

Uptown



Corridor-specific Report

Phase II and III
City of Houston

May 2008

The **Planning** Partnership
in collaboration with:

Asakura Robinson Company

Gunda Corporation

Cushman & Wakefield LePage

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Foreword



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June 27, 2008

Dear Urban Corridor Planning participants,

It is an exciting and interesting time for the City's Urban Corridor Planning initiative.

After a long and productive process, the work of our consultants is coming to a close. They conducted a vast amount of research into the neighborhoods and conditions along METRO's light rail corridors, engaged in a thoughtful conversation with the community through a series of public workshops, and put tremendous effort into producing ideas and recommendations. These ideas and recommendations are contained in reports that we are now releasing.

In addition to our consultants' work, we have received input from ongoing dialogue with our Stakeholder Group, citizens and businesses in the corridors, and the real estate and development community. We are considering all of this input as we determine how we will go forward with modified City policies for development and infrastructure. Whatever we adopt, it has to make sense for Houston. Therefore, it is important to understand that actual development and infrastructure policies drafted by the City may differ from the guidelines presented in the consultants' reports.

The City will continue working to develop new policies that will smoothly integrate the Urban Corridors concepts into our communities. We look forward to the continued involvement of our citizens and businesses as we move ahead.

Sincerely,

Carol Abel Lewis, Ph.D.
Chair, Houston Planning Commission

Houston Planning Commission

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Executive Summary **Urban Corridor Planning**

Uptown Corridor

This Report for the Uptown Corridor should be read in conjunction with the Urban Corridor Planning Report. While the Urban Corridor Planning Report provides an overview of issues and recommendations that are common to all of the six Urban Corridors, this report provides specificity to the Uptown Corridor.

The study process included a background analysis of the existing Corridor, interviews with stakeholders throughout the Uptown Corridor, working sessions with residents and landowners in the Uptown Corridor, and extensive consultation with the stakeholder group and the City of Houston staff.

While there are many common characteristics between the various Corridors, each has distinctive features. Unlike many of the six Corridors, the Uptown Corridor has already achieved a high degree of development, and the existing streetscapes are highly developed in a manner unique to the area. This report includes observations about the existing conditions in the Corridor, new directions for future development and recommendations specific to the Uptown Corridor.

Context/Background Analysis

The first part of this Report examines the existing conditions and planned initiatives for the Corridor and establishes the framework for a Corridor-specific planning strategy.

Block Pattern

The Corridor extends from the Westpark/610 intersection and terminates at the Northwest Transit Station. The block sizes include mainly large lots that allow large scale development of office and retail uses, with parking between the buildings, and fronting along the Transit Street. The result is that a considerable proportion of the development along this Corridor will likely occur on existing parking lots, or through the redevelopment of full blocks. This may necessitate the introduction of new streets where block sizes are excessively large.

Pedestrian Realm

For the most part, the pedestrian realm is well developed in accordance with a history of planned improvements and streetscape investments. Street trees, sidewalks, street furniture and other pedestrian realm features are particularly well designed. The only weakness in the pedestrian realm is the lack of connectivity through the parking lots and between the sidewalks and the retail and office facilities set back from the street.

Demographics

The average household size is 2.17 persons, which is among the lowest of the six Corridors. Persons under the age of 25 make up 32% of the population while those aged from

25 to 54 make up 51% of the residents. The housing stock is the newest of the six Corridors with only 34% of the area homes having been built pre-1970. In terms of tenure, 40% of households are owner occupied, while 60% are renters.

Uptown Corridor Planning Strategy

Based on the existing conditions along the Corridor, a strategy has been developed for the integration of new forms of development that includes a number of different conditions.

A key component of the Uptown Corridor Planning Strategy is the Land Development Concept Plan that divides the Corridor into Development Opportunity Areas (those areas where Transit Oriented Development is most probable and should be promoted and focused) and Stable Areas (where an emphasis should be placed on protecting and enhancing the physical character of stable residential neighborhoods). The Uptown Corridor is divided into the following three Land Development Concept categories:

Development Opportunity Area 3 – Uptown Core

This encompasses a large portion of the area along Post Oak Boulevard, focused mainly around the planned Transit Stations. Based on its mix of uses and varied development pattern, it has significant potential for future Transit Oriented Development.



Development Opportunity Area 4 – Uptown Corridor

This includes the area along the Uptown Corridor north of Buffalo Bayou. With the planned establishment of Transit Stations at the northern end of the Uptown Corridor, there is a future potential for higher density Transit Oriented Development in this area as well as significant pedestrian realm improvements along Post Oak Road.

Stable Areas

These are comprised of the predominately residential neighborhoods and open spaces along the Uptown Corridor.

Demonstration Plans

Based on the Land Development Concept Plan, four demonstration plans were developed for sites along the Corridor that demonstrate the scale and nature that Transit Oriented Design might take. The sites include the Northwest Transit Center and the core of the Uptown Area. The plans demonstrate a variety of block sizes and development scenarios. In addition, recommendations for the treatment of the interface between the IH 610 and the residential areas north of Memorial Park were developed.

Recommendations for Implementation

The final component of this Report is a series of recommended design guidelines that are intended to eventually form the basis of the City's new planning regime for Transit Oriented Development. The guidelines correspond with the Development Opportunity Areas as delineated by the Land Development Concept Plan and provide a series of mandatory requirements, performance standards and optional guidelines for the design of pedestrian realm, buildings, parking, access and service facilities, as well as engineering standards.



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Introduction

The Uptown Corridor is quite distinct from the other Corridors in that it already has achieved a high degree of development, and the existing streetscapes are highly developed in a manner unique to the area. The Corridor Study recommendations for the Uptown Area are aimed at providing the context to assist more development in a manner that results in a pedestrian environment supportive of the existing community and the new transit facilities.

The report suggests some built form objectives for the pedestrian realm that can be implemented within the context of current conditions. At the same time, the report suggests some benefits that can be accrued as portions of the Corridor redevelop over time. Finally, an important component of all of the Corridors is strengthening connections to the Transit Street from the surrounding community.

The Uptown Corridor has a healthy balance of residential, retail, and commercial uses. The character of the street between Richmond Street and the Uptown Park Station is that of a mixed use Corridor with buildings set well back from the street and parking between the buildings and the street. Further to the north, where the Corridor is not paralleling the highway, it is characterized by low-rise residential development. Redevelopment opportunities are present along most of the Transit Street. The Northwest Transit Street, for example, is appropriate for transit supportive development. The demonstration plan illustrates one way that this site could be developed as a mixed use destination.

1 Context/Background Analysis

This chapter provides the context and background for the Uptown Corridor.

E1.1

Uptown Urban Corridor Study Area

The south end of the Uptown Urban Corridor starts at the Westpark and 610 interchange and runs north along Post Oak Road. Further north, the Uptown Corridor runs along the 610 up to North Post Oak Road where it terminates at the Northwest Transit Center.

The Uptown Corridor is approximately 4 miles long. The eastern and western boundaries of the Uptown Urban Corridor Study Area – measured at a 1/4 mile on either side of the proposed Transit Street – are shown on the adjacent map.

All Transit Street and station locations in this report are based on information provided by METRO and the City of Houston as of December, 2007.



Public art in front of Uptown Park along Post Oak Blvd.



Entrance to Uptown Park at Uptown Park Blvd. and West Loop South



Bus shelter on Post Oak Blvd. south of Hidalgo



Landscaping in front of Uptown Park



Office towers along the IH610



Open space adjacent to the Hilton on Post Oak Blvd.

E1.2

The Context of the Uptown Corridor

Part of this Urban Corridor Planning study is to understand the common and unique characters of each Urban Corridor. Four elements that define the area are the land uses, the size and scale of buildings, the pedestrian realm and infrastructure in the study area.

E1.2.1 Land Use

The map on the opposite page illustrates the range of existing land uses along the Uptown Urban Corridor. The area is dominated by a mix of high density office uses and large scale retail commercial uses along the Transit Street. These uses are augmented by a mix of low, medium and high density residential uses and public and private open spaces along the entire length of the Corridor.



Post Oak Park mid-rise commercial buildings



Medium sized building fronting at Westheimer Rd. and Post Oak Blvd.



Townhouse development along North Post Oak Road

E1.2.2 Building Footprint

The map on the facing page illustrates the size and scale of buildings found in the Uptown Corridor. All existing buildings have been shaded to help create a picture of the pattern created by different buildings, streets and open space - or the area's urban fabric.

The Uptown Corridor is typified by a large block pattern facilitating large office, retail and residential building footprints along the full extent of Post Oak Boulevard. At the northern end of the Uptown Corridor, along North Post Oak Road, the block pattern reveals a different urban form, characterized by a mix of single-detached residential and townhouse building footprints in adjacent neighborhoods with larger building footprints along the Transit Street frontage consisting of higher density residential buildings and office uses.

Park	Acquired	Acres	Park Class
Memorial West Pocket Park	2004	0.72	Pocket Park
Post Oak Park	2003	0.9	Pocket Park
Memorial-Silver Triangle		1.1	Neighborhood Park
Grady Park	1952	4.73	Neighborhood Park
Anderson Park	1960	7.1	Neighborhood Park
Tanglewood Park	1960	4.6	Neighborhood Park
Memorial Park	1925	1431.35	Metro Park
Delmonte Park	1938	1.1	CST/Spaceway
Weiss Park	1941	8.84	Reserve/Natural Area
Melcher Tract	1977	0.05	Parks Board

Target Acquisition Area/Parks

Proposed Pocket Park 610 West Loop/Railroad/Westheimer/Richmond
Proposed Neighborhood Park Chimney Rock/Sage/Westheimer/ Richmond

Other Park Projects of note

Dog Park at Westpark and Loop Central
Private/Semi-Private Park on Post Oak Blvd. at Hidalgo
Williams Water Wall on Post Oak Blvd. between Hidalgo and Richmond, 1983
Retention Pond under Construction at N. Post Oak and Oakford
Visual sound screen recommended near Pinewood Estates/Sherwood Forest
Tanglewood Boulevard Esplanade -1 mile linear park
Post Oak Central Fountain Park
Cosmopolitan Water wall – under construction
Uptown Park shopping plaza at 610 and Post Oak
Arch Oases

E1.2.3 Pedestrian Realm/Mobility Inventory

Parks

The table on the left lists the Uptown Corridor Parks and the Land Acquisition Target Areas described in the 2001 Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Memorial Park - At 1,505 acres, Memorial Park is the largest urban park in Texas and Houston's largest recreational area. It is one of the biggest central parks in the United States. Numerous drives, bridle paths, nature trails and walks wind through the park, as well as the 265-acre Houston Arboretum and Nature Center. The park features an 18-hole tournament-quality municipal golf course and clubhouse, a tennis center, swimming pool, baseball diamonds and picnic grounds. The park also offers tournament-standard softball fields, volleyball courts, jogging and exercise trails and biking paths. Memorial Park is located on Memorial Drive, just inside the West Loop.

Many City of Houston community center parks offer after school and summer enrichment programs, summer food service programs and teen camps, as well as teen, adult and senior recreation programs. Freed Community Center is located in the vicinity of the Uptown Corridor.

Publicly Accessible Open Space

Numerous upscale shopping centers and office towers located along the Uptown Corridor greatly enhance the park-like and plaza open space within the Corridor. These centers include: The Galleria, Lake on Post Oak, Uptown Park and The Williams Tower Water Wall.

The Galleria - The Galleria has established itself as the #1 shopping and tourist destination in Houston with over 24 million annual visitors and 375 fine stores and restaurants, an impressive ice rink and two Westin hotels. With the expansion that opened in 2003, The Galleria became the fourth largest mall in the nation with three office towers, two hotels, 2.4 million sf of retail space, and a variety of restaurants.

In 1992, Uptown Houston implemented a unique pedestrian realm identity system including stainless steel arches, gateways and halos over major streets and intersections. The District also installed extensive median landscaping, specialty street lamps, street furnishings and signage.

Lake on Post Oak - resides within a 28-acre, park-like development at the corner of Post Oak Boulevard and Hidalgo. The three crystal blue ponds are nestled around three office buildings and surrounded by a lush landscape of trees and flowers as well as an assortment of wildlife including ducks and swans.

Uptown Park – Constructed in 1999, Uptown Park provides an Italian-styled lifestyle center at Post Oak Boulevard and the 610 West Loop. The center boasts several urban squares, fountains, public art, landscaping and is adjacent to Post Oak Park.

The Williams Tower Water Wall-The 64' curved, black obsidian wall was designed in 1985 by the internationally



Sidewalks and street trees along Post Oak Blvd.



The Williams Tower Water Wall



Street tree canopy along N Post Oak Lane

acclaimed architectural team of Philip Johnson and John Burgee. The Water Wall pumps 78,500 gallons of recycled water every three hours and 20 minutes. More than 180 live oaks shade the three-acre park-like area.

Other privately held open space with park-like or urban square qualities includes Woodlawn Cemetery, Four Oaks Place and Post Oak Central.

Sidewalks

In general, the pedestrian realm is exceptionally developed within the Uptown District and Uptown TIRZ jurisdictions.

Sidewalks constructed along the remaining areas within the Uptown Corridor generally meet City of Houston minimum width standards of 4'. This width is not sufficient to accommodate targeted development densities along the length of the Corridor.

Community Facilities

Schools - Schools are dependant on pedestrian and bicycle mobility in order for students to safely and efficiently arrive and depart Uptown Corridor schools. Public schools within the Uptown Corridor are administered by the Houston Independent School District (HISD).

The SPARK School Park Program is a non-profit organization which increases park space by developing public school grounds into neighborhood parks. SPARK Parks within the Uptown Corridor Area are located at Pilgrim Elementary and Rogers Elementary.

Other facilities accessed by pedestrians -

Several significant public, civic and cultural facilities rely on safe and continuous sidewalks for optimum access.

These facilities include:

- First Baptist Church
- St. Martin's Episcopal Church
- St. Philip Missionary Baptist Church
- St. Michael's Catholic Church
- Berachah Church
- Post office-Galleria on Westheimer at McCue
- Post Office-Sage on Sage at Rice
- Jungman Branch of Houston Public Library

Streetscape

Street trees - The established neighborhoods of Pineview Estates, Sherwood Forest, Riverway, Briarcroft, Larchmont, St. George Place, Tanglewood, Afton Oaks, and Post Oak Park benefit from mature street tree plantings. Street trees species primarily consist of Live Oaks whose shallow root systems often exacerbate concrete sidewalk maintenance needs in those areas.

Public Art

Public art adds an element of pride and interest to the pedestrian realm. In 1999, the City of Houston established an ordinance mandating that 1.75% of qualified Capital Improvement Project monies be set aside for civic art.

Civic art works located within the Uptown Corridor include "3/4 Time" by Ben Waitena, 1976 Sculpture in Memorial Park esplanade.

Mobility

Crosswalks - Demarcation of crosswalks at key intersections and mid-block areas provide safe and visible pedestrian crossings of public rights-of-way. Crosswalks exist at many signaled intersections along the Uptown Corridor Transit Street.

Bikeways/Trails - Houston boasts an extensive Bikeway Program. This transportation network of designated bikeways is integrated into the overall transportation system and consists of a total of 345 miles of designated on-street and off-street bikeways. Several of these bikeways are located along N. Post Oak Lane, Antoine, Westview, Memorial Dr., Tanglewood Dr., Sugar Hill, Woodway, Yorktown, Briardale, Westpark Toll Rd., Wesleyan and W. 12th Street. These bike lanes are often narrow and do not meet current AASHTO standards for recommended bike lane widths and demarcation.

METRO allows cyclists to bring their bikes onto the Uptown Corridor Light Rail System. The fleet is being equipped with bike racks and can also be stowed on high-floor buses in the designated baggage compartment.

Public Transit - Additional transit options within the Uptown Corridor include the METRO HOV lane access to US-59, I-10, and US 290, via NWTC.

Current METRO bus commuter and local lines serving the Uptown Corridor include:

- Jensen/Tanglewood
- Richmond
- Post Oak Crosstown
- Fairview
- Chimney Rock Crosstown
- Briar Forest
- Belfort Crosstown
- Westheimer
- Greenway/Uptown

METRO Transit Center:

- Northwest Transit Center



Sidewalk and street furnishings along Post Oak Blvd.



Service Poles and street condition looking south along N. Post Oak Rd.



Bus stop north of Westheimer and Post Oak Blvd.



Streetscape features facing north on Post Oak Blvd, south of San Felipe

E1.2.4 Engineering/Infrastructure Inventory

Existing Watermains

The typical life of a water transmission main is 40-50 years. Segments from North Post Oak at Memorial Woods to Post Oak at Westheimer are at the end of their life span and will require replacement soon.

Existing Sanitary Sewer Lines

Trunk sewer lines have been identified along the proposed alignment of the Corridor. The life of a sewer line is typically 30 to 40 years, unless the lines are rehabilitated. There are several sewer lines that are older than 40 years. It is not clear from the City's GIMS database if these lines have been rehabilitated, and it is recommended that the assessment of sewer lines be done for sewers that are more than 30 years old by closed circuit television inspection.

Existing Storm Sewer Lines

Current City regulations require storm water detention for all new development. Hence, any new developments that are proposed will be required to design for storm water detention.

Existing Lighting

The existing lighting conditions along the road observed during a drive through of the proposed alignment in April 2007 suggest that existing lighting is sufficient and of good quality.

Capital Improvements Plan

Recent capital improvements projects that have been undertaken in the Uptown Corridor include:

- West Alabama - Reconstructed the roadway between Post Oak Boulevard and the Southbound IH 610-West Loop southbound frontage road to serve as one of the entrances to the West Loop.
- McCue - Reconstructed 40' of pavement from Westheimer to Chevy Chase.
- Post Oak Boulevard - Widened the intersection at Richmond to better align Post Oak Boulevard for the entrance to the new Westpark Tollway.
- Sage - Widened from a four-lane divided roadway to a six-lane divided roadway between Hidalgo and West Alabama; installed a 48" storm sewer line to provide added safeguard against local flooding.
- Sage and Rice - Reconstructed and improved the intersections of Sage Road and Rice at US 59 to create better access to the new Westpark Tollway.
- San Felipe from Yorktown to Sage Road - Reconstructed the pavement, installed a major water distribution line, replaced water/sewer lines.
- Uptown Park Boulevard - Widened the intersection at Post Oak Boulevard to four lanes.
- Post Oak Boulevard – Sewer Line Repair Project 2007 between Westheimer and Richmond.

Summary

A number of residential towers have been built in Uptown and the uses in the area are close to evenly split between residential, commercial and retail. Nevertheless, it appears that basic services including some of the water and sewer have reached their suggested life spans and need to be replaced. In addition, storm water is an issue that will have to be addressed with each new development or redevelopment proposal. As in other Corridors, it appears that consideration for replacing principle services should be considered as the new transit is being constructed.

Socio-Economic Profile - Uptown Corridor		
		% Share
Total Population	35,943	
Total Households	19,628	
Population Age Profile:		
Age 0 - 4	1,487	4.1%
Age 5 - 9	1,542	4.3%
Age 10 - 14	1,312	3.7%
Age 15 - 17	714	2.0%
Age 18 - 20	601	1.7%
Age 21 - 24	1,382	3.8%
Age 25 - 34	7,994	22.2%
Age 35 - 44	5,702	15.9%
Age 45 - 49	2,666	7.4%
Age 50 - 54	2,811	7.8%
Age 55 - 59	2,543	7.1%
Age 60 - 64	1,817	5.1%
Age 65 - 74	2,369	6.6%
Age 75 - 84	1,943	5.4%
Age 85+	1,059	2.9%
Median Age	40.2	
Average Age	41.8	
Household Size Profile:		
1 Person	9,876	50.3%
2 Person	6,480	33.0%
3 Person	1,665	8.5%
4 Person	992	5.1%
5 Person	390	2.0%
6 Person	162	0.8%
7+ Person	63	0.3%
Average Household Size	1.79	
Period of Housing Construction:		
Built 1999 to 2006	3,271	14.2%
Built 1995 to 1998	2,229	9.7%
Built 1990 to 1994	1,509	6.5%
Built 1980 to 1989	2,963	12.8%
Built 1970 to 1979	5,203	22.5%
Built 1960 to 1969	4,033	17.5%
Built 1950 to 1959	2,993	13.0%
Built 1940 to 1949	709	3.1%
Built 1939 or Earlier	177	0.8%
Median Year Built	1977	
Owner Occupied Households	7,691	39.2%
Renter Occupied Households	11,937	60.8%
Household Income Range:		
< \$25,000	2,657	13.5%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	4,081	20.8%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	3,480	17.7%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	2,312	11.8%
\$100,000+	7,098	36.2%
Median Household Income	\$72,095	

Source: Claritas

E 1.3

Uptown Corridor Demographic Market Overview

Demographic Overview

The methodology for generating the demographic profile was consistent for all of the Corridors examined – a one-mile buffer around the length of the Transit Street was generated from geographic information systems (GIS) files, and socio-economic data for all residents within this zone were analyzed, extrapolated from the 2005 Census using Claritas data. The rationale is that this sample draws upon not only the residents in the immediate area of influence of the Corridor infrastructure improvements, but also adjacent neighborhoods that will see secondary benefits (proximity to higher-order transit, improved commercial-retail facilities over time, improved pedestrian realm and civic spaces; etc.).

It is acknowledged that a demographic report exists for Zip Code 77056, prepared by Claritas for Harris County Improvement District 1. Although the sample population in our analysis is greater than twice the size of Zip Code 77056 (36,000 persons compared to 16,000 persons) key variables (median household income; rental versus ownership tenure; median age; average household size; median age of dwellings) have been compared with our demographic research and reflect a high degree

of consistency between the data sets. As a result, our analytics rely on our original demographic data – the one-mile buffer around the transit Corridor – as presented below.

The Uptown Corridor area has a population of approximately 36,000 persons, ranking it as by far the smallest among the six Corridors being examined in this study (next smallest is around 60,000 persons). The median age level is 32.9 years old, placing it in the mid-range of the six study Corridors. Persons under the age of 25 account for a 32% share of the local population in the Uptown Corridor, while persons aged 25 to 55 (prime income earning years) account for a 51% share of the total.

The average household size in the Uptown Corridor is 2.17 persons, which places it third lowest among the Corridors being examined, which range from 3.26 down to 1.79 persons per household. Households with one or two persons account for a nearly 83% share of the total, while households of five or more persons account for a nominal 3% share.

Uptown Corridor has the newest housing stock among the six Corridors in question. Homes built since 1990 account for some 30% of the total, while homes built pre-1970 represent a 34% share. This compares to an average of 21% and 54% share, respectively, for the total sample of housing across the six Corridors. The rate of home ownership is second highest among the six Corridors, with some 40% of homes being owner occupied, and 60% rental tenure.

In examining household income levels, the Uptown Corridor is by far the most affluent areas among the six Corridors being examined. With a median household income level of nearly \$72,100, some two-thirds of area households have an income level of greater than \$50,000 annually, and over 36% earn in excess of \$100,000 per year.

Neighborhood Description

The Uptown Corridor straddles three large Study Areas, analyzed as part of a Land Use and Demographic Profile prepared by the City's Planning and Development Department in 2003. These Study Areas are 6, 3, and 10. The Uptown Corridor itself principally comprises the following three areas: Spring Branch West; Memorial Park / Washington Avenue; and Afton Oaks / River Oaks. The following is a brief area description.

- Spring Branch West (northwest portion of the Corridor area, in Study Area 6) is located north of I-10 and west of Blalock. Gessner Road and W. Sam Houston Parkway North are the major north-south arteries in the area. Light industrial uses, including distribution centers, are located along the Parkway. The area is largely deed restricted single-family residential. Multi-family uses are concentrated along Long Point Road, Gessner and Blalock Street. New home construction occurs on small sites in the southeastern part of the community where land prices have risen dramatically.
- Memorial Park / Washington Avenue (northeast portion of the Corridor area, in Study Area 3) –

Memorial Park / Washington Avenue is a Corridor stretching from the northern edge of downtown on the east to Loop 610 on the west. It includes Memorial Park and the First and Sixth Wards which date from the 19th Century. Residential areas in the west, adjacent to the park, are rapidly redeveloping with high-end single-family homes.

- Afton Oaks / River Oaks (east portion of the Corridor area, in Study Area 10) includes two of Houston's most prestigious upper-income neighborhoods. River Oaks and Afton Oaks were developed in the 1920's and after World War II, respectively. Many of Afton Oaks' original ranch-style homes are now being extensively renovated or replaced with much larger homes. Afton Oaks/River Oaks Area is conveniently located between downtown and the Uptown/Galleria area. It also includes Post Oak Park, a mixed use development in the northwest portion of the neighborhood. The area's garden apartments are now being replaced with luxury homes and townhouses as area land prices rise.

Given that the Uptown Corridor does not constitute a significant portion of any of the broad Study Areas, no reliable land use characteristics can be summarized from the Land Use and Demographic Profile prepared by the City's Planning and Development Department in 2003.

E1.4

Summary of Initiatives

The Initiatives Plan compiles and maps all of the initiatives, projects, and plans that have been prepared for lands in the study area. In addition, initiatives identified by participants in the workshop have been added.

A comprehensive picture emerges of the immense planning and development efforts undertaken in the Corridor to date, as well as the geographical relationship between the initiatives and the Transit Street and Stations.

Four groups contribute to Uptown's commitment to economic growth and the creation of a sense of place: the Uptown Houston Association, the Uptown Houston District, the Uptown Houston Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) and the Uptown Development Authority.

From a strategic stance, the Initiatives Plan provides a clearer sense of the location of priority areas within the Corridor and how future Transit Oriented Development objectives might be focused and positioned to build on existing initiatives and planning efforts.

Opportunity Areas

These locations identify sites that could be considered for redevelopment. Several locations along the Transit Street are suitable for intensification with transit supportive uses. These locations were identified with participants the workshop.

1. Northwest Transit Center

The last Station on the transit line is located at the junction of the existing Northwest Transit Center, which provides access to an extensive bus network. The underutilized land adjacent to the station is ideal for intensified mixed use redevelopment.

2. North Post Oak Road

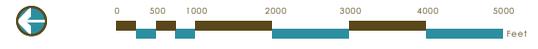
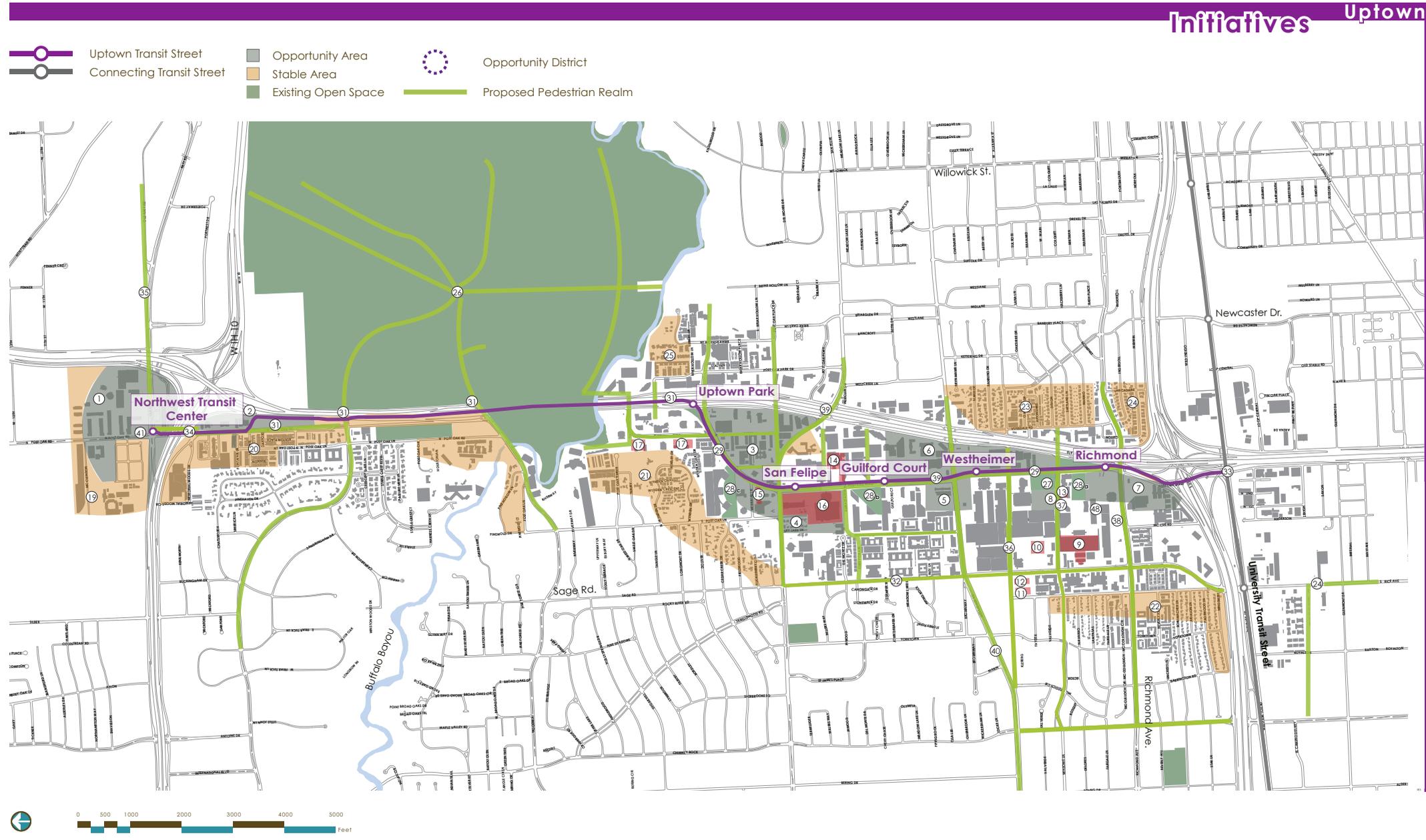
This road could function as a green buffer to reduce the visual and noise pollution caused by the highway and its ramp.

3. Between Four Oaks Place and San Felipe

The northern end of Post Oak Boulevard has a distinctive curve in the road alignment, making this site highly visible to Transit Street users. The low-rise components of this site could become a high density transit supportive development.

4. Southwest of proposed San Felipe Station

Boulevard Place is a 21-acre mixed use project comprised of a dense mixed use development with a high-rise luxury residence and hotel, restaurants and retail. Between Sage Plaza and the future Boulevard Place lies an opportunity for a complementary use.





Granduca Hotel at Uptown Park

5. Westheimer, west of Post Oak Boulevard

Westheimer Road and Post Oak Boulevard are some of the busiest streets in Uptown. The buildings at this intersection currently have a deep set back with parking located at the front, offering little presence on the street edges. Bringing the building frontage closer to the street would improve the street wall.

6. Westheimer, east of Post Oak Boulevard

A similar situation occurs on the east side of Post Oak Boulevard between Guilford Court and Devon. Front yard surface parking make this area difficult to navigate for pedestrians. The Starbucks Coffee shop has a lesser setback and shows the potential for a pedestrian environment in this area.

7. West of Richmond Station

To the west of the future Richmond Station is an underutilized site that currently houses a one-story big box development. Creative alternatives to the typical large format retail layout have shown that it is possible to incorporate these into denser mixed use developments.

8. Hidalgo Street and McCue Road

The vacant lot west of the Water Wall could be developed to frame and complement the landmark park.

New Development Projects:

4 new hotels were recently built adjacent to the Galleria:

9. Hilton Garden Inn

182 units

10. Hotel Indigo

132 units

11. Courtyard by Marriott

190 units

12. Homewood Suites

160 units

Condominium Developments:

13. The Empire

70 units

14. Lofts of Post Oak

351 units

15. Cosmopolitan

Under construction - 75 units

Mixed Use Development:

16. Boulevard Place

350 units, 200,000 sf of office space and 500,000 sf of retail

Retail:

17. Uptown Park Expansion

A lifestyle center with close to 50 tenants

Extended Stay Hotel:

18. Granduca

132 residences

Stable Areas

Workshop participants identified many neighborhoods, open spaces, schools and employment areas as Stable Areas. It is important to protect and enhance employment areas close to the Transit Streets so that employees can conveniently and safely walk to and from the stations. Neighborhoods should work with the City to evaluate the application of available tools to preserve Stable Areas or encourage redevelopment. Safe and convenient pedestrian connections to the Corridor will encourage ridership and help to support the new retail and service uses that may develop near the Stations. The following areas were identified as Stable Areas by workshop participants.

19. Area adjacent to Northwest Transit Center
20. West of North Post Rd
21. Northwest of San Felipe and Uptown Park Stations
22. West of Rice Ave
23. East of Highway 610 between Westheimer Rd and Waring St.
24. South of Richmond Ave at Southwest Freeway
25. South of Memorial Park



Stable neighborhood west of Post Oak Road



Uptown's iconic streetscape

Pedestrian Realm

The Uptown Corridor has several neighborhood, community, and city scale parks and open spaces. Workshop participants identified several initiatives for open space, streetscape and Corridor enhancements.

Parks:

The protection and enhancement of existing parks is crucial to the pedestrian realm. Enhancements could include landscape upgrading, improved pedestrian and cycling access and upgraded facilities.

26. Memorial Park

This vast 1,466-acre park welcomes 3 million visitors per year. Improved connectivity between the park and adjacent neighborhoods was requested by the workshop participants.

27. Water Wall

Philip Johnson designed the majestic multi-story sculpture and fountain that sits on a lawn across a residential tower. The water cascade has become a Houston landmark.

Publicly Accessible Open Space:

28a. Hidalgo Park

Part of a private development, this park has an extensive pond network. Across the boulevard, an attractive retention pond was recently built.

28b. Post Oak Central

This complex is located in a 17 acre park-like setting with plazas, fountains, courtyards and large landscaped areas that attract many users.

28c. Four Oaks Place

The three towers designed by Cesar Pelli form an arc around an inviting open space.

Corridor Connections and Streetscape: These Corridors provide connections to adjacent neighborhoods and walking/biking trails. They are to be designed to create a pleasant environment for pedestrians and cyclists. Improvements could include street planting, safe and connected sidewalks, pedestrian scale lighting and amenities such as benches, trash receptacles and transit shelters.

29. Post Oak Boulevard

The application of the Uptown Houston Urban Design Guidelines has transformed the area. Innovative stainless steel arches, parkette arch oases and halos are part of the Corridor's strong identity. Improvements to the pedestrian realm are currently being studied, in particular wider, more continuous sidewalks. Existing furniture is intended to be adapted to accommodate transit and widened sidewalks.

30. Pedestrian environment along North Post Oak Road

See example to the right of how the pedestrian environment could evolve on this street.

- 31. Connections across Highway 610
- 32. Streetscape along Sage
- 33. Connection to University Corridor
- 34. Pedestrian connections to Transit Center
- 35. Streetscape along Old Katy Road
- 36. Streetscape along W. Alabama Street
- 37. Streetscape along Hidalgo Street
- 38. Streetscape along Richmond Avenue

- 39. San Felipe Street
- 40. Westheimer Road

Gateway:

Gateways could include signage, landscape treatment or special buildings.

41. Gateway to Uptown at northern end of the proposed Corridor

Workshop participants suggested a gateway feature near the Northwest Transit Center.



Post Oak Boulevard intersection marker



Post Oak Road existing conditions



Post Oak Road evolution of the pedestrian realm - Photomontage

E1.5

Uptown Corridor Workshop

A two day workshop was held in April 2007 to engage area stakeholders and residents in Urban Corridor Planning.

The purpose of the first day of the workshop was to establish a common understanding of existing conditions and opportunities in the Corridor. During the day, the consulting team met with representatives of City staff, and major landowners, to review the understanding of the context of the Corridor. During the evening session with the public, following a presentation on our understanding of the context, participants were asked to identify projects or initiatives that would enhance the area, as well as to help identify areas that could change and those that should be protected. As background, the Current Initiatives plan was presented at the workshop. It was a compilation of projects identified in previous strategies, plans and reports (see Chapter E1.2)

Each one of the table groups identified many opportunities in the Uptown Corridor that have been included in the Initiatives Plan (see Chapter E1.3). A summary of comments made by participants follows:

Pedestrian Realm

- bury power lines below sound barrier walls
- under overpass is as an opportunity to beautify with trees & landscaping
- reduce noise pollution from highway
- buffer to be put between the sidewalk & street
- retention pond that was put in place near northern end of Transit Street should be landscaped
- gateway to signify entrance to neighborhood
- need wider sidewalks
- streets are really wide making it difficult for people to cross
- need protection from the rain, elements, like today
- need enhanced crosswalks
- keep a commitment on the green space
- sidewalks are needed near San Felipe Station
- in order to make the station more accessible and desirable to walk to, small public spaces/pocket parks should be created on the way to the station
- improve sidewalks near Galleria area – currently unsafe and have to get into your car to cross the street
- need more trees
- upgrade the intersection of I-610 and train line to accommodate bike path/pedestrian trail

Redevelopment Opportunities

- parking problems caused by people parking on neighborhood streets
- group public parking with transit facility
- parking garage preferred to surface parking lot
- human scale structures near Guilford Court Station
- real development potential exists in the industrial area, north of Highway 610 along Hempstead Road. Lots of property for sale ideal place for redevelopment.

Areas to be Protected

- protect residential neighborhoods
- don't want to see existing amenities destroyed

Evolution from workshop suggestions to report **Uptown**

Pedestrian Realm



Existing pedestrian realm as presented at the workshop

Potential pedestrian realm drawn during the two-day workshop

Proposed pedestrian realm

Initiatives



Current Initiatives as presented at the workshop

Sample workshop comments

Summary of workshop Initiatives results

Summary of Initiatives

Land Development



Existing Land Use as presented at the workshop

Land Development Concept Plan produced during the workshop

Proposed Land Development Concept Plan



Uptown Corridor Workshop



Table group discussions



Initiatives exercise

Participants were also asked to write a headline for the front page of the Houston Chronicle in 2012. The headline was to reflect the character of the Uptown Corridor once the Transit Street has been built. The facing page summarizes some of the headlines collected during this exercise.

Based on the input provided during the first workshop day, the preliminary Pedestrian Realm, Land Development Concept Plans, and a demonstration plan were developed and presented for discussion the next day.

The drawings on the previous page illustrate the input received at the workshop and the evolution to the report's Pedestrian Realm, Current Initiatives and Land Development Concept Plans (see Chapter E2 for proposed Plans).



French Quarter, New Orleans, LA



San Antonio, TX



Byward Market, Ottawa, Canada

Post Oak voted one of most walkable streets in Houston
Houston clean air capital

Pedestrians now outnumber cars!
Open Space and high density - a perfect pair

Temperature down, Uptown
Like highways, light rail works... barely

Transit links Memorial Park with Galleria to improve quality of life

Uptown now 24/7

These headlines were taken during the Uptown Corridor Workshop