

Historic Meridian Park



BEAUTIFICATION BLUEPRINT

The Historic Meridian Park neighborhood sponsored a community design “charrette” workshop on February 9-11, 2006 to develop a vision for a “distinctive, signature look” for the area. The Ball State University’s College of Architecture and Planning: Indianapolis Center facilitated a neighborhood survey, community meeting and the charrette workshop in which nearly two dozen students of architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, and historic preservation teamed with college professors and local design professionals. Prior to the workshop, an academic studio in historic preservation also conducted extensive research into the history and conditions of the Meridian Park neighborhood. This newspaper documents the recommendations derived from the community input and charrette workshop.



WHAT IS A CHARRETTE?

Legend has it that in renaissance France, students studying architecture would transport their architecture projects from home to school for reviews by their professors on horse-drawn carts known as “charrettes.” While riding on the charrette, students would be frantically working to complete their drawings or models to perfect them for the review.

Today, the design professions use the term to describe a short, intense period of brainstorming on a design issue. Instead of the charrette coming at the end of the project (as in renaissance France), charrettes are usually a “kick-off” event to come up with an overall organization and approach as well as concepts for the design issue at hand.

The ideas shown here are just that—an overall organization and general concepts. They aren’t final refined ideas. They are meant to facilitate discussion and provide the neighborhood with a professional opinion on how to best move forward with beautification plans. Most importantly, the images are just the beginning. To make them happen, the neighborhood must prioritize, start with one or two, and champion their development.

SIX PLACEMAKING STRATEGIES

for a beautiful neighborhood

Define **THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

The manner in which the neighborhood was platted at the turn of the 20th century as well as the architectural style of the homes suggests the Meridian Park Neighborhood explore adjusting its boundary east to Central Avenue. Not only would Central Avenue provide greater visibility for the neighborhood, a significant renaissance is occurring along Central Avenue just across Fall Creek.

Beautify the **STREET CORRIDORS**

If the historic homes are the defining characteristic of the neighborhood, the public realm, including the streets and sidewalks, are the front door. They are public places everyone experiences, whether one lives in or commutes through Meridian Park. Well designed and maintained public places convey community pride and create a lasting impression.

Restore and Maintain **THE HISTORIC CHARACTER**

Perhaps the single greatest strategy in developing identity is to preserve and maintain the tremendous identity that already exists—and cannot be recreated. The historic homes are the defining characteristic of the neighborhood, and regardless of any beautification efforts, will remain the defining characteristic.

Encourage **MIXED-USE ANCHORS**

The most memorable urban neighborhoods have more than beautiful homes and great streets. They have mixed-use retail centers where residents can relax over a cup of coffee and share their lives. Healthy neighborhoods bring healthy business, and having an active retail area adds a vibrancy that improves the quality of life for residents but also is noticed by passers-by.

Develop a Network of **ACTIVE PUBLIC PLACES**

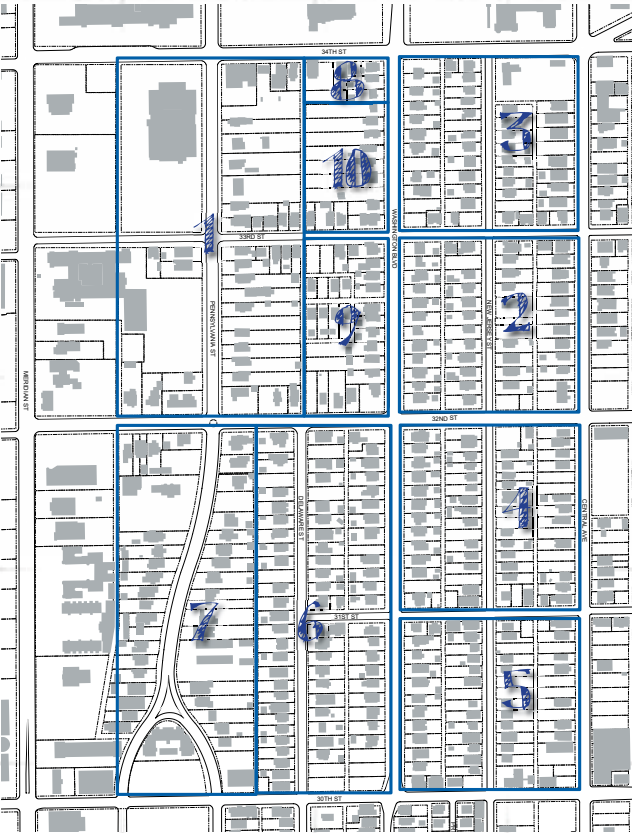
Active sidewalks and parks indicate a healthy and safe community life. Just as street lights and trees contribute to a visitor's impression, so to does a family taking an evening stroll, a neighbor jogging on a crisp morning, and children playing in a park. A well-connected sidewalk system, connections to nearby greenways, and a hierarchy of parks are essential to neighborhood identity.

Incorporate Identity **INTO NEW DEVELOPMENT**

There are several opportunities for new infill development within and nearby the neighborhood. Potential new development could itself be a gateway and contribute positively to neighborhood identity. While literal replication of historic styles should be discouraged, buildings should be well-designed, incorporate historic elements, materials, and patterns, and convey that this historic neighborhood has a vibrant future.

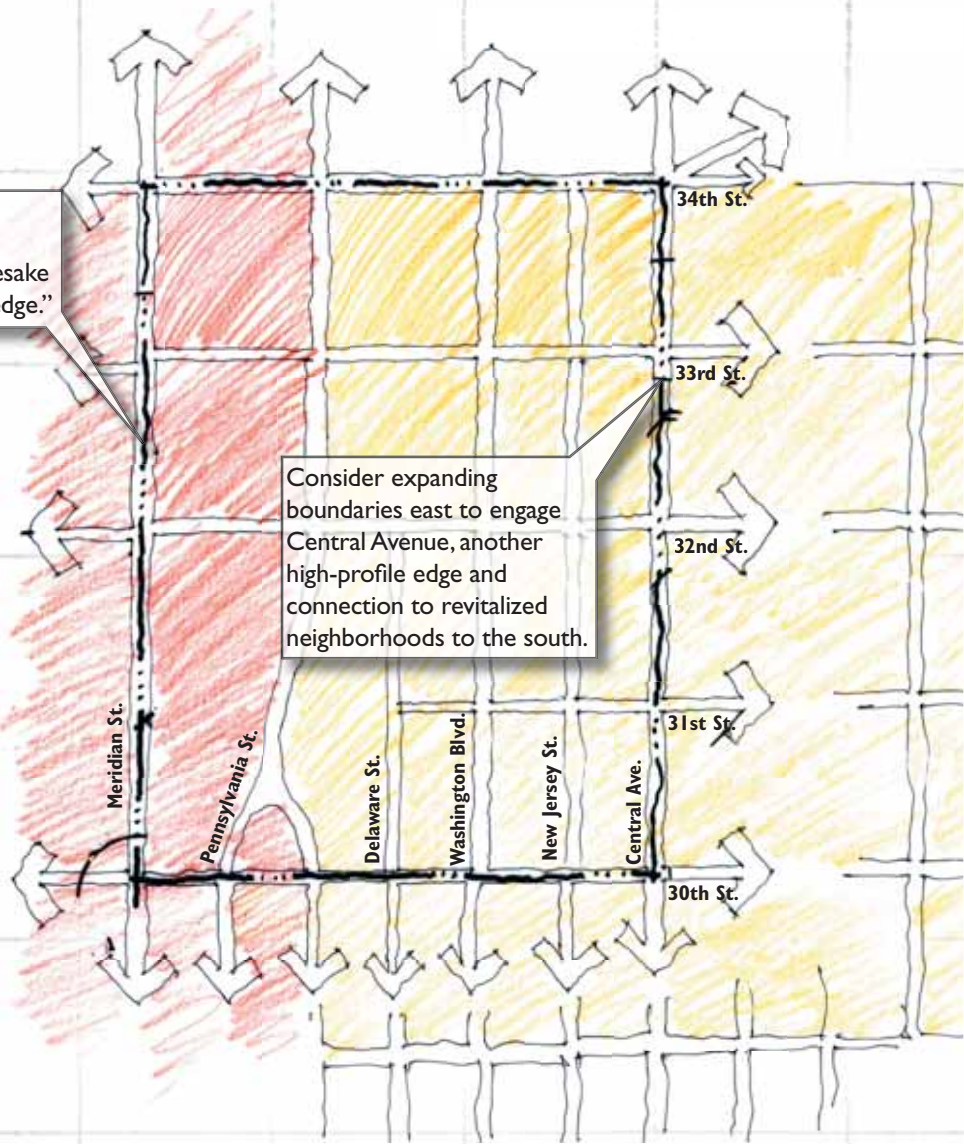
Define THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Before pursuing any substantial beautification efforts, it will be important to agree on the actual “boundaries” of the Historic Meridian Park neighborhood. This need not be the same as the actual National Register boundaries. It is important to somehow engage Meridian Street, the neighborhood’s namesake, front door, and connection to The Children’s Museum. It is vital that this portion of Meridian Street is “claimed” by someone to prevent it from becoming an unattractive, “leftover” edge to the neighborhood. It is also important to consider expanding the boundaries eastward to connect with Central Avenue. Not only is this the way the neighborhood was historically platted, it provides a direct connection to neighborhoods to the south undergoing significant reinvestment, including Fall Creek Place, Herron Morton, the Old Northside, and Mass Ave.



NEIGHBORHOOD PLATS

1. University Place
March 1, 1889
2. 1st Osgood Addition
May 16, 1904
3. 2nd Osgood Addition
July 24, 1905
4. 3rd Osgood Addition
December 27, 1905
5. 4th Osgood Addition
April 21, 1906
6. 5th Osgood Addition
April 21, 1906
7. 6th Osgood Addition
March 28, 1907
8. Mullis Addition
February 17, 1908
9. Washington Place
March 15, 1911
10. Unknown



Engage the Meridian Street Corridor...the neighborhood’s namesake and highest-profile “edge.”

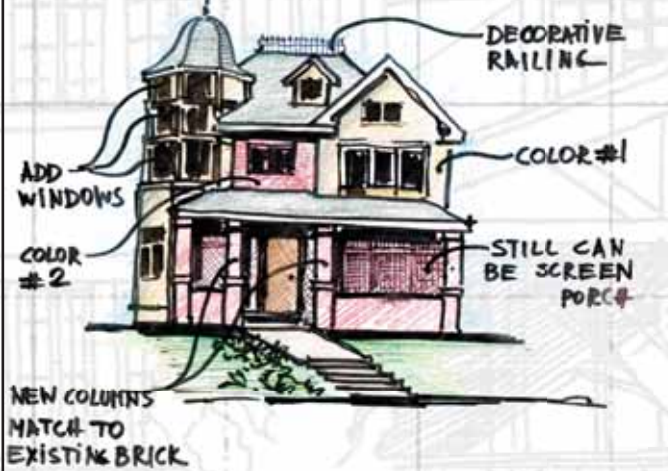
Consider expanding boundaries east to engage Central Avenue, another high-profile edge and connection to revitalized neighborhoods to the south.

Restore and Maintain THE HISTORIC CHARACTER

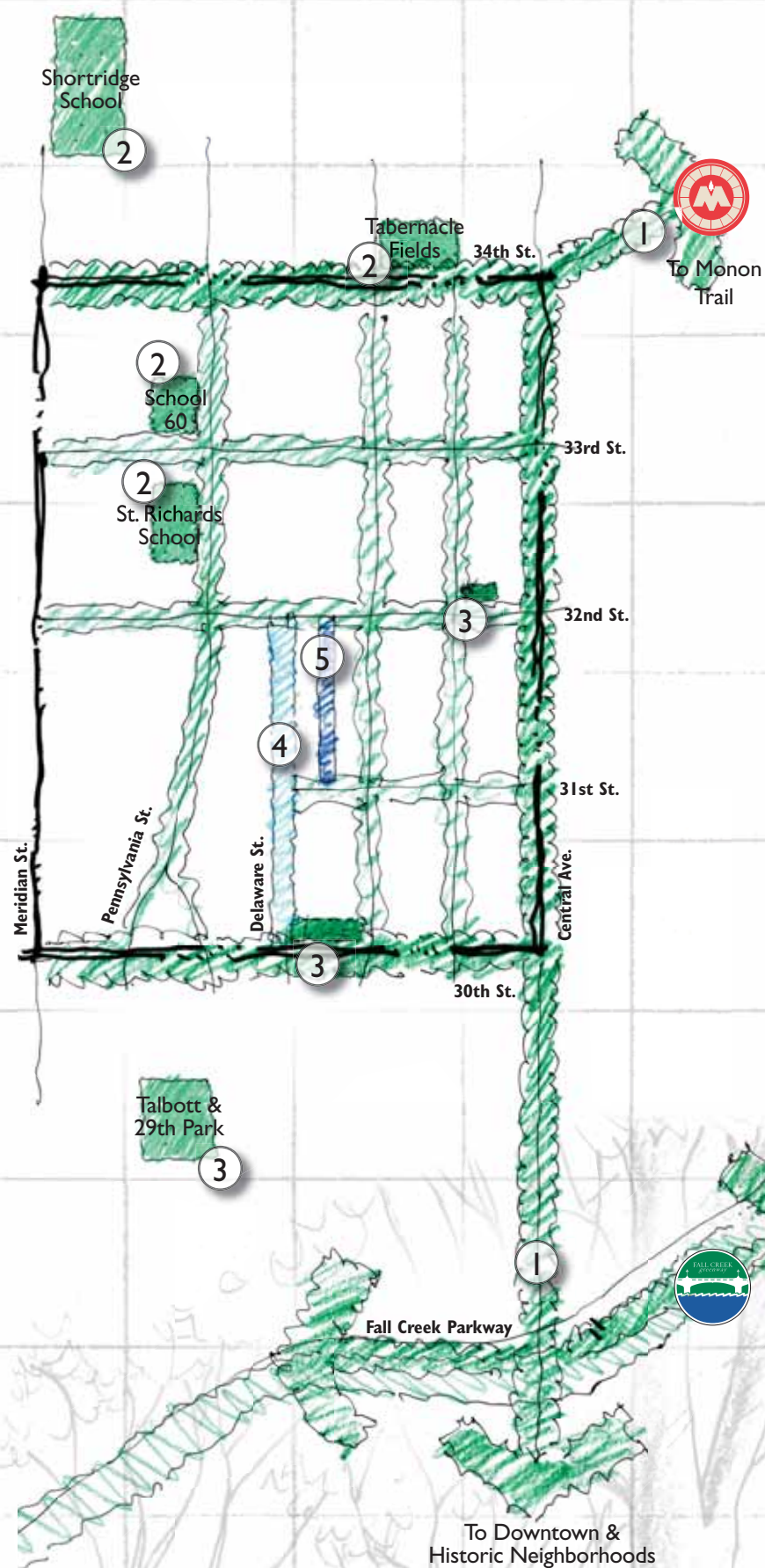


The primary identity of the Meridian Park neighborhood is its amazing collection of historic homes. Even if no other part of this blueprint is implemented, the continued maintenance and restoration of the existing homes in the neighborhood would do wonders in establishing a signature identity. The housing stock in Meridian Park is fairly well intact, although several homes have severe maintenance needs. The neighborhood should work with developers and the Mapleton-Fall Creek Community Development Corporation on ways the most endangered homes (and usually the most expensive to restore) can be saved.

ANATOMY OF A RESTORATION



Develop a Network of ACTIVE PUBLIC PLACES



A HIERARCHY OF OPEN SPACES

1 CONNECTIONS TO GREENWAYS

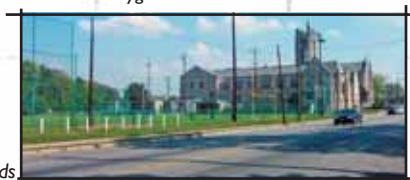
The Indy Greenways system continues to grow in popularity. The Meridian Park neighborhood can capitalize on its proximity to the popular Monon Trail (less than one mile to the east) and the scenic Fall Creek Greenway (six blocks to the south). A well-developed streetscape along Fairfield Avenue and Central Avenue could connect the neighborhood to these regional amenities.

2 INSTITUTIONAL OPEN SPACE

Shortridge School, School 60, St. Richard's School, and Tabernacle Presbyterian Church all maintain substantial amounts of sports fields and recreation space. This semi-public space is a great asset for the neighborhood. These institutions are also great potential partners in any effort to beautify, program, or otherwise enhance these open spaces.



School 60 Playground



Tabernacle Presbyterian Fields

3 NEIGHBORHOOD & POCKET PARKS

The only nearby municipal park is the Talbot and 29th Park, located across the busy one-way pair of 29th and 30th Streets. As the area improves, it will be important to explore a safer pedestrian connection to this nicely developed park. The neighborhood might also explore developing pocket parks on some vacant lots. Such parks might include community gardens, landscaping, public art, picnic tables and benches, or a small playground. They also transform an undesirable vacant lot into a tremendous opportunity for beautification through open space.



Vacant lot at Delaware St. and 30th St.



4 SIDEWALKS AND FRONT YARDS

Meridian Park has a good sidewalk network that is generally in great condition. In addition to a pedestrian transportation function, this network also serves an open space function. Many neighborhood residents regularly walk the neighborhood along what could be considered "pedestrian parkways" if you factor in the front lawns and gardens of homes along the sidewalk. The neighborhood can easily improve these "pedestrian parkways" by encouraging neighbors to add landscaping in their yards. A mix of spring-flowers and flowering trees, lush summer foliage, and amazing fall colors will create a striking natural beauty for residents as well as passers-by. Establishing relationships with nurseries, creating a perennial plant exchange program, or simply offering awards are simple ways a neighborhood group can encourage such enhancements.

5 ALLEYWAYS

Alleyways often become the back door to the neighborhood where trash and similar materials accumulate. By changing residents' thoughts of alleys from one of a back door to one of a neighborhood greenspace can not only add available open space but improve the overall appearance of the neighborhood as well. While alleys must maintain their service and vehicle function, their low traffic volumes can allow sharing with adjacent residents. Alleys are different than systems above in the hierarchy in that they are usually ONLY for residents. Visitors often see and have access to everything else, but alleys are strictly for residents. As such, a great alley says that the pride and beauty in the neighborhood isn't just for show.



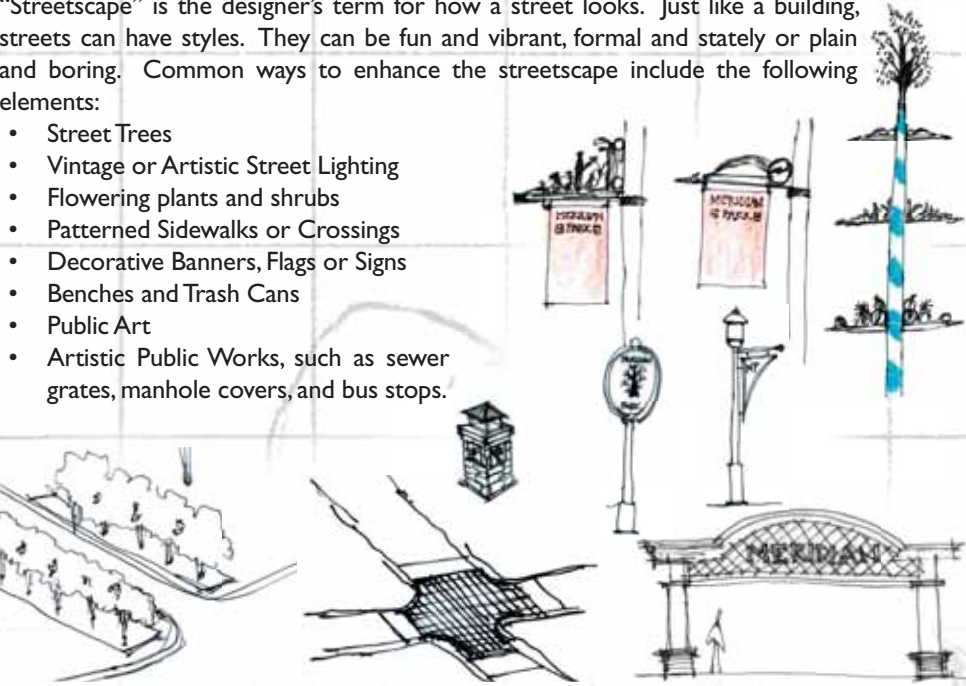
While a unique example, Washington Court illustrates the potential for front yards to contribute to the public sidewalk to form a "pedestrian parkway".

Beauty of the STREET CORRIDORS

ADDING CHARACTER TO THE STREET

“Streetscape” is the designer’s term for how a street looks. Just like a building, streets can have styles. They can be fun and vibrant, formal and stately or plain and boring. Common ways to enhance the streetscape include the following elements:

- Street Trees
- Vintage or Artistic Street Lighting
- Flowering plants and shrubs
- Patterned Sidewalks or Crossings
- Decorative Banners, Flags or Signs
- Benches and Trash Cans
- Public Art
- Artistic Public Works, such as sewer grates, manhole covers, and bus stops.



Street trees with spring flowers or great fall color, combined with colorful streetscape elements like flags or banners, add a dynamic atmosphere to the streetscape.



WHAT’S A GOOD STREET TREE?

There are dozens of great street trees, each with its’ own advantages and disadvantages. When choosing a street tree, it is important to note its soil, sunlight, and water preferences as well as its growth rate, maintenance requirements and tolerance of urban conditions and de-icing salt. Some characteristics are desirable, such as spring flowers and vibrant fall colors. Others, like fruits that may litter the ground, are undesirable. Also note that trees come in many varieties, so while one variety may be great for a street tree, another variety of the same species may not be!

Most importantly, no more than 10% of any one species of tree should be planted in a neighborhood. The American Elm, once the dominant street tree in the United States, was devastated by dutch elm disease. Today the Emerald Ash Borer threatens to do the same devastation to Ash trees. Biodiversity is extremely important in an urban forest. It is suggested that tree species be changed block by block or street by street. Trees are a long-term investment and steps must be taken to minimize the threat of insect and disease outbreaks that might harm that investment!

Below are four diverse street trees that are among the dozens that would thrive in Historic Meridian Park.



Japanese Zelkova: Fast growth, great red fall color, interesting peeling bark.



Autumn Gold Ginkgo: Leaf was common decorative element of Arts & Crafts movement, great gold fall color, urban tolerant.



Columnar Norway Maple: Stately columnar form, yellow fall color, highly urban tolerant.



Flowering Crabapple: Showy white spring flowers, yellow fall color, highly urban tolerant.



Adding street trees and colorful, artistic public works such as this bus shelter helps to create a strong and unique identity.



An artistic bus shelter and decorative flags identify the neighborhood as a unique place.

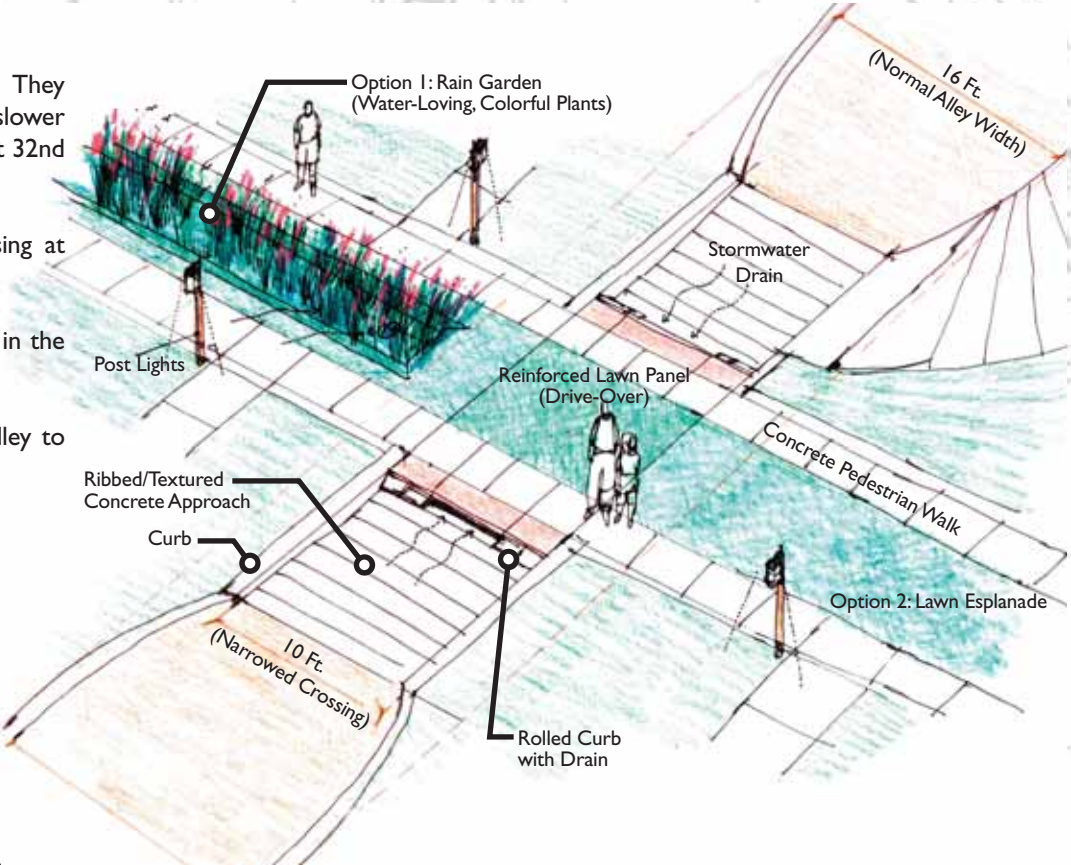
TAMING ALLEY TRAFFIC

Alleys are designed to only accommodate traffic from residents who live along it. They typically lack site distances, sidewalks, and other features that require cars to drive slower along them. Some alleys, especially the one that Delaware Street “dead-ends” into at 32nd Street, have become quasi-streets, creating unsafe conditions.

One idea, shown to the right, is to create a mid-block raised pedestrian crossing at Washington Court, in effect creating a large, “green” speed bump.

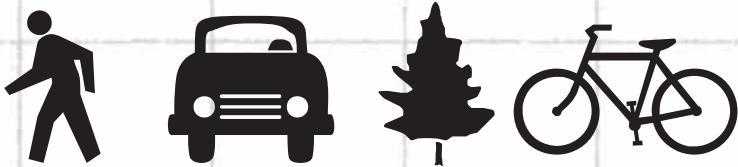
Another option, shown below, is to create “pockets” of raised landscaped plantings in the alley width, creating a slightly narrower and curvilinear path.

Bump-outs, described on the next page, could also be placed at the ends of the alley to narrow the “mouth” of the alley, making it appear narrower like a typical alley.

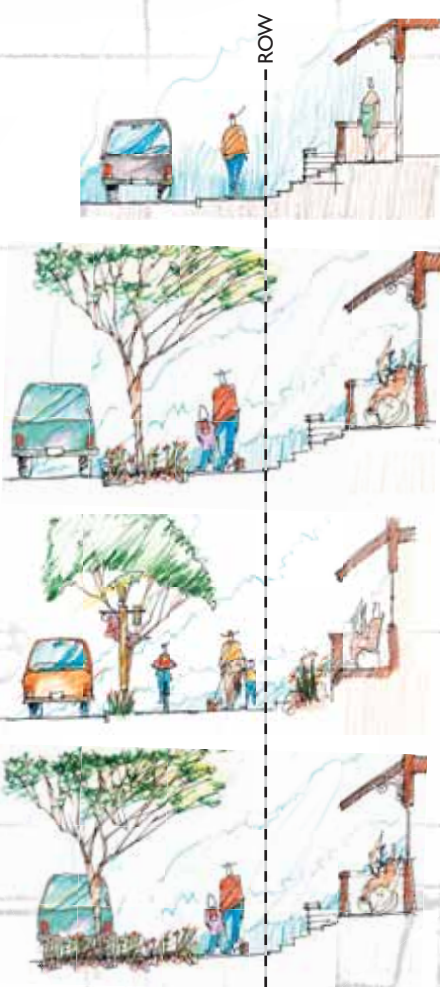


BALANCING THE RIGHT-OF-WAY

The public right-of-way is the city-owned land where the street, sidewalk, utilities and related infrastructure is developed. How a street ends up looking depends on the width of this right-of-way and the balance between the different uses that must be accommodated in this right-of-way. For example, on Pennsylvania Street, which has a fairly wide right-of-way, two wide travel lanes, two parking lanes, a planting strip and a sidewalk are accommodated. On 30th Street, several parking and travel lanes and a sidewalk occupy the right-of-way.



Reconfiguring the existing right-of-way is expensive, but Meridian Park could drastically improve its character by taking some space from the automobile and giving it to the pedestrian and to the streetscape. This balance between neighborhood-friendly uses (sidewalks, yards, and planting areas) and the automobile will vary by street, but generally there are three manners in which this balance can be shifted more towards the neighborhood uses.



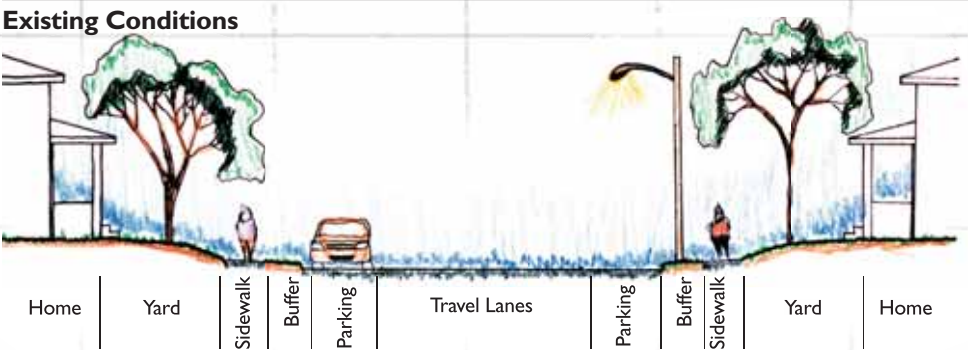
Existing Conditions. Most of the right-of-way is dedicated to the automobile, with a sidewalk squeezed in along the curb.

Increase Buffer. Taking 3 to 4 feet from the roadway can allow the planting of street trees and other landscaping. This drastically improves the look of both the street and adjacent homes, as well as improving safety for pedestrians.

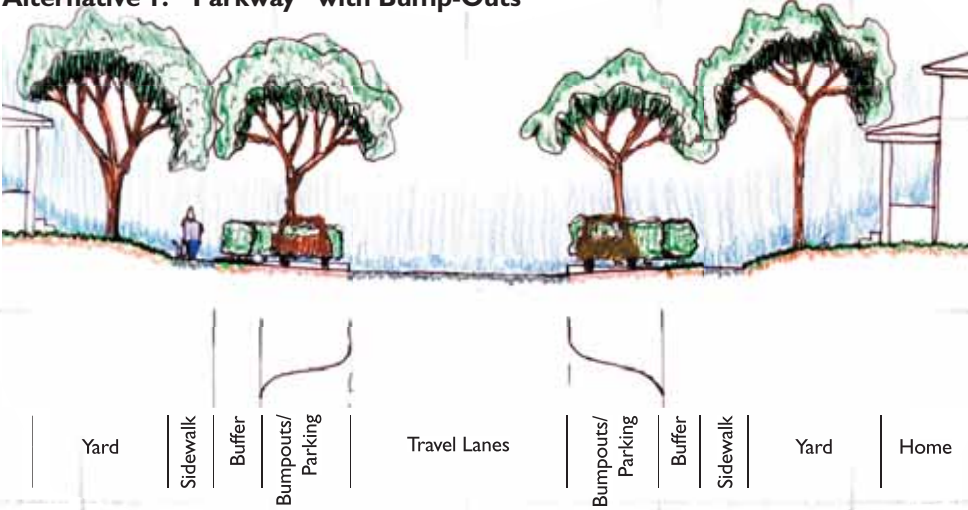
Increase Sidewalk. Where space allows, a widened sidewalk and an increased planting buffer can be used. This could be used near schools, retail, or other high-pedestrian areas, or where bicycle lanes are needed.

Add Bump-Outs. Where parking is required, street trees can be planted in bump-outs, which are planting areas that extend into the parking lane at periodic intervals.

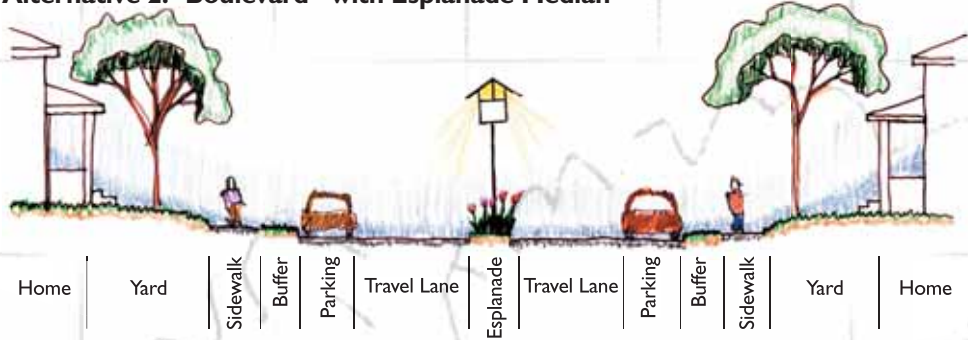
EXAMPLE: PENNSYLVANIA STREET



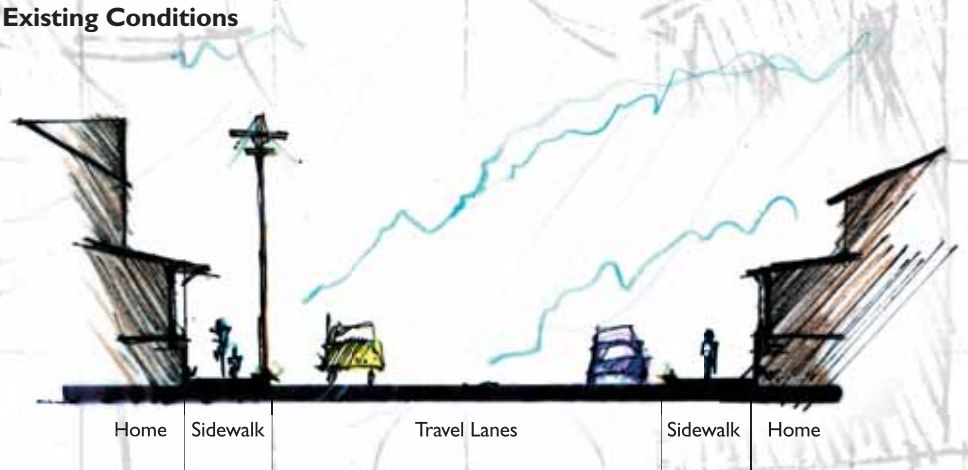
Alternative 1: “Parkway” with Bump-Outs



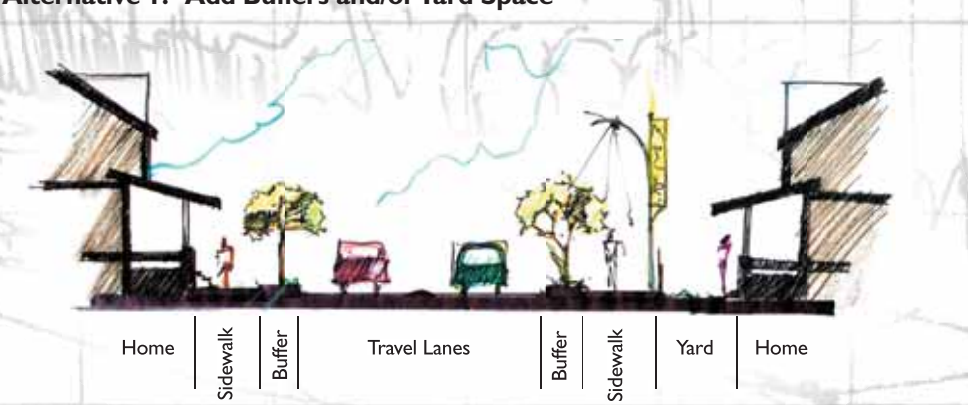
Alternative 2: “Boulevard” with Esplanade Median



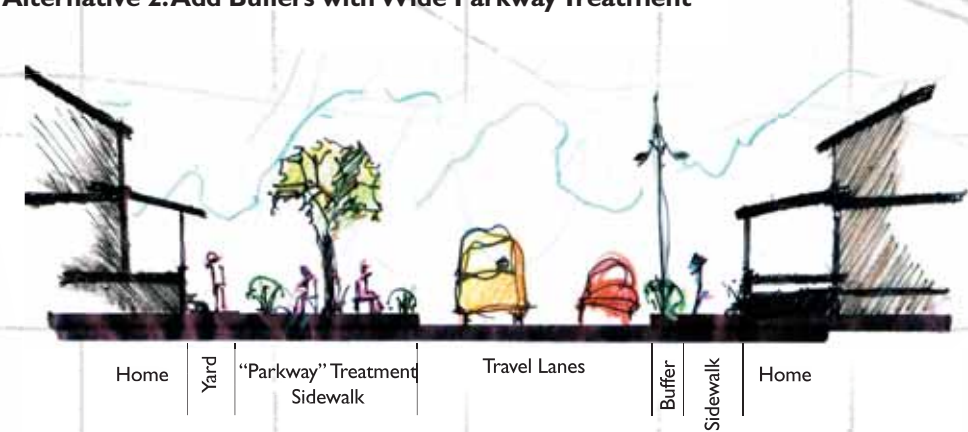
EXAMPLE: 30TH STREET



Alternative 1: Add Buffers and/or Yard Space



Alternative 2: Add Buffers with Wide Parkway Treatment



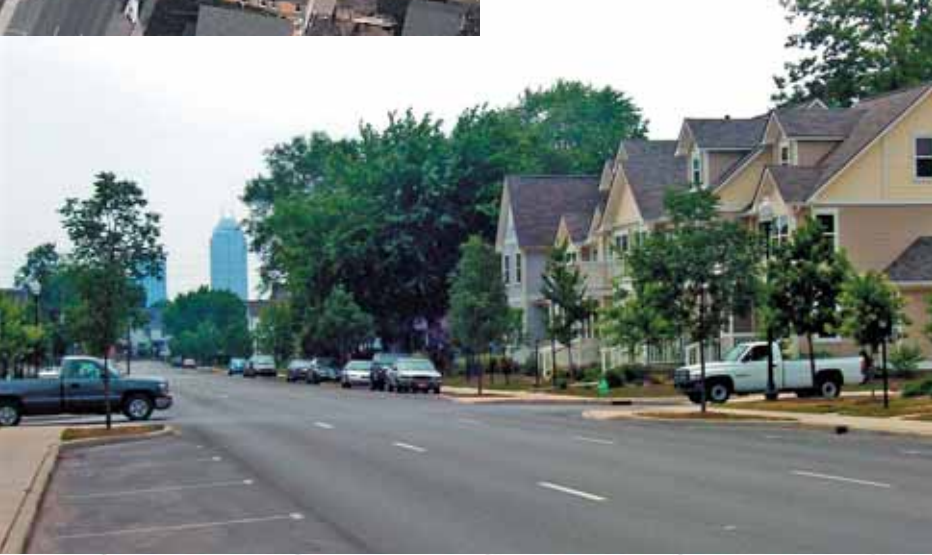
“BUMP-OUTS”



Bump-outs are an excellent way to introduce street trees into a street while not reducing the width of the travel lanes and still accommodating parking needs. Bump-outs usually are placed at intersections, where they narrow the distance of the pedestrian crossing while increasing pedestrian visibility and safety. They are also placed at regular intervals along the street, where they provide space for street trees and/or lights.

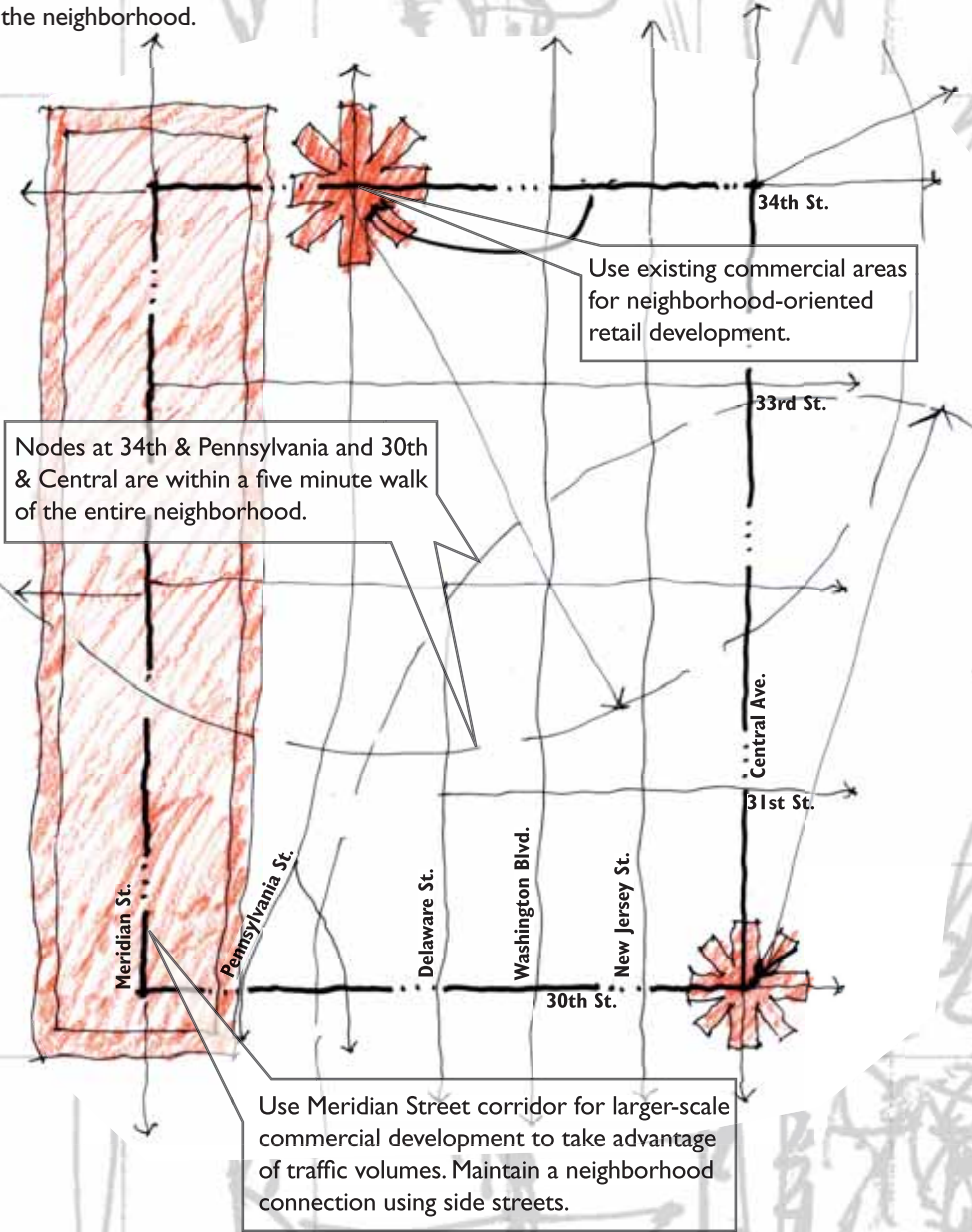
Bump-outs are also considered a traffic-calming device because they psychologically narrow the street, which can cause drivers to slow.

Bump-outs are used extensively in Fall Creek Place, shown here, just south of the Meridian Park neighborhood. They are an excellent way to introduce greenery and character to an area.



Encourage MIXED-USE ANCHORS

Many of the “edges” of the neighborhood, including Meridian Street, 30th Street, and 34th Street have existing commercial activity or buildings. Currently, the condition and vacancy of these structures negatively impacts the character of the Meridian Park neighborhood. But they also present a great opportunity to breathe new life into the area by promoting commercial revitalization along the Meridian Street corridor as well as at existing neighborhood nodes at 34th Street and Pennsylvania Street and at 30th Street and Central Avenue. Bringing new development and tenants into these spaces can significantly contribute to the character of the neighborhood.



The illustration above shows how the existing commercial building at 34th Street and Pennsylvania Street can be rehabilitated into a neighborhood-oriented retail node, where neighbors could pick up a bite to eat or talk over coffee.



The illustration below shows new infill development at 30th Street and Central Avenue.



The illustration above shows new infill development across from The Children's Museum at 30th Street and Meridian Street. Exciting architecture contributes to the museum, but traditional patterns and materials also help it contribute to its historic surroundings. The building is mixed-use, with retail shops on the ground floor and offices or apartments above.

WHAT IS "URBAN"?

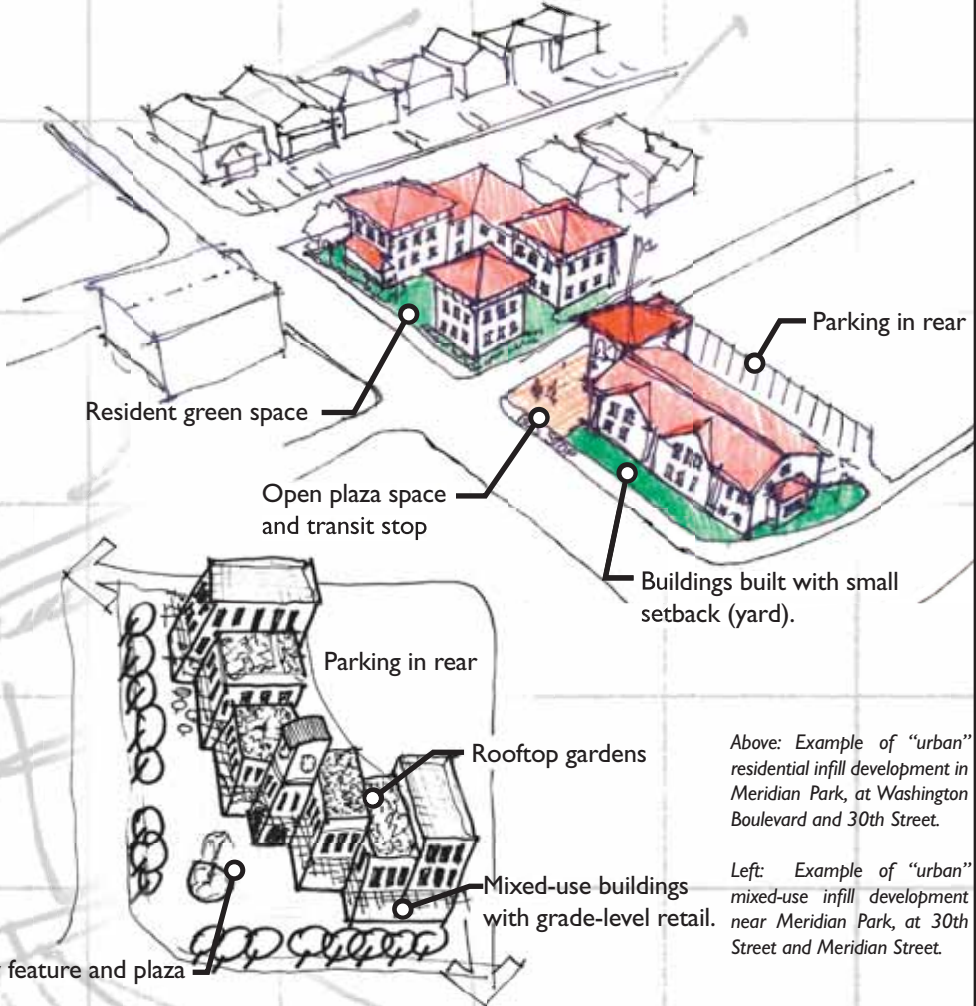
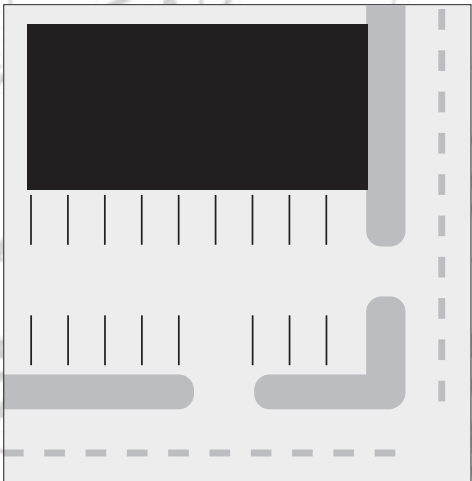
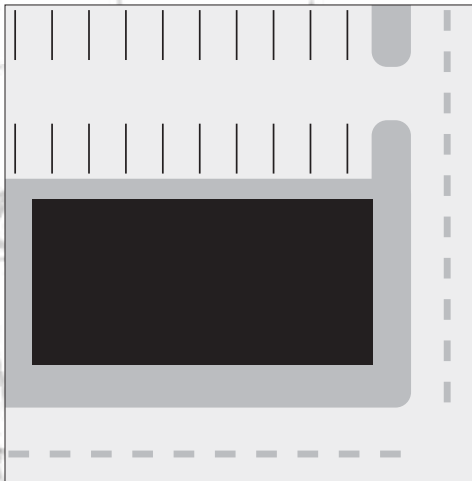
Even in urban neighborhoods it is often difficult to persuade new developers to build an urban development. Since the 1950s, a majority of new development has been suburban style, to the detriment of many older neighborhoods. So what makes a development "urban" or "suburban"?

URBAN

- Building ON the property line
- Parking BEHIND building
- PEDESTRIAN oriented, with windows, awnings, lighting, etc.
- Main entrance on SIDEWALK

SUBURBAN

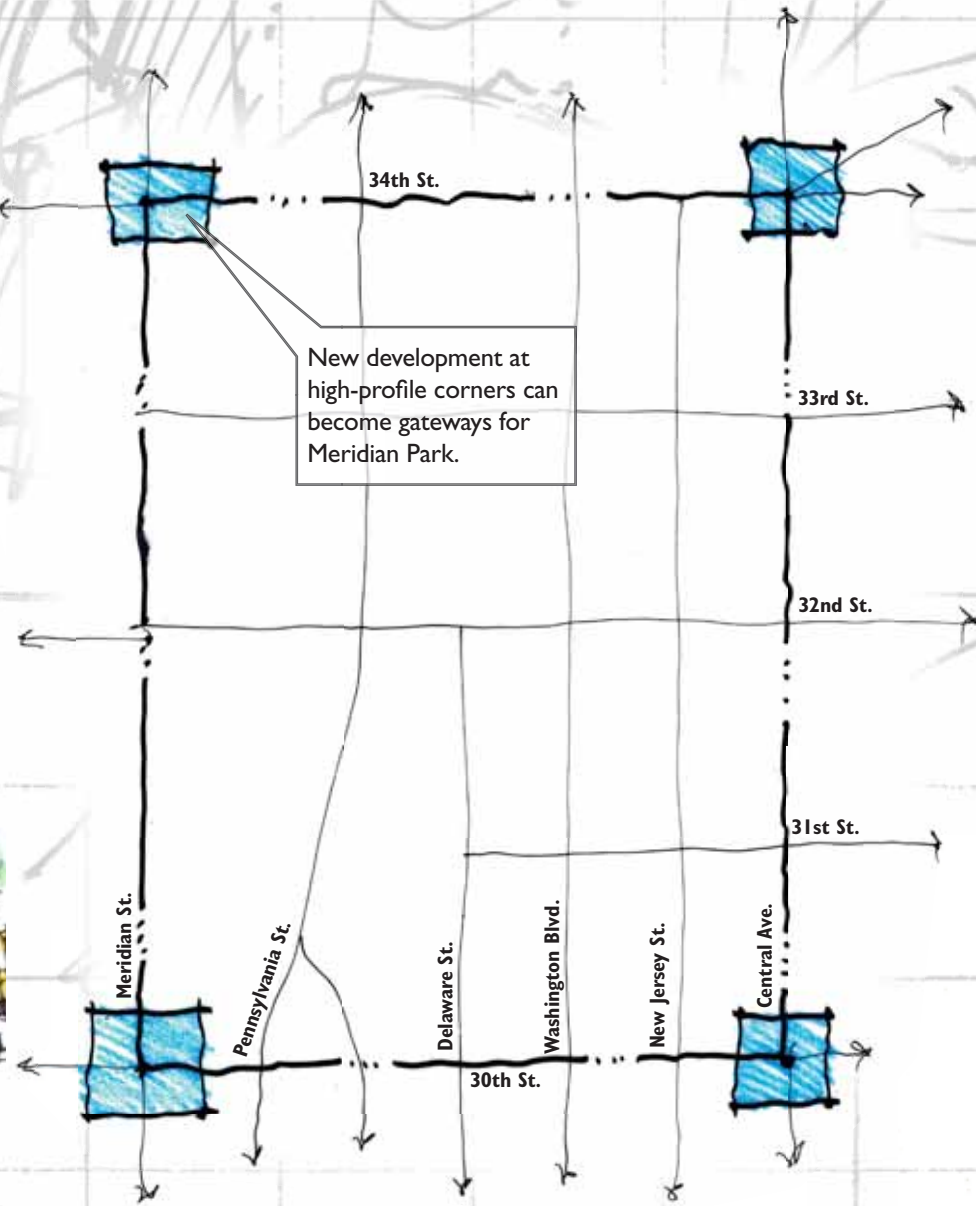
- Building SETBACK some distance
- Parking IN FRONT of building
- AUTOMOBILE oriented with large curb cuts and little connection between the sidewalk and main entrance.
- Main entrance on PARKING LOT



Above: Example of "urban" residential infill development in Meridian Park, at Washington Boulevard and 30th Street.

Left: Example of "urban" mixed-use infill development near Meridian Park, at 30th Street and Meridian Street.

Just as the historic homes in Meridian Park create the defining identity, new development can contribute to neighborhood character. New development, especially at high-profile intersections at the corners of the neighborhood, should be encouraged to incorporate gateway-type elements such as plazas, fountains, neighborhood graphics, public art and unique architecture. New buildings should themselves create identity and become neighborhood landmarks. This does not necessarily mean new development should mimic the early 20th century architecture of the homes. In general, the historic preservation movement celebrates buildings of their time, and strongly discourages falsely building a 1900s era building today. In fact, some of the most "modern" homes in the area are being built in nearby protected historic districts of the Old Northside and Herron-Morton Place. Careful design consideration ensures that new buildings are not "fake" by appearing to be historic but also follow basic design parameters, including being pedestrian-oriented, having patterns and openings in the facade similar in scale to nearby buildings, and using compatible building materials.



Build Identity INTO NEW DEVELOPMENT

Placemaking TOOLBOX



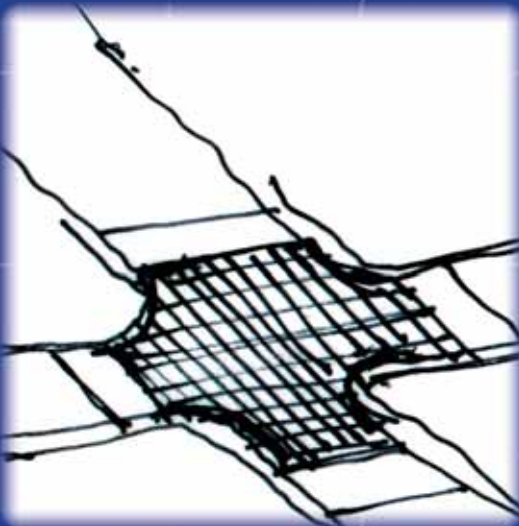
Keep it urban. New development must follow basic principles of urban design, the most important of which is to keep parking behind the building!



Incorporate graphic elements into unique identifying signage, with emphasis on placement at intersections and boundaries.



Keep the historic fabric and encourage appropriate home rehabilitation. These homes are Meridian Park's signature identity!



Calm traffic with textured pedestrian crosswalks or intersections. They can serve as a "red flag" for drivers that pedestrians may be around.



Build on the median gardens along Pennsylvania Street by adding tree bumpouts along streets and at intersections. They improve safety and look great!



Don't settle for mundane public works. Use every opportunity, from bus shelters to manholes, to add unique identity to the neighborhood.



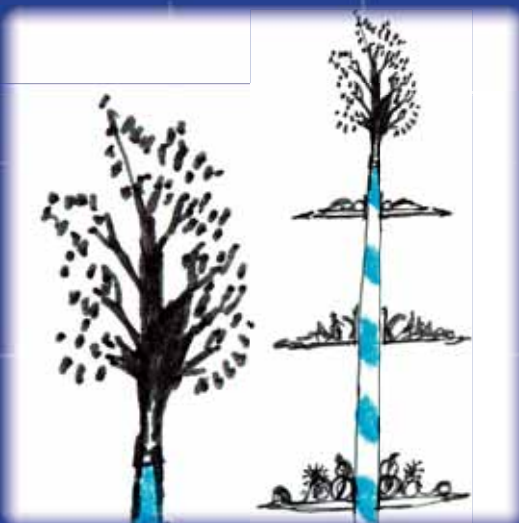
Flags and banners are one way the neighborhood can add color to the street and celebrate special events or seasons.



Street trees should line every street, and select a variety of trees with great spring or fall color.



New development, especially at the major corners of the neighborhood, can contribute significantly to neighborhood identity.



Neighborhood markers don't have to be just signs. Artistic poles or other small "monuments" are a highly unique alternative.



Use vintage or artistic lighting to line the streets. Not only do they look nicer, they're also more pedestrian-friendly.



Make Meridian Park more than just a great place to live. Promote neighborhood-oriented retail that serves residents and attracts visitors!

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