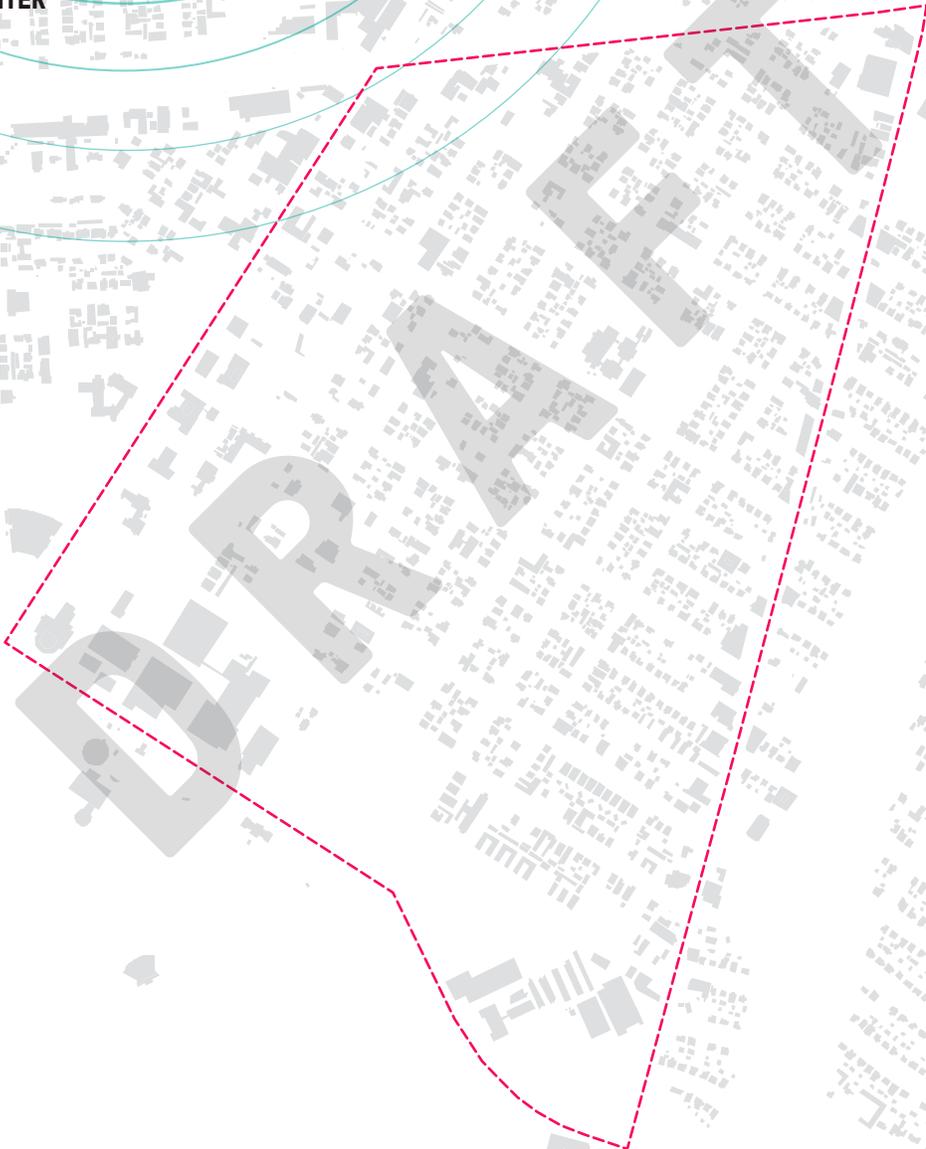


02 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

YOUR MUSEUM PARK

MAKING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD
A LIVABLE CENTER



MUSEUM PARK LIVABLE CENTERS STUDY

DRAFT NEEDS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

02.08.2016

LAND USE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT & OPPORTUNITIES SUMMARY

Museum Park is a moderate to upper income community that was settled prior to World War II. Much of the neighborhood's architecture reflects this provenance; however, ongoing and recent development is altering the look and feel of the neighborhood. This new development is occurring at higher residential densities than was the case at the neighborhood's inception and it exemplifies contemporary architectural styles.

The neighborhood is a desirable location, as reflected in year over year property values. These values have increased considerably in recent years and as a result, are higher than is the case in Houston overall.

LAND USE AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Museum Park is predominantly residential in the interior, with commercial uses occurring primarily along major thoroughfares. There are also some public/institutional uses on the edges and in the interior. The proposed strategies for land use are based on analysis of land uses within and immediately surrounding the study area; a review of new and planned development, and the input of Museum Park residents and other community stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives to support a model healthy community with desirable and compatible land uses are as follows:

- Protect community character
- Attract and retain land uses that support community needs and aspirations

STRATEGIES

Protect Community Character:

1 Employ Community Benefits Agreements

Windshield surveys reveal that in recent years, residential development has occurred at a robust pace and is continuing to occur at this pace. Inasmuch as this development is inconsistent with traditional development patterns, a strategy of embracing tools that

are designed to decelerate the ongoing degradation of community character is in order. Accordingly, Community Benefits Agreements are a best practice that can be adopted to address development that is planned, but not yet under construction. These agreements enable communities to enter into agreements with developers that set forth mutually agreeable parameters for development.

2 Utilize COH Minimum Lot Size Program

The city of Houston's minimum lot size program is another neighborhood preservation tool that is available. Section 42-197 of Chapter 42 of the Code of Ordinances enables communities to protect land uses, to a degree, by regulating lot sizes on a block by block basis. In order to qualify as a Special Minimum Lot Size Block, "an area must: contain at least one block-face, but not more than two opposing blockfaces; contain all lots on each blockface; form a contiguous area; have at least 60% of the lots developed for or restricted to single-family use (exclusive of land used for a park, library, place of worship, or school); and contain at least one lot that does not have a minimum lot size established by deed restrictions." A majority of affected residents must agree, i.e., "completed applications will be sent to the Planning Commission for a public hearing if: a) it has at least 51% support and has received protests, or b) it has less than 51% support but has received no protests." This tool can be used to protect blocks that have not yet been redeveloped.

3 Institute Conservation Easements

Preserving community character by creating a historic district is not feasible because virtually every block-face that contains a historic property also contains a contemporary town home development. Under these conditions, conservation easements are a more practical approach. These easements enable landowners to retain and use their property, permanently removing development rights in exchange for tax benefits. A land trust would have to be created to manage the easements.

Attract and retain development that supports community needs and aspirations:

4 Encourage and support mixed use and transit-oriented development

Residents and other Museum Park stakeholders have expressed interest in attracting commercial development to the community. The METRORail Light Rail Transit (LRT) line that traverses the edge of Museum Park has the potential to attract transit-oriented devel-

opment that features commercial/retail (and residential) uses. Already, there are plans for this type of development in proximity to the LRT. This presents an opportunity for the community leadership to influence the types of commercial/retail uses that are incorporated into the development. The above-referenced community benefits agreement mechanism could be deployed in this instance.

5 **Implement Urban Design and CEPTED Strategies that Support Development**

Commercial/retail uses are attracted to well-landscaped, well-lit, environments that have effective way-finding mechanisms. It is recommended that Houston Southeast implement urban design and CEPTED methods presented in this study, to attract commercial/retail development.

HOUSING

Expanded housing choice is a value held by residents and other stakeholders, with the goal of ensuring demographic diversity. High land values make this a challenging goal; however, mixed financing and collaborative partnerships could place this goal within reach.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives to facilitate expanded housing choice include:

- Leverage land owned by public, quasi-public, and nonprofit entities, both inside and outside of the community
- Encourage set asides of workforce housing units in transit-oriented and mixed use residential development

STRATEGIES

Leverage land owned by public, quasi-public, and nonprofit entities, both inside and outside of the community

1 **Build partnerships among public, quasi-public, and nonprofit entities to lower the purchase price of workforce housing in and around the Museum Park community.**

Public and quasi-public entities that own land in and around Museum Park could make it available at reduced cost, while COH-administered affordable housing funds and Section 380 subsidies could be used to further lower the cost of development. Non-profit developers would be encouraged to partner with for-profit developers to construct the units.

2 **Encourage Set Asides Of Workforce Housing Units In Transit-Oriented And Mixed Use Developments**

It is conceivable that mixed use developments could incorporate housing that is affordable for individuals in the moderate income range. Incentives such as the use of expanded-subsidy Section 380 agreements and the allocation of COH-administered affordable housing funds could make this more economically feasible. (This is most feasible for developments that utilize tax credits and require community support.)

3 **Prioritize Aging In Place**

Strategies that result in enabling elderly households to “age in place” can support housing diversity goals and neighborhood preservation goals to the extent that elderly households occupy older housing in Museum Park.

- Rehabilitation loans made to elderly household with special conditions
- New senior HUD 202 development
- Assisted living development
- Encourage for-profit developer; best practice example is Galleria area senior housing

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Conditions are favorable for neighborhood economic development. Museums located in and around Museum Park make a substantial contribution to the local economy and there is potential for enhancement, i.e. innovations planned by the museums are expected to attract additional visitors, create demand for restaurants and other retail experiences. This aligns with the desire of residents and other stakeholders for additional retail, especially restaurants. Most Museum Park retail establishments have a single location as opposed to multiple branches or franchises. The vast majority employ less than 25 persons. These establishments benefit from the neighborhood’s favorable location and have the potential to attract patrons from the Texas Medical Center, the nearby museums, and Museum Park.

OBJECTIVES

Objectives to preserve and enhance neighborhood economic conditions are as follows:

- Employ business retention and attraction strategies
- Incentivize transit-oriented development and mixed-use development
- Enhance access between surrounding activity centers and local businesses
- Increase awareness of the existence of local businesses.
- Address parking issues of local businesses

STRATEGIES

Employ business retention and attraction strategies

- 1 Use results of the marketing plan and business survey that Houston Southeast (formerly Greater Southeast Management District) have engaged to guide business attraction and retention strategies.
- 2 Implement urban design and CEPTED strategies.
- 3 Earmark public loan funds for façade improvements and capital lending.
- 4 Employing a best practice adopted by the city of Fort Worth, City of Houston designates the Almeda Corridor as a key commercial corridor and targets a bundle of incentives and amenities using CDBG, TIRZ, HSE, HBDi, and other funds to for façade improvement loans, enhanced lighting, capital lending programs, streetscape improvements, and safer street crossings, to the corridor.

Incentivize transit-oriented development and mixed-use development

- 5 The City of Houston transit corridors ordinance enables developers to maximize the development potential of properties in Light Rail Transit corridors. METRO can encourage transit-oriented development, which is typically mixed use, by crafting and releasing bid solicitations that incentive transit-oriented development that meets Museum Park community goals.

Mixed use development away from transit corridors can be encouraged by the City of Houston pursuant to the crafting of a package of incentives that attract mixed uses that support community goals.

Enhance access between surrounding activity centers and local businesses

- 6 Patronage of local businesses would likely increase if museum patrons and Texas Medical Center visitors and employees were aware of the existence of businesses on Almeda Road and other locations in the community. A form of motor transport that would circulate between the TMC and business clusters and museums and other business clusters would enhance access to these businesses.

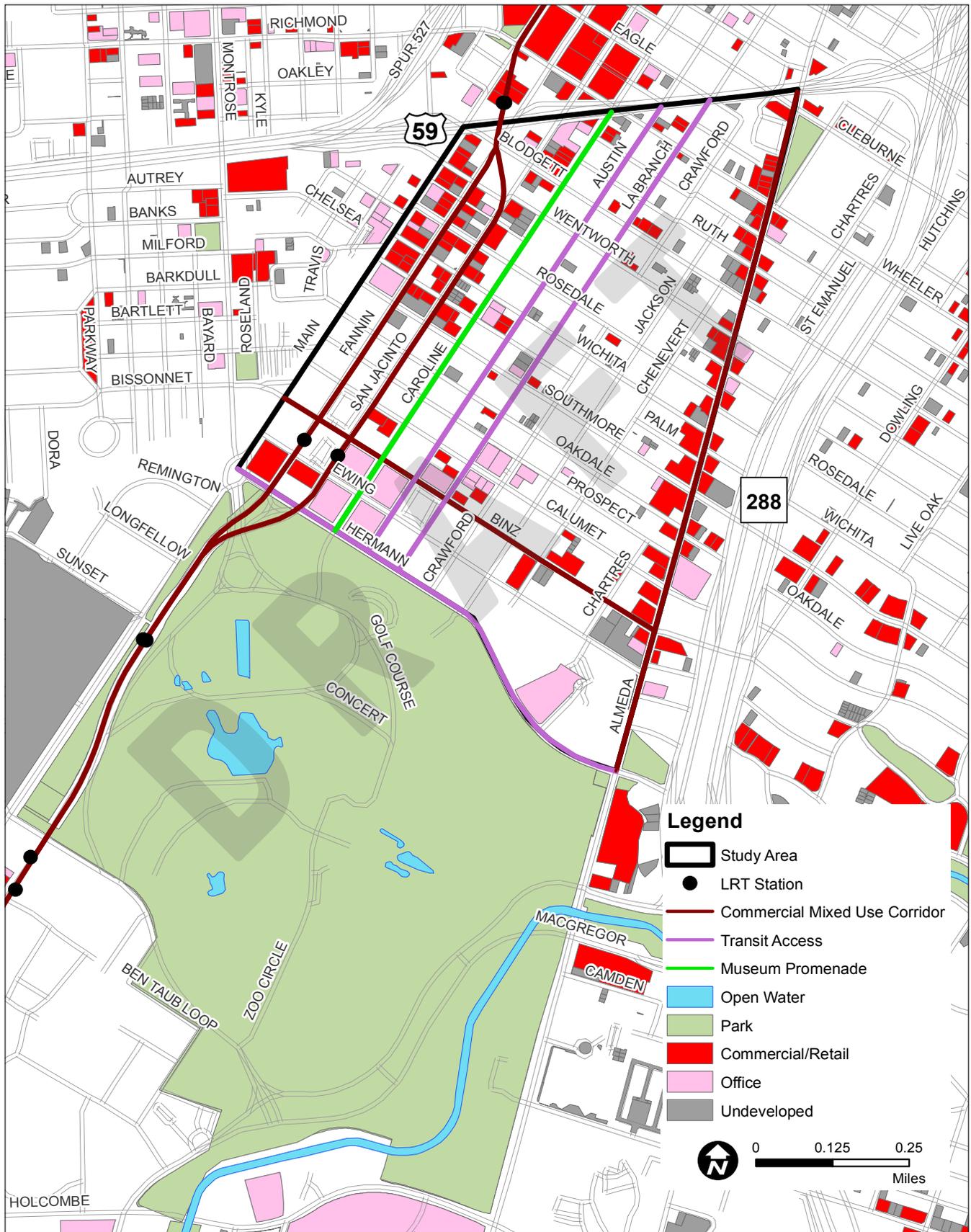
Increase awareness of the existence of local businesses.

- 7 Wayfinding signs funded by Houston Southeast would make known the existence and location of local businesses, leading to an increase in patronage. These signs would direct museum patrons and TMC visitors to local businesses.

Address parking issues of local businesses

- 8 A form of motor transport or circulator would ease parking issues experienced by local businesses. However, signs that point the way to parking facilities, including those that the OST/Almeda Redevelopment Authority have provided on Almeda Road.

Key commercial corridors identified for the transportation/connectivity component of the study have been overlaid onto a map of non-residential land uses to facilitate an analysis of the relationships among land use and urban development, transportation, and economic development.



MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT & OPPORTUNITIES SUMMARY

The Museum Park neighborhood has an amazing asset base to build upon including many one-of-a-kind destinations and strong residential housing stock within the neighborhood's footprint. However, Based on community feedback and team assessment of Museum Park, the neighborhood can feel fragmented, and defines itself by adjacencies (e.g., the Museums and Hermann Park) rather than its internal character. The existing infrastructure provides inconsistent and at times uncomfortable experiences for residents and visitors. Mobility enhancements to the strong existing grid of streets can connect unique and inviting experiences along corridors and at key destinations strengthen the neighborhood. A focus on prioritizing walkability can help create a connected, healthy and vibrant community.

By focusing on the walking experience first, while considering the role other mobility options play in the community, Museum Park can be a neighborhood where residents and visitors can easily access various museums, safely utilize the attractive transit options, explore shops and businesses, or take a stroll to nearby parks.

OBJECTIVES

Focusing on the following objectives will facilitate a connected transportation network, supportive of a vibrant neighborhood:

- Prioritize walkability
- Leverage high quality, existing assets
- Support Transit Oriented Development (TOD) and walkable mixed-use development

STRATEGIES

Transportation networks and strategies can be an effective way to influence and support desired changes in all areas of the livable centers context. Specifically, the strategies below will advance the above-mentioned objectives and address the needs of the neighborhood.

- 1 Develop a comprehensive transportation and mobility network that considers walking as a priority for major street corridors to help prioritize and guide investments in infrastructure improvements. Street im-

provements related to transit, bicycles, and automobiles should also be considered as appropriate for the context of the roadway and surrounding uses.

- Focusing on sidewalk infrastructure, particularly on priority corridors early, could provide a walkable grid that enhances the existing neighborhood, businesses, museums and transit access.
- Creating a network of comfortable bike facilities the neighborhood would enhance connections and safe biking, and encourage biking to destinations outside of Museum Park.
- Redesigning streets to allocate appropriate space to walking, biking, on-street parking, while still maintaining vehicle and transit access can have a great benefit to the surrounding uses of the street as well as the neighborhood.
- Enhance transit access and sites. Improving transit facilities can improve safety and enhance mobility options and connections to the large adjacent employment centers of Downtown and the Texas Medical Center. Enhancements should reflect the character of the neighborhood and be comfortable for people to access.

- 2 Improve access to Hermann Park by focusing on safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.
- 3 Develop a comprehensive parking strategy for the neighborhood that addresses the significant number of buses and visitors, while preserving access and parking for residents.
- 4 As part of the overall IH45 Downtown Access Study be led by TxDOt, which has the potential to transform the I-69 freeway segment that makes up the northern boundary of the Museum Park Neighborhood, advocate for a cap over I-69 from west of Main street to East of Caroline to preserve connectivity. The cap allows improved roadway connectivity between Museum Park and Midtown as well as access to the METRORail station at Wheeler. Clarity of direction and a focus on connectivity in this area could also serve as a catalyst for TOD at Wheeler Station. Thoughtful development plans and coordination with METRO on the future of the University Line could transform the station area and increase the desirability of northern section of the study area with an increase in retail/business opportunities, housing options, and overall safety improvements.

POTENTIAL PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking at the surrounding land uses and existing street context, a corridor designation table was developed and mapped with key corridors in the study area. These corridor designations will feed into on modal priorities of people walking, biking, using transit, and driving for each respective corridor the supports the role that corridor plays in regional and local mobility and the surrounding land use context and economic development goals. The following are the preliminary recommendation for the key corridors based on their modal and thematic designation:

Alameda Road

5 lane to 3 lane conversion with parallel parking, bike lanes and wider sidewalks. Design to enhance walking, maintain vehicle and transit access, and support increase in neighborhood retail and services.

Main Street

Convert one lane in each direction for bus and ambulance only traffic. Coordinate transit route stops. Design to enhance walking and provide safe pedestrian linkage across Main Street to MFAH.

Fannin & San Jacinto Streets

3-2 lane conversion: the lane adjacent to the LRT would be converted to a landscaped median that would provide additional “boulevard” type streets to the neighborhood and would act as a pedestrian refuge to provide safer crossings.

Caroline Street

Design for improved pedestrian access and maintain bicycle and automobile accessibility. Embrace the boulevard and access to multiple museums by creating a “museum walk”.

Crawford Street

Design for improved pedestrian access and maintain bicycle and automobile accessibility through the comfortable boulevard style that currently exists.

Austin Street

Option 1: Create a neighborhood bicycle boulevard consisting of alternating 1-way blocks that allow through movement for bicyclists in both north and south directions, but not vehicles. On-street parking and vehicle access would be maintained.

Option 2: Create a southbound bicycle lane and maintain through vehicle access and parking.

La Branch Street

Option 1: (coordinated with Austin Street options) Enhance pedestrian access and maintain current automobile access and parking.

Option 2: Create a northbound bicycle lane and maintain through vehicle access and parking.

Hermann Drive

design a two-way bicycle facility buffered by parking along the southern side of Hermann Drive. Reduce the number of lanes from 4 to 2 with left-turn lanes for access to Hermann Park and museums.

Binz Street

Design to enhance walking, while providing access for vehicles and transit to support increases in neighborhood retail and services.

Calumet Street

Design for improved pedestrian access and maintain bicycle and automobile accessibility. Embrace the boulevard and access to museums by using wayfinding and coordinating with of the “museum walk” on Caroline Street.

Southmore Boulevard

Design bicycle facilities that provide a significant bicycle connection through the neighborhood, enhance pedestrian access, and maintain boulevard and vehicle access.

Blodgett Street

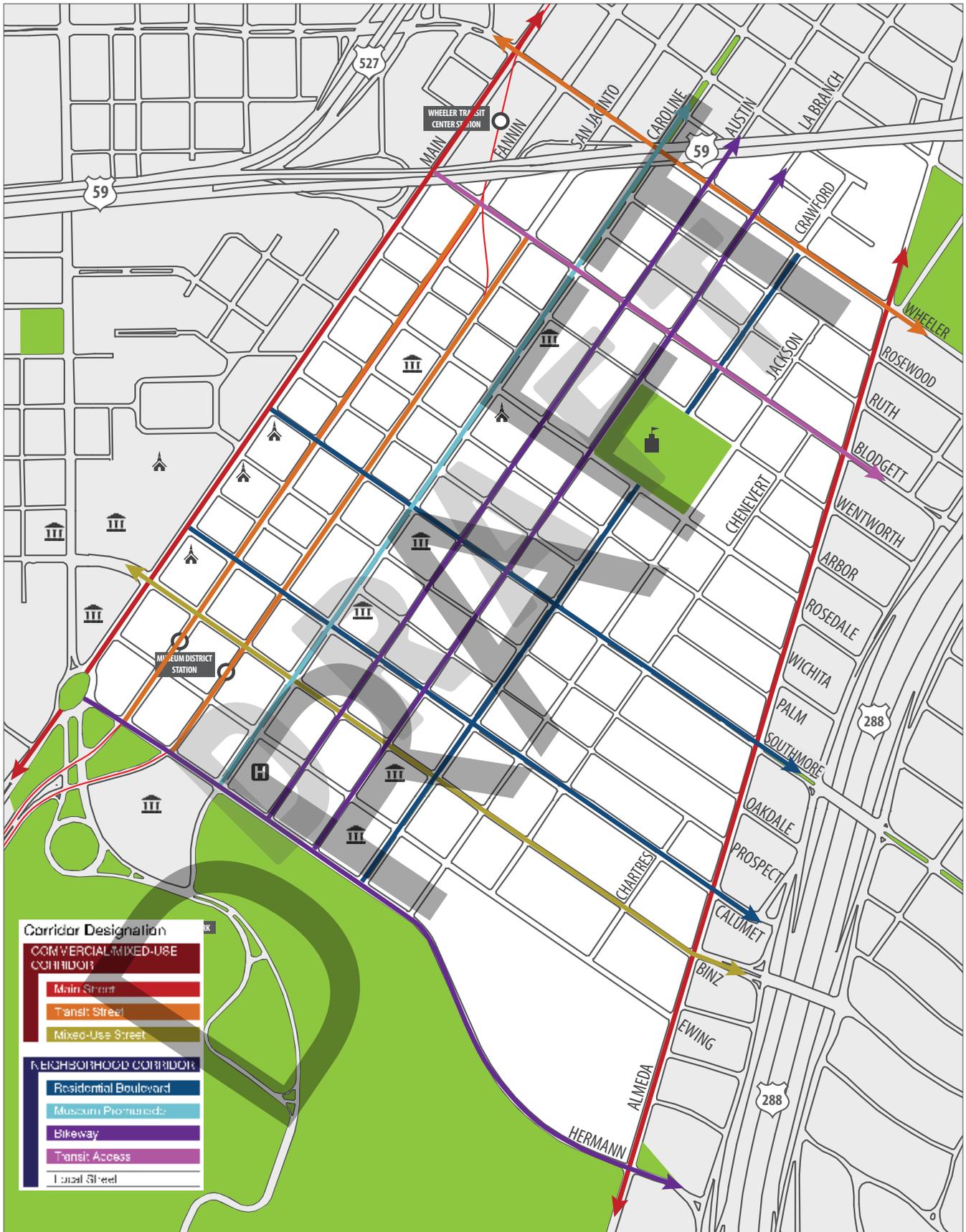
Enhance access to transit and the Wheeler Station area for pedestrians, bicyclists and automobiles.

Wheeler Avenue

Prioritize access to Wheeler Station for transit and pedestrians, while maintaining access for automobiles.

Parking:

- Improve parking wayfinding and signage to better direct visitors
- Improve parking and transit access information dissemination to public
- Work with the City to designate residential parking districts in areas of the neighborhood that are most impacted by events and visitor access.- Work with the City’s Parking Management department on strategies and improvements identified for Hermann Park and neighborhood parking to alleviate parking stress to residents
- Increase bicycle parking at destinations



PLACEMAKING AND SUSTAINABILITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT & OPPORTUNITIES SUMMARY

From its namesake, Museum Park assumes its identity from its peripheral characteristics. Fragmented by result of its context, with multiple identities borrowed from its edges, Museum Park is at a moment of renegotiation.

The following observations allude to neighborhood needs from the placemaking standpoint:

- Rapid changes are uncontrollable, uncoordinated, take away from a cohesive aesthetic neighborhood appearance.
- Neighborhood's own identity is weaker than Museum District's and other adjacent destinations, as a result it is perceived as a "drive-through" area.
- There's a deficiency in community cohesion, partially due to new and renting communities of residents not engaging, partially due to a fragmented public realm.
- There's unmet potential for great physical assets: street grid structure, wide landscaped esplanades, proximity to transit, regional park and cultural institutions, historical character and landmark quality of architecture.

Overall, cohesiveness, as identified by the design team and defined by the neighborhood, is an aspiration for Museum Park. In a neighborhood so rapidly changing, upcoming buildings and their future occupants are largely unknown. Landscape and public realm elements are a commonality; it is a tool that can reinforce neighborhood consistent aesthetic appearance and a stronger sense of place.

Museum Park contributes to a healthier Houston and can inspire change in adjacent neighborhoods by sharing current and implementing new urban strategies in the landscape. Recommendations for place making and sustainability should emphasize health in the urban setting from various perspectives. Benchmarks will be set for areas of including resiliency, environmental comfort, and biodiversity, all while considering personal and community health.

OBJECTIVES

Meeting the following objectives will improve the sense of place and marketability of the study area:

- Add to the existing landscape charisma
- Improve pedestrian and vehicular navigation
- Clarify branding and image
- Add to the community cohesion

STRATEGIES

Planting strategies, landscape and place making approaches below can be used to strengthen neighborhood image and sense of place:

1 **Esplanade Improvement Plan**

Planted medians in are a central point of pride for Museum Park. A number are associated with Houston's Adopt-An-Esplanade program where residents volunteer time and resources to their improvement. Efforts are not matched across the neighborhood. Developing a shared vision that details plant selection and sustainable maintenance regimes are essential to moving forward.

- Caroline's esplanades embody a strong sense of internal neighborhood values. The community welcomes visitors with visual experiences that connect them to their destination. Most of the medians along this street are adopted with native displays. To amplify this energy, non-natives and those outside the recommended plant list can be reduced over time.
- Crawford's medians are the go-to neighborhood gathering spot. Block parties and festivals are held regularly in these common areas. With this in mind, design recommendations can accommodate to and strengthen this use.
- With some exception, North/ South Boulevards are driven by cultural, have a more internal connection (pedestrian), East/ West are neighborhood connectors, are more externally focused (vehicular). Medians beyond Caroline and Crawford need to reflect this understanding and respond accordingly.

2 **Streetscape Improvement Plan**

Visual consistency is a long term ambition that will require the cooperation of various entities. A collective

plan will navigate design direction for the public R.O.W. and provide structure for possibilities.

- Although Museum Park is generously landscaped, the appearance is inconsistent across the neighborhood. New development may serve as a further hindrance as established street trees risk being removed and not replaced. Conscientious neighbors would also like to see more native landscapes; adding sustainability to the streetscapes. A refined planting approach for the future will strengthen the neighborhood's overall image and improve ecological value.
- Art installations in the right-of-way (including medians) can be approved on a case by case basis. Exploration past a planned destination can be encouraged with select pieces that can physically link museums to one another and the greater neighborhood. Strategies for selection, location, and management can enhance neighborhood walkability and sense of place.
- An illumination plan describing lighting strategies will appease concerns for safety and provide additional branding opportunities at night.

3 Strategic Wayfinding

- Reducing signage clutter through a strategic plan can conserve resources and provide useful guidance to neighborhood visitors

4 Intentional Branding

- Signage is not the only answer to branding. The above recommendations combined with clear intent will convey a strong sensibility.
- Museum Park differentiates itself from other neighborhoods with the idea of museum and park. Successful branding can generate this image of place through landscape gestures and future development.

5 Promote a Strong Community in Support of a Strong Image of Place

Develop means of engaging resident, professional, and student communities in the neighborhood activities.

6 Shared Space Development

Other than the medians, common public spaces within the community are scarce. Outdoor neighborhood spaces are recognized by residents as places that build community. More collective spaces to recreate, relax, and host festivities are necessary considerations especially at the block level. Demand

for shared public places will continue to increase with the rise in residents (especially from those without access to private yards).

- Undeveloped parcels provide potential opportunity for open space and require further analysis.
- Underutilized spaces I-69 and those created by highway modifications could add to available land for public use.

POTENTIAL PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

WAYFINDING

- Enhance gateway experience at a few key locations along MPSN perimeter.
- Develop “soft signage” on the neighborhood interior laid out along pedestrian culture loops.
- Develop vehicular directional signage for public parking.
- Develop Gateway Bridges design along I-59 corridor.

BRANDING

- Develop branding strategy based on ownership of concepts of “Museum” and “Park” by the neighborhood, overcoming reference to adjacent namesake amenities. Streamline visual appearance used across a variety of media – including electronic, social networking, print collateral, and environmental graphics. Develop graphic design of new wayfinding signage.
- Market the area as a heritage site and an exemplary neighborhood through media outreach.
- Develop “Insider’s Guide” to the neighborhood’s notable landmarks to attract visitors and engage adjacent communities.
- Install signature streetscape elements that embody a theme of “functional art”
- Promote local businesses as part of the local destination appeal in communications outreach efforts.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

- Negotiate alternatives to COH maintenance program for landscape in the public ROW.
- Develop cohesive landscape design of median “Nature Corridors”.
- Develop landscape design of endcap gardens and cul-de-sac parks.

- Develop landscape design vision of gateway bridges and cap over I-59.
- Bury overhead utilities along signature corridors.

PUBLIC ART

- Develop an Art Strategy for the neighborhood based on the notion of functional art that supports community life in the street.
- Establish a curatorial and maintenance program by partnering with the Midtown Cultural District, Museum District and TMC.
- Designate primary outdoor gallery sites for public art displays.
- Identify opportunities for integrating art and creative business models in the available neighborhood facilities (live-work art spaces, a small gallery business model, etc.).

BUILT FORM

- Establish guidelines for preserving desirable neighborhood physical characteristics through ordinance regulation (ROW grid, proportion of building height to street width, etc). Develop scenarios for potential range of outcomes.

GREEN NETWORK CONNECTIVITY

- Improve pedestrian connections to parks. Improve landscape connectivity to parks via streetscapes and medians.
- Develop “Beneficial Landscapes” planting strategy for the medians.
- Make provisions for expanding canopy coverage in pedestrian realm.

DRAINAGE NETWORK

- Install permeable pavement in parking lots.
- Upgrade curbless swales in the residential area ROW.
- Identify sites for rain garden detention areas.

NEIGHBORHOOD AS AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

- Partner with area schools to promote habitat and edible landscape initiatives.
- Water cycle installations/drinking stations.
- Install demonstration rain garden in the vicinity of the McGregor Elementary.
- Partner with Hermann Park Conservancy

for Nature Education programming in the community and potential pilot projects for habitat enhancement.

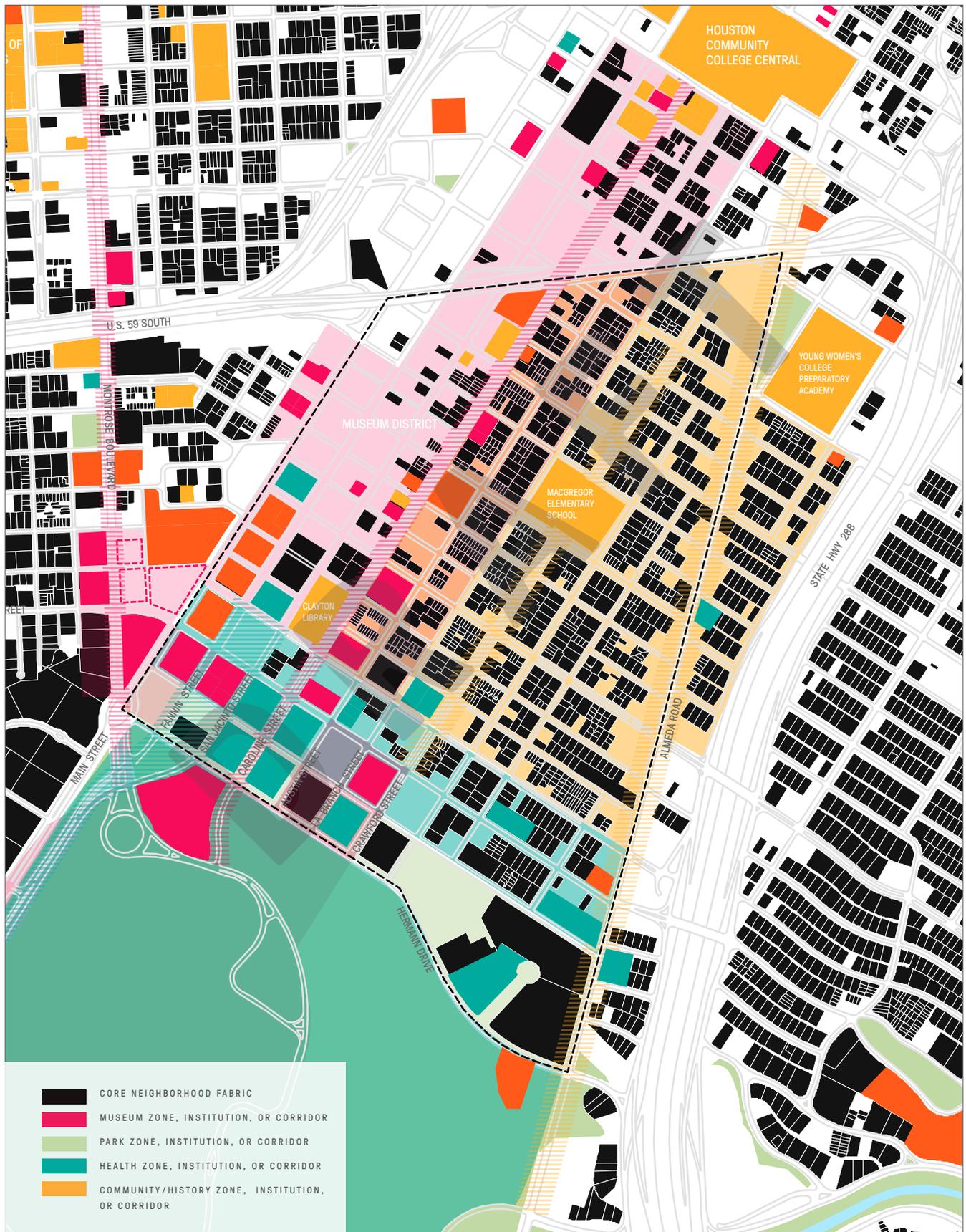
SHARED SPACE

- Develop Crawford Street Esplanade and Streetscape Improvements Plan.
- Develop a volunteer program for neighborhood interactive installations that promote communication and togetherness: curbside exercise stations, library and music boxes, something for pet lovers, furnishings and play equipment, etc. that ties back to the public art/functional art overall strategy.
- Further develop web-based tools for community outreach, organize and promote community events that will recruit new residents and businesses to community organizations.

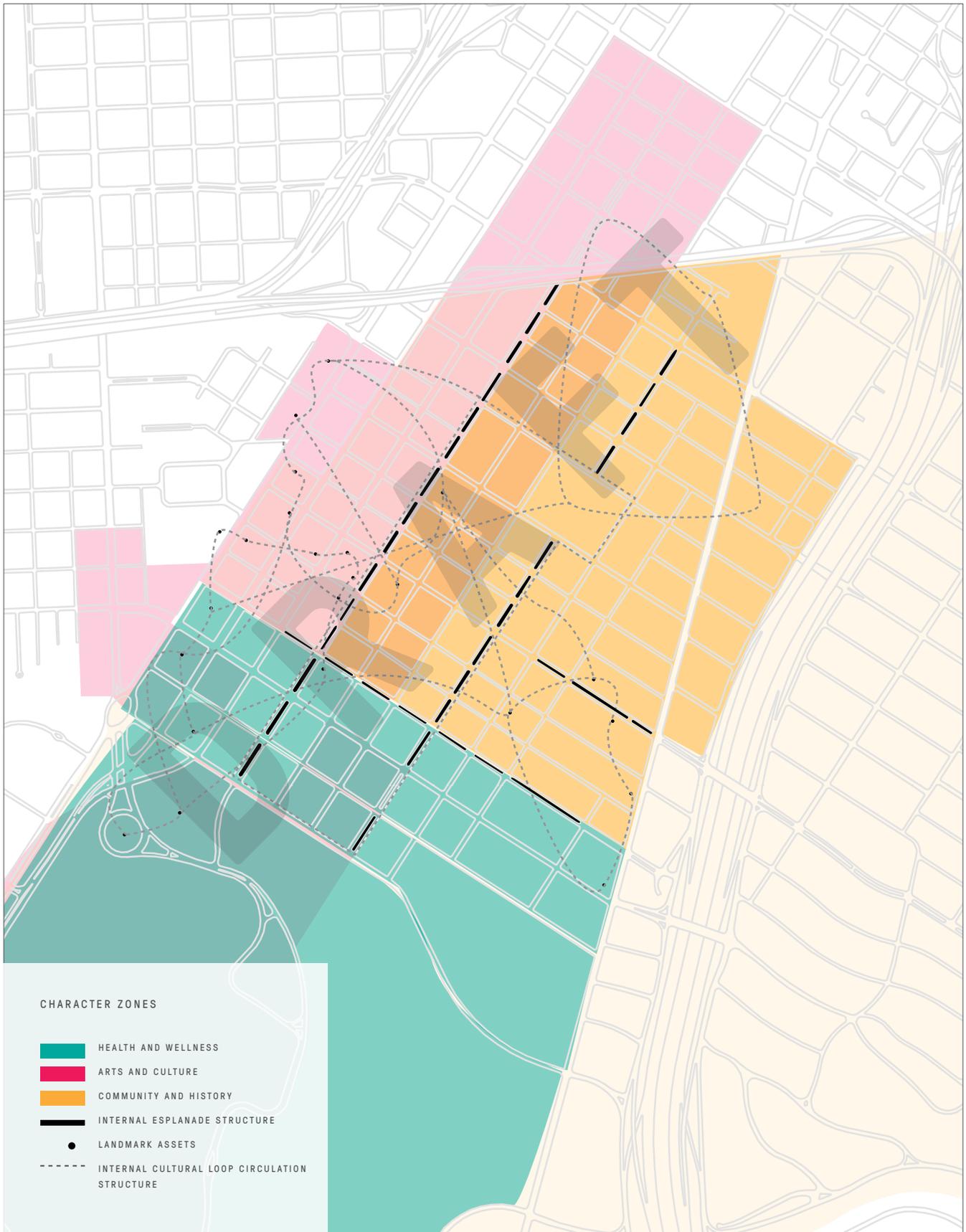
The character zones map and begins to inform the distribution of placemaking improvements based on the following findings:

- There are three distinct places that overlap within the boundaries of the study area and extend beyond, the Super Neighborhood perimeter margins are blurred as a result.
- The distinct zones will help guide improvement strategies based on their existing unique qualities and strengths.
- The condition of built form diversity is innate and interesting, but it raises the question of potential jarring transitions from one type of development to the next, and the need for buffering at those transitions.
- Regional connector corridors that surround and bisect the neighborhood contribute to the diluted sense of place by allowing activity to escape the boundaries too fast. An inwardly focused “pedestrian loop, walkabout” strategy for navigation and circulation counteracts this dynamic.

EMERGENT CHARACTER ZONES



INTERNAL LOOP PLACEMAKING STRATEGY



OVERALL OPPORTUNITIES PROJECT MAP

