



# Downtown Mobile

*keeping it easy*

DOWNTOWN MOBILE ALLIANCE

DUANY PLATER-ZYBERK & COMPANY

2013

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We thank the many residents, merchants, elected officials and municipal administration who participated, especially the mayors Samuel L. Jones and Mike Dow.

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## LETTER TO THOSE CONCERNED

With this introduction, I take the opportunity to make remarks of a kind that would not normally appear in the body of a professional planning report. Nevertheless, they bear upon the endeavor to revitalize your downtown.

In my three decades as an urban planner I have not come across a place more promising than Mobile. Most of the virtues should be known to you but perhaps they have not for a long while been listed together. First there is physical place itself: the qualities of the street grid, its intimate scale and general character. It is excellent; there is no better word. Sometimes when we are tasked to restore a place to its former glory, I think to myself, "What former glory? The urbanism was not any good in the first place." Mobile has a great urbanism to build upon.

Then, what is equally important—the people. In the political realm--without which it is difficult to accomplish urbanism—Mobile has two mayors, the present, Sam Jones, and the prior, Mike Dow, who are mutually supportive and in agreement regarding the importance of downtown. They, together with William Carroll, the long-term local Councilperson, committed during the charrette to push this downtown strategy forward.

This commitment is in spite of the usual political difficulty: as is the usual, the downtown has fewer voters than any of the surrounding residential areas--many of which could use the available funding just as much. These elected officials understand that the downtown of Mobile belongs to all the neighborhoods and that its success is identified with the city as a whole. It is therefore deserving of care beyond that of the other neighborhoods, as it brands and contributes to all of them. A downtown has a huge multiplier effect on the reputation of a city.

Then there is the Downtown Alliance staff, who are remarkably competent. They have already implemented so many intelligent strategies that at times I wondered whether there was anything that we had to offer in terms of advice. Elizabeth Sanders and Carol Hunter are masters of the difficult art of urban revitalization, having both the technical and personal skills to pull it off. They should be supported in every way possible, not least because this plan is quite dependent on their daily efforts for its success.

The Urban Development Department seems to be well led by Laura Clarke, of long experience and excellent interpersonal skill. In terms of plan review and permitting, the processing policies appear to be sound. All the officials that participate in the permitting process should understand the urgency of need to fully revitalize the downtown, and should understand themselves as partners in the risks and efforts associated with this goal. Mobile's built environment requires a light, discerning and sophisticated hand ("keeping it easy") as the City brings the downtown fully back into service. A building that is occupied and maintained is safer than one that is empty and neglected, and the administration of the building code should do everything possible to facilitate bringing currently vacant buildings and property back into use. Zoning and building codes enforced mindlessly make it too difficult to get things built in an economic environment where the potential profits are too slim. Failure to repair, to rehabilitate and to infill the downtown will perpetuate this economic weakness. An administration that does not partner in the risks in order to overcome inertia is not protecting the greater public welfare.

Then there are the merchants—who are the most important catalysts. Some of the restaurateurs in particular are terrific.

Others could use some nudging advice and yet others require a shove—all under the guidance of the Downtown Alliance.

Most hopeful are the many young people that we met in the bars and music venues, but as is typical did not show up to participate in the charrette meetings. We have not given up on them. The equally young people of our charrette team are challenged to make the connection. It is they—the twenty to thirty-year olds who will be forty and fifty when this plan works in all of the ways that we project. Urbanism is a long-term endeavor and we must work with the young, as the outcome will be theirs to thrive with.

If some of the recommendations seem oddly ambitious, or perhaps not ambitious enough, it is because we are projecting a future that will not be like the present. The 21st century is already fraught with crises that may be permanent. And it is precisely because of them that the downtown is important. For the mixed-use, walkable urbanism is the principal instrument to mitigate the effects of these crises. They are: climate change; the huge population of aging baby boomers, which needs walkable neighborhoods like no other; the disappearance of cheap energy; and the general relative impoverishment of the United States and, indeed, the West. Each of these requires further explanation.

If climate change is to occur, it will not manifest itself just in the rising tides from which FEMA standards are intended to protect us. It can be mitigated primarily by lowering the carbon impact most of which emanates from our driving. Mobile's future walkable, bicycle-able, transit-ready downtown can minimize per capita atmospheric pollution—as well as help in recruiting new businesses. Corporations and their employees will look for locations with good downtowns—and Mobile must be a contender.

The aging baby boomers face three great challenges: loss of mobility as driving becomes too difficult; social isolation as children leave the home and spouses pass away; and the difficulty and expense of obtaining support in a low-density suburbia ostensibly designed around the needs associated with raising children. For addressing these challenges, the walkable and convivial downtown of Mobile provides an effective antidote. As their single-family suburban houses become unmanageable and isolating for aging empty nesters, the downtown is an alternative to expensive and segregated retirement communities. The social opportunities and neighborhood supports can be found close by, and can be accessed safely by walking long after driving becomes too difficult or dangerous. The walkable environment of downtown Mobile is so gentle in scale that it is perfect for aging in place—especially if the traffic is calmed as recommended in this report.

Downtown is also particularly attractive to the young who, it is already known, are much less interested in cars than the prior generations. When the downtown of Mobile is working as planned it will prove to be an exceptional asset for the recruitment of young talent. The urban experience is attracting many young, well-educated people to Austin, Miami, New Orleans, Portland, Seattle, and indeed any city that has a decent downtown. To be competitive in the future it will not be enough to have the jobs, it will also require a thriving downtown to attract the talented workforce that attracts the corporations that create the jobs.

As far as the energy crisis, it must be emphasized that we will not run out of energy. There will be solar, wind, tidal, biofuels, and gas available — but energy will never again be inexpensive. Unfortunately, the suburban sprawl was built on the premise

of cheap fuel. So a return to the walkable downtowns and neighborhoods will become inevitable, for all but the very wealthy.

This is related to, but not identical to what I regret to call the general impoverishment: the current economic crisis has proven to be structural. The real estate bubble and the banking meltdown are not permanent, but they did serve to reveal the unwieldy obligations of the federal, state, and municipal governments. At the municipal level of a city like Mobile, it is expensive to maintain the far-flung infrastructure and services of suburbia. Only walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods such as this plan intends, will be cost effective. Suburban sprawl, alas, doesn't have much of a future in the long term, unless it can be retrofitted with main streets, more walkable street networks, and a greater diversity of housing (that is another plan that Mobile must engage sooner or later). Hence the importance of downtown Mobile and the older neighborhoods that surround it: with only the slight improvements proposed by this plan, they are already configured for the challenges of this new century.

One warning: the downtown plan is not another in the long string of the infamous "silver bullets" which the planning profession has foisted upon cities for the past half century. The plan does not bank on the "Bilbao Effect" of a Gehry museum that provides population spikes. Fun though they are, it is not enough to have only jewels—a baseball stadium, an aquarium, a space needle, an inner-city mall, or any other of those magical silver bullets—which did not measure up to the planners' promises and in fact served mostly to increase the municipal debt. Rather it builds on the inherent and steady strengths of a downtown: businesses that bring people every day, houses that are constantly inhabited and which support nearby shops. It is about many smaller moves, like maintaining the perfectly embedded theater where Yo-Yo Ma played the week of

our charrette—and which brought out a most impressive array of cultured people, who were then able to walk to art galleries and enjoy the restaurants and after-show urban experience. Downtown success is about bustling store-lined sidewalks, fun and useful parks, very good schools that kids can walk to, and decent, relatively inexpensive housing for all ages—housing that doesn't have to be large or extravagant precisely because the public life on the street is large and extravagant.

I expect there might be some disappointment that this plan does not have its silver bullet. What it does propose is a strategy for the slow, patient, and always-successful work that has made some American downtowns great again. Well, OK. There is one old-style silver bullet—the High Line to the riverfront—which we are able to think is realistic only because most of the pieces are already in place (the Convention Center, the hotels and parking garages, the waterfront park), and Alabama D.O.T. is already engaged in taking down its old cloverleaf interchange—and has the budget to do it.

This plan is a collection of whatever we found (or were told by the local participants) to be necessary. There are many "recommendations," half a dozen "special projects," and one tailored "Smartcode" to guide the rebuilding predictably and efficiently. Only the code was required by our contract. The rest of the work was done because we love the place.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Branyan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'J' at the beginning.

## A SELECTIVE NARRATIVE

Mobile is a very old city with a colorful history. We could celebrate these, but it is the postwar misadventures that are most relevant to the initiatives of this plan. The results of postwar planning in Mobile—as elsewhere in the United States—have been so disappointing that it is necessary to create some distance between those plans and what we propose by this one.

The mid-century urban renewal plans failed because they were coarse-grained and unprecedented ideas, not because Mobile slipped up in their implementation. All the demolitions of urban renewal demonstrate (unfortunately) that Mobile has the ability to get things done!

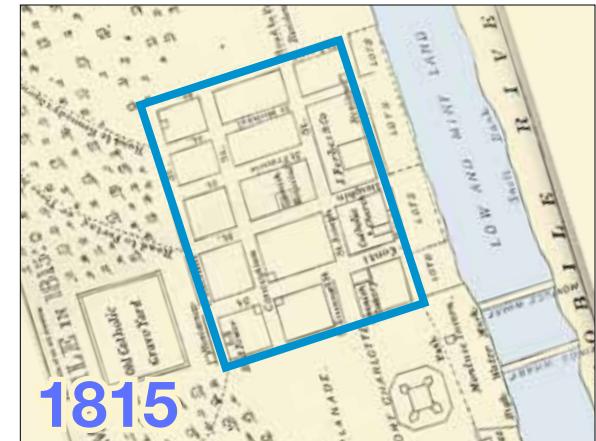
In the broadest terms Mobile came into existence as a port, upon which its economy was based until the Second World War. Shipping decreased after the war, jobs were reduced by containerization, and the port as a socioeconomic engine lost its primacy. However, its influence is not over. Even as it is further superseded by the competing and newer ports of Texas, Mississippi, Florida, and Georgia, the docks should be retained, as the challenges of the 21st century will likely restore shipping to importance as a factor in regional transportation. The shore should not be further gentrified as so many other cities have done. Mobile is now a shipbuilding center, producing the most technically advanced ships on earth.

And Airbus—while an aircraft factory—is dependent on marine transportation. These industrial uses, as much as recreation, should remain the reality of Mobile's waterfront.

As with virtually all North American cities, with the end of World War II and a long period of decay set in as investment and growth turned to the suburbs. The migration outward was not driven purely as a private market phenomenon: public policy and subsidy incentivized suburban sprawl by underwriting the highways and home mortgages that fueled the expansion. These policies first led housing out of the downtown, then the shops followed the customers, and then offices followed both. Downtowns did not suddenly fail; we chose to abandon them for the promises of a car-oriented lifestyle.

Mobile's urban highway system, with the cloverleaf and the ring road, enabled people who worked downtown to leave easily and those who lived in the suburbs to rush in to the churches, museums and other institutions which remained behind. It was not necessary to live downtown in order to benefit from it.

The remedies that ensued in the 1960-70 planning era were misguided by the notion that a downtown should compete with its own suburbs by becoming themselves more suburban: more parking lots, wider streets, and new buildings that were less dense and more



**1815**

Foundation



**1860**

Apogee



**1950s**

Low Point



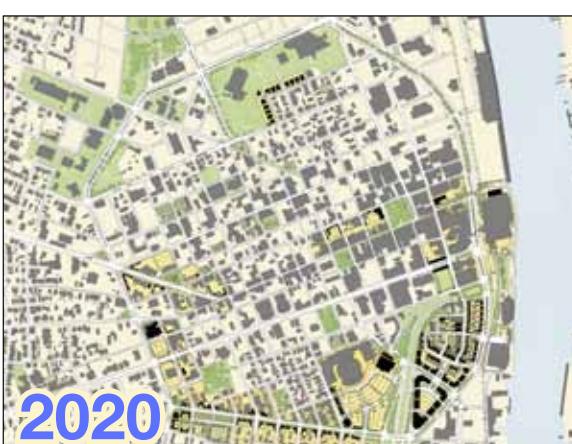
**2008**

*New Plan for Old Mobile*



**2012**

*Existing Conditions*



**2020**

*Proposed Conditions*

landscaped. Mobile, more than most cities, had the misfortune of having the leadership to get itself demolished in the pursuit of this.

Mobile's downtown was once of the urban quality of New Orleans, but the leadership of New Orleans did not have the initiative to arrange the Federal subsidies for demolition. Alas, the leadership of Mobile did.

The downtown area today still has empty land. Paradoxically, it is fortunate that there has been so little rebuilding, as it would have been the unsympathetic kind prevalent in the sixties and seventies—surely the low point of Western architecture. But one would have preferred that the old building had not been demolished in the first place.

Mobile's old can-do attitude is commendable... and should continue. But the plans should be different this time, involving sympathetic rebuilding—in context to what was lost.

The later generation of questionable advice should also be avoided: those that provide spikes of population and visual prestige, but that are not steady enough to really support commerce. They can easily become obsolete relative to newer, more glamorous competitors. In fact, those convening places which currently exist in Mobile can only compete if the downtown becomes a terrific experience in support; for there are no sandy beaches, palm trees, or golf courses nearby

like in, say, Orlando. These investments require the downtown to become more than viable—and then exciting. The downtown has to become a place worth visiting, first from the suburbs, then nationally.

As suburbia eventually proves to be neither as sustainable nor as alluring as was promised, it is a testament to the stability and durability of Mobile's downtown that so much of its assets can still be recovered. Given the 50 years of neglect, it is essential that again a vision of greatness is possible. Mobile's downtown can be rebuilt and transmitted to the new century as a place to live, better adjusted than if it had all been preserved and become similar to a tourist-sodden New Orleans.

So we reach the present. It is fortunate that this plan was conceived in 2012 and not earlier, because it is only now that the outlines of the 21st century are becoming clear. For a time that promises to be difficult in terms of energy, climate, demographics, and finance, there is a very clear and compelling need for walkable, mixed-use and transit-friendly downtowns such as Mobile's can become.

## MANAGEMENT: INITIATIVES

### Observation

The Downtown Mobile Alliance is very active as the principal instrument for the revitalization of the downtown.

### Discussion

The Alliance, its policies and actions, has already initiated much of what the present planning team would have recommended. These include the street lighting, which is excellent where it has been implemented; the public spaces which are exceptionally clean (with the exception of the trash containers to be discussed); the landscaping, which is very well maintained; a facade improvement fund; the advocacy and public relations; the ongoing and effective coordination with the elected leadership; the visitor assistance protocols; the provision for a community meeting space; and some well-conceived initiatives for business development and retail management.

### Recommendation

1. The current initiatives are to be continued, funded, and supported as fully as possible by the municipal administration. The few omissions will be covered in the respective sections of this report.
2. The initiatives proposed by this report should be carried out primarily through or with the support of the Downtown Alliance.

## DESIGN: CIVIC SPACE

### Observation

The streets, rather than the squares and parks, supply most of the public space, and indeed the most used public space, in a downtown like that of Mobile. However, there is usually need for additional specialized civic open spaces.

### Discussion

Civic open spaces have specific attributes according to type: greens, squares, plazas, campuses, greenways, etc. Mobile is equipped with four squares of world-class beauty. Bienville Square, the Cathedral Plaza, Cooper Riverside Park, and Spanish Plaza—the latter three having been recently created. Within the Church Street neighborhood can also be found the beloved British Park. They are some of the best brand assets of Mobile.

This master plan proposes to add one more square, this one associated with the Mardi Gras parade. It would enhance the connection of Conde Fort and Village to Dauphin Street. There is also a proposed Highline to connect Dauphin Street to the waterfront, the Convention Center, and to Cooper Riverside Park.

### Recommendation

Design, fundraise, and implement Mardi Gras Square and the Highline according to the sketches provided.

There is a type of public space that is emerging worldwide as the most useful and popular for all ages: the community garden. There are half a dozen sites that could be implemented as either temporary or permanent community gardens. No difficulties against individual initiative to implement community gardens, as there was in the instance of the de Tonti neighborhood's attempts to create a community garden.

### Observation

The Calloway Smith Middle School of the de Tonti neighborhood has excess grounds not in use.

### Recommendation

Lots should be restored, creating a proper square for the neighborhood and as a gateway to school grounds. The lots may be sold and the profits allocated to the School Board.

### Observation

Like most downtowns, Mobile's is equipped with a very high proportion of the City's civic buildings. These are of a scale and importance commensurate with the downtown being the center of the entire city, and indeed, the region. The Saenger Theatre, the Center for the Living Arts, and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception—these institutions still bring citizens into the downtown—but only on an interim basis. The civic buildings that best serve to revitalize a downtown's full-time residential component are the public schools.

### Discussion

The downtown is equipped with three schools and the empty but elegant hulk of a fourth: Barton Academy. It is essential that Barton be reactivated, as it is within walking distance of the largest residential area of the downtown. This (and the others, if possible) must be conceptualized as elite schools if they are to attract young families (and not just singles and seniors). In order to support the re-inhabitation downtown, a percentage of the enrollment (10-15%) should be reserved for kids whose families live within a five-to-ten-minute walk.

## DESIGN: TRANSPORTATION

### Observation

Some maintain that the Mobile Civic Center is too expensive to maintain and that despite its important annual function during Mardi Gras, that it should be demolished. This will be discussed as a special project.

### Observation

The street layout of the downtown is perfectly able to provide a complete set of transportation choices, among which are walking, bicycling, and public transit--without precluding the use of the car.

### Discussion

It is one of the greatest amenities for those who are considering living downtown that they be able to walk to most of their daily needs, and perhaps even to dispense with the burden of having to own a car. (see plates 2A, 2C & 10 for markets and schools)

### Recommendation

To this end it is essential that the streets be made walkable, and bicycleable, (see plates 12 & 14) and that daily needs be provided within walking distance.

### Discussion

While walking is normally constrained to a five-minute radius, bicycling can extend that distance by ten times. There is an existing bicycling network entering the downtown and its expansion is recommended. The principal assets to be provided are not new bike lanes, but slowing down traffic so that all the streets are bike routes. If the traffic velocity is reduced there is no need of specific lanes but there is a need for smooth pavement--otherwise, with the potholes bicycling becomes unpleasant and dangerous.

### Recommendation

It is possible to create a four to eight-foot wide lane within a street by smooth asphalt overtopping. This is a low-cost way to demarcate bicycle lanes.

### Recommendation

To increase the types of pedestrian experiences there are two corridors that may be detailed and administered purely for pedestrian and bicycle use. These can be temporarily established during festivals and weekends, and if there are positive consequence with minor disruption, they may be permanently installed. One is an important portion of Dauphin Street and the other is that portion of Glidden Place, which is not needed for vehicular traffic.

## DESIGN: TRANSPORTATION (CONT.)

### Discussion

While the streets of downtown Mobile, on the whole, are pedestrian friendly because some relatively minor modifications will improve their performance.

### Observation

Among the more important improvements are the masking of the parking lots with liner buildings.

### Observation

Perhaps the simplest improvement is to install traffic lights or stop signs at strategic intersections. This will require a set of specific intersection-by-intersection engineering studies—but based on the presumption that on those intersections pedestrian comfort will take priority over vehicular speed.

### Observation

There are a great number of streets that can be improved as pedestrian environments.

### Discussion

No city has ever been able to provide a continuously excellent pedestrian experience as there are a number of activities that are intrinsically hostile to pedestrians. These must be accommodated in a systematic way.

### Recommendation

To avoid the interspersing of the inferior and superior frontages, support the quality of the frontage, as can be seen in plates 3A & 3B. Great care should be taken to assure that the Code and Regulating Plan designations, “A STREETS” (see code plate C) receive the highest quality frontages and that they be incentivized for improvements sooner.

### Observation

Mobile, like most cities that had their heyday from the 1870s to the 1920s, had a streetcar system that was abandoned in the 50s.

### Discussion

Streetcars have a future--especially the low-tech streetcars such as those in Portland, Houston or Dallas. They are light-weight, but nevertheless durable. The cars can be expected to last as long as fifty years, in contrast to the standard life of the bus, of seven years maximum.

### Recommendation

Solicit funding from the federal level for a streetcar system. The densities of the build-out and the detailing of the public space should be in support of the designated stops of the future. A supportive context *precedes* the installation of transit, rather than the other way around.

## MANAGEMENT: COMMERCE

### Observation

Cities work best for humans when all their streets are two-way—for cars they work best as one-way systems. Mobile, in its downtown, has both.

### Discussion

Two-way systems force the traffic to slow, and allow drivers to make the decision about which route is quickest at the moment, rather than have the decisions made by traffic engineers at the design phase. Two-way traffic supports retail, whatever the location, as shops have access to both the morning and evening trade. However, an entirely two-way system in the case of Mobile may eliminate too many on-street parking spaces and thus is not a blanket recommendation for the entire city.

### Recommendation

Revert certain streets to two-way, especially St. Anthony and Conti, for the sake of parking access and slowing traffic speed.

entertainment, and shopping needs.

### Discussion

While downtown workers may occasionally get lunch downtown, typically at the end of the day they drive back out to the suburbs to shop, dine, exercise and take advantage of other commercial opportunities. It would markedly improve the commercial performance of the downtown to attract these workers before they head back home.

### Recommendation

There are business development tools, not already in the repertoire of the Downtown Alliance, which should be considered. Free parking should be provided at some distance from major employment centers and the walk from parking to work should be lined with commuter-oriented retail.

1. A pop-up retail program of trucks and carts should be directly associated with the more disconnected office buildings
2. A community capital program should be established to support downtown merchants, perhaps including a deferred loan payment program.
3. Encourage landlords to participate in the success of their tenants by providing start up periods of free rent and otherwise participate in the businesses.

ordinary daily needs of residents.

### Discussion

Without a decent supermarket, drugstore, and department store available within walking distance, the automobile continues to be necessary—and one of the great incentives of dwelling in the walkable downtown is lost.

### Recommendation

Recruit and enable a mid-level supermarket and drugstore in one of two locations: the corner of Broad and Government (see plate 2A). Alternatively, recruit the supermarket and a department store of the category of Target to the Civic Center (see plate 2D). In that case, the parking lot is set, and the proximate intersection is the best in the region. Recruitment should not be difficult.

### Observation

Even though 20,000 people come daily to work, the downtown does not supply their dining,

### Observation

Within walking distance of downtown residential areas there is no shopping that provides for the

### Observation

One of the amenities of Mobile is its waterfront, which is currently disconnected by Water Street

## MANAGEMENT: COMMERCE (CONT.)

from the downtown and the shopping and entertainment experience of Dauphin Street.

### Discussion

This is not to be overestimated because the riverfront waterfront is not a Gulf-front beach, but neither is it the muddy Mississippi. It is pretty enough and water always has an inordinate appeal. Besides, there is already an enormous investment at the waterfront: the Convention Center, a new park, and the recently completed museum. These amenities, with their many visitors should be well connected to the shops, hotels and restaurants downtown.

### Recommendation

Connections should be made from the retail corridor of Dauphin Street to these venues. This should be done within the current D.O.T. budget for highway modification.

progress.

### Discussion

The provision of retail is essential to the viability of a downtown for two reasons:

1. To provide the entertainment and social opportunities that are the most important amenity in a diverse, walkable downtown.
2. To provide at a minimum the ordinary daily needs of the residents if they are to live without cars, which is one of the great attractions of the downtown.

### Discussion

Retail environments should be grouped, marketed and managed as several distinct and differentiated districts. There are no silver bullet strategies--only many small interventions will work.

### Recommendation

Conceive of the downtown as a series of specialized retail groupings, each with its own character and business plan derived from its locations. These include one associated with employment on Royal Street. One associated with shopping and restaurants on Dauphin Street and one with entertainment on St. Louis Street.

### Observation

It is more difficult to develop a commercial business downtown than it is in a pre-existing, pre-permitted shopping center or shopping mall in the suburbs.

### Discussion

As it is necessary to compete, it is necessary to match the monetary incentives as well as marketing advice for the prospective tenants downtown.

2. Establish an ordinance permitting temporary retail.

3. Organize startup support for insurance business permits, and certificates of occupancy.

4. Continue supporting the existing Urban Emporium business incubator.

### Observation

The construction of the large new Federal courthouse on two blocks adjacent to the de Tonti neighborhood requires particular attention. This area will inevitably become the “legal” district as the projected demand for lawyers’ office space could change the character of the neighborhood from a 24/7 residential community to day-time only offices.

### Discussion

Small non-entertainment businesses have thus far operated without conflict within the de Tonti and Church Street Neighborhoods. They are unlikely to cause problems so long as they remain relatively small and do not provide social services. As telecommunicating and small consultant practices become more common, these will likely increase, causing conflicts with parking, principally.

### Recommendation

Follow the code, which minimizes parking problems, although they are inevitable.

### Recommendation

Enable the construction of new low-rise office buildings on lots in proximity to the Courthouse. Historic houses suitable for residential use should not be converted (the T4 District ensures that). It is also essential that shop fronts not be disrupted by law offices that do not support retail continuity (the T5 District ensures that).

### Observation

1. Surface parking lots cover a high percentage of the downtown.

### Observation

Retail is important to downtown. In terms of retail incubation the Downtown Alliance is making

### Recommendation

1. The Downtown Alliance should expedite commercial building and renovation permits.

## MANAGEMENT: PARKING

2. Many of the lots are poorly maintained.
3. Few of the lots are lined with buildings or fences or otherwise masked from the street.

### Discussion

Open surface parking lots make the surrounding streets and neighborhoods seem desolate and unsafe, creating a negative perception for visitors who would revitalize the downtown.

### Recommendation

1. Line the large surface parking lots with thin buildings (liner building). This is both profitable for the owner and highly beneficial to the surrounding community, and there is no loss of parking spaces. Encouraging and/or incentivizing owners to construct liner buildings will provide significant long-term benefit to the downtown.
2. When liner buildings are not feasible, lots should be lined with a hedge combined with a metal fence or short masonry wall to screen the cars.
3. Smaller lots may be surfaced in crushed granite rather than pavement. This is less visually jarring and is more environmentally sensitive, is less expensive, and is easier to plant with trees.
4. Newly adopted parking lot screening requirements should be phased in over time. In the interim, before liner buildings, food trucks and temporary retail within non-permanent structures should be encouraged as liners along the street frontages of parking lots.

of an excellent parking experience. Parking establishes a sense of welcome when it is well managed, landscaped, signed, illuminated, and maintained. The routes between parking and destinations must also be safe and pleasant.

2. On-street parking supports commerce, encourages visitors, acts as a protective buffer for sidewalks, and helps calm traffic.

### Recommendation

1. Duration of parking should be coordinated with the type of destination being served. Meters near restaurants should allow two hours for a meal, whereas meters near shopping can be one hour. Parking rules should be readily apparent (posted and easy to understand), and the fines should not be so punitive as to anger people and sour them to coming downtown.

Parking management should discourage employees from taking the best parking spaces. Parking meters should allow 2 hour stays in areas where restaurants are concentrated (like Dauphin), but stays of 4-8 hours or more should be available in areas further from Dauphin.

2. The 2008 report by Downtown Parking & Planning Associates provides many good recommendations that should continue to guide strategies.

Pedestrian lighting and sidewalk improvements of the type installed on Dauphin Street should be extended along some of the north-south streets so that visitors feel that they can safely walk from parking to their destinations—and that their cars are safe.

### Observation

The majority of existing garages serve specific programs, like the conference center. Few serve the general downtown parking needs.

### Discussion

Structured parking will be a catalyst to the continued redevelopment of downtown by allowing a greater quantity of parking once the existing on-street and surface parking is exhausted. Some well-placed lots may be secured today for municipal parking in the future. Parking garages, like open lots, can be easily lined with frontages that activate the street and reduce the wide expanses of asphalt associated with parking lots.

### Recommendation

Three sites have been identified for structured parking decks. These sites would help ensure that in the foreseeable future parking is available in easy walking distance to most downtown destinations. They can serve general parking and will help incentivize new development or allow for the conversion of existing surface parking lots to new mixed-use developments.

### Observation

1. The downtown's success as regional destination is dependent on the provision

## MANAGEMENT: NOISE ABATEMENT

### Observation

Noise associated with night time entertainment and from other causes conflicts with existing and projected residential use.

### Discussion

This problem is today tolerably managed but it will be exacerbated as the present plan is implemented resulting in additional residential and commercial venues. There are several possible strategies for different scales and with different degrees of difficulty in implementation.

### Recommendation

1. *Immediate:* Enforce the existing noise ordinance including rules for outdoor bands and speakers.
2. *Immediate:* Permit the installation of windows with noise-insulated glass in the historic district.
3. *Medium term:* Require interior speakers to face away from the doors and storefront.
4. *Medium term:* Delineate three sectors with graduated standards for mitigation of noise intensity. (see code plate D)
5. *Medium term:* Encourage landlords to include "acknowledgement of noise intensity" clauses in their leases.

### Discussion

In certain areas traffic noise detracts from the experience of living and visiting the downtown.

### Recommendation

1. *Immediate:* Require "California compliant" leaf blowers.
2. *Medium term:* Establish siren policy for emergency vehicles.
3. *Medium term:* Traffic-calm "acceleration" alleys (see plates 12 & 13)

## MANAGEMENT: PUBLIC LIGHTING

### Observation

Public lighting is excellent - where it has been installed.

### Discussion

The fixtures are durable and of appropriate character. The height of the luminary is appropriate. The color and intensity of the light is excellent for pedestrian activity. However, the fixtures are not being well enough maintained and there are no plans to expand their coverage. This is folly, as the lighting has proven its worth in its positive effect on retail, pedestrian experience, and security.

### Discussion

The surviving cobra-head fixtures with yellow vapor lights are associated in the public mind with crime-prone areas and send the wrong signal.

### Recommendation

Maintain the existing lighting and systematically extend along axes where "A" streets are designated in the plan (see code plate C). The cobra head and sodium vapor lights should be gradually eliminated.

## MANAGEMENT: PUBLIC SAFETY

### Observation

Currently, incidence of crime is relatively low by the standards of a downtown of this kind.

### Discussion

Even if the crime is under control, there is a perception that it is high, especially as crime is currently rising in the suburbs where the visitors come from. The visitors' comfort can be addressed in several ways.

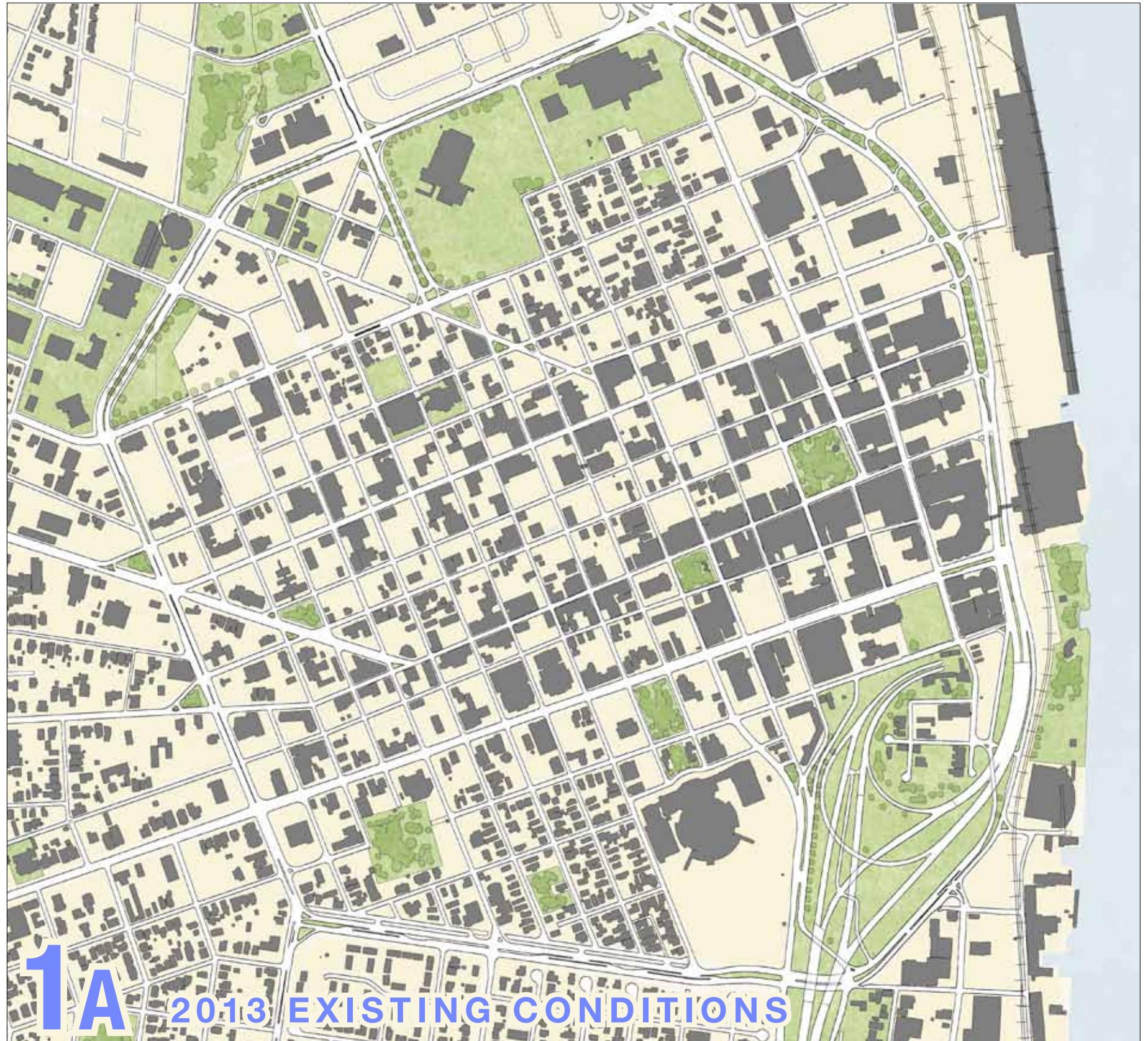
### Recommendation

1. Provide visible policing in terms of parked patrol cars (but not too many and only where effective) and policemen walking the sidewalks.
2. Coordinate the police force with private security personnel, delegating the appropriate powers.
3. Establish a Smart Phone "Tattle Tale Network."
4. Advertise the low crime statistics via media.



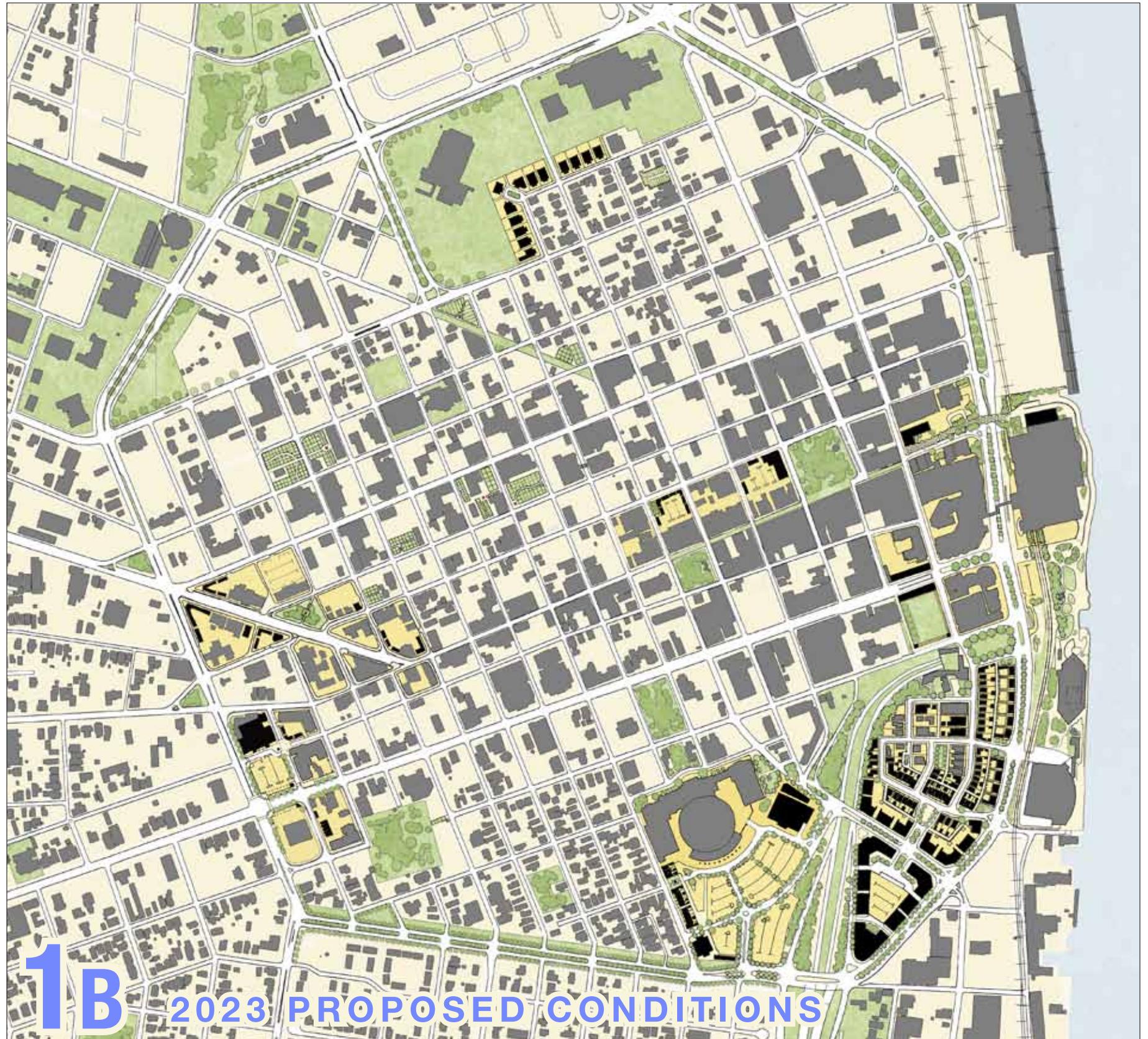


# ILLUSTRATIONS



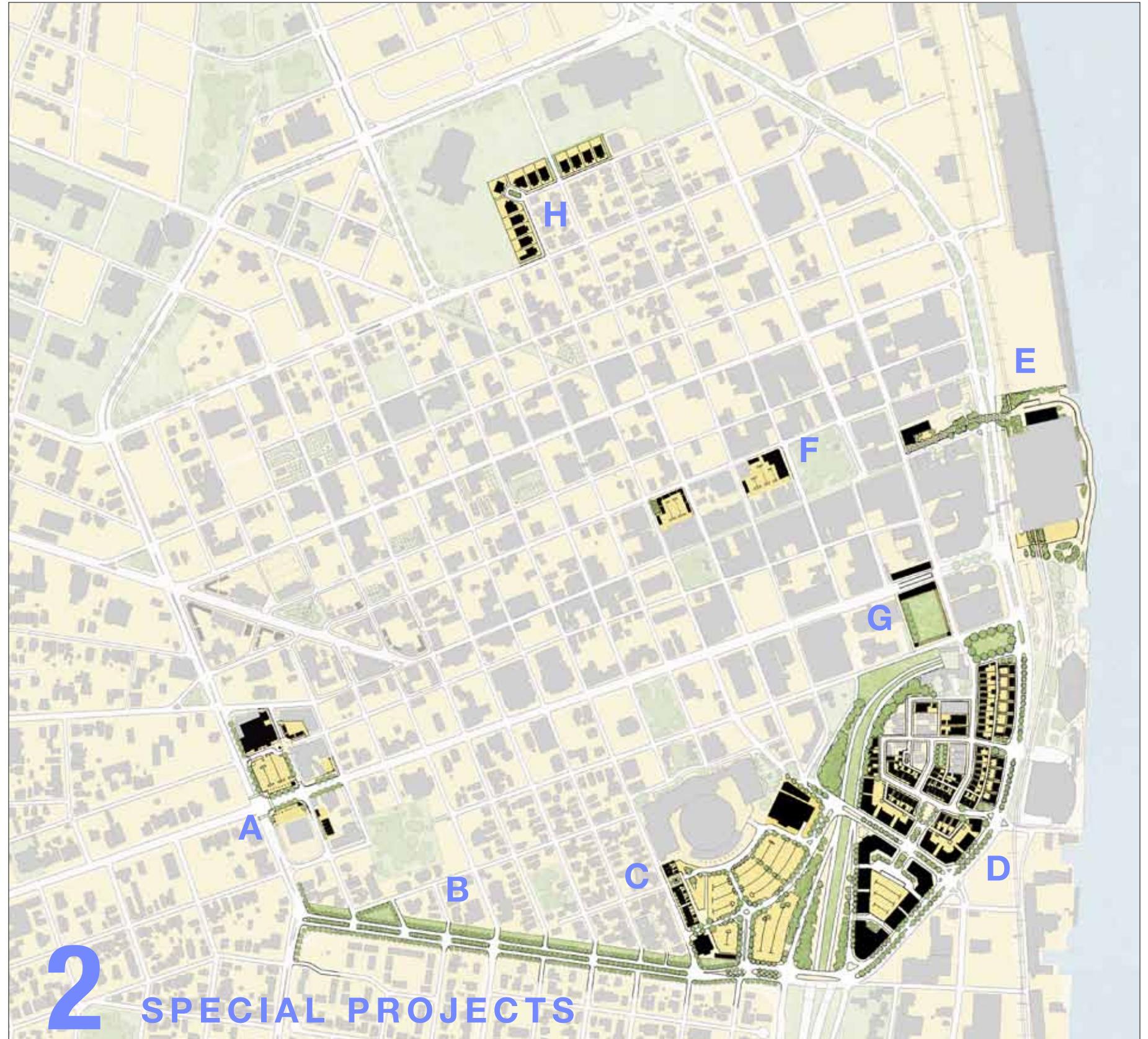
## 1A 2013 EXISTING CONDITIONS

This is an illustrative plan showing the existing conditions at the time of the November 2012 charette. Note in particular the highway cloverleaf to the southwest around the Fort Conde neighborhood.



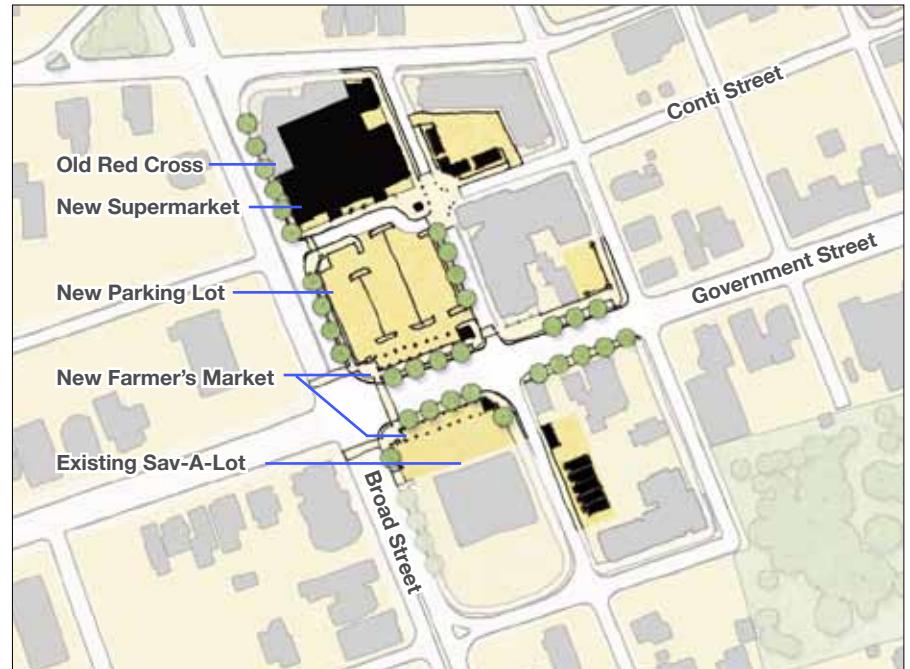
*This is an illustrative plan incorporating the various special projects described in this report. It does not include the infill interventions and street improvements, which are envisioned as a result of the new code.*







▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions

It is crucially important, if downtown is to be restored to a walkable, mixed-use (commercial/residential/workplaces/schools) community, that a small, upscale supermarket be introduced. This will require proactive recruitment and possibly subsidy. The corner of Broad and Government Streets is, in terms of traffic volume, one of the two best corners available in the region, so this should not be too difficult. The parking lot screens are necessary, because this location is the entrance to the downtown, and to pass by two open parking lots sends the wrong message as to the kind of place that it is to become.



▲ Parking lot screen and farmer's market on both sides of Government Street at the corner of Broad Street.

## 2A SPECIAL PROJECT: NEW MARKETPLACE

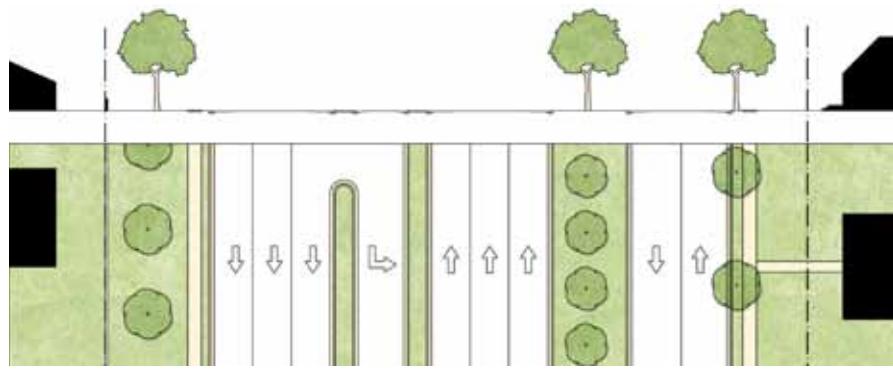


▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions

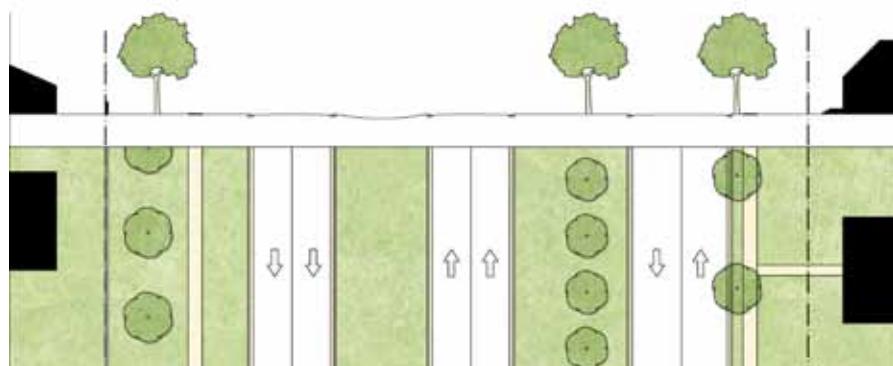
## 2A SPECIAL PROJECT: NEW MARKETPLACE



▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions - Alternate

Canal Street is radically overdesigned, creating a separation between downtown and the neighborhoods to the south. The proposals are two: with and without the side street. The adjacent cul-de-sacs may then be opened, with additional building lots created from the reclaimed lanes, which may be sold to pay for the improvements.



▲ Existing Conditions

## 2B SPECIAL PROJECT: CANAL STREET



▲ Proposed Conditions

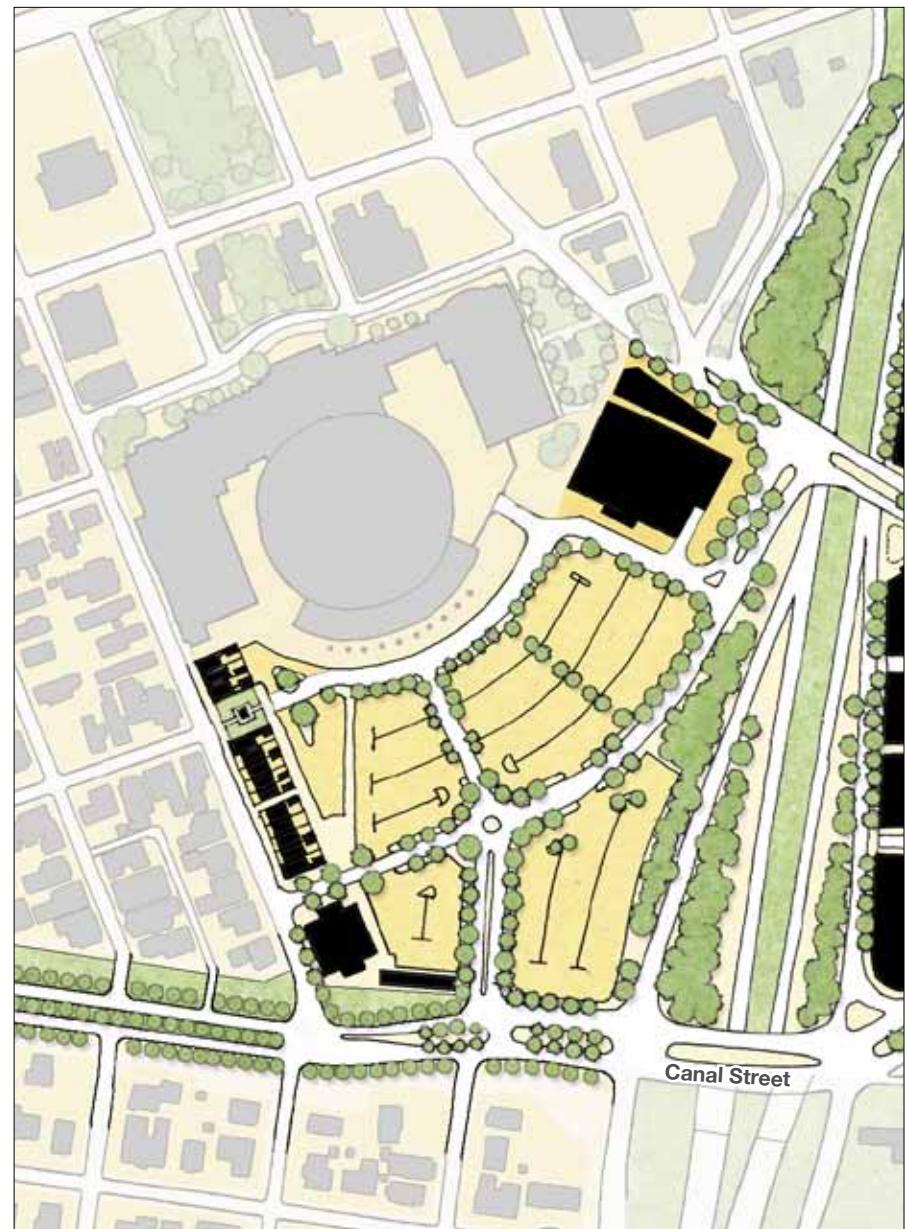


▲ Proposed Conditions - Alternate

## 2B SPECIAL PROJECT: CANAL STREET



▲ Existing Conditions

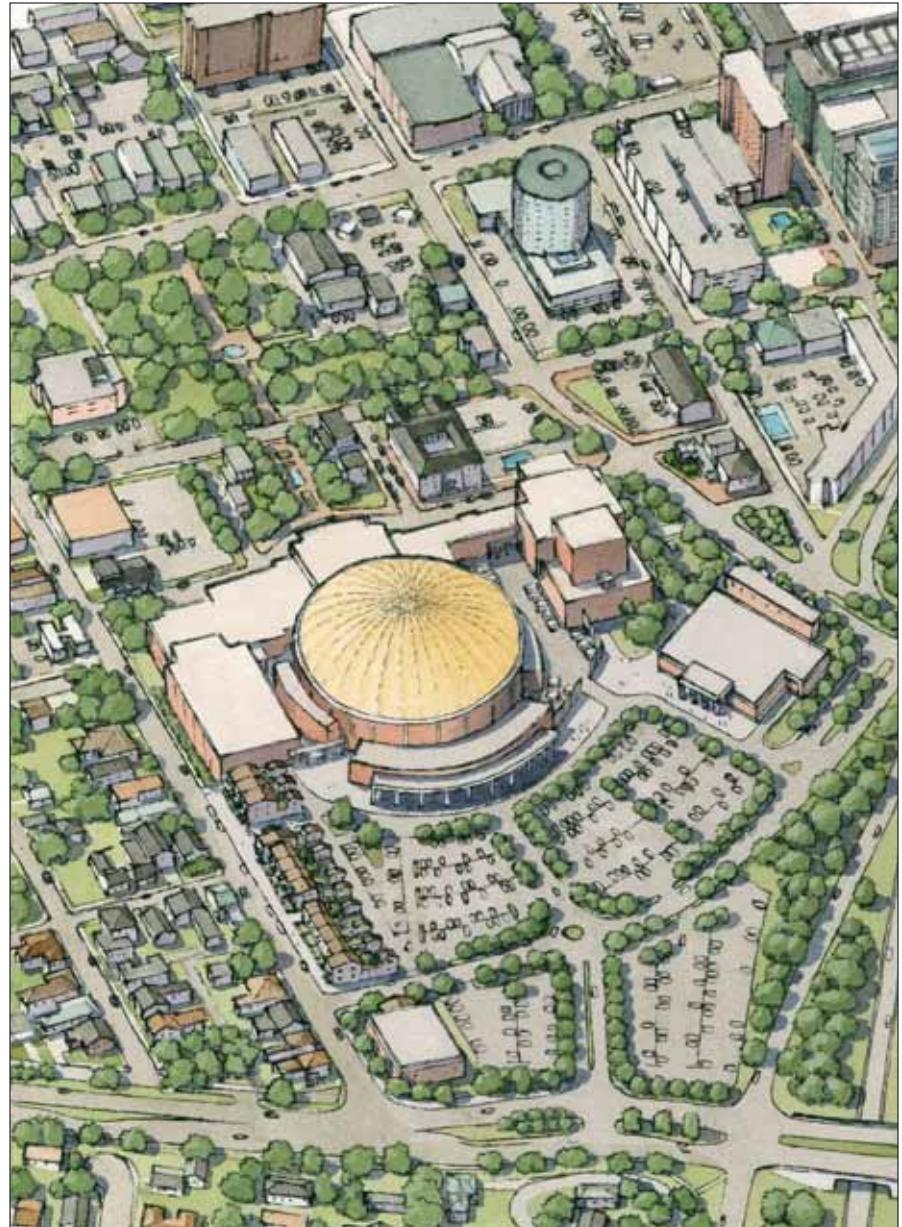


▲ Proposed Conditions

## 2c SPECIAL PROJECT: CIVIC CENTER CONVERSION



▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions

## 2c SPECIAL PROJECT: CIVIC CENTER CONVERSION



▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions

## 2D SPECIAL PROJECT: FORT CONDE NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDOUT



▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions

## 2D SPECIAL PROJECT: FORT CONDE NEIGHBORHOOD BUILDOUT



▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions: Dauphin Street towards the river

## 2E SPECIAL PROJECT: HIGHLINE PARKWAY



▲ Existing Conditions

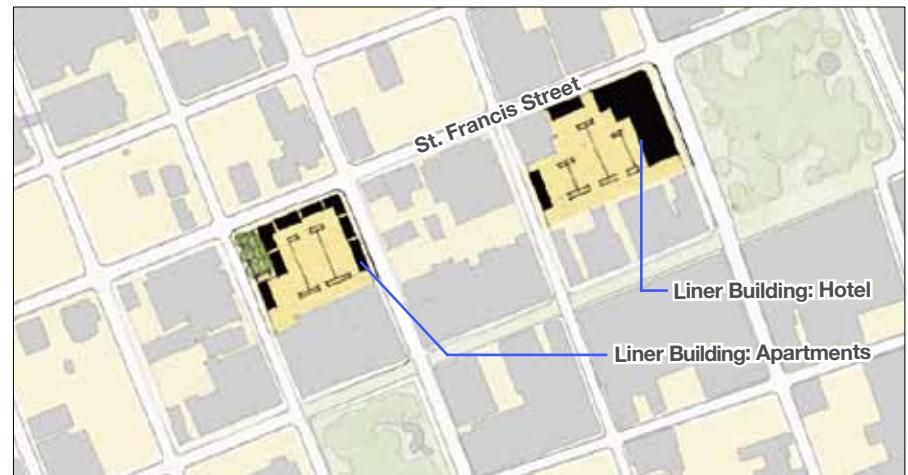


▲ Proposed Conditions

## 2E SPECIAL PROJECT: HIGHLINE PARKWAY



▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions



▲ Prototypical Apartment Frontage



▲ Prototypical Apartment Rear View

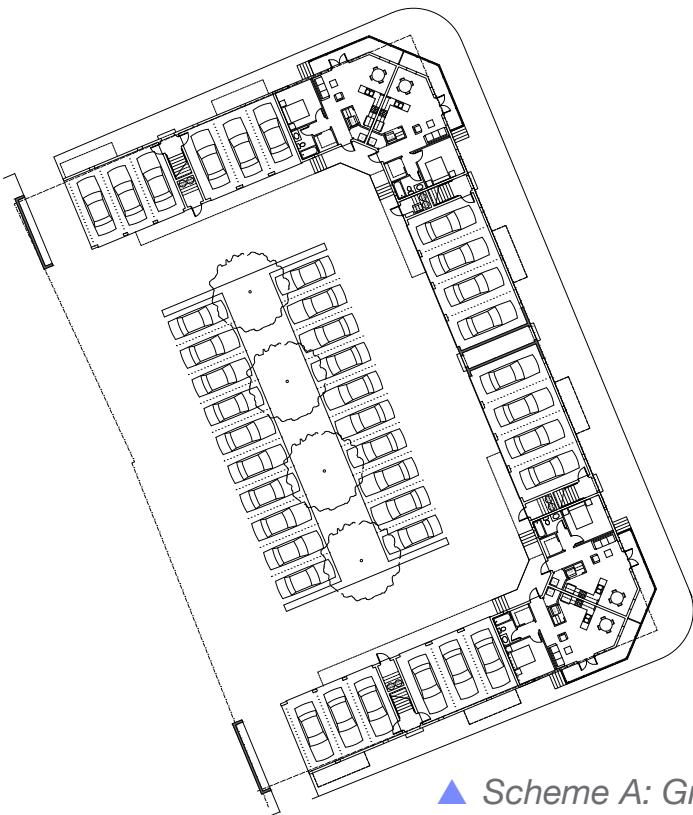


▲ Prototypical Apartment Frontage

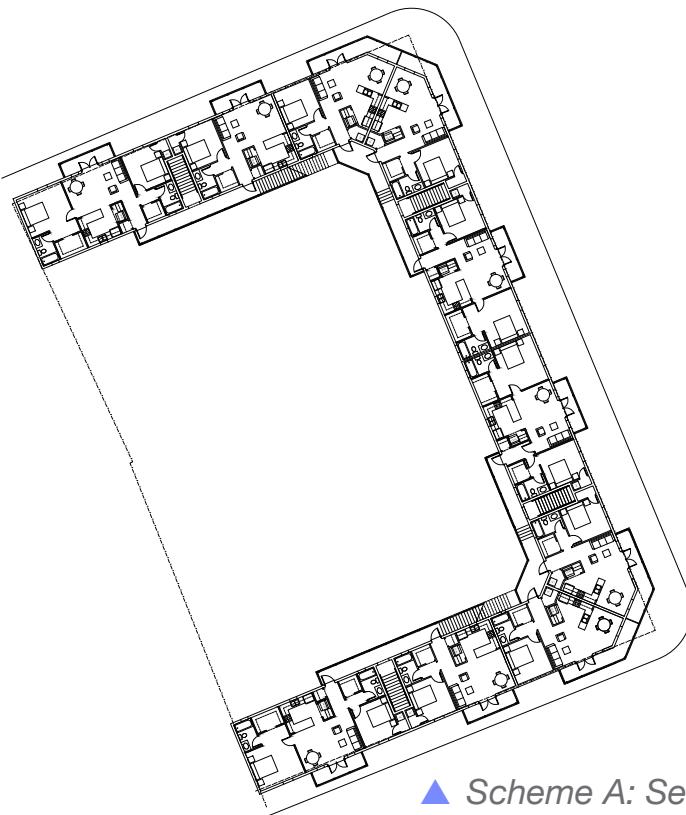


▲ Prototypical Apartment Rear View

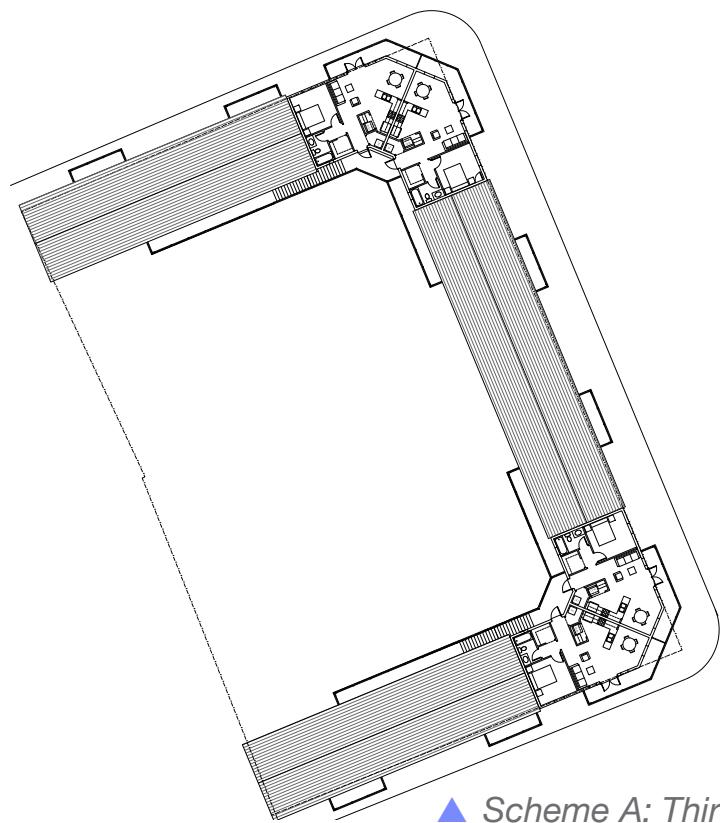
## 2F SPECIAL PROJECT: ST. FRANCIS STREET LINER BUILDING



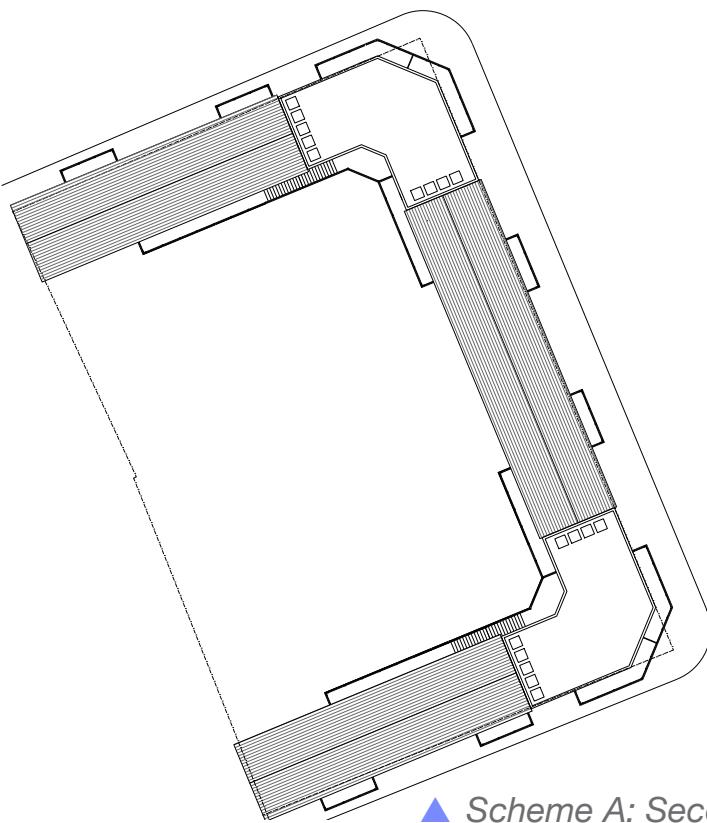
▲ Scheme A: Ground Floor



▲ Scheme A: Second Floor



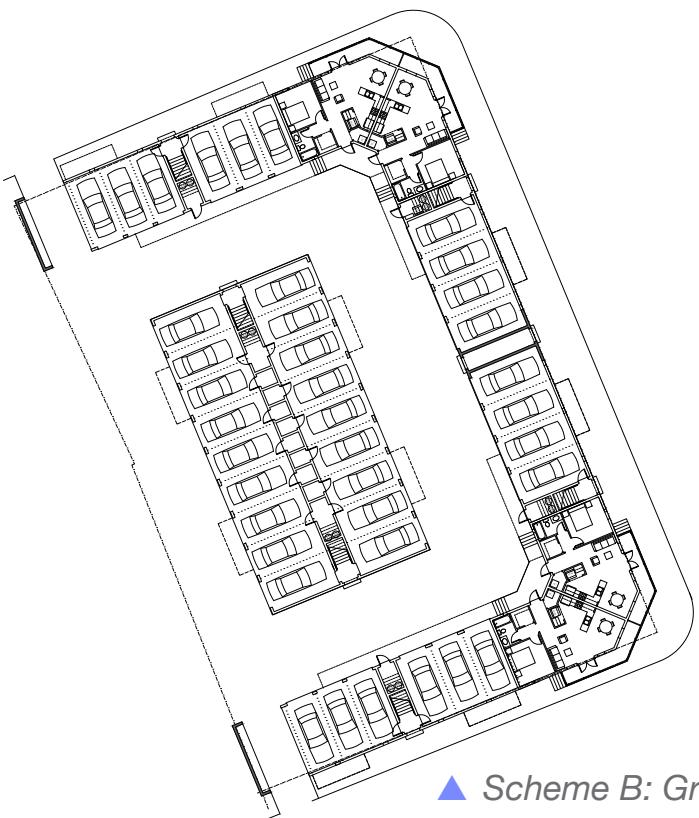
▲ Scheme A: Third Floor



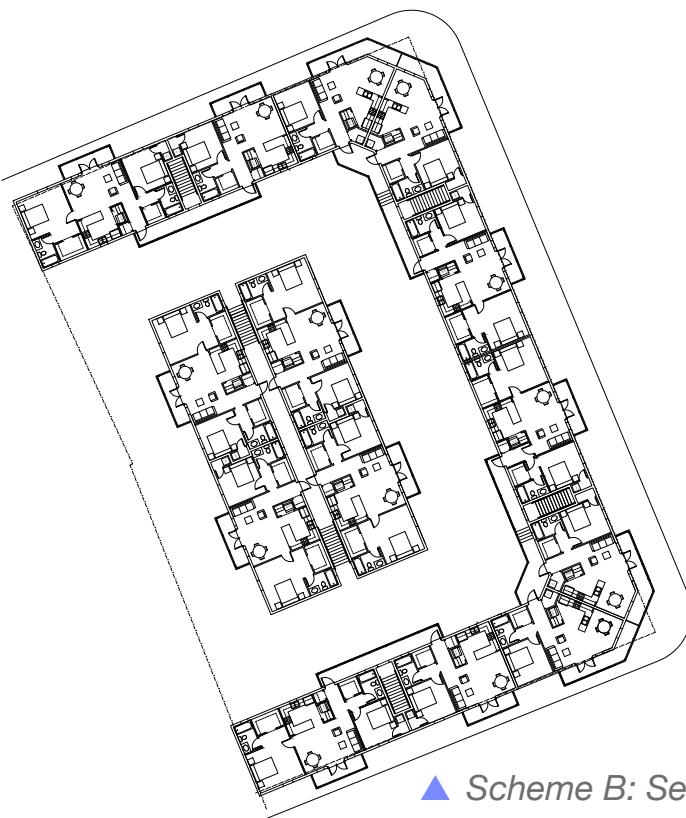
▲ Scheme A: Second Floor

## 2F SPECIAL PROJECT: ST. FRANCIS STREET LINER BUILDING

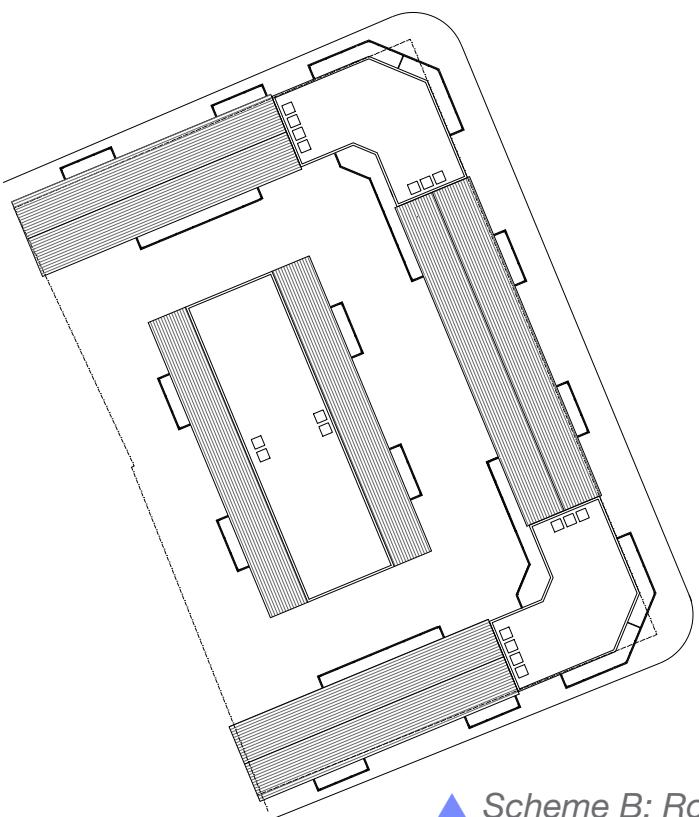
ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN COPYRIGHT DPZ - NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT PERMISSION



▲ Scheme B: Ground Floor

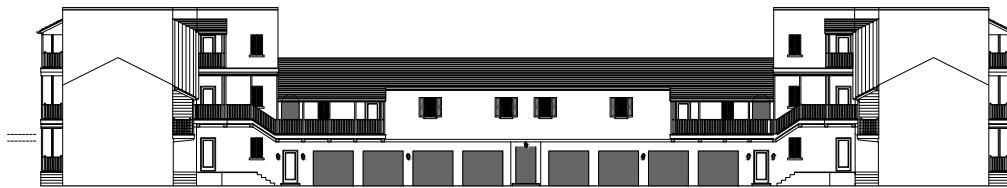


▲ Scheme B: Second Floor

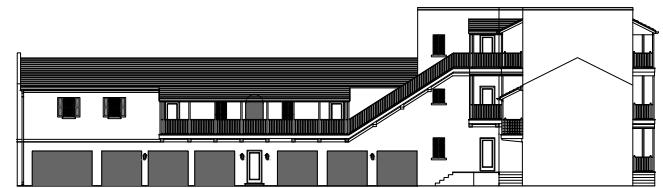


▲ Scheme B: Roof

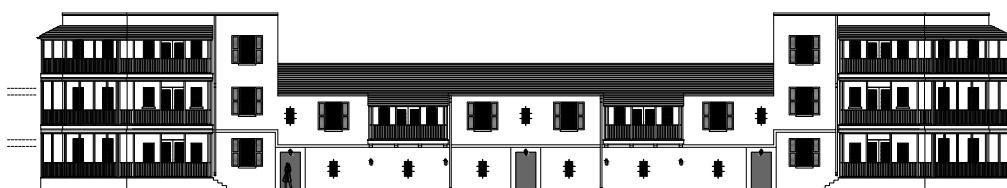
## 2F SPECIAL PROJECT: ST. FRANCIS STREET LINER BUILDING



▲ Scheme A: N. Joachim St. Rear Elevation



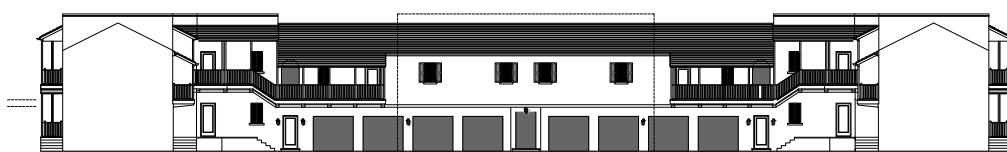
▲ Scheme A: St. Michael St. Rear Elevation



▲ Scheme A: N. Joachim St. Front Elevation



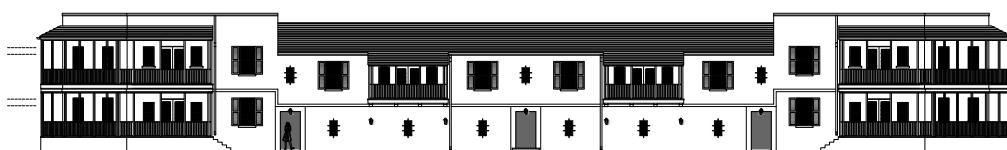
▲ Scheme A: St. Francis St. Front Elevation



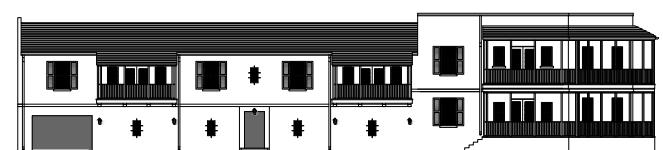
▲ Scheme B: N. Joachim St. Rear Elevation



▲ Scheme B: St. Michael St. Rear Elevation



▲ Scheme B: N. Joachim St. Front Elevation



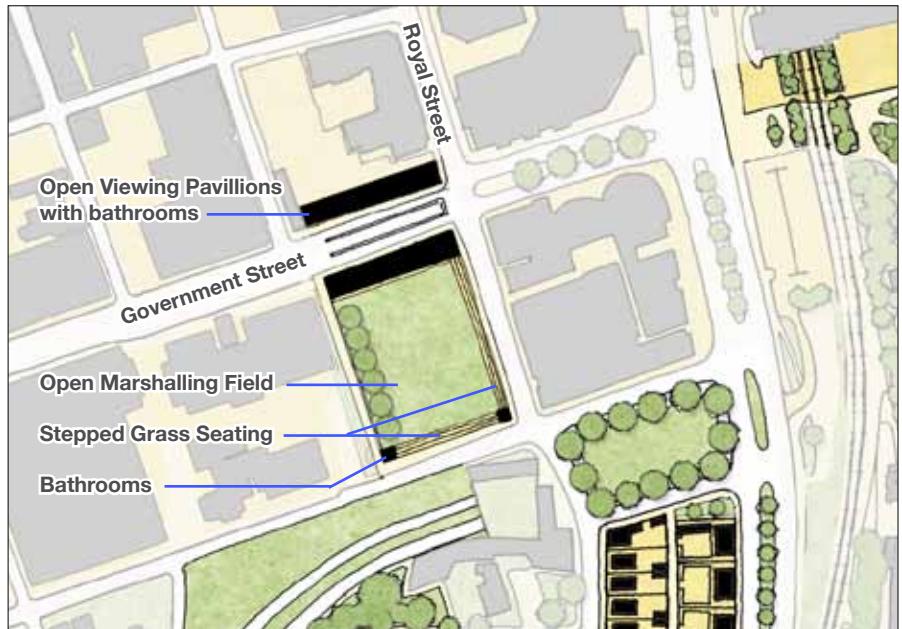
▲ Scheme B: St. Francis St. Front Elevation

2F

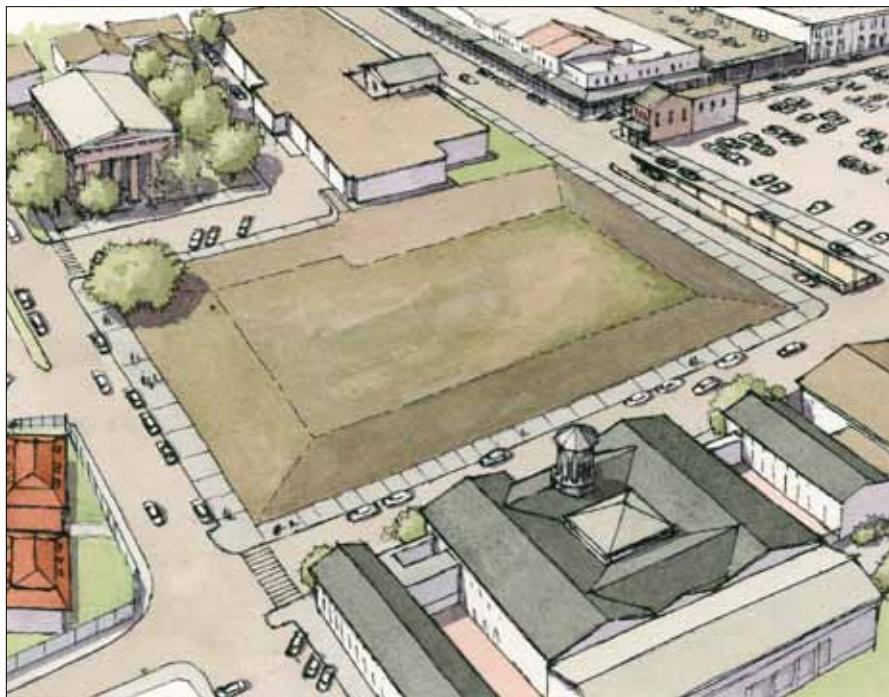
## SPECIAL PROJECT: ST. FRANCIS STREET LINER BUILDING



▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions



▲ Existing Conditions



▲ Proposed Conditions

There is an open site on the corner of Royal and Government Streets which is slated to be developed for marshalling and viewing the Mardi Gras Parades. This requires specialized viewing structures at its

perimeter and simple sod at the center. This area, at other times of the year, may provide playing fields for the Barton Academy School or playing fields for the younger downtown workforce.

## 2G SPECIAL PROJECT: MARDI GRAS SQUARE



▲ Existing Conditions



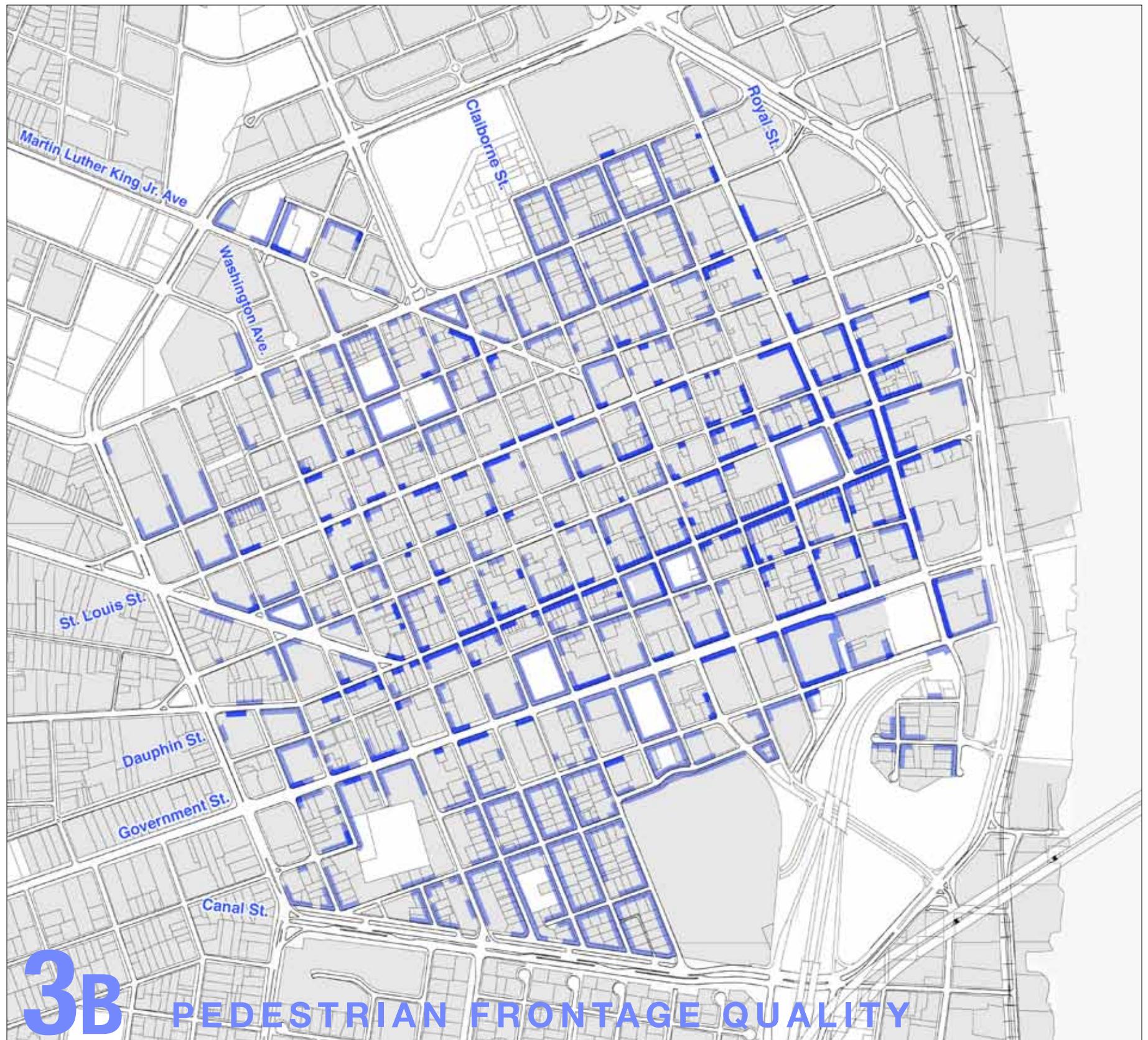
▲ Proposed Conditions

The Calloway Smith Middle School has an excess of open space and provides a mediocre edge to the growing de Tonti Neighborhood. The eastern edge should be re-platted in a pattern approximating the historic conditions. The lots should be sold, perhaps, to raise funds for school programs. This neighborhood is too valuable to waste this opportunity.

## 2H SPECIAL PROJECT: DE TONTI NEIGHBORHOOD INFILL



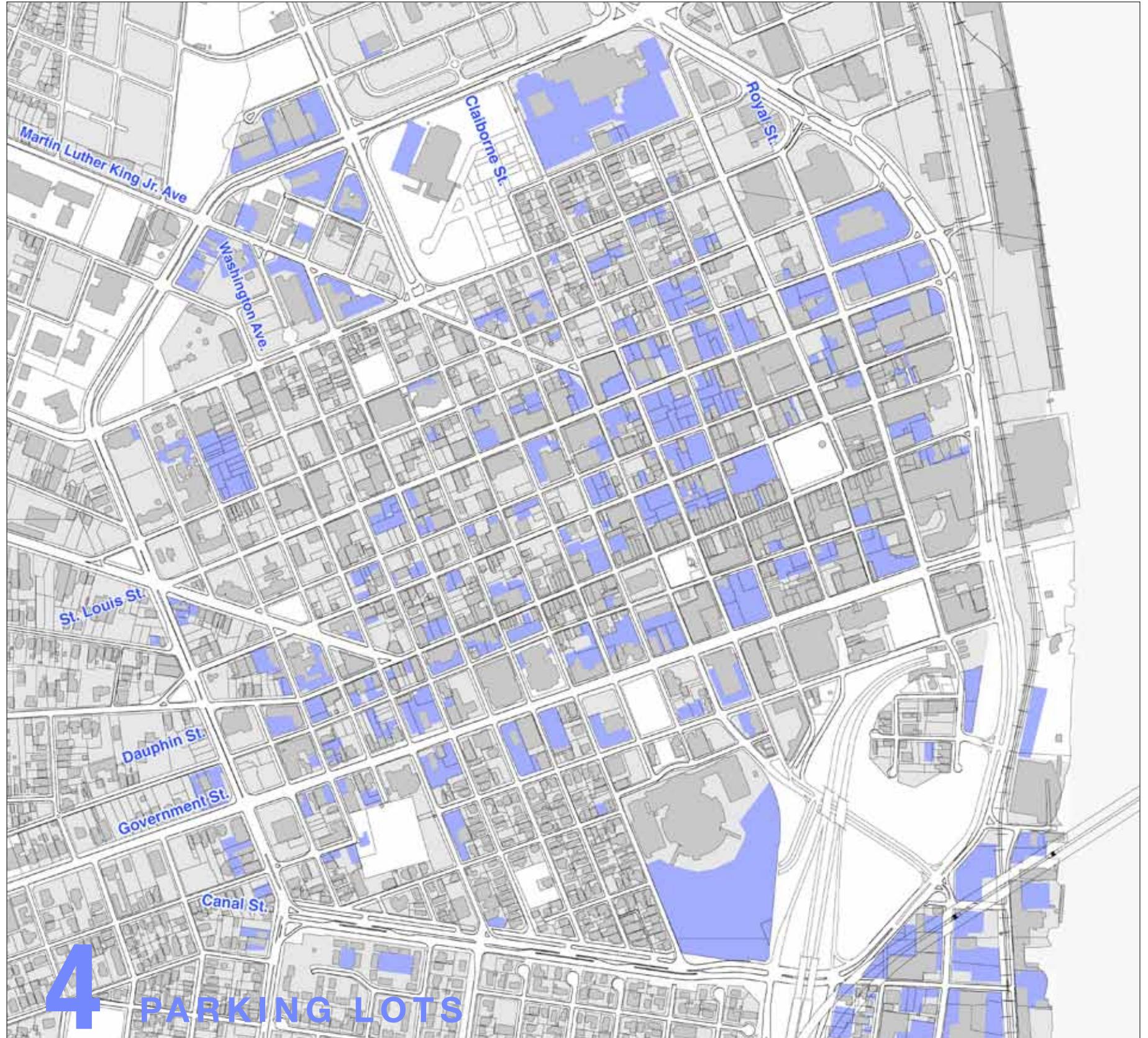
This illustration depicts typical frontages. The first five are most supportive to pedestrian activity and the last four are progressively less so. With the exceptions of frontages 1 and 6, all of these exist in downtown Mobile. The code enables frontages 2 to 5 and allocates frontages 7 to 9 to less important "B" streets.



## 3B PEDESTRIAN FRONTAGE QUALITY

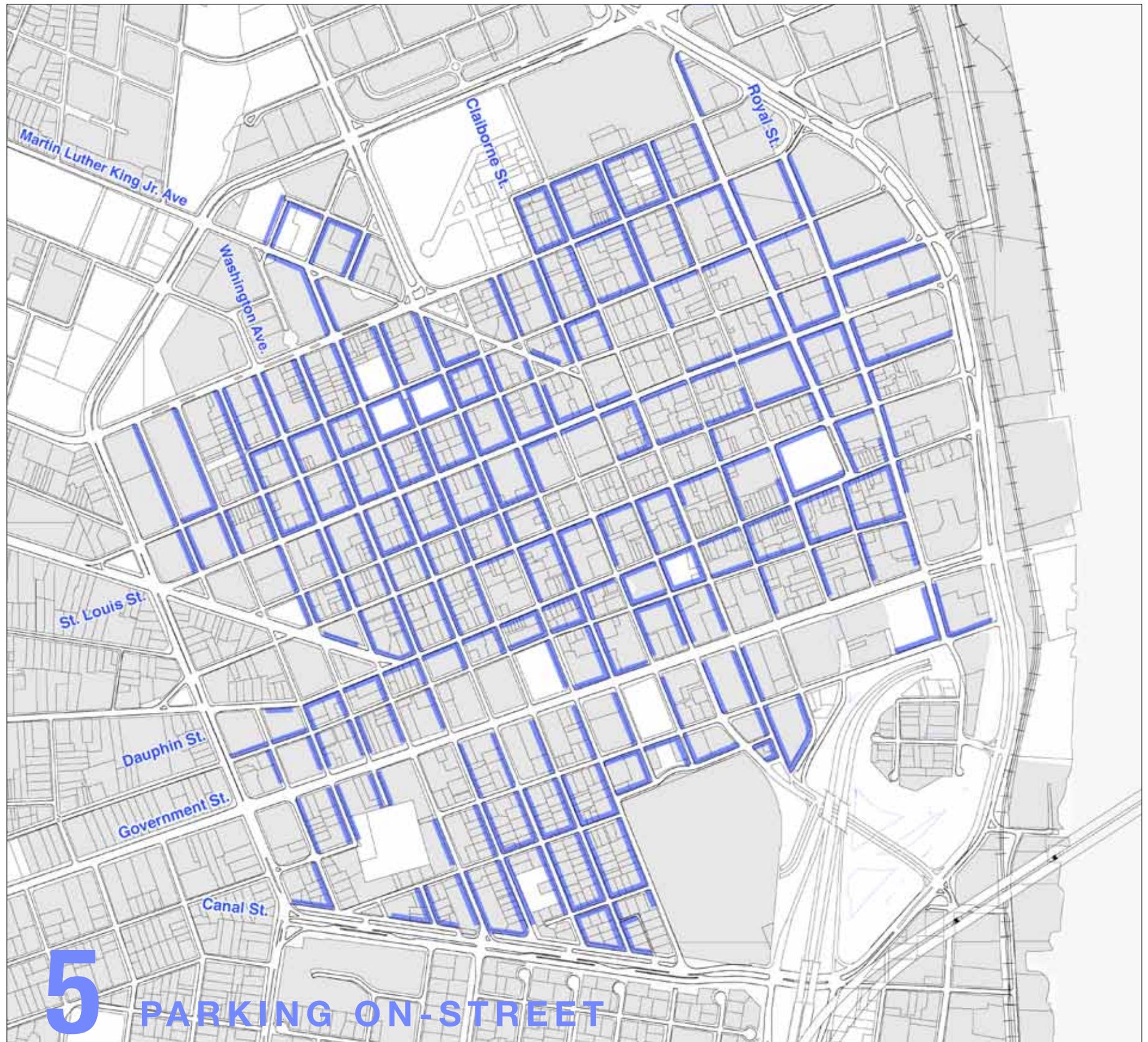
- Better Frontage
- Neutral Frontage
- Worse Frontage

*This illustration shows frontage quality according to the existing conditions. The darker colors coincide with the best frontages. Re-development activity should complete the best frontages first.*



There are 12,000 off-street surface parking spaces in Downtown Mobile. While they are necessary, unbuffered, they undermine the pedestrian experience. On all "A" streets of the regulating plan, they should be "masked."

■ Existing Surface Parking Lots



## 5 PARKING ON-STREET



Existing On-Street Parking

The 3,400 on-street parallel parking spaces slow down traffic and protect the pedestrians from passing cars. On-street parking should be provided on all the downtown streets.



## 6 PARKING STRUCTURES

- Existing Structured Parking
- Recommended for Structured Parking

The 3,000 parking spaces in structures are not optimally distributed for the commercial evolution of Dauphin, St. Louis and Claiborne Streets. Certain additional lots should be purchased for future municipal parking structures.



▲ Current Trash Management

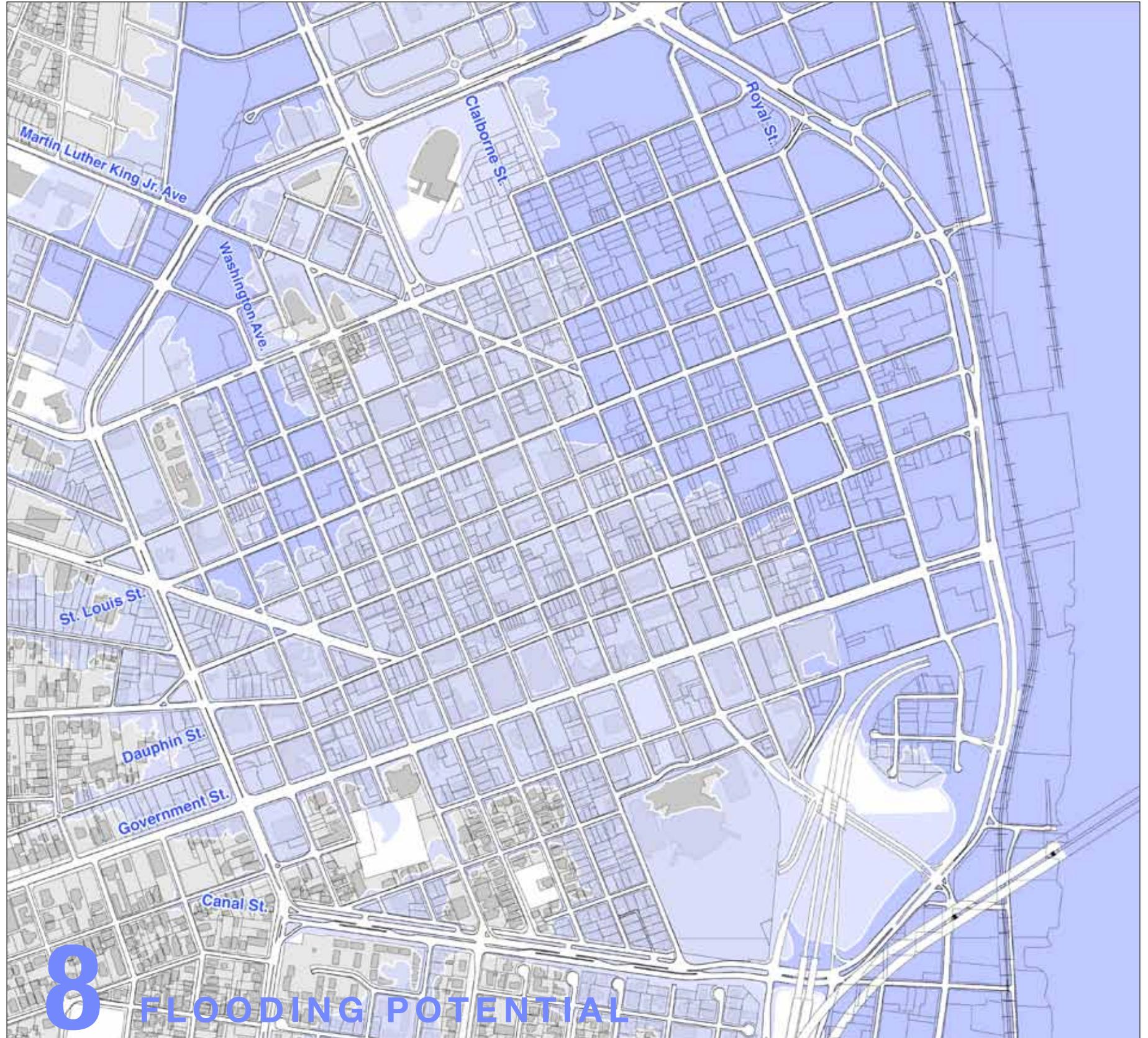


▲ Recommended Enclosure



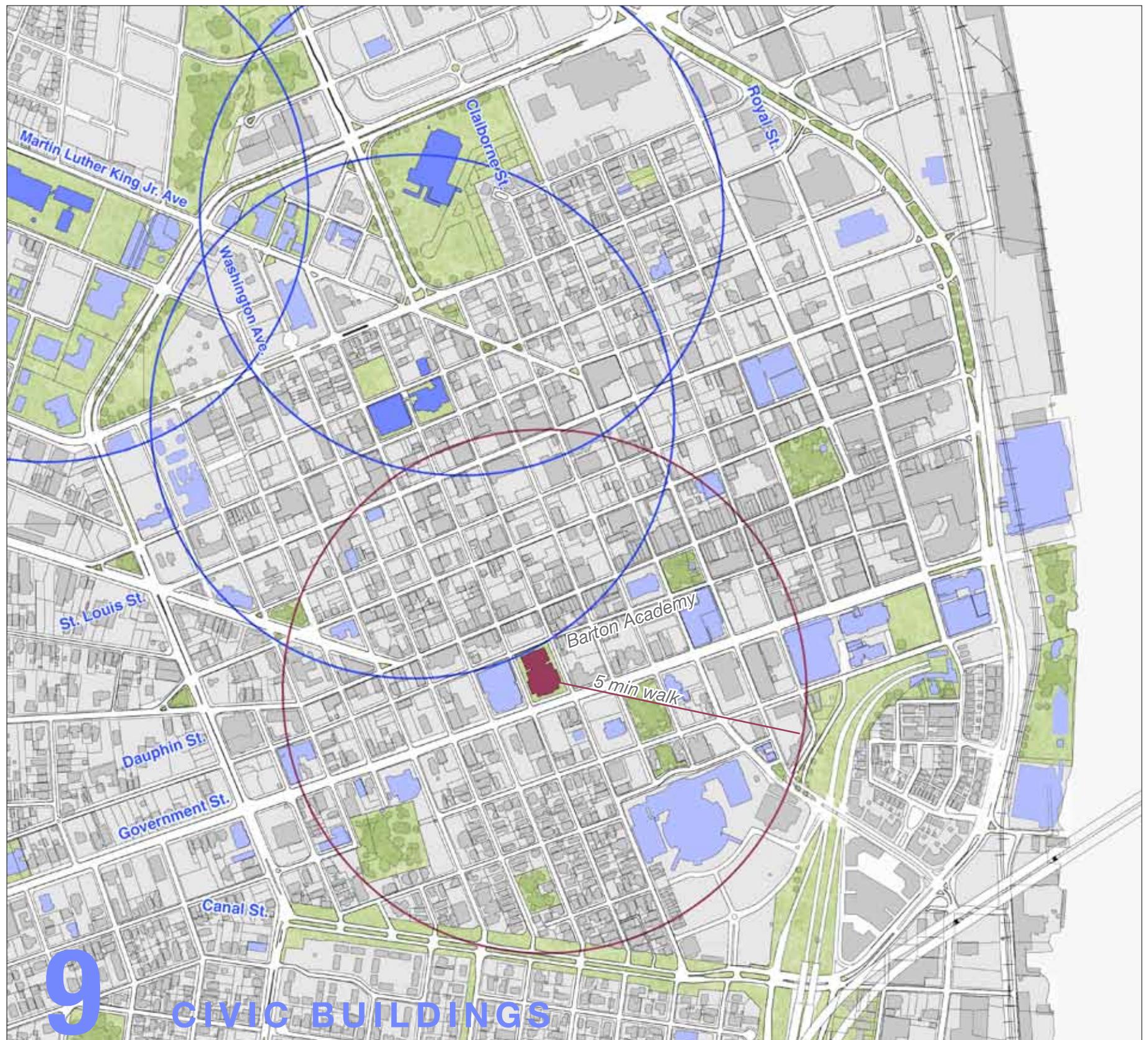
Potential Rear Areas for Trash  
Buildings without Rear Areas

Trash collection cannot be resolved physically, as a great number of buildings do not have rear access. The problem is to be solved by management with opportunistic sidewalk interventions.



FEMA 100 Year Flood Plain  
 500 Year Flood Plain

FEMA requires a minimum building elevation at the 100 year flood plain. The same elevation should be applied to the 500 year flood plain, subject to a radically simplified local approvals process.



- █ Civic Buildings in General
- █ Schools with 5 min. walk radius
- █ Barton Academy School

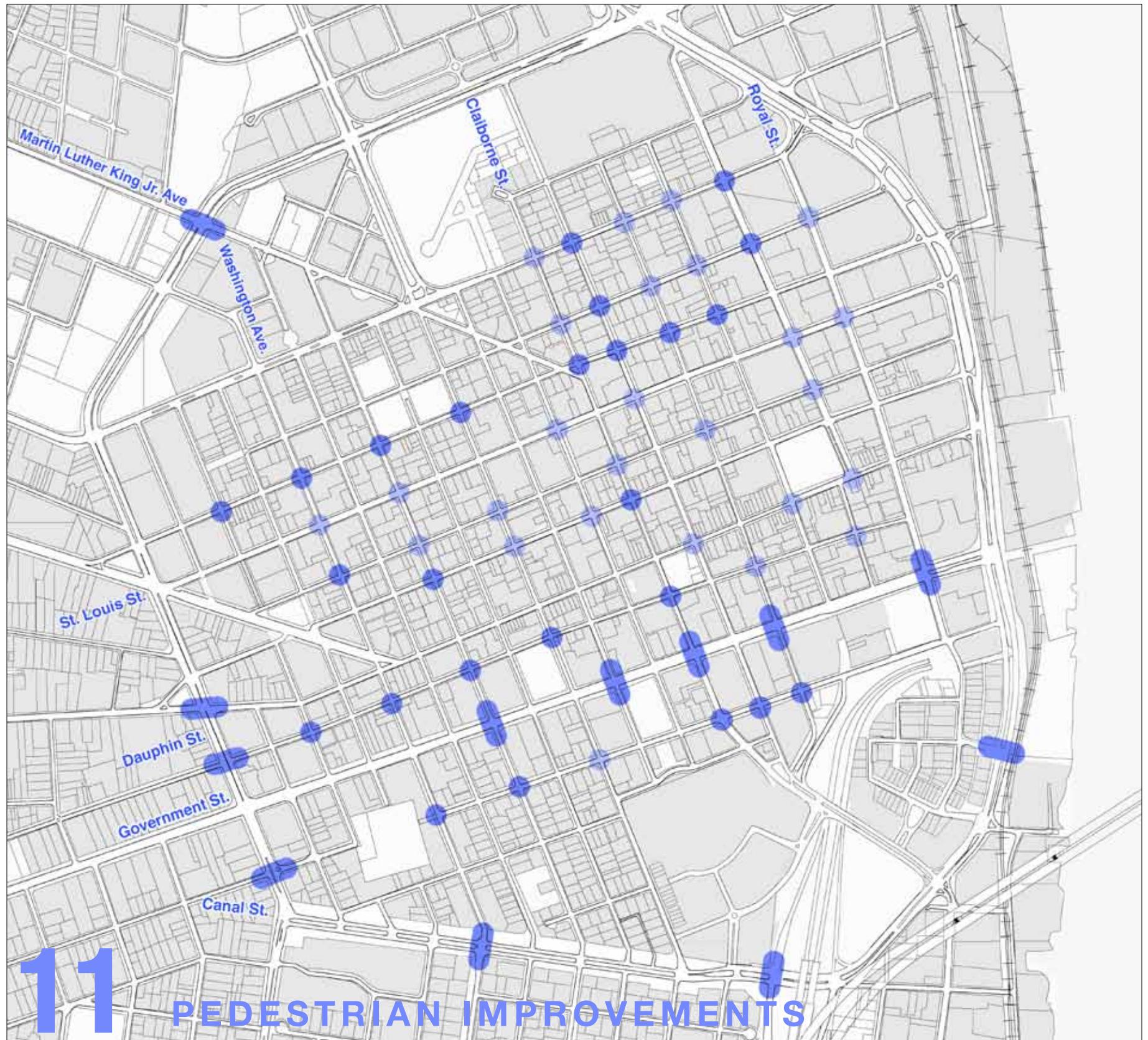
The residential areas to the north of downtown are well-supplied with schools. The residential areas to the south require the reinstitution of the Barton Academy School.



Existing Public Spaces  
 Proposed Public Spaces

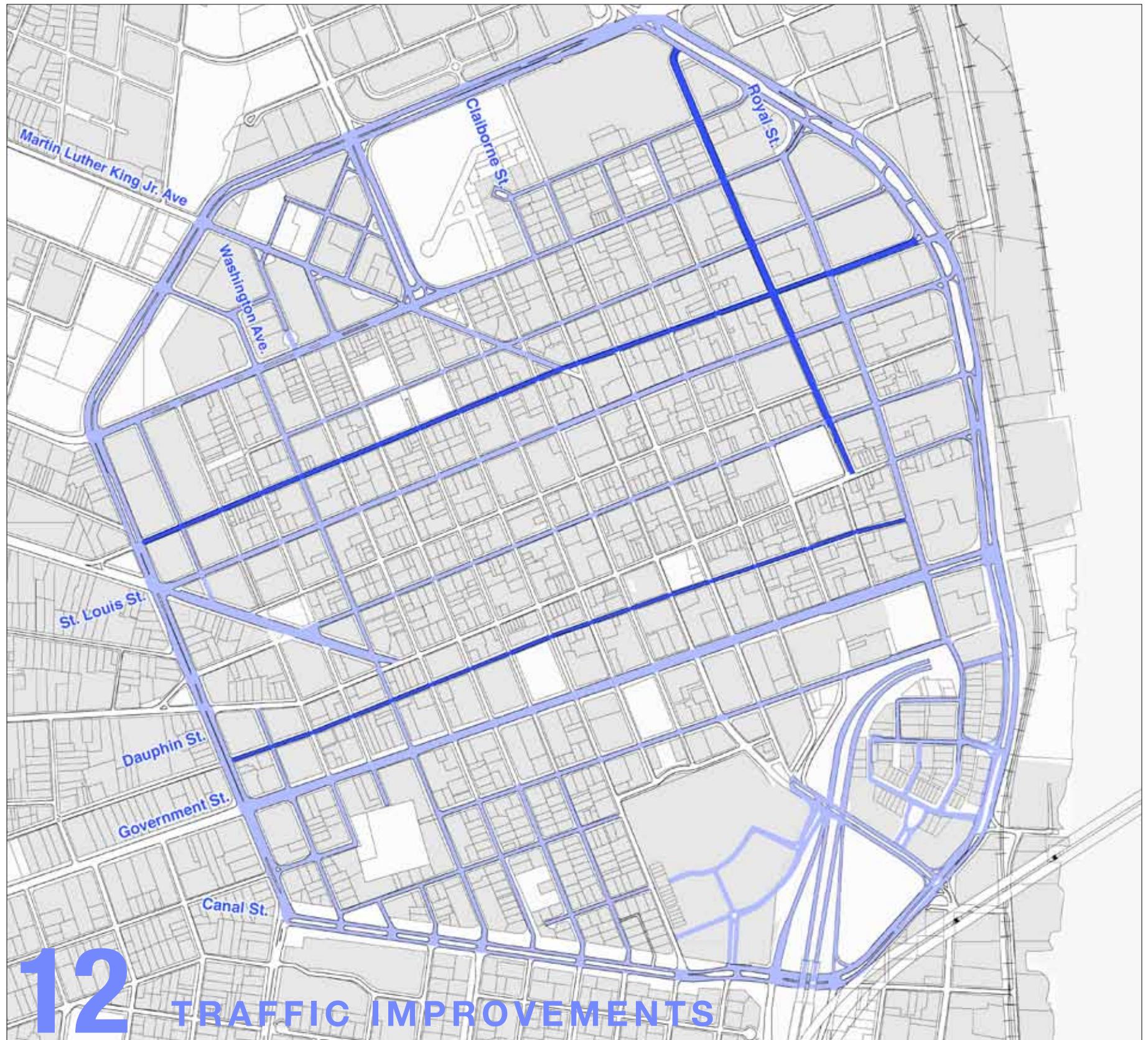
**A** Community Gardens  
**B** Highline Parkway  
**C** Pedestrian Parkway

There are sufficient and well-located open spaces to the south. Additional ones are recommended for the north, most should be community gardens.



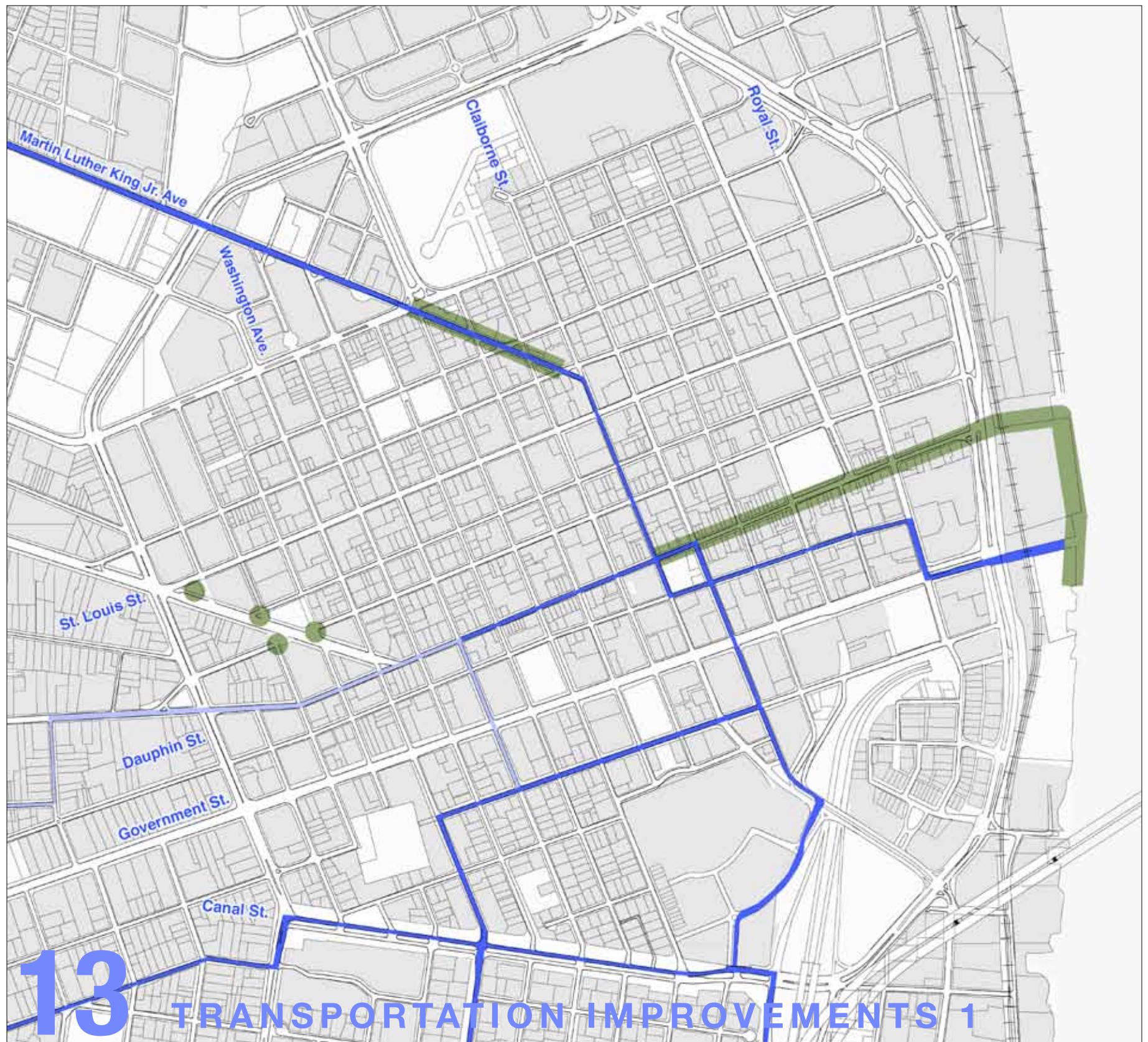
- █ *Intersections of highest importance*
- █ *Intersections of high importance*

*These intersections should be provided with stop signs or stop lights. An engineer is to be retained to negotiate with Public Works and D.O.T.*



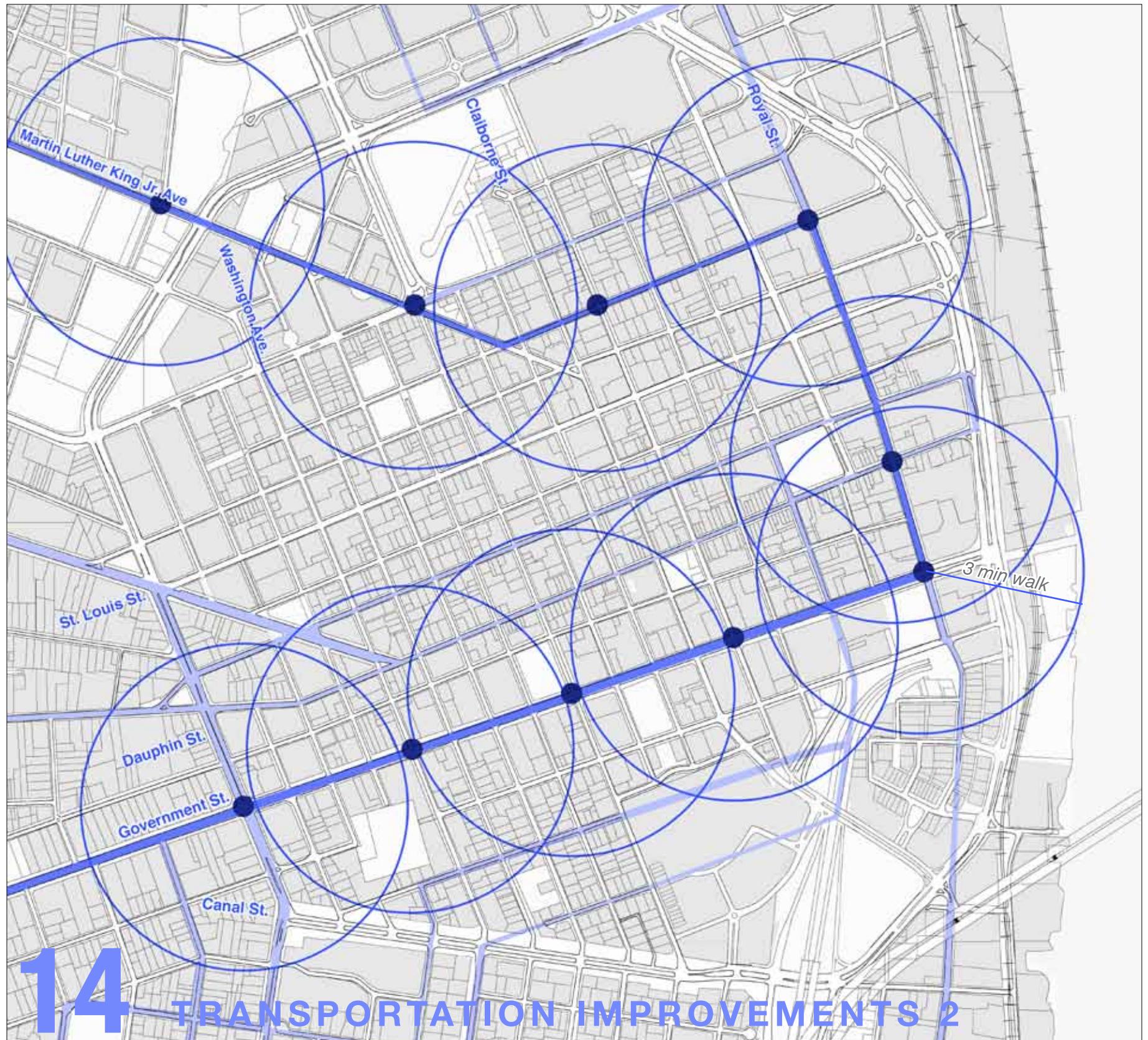
- Existing Two-Way Streets
- Recommended Two-Way Streets

The indicated streets should become two way.  
An engineer is to be retained for further study.



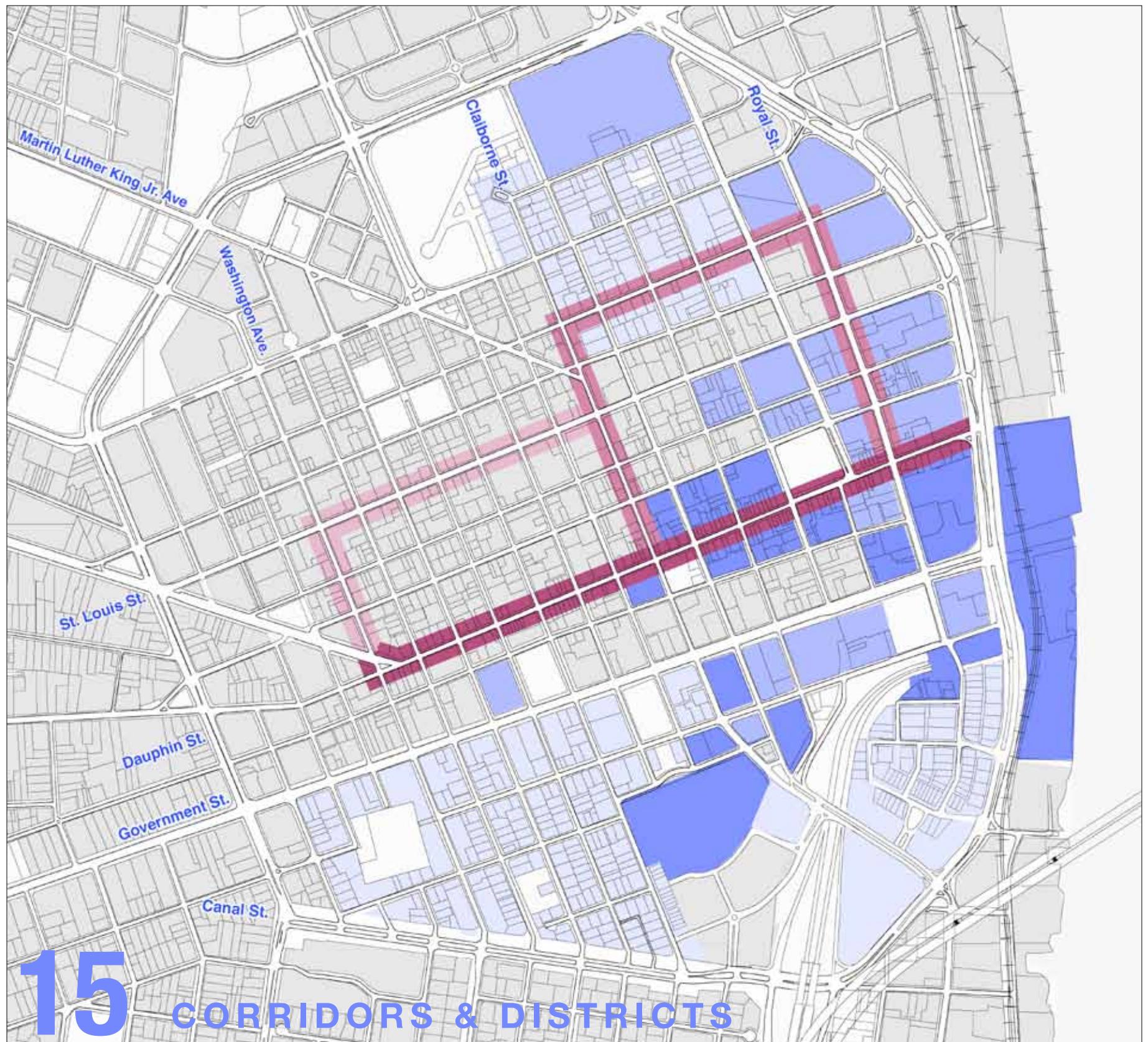
- Existing Bicycle Network
- Expanded Bicycle Network
- Pedestrianization Areas

*Existing alternate transportation networks should be enforced and extended.*



- Historical Streetcar Network
- Recommended Streetcar Network
- Recommended Streetcar Stops

The existing bus system should become, over time, a streetcar system along the designated trajectory.



Primary Retail Corridor  
 Secondary Retail Corridor  
 Tertiary Retail Corridor

Tourism District  
 Employment District  
 Residential District

