

American Planning Association

2024 Student Planning and Design Competition

Team Outsiders Placemaking for Empowerment (OPE)

University of Michigan

Playmart

Placemaking. Proximity. Play.

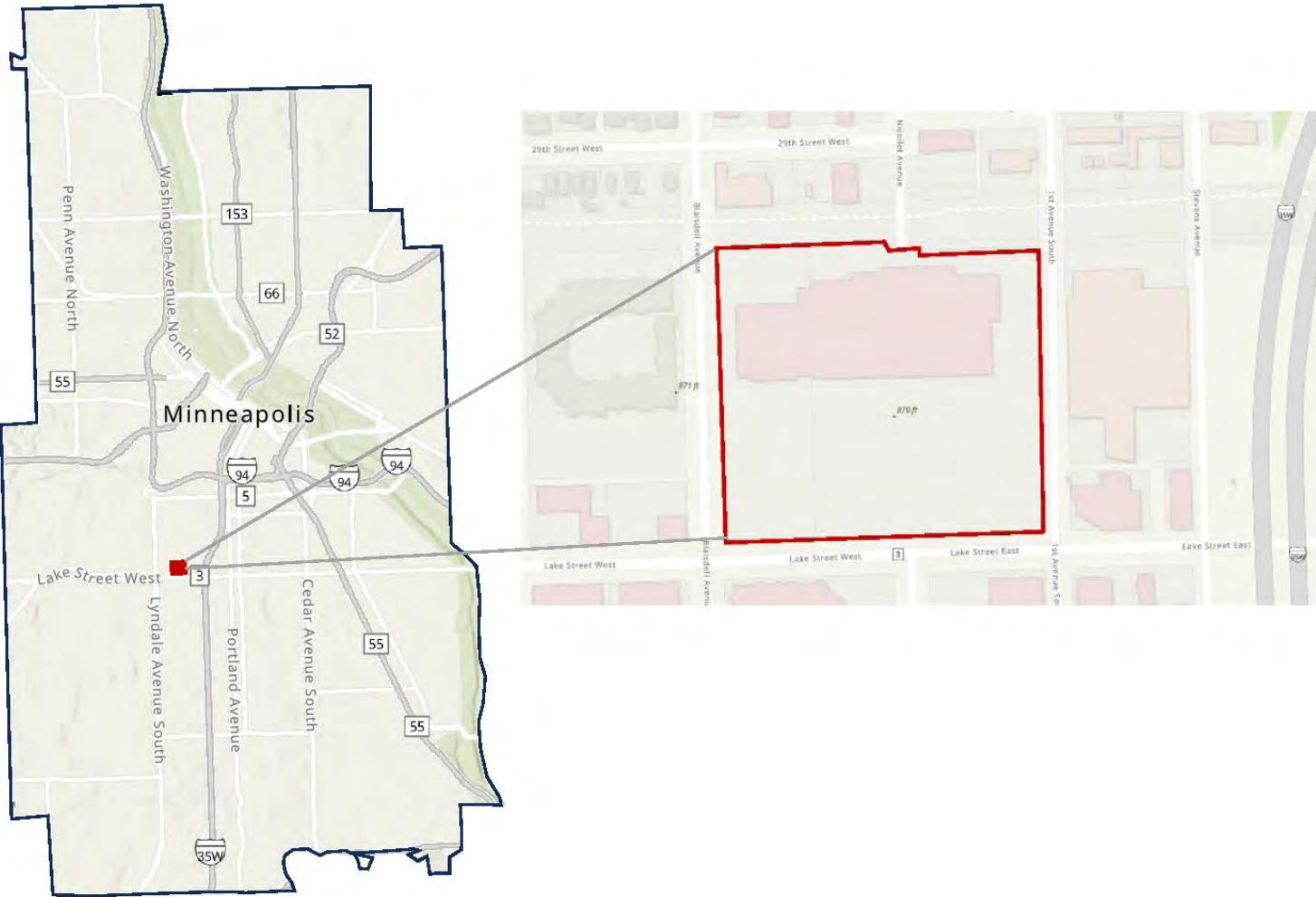
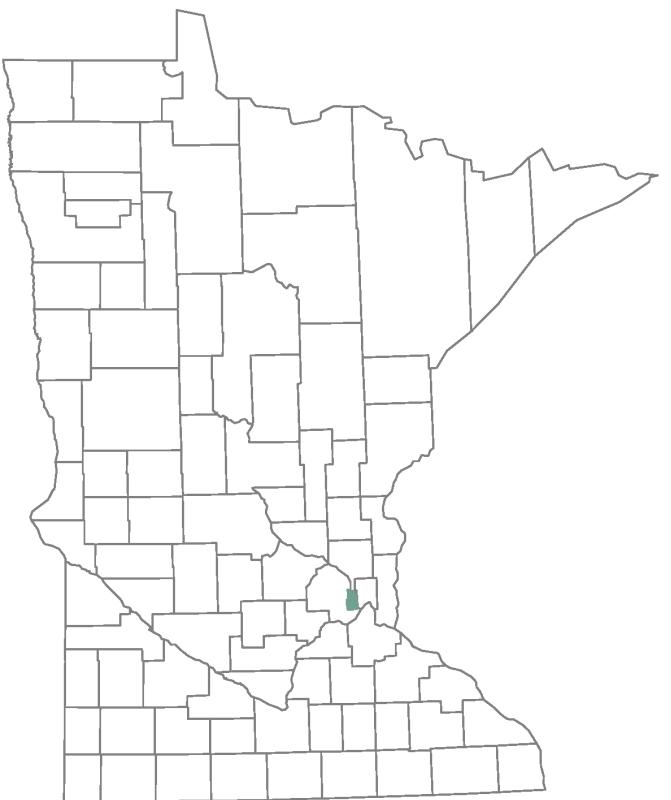
Welcome to Playmart

Vision Statement

Long awaited activation of the former Kmart parcel will propel the neighborhood into a sustainable, equitable, resilient, and beautiful district while preserving and protecting the rich history, current residents, and imminent city changes. Playmart fully embodies an ideology of visibly celebrating culture and identities, accessibility of social and physical networks, and a prioritization of joy through an inter-generational lifestyle, thus culminating in the three pillars: **Placemaking, Proximity, and Play**.

Introduction

This development proposal synthesizes extensive community engagement, rich edge conditions, flourishing multimodal networks, and active city-wide policies. The closure of the Kmart site is interpreted not as a symptom of the surrounding neighborhoods, but rather as a vital departure towards a sustainable future built on **Placemaking, Proximity, and Play**. The 10-acre site is advantageously positioned to foster a transit- and pedestrian-oriented redevelopment to address the needs of pre-existing residents, local businesses, and overall visitors. The redevelopment will manifest as a high-density, mixed-use landscape which prioritizes the city's goals through an innovative and ambitious proposal.



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Context Analysis

History



Peek Into the Past

Nicollet Avenue and Lake Street were once a bustling commercial shopping district, serving Minneapolis' southside communities and was an intersection of two heavily used streetcar lines. The area was also home to the Minneapolis Millers' baseball stadium, which drew people to the area for over 60 years. When the team moved to a new stadium in 1955, many of the businesses suffered the loss and consequently closed. The Lake Street streetcar service was also discontinued.



Urban Renewal, Kmart, and Space Activation Foreshadowing



The construction of 35W in 1965 marked the arrival of urban renewal to the city through available funding targeting "blighted" areas. The highway construction intentionally destroyed around 50 city blocks, primarily black-owned single-family residences, and displaced 25,000 people along the route. Due to restricted covenants, the Nicollet neighborhood of Minneapolis was a predominantly black community.

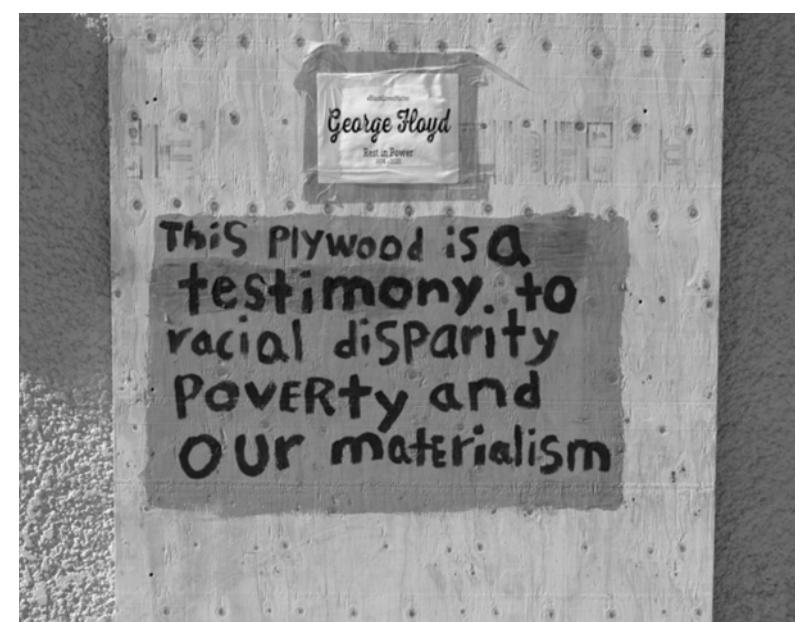
In the 1970's the City of Minneapolis wanted to revitalize the area but had little funding or developer interest. They initially purchased 10-acre lots in 1972 as a revitalization effort for the area. Kmart expressed interest in 1976 which included severing the Nicollet Avenue corridor to accommodate the new store and parking lot. The lots were sold to a developer who leased the property to Kmart for 75 years. The remaining businesses were torn down, yielding ample room for the new department store and a grocery store.

The community protested the road closure and referred to the building as the "Berlin Wall" which separated the low-income neighborhoods from the north. Despite the community's vocal efforts, Kmart and SuperValu built their stores in 1977. Their presence created a barrier, affecting south Minneapolis and effectively disrupting Nicollet Avenue direct connection downtown and Lake Street Drive. In 1998 the city began to explore the possibility of reopening Nicollet Avenue and developing a mixed-used, pedestrian-friendly commercial hub with support from local business associations. Kmart was not interested in closing their site or relocating. By 2014 the SuperValu grocery store closed due to low profitability and thus decreased local food access.



Discussion of a New Future

The City of Minneapolis bought the property in 2015 and the Kmart site in 2017, but continued to lease the space to Kmart. In 2020, the city terminated the Kmart lease and the store closed in June 2020 after vandalism and protests as a result of George Floyd's murder, 2 miles away. The local community joined together to clean up the area, including painting murals on boarded-up windows. The site now sits vacant with imminent plans to reopen the prominent Nicollet Avenue corridor. Lake Street borders the site and is a major commercial and cultural corridor in south Minneapolis with an incoming bus rapid transit (BRT) route. North of the site, Nicollet Avenue has a bustling north-to-south commercial area connecting to downtown Minneapolis and is known for a wide variety of restaurants. The site is adjacent to the Midtown Greenway, a unique east-to-west bicycle and pedestrian trail across southern Minneapolis. One block from the site is an existing BRT service station downtown and the I-35 freeway. The former Kmart site's history should not be disregarded, for its prior constant state of flux provides an interesting narrative of reconnection as an opportunity for locally based placemaking, increasing proximity, and engaging play.



Community Engagement

Community Engagement: Phase I

In 2021, the City of Minneapolis curated an exemplary framework for public engagement, conducting Phase I in 2022. The framework identified the community focus area as a 1-mile radius around the site, stretching from Lyndale Avenue to Portland Avenue and from 26th Street to 34th Street. Phase I was titled "Launch and Listen" and took place over six months between August 2022 - January 2023. The primary focus of Phase I was to create a platform for ongoing, two-way communication through a city website; have community dialogues with stakeholders in the study area; engage with property owners, tenants, and residents on displacement risk and mitigation strategies; and investigate strategies to expand wealth-building opportunities throughout the redevelopment process.

During Phase I, the City hosted 21 events and received 1,750 comments. Events included open houses, two rounds of canvassing, stakeholder meetings, focus groups, community meetings, and seven tabling events. The City met with community organizations, business districts, and nonprofits, and attended numerous neighborhood events, and food banks. An online survey was made available to the public, which resulted in over 10,000 survey responses and over 2,500 were identified as residents in the four surrounding neighborhoods of Whittier, Lyndale, Central, and Phillips West.

The public outreach results identified six thematic desired outcomes to guide the development. The themes identified are:

1. Connecting people to places
2. Culturally relevant community spaces
3. Housing affordability and wealth building
4. Business opportunities and success
5. Space for community service
6. Designing for inclusivity, safety, and sustainability.



Community Engagement: Phase II

Phase II responded to community needs and input from Phase I to develop the Public Space Plan and Nicollet Avenue Layout Plan. The Public Space Plan was constructed to guide the location and design of the future public spaces on the site, how they connect, and other spaces in the surrounding area. The City released three Public Space Concept maps in October 2023. The concepts include a sitemap with a lawn, garden, recreation, plaza, pathway locations, and photos of each to help visualize the areas. Feedback from these concepts is vital in helping to refine the Public Space Plans and Street Plans.

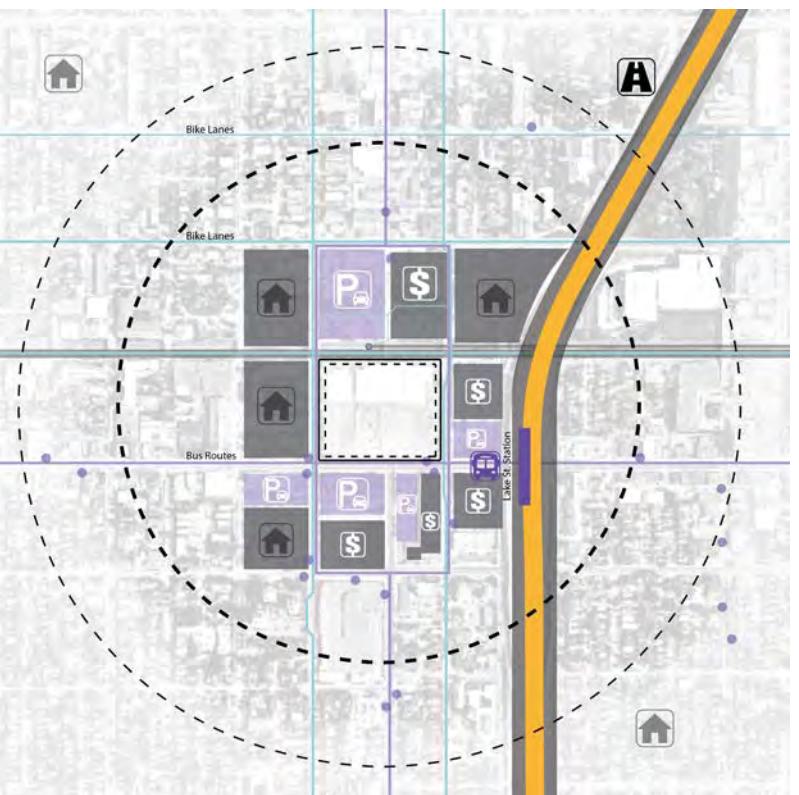
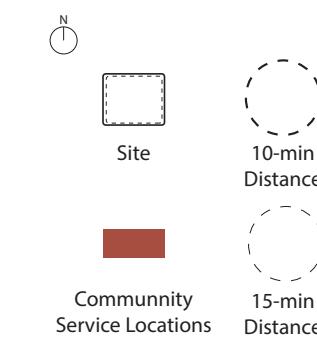


Leverage Your Assets



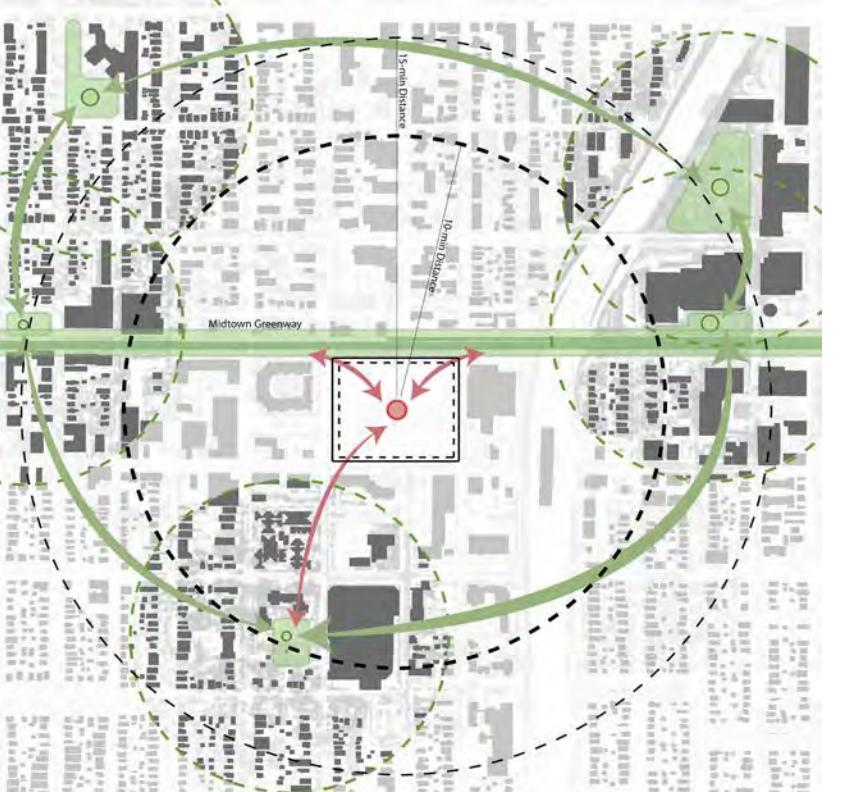
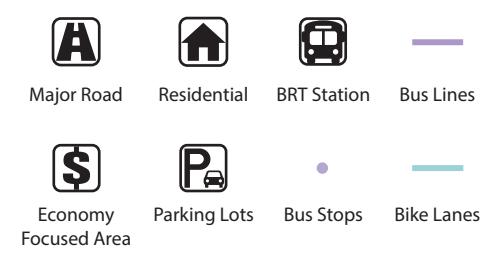
Spatial Analysis of Community Assets

This diagram shows the existing buildings that surround our site. The red highlighted buildings and areas are identified as community services which include foods, marketplaces, and religious centers. Their spatial distribution to our site provides a snapshot of the community's network, allowing us to further propose ideas for specific needs.



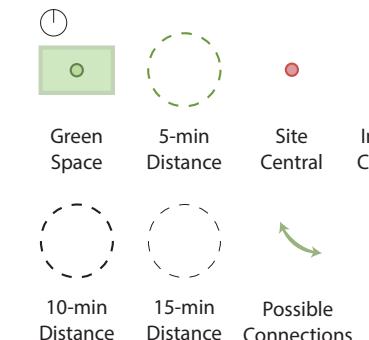
Economic and Transit Relationship

In order to further incorporate the local population and Minneapolis downtown population, we identified a diverse array of transportation facilities, including bus stops, parking lots, bike lanes, and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) station within the 10-min walking distance perimeter, with each representing a transportation mode. Then, we also identified the immediate surrounding context, economic buildings and residential buildings, next to the site. Map 2 shows the relationship between varied transit options and the functional diversity of the area, and this relationship can guide us for a cohesive urban planning and design that supports both the local and greater Minneapolis.



Green Space

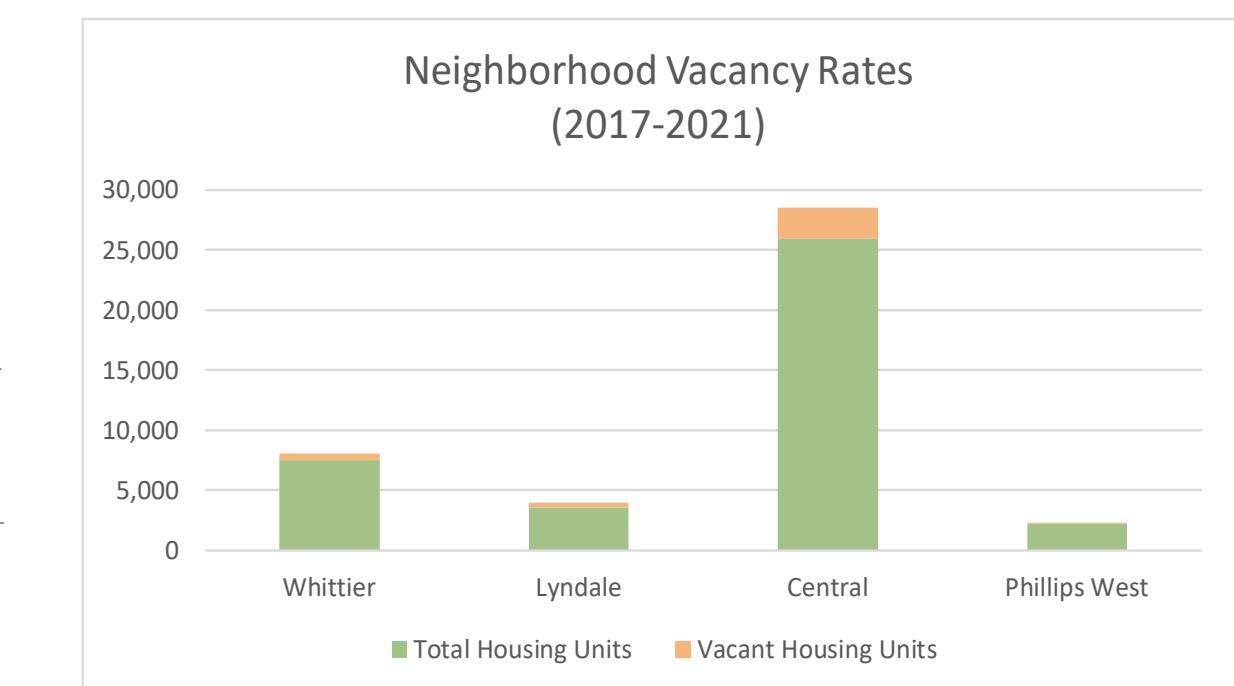
Within an approximate 10 to 15-minute pedestrian walking radius from the site's center, we discovered that there are 5 notable green spaces in the surrounding neighborhoods. These spaces have potential to be connected to the Midtown Greenway, especially two of them have immediate connections to the Midtown Greenway. This finding lays the groundwork for our strategic approach to plan and design, where the emphasis will be on fostering strong linkages between the site and its green surroundings to cultivate a harmonious and connected urban fabric.



Economic

Market Analysis Driving Redevelopment Visions

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development estimates that Minneapolis was home to 318,500 jobs in 2015, and the Metropolitan Council projects that the city will add 41,500 jobs by 2040. Health Care and technology sectors are anticipated to grow the most in the next 10 5- 10 years. Minneapolis neighborhoods, business districts, and corridors serve a vital economic role in sustaining new growth. Residents frequent businesses daily for goods and services, community gathering places, and place-making. The city's redevelopment of Nicollet Avenue and Lake Street provides new opportunities for businesses, including small businesses, people of color, and indigenous by supporting entrepreneurship within their community. Creating livable neighborhoods, connecting green spaces, and improving opportunities for wealth building and home ownership, bring vital energy to the area. The walkability of the neighborhood improves the vitality of the community. Developing and enacting affordable housing policies to create opportunities for residents to own homes without displacement from their community.

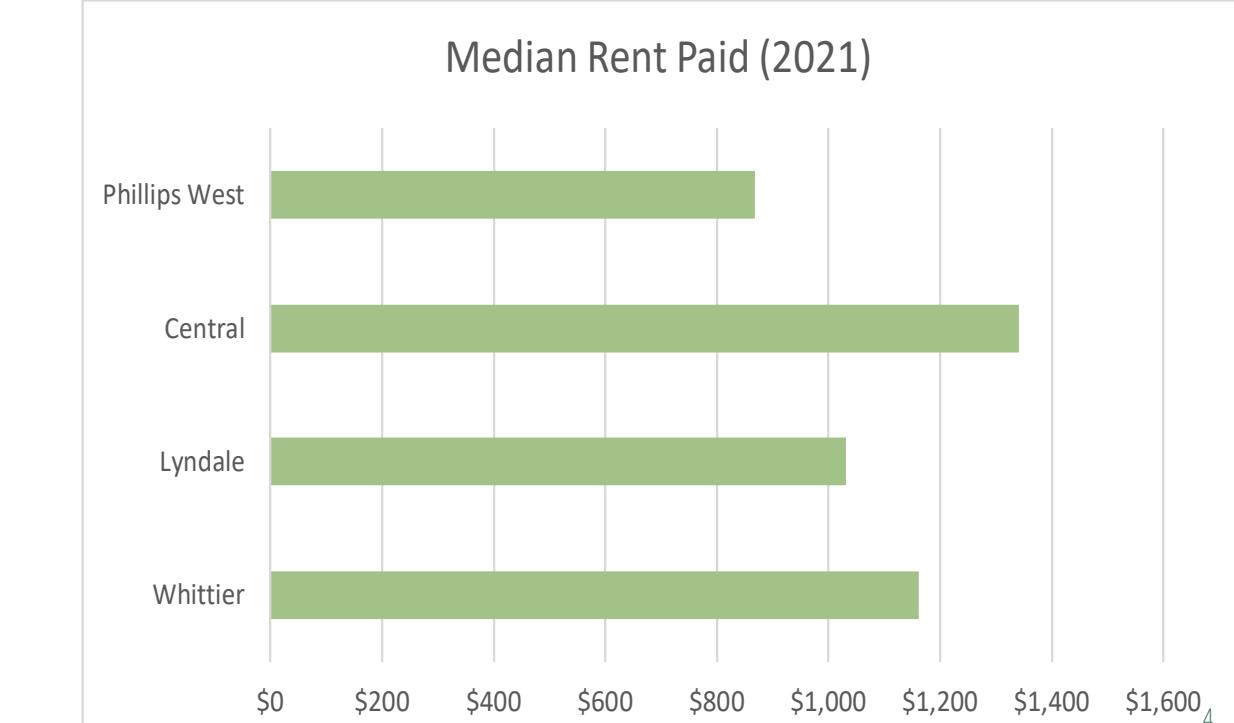
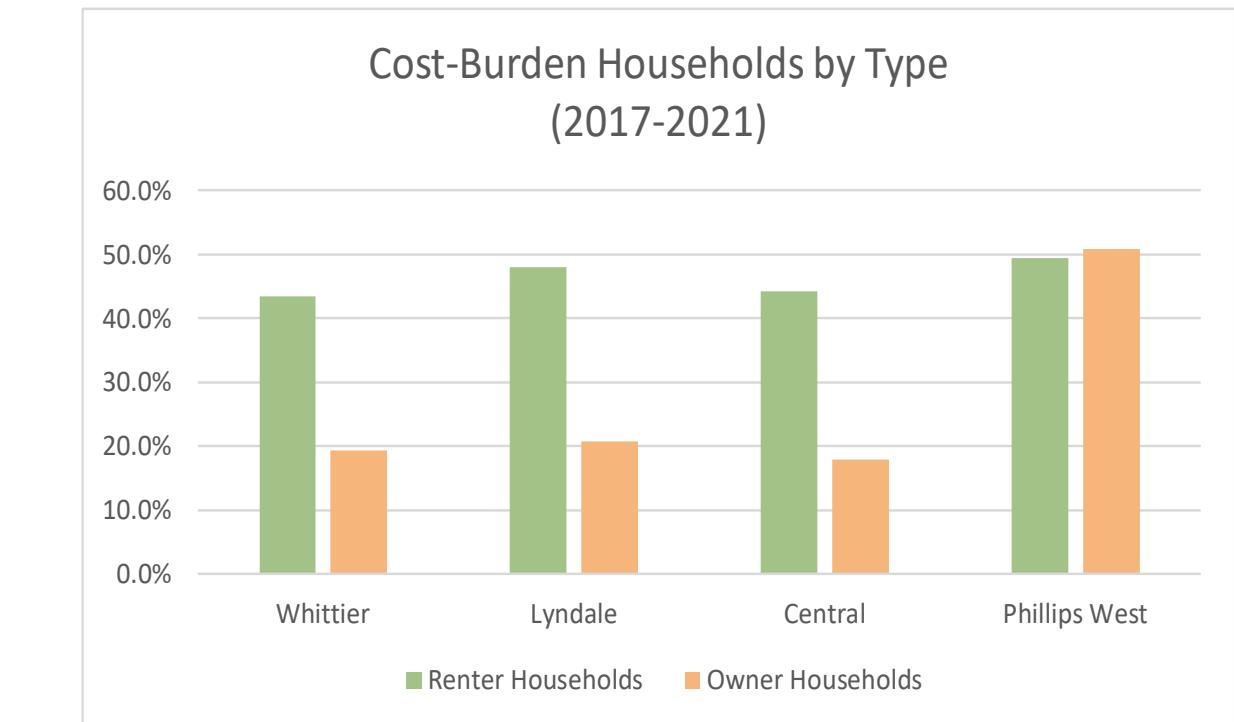


Neighborhood Workforce in 2020

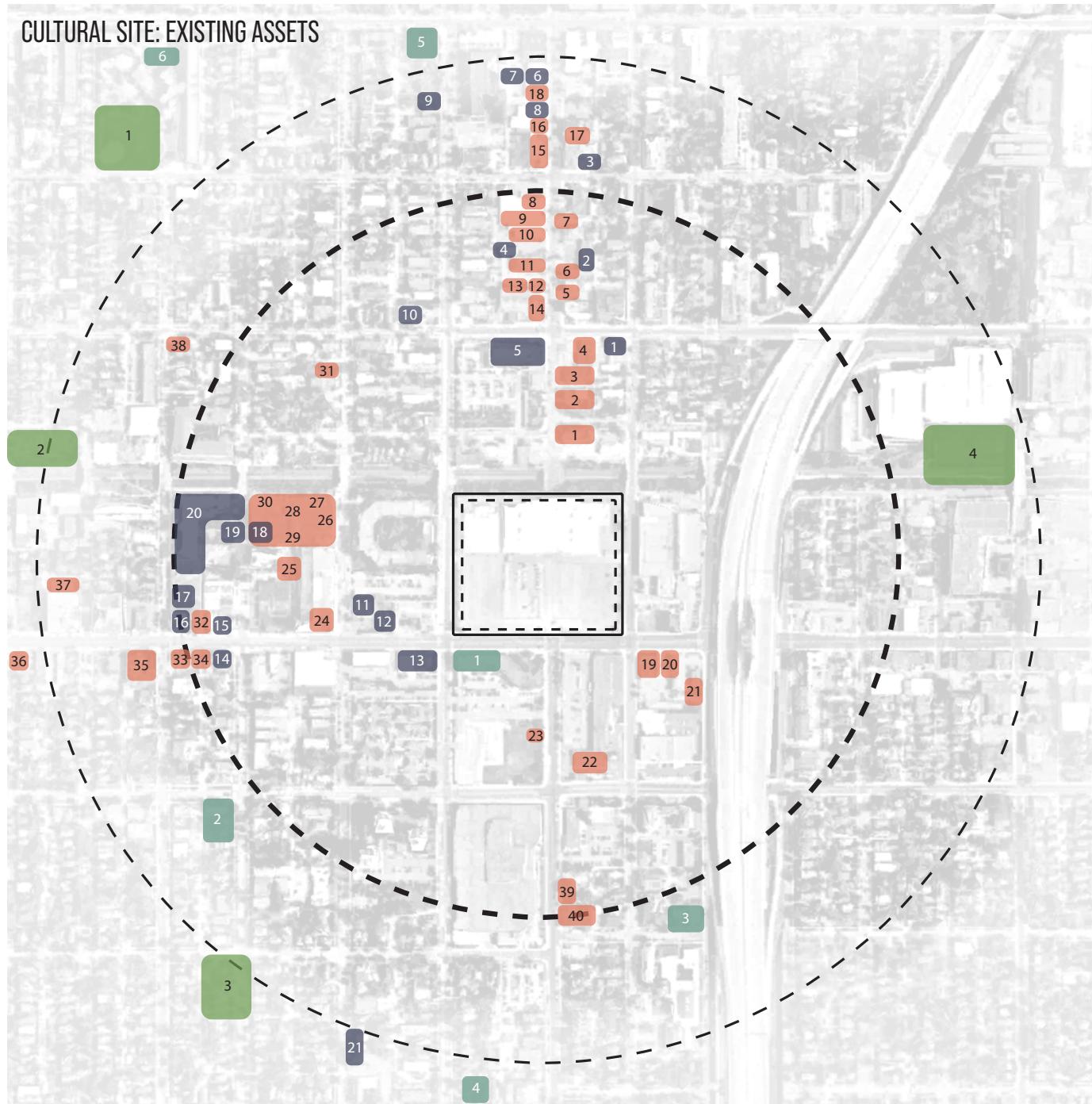
Industry	Whittier	Lyndale	Central	Phillips-West
Accommodations & Food Service	503 9.1%	202 7.2%	1,020 5.9%	136 10.60%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	403 7.3%	186 7.2%	1,087 6.3%	133 10.4%
Arts, Entertainments and Recreation	151 2.7%	60 2.3%	327 1.9%	16 1.2%
Construction	136 2.5%	81 3.2%	306 1.8%	24 1.9%
Educational Services	211 3.8%	89 3.5%	512 3.0%	40 3.1%
Finance & Insurance	436 7.9%	199 7.7%	2,231 13.0%	72 5.6%
Health Care & Social Assistance	1031 18.7%	513 19.9%	2,596 15.1%	387 30.0%
Information	152 2.8%	68 2.6%	657 3.8%	10 0.8%
Management of Companies & Enterprises	303 5.5%	138 5.4%	1,388 8.1%	45 3.5%
Manufacturing	395 7.2%	211 8.2%	1,002 5.8%	104 8.1%
Other (excluding public admin)	208 3.8%	88 3.4%	481 2.8%	38 3.0%
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	620 11.2%	291 11.3%	2,962 17.2%	87 6.8%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	123 2.2%	46 1.8%	345 2.0%	25 1.9%
Retail Trade	468 8.5%	240 9.3%	1,075 6.3%	78 6.1%
Transportation & Warehousing	142 2.6%	62 2.4%	361 2.1%	47 3.7%
Utilities	15 0.3%	No Data	48 0.3%	No Data
Wholesale Trade	217 3.9%	92 3.6%	777 4.5%	34 2.7%
Total	5514 100.0%	2566 99.0%	17175 99.9%	1276 99.4%
Unemployed (2017-2021)	582 6.1%	303 7.3%	1062 4.2%	259 10.5%

A District-Wide Approach

In some areas of the city, strategic investments by the public sector can spur the private market to deliver new development that provides housing, jobs, and retail goods and services while increasing the tax base. In these cases, the City recognizes that redevelopment areas can benefit from a system-wide district approach through coordinated infrastructure improvements, building on proximity to critical resources, and implementing synergistic land use and transportation strategies. This approach can also be utilized when planning for stormwater management, energy, parking, place making, green space, and marketing as opportunities for achieving the goals w this plan. This district-wide approach to coordinated development can be referred to as an Innovation District or a Cultural District.



Cultural



Inventory

Engaging in a cultural inventory of the neighborhoods surrounding the site provide a medium to intimately know the residents. In order to plan and design for who is here, it is important to understand cultural assets, deficiencies, and overall composition. A diverse cultural composition prompts questions of food injustice, appropriate housing styles, funding structures, religious institutions, and gathering spaces. To capture an accurate and holistic narrative, the inventory was separated into four themes: food and markets, goods and services, community green space, and community green space.

Social

	Educational Attainment (population 25 years and older)			
	Less than high school	High school diploma or GED	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate of professional degree
Whittier	810 (9.2%)	1,321 (15%)	2,673 (30.3%)	1,526 (17.3%)
Lyndale	949 (19.8%)	794 (16.6%)	1,259 (26.3%)	722 (15.1%)
Central	947 (20.6%)	604 (13.2%)	1,161 (25.3%)	574 (12.5%)
Phillips West	1,013 (29.3%)	758 (29.3%)	695 (20.1%)	134 (3.9%)

	Race and Ethnicity		Language (populations 5 years and older)		Nativity
	White	Of Color	English Only	Language other than English	
Whittier	7,249	5,711	9,509	302	2,382
Lyndale	3,411	2,505	4,355	2,138	1,520
Central	2,850	4,204	4,507	2,573	1,528
Phillips West	1,504	4,299	2,129	3,140	2,347

Whittier

The neighborhood is within the Powderhorn community south of downtown Minneapolis. The neighborhood is bounded by I35W to the east, Franklin Avenue to the North, Lake Street to the south, and Lyndale Avenue to the west. Nicollet Avenue is a destination for a diverse range of restaurants and is affectionately known as "Eat Street." Whittier is home to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and the Children's Theatre Company.

The Whittier neighborhood of Minneapolis is home to about 14,400 residents as of 2020. The population of the neighborhood showed a 5.8% increase from the 2010 US Census. Whittier is identified as 53.7% white, 42.3% of color, and 16.3 % Hispanic. According to the American Community Survey (2017- 2021), 25.2% of the population speaks a language other than English at home while 17.7% of the community is foreign-born. 65.3% of the community lived in the same home last year while 32.7% moved to the community or changed addresses. In 2021, 32.1% of the population earned less than \$35,000. The Median Household income in 2021 was reported at \$52,505.

Lyndale

Lyndale neighborhood of Minneapolis is home to about 7,200 residents as of 2020. The population of the neighborhood showed a 2% decline from 2010 of the US Census. The neighborhood is within the Powderhorn community south of downtown Minneapolis. The neighborhood is bounded by I35W to the east, Lake Street to the North, 36th Street to the South, and Lyndale Avenue to the west. The Lyndale neighborhood has an established Lyn-Lake Small Area Plan adopted in June 2009. This plan was created by input from the community, business, and community leaders to encourage a cohesive mixed-use commercial area along Lake Street, Bryant Avenue and Lyndale Avenue. The plan guides economic development, the built form, sustainability, connectivity and greenspace within the area.

Lyndale is identified as 51% white, 37.4% of color, and 21.4 % Hispanic. According to the American Community Survey (2017- 2021), 32.9% of the population speaks a language other than English at home while 22.7% of the community is foreign-born. 81.6% of the community lived in the same home last year while 18.4% moved to the community or changed addresses. In 2021, 37.1% of the population earned less than \$35,000. The Median Household income in 2021 was reported at \$54,207.

Central

Central neighborhood of Minneapolis is home to about 8,000 residents as of 2020. The population of the neighborhood showed a 2% decline from 2010 of the US Census. The neighborhood is within the Powderhorn community south of downtown Minneapolis. The Central neighborhood is bounded by I35W to the west, Lake Street to the North, 36th Street to the South, and Chicago Avenue to the east. Central is identified as 36.9% white, 54.4% of color, and 29.4% Hispanic. According to the American Community Survey (2017- 2021), 36.3% of the population speaks a language other than English at home while 19.8% of the community is foreign-born. 77.9% of the community lived in the same home last year while 21.4% moved to the community or changed addresses. In 2021, 16.3% of the population earned less than \$35,000. The Median Household income in 2021 was reported at \$67,159.

Phillips West

Phillips West neighborhood of Minneapolis is home to about 5,000 residents as of 2020. The population of the neighborhood showed a 7% growth from 2010 of the US Census. The neighborhood is within the Phillips community south of downtown Minneapolis. Phillips West neighborhood is bounded by I35W to the west, Lake Street to the South, 22nd Street to the north, and Chicago Avenue to the east. Phillips West is identified as 18.7% white, 76.4% of color, and 19.7% Hispanic. According to the American Community Survey (2017- 2021), 59.6% of the population speaks a language other than English at home while 41.7% of the community is foreign-born. 81.6% of the community lived in the same home last year while 15.2% moved to the community or changed addresses. In 2021, 54.9% of the population earned less than \$35,000. The Median Household income in 2021 was reported at \$29,795.

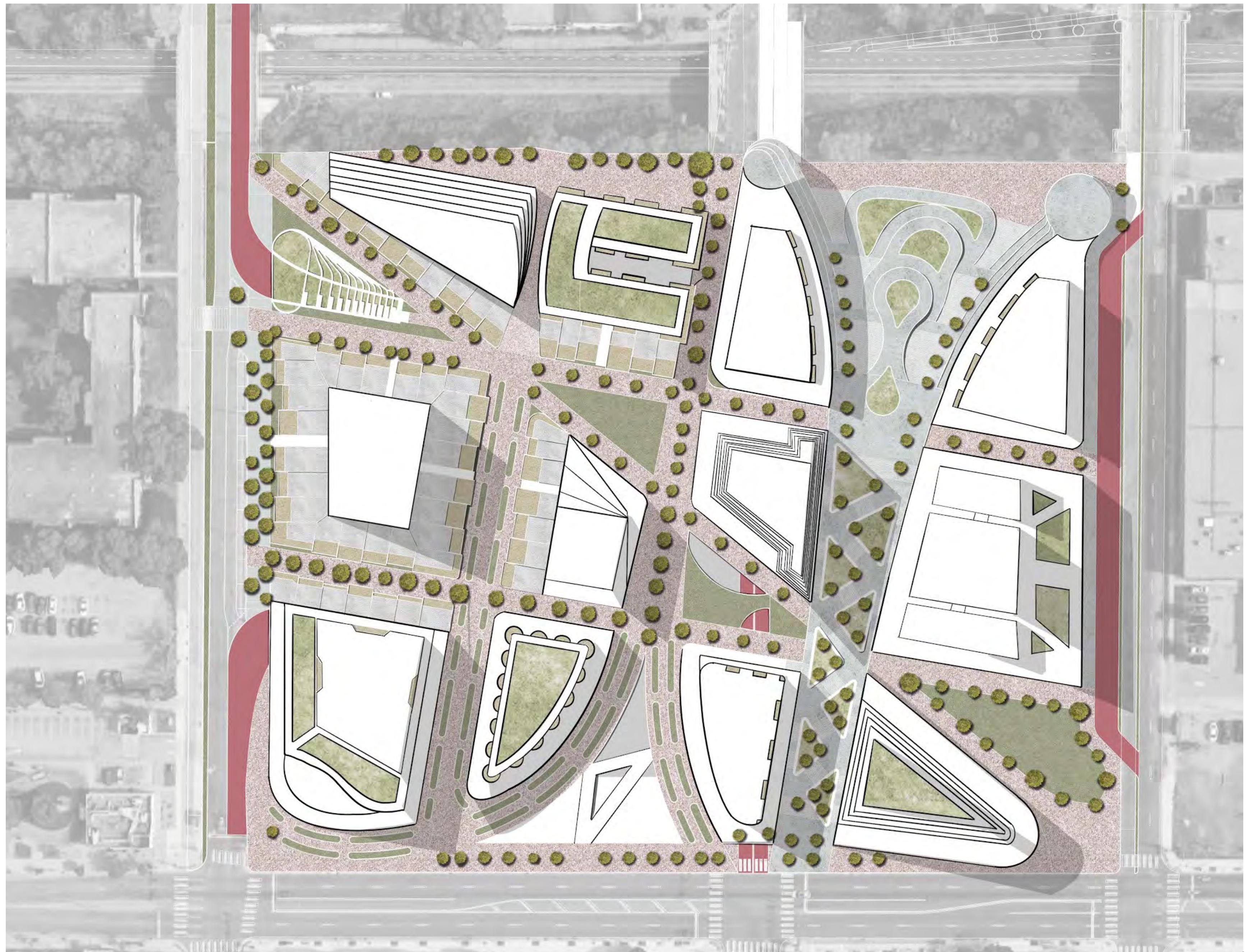
The Phillips West neighborhood has an established Phillips West Master Land Use Plan adopted in July 2009 and the Chicago Avenue Corridor Plan adopted in January 2012. Phillips West became an independent neighborhood organization recognized by the City in 2005. Both plans were adopted to guide investment in the neighborhood and along Chicago Avenue. The Chicago Avenue Corridor Plan was created with input from the community, businesses, and community leaders to encourage a cohesive mixed-use commercial area along Chicago Avenue, between 18th Street and the Midtown Greenway. The plan guides economic development, the built form, sustainability, connectivity, and green space within the area.

Design Philosophy

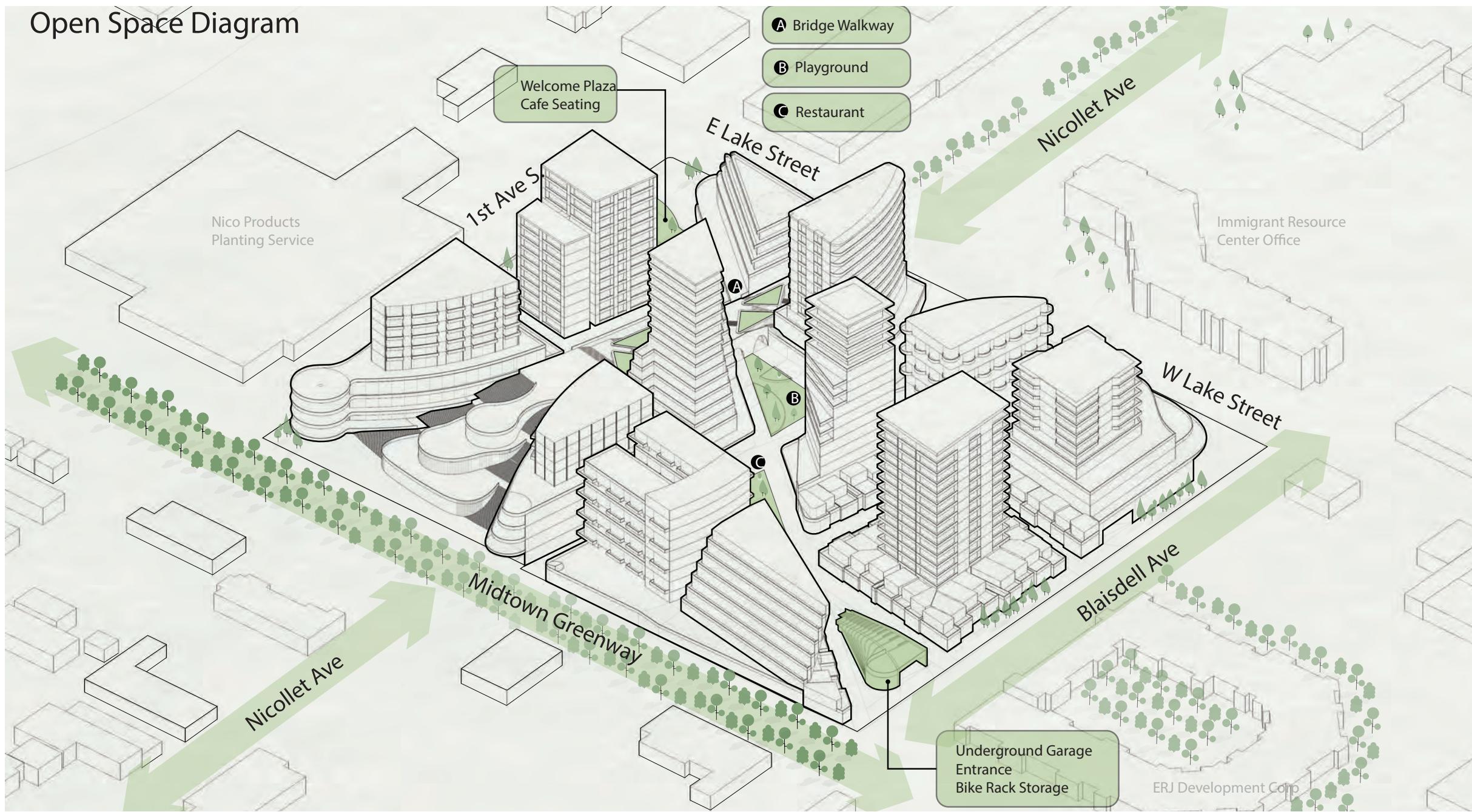
Playmart is all of Minneapolis in one block, and one block accessible to all of Minneapolis. Decades of incremental efforts by the community and decisions made by the city have culminated in a one of a kind site.

Although Playmart is a dramatic departure from current conditions, it actually represents a very organic urban response to its context. Disrupting Nicollet Avenue, one of the city's strongest corridors, for a Kmart was an unfortunate change to the urban form. However, the forceful implementation of Kmart produced a serendipitous intervention resisting a car-centric landscape. It is clear that a big-box retailer wasn't constructed to decrease traffic congestion, yet it catalyzed an experiment in removing vehicles from a historically significant Minneapolis thoroughfare. Other cities have gone through this process more intentionally, but the lesson remains the same: where cars have been removed, there is no reason to reintroduce them.

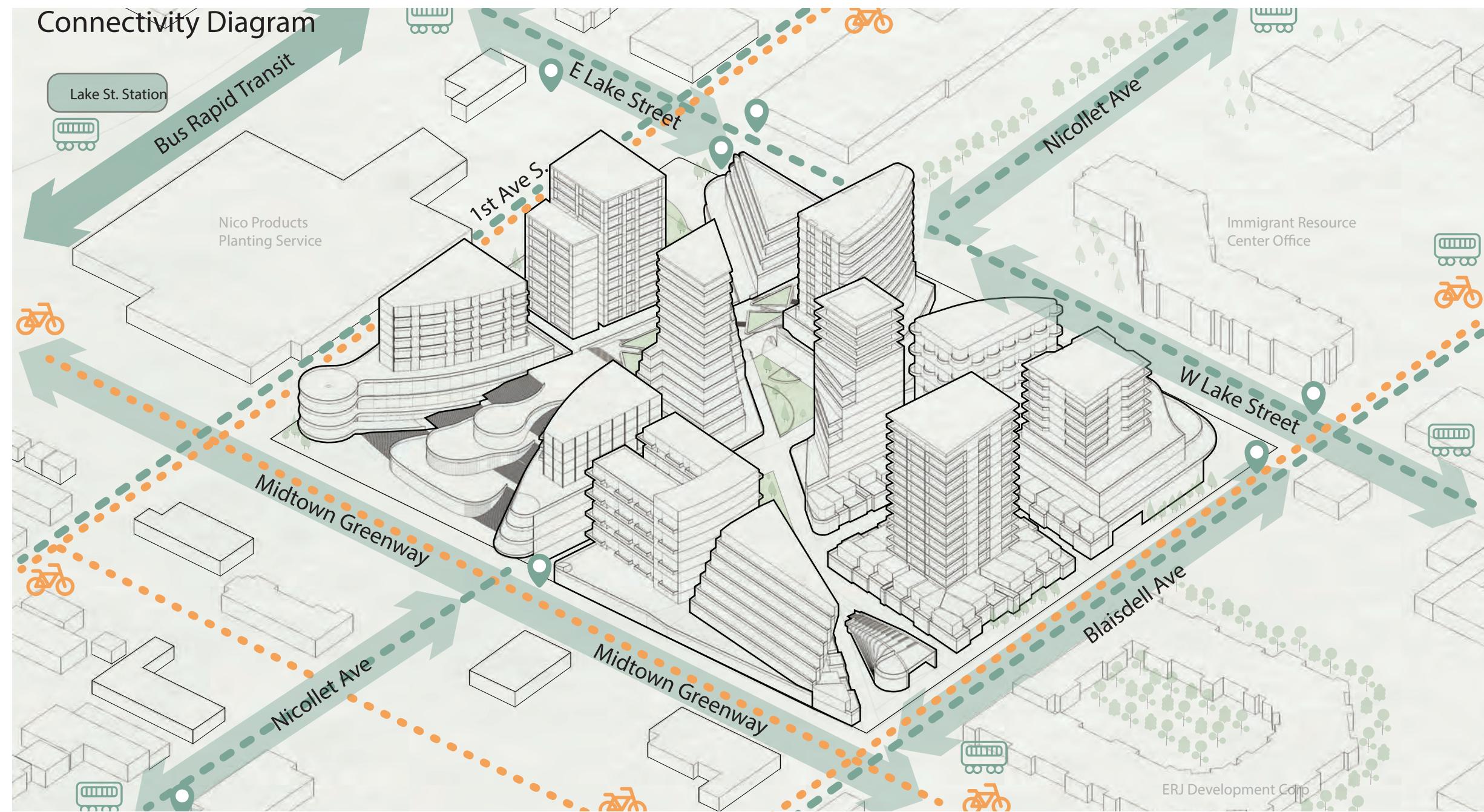
Surprisingly, Kmart provided Minneapolis the canvas and momentum to explore alternative urban forms in the absence of vehicular traffic. The city has deplored praiseworthy efforts, manifesting through a stunning greenway, extensive bike infrastructure, and modern bus rapid transit line. These achievements showcase Minneapolis' unique capacity to foster sustainable lifestyles. All that's missing is for people to live, work, create, and play there.



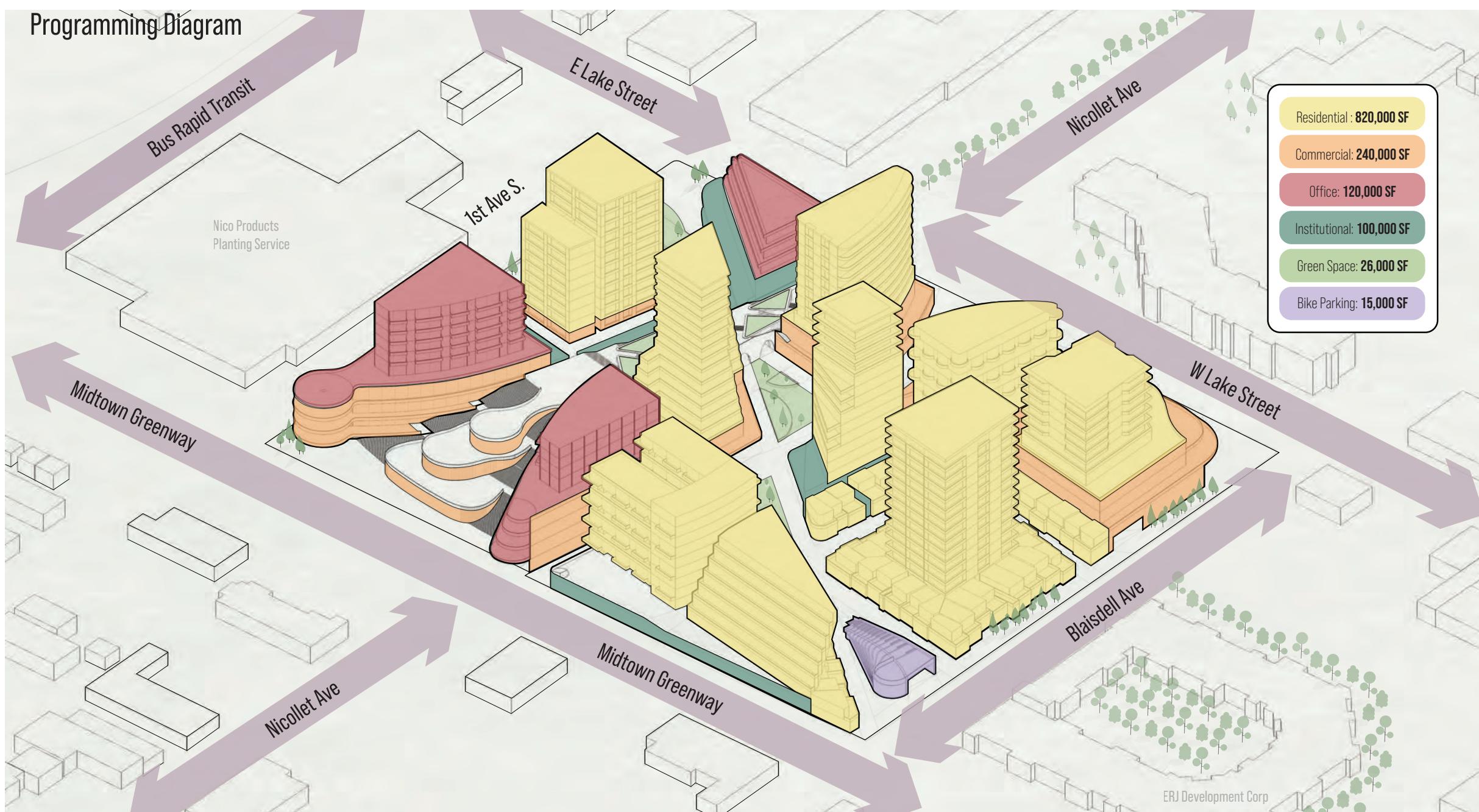
Open Space Diagram



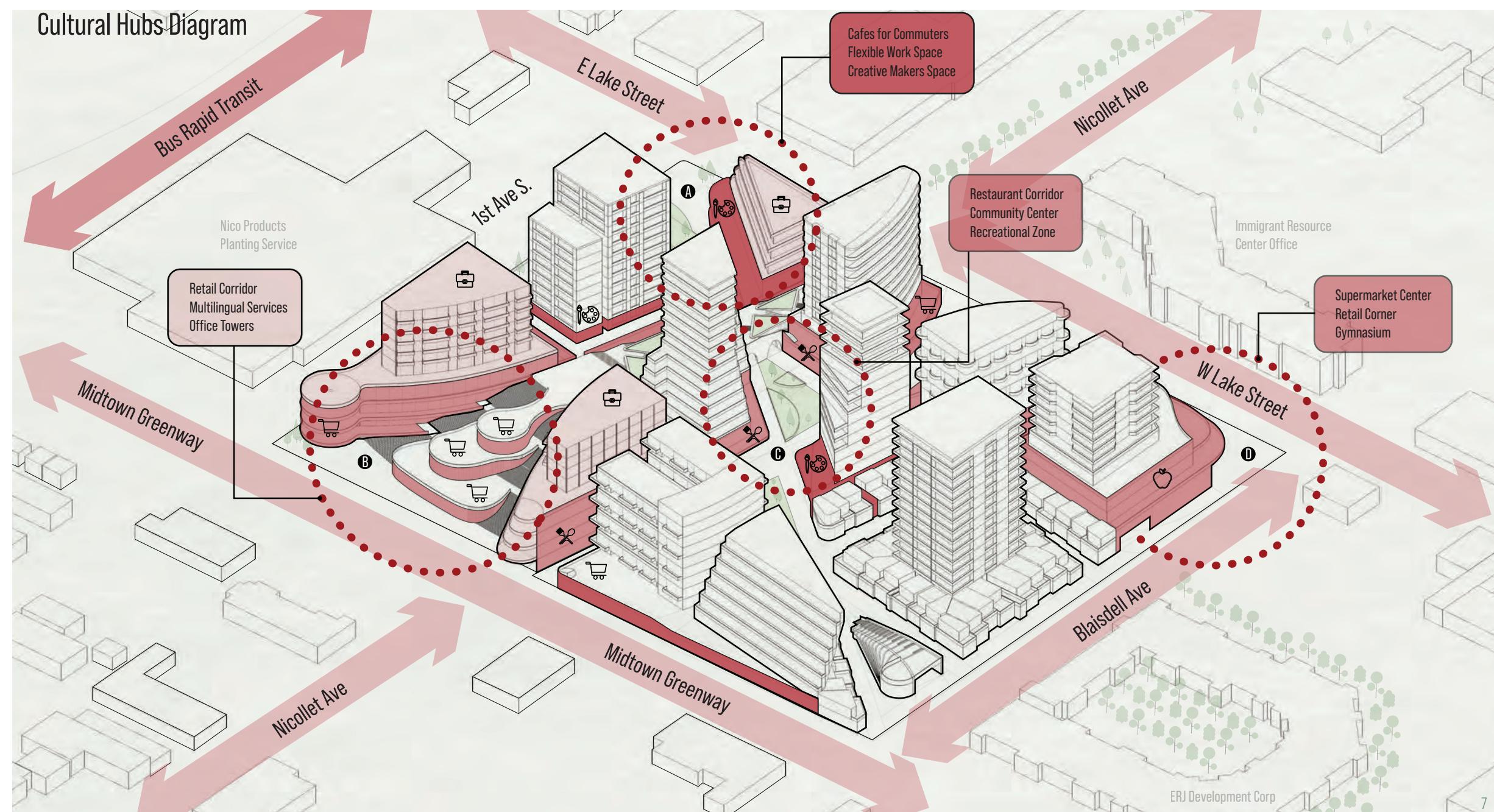
Connectivity Diagram



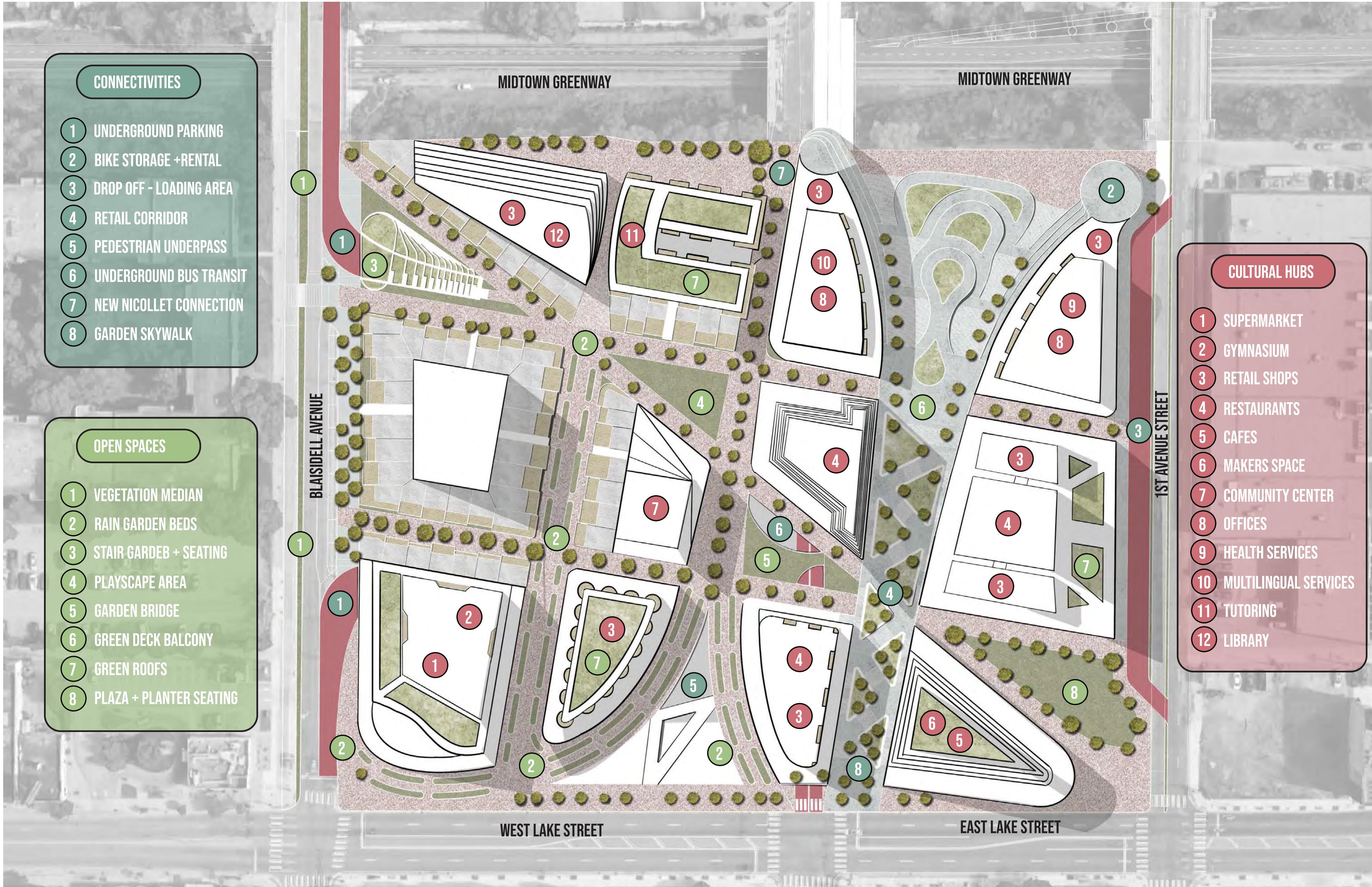
Programming Diagram



Cultural Hubs Diagram



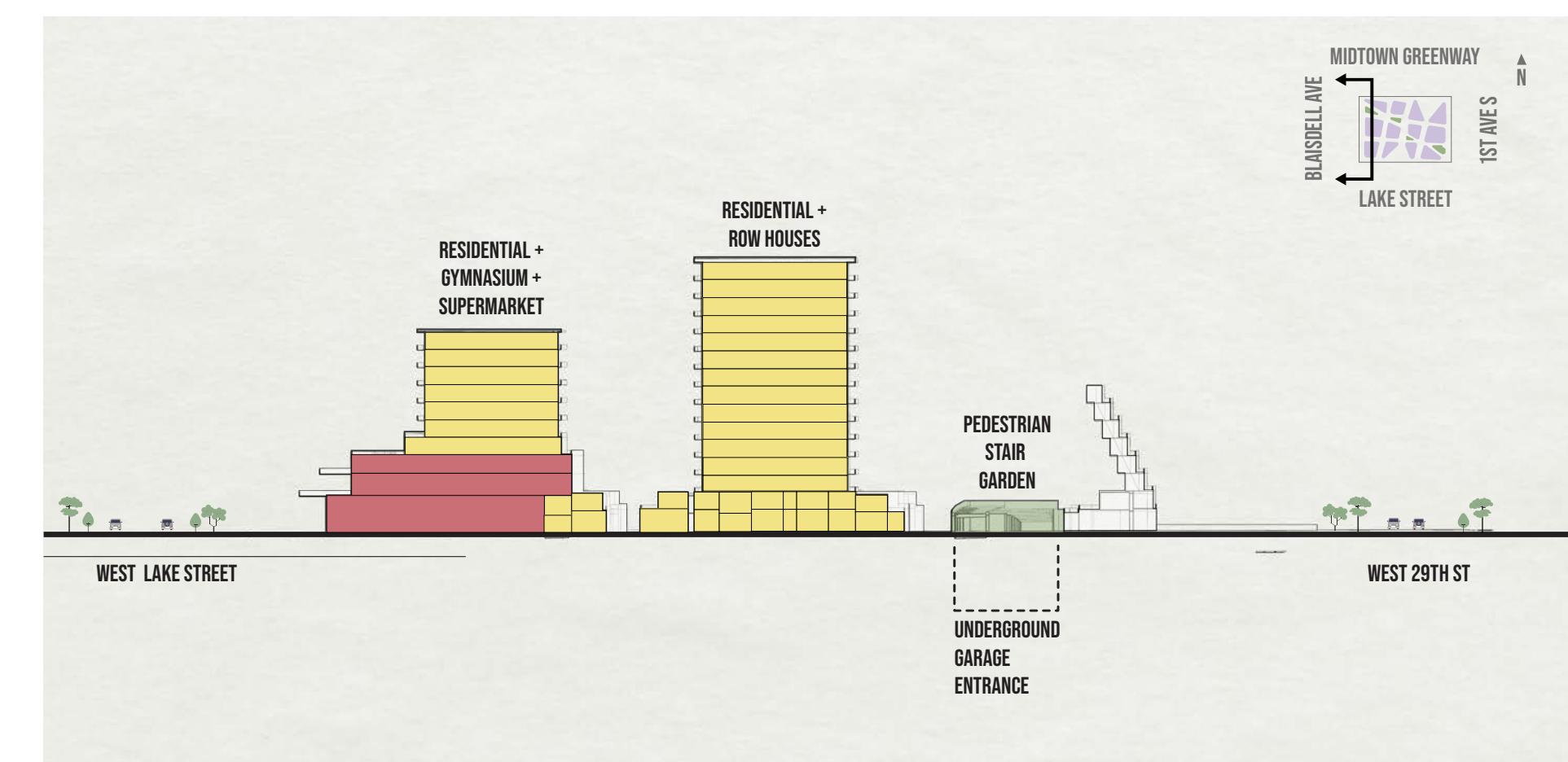
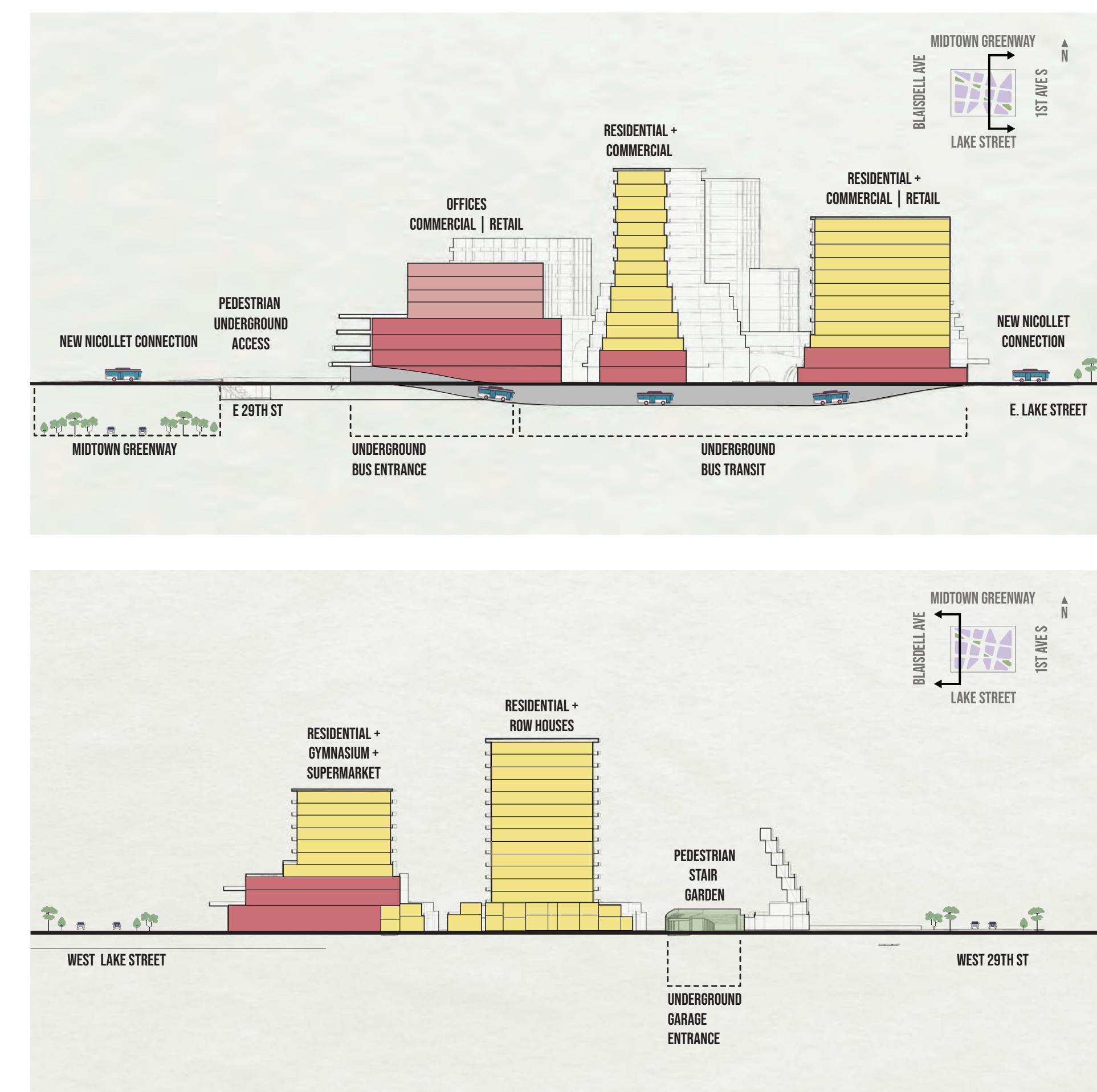
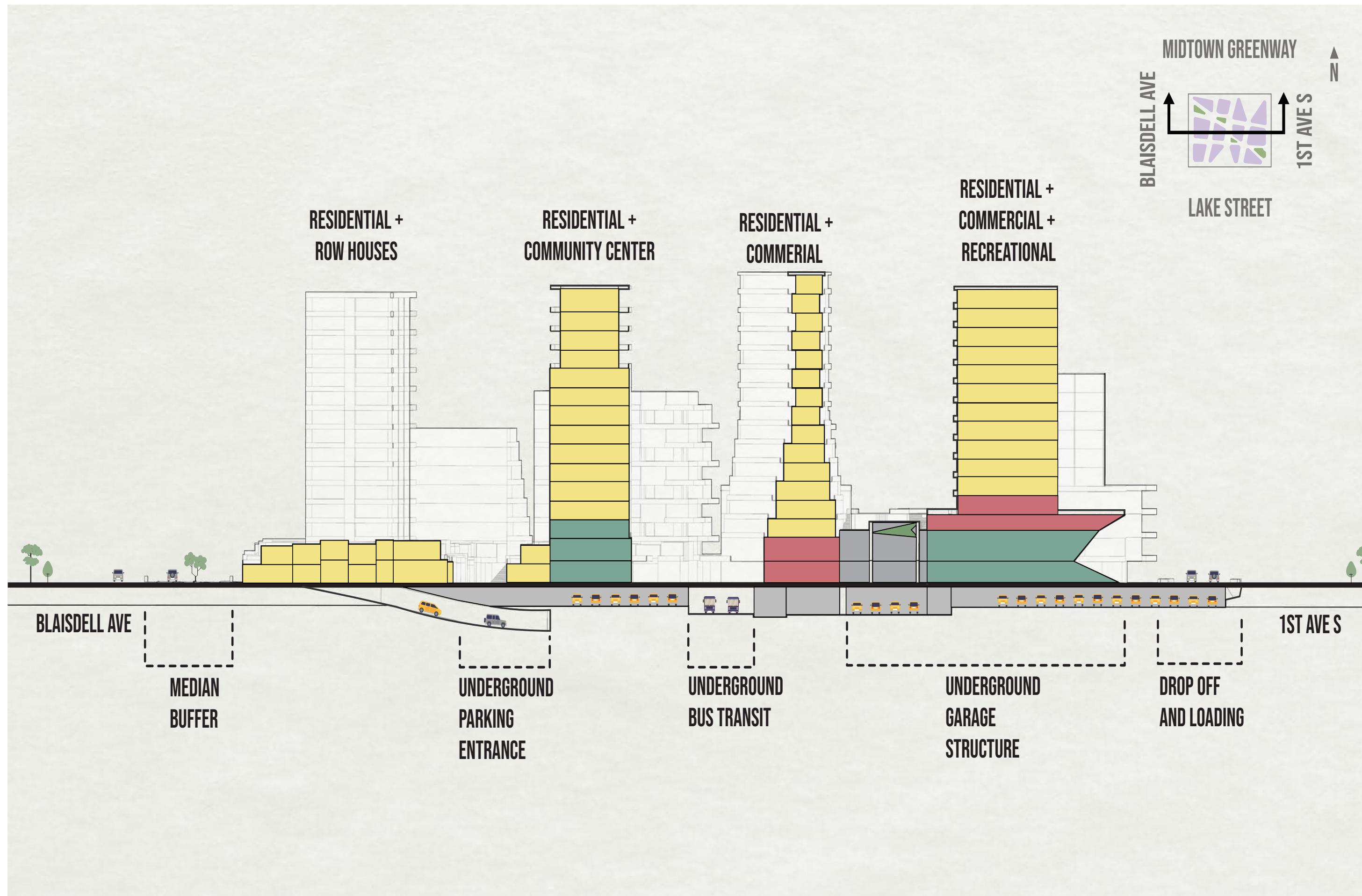
Site Plan



Achieving Placemaking, Proximity, and Play

It became undeniable that in order to deliver the three pillars of Playmart, our site plan needed to prioritize connectivities, open space, and cultural hubs. The diverse array of opportunities in each category caters to the pre-existing residents, local businesses, and visitors.

Cross Section Analysis



Placemaking.



Proximity.



Play.



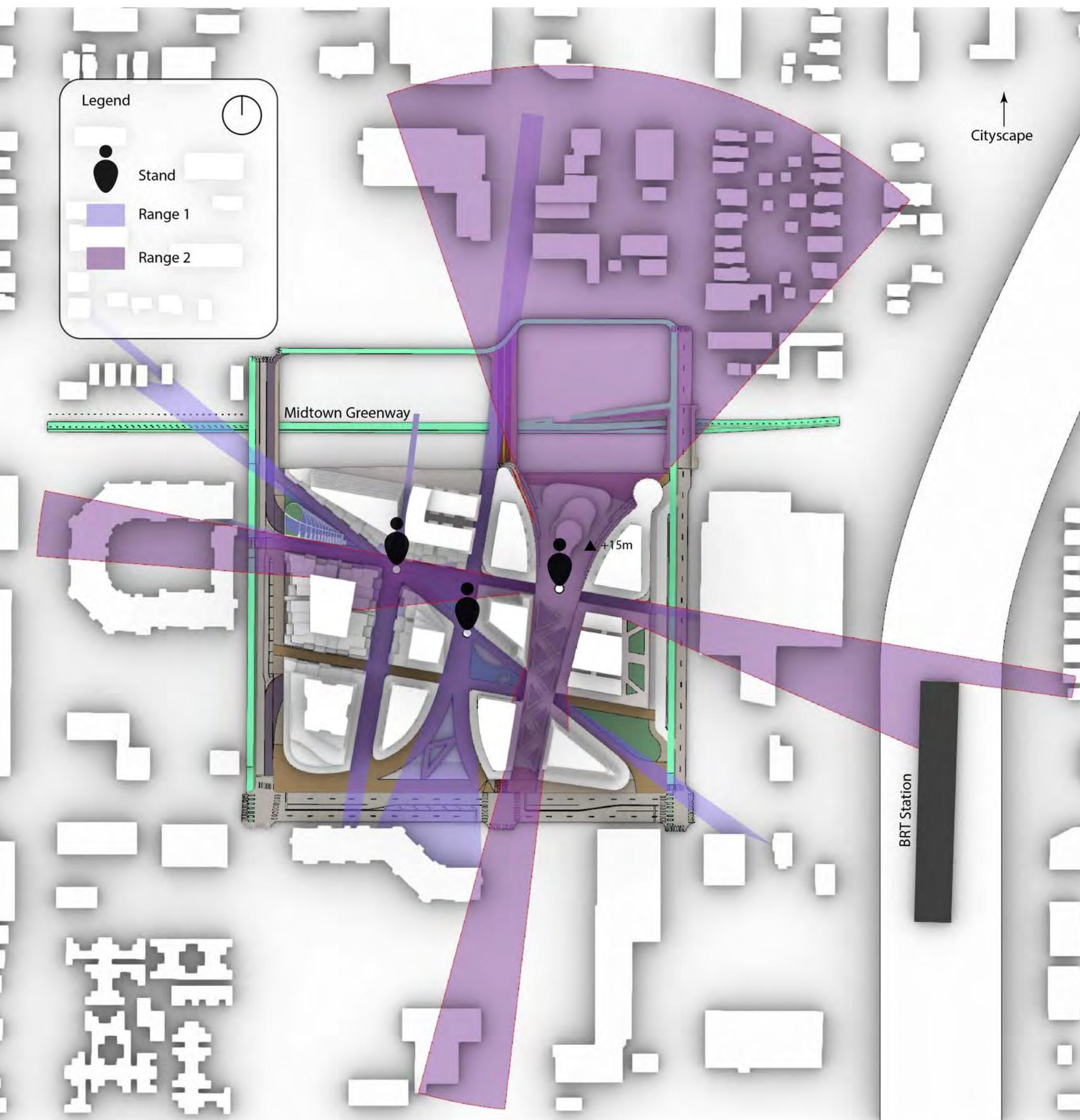
Parametric Visibility Analysis

Application

We employed a critical quantifying tool, parametric visibility analysis, to assess the visual impact of Playmart's development. This analysis uses massing models and calculations to quantify how visible areas are viewed by pedestrians. The three major gathering points are marked as "stands" on the map. By toggling with the variables, such as building heights, street widths, and elevations, we simulated three different scenarios, two on the ground level and one on the elevated level, and their effects on visibility.

Findings

Our findings from this analysis indicate how the design can influence sight lines and visual access. The shaded areas represent the range of visibility from each stand, with Range 1 showing immediate visibility on major entrances and exits and Range 2 showing peripheral vision on the cityscape and the BRT station. This study ensures our basic design aligns with the goals of creating an engaging public space by enhancing visual connectivity, prioritizing pedestrians, and integrating the Greenway into the site. Moreover, the clear visibility paths can help create a sense of openness in the surrounding contexts.



Precedent Redevelopment Projects

43 Green, Chicago, IL

43 Green is located in Chicago's south side as a model for equitable, transit-oriented development. The green line runs through the middle of the site plan, and although Playmart places the bus lane below-grade, it speaks to accessibility of public transportation. The structures are proposed to be 10-stories and Playmart's highest building is 15 stories, reinforcing our philosophy of density while maintaining a feeling of openness. 43 Green is prioritizing affordable housing, for half of the apartments will be at 60% AMI and the other half at market rate. Playmart applauds the incorporation of affordable housing, however, pushes the possibilities of 50% and 30% AMI units through ambitious housing policies and programs. Lastly, green roofs are incorporated throughout the site to decrease urban heat island effect. Project broke ground in 2023.



"Steel District", Sioux Falls, SD

The "Steel District" in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, marks the departure of the former Sioux Steel Company. The narrative mirrors that of Kmart: closure of a dominating company liberates the surrounding neighborhood to envision a future that addresses their unique needs and desires. This 11-acre redevelopment champions intergenerational living, which is a driving principle in Playmart. The public courtyard speaks to our pillars of placemaking, proximity and play by giving residents, workers, and visitors an easily accessible space to gather and celebrate their community. The redevelopment includes skywalk connections between buildings, a common infrastructure feature in Minneapolis. Lastly, a TIF was established to finance their parking structure, which is something Playmart explores to finance affordable housing. The project broke ground in 2021.



"The Assembly", Columbus, OH

"The Assembly" is a transformation of a former Kroger Bakery complex in Columbus, Ohio. Similar to Kmart's absence in Minneapolis, the loss of a large commercial presence presents an energizing opportunity for redevelopment that responds to the current (and future) community. Although being half the size at 5-acres, it follows similar guiding urban planning and urban design principles. Space activation is prioritized, especially for residential units, and speaks to a mix-used, pedestrian-oriented landscape. There is interior parking to maintain open space that is for residents over automobiles. The conversation of jobs is forcefully inserted into the conversation throughout the development, such as a platform for construction positions and the creation of permanent job sites. Furthermore, "The Assembly" is located adjacent to a highway and is near a downtown extension, which emulates the Nicollet Avenue corridor and I-35W. The project broke ground in 2020.



Recommendations

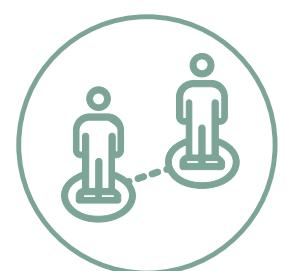
Overview

The portfolio of recommendations were intentionally crafted through background considerations, existing citywide policies, deficiencies in the area, community engagement, and ambitious programs and policies.

Guiding Principles

To ensure that our redevelopment plan not only aligned with but strengthened the city's vision, we integrated the five goals from the proposal as guiding principles (see below). Additionally, we deliberately infused the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan policies to produce a report that celebrates current citywide planning efforts. Lastly, our pillars of **Placemaking, Proximity, and Play** percolated social, economic, political, and economic considerations to yield Playmart.

Minneapolis City Goals



Reconnect People and Places



Build for Who's Here



Let People Live, Work, Shop,
and Play Here



Build Safe, Fair, and Sustainable
Transportation Networks



Design Healthy Communities

Short-Term Recommendations: 1-3 Years



1. Developer Requirements to Inform Selection Process

1.1 Community Engagement

The Playmart site has been proactive in dynamic and robust community engagement, especially with imminent RFPs being submitted to the City of Minneapolis. It is evident that the community, both residents in the study area and beyond, exceeds expectations in responsiveness, creativity, and overall dedication to the future of the site.

The selection of a developer to transform the site should not be the hallmark of the end of community engagement. Community engagement during the development process is arguably as important, for it was the residents who guided the various visions that were produced. In order to ensure that engagement is incorporated until completion, community engagement in the development requirement would secure local voices, transparency, and sustained excitement. The Playmart site presents the perfect scenario to build with community instead of for community.

1.2 Public Realm Framework

There are appropriate concerns over the residential, commercial, and public space delegations throughout the site. Nonetheless, the public realm plays a vital role in connecting these various uses that will be embedded throughout redevelopment.

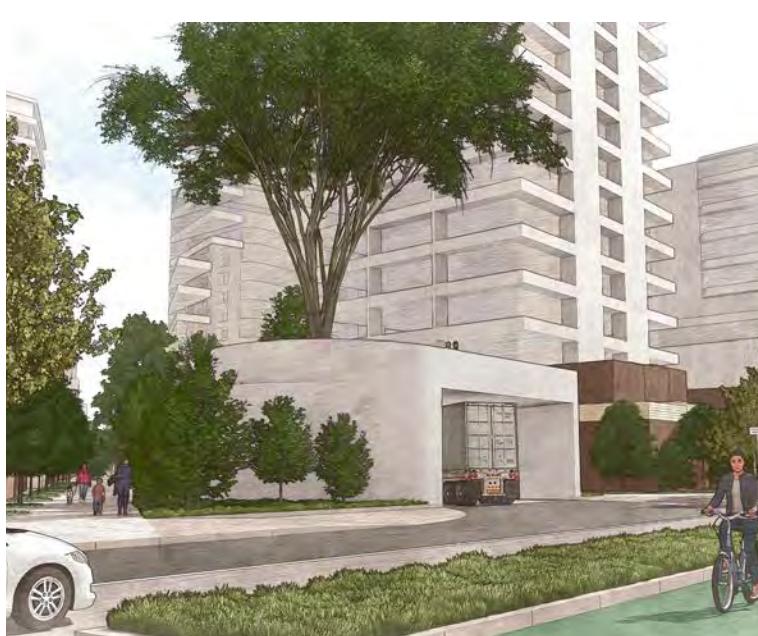
The public realm controls the user experience of the site and can be vulnerable to socially, economically, and environmentally unsustainable practices. By establishing a public realm framework as a development requirement, developers will be required to engage in thoughtful design choices that reflect the community.

2. Below-Grade Parking Garage

Electing to place the parking below-grade liberates the site to be fully realized as a multi-modal, pedestrian oriented environment. The entrance and exit are strategically located facing Blaisdell Ave to avoid unnecessary congestion around the BRT station and Lake Street. The parking garage is publicly accessible via elevators and experiential stairs.

3. Garage Entrance Placemaking

The land above the entrance to the below-grade parking garage exemplifies how structural components can simultaneously provide a platform for ornamentation. The above-grade walls of the entrance serve as a canvas for sculptural details, public art, placemaking, and branding. This celebrates the culture and creativity of the residents with intentional community engagement. It additionally provides a platform for green roof design to combat urban heat island effect, provide aesthetically pleasing visuals, and capitalize on biophilia.



4. Professional Development Program: Construction and Real Estate

Redevelopment of a 10-acre lot into a community hub and asset will span a significant timeline. This construction period towards completion can be leveraged for productive professional development, community involvement, and expansion upon existing city programs. The City of Minneapolis has a Developers Technical Assistance Program (DTAP) that offers free resources, such as workshops for small or nascent real estate developers. In addition to the DTAP program, developers should be required to provide contracts to local individuals or small groups who are involved in the real estate and construction profession instead of contracting work beyond the community itself.

The scale of this redevelopment is typically controlled by a mass developer; however, our team believes that the scale is conducive to local apprenticeship and training programs throughout the construction process. The Playmart site is a one-of-a-kind position for local real estate developers and construction professionals to be involved in its transformation. Additionally, to align with equitable planning practices, the DTAP is recommended to host meetings, classes, workshops, and advice events on site. This is an intentional effort to build with the community instead of for the community by going to them and eliminating geographic, economic, and time obstacles.

Capitalizing on the considerable scale and temporal characteristics of the redevelopment promotes policy #52 in the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan. This policy focuses on human capital and a trained workforce to be adaptable to the demographic composition of a neighborhood. Resources are strategically funneled into training programs, job creation, and equitable employment practices concentrated within the local context.

Professional development opportunities throughout the transformation of the site will produce sustainable economic growth in the community. In addition to equitable planning practices implemented through the DTAP and required contracts for developers, the extensive professional development programs can be situated on short-, medium-, and long-term phases.

5. Activate Lake Street Corridor

The buildings situated on the Lake Street corridor inaugurate construction of key neighborhood assets to meet immediate needs of residents and activate the site facing Lake Street. The first building is at the south-west corner and will be a mixed-use structure housing a grocery store and residential units. Secondly, the adjacent two buildings that are closer towards the BRT station will additionally be mixed-use with artists' lofts, studios, communal working spaces, public rooftops, and residential units.



6. Initial Landscaping and Green Infrastructure

The implementation of green infrastructure will be present throughout the site, however, it is preferred that stormwater management be constructed in the initial phase. Or, at the very least, have the foundation of the infrastructure be laid out as it will relate to the rest of the site.



Mid-Term Recommendations: 3-8 Years



1. Establish Housing TIF District

The Playmart site provides an unique opportunity since there are no current industrial, commercial, or residential structures. This temporary absence of built forms translates into a deficit of tax revenue which could be leveraged for improvements, such as public infrastructure, pollution cleanup, and attracting economic development. Both Minnesota and Minneapolis are not foreign to TIF Districts, for they frequently use them for public realm improvements.

According to Minnesota Housing TIF Districts, increments will be collected for 25 years then subsequently dissolved. Under the permitted uses, the increments may only be used to finance housing projects or public improvements that are intimately connected to the project. A housing project describes a development that serves low and moderate-income individuals which aligns with Playmart's housing goals.

The City recently approved a TIF Plan at 3030 Nicollet Avenue, which is positioned at the south-west corner of the Playmart site. The Plan was tailored to add affordable housing units, demonstrating how establishing a Housing TIF District in the redevelopment will address housing concerns.

Establishing a Housing TIF District will promote affordable housing that otherwise would not have been available to pre-existing and new residents.

2. East Wing Loading Zone

The east wing loading zone caters to the needs of daily operations to sustain the site for residents, local businesses, and visitors.



3. Amend Inclusionary Zoning Policy

The City of Minneapolis has been active in coordinating policy and programs based on the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance was instituted to facilitate mixed-income neighborhoods by requiring affordable units in new development. The ordinance speaks to policies #33, 37 and 38 in the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

Although an innovative, ambitious, and expertly crafted ordinance, the results have demonstrated that developers do not opt to build units more affordable than 60% AMI. This is a result of the catalog of options developers can choose from, and a majority of developers elect to dedicate 8% of units as affordable housing at 60% AMI for 20 years. The shortage of units at or below 30% AMI is critical for the City of Minneapolis and for the surrounding neighborhoods. Located adjacent to a transit hub, the site is conducive to low-income housing for pre-existing and new residents, but risks a developer strictly building units at 60% AMI as opposed to 50% or 30%.

To combat the current trend while preserving the ordinance, the team proposes including additional incentives for developers to build at 50% and at or below 30% AMI. Additional incentives can include density bonuses, increment financing, and expedited reviews.

The implementation of zoning policies aimed at affordable housing is faced with finding the balance between both the community and the developer's needs. The additional incentives encourage developers to provide affordable housing without imposing undesirable costs or obstacles.

3.1 Precedent: Bloomington, MN Opportunity Housing Ordinance (OHO)

The City of Bloomington Minnesota's Opportunity Housing Ordinance (OHO) was implemented to target the same housing issues as the Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance. However, the OHO includes housing incentives as a tool to multiply affordable units within the same development.

4. Below-Grade Transit Tunnel Amenities and Access

The below-grade bus lane will be constructed along the same justification for the parking garage: to liberate the site from automobile right-of-ways in order to foster a multi-modal pedestrian environment. The below-grade bus lane additionally provides shelter from environmental elements for unhoused individuals. Furthermore, in order to build for all users of the site, the below-grade bus area will have public bathrooms, showers, elevators, and stairs.

4.1 Precedent: Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel

Commonly referred to as the Metro Bus Tunnel, this transit tunnel was established to efficiently move riders, decrease congestion, and ultimately save riders time. Although the tunnel currently accommodates a light rail system, its original inception was solely buses. This contemporary investment in a transit-oriented right-of-way actively builds a sustainable, equitable, and efficient network.



5. Incremental Affordable Housing

Constructing affordable housing is an incremental process, especially with the consideration of community input and professional development programs, specifically in the construction and real estate fields. Incremental housing additionally allows for proposed policies and programs to be initiated.

Design guidelines present the community with a unique opportunity to share their stories, ideas, and overall vision. For example, signage, branding, and wayfinding invite local artists to proactively participate in the development. Design guidelines put into action Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan policies #5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 17, 29, 30, 32, 33, 78, 100. Design guidelines are useful documents to promote identity and legibility of the space, yet they don't inhibit creativity, community desires, necessary changes, or establish homogeneity. Due to the incremental nature of the development, guidelines will ensure that the site reads as one cohesive hub for placemaking, proximity, and play.

6. Activating Street-Level Floors

We believe that the CM4 Zoning, Destination Mixed Use, foreshadows Playmarts potential in activating the space for sustainable economic activity by providing leisure time platforms, spaces for gathering, networks of social capital, and a homegrown local economy. Street-level activation is intentionally concentrated around public realm spaces and corridors to facilitate community building and a positive feedback loop of economic development.



7. Design Guidelines

Design guidelines celebrate the character of a site by utilizing a comprehensive framework to drive informed, thoughtful, and inclusive urban design principles. Design guidelines are not a top-down approach, but rather a platform to strengthen the personality of a site, celebrate the history, engage current residents, and generate an identity that is led by the community.

The Playmart site is liberated from constraints imposed by pre-existing structures, yet is confronted with challenges of producing a new identity through physical forms. While an exciting opportunity and an exemplary platform for the community to get involved, challenges include maintaining consistency, producing an aesthetic and safe environment, and connecting to local context. Design guidelines can encompass, but are not limited to, lighting, landscaping, materiality, signage, branding, and wayfinding.

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8. Amend CM4 Zoning Code

The Playmart site is currently zoned for Destination Mixed Use, also referred to as CM4. Destination Mixed Use Zoning is appropriate for the site considering the pivotal edge conditions: BRT station, Midtown Greenway, two bordering bike paths, and the imminent Nicollet Avenue corridor extension. Mixed-use stimulates the site to cater to residents, local business, visitors, and workers, creating a dynamic hub of activity beyond traditional business hours.

The current CM4 zoning code limits development through mandating street-level floors to operate as commercial. It is noted that street-level commercial uses facilitate activity and overall economic development, yet can stymie a diverse residential portfolio.

The team proposes amending the CM4 Zone to allow residential development on the street-level floor. The prohibition of residential units at street-level eliminates the compilation of diverse housing styles. For example, townhouses can be instrumental in wealth building strategies through condo classifications. A condo presents the opportunity for tenants to lease rooms or units for income and if the property value increases the monetary benefits go directly to the tenant (not a landlord). Furthermore, by integrating some residential at street-level, it intentionally creates a neighborhood atmosphere and visual aesthetic instead of a strictly commercial district. An alternative to amending the entire CM4 zone is to create a special overlay district for the site to spawn as a hub for both residential and commercial desires.

The current CM4 zone speaks to the potential of the site to embody a destination in Minneapolis for residents, local businesses, workers, and visitors. While it is essential to foster economic growth, it is equally important to capitalize on the transit-oriented location to serve residents.

9. Additional Bus Stop: Bus 18

The physical characteristics of the parcel disrupt Nicollet Avenue, a strong north-south corridor providing direct connections to downtown. The redevelopment plan incorporates a below-grade bus route to preserve the pedestrian nature of the site while achieving the Nicollet Avenue extension. In keeping with one of the foundational pillars of proximity, an addition of a bus stop provides more frequent, safe, and reliable transit service.

10. Façade Program

The facade of a structure negotiates the boundary between the streetscape and a building's interior. Facades address beautification efforts, enhance user experience, and promote economic activity. The site plan has various internal and external facing corridors, which have the potential to produce conflicting facade treatments. While the goal is not to produce a homogenous visual, a facade program provides guides to creating a thoughtful interface.

A facade program ensures a cohesive, safe, and enjoyable user experience throughout the site while holding developers accountable to how they will ultimately influence the public realm interface. The program will additionally reinforce the design guidelines.

10.1 Precedent: City of Revere, MA

The City of Revere, Massachusetts, has executed a facade program on their economic corridors. The program provides a platform for business owners to meet with a consultant team selected by the city to collaborate on best practices. Leading principles of design are brand identity, color, materials, transparency, lighting, public space, signage, architecture, and utilities. The program has been a tremendous success, evoking the city to engage in a phase two on account of eager business owners and excited residents. The program is supported through federal funding, yet demonstrates the positive outcome of engaging in this type of program.



Long-Term Recommendations: 8+ Years



1. Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO)

Community Benefits Agreements (CBA) are contracts between developers and a community-based organization that is serving on behalf of residents. CBAs are excellent tools for prioritizing community engagement and community voices during the redevelopment process.

There are concerns around the Playmart site that a mass developer will come with little regard for the pre-existing residents, community composition, or the intensive community engagement conducted. To maintain transparency, a CBA opens dialogue between the developer and the community. Two issues arise: one is that a CBA is at risk of not being proposed during development, and the second is that developers have a negative history of pressuring communities into agreements due to duress of the power dynamic. To address these issues before they arise, our team is proposing the implementation of a Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO) in Minneapolis as a public action towards protecting the city's residents in the face of development pressures. Furthermore, beyond implementing a CBO, it is imperative to integrate a training structure that prepares and educates residents on how to negotiate with developers.

Endorsing CBAs or a CBO prioritizes the communities needs and secures residents a seat at the table when discussing the project that will ultimately affect them. Although it is recognized that these are situated in long-term phasing, it is an influential consideration when choosing a developer if they are willing to enter into a CBA.

1.1 Precedent: Detroit, MI, Community Benefits Ordinance (CBO)

The City of Detroit, Michigan, has implemented a CBO as a law. The CBO applies to development projects that trigger different thresholds, such as \$1 million+ property tax abatement or total value of \$75 million. The CBO mandates that developers engage with the community through a Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC), which is formed once the development triggers the requirements. At the core of the CBO is the ability for residents to assess the project and calculate what the community needs in light of the development, especially the development's negative externalities.

2. Northeast View Corridor

Playmart is beautifully situated with propinquity to downtown Minneapolis, however, the site maintains a sense of individuality. During the inception of the site plan, view corridors were immediately prioritized to celebrate the city, provide wondrous vistas, and cultivate a unique experience as users explore the public space. The prominent north-east view corridor is constructed on an elevated structure with soft, organically shaped edges to negotiate the visual boundaries between Playmart and downtown. The individual is immersed in the skylines' grandeur through a processional movement to the highest vantage point, engaging in one of the three pillars of play.



3. Amend 4d(1) Affordable Housing Incentive

The 4d(1) Program is a pre-existing housing incentive in Minneapolis to promote and protect affordable rental units. The program offers rental property owners tax reductions to maintain that 20% or more of their units remain affordable.

The 4d(1) program, which is specific to rental units, is a trailblazer program in Minneapolis to reinforce the city's goals of preserving existing units and creating new ones to serve their residents urgent needs. The affordable housing criteria recently underwent changes for 2024, stating that the threshold for affordability is at or below 60% AMI. However, our team argues that in order to promote a mixed-income community, there need to be explicit considerations for affordability at or below 30% AMI. Second, the program only applies to rental units. To offer wealth building opportunities, the program needs to extend to owner units (i.e., condo properties). The 4d(1) program establishes a solid foundation with wonderful success stories in the city of how residential properties can integrate affordable rental units. However, in order to be responsive to both the community's needs and the current state of the affordability crisis, the program needs subsequent modifications.

4. Real Estate Co-Operative

The Playmart site is advantageously positioned for residential and commercial development; however, the challenge is to preserve and promote local businesses (pre-existing and new). A real estate cooperative celebrates the uniqueness of a neighborhood with administrative structures that allow community members to be owners and investors. This solidifies long-term community engagement and local participation in commercial development, as economic growth is always in a state of flux.

A real estate cooperative inserts the community into commercial and residential development to boost the local economy while preserving local interests, needs, and desires. The cooperative manages the properties, which in turn creates jobs and the flexibility to respond to inevitable changes. The creation of cooperatives additionally allows the possibility for homeownership strategies to promote wealth building.

4.1 Precedent: Minneapolis, MN, Northeast Investment Cooperative (NEIC)

The Northeast Investment Cooperative (NEIC) in Minneapolis, MN is a real estate cooperative that buys and develops real estate then leases it to local businesses. Although the NEIC focuses on vacant buildings, their structure and success for community engagement, space activation, and economic development is an excellent model for a real estate cooperative at the site.

5. Incremental Affordable Housing (Continued)

Incremental affordable housing construction will continue.

6. Renewable Energy: Solar

Playmart recognizes that environmental sustainability warrants equal considerations alongside social and economic sustainability. The implementation of renewable energy is an active step in addressing global climate change. This can be explored in tax credits to incentivize decarbonization of the district's carbon footprint. Furthermore, the buildings were strategically oriented to capitalize on solar energy via solar panels atop roofs that are not reserved for public use or green space.



7. Community Center

Playmart strives to be a 24/7 district that avoids being subjected to solely catering weekday commuters. In order to foster an all-inclusive community, the establishment of a community center solidifies the community's needs, desires, and wishes into a sustainable framework. It is inevitable that Minneapolis communities will undergo changing conditions; however, a community center has the flexibility to address these shifts. Furthermore, it represents a physical, permanent space that individuals know is there for them.

8. Community Development Corporation (CDC)

Community Development Corporations (CDC) are nonprofit organizations that support community revitalization, development, and leverage existing assets. CDCs often focus on housing, economic development, and physical design at the neighborhood level, providing a tailored approach. A CDC can't be implemented through the City of Minneapolis; therefore it needs to be organized organically for the site. Regardless, the city can promote, endorse, and educate on the creation of CDCs.

CDCs have consistently proven to be successful organizations due to their flexibility in focus areas, nimbly allowing them to quickly respond to local conditions and therefore ensuring sustainable growth.

8.1 Precedents: Three Success Stories

There are three exemplary precedents that serve as resources for the creation of a CDC focused on the Playmart site. The first CDC is College Hill Community Urban Redevelopment Corporation located in Cincinnati, Ohio. CHCURC focuses on the following topics: economic development, affordable housing, small business support, and community engagement. They have various programs that are adaptable for the site, such as a facade improvement program, outdoor improvement program, alleyway activation, and de-risk business mentorship program. The second CDC is Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD) located in Detroit, Michigan. CDAD focuses on the following topics: public policy advocacy, community engagement, neighborhood initiatives, capacity building and knowledge sharing. The third CDC is Redesign located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Redesign focuses on economic development, community plans, and small business assistance. These precedents begin to illuminate the positive impact that CDCs have on their local communities.



Team Members

We are a team of dedicated placemakers who are passionate about creating equitable, sustainable, livable, and beautiful spaces. While all first year students earning our Master of Urban and Regional Planning degrees from Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, we bring diverse backgrounds, skillsets, and focus areas which ultimately allowed us to produce Playmart.

Aaron Johnson earned an individualized BS in Sustainable Urban Design from the University of Connecticut. As a now reformed car enthusiast, he credits moving to Detroit to study car design for his falling out with auto-centric placemaking. When not training for inline skating marathons in Duluth, his long-term focus is envisioning futures in which autonomous vehicle typologies drive equitable, compact urbanism.

Allison Yu earned her BS in Architecture from University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture and Community Development. She is dedicated to advancing accessible, mixed-used and people-centered design; with a particular interest in neighborhoods, campuses and urban streetscape typologies.

Elyse Cote earned her BA in Architectural Studies and Environmental Studies from the College of the Holy Cross. Her passion in the field aligns with local food networks, space activation of neglected parcels, climate resiliency, and using urban history to drive informed decisions. She operates at the intersection of urban planning and urban design.

Rebecca Griswold earned her BS in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Administration from San Francisco State University. She is interested in the intersection of public, regional, and federal parks and the built environment with a focus on ecological design and placemaking in public space corridors. She is interested in the human dimensions of outdoor spaces. She is a map enthusiast, an advocate for public and open space, and an avid user of recreational waterfronts and trails.

Xuanshu Lin earned two degrees: BS in Sustainable Design and BA in Urban Studies and Planning with the highest honors from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. With a dual-degree background, he is passionate about sustainability with deep skills in parametric analysis and user experience (UX) design. His skills in evaluating urban scenarios contribute to innovative and sustainable urban planning and design solutions.



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