

RE-CONNECTING SPACES

The Urbanization of Greenbriar Mall

A design project by Keith Brockman



Master's Project Report

Thesis Statement:

The suburban spaces we live in today have developed in a pattern which focuses on supporting our technological advances as opposed to focusing on our communities. This in turn has resulted in spaces which do more to isolate people from one another; separating them by vast distances and often unmanageable conditions. A response is needed which reconfigures these spaces and repurposes them in order to provide places where people can reconnect with their neighbors and the regions they inhabit on a more humane level.

Critical Positions Statement:

There is an epidemic in the United States of communities, families, and individuals being isolated from each other and there are many factors which have lead to this. Our lives are busier than ever filled with work and extracurricular activities which are in locations that are isolated from one another be they domestic, employment, recreational, or just social. These busy schedules keep us constantly on the move and in our current built environment further isolated from one another due to the vast distances between activities and the routes we must take to get there. Single uses take up vast swathes of land and many of our streets in suburban areas especially have developed in dendritic patterns which funnel vehicles into arterials that are often remotely located from one's ultimate destination. This pattern of development takes up more of our time with travel, isolates individuals from one another, and needlessly consumes vast resources. I believe our built environments need to be reorganized into a more socially integrated mix of uses and spaces that keep us in closer connection with one another.

Not until recently and for decades before it has been common zoning and planning practice to isolate uses from one another so that there are large pockets of commercial uses separated from residential and industrial uses, and unless you lived in a metropolitan or sometimes historic downtown district there was never any mixing of uses. This development practice has lead to a dependence on the automobile for transportation which further isolates individuals from one another. Each automobile acts like an isolation tank depriving the occupant of their senses of the environment around them and further isolating them from their neighbors and communities.

It is my belief that in order to reconnect with our surroundings and each other a more integrated approach to the design of our environments is necessary. Instead of each discipline working on their own separate part of a project and not worrying about if it is the best solution for the problem we must reconnect with our counterparts in order to create efficient solutions for our future. We will get the perspectives of our colleagues and they ours getting the benefit of our each other's unique training and knowledge so that more dynamic solutions can be found for the problems we face in an ever growing population with diminishing resources.

This is only a first step though, we also need to create more dynamic spaces where the uses are mixed and pedestrian friendly to reduce our reliance on automobiles and get us out into the environments we live in. We need to once again become actively engaged in the places we live. A good mix of uses is not enough though, there must also be spaces designed to become third places. These locations are outside work and the home and give us ways to more deeply engage those we share our communities with.

Thesis Abstract:

“A number of recent American writings indicate that the nostalgia for the small town need not be constructed as directed toward the town itself: it is rather a “quest for community” – a nostalgia for a compassable and integral living unit. The critical question is not whether the small town can be rehabilitated in the image of its earlier strength and growth, but whether American life will be able to evolve and other integral community to replace it.”

Max Lerner

America as a Civilization 1957

Instead of focusing internally on individual properties and their uses we must take a more external approach to the design of our environments. The day of the single purpose structure isolated in a gray field of parking which can only be accessed by an automobile are over, It is my belief that we need a more integrated network of transportation and public community spaces that support one another and seek to connect the spaces in which we live offering a chance for interaction between the inhabitants.

In examining this thesis I have focused my project on retrofitting the existing Greenbriar Mall shopping center which was the third enclosed shopping center in Atlanta, Georgia and is located in Atlanta's southwest region at the intersection of Interstate 285 and Langford Parkway. This location gives the shopping center the possibility of regional access but due to a greater emphasis on the movement of automobiles along with providing exorbitant amounts parking rather than a focus on connectivity and pedestrian movement it has resulted in its lack of visibility and being almost inaccessible to these major thoroughfares of the region as well as the surrounding neighborhoods. This shopping center provides a great example of common development patterns that have resulted in a disconnect between the individual and their community.

I propose to as a solution to this disconnect developing an integrated system of transportation options on a new more connected urban grid. This grid will have a greater focus on the pedestrian and walk ability. The new framework will also create an entertainment area which incorporates a series of plazas and public spaces that connect the system together offering a chance for individuals to reintegrate themselves back into their communities to reconnect with each other and their region.

Master's Project Report

Design Project:

The intent of this project is to take an existing suburban shopping mall which is isolated from the surrounding infrastructure due to a poorly integrated suburban fabric and an over exaggeration of the parking requirements needed to serve the location, and retrofit it into a more sustainable and community oriented urban environment.

The current site consists of one main building which serves as the main impetus for the entire site, and although it boasts a ninety five percent occupancy rate it continually suffers from a lack of connectivity to the surrounding communities and region. In order to compensate there have been numerous attempts to lease portions of the outlying property for other uses such as a movie theater, grocery store, and several restaurants thinking this could increase the regional draw to the site as well as result in a sharing of customers, but only ends up in struggling and abandoned structures around the principle use. This project seeks to resolve these issues by first imposing a new urban grid over the property which will make it a more developable site and a more manageable environment for pedestrians to navigate increasing the connectivity of the site to surrounding communities and the region. In an effort to further increase regional connectivity to the site a new street car station is being introduced that will tie back into the existing mass transit system. Finally a new system of special public streets and plazas are introduced to create an environment which promotes community interaction through the framework of an entertainment district located between the existing mall and new transit station. All these elements seek to support the mall and focus on it as a nexus around which community can happen.

The urban plan forms the backbone of the project creating a network of streets which have the pedestrian in mind incorporating wide sidewalks with trees and street parking lining all the streets. All of the main thoroughfares surrounding the site except the interstate are scaled down in order to slow traffic down and allow pedestrians to enter the site without having to worry about making it across the street before the light changes allowing them to no longer function as dunes to movement. This was particularly important in this area as a vast portion of the community gets around on foot or by public transportation. All the streets internally to the site are also scaled down with strategically located bike paths. Additionally the street network breaks the super block down into a more manageable and developable series of blocks which range in size from two hundred and fifty feet by five hundred and fifty feet to a smaller three hundred by three hundred foot block. These block sizes are important as they offer a great flexibility in development and parking options for the whole site. This restriction in block size also allowed for the addition of two streets which divided the mall into three parts opening up the existing internal plazas to the public as well as preparing the site of the mall for possible redevelopment in the future if the mall should not be a desirable building type at that time.

The scaling down of the freeway to the North as well as the integration of a new street car transit station is the key to reintegrating the site back into the region. Regional access previously was from one freeway off ramp which was poorly integrated into the site offering limited visibility to the site or any indication of its amenities. By turning the freeway into an at grade commercial main street it offered the opportunity to connect to neighborhoods across the street by both automobile and pedestrian traffic as well as increasing the permeability of the site. The at-grade street design also allows for the introduction of a new street car to the site serving a greater need to this community of connectivity to the broader metropolitan area through an expanded mass transit system. In addition the Street car also brings a new demographic to the shopping center.

Not only does the new transit station integrate the site into the regional transportation and community network but it also serves as the main gateway to a series of plazas and public spaces that will form the new entertainment district. The entertainment thoroughfare is designed to create an area where community can happen. This street is designed primarily for the pedestrian separating people from the isolated environments of their cars and offering them the opportunity to interact with one another. Automobile traffic it discourages through the use of narrow one lane traffic in both directions and limited access to parking from this street. There are broad sidewalks to either side with a central kiosk lined pedestrian walk connecting the transit station to the new centrally located mall plaza. These kiosks will offer two services. The first is to replace some of the retail which will be lost at the mall itself due to the addition of cut through streets and a central plaza. This will allow the mall to reach out to the transit station as if the shopping simply transitions from indoors to outdoors. The second function the kiosks will server is a place for enlivening activity in this new public realm and not just resulting in a long corridor devoid of activity. They will offer opportunities for pause where people can begin to interact with one another. The buildings lining the street will also consist of a series of bars , restaurants, comedy, night clubs, and music venues completing the entertainment component of the street. Occasionally the street may be closed down to automobile traffic and incorporated with the new central mall plaza to host large events or concerts of local and national musicians.

The new central mall plaza though is the main community space. No longer with an emphasis on movement this place offers a refuge from the fast paced urban environment. Here people are enticed to sit and visit or eat as the food court of the mall is integrated into the plaza offering outdoor seating which is both shaded and sunlit throughout the day due to its complex north facing alignment. There are also spaces designed into the plaza acting as natural stages for two or three local performers or one larger function at the southern end of the plaza. Other stage events can take place in the plaza as well. These may include pageants and community wellness events or even local premieres of the neighborhoods Tyler Perry Studios latest movie.

I believe this project shows how through a combination of a multi-modal transportation network with integrated public spaces community can be fostered. Our communities can be reconnected to one another if we just take the time to eliminate some of the space with place.

Site Location

Greenbriar Mall is part of the Atlanta Regional Commission's (ARC) Greenbriar Mall LCI study area. The study area is located in South East Atlanta Georgia and comprised of approximately 1.6 miles surrounding Greenbriar Mall. The Greenbriar Mall LCI study area is bounded by Giland Road and Panther Road to the North, Barge Road on the West, Hogan Road the city limits, and Tri-Cities area East Point on the East, and College Park and Hapeville on the South. There is strong regional access via I-285 and Langford Parkway as well as global access given its proximity to Hartsfield International Airport, Site visibility and directional signage however are extremely poor from I-285 and only slightly better from Langford Parkway. In addition to connecting the site to the region through these arterial roadways effectively isolate the site into three distinctly separate quadrants, which are only able to be adequately accessed by automobile or bus transit. This has affected the site's ability to be a major retail area which can serve the region and significant to the local economy.



Site History

Greenbriar Mall was designed by John Portman and opened in 1965 as Atlanta's third enclosed mall. The mall and surrounding out parcels occupy 90.71 acres of prime developable land which is currently being underutilized by vast amounts of impermeable surface parking. The mall proper has 113 stores which are 96 percent occupied and Macy's and Burlington Coat Factory as anchor tenants on opposite ends of the long axis of the mall. Burlington Coat Factory is located on the less visible western end of the mall. This anchor location has traditionally suffered due to its lack of visibility, starting out as a JCPenney's from 1965-1985 then an Upton's from 1987-1992. The more prominent anchor site is the eastern site which started out as a Rich's when the mall opened a recently changed ownership becoming a Macy's. This location seems to have always out performed its counterpart possibly due to its greater visibility, and while still under Rich's management signed a 10 year lease in 2001. The smaller tenant stores occupying the body of the mall are a variety of lower quality brand stores with some better quality non-brand stores. There is even a waiting list for some of the smaller locations indicating at the health of the location itself. The out parcels which exist consist of some fast food dining and an automotive service center in the north east corner of the site along with a Wachovia Bank in the south east corner of the site. These out parcels appear to perform better than their larger counterparts to the west which consist of a sit down restaurant a Cub Foods and Magic Johnson Cinema, the only difference being the visibility of the locations. Cub Food's closed in 2001 and remains boarded up even though mall management has been trying to get a tenant for the location. Magic Johnson Cinema was anticipated to act as a third anchor for the mall, but due to the expansive parking lots separating them the theater had to support itself and again because of a lack of visibility ultimately closed its doors on October 11, 2009. A renewed interest has been taken in the theater though and it is being renovated for reopening in the near future. The remainder of the site consists of 68 acres of under utilized surface parking offering 6000 spaces. Only 4000 spaces are currently needed to support the mall's current operations leaving 2000 spaces (20 acres) which never get used. The topography of the site is also relatively flat and slopes mildly from north west to south east.

Site

Area: 90.71 acres
Undeveloped: 11.97 acres
Built: 16.78 acres
Parking: 68 acres
Unused: 20 acres

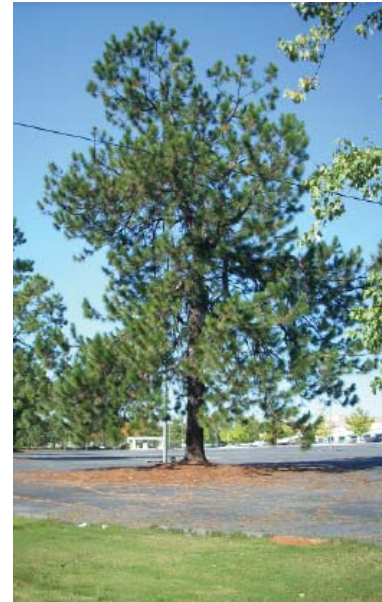
Boundaries
North: Langford Parkway
East: Greenbriar Parkway
South: Greenbriar Parkway
West: I-285



Existing Conditions

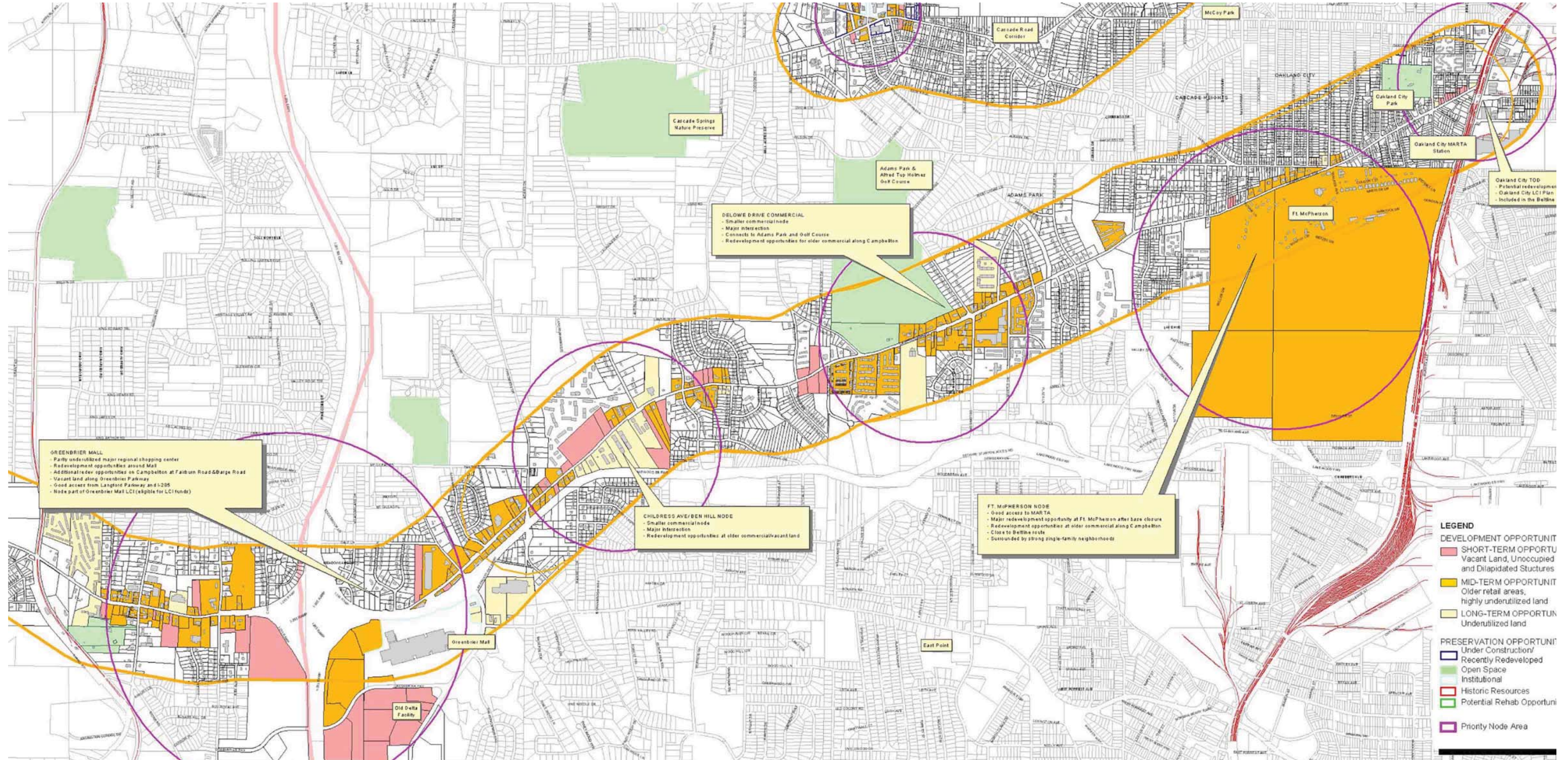


Existing Conditions



Renderings

Campbelton Road TAD



Key Concepts:

- Seeks to increase economic development potential and connect surrounding neighborhoods.
- Route for new proposed mixed-flow light rail trolley connecting Greenbrier to Greater Atlanta Mass Transit System and future Beltline project.
- Develops connection of several new economic centers with Fort McPherson and Greenbrier serving as anchors for new transit corridor.

Current Proposals

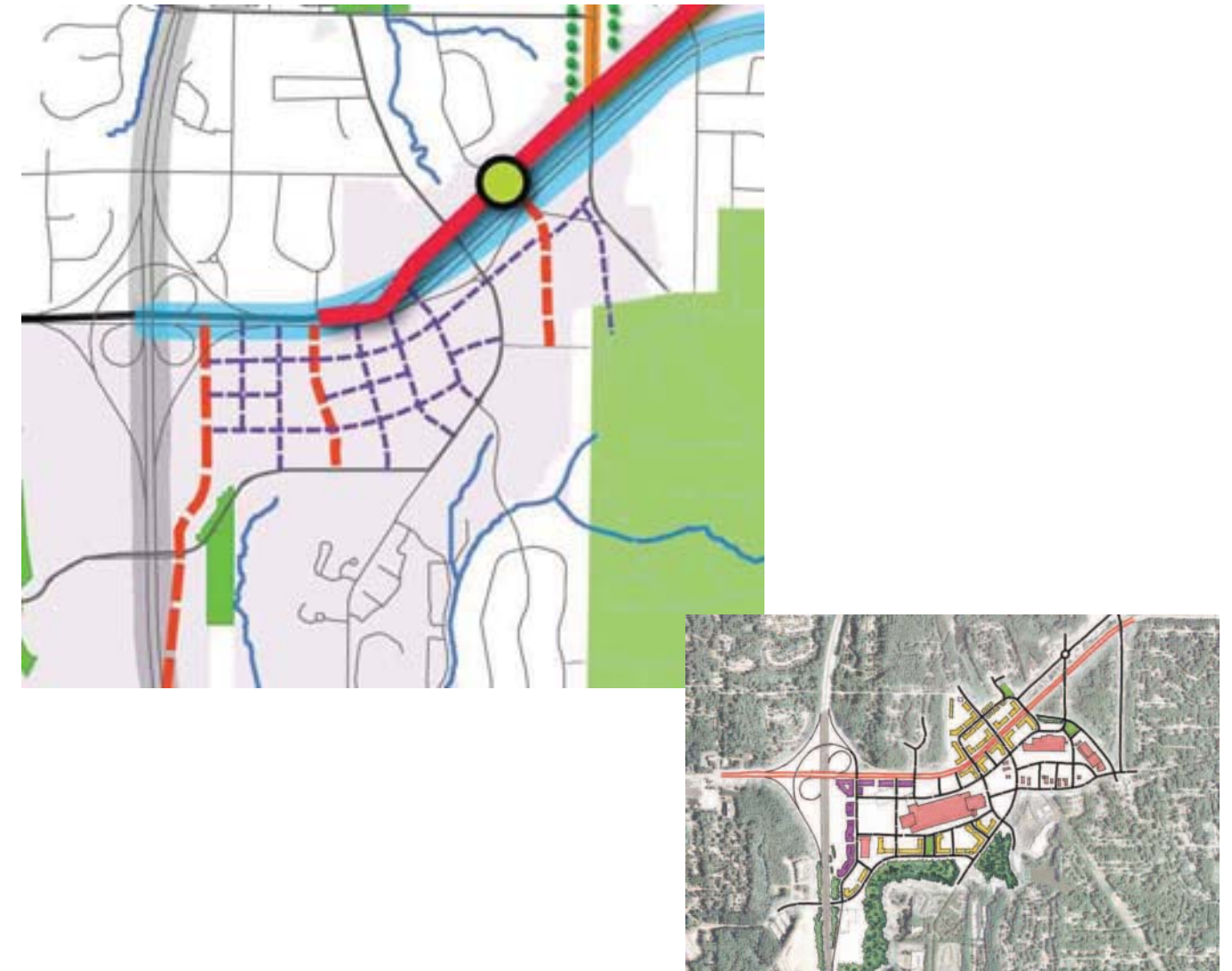
LCI Study Proposal



Key Concepts:

- Defining walkable neighborhoods and neighborhood commercial centers.
- Creating an interconnected street network that supports pedestrians as well as shorter local auto trips and transit.
- Proposing a mix of land uses, particularly higher density housing in a range of new housing types reflecting changing demographic needs and community desires.
- Creating a new network of public squares, parks, community focal points, and natural open spaces.

Connect Atlanta Proposal



Key Concepts:

- Defining Greenbriar Mall Area as a commercial and office anchor for south west Atlanta and south Fulton County
- Connect Mall area two Campbelton Road with enhanced street network which integrates Langford Parkway and Campbelton Road as a single at grade street in advance of I-285 ending the freeway section on Langford Parkway near present alignment adjustment.
- Integrate with Campbelton road transit project
- Reconfigure Interstate 285/Langford Parkway interchange allowing local access to an expanded street network.
- Convert Langford Parkway to an at-grade street in advance of I-285

MARTA Bus Routes



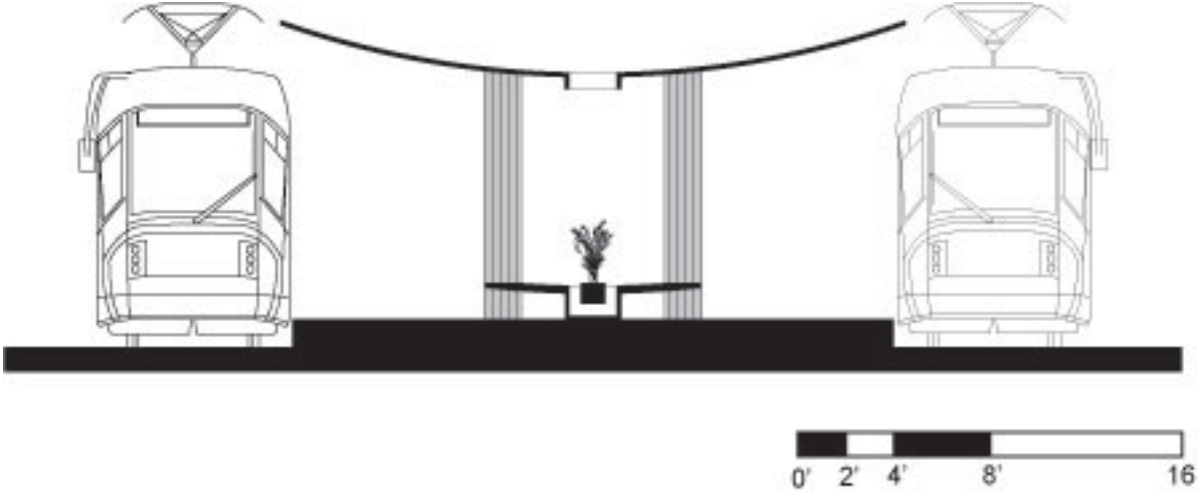
-MARTA Park & Ride provides connections to Hightower and Oakland MARTA Stations.

-Parking lot underutilized
-Buses used extensively
-Five bus routes service Greenbriar Area.

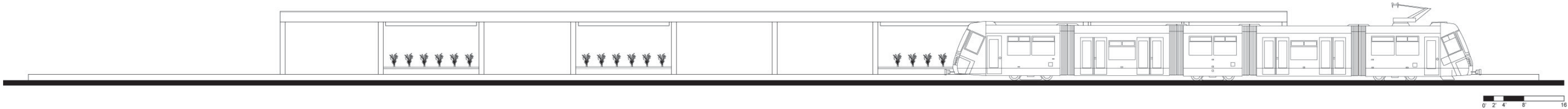
-Route	Ave. Ridership
62	715
66	1,698
82	2,298
83	4,710
166	1,272
170	1,059

Street Car Drawings

Transverse Section

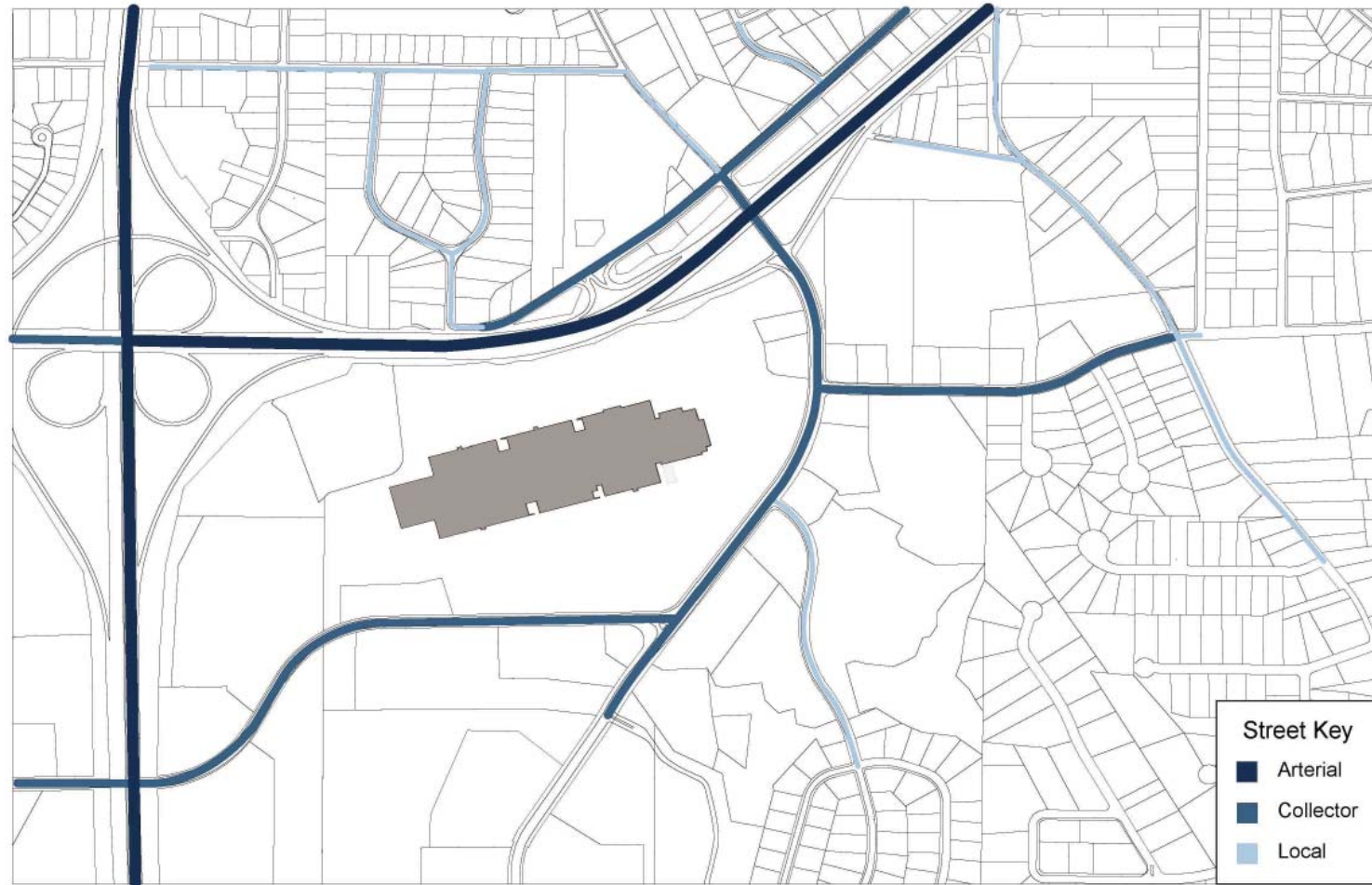


South Elevation

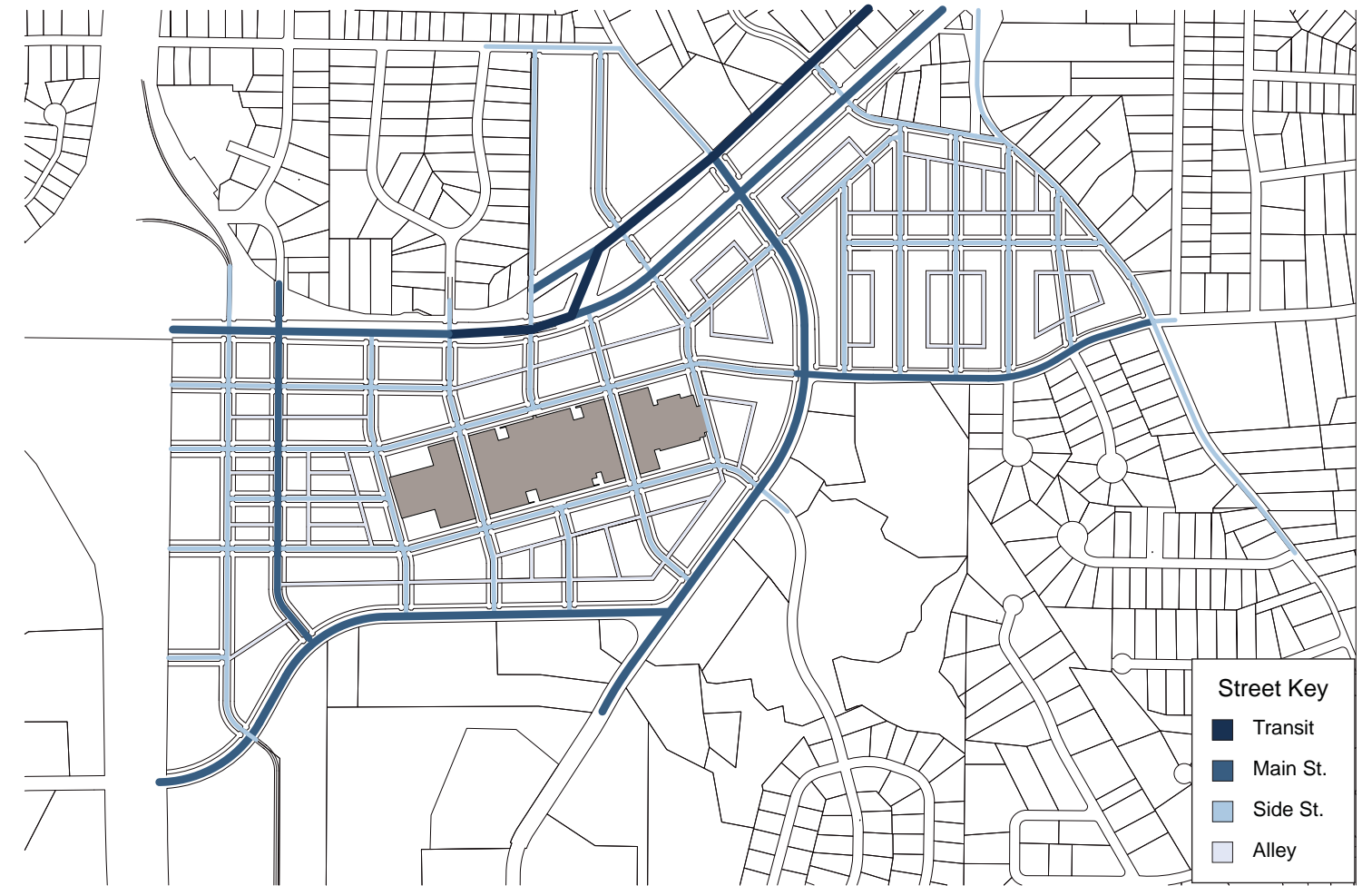


Street Network

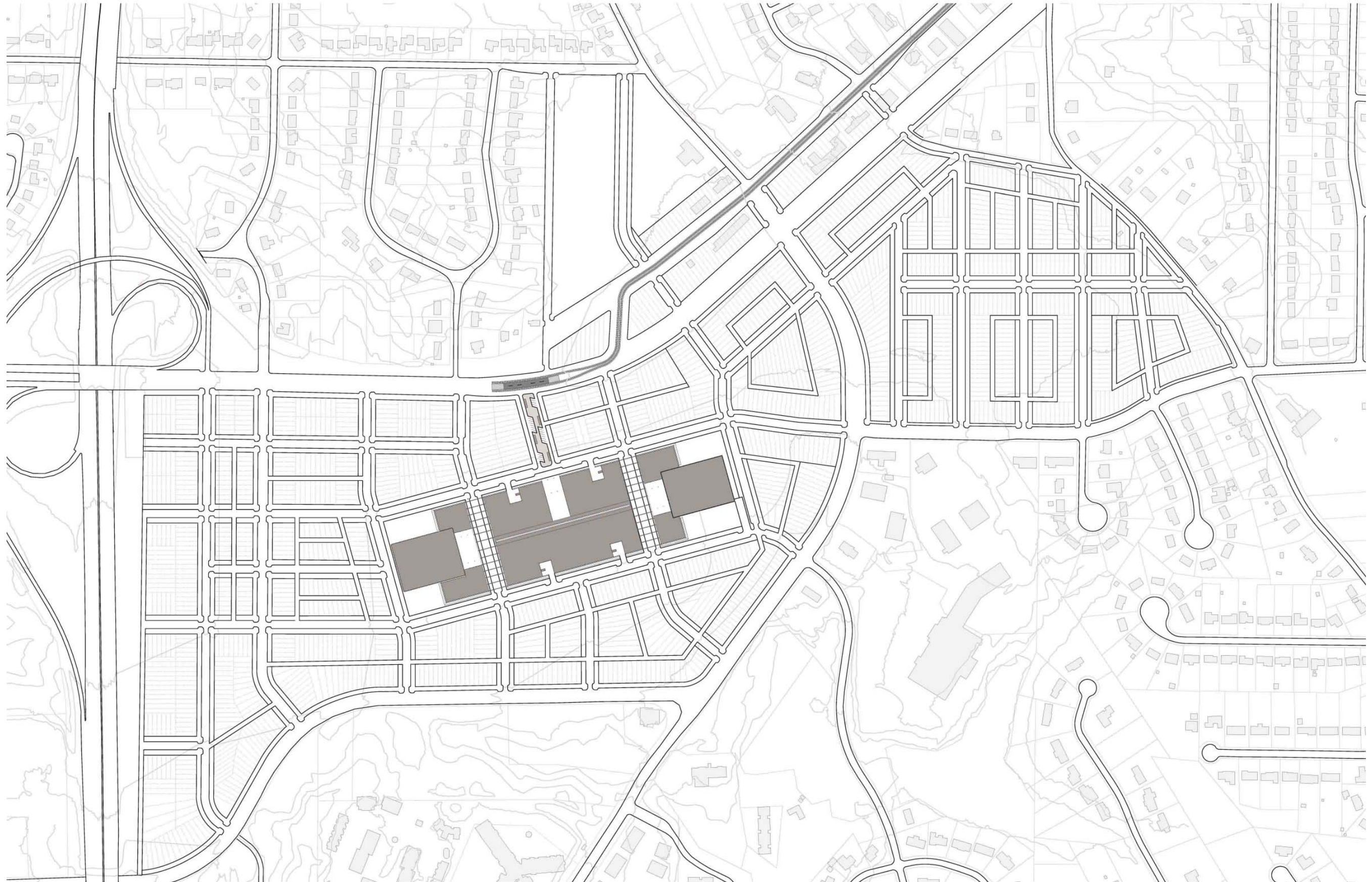
Current Street Layout



New Street Layout



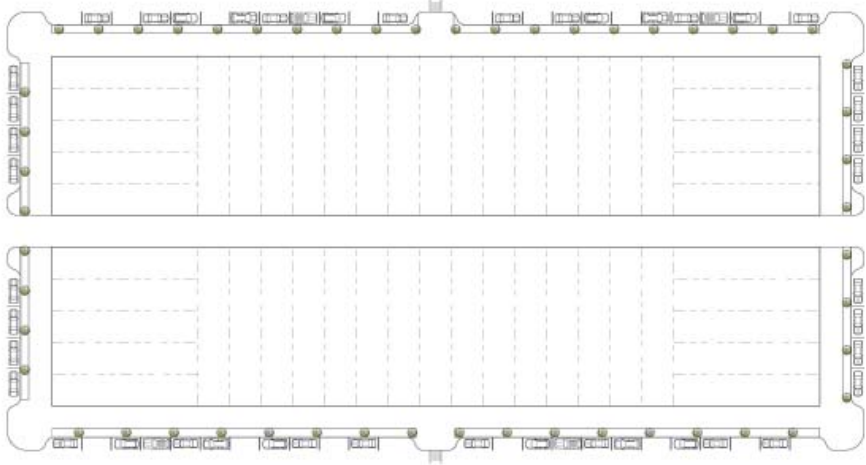
Site Plan



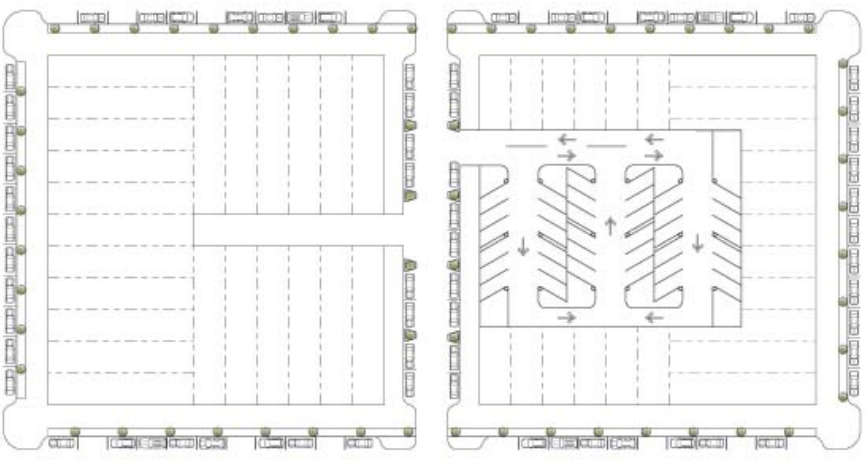
Scale : 1in = 125ft



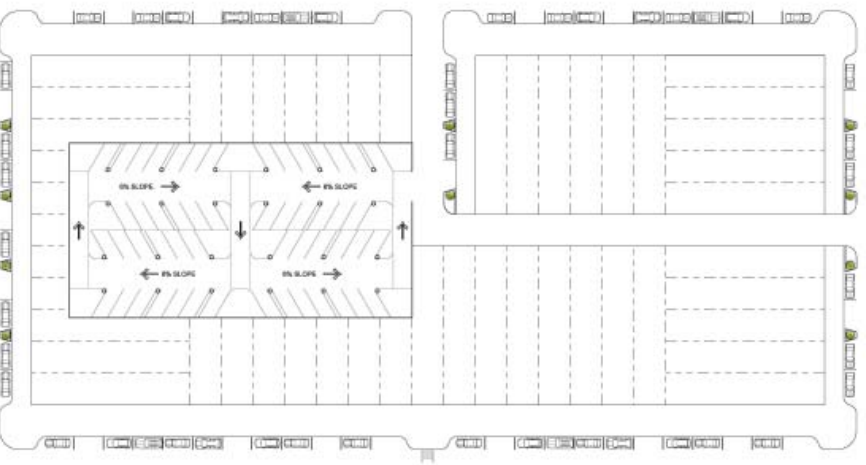
Typical Block Design



Block 1 No Parking

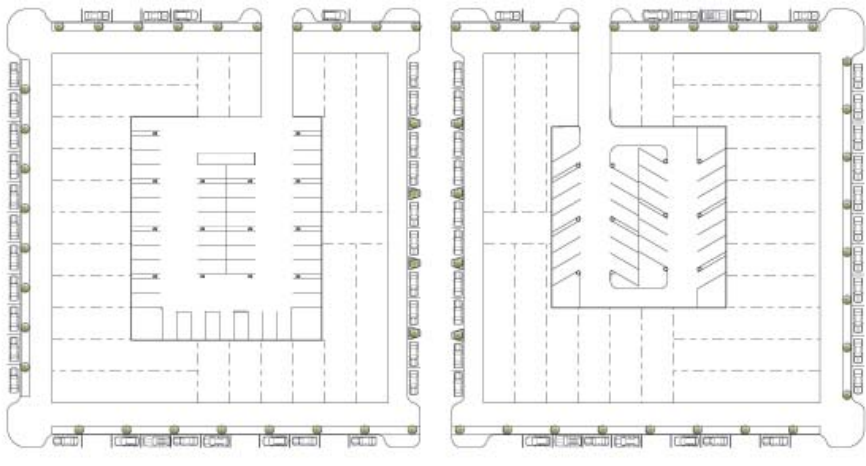


Block 2 Ground Parking

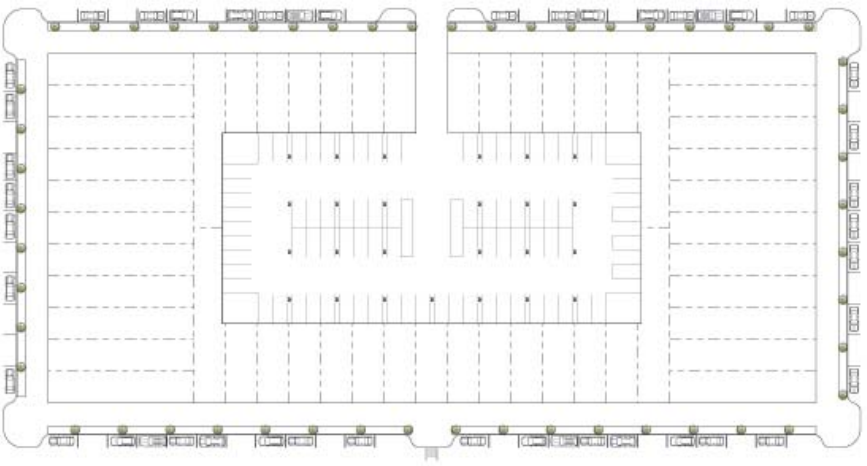


Block 3 Garage Parking

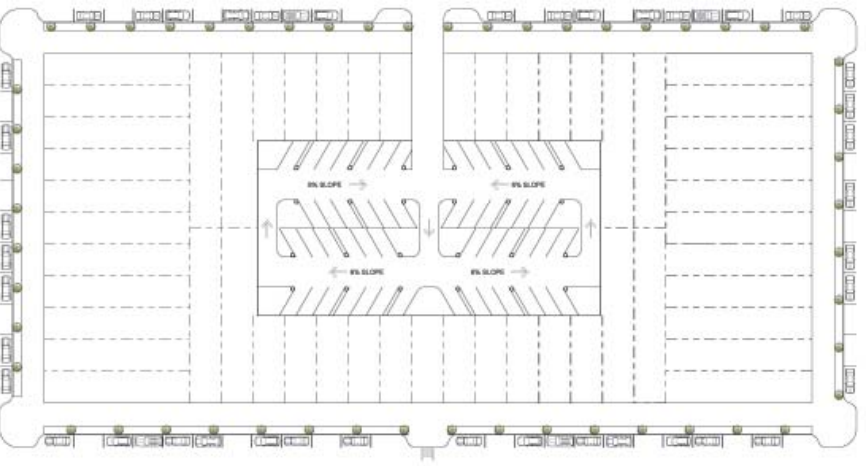
Block 4 Ground Parking



Block 5 Garage Parking

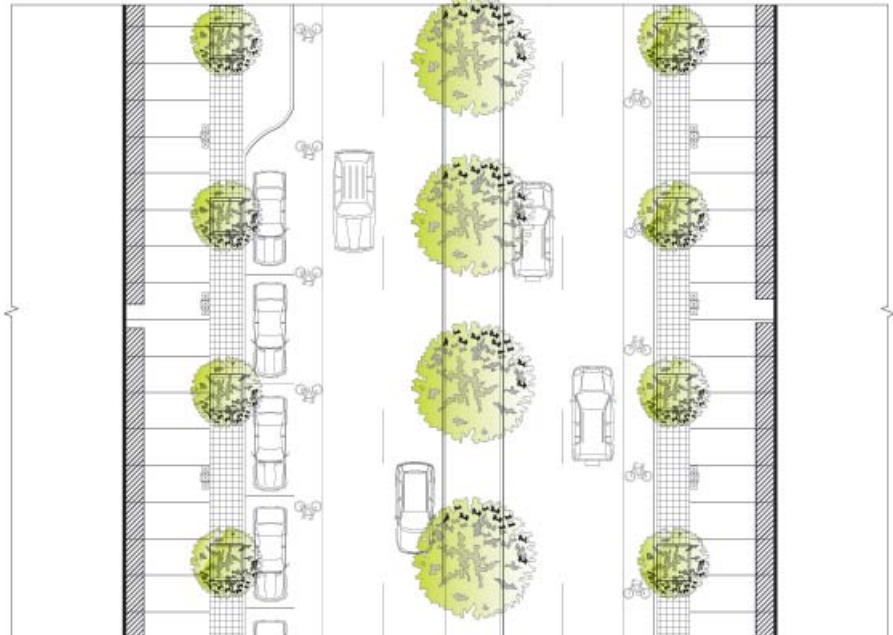
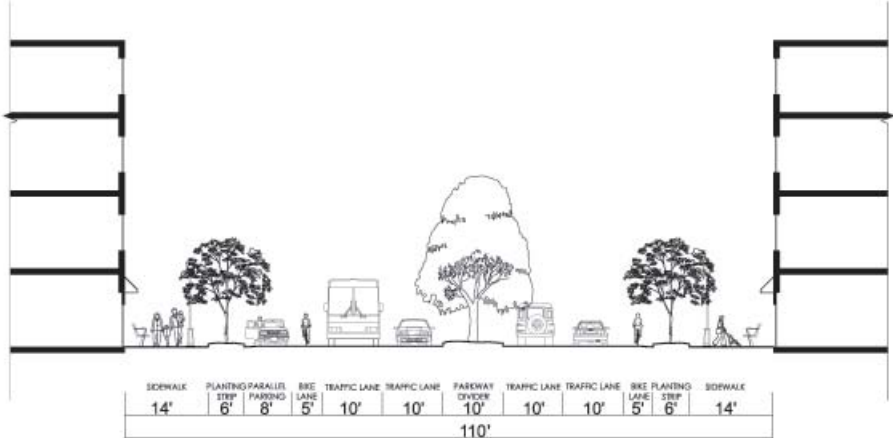


Block 6 Garage Parking



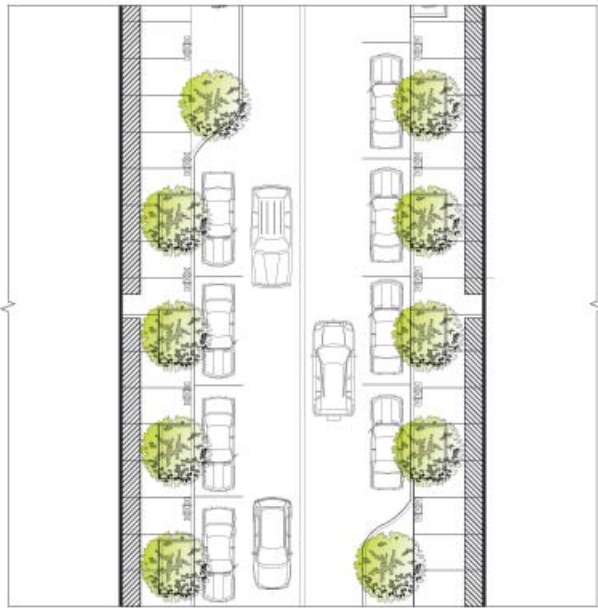
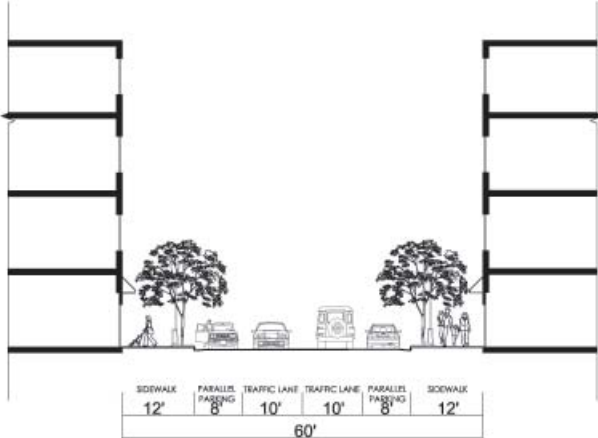
Typical Street Design

Main Street



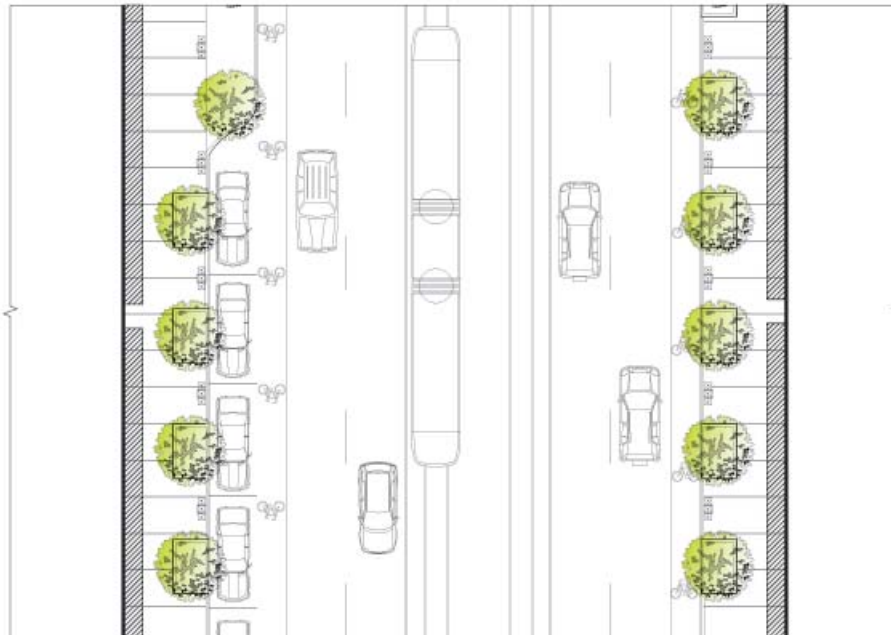
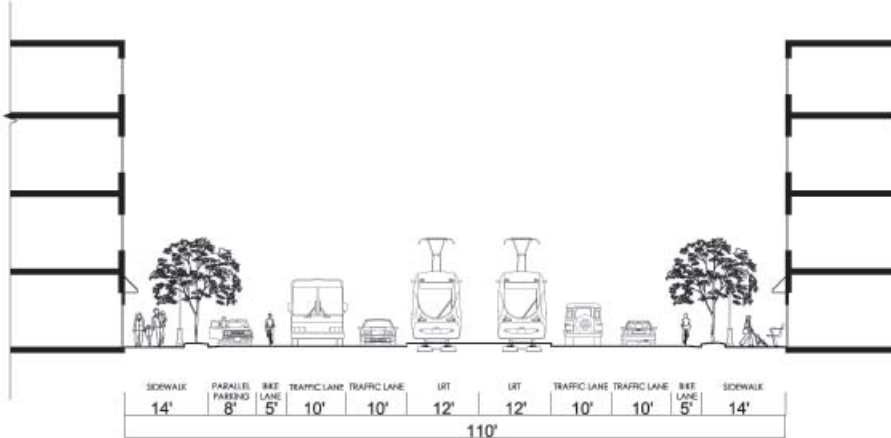
0 8' 16' 32'

Side Street



0 8' 16' 32'

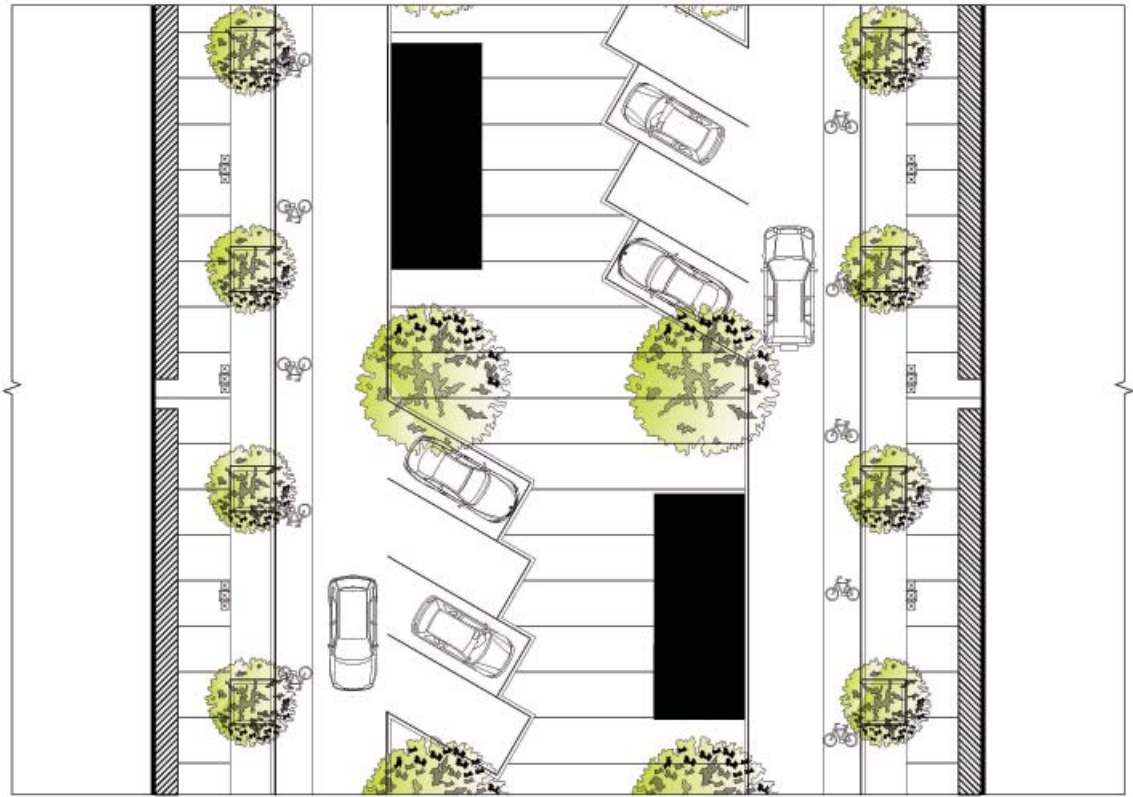
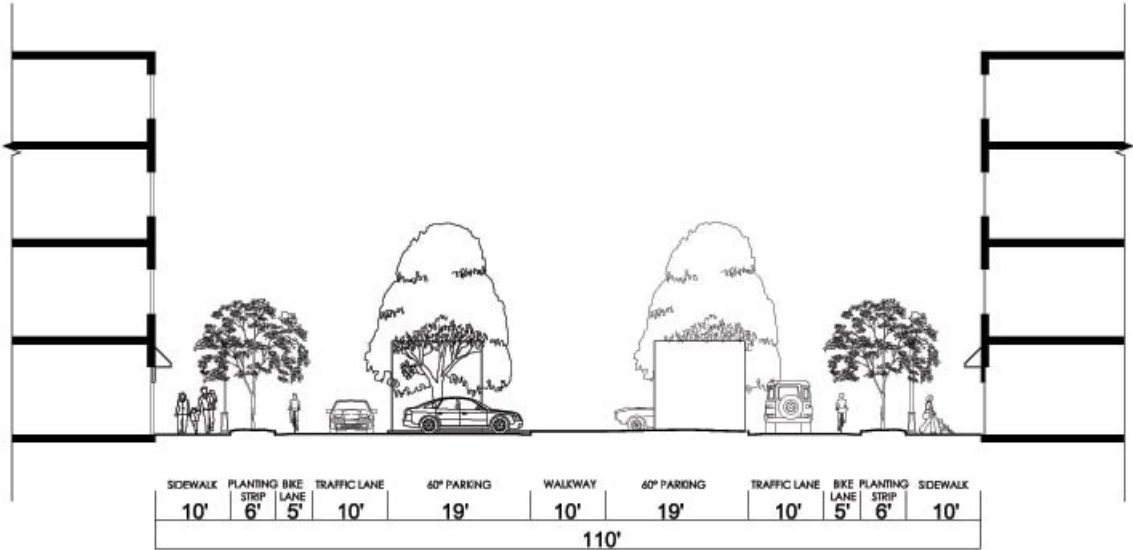
Transit Street



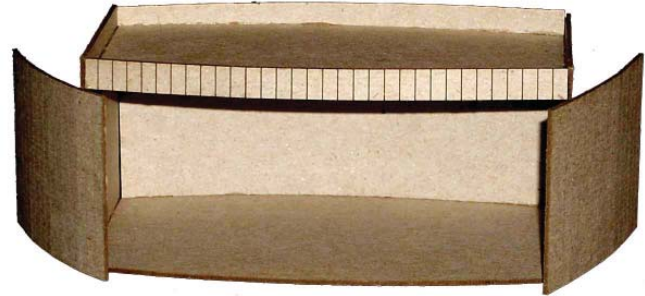
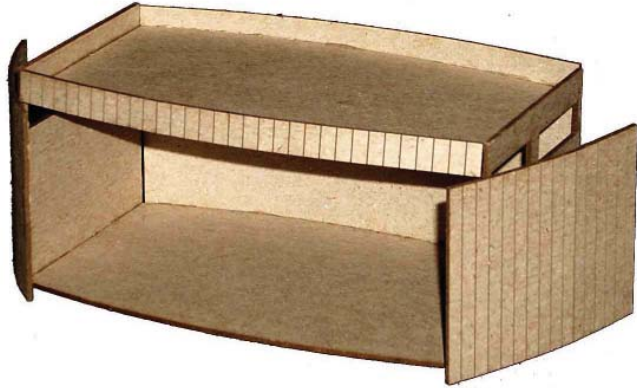
0 8' 16' 32'

Typical Steet Design

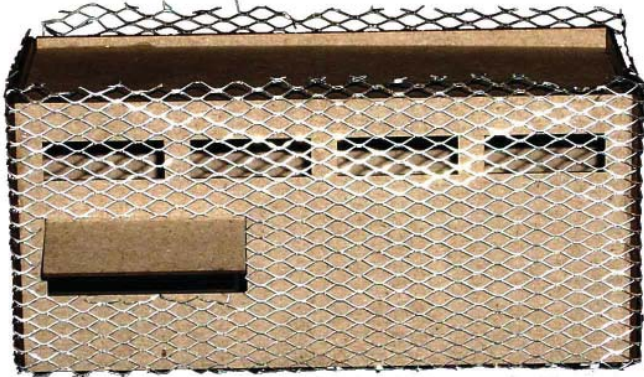
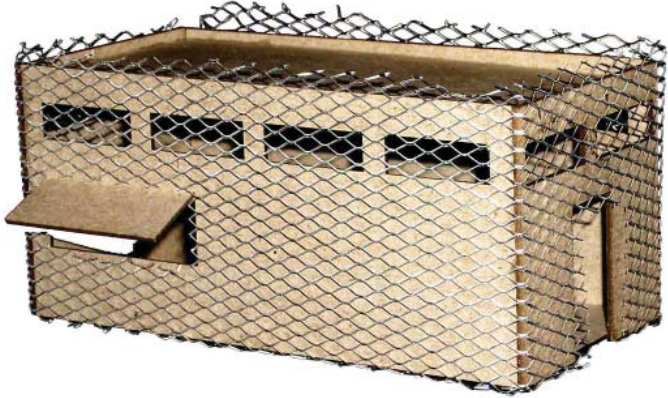
Entertainment Street



Kiosk Prototype 1



Kiosk Prototype 2



0 8' 16' 32'

Renderings



Renderings

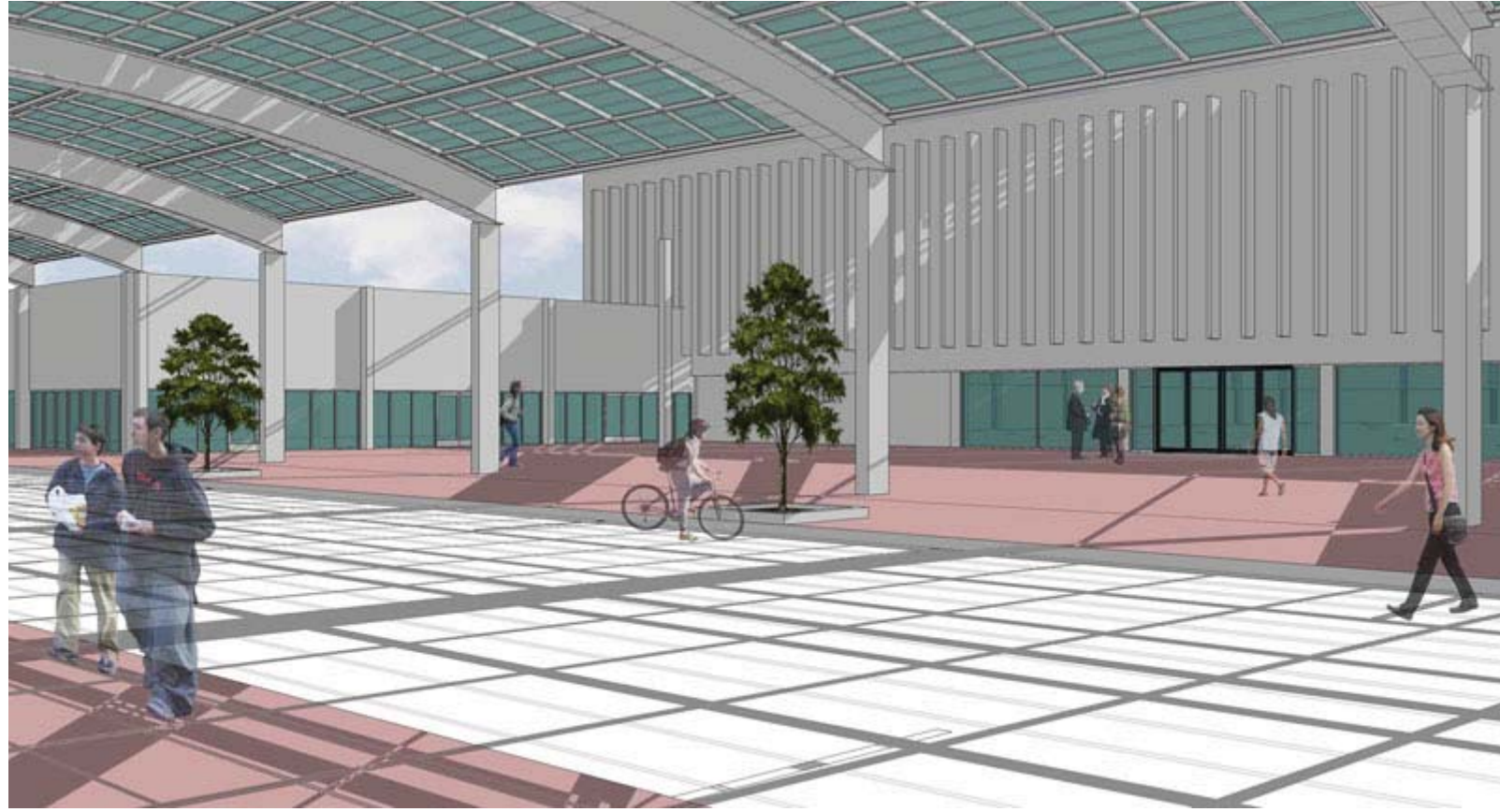


Plaza Perspective View

Plaza at Night



Renderings



Berlington Plaza

New Street Through Mall

