

**HIGHWAY 99  
ENHANCEMENT PROJECT  
REPORT**  
04.07.04

**CITY OF EDMONDS**  
**HIGHWAY 99 ENHANCEMENT PROJECT**  
**Report**

## *Highway 99 Task Force*

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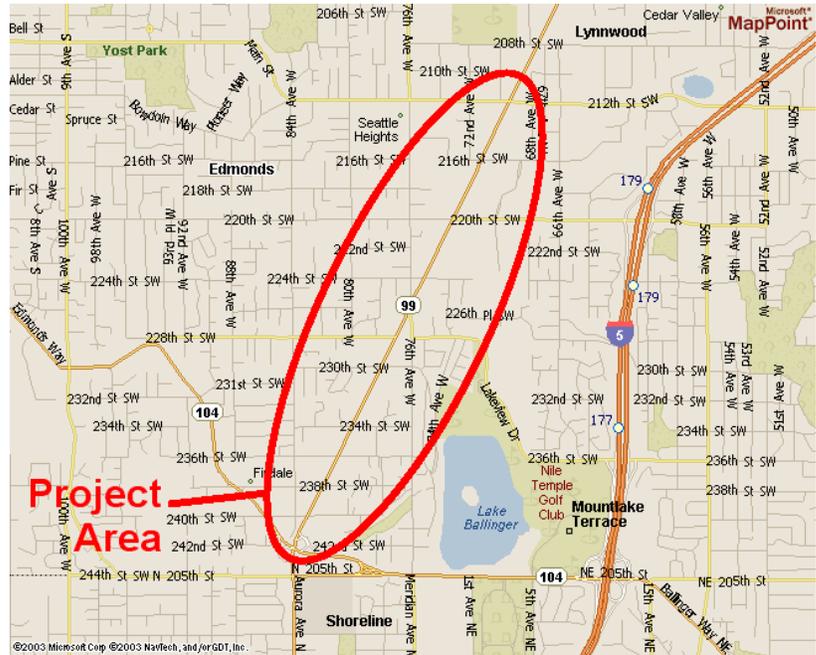
## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Background.....	1
Next Steps.....	2
<b>Summary of the Process</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Results of the Focus Groups with Local Residents.....	3
Results of the Charrette Meetings with Business Owners .....	9
<b>Concept Plan of the Corridor</b> .....	<b>11</b>
General Considerations .....	11
Key Objectives and Suggested Actions .....	12
Focus Areas along the Corridor .....	13
<b>Design Objectives and Recommendations</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Hospital Community and Family Retail Center .....	14
“International District” .....	16
Residential Area Retail Center.....	19
“Hotels” Area Improvement.....	21
Gateways .....	23
<b>Summary Recommendations</b> .....	<b>24</b>

# Introduction

## Background

During the City Council retreat in February of 2002, the Highway 99 corridor was identified as one of the areas of greatest potential for generating tax revenue for the city. The concept for the Highway 99 Task Force was then generated at the City Council retreat in February of 2003. At that time, there appeared to be a consensus among the councilmembers that a working group should be convened to study and make recommendations on how to maximize business growth along the Highway 99 corridor.



Given the competitive nature of the retail industry and the fact that cities are actively competing to attract revenue-producing businesses, Edmonds must take pro-active steps to achieve the desired development. Among communities along the Highway 99 corridor, Edmonds has a unique advantage in that the street has already been improved. By establishing the character, quality, and dimensional standards in the right-of-way, these improvements provide a predictable and attractive setting. However, the small lot size and relation to surrounding neighborhoods of most commercial parcels are significant constraints. In order to maximize opportunities for significant positive development in most places along the corridor, the City may need to adjust regulatory measures and work collaboratively with prospective developers, property owners, and nearby neighbors.

The Task Force first completed information gathering. The activities in this report constitute the second phase, in which neighborhood representatives and business and property owners identified local objectives and explored development opportunities with an eye towards possible Comprehensive Plan and regulatory amendments. The results of this effort will serve as a starting point for the Planning Board's consideration of Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments ultimately City Council action in 2004.

It must be recognized that we, as a city, can draft and craft all we want—and, in the end, it will be the business and property owners who will decide to develop or not. This is an absolutely crucial point. Since we do not own the property, we have no control over whether a property will develop or not.

Therefore, it is critical that the process encourage local business and property owners to think creatively about their opportunities. During the meetings, designers will work directly with participants to explore options at key locations. In other corridor redevelopment plans, such as those for Juanita, Tukwila's International Boulevard, First Avenue South (Normandy Park), Viking Way (Poulsbo), the Mill Creek Town Center, Woodinville, and Tumwater's Capital Boulevard, similar work sessions have generated a lot of developer enthusiasm and key implementation concepts.

A research executive was consulted to determine the correct way to get valid information from the focus group as a benchmark of neighborhood values. Once benchmarked, we presented these neighborhood values to the property owners and business owners as the starting point for discussion of what might be possible. This was done in one of two meetings where the property owners and business owners will be asked to participate in the process of exploring what might conceivably be developed in the corridor.

A letter was sent to the more than 300 property owners and business owners, asking them to prepare to participate in these meetings. We received a favorable response to this mailing.

## Next Steps

1. **Review of Results of the First Phase.** The results of this effort will be reviewed by an urban economist to ensure that what is forwarded to the Planning Board for serious consideration is both viable and prioritized. Elements that make no economic sense will be identified.

**Projected Cost: \$20,000 (Could be done after the Planning Board develops concepts.)**

2. **Planning Board Review for Possible Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Amendments.** The public and members of the Highway 99 Task Force will continue to participate in the public process of evaluating possible actions. The Planning Board will conduct a review of the Highway 99 corridor as part of the 2004 major Comprehensive Plan update. This process will involve work sessions and public hearings, with the goal of completing the work by the end of 2004. Specific recommendations brought forward by the Planning Board will have the advantage of significant public review before they are brought to the City Council. If, for example, there is public buy-in for specific plan amendments, then zoning or development code changes will be much less difficult to approve.

Once this work is completed, it can act as a springboard to economic development in the Highway 99 corridor, assist an Economic Development Director in recruiting new businesses to the corridor, and help prevent the loss of others. It is planned that the Highway 99 Task Force will continue to participate throughout the process and continue to shepherd development along with the City's Economic Development Director. Development of many projects may take years to bring to fruition. We should be reminded that, if we want to maximize the Highway 99 corridor for tax generation, we must nurture and encourage development. At the same time, we must preserve the charm and character of Edmonds. These goals have equal importance to the Highway 99 Task Force members.



The chart with photos on page 6 summarizes the two groups' responses to sample types of development (Activity #2), and the map notes on page 7 presents the results of the map exercise (Activity #3).

The Activity #1 results of the two groups are summarized in the table below.

<b>Activity #1. Things You Want to Preserve/Prevent:</b>	
<p><b><u>GROUP 1</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● No increase in traffic</li> <li>● Safety for children and pedestrians</li> <li>● Keep the chicanes</li> <li>● East-West traffic is an issue</li> <li>● Limit high-noise activity development</li> <li>● Like the small town community feel (Don't turn this into commercial strips like in Lynnwood)</li> <li>● Like the downtown Edmonds feel</li> <li>● Extend the downtown visual appeal toward Highway 99</li> <li>● Protect the good downtown character</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>GROUP 2</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Don't lose green areas</li> <li>● Keep the single-family development model</li> <li>● Activities arriving should respect the quiet neighborhood character</li> <li>● Need for family/community places in the Highway 99 area</li> <li>● Need more restaurants</li> <li>● Have more stable (over time) shops</li> <li>● Cluster around business</li> <li>● Attract other large businesses and institutions</li> <li>● Attract businesses that participate in the community and take care of their grounds</li> <li>● Balance between large and small businesses</li> <li>● Improve East-West pedestrian access and add sidewalks on side streets</li> <li>● Add a pedestrian crossing East-West between 238<sup>th</sup> and 224<sup>th</sup></li> <li>● Want a large variety of discount stores (e.g., Target)</li> <li>● Want a "U village"-like development with a pedestrian core and café, etc.</li> <li>● Attract businesses that produce revenue</li> <li>● The presence of residences (condos) on Highway 99 is good</li> <li>● All new development should have good access</li> <li>● Allocating more businesses north would bring in more customer traffic along the corridor</li> <li>● Better signal timing along Highway 99</li> <li>● More landscaping (like Premera)</li> <li>● More organic redevelopments</li> </ul>

**Activity #2. Things to Avoid:**

**GROUP 1**

- Massive apartment buildings
- If Lynnwood is made up of shops with people living around them, Edmonds is more a community with shops in between (Keep it like this)
- “No” to retail that look like a mall
- “Yes” to retail with curb appeal
- “Yes” to continuity of community values and appeal
- Stability is good (referred to longevity of businesses)
- Don't increase pedestrian paths if they can't be safe and secure (There are examples of polluted, unsafe pedestrian access only areas)
- No more used car dealers
- Bus stops are poorly designed and maintained (But a contradiction: the better they look the more they tend to attract bums and vandals)
- Asian businesses have tended to be exclusive and don't relate to the community
- All along the corridor there are problems with crossing and left-turns
- The ease of access will affect where we go shopping
- East -West crossing is an issue
- A superstore broken into mini stores would be a nice development model
- NO MORE CASINOS
- No more signals on Highway 99

**GROUP 2**

- There are enough car lots and casinos
- “No” to activities that attract criminality
- Semis (trucks) impact local streets
- Avoid attracting only businesses that produce revenue

Activity #2. Development Samples Evaluation:				
	Group 1		Group 2	
	<b>3 1/2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nice sidewalks</li> <li>Nice trees</li> <li>Doesn't look like strip mall</li> </ul>	<b>4+</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Store front is good</li> <li>Light and trees are good</li> <li>A complex made out of this kind of shops would be good</li> <li>But it should be oriented off Aurora</li> <li>But it needs good access</li> </ul>
	<b>1/2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why should they come here?</li> <li>Strictly functional to shopping</li> <li>There's no room for it here</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good development example for a big place</li> <li>It'd be good to mix #1 and #2</li> </ul>
	<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too modern for Edmonds</li> <li>Visually attractive</li> <li>Thanks but not here</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sidewalks need to be better than this</li> <li>Put this near Ranch 99</li> <li>A theater needs other uses around</li> </ul>
	<b>1 1/2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development not for high speed traffic</li> <li>But good looking</li> <li>But not on 99</li> <li>Too tall</li> </ul>	<b>OK</b> If some conditions are met	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is character to it</li> <li>Maybe not practical</li> <li>Does it have enough amenities?</li> <li>Too tall too close</li> <li>Maybe set back from 99</li> <li>Need to keep up shops</li> <li>Small doses are OK but not on highway</li> </ul>
	<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aesthetics</li> <li>Materials</li> <li>Small feel</li> <li>Looks like Redmond Ridge</li> </ul>	<b>1 &amp; 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What's around it? Don't put it in alone</li> <li>It's inviting, pleasant NW style</li> <li>Not a box (good!)</li> <li>Too small, too rural</li> </ul>



<b>General Considerations:</b>	
<p><b><u>GROUP 1</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Like the “neighborhood” character</li> <li>● Traffic is a problem</li> <li>● New development should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Not generic</li> <li>○ Small scale</li> <li>○ Various</li> <li>○ Including amenities</li> <li>○ Carry the downtown sense</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Gateways in and out of Edmonds</li> <li>● Variety of activity is good</li> <li>● No Lynnwood type development</li> <li>● No “big box” because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Quality</li> <li>○ Impacts (service at 3 in the morning)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b><u>GROUP 2</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Protect residential qualities and property values</li> <li>● Lots of variety: big and small developments; retail, office, residential</li> <li>● Pedestrian access East -West and retail-oriented</li> <li>● Make the corridor more attractive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Businesses</li> <li>○ Streets</li> <li>○ Upkeep</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Should have more consistent quality</li> <li>● Trees and landscaping</li> <li>● Focus on vacant property maintenance: have a standard for upkeep and health code</li> <li>● Look at land use – cluster organization</li> <li>● Emphasize cultural diversity – attract the whole population</li> <li>● Focus on local customers (better local advertising and access)</li> <li>● Need closer services</li> </ul>

Summarizing in a few points the results of these focus groups, the following should be considered:

- Highway 99 lacks identity with the Edmonds character.
- The Highway 99 corridor has little attractiveness for pedestrians.
- New development should be high-quality, varied, not generic, and include amenities.
- Protect residential qualities and connect businesses with the local community.
- Make the corridor more attractive and pedestrian-friendly (e.g., add trees and landscaping)

## Results of the Charrette Meetings with Business Owners



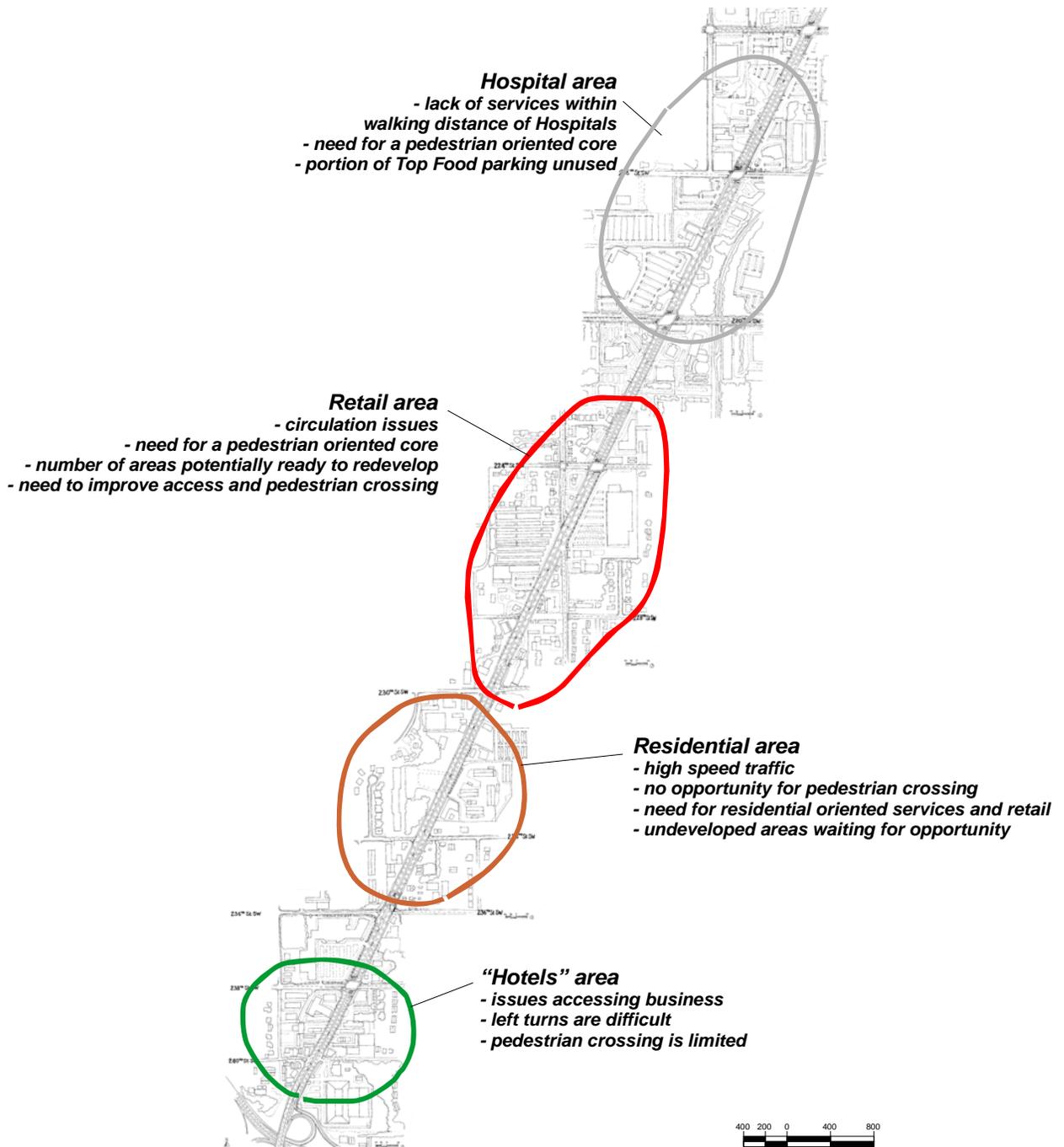
The City invited all business and land owners along the Highway 99 corridor to participate in a charrette meeting. Once again the participants were given a choice between two dates to accommodate schedules and to have a better chance to interact directly with every single stakeholder. The charrette meetings took place on February 25, 2004 and February 28, 2004.

The participants were first updated with the results of the residents' focus groups and shown a brief analysis of the area and a series of development examples. The discussion was then taken into small groups on different sectors of the corridor.

Although the subject of the discussion was typically strictly connected with the area of interest of the participants, a few general considerations emerged for the whole corridor:

- There are problems all along the corridor with access, left turns, and pedestrian crossings.
- Several areas are ready for redevelopment, but incentives and opportunities are lacking.
- Increasing pedestrian access and visual quality will facilitate businesses.

More specifically, comments regarding issues and opportunities were discussed for four specific sectors of the corridor; beginning in the north: the hospital area, a retail/international district area, a residential area, and the "hotels" area. For each area, participants identified issues and potentials, described business expansion or redevelopment aspirations, and worked with team members and City officials to integrate their ideas into a comprehensive development vision.



The meetings produced an extraordinary quantity of good information about what properties are or could be likely to redevelop, what are the issues connected to the development or redevelopment, and what exterior conditions of traffic, access, attractiveness, and vicinity with other businesses may be. They also provided the basis for development scenarios that reflect the aspirations for change.

# Concept Plan of the Corridor

## General Considerations

Hwy 99 is divided by two conflicting but inextricable interest: traffic and business.

The key issue is to introduce changes that combine improvement in traffic, like better chanalization of consistent left-turn fluxes, and in pedestrian and business access. I. e. while a wild increment in light controlled intersection can create traffic distress and even reduce left turn and access capacity, a more regular distance between traffic lights can improve circulation, reduce accident rate and improve business access and pedestrian crossing.



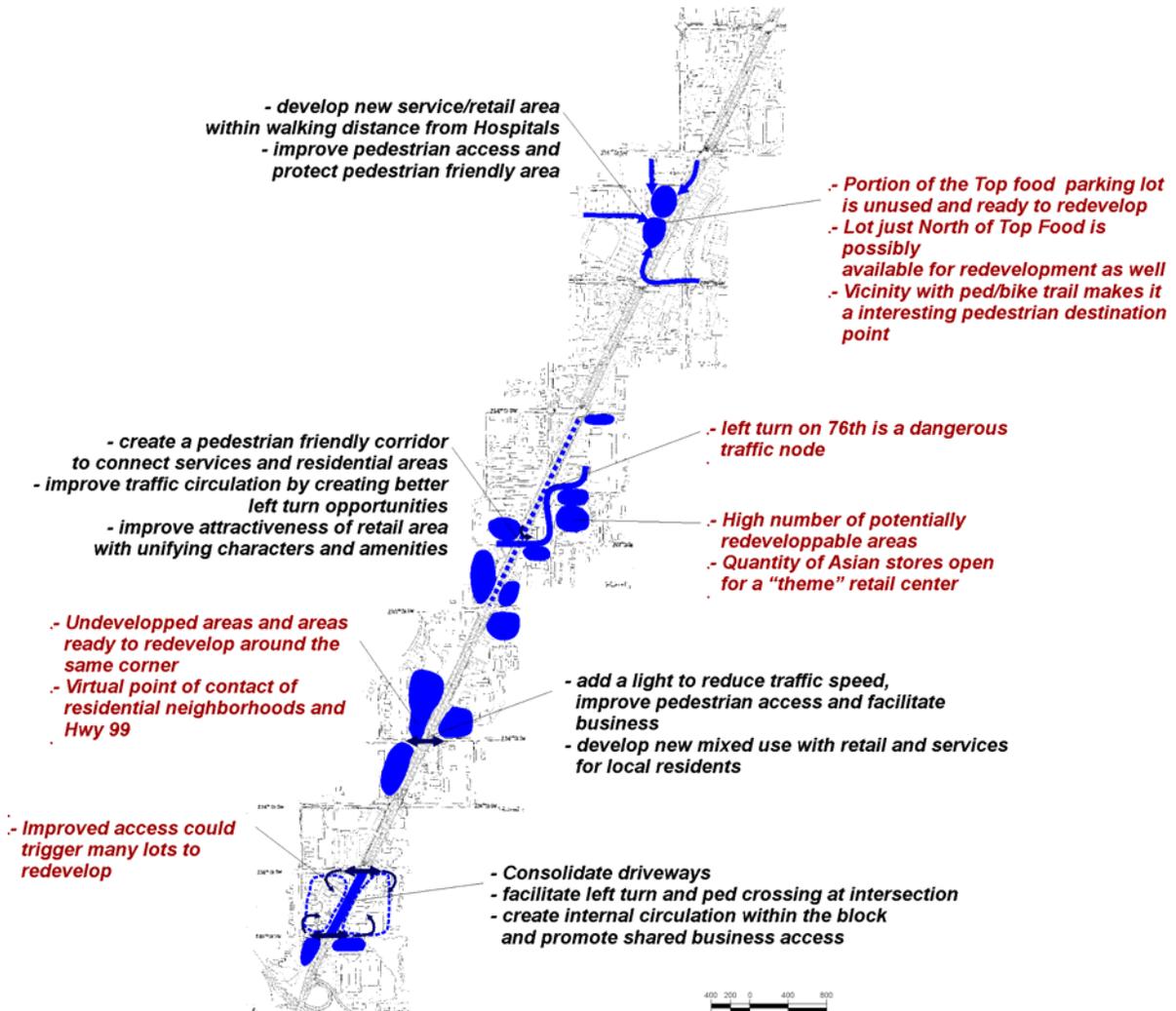
*One long stretch on Hwy 99 where the absence of traffic lights, the high number of driveways and traffic speed are a concern both for safety and business growth.*

Common denominator of all the comments and local improvement suggestions collected during the focus groups and charrettes is poor/dangerous access for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. High speed, high number of driveways, poor or absent chanalization of consistent left turn movement are recurrent problems along the corridor and they all contribute to a limited visibility for business and a poor pedestrian friendly environment.

All the suggested intervention addresses these issues. In some case a more pedestrian oriented development opens new connection with surrounding business and residential environment, in some cases the improved access conditions opens to a better and new wave of development opportunities.

## Key Objectives and Suggested Actions

Working with the local communities it was possible to identify a number of opportunities that would allow improvements in traffic, access and pedestrian connection; such improvements guarantee a better opportunity of redevelopment for several lots around and respond directly to the specific issues raised on the areas.



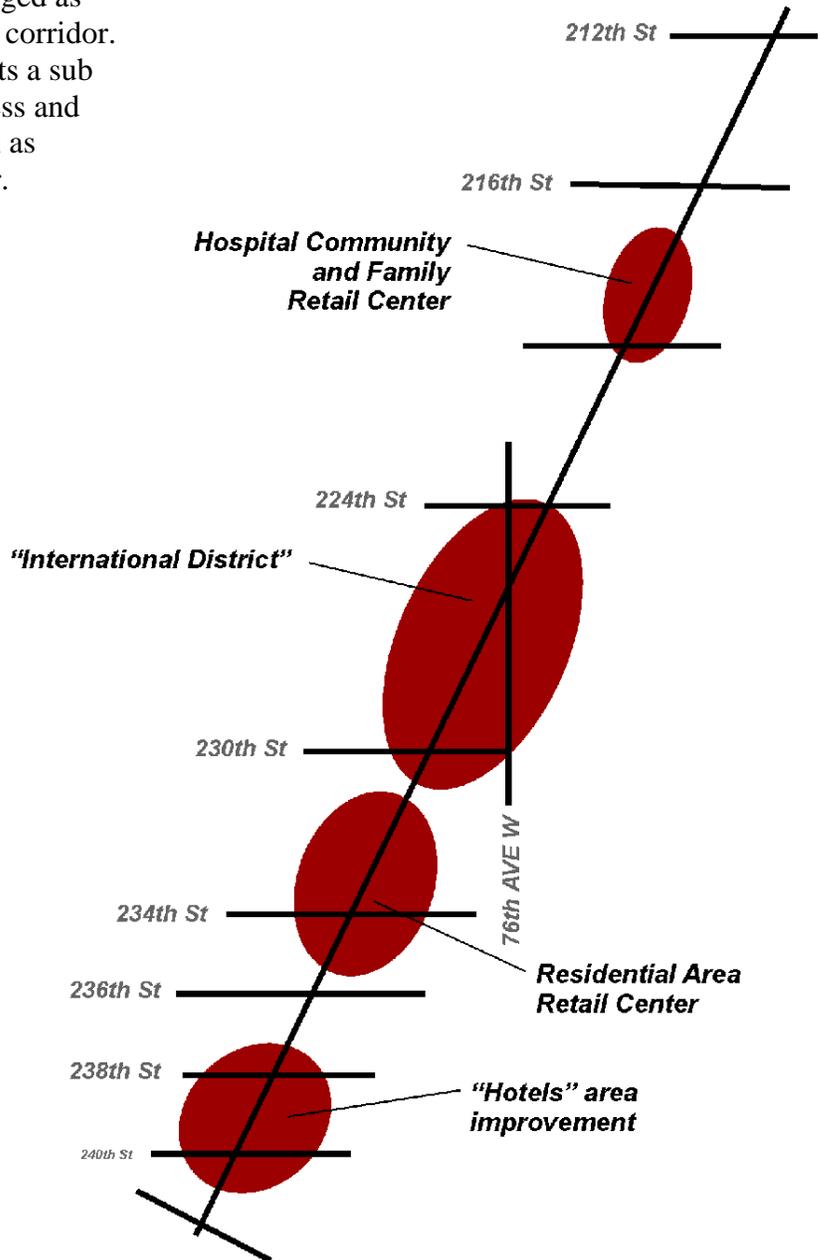
*A summary of opportunities (in red) and improvement goals (in black). The planned improvements are organized in sub systems of developments, connected by use, access and area identity.*

## Focus Areas along the Corridor

Four themes and four areas emerged as particularly interesting along the corridor. Each one of these areas represents a sub system with specific traffic, access and pedestrian characteristics as well as development goals and character.

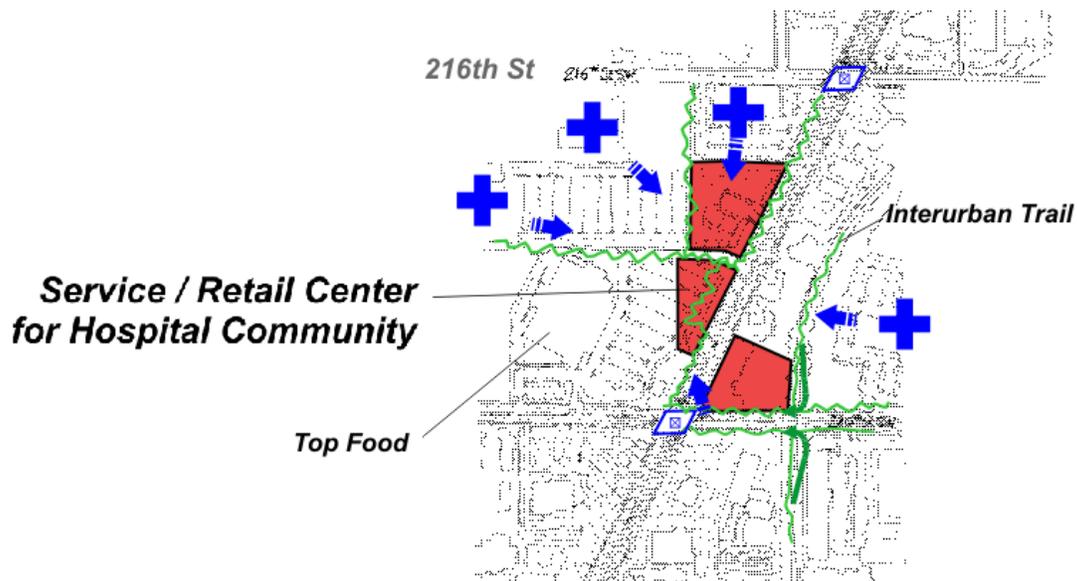
From the north to the south we recognize the following areas:

- The **Hospital Community and Family Retail Center**;
- The **“International District”** area;
- The **Residential Area Retail Center**;
- The **“Hotels”** area improvement



# Design Objectives and Recommendations

## Hospital Community and Family Retail Center



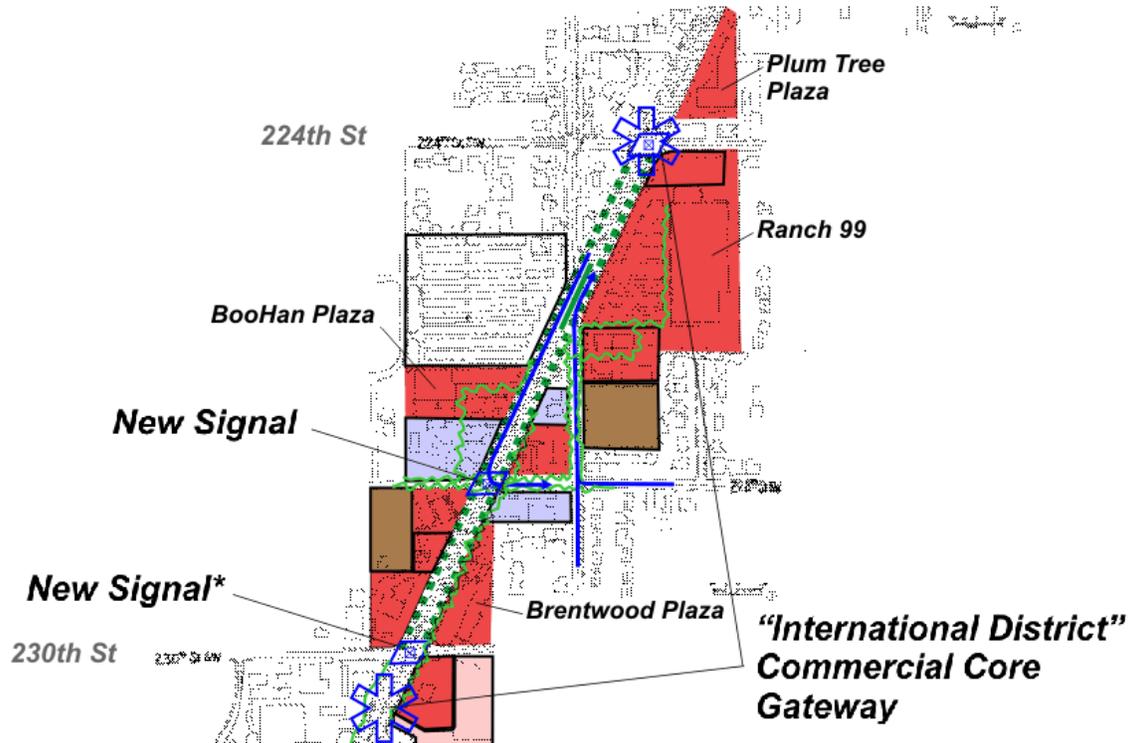
In this concept map it's easy to visualize how the new retail center would be positioned in a favorable position to the many hospital services in the area and it would be easily reachable from the Interurban trail.

To accentuate the pedestrian access to the new development new pedestrian paths are suggested even between the properties and not necessarily along the main roads.



*This is one of the many possible development scenarios that would fit the goals expressed in the concept plan. The new plaza / pedestrian oriented retail center creates a protected pedestrian environment while maintaining good visibility and parking access.*

# “International District”

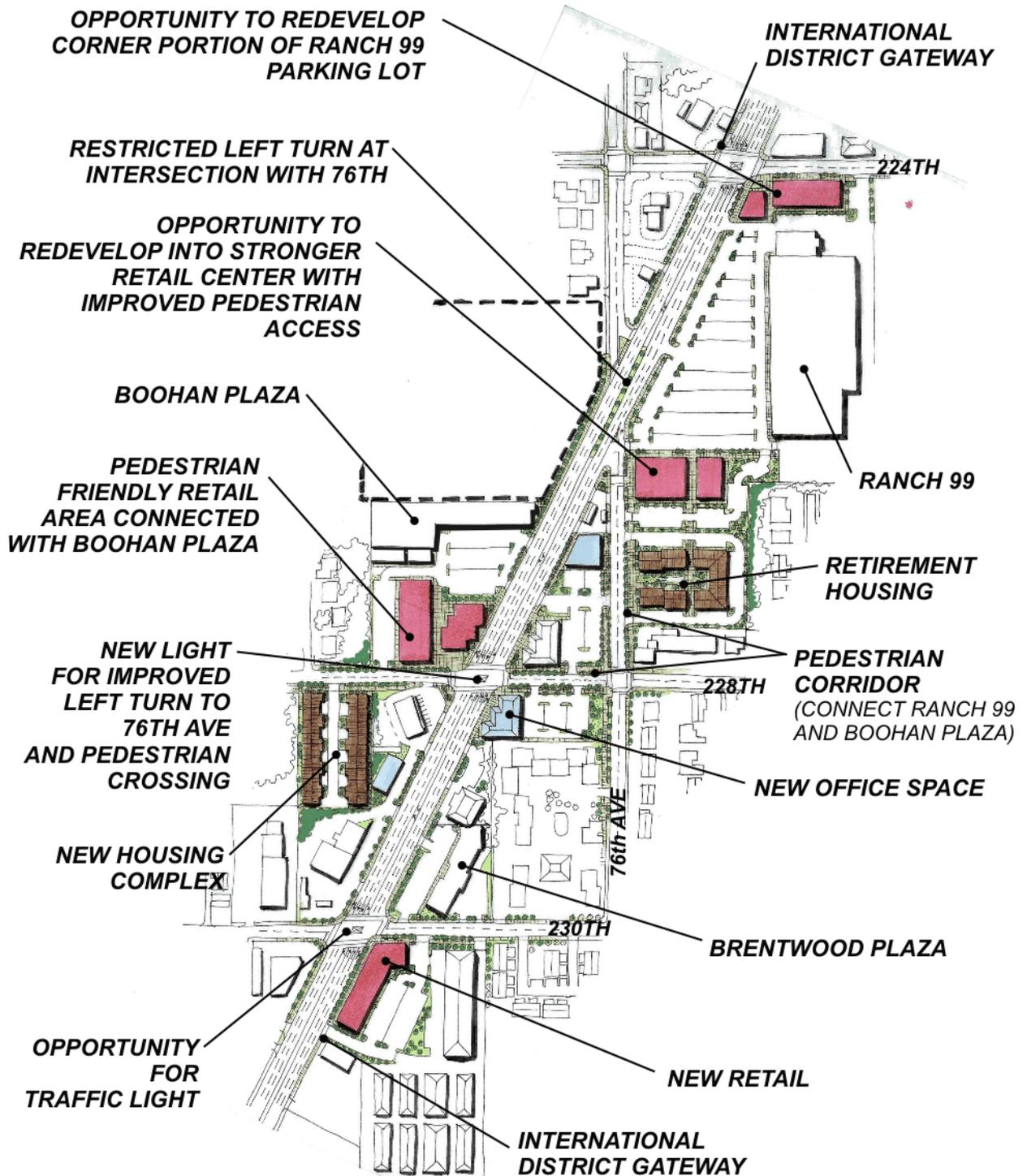


The idea of an “International District” is organized around the concepts of visibility and internal connection. The access to the “District” is marked by specific gateways and the many focus point of the area (and the new development in between) are connected with a strong pedestrian corridor.

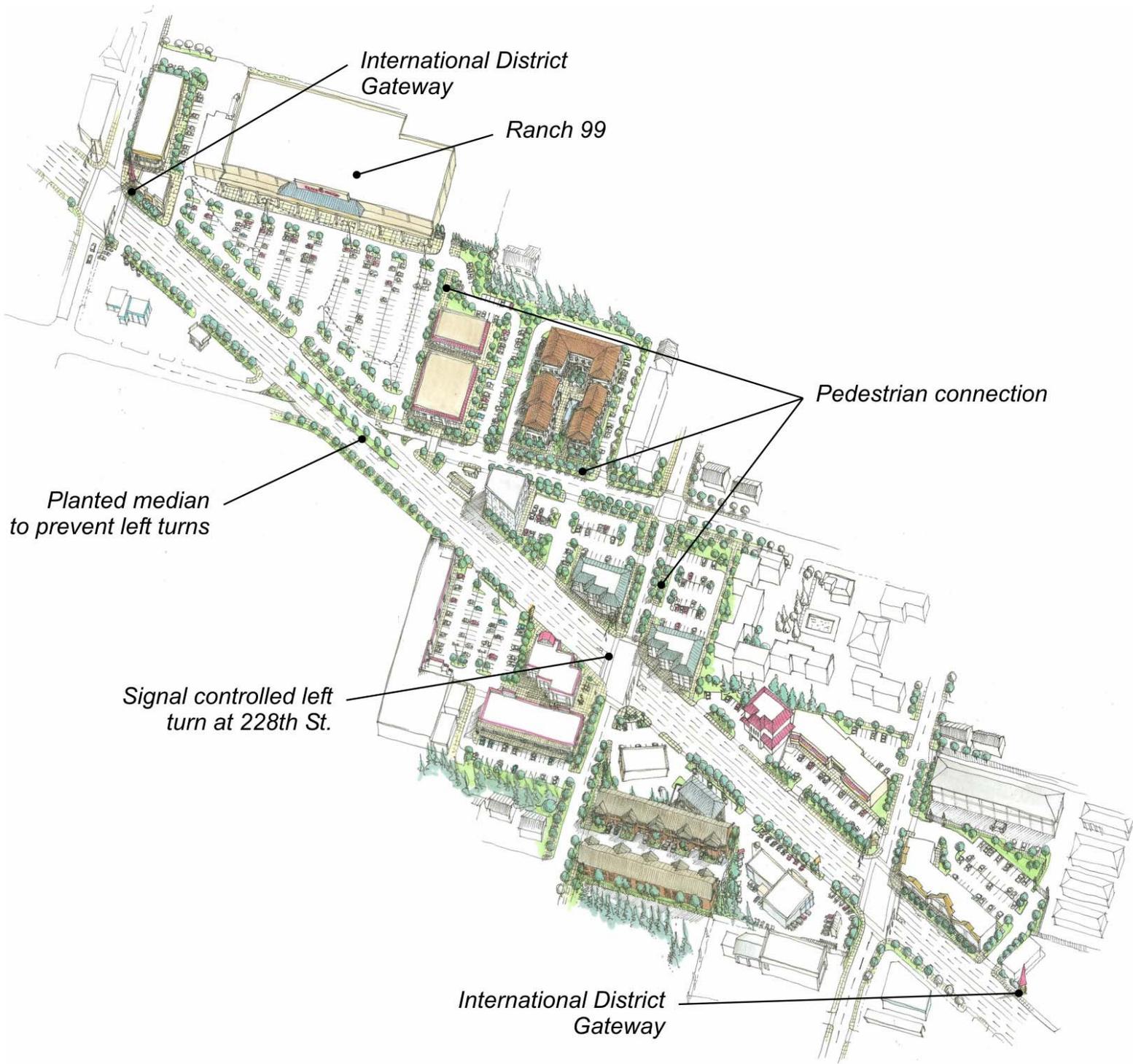
Better access and pedestrian connection work together with an improved traffic circulation, routing the significant volume of traffic that normally turn left to 76<sup>th</sup> through the new signal at 228<sup>th</sup>.



*A detail of the pedestrian corridor along 228<sup>th</sup> St. SW and 76<sup>th</sup> Ave*



*A development scenario of the “International District” concept. Traffic improvement (left turn at 228<sup>th</sup>) and pedestrian connection work together in this scheme of many new developments.*

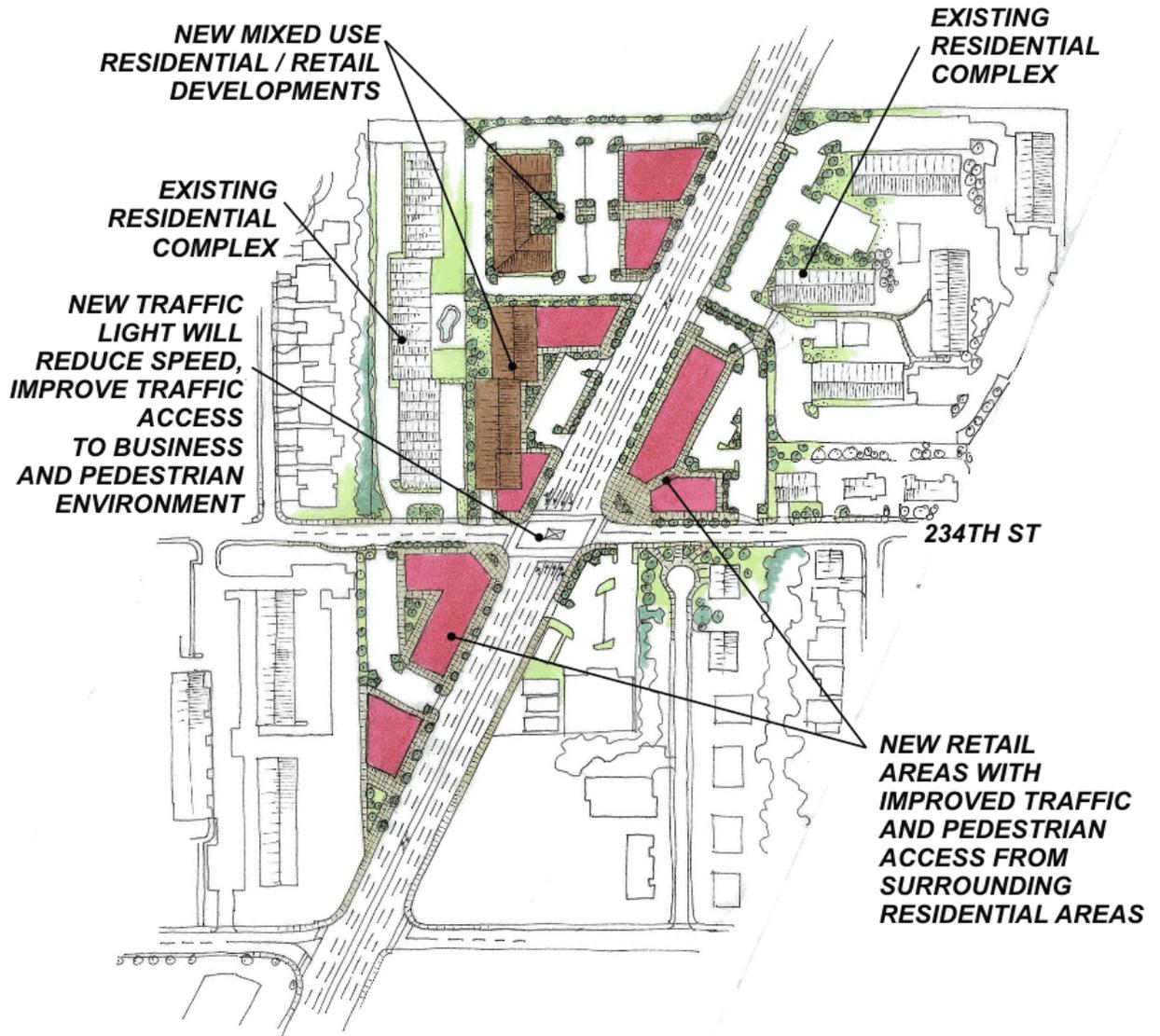


*This 3d development scenario shows even better the pedestrian connection along 228<sup>th</sup> and 76<sup>th</sup>.*

## Residential Area Retail Center

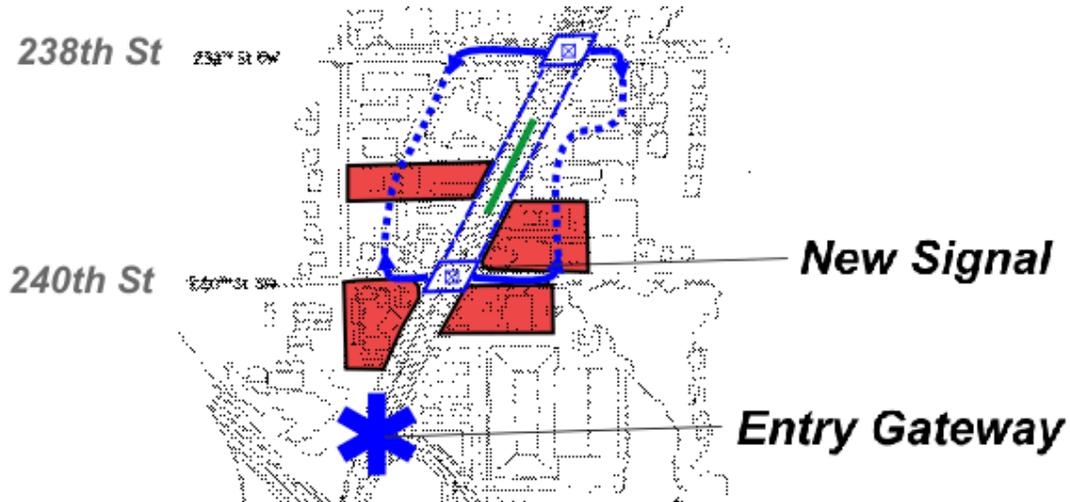


A new light at 234<sup>th</sup> should provide a more favorable condition for new retail and more pedestrian friendly connection to the local stores. The two undeveloped properties represent a good opportunity to explore mixed use development on Highway 99; this development should improve the neighborhood feel and reconnect the community and the local businesses.

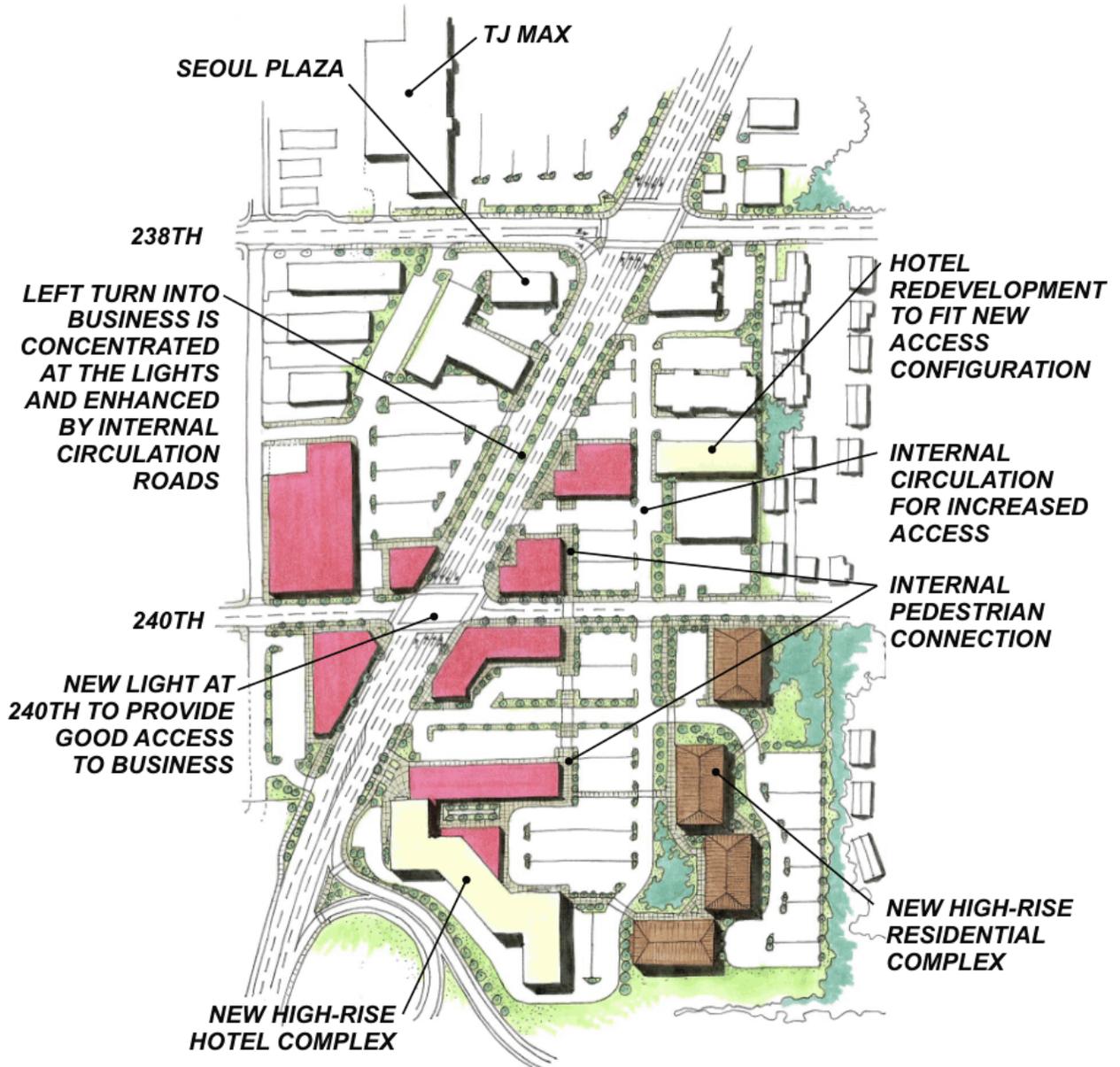


*In this development example new retail is created around the intersection with 234<sup>th</sup>. A solution of mixed use residential / commercial on the first floor is shown for the two undeveloped properties north of the intersection.*

## “Hotels” Area Improvement

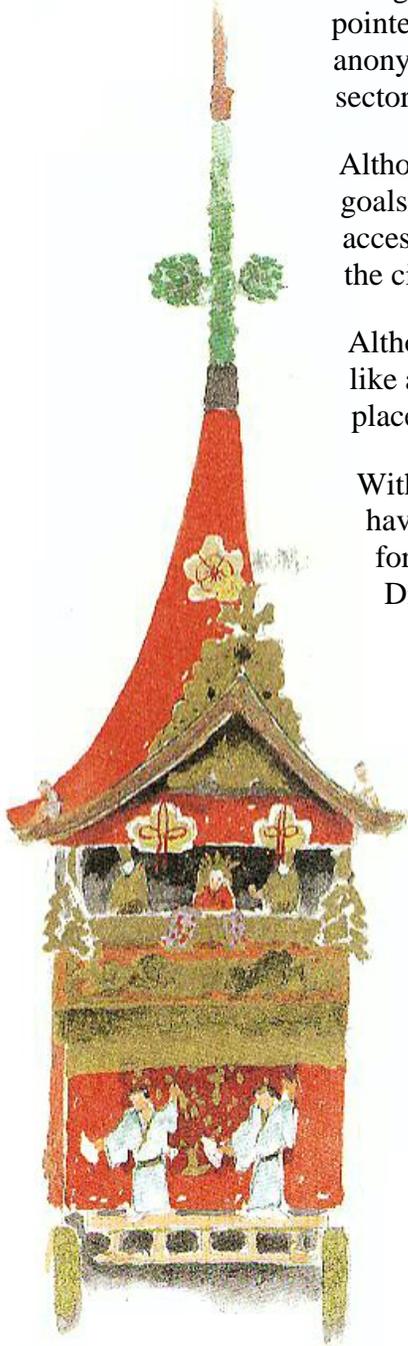


The core concept of this area is the reorganization of the traffic access introducing a new light at 240<sup>th</sup>. While right-in / right-out access will still be granted, a shared access road combined with a secured left turn at the lights will implement access to all businesses. The new light at 240<sup>th</sup> opens to the possibility of redeveloping the “Burlington” area.



*High rise Hotel and residential complex could surround new retail around the new intersection at 240<sup>th</sup>. Access and circulation to all the businesses is provided by new internal circulation roads.*

## Gateways



Going back to very beginning of this project, one of the first thing pointed out during the focus groups and the charrettes, is the sense of anonymity and lack of identity with “the Edmonds feel” of this sector of the city around Highway 99.

Although all the improvements suggested in this plan share the same goals of connection with the local community, improved pedestrian access and visibility, there’s still the need to mark the entry point to the city of Edmonds.

Although a gateway doesn’t replace identity, a clear entry point, like a signage or a symbol, can help recognizing and identifying places and their character.

Within the area of this project we also recognized how some areas have the potential to use recognizability and identity as a theme for future development, like in the case of the “International District” between 230<sup>th</sup> and 224<sup>th</sup>.

Signage has proven, especially along a high speed corridor like Highway 99, to be a good marker for a gateway. In the case of the international district it can help identify and highlight the character of the area; for the whole stretch of Highway 99 that belongs to the City of Edmonds, it can be an occasion to unify and recognize the area.

# Summary Recommendations

The principal finding of this plan is that there is significant redevelopment opportunity along Edmond's SR 99 corridor. Property owners, business persons and residents participating in this project as a whole encouraged the City to take a pro-active role in fostering substantial high quality, diverse and attractive redevelopment and suggested a number of project ideas and implementation actions to pursue. By exploring these ideas, the team identified the following specific recommendations for the City's redevelopment efforts.

## **Improve access and circulation.**

Access into businesses for both pedestrians and automobiles is difficult along major portions of the corridor. The inability of pedestrians to cross the street and for automobiles to make safe turns is a critical limitation. Better pedestrian crossings are needed to foster transit use as well. The illustrations in this plan recommend traffic signals, access management, and rechannelization at several points to facilitate these movements and to maintain traffic capacity along SR 99. The City should work collaboratively with WSDOT on these issues. In some cases the impacts of the traffic signals can be enhanced by access management, rechannelization and other measures.

## **Focus on specific nodes or segments within the corridor.**

The participants identified specific areas where development might most easily be achieved and suggested ideas, such as the "International District North" or the service center near the hospital and trail that would take advantage of existing conditions. The City should consider the different sections along the corridor and emphasize their unique opportunities rather than view the corridor as an undifferentiated continuum. Street improvements and, in some cases regulatory measures can encourage these efforts

## **Consider the surrounding neighborhoods**

Residents noted that they needed a number of services that are not presently provided along the corridor. This can provide a minor opportunity that might be part of a larger business strategy. At the same time new development should contribute to the residential quality of the adjacent neighborhoods.

## **Encourage a variety of uses and building types**

While some participants preferred that new development reflect the downtown Edmonds character with smaller shops and architectural details, most understood that a variety of uses and building types is most appropriate to take advantage of different opportunities and conditions. For example, a tall hotel may be an excellent addition to the south of the corridor while some small restaurants and convenience shops might cater to hospital employees, trail uses and local

residents near SW 216<sup>th</sup>. St. In some cases the City may want to consider zoning changes to encourage mixed use or taller development.