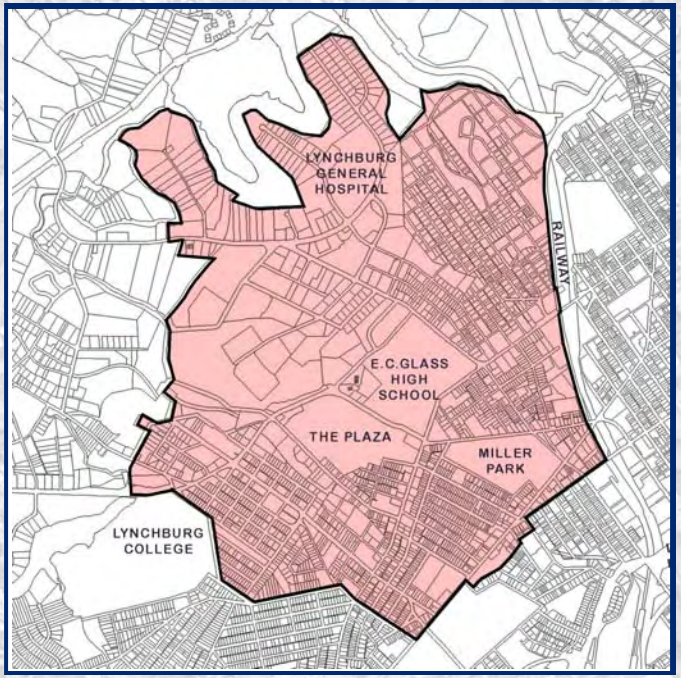


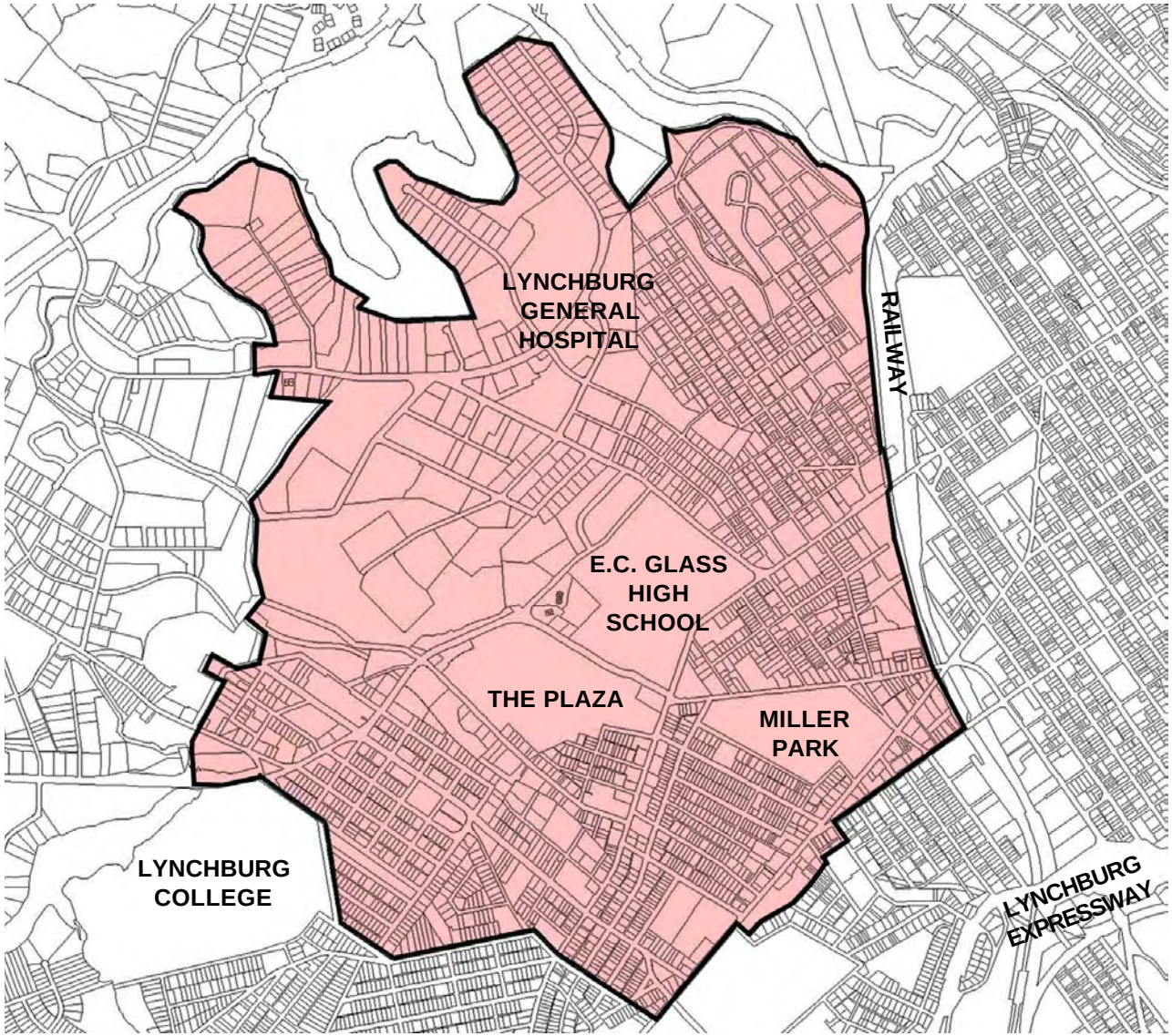
research & analysis 1

City officials decided to create a plan for the future of Midtown Lynchburg as stated in the 2002 - 2020 Comprehensive Plan. In 2004 the planning and design firm of Dover, Kohl & Partners was selected to oversee this effort. Their team included local architects, Craddock Cunningham Architectural Partners, urban economists, UrbanAdvisors, transportation experts, Hall Planning & Engineering, and a computer visualization company, UrbanAdvantage. The extensive planning process began with a thorough evaluation of the study area. This chapter details the analysis of Midtown; the chapters following describe the community charrette and resulting plan.

MIDTOWN ANALYSIS

The area of Lynchburg referred to as Midtown is bounded by the 5th Street Bridge to the east, Fort Avenue to the south, the Lakeside Drive entrance to Lynchburg College to the west, and the Blackwater Creek Trail to the north. The area is west of Downtown and is the geographic center of Lynchburg. Due to its location, natural features, history, strong institutions, businesses, neighborhoods, and physical character, Midtown is an area that deserves the best planning. We must study Midtown's past to prepare for its future, in turn creating a plan for the area which builds on its strengths and addresses its challenges.

The thorough examination of background information, whether through photographing existing conditions, talking to citizens, or analyzing base maps, helped the planning team to better prepare for creating a workable plan for Midtown.



The shaded area above denotes the Midtown study area.

Miller Home for Girls, 1872

West Lynchburg Inn, 1890

Miller Park, 1926 (dedicated in 1862)

MEDICAL CENTER NEARING COMPLETION JUN 20 1956

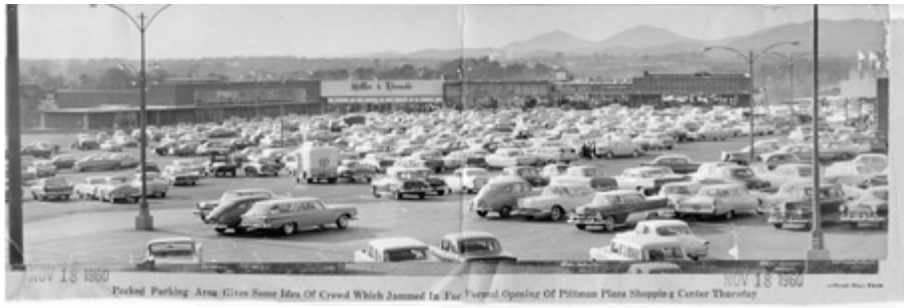
Lynchburg's new $4½ million medical center on Langhorne Road approaches completion after more than a year's labor by the Virginia Engineering Co. Finishing touches are being applied to interior as the rush to complete hospital by September, when tentative plans call for transfer of patients and equipment from old hospital on Federal Street. Most grading and entrance and exit highways have been completed. This tree-top-high photograph was made by Staff Photographer George Smith.

Lynchburg General Hospital, 1956

Pittman Plaza, 1959

TO BE WIDENED—This section of Memorial Avenue from Lakeside Drive to Alleghany Avenue is planned to be widened from 32 to 40 feet. The street will be widened from Lakeside Drive at the Sears Roebuck Co. store to Wadsworth Street on Sears' side and on both sides from Wadsworth to Alleg The area has been zoned for business. (Jimmy Ripley Ph

Memorial Avenue, 1962



Packed Parking Area Gives Some Idea Of Crowd Which Jammed In For Formal Opening Of Pittman Plaza Shopping Center Thursday

Pittman Plaza, 1960

STUDYING THE PAST

Midtown Lynchburg is an area which has experienced tremendous change over recent decades. Originally platted as an extension of Downtown neighborhoods, the area was once a country retreat area that became a thriving streetcar suburb. Miller Park was dedicated in 1862 and continues today to serve as a great community space. The Miller Home for Girls was located close-by along Memorial Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods were made up of graceful homes on tree-lined streets. The West Lynchburg Inn, a resort hotel accessible by train, was built in1890. The Inn was purchased by Josephus Hopwood in 1903 to begin Lynchburg Christian College, later renamed as Lynchburg College.

E. C. Glass High School opened its doors in 1953 and remains strong today. The opening of Lynchburg General Hospital in 1956 provided an emerging economic engine for Midtown. The area surrounding the hospital began to expand and evolve as the medical community became a centerpiece of the city.

In 1960 Pittman Plaza opened as a major retail shopping center. Located on the site of the former Miller Home for Girls, the opening of Pittman Plaza marked the move from downtown commerce to suburban retail.

Miller Home for Girls and Sears Roebuck Store, 1958

All photos provided by Nancy Marion Blackwell

Pittman Plaza had a prosperous, yet short life. In 1980 with the opening of River Ridge Mall, the Plaza began to decline. As stores relocated the property changed ownership several times; however, no efforts to revive the Plaza to its earlier prosperity have been successful. While many Lynchburg residents have fond memories of visits to the Plaza, the shopping center property today is in need of a dramatic renaissance.

Citizens and City leaders recognized the importance of revitalizing Midtown and included specific action steps in the City's 2002 Comprehensive Plan. This report and planning process are a result of the City's initiative to create a plan for the future of Midtown.

BUSINESS
The News & Daily Advance — Sunday, February 16, 1986 F-4

The Plaza: Hard times are thing of the past

By Shelly Herman
Staff writer

Twenty-five years after its birth as Pittman Plaza and just five years after many people pronounced it dead, the Plaza has risen from the grave and is making its presence known.

In the five years since the Richmond-based Covington Co. purchased the Plaza with about half the 406-square-foot tenant ve re- erking nts in- lowen- tor & nd in- ne is ecline crowd Clyde ercent anges. million dition ruct a st side n four n The ancing d last

week and the structure should be available for occupation by late fall, Covington said.

Immediate plans for the Plaza include the expected opening of three businesses in the next 60 to 90 days, said leasing manager Carl Blackwell. These openings will fill all the vacancies on the upper level for the first time since the Plaza's decline began in 1980, said Jean Jordan, Plaza manager.

Covington declined to reveal the new tenants because company policy allows the tenant to announce their opening first.

A representative of Safeway grocery stores said last week the company is interested in Lynchburg and is negotiating with Covington Co. An official of Covington Co. confirmed that Bradlee's, a Boston-based discount store, is interested in the Plaza.

Gary Anderson, manager of Big Star grocery store, said he couldn't comment on how the opening of another food store in the Plaza would affect his store because he doesn't even know for certain that the Safeway is opening.

A&N, a Richmond-based sporting goods and active wear store, plans to open a store in the Plaza within six weeks, said Ron Britt, A&N head buyer. He didn't have any details on the store's location or size available.

A Radio Shack official confirmed that the store on Wadsworth Street is negotiating with Covington Co. but no details are available yet.

Mr. B's Garden Deli is more than doubling its current 800-square-foot size by moving into a 2,000-square-foot vacant space

Please see Plaza, Page F-4

File photo
Since its down days in 1980, the Plaza has added several stores with more renovations in works

Penney To Open In Plaza, Close Downtown Store

V.F- LYBU- PLAZA SHOPPING CTR
NEWS 9-12-62

Pittman Plaza To Employ 2,000 With $150,000 Weekly Payroll

By BILL BENJAMIN
The News Business Writer

NEWS 7-16-60 87

Inc. It would have 18,000 square feet on two floors with escalator service. As the building is split-level, Pittman said, it would be possible to enter both front and rear easily.

Pittman said a beauty parlor, fabric shop and S. O. Fisher, Inc., would be next in line. The S&W Cafeteria would have 14,000 square feet with two counters on the main floor. Six hundred persons can be served at one time.

* * *

THE LOWER FLOOR of the cafeteria will be a community

Miller & Rhoads Store In Pittman Plaza

FOR MILLER & RHOADS

First Suburban Store Opening

NEWS 11-17-60

The News
LOCAL
LYNCHBURG, VA., THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1960 B-1

Pittman Plaza Opening Today

Pittman Plaza, Lynchburg's first modern shop ping center, opens formally at 10 a.m. today.

The opening will be marked by a brief and simple ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The ribbon will be cut by Miss Virginia Catherine Cynthia Birch of Staunton.

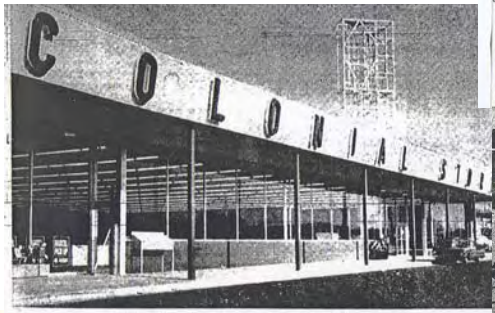
Also participating in the event — considered a pre-grand opening to the grand opening slated in February — will be city officials, civic and business leaders.

Of the 24 stores already scheduled for the center, 11 will be ready for business

Those observing these hours wil be Harry Haga Co., Bewe Jewelry Co., Hand Box, Lerner's Phillips Shoes and Miller & Rhoads.

First National Trust and Sav ings Bank will be open from 9 a. m. to 2 p. m. Mondays throug Thursday and from 9 a. m. to 6 p. m and from 3 p. m. to 6 p. m on Fridays.

Peoples Drug Store will be ope from 8 a. m. to 10 p. m. Mon dms through Saturdays and fro 9 a. m. to 10 p. m. on Sunday



Colonial Stores Supermarket In Pittman Plaza

COLONIAL STORES

Supermarket Largest Of Kind

NEWS 11-17-60

After 41 years ...

V.F- LYBU- PLAZA SHOPPING CENTER

Shopping hub shows its age

N.A 12-29-02 12-29-02

Customers recall The Plaza bustling during its youth

By Emily Battle
The News & Advance

During lunch hour on a December weekday, cars and shoppers bust past the Nativity scene in the parking lot at The Plaza shopping center, as piped in Christmas carols fill the walkways.

There's activity here, but The Plaza today is far from the Pittman Plaza Rebecca Mayberry remembers from her childhood.

Growing up on Hood Street, Mayberry would pass The Plaza as she walked to school at E.C. Glass. She'd often stop to pick up groceries for her mother.

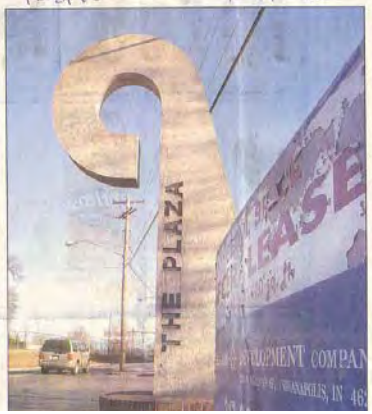
"I used to go over there and shop when I was a teenager, because I didn't have a car," Mayberry said. "A bunch of us would get together and more or less just walk."

She said when Leggett, Sears, J.C. Penney and Miller & Rhoads were open, The Plaza was a popular place for families to take out-of-town guests — especially since back then, Memorial Avenue was U.S. 29, the main artery leading to all points north and south.

Although it's not the one-stop shopping destination it once was, The Plaza still brings bargains in for a variety of reasons.

"The price is what brings me here," said Amanda St. John, as she headed into Food Lion.

St. John said the store's low prices make it worth it for her to drive from her home in



Retailers shift to box stores on city's edge

By Emily Battle
The News & Advance

A drive down U.S. 29 Business in Lynchburg shows the progression of retail development in the city.

If you start moving south on Fifth Street from downtown, the original retail cluster, you soon hit The Plaza, Lynchburg's first major shopping center.

Keep driving and you pass the old Acorn Plaza (or Hills Plaza, depending on what's store you remember better) and Kmart on your way to River Ridge.

Pop over to store does as you approach the newest trend in retail space: the big-box superstores of Wards Road, where one store can take up nearly half the amount of square footage that's in the entire Plaza.

"That's sort of the natural progression," said Gary W. Case, a local commercial real estate agent.

The building of shopping centers in the 1960s and 70s, the mall in 1980 and the big box development of the 90s have left Lynchburg with no shortage of retail space. The Planning Department estimates that 400,000 square feet of it lie vacant throughout town.

Case said today's top retailers come in two categories.

There are the all-purpose big boxes that try to be everything to everybody (think Wal-Mart and Target), and then there are what Case calls "category busters," the single-category stores like Barnes & Noble and Circuit City that aim to corner the market on whatever they're selling.

REGION 2000 Business — February 1997 — Page

BUSINESS NEWS

Sale of Plaza center is finalized

Developer says to expect "big changes" for shoppers

From Staff Reports

The Plaza shopping center in Lynchburg has been sold by Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company for an undisclosed amount to Sandor Development Corp., a small, family owned company located in Indiana.

The sale was finalized in late December 1996.

Jay Stein of Sandor Development said the company is very pleased with the sale, even though the center has been hurt by the vacancies created by Best Products, Dynamic Lady and other merchants over the years.

The Plaza (left) includes Best Products,

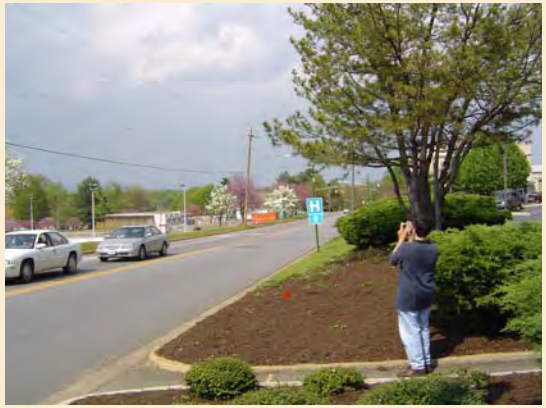
Newspaper clippings provided by Lynchburg Memorial Library

ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

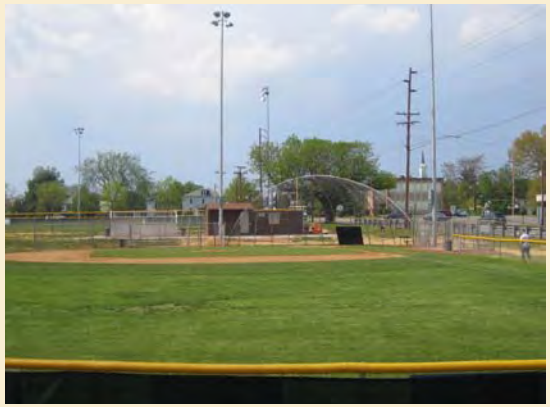
A variety of urban and suburban physical characteristics exist in the Midtown area and the team focused its efforts on documenting such examples. Walking or driving the study area, team members photographed corridors, neighborhoods, civic buildings, and open spaces to document the existing conditions of Midtown.

THE PLAZA

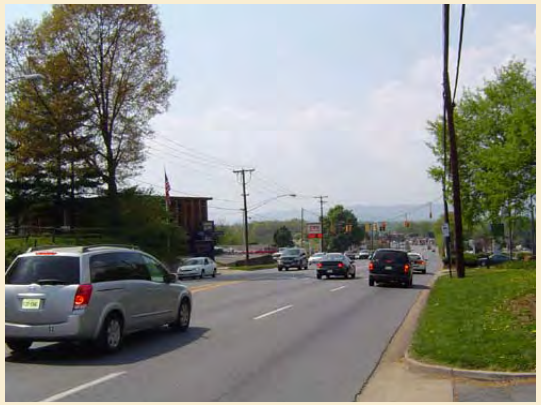
LYNCHBURG GENERAL HOSPITAL



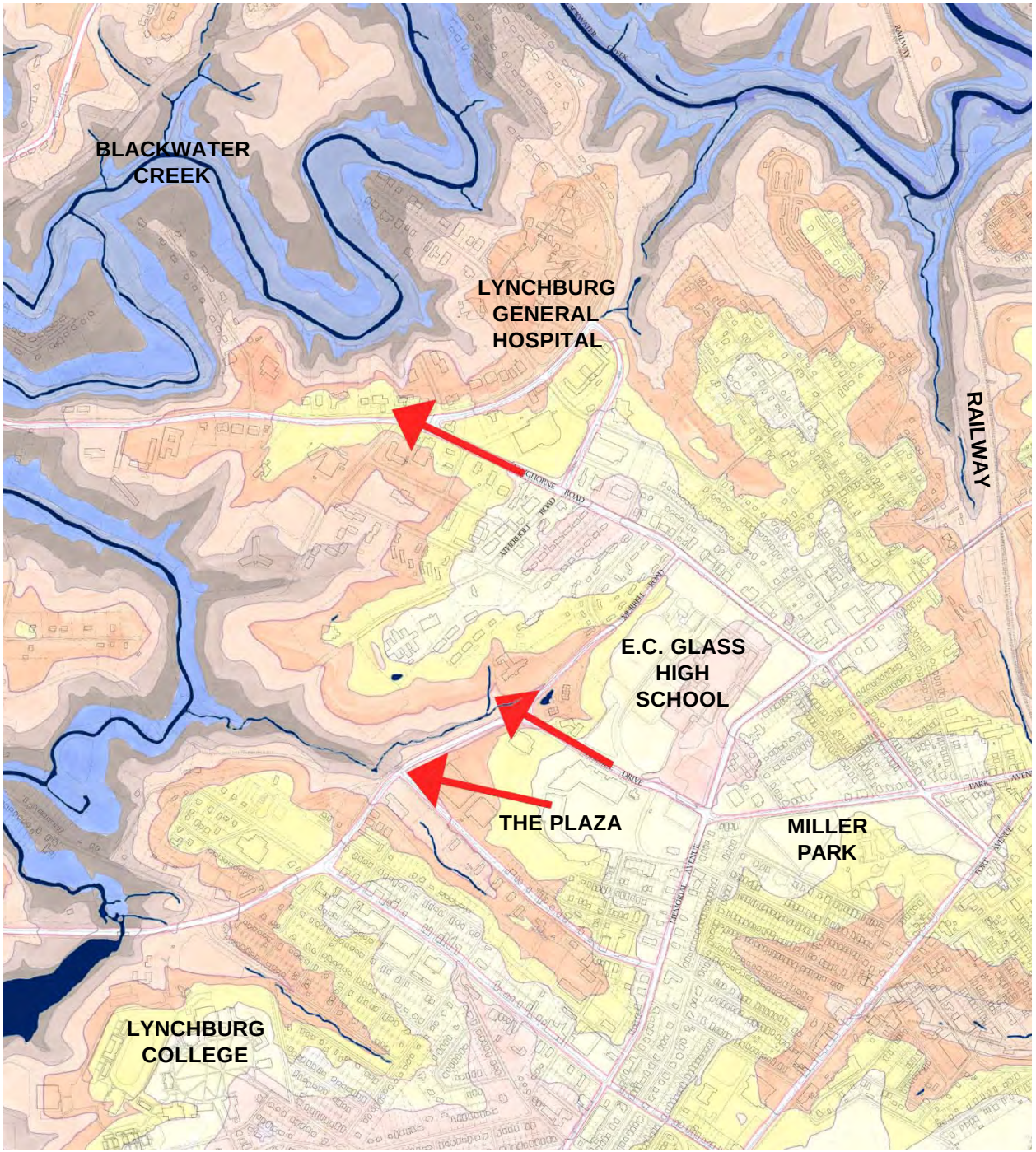
MILLER PARK



CORRIDORS



NEIGHBORHOODS



Analysis Diagrams*

In addition to photographing the study area, the team analyzed past studies of the area, the City's zoning code, recent development proposals, police crime data, and other relevant background information. Using the City's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data, the team created a series of analysis diagrams to better understand the dynamics of the planning area.

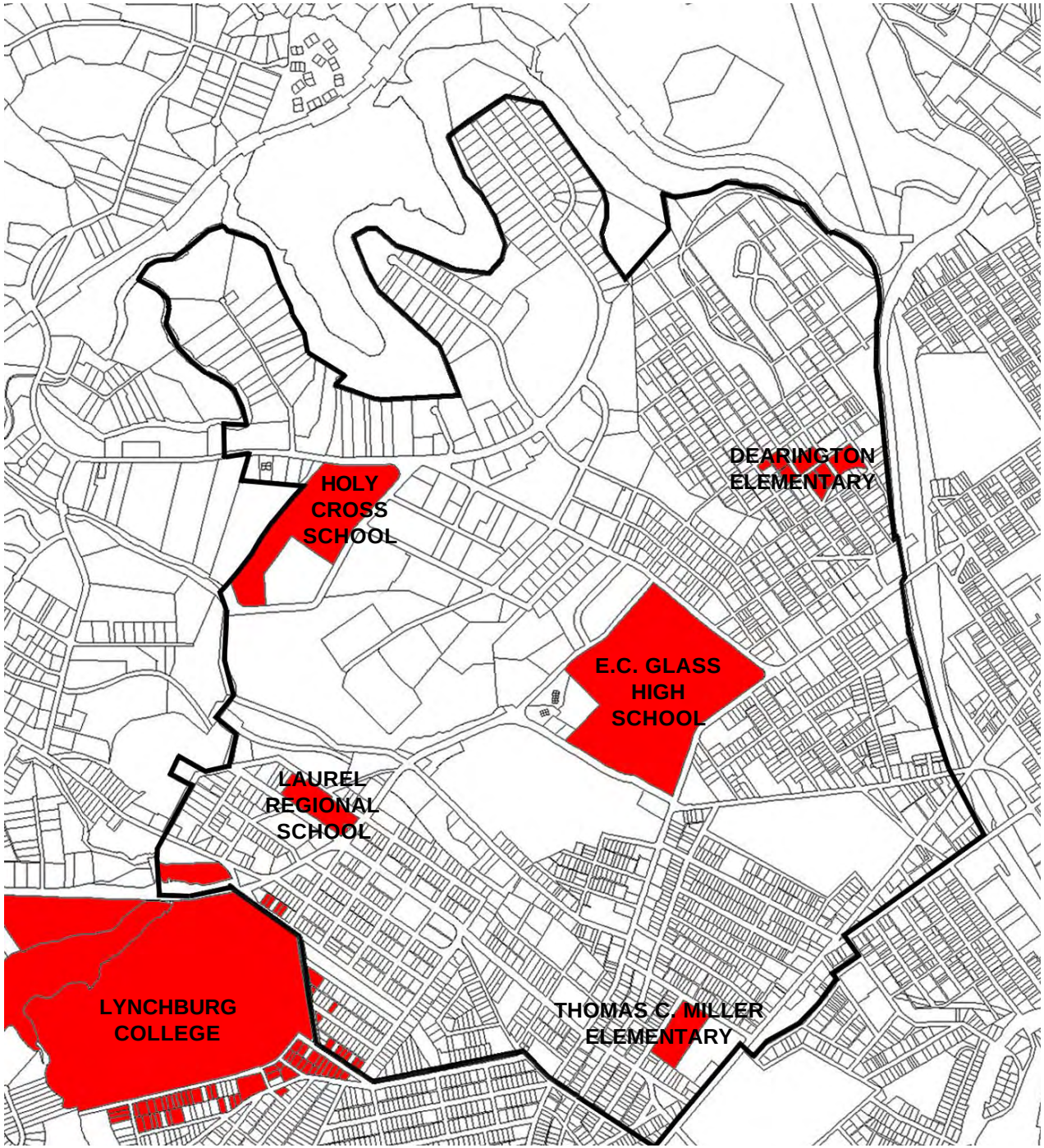
Topography and View Corridors

The terrain of Midtown is that of sweeping hills and mountainous views. The planning team paid particular attention to the topography of the study area, emphasizing that design must be respective of the natural environment. The diagram at left highlights areas of various slopes based on 10 foot contour lines. The lighter shades represent higher elevations with darker shades representing lower elevations. The arrows denote spectacular views towards the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Streams and Lakes

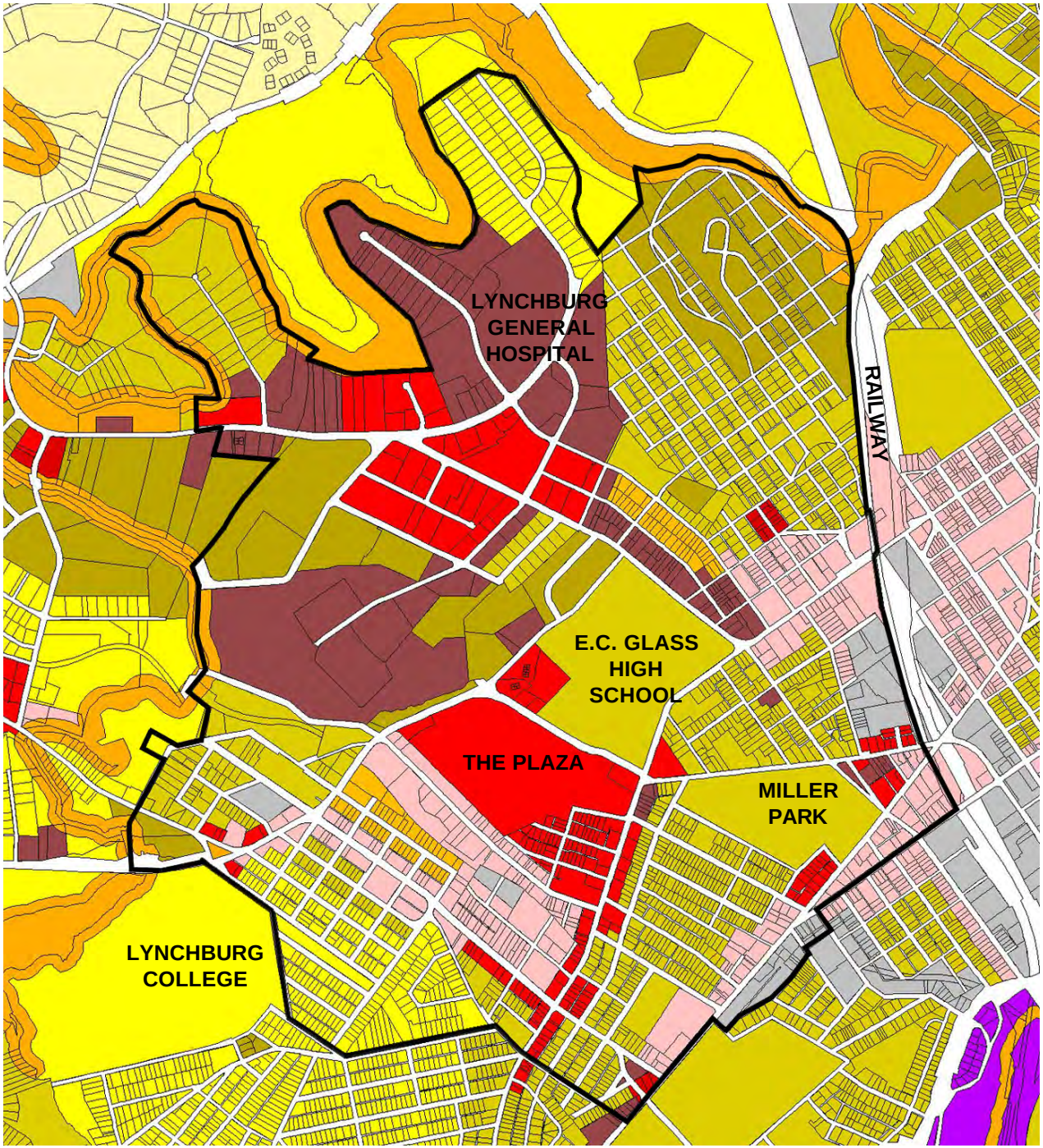
An analysis of water features in the study area reveals that there is an extensive stream and lake system within Midtown. From Blackwater Creek to the lake at Lynchburg College, a network of streams moves water throughout the area. The analysis of such water features will help to ensure that existing and proposed development drains properly to the natural water bodies. More importantly, as development occurs it is extremely important to cleanse and treat stormwater before it enters the network of streams and lakes. The plan for Midtown includes both physical and natural mechanisms to provide for adequate drainage as well as water purification and cleansing.

* The analysis diagrams are based on April 2005 GIS information provided by the City of Lynchburg. This information is updated from time to time; any inconsistencies should be brought to the attention of the City.



Places of Learning and Education Centers

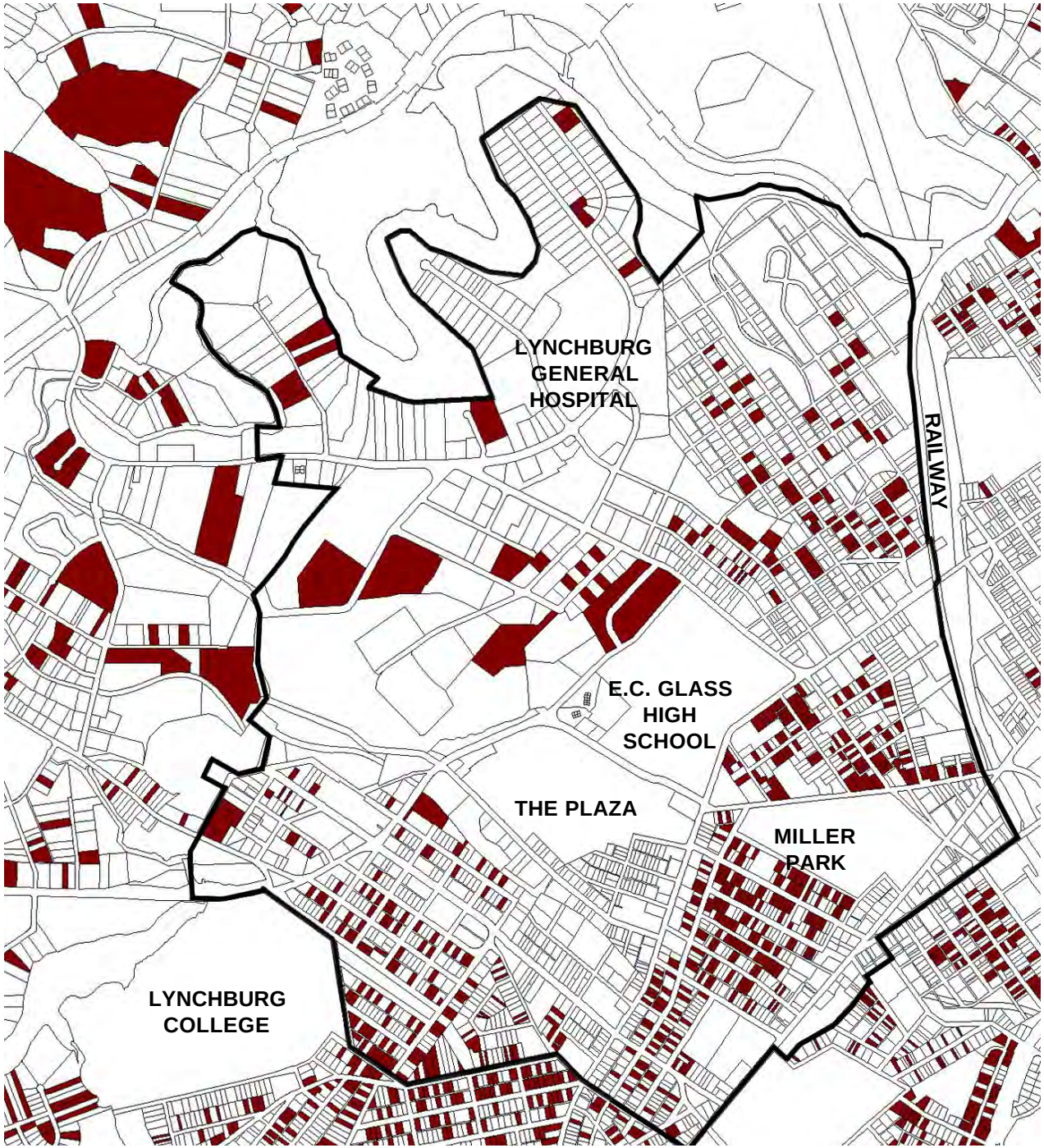
Midtown Lynchburg has a variety of places of learning which serve the community. This diagram identifies four elementary and secondary schools and one college, Lynchburg College, all located in Midtown.



Zoning

Parcels in Midtown represent a broad spectrum of zoning classifications. The majority of parcels are zoned R-3 (medium density two-family residential district), while business districts are interspersed.

- B1
- B2
- B3
- B4
- B5
- B6
- I1
- I2
- I3
- R1
- R2
- R3
- R4
- R5
- RC

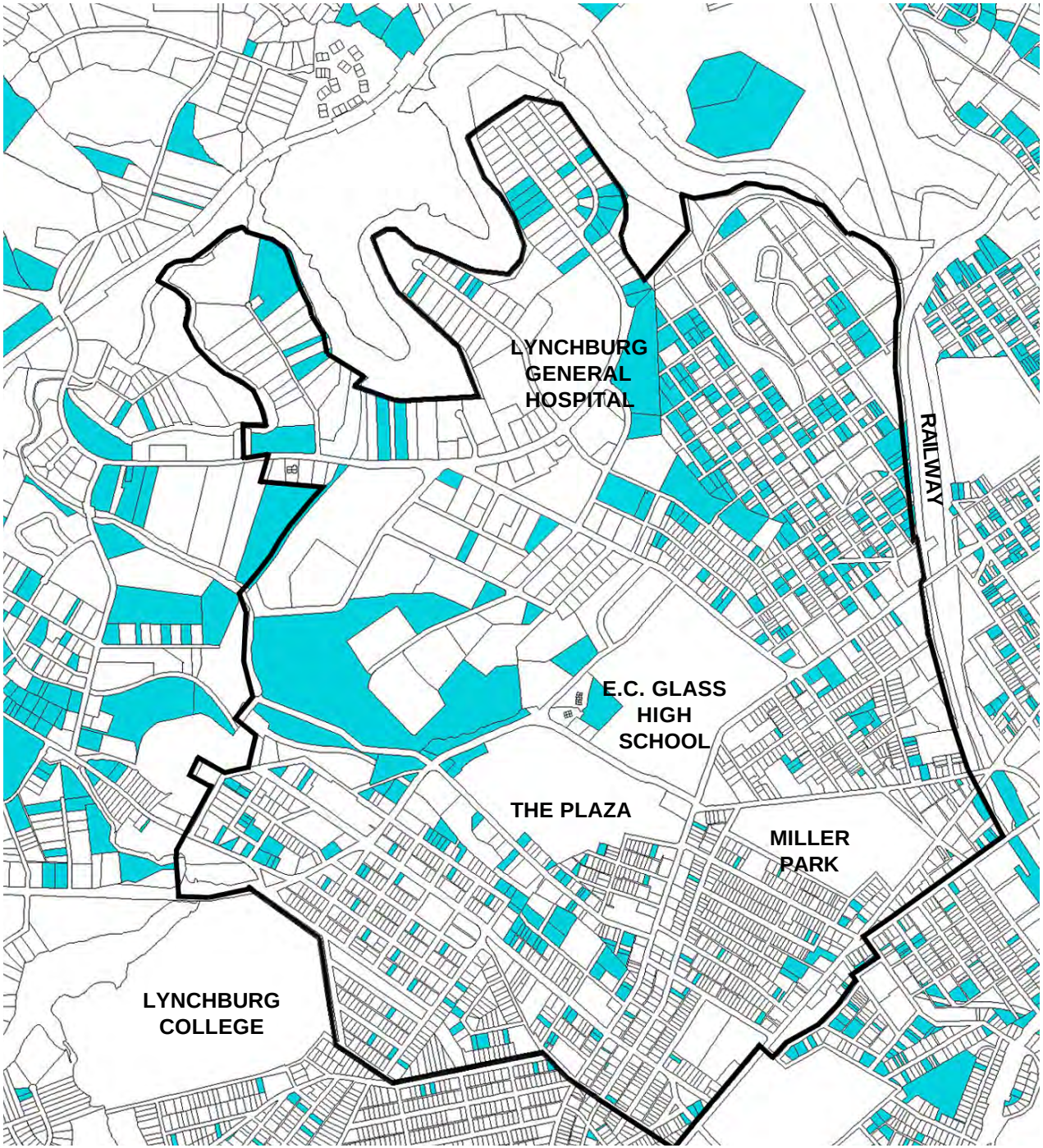


Owner and Renter Occupied

Midtown Lynchburg contains a mix of owner and rental occupied single family housing. The neighborhoods surrounding Miller Park show a “piano key” pattern of owner occupied housing interspersed with rental units.

Rental Property

Owner Occupied

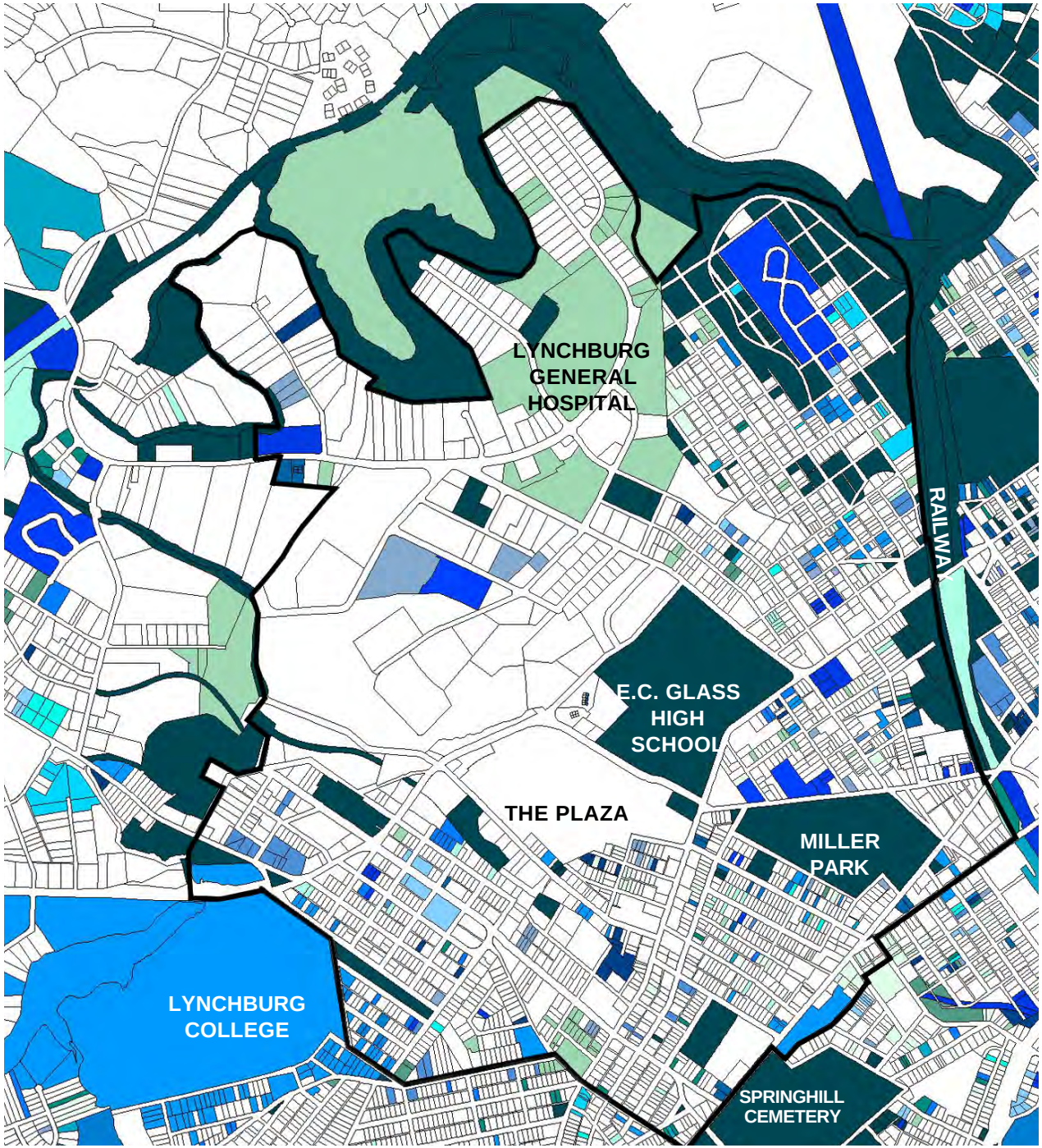


Vacant Parcels

Based on GIS data provided by the City, the parcels noted in blue are classified as currently being vacant. These properties represent opportunity sites for infill development.

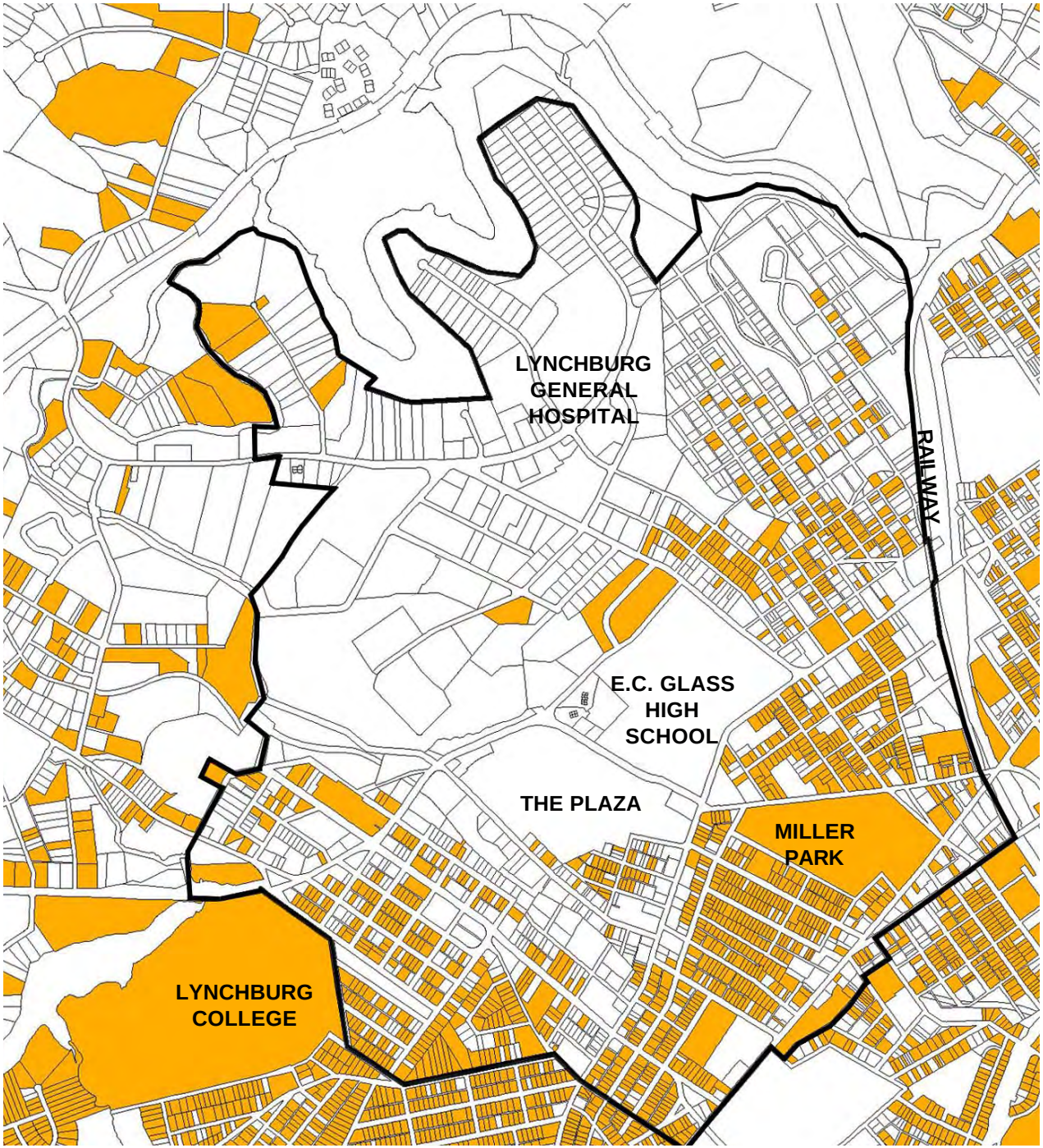
Vacant

Occupied



Property Ownership (5 or more parcels)

The property ownership diagram highlights multiple properties owned by the same landowners. The purpose of this diagram is to identify any large assemblies of land where substantial infill development could occur.

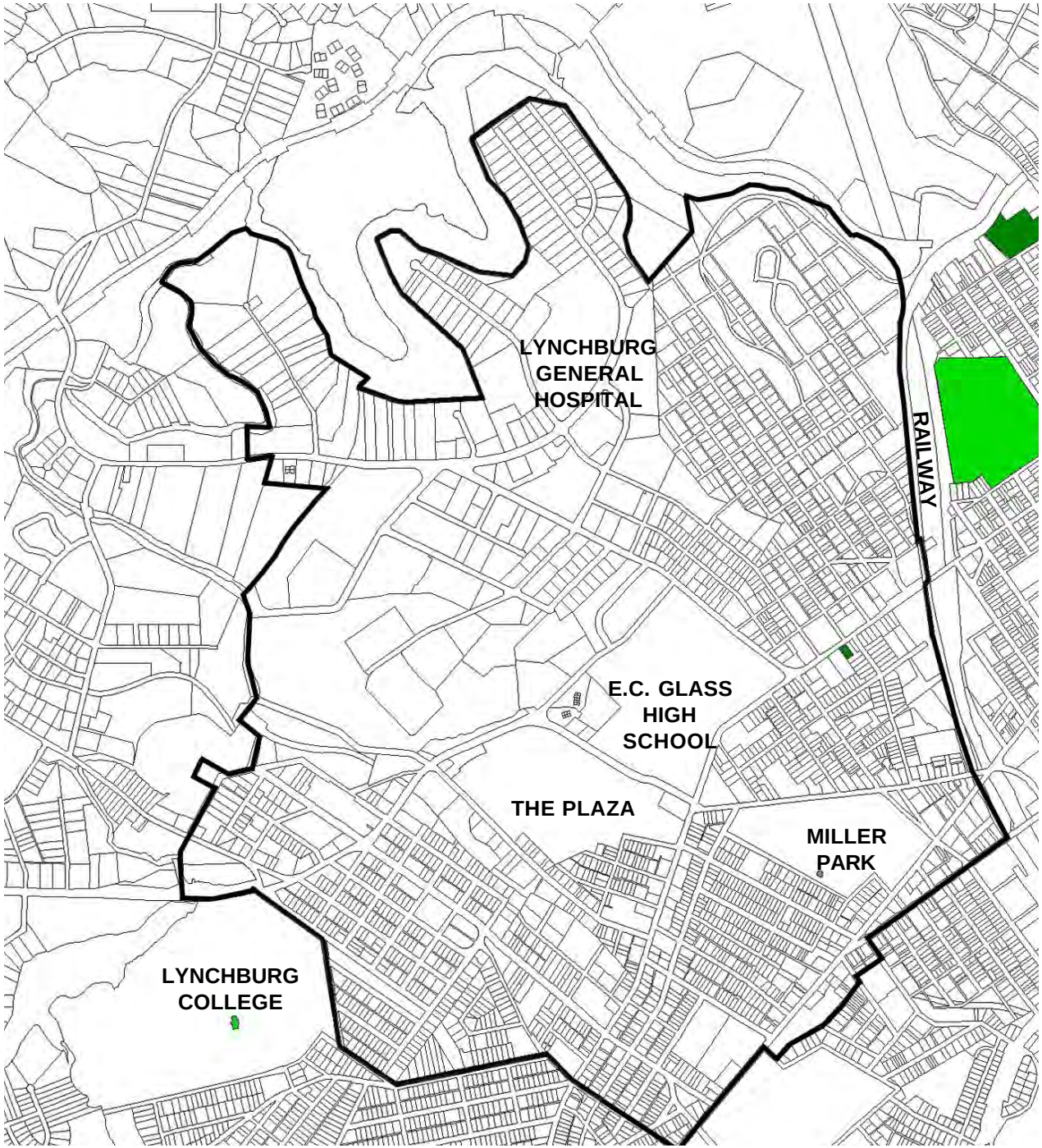


Building Construction

The housing and building stock of Midtown Lynchburg is fairly old. A majority of properties located within the study area were built prior to 1950. This analysis reveals the opportunities for historic preservation, as well as rehabilitation or redevelopment based on building conditions.

Built before 1950

Built after 1950



Historic Districts

The parcels delineated in shades of green are those which are designated in either a city or state historic district. Based on the previous diagram of building construction, Midtown contains a large number of buildings built prior to 1950. The age, quality, and character of the architecture is of real value; it can be guaranteed and preserved for generations to come through historic district designation. For this reason, the establishment of one or many historic districts should be considered for Midtown's neighborhoods.

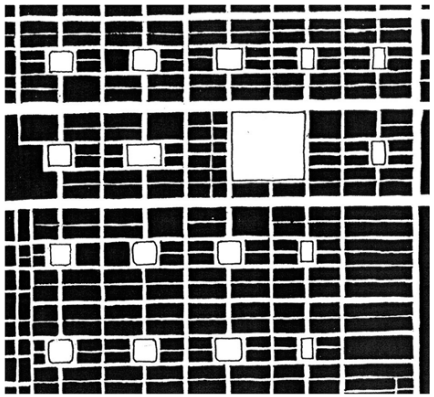
Local Historic District

State/National Historic District

Scale Comparisons

These scale comparisons helped the planners and community participants to better understand the scale of Midtown in relation to other great places. Below is the Plaza at the same scale as other well known towns and universities. The scale comparisons give light to the great development possibilities that could be achieved on the Plaza site.

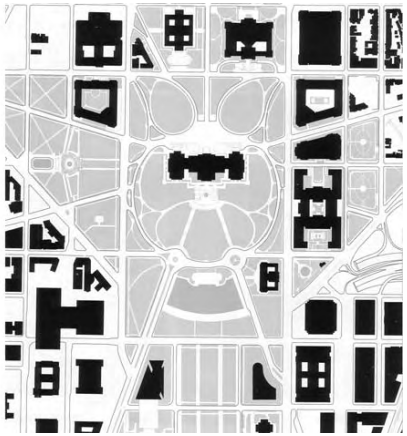
The Plaza



Savannah, GA

Colonial Williamsburg, VA

The Plaza

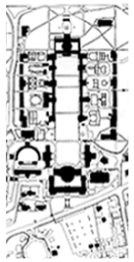


Credit: Ayers Saint Gross

The Mall, Washington, D.C.

Credit: Ayers Saint Gross

Virginia Tech Drill Field



Credit: Ayers Saint Gross

University of Virginia Lawn

PRELIMINARY ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

At the start of the planning process UrbanAdvisors, urban economists, reviewed the economic components of the City of Lynchburg 2002-2020 Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Master Plan, and supporting documents previously produced by Economic Research Associates (ERA). Supplementary data on the City of Lynchburg and the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) were collected and reviewed. UrbanAdvisors assisted with stakeholder interviews during the March and April 2005 site visits to better understand resident and business concerns and incorporate local intelligence.

The City's Comprehensive Plan 2002-2020 observes that new housing in the surrounding counties has been growing at a greater rate than in the City. One explanation suggested by a local real estate professional is that there is an insufficient supply of adequate middle-income housing available in the City. This observation is supported by the larger proportion of low and high-income households captured by the City and the lower proportion of middle-income households (see Table 1.1 and 1.2). Together, this suggests that there is latent demand for quality middle income housing opportunities close to amenities in the City, including the Midtown Area. The new neighborhood of Wyndhurst and the Downtown loft units prove that there is a market for new housing types in Lynchburg for middle and upper income resident who choose to live in neighborhoods designed as traditional urban developments.

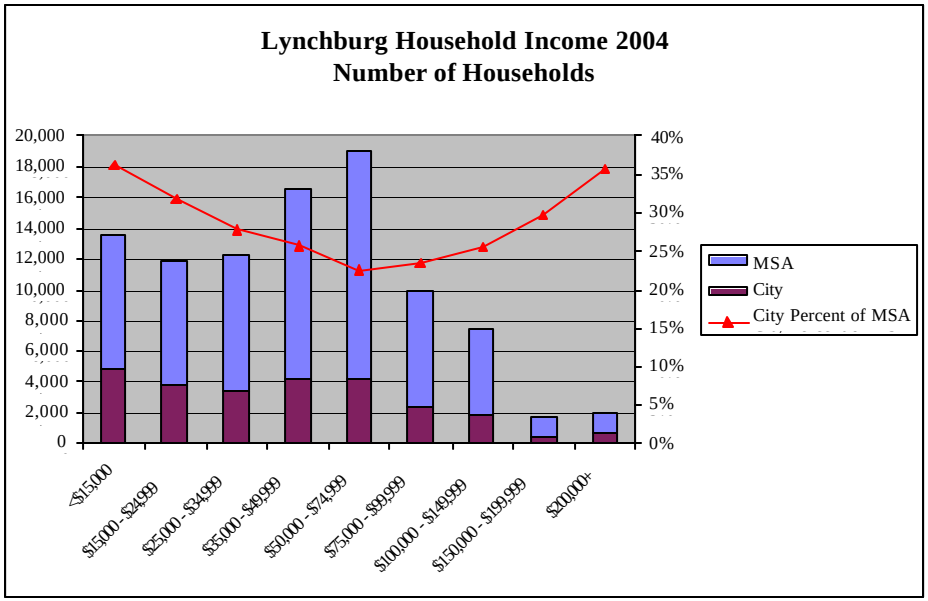


Table 1.1 Demographic trends for both the city and MSA suggest growth in the number of households with incomes over $100,000 annually. (Source: ESRI BIS, and UrbanAdvisors Ltd)

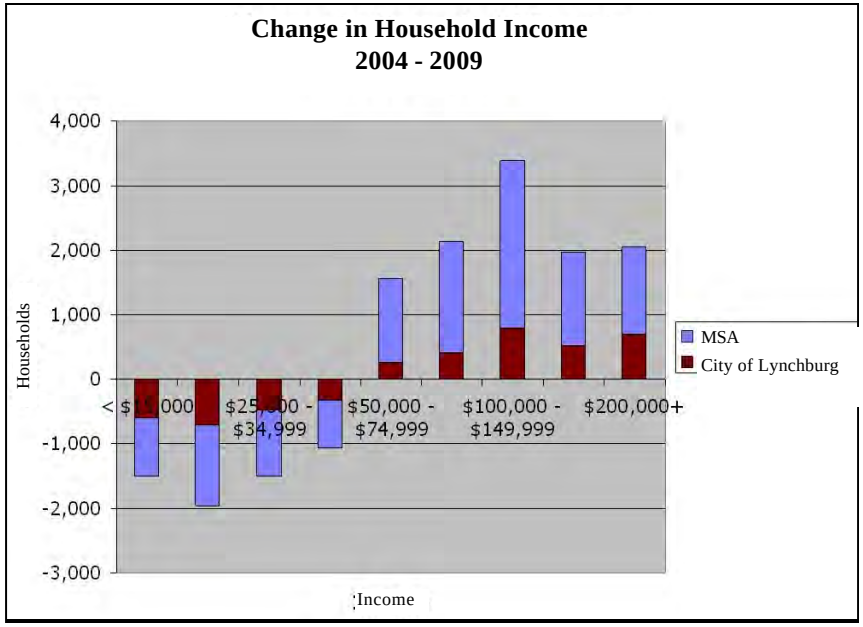


Table 1.2 Household incomes are increasing in the MSA and within the City, however the majority of households with higher incomes are locating outside of the City. This shows that there is a gap in the Lynchburg housing market where increased housing options and opportunities could attract a wider range of households. (Source: ESRI BIS, and UrbanAdvisors Ltd)