

NEAR NORTHWEST MANAGEMENT DISTRICT | LIVABLE CENTERS PLAN



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We would like to thank the more than 500 people who participated in the creation of this plan.

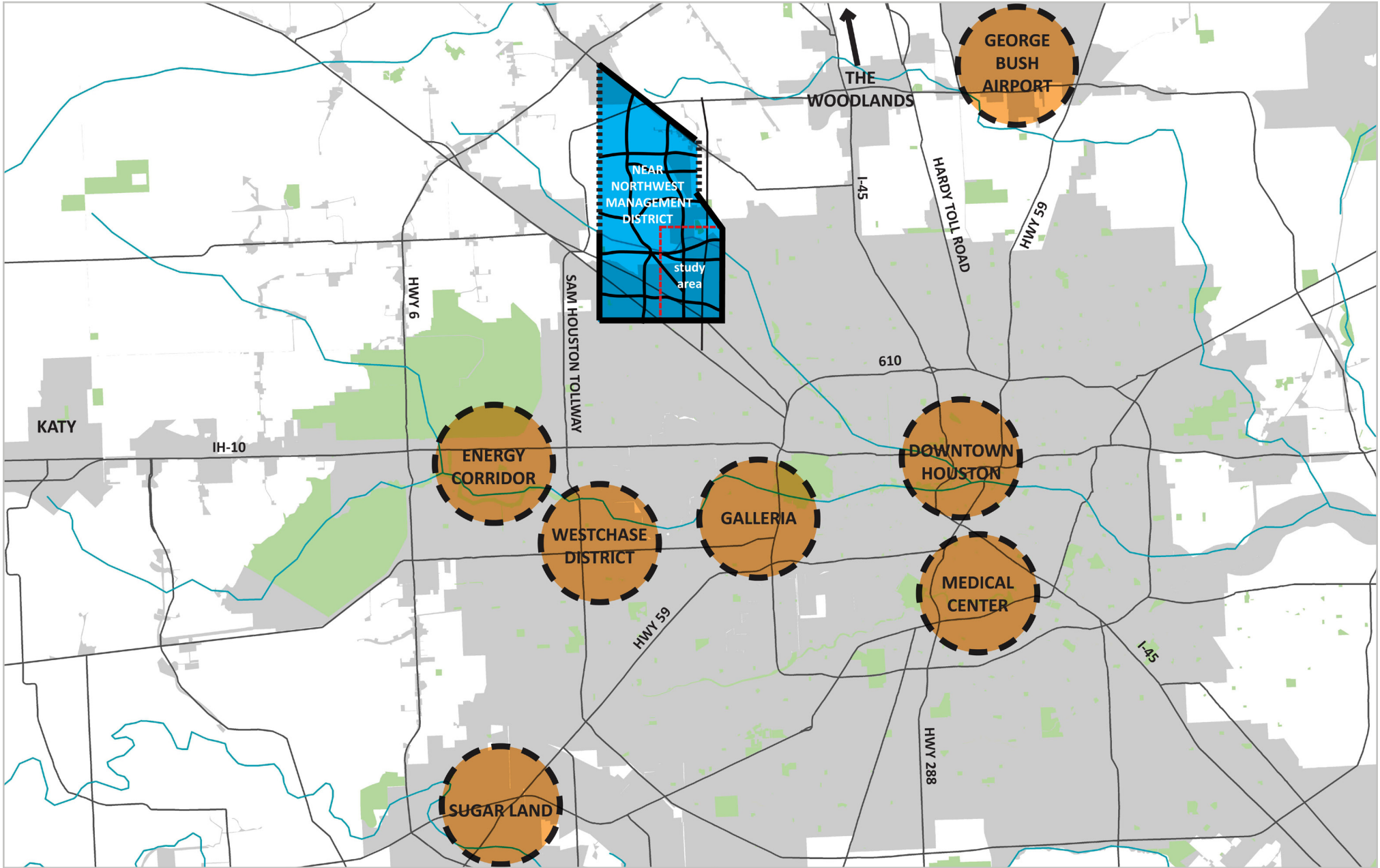


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INTRODUCTION



HISTORY & OVERVIEW

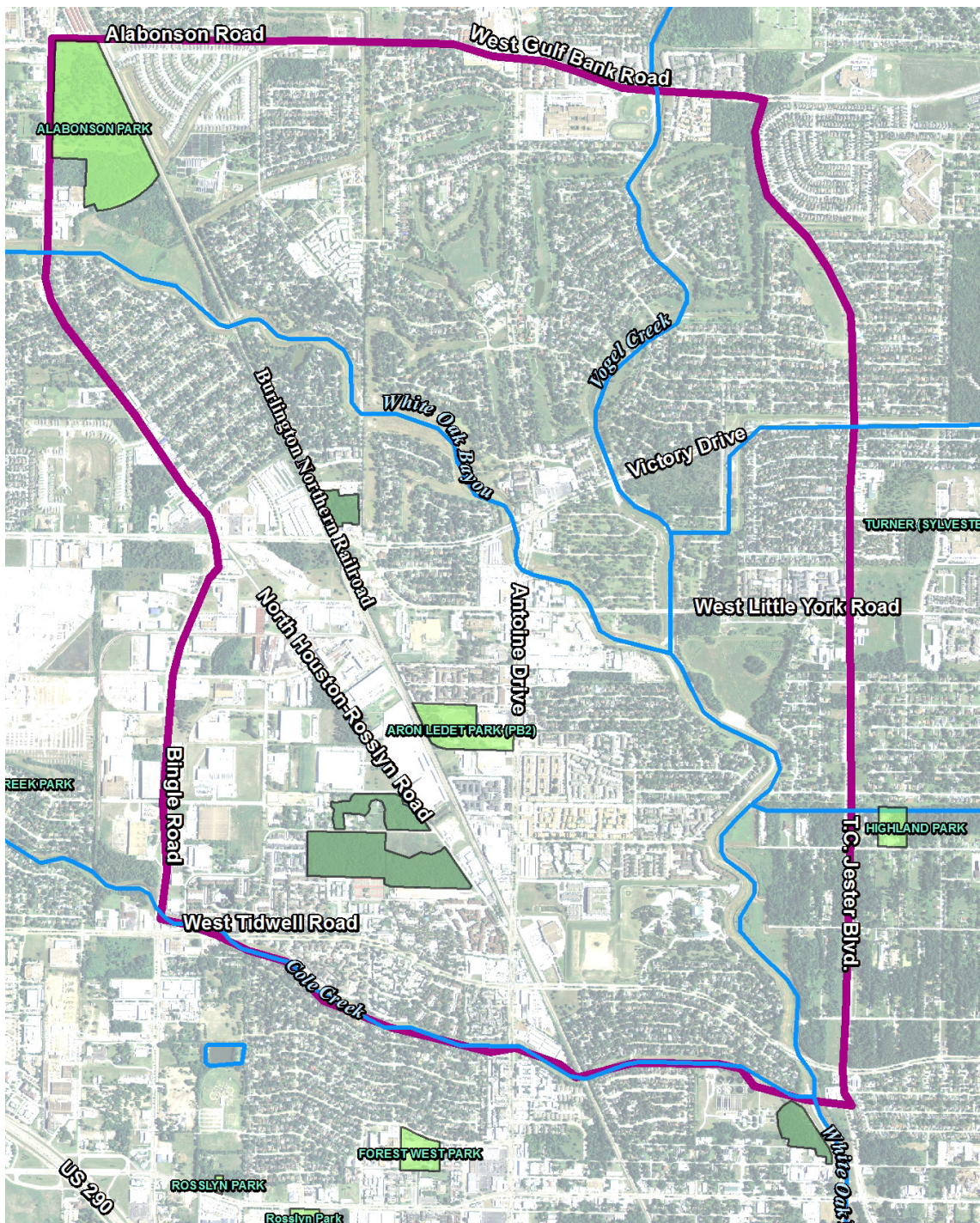
The Texas State Legislature created the Near Northwest Management District (the District) in 2001 to address concerns about public safety and economic decline by promoting and coordinating the economic growth, cultural activities and public welfare of the property within its boundaries. The District boundaries include territory contained in the sixteen square mile area bounded by T.C. Jester Boulevard on the east, Pinemont Drive on the south, Hollister Drive projected to State Road 249 on the west, and State Road 249 on the north. The District was modeled after other existing management districts in the City that have been successful in addressing the service needs of the commercial property owners within their boundaries, such as the Greenspoint District, the Westchase District and the Greater East End Management District.

In 2010, the Board of Directors of the District approved a fifteen-year Service, Improvement and Assessment Plan that will serve as a guide in developing and administering services and programs for commercial property owners in the following areas:

- Security and Public Safety
- Planning and Urban Design
- Marketing and Perception Enhancement
- Administration

There is now a firm foundation of real accomplishments. Today, the area is safer and cleaner than in 2001 when the District first began operations. The District is making real progress in changing the public perception of the Near Northwest Area as rundown, unsafe and unappealing for businesses or as a destination. The leadership of the District looks forward to building on its accomplishments to further serve its constituency and position the District as the next great place to work, live and do business and increases economic opportunity for area businesses and commercial property owners.

The Study Area includes an approximate one-mile section of the Antoine Drive corridor, from West Tidwell Road on the south to the edge of Inwood Forrest just beyond Victory Drive at the north, and from White Oak Bayou & Vogel Creek on the east to the railroad on the west.



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The District has completed the initial phase of the strategic planning process and begun to set priorities with four areas of focus:

Near

One of the primary strengths identified is the District's excellent location. Proximity to all major business centers in the city makes the Near Northwest Area an excellent location to live and do business. A Location Committee was created to find ways to enhance and market this feature. Projects they will be working on include working with Metro to increase public transportation in the area, improving entrances into the area, improved signage for the area and synchronizing the lights to enhance mobility in the area.

Safe

Security continues to be an important issue for the area. In addition to regular police patrols, an additional Constable was added to the seven already patrolling to reinforce security. The Weed & Seed Grant formed new commercial and residential partnerships that increase security in the area and the District is applying for additional grants to bring new security programs into the area. The District is working on applications for an anti-gang grant and a grant to build youth leaders through service learning projects.

Green

Enhancing greenspace was identified as a priority for our area and a Beautification Committee was created to work with the City Parks Department for regular park maintenance, pursue the completion of the bike trails and continue working to make the former golf course property into a greenspace for all area residents and their families.

Growing

Finally, a Business Development Committee was created to focus on bringing new businesses into the area. These efforts will include creating a new web site for the District, developing a comprehensive master plan and working to improve business relationships both inside the District and the city.



Near Northwest Management District Livable Center




Inwood Forest

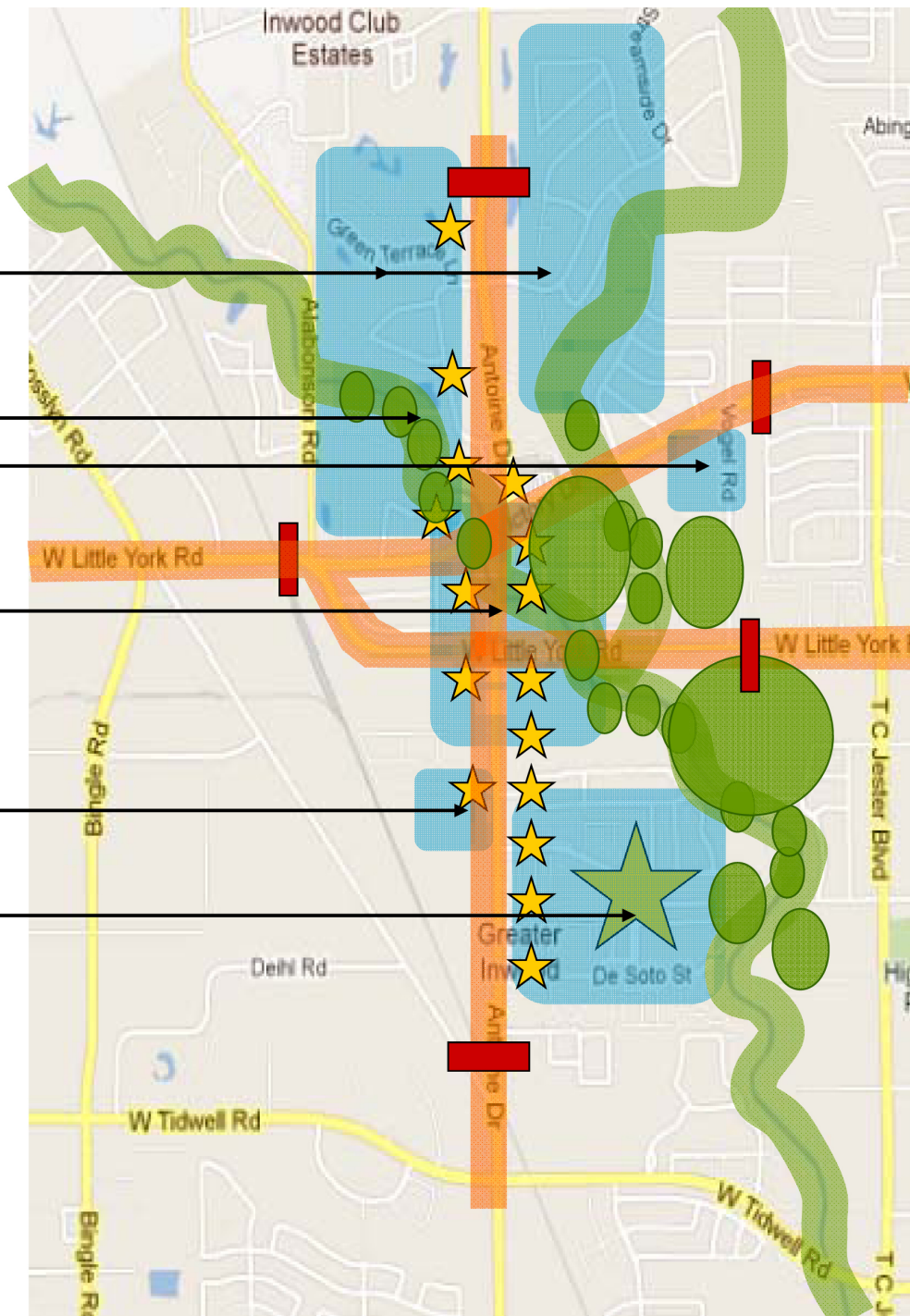
White Oak Bayou
Lone Star Campus

Commercial Center

Aron Ledet Park

De Soto Street Area

- Key Branding Gateways 
- Key Areas of Interest 
- Key Natural Development 



LIVABLE CENTERS STUDY

By 2035, the thirteen-county Houston-Galveston region is expected to grow by an additional 3.5 million people. Accommodating this growth will overburden the region’s transportation network unless we identify ways to reduce vehicle trips. The Regional Transportation Plan of the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) lays out a new strategy to address this growth - Livable Centers.

Livable Centers are walkable, mixed-use places that provide multi-modal transportation options, improve environmental quality and promote economic development. These places are safe, convenient, and attractive areas where people can live, work, and play with less reliance on their cars.

In 2010, the District submitted a preliminary vision of how to improve the area to H-GAC for consideration for a Livable Centers Study Grant. The Near Northwest Management District Livable Centers Plan is a partnership between H-GAC and the District for developing a vision and plan for a Livable Center.

The Livable Centers Grant provided the funding to develop design recommendations, infrastructure improvements and urban design solutions that will provide residents and businesses with more appealing places for people to interact and gather, make walking, bicycling and transit more convenient, preserve the environment and create a unique community that will act as a catalyst for investment and development. This plan will incorporate recommendations for transportation, infrastructure improvements, urban design and economic development.

The diagram at left was prepared as an initial strategy for the Livable Centers Study.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The area has already attracted significant attention from the following:

1. City of Houston

Purchased former Inwood Forest Golf Course to create a park and community center; approved Ike Recovery Funding for the renovation of Holly View, Sterling Grove and Linda Vista Apartments

2. Harris County Flood Control

Creating flood control plan for the area using sections of the former Inwood Forest Golf Course for flood water detention ponds

3. Houston Parks Board

Identified White Oak Bayou as a priority for City green space and is expanding bike trail from Pinemont to Antoine

4. METRO

Recognized that Antoine bus route has one of highest riderships in the City

5. Urban Land Institute

Selects Antoine Corridor as one of four national study areas for a Rose Center Fellowship

6. Aldine ISD

Partnering Smith Academy with the University of Houston

7. Greater Inwood Partnership

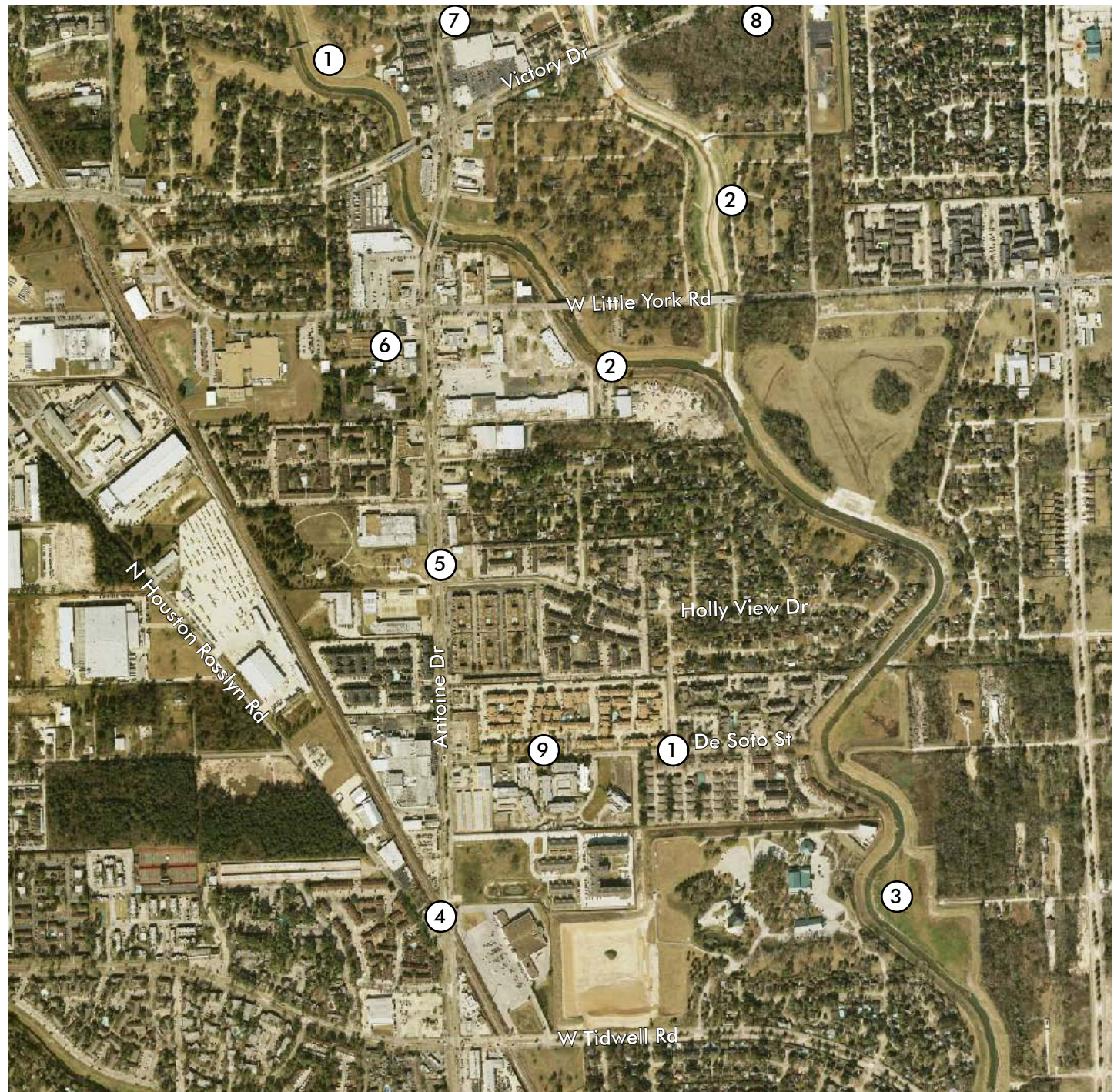
Provides ongoing beautification of parks and esplanades, tree planting and litter pick-up

8. Lone Star College

Building Victory Center

9. H-GAC

Awarded a Livable Centers Study Grant to the Near Northwest Management to provide urban planning and design recommendations to enhance vitality and connectivity throughout the Antoine Corridor





Transform Antoine into a destination intertwined with the waters of White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek, linked to the heart of Houston by waterside trails and enhanced transit, punctuated by unique parks and community gardens, to be reborn as a walkable, bikable mixed-use corridor anchored by landmark buildings and lively public spaces.

The original focus of this Livable Centers Study is to explore the creation of a Town Center along the Antoine Corridor from West Tidwell Road to Victory Drive that would attract business into the area as well as increase the area's livability for its residents. The Livable Centers Study was intended to help to define practical ways to improve the area's accessibility, increase venues for community activities and generally improve the area through projects like the creation of pedestrian and biking thoroughfares, providing bike parking at bus stops, adding beautification elements, revitalizing vacant shopping centers, improving existing parks and adapting the vacant golf course into a community center and wellness park.

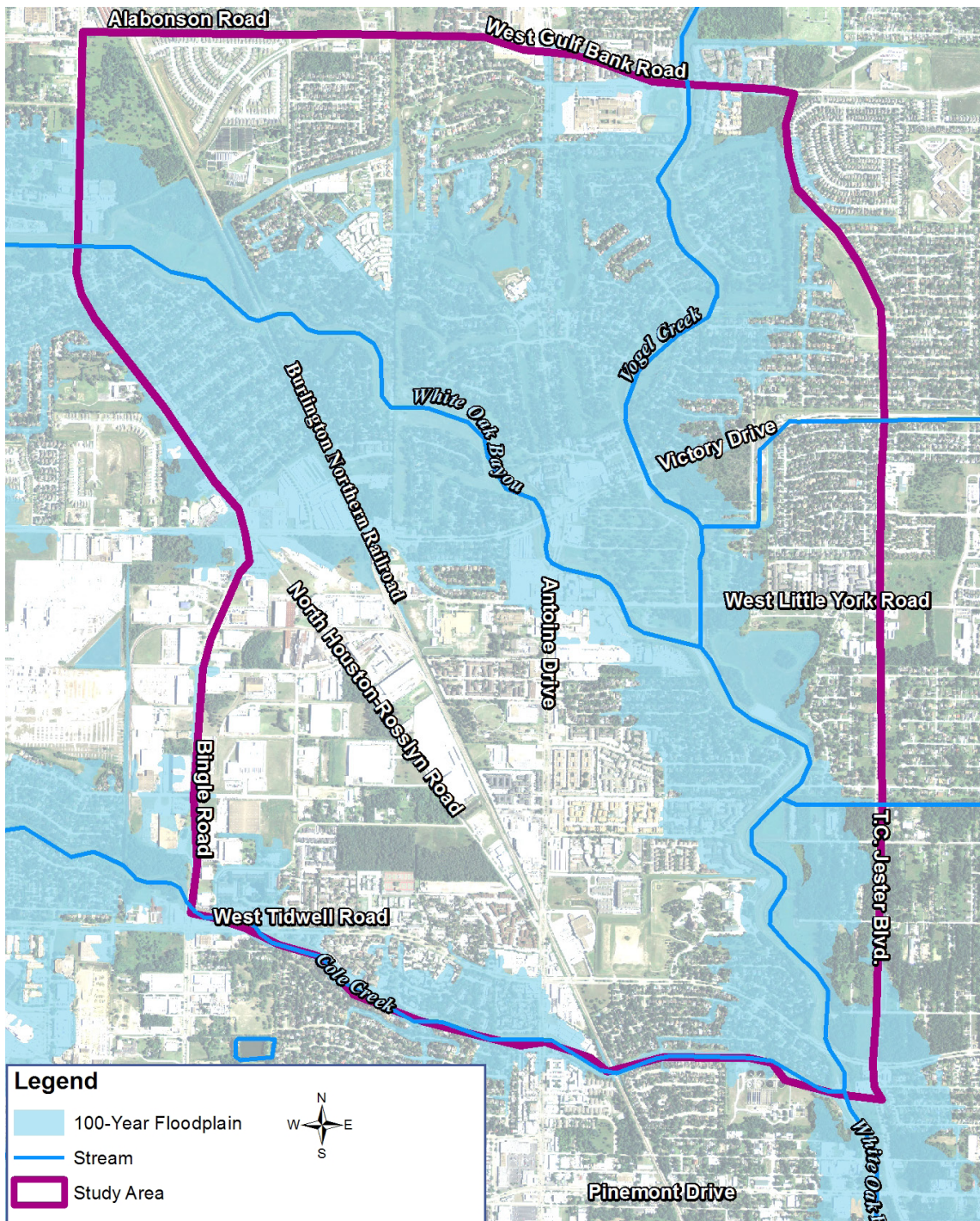
The consultant and design team commenced in February 2010 by studying the area to become familiar with existing conditions and the opportunities and challenges. The District formed an Advisory Committee to provide input to the consultant team. An initial Stakeholders Meeting was held February 23, 2011 at Advent Lutheran Church at which a preliminary Vision Statement and "Big Ideas" was presented for input and feedback.

"Big Ideas"

- Refine our relationship to water
- Make parks and gardens a priority
- Create a place that is a destination
- Transforming an auto-centric strip into a street for people
- Leverage strategic location with upgraded transit connections

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES





ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

Due to environmental constraints, it is recommended that future development attempt to incorporate low-impact development techniques particularly to help mitigate storm water run-off. Storm water treatment swales, rain gardens, green roofs and other techniques can be incorporated in public infrastructure improvements, future site improvements and buildings.

The streams in the Study Area are White Oak Bayou and its tributaries, Vogel Creek and Cole Creek. The current Flood Insurance Rate Map by the Federal Emergency Management Agency shows that more than half of the Study Area is in the 100-year floodplain of these streams. Many buildings are located in the floodplain and are therefore subject to periodic flooding.

The Harris County Flood Control District has acted to reduce flooding in the Study Area. Vogel Creek has been channelized to increase its capacity and carry flood waters downstream more quickly. In addition, the District has purchased and demolished homes close to White Oak Bayou.

Flooding is and will remain a major problem in the Study Area. The Near Northwest Livable Centers Study focuses redevelopment opportunities outside of the floodway. The study recommends that vacant sites within the 100-year floodplain be reserved for recreation and conservation use, such as parks, gardens and greenbelts.



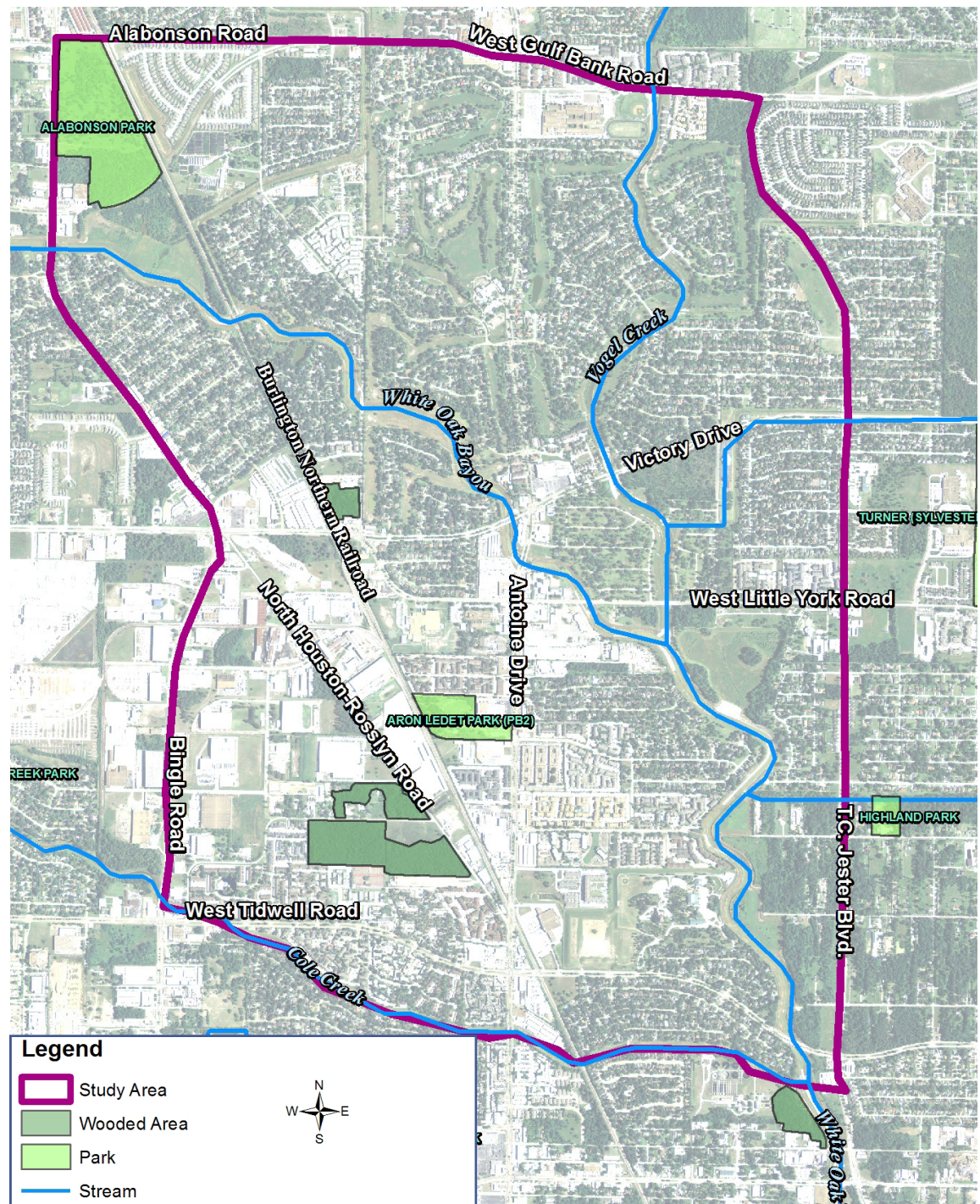
Looking south at the Victory Bridge over Vogel Creek in the Five Bridges Area. The Arbor Oaks area is to the east and west. An urban garden demonstration project is being considered to the east (right) adjacent to the new Lone Star Victory Campus.

EXISTING GREEN SPACE

The Livable Centers Study Area has a collection of green spaces made up of both parks and wooded areas. The bayous in the Study Area made up of White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek and are the true under-utilized green spaces in the area. These green spaces are in many cases hidden from view of those traveling through the area. Just north of the Study Area is the community's most well-known green space/open space being the former Inwood Forest Golf Course. Currently, the only public park in the area is the small Aron Ledet Park on and west of Antoine Drive about one-half mile north of Tidwell.



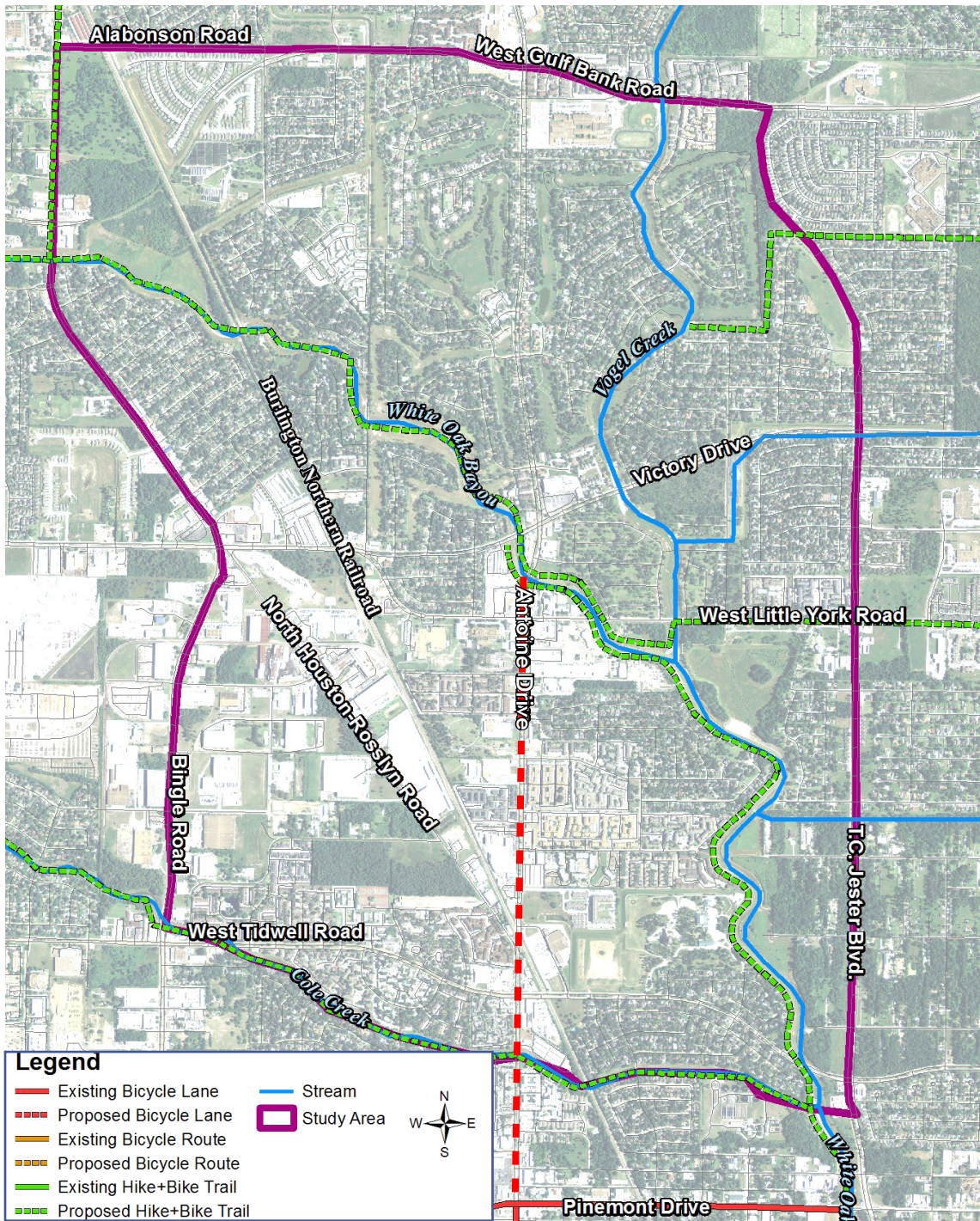
Often hidden from view or crossed by banal bridges when traversing the Study Area, the White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek are the true underutilized green spaces.



EXISTING & PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN & BIKE TRAILS

New bicycle paths will soon provide a safe and attractive alternative to riding on the street, and other paths are also proposed. The pedestrian and bike trails network within the Livable Centers Study Area is currently being improved today with new trails being constructed along White Oak Bayou connecting to existing trails along White Oak that go to Memorial Park as well as other great parks and green spaces in the city. The trails under construction as well as the future trails planned along the bayou are key in creating a true cohesive network of pedestrian and bike trails in the region.

The City of Houston is now building the first bicycle path in the Study Area, a separate route along White Oak Bayou from south of the Study Area to Victory Drive. Antoine Drive is currently in the process of being restriped to include bike lanes from Pinemont north to White Oak bridge. There are two proposed bicycle paths crossing the Study Area. One proposed bicycle trail would be built along Cole Creek, crossing the Study Area from east to west. Another would cross the Study Area from West Little York Road on the east to White Oak Bayou on the west. Bicyclists are poorly served in the project area with no bicycle paths and few through streets that are not crowded with motor vehicles.



The City of Houston is currently completing the bicycle path along White Oak Bayou which will connect the Study Area all the way to Downtown.

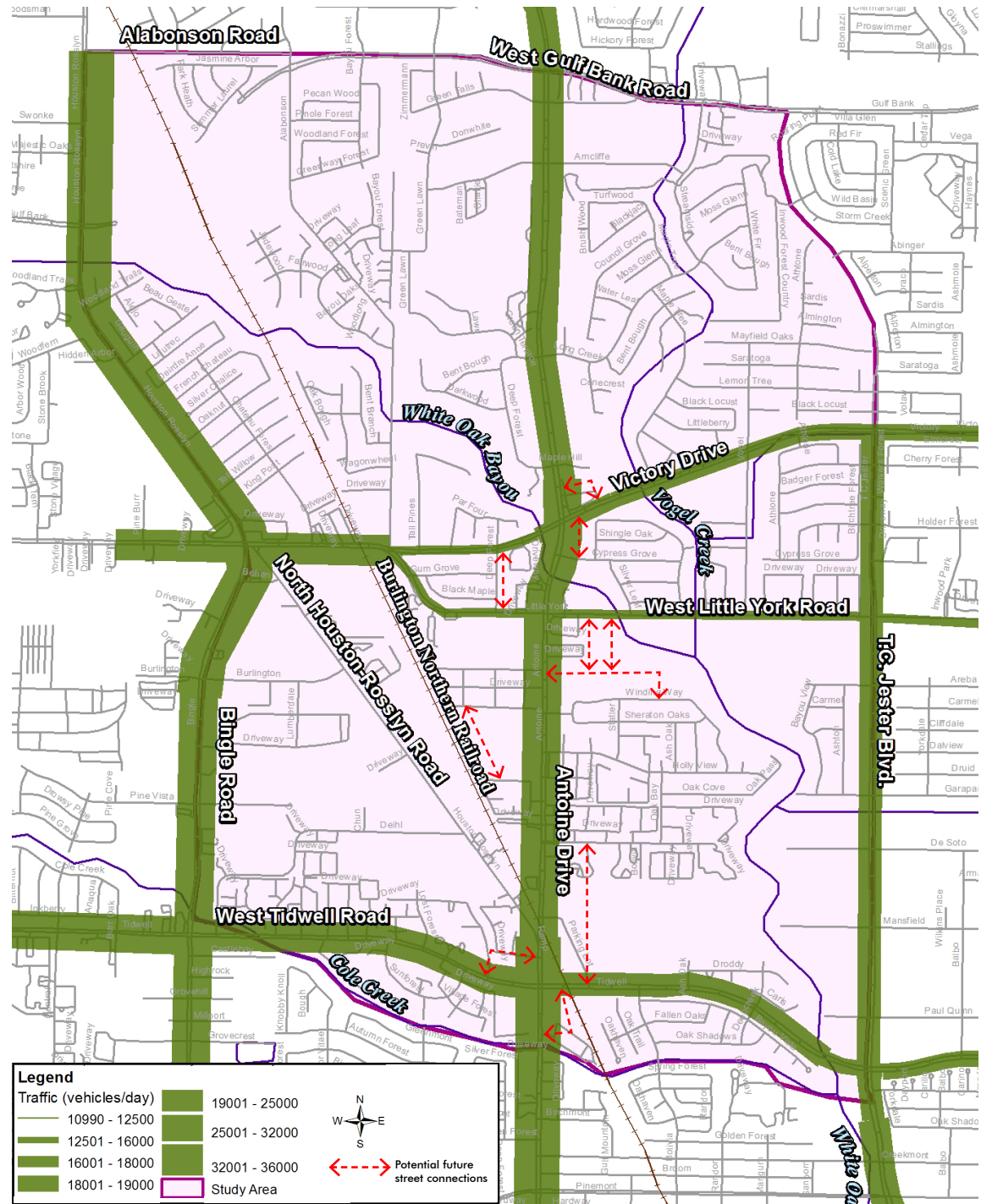
REGIONAL MOBILITY

The daily traffic volume at Antoine Drive reaches 32,000 vehicles per day. West Little York Road west of the Burlington Northern Railroad has traffic volume between 19,000 to 25,000 vehicles per day. Victory Drive and West Little York Road east of Burlington Northern Railroad have daily traffic volumes less than 18,000 vehicles. Traffic volume on West Tidwell Road increases gradually from east to west, from 16,000 to 36,000 vehicles per day. In general, northbound and southbound streets are more congested than eastbound and westbound streets.

The Near Northwest Study Area lacks a sufficient network of streets to connect with the major arterial roads. The area's stream and railroad corridors (White Oak Bayou, Vogel Creek, Burlington Northern Railroad) create barriers that restrict movement from one side to the other. Potential future local street connections are shown in red dashed lines in the accompanying graphic.

The Study Area has parking at major shopping centers, employers (for employees and customers only), and on minor streets in residential subdivisions. Major arterials such as Antoine Drive do not allow on-street parking. Consequently, businesses must have their own parking lots for patrons, making for an automobile-dominated community where pedestrians are not encouraged.

Pedestrian use of the study area is hindered by lack of safe sidewalks. Where sidewalks exist along major streets in the study area, most are in poor condition. As a result, pedestrians must walk on unpaved shoulders or on the street. Also, subdivision street patterns have few links to other areas and it is difficult for people to walk or ride bicycles from subdivisions to schools, commercial areas or transit stops without traveling along a major arterial roadway, sometimes three to five times farther than a direct connection would allow.



REGIONAL MOBILITY

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) operates three bus routes in the Study Area:

- Route 85: North-South on Antoine Drive
- Route 45: East-West on West Tidwell Road
- Route 79: East-West on Victory Drive and West Little York Road

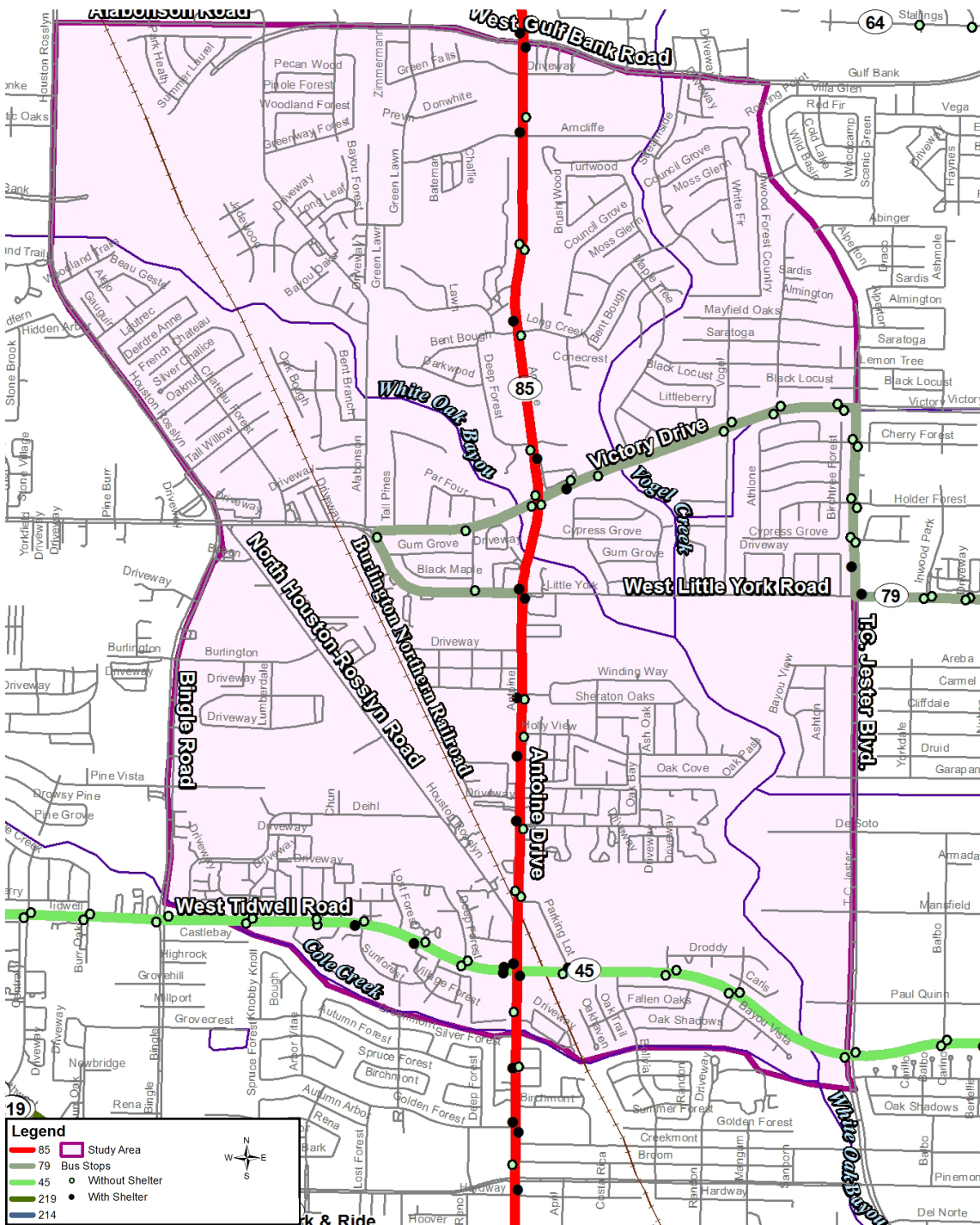
Routes 85 and 79 connect the Study Area with downtown Houston, while Route 45 is a crosstown line that serves north Houston and does not go downtown. The map at left shows the locations of bus stops and bus shelters in the Study Area. METRO has built bus shelters at the stops with larger numbers of daily boardings.

METRO has determined that average weekday transit ridership in the Study Area is about 3,600 riders per day. H-GAC has provided average daily vehicle trip estimates from their regional travel demand model, aggregated to a set of ten Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZs). After calculation, it is estimated that the total number of person-trips per day to and from the Study Area by personal motor vehicle is at least 68,700 person-trips per day. Thus, about five percent (5%) of travelers coming to or from the Study Area use public transportation, and about 95 percent of travelers use private automobiles. There is no information about the number of bicycle or pedestrian trips in the Study Area.

Modal Split

Subject	Subject	Male	Female
Workers 16 years and over	70,869	35,558	35,311
Car, truck or van	90.70%	89.70%	91.70%
Drove alone	82.00%	81.10%	83.00%
Carpooled	8.70%	8.60%	8.70%
In 2-person carpool	7.30%	7.30%	7.30%
In 3-person carpool	1.00%	1.00%	0.90%
In 4-or-more person carpool	0.40%	0.30%	0.50%
Workers per car, truck or van	1.16	1.17	1.15
Public transportation (excluding taxi)	2.50%	2.50%	2.60%
Walked	1.90%	2.00%	1.70%
Bicycle	0.20%	0.30%	0.20%
Taxicab, motorcycle or other means	1.20%	1.70%	0.70%
Worked at home	3.50%	3.80%	3.20%

Above is information from the US Census web site illustrating mode split data for the Study Area. The data was produced as part of the American Community Survey. Statistics shown are for a three year average from data collected during the period 2006 – 2008. This survey uses a random sample from the Study Area which is then expanded to the total population in the area.



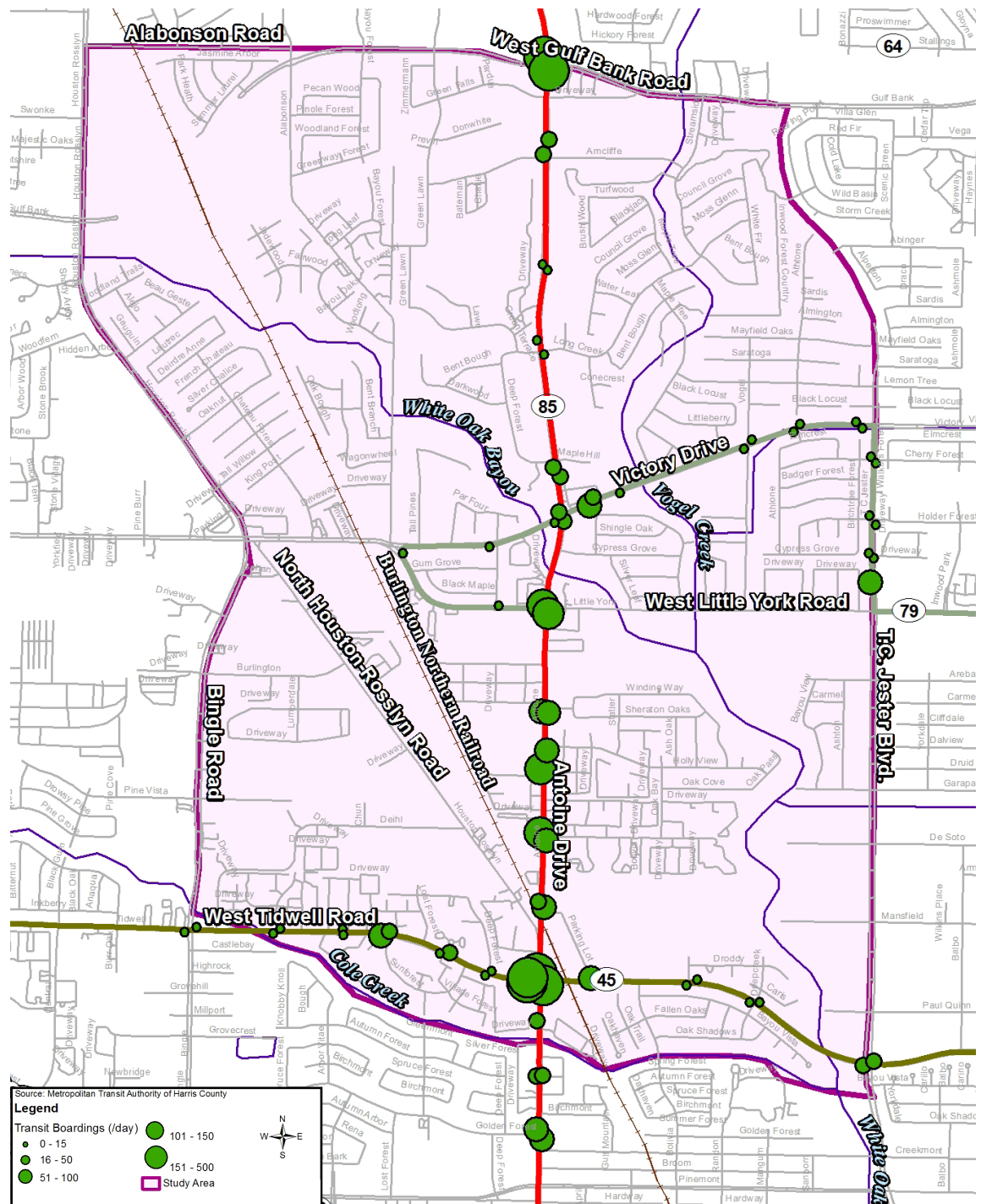
REGIONAL MOBILITY

The average number of riders entering and exiting METRO buses at Study Area bus stops on average day is shown in the adjoining figure. This indicates that Route 85 on Antoine Drive has many more boardings than Routes 45 and 79, with daily boardings of over 500 passengers per day.

Impediments to transit use in the Study Area include long walks from residential areas to bus stops, the difficulty of walking or riding a bicycle along arterial streets and bus stops without shelters or seats. Most bus stops have no shelter and no seats for people waiting for the bus.

Single-family residential developments in the Study Area have been designed in the auto-dominated manner popular since the 1950s. There are generally one or two streets connecting the residential area with a major thoroughfare instead of each street connecting directly to a thoroughfare and a bus stop at most corners. Consequently, the use of public transportation requires walking along a convoluted street pattern to reach the bus stop at the major thoroughfare, a substantial obstacle to transit use. Apartment residents are more likely to have a short walk to a bus stop.

The area has few bicycle paths and few sidewalks in good condition for people to use to get to transit stops. Many sidewalks in the Study Area are dilapidated, overly narrow or non-existent. The paved area is narrow, in some places less than three feet wide. Pedestrians must walk on the roadway in some places, jeopardizing their safety. Connections through parking lots from the sidewalk are often missing. Frequent curb cuts create conflicts between pedestrians and automobiles.



POPULATION GROWTH

Population in the Study Area is expected to experience moderate to rapid growth, which will result in increased traffic volumes in the Study Area. The projected annual growth rate of population from 2011 to 2035, as forecast by H-GAC, shows that the southern part of the Study Area is predicted to have a higher population growth rate than the northern part. Population is expected to grow rapidly in the area bordered by Cole Creek, West Tidwell Road and Burlington Northern Railroad, exceeding 3.5% through 2035. The area bordered by Burlington Northern Railroad, West Little York Road, West Tidwell Road and White Oak Bayou is expected to grow at a slower pace, between 1% and 2.5% annually through 2035. Population in the remainder of the Study Area is expected to remain stable or decrease, with growth rates less than 1% per year.



DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC & MARKET TRENDS

Land Use

The Livable Centers Study Area is primarily a series of single family residential neighborhoods with a few concentrations of multi-family developments. Along Antoine, and concentrated at the major intersections of Tidwell, West Little York, and Victory is retail and commercial development considered to be of average to poor quality. Industrial land-use, serviced by the Burlington Northern railroad line occupies the western edge of the Study Area. Significant green space/open space is provided by flood control initiatives along White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek as well as the presence of the abandoned Inwood Forest Country Club.

Land use is changing in some parts of the Study Area. Homes close to White Oak Bayou were bought out and demolished by the Harris County Flood Control District for flood control, and the City of Houston has condemned and demolished the apartments on De Soto Street for redevelopment.



Hollyview's 328 dwellings were renovated in 2011

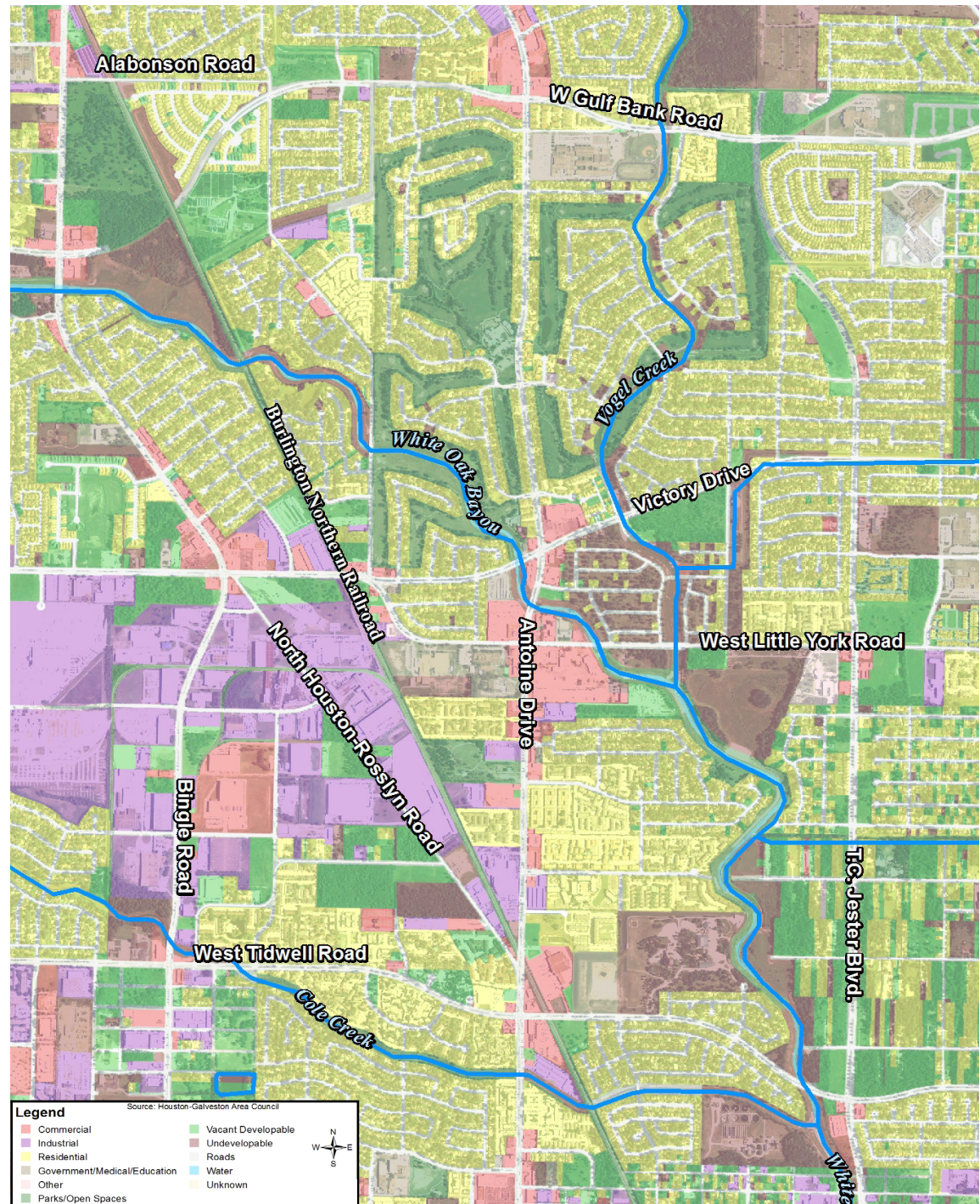


Linda Vista's 556 dwellings are being renovated and is expected to be completed in 2013

Market Conditions

An assessment of existing demographic profiles, market conditions and historical trends was conducted for the Study Area. The Study Area saw its most significant period of past growth from the 1970s through the 1990s. The population has a higher percentage of households with children under 18 (55.6%) than the City of Houston overall (50%). There is a relatively high share of the population without education past high school. African Americans represent approximately 50% of the Study Area's population which is more than twice the average for Houston.

Retail Trade and Services are the top two job classifications currently in the Study Area making up roughly 55% of the jobs. The largest portion of retail positions are in Building and Garden Supplies, while the majority of service oriented positions are in the Educational Service field. Income distribution is



DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC & MARKET TRENDS

more heavily weighted toward lower ranges than the distribution for the City overall with the estimated 2010 median income at \$39,290 versus \$44,923 citywide.

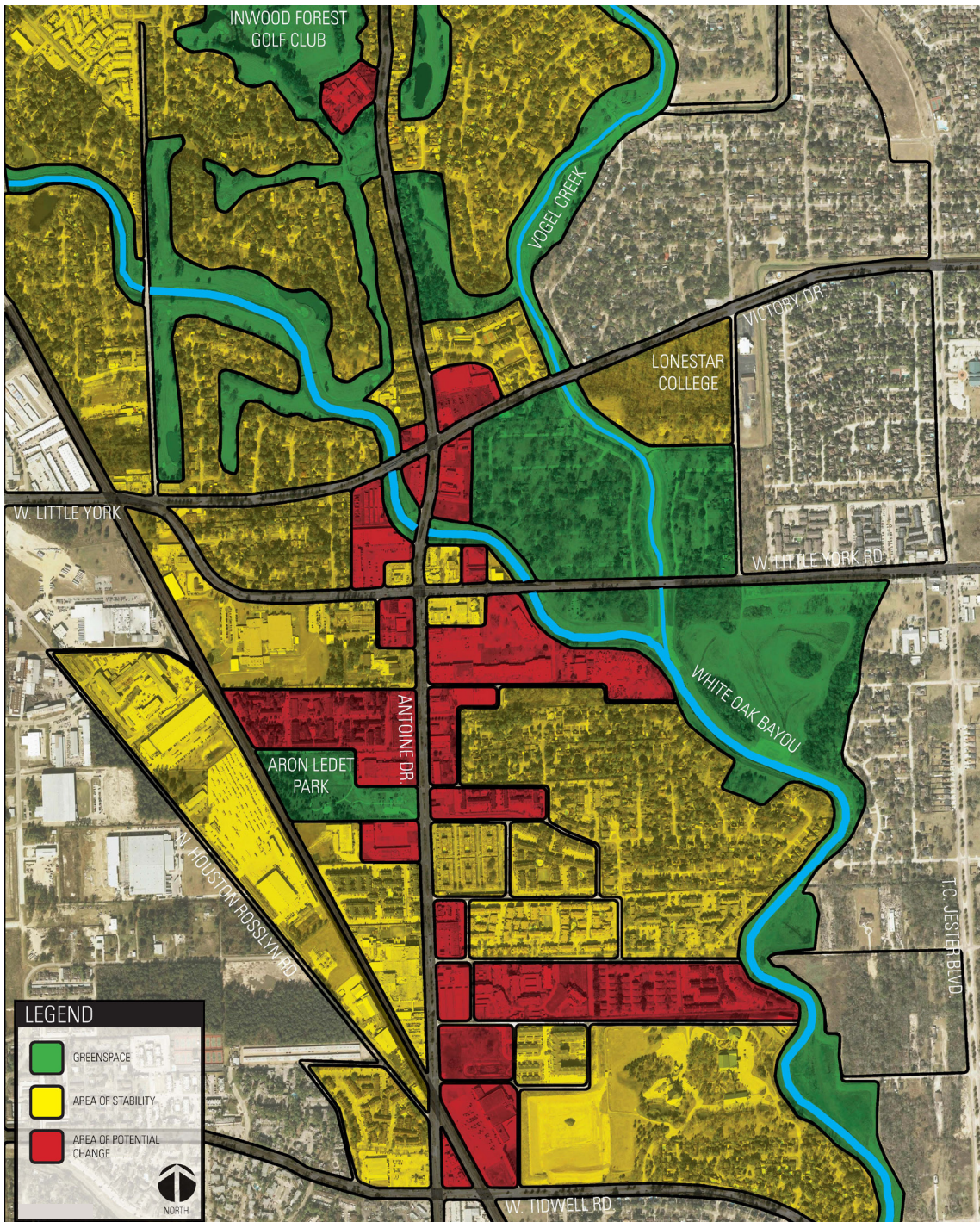
The Study Area has more multi-family units (56.3%) and more renter-occupied units (56.7%) than citywide multi-family units (44.1%) and renter-occupied units (52.3%). A comparison of home values reveals that on a median basis the Study Area is rather evenly matched with the City of Houston overall. However, compared to Houston the Study Area has nearly twice the share of housing units within the \$100-149,000 range and nearly double the share built within 1970-1979. This lack of diversity means a large portion of the housing stock is simultaneously aging and is potentially an indicator of a stagnant housing market.

The existing multi-family occupancy is low, partly the result of intentional application of more strict tenant selection policies at some complexes. Historical multi-family absorption in the Study Area has fluctuated significantly with an obvious downward trend over time and rental rates that are relatively low and stagnate in comparison to the City overall. Most properties were built in the 1970's and 1980's and while some have been renovated, many are likely to deteriorate unless the market improves enough to justify capital expenditure for upgrades.

Similar to multi-family, the majority of commercial space was built in multi-tenant retail centers in the 1970's and 1980's and have an average overall occupancy of 82.7%; however, rates of 85-90% would indicate a healthy market. The retail market is functioning moderately well from an occupancy and absorption standpoint, but at a depressed level in terms of rent and quality of tenants. Rent levels have fallen at grocery anchored centers suggesting that retailers are less concerned with proximity to brand anchors as they are with affordable space. Some older properties that have not been updated suffer from very high vacancy. Another factor affecting the retail market is the presence of competitive, more strongly anchored retail properties along US 290.

The current income base in the Study Area is a challenge when trying to attract national credit tenants for retail and to justify upgrades to multi-family properties. The physical condition of both commercial and multi-family properties along the Antoine corridor acts as a deterrent for more risk-averse tenants.

The map at left strategically analyzes the Study Area from the standpoint of identifying those areas most stable and those most susceptible to change based on a variety of physical, environmental, socio-economic and market conditions and/or trends. In this case, the potential for certain places to change can be viewed as an ally in creating focus areas as part of a plan for the future.



OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

At the inception of the planning process at meetings with The Advisory Committee members and stakeholders, a series of “big ideas” and the associated opportunities and challenges for each was identified. These big ideas became the major themes guiding the focus of this project and serve as the story-line for what a Livable Center can achieve in the Antoine Corridor.

Redefine our relationship to water



Challenge: Historically, water has been an enemy attacking this area with flooding, requiring extensive repair and rebuilding.

Make parks and gardens a priority



Challenge: This is one of the most under-served areas of Houston in terms of park space.



Opportunity: Raise the awareness of water with public spaces and trails that trace it, landmark buildings that leverage investments overlooking it and bridges that celebrate crossing it.



Opportunity: Transform the area with a series of diverse parks linked in a green network, animated and accented by water.

Create a place that is a destination



Challenge: People have limited reasons to come to this area today.

Transforming an auto-centric strip into a street for People



Challenge: Tame traffic and transform the character of a strip dominated by vehicles, pavement and parking.

Leverage strategic location with upgraded transit connections



Challenge: A location with proximity to the airport, Galleria, downtown and other employment areas, but with limited and lengthy connectivity.



Opportunity: Create a live, work, learn, visit and play lifestyle and sense of place that will be unique in Houston.



Opportunity: Transform the street edge with active public spaces and commerce that makes it safer to walk and a place of identity and civic pride.



Opportunity: Establish express service signature bus lines allowing residents to live, walk and ride transit to jobs while reducing traffic and increasing pedestrian activity on Antoine.

PLANNING PROCESS





PLANNING PROCESS

The consultant and design team commenced in February 2010 by studying the area to become familiar with existing conditions and the opportunities and challenges. The District formed an Advisory Committee to provide input to the consultant team. An initial Stakeholders Meeting was held February 23, 2011 at Advent Lutheran Church at which a preliminary Vision Statement and "Big Ideas" was presented for input and feedback.

Highlights of these public meetings and workshops including preliminary sketches by the consultant team have been posted on the District website for all community members to see. The consultant team met with the Advisory Committee in July to present the draft plan and seek comments. The team has taken those comments, finalized the plan and will present it to the community in November.



PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE WORKSHOP

A three-day, charrette-style workshop was conducted April 26-28, 2011 at the Advent Lutheran Church at which more than 500 people attended. The Public Open House Workshops were promoted via 4000 postcards mailed to businesses and residents, more than 2000 flyers distributed to homeowners, ads in The Leader, articles in the GIP e-newsletter and a story on KUHF. The offices of elected officials representing the Near Northwest Management District were also invited.

On the first day, April 26, community input was solicited in an "open house" where the public could "drop-in" any time at their convenience. Attendees were asked to identify with dots on maps where they live/work, traffic and pedestrian "hot spots", and most/least favorite places in the Study Area. A Community Vision Survey allowed participants to help evaluate and select images to help guide the creation of the concept plan.

The second day of the workshop consisted of work sessions to translate community input from the open house into the plan. The third day of the workshop involved refining the vision and design concepts followed by a presentation where the public was invited to see how the conceptual plan was shaping up. This format made it easy for the public to follow the evolution of their input, the vision and concept plan.

"Farmers Market with associated community farms and community garden plots available for rent. Gardens can also be a place to gather as a community..."

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT QUOTE



Help Imagine a "Livable Center" along the Antoine Corridor

You are invited to share your thoughts and vision at two special public "open house" workshops.

Tuesday April 26th, 4 - 8pm: Open house to share your best ideas
Thursday April 28th, 6pm: Presentation to see how the plan is shaping up
 Location: Advent Lutheran Church, 5820 Pinemont

The public is invited to drop by our workshop and presentation to create the vision for the Near Northwest Management District Livable Centers Study for the area along Antoine Dr. from Pinemont Dr. to Victory Dr.

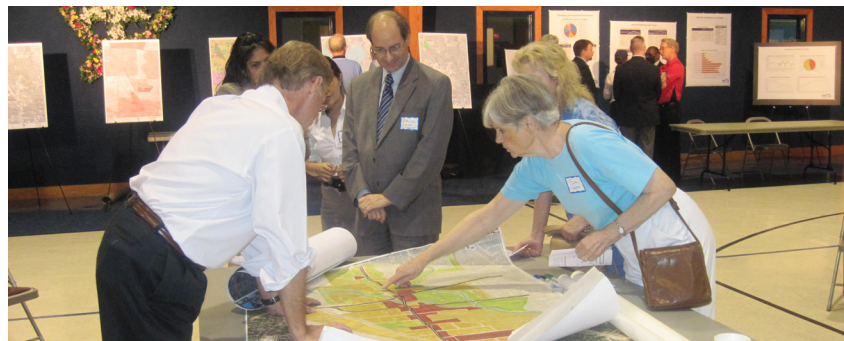
- Tell us the kind of new development you would like to see.
- Share how we can expand and enhance our trails to become the "best hike and bike network in the region."
- Learn about better ways to manage traffic by creating more travel choices and access.
- Describe how our streets can be safer for walkers and cyclists of all ages.
- Help Envision the "Town Center" for the Antoine Corridor.
- Generate the "Big Idea" that makes our Livable Center a destination in Houston.

We value and appreciate your insights and ideas regarding this exciting project.

For more information, call Wayne Norden at (713) 895-8021 or email at wnorden@nearnorthwestdistrict.com.



www.nearnorthwestdistrict.com





COMMUNITY VISION SURVEY

A visually-based Community Vision Survey was used to gain public input on the “look and feel” of bayous, greenways, streetscape, public spaces and transit facilities. The Survey was conducted during the April 26 Public Open House Workshop and results have been incorporated into the concept plan.

The survey arranged images in a series of four per topic to present a range of choices for possible future visions. Presented to small groups, participants were given a chance to view each set of images and then select the image they felt would be “most appropriate” for the Study Area or select “none” if they felt that no image fit their vision. Scores were recorded on individual score sheets and afterward, select images were re-presented for follow-up discussions. A summary of these findings follows on this and the next few pages.

The existing images of the Study Area were either not selected or generated a very low response as being an appropriate vision. In short, participants voted for change across each category in the survey and want to see the Study Area transformed.

Bayou / Greenways

The images displayed at middle and bottom left were the highest rated open space images in the survey. Participants indicated that they want to see a diversity of spaces ranging from passive greens to enticing water features to hard paved plazas. Discussions were very precise with participants noting that these spaces need shade, not too much concrete, places to sit, open spaces for kids and changes in elevation to add interest to the flat environment. The design character of trails and other improvements did generate some interesting discussions and highlighted some differences among survey participants. While some liked a more rustic character for trail improvements, others preferred something a bit sleek and contemporary.

COMMUNITY VISION SURVEY

Antoine Streetscapes

The images on the middle and bottom of this page represent the type of improvement desired for the Antoine streetscape. Street trees that provide shade for pedestrians was a critical element of preferred streetscapes. Participants want to see safer, wider sidewalks, pedestrian-scale lampposts and touches of greenery that add interest for pedestrians and motorists. Participants clearly stated that they want more opportunities to walk in safety, with some protection from the sun and to destinations with activities that are currently missing or non-existent.

The preferred architectural character for Antoine generated a wider range of discussion, but almost all participants agreed that any change was an improvement. Follow-up discussions touched on subjects ranging from the challenges of public funding to the evolving dynamics of the existing market for retail and multi-family residential.



Public Space



Transit Stops



COMMUNITY VISION SURVEY

Public Space

While participants had positive comments to make about Aron Ledet Park, they embraced the idea that this public space could become even better if there were storefronts and other uses that related to the park. Participants were intrigued by the concept of creating new parks and public spaces with fountains to pick up on the “water theme” and having active uses integrated at the edges for comfort, safety and convenience of park users.

Transit Stops

The survey presented sets of images to test the design and setting of transit facilities (bus shelters). Participants had a very clear preference for transit facilities that were more than just a typical shelter isolated at the edge of a road. In follow-up discussions, participants focused on how the seating and attention to design details made the transit facility feel much more attractive, safe, inviting and dignified. Placing the transit stop in a lively mixed-use public space with day and evening activities received the highest response for what participants want to see in the plan.

CONCEPT PLAN



TRANSLATING THE VISION

The Public Open House Workshop schedule was established in a charrette-style to enable the consulting team to focus intensely on the design of the concept plan immediately following gathering community input at the April 26 Open House. Two days later, the concept plan was then presented for public feedback at the April 28 Open House.

The charrette allowed the consultant team to listen to the community and translate their input as follows:

Within a compact area, Antoine, West Little York and Victory cross over White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek at five locations, giving rise to – **Five Bridges**. The current bridges are functional for vehicular traffic; the vision is to enhance these crossings to celebrate the waterways and new trails underneath and to identify the value of water as a focus of this community. Five Bridges is a place where the heavily travelled Antoine corridor, the bayou/greenway trails, the future “town center”, the regional “destination park”, and a series of public spaces all culminate.

A long-term centerpiece of this plan is the creation of a public-private partnership to develop a regional “destination park” – **White Oak Gardens** – established in association with the bayou trails and Lone Star College. With a location backing up to **White Oak Bayou**, this project has the ability to leverage the trail and greenway system while establishing a regional landmark on Antoine that draws visitors from near and far.

Coordinate redevelopment of property formerly occupied by deteriorated and abandoned multi-family projects and transform De Soto Street into a linear water channel – **Bayou Boulevard at White Oak** – that connects a proposed park at White Oak Bayou on the east end with a proposed plaza and water feature visible from Antoine at the west end. This project has the ability to achieve numerous goals from replacing deteriorated multi-family seen as a blight on the area to extending the park/trail system from White Oak Bayou to Antoine in order to give the greenway a visible identity on Antoine.

The significant existing bus transit ridership in the Antoine corridor is envisioned to be enhanced with the introduction of signature express bus service that ultimately could transform into – **White Oak Station** – a multi-modal hub with future rail transit on the Burlington Northern line. Located around the intersection of Antoine and West Tidwell, the hub should take the form of a multi-purpose public space, and the immediately surrounding blocks provide long-term opportunities to promote dense, transit-oriented development that will activate the hub 24/7 and generate riders living near the station.



Five Bridges



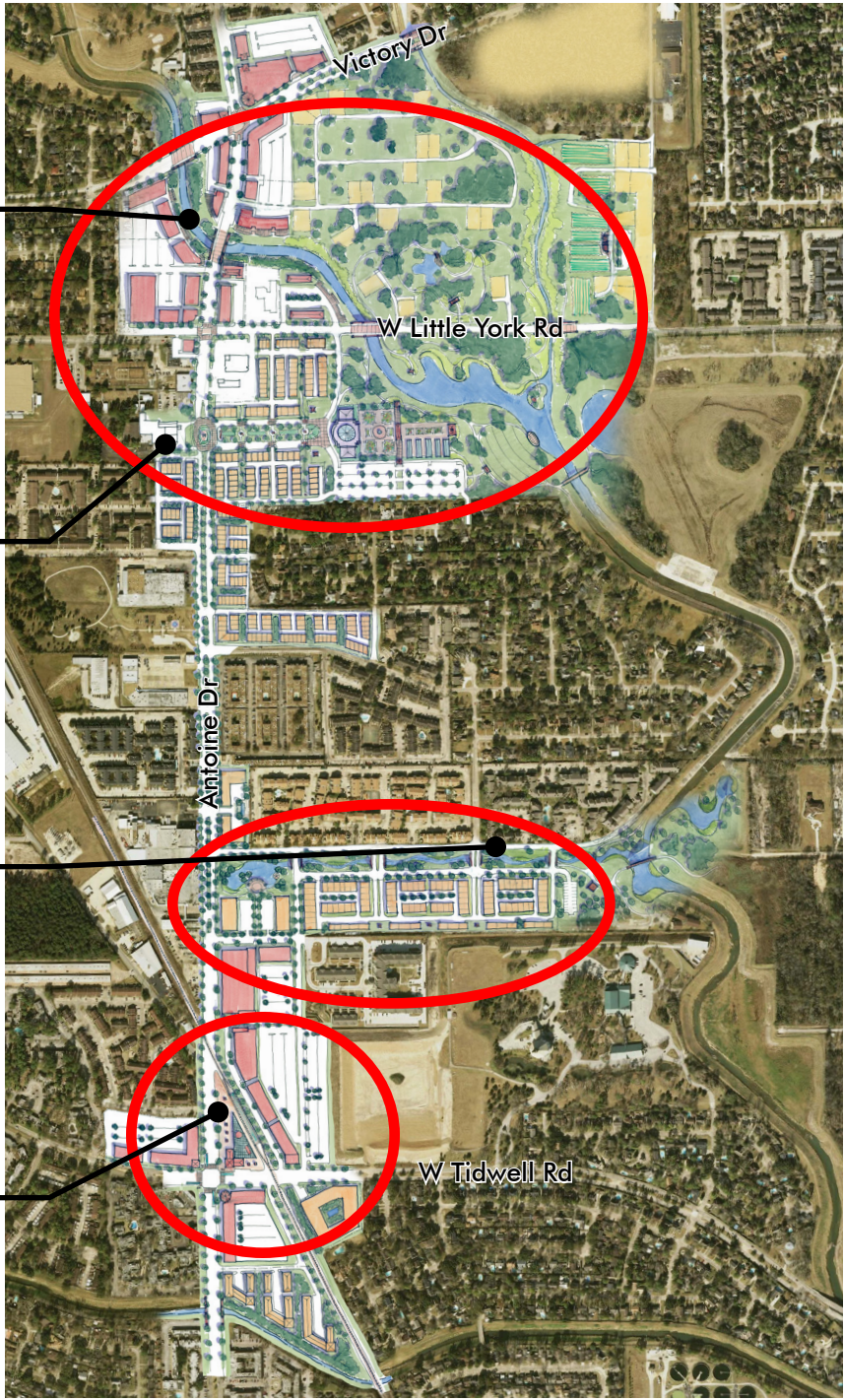
White Oak Gardens



Bayou Boulevard at White Oak



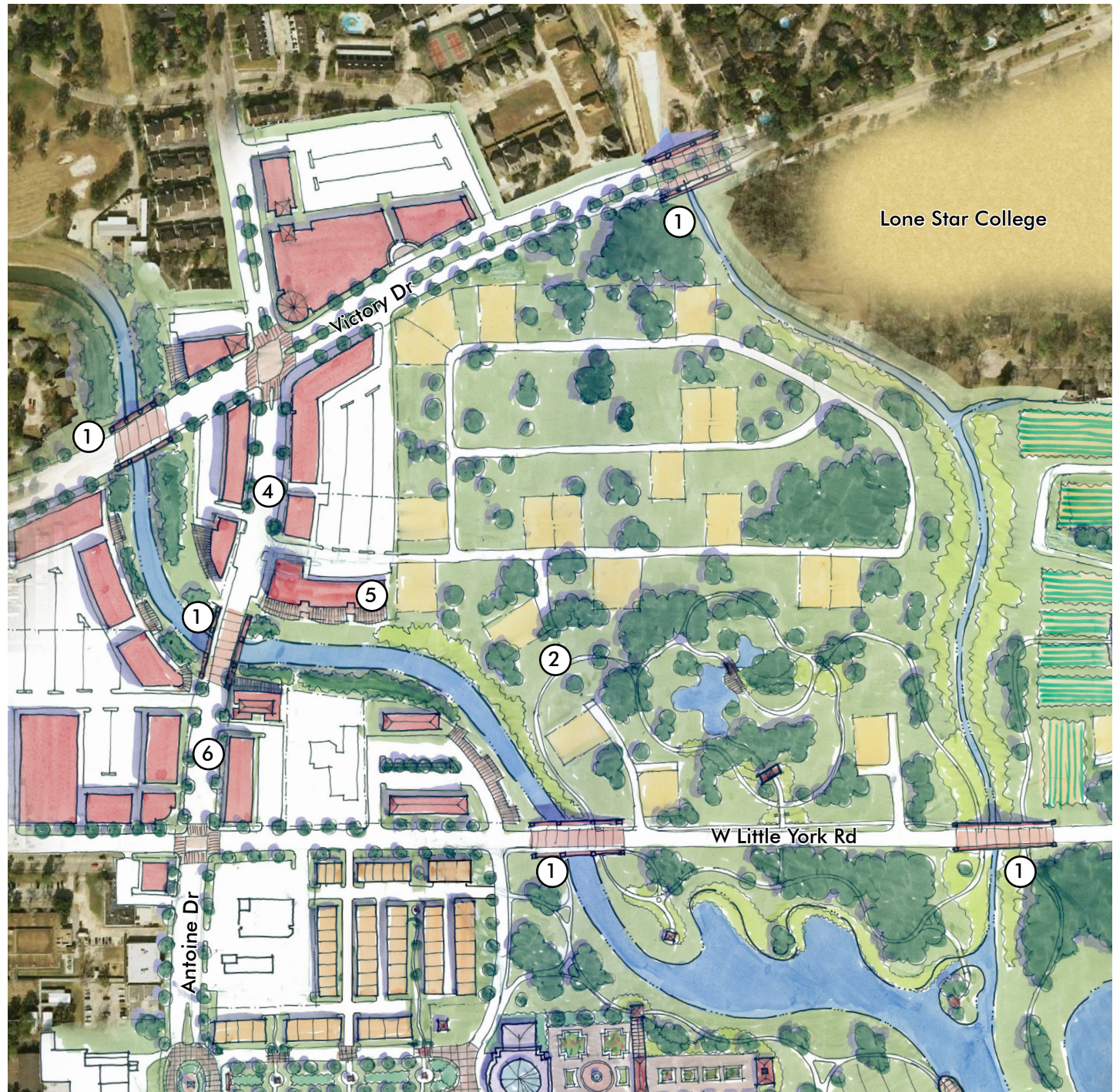
White Oak Station



FIVE BRIDGES

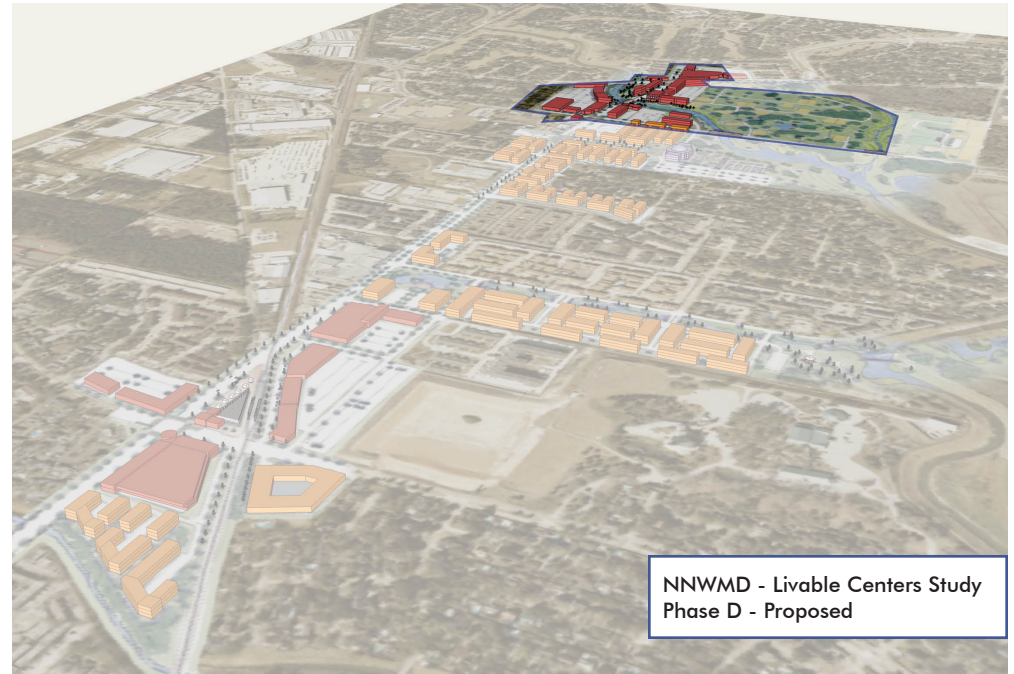
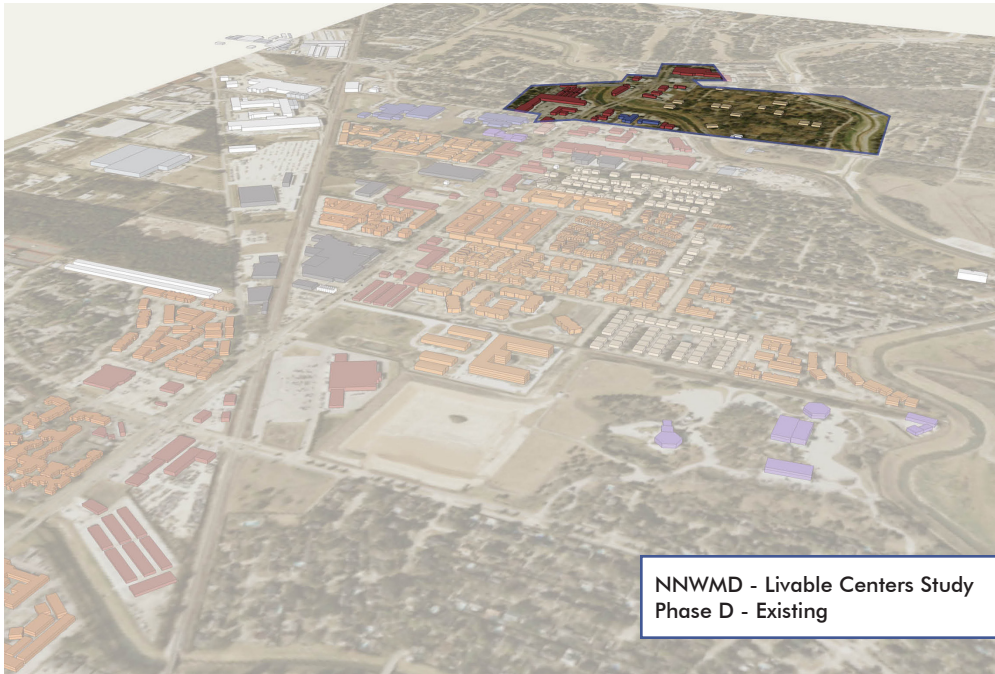
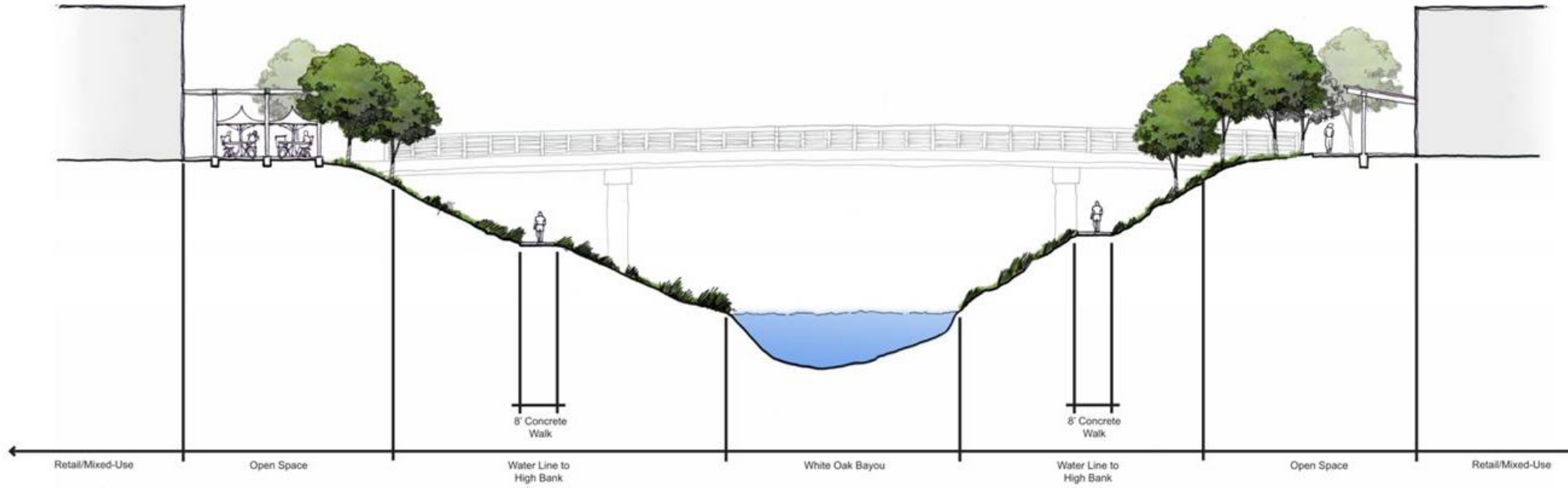
Within a compact area, Antoine, West Little York and Victory cross over White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek at five locations – giving rise to Five Bridges. The current bridges are functional for vehicular traffic, the vision is to enhance these crossings to celebrate the waterways and new trails underneath and to identify the value of water as a focus of this community. Five Bridges is a place where the heavily travelled Antoine corridor, the bayou/greenway trails, the future “town center”, White Oak Gardens and a series of public spaces all culminate.

1. Accent of bridge crossings with poles, banners and “suspension bridge” strings of LED rope lights identifying the value of water within the community
2. The Five Bridges help identify the location for this community’s “Central Park” used by both the local community and regional visitors. Approximate 60 acre community and regional park and open space formerly the Arbor Oaks subdivision. Urban farming/gardening in association with Lone Star College; Community gardens managed by NNWMD and utilized as a demonstration classroom for Lone Star College and six other educational facilities located within a one-mile radius
3. White Oak Farmer’s Market facility furthers weekend activity as well as showcasing the urban farming/gardening
4. New “town center” with numerous restaurants opening to outdoor space with a relationship to the renovated White Oak Bayou
5. Restaurateurs utilizing the Farmer’s Market and the community gardens
6. The Town Center consists of 2-4 story mixed-use buildings enhancing the street edge and providing street retail with residential above





The existing bridges over the White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek do not create an awareness that one is crossing water (bottom photo). The vision for Five Bridges is to celebrate each crossing with poles, banners and “suspension bridge” strings of LED rope lights. Waterside trails and public spaces will be surrounded by landmark buildings to leverage investment value overlooking waterside activity.





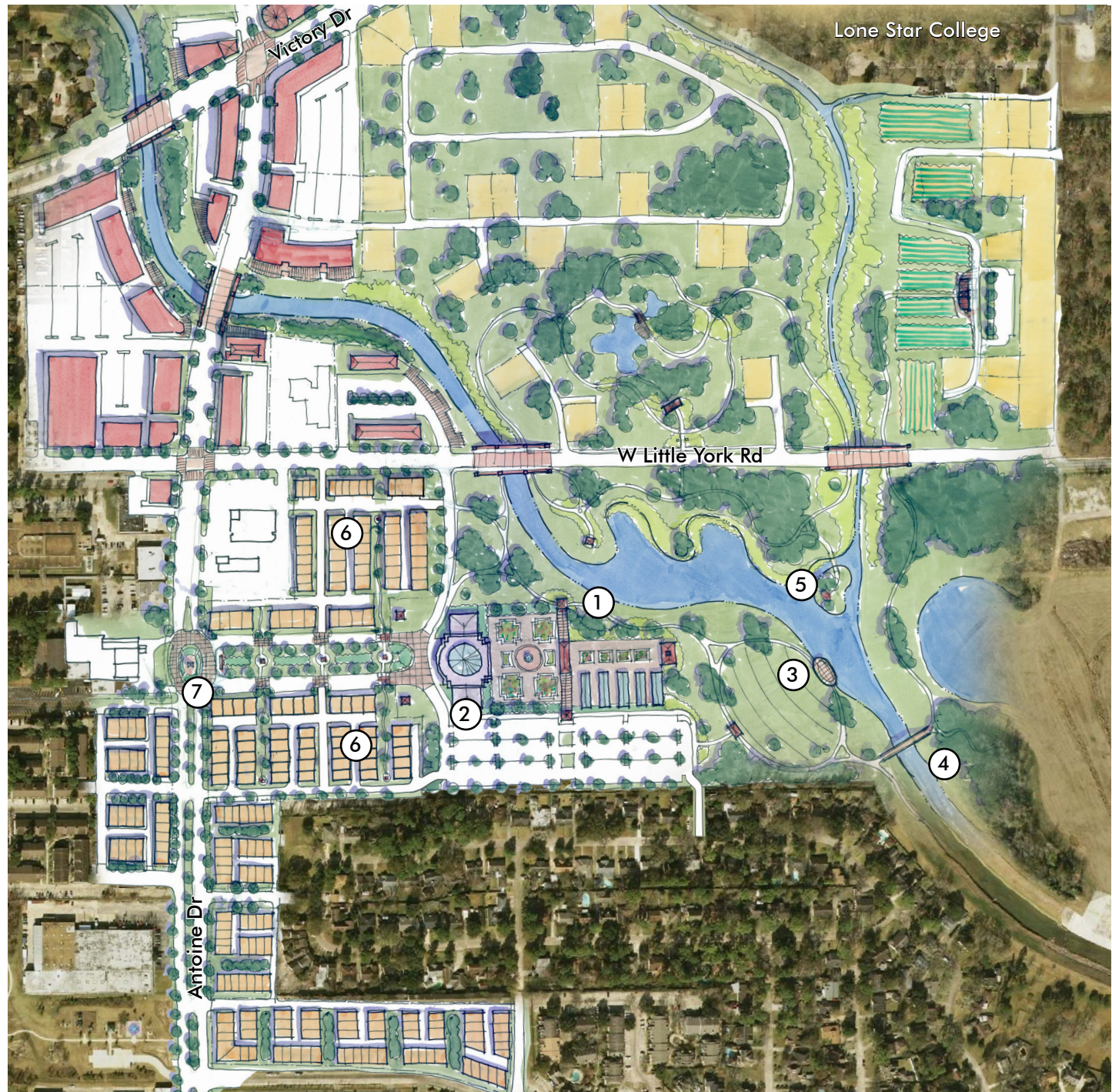
Existing conditions near the bridges does not invite people to the water (bottom photo). Trails tracing the bayous will open into public spaces at the water's edge. Landscape elements, plantings and ledges will allow humans to interact with water in a variety of settings.

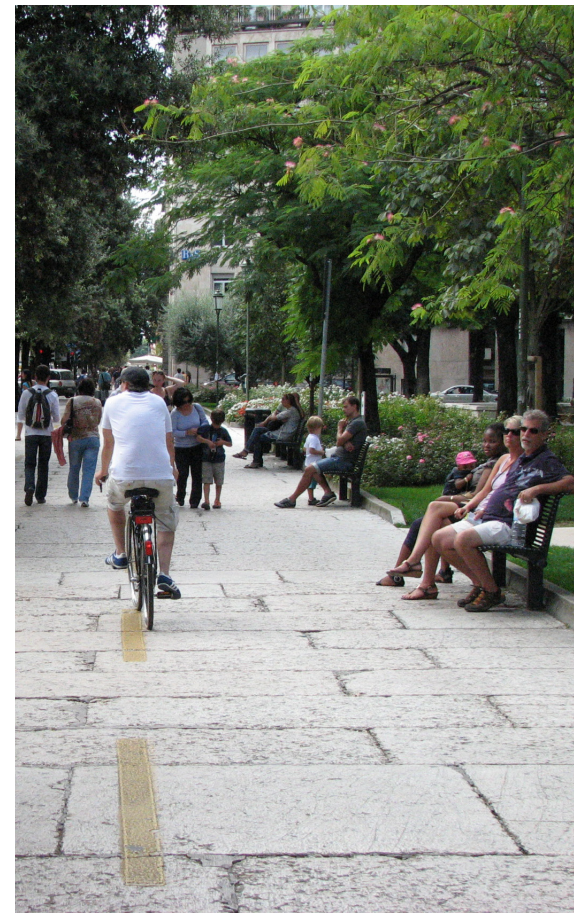
WHITE OAK GARDENS

A long-term centerpiece of this plan is creating a public-private partnership to develop a regional “destination park” – established in association with the bayou trails and Lone Star College. With a location backing up to the White Oak Bayou, this project has the ability to leverage the trail and greenway system while establishing a regional landmark on Antoine that draws visitors from near and far.

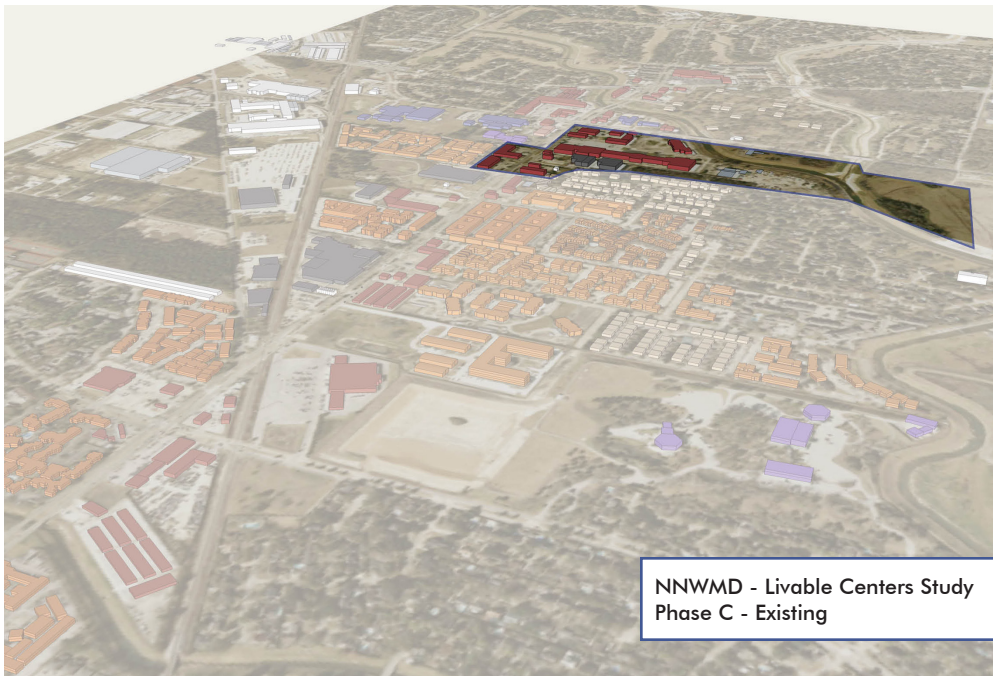
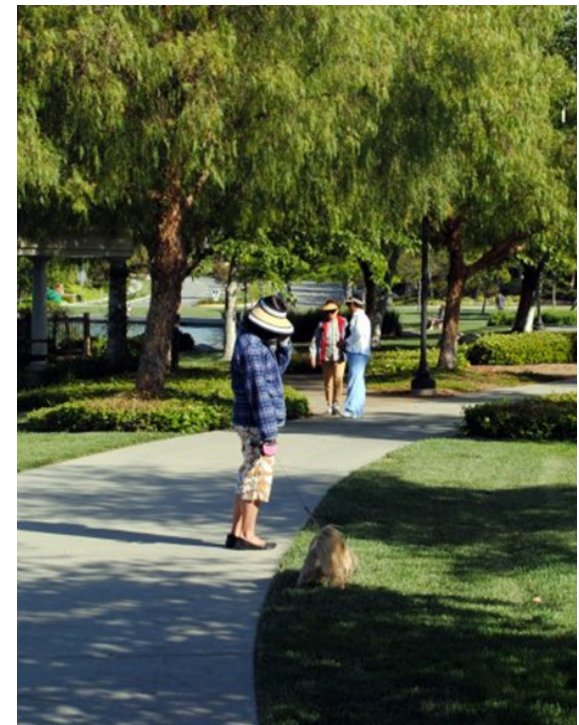
1. Regional “destination park” in association with bayou trails and Lone Star College
2. Park Pavilion used for regional events, parties, festivals, weddings, etc.
3. Large community amphitheater for local and regional events such as July 4th festivities and community liberal arts performances overlooking the convergence of White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek
4. Pedestrian bridge connecting regional pedestrian and biking trails to community amphitheater and botanical garden area
5. Dry bottom detention turned into wet bottom detention in return creating a large community water amenity
6. Large townhome development anchored by axial green space terminating at Park Pavilion
7. Public plaza with statue as landmark on Antoine

It is recommended that future development in this area specifically incorporate low-impact development techniques to mitigate storm water run-off. Storm water treatment swales, rain gardens, green roofs and other techniques can be incorporated in future site improvements and buildings. The proposed gardens and water features offer ready opportunities to capture and treat storm water in specialized ways. In fact, one unique educational aspect of the proposed park and gardens could be acting as a demonstration project for low impact development techniques and green technologies.

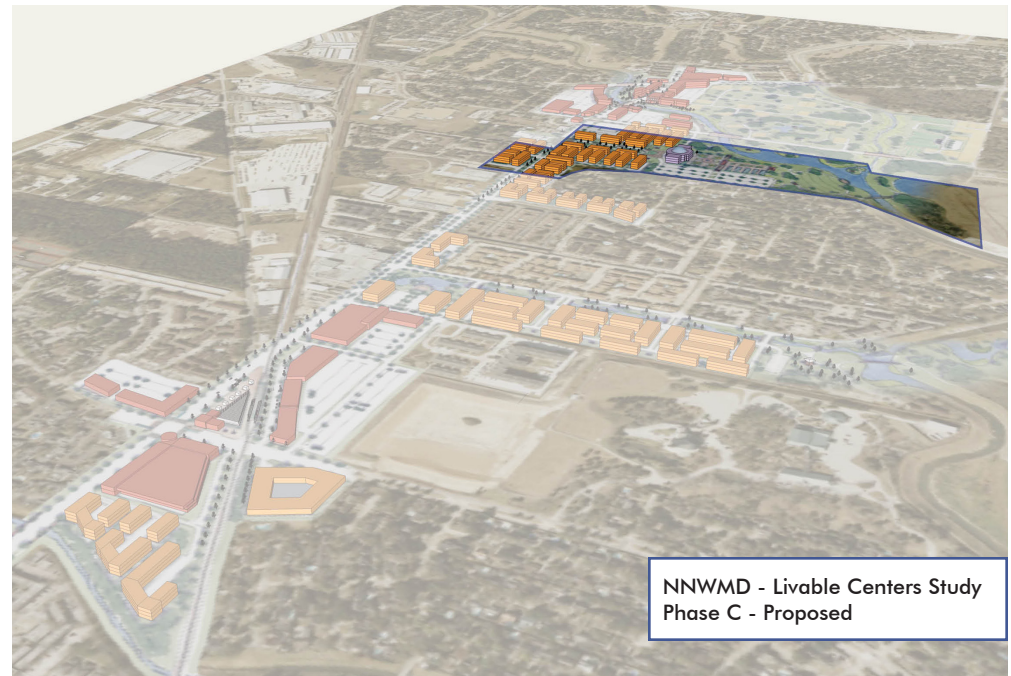




At the heart of the Antoine corridor, the plan envisions creating a new regional landmark in the form of a “destination park”. The poles and pylon signs that pockmark Antoine today (bottom photo) will be replaced with flags and a statue or obelisk set in a public plaza that creates a dignified approach to the Park Pavilion.



NNWMD - Livable Centers Study
Phase C - Existing



NNWMD - Livable Centers Study
Phase C - Proposed



With a location that backs up to the convergence of the White Oak Bayou with Vogel Creek (bottom photo), the proposed “discovery park” has the ability to leverage the trail and greenway system. Features include a large community amphitheater for local and regional events, pavilions, footbridges and garden areas that extend out along the trails.

BAYOU BOULEVARD AT WHITE OAK

Coordinate redevelopment of property formerly occupied by deteriorated and abandoned multi-family projects and transform De Soto Street into a linear water channel that connects a proposed park at the White Oak Bayou at the east end with a proposed plaza and water feature visible from Antoine at the west end. This project has the ability to achieve numerous goals from replacing deteriorated multi-family seen as a blight on the area to extending the park/trail system from White Oak Bayou to Antoine in order to give the greenway a visible identity on Antoine.

1. New development to be high-density "ownership" townhomes in lieu of rental
2. Linear water channel feature with trails visually connecting to White Oak Bayou
3. Houston Parks Board intent to acquire and develop park at the terminus of De Soto
4. Pedestrian bridge across water channel connecting the proposed residential to the existing residential
5. Neighborhood park and water feature on Antoine with small plaza and park pavilion for community events
6. Development near the Antoine water feature to be neighborhood retail with possible residential development above
7. Redevelopment of this area provides the opportunity to provide more connections

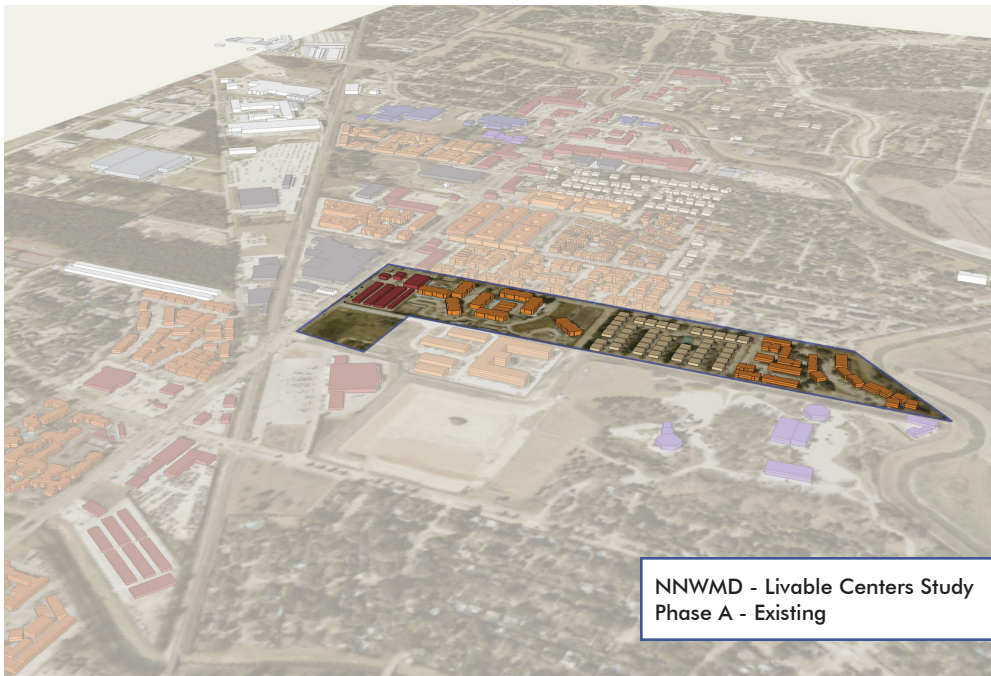
It is recommended that redevelopment in this area specifically incorporate low-impact development techniques to mitigate storm water run-off. Storm water treatment swales, rain gardens, green roofs and other techniques can be incorporated in future site improvements and buildings. The proposed linear water channel offers an ideal opportunity to capture and treat storm water as a centerpiece of this neighborhood.



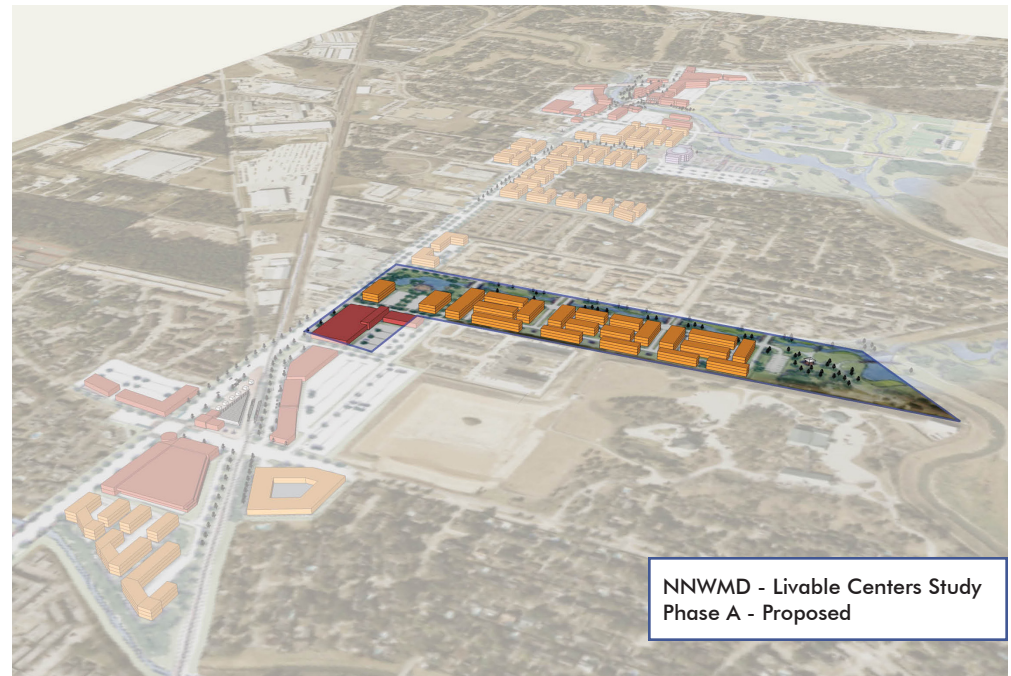


WHITE · OAK
BAYOU BOULEVARD

The Bayou Boulevard proposed along De Soto Street would connect the White Oak Bayou to Antoine Drive (bottom photos) with a linear water feature that creates investment value and reinforces the relationship of this re-established neighborhood to the nearby water that leads to the center of Houston.

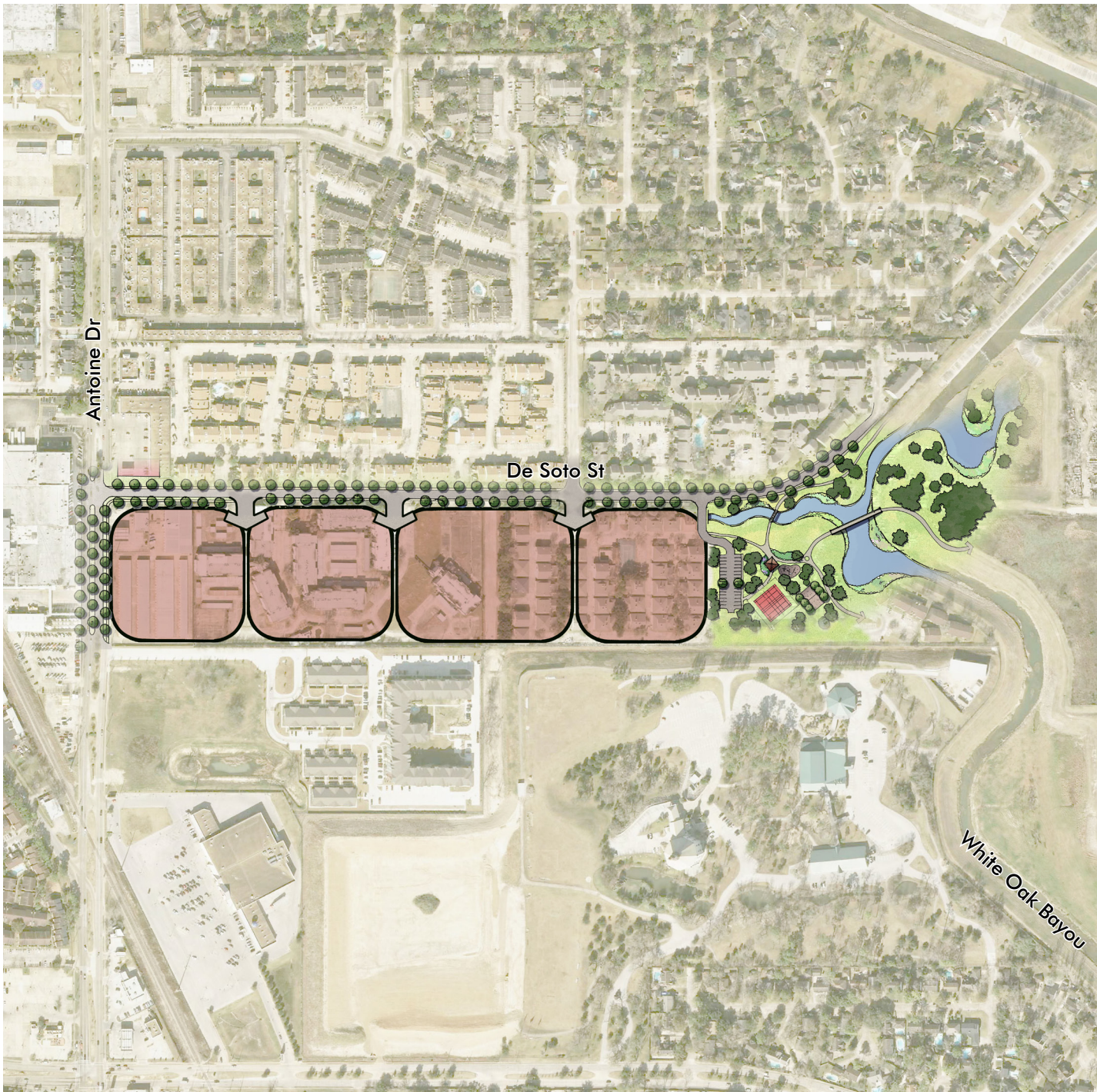


NNWMD - Livable Centers Study
Phase A - Existing



NNWMD - Livable Centers Study
Phase A - Proposed

DE SOTO - ALTERNATE SCENARIO



As compared to the more comprehensive scheme on the previous pages, this alternative scenario for De Soto Street would allow each of the four individual parcels to redevelop separately and apart from one another but should seek to enhance street grid connections. This scenario does not focus upon and require new public space infrastructure in the form of a canal connecting White Oak Bayou to Antoine and avoids the more complex implementation strategies and funding required for the preferred scheme.

While this alternative scenario is satisfactory toward achieving the goals for this area, it will not create the same level of synergy nor act as a strong catalyst triggering nearby reinvestment to the same degree as the preferred scheme. Redevelopment of the separate parcels also could be hampered by piecemeal timing and sequencing caused by separate projects, ultimately taking many more years to achieve the transformation of the De Soto corridor.

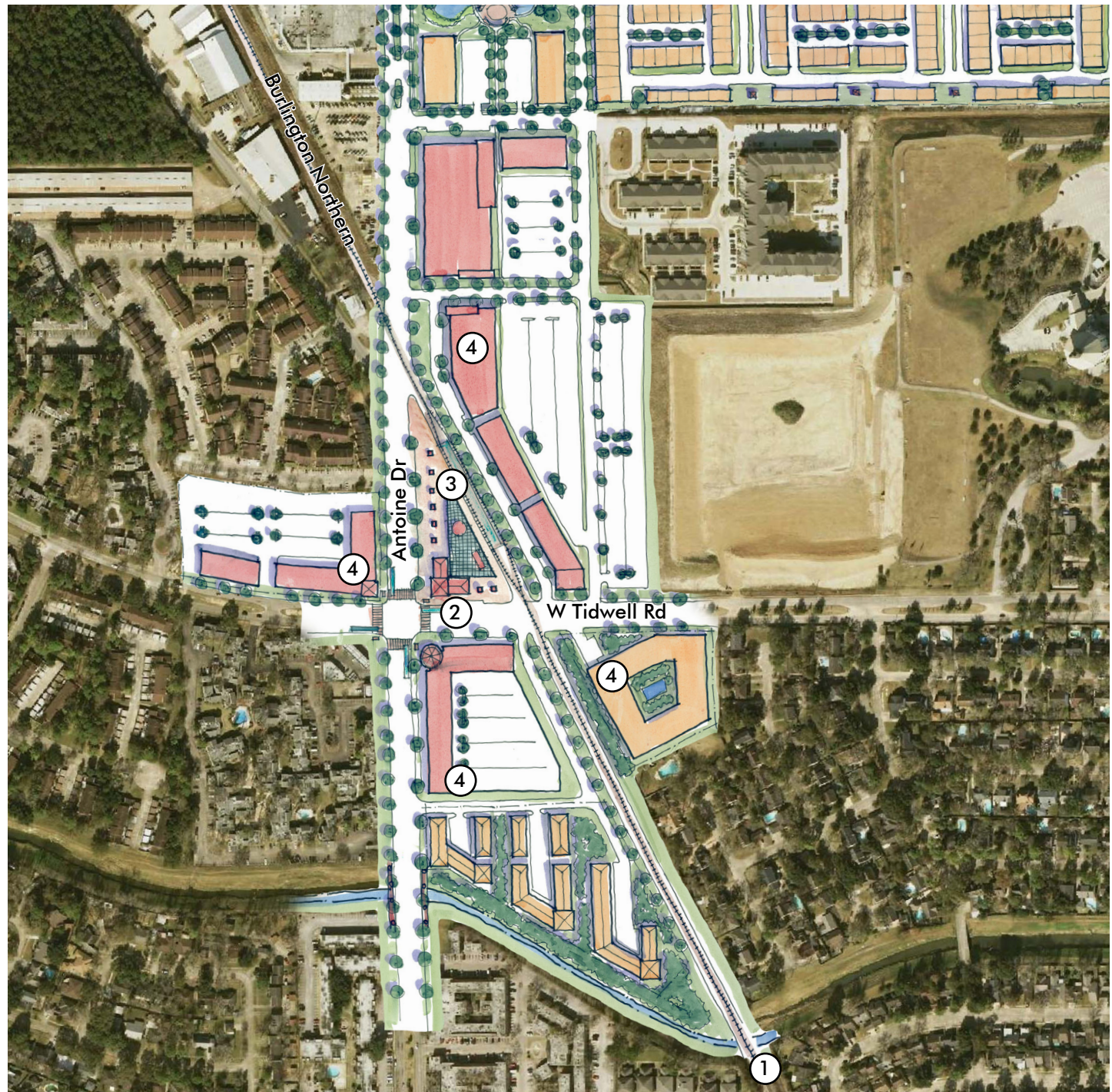
WHITE OAK STATION

The significant existing bus transit ridership in the Antoine corridor is envisioned to be enhanced with the introduction of signature express bus service that ultimately could build increased ridership transform into a multi-modal hub with future rail transit on the Burlington Northern line.

Located around the intersection of Antoine and West Tidwell, the hub should take the form of a multi-purpose public space, and the immediately surrounding blocks provide a long-term opportunity to promote dense, transit-oriented development that will activate the hub 24/7 and generate riders living near the station.

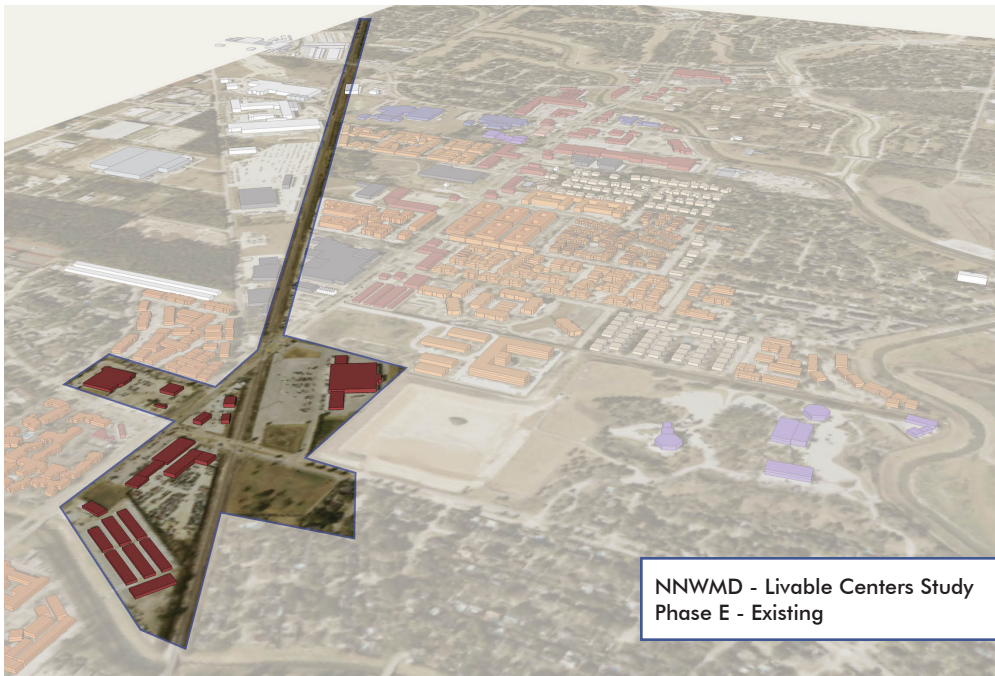
1. METRO contemplates the concept of acquiring the Burlington Northern line and converting it to a commuter rail line in the future
2. White Oak Station occupies the strategic corner of Antoine and Tidwell where the commuter rail shares an active pedestrian domain adjacent to the METRO bus transfer point
3. Urban multi-modal hub with wide pedestrian walkways and inviting plaza for local food vendors and local entertainment during the transit peak time
4. A mix of retail and residential buildings generated as transit-oriented developments by the White Oak Station

Future growth of population and employment will result in more traffic congestion. Due to the bayous, floodplains, railroad, and existing development pattern, the limited existing street connectivity will remain a constraint for movement in the future. With Antoine as the major north-south corridor, the most effective way to increase mobility is with enhanced transit service. In short, there is simply no room to add streets or lanes to increase vehicular connectivity in any significant manner in this area in the near-term. In addition, shared and reduced parking strategies should be explored as transit service increases. As the area develops, new connections in the street grid should be created.

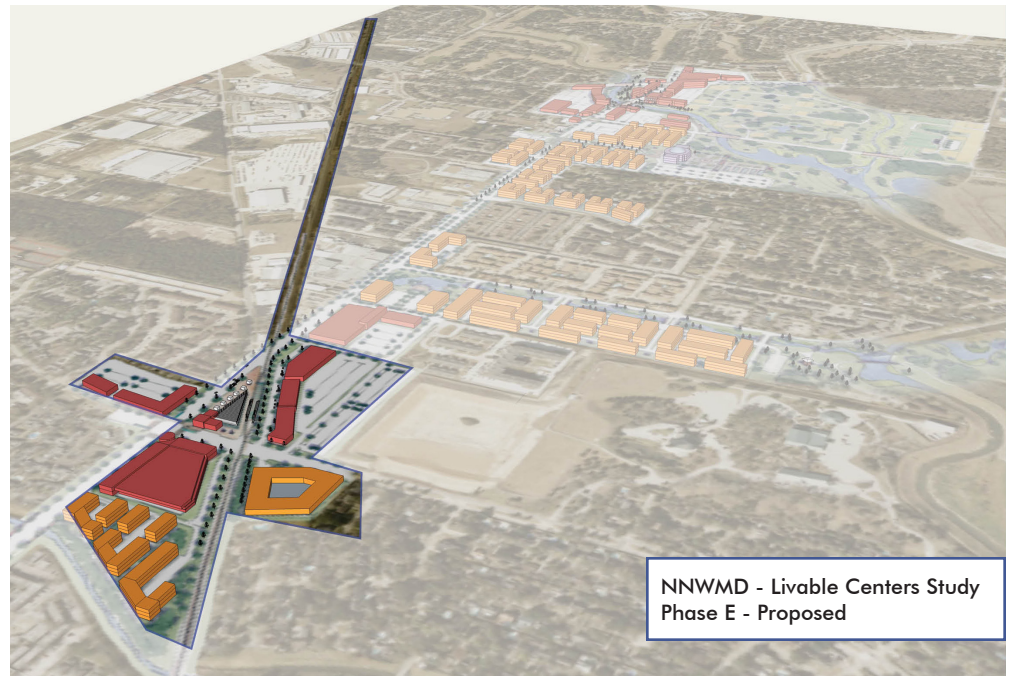




In the future, METRO contemplates converting the Burlington Northern line into rail transit with a station at Antoine and West Tidwell (bottom photo). The Community Vision Survey allowed the public to help establish a vision for a multi-modal hub set in a mixed-use public space.



NNWMD - Livable Centers Study
Phase E - Existing



NNWMD - Livable Centers Study
Phase E - Proposed



WHITE · OAK
STATION

The existing triangular block at the intersection of Antoine and West Tidwell is occupied by one-story auto-oriented uses (bottom photo). The future White Oak Station multi-modal hub is envisioned as a multi-purpose public space surrounded by dense transit-oriented development.

TRANSFORMING ANTOINE

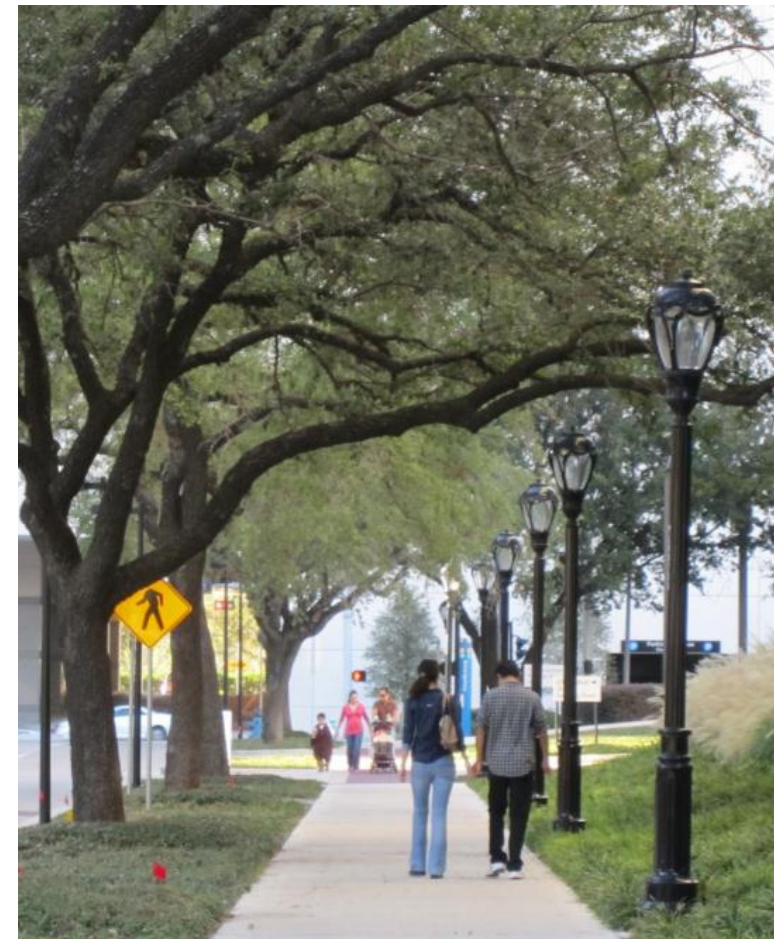
Presently, Antoine Drive is an auto-dominated strip that is not pleasant or safe for pedestrians and bicyclists. Heavy vehicular volume, limited sidewalk separation from fast-moving lanes, numerous curb cuts, exposed parking lots that constantly surround the pedestrian with vehicles and sections where there is no sidewalk.

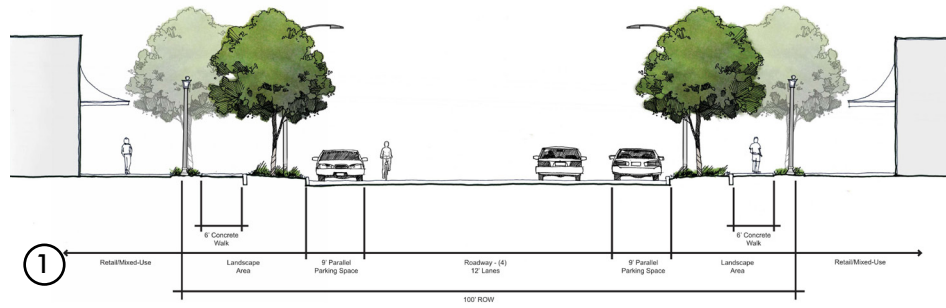
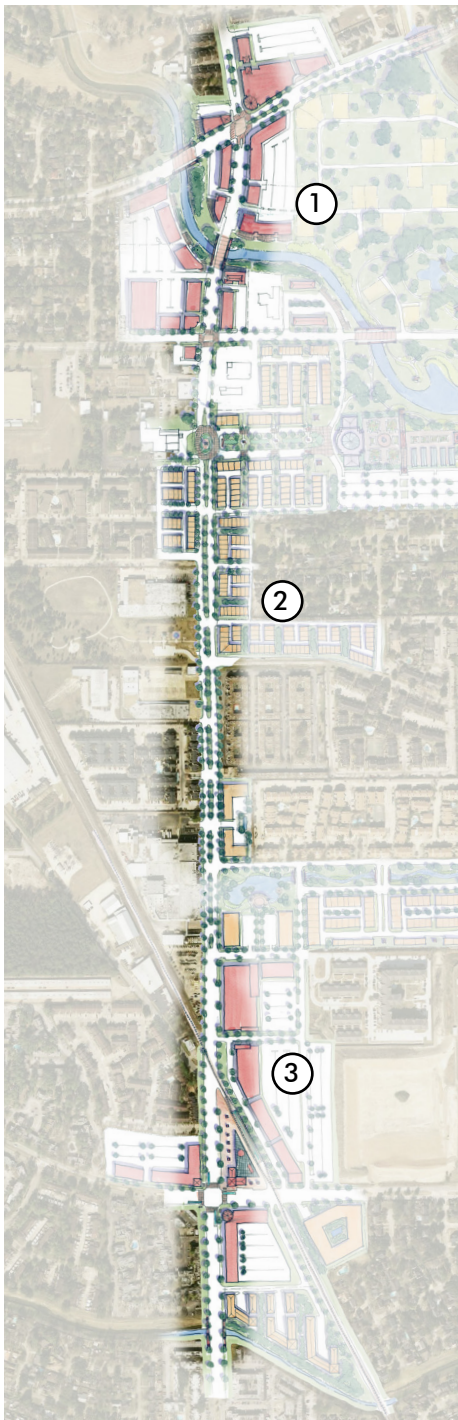
Due to the bayous, floodplains, railroad, and existing development pattern, the limited existing street connectivity will remain a constraint for movement in the future. As the area develops, connections in the street grid should be created.

Currently, along Antoine there is simply no room to add lanes to increase vehicular capacity. With Antoine continuing to be the major north-south corridor, the most effective way to increase mobility in the short-term is with enhanced pedestrian, bicycle and transit service. Transforming the street section to become a “complete street” for all users is a major recommendation of this study. Once Antoine becomes more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, it will:

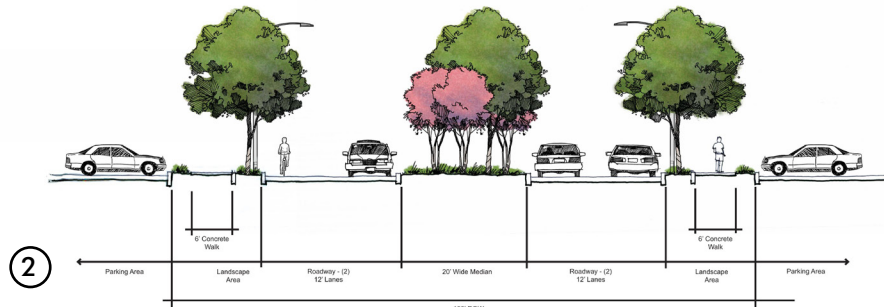
- Induce more people to walk safely to transit stops
- Allow motorists to utilize shared parking and “park once” then walk to multiple destinations
- Give people the choice to walk or bike for short local errands

Due to varied and numerous existing conditions, this plan has proposed several different, but compatible, street section types to be utilized along Antoine. Some portions of Antoine are proposed to retain and/or enhance the existing median while in other sections it is proposed to be removed (eg. Five Bridges and White Oak Station). Any improvements or reconstruction of Antoine should include a signed and marked bicycle facility such as a bike lane or sharrow.

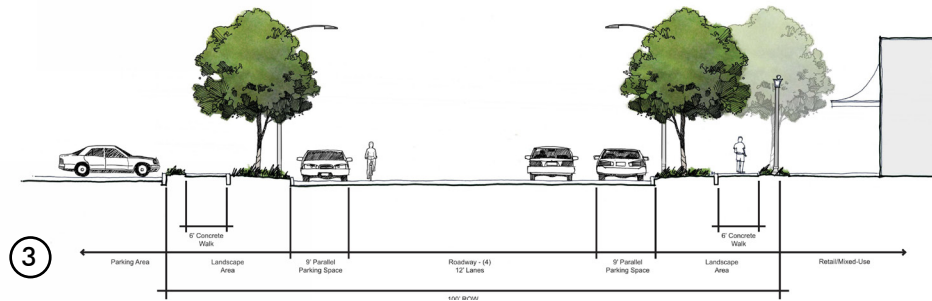




Urban streetscape section runs through high density development on Antoine. Median removed and placed on the outer edges of the R.O.W. to create more pedestrian space and accommodations for local cycling in the new urban landscape. Parallel parking is provided in this zone.



Suburban streetscape section runs through more traditional residential development on Antoine. Landscape median remains for large oaks and public art. Additional green space provided on the outer edges of the R.O.W. to provide wider sidewalks and more room for trees and landscape.



The city is currently restriping the stretch of Antoine between Pinemont and Little York to include bike lanes. All of the proposed streetscape sections illustrated on this page include a signed and marked bicycle facility such as a bike lane or sharrow within the street section.



BRANDING & WAYFINDING

The plan recommends rebranding and repositioning the Study Area as the “White Oak Villages”. White Oak Bayou is the most significant natural feature defining this area and the new greenway trail connects all the way to downtown Houston, forever changing the sense of location for this area. Thus, it is fitting that White Oak become the place name for the area connecting to both nature and the city center.

The logo contains the silhouette of a mature White Oak tree which may also be produced as a freestanding silhouette form such as finials to place on top of poles for street signage. The name and logo should become the theme from which street signage and other wayfinding devices are designed. “White Oak” should be tagged to place names within the district:

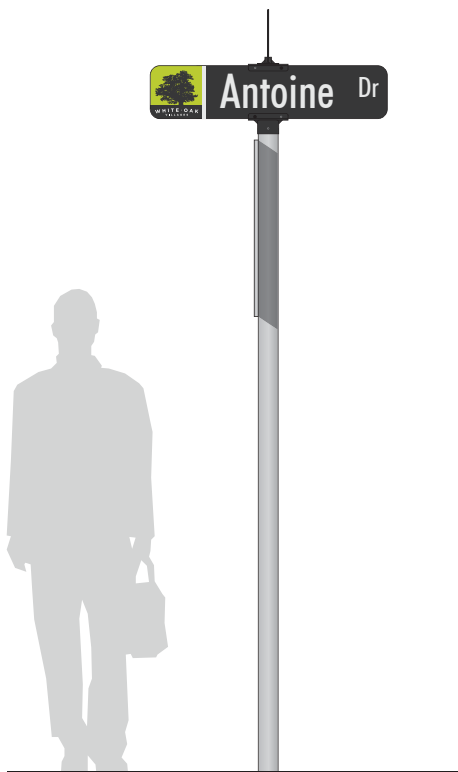
- Five Bridges at White Oak
- White Oak Gardens
- Bayou Boulevard at White Oak
- White Oak Station

An attractive and identifiable wayfinding system is also an important tool for enhancing mobility in the Study Area. Due to the bayous, floodplains, railroad, and existing development pattern, the limited existing street connectivity will remain a constraint for movement in the future.

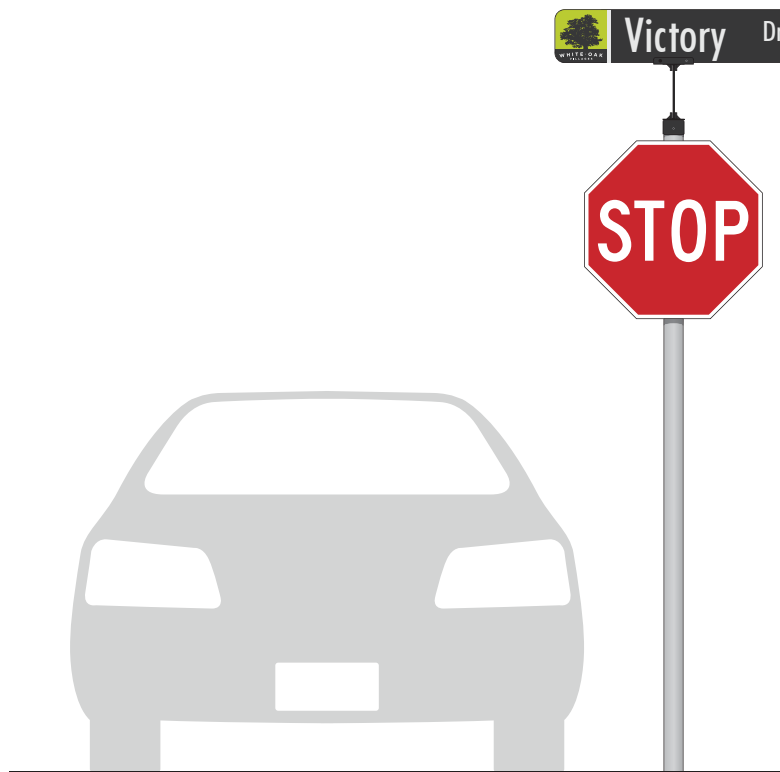
The increased connectivity proposed in this plan is focused on pedestrian and bicycle trails, footbridges crossing the bayous and improved sidewalks along the Antoine corridor. Thus, the wayfinding system is critical for inducing people to walk and bike along the new bayou and greenway trails, the transformed Antoine corridor and from their homes to mass transit.



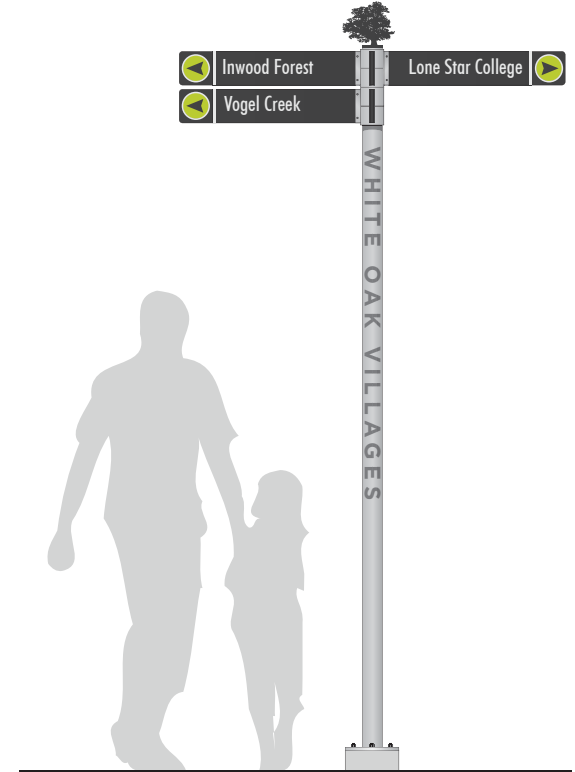
An example of wayfinding and signage in the Dallas Design District.



1 End View - Street Identification
Scale: 3/4" = 1'-0"



2 Elevation - Street Identification
Scale: 3/4" = 1'-0"



4 Elevation - Pathway Directional
Scale: 3/4" = 1'-0"

IMPLEMENTATION



Overview and Strategic Objectives

The Near Northwest Livable Centers Study Area presents both a prime opportunity and a tremendous challenge for the surrounding community, the City of Houston, and other various public agencies and not-for-profit organizations. Its single family neighborhoods could re-emerge as a residential location of choice for middle class homeowners through a multi-faceted transformation – of mobility, of environment, and ultimately of the local market economy – centered on the improvements identified in this study.

The City of Houston has already taken unprecedented measures to stem decay and begin moving the area in a more positive direction. While this has been an excellent and necessary start, the market forces, legal realities and physical conditions that brought the Study Area to its position today are not easy to redirect. The Near Northwest community and the City of Houston will have to recognize that accomplishing the transformation in a reasonable time frame will require a substantial additional financial, organizational, political, and human capital commitment over a sustained period of time.

In recognition of the Study Area’s current situation and ultimate vision as a renewed area of improved demographics leading to residential and commercial vitality, the team has identified four main strategic implementation objectives which the recommended improvements in this study support. These objectives are:

1. Create an urban environment that is distinctive and memorable to those within or through the Study Area while enhancing street connectivity as the area redevelops.
2. Stabilize and fortify the commercial, single-family and multi-family residential markets by reducing the supply of nearby deteriorated, blighted, and nuisance properties and replacing them with uses that have more positive effects on value.
3. Elevate the Study Area’s regional market awareness through unique and functional open space investments that simultaneously build community.
4. Capitalize economically on existing and potential transit services.

The following sections provide guidance as to associated

projects and implementation pathways for each objective. Project numbers refer to the Project Summary Table on Page 53.

Strategic Objective 1: Create an urban environment that is distinctive and memorable to those within or through the Study Area while enhancing street connectivity as the area redevelops.

Action: Turn Antoine from the BNSF tracks to Victory into an attractive boulevard with residential and urban design segments.

Currently the primary method of exposure for the Study Area is the experience travelers have who pass through on the major thoroughfares, most notably Antoine Drive. Antoine is the primary north-south transportation link through the area and the location of most of the Study Area’s retail activity. Its functionality and presentation has an outsize role in the quality and appeal of the area to potential residents, investors, and shoppers. Thus the changes in Antoine’s streetscape and cross section, as proposed by this plan, represent a strong opportunity to change market perceptions of the Study Area.

Fortunately, for the most part, right of way acquisition should not be necessary. The tasks involved in this transformation will be (1) design and engineering and (2) construction. The design and engineering tasks would be an appropriate responsibility for the Near Northwest Management District to take on, in order to ready the project for action by the City of Houston.

Street design changes

Whether done in segments or as a single effort, the construction portion of the Antoine project presents an opportunity for the City of Houston to seek federal transportation funding. Such programs have typically required a minimum 20% local match, which the City could fund either from the General Fund or through Housing and Community Development funds such as CDBG. Given that the low income population in the Study Area will remain high, even as the multi-family housing stock is rehabilitated or reduced, the Antoine transformation

should fulfill requirements to serve this demographic. This is especially true because making the corridor more walkable, through improved sidewalks, safer crossings, trees and landscaping, and slower traffic, will directly help the population dependent on transit, walking, and biking.

The federal transportation funding would require the City to place the project in the 3-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as well as the long range Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), administered by H-GAC. The federal transportation funding that is allocated through the TIP process is governed by federal Congressional spending authorizations. The last authorization was the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005. It expired in 2009; Congress has approved several extensions of that authorization in order to maintain ongoing transportation funding. It is expected that a full multi-year reauthorization will not occur until 2012. Several of the funding programs from SAFETEA-LU are likely to be included in the new authorization, though their specifications are unknown at this point. Key programs that could apply to Antoine include:

- Surface Transportation Program (STP)
- Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ)
- Transportation, Community & System Preservation Program (TCSP)
- Safe Routes to School
- Transportation Enhancements



The former Inwood Forest Country Club has recently reopened as the White Oak Conference Center.

Project readiness is an important consideration for inclusion in the TIP, so advance completion of the aforementioned design and engineering, along with the City’s funding commitment, will be very important. In addition, based on the conceptual design of certain roadway segments being recommended, it is likely that the equivalent of a variance will be required from the City’s Public Works and Engineering Department because these designs may not fit existing approved street section standards. This approval process will also need to occur in advance of funding commitments.

It should be noted that various funding programs associated with “stimulus” funding during the current recession (TIGER grants and I-10 recovery funds for example) have had different specifications, including some that did not require a local match. Recently this funding has been coordinated with the federal government’s Partnership for Sustainable Communities program between HUD, the Department of Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency. The availability of these programs is speculative and partly dependent on national political developments; therefore they would not make sense as the basis for a funding plan in this study. However, the City and the Near Northwest Management District should remain vigilant in case such funding becomes available again; the projects recommended by this study would match well with the Sustainable Communities objectives.



The recently completed Lone Star College on Victory is a welcome institutional anchor for the Study Area.

In addition, if it is determined that drainage improvements are needed on Antoine that necessitate the reconstruction of the street, Renew Houston funds could be applied as well.

Five Bridges

The decorative and placemaking enhancements to the waterway bridges in the Antoine / Victory / West Little York area are typical improvements spearheaded by management districts and property owner or business associations. The Near Northwest Management District should be the lead agency in designing and procuring the decorative enhancements as well as maintaining them (including electrical usage). However, as the District’s budget totals only about \$1.1 million and has an emphasis on security and public safety programs, its own financial resources to accomplish this are limited. The District could consider shifting some emphasis within the planning and urban design component of its service plan to include the Five Bridges project. The responsibility for detailed design and production of specifications will almost certainly fall on the District. Partnerships with local neighborhood associations and perhaps the creation of a 501(c)(3) (see more detailed discussion under Strategic Objective 3) will be needed to fund the procurement and installation of the enhancements.

Enhanced bus service and transfer center

While Strategic Objective 4 below anticipates a major transit capital investment by METRO, an interim short-term measure with potential benefits from a mobility, marketing and residential location standpoint would be to enhance bus service throughout the area and create a transfer center at the intersection of Antoine and Tidwell. This enhancement would target a service level similar to or exceeding that of Bellaire Boulevard “Quickline” branded service. The H-GAC Regional Transit Framework Study (2010) indicates the Antoine Corridor as a segment of larger recommended express bus or bus rapid transit service corridors under several of its potential scenarios. The study also provides an overview of potential funding strategies and mechanisms, not restated in this report. It should be noted that elements of enhanced service could be eligible for typical TIP-programmed funding such as CMAQ.

Strategic Objective 2: Stabilize and fortify the commercial, single-family and multi-family residential markets by reducing the supply of nearby deteriorated, blighted, and nuisance properties and replacing them with uses that have more positive effects on value.

Fast track actions: (1) Select suitable properties for rehabilitation assistance between Cole Creek and the former Inwood Forest Country Club. (2) Reduce supply of other low-end multi-family rental / condo and retail properties in the same area. Redevelop into productive private uses and/or public facilities and infrastructure.

To date, the single family neighborhoods in the Study Area, while low priced compared to suburban homes of equivalent age and builder quality in Houston, have nevertheless managed to remain viable with houses generally in reasonable condition. However, as these homes reach 40 years in age, they will require more investment and upkeep to retain value. The Study Area’s economic health depends on these homes being purchased by buyers who are willing and have the financial resources to ensure both stable or rising values and good physical condition. The most significant obstacle to assuring that cycle is the oversupply of lower-income, sometimes dilapidated, multi-family properties, deteriorating aged retail strip centers, and the occasional incompatible use – most notably the industrial use along White Oak Bayou just south of West Little York. These elements in the Study Area landscape create uncertainty that may be sufficient to deter home buyers from making the needed investments in the single family neighborhoods. Though rapid gentrification and home value increases have occurred in parts of the nearby Oak Forest neighborhood, its location is not directly adjacent to the Study Area, and it is not anticipated that this market momentum will carry over to the Study Area in the short term.

The nature of the retail and commercial properties in the Study Area is determined by the health of the surrounding residential neighborhoods – the income distribution of the population and the general sense of whether investment is

occurring. It typically lags residential revitalization, often by a considerable period of time. Commercial revitalization rarely occurs in advance unless the structures are architecturally noteworthy or uniquely positioned adjacent to a destination amenity. Therefore, though Strategic Objective 2 focuses on the single family market, it is also the key to reviving retail and commercial activity over the longer term.

Therefore, a continuation of the large-scale intervention by the City of Houston is necessary to ensure this near-term stability. In the process, the City and other entities can also create Livable Centers infrastructure that will add a new dimension of mobility and sustainability to the area. These actions can occur on an accelerated basis or a more moderate track; the time frame of stabilization and economic upswing will vary depending on which level of intervention is chosen.

Accelerated intervention scenario

Although the City has taken heretofore unprecedented measures to demolish blighted multi-family structures in the De Soto / Hollyview area, it does not actually own those sites. Given the absentee ownership of many multi-family and commercial properties, plus the highly fractured and convoluted ownership structure of properties such as Candlelight Trails and Candlewood Glen, “arms-length” (willing, non-forced transaction) sale of the properties to the City would be unlikely in the near term. Therefore, a quicker turnaround could only be accomplished through condemnation by the City.

Normally condemnation of private property must be undertaken for conversion of those properties into public uses only. The Texas Constitution and Local Government Code prevent acquisition of privately owned properties for conveyance to private developers. The redevelopment scenario envisioned in this study would convert many of the blighted multi-family and commercial uses in the Study Area to both public open space / recreation and private housing or mixed-use. State law provides for only one way to include private redevelopment on properties acquired through public condemnation: the Urban Renewal statute (Local Government Code Chapter 374).

The law requires an Urban Renewal Plan to be developed for the area and adopted through a citywide vote. A recent amendment to this statute provides an exception to the election requirement if the properties to be condemned and redeveloped are in condominium ownership (in Houston only). In the Study Area, only the former Candlelight Trails and portions of Candlewood Glen qualify under this exception. Thus to begin the general redevelopment scenario as laid out earlier in this study within a near-term time frame, the City would need to declare the following properties as constituting an Urban Renewal Area:

1. Former Candlelight Trails condominiums (now demolished), 5675 De Soto, HCAD value: \$248,759
2. Candlewood Glen apartments / condominiums, 5365 De Soto, HCAD value: \$1,298,841
3. Former Oak Brook apartments, 5353 De Soto, HCAD value: \$1,063,979
4. Former Gables apartments, 5600 Hollyview, HCAD value: \$581,647
5. Commercial / retail properties on east side of Antoine from Pepper Tree to 6314 Antoine, HCAD value approximately \$4 million
6. Retail properties on east side of Antoine at 6440 Antoine and 6600-6710 Antoine
7. Possibly other multi-family and retail properties on west side of Antoine

Public streets and properties such as De Soto Street, portions of Hollyview Street, and the Harris County Flood Control properties along White Oak Bayou and Vogel Creek could be included. The plan would exclude existing single family homes.

Since this includes non-condominium properties, the plan would require a citywide vote. This level of intervention would reach far beyond actions the City has taken in the past, so a great deal of political groundwork would be required. The City could highlight other potentially similar blighted areas (Broadway, Fondren Southwest, Spring Branch, Sharpstown / Gulfton, etc.) and package together as a way of garnering widespread voter support.

Furthermore, this accelerated redevelopment scenario will require significant fiscal and organizational resources up

front to accomplish condemnation, property acquisition, and, in the case of the De Soto Bayou Boulevard, public space improvements. It may be most practical to create a local government corporation (LGC) to administer the redevelopment and public improvement process. Funding for these up front expenditures could happen through the following strategies:

- HUD funds (administered through the City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department) – as the area’s current demography has a large low-income component, the public improvements and amenities would be shown to benefit that population; property resales for housing development would need to have stipulations of affordability relative to area median income.
- Section 108 loans provide a means of funding larger scale expenditures. HUD makes these loans to cities on the provision that repayments are secured by future Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocations. However, the City should seek repayment funds from other potential sources:
 - The Rebuild Houston program for land purchased for drainage / flood control
 - NNWMD, Houston Parks Board (Bayou Greenway), and local charitable foundations’ contributions for public space benefits to the area
 - Resale from properties sold to for-profit housing developers (stipulating affordability as required by HUD) for new for-sale housing
 - Resale from properties sold to not-for-profit developers (consider both lump-sum and payment plan where developer makes payments equal to Section 108 payments to HUD) for new for-sale housing; will require restriction of a portion of home sale prices to conform to HUD affordability guidelines (normally 80% of area median income, or \$43,100)
 - Ground lease revenue for redeveloped commercial projects
 - Lease revenue from tenants in redeveloped commercial projects
- CDBG entitlement funds
- HOME funds
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Urban Outdoor Recreation Grants (currently suspended)
- Harris County Flood Control (where bayou channel detention is involved)
- Houston Parks Board



One of the recently renovated apartment complexes on De Soto Street.

- Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs), other community development organizations, and private for-profit developers
- Lone Star College – as a purchaser of sites to support programs at its new Victory campus or as a tenant / ground lessee on a redevelopment site
- Tax increment funding, if authorized by a citywide vote, as authorized in state Urban Renewal statutes

It cannot be over-emphasized that an Urban Renewal approach, along with large up front redevelopment funding, is technically possible but represents an outsized political and fiscal commitment by the City. Normally the City would not be expected to pursue this route. Political support for elected officials and administrators will be needed from the community, and indeed citywide, for this strategy to be viable.

Moderate intervention scenario

Because the accelerated scenario just outlined may be difficult to bring about, it is useful to consider a more moderate level of intervention. The principal difference is that property acquisition by the City through the use of the Urban Renewal statute would not be pursued. The only acquisition would occur when funding partners such as the Houston Parks Board could bring additional resources to fund an “arms-length,” friendly transaction. Otherwise, the City would focus on the improvement of existing public properties and rights of way. For example, instead of acquiring and redeveloping

the properties on the south side of De Soto, the City would improve De Soto Street (such as adding sidewalks), and put incentive policies in place to encourage redevelopment. These incentives could be especially helpful in defraying the costs of property assembly for some sites that the private sector is unlikely to pursue in the near term, such as Candlelight Trails and Candlewood Glen, because the assembly costs would likely outweigh the potential returns from redevelopment.

Two potential financial incentive programs should be noted:

- Chapter 380 agreements – Texas law allows the City a great deal of flexibility in assisting private development through offering grants, subsidies, loan guarantees, and other help. The City has recently enacted several Chapter 380 agreements for development projects, usually based on incremental tax revenue generation and the meeting of specific public policy objectives such as the developer’s provision of public infrastructure or desired types of employment. The City could offer Chapter 380 agreements to developers within the Study Area whose projects meet objectives supporting the Livable Centers plan and provide new, affordable for-sale housing.
- New Markets Tax Credits – The U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Community Development Investments Fund administers the New Markets Tax Credit program, which helps financial institutions make investments in ventures serving economically challenged populations that would not otherwise have fit within typical financing criteria. It appears that the Census tracts in the Study Area qualify as locations that meet the program’s eligibility criteria. The City of Houston may create an entity that can receive the tax credits which make these transactions possible; local private financing institutions can also receive them. The City could help coordinate applications for New Market Tax Credits that finance property redevelopment in the Study Area that provides affordable for-sale housing as envisioned in this plan. The program could also assist retail or other businesses in the Study Area that are expected to serve or employ low-income Study Area residents.

The moderate intervention scenario assumes that the City continues with its multi-family rehabilitation and code compliance efforts (including additional demolitions as required) using HUD and other funding as available. The apartment complexes west of Antoine along Tidwell should be considered for inclusion in this effort.

It should be noted that except for tax increment funding, the same funding partners as noted under the accelerated scenario could be approach to accomplish appropriate projects that advance the plan.

The moderate intervention scenario, while accomplishing improvements that fit in with the Livable Centers plan, is highly unlikely in the near term to accomplish the significant redevelopment of private properties envisioned herein. Such redevelopment, and associated demographic change toward a more firmly middle-class profile, will take several years to get underway, with truly significant change possibly more than a decade in the future. Still, the continuation of the City’s current efforts plus the additional investments and incentives will help the Study Area turn an economic corner so that it is set on a market upswing, even if a slow one.

Development regulations

In either the accelerated or the moderate intervention scenarios, the City of Houston will likely need to adjust regulations for private redevelopment so that pedestrian-friendly designs do not require variances. Creating a district that allows or encourages site and building design according to the standards provided in the Transit Corridor ordinance (primarily within Chapter 42 of City code) would be an appropriate approach to this issue. This will allow reduced setbacks along Antoine and other major thoroughfares and assure minimum clear sidewalk widths of 6 feet. Other modifications will be necessary to allow shorter block lengths and smaller lot sizes than currently allowed in the “suburban” area as designated by Chapter 42. This is particularly important due to barriers that restrict street connectivity.

Strategic Objective 3: Elevate the Study Area’s regional market awareness through unique and functional open space investments that simultaneously build community.

Action: Create activity and development node at Antoine / West Little York / Victory based on destination-quality open space, education, and recreation.

A set of core recommendations in this study call for open space, community gardens, and the destination-quality White Oak Gardens in the area of the intersections of West Little York and Victory with Antoine. These elements, along with the Five Bridges enhancements in the same area, will elevate the Study Area to a level of positive regional prominence that has previously lacked. This market awareness should bring increased demand for the adjacent single family housing.

The Harris County Flood Control District owns the stream channel along White Oak Bayou. This provides the starting point for these open space improvements. In addition, the flood buy-out area in the former Arbor Oaks subdivision east of Antoine provides ample land for multiple community garden initiatives. However, the White Oak Gardens and possibly some other open space elements will require acquisition of what is currently private property. This can occur via the accelerated or moderate scenarios outlined in Strategic Objective 2 above if some portion of the acquired properties are anticipated to be resold for private redevelopment. The City could use eminent domain for a property that is anticipated to be fully reused as publicly-owned open space, though this would constitute relatively aggressive action as well.

More likely is a moderate intervention scenario with a friendly acquisition by either the City, private not-for-profit organizations, or educational institutions (Lone Star College). Several of such organizations were listed under Strategic Objective 2. Other organizations that could assist in bringing funding or other resources include various foundations; provision of public open space amenities and related educational activity has been a focus of assistance for some major foundations in Houston. Alternatively, the Near Northwest Management District or other community-based entity could spearhead the creation of a 501(c)(3) corporation to raise funds for site acquisition and improvements through tax-deductible contributions from individuals and businesses. There is precedent in Houston for this type of structure; both the Houston Downtown Management District and the Westchase District have affiliated 501(c)(3) entities.

It should be noted that a 501(c)(3) organization, the Houston Botanic Garden, already exists to fund its namesake project on a not-yet-named site. Dialogue should occur to see if White Oak Gardens could meet some objectives of this organization and possibly receive resources or other assistance.

If reactivated, Texas Parks and Wildlife grants (Urban Outdoor Recreation or Regional) might also be able to aid in funding portions of the destination open space that are to be owned and operated by the City of Houston or Harris County.

The community gardens element is relatively inexpensive in terms of capital costs. However, since these are neighborhood-based, the expected resources would be coming from neighborhood groups that may have limited capacity, especially organizationally. Community gardening advocacy groups such as Urban Harvest can provide technical and organizational assistance to help neighborhoods cultivate new gardens. National organizations exist that provide small grants (often under \$2,000) which are sufficient to construct starter gardens. The Near Northwest Management District can work with both civic clubs representing single family neighborhoods and apartment complex managers to educate them about the community gardening opportunity.

In summary, the open space and related educational improvements are going to necessitate multiple partnerships with not-for-profit organizations and others. The Near Northwest Management District can spearhead the initiation of dialogue to work toward these partnerships.

Strategic Objective 4: Capitalize economically on existing and potential transit services.

Action: Create a transit-oriented vibrant place at Tidwell and Antoine.

The streetscape and sidewalk improvements along Antoine will support and enhance the travel experience for users of existing transit service, particularly the route 85 bus line. However, the presence of a rail corridor where commuter or urban transit could be installed brings a potentially more powerful foundation for placemaking, reshaping mobility

patterns, and economic development. Of course, the willingness and financial capacity of METRO to invest in the BNSF corridor is purely speculative at this point and is definitely a long term time frame scenario. However, the Near Northwest community should monitor METRO's plans and prepare for transit-oriented development (TOD) possibilities at the Antoine / Tidwell intersection should rail transit plans begin to take shape that include a station there.

If and when rail transit service becomes definite, to encourage TOD the City should apply the same tools as outlined under the moderate intervention scenario in Strategic Objective 2 – Chapter 380 and New Markets Tax Credits. To the extent that new multi-family properties are encouraged that provide housing to middle-income renters, the City and the District should highlight HUD's Mortgage Insurance for Rental and Cooperative Housing under Section 221(d)(3) and 221(d)(4) which is available directly to developers.

If METRO had to acquire land for the station (for example the triangle at Antoine and Tidwell), the agency may have excess property beyond that required to serve transit passengers. METRO could consider ground leasing this excess to developers and/or business operators to build facilities containing services, such as convenience retail and dining, that would be appropriate for serving transit patrons.

One particular opportunity in the TOD area is Harris County's property (excluding two front pad sites) at the northwest corner of Antoine and Tidwell. The county operates a social services center there, apparently repurposed from a former strip retail structure. It is likely that many customers and clients at this center arrive by transit. The City and District should work with Harris County to plan for redesign and/or redevelopment of that site to accommodate the same services while creating a more pedestrian- and transit-friendly environment.

At the same time, the City and the District should also plan for pedestrian improvements around the potential station site. These improvements could be eligible for federal funding similar to that identified in Strategic Objective 1 (though program names and specifications may have changed by that time).

DEVELOPMENT COSTS

The spread sheet on the opposite page illustrates the probable Public Improvements and Private expenditures that, as a whole, make up the physical components of “The Plan”.

The chart groups specific activities into Strategic Objectives which relate generally to a time frame and a district within the overall Livable Center Study Area. Using “Strategic Objective 1” as an example, the suggested enhancements include improvements along Antoine which include streetscape improvements, transit enhancements and bridge branding. It is thought that these improvements could commence in the near term and be completed over the next 5-8 years. All of the activities in Strategic Objective 1 are Public Improvements and their costs are estimated by using known unit costs or through information provided by similar systems, such as the existing Metro “Quickline” service.

The Chart demonstrates approaching the plan with four “Strategic Objectives”:

- Strategic Objective 1: Distinctive, memorable, multimodal environment for those traveling within or through the Study Area.
- Strategic Objective 2: Stabilize and fortify the single family residential market by reducing the supply of nearby deteriorated, blighted, and nuisance properties.
- Strategic Objective 3: Elevate the Study Area’s regional market awareness through unique and functional open space investments that simultaneously build community.
- Strategic Objective 4: Capitalize economically on existing and potential transit services.

As noted, Objective 1 is primarily a public effort whereas the following three are more dependent on private efforts and are fairly long term with anticipated activities occurring after 2020. In today’s dollars, it is estimated that a \$57 million dollar public investment could assist at leveraging a \$190 million dollar private investment and a rebirth in the Antoine corridor.



This is just the beginning of a great future for the area. The redevelopment of Antoine as a mixed retail/residential area has long been a dream of many who still live, work and play in the area. We have a lot of work ahead of us but it is doable!

Let us work together and get it done!

Project #	Time Frame	Public Improvement		Private Development		Notes	
		Project	Costs	Project	Costs		
<i>Strategic Objective 1: Distinctive, memorable, multimodal environment for those traveling within or through the Study Area.</i>							
C3		Antoine streetscape improvement from Diamond Ridge to W Little York	\$ 400,000			800lf @ \$500/lf	
A3	Near to	Antoine streetscape improvement from De Soto to Diamond Ridge	\$ 840,000			2,400lf @ \$350/lf	
D2	middle	Antoine streetscape improvement from W Little York to Victory	\$ 700,000			1400lf @ \$500/lf	
D3	term:	Enhancement of the 5 bridges	\$ 1,250,000			\$250,000/bridge	
	2012-20	Enhanced bus service and transfer center	\$ 4,500,000			Based on Quickline	
Subtotal			\$ 7,690,000				
<i>Strategic Objective 2: Stabilize and fortify the single family residential market by reducing the supply of nearby deteriorated, blighted, and nuisance properties and replacing them with uses that have more positive effects on value.</i>							
A1	Accelerated	Acquisition and De Soto Canal and Antoine terminus	\$ 10,800,000			270,000sf @\$40/sf, \$10/sf acq, \$30/sf const	
A2	scenario:	Acquisition and De Soto Park @ White Oak	\$ 9,600,000			240,000sf @\$40/sf, \$10/sf acq, \$30/sf const	
A4	before			Residential Townhomes along De Soto	\$ 13,160,000	94 units @ \$140,000/unit Average	
A5	2020			Mixed-use @ Antoine & De Soto	\$ 13,440,000	\$120/sf	
A6	Moderate			Residential @ Antoine & De Soto	\$ 2,800,000	20 units @ \$140,000/unit Average	
B1	scenario:			Residential Townhomes along Hollyview	\$ 7,840,000	56 units @ \$140,000/unit Average	
B2	2014 and			Residential Townhomes along Antoine, Hollyview to N. of Sheraton Oaks	\$ 5,700,000	38 units @ \$150,000/unit Average	
B3	beyond			Residential Townhomes along Antoine at Diamond Ridge	\$ 4,480,000	28 units @ \$160,000/unit Average	
Subtotal			\$ 20,400,000		\$ 47,420,000		
<i>Strategic Objective 3: Elevate the Study Area's regional market awareness through unique and functional open space investments that simultaneously build community.</i>							
C1		Acquisition and development of Education Park south of W Little York	\$ 18,000,000			600,000sf @\$30/sf, \$10/sf acq, \$20/sf const	
C2		Wet bottom Retention developed along White Oak south of W Little York	\$ 8,000,000			swag	
C4				Residential development of retail properties @ W Little York/Antoine	\$ 22,000,000	110 units @ \$200,000/unit	
D1		Extension of Educational Park & Urban Gardens North of W Little York	\$ 200,000			Assumes Gift from HCFC	
D4	Middle to			Development of Bayou Farmers Market	\$ 2,000,000	swag	
D5	long term:			Retail development at Northeast Corner of Antoine and W Little York	\$ 1,440,000	\$80/sf	
D6	2016 and			Retail development at Southwest Corner of Antoine and W Little York	\$ 192,000	\$80/sf	
D7	beyond			Retail development at Northwest Corner of Antoine and W Little York	\$ 13,500,000	\$80/sf	
D8				Mixed-use development at Southeast Corner of Antoine and Victory	\$ 17,640,000	\$120/sf	
D9				Mixed-use development at Southwest Corner of Antoine and Victory	\$ 10,080,000	\$120/sf	
D10				Retail development at Northeast Corner of Antoine and Victory	\$ 5,600,000	\$80/sf	
D11				Retail development at Northwest Corner of Antoine and Victory	\$ 480,000	\$80/sf	
Subtotal			\$ 26,200,000		\$ 72,932,000		
<i>Strategic Objective 4: Capitalize economically on existing and potential transit services.</i>							
E1		Metro Acquires Burlington Northern track alignment	\$ -			City wide service	
E2		Site @Antoine and Tidwell is developed as a Bus/Train Transfer Station	\$ 3,125,000			62,500sf @ \$50/sf	
E3	Long term:			Retail development at Northeast Corner of Antoine and Tidwell	\$ 9,040,000	\$80/sf	
E4	after 2020			Retail development at Northwest Corner of Antoine and Tidwell	\$ 2,640,000	\$80/sf	
E5				Retail/Garage development at Southeast Corner of Antoine and Tidwell	\$ 6,900,000	\$80/sf-\$20/sf	
E6				Residential Development along Cole Creek	\$ 27,900,000	\$120/sf	
E7				Residential Development Southside of Tidwell	\$ 23,520,000	\$120/sf	
Subtotal			\$ 3,125,000		\$ 70,000,000		
TOTAL \$			57,415,000	TOTAL \$			190,352,000

