

Civic Legacy

Reimagining the Civic Center Site

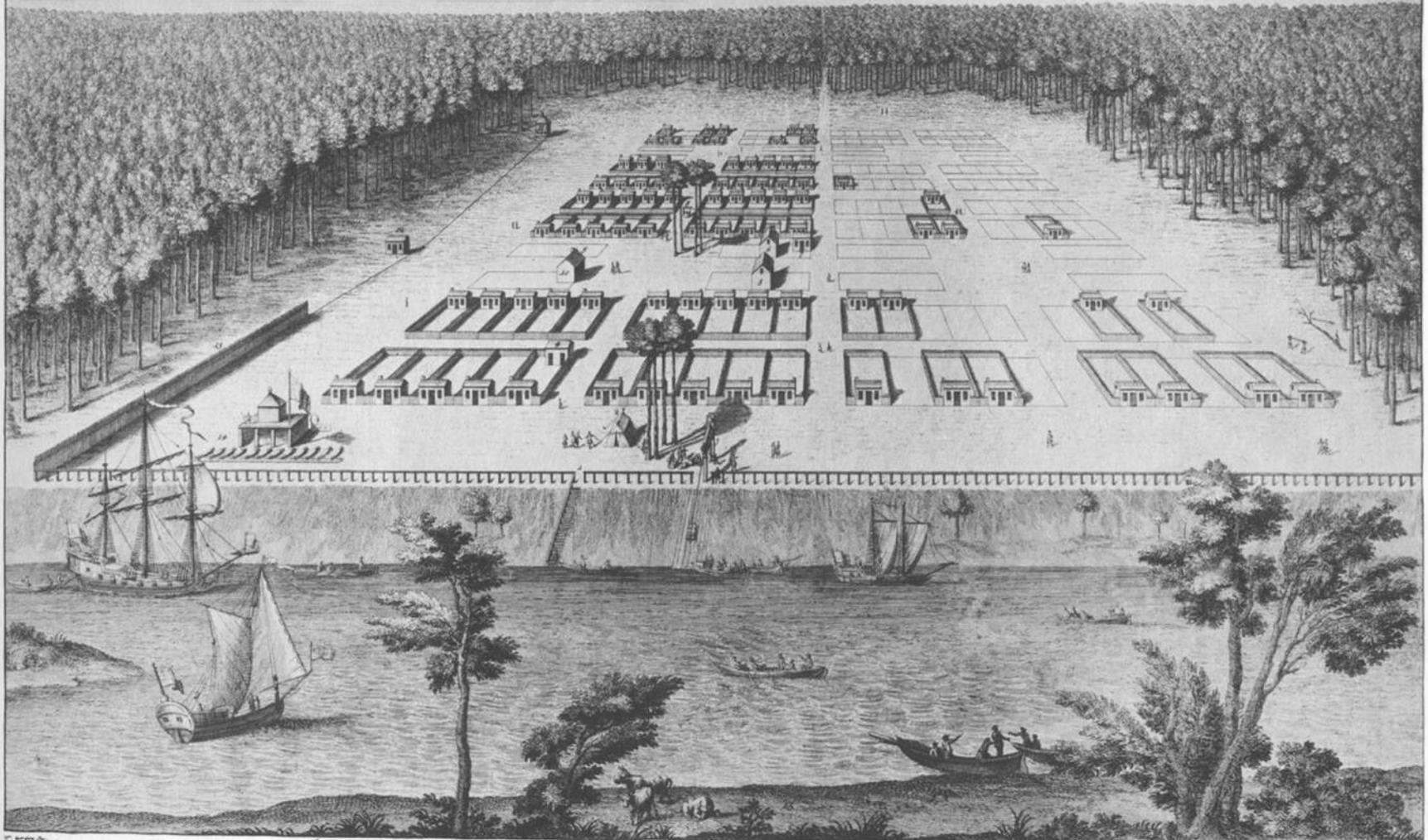
Public Engagement Session - October 2025

A photograph of a tree-lined sidewalk. The sidewalk is paved and runs alongside a road. On the left side of the sidewalk, there are several black street lamps with glowing yellow lights. The trees are large and mature, with dense green foliage. In the foreground, there are bushes with small pink flowers. The overall scene is a quiet, well-maintained urban or suburban street.

History of the Site

History of the Site...

In the Beginning...

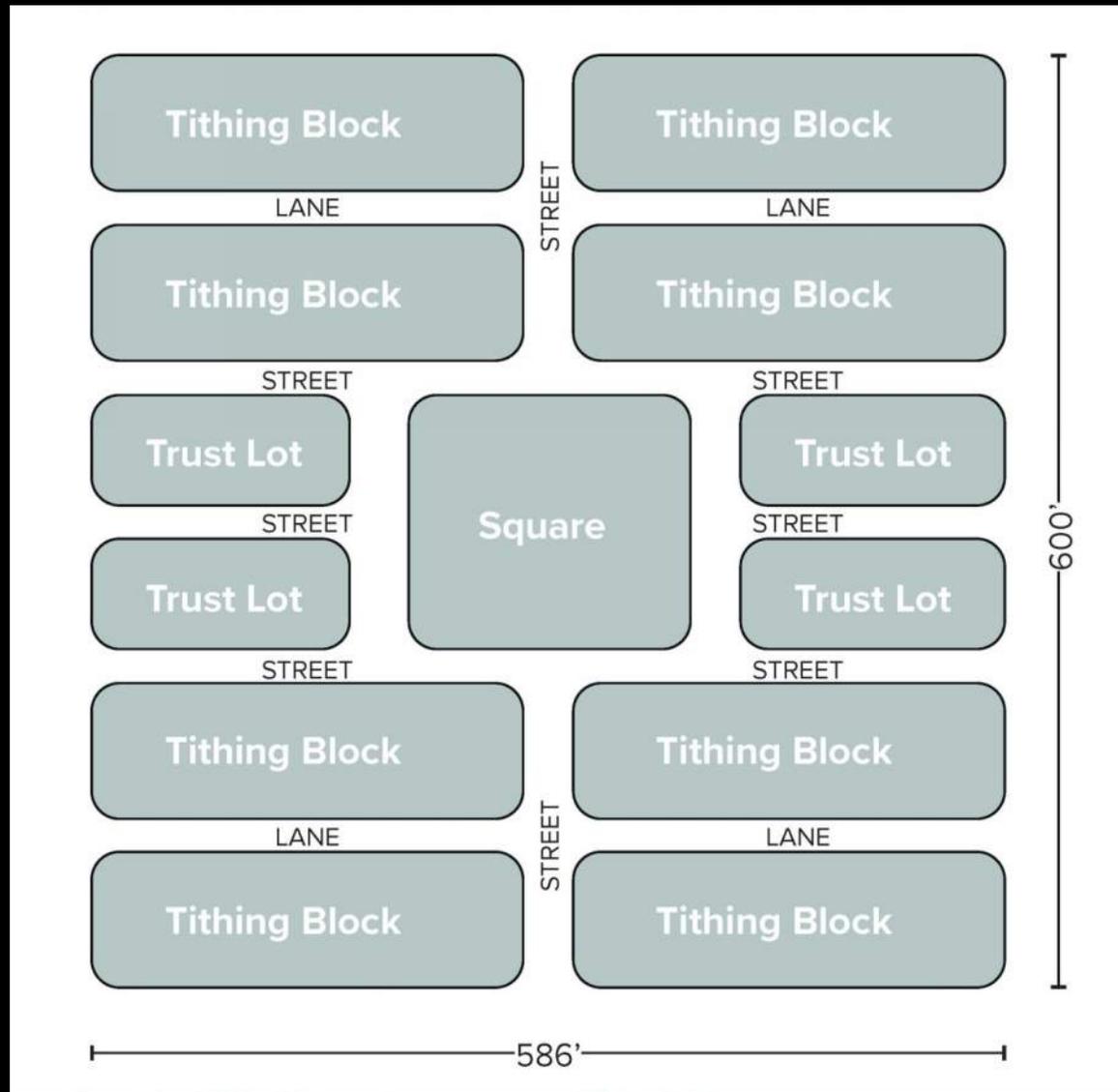


1. The Mills going up.
2. Mr. Oglethorpe's Tomb.
3. The Crane & Bell.
4. The Tavern & Court House.
5. The publick Mills.
6. The House for Strangers.
7. The publick Oven.
8. The draw Well.

To the Hon.^{ble} the Trustees for establishing the Colony of Georgia in America
 This View of the Town of Savannah is humbly dedicated by their Honours

Obliged and most Obedient Servant:
 Peter Gordon

9. The Lot for the Church.
10. The publick's Store.
11. The Fort.
12. The Barrack House.
13. The Pallisades.
14. The Guard House and Battery of Cannon.
15. Hutchinsons Island.



Historic Ward Structure



1733



1735



1790



1799



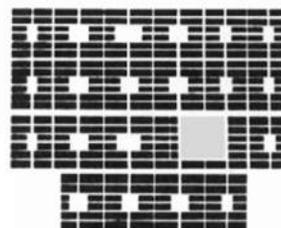
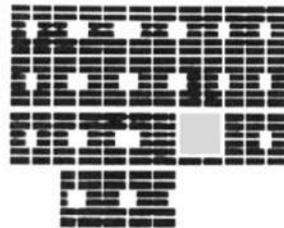
1801



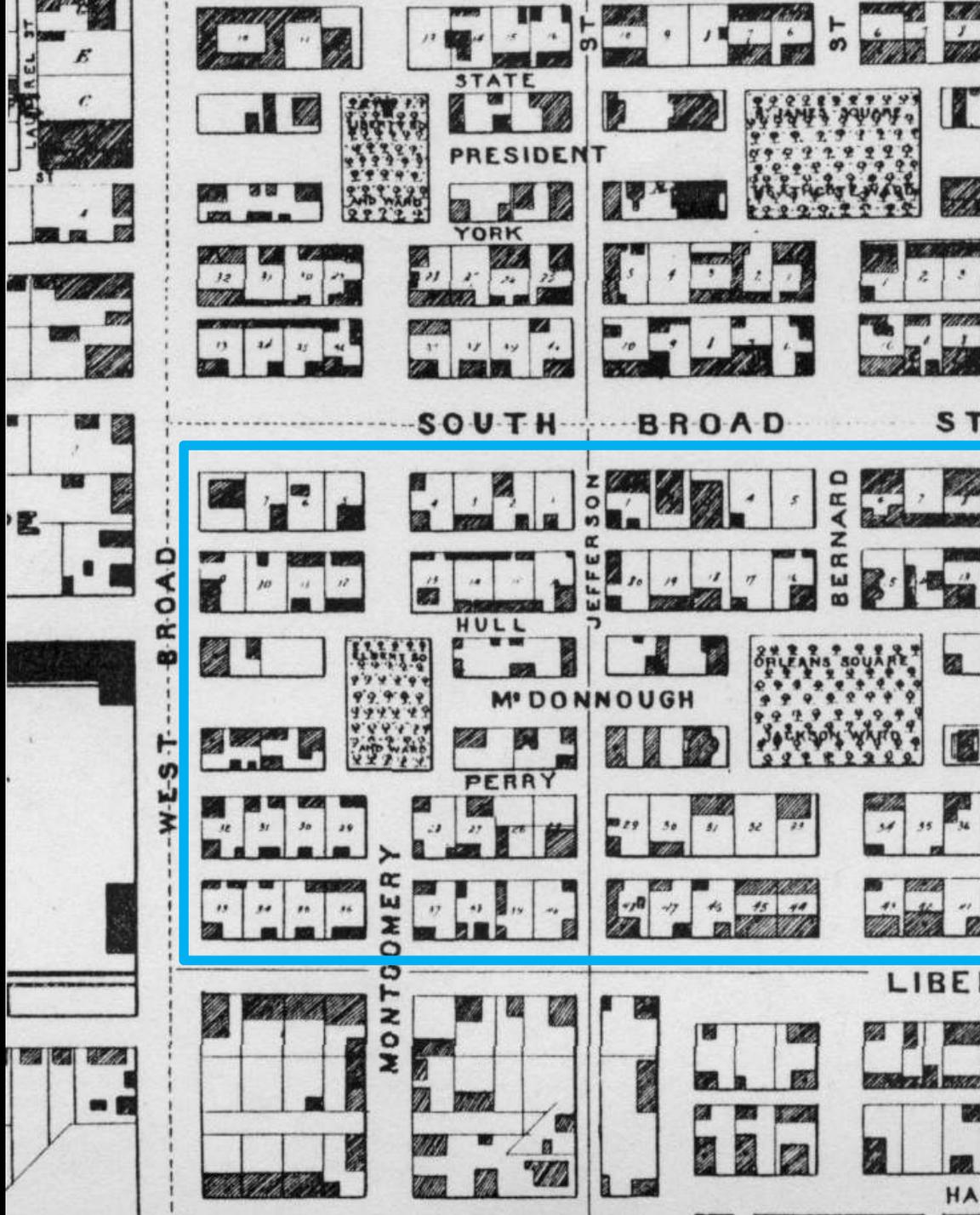
1815

1841

1856



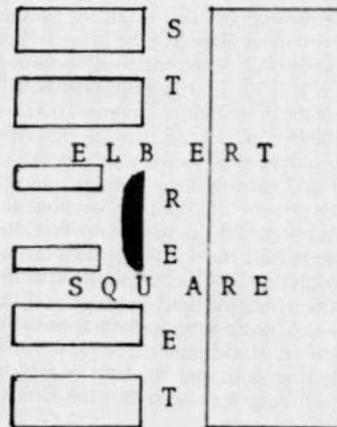
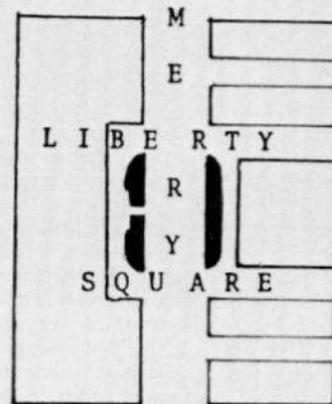
*Elbert and Orleans
Laid Out
in Early 1800's*



*Early
Development
Pattern*



Elbert Square



*1930's
 Loss of Three Squares*



*The Former Civic Auditorium
On Orleans Square....*



The Municipal Auditorium on Orleans Square



From the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum, Frederic Baldwin Collection



1955

Elbert
Square

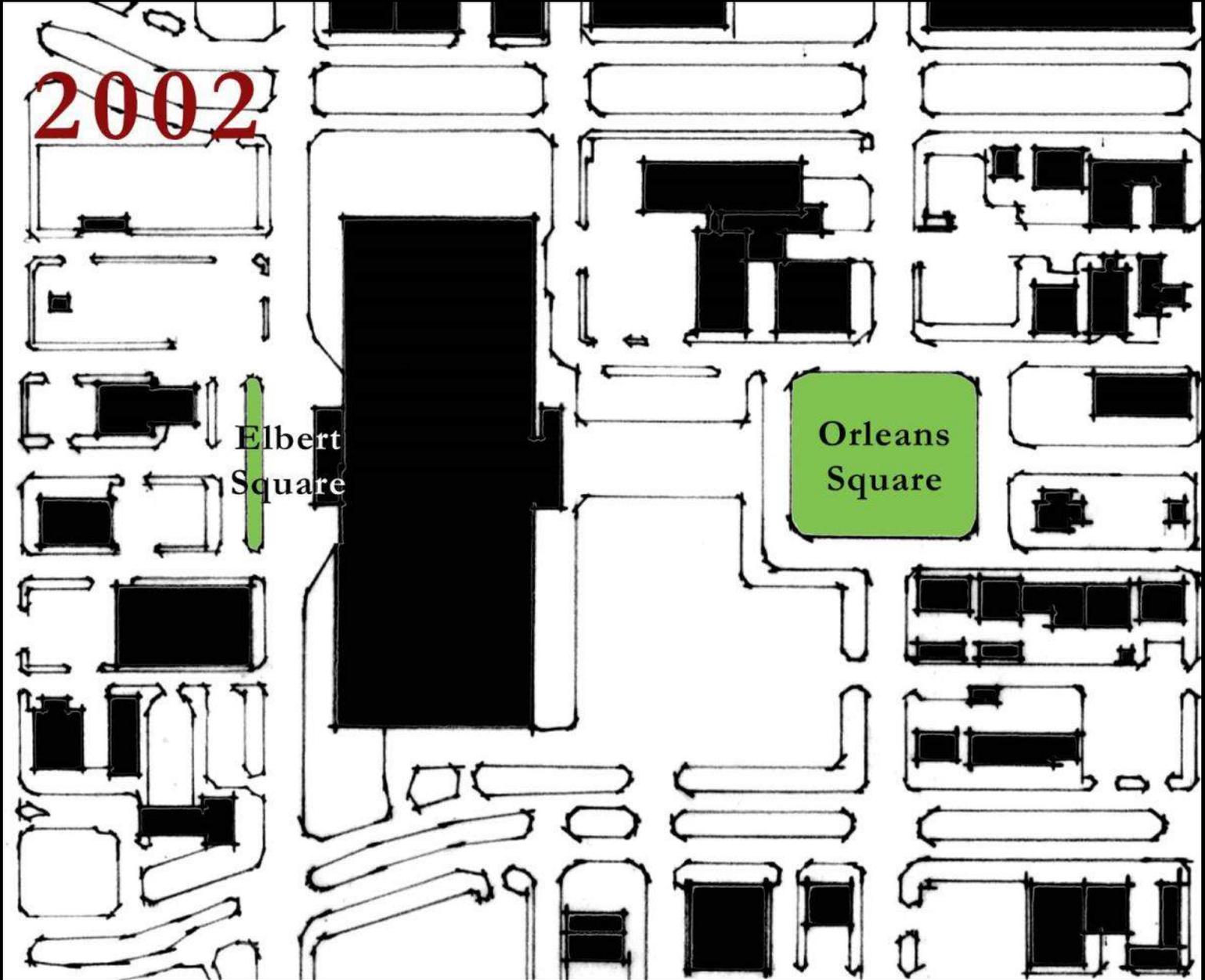
Orleans
Square



2002

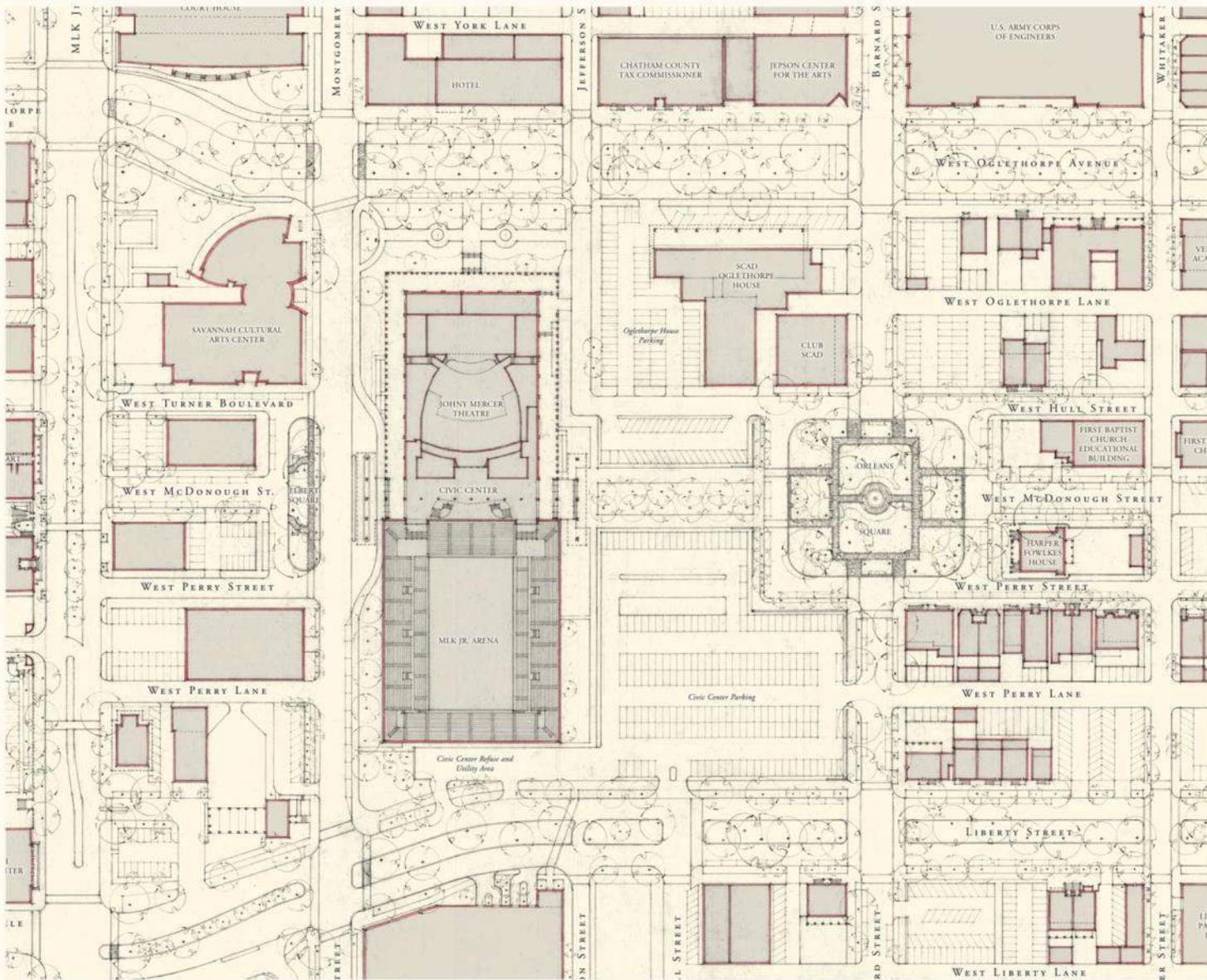
Elbert
Square

Orleans
Square



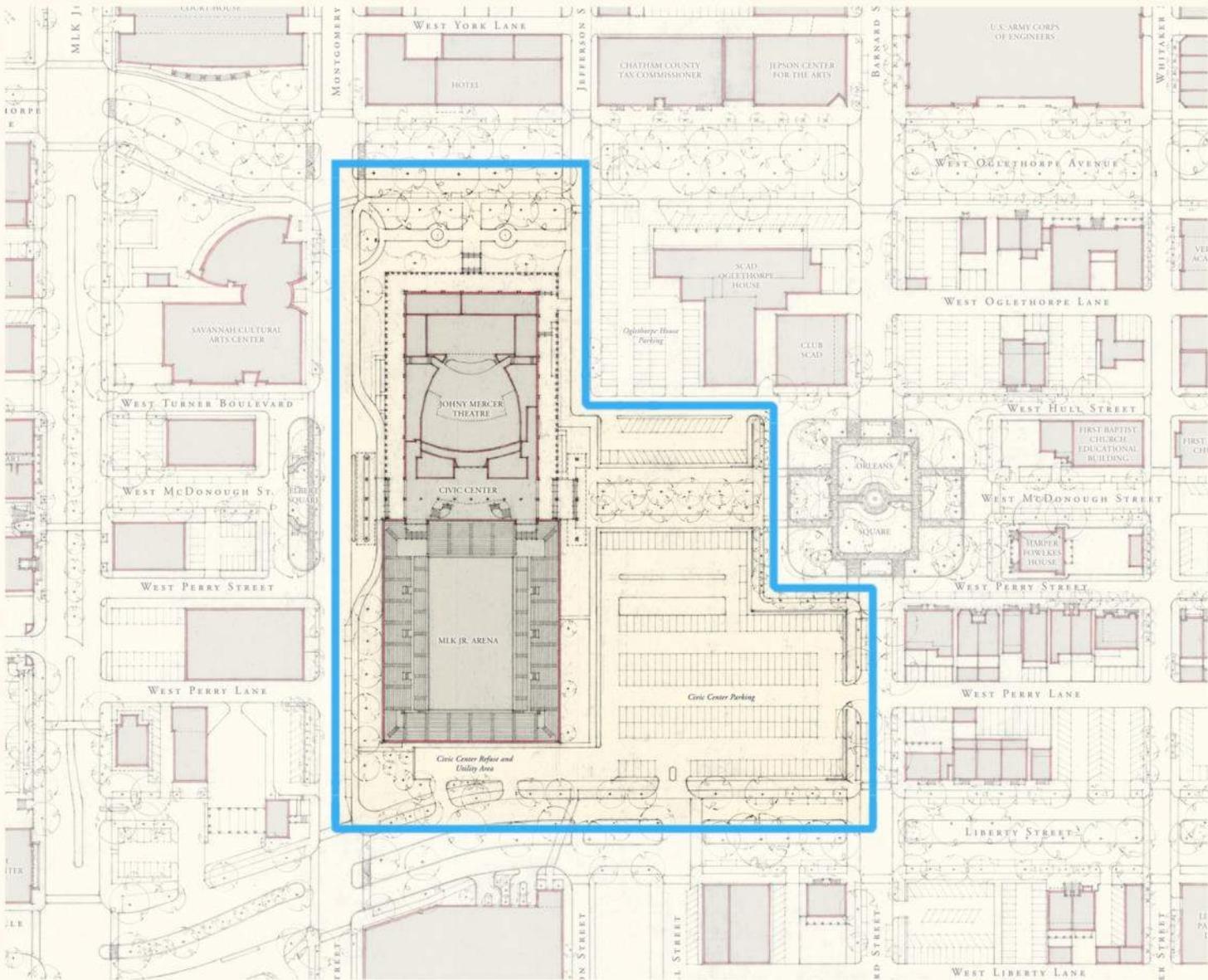
Evaluating the Site...

Old Civic Center Complex



CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

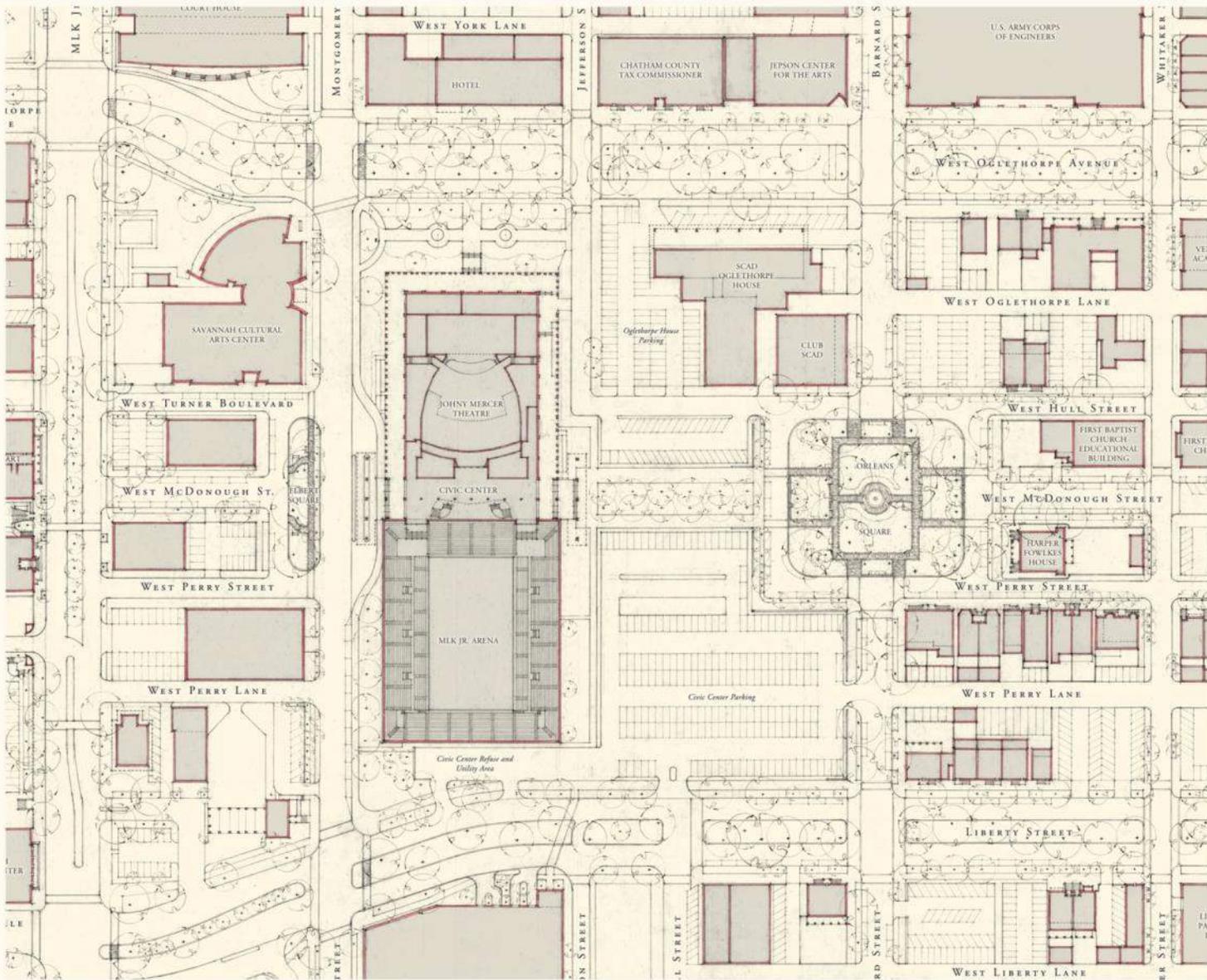
Existing Elbert-Orleans Wards



CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

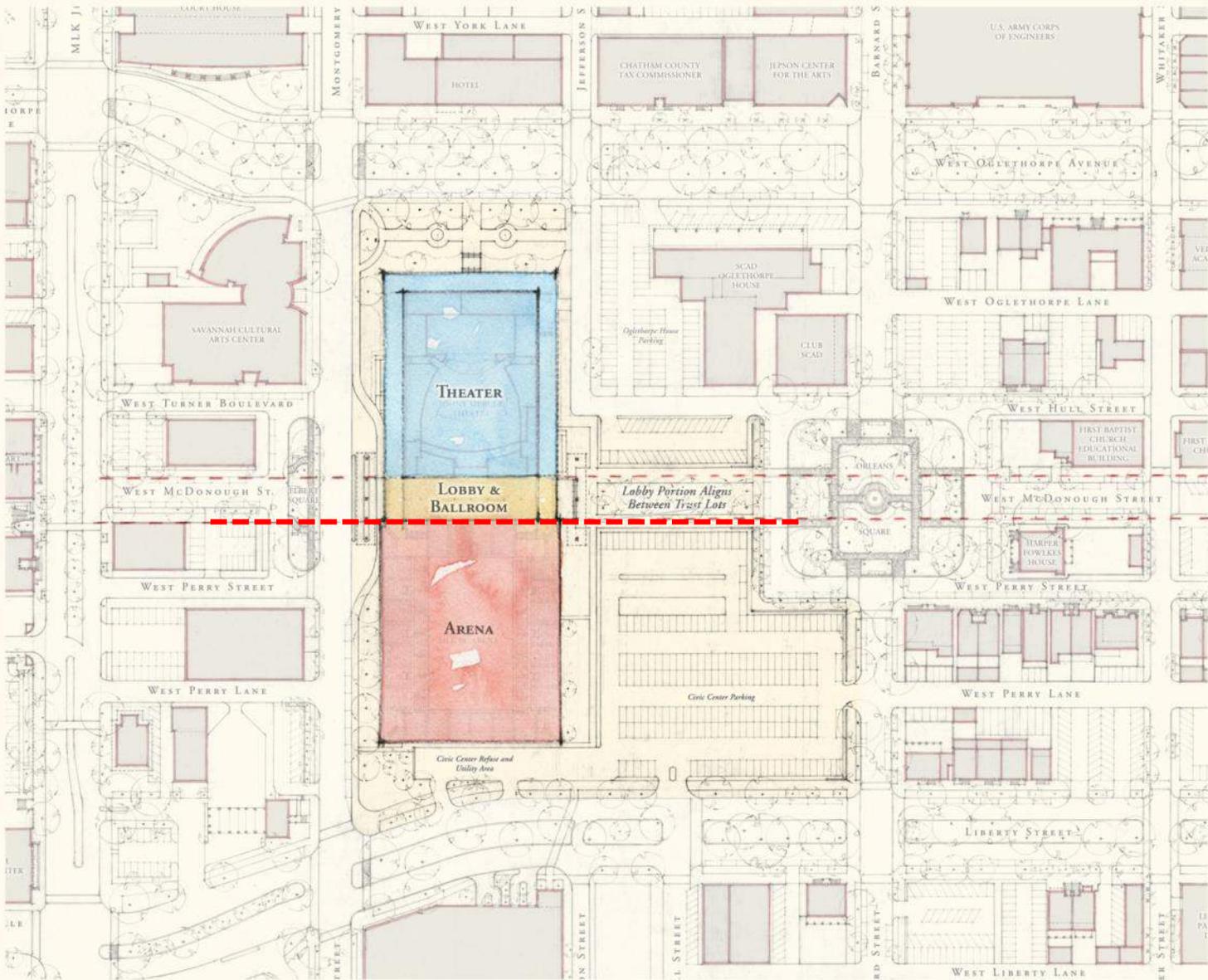
Existing Civic Center Site

How the Building Works...



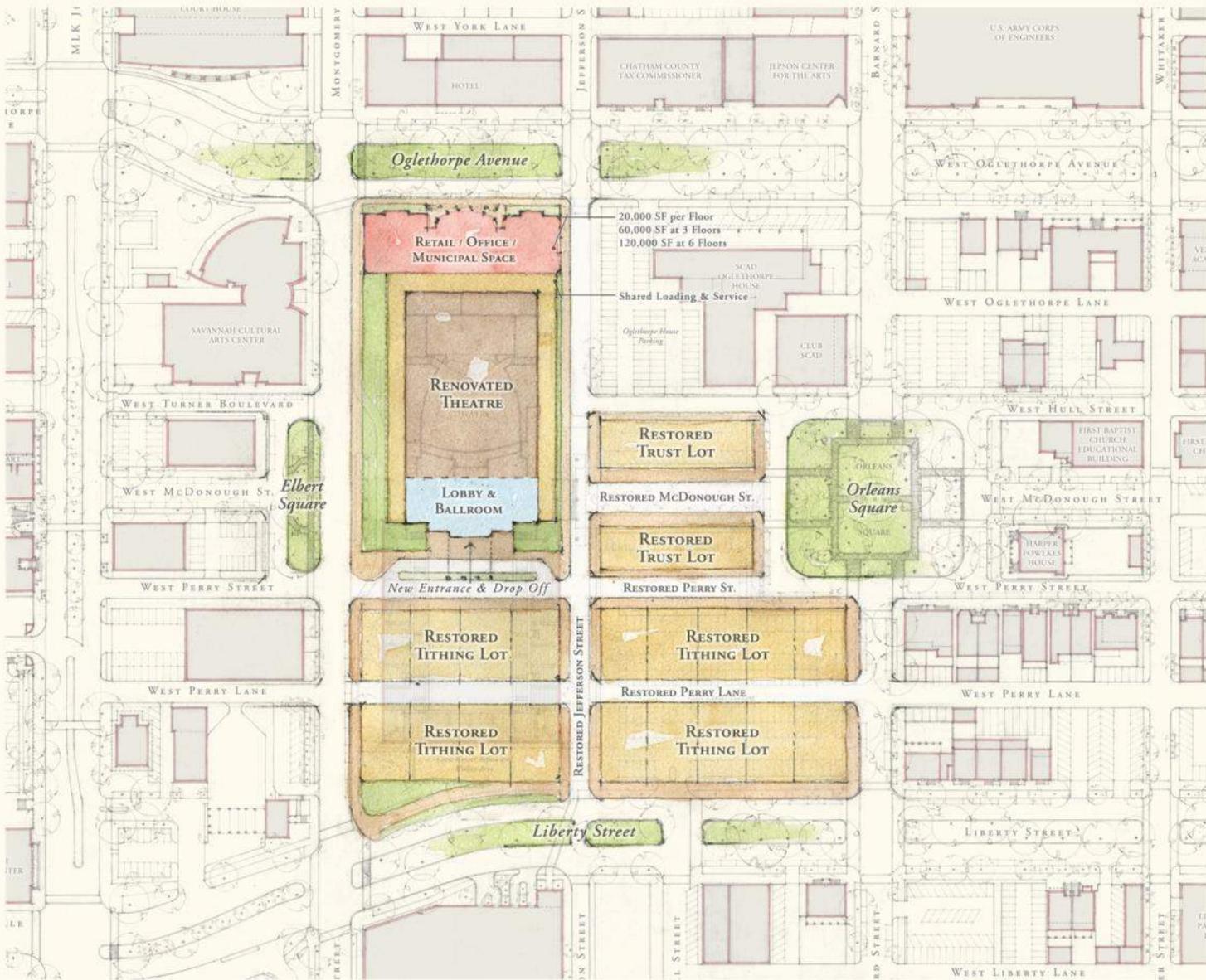
CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Existing Elbert-Orleans Wards



CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Key Components of the Existing Civic Center



CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Incremental Ward Restoration

June 2024:

The Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah voted to proceed with the removal of the arena and full renovation of the theatre, ballroom, and community meeting rooms.

City Council Resolution

June 2024

A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH, GEORGIA TO PROCEED WITH THE REMOVAL OF THE ARENA AND RENOVATION OF THE THEATRE, BALLROOM, AND COMMUNITY MEETING ROOMS.

WHEREAS, in 1972, the City of Savannah completed the construction of the Savannah Civic Center on the site of the former Municipal Auditorium; the seven-acre site includes the 9,700-seat Martin Luther King, Jr. Arena, 2,500-seat Johnny Mercer Theatre, Community Ballroom, several multi-purpose rooms, two levels of lobby space, and a 225-space surface parking lot; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Aldermen recognize the Civic Center has served as the site for important milestones for individuals and families, as well as for visitors to Savannah over the years since its construction; and

WHEREAS, the Civic Center stands as the largest single parcel in the Savannah National Historic Landmark District (SNHLD). Its construction preceded the enactment of the Historic District Ordinance, and the development was classified as an Urban Renewal project. This designation led to recombinations of the Oglethorpe Plan, including the claiming portions of the Elbert and Jackson wards, the diminishment of Elbert Square's size and prominence, the alteration of the street pattern, and a decrease in connectivity to neighborhoods to the west; and

WHEREAS, recognizing the significance of the Savannah National Historic Landmark District, the City has endeavored to restore the lost elements of the Oglethorpe Plan at this location. This goal emerged in the late 1990s, when the City explored the possibility of demolishing the arena, constructing a garage on its site, and relocating the arena while preserving the Theatre, Ballrooms, and multi-purpose rooms; and

WHEREAS, in 1984, the Mayor and Aldermen approved a request from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by naming the Civic Center Arena in his memory; and

WHEREAS, a 2001 Civic Center Arena Analysis ranked the existing Civic Center site as the least favorable of eight potential sites for a new arena due to limitations stemming from traffic congestion, the size of the parcel for future development, and inadequate parking facilities; and

WHEREAS, in 2013, the Mayor and Aldermen endorsed the Springfield Canal-City Lot site as the location for a new arena; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, the City established six advisory subcommittees comprising local community members and City staff to provide input during the initial phase of the new arena project. These subcommittees, tasked with considering the future of the Civic Center, convened regularly to discuss and conduct research pertaining to their respective areas of focus; and

Resolution 3: Remove Arena & Renovate Theatre, Ballroom & Community Meeting Rooms

1

Advisory Committee for Utilization of the Current Civic Center the Johnny Mercer Theatre, Ballroom, and multi-purpose rooms, locally sponsored events, and restoring the two tything blocks to its lots to the east of the site. Concurrently, the Proposed Arena assigned by the Mayor and Aldermen, advised against preserving initial costs associated with renovations and repairs necessary to compliance with development standards, including life safety, and

requested the Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Technical Assistance report and best uses for the Civic Center site; the Mayor and approved the ULI report which strongly recommended that the Annex be removed in preparation for the restoration of the

Market Arena, located at 620 Stiles Avenue, opened west of the arena, the Mayor and Aldermen considered a conceptual plan for the arena, while aiming to preserve and enhance the Johnny Mercer Ballroom, and multi-purpose rooms; construction of a new entrance to the building's south façade; development of a new municipal lot side of the Civic Center to reduce the City's need for leased land; and a larger section of the Oglethorpe Plan, including two lots lost during the development of the Civic Center. Following the City Manager was directed to study the proposed conceptual plan;

The City engaged Akustiks, LLC conducted an assessment of the existing Johnny Mercer Theatre at the Civic Center community asset and could be transformed to play a leading role in the life of Savannah, recognizing its demolition would be felt by the community; and

The Cultural Landscape Analysis to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Civic Center site, as well as Elbert and Jackson wards, to inform the loss of historic fabric, maintain the Civic Center site as a historic landmark, ensure that future development is appropriate to the character of the historic Landmark District; and

conducting a Phase I Archaeology Assessment of the Civic Center site;

WHEREAS, the City is conducting a comprehensive civil site survey of the study area to facilitate the redevelopment of the Civic Center area;

Resolution 3: Remove Arena & Renovate Theatre, Ballroom & Community Meeting Rooms

2

BEFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah, Georgia adopt this resolution and direct the City Manager to prepare and execute a plan, inclusive of robust community engagement and the required Council approval on annual amended budgets, project financing, zoning, contracts and agreements, that does the following:

1. Proceeds with the removal of the arena and renovation of the theatre, ballroom, and community meeting rooms;
2. Achieves an equitable approach to redevelopment of the area;
3. Retains the name and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
4. Restores as much of the Oglethorpe Plan as feasible;
5. Prioritizes housing, including affordable and workforce housing;
6. Prohibits the development of new hotels and restricts the use of short-term vacation rentals;
7. Optimizes space for public and municipal use, as well as appropriate retail and commercial spaces; and
8. Achieves future parking needs.

AND APPROVED by the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah, Georgia this the 27th day of June, 2024.


Van R. Johnson, II
Mayor




City Council

Resolution 3: Remove Arena & Renovate Theatre, Ballroom & Community Meeting Rooms

3

City Council Resolution

- Achieves an equitable approach to redevelopment of the area;
- Retains the name and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
- Restores as much of the Oglethorpe Plan as feasible;
- Prioritizes housing, including affordable and workforce housing;
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- Optimizes space for public and municipal use, as well as appropriate retail and commercial spaces; and
- Achieves future parking needs.



SAVANNAH

■ CIVIC LEGACY ■

Overview of Project Approach

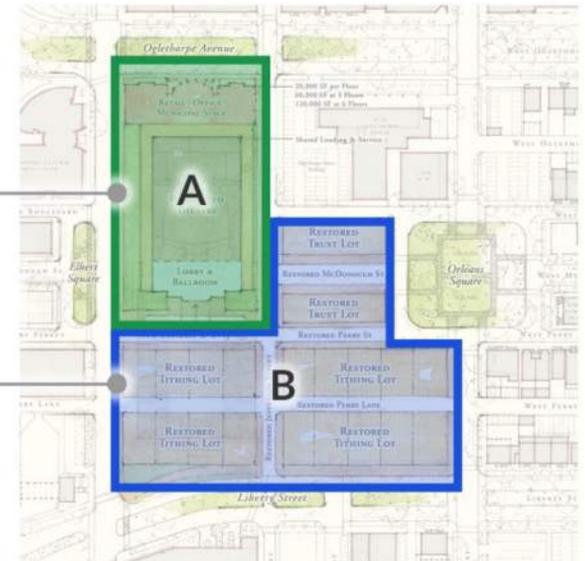
PROJECT AREAS

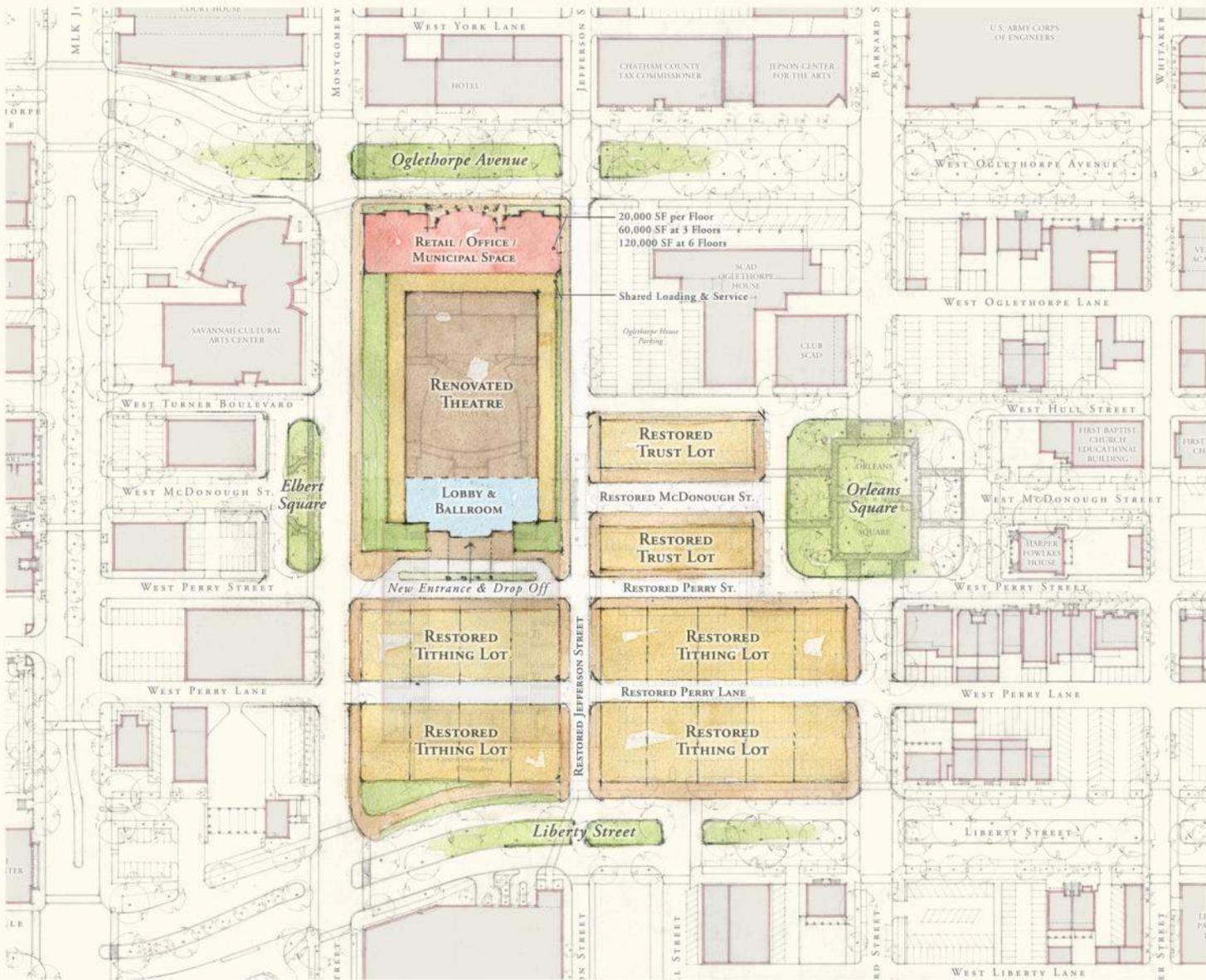
A. Civic Block

Theatre, Ballroom, Community Meeting Rooms,
New Multi-Use Space, Reimagining Elbert Square

B. Oglethorpe Plan Blocks

Restoration of Oglethorpe Plan, Blocks & Lots,
Streets, and Subgrade Parking





CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Incremental Ward Restoration

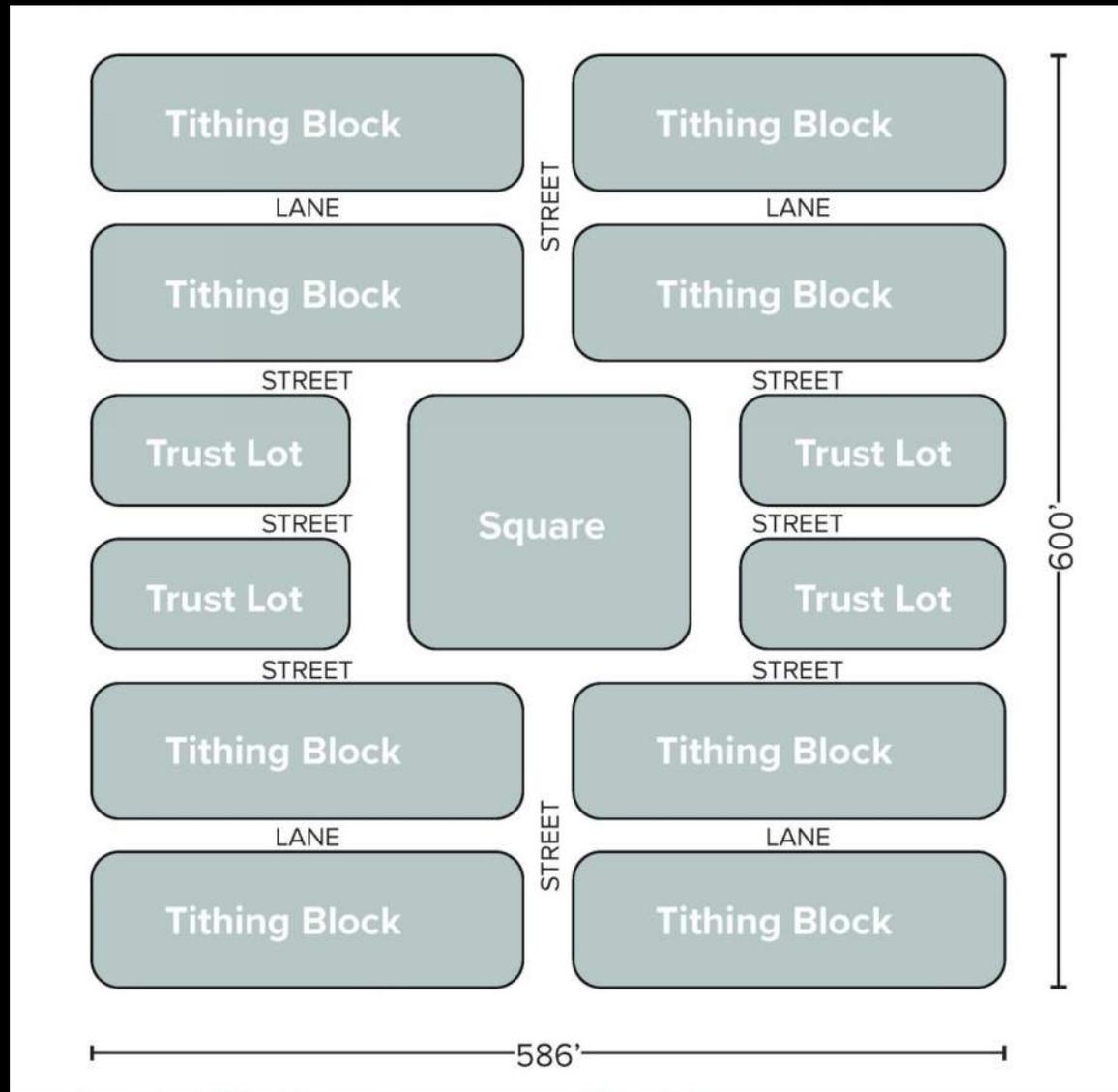
Area A

The Theatre, Ballroom,
Community Meeting Rooms,
New Multi-Use Space;
Reimagining Elbert Square



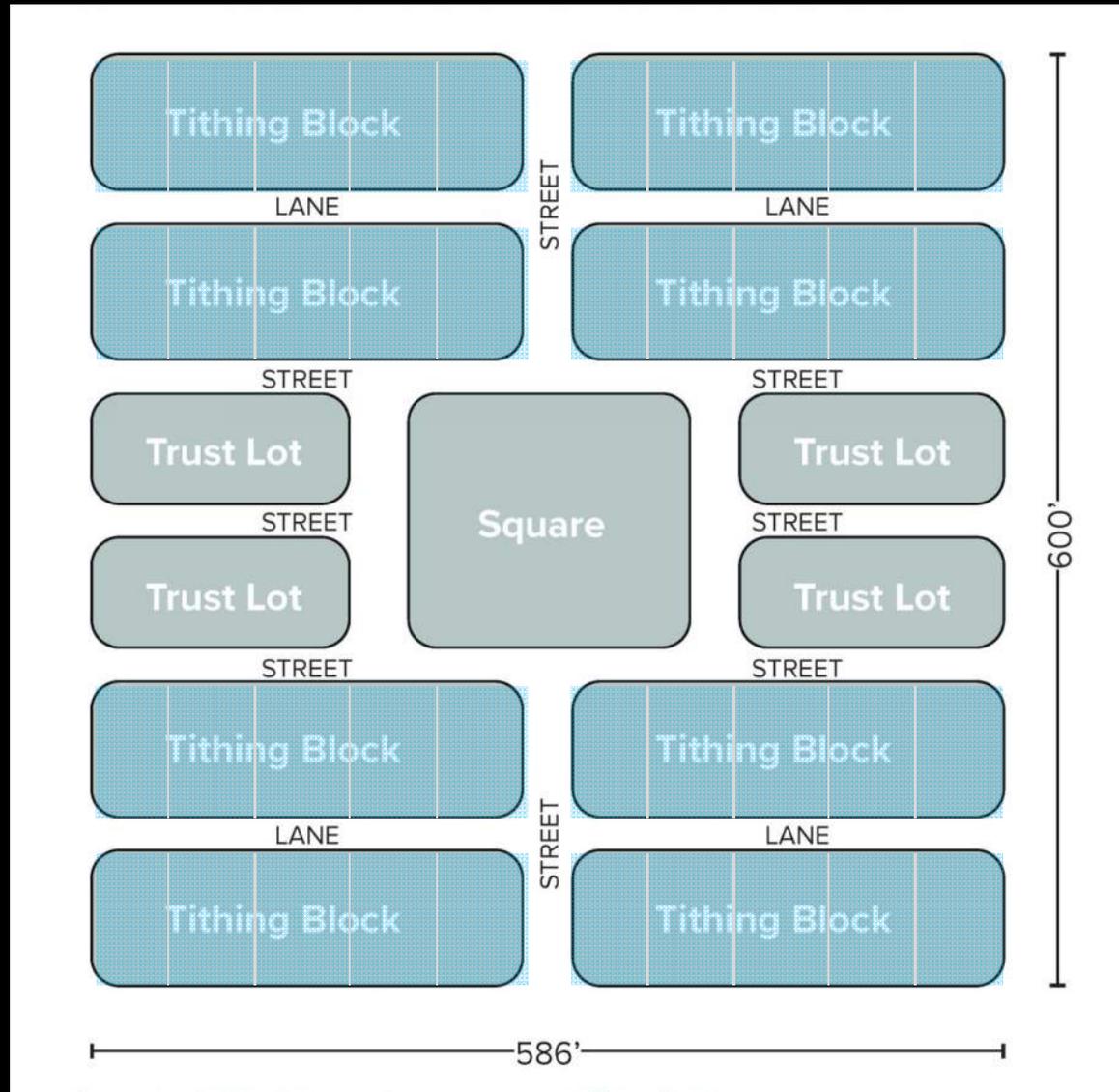
Area B

Restoring Original Oglethorpe Plan Blocks

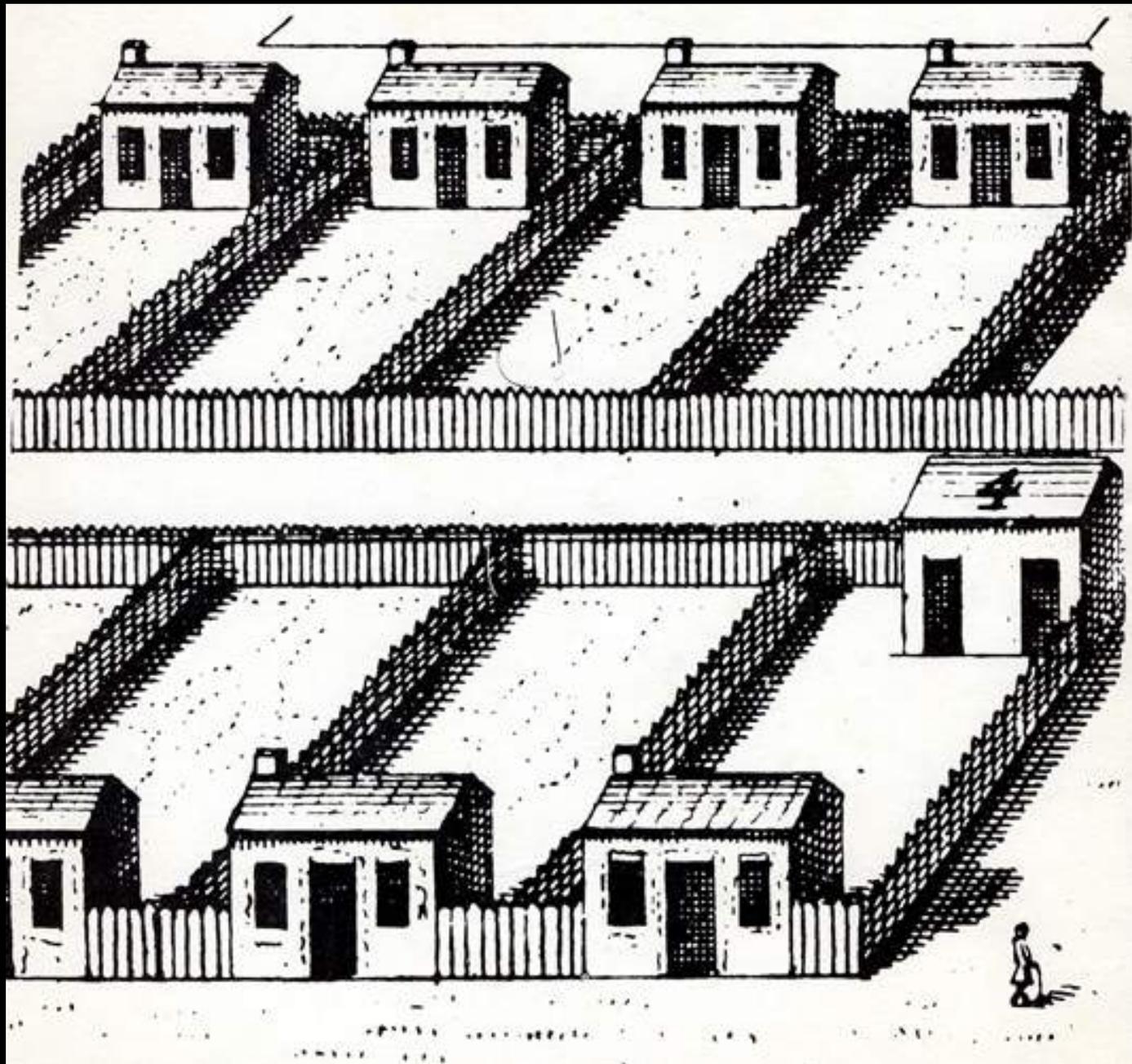


Historic Ward Structure

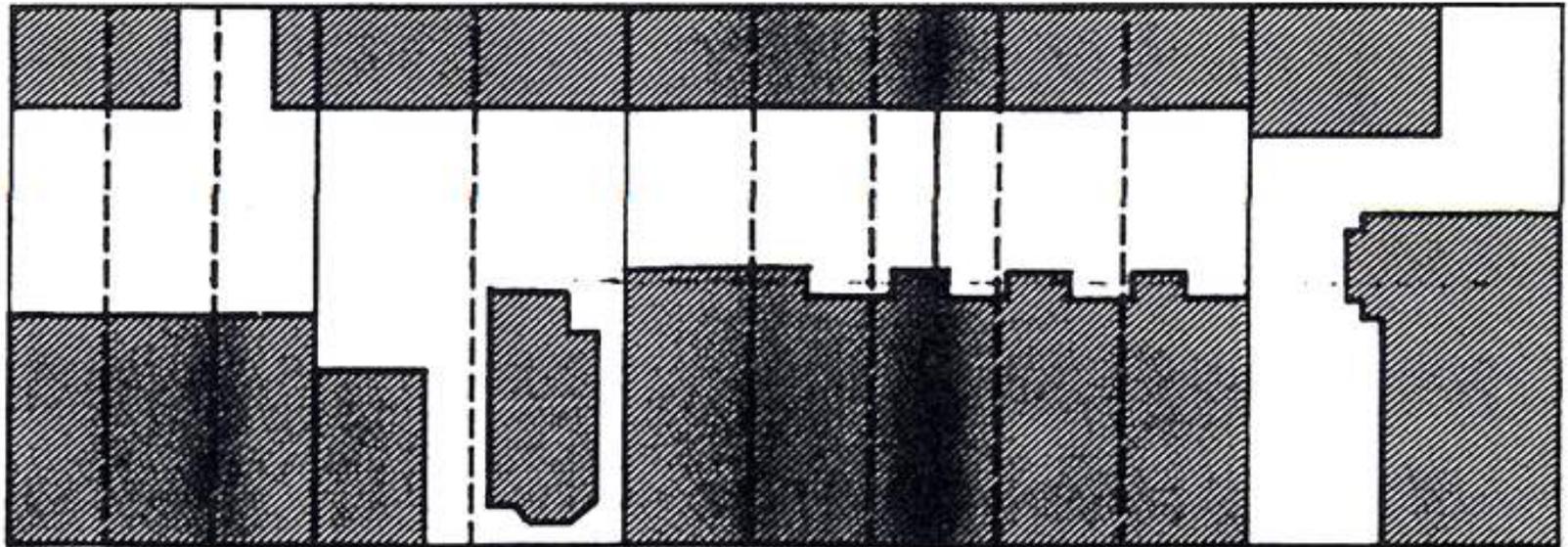
The Modular Design of the Oglethorpe Plan



Tithing Blocks



LANE



3 @ 20

2 @ 30

5 @ 24

1 @ 60

STREET



2.4a One story structure



2.4d Two story structure
with high stoop
and/or crawlspace



2.4b One story raised
basement structure



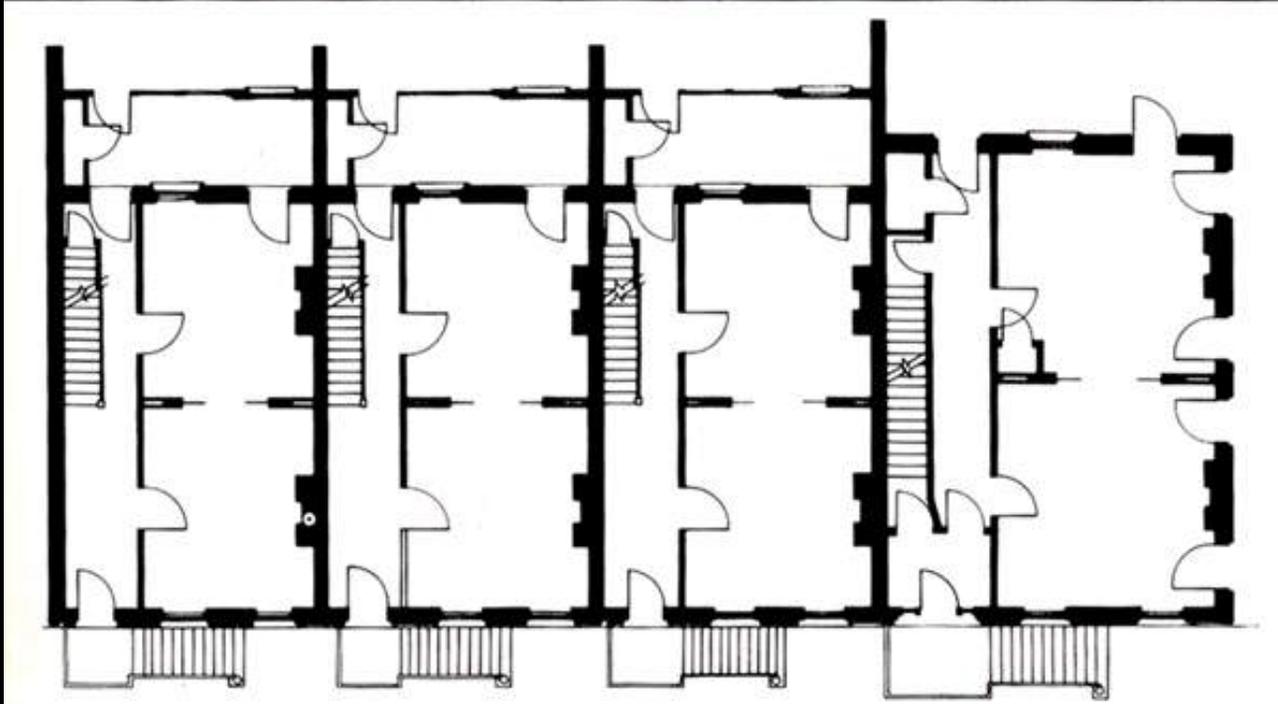
2.4e Three story structure
with street level entrance

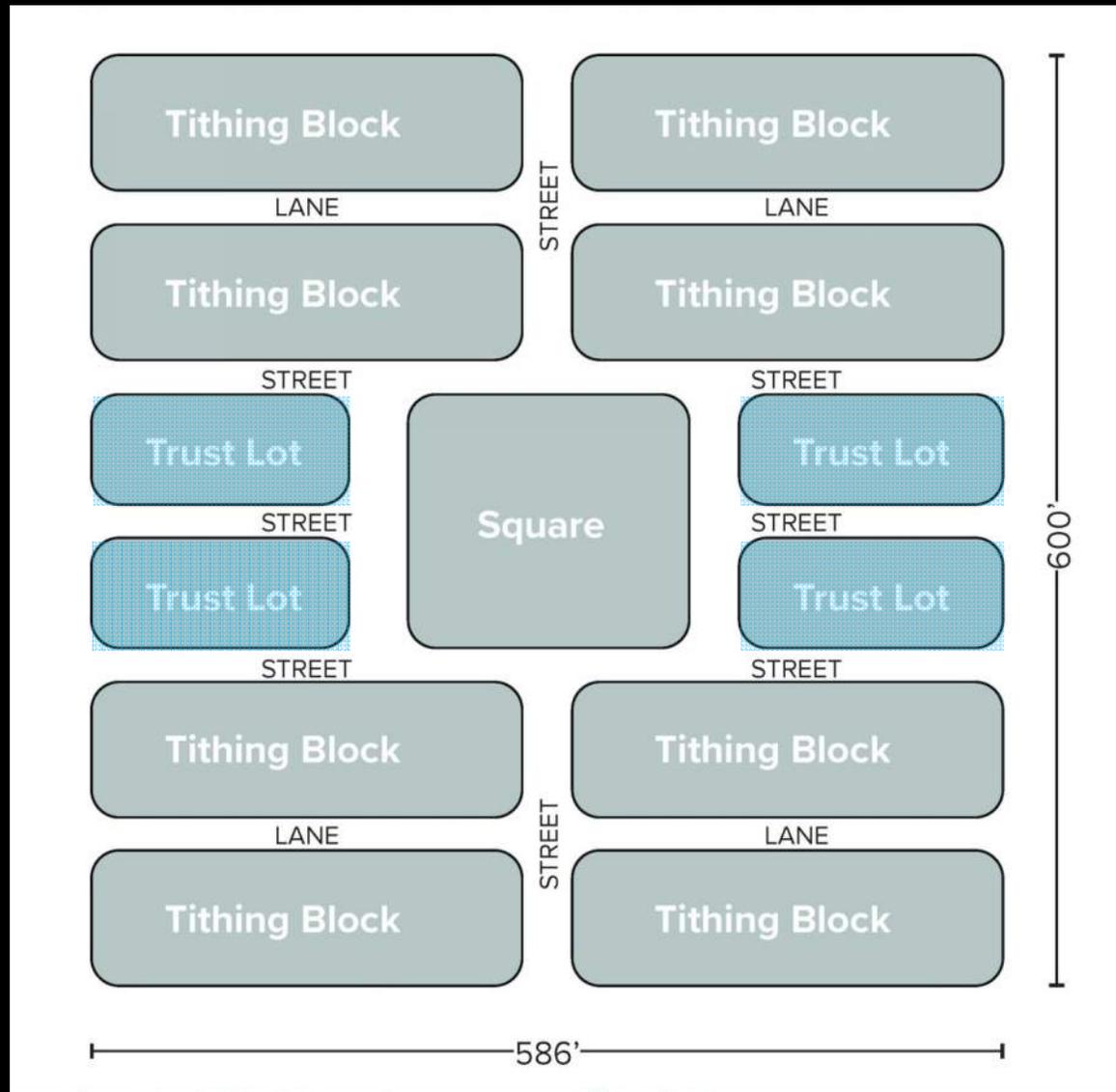


2.4c Two story structure
with street level entrance

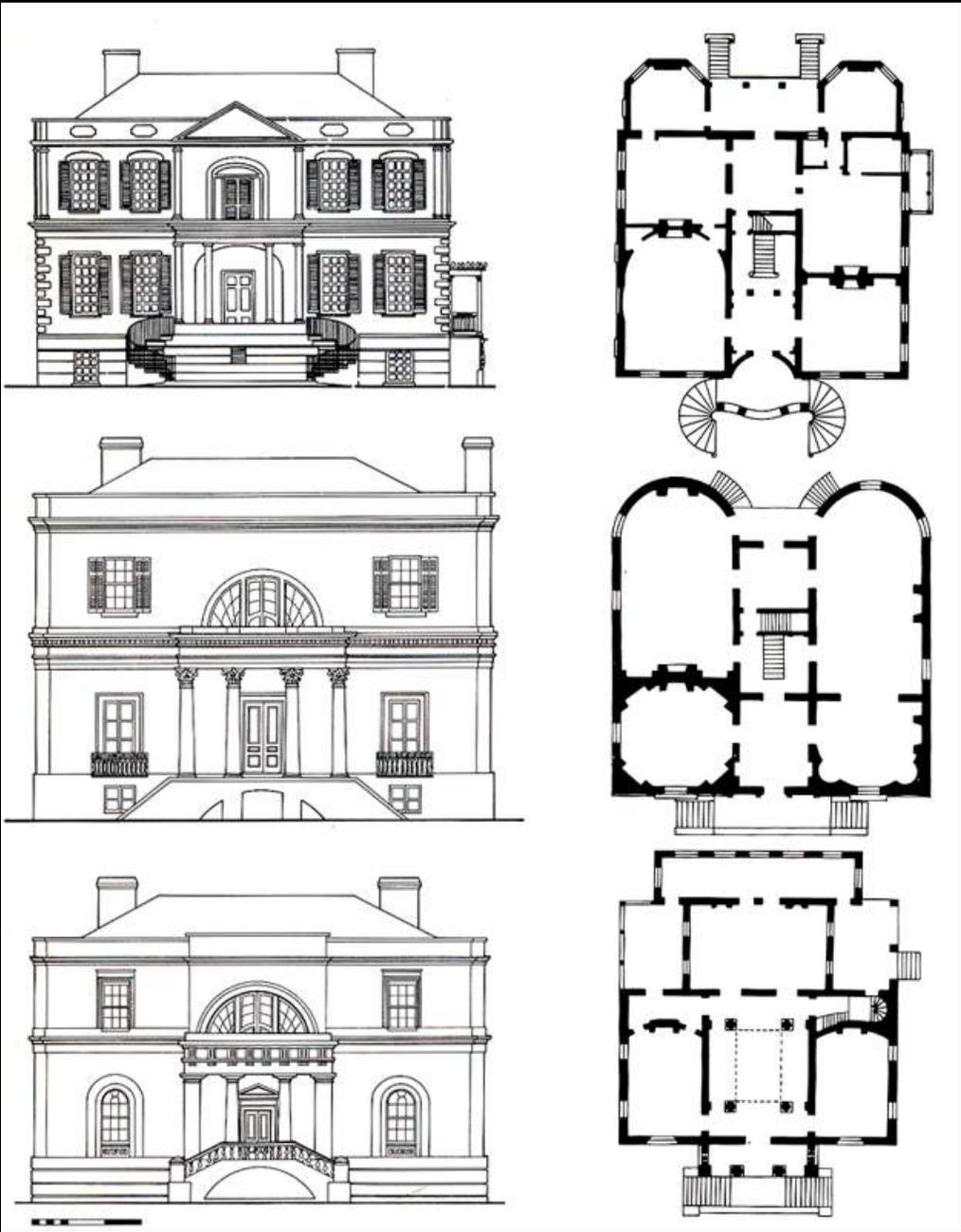


2.4f Three story structure
with high stoop





Trust Blocks



TELEFAP
ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

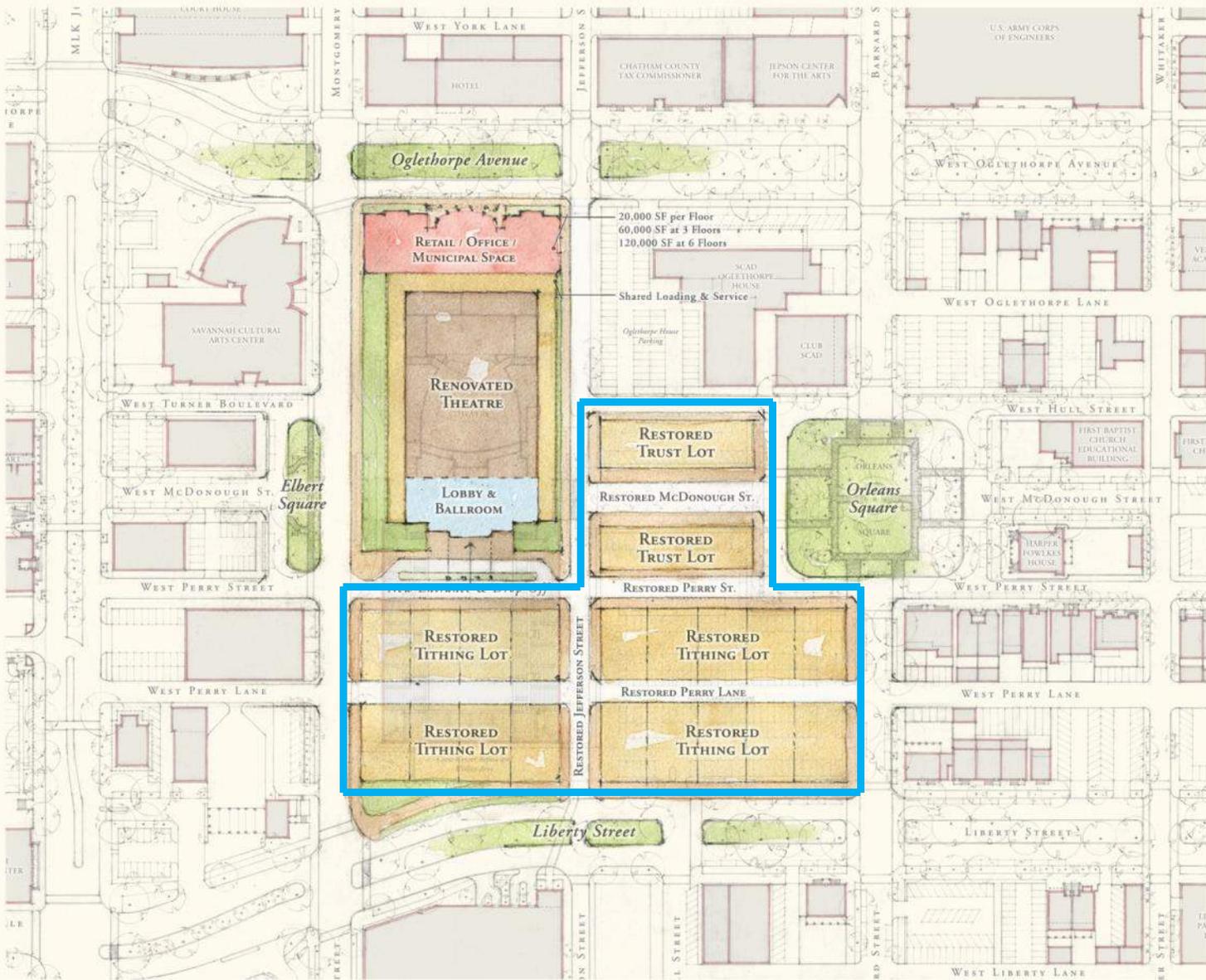






*The Archibald Bulloch House
(Orleans Square)*

Six Oglethorpe Plan Blocks To be Restored



CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Incremental Ward Restoration



Initial Market and Feasibility Findings

Why We Are Here

Our goal is to identify an actionable strategy for restoring the historical ward layout and generating long-term value for the City and community

What defines success?



Factors Shaping the Market Opportunity

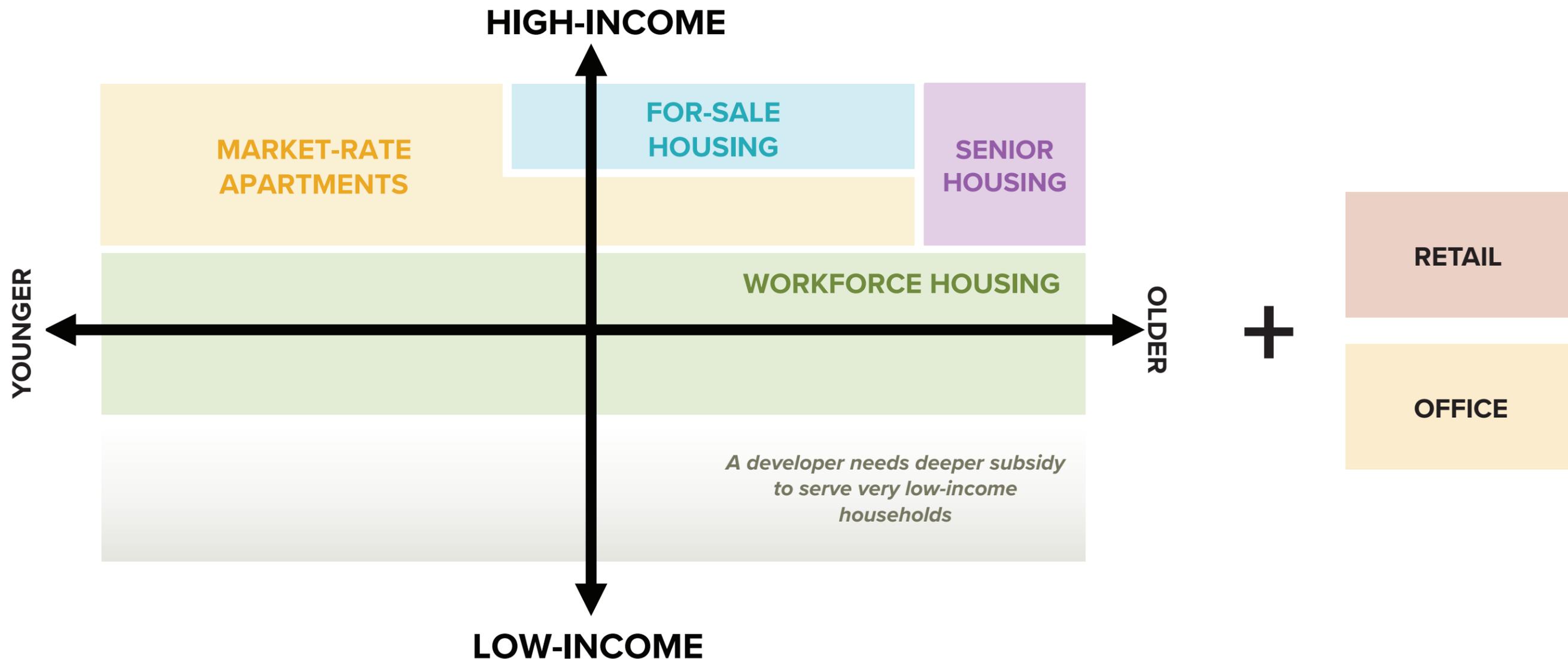
From a market perspective, the site is a unique and compelling infill development opportunity—one that could accommodate many different uses

- Located within the historic district
- Proximate to high-traffic areas
- Offers scale—very rare for the historic district
- Highly accessible on foot and by car / other modes
- Renovated theater provides unique source of foot traffic



Who Development Can Serve

The size of the site provides an opportunity to serve a diverse cross-section of the community—a core objective for redevelopment



What Could Work Here

Understanding market readiness helps ensure planning efforts are both realistic and forward-looking

SPECIAL CASES	POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES	STRONG OPTIONS	OBVIOUS FITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large multi-tenant office• Affordable rental apartments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workforce rental apartments• Smaller office or build-to-suit spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Market-rate rental apartments• Market-rate rental townhomes• Senior housing• Student housing• Retail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For-sale condominiums• For-sale rowhomes
<p>May require specific partnerships, incentives, or anchor tenants to make viable</p>	<p>Feasible under the right conditions, particularly with targeted support or a strong development concept</p>	<p>Broadly feasible, with strong market potential for the Historic District</p>	<p>Highly feasible, with significant market interest that already exists in the Historic District</p>

Understanding Housing Typologies

FOR-SALE

SINGLE FAMILY HOMES



ROW HOMES



CONDOMINIUMS

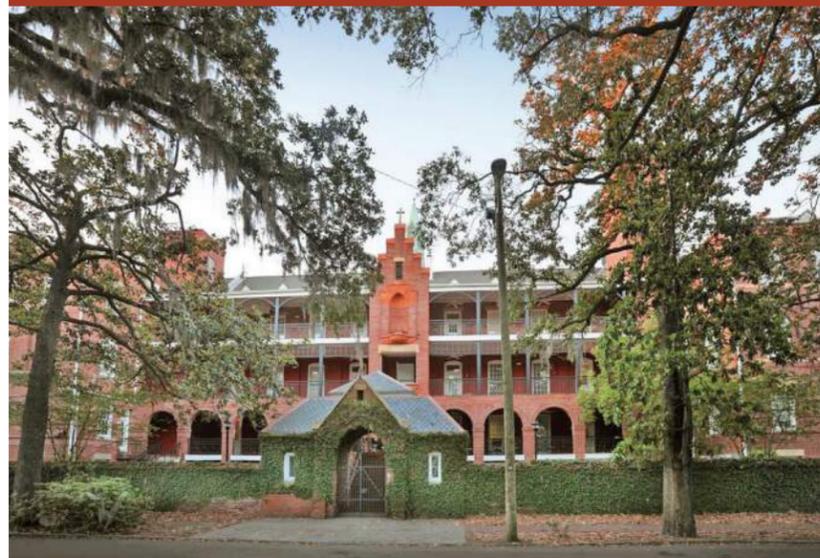


RENTAL

WORKFORCE HOUSING



SENIOR HOUSING



APARTMENTS



Balancing Priorities

Every type of housing comes with trade-offs, and understanding them helps guide smart planning decisions

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY



RESIDENTIAL DENSITY



BUILDING HEIGHT

4-5 stories on the Height Map

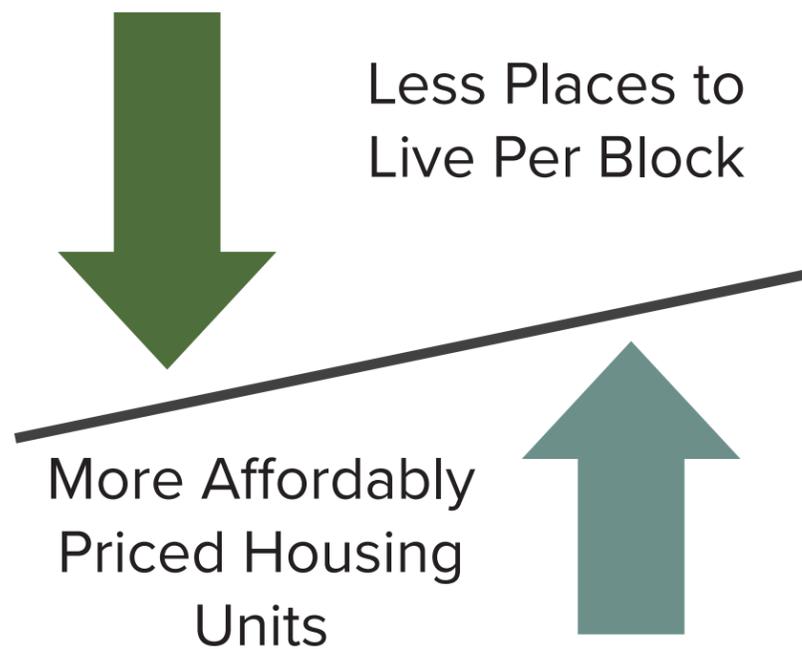


TIME TO BUILD

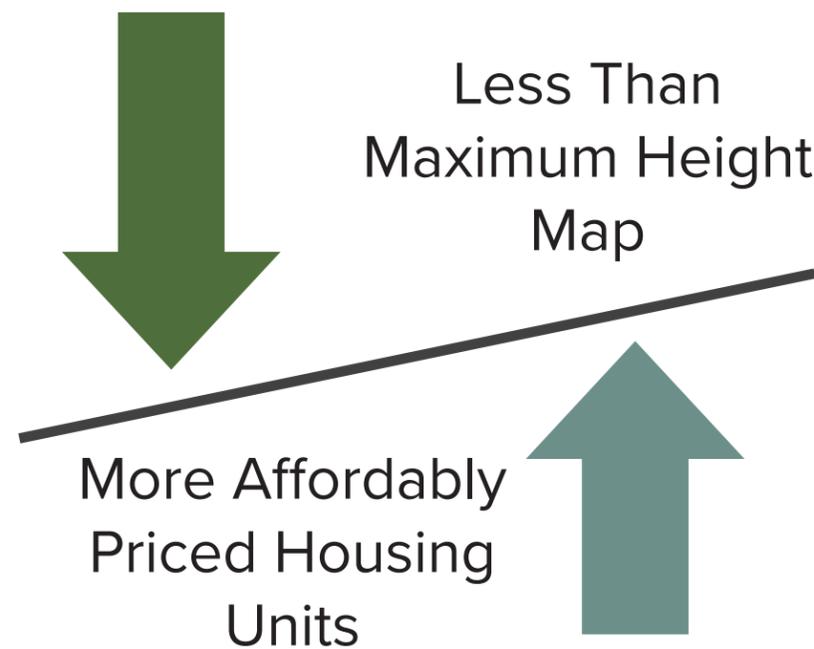


What Do We Gain or Give Up

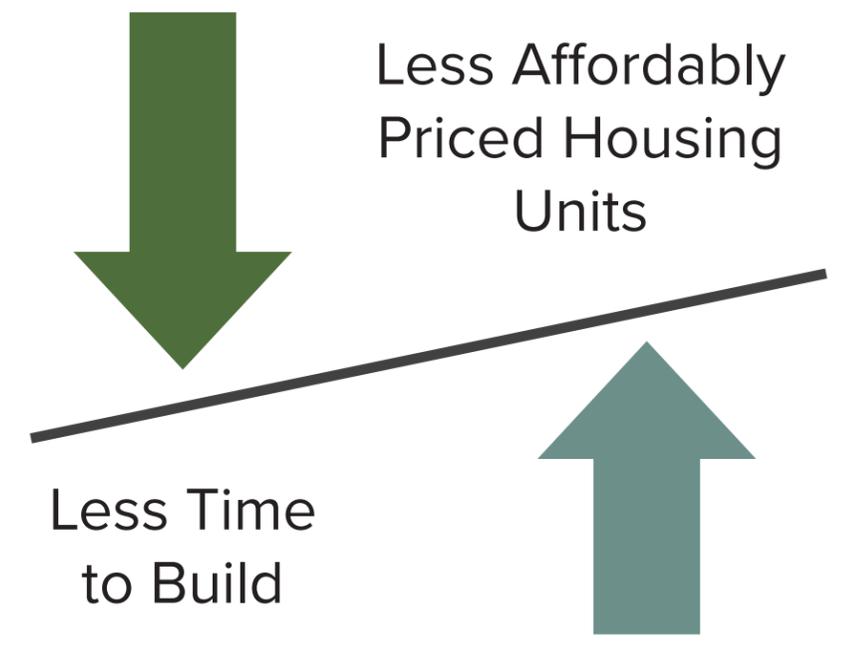
Planning decisions involve balancing affordability, design, and feasibility. These examples show how different choices affect outcomes.



Most rental housing development involves buildings that are at least 100 to 150 units, and that is not simply developers' preference; it reflects the economics of making rental housing development work today.



Most rental housing needs to reach 5 stories; meanwhile, the market could readily provide for-sale housing in shorter buildings, but this housing would serve a narrower set of Savannah households.

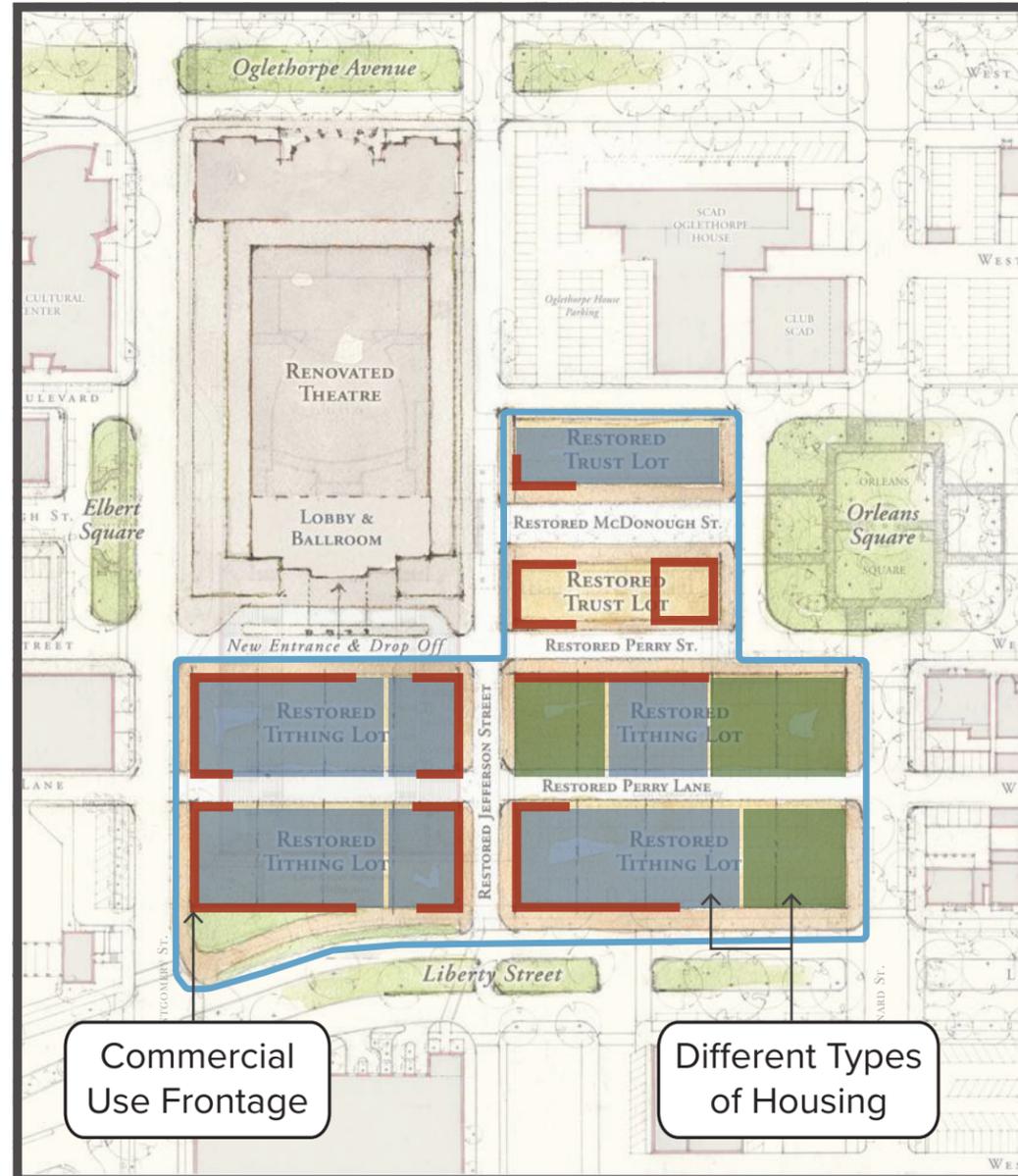


Prioritizing higher-priced homes would likely prolong the development of the site, since a developer can only deliver so many homes at once and expect the market to absorb them quickly.

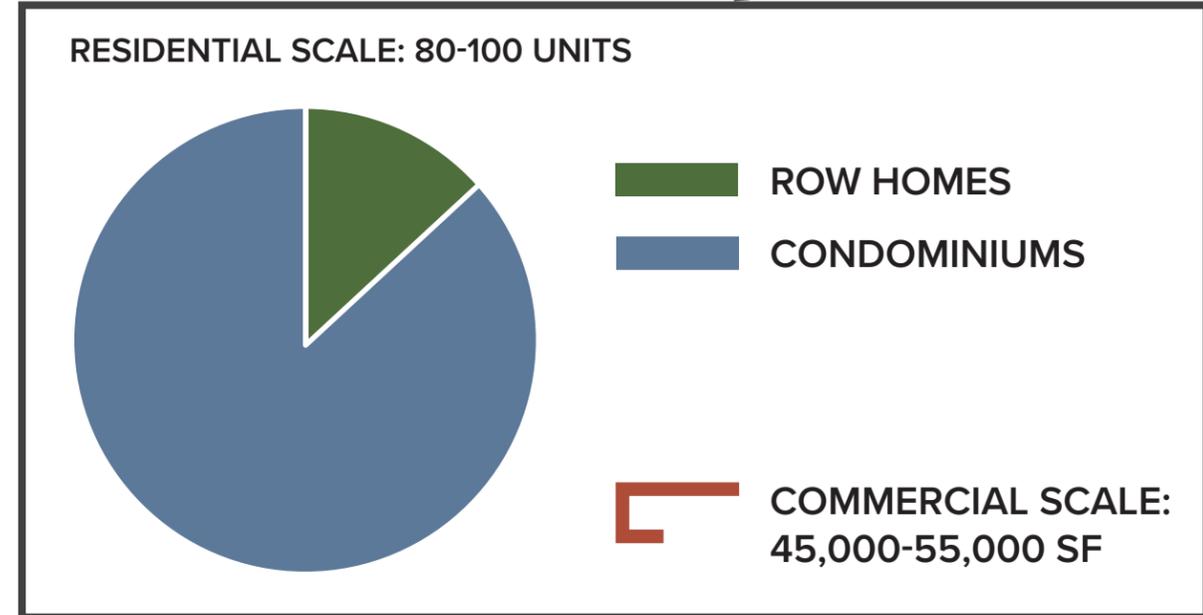


Scenario Overview

How to Understand Each Scenario?

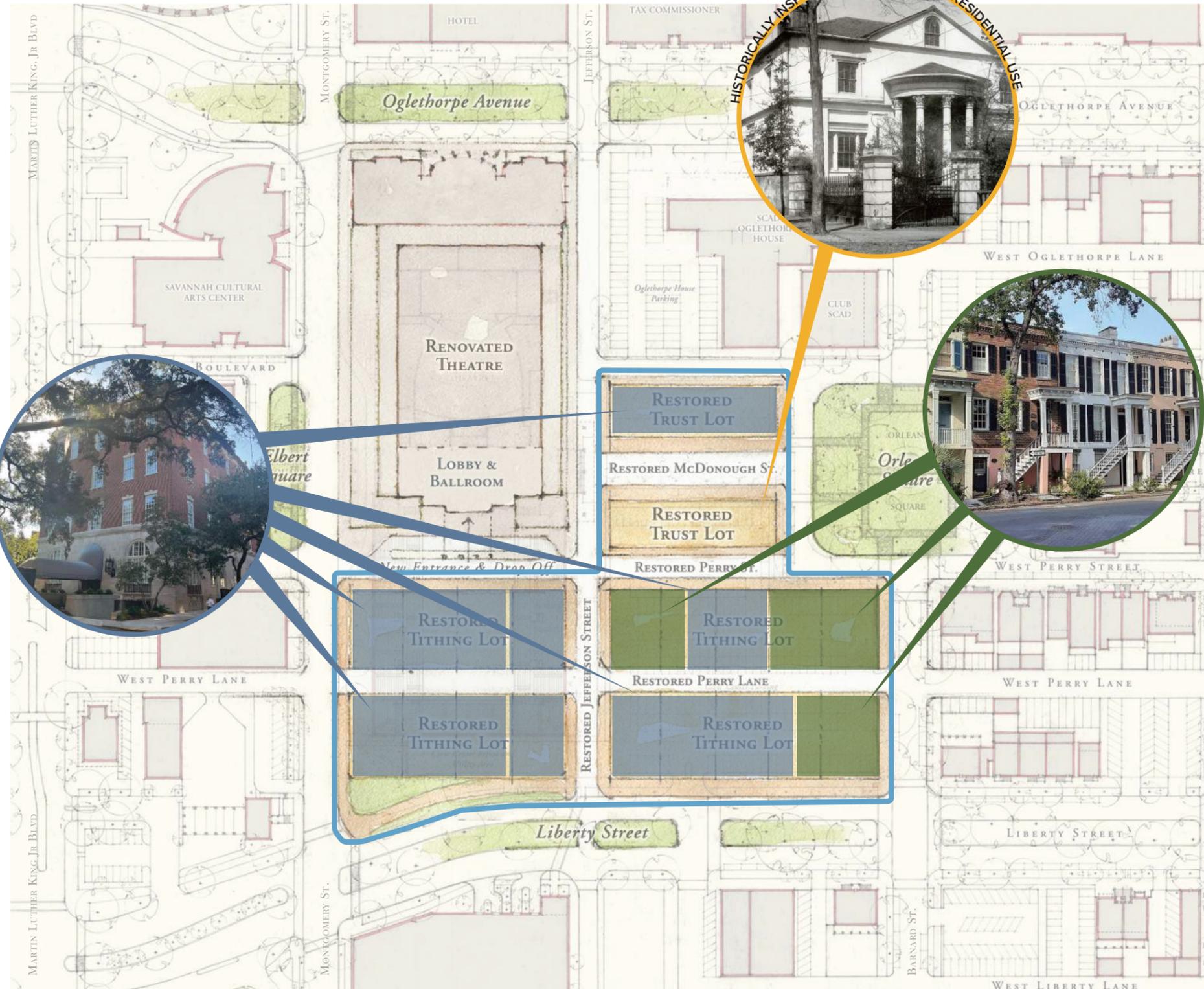


Metrics and Uses Distribution

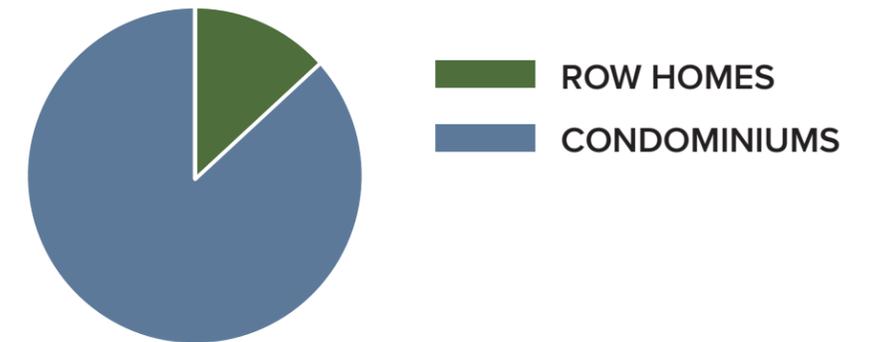
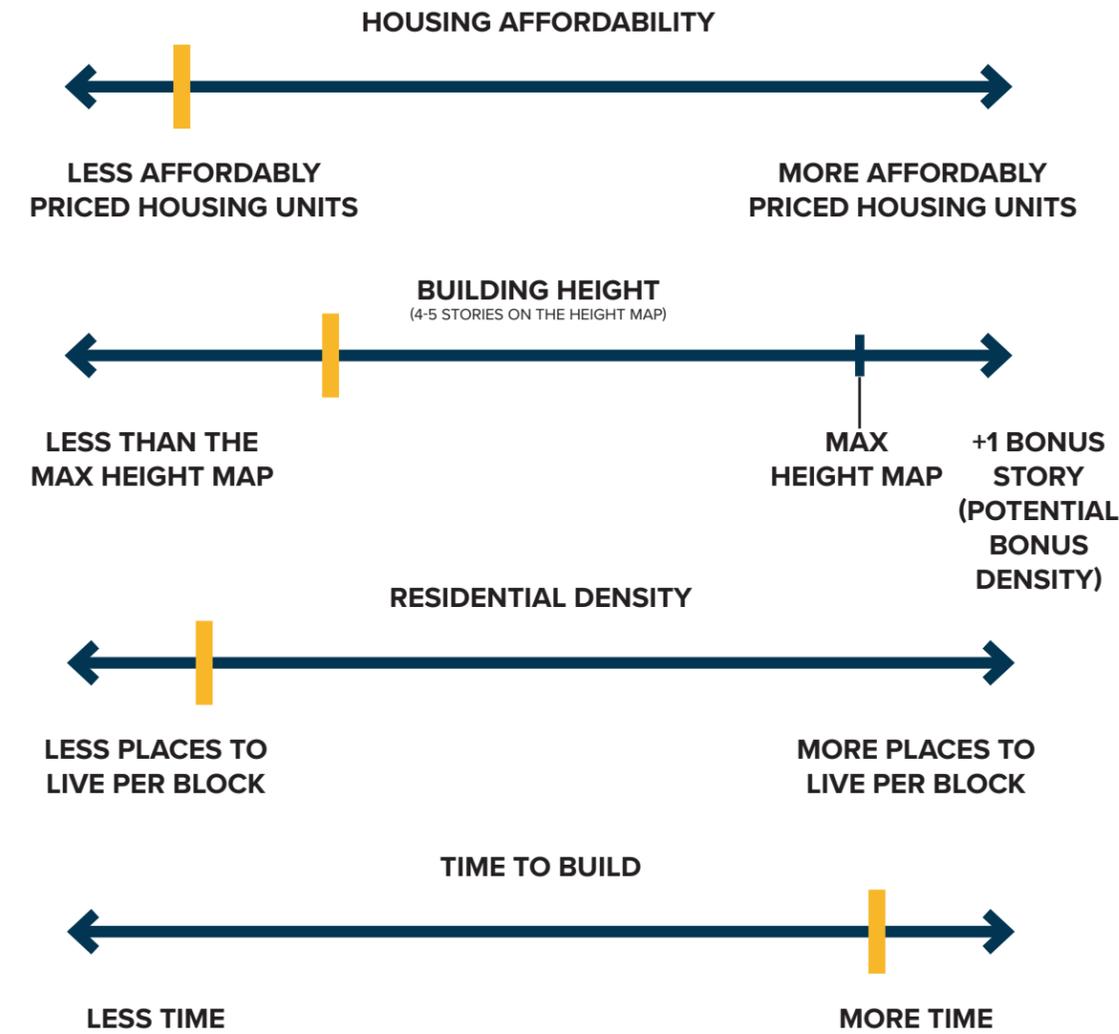


Trade-Offs

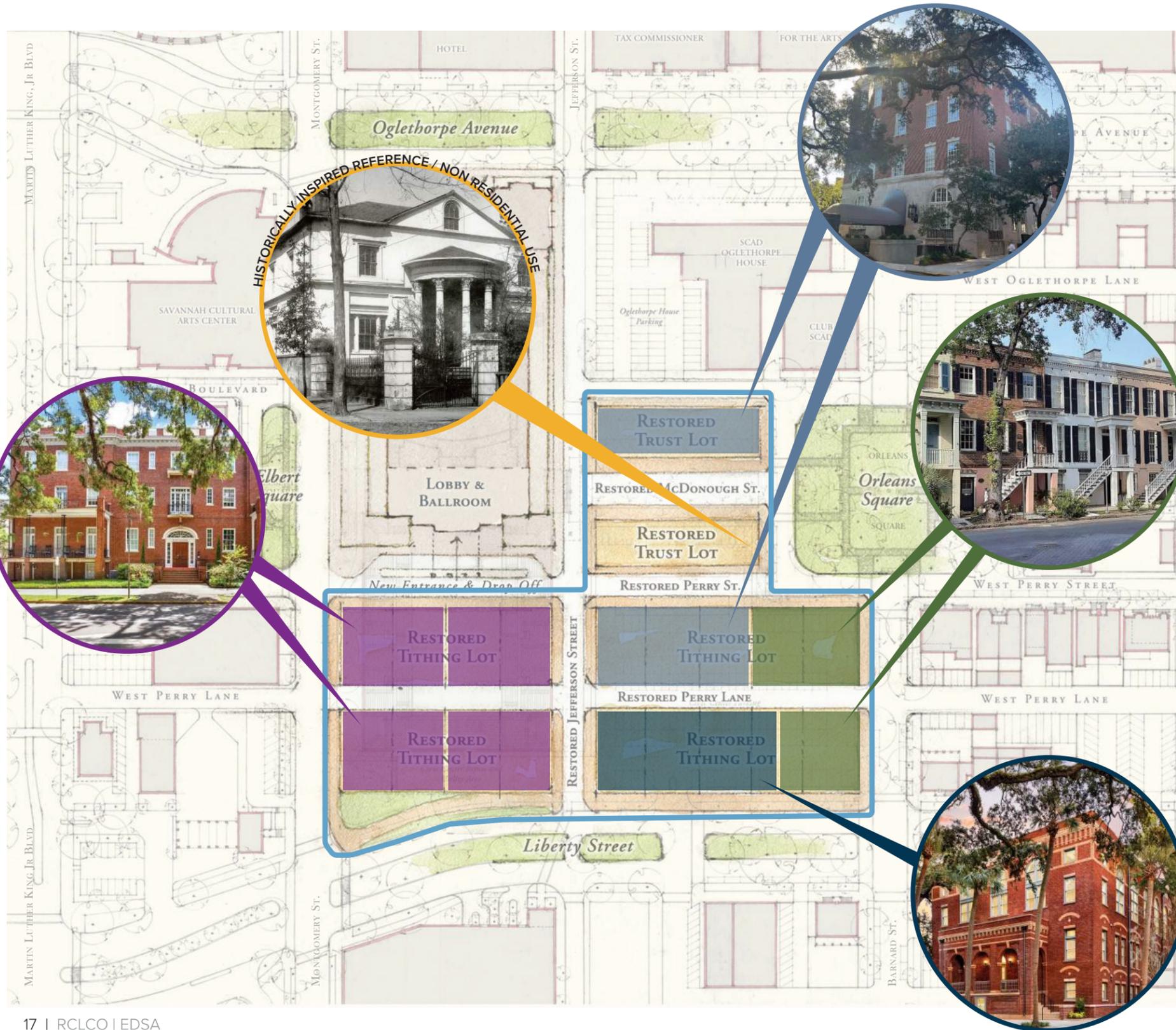
Scenario 1



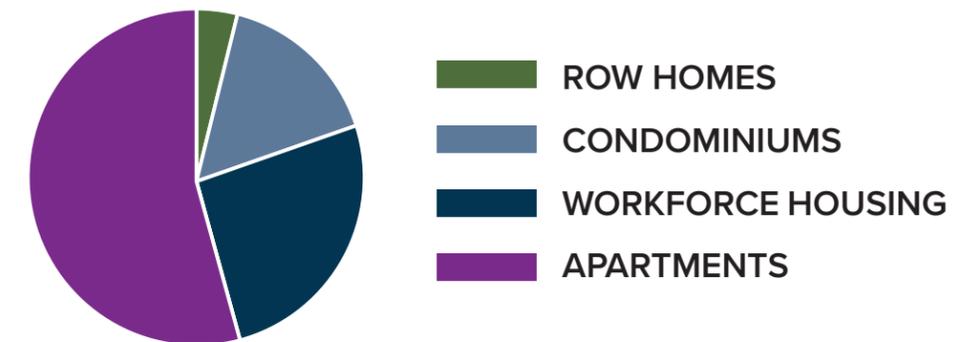
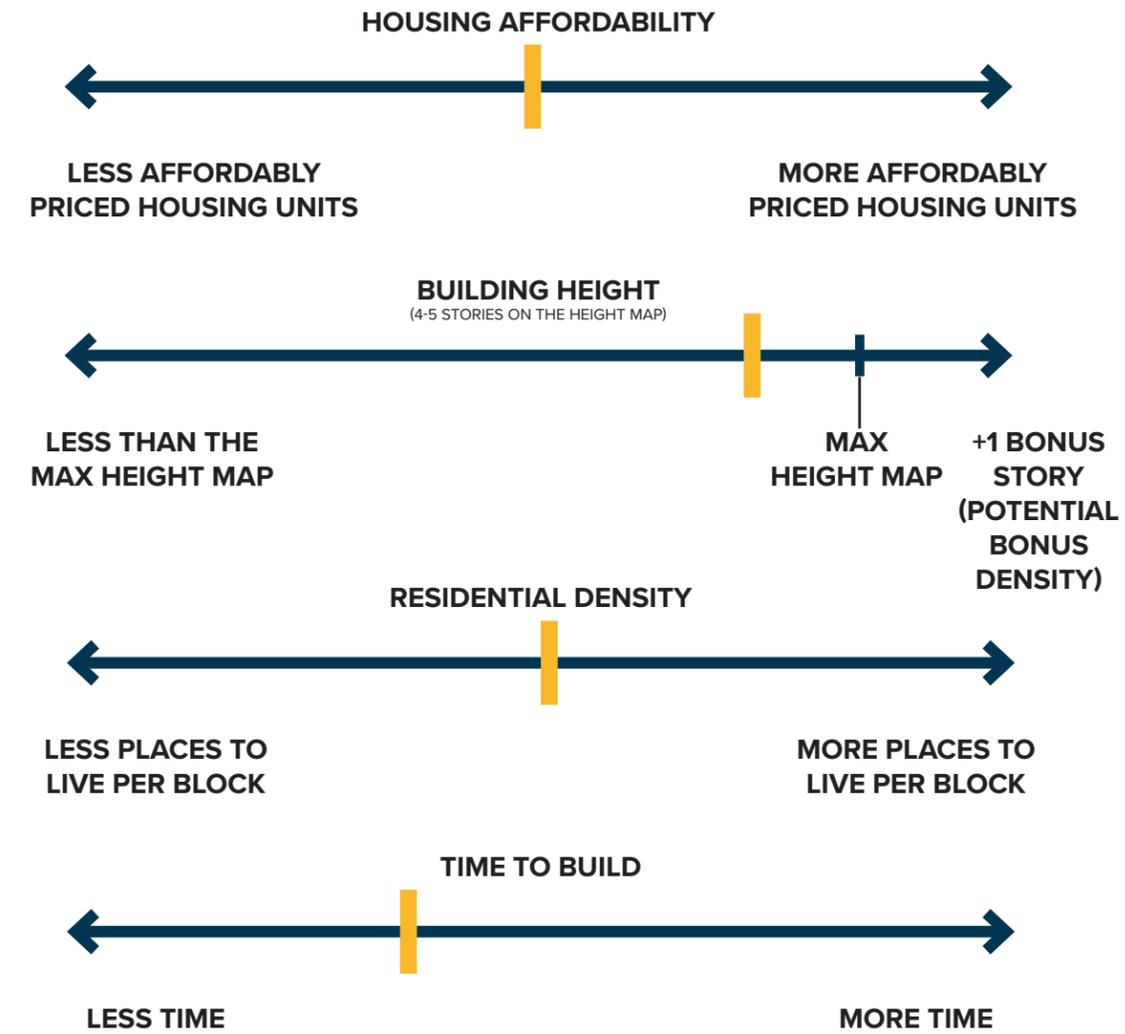
METRICS



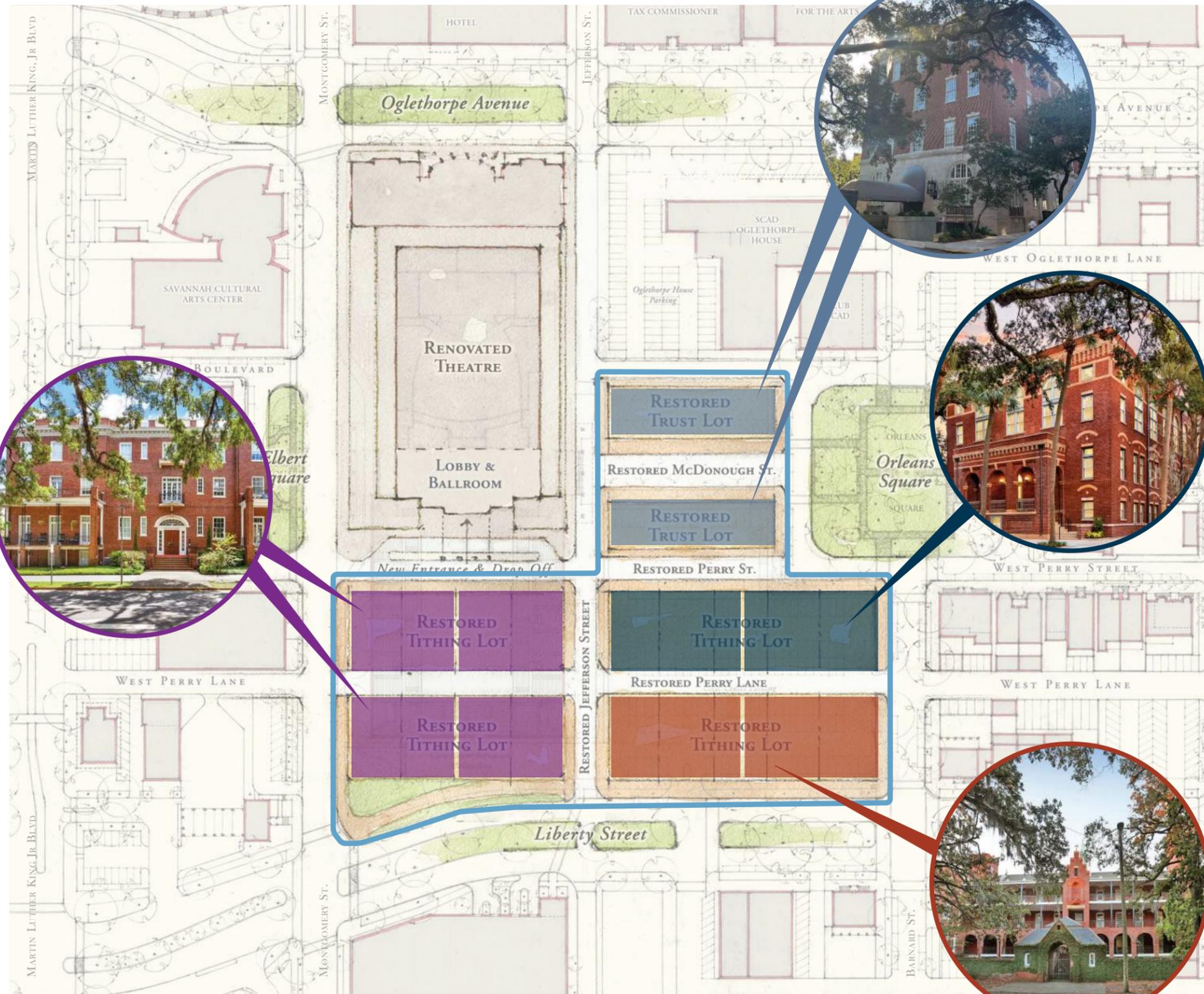
Scenario 2



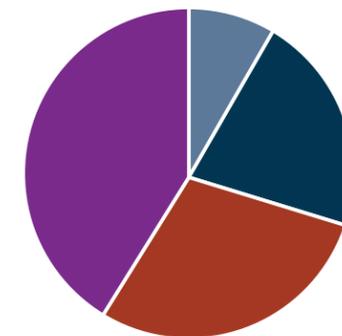
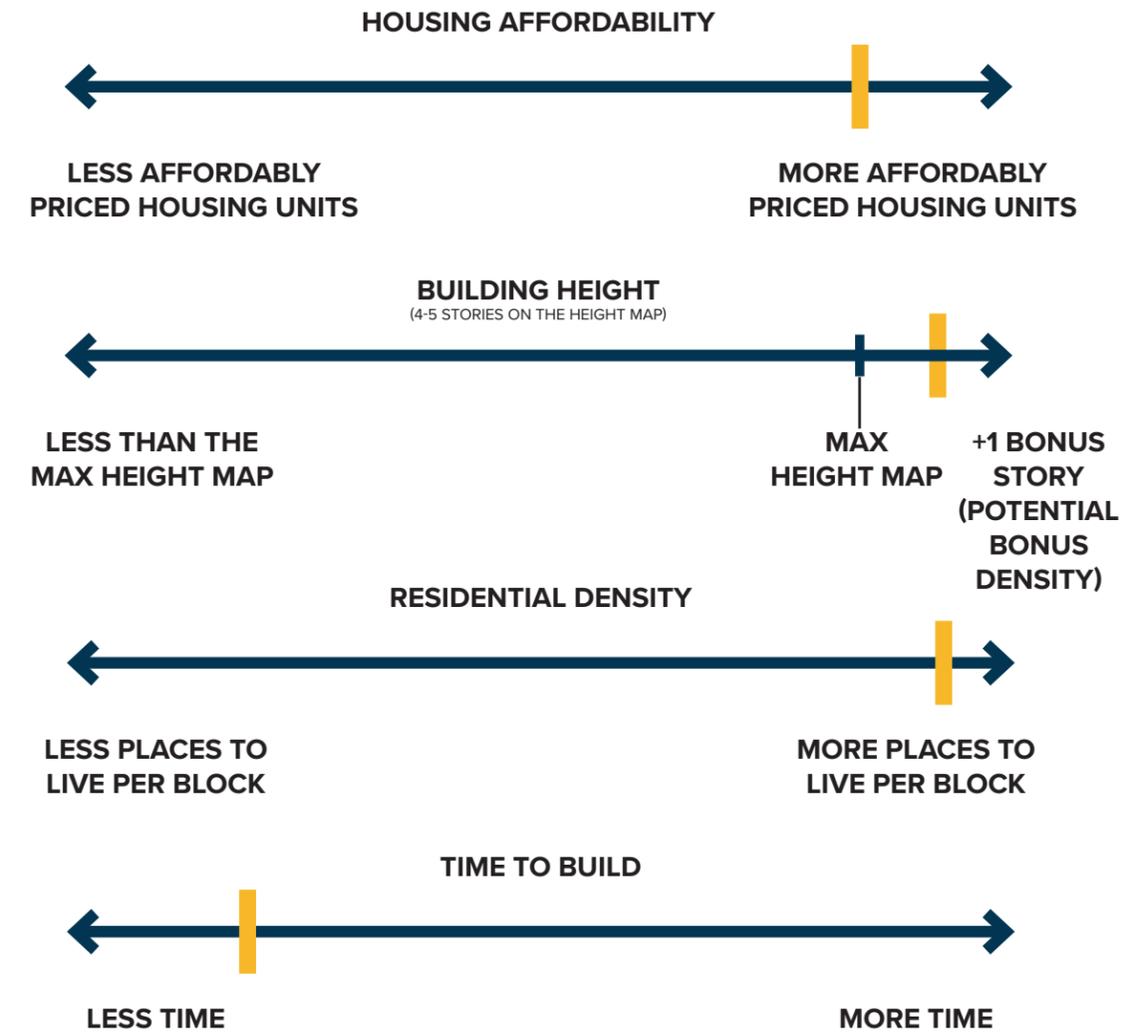
METRICS



Scenario 3



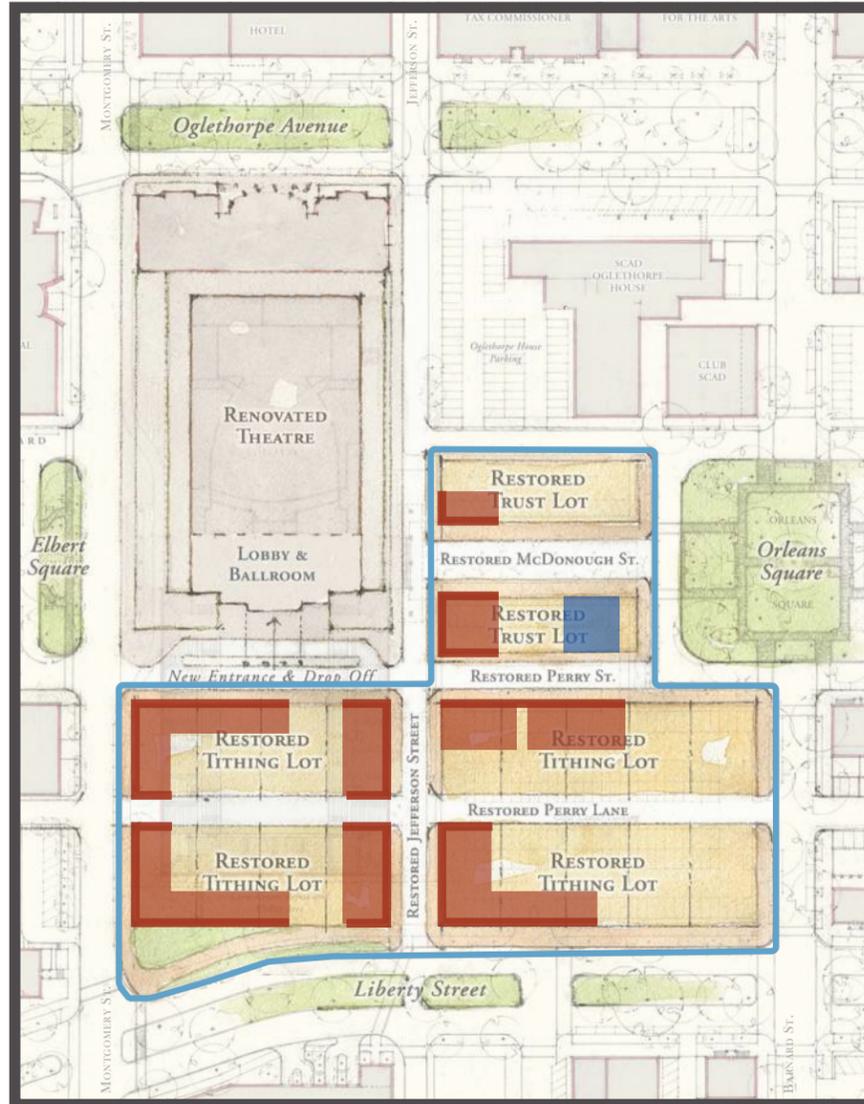
METRICS



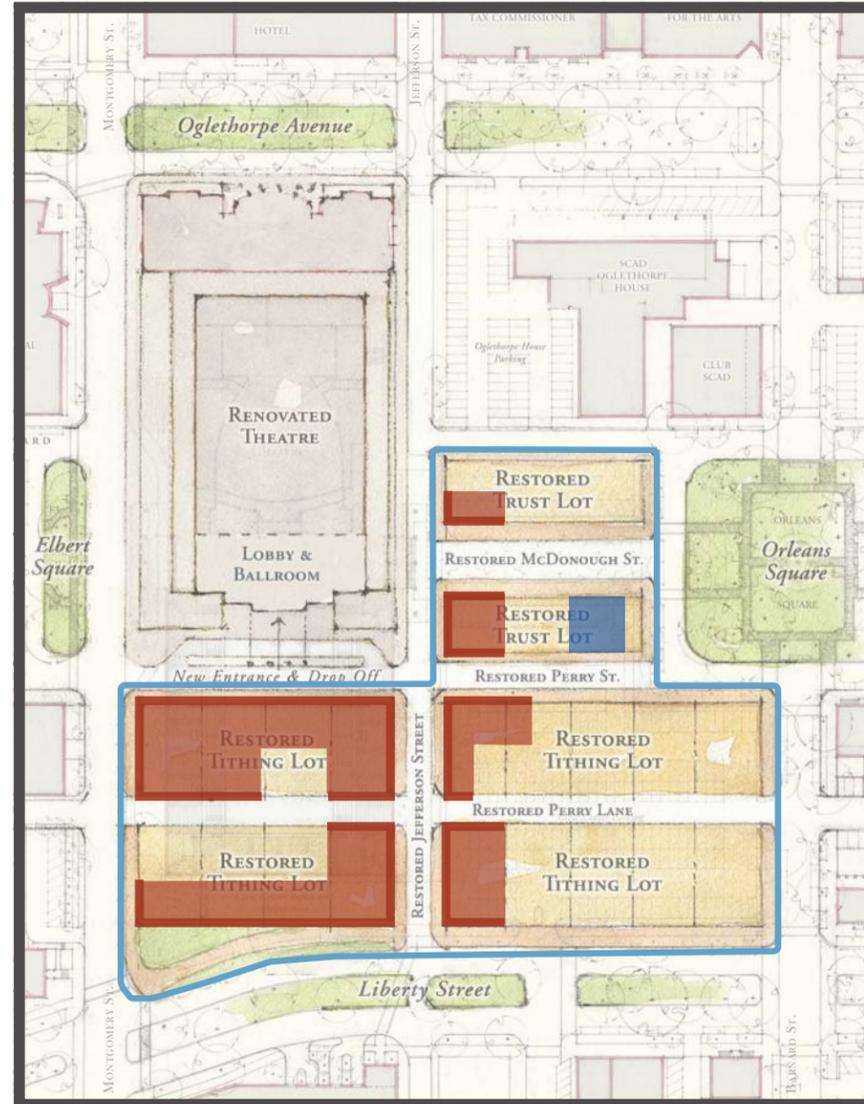
- CONDOMINIUMS
- WORKFORCE HOUSING
- SENIOR HOUSING
- APARTMENTS

Commercial Scenarios

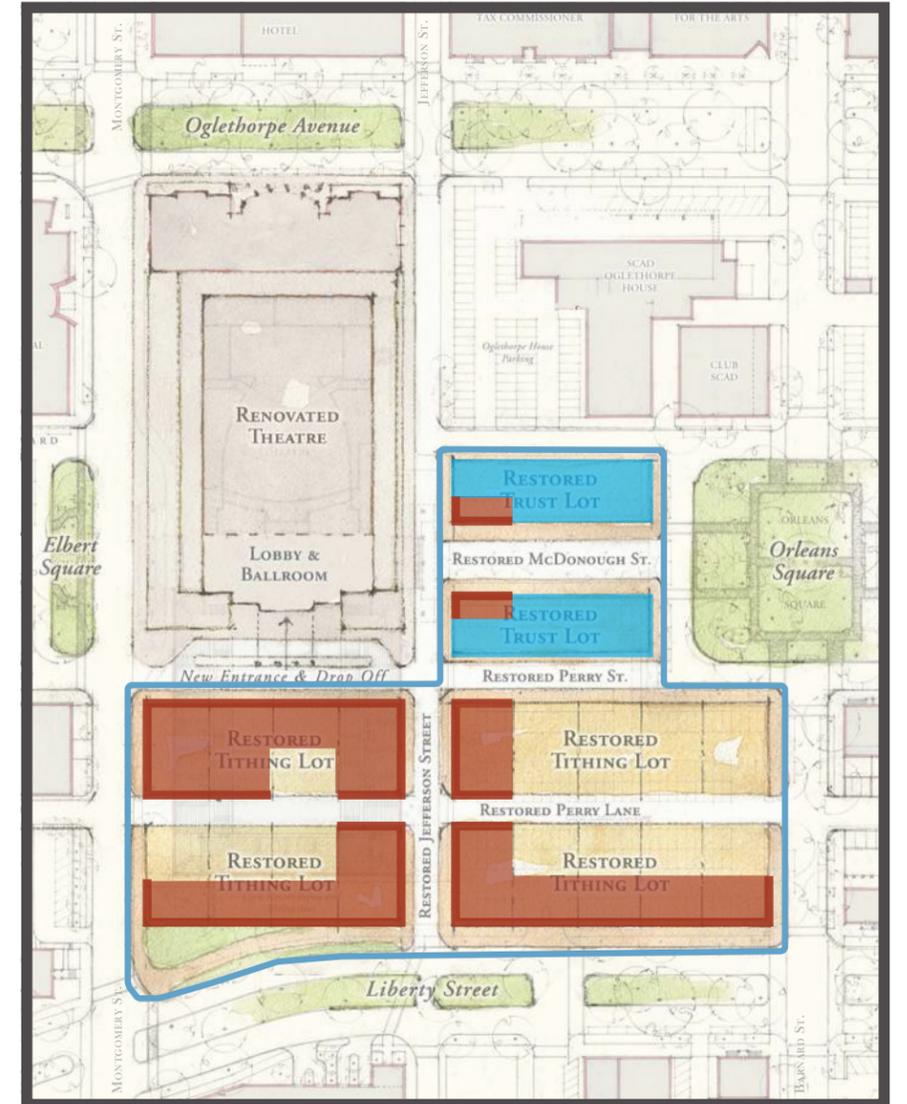
SCENARIO A
45,000-55,000 SF



SCENARIO B
45,000-55,000 SF



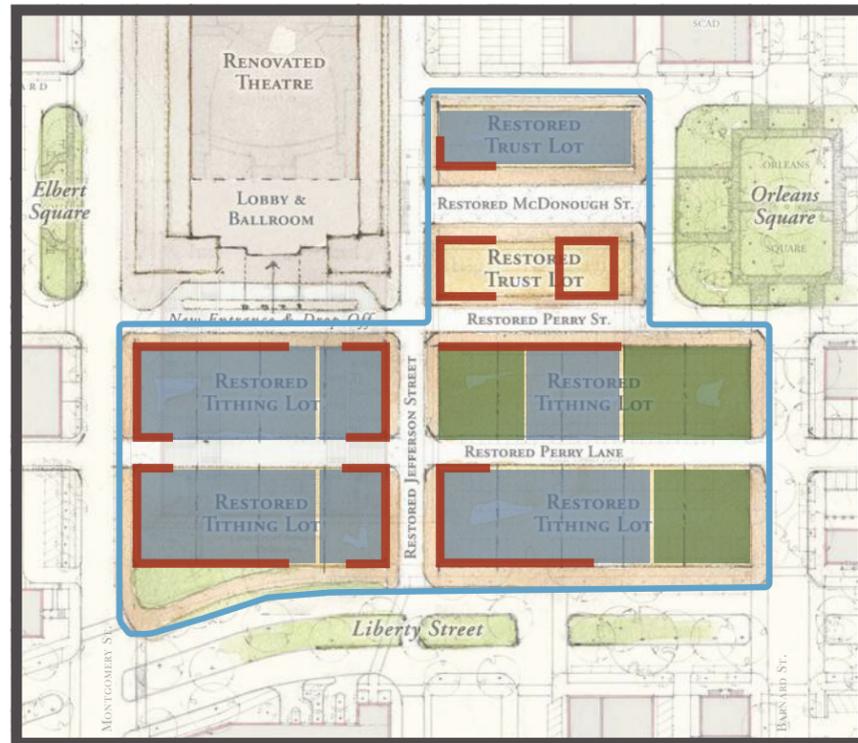
SCENARIO C
55,000-65,000 SF



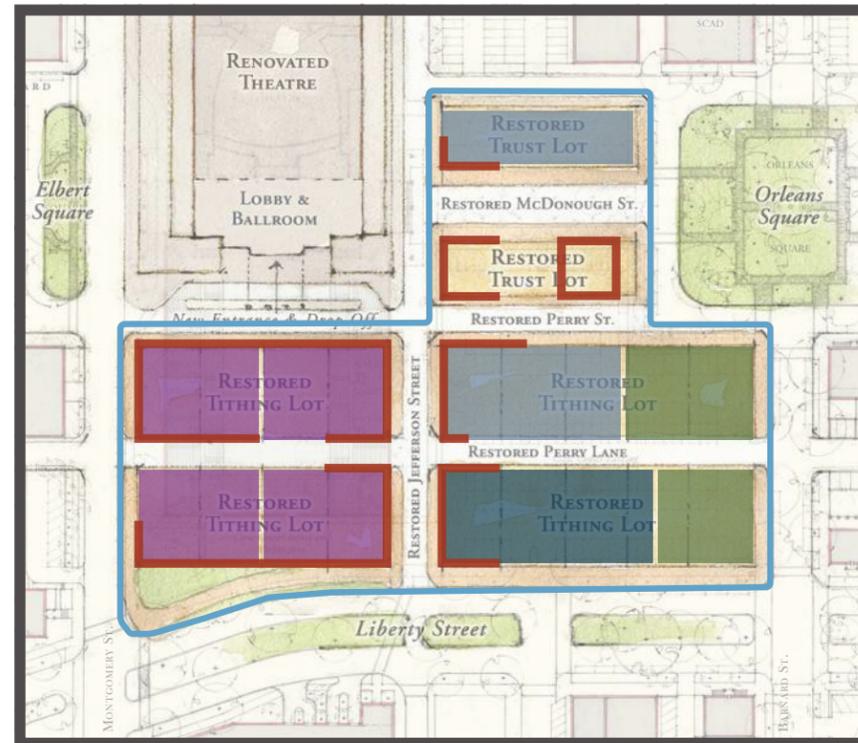
- STREET LEVEL OFFICE
- MULTI-STORY OFFICE
- STREET LEVEL COMMERCIAL

Putting it Together | Residential and Commercial Scenarios

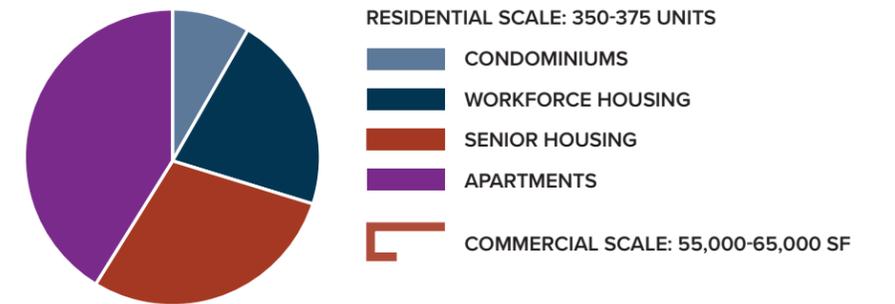
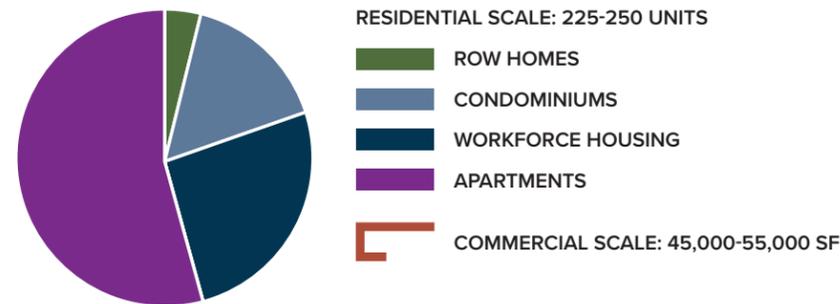
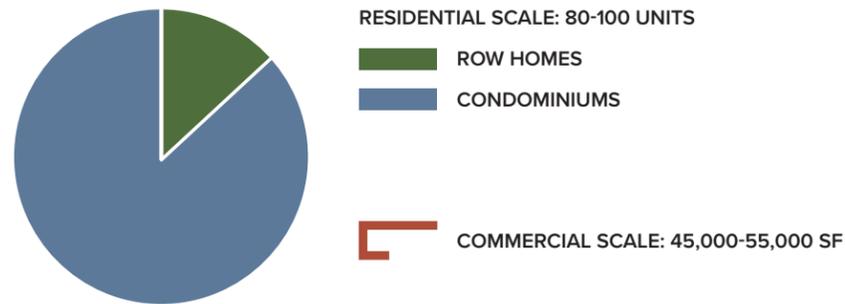
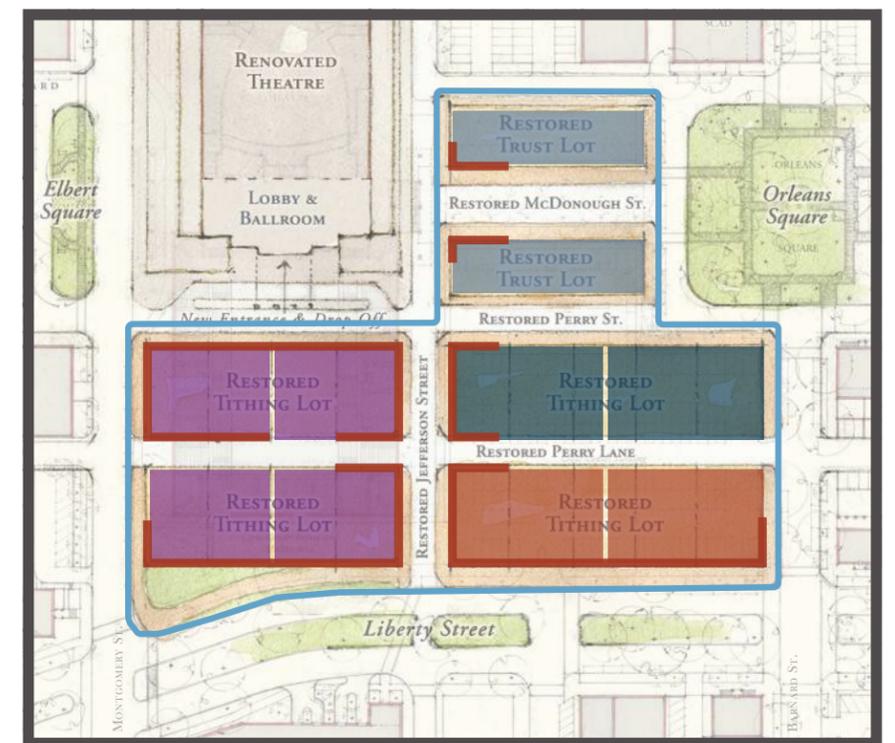
SCENARIO 1 (RESIDENTIAL) + SCENARIO A (COMMERCIAL)



SCENARIO 2 (RESIDENTIAL) + SCENARIO B (COMMERCIAL)



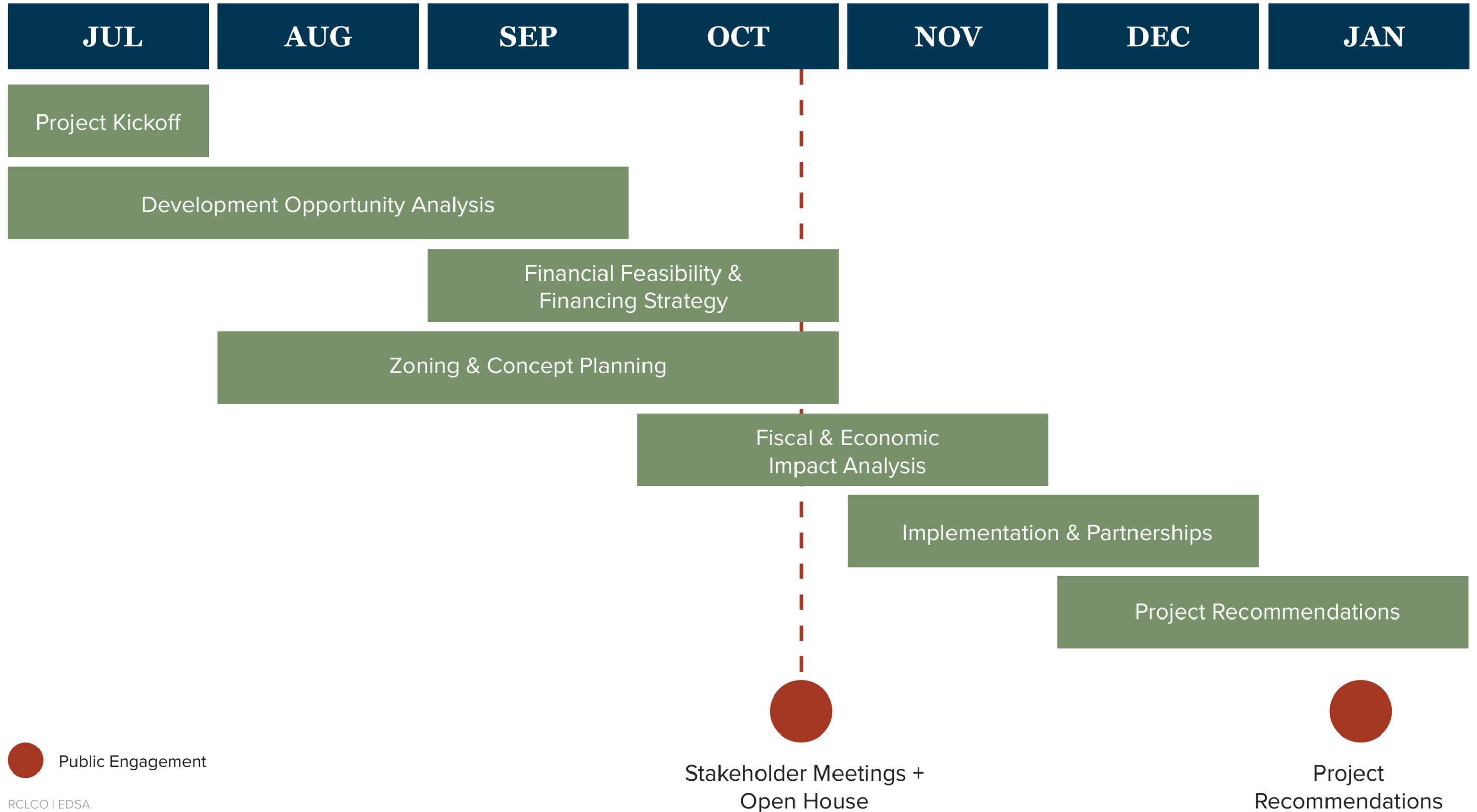
SCENARIO 3 (RESIDENTIAL) + SCENARIO C (COMMERCIAL)





Help Reimagine the Civic Center Site

Timeline



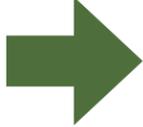
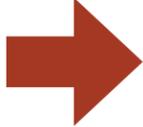
Public Engagement

Overview

- 1** Help identify priorities for how the site should evolve over time.
- 2** Provide feedback on housing, retail, and character choices through boards, discussions, and survey.
- 3** Shape which redevelopment scenarios are refined into a preferred plan that benefits the community.
- 4** Ensure the project reflects the community's values and Savannah's historic identity.



How to Engage Today

-  **Explore the boards** and learn about the tradeoffs.
-  **Use your dots** to tell us about your priorities.
-  **Share your ideas** or ask questions to City staff or consultant team.
-  **Fill out a feedback card** with your thoughts and drop it in the comment box before you leave.
-  **Scan the QR code** to access the Digital Feedback Cards and share your input.



QR Code to Digital Feedback Card