2 University Planning Strategy

This chapter introduces the Planning Strategy and describes the Pedestrian Realm/ Mobility Plan, the Land Development Concept Plan and Infrastructure Plan.

F2.1

The Combined Pedestrian Realm/ Mobility/ Land Development Concept Plan

The diagram on the facing page illustrates the combined Pedestrian Realm/Mobility/Land Development Concept Plan for the University Corridor. The Plan for the University Corridor illustrates broader elements of the corridor that will eventually result in development directly related to transit and connections to the surrounding neighborhood on key streets.

The distinguishing characteristic of the University Corridor is in the diversity of the existing conditions. The Corridor is comprised of three distinct areas.

The eastern end of the Corridor extends from the Eastwood Transit Center to the Wheeler/Main Station. The University of Houston and Texas Southern University are a natural draw for the community and provide an important bank of transit users. The proposed station locations are closely spaced and development opportunities exist at the stations as well in several intersections along the route. An important portion of the Transit Street runs through a closely-knit residential area that needs to have special design consideration to provide the proper scale and landscape to enhance the neighborhood.

The middle segment of the Corridor is located in an area that currently has some mixed use development in place and is seeing more in the Upper Kirby area. Station locations are located within ¼ mile of each other, providing the opportunity for a continuous pedestrian environment. This part of the Transit Street is the narrowest and creative approaches to developing a consistent pedestrian realm will be necessary.

The western end of the Corridor is located on Westpark Drive - a major street that is not at a pedestrian scale. The size of the street coupled with widely spaced station locations will not provide an ideal environment for pedestrians. In this area the pedestrian realm will be scaled to fast moving traffic and lengthy crossing times. There is the need to consider closer spacing for the stations over time. The Hillcroft Transit Station is an appropriate location for Transit Oriented Development and major park and ride facilities.

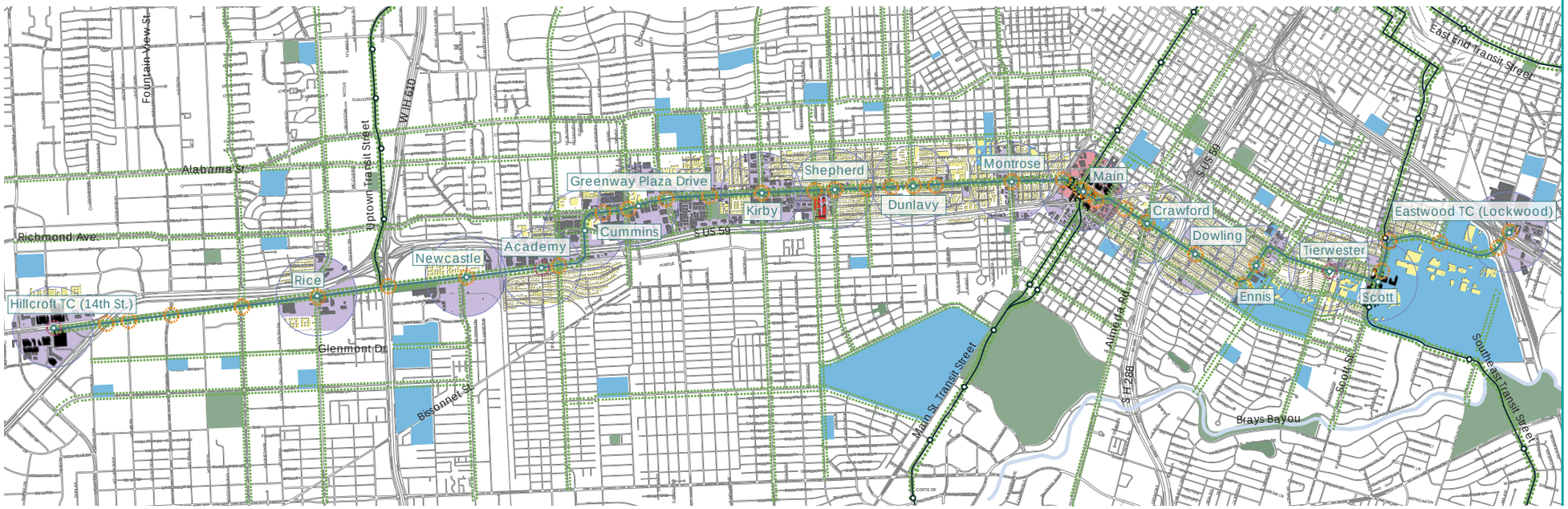
It is important to create strong connections to nearby neighborhoods along the University Corridor. These connections will reinforce pedestrian habits, especially within ¼ mile of the Transit Street. Special attention should be given to the Westpark Drive linkages, since as the Transit Street is not located within the residential neighborhoods.

The potential for Transit Oriented Development is most evident along Richmond Avenue, at the Wheeler/Main Station, the Hillcroft Transit Center and U of H (see F2.3.1).

Pedestrian Realm/Mobility/Development Concept Plan

University

- Stable Area
- Opportunity Area 1 - Downtown
- Opportunity Area 2 - Corridor
- Park
- School
- Existing Pedestrian Crossings
- Link Streets
- Demonstration Plans
- Stations
- Proposed Pedestrian Crossing



F2.2

Pedestrian Realm/ Mobility Plan

The Pedestrian Realm/Mobility Plan illustrates recommendations to improve and enhance the pedestrian realm and mobility conditions within the University Corridor. The goal of these recommendations is to provide a safe, vibrant, attractive, and highly functional pedestrian experience along the University Corridor Transit Street, adjacent to the proposed Transit Stations/Transit Centers and along key connecting streets.

Beautiful, tree lined, pedestrian focused streets are the framework of the Pedestrian Realm/Mobility Plan. Streets comprise a large percentage of public space and, as such, must be enhanced and treated as important public places. When streets function well, they are lively places where cafes, shops, public art, and gardens create vibrant outdoor spaces. This is where the eyes of the community view activities of the street and serve as the frontage for developments.

There are several streets that form the University Transit Street. These streets are all recommended for pedestrian realm enhancements: Westpark, Richmond, Wheeler, Ennis, Alabama, Scott, and Elgin. Furthermore, streets intersecting the proposed University Corridor Transit Line will provide access to and from the surrounding facilities, businesses, and communities to the Stations. These pedestrian connections are also recommended for enhancements.

The enhancements should include tree planting, aiming to create a continuous pedestrian canopy. Street trees will clearly identify the major streets and public places, and will provide shade to clear, wide, continuous sidewalks extending from back-of-curb to building fronts along the Transit Streets and connecting streets. In addition, pedestrian-level lighting and street furnishings are appropriate on these streets.

The intent of this pedestrian-oriented street hierarchy is to provide an integrated, multi-modal transportation network for all residents and businesses that is safe, convenient, and efficient.

Ample pedestrian crosswalks are crucial to the perception of accessibility to both sides of the University Corridor Transit Line. Great care must be taken to provide safe, well-marked, and unimpeded crossing opportunities, especially within retail zones. Bulb-outs reduce crossing distances and should be designed where on-street parking is proposed. Additional crosswalks are recommended for the University Corridor at Westpark Drive at 14th Street, and Alabama Street at Tierwester Street.

Special-needs enhancements to existing crosswalks should include audible and flashing LED systems throughout this heavily travelled corridor.

Existing bike lanes should be connected to the proposed Transit Stations. Additional hike/bike lanes and bikeways are recommended to improve multi-modal accessibility to key corridor amenities and public facilities. These recommended trails include Alabama, Taft/Garrott, Burlington/Bagby, Brazos, Elgin, Tuam, Hadley, and Dowling Streets.

METRO bus lines should be routed to the proposed Transit Stations and Transit Centers with appropriate bus shelters provided.

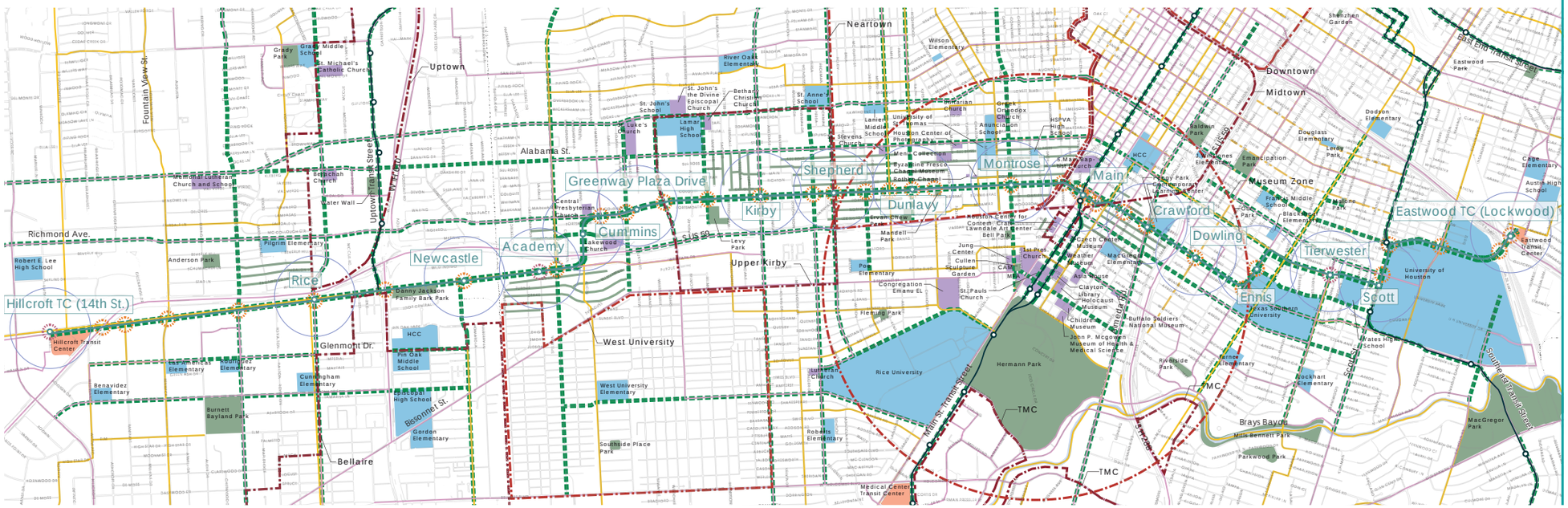
The University Corridor does not have any of the regional or major city parks along the Corridor Street, but it distinguishes itself from other corridors with its prime location. The University Corridor provides a connection between Uptown, Main, and Southeast Corridors, all of which have direct access to the city's prime open spaces. This connector role presents a leading opportunity to enhance and develop the pedestrian realm into an integral part of the Corridors.

Urban Squares are smaller scale, publicly accessible open spaces that should be located in association with Transit Oriented Development. These small plazas are more urban in nature and do not include active/sports facilities. Urban Squares are generally accessible to public use, often privately owned, and may be gated or well lit for night security. These squares are primarily paved with planting areas, shade trees, planters, public art, fountains and seating for passive, outdoor enjoyment.

University

Pedestrian Realm/Mobility Plan

- Bayou
- Schools
- Open Space
- Cemetery
- Institutional Buildings
- Metro Transit Center
- Trail/Bikeway
- Tree Lined Streets
- Bus Routes
- Existing Pedestrian (Signalized) Crossing
- MT
- Major Thoroughfare per COH Major Thoroughfare Plan 2006
- 5 Minute Walking Distance to Station
- Building Footprint
- Proposed Pedestrian (Unsignalized) Crossing
- Proposed Open Space
- Proposed Trail/Bikeway
- Streetscape Enhancement (Pedestrian Connector Street)
- University Transit Street
- Connecting Transit Stereets



0 1/8 1/4 1/2 3/4 1Mile
0 660 1,320 2,640 3,960 5,280 Feet

F2.3

Land Development Concept Plan

The Land Development Concept Plan divides the University Corridor into three categories based on their development potential:

Development Opportunity Area 1 - Downtown

This category comprises only a small portion of the University Corridor, concentrated around the planned Main Street Corridor and existing Wheeler Station, where the University Corridor intersects the Main Street Station. The Downtown area is likely to experience large-scale redevelopment activity as a result of the planned transit facilities and proximity to the City center. It includes existing employment, office and commercial uses, which are typically subject to more frequent redevelopment. The Downtown also includes vacant and underdeveloped lands within the ¼ mile station radius, where Transit Oriented Development is most likely to occur.

Development Opportunity Area 2 - Corridor

This category is dispersed throughout the entire University Corridor. Representing those areas where redevelopment is anticipated as a result of the new Transit network, the Development Opportunity Area 2 comprises a variety of existing uses and developed forms, including older, underdeveloped industrial and employment lands at its westernmost edge, and existing office, retail, and commercial uses along Richmond Avenue, with particular concentrations around many of the planned Transit Stations.

The Development Opportunity Area 2 is highly concentrated along Richmond Avenue between the planned Shepherd and Newcastle Stations, corresponding with the high concentration of employment and commercial uses. This is contrasted with a more sparse distribution of this category east of the planned Shepard Station because the alignment moves through areas characterized by established residential areas.

Stable Areas

Stable Areas consist predominately of residential neighborhoods and parks located throughout the University Corridor Study Area. Stable Areas are those areas that are not likely to experience large scale redevelopment activity as a result of the planned Urban Corridor. Areas designated as stable include existing residential neighborhoods, existing parks and open space, as well as significant institutional uses both within and outside of the ¼ mile station radius.

F2.3.1 Demonstration Plans

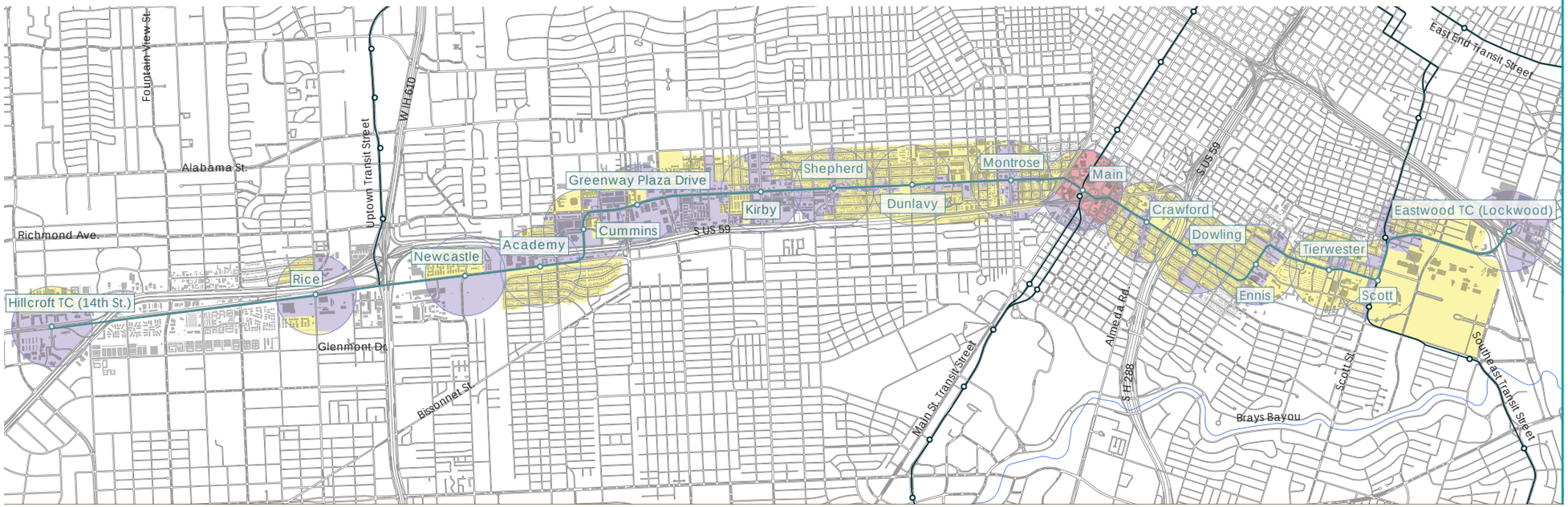
Four Demonstration Plans for prototypical sites were prepared to demonstrate, conceptually, how Transit Oriented Development could manifest itself given the varied contexts and conditions of the University Corridor.

The following diagrams provide a collection of images including a site plan, photographs of development precedents and photo simulations of development concepts for sites with frontage along the planned Transit Street.

Land Development Concept/Infrastructure Plan

University

University Transit Street
Connecting Transit Streets
Corridor Study Area
5 Minute Walking Distance to Station
Stable Areas
Opportunity Area 1 - Downtown
Opportunity Area 2 - Corridor



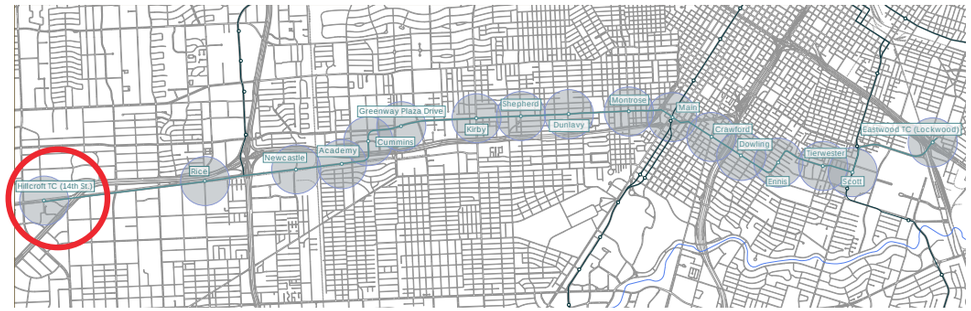
0 1/8 1/4 1/2 3/4 1 Mile
0 660 1,320 2,640 3,960 5,280 Feet

1 Large Through Lot

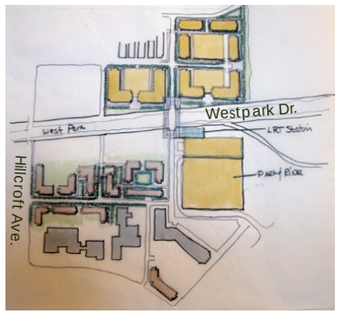
Hillcroft Transit Center

Located at the western end of the University Corridor at the existing Hillcroft Transit Center, an intermodal Transit Center adds to the dynamics of the site. This site is an example of a large through lot development.

Existing Site Conditions



Location of site in corridor



Workshop Demonstration Plan

Site Characteristics

- The site comprises approximately 1,655,580 sf of area (37,98 acres);
- the site has 600 linear feet of frontage on Westpark Drive; and
- the area surrounding the site is a mix of uses including office, residential and the Intermodal Transit Center. South of Westpark is the park and ride with residential buildings to the west and a small commercial center to the south. North of Westpark are low-rise office warehouses and residential buildings.

The Program

- The program for the site includes residential apartments on the north side of Westpark with the potential for some office space. On the south side is a major parking facility next to the intermodal station and residential buildings to the west.

The Design Solution

- Provide a range of 6-10 storey buildings;
- A neighborhood of multi-family and mixed use apartments next to the Transit Station;

The Results

- 600 linear feet of frontage on the Transit Street;
- 2000± apartments;
- retail at 94,217 sf;
- parking structures at 1,665,185 sf; and,
- 4,755 parking spaces.

Demonstration Plan

University

3D model of the Hillcroft Transit Center demonstration plan

Precedent - 6 storey mixed use, Port Credit, ON

Precedent - 10 storey mixed use, Vaughan, ON

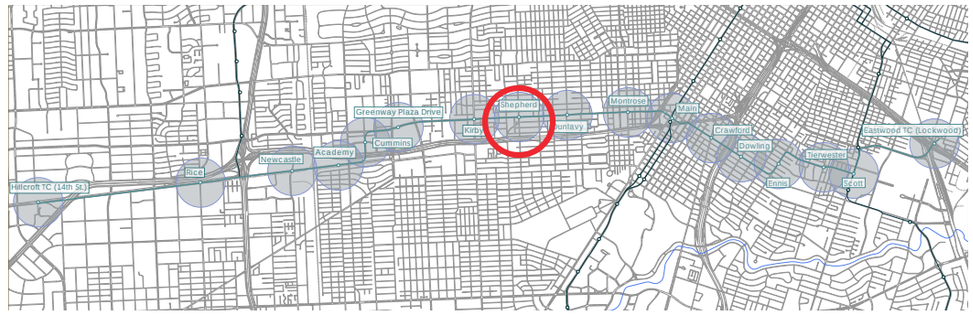
Precedent - Multi-storey mixed use, Toronto, ON

2 Large Through Lot

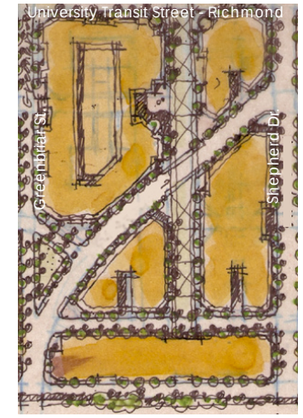
Shepherd

Located on the South side of Richmond Avenue, from Greenbriar Street to South Shepherd Drive, this site is an example of a large through lot development.

Existing Site Conditions



Location of site in corridor



Workshop Demonstration Plan

Site Characteristics

- The site comprises approximately 661,292 sf of area (15,17 acres);
- the site has 679 linear feet of frontage on Richmond Avenue;
- the site is located at the intersection of Richmond Avenue and South Shepherd Drive. It is presently the site of low-rise retail buildings with office above. Adjacent to the site are homes and the site is bounded on the south by Spur 59; and,
- this site lends itself to a mix of uses due to location and accessibility.

The Program

- The program for the site is to generate a transit supportive, mixed use development. The plan calls for mixed use residential or office above retail at grade on Richmond Avenue, residential buildings to the south and a parking structure between the residence and the highway.

The Design Solution

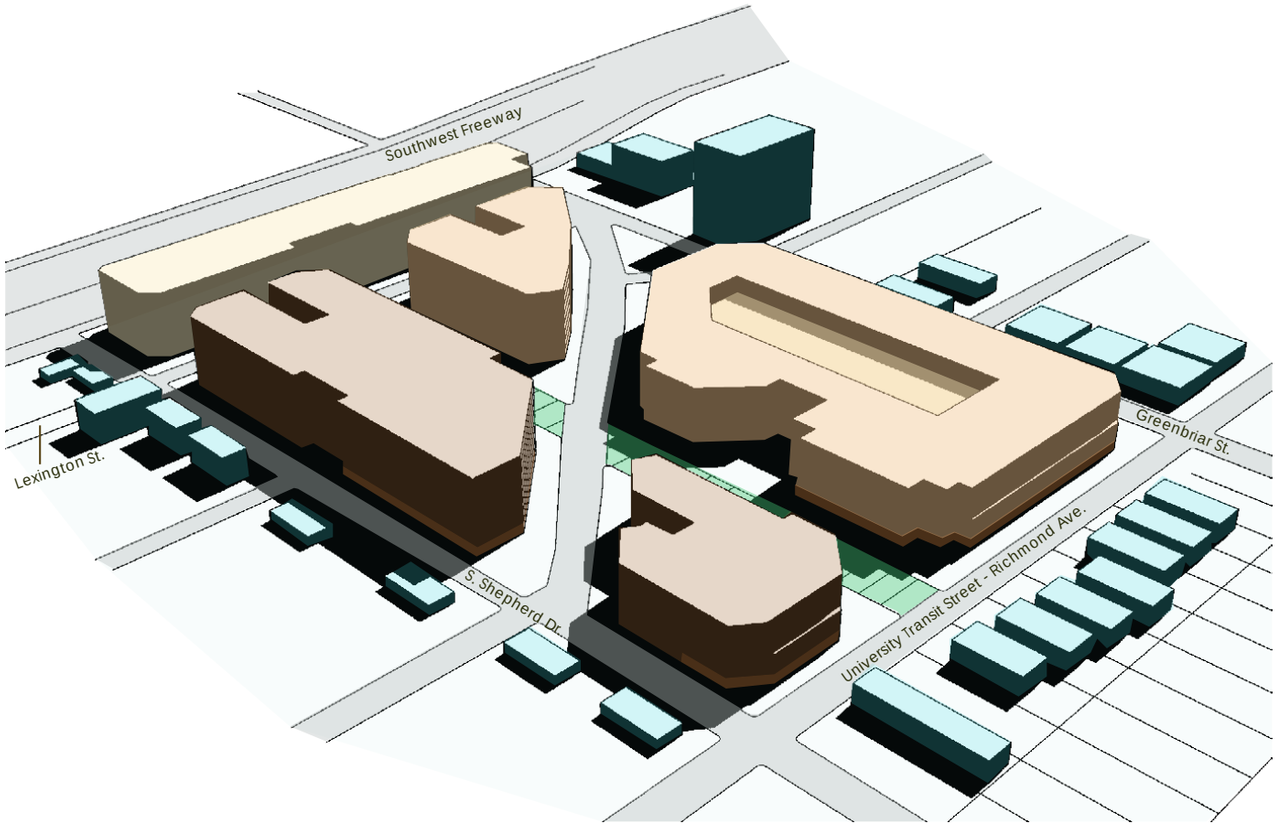
- Provide for a range of 6-8 storey buildings;
- contain a mix of transit supportive uses such as multi-family residential, office, and commercial; and,
- create a pedestrian friendly environment on the pathways from Richmond Avenue to Lexington Street.

The Results

- 679 linear feet of frontage on the Transit Corridor;
- 940 ± apartments;
- 16,892 sf of ground floor retail on Richmond Avenue and along pathways from the Transit Street to Lexington Street;
- parking structures at 691,984 sf, 1976 parking spaces; and,
- office buildings along South Shepherd Drive at 711,795 sf.

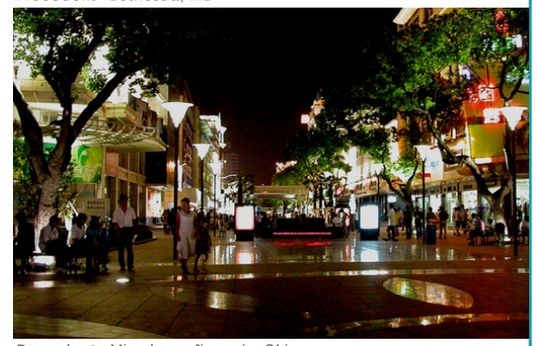
Demonstration Plan

University



3D model of demonstration plan

Precedent - Bethesda, MD



Precedent - Mixed use, Jiangyin, China

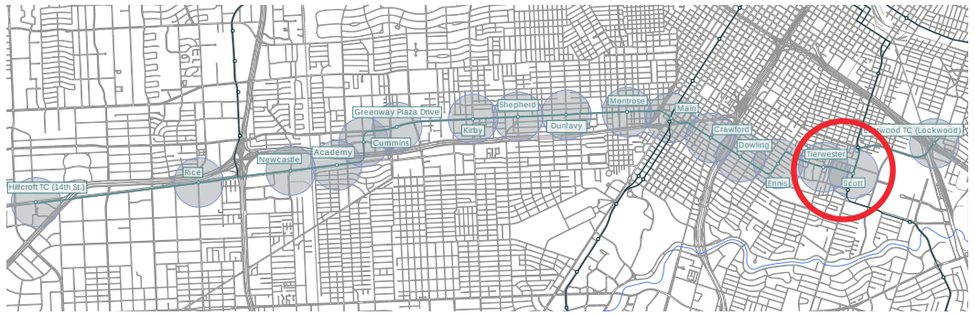
Precedent - Phillips Place, Charlotte, NC

3 1/2 Lot Single Frontage

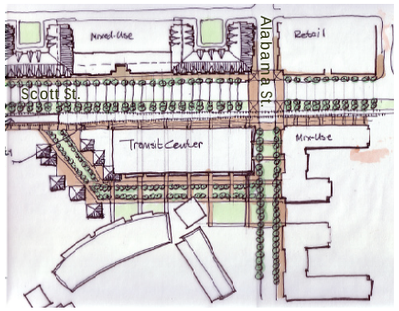
Scott Street, from Alabama Street to Cleburne Avenue

Located near the University of Houston-Stadium, the site is an example of 1/2 lot single frontage development.

Existing Site Conditions



Location of site in corridor



Demonstration Plan created during the workshop

Site Characteristics

- The site comprises approximately 566,187 sf of area (13 acres);
- the site has 1, 765 linear feet on Scott St; and,
- the area surrounding the site is a mix of low density residential, surface parking lots and the University. Along Scott St. there is a commercial plaza and the Robertson Stadium.

The Program

- The program for the site includes mixed use residential over retail and parking over retail.

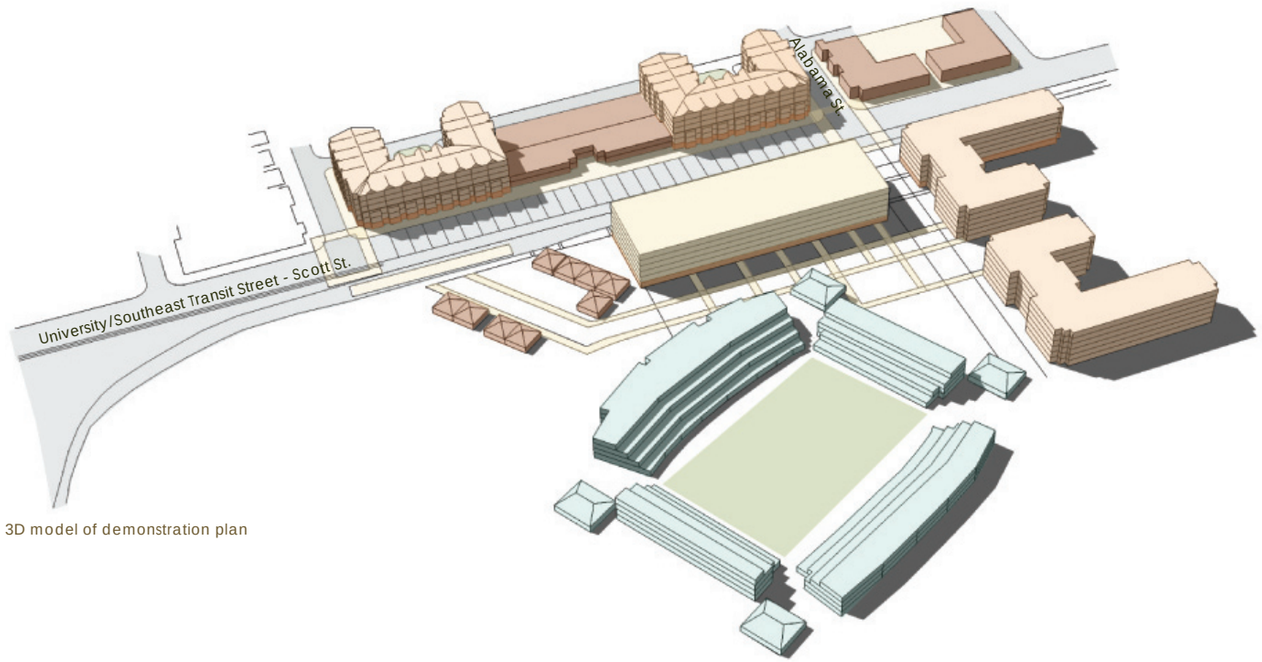
The Design Solution

- Provide a for a range of to 2-6 storey buildings;
- a mixed use Transit Oriented Development on Scott St.;
- contain a mix of transit supportive uses such as multi-family residential, and commercial; and,
- create a pedestrian friendly environment next to the existing stadium as a focus to the University and the neighborhood by developing both sides of Scott St. around the station.

The Results

- 1, 765 linear feet of frontage on the Transit Corridor;
- 175,913 sf of retail;
- 625± apartments; and,
- parking structure at 232,375 sf.

Demonstration Plan University



3D model of demonstration plan

Photomontage illustrating the potential enhanced streetscape and built form on Scott Street adjacent to the Transit Center of University of Houston

Precedent - Urban Streetscape

Precedent - Parking structure with enhanced streetscape

Precedent - 4-storey apartments with at grade retail