

A New Vision for Midtown: Smart Growth Principles Drive a Plan to Transform an Auto Zone into a Walkable College Town District

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The City of College Park and the University of Maryland have entered into a partnership to engage potential synergies between campus and community to create a vibrant urban environment based upon principles of smart growth. The partnership's current focus is on College Park's Midtown District, encompassing the stretch of Baltimore Avenue from the intersection of University Boulevard to the University of Maryland's main campus gate. Formerly known as Route 1, Baltimore Avenue is shedding its image as a placeless automotive corridor lined with fast food, service stations, and auto dealerships and becoming an attractive location for higher density development as the University's zone of influence expands. A new design for Baltimore Avenue aims to transform the highway into a route with multi-modal transportation options, using a complete streets approach. The site is adjacent to the new Discovery District to the south, bounded on the west by the University of Maryland and on the east by the historic African-American community of Lakeland with its school, community center, and church, and the existing residential neighborhoods of Berwyn Heights and Branchville. New residential slabs rising along the West side of Baltimore Avenue take the form of a wall dividing community and university. The Paint Branch river flows along the west side of the site, further reinforcing the town/gown separation.

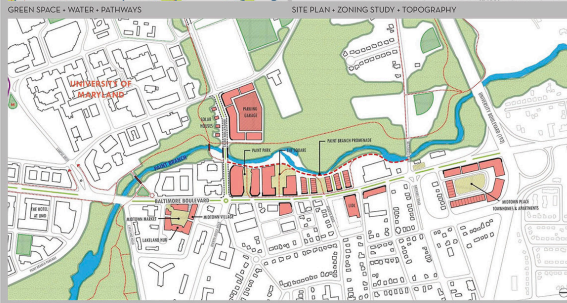
The College Park City-University Partnership commissioned this master planning study as a guide to developers interested in initiating new projects within the Midtown District. The multi-disciplinary design team was asked to envision a healthy, walkable district that fulfills the mandate of the partnership to tie together University and surrounding communities with sustainable mixed development. We developed a program through a combination of community and stakeholder engagement and market research. Key concepts that emerged from the team's dialogues with stakeholders and community

members were: authentic sense of place, connectivity, and healthy community. Market research pointed to opportunities for rental housing for students and young professionals, office space focused on University innovation initiatives, and retail promoting a sense of community. The proposed master plan illustrates the resulting vision for the Midtown District; focused proposals show how the place-making vision guides planning for four specific sites that are ripe for redevelopment in the near future.

The design team discovered an authentic sense of place in the history of the Lakeland community and the ecology of the Paint Branch, with the natural beauty of its native plants and animals. The proposed Paint Branch Promenade transforms the river from barrier to social connector, linking residential neighborhoods and providing access to nature and healthy outdoor recreation linked to a regional trail network. The pattern of development along Baltimore Boulevard is rotated 90 degrees, with buildings enclosing pedestrian mews and plazas connecting neighborhood streets to the river. A new Innovation Drive crosses the river, connecting the northern end of campus to the Midtown District. An existing diagonal path from Campus Drive leads pedestrians across a barn dance crossing to a new market square at the Lakeland Hub. With retail opening onto the pedestrian realm, residential and office uses above, and garage below, the compact mixed-use buildings on both sides of the Boulevard connect University and surrounding communities, providing "third places" for convivial social interactions.



RESEARCH + ANALYSIS + SITE FORCES



PROPOSED DESIGN: PLACES DIAGRAM

PROPOSAL

Urban Design Proposal

The proposal focuses on the areas most attractive for development in the near term. Focused study of these four sites illustrates the potential for transforming Midtown into a viable city district. The new vision for Midtown shows developers how they can create environments that foster an authentic sense of place, connectivity, and healthy community. The pattern of development relates to degrees, with buildings enclosing pedestrian places and views to the proposed Point Branch Promenade. Innovation Drive connects campus to the boulevard and a diagonal path with 'farm dance' street crossing connects campus to a new market square. With retail opening onto the pedestrian realm, residential and office above, and parking below, new mixed-use buildings on both sides of the boulevard connect campus to community, providing 'third places' for convivial social interactions and access to trails for healthy outdoor recreation.

Opening the Block to a Public Courtyard

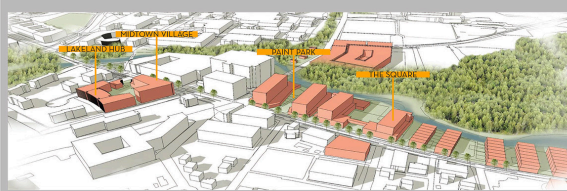
The outdoor room enclosed by Midtown Village and Lakeland Hub welcomes students, faculty, and staff from the university, employees of the Discovery District, and local guests to join community in public social life. This well-defined space sponsors shopping, eating, exercising, art exhibits, and festivals.

Rotating the Pattern of Development

By turning the buildings perpendicular to the street, open space moves from the back yard to visible prominence along the boulevard. Formerly conceived as private, open space becomes a shared amenity fostering social life in public. Point Park and The Square are conceived as convivial spaces where the broader community and university come together with local residents. Buildings are paired around the public squares, like arms embracing the public. Street-level retail is focused on uses that encourage social interaction. These pedestrian realms are safe places for children to play.

River Promenade

The building rotation also opens the visual connection from neighborhoods across the boulevard to the river, bringing the beauty of the river and its native flora and fauna into the public realm, featuring nature as an integral part of the city. Once the river becomes visible within the district, its potential for healthy recreation is evident. The public squares offer views of the Point Branch Promenade and provide pedestrian connection. Outdoor cafes open onto the promenade, offering enjoyment of nature in the city and providing 'open-on-the-street' to foster safe walking and biking along the Fall.



PROPOSED AERIAL DETAIL

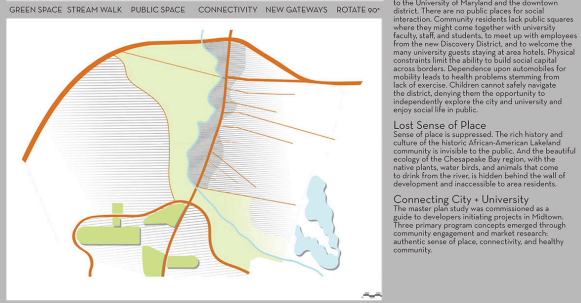
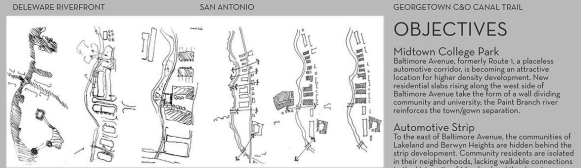
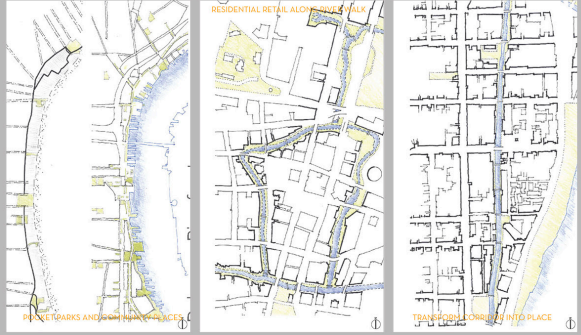


Point Park

Point Park defines modern, social living and Class A office space in the place where humans were meant to live and work. In nature, a secondary residential building features community-driven spaces designed to encourage social interaction. An agitator office building provides a high-tech, efficient working environment. The public realm between the two buildings includes the Point Branch Creek to the front door of interactive retail and dining. Sustainable design and interactive landscape architecture show that the natural and built environments were meant to be collaborators.

Midtown Village
Midtown Village is a sustainable mixed-use development includes 153 Class A rental units and 22665 square feet retail. The street level retail will include a high visible university bookstores, a destination restaurant, and several beauty retailers, providing all of your favorite shops and dining within moments of your door. The 2665 square feet place connects residents with the University and Community. With a minute walk to the main entry of the University of Maryland and a metro stop, Midtown Village provides an opportunity to live in a building that's central in terms of both Town center and the University.

BIG IDEA + PRECEDENT STUDIES



MAIN ARTERIES + INTERSECTION

OBJECTIVES

Midtown College Park
Baltimore Avenue, formerly Route 1, a placeless automotive corridor, is becoming an attractive location for higher density development. New residential slabs rising along the west side of Baltimore Avenue take the form of a wall dividing community and university; the Point Branch river reinforces the town/gown separation.

Automotive Strip
To the east of Baltimore Avenue, the communities of Lakeland and Barneys Heights are hidden behind the strip development. Community residents are isolated in their neighborhoods, lacking walkable connections to the University of Maryland and the downtown district. There are no public places for social interaction. Community residents lack public squares where they might come together with university faculty, staff, and students, to meet up with employees from the new Discovery District, and to welcome the many university guests staying at area hotels. Physical constraints limit the ability to build social capital across borders. Dependence upon automobiles for mobility leads to health problems stemming from lack of exercise. Children cannot safely navigate the district, denying them the opportunity to independently explore the city and university and enjoy social life in public.

Lost Sense of Place
Sense of place is suppressed. The rich history and culture of the historic African-American Lakeland community is invisible to the public. And the beneficial ecology of the Chesapeake Bay region, with the native plants, water birds, and animals that come to drink from the river, is hidden behind the wall of development and inaccessible to area residents.

Connecting City + University
The master plan study was commissioned as a guide to developers initiating projects in Midtown. Three primary program concepts emerged through community engagement and market research: authentic sense of place, connectivity, and healthy community.



The Square

The Square at College Park is a mixed-use development located within walking distance to the University of Maryland campus. The private rooftop garden offers residents an oasis, while the open square provides connection to community. This vibrant neighborhood center is a retail and entertainment destination with sustainability at its core. Have dinner with friends, shop, catch a movie, or center a private conference room, and a metro stop. The Square.

Lakeland Hub
Lakeland Hub is a mixed-use development built to transform College Park to a culturally vibrant college town through place making. Lakeland Hub features multi-family apartments, a food hall, a fitness center with pool & spa, a public plaza. Some features and amenities include a fully equipped business center, a private conference room, and a metro stop. The Square.

A NEW VISION FOR MIDTOWN