THE CREATIVE CORRIDOR A Main Street Revitalization

University of Arkansas Community Design Center + Marlon Blackwell Architect
for
The City of Little Rock

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NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

A great nation
deserves great art.

In fulfillment of an NEA *Our Town* grant

"...a stranger suddenly dropped into the business center of Zenith could not have told whether he was in a city of Oregon or Georgia, Ohio or Maine, Oklahoma or Manitoba...The shops show the same standardized, nationally advertised wares; the newspapers of sections three thousand miles apart have the same 'syndicated features'; the boy in Arkansas displays just such a flamboyant ready-made suit as is found on just such a boy in Delaware."

-Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*-

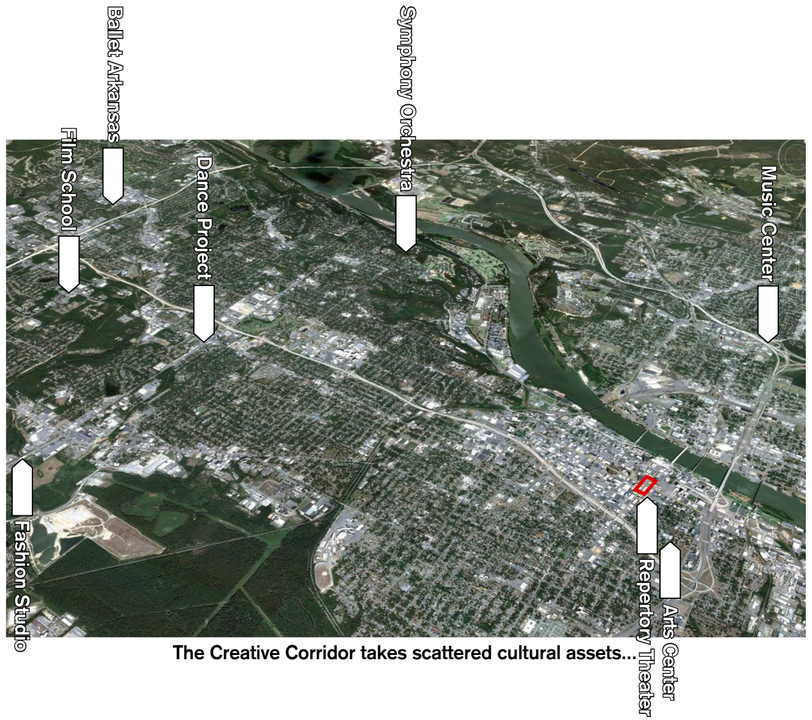
"Main Street became to America what the piazza was to Italy."

-Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street*-

Main Street, Little Rock 1910

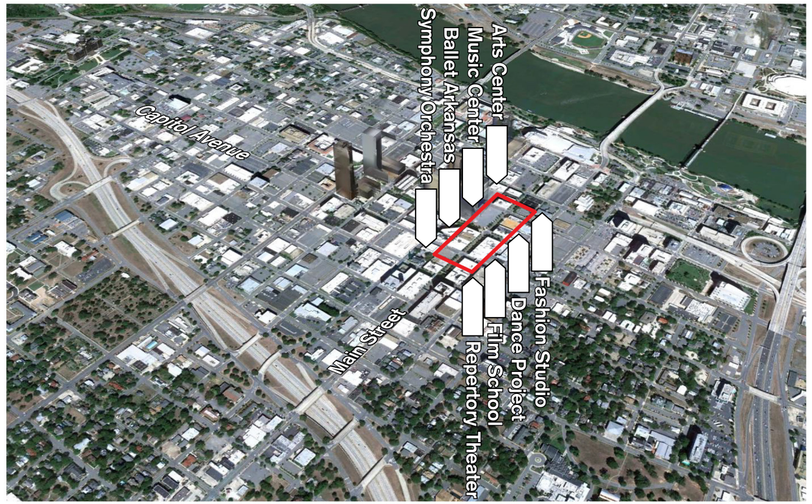
Main Street: From Commerce to Culture

If ecologies evolve through diversification, cities mature through aggregation of talent and resources. The Creative Corridor Plan is premised upon the aggregation of complementary creative organizations currently scattered throughout Little Rock. Some of these groups exist at the financial margin and struggle to stay alive. Their ability to secure greater visibility and support will likely be amplified through new synergies from aggregation. Facilities slated to anchor The Creative Corridor include instruction and production spaces for the symphony, ballet, arts center, visual artists, theater, and dance, as well as a culinary arts economy that triangulates restaurants, demonstration, and education.



The Creative Corridor takes scattered cultural assets...

The Creative Corridor retrofits a four-block segment of an endangered historic downtown Main Street through economic development catalyzed by the cultural arts rather than Main Street's traditional retail base.



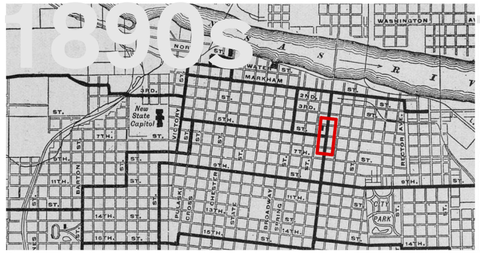
...and aggregates them into a district of four blocks.

The Creative Corridor retrofits a four-block segment of a downtown Main Street through economic development catalyzed by the cultural arts rather than Main Street's traditional retail base. The design challenge involves restructuring a public realm conceived for workaday commercial activity to now serve 24/7 urban lifestyles with highly amenitized streetscapes. Main Streets traditionally were shopping environments of long skinny buildings with thin frontages that compete for visibility and customer patronage through design, advertising, and convenient storefront parking. To optimize shopping productivity, their sidewalk spaces were simple and generally not landscaped.

The universal language of Main Street's early architecture was fashioned from the expressive order of brick and stone—a scale and fenestration pattern different from glass curtain wall systems prevalent today. Despite technological challenges in the adaptive reuse of historic structures to residential, large-format office, and cultural production functions, the plan generates niche value from the reclamation of a heritage environment whose exceptional place-making qualities cannot be replicated.

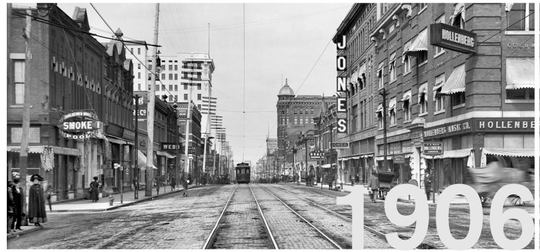
Main Street America

Main Street became a major force of centralization and incorporation in our emerging national landscape. Absent a town square or green, it functioned as the definitive heart of American civic and commercial life by the latter part of the 19thcentury. While no Main Street is exactly the same, this place type developed a categorical urban form exhibiting distinct morphological and typological patterns based on commercial activity. And, as chronicled in the novels of Sinclair Lewis, Main Street forged shared patterns and social capital that shaped a distributed American experience. But that was then. So goes the city, goes Main Street.



Urban Renewal
580 acres of the downtown were demolished, including 471 commercial buildings (more than 1600 total in a city of 193,000) and the population density dropped from 18 people per acre to five in 1970.

Pedestrian Mall
Four blocks of Main Street were converted into a pedestrian mall that made up the Metrocentre District. Due to lack of automobile access and a decline in businesses, the mall was perceived as a failure and was demolished.



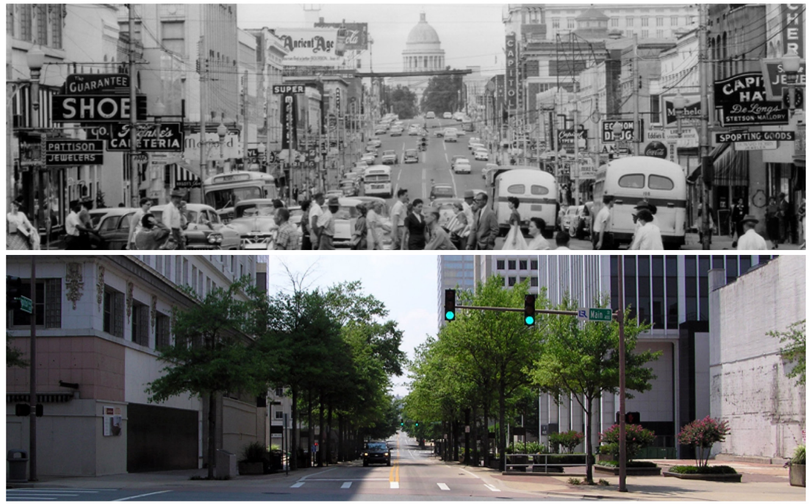
Classic Main Street
Main Street was once a high-density hub of activity in Little Rock—boasting 50% of the county's commerce and housing one of the nation's most extensive streetcar systems (44 miles) for a city of only 40,000!

Main Street Today
Beautification has not sparked any revitalization initiatives...

Now in the 21st century, commerce has long abandoned most Main Streets, including the one in Little Rock's. In Little Rock we are left with a great street space framed by beautifully crafted buildings that represent an irreplaceable tradition of architecture and urbanism. Like any accomplished work of art, music, or literature, Main Street is an important link in our cultural gene pool, representing a placemaking intelligence whose loss diminishes our collective city-building capacities. Tearing down structures with historical significance is an inferior land development solution. The good news is that as new interests pioneer revitalization within the city today, Main Street is once again seen as an important venue for adaptive reuse. Like with most strong urban form types, Main Street is highly resilient and capable of adaptation to new realities without losing its distinguishing spatial characteristics. To preserve and rehabilitate Main Street is prudent and farsighted stewardship regardless of whether one is following an economic, social, or ecological bottom line.

Main Street Decline

The ascendancy and eventual decline of America's Main Streets is the story of the American city's decline. The story includes game-changing transformations in the transportation technologies and retail logistics that originally serviced Main Street. The peak of Main Street's influence parallels the dominance of streetcars and trolleys as urban transit modes—forces of population concentration that facilitate walkable neighborhoods. Whereas rail transit *concentrates* populations, automobiles *distribute* populations. With the emergence of mass automobile ownership after the 1920s new suburban commercial districts derivative of Main Street arose, displacing the function of Main Street as an urban center.



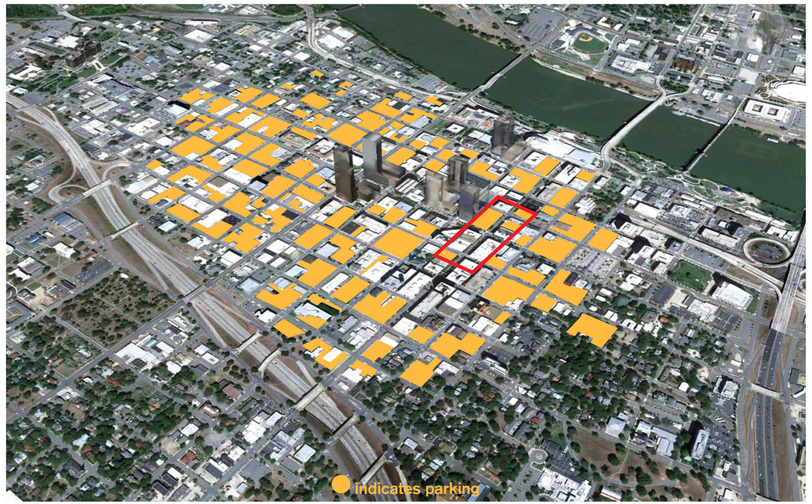
Intersection of Main Street and Capitol Avenue 1955 (above) and 2012 (below)

Main Street 1965 (above) and 2012 (below)

The decline of Little Rock's Main Street happened late; a victim of the city's all too successful efforts in securing federal urban renewal funds during the 1950s. The Central Little Rock Urban Renewal Project began in 1961 as a consortium of the Urban Progress Association, the Little Rock Housing Authority, Downtown Little Rock Unlimited, and the City of Little Rock—eventually to become a national model for urban neighborhood clearance. Over 580 acres of the downtown were demolished, including 471 commercial buildings (more than 1,600 buildings total in a city of only 193,000), and population density dropped from 18 people per acre to five people per acre by 1970. In some downtown neighborhoods the population dropped 75 percent. Primarily sustained by state office tenants, Main Street is an urban island among a few intact downtown districts floating within an otherwise underdeveloped building fabric. Downtown's single largest land use is parking, and the City's retail base is not coming back anytime soon.

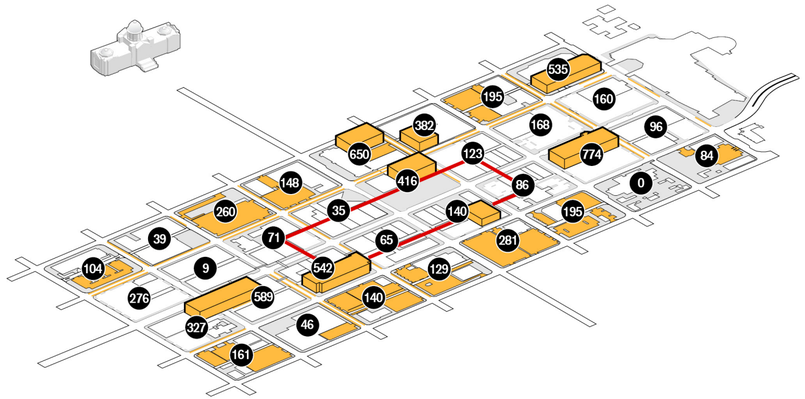
When Parking Becomes an Urbanism

Little Rock has a parking problem: surface parking is now the City's single largest land use. In downtown and urban areas generally, parking should never become its own land use! Successful urbanism incorporates surface parking into the street, or discretely within the block interior, or as structured parking within building footprints. A disproportionate amount of surface parking undermines continuity in building and neighborhood fabric, fatal to urban character and functioning. Of course, parking as its own urbanism is an outgrowth of the City's urban renewal efforts, the latter having never replaced the building fabric it demolished. Parking as a place holder has become a de facto urbanism.



Parking is downtown Little Rock's largest land use and...

In the 1950's downtown Little Rock had a population density of 18 people per acre. By 1970 Urban Renewal efforts demolished 1,600 buildings, dropping the population density to five people per acre.



...there are over 7,000 spaces within two blocks of the Main Street Creative Corridor!

While The Creative Corridor's building fabric is fairly intact with only four vacant sites among the four blocks, a different parking challenge exists. More than 7,000 parking spaces exist within two blocks of The Creative Corridor in structured, surface, and on-street formats. Most of this parking, however, is presently reserved for dedicated parking in structured decks. As The Creative Corridor retrofit eventually leads to higher and better land uses, some on-street parking will likely be lost to installation of new pedestrian amenities within the right-of-way. The reintroduction of rail transit someday will also warrant removal of on-street parking along Main Street. Urbanization of Main Street will necessitate new urban parking strategies fitting of the placemaking principles underpinning conception of The Creative Corridor. Since a primary goal of The Creative Corridor is to develop a superior public realm commensurate with the development of world-class architectural facilities, parking cannot be allowed to drive urban design, but rather should be considered in an integral manner with other public interests.

Precedents in Main Street Revitalization

Cities everywhere have tapped into the place-based economic development potential of their Main Streets. As with any project of the commons, these revitalization efforts all required public-private partnerships and cooperative agreements among property holders. Most importantly, they could not have happened without powerful city leadership with the ability to envision a different future. Most of the illustrated projects are located in once distressed downtowns with the usual naysayers and opponents who couldn't imagine a reality different from the status quo. These urban corridors have become mixed-use signature streets and destinations in their respective cities.

Like many Main Streets, The Creative Corridor neighborhood has a Walk Score ranking of 94 out of 100, considered to be a "Walkers' Paradise"—a key benchmark for securing high-grade urban reinvestment.

1. Transit Mall, Portland
2. Gaslamp Quarter, San Diego
3. Promenade, Charlottesville
4. Main Street, Memphis
5. Castro Street, Mountain View
6. 16th Street Mall, Denver
7. Transit Mall, Portland
8. 3rd Street Promenade, Santa Monica

Funding Initiatives and Community Participation

Planning for The Creative Corridor was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts under their inaugural *Our Town* program in 2011. The City was one of 51 communities out of 447 applicants to be awarded funding under this signature program. Considerable federal investments focused on elevating downtown livability in Little Rock preceded award of the *Our Town* grant. Indeed, leadership under Mayor Stodola has garnered successive grants over the last five years from the NEA and USEPA to develop The Creative Corridor. Working extensively with stakeholders and the design team, the City has shaped a vision for The Creative Corridor ready for further design development and implementation.

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016

MAYORS' INSTITUTE ON CITY DESIGN
A National Endowment for the Arts leadership initiative

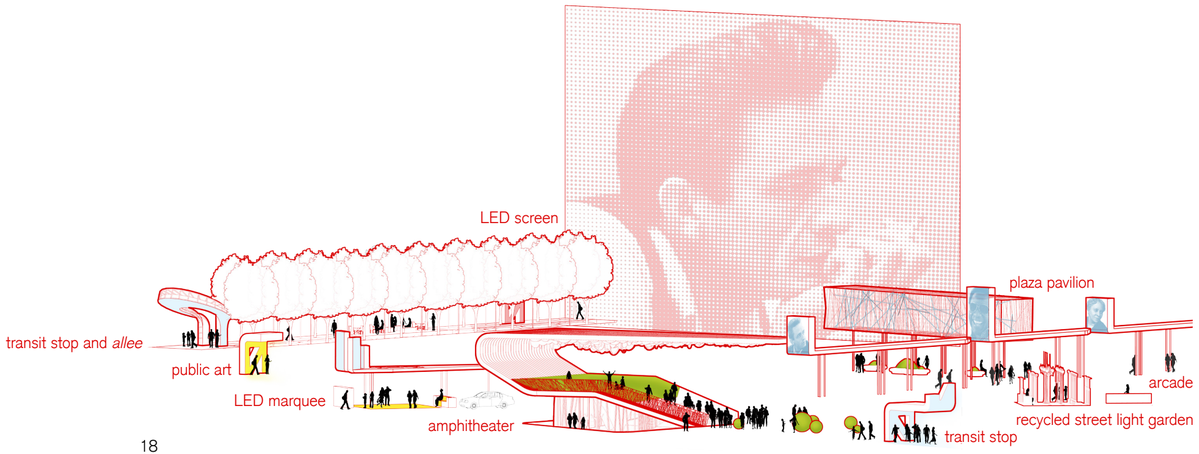
USEPA GRANT
Greening America's Capitals

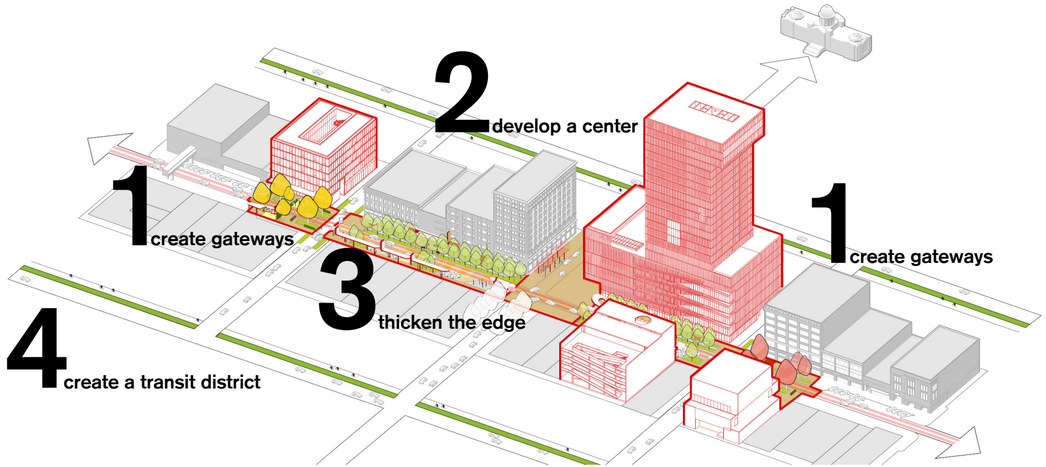
USEPA/ANRC 319 (h) GRANT
Water Quality Demonstration and Educational Program for Main Street Little Rock

NEA *OUR TOWN* GRANT
A National Endowment for the Arts creative placemaking initiative

During the project grant period spanning 2011 and 2012, the City and design team met with more than 30 stakeholders, including arts organizations, the Main Street Task Force, and property holders. From these meetings and workshops, a design strategy emerged for incremental implementation of The Creative Corridor Plan. The Creative Corridor Plan also draws upon planning proposals generated from the USEPA's 2011 report: *Greening America's Capitals: Little Rock, Arkansas*. The USEPA focused on the installation of Low Impact Development (LID) streetscapes for Main Street. Based on the Creative Corridor Plan, the USEPA and the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) just committed $1.2 million in capital funding to implement some of the plan's demonstration LID streetscapes under their 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution program. Meanwhile, development partners are preparing tenant build-out plans for the western edge of the 500 block of Main Street. Other historic structures within The Creative Corridor are either under contract or undergoing tens of millions of dollars in rehabilitation.

A Peak At The Creative Corridor's Townscaping...

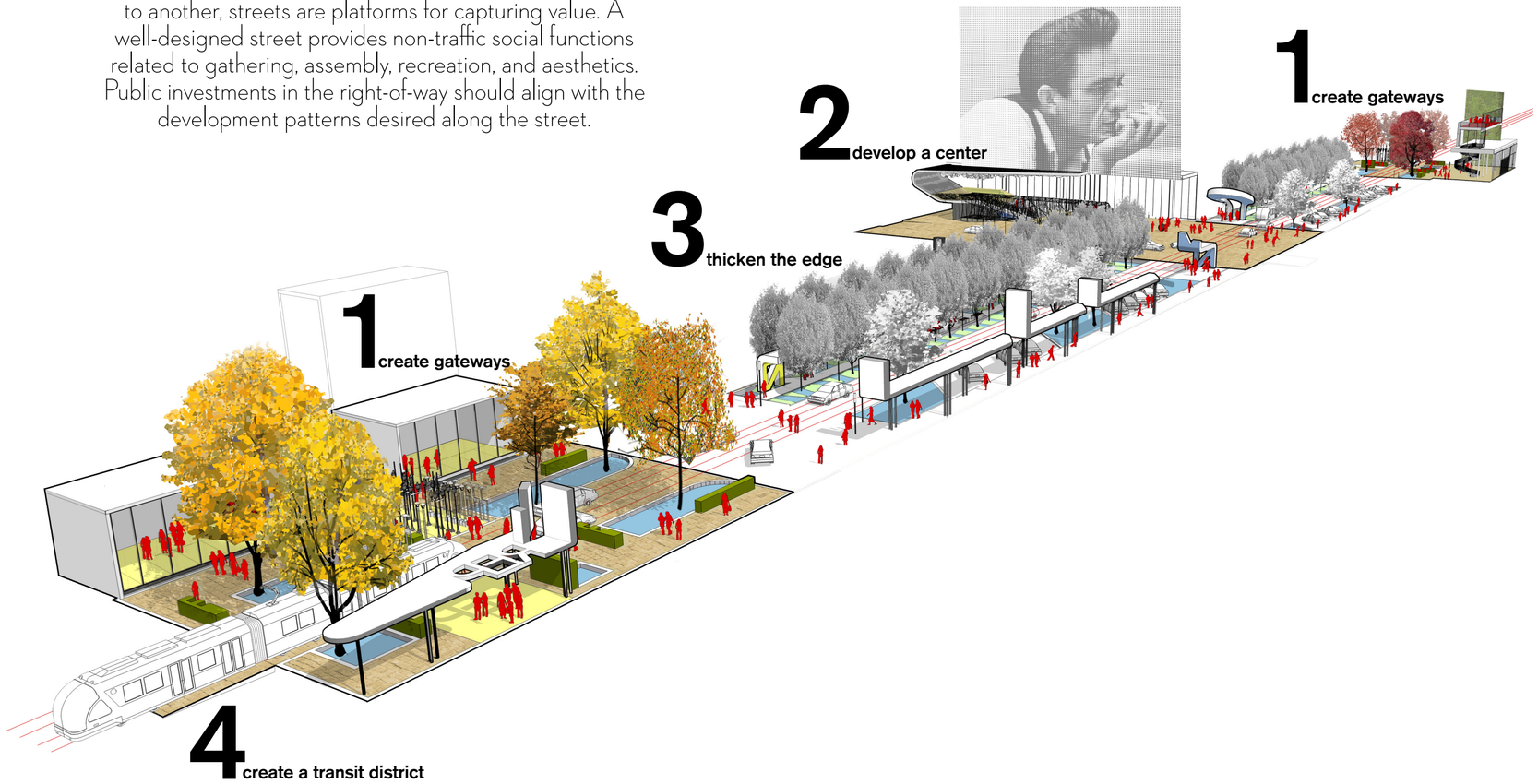


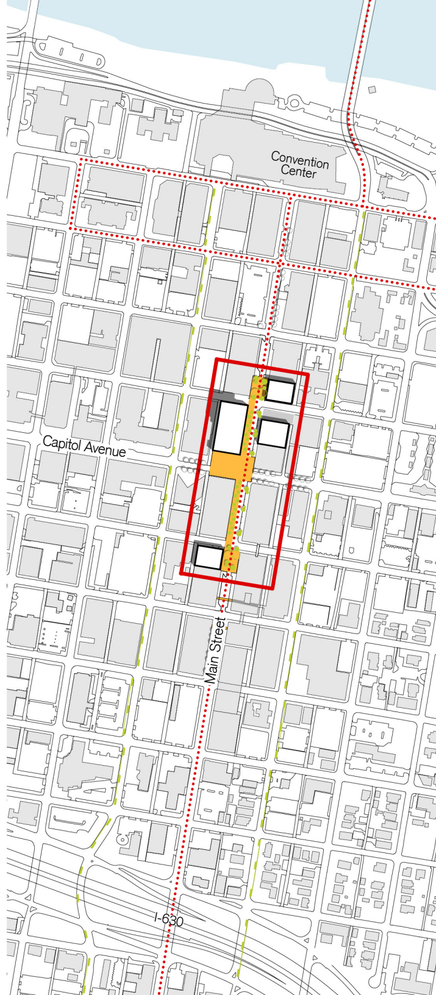


Design Approach: Creating Urban Rooms

The primary goal of The Creative Corridor is to create a superior public realm commensurate with the development of world-class architectural facilities. The plan structures an identity for The Creative Corridor adaptable to increasing levels of investment over time. The approach employs four phases in the corridor's transformation to a downtown cultural node. Consisting of a series of urban rooms, this node provides a sense of centrality and opportunity for social life that counters the dominance of mobility in corridors. Each phase can be accomplished in succession or all at once as funding and political will permit. Phasing maintains plausible alignment between public and private investments, and between proportional investments in the urban realm and individual buildings.

Unlike roads, which efficiently move traffic from one point to another, streets are platforms for capturing value. A well-designed street provides non-traffic social functions related to gathering, assembly, recreation, and aesthetics. Public investments in the right-of-way should align with the development patterns desired along the street.





The Street as a Platform for Capturing Value

Unlike roads, which efficiently move traffic between points, streets are platforms for capturing value. *A well-designed street provides non-traffic social functions related to gathering, assembly, recreation, and aesthetics.* Public investments in the right-of-way should align with land–use development patterns desired along the street. The plan coordinates Metroplan's proposed expansion of the rail streetcar system with the City's development of ecological-based stormwater management facilities as recommended by the USEPA. Design solutions, then, rely upon the urbanism of streetscapes—landscape architecture, ecological engineering, public space configurations, building frontage systems, and townscaping—to recalibrate the corridor for new uses.

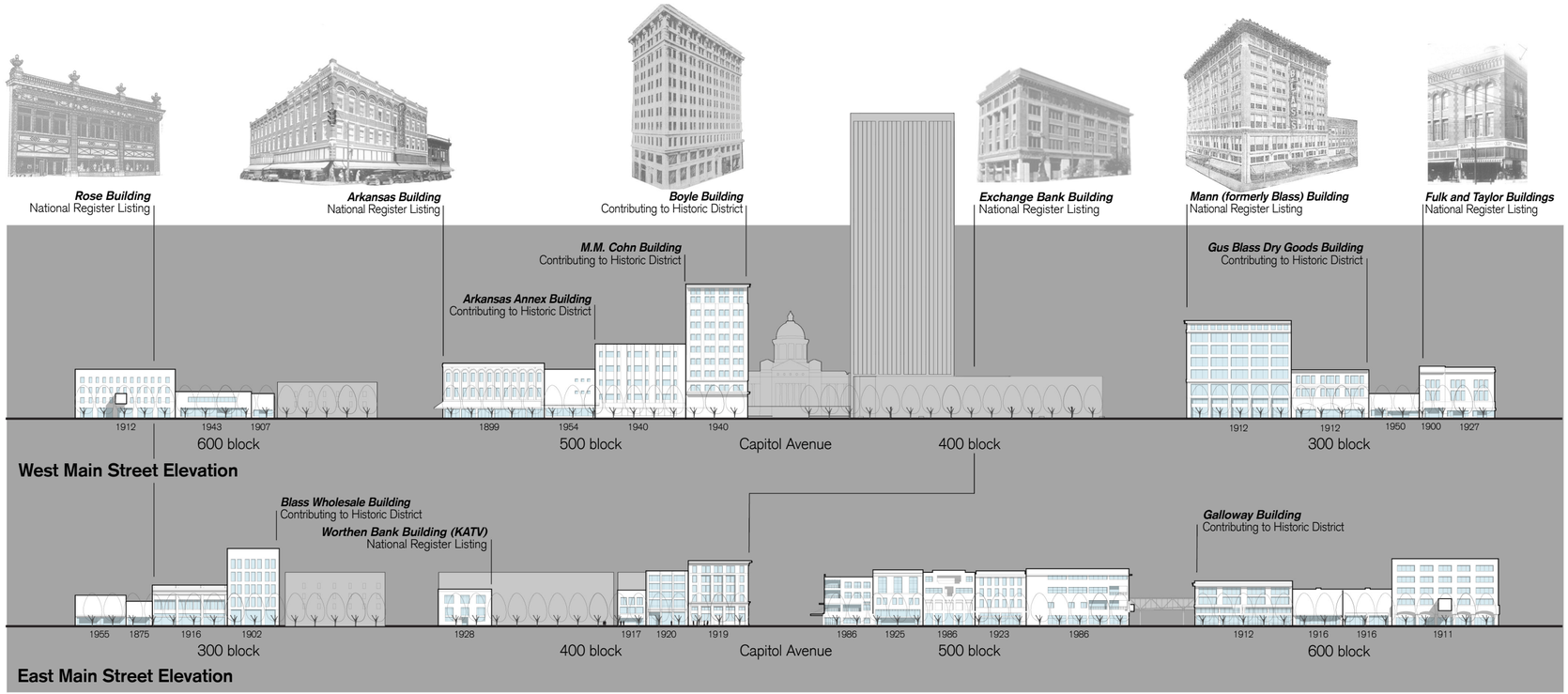
Creative Corridor looking north from the Arkansas Repertory Theater

"A vivid and integrated physical setting, capable of producing a sharp image, plays a social role as well. It can furnish the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication.... Indeed, a distinctive and legible environment not only offers security but also heightens the potential depth and intensity of human experience."

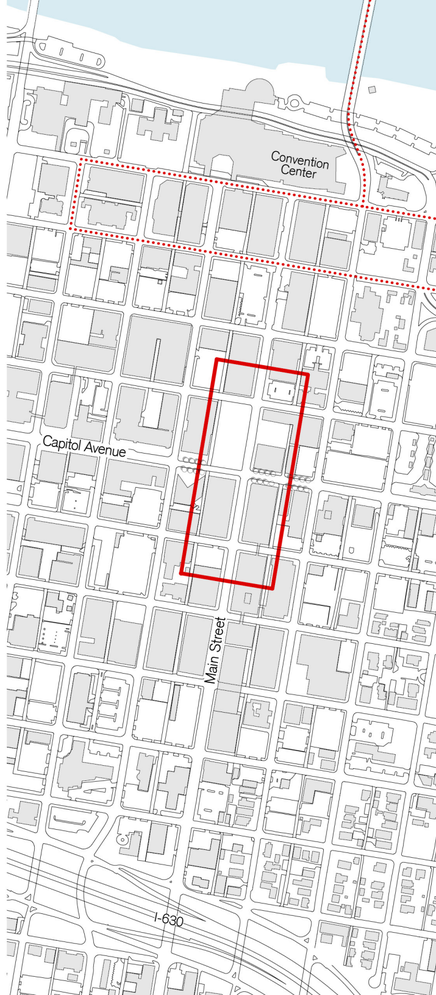
-Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*-

Alignment between Public and Private Investments

The vision is holistic, but the approach facilitates incremental implementation. Urban revitalization efforts are generally susceptible to failure when they lack either phased participation or balance between public and private investment. Particularly in today's risk-averse financing climate, viable plans will be structured around small-grained infill strategies reliant upon staged or self-financing. Accordingly, project phasing begins with prudent right-of-way improvements proportional to current development activity without getting too far ahead of the market. Each phase establishes self-sufficiency without reliance on the subsequent phase to appear complete—not dissimilar to Main Street's initial growth and development.

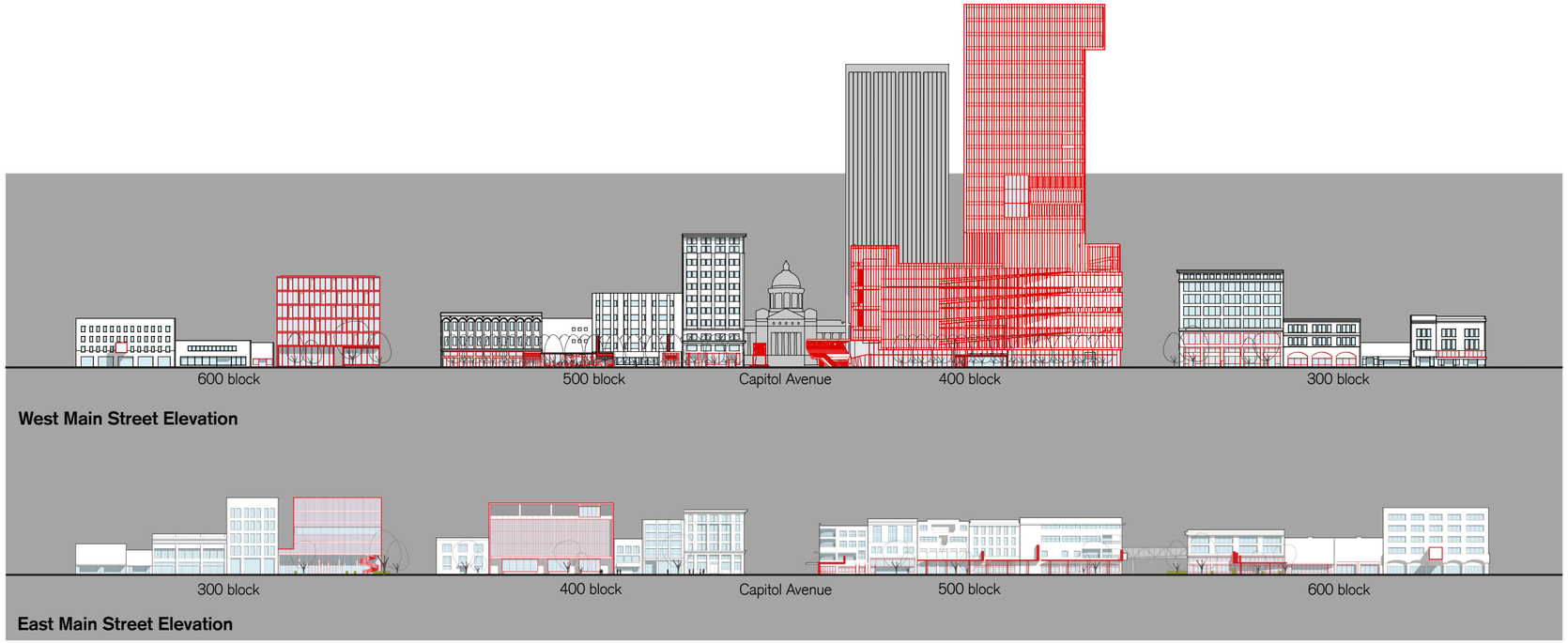


Like any accomplished work of art, music, or literature, Main Street is an important link in our cultural gene pool, representing a placemaking intelligence whose loss diminishes our collective city-building capacities.

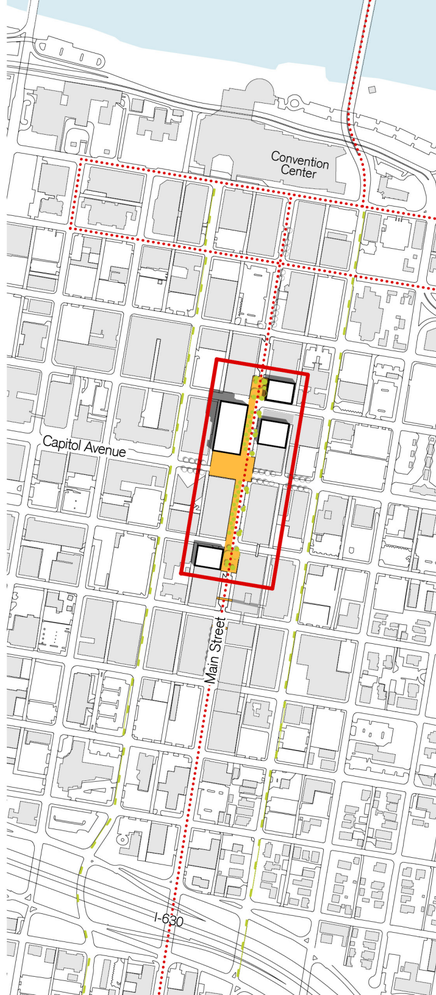


Main Street's New Land-Use Ecology

An additional challenge regards the compatibility between proposed larger infill buildings using curtain wall technologies and early 20th century commercial buildings fashioned from the expressive order of brick and stone. Rather than simply rely on historically-inspired frontage guidelines, the plan negotiates conflicting building traditions and scales through the use of townscaping elements like arcades, urban porches, marquees, LED screens, public art, and amphitheaters that bridge street and building interiors. This layer of pedestrian-oriented improvements support ongoing lifestyle shifts within the corridor, while allowing the City to maintain a de facto development momentum.

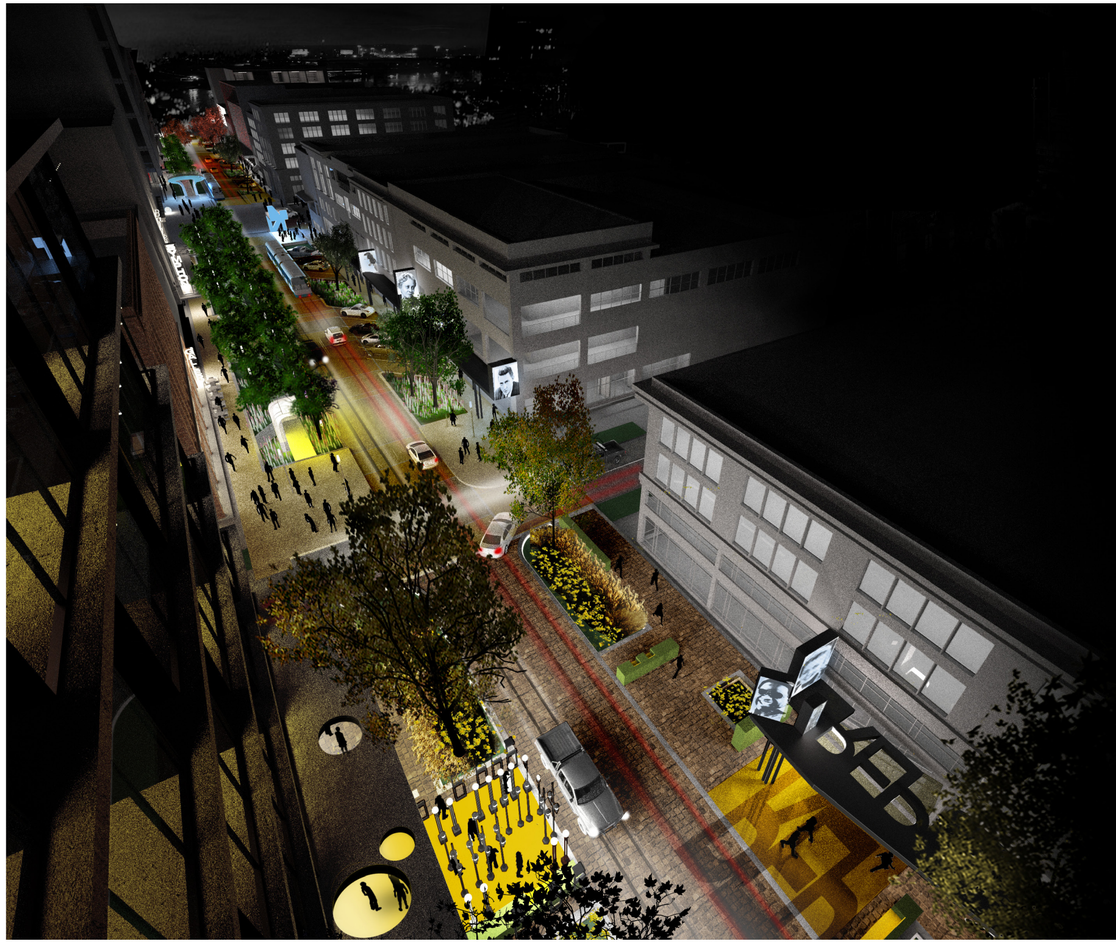


Since architectural guidelines are not politically feasible, townscaping elements and frontage systems mediate between new and old structures, big and small scales, and create anchoring spaces in the corridor.



A 24/7 Main Street

Main Street lacks vitality after weekday working hours. The design challenge involves restructuring a public realm conceived for workaday commercial throughput to now serve 24/7 urban lifestyles with a high level of livability. Main Street must be safe and inviting at night. The plan introduces pedestrian-oriented shared street configurations that support a new land-use ecology combining residential, tourism, and the cultural arts. Novel townscaping structures link spaces serially *along* the corridor while building frontage systems connect public and private spaces *across* the corridor. These highly amenitized streetscapes reward walking, sociability, and livability throughout the day and week.



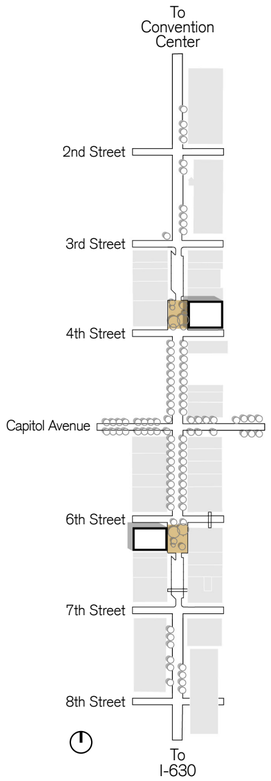
"Among the most common technique for making Main Street work as a design is the enhancement of any nodal space, or even the whole creation of such nodes that now serve as greens, vest-pocket parks, or squares. The nodes help introduce an element of centrality and enclosure, and in so doing attempt to influence our perceptions of Main Street as a safe social environment."

-Richard Francaviglia, *Main Street Revisited*-

Creative Corridor Phasing Strategy

Phase 1: Develop nodes for enhanced pedestrian activity which serve as gateways marking The Creative Corridor segment of Main Street. Through the introduction of shared street strategies that privilege a pedestrian environment supportive of non-traffic functions like outdoor dining and theater gathering, gateway nodes frame intimate social spaces within an otherwise continuous corridor.

Phase 2: Develop a center to The Creative Corridor, marking the most important intersection symbolically in Little Rock—Capitol Avenue and Main Street. A large central plaza for vehicles and pedestrians accommodates large public events and forms an appropriate gateway to the state capitol building to the west. The space configuration houses an elevated park lawn/amphitheater, arcade, and space for mobile food trucks to serve downtown office workers.



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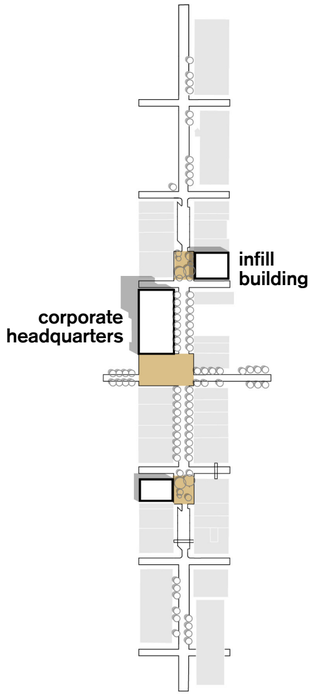
create gateways...



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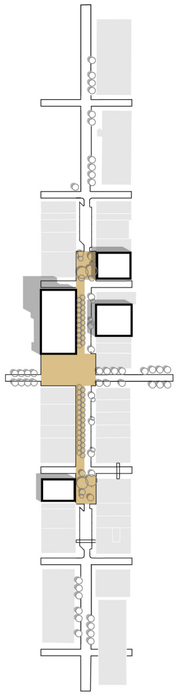
develop a center...



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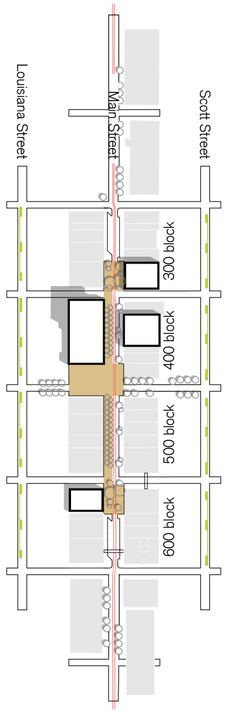
thicken the edge...



4

create a transit district!

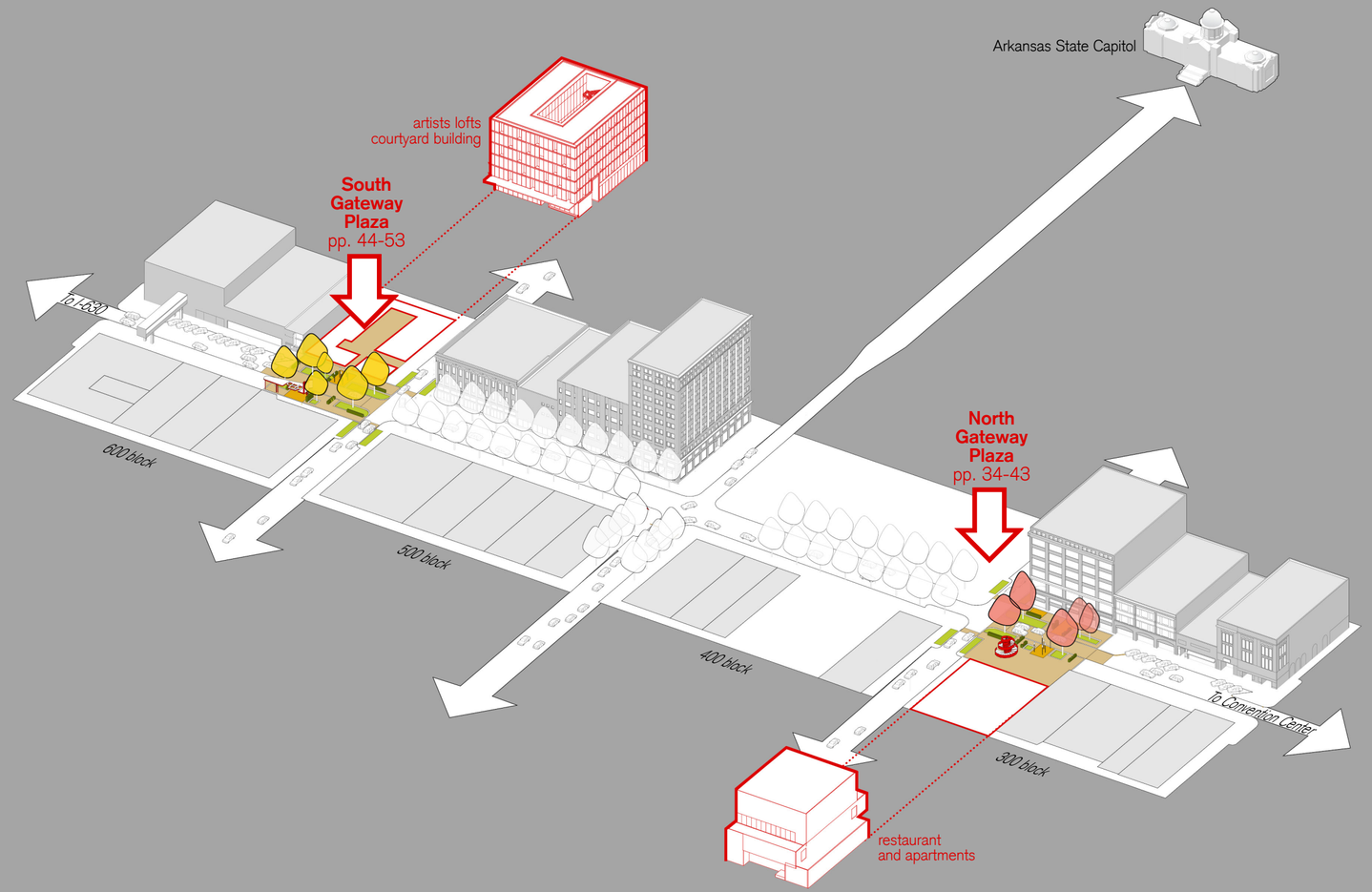
Phase 3: Connect the three nodes with a thickened edge or pedestrian promenade on the west side of the street. The west side holds the most development potential and borders the proposed plaza north of Main Street at Capitol Avenue. The pedestrian promenade is a two-block *allee* of trees housing outdoor dining courts, public art, and consequential low impact development pocket parks for ecological-based stormwater management to be funded by the USEPA.

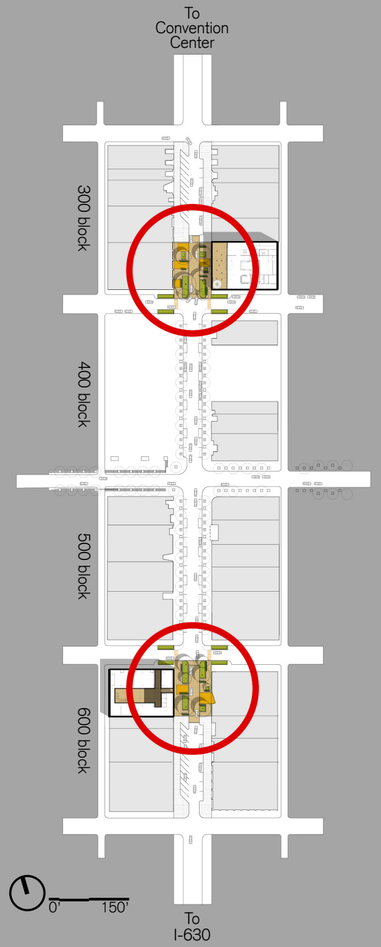
Phase 4: Install rail transit infrastructure facilities per Metroplan's proposal for future streetcar expansion, and relocate dedicated bicycle lanes with shading to parallel Scott and Louisiana Streets. The three streets combined offer full multi-modal passage between downtown and urban neighborhoods to the south.

1 Create Gateways

Establish gateways at the Arkansas Repertory Theater and the Mann Building to the north, demarcating The Creative Corridor core. Gateways employ shared street strategies to enhance pedestrian activity and calm vehicular traffic, while establishing a new visual structure for the corridor with minimal resources.

Like conventional streets, shared streets serve both pedestrians and vehicular traffic. Shared streets, however, privilege the pedestrian by inducing social behavior from motorists through the design of streets as rooms. Each gateway room is a raised pedestrian table made from a continuous surface of architectural pavers stretching from building edge to building edge. Table surfaces are flush with the sidewalk without markings that designate transport mode split—including that between auto and pedestrian. This slows traffic. Surface amenities include special townscape elements like lighting gardens that recycle old Little Rock street lights, street furniture, public art, and marquees.



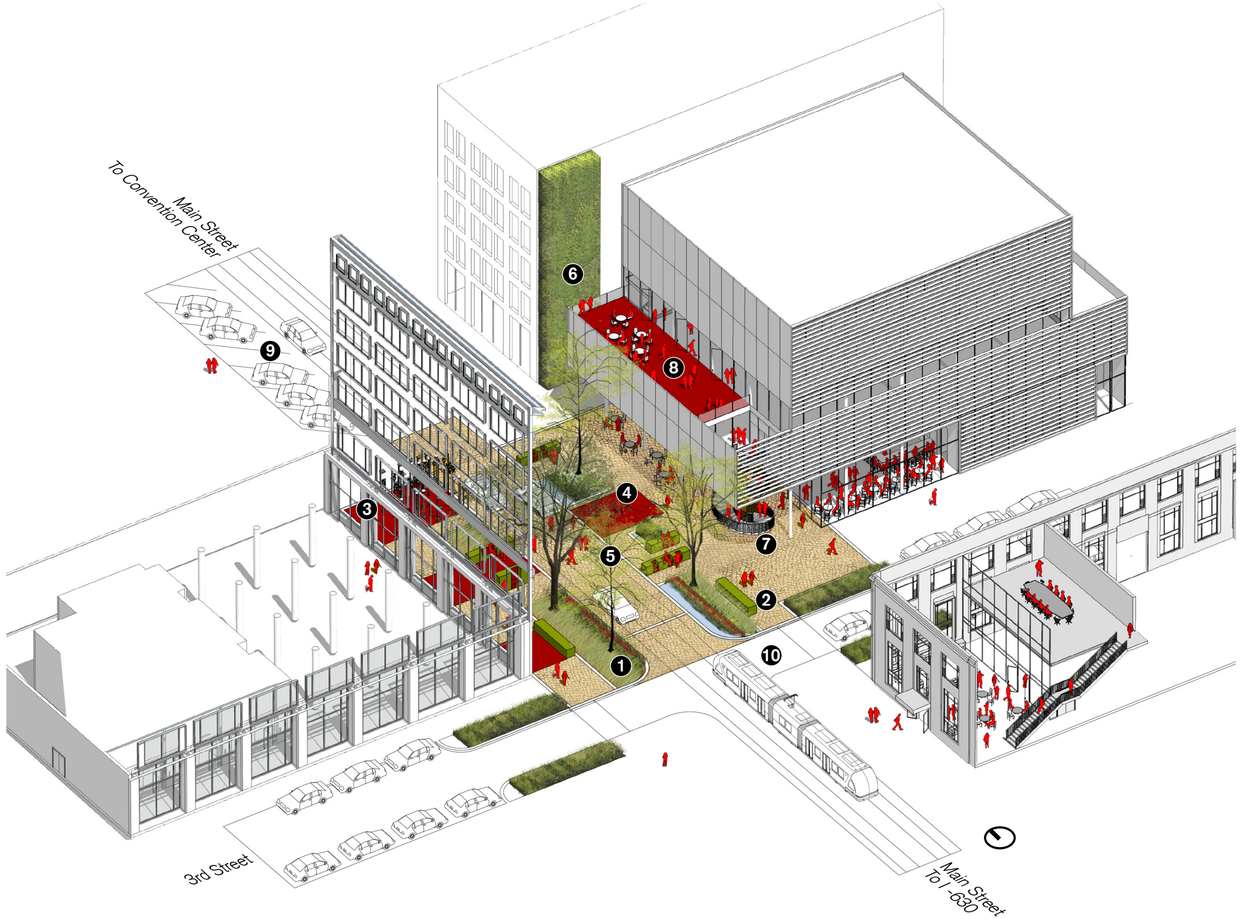


1 North Gateway Plaza

Willamette Street in Eugene, Oregon is an example of a shared street. By shifting transportation mode mix in favor of the pedestrian, shared streets support non-traffic social functions while integrating the automobile. Street design compels slower speeds without sacrificing traffic capacity.

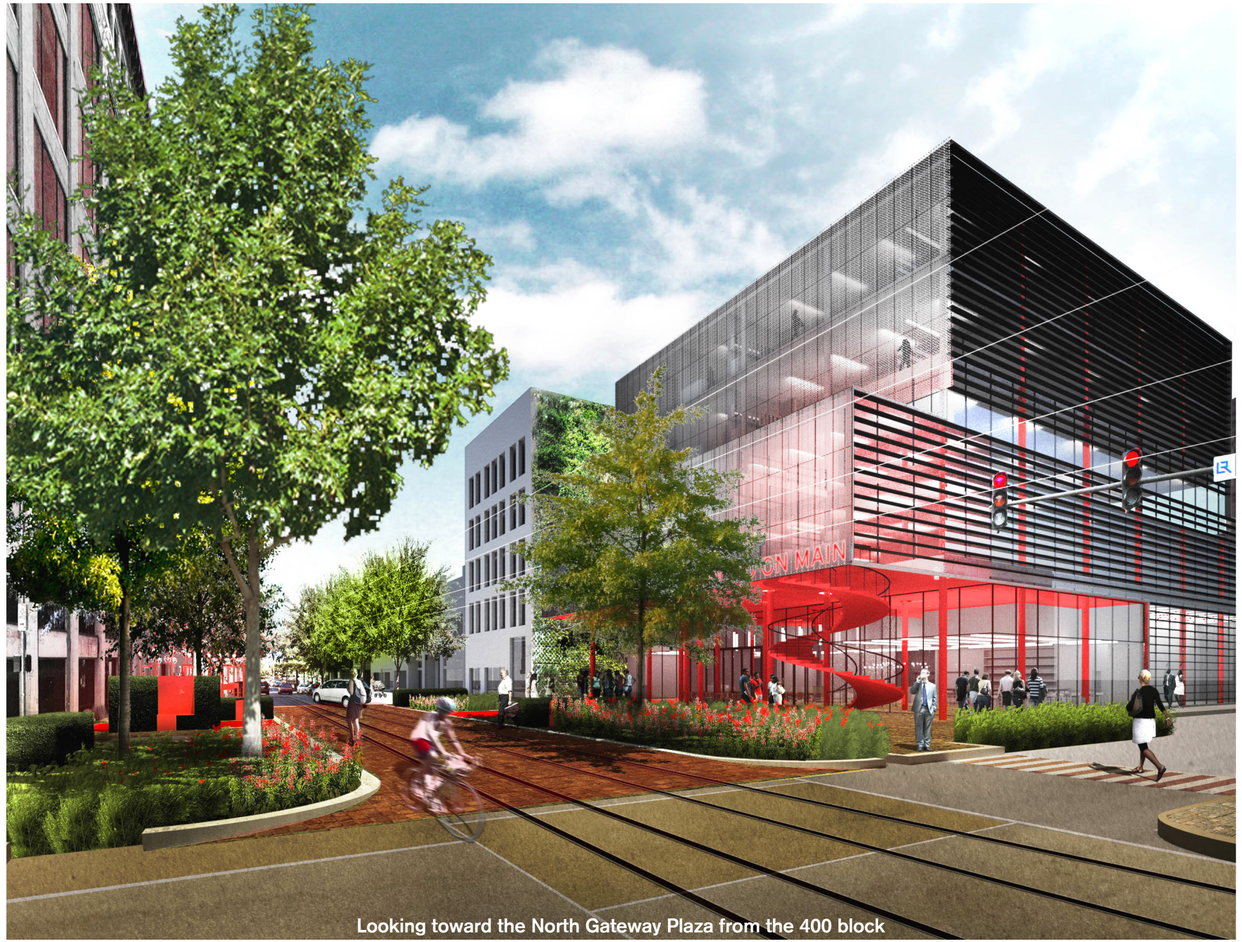
rain gardens ❶
plaza seating ❷
street light garden ❸
public art pad ❹
continuous pedestrian table ❺
green wall ❻
urban staircase ❼
urban patio ❽
back-in parking ❾
planned streetcar extension ❿

Phase 1 Example: Willamette Street, Eugene, Oregon



Looking into the North Gateway Plaza from the proposed mixed-use building

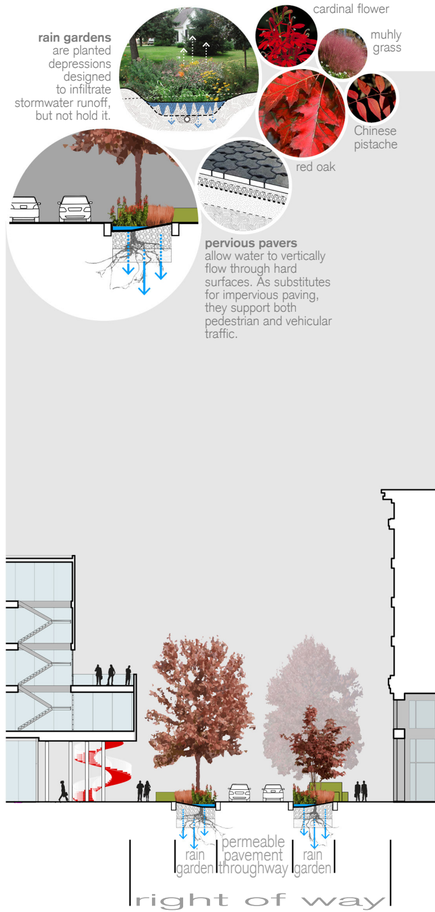
Before



Looking toward the North Gateway Plaza from the 400 block

1

Looking south from the North Gateway Plaza



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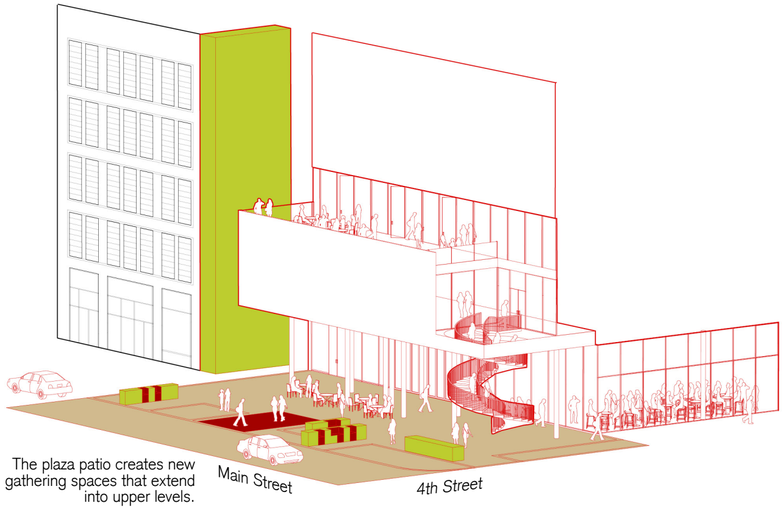
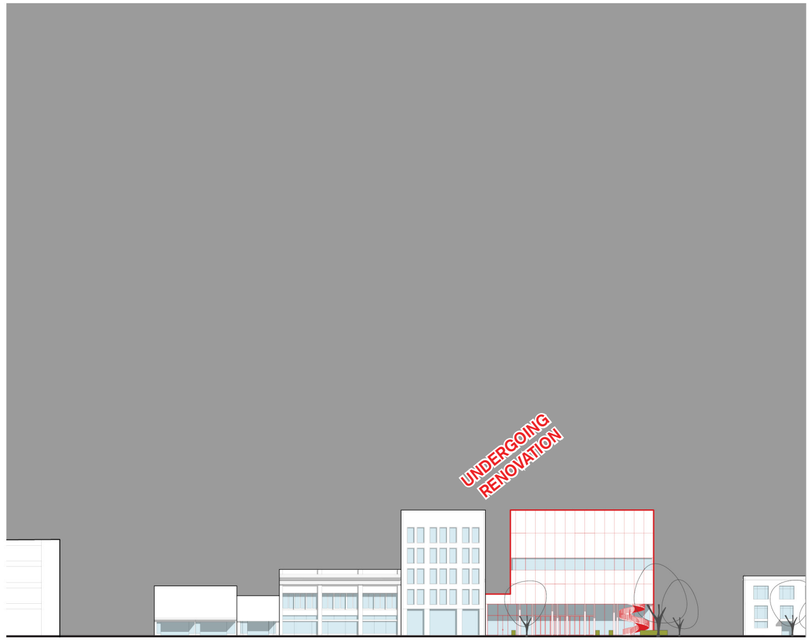
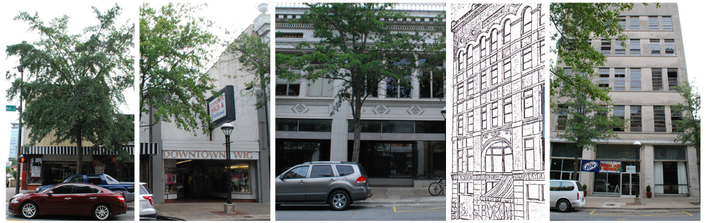
Gateway tables create urban rooms with street furniture, architectural pavement, and manicured landscapes akin to an urban pocket park. The City should consider a form-based code for The Creative Corridor that inspires highly public building frontages for new structures like that shown.





East 300 block



301 Main Street: ***Menke Building***

305 Main Street: ***Kempner Building***

307 Main Street: ***Rose Building*** National Register Listing

313-315 Main Street: ***Blass Wholesale Building*** Contributing to Historic District

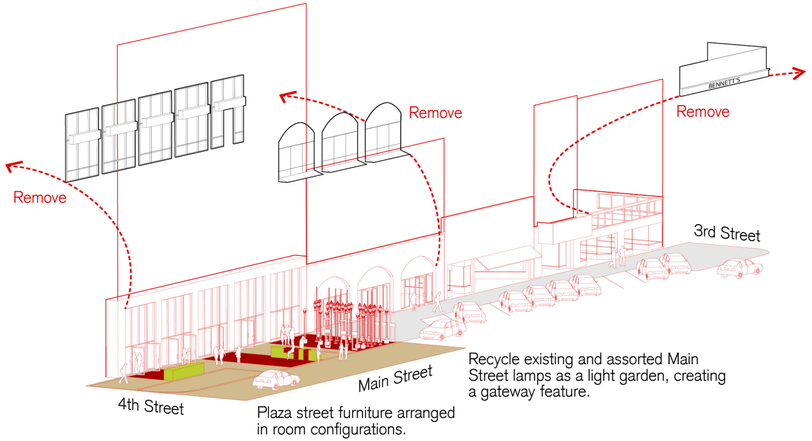
Likely Pressure for Greater Density

Historically significant buildings on the east side of the 300 block include the Rose Building and the Gus Blass Wholesale Company Building, for which a sensitive mixed-use renovation is nearing completion. Both are fine examples of classic Main Street building typologies. While the Rose Building has undergone several modern incarnations since its original construction, it remains a classic expression of the arcaded commercial building typology.

Minor structures on the northeast edge of the block, the Menke Building and the Isaac Kempner Building, may possess historic facades beneath their modern veneers, warranting improvement or replacement once comprehensive rehabilitation occurs throughout The Creative Corridor. New investments in The Creative Corridor and the block's proximity to the convention center will likely exert ongoing pressure for elevating densities on this side of the block.

1

Gateway tables feature a light garden consisting of recycled street lights gathered from the Little Rock area. Lights clustered from different eras and city neighborhoods function as a public art installation portraying an urban history otherwise left unnoticed.



West 300 block

320-322 Main Street: ***Mann (formerly Blass) Building*** National Register Listing

310-312 Main Street: ***Gus Blass Dry Goods Building***

300-302 Main Street: ***Fulk and Taylor Buildings*** National Register Listing

Major Adaptive Reuse Incorporating Residential

Renovations are now underway on the Gus Blass Dry Goods Company Building and the adjacent Mann Building (formerly the Blass Building) named after architect George Mann, who collaborated on the Arkansas State Capitol. Once a department store, the Mann Building is one of the City's most significant buildings and a prime example of Chicago School architecture (also known as the Commercial Style). Plans for both buildings involve a mixed-use program that includes ground floor retail, Class A office space, and multi-family residential, which will certainly enliven the northern end of The Creative Corridor.

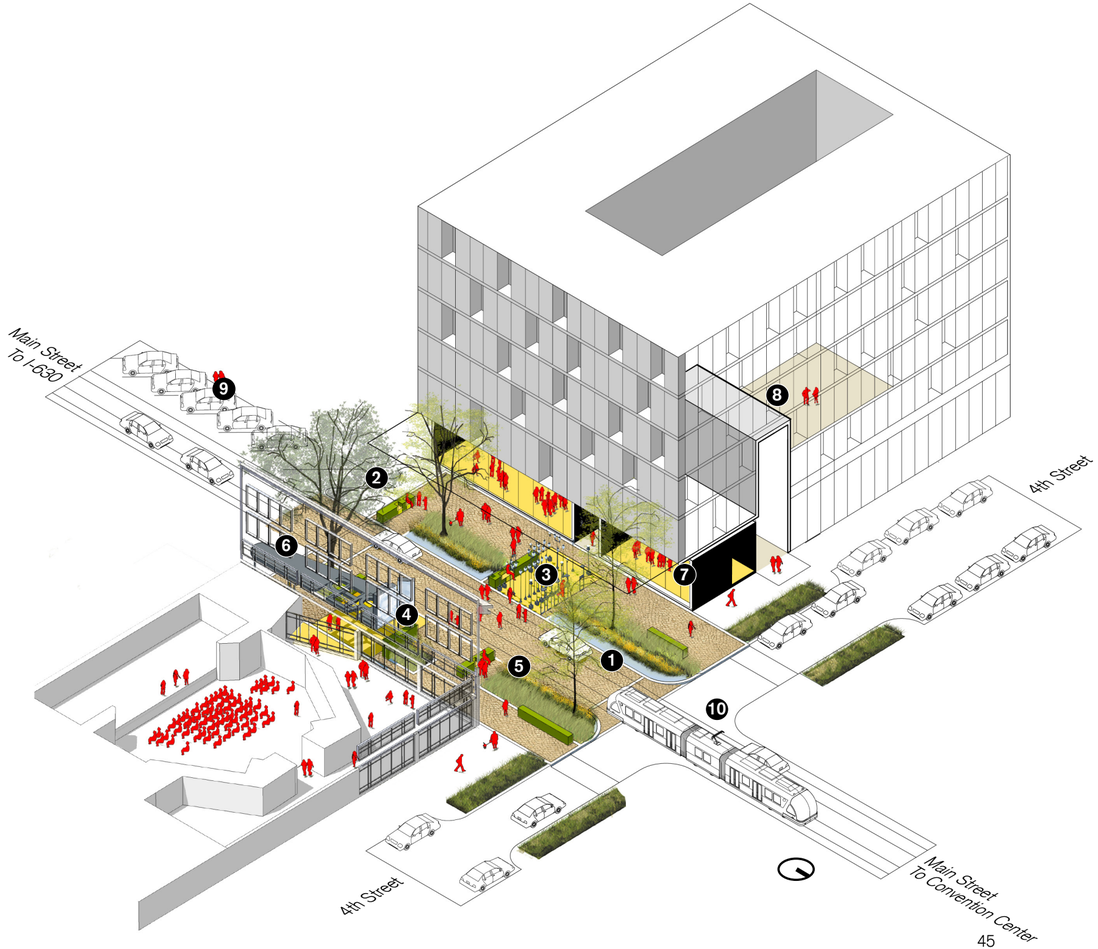
Another noteworthy historic structure on the 300 block is the elegant Fulk Building housing Bennett's Military Supplies. The Fulk Building has beautiful clerestory windows presently covered by an awning, whose removal would advance the building's stately presence on Main Street.

1 South Gateway Plaza

Like any shared space, the plaza gateways mark transition into The Creative Corridor by compressing street width into a "choke". The choke demarcates a shared space segment with a decorative surface flush with the sidewalk. Design positively influences motorist behavior without the use of regulatory devices and markings.

rain gardens 1
plaza seating 2
recycled street light garden 3
public art pad 4
continuous pedestrian table 5
repertory theatre LED marquee 6
gallery boxes 7
atrium 8
back-in parking 9
planned streetcar extension 10

Aerial view of the South Gateway Plaza



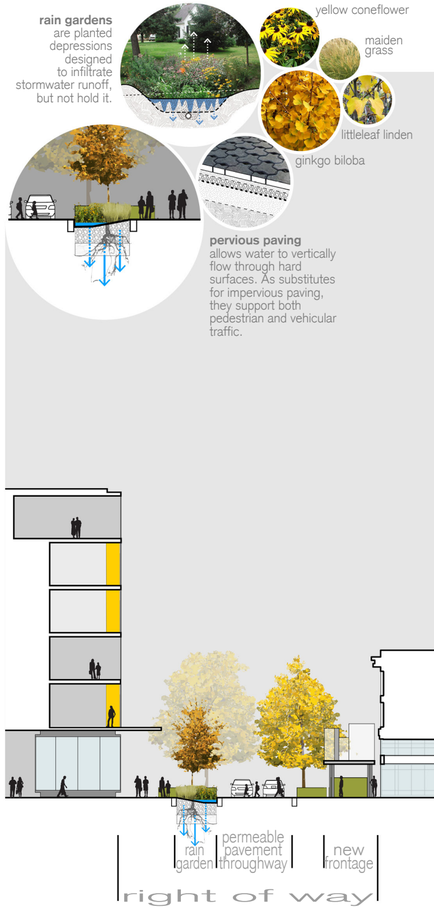
Looking into the South Gateway Plaza from the artists lofts building

Before

Looking toward the South Gateway Plaza from the 500 block

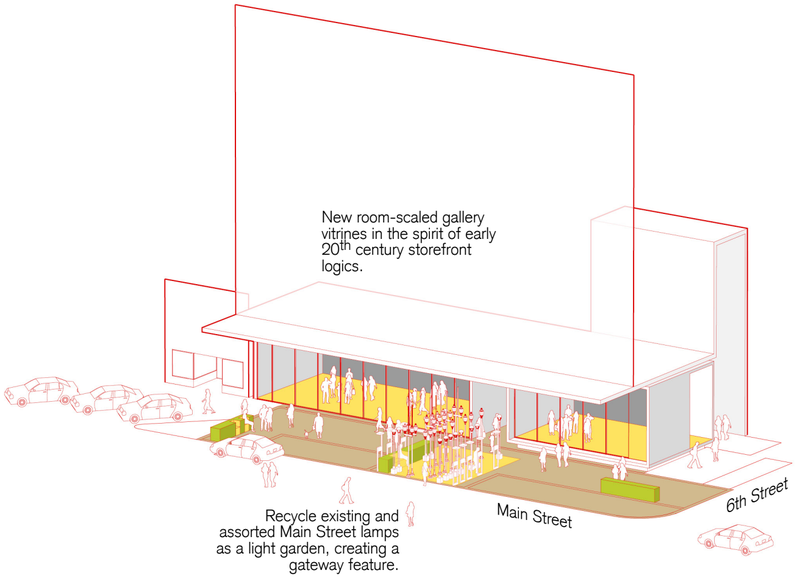
1

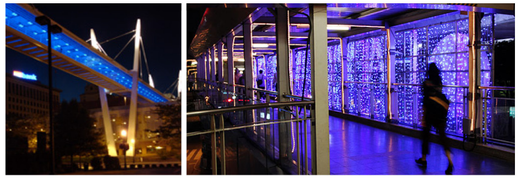
Looking north from the South Gateway Plaza



1

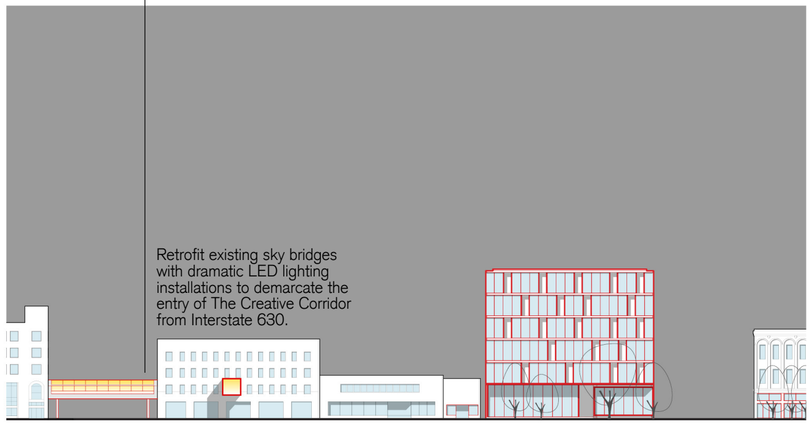
New building frontages using modern construction technologies can establish compatibility with the historic character of Main Street by honoring the scale and rhythm of the corridor's ground floor levels. In this case, early 20th century storefront logics are manifested in new room-scaled gallery vitrines that face the gateways.





Skybridge
Davenport, Iowa

Sukhumvit Road Skywalk
Bangkok, Thailand



East 600 block

618 Main Street:
Sears and Roebuck Dept. Store Building

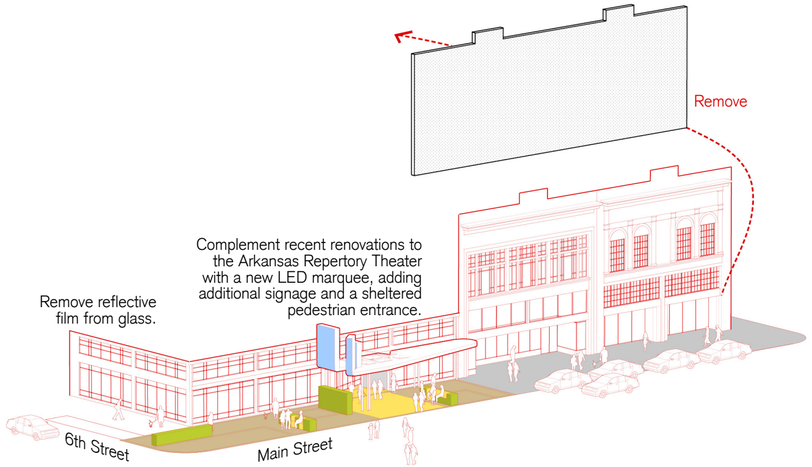
608 Main Street:
Penzel Building

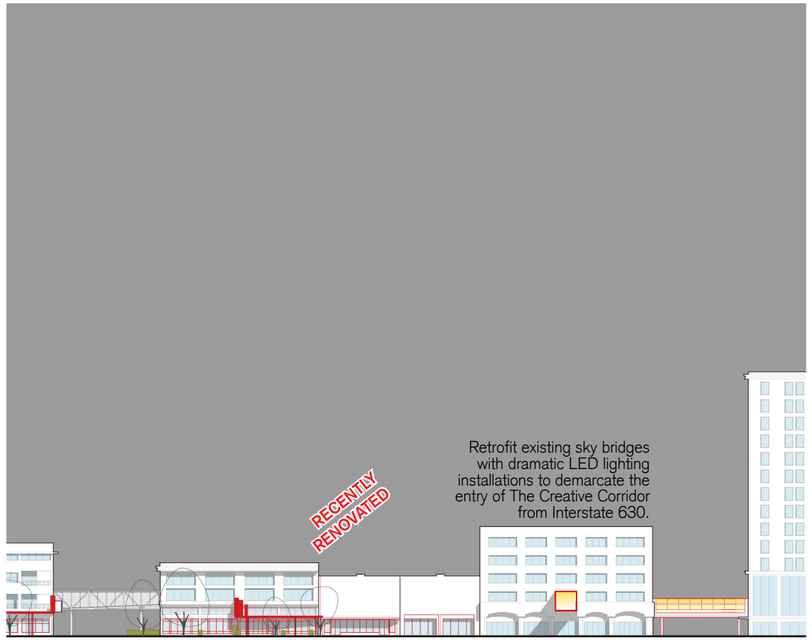
Gateway Infill and Sky Bridge Lighting

Complementing the Arkansas Repertory Theater across the street, a new mixed-use residential corner building anchors the south gateway to The Creative Corridor. Growth in the corridor will likely exert development pressure for larger structures on this side of the block. Decorative indoor lighting applications for the existing sky bridges extend the gateway effect of the southern entry to The Creative Corridor throughout the 600 block. Special artistic lighting effects can dramatically transform the utilitarian appearance of sky bridges to function as large light beams dramatically demarcating entrance into The Creative Corridor.

1

Townscaping elements such as street furniture and a new marquee extend the lobby space of the Arkansas Repertory Theater to the outdoor room of the gateway. The outdoor room serves as a fitting public foyer to a signature cultural asset like The Rep.





West 600 block

601 Main Street:
Galloway Building
Contributing to Historic District

609 Main Street:
Fulk-Haverty Building

613-615 Main Street:
Fulk-Arkansas Democrat Building

The Lone Cultural Anchor

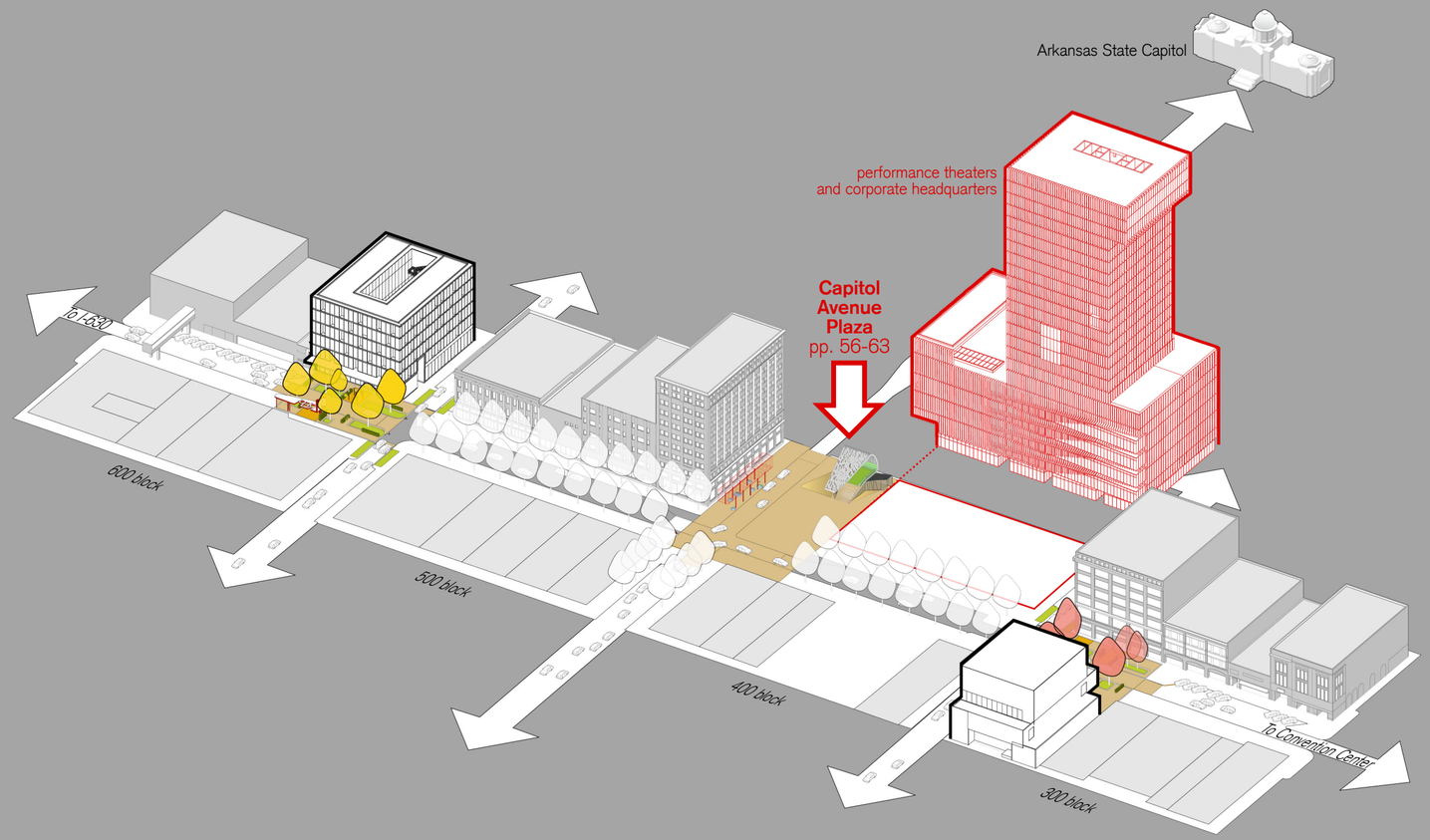
More than twenty years ago, the Arkansas Repertory Theater moved into an empty downtown department store. The Rep led the way in demonstrating creative adaptive reuse within Main Street's post-retail era. The theater has national recognition and exceptional community support, having recently raised $6 million to fund facility renovations. Nonetheless, the theater already has need for more space, particularly for expansion of its educational programs.

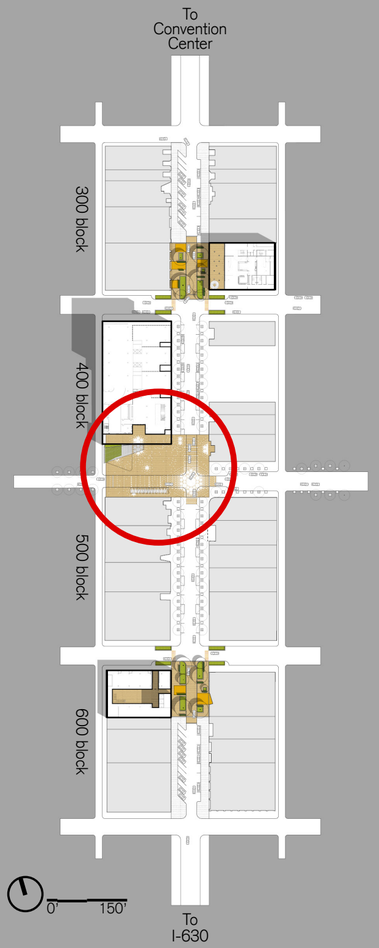
The 600 block is also home to other notable structures like the Fulk-Haverty Furniture Building and the Fulk-Arkansas Democrat Building, both designed by the prominent architect, Charles Thompson. These structures, once prime examples of early 20th century commercial architecture, are now ill-clad buildings with insensitive veneers that mask beautiful and highly-crafted architectural frontages. Photographs of the original structures indicate that both buildings are fine examples of early Main Street commercial architecture worthy of restoration.

Develop A Center 2

Develop a central event plaza for The Creative Corridor at the City's most symbolic intersection: Capitol Avenue and Main Street. The two corridors are absorbed into a larger urban room without diminishing traffic capacity. The plaza reclaims a setback on the northern edge of Capitol Avenue to incorporate Main Street's Exchange Bank frontage along the plaza's eastern edge.

Plaza is Spanish meaning "place", and this node houses an elevated lawn/amphitheater, public transit stop, arcade, light garden, and public art, to create an iconic and memorable room. A large central plaza for both vehicles and pedestrians accommodates large public events, and forms an appropriate gateway scaled to the state capitol building complex to the west. The plaza connects buildings on three sides with a decorative paver formatted into a large-scale pattern unique to this intersection.



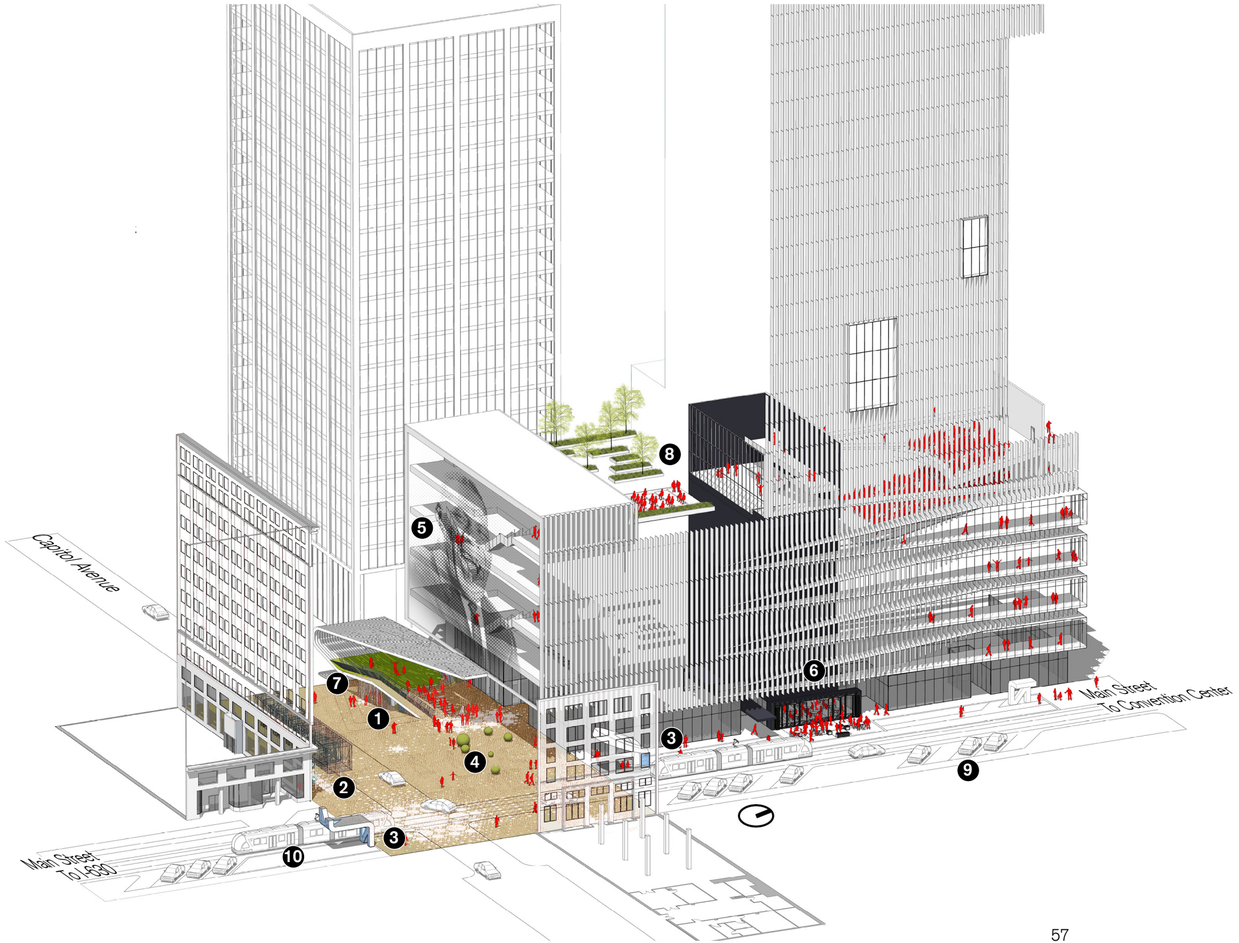


2 Capitol Avenue Plaza

Urban Center Plaza in Portland, Oregon is an example of an event plaza that incorporates public art, transit, and the periodic large crowd. The plaza as a room is well-defined by building edges while allowing all modes of traffic throughput and varying circulation paths.

amphitheater 1
plaza pavilion 2
transit stations 3
public art 4
LED screen 5
cafe 6
plaza club 7
roof garden 8
back-in parking 9
planned streetcar extension 10

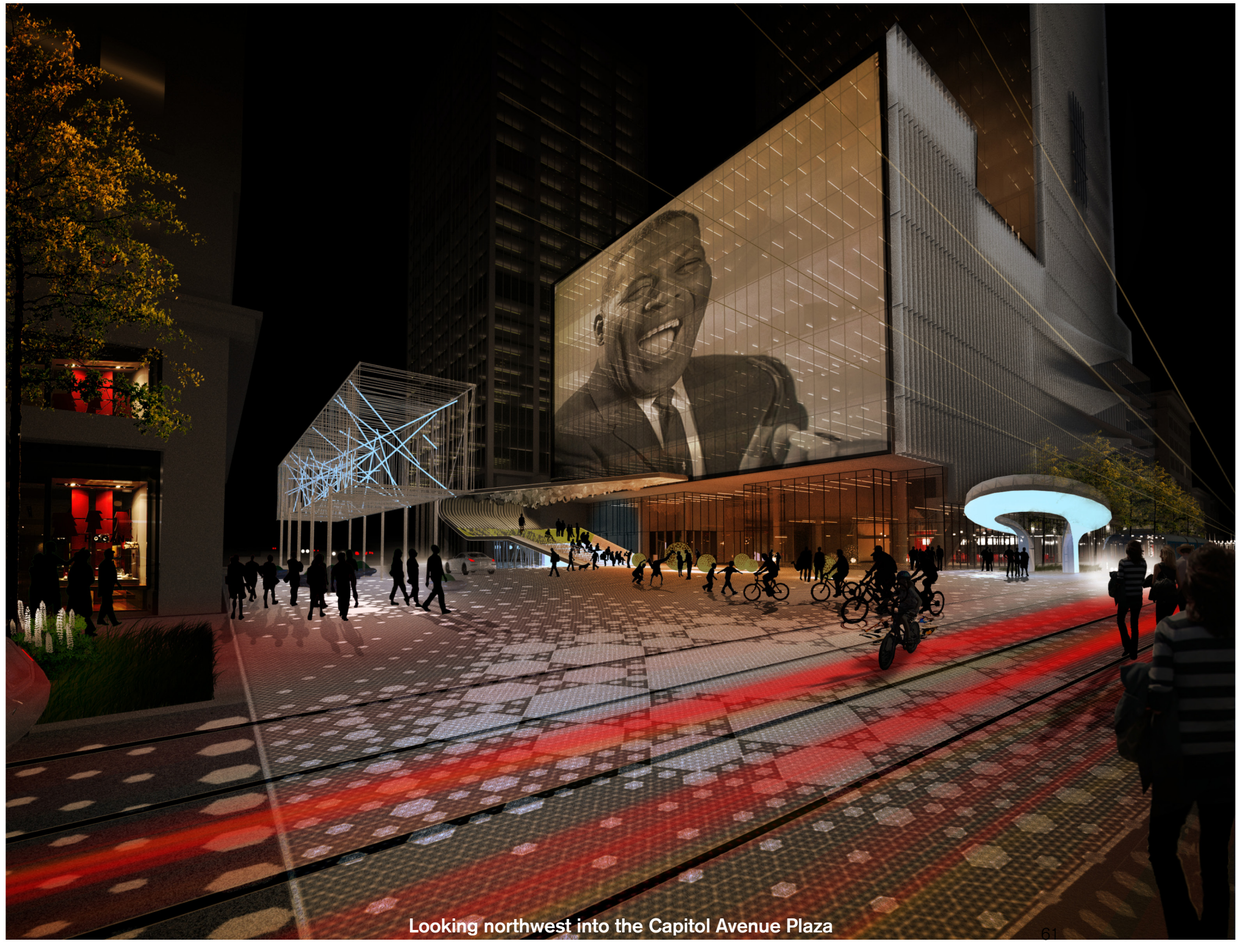
Phase 2 Example: Urban Center Plaza, Portland, Oregon



Roof terrace of the new infill building on the east side of the 400 block

Looking south from the roof garden at Capitol and Main

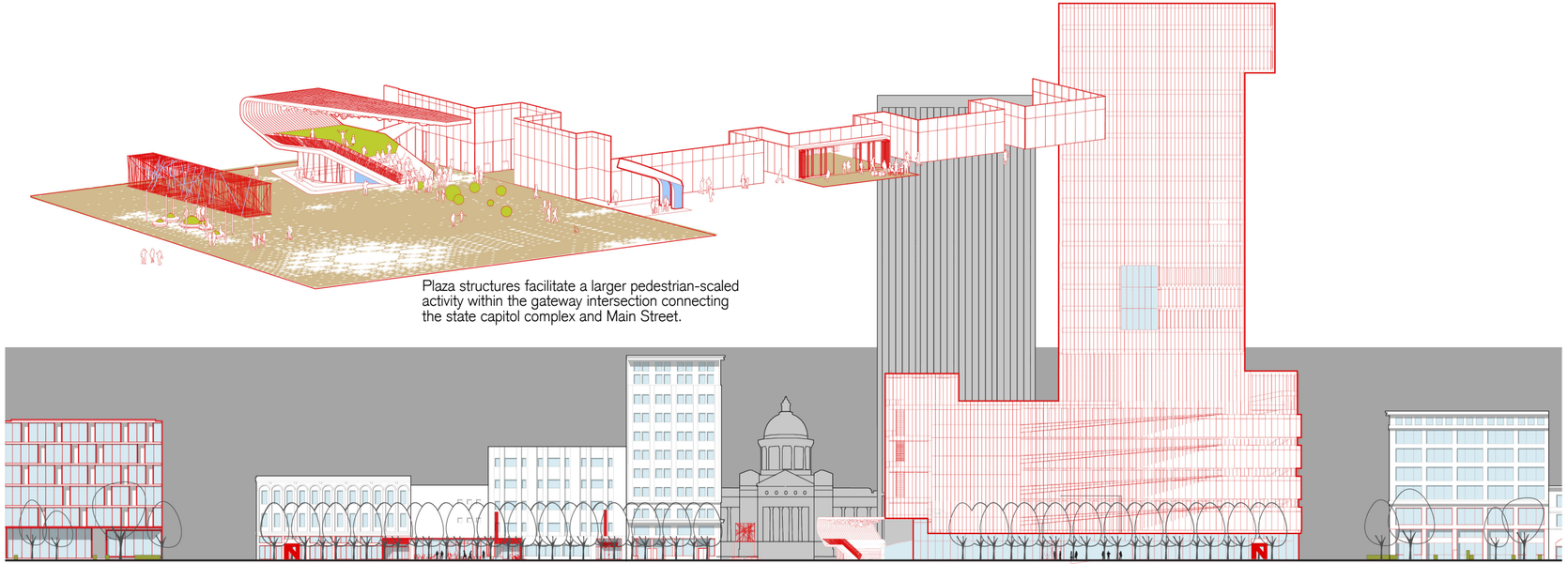
Before



Looking northwest into the Capitol Avenue Plaza

2

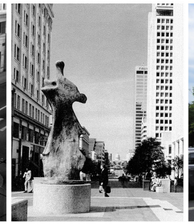
The Capitol Avenue Plaza celebrates this important crossroads though a layer of pedestrian-scaled amenities that mediate an intimate plaza space and large-scale building masses. The plaza pavilion (also a giant light beam that doubles as a porte-cochere), amphitheater, and transit station are memorable structures constituting an iconic space for the City.



Plaza structures facilitate a larger pedestrian-scaled activity within the gateway intersection connecting the state capitol complex and Main Street.

West 500 block | Capitol Avenue | West 400 block

Bicentennial (1976)
Main/Capitol Intersection



Pedestrian Mall (1978)
Main/Capitol Intersection

Present day (2012)
Main/Capitol Intersection

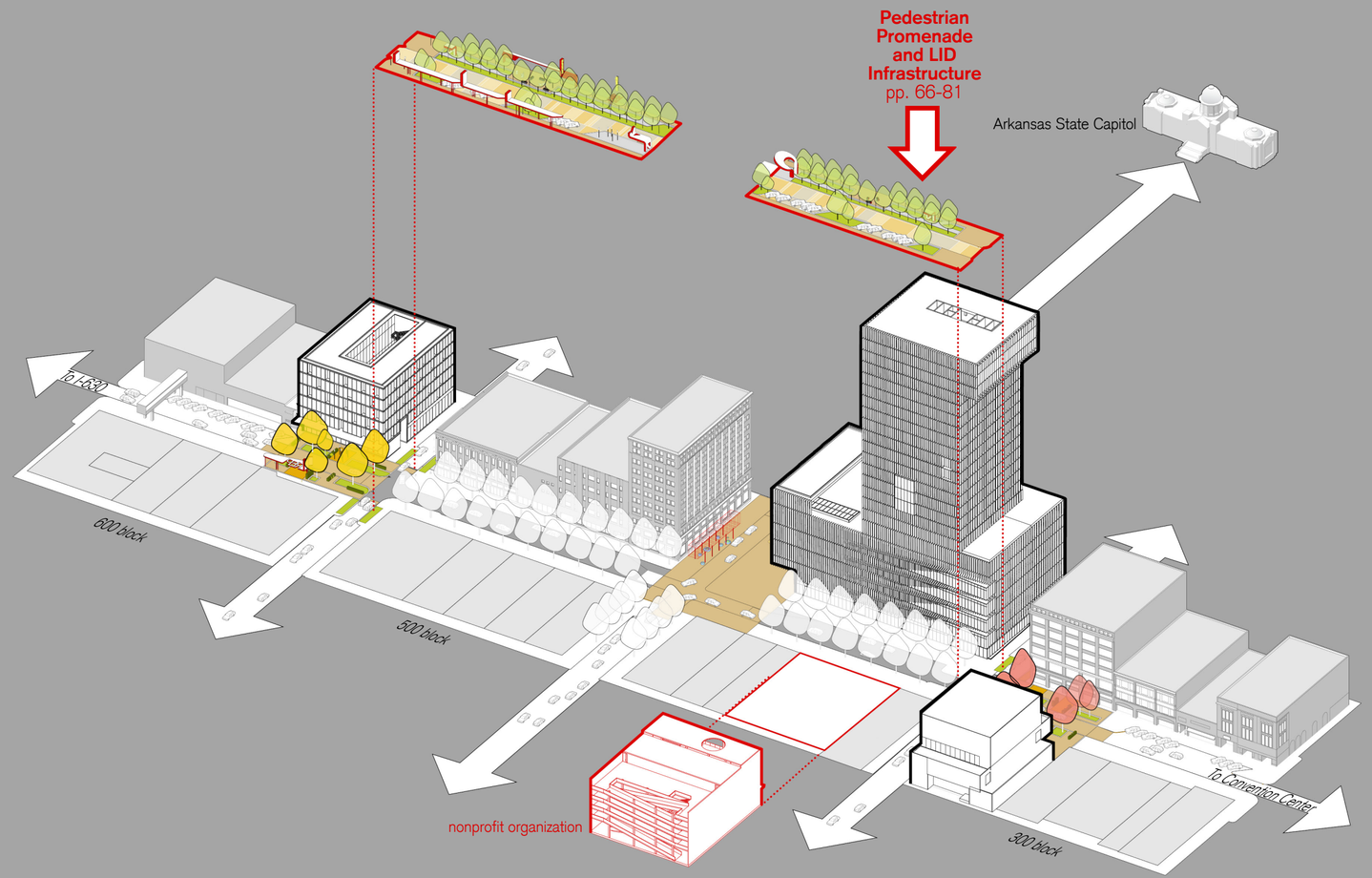
Never Close A Street

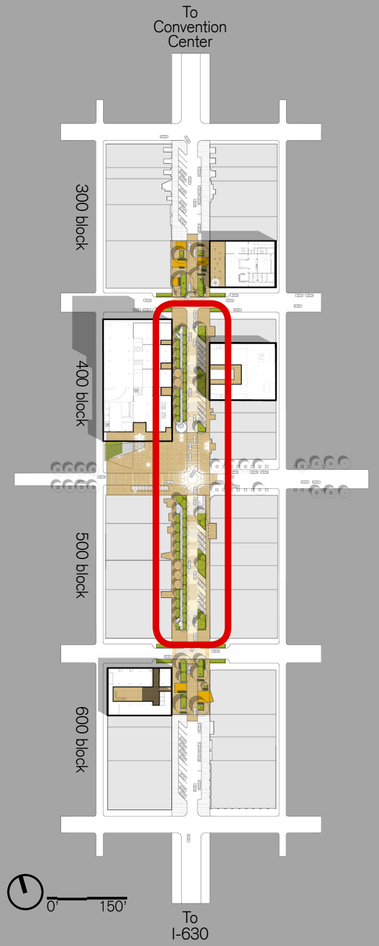
Due to its significance, the Capitol and Main intersection has undergone several transformations over the last forty years. For the 1976 Bicentennial a logo commemorating the event was painted at the center of the intersection. Two years later, the most impactful change occurred with construction of the Metrocentre Mall, a pedestrian mall which closed the intersection and its surrounding four city blocks to automobile traffic. The mall was part of a passing national design trend to reverse the decline of mid-sized American downtowns through installation of exclusive pedestrian zones with parking at their peripheries. Of the more than seventy pedestrian malls built in the U.S. since the 70s, only a handful was considered to be successful. Pedestrian malls enjoy wide success in dense and overdeveloped cities. *Prevailing wisdom, however, is to never close a street since closure destroys network connectivity: the essence of urbanism.* Instead, changes can be effected through recalibration of the street's level of service by altering traffic speed and capacity, building frontage requirements, and most importantly "dominant" transportation mode mix (i.e., bicycle, pedestrian, rail, automobile).

3 Thicken The Edge

Link Phase 1 gateways and the Phase 2 central plaza with a pedestrian promenade or a tree-lined *allee*. The two-block long, 24-foot wide pedestrian promenade combines rain gardens and bioswales with tree-shaded dining, gathering terraces, and public art platforms. The promenade expands the sidewalk to accommodate public functions fitting of a cultural arts district without diminishing traffic capacity.

The pedestrian promenade is an important component in the City's initiative to build green infrastructure. The *allee* delivers ecological-based stormwater management through a treatment network of swales, rain gardens, and filter facilities in the right-of-way. Differing from ornamental landscapes, the promenade is a productive landscape based on the delivery of urban and ecological services. It is a fitting urban frame for the central plaza at Capitol and Main.



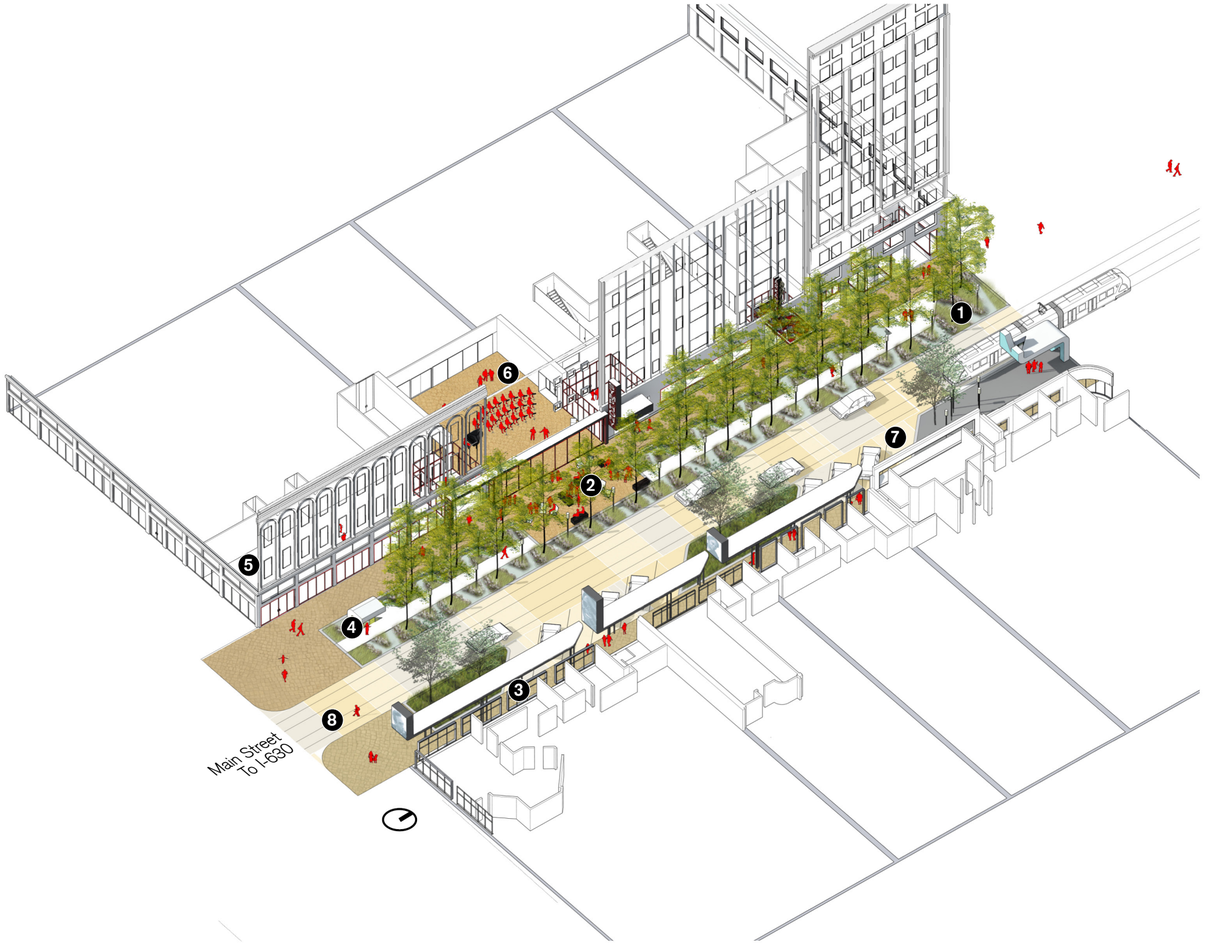


3 Pedestrian Promenade

Also a Main Street revitalization, the 16th Street Mall in Denver, Colorado maximizes sociability and other non-traffic functions in the right-of-way while accommodating traffic. The mall or promenade allows more intensive public activities, appropriate for highly populated downtowns.

bioswale 1
garden room 2
arcade 3
public art 4
gallery 5
symphony rehearsal space 6
back-in parking 7
planned streetcar extension 8

Phase 3 Example: 16th Street Mall, Denver, Colorado



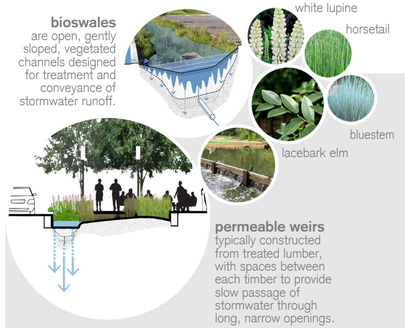
Looking north from the LID pedestrian promenade in the 400 block at day

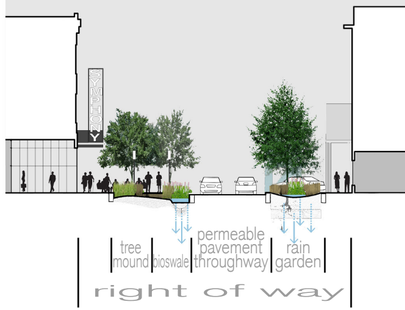
Before

Looking north from the LID pedestrian promenade in the 400 block at night

3

Looking north from the east side of the 500 block





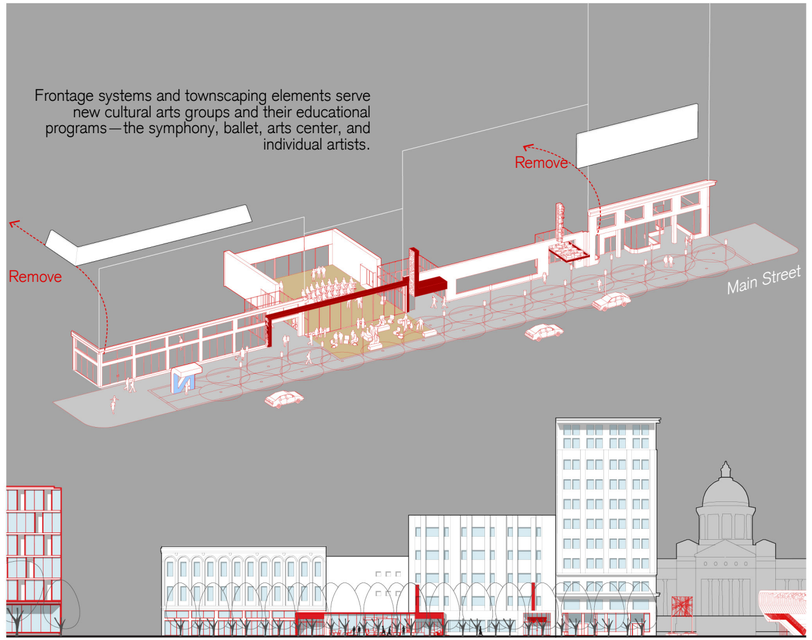
3

The pedestrian promenade is a highly-productive urban garden strip that accommodates public activities and gatherings complementary to the sidewalk. The promenade is a fitting extension of the indoor spaces along the 500 and 400 blocks west, the cultural core of The Creative Corridor.

East 500 block

505 Main Street:
Back Building

513-515 Main Street:
Bracy Hardware Company Building



West 500 block

534 Main Street:
Arkansas Building
National Register Listing

510 Main Street:
M.M. Cohn Building
Contributing to Historic District

500 Main Street:
Boyle Building
Contributing to Historic District

The Cultural Core

The 500 block will likely become the cultural core of The Creative Corridor since many of the relocating arts organizations are scheduled to occupy renovated tenant space within the block's existing historic structures. Among the ballet, symphony, arts organizations, and the Arkansas Repertory Theater on the corner of the 600 block, more than 600 students are served annually by these groups, representing a large user group for The Creative Corridor.

The historical fabric of the 500 block west is the most intact, and home to many architectural treasures such as the Boyle Building—an excellent example of Chicago School architecture and the City's second skyscraper. The most egregious architectural encroachments to historical character on the block involve the ground floor of the Boyle Building, once a transparent storefront arcade on the two streets. Most of the 500 block character can be recaptured through removal of cladding unsympathetic to original intent and restoration of original fenestration (window and opening pattern). The latter, along with the return of a transparent storefronts (please, no reflective glass) on the ground floor, will greatly improve the character and scale of Main Street.

Looking south from the west side of the 400 block

Before

East 400 block

401 Main Street:
Worthen Bank Building (KATV)
National Register Listing

417-421 Main Street:
H.G. Pugh and Company Building

423 Main Street:
Exchange Bank Building
National Register Listing

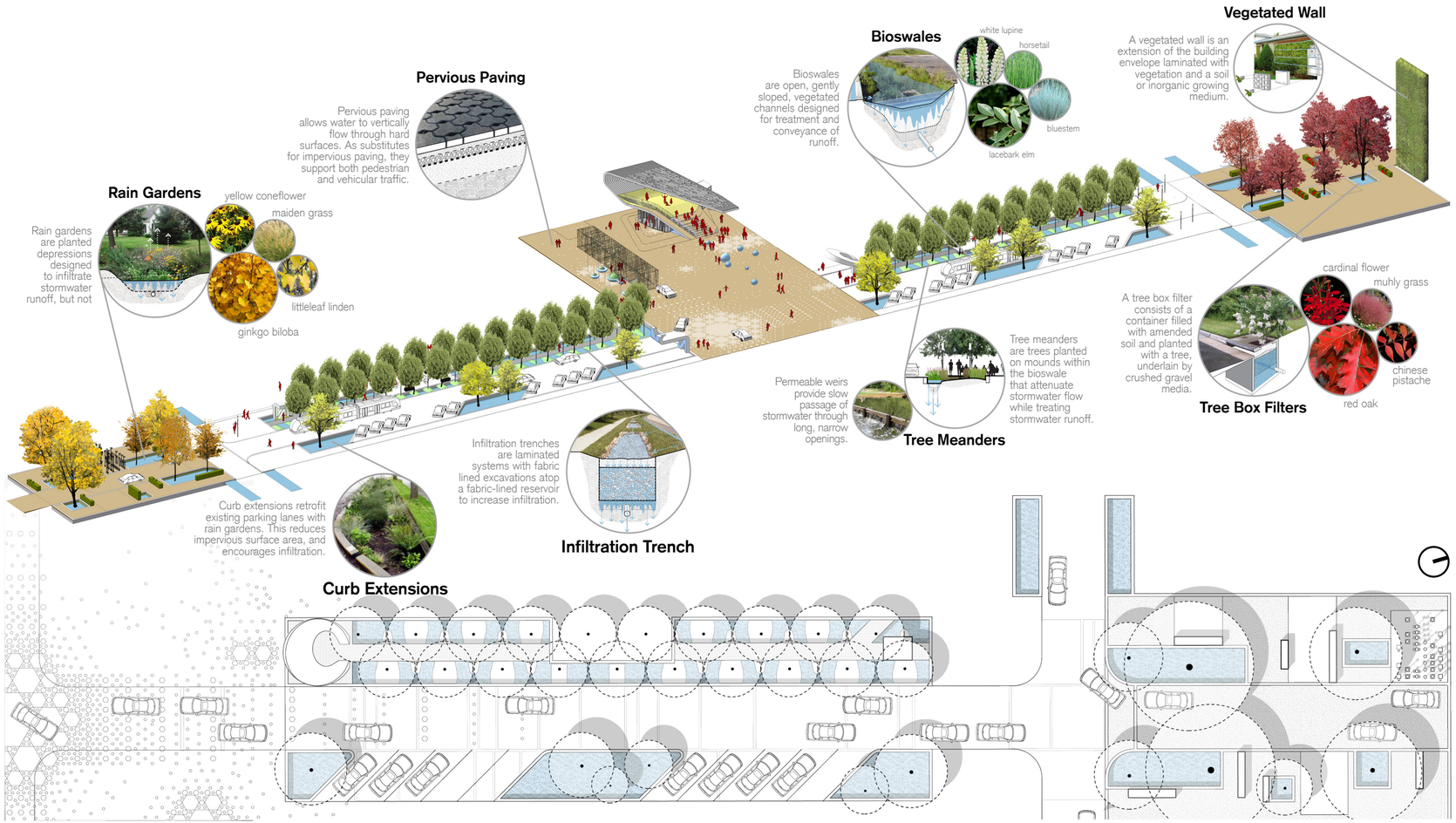
Infill Development for Improved Streetscape

One of the greatest obstacles to achieving great urban streetscapes is the surface parking lot. Besides the lack of building edge continuity critical to defining the street, surface lots promote midblock curb cuts which create pedestrian and automobile conflicts (at the least automobile access should be redirected to the alley). A large gap exists in an otherwise intact historic building fabric. The City should consider incentives toward realizing infill building development with ground floor frontages compatible with the storefront rhythms of Main Street. Pittsburgh, for instance, accomplished their model downtown rehabilitation in the 1970s by taxing vacant land at higher rates than developed property. Since this practice is against current Arkansas law other incentives may need to be developed to promote compatible development. Absent prohibition of parking lots as street frontage, consider requiring a provisional strip garden with pedestrian amenities (e.g., street furniture) to maintain edge continuity.

3

Low Impact Development

LID is an ecologically-based stormwater management approach favoring soft engineering to manage rainfall on site through a vegetated treatment network. The goal of LID is to sustain a site's pre-development regime by using techniques that filter, infiltrate, store, and evaporate stormwater runoff close to its source. Contrary to conventional "pipe-and-pond" conveyance infrastructure that channels runoff elsewhere through pipes, catchment basins, and curbs and gutters, LID remediates polluted runoff through a network of distributed treatment landscapes. LID solutions enhance urban livability while decreasing underground stormwater conveyance that ultimately dumps untreated runoff into the Arkansas River.

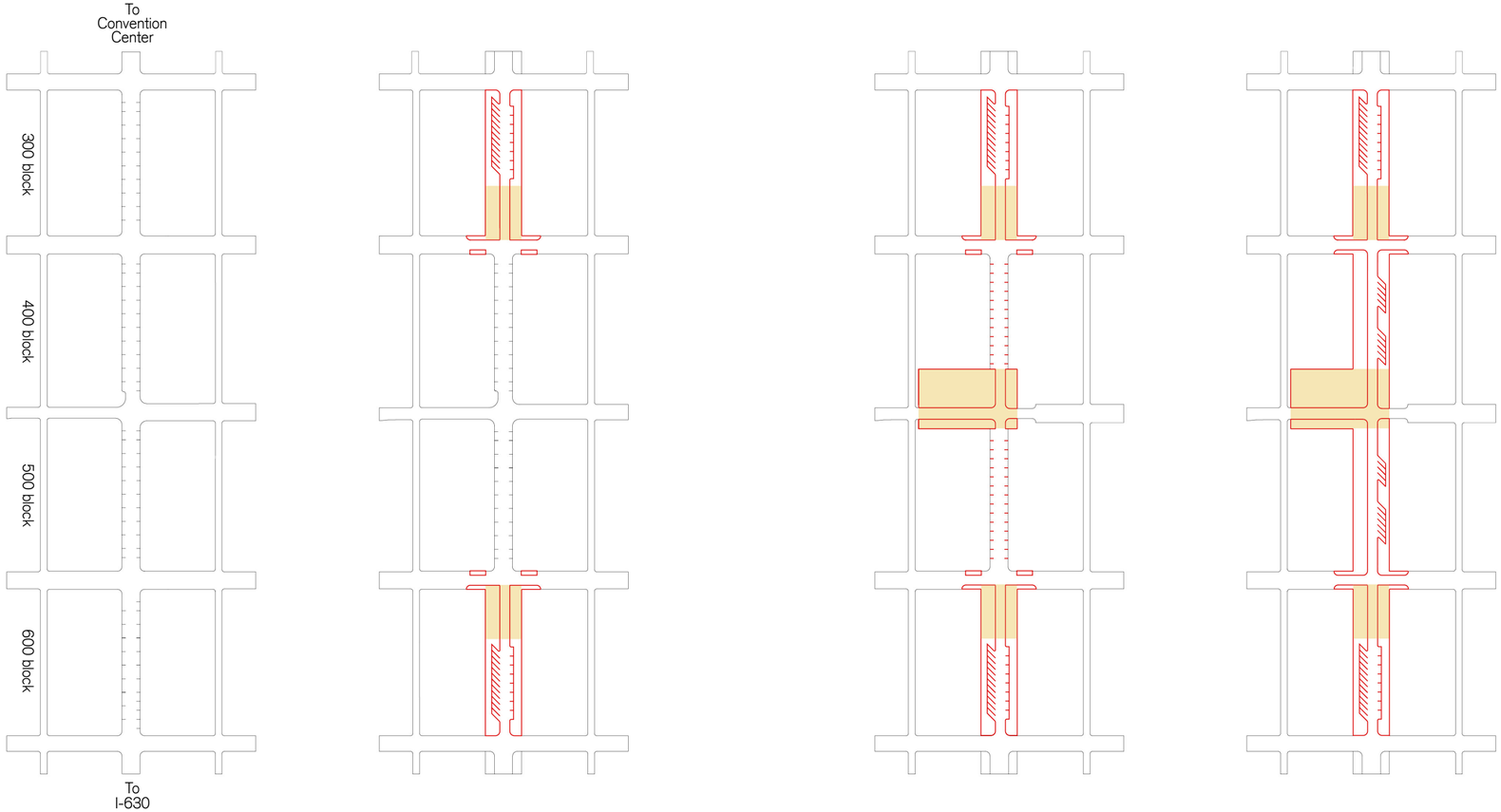


Botanizing the City

LID landscapes should not hinder urban functioning or compactness, since street life and vitality foremost define urbanism. While LID landscapes play a supportive role in urban design, they do offer niche ecosystem services important to urban functioning and livability. LID-based technologies can be integrated into urban infrastructure to deliver many of the recognized 17 ecosystem services in healthy ecologies—atmospheric regulation, disturbance regulation (e.g., flooding), water regulation, sediment control, nutrient cycling, waste treatment, pollination, provision of habitat, etc. These environmental conditioning services translate into greater livability through reduced ambient temperatures in hot weather, greater solar and wind protection, pollution mitigation, and improved aesthetics. Further cost benefit analyses should examine triangulation among LID network investment, proportionality in ecological services yield, and urban impacts.

3 On-street Parking Plan

On-street parking was essential to the success of storefront shopping environments like Main Street. As more non-commercial land uses populate Main Street on-street parking will become less important, eventually diminishing value in new investments by preventing higher and better uses within premium right-of-way space. Currently, parallel parking stalls are oversized to accommodate drive-in parking. The plan rationalizes parking through safety and efficiency improvements. The plan actually increases on-street parking in Phase 1. By the completion of Phase 3 only 17 on-street parking spaces will have been lost—a small trade-off for the additional streetscape amenities. The plan introduces reverse angle parking for improved safety.



Pre-revitalization
77 spaces

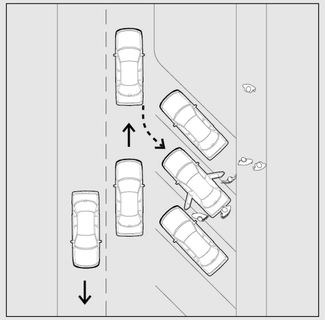
Phase 1
80 spaces

Phase 2
88 spaces

Phase 3
60 spaces

Reverse Angle Parking

Reverse angle parking allows motorists to back into the parking space, facilitating unobstructed views to oncoming traffic and cyclists when pulling out. Studies have shown a 25 percent reduction in the number of accidents and a 43 percent reduction in injuries as a result of reverse angle parking. Vehicle loading occurs from the sidewalk rather than the street. Opened car doors create a corral space for the safe loading and unloading of children and pets from the sidewalk rather than the street.

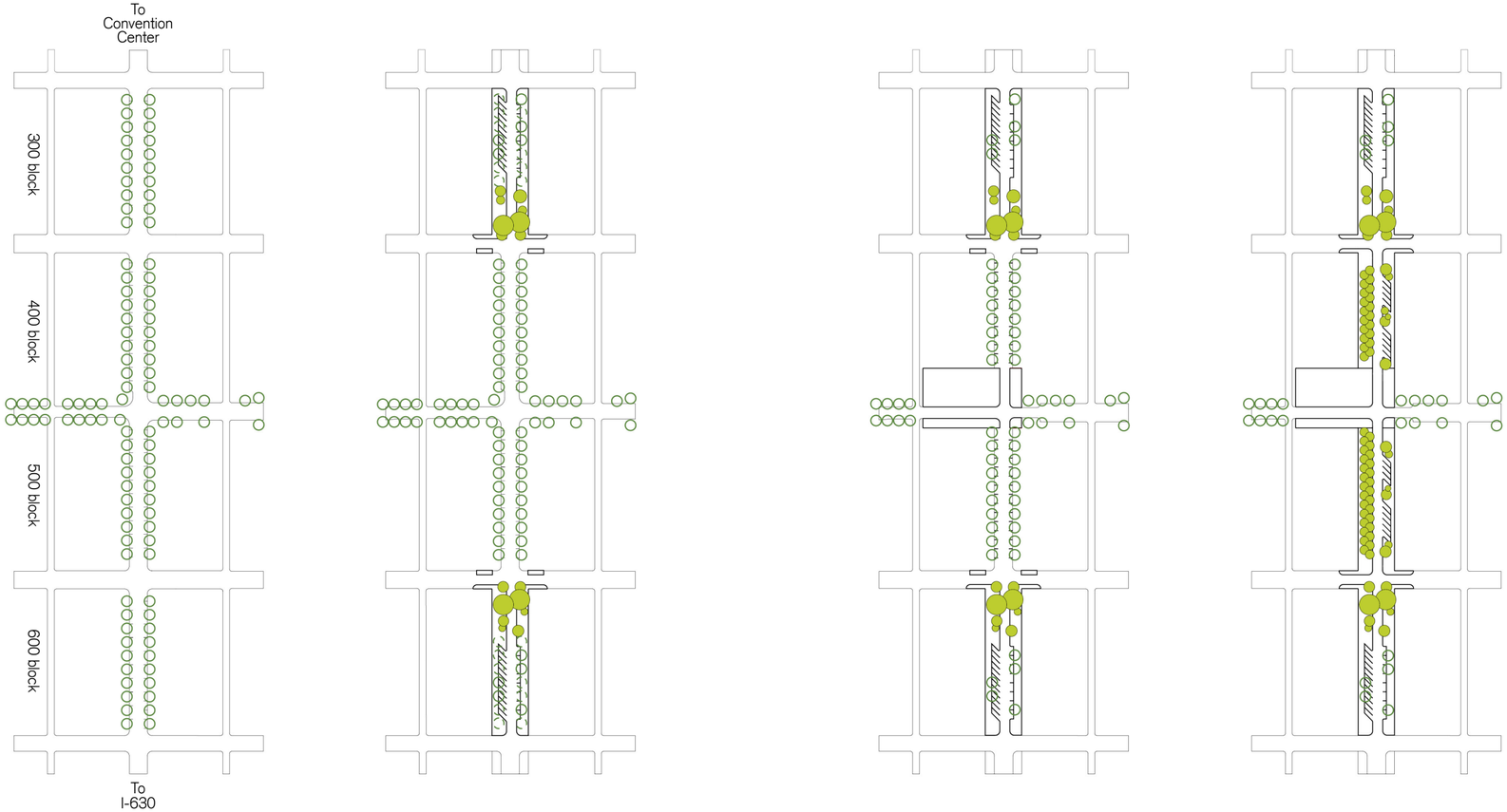


Reverse angle parking as a standard

3

Street Tree Plan

Understandably some devotion to the existing street trees has developed over time; it should be remembered that Main Streets generally did not contain trees. Trees mask commercial frontage and diminish sidewalk capacity. Street trees were added in the 1970s with little awareness for planting requirements that ensure tree health and longevity. The average urban street tree today has an average life span of 13 years—far below their natural mean—due to pavement coverage that prevents adequate water and nutrient supply to roots. The plan calls for phased replacement of the 80 trees on Main Street, most in marginal health, by trees grouped in space-defining formats like *allees*, gateways, and stands.



Pre-revitalization **Phase 1** **Phase 2** **Phase 3**

Pre-revitalization: Existing trees are evenly distributed along Main Street, undermining visibility of historic facades and their role in defining the street edge.

Phase 1: Gateway plazas are defined by clustered canopies consisting of large overstory species like Goldenrain or Gingko Biloba, with more decorative understory species. Trees in the gateways should be chosen for their dramatic and colorful flowering effects in Fall and Spring.

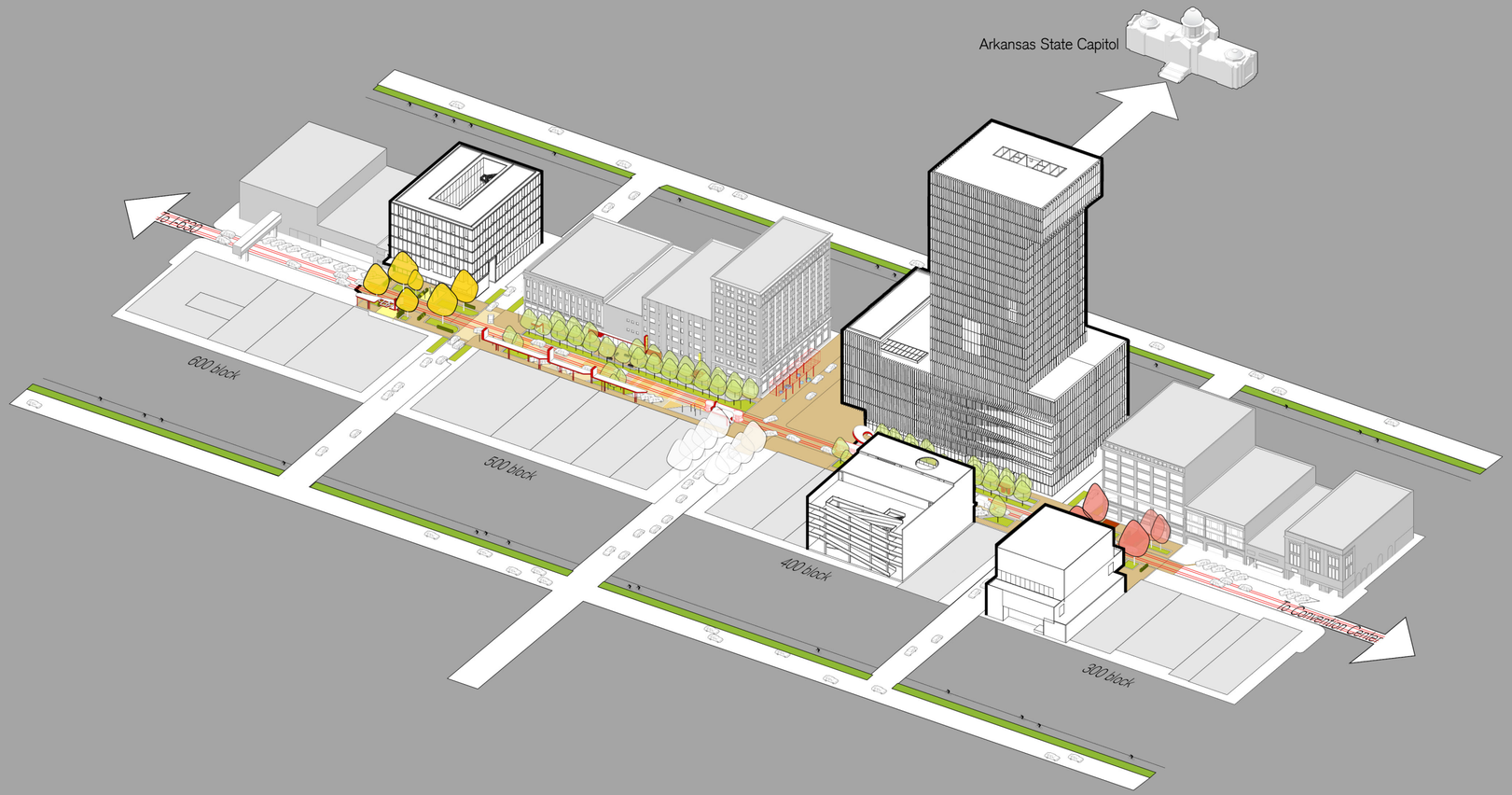
Phase 2: Trees are to be removed to create the plaza at Capitol and Main.

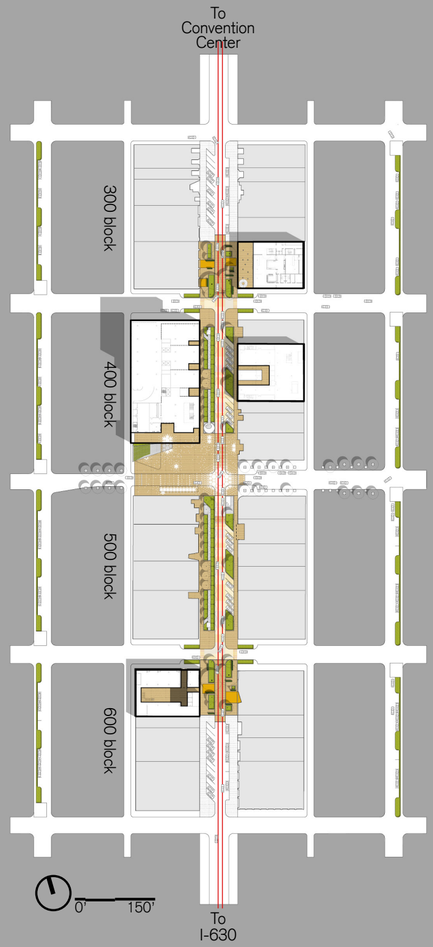
Phase 3: Defined by a double row of trees, the allee creates a formal walk or passage. The tree species selected should be able to tolerate standing water, be non-flowering, and have strong symmetrical and stately canopy structure similar to Lacebark Elm.

Create a Transit District 4

Adapt Louisiana and Scott Streets to function as bicycle boulevards connecting downtown and neighborhoods south of I-630. Per Metroplan's scheduled rail expansion plans, extend the streetcar system along Main Street, connecting downtown to first ring suburbs. The three streets coordinate multiple transportation modes anticipating a time when The Creative Corridor becomes a regional transportation hub.

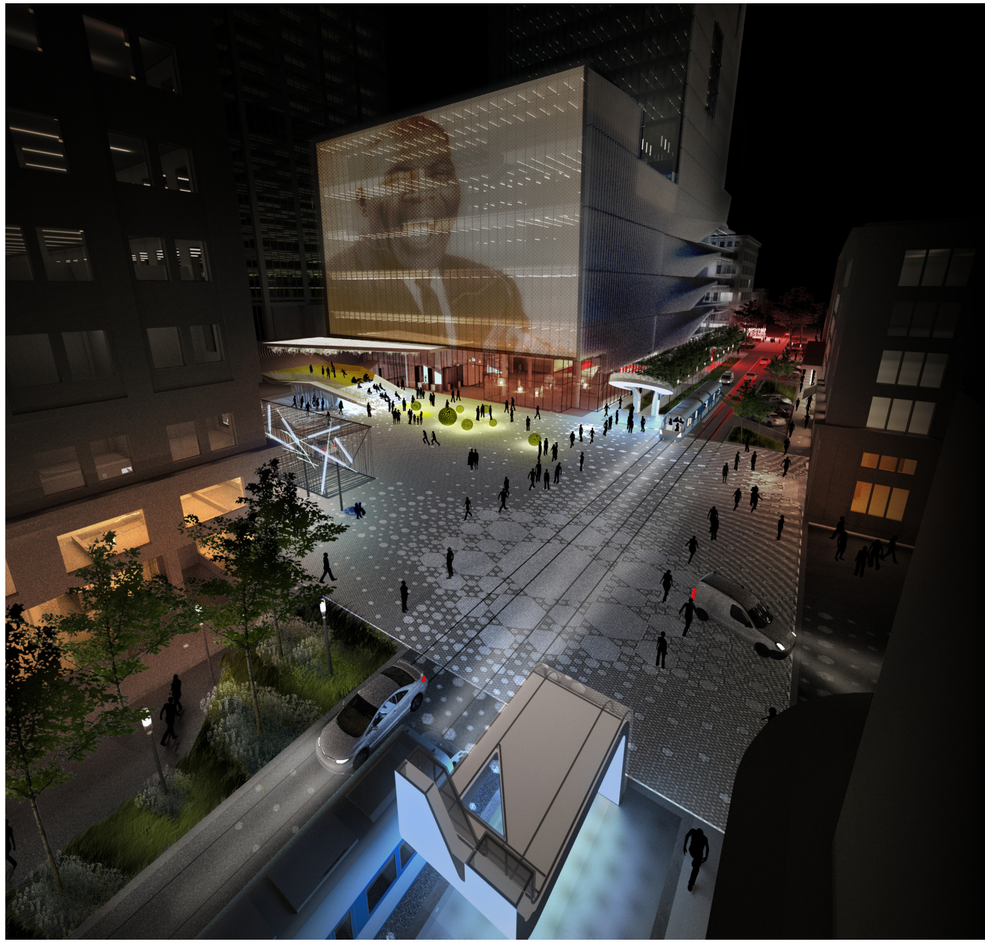
Bike lanes do not belong on Main Street. The Creative Corridor is a slow-speed environment based upon shared space where cars, bikes, and pedestrians can mix comfortably among the corridor's new outdoor urban rooms. Dedicated bike lanes are typically not required until street speeds reach the thirties; more appropriate to Louisiana and Scott Streets. Optimum transportation functioning requires that different street types offer niche levels of access and mobility within a district.





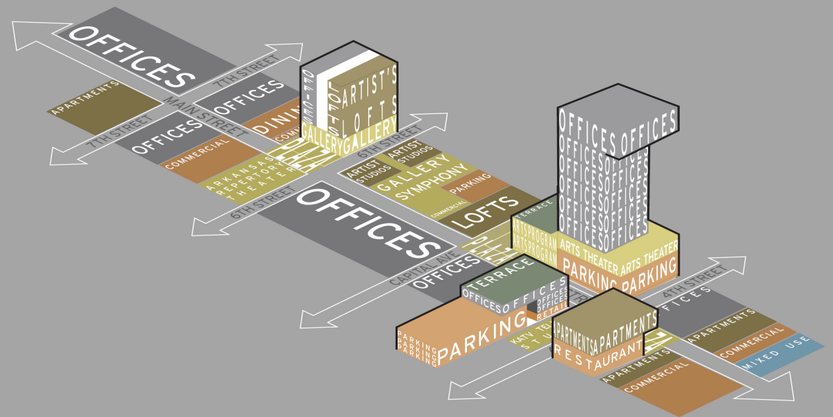
What's Next?

Like most cities, the image of Little Rock will always rest with its Main Street. Redevelopment goals and schedules at the scale of the lot are moving targets, necessitating a phased approach to The Creative Corridor Plan. Each phase should logically build The Creative Corridor identity. Each phase represents an irreducible unit of implementation—*an urban room*—wherein piecemeal development of individual townscaping components within each phase would be counterproductive. The City should commission an integrated team of design professionals (i.e., architects, landscape architects, civil and ecological engineers, and lighting designers) for further design development and construction oversight of a plan that is holistic and coordinated. So goes Main Street, goes the image of downtown and Little Rock.



A landmark is made at the ground as well as the skyline.

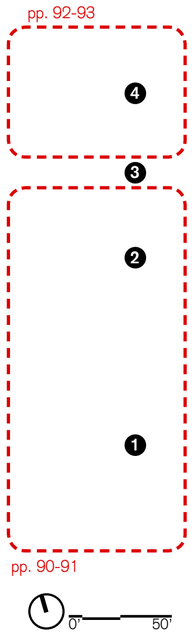
Tenant Proposals

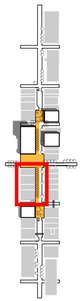


Artworks Gallery in the Arkansas Building

500 Block West
Restoration Plan

In the Arkansas Annex, and M.M. Cohn Buildings, open activity spaces are put at the street edge, showcasing the arts and the people inside. These spaces are supported by service cores with public restrooms, and lobbies that promote cross-programming between the arts.





1. Artworks Gallery
2. Symphony rehearsal space
3. lobby & box office
4. office & education

500 block west ground floor plan

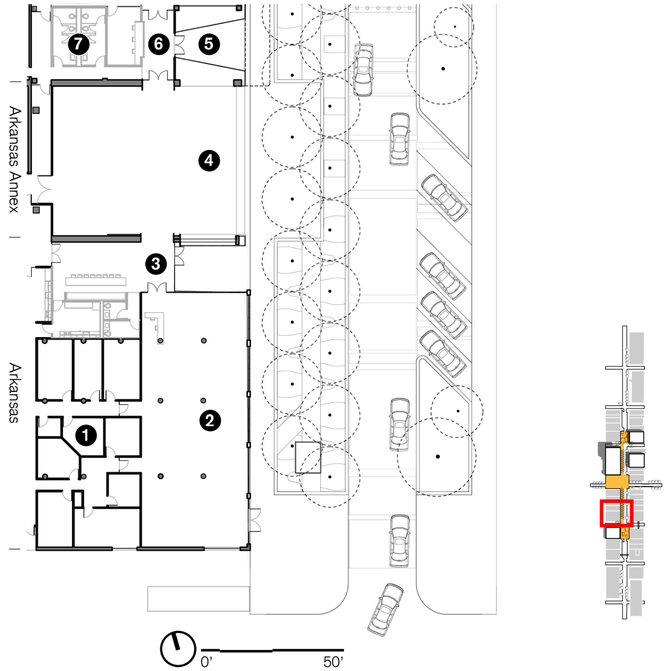
500 Block West

Arkansas Annex Building Plan

The rehearsal space and offices for the Symphony are seen as an important part of the broader strategy for the revitalization of Main Street. By allowing the Symphony's spaces to connect to the lobby in the Arkansas Building, access is provided to a small catering kitchen and bar, as well as to the art gallery as part of Artworks.

Symphony rehearsal space

Arkansas Annex Building



Ground floor plan of the Arkansas and Arkansas Annex Buildings

1. artist studios
2. Artworks Gallery
3. Arkansas Building lobby
4. Symphony rehearsal space
5. existing entry
6. lobby & box office
7. restrooms

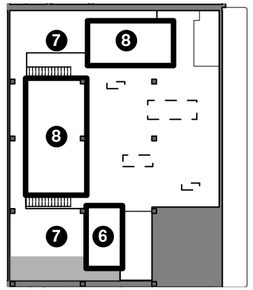
500 Block West

Administration Offices

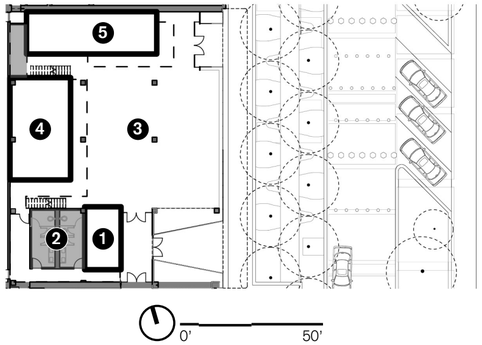
On each level, flexible suites are provided that are large enough to accommodate numerous offices, classrooms, or other rooms, and are flexible for the future needs. The different offices and spaces listed in the program have all been verified to fit within these flexible suites and can be designed specifically to meet the Symphony's needs.

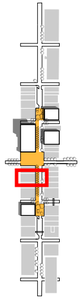
Administration offices and multi-purpose space

M.M. Cohn Building



Mezzanine plan





Ground floor plan of the M.M. Cohn Building

1. lobby & box office
2. restrooms
3. multi-purpose space
4. education & library
5. small rehearsal
6. music director's office
7. meeting areas
8. administrative suites

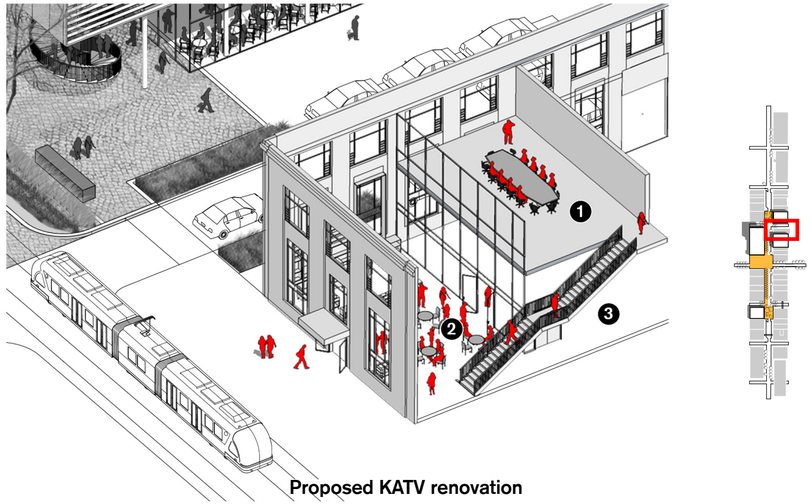
400 Block East

KATV Renovation

The historic KATV structure has great integrity as a building, and will be served well by revealing more of its original character while opening up its interior to display the history of the television and former radio station that continues to operate inside. By relocating the conference room above the lobby, a larger volume is created, allowing for a new visitors center, illustrating the history of the building and the station, while allowing for views into the ongoing production efforts.

KATV lobby and museum

Worthen Bank Building (KATV)



Proposed KATV renovation

1. conference room
2. KATV museum
3. KATV studios

Image Sources

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4 *Panoramic view #1, Little Rock, Ark* c.1910
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5 *Main Street, Little Rock, Ark* c.1900-1920
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8 *Little Rock Railway and Electric Co. Map*, c.1913
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73 *Arkansas Building*, c.1900
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96 *Present day Little Rock*
John Blakney

97 *Panoramic view #1, Little Rock, Ark.*, c.1910
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98 *A Thriving City, Little Rock, Ark, "City of Roses"* , c.1919
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back cover *Panoramic view #2, Little Rock, Ark.*, c.1910
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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

A great nation deserves great art.

The Creative Corridor Project Team

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Markhan St. West From Main Street c1910.

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