

City of Charleston

DESIGN DIVISION

REPORT 11

NORTHBRIDGE GATEWAY



NOVEMBER 2020

NORTHBRIDGE - CHARLESTOWNE GATEWAY

November 2020

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WELCOME

This is a community-based urban design concept for one of several major intersections and redevelopment nodes in West Ashley. An abandoned grocery store site and its surrounding roadways (known as the “suicide merge”) will be reworked as a mixed-use development.

CITY OF CHARLESTON

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SPECIAL THANKS

West Ashley Revitalization Commission

Urban Land Institute, South Carolina Chapter

Charleston County Transportation Planning

Clemson Architecture Center in Charleston

Propeller Aerial



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Suburban Retrofit at a Civic Gateway

One of West Ashley’s most important and widely-discussed gateway sites is the Northbridge Gateway, also known as the “old Piggly Wiggly.” The triangular site is located at a major intersection with an alternative merge condition, with yet another local nickname: the “suicide merge.” A sequence of major events spurred City ownership of the property and our team’s involvement in multiple-year civic design process. These include: a proposal for a large gas station unfavored by the community, City acquisition of the property, the creation of Plan West Ashley, and an effort by Charleston County to redesign and improve the alternative merge intersection.

Our role in this project was to facilitate community engagement, coordinate with the emerging roadway plans, and create a vision to prepare the site for a public-private redevelopment partnership. Our team launched an online survey, engaged with Clemson University architecture students, brought in the Urban Land Institute, and held numerous coordination and public meetings. The best part of the engagement was creating an open studio, where residents wrote their vision on a yellow piece of paper and we drew up the master plan right in front of them. This demonstrated a true willingness to hear their ideas, which actually shaped the vision for the project.

The final outcome is a simple but effective urban design scheme, where new 1-2-story buildings occupy and front onto each of the triangle’s three corners. A well-connected and landscaped surface parking lot is located in the middle of the site, with ample access from all surrounding roadways. The building at the apex triangle contains a civic-use building and should be an iconic work of architecture creating a gateway effect from the north. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the new development fronts onto a City-owned street called Sumar Street, calling for streetscape improvements and encouraging good urban frontage from the shopping center to the south of the site.

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SITE LOCATION



EARLY PLANS

The site, major roadway and surrounding area has long been envisioned for a walkable mixed-use revitalization. These images are from an "Old Charlestowne District Charrette" in 2002.



SITE MAP

The triangular shaped City-owned parcel is the subject site, but urban design options were explored for surrounding sites as well.

- 1** Subject site (2.65 acres)
- 2** Alternative merge area (coordinated redesign with Charleston County)
- 3** Sumar Street (City-owned street)
- 4** Neighboring commercial properties suitable for redevelopment
- 5** Planned extension of Sumar Street to Orange Grove Rd.



EXISTING CONDITIONS

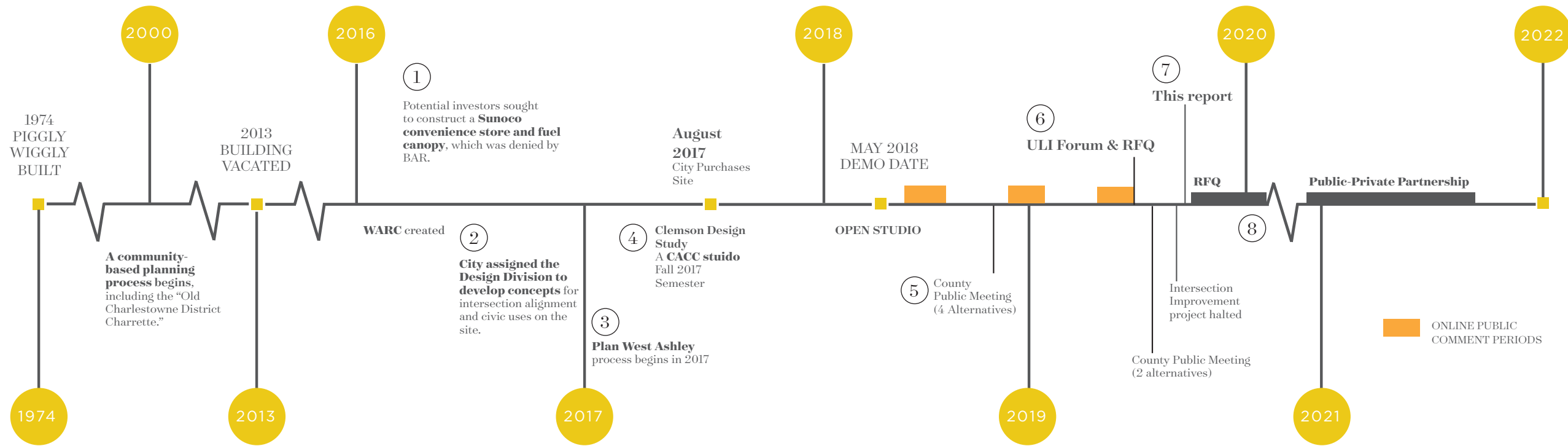


The former grocery store building was demolished in May 2018.



Existing condition of the alternative merge intersection in front of the site.

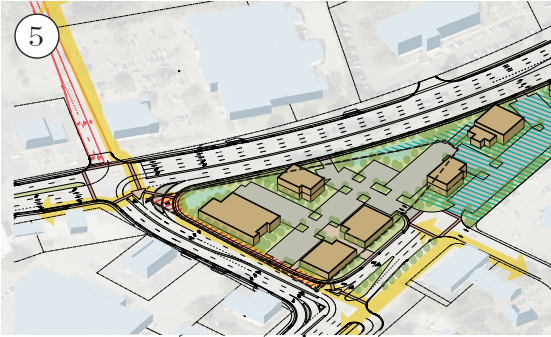
PROJECT TIMELINE



1 Gas station proposal submitted to Design Review Board. Public opposition results in intervention.



3 Plan West Ashley consultants develop possible urban design configurations as part of planning process.



5 Design Division develops massing studies in coordinated response to County-led major intersection redesign.



7 Design Division able to create this concept following County's decision to pursue modest roadway improvements.



2 City of Charleston acquires site. Design Division conducts initial sketch design for public use.



4 Clemson Architecture Center in Charleston conducts academic design studio study.



6 Design Division develops numerous design options on interchangeable tiles for ongoing engagement.



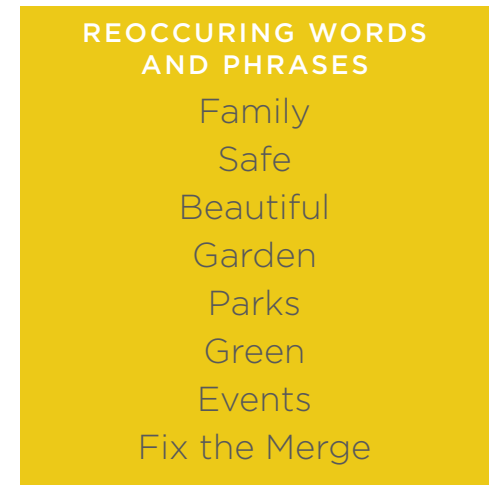
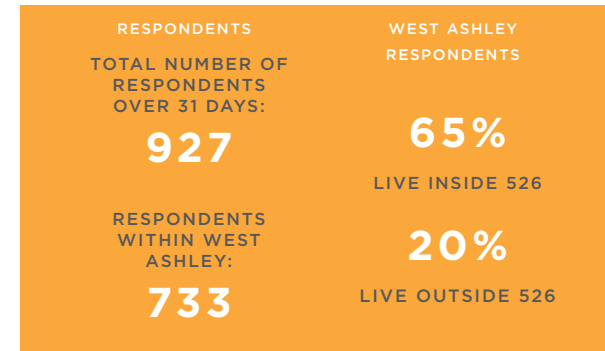
8 Design response from selected development team (not exactly as conceived but still a good design.)

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



The public conversation around this site and its potential future was multifaceted and robust. As stated previously, the City and County worked together on the design of the intersection while the City led the outreach effort for the site itself. The images here are from several engagement events. Our team launched the online survey, hosted a multi-day open studio, engaged the Urban Land Institute and presented the final design to the West Ashley Revitalization Commission and Charleston City Council.

SURVEY RESULTS

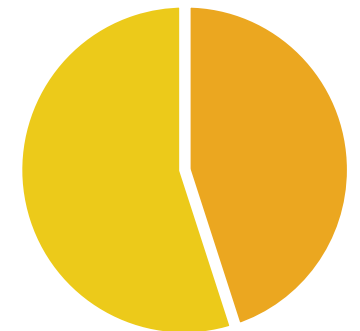


Top 3 Responding Neighborhoods

- 90 Northbridge
- 69 Sandhurst
- 40 Parkshore

Should the speed limit be lowered?

55% **YES** 45% **NO**



What should go there?

- 61% Passive Park
- 50% Small-Scale retail
- 49% Restaurant

What matters most? Top 3 Responses

72% “The Site should be **safe** for people **walking, biking, driving, and walking** transit.

68% The site should include **landscaping, street trees, and other beautification** elements.

46% The intersection should be improved to allow as many **cars** as possible to travel as **quickly** through the area as possible.

CASE STUDIES

Similar redevelopments across America

Community input pointed towards a modest-scale development featuring buildings that would “hold the corner” and accommodate a mixed-use town center type program.

FRESHFIELDS VILLAGE

Kiawah Island, SC

The nearby mixed-use village contains many 1- and 2-story buildings of a wide, yet locally appropriate, buildings and uses. The buildings front onto the main walkable streets and central square and have ample parking in the back. The variety of architectural forms, especially those that are two stories, have a height, scale and mass that would fit well onto the Northbridge site. The manner in which building facades are differentiated gives visual interest and helps with giving them a human-scale. The ground floors are activated with retail and restaurants.

Another key feature of this development is the central square that hosts programmed civic events. This enlivens the area and helps support the adjacent businesses. As you read on in the report, try to imagine any three of these buildings placed along Sumar, Old Town and Sam Rittenberg and also picture an active, central square on the site.



GRACE & GRIT

Mt. Pleasant, SC

This building was studied because of the way it “holds the corner” with interesting architecture (design, massing, orientation, etc.) that is appropriate to suburban revitalization. The building is part of a mixed-use complex that includes retail, office and a hotel. It activates the area along the street as well as the internal parking lot. A building like this would go well on the Northbridge site.



STONEFIELD

Charlottesville, VA

While not a local example, this mixed-use development in suburban Charlottesville is another example of what can be done on the Northbridge site. While many of the buildings are single-story, they are designed to activate the public realm and are just tall enough to be of an appropriate scale for the Northbridge site.

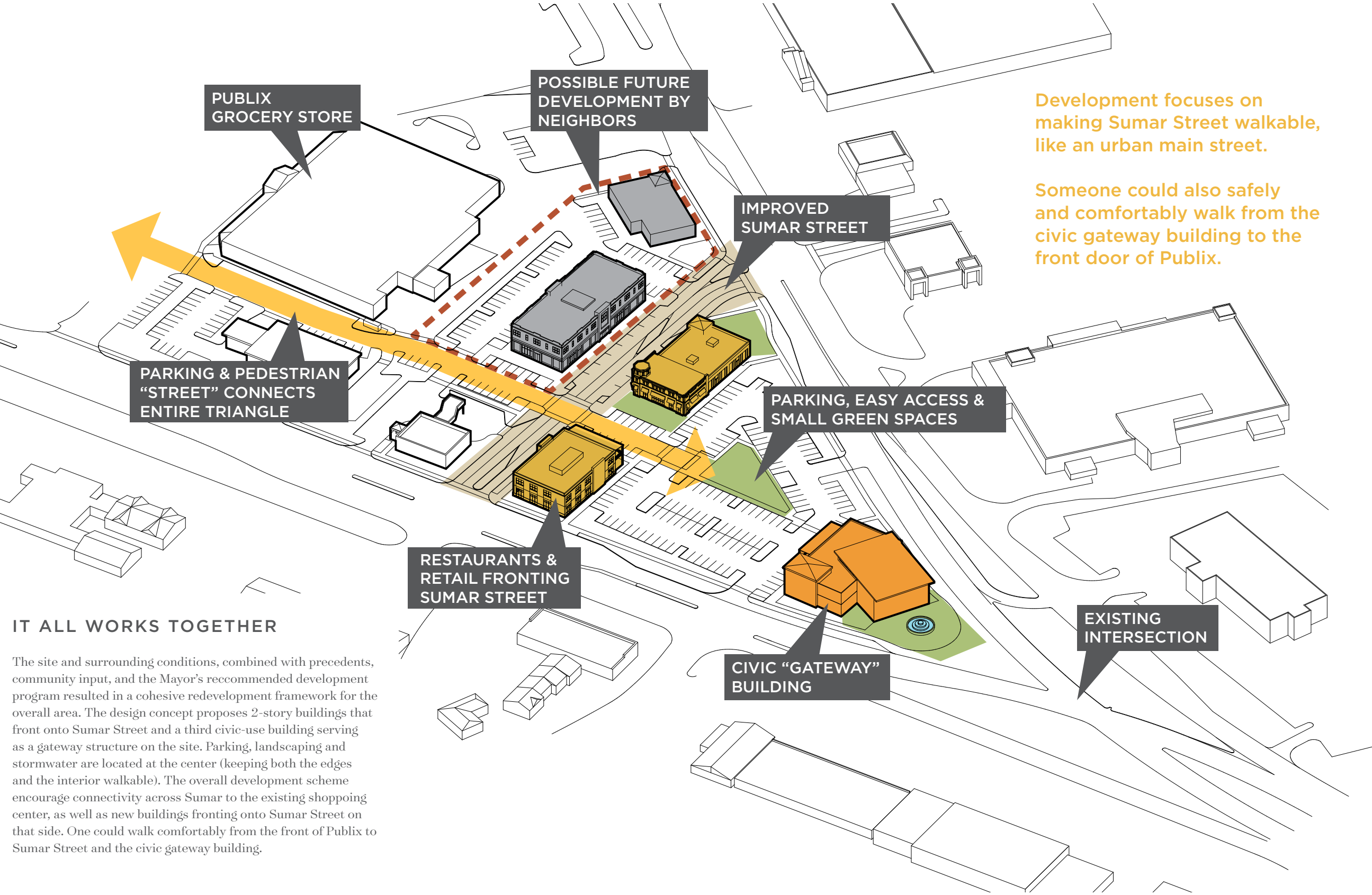


IMAGE SOURCE: <http://andrewshurtleff.photoshelter.com/image/I0000e5cCy3Sn14s>



IMAGE SOURCE: http://andrewshurtleff.photoshelter.com/image/I0000tU00L_Jyn9w

REDEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



Development focuses on making Sumar Street walkable, like an urban main street.

Someone could also safely and comfortably walk from the civic gateway building to the front door of Publix.

IT ALL WORKS TOGETHER

The site and surrounding conditions, combined with precedents, community input, and the Mayor’s recommended development program resulted in a cohesive redevelopment framework for the overall area. The design concept proposes 2-story buildings that front onto Sumar Street and a third civic-use building serving as a gateway structure on the site. Parking, landscaping and stormwater are located at the center (keeping both the edges and the interior walkable). The overall development scheme encourage connectivity across Sumar to the existing shopping center, as well as new buildings fronting onto Sumar Street on that side. One could walk comfortably from the front of Publix to Sumar Street and the civic gateway building.

STUDY AREA PLAN



NORTHBRIDGE GATEWAY REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 1** Civic building
- 2** Parking & green space
- 3** Retail / restaurant
- 4** Restaurant (Possible 2nd Story Office)
- 5** Improved Sumar Street
- 6** Possible Future Development Along Sumar (Adjacent Property)
- 7** Parking Behind Building (With Buffer Along Grocery Store)
- 8** Improve/Increase Parking And Pedestrian Access
- 9** Improved Shopping Center Entrance & Signage Area
- 10** Sidewalks, Crosswalks And Other Pedestrian Amenities



MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT

The simple, yet effective, site configuration places 1-2 story buildings on each of the three corners of the site. This leaves minimal surface parking exposed to the sidewalk and roadway along the site perimeter, helping to emphasize walkability and positive revitalization. The parking area is well-landscaped and connected.

SUBJECT SITE PLAN



NORTHBRIDGE GATEWAY REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

- 1** Plaza with landscape buffer and a fountain
- 2** Civic building fronting onto plaza
- 3** Sidewalks connect to public sidewalk network
- 4** Central green space for events or stormwater
- 5** Deceleration lanes provide good access.
- 6** Thick tree and landscape buffer along roadway
- 7** Small plaza with shade trees and retail frontage.
- 8** Covered outdoor patio for restaurant dining.
- 9** Sumar street with landscaped median
- 10** Parallel parking on sumar street
- 11** Complete intersection with curb extensions and crosswalks
- 12** Pedestrian refuge island, crosswalks and turn lanes



CIVIC GATEWAY BUILDING

A building with a civic use is planned to anchor the gateway. It will be highly visible to those entering West Ashley from the north. While the detailed design remains to be developed with partner teams (see also the concept on the previous page), the building should be stately, handsome and of the highest level of architectural massing and materials.

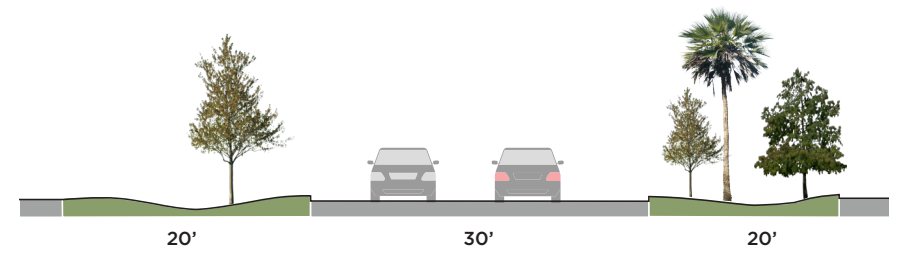


SUMAR STREET

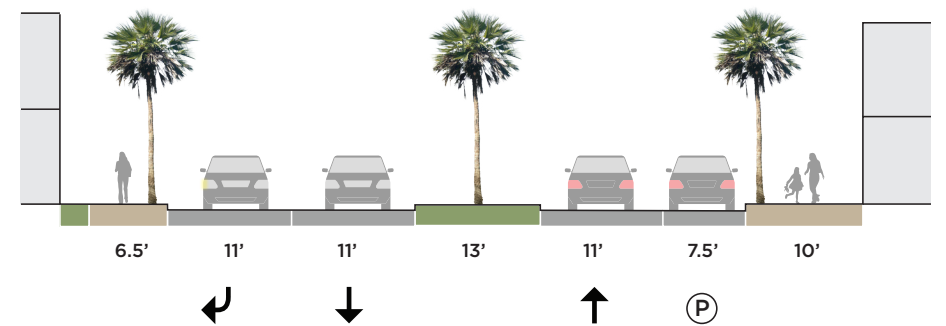
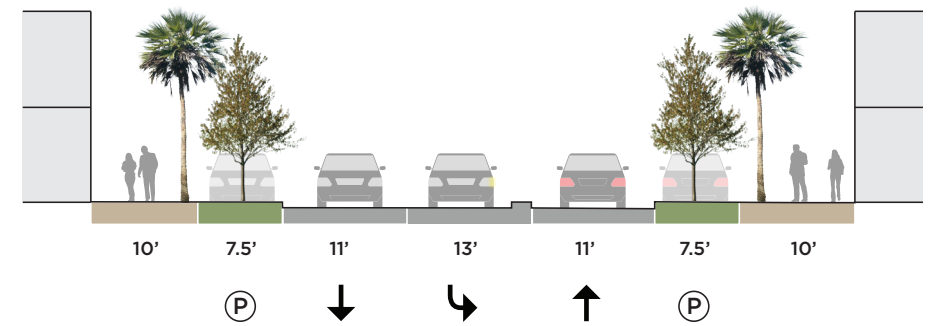
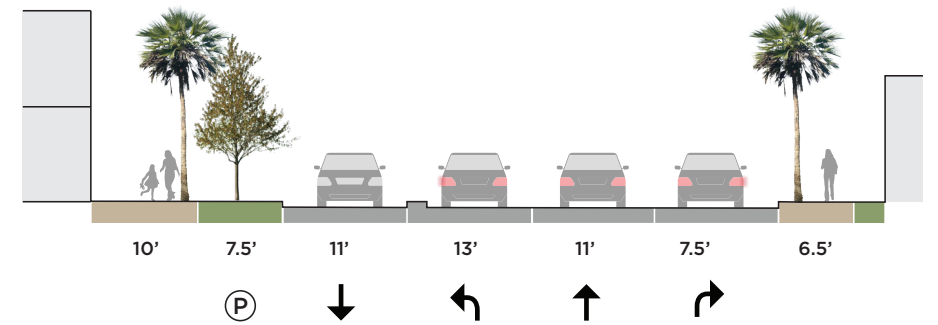
Sumar is controlled and maintained by the City of Charleston (not the State Department of Transportation). Thus, it can be designed to be of the highest multimodal and beatification standards. The street can be transformed into a type of “main street” with buildings and shops fronting onto it along both sides. It can have wide sidewalks, landscaping, crosswalks, curb extensions, medians, and other safety and comfort elements.

While the City does not control the development to the north, it is possible to positively incentivize that side to mirror the walkable building frontage, massing and orientation proposed on the City parcel. This will be much easier if the street is well-designed, giving the neighbors something to want to face with their new infill buildings.

EXISTING CONDITION



PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS





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