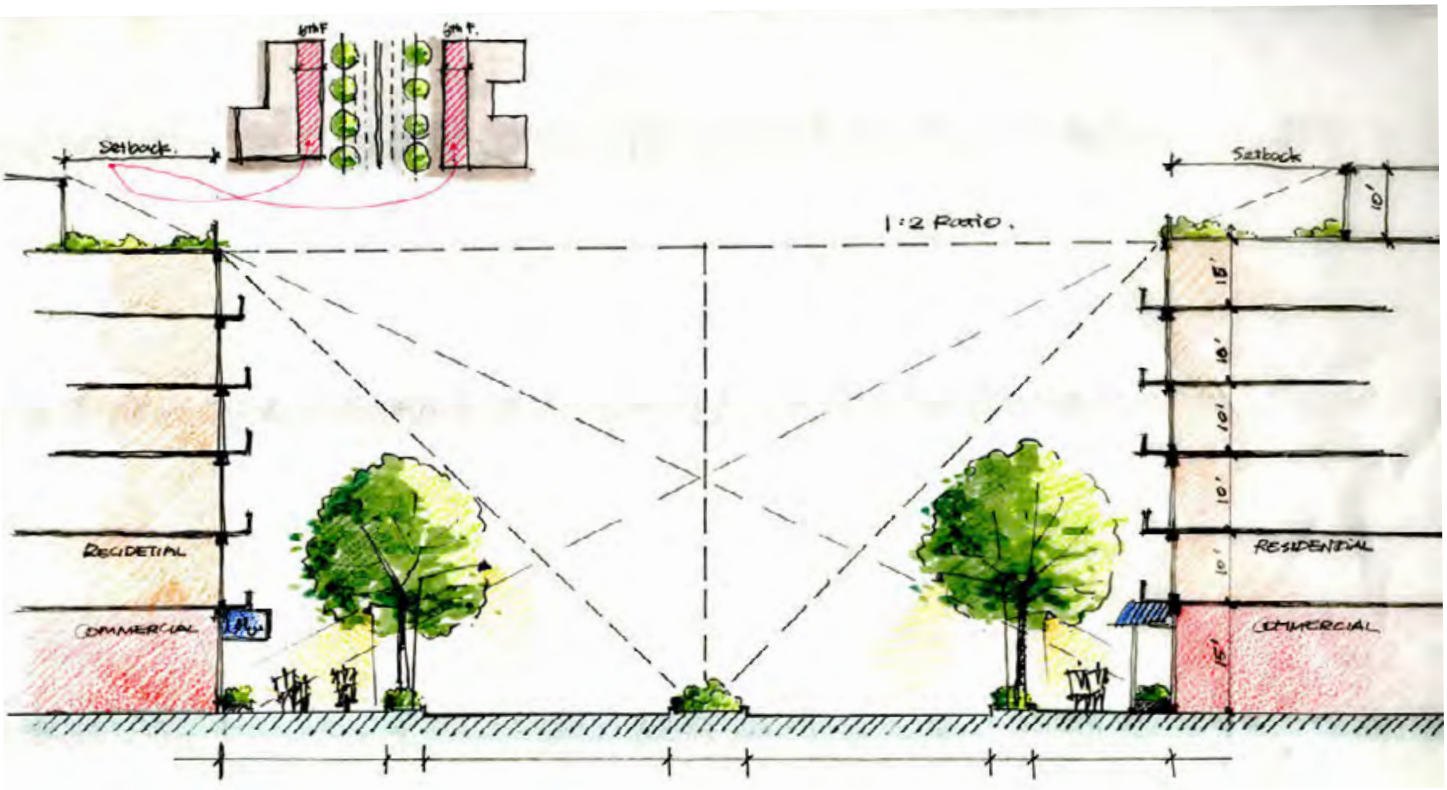
Northside Drive as a Multimodal Developmental Corridor: Transformation from Utilitarian Auto Route to Grand Transit Boulevard

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY -- WORKING DRAFT

A Studio Project of the Georgia Tech School of City and Regional Planning - Fall, 2012



CONTENT

1. OVERVIEW

This comprehensive studio was conducted August - December, 2012 and focused on a five mile stretch of Northside Drive from I-75 to West End. The Studio team was composed of 17 City Planning and/or Civil Engineering graduate students and led by Prof. Michael Dobbins. The Studio enjoyed the sponsorship of the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), the City of Atlanta, Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), the Midtown Alliance, and Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech). The purpose of the Northside Drive studio was to examine the corridor with regards to transportation, especially transit and non-motorized transportation, land use, urban design, the environment and community and economic development. This compendium of reports includes summaries of all of the work performed by the students this semester.

At the behest of Emory McClinton, board member of the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Georgia Tech planning studio explored ways to transform Northside Drive from a dismal, disorganized underperforming corridor that frames the west side of the Atlanta core into a grand transit boulevard. Picture a tree-lined, well-lit boulevard, wide and grand, with medians, and ample accommodation of cars, transit, bicycles, and sidewalks, lined with four to six story residential building s with as much retail and other ground floor activities as the market will support, over time transforming this now dismal traffic corridor from I-75 to I-20 and West End. Imagine too dissolving the east-west divide that for decades has walled off the low and mid wealth neighborhoods to the west from the robust Downtown and Midtown centers to the east, physically, economically, and socially.

Northside Drive has been the subject of numerous studies and plans from as far back as the 1990s, such as the Central Atlanta Transport Study of 1999; as recent as July of in 2012 with the Cobb County Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) and the Northside Drive Corridor Study of 2005 among others. Generally, these studies highlighted the potential of the corridor to become a fully developed arterial road which could facilitate transit alongside other modes of transportation. While mentioned, the need for improvement of the pedestrian facilities and aesthetics of the corridor was underplayed in these studies. And there have been no studies that deal with the land use and development potential in the corridor, nor issues of social equity between the generally affluent areas to the east and the lower income neighborhoods to the west, nor how to develop strategies to bridge that east-west gap.

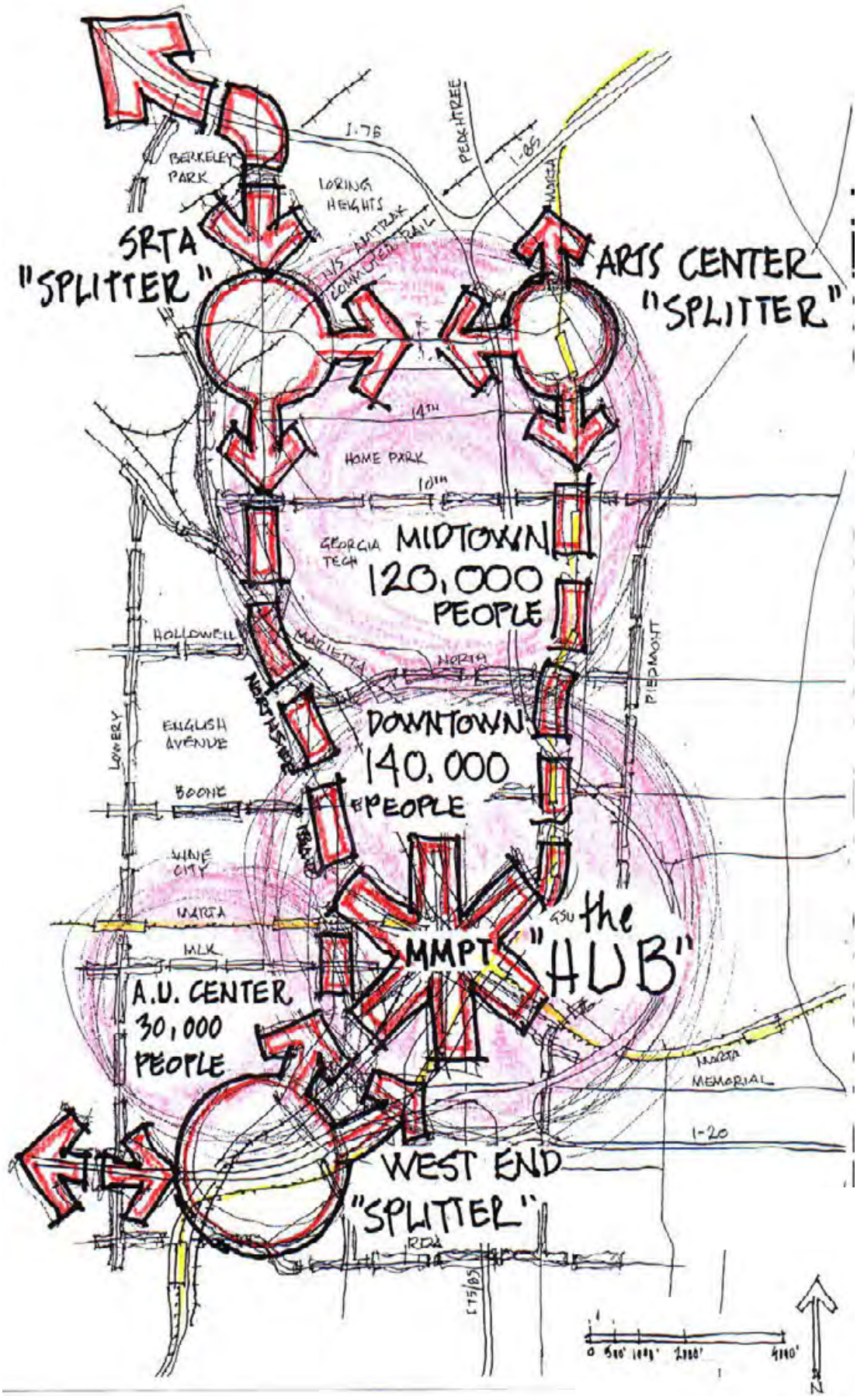


Figure 1. The orgins and destinations around Northside Drive

To organize work flow, four sub-study areas were derived from natural geographic or programmatic segments apparent in the existing layout of the corridor, and the studio team thereby divided itself up into five working groups with one working on corridor-wide strategies and the other four on sub-areas. The study areas and group assignment are shown in Figure 2.

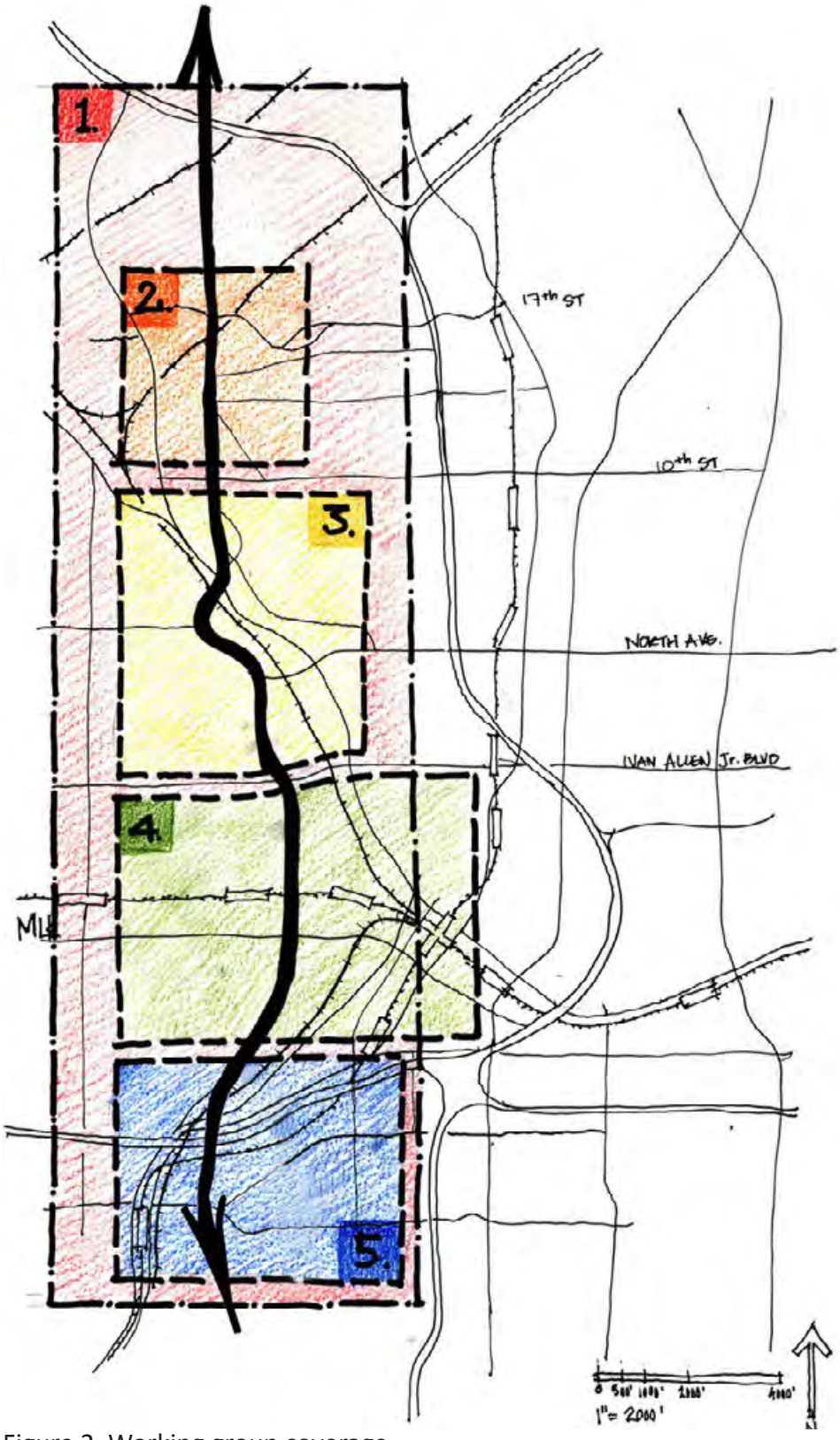


Figure 2. Working group coverage

The Whole Corridor Working Group (1) was tasked with the responsibility of both seeing to t¬he maintenance of a cohesive vision for the corridor and of taking the lead role in crafting the "big picture" for transit and other project-wide systems.

The SRTA Working Group (2) was tasked with assuming oversight of the area west of I-75/85, south of I-75, east of Howell Mill Road and north of 10th Street. These boundaries encompass Loring Heights, Berkeley Park, Atlantic Station, Home Park and part of the Georgia Tech property. The main focus was the redevelopment of the site owned by the State Road & Tollway Authority (SRTA) and the Lionstone Group into a transit hub serving the surrounding area as well as the northwest quadrant of the region. Throughout the report, sections will refer to this site for a new transportation hub as the "SRTA site".

The Mid-Corridor Working Group (3) assumed responsibility over the area centering on Northside Drive from 10th Street to Ivan Allen Boulevard. The Mid-Corridor group extended the focus to various land-use contexts including the light industrial zones along Marietta Street and north of Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway, the emerging West Midtown area of mixed-use districts along the Marietta Street corridor, Georgia Tech's institutional uses, the detached single family dwellings in English Avenue, along with an ample amount of vacant land including parking lots north of the Georgia World Congress Center.

The MMPT/AUC Working Group (4) was tasked with overseeing

the plan for the area roughly from Simpson Street to I-20, which encompasses the current site of the Georgia Dome, the Georgia World Congress Center, The Phillips Arena, Atlanta University Center (AUC), Vine City, English Avenue, Ashview Heights, Castleberry Hill, Georgia State University, Centennial Olympic Park, Fairlie-Poplar, the South-Central Business District, the "Gulch" area, and the future sites of the Multi Modal Passenger Terminal (MMPT), a possible Falcons Stadium, the "Green Line", and Historic Mims Park. This group generally considered on the area west of Northside Drive from Donald Lee Hollowell Pkwy NW down to I-20. The major projects we looked at throughout the planning process were the possible construction of a multi-modal passenger terminal (MMPT) in the "Gulch", the possible erection of a new stadium, and the development of the Green Line throughout the South Downtown district.

A fifth working group (5), being formed by professor Michael Dobbins, is examining the area that straddles I-20, focusing on a particularly complex snarl of streets, ramps, rails, MARTA and cut-up land uses that divide West End from the AUC, the Villages at Castleberry, and the Mechanicsville Station residential community.

Included in the compendium is a section from each of these groups. Each section includes its own executive summary, discussion of existing conditions, analyses of multiple alternatives to address various issues, and final recommendations. The summary of existing conditions was compiled through field visits, research and conversations with various stakeholders. It laid the basis for identifying key issues and creating multiple alternatives to address the issues. These include transit as well as alternatives specific to most intersections.

The Northwest Community Alliance hosted an introductory meeting that served to inform community members of the studio project and share initial thoughts and concerns on the transportation, land use, urban design and development opportunities and issues, as well community economic development challenges and potentialities.

Halfway through the semester, the students presented to approximately 40 stakeholders to get feedback and opinions. This information was essential for crafting the alternative scenarios. A second large stakeholder presentation in late November tested the viability of the alternatives. This feedback, then, was incorporated into the analysis and reasoning for the final recommendations section of each report, the culmination of all of the research and stakeholder feedback.

Even so, the "final" student report is not final, but will provide the document that will be circulated to all of the stakeholders for their final input and guidance over the spring of 2013.The graduate students who participated in this studio hope that this work can be carried forward by all of the stakeholders and can act as an inspiration to truly transform Northside Drive into a grand transit boulevard framing the extensive and diverse development that is expected to continue along the corridor.

Photos: Presentation to stakeholders on Oct 22, 2012 (Taken by studio team)

2. WHOLE CORRIDOR

The Whole Corridor group identified a number of issues (Figure 3) that emerged out of an assessment of the existing situation, which include:

- Lack of alternative travel modes, especially transit
- Inadequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities
- Divide between east and west, exacerbated by intersections that discourage east-west connectivity and pedestrian safety
- Spatial mismatch (the lack of proximity of housing to jobs) and social equity
- Deterioration on the west side and underutilized development potential
- Residents' vulnerability to displacement and other side effects of rapid redevelopment
- Irregular frontage and relationships between buildings and the street

Provided here is a summary of the final recommendations (Figure 4) with regards to transportation, land use, as well as community and economic development. All of the recommendations below can be implemented throughout the entire corridor.

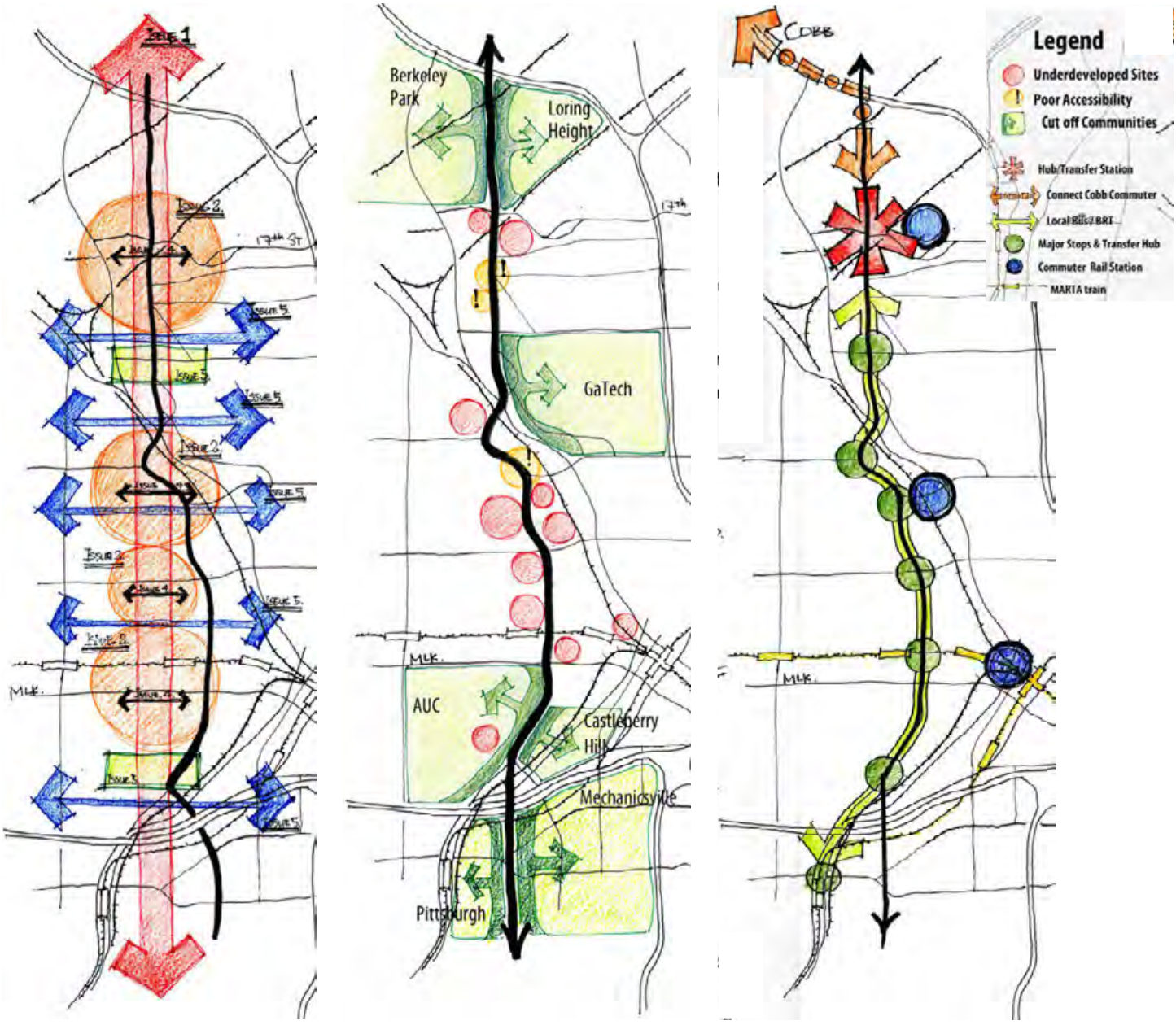


Figure 3. Existing issues, development potential and transit improvement possibility

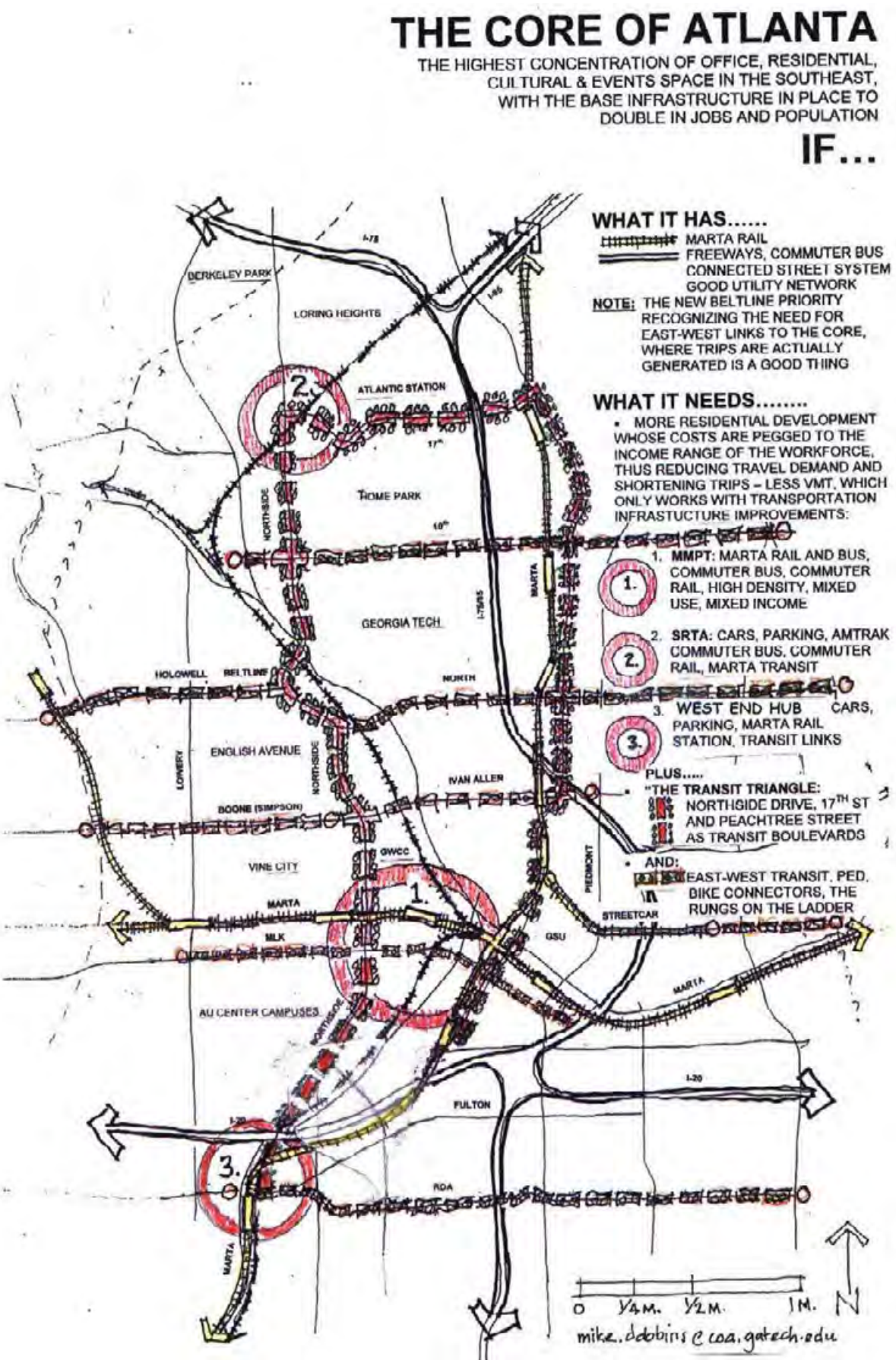


Figure 4. Critical sites and proposed connections

2.1. TRANSPORTATION

The transportation approach accommodates existing and projected travel demand through adequate through lanes, significant intersection improvements, a growing transit presence, attractive pedestrian networks, and appropriate provision for bicycle travel.

2.1.1. TRAFFIC & TRANSIT

Beyond accommodating projected traffic, these proposals suggest ways to provide more travel choices, both north-south and east-west. Alternatives were chosen that increase mobility and choice for residents and visitors, provide a fluid and pleasant transportation experience regardless of mode, and support the general vibrancy of the corridor area.

The reshaping of Northside Drive's transportation environment is proposed to occur in three phases (Figure 6), based primarily on immediacy, feasibility, and intensity.

Phase 1: This phase includes restriping along the length of the corridor to include four through lanes and outside lanes with multiple functions. the outside lane will be a through lane during peak hours (5-7pm northbound and 7-9am southbound) and will become on-street parking outside of peak hours. The goal of this approach is to get vehicles used to a reduced number of through lanes and to save the outside right-of-way for future transit. This way, when transit is implemented in later phases, it will be a transition from parking to transit, rather than a direct transition from general travel lane to bus dedicated lane. Current travel demand analysis argues that this configuration, incorporating proposed intersection improvements, could provide sufficient capacity to accommodate current and near term projected traffic.

Phase 2: This phase, which could be implemented in the near term by MARTA and CCT, who are ready to act, adds a bus route along the corridor. The major change from Phase 1 is that during peak hours, only buses, High Occupancy Vehicles (HOVs), and Electronic Vehicles (EVs) will have access to the outer travel lanes. During off-peak hours the bus mix with other vehicular traffic, but it will have the advantage during peak hours. The goal of this phase is to provide an incentive to take the bus, especially during peak hours.

Phase 3: This phase, longer term, eliminates all on-street parking and dedicates the outer lanes to transit and HOVs only. The timing of this phase depends on increased travel demand, increased shifts toward transit, biking and walking modes, and increased densification of origins and destinations in the corridor. It assumes a policy decision affirming the importance of transit along this boulevard as inducing and supporting sustainable growth pattern. Additionally, this has the potential to increase ridership and gain riders who before did not consider the bus because it came too infrequently.

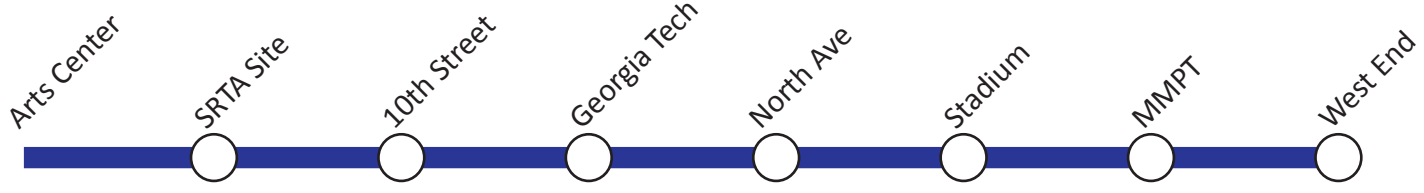
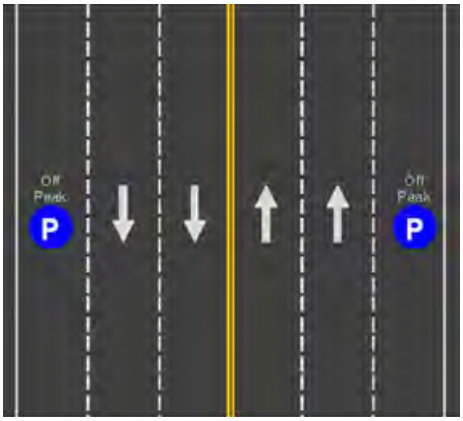
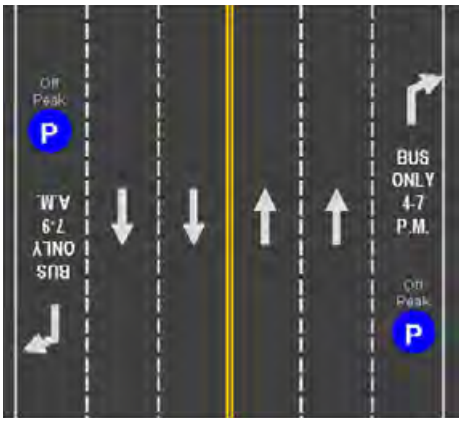


Figure 5. Schematic map of major transit stops



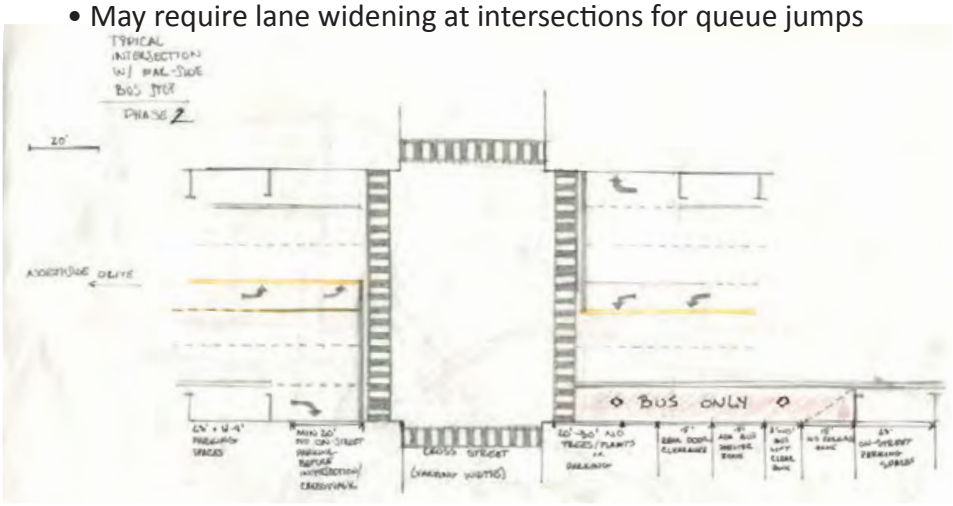
Phase 1: Introduce parking strip throughout corridor

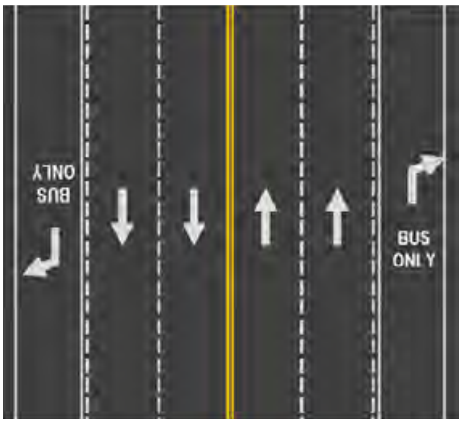
- Provide a parking strip for north and southbound lanes except during peak travel time (7-9am inbound, 4-7pm outbound)
- Preserve 2 lanes/direction at all locations
- Provide left-turn pockets at all major intersections
- Ensure minimum 68' cross section (curb-to-curb) for through
- Adds buffer for pedestrians throughout most times of day while preserving three peak lanes of capacity for commuters.
- Allows use of all lanes for special events through special restrictions



Phase 2: Add buses. Replace peak-hour curb lane with transit

- During the peak travel hours, replace the general purpose curb lane with transit and/or HOV restrictions
- Construct local bus stops
- Maintains all buffer characteristics of phase 1
- May require lane widening at intersections for queue jumps





Phase 3: Full time transit lanes

- When ridership and policy allow, introduce full-time transit lanes
- Transit signal priority may be added
- Preserve 2 general purpose travel lanes/direction

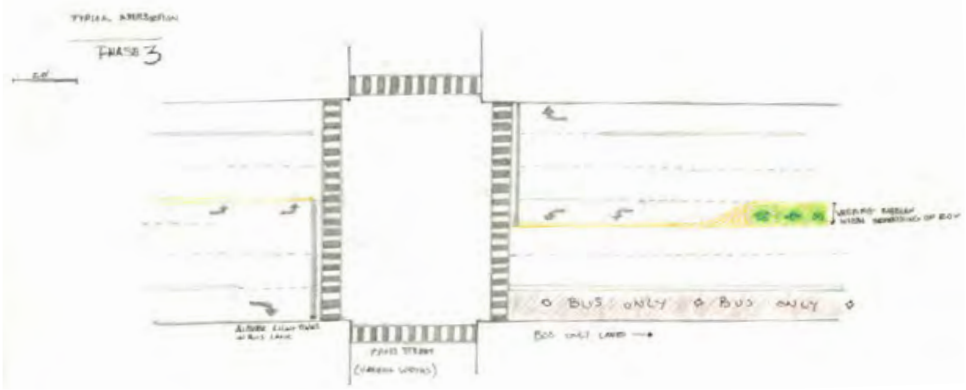


Figure 6. Traffic operations expansion plan by phase

2.1.2. BICYCLE FACILITIES

To accommodate and encourage bicycle ridership along the corridor, cycle tracks, multi-use paths, and parallel routes are encouraged. Also included in the report is a detailed analysis and plan for a bicycle sharing system throughout the corridor and surrounding communities to offer an additional transportation alternative for mobility. Figure 8 on the right shows the biking sharing system vision.

2.1.3. PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

Supporting the recent and growing residential and mixed use development activity will require that measures be taken to protect the safety of greater numbers of pedestrians along the corridor. This report highlights some of the most important changes to be made to the built environment to ensure these goals:

- Pedestrian risk analysis
- Mid-block crossing facilities
- Z-crossings
- Sidewalk improvements
- Intersection facilities

It is also recommended making public spaces and transit stops more “pedestrian friendly” by providing more shade along improved sidewalks as well as shelters at all the bus stops throughout the area. Transit access service and walk sheds should be increased to show the transit potential. Figure 7 below shows a typical pedestrian environment vision.

Figure 7. Recommended sidewalk improvement at human scale

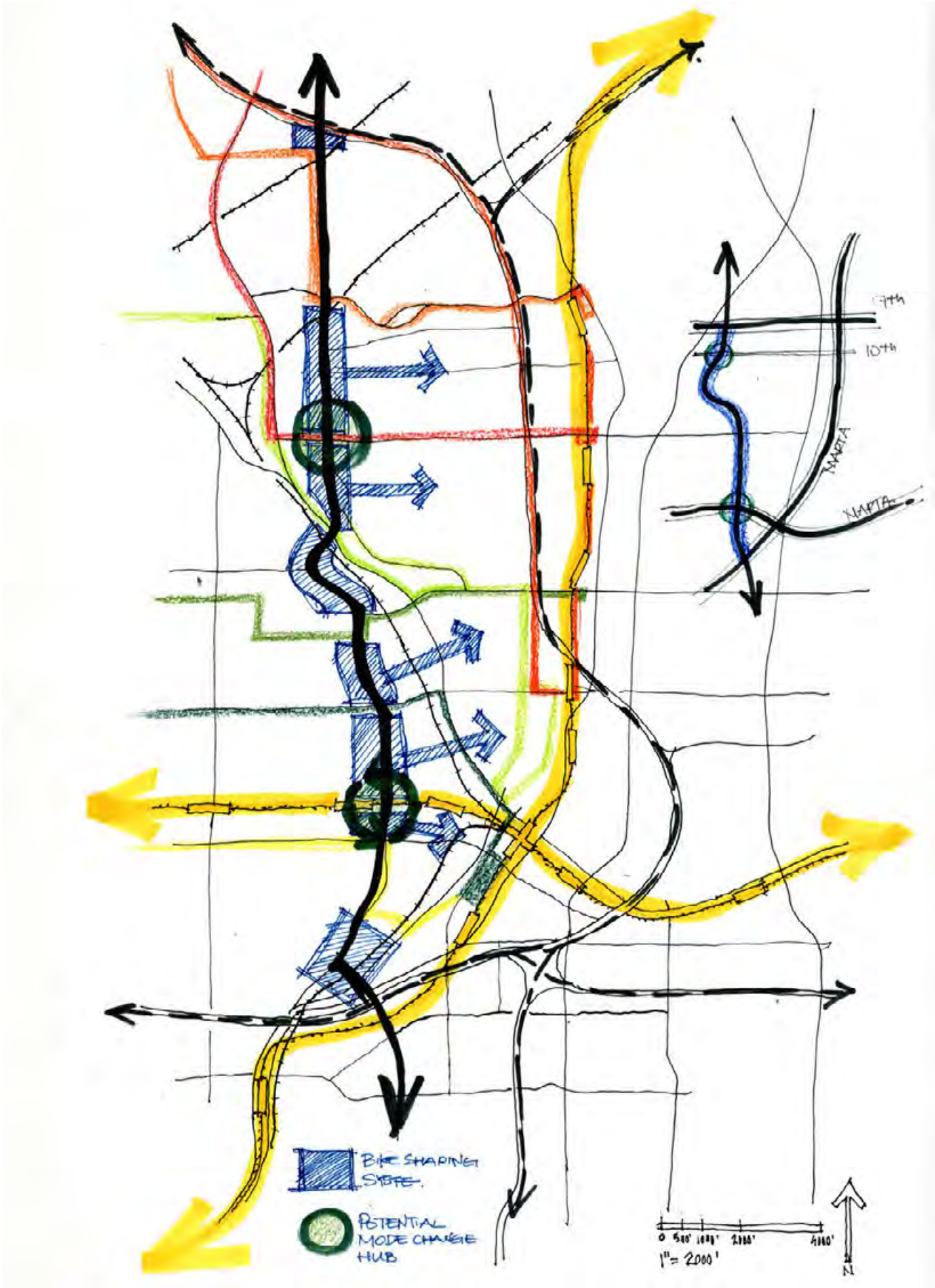


Figure 8. Bike sharing system vision

2.2. LAND USE & URBAN DESIGN

The thoughtful and successful management of land use, urban design, and development controls are key factors in quality redevelopment. Land use considerations for this corridor assume a continuous and likely acceleration of residential and mixed use development and the need to shape that activity to optimize Northside's potential as a grand boulevard. The high quality streetscape treatments, lined by activated building frontages would be designed to effect both good north-south as well as east-west connectivity.

The focus here, while general, is on:

- Building types and character
- Density and heights
- Sidewalks, bikes, and streetscape improvements
- Lighting for roadways, intersections, and sidewalks
- Greenspace
- Transit Stops
- Runoff Mitigation

Together, the transportation and land use/urban design strategy would result in a grand boulevard, combining a progressive transportation system, a forethoughtful medium density mixed use development, and "pulsing" activities at key intersections.

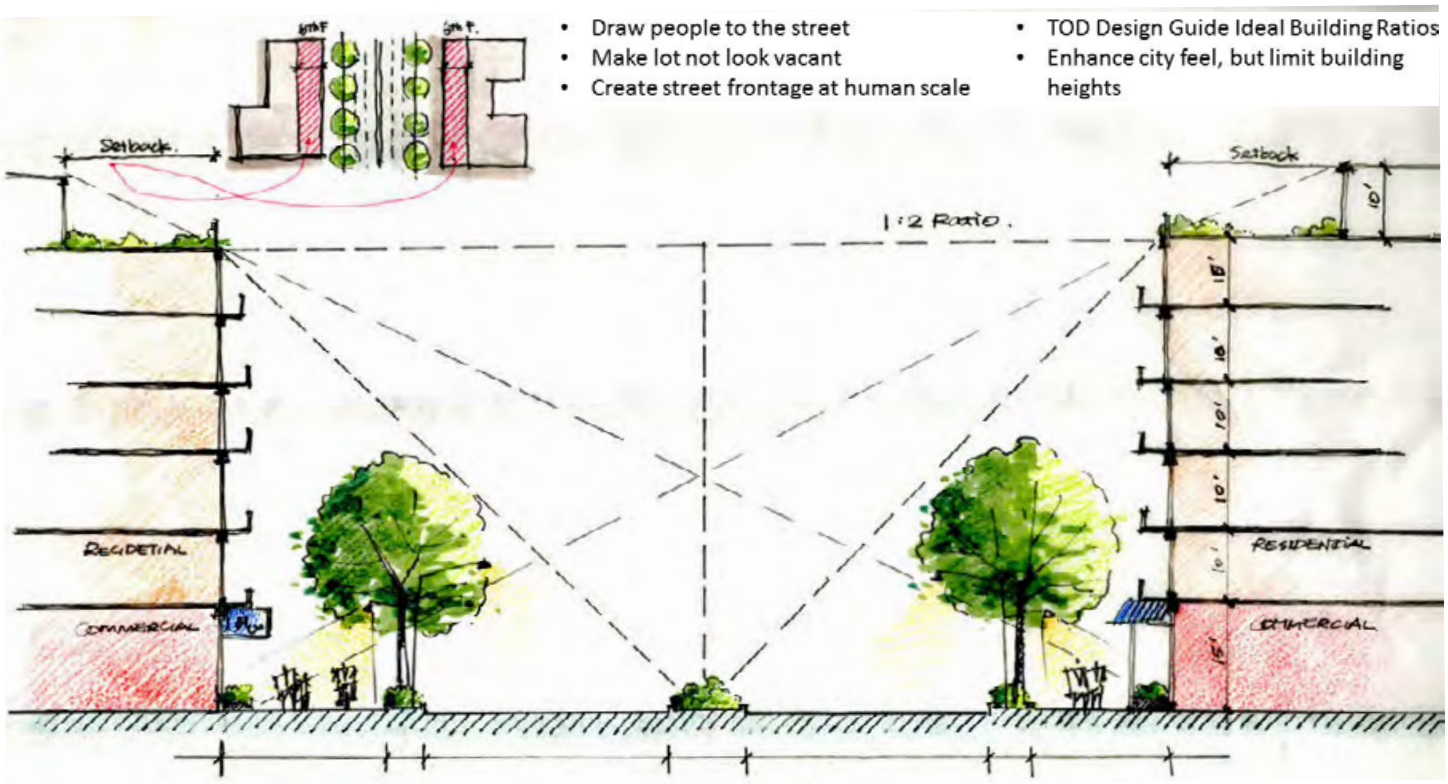


Figure 9. Urban design recommendation

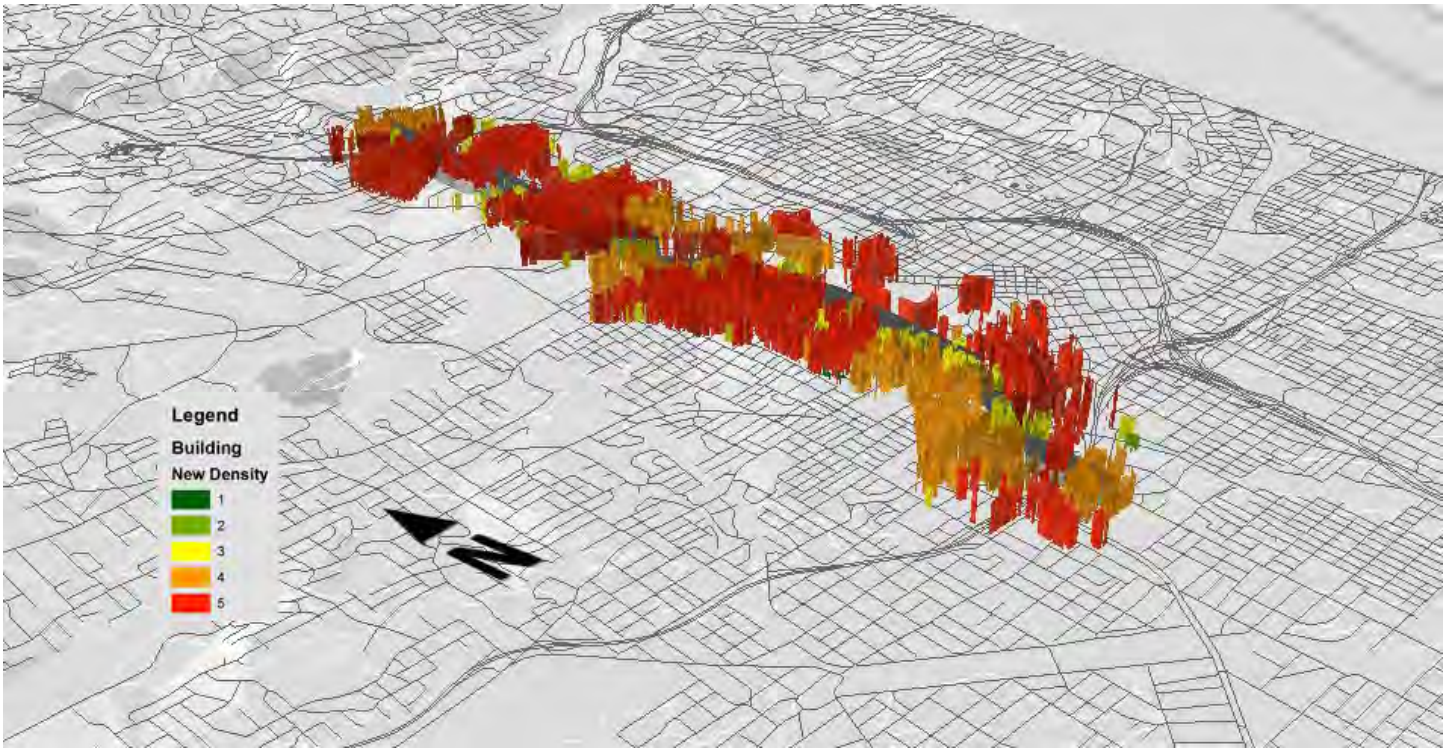


Figure 10. Proposed maximum density within 10 mins walkshed, able to accommodate another 5000 residents and 2500 jobs

Existing

Recommended

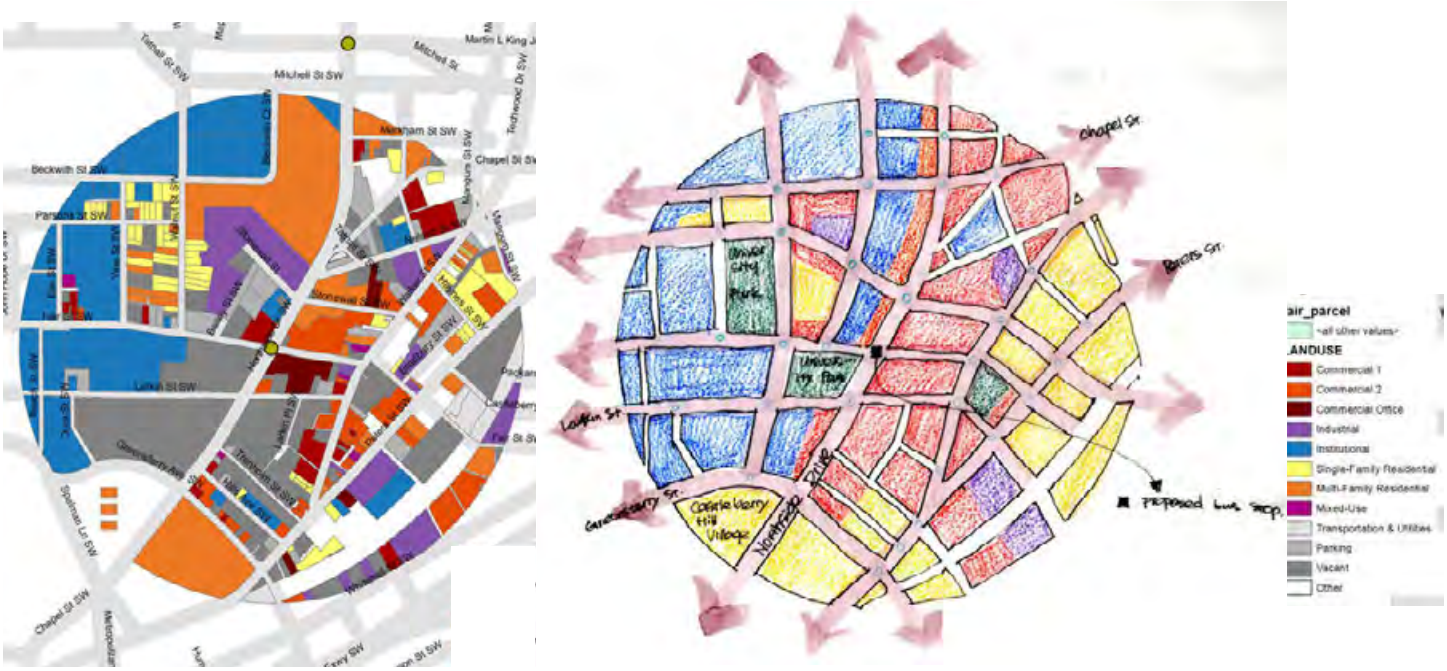


Figure 11. Existing and recommended land use at Northside Drive & Fair Street

2.3. COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The study area encompass some of Atlanta's lowest-income and most disenfranchised neighborhoods, as well as some of the city's most powerful institutions. Facing the challenges of redevelopment and revitalization, the neighborhoods also have great opportunities in social capital and strong community heritage. It is essential that any plan for redevelopment affirm current residents' right to benefit from any economic growth brought to the area, as well as to maintain the sense of community they have built over the years.

2.3.1. JOBS

Through institutionalization of concepts such as Community Benefits Agreements, the communities of Northside Drive can induce developers to incorporate local needs into their development program, to gain consensus on development goals and positive approval processes. It is essential that any entities engaging in significant redevelopment along the corridor commit to providing appropriate job training and jobs to local residents regardless of their educational level or experience. Figure 12 on the right shows the dispersion of workplaces for those living alongside Northside Drive.

2.3.2. HOUSING

In order to prevent displacement of local residents due to pressures such as higher intensity development and incipient transit proposals, measures will need to be implemented to help foster community resilience in the face of these opportunities and challenges. It is important that any strategies look to preserving affordability for both owner-occupiers and rental tenants. Strategies targeting the former might include community land trusts and institutional employee homeownership programs, and those targeting the latter might be an increased focus on nonprofits and religious institutions providing affordable rental housing. Figure 13 on the right shows the dispersion of residency for those work alongside Northside Drive.

2.3.3. ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

To carry forward the programmatic proposals above, a community framework needs to be established. Discussed briefly in this report are Community-Based Regionalism, Right to the City, and the Cooperative Models.

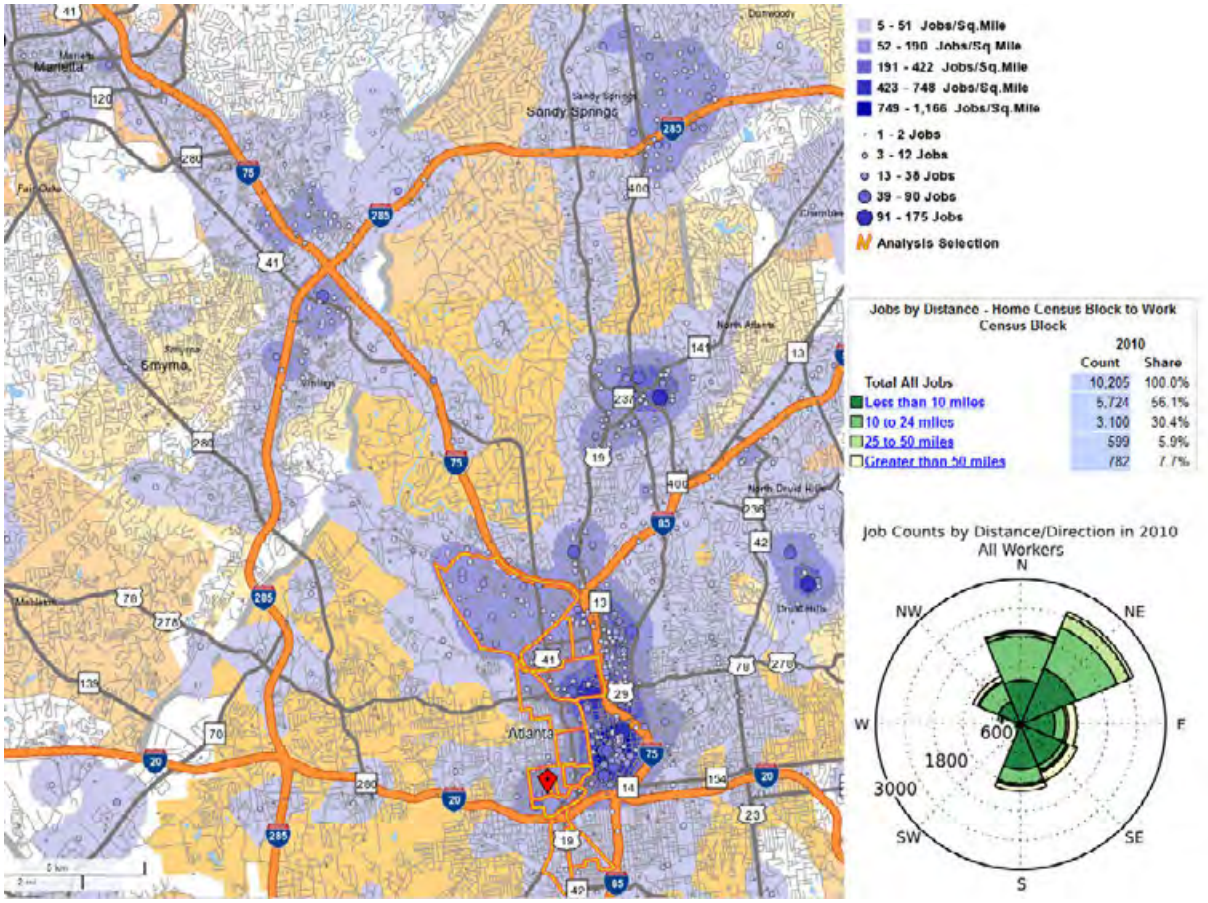


Figure 12. Employment locations for Northside Drive residents heat map

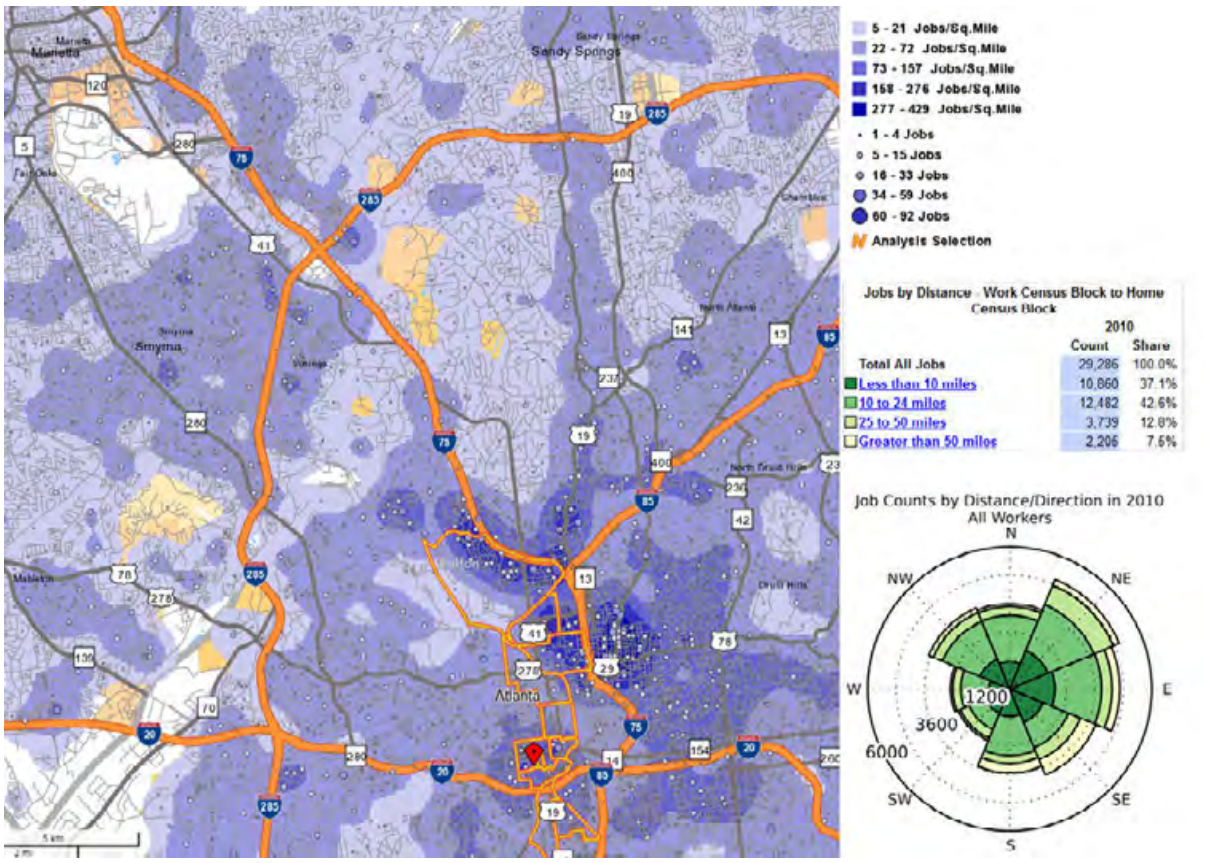


Figure 13. Resident locations for Northside Drive workers heat map

3. SRTA SITE AREA

The SRTA site area was divided into four sub-areas for which a number of alternatives were created and categorized into phases.

Figure 14. Focus area of SRTA group

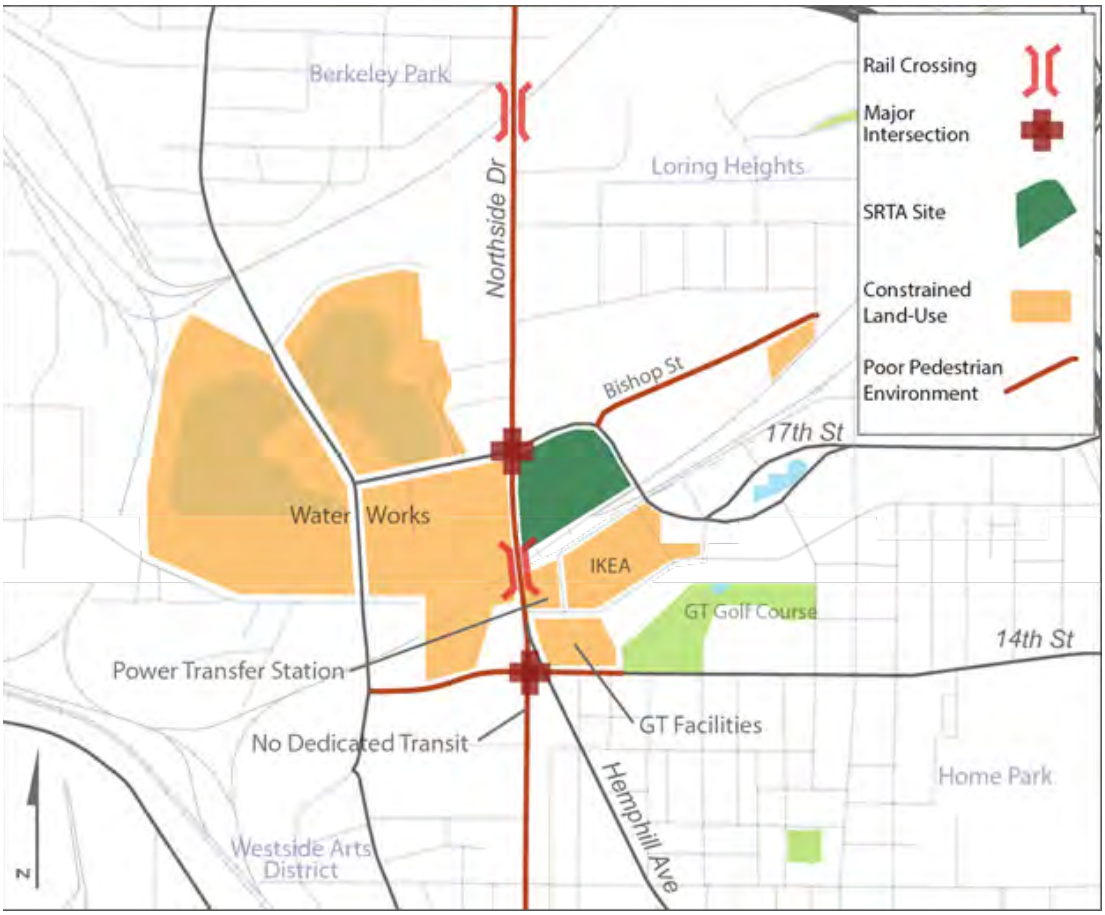


Figure 15. Summary of key issues

3.1. SRTA SITE

The State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) some years ago purchased an approximately 6 acre plot of land that is located at the intersection of 17th Street and NORTHSIDE DRIVE. At the time this was earmarked for the development of a transit hub that would serve to provide among other purposes, an intermediate transit hub for Cobb Community Transit (CCT), MARTA buses, Amtrak, and commuter rail. It was envisioned that this hub would be ideally located for the introduction of a transit system that would run north-south along the Northside Drive corridor as well as east-west connecting to Atlantic station and the Arts Center MARTA Station. Adjacent to this site is another property of approximately 6 acres which is now up for sale jointly with the SRTA site by the Lionstone Group. One of the major concerns associated with development of this site is the need to ensure that a provision for transit connectivity development is included in the sale agreement for the site, and that the projected development of the site for mixed-use purposes is adequately integrated into the surrounding urban fabric. The prospective activities that are considered for this site and any potential changes to the 17th Street intersection and adjacent areas will be restricted to the west by the Atlanta Water Works facilities.

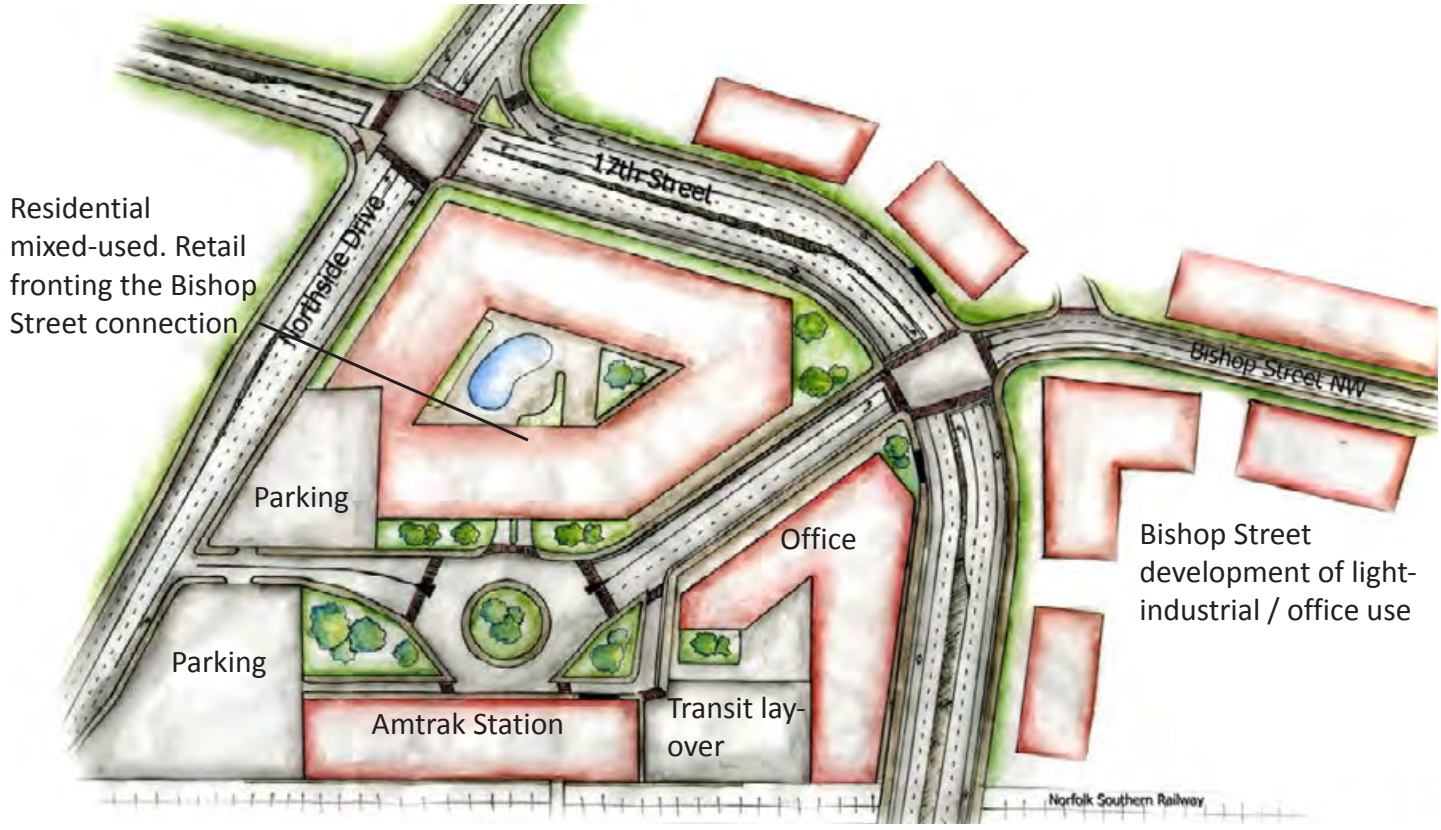


Figure 16. Recommendation on SRTA site

3.2. THE 14th/ HEMPHILL ROAD/NORTHSIDE DRIVE INTERSECTION

The intersection currently has an awkward configuration, prohibiting a quality pedestrian environment and optimal future development. It has the potential to be seamlessly reconfigured to make it operate more efficiently by optimizing vehicle throughput, create a more pedestrian friendly environment, improve the aesthetics of the area and to provide east-west street connections, such as the Ethel Street extension. All of these improvements are in alignment with the vision for incorporating transit along the length of Northside corridor. Planning for these intersection improvements should be carried out in conjunction with improvements to the 16th street intersection, both in the near term and in conjunction with the timing of widening the 16th Street underpass necessary to accommodate lane continuing.

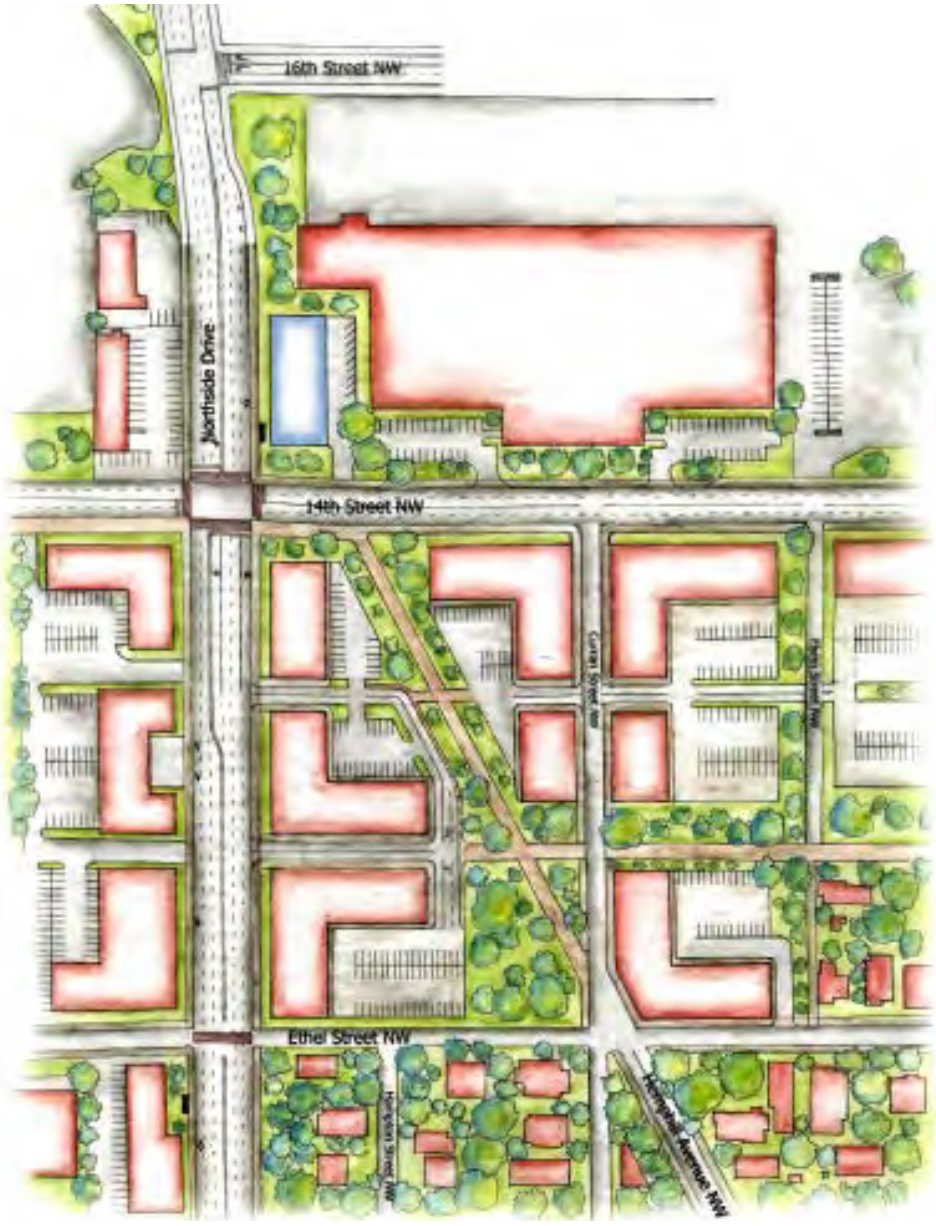


Figure 17. Recommendation on Hemphill Road

3.3. BISHOP STREET AREA

The Bishop Street area was once a predominantly vibrant light-industrial hub, which has over time lost its base as many of the once industrial properties either remain vacant or are derelict unused buildings. This area is across the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks from Atlantic Station, adjacent to Loring Heights, and other areas which are characterized by various types of housing and in some cases office spaces. Hence, in addition to the need for pedestrian and streetscape improvements in this area, the Bishop Street grid may also be considered for expansion to the north, subject to coordination with and design with the Loring Heights neighborhood. Street improvements here should leverage the new momentum that could be generated with a proposed Odyssey Sports Plex to be developed in the area. The condition and potential call to mind the creative and extraordinary reuse that characterizes Midtown West.

Figure 18. Recommendation on Bishop Street area

3.4. GEORGIA TECH PROPERTIES

The Bishop Street area was once a predominantly vibrant light-industrial hub, which has over time lost its base as many of the once industrial properties either remain vacant or are derelict unused buildings. This area is across the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks from Atlantic Station, adjacent to Loring Heights, and other areas which are characterized by various types of housing and in some cases office spaces. Hence, in addition to the need for pedestrian and streetscape improvements in this area, the Bishop Street grid may also be considered for expansion to the north, subject to coordination with and design with the Loring Heights neighborhood. Street improvements here should leverage the new momentum that could be generated with a proposed Odyssey Sports Plex to be developed in the area. The condition and potential call to mind the creative and extraordinary reuse that characterizes Midtown West.

Figure 19. Recommendation on Georgia Tech properties

3.5. PHASES OF MASTER PLAN

The assessment of these issues informed the development of a three-phase master plan of alternatives for the four previously identified sub-areas.

3.5.1. PHASE 1
Phase 1 of the master plan includes more short-term and framework measures that would result in improvements to the area immediately while setting the tone for further work.

3.5.2. PHASE 2
Phase 2 of the Plan would see the beginning of more construction and the implementation of more physical infrastructure changes within the study area as shown below. This includes initial residential mixed use development within the SRTA site, further improvements to the Bishop Street area and multi-use pathway development along the recently closed portion of Hemphill Avenue.

3.5.2. PHASE 3
In Phase 3 the area would be transformed as the particulars of the alternatives are fully built out and implemented including providing building setbacks in zoning south of 14th Street along Northside Drive. At this stage monitoring and evaluation will be critical as development ensues.

Phase 1	
SRTA Site	Establish framework plan for site
14th/ Hemphill	Streetscape improvements and Hemphill Ave. closure
Bishop Street	Pedestrian improvements and Sports Complex planning
GT Properties	Coordinate softball field development with existing plans

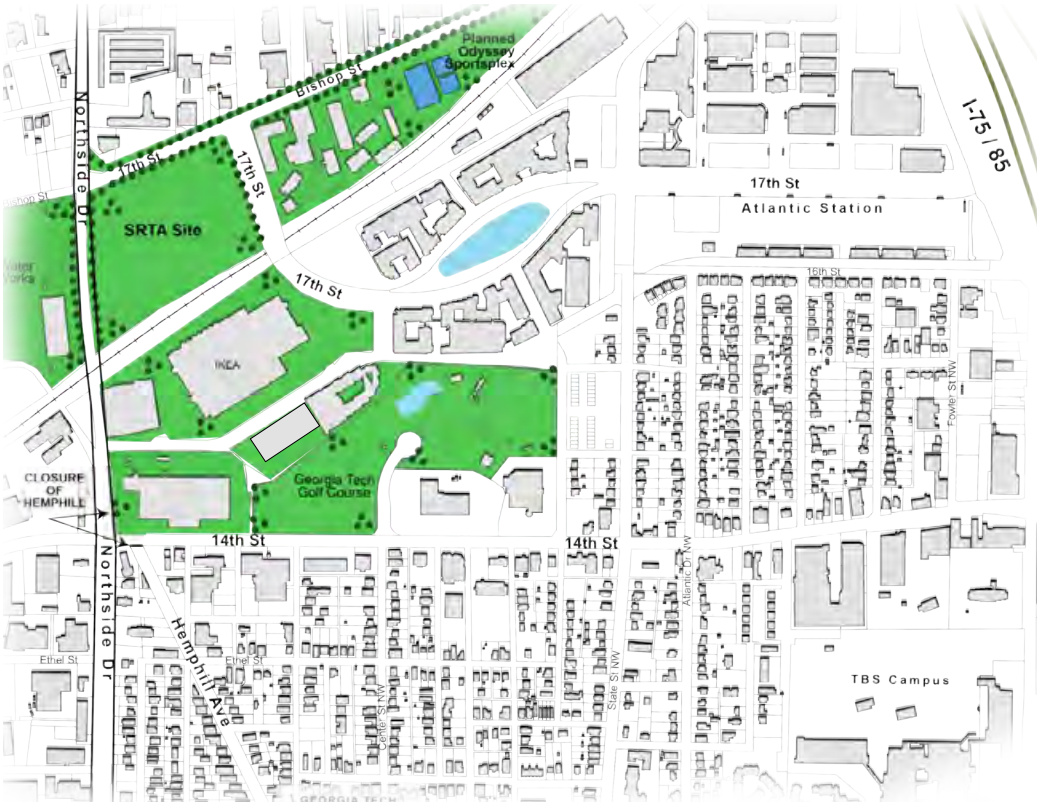


Figure 20. Phase 1 of SRTA area master plan

Phase 2	
SRTA Site	Initial sale and development with reservation of land for transit
14th/ Hemphill	Hemphill Ave. path development
Bishop Street	Zoning and initial redevelopment
GT Properties	Integrated street grid and initial development

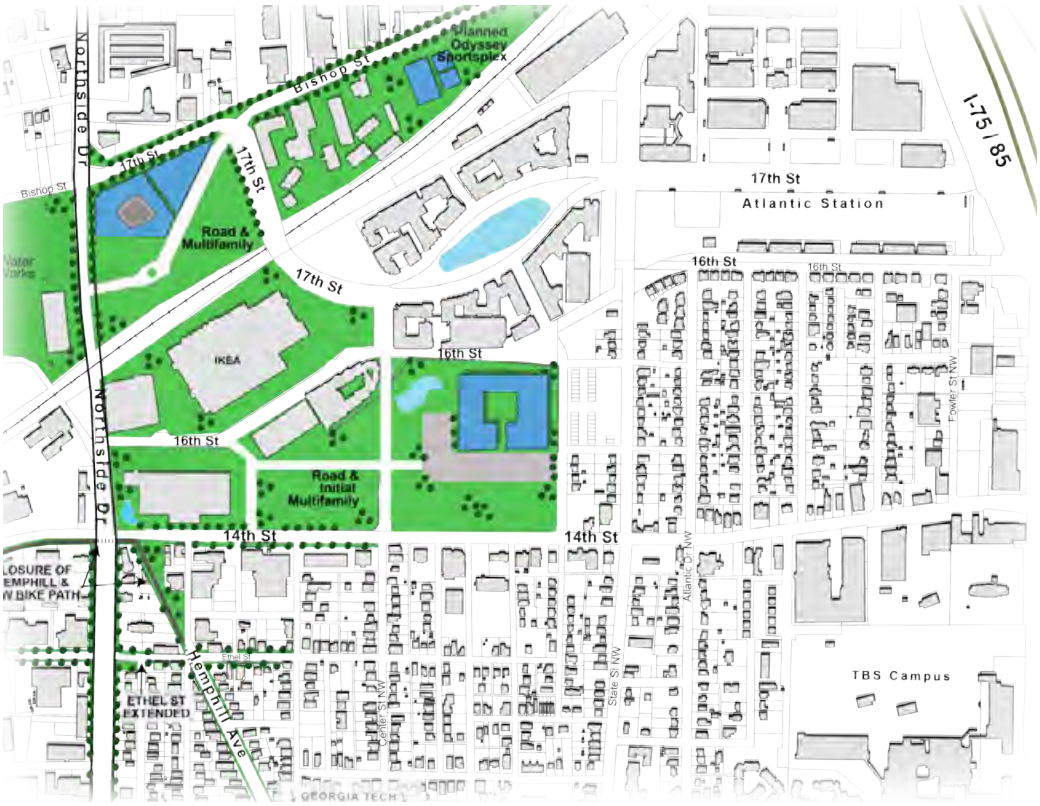


Figure 21. Phase 2 of SRTA area master plan

Phase 3	
SRTA Site	Full development of transit hub
14th/ Hemphill	Redevelopment of surrounding land
Bishop Street	Integrated street grid/ development
GT Properties	Development of remaining land

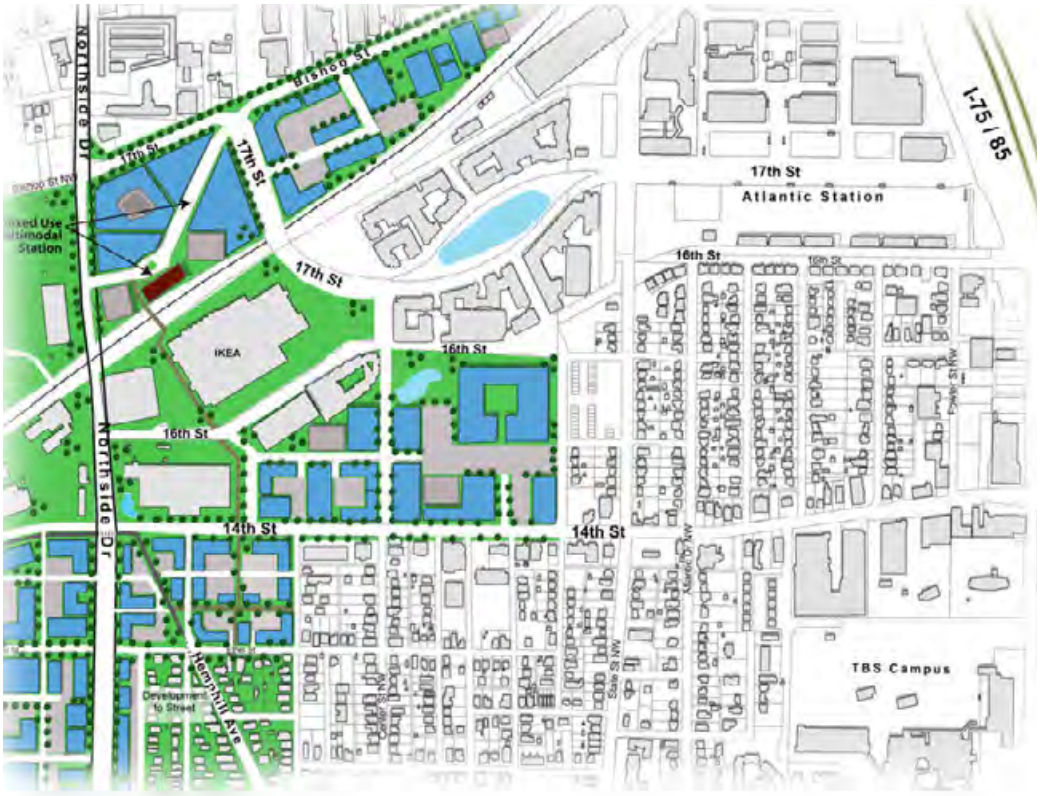


Figure 22. Phase 3 of SRTA area master plan

4. MID CORRIDOR AREA

The studio team embarked on an ambitious design process in an attempt to build on the assets within Northside Drive and address the issues brought up throughout the analysis of existing conditions. Key project areas were identified throughout the study area, namely at:

- 10th Street intersection
- 8th Street area
- Tech Parkway flyover and merge area
- Marietta Street intersection
- Northside Drive bridge over the railroad
- D.L. Hollowell Parkway and Northside Drive intersection
- Means Street bridge structure
- North Avenue intersection
- Existing bridge spans over North Avenue
- Land between North Avenue and Ivan Allen Blvd east of Northside Drive

For each of the project areas, the team considered ways to address the transportation needs of the corridor, while making design improvements to the surrounding areas. The location of these projects is shown in Figure 23. In particular, the team wanted to preserve the ability to carry up to three lanes of through-traffic per direction, consistent with the whole corridor team being two-lanes per direction. While addressing transportation issues, the team also reviewed the nearby land uses and considered their compatibility with the context of the corridor and their potential for bridging the east-west divides. As an example, light industrial uses were prioritized as part of the city-wide vision to maintain existing light-industrial building stock, for the decent jobs they provide. These were balanced with a complementary mix of commercial and residential uses where appropriate. Lastly, the studio team produced conceptual designs that called for specific building types, pedestrian and bicycle access routes, and streetscape treatments.

The following summary includes brief descriptions of the projects that can be found in the long-term vision for each of the subareas, subdivided into two separate master plan phases.

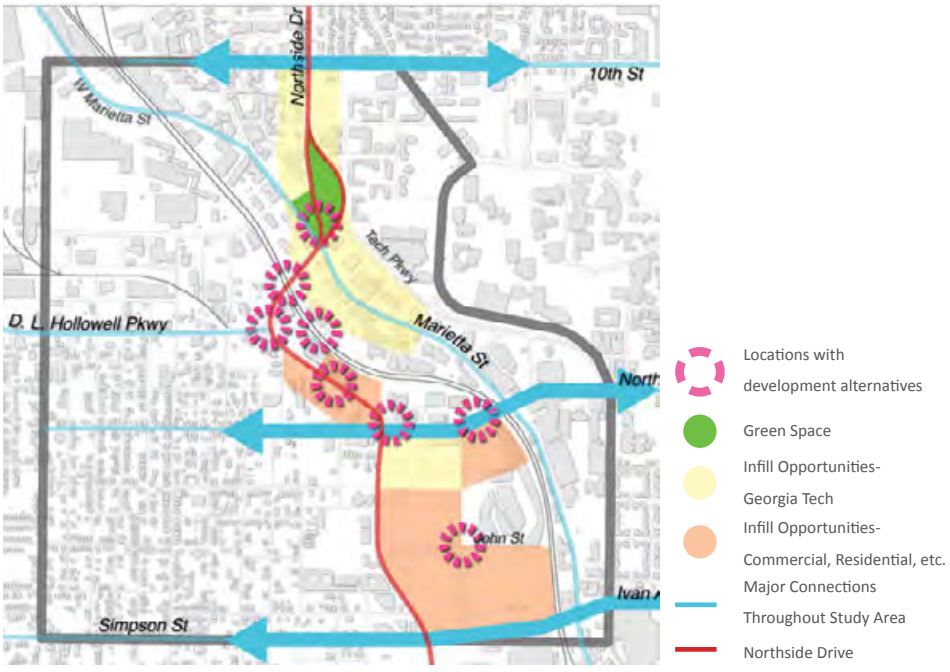


Figure 23. Project location in mid-corridor area

4.1. SUBAREA A -10TH TO MARIETTA STREET, INCLUDING TECH PARKWAY (Figure 24)

- Realign Tech Parkway to intersect with Marietta Street
- Realign Northside Drive for two-way operation over expanded flyover
- Introduce an elevated pedestrian park and street crossings to connect Georgia Tech and Marietta Street and provide a community space shared by east and west
- Construct 8th Street intersection with Northside Drive and provide access to Georgia Tech and again better connect west to east
- Add frontage to Northside Drive from Georgia Tech

each of the subareas, subdivided into two separate master plan phases.

4.2. SUBAREA B-DONALD LEE HOLLOWELL PARKWAY (Figure 25)

- Reduce footprint of D.L. Hollowell Parkway intersection with Northside Drive; maintain lane configuration
- Provide bicycle, pedestrian and streetcar connectivity over Means Street bridge using a parking structure on the east side to accommodate grade change and parking needs
- Introduce new building stock on vacant and underutilized parcels

4.3. NORTH AVENUE (Figure 26)

- Reduce footprint of North Avenue intersection with Northside Drive; maintain lane configuration and carry North Avenue streetscape improvements into English Avenue neighborhood
- Introduce street grid south of North Avenue, east of Northside Drive, including new intersections along Northside Drive
- Create new building parcels with adequate flexibility for uses between English Avenue and Georgia Tech
- Plan for commuter rail by leveraging parcels adjacent to railroad tracks for a future station
- Construct a new park on three unused bridge spans over Northside Drive
- Construct multi-use path on old railroad right-of-way south of D.L. Hollowell Parkway

4.4. SUBAREA D – IVAN ALLEN BOULEVARD (Figure 27)

- Extend street grid and new intersections from North Avenue to Ivan Allen Boulevard and east to the railroad tracks
- Consider ways to improve access to and from Coca-Cola campus
- Plan for new development on existing parking areas with uses that provide a transition between event spaces to the south (Georgia Dome, World Congress Center) and the uses found to the north and west (English Avenue, Georgia Tech).
- Construct innovative buildings that accommodate tailgating

To address the major east-west connectivity challenges, a series of treatments was considered along the full length of the corridor. Reworking many of the intersections should realize land recapture whose redevelopment could help defray the costs associated, both in land and in development costs. The pedestrian scale forms and compatible land uses were likewise considered throughout the study area. Lastly, the mobility requirements of Northside Drive, which dictate minimum roadway cross sections, were included in all renderings and alternatives.

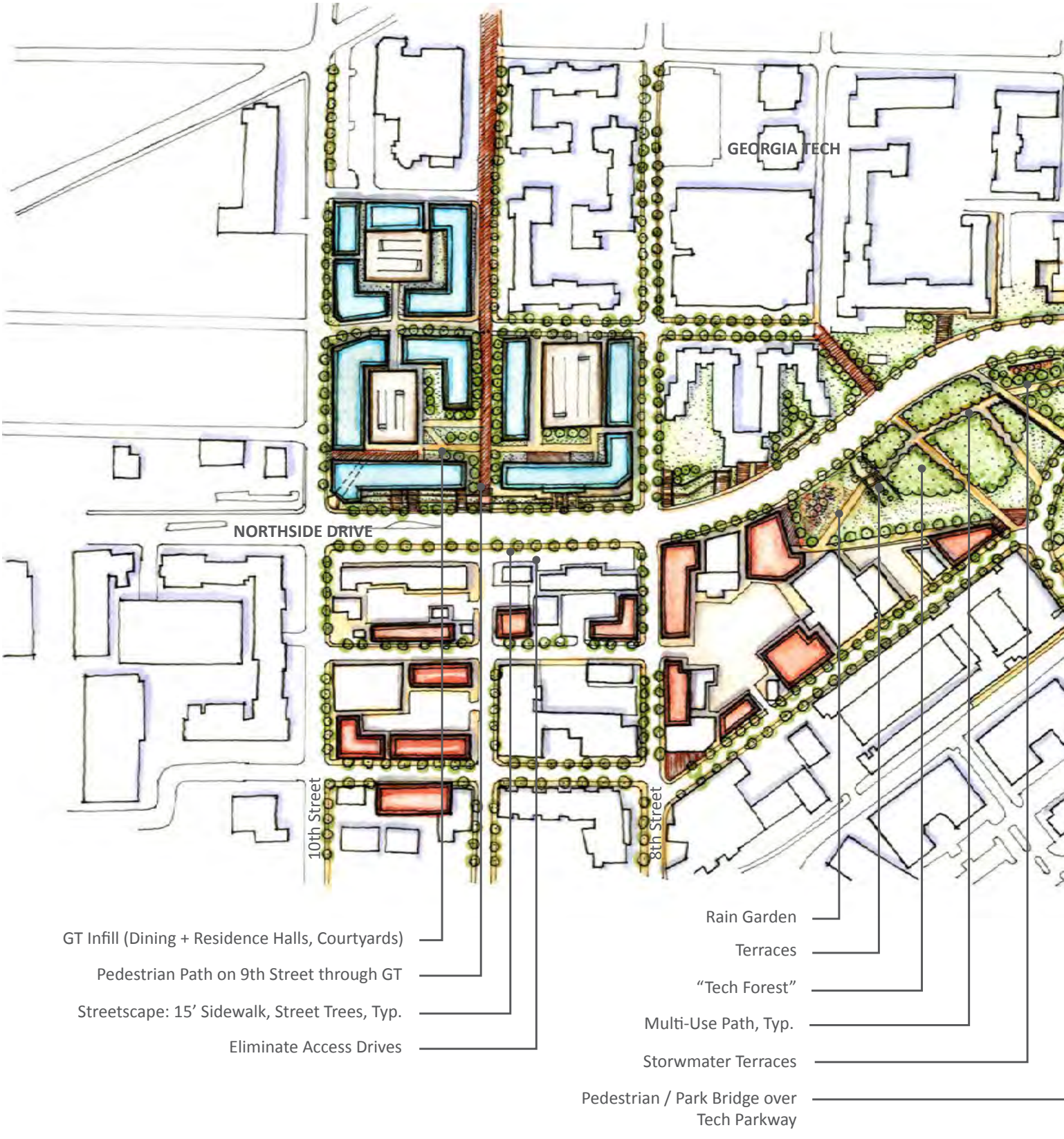
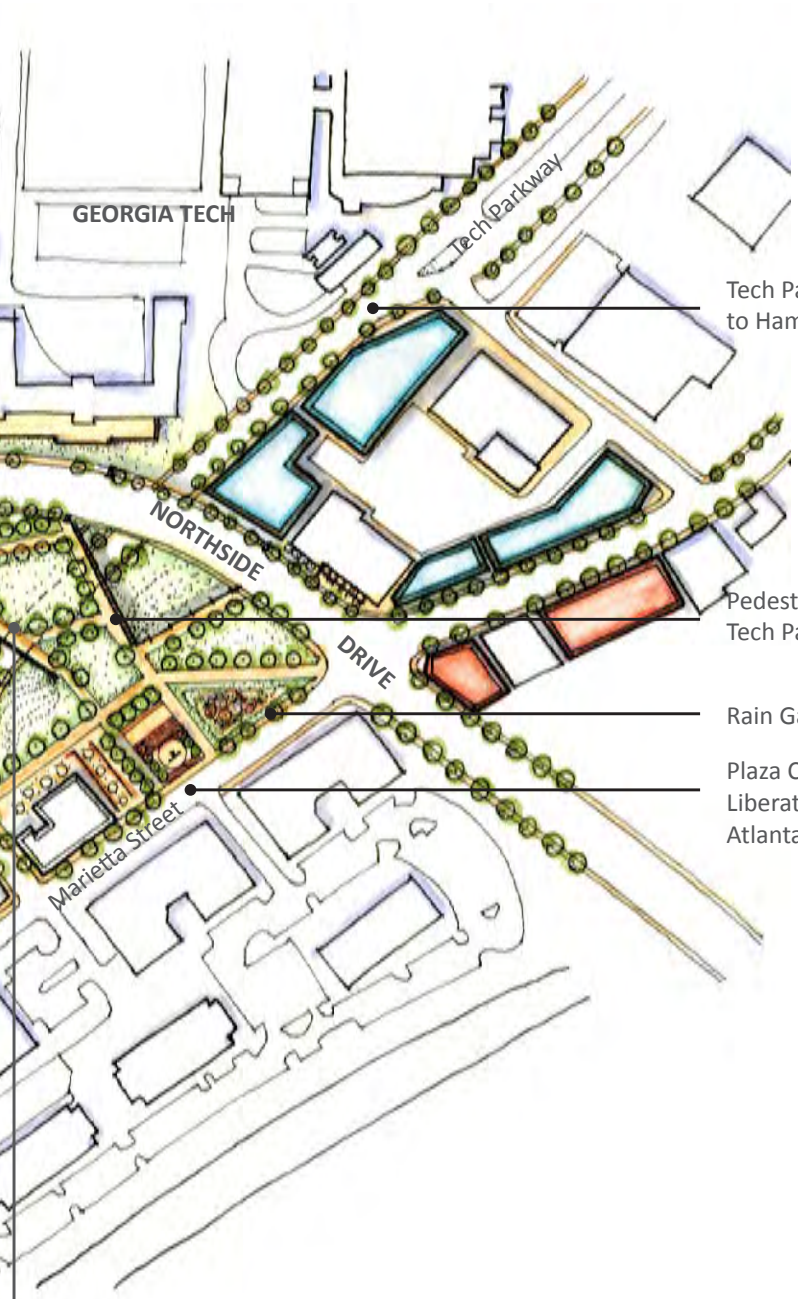
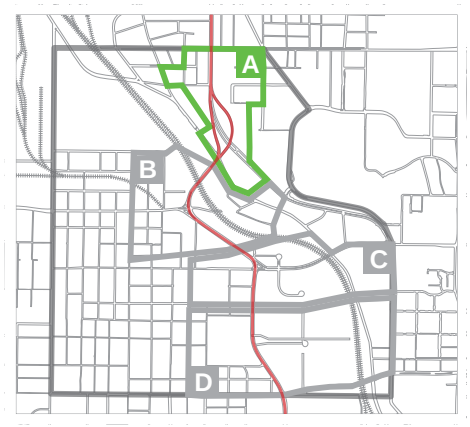


Figure 24. Recommendations on 10th Street to Marietta Street area





Main Points

- Add 3 lanes to flyover ramp to continue Northside Drive and connect Tech Parkway to Hampton St.
- Commercial Development added around the Park
- Georgia Tech Infill with Dining and Residence Halls
- Georgia Tech Infill South of the Park

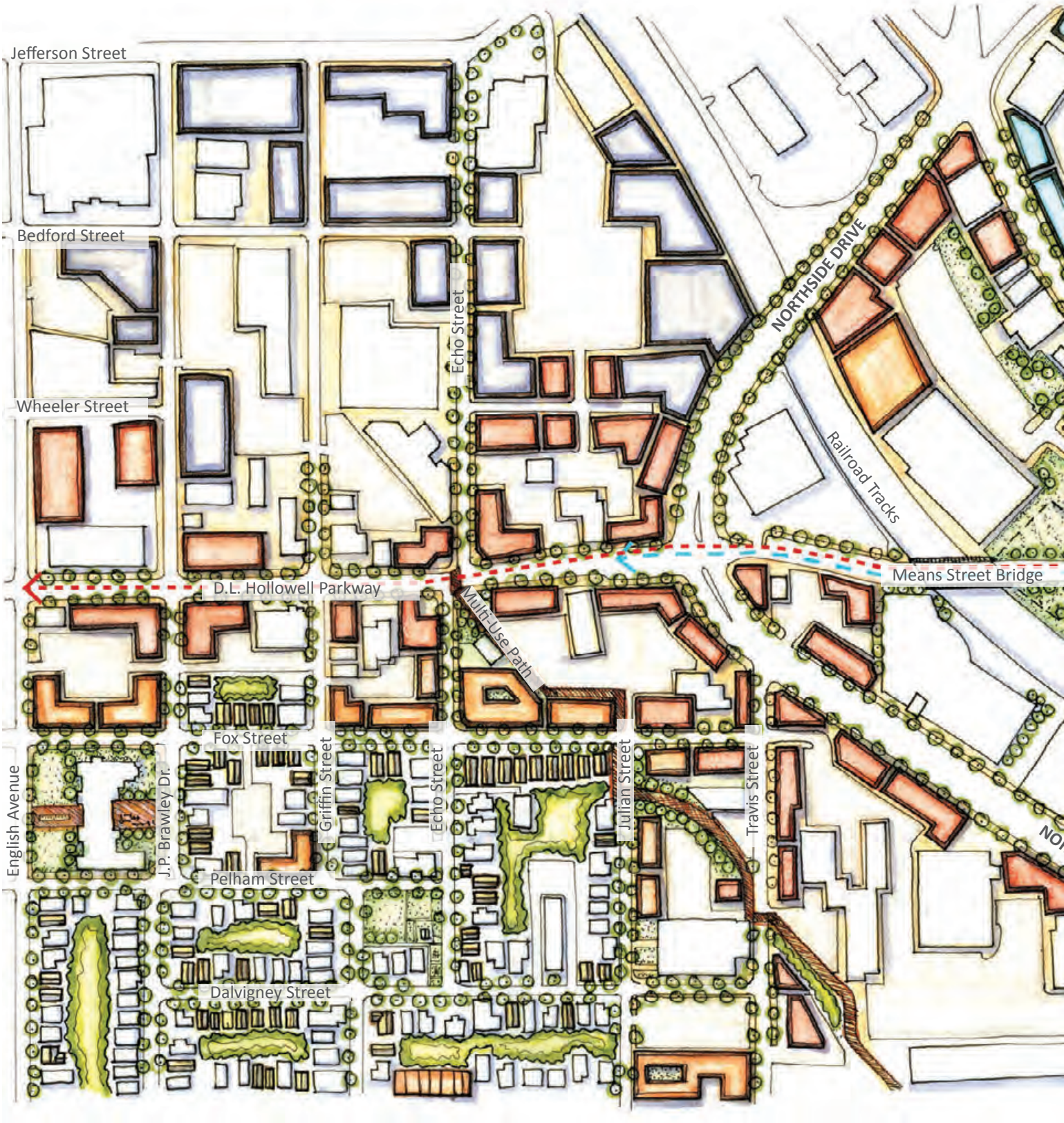
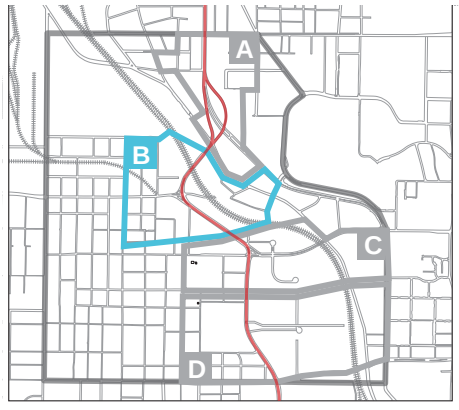


Figure 25. Recommendations on D.L.Hollowell Parkway area

Tech Trolley +Streetcar Stop

Streetcar Line, Typ.

Multi-Use Path, Typ.



Single-Family Home

Multi-Family Homes

Commercial: Office, Retail, Restaurant

Light Industrial

Institutional

Green / Park Space

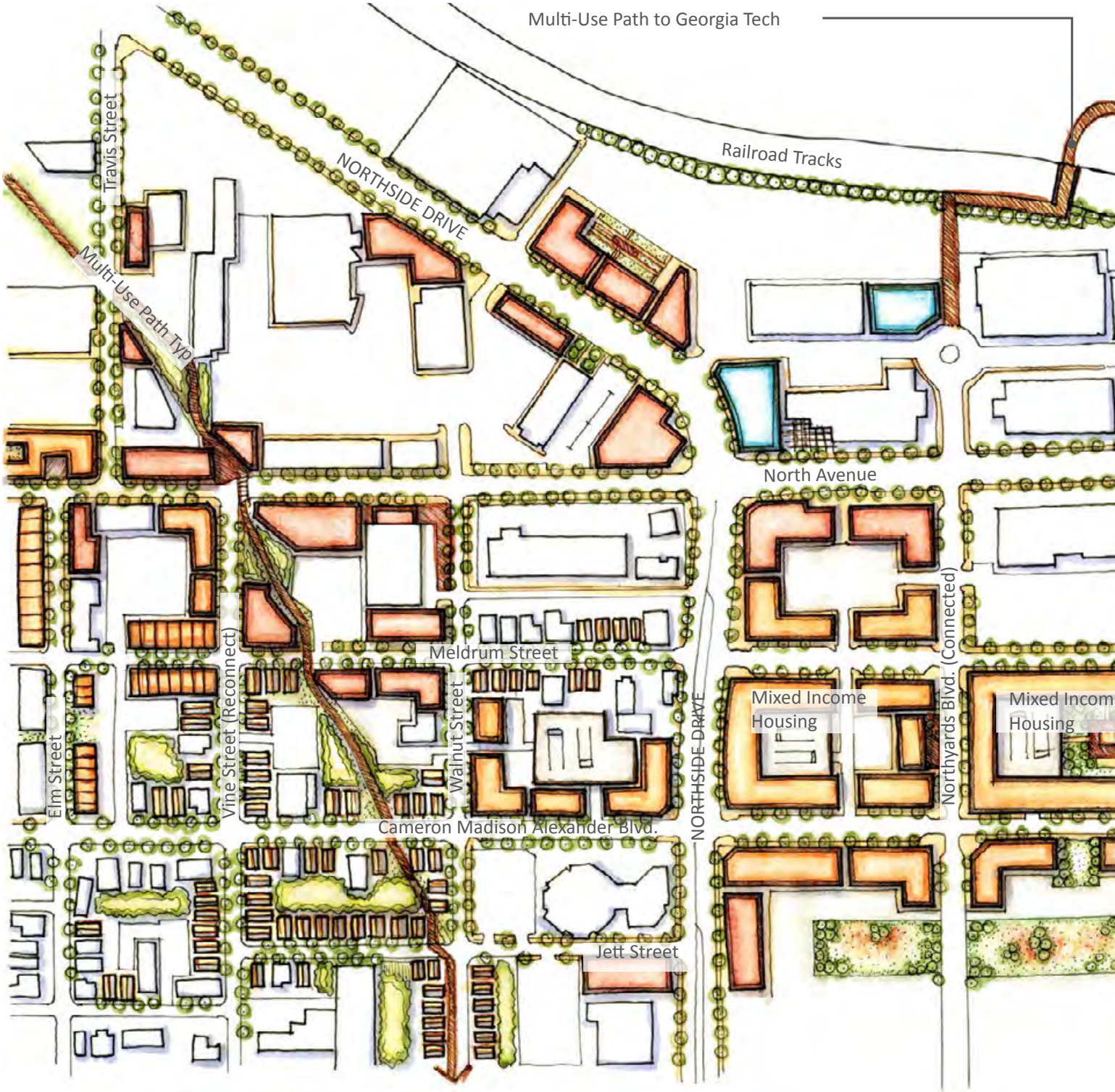


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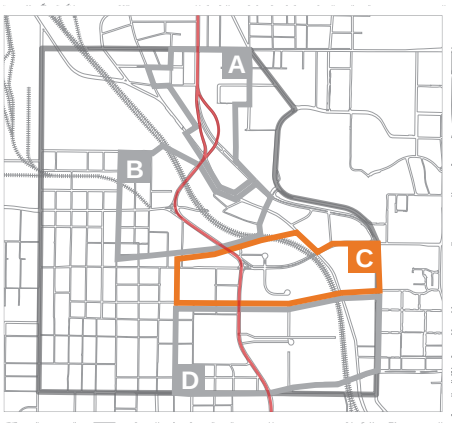
Figure 26. Recommendations on North Avenue area



- Single-Family Home
- Multi-Family Homes
- Commercial: Office, Retail, Restaurant
- Light Industrial
- Institutional
- Green / Park Space

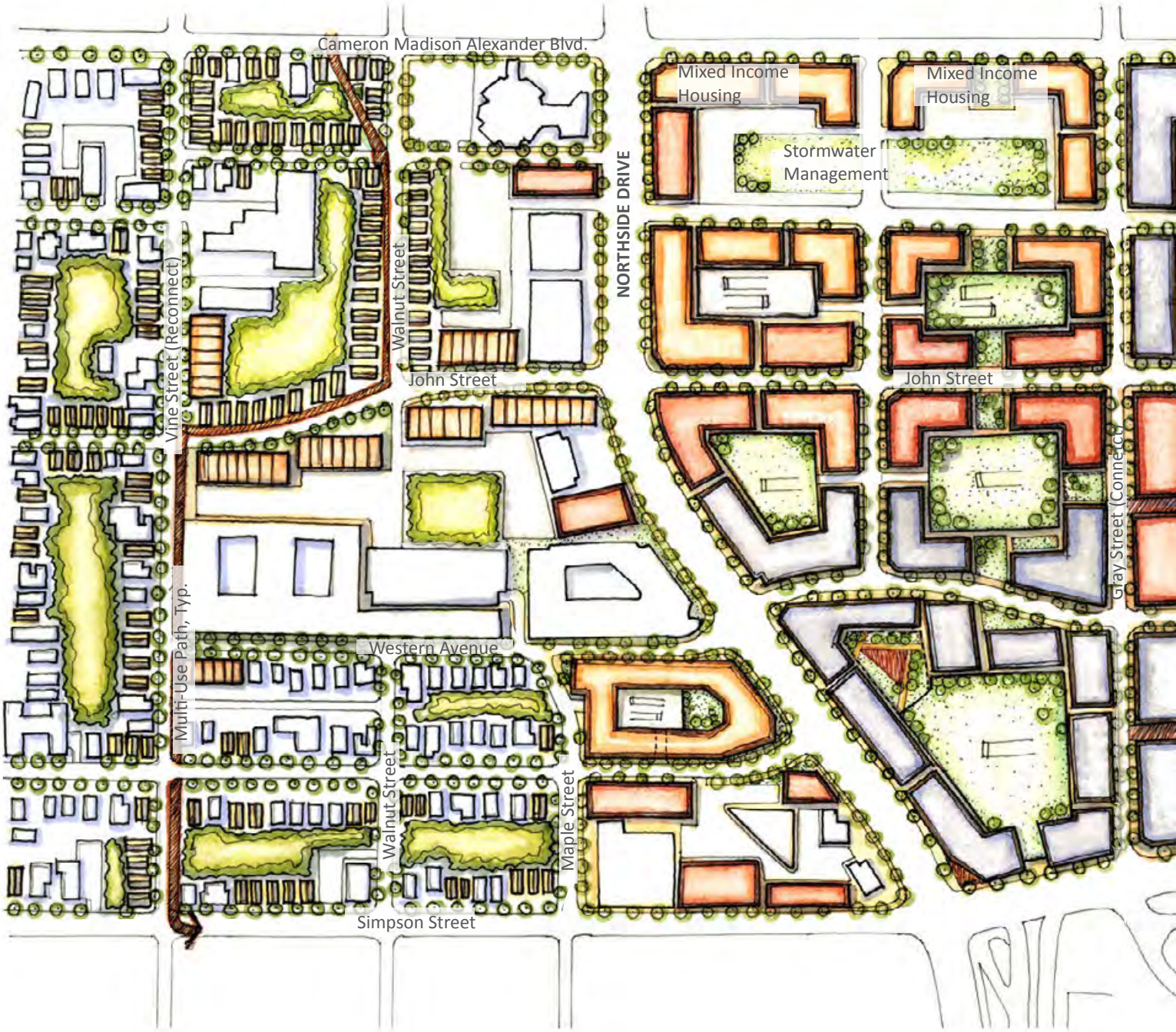
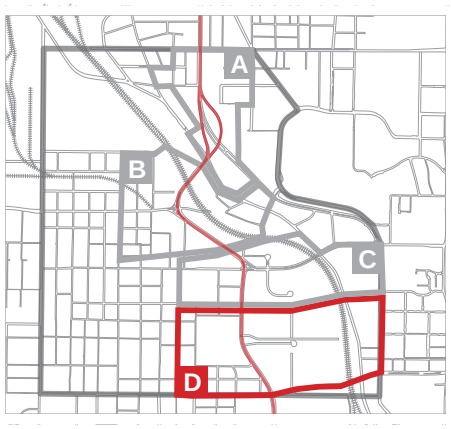


Figure 27. Recommendations on Ivan Allen Boulevard Area

Strategic infill continues in the second phase. Again, single-family residential land use governs infill in English Avenue. The remaining parking lots provide a variety of land uses with green space or parking topped with green space in the center. The interior garages would replace the surface parking currently in the area. Because the surface lots are used for tailgating, the green space on top of the garages and in the center courtyards can be used for tailgating on game days.



Main Points

- Add Commercial, Industrial, and Multi-Family Infill around Northside Drive
- Build Mixed-income Housing on former Herndon Homes site
- Connect a grid of streets through current parking for World Congress Center
- Georgia Tech Infill South of the Park

5. Multimodal Passenger Terminal (MMPT) – Atlanta University Center (AUC) Area

Major issues in the MMPT/AUC area include:

- Ensure community benefits from the MMPT, Falcons Stadium, and Mims Park projects
- Better connect the Westside neighborhoods (English Avenue, Vine City, Atlanta University Center, and Castleberry Hill) to Downtown and surrounding areas
- Improve the stability of the Westside neighborhoods through listening to and responding to community values, needs, and priorities and identifying feasible community benefit agreements (CBA) to implement the goals.
- Provide for transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities, consistent with the whole corridor team, as well as providing east-west connectivity

5.1. IMPROVED INTEGRATION OF LAND USE AND ACTIVATION OF VACANT PROPERTIES

In general, the Westside neighborhoods have experienced disinvestment and neglect over the last few decades, despite the development potential they possess due to their proximity to Downtown and the AUC, as well as their available land. The many vacant lots and buildings offer the opportunity of reinvesting in and revitalizing the neighborhoods, balancing preservation of historic cultures, creating strategic park and community garden space like Mims Park, maintaining housing affordability while encouraging new mixed economic development along Northside Drive.

Additionally, the large swaths of land upon which the Georgia World Congress Center and the Georgia Dome currently sit create impenetrable barriers for pedestrians who would like to access Downtown from the Westside neighborhoods. These two event spaces also require a lot of parking, which has partially been directed toward dirt lots that front Northside Drive along the boundaries of Vine City.

5.2. GREENSPACE AND STORMWATER MITIGATION

We also identified existing greenspace and areas that could further serve the surrounding communities as parks, greenspace, and stormwater mitigation areas. Throughout the planning process, we found that the area west of Northside Drive has experienced serious issues regarding stormwater runoff and flooding that have only been exacerbated by further hardscape construction Downtown like the Georgia World Congress Center, increasing the amount of impermeable surface space. During the visioning process, we have tried to plan for future growth while maintaining greenspace and reserving more to help mitigate the issue of stormwater runoff and flooding.

5.3. TAD AND FUNDING

In planning for this area, we looked at the government funding that has been available to those living in the Westside neighborhoods to improve the community. There is a Tax Allocation District (TAD) located within our area of focus and that money has been reserved to help improve these neighborhoods. Stormwater runoff, flooding, and an overall lack of infrastructure investment are all issues that this area faces. A study by Invest Atlanta to make best use of these funds (about $45 million) was just getting underway as the 2011 fall semester ended. TAD funding as well as the assistance provided through the Choice Neighborhoods Program are both resources for dealing with these issues in the future. The developments previously discussed, the MMPT, Green Line, and new stadium all have the potential for further generating revenue around South Downtown, and there should be a guarantee that those living on the Westside realize financial benefits in the form of jobs, job training, and rungs on the ladder for self-improvement. It is our goal that Community Benefit Agreements (CBA) be incorporated into future development processes so the Westside would experience further invest-

ment, growth, and development. Taking into account the range of stakeholder input and the technical access and connectivity factors, we strongly recommend the site south of the Dome.

5.4. INTERSECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the sub-area report, critical intersection improvements have been recommended at the following locations along Northside Drive: Thurmond Street, Rhodes Street, Magnolia Street, Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, and Fair Street. We also recommend improvements at Centennial Olympic Park Drive and Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and Andrew Young International Boulevard between Marietta Street and Centennial Olympic Park Drive. We have also identified four critical redevelopment sites: redevelopment of the area surrounding the Vine City MARTA Station, redevelopment of the assumed location of the new Falcons Stadium (MLK Jr. Drive and Northside Drive), redevelopment of the area surrounding Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive at Centennial Olympic Park Drive, and creation a "gateway" to the Atlanta University Center at Fair Street and Northside Drive.

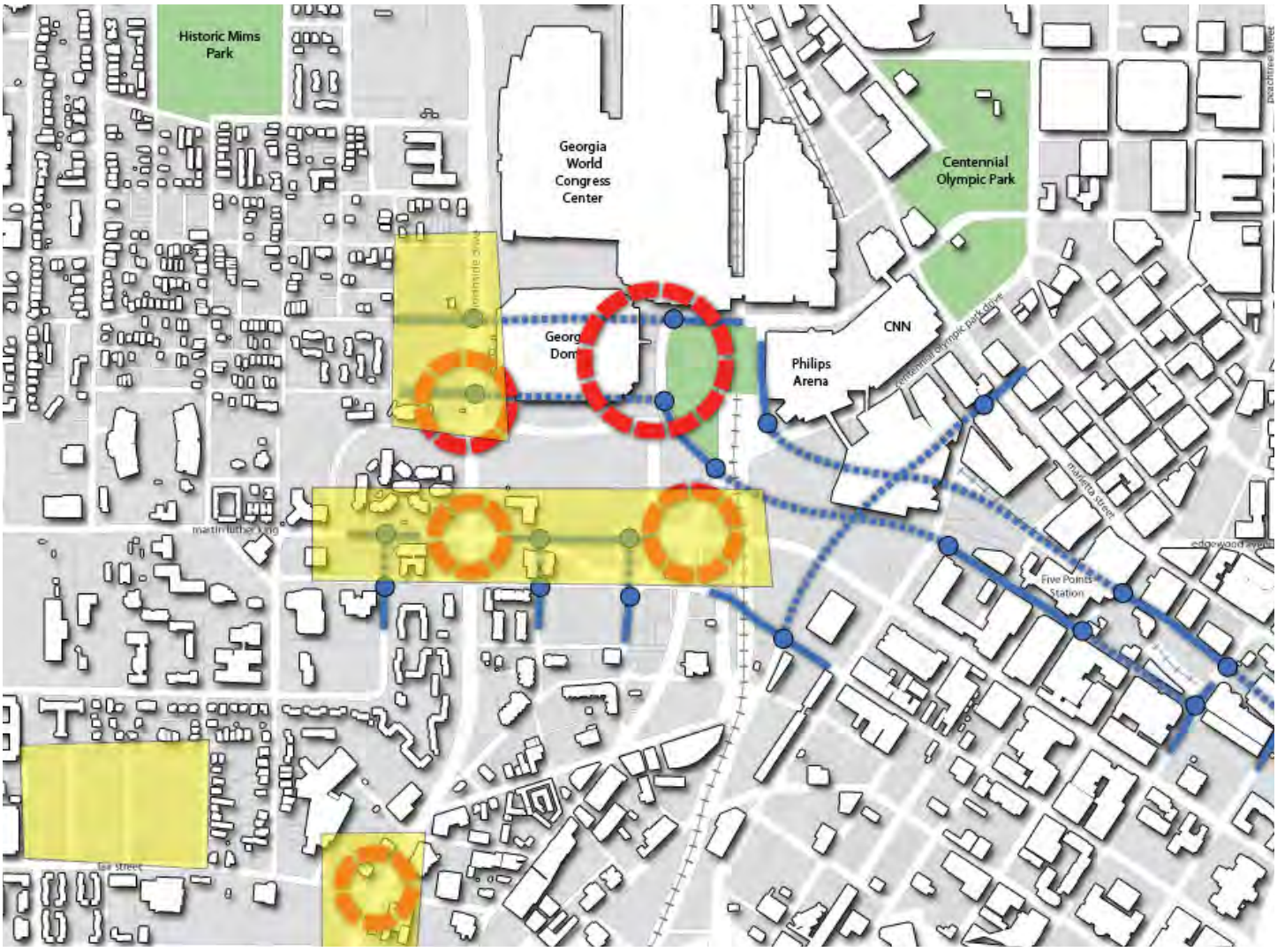


Figure 28. Critical locations

5.5. SCENARIOS AND MASTER PLAN

4.5.1. “BUSINESS AS USUAL” SCENARIO

The “Business As Usual” Scenario involves maintaining a “status quo” attitude towards redevelopment in the study area even with the prospect of the MMPT, Falcon stadium and associated east side investment. The development that does occur would probably continue to be divisive and inequitable, leaving vacant lots within neighborhoods and establishing additional physical barriers between the Westside and Downtown in the form of “super- blocks” and under-used parking lots.

5.5.2. “MODEST” SCENARIO

The “Modest” Scenario focuses on improvements that are feasible to be implemented in the near term. For example, improvements to pedestrian and public spaces could greatly improve the safety, functionality, and attractiveness of the pedestrian environment and help existing transit service work more effectively. This includes the provision of amenities like shelters at bus stops and adequate lighting along good quality sidewalks. Moderate land development could have significant impacts on the area’s livability, including the activation of vacant build- ings for use as job training centers, community centers, daycare centers, or various housing configuration. This assumes that the massive investment contemplated on the east side would in part fund these improvements.

A modest proposal in the longer term includes the restoration of the Downtown street grid network up to and beyond Northside Drive. This may also include extending the Downtown Streetcar into the Westside neighborhoods via the Atlanta University Center, most likely along Fair Street/Atlanta Student Movement Blvd or possibly along MLK Jr Drive to Historic Westside Village and Wal-Mart.

5.5.3. “ROBUST” SCENARIO

The “Robust” Scenario includes the construction of several new streets that are identified in the Connect Atlanta Plan, which begin to reconstruct the grid network Downtown near the Gulch area. Also, as part of the Connect Atlanta Plan, several streets would be converted to “Complete Streets” and three one-way streets would be converted to two-way streets. To supplement these new Complete Streets, we propose the addition of several bike/ped improvements that will help create a gateway to the Westside neighborhoods, especially the Atlanta University Center, through the creation of greenways, bikeways, and pedestrian-actuated crossings at several locations.

Some land use changes are also recommended at the intersection of Northside Drive and MLK, Jr. Dr. to enhance the “gateway” concept for the Atlanta University Center. This would include parking consolidation, greenspace, and the addition of medium density retail, restaurants, and multi-family housing. Similar land use changes are proposed for the Vine City MARTA Station area to foster a true transit-oriented development (TOD), using the existing Decatur MARTA station as a model. Finally, it can be expected that in the long-term the MMPT and new Falcons Stadium (presumably at the south site at Northside Drive and MLK, Jr. Dr.) will be constructed. Both of these developments should engage with the Westside and provide adequate connectivity. The stadium should not simply utilize the Westside neighborhoods for parking and tailgating.

5.5.4. IMAGINATIVE SCENARIO

The imaginative scenario incorporates all elements of the robust scenario and also includes the creation of a superblock that will serve to establish the gateway connection between the Westside neighborhoods and Downtown. By providing additional greenspace flowing from the MMPT and the new Falcons Stadium to the Vine City MARTA TOD, this plan will help mitigate some of the residents’ stormwater concerns related to these large new developments. As these two new attractors will likely require significant public investment and spur adjacent private redevelopment, the plan seeks to ensure that neighborhood residents do not take on an ad-

ditional burden and rather realize benefits themselves. In order to provide for near-term stability in an area with considerable developer interest, this plan recommends adopting a mixed-use zoning standard in the surrounding areas. Additionally, there is opportunity for residents to negotiate Community Benefit Agreements related to parking and concessions facilities/services within and around the new Falcons stadium, as well as workforce development elements that could be tied to the construction of the MMPT and stadium. Finally, this plan recommends a "Westside Loop" streetcar or other transit that would connect the Atlanta University Center campus with Vine City, English Avenue, Georgia Tech, Centennial Olympic Park, the Downtown Streetcar (connecting to the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic District), the MMPT and the new Falcons stadium at the south site.

Figure 29. "Business As Usual" scenario

Figure 30. Imaginative scenario

5.5.5. MASTER PLAN

The final master plan design combines elements of each of the aforementioned proposals. Figure 31 shows the compilation of design ideas over the entire study area. Some of the components of this plan include:

- Stormwater mitigation feature on the Westside just north of Vine City MARTA station
- Expansion of the Vine City MARTA station into a Transit Oriented Development (TOD)
- Extension of a trail from Washington Park and the BeltLine, through the Vine City neighborhood and into the Vine City MARTA station, dubbed the Vine City Promenade by the PATH Foundation, that would connect across Northside Drive, into Centennial Olympic Park, to Freedom Parkway and eventually link into the Stone Mountain PATH
- Location of the new Falcons stadium at the south site
- Redevelopment of Martin Luther King Jr Dr as a mixed-use and active corridor
- Expansion of the Green Line plan to connect into the Westside and south to Castleberry Hill
- Redevelopment of the vacant University Homes site within the Atlanta University Center Campus
- Reworking the Fair Street intersection to make a seamless link from the MMPT, down Northside or Peters to Fair, and thence into the heart of the AUC campuses
- An extension of the Downtown Streetcar that would run through the Multi Modal Passenger Terminal, down to the Atlanta University Center by way of Northside Drive, back north through the Westside neighborhoods and return into Downtown

Figure 31. Master plan for MMPT-AUC area


Centennial
Olympic Park
CNN
Philips
Arena
centennial olympic park drive
marietta street
New
Five Points
Station
edgewood avenue
peachtree street

6. NORTHSIDE TERMINUS

The area surrounding the somewhat indeterminate southern end of Northside Dr is characterized by a confusion of land use, transportation infrastructure, deterioration, disconnectedness, and environmental complications. Yet the area is surrounded by the Atlanta University Center campuses to the northwest, the Villages at Castleberry mixed income residential community to the northeast, the mixed income Mechanicsville Station residential community to the southeast, the giant Candler Warehouse with its profusion of activities (and inactivities) to the south and the West End Business District to the southwest. The transportation tangle that crisscrosses this hodgepodge terrain includes I-20 up high, MARTA rail also up high, the CSX/Norfolk Southern tracks lower and flanked by streets (West Whitehall to the west merging into Lee Street and Whitehall becoming Murphy Street on the east), Norfolk Southern tracks under Whitehall but at grade with Wells Street to the south, Peters Street (which becomes West Whitehall), Northside Drive diving down below Peters Street and the CSX/NS tracks and coming back up to cross Wells Street, intersect with Ralph David Abernathy, and proceed south as Metropolitan Parkway. The profusion of transportation infrastructure is contradicted by how inaccessible and unreadable it all is on the ground.

Like other such indeterminate industrial or rail terrains whose ebbs and flows are an Atlanta hallmark, people occupy this space with a wide range of activities, from homeless encampments, to stables for the Peachtree Street carriage trade horses, to a range from active to derelict light industrial spaces, to “informal” enterprises, and finally the usual discovers of interest in such spaces, the artists and crafts people. Unlike its surrounding neighbors with well-defined stakeholders who have an interest in the area’s improvement, then, this area has a myriad of interests, some in conflict, some consonant, reflecting the current owners and occupiers of the land as well as powerful agencies like GDOT, MARTA, N/S and CSX railroads, and the City of Atlanta.

So, what to do? Having reviewed a compendium of studies in the area, ranging from those seeking to establish a continuous streetcar corridor from Peachtree south to the airport, various West End studies, the AU Center’s visioning plan, the Housing Authority’s Choice Neighborhoods planning, and previous Northside Drive and I-20 corridor studies, the intractability of a positive approach to the issues facing this territory remains. Those issues are, in no particular order:

- Serious connectivity issues, including from West End to the AU Center, from Mechanicsville to AUC, Castleberry, and downtown generally, and from West End to points east
- Transportation barriers, including access to MARTA, I-20, and a functioning north and south and east and west street network
- Limited transit access, no viable pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure (not that there are many existing destinations that could benefit from such)
- Waste of land, including acres of disconnected, deteriorated buildings and properties, resulting in a kind of no-man’s-land in the middle of and repelling otherwise vibrant urban terrain
- A visible and stark marker for the historic cultural, race and class barriers that, again, define Atlanta’s patterns of investment on the one hand and neglect on the other

Yet the opportunities are exciting:

- Finally connecting Northside Drive in a clear, rational, and user-friendly way to I-20 by itself would enhance the investment and buy-in for repositioning the area for an improving future
- Sorting out the road, railroad, and MARTA systems into a serviceable connectivity system could bring appeal to an area that could be very productive both for the City’s economy and for the jobs and income-producing potential for the area
- A properly devised redevelopment program could both support the assets that ring the area – the AU Center, the West End business center, the relatively new nearby housing communities as well as reinforce

their goals and aspirations
• With little impact from the dislocation or gentrification of residential neighborhoods that troubles other redevelopment proposals, the prospects for using the area as an incubator of innovative industries and generator of jobs seem favorable
• Creating a welcoming entry point to the city for interstate travelers, MARTA riders, future commuter rail riders, as well as for the everyday population

Accordingly, these sketch studies show a range of possibilities to address the issues and to explore the opportunities. This work is not as fully developed as the other study areas for the studio work, yet it will be carried forward and intensified into the next semester. Preliminary analyses of the area along with a start-up consideration of possibilities follow.

The biggest move (Figure 32) to resolve the connectivity problems that afflict the area is probably also the most cost- and time- effective proposal for the whole corridor. With minimal right-of-way, environmental, and construction costs, Northside Drive can be rerouted to flow directly into the I-20 access road system and the West End business district by shifting it into Peters Street and then West Whitehall, bringing it thus to the west side of the rail tracks, leading straight in to the West End MARTA station, and from there into Lee Street. In addition to providing defined entrances and exits to and from I-20 to Northside Drive and direct access to West End, this routing frees up the existing Northside alignment to become the northern terminus of Metropolitan Parkway and to plan for future land use and development in a more cohesive and logical way.

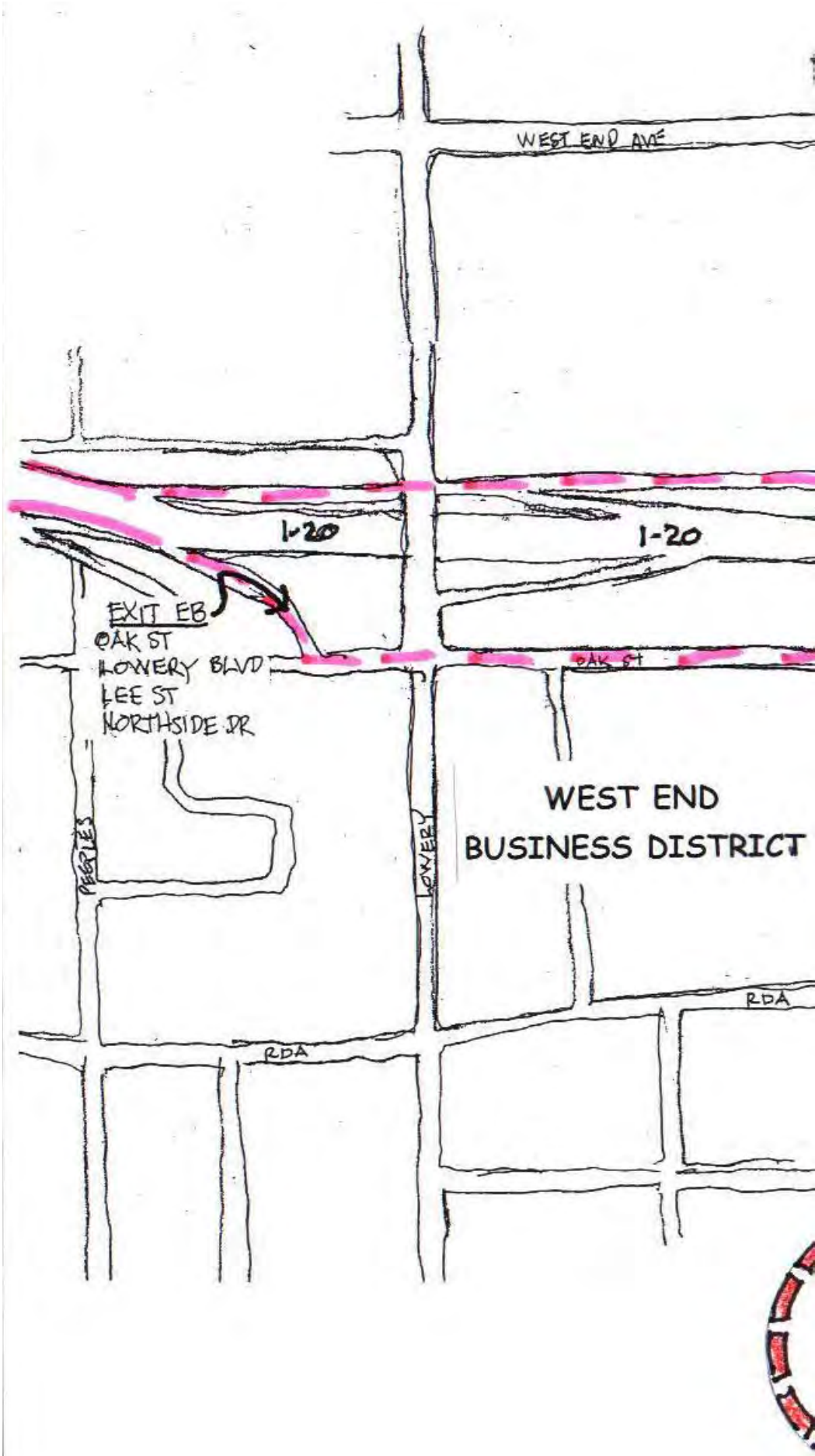
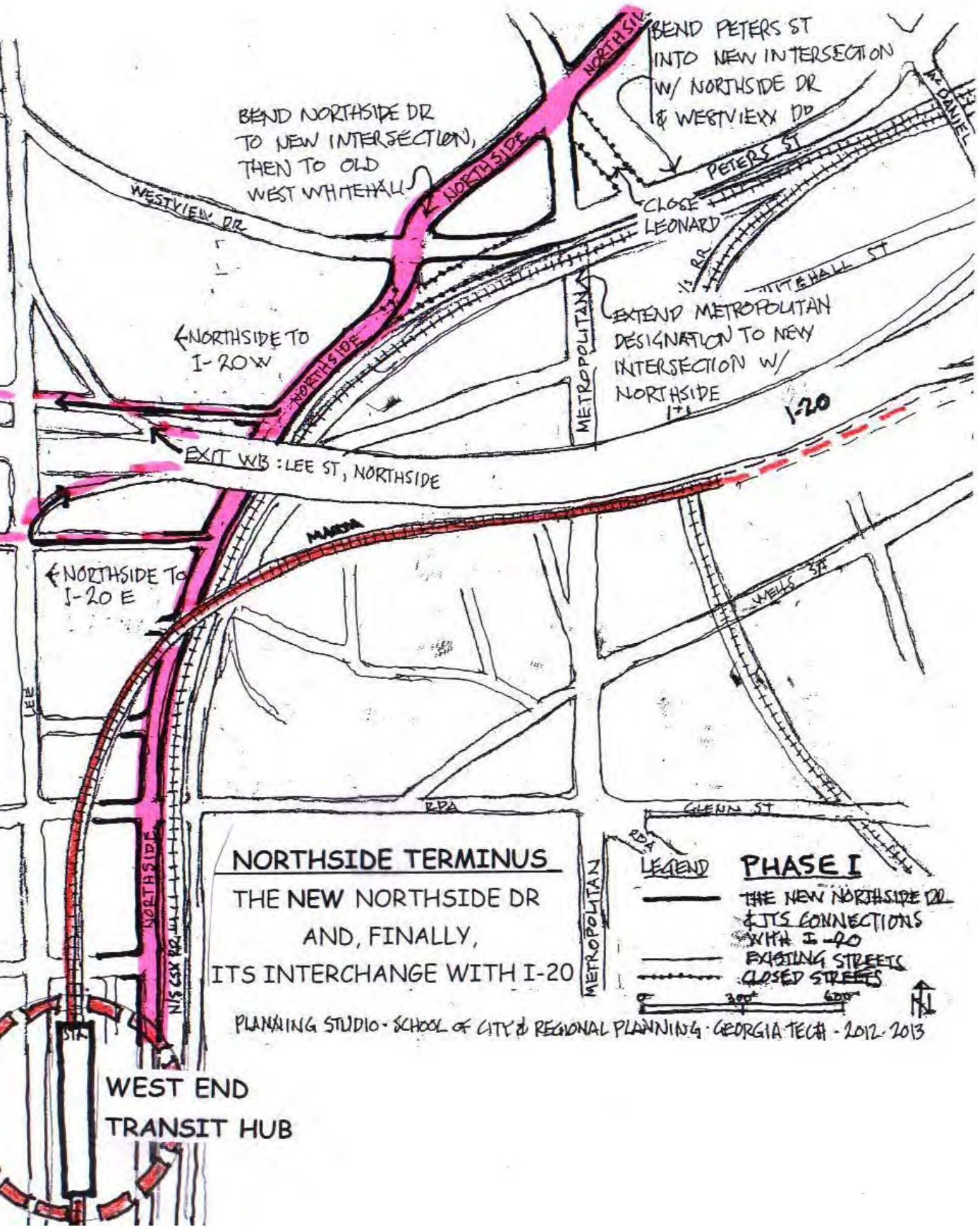


Figure 32. New Northside Drive


BEND PETERS ST INTO NEW INTERSECTION W/ NORTHSIDE DR & WESTVIEW DR
BEND NORTHSIDE DR TO NEW INTERSECTION, THEN TO OLD WEST WHITEHALL
NORTHSIDE
WESTVIEW DR
PETERS ST
CLOSE LEONARD
RR
WHITEHALL ST
EXTEND METROPOLITAN DESIGNATION TO NEW INTERSECTION W/ NORTHSIDE
METROPOLITAN
NORTHSIDE TO I-20 W
I-20
EXIT WB : LEE ST, NORTHSIDE
MARTA
NORTHSIDE TO I-20 E
WELLS ST
LEE
BDA
GLENN ST
NORTHSIDE
NORTHSIDE TERMINUS
THE NEW NORTHSIDE DR
AND, FINALLY,
ITS INTERCHANGE WITH I-20
LEGEND
PHASE I
THE NEW NORTHSIDE DR & ITS CONNECTIONS WITH I-20
EXISTING STREETS
CLOSED STREETS
300'
600'
PLANNING STUDIO · SCHOOL OF CITY & REGIONAL PLANNING · GEORGIA TECH · 2012-2013
WEST END
TRANSIT HUB

From a land use and development potential perspective (FIgure 33), in contrast to the established, active and stable activities all around, this territory is almost poetic in its irresolution, diversity, conflicts, and overall disheveled state. The blocks are small and can't be realistically consolidated. The streets are many, yet confusing. The two rail lines defy establishing connectivity with neighboring areas. I-20 looms above, with its embankments barricading connectivity on the ground. We considered a wide range of alternatives for this area's future:

- Wholesale assembly and redevelopment:
  - o Make it a park with a lake at the low point
  - o Make it a railroad yard
  - o Make it a mixed use development connecting into its surrounding neighborhoods
  - o Make it an industrial park
- Incremental approaches within the parameters of the existing conditions
  - o Take a "let a hundred flowers bloom" approach, where the strengths from the myriad of existing uses can be assessed with respect to identifying and prioritizing infrastructure and regulatory measures to encourage their success
  - o Interact individually with all the existing users to divine a strategy for supporting the most promising initiatives
  - o Design an identity for the area that builds on its positives and then install that identity at strategic entry points

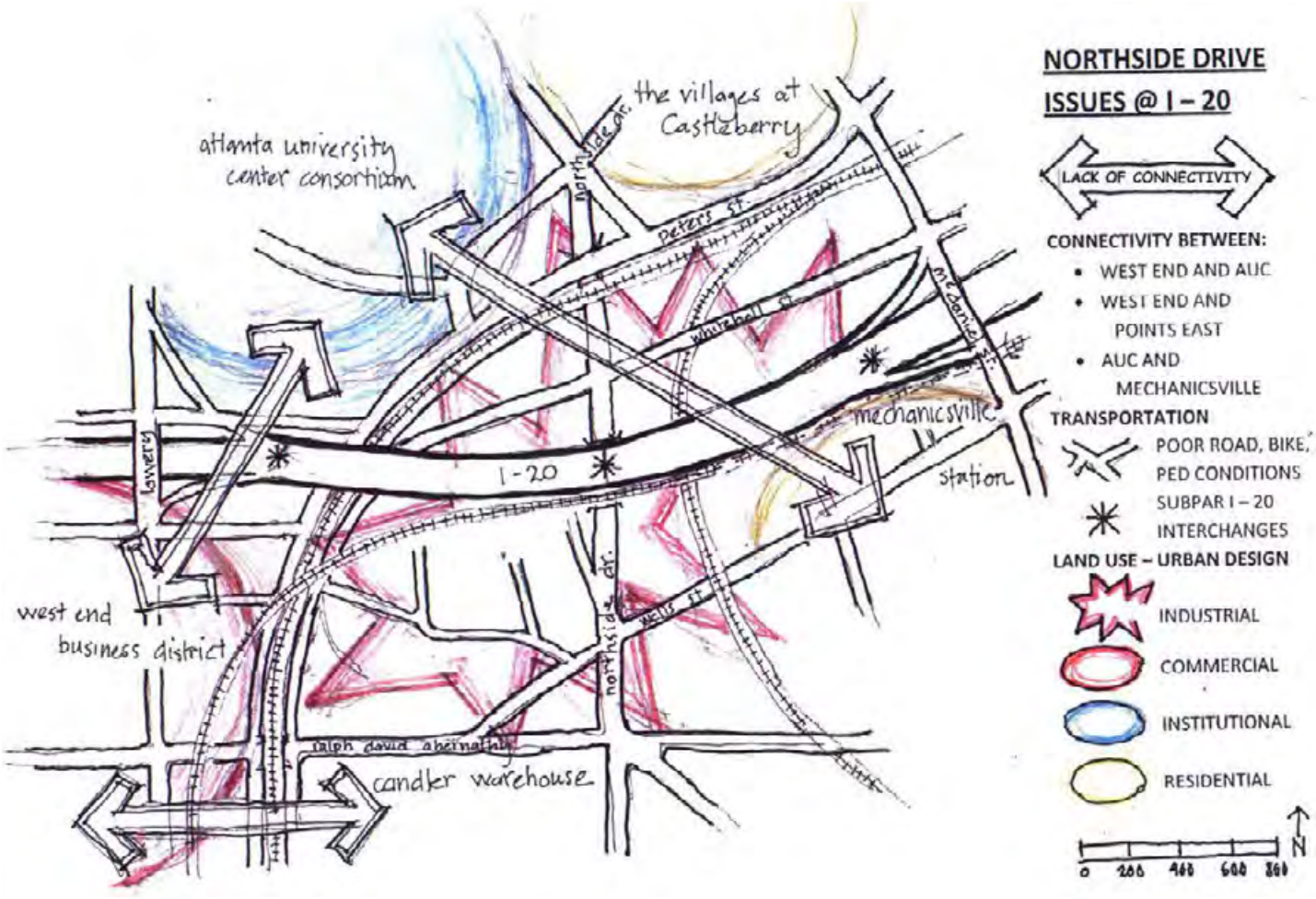


Figure 33. Land use at the Northside Drive-I-20 area

For a number of reasons, the incremental approach was deemed to be the most feasible, both from a time and cost perspective and from the point of view of encouraging that which Atlanta does best: encouraging small start-ups, artists, and diverse interests to experiment, to try their hand at unlikely things in unlikely places. Such efforts, supported strategically could launch a range of follow-up activities. Some of the properties, for example, could support business incubators and start-ups. Others could support research labs, maybe for the Morehouse School of Medicine. Still others could take advantage of Brownfield support programs to develop "green" industries or green building contractors. Perhaps the needs and advantages for the carriage trade stables could be supported, protected and enhanced. And all the while, space exists for artists and other people living and working at the margins. Part of such a program could consider employment of the underemployed and homeless individuals, to include ways of sheltering those who presently find shelter in the area (now the only nighttime occupants).

Proposed next steps would be to engage the interests in the area to probe the possibilities of this approach, beginning with the West End business interests, the Candler Warehouse (now styled "The Metropolitan") owners, and the Morehouse School of Medicine, which would need to be approached anyway to explore the land swaps necessary to rationalize the path of the new Northside Drive.

7. CONTACT

For further information on this studio project, please visit the website or contact any of the following participants:

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8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Northwest Community Alliance
Georgia Regional Transportation Authority
Georgia World Congress Center Authority
English Avenue Neighborhood Association
Central Atlanta Progress
Atlanta Beltline Inc
Urban Collage
Kimley-Horn and Associates
NPU-L
Councilman Ivory Young
And many more...