

urban values & vision for downtown harrisonburg

EUGENE STOLTZFUS ARCHITECTS

AUGUST 2008



A study of urban values and vision for the downtown- of Harrisonburg, Virginia

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Preface

This book is the printed version of *Urban Values and Vision for Downtown Harrisonburg*, a project commissioned by the Economic Development Committee of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance. The full project includes an image-based live presentation using photographs, figure/ground studies, and digital 3D modeling including virtual fly-overs, and virtual drive-throughs. The 3D base model allows real-time interactive exploration of the downtown.

The full project developed from an earlier project which grew out of conversations among a number of us working downtown who realized we needed to develop visual imagery representing the city and representing our ideas. In the spring of 2007, at the suggestion of Jim Barnes, I developed a Powerpoint presentation called *Urban Design Tools and Values for Downtown Harrisonburg*. This earlier project was built on the virtual 3D database of existing Harrisonburg that Randy Seitz and Ron Davenport of Blue Ridge Design Studio started to build in 2005, and which Jim and I then helped to fund, with Adam Steiniger doing the data entry and computer modeling.

The *Tools and Values* study was very well received at the dozen or more presentations we made to city administrators and department heads, county administrators, realtors, developers, and a large number of interested individuals. As a result, *Urban Values and Vision for Downtown Harrisonburg* was subsequently commissioned by Eddie Bumbaugh and Brian Shull of the Economic Development Committee of Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance to further develop ideas that came to light in the *Tools and Values* study. We offer our work as a contribution to the ongoing exploration of ideas for the revitalization of downtown Harrisonburg.

Eugene Stoltzfus AIA



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introduction

We are living in a time of extraordinary opportunity for growth in the city of Harrisonburg. This opportunity comes from local, regional, national, and global perspectives.

From the local perspective, Harrisonburg's booming economy has reached downtown. For several decades in the latter half of the 20th Century, the downtown deteriorated as business development moved to the malls and residential development moved to the suburbs, but that has changed.

A large number of local people are actively engaged in reinvigorating the city. Some represent the city; some represent non-profit organization; some are private entrepreneurs; some are design professionals; some are just interested citizens who live, work, or shop downtown. The important thing is that we are all thinking seriously about the urban character of the city and that we are talking to each other.

We are witnessing store fronts coming to life as buildings are being leased or sold all over the downtown. Rosetta Stone alone has grown from 250 to 450 employees in the past three years. Harrisonburg is designated as a Virginia Main Street Community. New restaurants, a bakery, a food market, an internet shop, and a clothing store are examples of recent retail openings. The initial phase of the new Main Street streetscape plan is under construction. As of this writing, 30 new upscale residential units at City Exchange have come on line. Thirty units at the Sancar building and 200 units at Urban Exchange are under construction.

From a regional perspective, the security needs of the nation's capital have presented Harrisonburg with a unique opportunity. Because Harrisonburg stands just outside the 100-mile blast zone, the city is well positioned to attract major technology companies relocating offices and plants. These companies will add to the already existing technology community anchored by SRI, SI, Criterion and Rosetta Stone, and include two-dozen start up and small technology entrepreneurs.

From a national perspective, a trend known as New Urbanism has found a foothold. This radical shift to rebuild our urban cores based on the synergies between economic need, social access, internet communication, energy costs, technological advances, ecological realities, and lifestyle changes have gotten the attention of regional planners, urban designers, architects, developers, builders, and the citizens who are the final users of the built environment. This trend is nationwide and is revolutionizing the urban environment from small towns to large cities.

From a global perspective, consensus has built in recent years that the citizens of the earth are faced with a radical climate change crisis. This crisis is driving a global green revolution, pushing everyone to reduce pollution. As good citizens of the earth, it is incumbent on us to think globally and act locally.

The synergies created by local growth, regional opportunities, national trends, and global needs now grant us the opportunity to build-out the downtown based on good urban design values. This is an auspicious time in the life of Harrisonburg.

city mandate



**Court Square was
once a very dynamic
urban place**

The core of Harrisonburg was once a very dynamic urban center.

We now have the opportunity to again make the downtown a great place to live, work, shop, and socialize.

Natural economic and cultural forces conspired in the latter half of the twentieth century to move commercial and residential growth outside the downtown. Among these forces were population growth, cheap fuel, the dominance of private transportation, and urban renewal based on the separation of living, working, shopping, and leisure. There was also a preference for short-term economic expediency over long-term building of a city.

We now have a county and city that have developed prescient comprehensive plans

that call for keeping the county open and for concentrating good urban density in the cities and towns.

The city's comprehensive plan has mandated Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance to "work in partnership with city government and the community to develop a comprehensive vision and master plan to

revitalize downtown Harrisonburg into a prosperous and vibrant city center."

The city's openness to the new is further embodied in its goal:

"to promote novel patterns of development like those developed early in the city's history – vital, well planned and well integrated mixed-housing and mixed-use urban areas of distinct character."

In response to the city's mandate to HDR, this book is about

"reviving downtown as the heart of the city - the civic, economic, cultural, and symbolic center of city life."

The City and County comprehensive plans call for keeping the county open and for concentrating good urban density in the cities and towns



urban success

Before we look at Harrisonburg, let's start by looking at successful urban places, places that seem to illicit from everyone a common positive response.

We are not starting with urban design principles, but rather finding places that appeal to us and teasing out why they appeal to us so strongly. This will help give us a common understanding, common reference, and common language. It will help tune our urban sensibilities, and help us to talk about our own city.

BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

Las Ramblas

BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

What makes Las Ramblas, in Barcelona, such an engaging street?

We might think of it as a large urban room whose walls are formed by buildings. A very successful effort has been made to achieve an appropriate balance between the cars and pedestrians. There are four lanes of traffic, but cars do not dominate. Prominent street graphics indicate pedestrian crossings. Low curbs favor those on foot. Motorscooters are lined up on their own designated paving to serve as a buffer between car lanes and the pedestrian plaza.

Tall trees give shelter to the blocks of shops. The balconies of the buildings mediate the inside/outside relationship, connecting the inhabitants of the buildings with the people on the street. Art has taken its natural place: a mosaic by Joan Miro, native son of Barcelona, graces the paving for both pedestrians and viewers from the balconies.

There is an appropriate balance between cars and pedestrians

We might think of this as a large urban room formed primarily by the buildings

Tall trees give shelter to the shops



Barcelona Intersections
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

The citizens of Barcelona have also developed a novel way of treating intersections in relation to the connecting streets. By cutting an angle across all four corners, they have more than an intersection, they have created a compelling activity center that re-occurs every block.

Again they have achieved a balanced and unique integration of cars and pedestrians. Cars are accommodated, but strong street graphics boldly mark pedestrian crossings.

These are not solutions for every city. Rather, they show how interdependent decisions can work together to achieve successful and novel functionality that works for a particular culture and circumstance.

By angling the corners of the blocks, Barcelona has created a place and achieved a balanced integration of cars and pedestrians



Campodiglio
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

The Campodiglio in Rome shows buildings forming another kind of extraordinary public place. A rich surface pattern filled with small pavers at pedestrian scale completes the intimate feeling of this public room. This is not just a place to pass through, it is a place to be.



This is not just a place to pass through, it is a place to be

Campodiglio
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE



Piazza del Campo
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

The Piazza del Campo in Siena is another unique public place formed by buildings and tuned-up by pavers. Service vehicles are accommodated, yet the feeling that this is a plaza primarily for pedestrians is retained. Cafes reach out from the restaurants that ring the plaza. Overhanging canopies mediate between the vertical walls and the plaza.

The fan pattern of the paving was developed to handle surface water flow and is a good example of an inspired treatment of practical needs



Piazza del Campo
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

The vehicular service lane is separated from the plaza by attractive bollards and is subservient to the pedestrian feel



St. Peter's
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

Saint Peter's in Rome is a formal example of a large urban place formed by buildings, but kept intimate by the nature of the pavers.

**Small-scale pavers
give a large space an
intimate feel**



St. Peter's Plaza

BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

Saint Peter's is also powerful because of its strong geometric form and the way the approaching street leads into a transitional space before one reaches the grand urban room. This shows a hierarchy of places, and it gives the impression one has arrived at a place of significance.



This shows a hierarchy of places from corridor to urban foyer to grand urban room

Paris City Hall

BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

The front of the Paris City Hall provides the defining wall of a tuned-up plaza that has achieved a unique balance between automobiles and pedestrians. Subtle treatments of paving and lack of curb are major contributors to this result. The plaza feels good as a place for public assembly, but at the same time, the light posts define where one might expect to find cars during normal business hours.

The front of a public building as a defining wall and focus of a public place



urban trees

Trees have special roles in our cities.

Trees bring natural beauty into our lives.

Trees provide homes for birds, our ubiquitous friends from the wild kingdom.

Trees devour carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen.

Trees offer shade in summer and sun in winter.

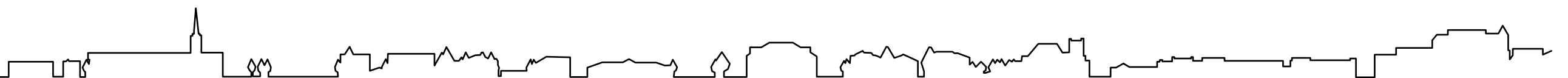
Trees absorb water where there is too much.

Trees hold banks to resist erosion.

Trees look wonderful at Christmas.

Trees can be positioned and shaped to form urban places.

In this section we will look at ways urban trees have been handled to form unique and memorable places.







This treatment of trees has simultaneously formed a large public sculpture court and an intimate meeting place under the trees

Champs-Elysees
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

This sculpture park along the Champs-Elysees uses trees to form an imposing hedge. At the same time, because they are limbed up, one can see through to the surrounding areas. This is a unique and very satisfying way to serve the need for visibility and safety. The limbing-up has also provided an intimate place along the edge, under the trees, for people to meet and talk.

View Plaza
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

In Tuscany, a memorable place is created not just by the striking façade and the scale of the paving, but by the spiky trees which define the edge and still facilitate a view.



The spikey trees have contributed to this feeling of place while still preserving the view below

Cross Path

BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

These trees in an apartment block in Spain are not limbed up at all, letting everyone know that this public path passes through a private space.



Pedestrians know by the treatment of the trees that this is a place to pass through

Capitol Square Park
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

This assembly of elements makes a one-of-a-kind place in Richmond. A dramatic cascade of steps is flanked by benches that not only provide seating, but give definition to the edge of this unique plaza.



The benches help to define the edge of a unique stepped plaza. They also signal that while you can step on the grass, you are not expected to cut paths across it

Downtown Mall
BARCELONA
ROME
SIENA
TUSCANY
PARIS
SPAIN
RICHMOND
CHARLOTTESVILLE

The Mall in Charlottesville is a good local example of a successful, thriving urban place defined by the buildings and a canopy of trees.



A local example of a thriving urban place defined by buildings, trees, and paving while being regulated by street accessories

Having looked at examples of wonderfully successful urban places, and having isolated some of the characteristics that yield that success, we now want to turn to Harrisonburg. After introducing new urban design tools, we will look at what typifies downtown Harrisonburg, and then explore the kinds of steps that might be taken to improve Harrisonburg as an urban center.

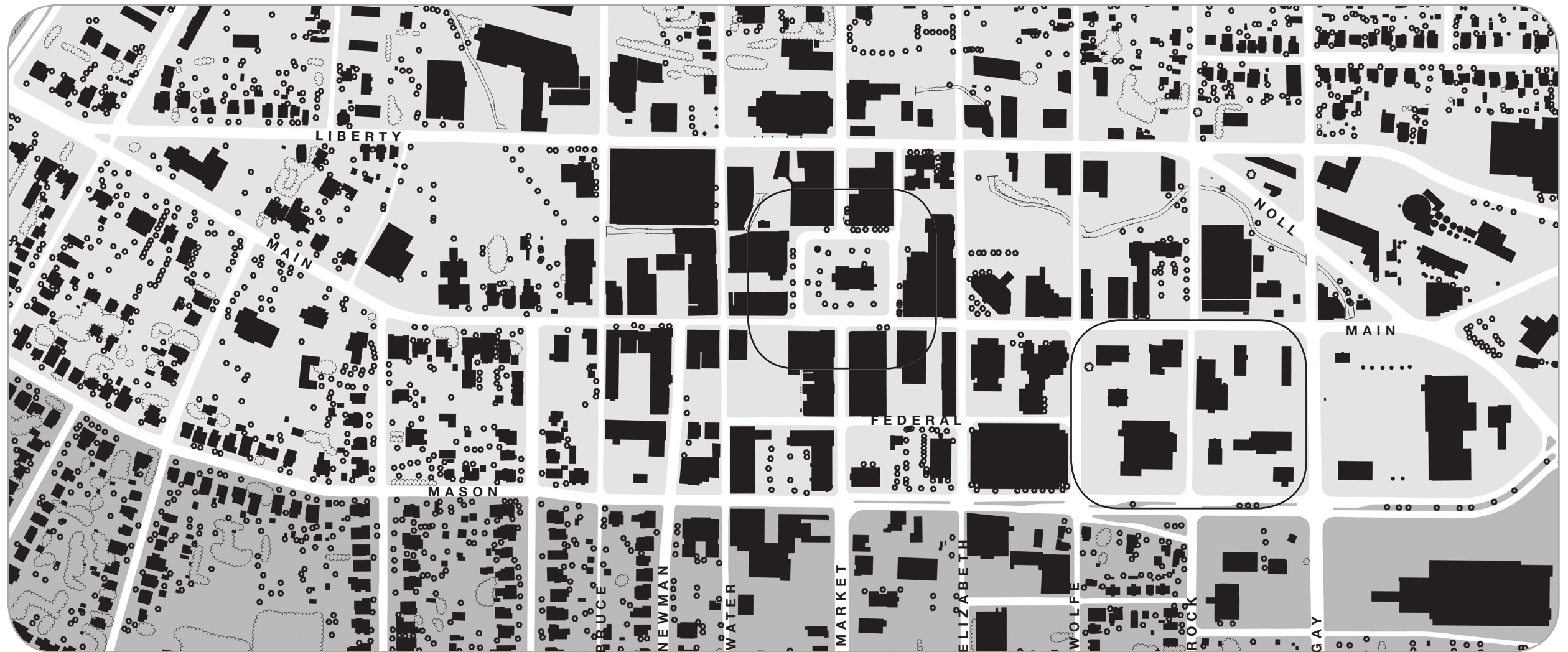
tools

to aid in parsing harrisonburg

A figure/ground drawing is a particularly revealing way of looking at a city. It is a 2D bird's-eye-view that has eliminated extraneous information, showing only the position and footprint of buildings. It reveals very quickly whether buildings form public squares and streets, or whether they stand alone with no role in defining urban space, isolated islands in a sea of asphalt.

The figure/ground study allows us to see how buildings relate to the space around them. We can assess the whole city at a glance and identify the general character of the various districts.

A quick glance across the figure/ground study of Harrisonburg identifies areas where buildings are clustered to form public space



and areas where isolated buildings stand alone surrounded by large surface parking lots

A 3D model gives other kinds of information, including the impact of building heights and general massing of buildings

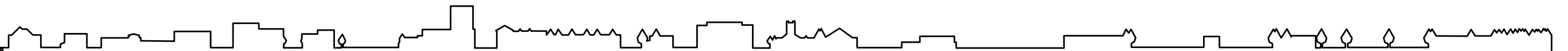


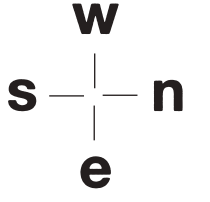
The model allows us to infill with 3D versions of new ideas and explore how they might feel



harrisonburg: the good. the bad. the ugly.

In this section we will sample typical parts of the downtown, using figure/ground studies, 3D modeling, and photographs.



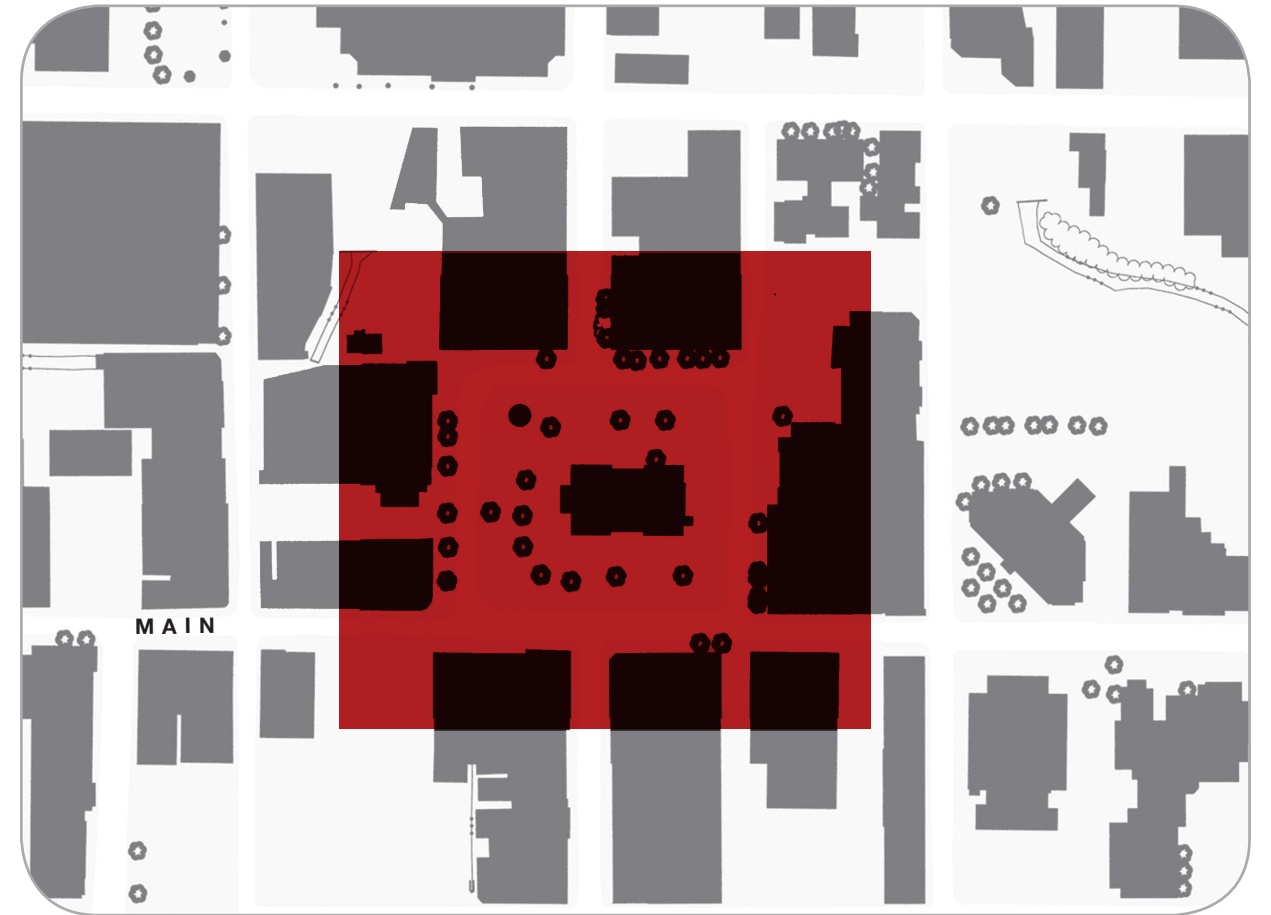


Court Square



How buildings in Harrisonburg define place is vividly illustrated by two areas that stand in stark contrast to each other: Court Square, and the two urban renewal blocks north of Wolfe Street.

The buildings surrounding the County Court House create such a strong sense of public place, it is reflected in its name: Court Square. This unique configuration gives Harrisonburg its distinctive downtown identity. People arriving here know they have reached the heart of our city.



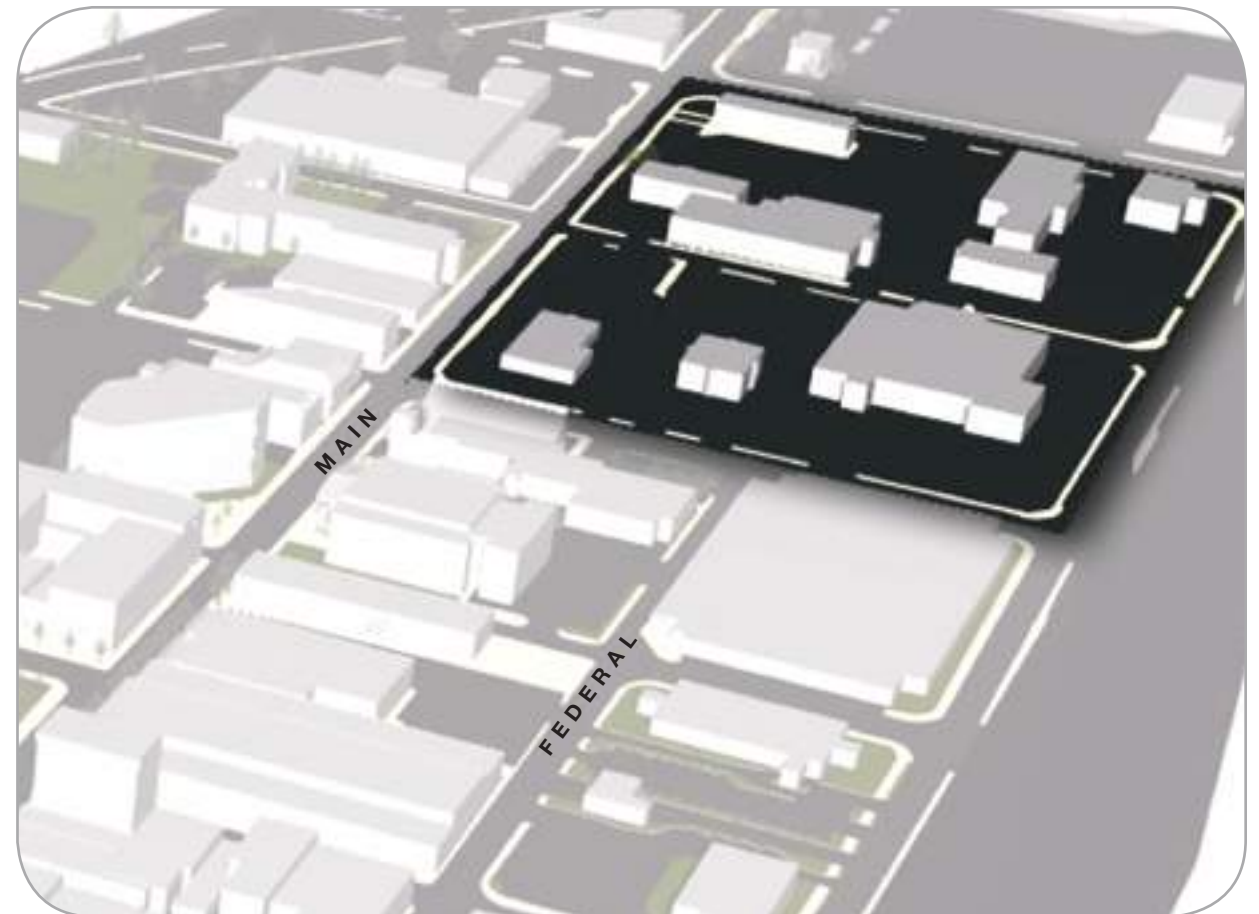
the good. the bad. the ugly.



Urban Renewal Blocks

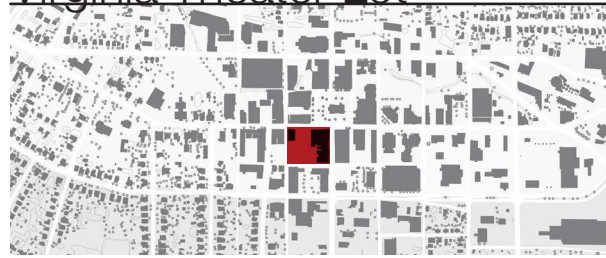


By contrast, the buildings of the urban renewal blocks north of Wolfe Street each stand alone, surrounded by asphalt parking lots. The buildings are not positioned to form outside space. They do not work together to define public place. This sea of asphalt is notable in its unattractiveness and in its lack of feeling of place. It has also failed to attract the kind of activity that generates significant tax revenue for the city.

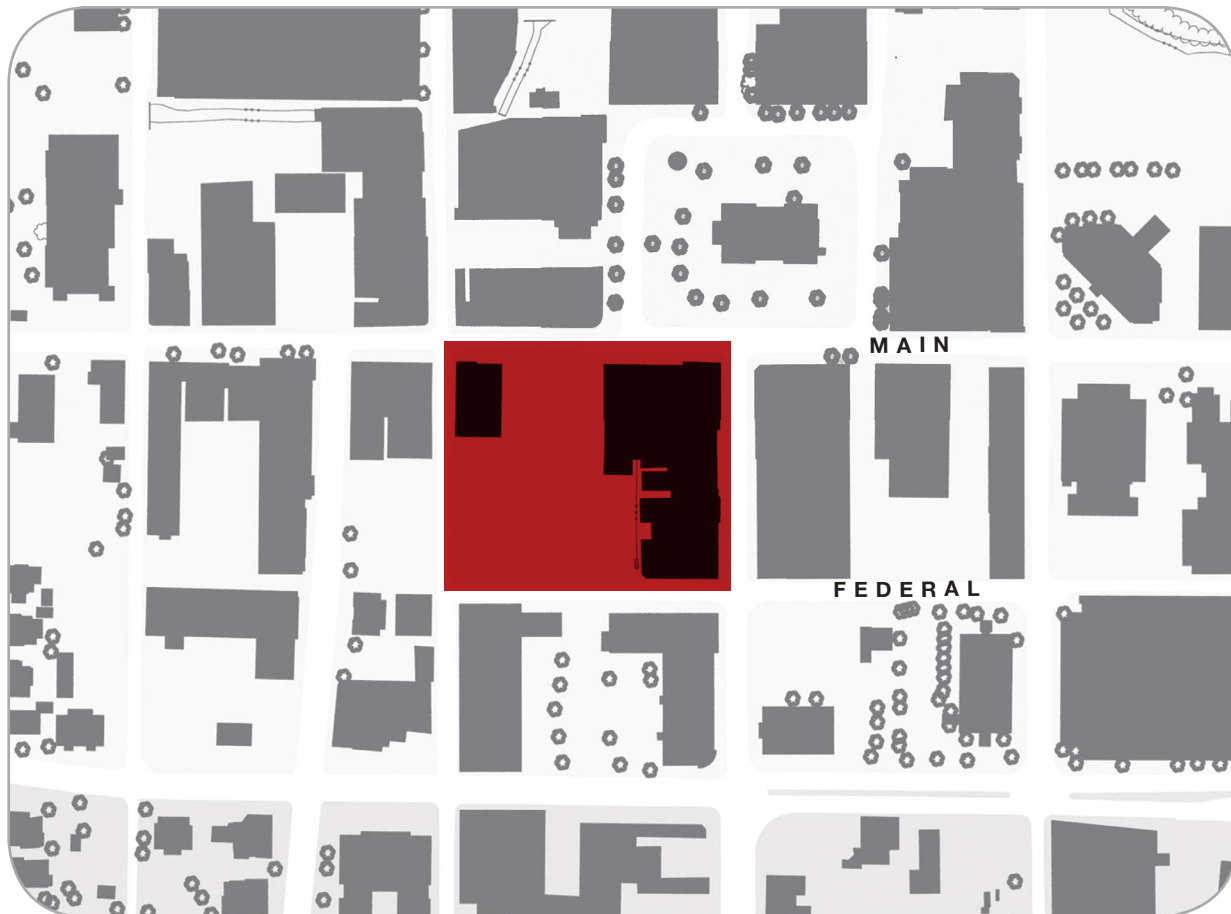
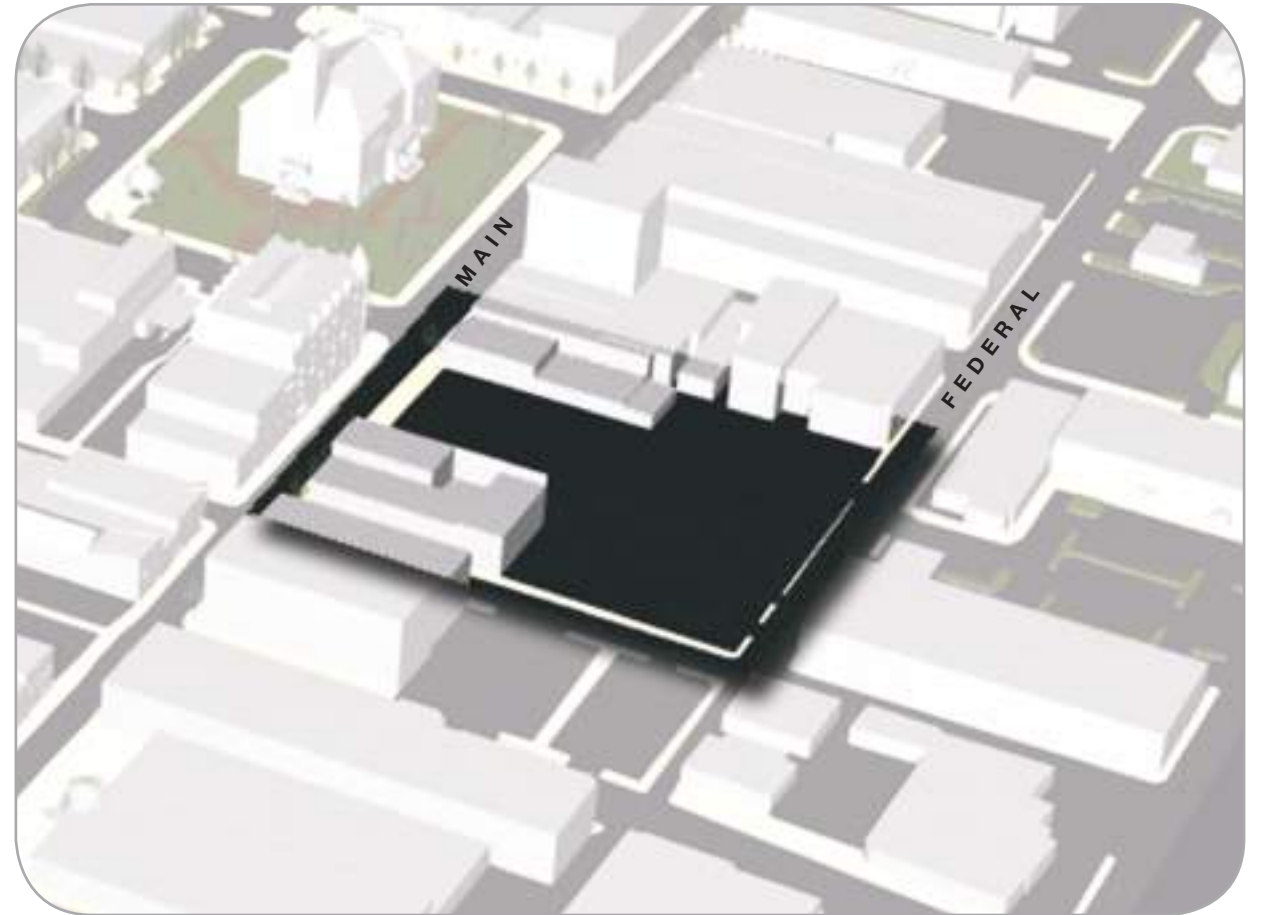


the good. the bad. the ugly.

Virginia Theater Lot

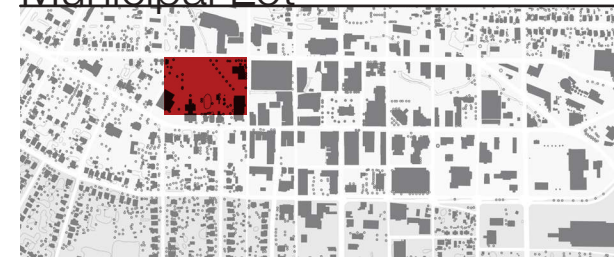


The demolition of the Virginia Theater to create a large downtown surface parking lot has left a gaping hole in the definition of both Main Street and Federal Street.

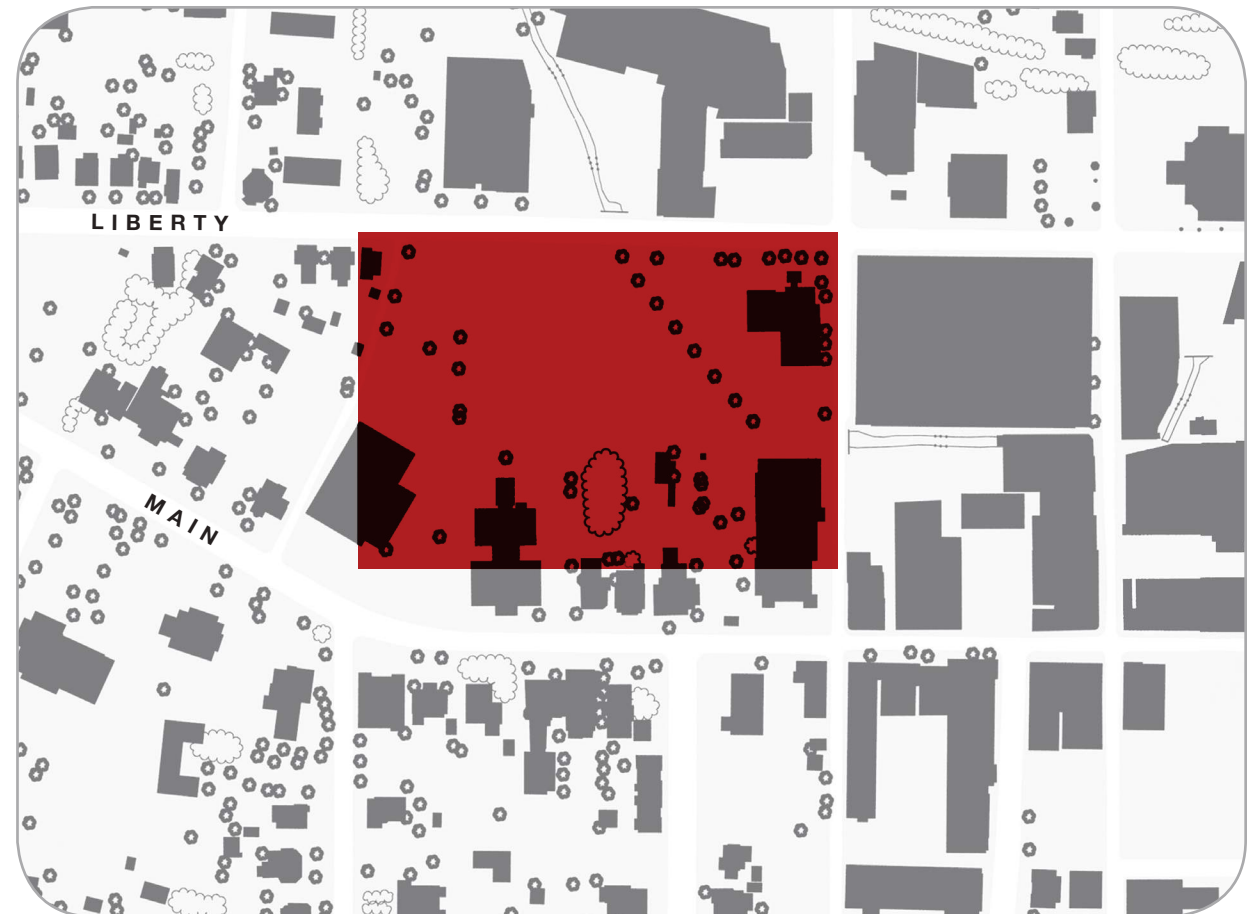




Municipal Lot



Looking at Liberty Street South, one can see yet another large surface parking lot near the Municipal Building. This raises the question of how we provide plenty of accessible parking without large surface lots. Large surface lots in downtown will become a thing of the past as we build the density and urban places we need.



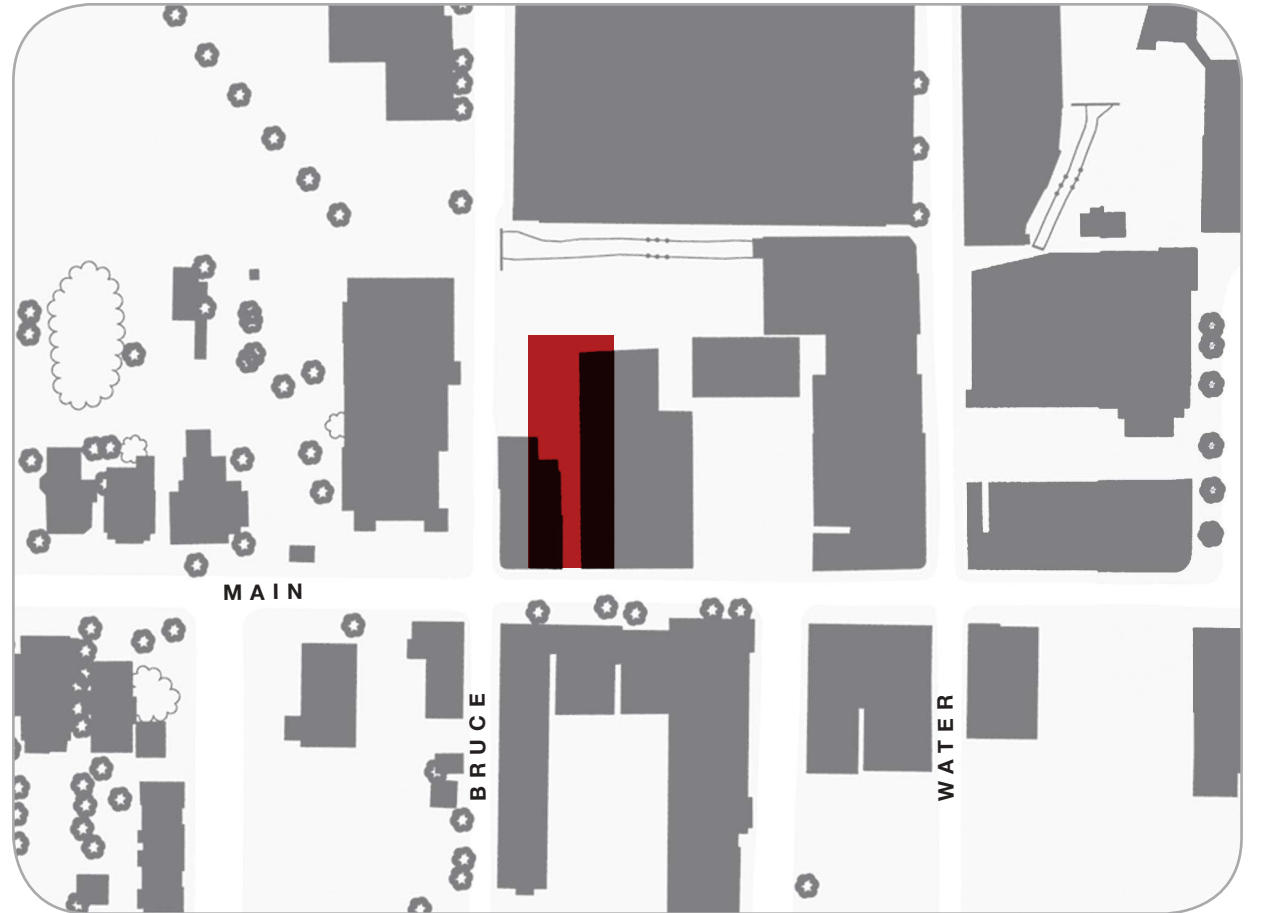
the good. the bad. the ugly.



Denton Park



Denton Park is a positive recent addition to downtown. It provides an intimate outside meeting place. Denton Park is a good way to make use of an alley that is no longer a needed passage.

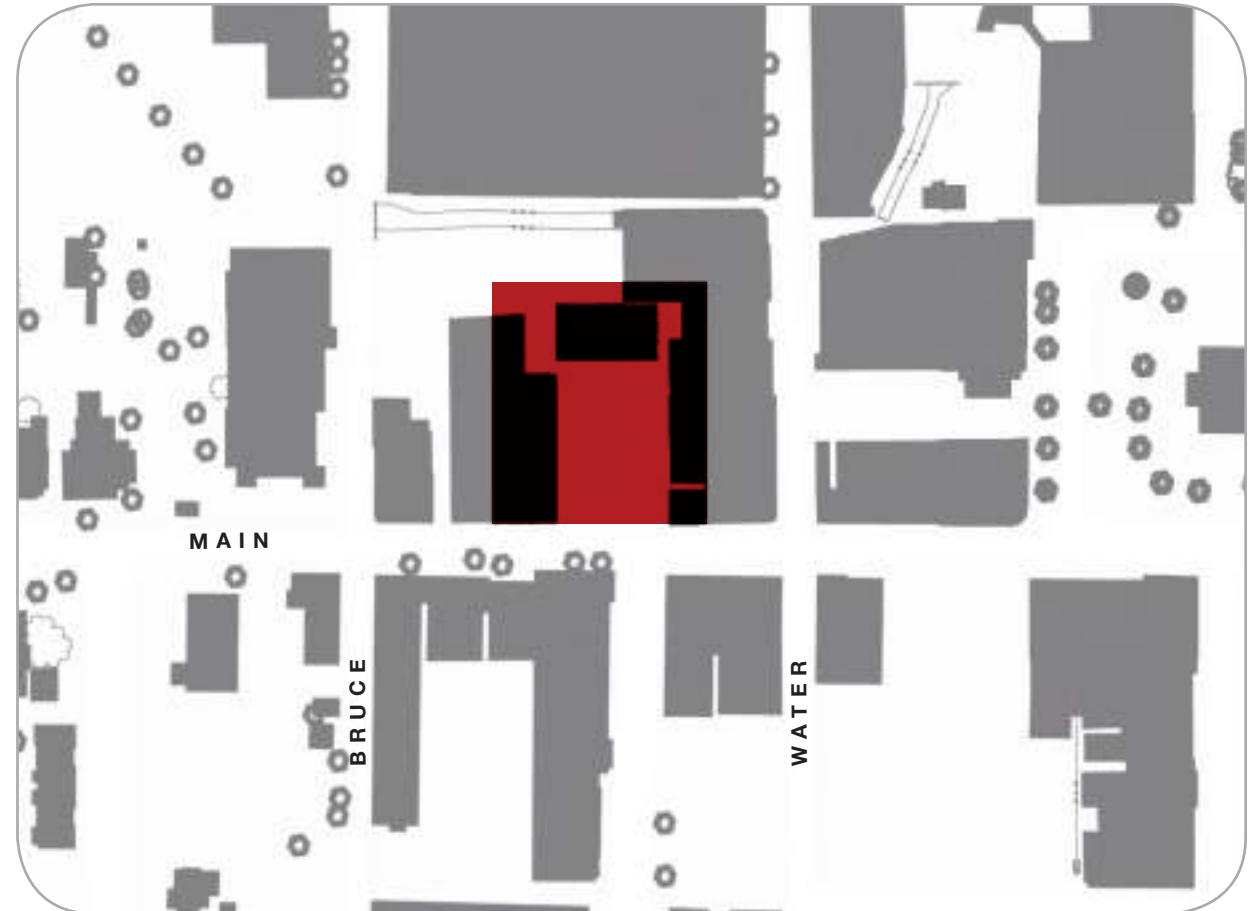




Parking Court



This parking court is formed between Clementine's, Dave's Downtown Taverna, and Shenandoah Bicycle Company. It has strong definition on three sides, but has only two retail establishments facing into it. It serves as a test example of how we integrate car parking courts, at a small scale, into our city.



vision for harrisonburg

In the following sections we will explore urban design ideas as they might relate to the **Federal Street** and **South Liberty Street** areas. We will also look at **Black's Run**, the new **Pedestrian Loop**, and the **Gateways** into the city.

We are taking these ideas as examples of ways that urban values might play out in the city. None of these ideas are intended as proposals for any specific urban plan or specific building.

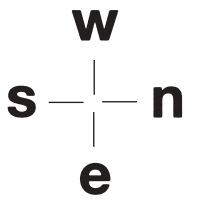
We will primarily be showing building positioning and building massing, since we are working at the scale of the formation of urban places.

We will also show some secondary characteristics that can be used to tune-up a building and how it relates to the space around it. These characteristics include niches, set-backs, projections, overhangs, cornices, balconies, and awnings. While we will comment very little on these secondary characteristics, they are shown because they are an important part of how the mass of a building is broken down to relate to human scale.

Whether we are showing position and massing or showing secondary characteristics, in this study we are more interested in what buildings do rather than how they look. What a building does in relation to the space around it, is the province of urban design.

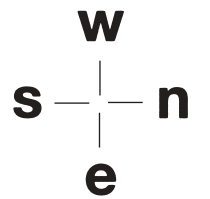
We are aware that position, massing, and secondary characteristics inform, but do not constitute, good architecture. It is also not our intention to show building styles or details. We would expect actual building plans to go beyond our 3D diagrams of buildings and to be real architecture.

In order to facilitate the free flow of exploration of values and ideas, we have not concerned ourselves with who the owners of property might be. We have not tested our ideas against the reality of business plans, city planning, ease of construction, or what the trade-offs might be for the city, the property owner, lessors, or residents. Our intention is to foster exploration of urban values and ideas, opening the conversation, and engaging our imagination to possibilities that are new to all of us.



federal street renewal

Looking at the figure/ground drawing, one notices that north Federal Street stops at Wolfe Street, but seems to have at one time continued north to Gay Street. The natural extension of Federal Street also leads straight to the main entrance of the County Administration building.



Currently Federal Street stops at Wolfe Street, but it seems to have continued north to Gay Street at one time



The paucity of urban places defined and the prominence of large surface lots along Federal Street is quite visible in the 3D model



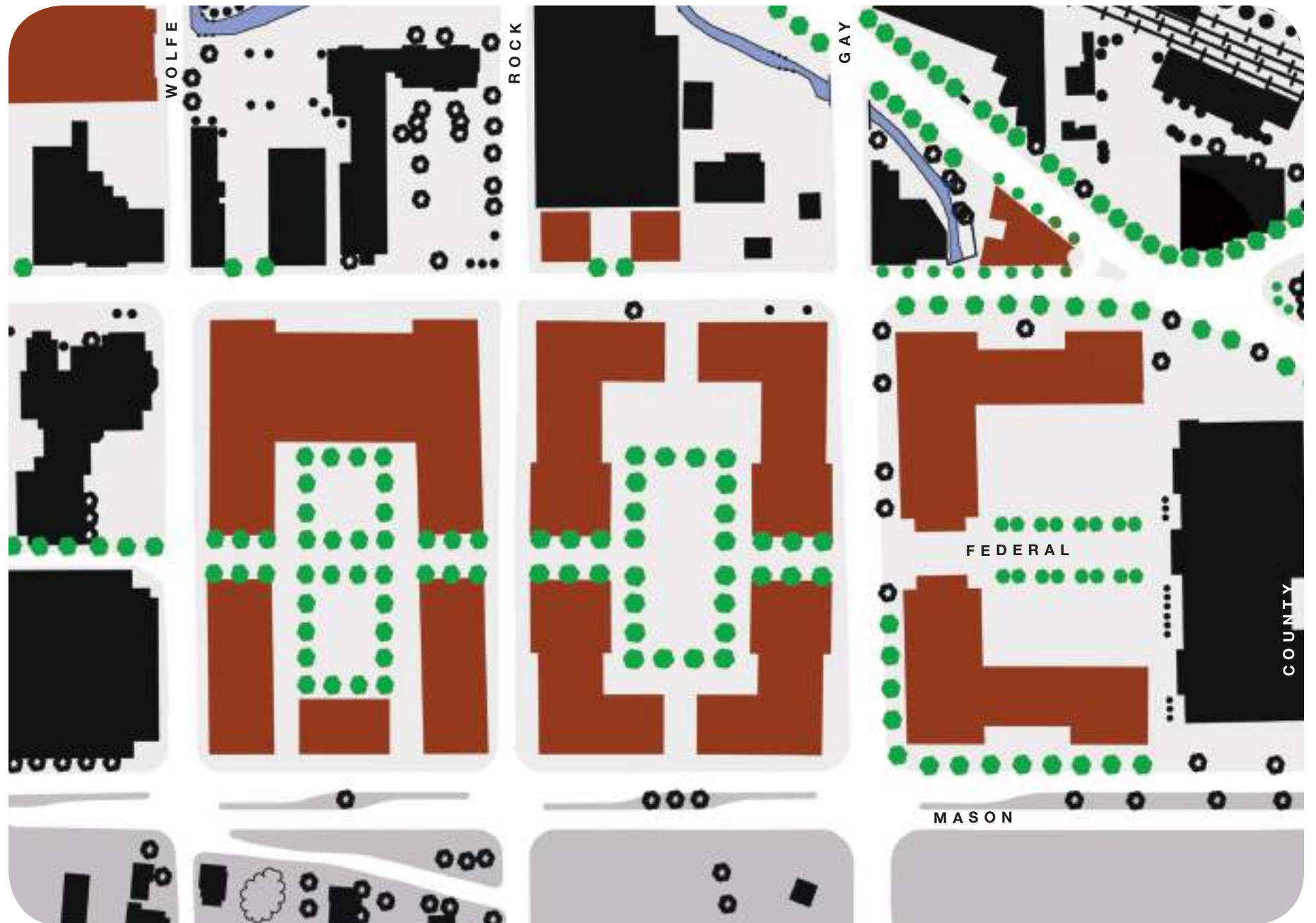
Tools and Values Study



In our first study, *Tools and Values*, we took Federal Street as a possible organizing device for this part of the city. We looked at how buildings could be massed along Federal Street, between Wolfe and Gay, defining the street and defining public space with courtyards in the middle of the block.

We think of these buildings as mixed-use with retail facing the street on the ground floor, and professional offices and residential units above. We have included structured parking as part of the mix.

We also show how expansion of the County Administration building might lend itself to creation of a parking court.



Tools and Values Study



This model shows the Federal Street axis continuing north across Gay Street to the County Administration building.

Three examples of courtyards are shown. One is formed by buildings that are stepped back, giving an open feeling, as though it is available to the general public. The second is more closed, as though it is intended for the use of those who occupy the buildings around it. The third is simply a way of defining a large parking court.

This 3D study shows three examples of how building massing can be tuned to define public place

The County buildings could form a parking court

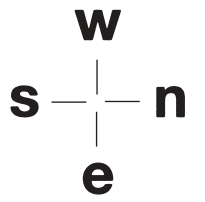


Federal Street Axis



This image shows the next stage of exploration ideas for the development of the Federal Street Axis along its length. In looking at the figure/ground study of the existing city, we notice Federal Street continues as an alley not only north, but south as well.

This color figure/ground drawing shows how Federal Street (yellow) could be anchored at the north end by the county buildings and at the south end by another cluster of buildings. Trees and buildings along the length of Federal Street are positioned to maintain the feeling of the street as a place.

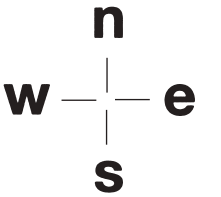


Federal Street Axis



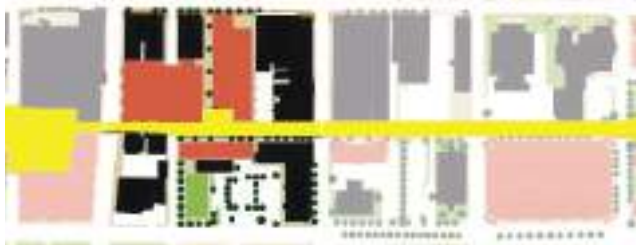
This view shows Federal Street defined as a corridor anchored by terminating courts at both ends. The south anchor is shown developed as a City Hall complex of buildings. Moving north, new buildings fill in the gaps along Federal Street.

**Federal Street
as an urban
corridor defined
by mixed-use
buildings and trees**



**A terminating square
at the south end**

Federal Street Hotel



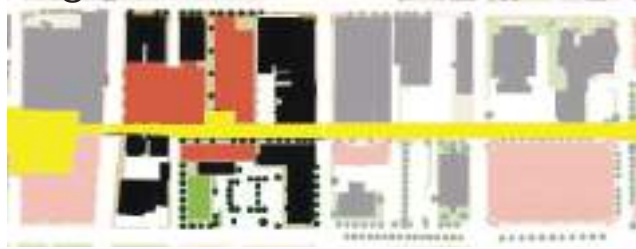
From the south end moving north we show a hotel with a parking deck spanning across Water Street. The massing of the hotel is broken down to reduce the scale and bring it into relationship with smaller buildings.

Attached parking across Water Street

A large hotel is shown with a stepped façade to break up the massing, opening the view, and allowing sunlight into the street



Virginia Theater Lot



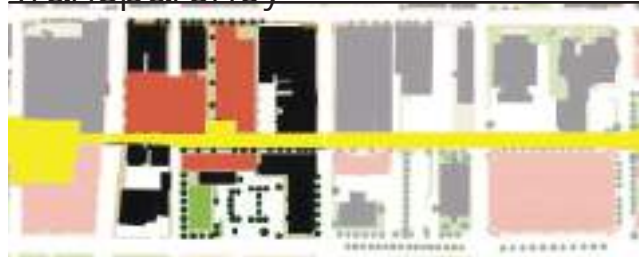
The massing of a new building occupying the old Virginia Theater lot is broken down in a different way and shows an entrance courtyard on Federal Street. It is configured to provide pedestrian walkways through the block connecting Federal Street to Main Street. It also shows lots of transparency between inside and outside. A small parking court is shown integrated into this urban scheme.

**Entrance courtyard
and walkway
through the block**

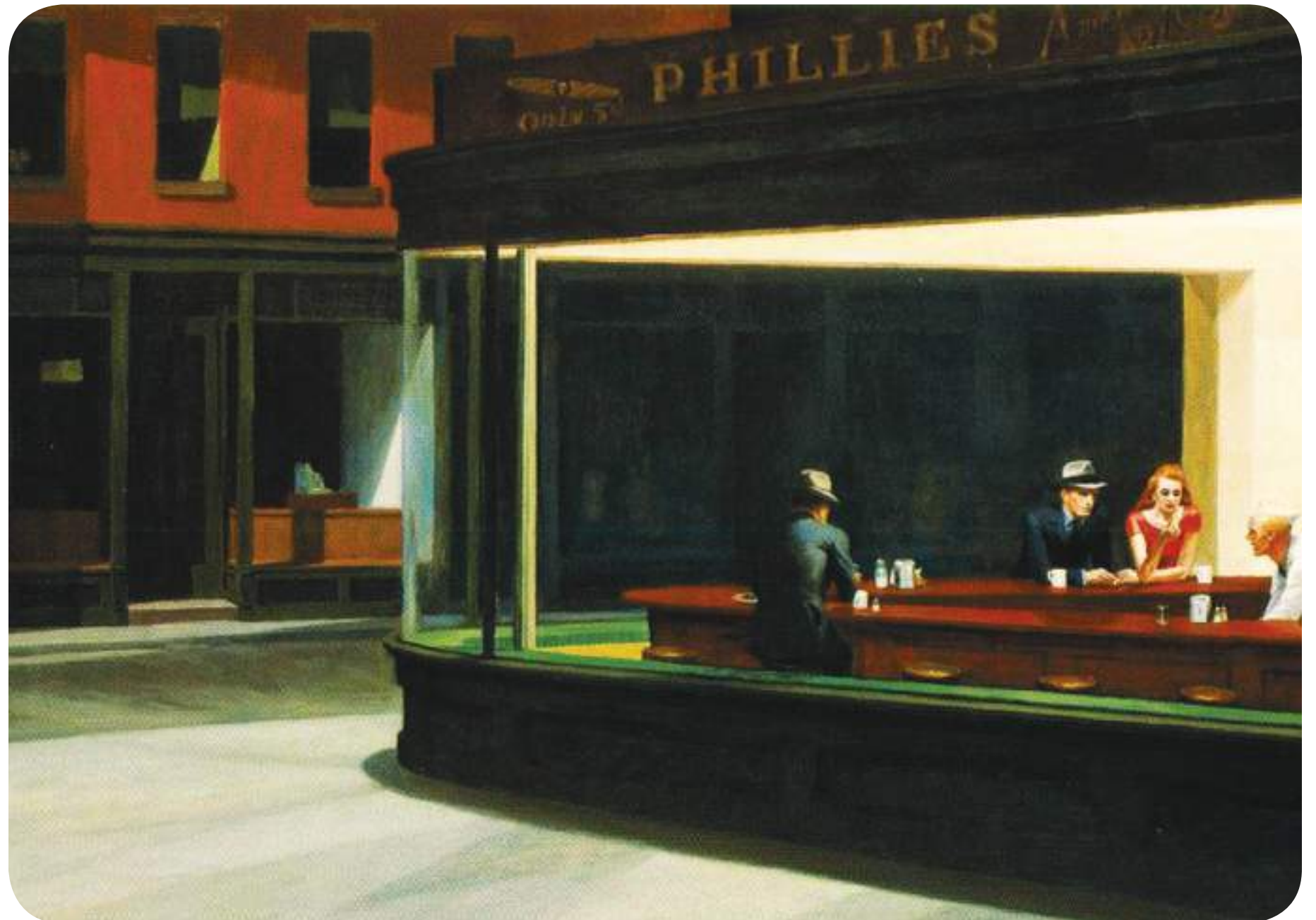
**Parking court
integrated in the
urban scheme**



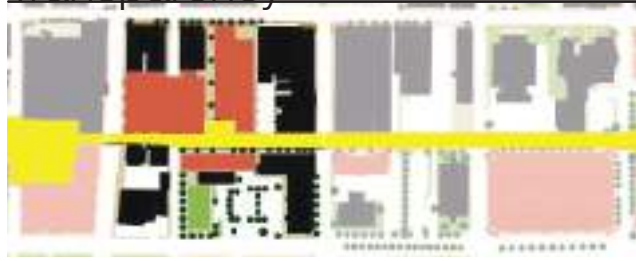
Transparency



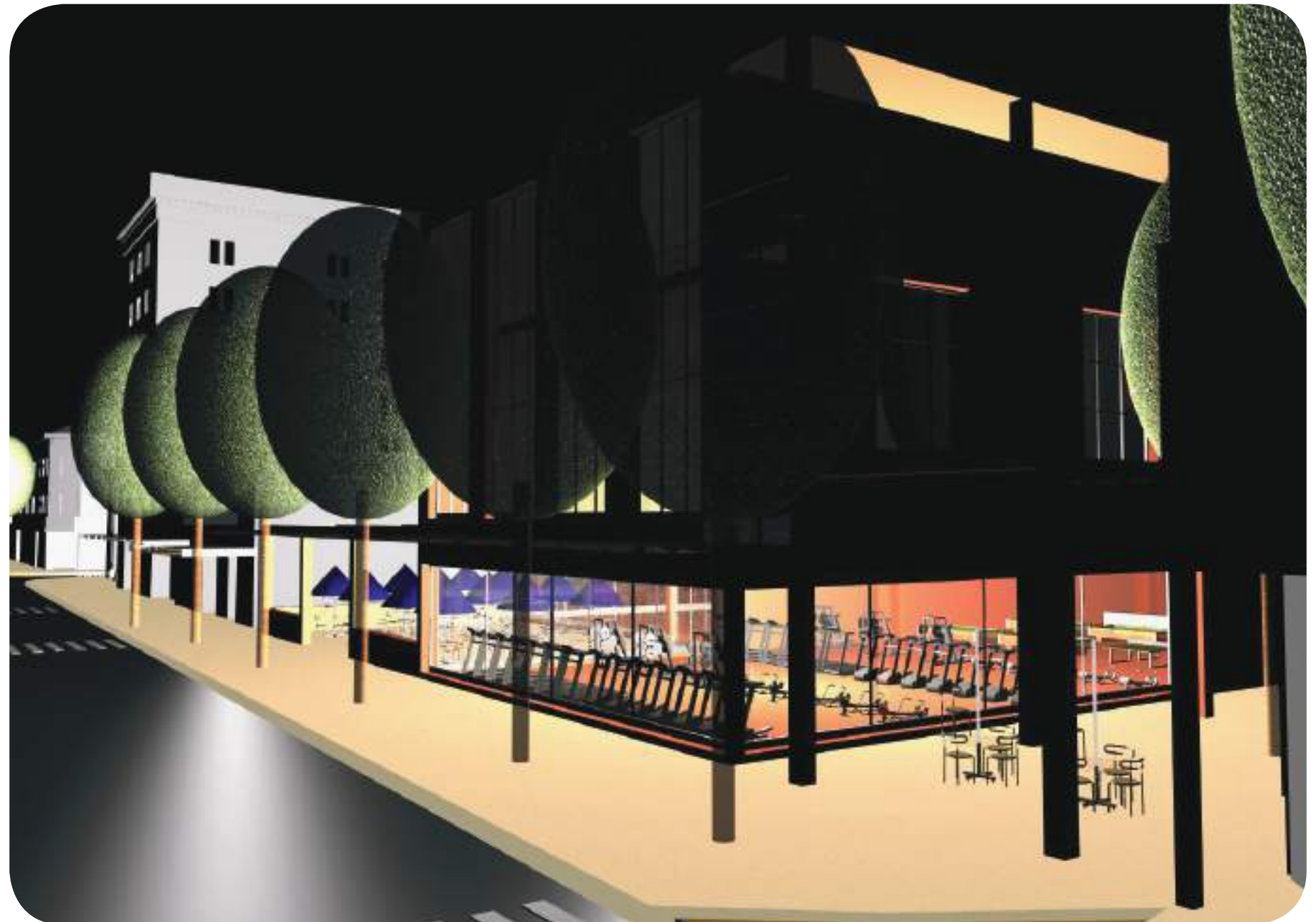
This painting by Edward Hopper shows the role transparency can play in facilitating the inside/outside relationship and the way a building can light the sidewalk at night.



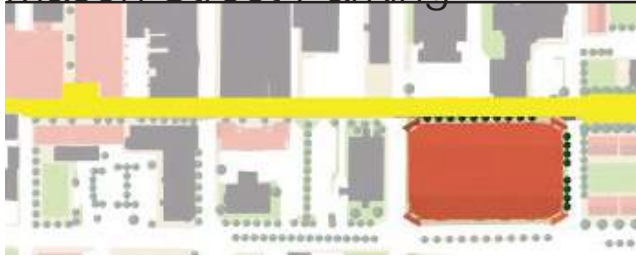
Transparency



This concept for a new building on the Main Street side of the Virginia Theater lot uses transparency to light the sidewalk, enhancing the inside/outside relationship. The light and visibility also make the street safer. The more people can see and be seen, the better.



Mason Street Parking



Continuing north, Mason Street Parking Deck is shown rebuilt as mixed-use with four stories of parking above grade and one or two stories below. The perimeter shows retail space, office space, and residential units facing the streets. The corners would act as lanterns lighting the intersections at night.

Mason Street parking deck rebuilt as a mixed-use structure

The corners would act as lanterns lighting the intersections at night



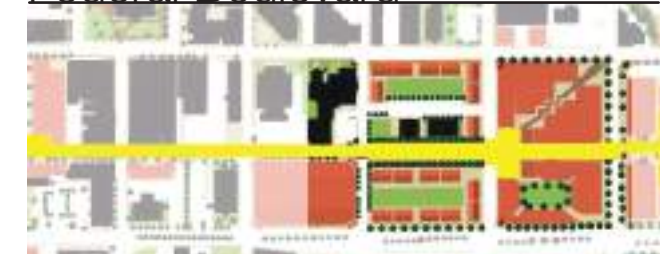


Kline's Dairy Bar intact with a large parking court

This version shows Federal Street widened to a tree-lined boulevard with two-way traffic and parallel parking on both sides

The building type shown is being used as a prototype to convey the idea of stand-alone mixed-use buildings forming courtyards

Federal Boulevard



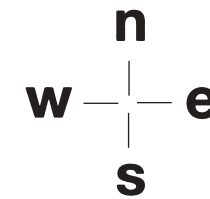
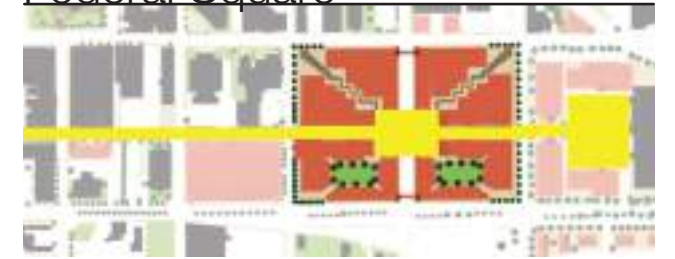
This version shows Kline's Dairy Bar intact with stand-alone mixed-use buildings forming courtyards and streets. Federal Street is tree-lined with two-way traffic and parallel parking on both sides.

Further north, Federal Street is shown flanked by two urban renewal blocks completely rebuilt. Cars could travel two ways or one way, but these are not collector or arterial streets: they are local streets intended for use by those whose destinations lie along or near Federal Street.

Small-scale paving and strong street graphics bring a sense of scale and balance between cars and pedestrians

Residential courtyards are formed on the east side of Federal Street

Federal Square

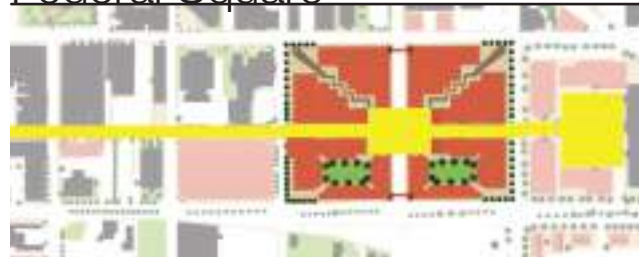


In this version a central urban square is shown where Federal and Rock Streets meet. Although these streets may be carrying cars both ways, drivers arriving at this square can feel that it has been designed to favor those on foot because of the scale of the paving, the strong pedestrian-crossing street graphics, and the presence of street furniture, bollards, and planters. The central square is a hub giving access to the inner blocks and beyond via pedestrian paths. On the west side of Federal, diagonal paths invite walkers to connect to other blocks and create an ideal place for retail shops, offices, and cafes.

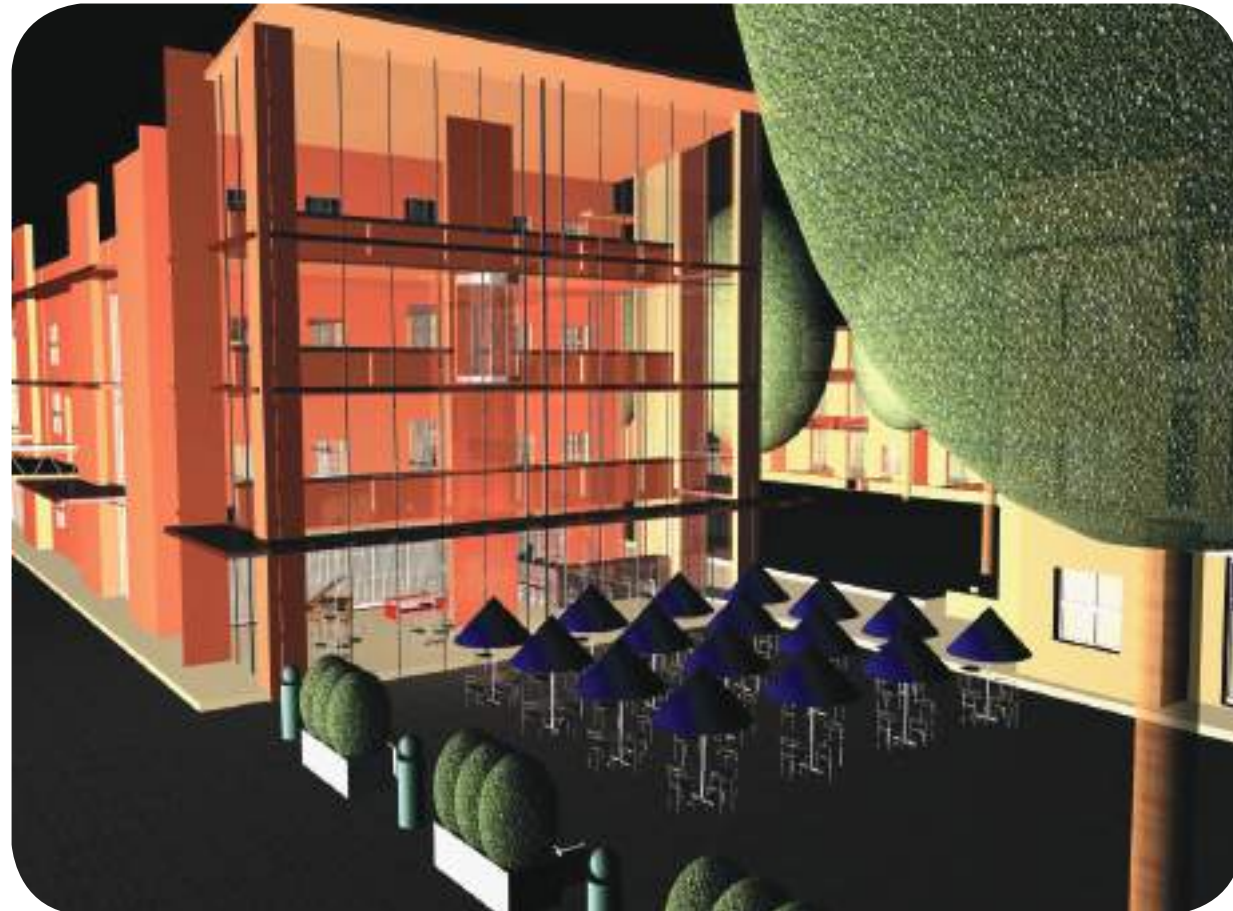
On the east side of Federal Street, courtyards are shown with perimeter sidewalks, leaving the centers as common defined greens. The lack of diagonal paths signal that these courtyards are for residents, not for cross traffic



Federal Square



Bollards, planters, paving, and trees work together to form a place for an outdoor café

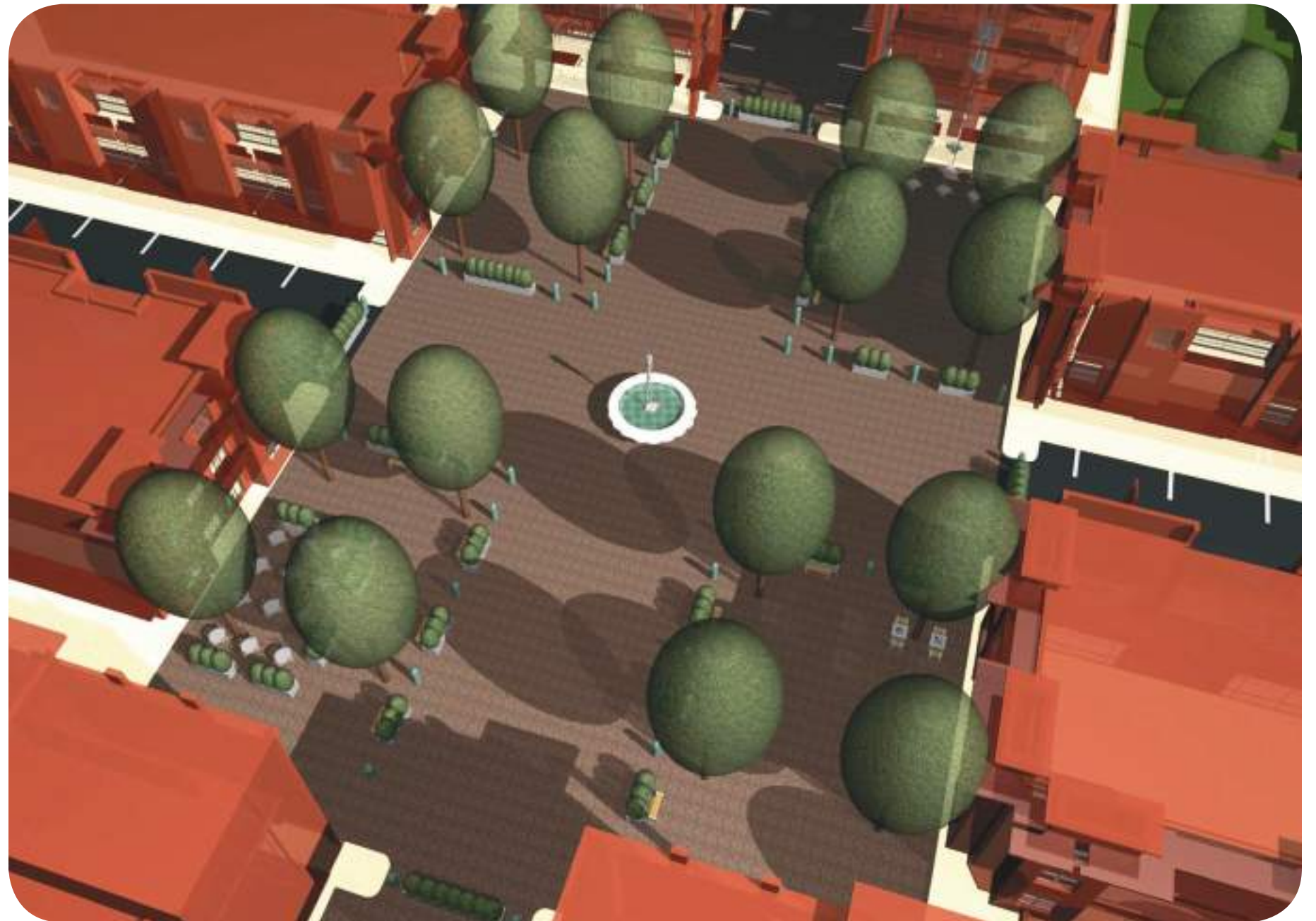


At night the building's transparency lights the square and enriches the inside/outside relationship

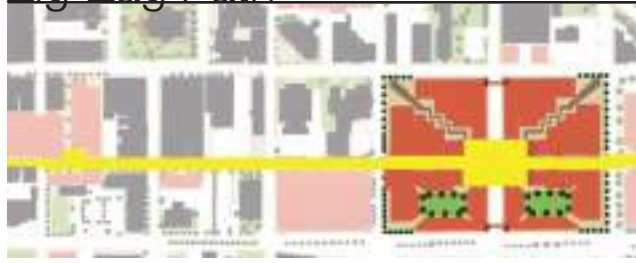
Federal Square



This version of the square shows Federal and Rock Streets closed to vehicular traffic except for emergency needs. Since bollards and planters are used to close the streets, the city would have the option of closing one street or both. The streets could also be closed in summer and open in winter.



Zig-Zag Path



This image shows an option for the zig-zag path that opens into the square. There would be many possibilities for retail, residential, and professional mixed-use.



The massing is broken down along a zig-zag path, and overhangs create a feeling of place below

Federal Circle



In this version Federal Street is shown quite narrow, and the center court is shown smaller. The four outside corners are marked by towers that make them particularly visible to passing cars and signal activity in the block. If the inner diagonal blocks were commercial, these corners could be very strong entry points.



Retail shops on these corner squares would be easily accessible to pedestrians from outside these blocks

These two courtyards use unlimbed narrow trees to show that pedestrians are welcome to pass through the block, with green areas reserved for residents

Federal Circle

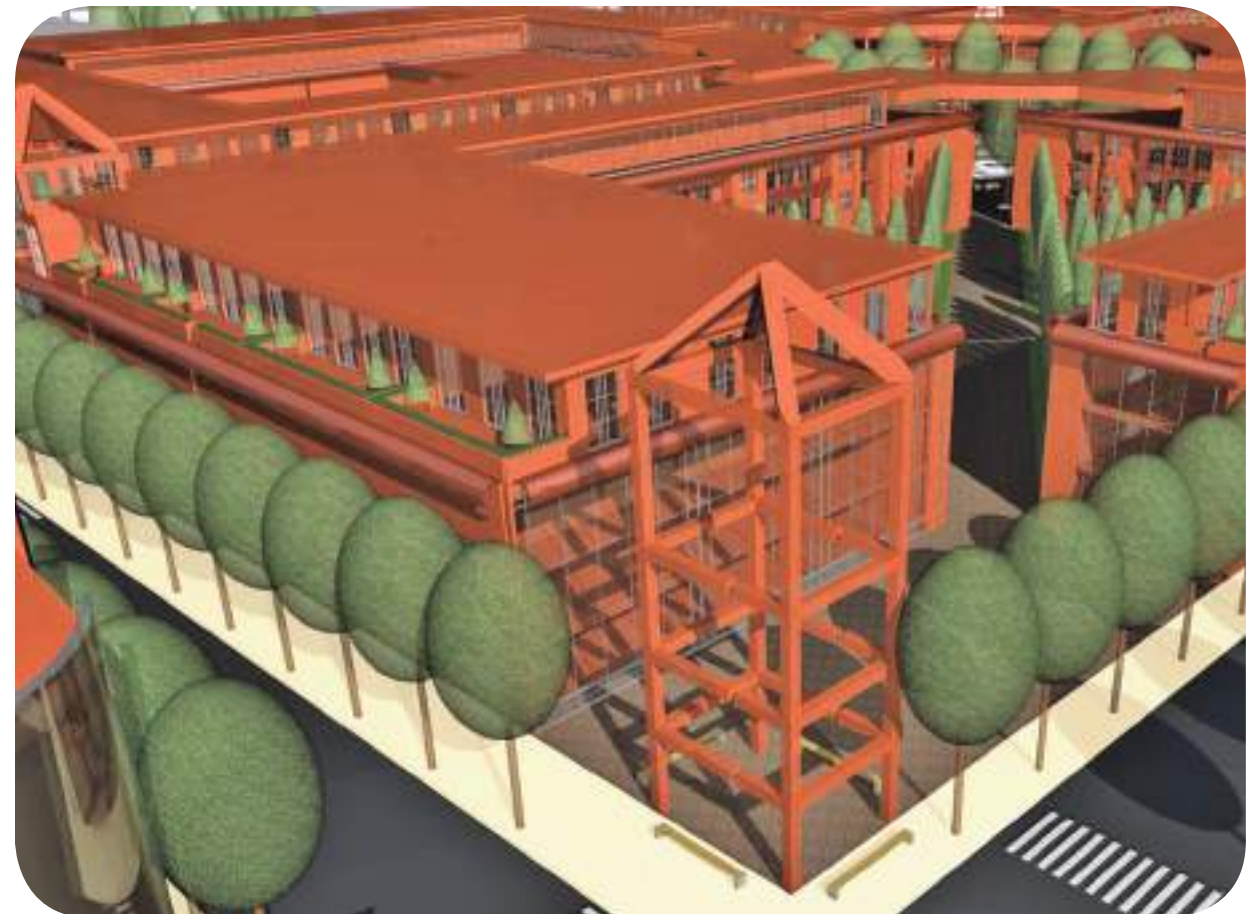
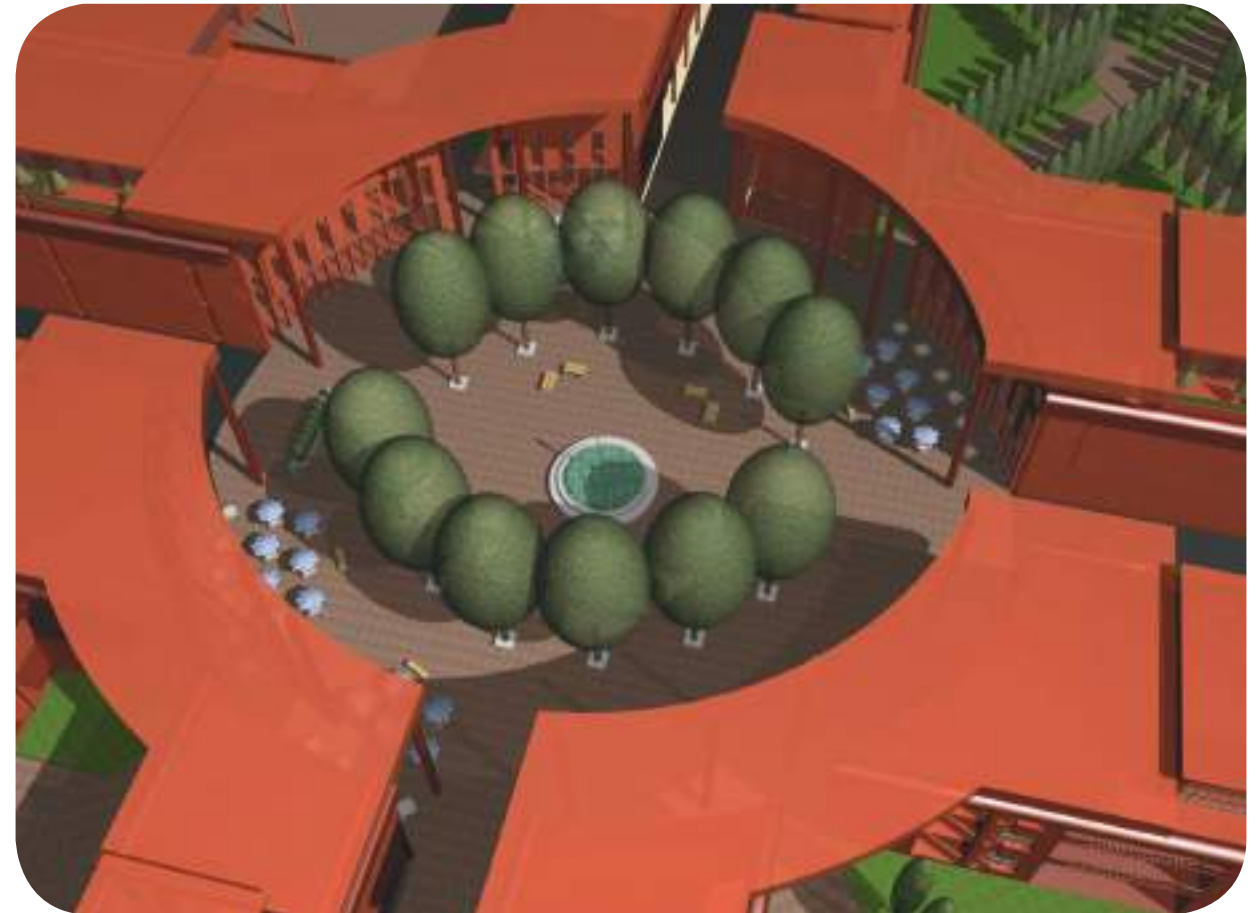


This tight square provides sheltered entrances from the adjacent blocks and carries no automobile traffic. One can feel the separation and the quietness resulting from the absence of cars.

The round geometry coupled with a narrower pedestrian access would create a more intimate, restricted public place, not intended to be open to automobile traffic

Penthouse residences with generous balconies would give downtown a nice range of living options

Towers on the four outside corners would help to define a unique shopping area



Going Green



Green building means energy efficient construction as well as life-cycle efficiency.

This kind of sustainable construction used to be the wave of the future. It has become the wave of the present. Finding ourselves on the verge of a major rebuilding of the core of the city, we have the opportunity to make a major contribution to the greening of Harrisonburg.

This image shows planted roofs which make cooling more efficient. This is a reminder that our buildings not only need to be green in terms of energy, they give us an opportunity to integrate nature into our city.

Going green is not just good for our health and the health of the earth, it is also very appealing. And in style. Which means besides being environmentally responsible, it is very marketable.

We need to look for opportunities to make visible contributions to the “greening” of Harrisonburg

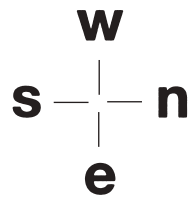
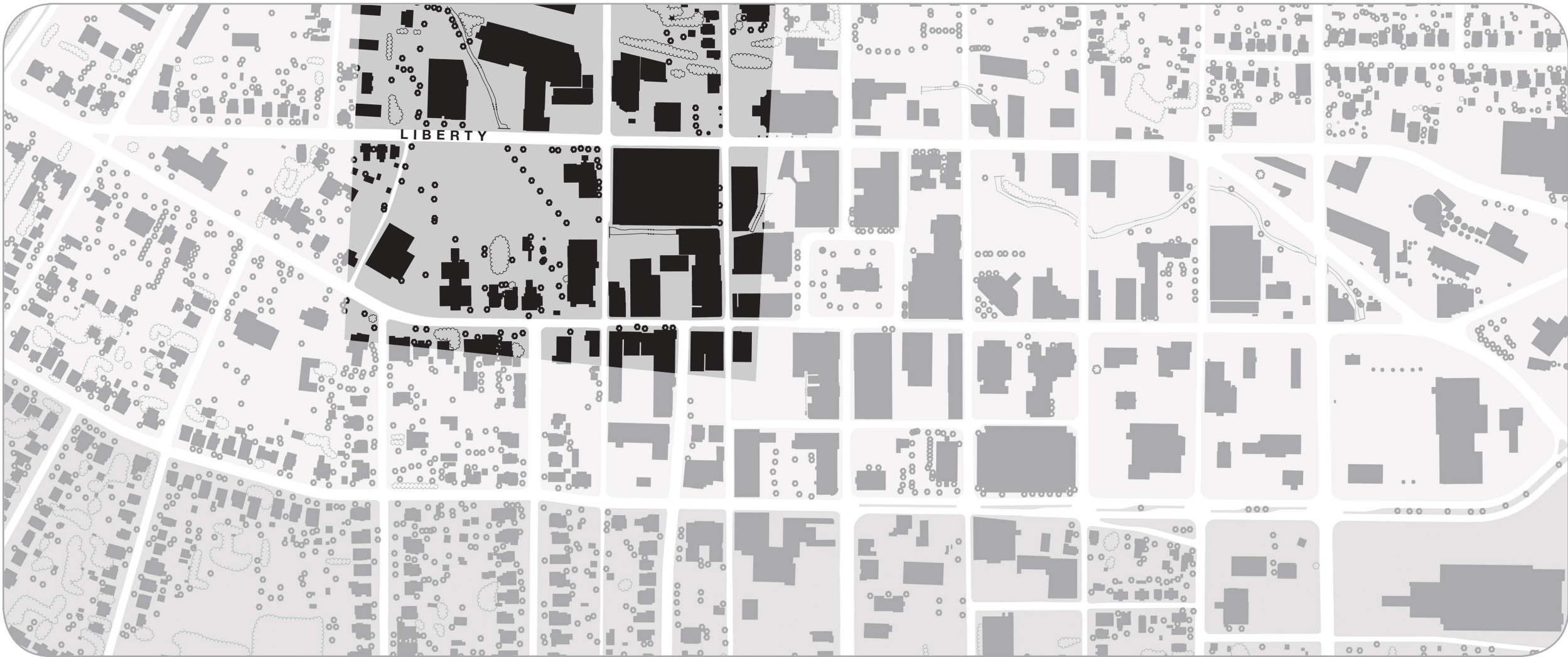
Going green means life-cycle energy efficiency



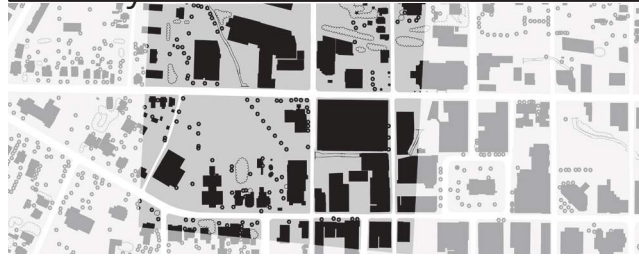
liberty street south renewal

The Liberty Street south area has large surface parking lots, isolated buildings, and very little definition of place.





Liberty Street South Area



Buildings in the Liberty Street south area include the recently vacated Police Department, the Water Street Parking Deck, the Ice Factory, the Harrisonburg Electric Commission, the Municipal buildings, and the Municipal parking lot. Black's Run is covered by the H.E.C. parking lot.

In keeping with the goal of eliminating large surface parking lots, we propose the city look for a new use for the Municipal Parking Lot. The Water Street parking deck is close and could accommodate the city and H.E.C. employees, and others who currently park in the Municipal lot.

With this added parking demand on the Water Street Deck, the time is hastened when it can be profitably rebuilt to four or five stories as a mixed-use development with retail, offices, and residential uses on its perimeter.



Liberty Street South Area



This view shows possibilities for redevelopment.

The city may want to consider the site of the Municipal Parking lot as a candidate for a city park. The downtown has Liberty Park, but does not have a full-size city park. Parks are a significant component of any mature city.

The Ice Factory is shown as a mixed-use renovation. The vacated Police Department block is shown with a courtyard formed by stand-alone buildings. The Water Street Parking Deck is shown as a mixed-use structure. Black's Run is shown opened up with lots of trees and a continuous path.



**Black's Run,
opened up with
a wide planted
bank and populated
with tall trees,
defines the north
edge of the park**

**The Farmers Market
will bring open air
activity to the park**



A Municipal Park



A closer look at this version of the park reveals the south edge of the park defined by trees and a concert shell. Currently we have one regular bi-weekly concert here, but we can expect that more frequent public performances of all sorts would naturally follow with the development of this park and a new concert shell. One can imagine a concert by Harrisonburg's famous Children's Choir or by the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra or a performance of *Shakespeare in the Park* by our friends in Staunton. The Farmers Market would form a backdrop to the concert area, providing a shaded area for concert-goers and vendors.

The Farmers Market Pavilion, currently under construction, will bring open air activity to the park two days a week. With this kind of attractive venue, we may find the Farmers Market could be profitable three or four days a week. We have shown a skating rink and a volley ball court as possible additions to Municipal Park.

Black's Run, opened up with a wide, planted bank and populated with tall trees, defines the north side of the park. An additional Municipal building is shown defining the east edge should the city decide to expand in its present location.

**The south edge
is defined by low-
limbed trees and
a concert shell**



Courtesy of Blue Ridge Design Studio

Mixed-use with retail below and residential above

The interior of the Ice Factory would lend itself to dramatic residential treatment

Casco Ice Building



The Casco Ice Building is a substantial structure that would lend itself to renovation into any number of commercial, residential, and retail uses. We are showing mixed use with retail below and residential above. Black's Run is shown with the banks widened, planted with large trees and accompanied by a continuous path.



Vacated Police Department Block



The previous location of the Police Department could be developed as a mixed-use block, with retail and offices on the ground floor along the street or surrounding a courtyard. Residential uses could fill in the balance of the block.

This version, viewed from the northeast, shows these functions in stand-alone buildings. The rebuilt Water Street Parking Deck is key to making this kind of development successful.

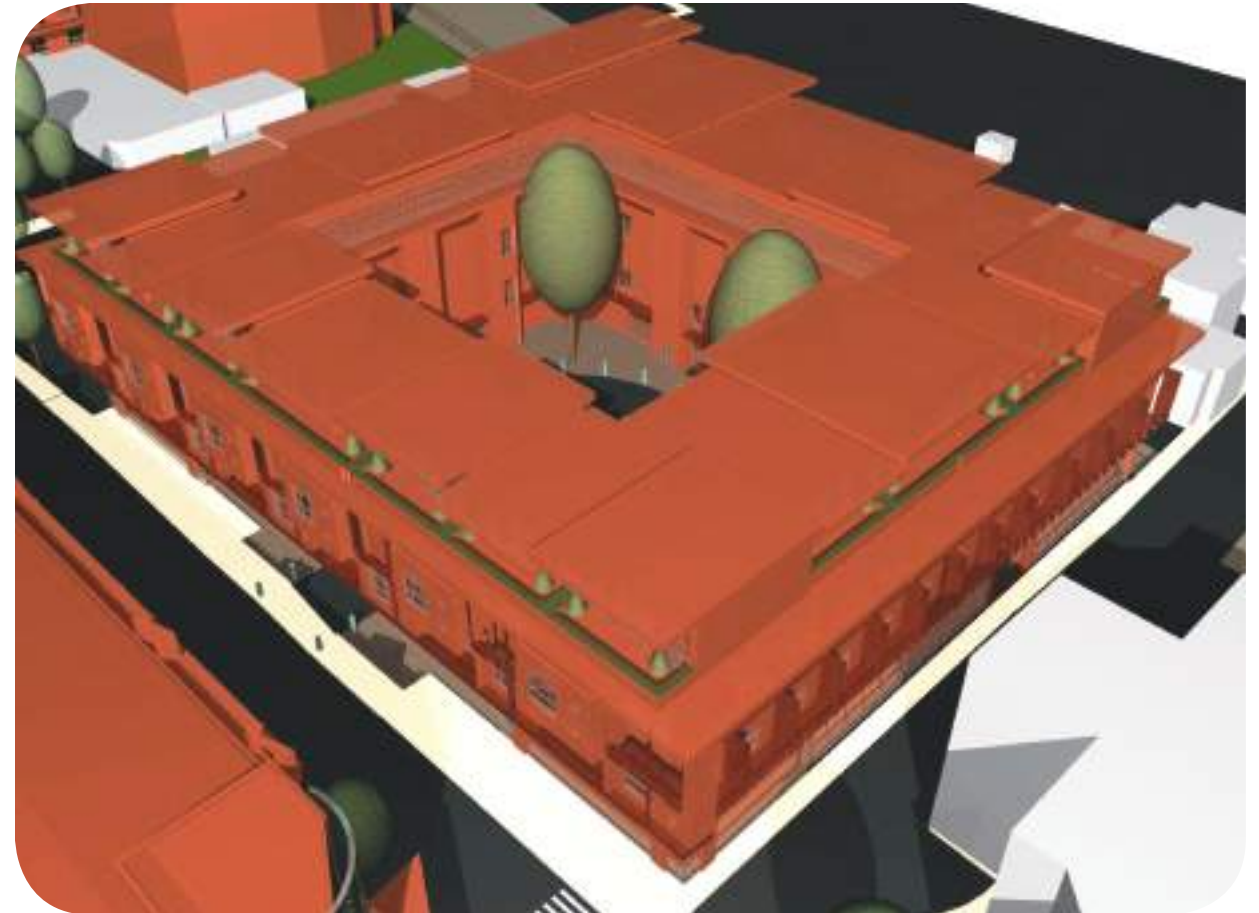
A chessboard plaza is a reminder that idiosyncratic personal interests could drive the unique character of places in our city. The local chess club could sponsor championship matches to be played before a public audience.



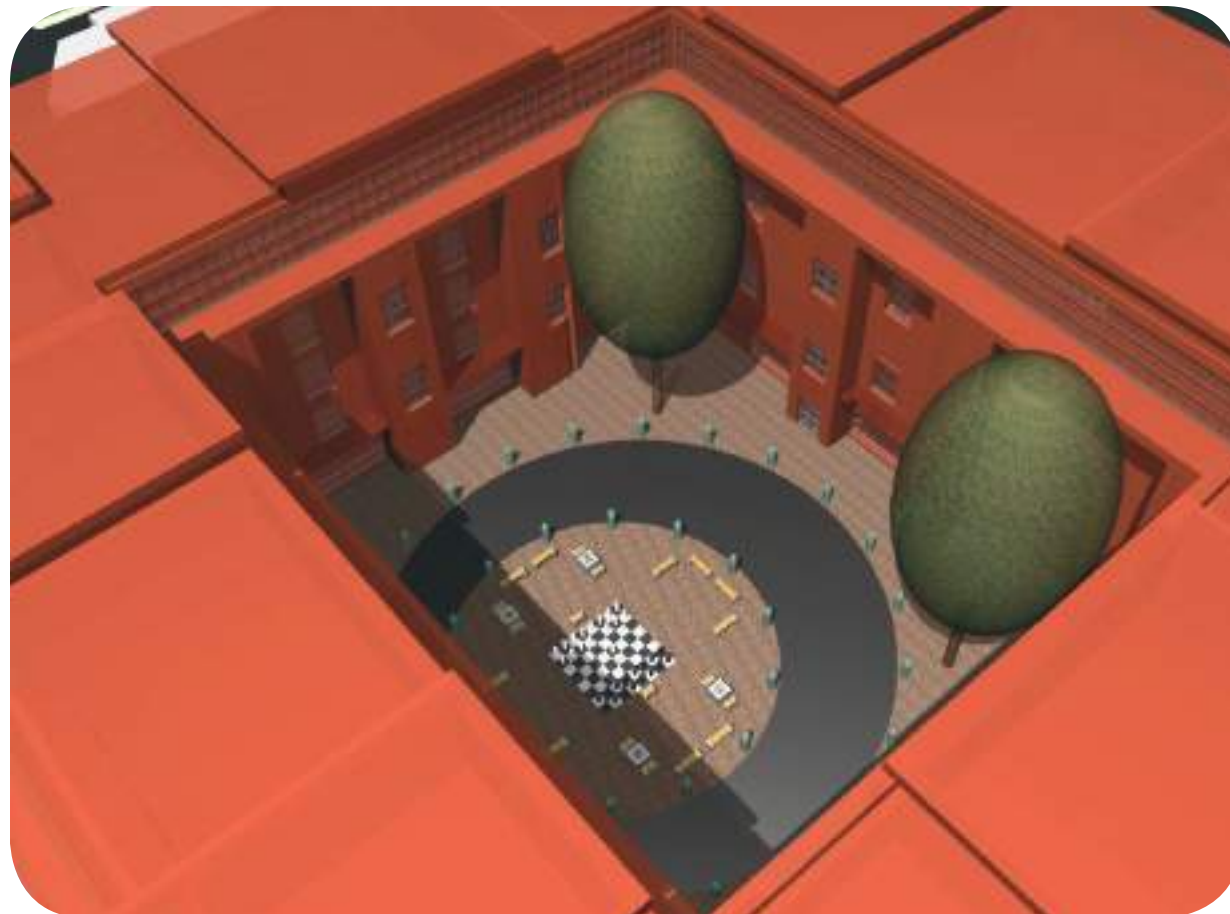
Police Block Variation



Depending on the adjacent needs that would be discovered in development of a business plan, a more dense build-out might also make sense in this location. This option again shows a mixed-use block with retail and offices at street level and residential above. Automobiles are accommodated while the courtyard retains its pedestrian scale. The chessboard plaza has found another iteration to go along with this level of density.



A more dense build-out might make sense in this location



The automobile drop-off loops through a pedestrian court defined by small-scale paving, lack of curb, and the use of bollards to indicate a driving lane

Water Street Parking Deck



The current Water Street Parking Deck is a good example of two-level parking which takes up too much real estate without a positive contribution to the surrounding urban character.

This rendering shows it rebuilt with four levels of parking in the middle and retail, professional, commercial, or residential uses around the perimeter going up all four stories.

A rebuilt Water Street deck is key to the successful development of the South Liberty Street area of downtown.

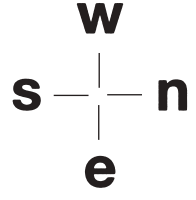
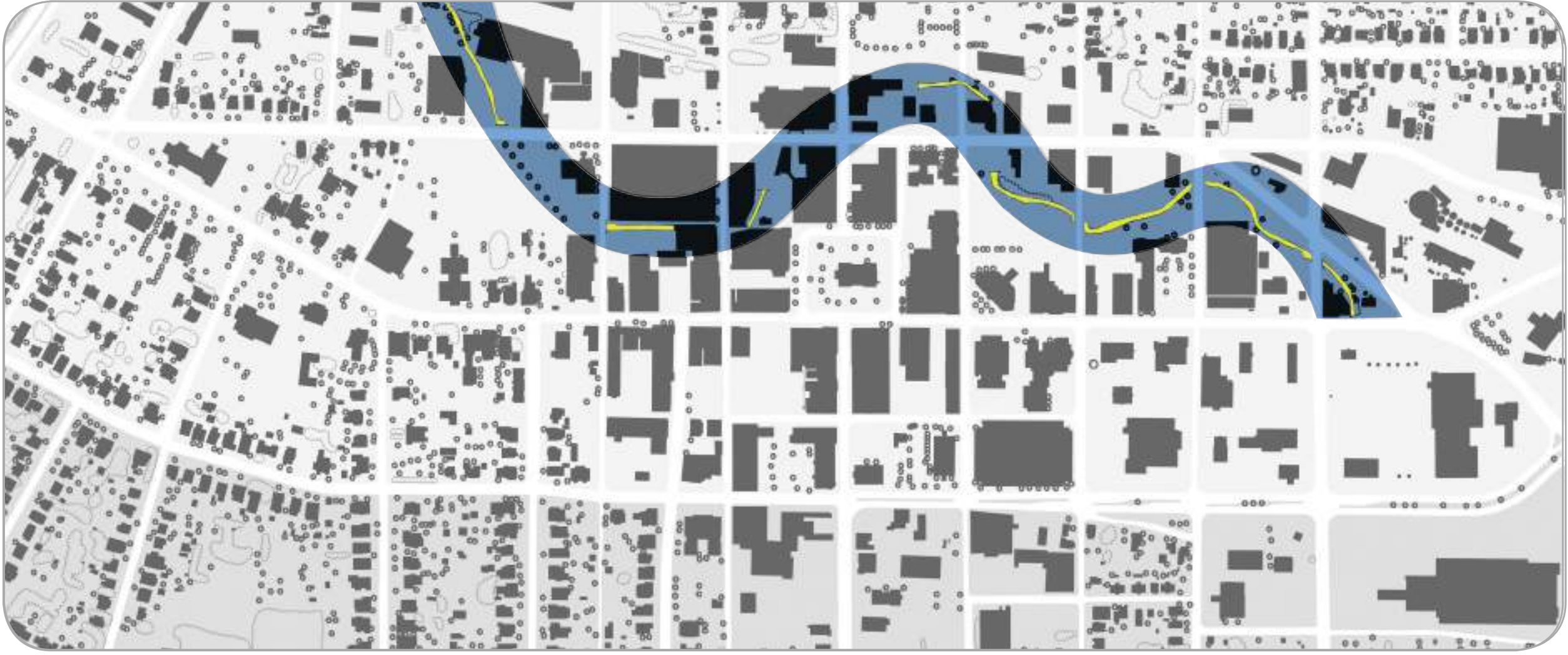


black's run

Black's Run was originally quite a small stream

because it flowed through woods and fields that absorbed most of the rainfall. Only on rare occasions, probably only during hurricanes, would it rise to the levels to which it now rises several times a year.





Black's Run from the sky



Because impervious surfaces cover what was once forest and meadow, Black's Run now handles large water flows on a regular basis. It has the potential to become a vital part of the city if it is handled thoughtfully.



Black's Run Opened Up



The city's Stream Health Coordinator says that good urban stream management calls for Black's Run to be opened up: the banks should be widened and planted with large trees for a number of reasons. Healthy, wide, planted banks absorb large amounts of water, reducing erosion and flooding. The banks also filter runoff, protecting downstream flora and fauna. Large trees, in addition to stabilizing the banks and absorbing water, serve ecological functions of microbiotic transformation which is very important to the health of Black's Run.

The city's stream maintenance protocol dovetails perfectly with how people feel about streams, trees, and living with nature in a city. Therefore, we also recommend that every opportunity be taken to uncover Black's Run where it is not covered by a street or a building.

New trees along Black's Run at Liberty Park





Opening up Black's Run and planting large trees is an opportunity to give nature a strong presence in town

Black's Run Impact



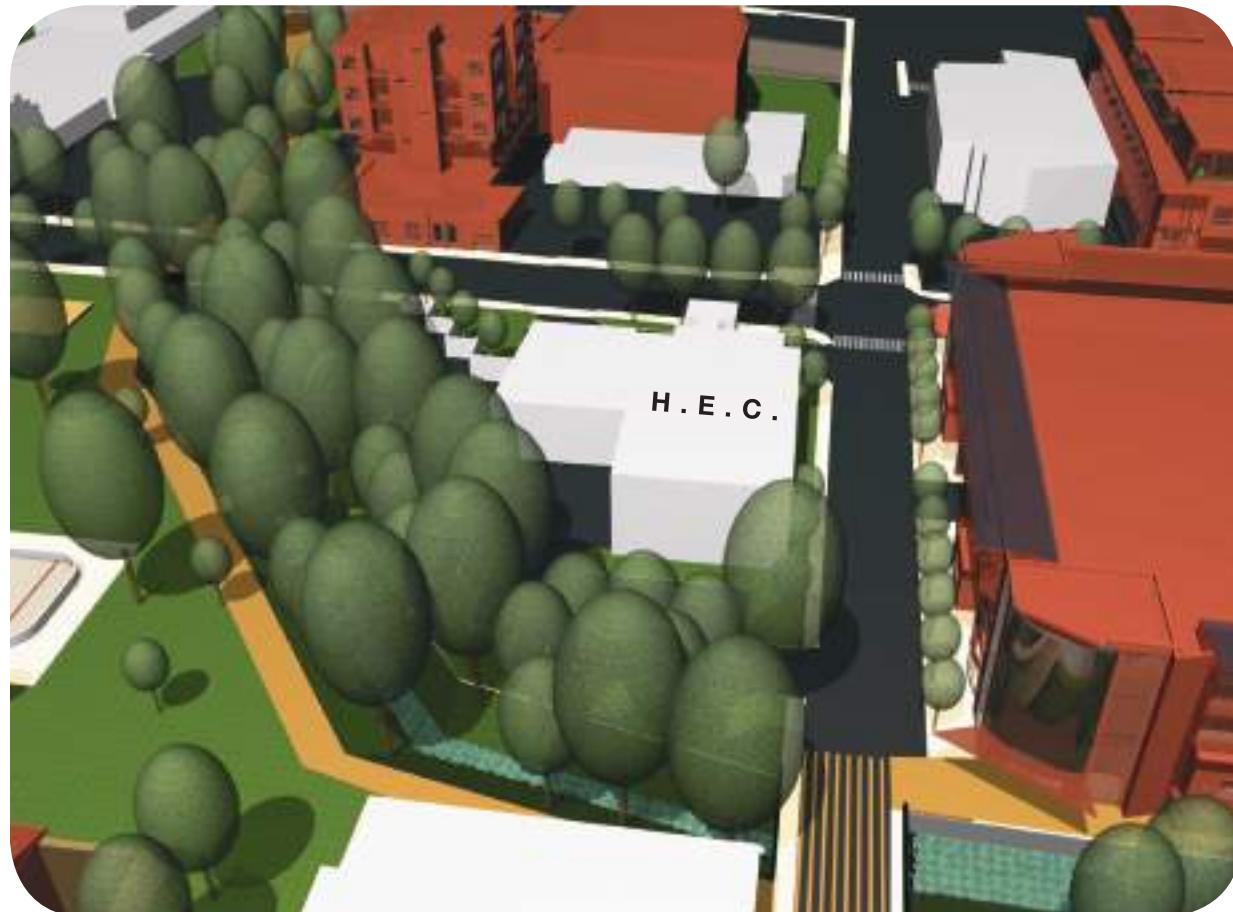
The opened banks and sheer size of large trees coupled with a continuous walking path, would give Black's Run a mass and presence that far exceed the actual size and volume of the stream bed. It would connect neighborhoods and provide an alternative walking/cycling pathway through the city.



Black's Run Impact



Black's Run opened up behind H.E.C.



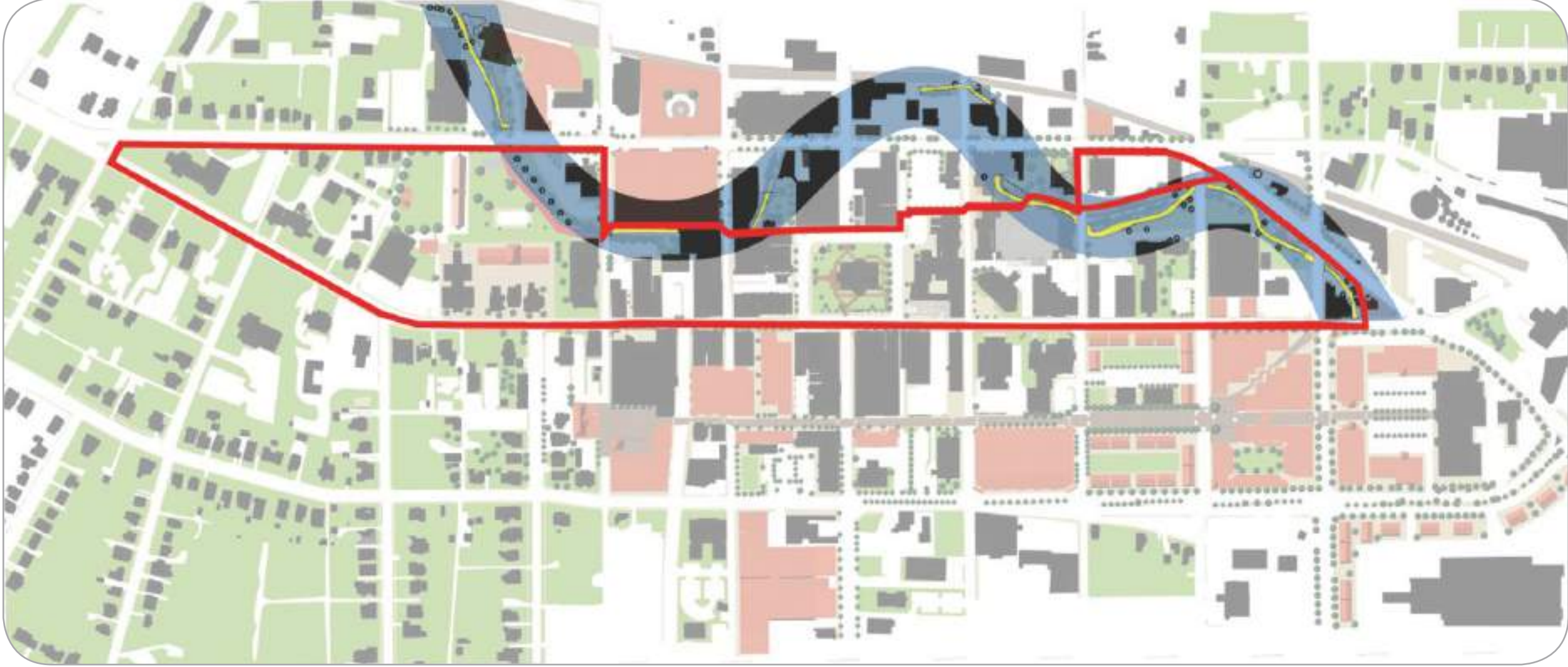
Black's Run at the rebuilt Water Street Deck with Municipal Park beyond

pedestrian mecca

The new Downtown Stream Walk, now being implemented, connects all downtown districts in the city's core.

The pedestrian loop offers downtown residents and visitors an invigorating way to exercise and see the city. The western part of the pedestrian loop follows much of Black's Run.

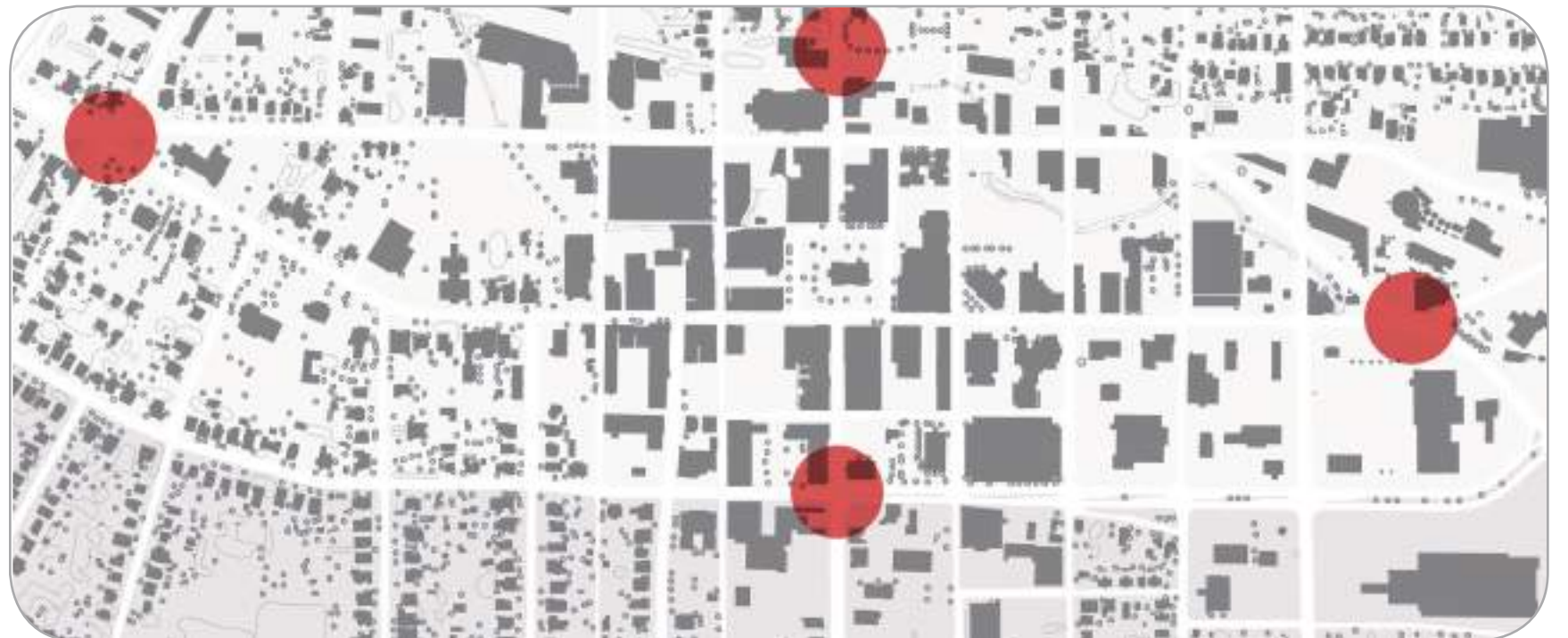
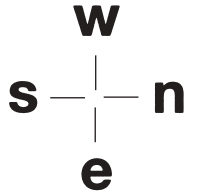




the gateways

Drivers now arrive downtown through four nondescript primary access points.

Memorable entrances into the downtown would reinforce downtown as a place of special character. The following pages show ideas for each of the four access points.



The four gateways as they now exist:



Market Street from the west



Market Street from the east



Main Street from the north



Main Street from the south

West Gateway



West Market Street was recently widened, eliminating the trees that lined the street. Replanting the trees would be a good first step toward restoration of this entrance to the city.

The removal of trees has left this gateway feeling vacuous



This version shows trees defining the street edges, and shows the Otterbine Church steeple and an abstract sculpture defining the gateway





East Gateway



The East Market Street gateway is currently dominated by utility poles and wires. We think the city should give priority to burying the utilities at this prominent entrance to the city.

Trees alongside East Market would define the street and, like the West Market Street entrance, create a passageway in anticipation of entering downtown

North Gateway



The North gateway on Main Street lacks definition and character



These sculptural towers are one example of a way to make an entrance memorable





North Gateway



Two more exploratory images might help lead us to a good design for the north gateway.



South Gateway



The statue of Miss Liberty is too small to give the south gateway definition. Landscaping in the median and large flag poles would make this gateway memorable.

The scale of the Miss Liberty statue environment could be enhanced to support the definition of entrance into the downtown

We have shown ideas to stimulate our thinking for what might work to define the gateways. Our images have not been limited by the idea of consistency. We suggest that the city hold a competition for the design of the gateways. Architects, artists, landscape architects, and urban designers would respond, as well as students from all four disciplines. In addition to generating concepts, it would develop buzz around our efforts to revitalize downtown. A modest monetary award for the winner would stimulate attention. This book could be a part of the background information supplied to the competitors.

guiding concepts

for the revitalization of downtown Harrisonburg

These are the values that have informed our studies of Harrisonburg.

1/Build density within the City and maintain openness in the County.

Both jurisdictions officially support the concept that growth should be focused in the city and towns, maintaining the rural beauty and openness of the county.

2/Use building position and massing to define urban place at a public scale.

What a building does in forming the space around it, is urban design.

Typical terms of description of urban place include squares or plazas, public rooms, axes, focal points, corridors, forecourts, and courtyards.

3/Use secondary building characteristics to tune-up how buildings relate to and form place at a public scale.

These characteristics have a dual role: to serve the internal and structural functions of the building, and to serve the external function of formation of urban place.

Typical terms of description include niches,

set-backs, projections, columns, balconies, awnings, overhangs, cornices, scale of surface treatment, and the frequency, size, prominence, and position of entrances.

4/Use urban accessory elements to tune-up the subtleties of access and definition of urban spaces.

These include bollards, planters, benches, light posts, flag poles, curbs, walls, fences, hedges, trees, paving, surface graphics, and urban-scale art such as sculpture and murals.

Regarding benches: We face the reality that in the past, daytime use of the benches downtown was dominated by homeless people who went to shelters at night. As a result, benches were removed. We need to seek a solution to this dilemma that allows for the general use of benches throughout the downtown.

Benches will allow maximum use of the Court House lawn which is a wonderful green space in the heart of downtown, and would contribute greatly to the revitalization of Court Square.

5/Use pedestrian-scale pavers for areas that are designed for and frequented by pedestrians.

Small-scale pavers can be driven on, yet drivers know they signal pedestrian territory.

6/Use building transparency to relate inside to outside.

Transparency supports connection and communication across the building envelope. It brings light and nature into our lives. Transparency also brings light to sidewalks, streets and intersections, and promotes safety through visibility.

7/Encourage mixed-use development throughout the city.

Integration of parking, retail, offices, residences, and social meeting places is essential to a good urban environment.

8/Encourage sidewalk cafés.

Cafes bring people into the downtown and give vitality to the street.

9/Develop a strategic parking plan.

A long-term parking strategy is an essential investment in the vitality and the tax base of the city. Prospective retail entrepreneurs and potential developers need to have confidence in the city's commitment to parking infrastructure.

10/Eliminate large surface parking lots, and provide structured parking decks of 4 to 6 stories.

Parking is not a bad thing. It just needs to be consolidated and managed. Large surface lots are an inefficient use of space and degrade an urban center.

11/Incorporate mixed-use into the sides of parking decks which front on streets.

A large structure dedicated only to parking can make a whole block dormant rather than inviting. Rebuilding our two-story parking structures to five stories with mixed-use requires us to plan aggressively so that there will be adequate parking available during the reconstruction phases.

12/Encourage growth of trees in the city.

We should seek out opportunities to plant trees for shade, for space-defining rows, for canopies, for privacy screening, and to define pathways and edges. Large trees have an important ecological role for Black's Run not only locally, but for the contribution Black's Run makes to the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Trees are also a vital part of maintaining the air we breathe since they inhale carbon dioxide and exhale oxygen.

13/Coordinate tree management and signage.

The placement and limbing of trees should be prescribed so that merchants can plan their signs and be assured they will be visible.

14/Uncover and open up Black's Run where possible.

Black's Run is a valuable asset bringing nature and beauty into the downtown, but much of it has been covered by buildings, streets, sidewalks, and parking lots. It should be uncovered everywhere possible, particularly at parking lots where uncovering it would be the least disturbing. Sections of Black's Run that are already exposed should be widened and planted with trees.

15/Provide more park land in the downtown.

No full-size city park currently exists in the downtown. We can't expect people to move downtown if we don't have more green space.

guiding values

for the revitalization of downtown Harrisonburg

16/Support individual low-tech transport such as walking, bicycles, and scooters.

This includes tune-up of street crossings, street crossing markings, traffic patterns, and parking to make a comfortable environment for low-tech transport. It includes bike paths and bike racks.

17/Develop good local public transport.

This includes a goal of making public transportation more efficient so that it serves more people, bringing them downtown, and moving them around the downtown.

18/Facilitate an appropriate balance between pedestrian and car movement.

This would encourage walking, low-tech personal transport, and public transportation while facilitating access by cars to downtown parking. Balancing would include tuning-up street graphics, proportions of crossings, height of or lack of curbs, width of sidewalks and streets, and the appropriate deployment and scale of paving elements.

19/Engineer the downtown traffic plan to enhance downtown as a destination.

Is our current traffic plan appropriate, for the kind of city we want to build?

A map of the city found in the City Comprehensive Plan shows High Street Virginia Avenue, Main Street and Mason Street labeled as “Arterial Streets”. Arterial streets are defined as “designed and intended for consistently heavy traffic volumes, and usually connect towns

with each other, and provide linkages to interstate systems.” That sounds right for High Street/Virginia Avenue, but, going forward, is it right for Liberty Street? Is it right for Main Street, the street that runs through the business district and our wonderful Court Square?

As it now stands, Main Street, with the two lanes going north through Court Square, with no parking, seems like it was designed to shunt cars through the downtown and out the other side. Is this the kind of downtown we want? Would it be better to direct northbound traffic over to Mason Street, a four lane street with a median strip? Should we route truck traffic, in fact all through traffic, around downtown?

20/Support green design.

Green building design is the wave of the present. It is necessary to reduce energy costs, and it will give us a healthier environment. Green design has caught the attention of everyone and, since it must be done, is a marketable attribute the city should exploit.

21/Cultivate the value that we are building a city for the long term.

Decisions need to include the long view of what constitutes a desirable urban center, what will attract activity on the streets and sidewalks, and what will drive the tax base over time.

There would be any number of development ideas that would bring a payback to initial investors. Their ideas need to be tested against the long-term impact on the city.

22/ Inform private developers about the urban values the city considers important.

Help developers take pride in their contribution to building a good urban center. Over the long term, good urban design is good business.

23/Maintain in public places, visible displays of Harrisonburg's urban values.

One prime spot could be the Municipal Building. The first floor hallway would be an excellent place for a display with narrative, figure/ground images, and 3D renderings.

A physical 3D model would be a powerful asset for keeping our conversation tangible, and letting the world know we take our city seriously. It would also be a practical working tool for positioning actual proposed construction. Perhaps students or interns, working with our 3D modeling, could make this an economical proposition.

resources

listed here are five good urban design resources

Bacon, Edward N. Design of Cities. New York: The Viking Press, 1968.

Katz, Peter. The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.

Steuteville, Robert, and Philip Langdon. New Urbanism: Comprehensive Report & Best Practices Guide. 3rd ed. New York: New Urban News, 2003.

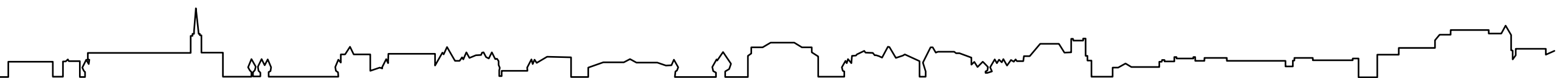
Arnold, Henry F. Trees in Urban Design. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980.

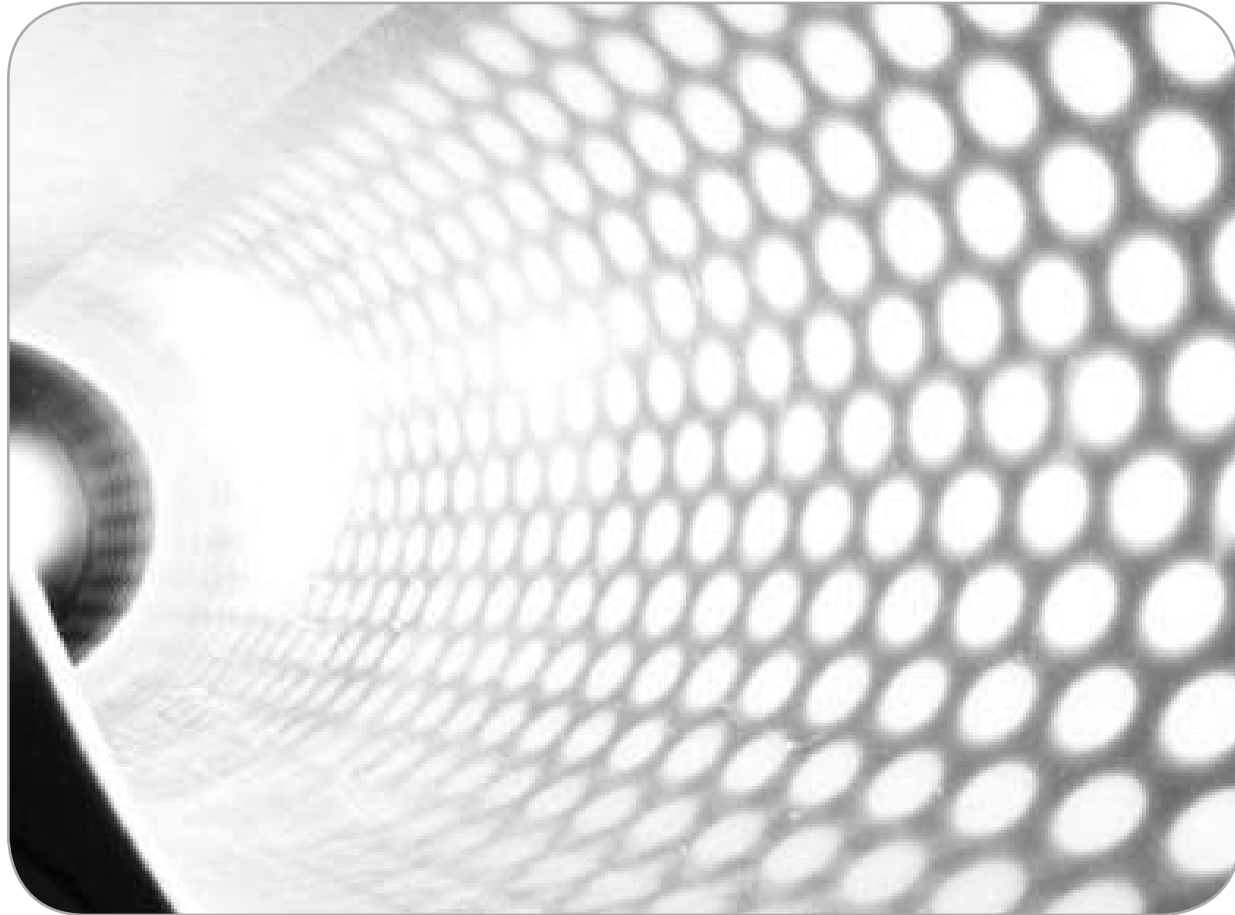
Watson, Donald, Alan Plattus, and Robert Shirley. Time-Saver Standards for Urban Design. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003.

credits

Urban Values and Vision for Downtown Harrisonburg was originally developed as an image-based live presentation.

The images used were photographs, figure/ground studies, and digital 3D modeling. The goal was to use visual images to explore and explain our ideas. A picture is worth a thousand words. This book is an attempt to capture the content of those live presentations in order to make the content more readily available.





Eugene Stoltzfus Architects team

Author & Principal In Charge/ Eugene Stoltzfus AIA

**3D base, interactive 3D modeling,
imagery, figure/ground graphics/** Adam Steiniger

Imagery, figure/ground graphics/ Kevin Bowman

Book graphics, book layout and design/ Dana Biedrzycki



