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Borderline Re-Order: Negotiating the Edge between City and Greenspace

Jeremy Taylor Morgan
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***Borderline Re-Order:
Negotiating the Edge between City and Greenspace***

North Sandy Springs, Georgia

Thesis Proposal is Presented to the
Faculty of the Department of Architecture
College of Architecture and Construction Management

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and

Dr. Arash Soleimani, Thesis Coordinator
Kathryn Bedette, Interim Chair of Department

By

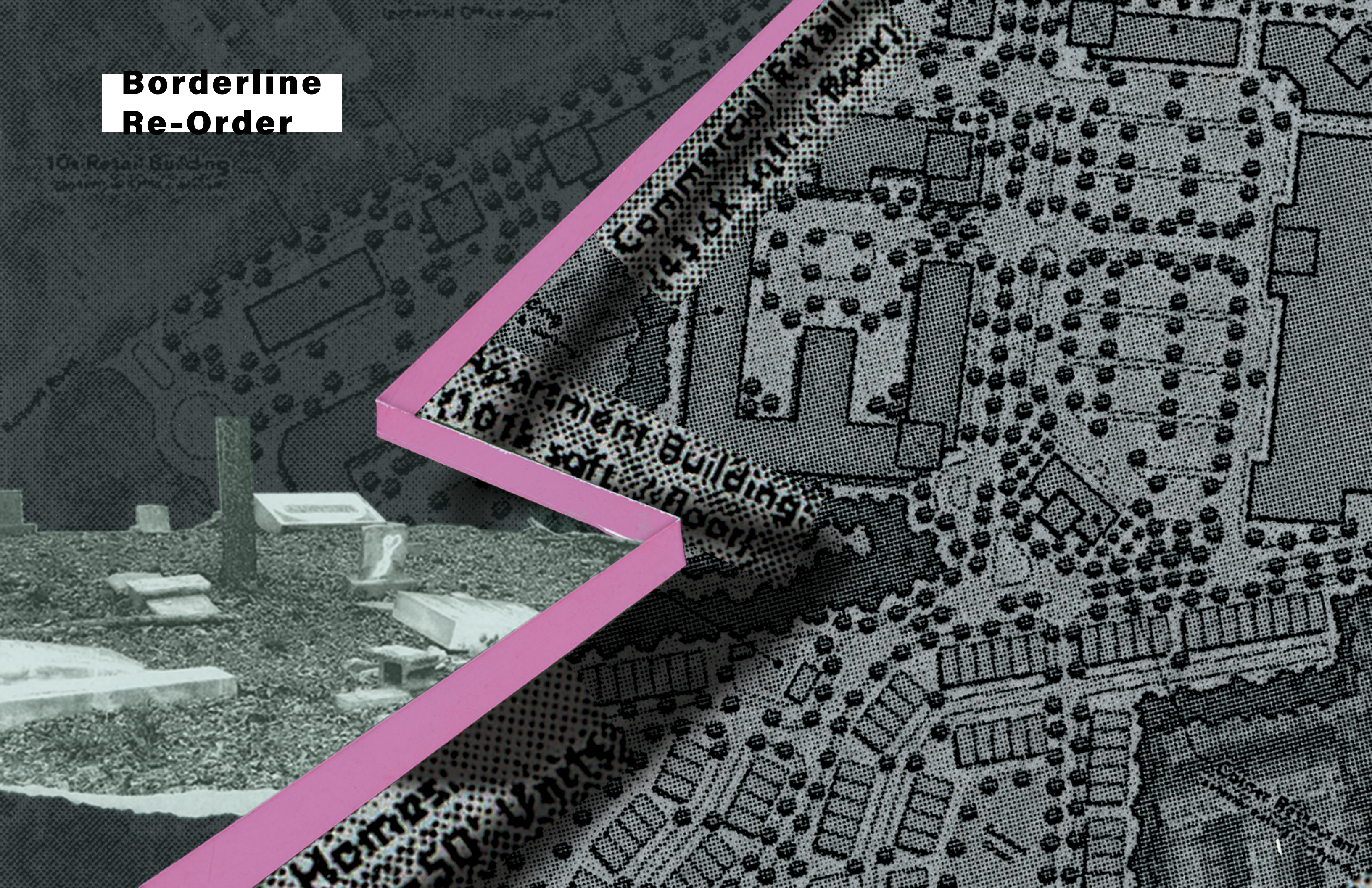
Jeremy Taylor Morgan

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Architecture

Kennesaw State University
Marietta, Georgia

May 2022

**Borderline
Re-Order**



Negotiating the Edge between City and Greenspace: A Case Study

Does development of urban areas naturally lies at odds with maintaining any memory of their historic character, e.g. historic artifacts, structures, land? If so, such a perspective may have warrant. The Atlanta area serves as an easy example: the Loew's Grand was conveniently burned down by arsonists after it received historic status and protection; the Fox Theatre was almost redeveloped into a parking deck, and; the placard for the site of Leo Frank's lynching was moved across the street to make room for an entrance ramp to a toll freeway.

But this single perspective, or prejudice rather, despite warrant, is a myopic projection onto all new redevelopment. *Development that respects historic sites can improve those sites to the advantage of both the observance of their history and the desirability of redevelopment.* Consider further

that given cities must change and grow (or even encroach), development must formulate such a new approach.

It cannot preserve an immaculate archive of that past, and it must not erase every sign of it either.

How can Architecture orient towards nature while protecting it from predatory development?

Given the dearth of examples for protecting natural environments and historic sites in Atlanta in particular, this proposal will seek to interrogate, investigate, and recommend a small set of architectural approaches to respect and vivify sites while encouraging sustainable redevelopment. For the sake of such a wide and tenuous scope, this proposal will select, and constrain, its parameters to a useful and commonplace condition within the metropolitan Atlanta region:

small forests within urbanizing centers.

Architecture can act as a barrier to invasive unsustainable development and boon to public quality of life:

By creating a barrier against development outside border,

By reuse of low-performing development inside border,

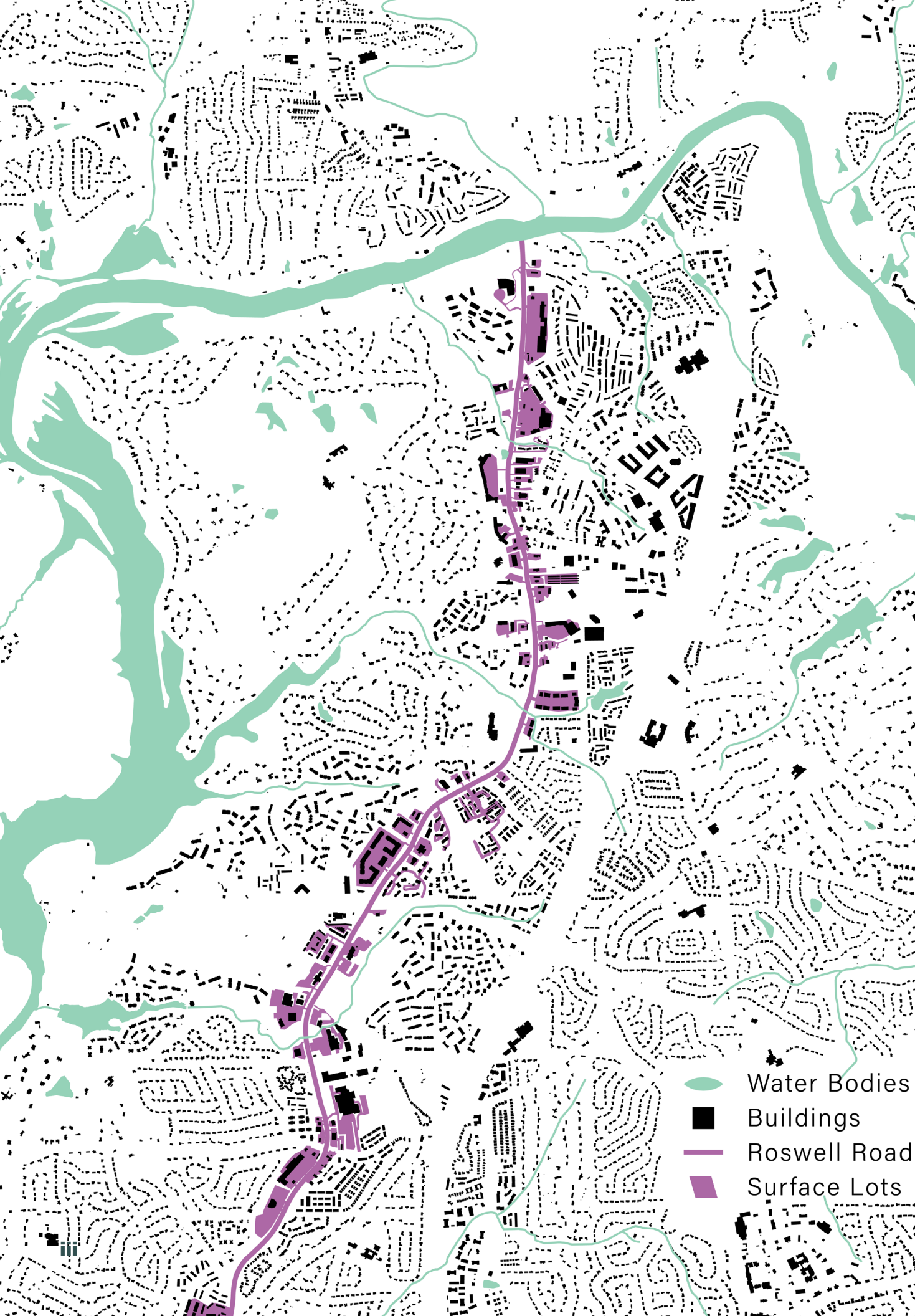
By retracting land from sprawl,

And by expansion of public access.

The undertaking will consider the following: I. Use, the social and urban need for such spaces; II. Method, the systematic method for attaining them, and; III. Purpose, the larger conceptual and theoretical purpose they fulfill. Lastly, it will conclude with a specific site and hypothetical approach with discrete architectural solutions.

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North Sandy Springs: A Case-in-Point for Suburban Atlanta

The City of Sandy Springs has recently taken interest in revitalizing the north end of the city by enumerating a new commission, the North End Revitalization Task Force, special Parks Department directives, and a Roswell Road master plan to remodel the five-lane highway into a pedestrian-friendly tree-lined boulevard with more crosswalks and other amenities. Recently, the city unveiled River Village, a mixed-use development along the Chattahoochee River in the northernmost point of the city. Sandy Springs continues to look for other plans and opportunities for urbanizing.

1/90th of land in Sandy Springs is protected greenspace, only part of which is dedicated parks.²⁹ To illustrate, out of every 90 acres of land in Sandy Springs one acre is protected

greenspace. If the metropolitan Atlanta area is a “City of Trees,” a majority of those trees are liable to be chopped down.

The metropolitan Atlanta area, like many cities, has many little-known sites of historical importance. Far from the grandeur of national and state cemeteries, memorials, and edifices, these sites are often humble homesteads, old church grounds, or family cemeteries of past Atlantans or Native Americans.

As Atlanta has developed, these forgotten sites are often positioned behind decades of development and redevelopment. Strip malls surround them. Subdivisions choke them. Streets block them as driveways and pathways to them lie forgotten.

However, given their preservation, albeit neglectful, they harbor a dense set of old-growth nature and unusual artifacts rarely seen within the metropolitan area. Large trees, naturally formed ecosystem refuges, and rare above-ground streams populate them. Given their prevalence and natural amenities, they serve as useful nodes for conscientious redevelopment.

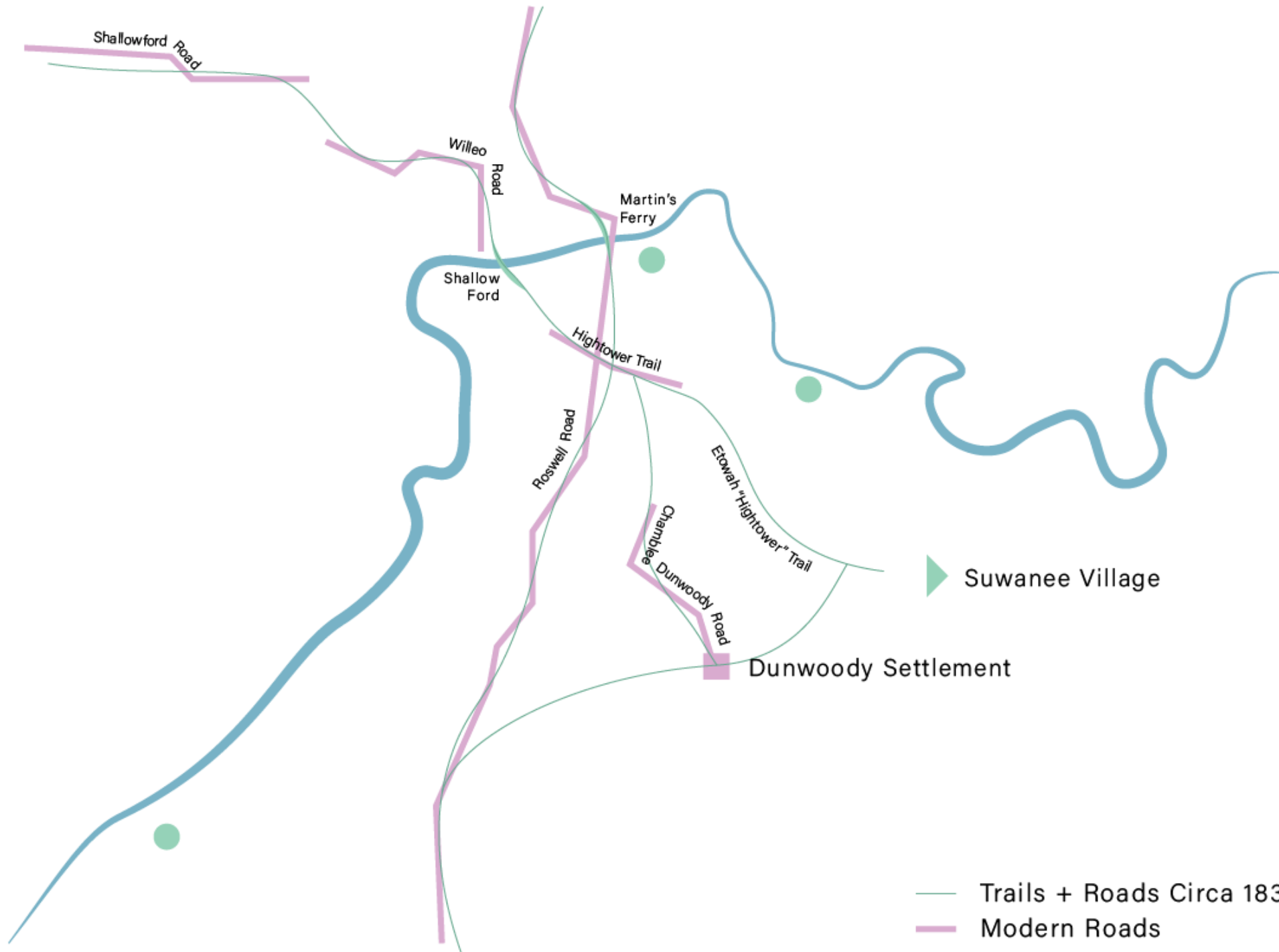
Yet, redevelopment often relies on their near-oblivion to disturb or even remove them for profit. This case study will select such a site to facilitate its interrogation and conclusion.

◀ Etowah + Sixes Villages
Rome Settlement

▲ Ustanali Village
Roswell + Alpharetta Settlements

▶ Suwanee Village


▼ Standing Peachtree Village
Atlanta Settlement



North Sandy Springs Historical Context

c. 1000 ^{BCE}	Muscogee Est.
c. 200	Cherokee Est.
1732	Colony of Georgia Est.
1845	Atlanta Est.
1861-1865	Civil War
1867-1877	Reconstruction
2005	Sandy Springs

- White Encroachment
- Genocide of Native Peoples
- Enslavement of People of Color
- Segregation
- White Flight
- Desegregation



...Retrofits are able to address that, when these properties were initially built, nobody was thinking about a lot of issues related to sustainability and climate change—issues related to equity, issues related to supporting an aging population and improving public health—and certainly a lot of it does sort of come down to reducing our dependence on automobiles

Ellen Dunham-Jones

Conserve Our Historic Landscape: Retrofit Suburbia

Ellen Dunham-Jones, June Williamson, et al.

The nuts-and-bolts method of creating beneficial neighborhood greenspaces in this proposal centers on the examples of Ellen Dunham-Jones, June Williamson, et al.

Why urbanize metropolitan centers? Why retrofit suburbia? In urbanizing former suburbs blighted by sprawl, public health and affordability are some of many immediate returns.¹¹

However, there is market-driven practicality for urban renewal. Demographics have shifted. Younger generations have less children. Older generations grow older, and their children move out. Far from the single-family picket fence model of Levittown, demographics now increasingly demand for urban lifestyles within suburban or formerly suburban centers.¹²

The old hardscape of sprawl becomes “under-performing asphalt” within these city centers. Parking lots on the outskirts of town are now central and

desirable locations.¹³ Within these densifying urbanizing centers (that originally had little-to-no dedicated greenspace) a need emerges for locations that “regreen” the area. Greenspaces offer parks, wetlands, bioswales, gathering spaces, etc., not just for human activity but also for water management and sustainability needs.¹⁴

People need a “third place” to hang out, and such a place offers community or a “sense of belonging.” The current strip mall and highway systems sorely lack this, but can be retrofitted within the same lines of division. With a “third place” one can go “likely interact,” visually or otherwise, with other people.¹⁵

These old highway corridors of “under-performing asphalt” can “retrofit” into walkable boulevards with multiple transit options and pathways.¹⁶ Regreening spaces can become parks, gardens, trails, flood control systems, all at the same time. And, such sites often increases the sales price

of the property around it.¹⁸

Only fifteen acres or more are necessary to create a new “sense of place” for redevelopment. Densification and redesign can offer complete self-sufficient and diverse neighborhoods.¹⁹ These new developments need green, walkable boulevards with retail oriented along the street.²⁰

It follows that an already existing patch of nature within urbanizing centers of former sprawl are opportune greenspaces. Rather than just build new parks on previously developed land, development can use already existing green infrastructure. Green infrastructure like a historic site and old-growth forest can be maintained while redevelopment uses the immense expansion of developed sprawl around it.

Why?

Restore habitat, water and air

Preserve nature for posterity

Create destinations not roads

Build housing for the future

Roswell Road Condition

“Under-performing asphalt”:

Heat Island Effect

Storm water pollution

Inefficient population density

Blighted landscape

Pedestrian nightmare

Ineffective landscaping greenery

Features

Long setback makes un-walkable

Landscaping acts as barrier

**Small sidewalks keep pedestrians
uncomfortably close to fast traffic**

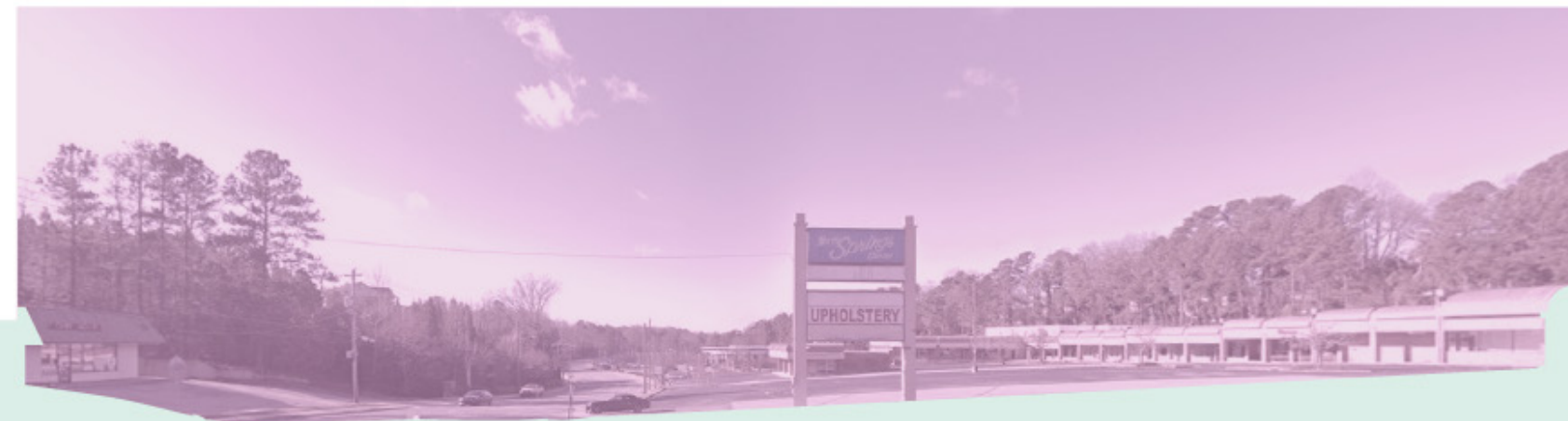
**Signage and architecture lacks any
significant character**



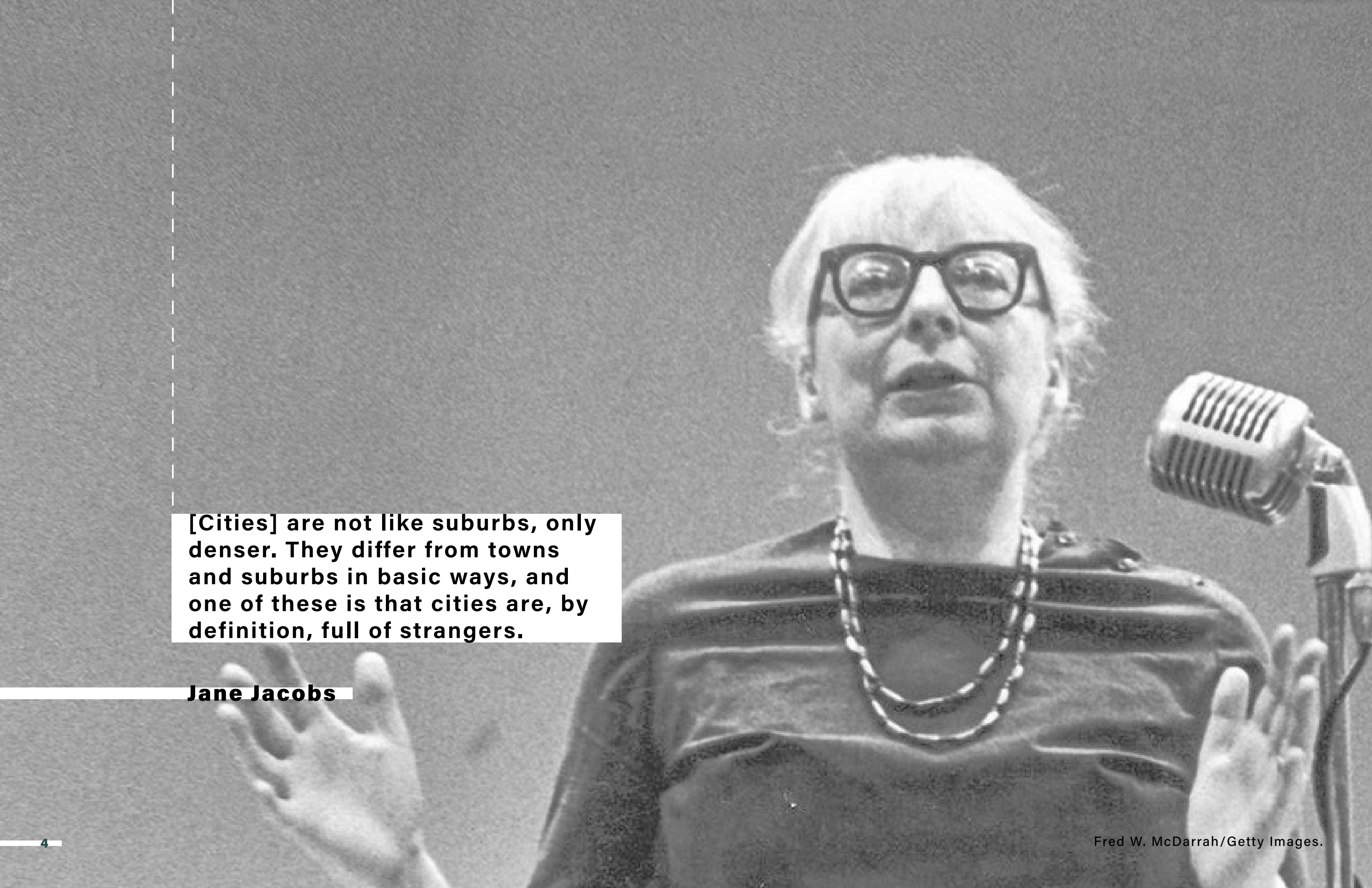
Roswell Road near Northridge Road



Roswell Road near Pitts Road



Roswell Road near Dalrymple/Spalding Road

A black and white photograph of Jane Jacobs speaking at a microphone. She is wearing glasses and a necklace, and her hands are raised in a gesture. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

[Cities] are not like suburbs, only denser. They differ from towns and suburbs in basic ways, and one of these is that cities are, by definition, full of strangers.

Jane Jacobs

Conserve Our Historic Landscape: Eyes Upon the Park

Jane Jacobs

The pragmatic need for neighborhood parks in this proposal centers on the work of Jane Jacobs.

Much like streets, the success of parks depends on their usefulness and versatility throughout the day. Like stores they depend on pedestrian traffic. Without such use, they lie idle, but unlike stores, their idleness sticks. A store would close or never open if it were too idle, but a park's dereliction remains there as a blight, a place that generates inactivity, or worse bad activity.¹

"...Parks need users" to animate city life, otherwise they attract mis-users that exploit their disuse and anonymity for crime.² "Eyes upon the

street" elects pedestrians as proprietors who not only use those spaces but safeguard them out of their own self-interest.³ Like interior streets, public spaces need public access, i.e. physical and most importantly visible access. Visible access and "eyes upon" create a citizen law of "checks and inhibitions" to crime and disuse.⁴

Parks and their surroundings are symbiotic. A good park is the result of a thriving neighborhood, not vice versa. Neighborhoods where people want to work, live, and interact, to walk, exercise, and entertain. This diversity intensifies parks which in turn intensify their neighborhoods. The park is a catalyst sparked by the quality of its

community.⁵

Greatly loved neighborhood parks benefit from a "certain rarity value." It follows that the historic nature of an old-growth historic site does not wield enough power to make a lively city park in and of itself. Conversely, a new-built park within a development with amenities does not predestine successful activity. Then, imagine the potential of a synergy of spaces that highlights its important in history among useful new infrastructure and amenities for everyday life, surrounded by a cathedral of mature trees (which cannot be built new) inside dense mixed-use development with proud, verdant, useful streets bustling with pedestrians.

Why?

Give people walkable cities

Citizens have shared ownership

Public/private transparency

Neighborhood accountability

Built-Greenspace Relationship

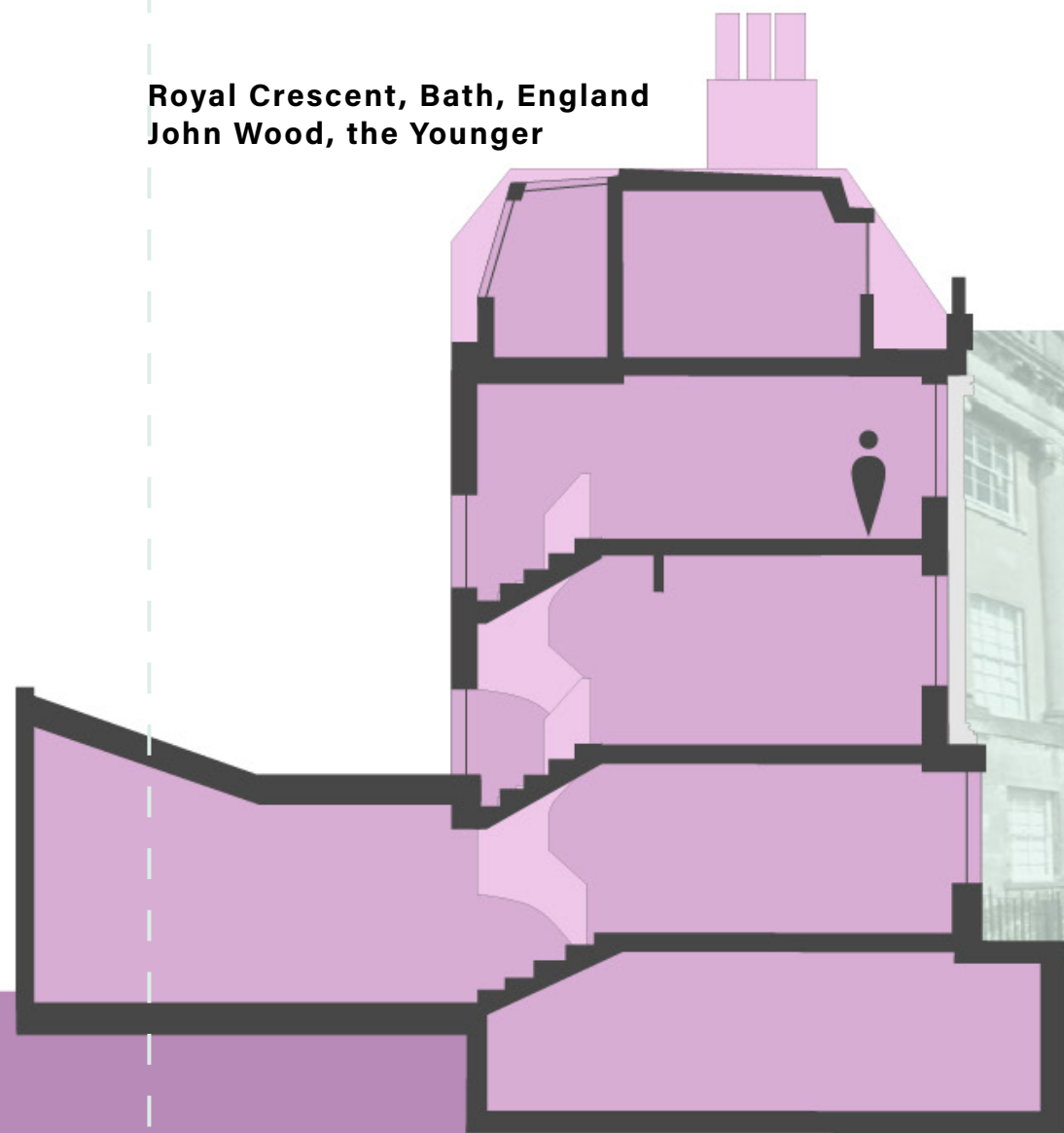
How?

Entrance-street-greenspace extroverts outward toward pedestrian life

Views and access oriented outside

Central design of form and layout creates community

Royal Crescent, Bath, England
John Wood, the Younger



Built-Greenspace Relationship

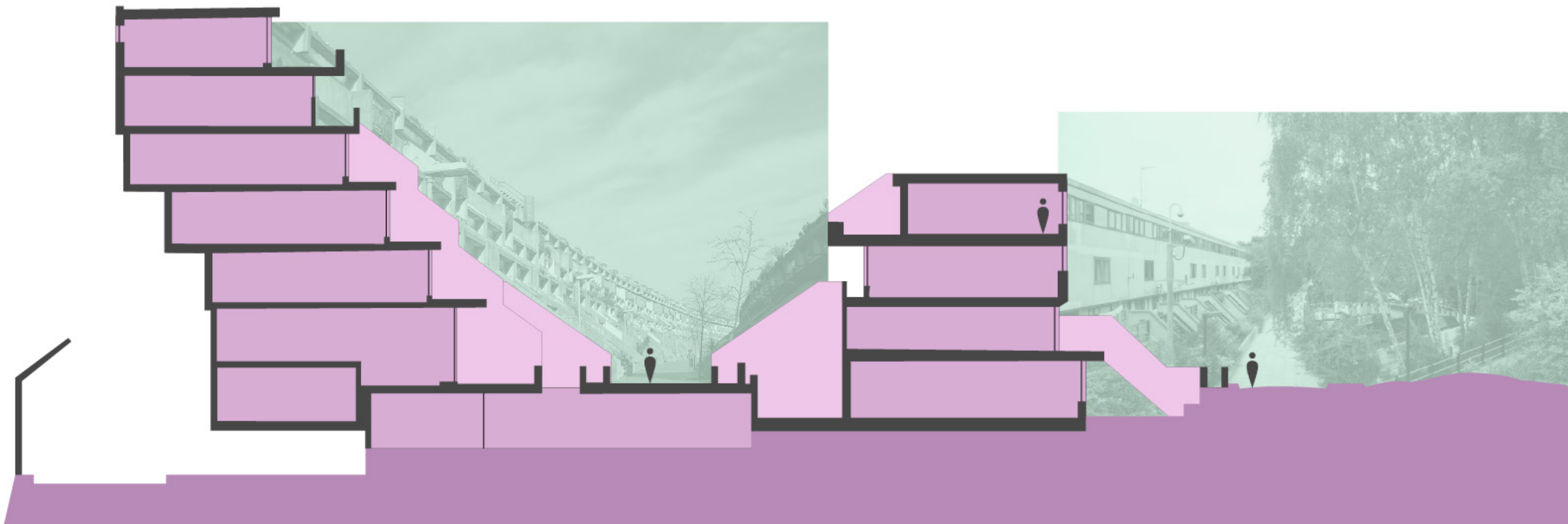
How?

Entrance-street extroverts outward toward pedestrian life

Views and access oriented toward pedestrian sphere

Central design of form and layout creates community

Alexandra Road Estate, Northwest London, England
Neave Brown



Built-Greenspace Relationship

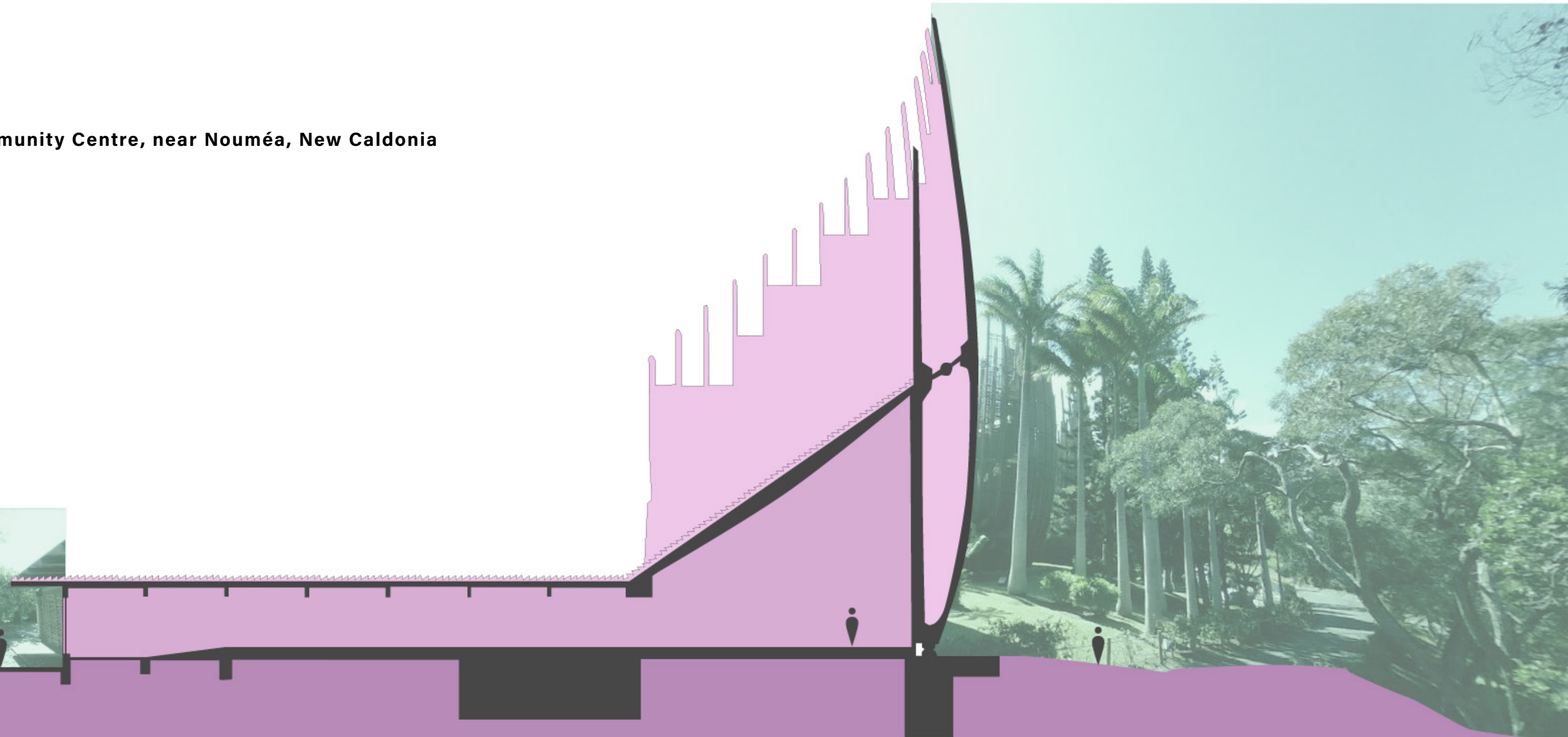
How?

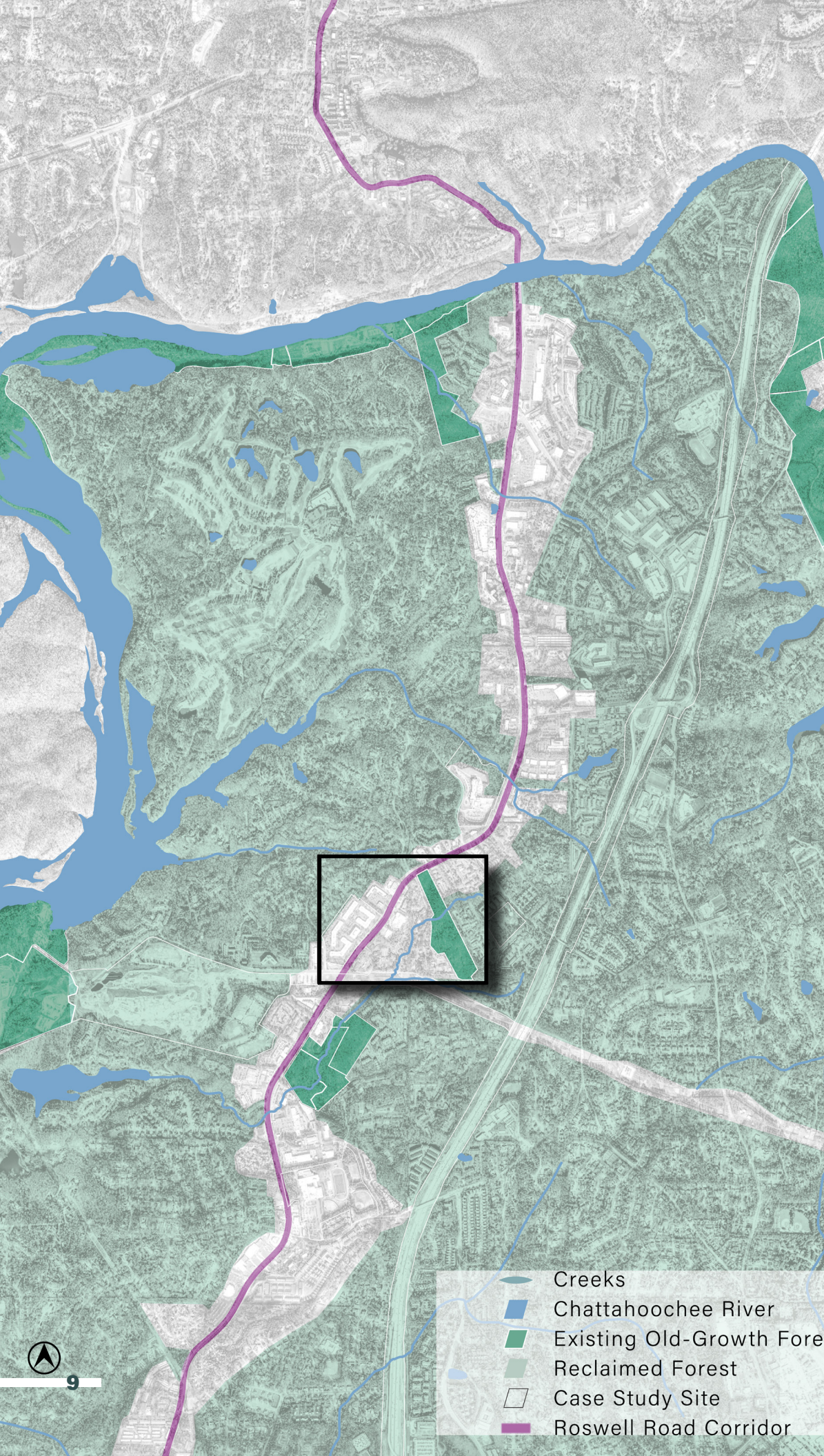
Serpentine plan exhibits nature preserve

Structure blends with both vernacular and nature

Vernacular form creates sense of community and belonging

Tjibaou Community Centre, near Nouméa, New Caledonia
Renzo Piano





Ecological Plan

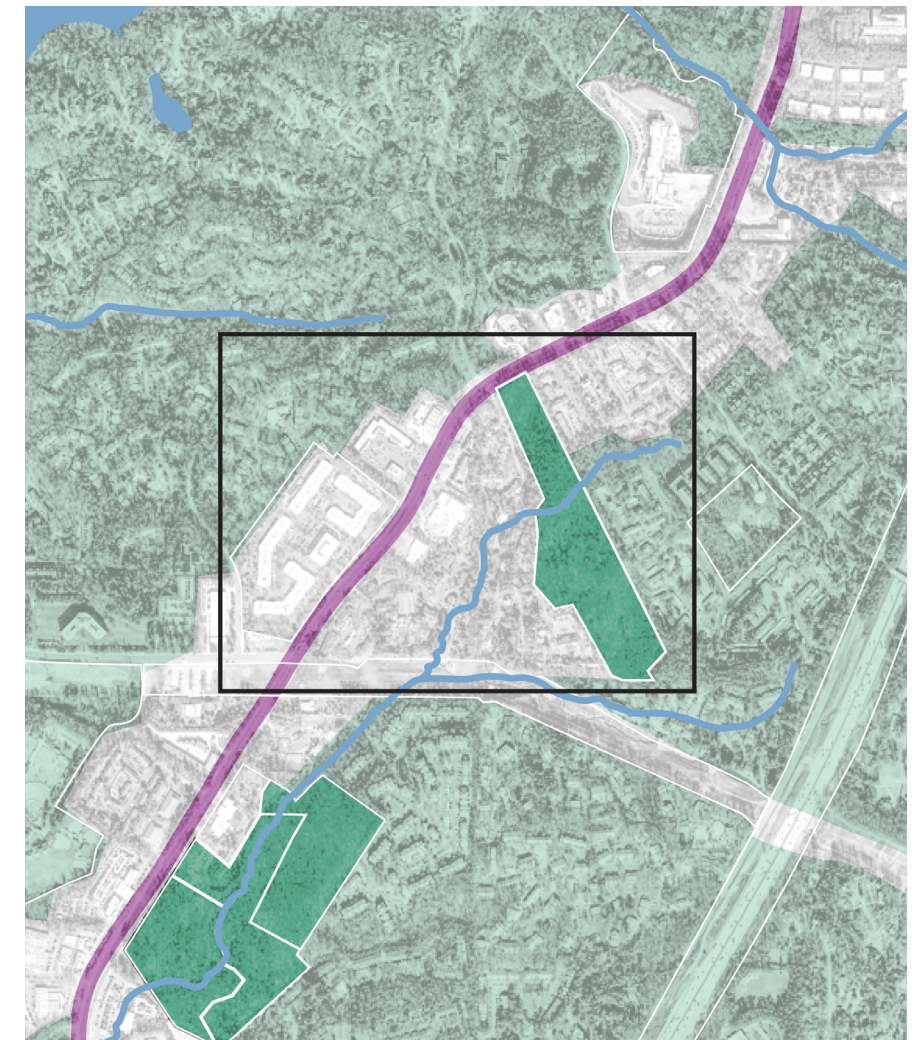
Restitch Public Greenspace with easement along Chattahoochee

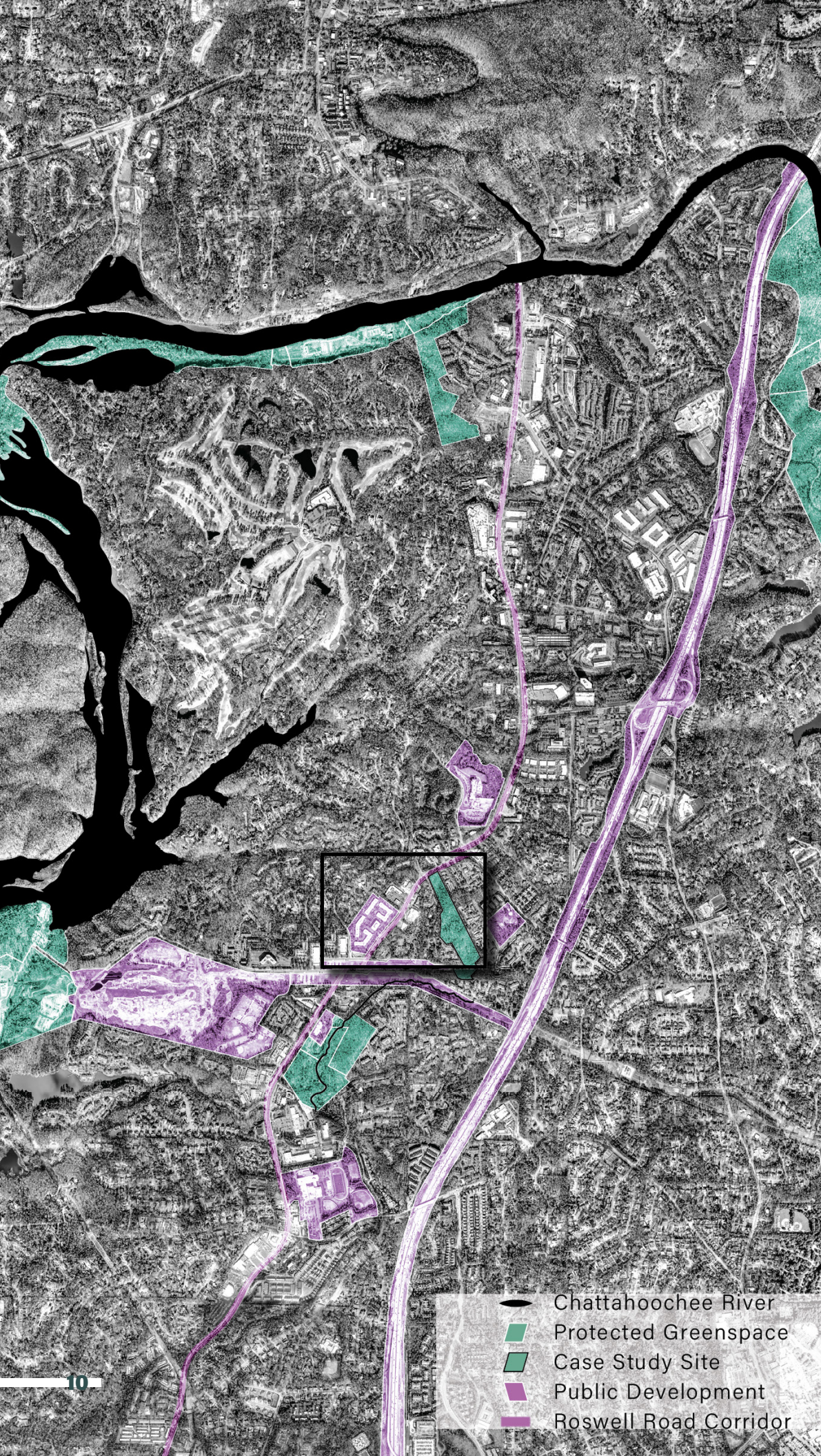
Reclaim low density development over a 100+ year plan

Bound development to urban corridor along major arteries

Over the next few decades as North Sandy Springs approaches a density analogous to current Midtown Atlanta, the Roswell Road corridor needs a new urban plan. The current suburban model is non-viable, and counterproductive to growth. More so, current ecology and quality of life proves lacking under this model.

First, the northern corridor of Roswell Road can use the Chattahoochee River (blue) and existing old-growth (dark green) as a starting point. Except for key crossings over the river, the city should move away from these easily endangered natural resources. Outlying sprawl can give way to reconstituted forest (light green) over a long-range buy-back plan as subdivisions complete their life-cycle.





Development Plan

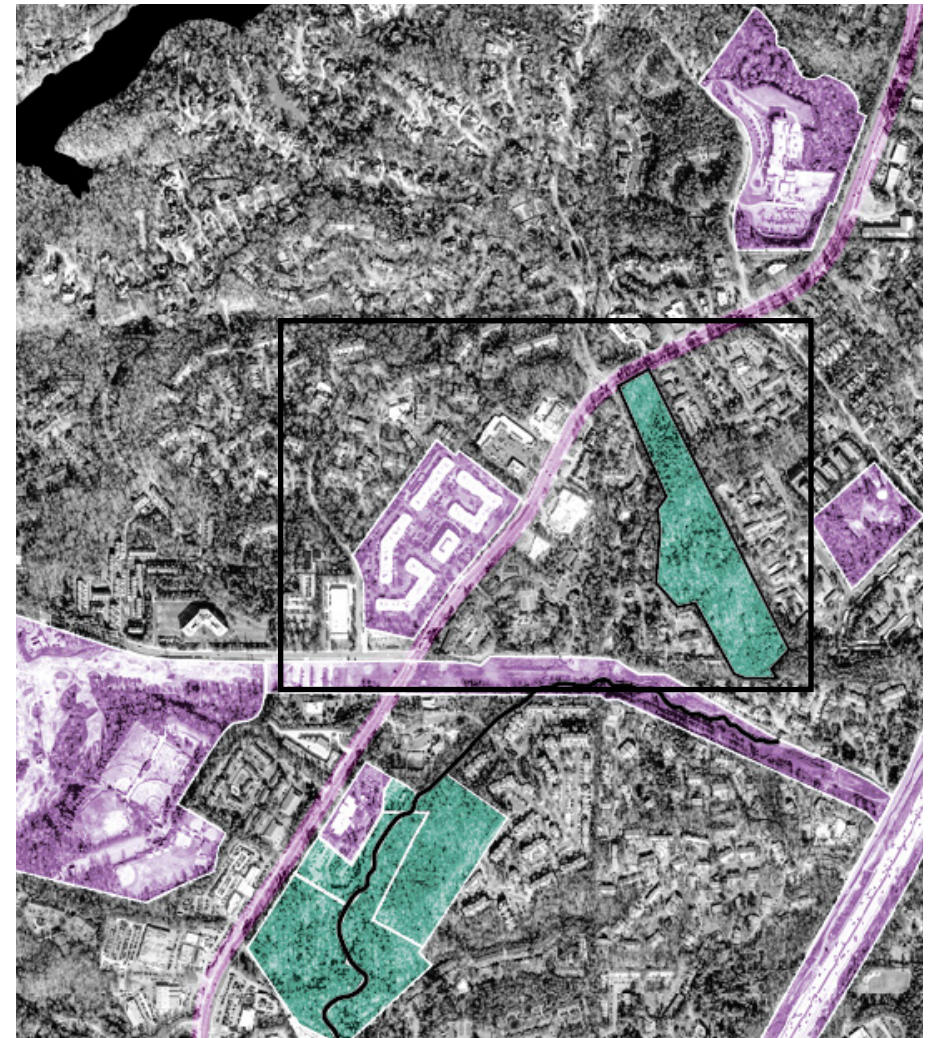
Restitch Public Greenspace with easement along Chattahoochee

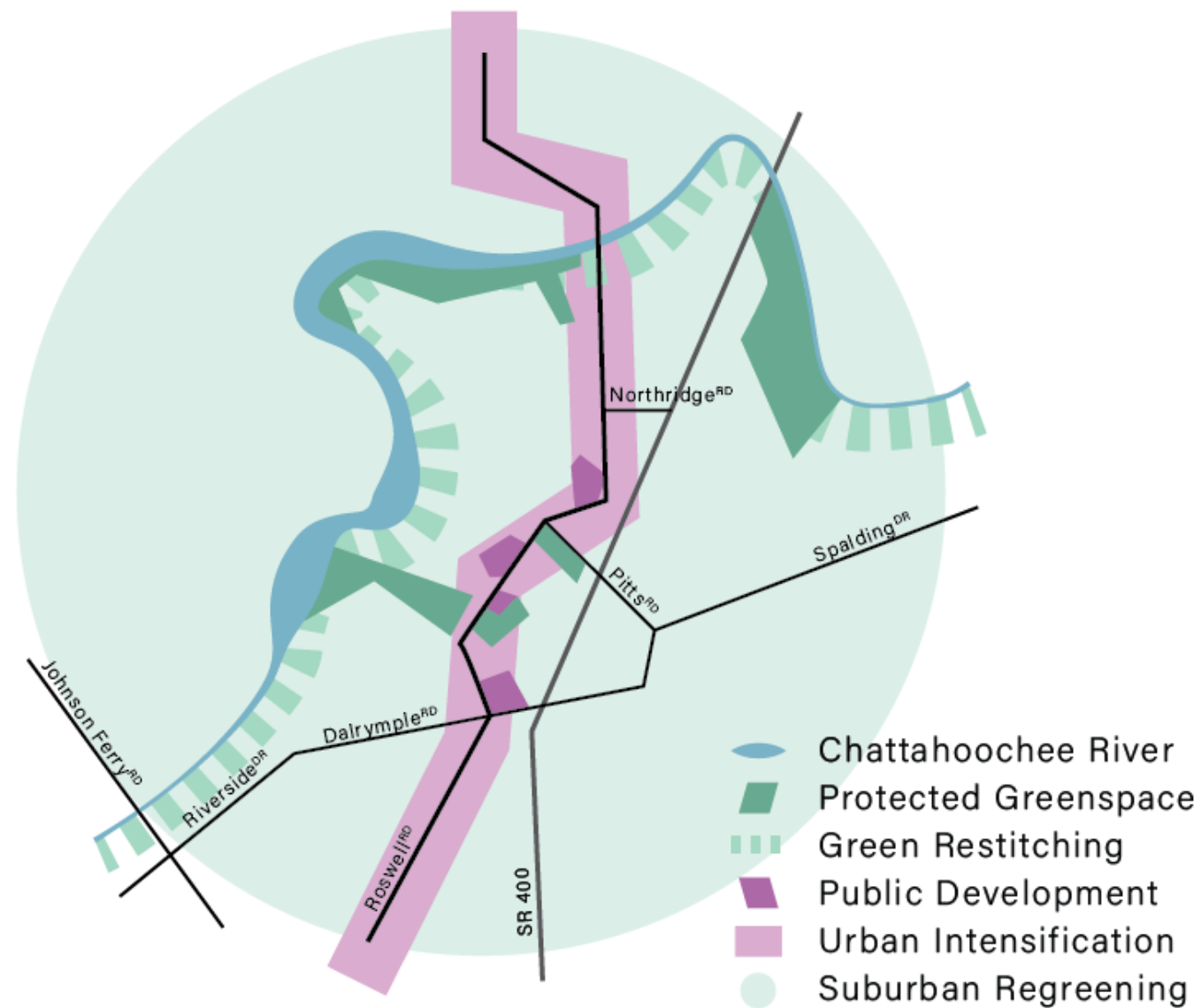
Reclaim low density development over a 100+ year plan

Bound development to urban corridor along major arteries

Second, densification along the corridor can more than accommodate for the underperformance of deletion of sprawling single family homes, apartment complexes, and office parks. The land adjacent to the Roswell Road corridor provides a prime setting for dense redevelopment (light magenta) given the lack of much greenspace, existing grading, and proximity to the street. Key areas of this corridor lie already within the ownership of the City of Sandy Springs (dark magenta) and can serve as keystone trend-setters for conscious redevelopment.

Third, the resulting re-formation provides an opportunity to define the edge between city and forest, with ecology, history, and public well-being at the center of it.





Re-Order Goal

Borderline creates barrier of access:

Physical Access

Visual Access

Legal Access

What if our property lines were walkways not walls?

Borderline creates public ownership:

"I walk here!"

"That's ours!"

"Not in my front yard!"

Re-Order General Method

Restitch Public Greenspace with easement along Chattahoochee River

Reclaim low density development over a 100+ year plan

Bound development to urban corridor along major arteries

The corridor does not have to stretch along in a linear north-south column. Rather, existing rare old-growth greenspace that lies adjacent to the corridor (dark green) can pierce into the city from the outlying forest. In this effect, the outer forest appears to open and close around Roswell Road. This pinch and pull creates a variety of opportunities for access between the two (green dots and solid lines). The resulting irregular edge allows for more tangential development to grow alongside greenspaces which can use that adjacency to enrich community ownership and value.

Re-Order Specific Method

Irregularize borderline to create more nature park frontage

Create pedestrian street along, sometimes bridging over Roswell road and other streets

Allow nature park to touch Roswell Road at interval nodes

Re-Order Architecture

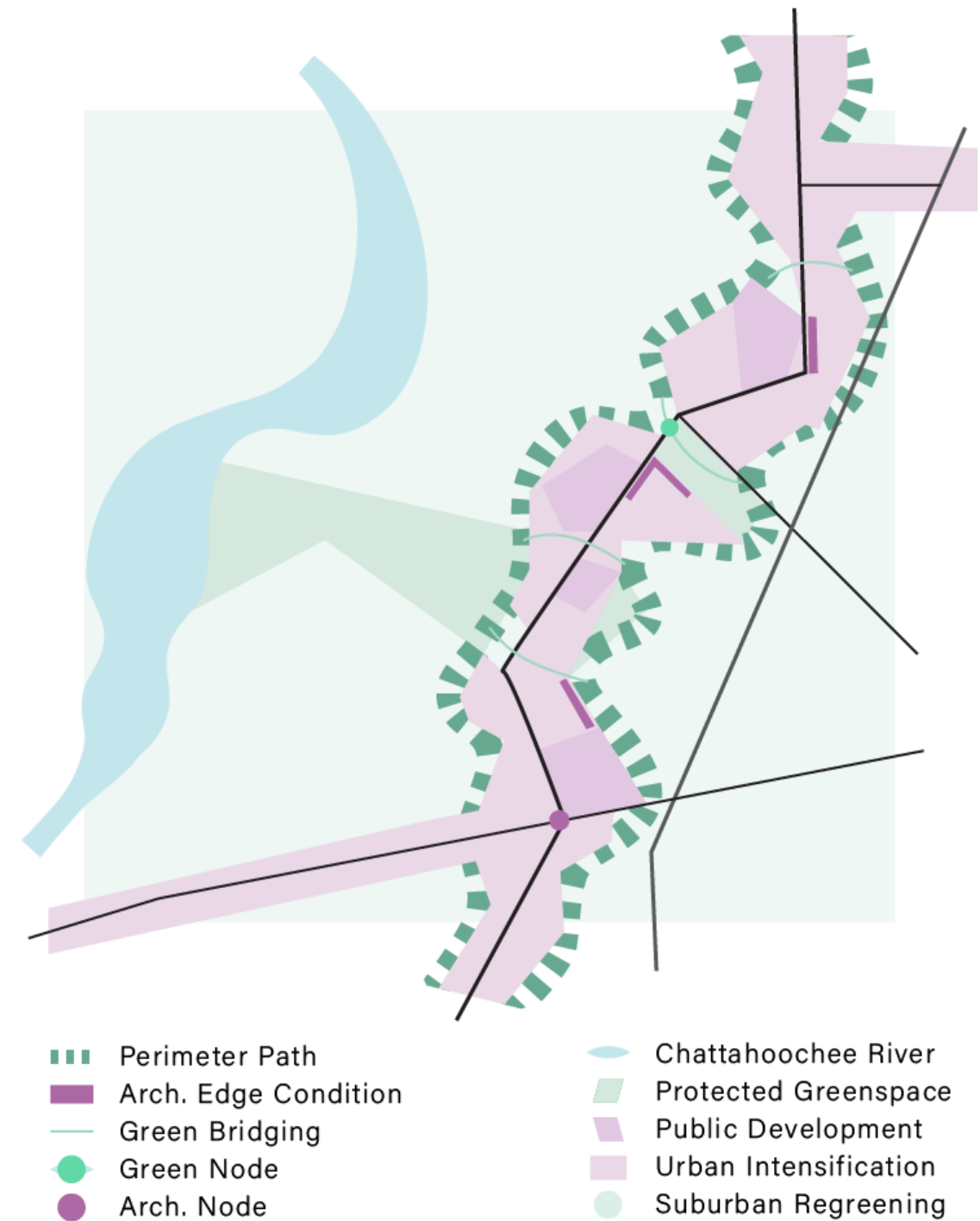
Opportunities for architectural intervention arise in edge conditions:

Street condition along renovated Roswell Road

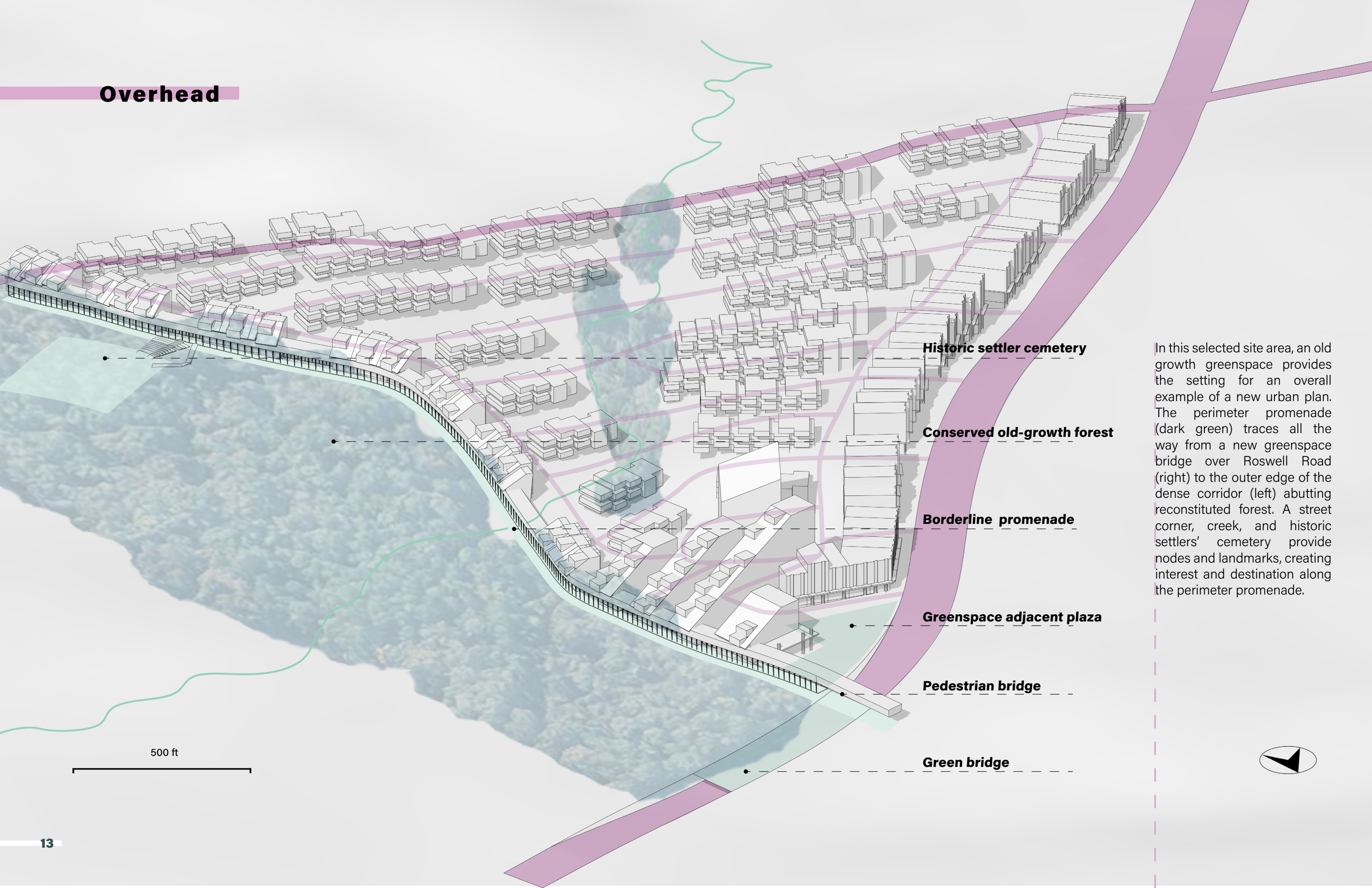
Corner condition between street and nature park

Edge condition along nature park

The perimeter between the city and forest gives the opportunity for a promenade pathway (green dotted line) between the two. Hiking trails, spaces for sitting, and other activity can branch off of this pathway outline. Gathering places and shops can program this perimeter promenade, creating a pedestrian street alongside nature that periodically connects to Roswell Road. Architecture along the corridor can focus on the following edge or corner conditions (dark magenta): facing Roswell Road, facing greenspace, and facing both as a bridging point.



Overhead



Historic settler cemetery

Conserved old-growth forest

Borderline promenade

Greenspace adjacent plaza

Pedestrian bridge

Green bridge

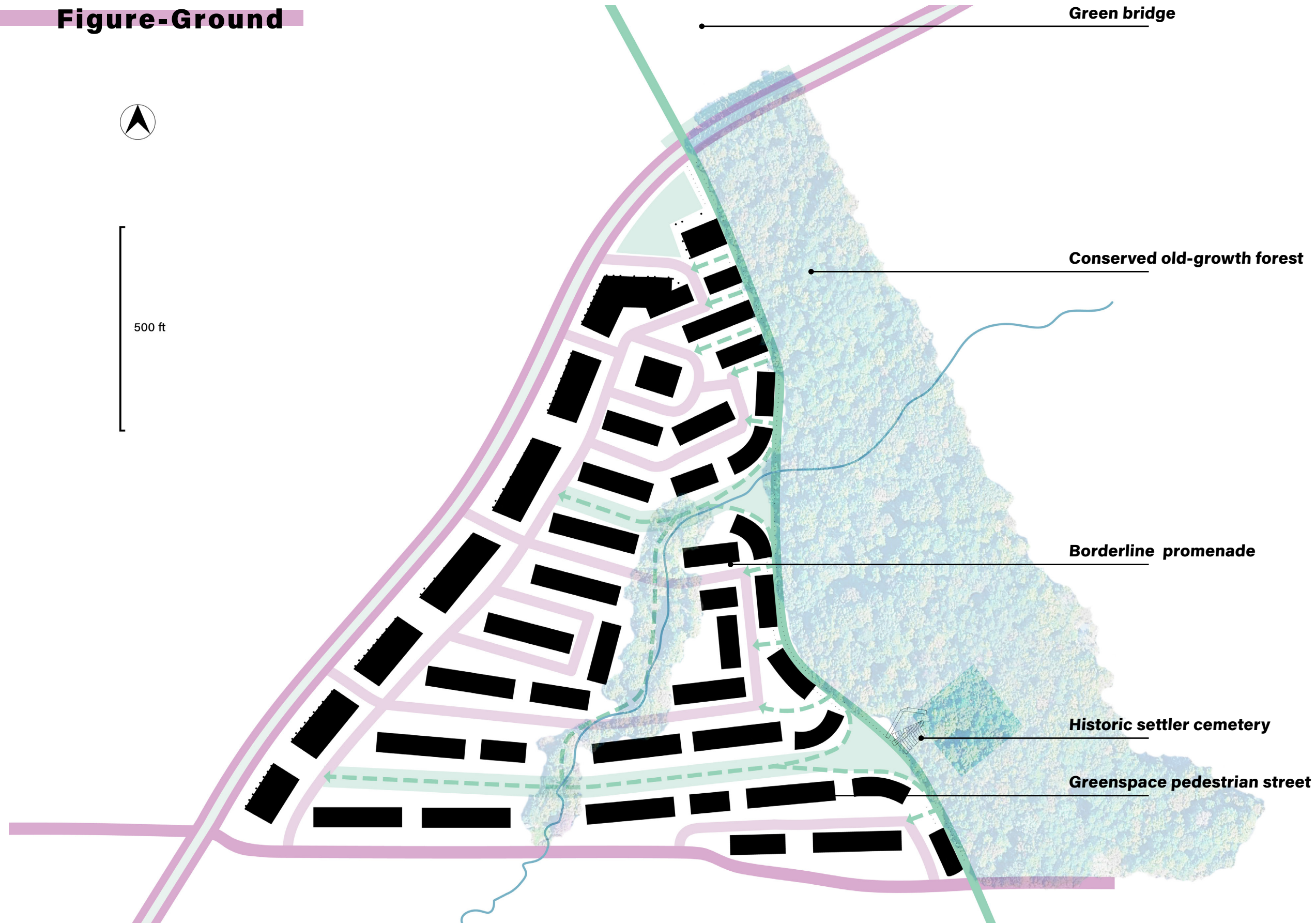
In this selected site area, an old growth greenspace provides the setting for an overall example of a new urban plan. The perimeter promenade (dark green) traces all the way from a new greenspace bridge over Roswell Road (right) to the outer edge of the dense corridor (left) abutting reconstituted forest. A street corner, creek, and historic settlers' cemetery provide nodes and landmarks, creating interest and destination along the perimeter promenade.

500 ft

Figure-Ground



500 ft



In this figure-ground plan, an overall plan of built space and public space emerges. Larger built spaces outline Roswell Road (thick magenta lines). A serpentine line of built space follows the perimeter promenade (dark green line). Inner-city built space creates new residential streets (thin magenta lines) that break up the superblock into a pedestrian friendly city.

The perimeter promenade (dark green) allows for adjacent architecture to curve inward, creating greenspace streets (light green) where new green space planting can connect the old growth into the city blocks. The greenspace pedestrian streets here take advantage of an existing creek (blue line) to further pierce into the once-superblock and create green pathways that loop inward and outward along the dense city corridor.

Views along Promenade and Greenspace Street



Views along Promenade and Greenspace Street

The views featured here and following show the nexus of old-growth forest to new-growth greenspace streets. The hill with an amphitheater serves as a congregating point and wayfinding landmark for pedestrians to navigate towards the perimeter promenade. This joint creates a funnel mechanism where greenspace "pours" into the city, and people can flow in and out from city to forest.



View along Promenade-Residential Gateway

The views featured here and following show a nexus between inner-city streets that do not feature greenspace and the perimeter promenade. The architecture along the promenade opens up to create a gateway at the end of the residential street. This gateway acts as a window into the old-growth greenspace beyond, enticing people to enter.

Whether a street has greenspace or not, is residential, or is core along Roswell Road, this plan allows for every pedestrian to easily access greenspace, first visually then physically. Pedestrians only have to walk a few steps in order to view greenspace, and beyond that wayfinding feature, only a few steps more to enter the forest within the city, and then the forest outside the city.



Conclusion

None of the disparate ideas and solutions proposed in this work are original. They are only a new combination. Rather, there is significant knowledge about the importance of nature, history, how to respect it, and how to apply that understanding toward building cities. Cities that do so have already exist both past and present.

Instead, this work seeks to give a specific solution to a specific site with the hopes of challenging the status quo of architecture and urbanism in metropolitan Atlanta. Development du jour often treats virgin land as a commodity cheaper than already developed land. This misappropriation favors short term profit and disregards long-term economic and social value of such land.

Too often the built world turns it back on what is important,

such as old-growth forests, and toward what is unimportant, such as easy and ample car parking. If architecture can continue to challenge entrenched mindsets about what constitutes a good city with greater proposals than this work then perhaps the needle can be shifted away from the trajectory of metropolitan Atlanta. As of yet, that trajectory specifically threatens historic natural sites and ecological sustainability. More generally, it threatens a healthy symbiosis where people and nature can live alongside each other to the benefit both. The current direction would likely establish a city of cars but no meaningful destinations to drive to—and eventually no one left to drive.

The wheel doesn't need to be re-invented; it only needs a push it to get rolling.

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¹ 152 - 153, 89 - 90

² 153, 90

³ 35, 95

⁴ 42 - 43

⁵ 89, 95 - 96

⁶ 103 - 104

⁷ 104 - 105

⁸ 105

⁹ 106

¹⁰ 106 - 107

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¹¹ 5

¹² xxix, 18 - 19, 228

¹³ xxvi

¹⁴ viii, xx, 72

¹⁵ 60, (Note: Reference to *The Great Good Place* (1989) by Ray Oldenburg)

¹⁶ 62

¹⁷ (Left Page) 67, Colorplate 3; (Right Page) 107, Figure 6-1

¹⁸ 72 - 73

¹⁹ 72

²⁰ 84 - 85

iii.

²⁹ sandyspringsga.gov, Document 9974