



MID-TOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN

Norfolk, Virginia

Prepared for
City of Norfolk
and
Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority

by
UDA

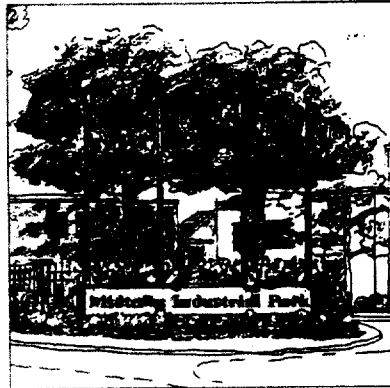
March 1997

Acknowledgements

The Revitalization Plan Team includes Mid-Town business leaders and property owners, the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA), the City of Norfolk, and Urban Design Associates (UDA).

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I PLANNING PROCESS

Background

Mid-Town is a turn-of-the-century industrial area which developed around the Norfolk Southern mainline. Once a vital employment center, the district experienced severe decline as facilities became outdated and businesses moved to less urban locations. Neighborhood blight reached a peak in the early 1980s with abandoned automobiles, vacant buildings, trash and debris characterizing the landscape. The few new buildings constructed around this time were designed without thought to the district's image and character. Growth stagnated as the park became unable to compete for new businesses and jobs with the city's newer industrial areas.

To combat this decline, an Action Plan was prepared in 1987. This plan analyzed Mid-Town's problems and proposed a series of initiatives to improve the district's marketability. Due to support for the Action Plan and the interest of local business leaders, the area was targeted for revitalization by the City and the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA). A Conservation Plan was prepared in 1988 and revitalization efforts were initiated. Objectives of the Conservation Plan include:

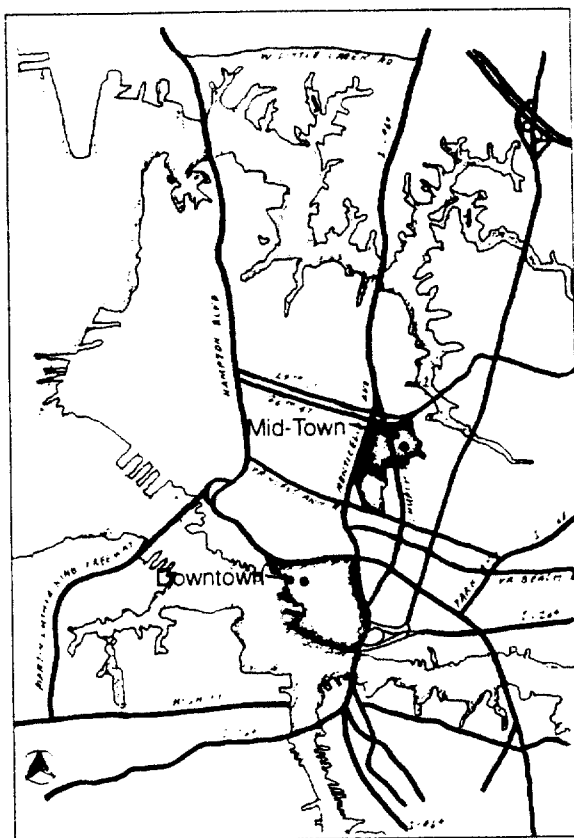
- Arrest the deterioration of the area by removing blight, obsolescence and incompatible uses.
- Assist property owners and occupants to improve their buildings and property.
- Create an environment which is conducive to the growth of industry and commerce, fosters job opportunities and encourages appropriate land use.
- Provide needed public infrastructure improvements to better serve the needs of the community.
- The rendition of assistance to the construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation or sale of commercial and industrial properties.
- The acquisition, rehabilitation or clearance of deteriorated property.

Since the implementation of the Conservation Plan many positive changes have taken place. Owners have started to re-invest in their properties, new street lighting has been installed and key streets have been scheduled for improvements. However, despite these encouraging changes, much work remains.

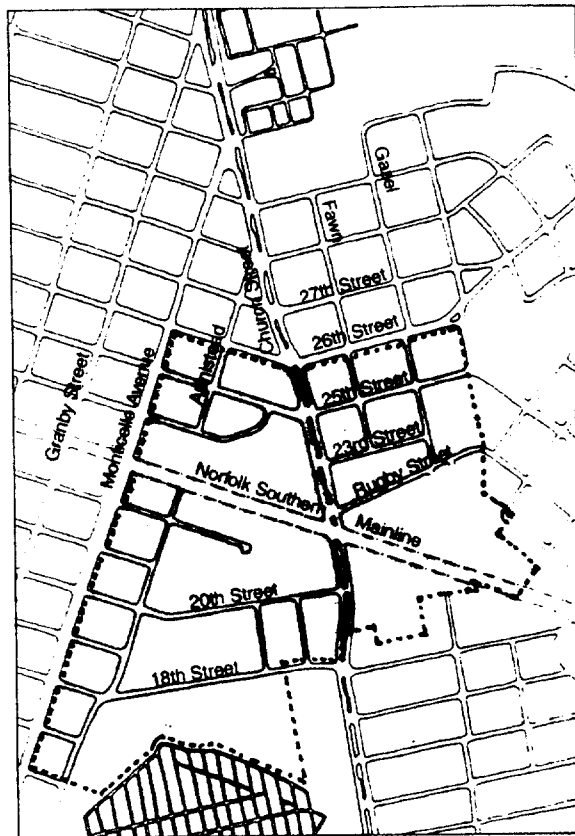
The Mid-Town Revitalization Plan is intended to build on the goals, recommendations and successes of the previous plans. It contains physical design recommendations and guidelines for Mid-Town and the adjacent area. It is intended to provide a framework for revitalization which ensures that public and private investments work together to create a safe, marketable and attractive district. This plan also applies traditional urban design principles to encourage the construction of a sustainable environment.



II ANALYSIS



Map of southwest Norfolk



Street map of Mid-Town

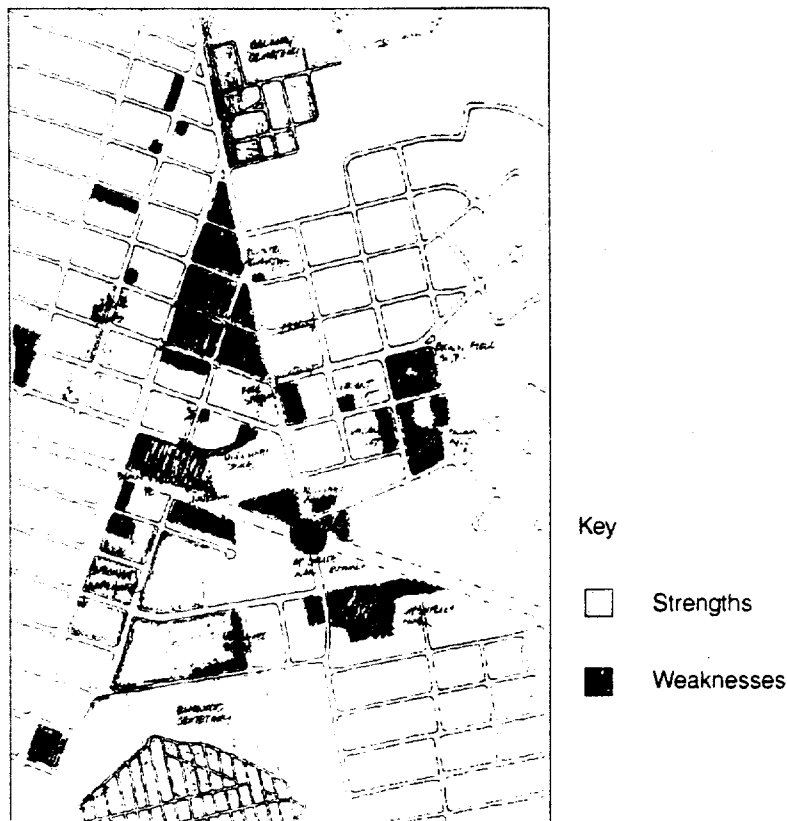
Context Plan

Build on Mid-Town's unique location and assets

Mid-Town's central location in the city is an asset which can be built upon to attract new businesses and jobs to the area. The park is close to downtown and a number of commercial corridors—an ideal location for local distribution businesses. The area is also adjacent to three residential neighborhoods which are each involved in ongoing revitalization efforts.

Mid-Town is located along Church Street between 18th and 26th Streets. Its boundaries are

26th Street on the north, Leo Street on the east, the Huntersville neighborhood and Elmwood Cemetery on the south, and Monticello Avenue on the west. Monticello Avenue and Church, 26th, and 27th Streets provide the area with good access to the city's boulevard and interstate highway systems. The strategy for Mid-Town in this plan uses the Church Street widening and the redevelopment of vacant property to reinforce linkages to these adjacent strengths.



Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths and Weaknesses

During the first meeting with Mid-Town's business leaders, the area's strengths, weaknesses, and possible changes and improvements were discussed. The participant's comments made during that meeting were documented and used to develop design strategies and alternatives. The following is a summary of the meeting minutes:

Strengths: Location, accessibility, affordability, adjacent services.

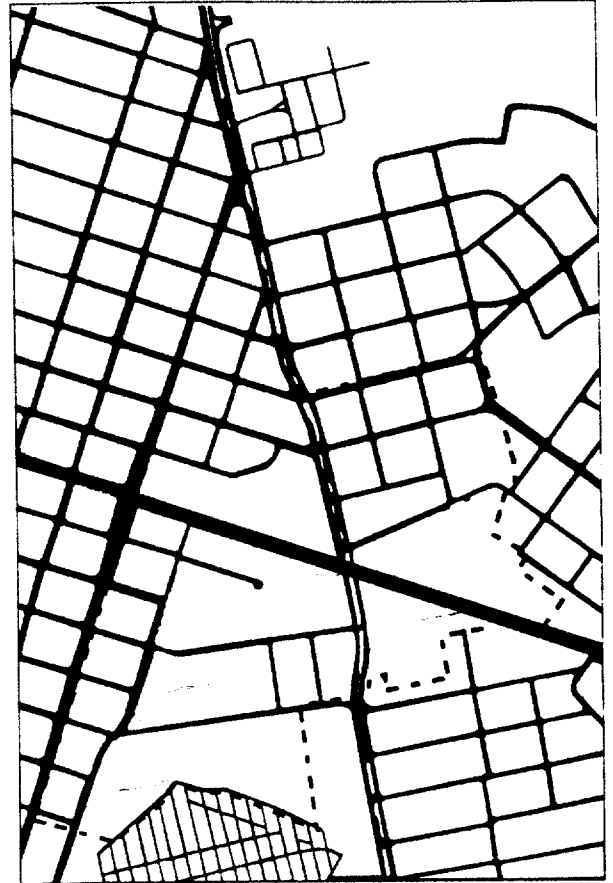
Weaknesses: Railroad tracks, crime and vandalism, vacant lots, zoning violations, trash, lack of clear

boundaries/signage, cut through traffic, traditional urban design principles have been violated.

Changes and Improvements: Reduce crime, clean-up trash, create a positive image/identity, define boundaries, write guidelines for secure parking, create incentives for reinvestment, change the park's name, utilize the new Church Street as a front door.



Portrait



Streets

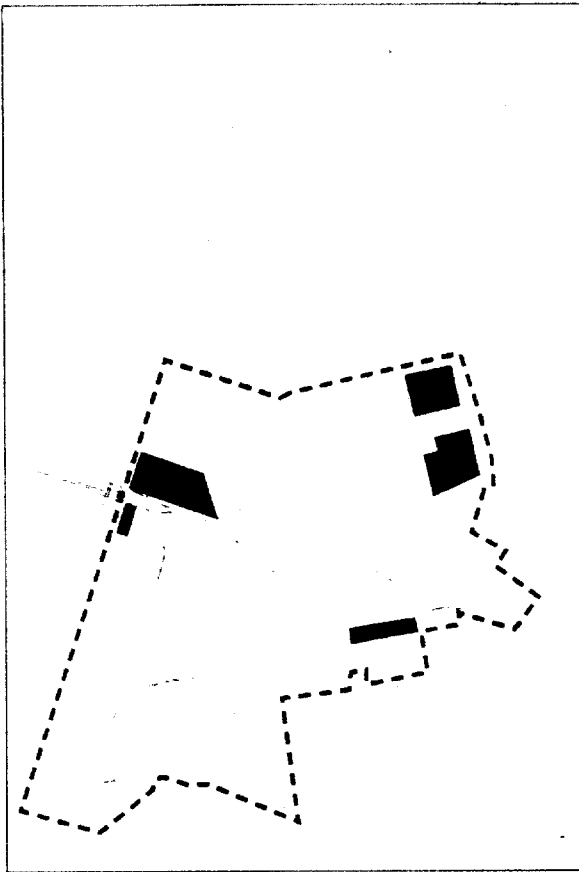
Urban Design Analysis

In order to better understand the existing conditions in the district and the area's relationship to the region, UDA prepared a series of analysis drawings called x-rays. These analysis drawings documented the existing street and highway network; building coverage; residential, industrial and commercial settlement patterns; the impact of the Church Street widening project; zoning; empowerment zones; brown field sites; vacant lots; and parking lots. A sample of the x-ray drawings are pictured above and on the following page.

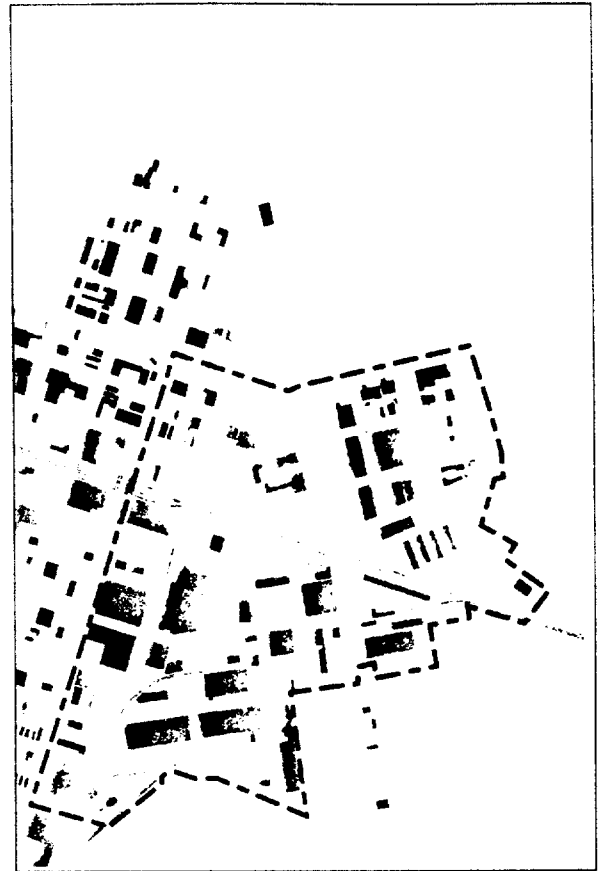
The urban design supports the business leaders comments on the area's strengths and weaknesses:

Streets: Norfolk Southern's mainline, which once serviced many of the local businesses, bisects Mid-Town and disrupts the street network. Church Street functions as the main crossing, but is blocked at least twice a day by passing trains. One-way streets and streets connecting directly into residential neighborhoods are also a problem.

Residential Buildings: Most of the area's residential buildings are in



Probable brown field sites



Commercial/Industrial

surrounding residential neighborhoods such as Huntersville and Park Place.

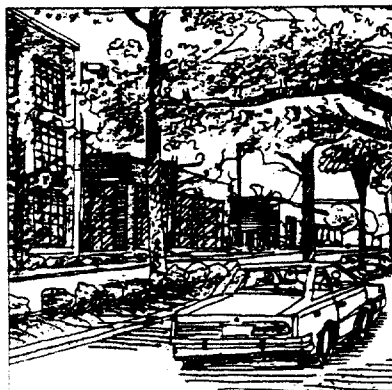
Industrial Buildings: A very eclectic mix of industrial buildings is gathered along the Norfolk Southern mainline from the heart of Mid-Town to Hampton Boulevard.

Commercial Buildings: Retail buildings are for the most part concentrated along Monticello Avenue and 26th Street.

Church Street: The widening project will create a new medianized boulevard through the heart of Mid-Town.

Vacant Lots: The unclaimed space peppered around the park attracts criminal activity.

Parking Lots: Area businesses have inadequate off-street parking resources.



III VISION



Church Street tomorrow

Define Mid-Town's Image, Character and Boundaries

The goal of the current planning effort is to continue the transformation of a once distressed district which today stands on the threshold of rejuvenation. Our objective in creating this design is to provide a positive, marketable image for the park that will support existing businesses while attracting new industry and jobs.

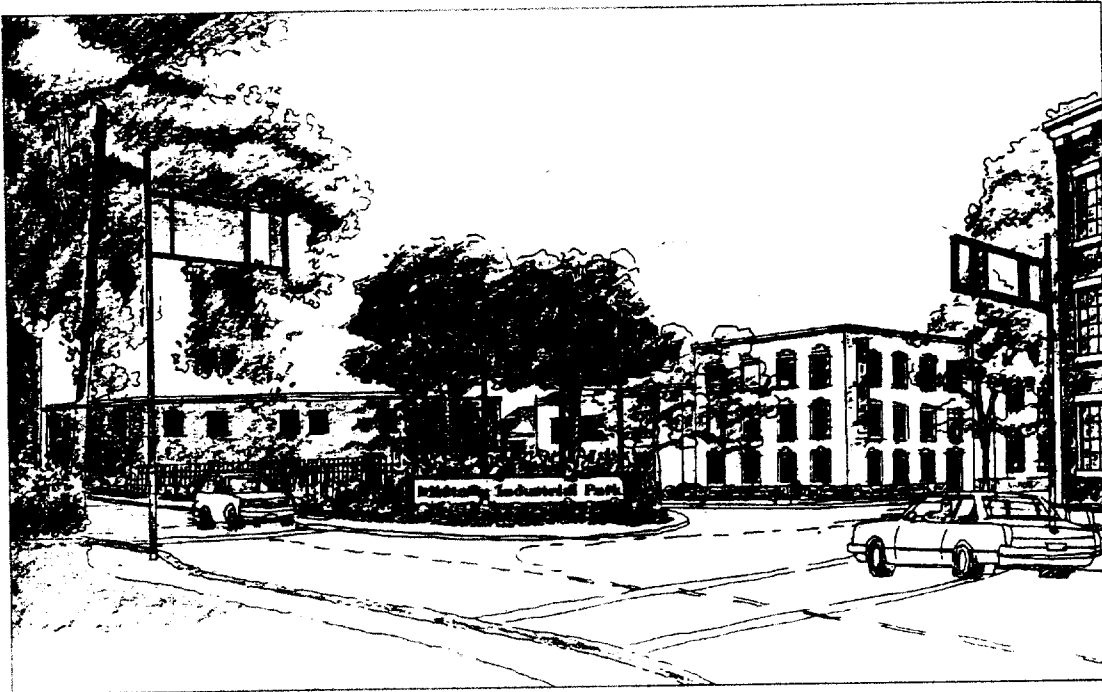
The proposed design by UDA follows traditional urban design principles for creating safe and sus-

tainable environments. These principles (linked street and pedestrian networks, buildings close to the public right-of-way with doors and windows facing the street, the elimination of unclaimed space, street-scapes incorporating street trees and planting strips and sidewalks) support the redevelopment of an urban, industrial/commercial, customer-friendly environment. The street network is refined to become a place of shared use and the appropriate setting for industrial, commercial and institutional addresses. These updated streets are lined with the windows and front doors of new and existing industrial buildings to provide both security and human scale. The pattern of streets exists, but is transformed in the plan to a more pedestrian scale with landscaping, amenity strips and ornamental security fencing.

Working with business leaders, property owners, the City, and NRHA, UDA's design process began with identifying the area's strengths, a summary of which are included in the previous section. The plan systematically builds on the district's strengths by proposing new development on the vacant lots to completed existing blocks.

The plan creates a series of 'good addresses' for development. The variety of such addresses will make it possible to market to the widest range of potential businesses. Only by attracting businesses with choice will the City be able to reverse the cycle of industry moving to the suburbs.

This approach to transforming the park combines a respect for traditional patterns with something new to appeal to a wide market and modern business requirements.



Street level perspective of proposed gateway intersection

The Concept

Transform an anonymous area into *someplace*

The idea behind this plan is to transform an area which is now perceived as 'no place' into 'someplace.' This current perception is based on the area's tattered appearance and lack of clearly defined boundaries. In order to accomplish a true transformation, Mid-Town's association with decades of blight and decline must be broken.

In Mid-Town Tomorrow, existing vacant lots will be redeveloped with

new industrial facilities and off-street parking lots. New buildings will be sited close to the sidewalk to encourage windows and front doors facing the street and to capture unclaimed space. Adjacent parking lots will be secured with ornamental security fences which feature brick piers at the corners and landscaping along the sidewalk. To facilitate the creation of a harmonious environment, all new development will be directed by this plan's design guidelines.

In addition, owners of existing businesses will be encouraged to invest in equivalent fencing programs around their facilities. Ambiguous and unclaimed areas should be secured with fencing and security lighting as should off-street parking

lots. Only by fencing and lighting private property will criminal activity be driven from the area.

Public investment will complement private reinvestment with the widening of Church Street and the addition to district streets of street trees, grass amenity strips and more street lights. As part of this effort, residential and industrial land uses will be separated, and gateway intersections defined. Boundaries in general will become more clear as landscaping and land use set the area apart from bordering neighborhoods.

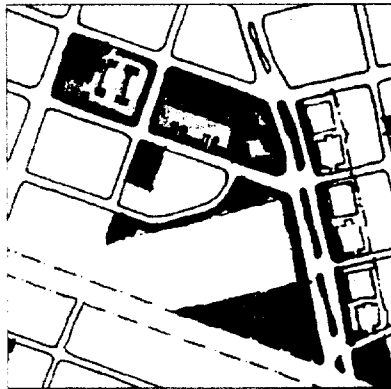
Taken together, these improvements will support the transformation of Mid-Town's negative image into that of healthy, rejuvenated and clearly defined district.



Street level perspective of existing Church Street

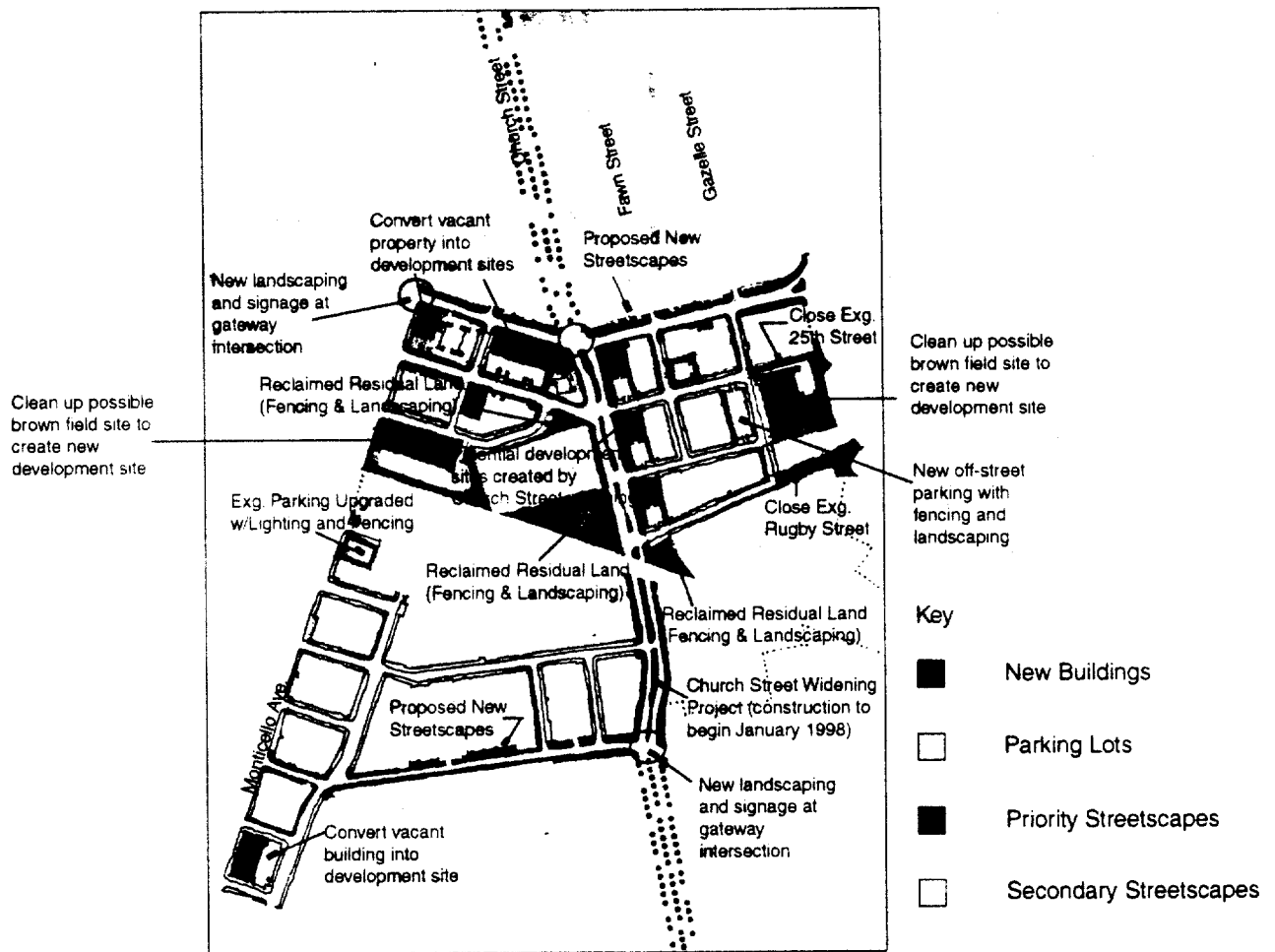


Street level perspective of Church Street tomorrow



IV STRATEGIES

Strategies



Strategic Revitalization Plan

Strategic Plan

Build on strengths and eliminate weaknesses

The plan above shows interrelated public and private initiatives proposed as part of the Mid-town Revitalization Plan. The suggested development and streetscapes will be 'knitted' into the existing industrial fabric to create a safer, more attractive and marketable environment. Key elements of the plan include:

Public Initiatives

- Addition of new streetscapes along main arterial.
- Addition of landscaping and signage at gateway intersections.
- Church Street widening project.

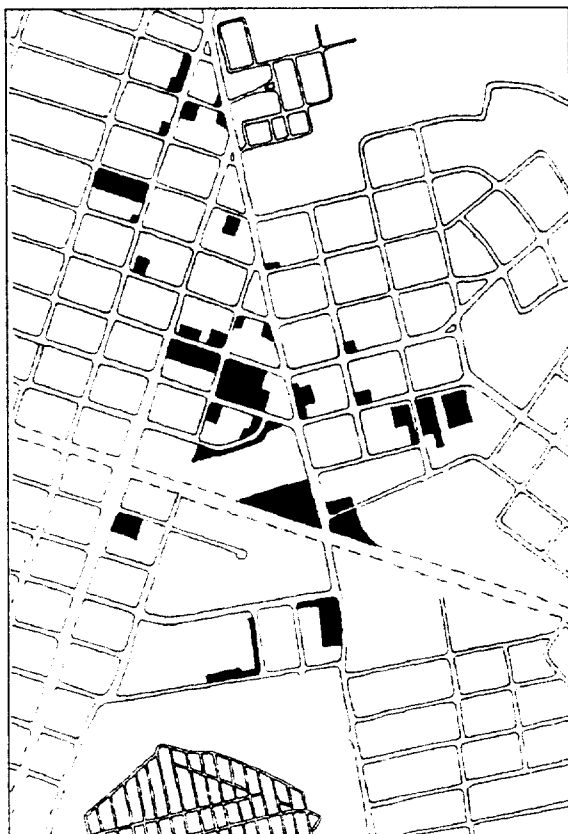
Public/Private Initiatives

- Clean-up of brown field sites.
- Construction of new businesses on vacant properties.

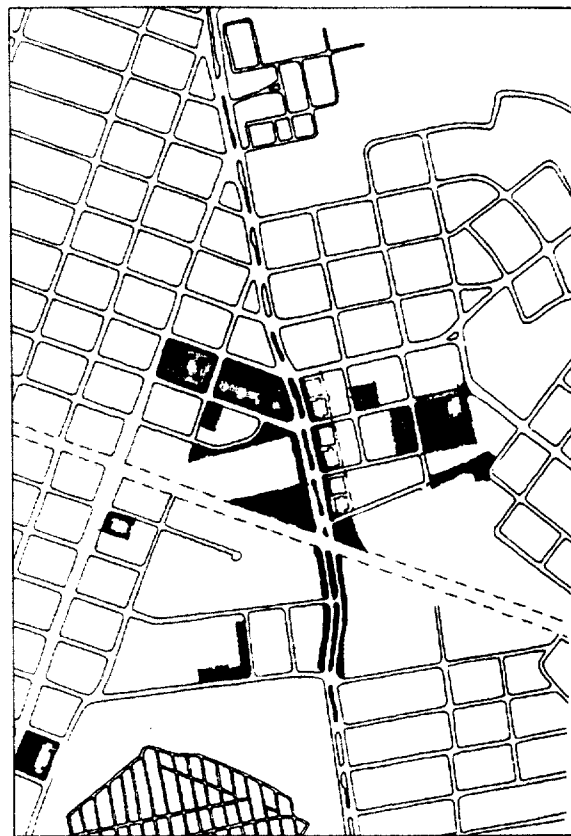
Private Initiatives

- Installation of visually pleasing fencing around parking lots and properties (possible future matching grant program).
- Creation of additional off-street parking for existing businesses.
- Reclamation of residual land.

On the following pages the Revitalization Plan is further subdivided into a series of interrelated strategies.



Existing unclaimed territory



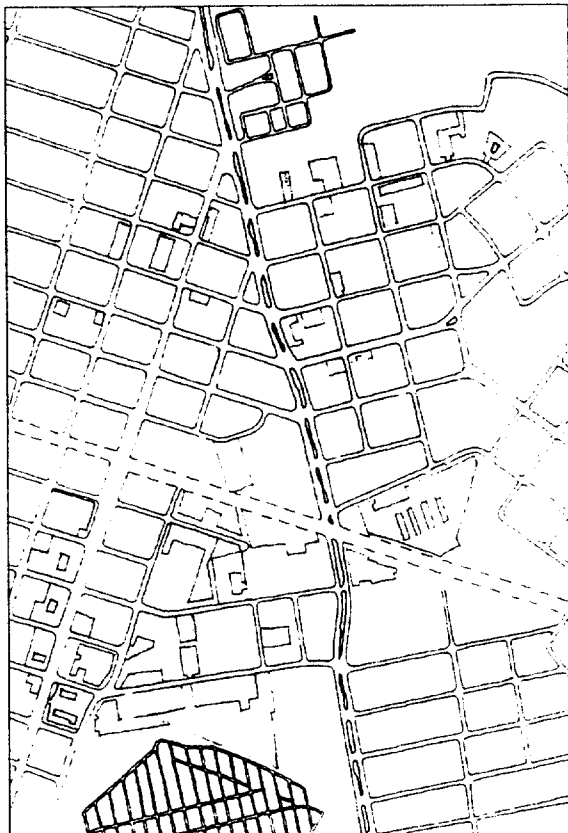
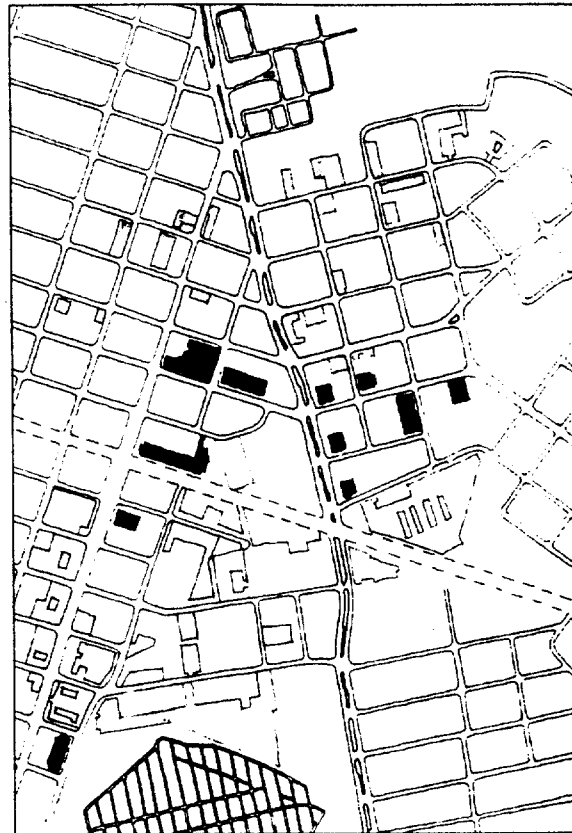
Proposed infill and land reclamation

Crime

Drive crime out of the neighborhood

Street crime is generally not synonymous with industrial parks. Unfortunately for local businesses, Mid-Town is the exception. Business owners were unanimous in their belief that controlling street crime is the number one issue in retaining existing businesses and attracting new companies. More police patrols, better lighting and the channeling of pedestrian traffic were all suggested as possible solutions. Although these are all important options, the biggest hurdle to be overcome may be eliminating the unclaimed territory which acts as a magnet for criminal activity.

The infill and land reclamation proposed in this plan are targeted at eliminating all unclaimed space. Vacant parcels will be sold for the expansion of existing businesses and the construction of new facilities. All new development shall conform to design guidelines to insure that safety, image and character issues are always addressed. In addition, it is strongly suggested that unclaimed territory on privately owned properties be fenced off and landscaped.

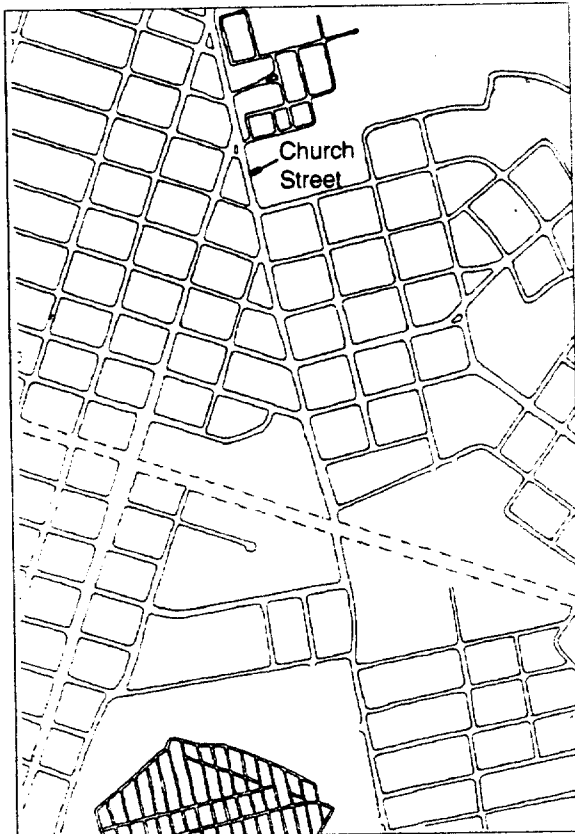
*Plan of existing off-street parking**Plan of proposed additional off-street parking*

Off-Street Parking

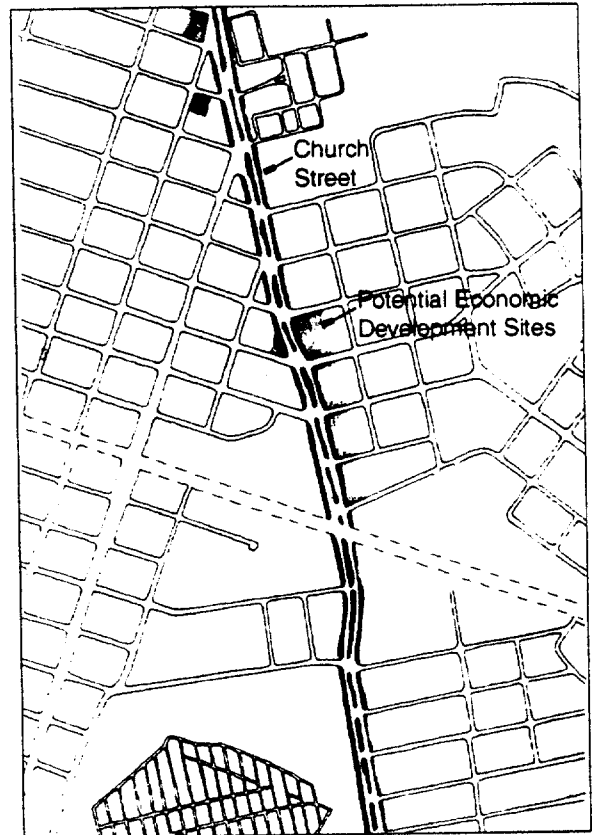
Link off-street parking to the businesses

Although there is a debate as to whether or not there is adequate parking for existing businesses, there is no question that new development will require the construction of additional off-street parking. There is also consensus that fencing existing unsecured lots will help reduce the incidence of car theft and vandalism. The plan suggests that existing businesses which lack secure off-street parking take steps to create fenced lots. New development shall include enough off-street

spaces to keep from further burdening existing resources. All new and updated lots shall be well lit, fenced and landscaped to meet the Design Guideline standards in the last section of this plan.



Plan of existing Church Street



Plan of widened Church Street with new opportunities for economic development

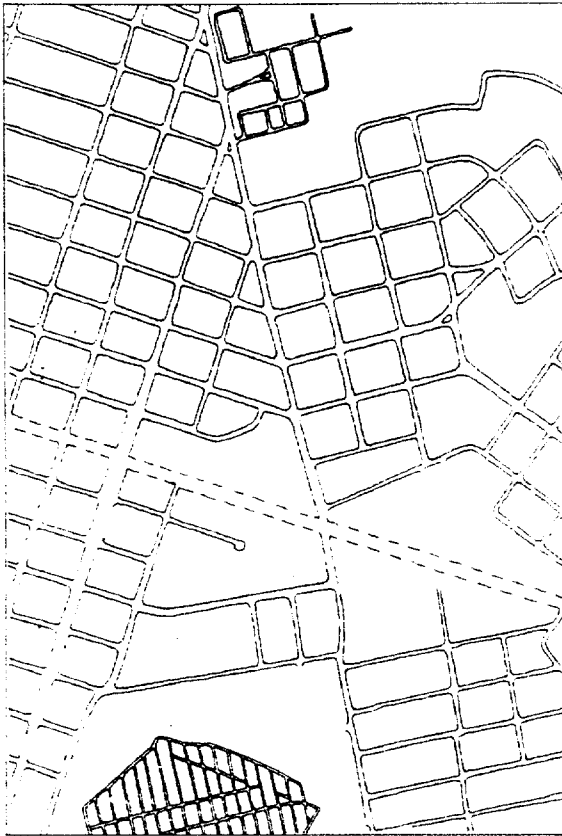
Church Street

Seize the opportunity created by the widening of Church Street

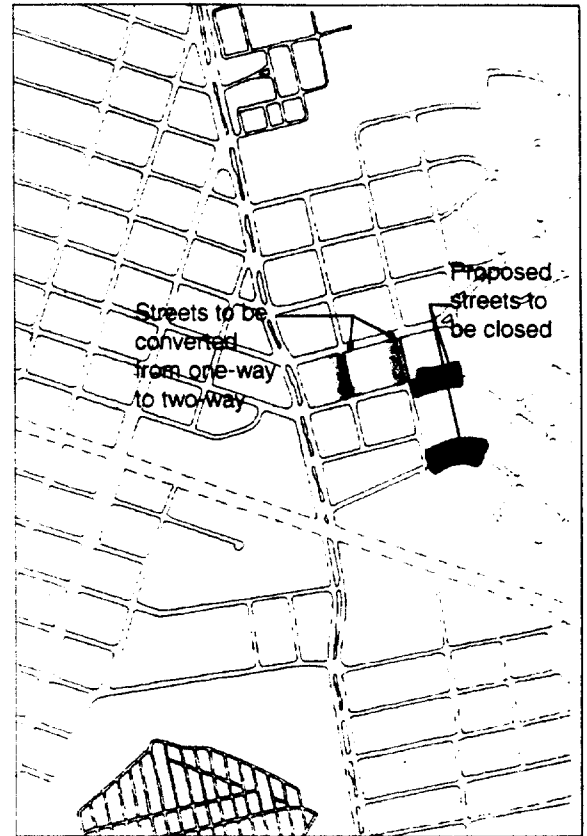
The Church Street widening project presents a unique opportunity by putting a new front door on the park. The scheduled upgrades are projected to accommodate 25,000 vehicles per day, twice the present capacity. The Virginia Department of Transportation is currently in the process of acquiring land along the east side of the street in anticipation of a 1998 construction start. Along with the street widening will come a new planted median strip, curbs, sidewalks, lighting, and landscaping. Residual land on the east side will be sold by the NRHA for redevelopment.

The street improvements and the resulting increased traffic will trans-

form Church Street into Mid-Town's 'main street.' Both existing and new businesses between 18th and 26th Streets will come to be identified with the public's perception of the park. The plan calls for seizing this opportunity to help define Mid-Town's image and character. New buildings constructed on the east side of the street should be sited to reinforce main intersections and designed in accordance with the Design Guidelines. To complement this activity, west side property owners should consider investing in improvements to fencing, landscaping, signage, and buildings.



Existing streets



Proposed street network

Streets

Close streets which make linkages directly into residential neighborhoods

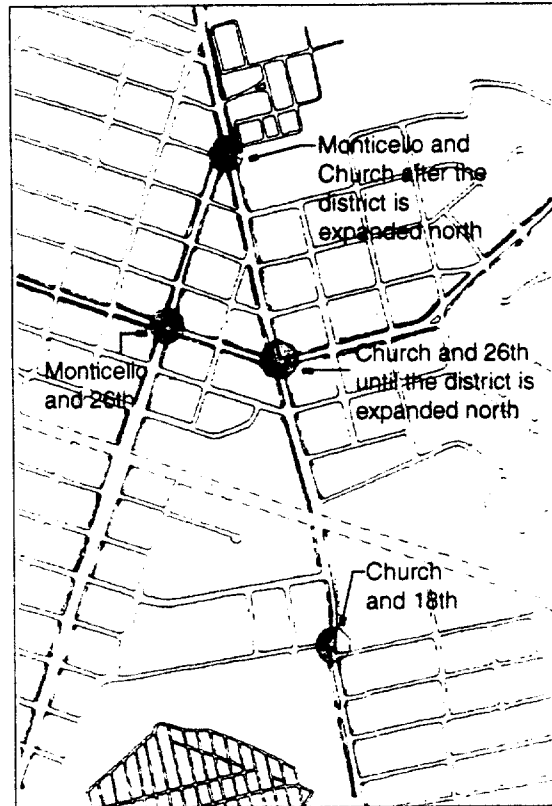
Mid-Town's existing street network is formed by the extension of the residential street grids of adjacent neighborhoods. Some roads have been eliminated to create relatively large development sites. With the exception of Church Street, all of the north/south connections are severed by the Norfolk Southern

mainline which runs east/west through the middle of the park.

The street strategy most requested and still desired by business owners is one which would re-route Church Street under the Norfolk Southern mainline. This option was studied as part of the widening project and not pursued because of the high cost. Railroad warning lights at Granby and Monticello and Virginia Beach and Church were suggested as a short-term solution. In the long term the decision to keep the grade crossing should be reconsidered.

Since rerouting Church Street is not presently a possibility, the refinements proposed in this plan are targeted at fixing inappropriate

linkages and movements. UDA is recommending that 25th Street be closed between Gazel Street and Lindwood Avenue and that Rugby Street be closed between Gazel and Hale Streets. This reconfiguration is intended to discourage pedestrians from cutting through the back streets of Mid-Town, and trucks from cutting through the residential neighborhood. To complement this initiative, Fawn and Gazel should be converted from one-way to two-way streets to facilitate better local traffic circulation.



Proposed gateway intersections

Gateways

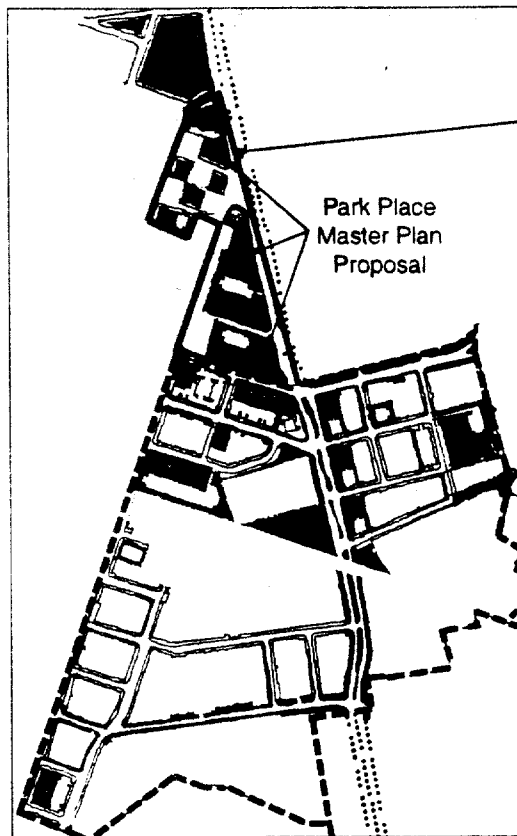
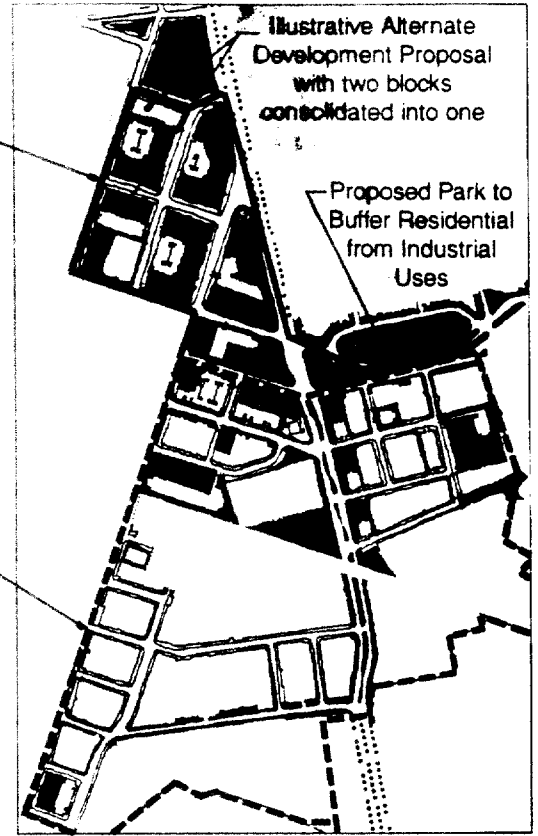
Define and mark gateways

As part of the effort to define Mid-Town's boundaries, a series of gateway treatments are proposed to mark key portals into the area. These points include the intersections of Church Street and Monticello Avenue, Church Street and 18th Street, and 26th Street and Monticello Avenue. The selection criteria for these points included their location at the edge of the district, high visibility and large daily traffic volume.

The design guidelines contained in the last section of this report call for a combination of fencing, landscaping, lighting, signage, and pave-

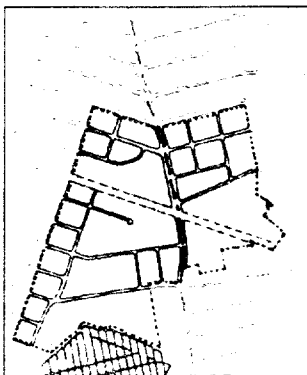
ment treatments to mark these spots. The gateways will be distinguished from similar markers by the industrial feel and character of their components. Low maintenance should be a major consideration in the final design of these places.

Since the plans for reconstructing Church Street preceded the concept of creating gateways, work on financing and building these markers must wait until after the street is rebuilt.

Strategies*Park Place Proposal**Illustrative alternative plan*

Boundaries

Capture adjacent vacant sites as economic development opportunities

*Existing boundary*

Mid-Town's existing boundaries are defined more by the edges of adjacent neighborhoods than land use. If the area's perimeter were reconfigured to encompass all like uses, the district would be extended east/west along the rail line and north to the intersection of Church and Granby Streets.

Mid-Town business owners were reluctant to discuss an east/west expansion. They felt that extending the existing boundary to either the east or west would stretch limited dollars even further without enhancing either the Park's image or marketability.

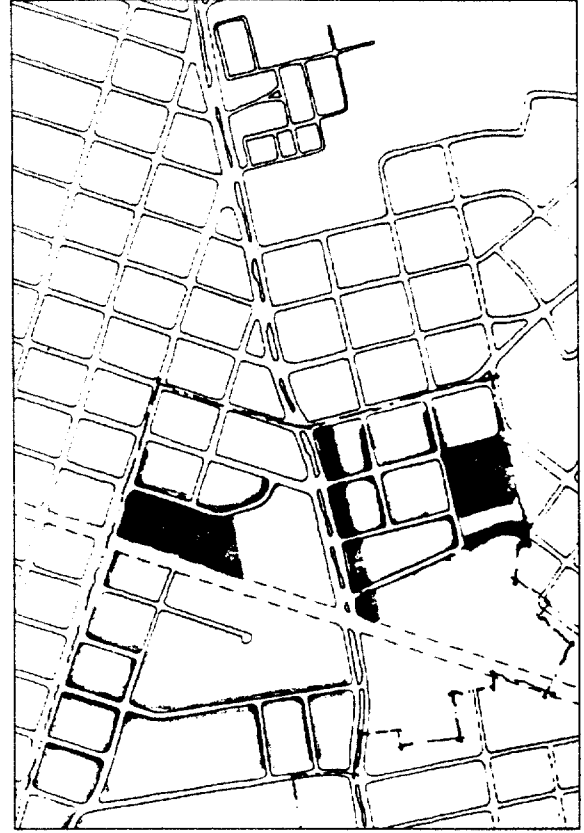
In contrast, they commented that the north revitalization could attract new businesses. This area not only

functions as a gateway, but also offers the opportunity to assemble unusually large development sites. Consensus was reached that redevelopment of this area must support the district's revitalization efforts by showing similar signs of rejuvenation. The residents of Park Place have also looked at this alternative as part of their communities conservation efforts.

It is UDA's recommendation that a dialogue between the residents of Park Place, Mid-Town business owners, the City, and the NRHA be started for the purpose of developing the appropriate Master Plan for the north area.



Phase I Plan—Eliminate addresses for crime



Phase II Plan—Build on the success of Phase I

A Phased Strategy

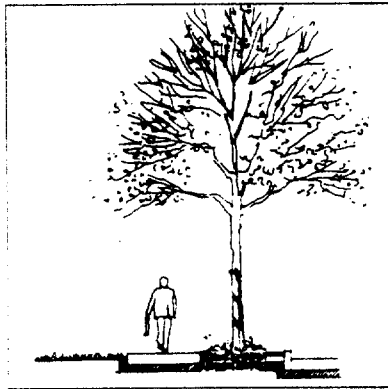
Create marketable addresses that link the strengths of the district to the city

The Phase I plan addresses the primary objective of making the area safer and more marketable. Proposed initiatives include the redevelopment of existing clean sites, the clean-up of brown field sites, the improvement of lighting on public streets and in private parking lots, the landscaping of main streets, and the fencing of unclaimed territory.

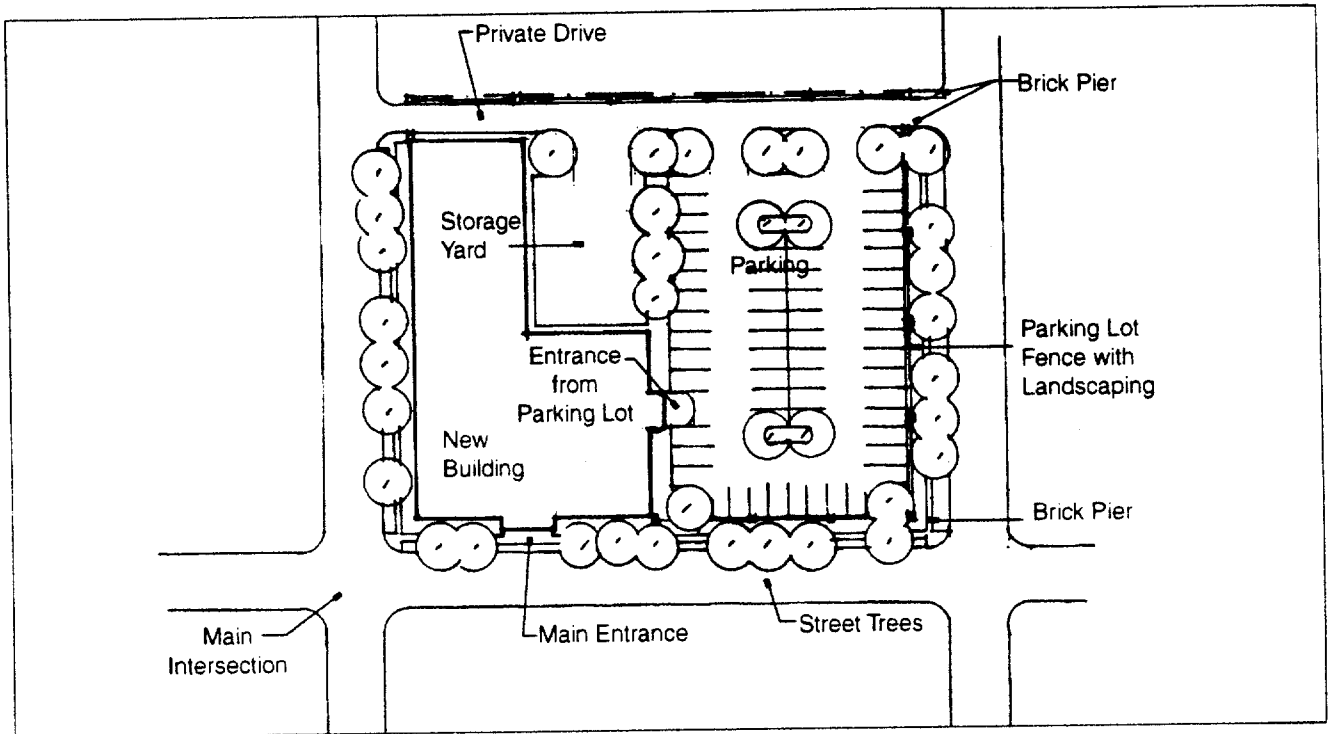
The Phase II strategy is to build on the momentum of the Phase I plan and complete the revitalization of the park. Suggested initiatives include the redevelopment of the

brown field sites, the one block closing of Rugby and 25th Streets, development of sites created by the Church Street widening project, and the continuation of the streetscape program.

The exploration of expanding the district boundary to the north should also be part of this phase.



V DESIGN GUIDELINES



Illustrative prototype site plan

Building Siting

Reinforce key intersections while eliminating unclaimed space

Location

New buildings should be sited at main intersections and along main streets as defined by the Master Plan drawing in the previous section of this document. This approach is intended to reinforce key intersections while placing buildings in the most visible location on the site.

Every attempt should be made to locate service yards behind buildings and away from main streets.

Orientation

Front doors and office windows should be oriented to the street to encourage activity and eyes on the street. This is not only the traditional Mid-Town pattern, but is also of the best security measures that prospective new businesses can employ. Secondary entrances may

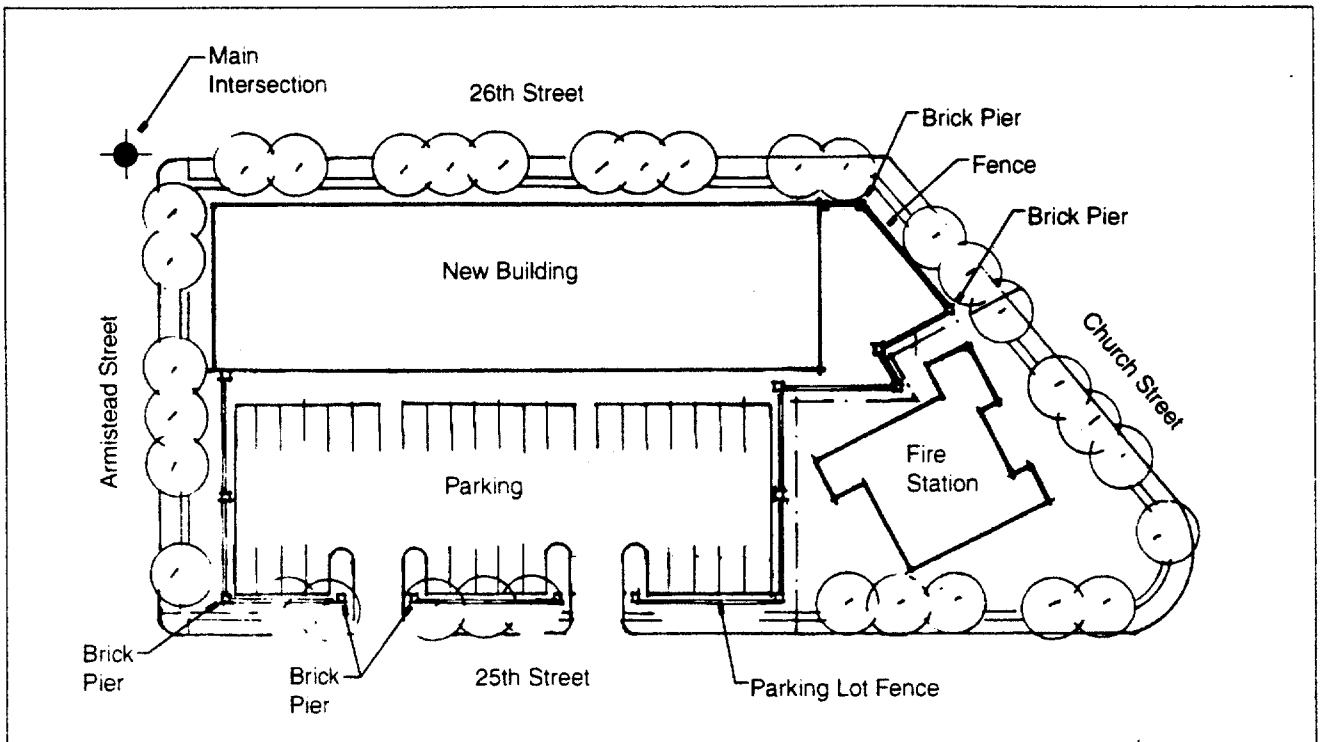
be accessed directly from off-street parking areas.

Image and Character

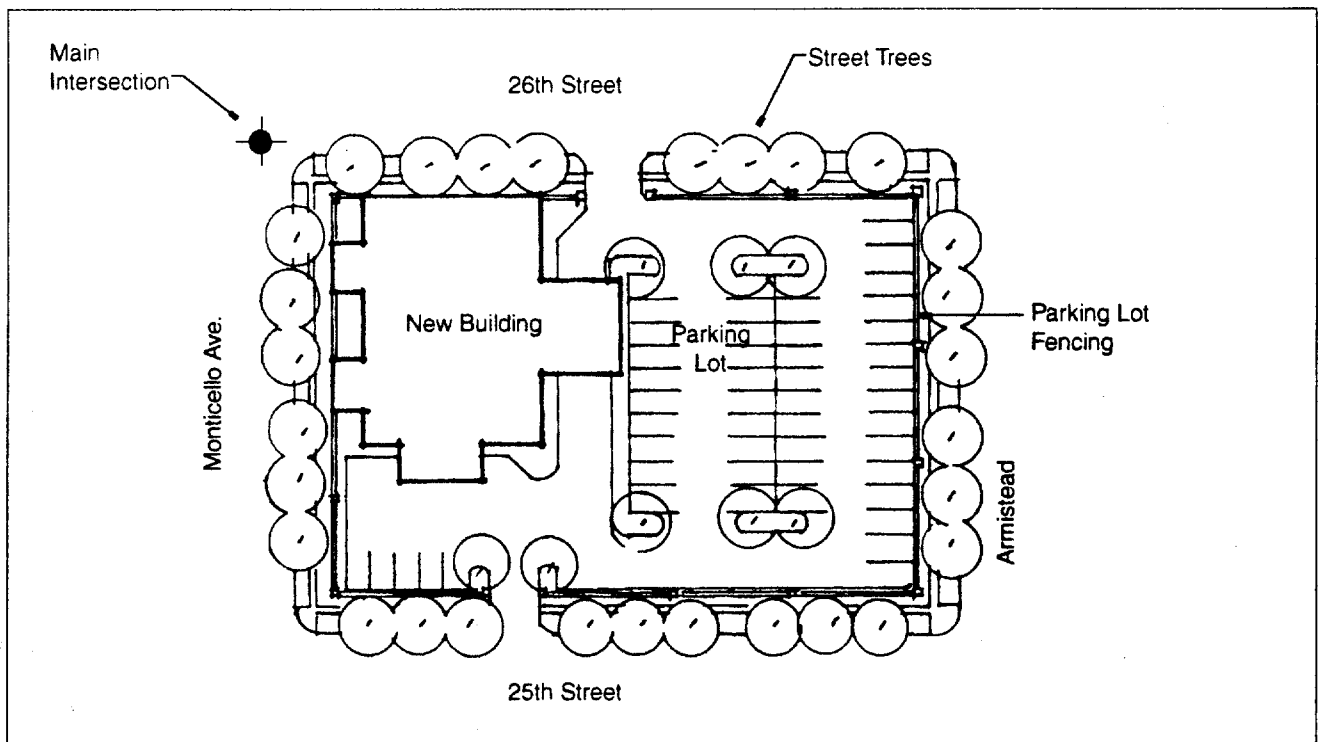
Although new buildings will not be required to adhere to a particular architectural style, some attempt should be made to make them fit into the existing context. Entrances should be clearly articulated along main streets, and windows should be scaled to match the older warehouse buildings.

Materials

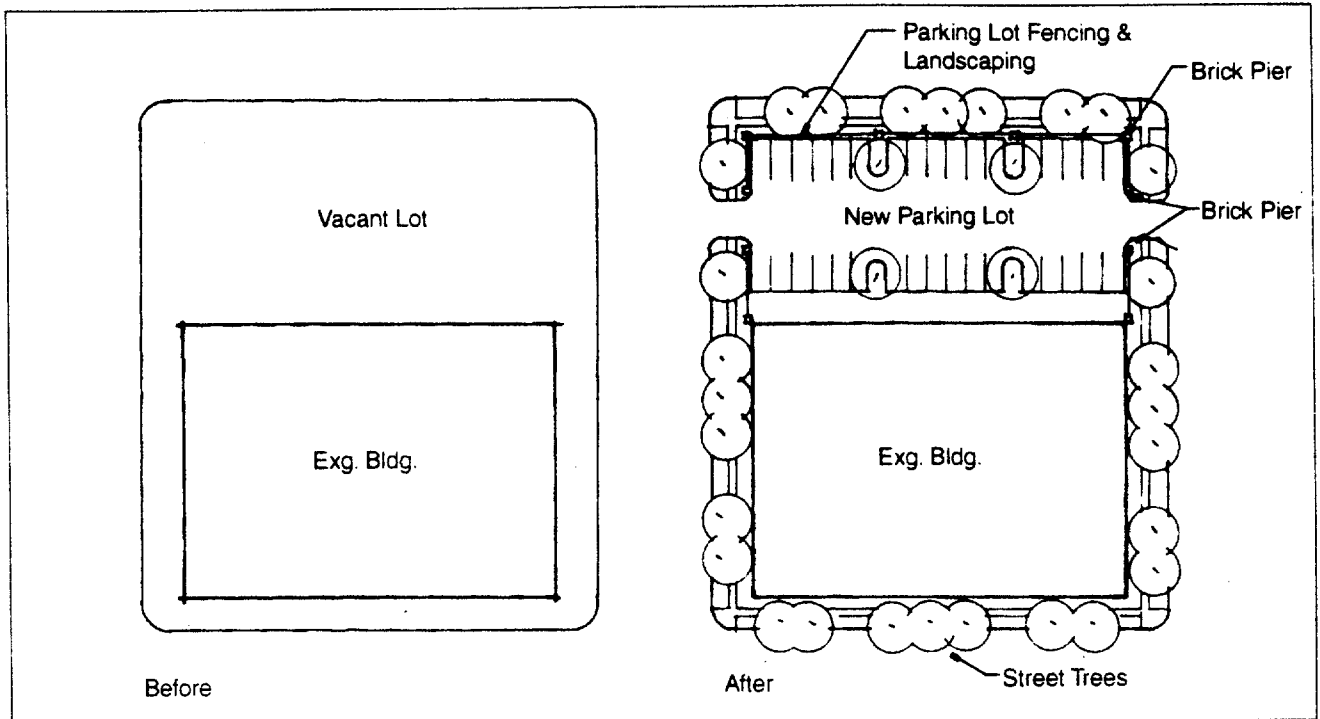
Street facades of new buildings should be constructed of brick and or split-faced concrete masonry or metal siding. All colors should be selected from the natural color palette. White siding and bright colors are discouraged.



Illustrative site plan



Illustrative site plan



Illustrative parking lot plan

Parking Lot Guidelines

Create off-street parking for businesses

General

All businesses in Mid-Town are required to provide off-street parking for their clients and employees.

New and refurbished parking lots should support this plan's goal of improving aesthetics, safety and access while creating a positive marketable image for the area.

Materials

Parking lots which are visible from the street and/or intended for public use, such as guest and visitor parking, should be paved with asphalt.

Location

New parking lots should be located to the side and/or rear of buildings. Whenever possible, these lots should be visible from the street to increase supervision.

Main intersections, such as 25th and Church Streets, should be re-

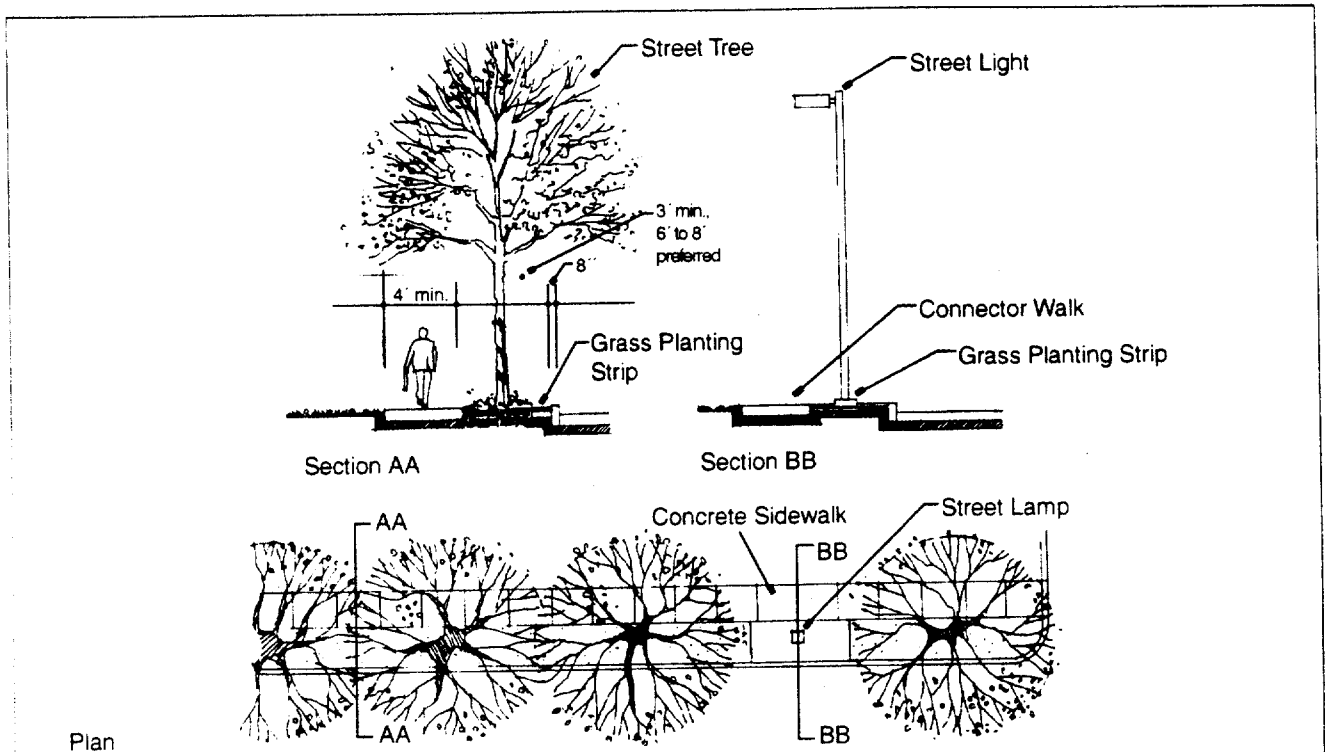
served for buildings and green space. Parking lots around these intersections should be located as far away from these points as possible.

Lighting and Landscaping

Security lighting is required in all new parking lots and encouraged in existing ones. This lighting should consist of rectangular cut-off fixtures on a round tapering pole.

Glare must be screened from residential areas and public right-of-ways. The objective is to get a high level of illumination across the entire lot.

The inclusion of shade trees in parking areas is an especially important step in trying to soften Mid-Town's hard environment. Landscaping in tree islands is therefore encouraged where zoning permits.



Typical streetscape

Streetscape Guidelines

Soften and clarify
Mid-Town's image

General

The character of new streetscapes in Mid-Town will complement the streetscape design proposed as part of the Church Street widening project. As that design is refined, the following guidelines will eventually need to be modified to ensure compatibility and consistency.

Sidewalks

Public sidewalks in the district shall be concrete and a minimum of 4'-0" wide. Control joints should be spaced at a distance equal to the width to create a square pattern.

Amenity strips

Amenity strips should be created in the area between the back of the curb and the sidewalk where space permits. These areas should be

planted with grass and feature street trees.

Accessibility Ramps

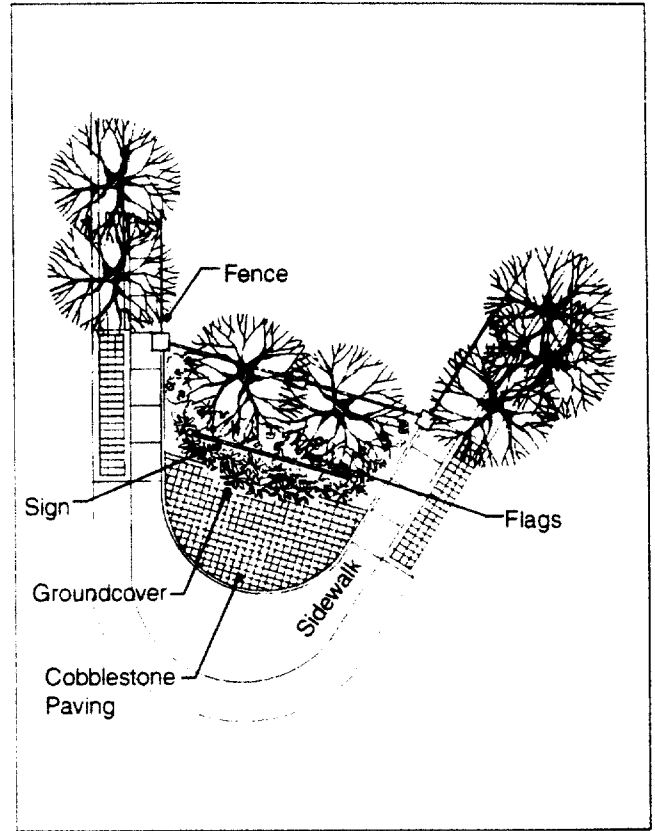
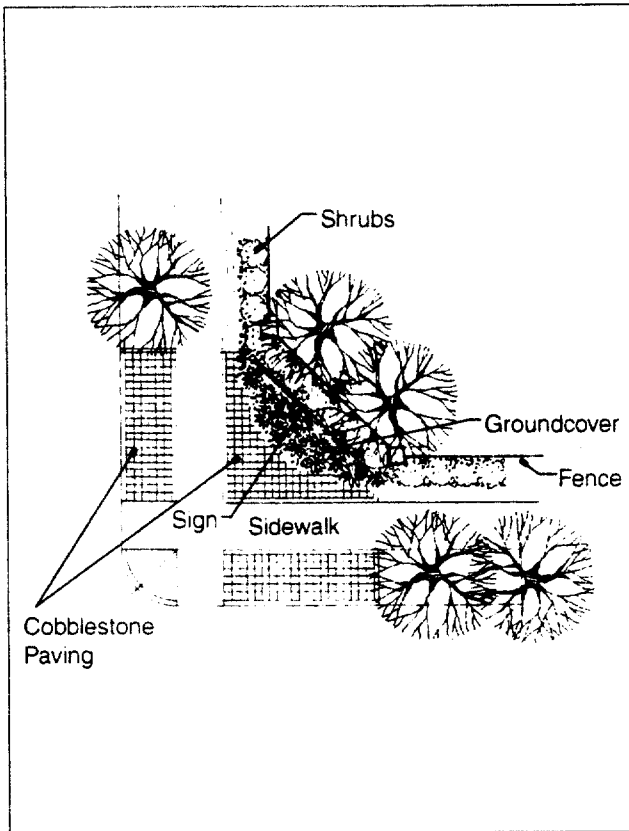
Accessibility ramps conforming to the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act are required at all crosswalks.

Street Lighting

Rectangular cut-off fixtures on a round tapered pole should be installed between intersections to increase the general level of illumination in the area.

Street Tree Planting Areas

Street tree planting areas should be a minimum of 3'-0" x 8'-0". Street tree spacing and locations will be determined by the Department of Parks and Recreation.



Gateway Intersections

Mark key gateways

General

Gateway intersections should incorporate a combination of signage, landscaping, special paving, and lighting to mark key entrance points into the district. Flags or banners should also be included at the intersection of Church Street and Monticello Avenue.

Signage

Signage should conform to the guidelines on the last page of this section. The existing Mid-Town sign at the intersection of Church and 26th Streets should be incorporated into one of the new gateway intersections.

Landscaping

Trees, shrubs, groundcover, and lawn will complement signage and paving treatments. Groundcover should be used in the foreground to soften the appearance of the signs. Trees can be inserted as a backdrop to mask visual clutter.

Special Paving

Cobblestone paving should be incorporated into the gateway designs to recall the area's historic image and character.

Lighting

Signage and landscaping should be lighted for evening and nighttime visibility.



Fencing Guidelines

Strike a balance between image and security

General

The existing fencing in Mid-Town is an eclectic mix of chain-link, barbed wire, corrugated metal, and picket and rail. There is very little consistency in approaches to fencing except in the common goal of providing a measure of security.

The revitalization plan's approach to correcting this problem is to strike a balance between image and security. New fencing will be selected from a more limited menu to encourage greater consistency.

Height

Fencing which fronts on public streets shall be a minimum of 3'-0" tall and a maximum of 6'-0" tall. Five foot to six foot high fencing

should be used only where security requirements dictate. These are most often the areas where 'eyes on the street' do not exist.

Fencing along property edges that does not front on a public street shall be a maximum of 8'-0" high. Security wire may be added above 8'-0" at the owner's discretion.

Setbacks

Fencing should be held back a minimum of 2'-0" from the edge of the sidewalk to allow for landscape screening. Where building facades are setback more than two feet from the property line, fencing should be set back an equal distance. The exception to this rule is where individual buildings are setback further than neighboring buildings. In this case, fences should align with the predominant street wall as established by the facades of adjacent buildings.

Materials and Openness

Materials for fencing along public streets shall be either metal picket and rail, or coated chain-link.

Formed galvanized or aluminum panels fastened to the back of a steel tube frame will also be permitted to screen storage yards. Brick piers should be added to all three types of fencing at street intersections and adjacent to pedestrian and parking entrances.

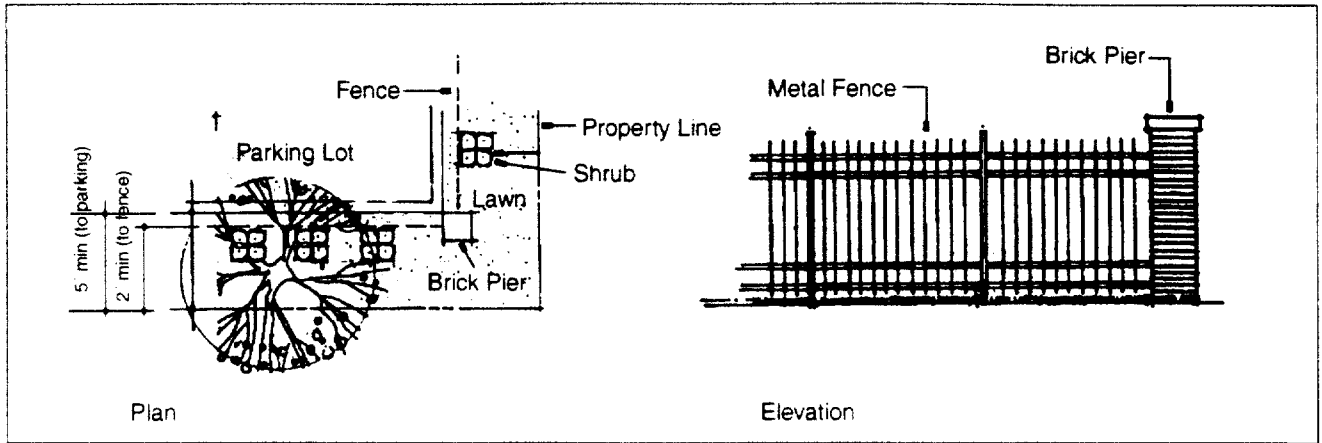
With the exception of service yard fencing, all fences should provide a minimum of 50% openness above 2'-6". Illustrative examples are shown on the following page.

Landscaping

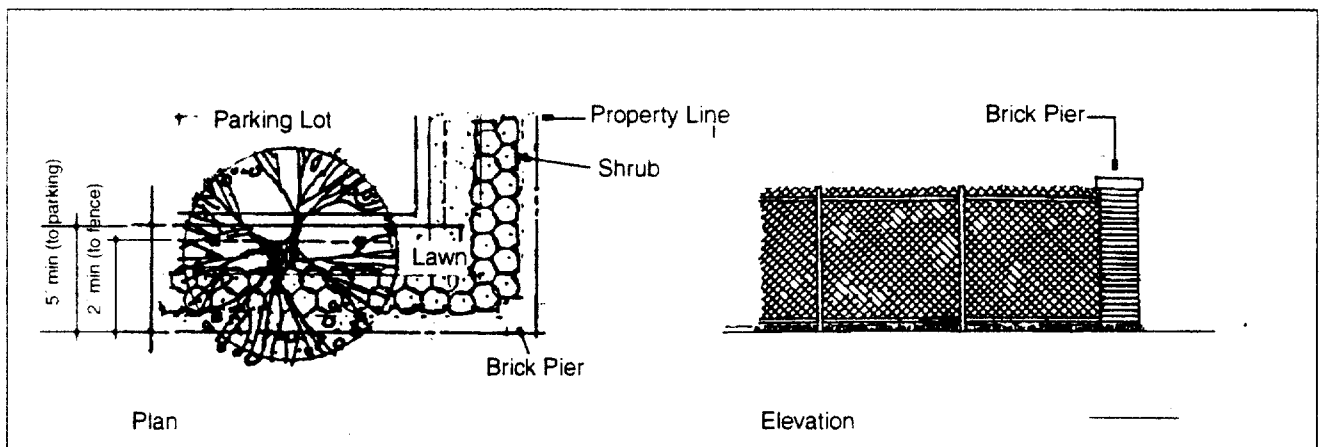
To further screen vehicles, metal picket and chain-link fences along parking areas should be landscaped, preferably to the street side, with trees and/or shrubs.

Colors

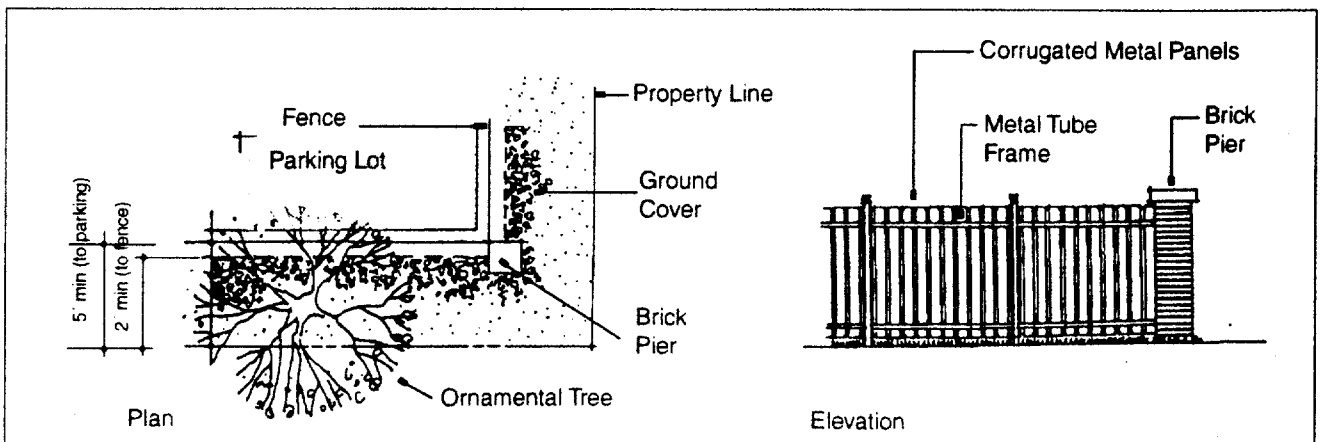
Open fencing facing streets should be prefinished black or dark green. Brick piers should be in the red range with white precast caps. Opaque storage yard fencing should be natural galvanized or aluminum with a silver colored or light grey frame.



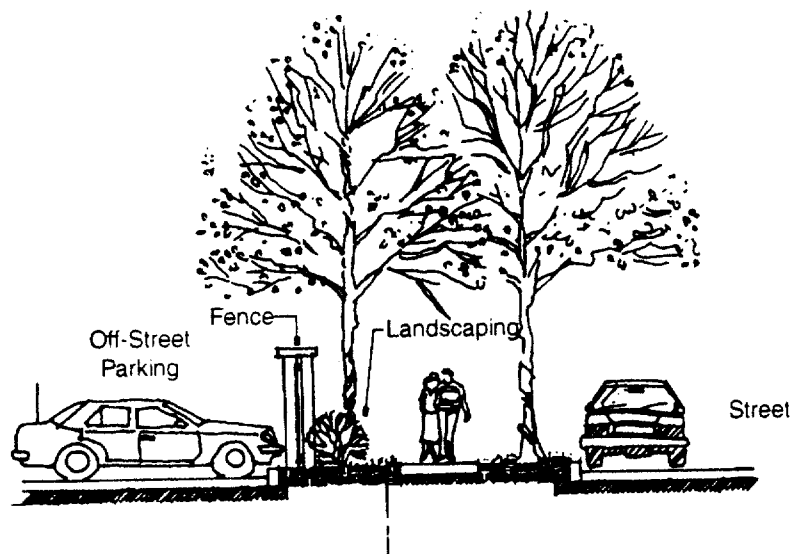
Illustrative Fencing Option A



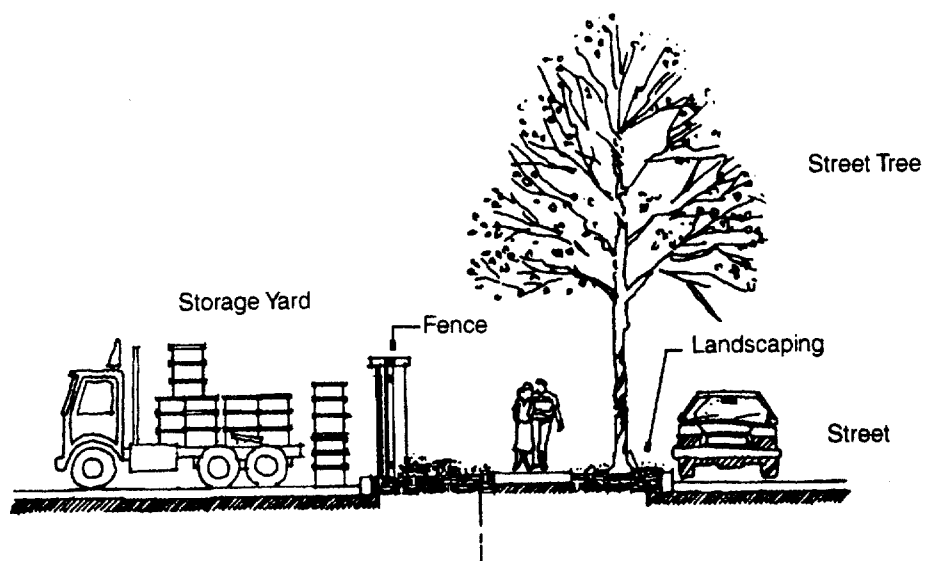
Illustrative Fencing Option B



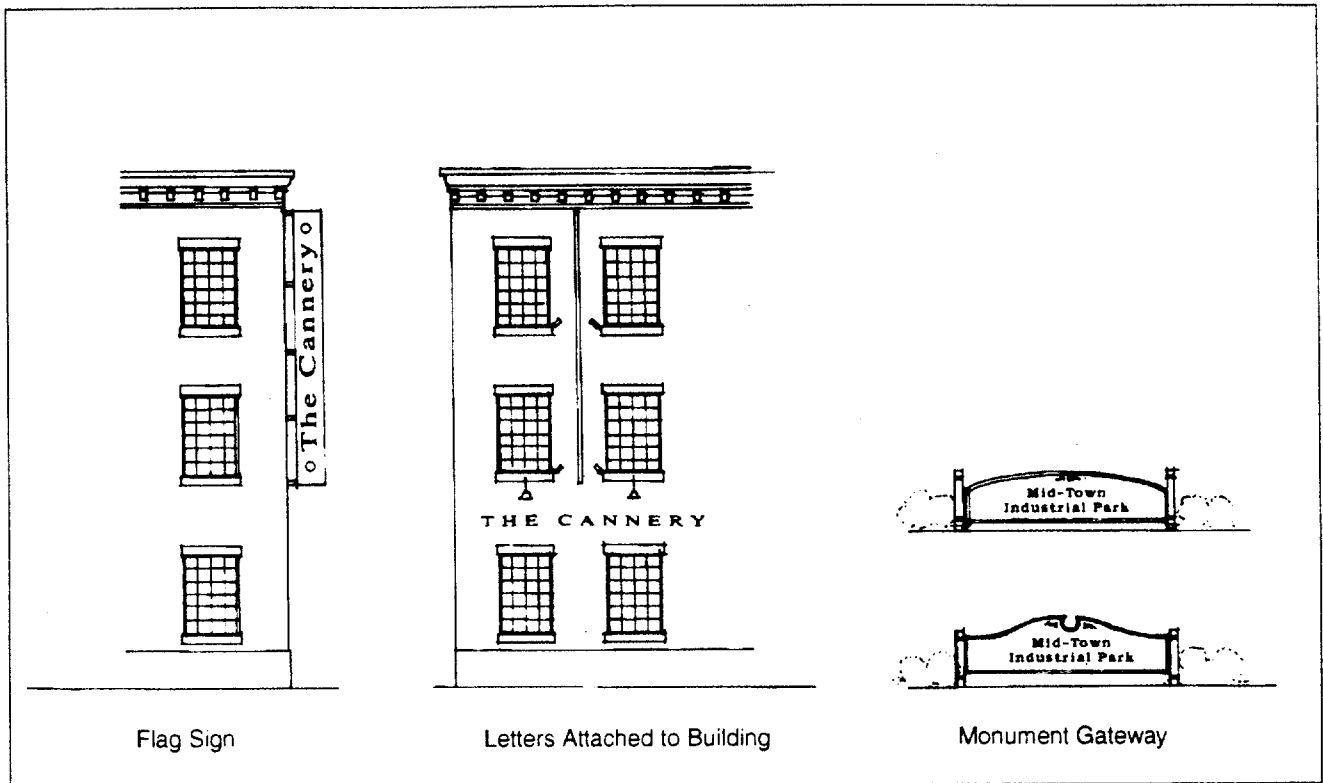
Illustrative Fencing Option C



Illustrative Fencing, Options A and B



Illustrative Fencing, Option C



Signage

Select signage that enhances the environment

General

Letters and marks applied to buildings and rectangular flag signs are the two types of signage recommended for Mid-Town.

Gateway Intersections

Low freestanding monument gateway signs are permitted as part of gateway intersections. These signs should extend a maximum of 4'-6".

Lighting

Signage should be ground lit or lit by spotlights attached to buildings. Internally lit signs are discouraged.

Codes and Ordinances

In addition to these guidelines, new signage must conform to all applicable City codes and ordinances.

APPENDIX



MID-TOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN

Norfolk, Virginia

Prepared for
City of Norfolk
and
Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority

by
UDA

March 1997

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