THE CORE SUB-AREA URBAN DESIGN PLAN

Concept Alternatives

In developing an overall urban design plan for the Core Sub-Area, three conceptually different organizing approaches were presented and discussed in detail by SDSU Foundation, University, City and community participants. These three alternatives are described below, along with a summary of their advantages and disadvantages and the comments made by stakeholders in presentation workshops.

None of these three concepts was expected to provide, in its pure form, the ultimate urban design framework for development of the Core Sub-Area. They were presented only as starkly different organizing approaches to stimulate discussion and clarify the concerns and design values of different interest groups. Review comments and the pros and cons of each concept were considered in developing a fourth, hybrid alternative that combines ideas from each of the above approaches. This fourth alternative was developed as the Core Sub-Area Urban Design Plan which is described in detail in the following section of the Manual.

Alternative 1 : Urban Streets

This concept is based on the idea of the street as a primary organizing framework for development. The existing street system is reinforced and expanded, with Hardy Avenue extended east to intersect with College Avenue, a new north-south street introduced connecting Hardy Avenue and Montezuma Road, and additional north-south alleys supplementing the existing alley system. All streets in this alternative are proposed as two-way, with as much on-street parking provided as possible.

The effect of extending the circulation systems in this way is to create a finer grain of development blocks, interconnected by a continuous network of streets and alleys through the area. Development in this scenario is oriented to the street, producing the kind of lively, bustling streetscape that is typical of traditional, mixed-use urban areas. The streets and alleys are designed to accommodate both vehicular and pedestrian activity, with associated plazas and pocket parks that make them the focus of outdoor amenity and public interaction throughout the area.

Advantages:

- With expanded circulation and access to all sites in the area, this concept supports a highly flexible, incremental approach to development that avoids the need to assemble property and allows separate parcels to redevelop as they become available.
- Individual redevelopment projects are smaller in size, creating the character of a traditional town with a fine grain of distinct buildings that have developed over time.
- A circulation network that offers several options for getting from place to place spreads traffic more evenly throughout the area, reducing volumes on key streets and intersections.
- Two-way traffic flow, shorter blocks and on-street parking reduces traffic speed and discourages through traffic.
- Necessary circulation area is recaptured as outdoor activity and recreation space, offering an active, public environment to complement the internal domain of private and semi-private spaces.
- More constant pedestrian and vehicular activity on streets and alleys enhances their safety and security, especially at night.

Disadvantages:

- Smaller scale of development blocks reduces the opportunity for large, multi-functional development projects and cost-effective approaches to resolving parking needs in large structures.
- Smaller scale, piecemeal development is less likely to achieve the full development potential of the area, or the overall densities proposed in the Master Project Plan.
- More land area is devoted to circulation, and traffic intrudes on all parts of the development area.
- Combining circulation systems increases the potential for conflicts between pedestrians, motorists and bicyclists.

Stakeholders' Comments:

- Representatives of the Fraternities and Sororities supported the multiple access opportunities of this concept and the potential it offers for small, independent Greek Houses, if these prove to be economically feasible.
- Metropolitan Transit Development Board (MTDB) representatives support transit-oriented mixed-use development as an approach that maximizes options for bus service and will encourage use of the proposed trolley line through campus.
- Several reviewers were concerned about adding more streets, feeling that this would tend to dissect the area, reducing the potential for a campus-like, pedestrian-oriented environment.
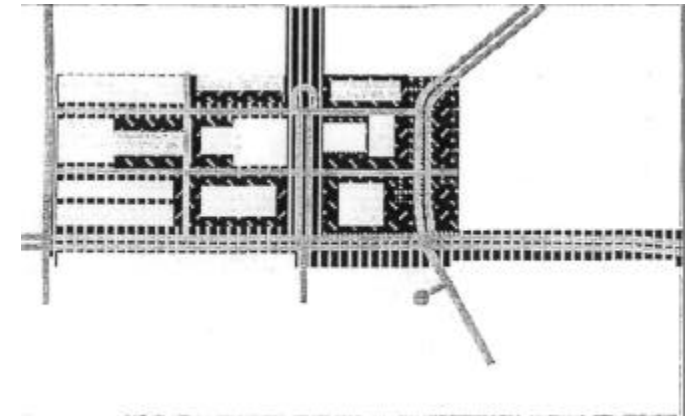
Legend:

 Mixed Use Commercial

 Commercial Streets & Plazas

Residential & Religious Organizations

 Residential Streets & Parks
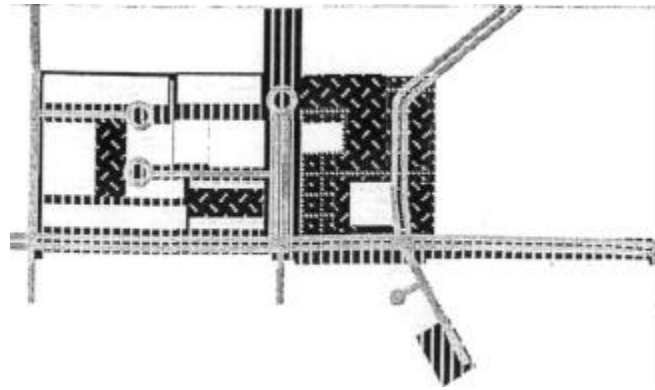
 Vehicular Traffic

Legend:

 Mixed Use Commercial

 Commercial Streets & Plazas

Residential & Religious Organizations

 Residential & Streets & Parks

 Vehicular Traffic

Alternative 2 : Superblocks

This concept removes pieces of the existing circulation system, reducing it to the minimum necessary to provide access to key development areas. Hardy and Lindo Paseo Avenues are terminated at the existing SDSU Parking Structure, providing access into the area from the east and west respectively, but eliminating through connections from College Avenue to 55th Street. The alleys in this alternative are converted into pedestrian pathways, connecting a series of small parks and plazas in each development area.

By closing redundant parts of the existing circulation system, six major development areas, or "superblocks", are defined. In contrast to the Urban Streets approach, development in this concept is oriented away from the street, and public activity is focused on an internal system of pedestrian paths and open spaces that are separated from cars, buses and service vehicles.

Advantages:
- Larger contiguous sites provide opportunities for major development projects that can achieve the critical mass and economies of scale necessary for feasible development, particularly in the commercial mixed-use area.
- Parking requirements can be more cost-effectively resolved in larger, more efficient structures serving the combined needs of each development superblock.
- Less land area is devoted to circulation and traffic is eliminated altogether from large parts of the area.
- Separating vehicular and pedestrian circulation reduces the potential for conflicts.

Disadvantages:
- Superblock development has a coarser grain, dividing the area into a few distinct "projects" rather than the finer texture of numerous individual buildings.
- The proposed pattern of development is less flexible than the urban streets concept, requiring significant property assembly, comprehensive project planning and design, and the long-term commitment of experienced, large-scale developers.
- Concentrating traffic on a limited number of streets increases the volume on each street and the potential for congestion at key intersections.
- Pedestrian-only paths and open spaces lose much of the animation and vitality of traditional urban streets and can be isolated and dangerous after dark.

Stakeholders' Comments:
- A stronger pedestrian priority throughout the area was universally endorsed, although several participants questioned the viability of large development projects in the residential area to the west, where parcel sizes are generally small and existing ownership is more scattered.
- The scale of development and its impact on both the neighborhood and the campus was a common concern.
- The approach was supported for its ability to promote a clear unity and stronger sense of coordinated design and development.

Alternative 3 : Peripheral Parking

This concept takes the approach of Alternative 2 a step further by removing auto traffic from the heart of the Core Sub-Area altogether. Cars are intercepted at large parking reservoirs located in structures on College, Montezuma and 55th Street, leaving the interior essentially vehicle free. Emergency and service access to buildings within the area are integrated into an internal network of pedestrian paths and open spaces.

This is the organizing approach of the existing campus which establishes a clear pedestrian priority throughout. It is typical of educational settings and other large institutions where property is developed and maintained by a single entity that can organize and manage coordinated parking, service and emergency systems. Its parallel in commercial development is the retail mall where many different tenants conform to operational patterns set by a mall management authority which controls issues such as hours of business, delivery schedules, waste handling procedures and so on.
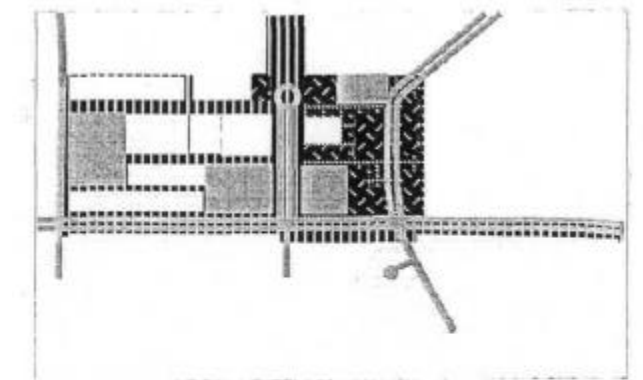
Advantages:
- Circulation and parking area is minimized, freeing up additional space for pedestrian and open space amenities throughout the development.
- Significant economies of scale can be achieved by aggregating parking in a limited number of efficient, large floor-plate garages that connect directly to the external system of collector streets.
- Centralized parking management can maximize opportunities for sharing spaces and spreading peak loads, reducing the overall number of parking spaces required and improving convenience and efficiency.
- Pedestrian and vehicle conflicts are minimized and the design quality of internal pathways and open spaces is not compromised by traffic and parking requirements.
- The collective form of the development and individual buildings are unconstrained by the technical requirements of traffic engineering, allowing for the more figural and intimately scaled pathways and public spaces of a unique, auto-free environment.

Disadvantages:
- The focus of this concept is clearly internal, concentrating vehicular access and parking in a peripheral zone that will tend to separate the amenities of the interior from the surrounding neighborhood.
- Balancing parking supply and demand throughout the development process is essential to the concept, requiring a carefully orchestrated and relatively inflexible program of property acquisition and construction phasing.
- Large, shared parking reservoirs demand complex and continuous management of space assignment, validation systems, fee collection and regulation enforcement.
- Concentrating vehicle movements around a limited number of large garages increases the potential for congestion on access and egress streets, particularly during rush hours.
- The necessity to assemble large land holdings for individual phases is more critical than in the super block alternative. Construction of commercial and residential phases would need to match with parking construction in order to avoid costly "front-end" development expenditures.

Stakeholders' Comments:
- There was clear support for the idea of building on the image of the campus, strengthening SDSU's identity on streets surrounding the Core Sub-Area, and extending the open space character of the campus closer to the neighborhood across Montezuma Road.
- The effort to achieve an auto-free, campus-like setting for development was generally applauded, although several people noted that without passing cars, the interior spaces could be very "dead" and potentially dangerous at night.
- Strong objections were expressed about the image of perimeter parking, traffic impacts on already congested access streets, and the poor functional and visual interface with the community.
- Several reviewers observed that a centralized parking approach does not satisfy students' and retailers' preference for immediate auto access and convenient, nearby parking.

Legend:
- Mixed Use Commercial
- Commercial Streets & Plazas
- Residential & Religious Organizations
- Residential Streets & Parks
- Vehicular Traffic