

## **collaborative community design initiative**

A program of the Community Design Resource Center at the University of Houston

Susan Rogers  
Rafael Longoria

Publication Assistant:  
Maria Oran

Research Assistants:  
Maria Oran  
Natasha Ostaszewski  
Jay Taylor

The mission of the Community Design Resource Center is to enhance the quality of life in low and moderate income communities throughout the Houston region through design research, education and practice.

Established in 2005, the Community Design Resource Center works to address issues of community development, design, planning, affordable housing and civic projects that meet the goals and visions of our partners.

### **Contact:**

Susan Rogers, Director  
Community Design Resource Center  
Gerald. D. Hines College of Architecture  
University of Houston  
122 Architecture Bldg.  
Houston, TX 77204-4000  
713.743.2403  
skrogers@mail.uh.edu



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# Introduction

Across our cities—leaders, organizations, and institutions—are looking for new ways to achieve sustainable and comprehensive community development. This renewed interest in holistic community development is reminiscent of the original community development legislation passed in 1968, which focused simultaneously on political empowerment, education, the arts and culture, housing and economic development, and social equity and opportunity.

Finding a path to new and lasting change could not be more imperative than at this moment as hard won gains in equity and opportunity are currently being diminished by our economic crisis and budget shortfalls that are squeezing education, public infrastructure investment, and community resources. Today, it is vital that we find new ways to work across disciplines, scales, and issues to develop innovative strategies for positive change in our communities. This means looking for new models of economic development, such as co-operatives; finding new ways to develop quality affordable housing, for example by mixing models and programs; creating

new opportunities for us to come together as citizens, not as consumers; identifying existing skills and resources in our communities as a means to shape and create new jobs; and working towards achieving sustainability in its fullest and most meaningful definition, which includes achieving a balance between equity, the economy, and ecology in all that we do.

Together we can develop participatory, proactive, and asset-based community processes and strategies that have the potential to point us towards opportunities for meaningful and sustainable change. To this end the Collaborative Community Design Initiative is a program founded on interdisciplinary problem-solving, community engagement, partnerships, and broad-based participation that provides one model for new ways of acting and thinking about our communities. This publication is intended to be a guide for change in our four partner communities, as well as point to potential strategies and tactics in communities across the country that are facing similar challenges.



# One Year

25 Architecture Students

100 Community Stakeholders

48

Design, Development, and Financing Professionals

12,000 Hours

1.5 Full-time Employees for each Community Partner

The Collaborative Community Design Initiative is a program of the University of Houston's Community Design Resource Center that builds partnerships between communities, faculty and students, and professionals in the fields of design, planning, real estate, and community development as a means to work towards sustainable and comprehensive community change. Working across different scales and issues—ranging from ecology, to economics, to the arts and culture—the goal of the program is to collaboratively generate design strategies that build on existing resources and the strengths of our communities.

Teams of designers, researchers, and problem solvers bring wide-ranging expertise to the table and collaborate with citizens to tackle complex community issues, developing innovative solutions, and identifying the means to realize these solutions. The program demonstrates that through collaboration between public and private interests, professionals, citizens and decision makers new innovative and flexible design practices and processes can emerge.

Houston, the laboratory for the Initiative, is a city characterized by its lack of zoning and comprehensive planning. This reality

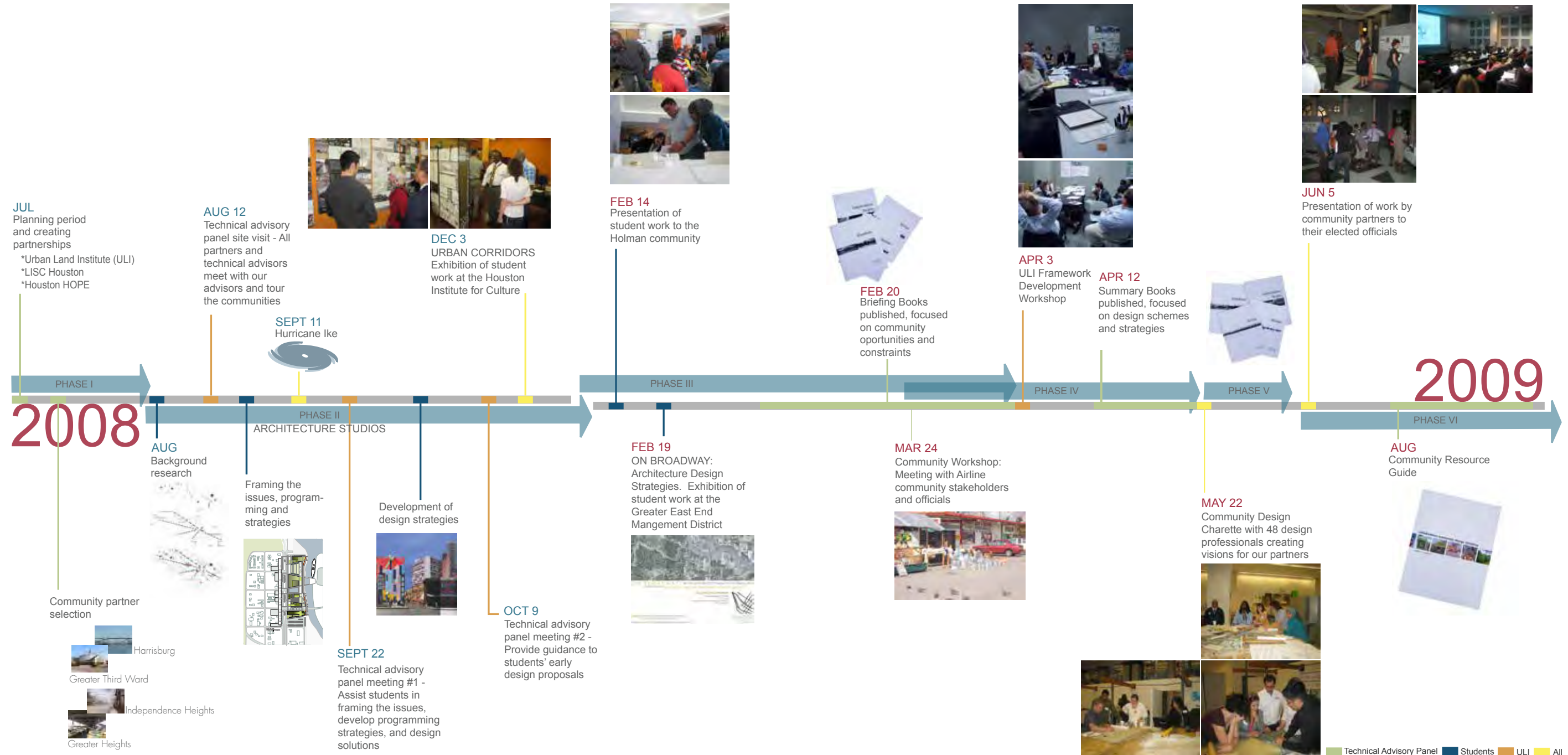
places particular stress on the least affluent neighborhoods, where property-owner initiated deed restrictions that moderate development in other parts of the city are non-existent.

Four of Houston's most stressed neighborhoods were selected for the pilot version of the Initiative, which focused on once-thriving commercial corridors. The efforts of the first Initiative amounted to over 12,000 hours of in-kind services provided to our community partners, or nearly 1.5 full-time employees for each community. In addition, twenty-five architecture students participated by working directly with our community partners. Four-dozen architecture, design, planning, development, and financing professionals shared their expertise at two workshops. And over one hundred community leaders and stakeholders brought their visions and passions to all aspects of the program.

CCDI will continue selecting four additional neighborhoods each year, framed around a topic, until we have partnered with organizations representing all of Houston's 88 official super neighborhoods that need assistance.



# Timeline











# Context

Houston, the fourth largest city in the U.S., is a study in contradictions. It is simultaneously coherent and disorderly, connected and severed, open and closed, rich and poor, urban and rural. The lack of zoning and increasing dependence on private investment for public infrastructure and public space is creating the need for new ways to think about how communities can play a role in affecting change that builds on the foundation of existing strengths, identity, history and culture. This new process departs from standard ideas about planning and design and moves toward more dynamic ideas about building on the unique places and communities that create the mosaic of the city.

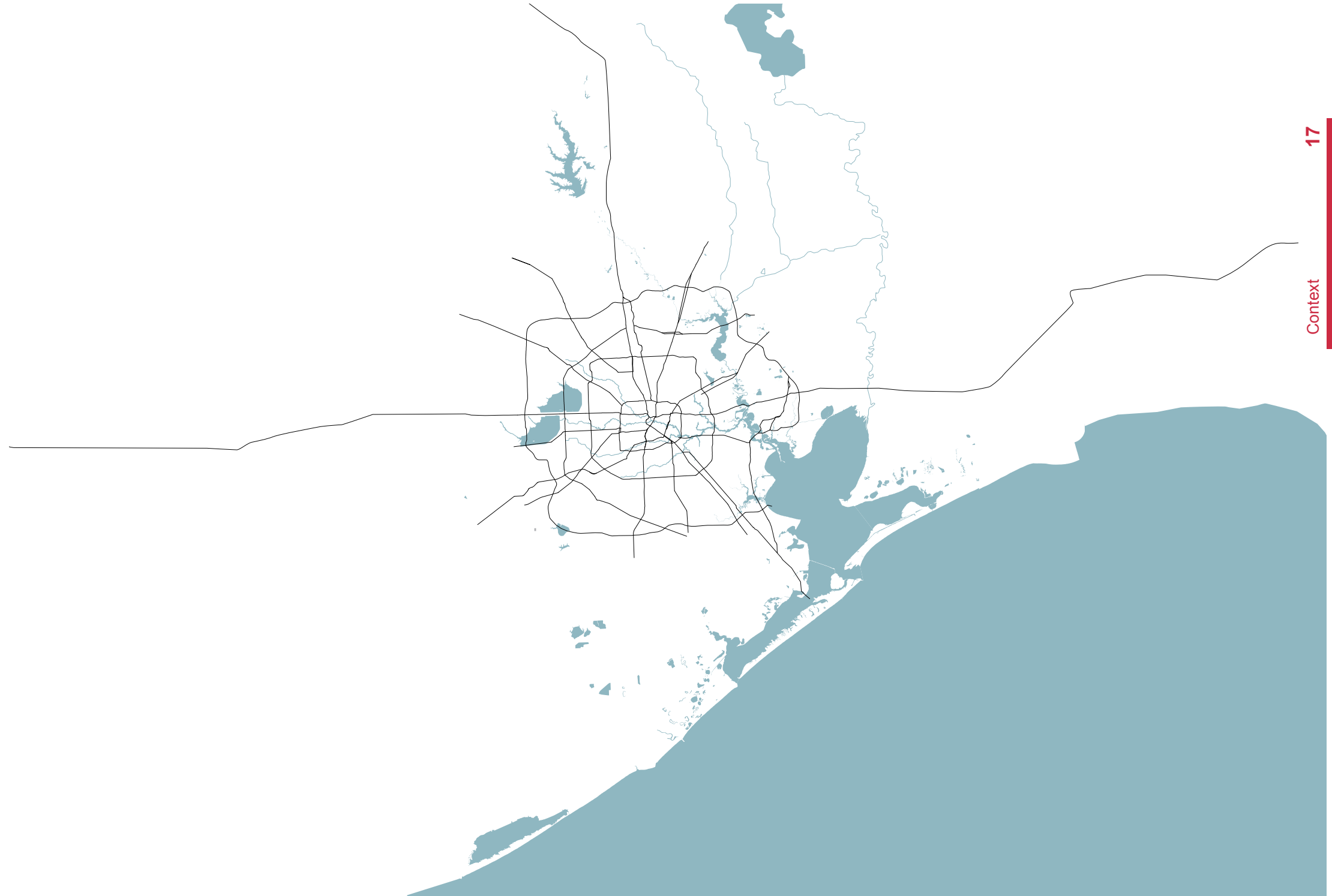
In Houston, communities cling to the city's superstructures, dissolving and concentrating in successive, though not entirely logical, waves. The superstructures that define the physical and social landscape effectively organize the city and process its flows.

The most prominent superstructure is the 575-mile network of freeways (55% of the planned 1,000 mile system) with 14 spokes leading in every direction tied together with three rings, and a fourth under construction. The rings define the city's "concentric zones," not only in terms of geography but also in terms populations. Ring one encircles downtown and its iconic skyline; ring two defines the inner from the outer-loop, which has become more than a geographic definition and now loosely divides the creative class from the masses; ring three, the beltway, defines the city from its edges; and the fourth ring once completed will open up even more far flung territory for development—defining a super-region.



Winding through the freeway superstructure is a natural network comprised of 2,500 miles of waterways and tributaries, including the Houston Ship Channel, that drain the flat alluvial plain and connect the city to the Gulf of Mexico. The bayous constitute a regular bronchial system flowing in a southeasterly direction towards Galveston Bay and the Gulf. The bayous are unhindered by major obstacles, yet are much less visible than the system of freeways. During the city's frequent and severe rainfalls the bayous capture run-off and drain the city.

Adjacent to Buffalo, White Oak, Brays, and Sims Bayous are miles of trails creating linked, but often neglected, open space that slithers and slinks through countless neighborhoods and districts. Coupled with this system are the floodways and plains that expand outward from the waterways, sometimes harmlessly and at other times engulfing entire neighborhoods, illustrating the risk of living on land that was once a shallow sea.





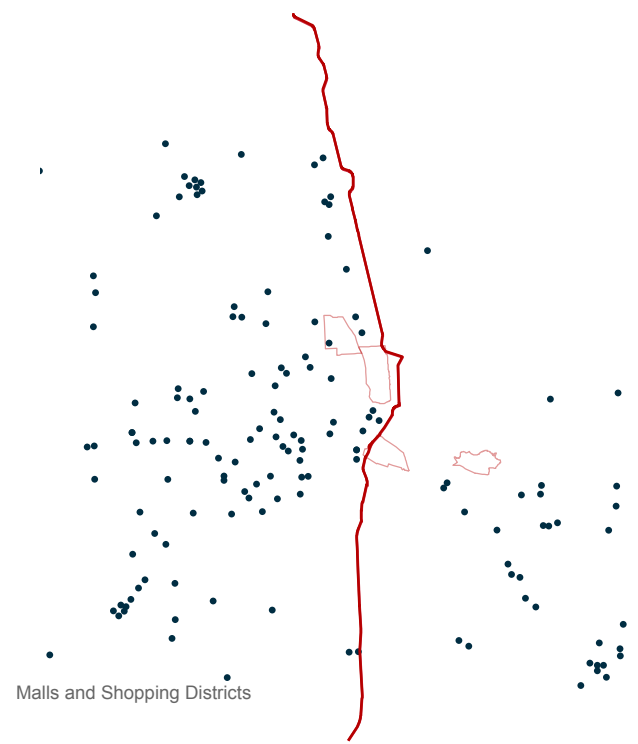


From upper left to lower right:  
 North Main Corridor, Independence Heights;  
 Airline Corridor, Greater Heights;  
 Holman Corridor, Greater Third Ward;  
 Broadway Corridor, Harrisburg

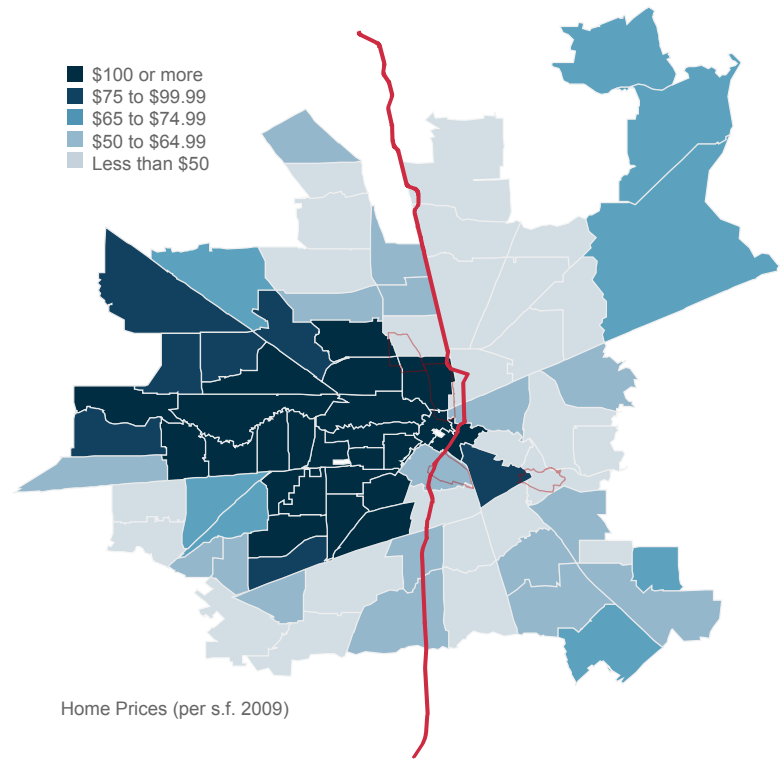
The social and cultural superstructure of the city is also well defined. You can virtually cut a dividing line through the center of the city from north to south and with only a few exceptions know the conditions on either side of this datum—wealth on the west, poverty on the east; white collar on the west, blue collar on the east; skyscrapers on the west, smoke stacks on the east; investment on the west, disinvestment on the east.

The line dividing east from west is more than hyperbole, it reveals itself in real estate advertising which often leaves the

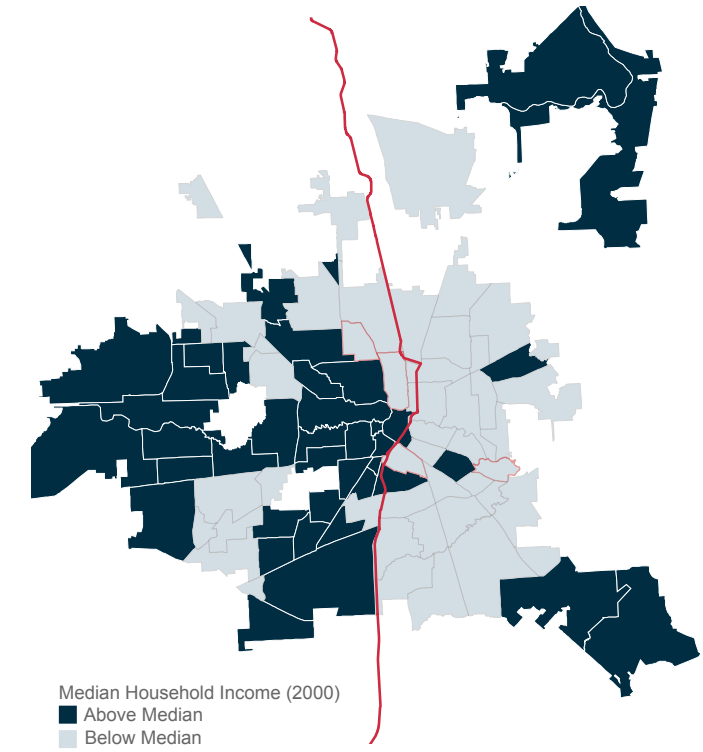
entire east side off the maps and a general perception that the east is always less than the west. This is the idiosyncratic superstructure of the city—defined more by perception and prejudice than fact. But the impact on the ground is real. It is when you refrain from looking at Houston from above, as a simple sprawling city, that you can begin to see the power and diversity on the ground—the power of people.



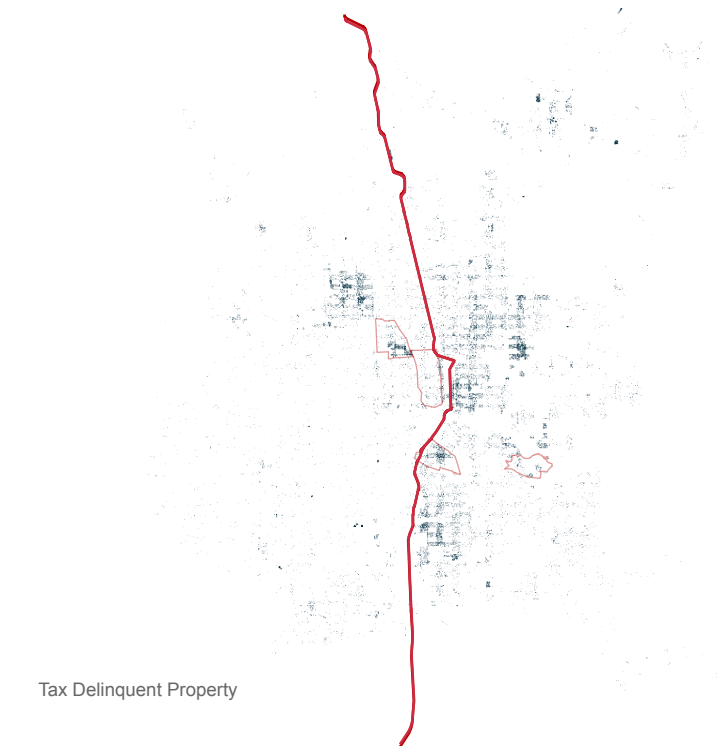
Malls and Shopping Districts



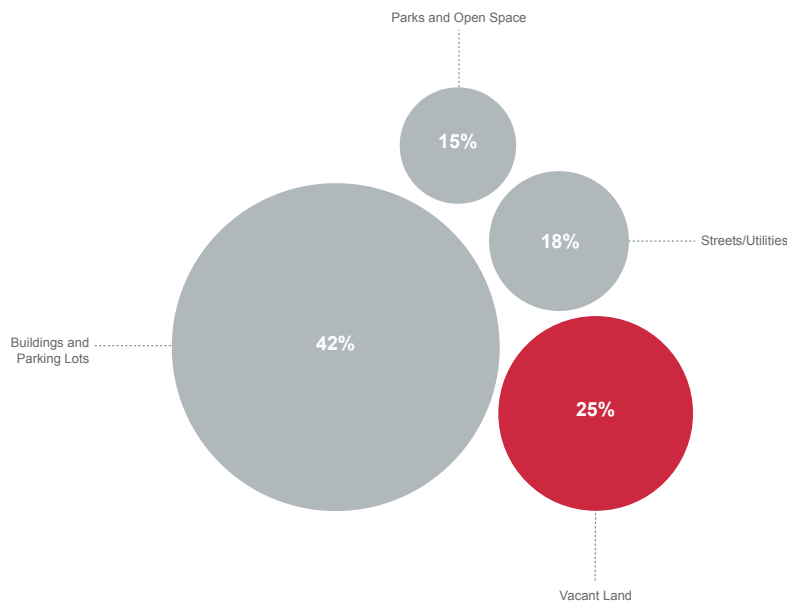
Home Prices (per s.f. 2009)



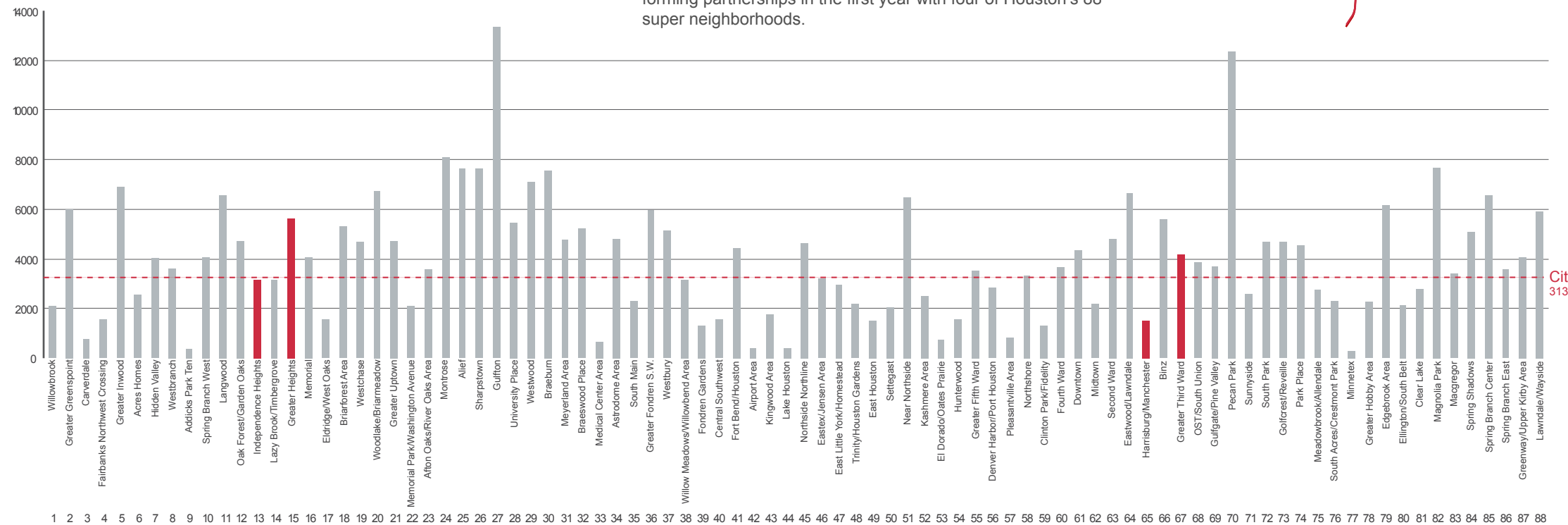
Median Household Income (2000)  
 Above Median  
 Below Median



Tax Delinquent Property



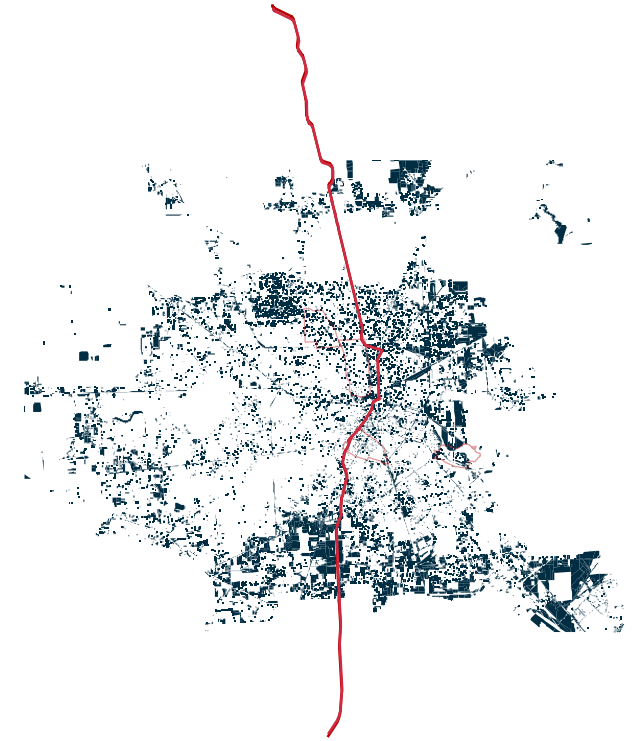
BOTTOM, Left: *Houston Land Use*  
 BOTTOM, Middle: *Population Density by Super Neighborhood (2000)*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Top: *Vacant Land*



While the superstructures organize the city, the flatness of the landscape obscures this organization, and the predominantly low-density development sprawls across the 627 miles inside the city limits. The average density in the city is just over 3,000 people per square mile, one-third the average density of Los Angeles.

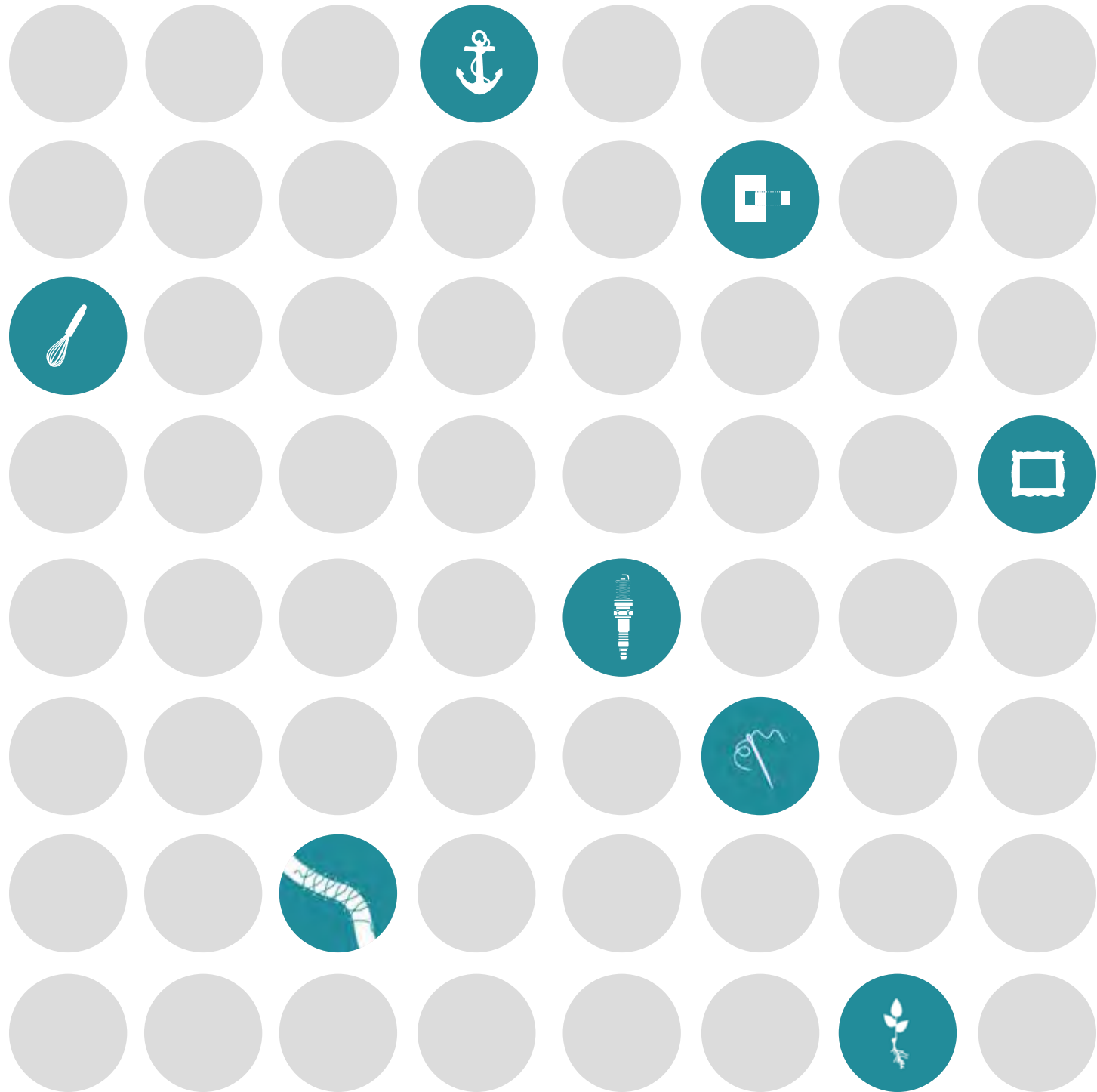
The pattern of sprawl has generated a tendency for development to leapfrog, leaving large swathes of vacant land undeveloped. As a result, Houston is 25 percent vacant—over 150 square miles of void—an area that could comfortably contain the city of Boston three times or half of New York City. When you add to the vacant land streets, right-of-ways and open spaces the amount skyrockets to nearly sixty-percent of the city being free of buildings or vertical interruption.

The Collaborative Community Design Initiative begins here, forming partnerships in the first year with four of Houston's 88 super neighborhoods.

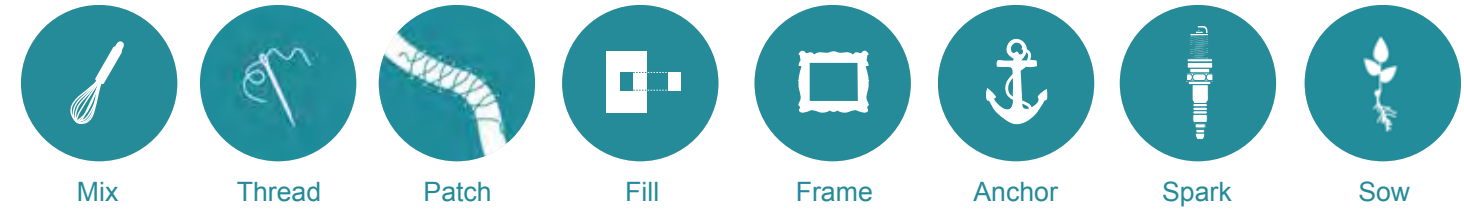


City of Houston  
3138 people/sq.mile





# Strategies



Strategies are defined here as tools for community change. The strategies are both processes and products that work towards achieving community goals and objectives.

Eight strategies were developed that focus on the existing physical, economic, and cultural landscape of the four communities and their corridors. These strategies work at different scales—from the neighborhood, to the block, to the lot—and across different issues from ecology, to economics, to culture, as operational design tactics based in both programs and processes. The strategies are projected from the existing conditions in each of the corridors and are intended to generate change. The strategies progressively build on the existing foundations, including bringing the strengths and resources of the neighborhoods to the surface, while providing for flexibility and the possibility of continued transformation

over time in order to become increasingly durable. While each corridor has its own character and particular circumstances, there are enough shared conditions that these strategies can be applied to multiple neighborhoods, and some to the entire city.

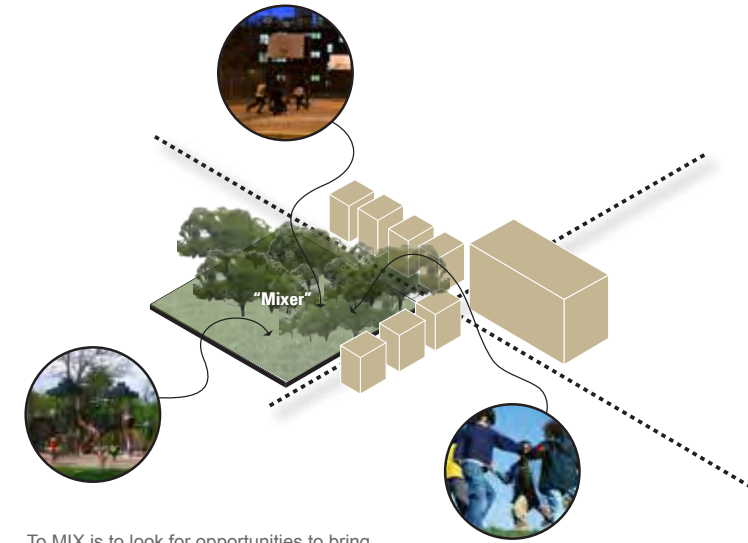
The strategies are catalysts—directly addressing issues related to the physical and cultural landscape, the environment, economy, housing, infrastructure, public space, and broader community concerns. It is intended that the catalysts be applied as needed, or desired, not just in the four corridors but also in neighborhoods throughout the city facing similar issues. In other words, the catalysts are intended to be a broad menu of options that can be combined in different ways to generate different results and different futures.



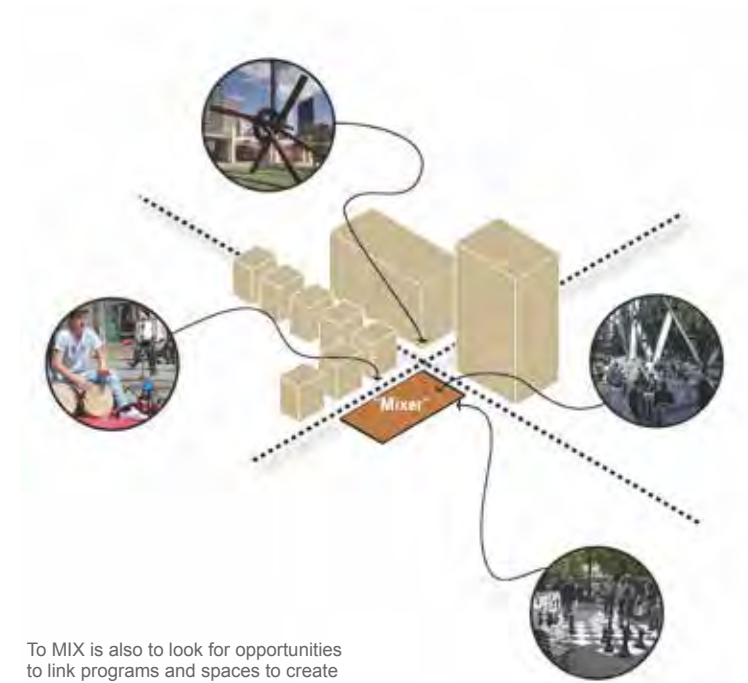
## Mix

In many communities there are both visible and invisible boundaries that separate constituencies and land uses. This condition is most prominent at the edges of districts or campuses, and are particularly stark when the conditions on either side of the edge are extremely different. In the study of the four corridors we found these conditions were more common than expected and as a result the MIX strategy was developed to work towards deconstructing these boundaries, and building opportunities for both users and programs to come together in shared spaces.

To MIX is to create places for interaction, to insert a link that connects and collects different users, and that introduces programs that build on the existing conditions.



To MIX is to look for opportunities to bring diverse constituents together in one place. This is mixing users.



To MIX is also to look for opportunities to link programs and spaces to create dynamic places that meet diverse needs.

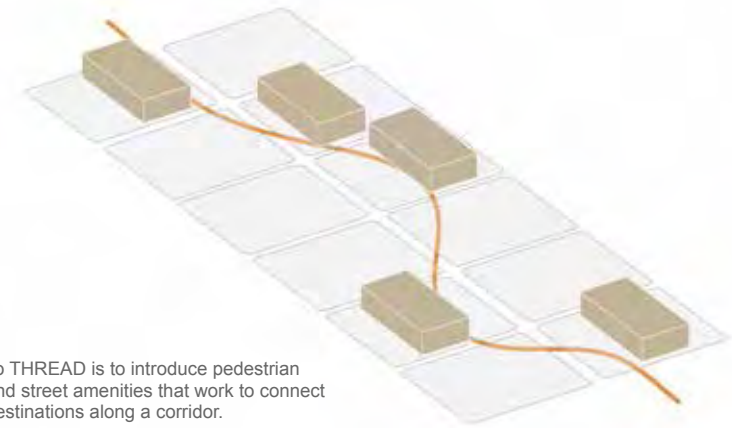


## Thread

Corridors serve as both conduits and places. In many cases moving from one place to another along a corridor is hindered by the lack of sidewalks, fast moving traffic, holes in the urban fabric, or the absence of other amenities that make walking comfortable. These conditions are most prominent in corridors that have experienced widespread disinvestment, or that otherwise do not have the political or economic stakeholders that influence decision-making. In this study of four once-thriving commercial corridors we found that these conditions were common, and as a result the THREAD strategy has widespread application.

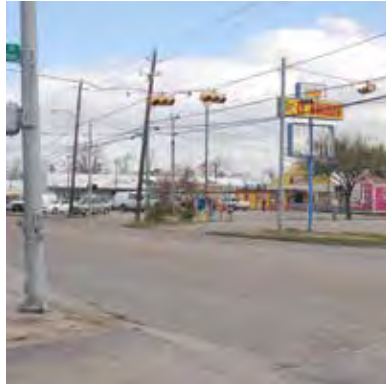
To THREAD is to connect. It is a string of amenities that join together places of interest along a corridor, helping to frame a continuous experience from beginning to end.

Threads can come in many types and sizes, depending on the specifics of each site. The most simple thread would be a comfortable place to walk, such as a shaded sidewalk. Sometimes a corridor may call for something more intricate such as a series of green spaces, a trellis system, or bike trails.



To THREAD is to introduce pedestrian and street amenities that work to connect destinations along a corridor.

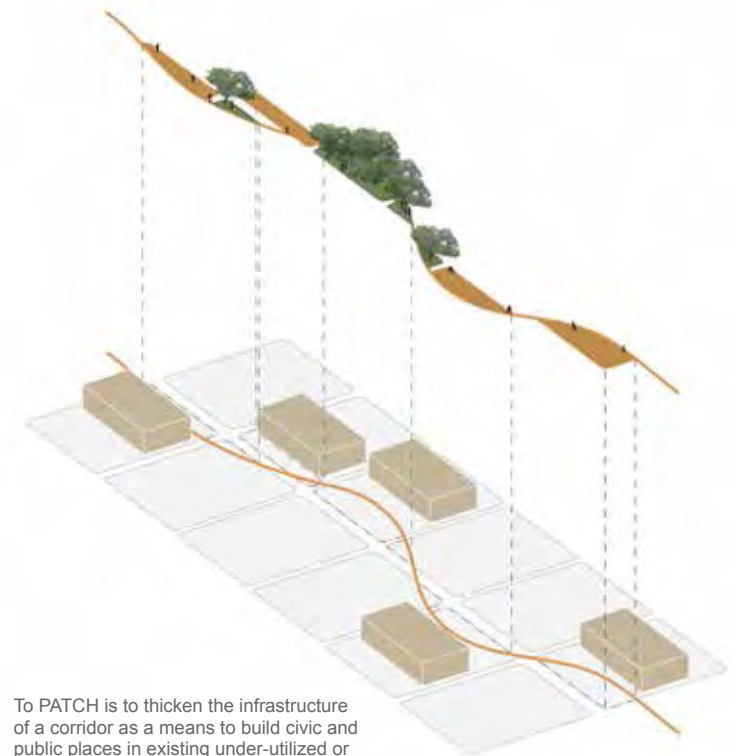




## Patch

The basic building blocks of corridors, particularly when serving as conduits, are infrastructure systems, including streets, utilities, and drainage systems. In most cases the infrastructure is basic, meeting functional requirements only and not considered part of the designed world, or as a tool to create places. Thickening and re-programming this infrastructure so it can become part of the public and civic realm is a new way of thinking about how public investment is made in our cities.

To PATCH is to thicken the infrastructure of a corridor as a means to build civic and public places in existing under-utilized or vacant spaces, and in association with public works investments.



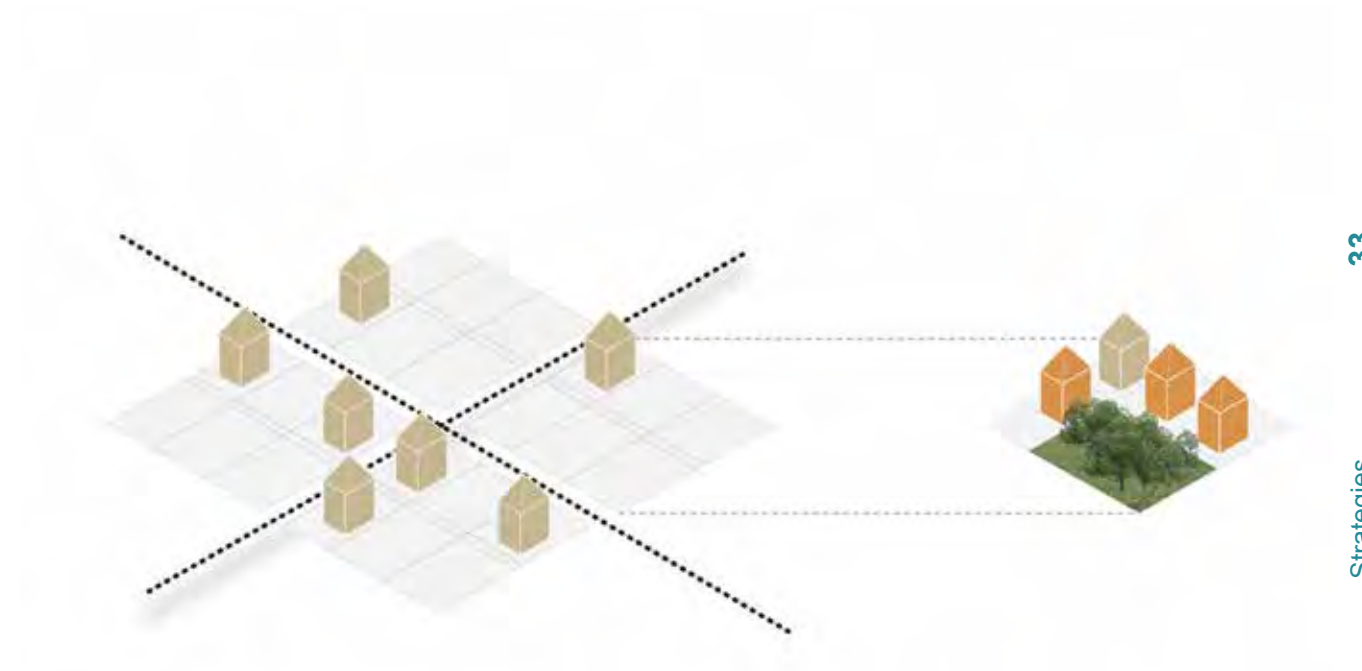
To PATCH is to thicken the infrastructure of a corridor as a means to build civic and public places in existing under-utilized or vacant spaces, and in association with public works investments.



## Fill

Wide-scale disinvestment in communities over time creates voids in the urban fabric. These voids interrupt the urban experience and contribute to a sense of decay and abandonment, yet can also be seen as an opportunity to re-think and re-make urban space in new ways. In many of the study corridors, voids, or vacant spaces, are the defining condition. Developing strategies and programs to fill these spaces is fundamental to repairing the landscape.

To FILL is to eliminate voids in the urban fabric through new programs and strategies.



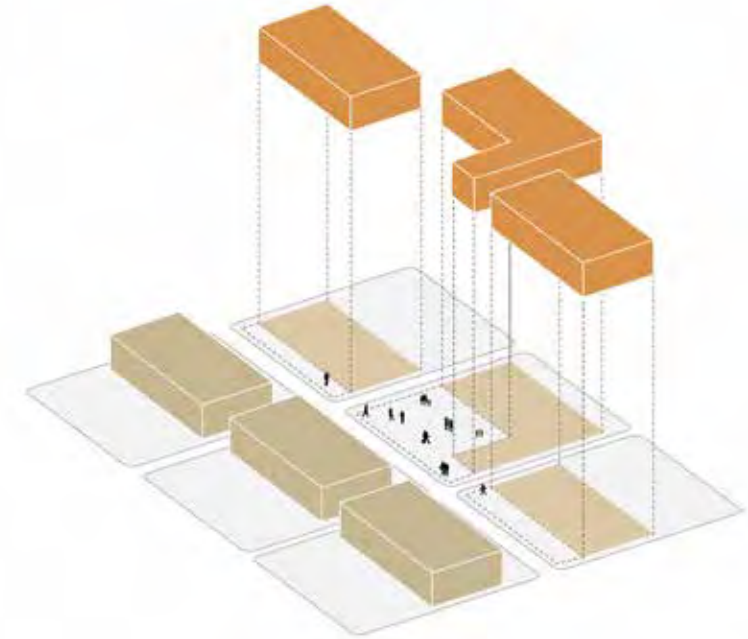
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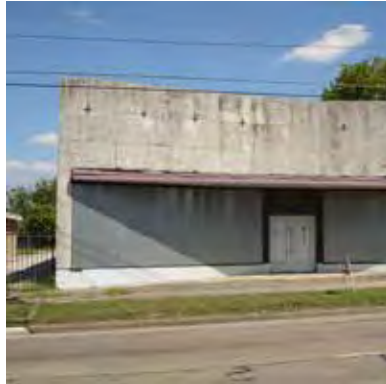
## Frame

Hierarchy in urban space creates a sense of definition. In many corridors there is so much empty and under-utilized space it is difficult to find any elements that define, focus, or frame space. Corridors need focus areas, places to start a program of planned reinvestment and build out from.

To FRAME is to define space, to use new programs to shape and focus public spaces.



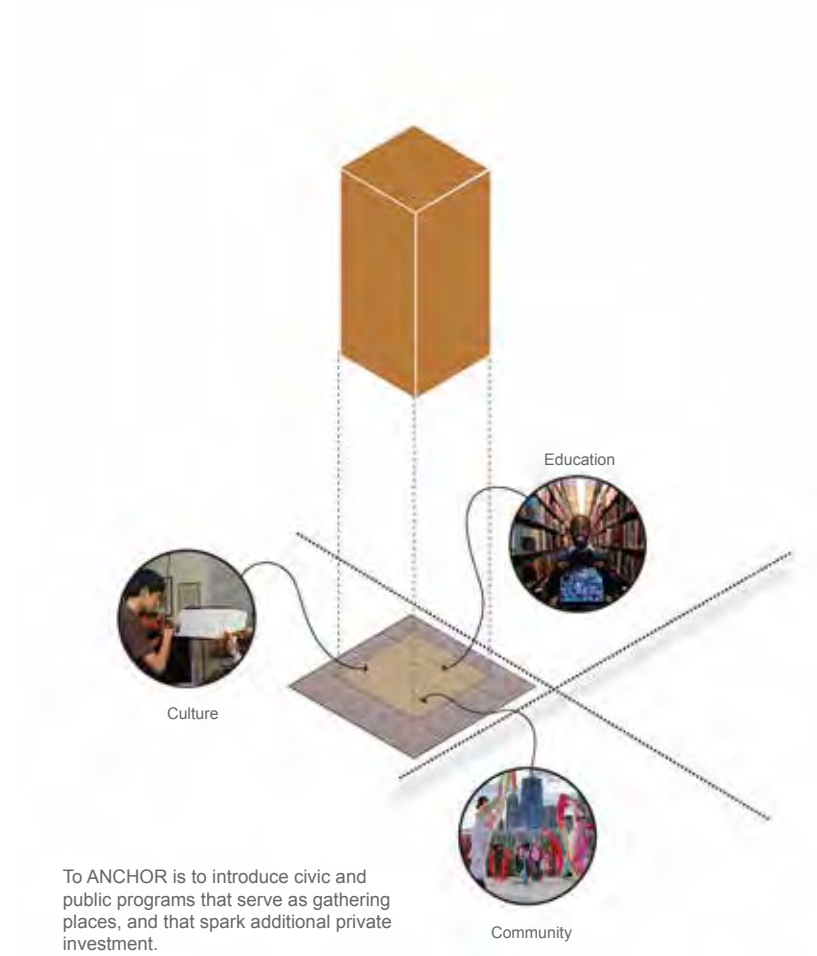
To FRAME is to define space, to use new programs to shape and focus public spaces.



## Anchor

A key characteristic of strong communities are civic programs such as libraries, schools, community centers, parks and open spaces, and cultural institutions that serve as centers, or gathering places in communities. These places ANCHOR the civic life of the community, but also have the potential to spark private investment. Identifying potential ANCHORS and working to realize them is an important strategy for each of the study corridors.

To ANCHOR is to introduce civic and public programs that serve as gathering places, and that spark additional private investment.



To ANCHOR is to introduce civic and public programs that serve as gathering places, and that spark additional private investment.



## Spark

Under-utilized spaces occur across all of our cities, with the most ubiquitous example being the parking lot. In many corridors these spaces interrupt the potential for good urbanism, and dissuade other activities from taking place. Finding new and multiple uses for these spaces has the potential to re-activate space along the corridors and in other places throughout the city.

To SPARK is to introduce both temporary and permanent programs that activate under-utilized spaces and introduce layers of additional programs that make these spaces more useful.



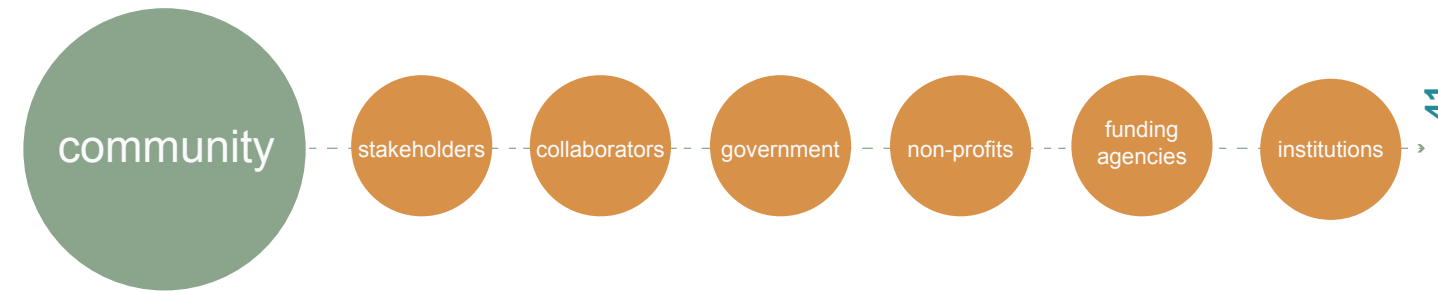
To SPARK is to introduce temporary and permanent programs that activate under-utilized spaces and introduce layers of additional programs that make these spaces more useful.



## Sow

Building strong communities requires more than bricks and mortar, it necessitates building partnerships across institutions, organizations, residents, and businesses to support a vision. As in any collaboration, building partnerships requires compromise and asks that all involved have the greater public interest in mind, in other words, the greatest good for the greatest number. In disinvested communities this is one of the most important strategies as power comes in two forms—having the financial resources to get things done, or having as many people behind a project as possible.

To SOW is to build partnerships both within and outside of communities in order to achieve a vision.



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# Corridors

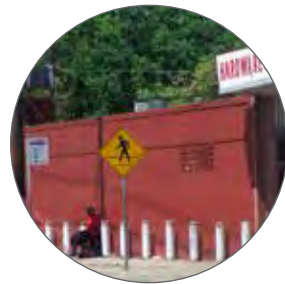
Four communities were selected for the pilot version of the Collaborative Community Design Initiative: Independence Heights, Greater Heights, Greater Third Ward, and Harrisburg. The focus of the Initiative was on once-thriving commercial corridors.



NORTH MAIN CORRIDOR: Independence Heights



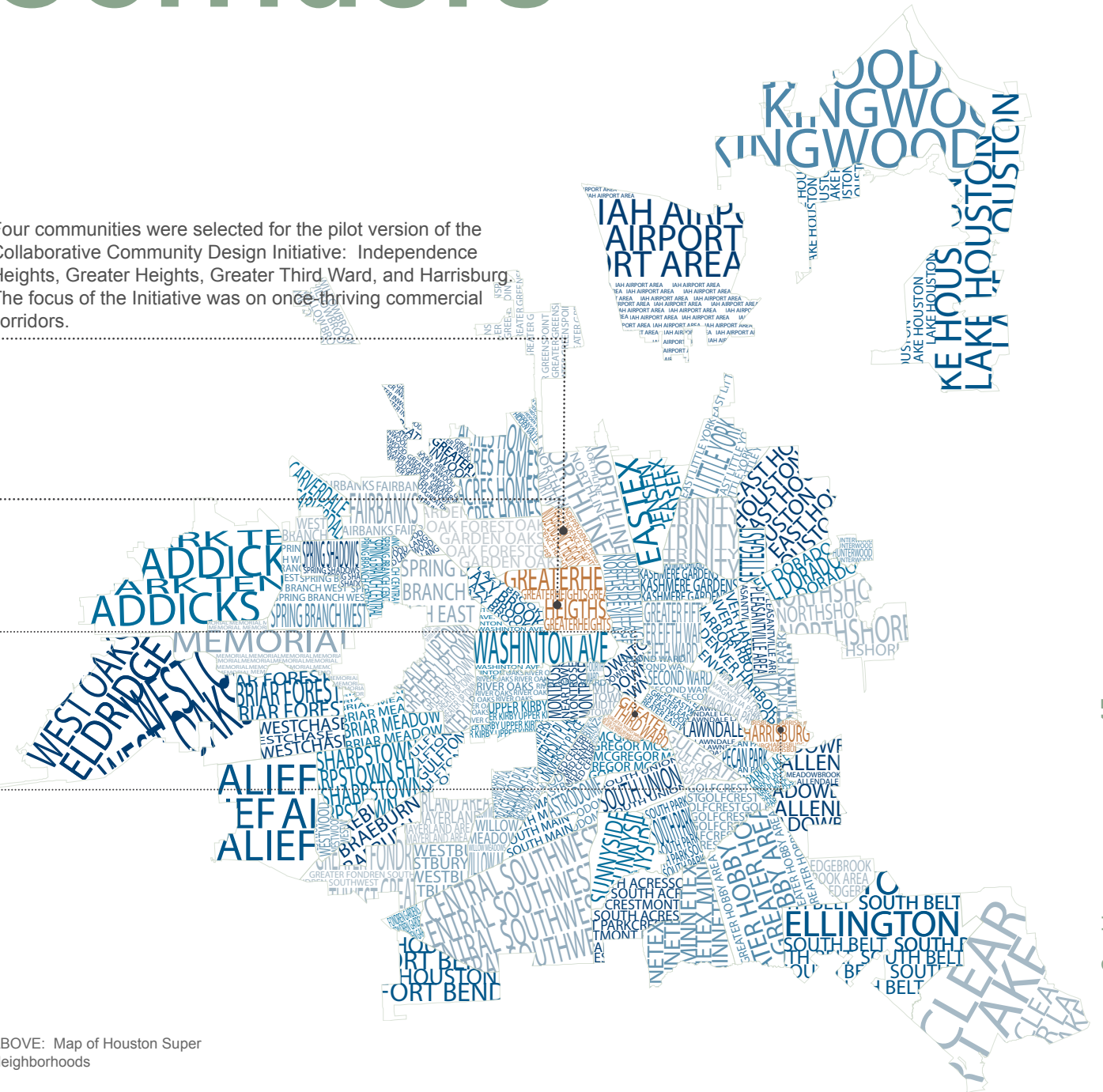
AIRLINE CORRIDOR: Greater Heights



HOLMAN CORRIDOR: Greater Third Ward



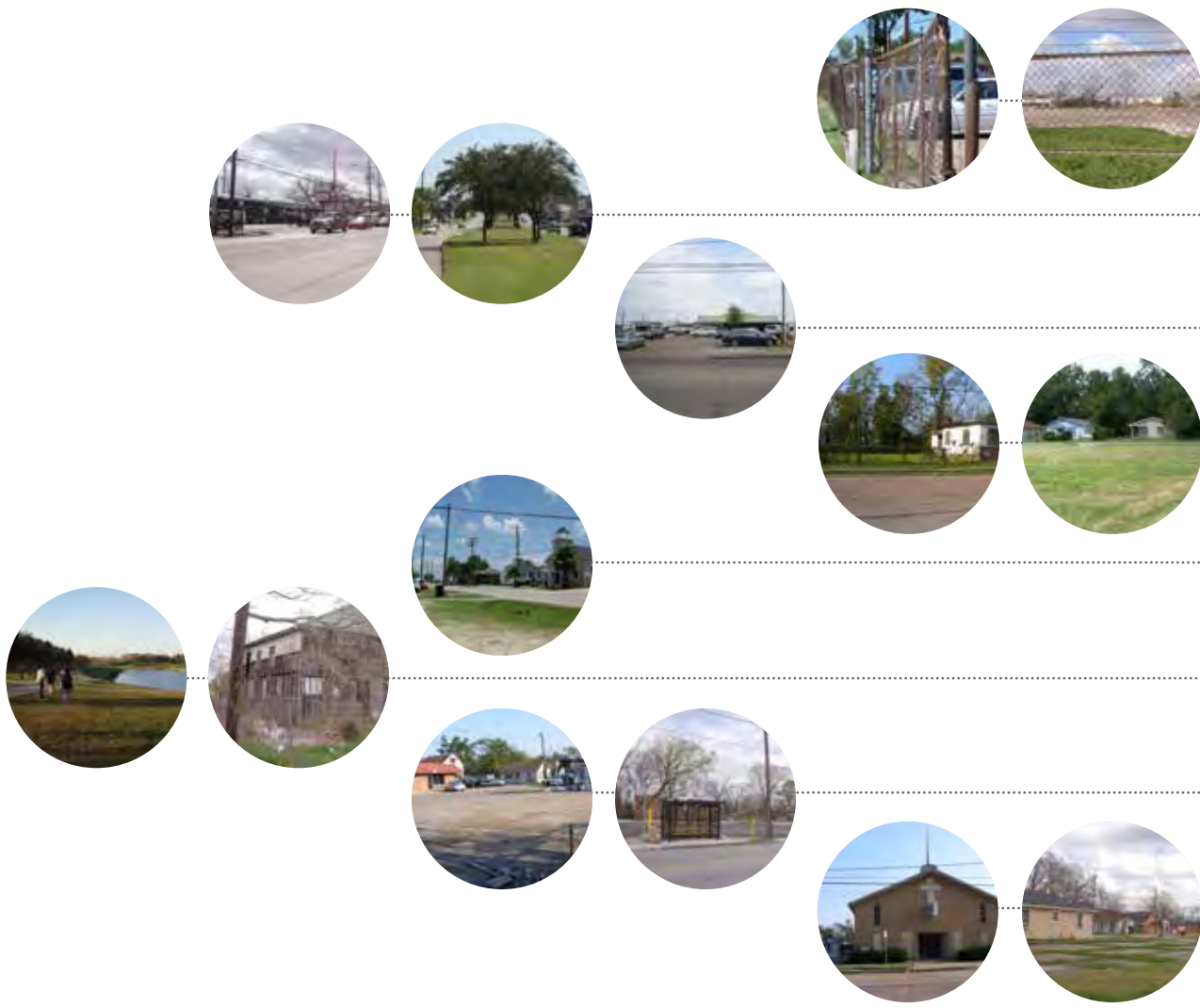
BROADWAY CORRIDOR: Harrisburg



ABOVE: Map of Houston Super Neighborhoods

The focus of the first Initiative was on commercial corridors and the adjacent communities. Each community and corridor has different strengths and weaknesses. Airline is a thriving commercial and market corridor that is at risk of becoming obsolete if new strategies are not developed to achieve a greater balance between automobiles and pedestrians. The Broadway Corridor has likely reached the peak of its disinvestment and has the potential to emerge as one of the most unique places in the city by building on its location at the confluence of two major bayous. The Holman Corridor, sandwiched strategically between major educational institutions, is an opportunity to think big based

on the opportunities of the surrounding anchors. Finally, the North Main Corridor, in the heart of a historic African-American community, has the potential for great change based on the sheer commitment and strength of its residents. These corridors are the genesis of the eight strategies developed in the first Collaborative Community Design Initiative. The strategies address the specific conditions in each of the corridors, but have application in other communities throughout the city. The current conditions, strategies, and visions for each of the Corridors (Airline, Broadway, Holman, and North Main) are detailed in this section.

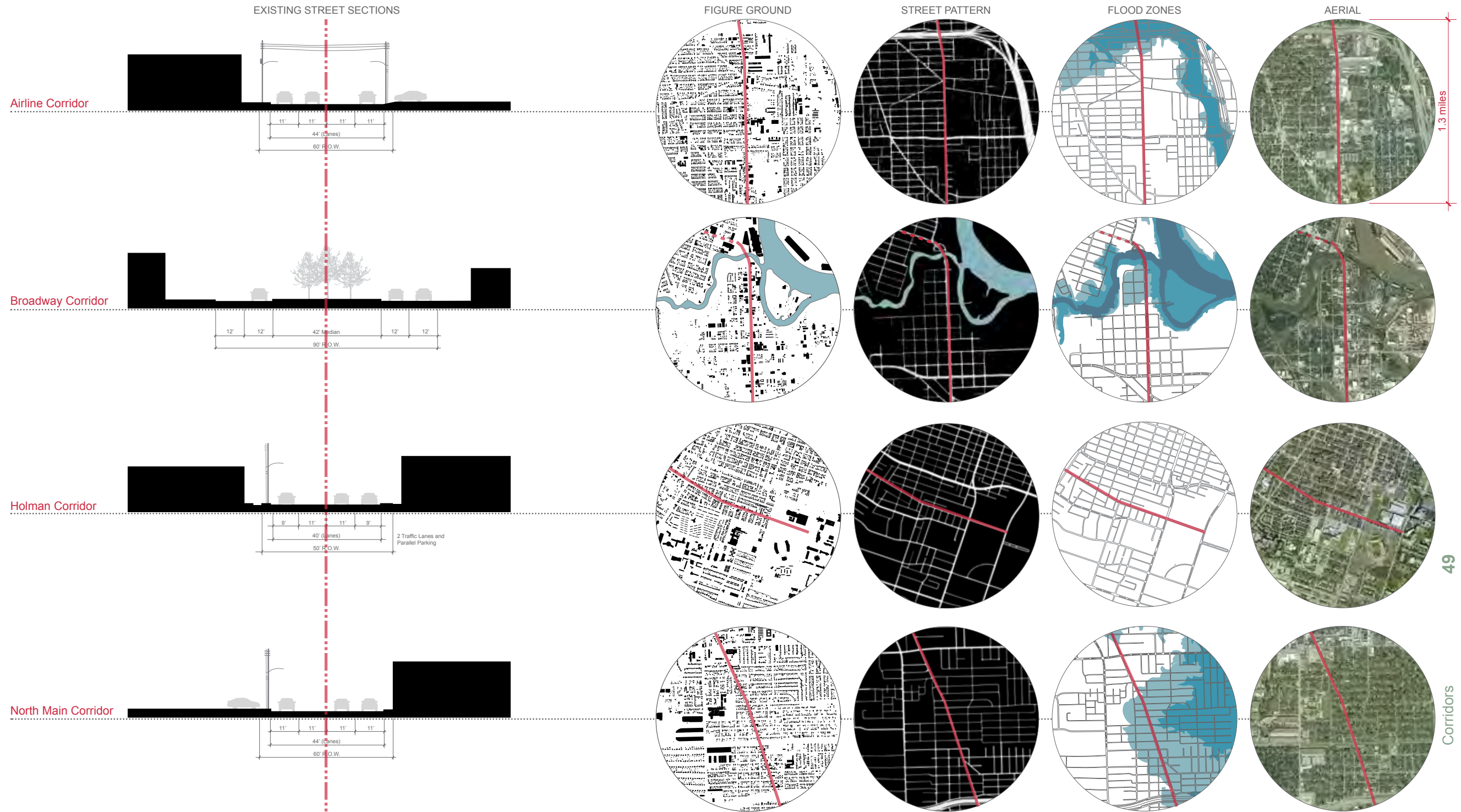


STRATEGIES	AIRLINE CORRIDOR: Greater Heights	BROADWAY CORRIDOR: Harrisburg	HOLMAN CORRIDOR: Greater Third Ward	NORTH MAIN CORRIDOR: Independence Heights
Mix				
Thread				
Patch				
Fill				
Frame				
Anchor				
Spark				
Sow				



Corridors are the spines of communities. Corridors move people, provide a framework for development, and serve as anchors for commercial, cultural and civic spaces. Throughout our cities disinvestment has eroded many once thriving corridors, and for others the predominant focus on moving traffic or parking cars over the creation of place has had a similar effect.

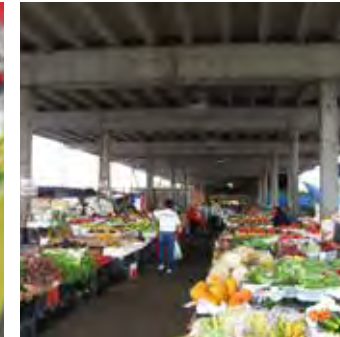
Re-thinking corridors begins with an understanding of the current conditions, including the opportunities and constraints, finding elements to build on, and creating the vision and partnerships to make it a reality. This book provides a tool kit for change that has direct application to the four corridors studied in depth, yet also has application in communities throughout the city.







# Airline

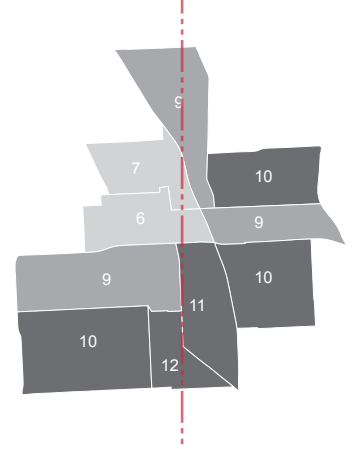
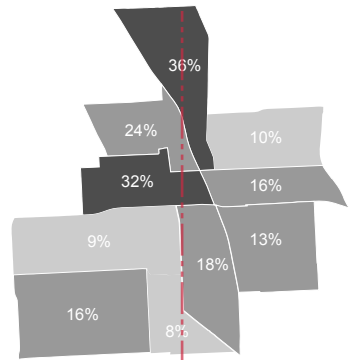
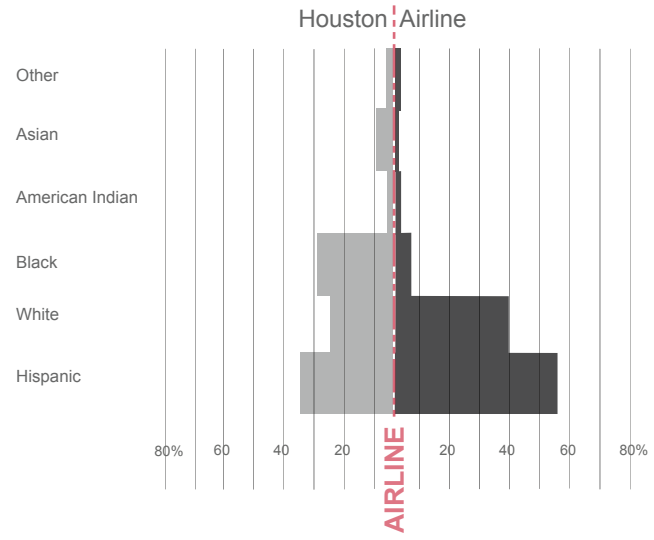


In the Airline Corridor the question was not about creating a “destination,” the Corridor already serves this purpose. It was not about retail or housing, it was simply about public space, and about creating opportunities for people to interact with others, building the social density of the site. It was also a study of values, of the disparity between investments in streets and investments in people. Airline is currently being re-designed, and while it will surely function more efficiently for traffic, the public realm is not being enhanced. As such, the study points to the potential synergy of merging public works expenditures with public amenities, and identifies new strategies for decision-making that combine investment in infrastructure with investment in the public realm.

Building the civic infrastructure of the Airline Corridor means carving out public places from parking areas, under-utilized, and leftover spaces for both permanent programs and temporary events, providing places to play, sit, gather, eat, and linger while reinforcing the informal qualities of the site that make it unique.

The Airline Corridor study area is on the north side of Houston, bounded by Cavalcade to the south and the 610 Loop to the north and just west of the North Freeway. The area is home to Canino’s Market, one of the largest produce markets in the city, and dozens of other small businesses and entrepreneurs. The site is surrounded by diverse neighborhoods that differ greatly from one another.





**Along the Airline Corridor sidewalks are infrequent, and where they do exist they are interrupted frequently with loading docks, parked cars, and driveways**

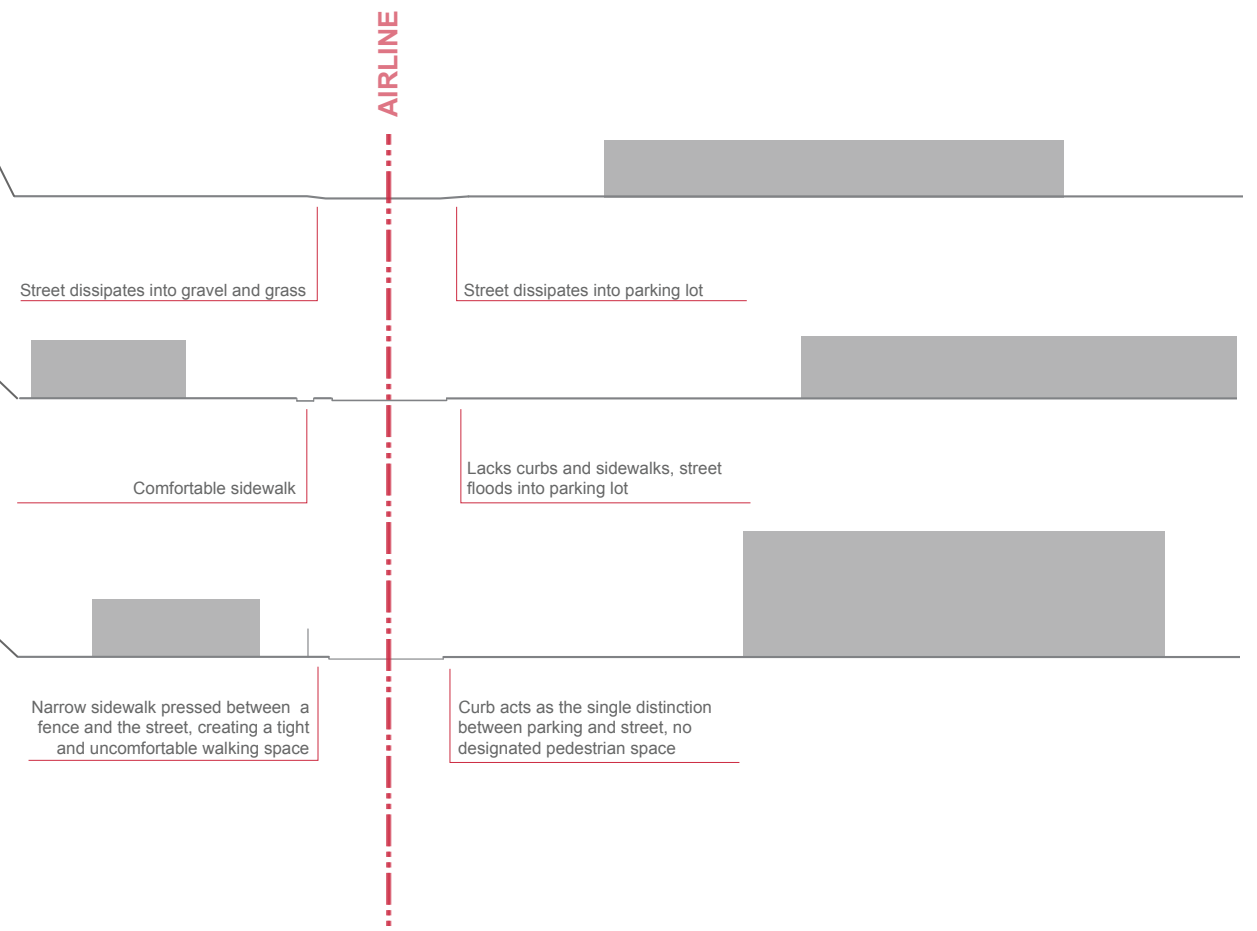
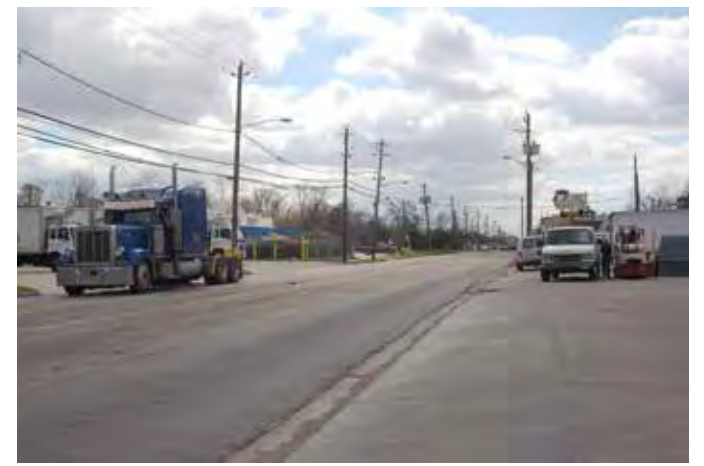
LEFT, Top: *Population Ethnicity in the Corridor (2000)*  
 LEFT, Middle: *Percent of Households without access to a vehicle (2000)*  
 LEFT, Bottom: *Population Density per acre (2000)*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Right: *Street Diagram and Typical Street Sections*



## Airline: Context

The Airline Corridor is diverse and has an average population density of ten people per acre, more than twice the average density of the city. Over 18% of residents in the area depend on public transportation or other modes of transit, including walking, for mobility, as compared to 12% in the city.

The Corridor, a popular destination for local residents, has an ill-defined public realm. Along the study area sidewalks are infrequent and the pedestrian zone is interrupted with multiple driveways, parking lots, and other obstacles. Where sidewalks do exist they are often very narrow and put the pedestrian in an uncomfortable relationship to moving vehicles.



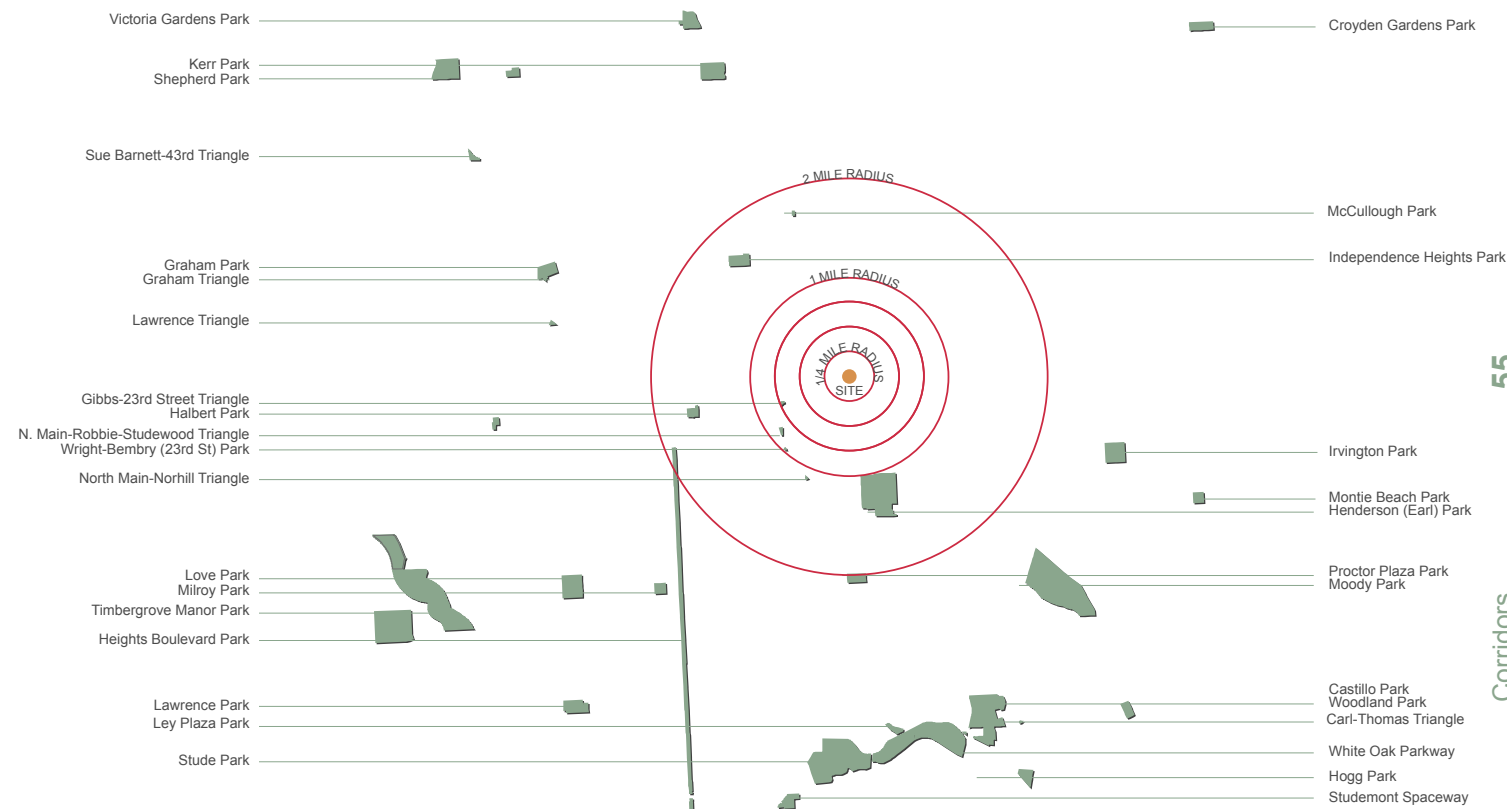




The Airlane Corridor measures 3600 feet from the North Loop to Cavalcade, just under seven-tenths of a mile and slightly longer than the full length of the Galleria shopping mall from Dillard's to Macy's. Along this length there are 30 parking lots, 10 markets, 7 produce companies, 7 loading docks, 7 restaurants and bars, 2 gas stations, 1 washateria, 1 used appliance store, 1 unsavory motel, and 1 very popular Mexican bakery. There are no parks, no ATMs, no public restrooms, and no general public parking. The closest sizable public park is more than a mile from the center of the corridor. Sidewalks are narrow, uncomfortably adjacent to the fast-moving traffic on Airline, and are discontinuous, interrupted frequently with driveways, loading docks, and parking.

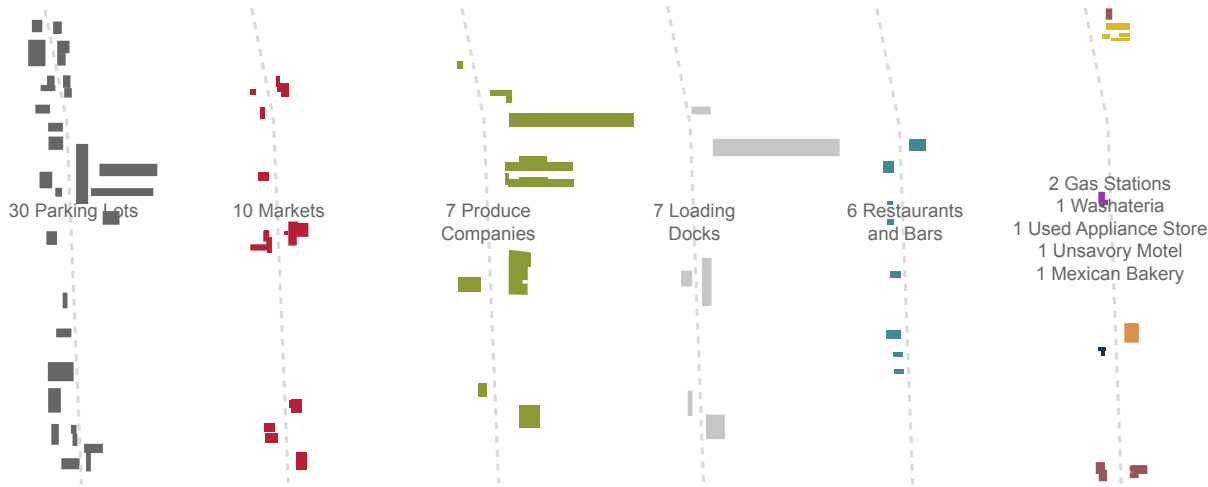


ABOVE: Airlane Corridor length compared to Galleria Shopping Mall  
 BELOW: Parks in the Airlane Corridor  
 OPPOSITE PAGE: Figure Ground



Connecting all of the destinations along the Airline Corridor—the markets, produce companies, restaurants and bars, and bakery—was one of the primary goals of the Initiative

THIS PAGE, Below: *Diagram of Uses along the Airline Corridor*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Right: *East/West Street Diagrams*, grey represents areas where the pedestrian realm dissolves into parking or driveways, black lines represent areas where there are sidewalks.





# Airline: Strategies

The primary goals for the Airline Corridor were to create a continuous path, or thread, that would link all the destinations along the street and to build the civic infrastructure of the site by carving out public places from parking areas and other leftover spaces that would be rendered useless after the proposed street widening, creating places to play, sit, gather, eat and linger while reinforcing the informal qualities of the site that make it so unique.

The strategies identified point to the potential synergy of merging public works expenditures, in this case street widening, with public amenities, and forming new strategies for decision-making that combine investment in infrastructure with investment in the public realm, defined here as “thick infrastructure,” or infrastructure that serves multiple purposes and programs.

The project points to the development of a new strategy for public works, defined here as “thick infrastructure,” or infrastructure that serves multiple purposes and programs



**SOW**  
Create a Market Chamber of Commerce to guide decision-making in the Corridor



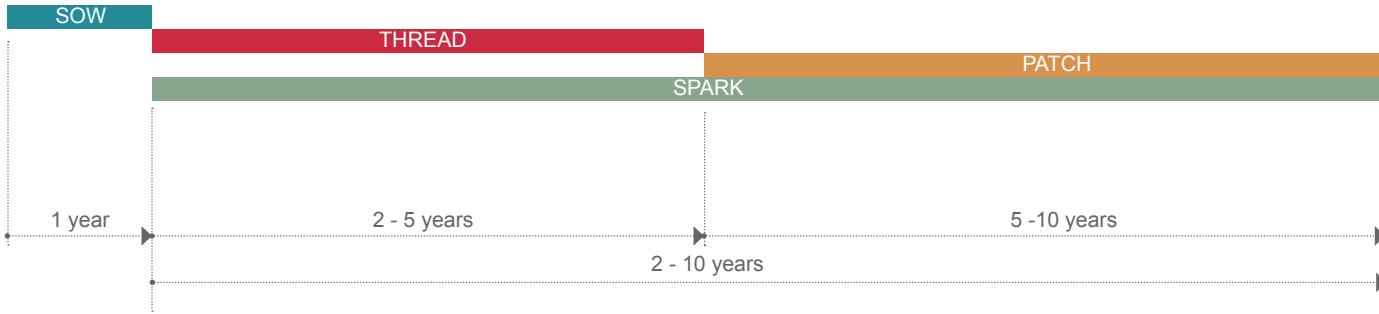
**THREAD**  
Create a safe and inviting pedestrian zone that connects all the major attractions along Airline



**PATCH**  
Insert pocket parks and plazas along Airline that define a public realm and strengthen the social density of the site



**SPARK**  
Program new uses for existing parking lots and public spaces that encourage multiple uses of the sites



# Sow

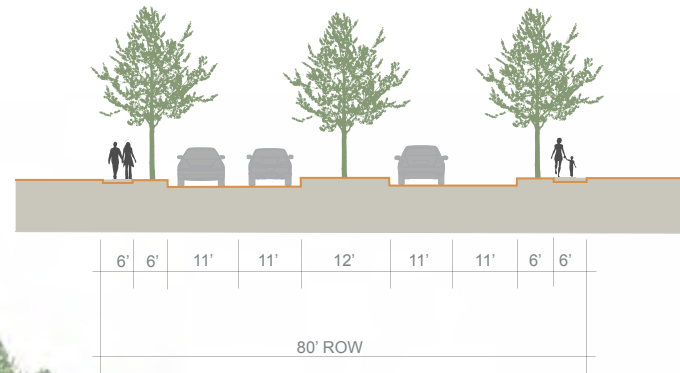
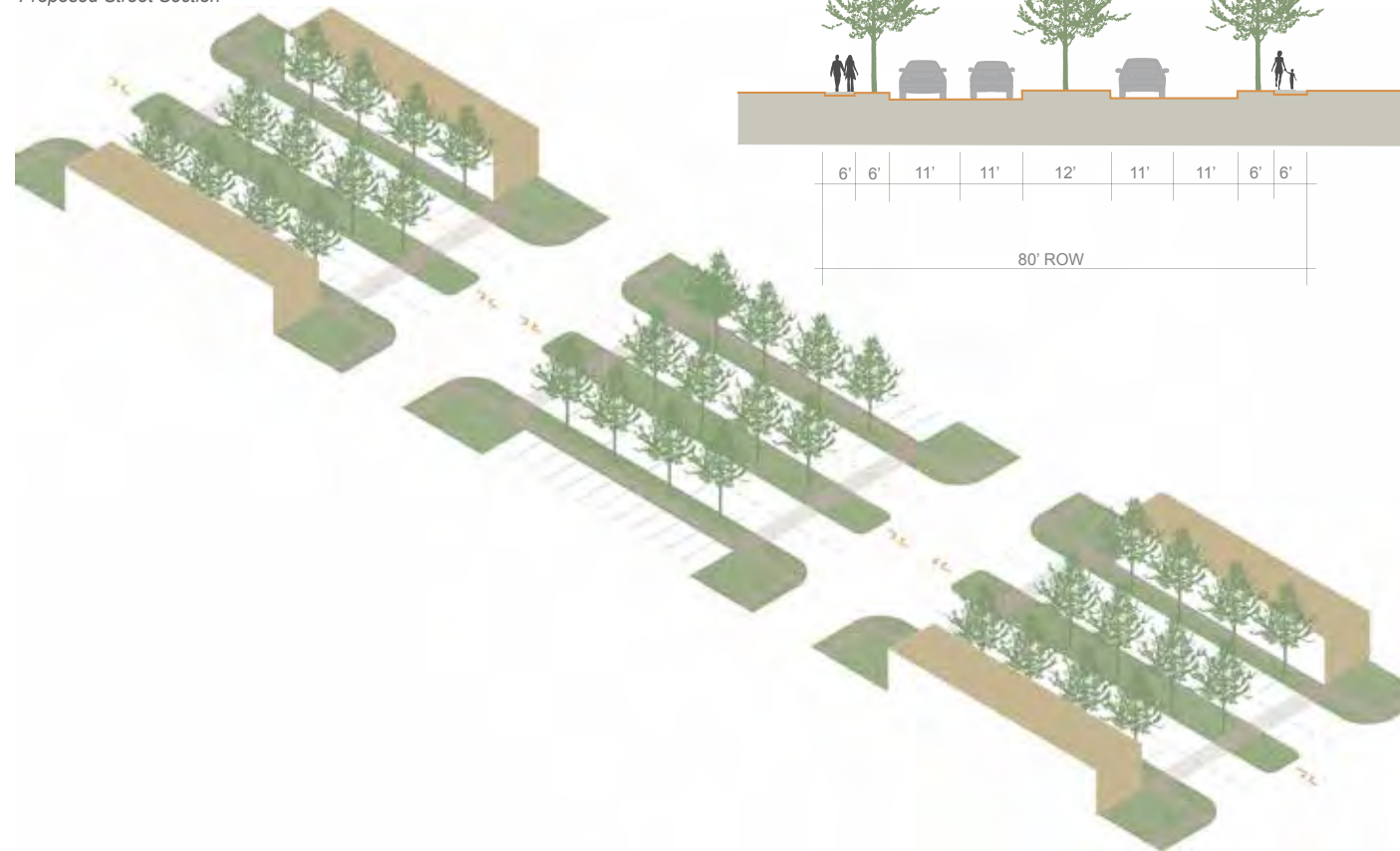
Building strong communities requires more than bricks and mortar, it necessitates both the creation of a vision and the formation of partnerships to make that vision a reality. In the Airline Corridor the Sow strategy focuses on establishing a Market Chamber of Commerce to serve the local merchants and advocate for improvements that will enhance the public realm, make the Corridor more attractive and accessible, and thereby improve its overall success.





The existing conditions along Airline deter pedestrian activity. The City currently has a proposal to widen Airline 20' to relieve traffic congestion in this bustling corridor, while providing no amenities to pedestrians. Specifically, the additional right-of-way will be used to add a 14' left turn lane, while maintaining two 12' traffic lanes in each direction. In order to successfully "thread" the destinations along Airline the street widening is an opportunity to add amenities, not just in the street but adjacent to it as well. We propose that a median be added to assist pedestrians in crossing the street, while maintaining cut-outs for left turns. In addition, 11' lanes are satisfactory and reduce speeds to create additional safety for pedestrians. This provides additional right-of-way to be developed into a public realm on both sides of the street, while "patches" begin to thicken this realm further.

ABOVE: Aerial of Existing Street Conditions  
 RIGHT: Proposed Street Section  
 BELOW: Isometric Diagram of Proposed Street Section

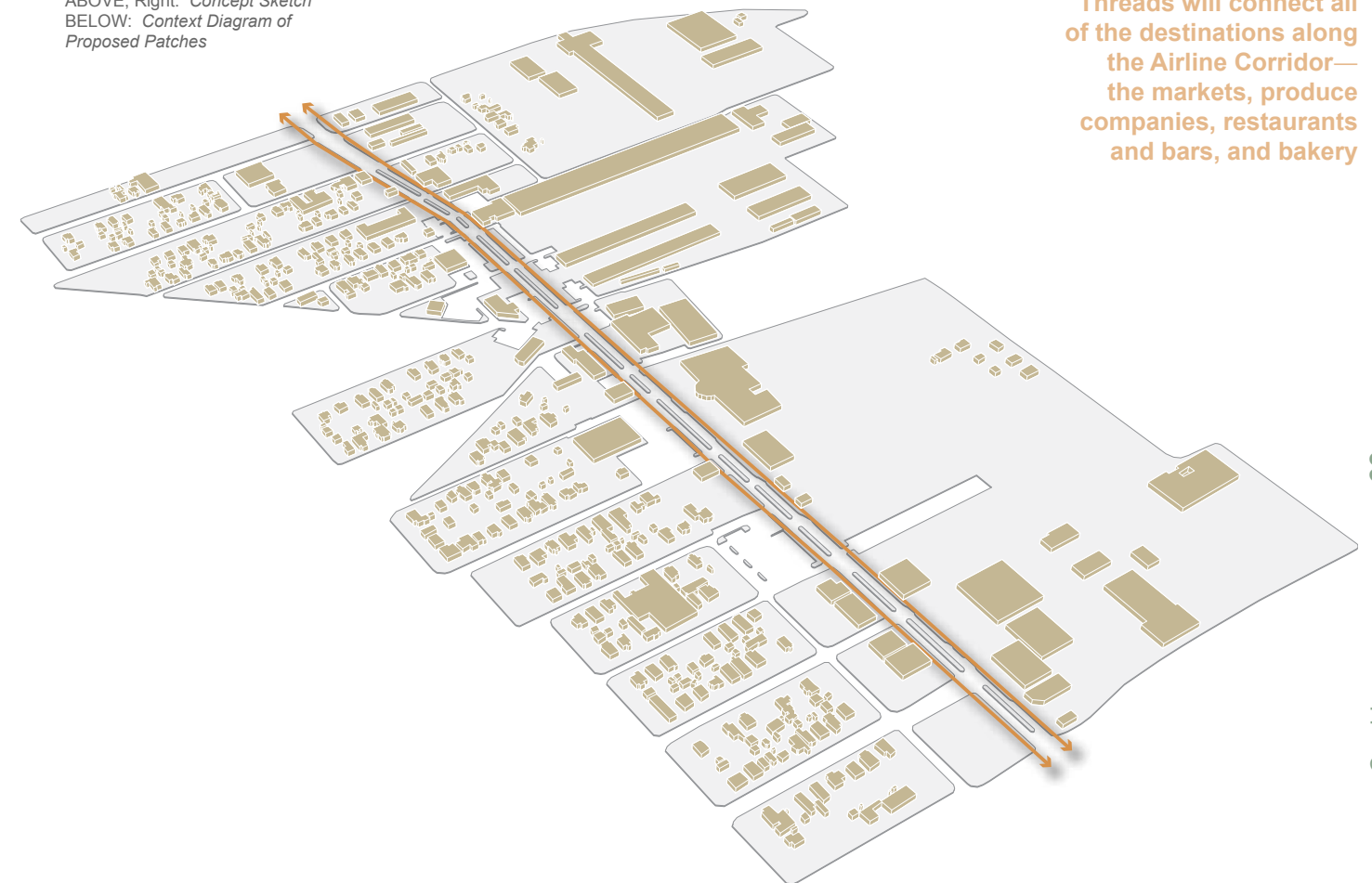


## Thread

Threads are pedestrian and street amenities that work to connect places along a corridor. Along Airline threads are simply continuous sidewalks that are proposed to be constructed in conjunction with the widening of the street.



ABOVE, Right: Concept Sketch  
 BELOW: Context Diagram of Proposed Patches



Threads will connect all of the destinations along the Airline Corridor—the markets, produce companies, restaurants and bars, and bakery



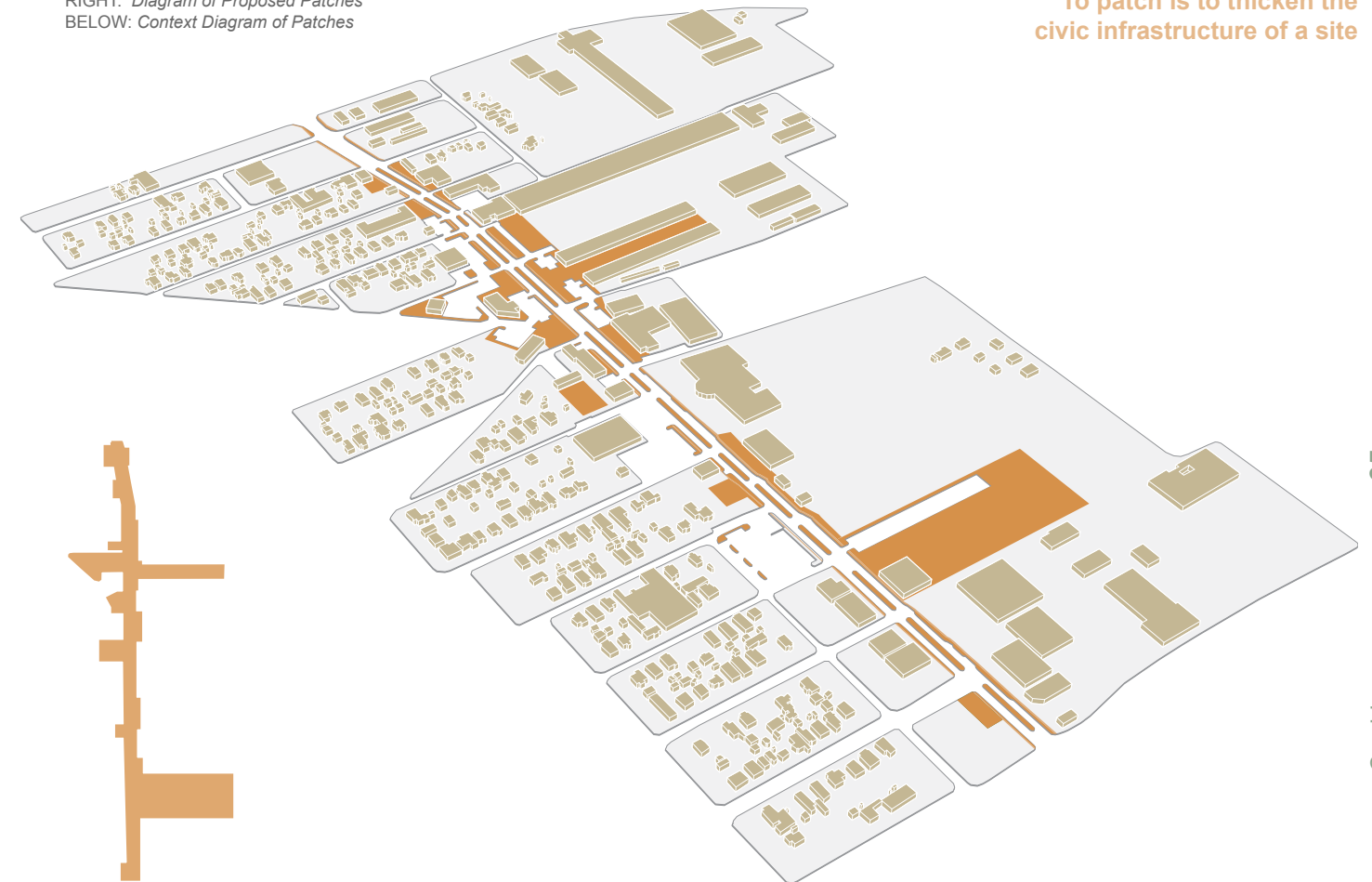


## Patch

A patch is a thickened thread, or infrastructure that expands to become part of the public realm. In the case of Airline patches extend east and west where the proposed street widening makes existing parking areas and driveways obsolete. These areas are proposed to become pocket parks and plazas that provide places to sit, eat, gather, and enjoy the shade, increasing the social density of the site.



RIGHT: *Diagram of Proposed Patches*  
 BELOW: *Context Diagram of Patches*



To patch is to thicken the civic infrastructure of a site





Dancing



Drive-In Movies



Markets



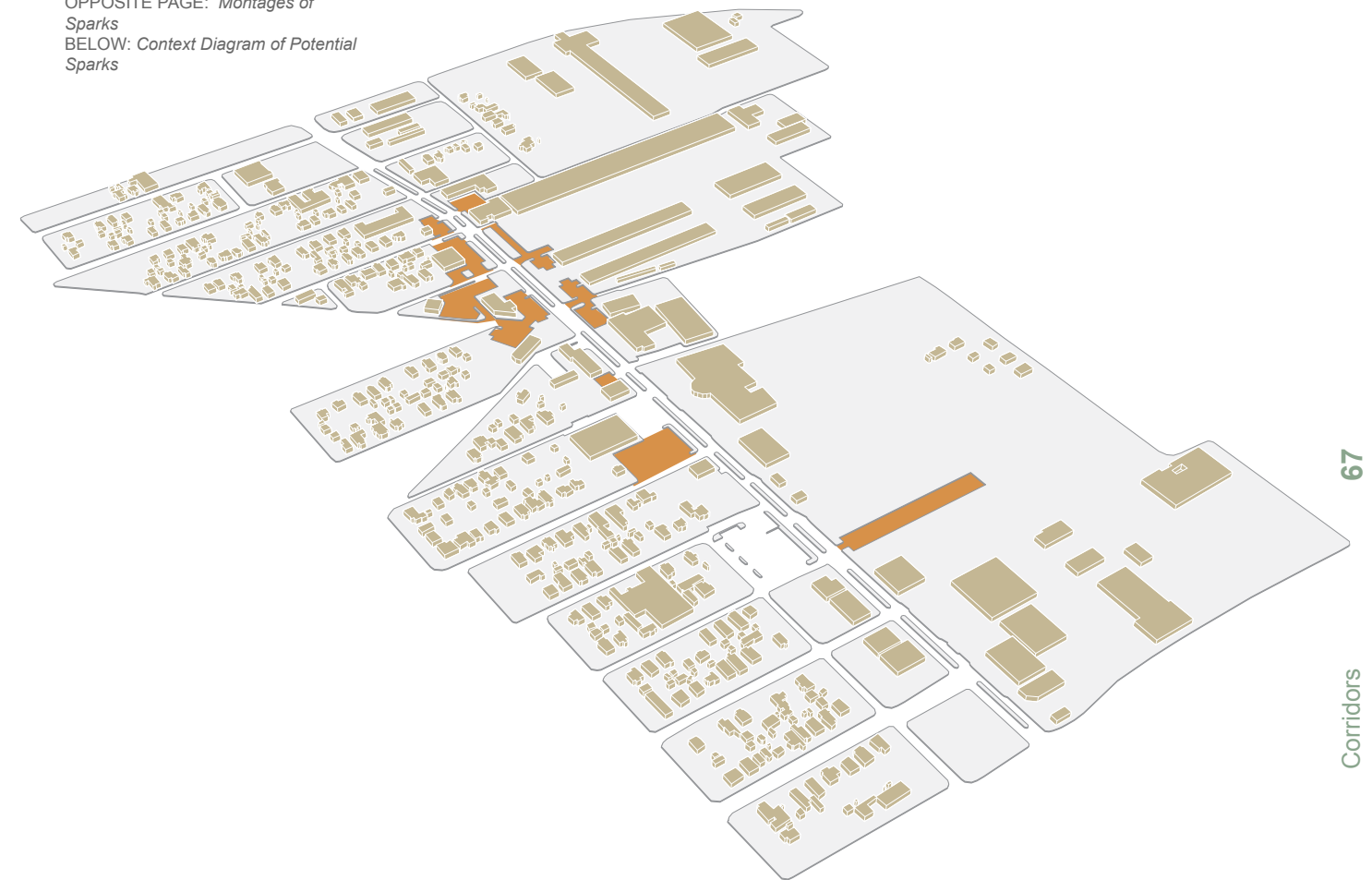
Mobile Food

## Spark

To spark is to look for opportunities to introduce new uses into under-utilized or leftover spaces in our communities. In the Airline Corridor a dance hall, drive-in movie theater, sport court, markets, pop-up retail, music, and mobile food are just some of the possibilities for introducing both permanent and temporary uses to activate the many parking lots.

A dance hall, drive-in movie theater, sport court, markets, pop-up retail, and mobile food are just some of the potential uses, or sparks, for parking lots

OPPOSITE PAGE: *Montages of Sparks*  
BELOW: *Context Diagram of Potential Sparks*

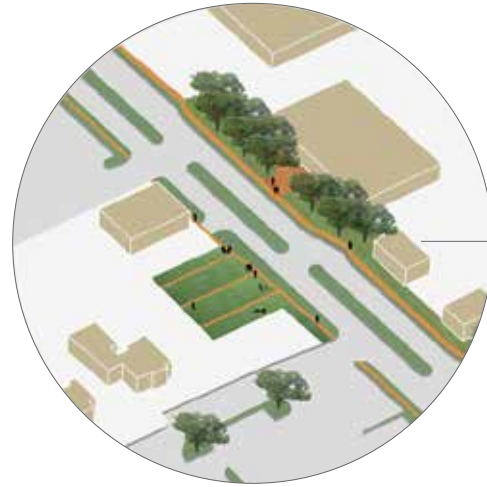


# Vision

The Airline Corridor is a center of economic activity drawing thousands everyday to its markets and restaurants. Yet, the Corridor has an ill-defined public realm that limits its success. Along the Corridor sidewalks are sporadic and where they do exist they are narrow and interrupted frequently by driveways, parking lots, loading docks and other obstacles, deterring pedestrian traffic.

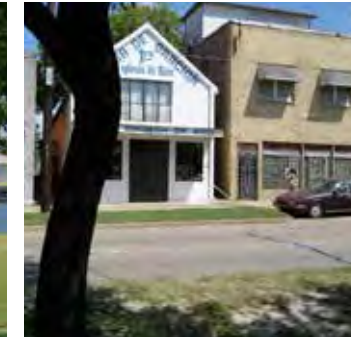
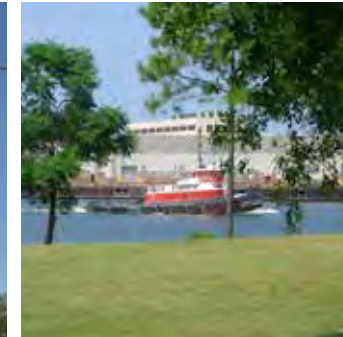
As a result, the strategies identified for the Airline Corridor focus on merging public works expenditures, in this case street widening, with public amenities. Threads link the many destinations along the street, patches thicken the public realm, and sparks activate and program under-utilized spaces along the length of the Corridor.

The vision for the Airline Corridor focused on building the civic infrastructure of the site through a thickening of the public realm that would occur simultaneously with the planned expansion of the street right-of-way. This thickening provides places to sit, gather, play, eat, and linger while supporting the informal qualities of the site that make it unique. The timing for this project is important as the street is currently in Houston's capital improvement plan. The plan is to widen the street from a 60' to an 80' right-of-way, with two lanes of traffic and a left turn lane. Here we suggest to Airline stakeholders as well as to residents throughout the city that there should be more benefit to street reconstruction than simply a wider street, and that we should use these opportunities to add public amenities and to thicken the civic infrastructure of our communities.





# Broadway



Just the name—Broadway—evokes certain emotions and images in the American cultural consciousness conjuring up images of centrality, intensity and vibrancy. While Houston's Broadway Corridor once held such a position, it is currently far quieter and far emptier than the name implies. Over the decades the Corridor has quietly eroded, losing much of its built fabric, its residents, its businesses, and its liveliness. The primary question for the Corridor is not how to recreate it, a process that would be fundamentally nostalgic, but how to re-invent it by building on the investments that are already occurring and reconnecting the site to the waterfront.

Broadway was the "Main Street" of the Town of Harrisburg, established in 1825, a decade prior to the founding of Houston. The town was prominent and the area was well-regarded enough to briefly become the capital of Texas in 1836.

Harrisburg was the home of the Houston Yacht Club from 1910 to 1926.

As the scale of urban development transformed with the automobile, Houston slowly spread out from the historic neighborhoods of the core. Areas like Broadway were all but abandoned in favor of new developments on the periphery. The impact of this dispersion was significant; in the 1920s the Broadway Corridor was home to almost 14,000 people, accounting for more than 10% of Houston's growing population, today the Corridor is home to less than a third as many people—4,000—and currently accounts for only 0.2% of Houston's population. The Corridor's decline has been steady, and this decline has been compounded by the lack of new development.



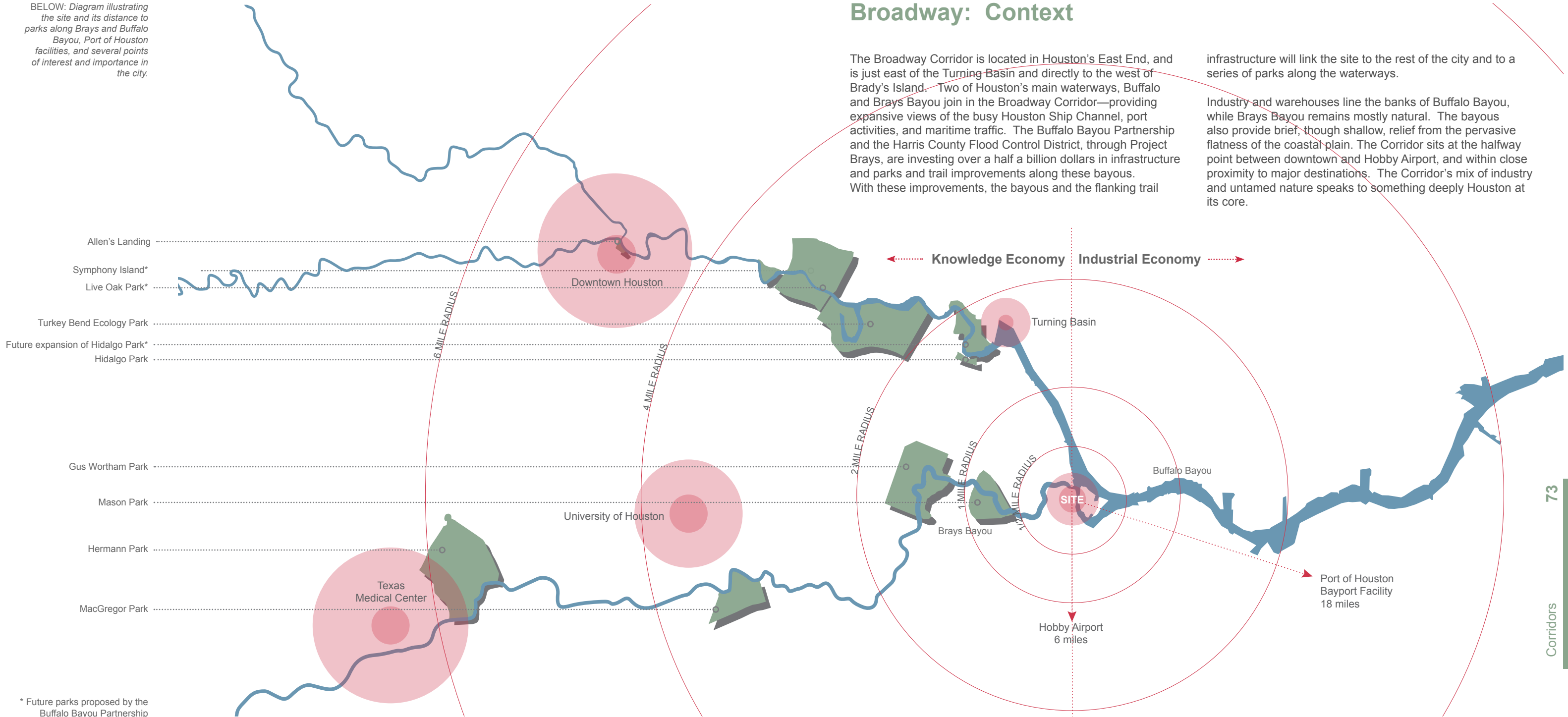
BELOW: Diagram illustrating the site and its distance to parks along Brays and Buffalo Bayou, Port of Houston facilities, and several points of interest and importance in the city.

## Broadway: Context

The Broadway Corridor is located in Houston's East End, and is just east of the Turning Basin and directly to the west of Brady's Island. Two of Houston's main waterways, Buffalo and Brays Bayou join in the Broadway Corridor—providing expansive views of the busy Houston Ship Channel, port activities, and maritime traffic. The Buffalo Bayou Partnership and the Harris County Flood Control District, through Project Brays, are investing over a half a billion dollars in infrastructure and parks and trail improvements along these bayous. With these improvements, the bayous and the flanking trail

infrastructure will link the site to the rest of the city and to a series of parks along the waterways.

Industry and warehouses line the banks of Buffalo Bayou, while Brays Bayou remains mostly natural. The bayous also provide brief, though shallow, relief from the pervasive flatness of the coastal plain. The Corridor sits at the halfway point between downtown and Hobby Airport, and within close proximity to major destinations. The Corridor's mix of industry and untamed nature speaks to something deeply Houston at its core.



\* Future parks proposed by the Buffalo Bayou Partnership



The Broadway Corridor has experienced substantial abandonment and disinvestment over the decades. There are many holes in the urban fabric including abandoned buildings, parking lots, and vacant land. The voids provide opportunities for the site to be re-imagined, building on the foundation of the Corridor's distinct history, culture, and location.

The unique views of industry and the Ship Channel from the area also point to new possibilities for redeveloping the bayou waterfronts with combined investments in both public and private amenities. Land values are affordable, there is substantial vacant land, and major public investment is already occurring in association with the bayous.

**The Broadway Corridor has experienced substantial abandonment and disinvestment over the decades. There are many holes in the urban fabric including abandoned buildings, parking lots, and vacant land**



1920s



1950s



2000s

THIS PAGE, Top: *Broadway Corridor Figure Ground*  
 THIS PAGE, Middle: *Map of Vacant Land*  
 Illustrating the increase in vacant lots over time  
 as buildings were demolished  
 OPPOSITE PAGE: *Historic Map of Houston, 1922*



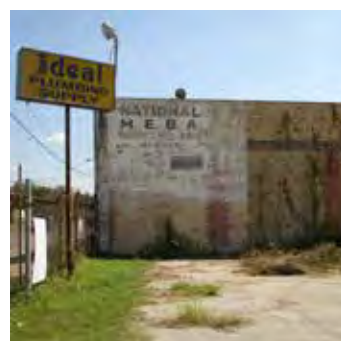
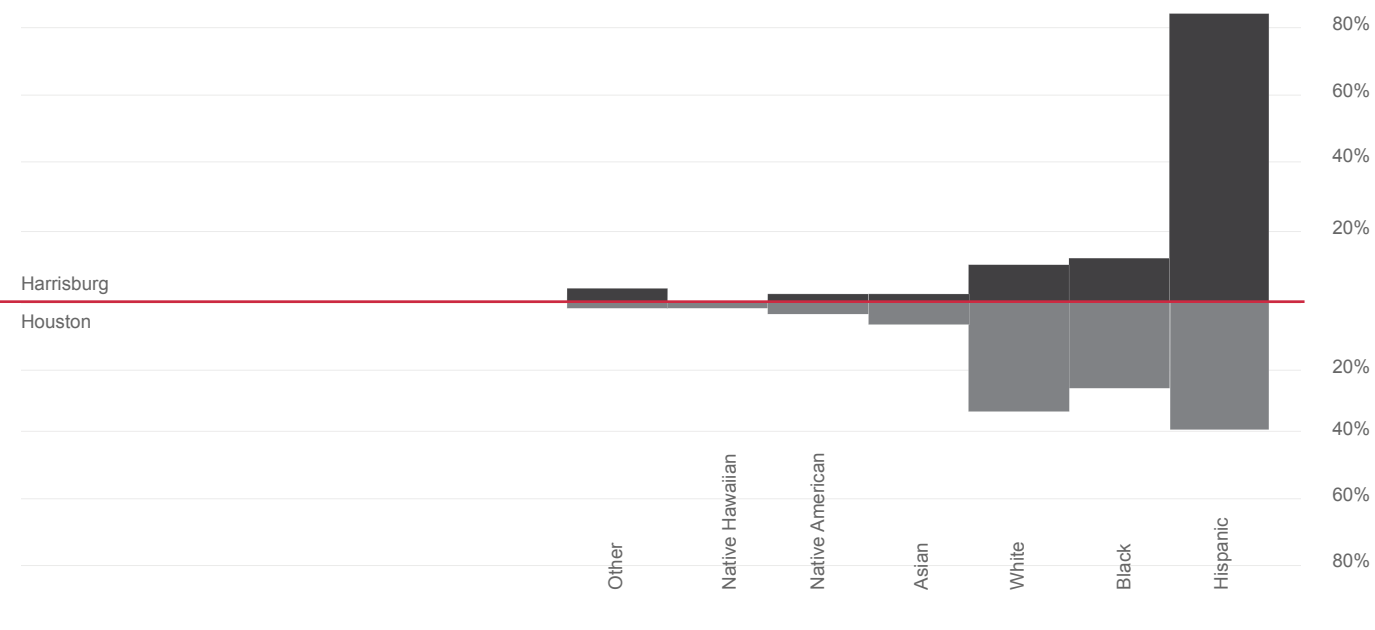
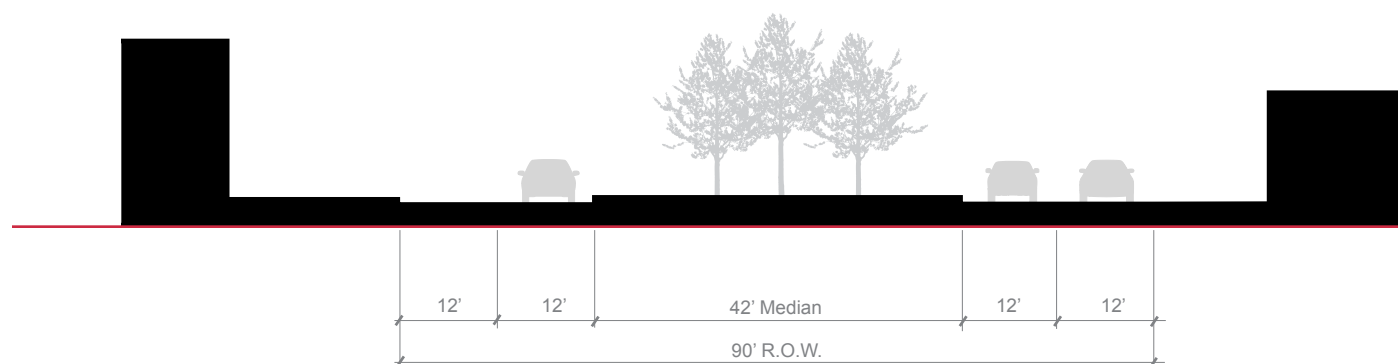


The Broadway Corridor is sparsely populated, with an average density of just over three persons per acre. However, just south of the Corridor is Pecan Park, the second most densely populated super neighborhood in Houston, with an average population density of over forty-eight persons per acre.

In 2000, the population of the Broadway Corridor was predominantly Hispanic, making up 80% of the population.

**In the 1920s nearly 14,000 people lived in the Broadway Corridor, today only 4,000 call the area home**

THIS PAGE, Middle: *Population Ethnicity, comparing Harrisburg to the City of Houston (2000)*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Top Right and Bottom: *Broadway Photographs*  
 Middle: *Broadway Street Section*







Like the rest of the city, the Broadway Corridor is diverse, quirky, and oddly beautiful. With its distinct location adjacent to the Ship Channel and bounded by Brays Bayou on the west and Buffalo Bayou on the east, the Corridor presents the perfect opportunity to redevelop Houston's industrial waterfront, opening it up for public use. Waterfront redevelopment projects are occurring in cities across the U.S., as fundamental economic shifts open up new spaces for economic development. From Pittsburgh to Long Beach waterfront redevelopments are transforming working ports into major city attractions, waters are being filled with

sailboats, canoes, and kayaks and the banks are becoming attractive places for promenades, hiking and biking, and other recreational activities. Waterfronts are also increasingly becoming prime locations for innovative housing, commercial, and cultural activities. The Broadway Corridor then, becomes an exercise of possibilities: the possibilities of dreaming big, of creating a city-wide destination, of bringing together diverse groups of people, of working to build a better city by openly acknowledging our strengths and constraints and using them to provide public places that serve diverse needs.



THIS PAGE, Above Left: *Diagram of Opportunities*  
 Above Right: *Diagram of Potential Connections from Brays to Buffalo Bayou*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE: *Concept Diagram for the Corridor*

# Broadway: Strategies

The Broadway Corridor has the potential to become a destination unlike any other in Houston. The site is surrounded by history, lush landscapes, and wildlife—with truly unique views of the city and port, low land values, and substantial vacant tracts that create opportunities for development. The Broadway Corridor is also a prime location to re-think our connection to the waterfront in Houston.

Public open space, recreational amenities, and housing emerged as the most important catalysts for change in the Corridor. The strategies for design intervention support this focus by seeking to create a distinctive destination for sports, recreation, and leisure in the city while enhancing the overall quality of life in the community through housing and economic development.

The Broadway Corridor, with its distinct location adjacent to the Ship Channel and bounded by Brays Bayou on the west and Buffalo Bayou on the east, is an opportunity to redevelop Houston's industrial waterfront, and open it up for public use



**SOW**  
Success in the Broadway Corridor is linked to maintaining and building partnerships



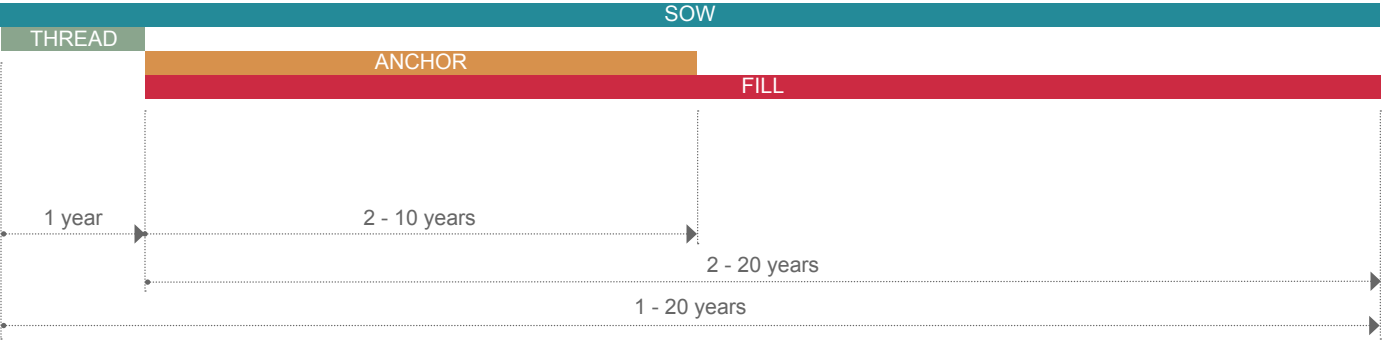
**THREAD**  
Build threads to connect the Corridor to Brady's Island, the bayous, the Harrisburg Sunset Trail, and the Greater East End



**ANCHOR**  
Anchor the Corridor by introducing programs that draw people to the area



**FILL**  
Maximize the potential of vacant land in the Corridor through the development of housing and economic development



# Sow

The potential of the Broadway Corridor is linked to maintaining and building strong partnerships between the Harris County Flood Control District, the City of Houston, the Buffalo Bayou Partnership, the Greater East End Management District, the Port of Houston Authority, the Harrisburg Civic Association, and residents and stakeholders, and to work collaboratively to imagine and re-develop Houston's industrial waterfront.



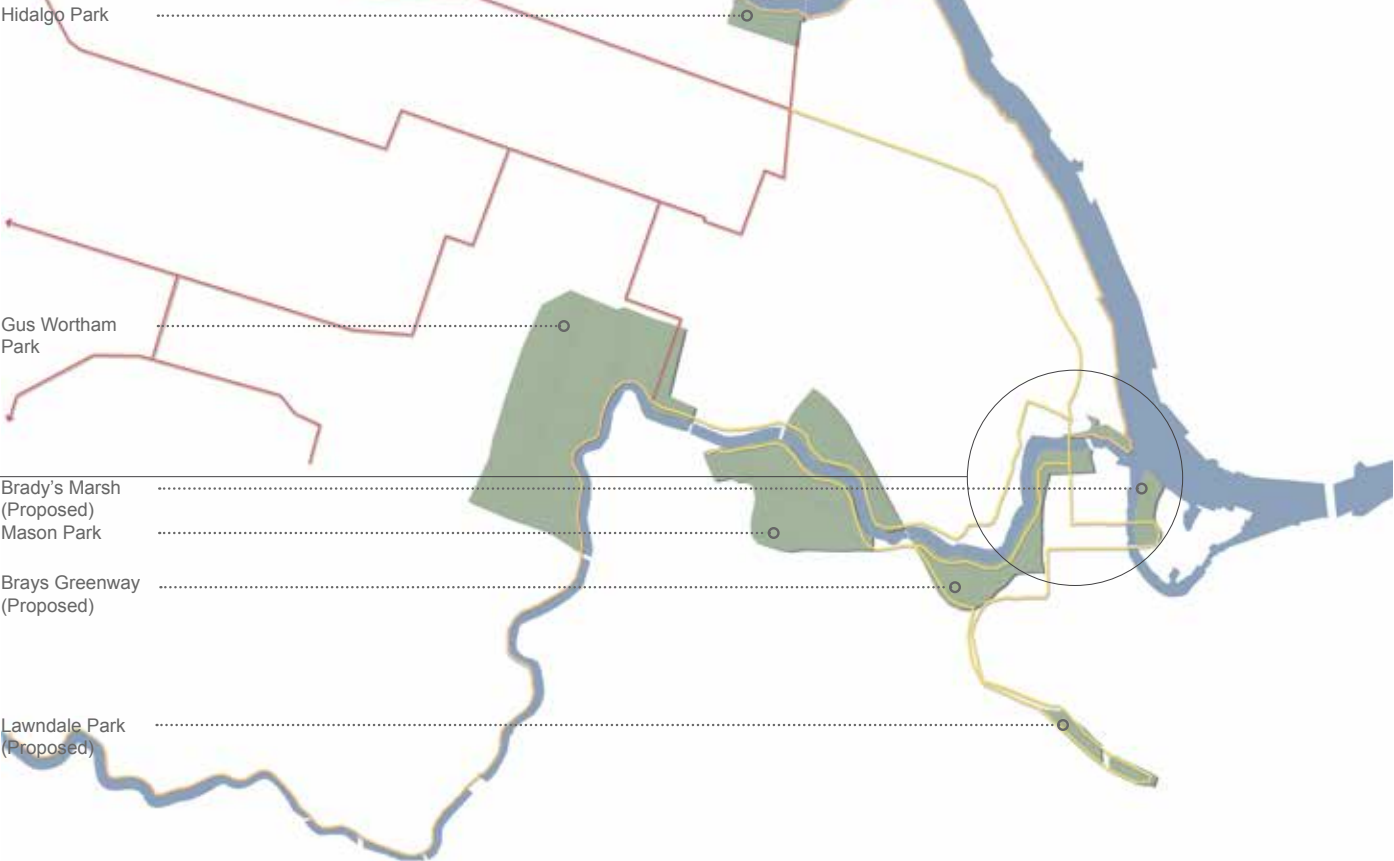
# Thread

To Thread is to create a trail loop that links the Sunset Harrisburg Bike Trail and the existing and proposed bayou trails and parks throughout the East End to the Broadway Corridor.

Create an “Emerald Necklace” for the East End

The existing trails in the East End connect the district to Downtown, and link Mason and Hidalgo Parks. It is proposed that new bike trails and routes be constructed and designated to create a loop that connects the Sunset Trail to Brady’s Island and the proposed Brays Greenway to the southeast, and continue south to connect the new park at 225 and Lawndale, and back north to complete the loop at Mason Park along a railroad right-of-way, as illustrated below. The proposed threads will connect the Corridor to a larger network of paths and bikeways and make Broadway the starting point and terminus for the East End trail network.

BELOW: Perspective of Proposed Trails  
 OPPOSITE PAGE: Existing and Proposed Trails  
 Proposed Bike Trails  
 Sunset Harrisburg Trail  
 Bayou Hike and Bike Trails





# Anchor

The design strategies for the Broadway Corridor take advantage of the proposed Brays Greenway, trails, vacant land on Brady's Island, flood zones, and vacant properties along the waterfront to anchor the Corridor. A museum of maritime history, a marsh on Brady's Island, and a trailhead and pedestrian bridge will all anchor the site, while linked open spaces create a destination for recreation.

### BROADWAY GREENWAY: Trailhead

It is proposed that the Brays Greenway become the trailhead for the greater network of bayou trails throughout the district. The proposed 30-mile continuous hike and bike trails along Brays Bayou will connect Brays Greenway to Mason Park, Gus Wortham Golf Course, MacGregor Park, Hermann Park, and the Addicks Reservoir.

Soccer fields, a new launch dock for the Sam Houston tour boat, bike and kayak rental, and eating destinations are proposed to mark the beginning and end of the trails, providing resting places as well as recreational spaces for the public.

A pedestrian bridge, illustrated to the left, would connect Brays to Buffalo Bayou, providing easy access to Broadway and the greater Harrisburg area.

### BRADY'S AMPHITHEATER

With views of the Ship Channel, Downtown Houston, and local industrial activity, Brady's Island is an ideal place for a multi-purpose amphitheater, illustrated to the right. The amphitheater could be used for public and special events, as well as serving as an observation platform, public space, and gathering place.

A museum of maritime history, a marsh on Brady's Island, an amphitheater, and a trailhead to mark the beginning and end of the network of trails are the strategies to anchor the Corridor





# Anchor

## BRADY'S MARSH

A natural marsh is proposed for Brady's Island to return part of the landscape to nature, to mitigate flooding, and improve the water quality.

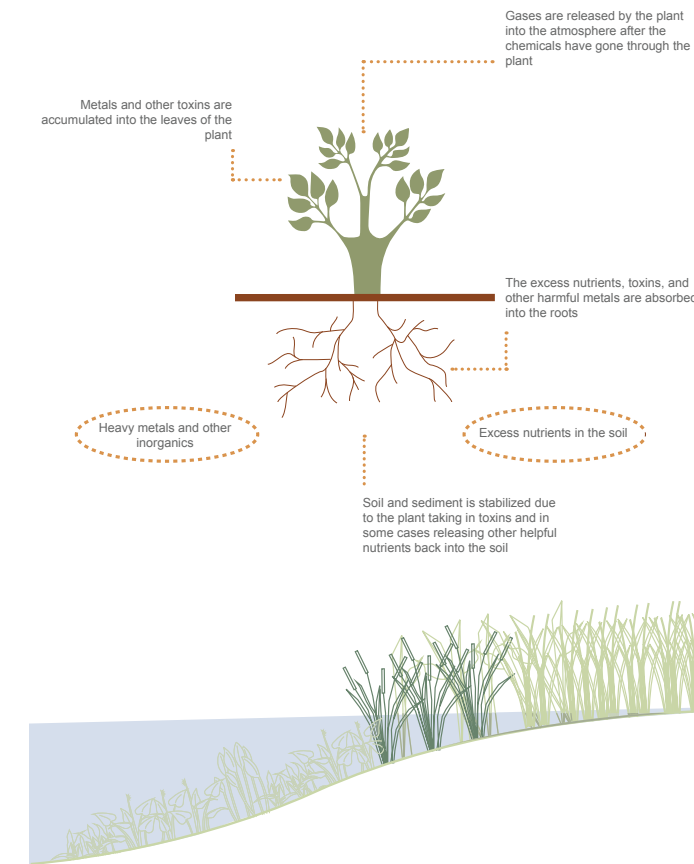
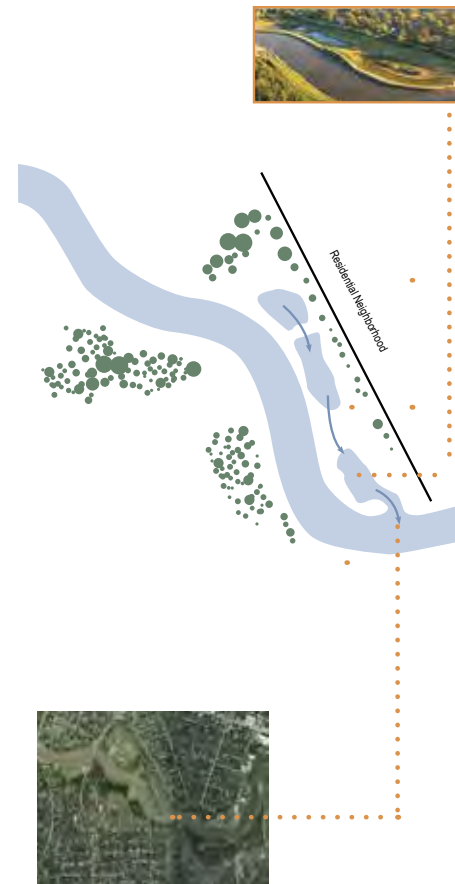
Following the model of the Tidal Marsh at Mason Park, the proposed Brady's Marsh will work naturally to clean excess nutrients that are in the soil and water. In addition to detoxifying the soil and water, marshes also help to moderate stream flows, recharge underground water supplies, reduce flood damage, and treat wastewater that is introduced into the system through the process of phytoremediation. Taking into account the location of Brady's Island, adjacent to the Houston Ship Channel, phytoremediation could help to improve the water quality in the bayou.

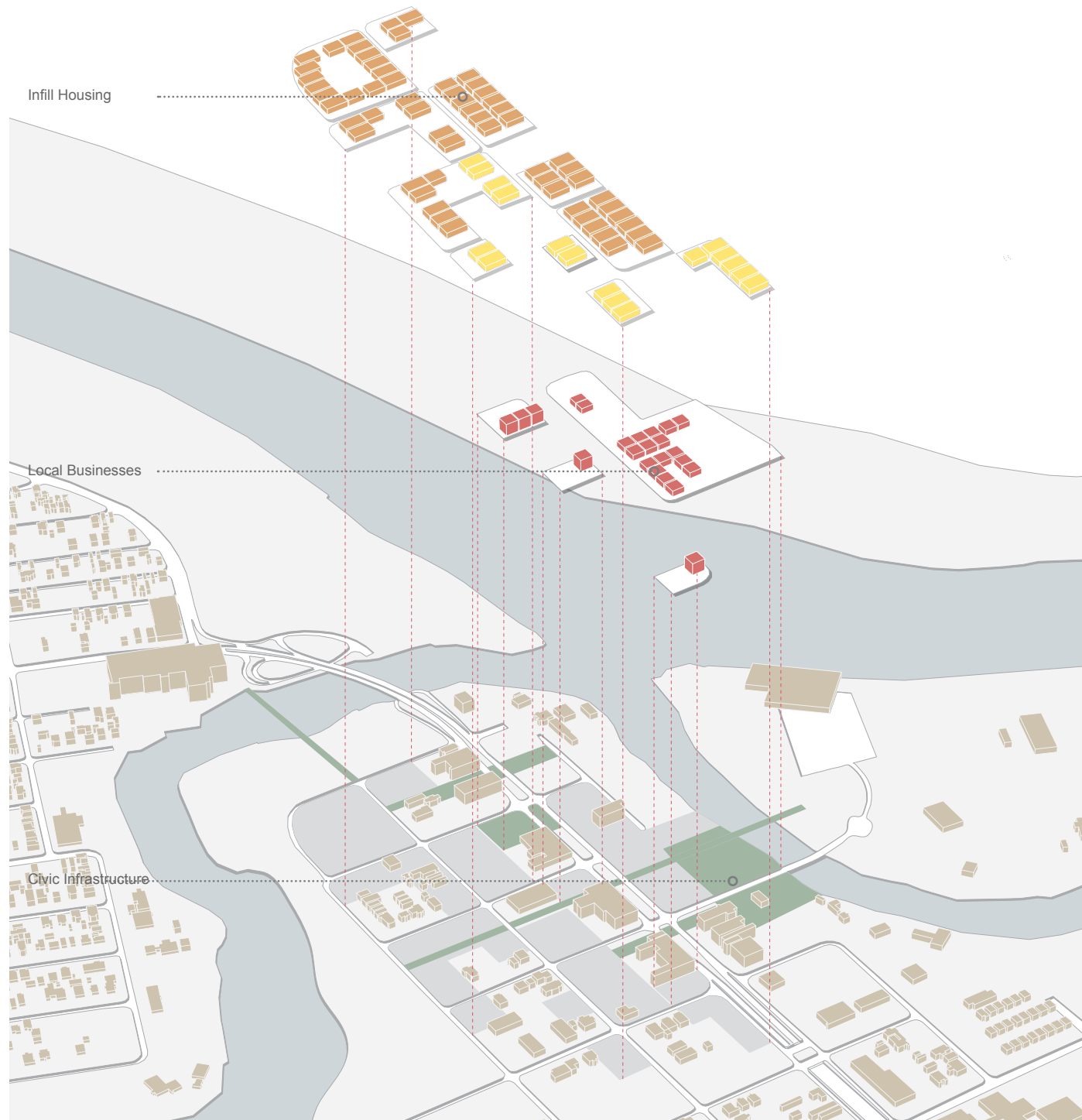


ABOVE: Photograph of Existing Conditions on Brady's Island  
 BELOW, Left: Phytoremediation Process Diagram  
 BELOW, Right: Marsh Ecology Section Diagram

**Mason Park Tidal Marsh**  
 Located at the intersection of 75th Street and Forest Hill the Tidal Marsh at Mason Park was designed to serve as a prototype for future wetland restoration. The Marsh encompasses 3.5 acres of newly restored wetlands that attract wildlife while helping to clean the water entering the Gulf from Brays Bayou. The Marsh is split into three separate pools of water that perform different decontamination processes.

BELOW: Tidal Marsh at Mason Park



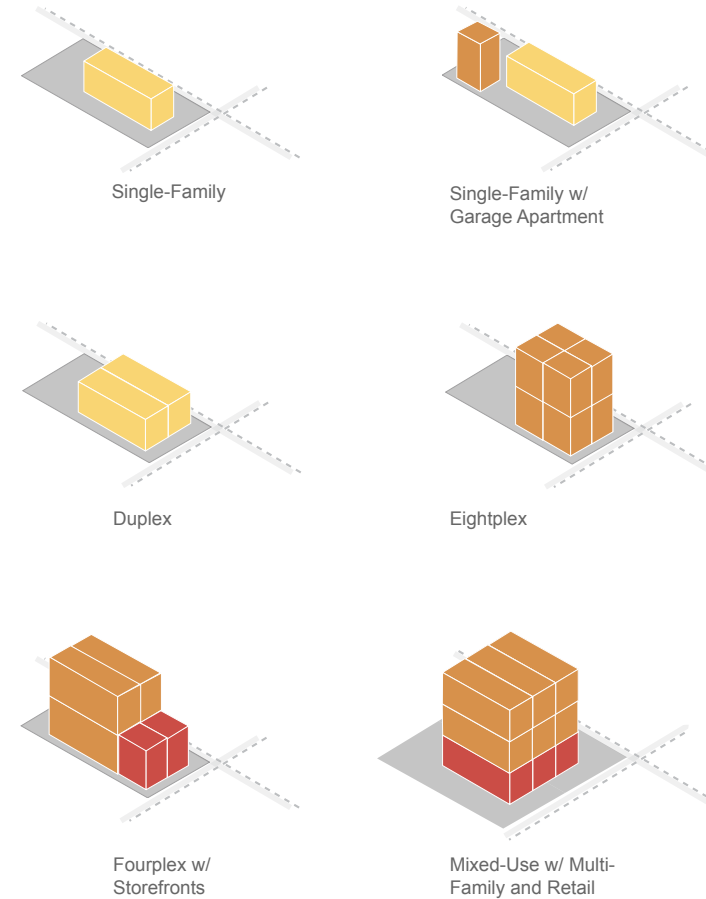


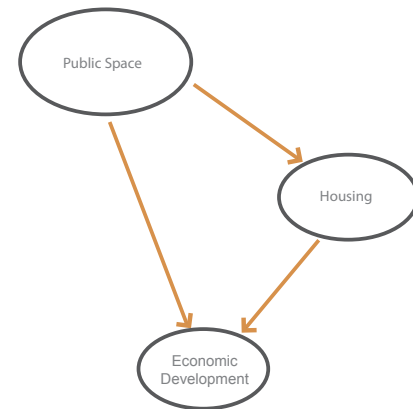
## Fill

Over the last eight decades much of the built fabric in the Broadway Corridor has been slowly erased. Today, vacant land is the prevailing condition. Finding ways to fill the voids in the Corridor, while capturing the value of the truly unique views and the current investment in parks and open spaces along the waterways, is a primary strategy for change.

Infill housing is one way to begin to mend the holes in the built fabric, and it is proposed that a set of housing models be developed in association with a comprehensive housing plan to meet the needs of diverse households—including both single family infill housing and higher density housing along Broadway. In addition to housing, the Corridor is primed for the introduction of commercial incubators, small local businesses, and a network of civic and public spaces.

**Develop infill strategies for the vast amount of vacant land in the Corridor**





## Vision

The Broadway Corridor is one of the only locations in Houston where expansive views of the Port and its activities are possible—from the massive ships arriving from all over the world, to the wharves and docks, and barge activity—the site provides a unique vantage point. The Corridor is also benefitting from major public works projects. These projects are transforming the banks of both Buffalo and Brays Bayous, adding civic amenities such as new parks and trails. Capitalizing on these inimitable opportunities and re-thinking the connection to the waterfront is the foundation for the vision.

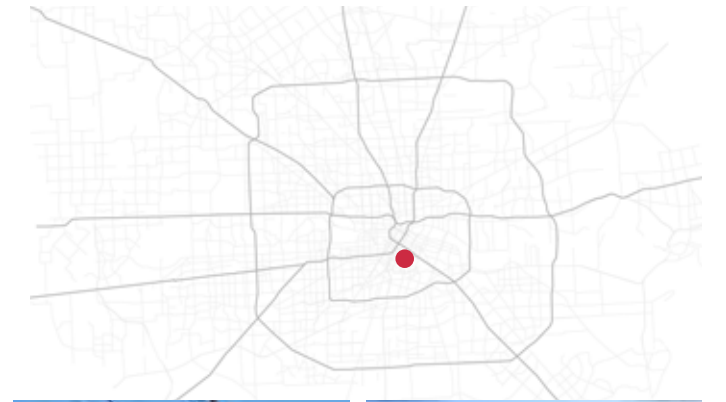
The proposals and strategies for the Broadway Corridor focus on catalyzing change by building on the existing opportunities of the site, and organizing new programs—including housing, economic development, and public spaces around the views, existing and proposed parks, open spaces, and trails. These interventions have the potential to create a destination in Houston, unlike any other, built around the truly rare conditions of the site.







# Holman



The Holman Corridor is fundamentally defined by what is missing rather than what is there. There are no grocery stores, full-service banks, dry cleaners, movie theaters, or pharmacies. And there are few places to eat or gather. This wasn't always the case—Holman was once lined with small shops and stores that served the surrounding neighborhood. Over the last seventy years disinvestment and abandonment have wreaked havoc on the neighborhood and both the University of Houston and Texas Southern University have expanded their campuses, gobbling up sizeable pieces of the neighborhood. The original pattern of small, urban blocks has been eroded and much of the fabric subsumed in the super-blocks of the bordering institutions.

With the erosion in the Corridor there is also an overwhelming sense of division—new developments, including university buildings, more often than not turn inward instead of outward to the community. Gates and walls predominate. This physical division is echoed in the social division and distrust between the diverse users and constituents in the area. Students and faculty from both university campuses rarely travel outside of the limits of their respective institutions, and the congregants of local churches fill the streets on Sundays during services and quickly dissipate once services have concluded. The only people who truly use the Corridor are those who call it home.

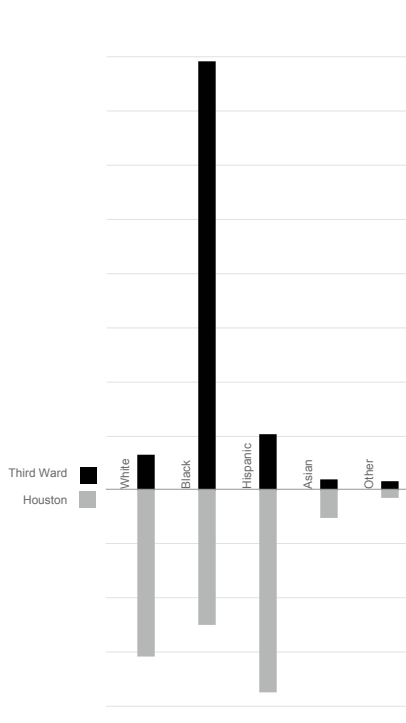


# Holman: Context

The Third Ward, one of Houston's original six political districts, is a historic neighborhood and an important center of African-American culture and history. It is home to many prominent institutions such as Texas Southern University, Riverside Hospital, and the Eldorado Ballroom which hosted legends like Count Basie, B.B. King, and Sam Lightin' Hopkins. Dowling Street, just west of the site, was the area's main business corridor, once lined with shops, black-owned businesses, churches, theaters, restaurants, and nightclubs. The area has been the home of Holman Street Baptist Church for over 75 years and is within minutes of downtown, the Medical Center, and Theater District. The Corridor is sandwiched between the University of Houston and Texas Southern University, two institutions that draw more than 50,000 students, faculty, and staff to the area nearly every day.



ABOVE: Map of Houston's Original Six Wards  
BELOW: Figure Ground



ABOVE, Right: Median Household Income by Census Tract, Compared to Houston Median (2000)

- 0-25% of Houston Median
- 26-50% of Houston Median
- 51-75% of Houston Median
- 76-100% of Houston Median



ABOVE, Left: Population Ethnicity in the Corridor (2000 Census)  
BELOW: Institutional Islands

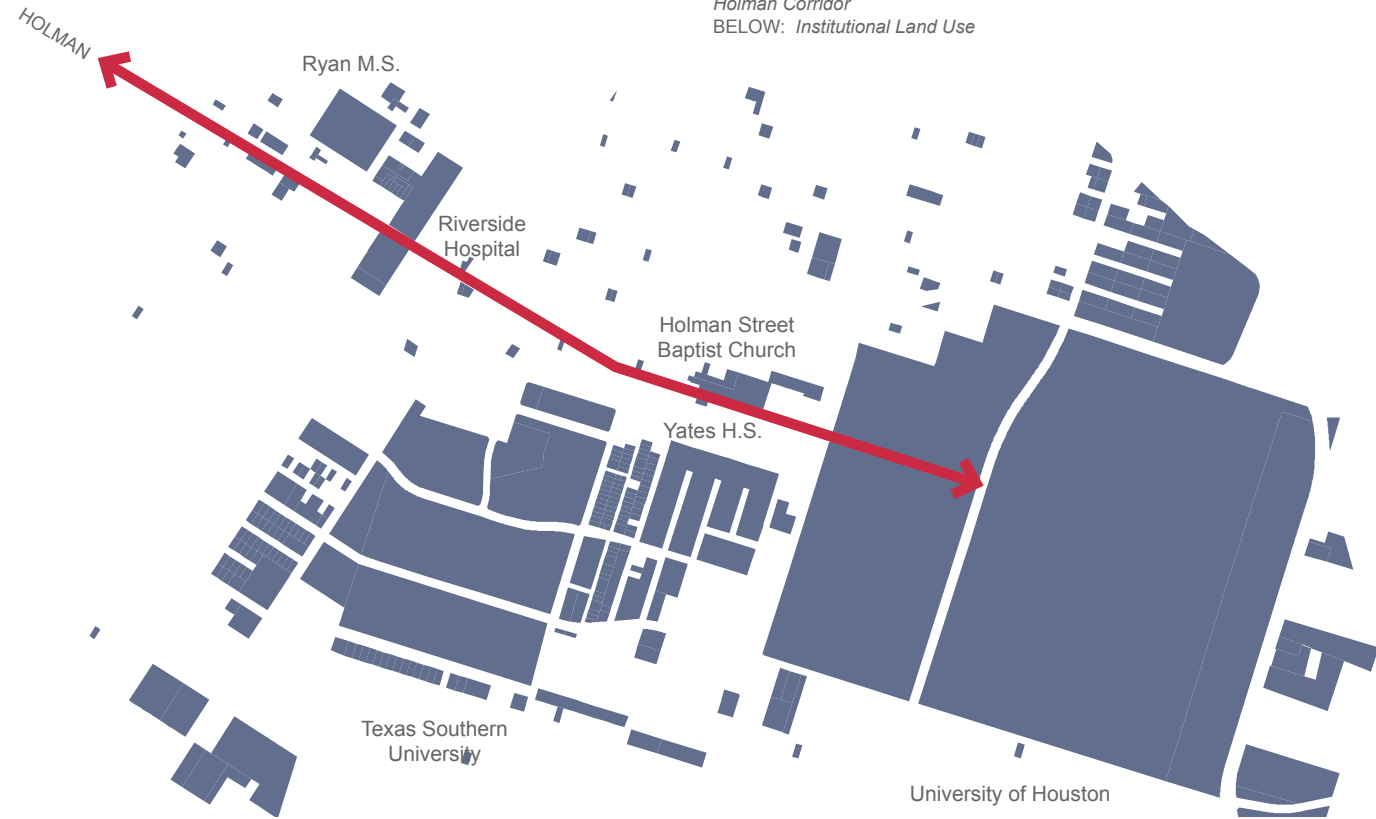




In the 1950s more than 30,000 people lived in the Third Ward, today just over 15,000 call the district home. Contrary to the steady growth of Houston's population between 1990 and 2000 (14.5%), the Greater Third Ward's population has declined by 2.1% during the same time period. New housing development is occurring in the western portion of the community, however there is very little new development in the northern and eastern sections, where the Holman Corridor is located.

The Greater Third Ward has a median household income substantially below that of Houston. In 2000, Houston's median household income was just above \$36,000 and the Third Ward median household income was just under \$14,500, or 40% of the median household income in the city. The Third Ward also has a very high percentage of renters—77% of the population rent, with only 23% owning their homes.

ABOVE, Left: Grocery Stores, Banks, Pharmacies, and Gas Stations near the Holman Corridor  
BELOW: Institutional Land Use

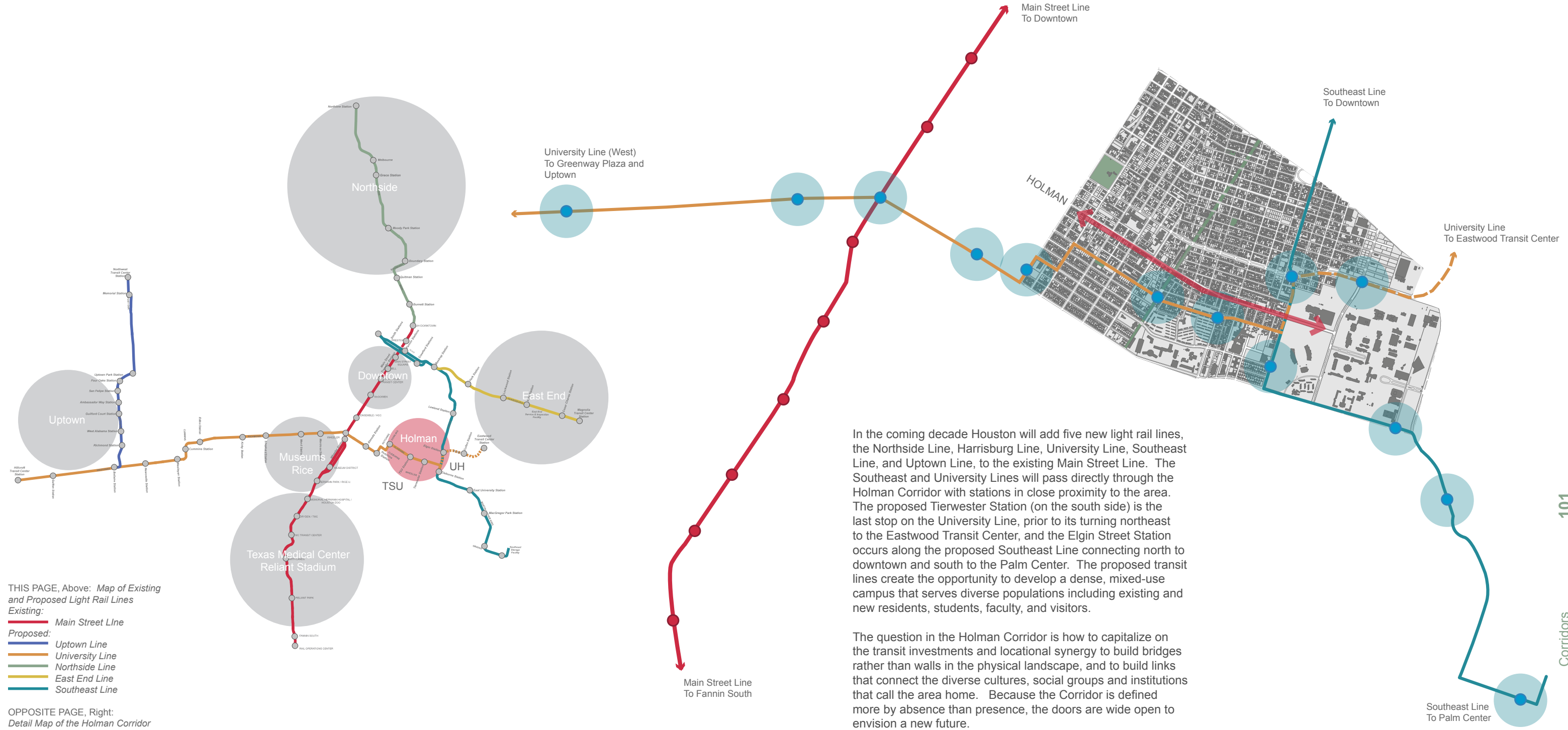


Vacant land makes up nearly 20% of all property in the Holman Corridor, nearly five million square feet, and this number is rising as demolition permits outnumber construction permits two to one in the Corridor. Nearly 900 vacant lots are located just in this area, an additional 134 lots are vacant and owned by the Midtown TIRZ to be developed for affordable housing.



ABOVE: Map of Vacant Land and Property Owned by the Midtown TIRZ and Southeast Houston CDC  
 ■ Vacant Land  
 ■ Midtown TIRZ  
 ■ Southeast Houston Community Development Corporation





THIS PAGE, Above: *Map of Existing and Proposed Light Rail Lines*  
 Existing:  
 Main Street Line  
 Proposed:  
 Uptown Line  
 University Line  
 Northside Line  
 East End Line  
 Southeast Line

OPPOSITE PAGE, Right:  
*Detail Map of the Holman Corridor*

In the coming decade Houston will add five new light rail lines, the Northside Line, Harrisburg Line, University Line, Southeast Line, and Uptown Line, to the existing Main Street Line. The Southeast and University Lines will pass directly through the Holman Corridor with stations in close proximity to the area. The proposed Tierwester Station (on the south side) is the last stop on the University Line, prior to its turning northeast to the Eastwood Transit Center, and the Elgin Street Station occurs along the proposed Southeast Line connecting north to downtown and south to the Palm Center. The proposed transit lines create the opportunity to develop a dense, mixed-use campus that serves diverse populations including existing and new residents, students, faculty, and visitors.

The question in the Holman Corridor is how to capitalize on the transit investments and locational synergy to build bridges rather than walls in the physical landscape, and to build links that connect the diverse cultures, social groups and institutions that call the area home. Because the Corridor is defined more by absence than presence, the doors are wide open to envision a new future.



# Holman: Strategies



In the coming years METRO will be constructing two new light rail lines through the Holman Corridor, two major universities flank the site, Holman Street Baptist Church is an island of institutional strength, and new partnerships for affordable housing, public amenities, and economic development are emerging.

Based on these opportunities the primary goal for the Corridor is to build strong partnerships with adjacent universities, churches, non-profit organizations, and other entities to envision and implement a future that benefits all constituencies.

The strategies support this goal by focusing on catalysts for change that build on the existing conditions and introduce new amenities and programs to enhance the overall quality of life.

The strategies build on both the existing and future assets of the site, its constituencies, and surroundings



**SOW**  
Develop partnerships between the community and the adjacent institutions to support joint development projects



**THREAD**  
Thread the community together with great streets



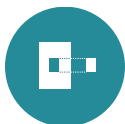
**FRAME**  
Frame the site with public space and economic development opportunities



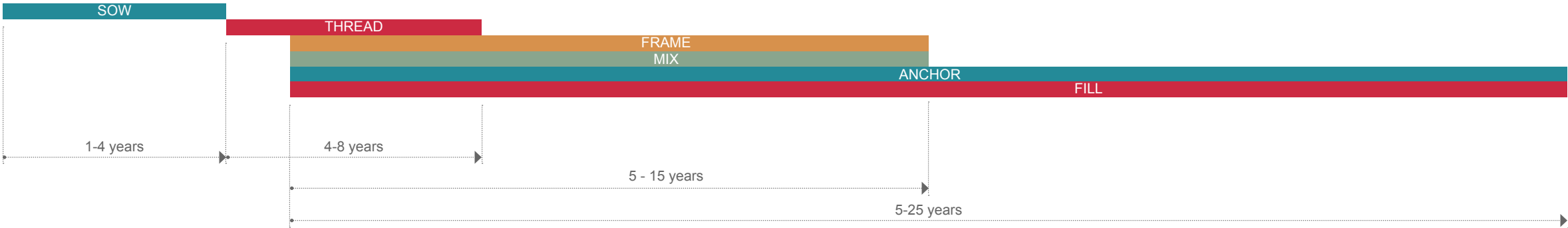
**MIX**  
Mix diverse users and programs



**ANCHOR**  
Anchor the project with social services, educational, and job training programs



**FILL**  
Develop a plan to fill vacant lots with housing that meets the needs of a wide-range of households



## Sow

The Holman Corridor, in the historic Third Ward, is located strategically adjacent to two major universities, it will benefit from two new transit lines, and has a wealth of community resources. Finding ways to come together to support a shared vision is one key for the future of the Corridor. New partnerships between the community and the universities could support joint development projects including affordable housing, economic development, workforce development, education, social services, and other programs.



## Thread

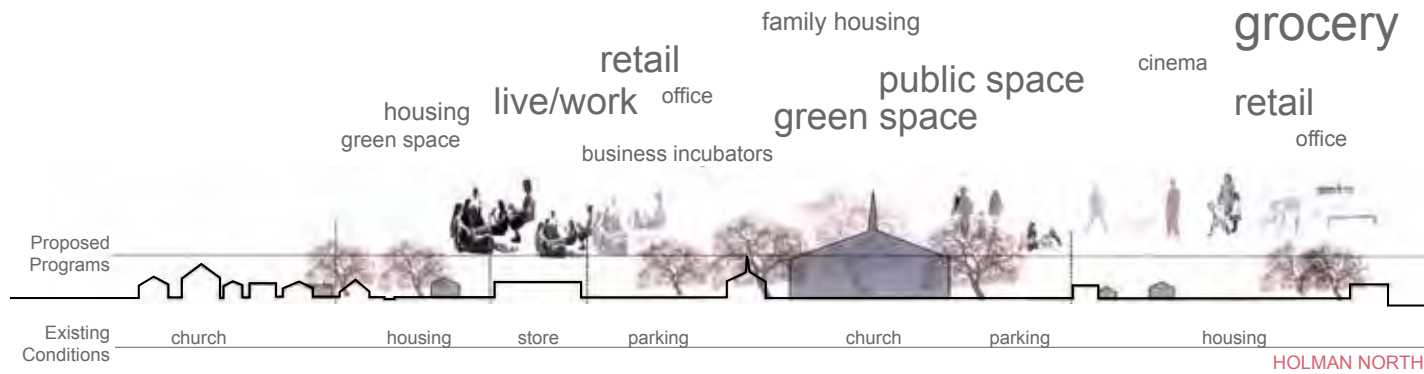
The basics of good streets are one of the keys to the future success of the Corridor at a district level and can work to connect the existing centers. Street improvements should occur in two phases, first Alabama and Scott, and second Holman, Tierwester, Sampson, and the north-south connector streets as illustrated in the diagram below. At a minimum, street improvements should include decent sidewalks, trees, and lighting.

BELOW: *Street Improvement Diagram*  
 Phasing:  
 Phase 1: Alabama and Scott  
 Phase 2: Holman, Tierwester, Sampson and North-South Connector Streets



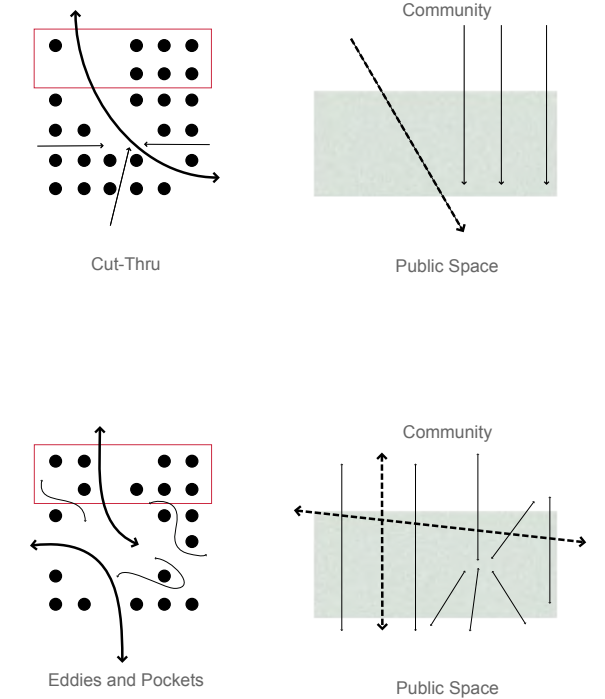
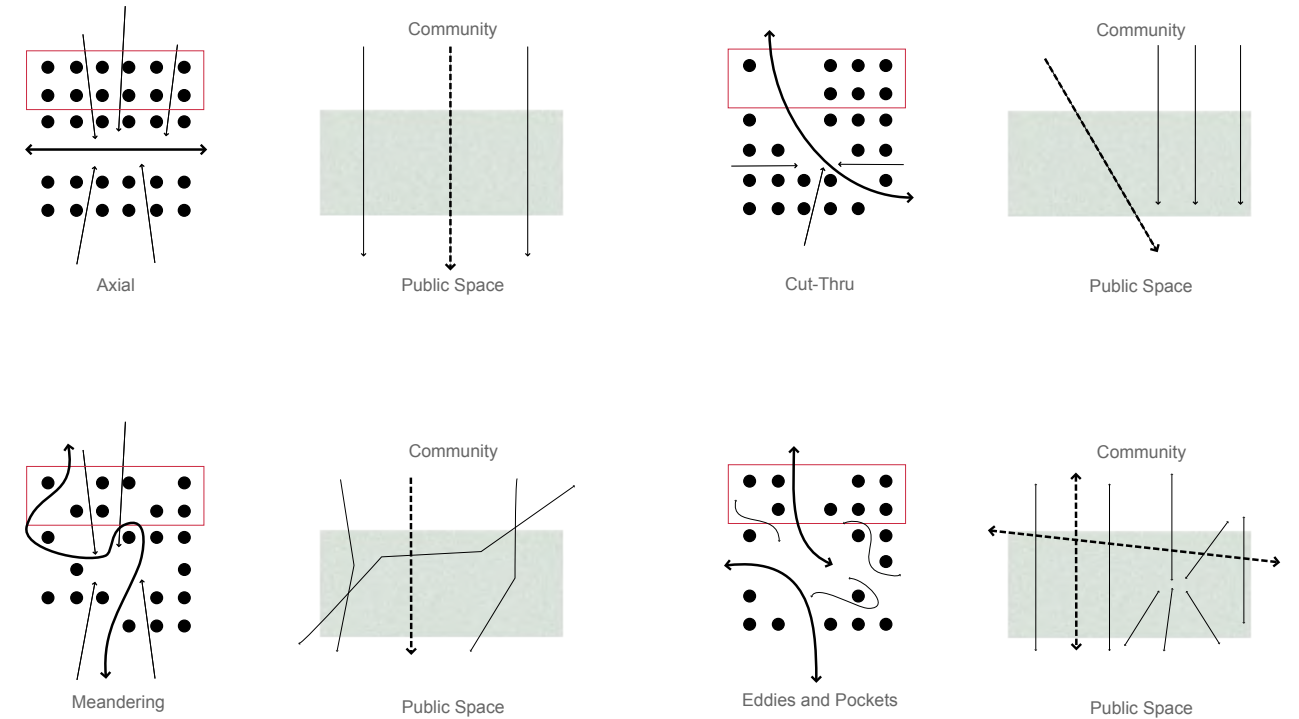
The existing small scale urban pattern of the Corridor is reinforced through new public spaces and paths that frame space and provide porosity

THIS PAGE, Below: Existing and Proposed Programs in the Holman Corridor  
 OPPOSITE PAGE: Diagrams of proposed public spaces

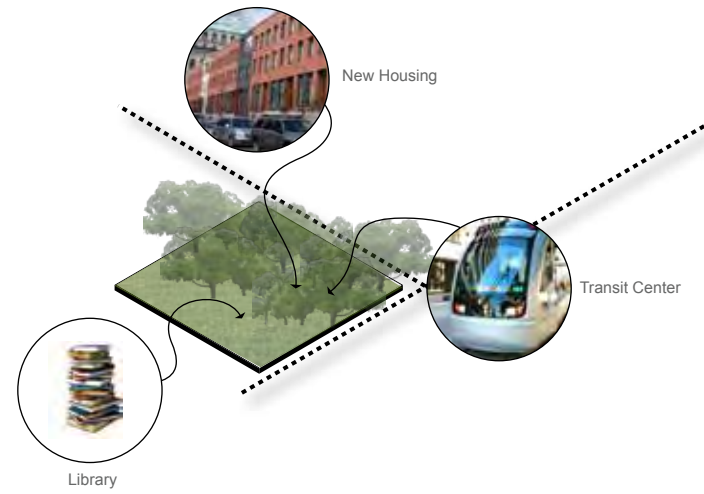


## Frame

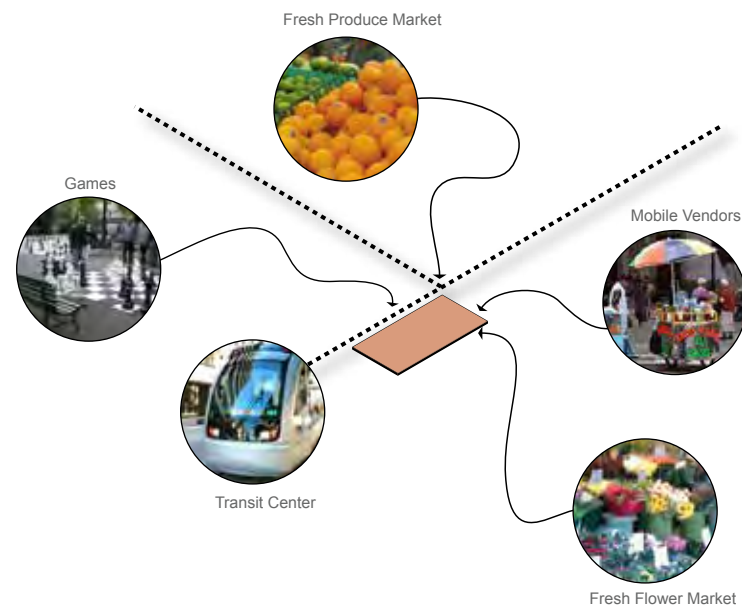
To frame is to define space, to use new programs to shape public spaces. In the Holman Corridor programs, including housing, retail, incubator spaces, and institutional spaces are used to frame and define porous public spaces that link the site to the neighborhood.







**Mixer 1: Public Green**  
 Introduce public spaces adjacent to existing and new civic programs. For example, urban green spaces sited adjacent to educational institutions, churches, and other public programs to create opportunities for synergy.



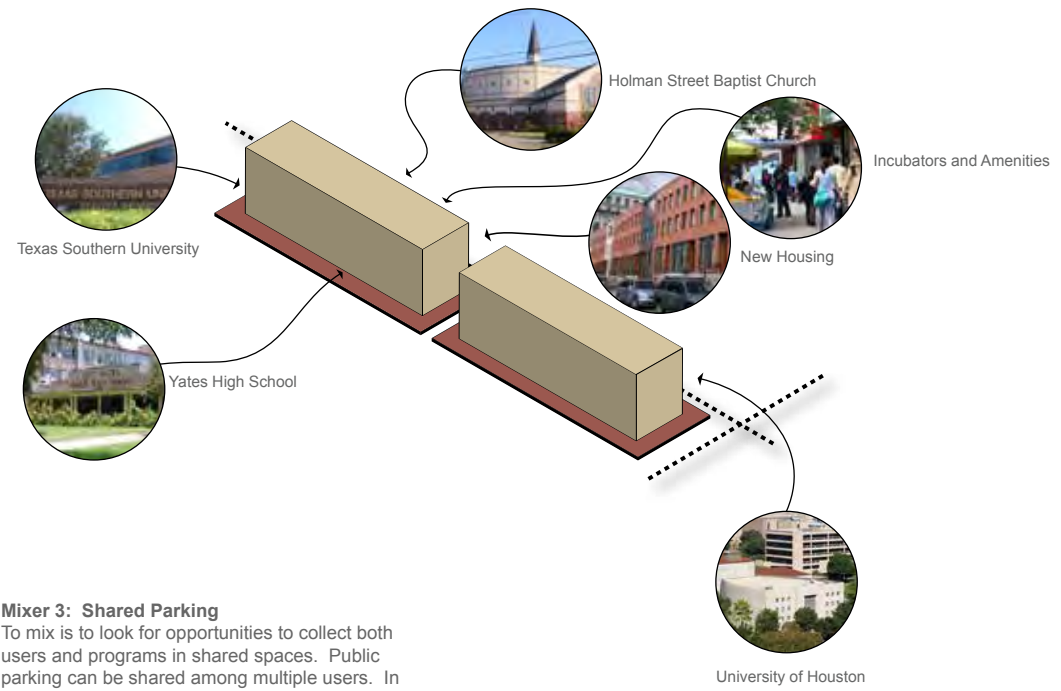
**Mixer 2: Transit Plaza**  
 Two transit centers will be constructed within the boundaries of the study area, at Tierwester and Alabama and Scott and Alabama. Introduce public spaces around these amenities and activities that all user groups can enjoy.

## Mix

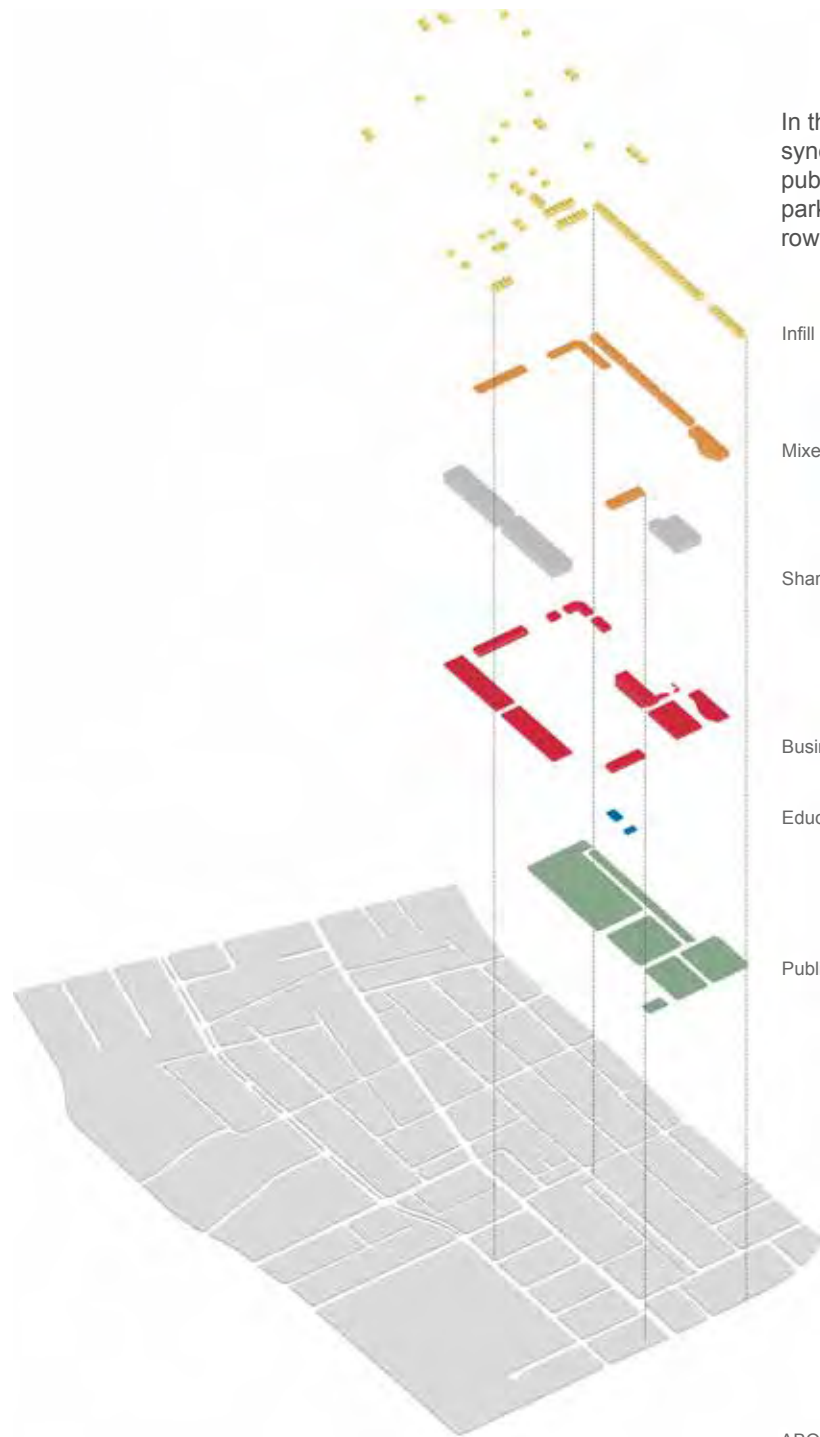
MIX works towards deconstructing boundaries in corridors and communities, and builds opportunities for both users and programs to come together in shared spaces. In other words, to MIX is to create places for interaction, to insert a link that connects and collects different users, and that introduces programs that build on the existing conditions.

In the Holman Corridor to Mix was to create public spaces built around civic programs that bring together all constituents—community residents, students, faculty, staff, and visitors. Potential programs for the “Mixers” include markets, vendors, sports courts, games, green spaces, and plazas.

The “Mixer” sites are adjacent to existing and proposed public spaces and programs such as the three educational campuses, places of worship, the proposed transit centers, and the library.



**Mixer 3: Shared Parking**  
 To mix is to look for opportunities to collect both users and programs in shared spaces. Public parking can be shared among multiple users. In the Holman Corridor these users could include Yates High School, Holman Street Baptist Church, universities, visitors, and others.



In the Holman Corridor mixing programs is a strategy to create synergy between users and activities. Across the site—public open space, plazas, business incubators, retail, shared parking, mixed rental housing, single-family housing, and rowhouses—are mixed across the porous site.

Infill Housing and Rowhouses

Mixed Rental Housing

Shared Parking

Business Incubators and Retail

Education and Social Services

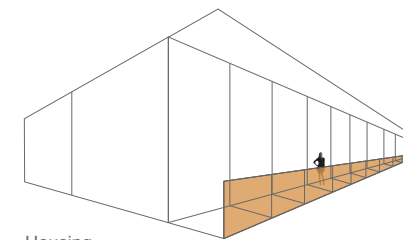
Public Open Space

ABOVE: Exploded Program Diagram

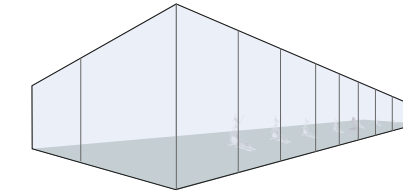
## Anchor

The Southeast Houston Community Development Corporation, and its parent organization Holman Street Baptist Church, provides a series of services to both residents and congregants in the Corridor. Additional program spaces and amenities should be provided for the expansion of existing programs, new programs, and to improve the economic and housing opportunities in the Corridor.

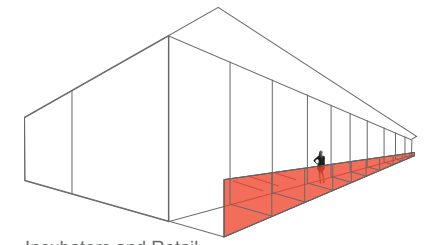
To this end, a series of anchors that include social services, education and job training programs, open space, business incubators, and retail are proposed.



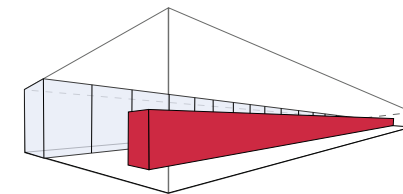
Housing



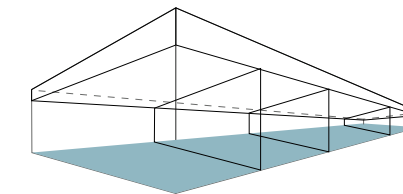
Health and Fitness



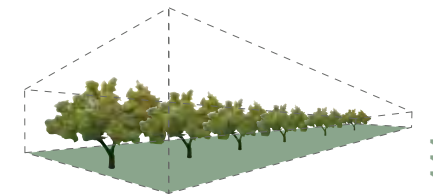
Incubators and Retail



Grocery



Education and Cultural Programs



Public Open Space



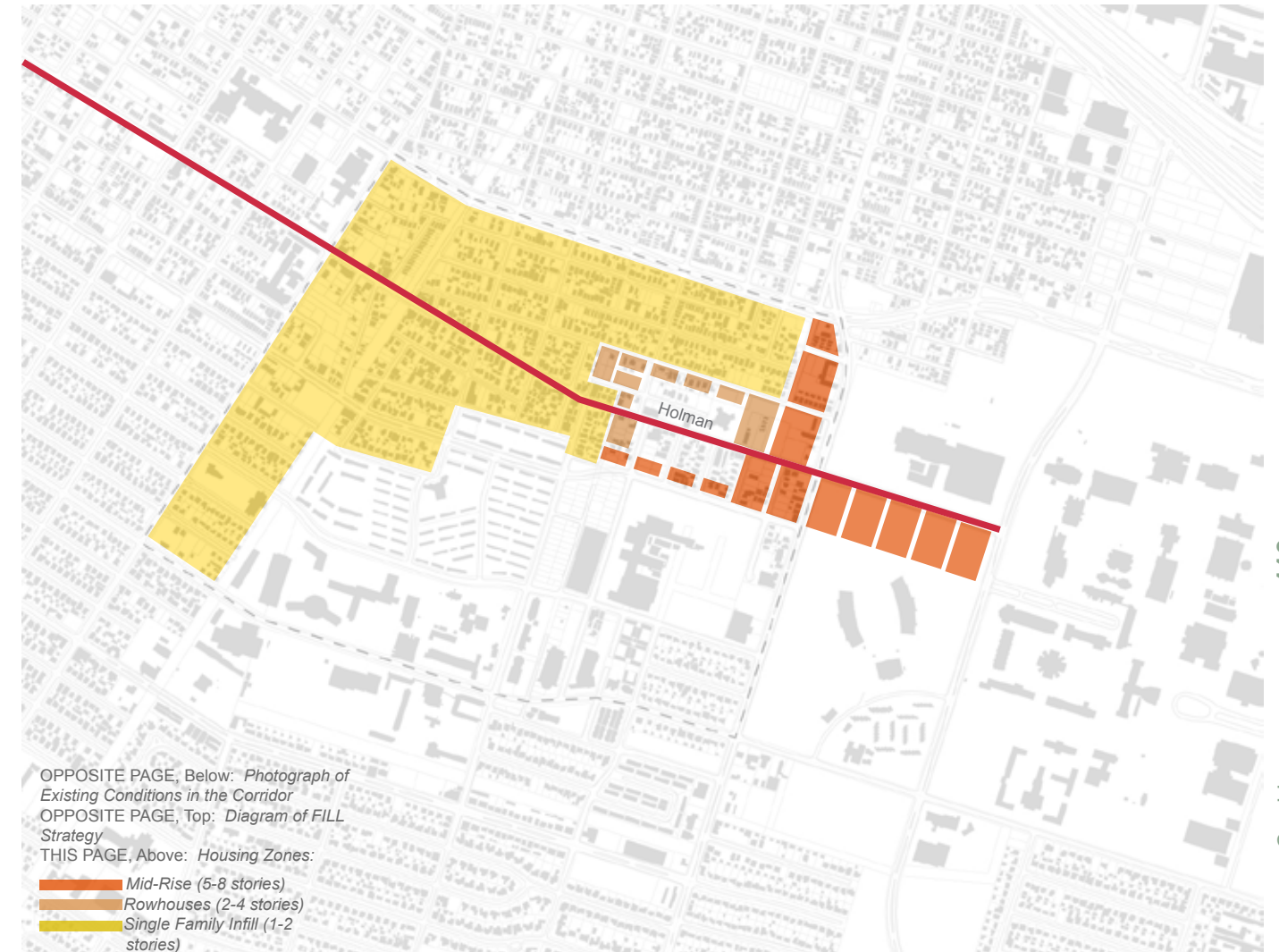
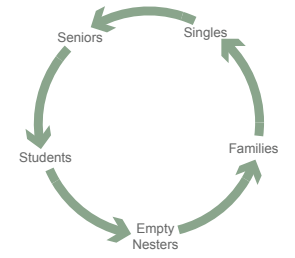
# Fill

The Holman Corridor has experienced large-scale loss of its built fabric over the decades. As the built fabric has disappeared so too has the basic services and amenities that served the community. Within a one-mile radius of the site there are more than 55,000 people living, learning, and working, yet residents and visitors have few options for groceries, dry cleaning, banking, dining, entertainment, or other amenities near the site. As a result, one of the primary strategies for the Corridor is to fill the gaps through incubator spaces for small entrepreneurs, retail and restaurant spaces to attract market tenants, and larger amenities such as grocers, pharmacies, and a small cinema. In addition to the retail and service facilities, office suites would support emerging professionals and include shared copy rooms, kitchens, and baths.

- Businesses to Incubate:**  
 Small Restaurants; Mobile Vendors and Food Carts; Car Detailing; Appliance and Small Machine Repair; Small Professional Offices; Beauty
- Businesses to Attract:**  
 Grocery Store; Pharmacy; Convenience Retail; Personal Services; Additional Dining Options (not fast food); Fresh Produce; Used or New Bookstore (non-campus); Cinema; Office Space; Entertainment; General Merchandise



To Fill in the Corridor is also to develop new models for affordable and market rate housing throughout the area that meets the needs of diverse household types, including housing for students, young singles, families, empty nesters, and seniors. Three housing zones were identified in the planning process: a zone for mid-rise multi-family; a zone for attached rowhouses; and a zone for single-family infill housing.



OPPOSITE PAGE, Below: *Photograph of Existing Conditions in the Corridor*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Top: *Diagram of FILL Strategy*  
 THIS PAGE, Above: *Housing Zones:*

- Mid-Rise (5-8 stories)
- Rowhouses (2-4 stories)
- Single Family Infill (1-2 stories)



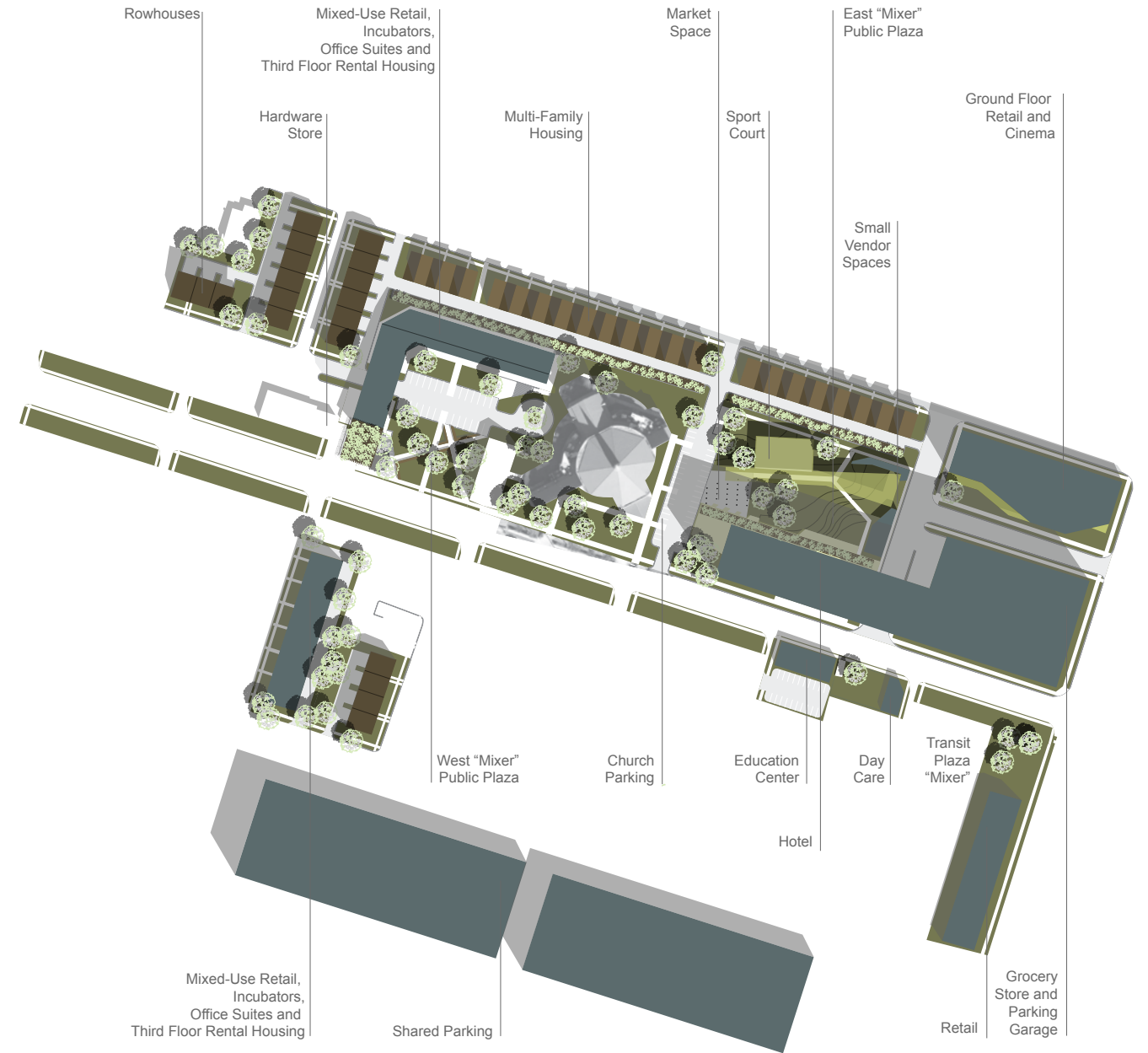
**Building on opportunities and forming partnerships is the foundation for the vision**

## Vision

The Holman Corridor vision was developed to support the diversity and character of this historic community while at the same time looking forward to the major changes that will fundamentally shape this area in the future, including transit.

The vision is organized around public spaces which create "mixing" opportunities on the site, as well as mixed programs of housing, business incubators, convenience retail, community services, and entertainment. The existing small scale urban pattern is reinforced through new streets and paths that provide accessibility and porosity. The project also works to negotiate between the small scale housing north and west of the site with the larger scale of the institutions to the south and east of the site.

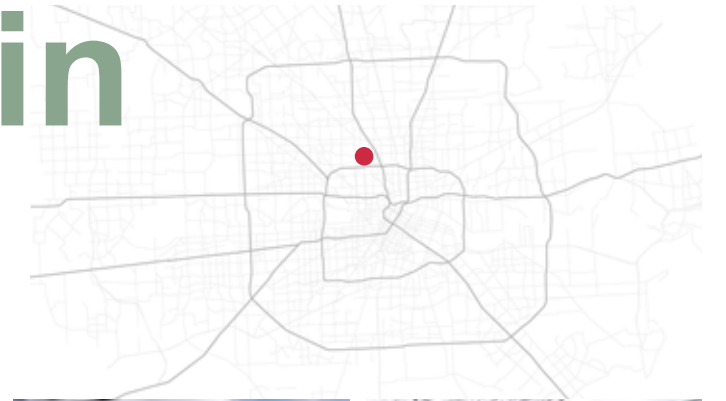
The project illustrates the potential of creating catalysts that both support the existing residents and conditions on the site and introduce new amenities and programs to enhance the overall quality of life for the diverse constituencies that live in the community or use the area daily.







# North Main



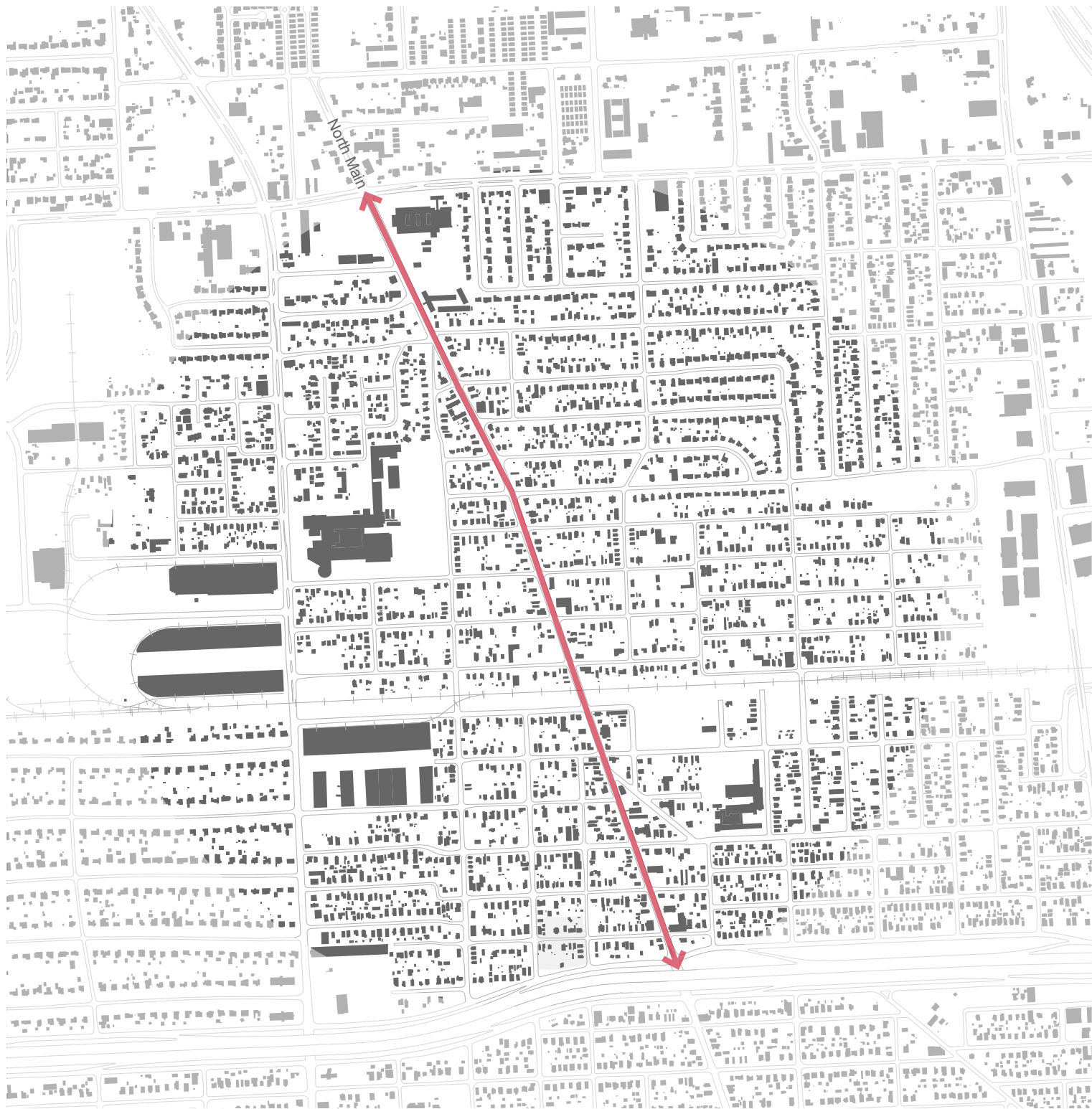
History can be a subject you learn in school, or something that fills your life. In Independence Heights, history is the glue that holds the community together, it is the foundation. Yet the community's rich history resides mostly in memories—there are few concrete remains.

Independence Heights was established in the early 1900s as black families moved outside of Houston's city limits during the era of Jim Crow. Originally developed by the Wright Land Company, Independence Heights was a community of small wood-frame homes, many built by resident craftsmen. In 1915 Independence Heights was incorporated as a city and was home to nearly 600 residents. On January 17 of that same year the *Houston Chronicle* noted, "The new city is unique in that, according to all reports, it will be the only incorporated town in Texas in which both citizenship and officials are practically all [African American]." The business district along what was then West Montgomery Avenue (now North Main) thrived in the early years. Early Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps identify

twenty stores and two churches lining the east and west sides of just four blocks along Main Street. The City of Houston reports that in 1928 "there were 40 black-owned businesses in Independence Heights including: grocery stores, restaurants, a lumber company, a watch repair shop, ice cream parlors, a cleaning and pressing shop, a drug store, a black smith shop, law offices and an electrical shop." The anchor of civic life in Independence Heights was the General Mercantile Cooperative (later renamed Burgess Hall after the first mayor of the city), a cooperative general store and meeting hall owned and operated by the community. It is one of the few remaining structures from that era along North Main, though it is in extremely poor condition. Independence Heights was annexed by the City of Houston in 1929.

Today, there are few businesses along North Main, much of the housing is old and in disrepair, and the infrastructure is neglected, yet those with roots in Independence Heights have a vision for a future built on the strengths of the community's past.





# North Main: Context

The North Main Corridor was once the “Main Street” of Independence Heights. The neighborhood is located in north Houston, about five miles from downtown and is easily accessible to major freeways and employment centers. Over 14,000 people call the neighborhood home and it is most densely populated in the southern portion, the historic center of the community, where there is a more traditional urban pattern. Two historic district designations apply to this section of the community, a national and a state. Crosstimbers is the contemporary commercial corridor of the neighborhood, but like North Main, the street is suffering from abandonment and vacancy.

In 2000 the median household income in Independence Heights was just under \$18,000 a year, less than half of the City of Houston’s median household income of \$36,616. The disparity in the economic resources of the community has impacted the housing stock substantially. 12% of the housing units in Independence Heights are vacant.



ABOVE: *Historic photos of Independence Heights*  
 BELOW: *Map of National and State Historic Districts*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Left: *Figure Ground*







Independence Heights faces a number of constraints that have limited the potential for transformative neighborhood change over the decades, including disinvestment, flooding risks, and aging infrastructure.

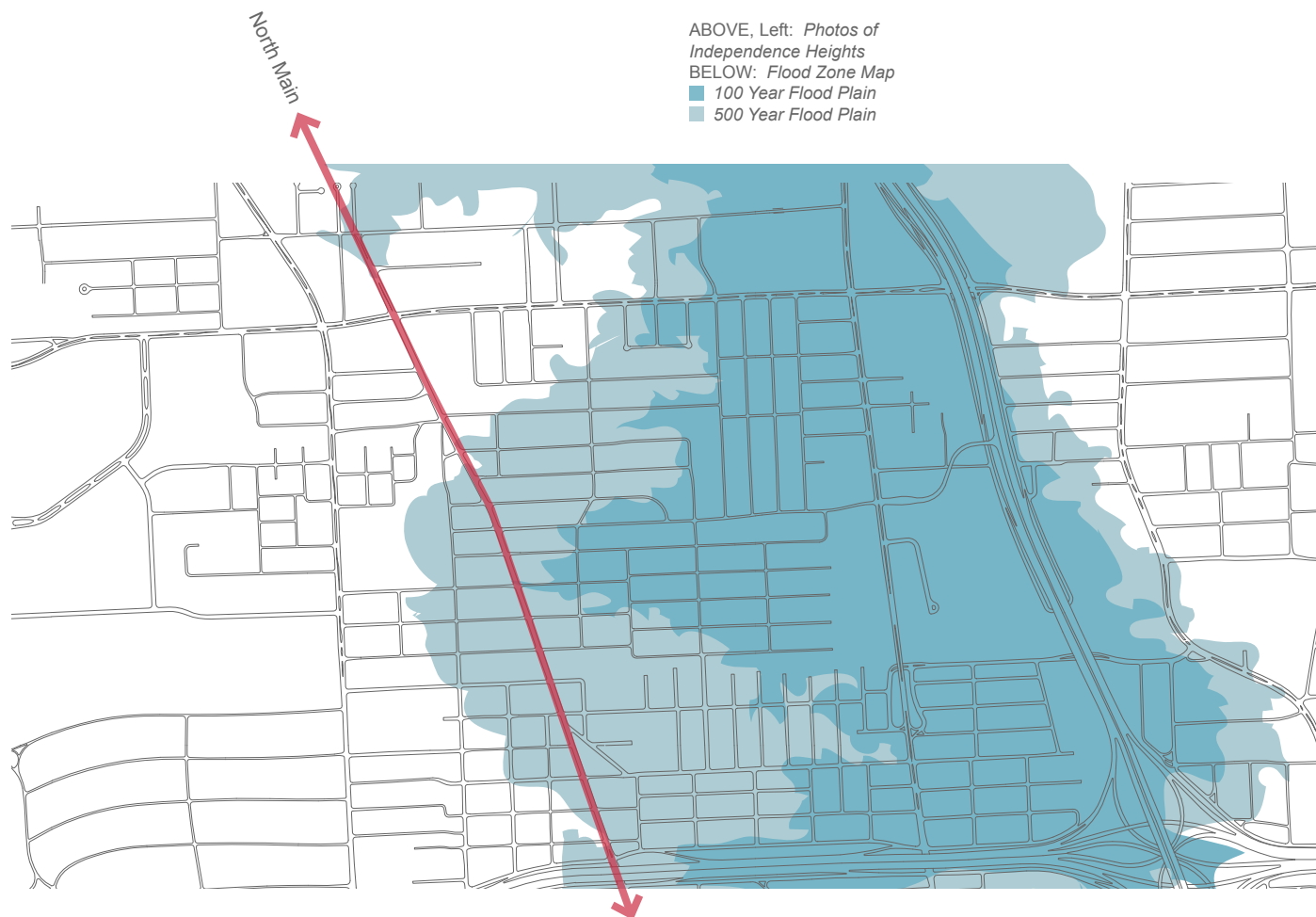
The majority of Independence Heights, just west of Little White Oak Bayou, is inside either the 100 or 500-year flood plain, a significant barrier for both new housing and economic development.

North Main was once lined with shops and stores, today the street dissolves into the abundant parking lots that line the Corridor. Most of this parking serves the churches in the neighborhood. Independence Heights has 85 churches, one church for every 167 residents. The abandonment along North Main combined with the church parking has significantly eroded the street, and today it has very little definition. There are three neighborhood parks and five schools in Independence Heights: Burrs, Hohl, Allen and Kennedy Elementary Schools, and Booker T. Washington High School. Kennedy Elementary will be closed in 2011 and finding a new use for the school building is important to the community.

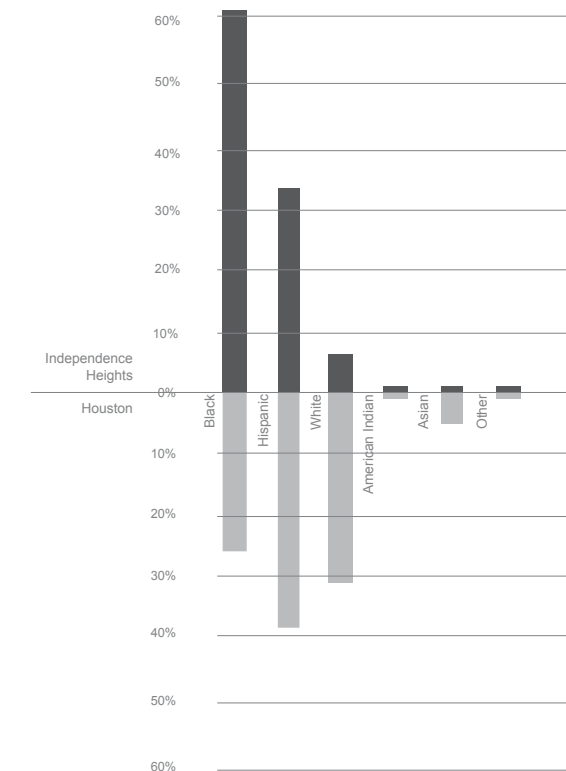


**Independence Heights, incorporated in 1915, was the first city established by and for African-Americans in Houston and in Texas**

ABOVE, Left: *Photos of Independence Heights*  
 BELOW: *Flood Zone Map*  
 ■ 100 Year Flood Plain  
 ■ 500 Year Flood Plain



ABOVE, Right: *Photos of Independence Heights*  
 BELOW, Left: *Map of Churches and Parking Lots*  
 BELOW, Right: *Population Ethnicity (2000)*

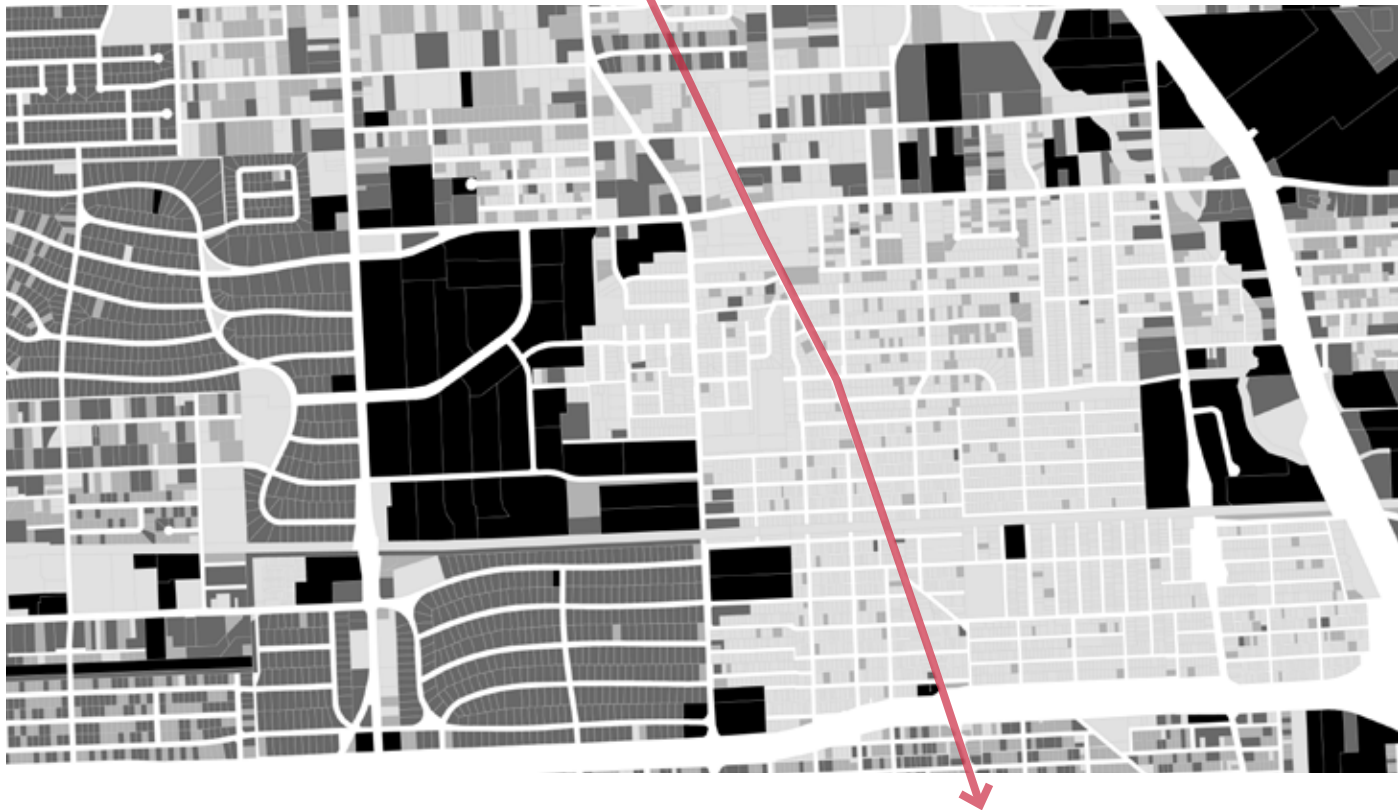


Independence Heights has 160 acres of vacant land, approximately 7% of all land in the neighborhood. Vacant properties are concentrated in the southern portion of the neighborhood. In addition, there are 1,004 tax delinquent parcels in Independence Heights. Many of these parcels are vacant, and over 400 parcels have been delinquent for 20 years or more. The Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority program to distribute these lots for affordable housing and other community amenities is an opportunity for change.

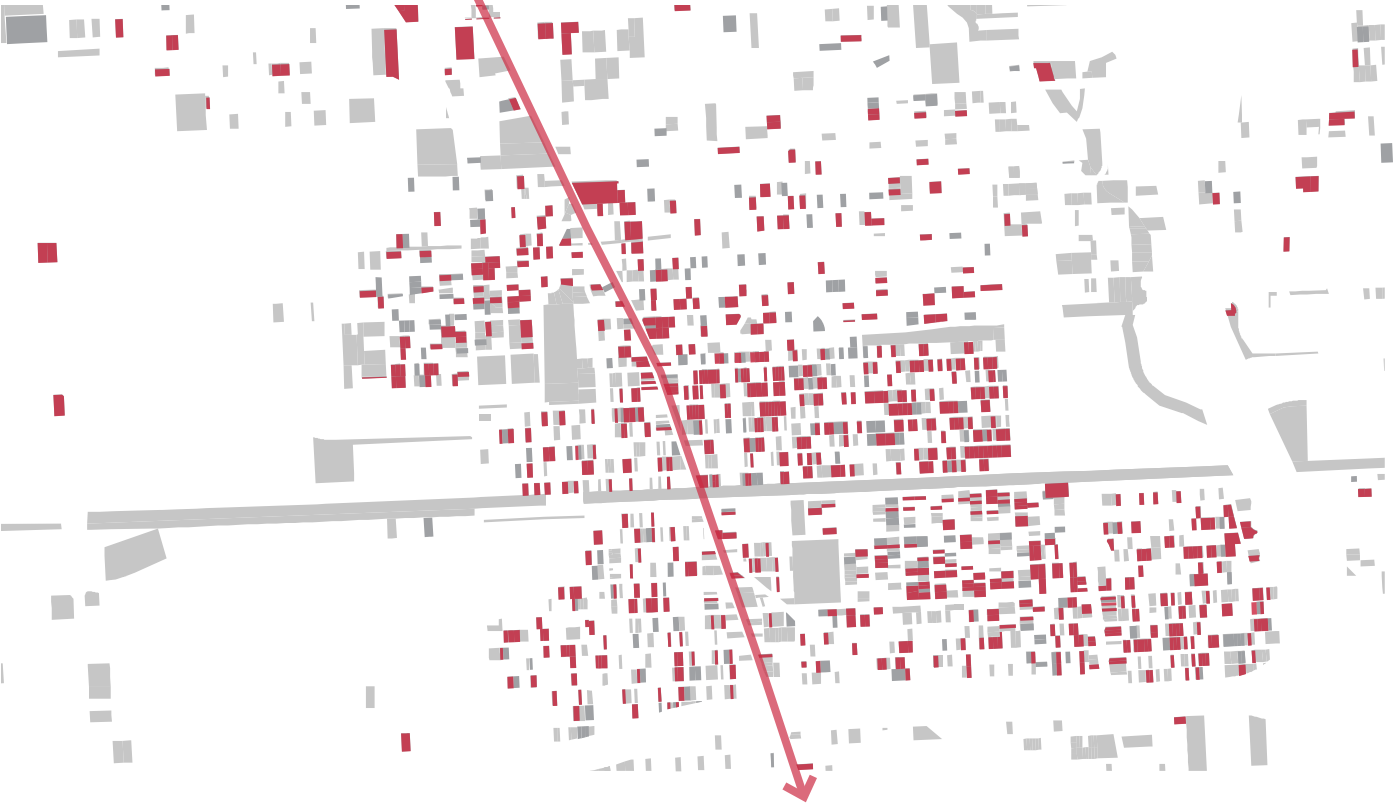
Appraised land values along the North Main Corridor are very affordable. There are a substantial number of parcels worth less than \$50,000. The low cost of land, relative to the cost of property in surrounding neighborhoods, provides opportunities for new investments in affordable housing, community and public amenities, and economic development.



BELOW: 2004 HCAD Appraised Land Values



BELOW: Map of Vacant and Tax Delinquent Properties



# North Main: Strategies

Independence Heights is a historic community, with strong civic leaders. The neighborhood has enormous potential based on these characteristics, yet constraints have limited the potential for the neighborhood, including disinvestment, flooding risks, and aging infrastructure.

Based on the existing strengths and weaknesses in the community the primary goal was to build on the strong history, culture, and community in the neighborhood by focusing on innovative housing, creating social and civic centers, and promoting the economic independence of the neighborhood.

The strategies developed for the North Main Corridor focus on housing, the public realm, community anchors, economic development, and civic gathering places. Each of the strategies build on the foundation of history and the strength of the people.

Build on the strong history, culture, and community in the neighborhood by focusing on innovative housing, creating social and civic centers for the community, and promoting the economic independence of the neighborhood



**SOW**  
Build partnerships both within the community and outside of it in order to reach the vision



**SPARK**  
Program civic events in the church parking lots such as health fairs, community food drives, and markets



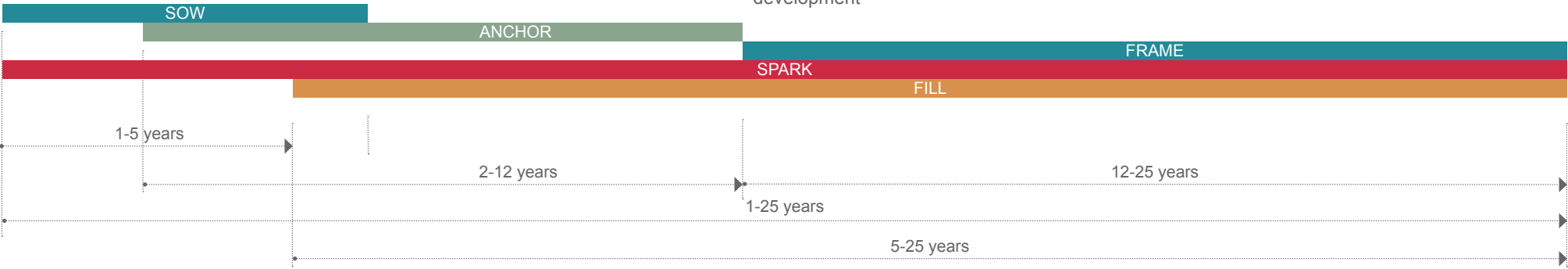
**FILL**  
Continue to infill vacant and tax delinquent lots with affordable housing while experimenting with new models of economic development



**ANCHOR**  
Finalize plans for civic buildings that create anchors for the community, including a library and community center



**FRAME**  
Create a sense of place along North Main that builds on the area's history and culture







## Sow

Affordable Housing, new models of economic development, community anchors, and civic amenities are the primary strategies for change in the North Main Corridor. To achieve these strategies strong partnerships must be formed with organizations from across the spectrum, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, local churches, community-based organizations, and funders. These partnerships are the foundation for a new future for Independence Heights.

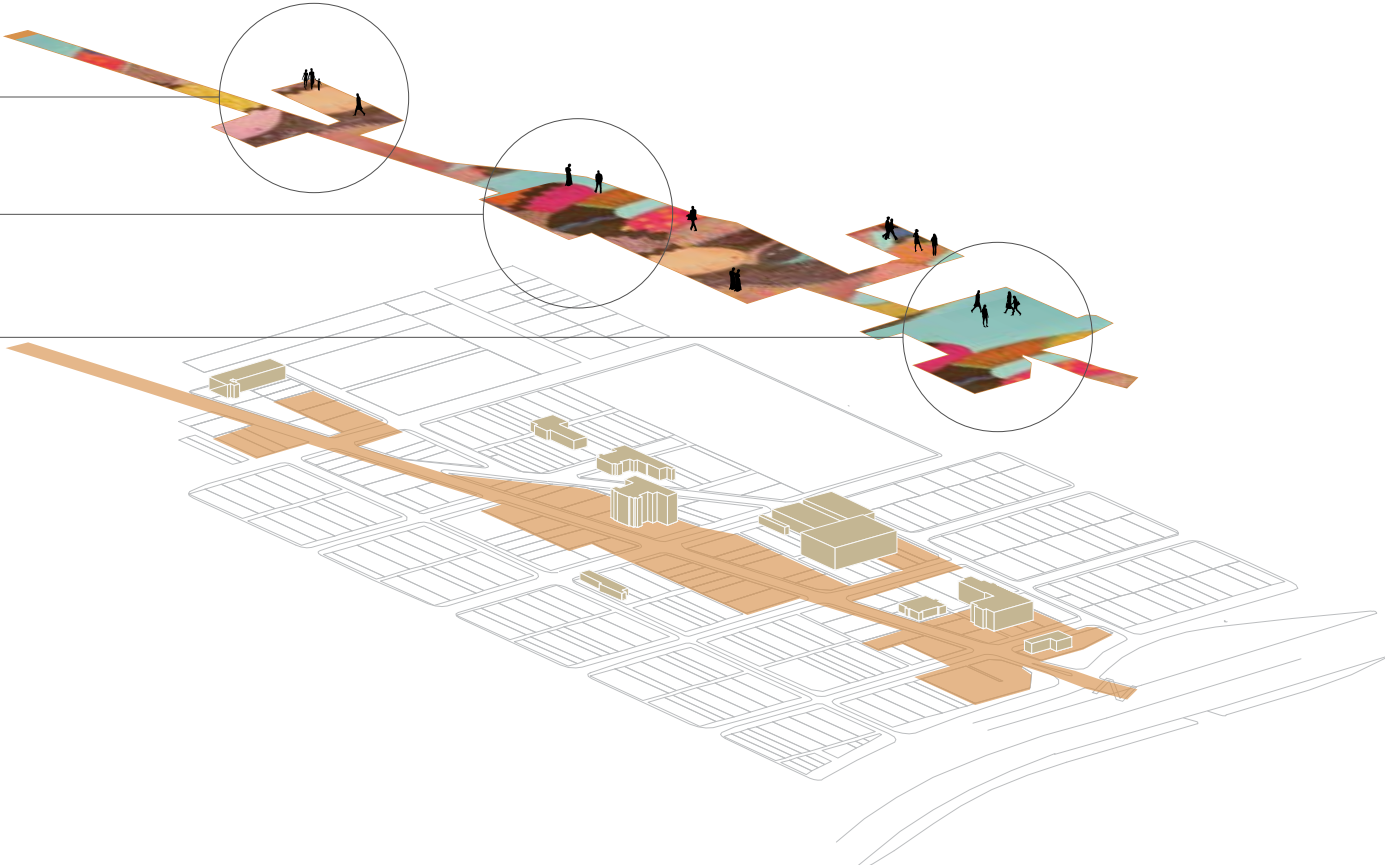


# Spark

To spark in the North Main Corridor means to develop the partners, strategies, and programs to activate the abundant church parking lots with civic events and public art.

The church parking lots, lining North Main, are vacant most of the time, with the exception of Sunday. A schedule of regular events and activities could activate these spaces and provide opportunities for civic gathering. The event programs, organized by local church congregations and community-based organizations, could include: health fairs, food drives, farmers markets, domino tournaments, bake sales, holiday bazaars, chess and checkers tournaments, cook-offs, craft lessons and sales, community garage sales, youth dance-offs, gardening contests, DIY home repair days, potluck community picnics, and more. In addition, a public art program for the parking lots should be developed focused on highlighting the community's culture and history.

To spark in the North Main Corridor means to develop the partners, strategies, and programs to activate the abundant church parking lots with civic events and transform the community with public art



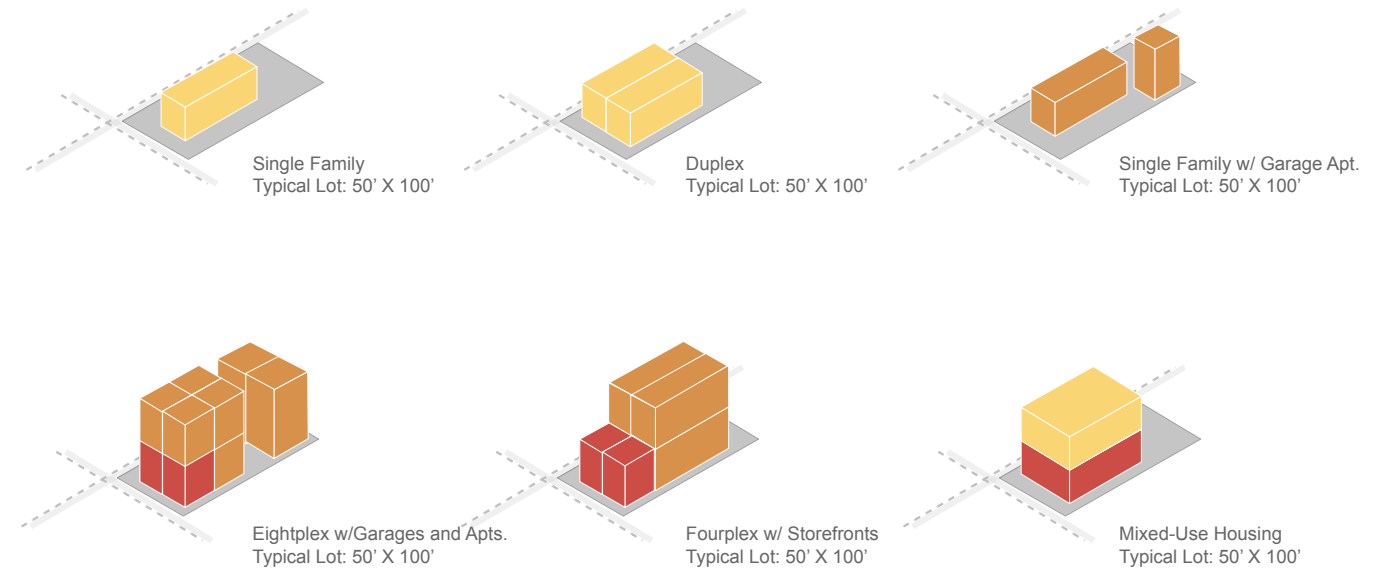
THIS PAGE, From Top to Bottom: *View of Proposed Shaded Domino Area; View of Proposed Market; View of Proposed Chess and Checkers Plaza*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Top: *Spark Concept Diagram*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Bottom: *Existing Parking Lots*

The existing vacant and tax delinquent lots in Independence Heights have the capacity to support 12% population growth over time, this is just over the Houston-Galveston Area Council's Population and Employment Forecast for the area which predicts 11% growth by 2040



## Fill

Because of the abundance of vacant land in Independence Heights infilling is a key strategy to piece the community back together. Three strategies for infill housing were identified. First, to continue infilling vacant lots with affordable single-family housing. Second, to develop creative combinations of attached housing, such as duplexes, fourplexes, and garage apartments. Third, to develop higher density mixed-use live/work housing along North Main to help define the street edge and provide entrepreneurial opportunities with small storefronts. In each case creative mixes of owners and renters should be tested to maximize the potential. All housing models will have to take special consideration of the community's extensive flood plain.







THIS PAGE, Left: *Proposed Housing and Mixed-Use Infill*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Right: *Existing Conditions Along North Main*

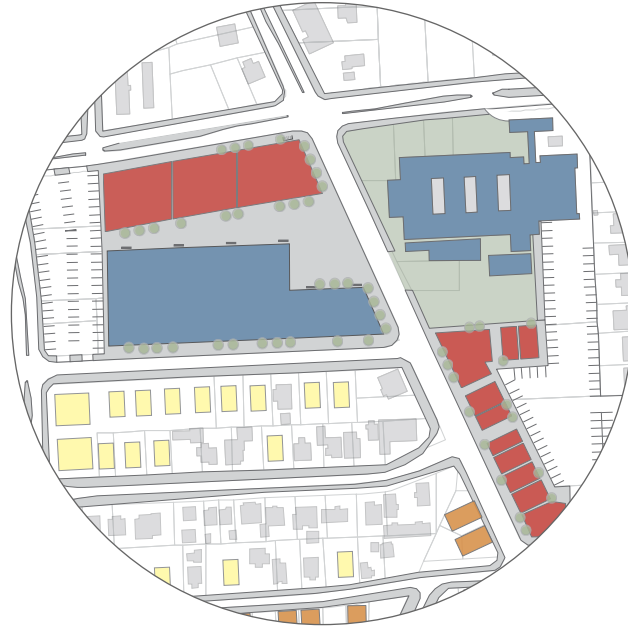
## Fill

Throughout the U.S. communities are returning to co-operative models for basic retail needs, including groceries, general stores, and banking services. Many of these experiments are funded through community investors and operate as non-profit entities while providing employment to area residents. As a result, it is a model that is particularly appropriate for areas that have been almost completely disinvested. Independence Heights' historic Mercantile Hall operated as a co-operative in the early 1900s, and a return to this model could meet residents' basic needs, serve as a mechanism to keep dollars flowing through the community, and provide employment.

Early progress has been made in Independence Heights to this end. A coalition of churches in the Corridor have chartered a new credit union to serve the community as the neighborhood currently does not have any banking services. And a co-operative grocery has the potential to meet residents' needs and attract, over time, additional convenience retail, a pharmacy, and other amenities.

In many communities faced with disinvestment new models for economic development need to be explored focused on community co-operatives, local entrepreneurs, and new markets

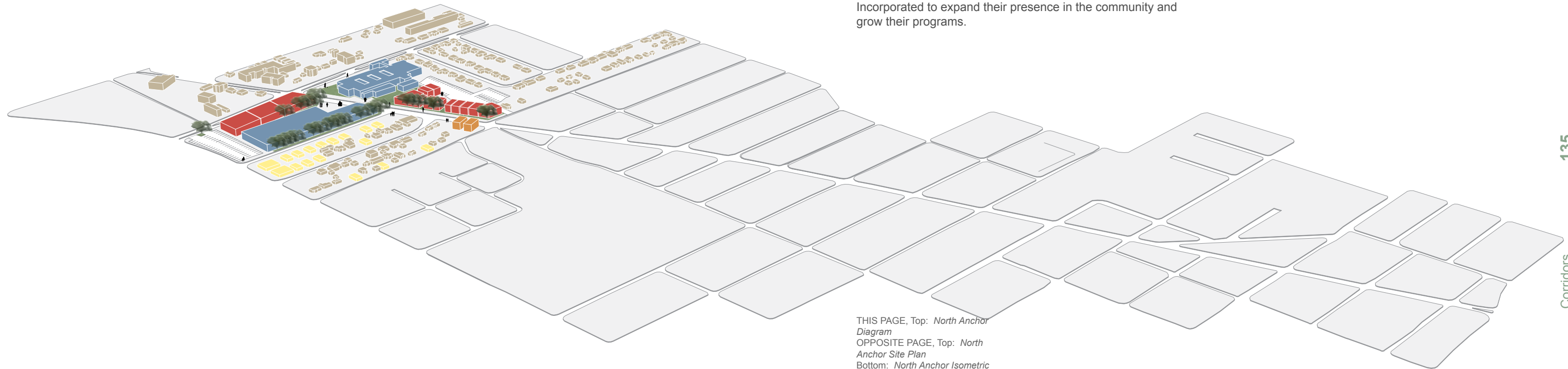




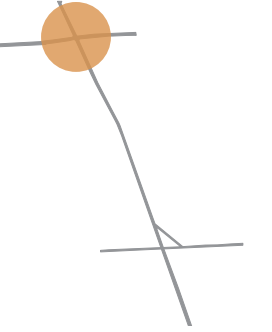
## Anchor

Anchors are public buildings and civic spaces that provide a center for the community. The vision for North Main builds on two anchor points, concentrating the efforts to transform the community with the hope that change will ripple throughout the rest of the community in time. The north anchor point, North Main at Crosstimbers, is envisioned to have a new e-library, a co-operative grocery, credit union, and additional retail. The south anchor point is people-centered, focused on developing green spaces, public plazas, and community amenities that provide gathering places.

The north anchor at the intersection of Crosstimbers and North Main has two opportunity sites. The first site, on the southwest corner, is a 4.5 acre property owned by Harris County Flood Control District, that is the proposed home of a new e-library, co-operative grocery, community credit union organized by local churches, a pharmacy, and other convenience retail. The second site, on the opposite corner of Crosstimbers and North Main, is home to Kennedy Elementary School, which is scheduled to be closed in 2011. The 75,000 square foot structure is a perfect opportunity for Neighborhood Centers, Incorporated to expand their presence in the community and grow their programs.



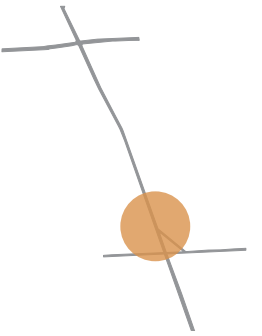
THIS PAGE, Top: *North Anchor Diagram*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Top: *North Anchor Site Plan*  
 Bottom: *North Anchor Isometric*





# Anchor

Independence Heights lacks civic and public spaces that provide places for gathering. The south anchor site, at the intersection of Link Road and North Main, is in the historic center of the community, adjacent to the historic General Mercantile Hall, an arts magnet elementary school, and public park. A large number of vacant lots and under utilized church parking lots also characterize the site. Building on the existing spaces adjacent to the site, and incorporating additional green spaces, public plazas, and pedestrian amenities creates a community campus, or a heart.



THIS PAGE, Below: *South Anchor Site Plan*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Top Right: *South Anchor Diagram*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Middle: *Concept Sections*  
 OPPOSITE PAGE, Bottom: *South Anchor Perspective*



Section through small green space for playing dominoes under the shade



Section through Main Plaza on the site of the historic Mercantile Hall, with Bocce Ball Court and Chess Board on the sidewalk







## Vision

The vision for the North Main Corridor is based on the introduction of catalysts that build local entrepreneurship, enhance civic engagement, provide affordable housing, and launch community programs that are anchors for the neighborhood and its residents.

The vision builds on two anchor points, concentrating the efforts to transform the community with the hope that change will ripple throughout the rest of the community in time. The north anchor point, North Main at Crosstimbers will become home to the proposed new e-library, Neighborhood Centers Incorporated, a co-operative grocery, credit union, and additional retail. The south anchor point is people-centered, focused on developing green spaces, public plazas, and pedestrian amenities that provide gathering places. In addition, the vision depends on a creative mix of new infill housing that can meet the projected population growth in the area, and also meet the needs of diverse households including single-family housing, multi-family housing, rental duplexes, and live/work units.

**NEW HOUSING:** Continue to infill vacant and tax delinquent lots with affordable housing while experimenting with different residential models.

**MAIN STREET:** Improve the local street infrastructure, including public art, streetscaping, and lighting to create a sense of place along North Main that builds on the area's history and culture.

**COMMUNITY ANCHORS:** Finalize plans for civic buildings that create anchors for the community, including the library and community center.

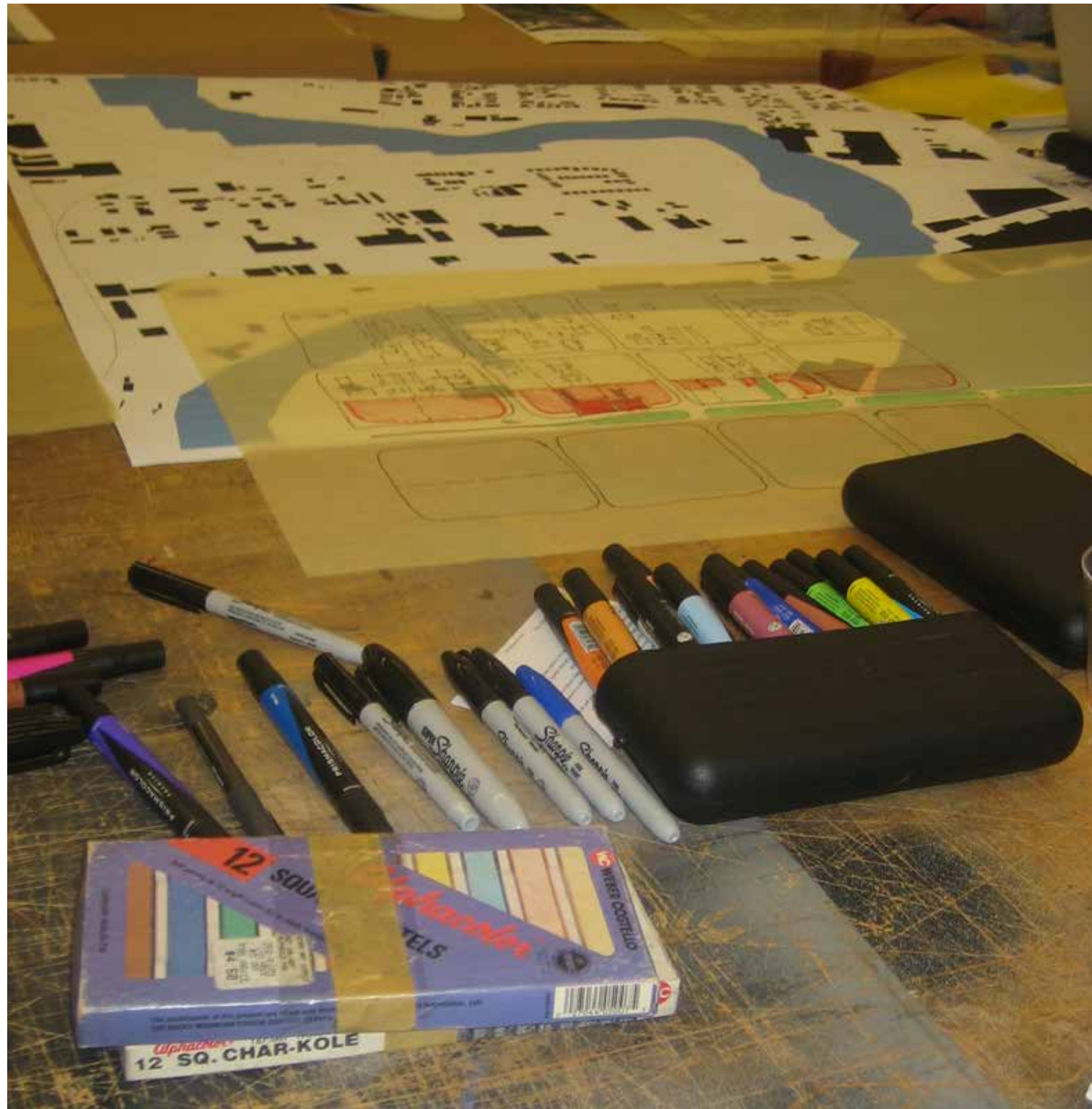
**LOCAL MARKETS:** Develop new models for economic development that build on the community's 'co-operative' history, supports local entrepreneurs, and opens up new markets.

**CIVIC ASSEMBLY:** Develop partners, strategies, and programs to activate the abundant church parking lots with civic events such as health fairs, food drives, and markets.









## Collaborative Community Design Initiative

The **Collaborative Community Design Initiative** is a partnership between the Community Design Resource Center at the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation Houston, and the Urban Land Institute Houston District Council in collaboration with our community partners and their residents and stakeholders, the Greater Northside Management District, the Greater East End Management District, the Southeast Houston Community Development Corporation, and the Independence Heights Redevelopment Council.

The project is sponsored through generous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Urban Land Institute, and CapitalOne, with additional support for the project from the Local Initiatives Support Corporation Houston, the Urban Land Institute Houston District Council, Southeast Houston Community Development Corporation, and the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture at the University of Houston. We would like to thank all of our partners and supporters.

### Community Design Resource Center

Susan Rogers, Director  
 Rafael Longoria  
 Research Assistants:  
 Maria Oran  
 Natasha Ostaszewski  
 Jay Taylor

### Participants

Gary Altergott  
 Marie Arcos  
 Keiji Asakura  
 Danny Asberry  
 Derek Avery  
 Laura Bailey  
 Minnette Boesel  
 Antoine Bryant  
 Jolea Bryant  
 Doug Childers  
 Melissa Crispin  
 Tanya Debose  
 Karen Derr  
 Joy Draper  
 Ed Edwards  
 Marc El-Khouri  
 Stephan Fairfield  
 Raouf Farid  
 Martha Ferguson  
 D.V. Sonny Flores  
 Kiza Forgie

Stephen Fox  
 Lianka Gallegos  
 Robert Gallegos  
 Mina Gerall  
 Lance Gilliam  
 Edward Gonzalez  
 Aaron Grant  
 Ric Guenther  
 Myriam Habib  
 Michael Halpin  
 Stanley Harris  
 Ruqiya Imtiaz-Uddin  
 Deloris Marie Johnson  
 Pastor Manson B. Johnson  
 Napoleon Johnson  
 Evelyn Jones  
 Mireille Kameni  
 Ivory Kelley  
 Sheila Jackson Lee  
 Alex Lahti  
 Joe Lambert

Chima Maduka  
 Ernesto Maldonado  
 Julia Mandell  
 Marcus Martinez  
 Sylvia Medina  
 Kirk Michaelis  
 Tammy Michaelis  
 John Moning, Jr.  
 Mardie Paige  
 Camilo Parra  
 Hayley Pallister  
 Allison Parrott  
 Chris Patterson  
 Brit Perkins  
 Patrick Peters  
 Trevor Piper  
 Tressa Powell  
 Rebecca Reyna-Tamez  
 David Robinson  
 Elissa Robinson  
 Margaret Robinson

Blanca Salinas-Saldaña  
 Chula Ross Sanchez  
 Diane Schenke  
 Bayardo Selva  
 Eusebius Small  
 Scott Smith  
 Mark Sonnier  
 Christof Spieler  
 Steve Spillette  
 Matt Stovall  
 Ann Taylor  
 Amanda Timm  
 William Trevino  
 Julie Truong  
 Evan Vargas  
 Hedy Wolpa  
 Paul Wright  
 Sanja Zilic



