

Revisiting the Urban Rivanna River Corridor Plan

Rivanna River Basin Commission

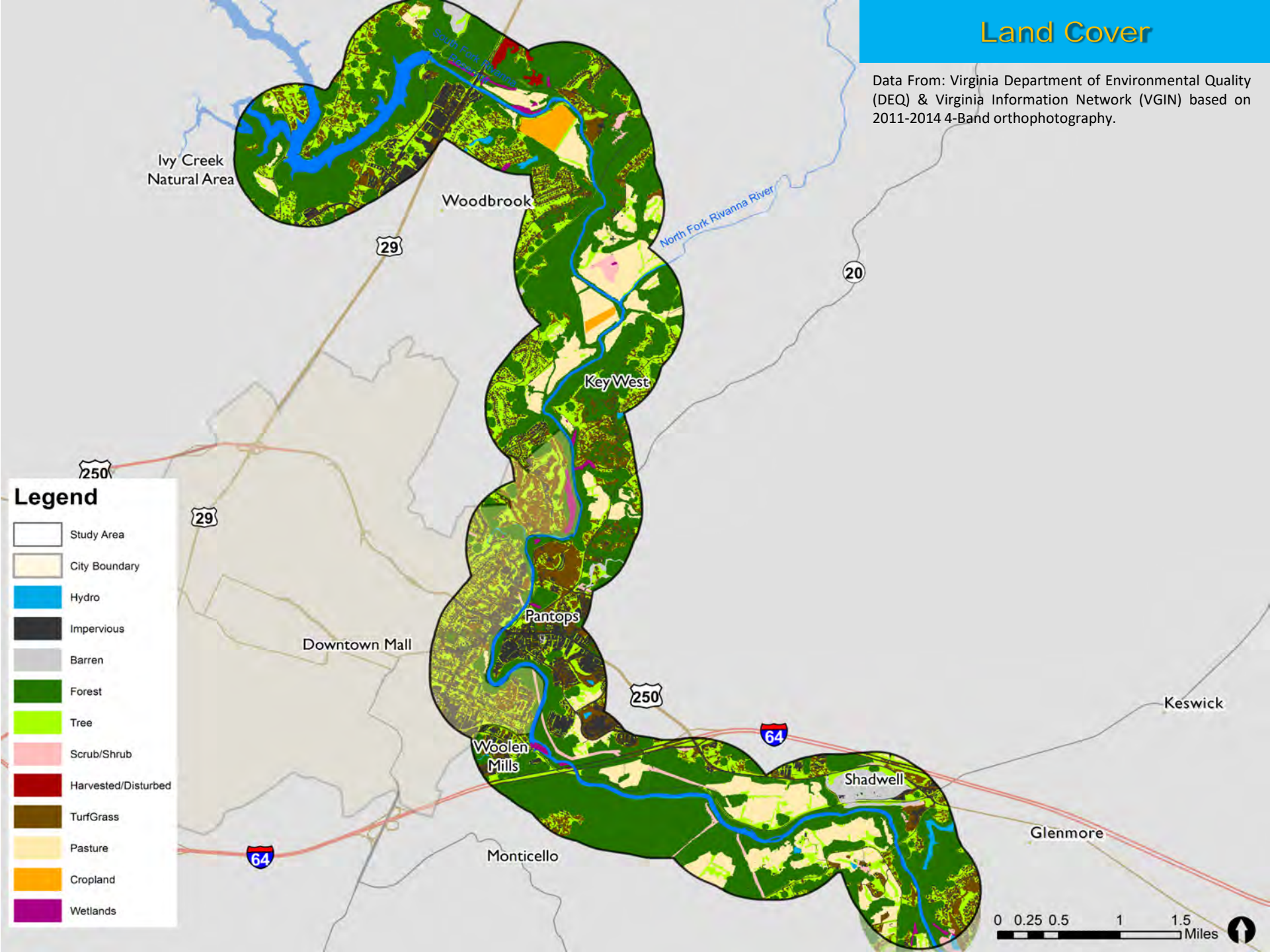
September 27, 2024

Process Background

- A joint effort between Albemarle County & The City of Charlottesville
- Goal to develop a unified vision and action plan for their shared segment of the Rivanna River
- Recommended a three phased approach:
 - **Phase I:** Existing Conditions Inventory completed in 2018
 - **Phase II:** Visioning Phase – Completed in 2022
 - **Phase III:** To be determined, would develop master plan for the urban corridor

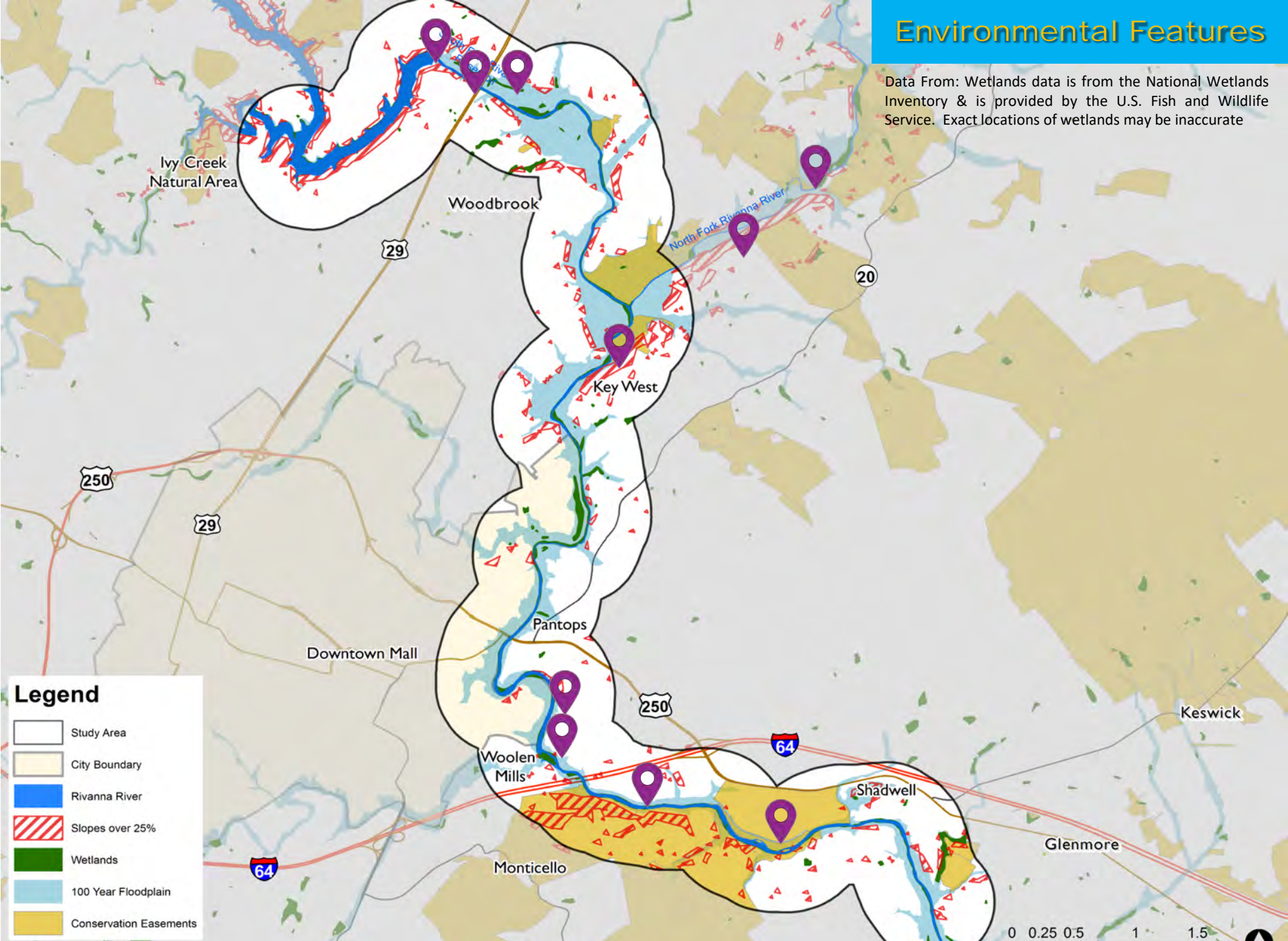
Land Cover

Data From: Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) & Virginia Information Network (VGIN) based on 2011-2014 4-Band orthophotography.



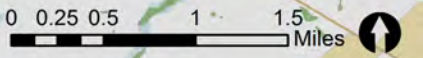
Environmental Features

Data From: Wetlands data is from the National Wetlands Inventory & is provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Exact locations of wetlands may be inaccurate



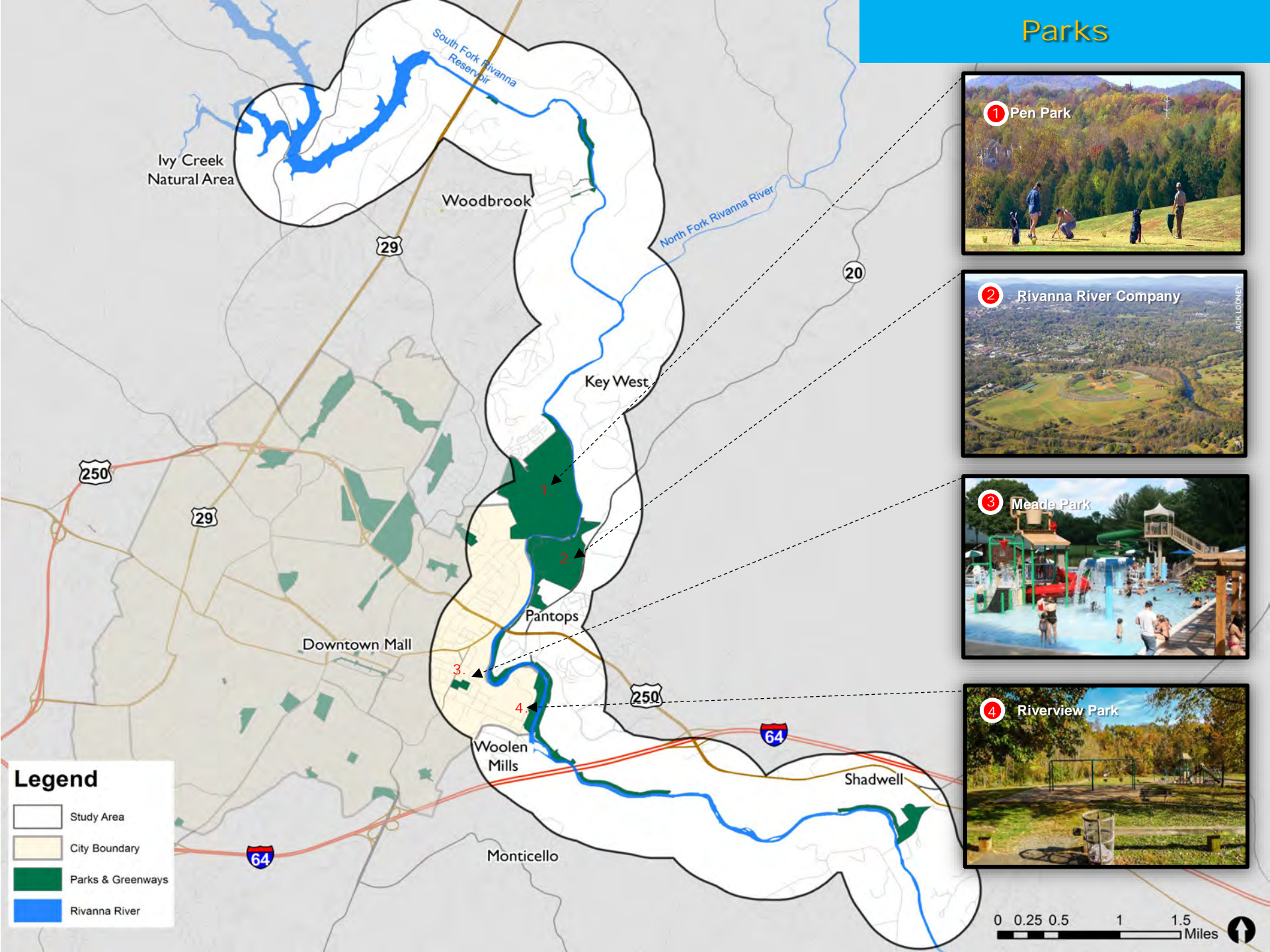
Legend

- Study Area
- City Boundary
- Rivanna River
- Slopes over 25%
- Wetlands
- 100 Year Floodplain
- Conservation Easements



*Markers for Natural Heritage sites do not represent the exact center or extent of the site, but rather the general location of the site

Parks



Phase 1 Committees

- **Technical Advisory Committee:** Charged with guiding & coordinating technical matters. They met 5 times and provided crucial feedback and suggestions related to the thematic maps and scoping for Phase I
 - Albemarle County Community Development Dept.
 - Albemarle Parks & Recreation
 - Charlottesville's NDS
 - Charlottesville's Parks & Recreation
 - Rivanna River Basin Commission
 - Rivanna Conservation Alliance
 - Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority
 - Thomas Jefferson Soil & Water Conservation District
- **Steering Committee:** Charged with providing general guidance & acting as advocates for advancing the planning process
 - Two elected officials from City of Charlottesville
 - Two elected officials from Albemarle County
 - One City-appointed citizen
 - One County-appointed citizen
 - Two City and Two County Planning Commissioners

Phase 1 Common Themes

- 1. Balancing Development and Preservation:** Find ways to protect the river's ecosystems while promoting economic growth.
- 2. River Access:** Increase the number of safe public access points to the river.
- 3. Park and Trail Connections:** Fill in gaps in the existing trail and park network.
- 4. Historic and Cultural Awareness:** Acknowledge and honor the river's rich history.
- 5. Continued Cooperation:** Maintain strong coordination between the City, County, and other stakeholders.

Phase 1 Conclusions

- 1. The need for additional study** - A key finding was the realization that a more robust effort was needed. Numerous data sets exist that could not be explored with the limited resources in the initial phase. There is a need to analyze: environmental quality, land use, zoning, view sheds, etc. To gain the envisioned, holistic understanding of the river corridor, analysis will need to occur in subsequent phases
- 2. Coordination** - There are a number of concurrent efforts underway impacting the river (Comp Plan updates, Pantops Master Plan, RCA efforts) and there is a need to plug into these efforts & incorporate their findings into subsequent planning phases
- 3. Community interest & Awareness** - There is increasing community interest in the river becoming more of a community asset for recreation, green infrastructure, environmental services, and economic development opportunity
- 4. Comprehensive Scope** - City & County Comp. Plans call for coordinated & comprehensive planning effort for the river. This joint effort should include existing & past work. Incorporating community engagement & visioning for the corridor could lead to a more defined set of recommendations

Phase II Study Area

- Phase II study area runs from Pen Park as northern terminus to I-64 as southern terminus
- Technical committee helped to define the new study area
- Is more targeted than Phase I study area, which consisted of a 0.5-mile buffer from the center of the river from the South Fork Reservoir down to the Milton Road Bridge near Shadwell
- Length of Phase II Corridor: 4.3 Miles (Phase I covered 13.5 Miles)



Vision Statement

The Rivanna River, flowing through Charlottesville and Albemarle County, is one of the community's greatest assets. In and near Free Bridge, Woolen Mills, and the Pantops area, the river corridor is and will be a dynamic place where people can experience a natural environment, healthy outdoor activities and venues, peaceful and serene opportunities, and important historic and cultural points of interest.

Guiding Principles

Environmental protection and stewardship of the riparian system shall be paramount to all activities and land uses in the river corridor.

Recreational activities in public parks and greenways along the riverfront will be enhanced; commercial recreation that supports use of the river and trail system will be encouraged and promoted with environmental sensitivity.

Public health, safety, and wellness measures will maximize safety and enjoyability, instill a sense of confidence for users to be able to respond appropriately to public safety and hazardous situations, and protect the integrity of the unused natural areas along the river.

New development and redevelopment in appropriate locations will contribute to a mixture of uses in the river corridor. New uses that result in or complement recreational activities will be encouraged; environmental assets such as steep slopes, floodplains, and designated natural heritage sites, as well as historical features, will be protected. **Landscaping and buffering** of existing commercial and industrial activities within the river corridor will enhance the aesthetic experience of being on and along the river.

Historic places and cultural features will be identified, protected, and incorporated into the greenway and parks system along the river corridor.

Multi-purpose trails and bridges will offer pedestrians and bicyclists opportunities for movement to, through, and within the river corridor.

Recommendations

Acronyms

ACPR = Parks and Recreation (Albemarle)
 CPR = Parks and Recreation (Charlottesville)
 FES = Facilities and Environmental Stewardship (Albemarle)
 PW = Public Works (Charlottesville)
 CDD = Community Development (Albemarle)
 NDS = Neighborhood Development Services (Charlottesville)
 AED = Economic Development (Albemarle)
 CED = Economic Development (Charlottesville)
 CAPE = Communications and Public Engagement (Albemarle)
 C = Communications (Charlottesville)
 ECC = Charlottesville-UVA-Albemarle Emergency Communications Center
 ADSS = Department of Social Services (Albemarle)
 CHHS = Health and Human Services (Charlottesville)
 VDH = Virginia Department of Health

Timeframe

Ongoing
 Short-term = 0-5 years
 Long-term = 5+ years

Fiscal Impact

0 = No fiscal impact beyond staff time
 \$ = Small fiscal impact, minimal capital expense
 \$\$ = Moderate fiscal impact, capital expense
 \$\$\$ = Large fiscal impact, capital expense

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION		Category	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Fiscal Impact
1	Identify and protect the most sensitive biological and ecological areas by limiting access and installing signage and appropriate barriers where possible, avoiding impacts to wildlife movement.	Coordination, Outreach	FES, PW	Ongoing	\$
2	Retain and steward natural habits and systems throughout the river corridor.	Policy	FES, PW	Ongoing	\$
3	Identify and implement riparian restoration and mitigation projects, including removal of invasive plant species, incorporation of locally native plant communities, and the stabilization of eroding streambanks in a manner consistent with natural system function.	Capital	CPR, FES, PW	Ongoing	\$\$
4	Continue and initiate activities of the City and County to improve water quality in partnership with other organizations.	Operations	ACPR, CPR, FES, PW	Ongoing	0
5	Encourage the use of locally native plants for landscaping at parks and businesses.	Outreach, Operations	ACPR, CPR, FES, PW, AED, CED	Ongoing	0
6	Promote stewardship, awareness, appreciation, and education of the natural elements through interpretive and informational signage, educational tours, and river system-focused events on public property.	Programming	ACPR, CPR, FES, PW	Ongoing	\$
7	Continue to deliver a compliant and effective stormwater management program that meets or exceeds minimum state regulations. Encourage on-site mitigation measures and forest/open space protection.	Policy	FES, PW	Ongoing	0

Recreational Activities

1. Improve multi-purpose trail connectivity between the corridor and nearby neighborhoods and commercial facilities to provide better recreational access with special consideration for issues of equity and increasing access to recreation destinations for underserved populations.
2. Improve and **expand the trail system** within the urban river corridor.
3. Improve and **expand the park system** within the urban river corridor.
4. Increase the number and type of public access points to the river and waterfront for better public use and enjoyment of the water, with special consideration for accessibility for people with limited mobility.
5. Monitor the need and identify opportunities to expand vehicular access for recreational users.
6. Ensure that the planning and development of parks and trails in and through the urban river corridor successfully support the operations of private recreation service providers and help to facilitate increased commercial, recreational use of the river and trails.
7. Pursue strategies that will minimize the accumulation of loose trash along the urban river corridor.
8. Develop and **maintain a trail network that incorporates a variety of trail facilities and specifications to accommodate users of all ability levels**. Designate more rustic trails as well as wider paved trails.
9. Promote recreational wildlife-watching.
10. Use vegetation as sound barriers to urban/traffic noise to protect the sounds of nature
11. Promote **awareness of the river corridor as a natural and cultural asset** throughout the broader region through marketing, programming, and information sharing.

Development & Redevelopment

1. **Protect and enhance the natural beauty and ecological functions of the urban river corridor by maximizing the environmental sustainability and context sensitivity of new development, redevelopment, infrastructure, and other improvements.**
2. **Promote high-quality design and positive visual impact in all new development and redevelopment projects that are visible from within the corridor.**
3. **Promote development of small service-oriented businesses in previous identified development area, such as restaurants and outdoor recreation-focused businesses, that support visual and/or physical access to and use of the river and trails.**
4. **Collaborate with private developments and businesses to develop and market businesses along the trail system along both sides of the river and enhance connections across the river.**
5. Explore the use of industrial art to beautify existing commercial and industrial sites and add visual interest.
6. Encourage new and existing businesses to utilize landscaping, using locally native plants to the extent possible, to tie visible establishments into the surroundings of the river corridor.
7. Collaborate with private property and business owners to connect the trail system to economic development sites and promote use of the trail system among employees and patrons.
8. Encourage consolidation, or shared use, of stormwater management facilities supporting adjacent development when possible to minimize visual impacts and physical intrusions into the corridor.
9. Affordable housing is encouraged to be located with close proximity to the river corridor supported by robust transportation access in conformance with locally adopted land use plans.

Historic Places & Cultural Features

1. Create a comprehensive inventory of historic and cultural resources throughout the river corridor to be used for planning purposes.
2. Identify and protect resources that are sensitive and, if necessary, limit public access to those resources.
3. Identify and **promote resources that can be accessed by the public.**
4. Promote the Lewis and Clark Center as an asset to support awareness and understanding of the river corridor's importance.
5. Develop and conduct educational tours of the Rivanna Trail system; partner with schools and local non-profits to develop inclusive programming and create self-conducted tour modules.
6. Hold historical/culturally-focused events.
7. Partner with Monticello and other local history/cultural resource centers to develop programming and events.
8. **Support initiatives of the Monacan Indian Nation to improve awareness of their history and current status** throughout the region, especially in relationship to the river corridor.
9. **Designate and promote the trail as a historic asset. Promote regional efforts to incorporate this section of the trail into a larger network.**

Environmental Protection

1. Identify and protect the most sensitive biological and ecological areas by limiting access and installing signage and appropriate barriers where possible, avoiding impacts to wildlife movement.
2. Retain and **steward natural habitats and systems** throughout the river corridor.
3. Identify and **implement riparian restoration and mitigation projects, including removal of invasive plant species, incorporation of locally native plant communities, and the stabilization of eroding streambanks** in a manner consistent with natural system function.
4. Continue and initiate activities of the City and County to improve water quality in partnership with other organizations.
5. Encourage the use of locally native plants for landscaping at parks and businesses.
6. Promote **stewardship, awareness, appreciation, and education of the natural elements through interpretive and informational signage, educational tours, and river system-focused events on public property.**
7. Continue to deliver a compliant and effective stormwater management program that meets or exceeds minimum state regulations. Encourage on-site mitigation measures and forest/open space protection.
8. Protect and enhance forests within the river corridor with particular focus on the 100' stream buffer zone.
9. Consider opportunities to reduce mowing and create naturalized grasslands/meadows in existing open areas.
10. Collaborate with other organizations **to leverage resources for conservation and mitigation efforts** and pursue funding.

Next Deliverables – Master Plan

- **A Master Plan would be the final phase of the project as originally envisioned.**
 - **Consider priority locations for:**
 - Preservation
 - Capital investment
 - Private investment
 - River restoration
 - **To move forward with Master Plan:**
 - Financial commitment from both Charlottesville and Albemarle
 - Development of a Scope of Work
 - Selection and retention of a consultant to develop plan
 - **Goal of Master Plan:**
 - Identify specific priorities and implementation schedules
 - Determine funding needs/options for priority projects, including identification of grant opportunities

Next Steps

Planning Priorities:

- Create a comprehensive inventory of the most sensitive biological and ecological areas.
- Create a comprehensive inventory of historic and cultural resources throughout the river corridor to be used for planning purposes.
- Conduct a viewshed analysis both from the perspective of being on the river and overlooking the river.
- Conduct an architectural analysis/design charette to identify preferred design standards for development within the corridor.

Grant Application Priorities:

- Transportation system improvements (SMART SCALE, Revenue Sharing, Transportation Alternatives Program, Recreational Trails Program).
- Environmental conservation and mitigation in collaboration with local partners.
- Flood prevention.
- Historic preservation.

Project Priorities:

- Ensure that existing facilities and equipment are sufficiently secured to withstand flooding.
- Review local zoning ordinances to identify barriers and/or opportunities to support recommendations.
- Provide user information on the types of trails and accessibility through signage and online information sharing.
- Identify locations where additional safety measures are needed and implement strategies to mitigate existing risks.
- Provide emergency contact information at each trailhead/parking area.
- Install and maintain rope railings and simple steps for steep banks.

