

# International Falls Area Transportation Plan

2021





**Disclaimer:** Any goals, strategies, or designs included in this document are conceptual and may not be implemented, as presented or at all. The pursuit of these goals, strategies, and designs are subject to the availability of public resources, which are not secured unless otherwise noted.

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# Introduction

## Background

In 2019, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) started processes to facilitate the development of a transportation plan for northeast Koochiching County, Minnesota.

The idea for this transportation plan came during MnDOT's scoping process for its 2027 Trunk Highway (TH) 11/71 project. Though the 2027 project included only routine pavement maintenance, MnDOT recognized larger changes that could be made to the roadway in the future. It also recognized that the public should be involved in conversations about changes to this community corridor.

While engaging the community about this roadway, MnDOT also wanted to facilitate conversations about transportation needs and desires on other roads and streets in northeast Koochiching County, defined for the purposes of this plan by the extent of zip codes 56649 (International Falls) and 56668 (Ranier).

In the end, MnDOT's hope was that the results of the planning project would be informative for its pavement project on TH 11/71 in 2027, inspirational for MnDOT and its partners to pursue a larger future project on TH 11/71 if a desire for larger changes were identified, and useful for the County and the cities, which may be better positioned to prioritize internal capital and seek external funding by taking part in a transportation planning process.



## Planning Process

In 2020, MnDOT hired ARDC Planning, a division of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC), to facilitate the development of its transportation plan for northeast Koochiching County, Minnesota. In turn, ARDC Planning hired Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects to assist with TH 11/71 corridor redesign work, which would accompany the plan.

Funded by MnDOT with match funding provided by ARDC, the planning process kicked off in July 2020. During the project's first months, MnDOT and ARDC Planning staff collected data about the International Falls area's transportation system. The results of this data collection are documented in maps attached as **Appendix A** and in reports attached as **Appendix B**.

In September 2020, ARDC Planning convened a group of transportation stakeholders to form a steering committee, outlined in **Appendix C**, for the planning process. This steering committee offered its perspectives about preliminary community transportation desires and helped consultants design a tool to empower the public to provide input about transportation issues. An online survey was administered in December 2020; results of that public input are attached as **Appendix D**.

The steering committee met again in January 2021 to review the public input and draft designs for the TH 11/71 corridor; based on survey results and their own knowledge, they also brainstormed transportation goals.

Consultants consolidated all ideas into a draft plan, and the steering committee reviewed the plan before sending it out for public review in April 2021. Following the public review period, the steering committee met a fourth and final time to review public feedback and to direct consultants to make final adjustments to the plan.

All steering committee meetings are documented in **Appendix E**.



# Action Plan

The following pages include development goals for the International Falls area's transportation network. Each page includes a goal with strategic action steps. They were created using input from the public and guidance from the plan steering committee.



*Figure 1. Spruce Street in Ranier*

## Project 1: Trunk Highway 11 Paved Trail

**Goal:** Provide a safe and continuous paved trail along Trunk Highway 11, from the International Falls Visitors Center to the Rainy Lake Visitor Center, that is intuitive for people walking and bicycling to use year-round.



*Figure 2. A segment of the TH 11 paved trail*

### Strategies:

- Work with the owners and managers of the trail to select an official name of the trail.
- Enhance coordination between the owners and managers of different trail segments to standardize maintenance practices and create a better experience for trail users.
- Create, display, and distribute a map of the trail showing its alignment and any special notes for trail users.
- Identify continuity gaps in the trail and construct trail segments that provide a continuous, separate route along the highway corridor; in addition to maintaining the trail connection into the Ranier community, construct a parallel trail segment that stays within the TH 11 corridor. Seek external funding for trail construction if needed.
- Develop several trail kiosks in downtown International Falls and near main trail access points to help residents and visitors easily use the trail.



## Project 2: Uncontrolled Intersections

Goal: Provide traffic control signage at currently uncontrolled intersections on the local street system in International Falls to enhance safety of street users.



*Figure 3. Intersection in residential area of International Falls*

### Strategies:

- Hire a consultant to study and create recommendations for addressing the uncontrolled intersections in International Falls.
- Work with the City of International Falls Public Works Department to implement recommendations and to seek external funding for signage if needed.

## Project 3: Street Lighting

Goal: Provide street lighting at high-risk areas on the local street system in International Falls and Ranier to enhance safety of street users during low-light hours.



*Figure 4. Street lighting along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street/TH 11/71 in International Falls*

### Strategies:

- Hire a consultant to study and create recommendations for where street lighting should be installed throughout the local systems, how public requests for street lighting should be handled, and how a local street lighting system will be maintained.
- Work with the City of International Falls and the City of Ranier to provide street lighting at recommended locations as regular street projects and funding allow these additions.
- Continually work to lessen light pollution that impacts night sky viewing; commit to using street lighting fixtures that are “Dark Sky Friendly” on all street and road projects going forward. (Note: Voyageurs National Park is a certified International Dark Sky Park.)



## Project 4: Road Crossings

**Goal:** Provide safety signage and street markings that communicate to drivers where to expect people walking, biking, snowmobiling, or ATVing to cross the roadway; pair these efforts with public education about safe driving around pedestrians and safe walking around vehicles.



*Figure 5. Pedestrian crossing safety measures on 3rd Street/TH 11/71 in International Falls*

### Strategies:

- Develop a public education campaign about safe practices for driving around pedestrians and safe walking around vehicles; ensure its lessons are included in local driver's education classes.
- Create an inventory that identifies where popular road crossings necessitate safety measures (i.e. crosswalk, signage) and what kind of safety measures should be applied to each crossing.
- Work with local Public Works departments to review marked crossings at least once each year, maintain them as needed, and introduce additional safety measures to them as needed.

## Project 5: Trail Crossings

Goal: Provide people using area snowmobile and/or ATV trails with clear sightlines and safety signage where trails cross roadways.



Figure 6. Blue Ox Trail through Kerry Park

### Strategies:

- Create an inventory that identifies crossing locations and what kind of safety measures are present at each crossing.
- Work with stakeholders (i.e. area snowmobile club, DNR, city, county, MnDOT) to make sure the approach to each crossing is well-signed (i.e. stop ahead, stop) and has clear sightlines for both trail users and road users.



## Project 6: Wayfinding Signage

Goal: Provide wayfinding signage along U. S. Highway 53 and Trunk Highway 11/71 that is easy for visitors to understand and use.



Figure 7. Wayfinding signage along Highway 53 in International Falls

### Strategies:

- Work with MnDOT to complete an inventory of current wayfinding signage on the Hwy 53 and TH 11/71 corridors.
- Work with local tourism-related agencies, including the International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce and Voyageurs National Park, to identify the wayfinding signage that should be part of each corridor; as a part of a wayfinding signage system, consider how gateway signage (i.e. a welcome sign with landscaping at a destination point like Voyageurs National Park) plays a part in the wayfinding system.
- Work with MnDOT and other agencies as needed to implement the desired wayfinding signage program, including seeking external funding if needed.

## Project 7: Skewed Intersections

Goal: Address safety issues (i.e. sightline issues, pedestrian crossing distance) for people navigating skewed roadway intersections, particularly along the U. S. Highway 53 and Trunk Highway 11/71 corridors.

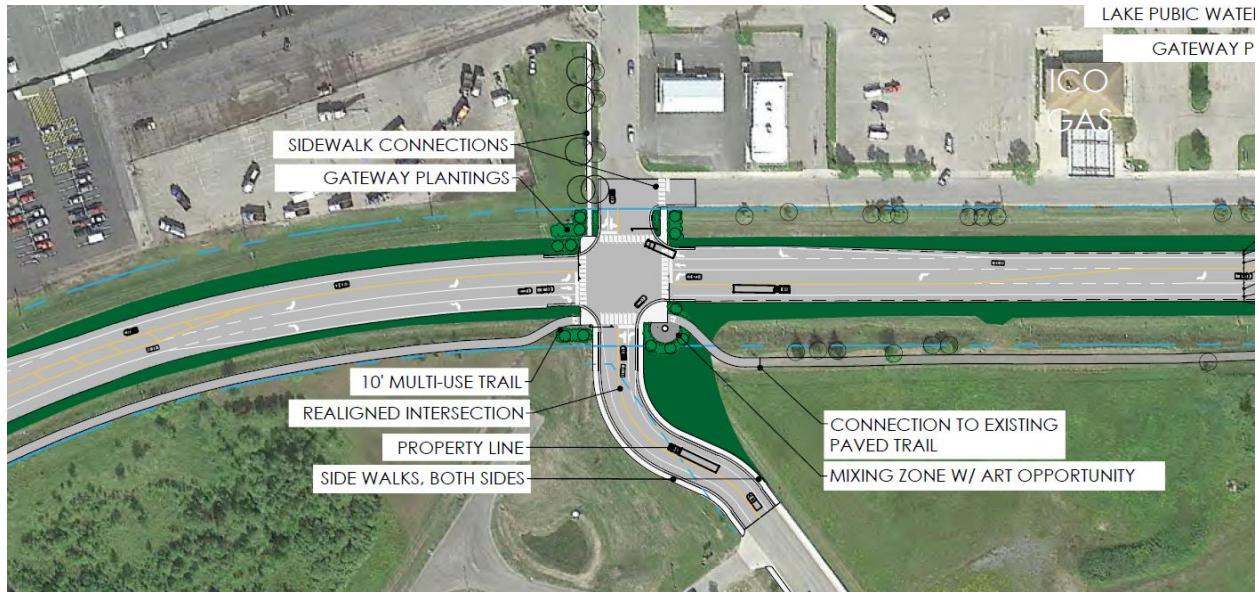


Figure 8. Example of proposed changes to enhance safety at an existing skewed intersection

### Strategies:

- Create an inventory that identifies skewed roadway intersections in the area that may cause safety issues.
- For each intersection identified, identify safety measures that may address safety issues.
- Implement those safety measures, perhaps using external funding programs like MnDOT's Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) if needed.



## Project 8: City Trail Loop

Goal: Provide a “City Loop” in International Falls (along Trunk Highway 11/71/3rd Street, U. S. Highway 53/3rd Avenue/2nd Avenue, and 17th Street/Keenan Drive) with safe and continuous designated infrastructure for people walking and biking.

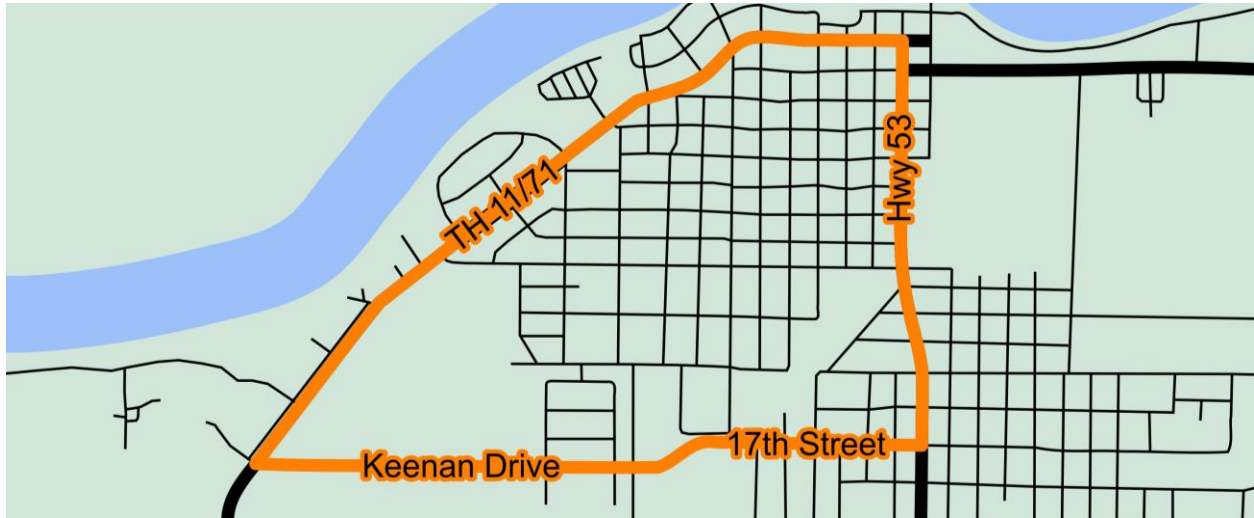


Figure 9. Map of International Falls City Loop

### Strategies:

- Identify missing gaps in the trail loop and work with the appropriate road agency to develop a conceptual design for what those sections will look like; prioritize which sections require additional safety infrastructure for a user of any age.
- Designate on-road lanes for people biking on 3rd Street in downtown International Falls; communicate with the public that these lanes are a safety tool to help drivers understand where they may see a person using a bike in this corridor.
- Identify a way for the community to recognize the loop “on the ground” through signage, posted maps, or other means.
- Communicate with City Loop-adjacent property owners about snow removal practices during the winter. (Note: Ongoing discussions about snow removal policies are taking place.)
- Work with the city, county, and MnDOT to program projects for development of gap infrastructure when the opportunity arises; if needed, seek external funding opportunities through MnDOT and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to initiate projects.
- Work with the appropriate road agency to ensure each road crossing of the trail has safety measures in place for users of all ages, and work with agencies to design and apply safety measures as needed.

## Project 9: Walking & Biking Network

Goal: Provide streets throughout International Falls and Ranier that are safe for people walking and biking to use.



Figure 10. Sidewalk segment along Spruce Street in Ranier

### Strategies:

- Continually work to create and maintain a safe network for walking and biking on all streets and road corridors in International Falls and Ranier, providing and maintaining off-street sidewalks and trails where necessary for safety.
- Revise municipal snow removal policies as needed to create a maintenance system that results in safe use of the walking network during times of snow cover. (Note: A new policy that covers snow removal in the City of International Falls is currently in development; the City is planning to engage the public about this new policy during the development process.)
- Consider the development and adoption of inclusive streets policies for Koochiching County, the City of International Falls, and the City of Ranier to guide decisionmakers to think about vulnerable road users (i.e. pedestrians and bicyclists) while scoping future projects.



## Project 10: Freight Route

Goal: Provide freight routes through International Falls that are easy for freight drivers to recognize and that promote safety of all other road users.



Figure 11. U.S. Highway 53 through International Falls (prior to 2020 construction)

### Strategies:

- After the installation of the roundabout at County Road 332 and U.S. Highway 53, communicate to trucking companies on the preferred route instead of using Trunk Highway 11/71, if possible. Work with MNDOT, Koochiching County and PCA to communicate to freight drivers.
- While studying and strategizing routes, communicate with the International Falls business community that the preferred routing only applies to freight traffic, not all traffic.

## Project 11: 11<sup>th</sup> Street Rerouting

Goal: Provide a safer secondary school zone by rerouting 11th Street away from the secondary school building and into alignment with Riverview Boulevard.

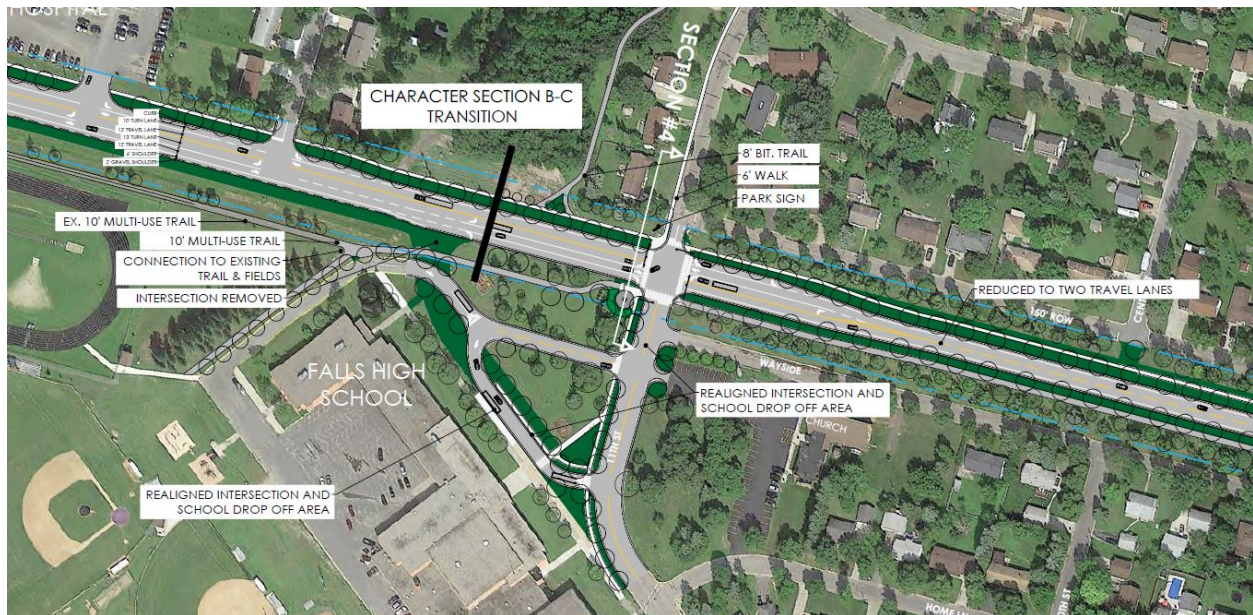


Figure 12. Schematic of proposed 11<sup>th</sup> Street rerouting

### Strategies:

- Work with the County to identify if using undeveloped property across from the secondary school would be available for transportation use.
- Work with MnDOT to identify if moving the intersection of TH 11/71 and 11th Street is possible and desired from its perspective.
- Work with the City of International Falls to realign the roadway and to seek external funding if needed.



## Project 12: Van Lynn Road Access

**Goal:** Provide full-time access to homes on Van Lynn Road, which currently has intermittent access issues due to idled rail cars.



*Figure 13. Pictured here in Ranier, the rail line that crosses Van Lynn Road to the south*

### Strategies:

- Funding has been secured to construct a bridge to enable access to Van Lynn Road; ensure this funded project is implemented.

## Project 13: Trunk Highway 11/71 Redesign

Goal: Provide transportation infrastructure along the Trunk Highway 11/71 corridor in International Falls that is safe for any mode of transportation to use or cross; if possible, align the schedule for needed utilities work along this corridor with the schedule for desired surface transportation changes.

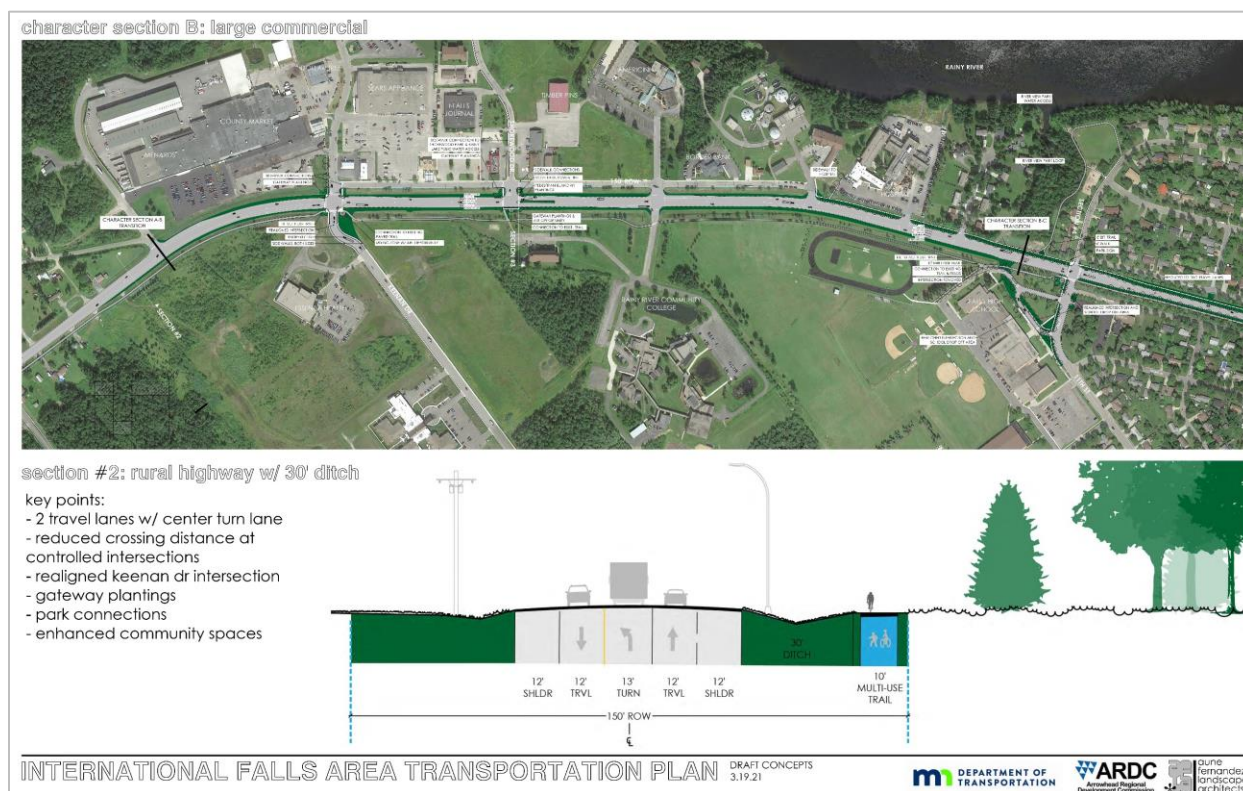


Figure 14. Excerpt from TH 11/71 designs, available in Appendix F

### Strategies:

- See **Appendix F** for full designs.
- Work with MnDOT to select final designs, secure external project funding if needed, and program the project for construction.



# Appendices



Figure 15. "Creative" bike rack in downtown International Falls

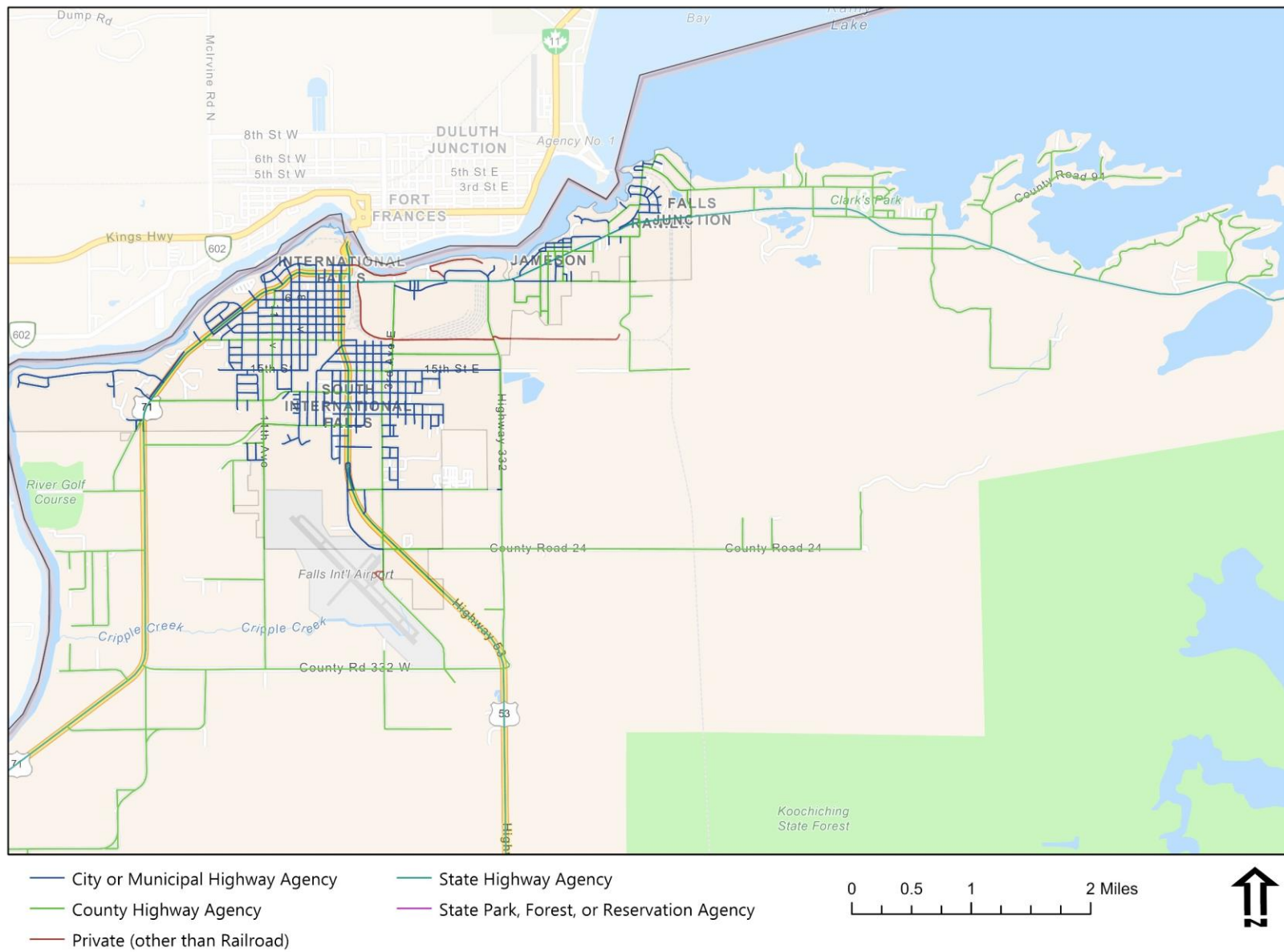
## **Appendix A: Maps**

The following pages include the results of transportation data collection efforts of ARDC Planning and the Minnesota Department of Transportation during July 2020.

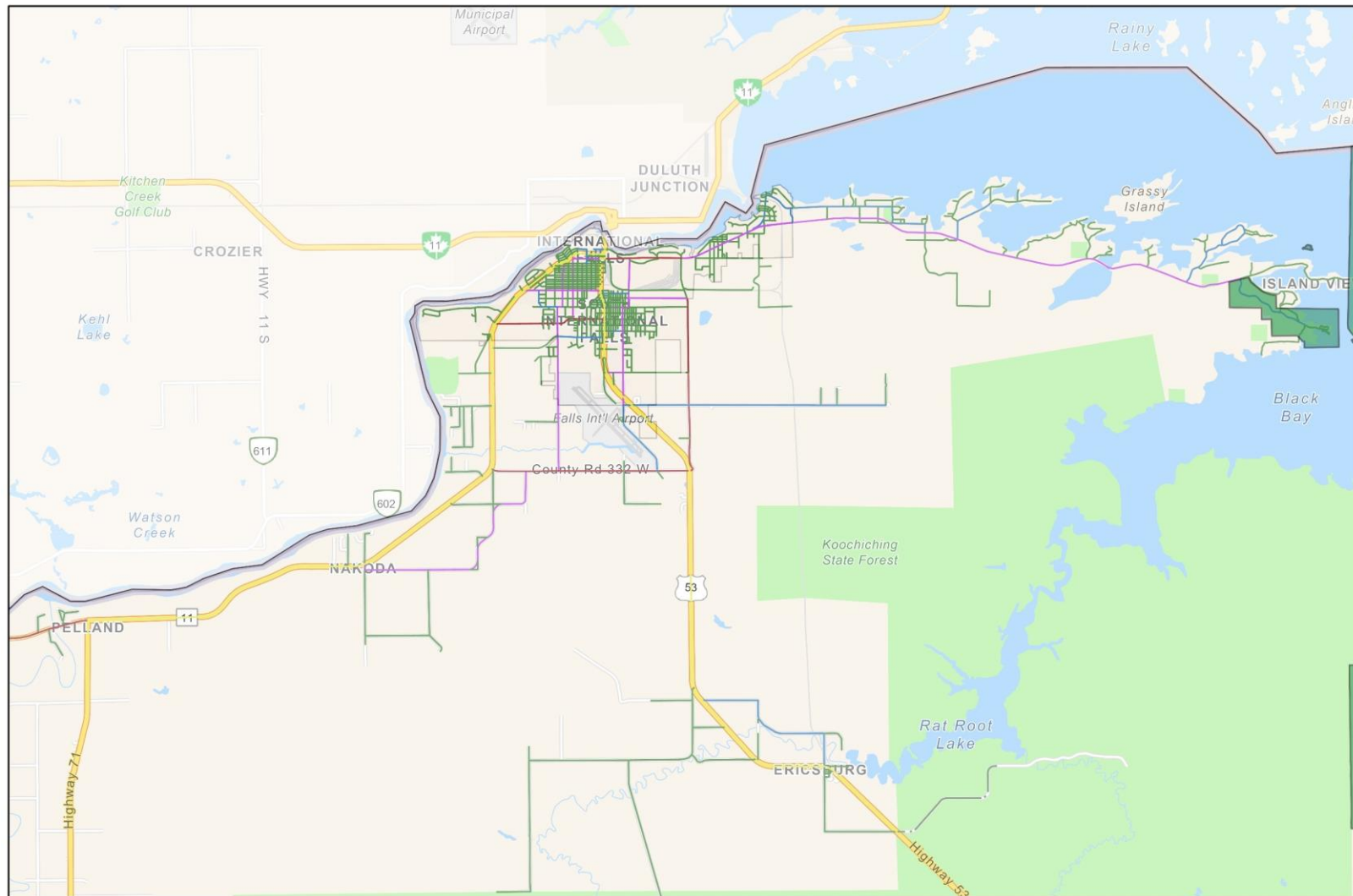




## International Falls Transportation Plan | ROW Ownership



## International Falls Transportation Plan | Functional Classification



Layer2  
Local

Major Collector  
Minor Arterial

Minor Collector  
Principal Arterial - Other

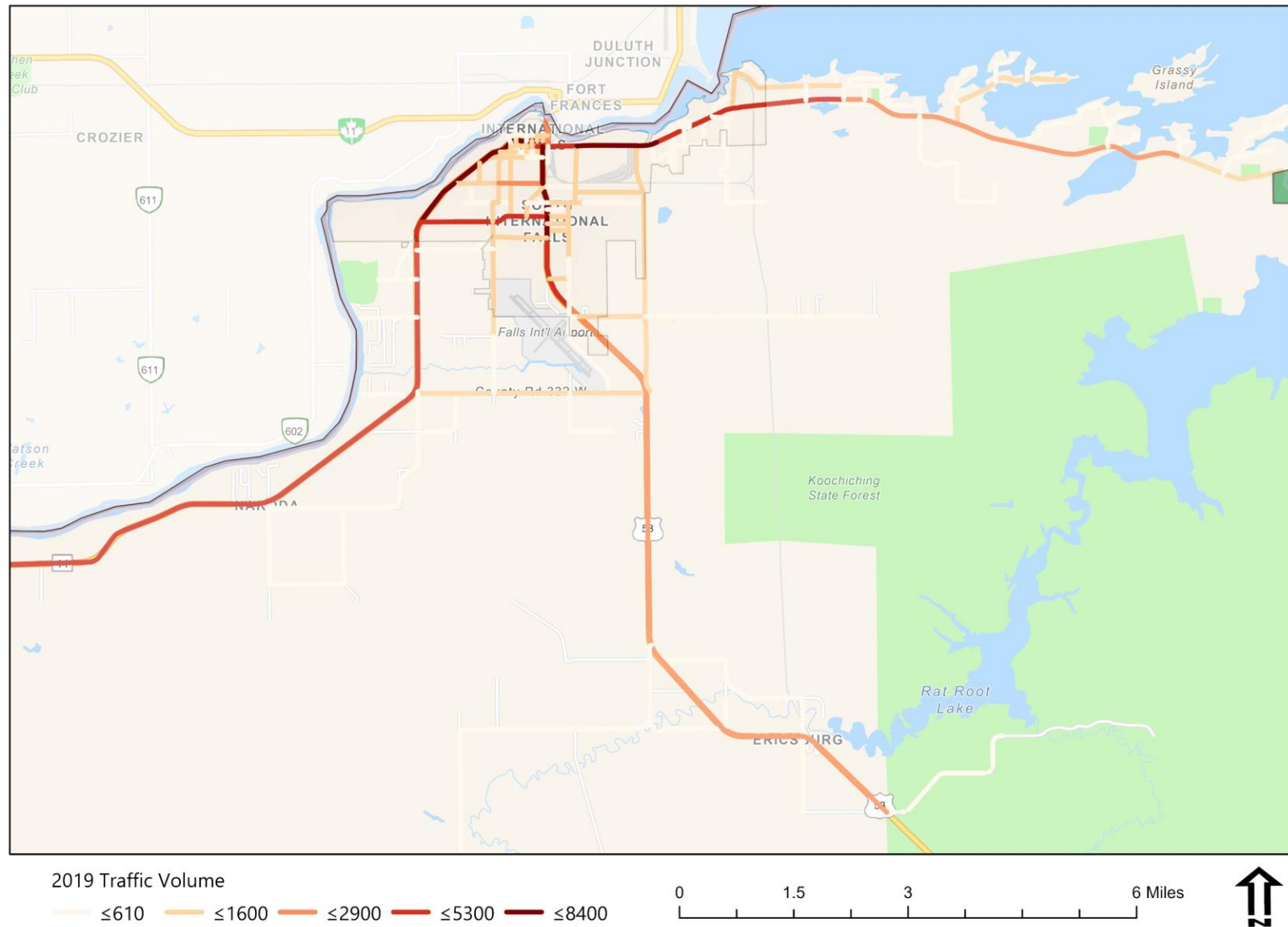
4

8 Miles

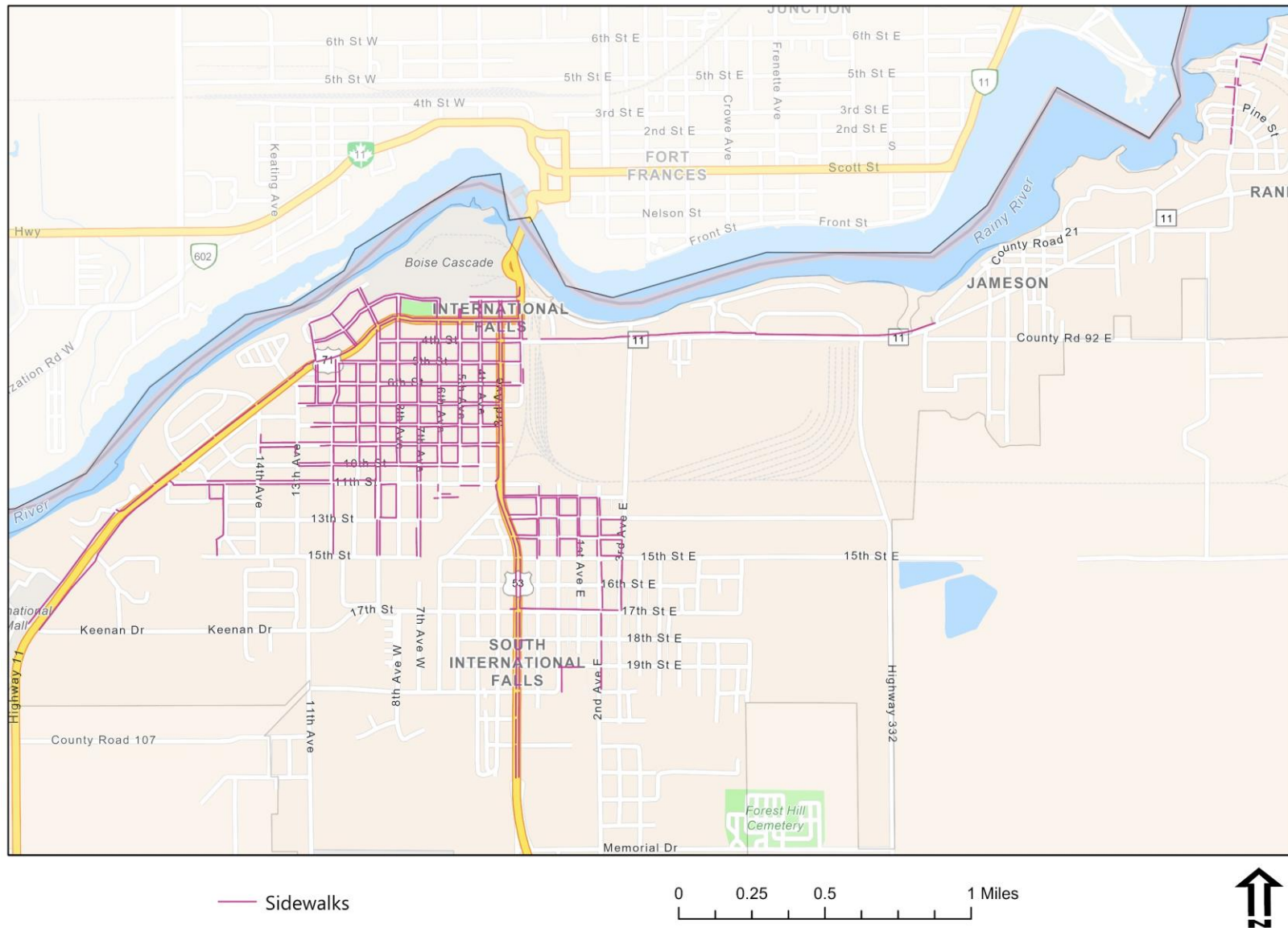




## International Falls Transportation Plan | AADT

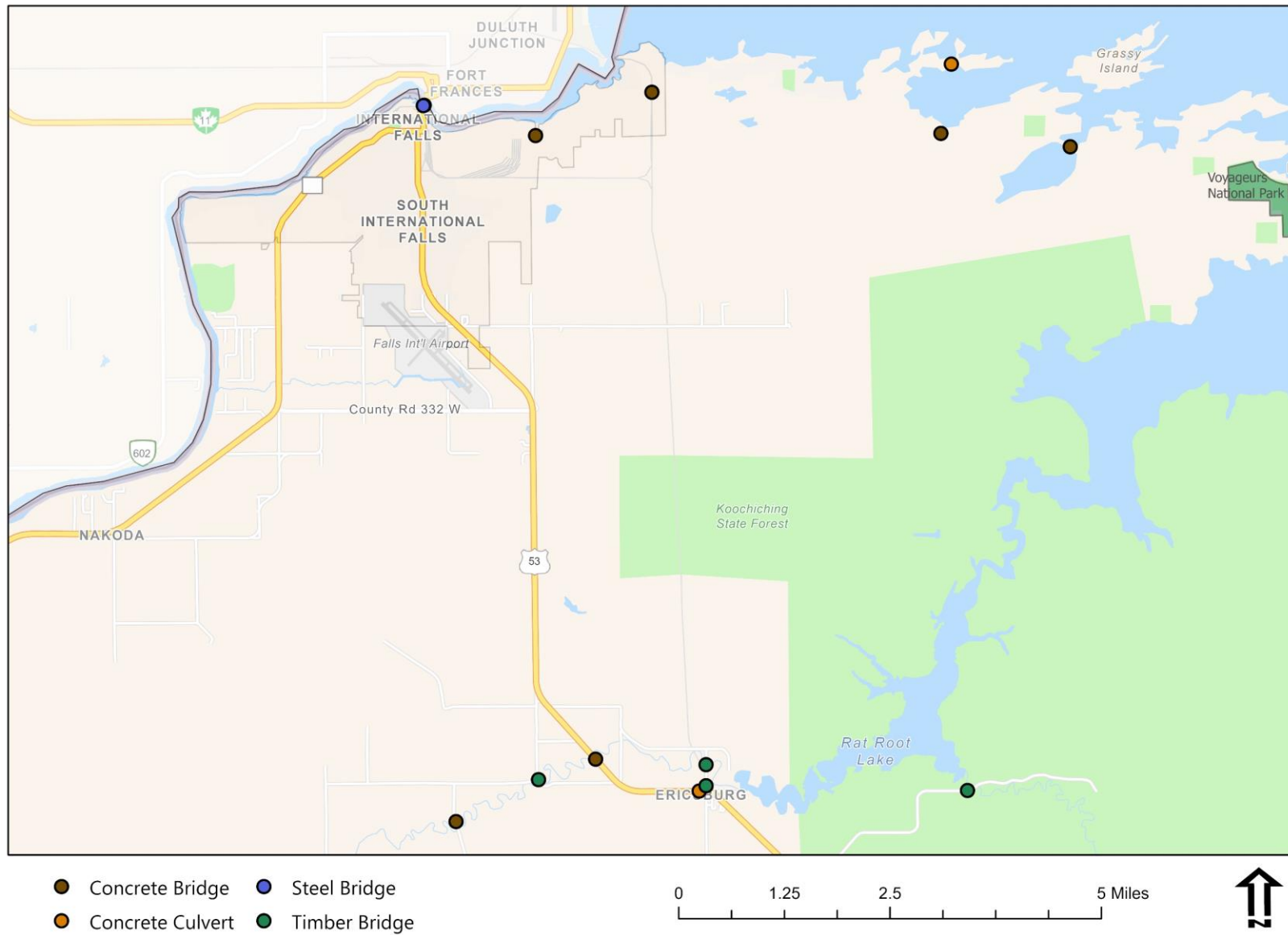


## International Falls Transportation Plan | Sidewalks

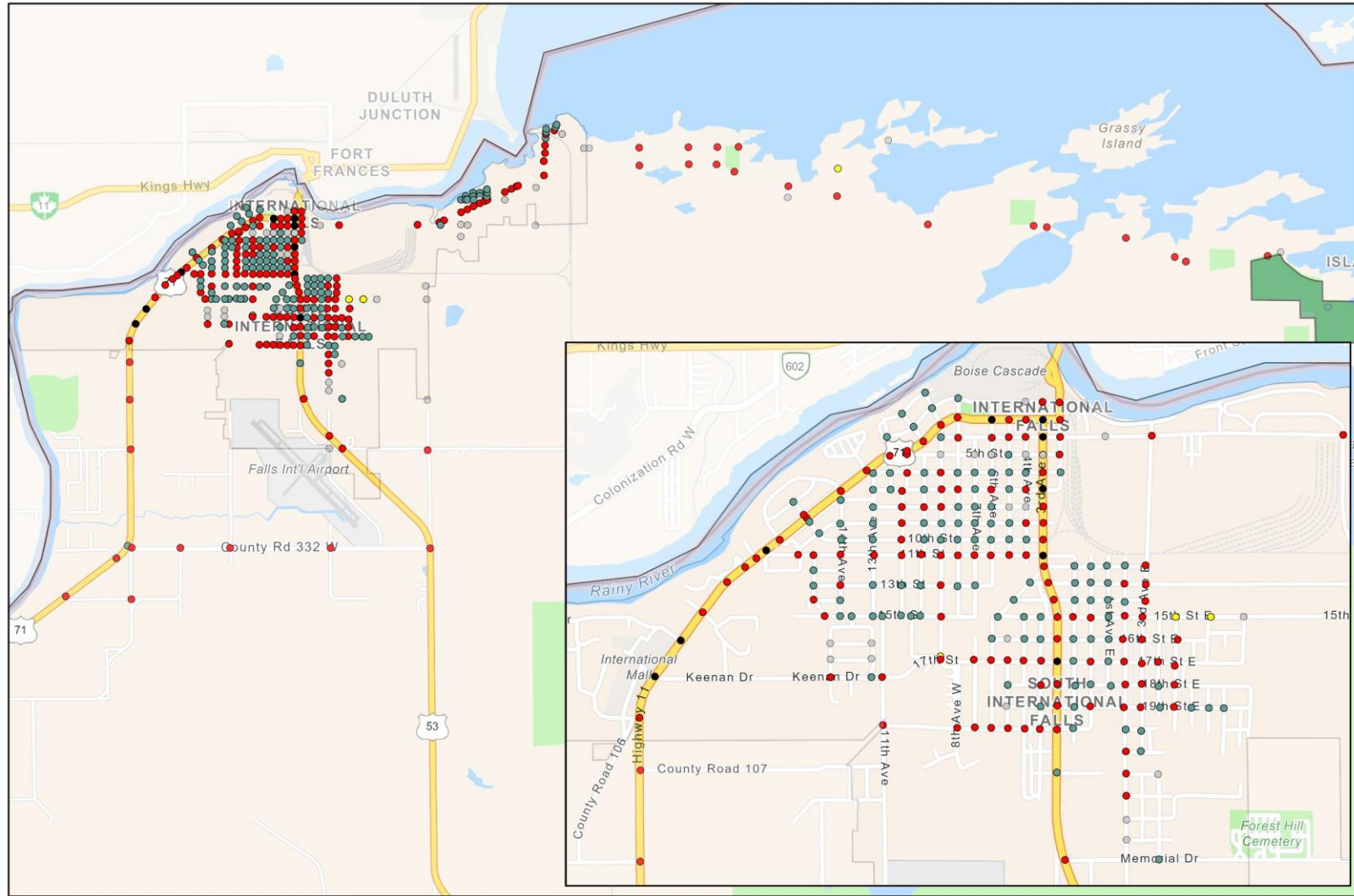




## International Falls Transportation Plan | Bridges



## International Falls Transportation Plan | Intersections



Layer

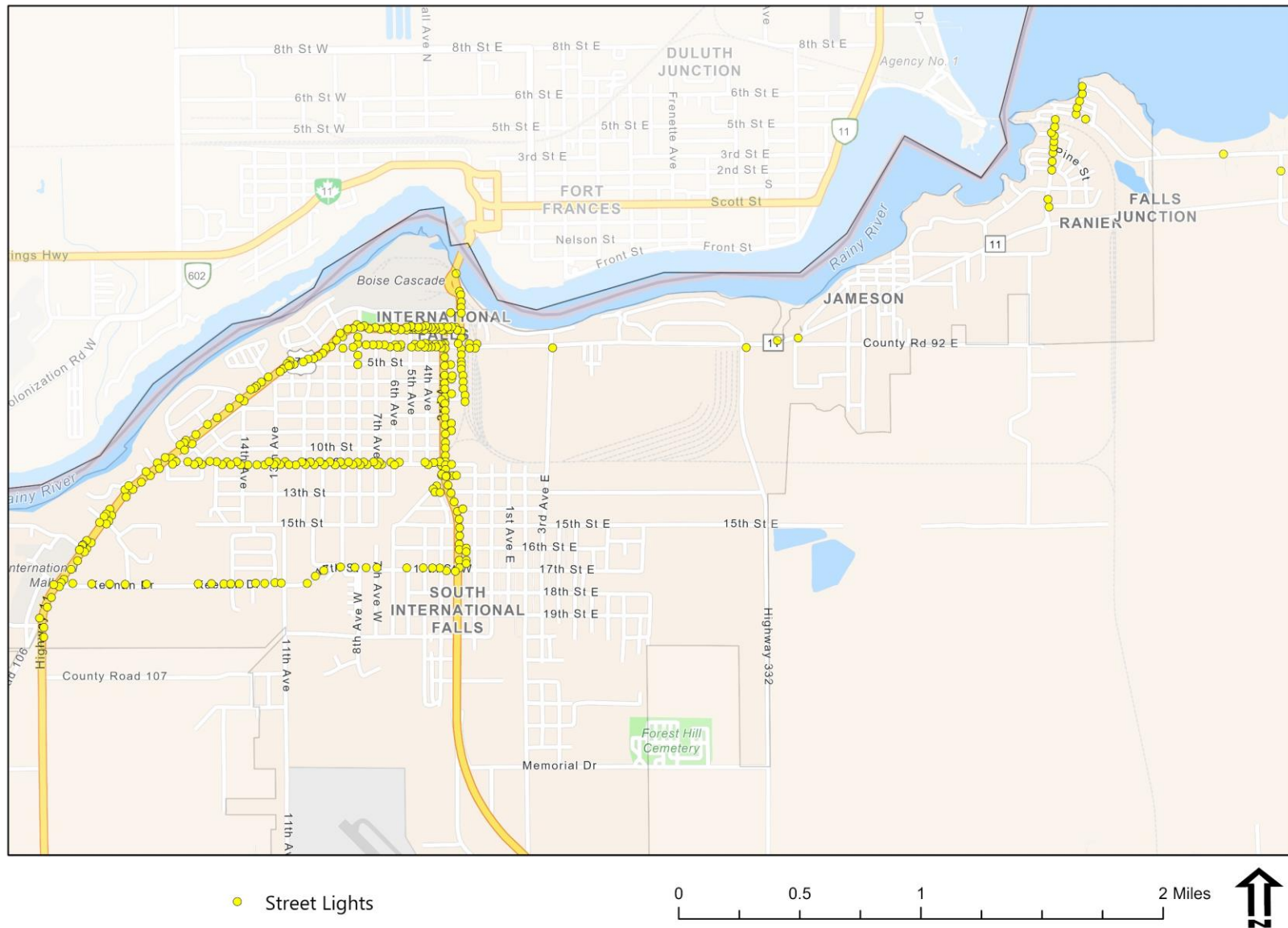
- Stop Sign
- Yield Sign
- Uncontrolled
- Traffic Light
- Unknown

0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles





## International Falls Transportation Plan | Street Lighting



## **Appendix B: Trail Count Reports**

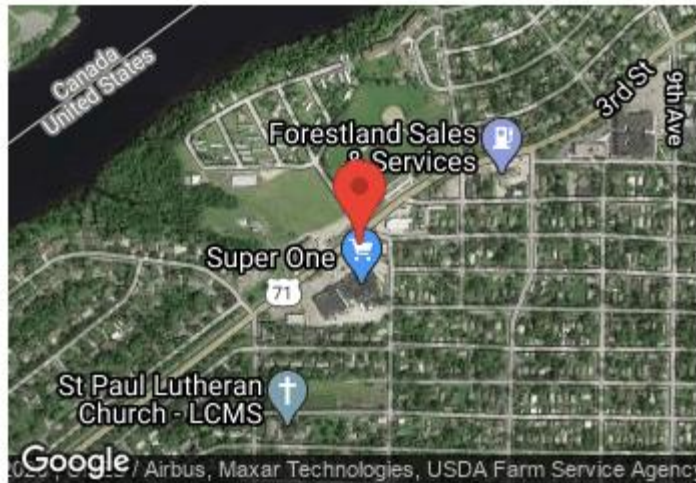
The following pages include data collected with automated trail counters at disclosed locations throughout the International Falls area during June, July, and August 2020.





## D1 | I-Falls | 6th St & TH 11

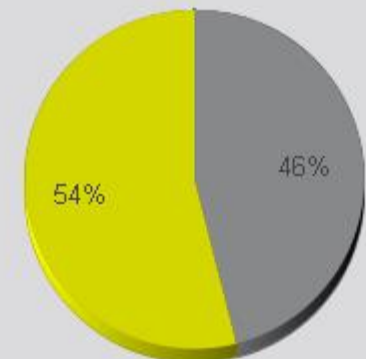
Period Analyzed: Wednesday, July 22, 2020 to Monday, August 03, 2020



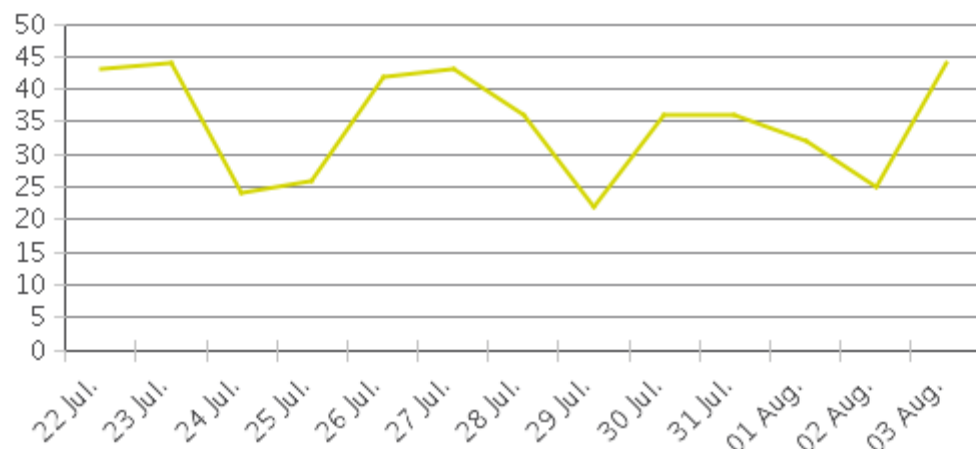
### Key Figures

- Total Traffic for the Period Analyzed: 453
- Daily Average: 35  
Weekdays: 36 / Weekend days: 31
- Busiest Day of the Week: Monday
- Busiest Days of the Period Analyzed:
  1. Thursday, July 23, 2020 (44)
  2. Monday, August 03, 2020 (44)
  3. Monday, July 27, 2020 (43)
- Distribution by Direction:

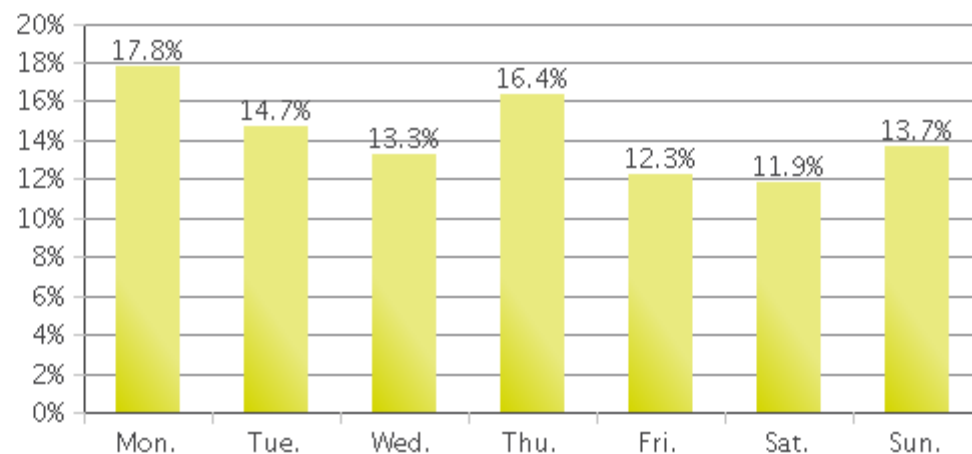
- IN: 54%
- OUT: 46%



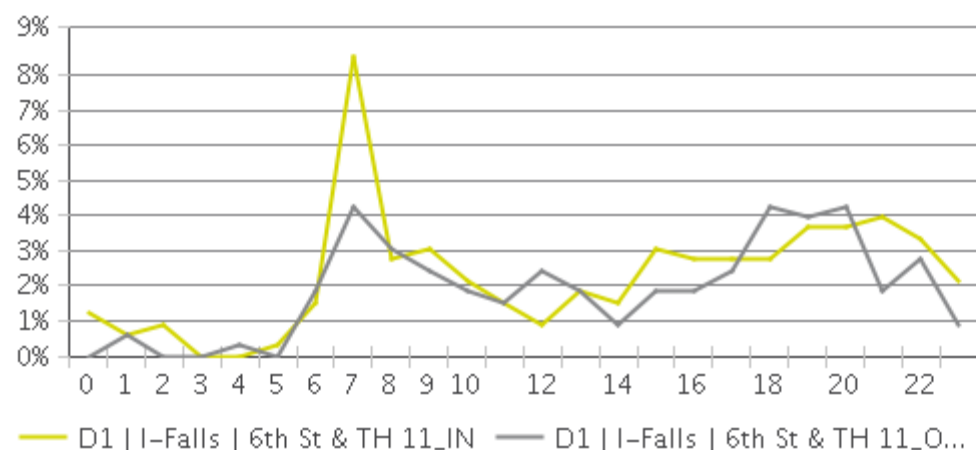
Daily Data



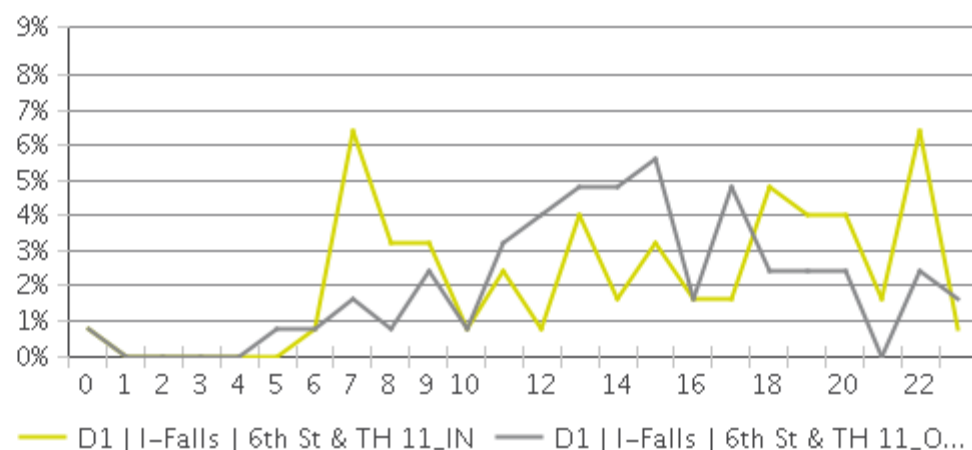
Weekly Profile



Hourly Profile during Weekdays



Hourly Profile during the Weekend



## D1 | I-Falls | Ranier - East Ave

Period Analyzed: Monday, June 22, 2020 to Tuesday, June 30, 2020

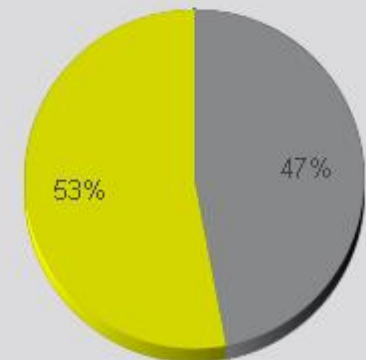


### Key Figures

- Total Traffic for the Period Analyzed: 922
- Daily Average: 102
  - Weekdays: 105 / Weekend days: 95
- Busiest Day of the Week: Thursday
- Busiest Days of the Period Analyzed:
  1. Tuesday, June 23, 2020 (130)
  2. Thursday, June 25, 2020 (129)
  3. Wednesday, June 24, 2020 (110)
- Distribution by Direction:

■ IN: 53%

■ OUT: 47%

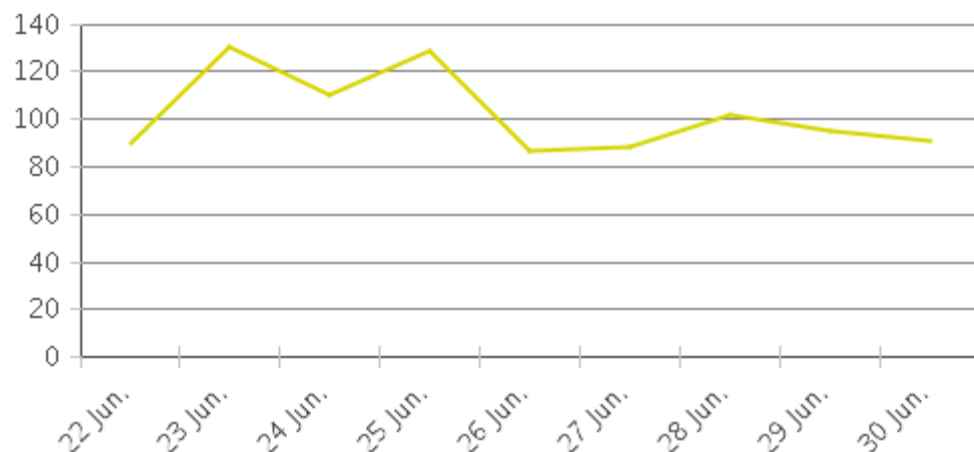




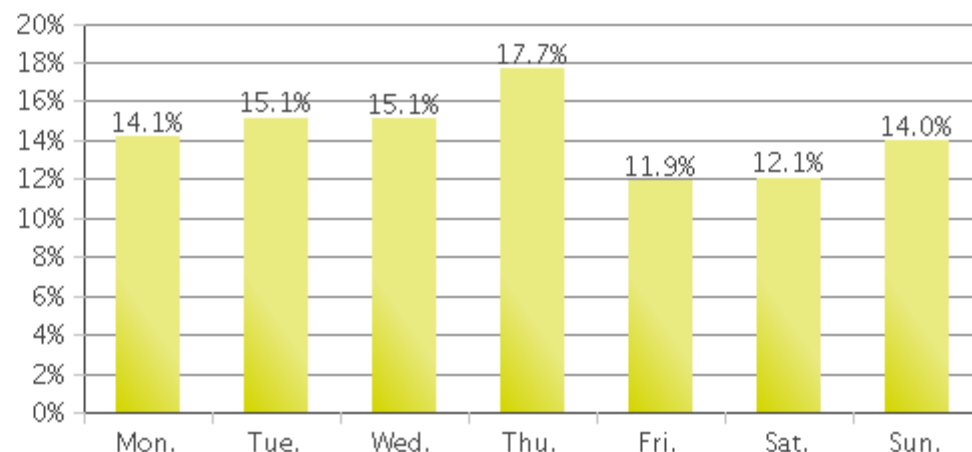
## D1 | I-Falls | Ranier - East Ave

Period Analyzed: Monday, June 22, 2020 to Tuesday, June 30, 2020

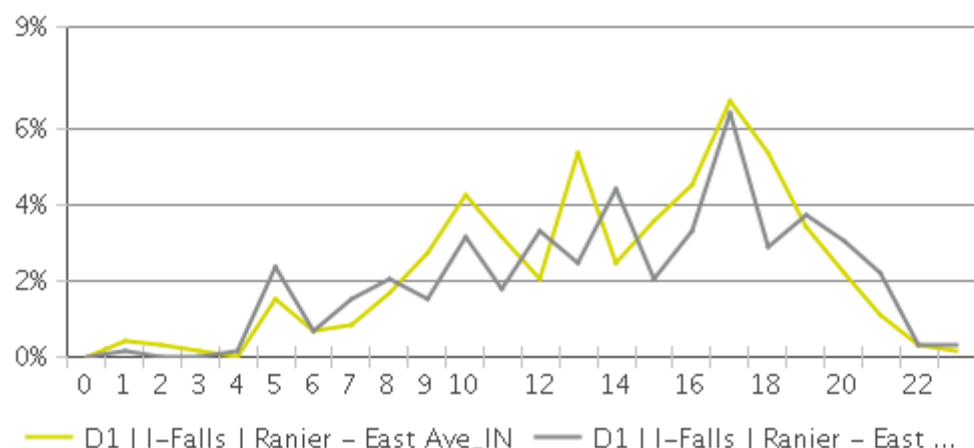
### Daily Data



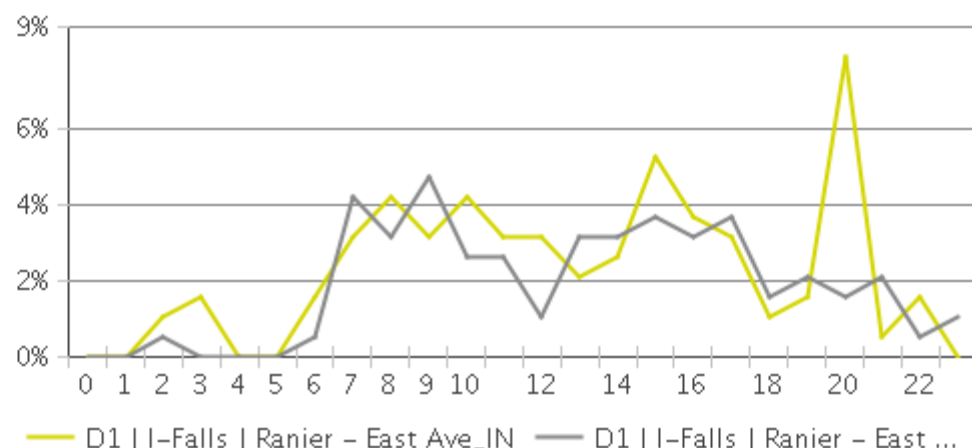
### Weekly Profile



### Hourly Profile during Weekdays



### Hourly Profile during the Weekend

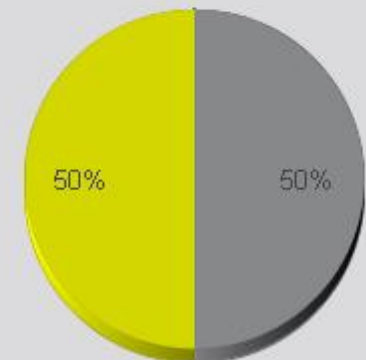




## Key Figures

- Total Traffic for the Period Analyzed: 1,232
- Daily Average: 68  
Weekdays: 74 / Weekend days: 58
- Busiest Day of the Week: Wednesday
- Busiest Days of the Period Analyzed:
  1. Saturday, July 11, 2020 (94)
  2. Wednesday, July 15, 2020 (90)
  3. Tuesday, July 14, 2020 (86)
- Distribution by Direction:

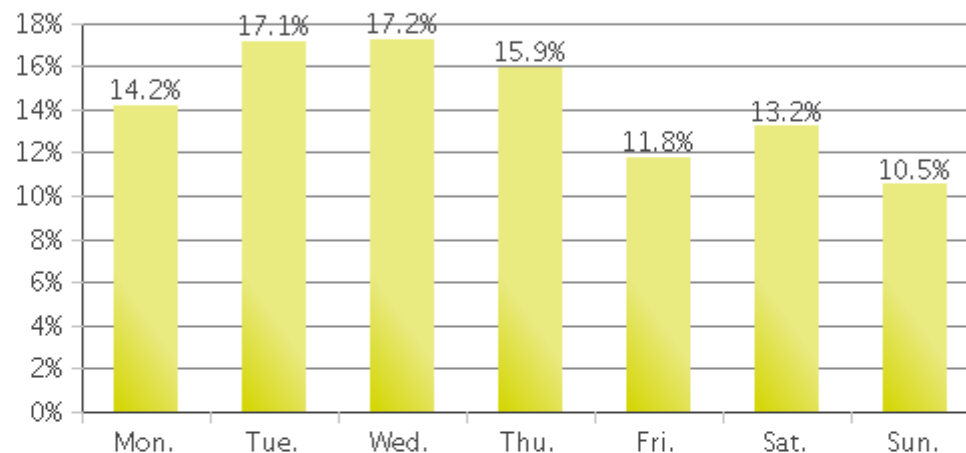
- IN: 50%
- OUT: 50%



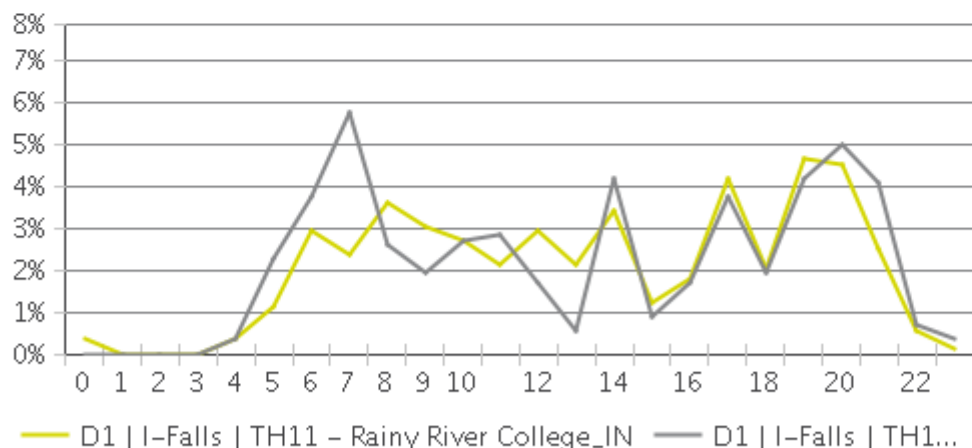
## Daily Data



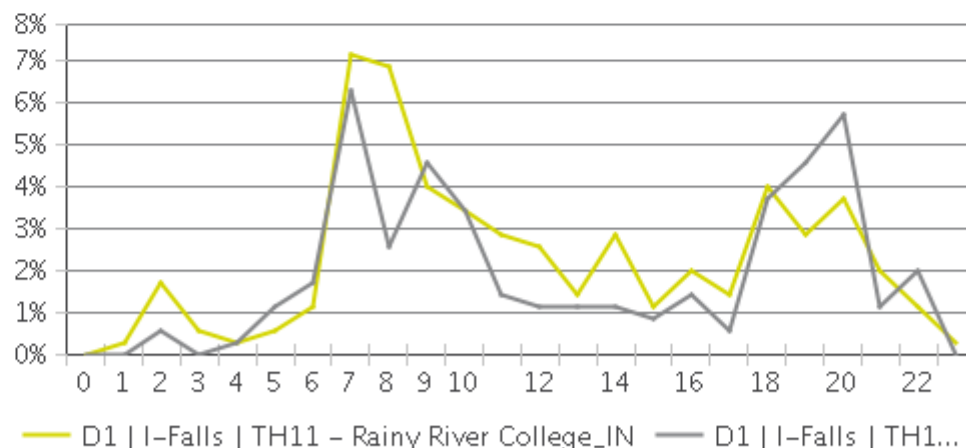
## Weekly Profile



## Hourly Profile during Weekdays



## Hourly Profile during the Weekend



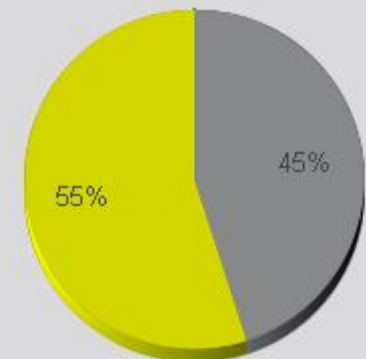




## Key Figures

- Total Traffic for the Period Analyzed: 622
- Daily Average: 48  
Weekdays: 51 / Weekend days: 42
- Busiest Day of the Week: Thursday
- Busiest Days of the Period Analyzed:
  1. Friday, June 12, 2020 (71)
  2. Saturday, June 13, 2020 (65)
  3. Thursday, June 04, 2020 (65)
- Distribution by Direction:

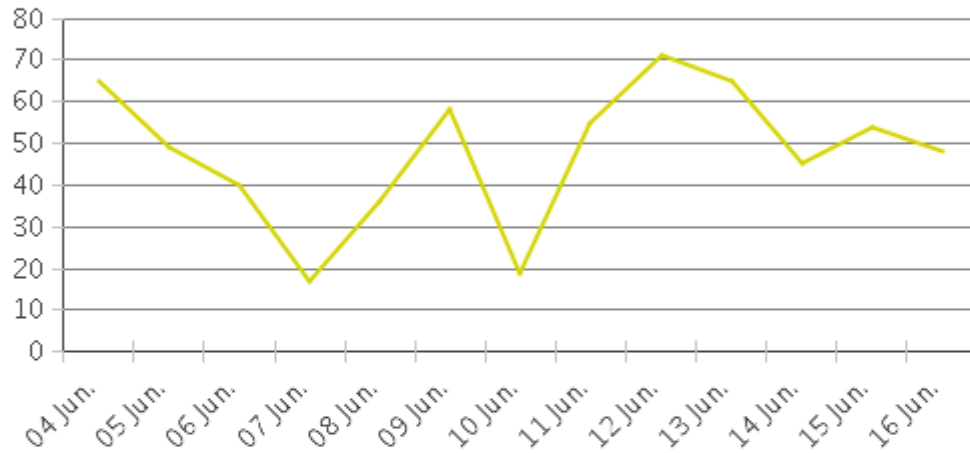
- IN: 55%
- OUT: 45%



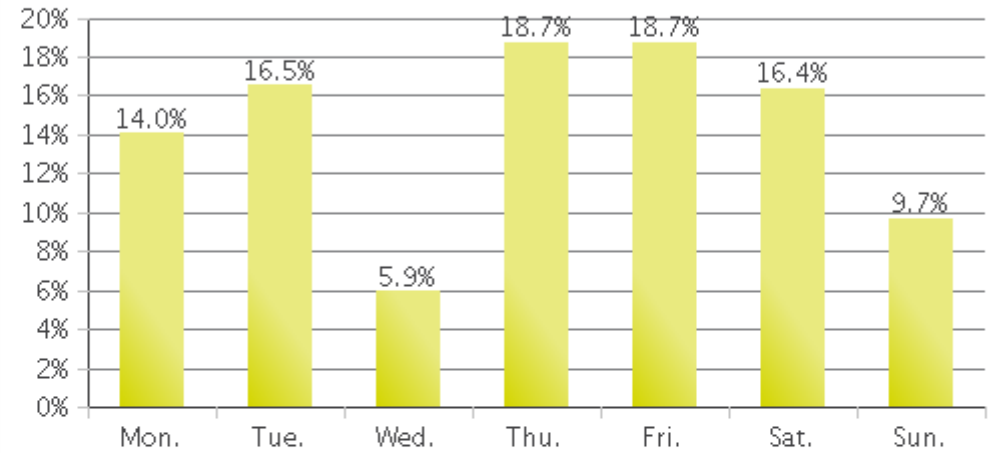
# D1 | I-Falls | Voyageur NP Trail - 3rd S...

Period Analyzed: Thursday, June 04, 2020 to Tuesday, June 16, 2020

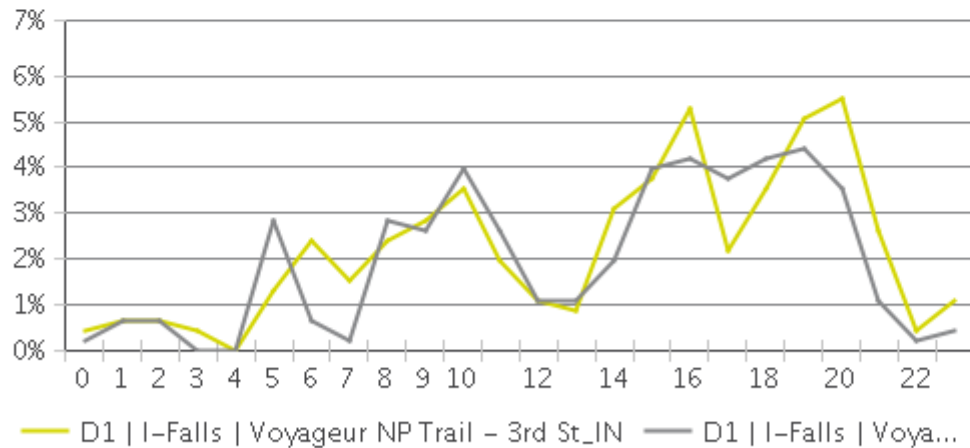
## Daily Data



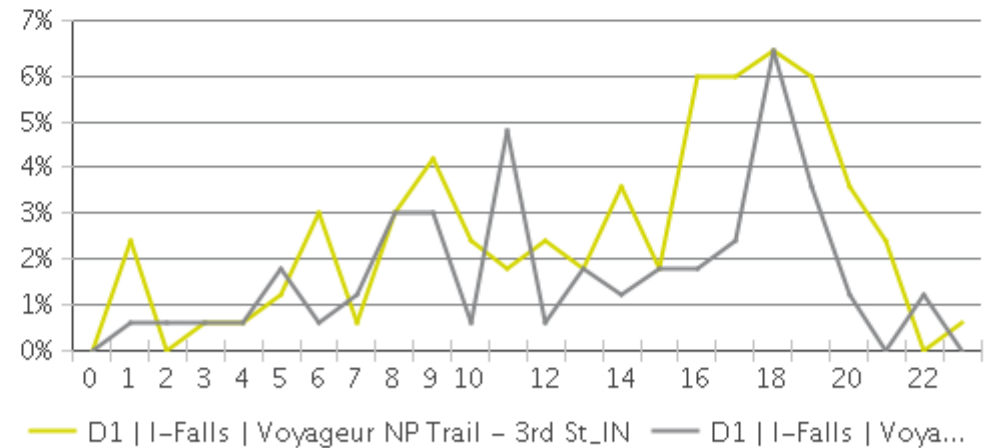
## Weekly Profile



## Hourly Profile during Weekdays



## Hourly Profile during the Weekend



## Appendix C: Steering Committee

The list below includes the names and affiliations of members of the plan steering committee, which guided the development of this plan. This group was convened by ARDC Planning in September 2020.

- Bryan Anderson, Minnesota Department of Transportation District One
- Ken Anderson, City of International Falls Administration
- Tara Besch, Koochiching County Public Health and Human Services
- Ted Brokaw, City of International Falls Public Works
- Sherril Gautreaux, City of Ranier Administration
- Josh Glashauckas, USDA Forest Service/Voyageurs National Park
- Kevin Grover, International Falls Public Schools Administration
- Tricia Heibel, International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce
- Katrina Heibel, Eleven Seventy-One Boutique
- Kelly Franz, Eleven Seventy-One Boutique
- Tony Jackson, U. S. Customs and Border Protection, International Falls Station
- Eric Johnson, International Falls, Rainy Lake and Ranier Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Lori Lyman, Boise Paper/PCA
- Seth Nelson, USDA Forest Service/Voyageurs National Park
- Alex Peritz, Minnesota Department of Transportation District One
- Dave Reimer, Koochiching County Highway Department
- Dennis Wagner, City of Ranier Council



## Appendix D: Survey Results

The following pages include the summary results of an online public input survey administered in December 2020.



# International Falls Area Transportation Survey Results

December 2020

Respondents = 62



## Issues for Road Users (Pedestrians, Bicyclists, ATVs/Snowmobiles, Personal Vehicles, Commercial Vehicles)

In this section of the survey, respondents were asked to identify transportation issues by mode. The information provided by respondents is categorized below.

### Highway 11 Corridor

- TH 11/CR 332: Freight vehicles use TH 11 instead of truck route along 332, freight vehicles move too quickly along TH 11, request for bike trail along TH 11 from 332 into town, narrow shoulders
- TH 11/Keenan Drive: Pedestrian crossing issues, backups and confusion on west leg, steep and icy grade on west leg
- TH 11/Shorewood Drive: Pedestrian crossing issues, conflict between intersection traffic and frontage road, issues with traffic light sensors being triggered and stopping TH 11 traffic abruptly
- TH 11 School Trail: Not plowed during winter, lacking pedestrian crossings from trail to big box businesses
- TH 11/College Entrance: Snowmobile crossing issues, request for intersection control
- TH 11/7<sup>th</sup> Street: Vehicle-pedestrian conflict (high volume pedestrian crossing due to adjacent school), issues with traffic light sensor, southbound bike routing to TH 11 trail difficult
- TH 11/Riverview Blvd (S): Informal student crossing, vehicles speeding up for northbound reduction to one lane (during winter, acts as one travel lane due to snow not being cleared from right northbound/eastbound lane)
- TH 11/10<sup>th</sup> Street: Poor pavement in right southbound/westbound lane, bike safety issues, crosswalk desired
- TH 11/Riverview Blvd (N): Difficult to see crossing pedestrians, right hand turn lanes desired for cars turning off TH 11
- TH 11/6<sup>th</sup> Street: Pedestrian crossing issues, drivers not yielding to pedestrians along stretch, too many access points along this stretch, skewed intersection causes sightline issues for drivers
- TH 11/11<sup>th</sup> Ave: Deep manhole covers cause damage to cars, sidewalk on south side of TH 11 requested, pedestrian crossing requested, turn lanes from TH 11 onto 11<sup>th</sup> Ave requested (from both directions), conflicts with gas station entrance
- TH 11/10<sup>th</sup> Ave: Faded crosswalk



- TH 11/9<sup>th</sup> Ave: Faded crosswalk, turn lanes off TH 11 onto 9<sup>th</sup> Ave requested
- TH 11/9<sup>th</sup> Ave: Faded crosswalk, turn lanes off TH 11 onto 8<sup>th</sup> Ave requested
- Downtown/3<sup>rd</sup> Street: No safe bike routing, bumpouts cause sightline issues for drivers entering from avenues, request to remove bumpouts, cars don't stop for pedestrians trying to cross, bumpouts make it difficult for commercial vehicles to make turns
- TH 11/2<sup>nd</sup> Ave: Border traffic creates backups (separate infrastructure for queued vehicles requested), drivers not stopping for bikes crossing
- TH 11/CR 155: Traffic light requested, past traffic safety issues noted, ped/bike crossing issues
- TH 11/CR 113: Signage requested for how bikes should bypass Ranier and stay along TH 11, signage requested (in far advance of intersection) for wayfinding to Ranier
- TH 11/bridge over Ranier rail line: Bad crossing for ATVs/snowmobiles
- Rainy Lake Trail: Driven on by ATVs, does not run the full length of TH 11 and becomes dangerous for cyclists and pedestrians because of curves, hills, narrow bridges, and excessive vehicle speeds

### Highway 53 Corridor

- 53/CR 332: Sight lines make crossing 53 difficult
- 53/Van Lynn Rd: Skewed intersection makes sight lines and turns difficult
- 53/16<sup>th</sup> Street: Difficult for commercial trucks to turn onto 53 due to recent lane reduction
- 53/11<sup>th</sup> Street: Difficult to cross 53, congested, pavement issues
- 53/5<sup>th</sup> Street: Blind intersection
- 53/4<sup>th</sup> Street: Sidewalks in poor condition, confusion about lane configuration changes along 4<sup>th</sup> Street
- 53 Corridor: No access to snowmobile trails

### I'Falls Area Local System

- Systemwide: Lack of stop/yield signs (many uncontrolled intersections)
- 9<sup>th</sup> Ave/4<sup>th</sup> St: Stop or yield sign requested
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave/3<sup>rd</sup> St: Hard to cross 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave to get to trail from downtown
- CSAH 24: Standing trains cut off neighborhood from emergency services
- 17<sup>th</sup> Street: No sidewalks or bike lanes available
- CR 332: Request to complete trail along full length
- 23<sup>rd</sup> St: Request to enhance/maintain roads
- CR 107: Narrow shoulders

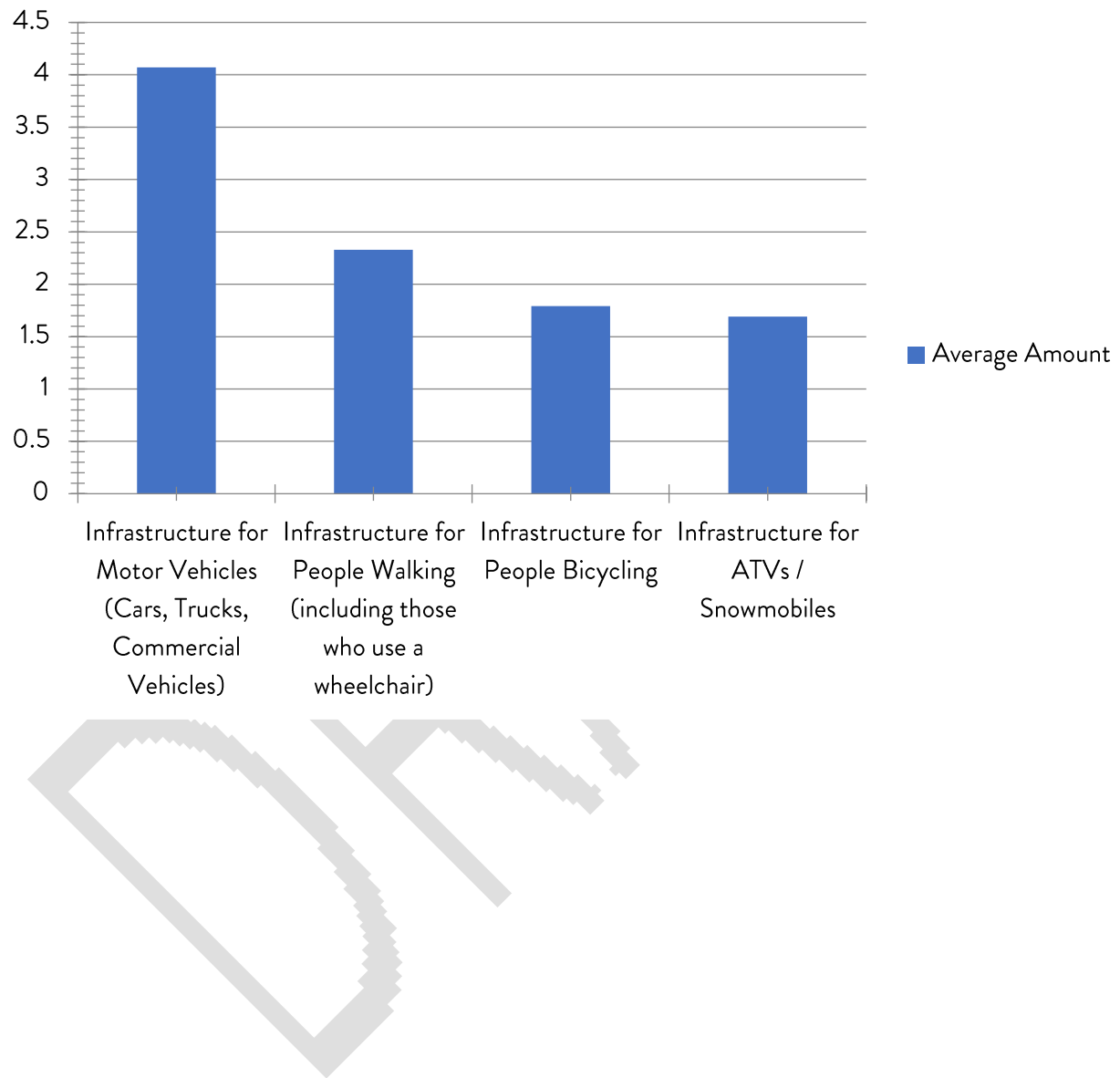
- 15<sup>th</sup> Ave/13<sup>th</sup> St: Pothole
- 13<sup>th</sup> Ave: Cars failing to yield to pedestrians
- CR 29: Road is too narrow for the amount of truck traffic

### Ranier Area Local System

- CR 20: Poor pavement condition, people drive too fast
- UT-273: County does not gravel or sand road, cars frequently get stuck
- ATV/Snowmobile Trails: Unsafe routing through Ranier
- Spruce Street RR Crossing: Trains cause cars to back up, and there's no warning of a train crossing before turning off the highway, pedestrians run across the train tracks
- Spruce Street: Conflicts between boat launch and pedestrians

## Transportation Funding Allocation

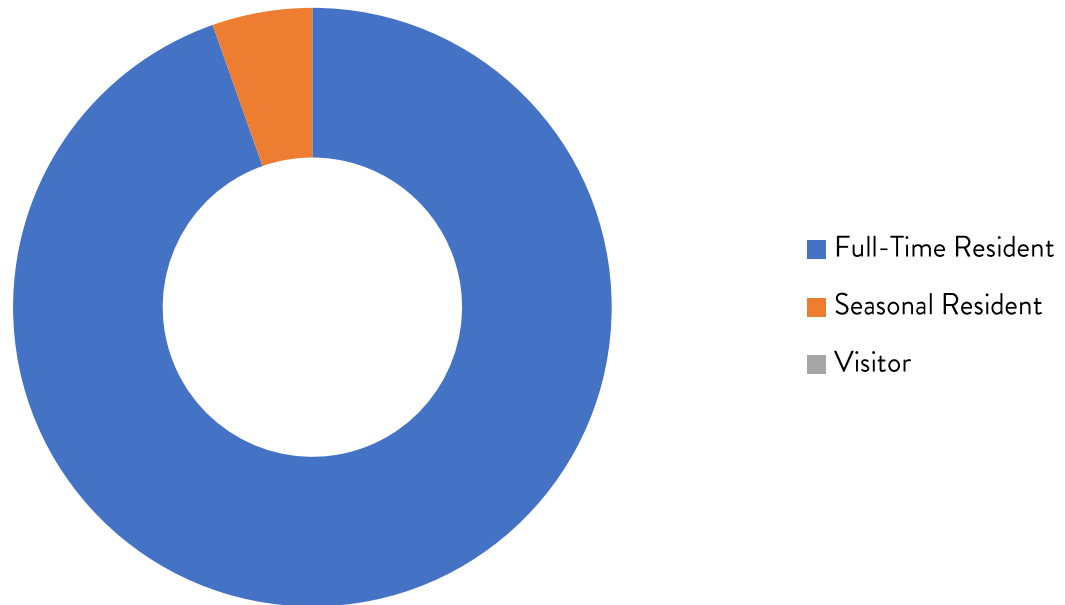
In this exercise, respondents were asked to distribute 10 coins to the following categories based on where they would allocate available transportation funding.



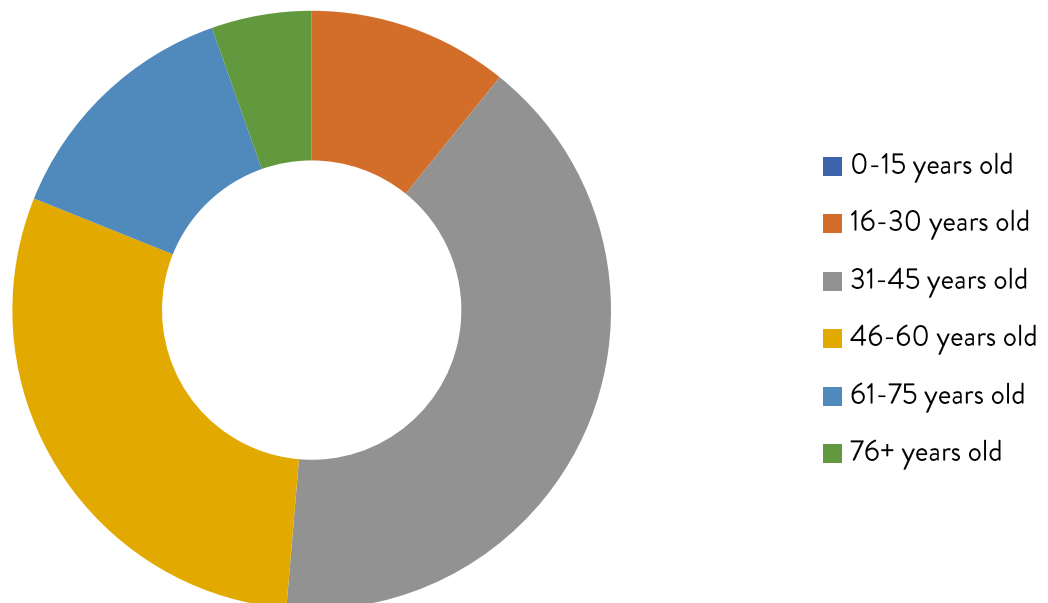


## Demographics of Respondents

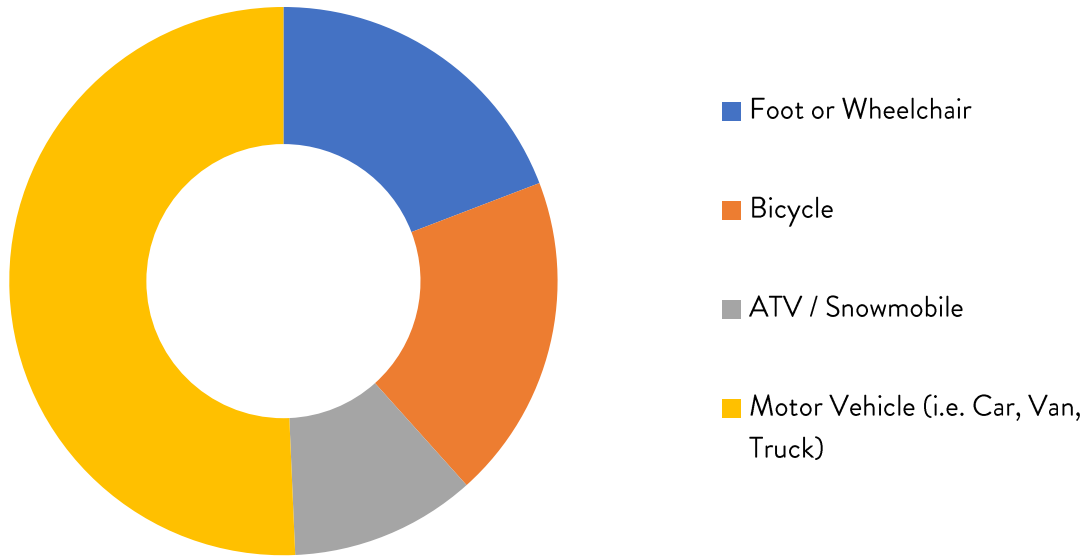
In northeast Koochiching County, I identify as a...



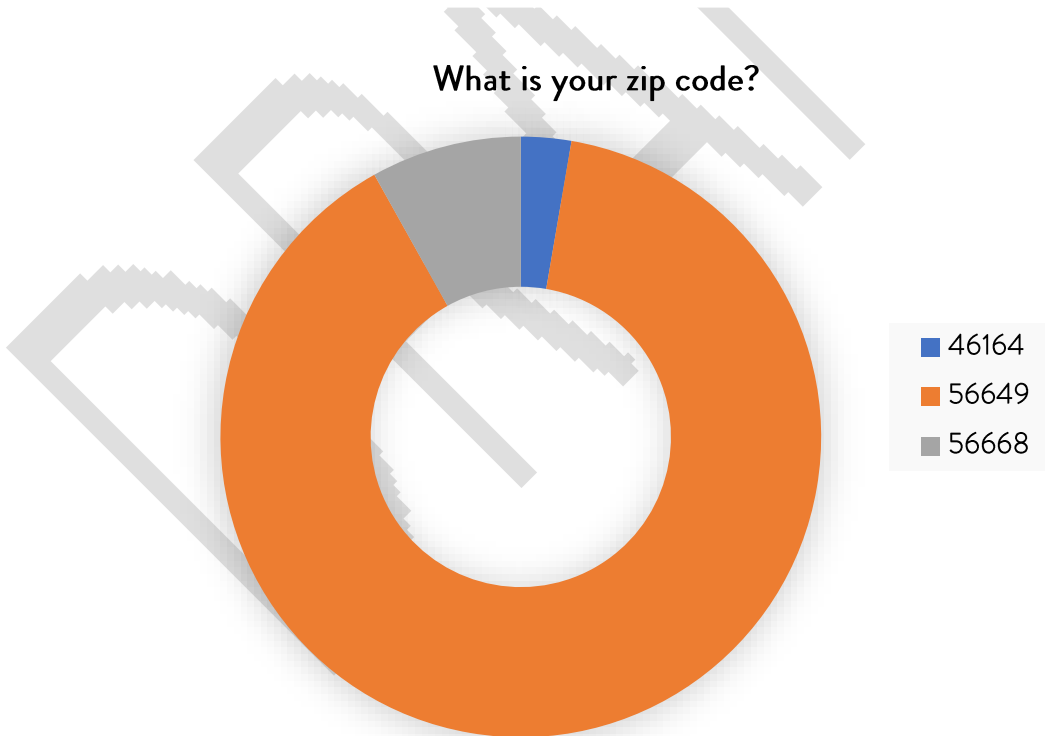
What is your age?



In northeast Koochiching County, I usually get around by... (Select all that apply)



What is your zip code?



## **Appendix E: Steering Committee Meeting Summaries**

The following pages include summaries of the steering committee meetings held between September 2020 and April 2021.





# International Falls Area Transportation Plan

Steering Committee Meeting #1

September 22, 2020, 2:00 p.m.

Zoom Video/Audio Conference

## Summary

### Introductions

Attendees: Bryan Anderson (MnDOT District 1), Ken Anderson (City of International Falls), Tara Besch (Koochiching County Public Health), Kelly Franz (Eleven Seventy-One Boutique), Sherril Gautreaux (City of Ranier), Kevin Grover (International Falls School District), Katrina Heibel (Eleven Seventy-One Boutique), Tricia Heibel (International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce), Tony Jackson (U. S. Customs), Lori Lyman (PCA), Seth Nelson (Voyageurs National Park), Alex Peritz (MnDOT District 1), Dave Reimer (Koochiching County Highway Department)

Project Technical Team: Russell Habermann (ARDC Planning), Andy Hubley (ARDC Planning), CJ Fernandez (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects), Jason Aune (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects), Kellen Kirchberg (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects)

### Project Overview

Russell Habermann, Senior Planner with ARDC Planning, shared the two goals of the project: 1) to develop a vision for Hwy 11 in International Falls for MnDOT's scheduled 2027 project (focus segment outlined in pink to the right, but additional areas of interest may be considered based on steering committee interest), and 2) identify transportation goals in northeast Koochiching County (zip codes 56649 and 56668, outlined in second map).



He then shared the expected outline of the projects process:

- **September: Meeting 1**
  - Plan overview, desired public input methods, inventory of transportation system and existing planning documents, mapping exercise, opportunities and barriers, next steps



- **January 2021: Meeting 2**
  - Identification of plan goals, review of draft designs/plan for Hwy 11, guidance for public review process
- **February 2021: Public Review**
- **March 2021: Meeting 3**
  - Finalize plan
- **April 30, 2021: Contract Expiration**

Habermann shared that the steering committee's role in this process is to be experts about the International Falls area and to provide guidance to ARDC Planning and Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects during the planning process. Eventually, the process will result in a planning document outlining desired transportation projects in the International Falls area and concept designs for the Hwy 11 segment scheduled for MnDOT work in 2027.

### **Inventory of Existing System/Plan Documents**

Habermann shared that ARDC Planning and MnDOT have been collecting data during the summer in anticipation of the planning process. He told the steering committee that they have the following data currently on file:

- Highways/roads/streets (by functional classification)
- Right-of-way ownership
- Speed limits
- Annual average daily traffic (AADT)
- Bridges
- Intersections (by type)
- Transit services
- On-street parking locations
- Public off-street parking lots
- Streetlights (along MnDOT project corridor)
- Road entrances/driveways (along MnDOT project corridor)
- Medians (along MnDOT project corridor)
- Population density

Habermann asked what additional data the committee thinks may be helpful. Steering committee members offered the following:

- Sidewalk/trail data
- Directional signage (especially for visitors using 53 and 11/71)
- Rail intersections

- Pedestrian/bicycle counts

Habermann then shared that ARDC Planning has been collecting published planning documents that can inform this planning process. He told the steering committee that they have the following plans currently on file:

- City of International Falls Comprehensive Plan (2020)
- International Falls Area Gateway Corridor Design Plan (2008)
- International Falls Area Gateway Corridor Plan (2007)
- International Falls Safe Routes to School Plan (2008)
- International Falls Safe Routes to School Plan (2016)
- Greater International Falls Transportation Study (2004)
- St. Louis County and Northeast Koochiching County Trails Plan (2018)
- Waters of the Dancing Sky Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (2013)

Habermann asked what plan document may be missing from the list. Steering committee members offered the following:

- Landscape architect visual quality manual for 53 project
- Ranier Community Plan
- Documents from Tricia Heibel (Sustainability plan, retail trade and marketing analysis)
- GSA Environmental impact statement for Border facilities

### **Desired Public Input Methods**

Sharing that ARDC Planning will need to collect public input about International Falls area transportation issues this fall, Habermann asked the steering committee to share what strategies and outreach methods may work well, noting that face-to-face engagement is not a possibility at this time. The steering committee offered the following:

- Before the public can weigh in, they will need to know what this plan and the Hwy 11 project is for. (Response provided by Bryan Anderson, MnDOT: The Hwy 11 project is scheduled to address pavement issues, and looking at the area transportation system as a whole can help plan what changes to the Hwy 11 corridor can be made and position the community for scheduling and getting funding for future projects.)
- There are road projects currently happening, so any public input requests will need to be careful about not soliciting input on those ongoing projects.
- There are a lot of surveys going around lately, but surveys are an effective way to collect information from the public.



- Launching something like a survey would be most effective if using multiple outlets (i.e. local newspaper, community Facebook Groups, local radio, presenting to city councils and county board).
- Outreach directly to community groups via video conference may be helpful.

Habermann proposed that ARDC Planning would develop a survey and work with the steering committee to beta test it in October. The survey would launch with a multi-faceted media approach in November. Scheduling focus group-style input sessions with community groups to promote the survey and collect additional input may be part of this public input process.

### **Mapping Exercise – Transportation Opportunities and Barriers**

CJ Fernandez, Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects, provided some background about his firm's previous work and introduced that they will work with the steering committee to take a concentrated look at the Hwy 11 corridor project portion of this planning process. He guided the steering committee through an exercise to record some initial thoughts about the corridor that will be undergoing MnDOT work in 2027. The steering committee provided the following pieces of input:

- There are new sidewalks on the south side of Keenan Drive.
- People don't like sidewalks because they are responsible for shoveling them.
- There are drainage concerns at the intersection of 332/Hwy 11.
- People biking into International Falls on Hwy 11 are routed to the Blue Ox Trail via 332 and run into flooding, forcing them to turn around.
- Wider shoulders are desired along the rural section of Hwy 11.
- Chamber of Commerce 5ks utilize the Hwy 11 and Keenan Drive corridors.
- Trails from 332 to the city walking loop are desired.
- There is a desire to make the Blue Ox Trail (currently gravel) better for biking.
- Work is needed on crossings of Hwy 11 on the north end of the 2027 project: near Super One, at 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue – some pedestrian crossings are unmarked in this area.
- The marked City Loop for walking and biking doesn't have sidewalks or trails along the whole loop, but infrastructure is desired. There is a suggestion to make Hwy 11 like the new Hwy 53 design, where there's a bituminous trail on one side and a concrete sidewalk on the other.
- Hwy 11 trail (heading east from downtown International Falls) shares roadway in sections, and a trail fully separated from roadways is desired.
- Snowmobile connections have been talked about, particularly connecting into International Falls on Highway 11 and on Highway 53. Conversations to implement a route along Keenan Drive is currently underway.
- Three intersections for pedestrian crossing safety along Hwy 11 should also be addressed: Keenan Drive, Shorewood Drive, and 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

- 11<sup>th</sup> Street could perhaps be rerouted away from the high school, through the green space across the street and squared up with Hwy 11.
- Smokey Bear Park is used for community gatherings (i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> of July, parade line-ups, Labor Day picnic, concerts in the park), and people park a block or so away and walk there; this higher foot traffic should be considered for crossings leading to the park.
- If a trail is constructed along Highway 11, Smokey Bear Park would be a natural place where the trail would terminate.
- There is a snow storage issue near the cinema.
- Backus Community Center is hoping to put in 30 units of affordable housing.
- There are conversations to extend International Falls city limits down to the intersection of 332/Hwy 11 because of city utilities serving the corridor.
- There is a desire to keep freight traffic out of downtown International Falls, meaning that traffic would need to route along 332 to Hwy 53 instead of up Hwy 11. This reroute would help with people walking and biking in the Hwy 11 corridor.
- Speeding along the Hwy 11 corridor is the most frequent complaint MnDOT hears.

### Next Steps

Habermann shared that ARDC Planning will prepare meeting notes and start work on survey development. Fernandez will begin design work with the Highway 11 corridor. The next meeting is expected to be held in January.

# International Falls Area Transportation Plan

Steering Committee Meeting #2

January 19, 2021, 2:00 p.m.

Zoom Video/Audio Conference

## Summary

### Introductions

Attendees: Bryan Anderson (MnDOT District 1), Tara Besch (Koochiching County Public Health), Kevin Grover (International Falls School District), Seth Nelson (Voyageurs National Park), Alex Peritz (MnDOT District 1), Dave Reimer (Koochiching County Highway Department)

Project Team: Russell Habermann (ARDC Planning), Andy Hubley (ARDC Planning), CJ Fernandez (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects), Alex Heid (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects)

### Review Survey Results

Russell Habermann, Senior Planner at ARDC Planning, briefly reviewed results of the International Falls Area Transportation Plan survey, which was administered in December 2020 and gathered 62 responses. Outreach for the survey included asking the steering committee members to share the survey with their networks, working with local media for distribution, posting it on the I'Falls Nice Facebook group, and presenting about the project and the survey opportunity to the County board.

The average respondent identified themselves as a full-time resident of the 56649 zip code between 30 and 60 years old who usually gets around by motor vehicle. Most responses identified transportation issues in the Hwy 11 corridor, specifically the portion scheduled for MnDOT construction in 2027. Additional themes/issues brought forward by respondents are outlined below:

- Skewed intersections along highways create blind intersections
- Faded crosswalks
- Cars fail to yield to pedestrians
- Downtown bumpouts restrict sightlines for motorists
- Many uncontrolled intersections in I'Falls residential neighborhoods
- Hwy 53 snowmobile access
- Lack of sidewalk/trail along 17<sup>th</sup> Street
- Hwy 53/11th Street trails crossing



- Wayfinding to Ranier (from Hwy 11)
- Trails (paved, ATV/snowmobile) through Ranier
- TH 11/Rainy Lake Trail completion
- Van Lynn Road access cut off by rail line

Dave Reimer, Koochiching County highway engineer, provided that MnDOT and Koochiching County are looking at the intersection of Hwy 53 and CR 332 about addressing sightline issues. He also mentioned that state bonding funds have been secured to build an overpass to address access restrictions caused by backed-up rail cars across Van Lynn Road.

### **Review Draft Design/Plan for Highway 11**

CJ Fernandez and Alex Heid, both of Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects, introduced and presented draft designs for the Highway 11 MnDOT project corridor. Heid shared the designs in six different character sections. Comments provided by the committee by section are outlined below:

- Section A (CR 332 to CR 107): A resident has concerns about banks sloughing along Crippled Creek.
- Section B (CR 107 to 11<sup>th</sup> Street): A pedestrian crossing on the southwest leg of Shorewood Drive intersection makes most sense based on pedestrian destinations. A hotel may be proposed in the empty lot across Keenan Drive from Essentia Health. A road diet for this section may be a good idea to explore.
- Section C (11<sup>th</sup> Street to Riverview Blvd N): There's interest in exploring a way to reroute 11<sup>th</sup> Street away from the school (and through public land on opposite side of street) to meet Riverview Blvd. Residents in the Riverview neighborhood may not support closing off neighborhood access from highway via Center Street.
- Section D (Riverview Blvd N to 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue): Gas station at 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue purchased property to its west and expanded access to the back of the building (where water filling and car washes queue. The 6<sup>th</sup> Street pedestrian crossing should remain on the west leg of the intersection based on observed foot traffic.
- Section E (11<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue): No comments
- Section F (8<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue): Talk to the paper mill about 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and its needs for turning of commercial vehicles; bumpouts may not work for this intersection.

### **Identify Plan Goals**

Habermann asked the steering committee to share what issues raised in the survey results should translate to goals for northeast Koochiching County in the transportation plan. The committee identified the following:

- The Rainy Lake Trail is owned and maintained by different agencies (State, County, Voyageurs), and different management of sections can cause confusion for trail users. Greater coordination between the agencies could help, and maps of the trail could help trail users understand what to expect for trail conditions, especially when snow is on the ground.
- There is a desire to complete the Rainy Lake Trail along the entire TH 11 corridor.
- Many crosswalks are faded, and only certain crosswalks are maintained year-to-year. After a MnDOT project, crosswalk upkeep is the responsibility of the City.
- 125 uncontrolled intersections are present at city-owned intersections in the City of International Falls. A study could aid in addressing confusion spurred by these intersections. The City will need to be engaged for inquiry about these intersections.
- Snowmobile and ATV traffic could better be addressed by reaching out to local clubs.
- Roadway safety is of high value to the community.

ARDC Planning will use these ideas along with ideas submitted in the survey and at the steering committee's first meeting to develop a draft list of goals that will be reviewed electronically by the steering committee.

### **Next Steps**

ARDC Planning will prepare meeting notes and start work on draft goals; this will include reaching out to Ken Anderson at the City and local snowmobile and ATV clubs. Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects will revise designs for the Highway 11 corridor. ARDC Planning will also be in touch with the committee about releasing a draft plan document to the public for review, tentatively in March. One final steering committee will be held in April to finalize the plan document.

# International Falls Area Transportation Plan

Steering Committee Meeting #3

March 31, 2021, 2:00 p.m.

Zoom Video/Audio Conference

## Summary

### Introductions

Attendees: Bryan Anderson (MnDOT District 1), Tara Besch (Koochiching County Public Health), Ted Brokaw (City of International Falls), Kevin Grover (International Falls School District), Tricia Heibel (International Falls Area Chamber of Commerce), Lori Lyman (PCA), Seth Nelson (Voyageurs National Park), Alex Peritz (MnDOT District 1), Dave Reimer (Koochiching County Highway Department)

Project Team: Russell Habermann (ARDC Planning), CJ Fernandez (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects), Alex Heid (Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects)

### Draft Plan Review

Russell Habermann, Senior Planner at ARDC Planning, shared that the goal of the meeting was to review and revise the draft plan document in preparation of public review.

He first asked for feedback on things that should change within the project pages, excluding the Trunk Highway 11/71 Redesign, which would be addressed separately. The following comments were shared:

- Street Lighting: Really emphasize Dark Sky friendly lighting. Make note about the commitment to it and the need to evaluate options for lighting with projects.
- Wayfinding Signage: The Chamber has a list of desires for wayfinding signage. The city center and courthouse are two examples of destinations within the desired system.
- City Trail Loop: There may be an expectation that the City removes snow from the designated trail loop. This may cause an issue and disconnect that leaves the trail uncleared and the public upset with the City. The details about snow removal should be explored.
- Walking & Biking Network: Sidewalks – maintaining them, constructing them – are a big topic. With snow removal, the City of International Falls has never enforced snow removal policies because they can be unfair, especially to older homeowners. The City is exploring a

new policy that would “right” some of the issues at play with snow removal; this work to explore options should be highlighted instead of continuing to pursue un-enforced policies.

- Freight Route: Being more collaborative with freight drivers/companies should be highlighted here. Language needs to be carefully worded to ensure the business community knows any re-routing is not aimed at re-routing private vehicles/paying customers. (Note: Russell will connect with Lori about revisions to this page.)
- Van Lynn Road Access: There was a question about a “back route” from Ranier, but it was clarified that it was an either-or situation with the overpass, and the overpass was less expensive.
- International Border Crossing: This topic has plans that are already in motion; bringing it up may distract from the rest of the plan. This project page will be removed.

CJ Fernandez and Alex Heid, both of Aune Fernandez Landscape Architects, then brought the group through the Trunk Highway 11/71 draft designs. The following comments were shared by the group during review:

- There can be an expectation that things listed in a plan like this will be completed, and then the public is disappointed when nothing happens. A reframing of this plan to “Conceptual Transportation Plan” may be appropriate.
- With changes at the Keenen Drive intersection, there was a question about the sidewalk, which is part of the City Loop, being rerouted with the “squaring” of the roadway. It was confirmed that the sidewalk connection would be kept intact.
- There was a question about the pedestrian island/median at the Shorewood Drive intersection. It was noted that MnDOT plows that section, so the City and County don’t have maintenance concerns themselves. Also, the addition of the median would not take away a turn lane since it is not a turn lane currently.
- The planting of trees along both sides of the corridor is nice.
- The design around the school makes sense, as does the road diet. This project could be presented like the Highway 53 project, as “cleaning everything up”.

## Next Steps

ARDC Planning will prepare meeting notes and revise the plan document; this will include working with Lori on the Freight Route project page, with Tricia on communicating with businesses about the plan review, and with Ted to get word out on the City’s social media page. A plan will be released for public review on April 7 and be open for feedback for two full weeks; results of the survey will also



help with work to prioritize goals in the plan. A fourth and final steering committee will be held on April 26 to review public feedback and finalize the plan document.



## **Appendix F: Trunk Highway 11/71 Designs**

The following pages include the full designs for a reimagined Trunk Highway 11/71 corridor through International Falls, from the highway's intersection with County Road 332 to its intersection with 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue adjacent to Smokey Bear Park.







# corridor study: highway 11/71



corridor plan and key connections



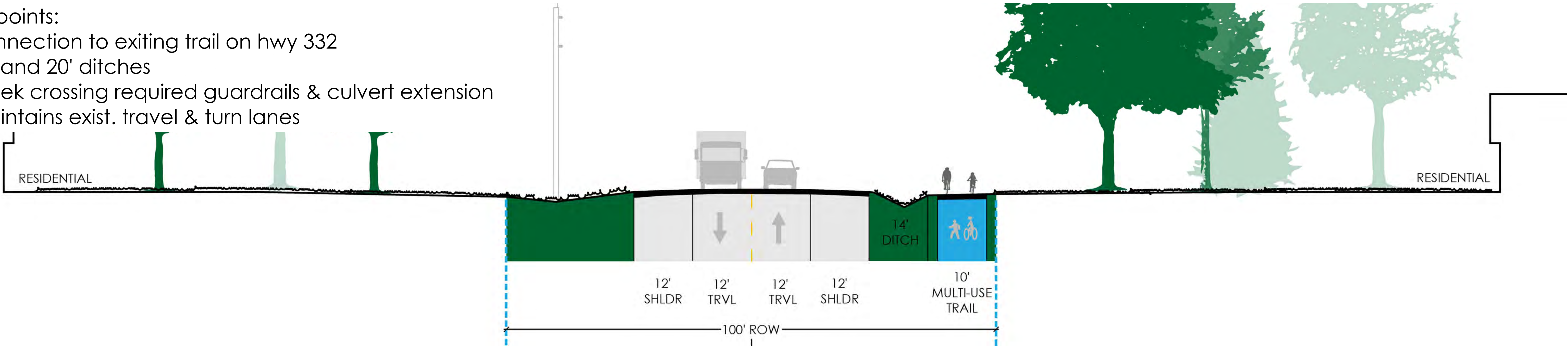


character section A: rural residential



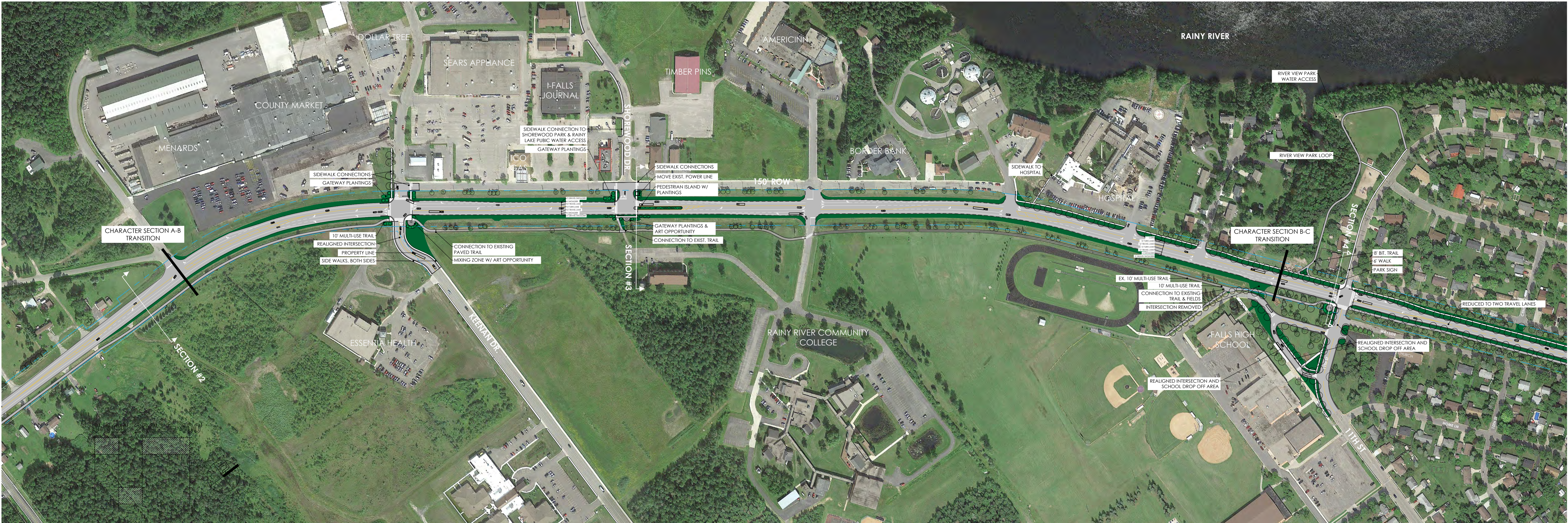
section #1: rural highway w/ 14' ditch

- key points:
- connection to exiting trail on hwy 332
  - 14' and 20' ditches
  - creek crossing required guardrails & culvert extension
  - maintains exist. travel & turn lanes



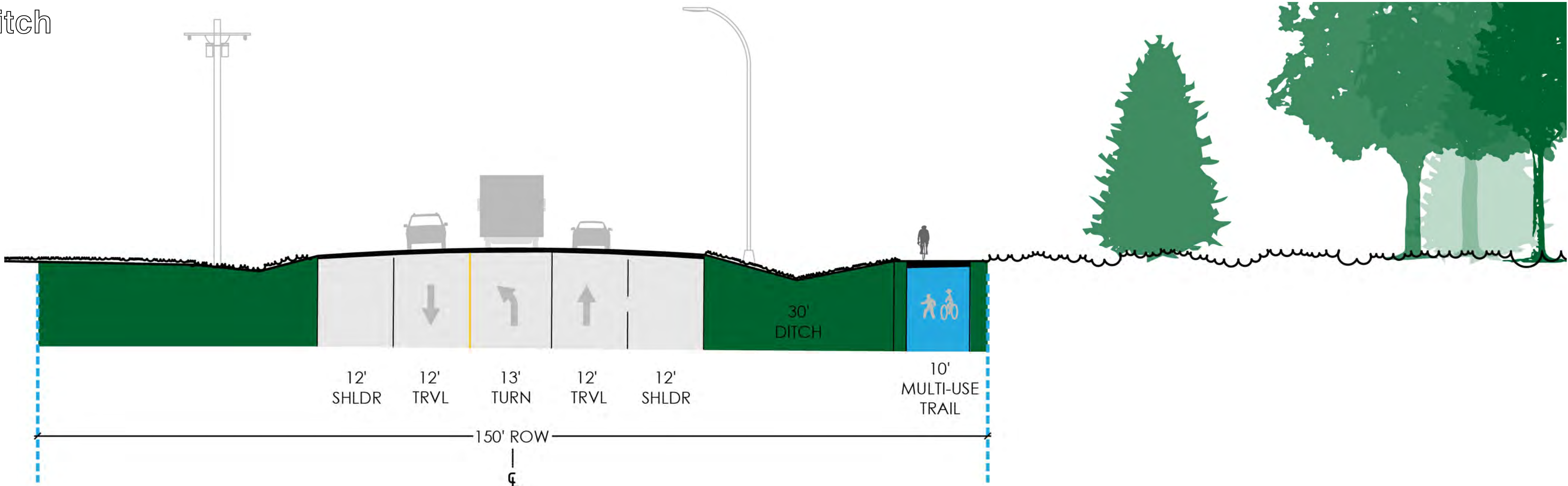


character section B: large commercial



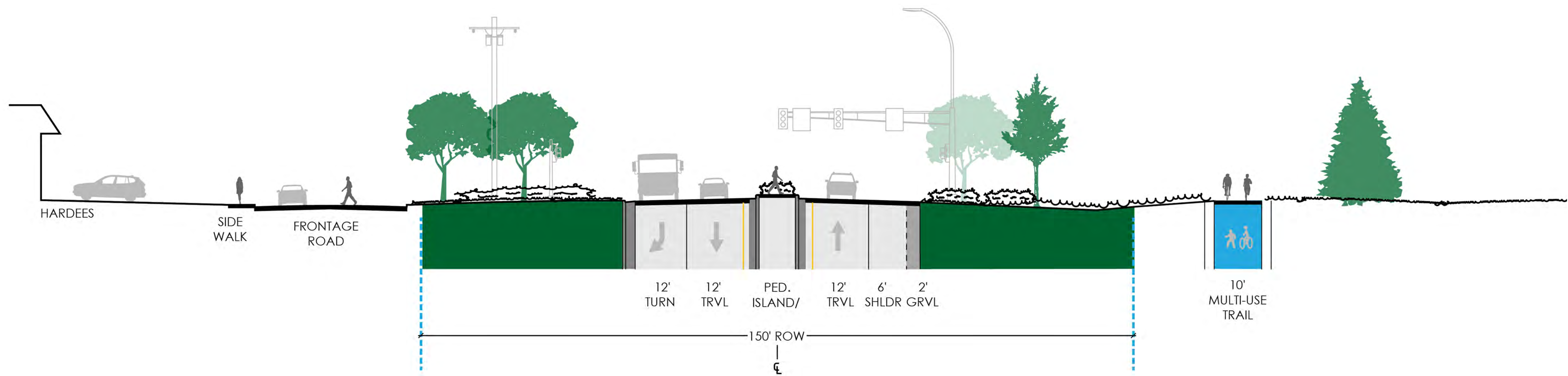
section #2: rural highway w/ 30' ditch

- key points:
- 2 travel lanes w/ center turn lane
  - reduced crossing distance at controlled intersections
  - realigned keenan dr intersection
  - gateway plantings
  - park connections
  - enhanced community spaces

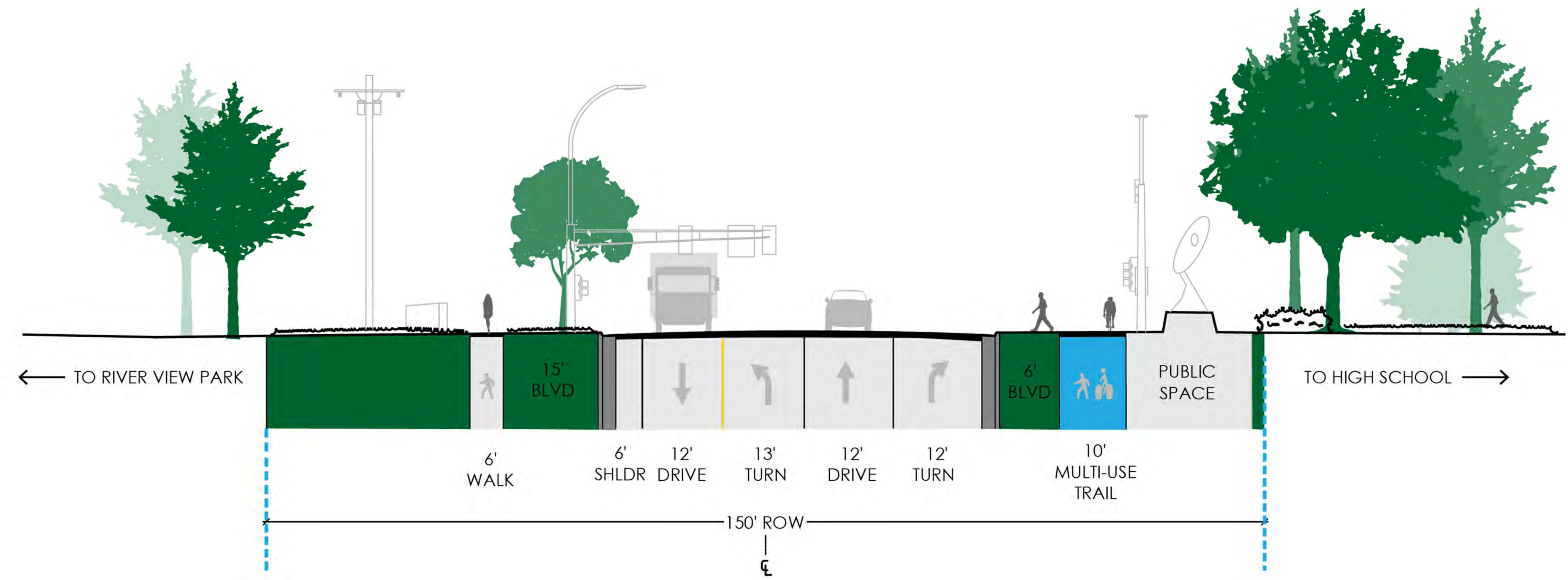




section #3: protected pedestrian crossing

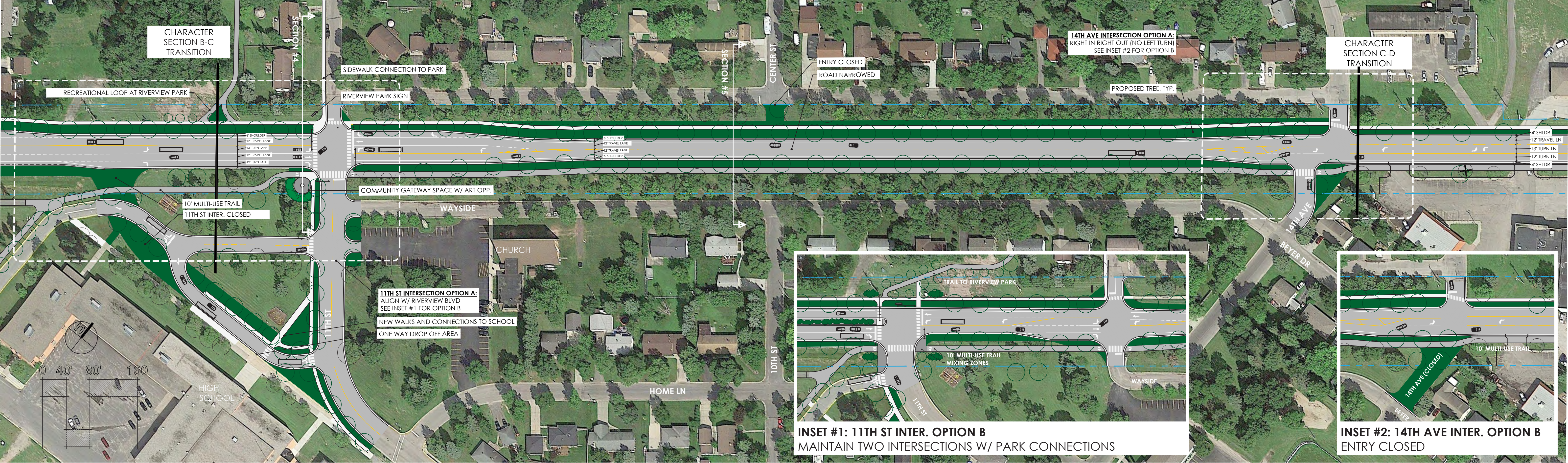


section #4: public space opportunity



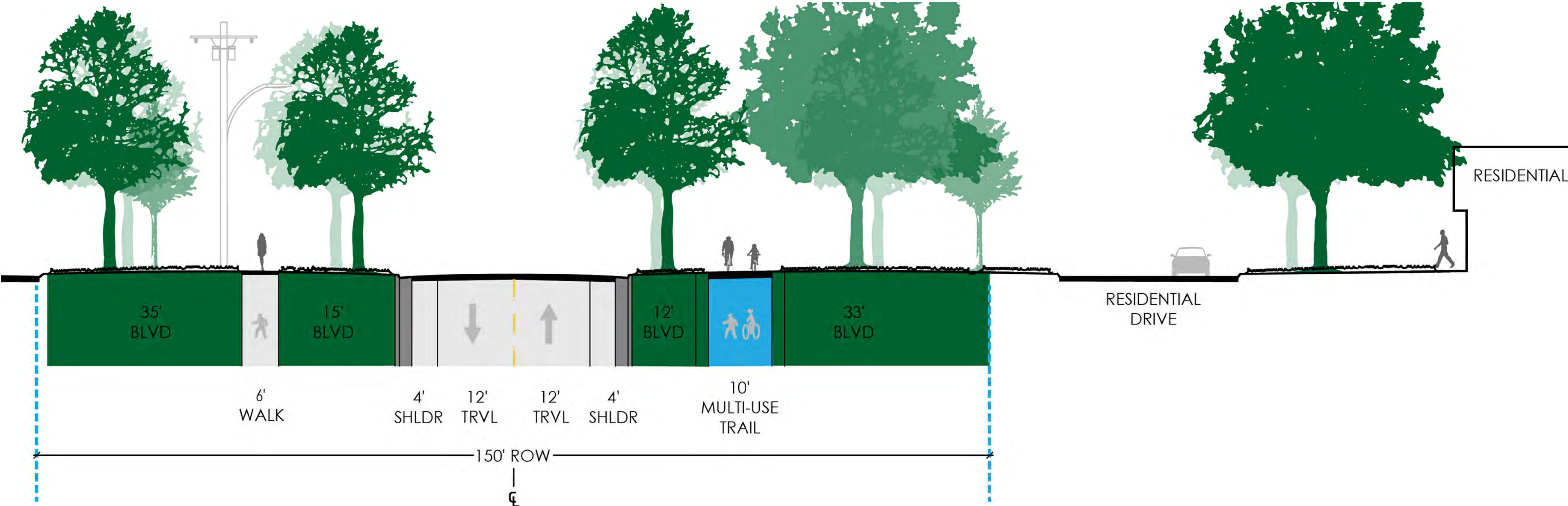


character section C: residential neighborhood



section #5: 2 way residential

- key points:
- reduces travel lanes from 4 to 2
  - maintains turn lanes
  - removes one residential area entrance
  - realigns 11th st and reconfigures school drop off area
  - additional blvd plantings & narrow road manages traffic speeds
  - multiple intersection options



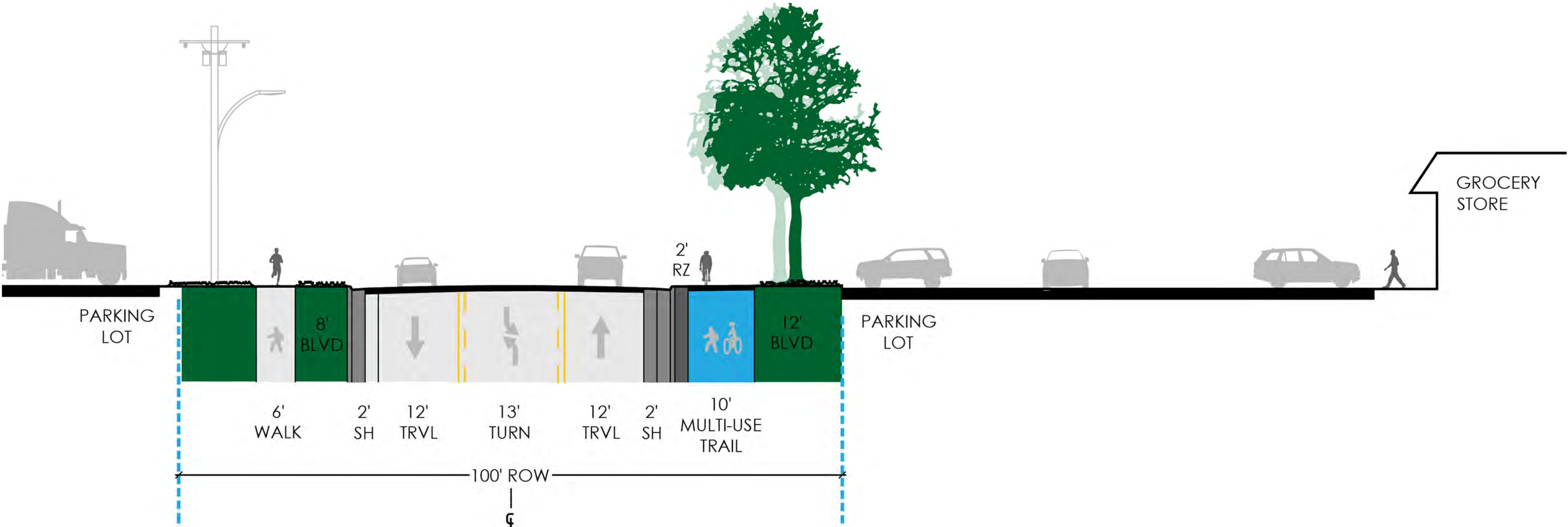


character section D: businesses & park



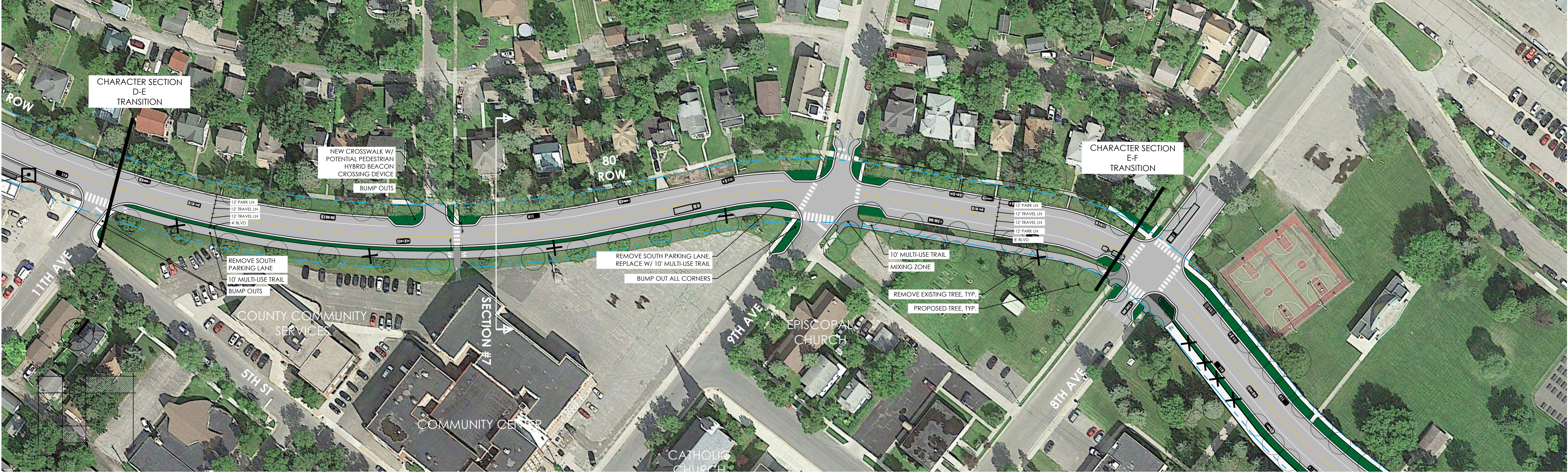
section #6: commercial connections

- key points:
- multi-use trail in exist. blvd
  - remove 1 block of parking on south side of hwy
  - replace w/ off-street multi-use trail
  - realigned commercial entries
  - realign 13th ave
  - maintains exist. travel & turn lanes
  - add pedestrian crossing signal at 6th street

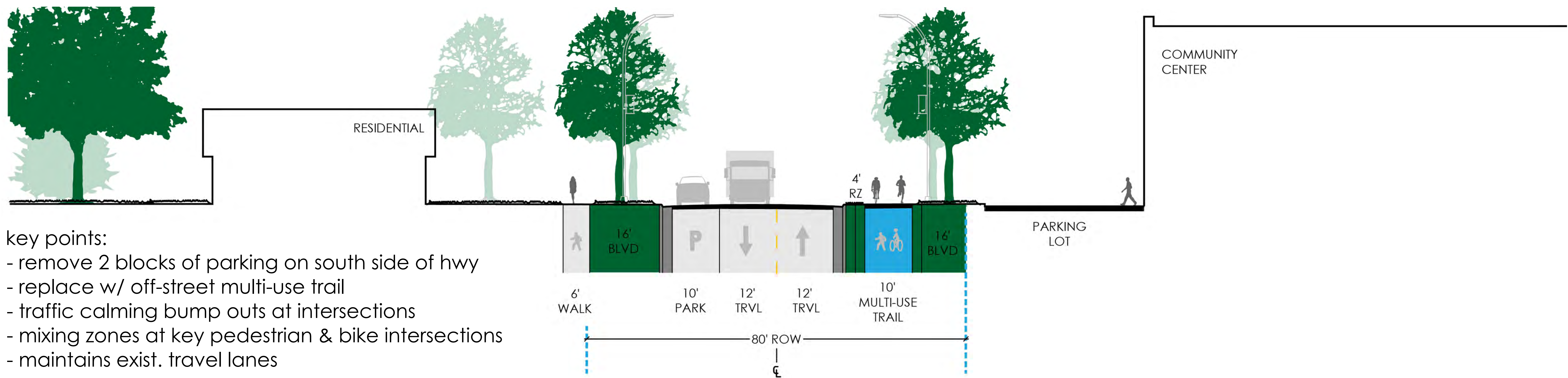




character section E: residential community



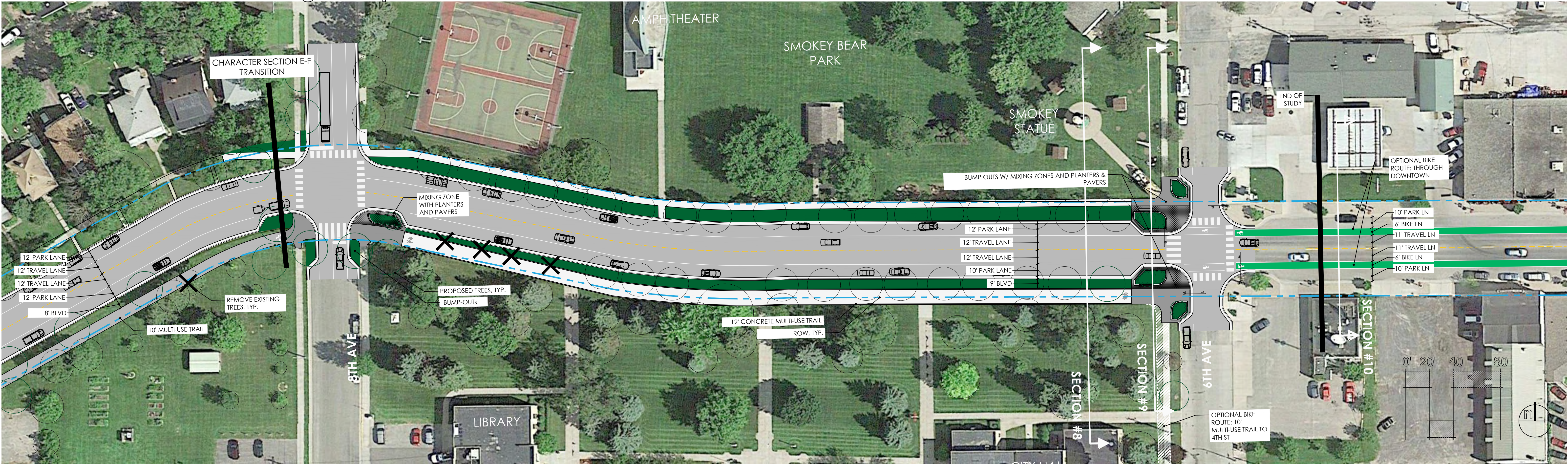
section #7: remove south parking lane



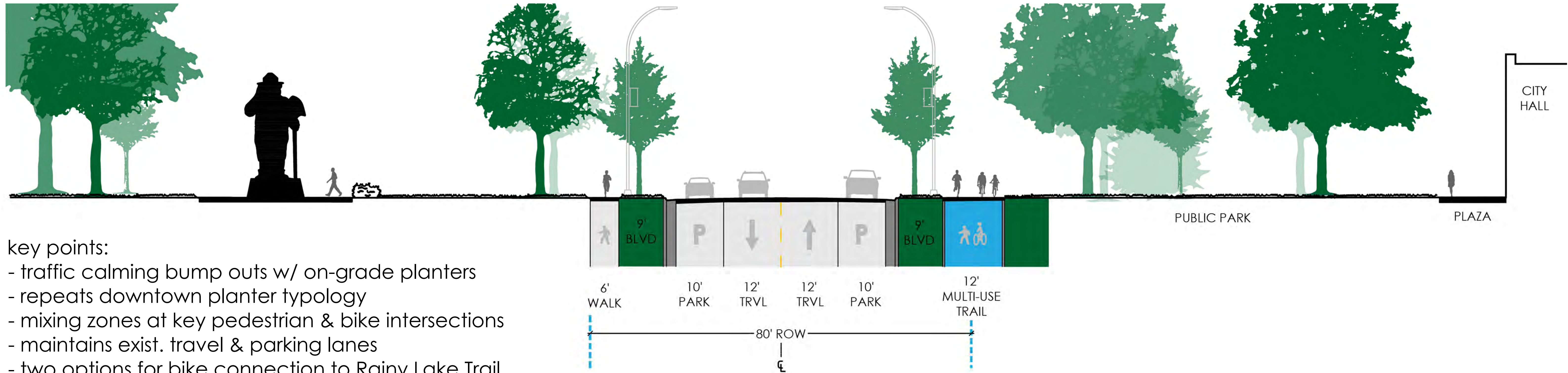
- key points:
- remove 2 blocks of parking on south side of hwy
  - replace w/ off-street multi-use trail
  - traffic calming bump outs at intersections
  - mixing zones at key pedestrian & bike intersections
  - maintains exist. travel lanes



character section F: civic greenspace



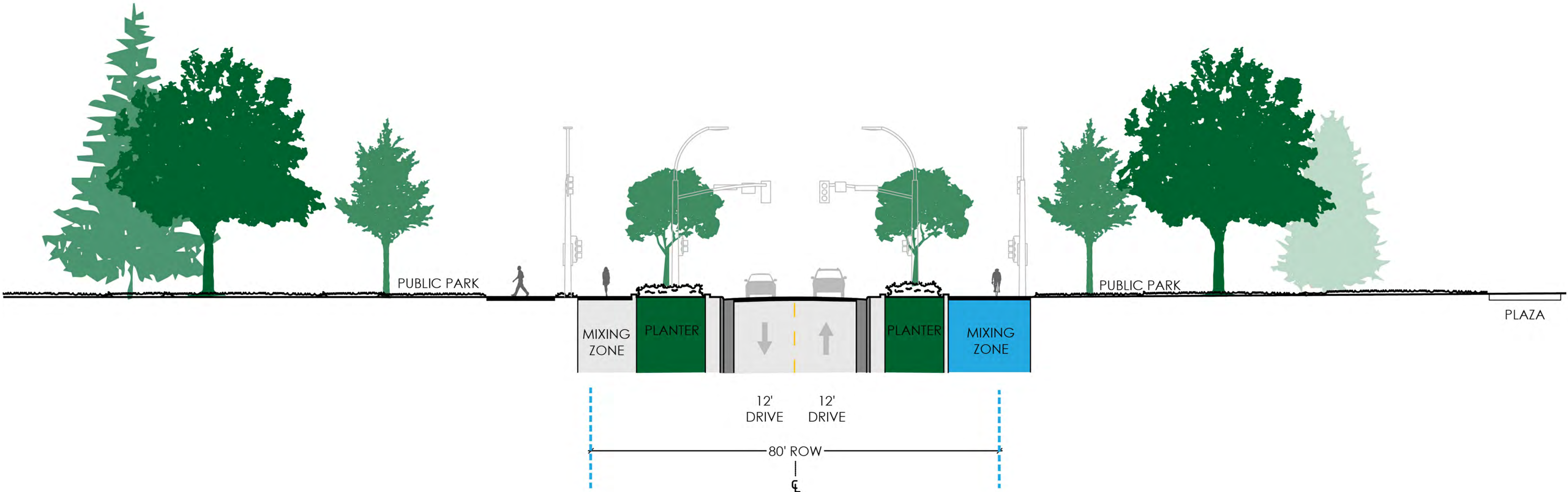
section #8: civic connections



- key points:
- traffic calming bump outs w/ on-grade planters
  - repeats downtown planter typology
  - mixing zones at key pedestrian & bike intersections
  - maintains exist. travel & parking lanes
  - two options for bike connection to Rainy Lake Trail



section #9: mixing zones w/ raised planters



section #10: dedicated on-street bike lanes

