

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: RE-DESIGNING SUITLAND, MD AS A TOWN/ GOVERNMENT/  
EDUCATION CENTER

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This thesis explores an urban intervention in Suitland Maryland. Suitland is serviced by the green line of the Washington DC metro rail system, yet it has seen little to no development or increased density. The metro primarily services a 230 acre Federal Center that houses government employees for a multitude of government organizations. The city outside the Federal Center has earned a negative reputation of crime and poverty, but there are many assets within miles of the Suitland Metro stop that could inspire a new vision for this area of Prince George's County. The Federal Center employees, along with local residents, provide the necessary density for a new town center. Suitland's topography and landscape offer dense wooded areas that can become amenities to the area. Another latent asset is the proximate locations of Suitland's public schools to the primary development zone.

The primary urban intervention will occur at the intersection of the Silver Hill Road and Suitland Road on the current government property. A series of new public open-spaces will provide the opportunity to make community, institutional, and landscape connections. A new town center will provide a place for the existing and new residents, the government employees, and the community college students to come together. Physical, social, and economic connections between the Federal Center, the town, and the new university are likely to create a revitalized community in Suitland, Maryland.

RE-DESIGNING SUITLAND, MD AS A TOWN/GOVERNMENT/EDUCATION  
CENTER

By

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents - Pete and Joanne – I could not have done any of this without you. You continue to inspire me every day, and I hope I can continue to make you proud.

And to the rest of my family – Sarah, Patrick, Heather, Victor, Aurelio, Melissa, Denny, and Evan – you all mean the world to me.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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A special thanks to Darlie Norton for creating one of the only historic accounts of Suitland Maryland and for being so kind as to share her images with me.



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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis will explore an urban and architectural design in Suitland, Maryland. The complexity of Suitland Maryland creates an interesting opportunity for development. The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission released an approved “Suitland Mixed-Use Town Center Development Plan” in 2006, but little to no development has begun.<sup>1</sup> There are several possible reasons why Suitland has not been developed. Suitland is located in Prince George’s County, which is known to be poorer than its surrounding Maryland counties (i.e. Montgomery County).<sup>2</sup> Along with that comes a reputation for higher crime rates and other negative activities.

Despite these drawbacks, Suitland has many assets that support an opportunity for development. The border of Suitland is shared with the southeast border of Washington DC. Suitland became connected to Washington DC through the green line of the WMATA metro system when the rail line began servicing Suitland in 2000.<sup>3</sup> Extensive bus routes and easy access to I-495, the major area beltway, connect Suitland to the greater metropolitan area as well. The Suitland metro stop is located at the intersection of Suitland Parkway and Silver Hill Road. Two of the quadrants of the intersection are predominantly gated off from the public. One quadrant of the intersection is owned by the government and is known as the Federal Center. The 230 acre Federal Center houses a variety of government organizations. Another quadrant of the intersection is owned by the Smithsonian Institute. Several of the Smithsonian storage, restoration, and research facilities are located on the property. The Federal Center and Smithsonian facilities bring

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<sup>1</sup> The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Prince George's County Planning Department 2006

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2009

<sup>3</sup> The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Prince George's County Planning Department 2006

thousands of employees to Suitland every weekday. In addition to the unique programs on the Federal Center and Smithsonian property, there are several environmental features that could be considered amenities to the area. One of Suitland's major thoroughfares, Suitland Parkway, is lined with trees and plantings and is a designated National Historic Park Site. Suitland Parkway has been maintained as a park that you drive through, unlike some other parkways in the DC metropolitan area. The 20 acre Suitland Bog is one of the only wetlands in the Prince George's County, and it is less than two miles away from the Suitland Metro stop.<sup>4</sup>

Design intervention at an urban scale that includes adding housing, retail, and other programs that create public activity throughout the day and night is likely to diminish negative activities and revitalize the Suitland area. Schematic urban design proposals will explore ways to break down the physical, social, and economic barriers between the Federal Center and the rest of the city. The introduction of a university that is tied to the government agencies within the Federal Center is likely to bring density to Suitland as well as provide an opportunity for locals to get a higher education and potentially have the opportunity to work in the Federal Center. Students can bring life and economy to the area, and the proposed community college facilities can be shared with the community as another way to bring the groups of users together. It is likely that an urban intervention, the introduction of a community college to the site will institute revitalization in Suitland, Maryland.

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<sup>4</sup> Norton 1976



Figure 1: Image of Suitland Parkway from Silver Hill Road Exit



Figure 2: Existing Illustrative Site Plan of Suitland Maryland



## **SITE**

### **SITE HISTORY**

#### **HISTORY OF PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND**

Prince George's County was established on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1696 as settlers from Maryland's first colony of Saint Mary's City moved to the Patuxent and Potomac Rivers. The county was named after Prince George of Denmark who was married to Princess Anne of England. Many plantations emerged as Europeans continued to settle in Prince George's County. Most plantation owners used African American slaves to work their fields. Tobacco was the primary crop in Prince George's county. Land owners prospered from tobacco plantations over the next century. Trade centers began to emerge along the county waterways. In the early eighteenth century Upper Marlborough was one of the major port towns for tobacco distribution<sup>5</sup> so it became the commercial, social, and political center of the county.<sup>6</sup>

In 1790 Prince George's County turned over a portion of its land to the development of the new Nation's Capital. The current border of Prince George's County shares the southeastern border of Washington DC. The emergence of the steam engine during the Industrial Revolution brought about more trade opportunities for Washington DC and Prince George's County. Fishing and trading along the Patuxent River increased with the development of the steamboat. An increased number of city centers began to emerge along the Baltimore and Ohio Rail Road. The tobacco industry was prevalent throughout the nineteenth century, but the agricultural economy changed as a result of the

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<sup>5</sup> Town of Upper Mrlboro - About 2010

<sup>6</sup> Schneider 2000

Industrial Revolution. Cotton mills came about in the early to mid 1800's, altering the traditional farming methods.<sup>7</sup>

Farming traditions expanded as agriculturalists began to find ways to utilize the over-cultivated tobacco fields. The interest in experimental farming in Prince George's County led to the First Agricultural Society in Maryland, which was founded in 1817. In 1858 the first agricultural research college was established in northern Prince George's County. The original agricultural college is now the University of Maryland in College Park. Even though agriculture throughout the region was expanding to include a variety of crops, Prince George's county focused primarily on tobacco, producing more tobacco than any other county in Maryland in the mid nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

The next occurrence that brought major change to Prince George's County was the American Civil War. The county was divided because many plantation owners were using slaves to work their fields. After the Emancipation of slavery, many freed slaves began to establish communities that were directly tied to a church. Schoolhouses were also established. Many of the new breadwinners started their own farms while others worked in industry.<sup>9</sup>

The amount of people working in Washington DC continued to increase through the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century. Residential communities continued to emerge along the Baltimore and Potomac railroad and the Washington and Baltimore railroad. When the automobile was industrialized, residential communities popped up in various locations around Washington DC. Government programs were also displaced outside of the District border. Prince George's County houses several Government

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<sup>7</sup> Schneider 2000

<sup>8</sup> Schneider 2000

<sup>9</sup> Schneider 2000

programs including the following: the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (land purchased from 1910-1940), the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center (1936), and the Suitland Federal Center (1942).<sup>10</sup>

## **HISTORY OF SUITLAND**

Suitland's history began in 1867. The origin of this place begins with business entrepreneur and Washington DC socialite Colonel Samuel Taylor Suit. Colonel Suit was born and raised in Prince George's County. He moved to Iowa and then Kentucky where he eventually established a successful distillery. Suit's popularity amongst the townspeople earned him the honorary title of "Colonel". Personal tragedy took him out of Iowa and into New York City where he eventually worked in the Stock Exchange. In 1867 he purchased 300 acres of what is now Suitland ("Suit's Land"), Maryland and moved back to Prince George's County with his wife and son.<sup>11</sup>

Colonel Suit acquired property throughout Prince George's County and in Berkeley Springs West Virginia, but Suitland was where he spent most of his time and where he developed his new whiskey distillery. Colonel Suit was responsible for establishing Suitland Road as a shortcut from Suitland to Washington D.C. in order to make an easier trip with the horse drawn wagons that carried his brown jugs of whiskey. He built a mansion on part of his estate in Suitland that was elaborately landscaped and decorated. His orchards produced fruit that was sold in Washington D.C. Colonel Suit and his wife hosted great American figures at their mansion, such as, President Ulysses S.

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<sup>10</sup> Schneider 2000

<sup>11</sup> Norton 1976

Grant and General Rutherford B. Hayes. The mansion was completely destroyed by fire in 1878.<sup>12</sup>

After Colonel Suit's death in 1888, his property was left to his children and his wife. Eventually, most of his children dispersed and the property was sold off to various owners. One of his sons maintained the property where the Federal Center is now located. He lived on the corner of Suitland and Silver Hill road where he kept a little bit of farm land. He also owned a bowling alley, a store, and a small jail house. Some of the other major property owners of Suitland are remembered through commemorative street names (i.e. Swann, Randall, and Ryan).<sup>13</sup>

The character of Suitland after the time of Colonel Suit was that of a farming community. Town businesses emerged as early as the 1870's. The intersection of Suitland Road and Silver Hill Road was the center of commercial activity at that time<sup>14</sup> and it continues to be a commercial hub today. The development of Iverson Mall, as well as several strip malls in the immediate area has spread the commercial activity throughout the area, leaving no commercial-based city center.

Suitland has been historically connected to Washington D.C. in several ways. Colonel Suit made a direct connection to D.C. by building a new road for his wagons; the "Tidewater Bus Co" was established in 1921 to take people from Suitland to D.C. Suitland Parkway was built during World War II to connect an airbase on the Anacostia River to what is now Andrew's Air force base. The Parkway was originally intended for military use only but is now a major connecting road from Suitland to the Washington

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<sup>12</sup> Norton 1976

<sup>13</sup> Norton 1976

<sup>14</sup> Norton 1976

D.C. beltway.<sup>15</sup> One of Washington D.C.'s major roads, Pennsylvania Avenue extended out to Suitland in 1955.<sup>16</sup> In 2001 the Green Line of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit metro added a stop at the intersection of Suitland Parkway and Silver Hill road.<sup>17</sup> The Green Line connects Suitland directly to D.C.'s Government center, Convention Center, and two universities - Howard University in the District and the University of Maryland just outside the District in Maryland.<sup>18</sup>

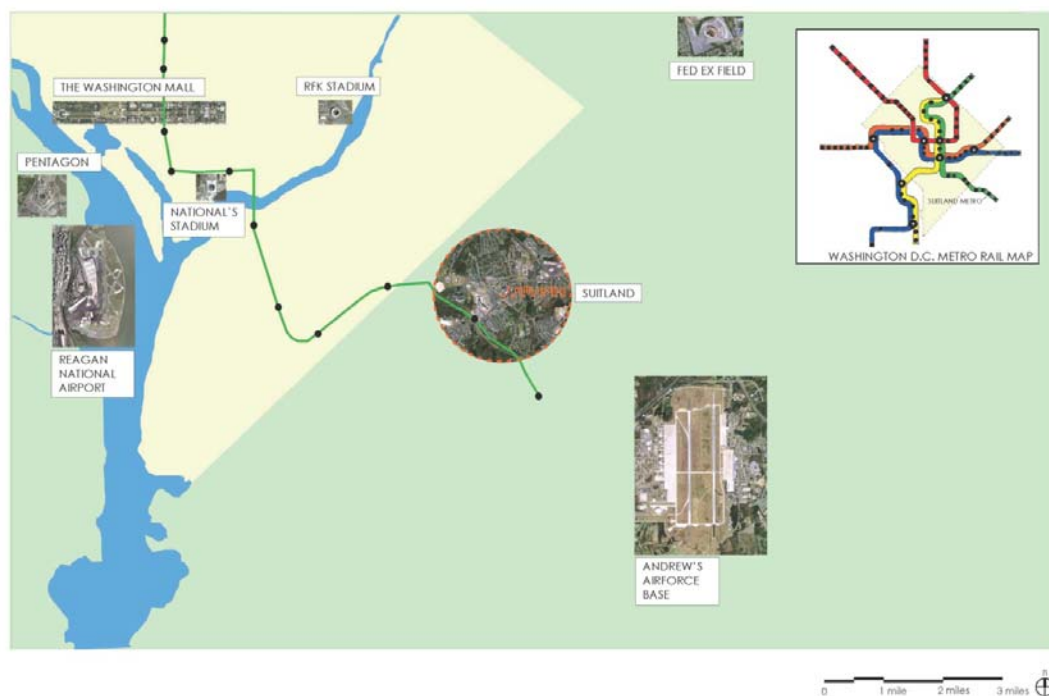


Figure 3: Suitland in Relationship to Regional Landmarks

<sup>15</sup> Census History Staff 2009

<sup>16</sup> Census History Staff 2009

<sup>17</sup> Norton 1976

<sup>18</sup> Metro-Rail-Maps 2010

## **SITE DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS**

### **REGIONAL CONNECTIONS AND ACCESS TO MASS TRANSIT**

Despite Suitland's agricultural history, it has been connected to the nation's capital and its surrounding communities since the days of Colonel Suit. Suitland has maintained its connection to Washington DC since Colonel Suit built Suitland Road for his wagons over 140 years ago. Since then, many roads have been built that reinforce the connection to DC and extend a connection to other surroundings areas. Pennsylvania Avenue, Suitland Road, and Suitland Parkway were some of the original major roadway connections to Washington D.C. Those roads currently connect Suitland to the greater metropolitan area via I-495. In the mid 1960's Interstate 495 (also known as the "Capital Beltway") was built around Washington DC to connect Maryland and Virginia to the nation's capital.<sup>19</sup> Interstate 95 (north and south), Route 66 East, and Route 50 toward Annapolis among many other major roadways are also connected to I-495. Suitland has direct access to I-495 via Suitland Parkway and Pennsylvania Avenue. Route 5 (also known as Branch Avenue) is another major roadway in Suitland, and it goes from Washington DC through Suitland and then south to Point Lookout at the southern tip of Maryland where the Chesapeake Bay meets the Potomac River.<sup>20</sup>

While auto-connectivity is a great asset to Suitland, the auto-centric mindset of previous generations affected the development of the area. The single story strip mall conditions that have become the defining physical characteristic of Suitland have meant that pedestrian access and walkability have been neglected. While some of the local road conditions have improved with the new Census Building Headquarters, the surrounding buildings outside the Federal Center remain rundown and the lack of quality, public

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<sup>19</sup> United States Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration 2009

<sup>20</sup> Census History Staff 2009

open-space is evident. The new Suitland Metro station, along with great automobile and bus access, provides the opportunity to create a town center in Suitland by increasing the density and improving the public domain.

The metro brings an invaluable opportunity to Suitland – the opportunity to be directly connected to the greater Washington D.C. area through mass transit. The Suitland Metro stop opened in 2001 during the time when the new Census Bureau building was being designed to replace the old building in the Federal Center. The Suitland Metro stop is on the green line of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit metro. The green line is centered in Washington D.C. and extends outward to service northern and southern Prince George's County. As the metro rail moves southbound from Washington DC, it begins to follow Suitland Parkway above ground until it submerges under Silver Hill Road after the Suitland Metro stop. The location of the metro stop is accessible and convenient for the Federal Center and Smithsonian campus employees. In the 6 years since the establishment of the Suitland metro stop, little to no development has been implemented around it. A 438,000 square foot parking garage that is adjacent to the metro stop reinforces the auto-centric intentions of the plan. According to the 2000 Census, only 15% of Suitland's working individuals use public transportation (including buses and taxicabs.), so the metro seems to be underutilized by the locals.



Figure 4: Suitland Street Connection to Washington D.C.

The primary streets of Suitland connect to the major roadways that lead to neighboring towns and the District of Columbia. The major connector streets can become optimal locations for gateway entrances into downtown Suitland in the proposed urban plan.



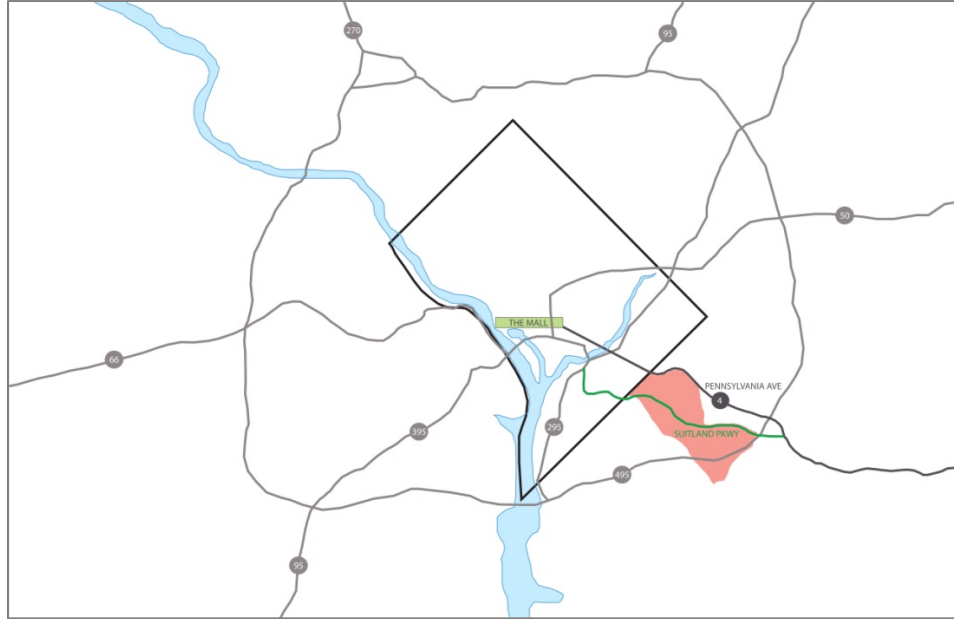


Figure 5: Suitland, Maryland – Immediate Context

Suitland is well connected to I-495, which connects to other state and local highways in the area. The street network connection bolsters the argument that Suitland can be a Federal extension city of the District of Columbia.



Figure 6: Suitland, Maryland – Macro Context

Through I-495, Suitland is also connected to other developed areas in the metropolitan area, such as College Park, Rockville, and Columbia, Maryland. Suitland is located between the Chesapeake Bay and the Potomac River. The Anacostia River, a tributary of the Potomac River, is about 3.5 miles from the intersection of Suitland Road and Silver Hill Road. There is also easy automobile access to the Chesapeake Bay from Suitland. Route 50 connects with I-495 and goes directly to the Bay.

## FEDERAL CENTER AND SMITHSONIAN PROPERTY

The Federal Center is located northeast of the intersection of Suitland Road and Silver Hill Road and extends to the edge of Suitland Parkway. This area was an air field prior to 1941 when the government claimed the land for their new Census Bureau facility along with other government organizations.<sup>21</sup> Currently the Federal Center houses the U.S. Census Bureau Headquarters, National Maritime Intelligence Center, National Polar-Orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System, and the Washington National Records Center.<sup>22</sup> The Smithsonian owns property on the west side of Suitland Parkway that includes the Smithsonian Museum Support Center, Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resource Center, and the Paul E. Garber Facility (a storage and reconstruction facility for Smithsonian aircraft). The Federal Center houses 11,000 employees every day,<sup>23</sup> and the Smithsonian facilities also house a large number of employees. The diverse organizations on the Federal Center and Smithsonian property that occupy hundreds of acres of Suitland are assets that are not currently bringing a positive ripple effect to the area. The Federal Center is gated off from the rest of the community. Consequently there is little to no interaction between the east and west side of Suitland Road.

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<sup>21</sup> Norton 1976

<sup>22</sup> Census History Staff 2009

<sup>23</sup> The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Prince George's County Planning Department 2006

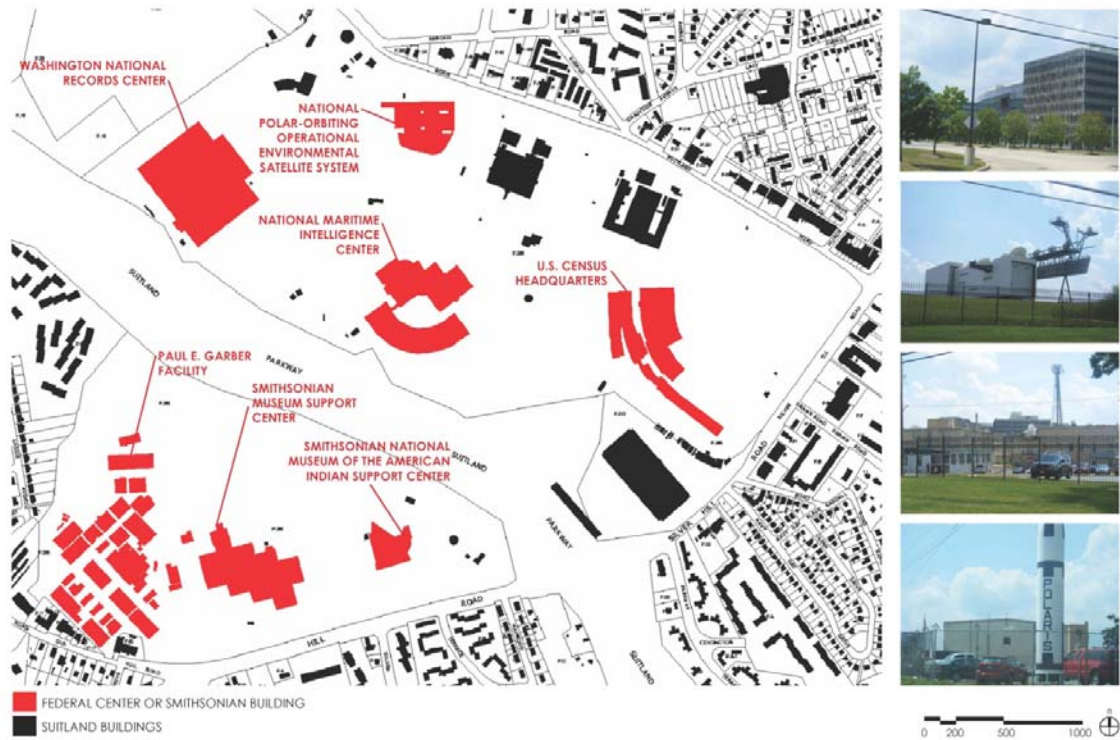


Figure 7: Organizations within the Federal Center and Smithsonian Properties

The buildings within the Federal and Smithsonian “campuses” are not formally organized in relationship to each other. The original edifices of the Federal Center were austere objects in the landscape; the layout of buildings bears no relationship to the surrounding urban condition.

## CONNECTIVITY IN SUITLAND



Figure 8: Barriers Diagram

One of Suitland's major problems is the lack of connectivity within the Suitland boundary. The extensive, isolated islands of the Federal and Smithsonian Centers, the gated residential communities, and the cul-de-sac islands that have popped up in Suitland over the years have created an environment that is adverse to the emergence of a unified community. Suitland Parkway is a visual and physical edge that becomes a divider because of the limited opportunities to cross it. The width of the 9 mile parkway ranges from 450 to 650 feet. The depressed topography of Suitland Parkway in relationship to its surroundings, as well as the fast moving traffic makes crossover points difficult. Silver Hill Road becomes a major connector road within the Suitland boundary. Silver Hill Road crosses over Suitland Parkway and connects to Branch Avenue on the southwest side of the parkway and Suitland Road and Pennsylvania Avenue on the northeast side of the parkway. Aside from the parkway, there are other designated park

areas in Suitland that act as dividers or create strong edge conditions because of dramatic topography changes and heavy forest. While the physical connectivity of Suitland needs to be addressed in the urban design proposal, it is the social implications of certain physical barriers that must be addressed in order for this place to form a community.

Communities put up fences and gates for different reasons, but a primary reason to close yourself in (or keep others out) is for safety and privacy. No matter what the reason is for the enclosure, gating sends a clear message to the neighbor's that they are not welcome. The Federal Center gates off over 230 acres of prime land in a fortress-like manner.<sup>24</sup> The vast Smithsonian property is also inaccessible to the public; it is gated off and there are guards at the entrance points. Richard Gardiner talks about the implications of creating an "urban fortress" in his book *Design for Safe Neighborhoods*:

Designed to be the most effective against burglary and other crimes... the [urban fortress] model makes no real attempt to deal with street crimes...

The urban fortress is, at best, a short-term solution.<sup>25</sup>

In an area where vandalism and car burglary are common,<sup>26</sup> it is perhaps understandable why Government Service Agency (GSA) employees would want to protect their property. Even outside of the Federal Center there are housing developments that have become gated communities. However, when a community gates itself in, the result is that those who are left out can become the isolated community. Breaking down the overt physical barriers between the Federal and Smithsonian Centers and the rest of Suitland will be essential bringing down the social barriers that further separate the area.

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<sup>24</sup> The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Prince George's County Planning Department 2006

<sup>25</sup> Gardiner 1978, 14

<sup>26</sup> Prince George's County Crime Maps 2008



Figure 9: Cul De Sac Islands and Federal Center and Smithsonian Islands

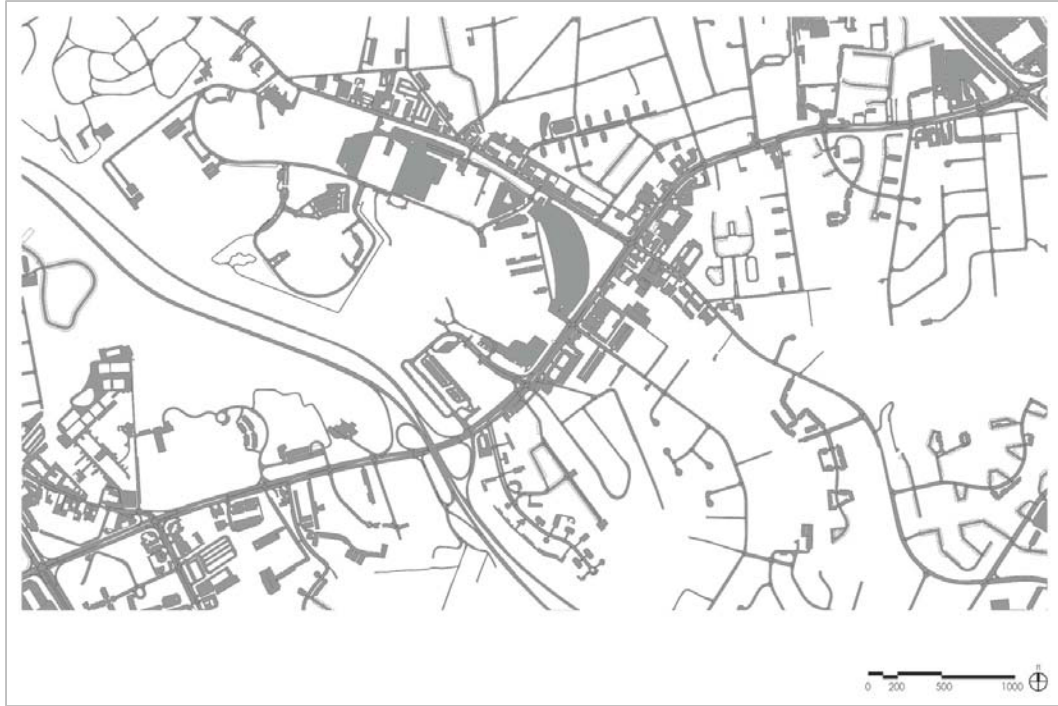


Figure 10: Street Hierarchy Diagram

The Street Hierarchy diagram and the Cul Du Sac islands diagram show how the area is lacking physical and social connectivity. There are some natural or manmade elements in Suitland, such as the forested parks and Suitland Parkway that prevent connectivity, but other developments seem to be withholding connection to surrounding streets as a result of the “sprawl” mentality of suburban development.



## FIGURE GROUND

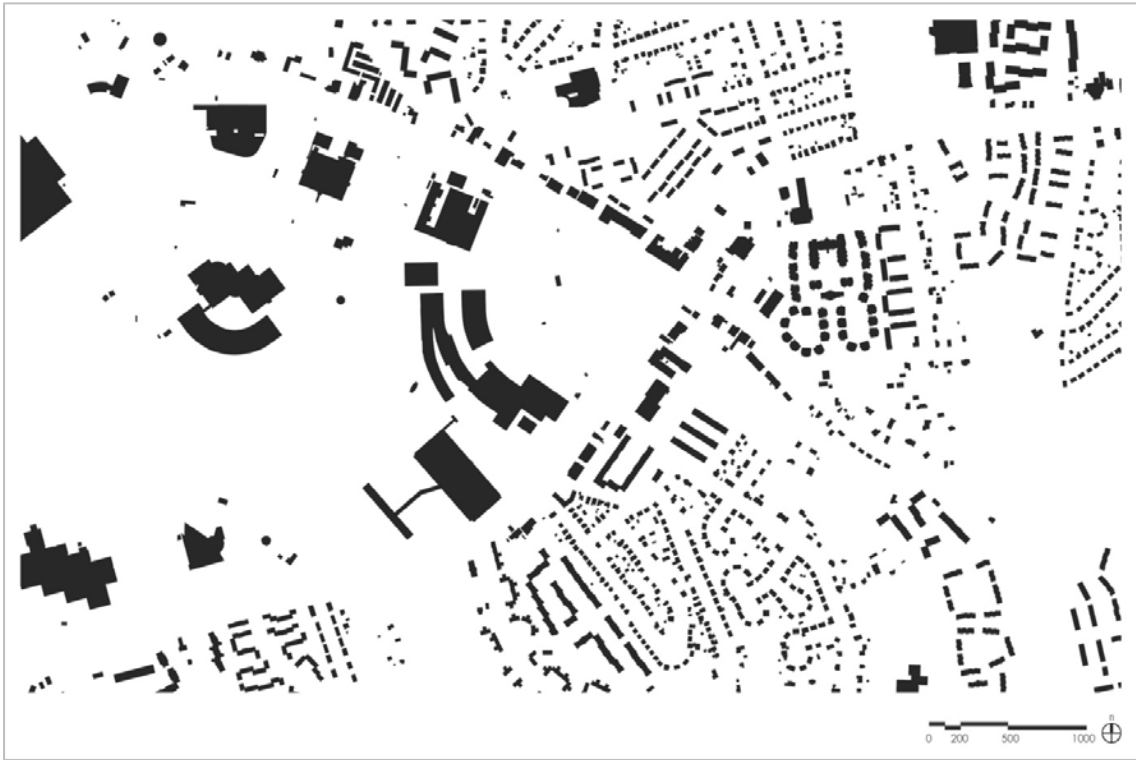


Figure 11: Figure Ground – Suitland, Maryland

There is a wide variety of building scales and types, but there is little to no transition from the large scale office buildings down to the single family home. Older single family housing developments are distinguished by the linear, grid-like organization. Housing developments around series' of cul-du-sacs are recognizable as developments that emerged out of the post World War II American “sprawl” trend. The loose fabric of the buildings reveals little about street organization and hierarchy.

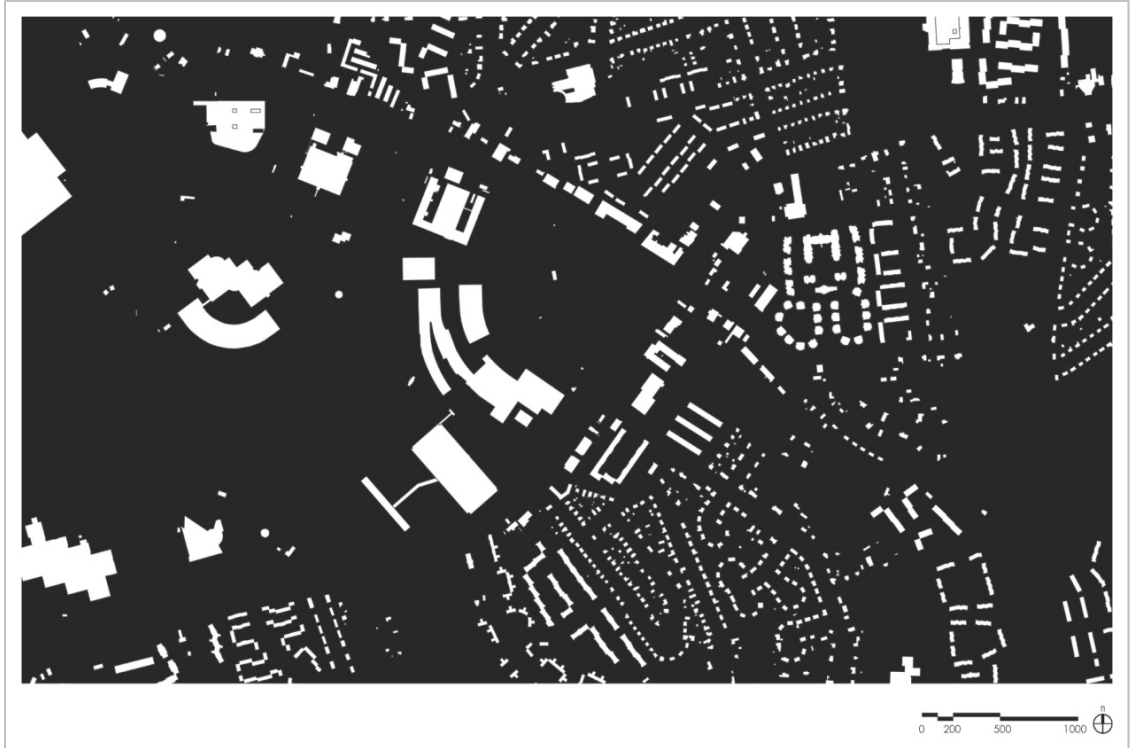


Figure 12: Figure Ground Reversal – Suitland Maryland

The vast properties of the Federal Center and Smithsonian Properties are clearly segregated from the rest of the city. Several primary roads are distinguished through the staggered connection of linear building frontages. Open spaces are not defined by building frontages; therefore, it appears that there is no formal public open space.

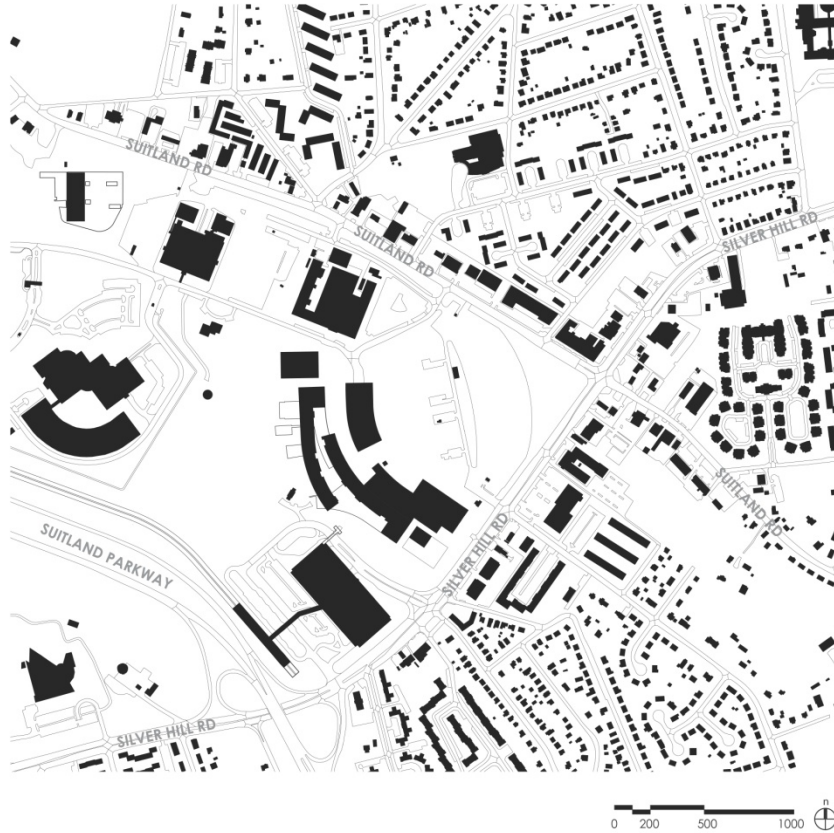


Figure 13: Existing Figure Ground of Immediate Site

The scope of this thesis is between the intersection of Suitland Parkway and Silver Hill Road and the intersection where the Federal Center meets the old commercial center of Suitland – Suitland Road and Silver Hill Road. The relationship between the Suitland Metro stop and the rest of the urban fabric will also be addressed. The proposed urban development will consider the existing topographic, hydrological, climatic conditions.

## TOPOGRAPHY, HYDROLOGY, CLIMATE

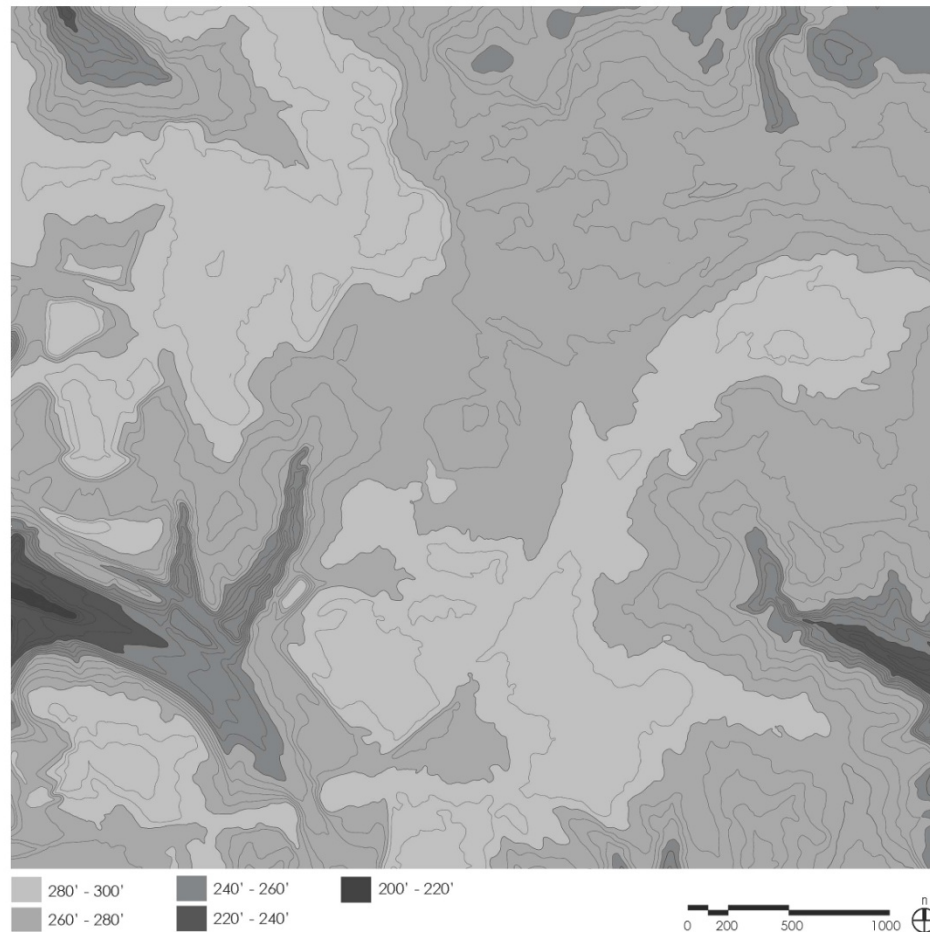


Figure 14: Contour Gradation

There are significant grade changes throughout the immediate site. Suitland Parkway (southeast side of the image) is recessed from the highest elevation by about 80' at the lowest. There are several other topographic recesses that occur at streambed locations. Those recessed areas have more vegetation and trees (as seen on Fig 2: Illustrative Plan – p.6) than the surrounding topography. Some of the irregular geometry of the streets are a result of the irregular topography.

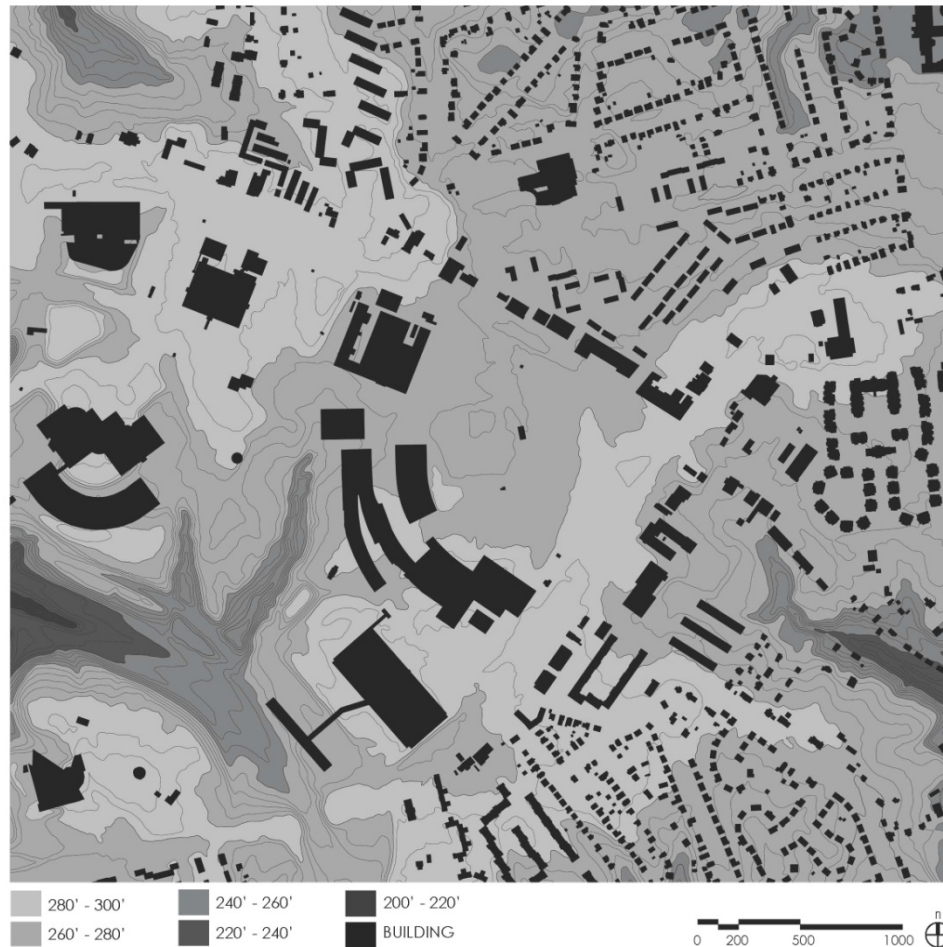


Figure 15: Contour Gradation with Existing Building Footprints

The buildings in the Federal Center are generally located on the higher elevation points of the property. The position and orientation of the Federal buildings are related to the irregular topography of the site. Silver Hill Road follows the apex across the site from the Suitland Metro stop up toward Pennsylvania Avenue. The orientation and organization of single family and multifamily residences appear to be related to the topography on the southeast side of the site.

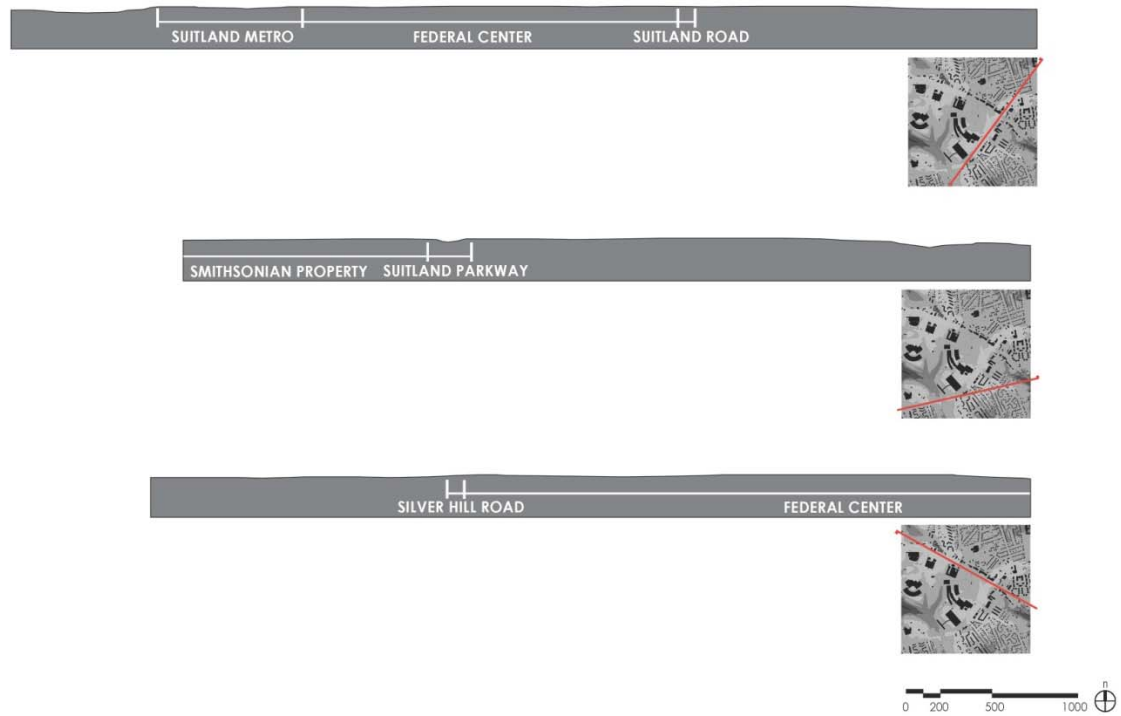


Figure 16: Existing Site Sections

The Federal Center and Smithsonian properties are located on high elevations. Suitland Parkway depresses between the two properties (top and middle sections). A section cut through Suitland Road looking southwest (bottom section) reveals the downward slope of the street as it moves southeast toward the streambed.

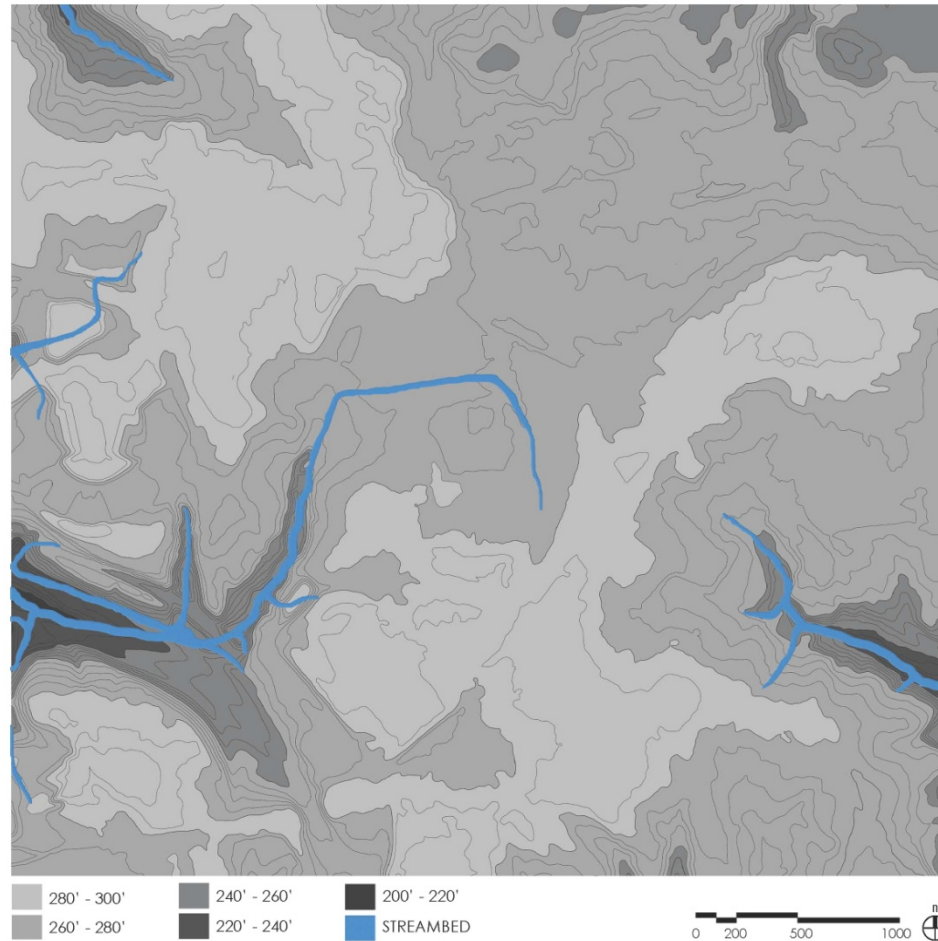


Figure 17: Local Streambed Locations

The primary streambed is along the valley of Suitland Parkway. The streambed is exposed along part of Suitland Parkway. Other streambeds can be found in the remaining valleys of the site. All of the streambeds lead back to the Potomac River and ultimately to the Chesapeake Bay. There are no designated flood zones in the immediate Suitland area.



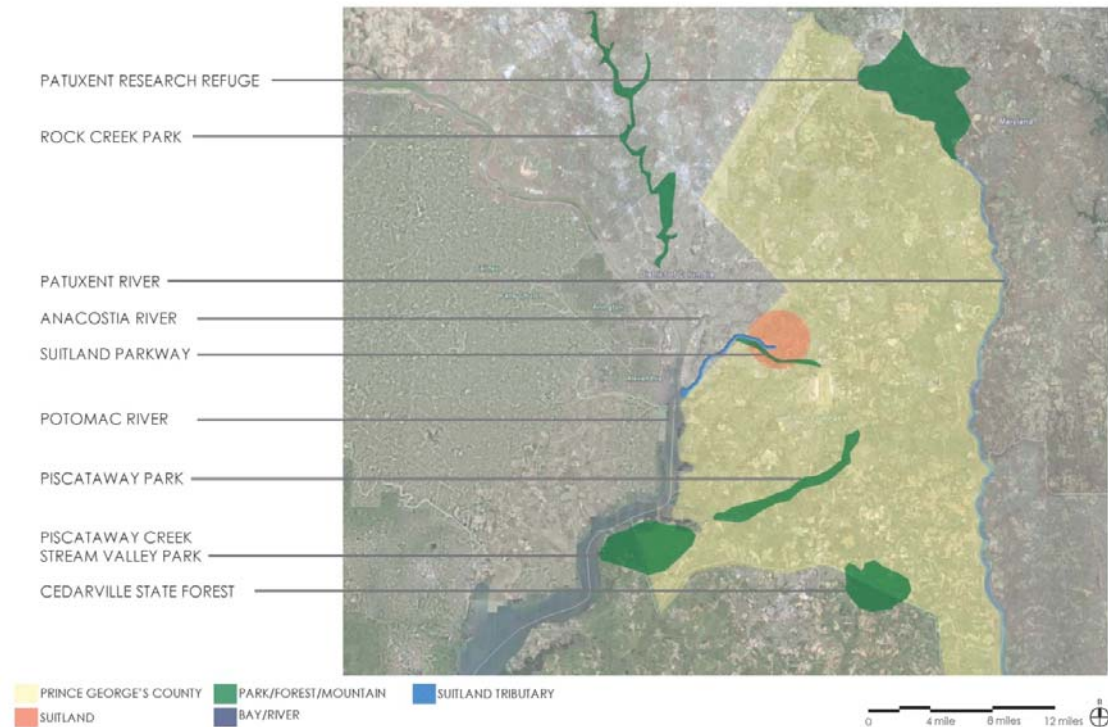


Figure 18: Regional Watershed and Relating Forests and Parks

The primary stream that connects Suitland's streambeds to the Potomac River follows along Suitland Parkway toward Washington D.C.; it runs along the border until it reaches the Potomac River at the southern tip of Washington D.C. Environmental features, such as rivers, parks, and forests, are part of the macro environmental system of the area. Rock Creek is a tributary of the Potomac River that starts in Maryland and meets the Potomac River in Washington D.C. Rock Creek Park is a continuous park and recreational area that follows along Rock Creek. There is a bike path that follows alongside the creek. There are also many subsidiary picnic, play, and multipurpose areas along the park. The Piscataway Creek and Park are also related to a tributary of the Potomac River.



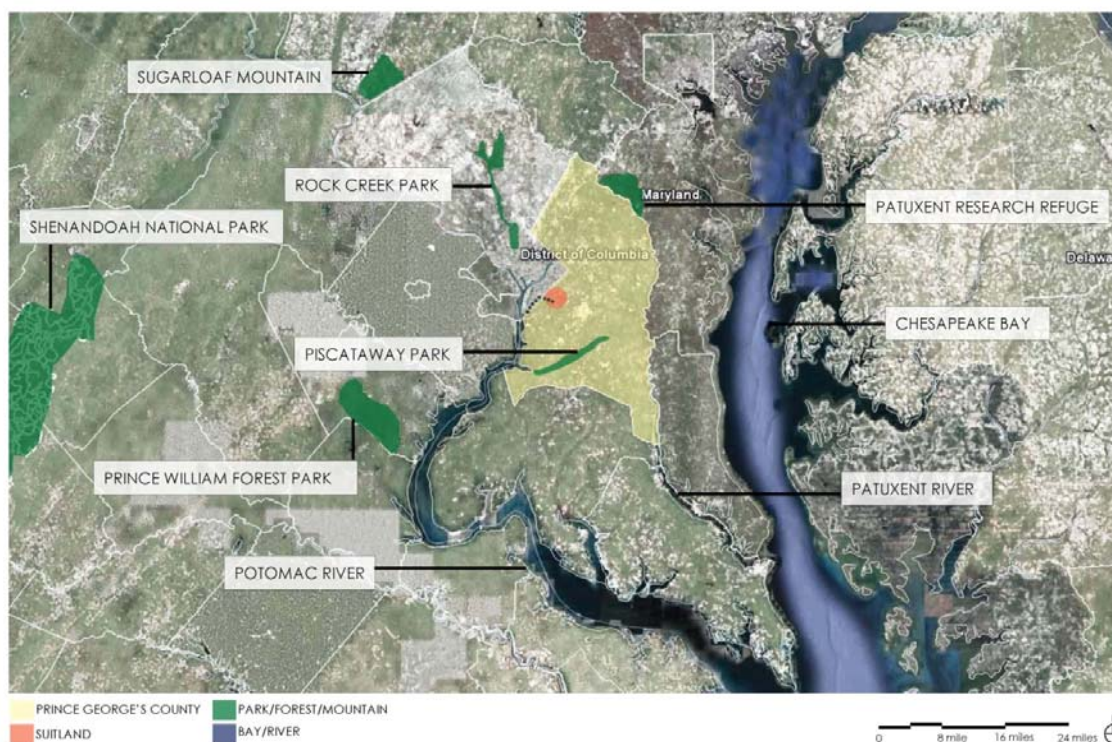


Figure 19: Greater Context of Watershed, Parks, and Forests

Suitland is located between the Potomac River and the Patuxent River. Both rivers lead directly into the Chesapeake Bay – the primary watershed for the D.C. metropolitan area. The Patuxent River marks the eastern edge of Prince George’s County. At the northern end of the Patuxent River is the Patuxent Research Refuge, where animals and fish are protected and observed in their natural habitat.<sup>27</sup> Along with a multitude of forests and parks, the Maryland and Virginia region has beautiful mountain ranges. Sugarloaf Mountain is just beyond the border of Montgomery County. The Shenandoah National Park is about 70 miles east of Suitland and it is known for its hiking trails and picnic spots. Suitland is connected to and/or surrounded by these among many other environmental features that make the D.C. metropolitan area so beautiful and unique.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 2010



Figure 20: Climate Analysis

Suitland is located at 38.8° latitude and -76.9° longitude. It sees all four seasons throughout the year. The average rainfall per month ranges from 3-4 inches.<sup>28</sup> The direction of the prevailing winds change according to the season.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Countrystudies.us 2008

<sup>29</sup> NOAA 1998

## CIRCULATION

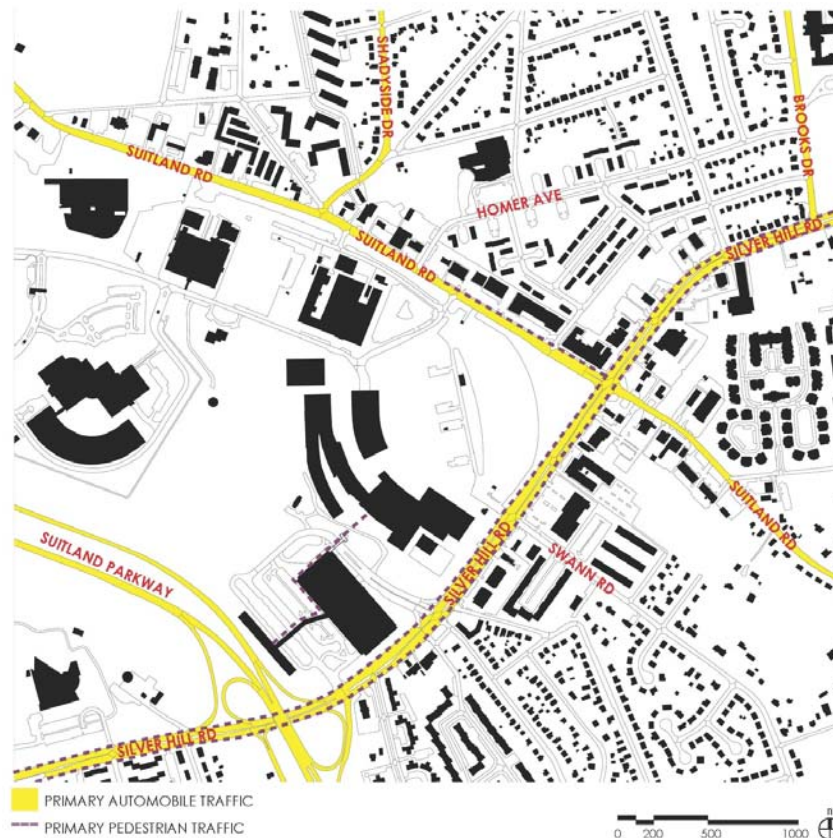


Figure 21: Circulation Diagram

Suitland Parkway is the primary road for fast moving automobile traffic. The parkway goes underneath Silver Hill Road (accessed from the parkway through exit ramps). Silver Hill Road is one of the primary automobile thoroughfares because it goes from Iverson Mall (SE – off map) to Pennsylvania Avenue (NW – off map). Suitland Road and Shadyside Drive also connect with Pennsylvania Avenue to the north. Primary pedestrian traffic is along Silver Hill Road. Pedestrians use the sidewalks to get from residential areas toward the commercial buildings along Silver Hill and Suitland Road or to and from the Suitland Metro Stop. There are also various bus stops along Silver Hill Road. In general, the entire Suitland area is well serviced by various bus companies.



Figure 22: Street and Parking Diagram

There is an extensive amount of parking surface along the two primary roads of Suitland (Silver Hill Road and Suitland Road). The parking surfaces reveal how porous the street frontage is along those major roads. The relationship between street and parking surface is unclear in many locations. The array of parking surface in the Federal Center is vast and disordered. The implementation of the metro should hypothetically change the previous parking needs of the Federal Center.



## BUILDING HEIGHTS

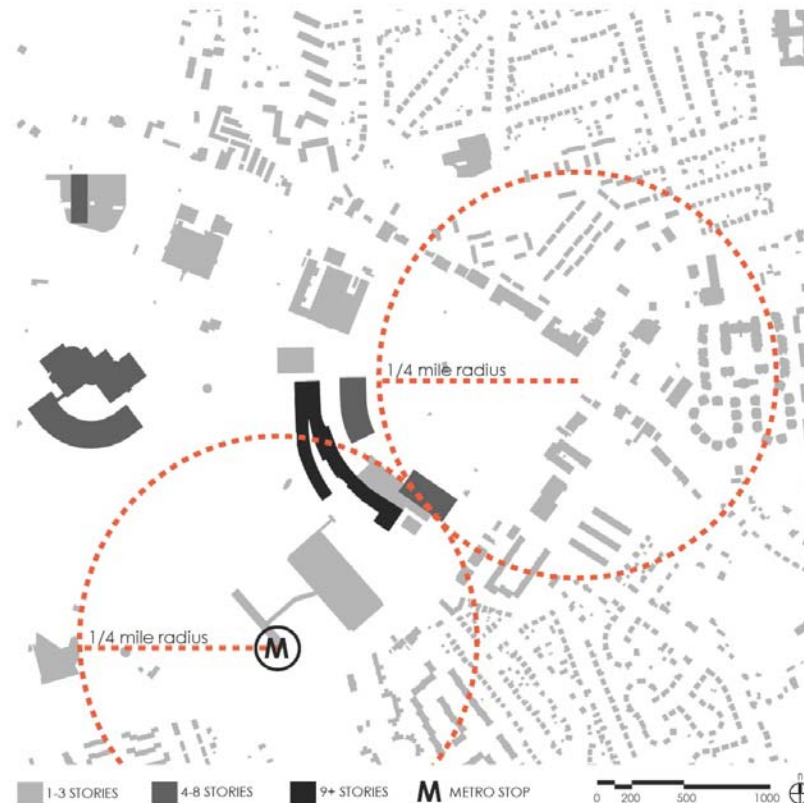


Figure 23: Existing Building Heights Diagram

For most of the buildings in Suitland, the building height outside of the Federal Center is one to three stories. There are a couple of buildings in the Federal Center that are more than three stories high, but only the new Census Headquarters building is higher than three stories tall. There are many multi-family residential buildings, but none are more than three stories high. The presence of a metro stop should signify higher density building types (both residential and office) within the quarter and half mile radius of the metro stop. Building the new town center within the quarter mile radius of the metro appears to require moving the existing metro parking garage. It is also desirable to have the primary retail within walking distance of the metro. New density outside of the

quarter mile walking distance could be serviced by a metro shuttle bus or a shuttle bus provided by the residential developments.

## SOFT SITES FOR DEMOLITION



Figure 24: Potential Buildings to be demolished

In the ideal hypothetical situation, the government will turn over a portion of its land for development in order to institute a change for the better in Suitland. The first phase of the urban intervention is ideally on the Federal Center, due to its proximity to the Suitland Metro. Once the first phase of the urban intervention has become established as a desirable place for people to live, work, and go to school, it is logical that the areas around the former Federal Center will be developed as well (either individually or collectively).

Many of the built structures outside of the Federal Center (and some within the Federal Center) are of poor quality; some are even abandoned. Suitland Road and Silver Hill Road are lined with 1 or 2 story, shoddy strip malls. Almost every strip mall has a church as one of the occupants. Several freestanding churches are clustered near each other at the southern side of Suitland Road after it intersects Silver Hill Road. There are several gas stations and auto service shops (some are currently out of service). There is also a number of Laundromats, car washes, and various clusters of storage sheds that front onto Suitland Road. Some of the apartment buildings and duplexes are in poor condition as well.

The poor quality of these structures makes them expendable. Demolishing some of these buildings will make way for new urban structures that can absorb some of the existing programs while bringing new programs that can create active streets during the day and night. Following are two options for soft sites to be demolished. Option 1 focuses on demolition of the buildings that front Suitland Road and Silver Hill Road. Option 2 eliminates some of the apartments and duplexes beyond the Suitland Road and Silver Hill Road.

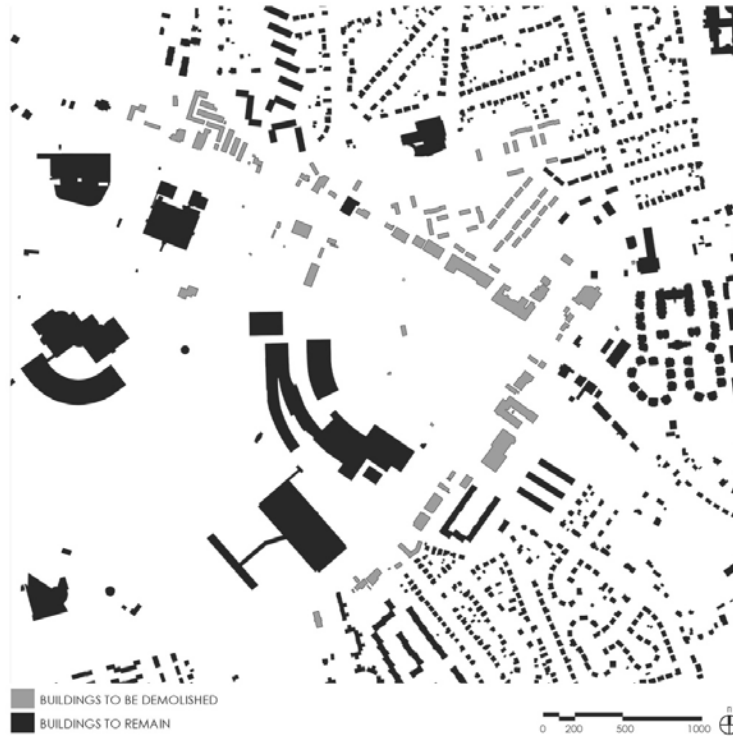


Figure 25: Soft Sites - Option 1

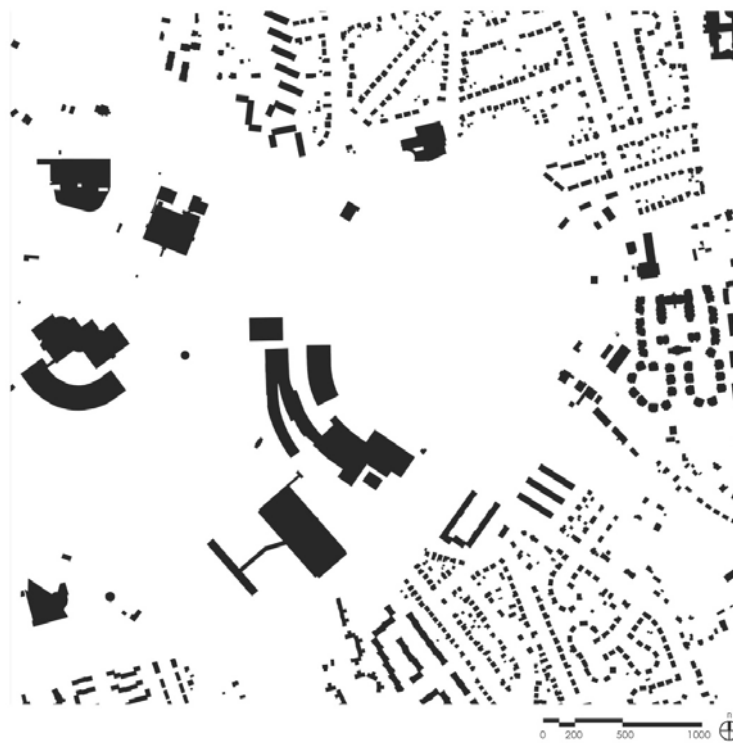


Figure 26: Soft Sites Removed – Option 1



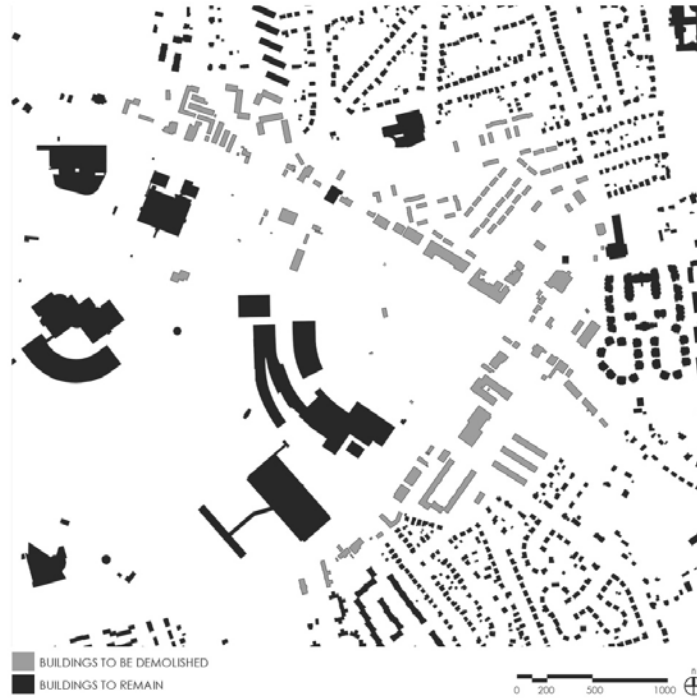


Figure 27: Soft Sites – Option 2

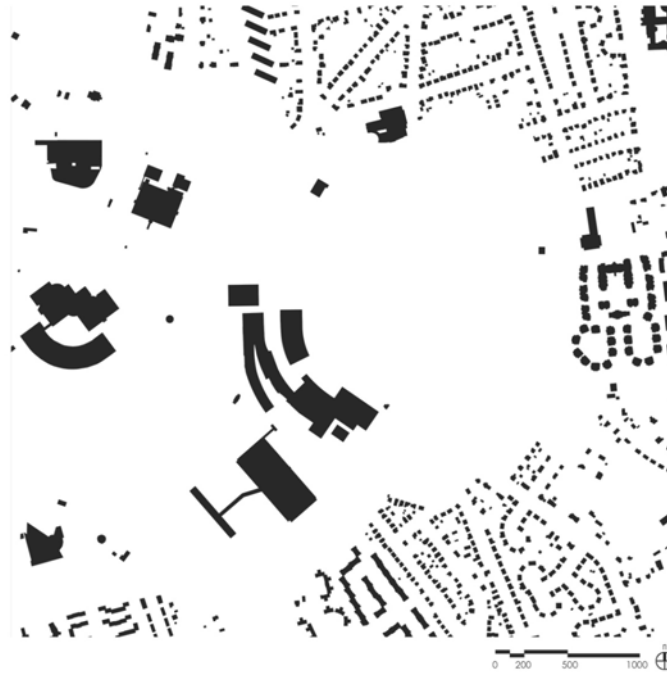


Figure 28: Soft Sites Removed – Option 2

## LAND USE



Figure 29: Existing Land Use Diagram

The current land use surrounding the Suitland Metro stop and the intersection of Suitland Road and Silver hill road is office use. There is currently no mixed use development close to the metro stop. The single story commercial buildings are creating an environment that supports activity during the day and less activity at night. Adding multiple stories of residential use above the commercial along the primary pedestrian roads is likely to increase activity throughout the day and evening. There are a few multi-family residential properties, but none of the apartments are high density. Creating higher density near the metro stop will afford new residence the opportunity to use public transportation as opposed to the automobile.

## PREVIOUSLY PROPOSED URBAN PLAN

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC)

Prince George's County Planning Department released the *Approved Suitland Mixed-Use Town Center Zone Development Plan* in February 2006. The Suitland Mixed-Use Town Center (MUTC) Development Plan establishes a design standard for all future development within the project boundary, along with the new review process for new developments. MNCPPC also re-zoned certain areas in order to encourage development and revitalization in the area. The following images are MNCPPC's maps for the Suitland MUTC boundary, existing zoning, and proposed concept plan. The development encroaches onto the Federal Center property. The concept plan shows Silver Hill Road and the southern side of Suitland Road as primary commercial boulevards.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission Prince George's County Planning Department 2006

## DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the 2000 Census, the total population in Suitland is 33,515.<sup>31</sup> The majority of the population is African American (at 93%).<sup>32</sup> Out of the working age population (16 years or older), 72.6% of individuals are in the labor force leaving almost 30% of individuals in Suitland unemployed.<sup>33</sup> Local job opportunities could potentially increase if Suitland were to develop new retail and offices outside of the Federal Center and Smithsonian facilities. Of those with earnings, the median household income in Suitland is \$41,870. The amount of individuals and families living below the poverty level is 14.8% (total percentage includes individuals, families, and families with female householder, no husband present).<sup>34</sup>

## EDUCATION

Suitland is served by the Prince George's County public school systems. There are also a number of private schools in the immediate area. The public elementary, middle, and high schools are located less than a half mile from the Suitland metro stop. The number of individuals with a high school degree or higher is 85.1%. The number of individuals with a Bachelor's degree or higher is 13.5%.<sup>35</sup> Closing the gap between the percentages of individuals with a high school degree and the percentage of individuals with a bachelor's or at least post-secondary education is one means that is likely to support revitalization of Suitland.<sup>36</sup>

There are several college campuses in the vicinity of the Suitland Metro Stop. The main campus of the Prince George's Community College (PGCC) is in Largo which

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000

<sup>32</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000

is about six and a half miles away from the Suitland metro stop.<sup>37</sup> PGCC has extension campuses in Laurel, Hyattsville, and Andrews Air Force Base. PGCC offers 68 career degree programs and 34 Professional Credentialing Programs.<sup>38</sup> There are other college campuses located within a few miles of the Suitland Metro stop. Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU) is a school that offers undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees in the field of aviation and aerospace. The College of Southern Maryland connected with ERAU to offer a program that will allow students to transfer to ERAU's bachelors, masters, or doctoral program at one of their official campuses.<sup>39</sup> The ERAU campus is located about 3 miles away from Suitland Metro stop at Andrew's Air Force base. Webster University is also located at Andrew's Air Force Base. Webster is part of a network of campuses across the country that is tied to the primary school in St Louis Missouri.<sup>40</sup> The degree programs offered at the Andrew's Air Force Base campus are a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Arts in International Relations.<sup>41</sup> Strayer University also has campus buildings in Prince George's County. Strayer offers a number of undergraduate and graduate degrees in various fields of study.<sup>42</sup> The Prince George's campus is one out of 70 Strayer campuses in the country.<sup>43</sup>

Prince George's Community College offers the widest range of classes and degree opportunities. Other college campuses in the area offer limited opportunities because they are extensions of a primary university that is located somewhere else. Some of the

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<sup>37</sup> Prospective Students: You can do this! n.d.

<sup>38</sup> Prospective Students: Areas of Study n.d.

<sup>39</sup> Embry-Riddle University: Home: The Best Aviation and Aerospace University n.d.

<sup>40</sup> Home: About Webster Home n.d.

<sup>41</sup> Home: National Capital Region Home n.d.

<sup>42</sup> Strayer University: Campus Locations n.d.

<sup>43</sup> Home: Why Strayer n.d.

schools are also very specialized in their degree programs, which is potentially limiting as well.

## HOUSING

There is a variety of housing developments in Suitland. Only about 10% of the total housing in Suitland was built after 1989, meaning that not many new housing units have been built over the past 20 years.<sup>44</sup> There is a variety of housing types represented in Suitland. About 16% of Suitland's housing units are single family houses. Multi-Family housing structures (10-19 units) represents almost 37% of the total housing, and high density (more than 20 units) represents only 7% of the total housing in Suitland. Of all the housing units, only 33.1% are owner occupied versus the 66.9% that are renter occupied.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 30: Images of Residences and Public Buildings in Suitland

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2000

## THEORY

### SMART GROWTH

*Smart Growth* principles were developed as a reaction to the deterioration of American cities, towns, and their central business districts partially resulting from the increase of “sprawl” in American suburbs. The main goal of *Smart Growth* is revitalize cities, towns, and downtowns as a way to improve peoples’ quality of life in several ways. *Smart Growth* principles are environmentally conscience. Public transportation is a key component in creating an accessible downtown. Bringing retail, amenities, and offices to a walkable downtown along with plenty of housing is proven to reduce automobile use. Housing is a priority for a successful downtown. It is also important to provide housing for a range of incomes, as well as institute policies to prevent locals from being displaced due to the rising cost of living. The ten principles of Smart Growth are listed on their official website as follows:<sup>46</sup>

Create Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices

Create Walkable Neighborhoods

Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration

Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place

Make Development Decisions Predictable, Fair, and Cost Effective

Mix Land Uses

Preserve Open Space, Farmland, Natural Beauty and Critical

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<sup>46</sup> Smart Growth Overview n.d.

## Environmental Areas

Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

Strengthen and Direct Development Towards Existing Communities

Take Advantage of Compact Building Design

Suitland is serviced by the metro rail and bus system. The infrastructure for development is in place for increased density. Offices are prevalent on the site, but there is no appropriate retail to support the office users. The offices are currently isolated from the rest of Suitland. Integrating mixed use residential and retail into the Federal Center will afford the opportunity for Suitland to grow as a community.

## URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Many of today's urban design theories are generated from the basic principles of planners, architects, and urban writers such as Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, and Kevin Lynch. Creating a safe and active urban environment is a requirement of successful urban design. Urban design theorists have presented many ideas on how to create this kind of environment. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), urban writer Jane Jacobs criticized some of the theories of her urban design predecessors and proposed new theories on how to design better cities.<sup>47</sup> Jacobs advocated for mixed land use throughout the city as opposed to having separate, isolated land uses. She also said that buildings should have "eyes on the street" so the people inside the buildings can look after the street in the same way that a homeowner would look after their front lawn. Jacobs insinuates that there is safety in numbers. When sidewalks are busy with people, there is a natural surveillance system at work. One way to invite sidewalk activity is to

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<sup>47</sup> Colquhoun 2004, 38



bring quality retail and restaurants to the street fronts that allow activity during various hours of the day and night.<sup>48</sup>

Architect Christopher Alexander offers insight into town planning, architecture, and construction in his 1977 book, *A Pattern Language*.<sup>49</sup> One of Alexander's key points is that the best *places* are created by the people of a neighborhood as opposed to its architects or planners. His book describes basic "patterns" or principles that solve common problems of design in a way that creates the kind of places where people want to live, work, and play.<sup>50</sup> Alexander believes that the ideal size of a town is about 7000 people (between 5000 and 10,000).<sup>51</sup> Each town should have a balanced representation of ages, individuals, and families; each group should have a designated place in a town, as well as places for them to come together.<sup>52</sup> Alexander proposes that within each town it is important to divide communities into subcultures. These subcultures can represent 500 to 1500 people and they should be easily identifiable as separate neighborhoods. City planner and urban theorist Kevin Lynch emphasizes the importance of the "imageability" of cities in his book, *The Image of the City*.<sup>53</sup> Lynch talks about "districts" as a key element of the city.<sup>54</sup> The physical characteristics or theme of each district should be easily perceived by outsiders and locals.<sup>55</sup>

Christopher Alexander defines several "patterns" that address public open space. Each district or neighborhood should have their own central place or "Eccentric

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<sup>48</sup> Colquhoun 2004, 39

<sup>49</sup> Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977

<sup>50</sup> Colquhoun 2004, 64-68

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977, 71

<sup>52</sup> Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977, 139-145

<sup>53</sup> Lynch 1960, 9-12

<sup>54</sup> Lynch 1960, 66-72

<sup>55</sup> Lynch 1960, 66-72

Nucleus”, as Alexander describes it.<sup>56</sup> If the central open space shares an edge with a town hall or other community building, it can be a place for the community to come together. The open space should have active building fronts along the edges. The subculture should also have a “promenade”, which is defined by Alexander as “a place where you can go to see people, and to be seen.”<sup>57</sup> Creating an urban environment with distinct districts that have activated public open spaces is likely to provide an opportunity for a collective community to develop.

Alexander proposes smaller, independent schools that are woven into the community as a way to connect the elementary education system with the community. The school should be integrated into the urban context as follows:

Place the school on a pedestrian street...; near other functioning workshops...and within walking distance of a park. Make it an identifiable part of the building it is part of; and give it a good strong opening at the front, so that it is connected with the street...<sup>58</sup>

The idea of integrating educational buildings into an urban context can be beneficial at all stages of education. A college campus could be conducive to Alexander’s “Shopfront School”<sup>59</sup> concept. Bringing a school system into an urban environment can be beneficial to the students, and it can have a positive influence on the town.

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<sup>56</sup> Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977, 73-74

<sup>57</sup> Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977, 169

<sup>58</sup> Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977, 425

<sup>59</sup> Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977, 420

## **COLLEGE CAMPUS AS CATALYST FOR URBAN REVITALIZATION**

When college campuses are located in an urban context, there is an opportunity to have an effect on the neighboring community. The University of Pennsylvania initiated a successful urban revitalization program at and around their campus in West Philadelphia. The city around the University of Pennsylvania took a turn for the worse in the late 1970's. The economy suffered, students were kept inside after dark, and aside from the students the neighborhood was virtually empty. After a series of violent crimes toward students and faculty, the university took action to embrace and revive the surrounding neighborhood.<sup>60</sup>

There were several facets of the project that happened concurrently in order to create a rapid result. Existing campus buildings were reconfigured to face the city streets as opposed to facing inward toward courtyards and campus streets. The front facing streets created surveillance on the formerly dangerous streets. The college also became a part of the neighborhood. The school also worked with the neighborhood to clean up the area's trash and graffiti. The University of Pennsylvania offered monetary incentives for their employees to purchase houses in the area. They also paid existing homeowners incentives to make improvements to their property. They even built a new elementary public school in order to establish a positive relationship between the university and the neighborhood.<sup>61</sup>

Another key part of the revitalization plan was to pursue appropriate retail. The introduction of an outdoor shopping center, Movie Theater, restaurant and coffee chains, and a 24 hour grocery store have satisfied the retail necessities for the school and for the neighborhood. The variety of retail also creates active streets throughout the day and

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<sup>60</sup> Crane 2004

<sup>61</sup> Crane 2004

night. The cost of living has increased, the college is profiting from some of its investments, and the neighborhood has become a safe and desirable place to live, work, and go to school. This model has been pursued by other universities including the University of Illinois at Chicago.<sup>62</sup>

The University of Massachusetts, Lowell (UML) recently developed a systematic connection with the surrounding neighborhood in order to improve the dire economic situation. Lowell's economy was formerly centered on the textile industry. Most of the mills were closed in the early 1920's. People remained in Lowell and thrived in the computer industry, but since the economic recession of the early 1990's, Lowell has been in decline. UML was originally established to train the locals in the engineering, supervising, and labor aspects of the textile industry.<sup>63</sup> The university that is still housed in the location of the old textile school offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in engineering, science, and business. Now the university is finding ways to give back to the regional economy through various community projects and integration of educational programs with real life problem-solving ventures. For instance, the university has gained the rights of 40 patents from one of the major inventors of plastics. They plan to use those rights to set up training programs in the hundred or so plastic firms and manufacturing facilities in the Lowell region. Professors and engineering schools are contributing to the greater good of the region by designing solar heating systems for new public housing projects. This type of connection to the community goes beyond the physical connection of the campus to its surroundings. The effects of these

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<sup>62</sup> Crane 2004

<sup>63</sup> Forrant 2000

and many other actions by UML are likely to have a lasting social and economic impact on the region.<sup>64</sup>

Introducing an institutional program, such as a community college, to Suitland Maryland could engender physical, social, and economic improvements in the area. Building an institution into the new urban fabric could begin to establish a sense of identity and community in Suitland. An institution could also create the opportunity to unify the Federal Center community with the surrounding neighborhood. The college programs could be linked to the neighboring middle and high school. The programs could also be related to the Government facilities that are housed in the Federal Center. The community college could potentially bring in new students while providing the opportunity for those who grow up in Suitland to go to college in Suitland and get a job at the Federal Center. The presence of a college is also likely to bring density to the area that will activate the streets, which should increase the feeling of safety in the area. New density and retail is also likely to create jobs for the local and incoming community. Incorporating the urban design principles of Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander, and Kevin Lynch with the principles of Smart Growth to capture the value of the Suitland Metro stop will be imperative to the success of the new Suitland development.

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<sup>64</sup> Forrant 2000

## PRECEDENTS

### URBAN DESIGN PRECEDENTS

#### EDINBURGH SCOTLAND

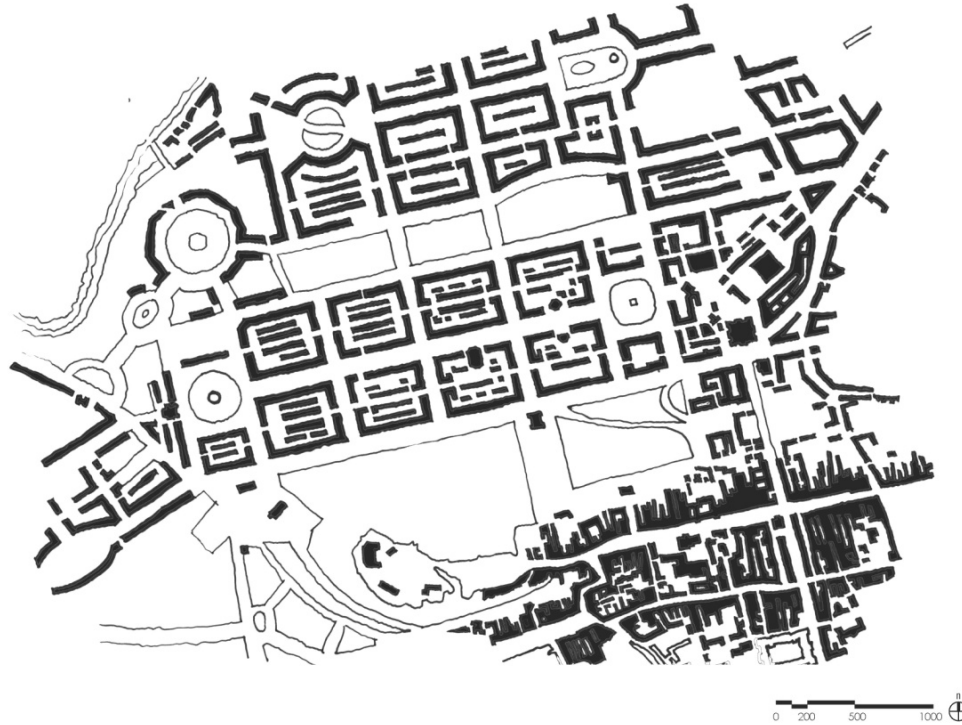


Figure 31: Edinburgh Figure Ground

The old town of Edinburgh, Scotland was built during medieval times. The town emerged between two of the city's oldest buildings –the Castle and Holyrood Palace.<sup>65</sup> The topography of the old town was intense and limiting. The town was built on top of a ridge and the east west street orientation follows the slope of the ridge. The surrounding sides of the town have steep contours, making expansion difficult in most directions.<sup>66</sup> Edinburgh housed a university as early as the sixteenth century.<sup>67</sup> The old town continued to grow until it got too crowded to house its population. Finally they decided to expand across the waterway to the north. They drained the Nor'Loch and built a

<sup>65</sup> The History of Edinburgh n.d.

<sup>66</sup> MacEwen 1975

<sup>67</sup> An Historic Capital, The History of Edinburgh n.d.

bridge across it in order to build more housing across the valley. In 1766 the city held a competition for the urban design of the “New Town” on the north side of the old waterway. James Craig won the competition with his proposition to create three parallel, primary streets that were capped at the east and west with two public squares. The classical, formal characteristics of the New Town provide an interesting contrast to the free form, organic nature of the old town. The valley between the Old and New Town is now occupied by train lines, the train station, and a public park.

The figure ground of Edinburgh in both the Old Town and New Town reveals how formal building frontages can create street hierarchies and conceal irregular elements within blocks. This technique can potentially be used in the Federal Center of Suitland where all of the buildings are objects in the landscape. At Suitland’s Federal Center, there is no apparent grid, orientation, or ordering system for any of the major buildings.

In order to increase the density within a mile of the Suitland Metro stop, the Federal Complex will be encroached by the new urban plan. Bringing the urban fabric into the Federal Center may require lining some of the “object” buildings with programs that can activate streets during a variety of hours throughout the day and night.

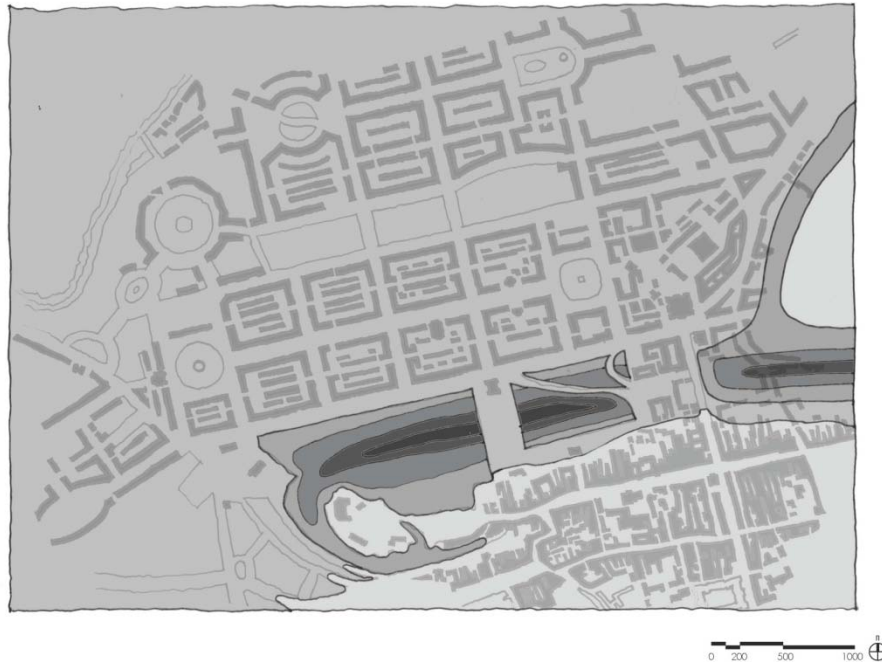


Figure 32: Edinburgh Topography Diagram

There are several lessons that can be extracted from the urban plan of Edinburgh and potentially applied to a new urban plan of Suitland. The unique topography of Edinburgh including the river valley was a divider until they decided to bridge the valley in order to make the necessary connection with the northern side of town. The former river valley has become a transportation hub now that it includes the train station. Suitland Parkway acts as a similar divider. The metro line and Suitland metro station are also following along the valley of the parkway. Currently, the only

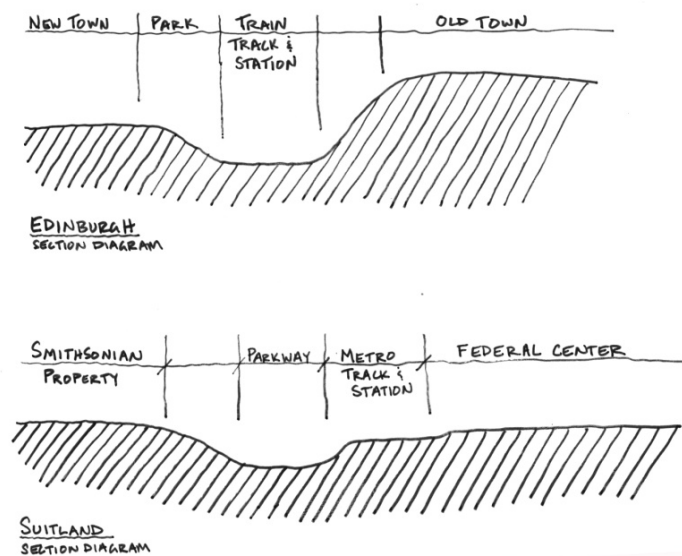


Figure 33: Section Diagrams



crossover “bridge” that connects eastern Suitland to western Suitland is Silver Hill Road. The Federal Center and Smithsonian property are adjacent to a lengthy portion of both sides of the parkway. The position of Suitland Parkway and the metro stop has the similar potential to generate a transportation node and gateway from east to west Suitland and from the landscaped parkway to the new urban district.

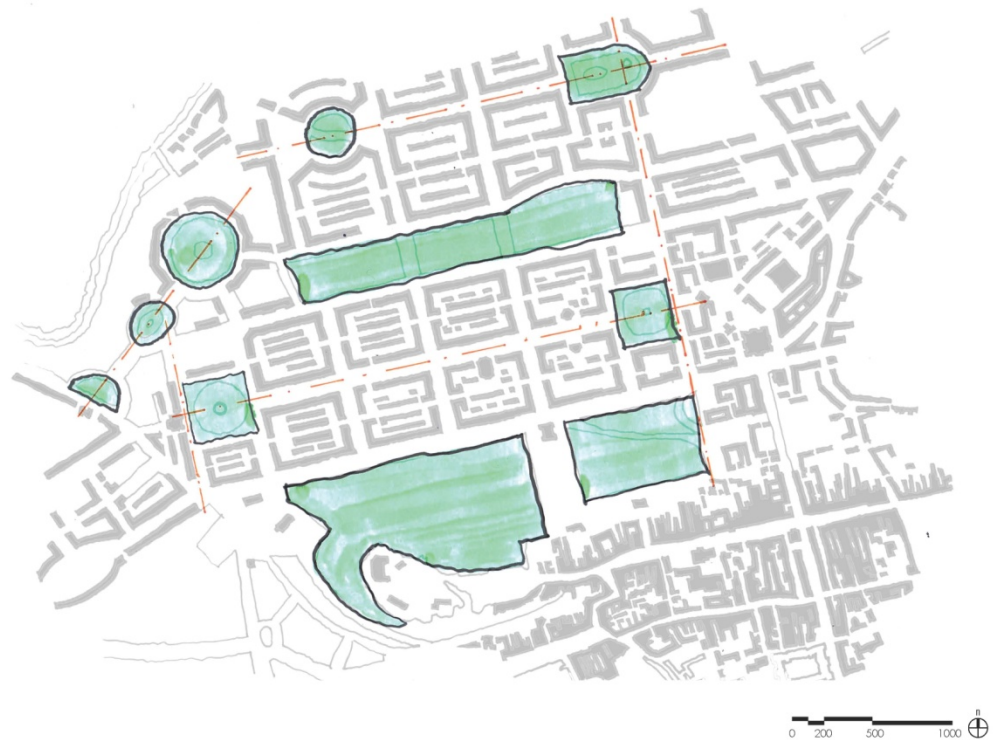


Figure 34: Edinburgh Park/Public Open Space Diagram

The New Town of Edinburgh designed by James Craig is organized by a consistent street grid and a primary axis that runs east west across the length of the town. At each end of the axis there is a 350'x350' public park. There are several parks north of the New Town that are off of the main axis as well, yet they still connect back to the two central parks. The green space along the north side of the train track has also been converted to an active public park (see Fig 43).



Figure 35: Edinburgh Overlaid on Figure Ground of Suitland, Maryland

The variety in size, shape, formality, activity, and character of the public parks in Edinburgh can provide the framework for planning public open space in Suitland, Maryland. The topography in Suitland lends itself to a degree of variety in the urban plan. Suitland already contains several designated parks that are primarily dense wooded areas that are not well connected to the existing street network. Connecting the natural wooded areas (see image on following page) with a series of formal, public parks and plazas is likely to create a network of diverse nodes of activity that overlap with each other. The distinct character of each node is likely to attract a diverse group of users to live, work, or play in Suitland.

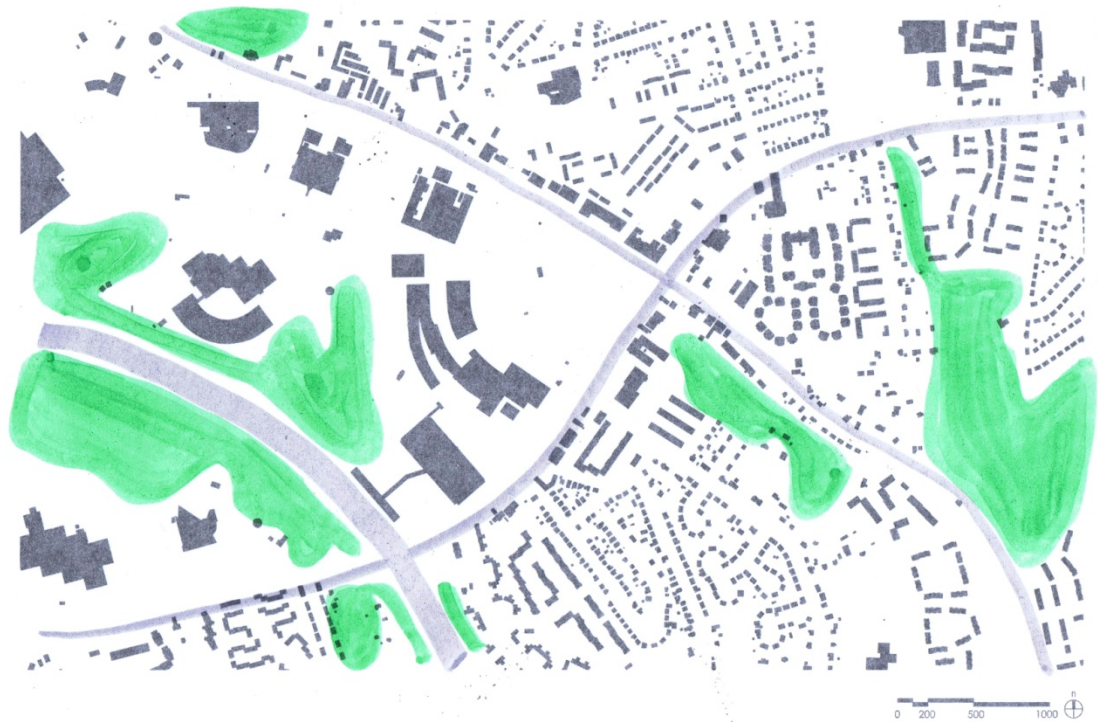


Figure 36: Existing Dense Wooded Areas in Suitland

## SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

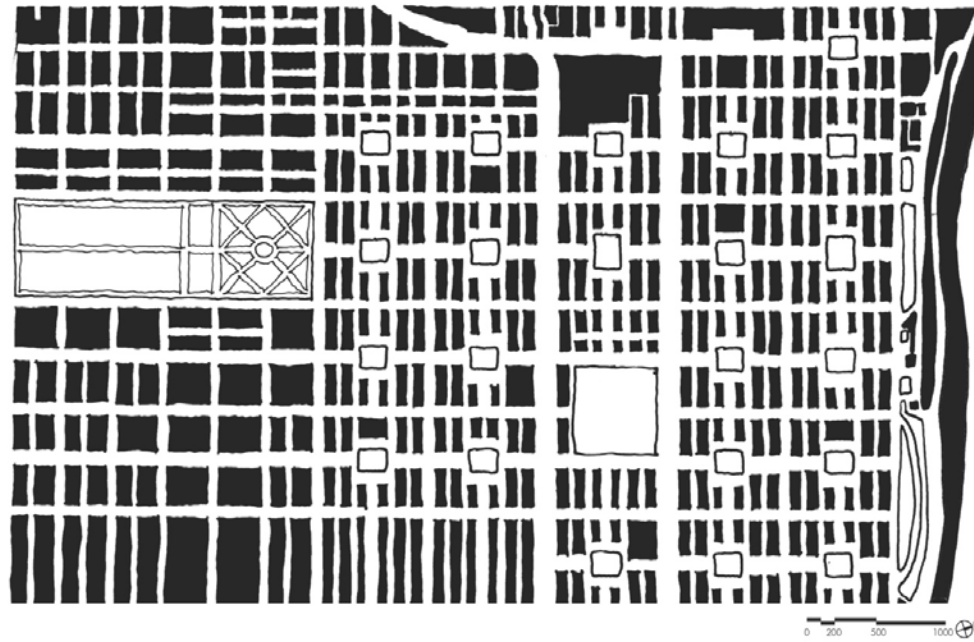


Figure 37: Savannah Figure Ground

Savannah was founded in 1733 by James Edward Oglethorpe.<sup>68</sup> The city was originally designed as a new type of agricultural town in which the homes of the farmers were separated from their fields. The regular street layout includes a pattern of public open spaces along main arterial routes. When the city began to grow, they continued Oglethorpe's street and plaza pattern. This utopian city has been able to absorb societal, architectural, and economical changes over the centuries.

The figure ground of Savannah highlights the variety of block sizes within the moderately rigid grid. The field of the grid changes direction in certain areas while the primary and secondary streets remain intact. The buildings are positioned so that the major thoroughfares are oriented to the river (toward the north).

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<sup>68</sup> Stevenson 1951

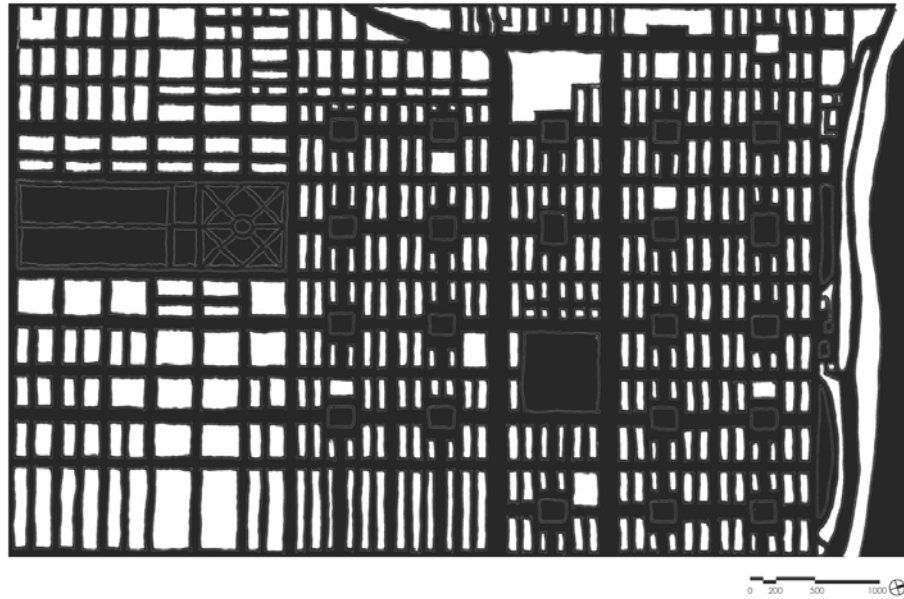


Figure 38: Savannah Figure Ground Reversal

There is a clear street hierarchy in Savannah's urban grid. Several streets are significantly wider and are unobstructed by parks. These types of streets are important in order for higher volumes of traffic to move at a higher speed than the smaller streets. There are secondary streets that are slightly smaller than the primary streets. These streets run through the middle and along sides of each macro block. The macro block is broken down by tertiary streets or alleys.



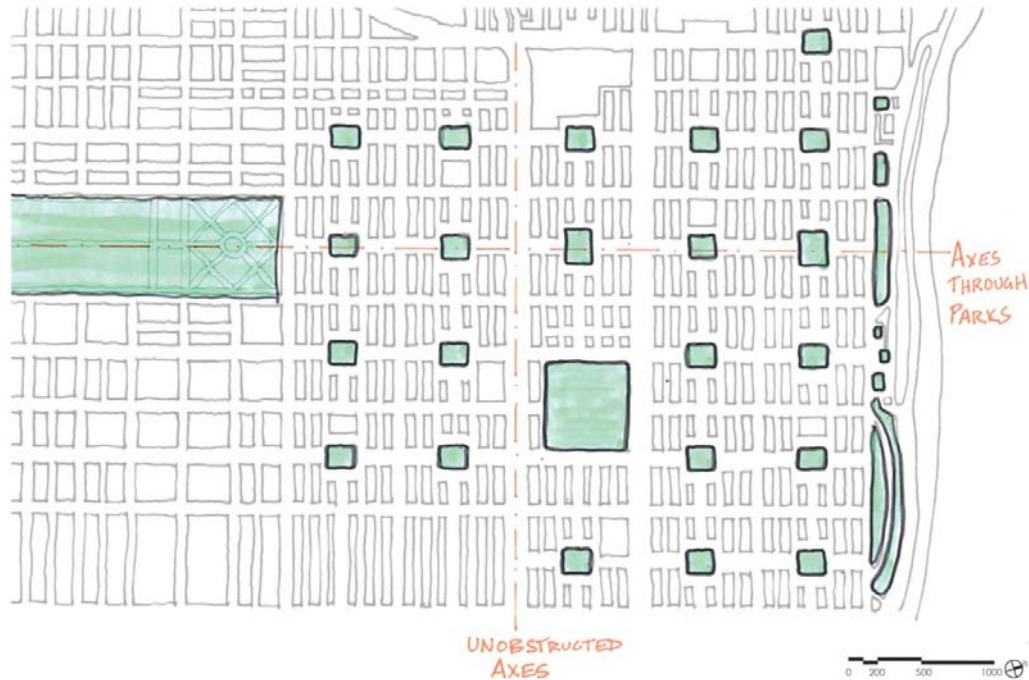


Figure 39: Savannah Park Diagram

One of Savannah’s interesting features is the regular pattern of parks throughout the city. There are several parks that are larger than the typical park size. Creating parks at the center of each macro block allows each block to have a central open space. The parks are also on axis with each other, so although each park serves as a “center”, they are ultimately part of a network.

Some of the parks are on axis with the secondary roads, while the primary roads are uninterrupted by parks. The position of the parks will have an impact on the automobile and pedestrian experience. The automobile traffic is likely to slow down as a result of the parks (which ultimately become traffic circles). Pedestrians can choose between the experience of walking on a street with or without parks.



Figure 40: Diagram of a Savannah Macro Block



Figure 41: Edinburgh Overlaid on Figure Ground of Suitland, Maryland

There are several lessons from Savannah's urban design that can be applied to Suitland as a way to improve the existing urban condition. The variety in block shapes and sizes allow a number of programs and building types to infiltrate the area over time. A clear street hierarchy can be reinforced by the building fabric and through public open spaces. Parks can be incorporated into the urban plan as a network. Each park can be uniquely expressed while the network of parks work together to form a whole.

## CAMPUS PRECEDENT – SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN



Figure 42: Savannah College of Art and Design (Campus buildings in poche)

Savannah College of Art and Design opened in 1979.<sup>69</sup> The university buildings are dispersed across the historic city of Savannah, Georgia. Savannah College of Art and Design has restored and/or occupied about 40 buildings throughout the city.<sup>70</sup> The integration of the campus into the urban fabric is facilitated by the distinct organization of Savannah's city blocks. Oglethorpe's versatile city plan allows the college campus buildings to become seamlessly absorbed into the urban fabric of Savannah.

The university chose to take advantage of the school's historic location by housing the school facilities in historic buildings. Through adaptive reuse and historic restoration, the school has developed a campus that supports the preservation of the city while bringing a new life to the community. Implementing a similar type of dispersed campus into the Suitland urban plan will afford the opportunity to establish a group of

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<sup>69</sup> Visit SCAD n.d.

<sup>70</sup> Visit SCAD n.d.



users throughout the new development. Dispersing the campus buildings is likely to bring density, economy, and activity to different areas of the urban development as opposed to concentrating the campus in general location. Some of the proposed public open spaces can be utilized by the university as well as by the public. Providing the public forums will hopefully bring the user groups (the Suitland community, the Federal Center employees, and the new students) together physically and socially in order to foster the development of a community.

## ARCHITECTURAL PRECEDENT – POLEENI CIVIC CENTER



Figure 43: Poleeni Civic Center Site Plan

The Poleeni Civic Center was designed by Kristian Gullichsen for the town of Pieksamaki, Finland in 1989. The Civic Center houses a library (an adult library and a children's library) as well as an auditorium. The different programs within the building allow people of the community to come together under one roof, affording the opportunity for neighborhood interaction.<sup>71</sup>

The Civic Center is part of the urban fabric because it is aligned with the surrounding buildings along the street. The building also serves as a transitional element between urbanity and the park and lake beyond. The park side of the building is sculpted to conform to the natural elements of the park while the urban side of the building is parallel to the street.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Brandolini 2000

<sup>72</sup> Brandolini 2000

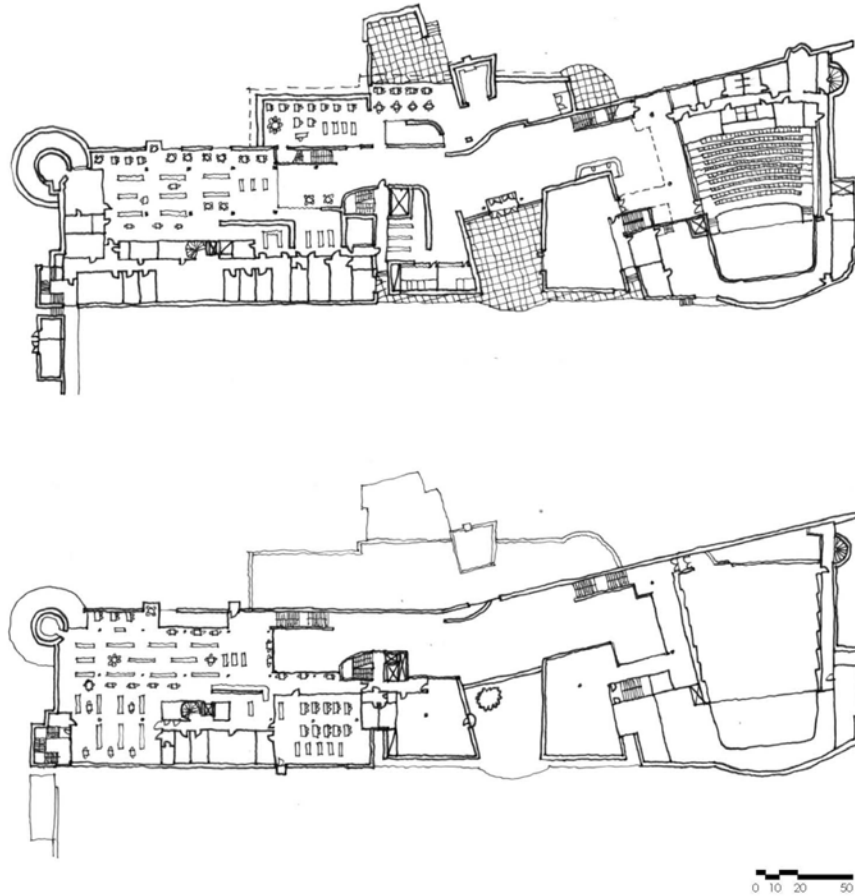


Figure 44: Poleeni Civic Center Floor Plans

The first floor of the Civic Center (upper plan) includes a 350 seat auditorium, offices, and part of the library. There is also a small room near the entrance that has a fireplace and benches for people who enter from the cold winter weather to sit and remove their shoes and jackets by the fire. The primary reading areas are located on the park side of the building, while the offices are on the street side. Some of the reading tables spill outside onto the terrace that directly faces the lake. The auditorium and the library are on opposite sides of the building. They are connected by a central community gathering area.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Brandolini 2000

The library continues on the second floor (lower plan). The second floor also has a classroom and more offices. The cylindrical element on the corner of the building is a children's reading area. Its shape represents a medieval tower in order to inspire the children's imaginations.<sup>74</sup>

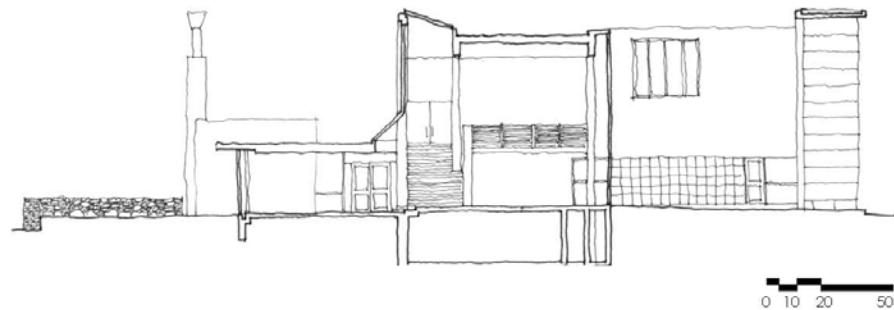


Figure 45: Poleeni Civic Center Section

The section through the main entrance and the terrace reveals the sculptural differences between the park side and the urban side of the building. The urban side (right side of image) is somewhat rigid and not very porous, but the building opens up toward the park side with large expanses of glazing. The terrace extends the building out into the park so the users can be both in the park and yet still engaged with the building. The chimney beyond is a reminder of the fireplace inside – a feature that is meant to make the users feel like they are at home away from home.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Brandolini 2000

<sup>75</sup> Brandolini 2000

The Civic Center is a building that responds to the needs of the community while respecting the site and context in which it is built. Providing one roof for individuals to gather can afford the opportunity to develop a unified neighborhood. The design of the building celebrates the dynamic qualities of the site, including the park and the lake beyond. Several programmatic and design elements of the Civic Center can be applied to a new university/community building in Suitland Maryland. Suitland would benefit from a building that can be used by a university, the Federal Center, and the community. Designing a building that engages the different elements of the site is likely to enhance the users' appreciation of Suitland's unique qualities.

## **PROGRAM**

### **URBAN OBJECTIVES**

The primary objective of the urban design is to establish a mixed use development that is supported by Suitland metro stop while introducing a community college. Dense housing, retail, and office programs will be incorporated into the proposed plan. Some retail will be directed toward the potential student community that will be living or commuting to the campus facilities. Alternative retail will be geared toward the residents of Suitland, as well as the GSA employees from the Federal Center.

The urban design intervention will penetrate the Federal Center property in an attempt to break down the barrier that keeps the rest of the community at bay. The new urban fabric will also attempt to address the scale of the Federal Center buildings. Some of the Federal buildings may be removed and redistributed to become part of the urban fabric.

The campus facilities will be integrated into the urban fabric, therefore, portions of the land need to be sold to the university. The government can require that a percentage of their land that will be developed must be sold to the university. As for the other properties to be developed, subsidies or rewards can be offered to developers who give 1 or 2 floors of their buildings to the college. Also, incentives will be offered to developers to provide public parks or plazas. Developers will be required to secure that a percentage of their retail space will be appropriate for the college community.

Ideally, the college will be systematically integrated with the Prince George's County public school system and the Federal Center Organizations. One option is that Suitland High School can offer classes that are geared toward the programs offered at the local university. Another option is that GSA employees can offer training programs or

teach classes at the university that are necessary to acquire a government job (specifically a job at the Federal Center). The university can, therefore, provide opportunities for their students to obtain internships at the Federal Center. The institution could be an extension of a larger university system that specializes in relevant degree programs that relate to the contribution of the region. If the public school system and the Federal Center organizations are linked to the new college in Suitland, there is a greater opportunity to form a solid community and neighborhood.

## **ARCHITECTURAL PROGRAM**

This thesis will explore a multifunctional facility that is primarily for the university but is also programmed to be used by the Federal Center and the general community of Suitland. The university program will include an auditorium, a multipurpose room, several classrooms, and administrative offices. The facility will also have a library that will be accessible to the community. The auditorium, multipurpose room, and classrooms will be accessible to the Federal Center and the community for scheduled events. Retail will also be incorporated into the facility in order to encourage activity along its street front during different times of the day.

- 350 person Auditorium 6000s.f.
- Library 8,000 s.f.
- Multipurpose Room 3,000 s.f.
- 4 Classrooms 300 - 500s.f. per unit
- 10 Offices 150 s.f. per office
- Reception Area 500 s.f.
- Retail
  - Restaurant/Café 1600 - 1800s.f.
  - Retail Units



## DESIGN APPROACH

### DIAGRAM ONE – FEDERAL CENTER MALL CONNECTED TO PUBLIC MALL BY “MAIN STREET”

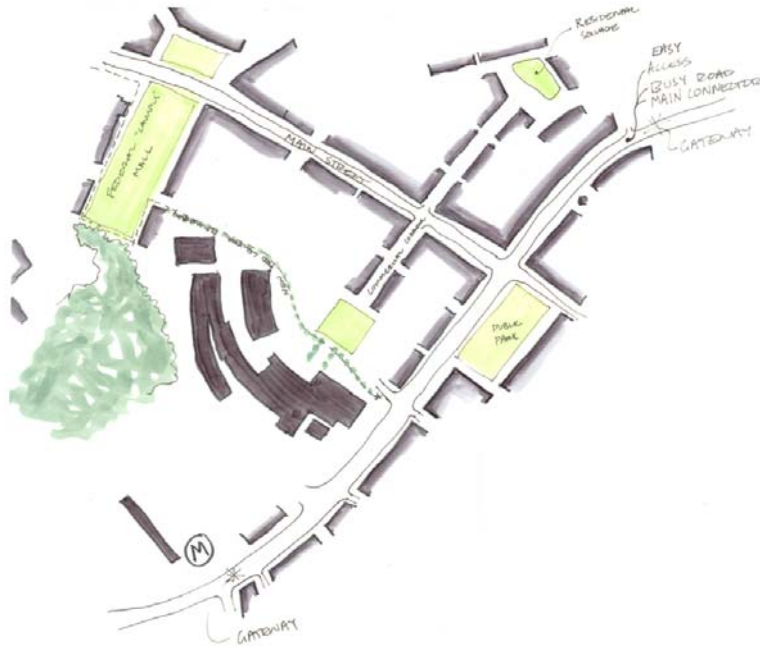


Figure 46: Diagram 1 – Federal Center Mall and Public Open Space Connected By Main Street

Creating a campus type mall for the Federal Center provides an organizing element within the existing vast dispersment of object buildings. A public open space occurs along the intersection of Suitland Road and Silver Hill Road, where most of the pedestrian traffic will be coming from the metro. A new “Main Street” connects the Federal Center mall and the public open space. Perpendicular to Suitland Road is a smaller cross street that will have some commercial on the east side of Suitland Road. Increased housing density is dispersed throughout new urban fabric.



### DIAGRAM THREE – PUBLIC MALL AS CONNECTOR BETWEEN FEDERAL CENTER AND CITY

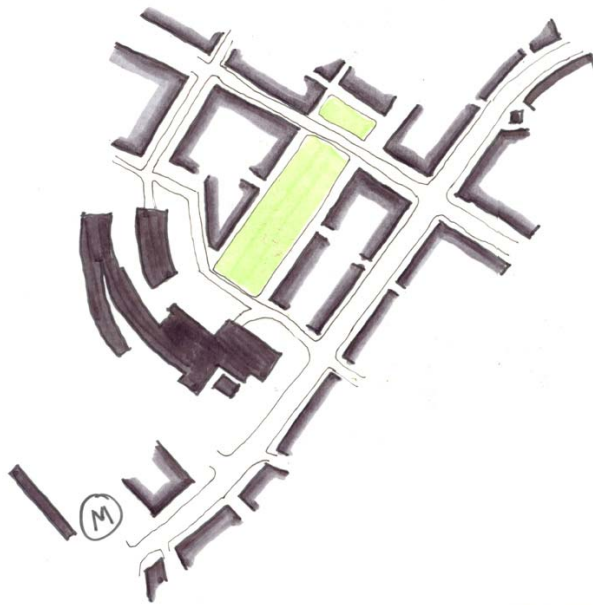


Figure 48: Diagram 3 – Public Mall as Connector between Federal Center and City

A public mall is introduced as a connector between the Federal Center and the city. Silver Hill Road acts as the “Main Street”, but there is commercial activity along the edges of the new mall. Integrated campus program would line the mall as well.

## DIAGRAM FOUR – PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AT INTERSECTION OF MAIN COMMERCIAL STREETS

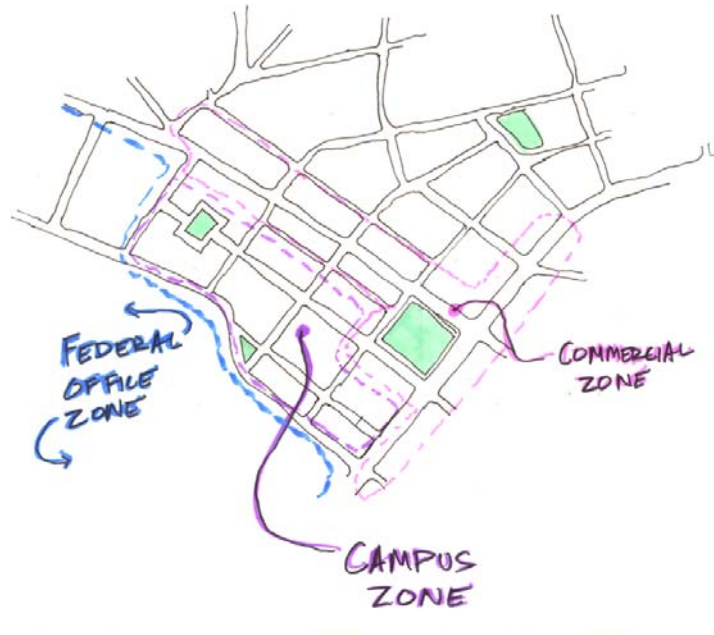


Figure 49: Diagram 4 – Public Open Space at Intersection of Commercial Streets

In this scheme, Silver Hill Road and Suitland Road are both lined with commercial on the ground floor. The public open space occurs at the intersection of these two streets. Smaller open spaces are introduced to serve as smaller residential parks and open space for the university.

**DIAGRAM FIVE – SMALLER PUBLIC OPEN SPACES DISPURSED  
THROUGHOUT URBAN DEVELOPMENT**



Figure 50: Diagram 5 – Small Residential Squares throughout urban plan with one public traffic square

This diagram was generated from the precedents of Savannah and Edinburgh.

The series of smaller open spaces as opposed to one large, central open space is meant to create dense nodes of activity that can overlap due to the proximity of the squares.

## URBAN DESIGN SCHEME 1



Figure 51: Urban Intervention Option 1

The first intervention is derived from Diagram 1. The parti includes two major public spaces that are connected by the new “Main Street” and two minor public spaces that are on the cross axis from “Main Street”. The character of the secondary “Main Street” will serve as a connector between the Federal Center and the rest of the City, while the primary “Main Street will act as the main boulevard of retail and residential development. A distinct gateway will be present on the primary roads at the extents of the new development.

## URBAN DESIGN SCHEME 2



Figure 52: Urban Intervention Option 2

The second urban intervention scheme is based off of Diagram 5. Suitland Road becomes the gateway road as you approach the new city center from the north. Silver Hill Road (which stretches from the SW corner of the Suitland Metro to the NE side of Suitland where it intersects with Pennsylvania Ave) serves as a “Main Street” in addition to the Suitland Road “Main Street.” The similarly sized public open spaces are dispersed throughout the city. There is a slightly larger public open space at the intersection of the two “Main Streets”.



## **CONCLUSION**

The objective of this thesis was to instigate social change in Suitland, Maryland by creating a mixed use downtown. In attempting to create a cohesive, connected, community, the new downtown provides the following new programs: a town center, a retail street, housing, office space, a variety of public open spaces, and a new community college. A number of existing assets provide the opportunity for extensive new development and its success. The new downtown's urban design addresses the opportunities and liabilities of the site. The opportunities include the following: 1) the presence of the Suitland Metro station; 2) the proximity of institutions particularly several public schools; 3) existing landscape features; 4) a Federal Center employing 10,000 people and a large piece of property that occupies an entire quadrant of Suitland's historic and primary retail intersection.

The presence of the Suitland Metro station provides Suitland with an opportunity to create a comparatively dense and pedestrian oriented mixed use environment. This can be accomplished using the Transit Oriented Development model. Currently the metro primarily serves the Federal Center. Secondarily it serves as a commuter stop servicing primarily Washington DC and the greater metropolitan region. The 3,000 car parking garage adjacent to the metro supports the secondary function and signifies the auto centric function of the metro station. The liabilities are 1) at present there is no pedestrian connection to the surrounding residential environment; 2) the distance from the metro to the main retail intersection is considerable; 3) the location of the metro parking garage stands in the way of making good pedestrian connections. The urban design solution is to redesign the parking garage to create direct pedestrian connection to



the new public realm. Additionally, a new community college is located immediately adjacent to the metro station.

Currently the existence of a large, minimally developed property under single ownership that occupies a quadrant of Suitland's main intersection provides a unique opportunity to develop a new downtown. Currently, the liability is that the Federal property is fenced off and there is no physical or social relationship to the surrounding environment. The underlying assumption is that this property will be made available by the government for development of the proposed mixed use downtown.

The potential asset of the over 10,000 government employees is currently denied by lack of connection to the surrounding area. The large, irregularly shaped office buildings bear no relationship to the surrounding context. The new development will provide the opportunity to mediate between the large scale of the office buildings and the two to three stories retail and residential.

The institutional assets of the area are the three public schools serving elementary, middle, and high school all within easy walking distance of the proposed site. These schools are also an asset because they have an 86% graduation rate and its highly regarded magnet program for the arts. Incoming residents of Suitland's new downtown will be drawn to the opportunity for their children to be able to walk to good public schools from many of the new housing developments. The design for the new downtown proposes a connection from the existing public schools to the new community college and the Census Bureau Headquarters – one of the primary office buildings on the Federal

property. The intent is that the physical connections between these institutions will inspire social connections on different levels.

There are three landscape assets in the area: 1) Suitland Parkway; 2) densely wooded areas surrounding streambeds; and 3) the distinctive Suitland Bog. Suitland Parkway has always maintained its character as a park/way. Winding through the beautiful tree-lined parkway is a sharp contrast to many of the other parkways of the region. Several densely wooded areas penetrate the Federal Center and surrounding suburban developments. Suitland Bog is located less than a mile from the proposed development site, and it is one of the only bogs in the D.C. metropolitan area. Establishing stronger relationships between the landscapes themselves and integrating them with the public spaces of the downtown can contribute to the overall quality of the environment.

Incorporating iconic public spaces, a retail street, community college, offices, and housing into a mixed use downtown development is likely to change Suitland's current image and become a place where people want to live and work. Establishing connections between new and existing streets, institutions, and landscape features provide opportunities to create the kind of social connections that can turn this area around for the better. Approximately 14 urban design alternatives were explored and developed in order to find the best way to discover the most optimum design solution. The final urban scheme provided the highest level of integration of the various solutions.

The public presentation of the Suitland Town Center was well received and provided an opportunity wide-ranging discussion. Positive comments included

recognition of the fact that the thesis objective was appropriate to the site and worthy of the research and design effort, the thoroughness of the process, and the development of the final design scheme. There was a positive reaction to the bold concept of capitalizing the existing Federal property. The quality of the verbal presentation and graphic presentation were commended.

There were some discussion regarding the number and location of the public spaces. Some reviewers thought that the College Walk might compete with the Suitland Town Center. Other members thought the two adjacent spaces complimented each other. There were also some suggestions about what could have been developed further, on phasing, and “next steps”. Several reviewers suggested a further study of the architecture would be helpful in understanding and defining the desired character of the new development. The alternate point of view was that designing the architecture of the intervention could make the development too homogenized. Presenting more examples of Design Guidelines may have provided a clearer definition of the desired architectural characteristics. One particular concern was that the first phase of development was too ambitious. It was suggested that creating a smaller first phase could provide developers with the ability to test the town center concept with lower investment risk.

The general consensus of the reviewers was that the analysis, design process, final solution was successful in addressing the goals of the thesis and the many problems and opportunities that emerged. It was recommended that the thesis proposal be made public. Presentations could be made to GSA, the Prince George’s County Planning Board, and the residents of Suitland. Public awareness could instigate a change in concert with the objectives of this thesis.

## URBAN DESIGN ITERATIONS



Figure 53: Intervention Option 3 Figure Ground



Figure 54: Intervention Option 3 Illustrative Plan



Figure 55: Intervention Option 4 Figure Ground



Figure 56: Intervention Option 4 Illustrative Plan





Figure 57: Intervention Option 5 Figure Ground



Figure 58: Intervention Option 5 Illustrative Plan



Figure 59: Intervention Option 6 “Mall on the Grove”



Figure 60: View of Residential Park



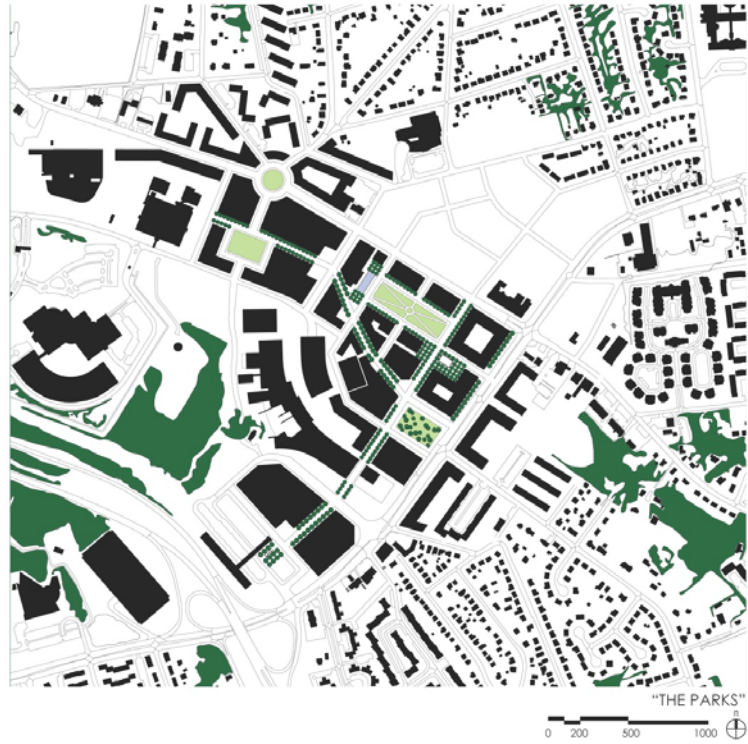


Figure 61: Intervention Option 7 “The Parks”



Figure 62: View of Mall



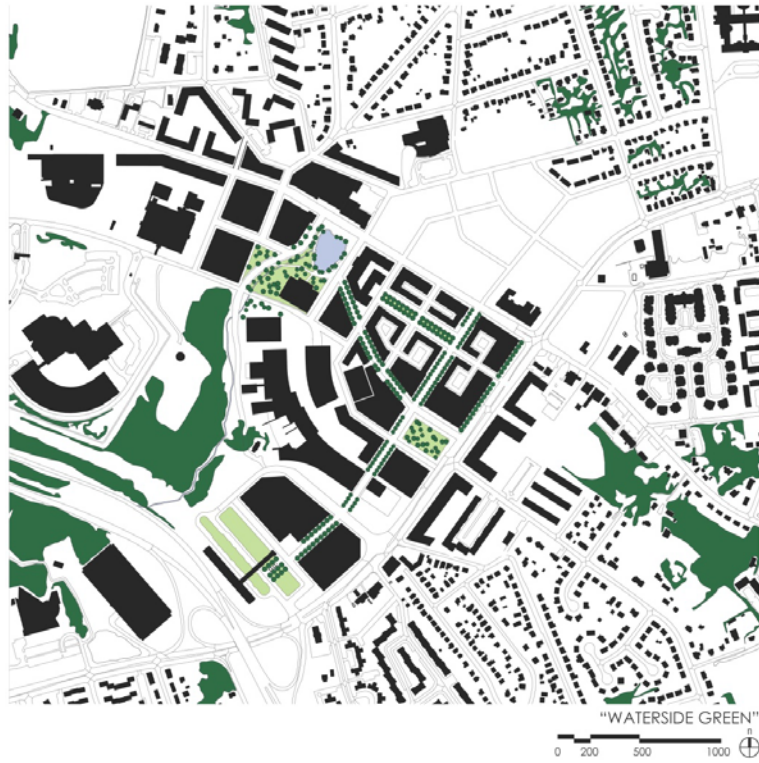


Figure 63: Intervention Option 8 “Waterside Green”



Figure 64: View of Lake

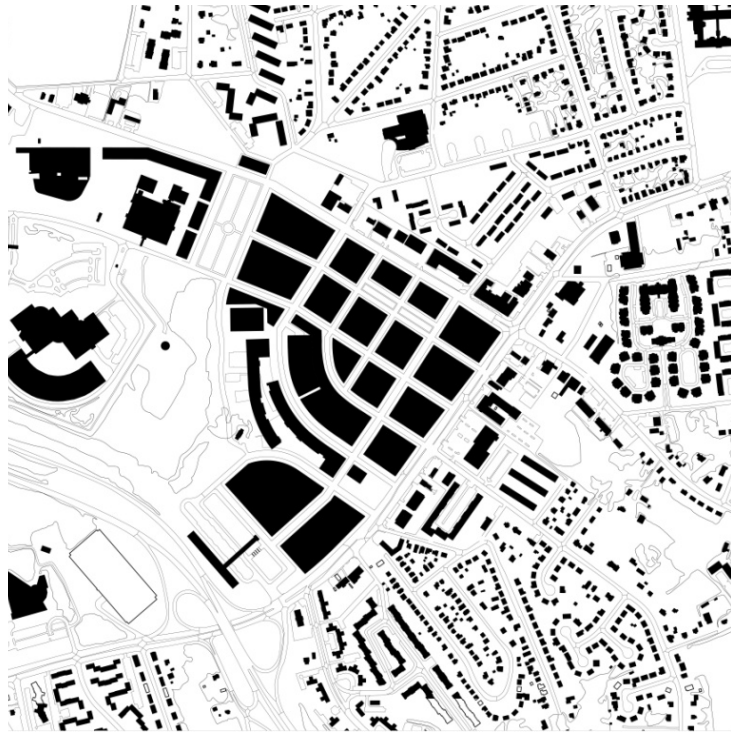


Figure 65: Intervention Option 9a Figure Ground



Figure 66: Intervention Option 9b Figure Ground



Figure 67: Intervention Option 10a Figure Ground



Figure 68: Intervention Option 10b Figure Ground

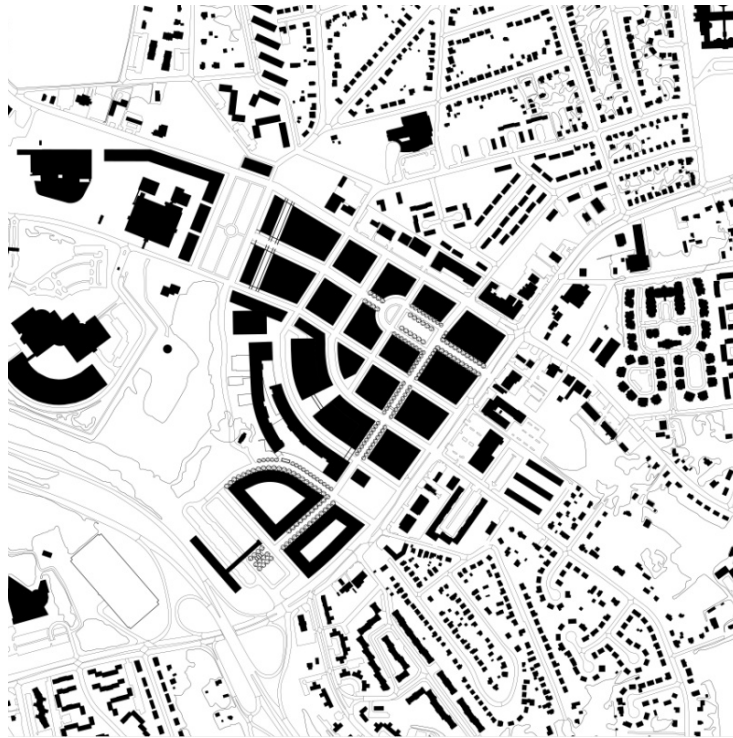


Figure 69: Intervention Option 11 Figure Ground



Figure 70: Intervention Option 12 Figure Ground





Figure 71: Intervention Option 13 Figure Ground



Figure 72: Intervention Option 13 Illustrative Plan



Figure 73: Intervention Option 14 Figure Ground

## DIAGRAMS OF FINAL SCHEME



Figure 74 and 86: Proposed Primary and Secondary Street Connections

In the final scheme, several new primary roads were designed on the current Federal property. These roads break up the superblock of the Federal center by connecting existing roads. These roads also connect the new public open spaces. Secondary streets create manageable block sizes while engaging existing streets. Creating a major public space within a quarter mile of the Suitland Metro required the demolition and re-location of the metro parking garage and one of the Census Bureau parking garages. The metro garage will become an underground parking garage underneath the new community college facilities. The Census Bureau garage will move north within a new urban block.

The new streets will become alternates for automobile traffic while remaining pedestrian friendly. Pedestrian access to the metro from the north, east, and south will filter through the new urban development, bolstering retail and activity along the way to the metro.



Figure 75 and 88: Existing and Proposed Institutional Property

The Suitland Metro in relationship to the Census Bureau Headquarters is accessible and pedestrian friendly, however, the vast area of the Federal property creates a barrier to the metro for a portion of Suitland residents. Breaking apart the area of the Federal property will allow people to filter more easily to the Suitland Metro.

The proximity of Suitland's public elementary, middle, and high schools to the new development is a major asset. Creating a physical connection from the public schools to the new community college (adjacent to metro and Federal Center) will afford students the opportunity to relate the benefits of attending secondary education to establishing a career (exemplified in the Federal offices). Physical ties between the public schools and the community college could lead to programmatic connections as well. Local residents may also benefit from a sense of identity and ownership over their having their own community college.



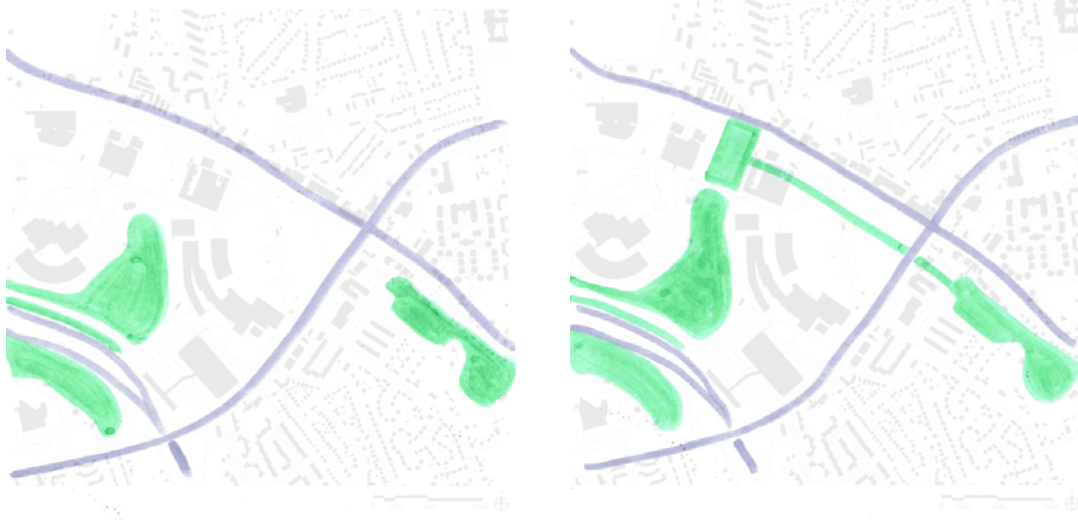


Figure 76 and 90: Existing and Proposed Landscape Connection

Suitland Parkway is an asset to this area because it is well-maintained. There are several wooded areas that branch off from the parkway that could become an asset to Suitland as well. A new park will serve as a primary connection from the suburban/urban development along Suitland Road to the natural landscape of the parkway. Creating a connection to different natural features across the site will also emphasize the importance of these resources. The residential park will be connected to the parkway as the woods become its fourth edge, and a tree-lined boulevard will connect the park to another wooded stream valley to the southwest.

## FINAL DESIGN DRAWINGS

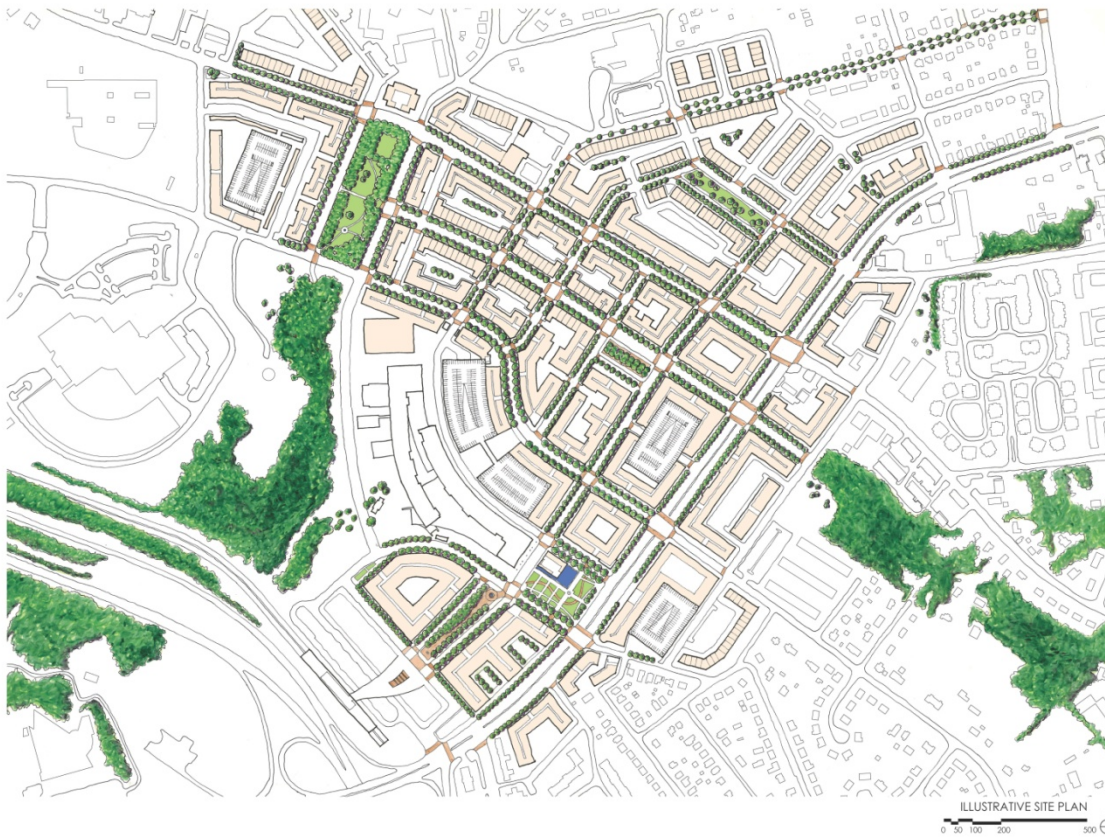


Figure 77: Illustrative Site Plan

The urban intervention consists of a series of public open spaces that are connected by new and existing streets. The primary public space is “Suitland Town Center” which is located within a quarter mile of the Suitland Metro Station. Community College facilities are located adjacent to the metro stop. Additional housing and office density provides opportunity for growth and revitalization of the area.



Figure 78: Parti Diagram



Figure 79: Proposed Aerial Perspective





Figure 80: Proposed Figure Ground



Figure 81: Proposed Intervention

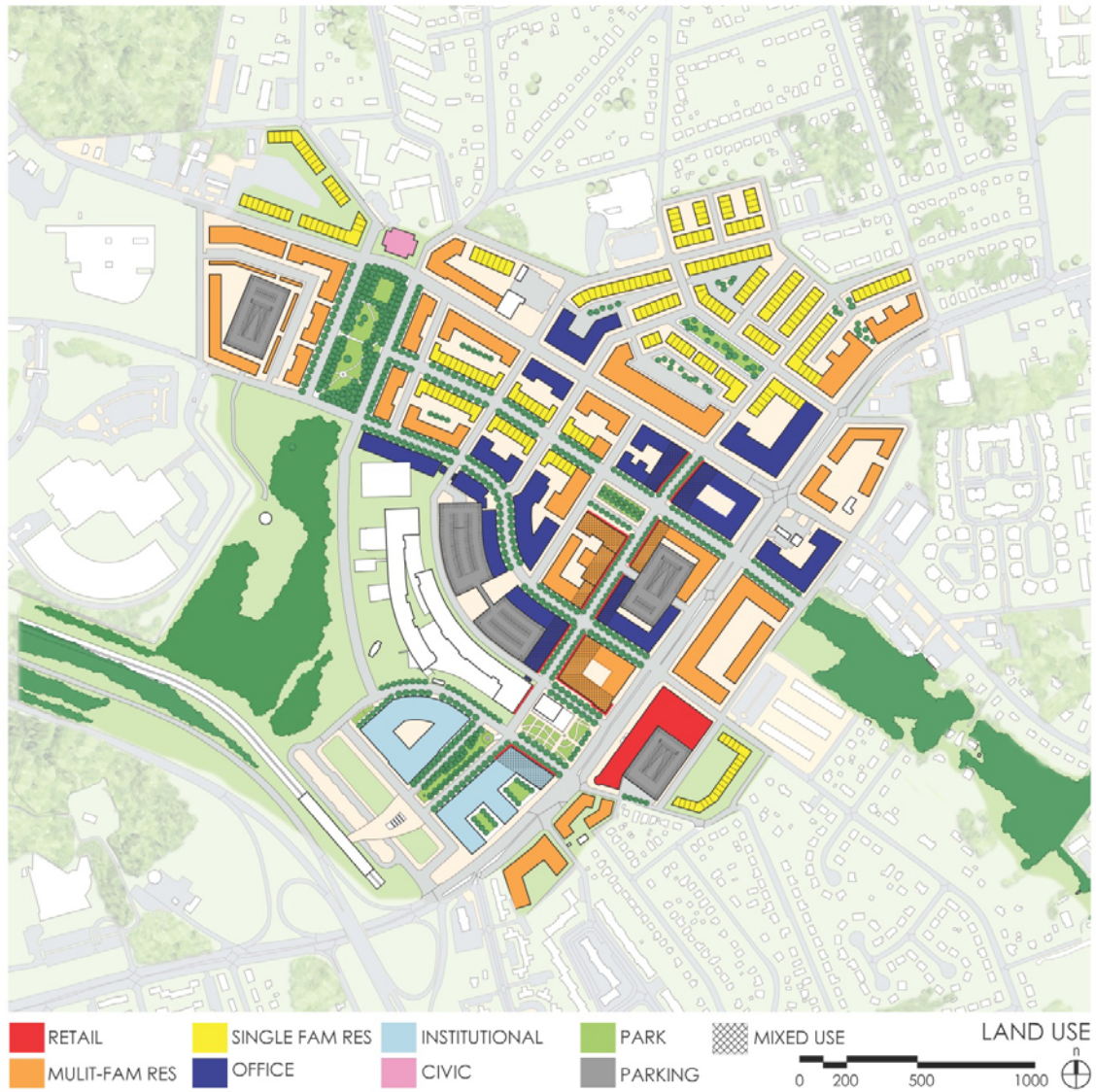


Figure 82: Proposed Land Use



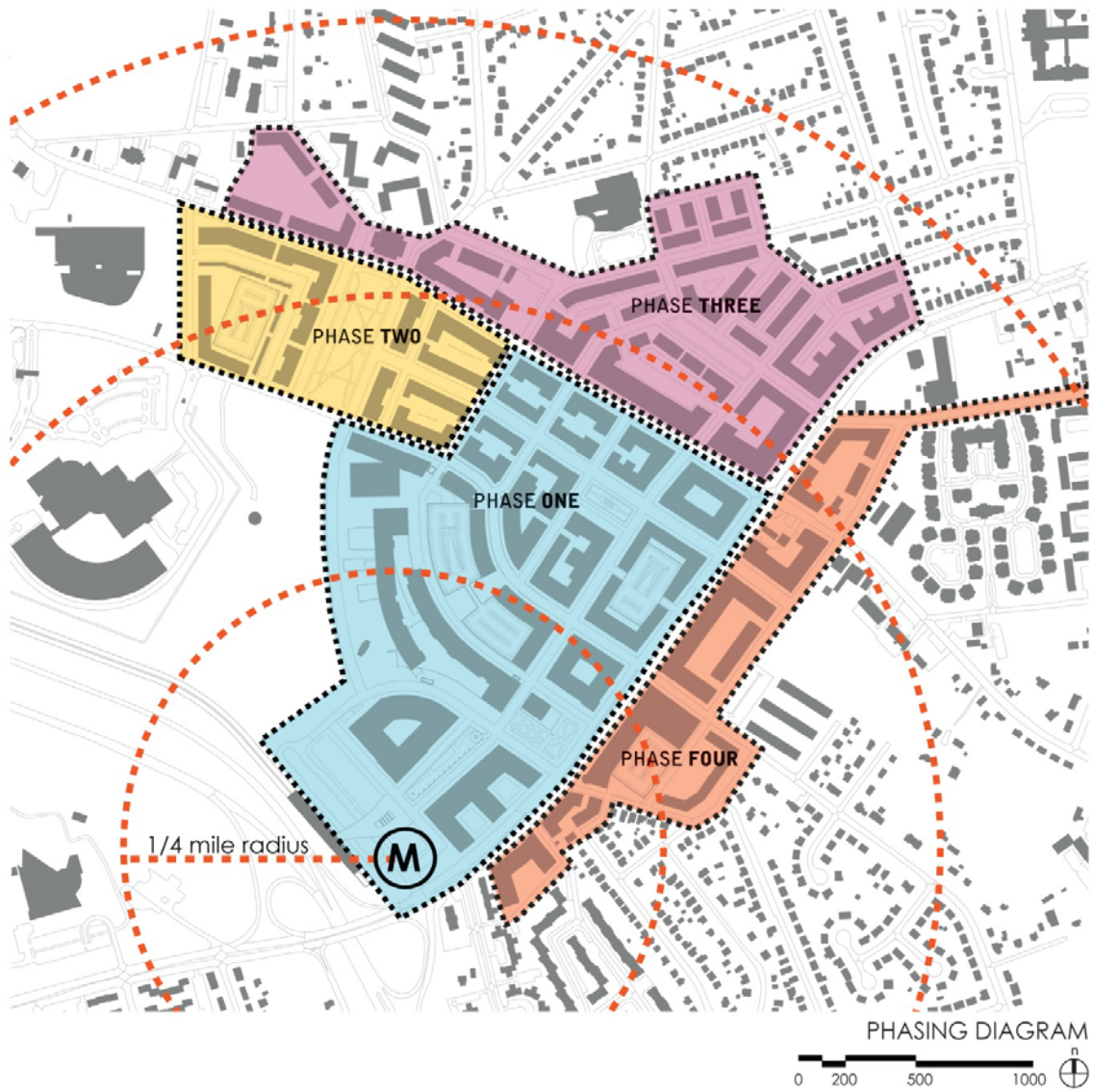


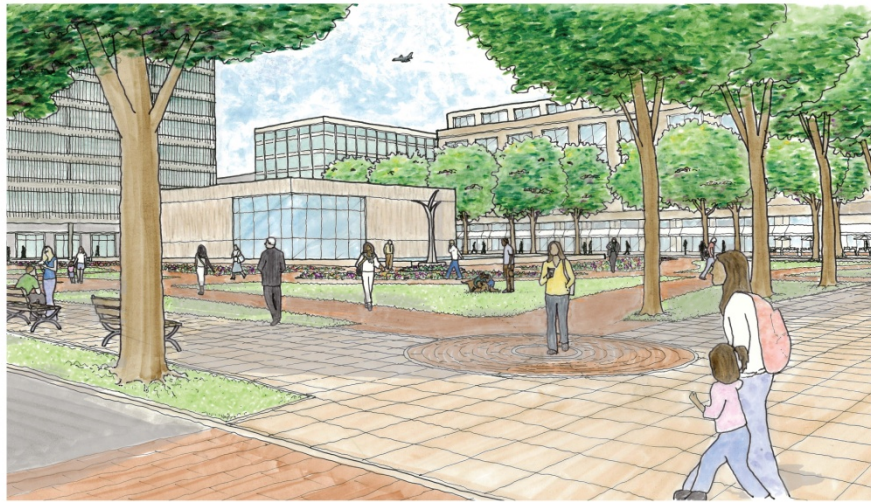
Figure 83: Proposed Phasing Diagram



Figure 84: Key Places Diagram and “College Walk” Perspective

While the new community college and “Suitland Town Center” relate directly to the Metro, there is also a physical and visual relationship to Silver Hill Road. “Suitland Town Center” will be lined with retail and will be connected to the nearby “Market Square” by the new primary retail street. “Market Square” is primarily a residential square during most weekdays and becomes a more public square during seasonal, weekend, open-air markets. Northwest of “Market Square” is the “Mall on the Grove” – a residential park that can be used for recreation by locals and visitors. It also becomes the primary connection to the wooded landscape of Suitland Parkway. As pedestrians and automobiles drive along Suitland Road, they will be able to see down the sides of the park into the natural landscape beyond, while the new park becomes a regularized version of that landscape beyond.





SUITLAND TOWN CENTER

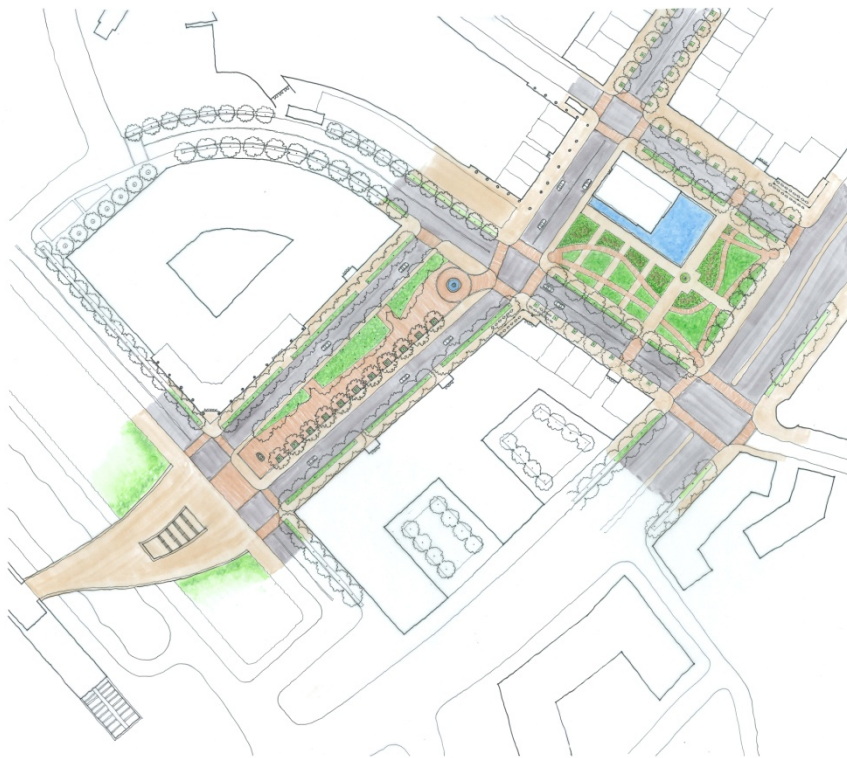


Figure 85: "Suitland Town Center" Plan and Perspective



MARKET SQUARE

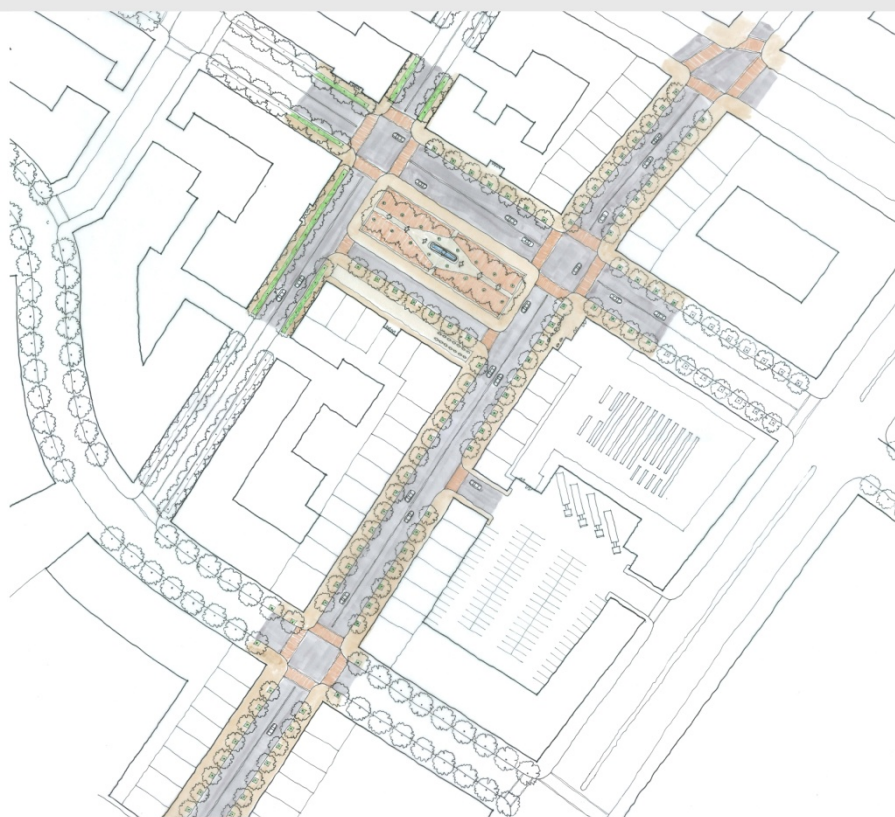


Figure 86: "Market Square" Plan and Perspective





MALL ON THE GROVE



Figure 87: "Mall on the Grove" Plan and Perspective

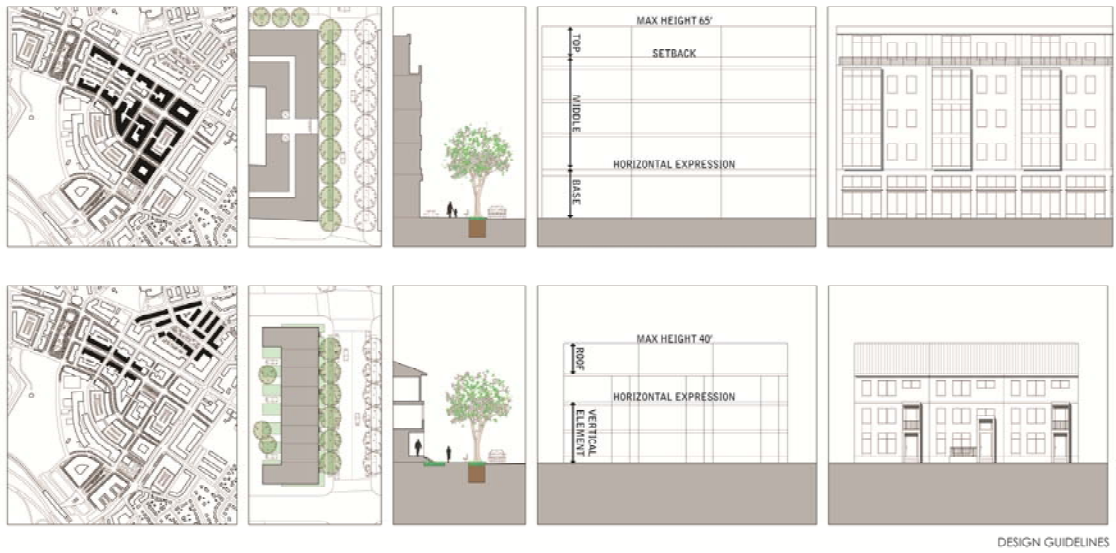


Figure 88: Design Guidelines

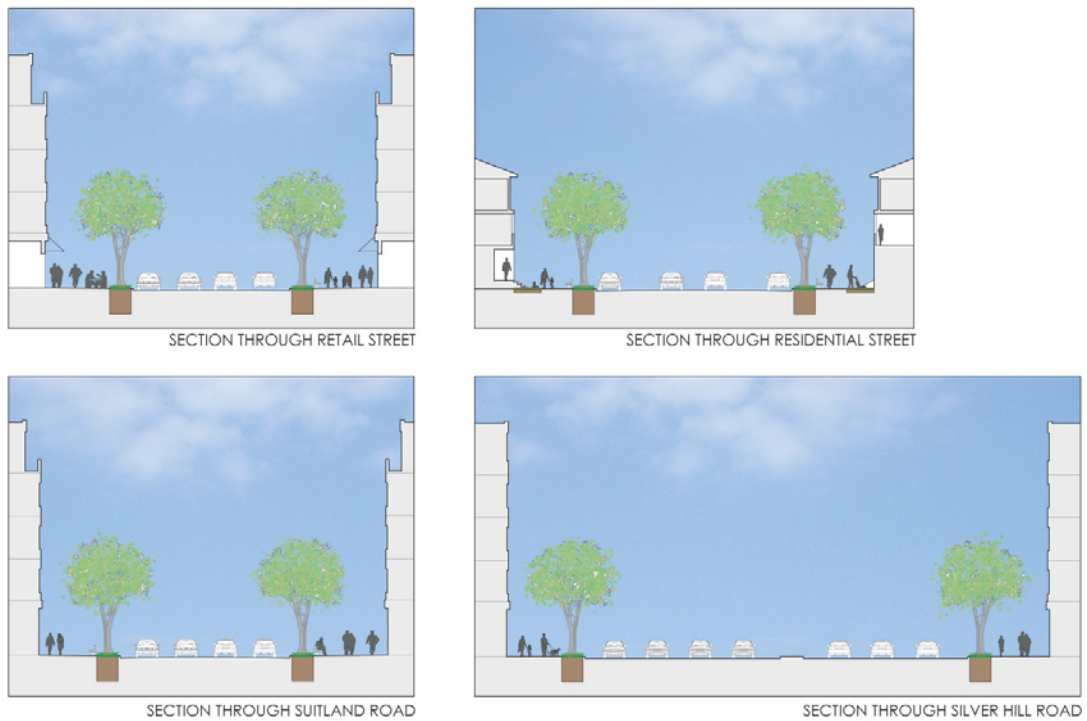


Figure 89: Street Sections

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