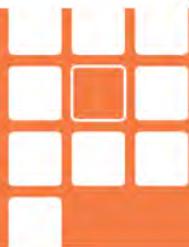




SOUTHERN DOWNTOWN/ CBD



public realm plan



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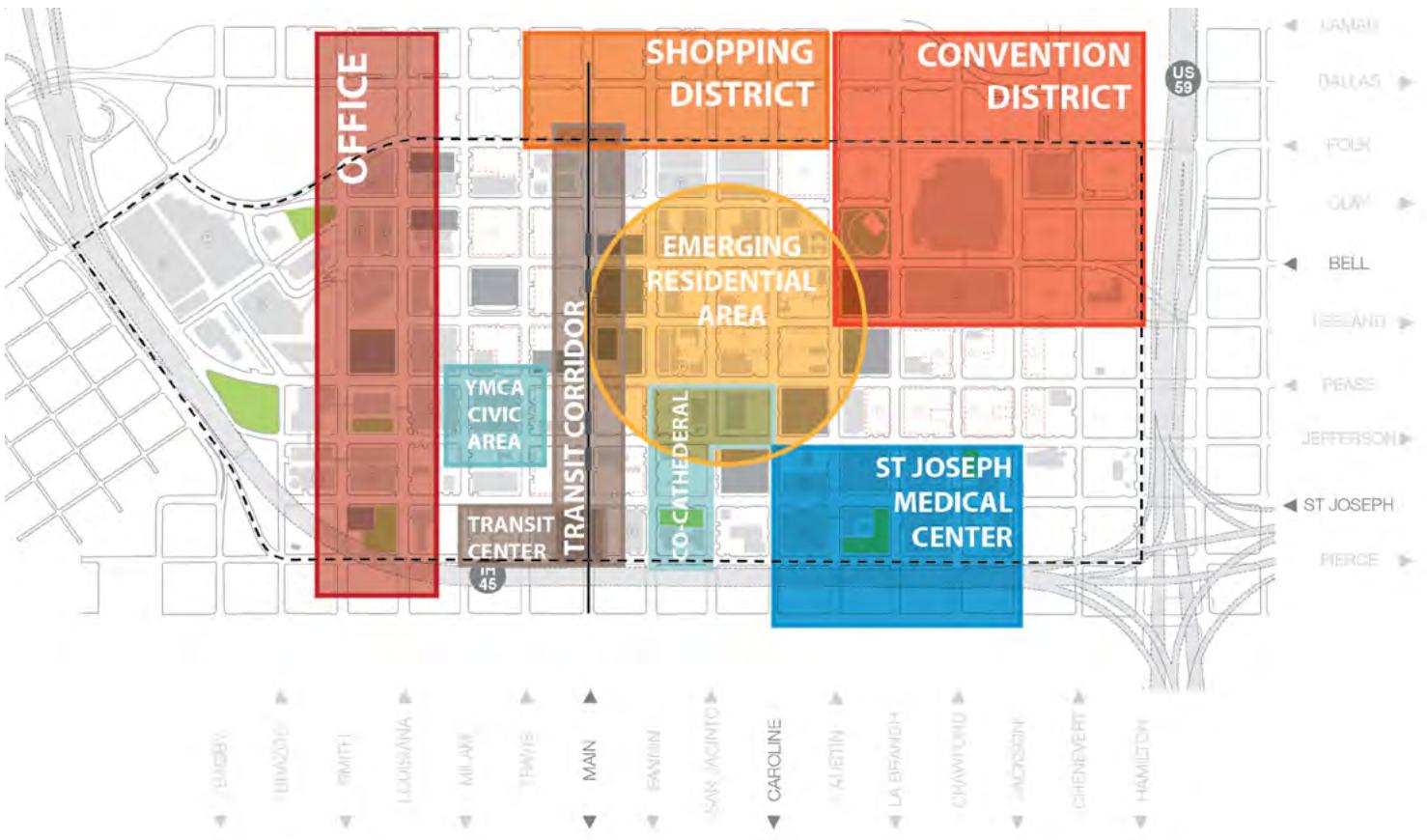
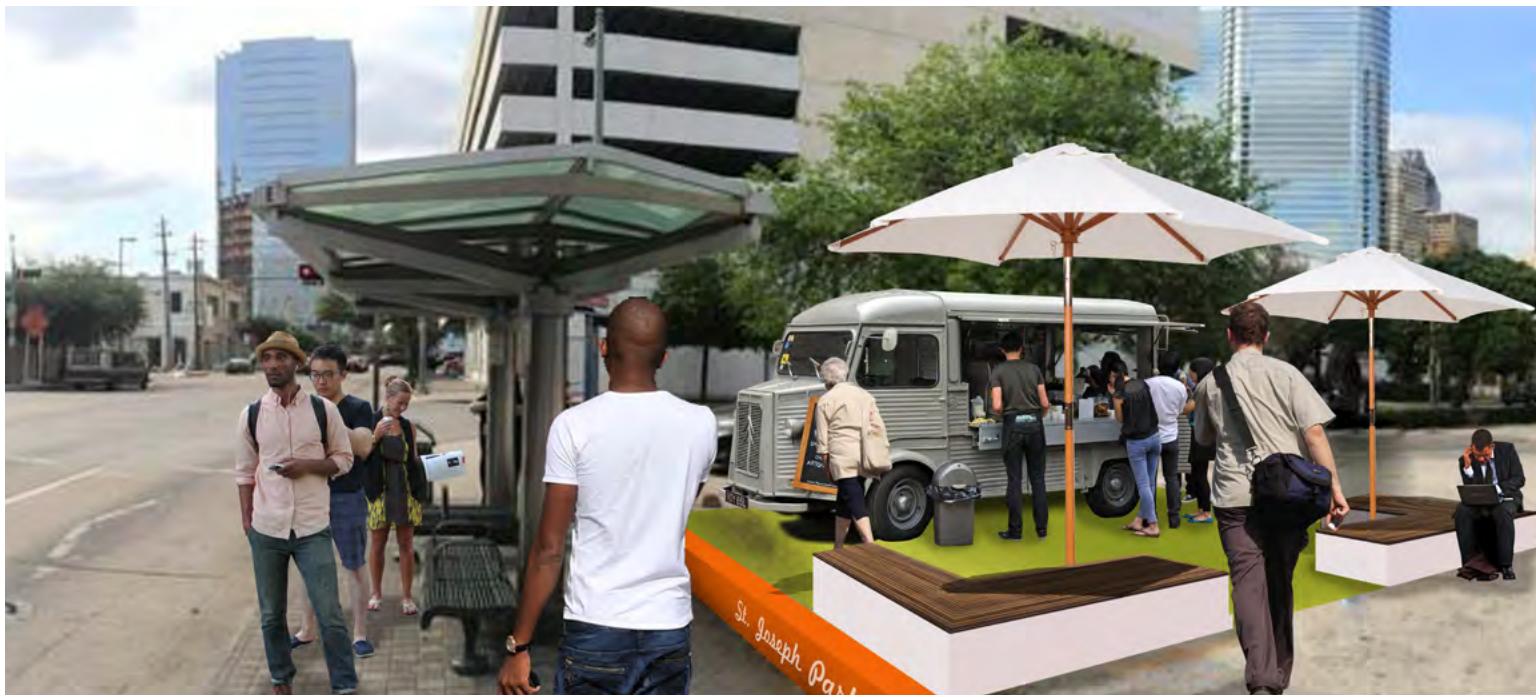
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Prepared For
Houston Downtown Management District
909 Fannin, Suite 1650
Houston, TX 77010
713.650.3022
www.downtownhouston.org



Prepared By
Asakura Robinson
1902 Washington Avenue
Houston, TX 77007
713.337.5830
www.asakurarobinson.com



Areas of Activity in southern Downtown

- St. Joseph Medical Center
- YMCA Civic Area
- Co-Cathedral
- Office Corridor along Smith and Louisiana

- Convention District, including Toyota Center
- Shopping District
- Emerging Residential Area
- Transit



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As is common in many urban areas, the network of streets, parks and open spaces that we call the public realm comprises about half of the land area of southern Downtown. In a city that has limited regulatory structures, strategic investment in our public realm is a powerful way to shape Houston's future.

CONTEXT

Downtown Houston is increasingly a stage for a diverse range of urban activities at all times of the day, rather than simply a destination for working commuters. With the expansion of the public transit system, people from surrounding neighborhoods will have improved access to Downtown jobs, retail, entertainment, and recreational amenities. Substantial amounts of new residential development in Downtown Houston — catalyzed by the Downtown Living Initiative — will create a growing need for amenities that have not typically been provided in the area. However, from our observations and conversations with stakeholders, it is equally clear that the network of streets in the study area is still heavily mono-functional, designed primarily to channel commuters in and out of Downtown during rush hour.

VISION AND GOALS

This plan presents a vision for the streets, parks and open spaces of southern Downtown/CBD that will support a diverse range of activities, development, and neighborhoods. Building upon previous efforts, the plan is intended to guide future investments and provide a framework for evaluation. The following goals have been developed to support the overall vision for the public realm in southern Downtown:



MOVEMENT: Public and private investments in southern Downtown should focus on distinctive streetscapes and park spaces that promote a variety of experiences and activities.



USE: In response to existing conditions and emerging development, define new public realm improvements that generate a more vibrant place.



PERCEPTION: Enhance the experience of southern Downtown through a network of public spaces, streets, and landmarks.

SIX STRATEGIES FOR SOUTHERN DOWNTOWN/ CBD

- CLASSIFY STREETS BY MODE OF TRAVEL
- RETROFIT AND IMPROVE STREETWALLS
- DESIGN AND PROGRAM PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARKS
- Design Standards
- ACTIVATE PRIVATE PLAZAS AND COURTS
- Targeted Interventions
- STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS TO ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS
- SET THE STAGE FOR FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES



- St. Joseph Medical Center
- YMCA Civic Area
- Co-Cathedral
- Office Corridor along Smith and Louisiana

- Convention District, including Toyota Center
- Shopping District
- Emerging Residential Area
- Transit

1

CLASSIFY STREETS BY MODE OF TRAVEL

A variety of street sections throughout the study area provides the opportunity for each activity to have a distinctive urban experience. Creating street classifications by travel mode will minimize conflict between modes and improve network legibility. While streets are and will be designed to ensure better safety and comfort for a primary mode, all streets will be inherently multi-functional.

2

DESIGN AND PROGRAM DISTINCTIVE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Parks and open spaces serve as common reference points and meeting places for shared experiences. A combination of new parks and retrofitted open spaces will anchor new development clusters and emerging activity areas. These open spaces will create memorable landmarks that are supportive of surrounding uses and promote increased activity through park design and programming.

3

ACTIVATE PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLIC SPACES

Privately owned public spaces are a significant component of the study area and cannot be ignored when documenting the existing public realm. These spaces are publicly accessible, and often seamless with public sidewalks, but privately managed by existing adjacent property owners and managers. By adding site furnishings and programming, these plazas can become local landmarks, creating prestige for their owners and tenants, while creating an amenity for employees, residents and Downtown visitors.

4

RETROFIT AND IMPROVE STREETWALLS

By retrofitting blocks and streetwalls that are designed primarily for cars and parking, the quality of space along sidewalks can be improved to create an appealing environment for pedestrians where the needs of automobiles have traditionally been prioritized. This strategy includes both design guidelines to increase comfort and aesthetic appeal, as well as ideas for semi-permanent retail to create destinations that increase foot traffic until future development is realized.

5

CREATE KEY CONNECTIONS ACROSS HIGHWAY EDGES

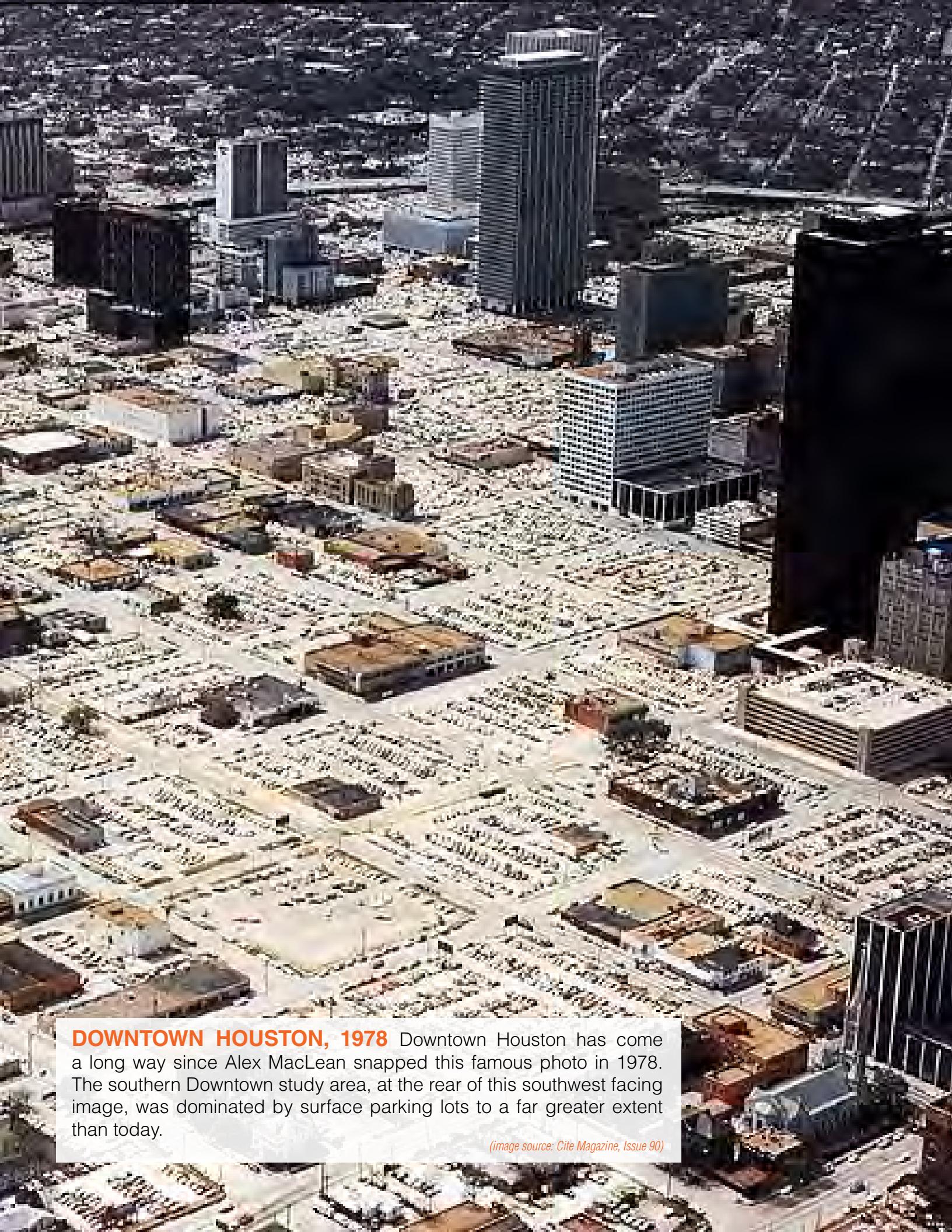
Addressing the barrier created by the major highways at the perimeter of the study area will strengthen connections between southern Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. Inviting gateways that encourage residents of the surrounding area to visit Downtown and vice versa will support new activities and create a more vibrant street life.

6

SET THE STAGE FOR FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

A long-term strategy for the southeastern portion of Downtown Houston must begin with short- and medium-term improvements of underutilized blocks. Through site rehabilitation and infrastructure investment, the area can be restored for existing site users, where future infill development will create an anchor to connect with and support other activity zones.

*This report may be downloaded at www.downtownhouston.org/resources
or a bound copy may be purchased at www.asakurarobinson.com/studies-links/southerndowntown.*



DOWNTOWN HOUSTON, 1978 Downtown Houston has come a long way since Alex MacLean snapped this famous photo in 1978. The southern Downtown study area, at the rear of this southwest facing image, was dominated by surface parking lots to a far greater extent than today.

(image source: Cite Magazine, Issue 90)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Our survey of the existing conditions analyzes the public realm as three major components: public parks, privately owned public spaces, and the streets that connect them. Throughout the course of our site visits, we also focused on observing and documenting street life: the way people travel through the area and how they respond to the physical spaces.

This northeast-facing image shows the extent of Downtown development. The study area is outlined in orange and important landmarks are labeled. From this view, the prominence of office towers in the western portion becomes clear, while larger portions of the eastern side remain less developed.

(image source: Greenworks Houston)



We also referenced recent studies (see Appendix B) for insight on land use, economic development, and other factors that are crucial to understanding how the public realm interacts with the private sector.

Overall, this study sought to find answers to the following questions:

What are the design features that currently define the space?

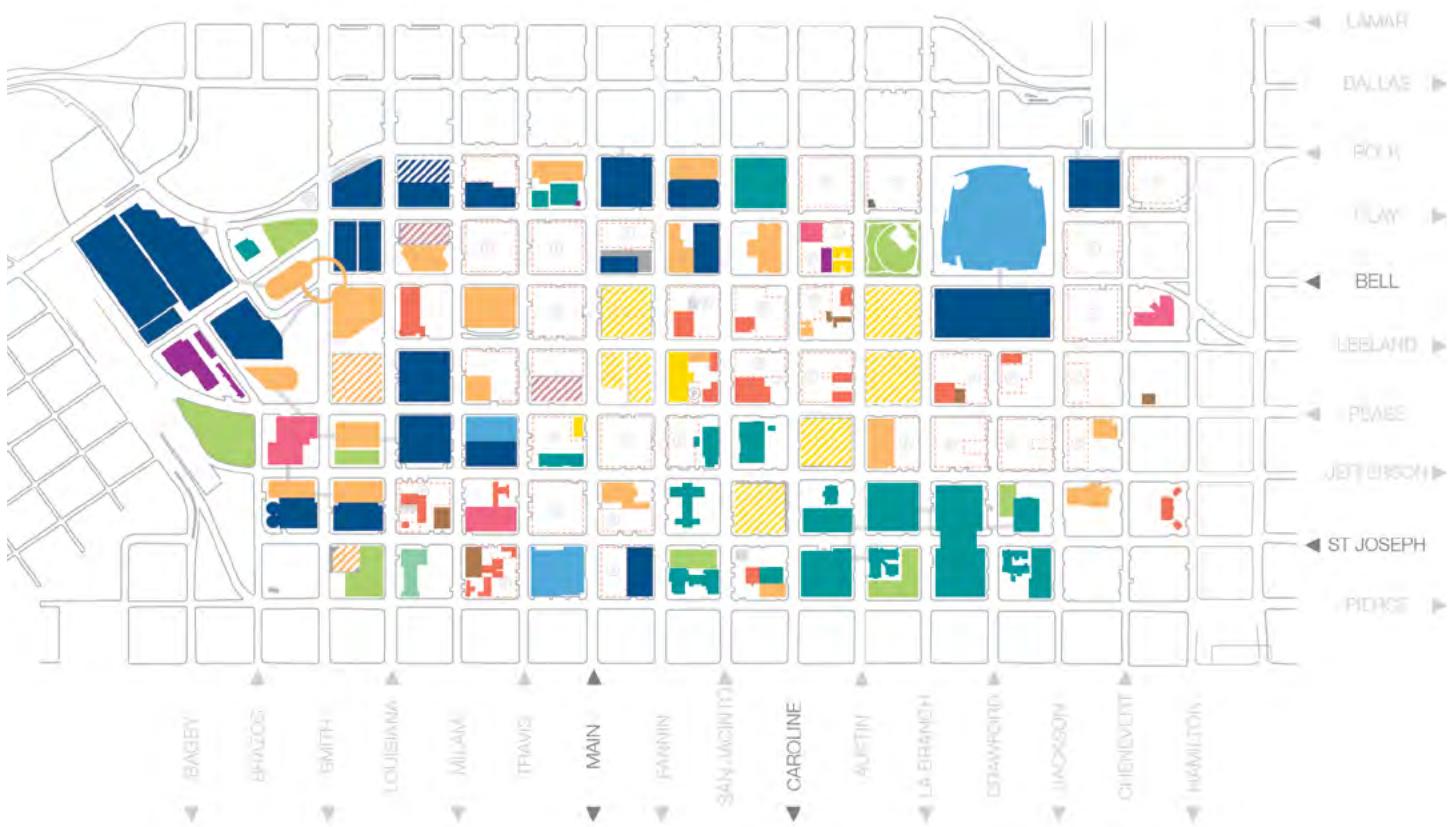
How do people experience and use the space?

What are the adjacent land uses and building types?

How does the time of day or time of week affect how the space is used?

What are the challenges to the space being used?

Our strategy for answering these questions relies on the power of observation, both subjectively through critical assessment and objectively through rigorous documentation. Throughout, our intent was simply to reach a level of knowledge and information that would provide a holistic view of the study area.



Existing Building Use

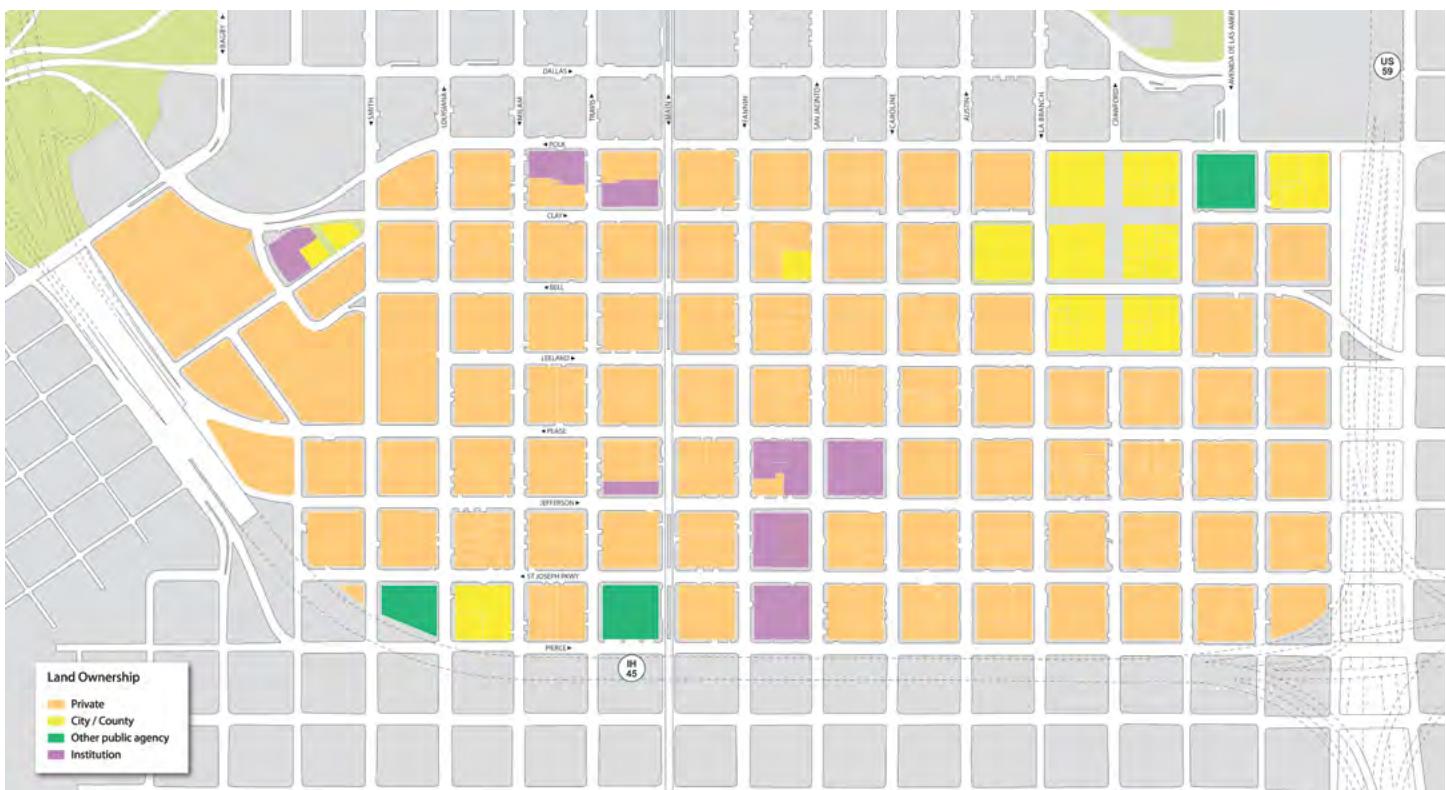
(source: Downtown District)

- Industrial / Warehouse
- Multi-Use Residential
- Hotel
- Commercial / Retail
- Office
- Government
- Civic
- Institutional
- Parking Garage
- Surface Lot
- Under Development

UNDERSTANDING SOUTHERN DOWNTOWN

The southern Downtown/ CBD study area is bounded by Polk Street to the north, US-59 to the east, and IH-45 to the south and west. The area has a number of important landmarks. The Co-Cathedral of Houston is located near the center of the study area. Toyota Center, home of the professional basketball team the Houston Rockets, is located to the northeast. St. Joseph Medical Center owns and operates their facilities over twelve blocks in the southeastern corner of the study area. The land use is dominated by commercial office towers to the west, with ancillary parking structures on adjacent parcels. A significant portion of the study area provides surface parking on both sides of Main Street. A substantial area of undeveloped land exists on the far eastern side of the study area adjacent to US-59.

Throughout the study area, many parcels are the size of a full block, primarily in the more highly developed western sector. The ownership of these large parcels is a mix of public, private, and institutional actors. Root Memorial Square is owned by the City of Houston; the block along Main Street containing the Downtown Transit Center is owned by METRO; the Leland Federal Building is owned by the U.S. Government; and Toyota Center and adjacent Tundra Garage are owned by the Harris County Sports Authority.



Current Land Ownership

(source: Downtown District)

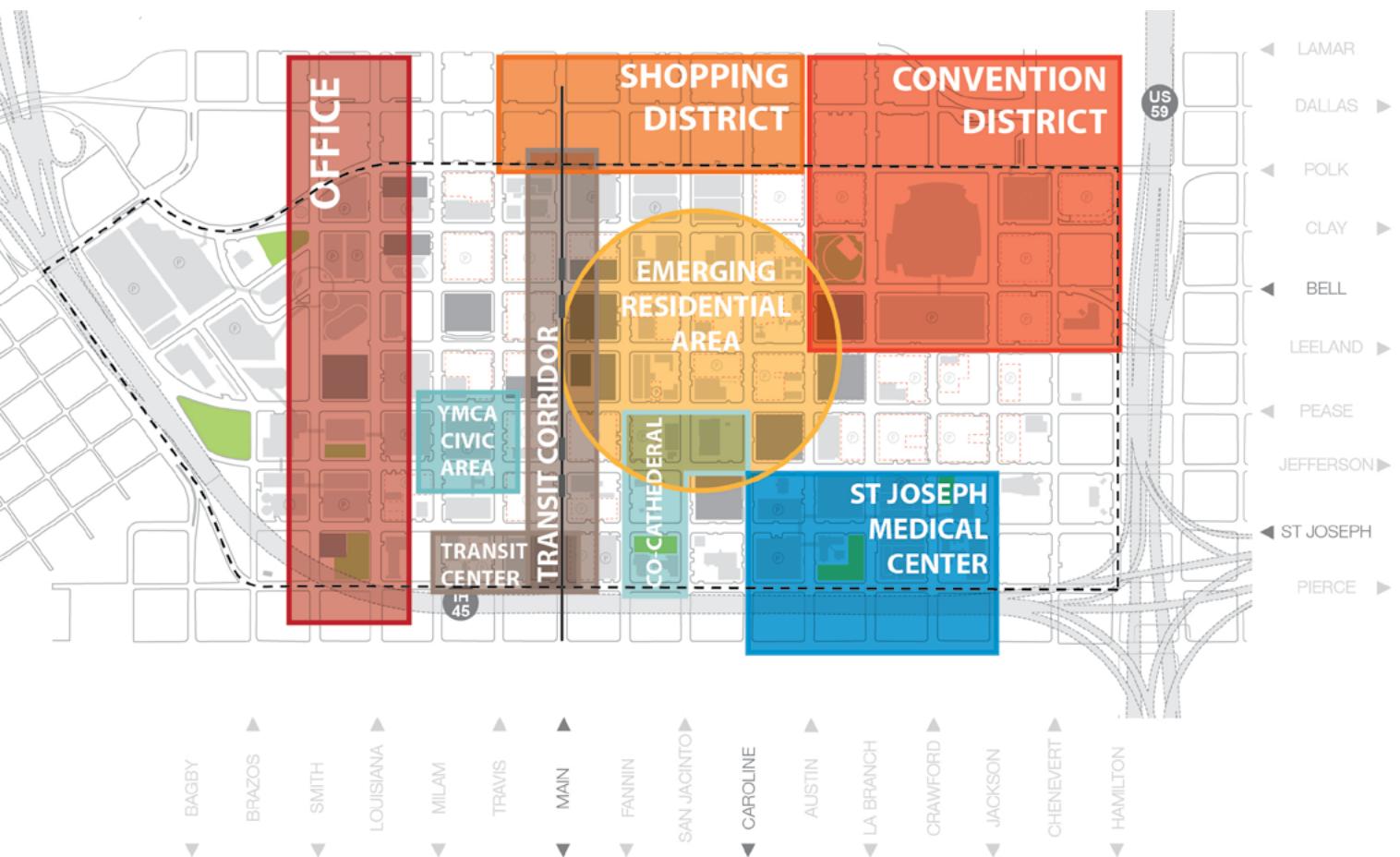
Several additional parcels are owned by private entities, including Chevron, Brookfield, the Archdiocese of Galveston and Houston, and St. Joseph Medical Center.

In addition to the large landholders with developed properties, there are also several property owners that hold large areas of undeveloped land. These include Houston First Corporation, Golconda Venture, and Main Bell Realty Corporation. For the most part, these properties are located either on or east of Main Street.

Note: Due to the variety of existing uses and emerging development, the planning consultant team has not been tasked with identifying a brand or sub-district for the full extents of the study area. Rather, southern Downtown is to be understood as approximately one-third of the geography of Houston's Central Business District.

EMERGING AREAS OF ACTIVITY

As a whole, the study area does not have a single dominant character or use. Rather, through the examination of existing documentation and site investigations, it is clear that there are several different areas of activity, both established and emerging.



Areas of Activity in southern Downtown

(source: Asakura Robinson)

- St. Joseph Medical Center
- YMCA Civic Area
- Co-Cathedral
- Office Corridor along Smith and Louisiana
- Convention District, including Toyota Center
- Shopping District
- Emerging Residential Area
- Transit

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EXISTING PLANS

GRBCC 2025 Master Plan

- (A)** Modify Avenida de las Americas
- (B)** Proposed Convention Center Expansion

Livable Centers Study

- (A)** Modify Avenida de las Americas
- (C)** Retail corridors with active ground floor use along Dallas
- (D)** Improve pedestrian crossings under US-59

(source: Downtown District and Asakura Robinson)

ULI TAP Report

- (F)** Designate Leeland, St. Joseph Parkway, Main Street and La Branch Street as pedestrian corridors
- (G)** Potential sites for a new park in southern Downtown

Downtown Shopping District

- (C)** Retail Corridor & Pedestrian Improvements along Dallas

TxDOT

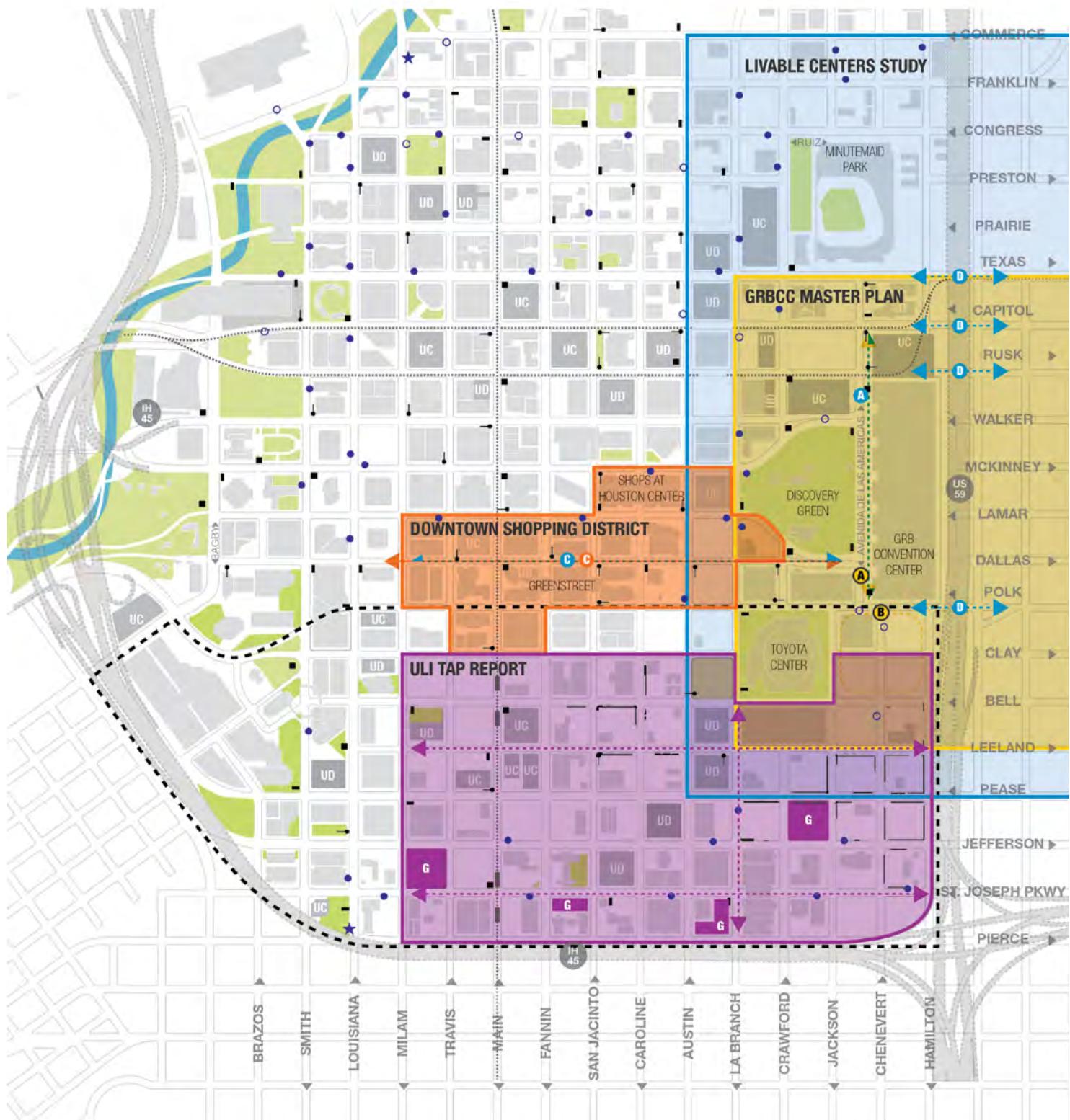
- Planned sidewalk improvements

Development Plans

- UC** Under Construction
- UD** Under Development

Wayfinding Improvements

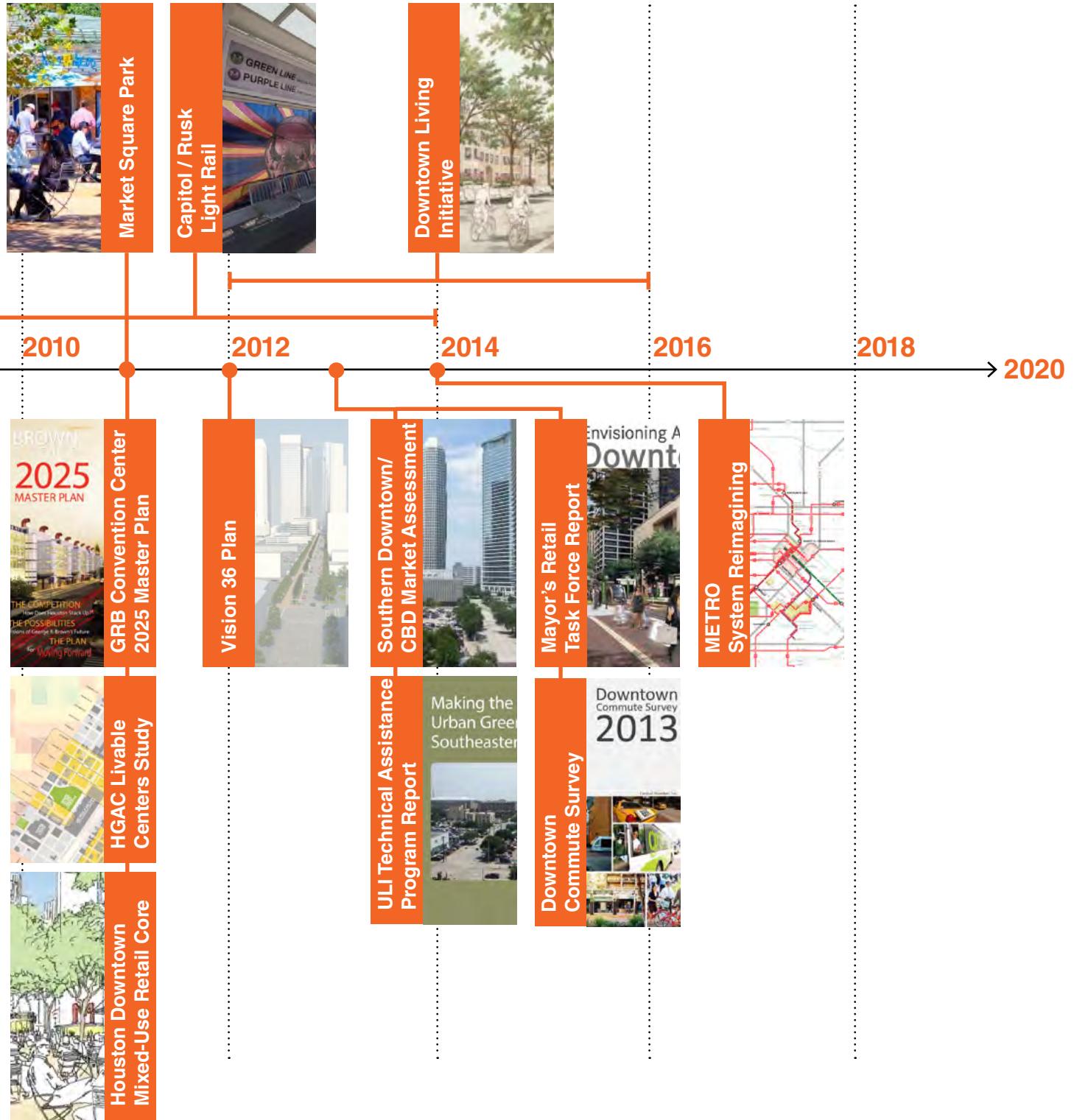
- ■ - Planned pedestrian wayfinding
- ★ ○ Planned vehicular wayfinding



PREVIOUS STUDIES AND PROJECTS FOR DOWNTOWN

Over the past decade, Downtown Houston has seen significant investment in both planning studies and public projects. The *Southern Downtown/CBD Public Realm Plan* builds upon these prior efforts that have shaped Downtown. Summaries of each plan are included in Appendix B.



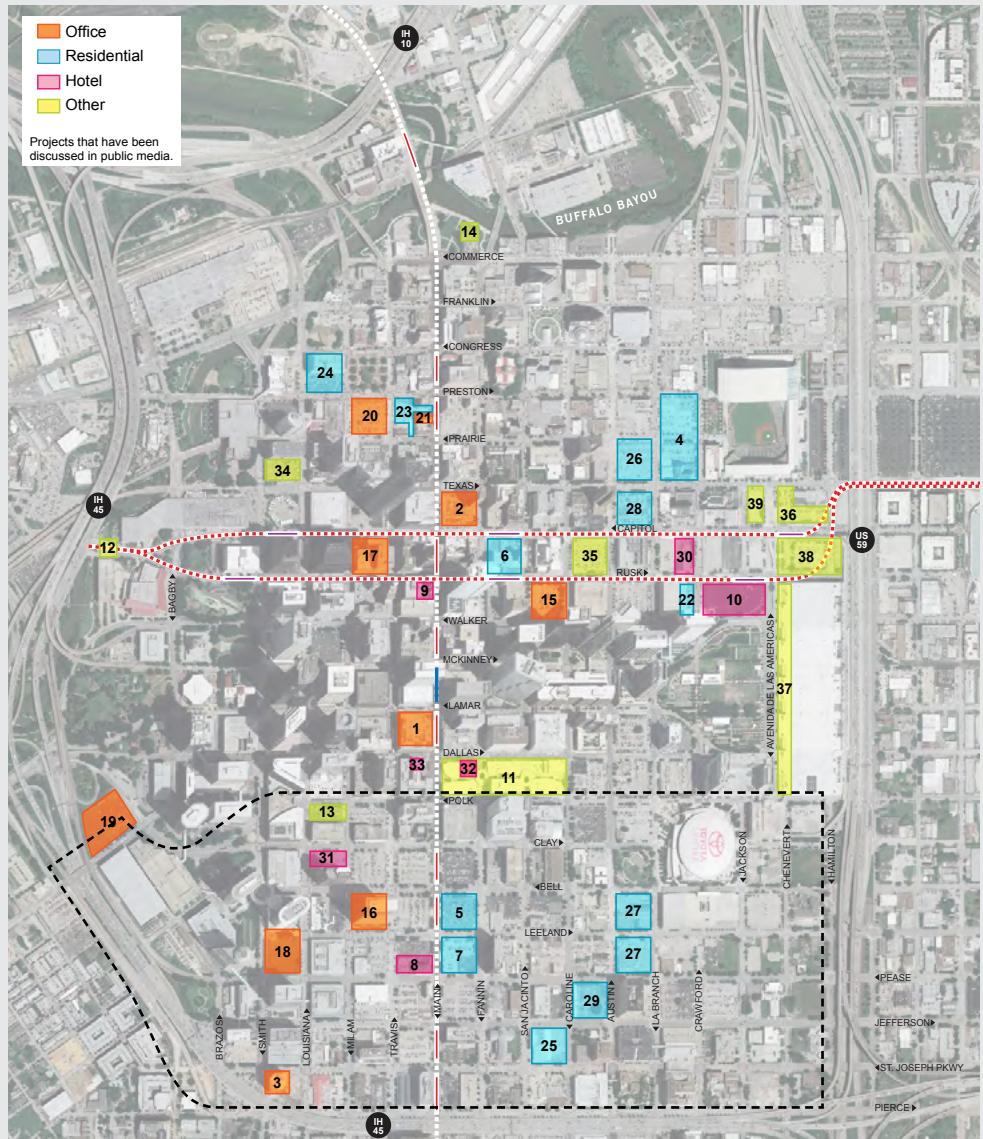


DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT: UNDER CONSTRUCTION AND PLANNED

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

Downtown is undergoing a significant building boom with 39 potential, planned, and under-construction developments or redevelopment sites.

(Map and table source: Downtown District. Projects are current as of June 2014)



As of June 2014, 39 major Downtown projects are in various stages of development. Within the study area, three office towers, two hotels, and one parking garage are in development west of Main Street. Five residential projects are in development east of Main Street, spanning six blocks and totaling 1,625 units, adding to the 445 units within three existing residential properties. This development trend confirms projections by earlier studies and strengthens the case that different areas of the public realm must support an increasingly diverse range of uses.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION		PLANNED (cont.)	
1	1111 Travis 24-story, 500,000 SF office tower. Developer: 1110 Main Partners, LP. Initial occupancy 4Q 2015. Est. completion 1Q 2016.	22	Block 98 39-story, 314-unit residential building, with 12 story garage podium. Developer: Trammell Crow. Est. construction start 1Q 2015. Est. completion 1Q 2017.
2	609 Main at Texas 48-story, 1,057 SF office tower. Developer: Hines. Est. completion 4Q 2016.	23	Hines Market Square 33-story, 289-unit residential building with ground floor retail and podium garage. Developer: Hines. Est. construction start 3Q 2014. Est. completion 3Q 2016.
3	Mickey Leland Federal Building Renovation of existing 22-story building. Est. completion 3Q 2014.	24	Market Square Tower 40-story, 463-unit residential building and renovation of existing garage. Developer: BMS. Est. construction start in 4Q 2014. Est. completion 1Q 2017.
4	500 Crawford 7-story, 397-unit residential building with ground floor retail and attached garage. Developer: The Finger Companies. Est. completion 3Q 2015.	25	Planned Residential 10-story, 302-unit residential building with 5 street-level live-work units. Developer: Allied Orion Group. Est. construction start 4Q 2014. Est. completion 3Q 2016.
5	Block 334 5-story, 207-unit residential building with underground garage. Developer: Alliance Residential Company. Est. completion 2Q 2015.	26	Planned Residential 28-story, 361-unit residential building with 13 street-level live-work units. Developer: Marquette Land Investment. Est. construction start 3Q 2014. Est. completion 4Q 2016
6	Old Texaco Building (1111 Rusk) Redevelopment of former office building into 323 residential units and attached garage. Est. completion 4Q 2015.	27	Planned Residential 21-story, 580-unit residential building. Developer: Camden Property Trust. Phase 1 est. construction start 1Q 2015 and est. completion 1Q 2017. Phase 2 est. construction start in 1Q 2017 and est. completion 1Q 2019.
7	SkyHouse Houston 24-story, 336-unit residential building with ground floor retail and detached garage. Developer: Novare Group. Est. completion 2Q 2014.	28	Planned Residential 6-story, 267-unit residential building. Developer: Trammell Crow Residential. Est. construction start 3Q 2014. Est. completion 1Q 2017.
8	Holiday Inn Redevelopment of the Savoy Hotel into a 215-key Holiday Inn Hotel. Developer: K&K Hotel Group. Est. completion 3Q 2014.	29	Planned Residential 5-story, 220-unit residential building. Developer: Leon Capital Group. Est. construction start 4Q 2014. Est. completion 2Q 2016
9	JW Marriott Redevelopment of the 1911 Carter Building into a 325-key hotel. Developer: Pearl Hospitality and HDT Hotels LLC. Est. completion 3Q 2014.	30	Hampton Inn / Homewood Suites 14-story, 168-key Hampton Inn and 132-key Homewood Suites. Developer: American Liberty Hospitality. Est. construction start 4Q 2014. Est. completion 1Q 2016.
10	Marriott Marquis Convention Center Hotel 29-story, 1,000-key hotel. Developer: Rida Development Corporation. Est. completion 3Q 2016.	31	Hilton Garden Inn 12-story, 230-key hotel. Developer: WEDGE Group Inc. Est. construction start 4Q 2014. Est. completion 1Q 2016.
11	GreenStreet Purchased and redeveloped by Midway. Under renovation.	32	Hotel Alessandra 25-story, 225-key hotel. Developer: Midway Companies Inc. Est. construction start 3Q 2014. Est. completion 3Q 2016.
12	METRORail Southeast & East End Lines New light rail lines extending 6.6 miles southeast of downtown and 3.3 miles east. Est. completion 3Q 2014.	33	SpringHill Suites Redevelopment of the Humble Building Apartments into SpringHill Suites 166-key hotel. Developer: RLJ Lodging Trust. Est. construction start 2Q 2014. Est. completion 2Q 2015.
13	Parking Garage 16-story, 1,600-space, tunnel-connected garage on 1/2 block. Developer: Trammell Crow for Wells Fargo Plaza. Est. completion 3Q 2015.	34	Alley Theater Complete restoration of historic performance hall. Est. construction start 2Q 2014. Est. completion 3Q 2015.
14	Sunset Coffee Building at Allen's Landing Renovation of the 3-story building constructed in 1910. Est. completion 3Q 2015.	35	High School for the Performing and Visual Arts Construction of a new magnet school by Houston Independent School District. Est. construction start 4Q 2014.
15	6 Houston Center 30-story, 600,000 SF office tower. Developer: Crescent. Est. construction start 2Q 2014. Est. completion 4Q 2016.	36	Nau Center for Texas Cultural Heritage 2-story, 60,000 SF cultural center. Est. construction start 4Q 2014. Est. completion 3Q 2016.
16	800 Bell Redevelopment 45-story, 1.4 million SF office tower. Purchase and redevelopment by Shorenor Properties. Est. construction start 2015.	37	GRB Convention Center Interior / Exterior Enhancements Substantial renovations for lobbies, retail and western facade; project includes improvements to Avenida de las Americas. Developer: Houston First Corporation. Est. construction start 4Q 2014. Est. completion 1Q 2016.
17	Capitol Tower 35-story, 700,000 SF office tower. Developer: Skanska. Construction start date not available.	38	GRB Convention Center North Garage 1900-car public parking facility with ground-floor retail. Developer: Houston First Corporation. Est. construction start 4Q 2014. Est. completion 1Q 2016.
18	Chevron Office Tower 50-story, 1.7 million SF tower. Est. construction start 2016.	39	Parking Garage 300-car parking facility for Incarnate Word Academy and Annunciation Catholic Church. Construction start date not available.
19	Five Allen Center 50-story, 1.2 million SF office tower. Developer: Brookfield. Construction start date not available.		
20	One Market Square 41-story, 750,000 SF office tower. Developer: Essex/Stream. Construction start date not available. Est. completion 1Q 2017.		
21	State National Bank Renovation of 14-story building constructed in 1928. Construction start date not available.		
PLANNED			

PUBLIC REALM MOMENTS





(image source: Asakura Robinson field research)

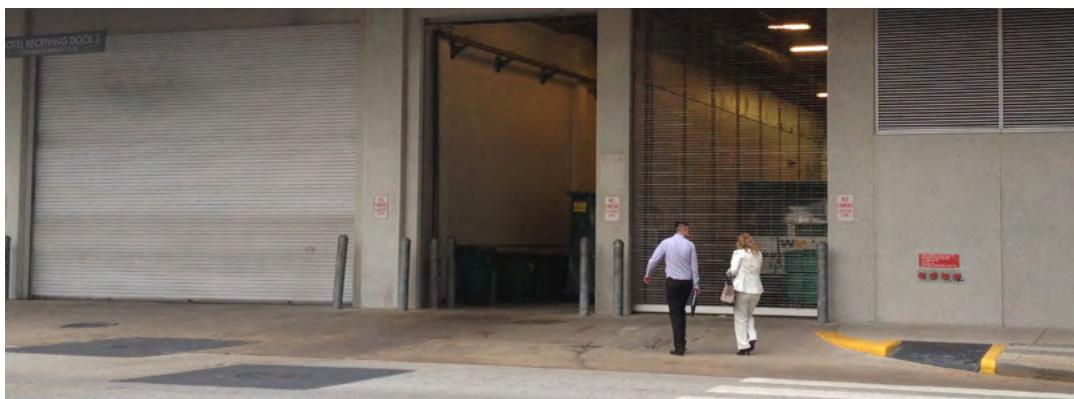
These “public realm moments” represent our current understanding of the prevailing uses and users of the streets, parks, pathways, and open spaces within the study area. The public realm consists of these publicly accessible spaces that allow for civic and common use.



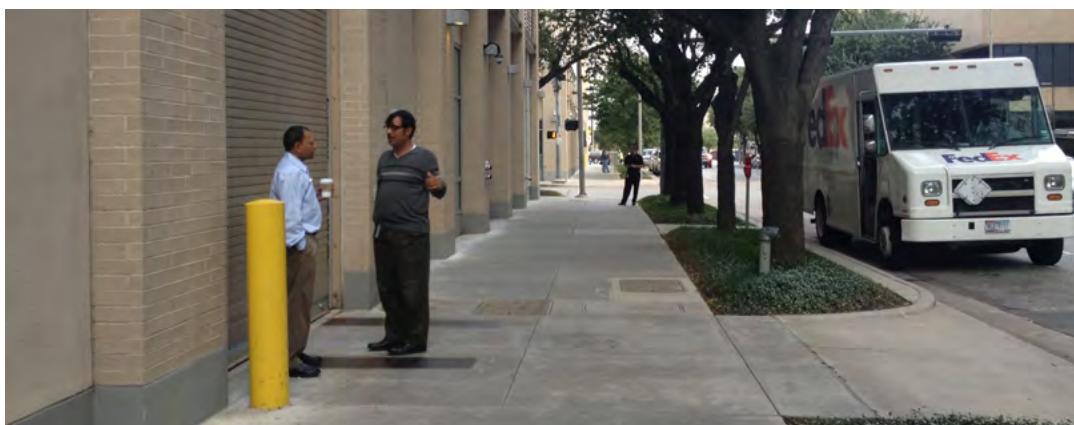
Downtown streets are designed primarily for traffic demand, bringing commuters in and out of the area during rush hour.



Cyclists may feel safer riding along sidewalks to avoid automobile traffic, which poses a concern for the safety of pedestrians. With the expansion of the B-cycle bike share program, bicycle trips between Downtown destinations are likely to increase.



Employees utilize the service entrance of their office building, where wide driveways create unappealing environments for pedestrians.



People on a work break enjoy the shade of street trees along a sidewalk, but lack a designated space with other amenities, such as seating or the availability of food for purchase.

Active bus stops can congest the sidewalk, as shelters provide shade and seating for a limited number of passengers.



Wide sidewalks allow for seating, and expand the usefulness of the public realm. By increasing the types of seating options, people can choose or arrange them into appropriate social configurations.



Ledges provide seating, but the lack of multiple seating options limits the usefulness and liveliness of the area.



(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

There is no singular or universal user or user group across Downtown. Users of the public realm come from all walks of life and are here for many different reasons. Our qualitative research has sought to identify the diversity of people who currently frequent the study area and the social places they visit. We have tried to see the existing public realm from the perspective of a lived experience: What are the ways that people use the public realm? Where are they coming from / going to? What are their public realm needs? The answers to these questions vary by day, time of day, time of week, and season of the year.

These “public realm moments” represent our current understanding of the prevailing uses and users of the streets, parks, pathways, and open spaces within the study area. The public realm consists of these publicly accessible spaces that allow for civic and common use. In planning for the future of southern Downtown, this plan seeks to address the current and potential users that may not have public places within southern Downtown today, but may in the future.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACES





(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

The most successful parks are designed to provide active and passive programs that appeal to many users.

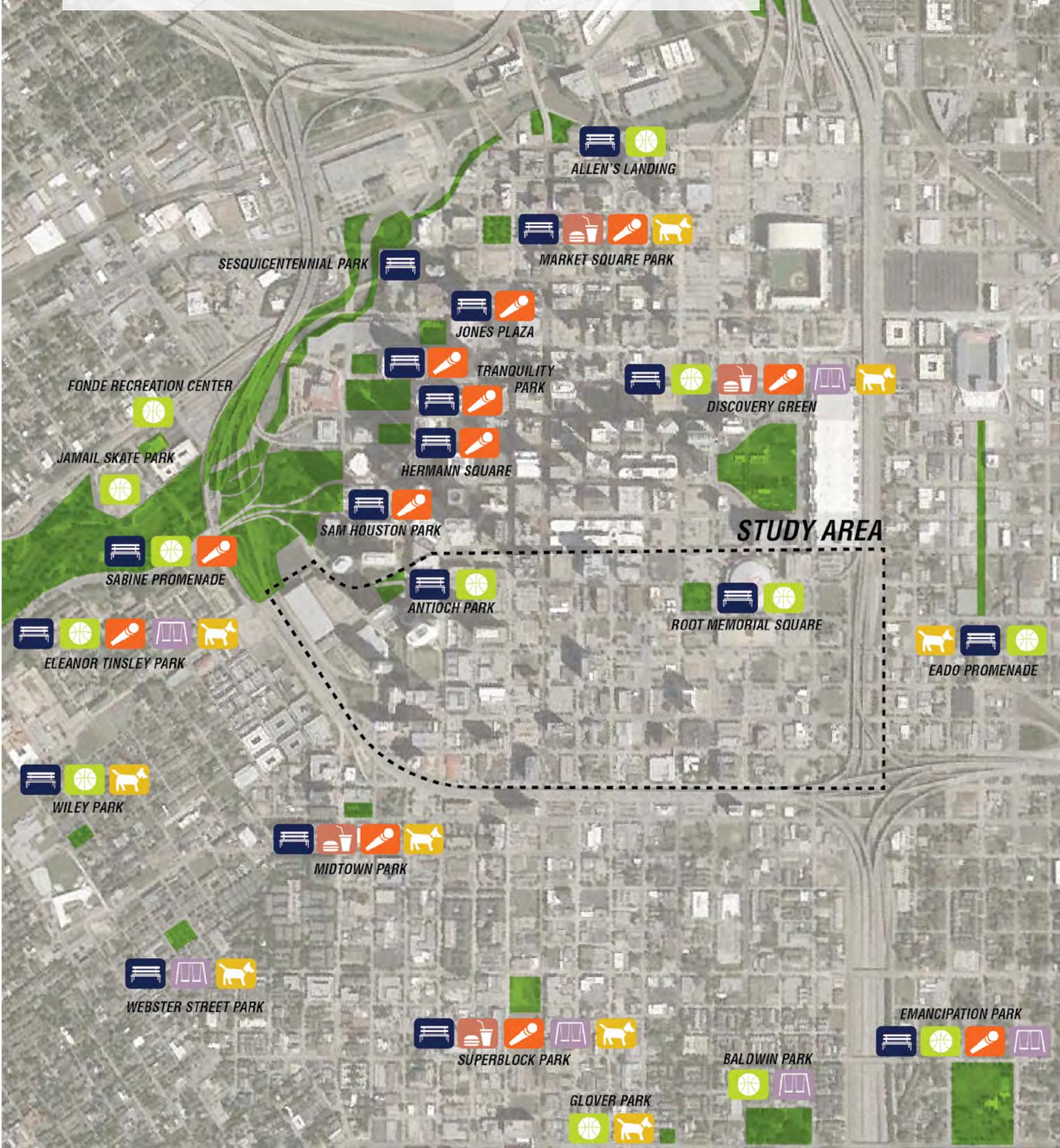
PARKS AND PROGRAMS NEAR SOUTHERN DOWNTOWN

Downtown Houston and the surrounding neighborhoods have a wealth of existing and planned parks and open spaces, ranging from regional destinations to smaller neighborhood amenities.

(source: Asakura Robinson field research)



JAMES BUTE PARK



EXISTING PARK CONDITIONS: ADJACENT TO THE STUDY AREA

Our field research examines existing parks within and adjacent to the study area, paying particular attention to the variety of program offerings at these sites. The research focused on three main tasks: to take stock of the current park program offerings within southern Downtown, to better understand the larger park context in which southern Downtown is located, and to identify trends in park programming that might be applicable to existing or future park sites in southern Downtown.

Six prevalent types of park programs most applicable to southern Downtown:



Passive Use: areas for sitting, reading, and lounging.



Recreation: hardscape or softscape areas for team sports and individual practice.



Food Service: restaurant, café, or concession operations with or without seating.



Performance: stage or amphitheater areas that provide a venue for scheduled performances or encourage spontaneous performances.



Playground: climbing structures, splash parks, swings, and other structures that encourage play and exercise for children and adults.



Dog Park: enclosed areas designated as open running space for dogs with casual sitting or standing space for their owners.

Looking beyond the boundary of the study area, our field research identified a wide array of existing and proposed parks in close proximity to southern Downtown. While these parks may not be close enough to have a direct impact on the study area, they provide an impressive glimpse of how parks have effectively spurred development and redefined urban areas elsewhere in Houston. Additionally, these parks provide a context for the range of trends in park programming that may be applicable to southern Downtown at a variety of scales. The most notable parks investigated just beyond the study area are Discovery Green, Eleanor Tinsley Park, Market Square Park, Sesquicentennial Park, the proposed park at Midtown's superblock, and



Antioch Park (left) and Root Memorial Square (right) are the only two public parks within the southern Downtown study area.

(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

Emancipation Park (currently under renovation). Looking at these parks in aggregate, it is clear that their success as well-used destinations depends heavily on their ability to provide a connective mix of programs and strong relationships with surrounding development and communities. In short, the most successful parks are designed to provide programs and amenities that attract an array of user groups with clear intent regarding the potential market.

EXISTING PARK CONDITIONS: WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

Existing park amenities in southern Downtown are minimal, with just two parks offering limited programming. We observed the following:

Antioch Park, located on Smith Street in close proximity to several high-rise office buildings and adjacent to the historic Antioch Baptist Church, is a well-maintained, primarily passive-use park. The site features an unusual topography for the area — a large grassy knoll — which is bookended by a pair of very large mature oak trees, a hardscape plaza, and an oddly situated but very popular half-court basketball area. The basketball hoop is technically located on the grounds of the adjacent Antioch Church while the court is within the park grounds. The hardscape plaza features concrete seat walls and benches. The space was well-used on a typical weekday afternoon by workers on break from the adjacent office towers. The grassy knoll framed by several evenly spaced mid-size trees at its perimeter, though quite idyllic, was sparsely used on a typical weekday afternoon.

Root Memorial Square, a full-block park located adjacent to Toyota Center, is a well-maintained site offering both active- and passive-use areas. A recently upgraded stadium-style basketball court with glass backboards is the centerpiece of the park, which was extremely well-used on a typical weekend afternoon. The rest of the park offers seating areas, a small shade pavilion, decorative plantings, a permanent public art installation, and a grassy lawn large enough for other active uses. Despite its ample space, well-maintained appearance, and close proximity to several major Downtown destinations, the park does not meet its full potential, due to limited promotion, programming and the lack of connection to surrounding development, which would otherwise attract park users.

TYPOLOGIES: PRIVATE PARKS AND PLAZAS



Raised Entry Plaza (800 Bell)



Sunken Entry Plaza (KBR Building)



Street-Level Entry Plaza (Chevron Building - Block 922)



Decorative Plaza (Chevron Building - Block 909)



City Park (Sisters of Charity Park)



Entry Park (St. Joseph Women's Center)

(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

EXISTING PRIVATELY OWNED OPEN SPACE CONDITIONS:

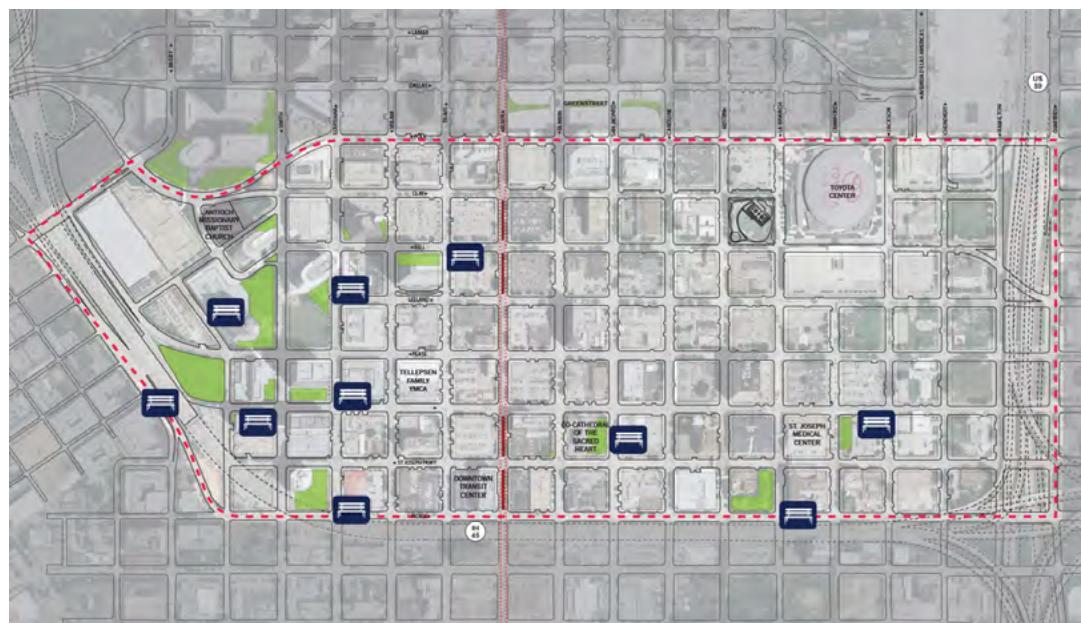
Though not explicitly within the scope of this study, privately owned open spaces are a defining feature of the study area and impossible to ignore when documenting the existing public realm. These spaces are publicly accessible, and often seamless with public sidewalks, but privately managed by adjacent property owners. Typically taking the form of hardscape or softscape plazas, these spaces are generally very well maintained but poorly defined as or designed to be public amenities. In many cases, these spaces serve as attractive entryways for high-rise office buildings. Despite these observations, the privately owned open spaces of southern Downtown offer a clear case of an underutilized asset to the public realm.

Existing Privately Owned Public Spaces in southern Downtown.

Private: 295,000 SF Public: 125,000 SF



(source: Asakura Robinson field research)

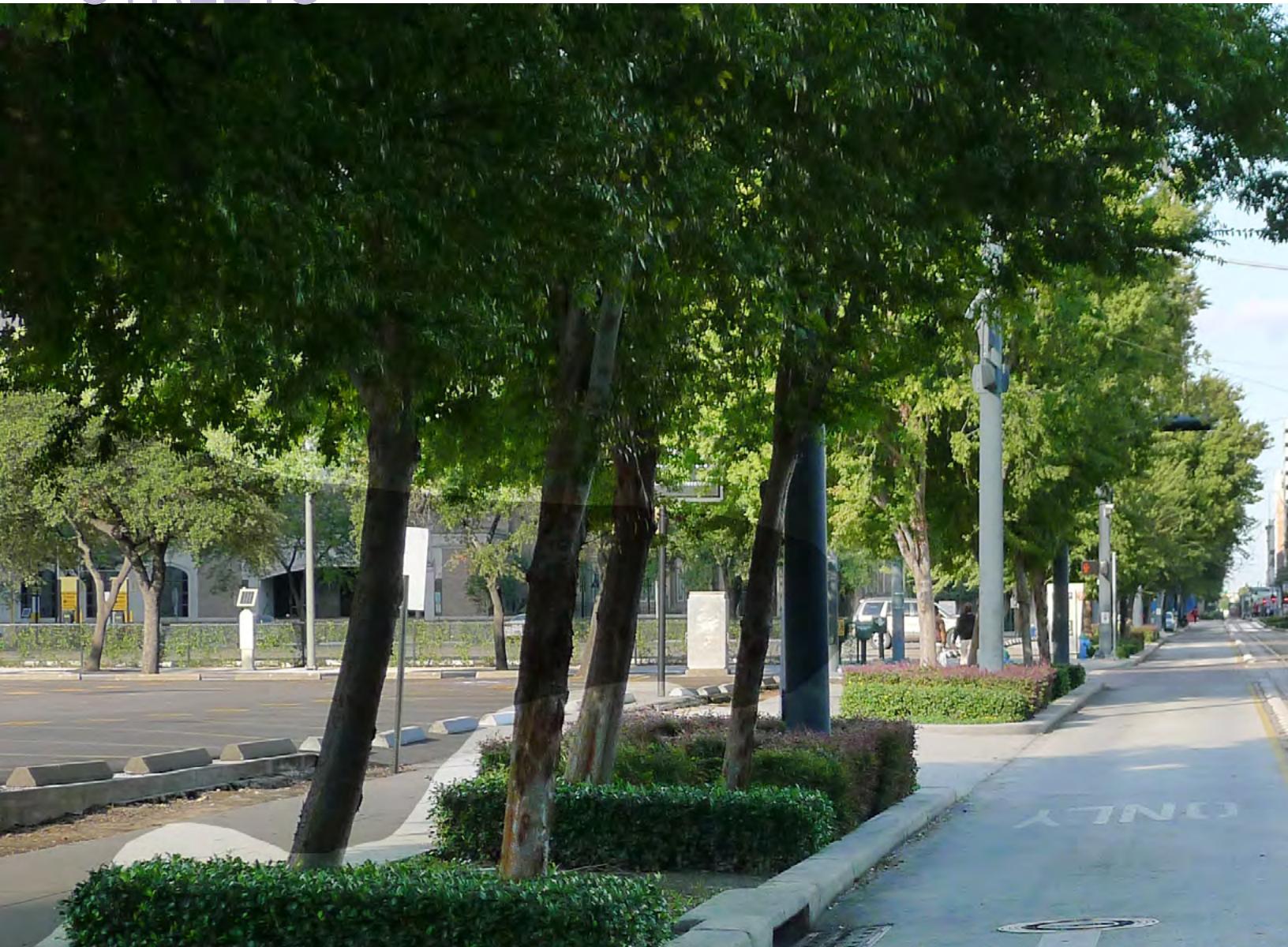


"High Plains Drifter" by Peter Reginato is a public art piece at Two Allen Center provided by artsBrookfield.

(source: artsBrookfield)

A curiosity of how these spaces could be better leveraged for the public life of southern Downtown led us to survey some of the best precedents of privately owned open spaces from other cities, both well-established places like Rockefeller Center and Paley Park in New York City, and the newly renovated Mint Plaza in San Francisco, as well as Brookfield's art initiative that programs private plaza spaces throughout the world. While these spaces vary dramatically in scale and context, they reveal that privately owned open spaces can and should be considered a significant component to the public realm. When designed for public use, these spaces often become vital urban amenities and add value to surrounding development. Moreover, the precedents suggest a variety of best practices for achieving an active and vibrant private public realm. In comparison, our survey of the privately owned open spaces of southern Downtown reveals a variety of practices seemingly intended to limit activity in these spaces.

STREETS





(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

Downtown streets must accommodate many different contexts and activities using different configurations of traffic lanes, streetscapes, and transit infrastructure. This section of Main Street accommodates light rail, pedestrians, and cars while creating a safe and appealing environment.

STREET TYPOLOGIES AND INTENSITY OF USE

Despite the significant differences that can be observed in the land uses, intensity of activity, and differences in the volume of traffic on various streets, the physical right-of-way on streets throughout the study area shows remarkably little variation. A grid of alternating one-way streets defines the study area. Typically, north-south streets have five lanes and east-west streets have four lanes.



*Fannin Street:
This street section, with an 80 foot right-of-way and five lanes is typical of the study area. Sections and a complete profile for all streets in the study area can be found in Appendix A.*

(source: Google Earth and Asakura Robinson)

However, existing data on traffic and transit volumes reveals significant differences within southern Downtown. North-south streets west of San Jacinto Street carry the highest volume of automobile and bus traffic, with Louisiana and Smith Streets carrying the greatest amount, followed by Fannin and San Jacinto Streets. Lower volumes of traffic on the north-south streets in the eastern portion of the study area are at least partially attributable to the lower levels of development, the lack of connectivity to central and northern Downtown, and lower levels of connectivity to the regional highway system.

Apart from Pierce Street and a short section of St. Joseph Parkway, the east-west streets carry significantly less traffic. Likewise, the volume of bus traffic, both local and Park and Ride service, reveals that significantly more traffic and individual boardings occur on the western side of the study area, especially on Smith, Louisiana, Milam, and Travis Streets.

Despite these drastic differences in the volume of traffic and transit across different parts of southern Downtown, the right-of-way is generally 80 feet. While this dimension is fixed, there are opportunities to respond to different contexts within the study area using different configurations of traffic lanes, streetscapes, and transit infrastructure.

24-Hour Traffic Counts.



(source: Downtown District, 2012)



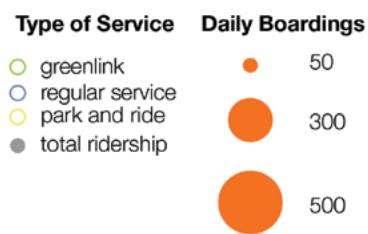
Street Hierarchy: Scheduled Bus Trips/Hr (AM).



(source: Downtown District, 2012)



Transit Ridership: Average Daily Boardings.

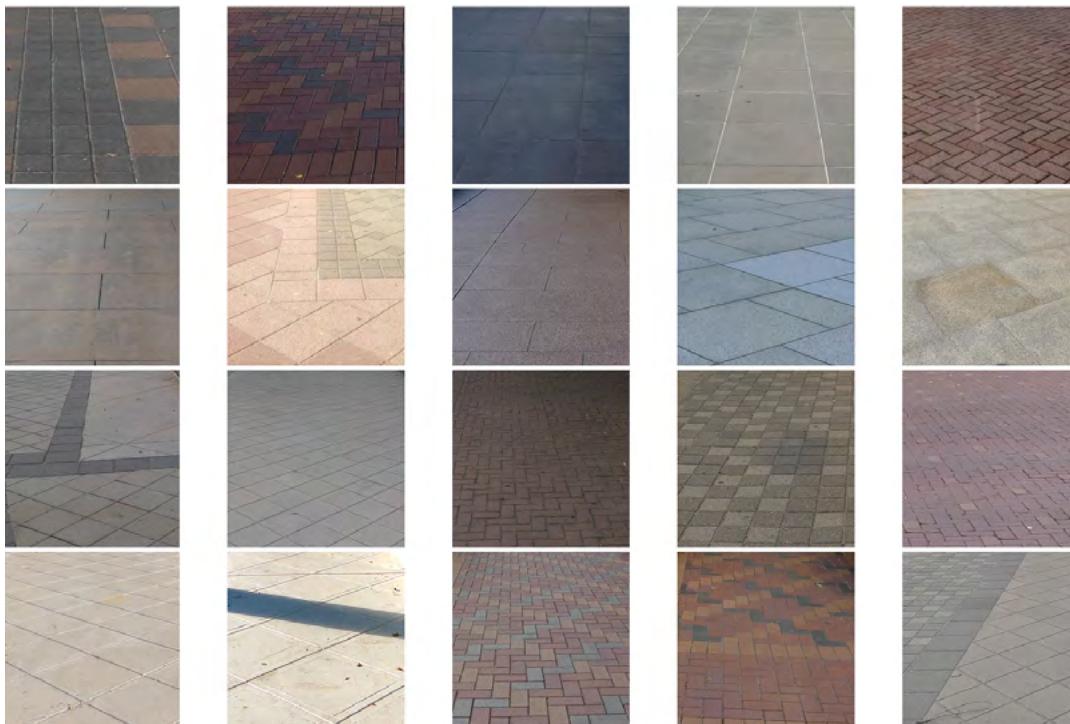


(source: Downtown District, 2012)



STREETSCAPE CONDITIONS: AREA-WIDE OBSERVATIONS

While analyzing the public realm, we photographed the study area both systematically and idiosyncratically. We evaluated existing conditions for nearly every block of the study area, cataloging features such as building entrances, landscaping, paving, street parking, and furnishings. We measured the width of nearly every sidewalk and spent time in the existing parks and open spaces of southern Downtown.



Southern Downtown has many distinctive sidewalk paving patterns.

(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

The streetscape conditions of southern Downtown are best characterized as inconsistent. Within the same study area, one will find lavish sidewalk treatments defined by custom paving and site furnishings, manicured landscaping and boutique lighting fixtures, as well as derelict sidewalks that have become nearly fallow due to lack of attention and a high vacancy of adjacent property. However, between these extremes are a variety of quality streetscape treatments that seem poised for new development. There are, for example, many street blocks with sidewalk width over 16 feet, excellent paving conditions, and frequently a tree canopy that could be the envy of other cities. In other words, despite its varied conditions, southern Downtown is distinguished by streetscapes with “good bones.”

An inventory of paving materials throughout the study area.

Solid sidewalk infrastructure does not always pair up with its adjoining land use or level of activity. Often, wide refurbished sidewalks adjoin massive full block surface parking lots, parking garages, or opaque building facades. In other cases, public sidewalks merge seamlessly with privately-managed open spaces to create hybrid public spaces whose program and function are not entirely clear. On many blocks, the only defining feature might be an extremely active bus shelter.



(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

- █ *concrete*
- █ *concrete w/ grass strip*
- █ *concrete and pavers*
- █ *pavers*
- █ *unique to building*



(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

Amid these varied conditions that often seem to change from block to block, some patterns emerge. The Main Street corridor is the most evident pattern as it boasts the longest consistent stretch of high-standard streetscape in the study area. Generally speaking, as one moves east-west across the study area, the sidewalk standard shifts at Fannin Street, with a higher standard to the west and a lower standard to the east. Transcending this pattern, however, is the fact that updated streetscape design throughout the study area is often closely linked to adjacent development with sidewalk treatments often taking cues from the building architecture of anchor property tenants. This is evident on all high-rise blocks, as well as around the Co-Cathedral, YMCA, METRO building and Transit Center, and Toyota Center, and within St. Joseph Medical Center. It appears that this pattern will continue based on the available plans of new developments for southern Downtown such as SkyHouse and Block 334.

SIDEWALK STANDARDS:

Sidewalk Width, Landscaping, Paving, and Street Furnishings

Active Ground Floor Use

Good



retail entrance

Fair

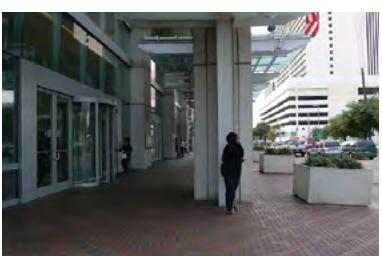


residential entrance

Poor



office / institutional entrance



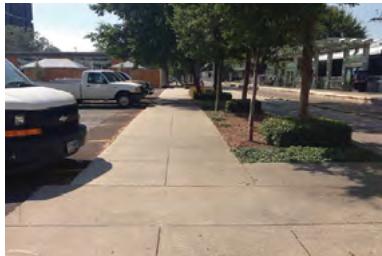
public park / private open space



service entrance



surface parking / garage / vacant lot



(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research, Google)

STREETSCAPE CONDITIONS: TYPOLOGIES

Within the varied set of conditions that define southern Downtown's streetscapes, certain typologies can be established. Through field research that focused on defining design features of the study area's individual street block frontages and predominant ground floor uses, a matrix has been created that aims to typify streetscapes based on these criteria. The intention of this matrix is to better understand how streetscapes and land use can be better married to improve the public realm of southern Downtown, as well as identify specific areas for intervention. The streetscape typologies are organized as follows:

- **Active Streetscape:** street frontage employing good sidewalk standards and predominantly active ground floor use.
- **Priority Streetscape:** street frontage employing poor or fair sidewalk standard and predominantly active ground floor use.
- **Potential Streetscape:** street frontage employing good sidewalk standard and predominantly inactive ground floor use.
- **Service Streetscape:** street frontage employing poor or fair sidewalk standard and predominantly service-oriented entrance at ground floor.
- **Idle Streetscape:** street frontage employing poor sidewalk standard and predominantly inactive ground floor use.

An example of a “potential streetscape” along Main Street.



(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

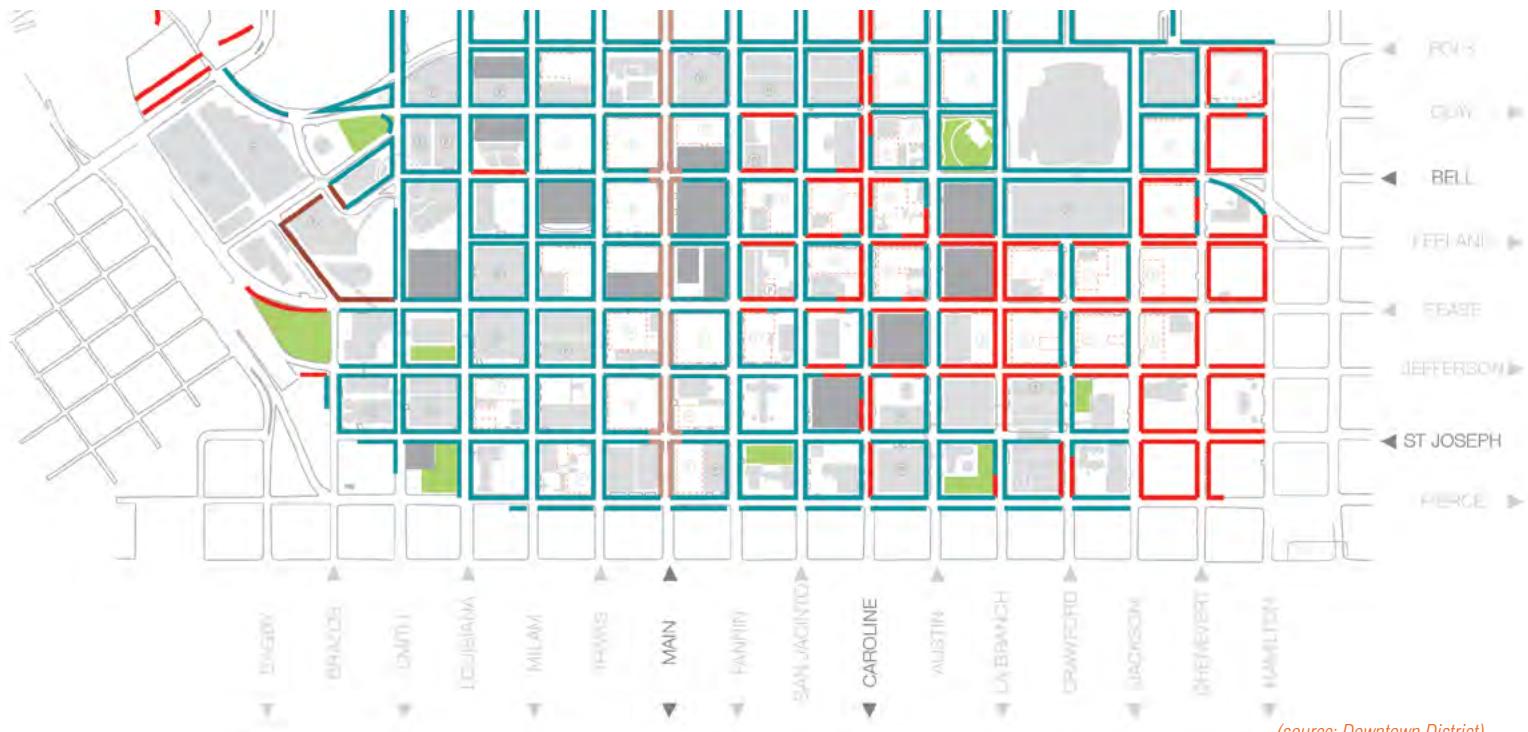


Within the study area, one will find lavish sidewalk treatments defined by custom paving and site furnishings, manicured landscaping, and boutique lighting fixtures, as well as derelict sidewalks that have become nearly fallow due to lack of attention and a high vacancy of adjacent property.



(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

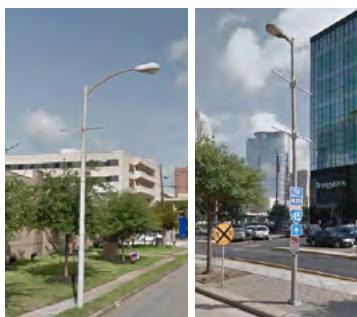
STREETSCAPE CONDITIONS: LIGHTING



(source: Downtown District)

Streetlight Typologies

- Constellation
- Cobra
- Main Street



Cobra (left) and Constellation (right) lighting.

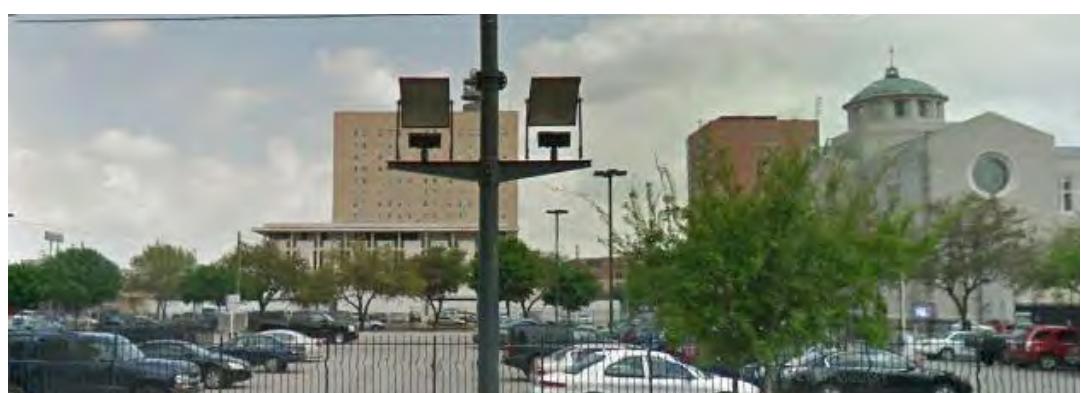
(image source: Google)

Custom lighting fixtures along Main Street provide a unique identity to the corridor; however, light levels have been identified as deficient.

(image source: Asakura Robinson field research)

Two types of streetlights are common in southern Downtown: Constellation and Cobra streetlights. Both are larger-scale streetlights that emphasize the need to light the streets for vehicles, rather than lighting the sidewalks for pedestrians. The primary difference between the 250-watt high-pressure sodium Cobra lights, seen mainly in the southern and eastern portions of the study area, and the newer 400-watt metal halide Constellation lights is that the latter emit a higher lighting standard with a visible improvement in the quality and color of light.

The only portion of the study area to receive special treatment is Main Street, which features contemporary reflective light sources that are lower to the ground and more appropriate to the needs of the pedestrian; however, the light levels have been identified as deficient and are subject to replacement as part of a 2015 Main Street capital improvement project of the Downtown Redevelopment Authority/ TIRZ No. 3.





VISION: The public realm will be a network of multi-functional streets, parks, and public places that connect and adapt to different nodes, and support diverse activities and neighborhoods.

(image source: Asakura Robinson)



CONCEPTUAL PLAN

Downtown Houston is increasingly a stage for a diverse range of urban activities at all times of the day, rather than simply a destination for working commuters. With the expansion of the public transit system, people from surrounding neighborhoods will have improved access to Downtown jobs, retail, entertainment, and recreational amenities. Substantial amounts of new residential development in Downtown Houston – catalyzed by the Downtown Living Initiative – will create a growing need for amenities that have not typically been provided in the area.

However, from our observations and conversations with stakeholders, it is equally clear that the network of streets in the study area is still heavily **mono-functional**, designed primarily to channel commuters in and out of Downtown during rush hour. And with the lack of vibrant, accessible parks and open spaces, visitors are not enticed to stay longer to enjoy and explore the area.

In order to promote desired activities and urban lifestyles, Downtown street life needs to be supported by a public realm comprised of **multi-functional** places and streets that people enjoy visiting and moving through, with an emphasis on slower moving pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

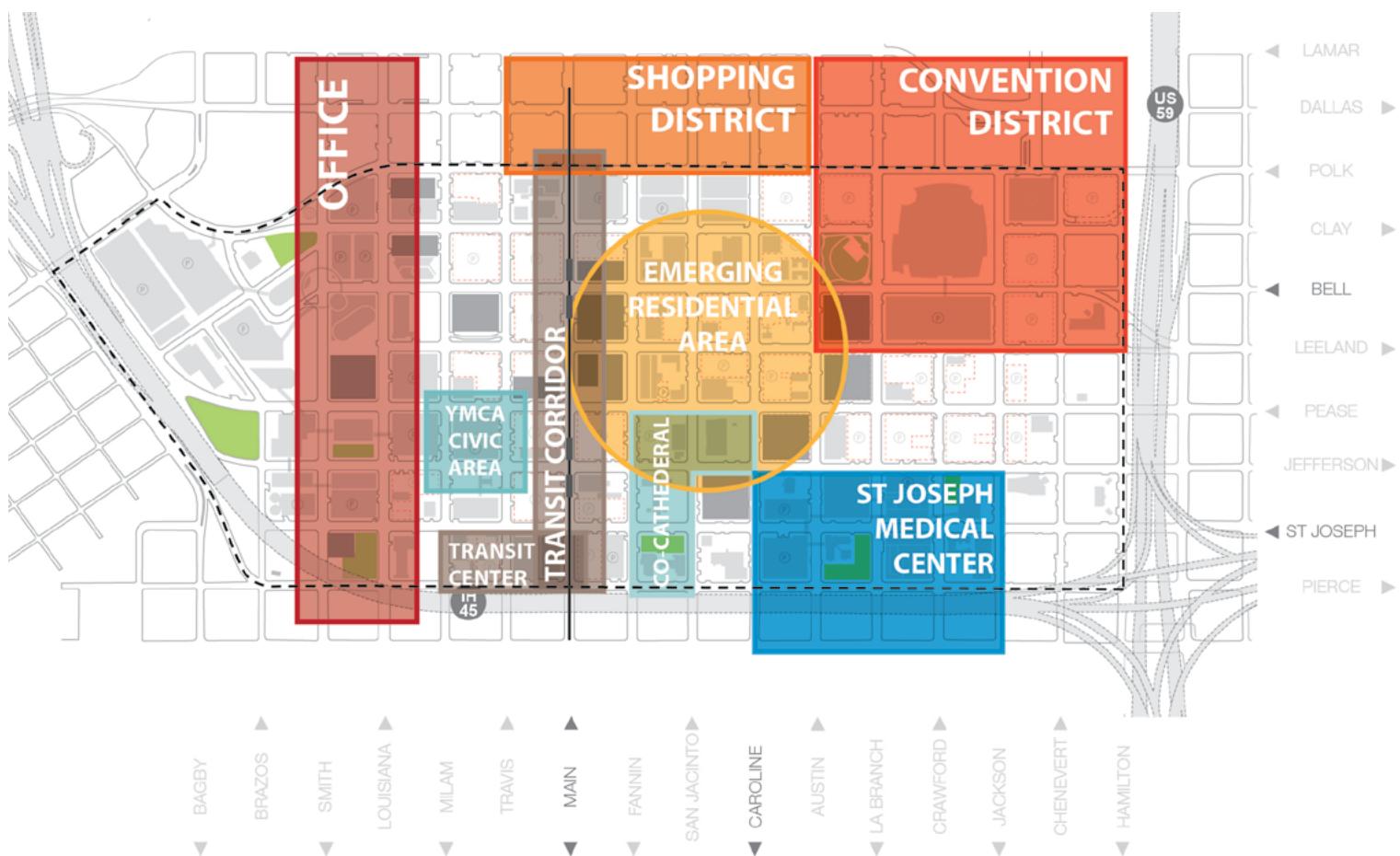
Responding to these trends, the vision for the southern Downtown public realm will draw on synergies between emerging areas of activity and existing conditions. This framework supports the strategies outlined in this plan, which reflect a new vision:

The public realm will be a network of multi-functional streets, parks, and public places that connect and adapt to different nodes, and support diverse activities and neighborhoods.

The public realm must serve a variety of purposes: to move goods and people efficiently, and establish spaces for informal moments and grand celebrations. Our streets and public spaces should connect people and places, be supportive of resident lifestyle choices and Downtown workforce needs, and attract visitors. In turn, the private realm can respond by reinforcing a sense of place in southern Downtown, creating destinations that become a part of people's mental map and are enjoyed as part of daily living.

SUPPORTING EMERGING DEVELOPMENT

The existing and emerging areas of activity will serve as anchors in southern Downtown. Connections must be improved to create an environment that is inviting to potential users. The challenge is to strengthen these centers and improve connections where voids contribute to an erratic and unappealing experience. A combination of infill development and public realm improvements will help achieve a density of uses that knit the existing and emerging anchors together to create a more cohesive and vibrant area.



Areas of Activity in southern Downtown.

- St. Joseph Medical Center
- YMCA Civic Area
- Co-Cathedral
- Office Corridor along Smith and Louisiana
- Convention District, including Toyota Center
- Shopping District
- Emerging Residential Area
- Transit

OVERALL GOALS

In order to guide future investments and provide a framework for evaluation, the following goals have been developed to support the overall vision for the public realm in southern Downtown:



MOVEMENT

Public and private investments in southern Downtown should focus on distinctive streetscapes and park spaces that promote a variety of experiences and activities.



USE

In response to existing conditions and emerging development, define new public realm improvements that generate a more vibrant place.



PERCEPTION

Enhance the experience of southern Downtown through a network of public spaces, streets, and landmarks.

SIX STRATEGIES

The following strategies have been developed to address the overall goals presented previously. Different strategies work at various scales and timeframes, and will complement and reinforce each other to establish multi-functional streets, vibrant activity centers, and a network of memorable places throughout southern Downtown.



1

CLASSIFY STREETS BY MODE OF TRAVEL

A variety of street sections throughout the study area provides the opportunity for each activity to have a distinctive urban experience. Creating street classifications by travel mode will minimize conflict between modes and improve network legibility. While streets are and will be designed to ensure better safety and comfort for a primary mode, all streets will be inherently multi-functional.

2

DESIGN AND PROGRAM DISTINCTIVE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Parks and open spaces serve as common reference points and meeting places for shared experiences. A combination of new parks and retrofitted open spaces will anchor new development clusters and emerging activity areas. These open spaces will create memorable landmarks that are supportive of surrounding uses and promote increased activity through park design and programming.

3

ACTIVATE PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLIC SPACES

Privately owned public spaces are a significant component of the study area and cannot be ignored when documenting the existing public realm. These spaces are publicly accessible, and often seamless with public sidewalks, but privately managed by existing adjacent property owners and managers. By adding site furnishings and programming, these plazas can become local landmarks, creating prestige for their owners and tenants, while creating an amenity for employees, residents and Downtown visitors.

4

RETROFIT AND IMPROVE STREETWALLS

By retrofitting blocks and streetwalls that are designed primarily for cars and parking, the quality of space along sidewalks can be improved to create an appealing environment for pedestrians where the needs of automobiles have traditionally been prioritized. This strategy includes both design guidelines to increase comfort and aesthetic appeal, as well as ideas for semi-permanent retail to create destinations that increase foot traffic until future development is realized.

5

CREATE KEY CONNECTIONS ACROSS HIGHWAY EDGES

Addressing the barrier created by the major highways at the perimeter of the study area will strengthen connections between southern Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. Inviting gateways that encourage residents of the surrounding area to visit Downtown and vice versa will support new activities and create a more vibrant street life.

6

SET THE STAGE FOR FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

A long-term strategy for the southeastern portion of Downtown Houston must begin with short- and medium-term improvements of underutilized blocks. Through site rehabilitation and infrastructure investment, the area can be restored for existing site users, where future infill development will create an anchor to connect with and support other activity zones.

1 CLASSIFY STREETS BY MODE OF TRAVEL

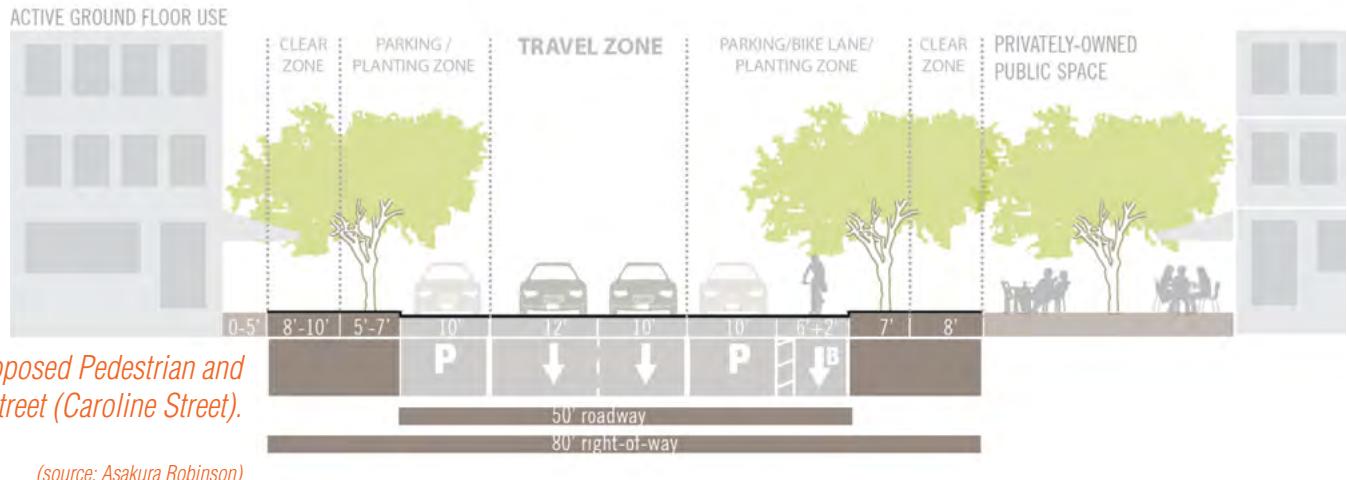


While every Downtown street is intrinsically multi-modal, a variety of different configurations within the 80-foot right-of-way can create a network that equitably accommodates all modes of transportation. The application of varying street sections throughout the study area provides the opportunity for each activity center to have a distinctive experience. Classifying specific streets to prioritize different travel modes will minimize conflicts and improve network legibility. This strategy will complement the existing urban design and mobility classifications that guide both public and private investment.

Streets that prioritize automobile traffic remain on the west side of the study area, emphasizing access to major highways and the needs of commuters. Austin (northbound) and Caroline (southbound) Streets, already designated as bicycle routes, will feature improved bicycle facilities, as will Bell (westbound) and Leeland (eastbound) Streets. Caroline, Bell, and St Joseph, with their collection of important destinations, provide major pedestrian routes across southern Downtown. These street sections emphasize dominant modes of travel to provide hybrid travel options between multiple modes.

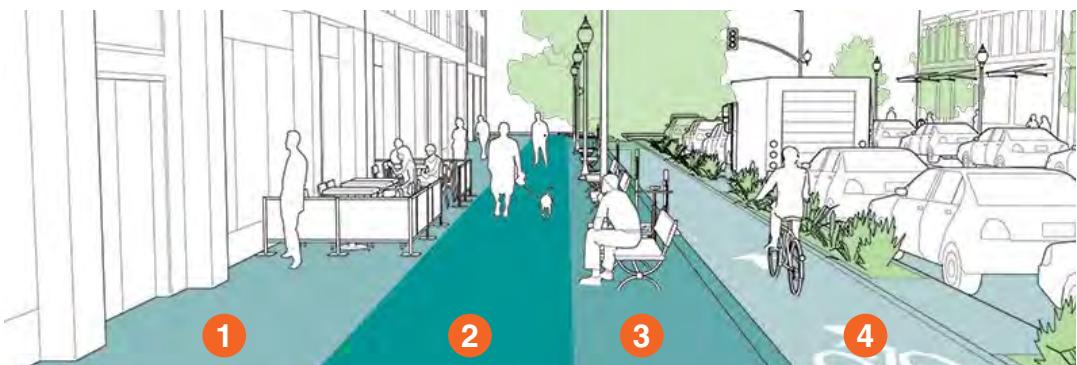


PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLE STREETS



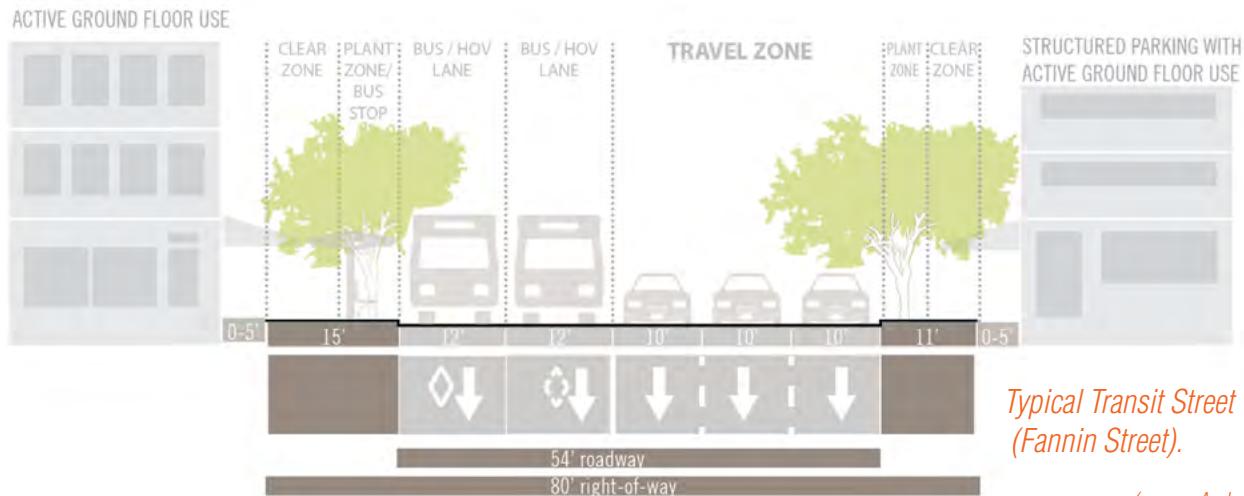
The components of sidewalks and bikeways.

(image source: NACTO)



- 1 Frontage Zone:** Immediately adjacent to the building facade, the frontage zone serves as an extension of the building's use, providing space for sidewalk cafés, information boards, etc.
- 2 Pedestrian Through Zone:** The through zone or pathway, running parallel to the roadway, should provide eight to ten feet for pedestrians to move safely.
- 3 Street Furniture Zone:** Located along the curb, the street furniture zone provides space for street lighting, utility poles, tree wells, bike parking, benches, transit stop shelters, litter receptacles, and rain gardens.
- 4 Bikeway:** The bikeway should be at least six feet wide, preferably with a two-foot buffer separating cyclists from automobile traffic.

TRANSIT STREET



(source: Asakura Robinson)

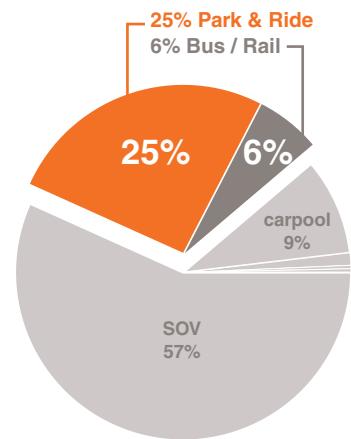
While the most prominent example of transit in Downtown is the METRORail along Main Street, local and commuter buses that run on several other streets are equally significant. Because Main Street is currently the subject of an ongoing capital improvement project (see pages 82-84), this study focuses on the bus system.

Most local and commuter routes run on Smith, Louisiana, Milam, Fannin and Travis Streets, with a few lines along St. Joseph Parkway and Pierce Street. The heaviest ridership occurs during the morning and evening commute times. Thus the main challenges are to ensure that buses experience limited impact from automobile traffic while accommodating the large number of riders walking to and waiting at stops.

Roadway: Transit priority lanes should be 11 to 12 feet wide, and are designated physically and/ or visually to prevent automobile drivers from crossing into the transit lane.

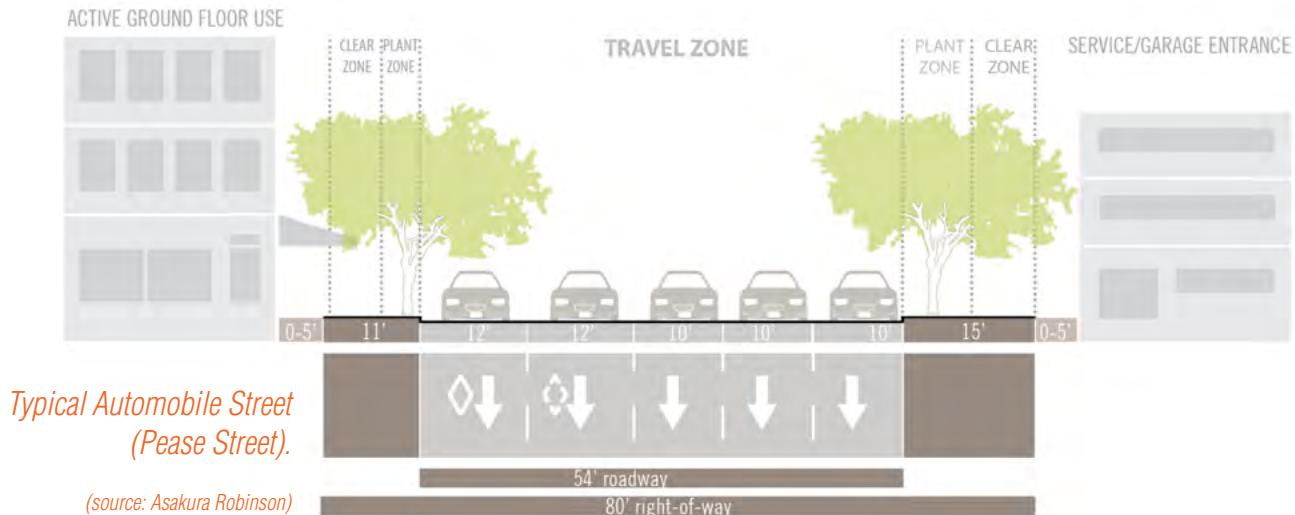
Pedestrian Realm: Because transit stops generate pedestrian activity, transit streets are also inherently pedestrian streets and should be designed with wide sidewalks and adequate street furniture. Due to large surges in ridership during peak hours, the potential for larger waiting areas with amenities should be explored, especially at the commuter bus stops.

*A substantial amount of
Downtown employees
commute to work by transit.*



(source: Central Houston Inc.
2013 Commute Survey Report)

AUTOMOBILE STREET



Current right-of-way configurations are predominantly automobile-oriented, and require little adjustment. These corridors are designed to provide mobility in order to help drivers navigate through Downtown, and connect highway exits to major parking facilities.

Automobile Priority Streets should provide easy ingress and egress to highways through directions indicated by pavement markings, vehicular wayfinding, and posted signage. As drivers exit highways into Downtown streets, they should assume slower speeds, which can be promoted by employing traffic calming techniques.

Establishing clear and visible parking garage signage will help prevent drivers from circling blocks and contributing to traffic congestion. In addition, conflict between garage entrances and the pedestrian realm can be mitigated through physical and visual design techniques to warn users of each others' presence.

2 DESIGN AND PROGRAM DISTINCTIVE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Distinctive open spaces will anchor new developments and emerging activity zones by creating memorable landmarks that are supportive of surrounding uses and promote increased activity through park design and programming. By also improving the usefulness and attractiveness of other existing open spaces, a network can be developed to expand open space accessibility for everyday use.



(source: Asakura Robinson field research)

These open spaces serve as common reference points and meeting places for shared experiences, where people develop an identity and sense of place. They should appeal to a variety of users and be comfortable for all ages. Users may include neighborhood residents, people on lunch break or lingering after work, visiting families, and shoppers.

Although southern Downtown has a significant amount of open spaces, the vast majority provide only passive uses with some opportunities for recreation, such as basketball. Partnerships with existing land owners and operators will be necessary to improve the design and program that is provided in open space throughout the study area. Sites of varying sizes have been identified within each emerging activity zone to create a network of attractive open spaces to serve as extensions of the public realm.

Existing Open Spaces within the Study Area

Open Space	Size	Activity Center	Programs	
			Existing	Proposed
Brookfield Park ¹	2 acres	Commercial Office Corridor		
Co-Cathedral Plaza	0.75 acres	Co-Cathedral, Transit Center		
Sisters of Charity Park ²	0.85 acres	St. Joseph Medical Center		
Root Memorial Square	1.8 acres	Toyota Center		
Antioch Park	0.75 acres	Commercial Office Corridor		

- Passive Use
- Recreation
- Food Service
- Performance
- Playground
- Dog Park

Proposed Open Spaces within the Study Area

Activity Center	Size	Proposed Programs
Emerging Residential Zone ³	0.3 - 2 acres	
YMCA Parklet	0.005 acres	
Transit-Oriented Parklet	0.005 acres	
Underpass Park ¹	1.8 - 1.9 acres	

Park precedents are on pages 50 and 51.

Parklet precedents are on pages 52 and 53.

¹ Adjacent to high- and mid-density housing of the Fourth Ward (see Strategy 5: Neighborhood Connectivity).

² Remove existing wall to reorient the park to the street.

³ For new signature park see pages 54-55.

PARK PROGRAM PRECEDENTS

(see Appendix C for image sources)



Passive Use: areas for sitting, reading, and lounging.



*Plaza-Euskadi
Bilbao, Spain*



*Mary Bartelme Park
Chicago, Illinois*



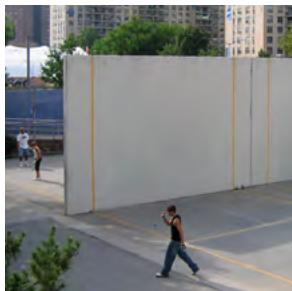
*Klyde Warren Park
Dallas, Texas*



*Market Street Garden
Dallas, Texas*



Recreation: hardscape or softscape areas for team sports, individual practice, and games.



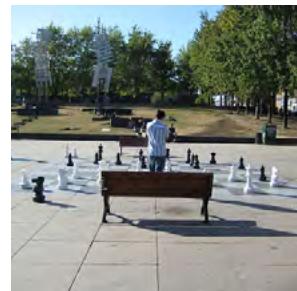
*Asser Levey Park
New York, New York*



*Olympic Sculpture Park
Seattle, Washington*



*Bryant Park
New York, New York*



*Berri-UQAM Plaza
Montreal, Quebec*



Food Service: restaurant, café, or concession operations with or without seating.



*Bryant Park
New York, New York*



*Connors Park
Chicago, Illinois*



*SOMA Street Food Park
San Francisco, CA*



*Mueller Trailer Eats
Austin, Texas*



Performance: stage or amphitheatre areas that provide a venue for scheduled performances or encourage spontaneous performances.



*Cumberland Park
Nashville, Tennessee*



*Discovery Green
Houston, Texas*



*New Center Park
Detroit, Michigan*



*California Institute of the
Arts, Valencia, California*



Playground: climbing structures, splash parks, swings, and other structures that encourage play and exercise for children and adults.



*Klyde Warren Park
Dallas, Texas*



*Potgieterstraat
Amsterdam, N. Holland*



*Van Beuningenplein
Amsterdam, N. Holland*



*Water Playground
Tychy, Poland*



Dog Park: enclosed areas designated as open running space for dogs and casual sitting or standing space for their owners.



*Hudson River Park
New York, New York*



*Chelsea Waterside Dog Run
New York, New York*



*Rincon Hill Dog Park
San Francisco, CA*



*Market Square Park
Houston, Texas*

PARKLET PRECEDENTS

Parklets are small plazas for passive use or active recreation that are typically created through the conversion of underutilized, residual spaces, such as a parking space. They are most successful in areas with high pedestrian traffic, and adjacent to restaurants and cafés that attract users.



While precise locations have not been identified, parklets in emerging activity zones, where full-size parks are not possible, should be considered. Due to the interior-focused activities of most ground floor buildings in southern Downtown, it may be a challenge to create vibrant parklets where commercial activity is not present along the public realm. However, through a collaboration with the City of Houston (Public Works & Engineering, Planning & Development, and Parks & Recreation), the Downtown District, and adjacent commercial establishments, existing on-street parking spaces may be designed and programmed to create attractive spaces during times of high use. The St. Joseph Parkway at Travis Street bus stop sees significant activity throughout the day by transit users who would benefit greatly from an improved boarding area. The adjacent surface parking lot allows for rotating food trucks or a stationary kiosk with improved shade and seating.

Photo collage of potential parklet at the bus stop on St. Joseph Parkway at Travis Street.

(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)

San Francisco: Pavement to Parks

<http://pavementtoparks.sfparking.org>

The San Francisco Parklet Manual provides a comprehensive overview of the policies, process, procedures, and guidelines for developing parklets.



(image sources: SF Planning Dept.)

"San Francisco's Pavement to Parks Program facilitates the conversion of utilitarian and often underused spaces in the street into publicly accessible open spaces available for all to enjoy. The Parklet Program provides a path for merchants, community organizations, business owners, and residents to take individual actions in the development and beautification of the City's public realm."

A parklet repurposes part of the street into a space for people. Parklets are intended as aesthetic enhancements to the streetscape, providing an economical solution to the need for increased public open space. They provide amenities like seating, planting, bike parking, and art. While parklets are funded and maintained by neighboring businesses, residents, and community organizations, they are publicly accessible and open to all."

- Parklet Program Overview, San Francisco Planning Dept.

Los Angeles: Streets for People

<http://www.livingstreetsla.org/streets-for-people/>

Through Los Angeles Department of Transportation's (LADOT) Streets for People program, underutilized automobile spaces are converted to plazas.



(image sources: LADOT)

LADOT's Streets for People program implements parklet projects in collaboration with the City Planning, Public Works, and Transportation departments. Streets for People is responsible for reviewing applications and designs, plus installing, inspecting, and performing maintenance. Community partners, such as a business improvement district, non-profit, or chamber of commerce, are responsible for identifying the sites, acquiring funding, insurance/ liability, and performing outreach, programming, general maintenance, and operations.

Source: Benjamin, Gary, "Partnering with Business Improvement Districts to Create 'Streets for People' Parklet Plazas in Los Angeles," 2013.

NEW SIGNATURE PARK

In addition to establishing new programmatic elements in existing parks, a new park is proposed to anchor the emerging residential neighborhood.



This open space should have a wide variety of programmatic elements to serve as amenities for the emerging residential uses and associated amenities in the area, including flexible passive space, food service, playscapes, dog park/ run, and performance space. By diversifying the amenities at the park, a wider range of users will be attracted to the site, creating a more vibrant environment for both active and passive users.

(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)

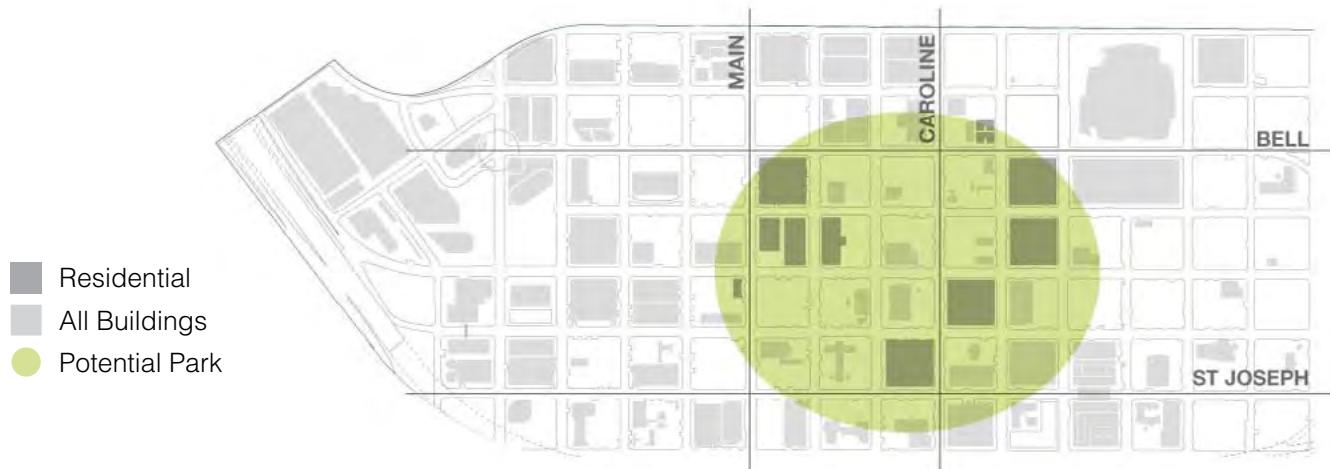
Depending on the availability of parcels, a park can be established across two blocks on either side of a street, where configurations can combine quarter-, half-, and full-block designs. Caroline Street, proposed to be a pedestrian and bicycle priority street, will provide connections to shopping and nightlife in central and northern Downtown. If separated by a street, passive and active programs and park uses may be established on opposite sides. In doing so, the street itself should receive special treatments in order to facilitate a visual connection between both sides of the park.

Open Space Supportive of Adjacent Uses.

The two blocks may be comprised of full-, half-, and quarter-block configurations, where building uses support park activity and programming, and vice versa.



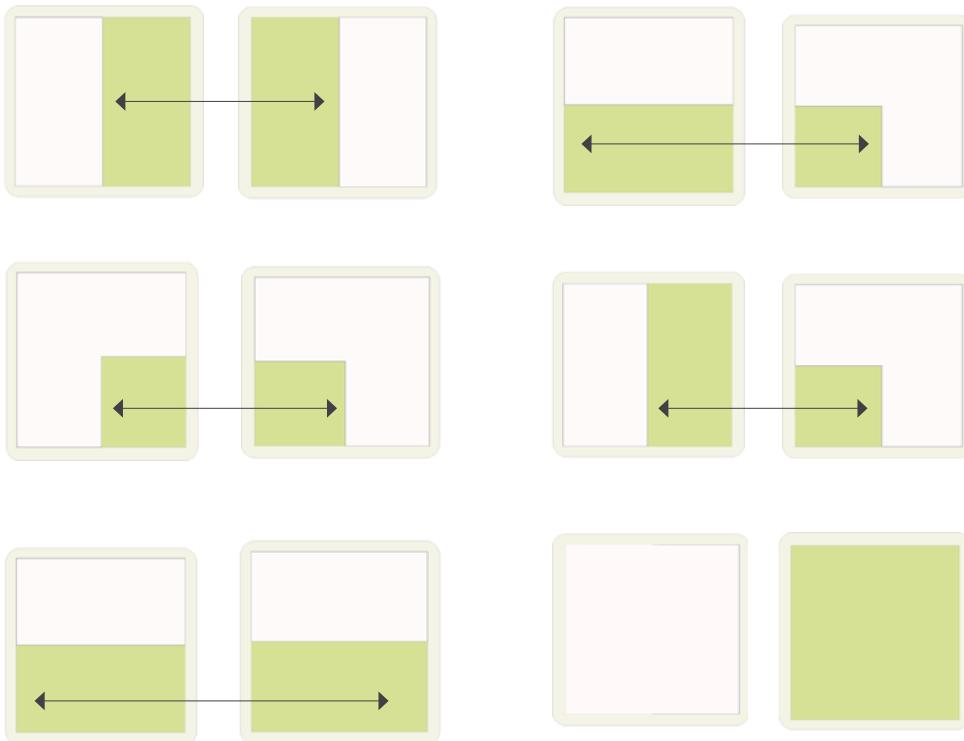
(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)



Open Space Configuration

The configuration of space between the two blocks may influence movement and enhance park activities with appropriate mix of uses between structures and open spaces.

(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)



3 ACTIVATE PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLIC SPACES

Privately owned public spaces are a significant component of the study area and cannot be ignored when documenting the existing public realm. These spaces are publicly accessible, and often seamless with public sidewalks, but privately managed by adjacent property owners and managers. By area, these privately owned spaces cover more than twice as much land as publicly owned and managed parks. In order to better utilize the existing hardscape and softscape plazas, these sites may be improved to create public amenities. As building owners add site furnishings and programming, these plazas will better serve both corporate employees and Downtown visitors.

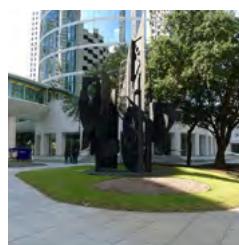
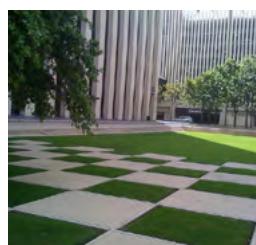


This 800 Bell Street rendering illustrates a number of key components of good public space design.

(rendering source: Ziegler Cooper Architects)

LIGHTING | DISTINCTIVE LANDSCAPE | STREET CONNECTION | PUBLIC SEATING | TRANSPARENCY | WATER | ENHANCED MATERIALS

The intention of this strategy is to provide developers and their design teams simple guidelines in order to achieve a common vision for the potential of the public realm in southern Downtown.



Existing Plazas (from left): Sisters of Charity, KBR Entry Plaza, Chevron Entry Plaza, Chevron Decorative Plaza.

(image sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

Privately Owned Public Spaces Classifications

Potential audiences and uses must be considered to determine the size, design elements, and programming of plazas, according to the following space classifications:

Classifications and descriptions are paraphrased from Privately Owned Public Space: The New York Experience by Jerold S. Kayden, The New York City Planning Department, and the Municipal Art Society of New York (2000).

Destination: High-quality public space designed to attract a broad audience of employees, residents, and visitors from the immediate neighborhood and outside. Destination spaces should allow for a wide range of passive and active uses, and provide amenities that may include food service, artwork, programmatic activities, restrooms, retail frontage, water features, seating, tables, trees and other plantings. In order to accommodate large gatherings, these spaces are usually sizable, well-proportioned and aesthetically appealing, and constructed with first-class materials.

Neighborhood: High-quality public space that draws residents and employees from the immediate neighborhood, including the host building and others within a three-block radius. Neighborhood spaces are generally smaller than destination spaces, and accommodate uses such as group socializing, child play, and individual relaxation. The space is strongly linked to the adjacent street and host building, is carefully maintained, and includes amenities like seating, tables, drinking fountains, water features, planting and trees. Neighborhood spaces can be differentiated from destination spaces by the exclusion of food service and limited programmatic uses.

Hiatus: Public space that accommodates the passing user for a brief stop, rather than attracting users like neighborhood or destination spaces. Hiatus spaces are usually small in size, and located along the sidewalk. Their design accommodates modest function and use with basic amenities like seating. The quality of design, amenities, and aesthetic appeal can range from high to low.

Circulation: Public space that improves the pedestrian experience with a principal purpose to enable pedestrians to move faster between point A and point B, and/or to make the journey more comfortable. Circulation space may be covered or uncovered, and is sometimes fully enclosed. It may also serve as a link in a multi-block chain of spaces. Functional amenities that provide a reason to linger are not taken into account when classifying a space as a circulation space.

Marginal: Public space that should be avoided. Marginal spaces often lack satisfactory levels of design, amenities, or aesthetic appeal, and therefore deter people from using it. This may be caused by one or more of the following characteristics: barren expanses of hardscape, elevations above or below the public sidewalk, inhospitable microclimates, no functional amenities, spiked railings on otherwise suitable surfaces, dead or dying landscaping, poor maintenance, driveways, and no measurable public use.

PRIVILEGED OWNED PUBLIC SPACES DESIGN STANDARDS

Privately owned plazas in the study area present opportunities for public amenities. Design guidelines can be followed in the design and construction of future spaces, or retroactively through renovation, where owner-initiated improvements can be made in the attractiveness and usefulness of existing spaces. It should be a shared goal between private ownership and public entities that open space — both private and public — is the result of a collaborative process.

Design Standards are modeled after City of New York City Department of Planning Public Plaza Standards (2009).

Size

Plazas should be a minimum area of 2,000 square feet to provide adequate space for seating, planting, and other amenities.

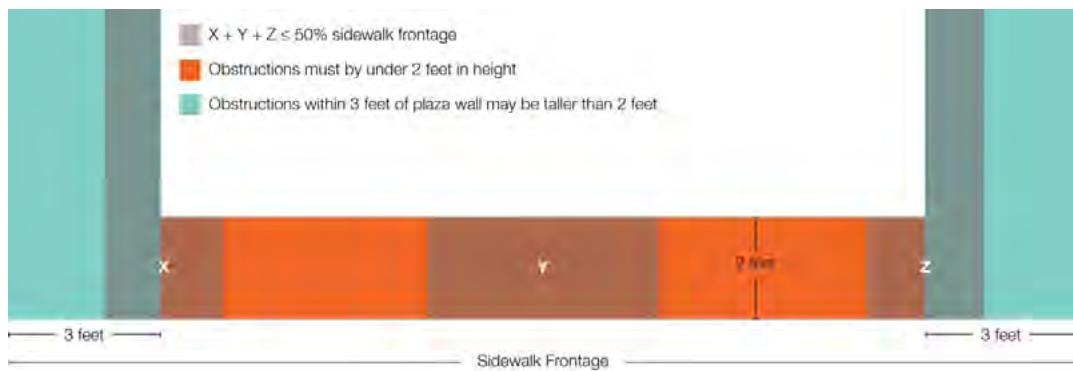
Location and Adjacency

In order to maintain continuity of the building street wall, plazas should not be located directly adjacent to other parks, plazas, or surface parking lots, and should be separated by a distance of at least 175 feet, as measured along the street line.

Access

Circulation: Paths of at least eight feet in width should connect to all adjoining street fronts, building and plaza entrances, and plaza features.

Sidewalk Frontage: Sidewalk frontage is defined as the first 15 feet of the plaza from the sidewalk edge (measured perpendicular to the street line), and the usability of a plaza is significantly determined by its spatial relationship to the sidewalk, which influences the ability to facilitate access and enliven the adjacent streets. At least 50% of the sidewalk frontage should be unobstructed to create an inviting space through a sense of openness. The remaining 50% may have fixed or movable seating, planters, trees, lighting,



Sidewalk Frontage Obstructions

signage, trash receptacles, and other design elements. These permitted obstructions must be under two feet in height, unless they are located within three feet of a plaza wall.

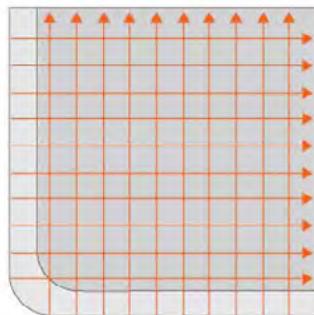
Elevation: Plazas should be at street level, with no more than a three foot elevation change from the adjoining sidewalk in order to maintain its usability, openness, and attractiveness. For large plazas, greater than 10,000 square feet in size, up to 20% may have an elevation up to four feet above the adjacent sidewalk, but should be more than 25 feet from the sidewalk line. Step height should be between four and six inches. Step depth should be a minimum of 17 inches.

Visibility

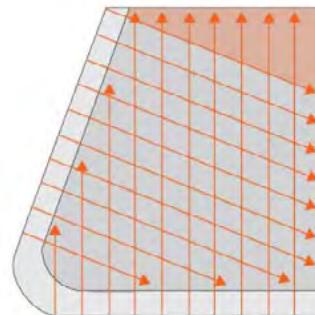
Views: Visibility and views should be maintained between the plazas and street to maintain a sense of openness and safety without obstructions, such as walls or planters. It is preferred that at least 50% of the plaza space be visible from the adjacent street front.

Corner Plazas: Plazas located at a street intersection should maintain a clear area, free from obstructions, within 15 feet of the sidewalk frontage in either direction.

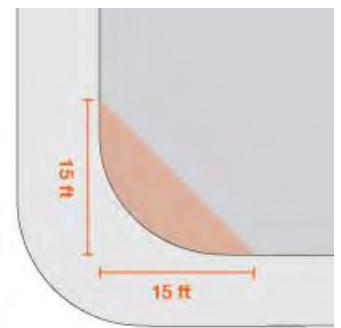
Visibility



Visibility from street fronts



At least 50% is visible from adjacent street fronts



Unobstructed from 15 feet of the intersection

Environment

Weather Protection: Protection from potential wind gusts should be addressed by avoiding large, unprotected areas and narrow openings between buildings (wind funnels). Sunlight is desirable in open spaces, but plaza design should provide opportunities for users to seek shelter from exposure during the hottest times of the year. The following devices can help provide protection from sun, rain, and other weather conditions: canopies, awnings, shelters, and tree coverage.

Noise Reduction: Mitigation of street noises, such as traffic, should be achieved through fountains, waterfalls, trees, and other design elements that help absorb the noise or detract attention.

Natural Features: Natural features and landscape elements, such as vegetation and water, contribute to establishing a softness to an urban plaza, which are essential components to successful public spaces. A variety of trees, shrubs, and ground cover should be considered based on the plaza's uses. For example, trees near seating areas can provide shade in hot climates, and lawn areas and planter ledges can provide an additional seating area. Specific design standards include the following:

- At least 20% of a plaza should have ground-level planting, planting beds, groundcover or accessible lawns.
- A minimum of four trees should be planted in every public plaza, and an additional four caliper inches of trees for every 1,000 square feet of plaza. For example, a 10,000-square-foot plaza may have four trees, plus 40 caliper inches.
- At least 50% of required trees should be flush-to-grade for pedestrian circulation and surrounded by a porous surface of at least five feet in width for water infiltration.

A tree caliper is the trunk diameter measured at six inches from the ground for trees with up to a four-inch caliper and at 12 inches from the ground for larger trees.

Social

Seating: Plazas should have multiple types of seating options available with choices that allow people to choose whether to sit in the sun or shade, directed towards a view, beside attractions, in groups, couples or alone. This variety is emphasized through a mixture of fixed and movable seating.

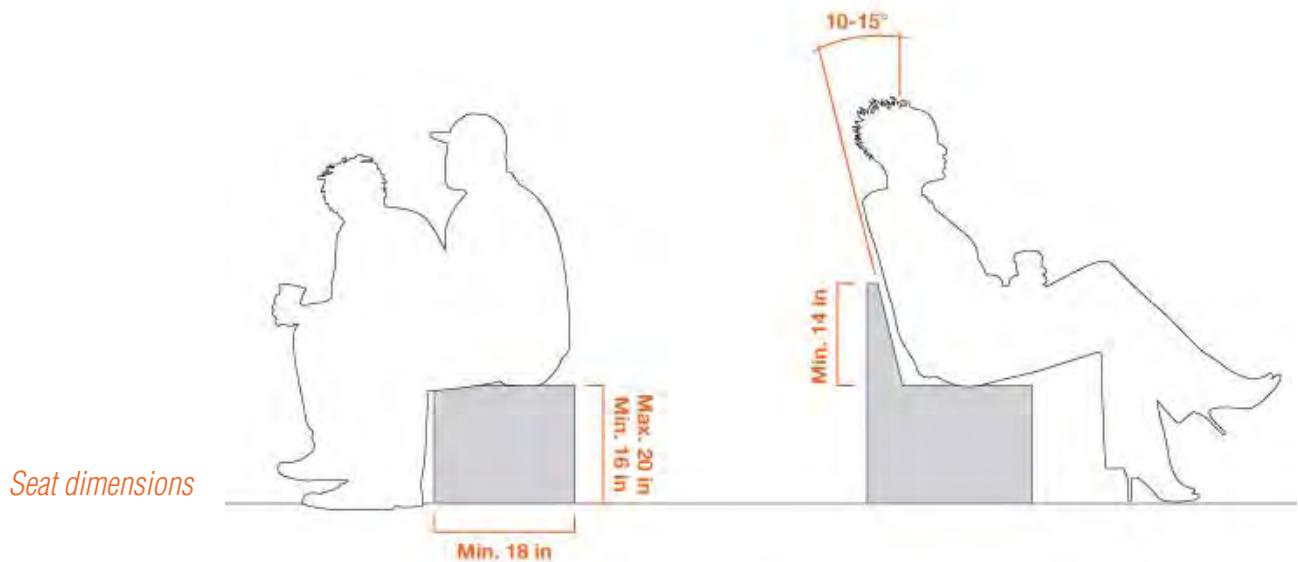
- All plazas should have at least two of the six possible seating types: movable seating, fixed individual seating, fixed benches, seat walls, planter ledges, and seating steps.



Seating type examples, from left to right: movable seating, fixed individual seating, fixed bench.

(see Appendix C for image sources)

- Plazas between 5,000 and 10,000 square feet should have three types.
- Plazas greater than 10,000 square feet should provide movable seating as one of the three options.
- In any situation, seating steps and walls should not account for more than 15% of the total seating requirement.
- Seats should be at least 18 inches deep and between 16 and 20 inches in height.
- Planter ledges should be at least 22 inches deep.
- A minimum of one linear foot of seating should be provided in the sidewalk frontage for every two linear feet of plaza street frontage.
- 50% of sidewalk frontage seating should have backs, and 50% of these should face the sidewalk.



Seating type examples, from left to right: seat wall, planter ledge, seating steps.



(see Appendix C for image sources)



While lounge seating is not a required seating type, it is an attractive element to plaza design that encourages use.

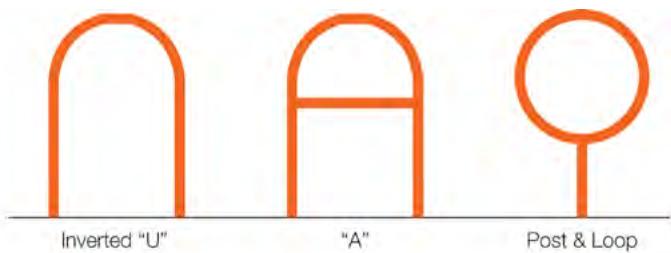
(see Appendix C for image sources)

Programs and Activity Generators: Specific programming can attract plaza users to the site at different times of the day. This may include food and retail options, social events, gathering, and performances. Depending on the size of the plaza and proposed activities, certain infrastructure may be needed, such as electrical outlets, lighting, and water supply. Other amenities that attract site users and create a lively environment may include bike racks, game tables, art installations, playground equipment, kiosks, and open air cafés.

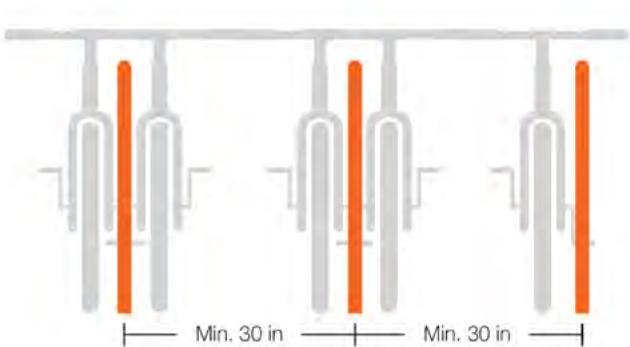
- If permitted to have kiosks, such as newsstands and food and drink service, it should be limited to one 100-square-foot kiosk for every 5,000 square feet of plaza space to prevent impeding circulation. Kiosks should be fully removed when not in operation, unless they are in service for at least 225 days of the year.
- Open air cafés should not occupy more than one-third of the plaza street frontage, and should not utilize fences, planters, or other dividers that separate the café from the rest of the plaza. Cafés in plazas larger than 30,000 square feet should be located against a plaza edge. Cafés should be accessible from all sides, unless they are located adjacent to a planter, wall, or other physical feature. Cafés should be unenclosed and open to the sky, but may feature certain protective elements like umbrellas, temporary roof fabrics (without vertical support), heating lamps, and cooling fans.
- Service and maintenance areas should be a primary design consideration. Delivery paths between the adjacent building and/ or street should contribute to the plaza's circulation network.

Bicycle Parking: Plazas should have bicycle parking, unless it is already included in the streetscape design of one of the adjoining street fronts. These facilities should be located on the sidewalk adjacent to the plaza. All plazas should provide parking for at least two bicycles, and plazas greater than 10,000 square feet should accommodate at least four bicycles.

*Bike Rack Types
Preferred bike rack types
include the inverted "U," "A,"
and post & loop.*

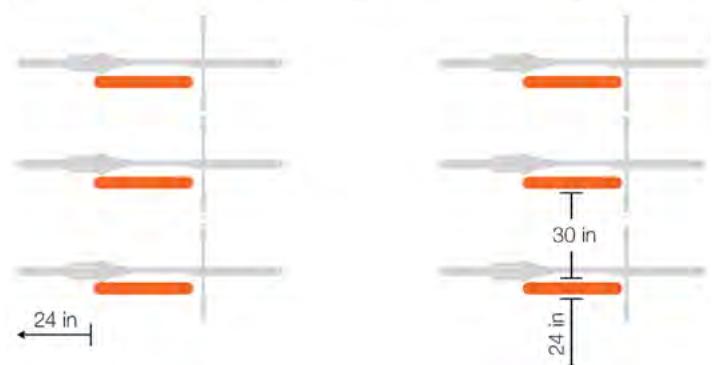


Bike Rack Grouping



Large Bike Rack Area

*Source: Association of
Pedestrian and Bicycle
Professionals, Bicycle
Parking Guidelines*



4 RETROFIT AND IMPROVE STREETWALLS

By applying aesthetic standards to otherwise bland spaces like blank walls, surface parking lots, and garages, the quality of space along sidewalks can be improved to encourage higher foot traffic between active uses. The application of fencing, planting, and public art can create an appealing environment for pedestrians where the needs of automobiles have traditionally been emphasized.



Today, in southern Downtown, parking garages cover the equivalent of 18 full blocks, and surface parking covers over 30 full blocks, not including vacant, unpaved lots. Based on our site research of existing conditions, there are approximately 88,000 linear feet of property frontage along eight east-west streets and 14 north-south corridors, of which 48,000 linear feet (55%) are blank walls and surface lots. Combined, that means more than two-thirds of the study area is currently devoted to parking. Because space for parking is a necessary consideration for the current travel demands in Downtown Houston, the resulting blank walls and paved parking lots that cover entire blocks hinder the development of a multi-functional Downtown and a vibrant public realm.

Working with owners of surface parking lots and garages to increase the quality of the streetscape and create additional opportunities for retail will create a subtle but important message to pedestrians and support new Downtown development.

Prioritized Blank Walls, Garages, and Surface Parking Lots

(source: Asakura Robinson field research)

As surface parking and blank walls cover such a large proportion of the study area as a whole, it is necessary to prioritize improvements to certain corridors within southern Downtown. The areas that should be considered as “starting places” for improvements are those around the newly emerging residential area, at the Co-Cathedral and St. Joseph Medical Center, as well as along Caroline Street, Bell Street, and St. Joseph Parkway.



Design Guidelines for Surface Parking in Priority Areas

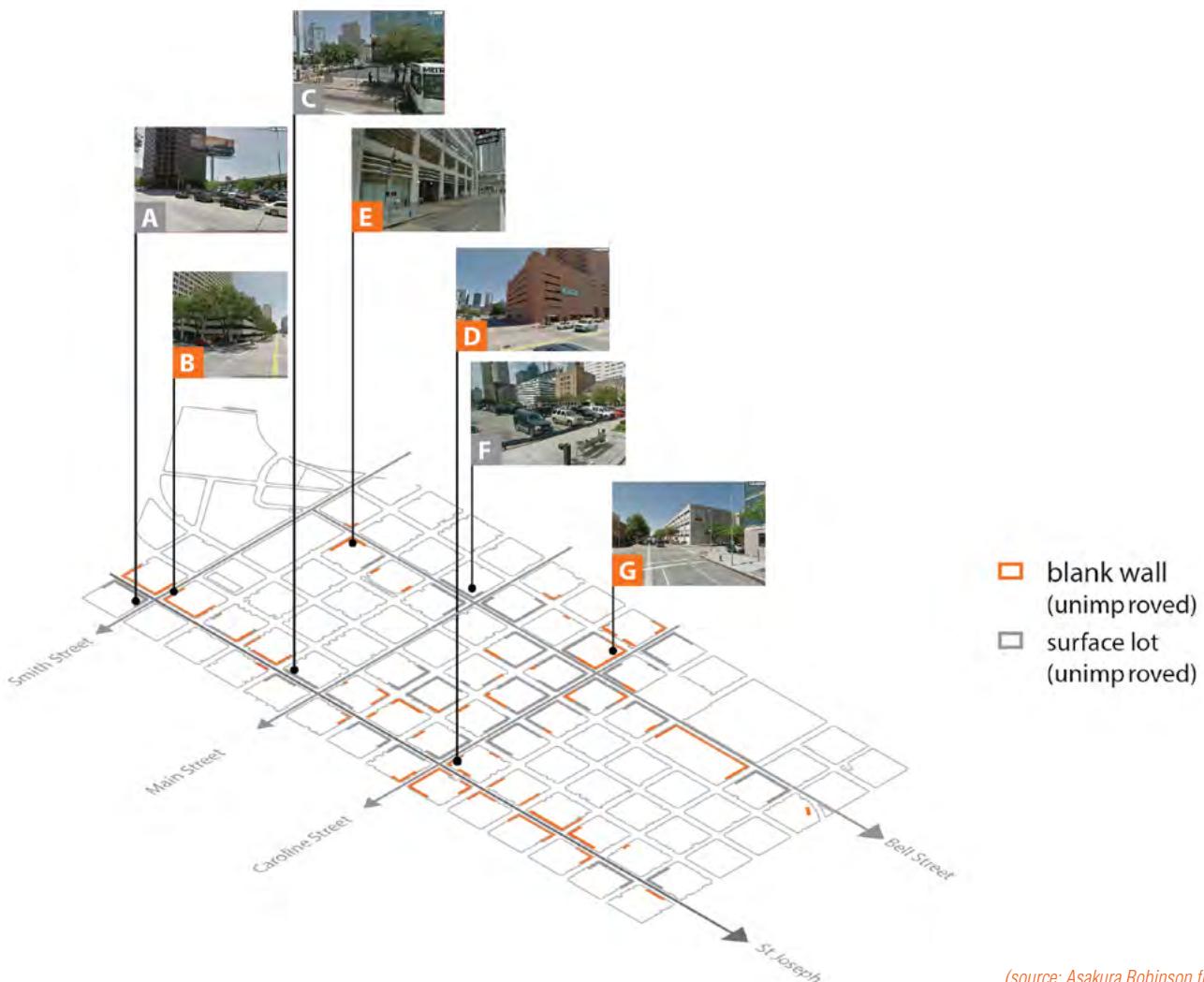
Approximately 50 block faces equal 12,500 linear feet.
Typical Section: Caroline Street.

	SURFACE LOTS	PARKING GARAGES	BLANK WALLS
Caroline Street:	8 block faces	1 block face	3 block faces
St Joseph Street:	6 block faces	2 block faces	6.5 block faces
Bell Street	10 block faces	2 block faces	2.5 block faces
Remainder of Residential Zone	25 block faces	1 block face	7.5 block faces
TOTAL	49 block faces	6 block faces	19.5 block faces

Priority Interventions

By working with property owners at key locations, prioritized interventions will create public realm landmarks, increase legibility, improve the urban experience, and act as catalysts for further public and private investments.

	Existing Condition	Rationale	Suggested Intervention
St. Joseph @ Smith	A Surface Lot	Key Gateway	Temporary Retail
St. Joseph @ Smith	B Parking Garage	Key Gateway	Retail Conversion
St. Joseph @ Travis	C Surface Lot	Near METRORail stop	Parklet
St. Joseph @ Caroline	D Parking Garage	Gateway to St. Joseph Campus	Green Wall / Retail Conversion
Bell @ Louisiana	E Parking Garage	Gateway to Bell Corridor	Retail Conversion
Bell @ Main	F Surface Lot	Near METRORail stop	Perimeter Green Fence
Bell @ Caroline	G Parking Garage	Key Gateway from GreenStreet	Green Wall



(source: Asakura Robinson field research)

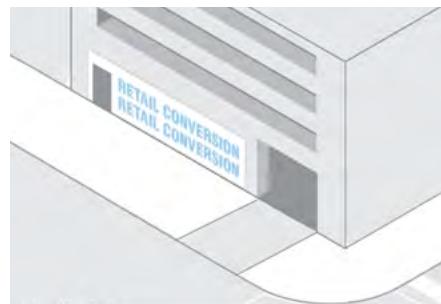


(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)



Retrofit Surface Parking with Parklets and/or Retail

Explore the feasibility of converting high-impact parking spaces at the intersections of pedestrian priority streets into parklets or small retail, such as kiosks, open-air cafés, food carts, and trucks. Positioned at the corners of surface lots, little, if any, parking will be sacrificed.



Conversion to Ground Floor Retail

Work with property owners to find potential locations to convert the ground floor of parking garages to active uses.



Murals and Green Walls

Work with artists, non-profit organizations, and property owners to mitigate large blank walls that intersect key sightlines.

BIKE STATION PRECEDENTS

Bike stations provide a range of bicycle services, primarily bike storage for commuters. Other amenities include restrooms, showers, changing rooms, repair stations, professional repair service, small bike retail (parts and accessories), bike rentals and tours.

Bike stations are best located near transit where cyclists can connect to the network, major business centers, or parks to establish an amenity for tourists and visitors. Typically 24-hour access is available for members, and additional services are provided at regular business hours. Community organizations and businesses often provide facility and operations management and sponsorship funding.

	Washington DC Bikestation	McDonald's Cycle Center	Covina Bikestation	Long Beach Bikestation	Bicycle Commuter Center	Freewheel Bike Center
Location	Washington DC	Chicago IL	Covina CA	Long Beach CA	Pittsburgh PA	Minneapolis MN
Context	Union Station	Millennium Park	Covina Metrolink Station	Transit Mall Station / Promenade Square	Cultural District / Downtown	Midtown Greenway trail
Size	1,600 sf	16,448 sf	250 sf	1,600 sf	320 sf	5,500 sf
Storage	130 bikes	300 bikes	36 bikes	100 bikes	21 bikes	150 bikes
Access	24 hr/wk	24 hr/wk	24 hr/wk	24 hr/wk	24 hr/wk	24 hr/wk
Showers	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Lockers	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Changing Room	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Repairs	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Retail	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Rental	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Tours	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

*Washington DC Bikestation
Washington DC*



*McDonald's Cycle Center
Chicago IL*



*Covina Bikestation
Covina CA*



*Long Beach Bikestation
Long Beach CA*



*Bicycle Commuter Center
Pittsburgh PA*



*Freewheel Bike
Midtown Bike Center
Minneapolis MN*



(see Appendix C for image sources)

5 CREATE KEY CONNECTIONS ACROSS HIGHWAY EDGES

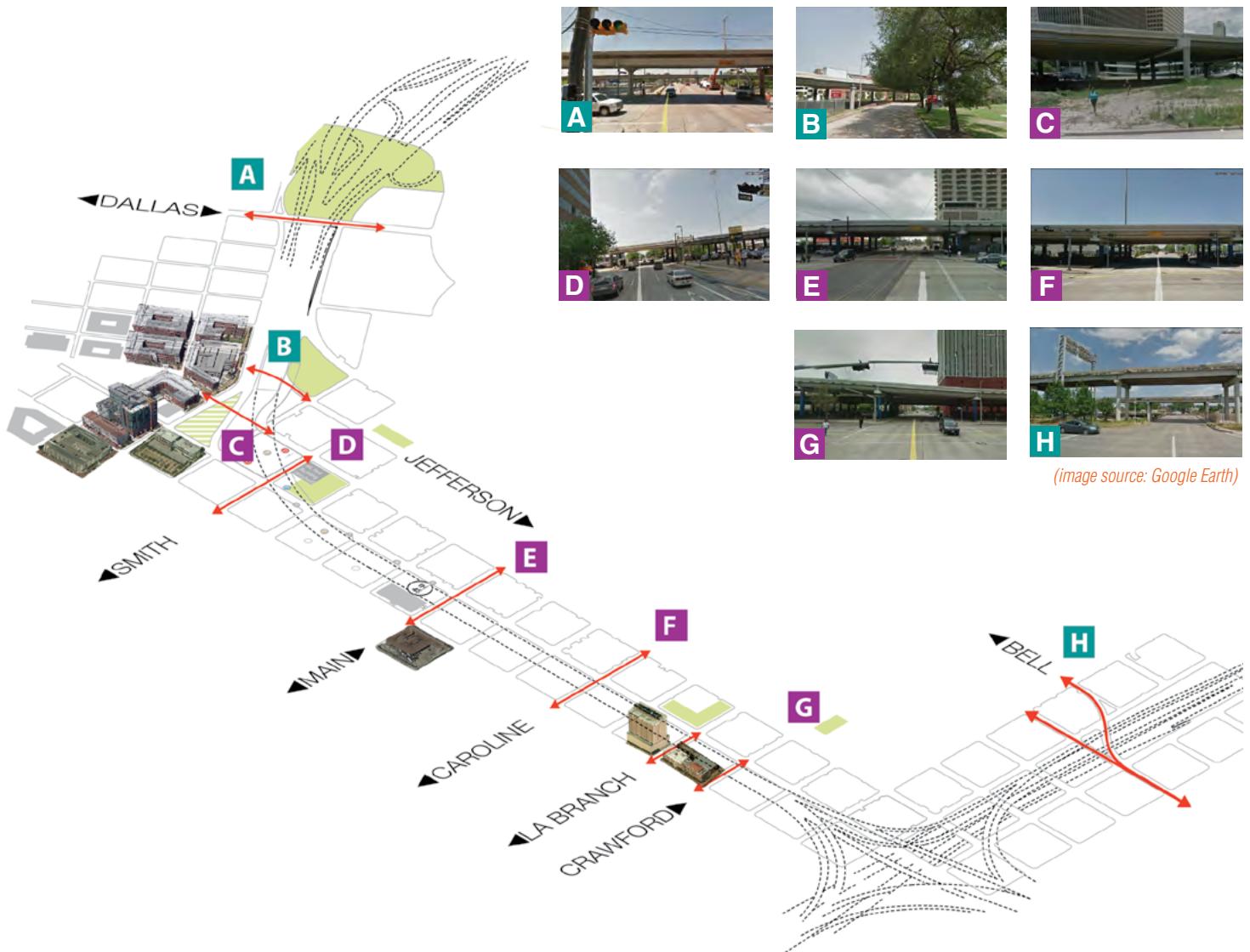
Edge strategies that address the physical and psychological barriers created by the major highways bordering the study area will better connect residents and visitors of surrounding neighborhoods — such as Fourth Ward, Midtown, and East Downtown — to destinations in southern Downtown. The gateway into the study area should be an attractive experience regardless of travel mode, and encourage walking, biking, and transit.



(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)

Downtown Houston is defined by a ring of highways that vary in elevation relative to surface streets. These highways create a physical and psychological disconnect, hindering circulation to surrounding neighborhoods. By transforming the monolithic infrastructure of the highway into a more appealing urban environment, existing and desired uses can be better integrated. Increased development in Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods has created a need for more direct connections, mostly recognized by crossing existing highway infrastructure. Due to some current undesirable conditions, strategies need to be implemented to create a more aesthetically appealing environment, and mitigate the health and safety risks arising from the lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

Existing pedestrian connection across the Jefferson bridge does not meet universal design standards, and poses major safety concerns. A new pedestrian bridge provides better connections between destinations across IH-45.



(image source: Google Earth)

(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)

	Existing Condition	Rationale	Suggested Intervention
Dallas	A Sunken and Elevated	Access to Fourth Ward	Upgrade pedestrian crossings, wayfinding
Jefferson	B Sunken and Elevated	Activate park and access to Midtown	New pedestrian bridge
St Joseph	C Elevated	Access to Midtown and new park	Landscaping, wayfinding, new pedestrian crossing
Smith	D Elevated	Access to Midtown	Wayfinding, art, gateway monument
Main	E Elevated	Support METRORail Corridor	Sidewalk treatment, art, gateway monument
Caroline	F Elevated	Extend Caroline Corridor to Midtown and Buffalo Bayou	Sidewalk treatment, gateway monument
La Branch/ Crawford	G Elevated	Unify St. Joseph Medical Center	Enhance St. Joseph Medical Center district branding
Bell/ Leeland	H Sunken and Elevated	Access to East Downtown	Bike lanes, trees, pedestrian crossing upgrade

B Jefferson Street Pedestrian Bridge

Reconnect the urban street grid of Midtown (west of IH-45) and Downtown Houston, creating a direct link between these destinations with a pedestrian bridge along Jefferson Street.

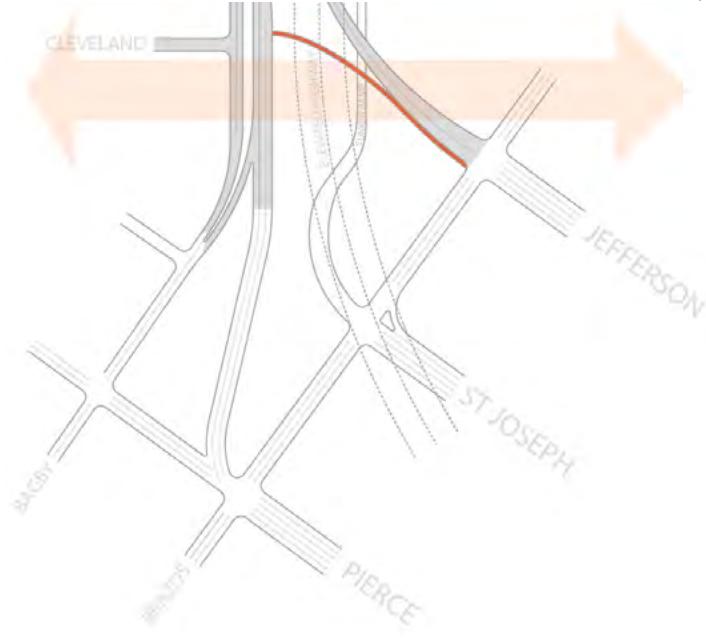


(images sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

West of IH-45

Mid-rise development in Midtown neighborhood at Cleveland Street (west of IH-45), where many Downtown employees live.

Photo collage (top, center) shows proposed pedestrian bridge connection between the neighborhood to the west and Downtown. Other improvements may include the conversion of concrete to softscape landscaping.



East of IH-45

Privately owned public park to the east of IH-45, accessible to Midtown neighborhood (west of IH-45) via proposed Jefferson Street Pedestrian Bridge. By connecting adjacent neighborhoods, the park gains greater user potential, other than Downtown employees.

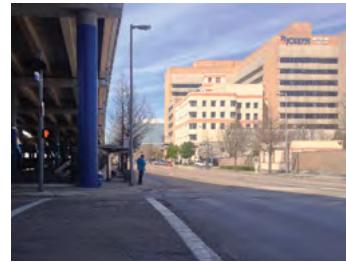


Pedestrians are currently using the Jefferson Street vehicular bridge to connect between Midtown and Downtown Houston, despite the lack of pedestrian infrastructure. With the increase of housing developments in the area, walking to Downtown for work or recreation is more convenient than navigating by automobile for those who live directly adjacent. The construction of a pedestrian bridge alongside the existing automobile bridge will improve safety conditions and the quality of space.

In addition to the bridge, a safer crossing must be established across Heiner Street and the IH-45 off-ramp to Pierce Street.

G Connect St. Joseph Medical Center at La Branch Street and Crawford Street

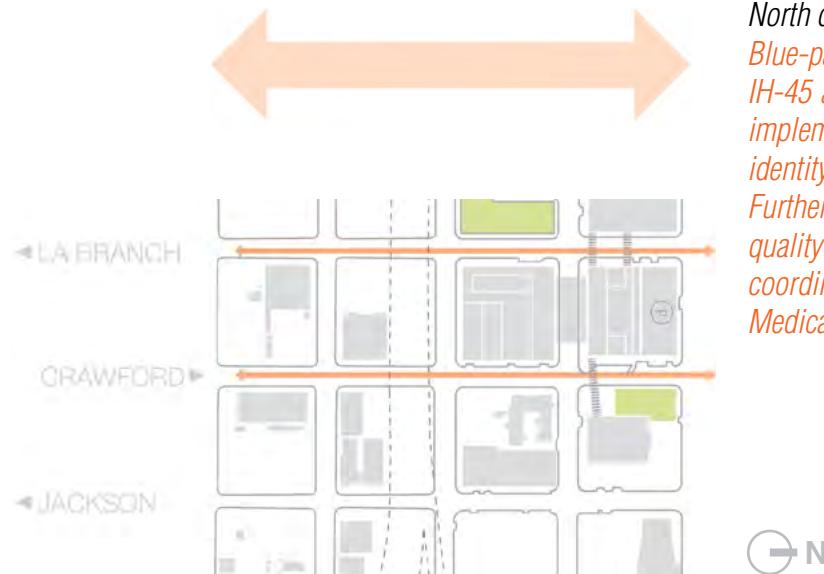
By addressing the Pierce Elevated underpasses at IH-45 and La Branch and Crawford Streets, campus identity for St. Joseph Medical Center can be improved through public realm amenities.



(images sources: Asakura Robinson field research)

South of IH-45

St. Joseph Medical Center buildings located to the south of IH-45 are disconnected from the campus by the elevated highway infrastructure.



North of IH-45

Blue-painted columns under IH-45 are an existing strategy implemented to create campus identity across the highway. Further efforts to improve the quality of space should be coordinated with St. Joseph Medical Center.

Visitor comprehension of St. Joseph Medical Center may not be clear, and the disconnect created by the elevated highway intensifies this challenge. By addressing this edge condition in a way that allows medical center staff and visitors to comfortably pass through, it will create an added amenity to the public realm.

By coordinating with St. Joseph Medical Center as a prominent stakeholder of southern Downtown, these efforts can be consistent with existing campus street furniture and branding initiatives, while ensuring the highest potential benefit for the campus.

C St. Joseph Extension and Underpass Park

St. Joseph Parkway is discontinuous and separated between Downtown and Midtown by IH-45 and series of on- and off- ramps. This transportation infrastructure creates a barrier for pedestrian traffic. Despite the dangerous environment caused by the lack of safe crossings, the presence of people making this connection on foot is evident by the paths worn in the grass.



(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)

By constructing a walkway and underpass park at the intersection of this major infrastructure, the site can be transformed from a derelict area designated for parking and moving automobiles, into a walkable destination for Downtown, Midtown, and other nearby neighborhoods.

This connection requires the incorporation of two mid-block crossings, where pedestrian crossing signs, roadway striping, or signalized in-pavement lights can indicate drivers of the need to stop for pedestrians. The pathway across these blocks may be coupled with plaza sidewalk extensions with amenities like benches, shade trees, and flexible open space.

St. Joseph Parkway can be extended below IH-45 with a pedestrian connection. The undeveloped, residual spaces provide opportunities for connections and improved open space, including an underpass park.

Underpass park

The area below the underpass is currently used as a parking lot, which is not a welcoming sight for Downtown arrival. An underpass park will create a unique amenity in southern Downtown in an unassuming location that will begin to attract visitors. Amenities may include playful features like swings, art installations that play with light and form, soft elements that aid in noise reduction, and adjacent landscape elements to address highway storm water runoff.



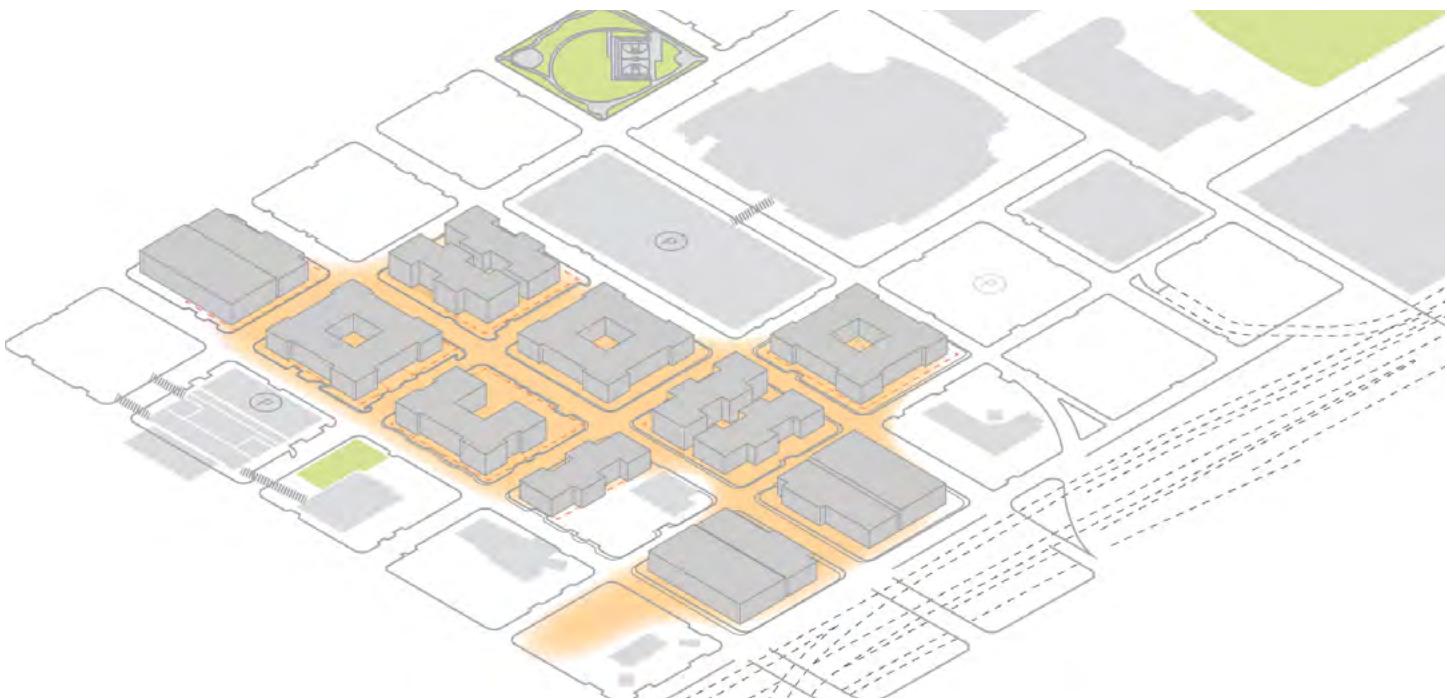
(rendering source: Asakura Robinson)

Toronto Underpass Park
By reclaiming underutilized
space beneath the Don
Valley Parkway in Toronto,
a new park was created
under the infrastructure that
divides the West Don Lands
neighborhood. The park
includes art installations,
half-court basketball,
skateboard area, playground
with teeter-totter, hopscotch,
swings, and climbing
structures. In addition,
flexible community space
allows for markets, festivals,
and other public events.
(see Appendix C for image sources)



6 SET THE STAGE FOR FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

A long-term strategy for the southeastern corner of Downtown Houston must begin with short- and medium-term improvements of underutilized blocks. Through site rehabilitation and infrastructure investment, the area can be restored to benefit existing site users, and promote future infill development, creating an anchor to connect to and support other activity zones.



The study area east of La Branch Street presents unique challenges, as no dominant activity has yet emerged. Surrounding uses face their backs to the area, creating a desolate stretch in Downtown. Disinvestment has led to the decline of surface conditions, where modest improvements and routine maintenance would make an enormous difference. The most deteriorated areas must be given priority, including hardscape/ softscape remediation, enhanced sidewalk infrastructure, infill tree planting, and lighting. Community organizations and residents may then take “ownership” of sites through partnerships that allow for temporary uses, such as gardening and art installations.

Midrise infill development on the southeastern corner of Downtown Houston.

Most of this area is consolidated under the ownership of a few larger stakeholders. The Downtown District should work with these owners to shape future development, all benefiting from the proximity to the Convention District. Perhaps a campus development for education, medical, or corporate uses should be considered to further support St. Joseph Medical Center.

Ground conditions in the southeast corner of Downtown Houston

- Building Footprint
- Surface Parking Lot
- Vacant / Grass
- Deteriorating Hardscape
- Existing Trees
- Infill Tree Planting
- TxDOT Sidewalk Improvements



Existing Conditions

There is limited evidence of ownership in the southeastern corner of Downtown Houston; however, the area is still used by people parking in the area, and those simply passing through. Site rehabilitation, regular maintenance, and general improvements are needed to alter the prevailing perception of neglect.



Poor Sidewalk Conditions



Deteriorating Hardscapes



Vacant Lots

Short- and Medium-Term Improvements can be made through infill tree planting, sidewalk reconstruction, site remediation, and lighting installation. By making a more comfortable environment, temporary community uses should be explored (examples on right).

(see Appendix C for image sources)



Site Improvements



Community Uses



Interactive Installations

The redevelopment potential on the southeastern corner of Downtown Houston presents the opportunity to create a culturally vibrant neighborhood that will serve as a strong anchor between surrounding activity areas and neighborhoods, drawing people for its social life and amenities. Whether the site develops as midrise residential, convention center expansion, hotel, urban campus, or a broad development mix, it is essential that the ground floor uses support public life and human interaction with well-maintained spaces that offer an element of flexible use, community ownership, surprise, and authentic vitality.

By carefully selecting a diversity of tenants that are supportive of one another's uses, these blocks can be inhabited at all times of the day. A few examples of supportive building uses include office space near restaurants/cafés and day care facilities, or housing near grocery stores, markets, and parks. Additionally, the creation of parks, plazas, and other open spaces alongside residential, institutional and commercial uses will reinforce a sense of place, community, and cultural urbanism.

Lifestyle in Houston, like many American cities, has suffered from a dominant investment in automobile infrastructure that has created a culture lacking community ties. By thinking holistically about the economic redevelopment of a larger area through public and private investment in the public realm, a celebration of civic life and neighborhood can be fostered.



This kinetic facade designed by Ned Kahn (left) transforms a parking garage at Brisbane Airport, Australia. A retrofitted facade could transform the Toyota Tundra Parking Garage (right) from a mono-functional structure to a signature component of southern Downtown's public realm.

(image credits: www.nedkahn.com, www.tellepsenbuilders.com)

Midrise Urban Living



Convention Center / Hotel



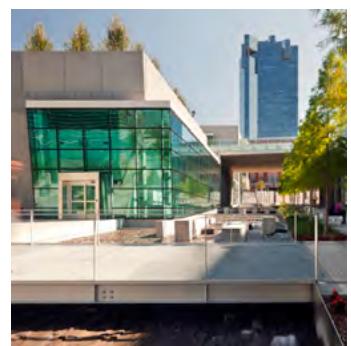
Urban Campus



Long-Term Vision

There is great potential for future site development to create a new activity center, such as midrise urban living, an expansion of the convention center, hotels, an urban campus, or a broad development mix.

(see Appendix C for image sources)

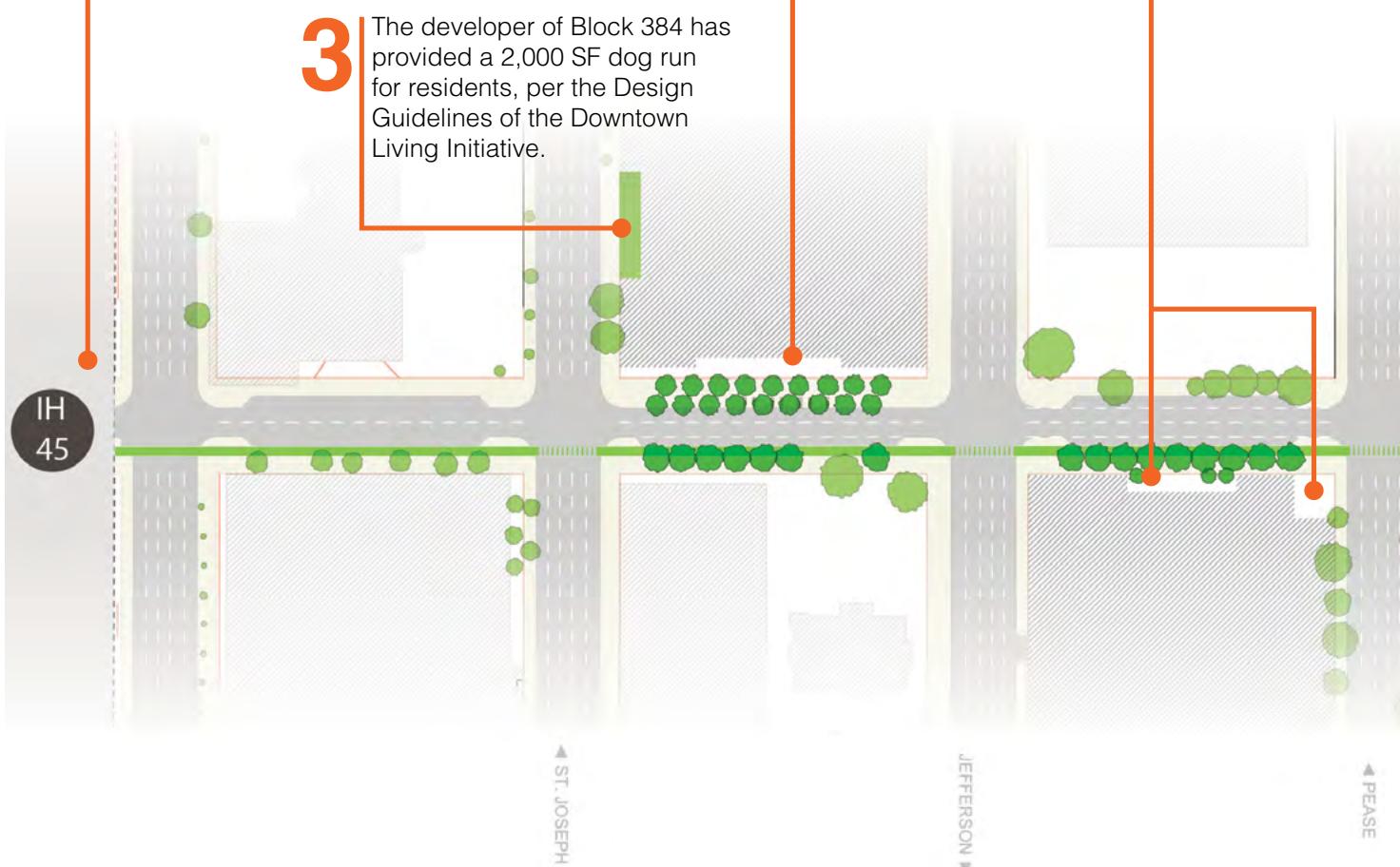


SYNTHESIS: CAROLINE STREET

5 Sidewalk treatments and a gateway monument will strengthen a key connection across IH-45.

4 New development follows design guidelines for green walls on parking structure.

3 New development follows plaza design guidelines to create small entry plazas.



This plan of Caroline Street serves as a model for how the "Six Strategies" of this *Public Realm Plan* might combine to form a bike and pedestrian corridor. The roadway itself consists of two travel lanes plus two lanes of inset parallel parking, providing ample room for spacious sidewalks and a protected bikeway. While there are two lanes dedicated for parking, narrower, more pedestrian-friendly crossings are created. Parking can be configured in various ways to respond to different building uses and provide spaces for vegetation and street furniture. Due to low traffic volumes, the need to support alternative transportation modes and to connect a number of residential neighborhoods, there may be future opportunities to extend the Caroline streetscape strategies beyond the southern Downtown study area, particularly southward all the way to Hermann Park.

6 Site remediation in the areas east of Caroline will set the stage for both short- and long-term uses that will connect to and support this pedestrian corridor.



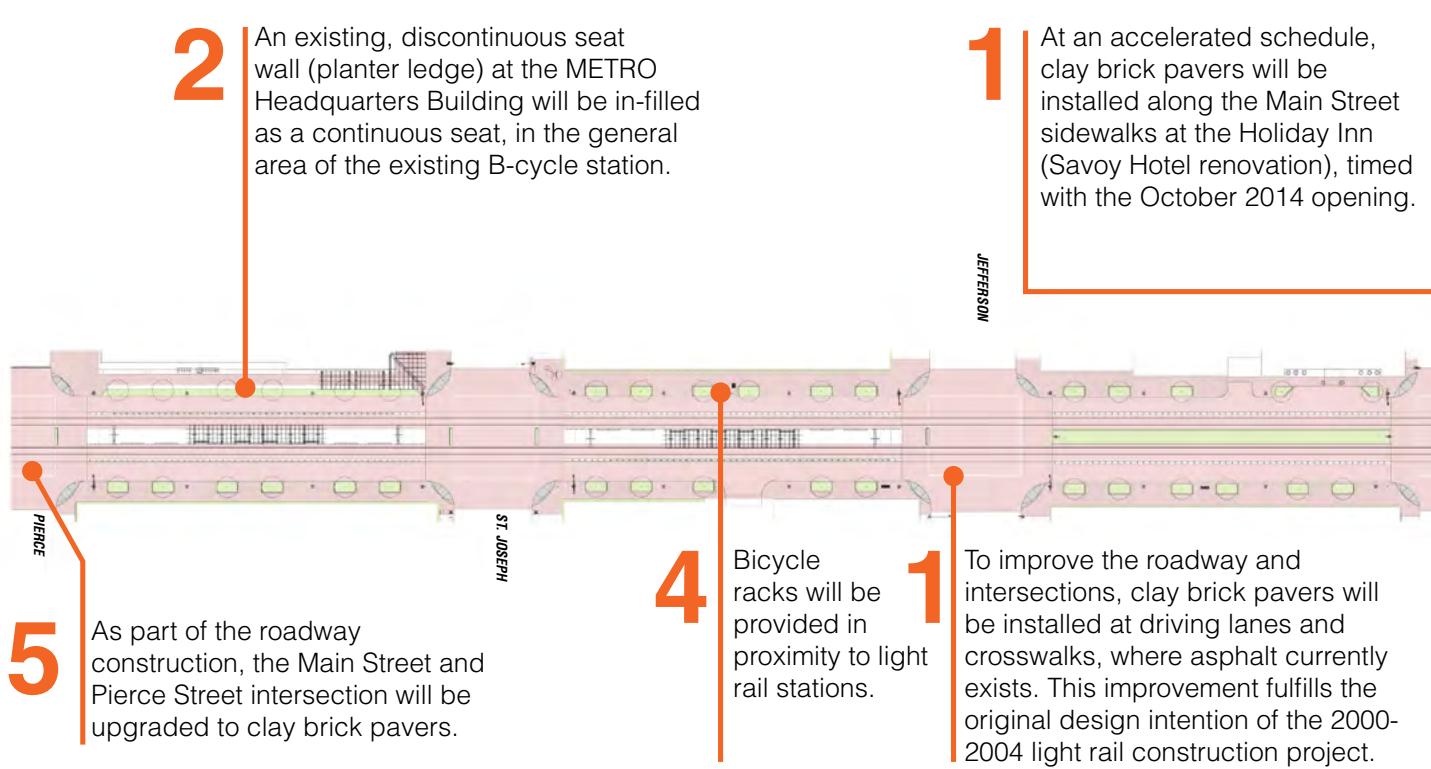
2 Blocks with large portions that are undeveloped are potential sites for a new signature park.

4 A small parklet in a surface lot supports a key intersection between two pedestrian and bike streets.

4 A green wall visible from GreenStreet serves as a landmark and gateway to this neighborhood corridor.

4 Landscaped fencing installed at existing surface parking lots.

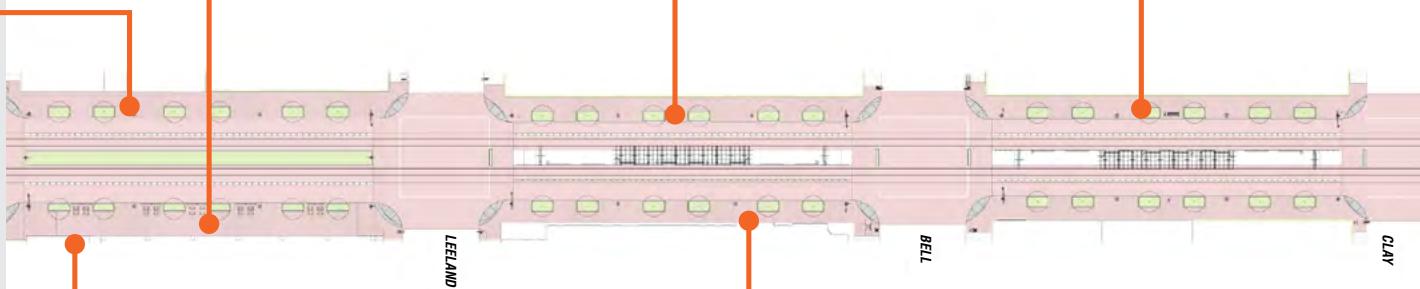
SYNTHESIS: MAIN STREET



For the duration of Asakura Robinson's research, planning and design, the Downtown Redevelopment Authority/ TIRZ No. 3 has conducted a parallel Downtown project for the full length of Main Street. While it is a public improvement project funded, designed and implemented independently from this report, our efforts and those of the Main Street design team have been coordinated by the staff of the Downtown Redevelopment Authority and the Downtown District. The Main Street Project is designed by Morris Architects, with Clark Condon Associates as landscape consultant, Huitt-Zollars as engineering consultant, and Quentin Thomas Associates as lighting consultant. The Main Street improvements are best understood as the initial implementation of this study.

1

At an accelerated schedule, clay brick pavers have recently been installed along the Main Street sidewalks at SkyHouse, timed with the July 2014 opening.



1

Several mid-block curb cuts will be in-filled with new paver sidewalks and landscaping to establish a more continuous pedestrian experience.

4

Bicycle racks will be provided in proximity to light rail stations and new development sites. Landscape fencing will be installed at surface parking lots

3

As an active use program along Main Street at the Pease Street corner, the developer of SkyHouse has provided a 950 SF dog walk for the use of their residents, per the Design Guidelines of the Downtown Living Initiative.

1

The Redevelopment Authority is also coordinating with the development team at Block 334 the future installation of clay brick pavers along Main Street sidewalks, timed with that project's construction progress.

(plan source: Morris Architects)

The Main Street project, 19 blocks from Commerce Street to Pierce Street, recognizes that Main Street is Downtown's principal historic, pedestrian and transit corridor. The project is not a "street re-build;" rather, it is a number of select upgrades that further improve upon existing conditions and prior investments. The project is organized into four "outdoor rooms" – the Historic District (Commerce to Texas), Central Station at the light rail intersections (Texas to Walker), Main Street Square (Walker to Polk), and southern Main (Polk to Pierce). Many of the design elements in the Main Street project have a direct relationship with the planning strategies and design recommendations contained in this report. Respective of the "Six Strategies" presented in the Conceptual Plan (pages 39-79), the Main Street improvements for southern Downtown, from Clay Street to Pierce Street, are shown above on the annotated plan and on the rendering on the following page.

The Main Street project consultants are currently producing the construction documents in order to obtain permits and award the contract in December 2014. Construction of the full project is scheduled for January 2015–February 2016.

1

To improve the public realm lighting, the existing reflective sail lighting will be replaced with new LED street lighting and pedestrian lighting.

4

At six block faces, landscaped fencing will be installed at existing surface parking lots.



(rendering source: Morris Architects)

1

To improve the landscape in the public realm, existing paired elm trees will be replaced with single elm trees, installed at landscaped tree wells with raised concrete curbs and decorative fencing. The new trees will be installed at consistent intervals relative to the existing light rail pole infrastructure.

3

The developer of the Holiday Inn (Savoy Hotel renovation) will build a 7,200 SF private parklet on the northeastern corner of their half-block property, mid-block on Main Street.

1

To improve the pedestrian experience, clay brick pavers will be installed at all sidewalks where concrete currently exists.

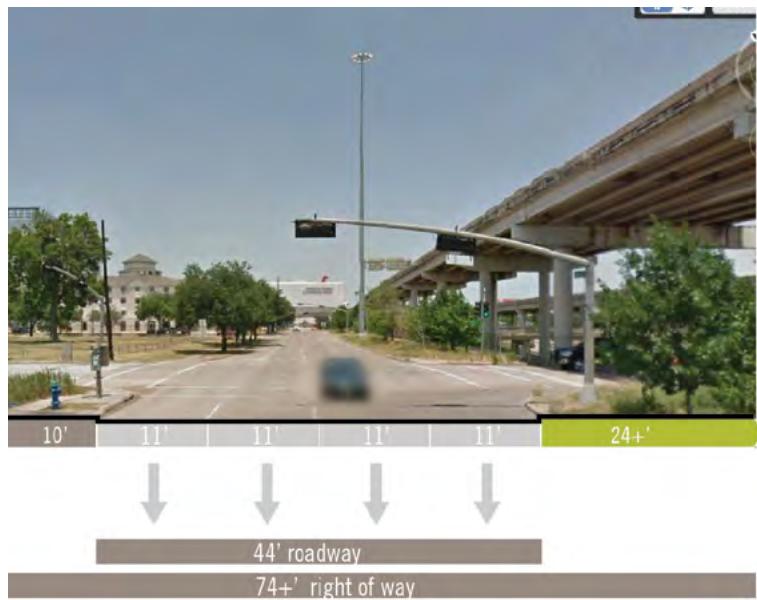
APPENDIX A: INVENTORY OF EXISTING STREETSCAPE DATA





(source: Asakura Robinson field research)

01: Hamilton Street



Direction of Travel Southbound, one-way.

Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Concrete on east face only.
Terminates at Polk Street
(GRB Convention Center).



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume
< 2,500 2,500+



Street Trees



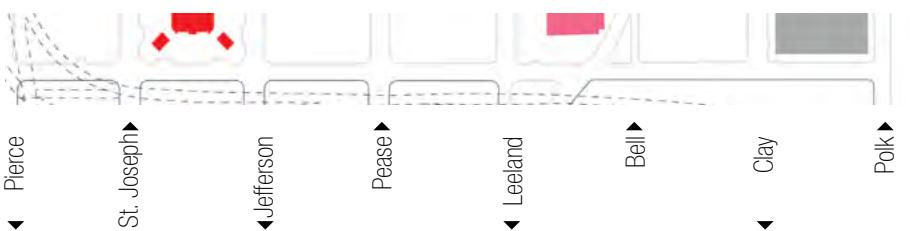
Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active



Land Use

institutional / civic /gov't	residential
civic /gov't	mixed use
parking/ other	commercial



02: Chenevert Street

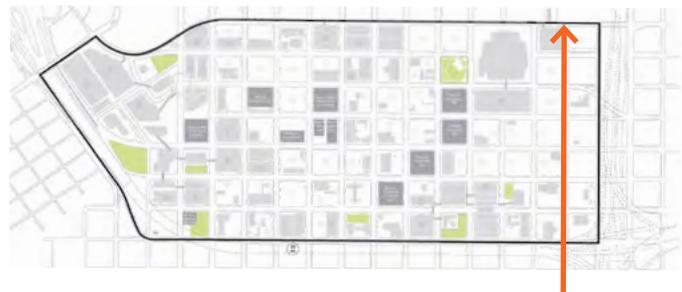


Direction of Travel Northbound, one-way.

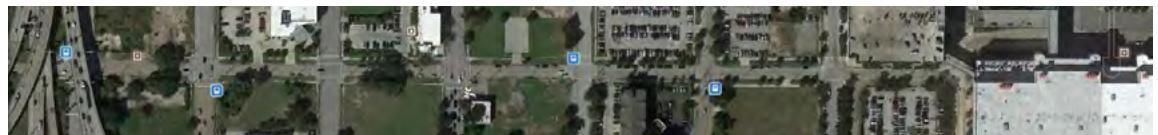
Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Concrete.
Terminates at Polk Street
(GRB Convention Center).



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume
< 2,500 2,500+



Street Trees



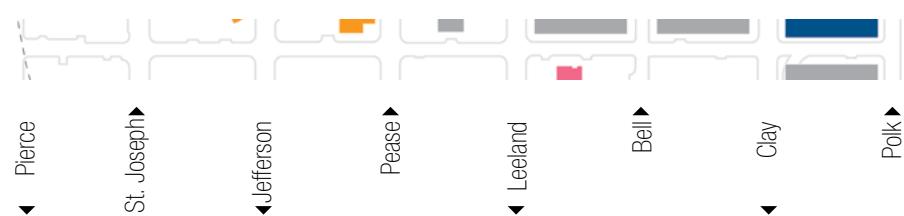
Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active



Land Use

institutional
civic /gov't
mixed use
commercial
parking/ other



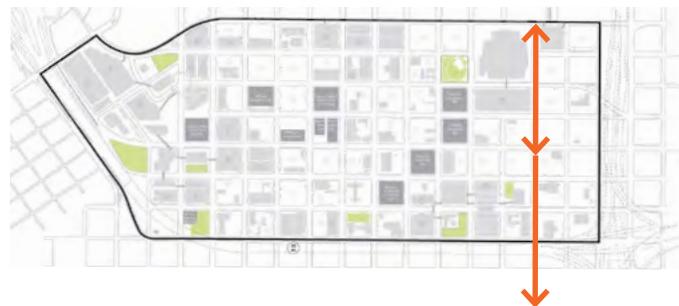
03: Jackson Street



Direction of Travel Southbound below Pease Street, otherwise two-way.

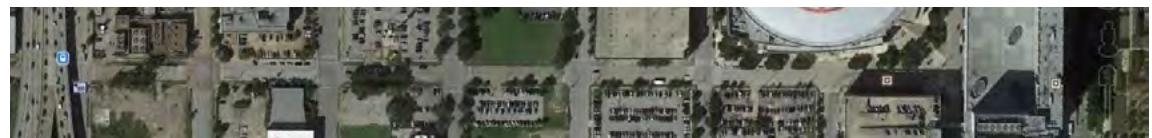
Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities None.



Sidewalks Concrete with grass strip.
Terminates at Polk Street
(Hilton Americas Houston).

Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume
< 2,500 2,500 - 10,000 10,000 - 25,000 > 25,000

Street Trees

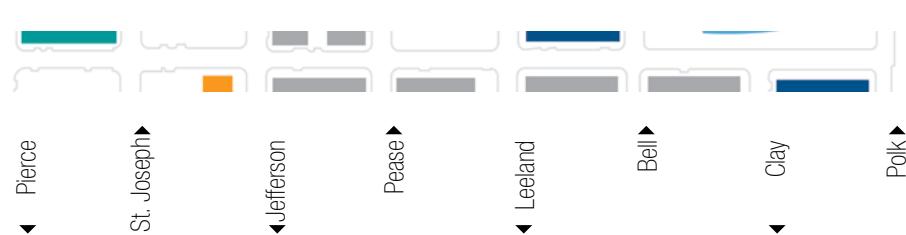


Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active

Land Use

institutional/civic/gov't	residential
commercial	mixed use
parking/other	



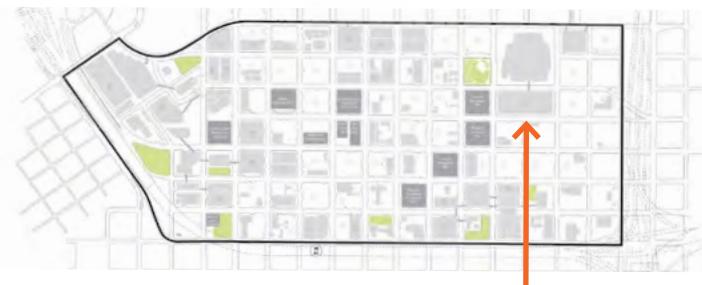
04: Crawford Street



Direction of Travel Northbound, one-way.

Transit 1-25 buses per hour
(between Pierce Street and St. Joseph Parkway).

Bicycle Facilities None.



Sidewalks Concrete, with some pavers near St. Joseph Parkway.
Terminates at Leeland Street (Tundra Garage).

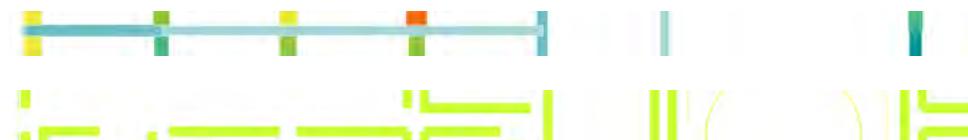
Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500 25,000

Street Trees



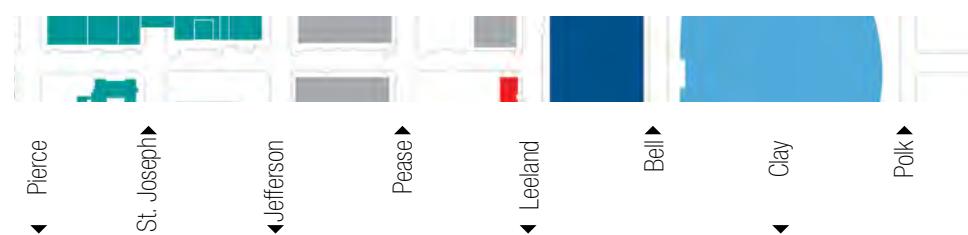
Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active

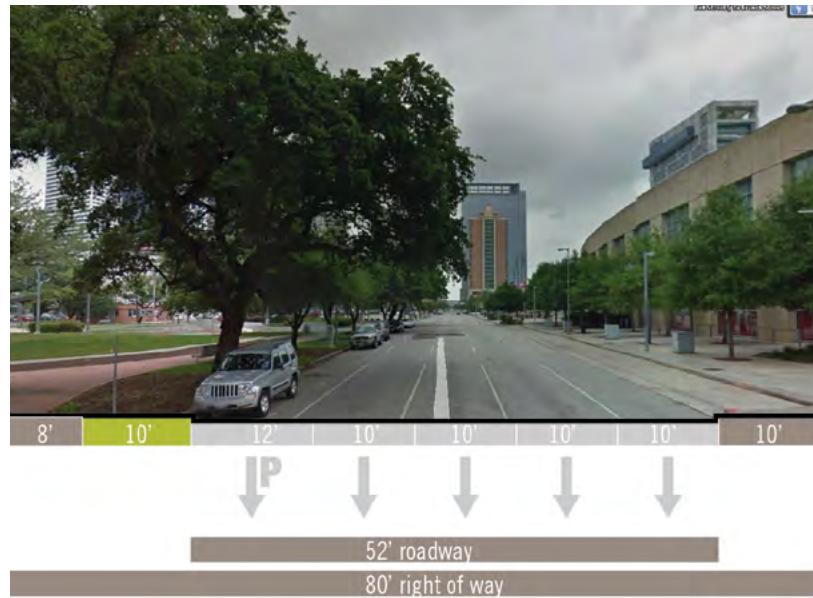


Land Use

institutional/civic/gov't		residential/mixed use	
civic/gov't		mixed use	
parking/other		commercial	
other			



05: La Branch Street



Direction of Travel Southbound, one-way.

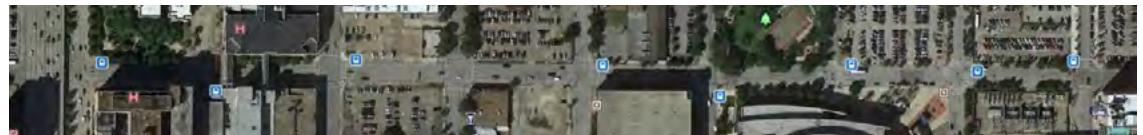
Transit 1-25 buses per hour.

Bicycle Facilities Signed bike route from Leeland Street to Clay Street.

Sidewalks Concrete, with some unique materials near Toyota Center.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

<2,500 25,000

Street Trees

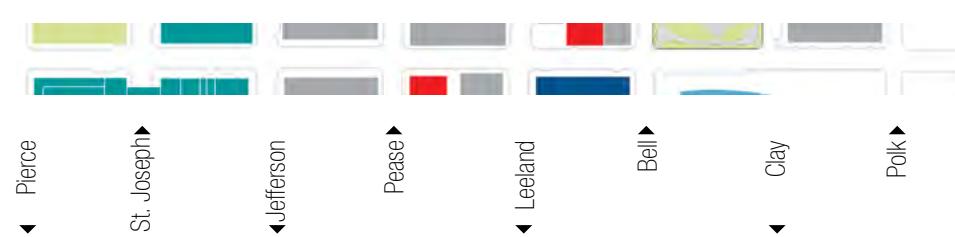


Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active

Land Use

institutional		residential	
civic /gov't		mixed use	
parking/ other		commercial	



06: Austin Street

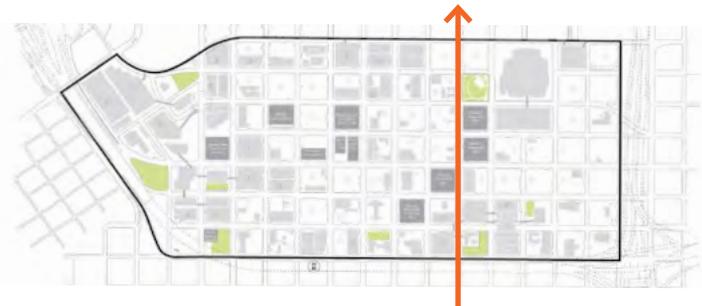


Direction of Travel Northbound, one-way.

Transit 1-25 buses per hour south of Bell Street, 25-50 north of Bell Street.

Bicycle Facilities Signed bike route.

Sidewalks Concrete, sometimes with a grass strip. Pavers near St. Joseph Parkway.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500

25,000



Street Trees



Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active

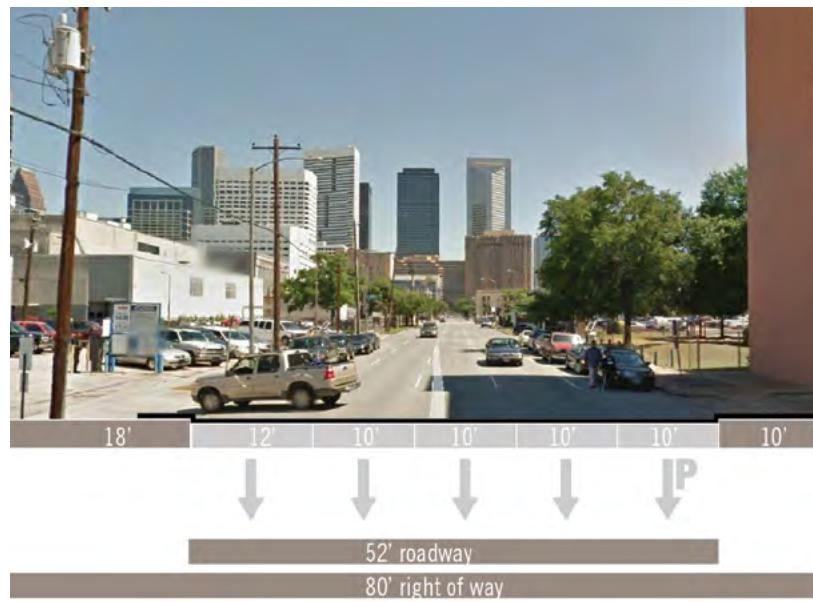


Land Use

institutional/civic /gov't	residential
civic /gov't	mixed use
parking/ other	commercial



07: Caroline Street



Direction of Travel Southbound, one-way.

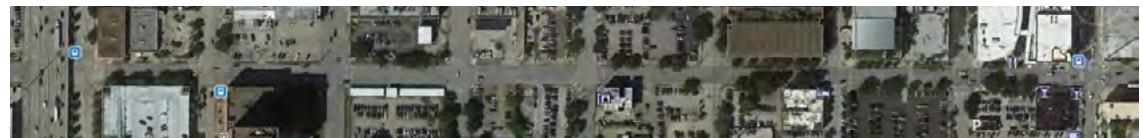
Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities Signed bike route.

Sidewalks Concrete, sometimes with a grass strip. Pavers near St. Joseph Parkway.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500

25,000

Street Trees



Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active



Land Use

institutional/civic/gov't	residential
civic/gov't	mixed use
parking/other	commercial



08: San Jacinto Street

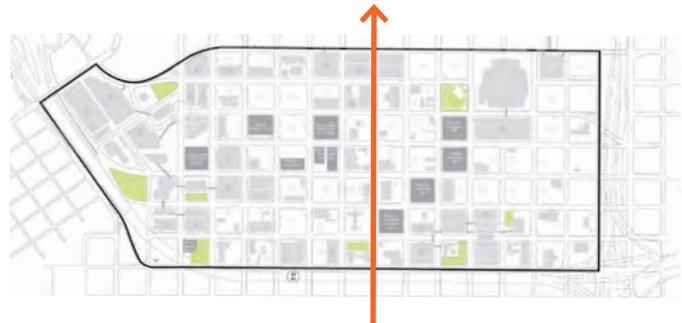


Direction of Travel Northbound, one-way.

Transit 25 - 50 scheduled buses per hour.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Pavers and concrete, with some unique materials near St Joseph Medical Center and between Clay and Polk Streets.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500 25,000

Street Trees



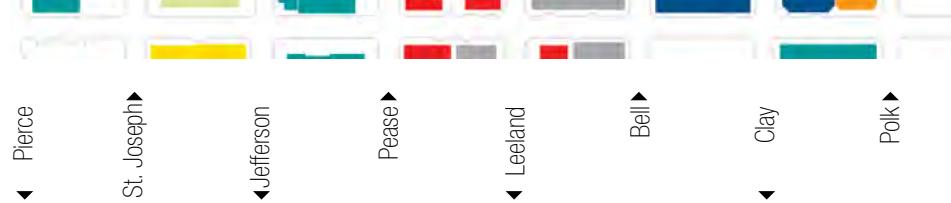
Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active

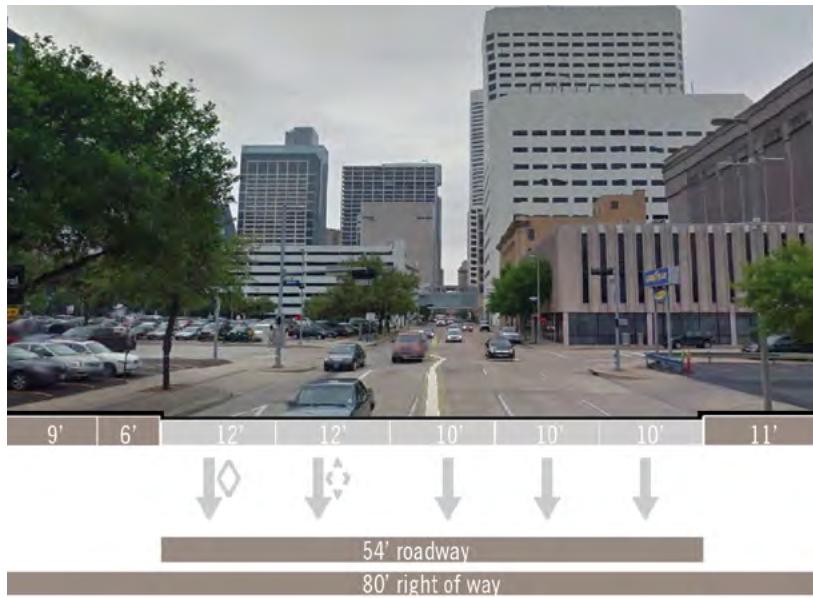


Land Use

institutional	residential
civic /gov't	mixed use
parking/ other	commercial



09: Fannin Street

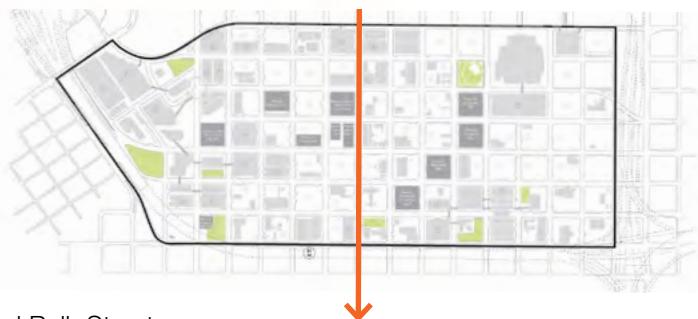


Direction of Travel Southbound, one-way.

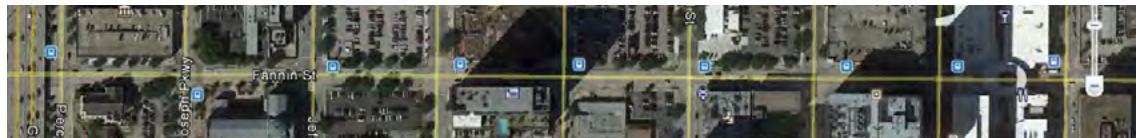
Transit 25 - 50 scheduled buses per hour.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Pavers and concrete, with some unique materials near St. Joseph Medical Center and between Clay and Polk Streets.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

<2,500 25,000

Street Trees

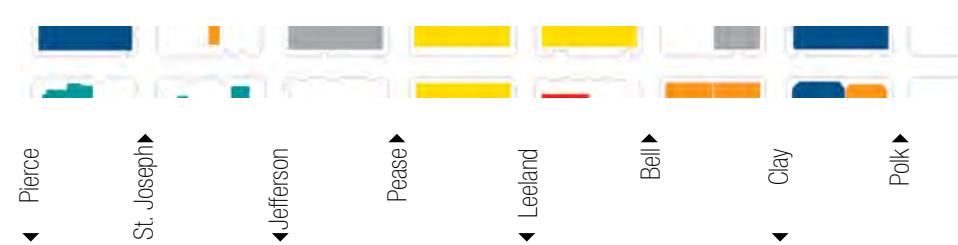


Streetwall

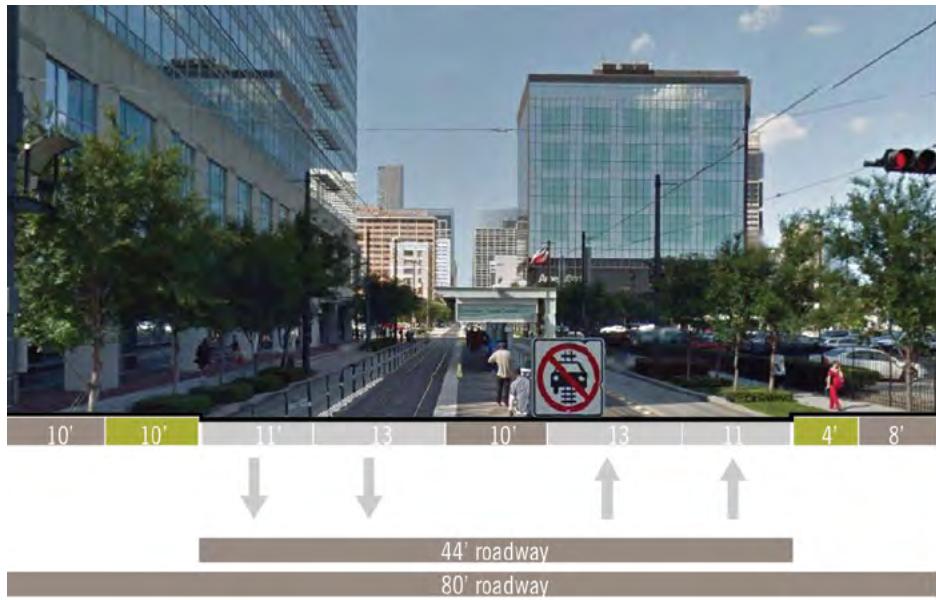
parking/loading inactive active

Land Use

institutional	
civic /gov't	
parking/ other	



10: Main Street

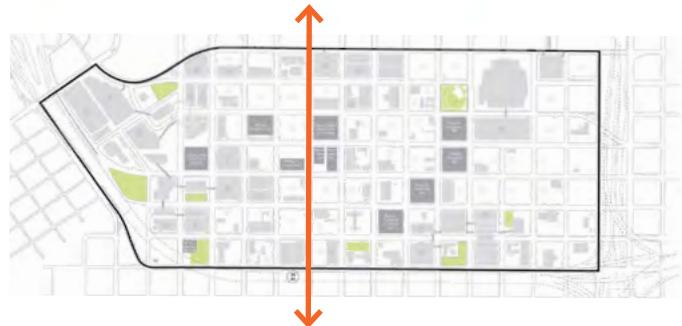


Direction of Travel Two-way.

Transit Red Line Light Rail.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Concrete with some pavers south of Pease Street (2015 upgrades to pavers).



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500 2,500+



Street Trees



Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active



Land Use

institutional/civic/gov't	residential
civic/gov't	mixed use
parking/other	commercial



Pierce
▼

St. Joseph
▲

Jefferson
▼

Pease
▲

Leeland
▼

Bell
▲

Clay
▼

Polk
▲

11: Travis Street



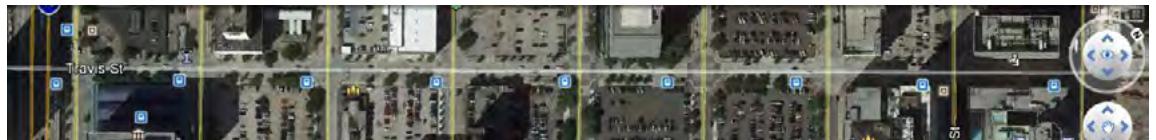
Direction of Travel Northbound, one-way.

Transit 25 - 50 buses per hour south of Jefferson; 75 - 100 buses north of Jefferson Street.

Bicycle Facilities None.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500 2,500 - 5,000 5,000 - 10,000 10,000 - 25,000 > 25,000

Street Trees

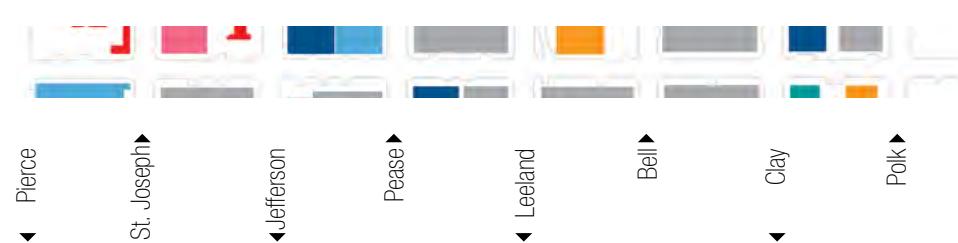


Streetwall

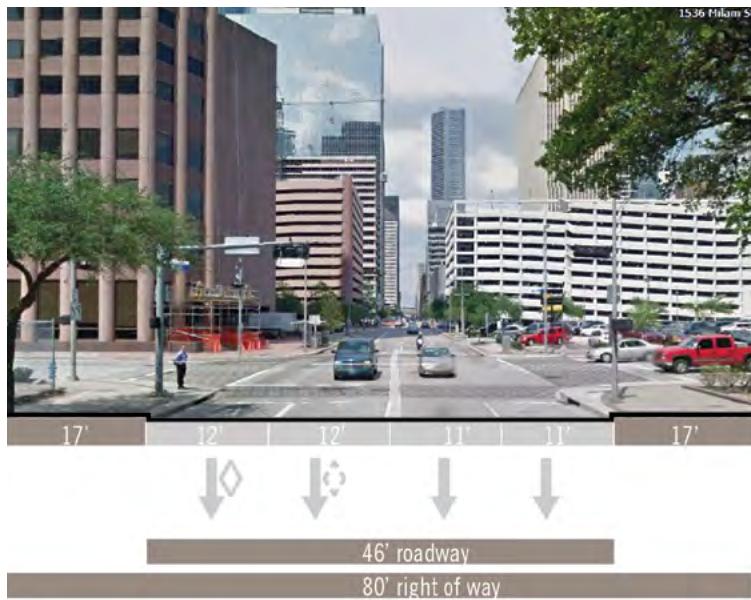
parking/loading inactive active

Land Use

institutional	residential
civic /gov't	mixed use
parking/ other	commercial



12: Milam Street

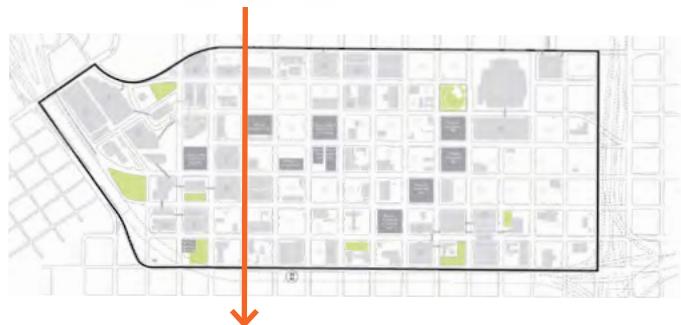


Direction of Travel Southbound, one-way.

Transit 50 - 75 buses per hour.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Concrete and pavers with some unique materials at Bell Street.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500 25,000

Street Trees



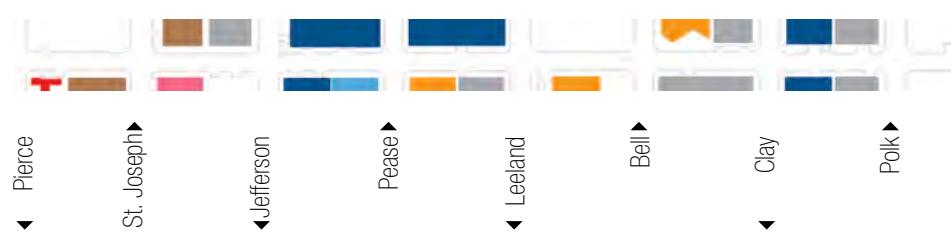
Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active



Land Use

institutional	residential
civic /gov't	
parking/ other	mixed use
	commercial



13: Louisiana Street

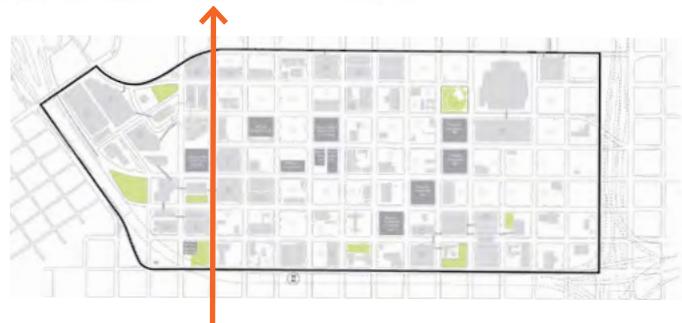


Direction of Travel Northbound, one-way.

Transit 50 - 75 buses per hour.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Concrete and pavers, with some unique materials between Bell and Leeland Streets.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500 25,000

Street Trees



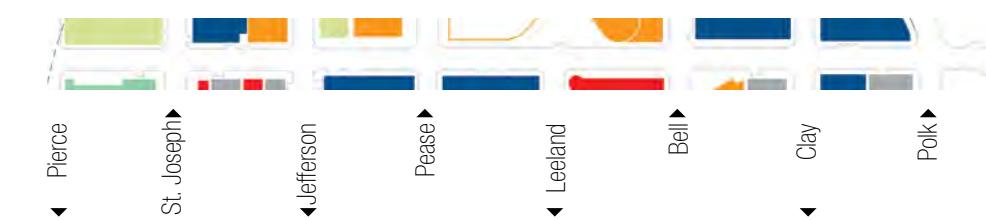
Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active

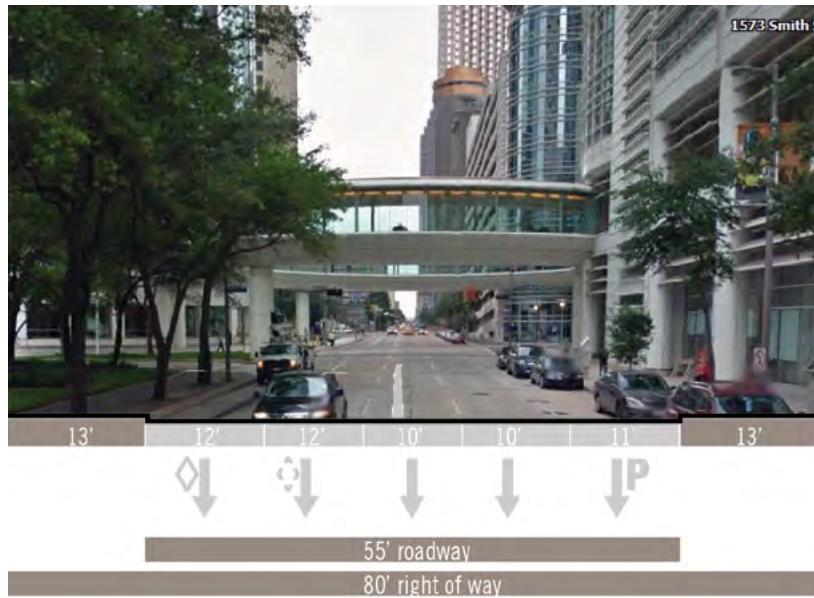


Land Use

institutional		residential	
civic /gov't		mixed use	
parking/ other		commercial	



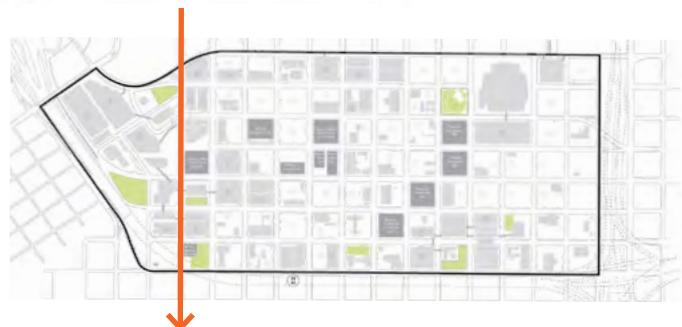
14: Smith Street



Direction of Travel Southbound, one-way.

Transit 50 - 75 buses per hour south of St Joseph Parkway; 75 - 100 north of St Joseph Parkway.

Bicycle Facilities None.



Sidewalks Concrete and pavers, with some unique materials between Bell and Pease Streets.

Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500 25,000



Street Trees



Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active

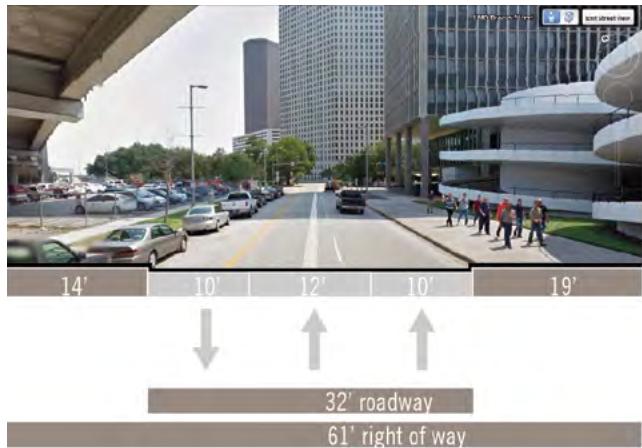


Land Use

institutional/civic /gov't	residential
civic /gov't	mixed use
parking/ other	commercial



15: Brazos Street

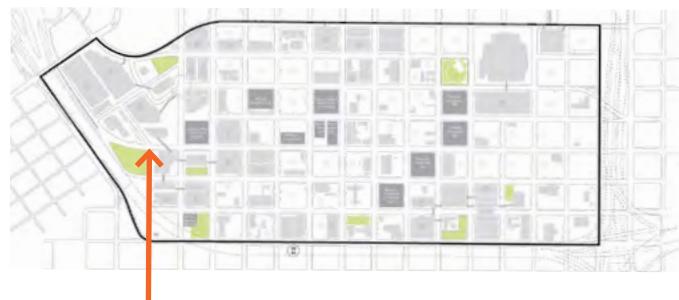


Direction of Travel Northbound, one-way.

Transit 1 - 25 buses per hour south of Jefferson Street.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Concrete.



Satellite



Avg Daily Traffic Volume

< 2,500

25,000

Street Trees



Streetwall

parking/loading inactive active

Land Use

institutional/civic/gov't	residential
parking/other	mixed use
commercial	



St. Joseph

Jefferson

Pease

Leeland

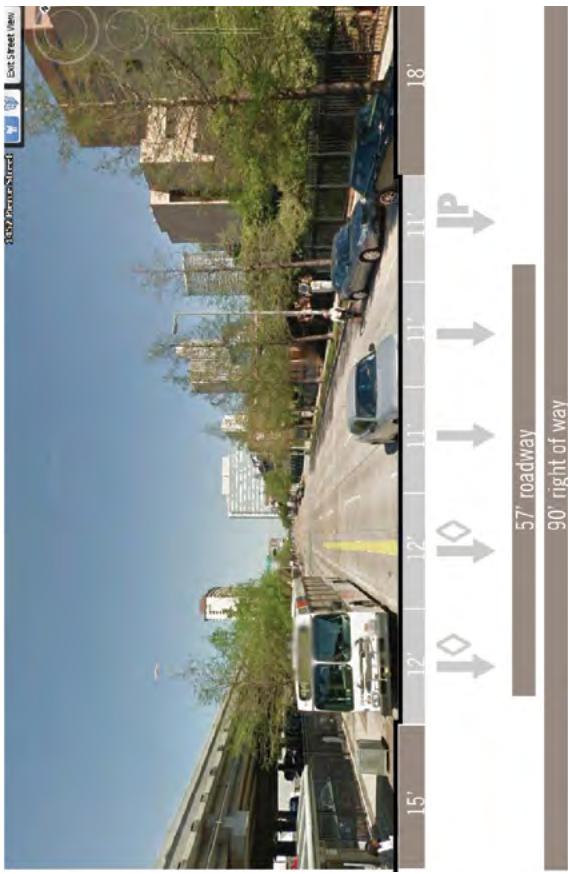
Bell

Clay

Polk

16: Pierce Street

Direction of Travel Eastbound, one-way.



Transit 50 - 75 buses per hour west of Smith Street.

25 - 50 buses per hour Smith to Travis Street.

50 - 75 buses per hour Travis to Fannin Street.

25 - 50 buses per hour Fannin to La Branch Street.

1 - 25 buses per hour east of La Branch Street.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Pavers on south side, concrete on north side.



Avg Traffic Volume

< 2,500

25,000

parking/loading inactive active

Street Trees

Streetwall

Land Use

residential
mixed use
commercial

institutional
civic/gov't
parking/other



17: St. Joseph Parkway

Direction of Travel Westbound, one-way



Transit	50 - 75 buses per hour west of Smith Street. 25 - 50 buses per hour Smith to Travis Street. 75 - 100 buses per hour Travis to Fannin Street. 50 - 75 buses per hour Fannin to La Branch Street. 25 - 50 buses per hour east of La Branch Street.
Bicycle Facilities	None.

Sidewalks Concrete with grass east of Jackson Street,
Concrete and pavers west of Jackson Street.



Satellite



Avg Traffic Volume

< 2,500
2,500 - 25,000
25,000+
parking/loading
inactive

Street Trees



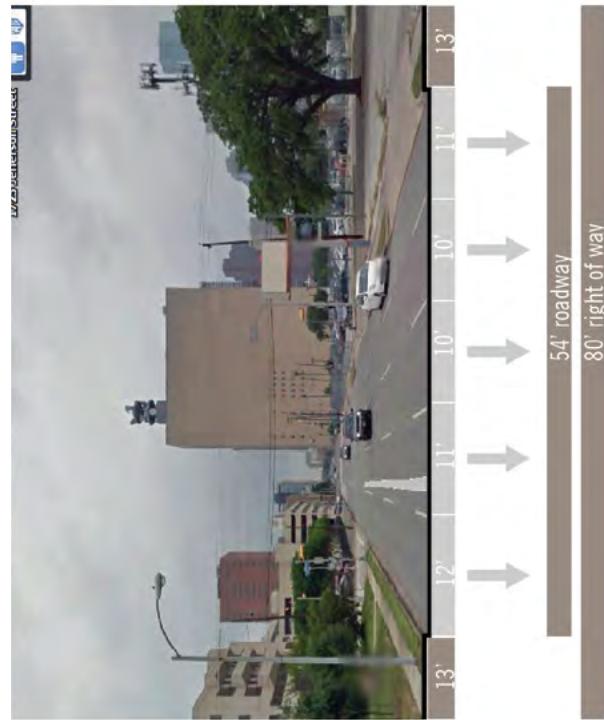
Streetwall

active
residential
mixed use
commercial
institutional
civic /gov't
parking/ other



Land Use

18: Jefferson Street

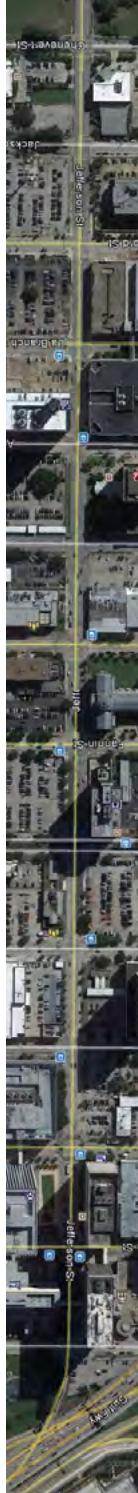


Direction of Travel Eastbound, one-way.

Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Concrete with grass strip east of Travis Street.
Concrete and pavers west of Travis Street.



Satellite

Streetwall

Avg Traffic Volume
< 2,500 25,000

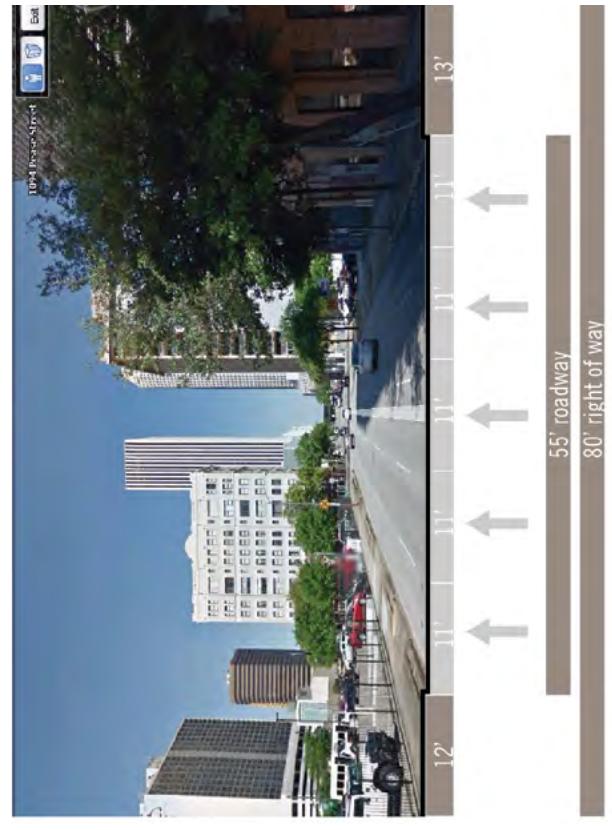
Street Trees
inactive active

Land Use
residential
mixed use
commercial

Land Use
institutional
civic/gov't
parking/other
commercial



19: Pease Street



Direction of Travel Westbound, one-way.

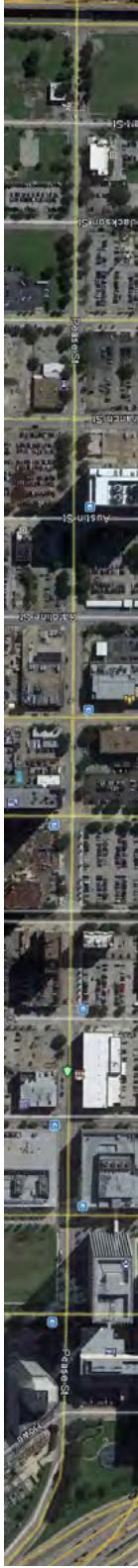
Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities None.

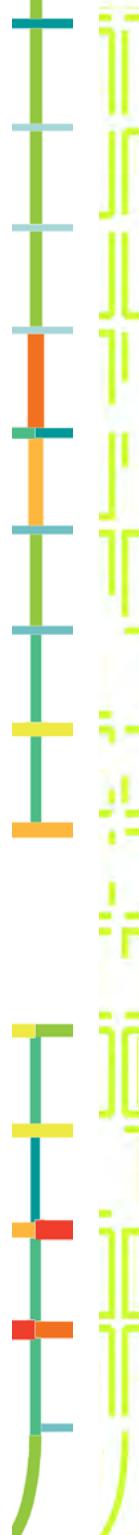
Sidewalks Concrete with grass strip, except for two blocks west of Louisiana Street.



Satellite



Avg Traffic Volume
< 2,500
2,500 - 25,000
Street Trees



Streetwall
parking/loading
inactive
active
Land Use
institutional
civic/gov't
residential
mixed use
commercial
parking/other



20: Leeland Street

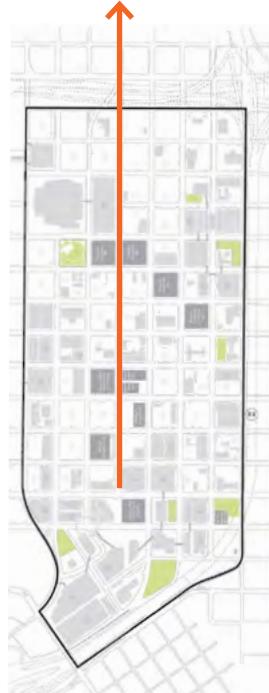


Direction of Travel Eastbound, one-way.

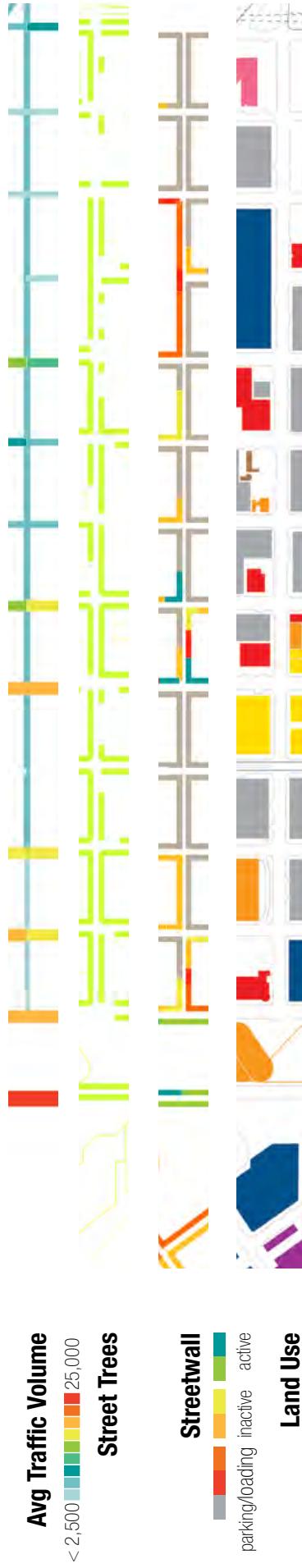
Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities Signed bike route east of La Branch Street.

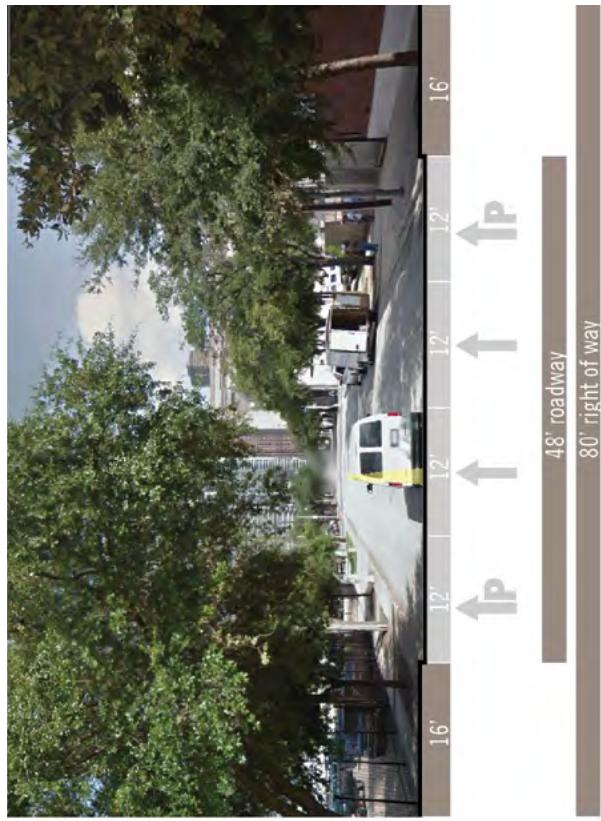
Sidewalks Mostly concrete with grass strips.
Pavers for two blocks east of Travis Street.



Satellite



21: Bell Street

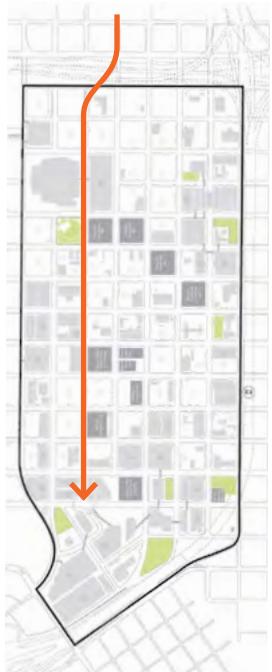


Direction of Travel Westbound, one-way.

Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities None.

Sidewalks Concrete with grass strips east of Travis Street.



Satellite



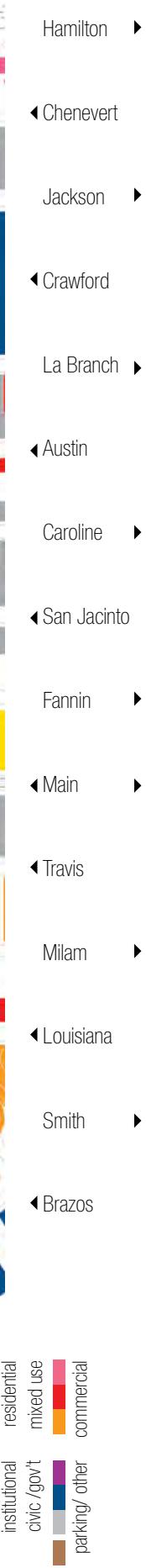
Avg Traffic Volume



Street Trees

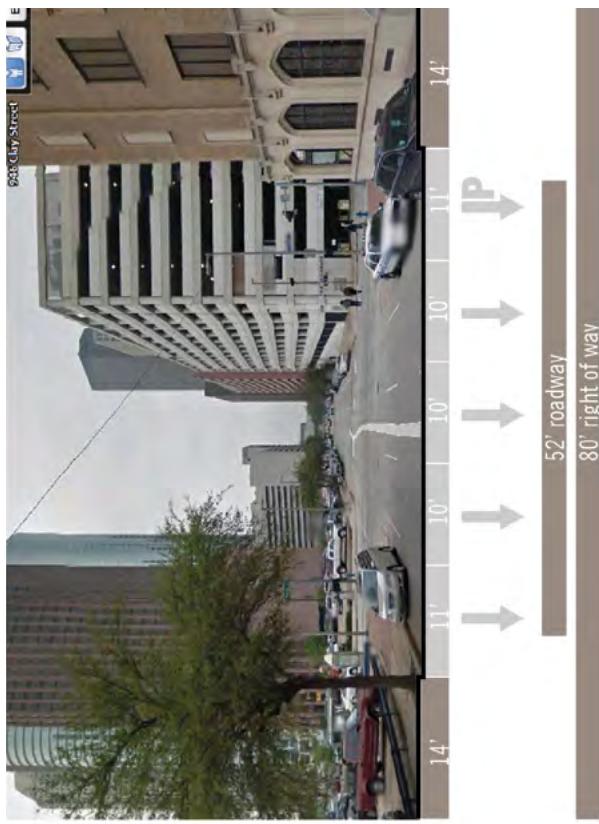


Streetwall



Land Use

22: Clay Street



Direction of Travel Eastbound one-way between Smith and La Branch Street, two-way between Jackson and Hamilton Streets.

Transit 1-25 buses per hour west of Smith Street.

Bicycle Facilities Signed bike route west of La Branch Street.

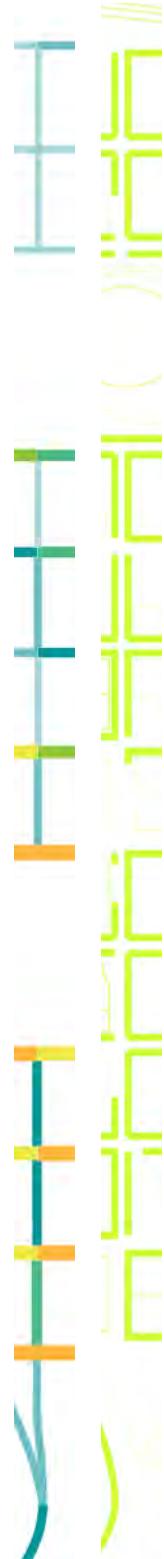
Sidewalks A mix of pavers and property-specific materials.
Concrete either side of Main Street.



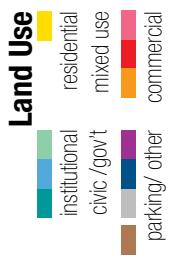
Satellite



Street Trees



Streetwall



23: Polk Street



Direction of Travel Westbound, one-way.

Transit None.

Bicycle Facilities Signed bike route.

Sidewalks No consistent materials between different blocks.



Satellite

Avg Traffic Volume

< 2,500

25,000

Street Trees



Streetwall

parking/loading
inactive

active

Land Use

institutional

civic /gov't

mixed use

residential

commercial

parking/other





SOUTHERN DOWNTOWN/ CBD

public realm plan

Over the past decade, Downtown Houston has seen significant investment in both planning studies and public projects. The *Southern Downtown/CBD Public Realm Plan* builds upon these prior efforts that have shaped Downtown.

APPENDIX B: PREVIOUS PLANS AND STUDIES

Houston's Downtown has been the subject of extensive construction activity and several planning studies in recent years. The following reports impact the southern Downtown area and provide vital work upon which to build.

RECENT STUDIES:



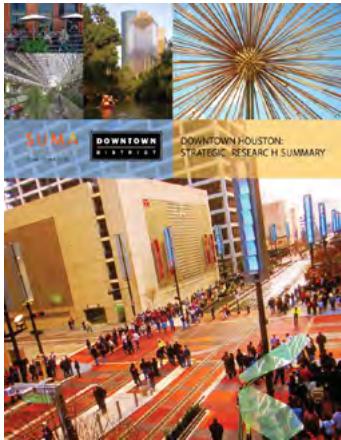
Houston Downtown Development Framework

Sponsored by Central Houston, Inc., Downtown District, Houston Downtown Alliance, and Main Street Market Square Redevelopment Authority, 2004

This document defines an overall long-term vision for Houston's Downtown in 2025 through four overarching themes: attracting tens of thousands of new residents living in new neighborhoods, creating an active and engaging public realm, strengthening larger venues and filling in the urban fabric with smaller attractions, and creating the sense that Downtown Houston is the regional and global hub of action to attract businesses. While this study was completed in 2004, before the completion of Discovery Green and other key developments, the overall vision and recommendations are still pertinent.

Key Insights and Recommendations:

- Designate residential growth areas within Downtown, including southern areas.
- Hasten more medium density residential development through creative incentive programs that optimize underutilized on-street parking and parking facilities.
- Promote supportive urban design and quality of life amenities, including standards for streetscapes, and active ground floor uses.
- Encourage street level retail and entertainment, including the creation of regularly scheduled ethnic and farmers markets that appeal to a broad cross section of Houstonians, and the development of a street vendor and performer program.
- Manage sidewalks as a core asset, and balance expansion of tunnel system with activation of sidewalks and public realm.
- Create new focal points around the Christ Church Cathedral and Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral, such as the proposed Cathedral Square. Integrate compelling green space into expanded campuses.
- Create a binding fabric of smaller-scale cultural and historic attractions.



*Downtown Houston Strategic Research Summary
Commissioned by the Houston Downtown Management District, 2007*

This study, by SUMA Partners, sought to develop a “lifestyle profile” for Downtown Houston, using a quantitative survey focused on residents, workers and visitors, as well as several focus group discussions. While respondents felt that Downtown Houston currently lacks vitality and the “right mix” of retail, it is one of the top locations of choice for people considering their next residential move. Respondents also indicated that “everyday” needs such as ATMs, ice cream shops, barbershops, and a grocery store are most needed. Finally, the need to connect destinations and create a “complete, end-to end, experience” was a recurring theme.



*George R. Brown Convention Center 2025 Master Plan
Commissioned by Central Houston Civic Improvements and Houston First Corporation, 2011*

This long-range strategic plan, by Gensler, outlines three major priorities: creating more hotel space near the Convention Center, creating a vibrant “Convention District” within a five- to seven- block radius of the Convention Center, with a proposed expansion southwards in a four-block area between Toyota Center and US-59. The report investigates streetscape improvements and a reconfiguration of Avenida de las Americas, suggests potential sites for new hotel development, and recommends that all new development in the immediate area include ground-level retail with an emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle access.



*Livable Centers Study for Houston Downtown Management District and
East Downtown Management District
Commissioned by Houston-Galveston Area Council, 2011*

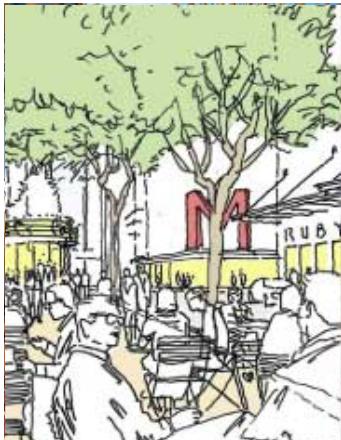
Led by Morris Architects, this study focuses on an area of 170 city blocks straddling US-59 on the east side of Houston’s Downtown. This area, the report states, has seen massive investment in the previous three decades and is the home of five major venues, yet has not seen the growth of a cohesive urban fabric in between these islands of activity. The focus of this report encourages a seamless public realm around these mega-projects, plus innovative ways to provide housing options close to Downtown jobs for a diverse range of incomes and ages.

Key Insights:

- The need and demand for better connections between Downtown and East Downtown (EaDo) is clear. An unpleasant and uncomfortable pedestrian realm compounds the limited access, while US-59 underpasses are poorly lit and lack appropriate pedestrian accommodations.
- Three major influences in the study area: post-industrial fabric extending from Main Street to warehouses in EaDo along several streets, gradient of land values from \$100/SF in Downtown to \$30/SF in EaDo, and major event venues that are an impediment to circulation.
- Much land is in the hands of speculative property owners who may hold land for a decade or more before developing. The key to private development is property assembly, as it is difficult to develop anything less than three-quarters of a block with on-site structured parking, especially as land values rise and larger-scale development is required for an economic return.
- Retail uses are having limited success in the EaDo study area, partly due to large amounts of recently built space at GreenStreet (formerly the Houston Pavilions), the Shops at Houston Center, and other space in the Central Business District (CBD). Although residential growth has brought more affluent households to the area, the residential population is insufficient to support neighborhood level retail.
- Large venues can be a barrier — many of the north-south and east-west streets are blocked by the footprints of Discovery Green, the Convention Center, Toyota Center, Minute Maid Park, and the BBVA/Compass Stadium.

Key Recommendations:

- Dallas Street to become a retail corridor.
- Ensure loading access zones for major venues.
- Identify potential land for new hotels near the Convention Center.
- Require active ground floors along Dallas and Crawford Streets.
- Improve pedestrian crossings under US-59 at Polk, Rusk, Capitol and Texas Streets.
- Implement pedestrian improvements along Dallas Street from Main Street to Avenida de las Americas.
- Enhance the pedestrian realm on Avenida de las Americas from Rusk Street to Polk Street.
- Implement pedestrian standards for the entire study area.
- Implement bicycle wayfinding and identity program.
- Study major east-west bike route across Downtown.
- Provide bike racks at transit stations and major destinations.



Houston Downtown Mixed-Use Retail Core

Commissioned by the Houston Downtown Management District, October 2011

With AECOM as the lead consultant, this report explores the possibility of creating a “world-class retail and entertainment district” in Downtown, focused on Dallas and Lamar Streets and the key blocks of Main Street Square. The importance of a “Big Idea” and a “Quick Win” are primary elements of this study. With a grand vision for Downtown’s retail core, many of the specific recommendations are pragmatic and context-appropriate. The plan proposes a joint effort through public projects (streetscape improvements, district branding and retail parking solutions) and private investment (retail anchors, repositioning of storefronts and infill retail development).

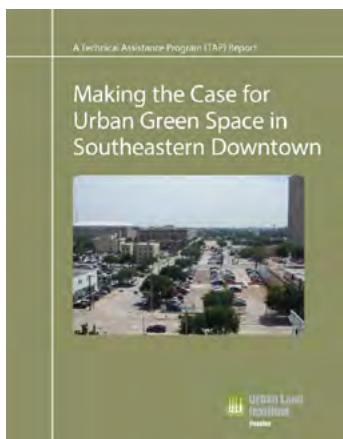
Key Insights and Recommendations:

- The Macy’s department store (now demolished) could be repositioned as a mixed retail and corporate hotel project in the 10-story Foley’s Building.
- A covered pedestrian promenade along Dallas Street, between Main and Caroline Streets, is proposed as the iconic “Big Idea.”
- Prioritizing “pedestrians first” in an auto-centric and bus-dominated area is challenging.
- While the system of tunnels and skywalks currently competes with Downtown sidewalks for activity, a powerful street level plan will draw sufficient attention to activate the street level.
- Any projects or programs must enhance the perception of Downtown Houston for both locals and visitors.
- Free concerts, a “Quick Win” strategy, and other programming that increases the visibility of this retail core can be used as a statement of intent and give the Downtown District a platform to engage the broader community as the core is revitalized.
- Connectivity to surrounding districts and venues is key to developing the retail core.
- Solutions for parking and mobility, such as shared office-parking and a reevaluation of several one-way streets, should be considered to generate and sustain traffic to support new retail.
- There are approximately 24,000 parking spaces within the area bounded by Rusk, La Branch, Clay, and Louisiana Streets. Strategies and partnerships that leverage these existing spaces will help Downtown retail compete with suburban locations.
- A district-wide strategy to address parking with a “park once” solution is recommended.



Houston - Vision 36
Commissioned by CBD Vision, July 2011

This conceptual plan was prepared by Kirksey Architects for CBD Vision, a coalition of property owners in a general area of 36 blocks within southern Downtown/ CBD. The essence of this urban design concept proposes linear green space along six east-west streets. The concept is derived from the insight that most of these east-west streets do not carry significant amounts of traffic and could be narrowed with minimal impacts. In addition to narrowing the streets, the plan suggests that each property owner would contribute approximately 10 feet of land bordering the right-of-way that would create linear parks. Although this contribution would, in theory, be offset by value capture from the green spaces, land acquisition or donation from a majority of property owners in the area has not been extensively pursued between public and private entities. A subsequent study by Kirksey exhibited the linear parks without the necessity of property owners relinquishing private land for right-of-way enhancements



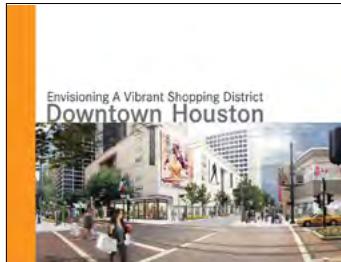
Making the Case for Urban Green Space in Southeastern Downtown
Commissioned by Urban Land Institute, Houston, 2013

This document summarizes the results of a collaboration between ULI Houston and Texas A&M University, including conversations with local stakeholders. The report is a culmination of a three-day workshop led by a seven member panel of local community leaders, including design and development experts. The study encompassed the area south of Clay Street, east of Milam Street, north of IH-45, and west of US-59.

Key Insights and Recommendations:

- Creating a park, by itself, is not enough. Urban green space must be well designed and actively managed to avoid detrimental uses. Park space must be linked to other active areas — particularly residential development — in order to make it attractive, easy to visit, and successful.
- A new park on the eastern side of the study area would be an important amenity for residential development in the immediate area.
- Potential green spaces should be linked with attractive, pedestrian corridors. Special emphasis should be given to Leeland Street, La Branch Street, St. Joseph Parkway, and Main Street.
- As future office towers and mixed-use developments near Main Street are realized, the Downtown tunnel system should extend to the western end of the Leeland Street greenway, where a visual linkage could entice tunnel pedestrians up to the street level and out onto the greenway.

- Strong connections to shoulder neighborhoods across the elevated freeways present design opportunities to strengthen the study area.
- La Branch Street has the potential to become a favorable location for restaurant and bar development, and eventually additional retail.
- Downtown Living Initiative Chapter 380 incentives and relatively lower land costs in the area east of Jackson Street and south of Leeland Street could make mid-rise, multifamily development feasible.



Envisioning A Vibrant Shopping District: Downtown Houston
Commissioned by Mayor's Downtown Retail Task Force, September, 2013

This report evaluates Downtown Houston's status and potential as a retail destination, with recommendations focusing on:

- retail recruitment
- public realm improvements
- parking
- marketing
- branding
- public sector incentives.

The report recommends creating a Shopping District along Dallas Street, with the new three-block GreenStreet retail development as a centerpiece and catalyst. This proposed Shopping District is directly adjacent to the northern edge of the southern Downtown study area, and thus represents a significant opportunity to create a gateway into southern Downtown. The Task Force envisions an aggressive timeline aimed at completing all streetscape improvements and bringing in a substantial amount of new retail in time for Superbowl LI in 2017.

Key Insights and Recommendations:

- Downtown should have a clearly identified retail Shopping District convenient to the office population, residents around Downtown, and visitors to the Convention District, stadiums, and other major venues.
- Develop a unique, premier setting for a Shopping District on Dallas Street between Milam and La Branch Streets.
- Provide a public realm that will attract national, regional and local retailers with a focus on Dallas Street. Improvements include 20-foot sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, landscaping, spaces for sidewalk cafés and kiosks, and wayfinding.
- Leverage proposed public realm improvements to secure commitments from property owners to participate with interior retail improvements or conversions.
- Designate portals connecting the Shopping District to the tunnel system.



*Southern Downtown/ CBD Market Assessment
Commissioned by the Downtown Management District, 2013*

This report provides a detailed overview of current and projected market conditions within southern Downtown, an inventory of recent and ongoing developments, and a comparative study of competitive business activity centers in the Greater Houston Area.

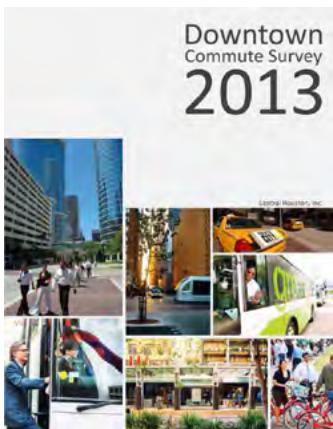
Key Insights and Recommendations:

- The area west of Fannin Street is most likely to support office and commercial uses due to higher land values, while the area east of Fannin Street is most likely to attract mid-rise residential development.
- The presence of dilapidated buildings and expansive parking lots means that this area of Downtown is perceived as less desirable than the northern and eastern parts of Downtown.
- The public nature of Downtown streets means that office workers have closer interaction with things they may find distasteful, such as deteriorated buildings and the homeless or panhandlers. This contrasts with non-downtown locations where there may be more privately controlled space and fewer older buildings that are underutilized.

Office: The majority of Class A office properties are along a north-south axis at the western edge of the study area. However, the redevelopment of Discovery Green is shifting development momentum to an east-west office tower axis through Downtown at the northern edge of the site. Ample vacant land in other parts of Downtown that are seen as more desirable and a lack of connection to the tunnel system means that development in southern Downtown may happen slowly.

Residential: Land values in adjacent areas, particularly Midtown, are significantly lower and will attract most of the demand for smaller scale, affordable housing. Creating connections to these adjacent areas could be an important part of increasing vitality in southern Downtown. A “transformative green space near Main Street” could increase demand and value of residential apartments.

Hotel: Southern Downtown has several prime potential locations, as well as a strong demand for more hotel space. There will likely be up to 2,000 hotel rooms built, particularly in the vicinity of the Convention Center.



Downtown Commute Survey 2013
Commissioned by Central Houston Inc., 2014

Similar to the 2009 Downtown Commute Survey, Central Houston Inc. conducted a survey of Downtown employees from March 2013 to May 2013 in order to better understand the commute patterns of the Downtown workforce. 13,810 Downtown employees completed the survey, and their responses provide insight to commute behavior and trends that will benefit employers, Downtown property owners, transportation planners, and public policy makers.

Key Insights and Recommendations:

- 43% of respondents use alternative modes of transportation during their commute.
- 32% choose public transit as their primary commute mode (26% Park and Ride; 6% local bus/ rail).
- Downtown Houston continues to achieve the strongest commute mode split of public transit, carpool, vanpool, and other alternative commute modes compared to the city and region.
- Commute distance influences commute mode choice. For respondents that live within 10 miles of Downtown, more than 70% choose to drive alone while those that live further from Downtown primarily choose Park and Ride.
- While Millennial workers (respondents under age 30) comprised 12% of the survey sample, they accounted for 28% of those who commute less than five miles and 20% of those who commute five-nine miles from home to work.
- Employer incentives shape commute mode splits as the companies that only provide transit incentives reported the highest rates of bus and rail commuting, while firms that offered some form of parking incentive reported higher rates for single occupancy vehicle (SOV).
- Survey respondents reported a median AM commute duration of 30-39 minutes with a majority of Park and Ride and carpool/ vanpool users leaving home between 5:30 AM and 6:59 AM, while a majority of SOV drivers and local bus/ rail transit riders leaving between 6:00 AM and 7:59 AM.
- Survey respondents reported a median PM commute duration of 40-49 minutes with a majority of Park and Ride and carpool/ vanpool users leaving work between 4:30 PM and 5:59 PM, while a majority of SOV drivers and local bus/ rail transit riders leave between 4:30 PM and 6:29 PM.



System Reimagining

Commissioned by METRO Houston, 2014

The System Reimagining plan is a five-year transit service plan, focused on improving METRO's local bus network to better serve the METRO region. The project involved a comprehensive analysis of the existing system and its relationship to the area's population, including factors such as: frequency, ridership, travel times between key destinations, residential density and the locations of key job centers. The plan provides a framework that emphasizes increasing ridership over coverage and outlines a more efficient and reliable system. The draft plan has been released to the public for review. METRO estimates that the plan will be finalized by the end of 2014, with implementation beginning in the summer of 2015.

Key Insights and Recommendations:

- Because Houston has multiple significant employment centers, a grid-based system layout is more efficient for the METRO service area than the current radial system, which focuses on Downtown.
- Routes with consistently frequent service (every 15 minutes for at least 15 hours a day) tend to attract the heaviest ridership.
- Frequent service routes tend to attract ridership and are perceived as more reliable, especially on trips that involve transfers.
- The current system is not aligned with population growth in recent decades.
- By focusing on providing more frequent routes through densely populated areas in the west and southwest areas of Houston, the population within a half mile of frequent access routes would rise from 534,000 to 1,126,000.
- By focusing on connecting key employment centers, the amount of jobs within a half mile of frequent service would increase from 643,000 to 998,000.
- Based on the proposed reimagined system plan, local bus ridership is estimated to increase by at least 20% over two years.
- Based on the proposed plan, travel times between regional destinations will improve significantly. Based on an analysis of 30 destinations within the METRO service area, 30% of trips will be faster by 10-19 minutes and an additional 28% of trips will be faster by 20 minutes or more.
- All of the proposed changes outlined in the System Reimagining plan can be accomplished with current resources within the next five years.

APPENDIX C: IMAGE CREDITS

Images are listed in order of appearance, from left to right and top to bottom.

	Description	Credit
<i>pages 50-51</i>	Plaza-Euskadi, Bilbao, Spain Mary Bartelme Park, Chicago, IL Klyde Warren Park, Dallas, TX Main Street Garden, Dallas, TX Asser Levey Park, Brooklyn, NY Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle, WA Bryant Park, New York, NY Chess at Place Emilie-Gamelin (Berrie Square), Montreal, Canada Bryant Park Hotel, New York, NY Argo Tea Café at Connors Park, Chicago, IL Soma Streetfood Park, San Francisco, CA Mueller Trailer Eats, Austin, TX Cumberland Park, Nashville, TN Discovery Green, Houston, TX New Center Park, Detroit, MI California Institute for the Arts, Valencia, CA Klyde Warren Park, Dallas, TX Potgieterstraat Amsterdam, Netherlands Van Beuningenplein Playground, Amsterdam, Netherlands Splashpad, Tychy, Poland Dog Run in TriBeCa, New York, New York Chelsea Waterside Park, New York, NY New Rincon Hill Dog Park, San Francisco, CA Market Square Park, Houston, TX	Iwan Baan / Balmori Associates Site Design Group Ltd, in Scanario Journal The Office of James Burnett, on Architezer Thomas Balsley Associate, on World-Architects Adaptive Actions Robert Wade Bryant Park Sebastian White
<i>pages 60-61</i>	SandRidge Energy Commons Landscape, Oklahoma City, OK Mid Main Park, Vancouver, CA The Plaza at Harvard, Cambridge, MA Director Park, Portland, OR Exelon Plaza, Chicago, IL The High Line, New York, NY Gantry Plaza State Park, Queens, NY Village at Southeast False Creek, Vancouver The High Line, New York, NY	Travel Pod Skyscraperpage forum, username: george Soma Street Food Park Mueller Austin Hargreaves Associates, in Landezine Discovery Green After5Detroit Michael Robinson Chavez, in The LA Times The Office of James Burnett / Mei-Chun Jau Carve Landscape Architecture, in Landezine Carve Landscape Architecture, in Landezine
<i>page 62</i>		Tomasz Zakrewski Yummy Pets John Sobel Curbed San Francisco Katya Horner, Slight Clutter Photography, Downtown District Rogers Partners
		Hapa Collaborative Stoss Ross William Hamilton, in The Oregonian Joe Zekas Jane Ridley in The New York Post Marie Viljoen Adam Regn Arvidson Jim Read

	Description	Credit
<i>page 69</i>	Bike Station, Washington DC Bike Station, Washington DC McDonalds Cycle Center, Chicago, IL McDonalds Cycle Center, Chicago, IL Bikestation, Covina, CA Long Beach Bike Center, Long Beach, CA Long Beach Bike Center, Long Beach, CA Bike Commuter Center, Pittsburgh, PA Freewheel Midtown Bike Center, Minneapolis, MN Freewheel Midtown Bike Center, Minneapolis, MN	JPChan via Flickr thisisbossi via Flickr jamesbondsv via Flickr jamesbondsv via Flickr Bikestation (both images) Long Beach Bike Center The Source Eric Staudenmaier Bike Snob NYC Freewheel Bike Nicola Betts Paul Raff Studios Tom Ryaboi / BlogTO Peter J. Thomson / National Post Craig White WATERFRONToronto Asakura Robinson field research Asakura Robinson field research Asakura Robinson field research Ann Arbor Chronicle Wikimedia Commons 3domen.com Houston Realtors Hotel News Now DLR Group WWCOT Mueller Austin Embassy Suites Hotels Nic Lehoux Houston Tomorrow jdlasica via Flickr The Spring District The Real Reporter / Katz Properties Austin Convention Center Groupe Cardinal Hardy / Provencher Roy + Associates
<i>page 75</i>	Underpass Park, Toronto, CA Underpass Park, Toronto, CA Poor Sidewalk Conditions, Houston, TX Deteriorating Hardscapes, Houston, TX Vacant Lots, Houston, TX YMCA Lot, Ann Arbour, MI Brug en nabij Rabot, Gent, Belgium Interactive Installation, Hyde Park, Sydney, Australia	
<i>page 77</i>	1704 Ovid Street, Houston, TX JW Marriott, Austin, TX Music Center, Santa Monica, CA Mueller Condominium, Austin, TX Embassy Suites, Denver, CO Tarrant County College, Fort Worth, TX Townhomes, Houston, TX Convention Center, Austin, TX The Spring District, Bellevue, WA Boylston West, Boston, MA Convention Center, Austin, TX Le Campus Outremont, Montreal, Canada	
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