

REGENERATION:

Designing Intergenerational Communities

Downtown New Brunswick, NJ



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Graphic Communication for Planners - Spring 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND

Introduction	06
Aerial Maps	08
Zoning	10
Project Goals	11
Site Analysis	12

MASTER PLAN

Concept Diagram	16
Final Design	17
Land Use	18
Architectural Precedents	19
3D Model	20
Site Sections	21
Photo Simulation	22
Illustrative Site Plan	24
Perspective Drawing	25





BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Public Interest Design at Portland State University's School of Architecture is hosting a design competition to explore new models in intergenerational housing. The competition sponsors are seeking to integrate an aging population into an active university setting in a way that improves community engagement and decreases isolation for community members of all ages. The new generation of seniors is looking for a setting that provides opportunities for lifelong learning, cultural activities, physical fitness, and other amenities that are common on university campuses. Meanwhile, college students often have limited interaction with the elderly and could benefit from the wisdom and life experiences of older residents as they start their adult lives. A site near Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey was chosen as an ideal location to create a model intergenerational community that takes into account the unique challenges and lifestyles of all age groups, but particularly seniors and students.

THE SITE

The selected site is in downtown New Brunswick, New Jersey. The Ferren Parking Deck, a rundown and underutilized parking facility owned by the New Brunswick Parking Authority, is the primary site targeted for redevelopment. The site is located across the street from the New Brunswick Train Station, which provides access to New York City and Trenton via New Jersey Transit, with connections available to Philadelphia via SEPTA.

New Brunswick is a small city of 55,181 residents. It is dominated by the college age population; 19,960 (36.2%) of the city's residents are in the 15-24 age bracket while only 2,803 residents (5.2%) are aged 65 and older. The mixed-use nature of the area and the cultural amenities available at Rutgers and in downtown New Brunswick make this an attractive area for residents of all ages. However, a number of interventions, particularly as relate to pedestrian mobility and open space, are required to make this area truly accessible for seniors.

Downtown New Brunswick is home to theaters, restaurants, shops, bars, offices, and county administration buildings, and has recently experienced a spate of high-rise residential development. Rutgers University's Civic Square Building, which houses the Mason Gross School of the Arts and the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, is located within the study area. Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital is just west of the downtown, and the College Avenue Campus of Rutgers University is approximately one-quarter mile north of the selected site.





INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITIES

Newer retirement communities are equipping their facilities with amenities and programs that promote active aging and creative pursuits, such as theaters, art studios, filmmaking and photography studios, pools, yoga classes, gym facilities, and lecture courses. In effect, senior communities are becoming more and more like miniature college campuses, full of amenities and activities to encourage intellectual and social growth and physical and mental health. This trend towards “active aging” and the desire for stimulating activity amongst senior citizens indicates opportunities to take advantage of the facilities and activities that are already commonly found on university campuses.

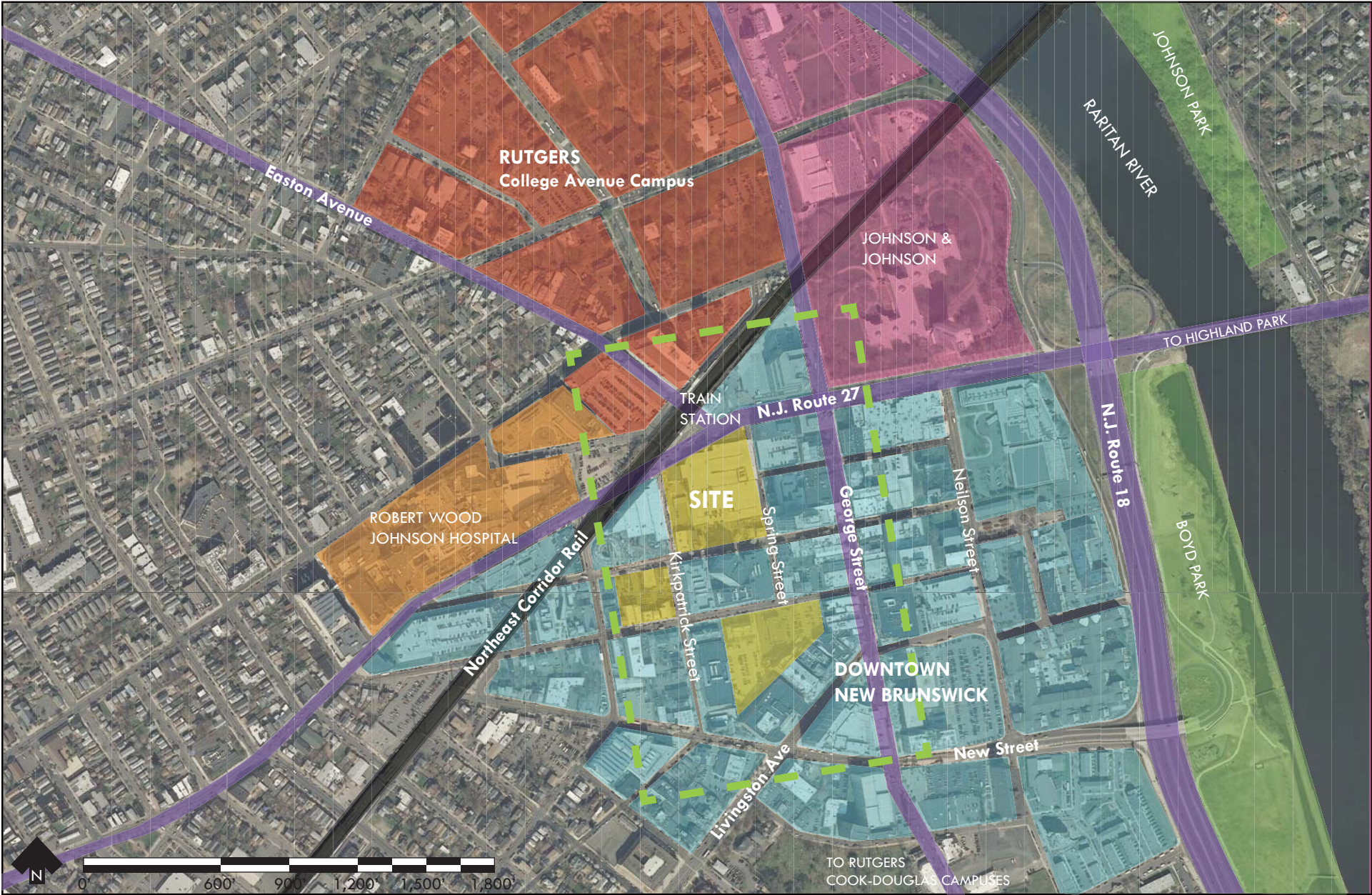
The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) issued a report entitled *Livable Communities: An Evaluation Guide*. This report identifies elements that help make a community livable for and attractive to seniors. Not surprisingly, many of the “livable community” characteristics described by senior citizens coincide with the elements desired in a community by people of all ages and incomes. The AARP guide identifies the following features as critical elements of senior-friendly communities:

- Reliable public transportation system;
- Variety in housing types;
- A safe and secure environment;
- Access to shopping, especially groceries;
- Physical environment that fosters walking with minimal barriers to mobility;
- Opportunities for recreation and culture; and
- Nearby quality health facilities.

Similarly, a report issued by Temple University in 2012 that focuses specifically on intergenerational communities identifies the following characteristics of communities for all ages:

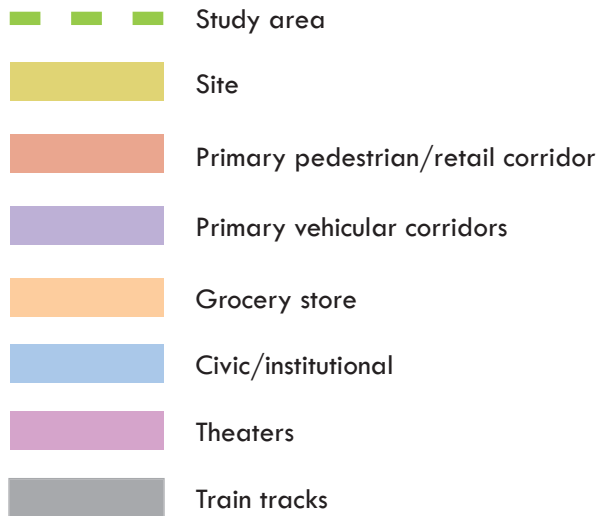
- Facilities and public spaces that foster interaction across generations;
- Opportunities for lifelong community engagement and learning;
- Diverse and affordable housing and transportation options that address people’s changing needs;
- A physical environment that promotes healthy living and the wise use of natural resources; and
- An integrated system of accessible health and social services.

The purpose of this project is to design a site that incorporates the above principles and provides opportunities to build connections across age, race, socio-economic classes and other traditional divides. Strategies to achieve this include creating public spaces that foster social interaction, addressing barriers that limit access and mobility, creating better connections between existing cultural assets in New Brunswick, and enhancing the vibrancy of the downtown by adding retail and residential space in order to make the city more appealing to people of all ages.



STUDY AREA: Downtown New Brunswick

1" = 400'



POINTS OF INTEREST

- 1 Train Station
- 2 Rutgers University Bookstore
- 3 Fresh Grocer Supermarket
- 4 Middlesex County Courthouse
- 5 Post Office
- 6 Rutgers: Bloustein & Mason Gross Schools
- 7 State Theater
- 8 George Street Playhouse
- 9 Crossroads Theater Company
- 10 Heldrich Hotel & Conference Center



ZONING

C-4 Downtown Commercial

The entire study area is in the C-4 Downtown Commercial zone. The intent of this district is to provide for the expansion and preserve the integrity of the character and pedestrian scale of the downtown central business district which serves as an urban regional center.

Allowable uses in this zone include:

- Retail
- Personal service businesses
- Restaurants, bars, and nightclubs
- Theaters
- Offices, including government offices
- Hotels and motels
- Schools
- Mixed-used ground floor with residential above
- Medical centers and clinics
- Multifamily residential is permitted as a conditional use

Lot Size (SF)	Min. Front Setback	Min. Total Side Set-back	Min. Rear Set-back	Height	FAR	Max. Bldg Cover (%)
5,000	0	0	0	40	4	100
10,000	7' at 40' height level	0	0	60	5	100
20,000	Building shall be set back above 40'	0	0	150	12	95
40,000	so as not to penetrate a plane of 10 degrees	0	0	250	15	95



CHALLENGES

There are a number of barriers, particularly as relate to access and mobility, that must be addressed in order to create a functional intergenerational community that is safe, easy, and pleasant for residents of all ages. These issues include:

- Long blocks that require walking a long distance to cross at a corner
- Wide streets that are difficult to cross in the time allotted, e.g. Route 27
- Lack of crosswalks, curb cuts, and/or traffic signals at intersections
- Discontinuous and/or overly narrow sidewalks, as on Spring Street
- Poor maintenance of sidewalks, including lack of adequate snow shoveling, and obstructions such as utility poles and overgrown hedges
- Train tracks segregate the college campus from the site in downtown NB
- Sidewalks and bike lanes are insufficiently separated from fast-moving traffic
- Noise issues may be a concern for seniors living near or on a college campus
- Poor lighting, dark alleys, and other features that make residents feel unsafe, such as Church Street under Ferren Deck and the alleys between the theaters
- Relatively small selection of restaurant and retail facilities
- While there is an abundance of open space on the college campus, there is a limited amount of green space in the downtown where it would be most accessible to seniors



Tracks separating downtown from Rutgers



Wide street makes it challenging to cross



Long block with lack of appealing uses



Underpasses feel unsafe, especially at night

OPPORTUNITIES

Rutgers University has many amenities and facilities that can support seniors' desire for an active retirement. Seniors can give life to the campus and the city not only during the school semesters, but also during summer and holiday breaks when many students are away and campus facilities are underutilized. For example, seniors could make use of existing art, music, museum, library, theater, fitness, recreational, health, dining, classroom, and computing facilities on campus.

The current pattern of students living on campus and seniors living in segregated communities fosters isolation and a lack of understanding. College students could benefit from the wisdom and life experiences of older residents as they start their adult lives, for example through career counseling and mentoring programs. Seniors could benefit from interaction with students through exposure to new technologies and trends, which would help them better relate to their younger family members and could even have physical health benefits if remaining "young at heart" translates to a more active life.

While there are a plethora of amenities on campus, addition of more retail space would benefit seniors, students, and everyone in between. In addition, while there has been new residential construction downtown, there is still a limited supply of apartments within easy walking distance of downtown amenities.

PROJECT GOALS

- Better integrate seniors and students by creating physical spaces that foster social interaction
- Create a civic space at the heart of New Brunswick that helps bridge the barrier between campus & downtown created by the train tracks
- Improve pedestrian connections between the site and key attractions in the area such as theaters, stores, and the campus
- Introduce new green spaces to downtown New Brunswick
- Provide space for additional residential and retail uses that attracts and could be used by people of all ages

SITE ANALYSIS: PUBLIC & PRIVATE SPACES

There is a lack of open space and greenery in the area surrounding the site. There are limited spaces to sit outdoors to eat lunch or wait for the train or bus, and the existing public-spaces are unattractive.

- Private
- Publicly accessible

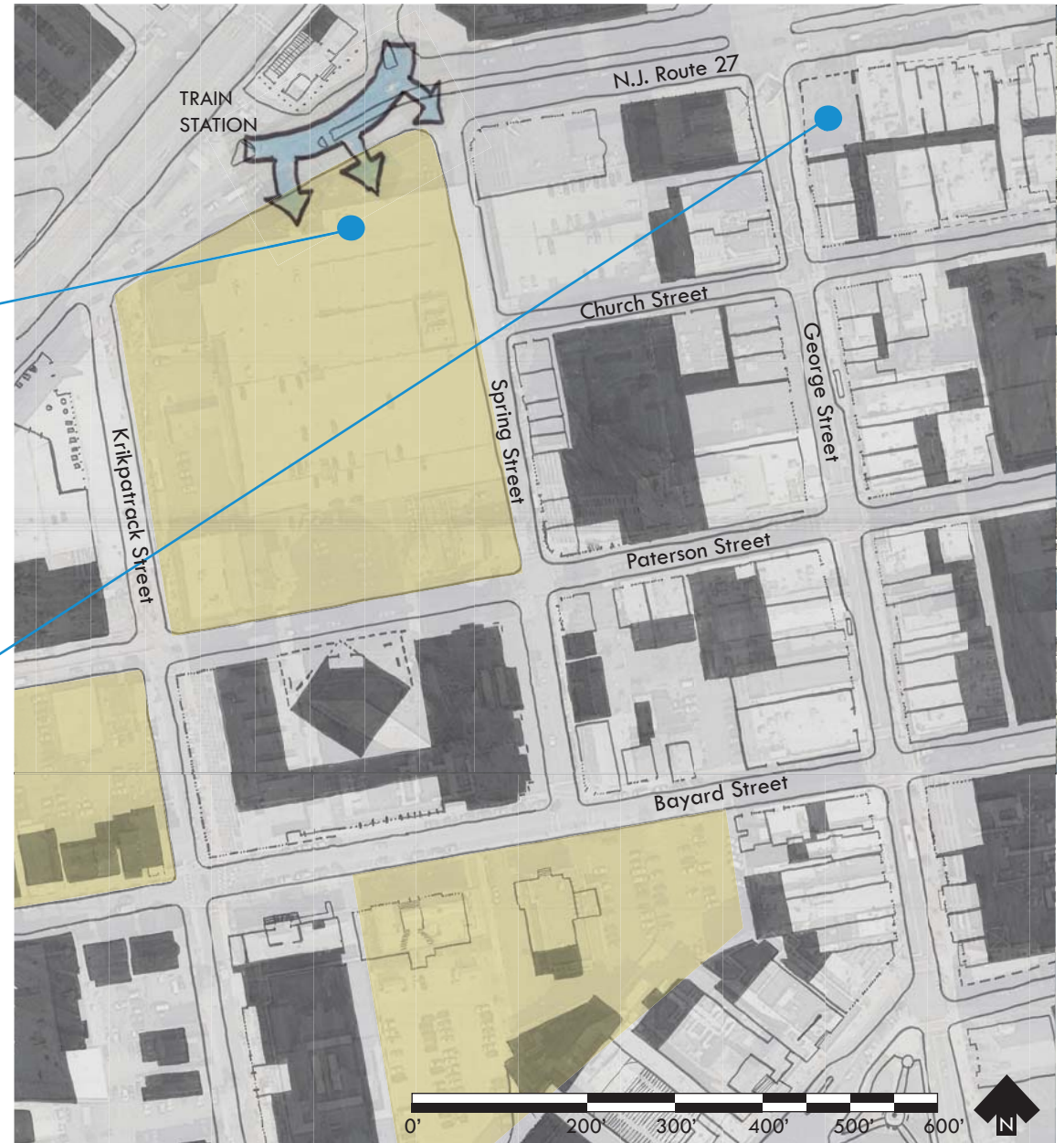


Current view of site across from train station

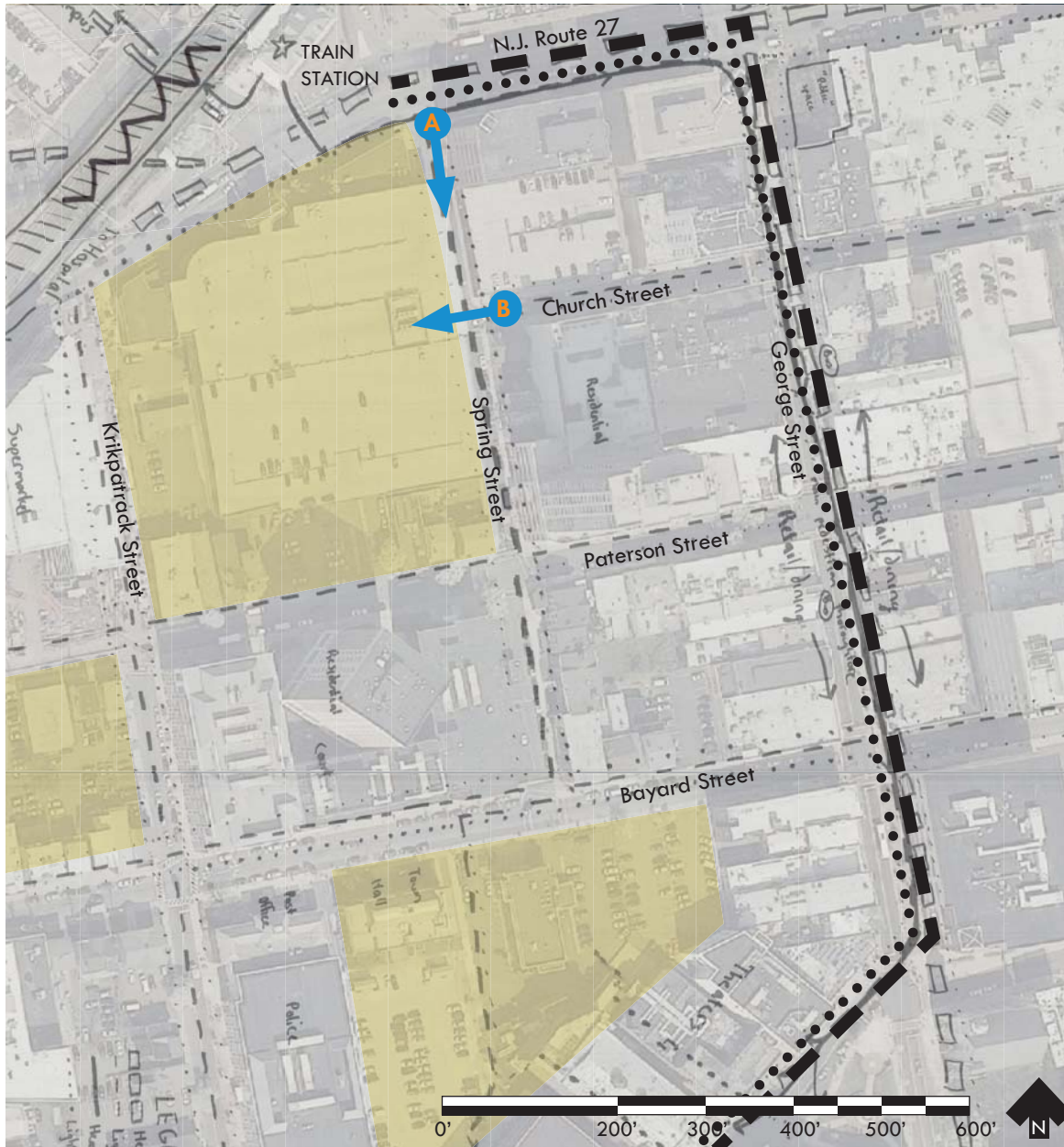
Inaccessible space raised above street level and dark spaces caused by the overhang creates uninviting retail entrances



Existing 'public' space at George Street and Route 27



1" = 200'



SITE ANALYSIS: CIRCULATION PATTERNS

Spring Street is underutilized because of the unpleasant pedestrian experience. Most foot traffic through the area occurs along George Street, creating the feeling that New Brunswick has a one-dimensional downtown.



A View looking south down Spring Street from Route 27



B View west down Church Street under Ferren Deck





MASTER PLAN

CONCEPT SKETCH

1" = 100'

PUBLIC PLAZA ACROSS
FROM TRAIN STATION

DAYLIGHT CHURCH STREET

MID-BLOCK BICYCLE AND
PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION

MIXED-USE BUILDINGS
WITH GROUND FLOOR
RETAIL

WIDEN SIDEWALKS AND ADD
TREES ALONG SPRING STREET

NEW PARK BY COURTHOUSE
AND CIVIC BUILDINGS



FINAL DESIGN

1" = 100'



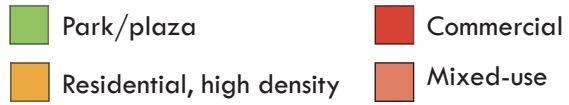
Building Footprints

	Use	Footprint (SF)	Floors	Description
1	Plaza	11,682	0	Plaza/park
2	Mixed	4,290	12	Retail: 1 story Office: 6 stories Residential: 4 stories
3	Mixed	14,158	4	Retail: 1 story Office: 3 stories
4	Mixed	21,687	12	Retail: 1 story Office: 3 stories Residential: 8 stories
5	Mixed	22,854	3	Retail: 1 story Residential: 2 stories
6	Office	20,751	4	Office: 4 stories
7	Mixed	32,704	3	Retail: 1 story Residential: 2 stories
8	Residential	16,316	5	Residential: 5 stories
9	Road	7,750	0	Church Street
Site Total		178,072 SF		

New Uses

Use	Area (SF)
Retail	95,693
Residential	337,791
Office	216,279
Open Space	11,682
Roads (new)	7,750
Total	669,195

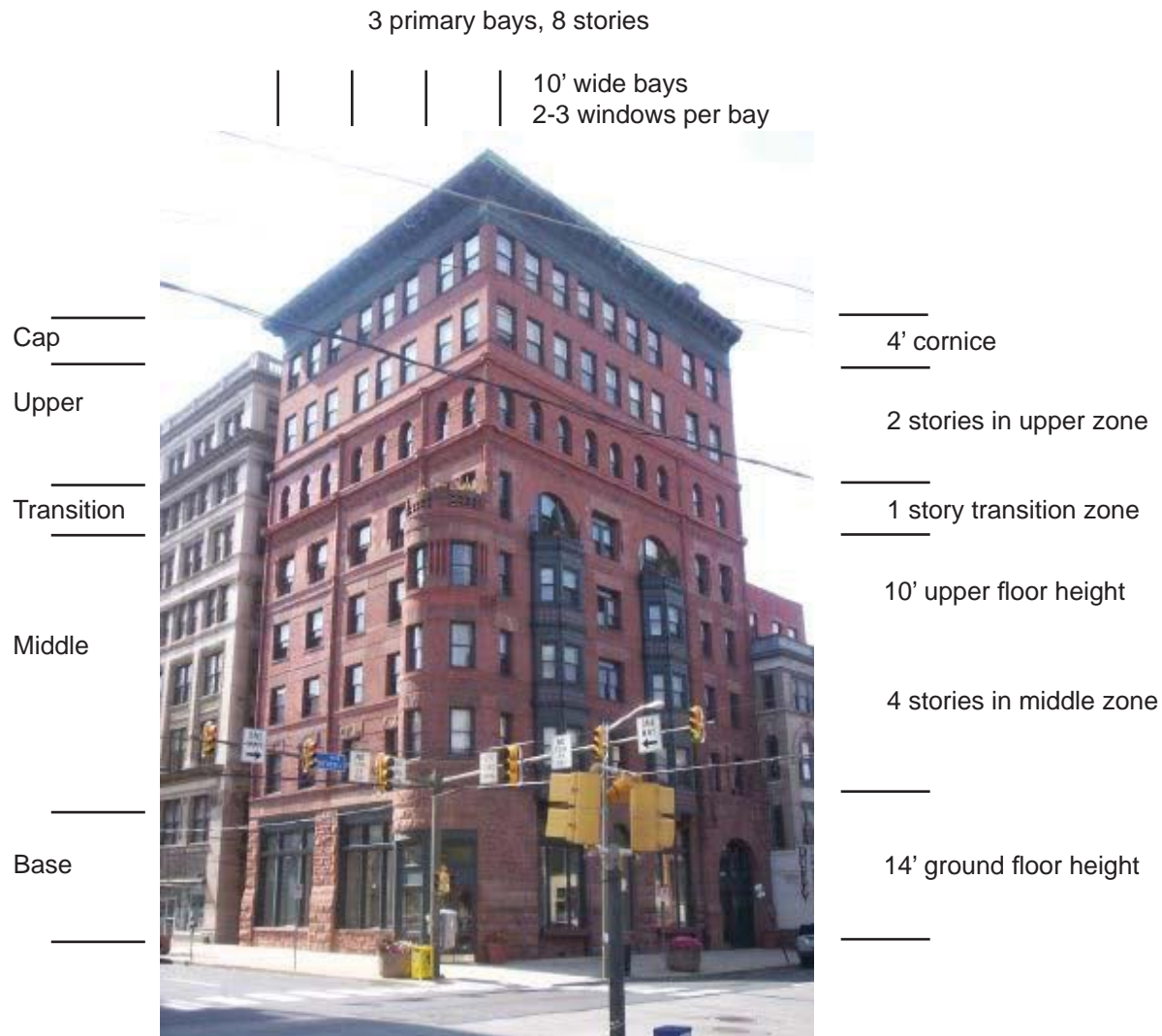
LAND USE



	Area (SF)	Apt Units
Plaza 1		
Plaza	11,682	
Building 2		
Retail	4,290	
Residential	17,160	16
Office	25,740	
Building 3		
Retail	14,158	
Office	42,474	
Building 4		
Retail	21,687	
Residential	127,935	120
Office	65,061	
Building 5		
Retail	22,854	
Residential	45,708	45
Building 6		
Office	83,004	
Building 7		
Retail	32,704	
Residential	65,408	50
Building 8		
Residential	81,580	70
Road 9		
Church Street	7,750	

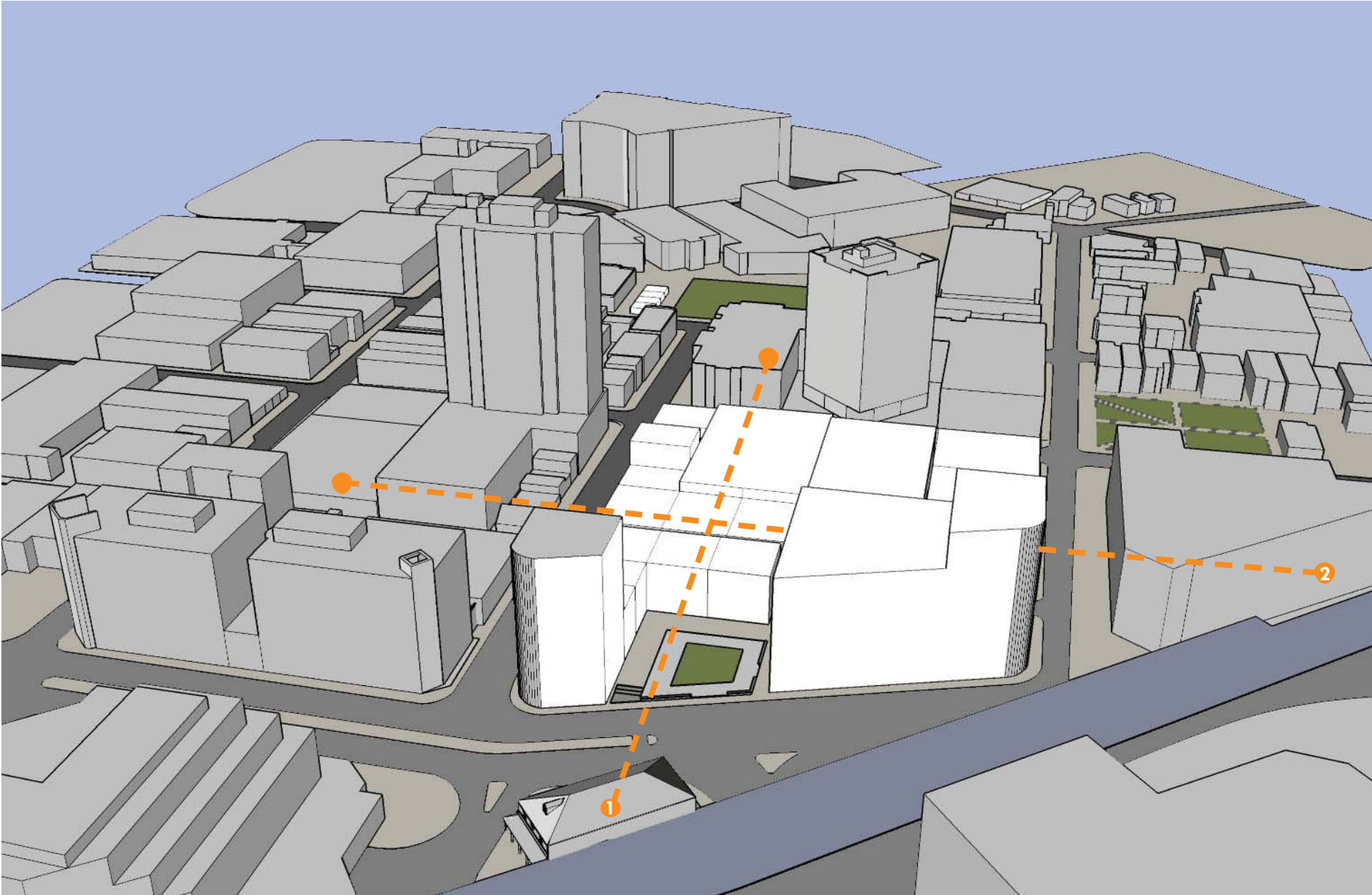


ARCHITECTURAL PRECEDENTS

Characteristics

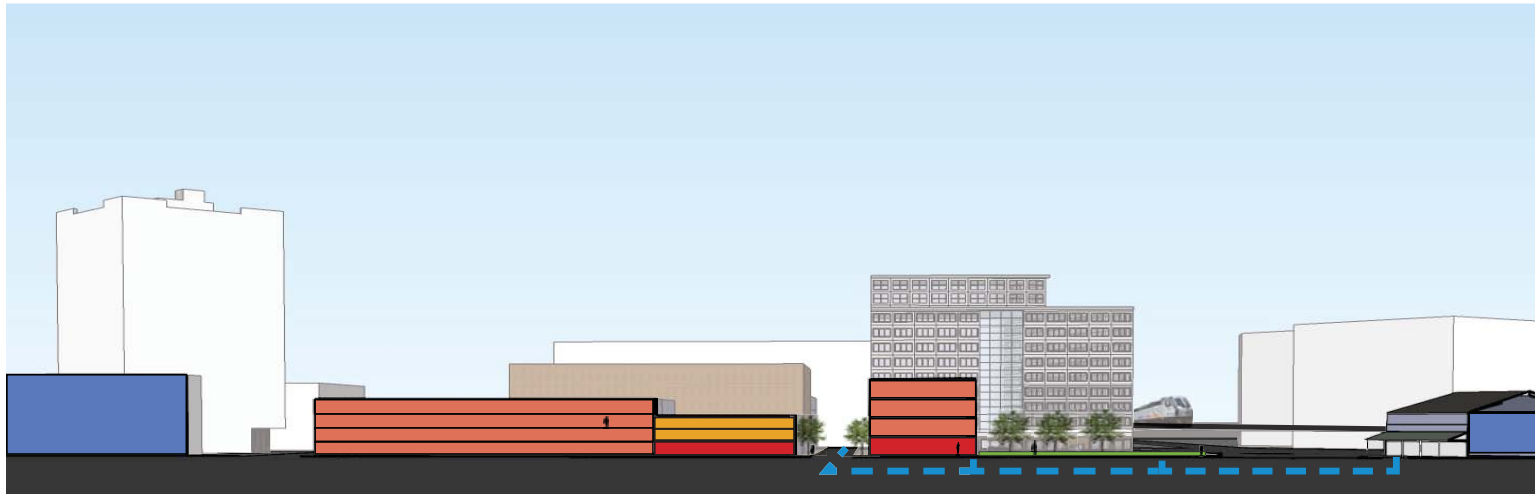
Large storefront windows at ground level
 Smaller windows on upper stories
 Grouping of windows into vertical bays
 Grouping of horizontal stories
 Horizontal differentiation of stories
 Different window configurations on different floors
 Heavy cornice at roof
 Brick or stone material
 Heavier materials at base
 Corner entrance

3D MODEL

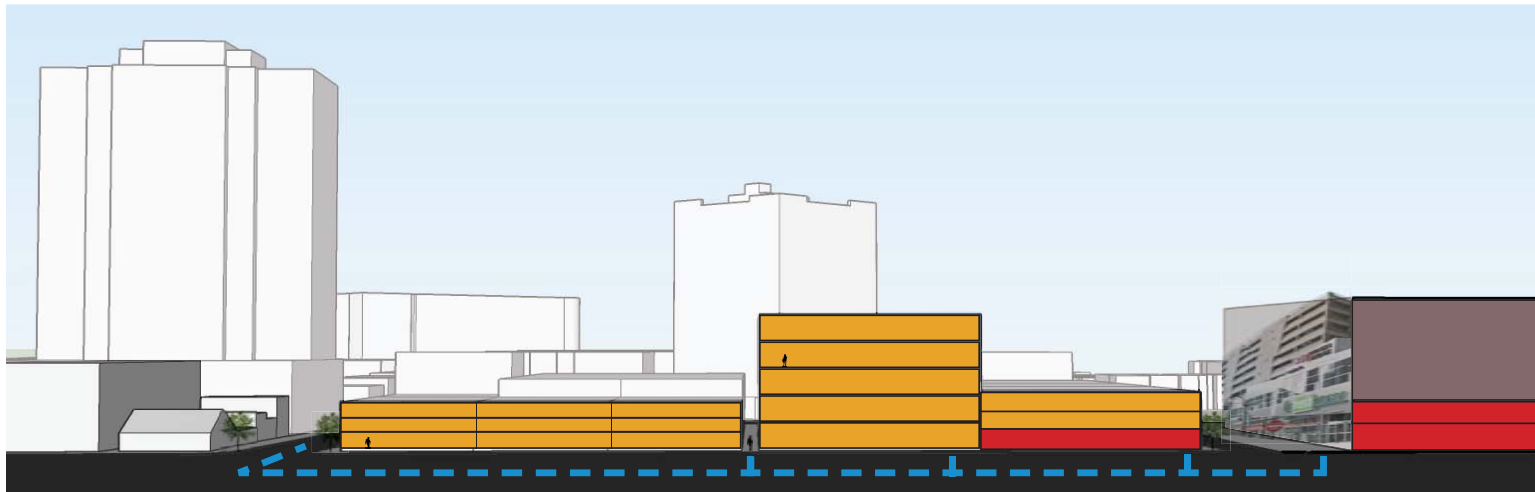








SITE SECTIONS

1: North-South Section Cut



2: East-West Section Cut



 Retail	 Residential, high-density	 Parking
 Office	 Civic and institutional	 Park/plaza

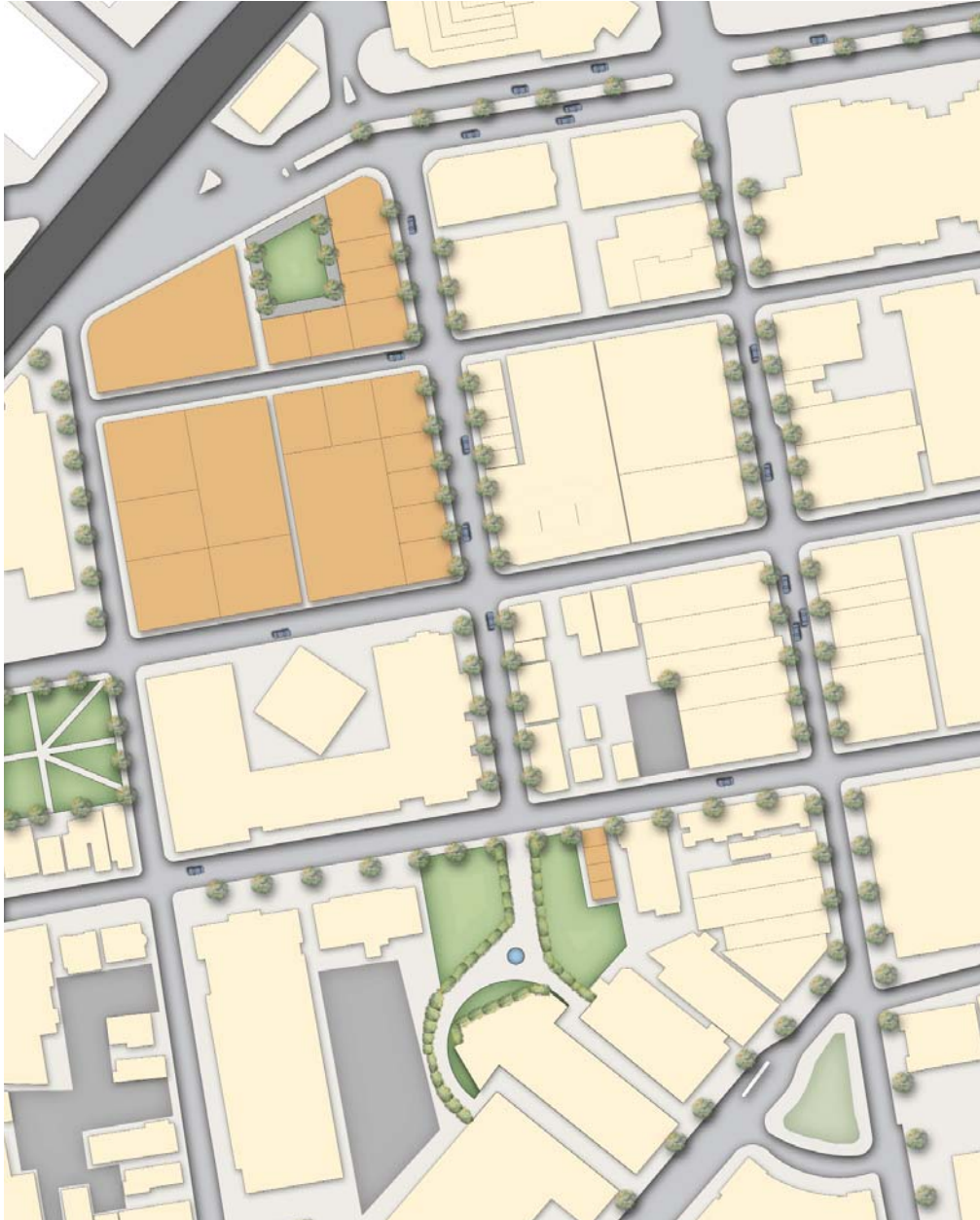
CHURCH STREET: Before



CHURCH STREET: After



ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN



New Brunswick Gateway Plaza across from train station, surrounded by new retail space



Green pedestrian connection between Spring Street and Livingston Avenue Theater District

PERSPECTIVE DRAWING

