



Charles City County

COURTHOUSE AREA PLAN

A guide for development in Charles City's historic center





Introduction

Charles City County is located in eastern Virginia, advantageously located in between the Cities of Richmond and Williamsburg. The Charles City County Courthouse area is a strategic focus area between the two intersections of Route 5 and Route 155 and Route 155 and Lott Cary Road. Adding new housing units, businesses and amenities in the Courthouse area offers the potential to make it a thriving center for life in the County.

The Virginia Capital Trail, planned to be complete by 2015, will extend from Richmond to Williamsburg, passing the length of Charles City County, along the Route 5 corridor. The trail will be a significant draw for visitors, and the County has potential to build upon the tourist trade the trail will attract and use the opportunity to develop the County's economy.

The "Courthouse" phase of the trail is already in place and in use, and runs west of the study area. The "Sherwood Forest" phase is expected to be complete by the spring of 2014, and will run through the study area and connect it immediately to Jamestown and Williamsburg, and to downtown Richmond by mid- 2015. In addition, a spur trail is proposed on the west side of Courthouse road, from the Capital Trail to the County school complex. Route 644/ Courthouse Road will be used as the trail through the Courthouse area.

In addition, if more jobs are to come to the County, there will be an increased need for housing for the new workers. Moderately priced housing is lacking in the County, which prevents sustainable local population growth.

The addition of various housing types in the study area will benefit the county as a whole and allow the Courthouse area to become more densely populated and developed as identified in the comprehensive plan and future land use map.

The purpose of this plan is to capitalize on the opportunity presented by increased housing demand and availability in the County, and ensure that the County is well-poised to direct growth to this area in an organized fashion which will provide amenities and enable residents while maintaining the character of the area.

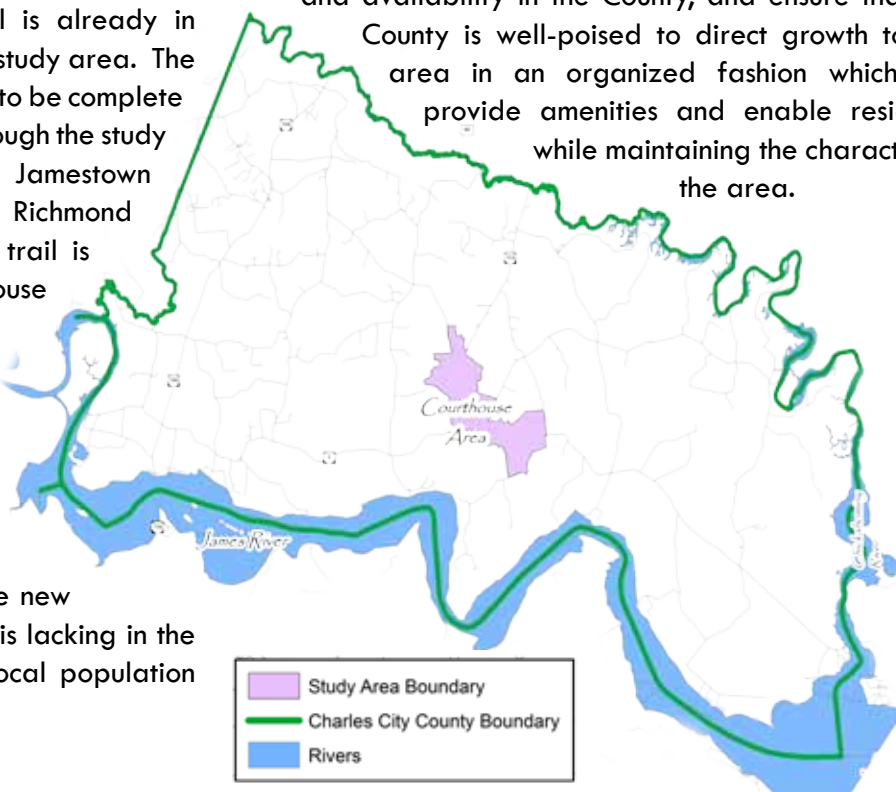




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The Vision for the Courthouse Area

The County's Vision 2030: A Strategic Plan document recommends developing "specific area plans for development areas to guide how developments should look and how community facilities will support these areas including but not limited to water and sewer utilities, underground electric and cable utilities, sidewalks/crosswalks, decorative space lighting, public transportation and open spaces", with the desired outcome of being "prepared to work with private developers interested in pursuing development in the designated development areas". As previously mentioned, the Courthouse Area is considered to be a development center and as such should have an associated specific area plan to guide its future development. In order to craft such a plan, one must first consider the desired vision for the defined area. The vision for the Courthouse Area development center is one of a defined central village and corridor that is home to the government, education and health care services of the County.

The Courthouse Village

The Courthouse Village will consist of mixed residential and business uses served by central utilities that are of a common architectural and landscape aesthetic similar

to that of the existing historic courthouse and grounds. This small core area will be the focal point of the County and will be home to the County's government, schools, visitors and cultural center, and the combined library/Center for Local History. The business uses will be less intensive in nature and will be geared towards tourists and transients, while also providing goods and services to surrounding County residents. The architectural style will be of the colonial period and will consist of brick and wooden siding style facades, landscaped entrances and perimeters, unimposing non-illuminated signage, with parking located towards the side and rear of buildings. Businesses will be encouraged to accommodate cyclists, with the provision of bike racks and bike shops and supplies. Such business uses may include and are not limited to: a period restaurant/tavern; church, bike and ecotourism shop; light retail store; country general store; professional and personal services in a larger development; internet café and coffee house; clothing and consignment store; county oriented gift, wine and book store; and residential and business mixed-use.

Residential uses will be denser in nature and will be part of a larger plan of development that is served by central utilities and supports low impact





environmental design. Residential structures within the development will also follow the colonial period architectural and landscaping theme. Residential uses will abut light-intensive business uses to create a walkable neighborhood that centers on the bike trail and preserves sensitive environmental features. Residential uses may include and are not limited to: (major subdivisions) clustered single family dwellings; townhouses; apartments, multifamily dwellings and condos (duplex, triplex and quadplex); and residential over retail. Residential development will be designed so as to ensure that residents have access to bike trails, walking paths to schools, and landscaped off-street parking.

The Courthouse Corridor

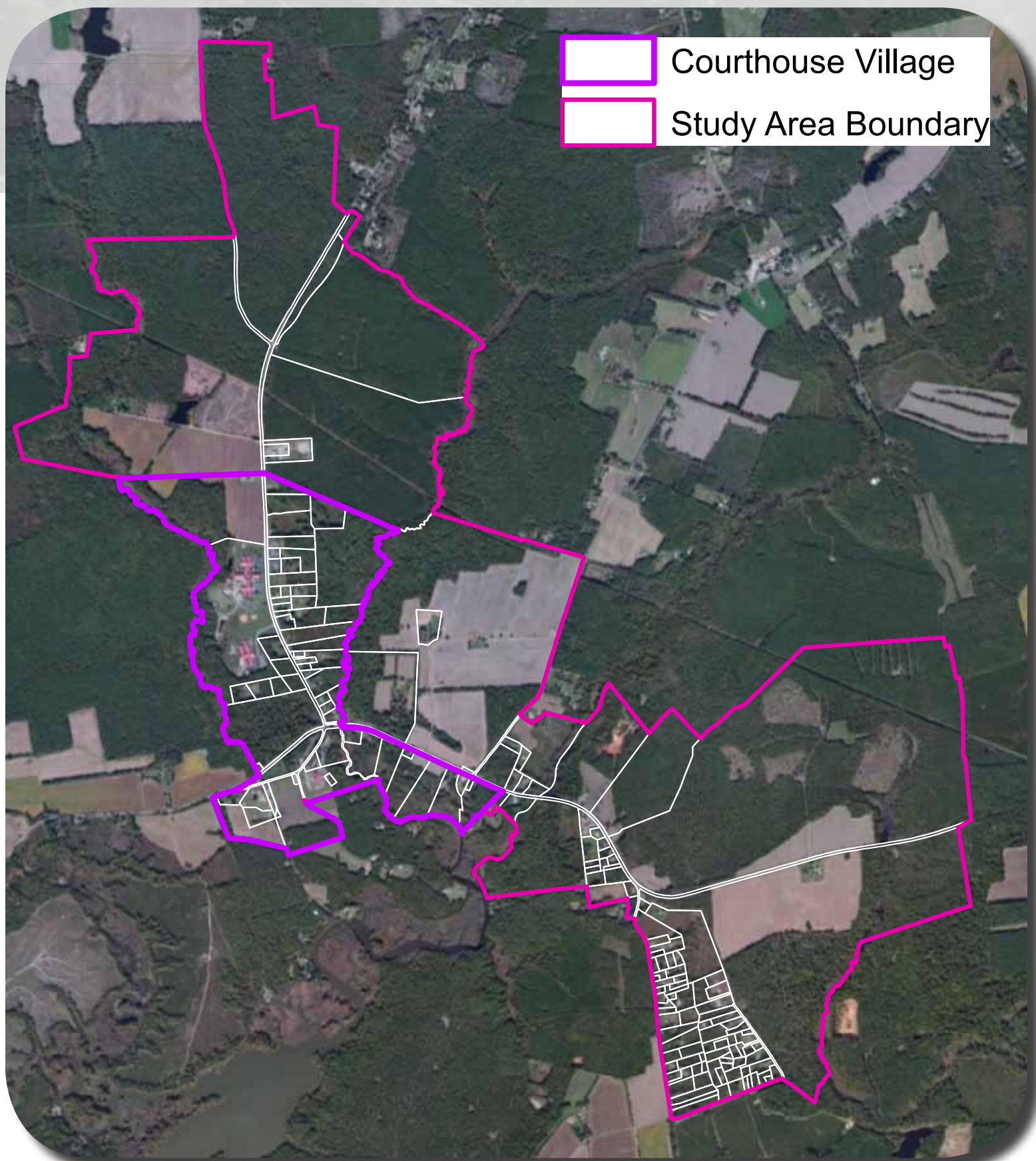
The Courthouse Corridor will be comprised of various retail and commercial, mixed, and residential uses that are served by central utilities. Retail and commercial uses will be general in nature and will cater to surrounding County residents and visiting transients. Such uses may include and are not limited to: a grocery store; dry cleaners; church; general restaurant; gas station and convenience

store; professional and personal services; hardware store; general retail store; medical facilities and offices including drug stores; sporting goods and retail; a business and technology park; financial institutions; general lodging; small amusement enterprise and entertainment; and auto service centers and parts.

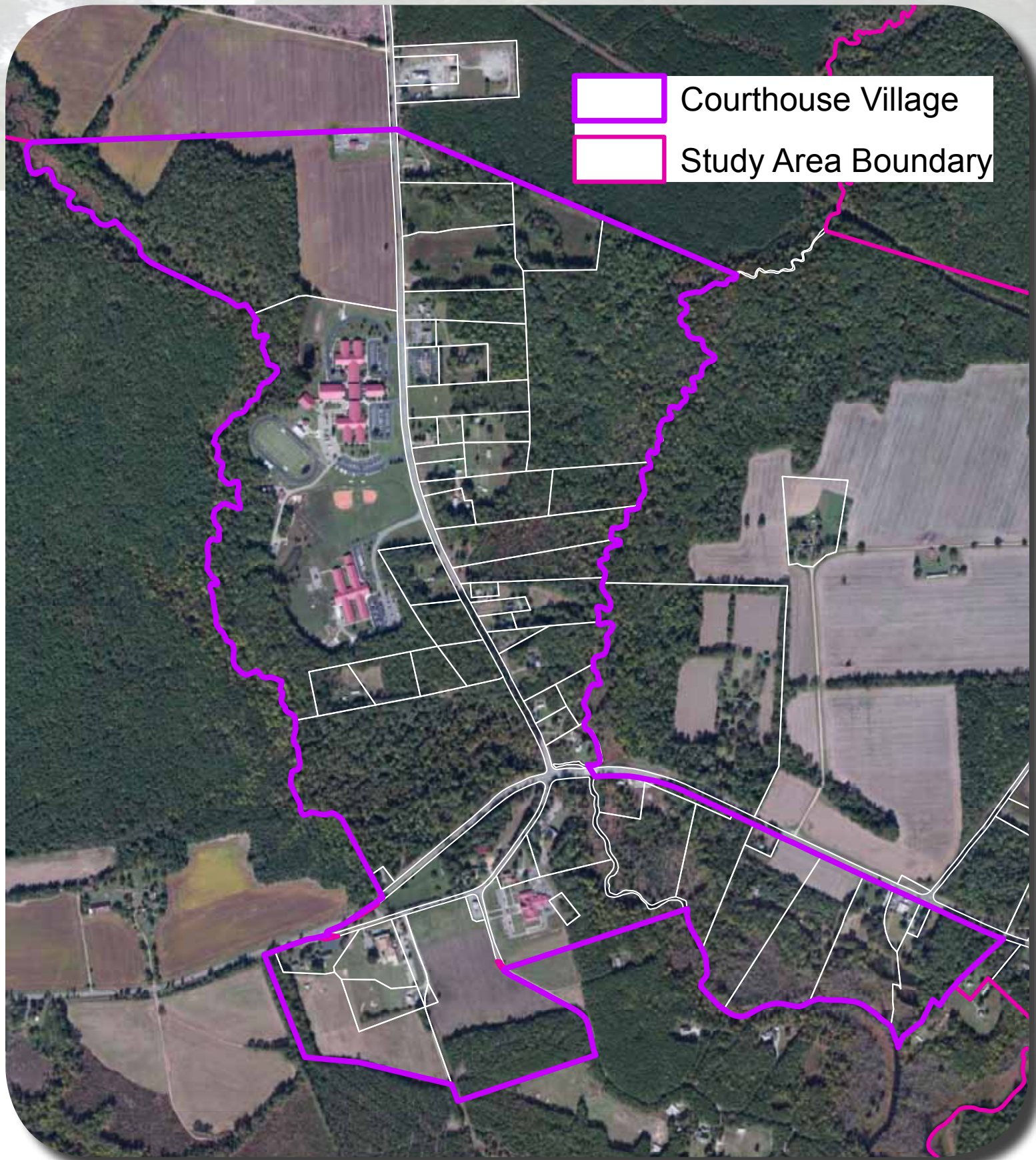
The Courthouse Corridor will also be comprised of residential uses of varying density, type and price that are marketable to all County residents. Residential uses will be primarily comprised of dense single family dwellings on individual lots that are accessed by internal streets and are served by central utilities. Major subdivisions will be permitted and will encourage low impact design to protect sensitive environmental areas while creating a sense of place and community through the inclusion of neighborhood playgrounds and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Multifamily dwellings served by central utilities will be permitted and will provide another means of housing for residents, both young and old. Passive and active recreation will be encouraged and will consist of walking paths, access to bike trails, neighborhood playgrounds, and park-like open space.



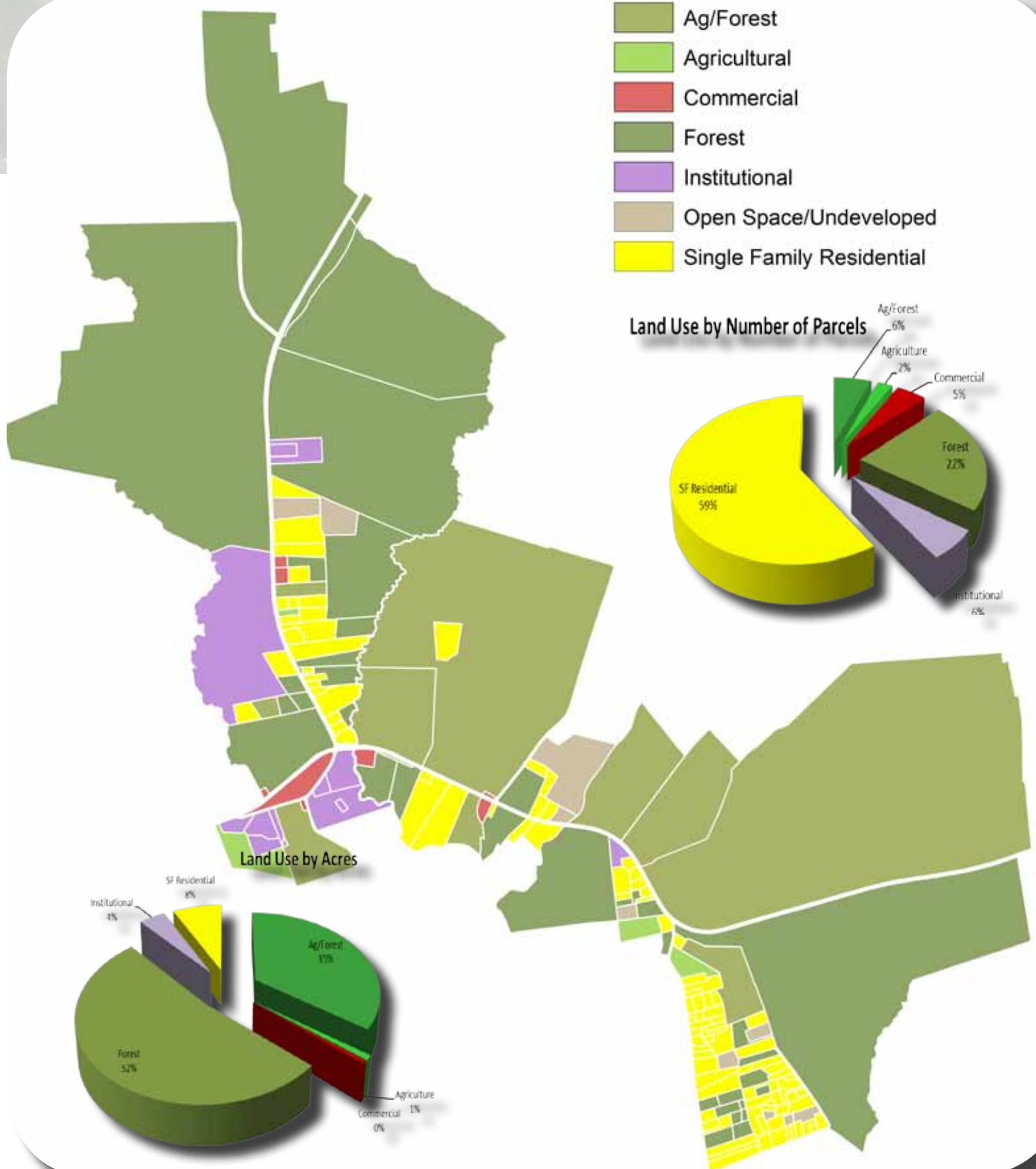
Study Area Map



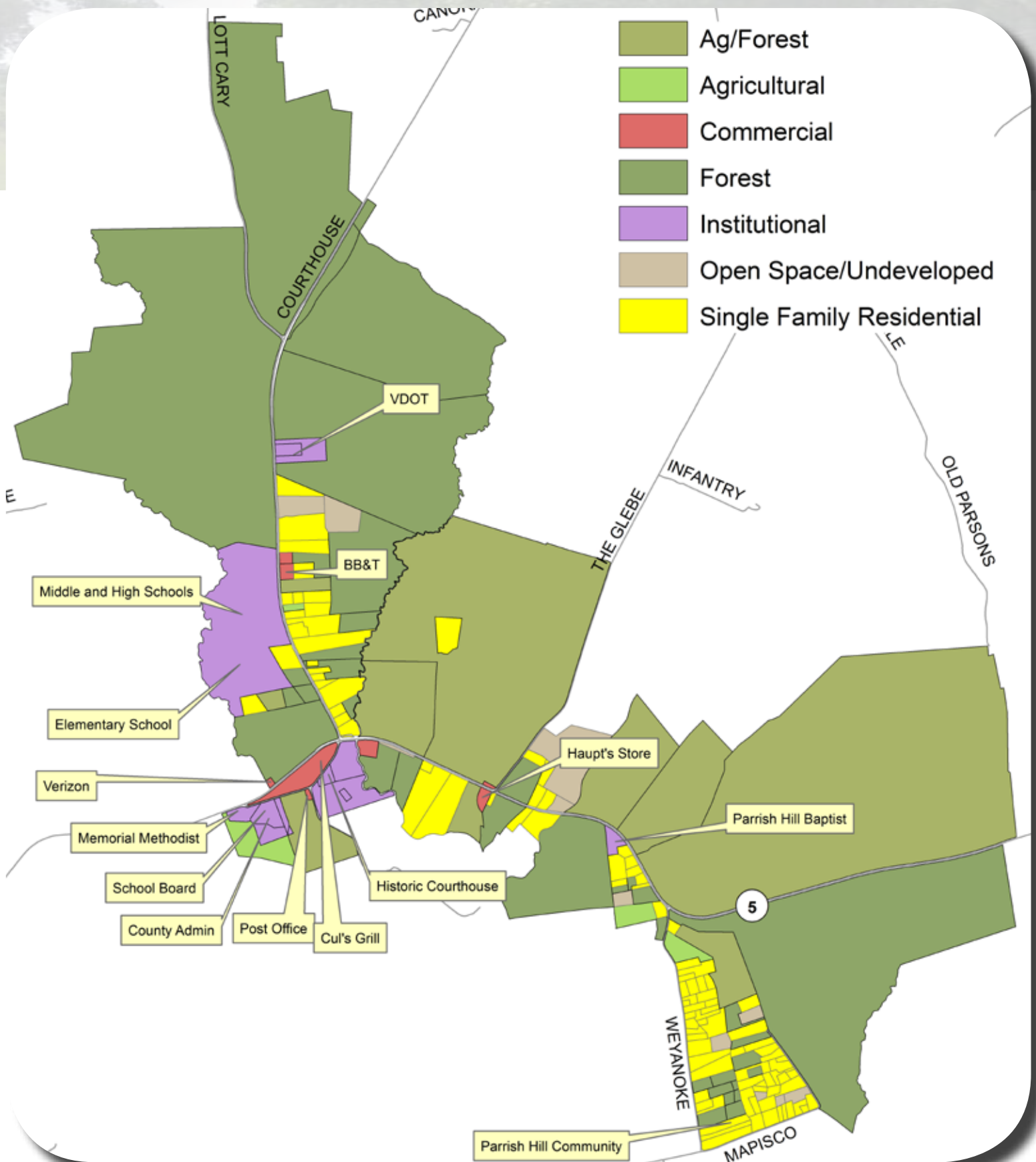
Courthouse Village Map



Existing Land Use

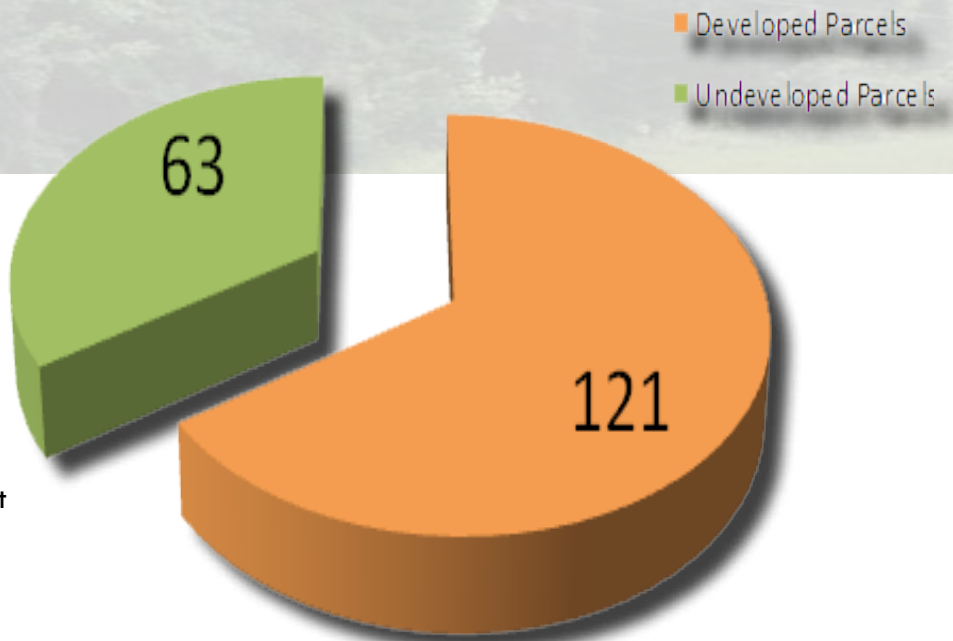


Major Landmarks



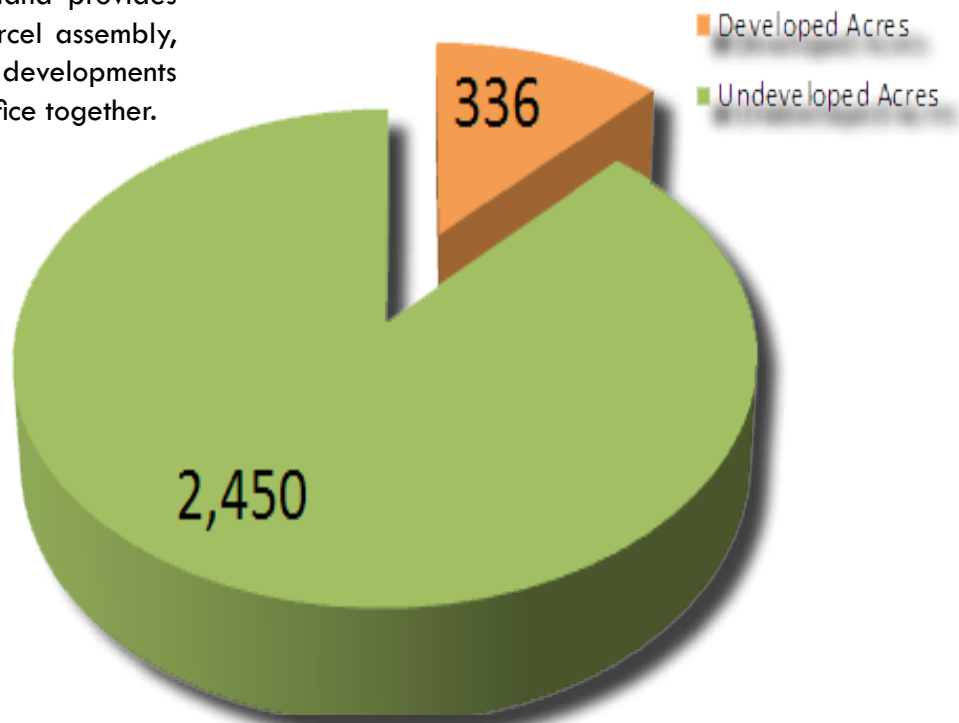
Developed/Undeveloped

As of November of 2013, the Courthouse study area is approximately 14% developed, with the majority land use being agriculture or forest. Though the majority of *parcels* in the area are developed, this represents a minority of the total land. Small, residential or commercial uses are scattered throughout the area, but the majority of the land is represented by large, undeveloped tracts.

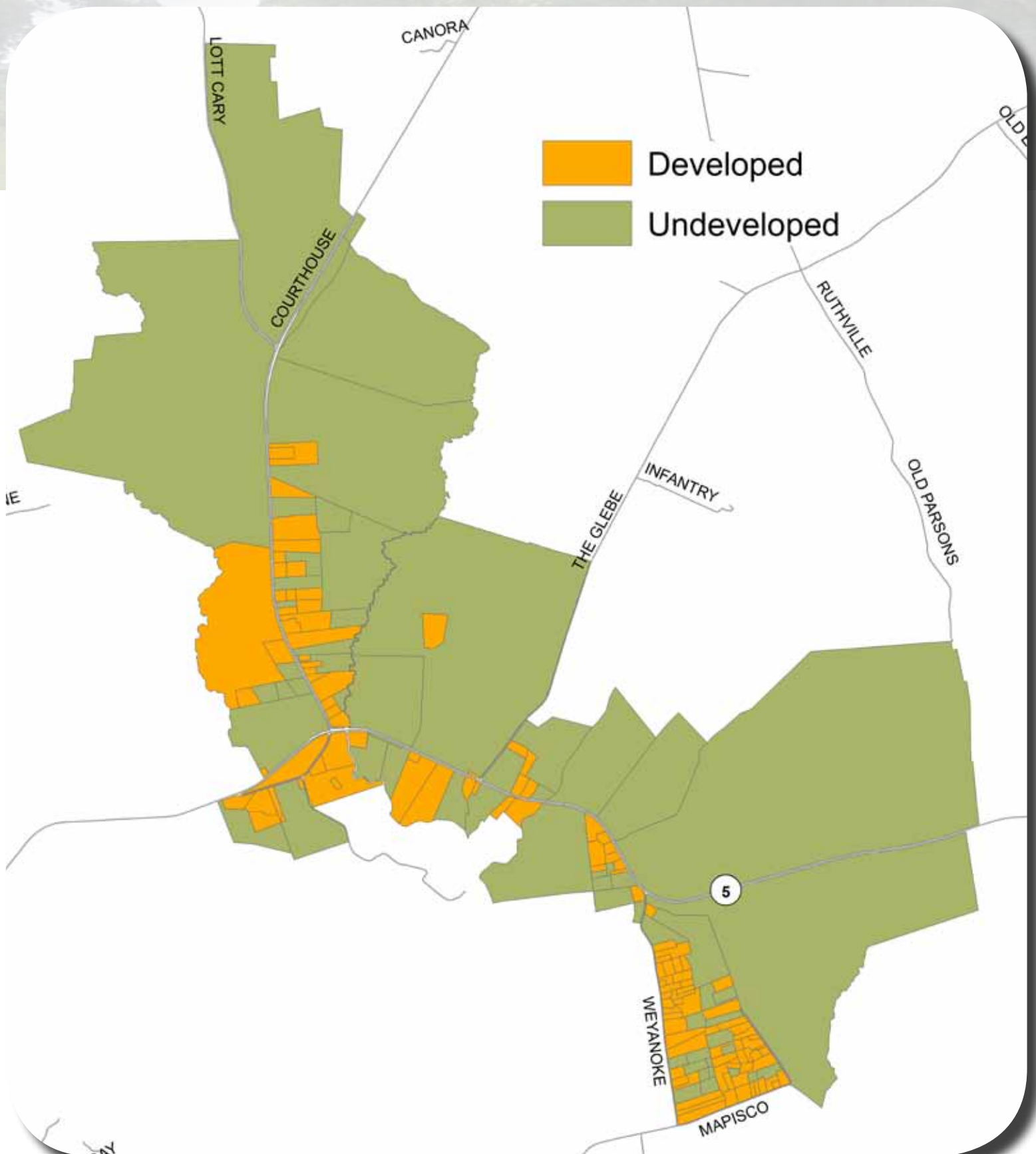


Of the 2,787 total acres which make up the study area, only 336 acres are developed, with 2,450 remaining in their natural state.

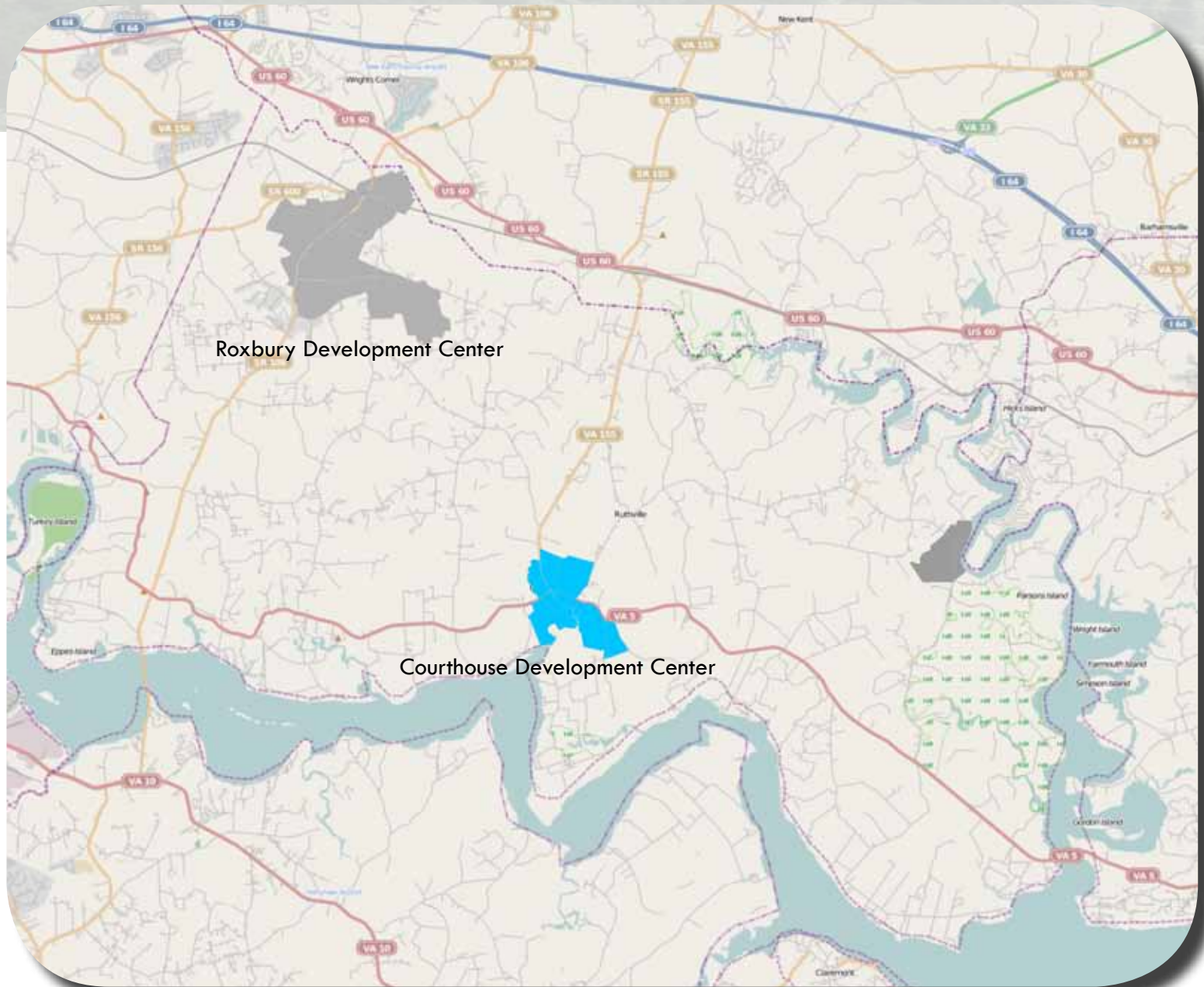
The existence of these large tracts of land provides opportunity for development without parcel assembly, and particularly lends itself to mixed-use developments combining residential, commercial and office together.



Developed/Undeveloped





Future Land Use



The County's comprehensive plan shows the Courthouse area as a "Development Center", indicating that this is one of only a few areas to which significant growth should be directed.

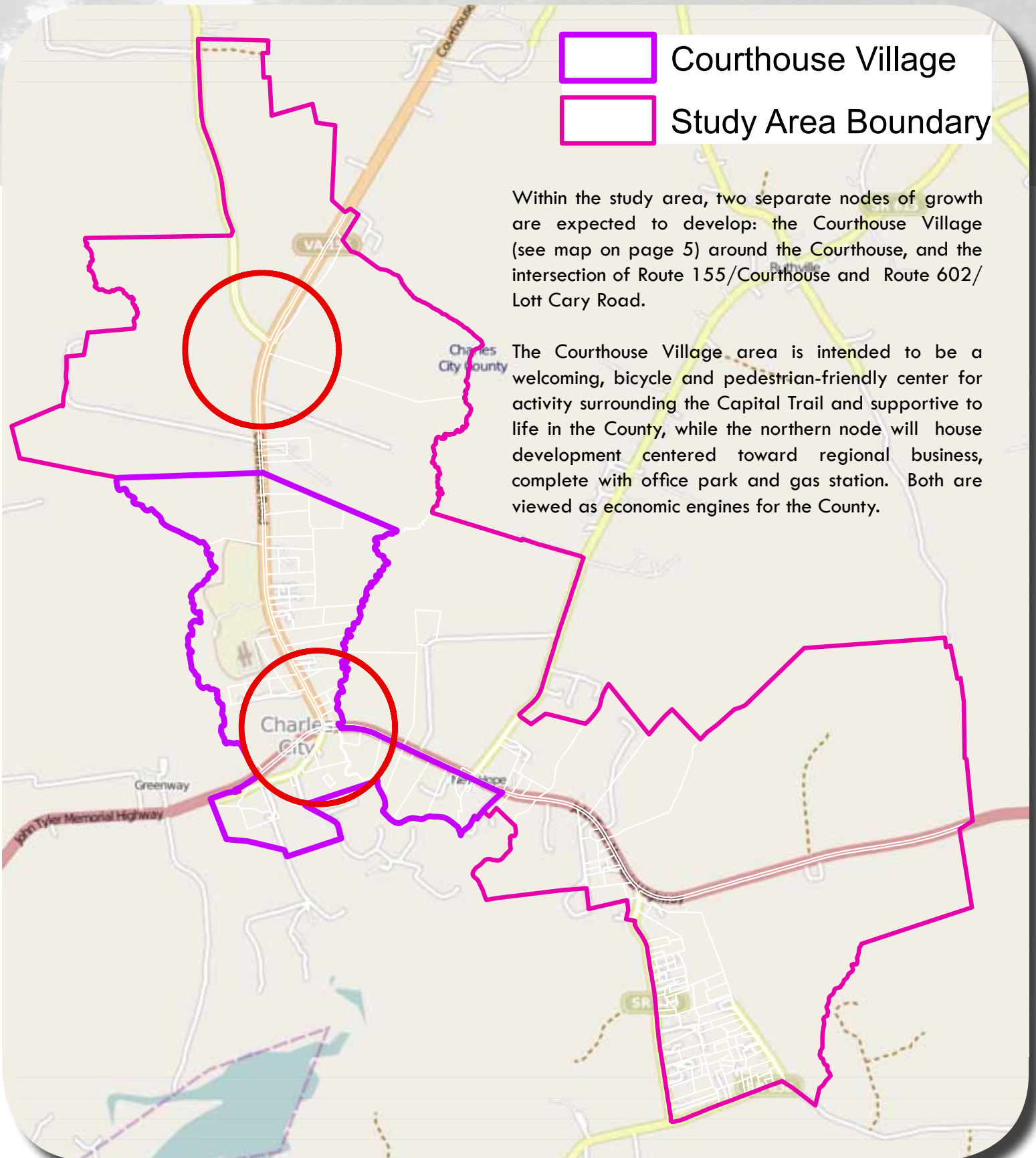
The map above shows the two development centers described in the County's comprehensive plan: Roxbury and Courthouse.

Growth Nodes

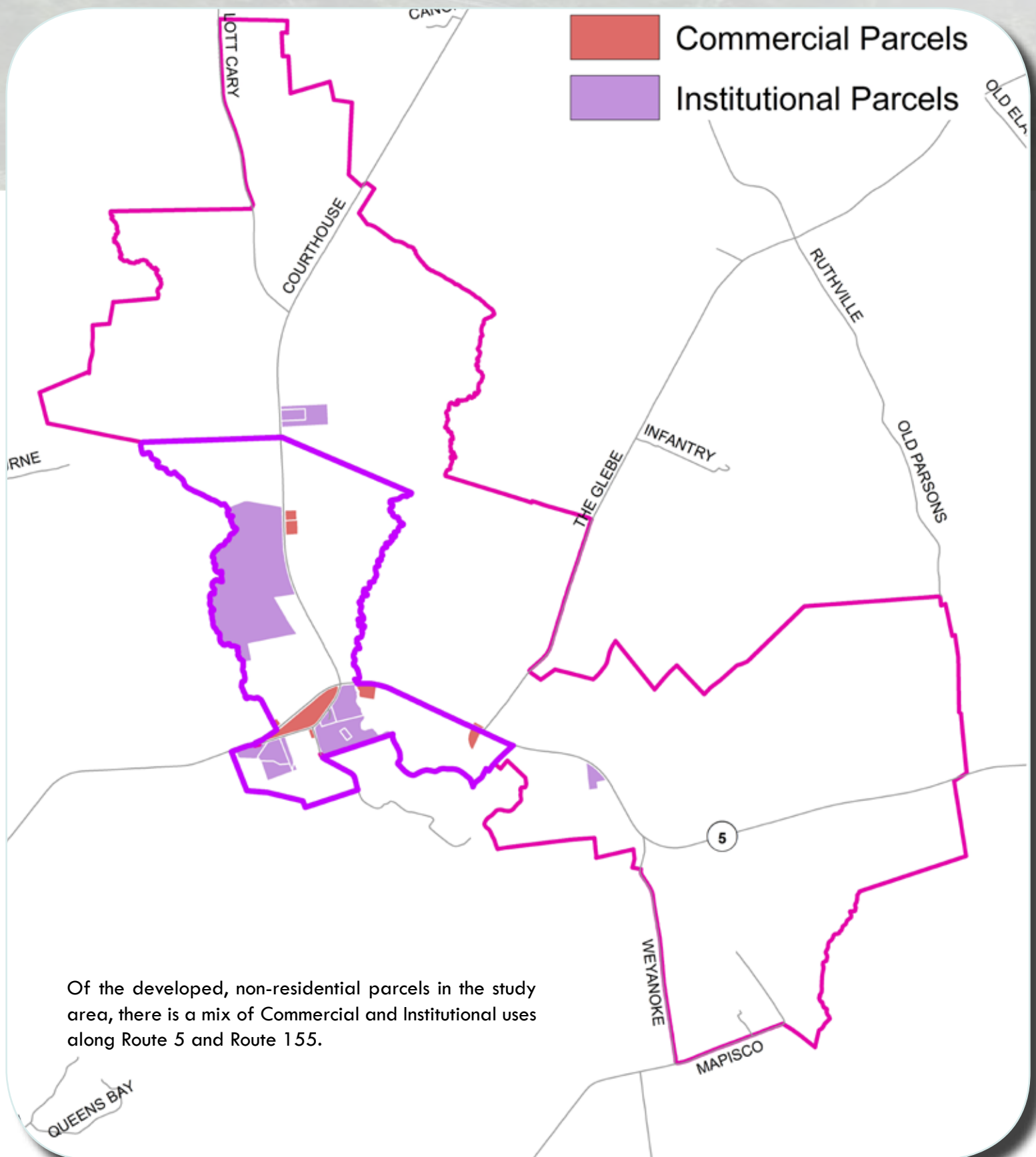
-  Courthouse Village
-  Study Area Boundary

Within the study area, two separate nodes of growth are expected to develop: the Courthouse Village (see map on page 5) around the Courthouse, and the intersection of Route 155/Courthouse and Route 602/Lott Cary Road.

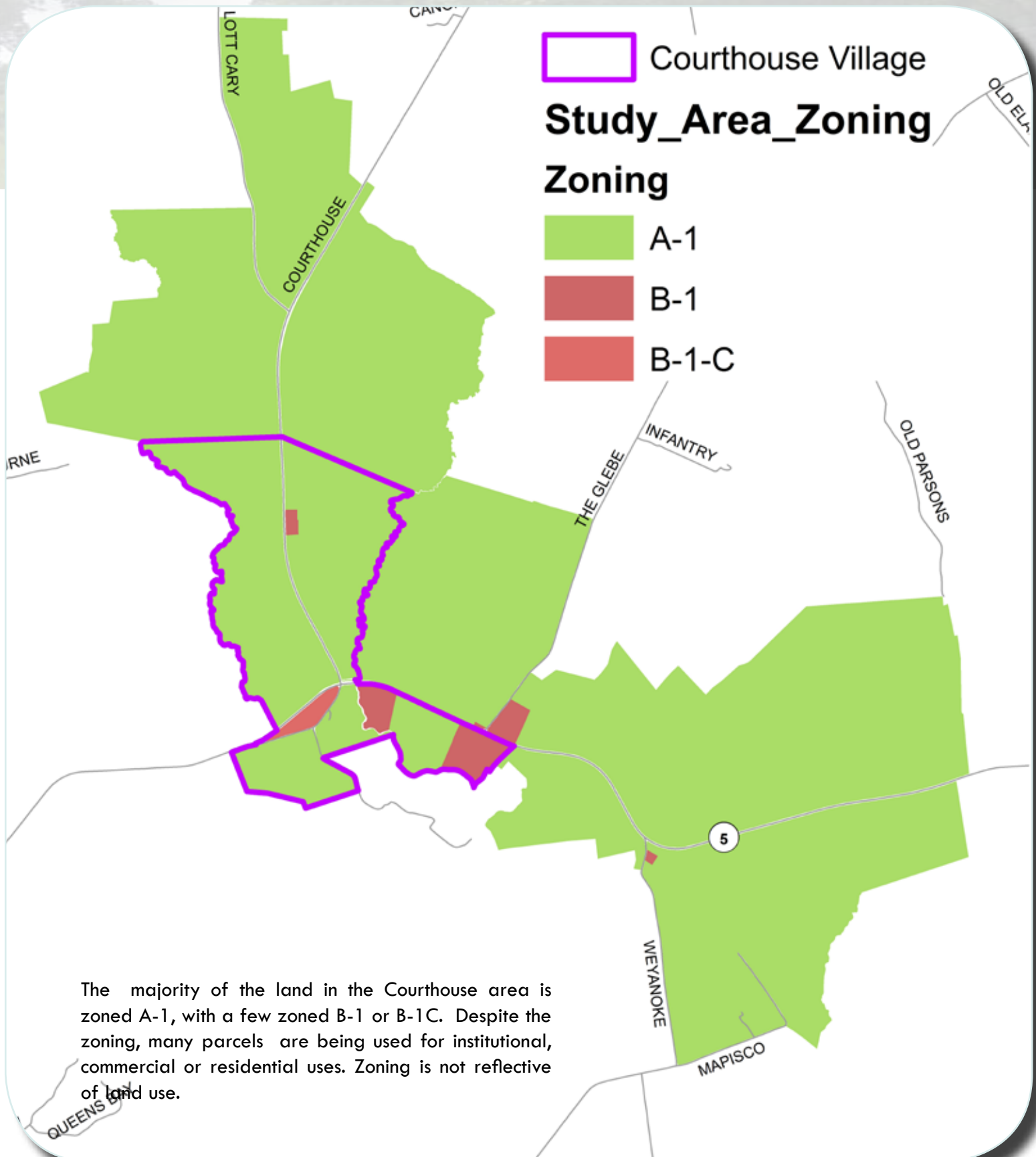
The Courthouse Village area is intended to be a welcoming, bicycle and pedestrian-friendly center for activity surrounding the Capital Trail and supportive to life in the County, while the northern node will house development centered toward regional business, complete with office park and gas station. Both are viewed as economic engines for the County.



Commercial and Institutional Uses



Current Zoning

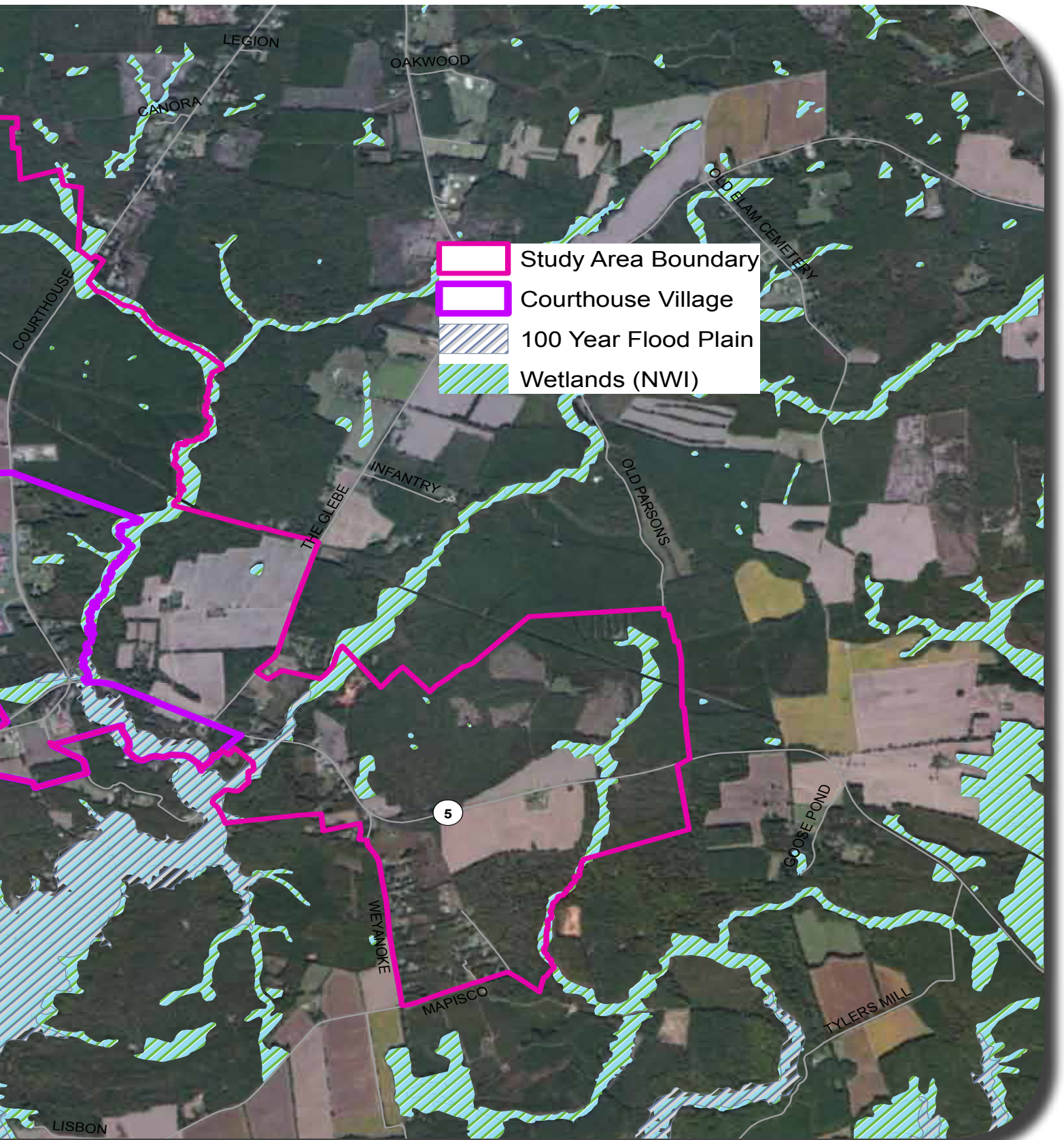


Wetlands and Floodplains

Much of the study area is covered with either 100-year flood plain or wetlands.

New development in the area will have to be sensitively planned to avoid floodplains and wetlands, and not harm water quality. Preserving the area's natural environment is essential to maintaining rural character.

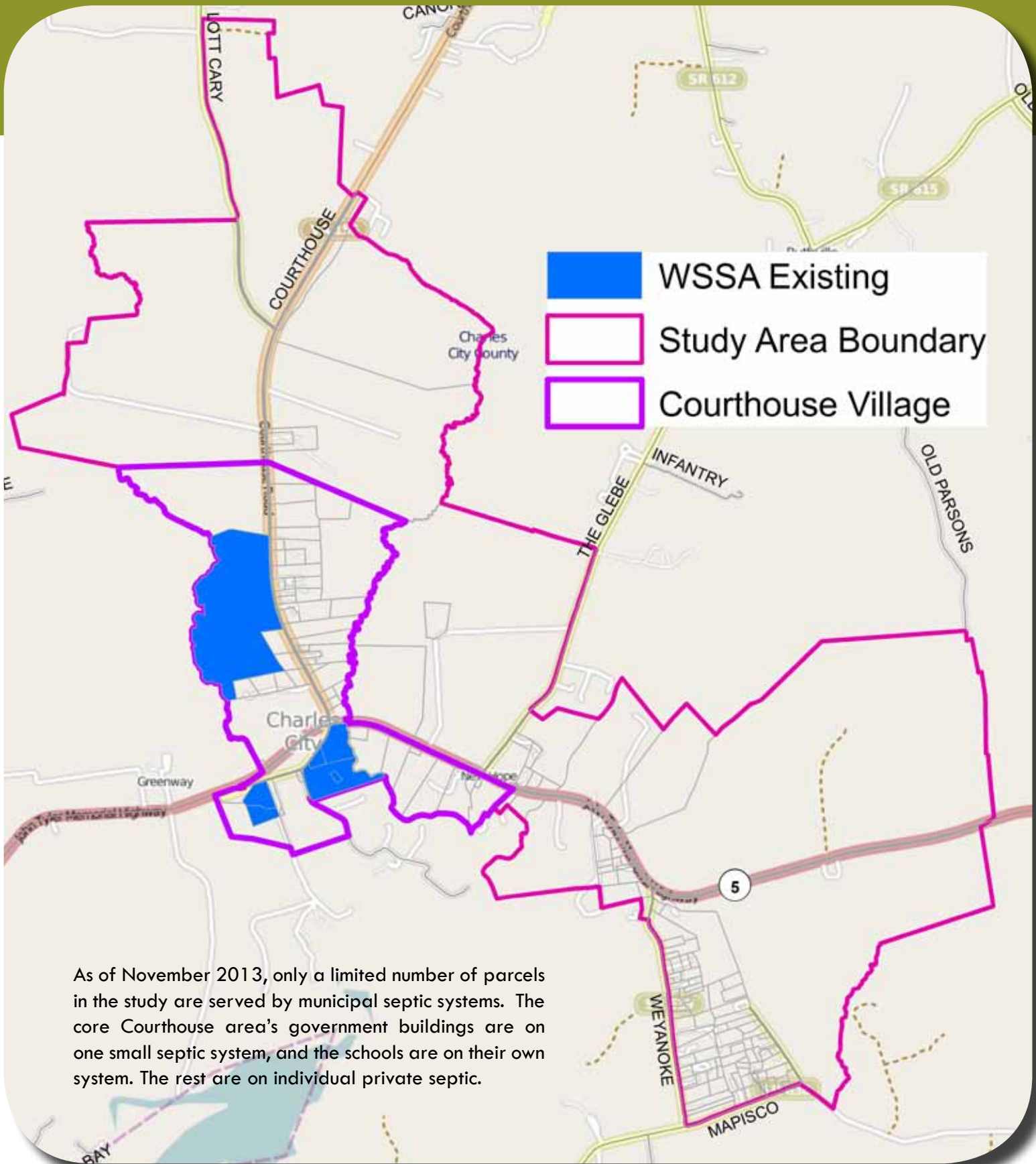




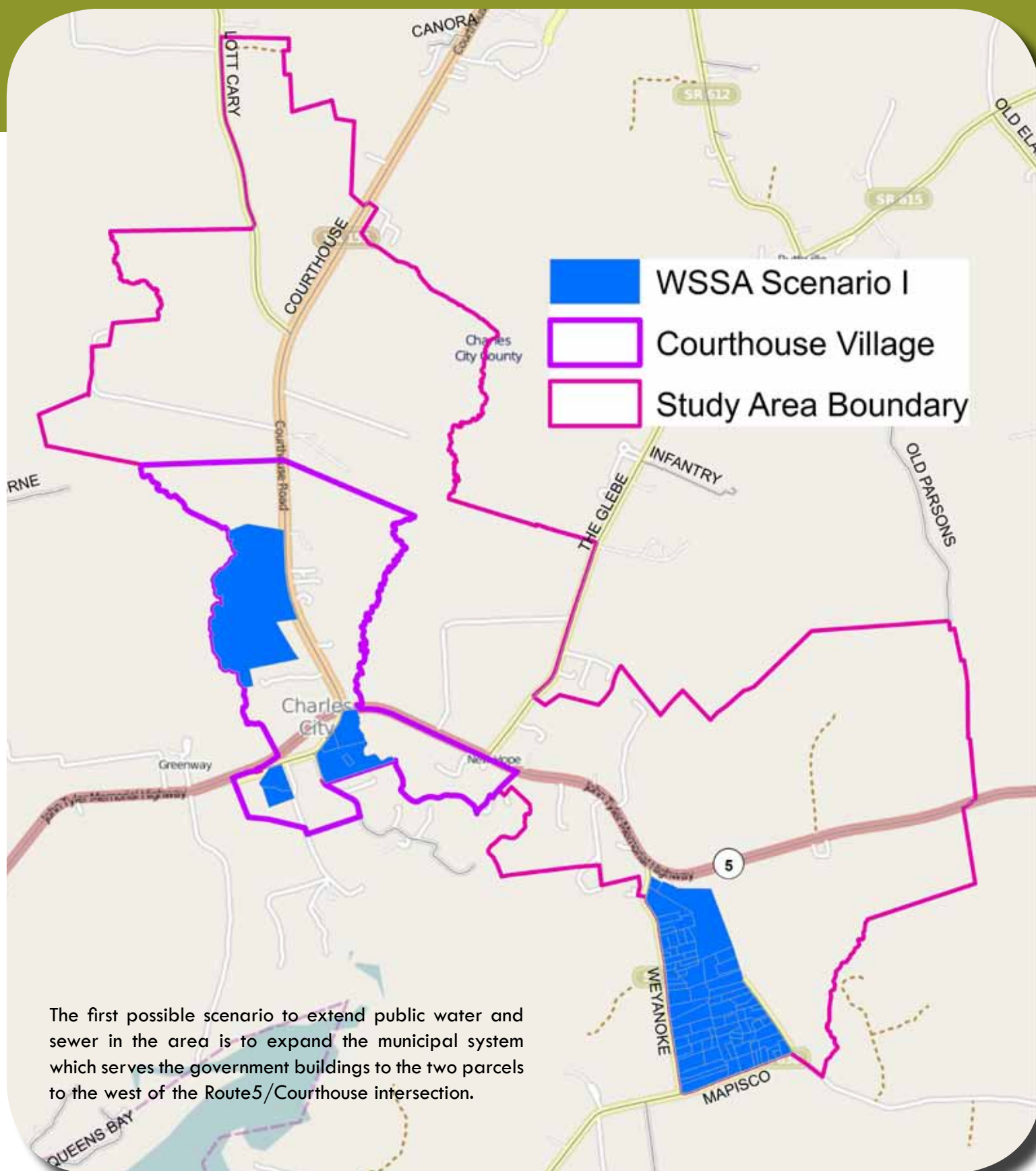
Water Sewer Service Area Scenarios

The maps on the following pages show four potential scenarios for expansion of municipal water and sewer service. Water and sewer service expansion would greatly affect development potential in the Courthouse area.

Water Sewer Service Area - Existing

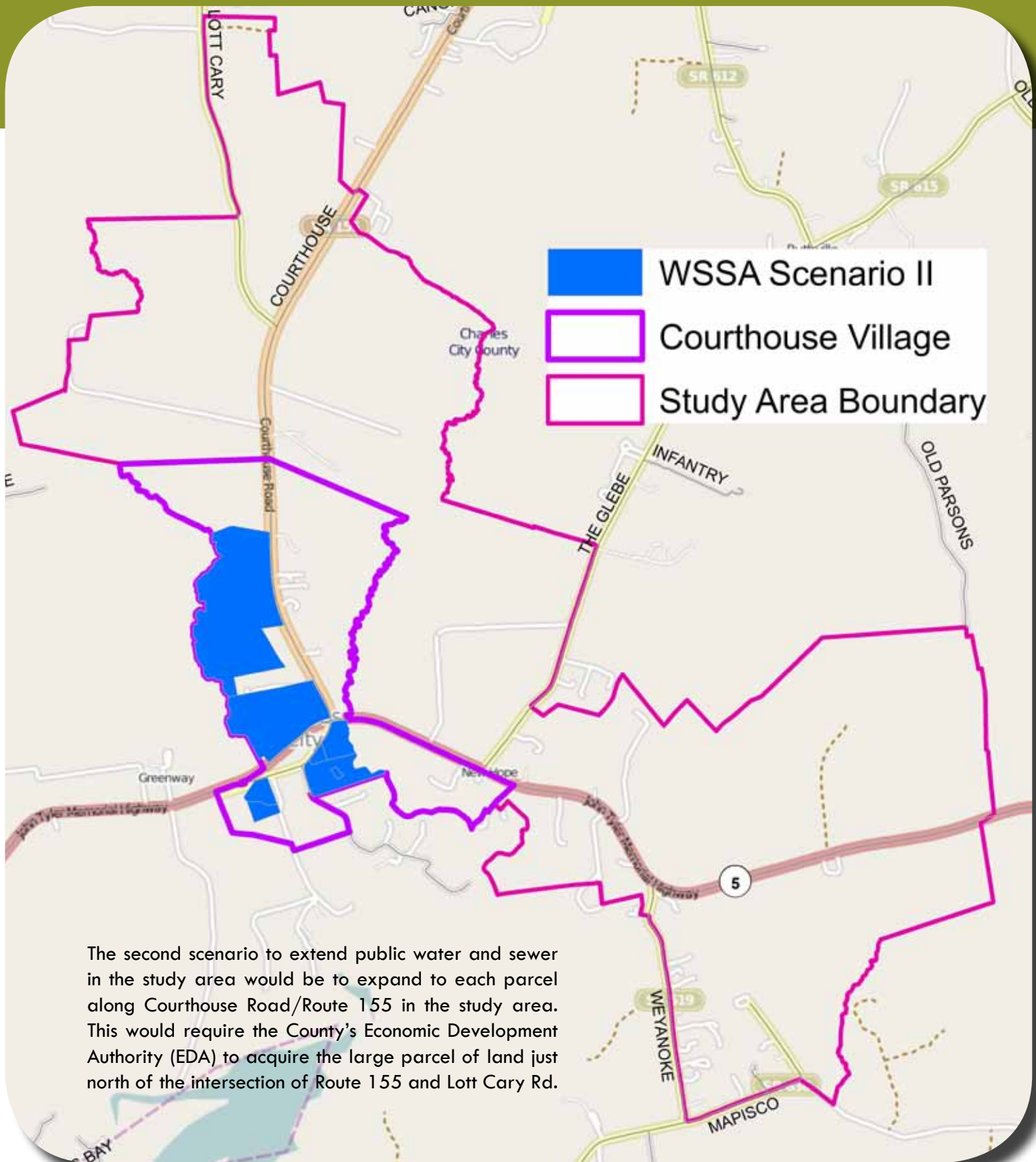


WSSA - Scenario I



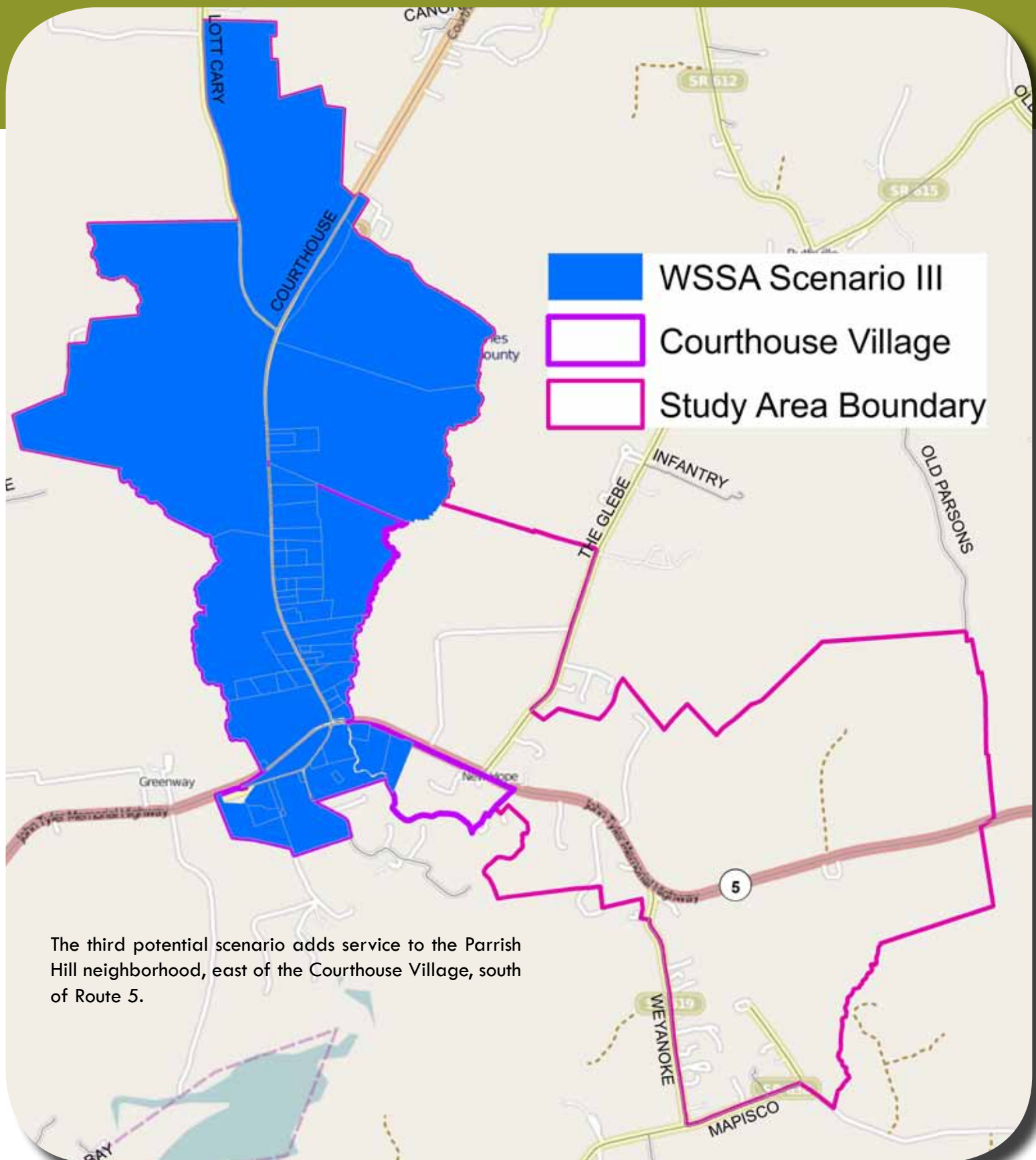
The first possible scenario to extend public water and sewer in the area is to expand the municipal system which serves the government buildings to the two parcels to the west of the Route 5/Courthouse intersection.

WSSA - Scenario II

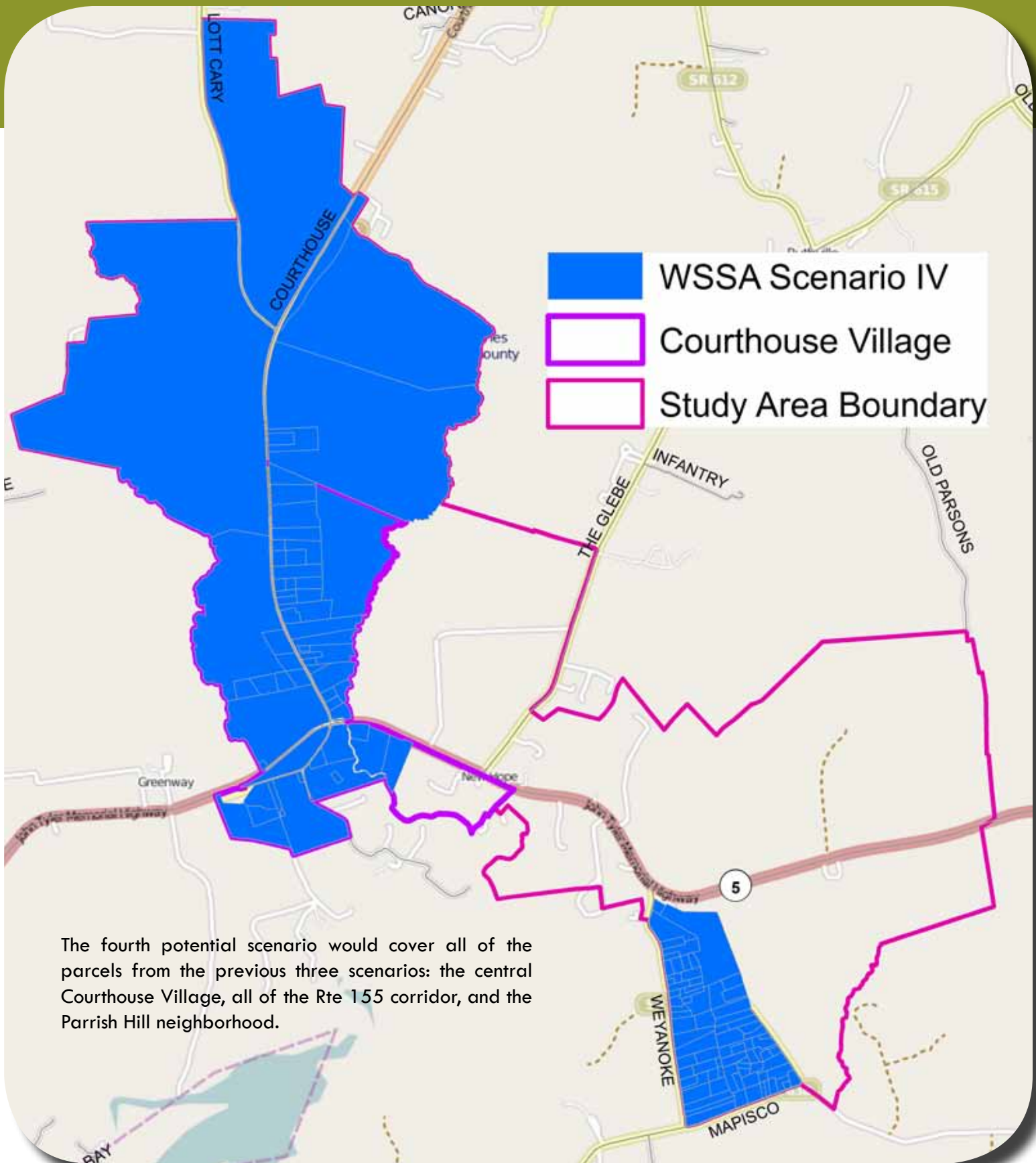


The second scenario to extend public water and sewer in the study area would be to expand to each parcel along Courthouse Road/Route 155 in the study area. This would require the County's Economic Development Authority (EDA) to acquire the large parcel of land just north of the intersection of Route 155 and Lott Cary Rd.

WSSA - Scenario III



WSSA - Scenario IV

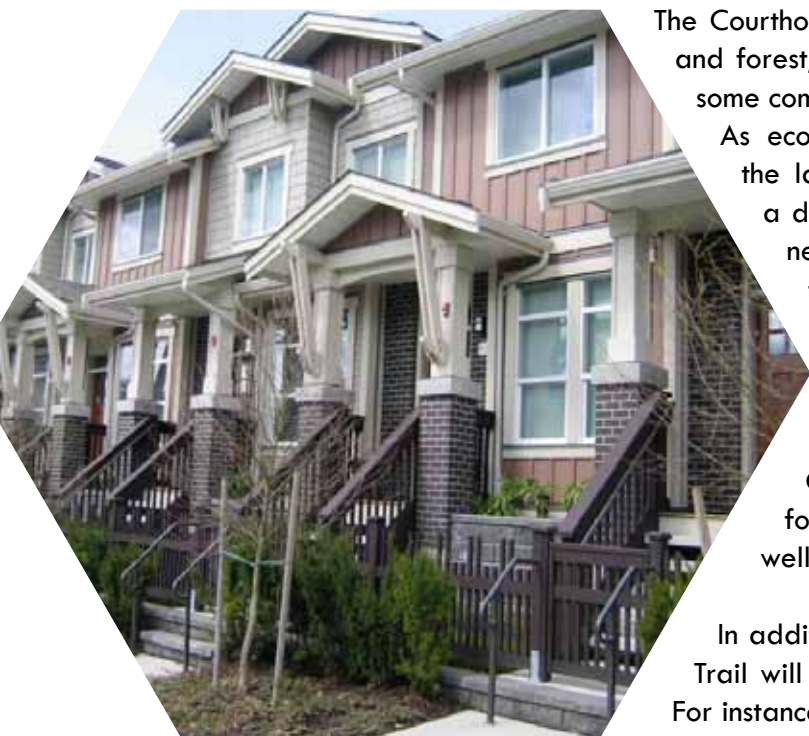


The fourth potential scenario would cover all of the parcels from the previous three scenarios: the central Courthouse Village, all of the Rte 155 corridor, and the Parrish Hill neighborhood.

NEW DEVELOPMENT

WHAT TYPES OF DEVELOPMENT ARE NEEDED IN THE AREA?

RESIDENTIAL UNITS



The Courthouse study area, other than the previously mentioned fields and forest, is a mix of single-family residential and institutional, with some commercial.

As economic development opportunities increase in the County, the lack of workforce housing will become more and more of a deterrent. A significant number of new housing units will be needed, and it makes sense to guide this development into the Courthouse area for many reasons. First, the County can provide services to more residents by having them locate in one area, and the residents can enjoy close access to schools, medical facilities and government services, as well as commercial uses.

Commercial and new office development would naturally follow as well, potentially both in an office/industrial park as well as some small offices in new mixed-use communities.

In addition to services for new residences, the users of the Capital Trail will be able to support new businesses specific to their needs. For instance, they will need lodging, a restaurant, and small stores for groceries and bike parts/services.

CAFE OR RESTAURANT

Other bicycle trails in Virginia, such as the Virginia Creeper Trail south of Abingdon, have shown that a trailside eatery is not only able to be supported by the traffic the trail brings, but that it is a welcome and meaningful addition to the trail users' experience. Though there will be far less trail traffic in the winter months, current and future County residents will also be able to patronize the trailside eatery, as there are currently limited dining options in the area.

Options are available to satisfy this need: a new cafe or restaurant could open in the study area along the trail; or a new store could open which provides outdoor seating and food service in addition to groceries and bicycle amenities like tire pumps and bike rentals.





FARMERS MARKET PAVILLION

No formal venue for local farmers exists to sell produce in the County. One potential anchor use for the Courthouse area is a permanent farmers market pavillion structure. This could be used for produce sales, or a formal farmers market on certain days, and used for other events, like concerts or private party rentals, on other days.

It would provide a community center for the Courthouse area, encourage the purchase and consumption of healthy foods for area residents, and be a potential income source for the County.



GROCERY STORE



As more and more people move to the Courthouse area, the lack of fresh food options will become more and more apparent. At a certain threshold of population, a grocery store can be supported in the study area to serve existing and future residents, to keep dollars spent on food in the County, and to provide for all the needs of County residents

VISITOR LODGING

The Courthouse area is the middle point on the Capital Trail between Richmond and Williamsburg. It is an excellent place for trail riders to stop and spend the night, to break up their city-to-city trip. Other than a few bed and breakfasts scattered throughout the County, few establishments exist for tourists and trail users to stay. This means that they have limited options to spend the time in the Courthouse area, and tourist dollars will continue to stay in Richmond or Williamsburg.

Ideally visitor lodging should be located directly on the Capital Trail, in the core Courthouse area.



What Does this Development Look Like?

Although many typical agricultural activities are in concordance with the historic, rural nature of Route 5 and the Virginia Capital Trail, there are many uses allowed (either permitted or by special use permit) in the A-1 district that, if developed, would disrupt the trail experience and lose the character of the area, making it a less desirable place to live and work. It is essential that new development is respectful of the nature of the area, both in form (see below) and in the preservation of open space (facing page).

(Please note that these examples are for aesthetic purposes and not the result of market analysis.)

Choices for Virginia Communities



**Chain
Drug Stores**



**Fast Food
Restaurants**



**Gas Station
Canopies**



Preservation of Rural Character and Open Space



⊕ (Left) "Yield plans" to determine density: Under Pennsylvania's Growing Greener program, conventional yield plans like this, demonstrating the feasibility of 18 two-acre lots in the two-acre-district, are no longer allowed. (Right) Village design under Growing Greener is an alternative option. It illustrates how lot yield could be doubled as a strong incentive for developers to produce layouts following certain hamlet design principles, including 70 percent of the unconstrained land remaining as permanent open space.



Open Space Site Design



Virginia farm before development



Virginia farm after conventional development



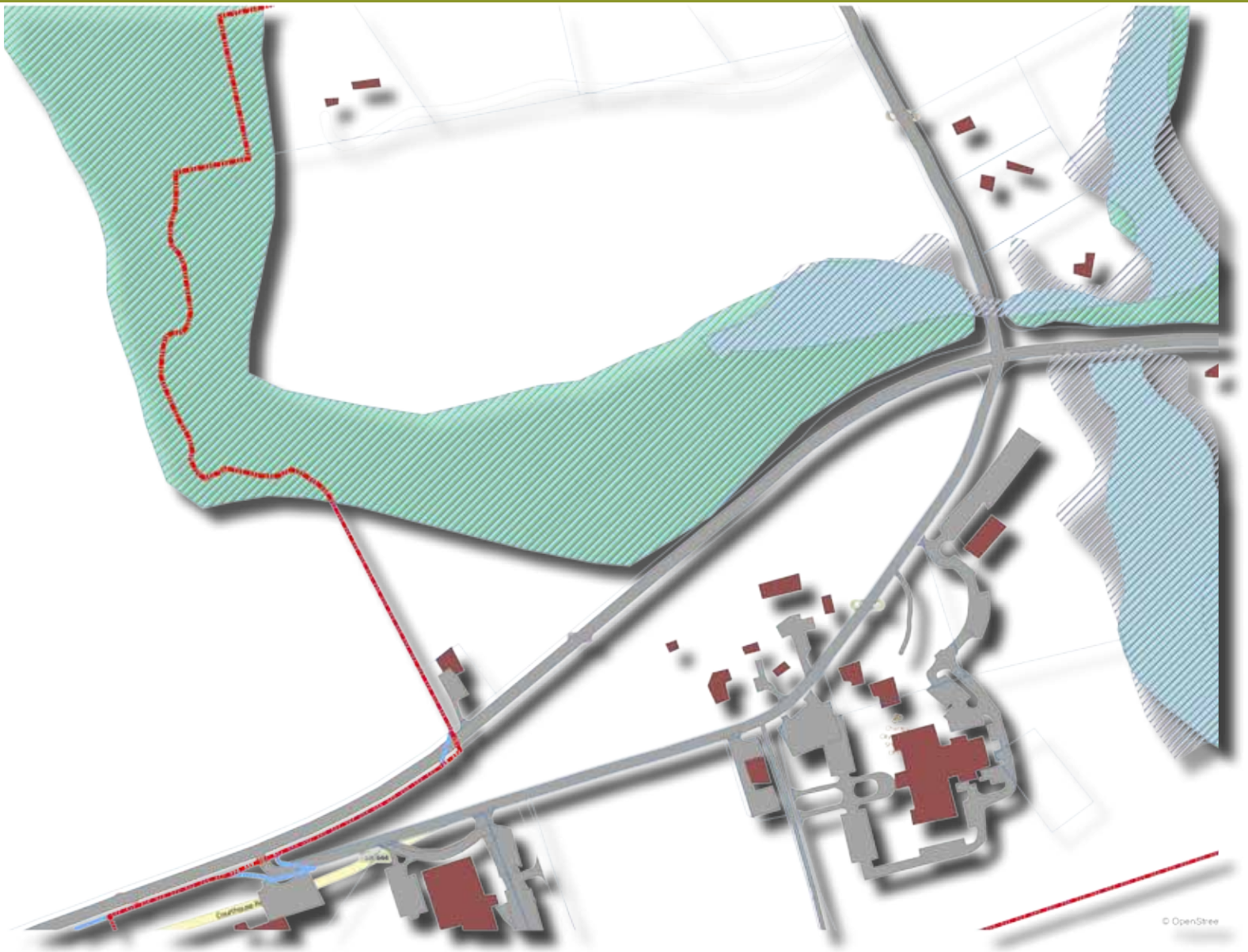
Virginia farm after open space development

Source: Better Models for Development in Virginia



All images by Randall Arendt. Adapted from PAS Report 523/524: Crossroads, Hamlet, Village, Town: Design Characteristics of Traditional Neighborhoods, Old and New; revised edition, 2004.

Courthouse Village Existing



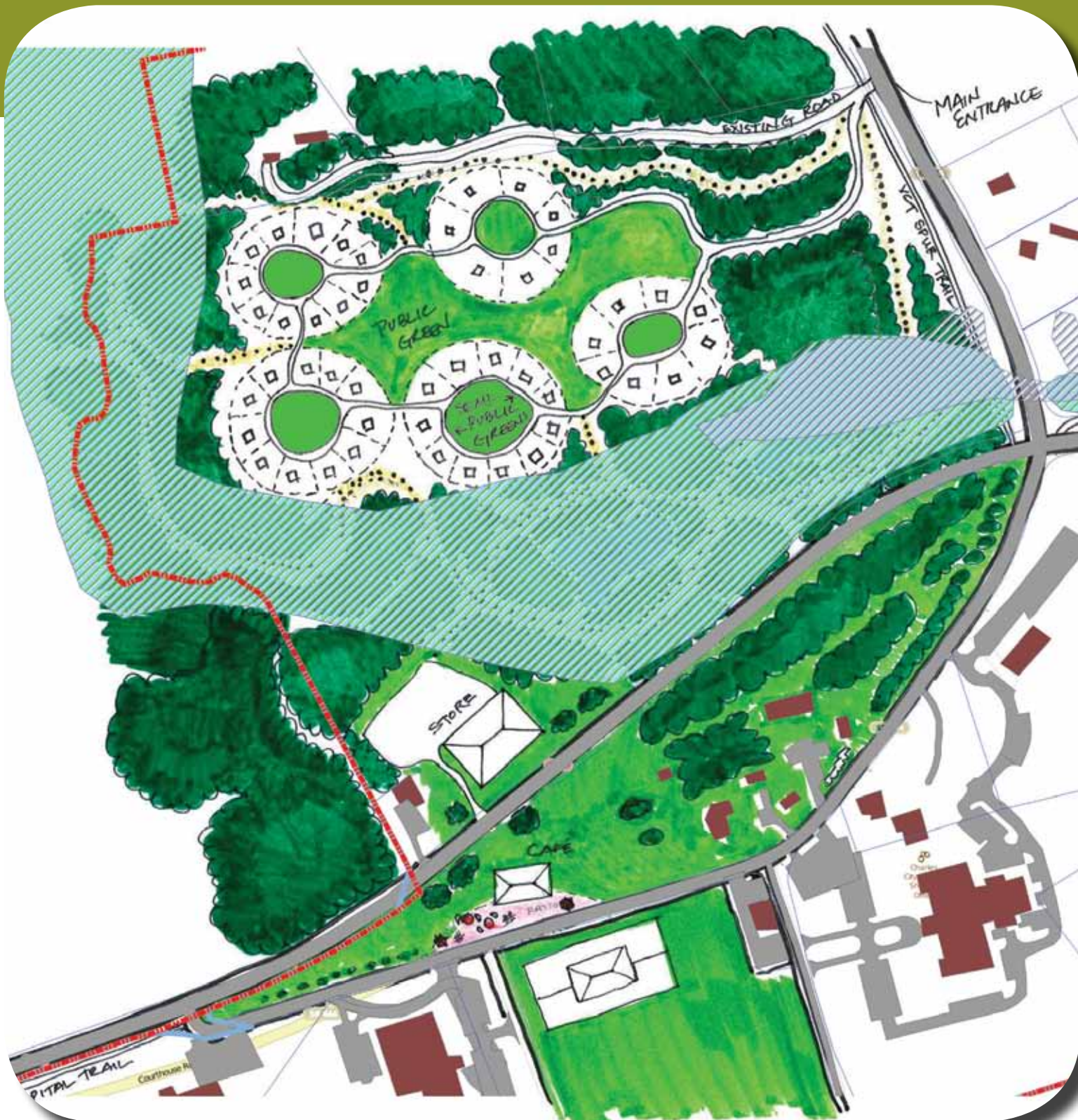
The above map shows parcel lines, buildings (in red), roads and parking lots (in grey) in the three largest undeveloped parcels in the Courthouse Village area, with 100-year flood plain and wetlands overlaid (grey hatches and blue hatches, respectively).

Courthouse Village Buildout



The drawing above shows three of the most central parcels in the Courthouse Village which are currently undeveloped and privately-owned. This buildout scenario shows five clusters of housing around a public green, with each cluster facing a semi-private green. Bicycle and pedestrian paths run through the wetland area, man-made ponds mitigate impervious surface, and a store on Route 5 is accessible from the development via the bicycle and pedestrian paths. The design incorporates 49 single-family units while preserving open space and rural character.

Courthouse Village Existing and Buildout



The above map shows the maps on pages 24 and 25 combined, with new and existing development as well as wetlands and floodplain.

Courthouse Village Buildout



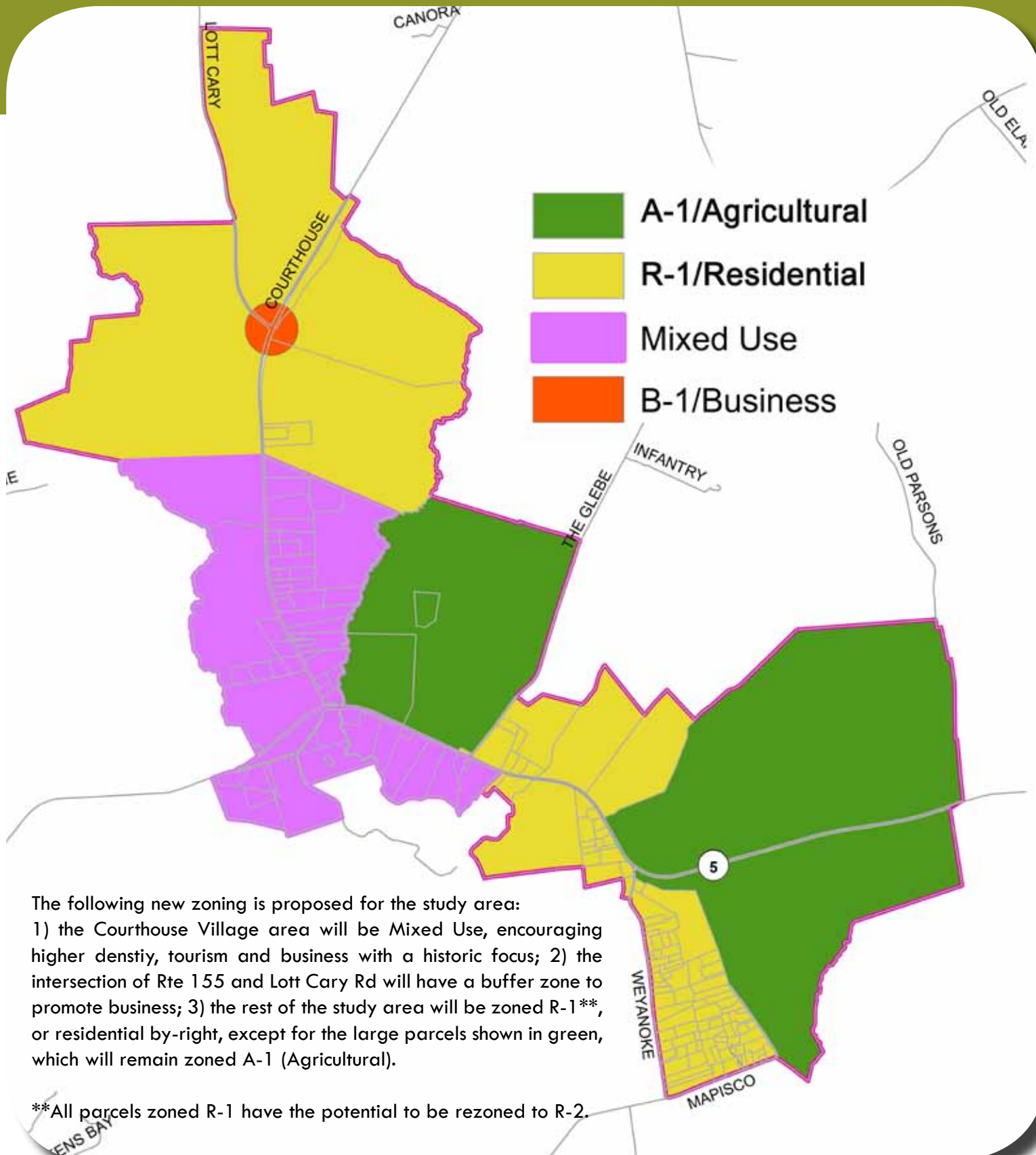
The above map shows a similar development, with 42 single-family units each facing the public green and backing to forest. The houses are shown at staggered setbacks to seem further apart.

Courthouse Village Drawing

This drawing gives a closer example of what the development could look like.



Proposed New Zoning





POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Establish zoning language to define the character and scope of development in the Courthouse Development Center and Courthouse Village
- 2 Develop new zoning categories for Village Mixed-Use and Business Development
- 3 Change County-wide setback requirement to allow business in the Courthouse Village to interact with the Capital Trail users
- 4 Streamline development process, primarily residential development in identified area
- 5 Encourage business and business-friendly practices -- rebates, investments, economic development website, creation of tourism and cultural trail
- 6 Establish utilities to create a defined sanitation and water district with well-established policies and guidelines
- 7 Be proactive in speculative rezoning



