DRAFT

Jefferson Avenue Corridor Plan: Existing Conditions Memo

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Overview of Project and Memo: How redevelopment is framed as repair

The Jefferson Avenue Corridor Plan seeks to identify a vision for future investment and propose zoning modifications for implementing that vision, with a focus on the corridor's key underutilized industrial parcels. The goal of the project is to guide new development spurred by proximity to downtown Salem, the buildout of the Salem Bike Path, and the construction of a new commuter rail stop in South Salem.

The corridor is part of the South River watershed and is increasingly vulnerable to flooding, underscoring the link between environmental conditions and community well-being. This plan takes an approach that centers the relationship between people and land, recognizing how that relationship has shaped the corridor over time. This history, coupled with data and mapping analyses, will inform a community vision for the corridor. In this lens, redevelopment is framed not as a narrow technical task but as a broader effort to reconnect land, water, and community, and to prioritize repair as a central planning value. For MAPC, "repair" means that growth and development in the corridor should bring community together, bolster small businesses and local jobs, and work with water and land, not against.

This memo presents MAPC's analyses of existing conditions along the corridor. It considers these conditions not only as physical facts but as the result of layered histories, cultural practices, and environmental changes that connect people and place. The process of putting together this memo included several research activities:

- Reviewing previous planning efforts affecting the Jefferson Avenue study area
- Interviews with key stakeholders along the corridor
- Conducting a site visit and guided tour with the City of Salem
- Examining the historical and community contexts that have shaped the area
- Analyzing land use patterns, transportation infrastructure, and environmental considerations

The findings highlight how land and community have shaped one another and how that relationship frames opportunities and constraints for future investment and will inform the next two phases of the project. MAPC will develop a vision, recommendations, and a regulatory framework for the Jefferson Avenue corridor during these phases.

The work ahead recognizes that growth is possible and needed, but lessons from the past and what's currently happening must shape it. Future development should focus on repair and reconnection so that investment strengthens relationships between people, land, and the South River rather than repeating cycles of displacement or erasure.

Community Context: Where Lived Experience Meets Mapped Boundaries

Study Area

MAPC defined a study area surrounding the Jefferson Avenue corridor as both a physical landscape and a lived environment. Outlined in black in Figure 1, it comprises 568 parcels, almost 830 dwelling units, 210 businesses, and about 1,111 workers. Approximately one-third of all the land in the study area is residential. The study area also encompasses segments of the South River, where changes to its course and visibility continue to shape neighborhood conditions and vulnerabilities.

MAPC identified 15 US Census Block Groups within or surrounding the study area to situate Jefferson Avenue within a larger demographic context. In selecting these block groups, MAPC was particularly interested in understanding nearby populations that could be affected by future changes along the corridor. As highlighted in Figure 1, 11 out of 15 of the Census Block Groups are considered environmental justice (EJ) block groups.

The River as Presence

The present-day conditions of the Jefferson Avenue corridor are rooted in a long history of interaction between people, land, and the South River. The river has carried indigenous mishoons, cargo, and stormwater. It has marked boundaries, linked neighborhoods, and absorbed the impacts of mills, wharves, railroads, and culverts. Each of these layers reshaped where people lived, worked, and gathered. What was once a fishing ground became a trade route, later an industrial channel, and finally a buried drain. Even where it is covered, the South River continues to move beneath streets and buildings, visible in the FEMA floodplain maps and in the way it drains two-thirds of Salem. Because the South River is hidden from view, many residents no longer perceive a river here at all, treating its absence as the ordinary condition of the place.

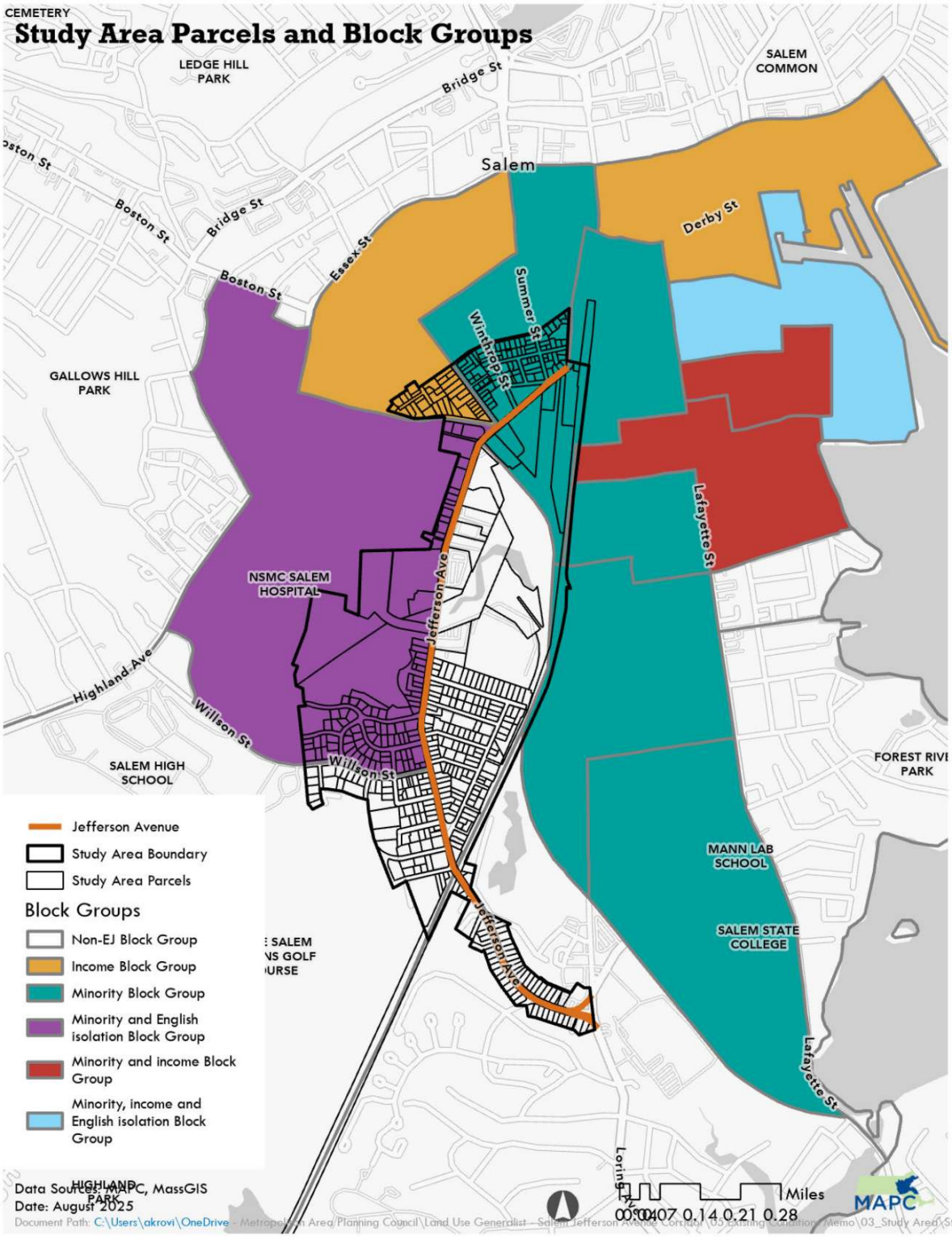


Figure 1: Census block groups along Jefferson Avenue show how the study area intersects with neighborhood life, revealing concentrations of households and community conditions. Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Survey, 2019-2023

Who lives here?

Demographics in the block groups within or surrounding the study area, calculated from the US Census Bureau 2019-2023 5-Year American Community Survey, reveal more than numbers. They show how people live with housing costs, language access, mobility, and intergenerational needs. These lived conditions set the stage for how redevelopment choices will either deepen or repair existing pressures:

- Block groups within or surrounding the study area ("the study area population") include roughly 20,000 residents, with 25% identifying as Hispanic/Latino (34% in EJ block groups), reflecting immigrant communities that continue to shape the corridor.
- Residents who speak Spanish as a first language make up 16% of the study area population, and 24% of non-English speakers report limited English. This affects how people can participate in civic and community life in an area where planning, signage, and decision-making often respond unevenly to different languages.
- Low-income households make up 28% of the study area population, and 5 of 15 block groups meet EJ income criteria. This shows how economic vulnerability concentrates in the corridor.
- Children and older adults are equally present, with 16% of residents under 18 and 16% over 65 in the study area population, showing overlapping generational needs for safety, care, and opportunity.
- Students also shape neighborhood life with 13% of residents enrolled in college or graduate school within the study area population, linking the corridor to broader educational networks.
- Commuters who do not use a car represent 22% of residents in the study area population, relying on walking, biking, or transit in streets that carry both connection and risk.
- Households facing housing-cost burdens make up 41% of the total households in the study area population, spending 30% or more of their income on housing. Families live with tradeoffs as costs consume resources needed for stability.
- Renters make up 56% of households in the study area population. Of these, 48% are rent-burdened (spending more than 30% of their income on rent) and 32% are extremely burdened (spending more than 50% of their income on rent), showing the uncertainty many face in remaining in the community.
- Households including a person with a disability make up 20% of the total households in the study area population, making accessibility and care central to daily experience in homes, streets, and shared spaces.

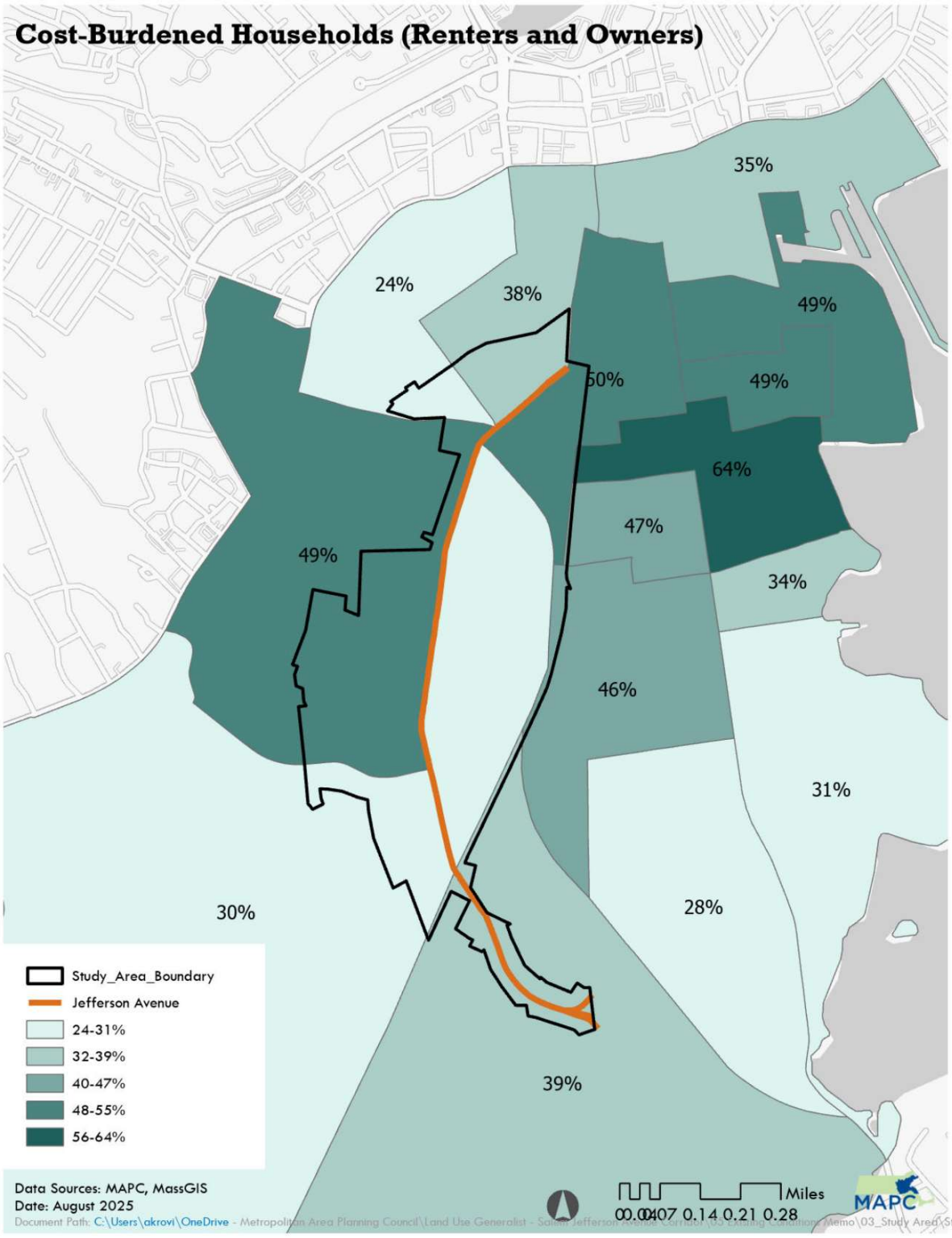


Figure 2: A majority of households along Jefferson Avenue are cost-burdened (meaning 30% or more of a household's income is spent on housing costs), with several block groups exceeding 49 percent. Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Survey, 2019-2023

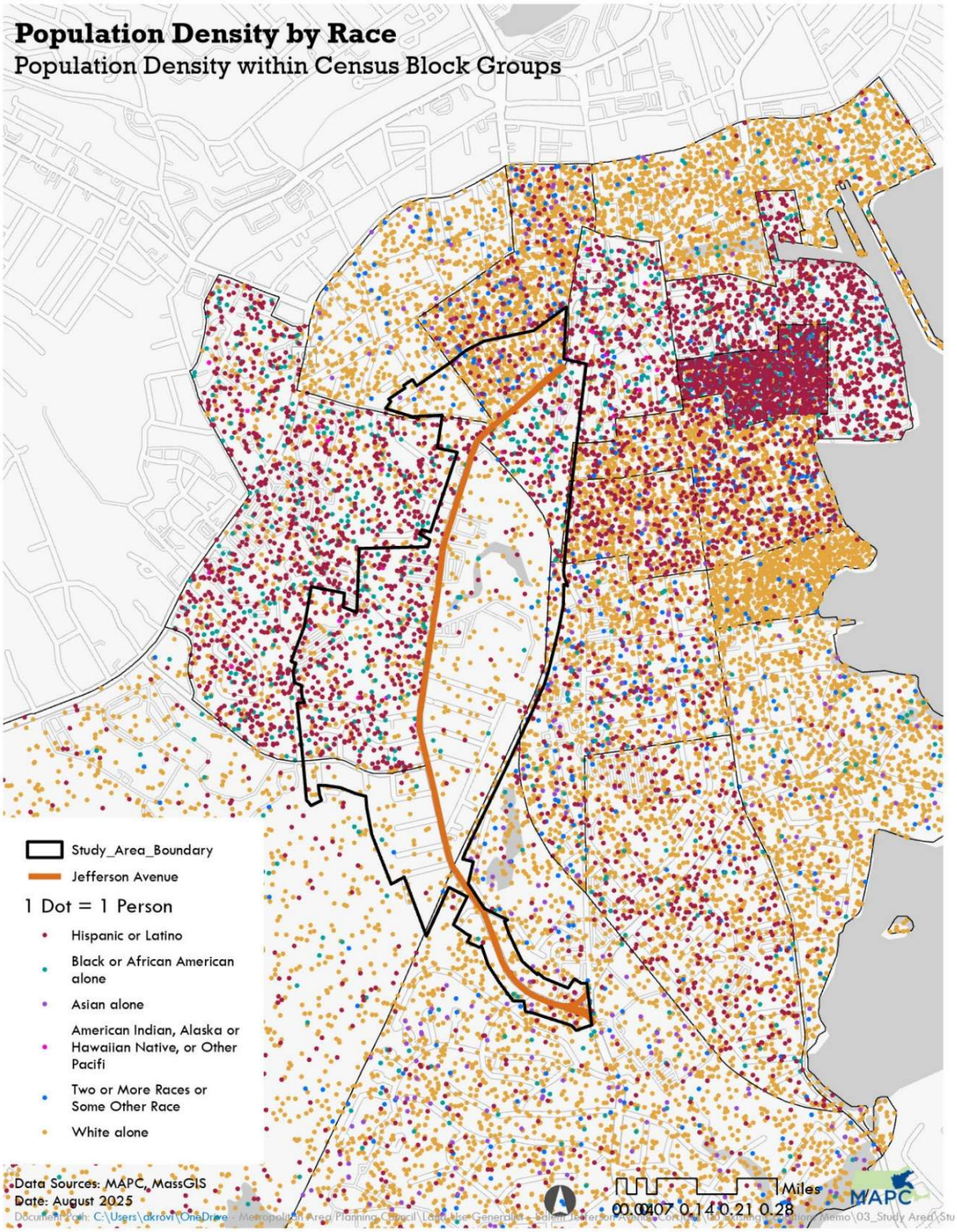


Figure 3: Hispanic/Latino and Black residents are highly concentrated within the Jefferson Avenue corridor compared to surrounding areas. Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Survey,

2019-2023. Note: When dot maps are generated, dots are evenly displaced within a block group. They are not representative of locations within these block groups.

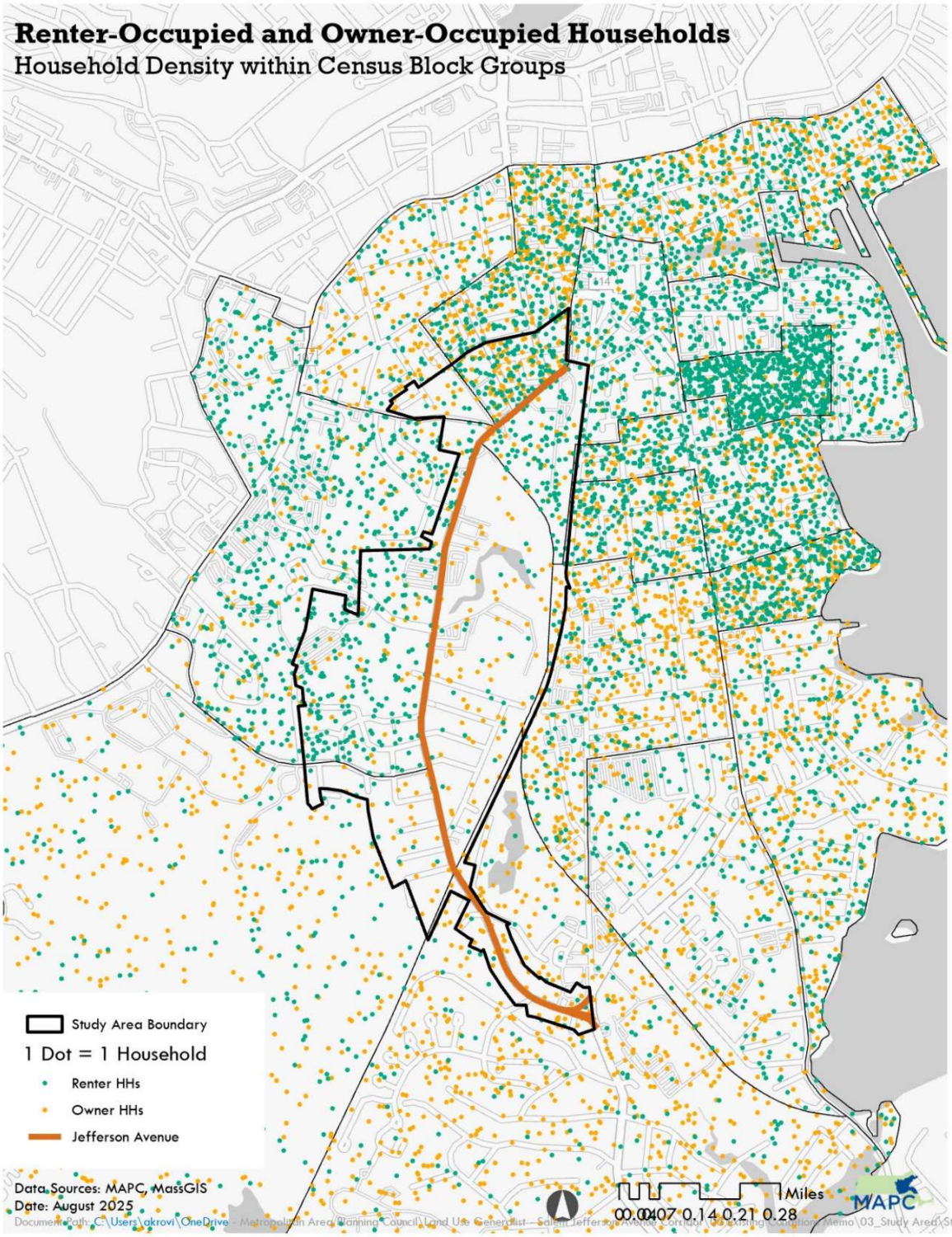


Figure 4: Renters make up most households in the corridor, while owner-occupied homes cluster outside its boundaries. Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey Five-Year Survey, 2019-2023. Note: When dot maps are generated, dots are evenly displaced within a block group. They are not representative of locations within these block groups.

How is land lived in and used?

The conditions of daily life along the corridor are also visible in how the land is used. As Table 1 shows, most parcels in the study area are residential, with nearly half in single-family homes and another third in two- and three-family homes. Because these parcels tend to be smaller, residential uses only make up ~37% of the land within the study area. Within residential uses, apartments and condominiums make up only a small share, which limits the range of housing options available. These small residential lots anchor the corridor in community, even as larger industrial parcels pull land toward uses that feel less connected to community life.

Table 1: How Land Holds People and Purpose

Category	Use	Number of Parcels	% of Number of Parcels	% of Land within Study Area Parcels
Residential	Single Family Home	267	47%	21.6%
	Two or Three Family Home	167	29%	10.7%
	Apartments with Four or more homes	14	2%	1.0%
	Condominium	30	5%	2.5%
	Residential Other	5	1%	0.4%
	Residential Vacant	7	1%	0.5%
Residential Total		**490**	**86%**	**36.6%**
Mixed-Use	Mixed Use	2	0%	0.2%
Mixed Use Total		**2**	**0%**	**0.2%**
Commercial	Commercial	37	7%	25.9%
	Commercial Vacant	5	1%	1.4%
Commercial Total		**42**	**8%**	**27.3%**
Industrial	Industrial	7	1%	17.7%
	Industrial Vacant	1	0%	2.5%
Industrial Total		**8**	**1%**	**20.2%**
	Federal State or Municipal	7	1%	2.6%

Vacant, Public, and Open Space	Institutional or Tax Exempt	8	1%	4.6%
	Municipal Vacant	11	2%	8.6%
Vacant, Public and Open Space Total		**26**	**4%**	**15.8%**
Total		**568**	**100%**	**100%**

Caption: Residential uses make up 86% of parcels and 37% of land within the study area, while commercial, industrial, and public lands are limited in number but carry disproportionate influence on daily life along the corridor. Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database

Within this overall pattern, residential space is also divided. As Figure 5 shows, the corridor's homes are split into two clusters separated by commercial and industrial parcels. The northern cluster, part of the Broad Street neighborhood, contains denser housing and fewer single-family lots than the southern cluster. As Figure 3 and Figure 4 highlight, the northern area is also home to more BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) residents and renters. It is also where historic Free Black communities were displaced and where the later Little Italy neighborhood experienced community loss under urban renewal.

These differences in housing density and lot size matter because small residential parcels overwhelmingly shape the corridor, while a handful of nonresidential lots influence its character and risks in disproportionate ways, given their size and use. Zoning ordinances often diverge from these lived conditions, casting homes as nonconforming. Of the 490 parcels with a residential land use, only 12 meet the minimum lot sizes for R1 and R2 zoning districts. This makes 97.5% of all residential lots non-conforming, higher than the 91% seen across the City of Salem.

Taken together, these patterns underscore not only how the corridor's built form has been shaped but also how disparities are distributed within it. When considering where new housing opportunities should occur, the central question becomes who within the corridor is asked to bear that change and how existing inequities might be either reinforced or addressed through mitigation and community benefits.

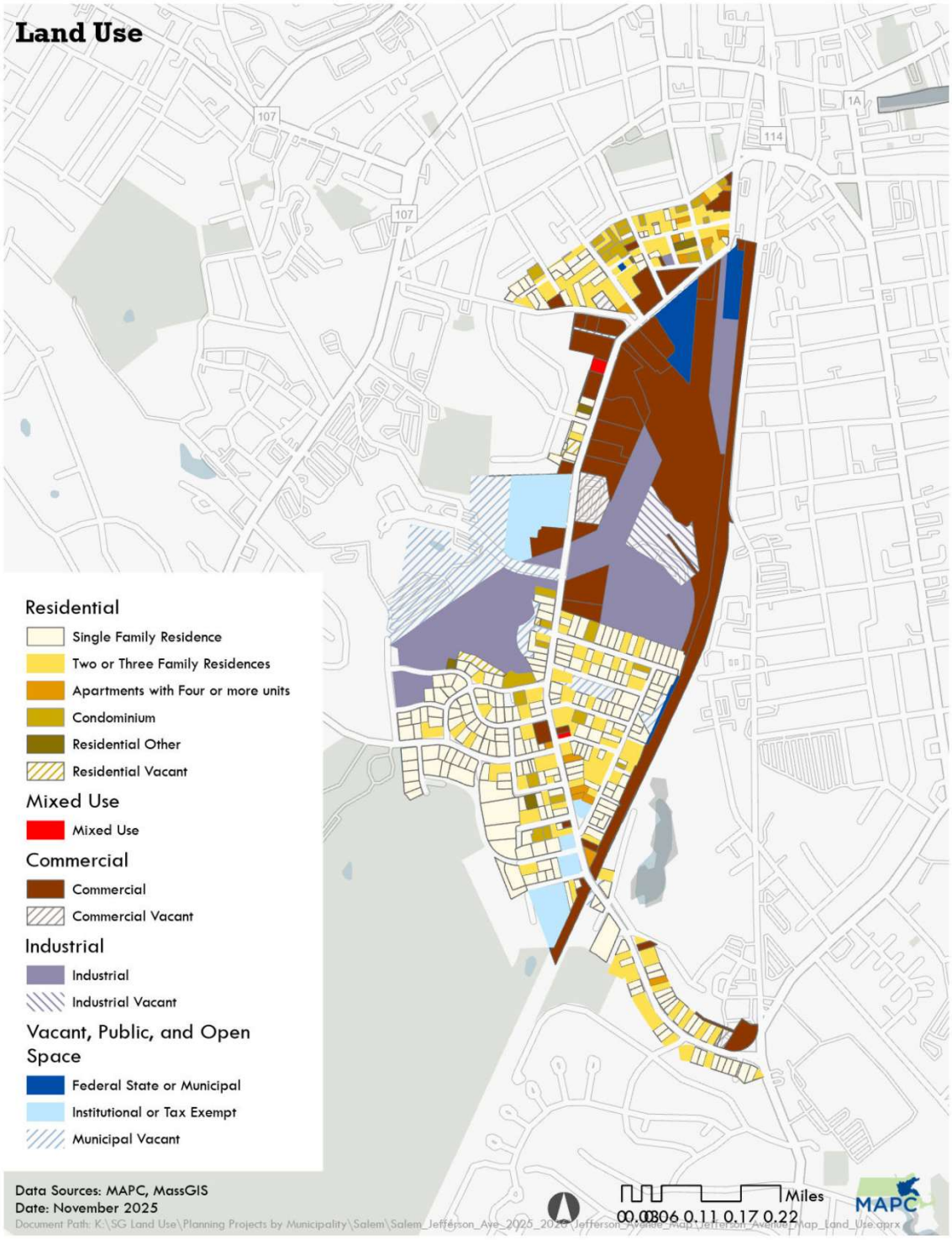
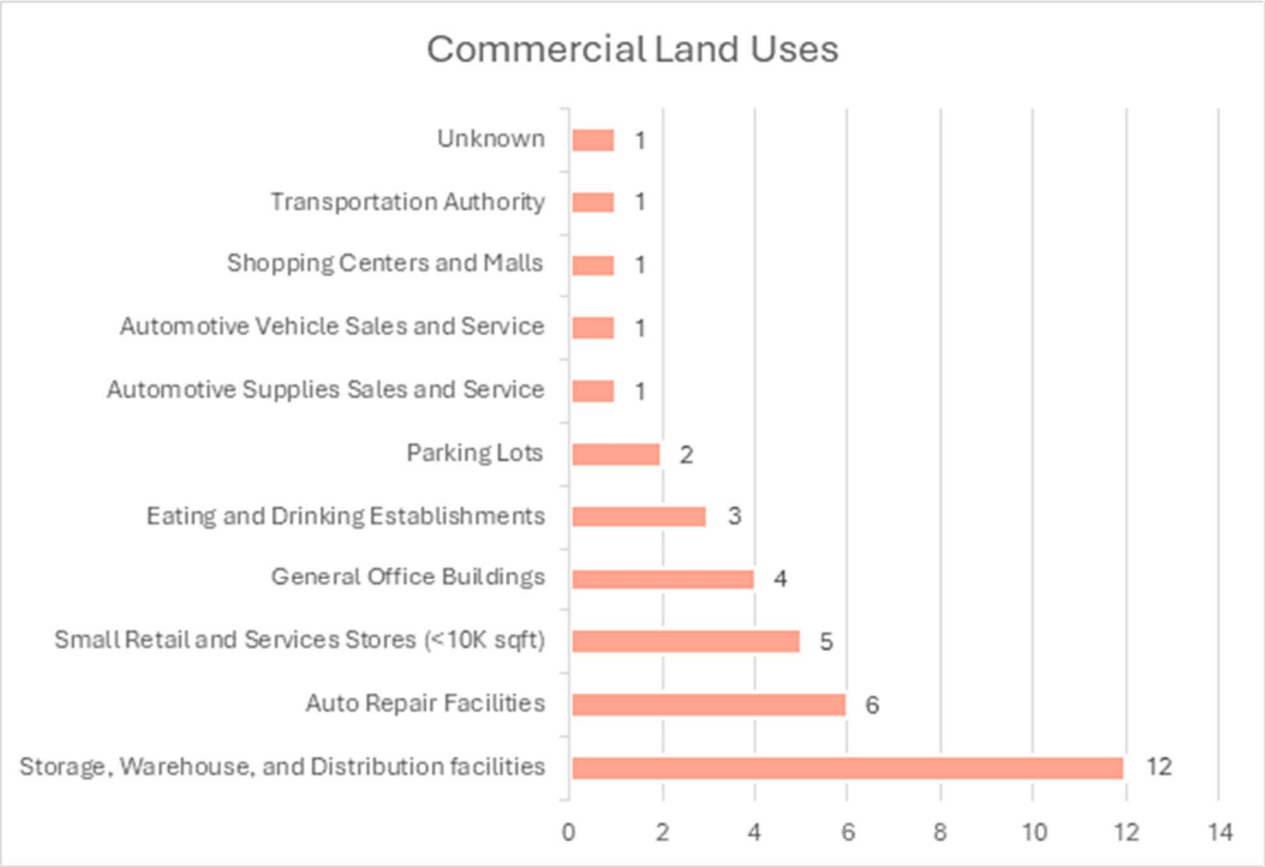


Figure 5: The land use map shows how daily life for residents is rooted in small residential lots, while larger parcels for parking (marked "Municipal Vacant") and commercial and industrial parcels shape ownership, work, and development in disproportionate ways. Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database

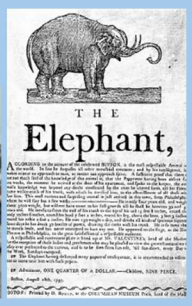
A cluster of 42 commercial and 8 industrial parcels exerts an influence far beyond their number, shaping employment options, traffic patterns, and redevelopment pressures across the corridor. Nearly one-third of all commercial parcels are warehouses or distribution facilities, extending a long history of land devoted to commercial circulation patterns (see Table 2). Yet within the same streets, small businesses and restaurants provide spaces that anchor the corridor in daily experience.

Table 2: What Commercial Uses Fill the Corridor?



Caption: Warehouses and auto parcels dominate, while shops and restaurants remain part of the corridor's fabric. Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database

Circus Lane Antiques, 10 Jefferson Avenue



This commercial parcel houses Circus Lane Antiques, a vintage shop that connects to Salem's history in both name and symbol. The shop recalls "Circus Lane," once a path bordering rented fields where circuses set up their tents, later renamed Hathorne Street in 1841. Its logo honors Old Bet, the first elephant brought to the United States through Salem's maritime trade in 1796. By drawing on these stories of spectacle and exchange, the business weaves Salem's past into its present role. As a commercial space, Circus Lane transforms retail into a point of cultural connection, offering antiques, salvage, and craft while anchoring community life along Jefferson Avenue. Better design of this lot can further enhance the commercial spaces housed within it and better contribute to livability of the corridor.

Mixed-use parcels are rare but telling. At 247 Jefferson Avenue, a convenience store and apartments share the same building, while at 42 Jefferson Avenue, homes sit beside an auto body shop. These juxtapositions reflect the lived reality of the corridor, where work and residence overlap even when zoning discourages it. Despite mixed-use parcels being rare, corner store "neighborhood commercial" alongside residential properties give parts of the corridor a mixed-use feel.

Figure 6: This mixed-use building at 27 Jefferson Avenue holds both a neighborhood convenience store and apartments, tying work, commerce, and residence together under one roof.

While only eight parcels have industrial land use, they comprise 20% of the study area. Five serve as electric rights-of-way or substations, while two large tracts host Amazon, including distribution facilities and parking lots along the wetlands. The remaining parcel at 128 Margin Street functions as a warehouse. These sites provide limited local employment but command large tracts of land, continuing the pattern of treating the South River's filled basin as ground for storage and utilities.

Lastly, around 4% of parcels and 16% of land within the study area are vacant, public, or open space land use. Of these parcels, around 56% are classified as by the State as "municipal vacant", meaning they are municipally-owned but not developed. As Figure 5 shows, "municipal vacant" includes city-owned land that is currently being used by the hospital (through an easement) for parking lots.

Who owns the land?

Ownership adds another layer to these characteristics. Roughly 80 percent of properties in the study area are owned by individuals or entities based in Salem, but these are primarily the small residential parcels that make up the majority of the corridor's housing stock (see Figure 7). This pattern reflects strong local ties, where most homeowners and landlords are part of the Salem community itself. Housing conditions are therefore tied directly to decisions made by neighbors rather than distant investors. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show a different story for the largest parcels. Many industrial tracts, utility corridors, and institutional holdings are controlled by owners outside Salem or even Massachusetts (with exception to parcels owned by the City of Salem, such as the police station and DPW facility, and the MBTA parcels, shown in Figure 8). These larger parcels carry far more weight in shaping land use and redevelopment potential than the smaller residential lots, yet they may be the least locally anchored. Both, by virtue of their large parcel sizes and the presence of Activity Use Limitations (shown in Figure 19) from historical industrial use, inherently carry a greater environmental risk. For planning, this matters because it shows how repair and reconnection will depend not only on supporting local households but also on engaging with large-scale landholders who have historically treated the corridor as space for industry (including storage and parking) and circulation.

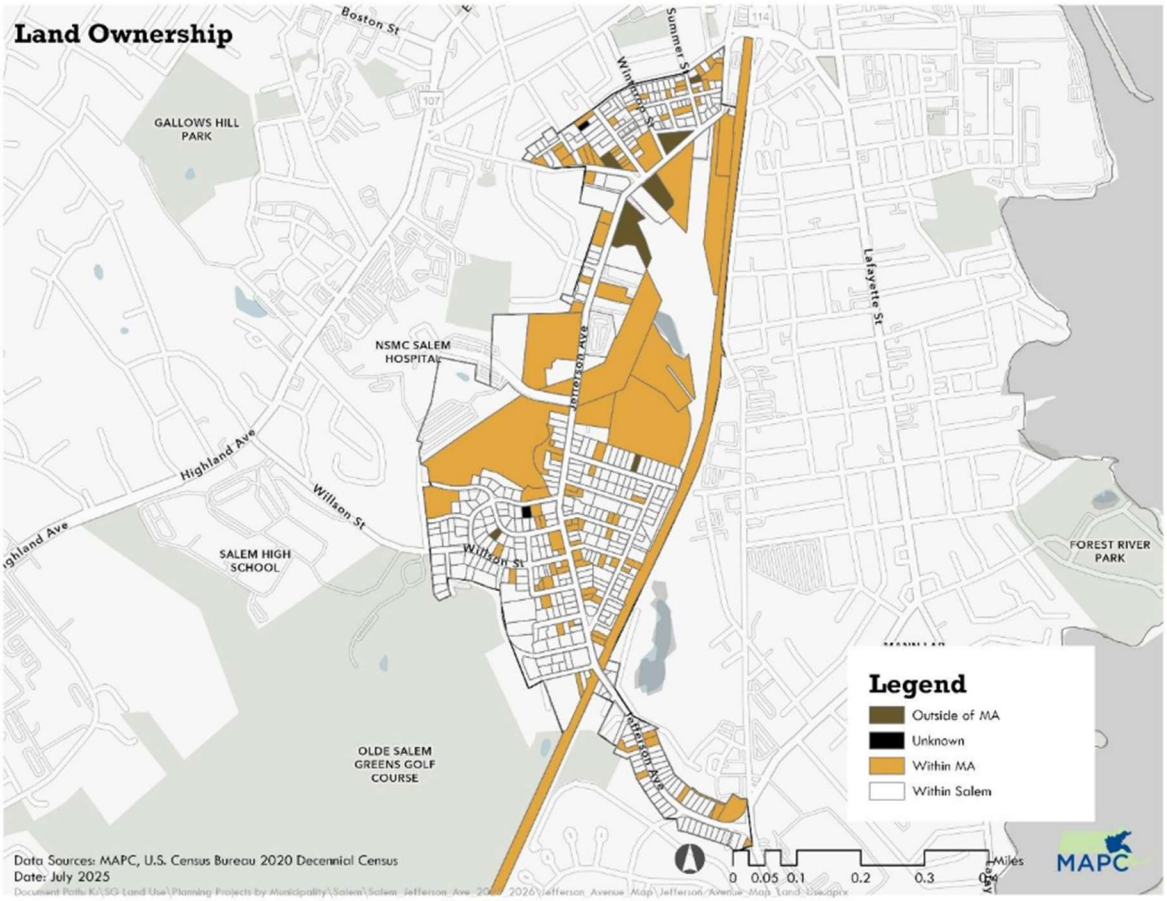


Figure 7: Most parcels are locally owned, but the largest tracts are controlled by owners outside of Salem. It should be noted that many of these parcels are public or quasi-public and including properties such as the Department of Public Works facility, the police station, the MBTA, and Salem Hospital. Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database

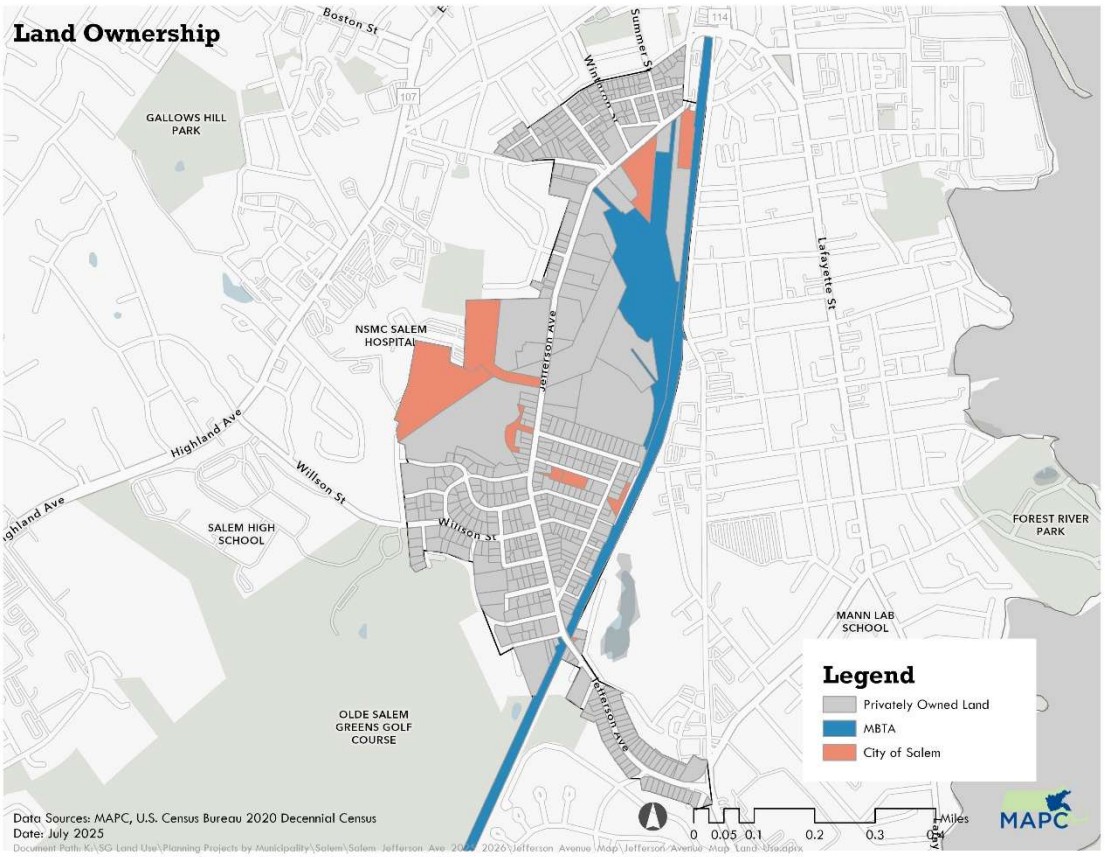


Figure 8: Many of these parcels are public or quasi-public and include properties such as the Department of Public Works facility, the police station, and the MBTA.

How is value assigned?

What appears to be a neutral pattern of valuation reveals how market, land use, and ecological patterns can intersect. In observing normalized land values in Figure 9 (land value per square foot), the larger industrial and commercial parcels are generally lower in value compared to residential parcels within the study area. Residential uses typically command higher normalized land values than the industrial and commercial uses observed along the corridor – industrial land is commonly purchased at lower per-unit costs. On the northern part of the corridor, the industrial and commercial land with lower normalized values overlaps with the floodplain, which also may moderate land values.

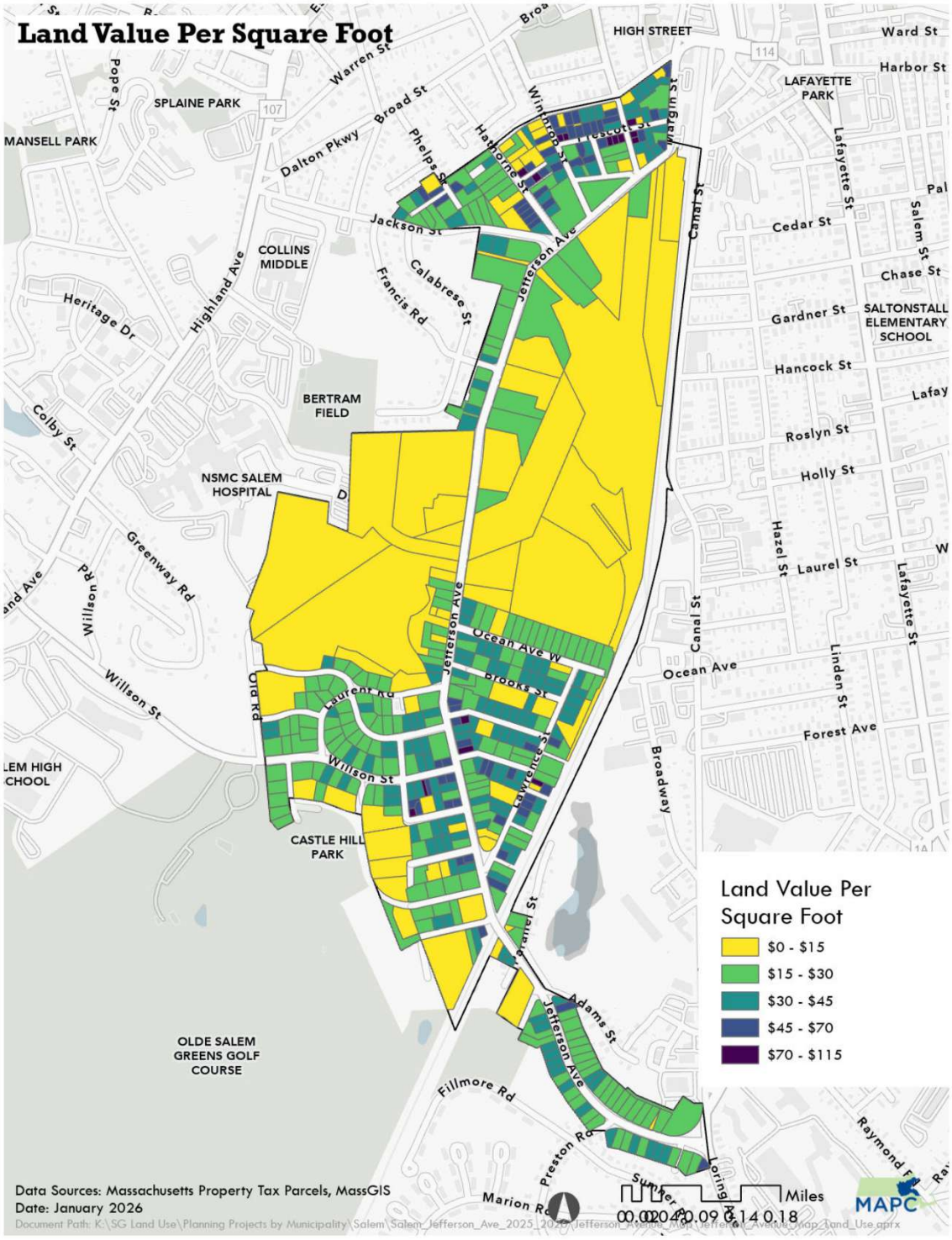


Figure 9: The larger industrial and commercial parcels may have higher land value due to size, but as this map demonstrates, land value per square foot is generally lower relative to parcels in the nearby residential neighborhoods. This map helps us understand patterns of affordability, limitation, and recognition across the corridor. Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database

What are the patterns of work here?

Work and business activity also shape the corridor. About 210 businesses operate within the study area, employing at least one person. Many are very small: 88 percent employ fewer than ten people (Table 5). Around one-fifth of these businesses are classified as "Other" and are tied to daily life activities along the corridor—they include beauty salons, auto repair, religious congregations, and social advocacy organizations. In terms of employment, around 15% of the approximately 1,000 workers in the study area work in Construction. Another 15% work in Public Administration.

The largest parcels tell a different story. Facilities such as the Amazon distribution center and electric substations occupy expansive tracts but they are not large sources of employment in the corridor. Besides the North Shore Medical Center (which is not included in the study area), the employers with the greatest number of staff are more civic or neighborhood-serving in nature—the Salem Police Department with 95 employees, Dube's restaurant with 40, and the Public Works Department with 35. This contrast shows that land footprint and workforce presence do not align neatly. The corridor's economy is layered: locally rooted small businesses and civic institutions make up much of the employment, while other landholders dominate physical space without providing a significant number of jobs. Planning must respond to this imbalance by supporting the viability of small-scale businesses while also accounting for how the largest parcels are used and by whom.

Industry	Number of Businesses	%
Accommodation and Food Services	9	4%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	7	3%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	3	1%
Construction	38	18%
Educational Services	8	4%
Finance and Insurance	5	2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	20	10%
Information	1	0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	3	1%
Manufacturing	6	3%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	1	0%
Miscellaneous	1	0%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	39	19%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	14	7%
Public Administration	7	3%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	12	6%
Retail Trade	19	9%
Transportation and Warehousing	10	5%

Wholesale Trade	7	3%
Grand Total	**210**	**100%**

Table 3: The corridor economy is rooted in construction and neighborhood services, with many businesses directly connected to residents' daily routines and needs. Source: Infogroup, Employment and Business Data, https://www.data-axle.com/

Industry	Number of Employees	%
Accommodation and Food Services	98	9%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	17	2%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	28	3%
Construction	164	15%
Educational Services	51	5%
Finance and Insurance	17	2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	105	9%
Information	12	1%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	11	1%
Manufacturing	40	4%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	1	0%
Miscellaneous	5	0%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	130	12%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	36	3%
Public Administration	163	15%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	62	6%
Retail Trade	87	8%
Transportation and Warehousing	35	3%
Wholesale Trade	49	4%
Grand Total	**1,111**	**100%**

Table 4: The corridor economy is rooted in construction and neighborhood services, with many businesses directly connected to residents' daily routines and needs. Source: Infogroup, Employment and Business Data, https://www.data-axle.com/

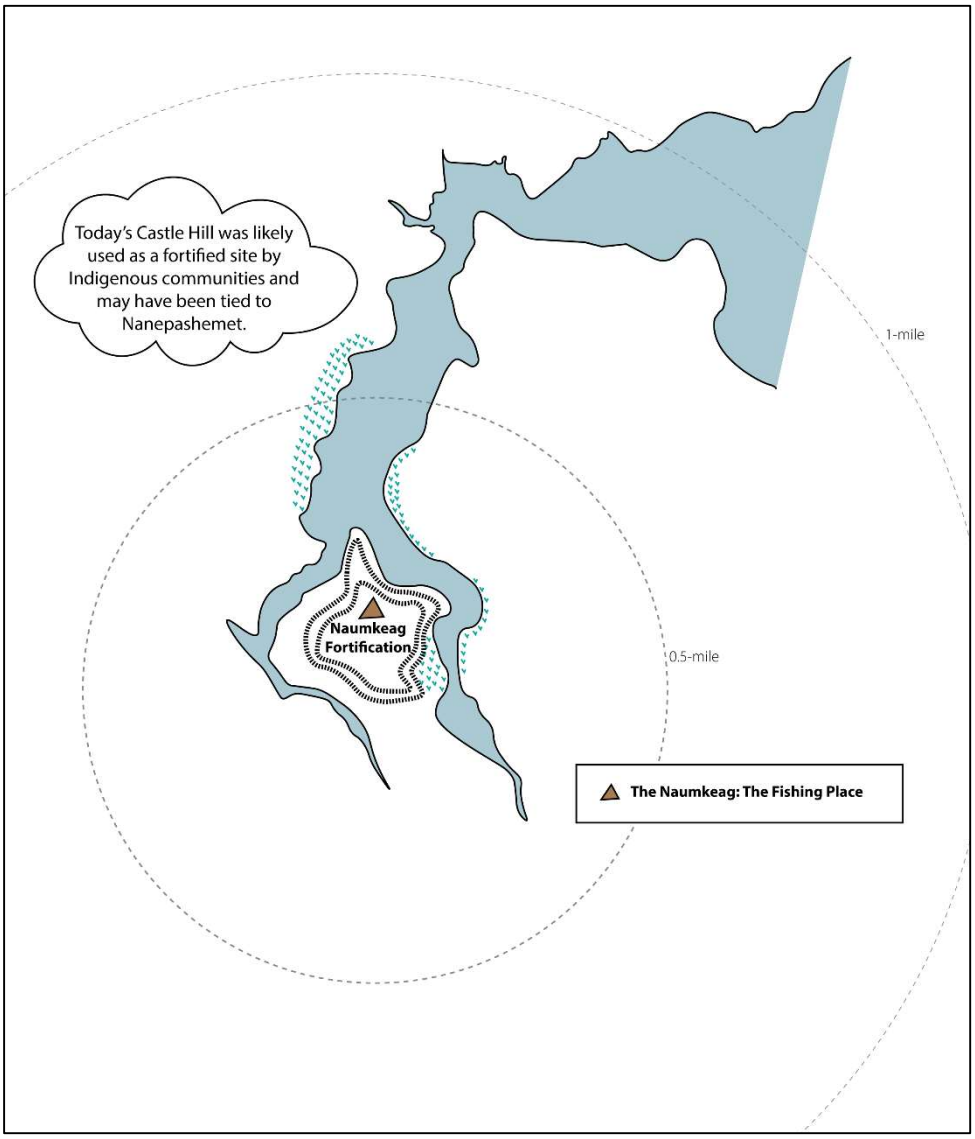
Employee Size	# of Businesses	%
1 - 4	137	65%
5 - 9	48	23%
10 - 19	19	9%
20 - 49	5	2%
50 - 99	1	0%
Grand Total	**210**	**100%**

Table 5: Most businesses are very small, while the largest employers (other than the North Shore Medical Center) are civic or neighborhood-serving, like the Police Station or Dube's. Source: Infogroup, Employment and Business Data, https://www.data-axle.com/

History and Place: What the River Remembers

The following section summarizes how land, community, and the South River historically intersected in the area that today makes up the Jefferson Avenue corridor. Sources for the following content in this section can be found under “Resources”.

The Fishing Place (Precontact): Live with the Rhythm of River



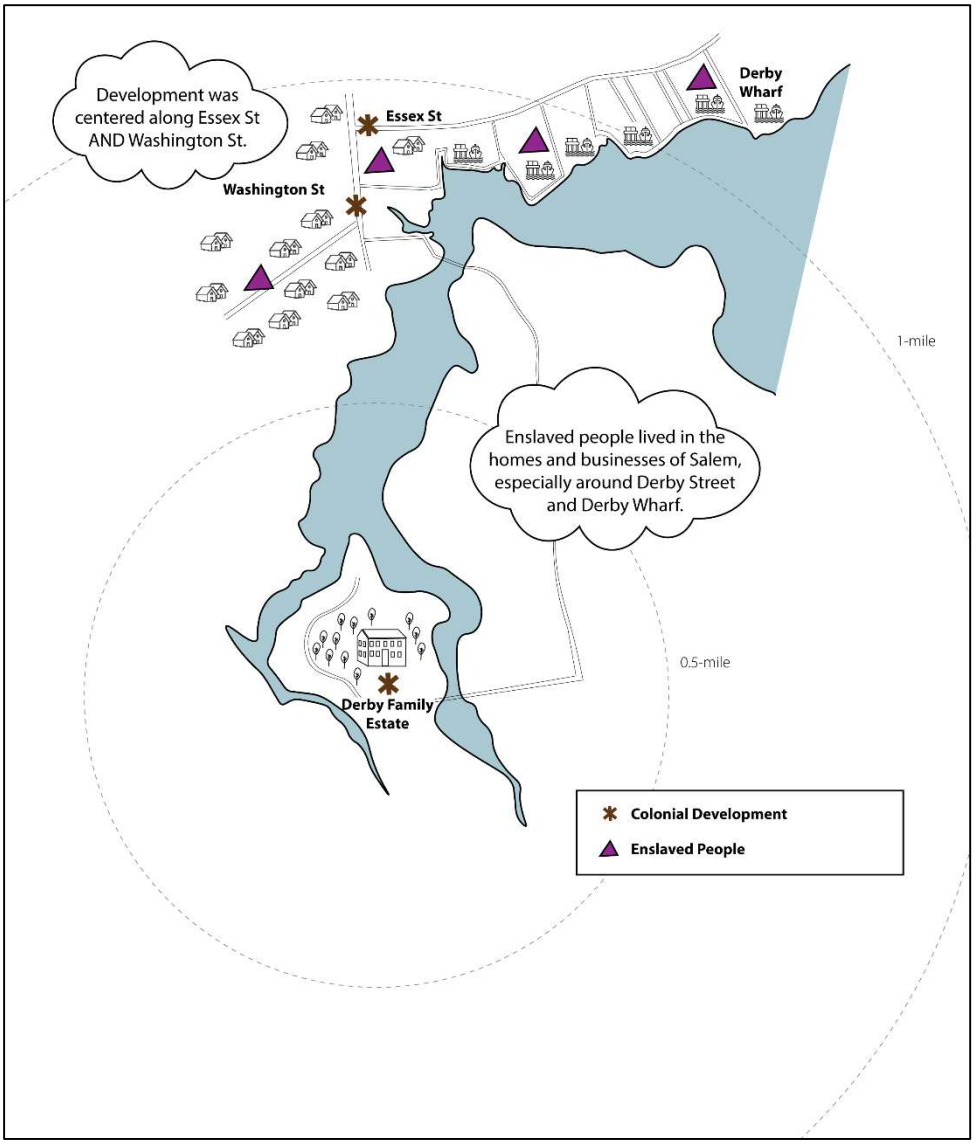
Shaped by the last glaciation, the South River curved around the area called Castle Hill and supported flora and fauna such as fish and shellfish. The area, named “Naumkeag, meaning “fishing place,” was home to Indigenous people who organized their movement, settlement, and seasonal activities in ways that today might be understood as river-centered planning, grounded in relationships with water and seasonal cycles. According to historic documents (see the “Resources” section), the river was a primary transport route,

structuring movement and fishing with its seasonal and tidal rhythms. Indigenous communities practiced a form of what today might be described as resource zoning, building seasonal and permanent shelters by ecological zones to make use of different resources each area offered at different times of year. Research highlights how indigenous communities used Castle Hill's height for protection and wide views, while the river provided food, transport, and a living boundary. The relationship was reciprocal: people observed and cared for the river, and in turn, it sustained their community. This balance began to shift with colonial settlement, which claimed land and resources and displaced Indigenous presence. Yet Castle Hill still defines the edge of the neighborhood, and the river continues to move beneath the city, reminders of a planning tradition grounded in reciprocity that planning today might look to recover.

The Harms of Slavery (1700s)

By the end of the 17th century, the South River had become a hub for transatlantic trade, carrying ships, goods, and enslaved people. In 1637, the Salem-owned vessel *Desire* brought the first Africans taken by force and enslaved into Massachusetts Bay, as part of a trade that sent nineteen Indigenous captives from the Pequot War, including seventeen boys and two women, to be enslaved in the West Indies.

The colonial economy depended on enslaved labor. Enslaved men and women lived in homes and worked in businesses near the waterfront, performing domestic tasks such as cooking and laundry, and maritime tasks such as distilling, ship maintenance, and dock work. Families such as the Derby's, whose farm occupied Castle Hill, relied on enslaved labor to sustain their households and commercial interests.



The Derby family Bible records include the note: “Sabe the black boy was born July 14, 1771. Rose the black girl was born _____.” These entries identify enslaved Africans who lived and labored on Derby family properties, possibly including the summer house on Castle Hill.

Alongside these realities of enslavement, the river was being reshaped to serve the same commercial system. It was engineered, dredged, and treated as infrastructure as wharves, warehouses, and shipyards grew along its edges. Development extended along Essex Street, with Washington Street running from North River to South River and principal wharves along South River. These changes were part of the broader commercial system

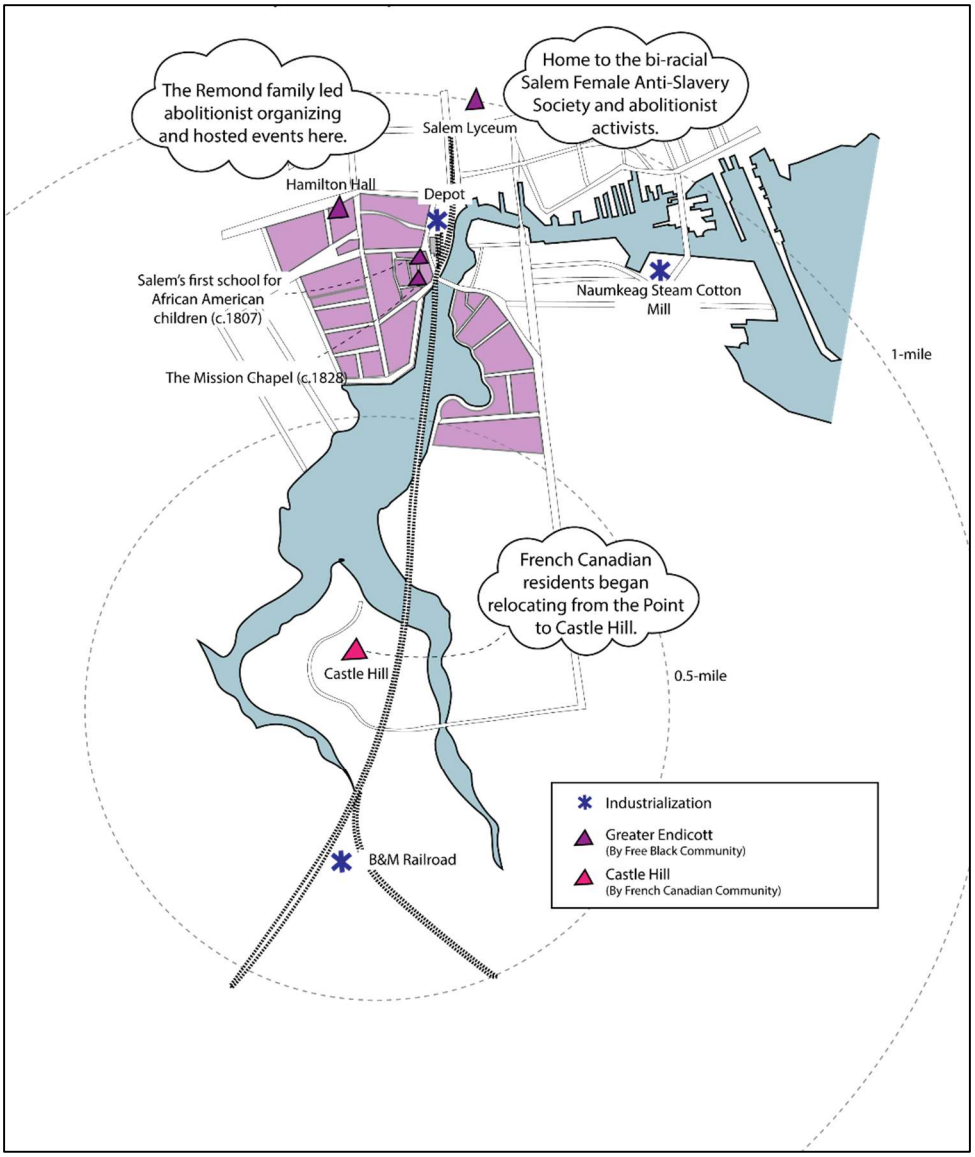
that expanded Salem's shipping, trade, and maritime industries. That expansion relied on both enslaved labor and the growing network of wharves and warehouses along the South River.

This history is rarely recognized, yet it shaped the corridor in lasting ways. Planning today requires naming these erasures and acknowledging the harms done to people and land.

Industrialization (Early 1800s): Up and Down of the Industrial River

By the mid-19th century, the South River had become the city's industrial engine, a working edge where free Black residents and newly arrived immigrant families built lives near the docks and mills that relied on their labor. Portions of the South River and its marshes were deliberately filled to make room for large factories, rail lines, and housing. These changes reshaped the landscape around what is now known as the Greater Endicott neighborhood and Castle Hill, where free Black and immigrant families built their homes. The 1847 construction of the Salem Depot marked the next stage in this transformation, introducing a downtown rail hub that shifted mobility and development toward the railroad economy.

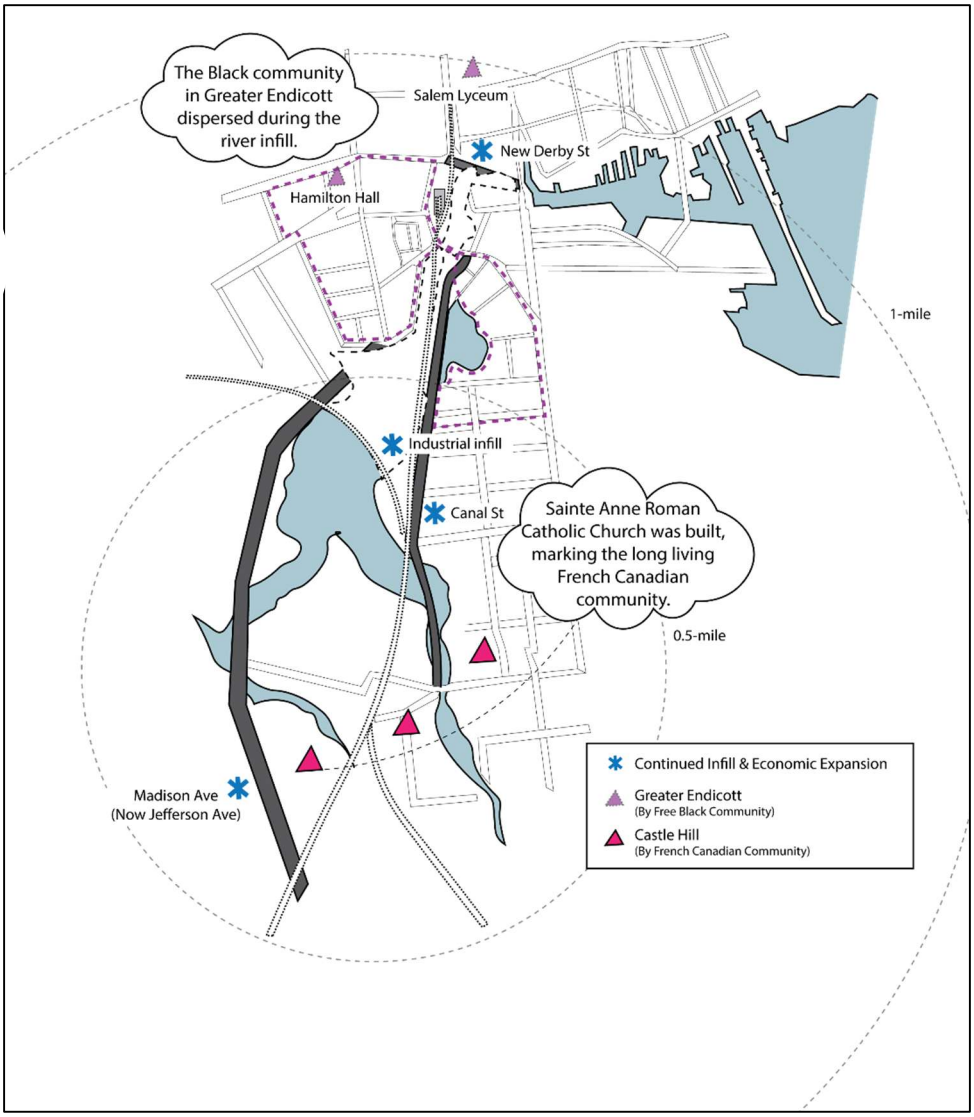
Despite structural barriers, environmental risks, and disinvestment, Salem's free Black community organized to create spaces of resilience and self-determination. Centered around the area known as the Greater Endicott neighborhood, encircled by Gedney, Margin, and Summer Streets, the community supported its own school, church, social halls, and small businesses. Sailors, educators such as Clarissa Lawrence, and abolitionists such as the Remond family lived within walking distance of the South River. Landmarks like Hamilton Hall, though altered in purpose over time, still testify to this history of cultural and civic life forged in proximity to the river while most facilities were lost to later waves of development.



The Story of Charles A. Benson
Charles A. Benson, a member of Salem's African American seafaring community, lived for a time on Pond Street. He spent over two decades at sea, where his skill earned him higher wages and his journals recorded both daily routines and dramatic moments, such as helping protect his ship from a waterspout in 1878.

The reshaped shoreline of the South River, particularly around Mill Pond, records both industry's advance and the endurance of self-organized communities. These spaces did not emerge through formal planning or market forces, but through collective needs, mutual aid, and cultural strength.

Industrialization (Late 1800s): Making Way for New Transit and Factories



By the late 1800s, the South River's wide tidal basin had been almost entirely erased, filled to make way for the railroad, factories, and new streets. The filling of the South River was driven by City funding and a State bill in the early 1880s and accelerated by the Boston and Maine Railroad's investment to build Canal Street in 1890. Once central to trade and shipbuilding, the river was buried beneath streets like Jefferson, Canal, and New Derby. By the early 20th century, most of the South River and Mill Pond were filled, leaving a narrow channel and industrial shoreline. Some streets, including Willson, Jefferson, and Mill, preserve their names though not their landscapes.

These changes reshaped the neighborhoods along its banks. Some African American residents remained near the former Mill Pond, but the larger Black community faced displacement as the filled lands were redeveloped for industry and transit.

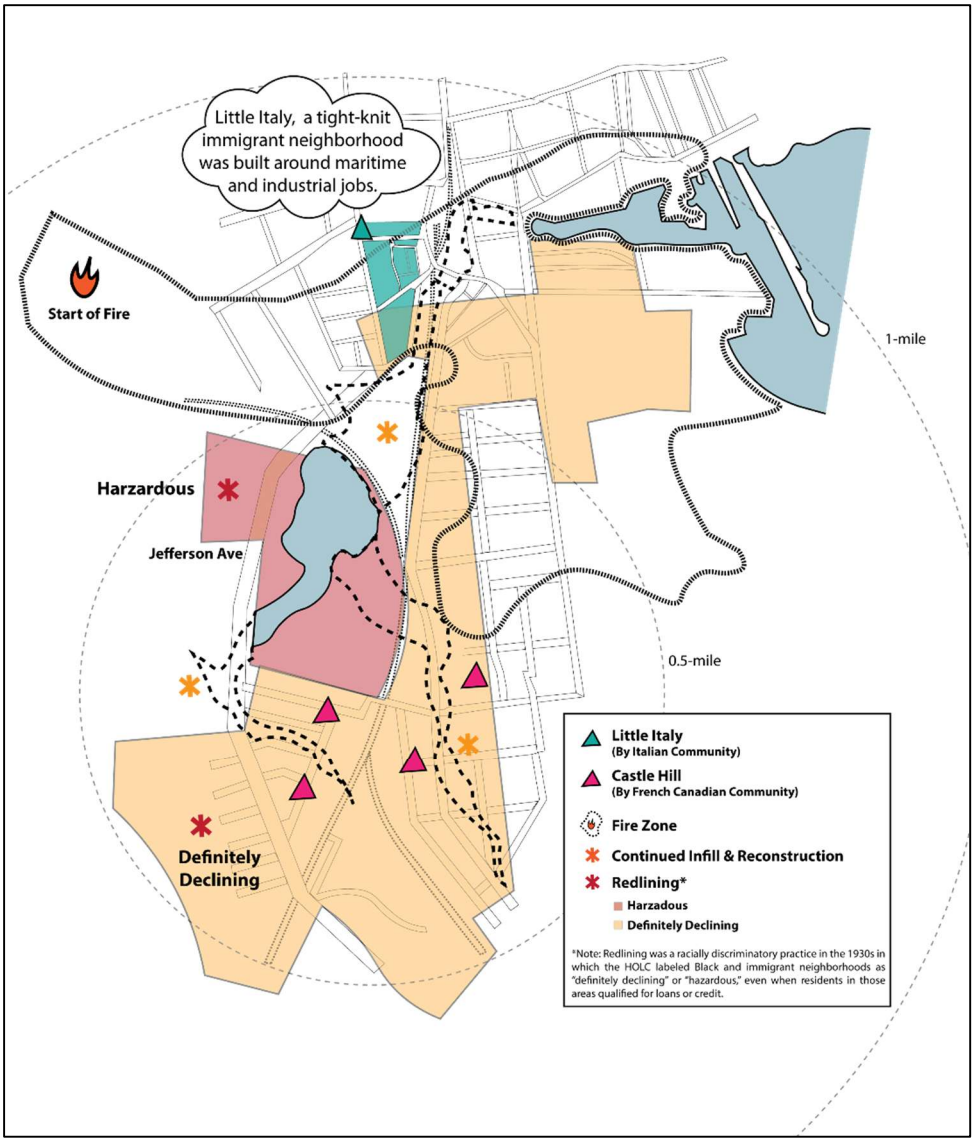
As the area changed, Castle Hill became the center of a new immigrant community. Beginning in the 1830s, the Boston and Maine Railroad's purchase of Derby family land opened space for working-class settlement. The Naumkeag Steam Cotton Company's Pequot Mills complex, established in the mid-19th century, had grown into Salem's largest employer, drawing Irish, French Canadian, and Polish workers. French Canadian families in particular settled in Castle Hill, building mostly single and two-family houses. The founding of Sainte Anne Roman Catholic Church in 1901, marked a central religious and social institution for the Castle Hill community.

This cycle of extractive planning, filling the river for industry, infrastructure, and profit, repeatedly consumed both the waterway and the communities that sought to sustain life along its edge. The filled basin of the South River thus tells a layered story: industrial ambition that reshaped land and water, the displacement of one community, and the endurance of others who made a life at the city's new industrial edge.

Post-Fire Reconstruction (1900s): The Great Fire of 1914 and Rebuilding on Fragile Ground

The Great Fire of 1914 shows us the dangers of extractive land use. The Great Salem Fire burned for 13 hours, left 20,000 people homeless, and destroyed large sections of the city. The remaining water bodies from the former South River system acted as a firebreak, helping stop the flames from reaching Castle Hill while nearby neighborhoods, including the area around Gedney, Margin, and Summer Streets, which was already strained by displacement, were heavily damaged.

Yet post-fire reconstruction repeated the same cycle of land-taking and industrial expansion, as the river's basin was further filled and reshaped into today's street patterns. Some traces remain, like the shrinking Mill Street, while others like Creek Street disappeared or were renamed, erasing reminders of the waterway they once bordered. Flood studies commissioned by the City revealed how the buried river continued to influence neighborhood conditions, a reminder that erasure did not mean disappearance. And by the 1930s, federal lending maps had already marked much of South Salem as "high risk" for mortgages and insurance, which was associated with racial characteristics of the neighborhood. These designations discouraged credit, slowed reinvestment, and left residents with fewer tools to maintain homes or businesses.



At the same time, communities along the corridor were shifting. After the fire, Italian immigrants established "Little Italy". The neighborhood flourished in the 1930s and 1940s with bakeries, butchers, markets, and shops. St. Mary's Italian Church, modeled after the Church of Santa Chiara in Assisi, was built in 1925 through community donations, including parishioners' gold jewelry melted down for its bell.

On Margin Street, Rev. Piemonte called on his parishioners to create a new place of worship. Families from the neighborhood took part in the construction, despite their limited means. Many were recently arrived immigrants, earning little and living in crowded housing. They not only gave their labor but also contributed pieces of gold

jewelry, which were melted down to cast a bell for the church. The building at 56 Margin Street became a lasting center of faith and community for Salem's Italian residents.

The waterway that shaped the fire's limits and later neighborhood boundaries is rarely recognized, just as the endurance of the working-class communities along its banks is too often overlooked.

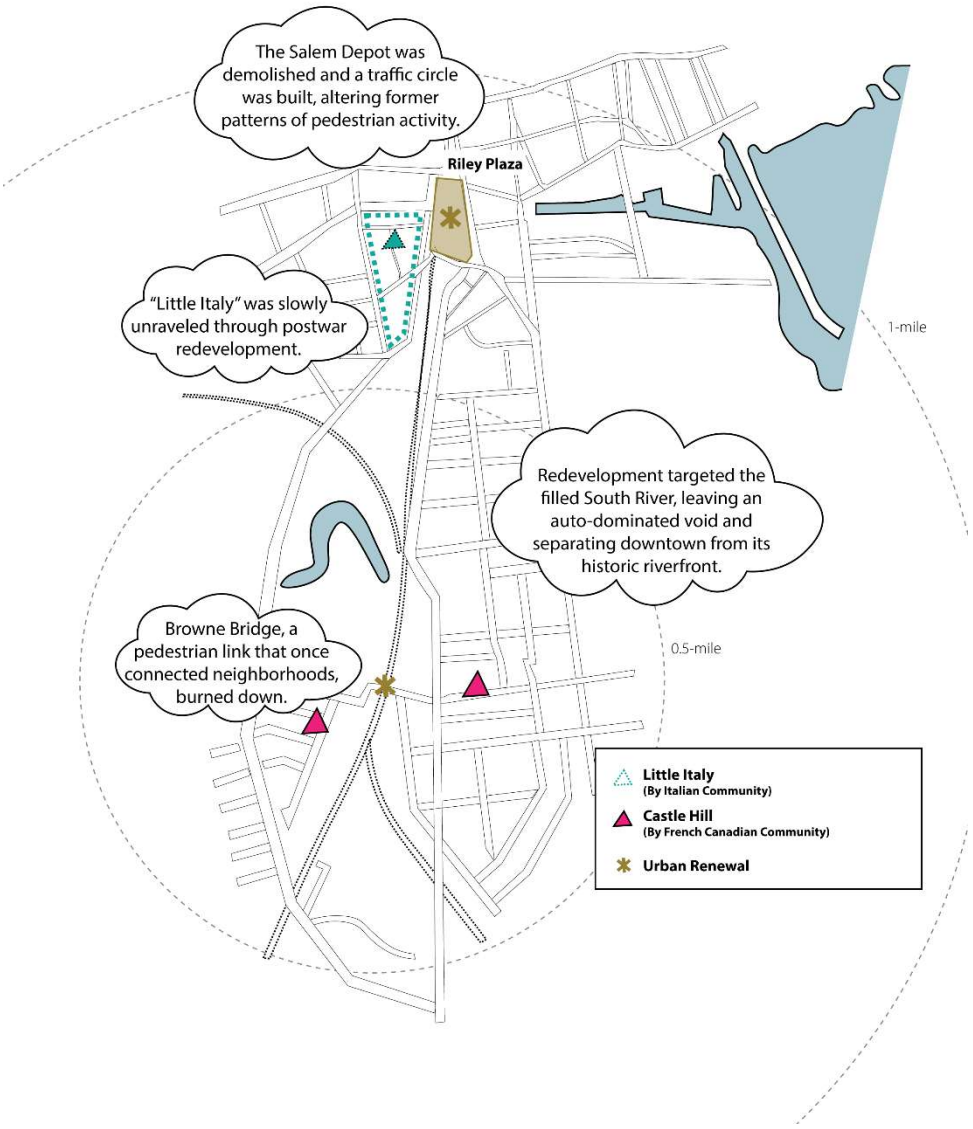
Urban Renewal (Late 1900s): Formalized Planning and Forgotten Origins

When urban renewal arrived in the 1960s, it built on this foundation of disinvestment, targeting the very neighborhoods that had already been cut off from conventional loans. In this period, Jefferson Avenue was reshaped through street reconfiguration as nearby industrial districts were further built out on filled river and marsh lands. The demolition of the Salem Depot, a little north of the study area in the 1950s, had already signaled this shift. It removed a long-standing rail presence in the downtown core and clearing land for auto-oriented redevelopment. The later loss of the well-remembered Browne Bridge, which marked the southern edge, further disrupted pedestrian patterns. The redevelopment entrenched auto-oriented design, such as wide roads, parking facilities and large storage lots, further distancing the area from its ecological origins. The South River was invisible in most places, buried beneath roads, parking lots, and industrial yards.

Little Italy, which had taken shape along the filled banks after the 1914 fire, remained a visible cultural presence in mid-1900s but Postwar redevelopment and demographic change slowly unraveled this tight-knit fabric, leaving Steve's Market as the last surviving business from Salem's original Little Italy.

The Jefferson Ave area today bears the historic neglect of river and people and its environmental and social consequences, carrying forward a legacy in which development priorities repeatedly outweighed land and community life.

Urban Renewal (Late 1900s): Formalized Planning and Forgotten Origins



Reflections on Browne Bridge

"Henry Michaud remembered how easy it was to go from Ocean Avenue to Canal Street by crossing the railroad tracks on the Browne Bridge."

— Anthony Salvo, *Personal Perspectives of a Changing Salem* (2007)

Present-Day: Living With and Living Through

Today, the South River moves in fragments. It appears along the Harborwalk, disappears beneath Jefferson Avenue, and runs through culverts under streets laid along its buried course. Flooding persists, as the FEMA floodplain traces the river's pre-1700s course, showing that the buried channel still governs the land above it. Remnants such as the South River Walk create a rare public link to a river once treated as expendable, while environmental groups monitor water quality and consider restoration, reasserting the river as a partner in Salem's future.

Historic communities along the corridor, from Indigenous people at Castle Hill to free Black families in the neighborhood later linked with Greater Endicott and to immigrant families who built "Little Italy" in that same place, could have remained overshadowed by planning, yet their resilience endured. Within cycles of displacement, residents kept their connection to place by returning to the land, building homes, churches, and businesses, demonstrating that community is not a passive outcome of planning but an active force, even under neglect. These efforts show how people continually remade resources for themselves even when formal planning had marginalized them in favor of other priorities which stripped value from the land and river.

What survives in the present reflects those overlapping choices. Flooding, unstable soils, and contamination remain as legacies of extraction, while small openings to the river signal how value can shift again when visibility or restoration is pursued. For many residents, however, these uneven conditions are the only ones they have known, so the absence of the river is no longer seen as loss, but simply taken as the way the corridor exists. These realities are also the backdrop for today's property owners, tenants, and community members, shaping how they describe both the risks they face and the possibilities they see for Jefferson Avenue.

Emerging Thoughts on the Corridor Today

Building from this perspective, MAPC in summer 2025 spoke with people shaping the Jefferson Avenue corridor, including property owners, developers, and political figures (see Appendix B). This preliminary stakeholder input (with more to come from a deeper community engagement process) helped MAPC understand conditions of the corridor today. Their reflections traced how the buried river and cycles of displacement still shape choices today.

Concerns about redevelopment echo past patterns of erasure of historic communities. Some interviewees saw the corridor as a prime location for housing near downtown and the proposed commuter rail station, while others pointed to high costs, small lots sizes,

and zoning and permitting rules as barriers to development. Vacant and underutilized parcels such as the recycling center, Department of Public Services (DPS) land, and surface parking lots were identified as likely sites for redevelopment, though a couple emphasized the corridor's industrial character and worried that redevelopment could again displace long-standing tenants. In these accounts, what counts as opportunity is tied to how past choices left land available or constrained. Vacant parcels are seen as areas of potential because earlier industries abandoned them, while contamination and flooding remain as limitations from those same histories. Recognizing this pattern shows that opportunity in the corridor is not neutral but the outcome of prior decisions and the resulting harm.

Stakeholders recognized the environmental constraints while envisioning future development. Interviewees imagined more housing, retail, and safer walking conditions, while naming flood zones, contamination, unstable soils, and limited transit as persistent obstacles. Many emphasized that only smaller-scale businesses were likely to succeed along the corridor, rather than large-format retailers, and pointed to recent small shops and restaurants in the area as evidence. This supports the perspective that the possibilities and constraints of development are shaped by environmental resources, which are not fixed but have shifted through cycles of use and the accumulation of past decisions.

Reconnection emerged as a key theme. Interviewees highlighted road safety and the absence of bus and rail service as barriers to connection. Just as the infilling of the South River once cut off routes of movement, today gaps in regulation and transit reinforce the difficulty of creating continuous connections. These patterns repeat earlier dynamics where land and water shaped how people could move and gather. Interviewees also spoke of the Browne Bridge, a pedestrian link that once connected neighborhoods but is now divided by the rail line, rebuilding that connection was raised as a priority. The prospect of rebuilding such links has sparked excitement among community members. These hopes remind us of the river's older role as a pathway and boundary, and that planning here has always shaped how people move with and across water.

Taken together, the presence of long-standing industry, speculation, displacement, fragile ground, and hopes for reconnection show that this corridor is not only a site of possibility but also of responsibility.

Policy and Planning Influence: How have rules reshaped community life

The long history of the South River shows how land and water were reshaped through both community life and deliberate intervention. Today's Jefferson Avenue area moved from Indigenous river-centered stewardship to colonial land allocation and maritime infrastructure, setting in motion a pattern of urbanization that prioritized industrial and economic expansion over natural systems.

Formal planning is well documented in archives. Ordinances, maps, and plans describe who could own land, what activities were permitted, and how streets or wharves would be laid out. These documents repeatedly reclassified land, turning places of food, trade, and settlement into taxable parcels, industrial yards, or transportation corridors.

Informal cycles of self-determined planning by working-class communities are far less visible but no less important. Residents pooled money for schools, organized congregations, and built meeting spaces. These practices show how people created resources of their own to support stability and permanence even as formal planning treated their neighborhoods as changeable and transient.

Moving toward participatory planning today requires acknowledging those communities' role in shaping the area and repairing the historic decisions that denied the participation of people and the role of natural systems, such as the river, for centuries.

The Evolution of Planning

The story of the Jefferson Avenue area and the South River mirrors the evolution of "planning" itself; from an organic, community-driven practice rooted in human-nature interdependence to a formalized, documented process shaped by colonial and later capitalist systems, and back again to a more community-centered approach. These formal systems often extracted value from the land and water while marginalizing the communities who depended on them. The filled basin, the wharves on Essex Street, and the culverts beneath Jefferson Avenue are all material records of this shift.

In the Jefferson Avenue area, the outcomes observed reflect planning practices prior to the 1970s, in which community planning was generally led in a top-down manner. Each layer of formal planning treated the outcomes of earlier extraction as the starting point, turning loss into the new normal. What once supported food and gathering was reframed as infrastructure, then expendable land for fill. This made diminished conditions appear natural, even though they were the result of deliberate choices. Furthermore, this approach left little room for public participation and did not place value in the expertise present in a community.

Yet land, water, and people are never passive. Displaced and working-class residents carried out their own informal planning. They funded and built schools, churches, and gathering spaces to sustain themselves, creating places that endured even as the river was cut, buried, or redirected. This kept alive a vision of planning grounded in community care and interdependence. Recognizing how past systems normalized loss helps present-day planning ask whether today's conditions are natural limits or the product of choices that can be undone. Participatory planning can help center community in the process of considering the future vision and goals for the area.

Toward Restorative Planning

In addition to addressing today's needs, such as affordable housing, multimodal connectivity, and climate resilience, reimagining the Jefferson Avenue corridor's future requires listening to the communities, river, and land tied to it. This process will build upon the existing conditions analysis to invite the community to define a vision and goals for the corridor. Sharing the analysis will uplift the stories of the ghost river, forgotten in daily life, as both a historical reflection and a call to expand future possibilities. Its path beneath Jefferson Avenue, its persistence in the floodplain, and its reappearance at Mill Pond and Rosie's Pond reveal how it continues to act in the present.

Restorative approaches must shift away from extractive systems and resist treating inherited losses as the starting point, learning from the ways people and river once sustained one another and recognizing how those relationships might guide repair today. This could look like equitable growth that considers who is asked to carry new housing growth and how it can address, rather than reproduce, existing disparities; economic revitalization that prioritizes businesses serving local residents; physical daylighting through creating a floodable park in the corridor that restores ecological function and captures stormwater to reduce flooding; and cultural daylighting by marking the historic course of the South River in public spaces such as along the bike path and within the proposed South Salem train stop parking area.

More recent plans have had to work within these inherited conditions, and since that time a series of formal plans has begun to address the corridor more directly, as summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Summary of Recent Formal Planning around Jefferson Avenue

Plan	Year	Corridor Relevance	Broader Drivers	Planning Areas
AECOM conducts study for South Salem station	2016	Identified potential sites for a South Salem commuter rail station within	Part of MBTA expansion debates and local efforts to improve job access	Transportation

		the Jefferson Avenue study area.	while reducing downtown congestion.	
Addition to Entrance Overlay Corridor District	2016	The City Council adds Jefferson Avenue as a designated corridor to the Entrance Corridor Overlay District through a zoning ordinance amendment.		Land Use
South Salem: From Trail-Oriented Development to Transit-Oriented Development: A Study of Market Potential	2018	Market analysis including Jefferson Avenue; examined development potential with and without a new station.	Linked to MBTA service expansion and land reuse discussions began to include ideas for public realm improvements.	Economic Development; Transportation; Land Use
Salem Bicycle Master Plan	2018	Called for buffered bike lanes on Jefferson Avenue from Margin Street to Adams Street.	Driven by citywide goals to balance walking, biking, driving, and transit.	Transportation
Beverly & Salem Resilient Together: Climate Action & Resilience Plan	2021	No direct Jefferson Avenue projects, but set citywide resilience goals that affect zoning in flood-prone areas, including this corridor.	Prompted by state climate mandates and recent coastal flooding events.	Environment
Salem Housing Roadmap	2022	Named northern Jefferson Avenue a “transformative area” for housing production.	Shaped by the statewide housing crisis and the pressures of rising costs and limited supply.	Housing
Wetlands Protection & Conservation Ordinance	2022	Applies buffers that are “no disturbance zones” and “mitigation zones” to all wetland areas.	Ordinance drafted in response to a greater need for climate change adaptation and mitigation and	Environment

		Some wetlands are in the corridor.	enhanced protection of wetlands.	
Coastal Resiliency Overlay District	2024	The C-ROD covers a substantial portion of the Jefferson Avenue Corridor.	The C-ROD is a continuation of recent resiliency-related initiatives, including the *Beverly & Salem Resilient Together Climate Action & Resilience Plan*, the *Resilient Together: The Point* initiative, and the wetlands protection ordinance update.	Environment
Salem Mobility Oriented Development	2024	Recommended a comprehensive redevelopment strategy for Jefferson Avenue, including reuse of hospital parking lot and Amazon site.	The interconnected pressures of Massachusetts' housing crisis and the need to modernize mobility infrastructure.	Transportation; Housing

Living Patterns: How Built Traditions Conflict with Written Rules

How the Corridor Took Shape

The corridor's building stock tells a story of community life over more than a century. The oldest surviving building dates to 1870, while the most recent was completed in 2022. The median year built is 1920, showing how much of the neighborhood was already established before Salem adopted zoning in 1965. As Table 7 and Figure 10 show, a large share of development occurred in the early twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1930, nearly half of all buildings in the corridor were constructed, many as modest homes for working-class and immigrant families seeking stability. In total, two-thirds of all buildings predate 1930, and most of these are residential. These layers of housing reflect how settlement followed the filling of the South River, the rise of Castle Hill as an immigrant neighborhood, and the persistence of communities who rebuilt after industrial expansion and the Great Fire.

Table 7: Waves of Building Over Time

Year Built	# of Parcels	%
1900 or Before	94	17
1900-1930	253	45
1930-1950	55	10
1950-1975	88	15
1975-2022	38	7
Not Building on Parcel (as of 2023)	40	7

Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database

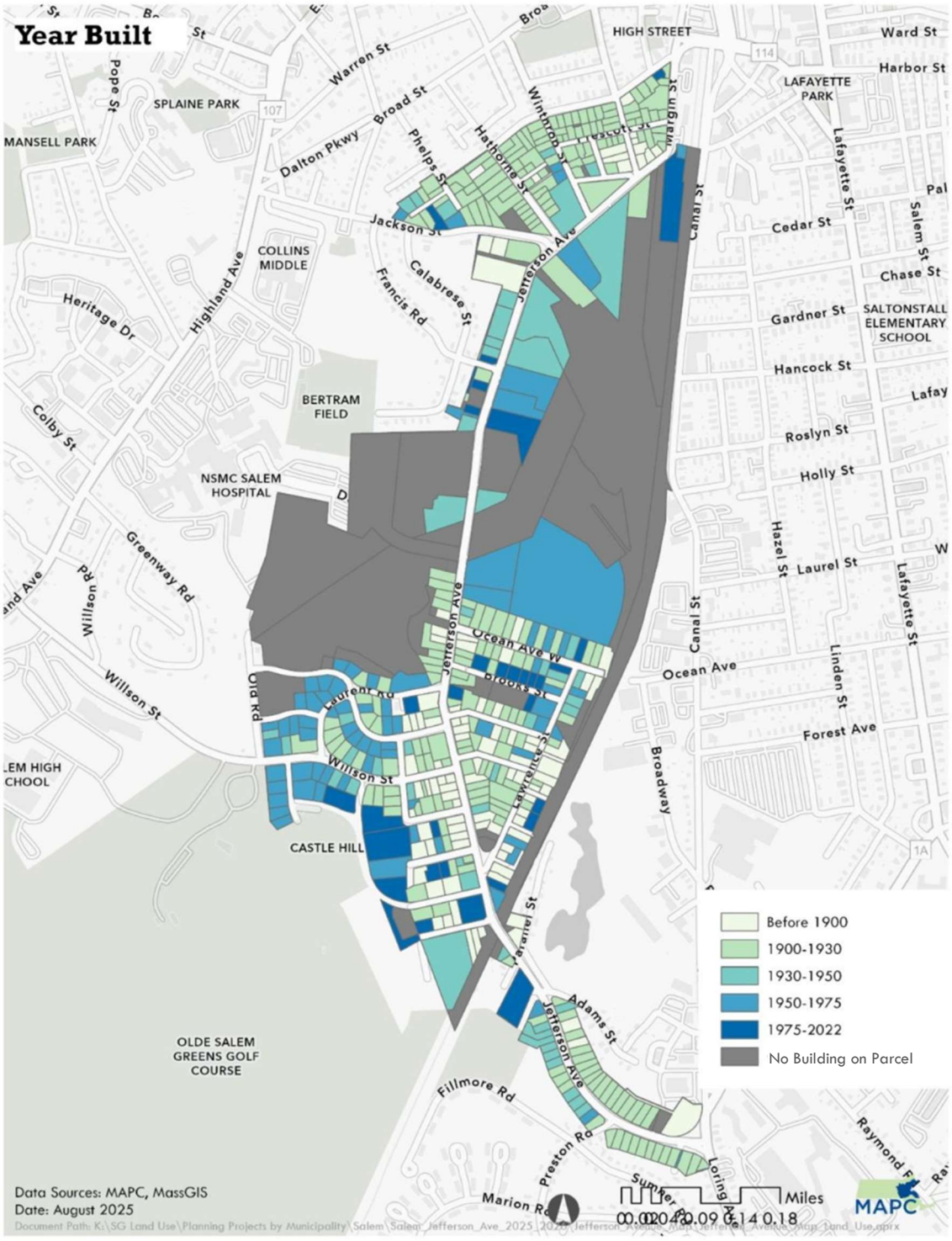
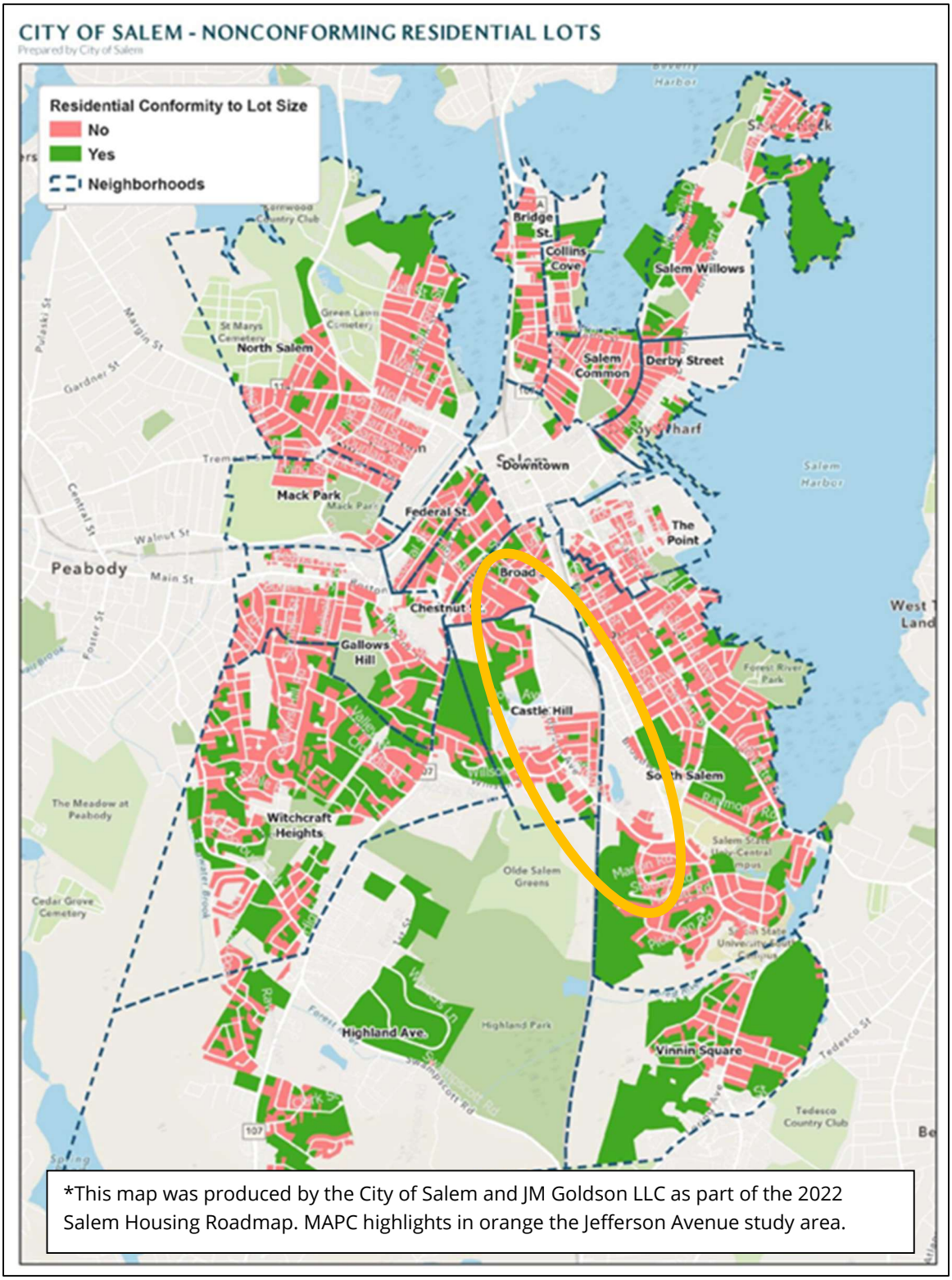


Figure 10: Buildings along the corridor trace more than a century of settlement. Nearly two-thirds predate 1930, reflecting working-class and immigrant families who sustained through the Great Fire, even as the free Black community was displaced by industrial expansion and the fire. Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database (2023)

Within the group of structures built in 1900 or before, residential uses dominate (see Table 8). The predominance of single-family, two-family, and three-family houses shows how stability was built in compact settlement patterns, long before zoning thresholds required larger parcels. These houses supported layered community histories, from free Black residents in the neighborhood around Gedney, Margin, and Summer Streets, to French Canadian families in Castle Hill, and later Italian immigrants who built schools, churches, and businesses that tied community life to the land and river. Taken together, these layers show how the river's erasure and the rise of industry shaped the homes that remain, while zoning later codified existing patterns as nonconforming (see Figure 11).



*This map was produced by the City of Salem and JM Goldson LLC as part of the 2022 Salem Housing Roadmap. MAPC highlights in orange the Jefferson Avenue study area.

Figure 11: Zoning codified existing residential patterns as nonconforming. Source: Salem Housing Roadmap 2022, produced by JM Goldson LLC and the City of Salem

Table 8: Building Community 1900 or Before

Building Type	# of Parcels	%
Single Family Residence	41	44
Two or Three Family Residences	35	37
Apartments with Four or more units	4	4
Condominium	7	7
Residential Other	2	2
Commercial	4	4
Federal State or Municipal	1	1

Caption: In 1900 and before, homes anchored stability and belonging on small lots, shaping the corridor's early character. Zoning later recast these same houses as nonconforming, narrowing patterns that once sustained community life. Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database

Zoning as Codified History

By the time Salem adopted zoning in the early twentieth century, the Jefferson Avenue corridor had already undergone centuries of decisions regarding land, water, and community. Each of these choices displaced communities and redefined how land was used.

Zoning did not mark a fresh start. It carried those choices forward, embedding them in law. It reflects who was invited to remain, who was pushed out, and how the South River was treated as filled land rather than as an active presence shaping the corridor. Zoning codifies the thinking of a particular era into the accepted standard for how development will occur in the future.

The rules on paper take physical form through dimensional standards that decide how large lots must be, how tall buildings can rise, and how much land may be covered by structures. Minimum lot sizes range from 80,000 square feet in the Residential Conservation district (RC) to as little as 6,000 square feet in the Business Neighborhood district (B1) and Business Wholesale and Automotive district (B4). The minimum lot area per dwelling unit is also highly variable, with 80,000 square feet required in RC compared to 3,500 in R3 and B1. Maximum lot coverage ranges from 20 percent in RC to 80 percent in B4, and building heights range between 30 and 45 feet, with exceptions for age-restricted housing in the Residential Two-Family district (R2) and certain large multifamily developments in the Residential Multifamily district (R3).

Table 9: Dimensional Regulations for Zoning Districts along Jefferson Avenue

	RC	R1	R2	R3	B1	B2	B4	I
Min. Lot Area (sq ft)	80,000	15,000	15,000	25,000	6,000	12,000	6,000	40,000
Min. Lot Area per Dwelling Unit (sq ft.)	80,000	15,000	7,500	3,500	3,500	-	-	-
Max. lot coverage	20%	30%	35%	35%	40%	25%	80%	45%
Max. building height (feet)	35	35	35*	45**	30	30	45	45
Max. building height (stories)	2.5	2.5	2.5*	3.5**	-	-	-	-

** Age-restricted housing constructed by the Salem Housing Authority shall be exempt from height requirements in the R2 district.*

*** Multifamily dwellings in R3 Districts on lots held under a single ownership and consisting of a minimum of two hundred thousand (200,000) square feet may be built to a maximum height of fifty (50) feet or four (4) stories in height.*

There is also an as-of-right 25% housing bonus in the inclusionary zoning ordinance.

Caption: Dimensional standards along Jefferson Avenue separate community needs from the code, restricting housing options while favoring large-lot and auto-oriented development. Source: Zoning Ordinance for the City of Salem

These standards shape who can live in the corridor and what kinds of buildings can be built. Large minimum lot areas increase costs of development, which can limit affordability and reinforce exclusivity. Commercial zones like B4 make it easier to cover nearly an entire lot with auto-oriented development than to build housing. Height restrictions in residential districts cap density and keep buildings low, even where greater flexibility could support multifamily options.

Future change could focus on rebalancing these regulations to better serve both people and land. Adjusting minimum lot sizes and coverage rules could open space for more housing types and reduce barriers to affordability, while targeted height flexibility could encourage multifamily living without overwhelming neighborhood character. Small but intentional changes in dimensional standards could make it possible for zoning to support ecological function and community needs together, rather than privileging one at the expense of the other.

Zoning also codifies small homes as irregular and preserves industrial tracts as permanent. The result is a corridor where lived conditions and mapped rules are often at odds, which can be noticed when comparing Figure 5 (Land Use Map) and Figure 12. As summarized

below, many properties sit on parcels zoned for different uses or smaller than today's minimum lot sizes, making them legally "nonconforming."

Initial Observations on Land Use and Zoning

- **Industrial land zoned as Residential Conservation (RC):** Portions of the study area currently used for industrial activities such as warehouse, distribution, or utility facilities are zoned RC. This zoning district does not permit those uses and instead allows only single-family homes, municipal facilities, or golf courses, creating a mismatch between existing and allowed uses.
- **Residential zoning around Salem Hospital:** Land directly below Salem Hospital, including its parking lot and adjacent wooded area, is zoned R1, R3, and RC. While the hospital is a regional destination, these residential districts (especially R1 and RC) do not allow multifamily housing by right, limiting opportunities to expand the housing supply near this major employer and service hub.
- **Predominance of R2 in residential neighborhoods:** Most residential parcels are zoned R2, with additional areas in R1 and RC. The R2 district requires fairly large minimum lot sizes and allows at most two units per lot. These restrictions prevent the creation of "gentle density" housing types such as triple-deckers, 3–5-unit buildings, or small multifamily homes that could diversify housing options. There are 33 parcels in the study area, zoned R1 or R2, that currently have three-family homes built.
- **Limited presence of B1 zoning:** Only a narrow stretch of the corridor is zoned B1. Unlike the other residential districts, B1 permits a full range of residential uses, including multifamily and mixed-use development. Expanding B1 zoning to additional areas could help meet housing demand and strengthen the corridor's mixed-use character.

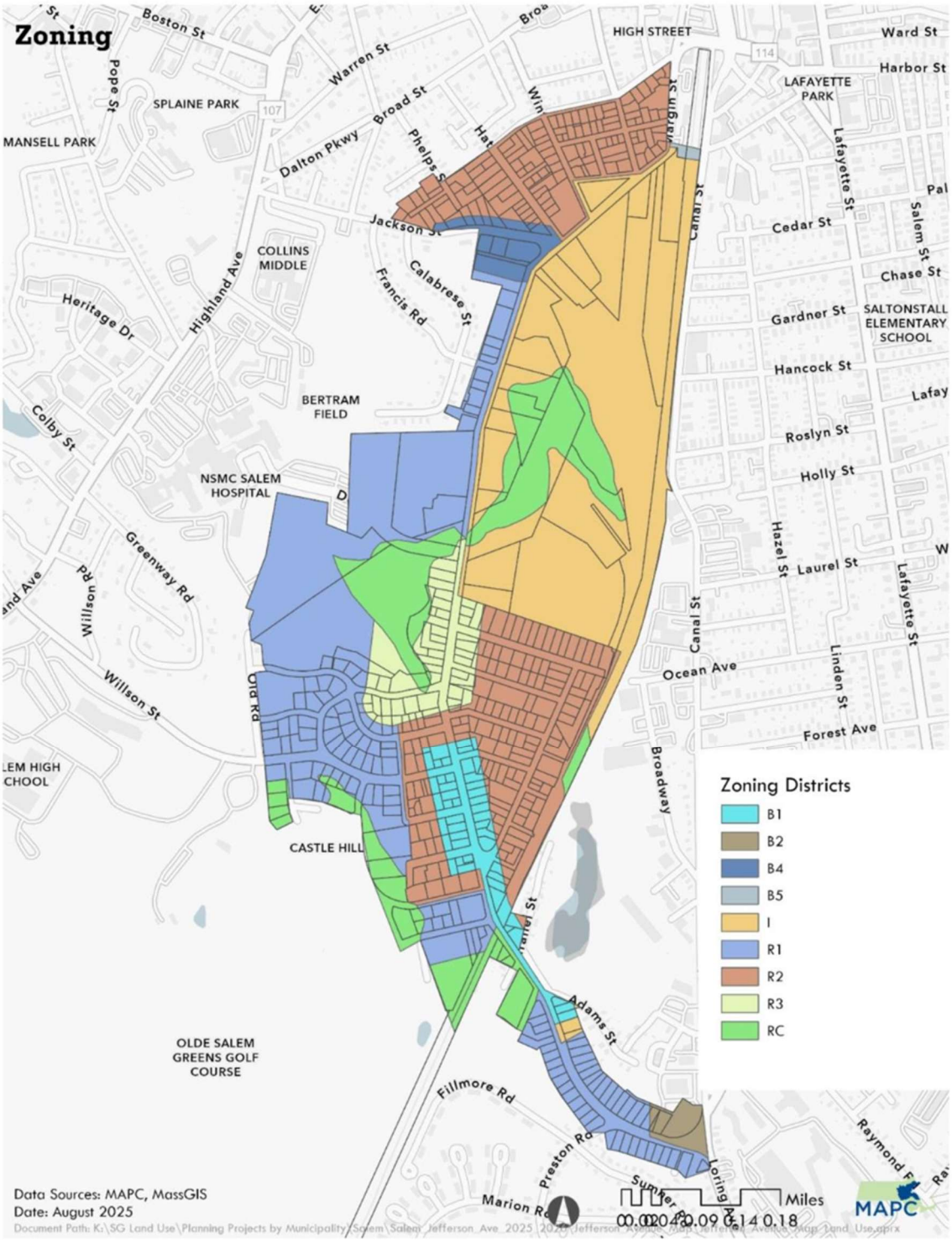


Figure 12: The zoning map shows how planning choices reclassified the corridor, narrowing who could remain and what forms of housing and work were permitted. Source: Zoning Ordinance for the City of Salem

Residential Districts (RC, R1, R2, R3)

The zoning map in Figure 12 shows four residential districts along the corridor: RC (Residential Conservation), R1 (Residential One-Family), R2 (Residential Two-Family), and R3 (Residential Multi-Family). RC permits only single-family dwellings on very large lots of 80,000 square feet. R1 and R2 allow smaller one- and two-family dwellings. It is important to note a discrepancy in the zoning ordinance regarding multifamily housing (see Figure 13). Multifamily dwellings, or buildings for three or more families, are allowed as-of-right in R3, but "multifamily development" requires a special permit granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Planned unit development is also allowed in R3 with a special permit by the Planning Board

ACCESSORY USE REGULATIONS											
PRINCIPAL USES	RC	R1	R2	R3	B1	B2	B4	B5	I	BPD	NRCC
A. RESIDENTIAL USES											
Dwelling, Single-family	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	-
Dwelling, Two-family	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	-
Dwelling, Multifamily	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	-
Cluster development	PB	PB	PB	PB	N	N	N	N	N	N	-
Dwelling unit above first floor retail, personal service, or office use	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	-
Dwelling unit in historic carriage house	BA	BA	BA	BA	BA	N	N	N	N	N	-
Multifamily development	N	N	N	BA	N	N	N	N	N	N	-

Figure 13: Screenshot of Use Regulations allowed in Salem. Source: Zoning Ordinance for the City of Salem

Lot size, minimum lot size per dwelling unit and special permit requirements limit housing types and density, particularly constraining the small-lot patterns that historically supported working-class and immigrant households. RC enforces large-lot exclusivity. R1 and R2 limit diverse housing options. R3 places multifamily development under conditional approval. Overall, most zoning districts in the study area don't allow multifamily by-right. Given that single-family housing is no longer affordable for many households today, current zoning limits the creation of affordable housing options for working-class households.

Table 9: What Zoning Says About Housing Size

	Minimum Lot Area (Sq ft)	Minimum Lot Area Per Dwelling Unit	Max Height (Stories)
R1 (Residential One-Family)	15,000	15,000	2.5
R2 (Residential Two-Family)	15,000	7,500	2.5*
R3 (Residential Multi-Family)	25,000	3,500	3.5**
RC (Residential Conservation)	80,000	80,000	2.5
B1 (Business Neighborhood)	6,000	3,500	-

** Age-restricted housing constructed by the Salem Housing Authority shall be exempt from height requirements in the R2 district.*

*** Multifamily dwellings in R3 Districts on lots held under a single ownership and consisting of a minimum of two hundred thousand (200,000) square feet may be built to a maximum height of fifty (50) feet or four (4) stories in height.*

Caption: Residential zoning districts set minimum lot sizes between 15,000 and 80,000 square feet, largely restricting the reproduction of the small-lot patterns that define the corridor's historic character. Source: Zoning Ordinance for the City of Salem

Table 10: What is the Reality of Housing Size?

	Lot Size (Sq ft)	Lot Size Per Dwelling Unit (Sq ft)	Height (Stories)
Smallest	958	510	1
Median	5,000	4,360	-
Average	5,433	4,378	-
Largest	40,319	40,319	4

Caption: Residential lot sizes in the study area highlight the disconnect with current zoning requirements. Most parcels are far smaller than today's minimums, which reclassifies existing housing as nonconforming. Source: Massachusetts Property Tax Parcels; Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Land Parcel Database

Future investment can address these affordability imbalances by reducing barriers to multifamily and alternative housing types. Allowing greater flexibility in housing forms would better align land use with community need and acknowledge the corridor's history of shared living shaped by the river and land.

Commercial and Mixed-Use (B1, B2, B4)

The zoning map shows three commercial districts within the corridor: B1, B2, and B4. B1 permits a full range of residential uses, including multifamily and mixed-use development, as of right, but cluster housing is excluded. In contrast, B2 and B4 prohibit residential uses and emphasize highway-oriented and wholesale businesses. Certain institutional uses,

including boarding houses, nursing homes, and planned unit developments, are permitted in some commercial districts only by special permit.

Commercial and industrial zoning can prioritize circulation, storage, and large-scale trade over housing and neighborhood life, leaving small businesses as vital but legally constrained. B1 offers flexibility for housing, and B2 and B4 do allow for some neighborhood-serving businesses, like restaurants. But they can also direct land toward auto services, storage, and wholesale trade. Small neighborhood businesses often occupy parcels far smaller than the code requires, yet they remain vital to daily needs. Larger parcels, by contrast, can be legally reinforced as spaces for vehicles and trade rather than for housing or gathering.

Repair could begin with supporting more balanced mixed-use development in commercial districts, connecting economic activity with housing and community uses. In some places, this might also include exploring opportunities for daylighting, where reopening portions of the river could reconnect residents with its presence and improve corridor livability.

Industrial District (I)

The zoning map shows that industrial district zoning is present within the Jefferson Avenue corridor. In this district, residential use is allowed only through special permits for planned unit developments, Chapter 40B projects, or special permits to expand non-conforming use. Non-conforming uses can also be changed to another non-conforming use through a special permit. Business and industrial uses are allowed either by right or by special permit, depending on the type of activity.

This designation grants permanence to industry at the expense of community-serving activities. Industrial parcels here are much larger than surrounding homes or businesses, concentrating land in ways that limit neighborhood integration. These sites also carry heavy ecological impacts—they pave over wetlands, generate runoff, and intensify flood risks, while restricting public access to the water.

Future planning could seek opportunities to integrate ecological and community functions within industrial landscapes. This might include enhanced requirements for stormwater management, public access along infilled river edges, or incentives for adaptive reuse that serves both industry and neighborhood needs.

Whose Needs Do Overlays and Rules Serve?

Extra zoning rules layer control onto land and people in the corridor.

- **Coastal Resiliency Overlay District (C-ROD):** Significant parts of the current commercial and industrial uses, as well as some of the residential areas, are zoned with C-ROD. The purpose of C-ROD is primarily to protect buildings from the projected increase in coastal flood risk, with especially high protection provided to residential dwelling units. Key requirements include: 1) Dwelling units and mechanicals raised above Sea Level Rise Base Flood Elevation (SLR BFE), 2) Other uses are allowed below SLR BFE if floodproofed, 3) Enclosed parking below SLR BFE is allowed if no feasible alternative exists and if an adequate management plan is provided. The overlay also provides flexibility for maximum building height, GFA, and setbacks in development, considering additional requirements for development. This could potentially impact the feasibility of having commercial space on the ground floor, given the cost to meet additional floodproofing requirements.
- **Entrance Corridor Overlay District:** Areas along Jefferson Ave (about 150 ft buffer) are zoned as Entrance Corridor Overlay District. The purpose of this overlay district is primarily to protect and enhance the major entrance into the City. Some key requirements include limiting the number of curb cuts to one for all residential uses, as well as a maximum of two for all commercial. There are additional requirements for the parking area to require specific landscaping components.
- **Halloween Parking Overlay District:** The Northern part of the study area is part of the Halloween Parking Overlay District, applying to commercial properties citywide. The primary purpose of this district is to augment the underlying zoning regulations to allow for additional necessary off-street parking during the periods of peak demand associated with the Halloween season.

While these overlay districts are reasonable, it will be worth revisiting these in terms of how they impact the development feasibility and residential life in the study area.

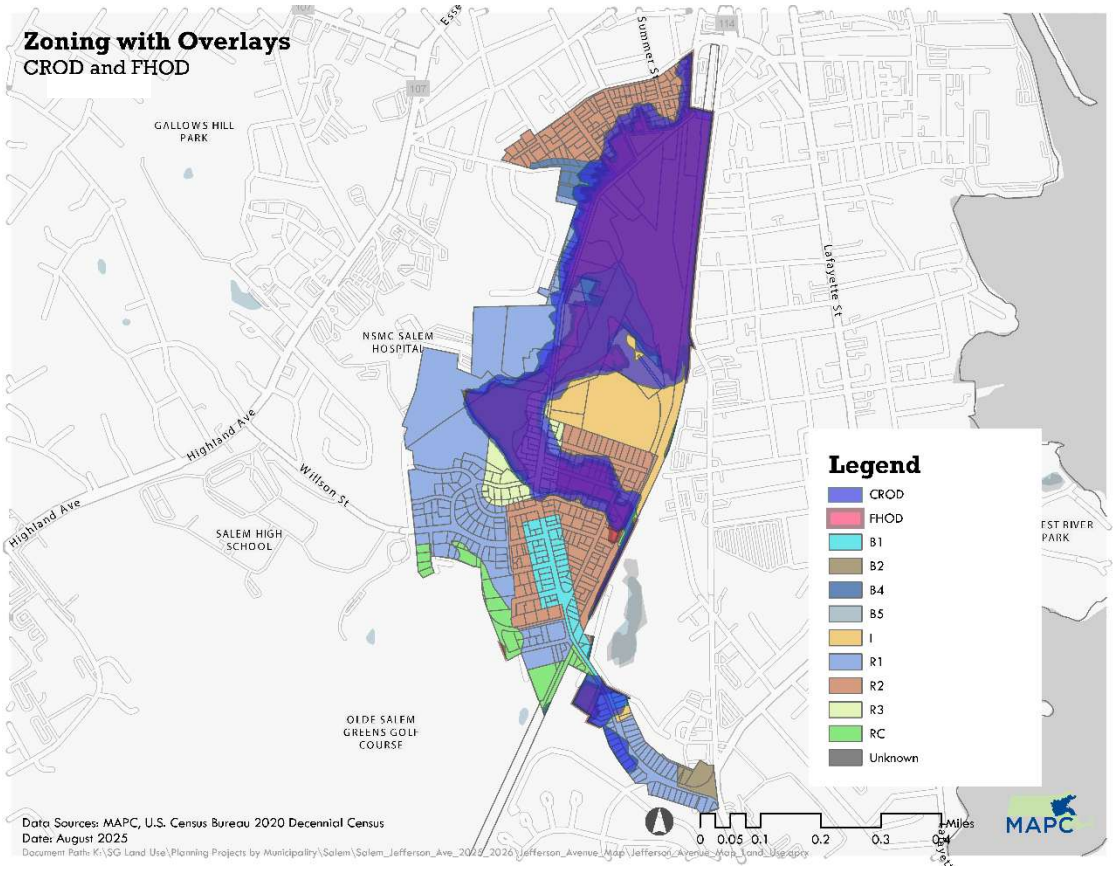


Figure 14: The Coastal Resiliency Overlay identifies areas vulnerable to flooding from the South River. Planning in this area can encourage climate-adaptive measures for development. Source: Zoning Ordinance for the City of Salem

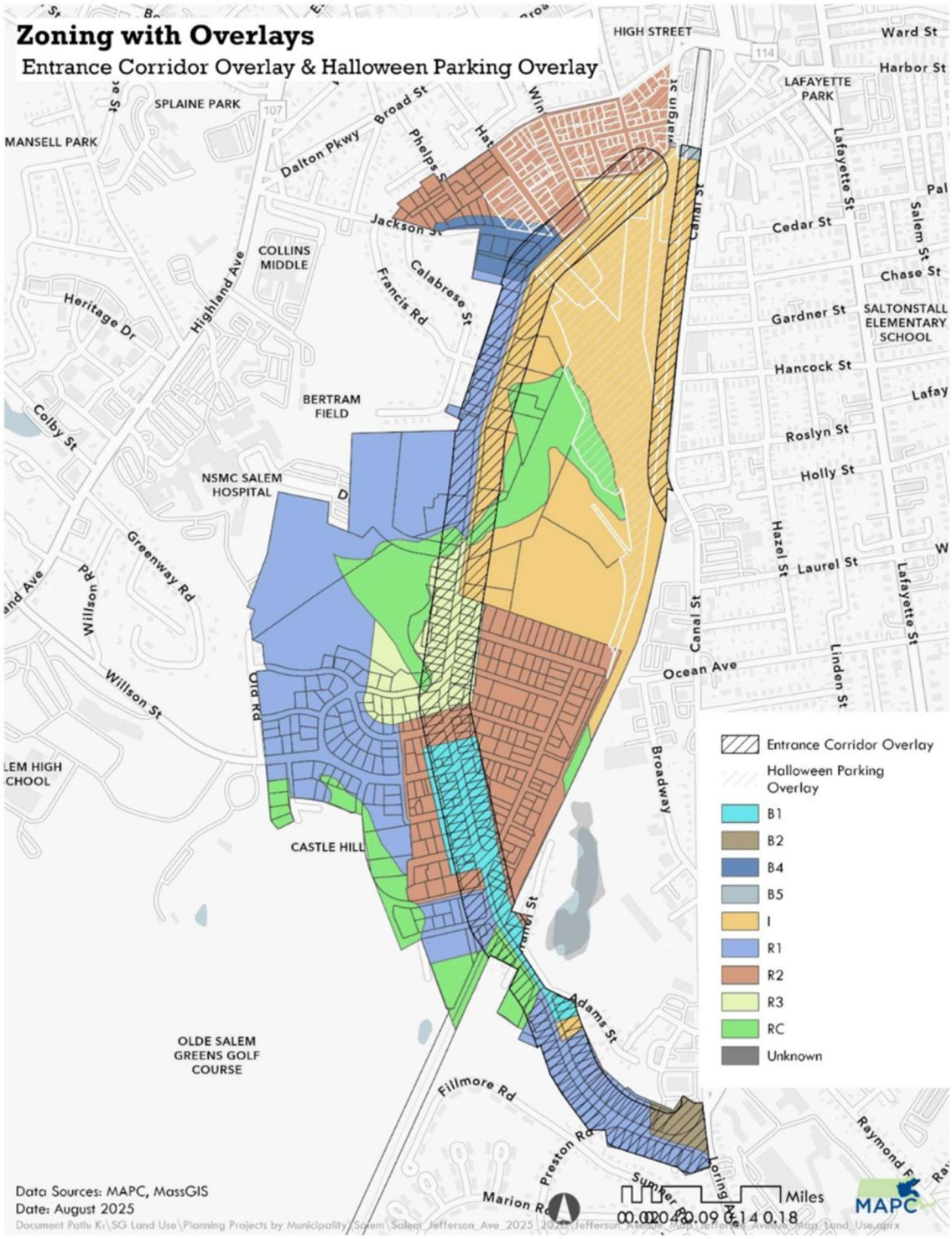


Figure 15: Both overlays put extra zoning regulations for this corridor to accommodate the needs of the broader city residents. Source: Zoning Ordinance for the City of Salem

Architectural Styles

Architectural styles represented in the study area reinforce the need for zoning to support continued existence of these housing types. Ninety-four properties in the corridor are included in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS), recognized for their historic and architectural significance. Most stand on lots far smaller than today's zoning allows. Under current rules, the very housing types that give the corridor its identity are harder to build. It is important for zoning to translate these architectural styles into the requirements so that new construction can fit with existing patterns and celebrate the architectural history in this neighborhood.

Figure 16: Examples of Classical Revival, Colonial Revival, Craftsman, and Greek Revival houses in the study area reflect Salem's historic and diverse collection of architectural styles – the historic density of buildings constructed on these smaller lots could not be replicated today. Today's dimensional standards would push similar buildings onto larger parcels, altering the rhythm and scale that give these neighborhoods their character. Source: Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS)

Land and Physical Setting: Absence, Constraints, and Responsibility

The planning choices described in the previous section are written into the land itself. The maps in this section show the corridor as it is today, highlighting soils, water, elevation, and environmental constraints that shape how it functions. These conditions reflect past choices and reveal both the challenges and the opportunities facing people who live and work along Jefferson Avenue corridor.

Looking at flood risk, wetlands, aquifers, and other features together shows how the South River still moves through the corridor, tying land, water, and community into one system. Its presence reveals where the land can support new activity and where it strains under past burdens. These patterns matter because they influence daily life, determine where investment is safe and sustainable, and show where burdens fall unevenly. Reading the landscape in this way helps ground the project's recommendations in a fuller picture of how ecology and resilience are connected, and how future decisions can be made with greater care for both.

Table 16: Defining Absence, Responsibility, and Constraints

Absence	Responsibility and Repair	Constraints and Consideration
Showing what is missing	Acknowledging harm and recognizing areas of care	Working with land's limits and possibilities

• **BioMap Map**
• **Open Space Map**
	• Activity and Use Limitations (AUL) Map
	• Archaeological Sensitivity
		• Land Constraints
		• Soils Map
		• Elevation Map
		• Water Constraints:
		  ○ Aquifers Map
		  ○ Water Bodies Map
		  ○ Wetlands Map
		  ○ Flood Risk Map
		  ○ Sea Level Rise Map
		• Composite Map: Water Constraints
		• Composite Map: Elevation, Soil, Flooding, and AUL Sites

Absence: Showing What is Missing

The analysis of biodiversity and open space highlights what is absent in the corridor. They show how land has been reshaped so thoroughly that natural systems and community resources are largely missing.

Figure 17, the BioMap, highlights areas most critical for biodiversity, including rare species habitats and large connected landscapes. In the Jefferson Avenue corridor, it identifies no core habitat and no critical natural landscape. That absence is telling. The river's ecosystems have been thinned and weakened here, even as the river still breathes and connects life in nearby areas. Habitats that once provided food, shade, or protection were filled or built over, shifting value from ecological function to industrial and commercial use. The closest area of concern lies about 1,000 feet southeast, separated from the corridor by roads and existing development.

The absence of mapped habitat within the corridor reflects how the land has been reshaped for industry, infrastructure, and housing over many decades. This is not simply a gap on a map but the record of resources being unmade, stripped of the ecological and community roles they once carried. Because each generation has known the corridor only in its diminished form, these losses risk being seen as the ordinary condition. This kind of shifting baseline narrows expectations of what the land can offer, making ecological decline harder to recognize and easier to accept.

While redevelopment here will not directly affect core biodiversity areas, it still influences the ecological health of nearby systems. Runoff, contamination, and land use choices in the Jefferson Avenue corridor can place added burdens on adjacent landscapes that continue to carry ecological value. Recognizing absence as the product of decisions rather than the natural state is what makes repair possible. What has been unmade by development choices can also be remade through careful planning.

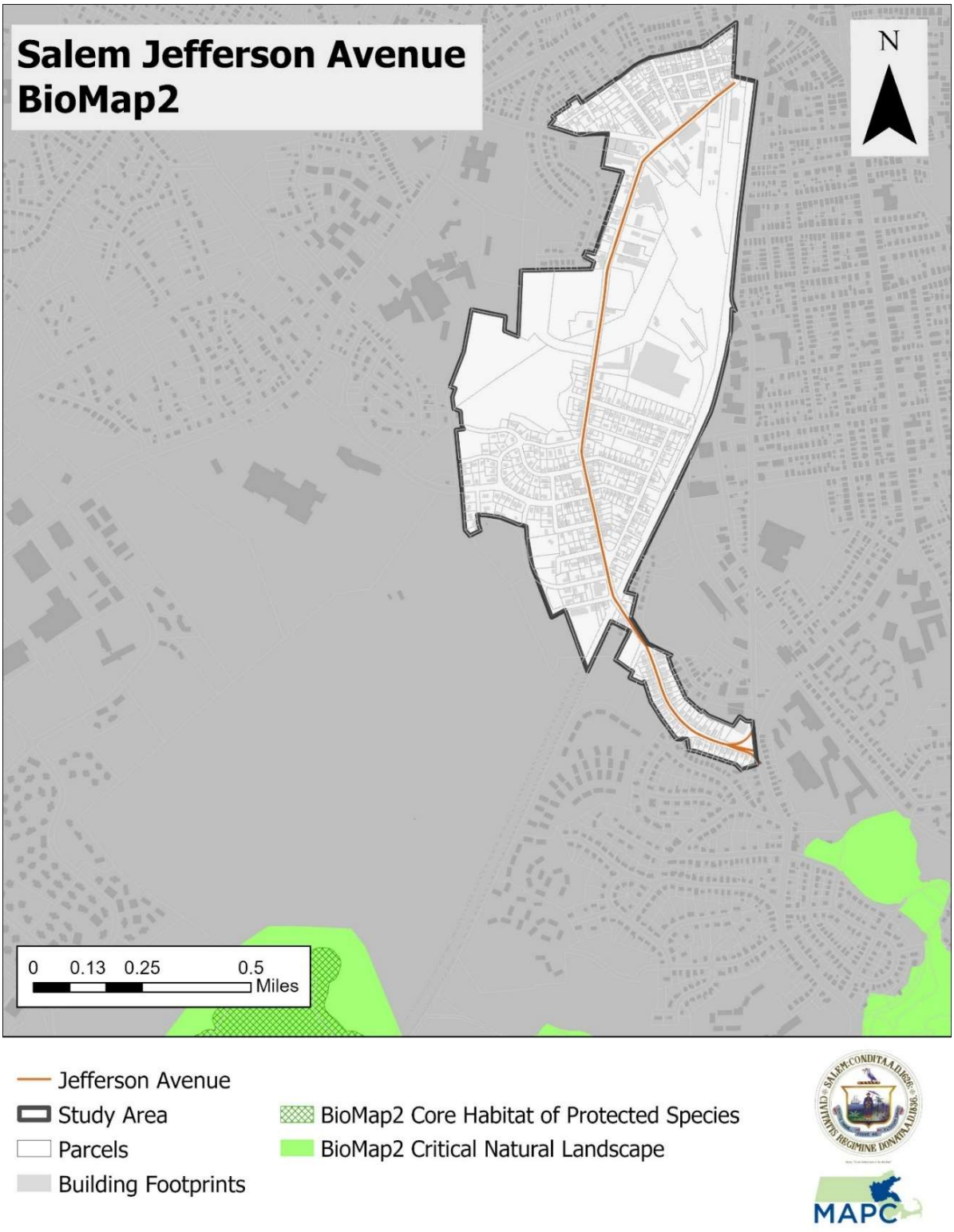


Figure 17: No core habitat or critical natural landscape is identified within the corridor. This absence reflects how the river's ecosystems have been thinned and weakened, even as they continue nearby. Source: MassGIS BioMap project data

In Figure 18, the Open Space map shows that there are no designated open space parcels within the Jefferson Avenue study area. Parcels that might appear vacant are either in use, such as MBTA property, or shaped by steep grade changes that prevent them from functioning as recreation or conservation space. The nearest open space parcels lie just outside the corridor: Highland Park (Salem Woods) and adjacent lands to Salem High School, and the Captain John Bertram Athletic Field to the northwest. An open space connector, the Salvo Bike Path, is nearby but inaccessible from the Jefferson Avenue side of the tracks.

With land directed to industry and infrastructure, residents and workers must look beyond the immediate area for access to green space and places of recreation and connection with nature. This pattern also places added pressure on nearby parks and natural areas outside of the corridor to provide ecological and community benefits for a neighborhood that has little open land of its own.

Investment in the corridor can help bridge the gap by improving connections to nearby parks, supporting stormwater management that protects wetlands, and exploring opportunities for small-scale green space within the corridor. These steps can ease the burden on surrounding landscapes and enhance the quality of life for people in the neighborhood, while ensuring that land use decisions better balance ecological function with community needs. Expanding access to open space can also serve as a form of repair, countering the long history of infill and disconnection that has limited both ecological function and community benefit in this area. These types of open space additions and expansions to open space access can be required through zoning and created through future investments in the corridor.

Reflections on Daily Life in Castle Hill
"[Norman] remembers Mill Pond, where he often ice skated all the way to Rosie's Pond, and Sylvania on Loring Avenue. Mill Pond was a popular spot located right behind Titus Furniture."
— Former Mayor Anthony Salvo, Personal Perspectives of a Changing Salem (2007)

Such memories show how earlier generations could use nearby ponds and open areas for recreation even without formal designation. That kind of everyday access has been lost.

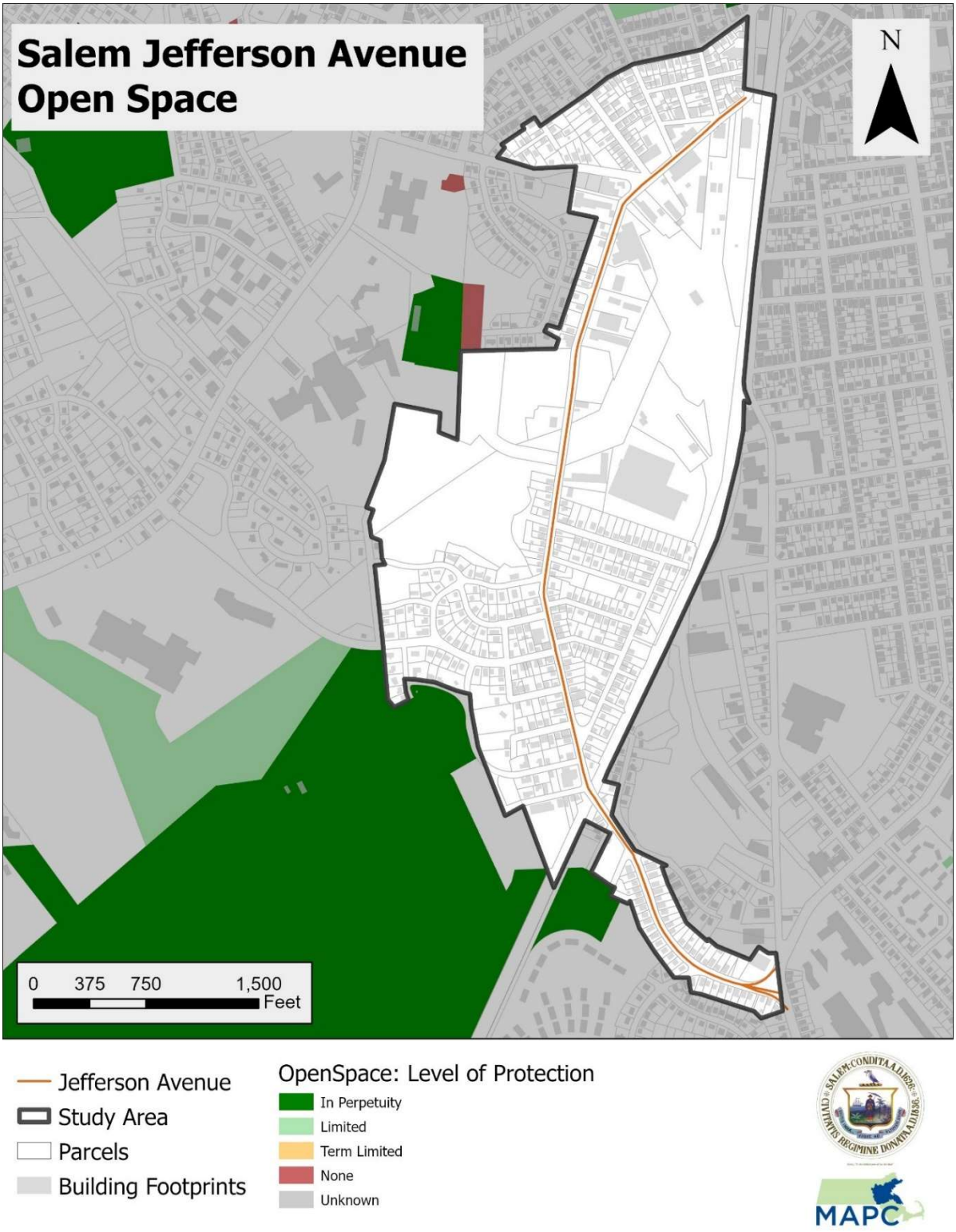


Figure 18: No designated open space parcels exist in the corridor. Earlier generations used Mill Pond informally for recreation, but such access is no longer permitted, leaving residents and workers to look

beyond the area for connection to nature. Source: MassGIS Data: Protected and Recreational Open Space data

Responsibility and Repair: Acknowledging Harm and Recognizing Areas of Care

The findings below point to places where past choices have left behind legacies of contamination or hidden presences. They show conditions that require care to enable future redevelopment. MAPC looked for Activity and Use Limitations (AULs) in the corridor area—as described by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, an AUL is a legal document that identifies activities and uses of the property that may and may not occur, as well as the property owner's obligation and maintenance conditions to ensure safe use of the property. Exact restrictions vary depending on the site. The AUL map, shown in Figure 19, identifies seven sites within the Jefferson Avenue study area where contamination has led to land-use restrictions. While the AUL indicates that the site is safe for its current land use, each must be analyzed individually when considering redevelopment options. These sites include the DPW yard, truck rental facilities, and industrial parcels, with contaminants ranging from petroleum hydrocarbons to arsenic, lead, and chromium. While MassDEP does not classify them as imminent hazards, the presence of AULs highlights that pollution is a defining condition of several parcels in the corridor.

Table 17: Sites of Contamination

RTN	NAME	ADDRESS	STATUS	RAO_CLASS	AUL_DATE	SITE_INFO
3-0002565	HAMBLET AND HAYES	20 COLONIAL	PSC	PA	Sep-19	bit.ly/41t5gBK
3-0003651	RYDER TRUCK RENTAL	59 JEFFERSON	RAO	A3	Oct-97	https://bit.ly/4lkb086
3-0003761	SALEM DPW YARD	5 JEFFERSON	RAO	A3	Mar-02	https://bit.ly/4ooiFoN
3-0013218	OFF COLONIAL ROAD	1 IGA	RAO	A3	Dec-96	https://bit.ly/45aHPQa
3-0051527	63 1/2 JEFFERSON	63 1/2 JEFFERSON	PSC	PA	May-25	https://bit.ly/3J8gmpw
3-0036990	SALEM DPW YARD	5 JEFFERSON	PSC	PA	Jan-22	https://bit.ly/4lgY4je
3-0029608	ERTEC	102-108 JACKSOT	RAO	A3	Oct-11	https://bit.ly/46OQZTE

Source: MassGIS Data: MassDEP (Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection) Oil and/or Hazardous Material Sites with Activity and Use Limitations (AUL)

For people living and working nearby, these conditions shape daily experience and long-term prospects. Contaminated sites often sit on low ground, overlapping with areas already prone to flooding, which raises risks of pollutants spreading beyond parcel boundaries. This amplifies risk for those already living and working in the lowest-lying and

most vulnerable parts of the corridor. At the same time, restrictions on land use limit how easily these properties can be redeveloped, adding costs and slowing opportunities for change in a corridor that already faces environmental and economic pressures.

The presence of AULs means redevelopment must account for both cleanup and long-term stewardship. It represents a chance to remake land that has been treated as expendable and to restore safety where past choices left risk. Cleanup is more than a technical task. It is an act of repair for land that has been overburdened and for residents who have carried the risks of industrial use. Done well, cleanup can return safety and possibility to the community, expand options for reuse, and share the benefits of redevelopment with those most affected by the corridor's industrial legacy.

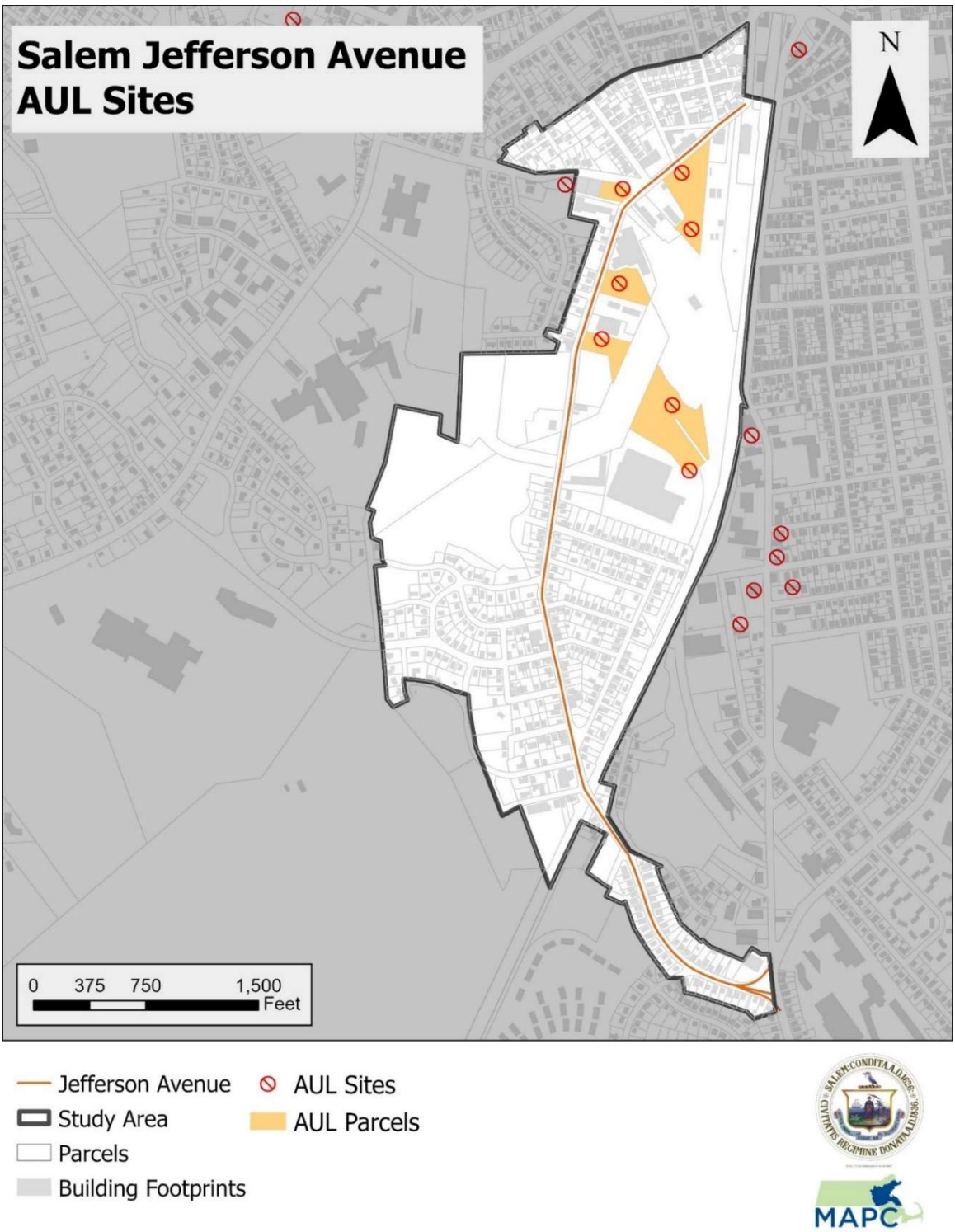


Figure 19: Seven AUL sites have been identified in the study area, where contamination has led to land-use restrictions. While the AUL indicates that the site is safe for its current land use, each must be analyzed individually when considering redevelopment options. Cleanup here is both a technical task and an act of

repair. Source: MassGIS Data: MassDEP (Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection) Oil and/or Hazardous Material Sites with Activity and Use Limitations (AUL)

Archaeological Sensitivity
In accordance with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) policy for the *Inventory of Archaeological Assets of the Commonwealt*h, archaeologically sensitive areas cannot be mapped due to the highly sensitive nature of archaeological site locations, which are confidential and not a public record (M.G.L. c.9, ss 26A(1), 26A(5), & 27C).

In an earlier Salem project, the MHC noted that parts of the study area may contain archaeologically sensitive deposits.

Given MHC's earlier indication that sections of this area could contain below ground archaeological resources, it would be best practice for any redevelopment to plan for archaeological review, even if not required by law. This ensures potential resources are identified and respected, supports responsible decision-making in the corridor, and establishes a standard step in working with the landscape.

Constraints and Considerations: Working with Land's Limits and Possibilities

The final set of maps highlights the physical and environmental conditions that continue to shape the corridor. They point to both the limits that must be respected and the possibilities that can be supported when planning works with the land as it is today.

Figure 20, the Soils map, shows that most of the Jefferson Avenue study area sits on till or bedrock, while the northeast portion contains sand and gravel deposits. This is in addition to the urban fill present in the area; soil mixed with other materials to level the grade for development. Smaller pockets of sand and gravel appear elsewhere, creating areas with softer ground conditions. The map also identifies a 10.5-acre parcel at 34 Horton Street as Farmland of Unique Importance, with soils suited to cranberry production.

These soil and geological patterns influence both what has been built and what can be built in the future. Areas of sand and gravel have less dense development today because the ground is less stable and more vulnerable to flooding. Bedrock areas have supported more intensive development and are better able to support infrastructure.

Planning here must align with development plans to the land's capacity. Stable parcels on bedrock may hold more potential for reuse, while sand and gravel areas will require careful attention to building types, density, and drainage. The presence of the Farmland of Unique Importance highlights a responsibility to honor land that once carried ecological and agricultural value. That choice shifted costs onto surrounding neighborhoods, who carried the risks while the land's productive role was set aside. Redevelopment here carries

responsibility to repair past tradeoffs and to respect the capacities of soils as active shapers of community well-being.

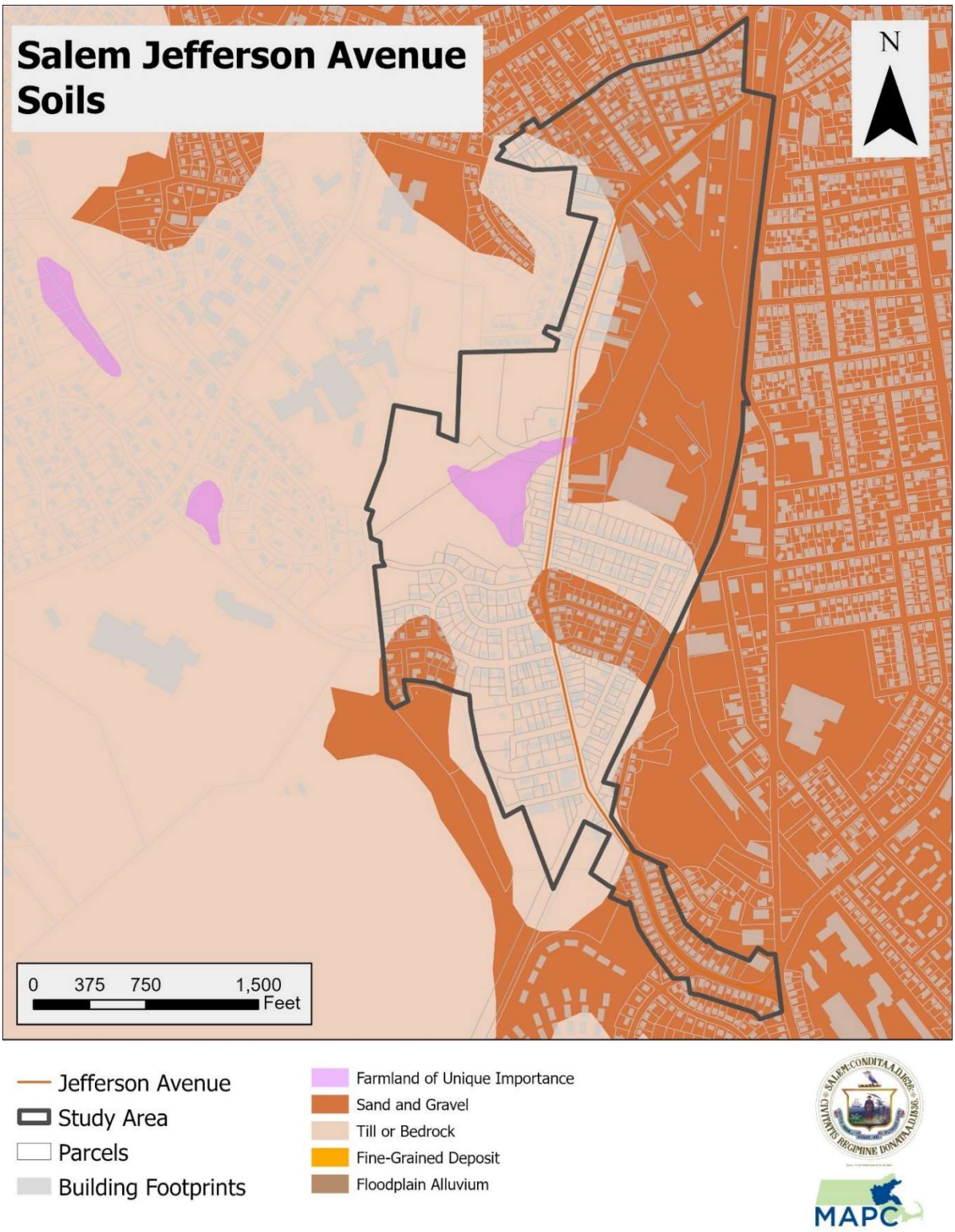


Figure 20: Till and bedrock provide stability that allows dense development and infrastructure, while sand and gravel create weaker ground and are more vulnerable to flooding. Source: MassGIS Data collected from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The South River continues to define the corridor's low ground—the Elevation map (Figure 21) shows mostly gradual slopes, with only two small peaks on the western side rising to about 24 meters above sea level. One of these is part of the parcel at 34 Horton Street, which also contains soils identified as Farmland of Unique Importance. Much of the Castle Hill peak was leveled and graded in the 19th and 20th centuries to create gravel fill, its stone carried away as gravel fill that reshaped the landscape.

These elevation patterns influence how water moves and where development is most feasible. Gradual slopes pose little barrier to construction, but the small high points contrast with low-lying areas shaped by the South River, where flood risks concentrate. In places like 34 Horton Street, elevation creates both opportunities for more stable development and responsibility for how runoff flows downslope.

Elevation must be considered alongside soils, flood maps, and other land features to understand how future investment can proceed safely. While steep slopes do not constrain the corridor overall, planning should recognize how even modest elevation differences affect flooding, resilience, and the way land can serve surrounding neighborhoods. These elevation contrasts also reveal inequities: families and businesses on higher ground face fewer risks, while those in low-lying parcels face the risks of repeated flooding and drainage failures.

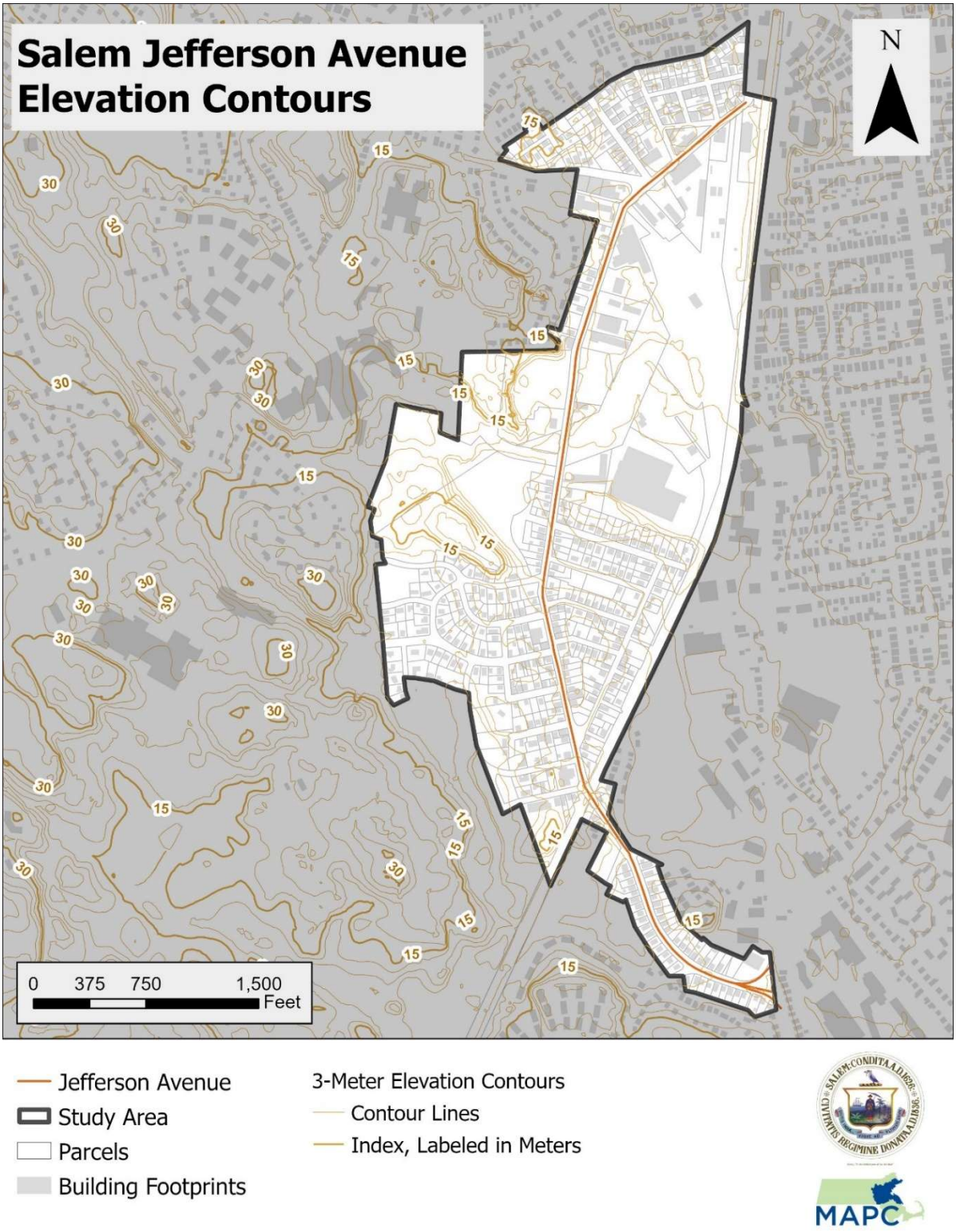


Figure 21: Gentle slopes shape the area. Low-lying land near the South River is more flood-prone, while higher ground stays drier but can shift flooding problems onto the parcels below. Source: MassGIS Data collected from the U.S. Geological Survey

The Aquifer map in Figure 22 shows that about one-quarter of the Jefferson Avenue study area lies above groundwater resources. In the northeast corner, a smaller high-yield aquifer and a larger medium-yield aquifer together cover roughly 51.8 acres. These aquifers extend beyond the corridor, running from Salem's coastline inland toward Peabody, forming part of the South River watershed's living system beneath the surface.

Their presence raises important considerations for both land and people. Groundwater affects how stable the land is for building, how water moves beneath the surface, and how pollutants can spread. Because these aquifers are within the South River watershed, what happens in the Jefferson Avenue corridor does not stay contained. Runoff, flooding, or contamination can move into the aquifer system and affect water quality across a larger area. While the dataset does not show depth or whether the aquifers are confined, the fact of their presence signals a need for caution.

For the project, this means redevelopment must recognize that the corridor is connected to a vital water system. Protecting groundwater quality and reducing strain on the watershed will be essential to making land use choices that are safe, resilient, and fair for the people who live and work here, as well as for the communities connected through shared water. Because aquifer risks extend beyond parcel boundaries, contamination from industrial sites in the Jefferson Avenue corridor does not only pose risks to this neighborhood; it can compound environmental burdens in other communities and neighborhoods connected to the water system.

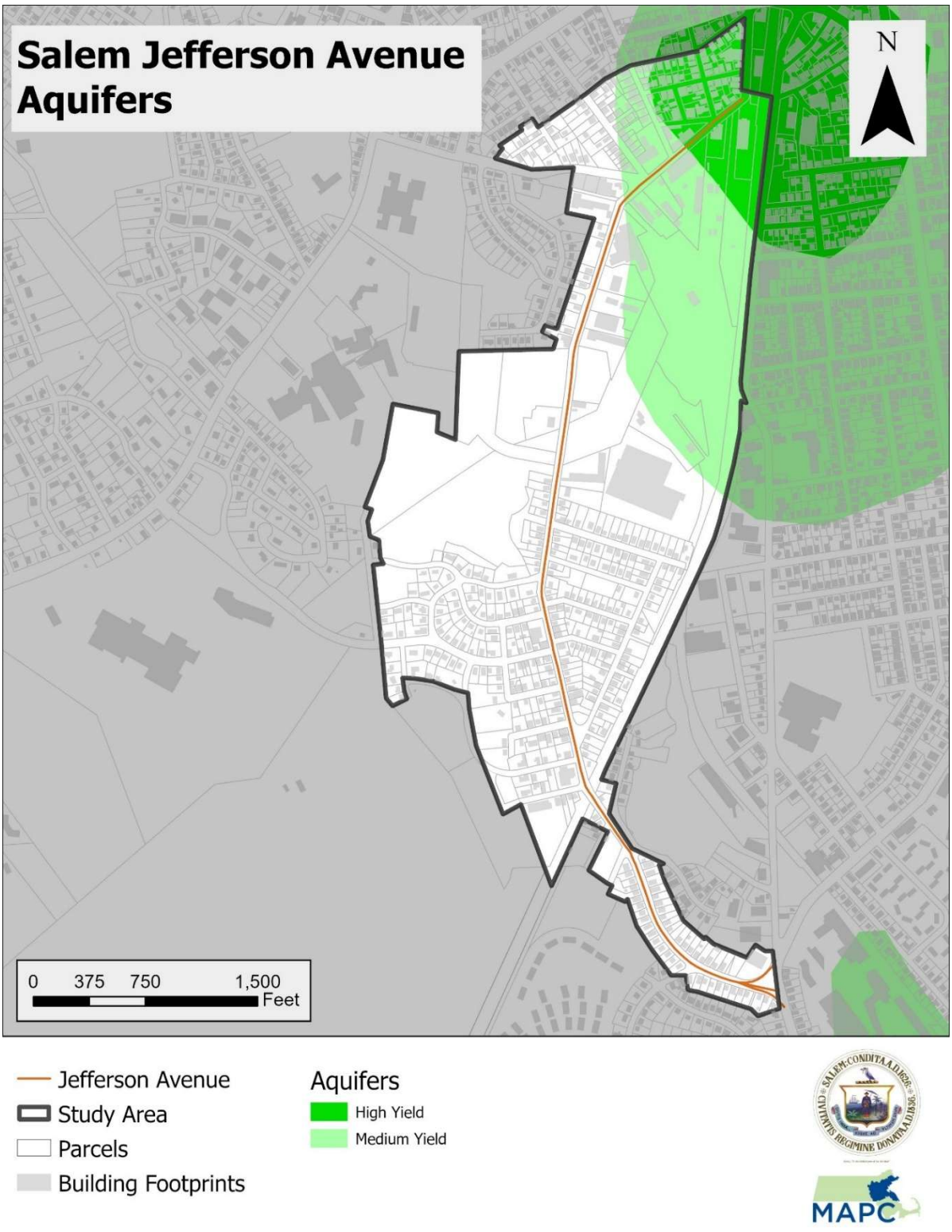


Figure 22: Groundwater lies beneath a quarter of the corridor, a reminder that this area is part of a larger water system that needs protection from contamination. Source: MassGIS Data: Aquifers

The Water Bodies map in Figure 23 shows Mill Pond as the largest visible feature in the corridor, with the South River continuing south through culverts, dams, and filled channels. Rosie's Pond, just beyond the study area, remains part of the same hydrological system.

Although much of the river is buried, it still directs drainage, flooding, and neighborhood vulnerability, carrying runoff into Mill Pond, culverts, and wetlands. These flows explain why some parcels remain waterlogged and why flooding persists despite decades of fill and control measures.

Recognizing both the visible ponds and the buried course of the South River is essential for future planning of this area. The South River has been forced underground for commerce and industry, yet it continues to flood, drain, and shape the corridor. Restoring part of the South River to above ground, a process called "daylighting", can add flood storage and reduce surface heat. Daylighting could be considered, where feasible. This process could also create visible routes along the river's hidden line, increasing awareness of the water's presence among pedestrians and drivers.

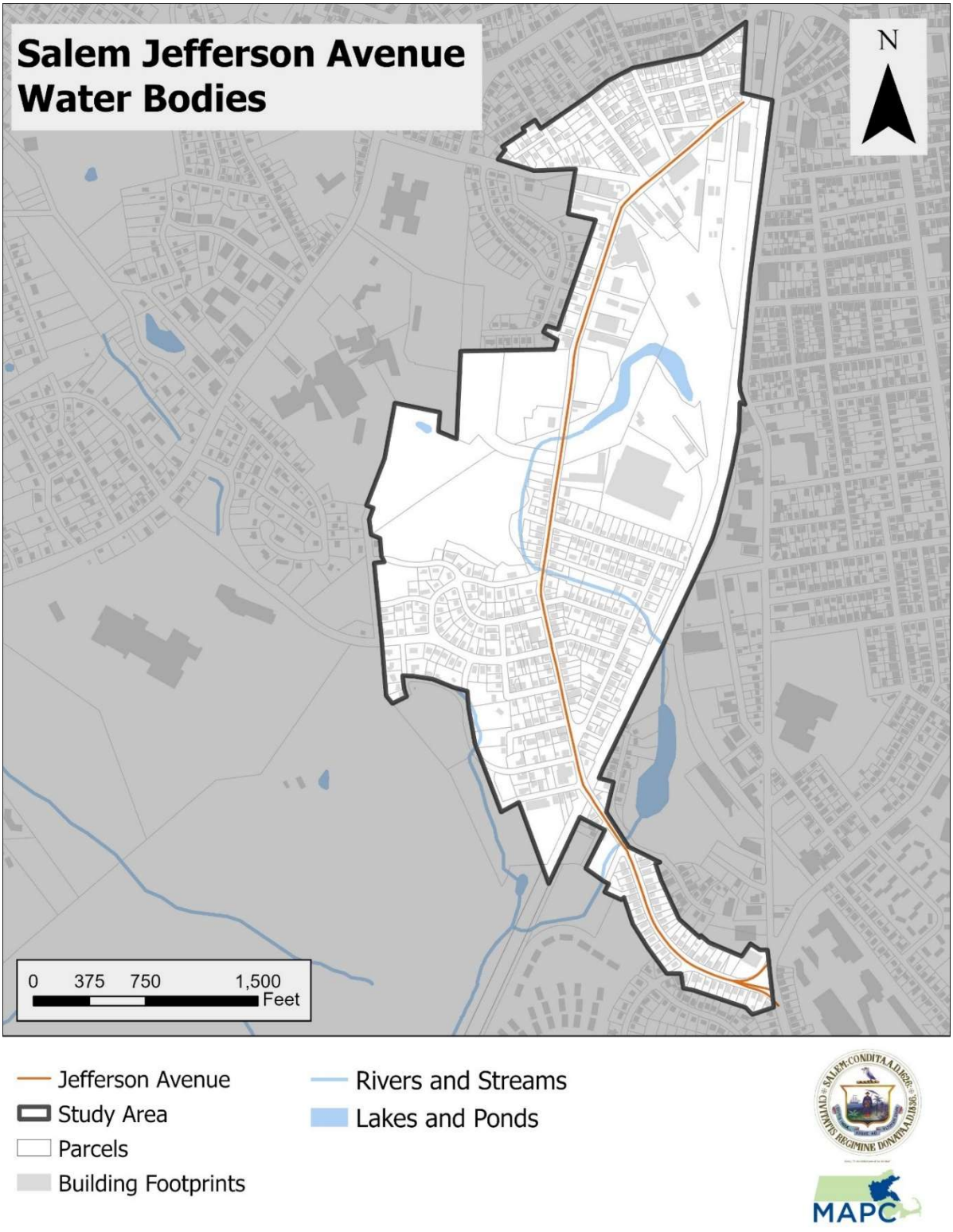


Figure 23: Mill Pond and buried sections of the South River continue to direct flooding and drainage, showing the river's presence even where it is hidden. Source: MassGIS Data: Major Ponds and Major Streams

In Figure 24, the Wetlands map shows that the Jefferson Avenue study area contains several Freshwater Emergent Wetlands. These areas appear most prominently around Mill Pond, within the parcel at 34 Horton Street, and at sites along the southwest and southeast edges of the corridor. The southeast boundary of the study area also borders a larger wetland just outside the project area. These wetlands are linked to the buried South River.

Wetlands influence how land can be used because they hold water, have soft soils, and are prone to flooding. Even when the surface looks dry, waterlogged soils beneath can limit what types of buildings or infrastructure are possible. In Jefferson Avenue, wetlands overlap with parcels that have redevelopment potential, including 34 Horton Street, 185 Jefferson Avenue, and 53 Jefferson Avenue. Their presence shows how the South River continues to surface in fragments, reminding us that the river has not disappeared, even if it is no longer visible.

Wetlands must be understood as more than obstacles to development, but as partners that hold ecological memory and value. They carry ecological functions the corridor has lost elsewhere, such as storing water, filtering runoff, and supporting biodiversity. Treating wetlands with care is both an ecological and social act, reducing flooding risks for residents while helping the land regain balance. The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, administered by the Salem Conservation Commission, protects wetlands for flood control, pollution prevention, storm damage prevention, protection of water supplies, and other priorities. Salem also has a local ordinance providing additional wetland protection, establishing a 25-foot “no disturb area” and a 50-foot buffer that requires impact mitigation, in addition to climate change considerations. Zoning and land use choices will signal whether wetlands remain overburdened or are remade into resources that serve both the community and the river.

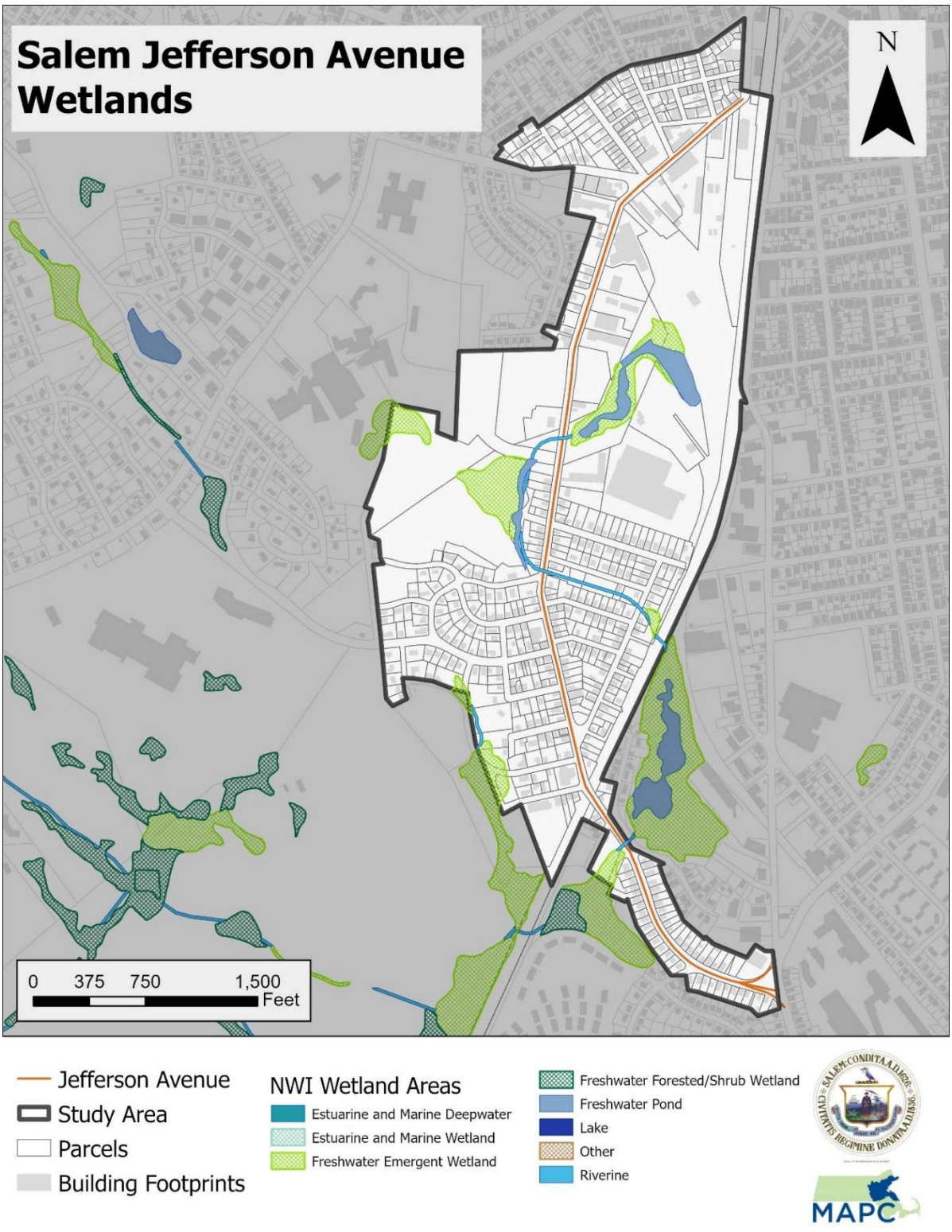


Figure 24: Wetlands persist in fragments, carrying ecological functions that shape both resilience and redevelopment potential. Source: MassGIS Data collected from National Wetlands Inventory

The Flood Risk map in Figure 25 shows that roughly one-third of the Jefferson Avenue study area lies within FEMA AE zones, meaning there is a one percent annual chance of flooding with a defined base flood elevation. This includes about 65 acres, concentrated in the northern portion of the corridor and overlapping with parcels at 34 Horton Street, 53 Jefferson Avenue, and 185 Jefferson Avenue. In total, 143 parcels in the study area have some level of flood exposure.

These flood zones reveal how the South River continues to move through the corridor, pressing water back into its lowest grounds even where culverts and fill tried to contain it. The river reasserts itself during storms, reminding the neighborhood that its buried course has not been erased. Families and renters living on these low-lying parcels experience this return most directly, carrying the risks left behind by industry and channelization. By contrast, higher parcels remain drier and safer, underscoring how elevation and history together shape unequal burdens.

Planning must work to appropriately recognize the South River as an active force that continues to shape land use. Development in flood-prone parcels will require careful design to reduce risks for residents and businesses while respecting the river's role in shaping the corridor and right to exist. Flooding has been framed as an unavoidable feature of low ground, but it is also the outcome of choices that fill channels and concentrate risk. Addressing it is not only a technical necessity but a chance to undo that inheritance, protect households most exposed, and enhance safety.

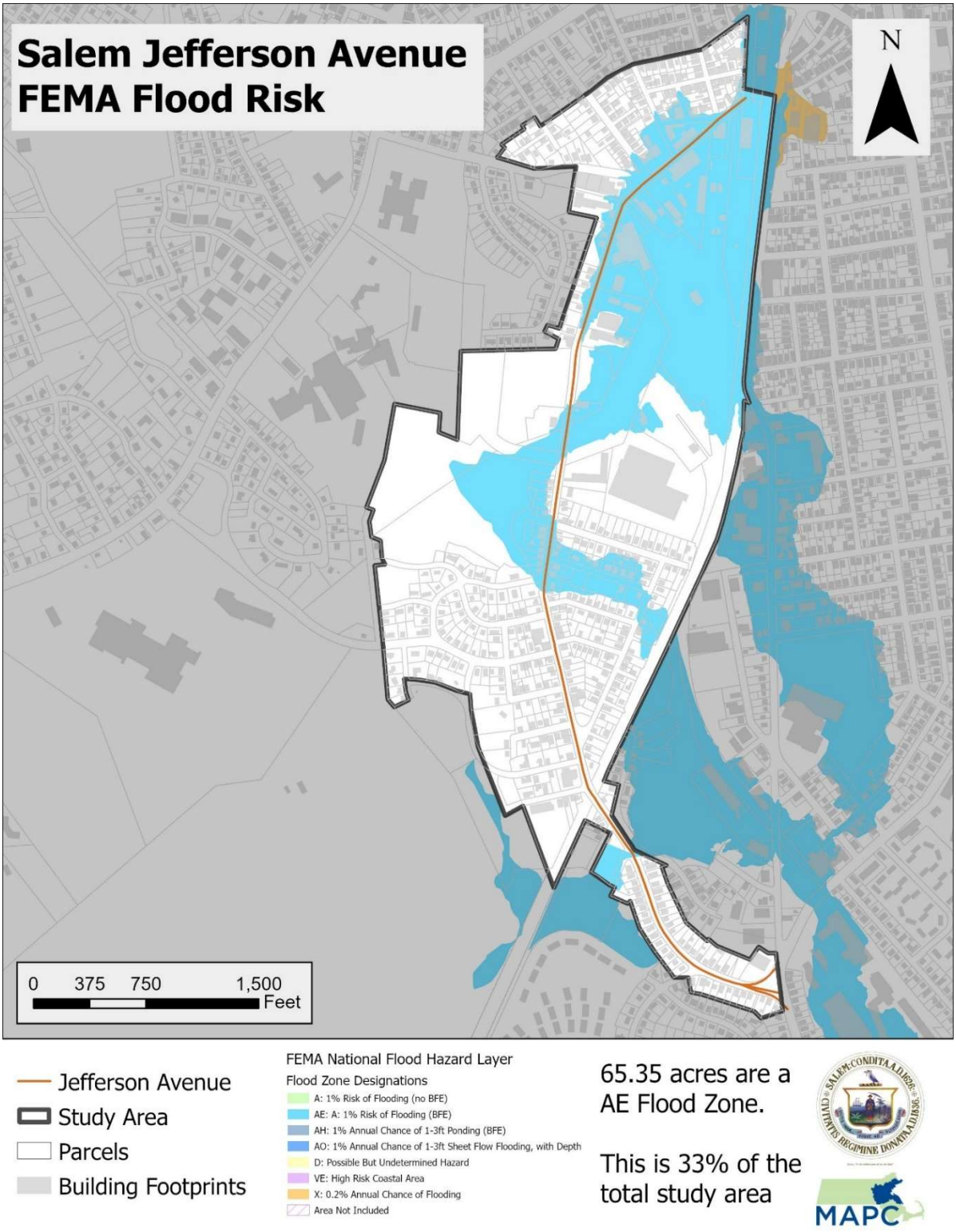


Figure 25: About one-third of the corridor lies within FEMA AE zones, concentrating risks in low-lying parcels. Source: MassGIS Data collected from National Flood Hazard Layer

The South River's lowlands connect directly to the ocean—the Sea Level Rise map (Figure 26) shows much of the corridor is projected to face inundation, with NOAA models indicating Mean Higher High Water plus four feet in about fifty years. Beyond that, larger portions of the corridor could be underwater within the next century.

These risks follow the historic course of the South River, which connects directly to the ocean. As seas rise, the river will bring water back into places once carved as its channels. This is not a new threat, but a continuation of the river's presence shaped by climate change.

Long-term planning must recognize that the river and ocean act together as living systems. Immediate priorities may focus on managing flooding and wetlands, but sea level rise makes clear that water will continue to return to these lands. Planning for this return means designing with water rather than against it, while also addressing the unequal risks borne by residents on the lowest ground – the Coastal Resilience Overlay District (CROD) in Salem's zoning ordinance takes this into consideration though higher elevation standards and other measures. Without intervention, the same households already exposed will inherit even greater burdens. Investment guided by this reality can reduce harm, protect vulnerable families, and allow the river to reassert itself without repeating the exclusions of the past.

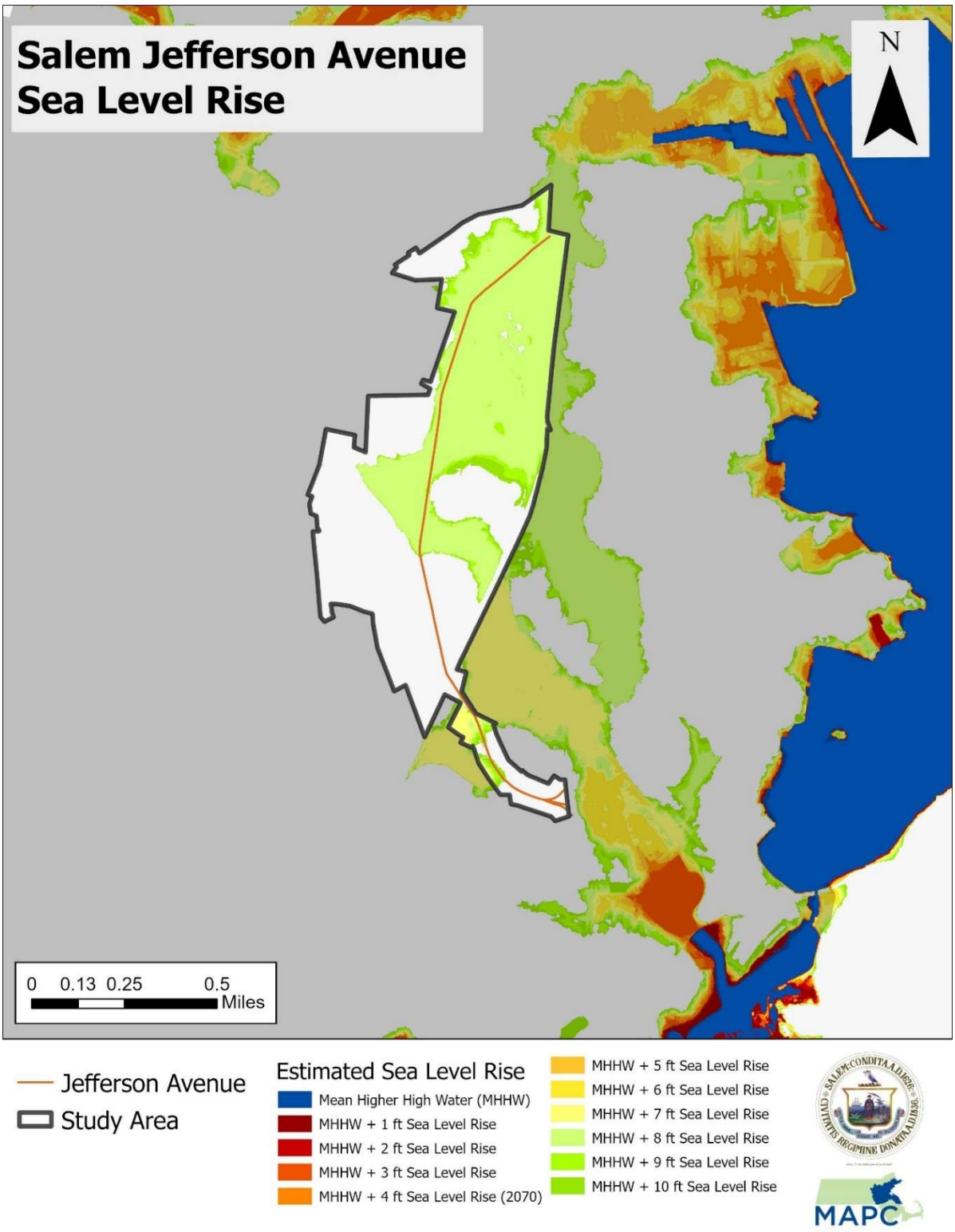


Figure 26: Models show future inundation across much of the corridor, with water returning to places long shaped by the river's path. Source: MassGIS Data collected from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

As Figure 27 shows, the Composite Water Constraints map layers aquifers, wetlands, ponds, and floodplains. Together, they show how the South River binds these elements into a single living system. The overlap is strongest in the low-lying parcels, where water resurfaces again and again.

This system reveals both limits and responsibilities. Where the river, wetlands, and aquifers meet, parcels carry compound risks of flooding, contamination, and instability. These connections add complexity to development but also point to the ecological functions the land continues to carry.

This composite view shows that planning cannot treat water as a single variable. The South River continues to bind land, people, and ecosystems, and planning must respect that connection. Parcels fall into three categories: most constrained, moderate risk, and fewer barriers. All require decisions that balance human needs with ecosystem function. Working with water as a defining presence, not a problem to overcome, means reducing repeated burdens on the same households and ensuring resilience benefits are shared across the community.

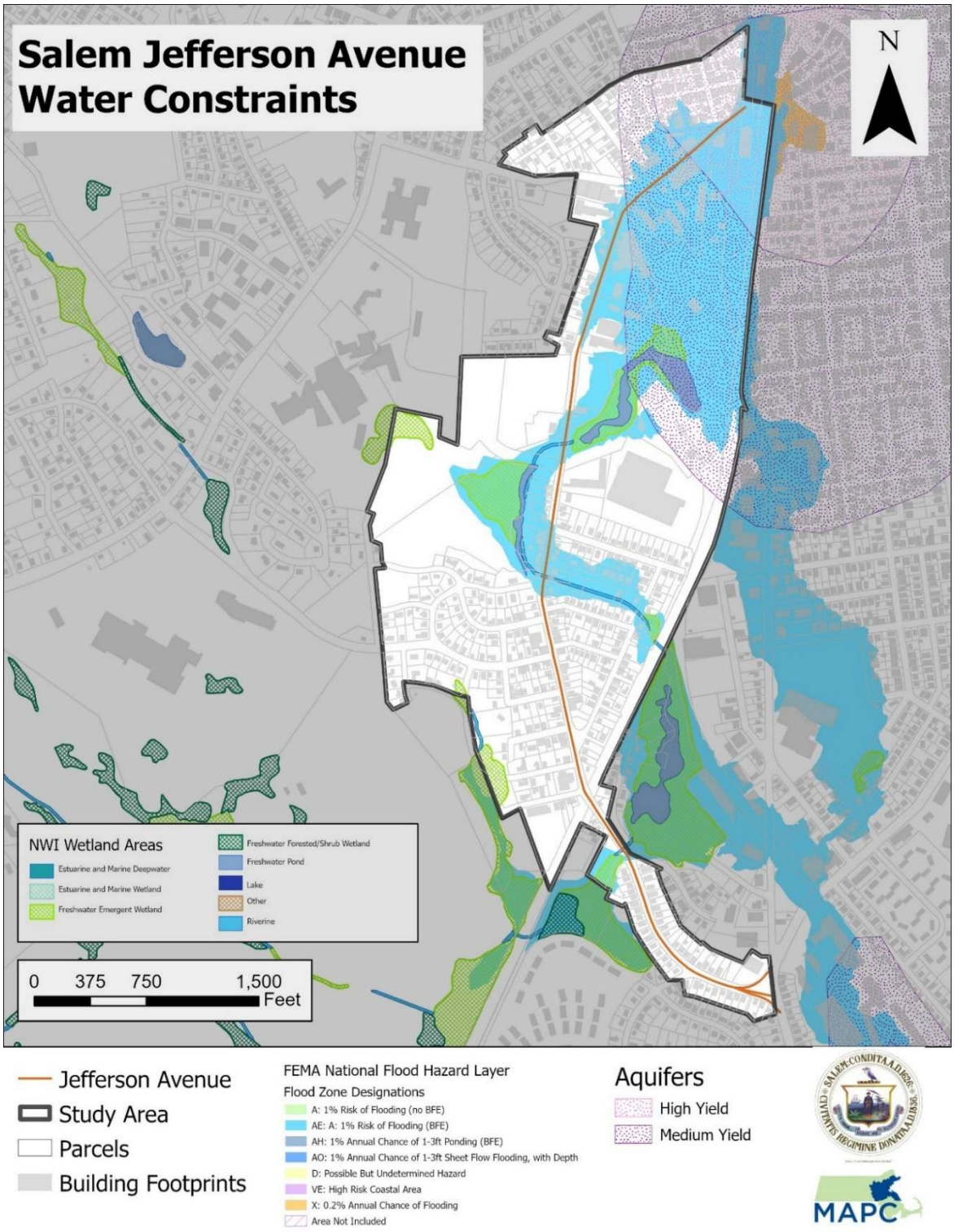


Figure 27: The overlap of aquifers, wetlands, ponds, and floodplains shows how land and water remain interconnected, revealing the legacy of the South River's erasure and the need for restoration. Source: MassGIS Data collected from National Flood Hazard Layer; National Wetlands Inventory; Aquifers data layer

The Composite Map in Figure 28 brings together land elevation, soil types, flood zones, and sites with Activity and Use Limitations (AULs). By showing these layers together, the map highlights where risks overlap and how they interact within the Jefferson Avenue corridor.

The greatest challenges appear in low-lying areas near sea level that fall within FEMA AE zones. These parcels combine fine-grained soils with flood risk, making them difficult to drain and costly to build on. Several AUL sites are located in these same areas, raising concern that contaminants could be spread by floodwaters or move more easily through sand and gravel soils. In the northern part of the study area, this overlap is particularly acute: three parcels with AUL restrictions sit within FEMA flood zones and coincide with census block groups where households already face high housing-cost burdens. Families living here carry multiple risks at once, including affordability pressure, exposure to flooding, and proximity to contamination.

The composite map underscores that decisions about land use cannot be made by looking at one factor in isolation. The overlap of elevation, soils, flooding, and contamination shows where risks concentrate and where planning must balance limits with responsibilities. It also highlights the question of whether redevelopment should favor the safer, higher parcels, or prioritize risk reduction for those already living and working in the most burdened areas.

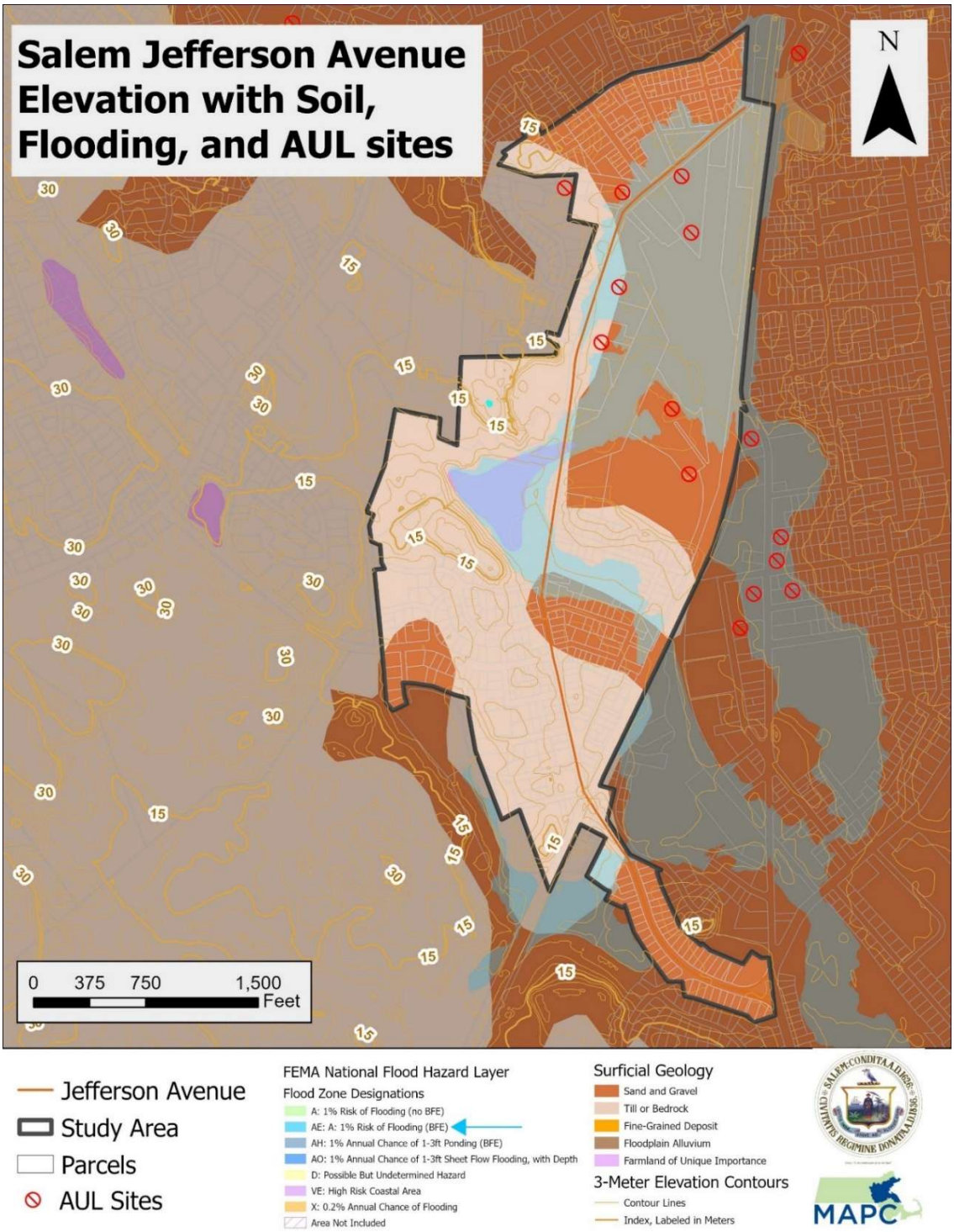


Figure 28: Elevation, soils, flooding, and AUL sites together reveal parcels where multiple risks overlap, shaping today's challenges. Source: MassGIS Data collected from National Flood Hazard Layer; the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); MassDEP (Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection) *Oil and/or Hazardous Material Sites with Activity and Use Limitations (AUL); and the U.S. Geological Survey*

Networks and Connectivity: How connection and disconnection shape belonging

Mobility along Jefferson Avenue has never been just about roads and traffic counts. It has been about who could move, who was blocked, and how land was reshaped to serve some forms of movement while cutting off others. Today's auto-centric corridor, with degraded sidewalks, limited transit, and no fixed-route transit, reflects a longer history of redlining, urban renewal, and disinvestment. In this sense, transportation data can be read as both infrastructure and social record, showing who has been connected, and who has been left out.

Roads, Rail, and Division

Jefferson Avenue begins just south of downtown Salem and extends nearly one and a half miles before joining Loring Avenue. Just before that junction, the street crosses the MBTA commuter rail tracks, and it is the only crossing of the tracks south of downtown. This makes Jefferson Avenue a vital connector for the city. At the same time, the crossing highlights how infrastructure draws boundaries that separate neighborhoods. Traffic count data from March 2024 show daily volumes between 11,627 and 15,913 vehicles. The highest volume, 15,193 vehicles, was recorded near 322 Jefferson Avenue south of Willson Street, while the highest north-of-Willson count reached 12,888 vehicles near 44 Jefferson Avenue. The difference of more than 2,000 vehicles indicates that many drivers use Jefferson Avenue and Willson Street in combination and travel less frequently along the full length of Jefferson Avenue. For the one in five households in the Jefferson Avenue corridor without cars, these volumes mean daily exposure to unsafe streets rather than improved access.

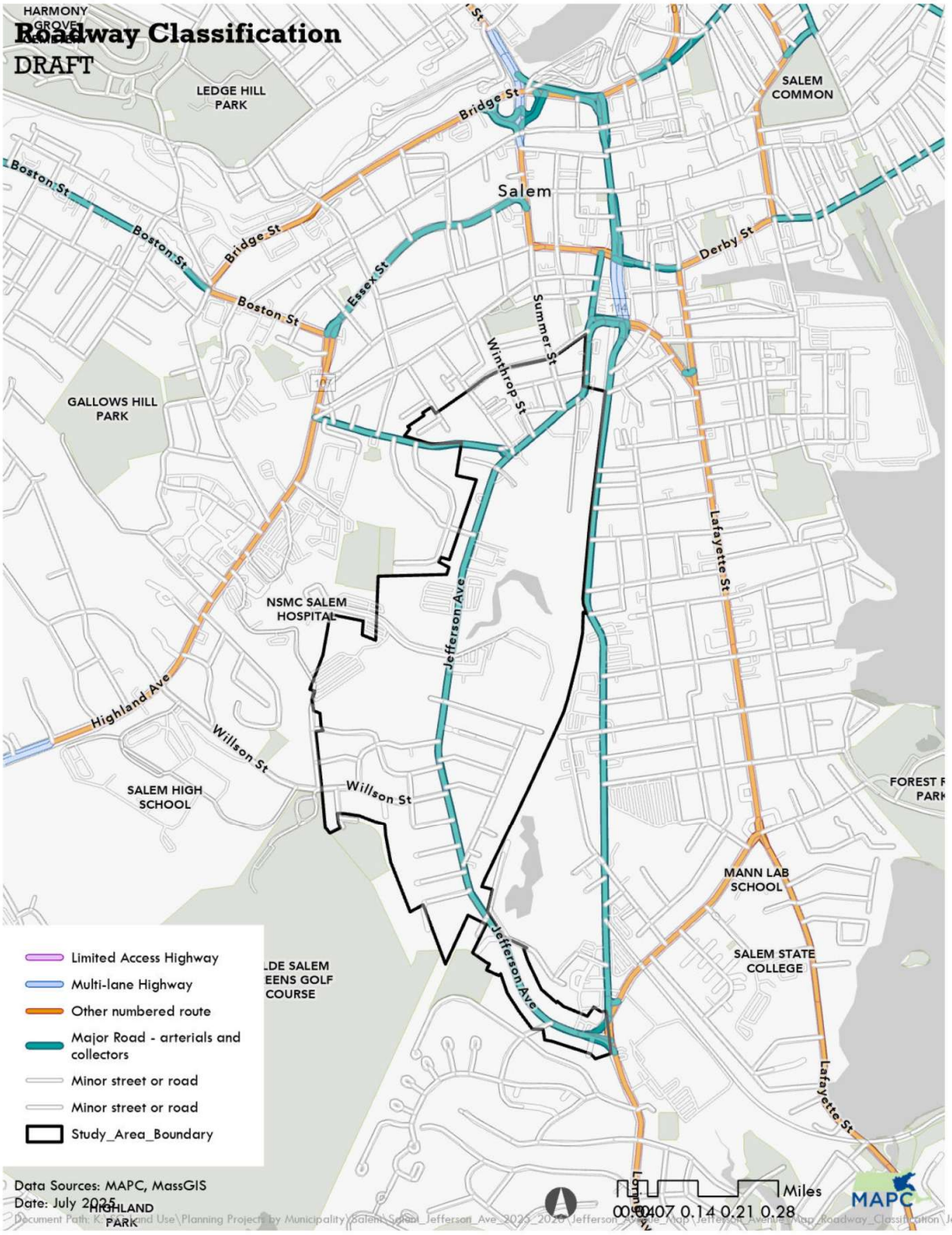


Figure 29: Jefferson Avenue and Canal Street are major routes that channel heavy through-traffic past neighborhoods at the expense of local circulation. Source: MassGIS Data collected from Massachusetts Department of Transportation

These conditions are not new. Filling the South River replaced movement that had once been made by small boats, footpaths, and neighborhood bridges with freight lines and industrial access. The Salem Depot, built in 1847 and later demolished during the 1950s tunnel extension, was one such project that redirected local movement toward regional rail and away from neighborhood paths. This redefinition of mobility set a precedent for later planning decisions, where regional circulation needs outweighed neighborhood life and local connections. Just as mid-century highway plans emphasized treating Jefferson Avenue as expendable ground for traffic, today's traffic volumes and injury patterns highlight how that area continues to privilege movement through the corridor over the safety of those who live along it.

Future investment could reverse this pattern by treating Jefferson Avenue as more than a conduit for traffic. Rebalancing road space for all users, improving crossings at the tracks, and slowing driving would create safer conditions for households that rely on walking, biking, or transit. In this way, the corridor could begin to serve neighborhood life again, restoring local connections that have long been deprioritized.

Transit and Disconnection

There is currently no fixed-route transit service on Jefferson Avenue itself. The northern end of the corridor is just under a mile from the Salem commuter rail station, while MBTA bus routes 450 and 455 run within half a mile along Highland Avenue and Lafayette Avenue. Route 450 connects Salem to Haymarket Station in Boston, and Route 455 connects to Wonderland Station in Revere. Under the MBTA Bus Network Redesign, both routes will improve to service every 30 minutes or better from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., with Route 450 shifted to terminate at Wonderland Station. Even with these upgrades, residents of Jefferson Avenue would need to walk unsafe streets to reach bus service, leaving many without direct access to transit.

This absence of transit continues earlier patterns of disconnection. When the river was filled, the smaller crossings and neighborhood paths disappeared. The new land was laid out for freight and later cars, which made travel more dangerous for people on foot. Transit routes then developed outside the corridor, reinforcing the lack of local-scale mobility. Infrastructure decisions favored industrial and regional circulation while leaving local needs unmet. The lack of service on the corridor today repeats that history, limiting opportunities for the very households that most need reliable transit.

Planned investments could begin to close these gaps. The proposed South Salem commuter rail station, likely located between Ocean Avenue West and Ocean Avenue, is designed as a neighborhood-serving stop with little or no parking, encouraging walking and biking. A potential bicycle and pedestrian bridge at Ocean Avenue would reconnect neighborhoods once linked by earlier crossings such as the Browne Bridge. These changes

would restore connections that have been erased over time and provide a foundation for transit that supports neighborhood belonging rather than exclusion.

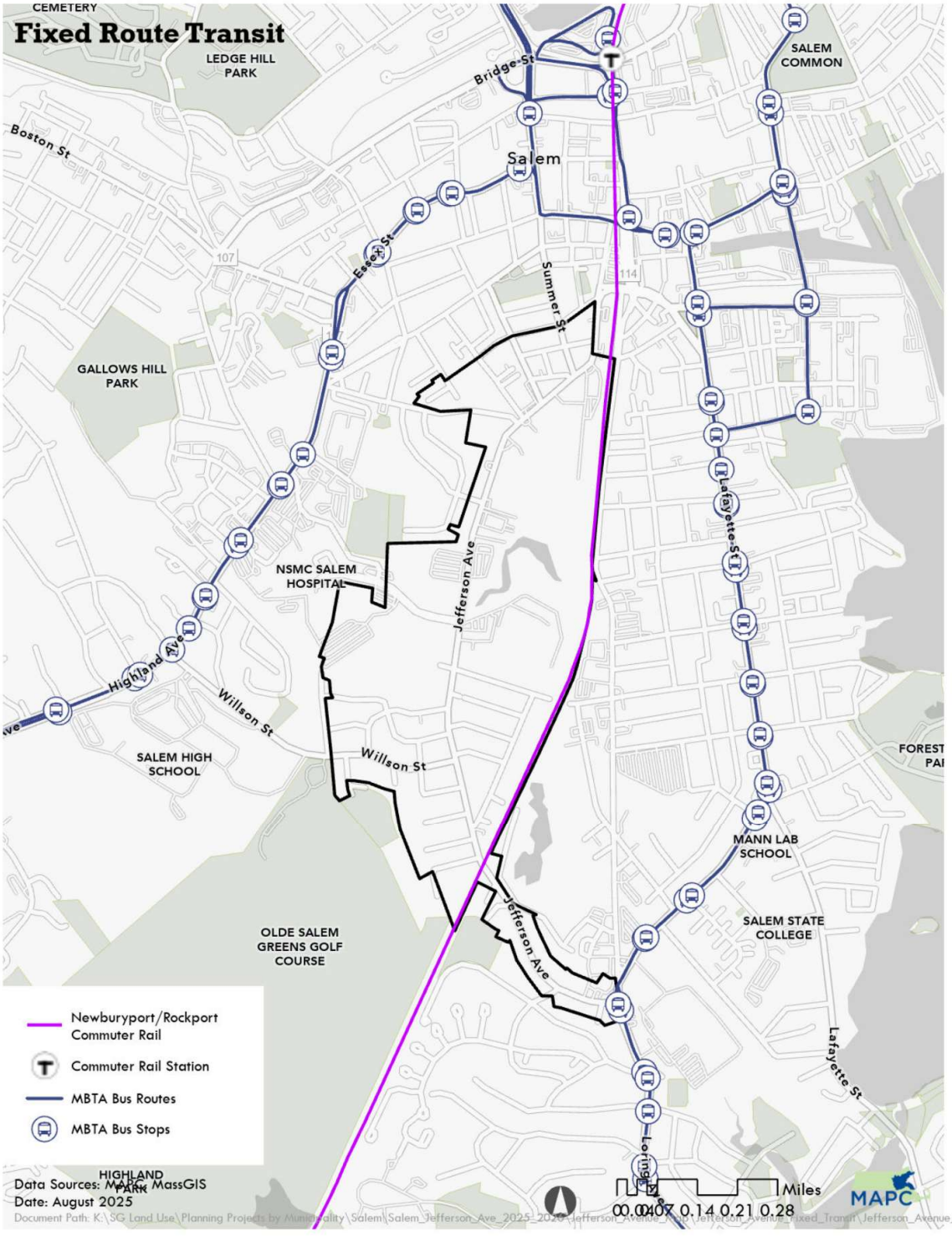


Figure 30: Fixed-route transit runs nearby but not within the Jefferson Avenue corridor, leaving residents reliant on unsafe walks to reach buses or trains. Source: MassGIS Data collected from Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Pedestrian and Bicycle Conditions

The corridor offers no bicycle infrastructure, and sidewalks, curbs, and crosswalks are often in poor condition. Wide vehicular travel lanes encourage high speeds, creating hazards for anyone on foot, bike, or using mobility devices. Between 2020 and 2025, crash data recorded one fatal pedestrian crash at Jefferson Avenue and Willson Street, two cyclist injury crashes, and 17 vehicular injury crashes. Salem's Safe Streets for All Action Plan identifies Jefferson Avenue as part of the City's High Injury Network. These outcomes are not accidental; they are the result of roadway designs that prioritized vehicle speed over pedestrian safety.

The City of Salem has applied for MassWorks funding to design a roundabout at Jefferson Avenue and Jackson Street and to build a shared-use path for walking and biking between Jackson Street and Margin Street/Mill Street. The path would connect directly to the Mayor Anthony V. Salvo Multi-use Path, creating a continuous network across the corridor. These projects advance goals from the Salem Bicycle Master Plan, which identified Jefferson Avenue as a priority for safe cycling. Adding improved crossings, bike facilities, and BlueBikes access would deliver on those earlier commitments while also reconnecting people to the South River corridor, turning land once treated only as space for vehicles into part of a neighborhood network of walking, cycling, and gathering.

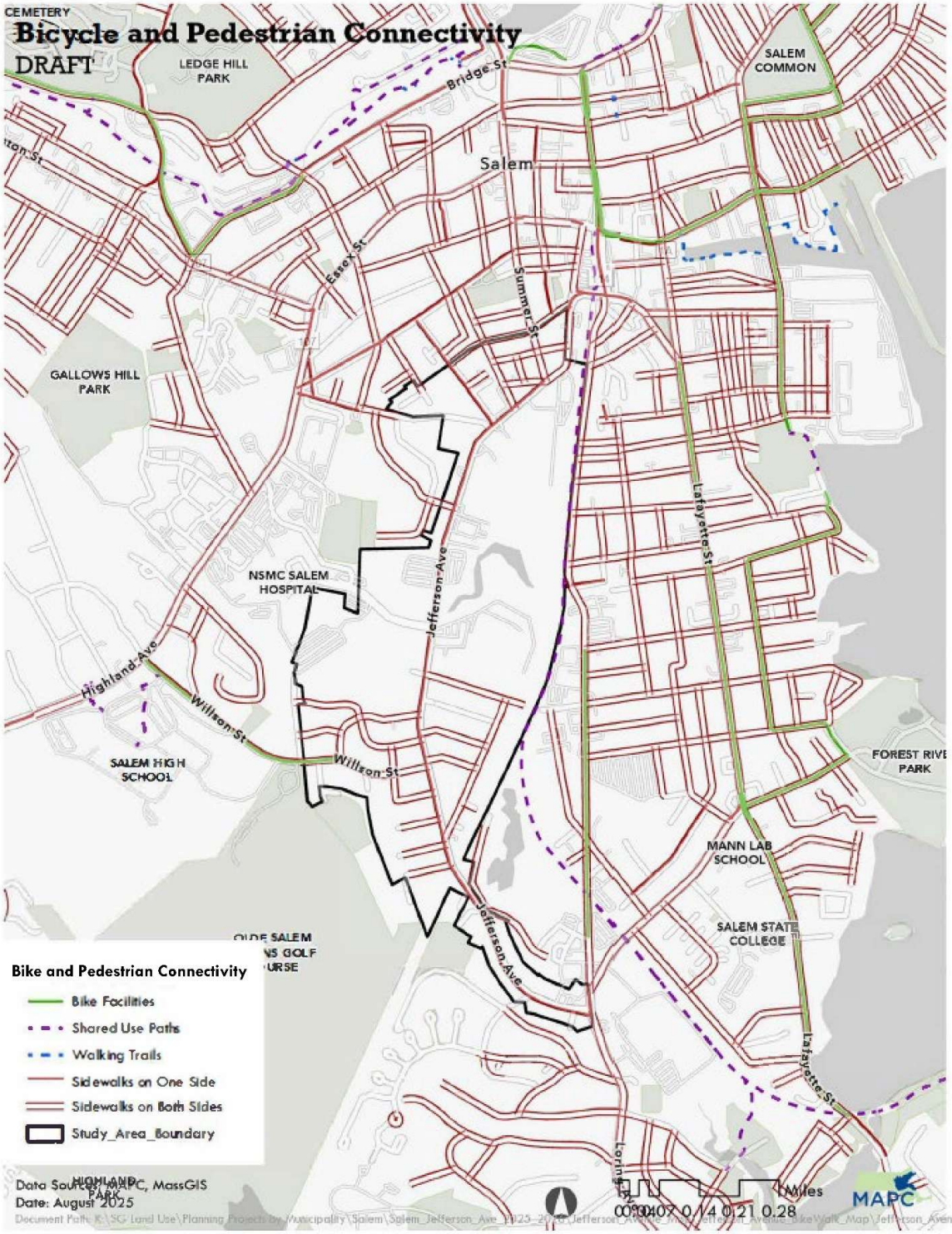


Figure 31: Along Jefferson Avenue, sidewalks run only on one side, while Canal Street has gaps, showing how limited pedestrian infrastructure shapes who can safely move through the corridor. Source: MassGIS Data collected from Massachusetts Department of Transportation. Note: A more thorough map of biking infrastructure, which distinguishes between protected and conventional bike lanes, can be found here.

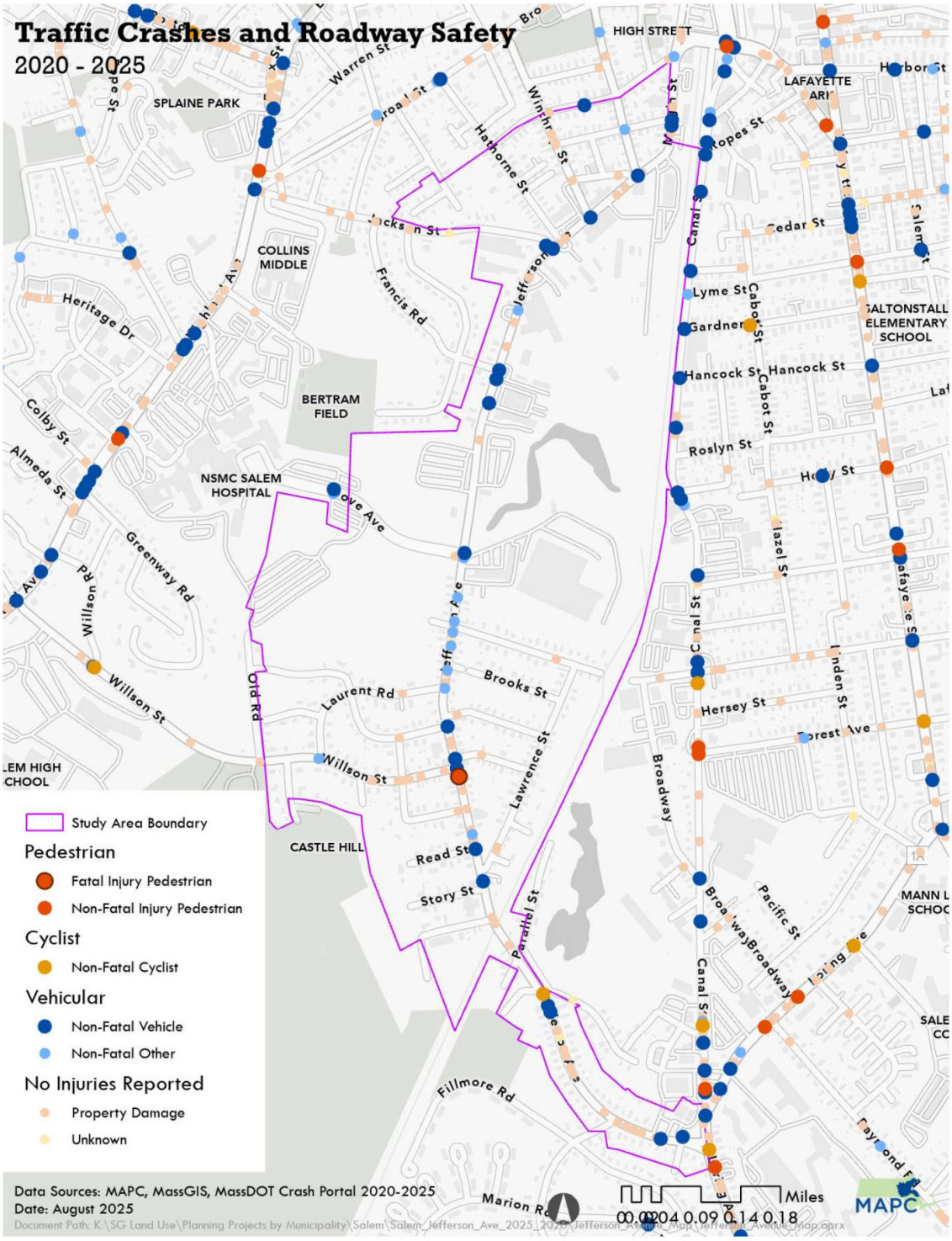


Figure 32: Data from 2020–2025 show frequent pedestrian and vehicular crashes along Jefferson Avenue and Canal Street, underscoring how roadway safety remains a daily concern in the corridor. Source: MassGIS Data collected from Massachusetts Department of Transportation

Land Use and Mobility Together

Land use along Jefferson Avenue reflects the corridor's circulation priorities. Small businesses sit behind wide paved areas without buffers or trees, leaving pedestrians exposed to traffic and heat. Additionally, Salem Hospital maintains two large surface parking lots on either side of the avenue, with shuttles carrying staff and visitors to and from the hospital. Together these choices create a streetscape defined by parking and vehicle movement rather than by neighborhood life. Residents today encounter unsafe walking conditions, limited shade, and few opportunities to meet. This pattern follows earlier cycles of change that reduced the ecological and community functions of land along the South River.

Recommendations should consider opportunities that prioritize these needs while considering key operations along the corridor. For example, as the ULI Technical Assistance Panel Report for Salem Mobility Oriented Development suggested, Salem Hospital could potentially maintain its parking capacity through a more efficient parking structure. This would create additional opportunities for land use investments in the corridor.

Framing the Future

Future reuse of these parcels could begin to repair the history and current challenges of the corridor. Active ground-floor uses and shaded sidewalks would make daily movement safer and more welcoming. Larger parcels now used for surface parking could support mixed-use redevelopment that brings together housing and community-serving activities. In select locations, exploring elevating the ground plane to reduce flood risk, and daylighting of the South River could strengthen this repair by making the water visible again and reestablishing it as part of neighborhood life.

Mobility in the Jefferson Avenue corridor has always been shaped by choices about whose movement to prioritize. Indigenous people once traveled the South River by canoe, and later residents crossed it by small bridges. The river was then filled for rail and freight, narrowing local circulation while privileging industrial use. Later investments in roads and urban renewal projects served commuters and outside industries rather than the neighborhoods along the corridor. Today, cut-through traffic and the absence of transit service continue those patterns of fragmentation. Crash data, traffic counts, and transit gaps show how movement in the corridor has been structured around exclusion.

Future investments such as the South Salem commuter rail station, pedestrian bridges, shared-use paths, and safer intersections are opportunities to reverse that history. Building the South Salem station would also serve as a form of historic preservation because it restores a transportation connection once provided by the Salem Depot - whose demolition in the 1950s marked the loss of rail access at the community's edge - while

avoiding earlier patterns of neighborhood disruption. Rebuilding connections would echo earlier practices where communities created their own pathways across barriers. Mobility improvements can work in a similar way, but their value will depend on whether they serve the people who live and work in the corridor. Repairing both ecological and human connections would allow Jefferson Avenue to function as a place of belonging that meets the needs of the community.

Place-Based Insights and Future Potential: How repair can guide the corridor's future

The existing conditions presented in this report show how land, community, ecology, business, and transportation interact along the Jefferson Avenue corridor. MAPC distills twelve key takeaways from this research:

1. **The buried South River continues to shape neighborhood conditions** through flooding and soil instability.
2. **Local residents face high housing stress**, with 41% of households cost-burdened and 32% of renters severely rent-burdened.
3. **Stakeholders view the Jefferson Avenue corridor as a place of both possibility and responsibility**, where hopes for new housing, small businesses, and reconnection are tempered by considerations for displacement, contamination, flooding, lot characteristics, industrial use, and financial feasibility.
4. **Most buildings in the Jefferson Avenue corridor were constructed before 1930** (median year 1920), predating zoning. Current zoning reflects some of those historical patterns, shaping which households and land uses are more common today.
5. **Over half of the corridor's housing sits on parcels now "nonconforming,"** including 94 historically significant MACRIS properties, while large minimum lot sizes (up to 80,000 sq. ft.) and restrictive commercial/industrial zoning limit multifamily housing and neighborhood-integrated uses.
6. **Minimum lot sizes, maximum coverage, and building height rules could restrict density and flexibility for developing housing, mixed-used, and other types of land uses**; small adjustments could enable multifamily housing, ecological integration, and better alignment with historic neighborhood patterns.
7. **Soils, elevation, wetlands, and aquifers continue to shape development feasibility**; underlying natural systems and constraints continue to drive land value and future potential.
8. **Past industrial uses, publicly accessible reports filed with MassDEP, and AUL restrictions indicate a presence of contamination in the study area.** AULs on a site mean that the current use of land is safe, but industrial contamination should be considered when thinking about redevelopment.
9. **The corridor lacks core habitats or open space**, shifting ecological value to surrounding parks, and manipulating active water systems drive drainage and flooding, requiring planning that integrates water management, ecological preservation, and social equity.
10. **Jefferson Avenue's mobility reflects past exclusionary decisions**—corridor mobility has prioritized freight and cars over pedestrian circulation, resulting in

today's high traffic volumes (11,627–15,913 vehicles/day in March 2024) and unsafe streets for non-drivers.

11. **The corridor lacks fixed-route transit and safe walking/biking infrastructure**. Between 2020-2025, there have been 1 pedestrian fatality, 2 cyclist injuries, and 17 vehicular injuries recorded on the corridor. Planned investments like the South Salem commuter rail station and a shared-use path aim to restore connectivity.
12. **Policies and zoning that encourage large surface parking lots, wide streets, and paved setbacks continue to prioritize vehicles**, limit potential for housing and public spaces, and perpetuate historical patterns that treat land along the corridor primarily as circulation and storage space.

For planning, the task is to respond to these linked pressures. Repair depends on treating land, water, and community as connected forces, with each shaping the corridor's conditions and possibilities. MAPC's restorative planning approach will consider how future zoning, land reuse, and mobility decisions can translate repair into zoning while addressing the regional housing and transit challenges felt in Salem.

Through this approach, the Jefferson Avenue corridor becomes a place not to avoid development, but to redefine it. Growth here can provide housing, jobs, and connection while also repairing the harm of past choices. To that end, MAPC will explore the following critical concepts through the community visioning activities and recommendations in Phase 2:

- **Repair as baseline**: Zoning and redevelopment can actively support small local businesses that serve the neighborhood, consider where mixed-use opportunities may lie, create housing that remains affordable, and strengthen ties among residents so that new neighbors are welcomed as part of the community. For example, the corridor already holds small-scale shops, cafés, and restaurants that anchor daily life, even though they often sit on parcels smaller than zoning allows. Repair in this sense could mean revising zoning so these businesses are supported as vital parts of the local economy. As another example, repair could mean ensuring that deed-restricted and naturally-occurring affordable housing options are welcomed as part of the neighborhood rather than coded as out of step with the surrounding community. Repair also applies to land itself, which could look like designing new development with permeable pavers that reduce runoff, or creating green spaces that double as flood storage.
- **Living systems**: By treating land and water as partners, redevelopment can balance ecological function with community needs, showing that investment in this corridor

is both viable and vital. This means asking how new development can work with water and soil. Zoning and redevelopment could consider climate-adaptive measures and nature-based solutions along the corridor.

- **Rejecting diminished conditions**: Planning should not accept flooding, contamination, and limited open space as the permanent norm.
- **Balancing needs**: Redevelopment can meet housing, mobility, and employment needs while restoring ecological function.
- **Restorative growth**: Investment should share benefits across the community, addressing past inequities and creating opportunities for both community and physical resilience.

Appendix A

Table 10: What Uses Are Permitted, Restricted, or Excluded

	B1	B2	B4	I
Commercial Uses				
Adult day care	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Animal clinic or hospital; kennel	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Arts and crafts studios and workshops	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit	By-right
Bank, financial agency	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Bed and breakfast	Special Permit	Special Permit	Not allowed	Not allowed
Business or professional offices	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Commercial recreation	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Drive-through facilities	Not allowed	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Funeral home	Special Permit	Special Permit	Not allowed	Not allowed
General service establishment	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Golf course	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Historic buildings open to the public	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Hotel, motel, or inn	Not allowed	By-right	Special Permit	Not allowed
Marijuana Testing Facility	Not allowed	Special Permit	Not allowed	Special Permit
Marijuana Product Manufacturer	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	Special Permit
Marijuana Retailer	Not allowed	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Marina; waterfront boat yard or yacht club	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Medical and dental offices	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Motor vehicle general and body repair	Not allowed	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit

Motor vehicle light service	Special Permit	By-right	By-right	By-right
Motor vehicle, trailer and boat sales, service and rental	Not allowed	Special Permit	By-right	By-right
Museum	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Nonprofit outdoor recreational facilities	Special Permit	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed
Personal service establishment	By-right	Special Permit	By-right	Not allowed
Plumbing, carpentry and sheet metal shop	Not allowed	Not allowed	By-right	By-right
Restaurant, with service of alcoholic beverages	Special Permit	By-right	Not allowed	Not allowed
Restaurant; drive-in or fast-food	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Retail department store located within a shopping plaza	Not allowed	By-right	Not allowed	Not allowed
Retail Marijuana Cultivator	Not allowed	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Retail store or grocery store, except department store, not elsewhere set forth	By-right	By-right	By-right	By-right
Retail-wholesale supply establishments, provided that the wholesale operation does not exceed 50% of the gross floor area	Special Permit	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed
Sale and storage of building supplies	Not allowed	Not allowed	By-right	By-right
Supermarket	Not allowed	By-right	Not allowed	Not allowed
Wind energy facility, commercial scale	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	Special Permit
Wind energy facility, residential scale	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Wireless Communications Facility	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit
Industrial Uses				
Assembly or packaging	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	By-right

Brewery, distillery, or winery with tasting room	Special Permit	Special Permit	Special Permit	By-right
Computer hardware development	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	By-right
Contractor's yard; landscaping business	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	Special Permit
Food and beverage manufacturing, bottling or processing facility	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	By-right
Junkyard or automobile graveyard	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	By-right
Light manufacturing	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	Special Permit
Livery facility, yard, or terminal	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	Special Permit
Manufacturing	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	Special Permit
Mini-storage warehouse facility	Not allowed	Special Permit	Special Permit	By-right
Publishing and printing	Not allowed	By-right	By-right	By-right
Research, laboratories, and development facilities	Not allowed	By-right	Not allowed	Special Permit
Transportation terminal	Not allowed	Not allowed	Not allowed	Special Permit
Wholesale, warehouse, or distribution facility	Not allowed	By-right	By-right	By-right

Caption: The table shows how zoning places everyday community needs under stricter control while giving industry and storage broader permission.

Note: Projects prohibited by base zoning may be possible through planned use developments (PUDs), Chapter 40B projects, variances granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals, or special permits to expand nonconforming uses. Nonconforming uses can also be changed to another non-conforming use through a special permit.

Appendix B

MAPC would like to thank the following stakeholders for their one-on-one interviews with the project team:

- Dominick Pangallo, Mayor of the City of Salem
- Joan Lovely, Massachusetts State Senator
- Alistair Sawers, Senior Director of Rail Transformation, MBTA
- David Hark, Real Estate Advisor, the Drumlin Group
- Owen Hall, Director of Asset Management & Development, NorthBridge Partners
- Chris Koeplin, President, Beverly Crossing
- Bob Dunham, Property Owner on Jefferson Avenue
- Todd Waller, Property Owner on Jefferson Avenue
- Andy Goldberg, CEO & Senior Partner at Goldberg Properties
- William Goldberg, Founder & Senior Partner at Goldberg Properties

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