

A Vision Plan for **SoHa**

A New Neighborhood Located **South of Harris Boulevard** at the McCullough Light Rail Station

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Master of Urban Design Program

University of North Carolina Charlotte



The SoHa Vision Plan for McCullough Station

The Strategic Vision Plan for University City (SVPUC) called for the design of an urban village at the McCullough Light Rail Station. The SoHa Vision Plan was prepared in furtherance of that goal by the Master of Urban Design students at the University of North Carolina Charlotte with support from University City Partners (UCP) and Atapco Properties. Project designers and participants were:

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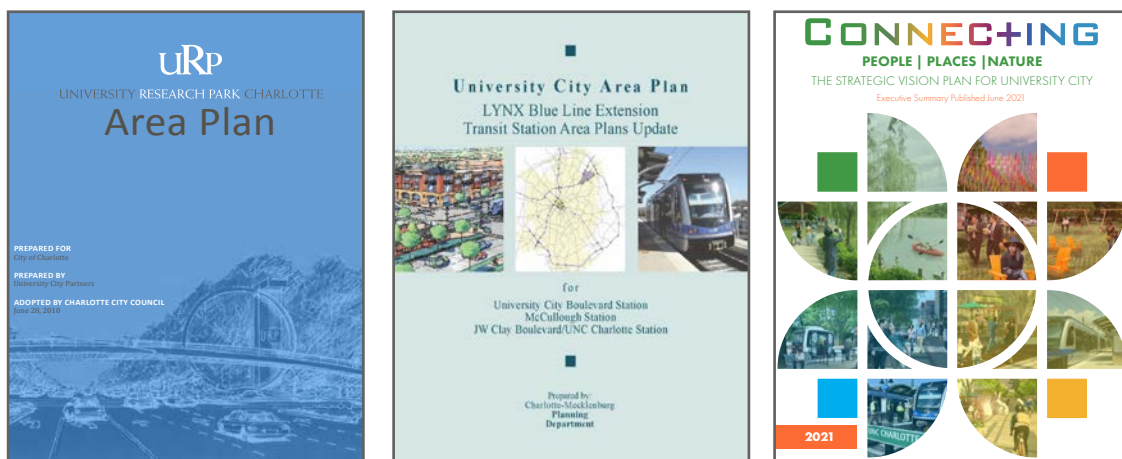
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Opportunities and Constraints:

Existing Conditions

The study site is located in the fast-growing University City area of north Charlotte, roughly five minutes from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte by car, or two light rail stops away from the campus. The project commenced with the identification of the opportunities and constraints on the site. The building ages and conditions, land-use, site topography, natural features, existing infrastructure, demographics, and historical context were analyzed to understand qualities that merited accentuation and areas in need of improvement.



Relevant plans that guided the growth in University City were also reviewed and included:

- The University Research Park Plan (adopted in 2010)
- The University City Area Plan (adopted in 2015)
- The Strategic Vision Plan for University City (adopted in 2021)

The third and most recent Strategic Vision Plan for University City (SVPUC) attempts to consolidate and update the previous two plans and adds further detail as the area evolves from a once auto-dominated suburban place into a cluster of walkable, transit-oriented neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Diversity and Inclusion and Housing Access for All

The SVPUC also builds on some of the Ten Goals set forth in the **Charlotte 2040 Comprehensive Plan (2021)** with emphasis on the creation of *10-minute neighborhoods*. The term was first coined by Carlos Moreno to describe a more sustainable, human-centric urban design model in which local residents can access their daily necessities by foot or bike within ten to twenty minutes. This SoHa Vision Plan adopted this principle to guide decision making.



<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/housing/info-2019/bring-back-missing-middle-housing.html>

Characteristics of Missing Middle Housing

There is a wide variety of Missing Middle housing types, but they are typically located in **walkable neighborhoods**, have **small-footprints**, **lower perceived density**, **smaller, well-designed units**, **fewer off-street parking spaces**, and **simple construction**. They housing units contribute to the creaion of community, and are **marketable to both young and old**.

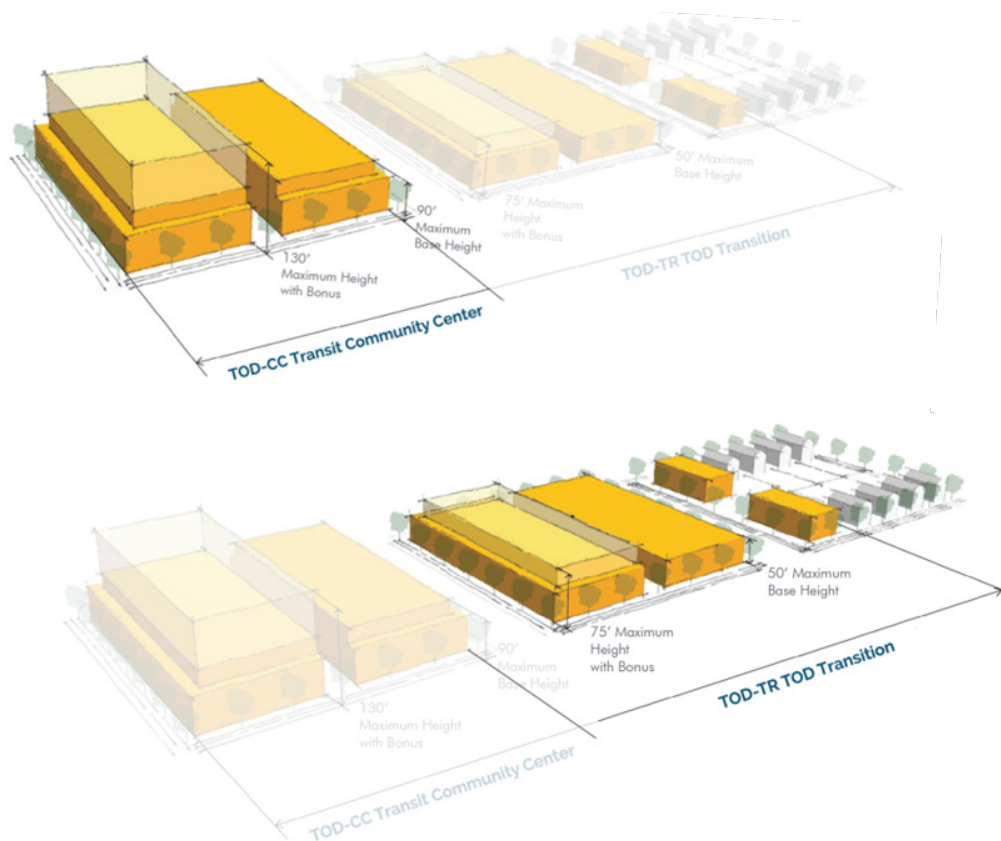
Just as important as the goal of a 10-minute neighborhood are the goals from the 2040 plan of *Neighborhood Diversity and Inclusion*, and *Housing Access for All*. To implement these goals, the SoHa Vision Plan referenced Daniel Parolek's book **Missing Middle Housing: Thinking Big and Building Small to Respond to Today's Housing Crisis**. These types of housing are *missing* because they have often been illegal to build since the mid-1940s. They are *middle* because they sit in the middle of a spectrum between detached single-family homes and large apartment buildings.

Transit-Oriented Development

The 193-acre SoHa Vision Plan study site is located on both the east and west sides of North Tryon Street, within a half-mile radius of the McCullough Light Rail Station. About 62% of the study site is located within a walkable quarter mile radius of the station.



The majority of the study site is zoned, or could be zoned, TOD-CC (Transit Community Center) or TOD-TR (Transit Transition). In these areas, the city will support moderate to high-intensity, compact, mixed-use urban development so that people can live, work, shop, dine, and pursue recreational opportunities, while enjoying a range of mobility choices by way of a robust network of streets, sidewalks, and bicycle paths. The specific requirements of these two TOD zoning districts most affecting the development of the study site are in reference to height limitations, parking, and building locations.



<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/housing/info-2019/bring-back-missing-middle-housing.html>

- **TOD-Community Center** has a maximum building height of 90' by right and up to 130' with a bonus. Buildings have wrapped or rear parking and are located at the back of the sidewalk to create a dense urban street edge.
- **TOD-Transit Transition** has a maximum building height of 50' by right and up to 75' with a bonus. Buildings also have wrapped or rear parking and are located at or near the back of sidewalk.

The 193-acre study site includes a large portion of University Executive Park (UEP). Atapco, a Baltimore based developer, is the largest single landowner in the UEP, owning 11 office buildings that amount to nearly 470,000 sq. ft. of office space on about 50 acres.

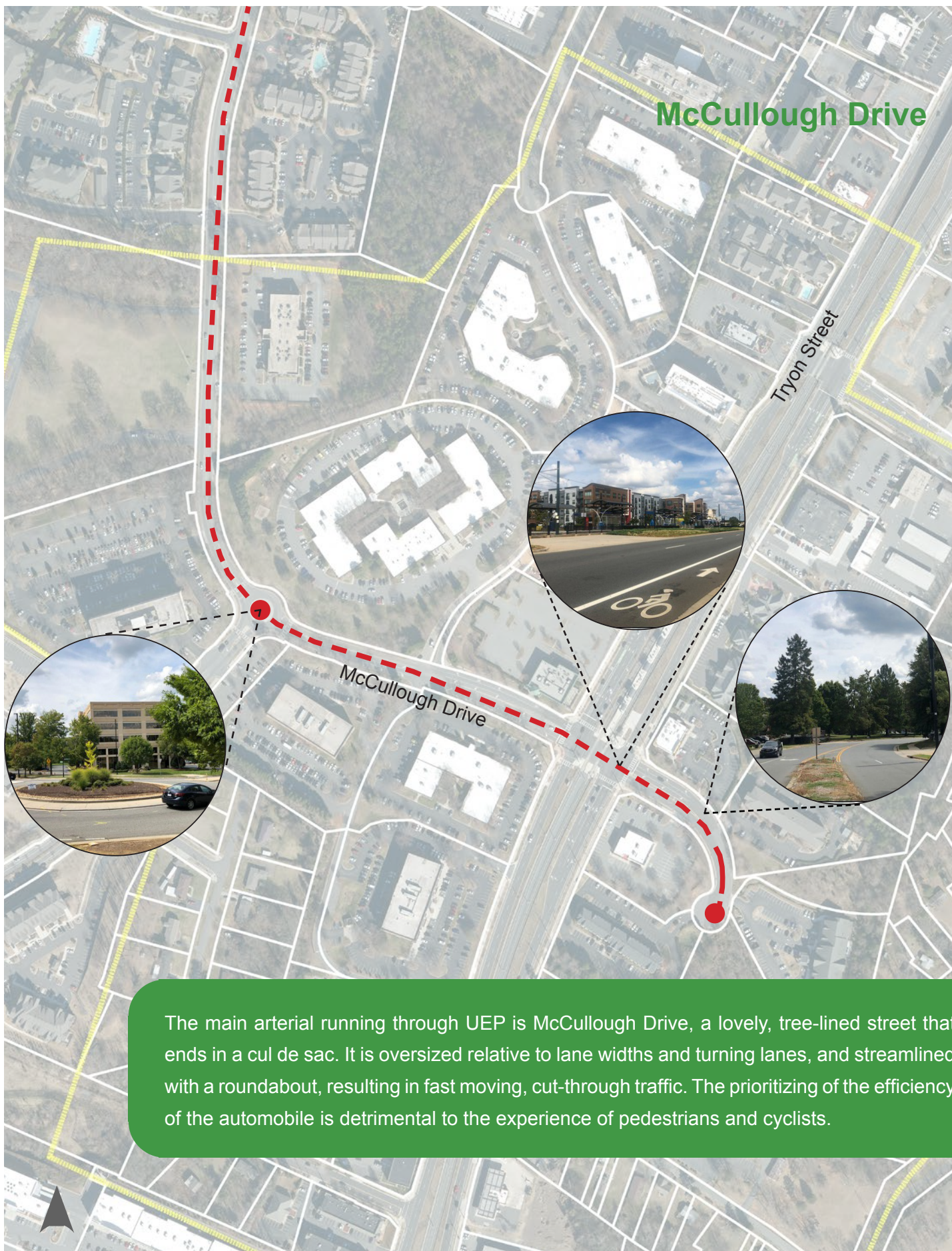
UEP was initially developed as an auto-oriented suburban office park, with mostly one to three-story red brick buildings. The buildings are surrounded by expansive parking lots, shaded by large canopy trees resulting in open spaces that are largely decorative, rather than usable. The street network is also scaled to the car, resulting in oversized blocks that in turn, provide poor connection to the surrounding neighborhoods and to the light rail station itself.



Area in green is the property currently owned by Atapco.

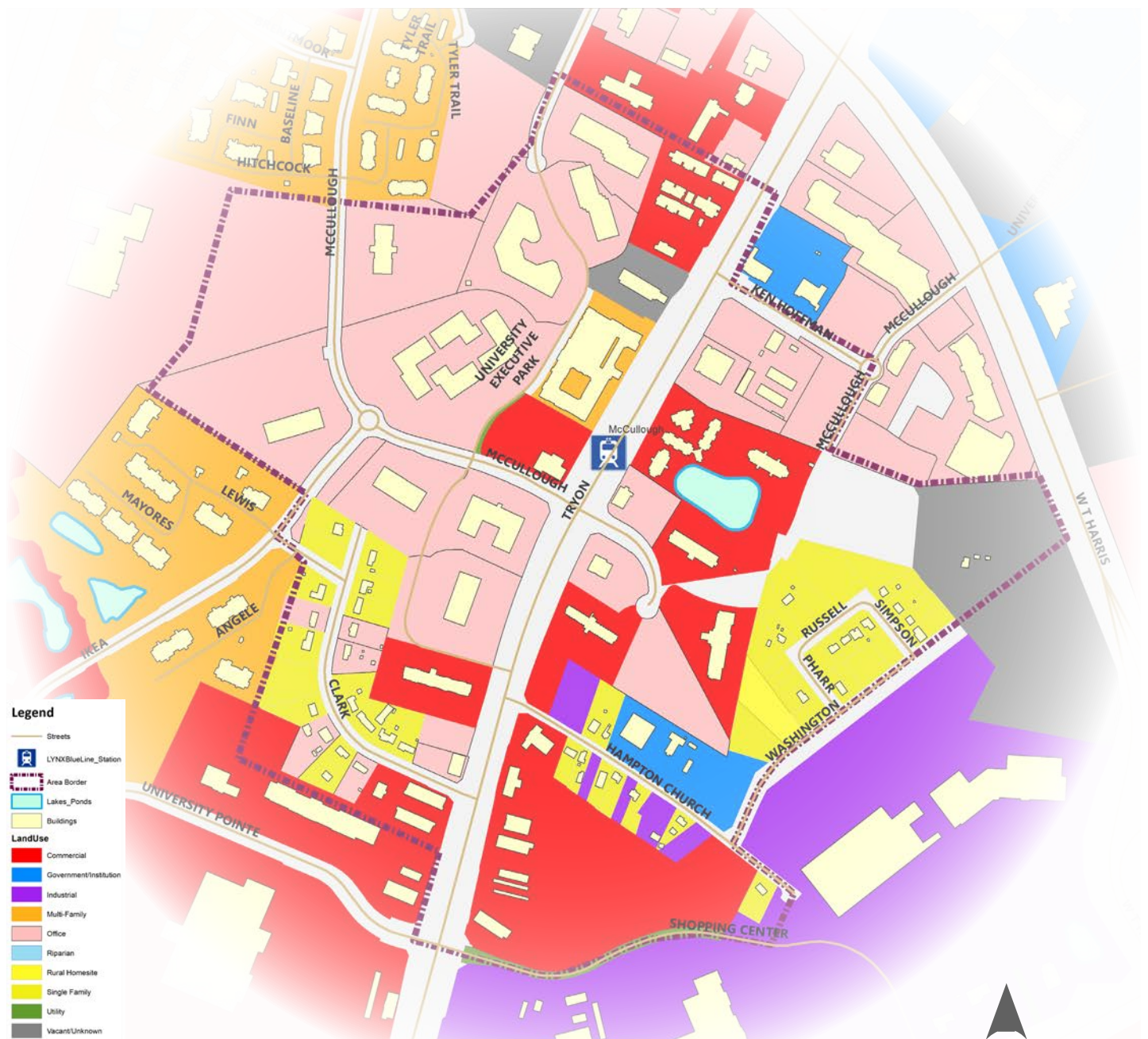


Existing buildings in UEP owned by Atapco.



The main arterial running through UEP is McCullough Drive, a lovely, tree-lined street that ends in a cul de sac. It is oversized relative to lane widths and turning lanes, and streamlined with a roundabout, resulting in fast moving, cut-through traffic. The prioritizing of the efficiency of the automobile is detrimental to the experience of pedestrians and cyclists.

Land Use and Street Network



Most of the buildings along McCullough Drive are set far back from the street and all are fronted by parking lots, creating a challenging environment for pedestrians.

The primary land uses in UEP are office, multi-family housing, and hotels. There are also some auto-oriented retail/restaurants on Tryon Street. But the different land uses are adjacent to each other, rather than mixed, and have few if any pedestrian or bike connections between them.

Immediately adjacent to UEP, is a small cluster of 19 single-family homes. Ten of existing homes have been assembled into single ownership, presumably to create a larger site for development. Many of these structures are seemingly vacant or in disrepair. Still, these homes provide Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing units (NOAHs) and have a potential role of supporting aging in place, if only for a very few residents.

10 ASSEMBLED LOTS

McCullough Drive

Tryon Street



Images depict the condition of some of the homes in the area of the assembled lots.

The introduction of the light rail stop at the intersection of McCullough Drive and North Tryon Street has brought higher land values, which in turn create both opportunities and challenges. And while the light rail line creates a new level of connectivity to UNCC and uptown, it also creates a physical barrier between the east and west side of North Tryon Street. On the study site, the tracks can only be crossed in two places: one at McCullough Drive and the other at Ken Hoffman Drive, The Ken Hoffman intersection currently dead ends into a Burger King parking lot. Just south of the study site, there is a third crossing at Shopping Center Drive.

1. Ken Hoffman Drive
2. McCullough Drive
3. Shopping Center Drive

In the study area east of Tryon Street, there are fewer buildings than on the west side and even less street infrastructure. The area is primarily characterized by auto-oriented stores, fast food restaurants, and inexpensive motels. Behind these retail uses, the Hampton Presbyterian Church (4) and cemetery are located, as are two separate clusters of single-family homes (5). The houses nearest the church are mostly vacant or in a state of disrepair. The houses just off Washington Blvd. are in much better shape. New construction is even evident there.



Image is looking north on Tryon Street at the intersection of McCullough Drive. The light rail station is located in the center of the street.

Evolution of the area around the Retention Pond



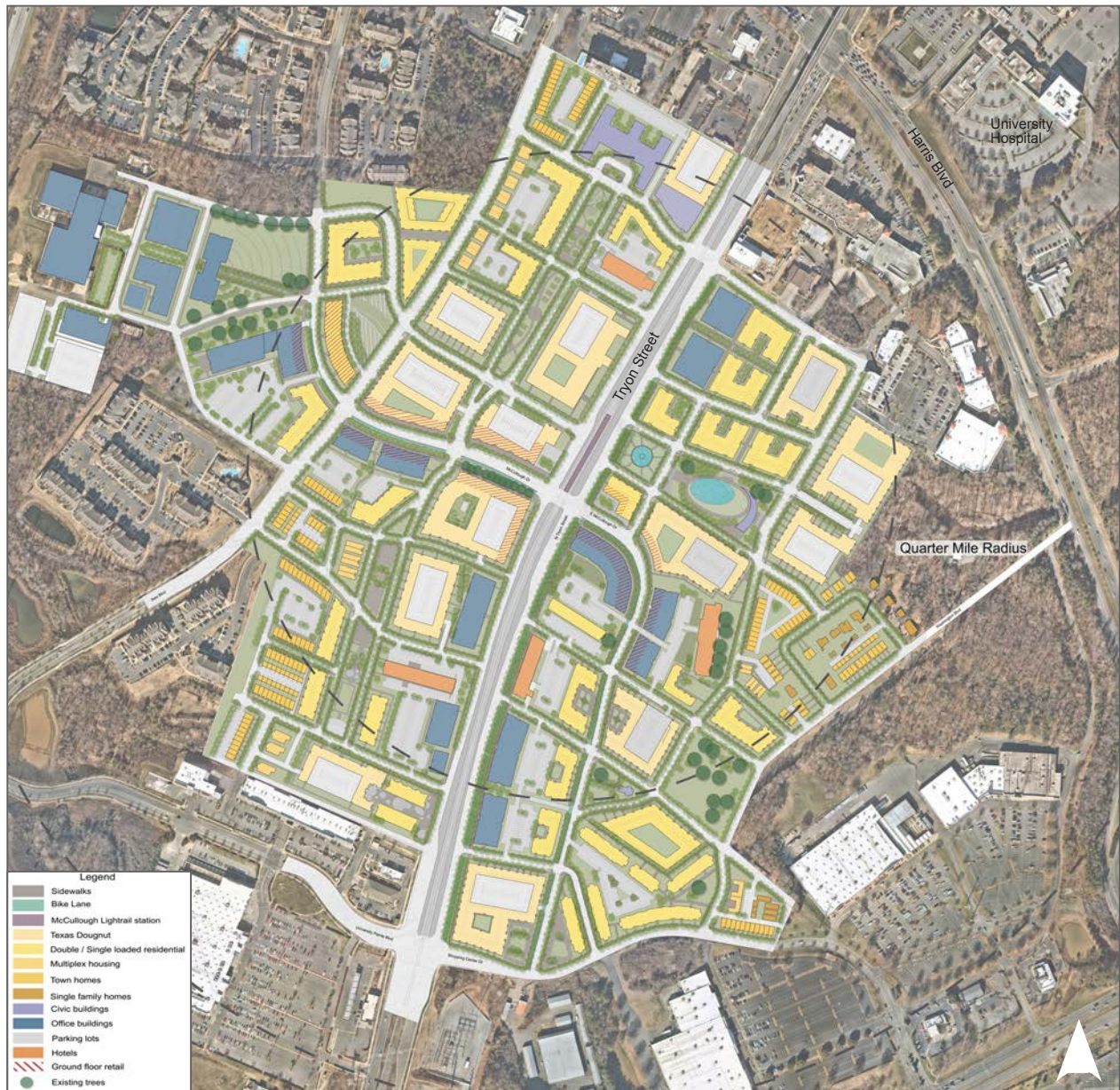
Historical photos suggest the existing retention pond was initially a farm pond, so it was probably not given very much aesthetic attention. Today, the pond is not well-kept and seldom used, perhaps due to its location behind a hotel, and the steep topography that surrounds it. The City's 2040 Plan lists *the Integration of the Natural and Built Environment* as a goal. The pond and its surroundings could be a place where that goal is met.

Summary of Existing Conditions

1. The new McCullough Light Rail Station provides both a catalyst and an expectation for increased density and a more walkable neighborhood within a half mile of it.
2. The primary and oldest land use within a quarter mile of the station is one to three-story office buildings. Auto-oriented retail and motels are mostly located at the periphery of the site.
3. All the office buildings have large setbacks from the street and are surrounded by parking.
4. There is a small grouping of older single-family homes on the site that are in poor condition. Ten of the houses have been assembled into a larger, contiguous lot.
5. There are also newer, three-story, walk-up residential projects and a wrapped deck apartment building on the site.
6. The light rail line creates a barrier along Tryon Street with just three crossing opportunities on or near the study site.
7. The primary Tryon Street crossing is at the intersection of McCullough Drive but it currently dead ends into a cul-de-sac.
8. The street network lacks connectivity both within the study site and to the land uses that surround it.
9. Circulation on the study site is auto-oriented.
10. The only sidewalks are located along Tryon Street and McCullough Blvd. The only bike lane is on Tryon Street.
11. There are very large deciduous trees located throughout the study site and especially along McCullough Drive.
12. There is a large, privately owned, lake-like retention pond on the study site, but it not visible from Tryon Street and it is not used as park space.

The SoHa Vision

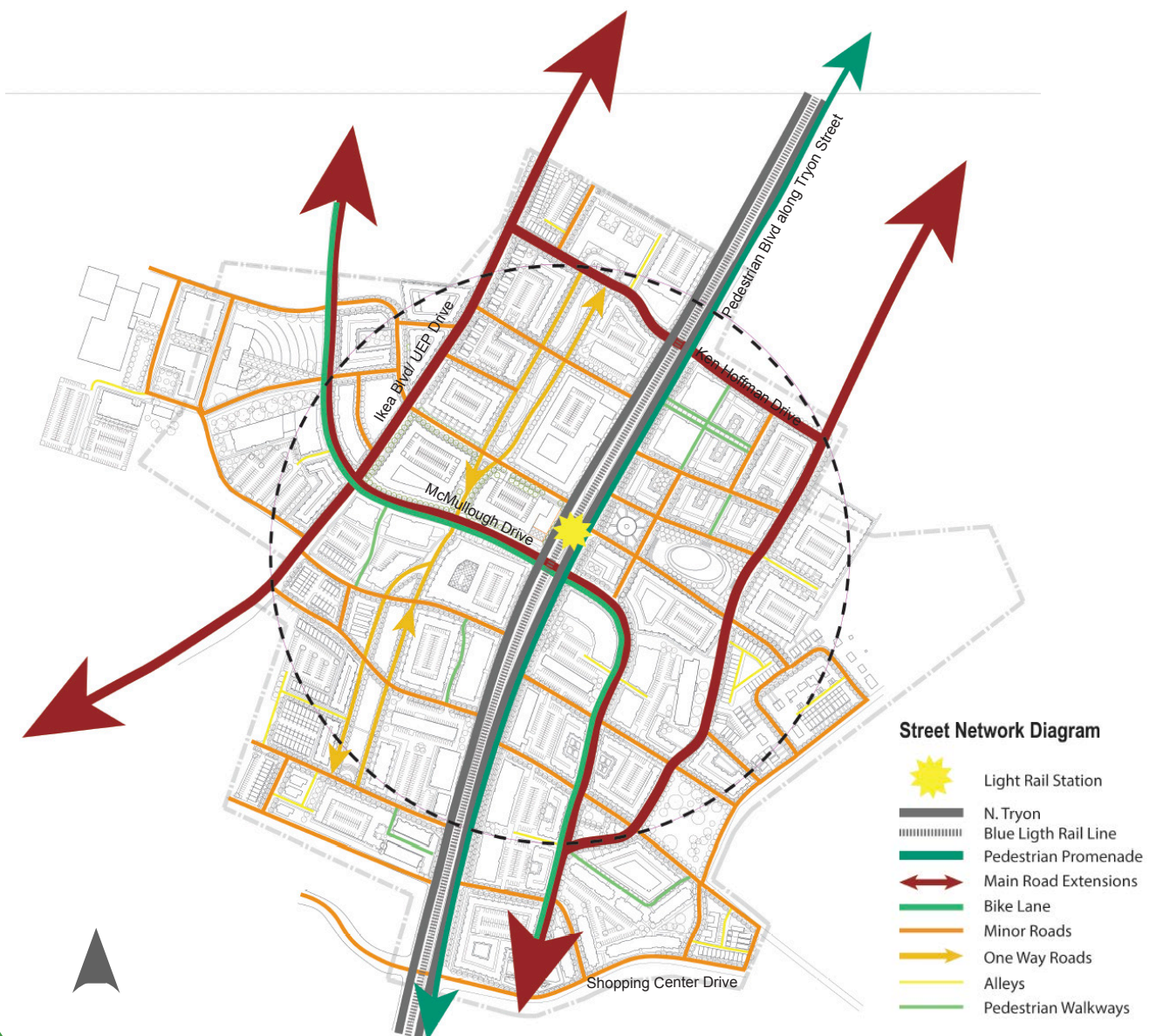
In response to the existing conditions, the goals of the Charlotte 2040 Comprehensive Plan, the characteristics of the 10-minute neighborhoods, and the strategies described in the SVPUC, the SoHa Vision Plan reimagines the study site as a healthy, diverse and inclusive mixed-use and mixed-income neighborhood centered on communal and active urban open spaces that are linked together by pedestrian and bike-oriented infrastructure. To celebrate this new vision, this plan proposes the rebranding of the McCullough Street Station area, University Executive Park and the land surrounding it as SoHa, an acronym based on it being located south of Harris Boulevard. The new name pairs well with NoDa, a historic mill village/arts and entertainment district just a few stops south on the light rail line.



Expanded Network and Street Typologies

The design for SoHa begins with improving pedestrian and bike connections by extending the proposed promenade from University Place and Harris Boulevard to McCullough Station. The extension would also create improved access to the Mallard Creek Greenway from neighborhoods to the south of it. The precedent for the promenade was the Hudson River Greenway in New York City.

To further create an improved pedestrian experience, an expanded street network is proposed across SoHa. IKEA Boulevard would extend across McCullough Drive so that it connects to University Executive Park Drive. McCullough Drive, which currently dead ends on the east side of Tryon Street would continue to Shopping Center Drive, and is reimagined to accommodate an extension of the separated bike lane proposed on University City Blvd. Ken Hoffman Drive, which currently dead ends in the Burger King parking lot would be extended across Tryon Street to University Executive Park Drive.



McCullough Drive



The extension of McCullough Drive would address multiple goals:

- Eliminate the dead end that currently exists at McCullough Drive.
- Reduce the number of lanes and lane widths to slow vehicular traffic.
- Expand first mile/last mile options further into University Place.
- Support the sense of a cohesive center.
- Create a signature street.

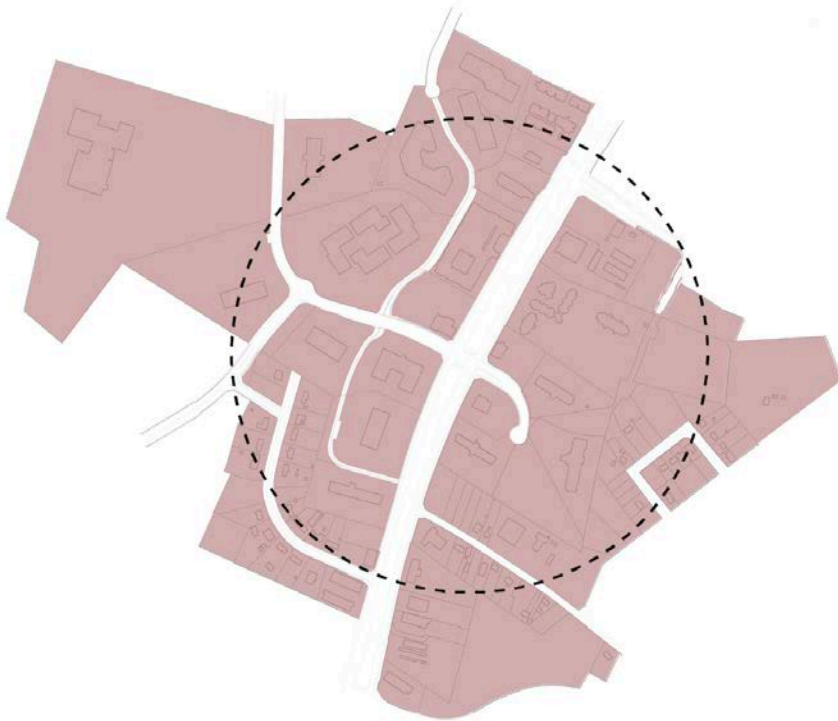
Courtesy of Mahima Parikh

McCullough Drive is reimagined as a signature main street with a new pedestrian focus and new five to seven-story buildings with street level retail or other active uses. Separated bike lanes provide safety to choice riders and connect University Place to McCullough Street Station and Shopping Center Drive.



Existing conditions

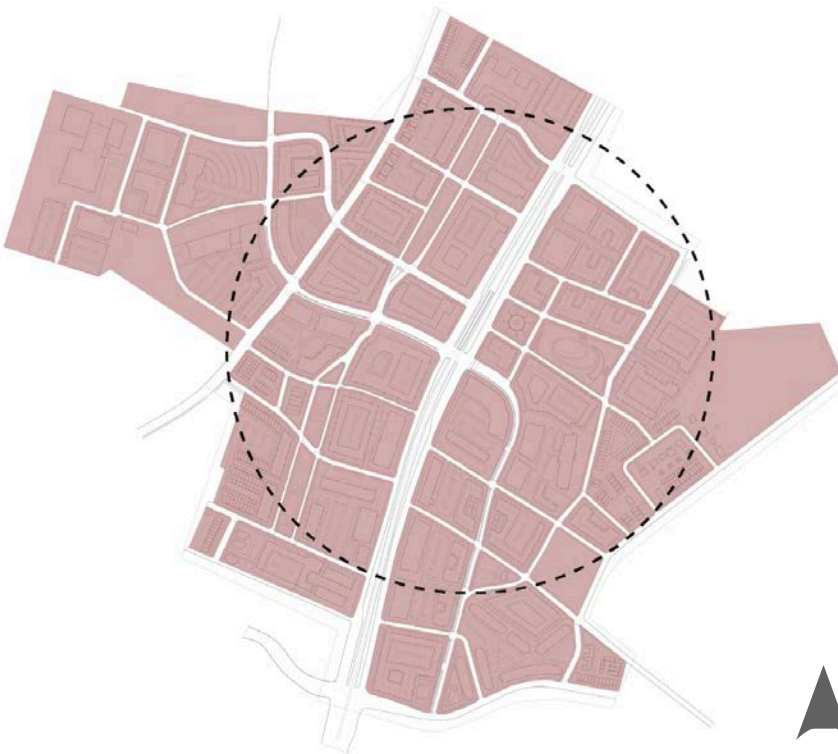
Existing Block Structure



These primary connections with McCullough and Ken Hoffman Drives, and an expanded street grid would allow for the introduction of a range of street types, create smaller blocks, and add more street frontage. The expanded network is designed to work around most of the existing buildings in University Executive Park, while also creating opportunities for signature and iconic moments.

The smaller blocks would also facilitate varied land uses and building types to accommodate changing market conditions. *The Urban Street Design Guide* by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) served as the basis for considering different types of streets.

Proposed Block Structure



Except on Tryon Street, most streets in SoHa would include on-street parking as it both reduces the amount of on-site parking required, and creates a safer pedestrian environment.

The new street typologies would also address the width of existing streets. For example, the too wide UEP Boulevard that runs in front of Verde, a new five-story, wrapped-deck apartment building, should be put on a road diet. The plan would reduce the street to a 20-foot wide, one-way street with on-street parking.

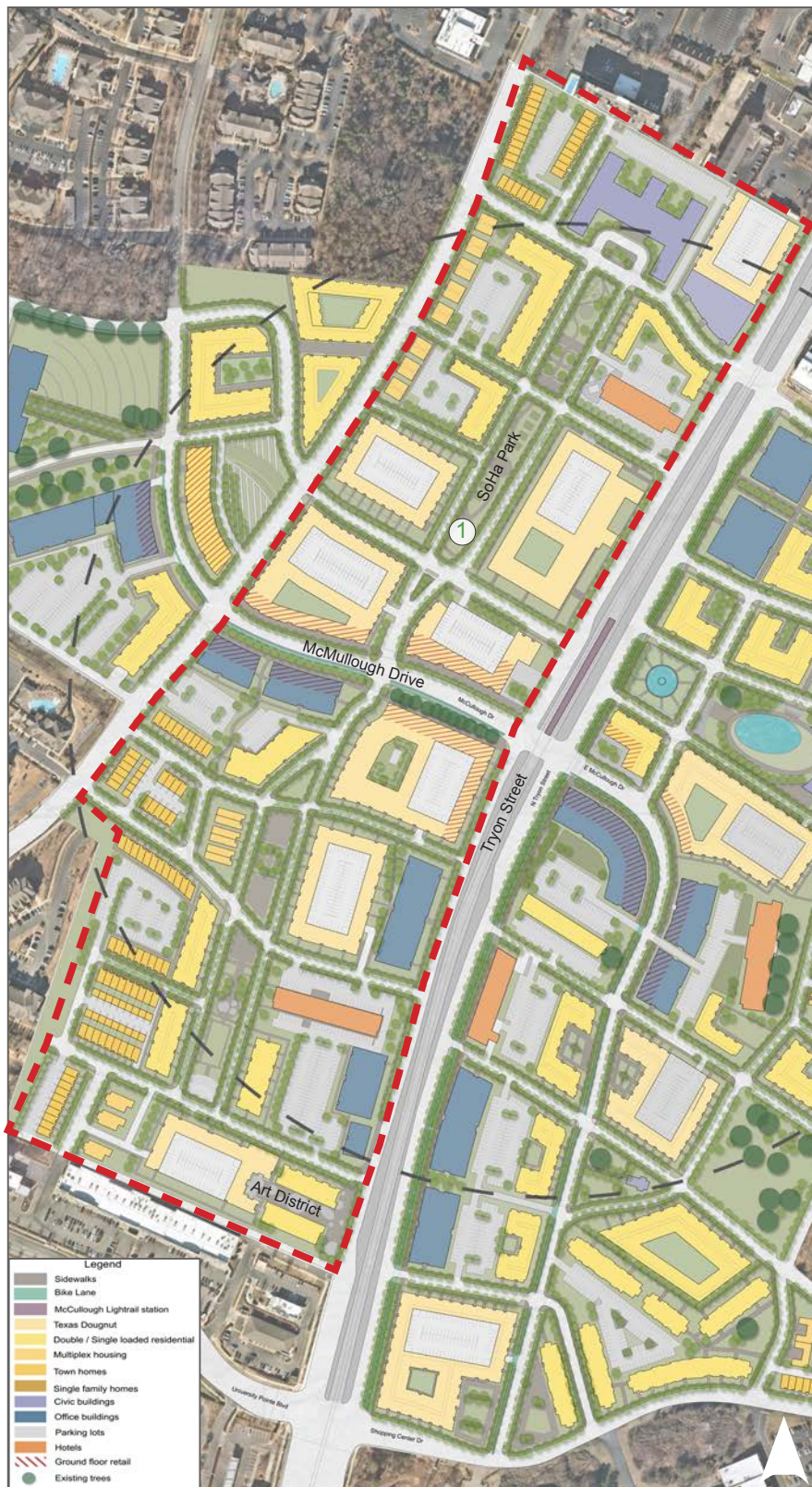


The Neighborhoods of SoHa



SoHa is divided into six distinct neighborhoods. The goal is that each neighborhood would have a unique character, a signature open space, and a mix of land uses and housing types, including a scattered site approach to affordable housing.

The Pier District



The largest neighborhood on the study site is the Pier District. It runs north to south the entire length of SoHa around SoHa Park (1), a linear, pier-like gathering spot. The park would contain both recreational opportunities and social gathering spaces to address the mental and physical well-being of local residents and office workers. The design of SoHa Park would also address the 2040 Plan goal of *Creating Safe and Active Communities*. By providing places to gather, whether it be for conversation or sport, the linear park would serve as both a magnet and a defining component of the Pier District.

The spatial precedents for SoHa Park were 9th Street in Charlotte's Garden District and Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. The design precedents for SoHa Park were New York City's linear parks, especially Piers 25 and 26 along the Hudson River. Their design illustrates how in a narrow sliver of land, a wide variety of recreational and gathering spaces can fit. Uses there include a sports court, dog park, outdoor table games like pool and ping pong, a playground, outdoor swings and sunbathing chairs.

Notably, the new SoHa Park would not substantially alter the amount of open space that now exists in the former University Executive Park. Rather, it would convert what are now simply scenic spaces into useable places. The shared open space might also lessen the need for each new residential building to have its own separate recreational facilities.

At the northern end of SoHa Park, a charter elementary school and satellite children's museum are proposed in hopes of attracting young families to the neighborhood. Shared parking would be provided for both these new uses in the wrapped deck of an adjacent apartment building.

Courtesy of Sol Cabero



Image depicting SoHa Park in front of the charter elementary school, children's museum and apartment building.

At the southern end of SoHa Park, an Arts Village is proposed in two small retail-oriented buildings that face Tryon Street. One building is a two-story brick building housing a hair salon and a clothing store, and the other is a one-story building housing Hibachi Express and a spa. The two buildings surround a small parking lot.

This SoHa Vision Plan reimagines this area as a place with artist studios surrounding a shared plaza. The buildings would be covered in murals that lead to the entryway of a six to seven-story parking-deck wrapped apartment building.

Courtesy of Makayla Binter

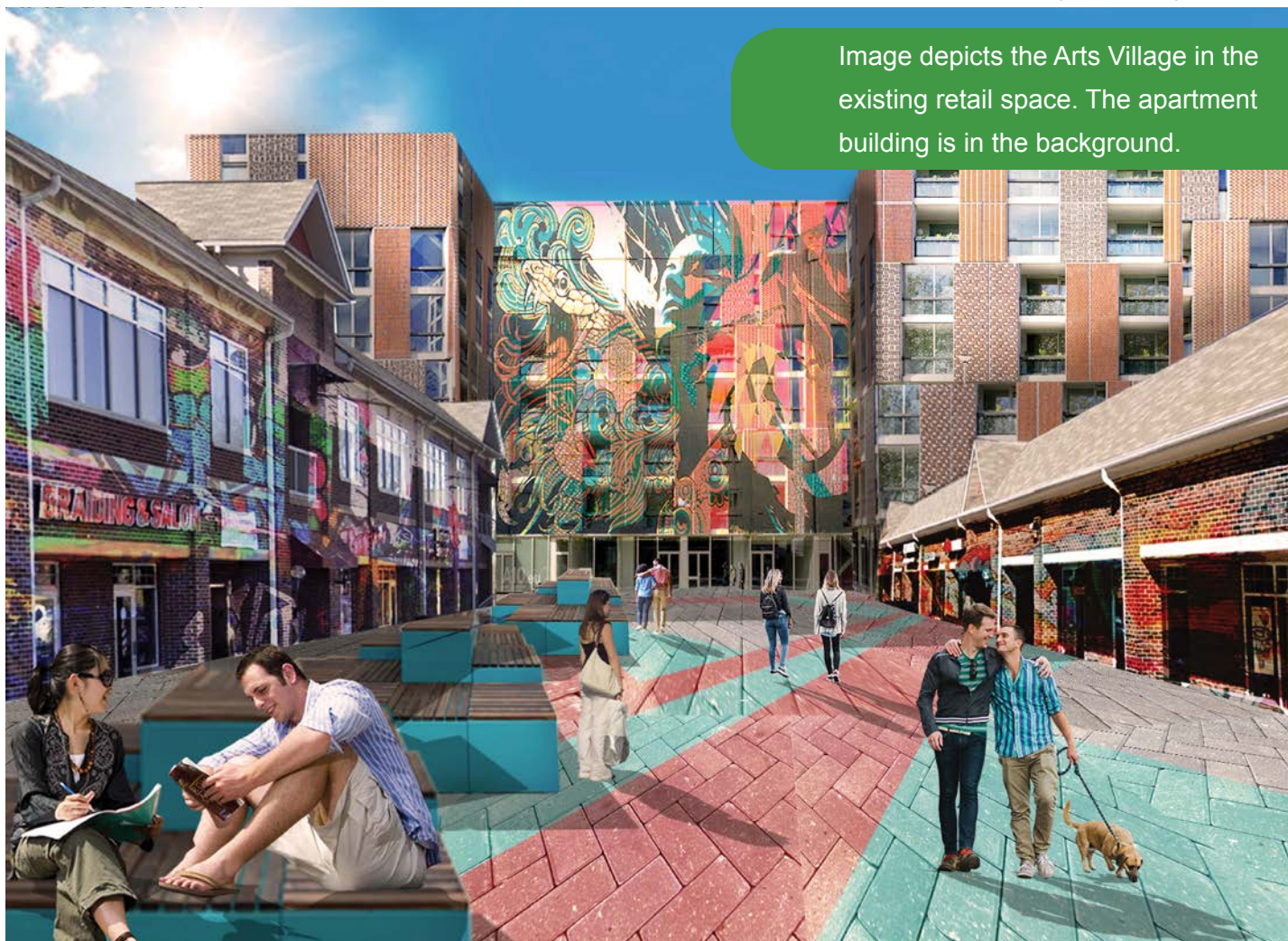


Image depicts the Arts Village in the existing retail space. The apartment building is in the background.

Homes lining the southern section of SoHa Park would share an artful vibe referencing their proximity to the Arts Village created at the end of the park. This character could be created in the repetition of stylized building types, brick patterns in the building, colorful paint accents, and murals. Greenery could be incorporated throughout the exterior of the buildings with living walls and rooftop gardens.

Image depicting SoHa Park with recreation amenities. Note the mural wall of the multifamily building in the background and shaded, wide sidewalks in the foreground.

Courtesy of Makayla Binter

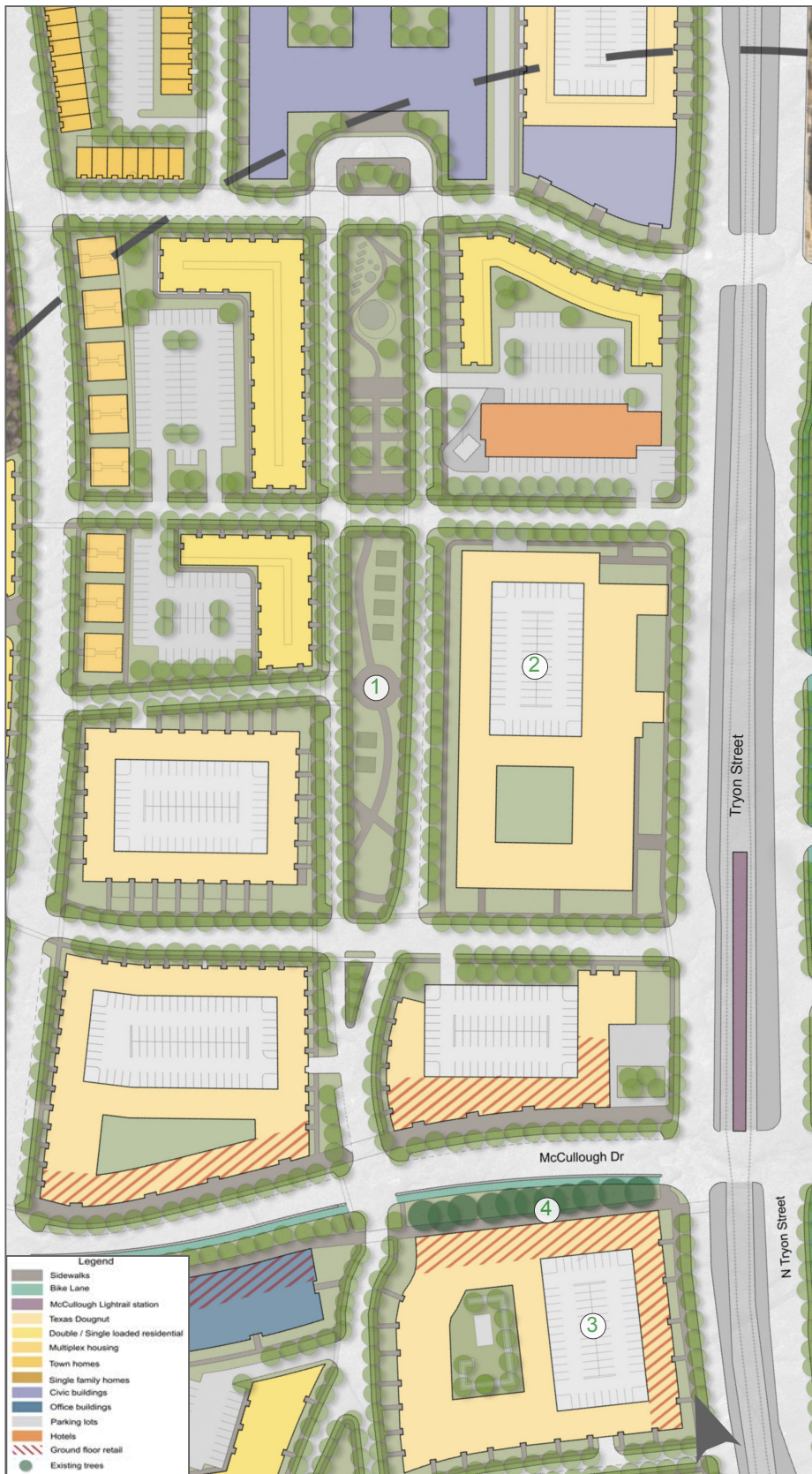




In the southern section of SoHa Park (1), a variety of residential buildings are proposed to surround it. The largest buildings would be five to seven-story apartment buildings, with residential units wrapping around a hidden-from-the-street parking decks (2). Additional not-to-exceed three-story missing middle housing units (3) would back up to Cortland Belgate, a rental complex that is composed of three-story walk-ups.

These new, potentially affordable units would replace some of the existing single-family homes that have been assembled into a much larger lot. Even though many of the original houses in the existing neighborhood appeared to be abandoned or in significant disrepair, it was important that more opportunities for affordable home ownership be created.

In that same vein, a non-profit or government entity could purchase and renovate the Extended Stay America-Charlotte hotel (4) on the south-eastern side of the neighborhood. This would create opportunities for additional affordable housing units. Perhaps, these could be set aside for working artists.



Tryon Street is located just to the east of SoHa Park (1). New buildings sited along Tryon Street should be located in response to the new Verde apartment building as it establishes a build-to line or datum (2).

Atapco has indicated their next likely project in UEP will be a wrapped-deck five to seven-story apartment building at the corner of Tryon Street and McCullough Drive (3). Currently, there is a one-story office building that they own on the site. While the building is well kept, its extremely low F.A.R. is incompatible with the goals of a more intensively developed TOD neighborhood.

Given its high visibility and location on McCullough Drive, this new building will set a design standard for SoHa. Thus, it has been designated the Cornerstone Building in this Plan. Its siting should establish a build-to line on McCullough Drive, with new buildings sited right up to the edge of the existing parking lots. Even with buildings in this location, the existing large canopy street trees could be saved and a wide sidewalk could be built behind them(4).



Image depicts retail activity spilling out onto a new wide sidewalk along McCullough Drive. Also note the new separated bike lane.

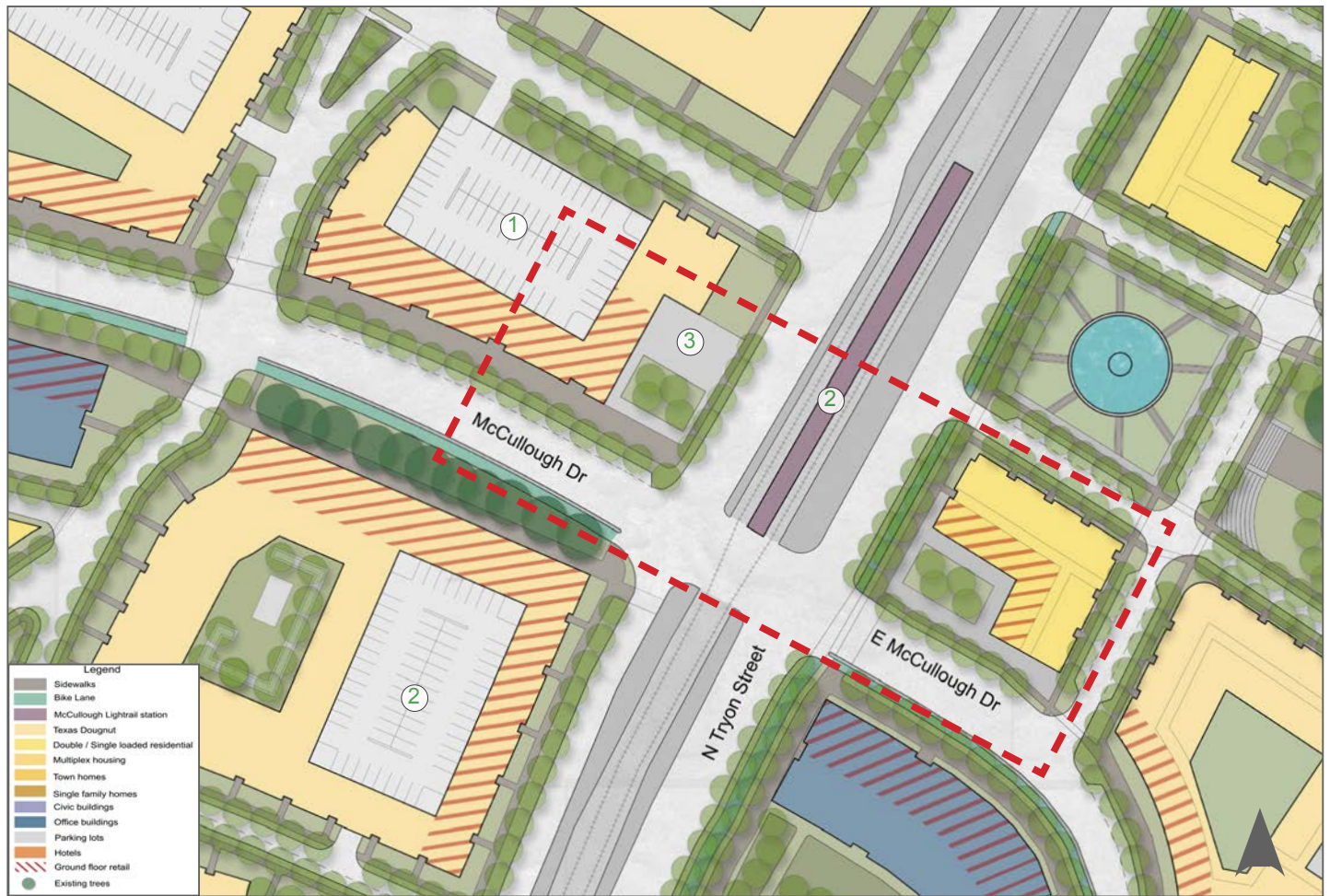
Courtesy of Jessie Cart

A new, wide sidewalk along McCullough Drive would allow the uses inside the buildings to spill out and activate the street, seeding the possibility of it becoming a pedestrian-oriented main street full of shops, restaurants and cafes. The residential units above the shops should then have abundant balconies to further activate the street.

With the primary building “front” of the Cornerstone Building being located along McCullough Drive, the second building “front” would then be located along North Tryon Street and its siting would establish a build-to line or datum for successive development.

This secondary front is a less than desirable location for more pedestrian-oriented retail because of the speed and volume of passing vehicles. Instead, generous entrances to ground level residential units should be located here to create a repetitive and active edge along North Tryon Street. However, it would be important to create a sense of privacy between the sidewalk and individual entrances. Along with establishing build-to lines and replicable edge conditions, the Cornerstone Building would serve as one of the four corners of a new neighborhood gateway that both surrounds the light rail station and bridges the east and west side of North Tryon Street.

Gateway West



The second corner of the Gateway West is located across the street on the north side of McCullough Drive. Currently, a one-story, stand-alone, vacant restaurant building is located here, and it is surrounded on three sides by parking lots (1). Given the site's immediate adjacency to the McCullough light rail station (2), the SoHa Vision Plan recommends a redevelopment of the site that would include an active and welcoming plaza (3) where the restaurant building now sits, surrounding a new five to seven-story primarily residential structure.

This new building, called Gateway West (1), would echo the conditions of the Cornerstone Building (2) in build-to lines, façade articulation, and adjacent sidewalk widths, but the retail plaza would set it apart. (3) Per William Whyte's guidelines for creating successful urban spaces, the plaza would include water, food, shade, and movable chairs. While providing a welcoming area with food/drink and shopping for people waiting for the light rail train to arrive, the plaza would also contain a mobility hub with a bikeshare station, a bike tool stand, and scooters to assist commuters in meeting their first mile/last mile challenge. This mobility hub aligns with the Charlotte's 2040 Plan's Goal of *Creating more Transit and Transit-oriented Development within Neighborhoods*.

The overall architectural character of the buildings lining the intersecting streets of McCullough Drive and Tryon Street should complement the existing office buildings because the old and new will co-exist for some time. Since all the original UEP buildings are clad in red brick, a sturdy ground-level brick base is recommended for new residential buildings to help create an identifiable district aesthetic.

Above the brick base, the SoHa Vision Plan recommends that the Tryon facing façade of Gateway West's would be adorned with a mural announcing and celebrating SoHa's healthy focus and hip character.

Courtesy of Robin Lowe-Skillern

Image depicting the retail and mobility hub at Gateway West. Note the building mural facing Tryon Street.



The Heart of SoHa

Just west of the northern Pier District, across from SoHa Park at the intersection of IKEA Blvd. and McCullough Drive, lies the Heart of SoHa.

As mentioned previously, IKEA Blvd. would be extended through the site and meet up with the realigned UEP Blvd. The existing tree-lined street section of IKEA Blvd., with paralleling bike lanes and on-street parking, would be continued as well. When the street extension is made, the traffic circle should be removed to provide a safer environment for pedestrians (1).

Currently, four single-story office buildings known by Atapco as *the Quad* are located on this site. While the Quad is well kept, its extremely low F.A.R. is incompatible with the goals of a TOD, and since the entire site is owned by Atapco, large-scale redevelopment will be quicker and easier than if the land had to be assembled.



The Heart of SoHa would feature a small, lively urban plaza tucked behind the buildings that line McCullough Drive (2) on pg 29). It, too, would be surrounded by ground level retail and abundant outdoor cafés. Drawing from The Durham Food Hall and Optimist Hall here in Charlotte for inspiration, the Food Hall would sit on the bottom floor of a residential building that looks out onto the tree-lined plaza (3) on pg 29).

Atlantic Station was the precedent for this area both in terms of enclosure and scale as both are about 38,000 sq. ft. in size.

Courtesy of Makenzie Elam

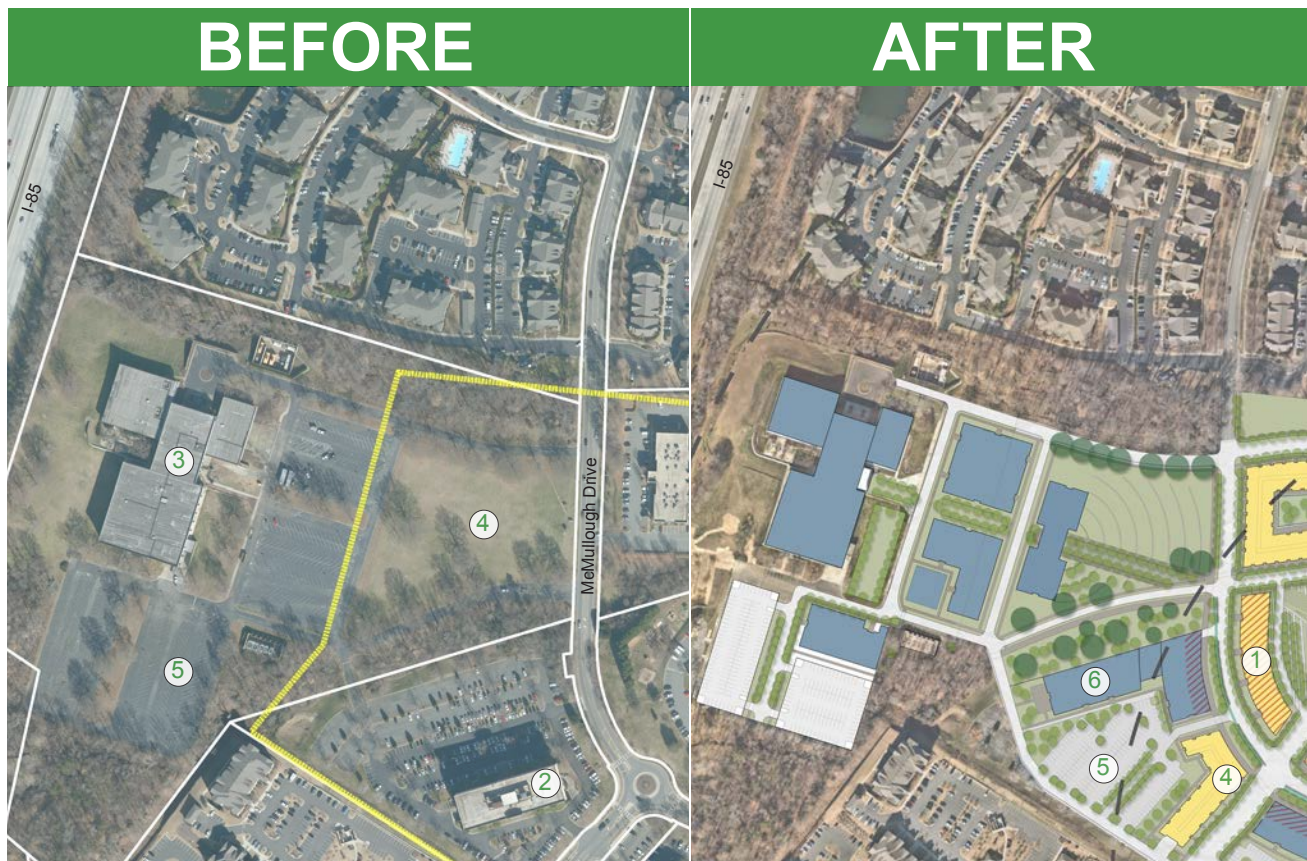


Image depicting the lively urban plaza at the center of the Heart neighborhood.

Corporate Headquarters Campus

Across McCullough Drive from the Heart of SoHa (1) is an area with the potential to become a Corporate Headquarters Campus. It would most likely occur in the later phases of project development, partially because the Atapco-owned portion of the site is currently occupied by what appears to be a well-leased, five-story office building (2). There would have to be substantial market demand to justify the redevelopment of the site, but its location, size, and visibility suggest its future potential, especially when combined with the adjacent, two to three-story Proximity Park Redevelopment (3), its expansive underutilized front lawn (4), and its even more abundant surface parking lots (5).

The recently renewed Proximity Park office building is sited near I-85, but its three-story height is too low to capitalize on its potential visibility from either the Interstate or at the end of the long green lawn on which it sits. However, the wide expanses of fairly hidden surface parking lots tucked in beside the building could easily accommodate large parking decks, if still needed in the future. The combined 34-acre site and its potential visibility from both I-85 and on the curve of McCullough Drive offers a signature opportunity. A new, 12-story office building could be sited on the Atapco property (6), along with additional buildings in Proximity Park. In addition, a slightly lower ten-story residential building could be located along IKEA Boulevard as a transition to the housing along IKEA Blvd. and McCullough Drive (4).



The ground floor of the office buildings fronting McCullough Drive would contain more retail space (4). Perhaps, a 10,000-20,000 sq. ft. grocery store could take up most of the space, since at least 6,500 new units of housing should have been completed in SoHa by the time this site is finally developed.

Surface parking for the grocery store and corporate campus could be located on the interior of the block. The area is large enough to accommodate a free-standing parking deck, if needed. Access to a loading area would be off McCullough Drive (5).

Courtesy of Sanaz Hosseini



Image depicting a grocery store on the ground floor of a new 12-story office building on McCullough Drive.

Gateway East

To the east of the Pier District, Tryon Street and the McCullough Light Rail Station would be the Gateway East (1). This area would be a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented, light-rail waiting space, created where McCullough Drive crosses Tryon Street. The five to seven-story massing for Gateway West buildings are mirrored here and given the same mural treatment on the primary south facing façade, which provides a backdrop to the tree-shaded, café laden, retail lined plaza below it (2).

Beyond the plaza, the redesigned McCullough Street and cycle track would extend for a few blocks into this re-imagined area (3), replacing the highway-oriented retail buildings currently housing a Verizon store and Showmars restaurant, with a more pedestrian-oriented main street.

With the proposed design, the hope is that the retail energy at Gateway West (4) would extend to Gateway East. But the latter would also be supported by the Lake District to the north (5), and the Hampton Neighborhood to the East (6).

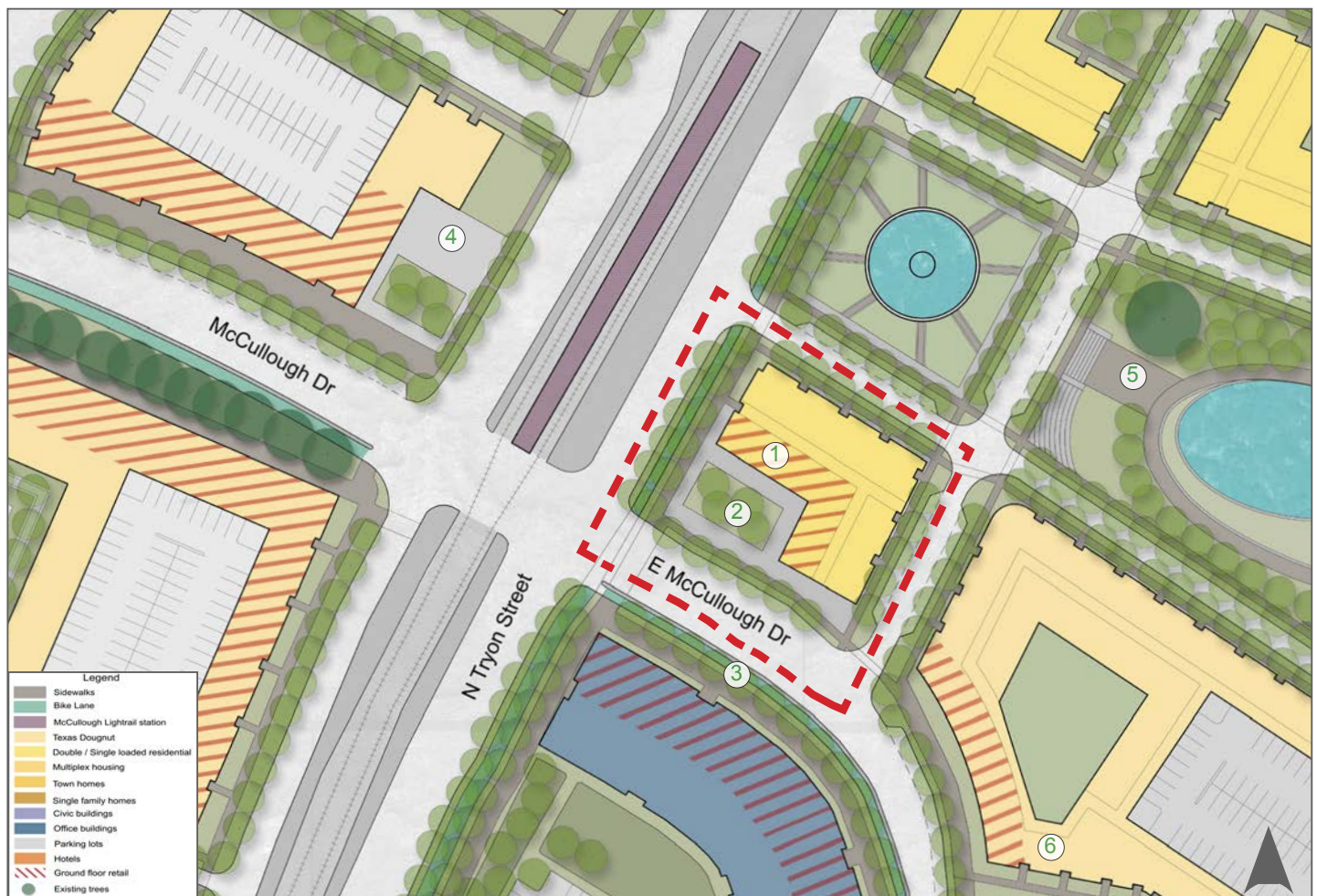




Image of Gateway East plaza looking towards the light rail line and Gateway West.

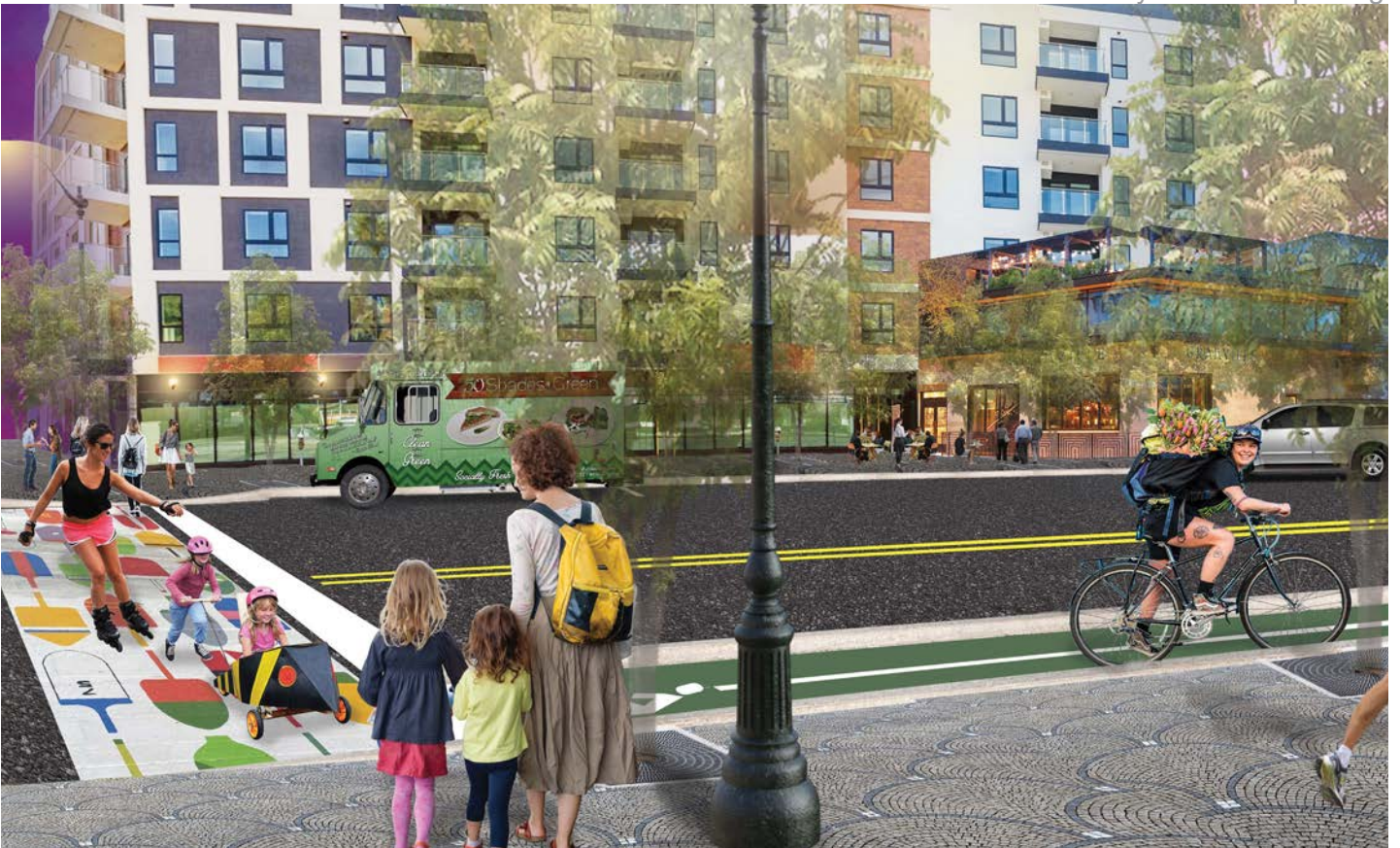


Image of Gateway West with ground level retail below multi-family housing.

Lake District

To the north of Gateway East is the Lake District. This neighborhood is bounded by the McCullough Commons Shopping Center (1); a small, low-density, single-family neighborhood consisting of 17 homes (2); and by a fire station (3) and police station (4). Street infrastructure is minimal here.

An improved street network and improved block structure would be created by extending East McCullough Drive to Shopping-Center Drive. Larger setbacks than in the other SoHa neighborhoods are proposed here, some up to 33 feet (5) on pg 36) to acknowledge the DNA of the adjacent single family neighborhood. However, repetitive, walk-up entrances to the first-floor residential units remain the same in hopes of creating an activated street edge. The next road extension would be Ken-Hoffman Drive across Tryon Street into the Pier District (6). This connection between east and west would also provide an alternative access route to the fire fighters stationed on Ken Hoffman Drive (3) and for the shoppers and diners needing to access McCullough Commons Shopping Center (1).





However, it should be noted that McCullough Commons (1), especially the lower portion of the development, is showing signs of decline with some empty big box stores, high restaurant turnover, and low-income tenants. While the SoHa Vision Plan did not contemplate the redesign of the shopping center, it could be the site into which University Hospital eventually expands.

Consequently, the SoHa Vision Plan suggests two 13-story office/medical buildings adjacent to McCullough Commons on Tryon Street (2). Their location would take advantage of the site's high visibility. The office pair could be similar in scale and siting to the Lending Tree buildings in Charlotte's South End.

But rather than leading to additional office space, this plan's spine passes by two seven-story, double-loaded residential buildings (8). Perhaps they would house elderly residents who would benefit by proximity to the medical offices, hospital, and nearby retail. The spine ends in a seven-story wrapped deck residential building where shared parking for the block would be located (9).

To the south of this office/residential block is an existing retention pond (10) on pg 36). While the pond's function should be retained, the SoHa Vision Plan reimagines it as the centerpiece for the Lake District Park, an inviting community gathering space with the potential of becoming what Jane Jacobs would call a *there there*. In contrast to SoHa Park, the Lake District Park would be more passive and social in its design.

Lower structures, including three-story townhomes, would be located behind the larger, park-lining buildings to create an appropriate transition to the existing single-family neighborhood near Washington Boulevard (1).

Courtesy of Matt Wilson



Courtesy of Javier Guillen



Image depicts the Lake District Park in the foreground with 5 to 7-story multi-family buildings behind.

Hampton Neighborhood

Just to the south of the Lake District is a neighborhood named for the New Hampton Presbyterian Church and cemetery that are currently located there (1). It appears that the church was once surrounded by a small but cohesive single-family neighborhood (2). Today, however, many of these homes have been abandoned and others are in a significant state of disrepair. Only a few of the homes appear to be occupied and cared for.

Similar to the Lake District, there are few streets here, so the extension of the pedestrian promenade along Tryon Street (3), and the extension of McCullough and East McCullough Drives to the Shopping Center Drive are defining elements in the neighborhood's design (4) on pg 39). Additional new streets running perpendicular between Tryon Street and past East McCullough Drive will create a new block structure, where one did not previously exist, to better connect Tryon Street to the land behind (5) on pg 39).



The new street grid would traverse the church property and respectfully wrap around the Hampton Church cemetery (6). This tree shaded area would be a signature urban open space in a re-imagined, more densely populated mixed-income neighborhood (7).

The housing surrounding the cemetery would be the largest in the neighborhood with a maximum height of seven stories to create a sense of enclosure.

Adjacent to the cemetery, where McCullough Drive and East McCullough Drive merge, is a new site for the church (8). This location will be more pedestrian-oriented and potentially help build the church's role in the community.

While residents of the Hampton neighborhood would have a range of incomes, there is opportunity for affordable housing throughout. The Country Inn and the Microtel Inn should be retained, purchased, and converted to affordable housing (3).

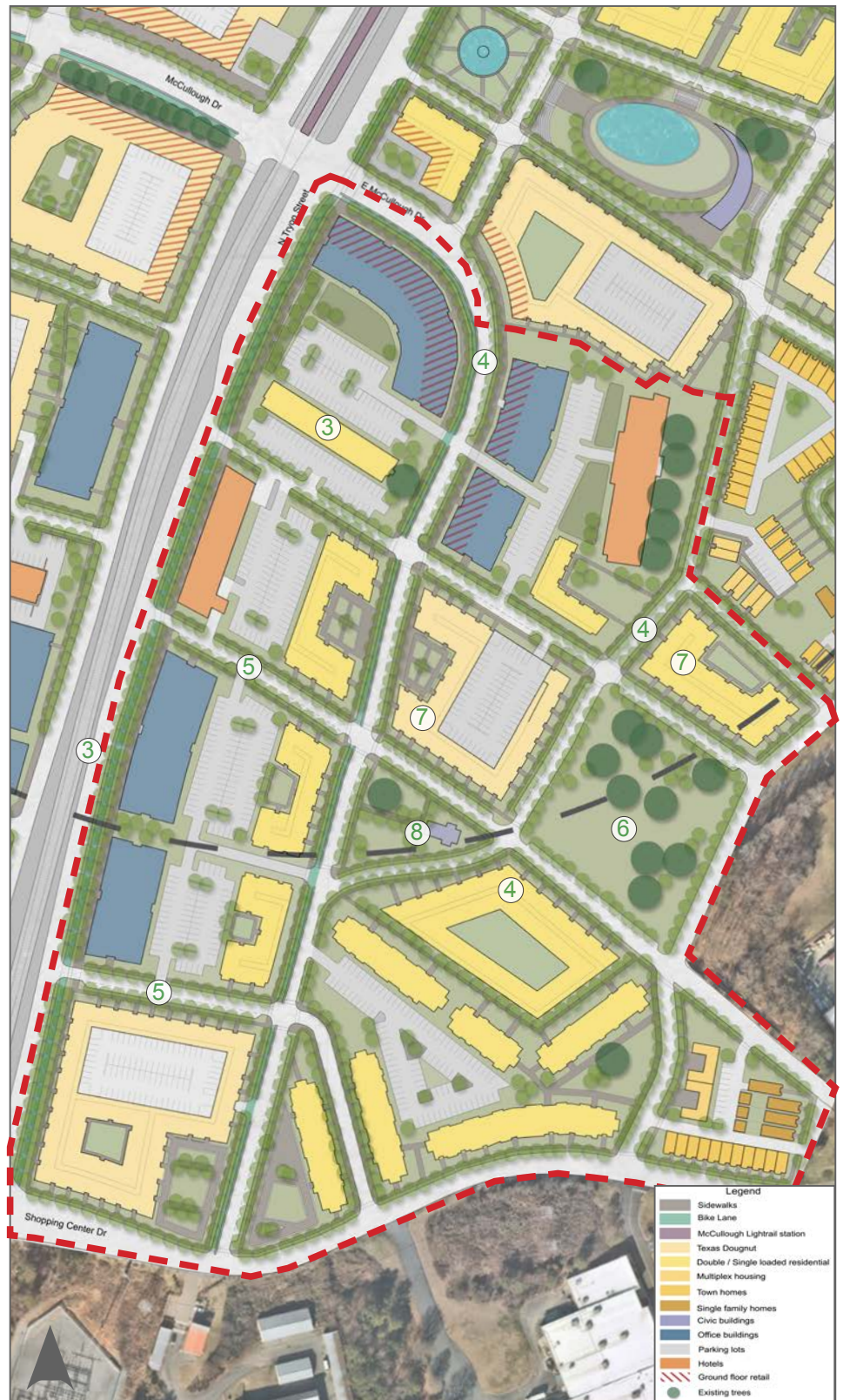




Image depicts new housing along the extension of McCullough Drive.



Image depicts the area surrounding the existing cemetery, reimagined as a contemplative place similar to Mt. Vernon Cemetery near Boston.

SoHa Massing and Notable Numbers



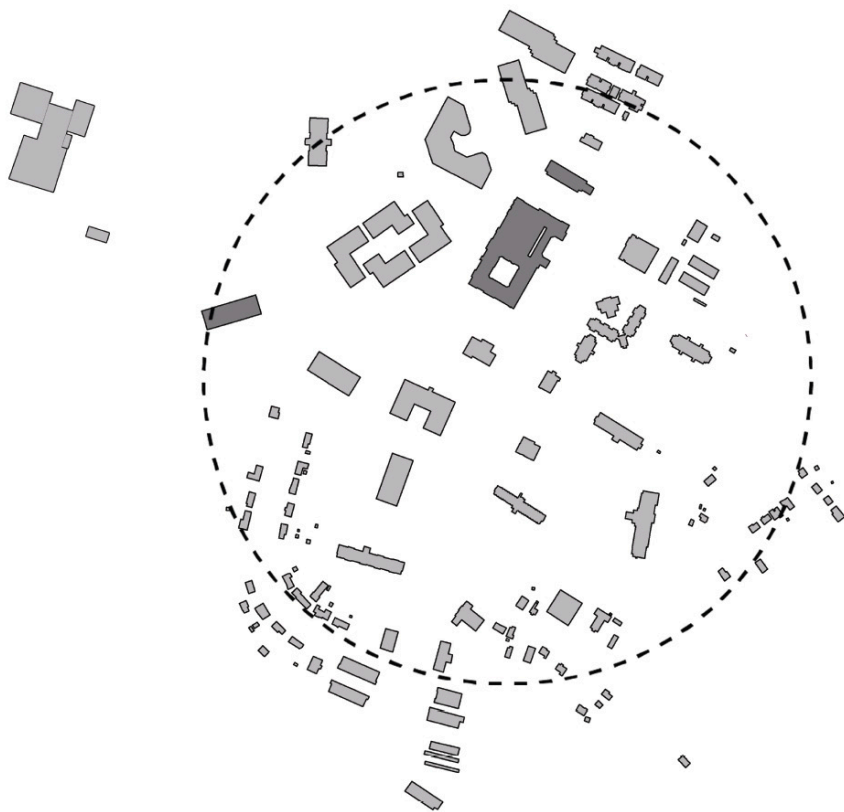
The height of buildings across SoHa would range from three to twelve stories. The Missing Middle Housing (townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, quads and three-story walk-ups) would be the lowest in height at just three stories. Most of these buildings would be located within the areas zoned TOD-TR zoning, that has a maximum height of 50 feet by right, and up to 75 feet with the bonus.

In the areas zoned TOD-CC, where the maximum height is 90 feet by right and 130 feet with bonus, the majority of the buildings are imagined as five-story, stick built construction, or seven-story buildings with a one to two-story concrete and masonry base.

Most new office buildings would likely be similar in height having seven to eight -stories with a 90 foot maximum, except in the Corporate Campus area where some of the buildings would likely reach the maximum of 130 feet, reflecting their later timing of the area's development and the potential visibility of the site from I-85 and as the focal point off McCullough Drive

A handful of other buildings might be equally tall, particularly those that are located in the expanded medical campus area near the intersection of Harris Blvd and North Tryon Street.

Existing massing



For the 193 acre site, the SoHa Vision Plan includes:

81 new buildings

- 3.5 million sq. ft. of new office space (vs 470,000 sq. ft. existing now)
- 6,524 new housing units (vs 307 existing today)
- 188,400 sq. ft. of new pedestrian-oriented retail space, which includes a 10,000-20,000 sq. ft. grocery store and an 11,500 sq.ft. food hall

14 acres of new usable open space

Proposed massing



Proposed Massing + Figure Ground Diagram

- 1-3 Stories
- 5-7 Stories
- 10 Stories or Above



Tactical Urbanism

Tactical Urbanism is a term coined by Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia in a book of the same name to describe low-cost, simple and short-term solutions intended to catalyze long-term urban transformation.

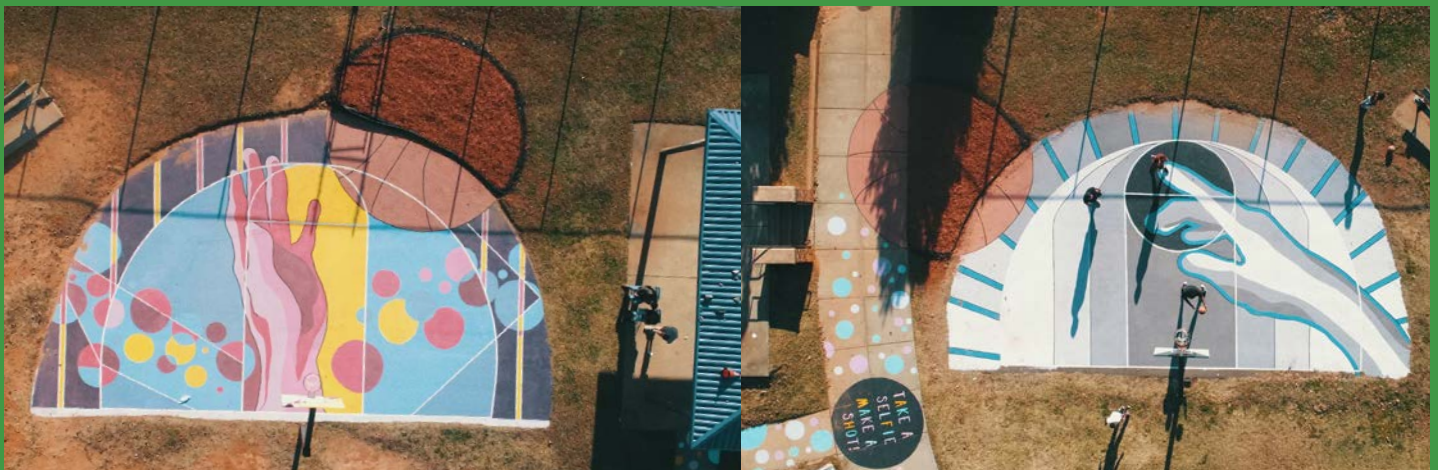
The holistic redevelopment proposed in the SoHa Vision Plan would be decades in the making, but small interventions now could have a profound affect in generating interest in and value to the area.

Tactical urbanism is a means of experimenting with some early branding options and could begin to redefine the development of SoHa as a hip and upcoming place. Projects could include pavement to plazas, pop-up cafes, food truck rallies, play streets, and of course, ground and building murals. What better use for an empty or outdated building than having it act as a canvas depicting the neighborhood's new life?

There are specific sites throughout SoHa that would provide early opportunities for Tactical Urbanism interventions. For instance, the abandoned sheds off of Ken Hoffman Drive could provide an ideal site for pop-up markets featuring holiday items, food, clothes, collectables, antiques, or art. But so could the parking lots in front of the existing office buildings in University Executive Park.

Pop-up neighborhood parks, featuring community gathering activities, could be created under the site's massive canopy trees, with the addition of outdoor table and lawn games, sand volleyball courts, and spectator seating.

These projects are the sort that the City's Placemaking Program, the Arts and Science Council, and Lowe's might support, and they are ones that UNC-Charlotte Master of Urban Design students would be more than happy to help implement.



Painted basketball courts at Charlotte's Alexander Park, a tactical urbanism project completed by UNCC MUD students 2021.

Strategies for the Future



1. Rebrand University Executive Park (UEP) as SoHa to signal its future as a vibrant, pedestrian/ bike-oriented, mixed-use neighborhood located south of Harris Boulevard.
2. Expand the street network and improve connectivity by extending Ikea Blvd. and Ken Hoffman Drive to UEP Blvd., and McCullough Drive to Shopping Center Drive and East McCullough Drive.
3. Remove the traffic circle on McCullough Drive to prioritize pedestrian safety.
4. Reconfigure McCullough Drive as a pedestrian and bike friendly main street. Save the large canopy trees along it and build a wide sidewalk right behind them.
5. Locate new buildings on McCullough Drive so that they abut the new sidewalk. Encourage active uses at street level in them.
6. Extend the planned separated bike lane in University Place across Harris Blvd. and along the entire length of McCullough Drive to Shopping Center Drive.
7. Extend the proposed pedestrian promenade along Tryon Street in University Place across Harris Blvd. to Shopping Center Drive.

8. Design a signature gateway with a mobility hub surrounding the light rail station at the intersection of Tryon Street and McCullough Drive.
9. Configure SoHa so that it contains five distinct but connected mixed-use neighborhoods. Each should have a signature public open space.
10. Create a heart in SoHa where the UEP Quad is currently located. Surround an active plaza with housing and consider placing a food hall in the building that would face McCullough Drive.
11. Create a linear greenspace in the Pier District that features recreational amenities below the site's large canopy trees. It should be anchored by an Arts District to the south and a charter school and children's museum to the north.
12. Reconfigure the existing retention pond as the center piece in a new public park that extends to Tryon Street.
13. Surround the existing cemetery with housing so that it can be used as a passive, public open space.
14. Create a corporate campus opportunity by assembling the five-story Atapco office building with the Proximity Park Redevelopment.
15. Intersperse different types of housing throughout the site. Parking deck wrapped Texas donuts should be located immediately adjacent to missing middle, more affordable housing.
16. Seek public support to convert some of the existing highway-oriented and/or long-term motels into affordable housing.

