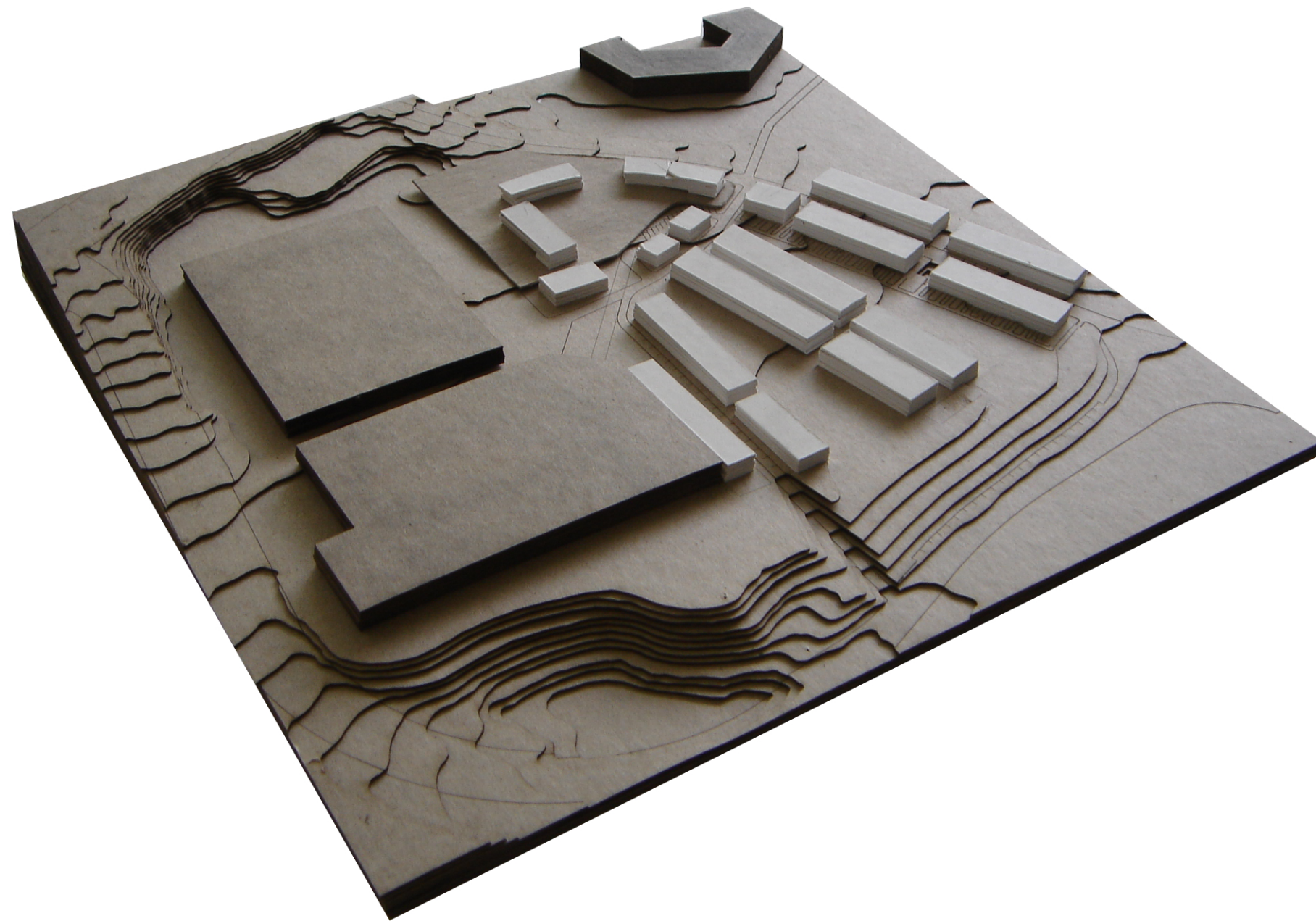


from Places to Park TO Places to Live

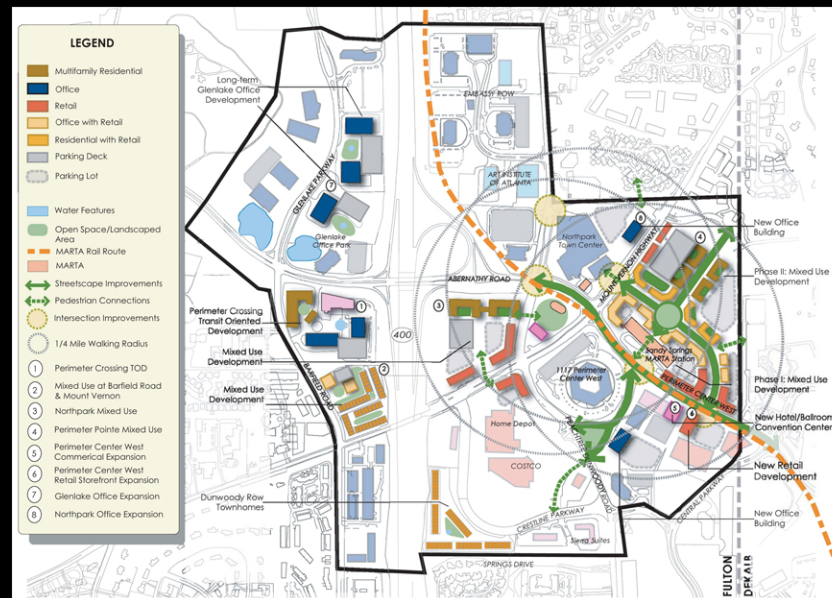


uniting Urban and Suburban desires

The site I have chosen to explore this proposal is an LCI site in Sandy Springs, and takes place on an existing parking lot for COTSCO and Home Depot. This site is unique because it explores ways under-used parking lots can be developed. To substantiate this "claim", in November of 2009 the Atlanta Journal Constitution published an article about Home Depot trying to sell surplus parking space as they have realized that their parking lots are too vacant. Also, a unique factor of the Sandy Springs site is that this area is home to one of the largest business centers in the United States, yet no residential except a few townhomes is actual in the "center" of the area, as shown in site research. All residential is pushed to the perimeter and needs to be better integrated and connected into the area as a whole. The Sandy Springs study area exemplifies the spatial inadequacies of the suburbs as a whole, with a sprawling space not densely occupied and not providing for a connective environment. With the high amount of businesses in this area it should be even more connective, and incorporate residential so that the study area be activated in different ways and different intensities. A conversation with Tony Peters of the Perimeter Community Improvement District revealed that a lot of empty nesters in the Sandy Springs area want to move away from their large lots and homes and want to stay in the Sandy Springs area, but don't particularly like the high-rise apartments that many retrofits provide as the residential component of their development. What they need is smaller versions of their current homes that area easy to maintain and take care of while providing the type of environment they have grown to love.



current site



sandy springs LCI proposal

The first vital move in the planning phase of the project was to face townhomes along both sides of the heavily traveled Peachtree Dunwoody Road that borders the east side of the parking lots. This, along with narrowing the road, reducing lanes of traffic, and adding parking on either side of the road was meant to slow down traffic on the road and create a more walkable and livable environment in this area of the site. Studying other precedents such as the successful Boston's Back Bay and the shortcomings of Boston's South End provide evidence for the development of a community that either faces homes against the main arterial roads and those that face homes against the secondary and tertiary roads. South End did the later and, as a result, progressed into a radically different community than Back Bay. A radial pattern was then used to setup the rows of townhomes throughout the rest of the site. The townhouse typology is appropriate due to the density it allows for, a median between the low density of the suburbs and the high density of high-rise apartments. A density as such will activate this space much better and hopefully encourage use of the space during all times. The way the site is planned, with residential developed up against the exterior wall of COTSCO, studies ways that different typologies can co-exist adjacent to one another. As many retrofits continue to focus on dead strip centers and dead malls the way we connect between building typologies, especially considering the large differences in size, becomes progressively more valuable. My design produces a more pronounced entrance to the big box while also decreasing the visual mass by developing townhomes connecting to a long-length exterior facade.



masterplan



building typology

Three main roads are created, the two-way with parking (just mentioned), a pedestrian muse-like street in the center, and a one-way with one lane of parking along the side of the site closest to the COTSCO. These different road types provide different environments for the town-homes facing each, providing for different desires. A muse-like pedestrian street was designed to allow the main street of the site to act as such, without having a town center idea, which I identify as a fault in many retrofits. These town centers often locate commercial immediately around the center, pushing and forcing residential behind the center. With a pedestrian street it allows for a welcoming walkable environment that activates the space. The experience out the front door of the home is more urban and city-like, the experience out the back door of the home is more suburban and park-like with the providing of backyards and community space. Different environments like these provide for not only the difference in desires between occupants, but promote the community aspect through walkability while still giving occupants privacy and greenspace.



two-way street

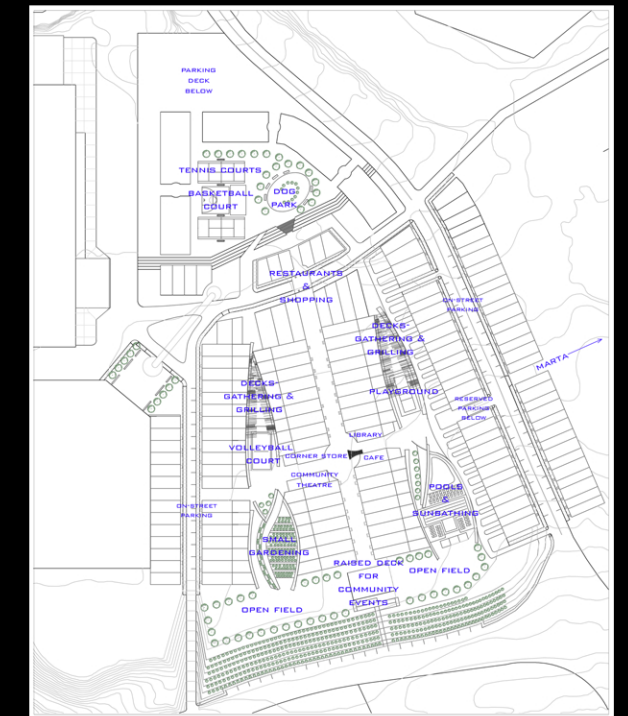


one-way street



pedestrian street

The community space is of paramount importance in this project. The space could have easily been paved and garages put in the backyards of the homes to give even more privacy, but the community space is what allows the project to have unique expanded versions of the amenities typical in the suburban home or “McMansion”. Some of these include a volleyball court, playground, decking and gathering space, a pool, a small gardening space, sports courts, a staged event area, and (at the larger urban scale) connection to MARTA, among many other features. Michael Brill speaks of the difference between community space and public space in his article “Problems with Mistaking Community Life for Public Life”, and it is important that this distinction exist and be noted in my design. This space is for the community, interactions between acquaintances, not for the public and interactions between strangers. Brill proposes that we no longer desire public spaces, for these experiences now occur through technology; which is why many public spaces designed in communities are not activated and used as intended. Any issues of privacy expressed by a resident can be addressed through individual cases, as the lots are designed for manipulating the backyard space as each owner desires. Although the street character is somewhat predetermined, as I will discuss later, the backyard allows for personalization. For example, a single-family may leave the backyard green and planted for the children, a young couple may pave, and an empty-nester couple may build a small pergola to create a larger buffer between their private space and the community space.

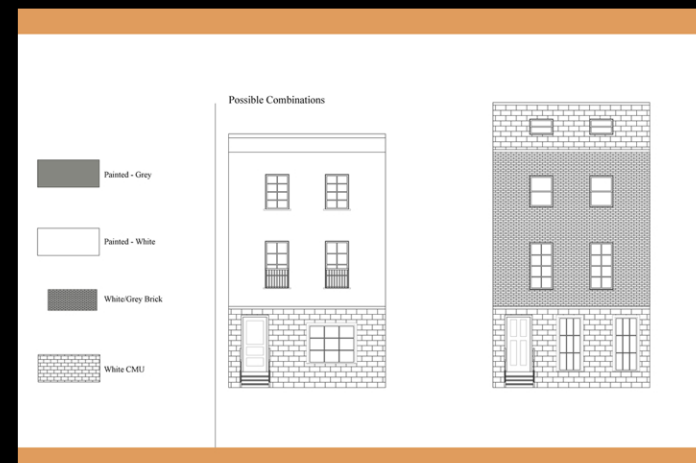
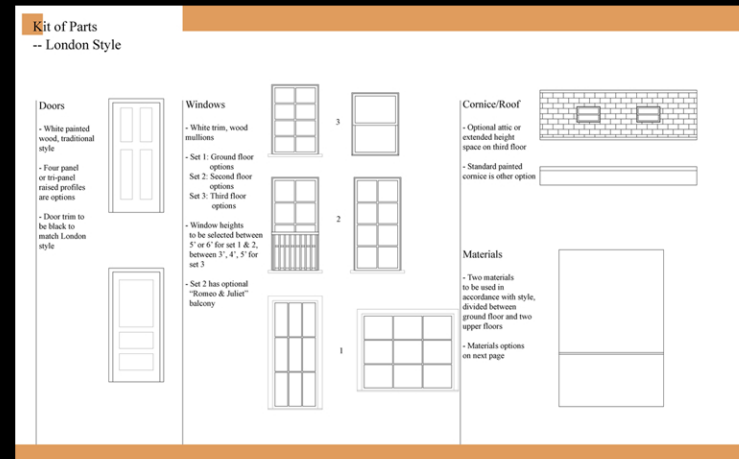


community ‘amenities’



community space

Different desires are addressed in the architecture in three main ways; through difference in style, difference in size, and difference in configuration. Configuration varies slightly, ranging from homes that are on the “most urban” road yet have private garages, to homes that are on the urban pedestrian street and have private backyards, and those that face up against COTSCO and have interior courtyards as opposed to a backyard, speaking to a more urban style. The differing facade styles are setup in such a way to allow for individuality and still develop a street character and an identity. Many suburban homes are thought of positively by their owners as being unique and different from their neighbors, especially in the higher income neighborhoods, while many urban neighborhoods, like Boston’s Back Bay, are unique because of the character created by having rows of townhomes that look nearly identical. Back Bay has a very different identity from New York City’s Turtle Bay, and it is because of the similarity in the style of homes in each. Fostering a balance between the individuality and the similarity is what led my design choice to the use of a “Kit of Parts” approach. Although I have prescribed what “styles” can occur on each row, for example one row can contain only Brownstone Styles and Traditional D.C. Styles, the builder/owner can choose the style from those offered and choose the facade composition according to the variety allowed in the Kit of Parts for that style. This allows for variety within the home but stability within the row, creating an identity without losing individuality.



kit of parts

partial
street elevation

The center area of the townhouse area includes certain amenities to support the residents like a small library, theatre, corner store, and cafe. Keeping these amenities within the typical townhouse size gives a more urban feel and begins to address mixing of building use while maintaining a consistent typological feeling throughout the development as a whole. Mailboxes are also located in this area, as is the exit/entrance to the parking below for residents located along the pedestrian street. The goal of this component is to again promote the community component and reinforce the high level of interaction between residents as shown in the earlier diagram; yet with careful consideration for this area not to become a “town center” but rather a “core” area to provide necessities.

Looking to the north area of the project a retail row-like idea is concentrated along the entry road to the development to build and draw off the activity already generated by the big box retail. This area focuses more heavily on the sector of the market that wishes to have a more compact living style with an apartment typology that wraps the end of the site. While the townhouse idea is the central idea of the project it is, again, important not to ignore any sectors of the suburban market, such as those that desire and are moving into current retrofits. The apartment typology is also needed to create the dual fronting condition in this area. The main road must be fronted as discussed before, but the central community space also should be fronted due to lack of backyards in this area. Located under the apartments are a two level parking deck to serve consumers visiting Home Depot and COTSCO, as well as the residents of the apartments. In line with the more active lifestyle typically associated with apartment residents tennis and basketball courts are provided in this area for the community along with a dog park.

modern-traditional
style
cutaway