

City Planning Department



Memo

To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Doug McLean, AICP, Principal Planner
Date: July 8, 2022
Re: **“Comstock Crossings”** AP 36, Lots 5, 36, 38, 51, 52 & 53
Ordinance #5-22-03: Comprehensive Plan Amendment from “Industrial” to
“Highway Commercial/Services”
Ordinance #5-22-04: Zone Change from M-2 to C-5

I. Proposal

This memo contains background information, staff analysis, findings, and recommendations for the two (2) petitions noted above (Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Zone Change) as part of an overall project entitled “Comstock Crossings”. This proposal has several different elements that all inter-relate. The applicants are seeking a Comp Plan Amendment and Zone change on six (6) subject lots. There is a pending commercial development proposal for three (3) of those parcels. The other three (3) parcels have separate ownership groups and are NOT considering any development changes for their properties at this time.

For all six (6) subject lots, the applicant, Elizabeth Paul, is requesting to change the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map designation from “Industrial” to “Highway Commercial/Services” and change the Zoning Map designation from M-2 (General Industry) to C-5 (Heavy Business, Industry).

The owners of the subject lots are as follows:

Lots 5 & 36: Alwoodley Realty, LLC
Lot 38: KM Realty, LLC
Lot 51: Julian J. DeMarco Jr., and his successors as Trustee of the Julian J. DeMarco Jr., 1998 Declaration of Trust, and Dennis Demarco
Lot 52: Julian J. DeMarco Jr., and Regina DeMarco, as joint tenants in common with Dennis DeMarco and Roberta DeMarco and joint tenants
Lot 53: Julian J. DeMarco Jr., and his successors as Trustee of the Julian J. DeMarco Jr., 1998 Declaration of Trust, as tenants in common with Dennis Demarco and Roberta DeMarco and joint tenants

The existing and proposed uses of the subject lots are as follows:

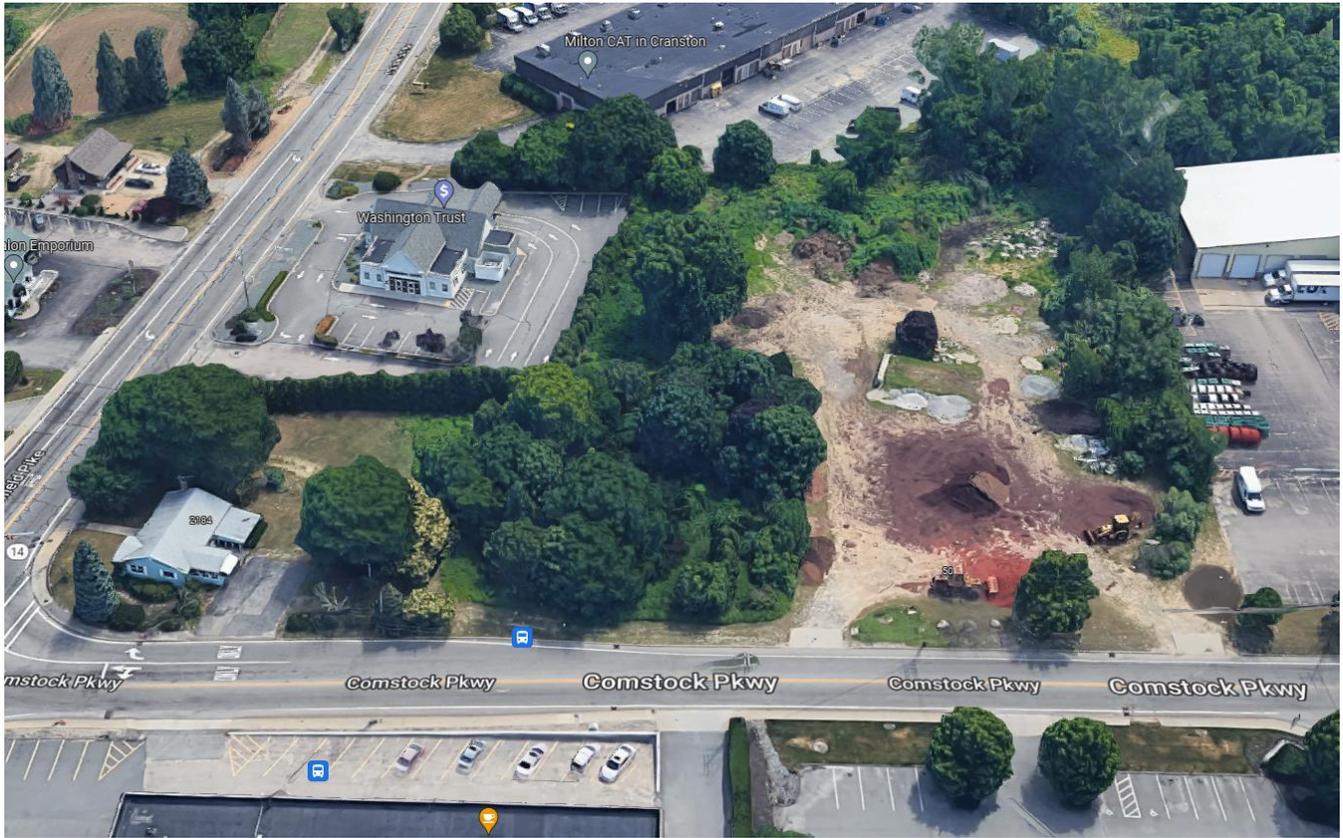
Lots 5 & 36: Currently occupied by Washington Trust Bank. No changes proposed.
Lot 38: Currently occupied by a single-family dwelling. No changes proposed.
Lots 51, 52 & 53: Currently vacant with a pending a commercial development proposal for a restaurant with drive thru (Latte Love Coffee Shop), retail/office, and self-storage.

AERIAL VIEW

(subject parcels marked in orange, 400 foot radius marked in black)



3-D VIEW



STREET VIEW OF VACANT LAND (Lots 51, 52 & 53) (from Comstock Parkway)



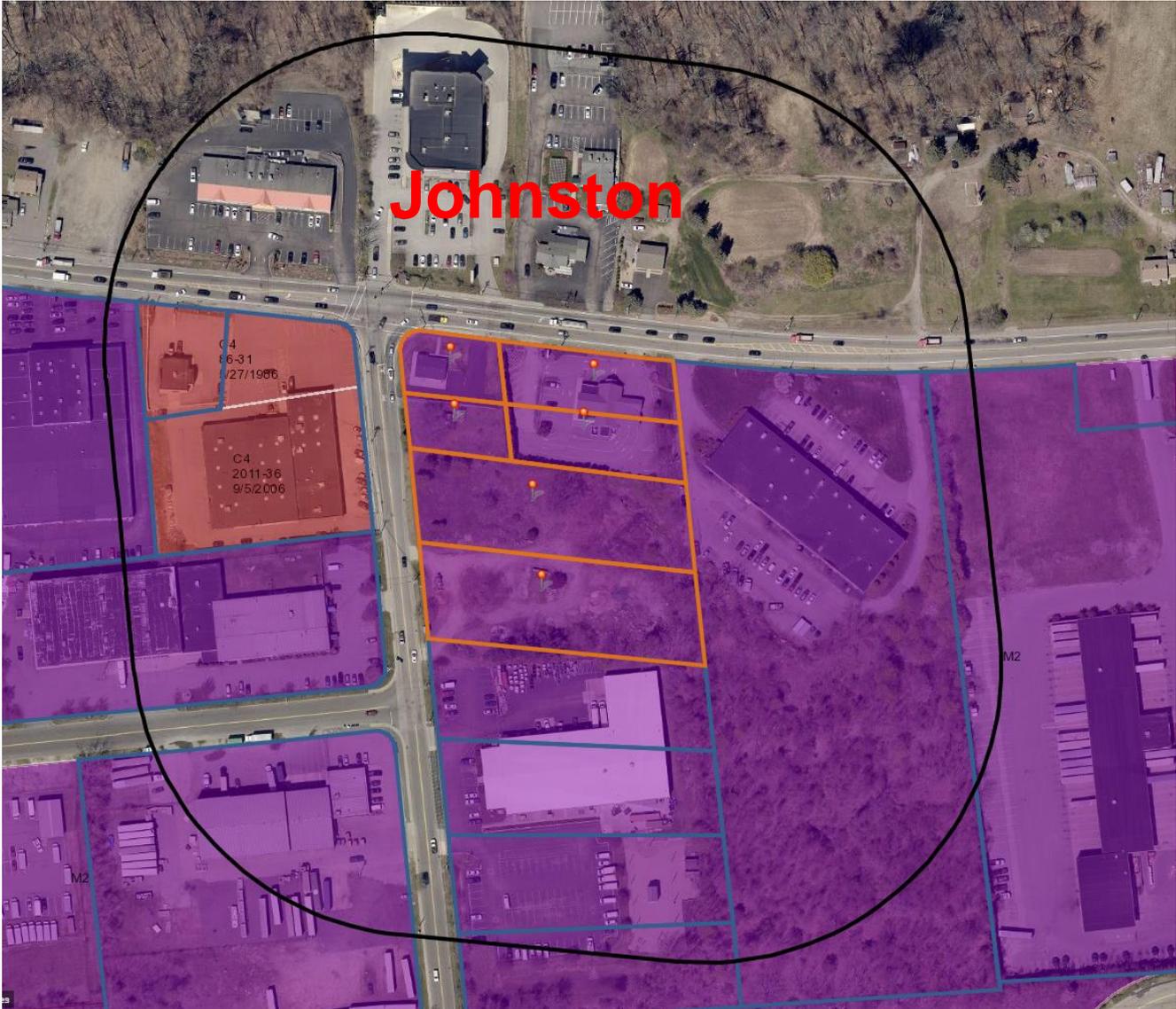
STREET VIEW OF HOUSE (Lot 38)
(from intersection of Comstock Parkway and Plainfield Pike)



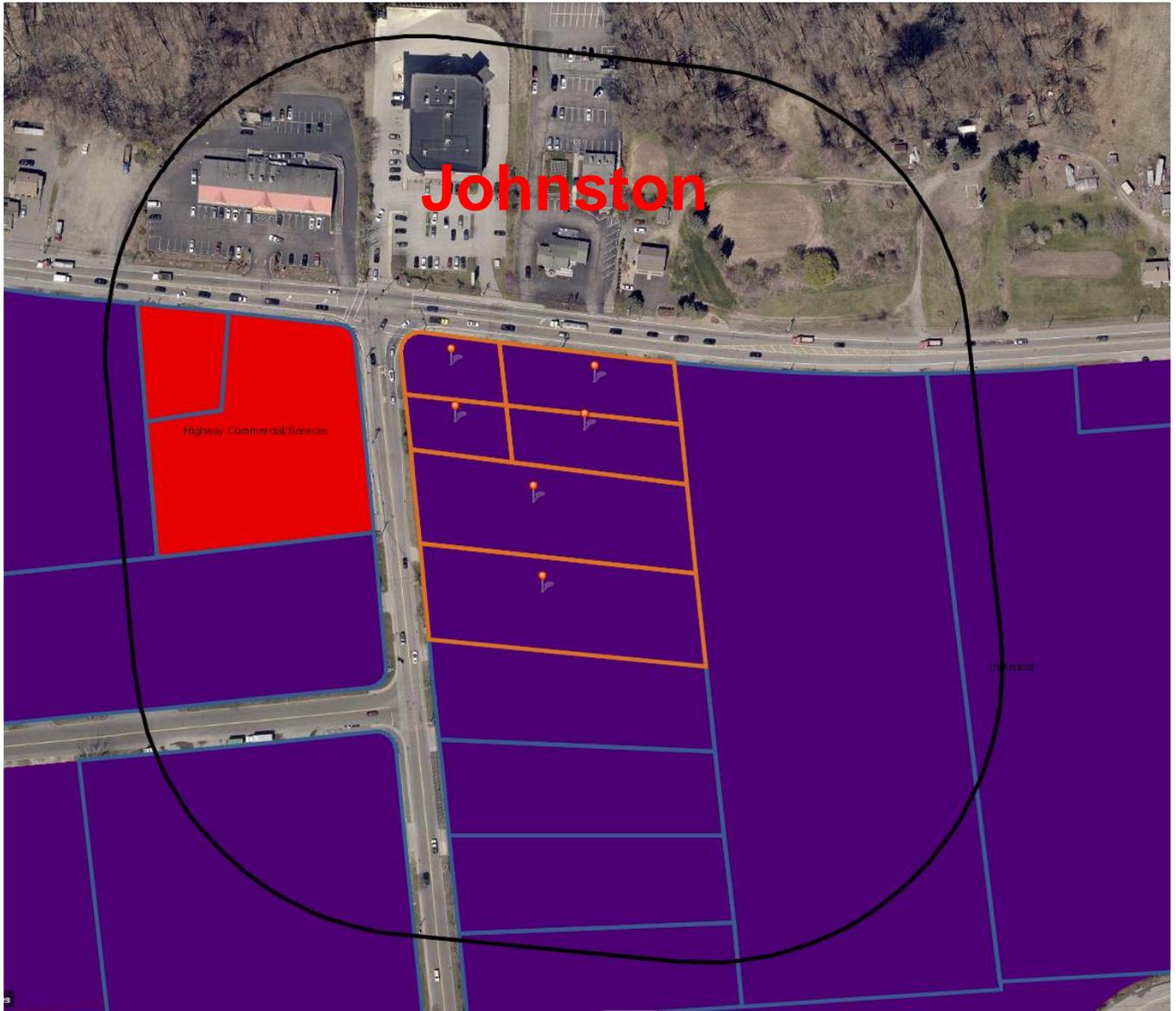
STREET VIEW OF BANK (Lots 5 & 36)
(from Plainfield Pike)



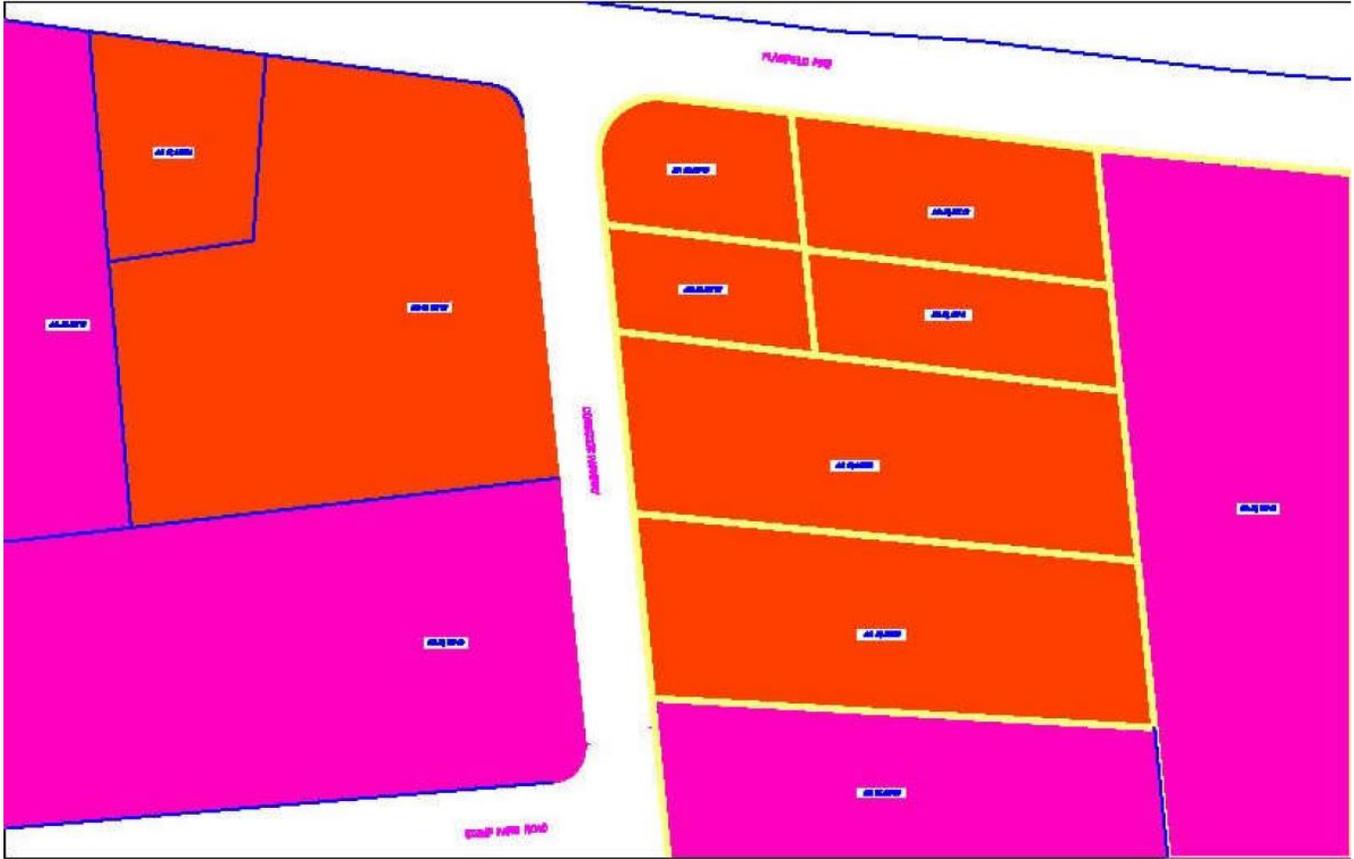
EXISTING ZONING MAP



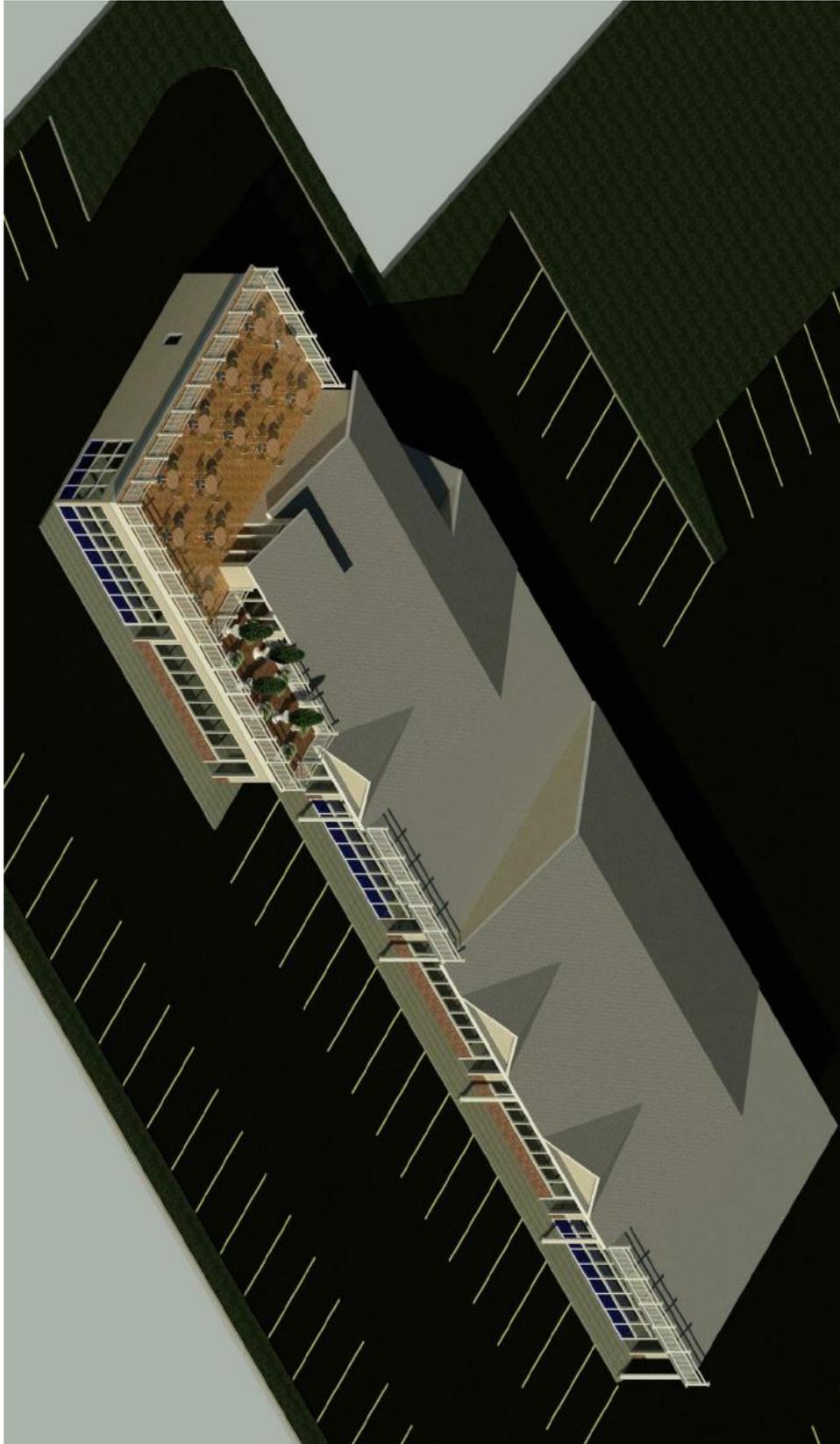
EXISTING FUTURE LAND USE MAP



PROPOSED ZONING MAP



PROPOSED CONCEPT RENDERING



II. Planning Analysis

As you may recall, a joint site walk of the Plan Commission and the City Council was conducted on the subject properties on April 20, 2022 in order to hear a presentation by the applicant and to better understand the conditions on the ground. This site walk included a quorum of both the Plan Commission and the City Council. Other interested parties and residents from a nearby multi-family development also attended the site walk. The outcome of the site walk was that all parties were able to ask questions, offer comments, and better understand the two (2) ordinance petitions being brought forward.

The applicant is requesting that all six (6) of the subject lots be changed from an industrial designation to a commercial designation in both the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map and the Zoning Map. This requires two (2) separate ordinances in order to change the two (2) documents respectively. The two (2) ordinance petitions must be considered in tandem because, if approved, they would ensure the Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan will remain consistent with each other. It is a requirement of state law and local code that the Zoning Ordinance be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

From staff's perspective, the Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Zone Change provide potential positive outcomes for all of the subject properties, whether development changes are proposed on them or not. The pending commercial development proposal for Lots 51, 52 & 53 is being provided herein for informational purposes only. This development proposal is not submitted for a formal vote at this time. The applicant has provided this information so that City decision makers could better understand the applicant's intended development outcomes should the two (2) ordinance petitions be approved. Non-the-less, the pending development proposal received an initial vetting by staff in order to provide some degree of technical feedback for the ordinance consideration. The details of the staff review are provided in subsequent pages of this memo.

It was at staff urgency that the "non-development" lots (Lots 5, 36 & 38) were included in the Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Zone Change petitions. The applicant worked cooperatively with staff to bring the other property owners into their application so that the overall petition represented a more logical and beneficial change to the broader area. Lots 5 and 36 are currently host to a Washington Trust Branch Bank. This bank is allowed in the current M-2 district by Special Use Permit only, and such a use would be allowed by-right within the proposed C-5 zone. Lot 38 is currently host to a single-family dwelling, which would be considered a pre-existing, non-conforming use in both the M-2 and the C-5 zone.

It should be noted the owner of the single-family home (Lot 38) had approached the City Planning Department several years ago with potential ideas for utilizing the structure for non-residential purposes. The owner was reluctant to utilize any by-right industrial uses but was more interested in potential future commercial uses. The cost and administrative burden for that property owner to seek a zone change on their own was the primarily obstacle to their consideration of commercial uses at that time. That specific property owner reportedly welcomed the opportunity to join the immediate petitions to include her lot as well as the other industrially-zoned lots around her. Planning staff is of the view that the zone change from industrial to commercial (M-2 to C-5) would be beneficial to both the bank property and single-family dwelling property as

it would better align with the current uses and provide more realistic options for redevelopment moving forward.

Aside from aligning with the specific uses on the ground and the current owner's desires, staff was insistent that the petitions include all six (6) lots based on a broader planning perspective. Whenever considering a zone change that represents a significant land use policy shift from one use to another, it is important to consider the broader implications. In this case, a zone change from industrial to commercial would represent a different vision than currently offered by the Comprehensive Plan. In fact, the Plan suggests that such changes should be made carefully as zoning land away from industrial designations will lead to having less industrial capacity overall as a community. It should be noted that it can be difficult to re-zone land back to industrial so this petition represents a long-term policy shift for the future of this corridor and specifically the intersection of Comstock Parkway and Plainfield Pike. Based on this, it was staff's view that any potential zone change should expand all the way up to Plainfield Pike so that the future of this entire intersection would grow in a cohesive and collective manner. The inclusion of lots 5, 36 & 38 will allow for a more rational and unified vision for the long-term future development along Plainfield Pike. Conversely, if lots 5, 36 & 38 were NOT included, this amendment would result in a zoning map that would take on a checkerboard pattern of inter-mixed commercial and industrial zones.

Planning staff sees positive benefits of re-visioning the entire intersection of Comstock Parkway and Plainfield Pike toward commercial uses. The resulting zoning boundaries between the commercial and industrial zones would more closely match the zoning designations on the opposite side of Comstock Parkway (see map on page 5). The re-zoning of the properties with frontage on Plainfield Pike would also more closely match with the uses and allowances of the properties on the opposite side of Plainfield Pike in the Town of Johnston. Overall, the manner in which Plainfield Pike is growing toward more commercially-oriented uses, especially around critical intersections such as Comstock Parkway, it is understood why a zone change to commercial has merit and potentially aligns with the apparent development market interests along this corridor.

In order to provide the Plan Commission and the City Council with a better understanding of the proposed development outcomes for Lots 51, 52 & 53 (currently vacant) the applicant has submitted the following documents for informational purposes:

- Conceptual Site Plan from Millstone Engineering P.C.,
- Traffic Impact Analysis from Pare Corporation,
- Comprehensive Plan Consistency Analysis from Pimentel Consulting, Inc.,
- Architectural Plans and Renderings from Richard Cardarelli, A.I.A.

Staff has reviewed the commercial development proposed for potential impacts to the surrounding area and consistency with City code. The applicant also submitted their development proposal for pre-application review by the Development Plan Review Committee (DPRC) and said pre-app. review occurred with the DPRC on July 6, 2022. Following review of the proposal the DPRC did not have any outstanding concerns with the proposal. Of specific note is staff review of the proposed Traffic Impact Analysis. Planning Staff and staff of Cranston Bureau of Traffic Safety coordinated in reviewing the Traffic Analysis and concluded that it is generally well-conceived and offer a conservative approach to new trip generation estimates. The applicant's Traffic Analysis concludes, and staff concerns based on its initial review, that the proposed development of Lots 51, 52 & 53 will have minimal impact on traffic capacity and safety.

It should be noted that a full Development Plan Review Preliminary Plan submission would still be required if the immediate ordinance petitions are approved. Any development of the subject properties, either the immediate pending commercial proposal on lots 51, 52 & 53, or the future re-development of lots 5, 36 & 38 will need to meet the applicable standards of zoning and any other building code requirements.

III. Findings

Cranston Comprehensive Plan 2010

The proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment to the Future Land Use Map of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan would re-designate parcels identified as AP 36, Lots 5, 36, 38, 51, 52 & 53 from "Industrial" to "Highway Commercial/Services". The corresponding Zone Change petition would re-designate the same parcel from M-2 (General Industry) to C-5 (Heavy Business, Industry). Staff finds that due to the unique location of these parcels, the context of the surrounding land uses, the growth of commercial uses in the broader corridor along Plainfield Pike, and the cohesive vision for commercial development at the intersection of Comstock Parkway and Plainfield Pike, these parcels are worthy of positive consideration for a Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Zone Change. It should be noted the applicant has submitted a Consultant Planning Analysis by Pimentel Consulting that is available on the City website that also provide positive evidence in support of a finding of Comprehensive Plan consistency. Based on the above, staff submits that the proposed Ordinance #5-22-03 and Ordinance #5-22-04 are consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Findings Under §17.04.010 City Code

Sec. 17.120.030 requires that the City Plan Commission as part of its recommendation to the City Council "Include a demonstration of recognition and consideration of each of the applicable purposes of zoning as presented in Section 17.04.010 of this title." Section 17.04.010 set forth the General Purpose for Title 17 (Zoning Ordinance) of the City Code. To the extent that any development of the subject properties will be required to comply with all aspects of the Zoning Ordinance, including Development Plan Review, and will be required to comply with City of Cranston Subdivision and Land Development Regulations, staff finds that the proposed rezone will adequately address the appropriate purposes detailed in §17.04.010.

IV. Recommendations

- 1) **Ordinance #5-22-03 - COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT - AP 36, Lots 5, 36, 38, 51, 52 & 53**

Based on the findings that Ordinance #5-22-03 is consistent with City's Comprehensive Plan and adequately address the appropriate purposes detailed in §17.04.010, and due to the unique location of these parcels, the context of the surrounding land uses, the growth of commercial uses in the broader corridor along Plainfield Pike, and the cohesive vision for future commercial development at the intersection of Comstock Parkway and Plainfield Pike, staff recommends that the Plan Commission send a **positive recommendation** on this application to the City Council.

2) Ordinance #5-22-04 – ZONE CHANGE - AP 36, Lots 5, 36, 38, 51, 52 & 53

Based on the findings that Ordinance #5-22-04 is consistent with City's Comprehensive Plan and adequately address the appropriate purposes detailed in §17.04.010, and due to the unique location of these parcels, the context of the surrounding land uses, the growth of commercial uses in the broader corridor along Plainfield Pike, and the cohesive vision for future commercial development at the intersection of Comstock Parkway and Plainfield Pike, staff recommends that the Plan Commission send a **positive recommendation** on this application to the City Council.