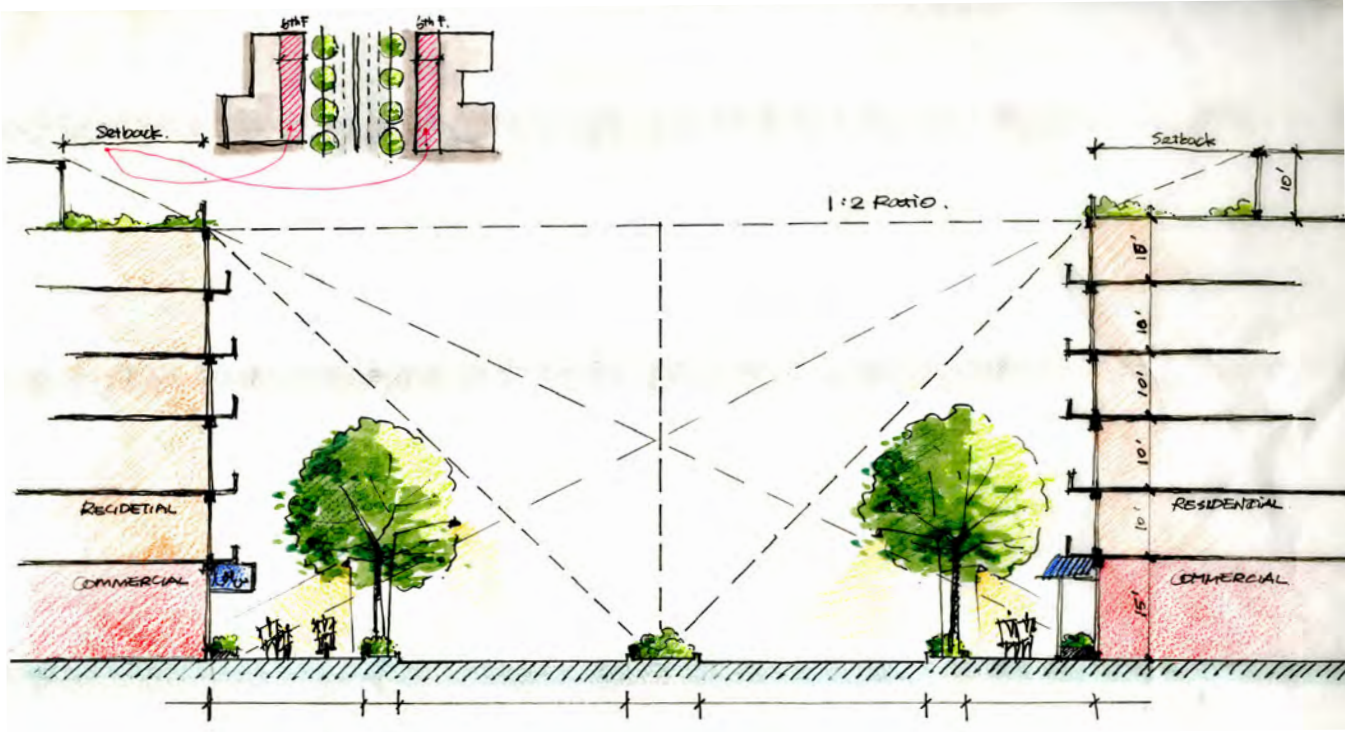


Northside Drive as a Multimodal Developmental Corridor: Transformation from Utilitarian Auto Route to Grand Transit Boulevard

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY -- FINAL DRAFT

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



INSTRUCTOR'S INTRODUCTION

The studio explored ways to transform Northside Drive from a dismal, disorganized underperforming corridor that frames the west side of the Atlanta core into a grand transit boulevard. Picture a tree-lined, well-lit boulevard, wide and grand, with medians, and ample accommodation of all travel modes, lined with mid-rise mixed income residential buildings with as much retail and other ground floor activities as the market will support. With the proper transportation and zoning design, over time this now dismal traffic corridor will transform all the way from I-75 to West End. Increasing mixed use development densities will support a growing share of transit, pedestrian and bicycle uses as distances shorten between residential and jobs concentrations. Planned and developed properly, the transformation will break down Northside's historic race and class divide to become a great urban street whose assets and attractions provide a common ground for sharing the strengths of diverse populations.

The summaries below synopsise students' investigation of this vision as modified by ongoing stakeholder feedback. I have highlighted in bold type the key proposals, together with actions and timelines, that have emerged as the students' work has been vetted with a wide array of stakeholders as add-ons throughout the students' executive summary.

The students' work, their engagement with most of the interested parties for input and guidance, and their diligence in fulfilling their tasks confirmed that such a vision is possible, exciting, and feasible over time. Carrying out what is on its face an immensely complicated yet crucial slice of urban territory, their work lays the basis for a sea change in how Atlanta and the region view the prospects for the future Northside Transit Boulevard.

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1. OVERVIEW

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

At the behest of Emory McClinton, board member of the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Georgia Tech planning studio explored ways to transform Northside Drive from a dismal, disorganized underperforming corridor that frames the west side of the Atlanta core into a grand transit boulevard. Picture a tree-lined, well-lit boulevard, wide and grand, with medians, and ample accommodation of cars, transit, bicycles, and sidewalks, lined with four to six story residential buildings with as much retail and other ground floor activities as the market will support, over time transforming this now dismal traffic corridor

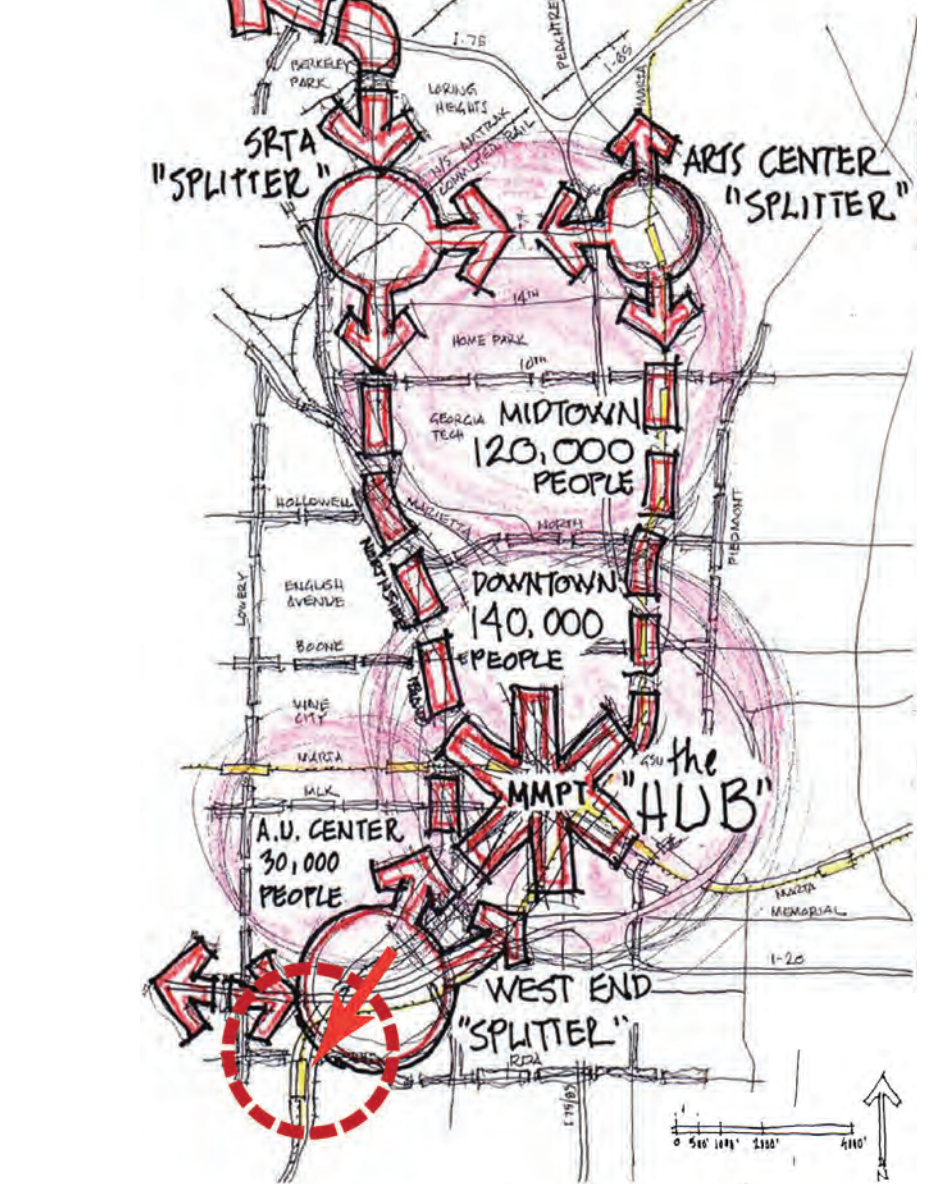


Figure 1. Diagram shows the strengths of the core of Atlanta as holding the greatest concentrations of people on any given day of any city in the southeast. These include residents, workers, university students, faculty, and staff, and visitors to convention, sports and cultural attractions. Note the transportation system concept to serve these concentrations, anchored by transit oriented development hubs: the Multimodal Passenger Terminal (MMPT) in downtown, the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) site to the northwest, the Arts Center MARTA station at the northeast and the West End MARTA station to the south.

from I-75 to I-20 and West End. Imagine too dissolving the east-west divide that for decades has walled off the low and mid wealth neighborhoods to the west from the robust Downtown and Midtown centers to the east, physically, economically, and socially.

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

1.1. WORK PLAN, INITIAL ASSIGNMENT, AND STUDY PROCESS

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

The Whole Corridor Working Group (1) was tasked with the responsibility of both seeing to the

maintenance of a cohesive vision for the corridor and of taking the lead role in crafting the “big picture” for transit and other project-wide systems.

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

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

The MMPT/AUC Working Group (4) was tasked with overseeing the plan for the area roughly

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

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

Included in the compendium is a section from each of these groups. Each section includes its own executive summary, discussion of existing conditions, analyses of multiple alternatives to address various issues, and final recommendations. The sum-

mary of existing conditions was compiled through field visits, research and conversations with various stakeholders. It laid the basis for identifying key issues and creating multiple alternatives to address the issues. These include transit as well as alternatives specific to most intersections.

The Northwest Community Alliance hosted an introductory

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

Halfway through the semester, the students presented to approximately 40 stakeholders to

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

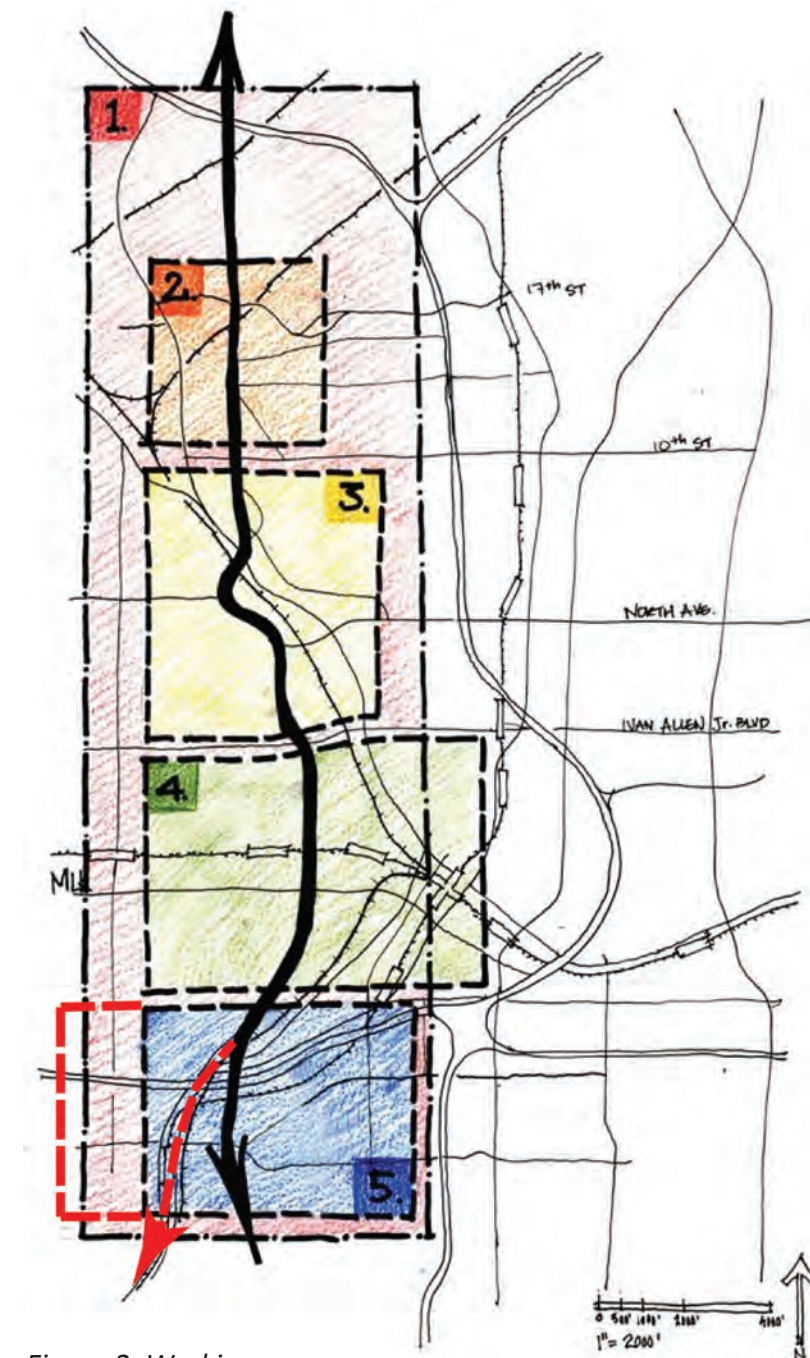


Figure 2. Working group coverage



Photos: Attendees at studio work sessions (Taken by studio team)

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

2. WHOLE CORRIDOR

The Whole Corridor group identified a number of issues (Figure 3) that emerged out of an assess-

ment of the existing situation, which include:

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

velopment

- Irregular frontage and relationships between buildings and the street

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

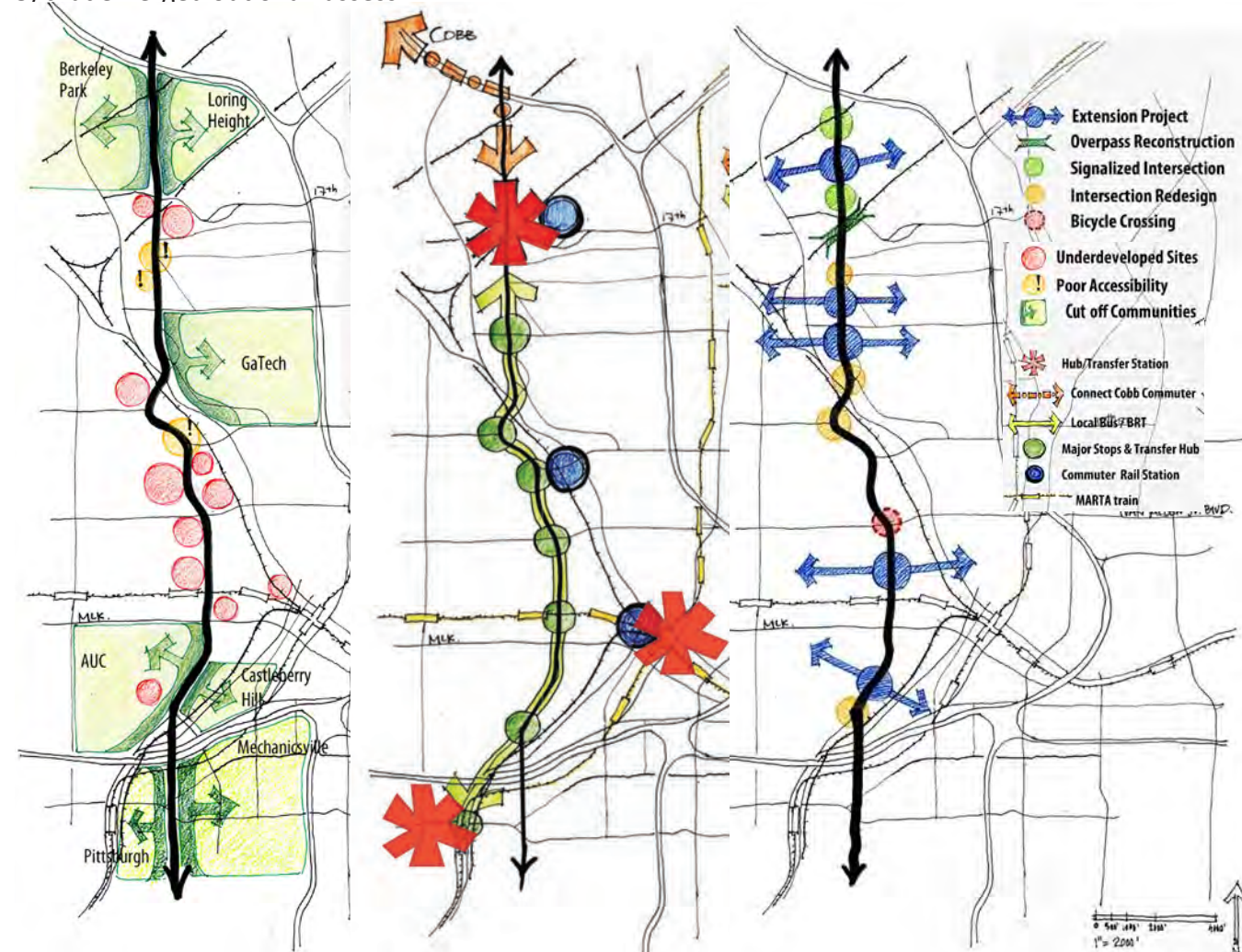


Figure 3. Sketches of some of the issues and opportunities for transforming the corridor as a whole

THE CORE OF ATLANTA

THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF OFFICE, RESIDENTIAL, CULTURAL & EVENTS SPACE IN THE SOUTHEAST, WITH THE BASE INFRASTRUCTURE IN PLACE TO DOUBLE IN JOBS AND POPULATION

IF...

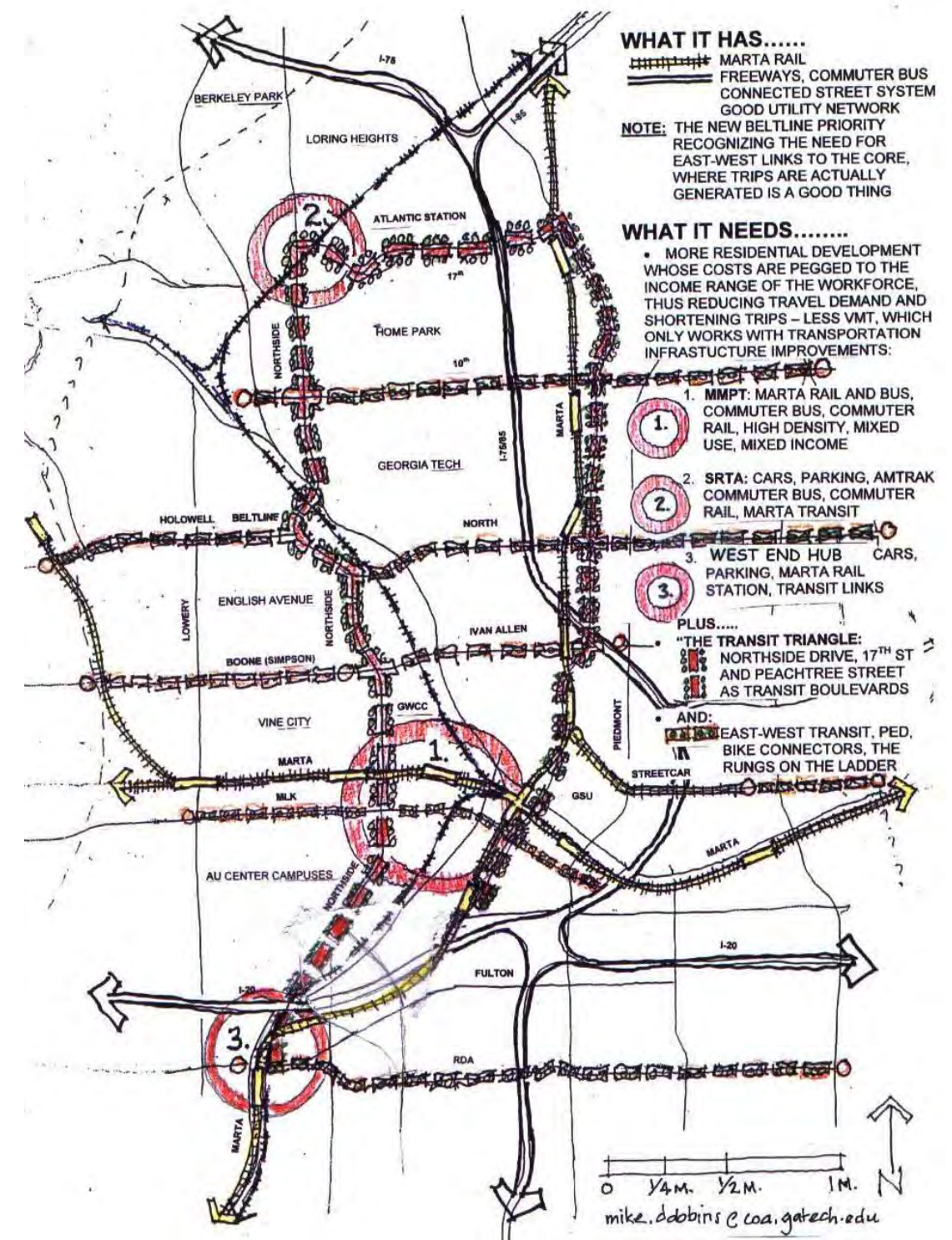


Figure 4. Sketch map showing a transit network to serve existing and projected high density, mixed use concentrations of origins and destinations; such a “rails and rungs” network would serve to shift the mode share increasingly toward transit and pedestrian modes; note that for optimum transportation efficiency, to the extent possible, housing costs should reflect income scales so that all levels of workers have the option of living close to work or school.

2.1. TRANSPORTATION

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

The project proposes a consistent baseline cross-section for the corridor, including four travel lanes, two variable use lanes, lighted and landscaped sidewalks, and bike lanes and planted medians where right-of-way and adjacent use conditions permit. The variable use lanes would provide the flexibility and opportunity to ramp up their use for ever more robust transit over time, beginning with corridor long bus service during rush hours and parking in the off peak. The proposal anticipates the transit mode share to increase in the corridor, first by actually providing bus service to the many high intensity destinations that line the corridor, then by increasing residential, institutional, and commercial uses whose proximities divert car trips to alternative modes, and finally as the transit share continues its gains in popularity.

North-south: Along the corridor, the students developed

concepts that taken as a whole suggest, responding to the corridor’s diversity of activities and conditions, that there is a certain pulse to the continuum of travel, where the beat is marked by key intersections, many of which should be reconfigured and all of which should be designed to incorporate the land uses and activities that are particular to each.

2.1.1. TRAFFIC & TRANSIT

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

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

Phase 1: This phase includes re-striping along the length of the corridor to include four through lanes and outside lanes with multiple functions. the outside lane will be a through lane during peak hours (5-7pm north-

bound and 7-9am southbound) and will become on-street parking outside of peak hours. The goal of this approach is to get vehicles used to a reduced number of through lanes and to save the outside right-of-way for future transit. This way, when transit is implemented in later phases, it will be a transition from parking to transit, rather than a direct transition from general travel lane to bus dedicated lane. Current travel demand analysis argues that this configuration, incorporating proposed intersection improvements, could provide sufficient capacity to accommodate current and near term projected traffic.

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

Phase 3: This phase, longer term, eliminates all on-street parking and dedicates the outer lanes

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

Stakeholder input generally supports this phased approach: begin with establishing a six lane section designed to accommodate cars, with landscaped medians where workable and wide tree-lined and well lit sidewalks with appropriately spaced crosswalks. BUT as corridor densities increase, assure that the design can transition toward using outside lanes increasingly to accommodate buses, off-peak parking, and then accommodate all transit use, whether express bus, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), or even rail modes.

ACTION: These goals should be part and parcel of the design charge to the GDOT consultants who will be working on the more detailed scoping for the project.

ACTION: The City should amend its Comprehensive Transportation Plan, Connect Atlanta, to designate Northside Drive as a “transit corridor,” from I-75 to West End, with defined links into the MMPT.

ACTION: MARTA should incor-

porate the heightened redevelopment in this corridor, which is likely to accelerate, into its route planning with a view toward establishing a north-south link from a West End hub that could accommodate transfers between MARTA rail and bus, Cobb Community Transit (CCT), and Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA), links into the Multimodal Passenger Terminal (MMPT), and a hub at the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) site at 17th Street.

East-west: Across the corridor, the students remarked on the divide that the corridor represents, including transportation connectivity for all modes, economic and social divides where the resources available and dispensed on the east are great where on the west there is little. Core to many of their proposals is to bridge that divide, physically and programmatically, where the resources on the east can directly support meeting some of the needs on the west.

There is much to be improved upon in the intersections. Overall, design speeds should not exceed 35 miles per hour, slip ramps should be eliminated, turn radii should be tightened, and sidewalks and pedestrian and bike crossings should be prioritized. That combined with pedestrian requirements under rezoning for higher intensity mixed use activities would go a long way toward transforming the corridor. Land recovered from unnecessarily excessive intersection right-of-ways, then, would be available for sale as way toward contributing to the

cost of the intersection modifications. In addition, much of the sidewalk environment could be achieved under the zoning provisions for the private development.

ACTION: GDOT should seriously consider an action agenda as it proceeds with its scoping effort. That is, there are projects in the “no-brainer” category that can be moved forward even as the scoping for more complicated reaches are studied in more detail. We view action as a critical priority for GDOT and the City, where community engagement can begin to support GDOT’s effort by building trust that GDOT can deliver.

ACTION: Candidates for early action (1 – 3 years), low cost-high benefit, include:

- Northside/Hemphill/14th Street: eliminate southbound left turn at Hemphill and instead rework left turn at 14th Street; sell recovered right-of-way to help defray costs
- Northside/Peters Street: rework intersection so that Northside flows into Peters Street and West Whitehall, thus realigning Northside to give direct access to I-20, to the West End MARTA station and the West End business district

NOTE: See other intersection improvement recommendations in the geographic area discussions below.

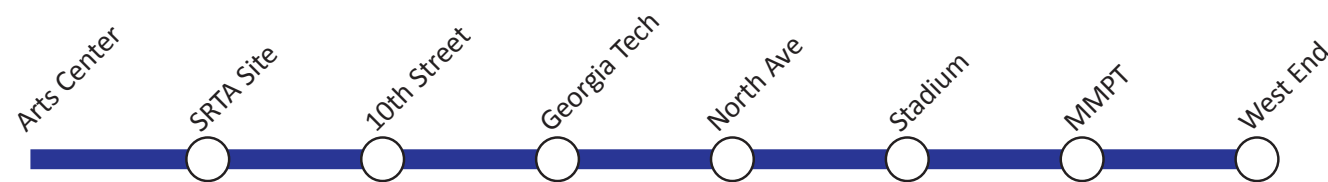
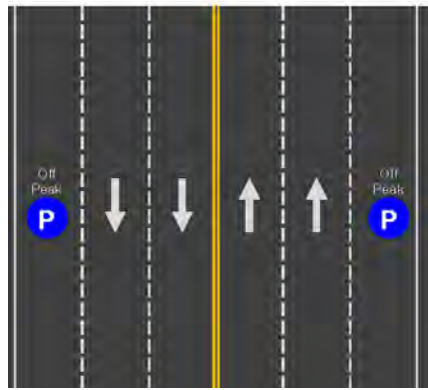
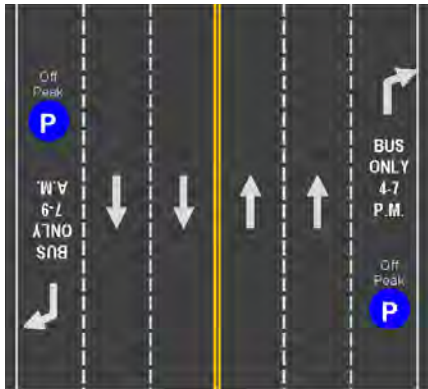
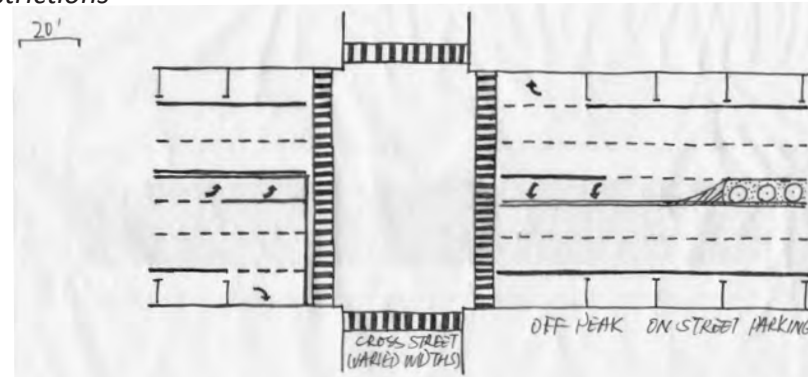


Figure 5. Schematic map of major transit stops



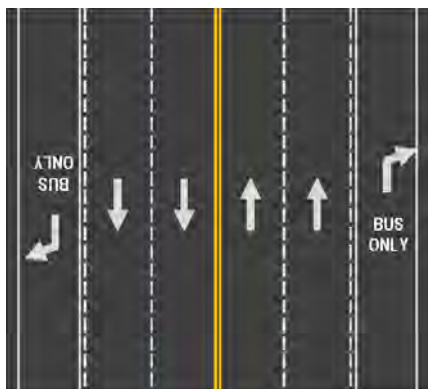
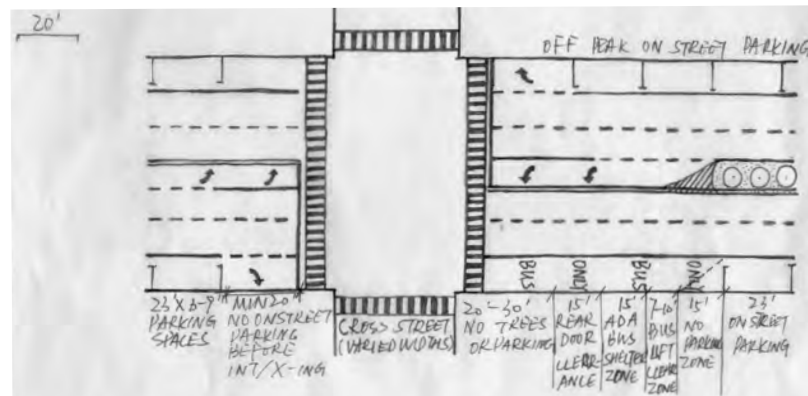
Phase 1: Introduce parking strip throughout corridor

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



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

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



Phase 3: Full time transit lanes

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

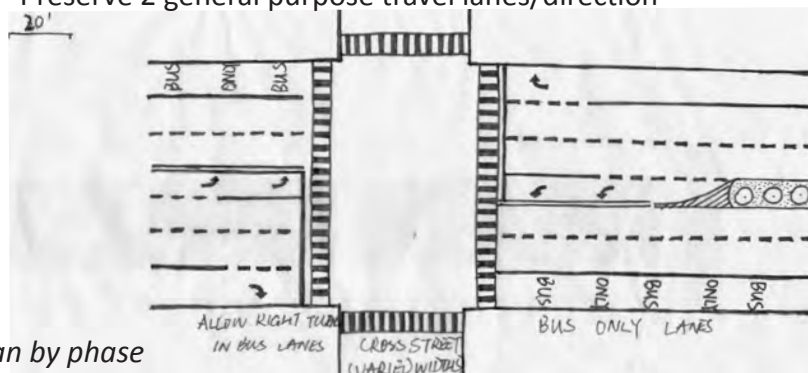


Figure 6. Traffic operations expansion plan by phase

2.1.2. BICYCLE FACILITIES

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

Feedback from multiple stakeholders suggests that the new Northside Boulevard may not be the best route for north-south bicycle connectivity. Rather, that function may be better served by a Howell Mill Road route that splits to go south down James P. Brawley to the AUC campuses

and southeast to Tech Parkway, Luckie and Centennial Olympic Park. Projected auto and eventual BRT traffic is not compatible with a flanking bike lane, Northside destinations would be accessed via east-west links from the Howell Mill-Tech Parkway bike corridor.

Taking into account the forward motion of the City's bicycle planning and project development, complementing Georgia Tech's moves in a similar direction (as recognized by the League of American Bicyclists as a Bicycle Friendly University), the Institute supported a detailed look at its bicycle plans and policies. In the context of the Northside Drive planning framework, then, Daniel Alhadeff developed

a draft proposed master plan. The plan's findings pointed toward the connections from City to campus as being a matter of high priority as well as identifying a number of routes and intersections for which a systematic, staged improvement program would greatly increase the functionality and safety of this rapidly growing travel mode. As relates to the campus-city interface, the plan will help focus the next round of capital improvements, hopefully as partnership ventures between the two.

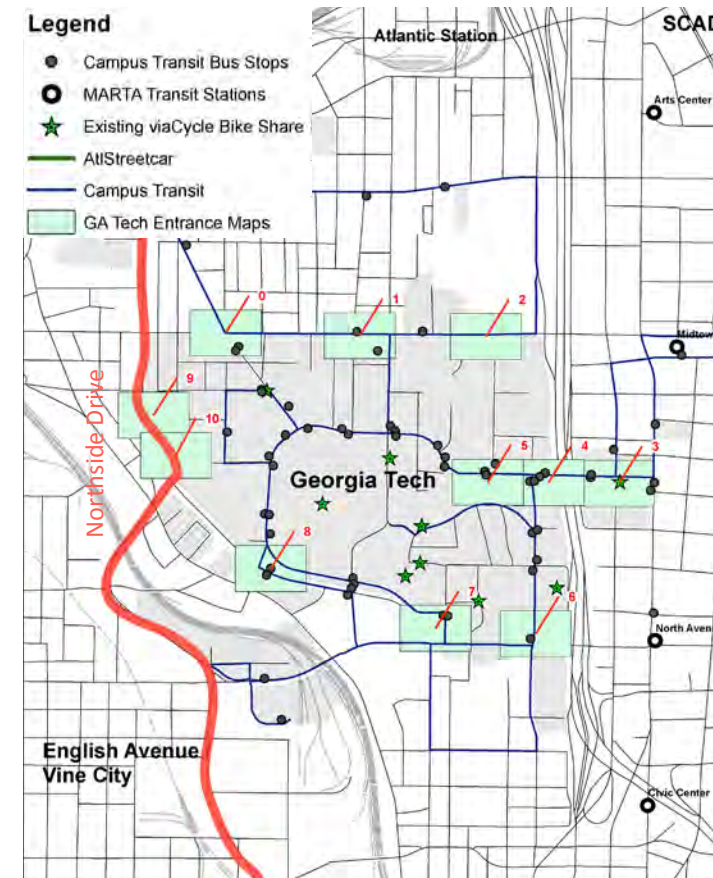


Figure 7. Plan view of the Georgia Tech campus in the context of Northside Drive and the immediate city districts and neighborhoods around.

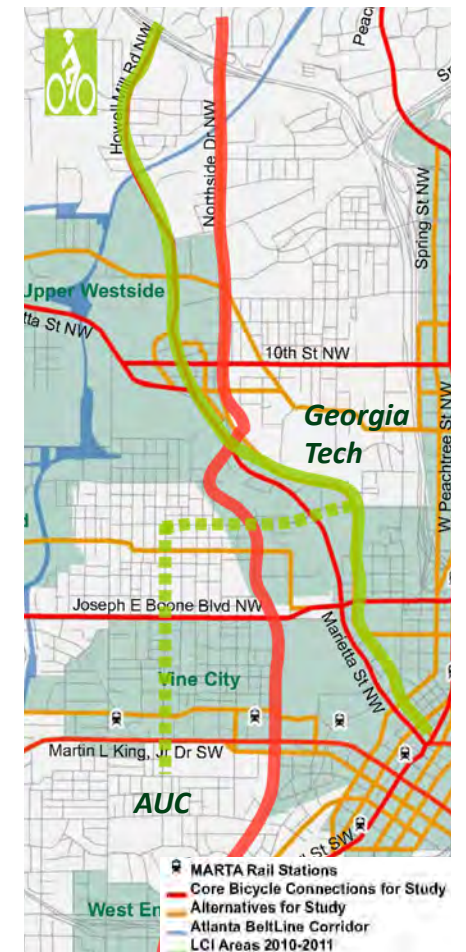


Figure 8. Connectivity diagram showing Howell Mill to Tech Parkway to Luckie Street to Centennial Olympic Park as the north-south bicycle path paralleling and crossing Northside Drive, with a leg that proceeds south from Georgia Tech to the Atlanta University Center campuses. Base Map Source: "Cycle Atlanta: Phase 1.0 A supplement to the Connect Atlanta Plan," City of Atlanta, December 5, 2011

2.1.3. PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

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

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

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

a typical pedestrian environment vision.

2.2. LAND USE & URBAN DESIGN

Through the vetting process a consensus anticipates that, with the infrastructure already in place and a staged improvement in transportation choice and efficiency, the corridor can grow in population by ten to fifteen thousand people and perhaps five thousand jobs. New mixed use, mixed income, mixed generational, low to mid rise complexes will house residents and employees in the growing institutional, transportation, hospitality, entertainment, and other businesses projected. These in turn will support the growth of neighborhood serving retail and restaurant activities already emerging in the Midtown West areas. The keys to this future include upgrading Northside Drive into a fully functional multi modal corridor for cars, transit,

bikes, and pedestrians; adding to and strengthening the east west links. Thus, Midtown flows into West Midtown, Downtown flows into Vine City, English Avenue, and the AUC campuses, and West End takes advantage of its opportunities to connect better to the AUC and to Downtown. Finally and probably most important, the jobs, infrastructure, and housing stabilization benefits identified by the affected communities must be built into and funded by the many developments slated to benefit from public expenditure.

The thoughtful and successful management of land use, urban design, and development controls are key factors in quality redevelopment. Land use considerations for this corridor assume a continuous and likely acceleration of residential and mixed use development and the need to shape that activity to optimize Northside’s potential as a grand boulevard. The high qual-



Figure 9. Recommended sidewalk improvement at human scale

ity streetscape treatments, lined by activated building frontages would be designed to effect both good north-south as well as east-west connectivity.

The City’s Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP), in addition to not including Northside Drive as a “transit corridor,” projects a checkered and disorganized picture of random land use designations that fairly represent the corridor’s past but need to be overhauled to anticipate its future. The issue here is compelling and urgent: development has begun to pick up along the corridor and its street frontages, yet there is no guidance to take advantage of the opportunities provided for transformation into a grand boulevard. Worse for the moment is that current land use policies may reinforce and intensify the hodgepodge that already condemns North-

side to its dereliction.

ACTION: The City should act with all due speed to amend the land use policies and designations contained in the CDP to create a proper framework for responding to growing markets for in-town living, working, schooling, shopping, and entertainment. In general, this means making consistent the mixed use, higher density categories for the length of the corridor, except where industrial uses remain viable.

ACTION: Concurrent with the proposed CDP amendments, the City should act to establish overlay design guidelines for the length of the corridor, using the BeltLine overlay district guidelines and structure as a model.

NOTE: See more detailed recommended actions in the geographic subsections below.

The focus here, while general, is on:

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

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

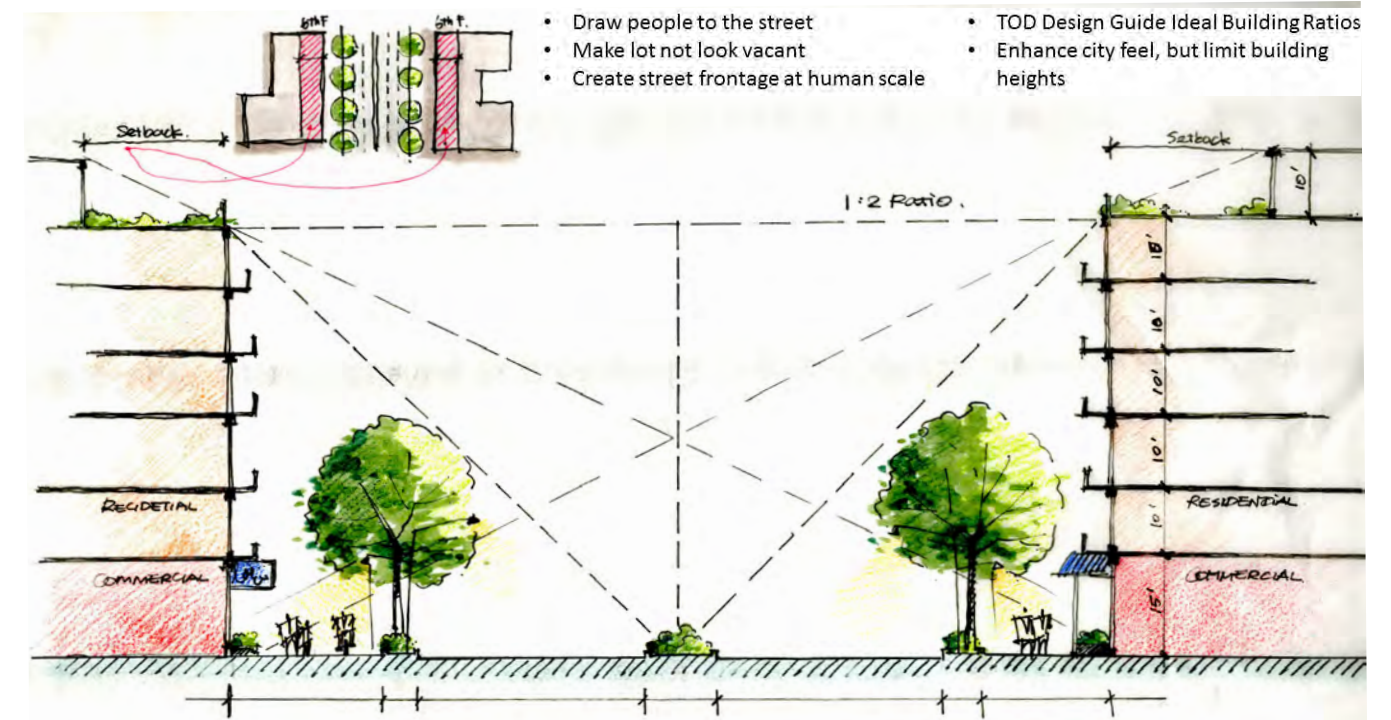


Figure 10. Typical cross-section of the new Northside Boulevard shows a tree-lined, well lit street, with planted medians, wide sidewalks, street level activity, six story mixed use buildings, the model for amending the land use, urban design, and zoning overlays for the corridor as a whole.

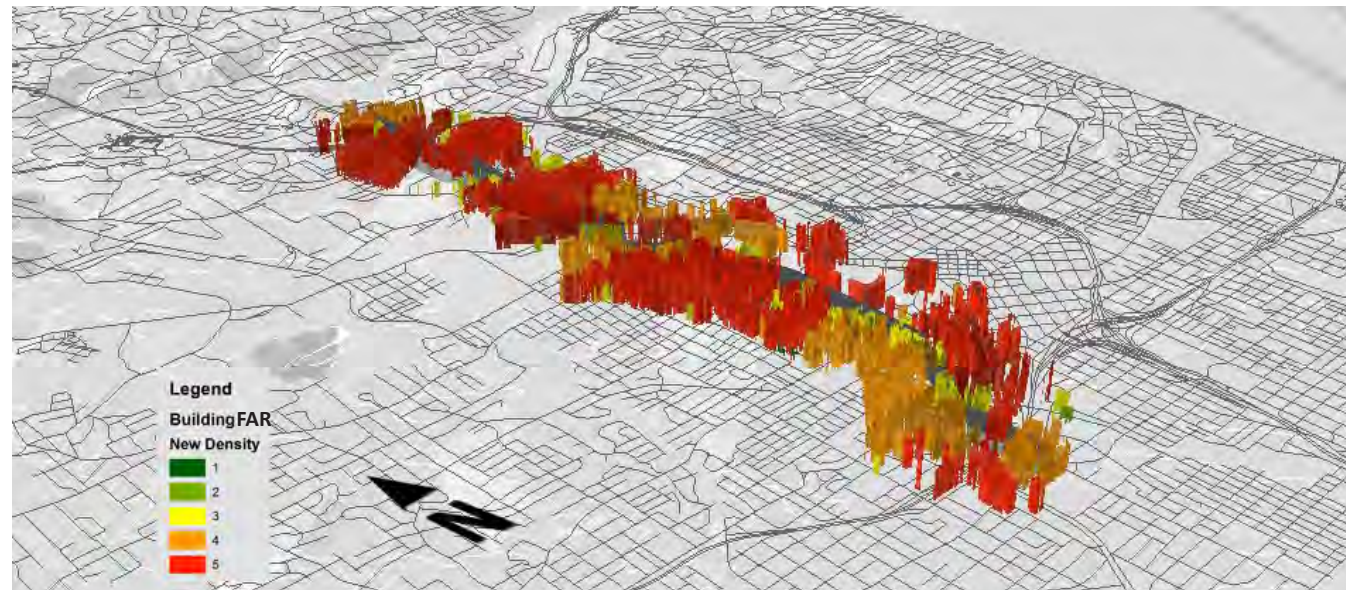


Figure 11. Digital characterization of corridor growth potential, posing a range of net FAR assumptions

2.3. COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

2.3.1. JOBS

Through institutionalization of concepts such as Community Benefits Agreements, the communities of Northside Drive can induce developers to incorporate

local needs into their development program, to gain consensus on development goals and positive approval processes. It is essential that any entities engaging in significant redevelopment along the corridor commit to providing appropriate job training and jobs to local residents regardless of their educational level or experience. Figure 12 on the right shows the dispersion of workplaces for those living alongside Northside Drive. Again, more detail on jobs strategies is provided in the MMPT/AUC section.

2.3.2. HOUSING

In order to prevent displacement of local residents due to pressures such as higher intensity development and incipient transit proposals, measures will need to be implemented to help foster community resilience in the face of these opportunities and challenges. It is important that any strategies look to preserving affordability for both owner-occupiers and rental tenants.

Strategies targeting the former might include community land trusts and institutional employee homeownership programs, and those targeting the latter might be an increased focus on nonprofits and religious institutions providing affordable rental housing. Figure 13 on the right shows the dispersion of residency for those work alongside Northside Drive.

2.3.3. ORGANIZATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

There have been innumerable studies in the corridor, conducted at various times under various sponsorships with varying scopes and results. Most of these have focused on subparts of the corridor. We have heard from people living, working, going to school, owning property or worshipping in the corridor a frustration that seems to have two main thrusts: "why doesn't anyone do something - nothing's happened" and "that study served other people's interests, not ours."

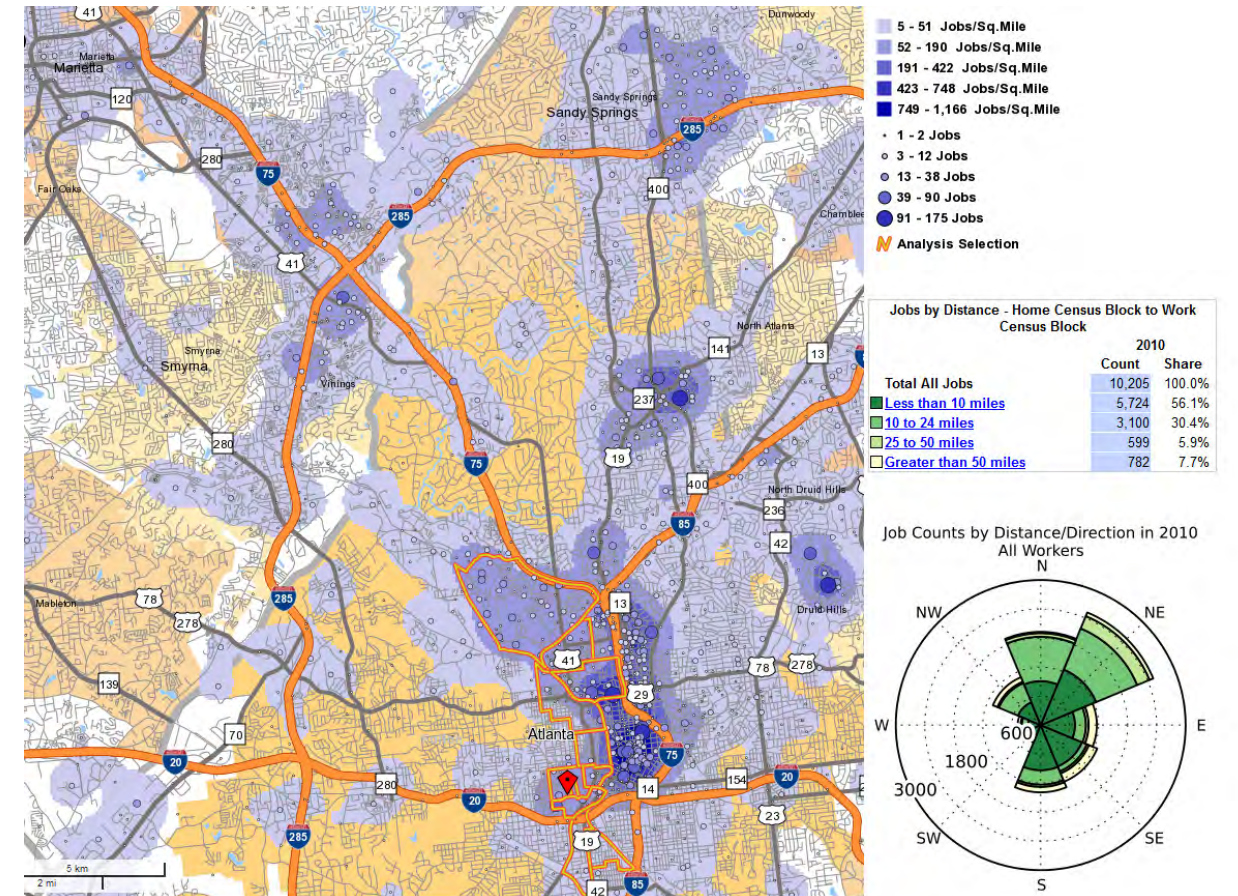


Figure 12. Employment locations for Northside Drive residents heat map

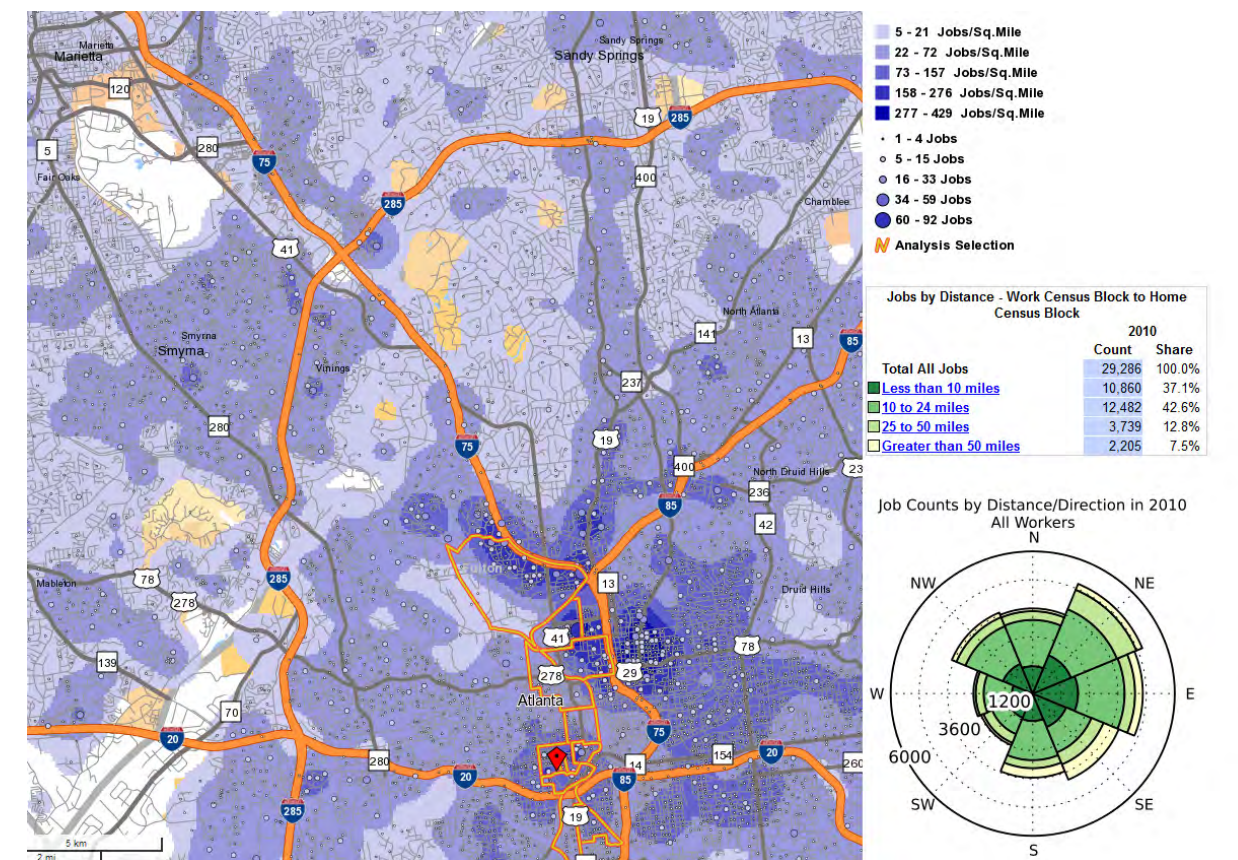


Figure 13. Resident locations for Northside Drive workers heat map

This feedback points up a central finding of our work: there needs to be an organizational framework in which all of the disparate interests can find a home. While that sentiment is shared by many, even many who don't see eye to eye on other issues, there is no overarching framework that represents all with interests in the area, a "Northside Corridor Association" or something. Within such an umbrella group, there should be – and to some extent there already are – organizations with either geographically or issue defined foci.

To overcome the mistrust and hidden agendas that have plagued neighborhoods and developers alike, the goal would be at minimum an information sharing forum aimed at coalescing around an overall vision of what could be, some general agreement on priorities across timelines and resources, leading to bases for mutual support. If everyone with an interest can come to count on information being transparent and regularly shared, if all can count on being listened to, there is a stronger likelihood that agreements can be struck. Presently, the NPUs, the Northwest Community Alliance, and the Westside Communities Alliance come closest to meeting that need.

Much of the work done under varying sponsorships has produced fairly consistent results about problems, alternatives, and possibilities, which from our neutral perspective largely support goals we have heard from diverse perspectives. The problems with rallying around those

findings, which seem to have consensus, stem from a lack of awareness among many in the community, leading to suspicion about motives and purposes, not to mention competition for what have been scant resources.

Neighborhoods, NPUs, community development corporations, business organizations, Atlanta University Center, Georgia Tech, the Georgia World Congress Center, the City, and Invest Atlanta, and others should be able to come together to hear each other and consider the question of searching out a basis for communication that could lead to mutually advantageous collaboration. At this point, the answer to why nothing happens and how to approach meeting all interests has been organizational fragmentation.

Yet, encouragingly, there seems to be growing consensus that major development initiatives should go forward under the principle that all affected should have the opportunity to benefit, whether in jobs, business development, housing conservation and stabilization, environmental mitigations, infrastructure improvements, or human resource development. All seem to want the new major expenditures to have a "transformational" purpose, with definitions of what that means still varying.

2.4. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Among the range of environmental constraints and opportunities in the corridor, topography, storm water, and park lands are

most compelling. While these issues are addressed in more detail in the geographic sections, we note here that responding to the issues that those three pose should create an underlying framework for changing land use policies and mapping. The need and locations for more and more useful park lands, for example, can benefit from storm water management strategies to create amenities for both existing and changing development patterns. As another example, the topography north of 16th Street calls for a fundamentally different land use and urban design pattern than the areas to the south.

2.5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The scope of work necessary to achieve a grand transit boulevard is daunting. The financing requirements in aggregate are staggering. Yet, in the framework of the realities placed upon resources in the wake of the TSPLOST failure, incremental work shaped by an overall vision can go forward, and if projects are wisely chosen and effectively carried out, improvements will generate increasing support for the wide range of financial tools necessary, some of which are already out there. Part of Northside Drive is in the Atlantic Station Tax Allocation District (TAD). Another part of it is in the Downtown West TAD. Another part is in the BeltLine TAD. The recent commitments of \$15 million of TAD funds from Invest Atlanta, together with another \$50 million committed from the Falcons are available for infra-

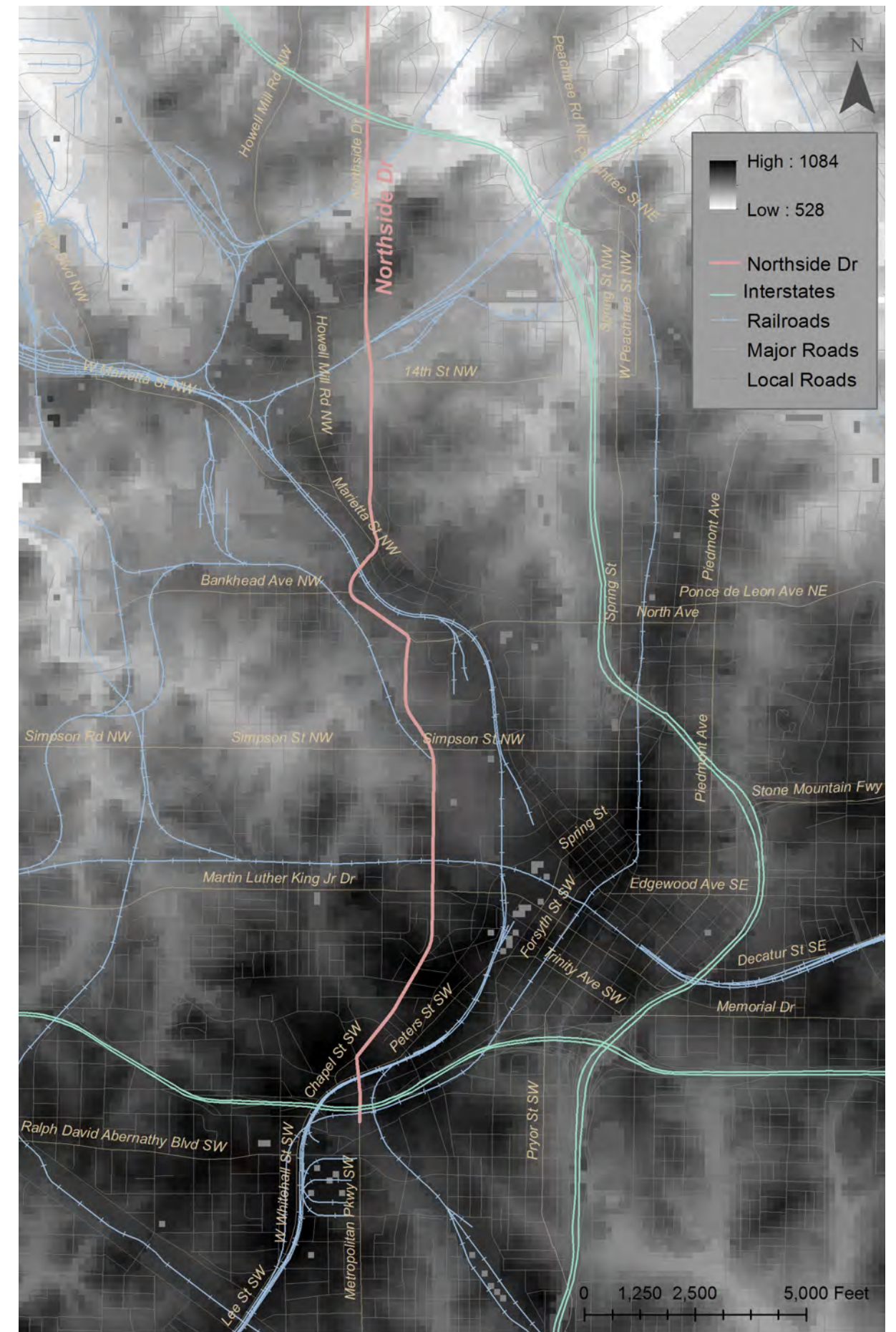


Figure 14. Topography along Northside Drive

structure improvements. The whole corridor is a state route, making it more readily eligible for State and FHWA and FTA funds. It connects to the Cobb County transit aspirations. As it develops into a more robust multimodal corridor, MARTA, Amtrak, and possibly commuter rail to Athens become potential sources of partnership support. Its improvement is vital to serving the Multimodal Passenger Terminal (MMPT) and any new stadium. As proposed to be realigned to the West End, if falls within the fledgling West End Community Improvement District (CID). It serves the Georgia Tech and Atlanta University Center campuses, setting up partnership possibilities. The proposed reconfigurations of many of its intersections will release significant amounts of developable land. The new zoning framework, in its “quality of life” requirements for walkable sidewalks, bikable routes, and on-street parking will assist in defraying costs that might otherwise go to right-of-way acquisition. Projects like the Mims Park initiative are examples of how philanthropy can be tapped in a way that contributes to achieving pieces of the vision. In summary, daunting though they may be, working at achieving a grand urban boulevard over time seems possible. The good news is that any step toward achieving the vision will surely leave Northside better off than it is now.

Beyond transportation financing obstacles and opportunities, the stormwater mitigation requirements also have some

hope for funding, through EPA, development financing, and the aforementioned infrastructure commitment from the Falcons. Otherwise, development financing options are not necessarily easy but at least have precedents for layering and leveraging bonds, tax credits, CDBG, Housing Authority, foundations as potential partners for meeting public-serving needs.

2.6. CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The student team study areas varied as much in their political and cultural character as in their geographical, transportation, and land development conditions. The north or SRTA group area is flanked by Loring Heights neighborhood to the east, Home Park to the south, and Berkeley Park and the Howell Mill Road corridor to the west. These neighborhoods are politically active, including NPUs D and E, are included in Council Districts 3, 8, and 9, and come together under the Northwest Community Alliance on a regular basis to share news and action priorities. Of the study areas, this one tends to be better off, more white, a little older, and quite stable.

The mid-corridor and AUC MMPT groups have in common the physical, social, economic, and racial divide that has been Northside Drive for decades, mostly lying in NPU L and Council District 3. As hinted at in the discussion on the need for an inclusive organizational structure, the cultural and political issues

may prove to be the greatest hurdle to moving forward. We have neighborhoods west of downtown with people and a heritage that have significantly shaped advances in civil rights, democratization, and fair play, not just here but nationally. Yet these neighborhoods have suffered devastating disinvestment with all of the associated indicators of poverty. While political attention and occasional spurts of investment have done some good, the English Avenue and Vine City neighborhoods remain fragile and vulnerable to speculative forces driven by anticipated huge investments across Northside to the east. Here, the continued expansion of the Georgia World Congress Center in the form of a likely new Falcons stadium, the probability of beginning work on the MMPT, and the new private investment likely to be generated provides both an opportunity and a threat to the neighborhoods’ stability and quality. Past such investments have left the neighborhoods worse off than they were before. This time, should these publically supported investments materialize, there will be no excuse if defined community benefits are not incorporated from the beginning and every step of the way. These must be identified and prioritized by the community, acting as one, and as we have heard include jobs and job training, infrastructure upgrades, and housing stabilization.

Approaching West End, the MMPT/AUC group considered the Castleberry Hill neighborhood to the east, the consider-

able redevelopment work undertaken by the Herman Russell interests on both sides of the street, and the Atlanta University Center campuses and associated neighborhoods to the west. These neighborhoods share gradual and effective redevelopment and rehabilitation as Castleberry continues to emerge as an arts flavored community, with loft conversion and new residential and entertainment space. The Northside frontages have become vital and active with the Russell corporation’s continuing investment, not to mention its activities as the redevelopment partner of the Atlanta Housing Authority’s HOPE VI conversion of John Hope Homes into the Villages At Castleberry. Another opportunity for AHA-centered redevelopment is the old University Homes property, where the prospect exists for developing continuity with Northside Drive as markets come back. Finally, the West End business center anchors the corridor at the south, where the connectivity obstacles may be improved under the proposals developed. The West End is well along in organizing itself as a Community Improvement District, a move that should allow it to consolidate its disparate assets into a single, actionable vision. These areas are in NPUs L, M, and T, and mostly represented in Council District 4.

3. SRTA SITE AREA

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

3.1. SRTA SITE

The SRTA site area centers on the SRTA site whose ongoing negotiations hopefully will result in its ultimate use as a transportation-centered hub for high den-



Figure 15. Focus area of SRTA group

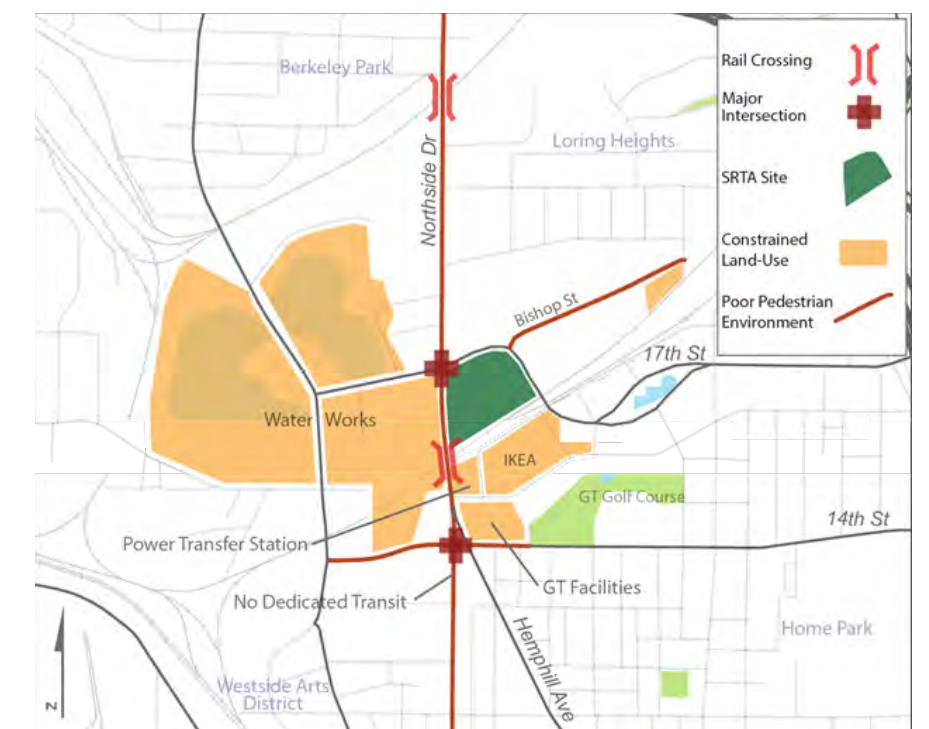


Figure 16. Summary of key issues

sity mixed use, mixed income development above. The area, however, poses other significant development issues and opportunities that focused students' attention, as outlined below. Indeed, as the semester was winding down, the importance of considering the dynamic development of the Howell Mill corridor increasingly affected developing concepts for Northside's future.

Land use and design strategies for this northern stretch of the corridor must respond to its extreme topography. That is, instead of organizing development to front along Northside Drive, it should be perpendicular and terraced along the street. This pattern reflects the deep lot frontages along the street. Note too that changing land use designations to mixed use should be approached cautiously so as not to disrupt viable heavier commercial uses. The City should review the viability and appropriateness of its Public Works yards, including considering the implications of moving to more compatible and safely accessible sites. Beyond encouraging infill and rehab mixed use development along the boulevard, policies should remain explicit to conserve existing housing stock and neighborhood character in the flanking neighborhoods of Underwood Hills, Berkeley Park, Loring Heights, and Home Park.

ACTION: incorporate land use, zoning, and street design standards review into overall CDP updates

Opportunities for environmen-

tal enhancements and green space amenities include the idea of developing a creek-based greenway trail system that begins with enhanced public use of the northern portions of the City Watershed Management property, joined by a trail from Atlantic Station and proceeding under the interstate into Tanyard Creek Park. At some point, this trail system could complement whatever might emerge as the BeltLine trail.

ACTION: continue to press for greater park use of City reservoir lands, mindful of the buffer needs to protect their security.

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

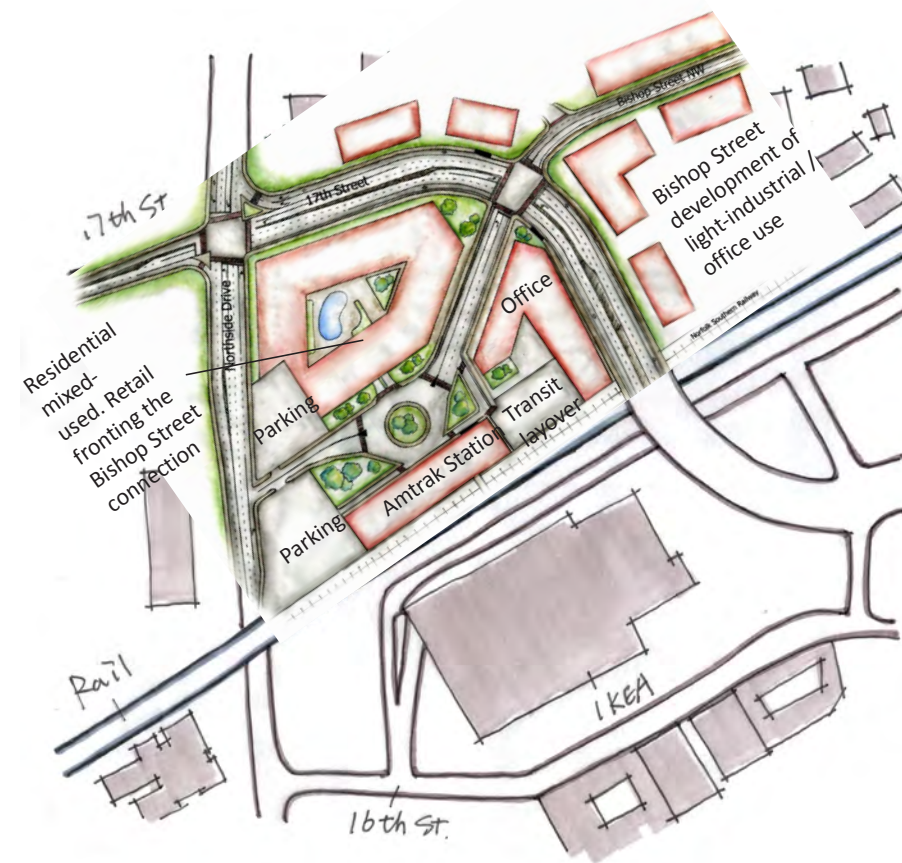
agreement for the site, and that the projected development of the site for mixed-use purposes is adequately integrated into the surrounding urban fabric. The prospective activities that are considered for this site and any potential changes to the 17th Street intersection and adjacent areas will be restricted to the west by the Atlanta Water Works facilities.

Vetting these proposals has resulted in these updates (a work in progress):

- The Lionstone Group severed their property from the SRTA offering
- SRTA has awarded the right to negotiate purchasing the property to Carter and Associates
- Carter is investigating the site's development potential, including its potential as a major transit hub
- GDOT is engaged in a process to determine the feasibility, timing, environmental impacts, and financing in moving the Amtrak Station from its present site to this location

ACTION: GDOT, SRTA, the City, and Carter should come together to coordinate work to assure that the great opportunities for a hub-based high density mixed use development are not squandered.

ACTION: GDOT and other transportation and development partners should come together to buy out Lionsgate's interests in order to control the future of the property as a unified site.



- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Apartments: 5 levels | 6. Apartments or Condos: 9 levels |
| 2. Pool deck above parking deck | 7. Parking deck |
| 3. Apartments: 5 levels | 8. Amtrak parking and taxis |
| 4. Pool deck above parking deck | 9. New Amtrak station |
| 5. Parking deck | 10. Amtrak plaza |

Figure 17. Students came up with these mixed use development site plans; both note the need to establish a new intersection with Northside Drive, essentially an extension of Bishop Street. Note that unless and until the Lionstone Group's property is added back into the mix, neither scheme fully works (Lionstone's property occupies the left half of the illustrated site – efforts should continue to be made to consolidate the two sites into one, at least for development planning purpose).

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

The intersection currently has an awkward configuration, prohibiting a quality pedestrian environment and optimal future development. It has the potential to be seamlessly reconfigured to make it operate more efficiently by optimizing vehicle throughput, create a more pedestrian friendly environment, improve

the aesthetics of the area and to provide east-west street connections, such as the Ethel Street extension. All of these improvements are in alignment with the vision for incorporating transit along the length of Northside Drive. Planning for these intersection improvements should be carried out in conjunction with improvements to the 16th street intersection, both in the near term and in conjunction with the timing of widening the 16th

Street underpass necessary to accommodate lane continuing.

As noted above, this intersection improvement fits into the “low hanging fruit” category: work could begin right away to cut off the leg of Hemphill north of 14th Street and sell the ROW to Georgia Tech, which owns all the property to the east and north of the intersection.



Figure 18. Illustration of the ultimate recommendation, that is, to convert that part of Hemphill between 14th and Ethel Streets into a cycle track street, eliminating its intersection conflict with 14th Street

3.3. BISHOP STREET AREA

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

The City, neighborhoods, and Atlantic Station should be very careful to actively guide this use so that proposed activities, like a proposed shooting gallery, do not poison the well for neighborhood compatible and Atlantic Station complementary activities to take place.

ACTION: The City, neighborhoods, and property owners should come together quickly to develop a strategy for this area that changes its land use and

zoning to implement an overall vision that leaves all concerned better off.

3.4. GEORGIA TECH PROPERTIES

Georgia Tech has properties that are located in between 14th and 16th Street which currently house the Institute’s golf practice course and women softball field, as well as at Hemphill and Northside Drive. These lands have good potential to be incorporat-

ed into the recent Atlantic Station grid as well as the neighboring Home Park development. In expanding the grid, it is anticipated that mixed use development could be undertaken in this area, which would provide the basis for a reinvigorated 14th Street, providing a link to the Midtown West area. The softball field section has already been sold and the remaining property may be up for sale in the near-term.



Figure 19. Illustration of one way to plan Bishop Street buildings toward a coordinated approach



Figure 20. Illustration showing how important it would be for Georgia Tech to establish some basic block and lot structure into its property before selling it off. For the foreseeable future, though, the present golf holes will remain in place

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



Figure 21. Phase 1 of SRTA area master plan

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

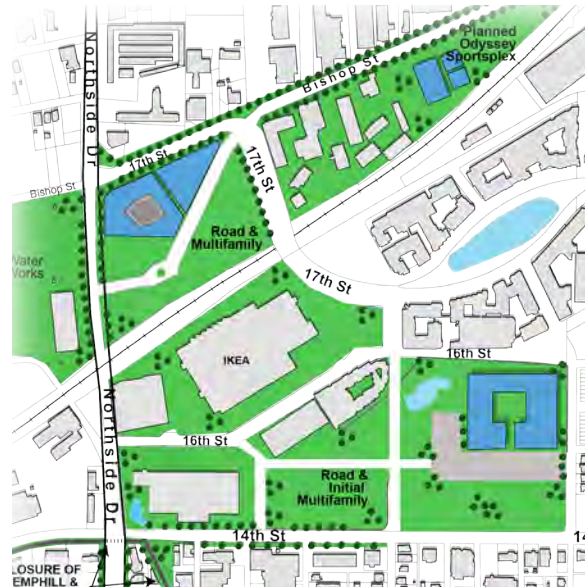


Figure 22. Phase 2 of SRTA area master plan

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



Figure 23. Phase 3 of SRTA area master plan

3.5. PHASES OF MASTER PLAN

Students in this group undertook to propose what appeared at the time to be an orderly approach for planning and building out the whole of their area proposals. While knowing that sequences can be unpredictable, this work conveys the elements and connectivity that make up good planning process.

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

3.5.1. PHASE 1

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

3.5.2. PHASE 2

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

3.5.2. PHASE 3

In Phase 3 the area would be transformed as the particulars of the alternatives are fully built out and implemented including pro-

viding building setbacks in zoning south of 14th Street along Northside Drive. At this stage monitoring and evaluation will be critical as development ensues.

As the formal study process was winding down, reflecting feedback from the vetting process, it became clear that this part of Northside's links to the west had to be addressed. Indeed, the links between Midtown West and Midtown, through 17th, 14th, and 10th Streets emerged as being the larger scale frame around which the goals of breaking down the west to east divide could be accomplished. While not studied in any depth, the advisability of creating west to east relievers of an increasingly stressed Howell Mill Rd emerged as promising. Consistent with this purpose, widening the two railroad underpasses on this stretch of Northside becomes imperative for maintaining lane continuity and improving capacity.

ACTION: GDOT should coordinate with the railroads to assure that these widenings are on the radar screen of both agencies. The opportunity might arise to incorporate these improvements into the work that the railroads are contemplating to ease the bottleneck at Howell Junction.

ACTION: Overall, then, the intersection improvements should include turn lanes at 17th, 14th, and 10th to divert capacity-challenged Howell Mill traffic over to Northside as an alternative route. For the same purpose as well as to support activities

along Trabert Avenue, its connection to Northside should be prioritized in a coordinated City and State planning effort.

ACTION: GDOT's consultants should be careful to include the worsening Howell Mill traffic conditions in planning for both modifications and priorities for work in this part of the corridor.

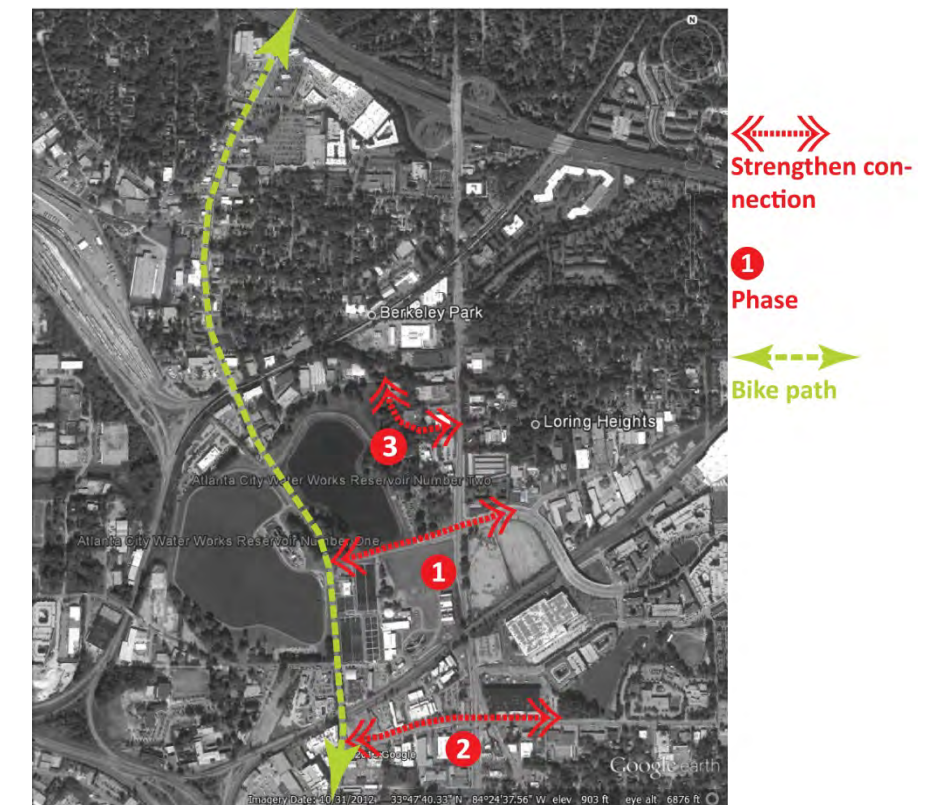


Figure 24. Alleviating traffic congestion by providing a series of better west-east links to Northside at Trabert St, 17th Street, and 14th Street, which should be dressed up as the major Midtown to West Midtown boulevard; a possible contraflow lane connecting east to west in the I-75 right of way should be investigated for further mobility improvements in the area

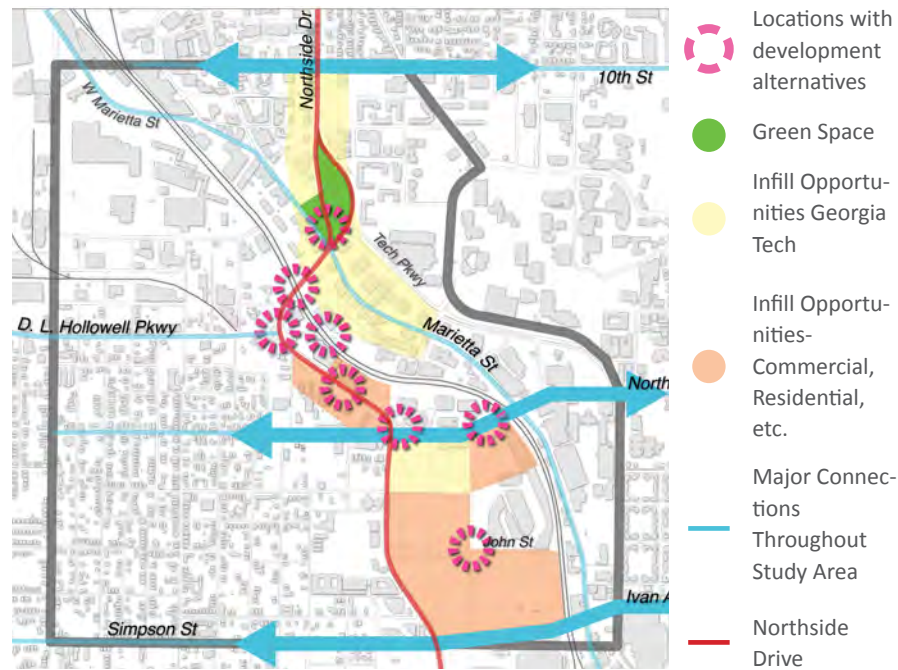


Figure 25. Project locations within the Mid-corridor area

4. MID CORRIDOR AREA

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

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

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

conceptual designs that called for specific building types, pedestrian and bicycle access routes, and streetscape treatments.

The following brief descriptions summarize the students' findings for this portion of the corridor. Overall, they project a vision that integrates a comprehensive multimodal travel overhaul with land use, design, park, trail, and housing infill development strategies.

ACTION: GDOT and the City should coordinate the course of their scoping work to encompass the fullness of this integrated approach to shaping Northside's future transportation, land use, environment, housing, and community development potential.

ACTION: Georgia Tech, following its embrace over the last 15 years of developing physical continuity with its neighboring communities, needs to follow the lead of Dean Royster's Westside Community Alliance in reshaping its master plan and development strategies to break down Northside Drive's east-west divide.

4.1. SUBAREA A -10TH TO MARIETTA STREET, INCLUDING TECH PARKWAY (Figure 26)

- Realign Tech Parkway to intersect with Marietta Street
 - Realign Northside Drive for two-way operation over expanded flyover
 - Introduce an elevated pedestrian park and street crossings to connect Georgia Tech and Marietta Street and provide a community space shared by east and west
 - Construct 8th Street intersection with Northside Drive and provide access to Georgia Tech and again better connect west to east
 - Add frontage to Northside Drive from Georgia Tech
- each of the subareas, subdivided into two separate master plan phases.



Figure 26. Recommendations for 10th Street to Marietta Street area

4.2. SUBAREA B-DONALD LEE HOLLOWELL PARKWAY (Figure 27)

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

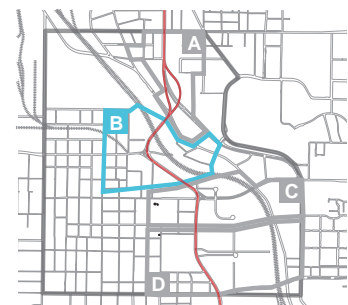
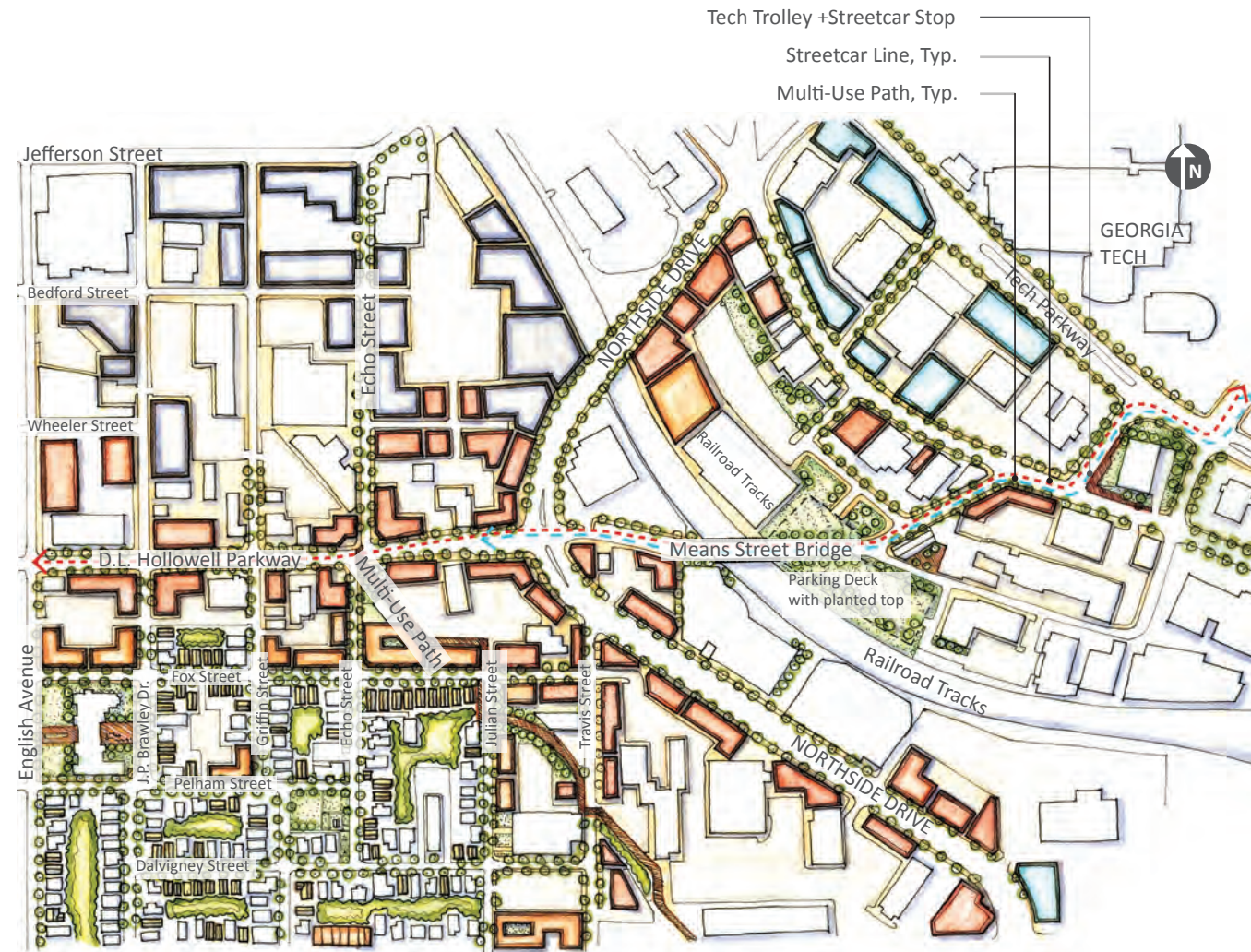


Figure 27. Recommendations for D.L.Hollowell Parkway area

4.3. NORTH AVENUE (Figure 28)

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

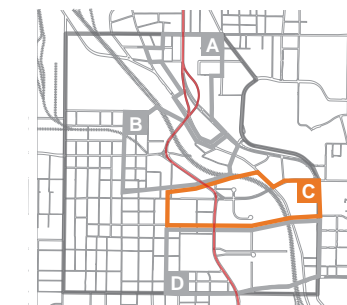


Figure 28. Recommendations for North Avenue area

In response to feedback through the vetting process and as a follow-on the opportunities identified in the fall studio, Elizabeth Ward undertook an independent studio to focus on the area along North Avenue, from east of the rail lines to west of Northside Drive. Her program consisted of a number of issues deserving of further study. Georgia Tech's interests have grown its acquisition and development of properties in conjunction with its growing research facilities that stretch along North Avenue up to Northside Drive. Community residents, appreciative of how Tech has dressed up North Avenue east of the rails, have lamented the apparent lack of concern with the quality of the environment west and into the English Avenue neighborhood. Because of the rails and perhaps the relative newness of this latest Tech expansion, these properties have connectivity problems, with each other across North Avenue, with the main campus to the northeast, and as showing their backsides to the neighborhoods. In addition, the rails are the mainline freight carriers into the gulch, but also the route of the Athens commuter rail line, should that ever materialize. The student's work addressed all of these issues, identifying both obstacles and opportunities to better synthesize this territory with the campus and as a contributing gateway into the neighborhood.



Figure 29. Plan view, showing proposed continuity of streetscape treatment into English Avenue neighborhood, tightening of excessive rights-of-way, reuse of abandoned railroad bridges for connectivity, opening up of the "canyon" of North Avenue, introduction of land use and design features that connect better, and the location of a prospective commuter rail stop serving Georgia Tech, Coca-Cola, and the communities around

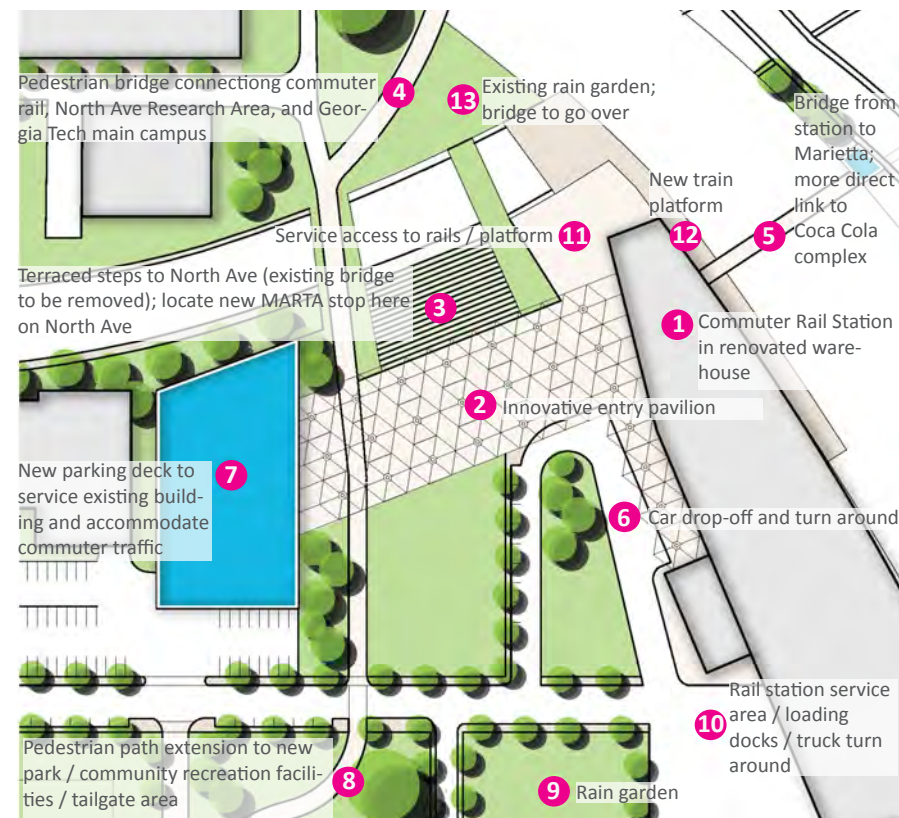


Figure 30. Detail plan view, showing the aggregation of activities that could connect both Tech research functions, community sharing uses, and a connectivity system that could include the commuter rail stop

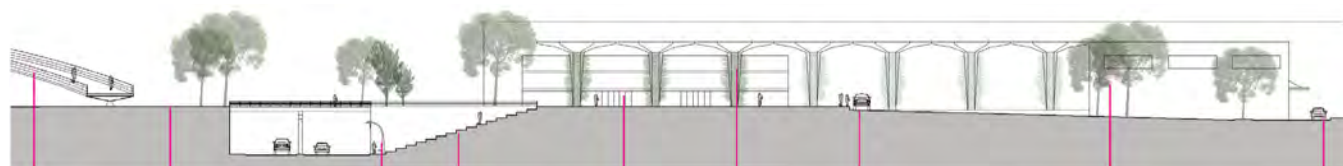


Figure 31. Section view, showing a terraced slope replacing the forbidding "canyon" wall to the south

4.4. SUBAREA D – IVAN ALLEN BOULEVARD (Figure 32)

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

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

To address the major east-west connectivity challenges, a series of treatments was considered along the full length of the corridor. Reworking many of the intersections should realize land recapture whose redevelopment could help defray the costs associated, both in land and in development costs. The pedestrian scale forms and com-

patible land uses were likewise considered throughout the study area. Lastly, the mobility requirements of Northside Drive, which dictate minimum roadway cross sections, were included in all renderings and alternatives. In the second phase, strategic infill continues. Again, single-family residential land use governs infill in English Avenue. The remaining parking lots provide a variety of land uses with green space or parking topped with green space in the center. The interior garages would replace the surface parking currently in the area. Because the surface lots are used for tailgating, the green space on top of the garages and in the center courtyards can be used for tailgating on game days.



Figure 32. Recommendations for Ivan Allen Boulevard Area

0 150 300 450 600

5. Multi-modal Passenger Terminal (MMPT) – Atlanta University Center (AUC) Area

This area has come into focus as the most intense and dynamic spot in the corridor, indeed in the region. With City Council approval in March to support a new stadium for the Falcons, that billion dollar project appears to be moving forward on the site south of the Georgia Dome, which would be removed. At the same time, coming into focus is the MMPT project, another billion dollar project, which at the present time appears to be headed toward a site that con-

nects Centennial Olympic Park Drive to Forsyth Street. To this point, these projects have been inwardly focused. Their forward motion requires and to some extent depends on careful attention to how they connect –with each other, with Downtown, with Northside, and with the Atlanta University Center campuses, Vine City, English Avenue, and Castleberry Hill. These connections are not just transportation or form-based, but more importantly based on people, economic, and environmental priorities. A consensus is emerging that these efforts should result in transforming the whole area into a model for

community improvement and place development. Accordingly, the students' report below is highlighted with updates based on vetting their ideas and incorporating stakeholder feedback. It should be noted too that a fall 2013 studio is coming together for Georgia Tech students to study this area far more intensively in light of the pace of projected development.

Major issues in the MMPT/AUC area include:

- Ensure community benefits from the MMPT, Falcons Stadium, and Mims Park projects



Figure 33. Critical locations in MMPT-AUC area

•Better connect the Westside neighborhoods (English Avenue, Vine City, Atlanta University Center, and Castleberry Hill) to Downtown and surrounding areas

•Improve the stability of the Westside neighborhoods through listening to and responding to community values, needs, and priorities and identifying feasible community benefit agreements (CBA) to implement the goals.

•Provide for transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities, consistent with the whole corridor team, as well as providing east-west connectivity

•Use the Proctor Creek North Avenue work prepared by the community through Park Pride and recently designated by EPA as a federal urban watershed as a strategy for stormwater run-off mitigation as well as an amenity for shaping new land use opportunities

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

In general, the Westside neighborhoods have experienced disinvestment and neglect over the last few decades, despite the development potential they possess due to their proximity to Downtown and the AUC, as well as their available land. The many vacant lots and buildings offer the opportunity of reinvesting in and revitalizing the neighborhoods, balancing preservation of historic cultures, creating strate-

gic park and community garden space like Mims Park, maintaining housing affordability while encouraging new mixed economic development along Northside Drive.

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

ACTION: Amend CDP to incorporate language and mapping that requires connectivity and mutual benefit provisions and that sets up this area for new and revised Special Public Interest (SPI) district zoning

ACTION: Note that the transportation work to date considers the MMPT and the Stadium separately and accordingly require the Stadium and the MMPT and related developments to carry out a coordinated Development of Regional Impact (DRI) review; the full extent of transportation, storm water, and other infrastructure provisions and impacts must be understood before finalizing plans for any one of the pieces.

5.2. GREENSPACE AND STORMWATER MITIGATION

We also identified existing greenspace and areas that could further serve the surrounding

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

ACTION: Treat the development planning for the stadium, the MMPT, and related developments as part and parcel of the planning for Proctor Creek so that run-off mitigation and park and trail development opportunities are understood and planned for as shared amenities for present and future neighborhood development, not just utilities.

5.3. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING, AND THE TAX ALLOCATION DISTRICT (TAD)

In planning for this area, we looked at the government funding that has been available to those living in the Westside neighborhoods to improve the community. There is a Tax Allocation District (TAD) located within our area of focus and that money has been reserved to help improve these neighborhoods. Stormwater runoff, flooding, and an overall lack of infrastructure investment are all issues that this

area faces. A study by Invest Atlanta to make best use of these funds (about \$45 million) was just getting underway as the 2011 fall semester ended. TAD funding as well as the assistance provided through the Choice Neighborhoods Program are both resources for dealing with these issues in the future. The developments previously discussed, the MMPT, Green Line, and new stadium all have the potential for further generating revenue around South Downtown, and there should be a guarantee that those living on the Westside realize financial benefits in the form of jobs, job training, and rungs on the ladder for self-improvement. It is our goal that Community Benefit Agreements (CBA) be incorporated into future development processes so the Westside would experience further investment, growth, and development. Taking into account the range of stakeholder input and the technical access and connectivity factors, we strongly recommend the site south of the Dome.

Since the students' completion of the report, funds have been committed to the Vine City and English Avenue neighborhoods, \$15 million from the Blank Foundation for human resource development and \$15 million of TAD funds from Invest Atlanta. It remains unclear whether the TAD funds are in addition to the TAD funds to which the neighborhoods are already entitled under the Westside TAD or an effort to scale back that commitment.

In developing a strategy for neighborhood conservation and

enhancement, based on feedback gained through the vetting process, first preserve what is preservable and in particular identify sites and areas of historic and cultural significance. Only then decide what is necessary to enhance the existing assets of the neighborhoods. From there decide what can or should be added in a way that respects the existing culture and fabric of the neighborhoods, mitigates risks of displacement through gentrification, yet does provide for new mixed use, mixed income housing development.

ACTION: One of the students prepared a menu of community benefit priorities based on extensive interaction with community groups and individuals; through further vetting and feedback, that menu includes:

- Community representation in all negotiations for the use of promised funds
- Stabilize and support rehabilitation of viable housing stock
- Honor the special historic significance of the neighborhoods and their places
- Establish job training and employment programs for nearby neighborhoods with measurable and enforceable criteria, not excluding individuals on the basis of their backgrounds
- Provision through the promised funding for education, training, and administrative support for various neighborhood-identified initiatives, such as food, health, daycare, and eldercare initiatives

•Infrastructure development to effect the goal of fully integrating the neighborhoods with Downtown, both physically and in terms of sharing resources

5.4. INTERSECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

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

ACTION: Consistent with the integrated comprehensive planning called for above, make sure that all project sponsors, their consultants, the neighborhoods, and the affected agencies (at least GDOT, the City, Invest Atlanta, Central Atlanta Progress, MARTA, GRTA, CCT, ARC, and the railroads) come together regularly from now going forward to

share concepts, plans, priorities, constraints and opportunities. Use the Greenprints Committee established by Governor Barnes to manage the Atlantic Station project as a model, which facilitated agenda setting and performance measures for all parties to be held accountable for progress, often on a weekly basis.

5.5. SCENARIOS AND MASTER PLAN

Students conceptualized alternative futures in the following way. Ultimately, through the vetting and feedback process, elements of these efforts were added to and synthesized into the plan that follows these sections.

5.5.1. "BUSINESS AS USUAL" SCENARIO

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

5.5.2. "MODEST" SCENARIO

The "Modest" Scenario focuses on improvements that are feasible to be implemented in the near term. For example, improvements to pedestrian and

public spaces could greatly improve the safety, functionality, and attractiveness of the pedestrian environment and help existing transit service work more effectively. This includes the provision of amenities like shelters at bus stops and adequate lighting along good quality sidewalks. Moderate land development could have significant impacts on the area's livability, including the activation of vacant buildings for use as job training centers, community centers, daycare centers, or various housing configuration. This assumes that the massive investment contemplated on the east side would in part fund these improvements.

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

Jr Drive to Historic Westside Village and Wal-Mart.

5.5.3. "ROBUST" SCENARIO

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

Some land use changes are also recommended at the intersection of Northside Drive and MLK, Jr. Dr. to enhance the "gateway"



Figure 34. "Business As Usual" scenario

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

5.5.4. IMAGINATIVE SCENARIO

The imaginative scenario incorporates all elements of the robust scenario and also includes the creation of a superblock that will serve to establish the gateway connection between

the Westside neighborhoods and Downtown. By providing additional greenspace flowing from the MMPT and the new Falcons Stadium to the Vine City MARTA TOD, this plan will help mitigate some of the residents' stormwater concerns related to these large new developments. As these two new attractors will likely require significant public investment and spur adjacent private redevelopment, the plan seeks to ensure that neighborhood residents do not take on an additional burden and rather realize benefits themselves. In order to provide for near-term stability in an area with considerable developer interest, this plan recommends adopting a mixed-use zoning standard in the surrounding areas. Additionally, there is opportunity for residents to negotiate Community Benefit Agreements related to parking and concessions facilities/services within and around the new Falcons stadium, as well as workforce development elements that could be tied to the construction of the MMPT and

stadium. Finally, this plan recommends a "Westside Loop" streetcar or other transit that would connect the Atlanta University Center campus with Vine City, English Avenue, Georgia Tech, Centennial Olympic Park, the Downtown Streetcar (connecting to the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic District), the MMPT and the new Falcons stadium at the south site.

5.5.5. MASTER PLAN

The final master plan design combines elements of each of the aforementioned proposals. Figure 36 shows the compilation of design ideas over the entire study area. Some of the components of this plan include:

- Stormwater mitigation feature on the Westside just north of Vine City MARTA station
- Expansion of the Vine City MARTA station into a Transit Oriented Development (TOD)
- Extension of a trail from Washington Park and the BeltLine, through the Vine City neighborhood and into the Vine City MARTA station, dubbed the Vine City Promenade by the PATH Foundation, that would connect across Northside Drive, into Centennial Olympic Park, to Freedom Parkway and eventually link into the Stone Mountain PATH
- Location of the new Falcons stadium at the south site
- Redevelopment of Martin Luther King Jr Dr as a mixed-use and active corridor



Figure 35. Imaginative scenario

- Expansion of the Green Line plan to connect into the Westside and south to Castleberry Hill
- Redevelopment of the vacant University Homes site within the Atlanta University Center Campus
- Reworking the Fair Street intersection to make a seamless link from the MMPT, down Northside or Peters to Fair, and thence into the heart of the AUC campuses
- An extension of the Downtown Streetcar that would run through the Multi Modal Passenger Terminal, down to the Atlanta University Center by way of Northside Drive, back north through the Westside

neighborhoods and return into Downtown

ACTION: As stated above, management of the overall planning and development process cries out for an inclusive, formal process.

ACTION: Support Georgia Tech, through City and Regional Planning and Architecture studios, in its planning and design effort in the fall of 2013 to tackle these complicated problems. While student work, the effort should at the least include the people, the issues, and the technical, organizational, financial, political, and cultural obstacles and opportunities for going forward.

ACTION: Serious consideration



Figure 36. Original master plan for MMPT-AUC area

should be given to extending the Streetcar now under construction, should there be any extension, to connect to the MMPT, Castleberry via Walker Street to Fair/Student Movement to the heart of the campuses.

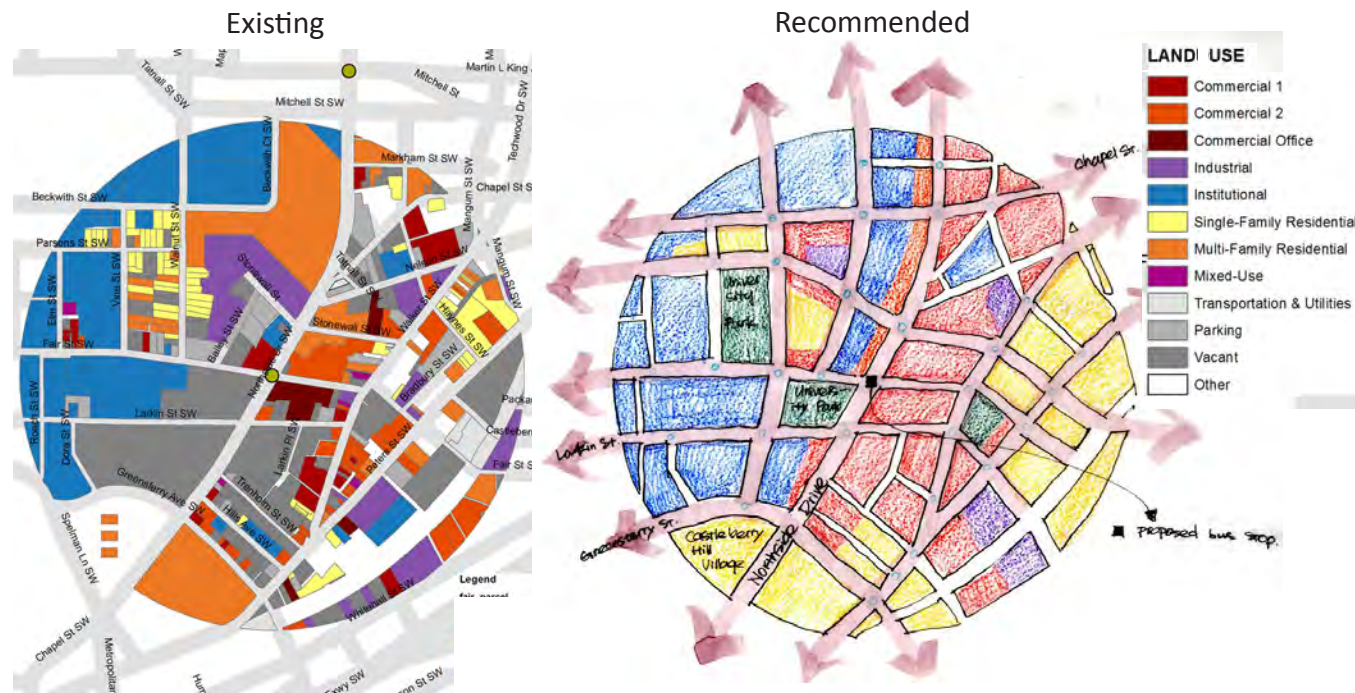


Figure 37. Fair Street/Student Movement Boulevard. This section of Northside, already looking up with developments by the H. J. Russell Company and the Atlanta Housing Authority, should be considered as the opportunity to better connect the Atlanta University Center campuses and neighborhoods to Castleberry Hill and into downtown.

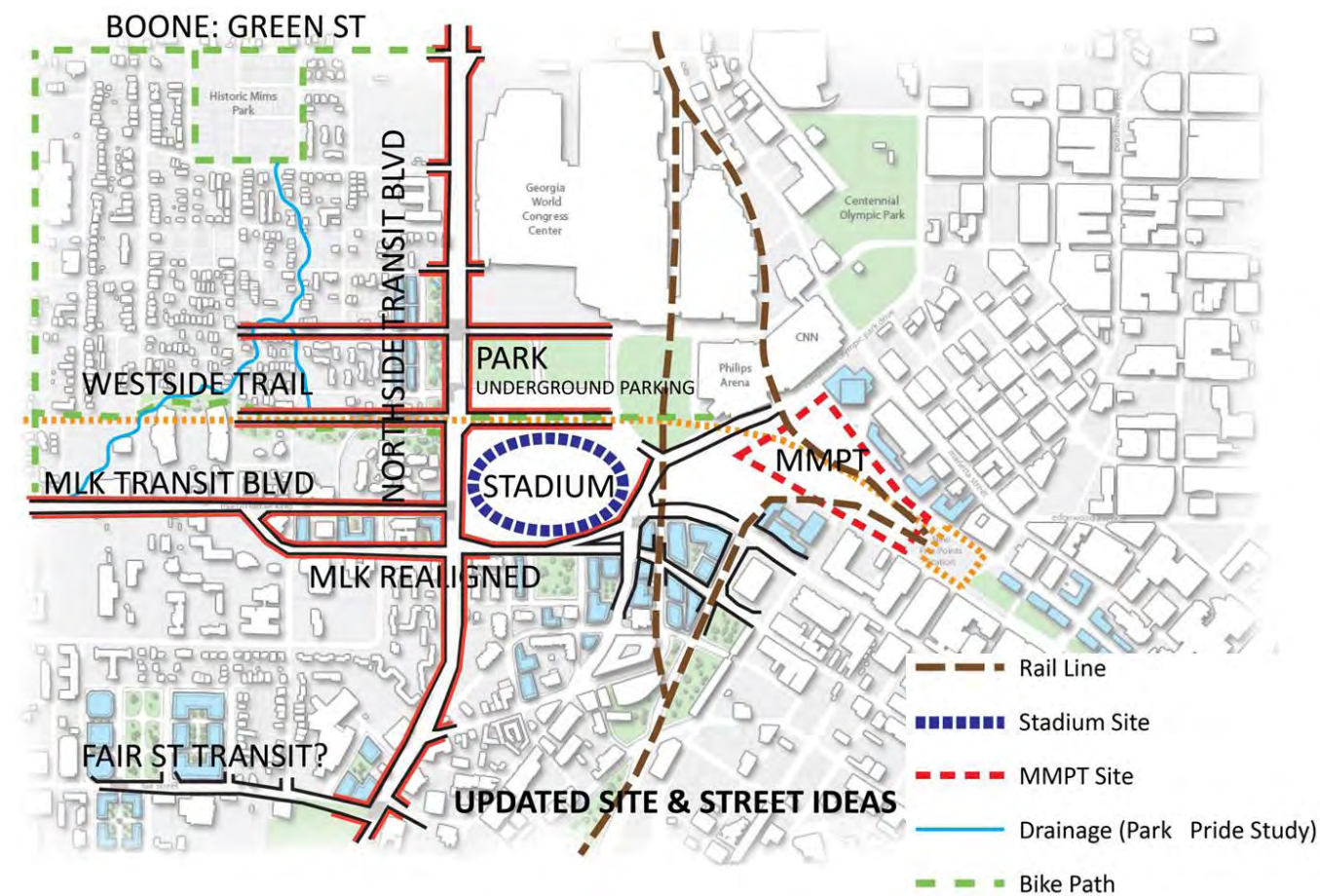


Figure 38. With new developments designed to front onto Northside and cross into neighborhoods and the AUC along MLK, the divide can begin to dissolve, to the benefit of all concerned, strengthening the core

6. NORTHSIDE TERMINUS

After struggling for weeks to try to make sense out of the existing Northside Drive terminus into Metropolitan Parkway, we stumbled on an idea, identified with Rob Ross at Kimley-Horn, whose simplicity and elegance seem to unlock the door to solving multiple problems.

6.1. RESOLVING NORTHSIDE'S CONNECTIONS TO I-20 AND THE WEST END MARTA STATION

The biggest move (Figure 39) to resolve the connectivity problems that afflict the area is probably also the most cost- and time-effective proposal for the whole

corridor. With minimal right-of-way, environmental, and construction costs, Northside Drive can be rerouted to flow directly into the I-20 access road system and the West End business district by shifting it into Peters Street and then West Whitehall, bringing it thus to the west side of the rail tracks, leading straight in to the West End MARTA station, and from there into Lee Street. In addition to providing defined entrances and exits to and from I-20 to Northside Drive and direct access to West End, this routing frees up the existing Northside alignment to become the northern terminus of Metropolitan Parkway and to plan for future land use and devel-

opment in a more cohesive and logical way.

The implications of this idea are far reaching. Suddenly, the establishment of the West End Business Center as a logical southwest hub for Atlanta's core comes into focus. The West End MARTA station, heretofore deemed too small and too cut up to provide for a transit oriented development (TOD), emerges as the anchor for the Business Center's revitalization. The land is capable of accommodating Cobb Community Transit buses, maybe Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the future, GRGA buses, both of which can interface here with MARTA rail and

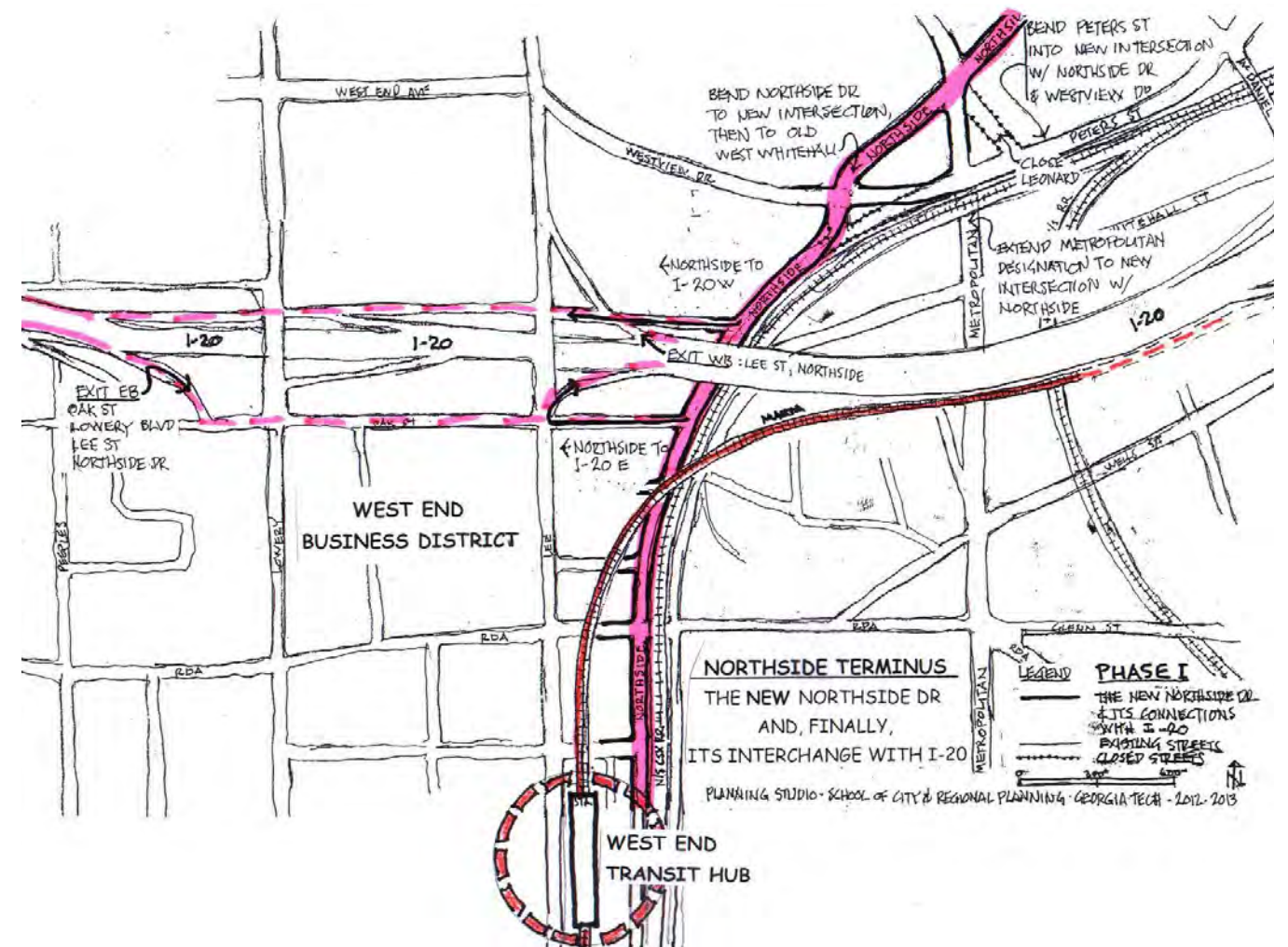


Figure 39. New Northside Drive

bus to provide multiple connection opportunities. The business district as a whole is within one quarter mile of this potential hub, and the lands values take a leap with the transit access, not to mention the rational connectivity that the newly located Northside Drive's terminus into Lee Street provides. Part of this planning, as for the MMPT/AUC area, should be comprehensively considered so that parking, green space, and other public serving purposes can be identified and set aside up front.

With the combined roadway and transit capacity increases comes the opportunity for densifying the Business Center's future development mix with housing, shops, and offices, perhaps planned around a town square. Furthermore, the link across I-20 at Lee Street, if treated along the lines of 5th Street at Tech Square, can be greatly enhanced to attract AUC students, faculty and staff to live and shop in the new West End. Using the existing or rehabbed historic storefronts to underscore the area's historic themes, the land at the mall could transition incrementally into a major center. At some point, improvements to the I-20 frontage roads that now give direct access to the new Northside may need improvements to function better for both cars and transit. The timing for beginning this transformation works well with the nearly completed effort on the part of business owners and residents to establish a Community Improvement District (CID).

ACTION: Build on positive feed-

back from GDOT, MARTA, FTA, the City, and West End Business leaders to advance the project by giving it priority in the new scoping effort coordinated through GDOT and the City.

ACTION: Begin the process of adding it to the ARC's Transportation Improvement Program, funding it for preliminary engineering, environmental study, and right-of-way acquisition as soon as possible.

ACTION: Informally contact the property owners whose minimal contributions for right-of-way should be balanced by significantly increased values of their remaining holdings.

ACTION: Incorporate this planning process into the required Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) update and then to CDP amendments and zoning and public works standards that can enable an attractive town center at this location.

ACTION: Support a Georgia Tech School of City and Regional Planning studio to assist the City in carrying out the LCI update and ensuing CDP and zoning amendment processes.

6.2. STRATEGIES FOR A TROUBLED TERRITORY

The area surrounding the somewhat indeterminate southern end of Northside Dr is characterized by a confusion of land use, transportation infrastructure, deterioration, disconnectedness, and environmental complications. Yet the area is surrounded by the Atlanta University Center

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

Like other such indeterminate industrial or rail terrains whose ebbs and flows are an Atlanta hallmark, people occupy this space with a wide range of activities, from homeless encampments, to stables for the Peachtree Street carriage trade horses, to a range from active to derelict light industrial spaces, to "informal" enterprises, and finally the usual discovers of interest in such spaces, the artists and crafts people. Unlike its surrounding neighbors with well-

defined stakeholders who have an interest in the area's improvement, then, this area has a myriad of interests, some in conflict, some consonant, reflecting the current owners and occupiers of the land as well as powerful agencies like GDOT, MARTA, N/S and CSX railroads, and the City of Atlanta.

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

- Serious connectivity issues, including from West End to the AU Center, from Mechanicsville to AUC, Castleberry, and downtown generally, and from West End to points east
- Transportation barriers, including access to MARTA, I-20, and a functioning north and south and east and west street network
- Limited transit access, no viable pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure (not that there are many existing destinations that could benefit from such)
- Waste of land, including acres of disconnected, deteriorated buildings and properties, resulting in a kind of no-man's-land in the middle

of and repelling otherwise vibrant urban terrain

- A visible and stark marker for the historic cultural, race and class barriers that, again, define Atlanta's patterns of investment on the one hand and neglect on the other

Yet the opportunities are exciting:

- Finally connecting Northside Drive in a clear, rational, and user-friendly way to I-20 by itself would enhance the investment and buy-in for repositioning the area for an improving future
- Sorting out the road, railroad, and MARTA systems into a serviceable connectivity system could bring appeal to an area that could be very productive both for the City's economy and for the jobs and income-producing potential for the area
- A properly devised redevelopment program could both support the assets that ring the area – the AU Center, the West End business center, the relatively new nearby housing communities as well as reinforce their goals and aspirations
- With little impact from the dislocation or gentrification of residential neighborhoods that troubles other redevelopment proposals, the prospects for using the area as an incubator of innovative industries and generator of jobs seem favorable
- Creating a welcoming entry point to the city for in-

terstate travelers, MARTA riders, future commuter rail riders, as well as for the everyday population

From a land use and development potential perspective (Figure 40), in contrast to the established, active and stable activities all around, this territory is almost poetic in its irresolution, diversity, conflicts, and overall disheveled state. The blocks are small and can't be realistically consolidated. The streets are many, yet confusing. The two rail lines defy establishing connectivity with neighboring areas. I-20 looms above, with its embankments barricading connectivity on the ground. We considered a wide range of alternatives for this area's future:

- Wholesale assembly and redevelopment:
 - oMake it a park with a lake at the low point
 - oMake it a railroad yard
 - oMake it a mixed use development connecting into its surrounding neighborhoods
 - oMake it an industrial park
- Incremental approaches within the parameters of the existing conditions
 - oTake a "let a hundred flowers bloom" approach, where the strengths from the myriad of existing uses can be assessed with respect to identifying and prioritizing infrastructure and regulatory measures to encourage their success
 - oInteract individually with all the existing us-

ers to divine a strategy for supporting the most promising initiatives oDesign an identity for the area that builds on its positives and then install that identity at strategic entry points

For a number of reasons, the incremental approach was deemed to be the most feasible, both from a time and cost perspective and from the point of view of encouraging that which Atlanta does best: encouraging small start-ups, artists, and diverse interests to experiment, to try their hand at unlikely things in unlikely places. Such efforts, supported strategically could launch a range of follow-up activities. Some of the properties, for example, could

support business incubators and start-ups. Others could support research labs, maybe for the Morehouse School of Medicine. Still others could take advantage of Brownfield support programs to develop “green” industries or green building contractors. Perhaps the needs and advantages for the carriage trade stables could be supported, protected and enhanced. And all the while, space exists for artists and other people living and working at the margins. Part of such a program could consider employment of the underemployed and homeless individuals, to include ways of sheltering those who presently find shelter in the area (now the only nighttime occupants). Proposed next steps would be to engage the interests in the area

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

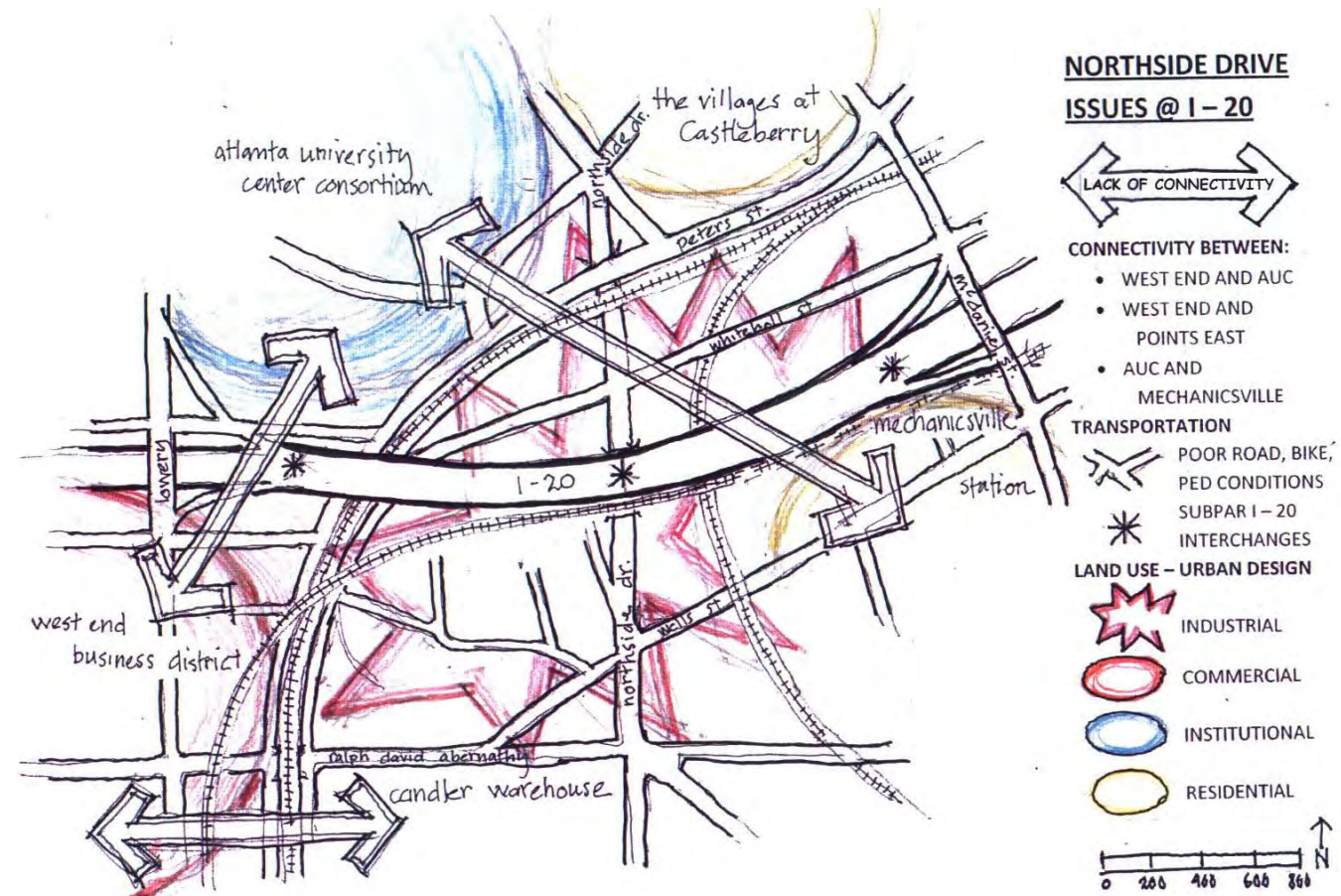


Figure 40. Land use at the Northside Drive-I-20 area

7. CONTACT

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