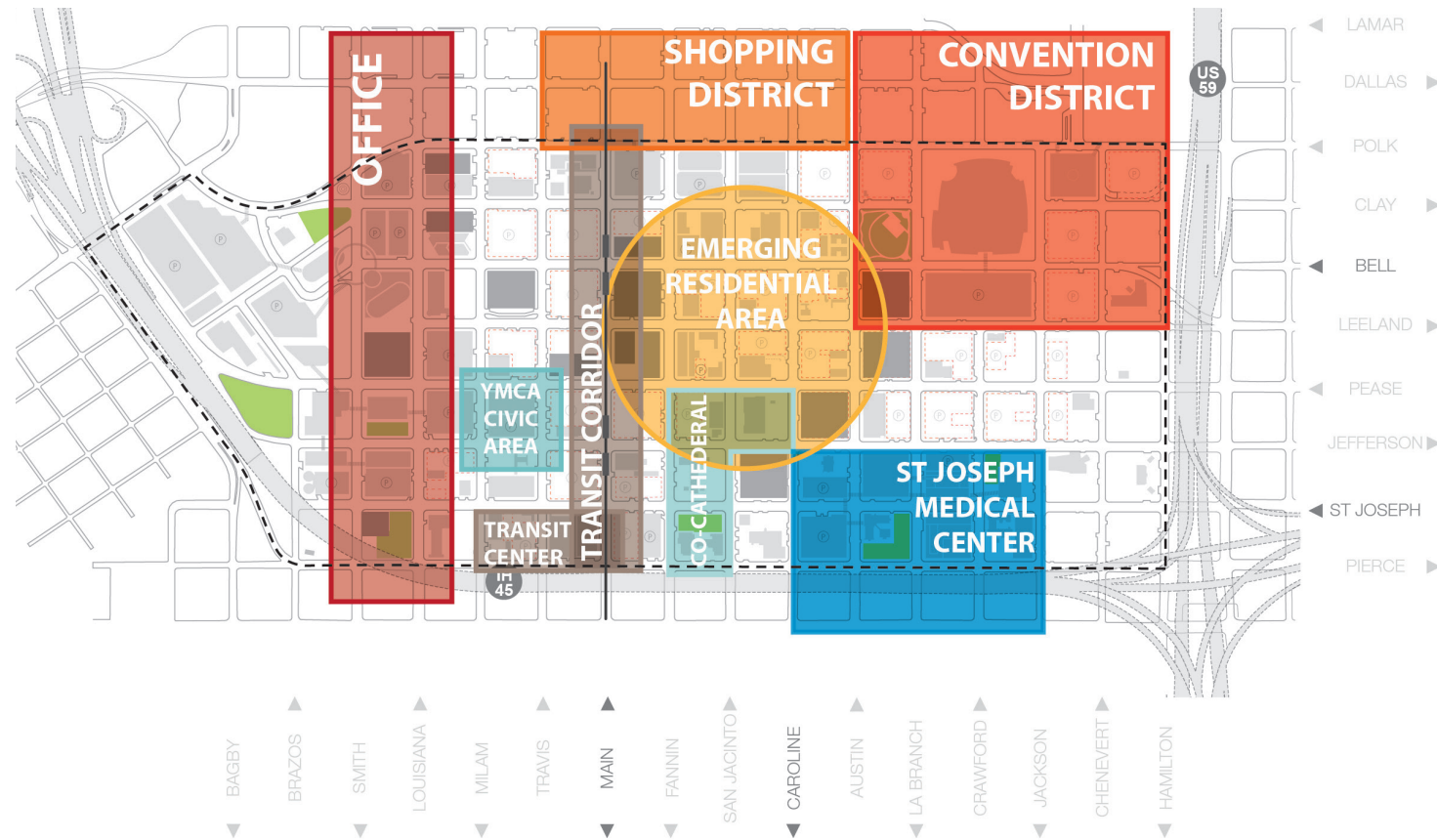




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As is common in many urban areas, the network of streets, parks, and open spaces that we call the public realm comprises about half of the land area of southern Downtown. In a city that has limited regulatory structures, strategic investment in our public realm is a powerful way to shape Houston's future.



Areas of Activity in southern Downtown

- St. Joseph Medical Center
- YMCA Civic Area
- Co-Cathedral
- Office Corridor along Smith and Louisiana
- Convention District, including Toyota Center
- Shopping District
- Emerging Residential Area
- Transit

CONTEXT

Downtown Houston is increasingly a stage for a diverse range of urban activities at all times of the day, rather than simply a destination for working commuters. With the expansion of the public transit system, people from surrounding neighborhoods will have improved access to Downtown jobs, retail, entertainment, and recreational amenities. Substantial amounts of new residential development in Downtown Houston — catalyzed by the Downtown Living Initiative — will create a growing need for amenities that have not typically been provided in the area. However, from our observations and conversations with stakeholders, it is equally clear that the network of streets in the study area is still heavily mono-functional, designed primarily to channel commuters in and out of Downtown during rush hour.

VISION AND GOALS

This plan presents a vision for the streets, parks and open spaces of southern Downtown/CBD that will support a diverse range of activities, development, and neighborhoods. Building upon previous efforts, the plan is intended to guide future investments and provide a framework for evaluation. The following goals have been developed to support the overall vision for the public realm in southern Downtown:



MOVEMENT: Public and private investments in southern Downtown should focus on distinctive streetscapes and park spaces that promote a variety of experiences and activities.

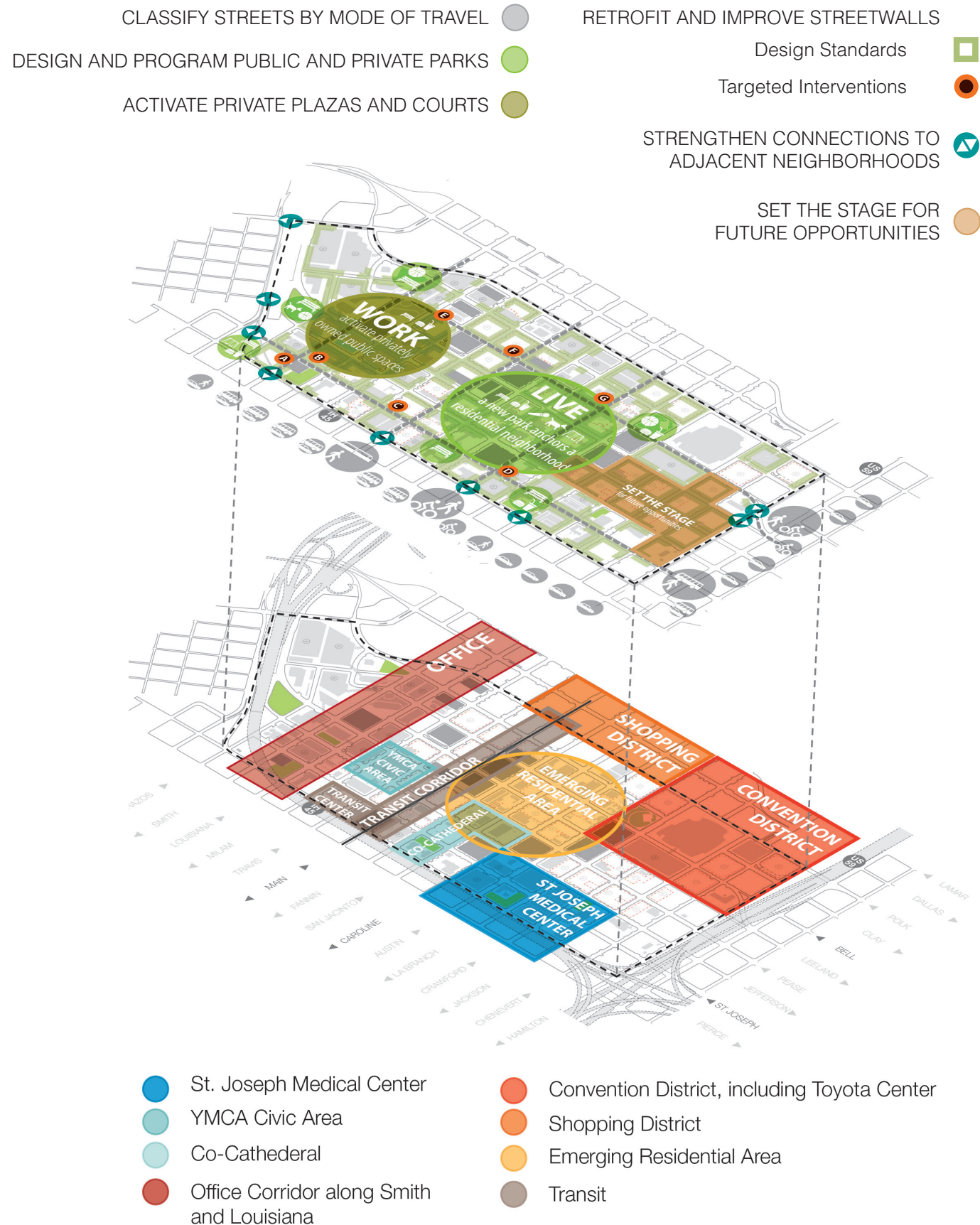


USE: In response to existing conditions and emerging development, define new public realm improvements that generate a more vibrant place.



PERCEPTION: Enhance the experience of southern Downtown through a network of public spaces, streets, and landmarks.

SIX STRATEGIES FOR SOUTHERN DOWNTOWN/ CBD



1

CLASSIFY STREETS BY MODE OF TRAVEL

A variety of street sections throughout the study area provides the opportunity for each activity to have a distinctive urban experience. Creating street classifications by travel mode will minimize conflict between modes and improve network legibility. While streets are and will be designed to ensure better safety and comfort for a primary mode, all streets will be inherently multi-functional.

2

DESIGN AND PROGRAM DISTINCTIVE PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Parks and open spaces serve as common reference points and meeting places for shared experiences. A combination of new parks and retrofitted open spaces will anchor new development clusters and emerging activity areas. These open spaces will create memorable landmarks that are supportive of surrounding uses and promote increased activity through park design and programming.

3

ACTIVATE PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLIC SPACES

Privately owned public spaces are a significant component of the study area and cannot be ignored when documenting the existing public realm. These spaces are publicly accessible, and often seamless with public sidewalks, but privately managed by existing adjacent property owners and managers. By adding site furnishings and programming, these plazas can become local landmarks, creating prestige for their owners and tenants, while creating an amenity for employees, residents and Downtown visitors.

4

RETROFIT AND IMPROVE STREETWALLS

By retrofitting blocks and streetwalls that are designed primarily for cars and parking, the quality of space along sidewalks can be improved to create an appealing environment for pedestrians where the needs of automobiles have traditionally been prioritized. This strategy includes both design guidelines to increase comfort and aesthetic appeal, as well as ideas for semi-permanent retail to create destinations that increase foot traffic until future development is realized.

5

CREATE KEY CONNECTIONS ACROSS HIGHWAY EDGES

Addressing the barrier created by the major highways at the perimeter of the study area will strengthen connections between southern Downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. Inviting gateways that encourage residents of the surrounding area to visit Downtown and vice versa will support new activities and create a more vibrant street life.

6

SET THE STAGE FOR FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

A long-term strategy for the southeastern portion of Downtown Houston must begin with short- and medium-term improvements of underutilized blocks. Through site rehabilitation and infrastructure investment, the area can be restored for existing site users, where future infill development will create an anchor to connect with and support other activity zones.

This report may be downloaded at www.downtownhouston.org/resources or a bound copy may be purchased at www.asakurabinson.com/studies-links/southerndowntown.