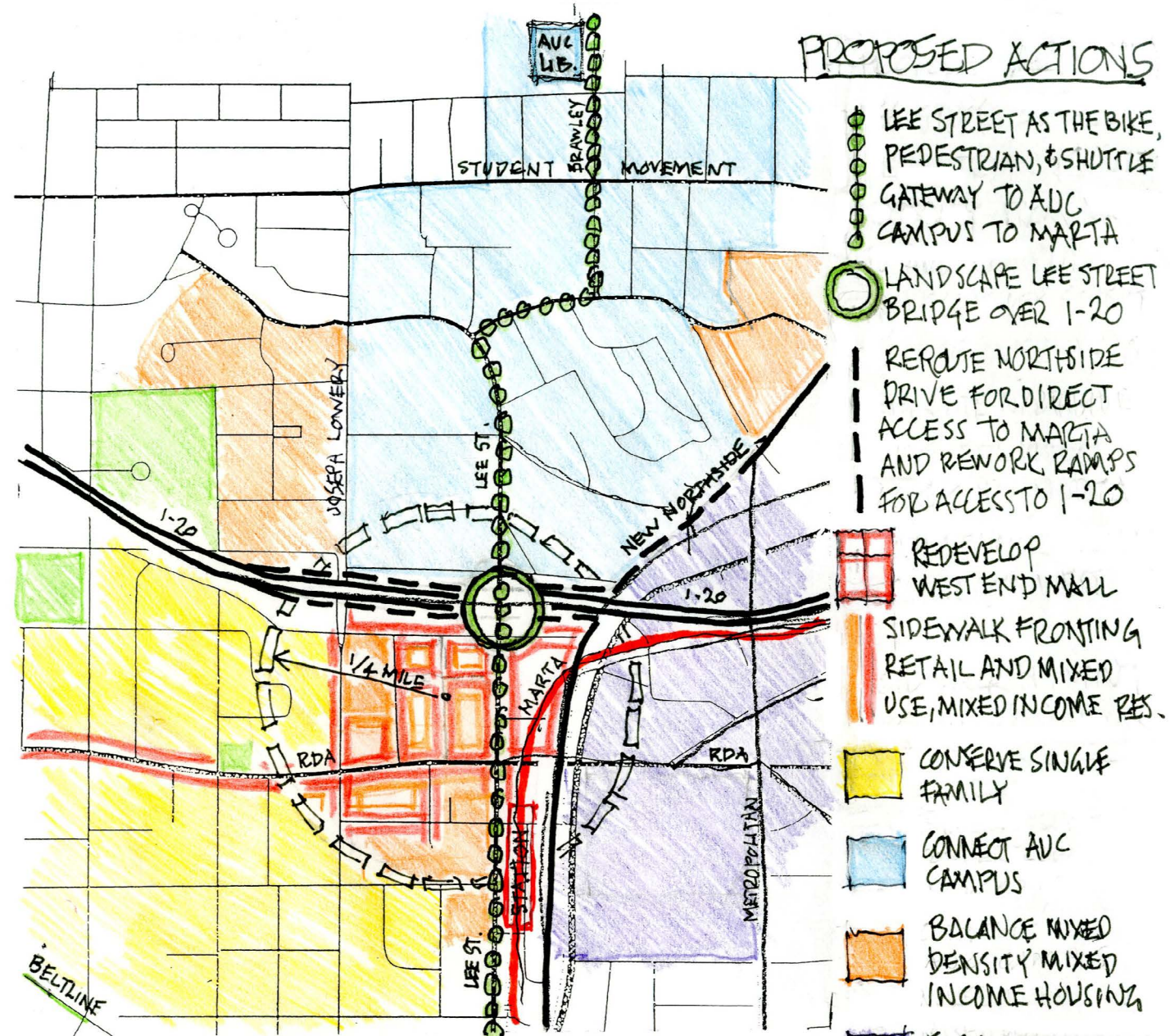


West End Hub Framework Plan

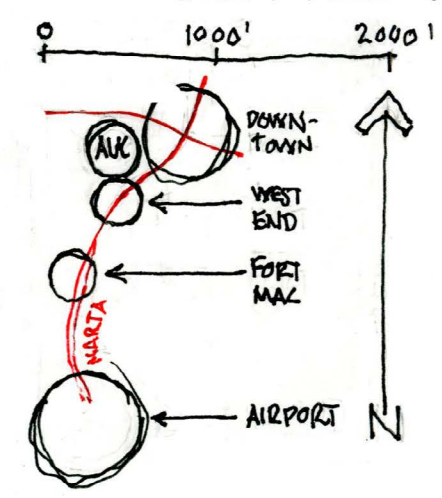
Exploring Opportunities to Grow West End as the Southwest Hub of Atlanta's Core

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Georgia Tech
City & Regional Planning Studio
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WEST END HUB FRAMEWORK PLAN

HIGHLIGHTING PRINCIPAL ACTION PROPOSALS FROM GEORGIA TECH SCHOOL OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING 2014 SPRING STUDIO



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Introduction

Master's Degree students in the City and Regional Planning program at Georgia Tech generated this report in the spring semester of 2014. Their purpose was to investigate the following research question: How can the economic potential of the West End to raise quality of life for its citizens be fully realized by improving transportation, land use, and the environment in the study area?

The work picked up from earlier studios that framed issues and made proposals that have begun to influence the policies and priorities for citizen groups, private sector interests, and government agencies. The first of these, www.northsidedrvision.gatech.edu, dealt with the Northside Drive corridor from I-75 to the West End. Its findings suggested that this corridor, long a dismal, utilitarian roadway, should be transformed into a grand transit boulevard, a gateway to the many strong institutions that line it and presently present a "back alley" character. The study further identified and analyzed the racial and class divide that Northside Drive has represented for decades. It suggested ways to replace the barrier with a seam, connecting low wealth neighborhoods to the west with the jobs and amenities of Downtown and Midtown to the east, both physically and programmatically. Finally, it identified West End as the logical terminus of the Northside corridor and suggested ways to realign the southern leg of Northside Drive to accomplish that goal. In that larger context, West End becomes the southwest hub of the Midtown/ Downtown core of the City, where most of its jobs, institutions, hospitality facilities, and cultural, entertainment, and sports facilities are concentrated.

The next studio, in the fall of 2013, focused on the midpoint of the corridor, the crossroads of Northside with Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, the principle travel corridor for neighborhoods to the west of Downtown. The studio paid special attention to the development of a new, 1.2 billion dollar stadium for the Atlanta Falcons, replacing their current home next door. The principal issues

picked up on the Northside divide between rich and poor, white and black, and explored ways in which the massive new investment might benefit the neighborhoods immediately impacted. Through considerable involvement with the neighborhoods and the Atlanta University Center (AUC), the students sought to support those groups' initiatives with planning analyses and findings that could add to the pressure on the City and the Falcons to do the right thing. These included suggesting ways to improve east-west connectivity, to develop job training and employment programs for local residents, to develop procurement programs that utilized local businesses, to improve travel and utility infrastructure, and to honor the national significance of the neighborhoods' history and culture. Related to West End, the AUC, the largest concentration of historically black colleges and universities in the country, became a critical focal point, the fulcrum through which Downtown and the West End connect. And the realignment of Northside Drive underscores that relationship as the frontage travel way for both AUC and the West End, along the way providing improved access between I-20 and Downtown.

Using these works, as well as supporting data and past studies from the City, the Region, and the State, this studio explored the implications, prospects, and opportunities for West End. Through successions of meetings with neighborhood and business leaders, private sector interests, and government agencies, students prepared a framework plan that should help guide local leadership to take best advantage of the opportunities before them. The framework suggests several key features:

- Establishing Lee Street as the key connection between the AUC, spanning the campus over I-20, to the West End business

- district and the MARTA rail and bus station by providing an attractive tree-lined, well lit, pedestrian environment that will then extend south to Fort McPherson and East Point
- Reworking the AUC shuttle system to give students, faculty and staff direct and unified access to the three MARTA stations that serve their populations
- Over time, establishing the framework provided by Lee, Ralph David Abernathy (RDA), Lowery, and Oak Streets as the vital core of the district, including incremental development and redevelopment that would modify that "superblock" into more pedestrian-friendly subsets
- Amplifying the already strong retail base with AUC-linked incubator, research, and other medically based activities as well as providing some level of staff and faculty housing in the broader core area
- Realigning Northside Drive so that it flows directly into West Whitehall Street, thus overcoming the barriers of the CSX and NS rail lines, providing better access to a more efficient and less disruptive I-20 ramping system, as well as improved access to AUC, Castleberry Hill and Downtown.

Together, these moves will underscore that West End is already a transit oriented development (TOD), strengthening the growing reality that great transit and pedestrian access are keys to economic and social equity success, analogous in some ways to Georgia Tech's move across the Downtown Connector into Midtown with Tech Square. Additionally, this framework will create a clearer, more continuous linkage system that highlights West End's many parks and cultural amenities, from Adair Park, through the commercial core, to the Historic District and West End Park.

Furthermore, assuring that the area's housing policies and programs can continue to accommodate the full range of incomes and ages presently there, understanding that there are certain to be both shifts and growth in repopulating what has been a declining population, is an important component of this framework. Finally, public education policies need to also change to anticipate these shifts and growth in population.

To guide what should be an exciting future, the studio suggests that the Community Improvement District (CID) that is presently in formation, with an inclusive leadership structure, could become the "quarterback" for many of the above initiatives. The work to be done is complicated and needs a long term, sustaining commitment to guide others' initiatives into a cohesive whole. An important first step is to identify and promote a workable makeup for the CID, ensuring that the criteria can be met. With that, efforts should be made with agencies at the City, like Invest Atlanta and the City's HUD programs, and/or foundations to support the necessary startup costs, so that the revenues generated by the CID can be applied to visible, "no brainer" improvements to show momentum and build confidence in leadership for the future. Updating the City's Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) with the Atlanta Regional Commission is a crucial first step. The first LCI led to City land use policy and zoning moves that are entirely compatible with the above menu of initiatives. Its update could lead toward significant capital funding support that could apply to Lee Street or RDA streetscape improvements or to other community defined transportation related priorities.

The students and faculty have been appreciative of the opportunity to participate in this effort and excited by the commitment and dedication of community and AUC leaders to take this vital area to the next level.

For more information see westendhub.gatech.edu