

EXISTING CONDITIONS: OVERVIEW

Entering Knightdale from the southwest on Railroad Street, one passes through a semi-rural landscape of older houses, then enters a unique setting in fast-growing Wake County. Here is a small-town core that has been bypassed, both literally and figuratively, by highways and most new development.



Old Town Knightdale is at a balancing point today, in a number of ways. Though few historic structures remain, the fingerprint persists of the historic street layout and vintage town pattern. Though facing new challenges, it is a pleasantly old-fashioned place. It is largely overlooked by the outside world, yet many have discovered – or have always known – its quiet charm.



EXISTING CONDITIONS: LAND USE



Knightdale Baptist Church



Hair salon



Single-family residences



Duplex



Single-family residence



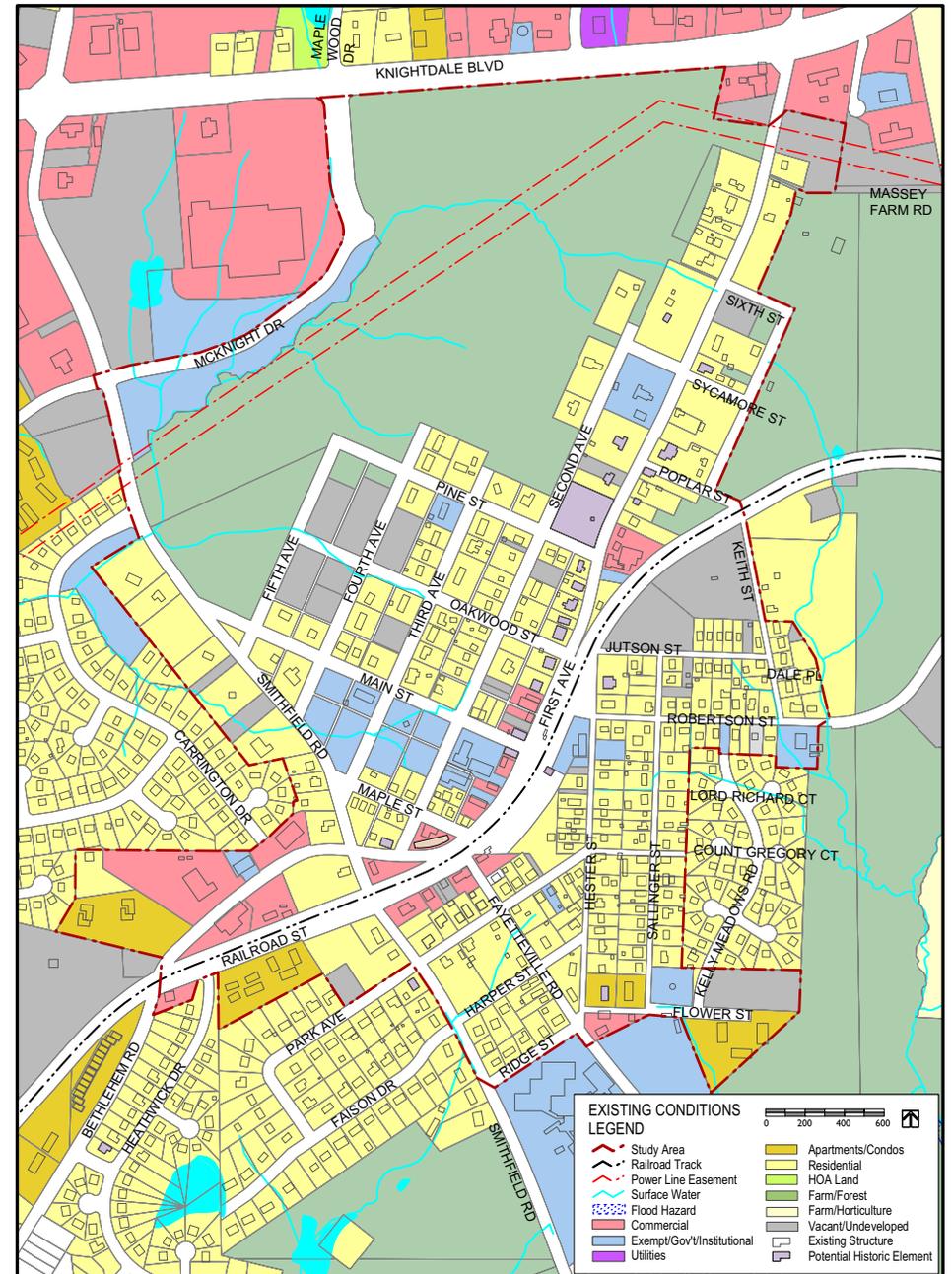
Single-family residence



Multi-family residences



Single-family residence



EXISTING CONDITIONS: LAND USE



Harper Park playground



Commercial buildings



*Vacant land abutting
Knightdale Blvd*



Chamber of Commerce



Commercial buildings



Eastern Wake VFD

EXISTING CONDITIONS: COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Old Town Knightdale is a classic example of a small town landscape in eastern North Carolina. Small blocks form a highly connected grid of streets. Building scale is fairly small, with residences mostly of modest to moderate size, and commercial buildings one or two stories tall. The grandest structures are churches, along with three or four of the larger single-family houses.

Vegetation and green space also contribute to the small-town feel. Large shade trees are abundant, as are mature shrubs and small understory trees such as dogwoods and redbuds. Vegetated swales instead of curb-and-gutter predominate, and picket or wire fencing is common around residential yards. Although there is only one public park, there are large amounts of private

open space such as vegetable gardens, large yards, and cemeteries. Also, the railroad right-of-way provides additional green space where it passes through the center of town. This spot is well maintained and has mature trees and a lawn, appearing very much like a park if not actually functioning as such.



EXISTING CONDITIONS: COMMUNITY CHARACTER

A massive fire in 1940 destroyed most of the older buildings in the commercial core at the south end of First Avenue, and the remaining commercial buildings are largely plain masonry structures without much ornamentation. This area also lacks street trees, street furniture, and other elements of a lively streetscape. However, the general scale of development is pleasing, as is the greenery across the street in the form of

grass and trees along the railroad right-of-way. The local Garden Club has attempted to brighten up this area and create a small landmark, Blue Star Memorial Highway, by installing US and NC State flags on poles, plantings and benches.

Also important to the character of Old Town Knightdale are the two narrow collector streets, First Avenue and Smithfield Road.

Along these roads, mature shade trees and lush vegetation, in combination with narrow pavement width and lack of curbing, give them a rural feel that is no longer common in Wake County towns and cities.

The sense of place in Knightdale is in fact unique, and some residents described this setting as a “hidden gem.”



EXISTING CONDITIONS: COMMUNITY CHARACTER



Houses on First Avenue are characteristic of the semi-rural setting of a railroad village, with picket fences, large lots, multiple outbuildings, and mature shade trees.



Fourth Avenue, an unpaved road, leads south to Main Street, which despite its name is a small, tree-lined road where the primary uses are small dwellings, a church and a park.



An okra patch at the northern end of First Avenue evokes a rural feel. The pie plates were hung to keep deer away.



Pine Street stubs into the undeveloped tract to the north.



The Norfolk & Southern Railroad right-of-way is a defining feature of Old Town.

EXISTING CONDITIONS: CHALLENGES

Like any community, Old Town Knightdale has its share of challenges. Some of these issues include property maintenance, rental housing, infill development, and some constraints on reinvestment in commercial and residential areas.

Although most properties in Old Town Knightdale – including houses of modest size – are well maintained, on some sites there are problems with upkeep and appearance. Rental properties are seen as a destabilizing influence in some cases, because the personal investment of an owner-occupant is not present. This can be a more significant problem where there are higher concentrations of rental property. Owners begin to feel that their property value may be at risk, which in turn can lead to more turnover and additional rentals.

Infill development is a sensitive issue in Old Town Knightdale. Recent changes to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) enabled small houses to be placed on narrow lots. Compared to the existing development pattern in residential areas, the newer houses so developed are felt by residents to be out of context, in terms of front and side yard setbacks, house size, and lot size or width.



Concerns about how infill development fits into existing neighborhoods resulted in the undertaking of this plan.

Moreover, many Old Town residents are disturbed that infill houses in some cases are purpose-built as rental properties. Residents have said they would rather see that their new neighbors have a personal investment (through ownership) in the attributes of existing neighborhoods, such as friendliness, peace and quiet, safety from traffic and crime, and stable property values.

Constraints on reinvestment represent another set of challenges for Old Town. The small commercial district is partly prevented from attaining critical mass because the existing building stock is limited



in size, the land across the street is mostly occupied by the railroad right-of-way, and opportunities for expansion of the district on nearby lands are not clear. There are also some procedural or regulatory hurdles to reinvestment, discussed further within the Market Conditions report.

For residential property owners, factors affecting the decision to reinvest are regulatory (discussed more under Public Policy Context), or related to perceived market conditions (such as the presence of rental housing or other factors affecting property values).

EXISTING CONDITIONS: NATURAL FEATURES & HISTORIC RESOURCES



The Teacherage



Residence



Depot Master's house



Residence



Geology and Soils

Soils in the Knightdale area are formed by weathering of the underlying bedrock, the Rolesville Granite. In some places where the soil is thin, outcrops of this bedrock appear at the surface (photo above). Currently this granite is quarried for use primarily as aggregate (crushed stone), but historically it has been used as building material. Blocks of the stone, which have a characteristic rectangular shape, can often be seen in old chimneys and foundations in eastern Wake County.

Historic Resources

Within this project study area there are approximately two dozen structures and one cemetery that were preliminarily evaluated in 1991 and placed on a National Register Historic District (NRHD) Study List. To date, a full NRHD nomination has not been prepared, but citizens have recently formed the Knightdale Historical Society, Inc. to document the town's history and promote the designation and preservation of the town's historic resources.



EXISTING CONDITIONS: NATURAL FEATURES & HISTORIC RESOURCES

Streams

Like many old roads, First Avenue marks a natural ridgeline, which means that streams that originate in Old Town flow either west via Mingo Creek to the Neuse River (joining it near Anderson Point), or east and then south via Poplar Creek, which also flows to the Neuse. Both are waterways of regional significance, with unspoiled natural areas that are important habitat for many species.

These two stream corridors present an opportunity for greenway trails that connect Old Town Knightdale to parks and recreational areas in and around the Town as part of a regional trail network. The Town's Comprehensive Plan proposes a greenway network with paths along both streams, creating recreational opportunities while also protecting natural areas.



EXISTING CONDITIONS: TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES

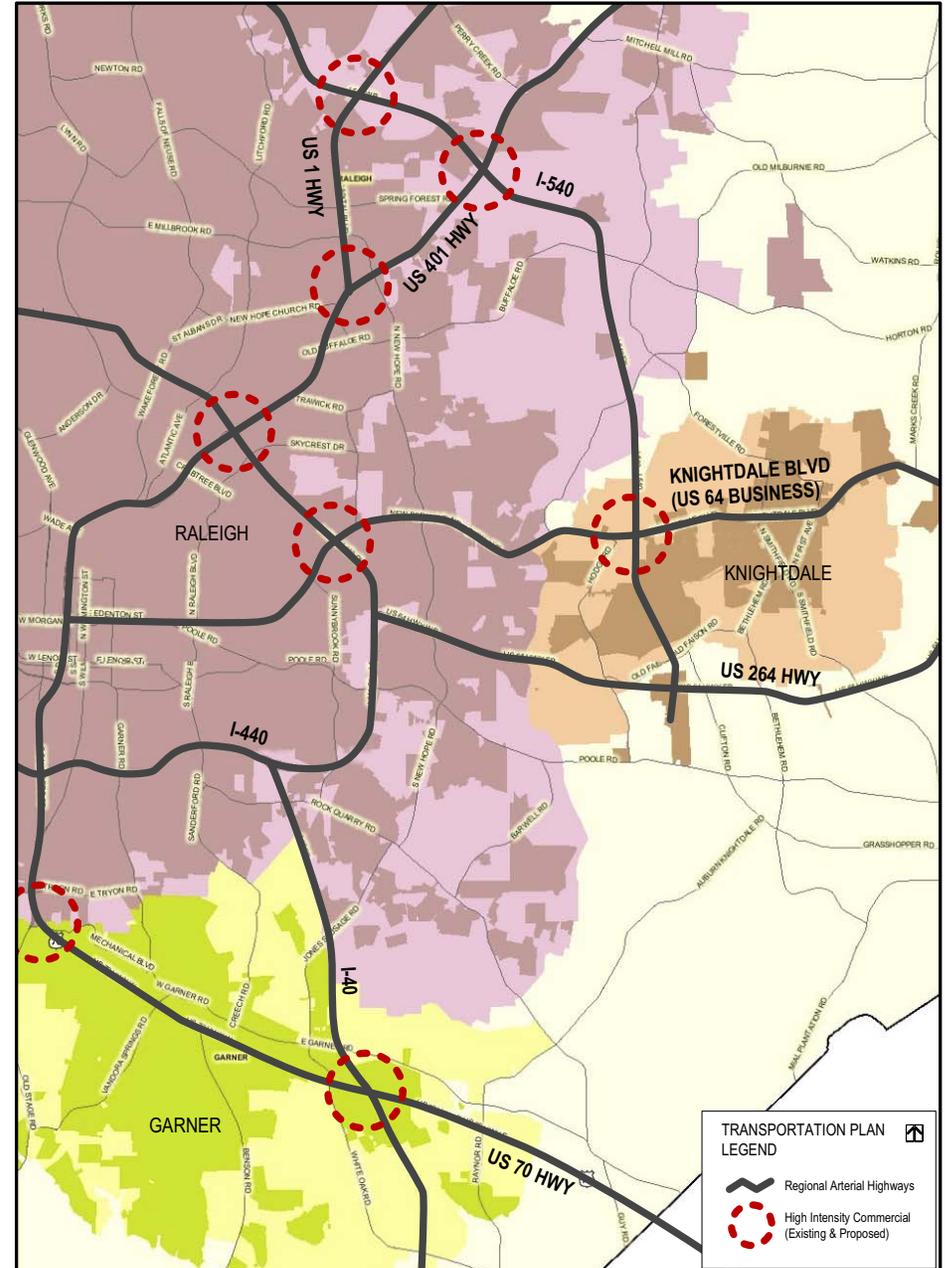
Regional Transportation Findings and Projections

Knightdale's town core is approximately 10 miles east of the State Capitol building in Raleigh. During weekday commuting periods under 2006 traffic conditions, this trip would take about 30 minutes via US 64 Business (New Bern Avenue/Knightdale Boulevard).

The metropolitan area is served by a series of radial highways connecting employment and government centers in urban Raleigh with smaller cities and towns throughout Wake and adjacent counties. Knightdale Boulevard (US 64 Business) and US 64/264 provide direct access from Knightdale to Raleigh. These highways also provide regional mobility to Wendell, Zebulon, and portions of Franklin, Nash and Wilson Counties. The recently completed US 64/264 Knightdale bypass has added considerable new capacity and mobility to the travel-shed.

Other regional radials serving the eastern half of the metropolitan area are US 1/401 north, serving north Raleigh, Wake Forest, Rolesville and Franklin County, and US 70/I-40 east, serving Garner and much of Johnston County.

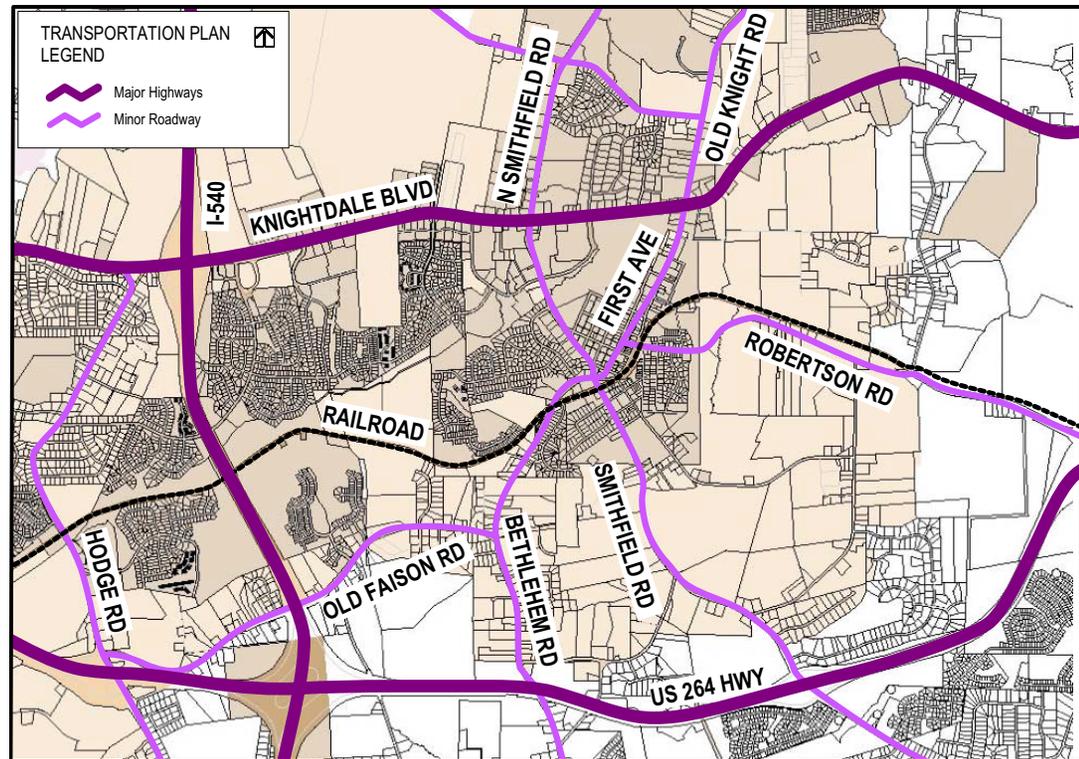
Regional arterials and highways in Knightdale vicinity



EXISTING CONDITIONS: TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES

The in-progress I-540 outer loop highway will greatly increase regional accessibility and have far greater effects on Knightdale than did the I-440 beltline. The I-540 outer loop provides much more direct links between Knightdale and major suburban employment centers, including the US 1 corridor and Research Triangle Park, as well as RDU airport. By the time the most recent segment connecting US 1 with US 64/264 opened in January 2007, much of the land surrounding the Knightdale Boulevard interchange was being developed. The areas surrounding these intersections of regional radials with I-540 will experience dramatic increases in commercial development and job growth. A new regional mall, the Triangle Town Center, is now located near the I-540 interchange with US 1. Although with I-40 rather than I-540, White Oak Crossings is located at the intersection with US 70.

Increased regional accessibility cuts both ways – while it becomes possible to attract new customers from other areas, it is also possible for the local customer base to travel elsewhere to find unique goods and experiences. To date, most of the development proposed for Knightdale’s interchanges with I-540 can be found at



Town of Knightdale

virtually every other major intersection and suburban commercial strip in the eastern metropolitan area. Anyone desiring something unique or different in Knightdale will need to look somewhere other than the I-540 commercial area.

The conventional nature of big box and chain development associated with I-540 may not bring many outside shoppers to

the area, but it will support much of the demand for goods and services within the US 64-264 travel-shed. Many suburban shoppers want to live within 10 to 12 minutes of the shopping, dining and entertainment they use on a daily or weekly basis. This new concentration of shopping, services, restaurants and entertainment should greatly intensify demand for suburban residential development in areas within 5 to

EXISTING CONDITIONS: TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES

15 minutes driving time. Areas with less than a 5 minute travel time may be suitable for less suburban developments, such as apartments or townhouses, but convenience is just one of many other factors involved here.

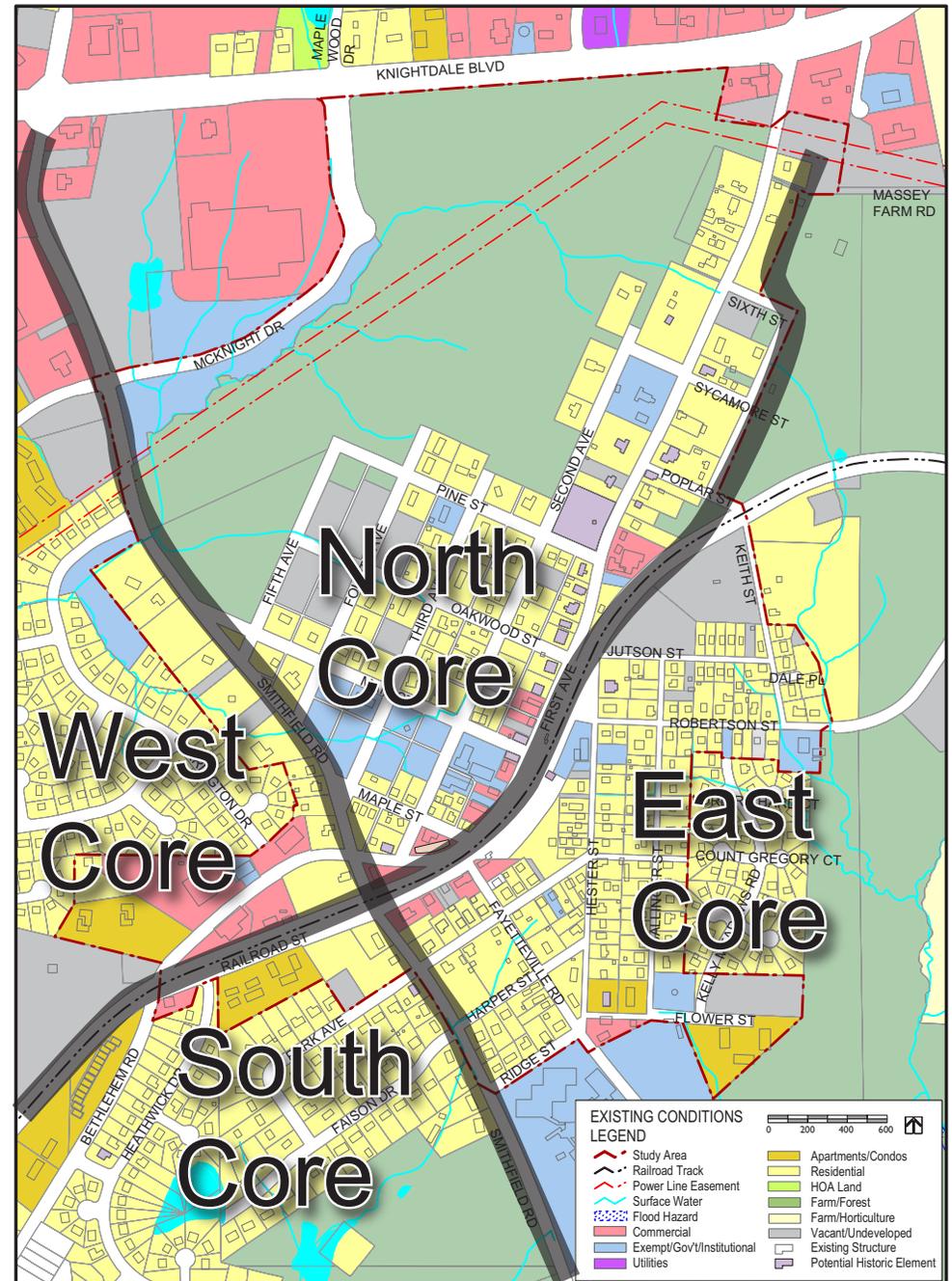
Existing residential development is predominantly oriented towards Knightdale Boulevard, as that is the original commuter route to downtown Raleigh. Much of the new development will be oriented towards roads that will provide access to US 64/264. The most desirable areas will be those with quick access to Knightdale Boulevard commercial development and to US 64/264 for commuting.

Core Area Findings and Projections

Old Town Knightdale to the east of Smithfield Road has a well connected street network. Connectivity across the Norfolk-Southern railroad tracks is limited to the at-grade crossings for Robertson Street, Fayetteville Street, and Smithfield Road, and the lightly traveled Keith Street at-grade crossing.

Old Town has few sidewalks. Most streets are shared, meaning that automobiles, bicycles and pedestrians all use the streets. Most sidewalks are in the commercial area along First Avenue or adjacent to Knightdale Elementary School. In the North Core, streets are generally wider with more open shoulders, while those in the east core tend to be more narrow with limited shoulders. On-street or on-shoulder parking is more common in the east core as well.

*Old Town Knightdale
study area*



EXISTING CONDITIONS: TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES

The remainder of the core, to the west of Smithfield Road, has a disconnected street network. The West Core area has only a single way in or out, although it has fairly good internal connectivity. The South Core generally has two entry points per area but is poorly connected internally. There are no sidewalks within either core and all streets must be shared.

Smithfield Road and First Avenue are the major roadways connecting the core area with the rest of town. For core area residents the Knightdale Boulevard commercial areas as well as the US 64/264 commuter corridor are both convenient. However, for travelers along both highways the core area is completely hidden. It is quite possible for someone traveling along Smithfield Road from one highway to another not to realize the core area exists.

Historically, old Knightdale grew up around the train station, so the traditional center of town is the intersection of Main Street and First Avenue. After growing up around the railroad, the town's core has been bypassed twice – first by what is now Knightdale Boulevard to the north and much more recently by US 64/264 to the south. Interestingly, this dramatic

change in transportation patterns has not been matched by changes in development patterns. The traditional center of town at Main and First is now “off the beaten track,” while the most visible intersection of the entire core, Smithfield and First, is one of the least developed parts of the core. It is little wonder then that few people other than Old Town residents know that this area exists.

Transit Service Findings and Plans

Knightdale does not have its own transit or paratransit services. The Triangle Transit Authority (TTA) provides regional transit services, including ridesharing and bus transit. Currently no fixed-route transit, express transit or paratransit services are available through TTA, although ride matching and vanpool services are available. Raleigh's Capitol Area Transit (CAT) bus system does not extend to Knightdale. CAT's Trawick Connector Route bus stop at the New Hope Commons shopping center is the transit service coming closest to Knightdale. CAT's WakeMed fixed route service does not extend east of I-440. Wake Coordinated Transportation Service provides human services transportation six days per week and general public transportation five days per week via TRACS.

TTA's long-range plans include the potential for creating an express commuter bus route from Knightdale to downtown Raleigh along Knightdale Boulevard and New Bern Avenue/Edenton Street. TTA already operates several such routes in conjunction with park-and-ride facilities. Park-and-ride express commuter services are created in an effort to remove automobiles from highways during periods of peak congestion and to offer commuters a less stressful commute while potentially reducing their commuting and parking costs.

Park-and-ride facilities need to be convenient and accessible from the main commuting route. TTA generally uses existing commercial parking areas, such as on the outskirts of shopping centers, so the most likely location for any future express transit service will be along Knightdale Boulevard.

Express commuter services and park-and-ride facilities have virtually no effect on adjacent land uses or development patterns. Service is limited to peak commuting periods and provides an alternative to a car-based commute trip. However, it does not reduce the need for car ownership for all other types of trips, which make up the

EXISTING CONDITIONS: TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES

great majority of daily household trips. Nonetheless, a major reason shopping centers offer their parking lots for park-and-ride use is that the mode shift between bus and car encourages commuters to “trip chain”, or link together several destinations. So, while park-and-ride facilities may not change development patterns, these can boost existing businesses while also accommodating commuters’ need to run errands on the way to and from work.

Eastrans is a feasibility study of the potential to create commuter rail service along the existing Norfolk Southern rail line from the City of Wilson into downtown Raleigh. The final report can be found online at http://www.ci.knightdale.nc.us/government/documents/other/eastrans_final_report.pdf. Easttrans was initially conceived as an extension of the proposed TTA commuter rail system, and later as a complementary system that could connect with TTA’s system. As of the time of this planning process, TTA has withdrawn its application for federal “New Start” rail monies and the existing rail system plan is on hold. Indications are that TTA will develop a new regional vision plan that may include rail, bus rapid transit, conventional bus transit, and ridesharing.

The Easttrans study proposes one station location in or near Knightdale’s core area, while noting that Knightdale’s Comprehensive Plan proposes three station locations within the municipal limits. The study also projects that approximately 80% of potential rail transit use will be via park-and-ride facilities, with at least some of the remaining 20% potentially being “kiss-and-ride” users who are driven to the station and then dropped off. Initial service is proposed to be two in-bound trips during the morning commute period and two out-bound during the afternoon period. No reverse commutes are feasible during the low-cost initial phase, nor would non-commute period trips be available. Once the system is established, the study indicates that reverse commutes may become possible and that a mid-day train or bus trip may be offered. Weekend service does not appear to be proposed during either the initial or later phases.

At the same time, the study indicates that a major goal of this rail system is encouraging TODs, or Transit Oriented Development. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that commuter rail services and park-and-ride stations (as opposed to more comprehensive transit systems) have much,

if any, effect on adjacent land uses and development patterns. As with express bus transit, service is limited to peak commuting periods and provides an alternative only to a car-based commute trip, but not to the need for car ownership for all other types of trips. Regardless, designing a pedestrian-friendly, “park once” mixed-use area around a park-and-ride rail station can enhance development opportunities for appropriate businesses and services around the station area.

Utilities

The study area is served by water and sewer provided by the City of Raleigh under contract with the Town. Existing sewer service is provided to the south side of Old Town (over a ridge line that roughly follows the rail right-of-way) via a network of pumping stations. It is anticipated that the development of residential subdivisions to the south and east of Old Town will provide the opportunity to connect the south side of Old Town into the facilities serving the Poplar Creek sub-basin.