

# *The Foundation of a Community*



## **CHAPTER** **3**

### Chapter 3. The Foundation of a Community

The Corridor’s existing conditions greatly influence revitalization strategies. The following sections summarize key existing conditions for the Corridor; Gateways; Area Business District; Neighborhoods; Mixed Use Areas; Commercial Areas; Transportation and Natural Resources; and Parks and Open Space. Additional demographic information can also be found in Chapter 2 – The People and the Economy.

#### I. The Study Area

U.S. 24 Highway serves as a major east-west transportation corridor, supporting a variety of residential neighborhoods and businesses. The construction of I-70 and I-435 has greatly influenced traffic patterns and land uses on U.S. 24 Highway. Over the years many neighborhood businesses closed and were replaced by less desirable second-tier businesses.

As shown in Table 3-1 and Figure 3-1, the strip commercial corridor is surrounded by older residential neighborhoods. Excluding roads and other infrastructure, residential areas are the predominate land use, closely followed by retail commercial.

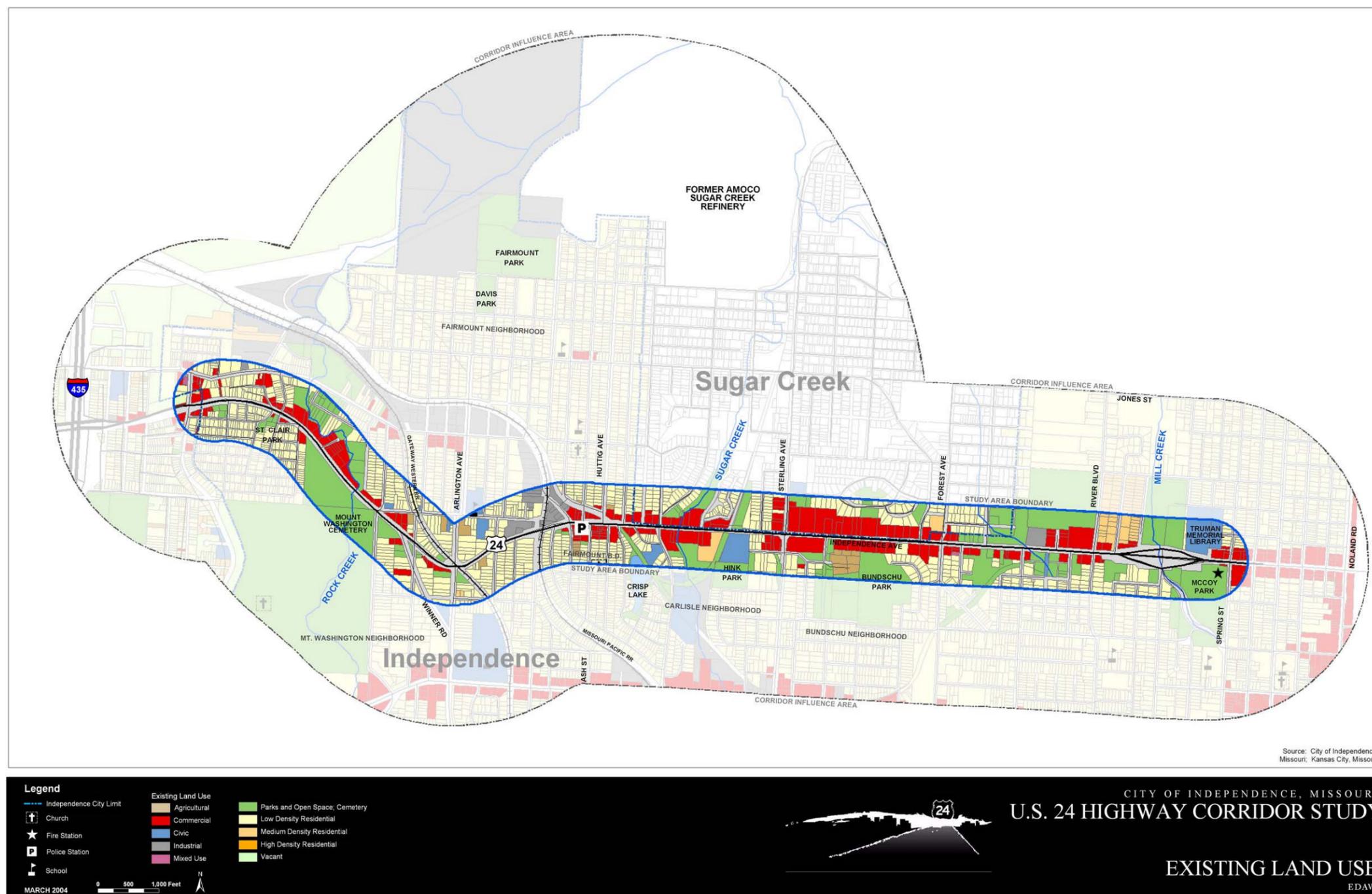


Figure 3-1



Low intensity industrial activity, including warehousing, is concentrated near the Fairmount Business District. Remaining areas throughout the study area provide for institutional functions such as the Truman Presidential Library, military functions, schools and churches. Natural drainages, open space and parkland also bisect the study area, providing some respite from the intense development. Although these comprise a large amount of the study area, most of the natural areas are not accessible by the public.

Table 3-1

Land Use Type	Study Area	
	Acres	% Total Ac
Cemetery	23.5	4.2
Civic	15.9	2.8
Commercial	82.3	14.7
High Density Residential	7.3	1.3
Industrial	9.2	1.6
Low Density Residential	179.3	32.0
Medium Density Residential	10.9	1.9
Mixed Use	1.1	0.2
Open Space	68.6	12.2
Park	26.2	4.7
Road/Infrastructure	134.7	24.1
Vacant Nonresidential	0.7	0.1
Vacant Residential	0.1	0.0
<b>Total Area (Land Use)</b>	<b>559.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>

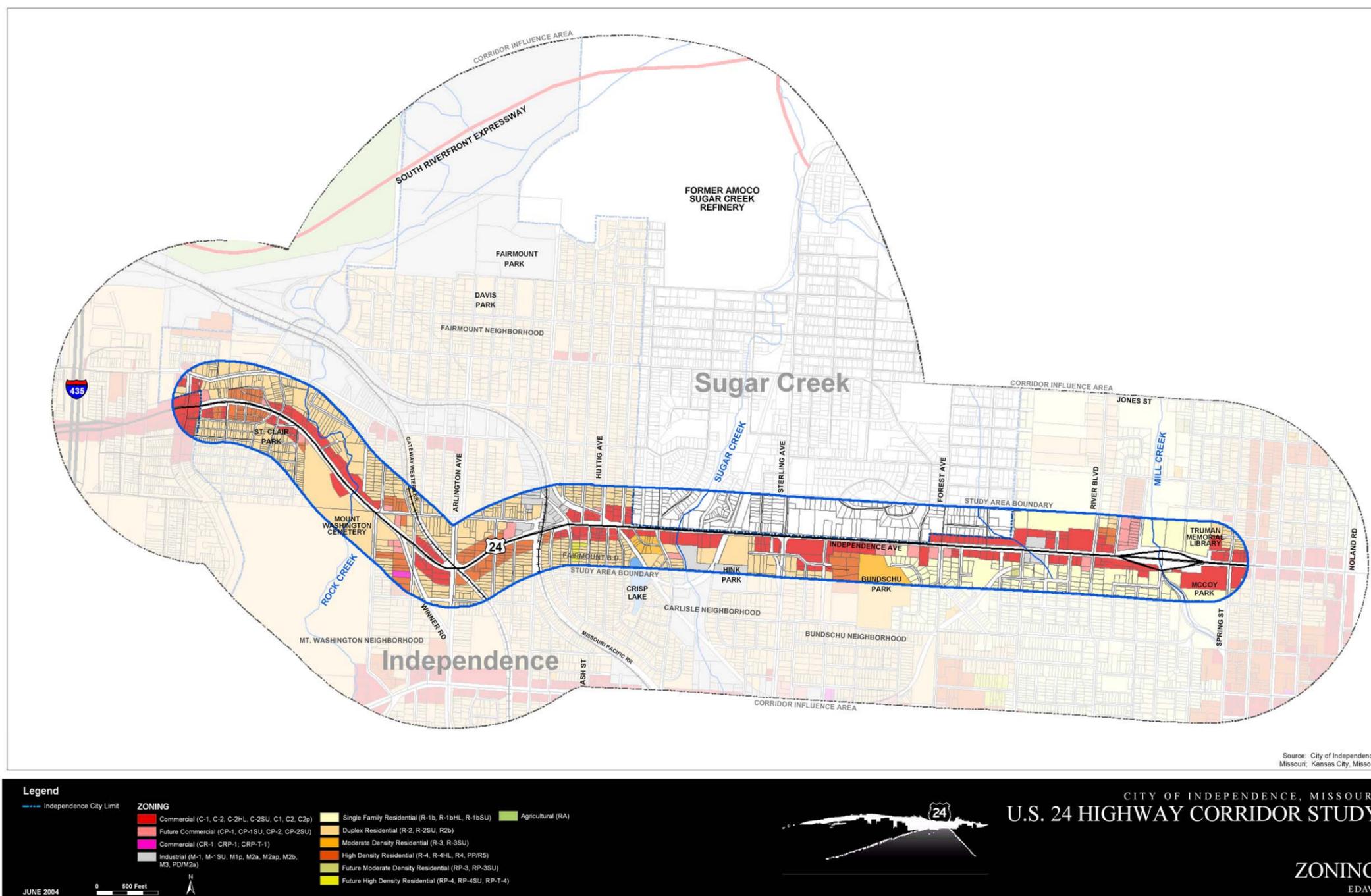


Figure 3-2

As illustrated in Figure 3-2 on the previous page, most of the area immediately adjacent to the Corridor is zoned commercial, while residential areas are primarily zoned single-family, with a portion zoned moderate density residential.

## II. Gateways



The U.S. 24 Highway Corridor is one of the gateways to the City of Independence, the City of Sugar Creek, Mt. Washington Cemetery, the Fairmount Business District, the Englewood Business District, the Historic Independence Square and the Truman Presidential Library. Visitor's first impressions of Independence are formed as they travel down the Corridor. What is learned within the first few minutes of arrival can influence a visitor's decision on length of stay and the destinations they visit.

The primary destination of visitors is the Truman Presidential Library, attracting 100,000 visitors annually. The residents of the City of Independence consider the hosting of the library as a considerable honor.

This Corridor was not the only location for the library originally considered. Other locations included the Truman family farm in Grandview, Missouri and the University of Kansas City. President Truman expressed considerable pride in the selection of the current site in the eastern end of the Corridor. Designed by Edward Neild of Louisiana, the building and grounds form a majestic terminus at the eastern edge of the Corridor. Since the library's dedication in 1957, major additions were made circa 1968, circa 1980, and circa 2000. These additions had the goal of providing additional public and educational programs. These programs and the internet have made the library a world-wide "classroom for democracy." Truman was buried in the library's courtyard shortly after his death on December 26, 1972. Mrs. Truman was buried beside him ten years later (<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/places/independence.html>).

Another primary destination is the Historic Independence Square, located southeast of the Corridor. The Square houses antique shops, restaurants, boutiques and is the hub for Historic Independence and its many visitor attractions. National Frontier Trails historic markers commemorating the California, Santa Fe and Oregon Trails are located on the Square. The Latter-day Saints Visitors Center, the Community of Christ Temple & Auditorium, a walking tour of early Mormon heritage sites, and a Truman History Walking Trail are also located in close proximity to Independence Square. Other area attractions include the Truman Home, Harry S Truman National Landmark District, Sugar Creek Historical Center, Vaile Mansion, Bingham-Waggoner Estate, 1859 Jail, Marshal's Home & Museum, Pioneer Spring Cabin, Log Courthouse and National Frontier Trails Museum.

Mt. Washington Cemetery complements these other adjacent historical resources. Due to Mt. Washington's aesthetic character and by being the burial place of many prominent Kansas citizens such as Jim Bridger, this area has the potential of serving as a destination for visitors. Its scenic grounds, thoughtful architecture and unique design elements provide a fitting western gateway to the Corridor.

Between the Mt. Washington Cemetery and the Truman Library, the Corridor suffers from a lack of identity and a poor visual quality. Older building stock, lack of streetscape, and the absence of a standardized wayfinding system affect the experience of both the visitor and the tourist. Most infrastructure improvements have been directed at the Truman Library and not at other destinations along the Corridor. This has included street lighting and landscaping. Near the Mt. Washington Cemetery, infrastructure is lacking. Sidewalks are present but suffer from lack of maintenance. Only one sign, located at the corner of U.S. 24 Highway and Winner Road, directs visitors to the Fairmount Business District. Signage directing visitors to other destinations such as the Englewood Business District and the Historic Independence Square is not present. The presence of the Library and the scenic and historic Mt. Washington Cemetery presents the opportunity to develop a Corridor with notable gateways and much improved sense of identity.

## III. Neighborhoods

As described in Section I of this chapter, existing residential neighborhoods comprise approximately one-third of the study area. These neighborhoods have historically been the backbone of the Corridor, providing housing for workers and supporting local commercial areas. As described in Chapter 2, these neighborhoods are experiencing a decline. Lack of public and private investment and services has affected these areas and therefore influenced the viability of adjacent commercial areas. An overall loss of population due to decreasing family size and an increasing senior population, increasing rental ownership and the dominance of small, older homes have further affected these neighborhoods.

Most neighborhoods are comprised of modest, vernacular houses on small lots. The bulk of housing was constructed during the 1950s and prior to 1940 with the average construction date of 1949 for owner-occupied housing units. Due to the age of the Corridor's housing and high rate of rental units, little re-investment has occurred and property values have lagged. An owner-occupied housing product within the Corridor consists of small homes with 2 and 3-bedroom models and account for over 80 percent of the stock. Most neighborhoods do not have sidewalks or gutters.



**IV. Area Business District**

As described in Chapter 1, the Fairmount Business District, a historic Town Center, was once a source of civic pride and community identity. This commercial hub supported trolley travelers, local neighborhoods and industry. Competition from new commercial areas has resulted in rapid deterioration. The area consists of several blocks of one to two story buildings, some with distinctive architectural characteristics. Traditionally, locally serving commercial uses were located on the first floor and office uses on the second. Over time, office use declined, leaving many areas vacant. The same fate happened to commercial uses in later years. Use has transitioned from neighborhood services to new tenants seeking inexpensive rents, such as thrift stores. Adjacent uses such as light industrial areas and used car dealerships often conflict with neighborhood serving commercial uses.

High renovation costs have discouraged reinvestment by the few remaining business owners. Some public and private investment occurred nearly two decades ago and included the parking lot behind the businesses on both sides of U.S. 24, landscaping and street trees, and the street lighting system. Sidewalks are also present on both sides of U.S. 24 Highway.

As described in Section II of this chapter, the area has a notable historic identity. Redevelopment of the Area Business District could promote this heritage and provide a positive symbol for the future. Additional information on this District is described in Chapter 2 and the remaining chapters of the plan.

**V. Commercial**

The U.S. 24 Highway Corridor consists of highway commercial development common in the Kansas City area. Highway oriented uses are by far the dominant commercial type. These areas had a period of success, but now suffer from deterioration and loss of a sense of identity. Most businesses depend on automobile traffic along the U.S. 24 Highway Corridor more than on adjacent neighborhoods, and they have suffered as other corridors compete for dominance. Businesses are small, regionally and locally-owned, with national chains occasionally represented. A lack of large parcels, limited parcel depth, lack of infrastructure such as sidewalks and poor aesthetics has hindered redevelopment. Despite this, the intersections of U.S. 24 Highway and other arterial streets, such as Sterling Avenue and River Boulevard, show immediate potential for redevelopment.

**VI. Transportation**

The major transportation corridor, U.S. 24 Highway, a four-lane, undivided principle arterial, is bisected by a number of north-south routes, including Sterling Avenue, Forest Avenue, and Winner Road. Street standards in the City are based on the 1993 Comprehensive Plan Thoroughfare System. Types of streets found within the study are described in Table 3-2. U.S. 24 Highway and portions of Sterling Avenue are the only major arterials in the study area. Minor arterials include River Boulevard and Winner Road. Collector streets include Arlington, Huttig, Forest Avenue, and portions of Winner Road. Previously located in the County, most of these roads are not constructed to City design standards.

The Corridor has a number of transportation issues including safety, continuity and access deficiencies. One of the primary concerns is traffic volumes. According to the Mid-America Regional Council’s Transportation Outlook 2030, U.S. 24 Highway and I-70 show signs of congestion. One indication of congestion is a roadway’s level of services (LOS). The LOS ranges from an “A”, the best traffic operation (no congestion), to “F,” the poorest (extreme congestion). Design LOS D means that travelers may expect that LOS D may occur during the peak hour of travel. The Average Daily Traffic (ADT) capacity for U.S. 24 Highway within the study area is approximately 36,600. Use in 1995 exceeded 23,900 resulting in a service level of C. By 2020, the ADT will exceed 26,100, resulting in a service level of D (MDOT, 2003).

Table 3-2

Thoroughfare System	
Description	Right-of-Way Requirement
Local streets serve residential areas and have minimal traffic.	50 feet
Collector streets are designed to connect local streets to arterial streets and include higher levels of traffic.	60 feet
Arterial streets are the major mover of people and include minor, major and divided. Minor arterials move traffic though primarily residential areas and have lighter traffic demands. Major arterials have greater traffic demands and are usually along commercial or industrial areas.	60-100 feet

Trucks account for approximately 20% of the traffic. This traffic will most likely continue since U.S. 24 Highway and Sterling Avenue are used as connections between existing inter-modal facilities and the interstate system. Future truck traffic volumes may be partially alleviated with the construction of the Lewis and Clark Expressway and more direct access to the industrial and multi-modal freight centers.

Safety is another significant issue. A high number of curb cuts, traffic volumes, and traffic speed contribute to an accident record that is higher than the state average (MDOT, 2003). Access control improvements are still needed within the Corridor.

The Corridor is served by a transit system. As described in MARC's Metropolitan Transit Initiative and Figures 3-3 and 3-4, the system may continue to be improved and will be based on regional and local transit services connected by transit centers and park and-ride lots. To encourage other transportation choices, MARC has also planned for a regional trail system. MARC's Metrogreen Plan details a trail system that could connect the Corridor to a regional greenway system. The greenway system will build on the City's on-street trail system and the off-street trail started along Mill Creek.

Transportation planning on U.S. 24 Highway is not new and a number of projects are proposed or underway to help address issues. For example, in 1959, an origin-destination survey (O-D) proposed to locate



Figure 3-3 Regional Transit Connections



Figure 3-4 Local Transit Connections (Source: MARC)

U.S. 24 Highway further north due to high demands. This concept of increasing mobility is one of the reasons for the proposed Lewis and Clark Expressway located in the cities of Independence, Kansas City, and Sugar Creek. The proposed 4-lane, limited access expressway will begin at the Front Street Interchange on I-435 and then proceed easterly along the south side of the Missouri River. The alignment continues and eventually turns south connecting with an interchange on U.S. 24 Highway in Independence. As shown in Figure 3-5, a future interchange may connect directly to Sterling Avenue in the vicinity of the Rock Creek treatment plant (MDOT, 2003). The Expressway is currently being evaluated through an Environmental Impact Statement. The proposed project will provide improved safety, mobility, multi-modal linkages, movement of goods, truck travel and to increase the opportunity for economic development. Other projects to improve safety and access include the bridge replacement over the Missouri Pacific Railroad at the western edge of the Fairmount Business District. Other future projects should include access control, site planning and traffic review and intersection improvements such as at U.S. 24 Highway and Sterling Avenue.

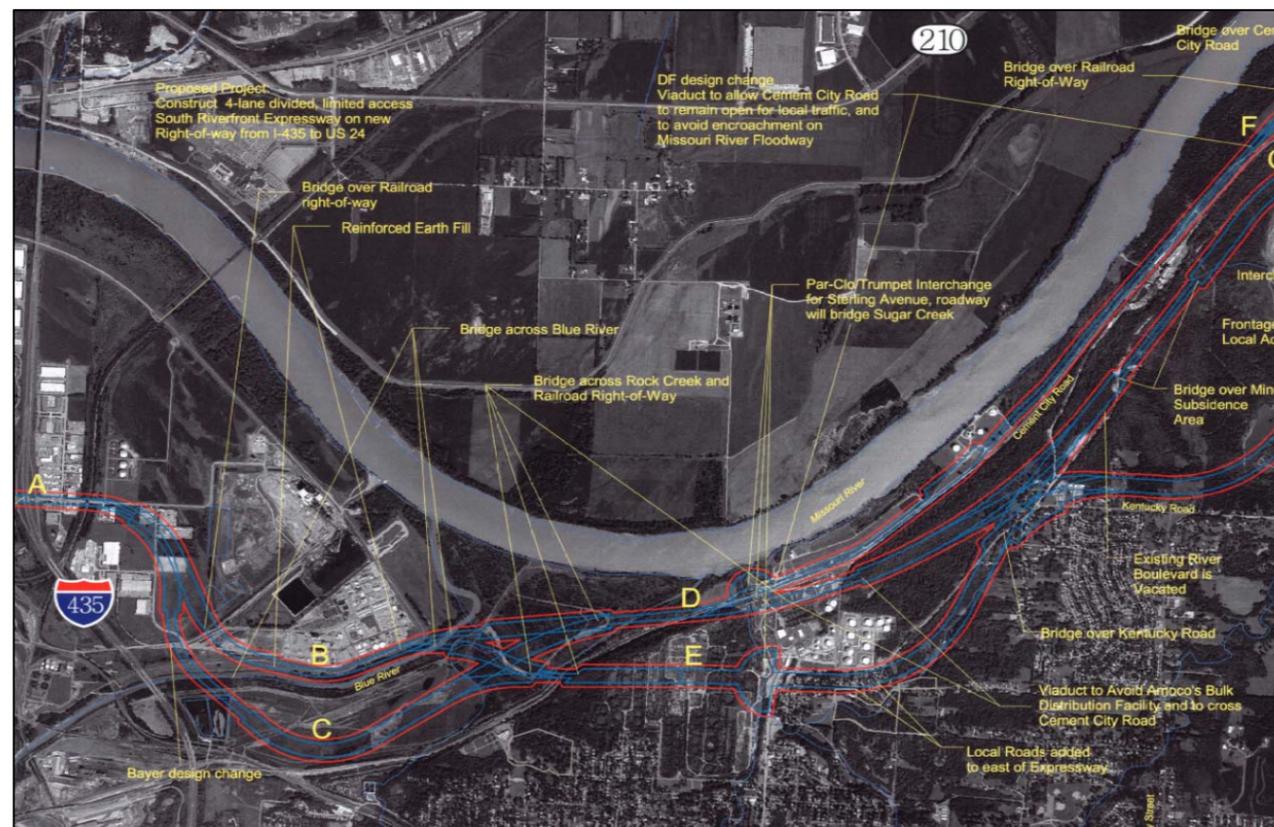


Figure 3-5. Lewis and Clark Expressway

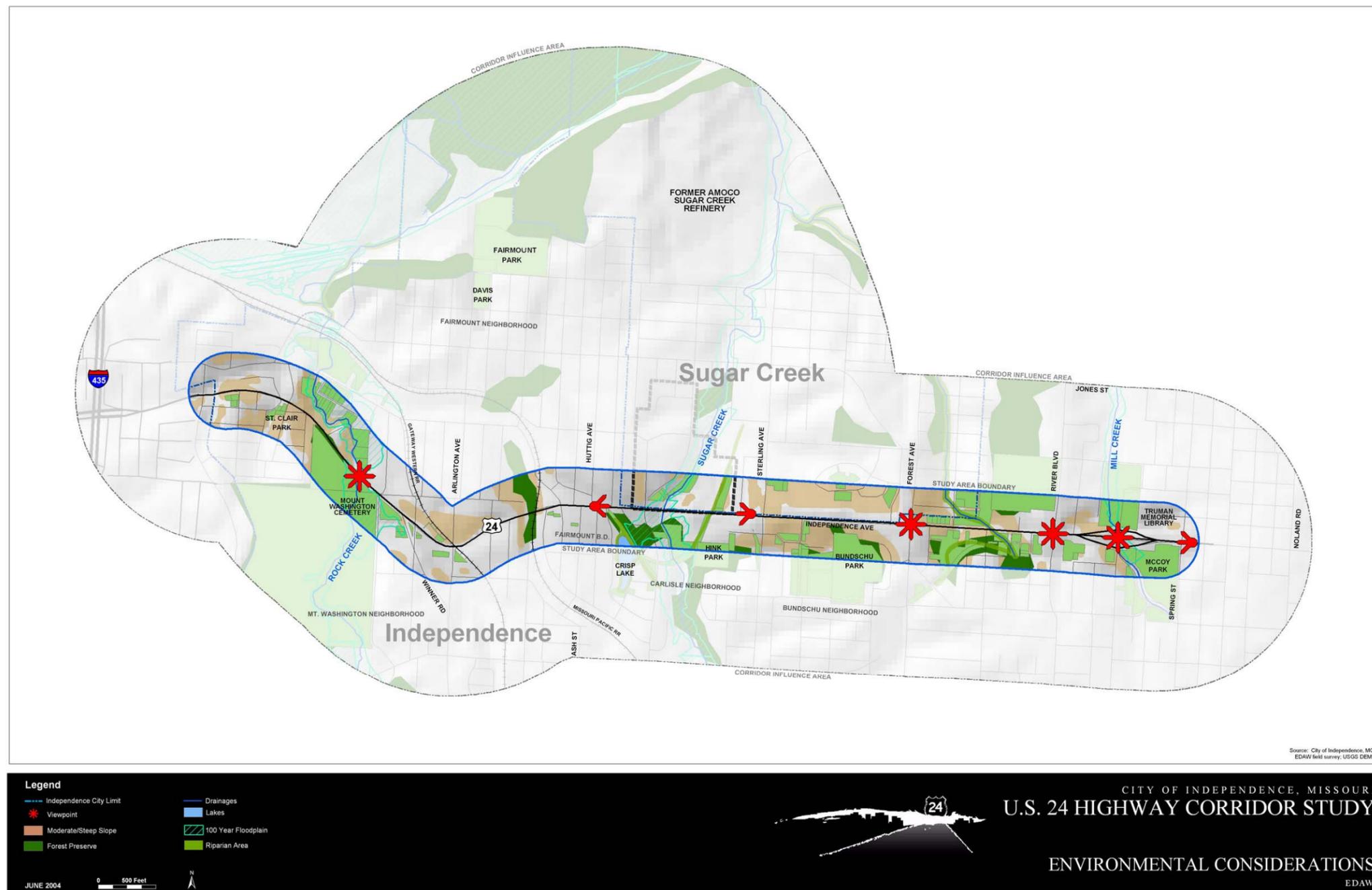


### VI. Natural Resources, Parks, and Open Space

There are four parks located in the Corridor comprising approximately 46 acres. These include St. Clair Park, Hink Park, Bundschu Park and McCoy Park. As outlined in Table 3-3 on the following page, *The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan* outlines existing and planned facilities for these parks. Bundschu Park is one of the largest parks in the area and includes open space and active recreational areas. Recent investments in the Park have provided additional recreational amenities, such as a new playground, walking trails, mountain bike paths, and tennis courts for local residents. Another large park, McCoy, is highly manicured and includes a number of amenities that make this park a City-wide destination. The City is evaluating the possibility of reclassifying Hink Park as open space due to the poor visibility and access. Steep slopes, vandalism and lack of developable space also limit utilization of St. Clair Park. The City is currently evaluating the feasibility of creating a new park within the St. Clair Neighborhood by piping and filling an existing drainageway.

Adjacent to most park properties are drainages and naturalized areas. As shown in Figure 3-6, these natural areas include hardwood forests located on steep sloped areas, bluffs and ridge tops. Other bottomland forests occur along the many tributaries to the Missouri River.

These upland forests, floodplains, and stream corridors are habitats and travel corridors for wildlife species including white-tailed deer and



Source: City of Independence, MO; EDAW field survey; USGS DEM's

Figure 3-6





wild turkey. These natural areas serve multiple functions including the conservation of riparian (stream-related) habitat, stabilization of stream banks, preservation of historic landscapes, protection of water quality, and the provision of suitable land for trail development. Among the many greenways identified by MARC and *The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan* is Rock Creek. Located in the western portion of the study area, this riparian system is still relatively intact. This system has the potential of providing movement for both people and wildlife.

The protection of floodplains is a high priority for the City of Independence. A number of floodplains associated with the major tributaries bisect the study area. The State of Missouri is a participant in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Any development located within a special flood hazard area, as identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), must meet the requirements of the State of Missouri Executive Order 97-09, which would require obtaining a flood development permit from the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) for the project.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency manages programs to assist communities in buyouts of properties that are to be set aside from future development and are restricted to only public activities or use as open space. The City of Independence has taken advantage of these programs, purchasing many properties along Rock and Sugar Creeks.

Table 3-3

Parks and Recreational Amenities	
Existing Facilities	Planned Facilities
<b>Bundschu Park (19 acres)</b>	
Playgrounds (2)	Park Signage
Basketball (4)	Shelter
Hiking (.2 mi.)	Picnic Sites
Picnic Area	Landscaping
Open space	Mountain Bike Trails
Fountain	
<b>McCoy Park (17 acres)</b>	
Playgrounds (2)	See Master Plan
Ball Field	
Basketball (4)	
Tennis (4)	
Bike Paths	
Hiking (.25 mi)	
Fitness Center	
Lagoon	
Picnic Area	
Restrooms (3)	
Shelters (2)	
Fountain (5)	
Sand Volleyball	
<b>Hink Park (8 acres)</b>	
Playground	Potential reclassification or exchange.
Ball Field	
Picnic Area	
Shelters	
Fountain	
<b>St Clair Park (2 acres)</b>	
No facilities are present.	No facilities are planned.