



CONSTRAINTS + OPPORTUNITIES

Community Input Summary

As previously mentioned, to gain insight into the history, concerns, needs and opportunities within the South Main Corridor study area and community, several focus groups and interviews were conducted with area stakeholders, including City/neighborhood leaders, staff, property/business owners and residents. A Community Open House was held on January 27, 2011, which introduced the planning process and offered a visual preference survey and other opportunities to respond and react to local South Main physical design imagery and concerns. These focus groups and interviews included representation from:

- Rockford Area Economic Development Council
- Rock River Development Partnership
- Civic Design Advisory Group
- City Planning, Economic Development, Community Development Departments
- Neighborhood Property/Business Owners/Residents
- Local Community Organizations, including SWIFTT and Pilgrim's Promise
- Winnebago County Planning and Forest Preserve
- Rockford Mass Transit District
- Local Developers/Real Estate Experts
- Rockford Area Venues and Entertainment
- Rockford Local Development Corporation
- Illinois Department of Transportation

Focus group participants were asked a range of questions about what they would like to see along the South Main Corridor in addition to identifying key community resources, weakness, challenges and strengths.

The following is a summary of consistent themes and individual stakeholder thoughts and responses (also see **Figures 5.1 through 5.4: Constraints + Opportunities**).

Weaknesses/Challenges/Issues

PHYSICAL CONDITIONS/PERCEPTIONS

“Lack of pride or care by landlords” has led to general deteriorating property/building conditions and lack of maintenance and enhancements along the Corridor.

Stakeholders feel Southwest Rockford has not seen the same level of investment as other areas of City. This lack of investment has contributed to poor physical conditions of the public realm, such as sidewalks and roads, lack of lighting, flooding and overgrown landscaping which has given Southwest Rockford a bad reputation... *“Not worth investing in the area.”*

Old, deteriorated buildings need to be removed and vacant sites cleaned up. There is a perception that *“nothing ever happens....it’s time for results.”*

Many of the buildings along South Main have been modified and are in poor shape; *“no money is being put into a facade program to salvage our historic resources.”* Focus should be on establishing and funding an historic survey and façade program.

Mobile home developments along the Corridor are in poor physical condition and lack organization and desired community character.

Many business owners and residents noted there is a perception Southwest Rockford is not safe... *“after 7 o’clock everyone goes inside.”*

Stakeholders noted they feel crime in the area has increased and there is a lack of a police presence.

TRANSPORTATION

The South Main Street roadway is currently in very poor condition, which has contributed to negative perception issues and lack of reinvestment to the area. When IDOT completes the new roadway improvements and the City combines streetscape improvements, features such as new roadway paving and sidewalks, curbs and gutters, landscaping, street trees, signage and bike paths should help reinvigorate the area.

Bus service runs along the Corridor, but service is limited, stops are not defined and ridership for this route is low. The planning process should be used to develop strategies for increasing awareness and promoting ridership. A set stop system will be in place once IDOT street improvements are constructed.

Some residents and business owners are concerned that the removal of street parking once the IDOT improvements are constructed will make it more difficult to patronize local businesses or attract new businesses.

Many expressed concerns about pedestrian safety due to perceived future traffic speeds through the northern portion of the Corridor.

South Main Revitalization Strategy

Section 5: Constraints + Opportunities

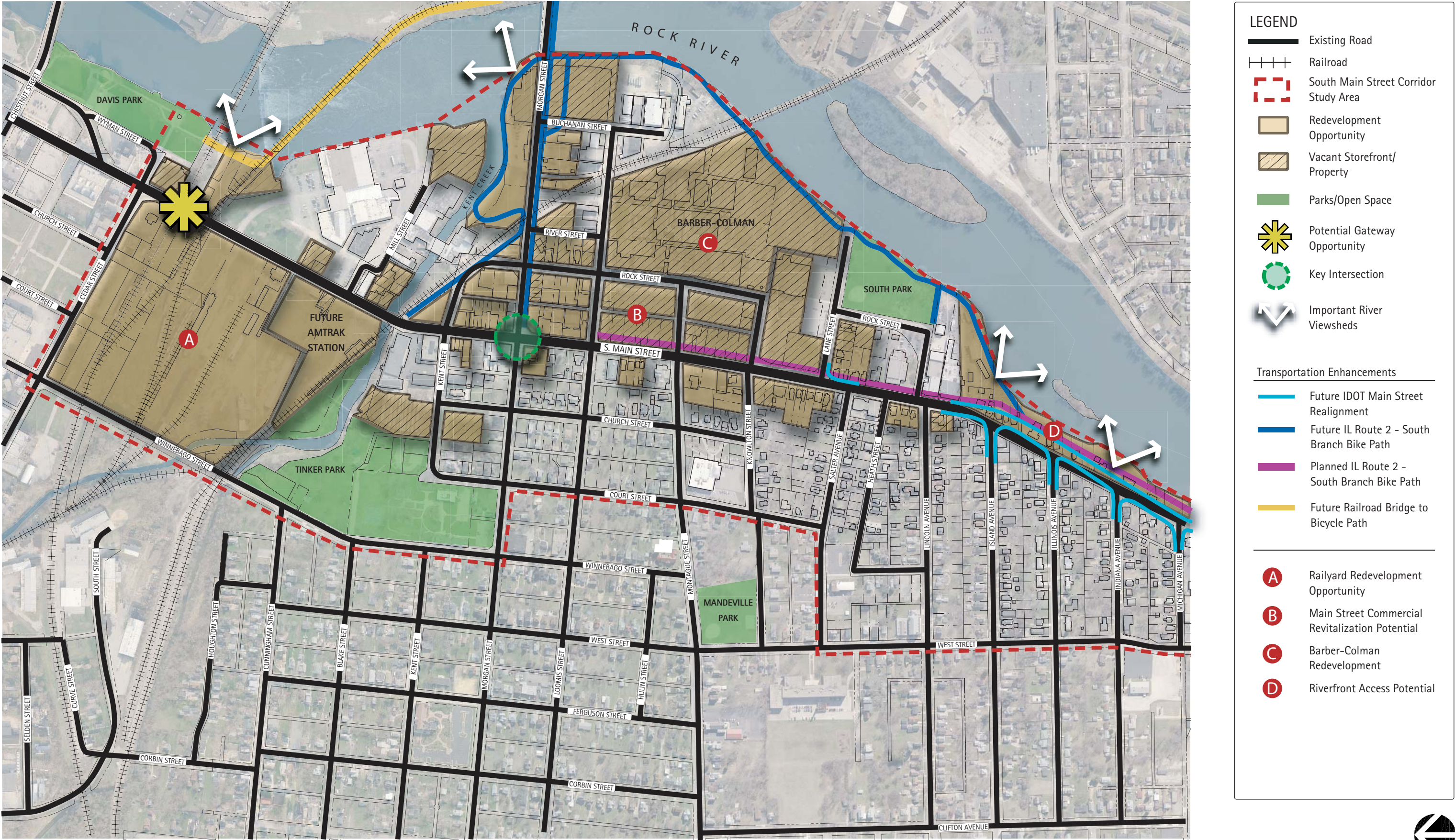


FIGURE 5.1: CONSTRAINTS + OPPORTUNITIES - CEDAR TO MICHIGAN

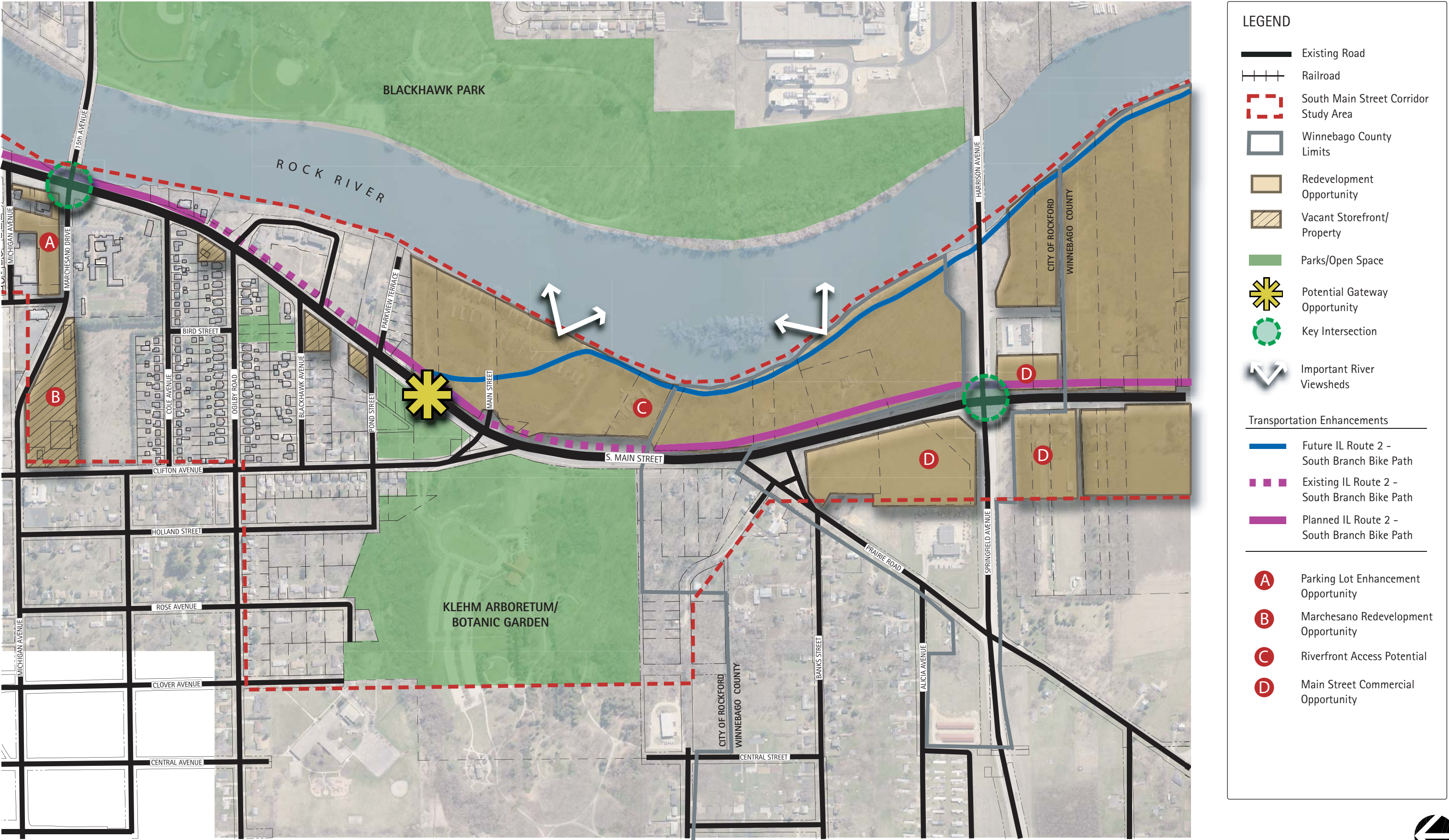


FIGURE 5.2: CONSTRAINTS + OPPORTUNITIES - MICHIGAN TO HARRISON

South Main Revitalization Strategy

Section 5: Constraints + Opportunities

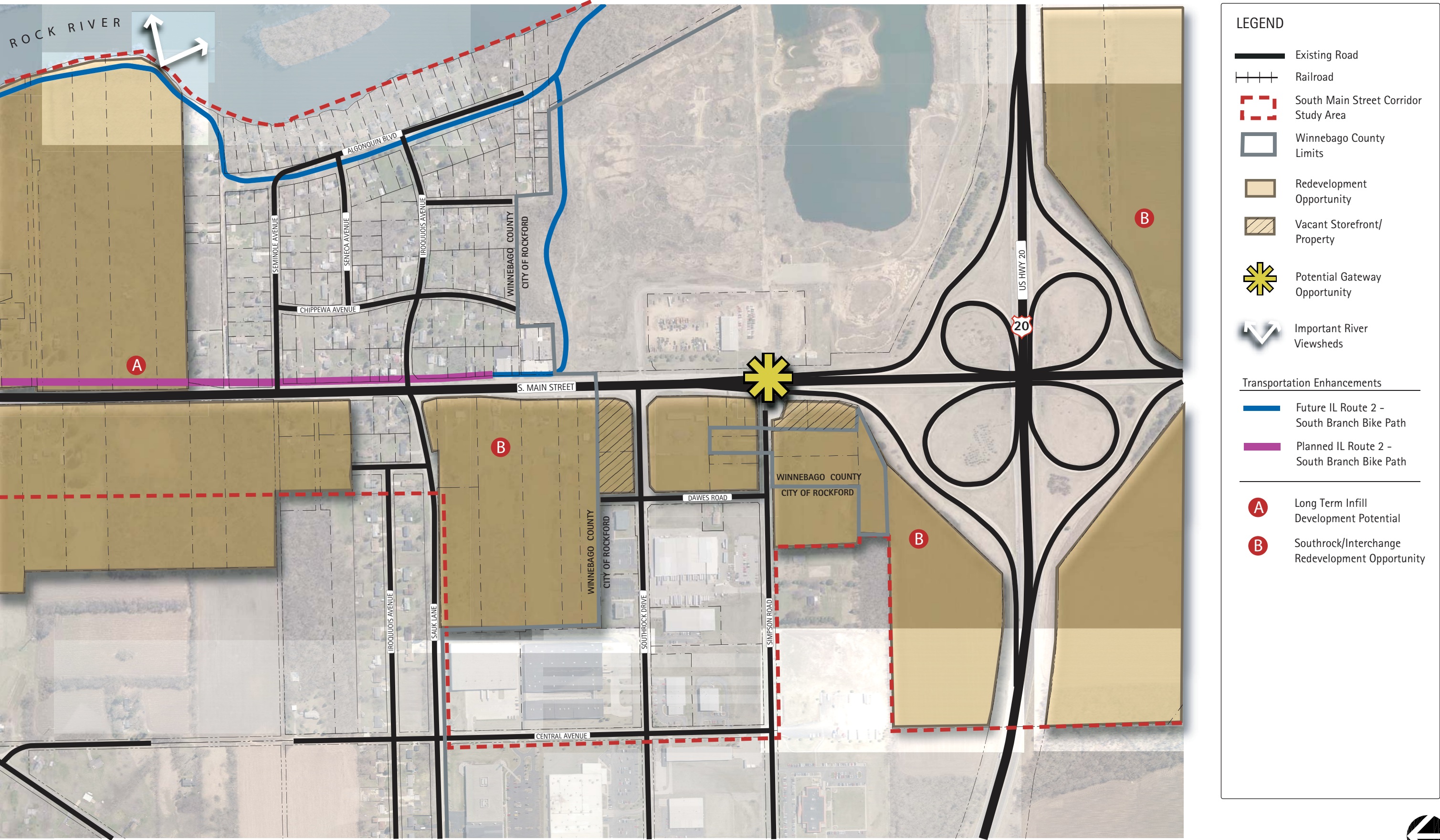


FIGURE 5.3: CONSTRAINTS + OPPORTUNITIES - HARRISON TO US HWY 20

Section 5: Constraints + Opportunities

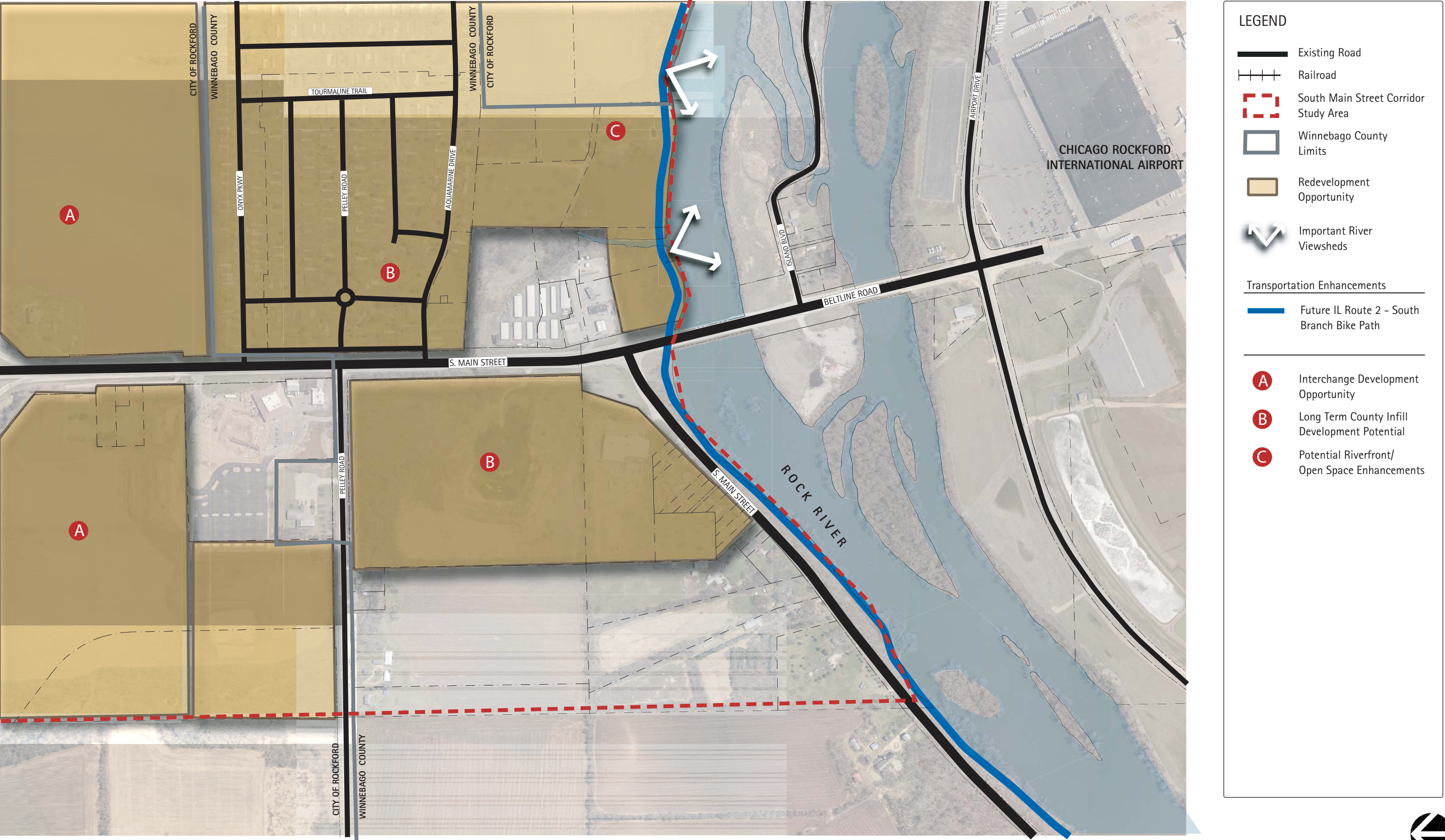


FIGURE 5.4: CONSTRAINTS + OPPORTUNITIES - US HWY 20 TO AIRPORT

South Main Revitalization Strategy

Section 5: Constraints + Opportunities

RESIDENTIAL

Currently, a significant amount of housing stock in the immediate neighborhoods abutting the Corridor is in need of maintenance and general upkeep. There appear to be few options for new, quality affordable housing, senior living and higher density multi-family.

“People want to own in the area, but there are limited options”...and the City does not have any funding resources to help with affordable housing projects or homeowner financing programs.

New or rehabilitated *“mixed-income housing is needed; the concentration of low-income housing is seen as a negative problem in Southwest Rockford.”*

There is a concern that the lack of City building code enforcement and property maintenance has diminished the sense of community character and values.

COMMERCIAL

Currently commercial and retail/service rents are low because buildings and commercial spaces are older and in poor condition. Some business owners are worried about new development and how it will affect rent pricing; *“Local business owners cannot afford higher rents.”*

Most people in the neighborhood identified that they drive to State Street for shopping and service needs, because they do not have these options along South Main... *“Would like to see more restaurants and options for retail and service needs in the area.”*

Not enough people are shopping on South Main Street... *“lacks any retail and street activity.”*

The La Familia grocery store was a newer market that recently went out of business and has left the neighborhood with few food options. Patrons noted that its marketing, store upkeep and displays and management were not shopper-friendly.

REGULATIONS

There is a clear lack of strong community organizations and young leadership in the area. Funding for SWIFTT was recently cut... *“SWIFTT needs focus and a new clearly-defined mission.”*

The focus on redevelopment and implementation should be the in areas close to Downtown. Clear leadership is needed from the City to move a vision forward.

The Barber-Colman property is seen as a *“catalytic project”* that needs a special use and plan. It would greatly jump start activity in the Corridor.

Currently, TIF and Enterprise Zones are the only economic development incentives the City has available in this area. Creative thinking is needed from both public and private partnerships in order to retain businesses and attract new ones to the area.

People would consider opening businesses in the area, but need some form of organization and incentives to help them get established.

Strengths/Opportunities/Ideas

The South Main Street Corridor enjoys close proximity to Downtown, the Airport and the future Amtrak station. These key generators need to be tied together.

The Rock River is an important regional, cultural and environmental asset upon which to build. There are numerous opportunities to open views to the river, increase public park spaces, access and linkages.

The City is planning a connected bike trail the length of the Corridor, providing additional access opportunities to the river and linking land uses.

South Main Street has numerous developable opportunity sites along the Corridor, which potentially provide for commercial, light industrial, hotel, technology, residential uses, mixed-use, transit-oriented development and public open space.

There are a number of businesses and services that are desired and should be considered for the area including: family restaurants, dry cleaners, drugstore, hardware, auto parts, dental care, professional services (legal/accounting), clothing/retail, outdoor ethnic market, theatre/entertainment venues and a grocery store.

“The Corridor has its own character”... There is a sense of pride in the neighborhood’s historic, cultural and ethnic diversity. In addition to the Ethic Heritage Museum, there is potential for a true city ethnic village/market to reflect the neighborhood’s values and celebrate its diversity, perhaps creating a regional destination and base to build upon.

There are opportunities for re-branding the community, including a new name for the district... *“Ethnic Village,” “South Town,” “River South,” “Old Town.”*

South Main Revitalization Strategy

Section 5: Constraints + Opportunities

The area has a number of activity generators and cultural resources that attract people locally and regionally, including: Davis Park, Tinker Swiss Cottage/Park, Klehm Arboretum, the historic Graham Ginestra House, Ethic Heritage Museum, St. Elizabeth's Community Center, St. Ambrogio Club, St. Anthony Church, Booker Washington, Maria's Café, Montague Branch Library and the Chicago Rockford International Airport, none of which are promoted or identified as part of the South Main neighborhood or area.

Additional public gathering spaces are needed. There are numerous opportunities to enhance area open spaces and parks.

Key neighborhood/area events include Cinco de Mayo Parade, September 16th festival and clean-up days with Youth Build (1 to 2 times a year).

The southern end of the Corridor near the Airport has a number of potential development sites for attracting new industries. Industries such as aerospace, alternative energy, metal/machining, energy efficiency, rail industry, software companies and agricultural technologies have been noted as target industries for the Rockford area.

Southrock Industrial Park has a low vacancy rate and provides an employment center along the Corridor.

The potential opportunity to attract a new Embry Riddle Aeronautical University campus to the area would bring an influx of new development, physical improvements, new uses and additional population of students to the Corridor.

The South Main Revitalization Strategy should be a pilot program from which to start the Civic Design Advisory Group's proposed design manual that will address streetscape, building, landscaping and other urban design elements. The manual will help create a unified set of "guidelines" and implementation strategies for design elements, thus adding value to the City.

The upcoming IDOT road reconstruction provides an opportunity to revisit landscaping, lighting and signage elements throughout the area... *"Building the road signifies the greatest example of new positive change coming to South Main."*