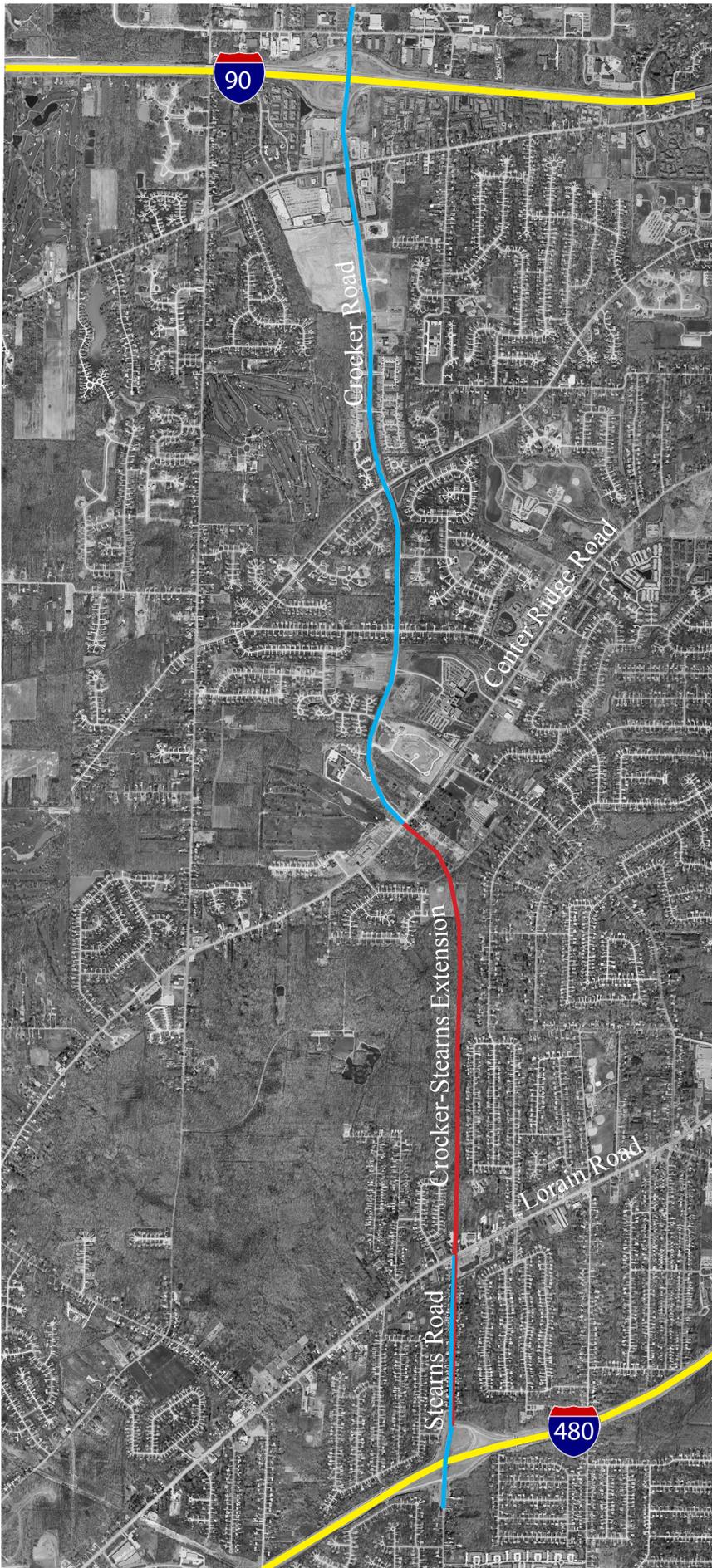


City of North Olmsted:
Crocker-Stearns Corridor Study



Prepared for the City of North Olmsted by
The Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio
April 2007



Context of the Study

Stearns Road extends north-south between I-480 and Lorain Road in North Olmsted. Crocker Road runs between Center-Ridge Road and I-90 in Westlake. The connection of these two roads is currently underway. This new corridor will connect 1-90 and Westlake to the north with 1-480 and North Olmsted to the south.

As this new corridor will be directly adjacent to residential neighborhoods, means are to be taken to minimize the acoustic impacts of vehicular traffic. In the City of Westlake, earth berms will be constructed. In the City of North Olmsted, a segmented, concrete sound wall will be erected along parts of the new corridor.

In addition to the construction of the new roadway, the existing segment of Stearns Road will be widened to accommodate two additional lanes. Based on its location and connection to development such as Crocker Park, the Corridor will undoubtedly become a high traffic road though both cities.



Purpose of the Study

The City of North Olmsted asked the Urban Design Center (UDC) to evaluate the potential land use changes that may occur along Stearns Road as a result of the new roadway and to propose a strategy of re-zoning areas to accommodate appropriate new development. This study is intended to aid the city in a rezoning process that will lead to the coordinated redevelopment of the corridor in accordance with the preferences of the city and its residents. The UDC was to also look into ways to minimize the visual impact of the sound wall.



City of North Olmsted: Crocker-Stearns Corridor

Process

The UDC worked with a Steering Committee formed by the City of North Olmsted to prepare the initial ideas about the corridor. These ideas were then discussed with residents during a community meeting in September, 2006. Based on community input, the UDC prepared a more detailed series of recommendations which were reviewed with the Steering Committee and presented during a second community meeting in February, 2007. Following this final meeting, community feedback was assembled and used to produce this report.

Study Areas

For this project, emphasis was placed on three different areas, representing the various conditions along the corridor that need to be addressed:

- 1 Stearns Road**
The widening of Stearns will have a significant impact upon the existing residents and potential future development.
- 2 Stearns/Lorain Intersection**
This intersection will gain visibility and have potential for place-making and redevelopment.
- 3 Sound wall treatment**
The walls represent a huge challenge in the ways they are perceived by pedestrian and vehicular traffic.



Existing houses without adequate turn-around space (in orange)

Home on Stearns with large tree buffer



City of North Olmsted: Crocker-Stearns Corridor

Stearns Road

The Crocker Stearns Corridor requires the widening of Stearns Road Lorain Road and I-480 by approximately 15 feet in both directions. This additional 30 feet of roadway undermines the current single family use along the street. The new four-lane road will limit the ability of residents to back out of their driveways, while the added traffic will increase noise levels. Many of the houses in this area are already fairly close to the street. The road expansion will make them much closer to a much busier street. Several houses along this street will have a set-back of less than 40 feet. The expansion of the street has also required the removal of many street trees.

There are strong feelings among the residents along Stearns Road regarding the roadway change. Many residents intend to move from their homes because of anticipated noise and traffic. For residents who chose to stay, the noise concern can be addressed by the strategic planting of trees and shrubs between the houses and the roadway. If vegetation is increased, the noise levels will be reduced. Residents are also concerned about difficulties getting out of their driveways, especially if they have to back out into the street. This issue can be addressed by making sure that residents have the space needed for turning their vehicles around on their own property. 44 properties along the street already have paved turnarounds. For the remaining 11 properties which do not have adequate pavement to allow this, a new concrete pad could be poured to accommodate turning around. The bulk purchase of trees for screening and a reduced rate on concrete installation would be an option for reducing costs to individual homeowners.

Based on community discussions, a significant number of Stearns Road residents plan to leave. Many are hoping a developer will buy their property as part of a larger development plan for the corridor. Since single-family housing is no longer the most viable use along Stearns Road, a new mix of uses needs to be determined that could accommodate a range of development alternatives. Near the intersection of Lorain Avenue and Stearns Road, a more dense mix of multi-family housing and retail uses would be appropriate, given the high visibility of the intersection and its proximity to public transit and existing retail areas along Lorain Avenue. In the short term, the middle segment of the street could become a flexible mixture of new and existing housing, ultimately transitioning to a mixture of new housing types, including townhouses, condominium buildings, and cluster homes, depending on market demand. The southern section of Stearns could support larger offices, or possibly a hotel, based on proximity to I-480. These possibilities are suggestions as to what could happen and make sense along the corridor; the actual uses along the wider Stearns will be strongly tied to market considerations. The goal is to create a zoning and land use plan that will accommodate this wide range of possibilities and allow them to successfully coexist.

In conjunction with new, higher density residential development, a new green space could also be created along the corridor. This amenity could include landscaped areas and an extension of an existing bike path. The public green space could be created as part of new private development in the corridor, rather than with city funds.



town center / local retail / gateway

higher-density residential or senior housing

multi-family housing

recreational area and trail

cluster homes

office space / hotel

Stearns Road
Development Possibilities

Stearns Lorain Intersection

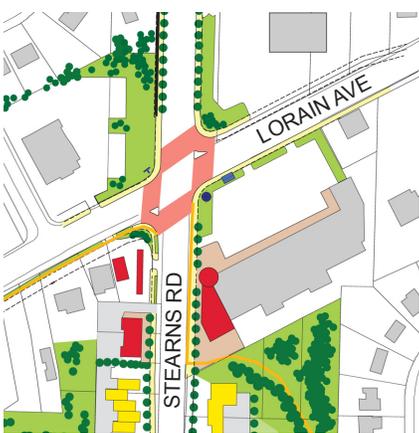
When the new corridor is complete, traffic at the Lorain Avenue/Stearns Road intersection will increase. Consequently, there will be an increase in development demand. Currently the intersection contains the following: in the northeast, a Rite Aid Pharmacy, in the northwest, the Chambers Funeral Home, in the southwest, the future site of a new BP and in the southeast, an existing shopping center. The funeral home, the Rite Aid, and the future BP station are established uses. The corner most susceptible to change is the shopping center, which has a high vacancy rate and is in need of reinvestment. The southwest corner could also include a small retail development, adjacent to the new gas station, to reinforce the intersection as a town center. There are two schematic options for improving the shopping center so that it will function as an activity center for the community and have better connections to other development in the corridor:

Option 1

The shopping center could be renovated with façade improvements and a small addition at the western end of the complex. This addition could include a community-oriented use, such as a restaurant or coffee shop with outdoor seating and public space at the end of the proposed bike trail. At the corner of the property, a clock tower or other vertical element could be erected to give the intersection some level of identity. Additionally, the bus stop at this location should be improved as it is likely to accommodate an increased ridership. This improvement could potentially be implemented through the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority's Transit Waiting Environments program.

Option 2

Another option for this property is the complete reconstruction and reconfiguration of the shopping center. The new development would address the corner in a more pedestrian friendly way and define the character of the intersection. The new complex should be at least two stories tall, to allow for a mix of uses, with parking behind. This configuration could also allow for the development of more housing along Stearns and an outdoor cafe/coffee shop area.



Intersection: Option 1

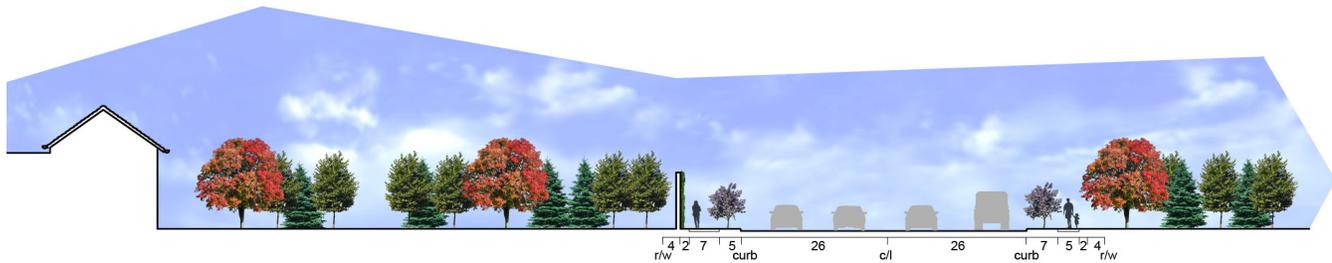
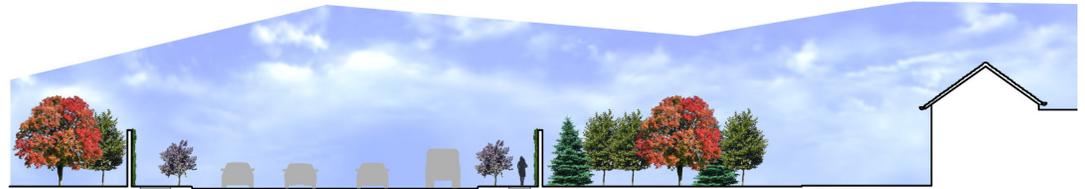


Intersection: Option 2





Elevation of Wall with climbing plants and trees



Sections of Corridor with Walls

Corridor Sound Walls

The sound walls will be installed as part of the corridor construction. The issue at hand is how to mitigate the negative impacts of this wall. The wall will be placed approximately 14' from the curb of the new road. This distance will include both a sidewalk and a small tree lawn. Emphasis should be placed on both masking the appearance of wall and creating a more comfortable environment for pedestrians. To address both conditions, vegetation is the most pragmatic solution.

The sound wall is constructed of precast pieces of concrete which are slid into armatures. There are a range of possibilities to "green" this wall in an effort to improve its appearance and allow it to absorb more sound. Planting climbing plants at the base of the wall that could climb the wall without structural support is the easiest option. Plant choices include Ivy, Trumpet Vine or Euonymus Fortunii. These plants use adhesive suckers or root hairs to attach to structures, and although they are known to cause damage to masonry structures with grouted joints, their perceived impact on the concrete panels would be minimal. A second option would involve the attachment of a support structure for the plants to climb up. The placement of these supports would depend upon plant species, but would greatly expand vegetation options to include plants such as Wisteria, Clematis and Vitus. In either option, low-maintenance, salt-tolerant plant materials should be selected.

The tree lawns between the sidewalk and the street along the corridor could support a range of small trees which would improve the appearance of the corridor for pedestrians and motorist. Flowering species such as Pear and Crabapple would have the greatest impact. These trees require watering when first planted, but are low-maintenance once they are established.

The wall stops at the northern boundary of the city. At this point there exists a possibility to create an east/west connection between Bradley Woods and the residential community to the east by extending North Park Drive. This connection would allow pedestrian and vehicular access into Bradley Woods, but could be configured to prevent motorists from using Bradley Woods as a cut-through route. The connection to the residential community to the east of Stearns would be a pedestrian-only connection. This connection should have a stoplight and crosswalk, which could serve as a traffic calming measure in the northern part of the corridor.