorists but pedestrians and cyclists as well. In addition, unique lighting fixtures along the corridor would help provide a clear indication to anyone traveling along Route 1 that he or she was now *somewhere*, as opposed to simply being anywhere on a generic suburban interstate highway strip.



*Carefully-selected streetlighting could provide a unifying and distinctive element along the entirety of Route 1 as it currently does on Old Saybrook's Main Street.*

# Individual Node Design Recommendations

With the overall design recommendations for the Route 1 corridor thus laid out, we now turn our attention to the design of each individual node.

## Spencer Plain Road

The intersection at Spencer Plain Road and Route 1 is in essence the southern gateway to Old Saybrook. Presently, what greets drivers entering town from I-95 is the Benny's shopping center and a Dunkin'



*As seen above, the present gateway to Old Saybrook at Spencer Plain Road is a jumbled mess of parking lots and commercial signage. In the artist's impression at right, an alternative is proposed. Liner buildings, crosswalks, and simple architectural elements such as a gazebo providing shelter to pedestrians and a well-lit, highly-visible welcome sign create a true civic gateway indicating entry to the Town.*

Donuts. By introducing liner buildings at the street line of the Benny's parking lot and new signage, a more appropriate site of entry could be created demonstrating that, in fact, one is now entering not just any generic suburban shopping strip but rather the Town of Old Saybrook. As requested by residents, clear signage should be introduced directing motorists to locations of interest. Traffic calming devices such as narrowed roadways at the intersection and pedestrian crossings would help slow

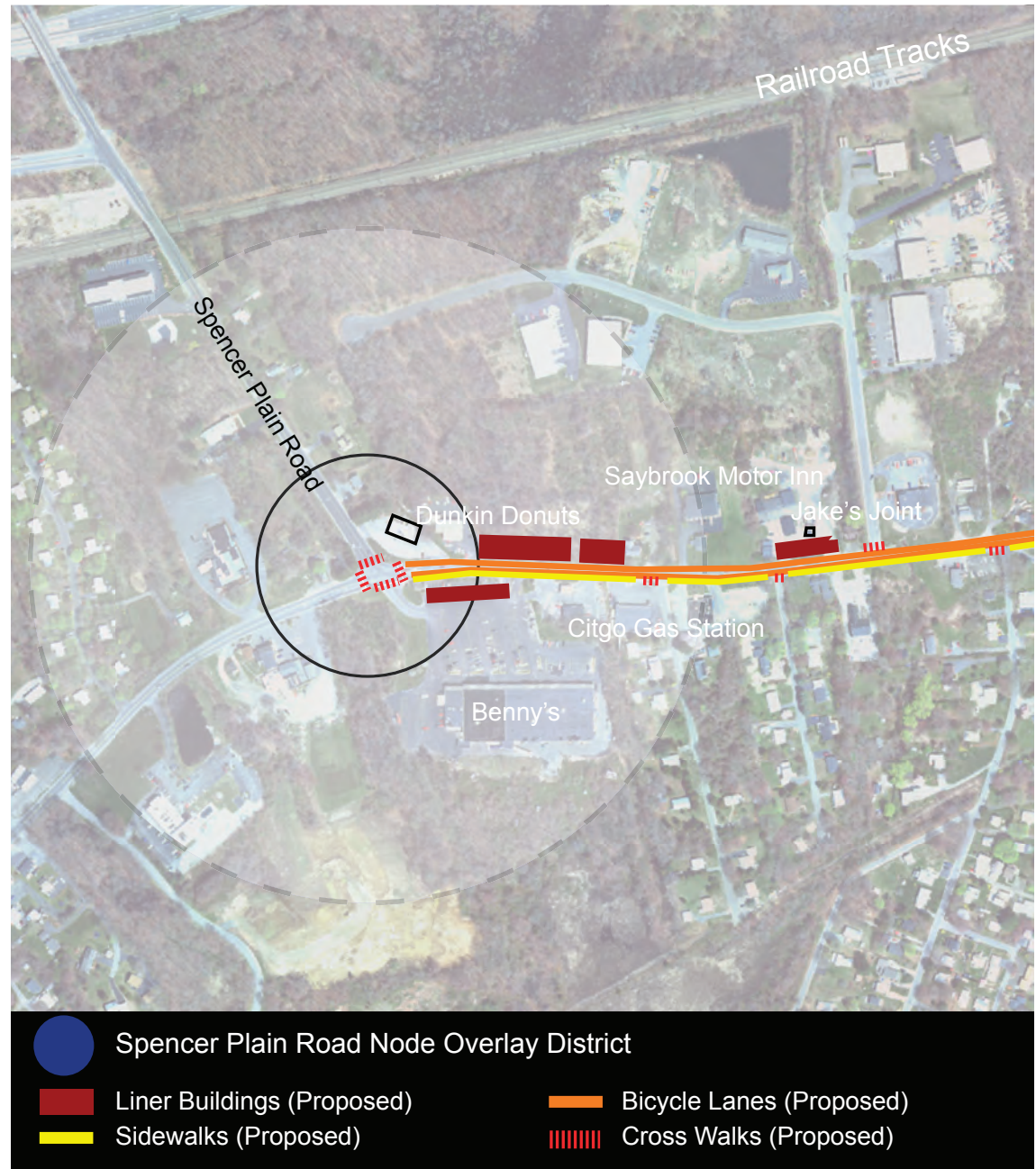
drivers coming off of I-95.

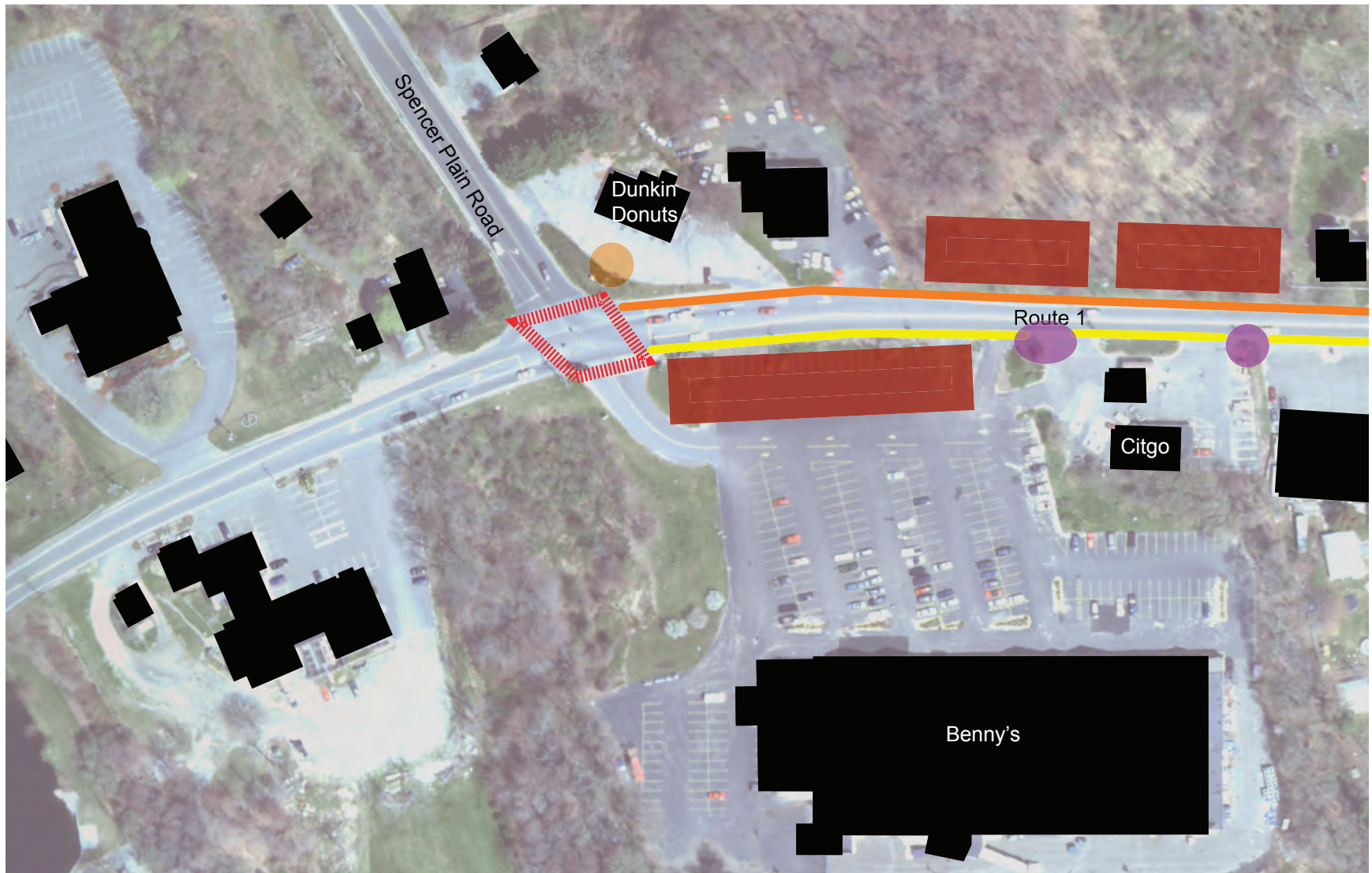
Furthermore, the current B-4 setback requirement in this node creates exactly the type of condition which the Town residents have specifically decried -- namely, stores such as Benny's awash in endless seas of parking. This is a condition anathema to pedestrian use. No one will walk in such an environment if they do not absolutely have to do so. Rather, what is recommended is that the setback requirement be reduced





to 15 feet as is the case currently in the town center, thereby bringing buildings up to the street line. This not only makes for an environment far more amenable to pedestrians, but also will serve to define a street wall.





- Liner Buildings (Proposed)
- ▨ Pedestrian Crossing (Proposed)
- Gateway Marker (Proposed)
- Sidewalk (Proposed)
- Bicycle Lane (Proposed)
- Shared Curb Cut Location (Proposed)



## School House Road

The intersection of School House Road and Route 1 is an example of a location in Old Saybrook where the introduction of *bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and paving changes at pedestrian crossings* could significantly impact both the appearance and use of the Route 1 corridor. Instead of remaining the sole domain of the automobile, Old Saybrook's Route 1 could become a local cornerstone of outdoor recreation for young and old alike.





Spencer Plain Road Node Overlay District



Liner Buildings (Proposed)



Bicycle Lanes (Proposed)



Sidewalks (Existing but in need of repair)



Sidewalks (Proposed)



Cross Walks (Proposed)



Cross Walks (In need of repair)

## Oyster River

The Oyster River is a beautiful natural resource which Old Saybrook should be loath to ignore in the future development of Route 1. As such, *the crossing should be re-zoned as a special recreational overlay district excluding all commercial development.* Currently, the river crossing is characterized by the presence of a McDonald's, a large advertising billboard, a shipping container and a few scattered people fishing and crabbing off the bridge depending on the time of year. In community meetings, participants have repeatedly expressed the desire to activate this waterfront for community use. The billboards should be removed along with the trash, and the river with its views should be accessible and enjoyed by all.

Designated fishing and crabbing areas along the river should be created within this node, hence taking fishermen and crabbers off of the bridge. Bike lanes should be created to provide easy access along Route 1 to this recreational node, and walking trails could be developed along the banks. Provision should also be made for car-top boats (kayaks, canoes, etc.) to be unloaded and launched clear of the main road. Commercial, municipal, and state signage should be eliminated or reduced to a bare minimum within this node, as should tree planting be kept relatively sparse, so as to preserve views of the river and marshes.



*River-oriented recreational activity should be removed from the bridge, shown at left, and encouraged to the North at the water's edge. This location, pictured at top and indicated in the plan at right, could be developed for fishing, crabbing, boat-launching, and other public river activities.*



- Spicer Plain Road Node Overlay District
- Boat Launch / Fishing Pier (Proposed)
- Parking for Waterfront Recreation
- Sidewalks (Proposed)
- Sidewalks (Existing)
- Bicycle Lanes (Proposed)
- Cross Walks (Proposed)
- Cross Walks (Existing)

## Lynde & Elm Streets

As the stretch of Route 1 between Lynde Street and Elm Street develops over time, careful efforts should be made to connect it to the adjacent residential neighborhoods through bike lanes, sidewalks, and lighting. If done properly, this could contribute to a successful pedestrian-scaled “town center” commercial development within this node. Sidewalks should be constructed within the node to allow easy access between inter-nodal destinations. Liner buildings would improve the current shopping center, and would encourage street-based pedestrian activity which is completely lacking in this zone currently. Widening sidewalks and bike lanes within the zone and hence narrowing the road would serve to slow traffic and make the environment far more welcoming to pedestrians than is now the case.










*The intersection of Elm Street and Route 1 is shown above. In the two artist's renderings below, the introduction of improved crossing signage, street-oriented commercial buildings, and bicycle lanes demonstrates the potential for a far more welcoming landscape.*







	Lynde & Elm Streets Node Overlay District		Sidewalks (Existing)
	Liner Buildings (Proposed)		Bicycle Lanes (Proposed)
	Sidewalks (Proposed)		Cross Walks (Proposed)
			Main Street Node Overlay

## Main Street

The intersection of Main Street and Route 1 represents the northern gateway to Old Saybrook from I-95. There is at present a dearth of signage to indicate this fact. Rather, upon entering town one is more likely to notice the signs for various local businesses. This will change with the erection of the planned Village Gateway Building, but consideration should be given to erecting a more prominent municipal sign. As in the Spencer Plain Road node, the setback requirement should be reduced to 15 feet to reinforce the definition of a street wall and encourage pedestrian-scale development. The intersection is heavily trafficked, especially when traffic on I-95 spills over. Consequently, pedestrian access will always be an issue, though not








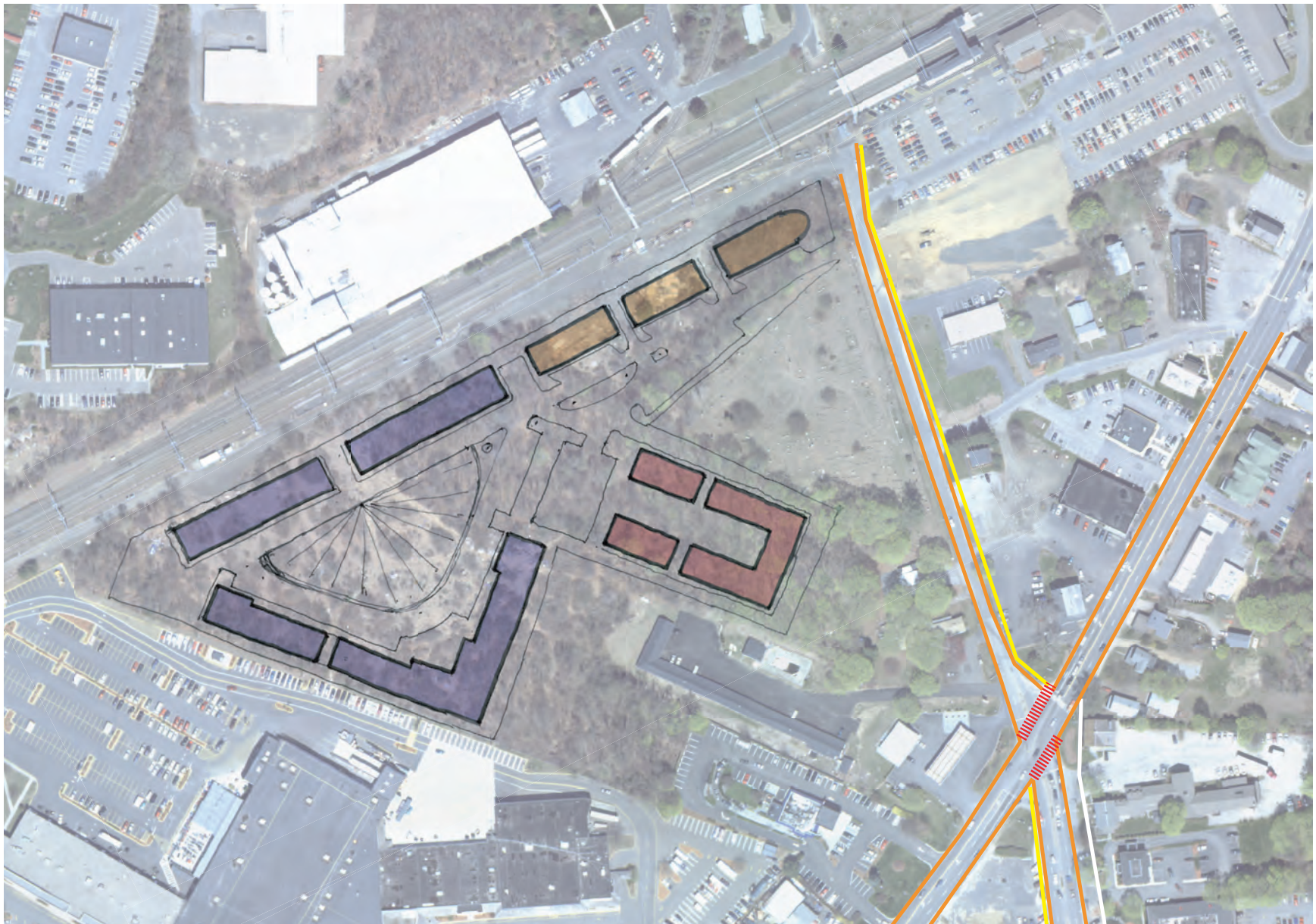
insoluble. Traffic calming is required to slow down the pace of cars coming off of the highway, and once again, this could be realized through curb bump-outs and surface texture changes at crosswalks. The axis of Main Street towards the train station should be considered as well, and any sidewalks and bicycle lanes should continue in this direction.

*Above, we once again see the present landscape. Below, however, simple means such as widening traffic islands and introducing curb bump-outs at pedestrian crossings simultaneously provide clearly marked places for pedestrians to wait before crossing while also narrowing the road at intersections, forcing automobile traffic to slow down and making the intersection that much safer for all.*












	Main Street Node Overlay District		Sidewalks (Existing)
	Bicycle Lanes (Proposed)		Cross Walks (Proposed)
	Sidewalks (Proposed)		



North Main Street Mixed-Use Sketch Proposal

- |   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
|  Commercial Buildings  |  Institutional/Recreational Buildings |  Bicycle Lanes (Proposed) |  Sidewalks (Existing) |
|  Residential Buildings |  Cross Walks (Proposed)               |  Sidewalks (Proposed)     |  |

Presently, North Main Street between Route 1 and the railroad tracks is a quiet if not desolate span. We propose that this condition be re-thought by the Town. After all, North Main comprises the gateway to Old Saybrook for many travelers arriving on trains. Instead of an empty sidestreet, what if North Main became an active mixed-use district, a true extension of Main Street all the way to the train station? This could be achieved by introducing sidewalks, signage, new lighting, and bike lanes along this road, in addition to encouraging streetfront commercial development. The existing parking for the strip mall immediately adjacent to this district could contribute to meeting the necessary parking requirements.

In addition, we would suggest that the Town consider for future development the site bordered by the cemetery, the Wal-Mart shopping center, and the train tracks. As sketched out in the conceptual diagram to the left, this site could host a small, mixed-use “town square” incorporating housing, business, and shopping. Significantly, this would all be located in close proximity to the train station and the existing Old Saybrook shopping center, thus affording easy walking access to the Wal-Mart and other stores for shoppers, and to the train station for commuters. Furthermore, such a development, if effectively realized, could frame an attractive and useful public square which would also offer a gateway to the Town from the train station more in keeping with the character of Old Saybrook.

*At left, a multi-use sketch proposal is offered for the site adjacent to the cemetery on North Main, incorporating commercial, residential, and institutional/recreational uses at this strategic location between the train station, the shopping center, and downtown. While this is only the most general of diagrams, the concept it sets forth is a concrete one: perhaps the best use for this site is not simply residential, commercial, or recreational, but a carefully-composed combination of all three.*

*To the right, an artist’s impression demonstrates how North Main Street could be realized as an active gateway street to the Town of Old Saybrook. Bike lanes, sidewalks, and street lighting combine with street-oriented commercial buildings to extend the vibrant town center already existing along Main Street south of Route 1.*



# Connector Zone Design Recommendations

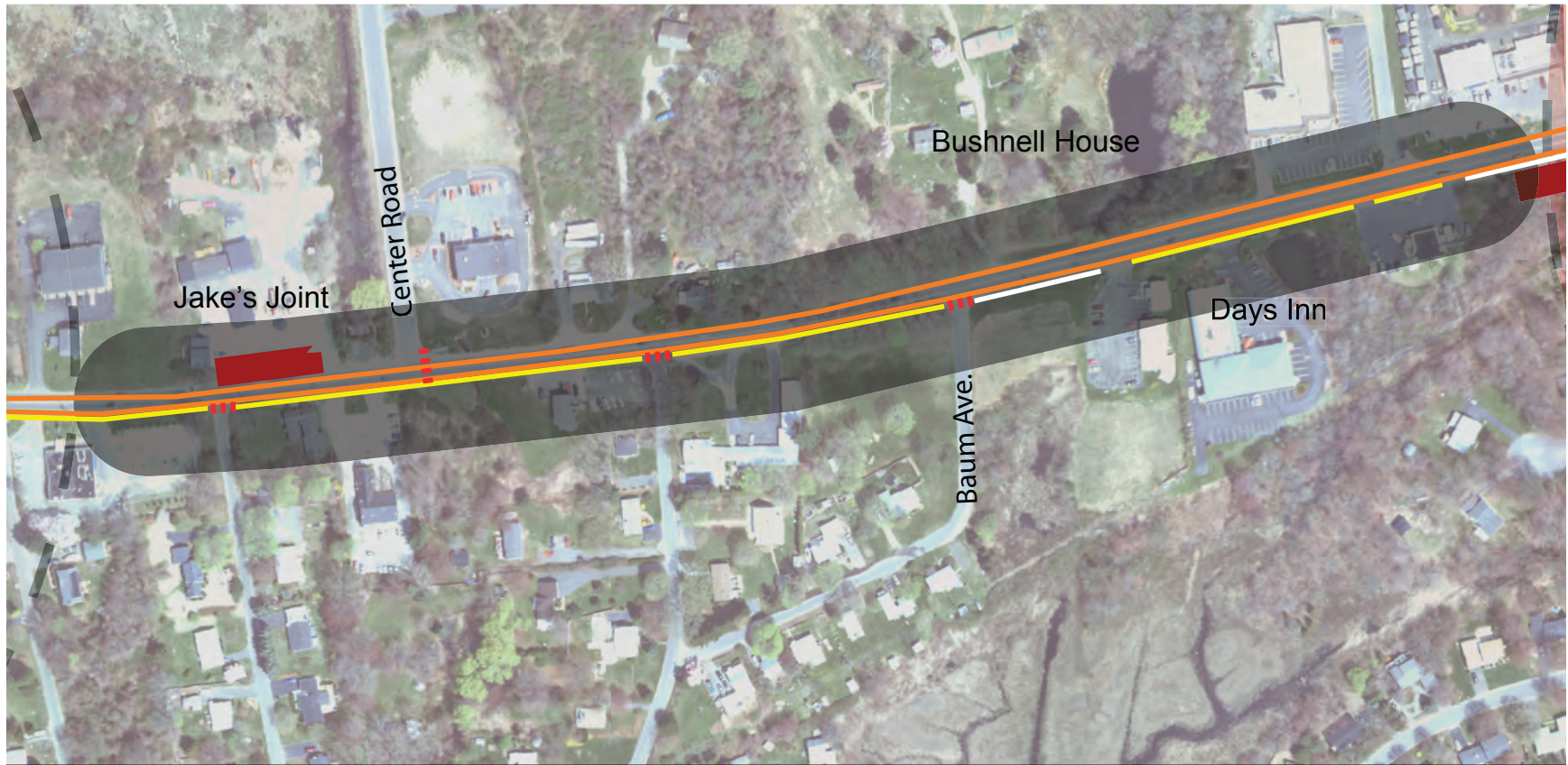
With the five main nodes along Route 1 in Old Saybrook thus discussed, it is now time to address what should be done with the distances that exist between these nodes. As acknowledged earlier in this report, it would be misguided and largely impossible to “pedestrianize” the entire length of Route 1. Such an effort would not only be expensive, but it is unlikely that people will willingly walk any further than 1/4 mile for day-to-day shopping and other needs. However, this does not mean that the inter-node stretches need be desolate seas of parking lots and box stores. Rather, the Town should safeguard these zones as carefully as the other nodes. Hence, we propose the creation of *Connector District* overlay “connector zones”.

## **Connector Zone 1 (Between Spencer Plain and School House Road Nodes) :**

The Town should consider maintaining the wooded character of this stretch of Route 1 as much as is possible. As it currently exists, Zone 1 adds variety to the streetscape, which is otherwise largely exposed to the sun along most of the corridor’s length, and provides an attractive transition between the two bounding nodes. As can be seen in the image at right, attractive lighting should continue through, as should bike lanes connecting all nodes along the length of the corridor. The Town may want to

consider repairing and expanding the existing sidewalk through this area. Such could provide a useful recreational pedestrian route on one side of the road. While this would not necessarily be used for everyday trips to the grocery store, it would be perfect for joggers, dog walkers, and a wide range of other exercise and recreational pedestrian activities.





- Connector Zone 1 (Between Spencer Plain and School House Road Nodes)**
- Bicycle Lanes (Proposed)
  - Sidewalks (Proposed)
  - Cross Walks (Proposed)
  - Liner Buildings (Proposed)
  - Spencer Plain Road Node Overlay
  - School House Road Node Overlay

**Connector Zone 2 (Between School House Road and Oyster River Nodes):**

This zone is characterized by relatively well-maintained and attractive converted and active residential construction in addition to the Old Saybrook High School. Of the three connector zones, Zone 2 requires the least modification. The existing sidewalk should remain, along with most of the buildings such as the one pictured at right.

As with the rest of the Route 1 Corridor, clearly marked bicycle lanes should be introduced on both sides of the road to facilitate recreational and everyday transport cycling. As shown in the map on the facing page, bicycle lanes should continue along the side street, leading all the way to bicycle parking facilities on school grounds, thus improving safety for those students cycling to school and back. Furthermore, the sidewalk should be repaired or built where indicated on the map in order to link this zone to the School House Road Node, and many of the current crosswalks would be greatly served by improved signage.

While Zone 2 is by definition seen more as a connection rather than a destination along the Route 1 Corridor, the presence of the High School changes this somewhat, especially for the youth of Old Saybrook.



Hence, the Town would be well-advised to apply the general design recommendations as outlined earlier in this report as actively here as it would in any of the Node Overlay Districts.





Old Saybrook High School

Donnelly Rd.

- 
- Connector Zone 2 (Between School House Road and Oyster River Nodes)
- Bicycle Lanes (Proposed)
- Sidewalks (Existing but in need of repair)
- Sidewalks (Existing in good condition)
- Crosswalks (missing or in need of repair)
- School House Rd. Node
- Oyster River Node Overlay

### Connector Zone 3 (Between Oyster River and Lynde Street Nodes):

This stretch of Route 1 comprises the most problematic of the connector zones. It is presently characterized by stores such as Staples and the AMF Saybrook Lanes set back behind seas of asphalt parking. It also lacks sidewalks and is generally inhospitable to pedestrian traffic. The existing pedestrian crossing signal located between Staples and the AMF Saybrook Lanes lot is hidden behind bushes, and lacks any markings on the pavement. This should be rectified at the very least, and as in all other Nodes and Connector Zones, bicycle lanes should be introduced on both sides of the roadway.

It should be noted that the large parking lots present in this Zone are ideal for liner buildings such as described earlier in this report. While the Town should consider allowing this district to remain essentially an automobile and bicycle-scaled shopping strip, thoughtfully sited and designed liner buildings, with entrances and windows facing Route 1 and the parking at rear, would greatly enhance the visual appearance of Zone 3 while allowing for more intensive commercial use of the sites.

*Pictured below is the vast parking lot that currently exists in front of the AMF Saybrook Bowling Lanes along Route 1. At right is the same location depicted with uniform streetlighting, bicycle lanes, and liner buildings. Even if this zone were to be largely oriented towards automobile and bicycle traffic, the facades of the liner buildings facing Route 1 could still serve as “rest-stops” for joggers, cyclists, and others seeking shelter from the sun and elements.*





- Connector Zone 3 (Oyster River to Lynde & Elm Nodes)
- Liner Buildings (Proposed)
- Bicycle Lanes (Proposed)
- Sidewalks (Proposed)
- Sidewalks (Existing but in need of repair)
- Oyster River Node Overlay
- Lynde & Elm Streets Node Overlay
- Crosswalks (missing or in need of repair)

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# Conclusion

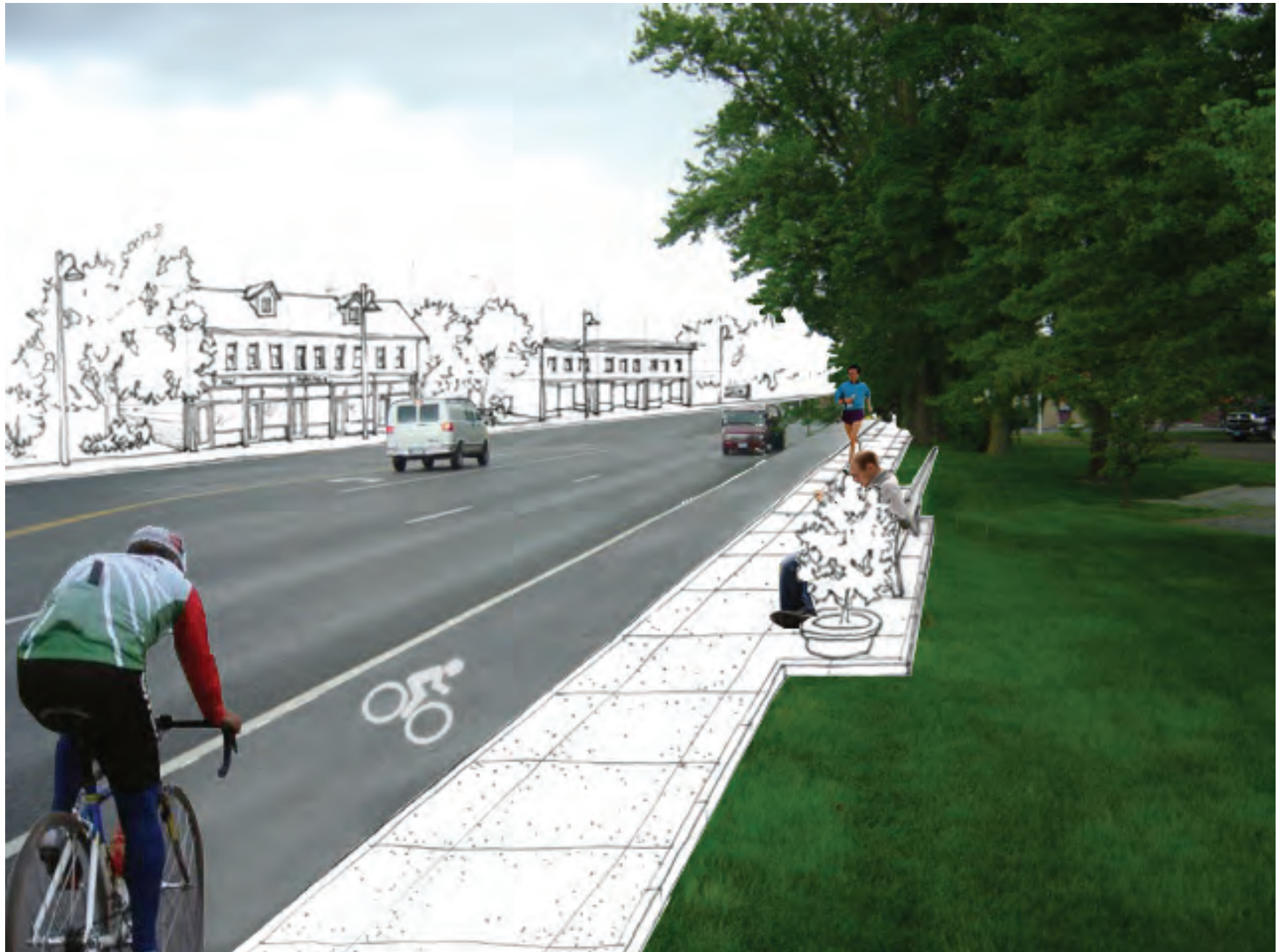
The Route 1 Corridor is today a generally unattractive environment. Far too oriented towards automobile traffic to the almost complete exclusion of the pedestrian and cyclist, Route 1 could be described with only slight hyperbole as a blight on the landscape of Old Saybrook. This condition is all the more unfortunate due to the fact that the Route 1 Corridor is the way countless people - be they motorists, cyclists, shoppers, or other - experience the Town.

Thankfully, as this report has endeavored to demonstrate, something can be done to change this. Old Saybrook has excellent 'bones', and the Route 1 Corridor is no exception. Oyster River offers a truly spectacular natural recreational landscape directly accessible from the road. Numerous side streets connect residential neighborhoods to Route 1, thus allowing for easy pedestrian and bicycle access to this fast-growing commercial corridor, if only there were bicycle lanes, sidewalks and pedestrian crossings that made such travel not only safe but pleasant. Box stores set back behind large fields of asphalt parking, rather than presenting insurmountable aesthetic and functional challenges, in fact create ripe opportunities for the introduction of visually-appealing and pedestrian-friendly liner buildings.

It should be noted that the design recommendations outlined in this report are relatively simple and well-known moves. This is not to suggest that their effects would be anything less than transformative on the surrounding landscape. However, while yielding powerful results, these recommendations are all realistically attainable for a town of Old Saybrook's size and ambition. This should serve as encouragement to those who read this report and must now decide upon a course of action for the Town.

In short, the Route 1 Corridor *can* be seen as an asset to Old Saybrook. The question is: will the Town take advantage of this potential? If the answer is no, then it can be expected that in a matter of years, Route 1 will look like any other suburban strip highway in America. If the answer is yes, however, there is the genuine possibility of creating a landscape that successfully reconciles the competing functional needs of suburban commerce, recreation, automobiles, pedestrians, bicycles, and many other uses. Furthermore, this can take place in an environment that is visually pleasing and in keeping with Old Saybrook's rich tradition of small-town urbanism. We would go so far as to suggest that, if developed properly, the Route 1 Corridor in Old Saybrook could become a model for countless communities

throughout the nation facing similar issues. Indeed, this is a truly exciting time in the Town's history. So to the residents of Old Saybrook we ask, what path will your town take? The choice is yours.



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# Acknowledgements

This report is the result of the efforts of many people, all of whom deserve mention for their time and commitment to the project.

To begin, there would have been no Route 1 Corridor Study had it not been for the Board of Selectmen who commissioned the project in the first place. Thus, Michael Pace, First Selectmen; William A. Peace, Selectman; and Velma Thomas, Selectman should be recognized for their contribution to this work.

The members of the Old Saybrook Architectural Review Board, Conservation Commission, Economic Development Commission, Planning Commission, and Zoning Commission have all devoted significant amounts of time and energy to these issues and, indeed, our work at the YUDW would have been impossible without them. Wilma Asch, Executive Director, Economic Development Commission; Christina M. Costa, Enforcement Officer; and Damon Hearne, GIS Map Maker have also all been extraordinarily helpful along the way.

This study has been very much a team effort at the Yale Urban Design Workshop, and the initial stages of the study were carried out under the direction of Alan Plattus by Anthony Goldsby and Andrew Lyon, who

laid the groundwork for all that followed. In addition, Michael Grogan and Surry Schlabs rendered many of the illustrations found throughout the report.

Finally, special mention must be given to Christine Nelson, AICP, Director, Land Use Department. Christine has worked tirelessly for some time now on this project, and she deserves as much - if not more - credit than any other person for its successful completion.

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# About the Yale Urban Design Workshop

The Yale Urban Design Workshop and Center for Urban Design Research provides a forum for faculty and students at the Yale School of Architecture, as well as interested faculty and students from other schools and departments, to engage in the study of issues, ideas and practical problems in the realm of contemporary urbanism and public landscape. The Center for Urban Design Research sponsors seminars, colloquia, design studies, reports and publications addressing not only the interests of faculty and students, but also topics and problems introduced by cities, towns and regional authorities, for consideration within the research and design context fostered by the School. The central mission of the Center is the provision of a venue within the School of Architecture for work and discussion which extends the core curriculum and educational experience of the School into the field of Urbanism.

In addition to academic explorations, the Urban Design Workshop, a community design center, researches and designs projects on behalf of groups that can benefit from the format of a faculty and student design workshop. These explorations are directed by teams of faculty and developed by graduate and undergraduate students on an extracurricular basis. Projects often involve faculty and students from other Yale schools, as well as consultants and collaborators from the community. The primary focus of these projects is educational and is in the spirit of community service; the projects are not intended to provide professional architectural services. They can, however, within a research and design setting, provide urban design studies, feasibility studies, and reports. These studies are funded by groups interested in addressing their urban design needs through an educational and research based process, as well as by grants received by students or faculty in order to pursue specific projects.

The Urban Design Workshop and the School of Architecture maintain ongoing involvement with interdisciplinary and collaborative urban programs and service organizations, whether based in the School of Architecture or other schools at Yale. The Urban Design Workshop is also a member of Community Design, Inc., a national organization of community design centers based in schools of architecture and planning.