Mid-City University District

a partnership for positive change

A Project of the Master’s in Urban and Regional Planning
Graduate Planning Studio 2007

Department of Geography and Planning

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State University of New York
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The contents of this report are the sole product of the Graduate Planning Studio 2007 and do not necessarily represent the policies, positions or plans of the University at Albany.
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Introduction

Each year the State University of New York at Albany’s Masters in Urban and Regional Planning program undertakes a Graduate Planning Studio project focusing on a community in or around the Capital Region.

Our goal in creating this document is to recommend a series of actions and strategies aimed at protecting and enhancing the positive qualities of the Mid-City University District (MCUD). The initiatives and actions we recommend range from relatively simple, straightforward projects that could be implemented fairly easily in the near term, and would have an immediate impact on the physical environment of the Mid-City University District, to projects and initiatives that are more ambitious and transformative, that will require the involvement and cooperation of multiple public and private entities, as well as possibly the creation of new laws and institutions.

In a very real sense, the interests of residents, homeowners and business owners in the Mid-City University District, and students, faculty and staff at UAlbany’s Downtown Campus are closely intertwined. Because it is the largest educational institution and employer in the District, and because UAlbany students have such a large presence in the District, the future fate of the Mid-City University District (i.e. whether it thrives or further decays) will be largely determined by decisions and actions taken by the University at Albany. At the same time, the educational experience the University at Albany offers, the University’s statewide and national reputation, and its ability to attract top-notch faculty and students, very much depend on having an urban environment that students and faculty find attractive and educationally supportive. In other words, it is very much in the interest of the University at Albany to collaborate with other institutions and stakeholder groups to try to bring about changes and improvements in the Mid-City University District that make it a better place in which to live, work, and study.

Many of the recommendations put forward in this report are the result of interviews and group meetings we had with UAlbany students and faculty, local residents, students, groups and organizations. On October 24, 2007 a Community Advisory Board meeting was held in which we described initial observations, findings and recommendations, and then broke down into a number of small group discussions that elicited valuable citizen reactions and input. In addition to the October 24 community meeting, members of the Planning Studio team contacted and met with representatives of a number of the neighborhood associations in the District, and interviewed a number of undergraduate students who live in the MCUD (either at the Alumni Quad or in private rental housing), as well as graduate students enrolled in classes at the Downtown Campus. We also met with a class of Albany High School students.
Mid-City University District: Current Zoning

Figure 2

Source: University at Albany - Department of Geography and Planning
(City of Albany)
Mid-City University District: Landmarks

Figure 4

Source: University at Albany - Department of Geography and Planning (Neighborhood Reconnaissance)
Figure 5: Mid-City University District - Nodes (centers of activity)

Source: University at Albany - Department of Geography and Planning (Neighborhood Reconnaissance)
Mid-City University District: Vacant Buildings

Figure 6
Study Area Characteristics— Population and Housing

The Mid-City University District contains approximately 25% of the City of Albany’s population. Due to the high concentration of college students who live in the District (close to 30% of the District’s residents are students attending college), the population of the District differs significantly from both that of the City of Albany and Albany County. Because so many students live in the District, the population of the District is more transient than that in other parts of Albany. Less than 37% of people who lived in the MCUD in 2000 had lived in the same residence for 5 years or more, compared to 45% in the City of Albany as a whole. Likewise, the vast majority of residents in the MCDU are renters. Only 22% of housing units in the MCUD in 2000 were owner occupied— compared to 37.6% in the City of Albany and 58% in Albany County. Perhaps most alarming of all, the poverty rate among MCUD residents (29%) in 2000 was significantly higher than in the City of Albany as a whole (22%). The percentage of MCUD residents with incomes below the poverty line increased by 4% between 1990 and 2000.

Housing and population data compiled by the U.S. Census in 1990 and 2000 suggest that conditions in the District are worsening, rather than getting better. The number of occupied housing units in the District actually decreased by 315 between 1990 and 2000— almost all of that increase (-311) being the result of a decrease in the number of owner-occupied housing units. Overall, there was a 2% decrease in the number of owner-occupied housing units in the District between 1990 and 2000. As owner-occupied housing in the District decreased, there was also a 533 decrease in the number of family households living in the District. Moreover, approximately 7.6% of structures in the District are vacant.

In large part because of the high concentration of students who live in the Mid-City University District and take classes at UAlbany, reliance on public transit in the District is higher than in other parts of the city and region. Approximately 15% of persons living in the MCUD in 2000 commuted to work or school via public transit.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Community Profile</th>
<th>Mid-City University District</th>
<th>Mid-City University District</th>
<th>Mid-City University District</th>
<th>City of Albany</th>
<th>City of Albany</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total housing units</td>
<td>12,685</td>
<td>12,565</td>
<td>-120</td>
<td>46,199</td>
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<td>total occupied structures</td>
<td>11,617</td>
<td>11,302</td>
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<td>owner-occupied hsg. Units</td>
<td>2,758</td>
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<td>-311</td>
<td>16,132</td>
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<td></td>
<td>% owner-occupied</td>
<td>23.74%</td>
<td>21.65%</td>
<td>-2.09%</td>
<td>38.29%</td>
<td>37.59%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>renter-occupied units</td>
<td>8,859</td>
<td>8,855</td>
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<td>25,989</td>
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<td></td>
<td>% renter-occupied units</td>
<td>76.25%</td>
<td>78.34%</td>
<td>2.09%</td>
<td>61.70%</td>
<td>62.40%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>vacant units</td>
<td>1068</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>-113</td>
<td>4078</td>
<td>4579</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% vacant</td>
<td>8.41%</td>
<td>7.60%</td>
<td>-0.81%</td>
<td>8.82%</td>
<td>10.11%</td>
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## Mid-City University District

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<th>Area</th>
<th>Mid-City University District</th>
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<th>Mid-City University District</th>
<th>City of Albany</th>
<th>City of Albany</th>
<th>City of Albany</th>
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<td>Family households</td>
<td>3,861</td>
<td>3,328</td>
<td>-533</td>
<td>20,308</td>
<td>18,397</td>
<td>-1,911</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fam. Households with children &lt; 18</td>
<td>1,929</td>
<td>8,961</td>
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<td>8,961</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% Fam. Households with child. &lt; 18</td>
<td>20.94%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Pop. 5 yrs. + in same house 5 yrs.</td>
<td>8,729</td>
<td>7,618</td>
<td>-1,111</td>
<td>41,811</td>
<td>40,207</td>
<td>-1,604</td>
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<td># enrolled in college or grad. School</td>
<td>6880</td>
<td>6878</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>17,635</td>
<td>16,882</td>
<td>-753</td>
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<td>Total Population</td>
<td>23,606</td>
<td>101,082</td>
<td>95,658</td>
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<td>Related Children under 18</td>
<td>3,282</td>
<td>17,672</td>
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<td>18 years and older</td>
<td>20,241</td>
<td>74,423</td>
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<td>20-24 years (21-24 yrs. In 1990)</td>
<td>7,962</td>
<td>6,353</td>
<td>-1,573</td>
<td>14,915</td>
<td>12,678</td>
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<td>65 years and older</td>
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<td>13,860</td>
<td>12,781</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>% 65 years and older</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent persons living in poverty</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total housing units</td>
<td>12,685</td>
<td>12,565</td>
<td>-120</td>
<td>46,199</td>
<td>45,288</td>
<td>-911</td>
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<tr>
<td># 1 unit detached structures</td>
<td>1537</td>
<td>1556</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11,840</td>
<td>12,188</td>
<td>348</td>
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<tr>
<td># 1 unit attached structures</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2,187</td>
<td>2,133</td>
<td>-54</td>
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<td>3 or 4 units in structure</td>
<td>6307</td>
<td>7595</td>
<td>1288</td>
<td>7,879</td>
<td>7,595</td>
<td>-284</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-9 units in structure</td>
<td>1683</td>
<td>1551</td>
<td>-132</td>
<td>3,998</td>
<td>3,761</td>
<td>-237</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 or more units in structure</td>
<td>2,494</td>
<td>2,559</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6,843</td>
<td>7,091</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers 16 yrs and over</td>
<td>16,926</td>
<td>11,891</td>
<td>-5,035</td>
<td>49,045</td>
<td>42,605</td>
<td>-6,440</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commute to work via public transit</td>
<td>2,338</td>
<td>1,838</td>
<td>-500</td>
<td>7,411</td>
<td>5,593</td>
<td>-1,818</td>
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"The physical campus sends a message about the institution. The meaning of the physical campus and the message it sends to students, faculty, staff and visitors is fundamental to achieving every part of the institutional vision."


**Purpose**

The Graduate Student Planning studio has focused on the “Mid-City University District” of Albany—those portions of the city that surround the UAlbany Downtown Campus and Alumni Quad. The University has cutting edge academic programs which have strong relations with the community and several departments of state government. The Downtown Campus is the home of nationally ranked schools and graduate programs that attract students and members of the professional community from all over New York State, the nation and world.

UAlbany's Downtown Campus is just a short walk from Downtown Albany—the seat of State government. Public universities have the potential through design enhancements to be well integrated with their surrounding neighborhoods. An urban university’s campus and surroundings should offer a pleasant experience that contributes to a vibrant city. UAlbany is in great position to consider many of the treatments described in this report.

The Downtown Campus is a landmark complex within the City of Albany and serves as a place of work, study and community outreach for hundreds of individuals. The University is a huge asset to the community, having a major impact on scores of businesses, organizations, religious institutions and thousands of students in the surrounding neighborhoods.

To achieve the aims put forward in this report will require the creation of university-community partnerships. Creating partnerships is the most important goal and emphasis of this Studio. Creation and utilization of partnerships is the most effective means to foster positive community change. Portions of this report provide suggestions about how strengthening various strategic university-community relationships can present the opportunity for measurable success.

The Planning Studio brings together graduate students in Urban and Regional Planning, usually in the semester before they begin careers following graduation. The Planning Studio represents a combined effort of students and faculty from diverse areas of expertise and skills. This Studio focuses on community development, land use, transportation and “healthy” infrastructure.

This year, with the support and encouragement of the University at Albany, the Planning Studio has focused on the area we call the Mid-City University District (MCUD)—an area which encompasses the University at Albany’s Downtown Campus and Alumni Quad, the campus of the College of St. Rose, and the campus of Albany High School. It is also an area of neighborhoods in which a very large proportion of the residents are University at Albany students. (See Figures 1-6 for the boundaries of the MCUD and other characteristics.)
Mid-City University District Planning Studio
Mission Statement

Through strategic improvements and enhancements that build on its educational assets and traditional neighborhood character, the Mid-City University District will become a more vibrant and thriving community that expresses and inspires the pride of community residents as well as University at Albany students, faculty and staff.

Specifically the Mid-City University District Planning Process aims to achieve:

• *A Lively Commercial District:* with a variety of retail options within walking distance to students and residents.
• *A High Quality Residential District:* with affordable, safe, and decent housing options for all.
• *An Attractive and Amenity-filled District:* with well-maintained historic architecture and groomed public spaces.
• *A Stable and Safe District:* with a variety of public safety programs to help the community feel at ease.
• *An Accessible District:* for pedestrians and cyclists, young and old, as well as for those with disabilities.
• *An Attractive and Welcoming Downtown Campus:* that strengthens and enhances the vitality and livability of surrounding areas.
• *An Ongoing University-Community Partnership:* that continues to look for opportunities to undertake cooperative initiatives and improvements aimed at making the Mid-City University District a better place in which to live, work, study and learn.
Creating a Vital Edge

“Until recently, a clearly defined edge, ideally with a fence, was seen as a desirable way of distinguishing a college or university from its neighborhood. Today, edges must be more porous, as institutions seek ways to be part of, rather than separate from, their neighborhoods. Treatment of the edge between the institution and the town is one of the most decisive actions an institution can take in building vitality in its neighborhood. Many colleges and universities, considering only the organization of functions within their campuses, ignore this opportunity. They do so at their peril.” [Kenny et al., Mission and Place, 2005, 229]

Washington Avenue

Washington Avenue is a main thoroughfare connecting outlying suburbs to downtown Albany, making it an important corridor within the study area. It is also an important public transit corridor connecting the Uptown and Downtown UAlbany campuses. Washington Avenue currently consists of 2 lanes and a 7 foot wide parking lane going both East and West. The traffic lanes are all 10 feet wide, making the street 54 feet from curb to curb. There is no designated bike lane along Washington Avenue.

Traffic counts conducted by the Planning Studio found an Average Annual Traffic Count of approximately 18,000 cars per day on Washington Avenue between North Lake Avenue and Robin Street. In a bike level of service study performed by the CDTC, the level of service along Washington received a grade of F.

Even though the public face of the Campus looks out onto Western Avenue, Washington Avenue remains as important gateway to the UAlbany Downtown campus. Not only do students, faculty and staff use this road as a way to get to school, but commuters and local residents also use it day in and day out. The way the Downtown Campus relates to Washington Avenue also has a significant impact on the quality and stability of the Washington Square neighborhood. Thus, the Washington Avenue streetscape along the northern edge of the campus is highly deserving of attention.

One of the most striking things about the Washington Avenue edge of the Downtown Campus is how inhospitable it is. Crosswalks are poorly marked and inadequately placed, and there are few places where bicycle riders can lock-up and store their bicycles. The entrance to the academic building is not immediately obvious, potentially confusing first-time visitors to the campus. Moreover, without an obvious way to walk from Washington Avenue to Western Avenue and Washington Park (except by circling around N. Lake or Robin Streets, or venturing into UAlbany buildings), the massive Downtown Campus forms a wall that obstructs rather than facilitates pedestrian movement.
The Washington Avenue side of the Downtown Campus feels especially cold and unsafe at night. Pedestrian lighting is largely limited to spotlights mounted on the buildings—there being no pedestrian-oriented streetlights along the sidewalk. With no trees or landscaping to soften the edge, and utility poles providing the only prominent features, the aesthetic appearance of the northern edge of the Campus is dispiriting, and lacks the kind of qualities that would make people feel drawn to the institution. This is unfortunate since the Washington Square areas closest to the Downtown Campus contains many fine homes and structures that show signs of reinvestment that should be further encouraged. Another very positive sign of private commitment to the Washington Square neighborhood is that members of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany has recently spent over $3 million building a major addition to its facility.

**Recommendations**

One of the first things that should be done is to install more visible crosswalks, signs warning vehicles of pedestrians crossings, and countdown pedestrian signals. With the inauguration of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service along Central Avenue it will be all the more important to provide safe crosswalks so that students, faculty and residents can safely cross Washington and walk to the Central Ave./Lexington Street BRT stop.

The step that would have the most positive and immediate impact on the streetscape would be to put the utility lines underground and install architecturally distinctive, pedestrian-scale street lighting along Washington Avenue from Robin Street to N. Lake Street, as well as along both sides of Robin Street from Washington Avenue to Central Avenue. Architectural and design services should be sought to accentuate and embellish the Washington Avenue entrance to the campus with some attractive, eye-catching features. Replacing a portion of the paved asphalt surface of Washington Avenue with a stamped concrete surface could also create a greater sense of place.

A longer term undertaking that we believe would have a beneficial effect would be to reduce the number of traffic lanes from 4 to 2, and install a planted median in the center of the roadway. By reducing the number of traffic lanes, there would also be enough space to create two designated bike lanes (one in each direction) and shift to diagonal on-street parking—thereby increasing the number of on-street parking spaces. All three measures (reducing the number of traffic lanes, converting to diagonal parking, and installing a planted median) will have a further calming effect on traffic, and make motorists more aware of their need to slow down as they pass through the Downtown Campus District.

At present, there is only a narrow strip of grass separating parking spaces in the Hawley Parking Lot and the sidewalk along Washington Avenue and Robin Street. A raised, landscaped buffer, planted with trees, should be installed to separate the Hawley Lot from nearby sidewalks. Defining the edge of the sidewalk will create a more appealing pedestrian environment, will enhance the quality of the Washington Square neighborhood. It will also transform the Hawley Lot into a space that might conceivably accommodate community activities that enliven the Campus community—such as a Farmer’s Market on Saturdays in the fall.
Image 1: Sidewalks, Utility Lines, & Limited Light and Greenery—Westbound on Washington Avenue

Image 2: Lanes for Cars and Parking—Eastbound on Washington Avenue

Image 3: Potential bicycle lane on Washington Avenue

Image 4: Potential planted median on Washington Avenue
Western Avenue

Western Avenue is also a major thoroughfare leading to the Downtown Campus, and an important public transit corridor linking the Downtown and Uptown UAlbany campuses. The portion of Western Avenue that the Downtown Campus fronts onto measures 40.5 feet from curb to curb, with two traffic lanes measuring 10.5 feet in width each, plus parallel parking along both sides of the street. Although Western Avenue is officially designated a bike route, it has no dedicated bicycle lane, and residents and students perceive the street in its current state as unsafe.

Unfortunately, the streetscape environment abutting the roadway offers little comfort for pedestrians. There are few if any trees to provide shade and define pedestrian paths; instead, utility poles are the major visual feature. The presence of overhead utility poles and lines in front of the UAlbany campus is worth noting, since almost everywhere else around the perimeter of Washington Park utilities are placed underground. Lighting of sidewalks, bus stops and cross walks along Western Avenue is also inadequate. In short, there are few amenities or aesthetic treatments to distinguish the Downtown Campus and convey a sense of its importance and stature.

Recommendations

A number of physical improvements are needed in the near term to increase pedestrian safety and create a more inviting streetscape for pedestrians and transit riders along Western Avenue. New, highly visible, lighted crosswalks with countdown signals are a top priority. Replacing asphalt with stamped pavement or pavers at busy intersections would further increase pedestrian safety by signaling drivers to slow down.

Laying out designated bicycle lanes, at least 5 ft. in width along both sides of Western Avenue from Robin to N. Lake Street, would also be beneficial. The eastern bound lane should parallel the east-bound traffic lane. Image 9 (page 19) shows how the westbound bike lane could be placed at grade parallel to the sidewalk, but separated from it by means of plantings and stone-work.
The UAlbany Downtown Campus’s Western Avenue frontage would also benefit greatly from three major physical improvements: the burial of utilities; the installation of architecturally distinctive, pedestrian scale lighting, and a carefully conceived tree planting scheme. Ideally, the pedestrian lighting scheme should extend from the Robin Street edge of the Downtown Campus to the Alumni Quad, so as to encourage pedestrian movement between the two areas, and help establish the special character and identity of the Mid-City University District.

Image 8: Pedestrian scale lighting

Image 9: Bike lane placed at grade parallel to the sidewalk, but separated from it by means of plantings and stonework
http://www.naparstek.com/Bike%20lane%20bollards.jpg
Quail Street

Quail Street is an important north-south artery running through the Mid-City University District. A number of businesses and restaurants frequented by UAlbany Students are already clustered around the Quail Street/Western Avenue intersection, and a number of UAlbany students are now living in the former Freihofer Bakery building at Quail Street and Washington Avenue, which has been converted to apartments. At the intersection of Quail Street and Central Avenue, WAMC has opened the Linda Norris Auditorium, an entertainment venue that is likely to attract significant numbers of UAlbany students, faculty and staff to its programs. The Bus Rapid Transit service that is expected to begin operating along Central Avenue, with a station stop at Quail Street and Central Avenue, is also likely to draw more pedestrians to walk along Quail Street to Central Avenue.

Recommendations

Quail Street between Western and Washington Avenues has the potential to generate a much greater amount of pedestrian activity and attract more campus-oriented commercial uses. This can be encouraged in various ways. First, the zoning along Quail Street should be changed to allow mixed-use buildings, with commercial establishments and restaurants on the ground floor and housing above. Outdoor cafés should also be encouraged by widening the sidewalks. This can be done by converting Quail Street from a two-way street to a one-way street heading north, thereby allowing the roadway to be narrowed. Last but not least, overhead utilities should be placed underground, utility poles should be removed, decorative street lighting should be installed, and trees should be planted to make the street more visually inviting.
Robin Street

“...Livening the edges of streets shared with the town by judicious placement of residential uses and student activities may create enough liveliness that markets open for private shops, cafes, and development...” [Kenny et al., Mission and Place, 2005, 230]

The Avenue2000 Plan prepared for the Central Avenue Business Improvement District has identified the short, two-block stretch of Robin Street between Central Avenue and Washington Avenue as an important connector between the University, Central Avenue businesses, and the future BRT system, which will have a station stop at Robin and Central. Unfortunately, the current bleak streetscape along Robin Street undermines its role as a gateway to and from the Downtown Campus. Also, the current residential zoning of the street does not allow commercial or mixed-use development.

Recommendations

Streetscape improvements and the installation of pedestrian-scale lighting along Robin Street will encourage greater UAlbany patronage of businesses and restaurants on Central Avenue, as well as use of the new BRT service. A more visible crosswalk across Washington Avenue will help draw attention to the Robin Street corridor. The same stamped concrete paving surface recommended for Washington Avenue could be extended down Robin Street. Other design treatments that communicate that Robin Street is a gateway to the University at Albany Downtown Campus should be major.

Creating a streetscape along Robin Street that is comfortable and inviting to pedestrians, and advertises itself as a connector between the University and Central Avenue, is important both strategically and symbolically, because it will serve as a reminder that the University at Albany does not wish to isolate itself from its host community, and recognizes that its distinctly urban location is key to its institutional identity.
Memorable places on campus can help create a sense of belonging, and sharing these places helps to create a feeling of community... Typically, students remember the open spaces of the campus more vividly than they remember the buildings... Memorable events happen in memorable places.” [Kenny et al., Mission and Place, 2005, 76]

“The campus entrance is a particularly significant space. Creating distinctiveness and impact in the architectural and landscape composition of the campus entrance may be the single most effective way to add a sense of identity to the institution as a whole.” [Kenny et al., Mission and Place, 2005, 79]

The lawn in front of the Downtown Campus should be such a memorable space. However, at the present time it isn’t. Instead, the lawn in front of Page Hall is largely unused because of a lack of seating, poor access, and a notable lack of landscaping and plantings. The front lawn of the campus could be a major focal point shade by adding a few amenities.

**Recommendations**

The great lawn area in front of Page Hall is in great need of a significant landscape redesign that should include the planting of shade trees and the creation of inviting seating and gathering places. A formal paved promenade should be developed leading to the center of Page Hall, and the main sign for the University at Albany Downtown Campus should be moved more toward the center of the campus, closer to the Page Hall entrance. The placement of large pieces of public art might be something to consider, to add visual interest and liveliness to the Campus lawn.
The Maintenance Courtyard area of the Downtown Campus is used for garbage storage and maintenance vehicle parking. A raised colonnaded walkway forms the back wall of this dead-end space, making it impossible for anyone to pass through between Washington and Western Avenues. As a result, people have to walk around the entire block to get to the opposite side of the campus. The photos to the left (Images 19 and 20) convey a sense of the desolate appearance and feel of this space. Here again, the Downtown Campus has put its least flattering appearance fronting onto the Washington Avenue neighborhood.

**Recommendations**

University maintenance vehicles should no longer be parked in this courtyard, and should be parked instead in the main parking lots. Dumpsters that currently occupy this space should also be moved to a less visible, screened location. The space can then be redesigned and converted into a comfortably enclosed space where students, faculty and staff can relax and socialize between classes. The raised colonnaded walkway should be modified to provide a pedestrian pass-through between Washington and Western Avenues (See image 21).
There are currently four handicapped parking spaces in the Thurlow Parking Lot, so that a disabled person needs to travel approximately 300 feet to the designated handicapped access entrance to the campus complex. There are also currently five handicapped parking spaces in the Hawley Lot. Neither location is well-located in relation to the handicapped accessible entrance to the Downtown Campus. Also, sidewalks along Washington Avenue and at the entrance to Milne Hall currently have no curb ramps.

**Recommendations**

Handicapped accessible parking spaces should be clustered and moved behind Milne Hall, closer to the clearly marked handicapped entrance. As stated earlier, we recommend that Washington Avenue be converted from four traffic lanes to two, with a planted median be in the center of the roadway. Through this modification, there will be enough room to shift from parallel to diagonal on-street parking spaces along the south side of Washington Avenue. In this way, nine handicapped parking spaces can be created close to the Downtown Campus handicapped entrance, freeing up the 9 existing handicapped parking spaces in the Thurlow and Hawley lots for people who do not have mobility issues. The shift to diagonal parking should also make it possible to increase the overall number of on-street parking spaces along Washington Avenue.
Alumni Quad - Courtyard Area

“Conversation is the backbone of community and personal growth; and the campus environment should be designed to nurture it. Interaction among community members is fostered by the availability of indoor and outdoor spaces where people can come together without much effort. Institutions should consider whether their campuses have adequate places that encourage spontaneous, informal interaction among students.” [Kenny et al., Mission and Place, 2005]

The Alumni Quad Courtyard is an enclosed public space within the Alumni Quad residential complex that one would think would be a much used gathering place for social interaction. College life is part academic and part social. However, in contrast to other quadrangles at other universities, the Alumni Quad Courtyard, home to more than 600 students, is often empty and devoid of activity, as was the case on a sunny, 80 degree day in Fall 2007 (see image 25). There are many explanations for why the Courtyard is such an unused resource. There is no visual focal point or activity center within the two acre large Courtyard to draw people in. Once within it there is no place to sit, and there are no shade trees or plantings.

The Quad Courtyard is currently accessible by means of three stairways and a narrow, steep emergency vehicle access. However there is no direct access to the Courtyard from Western Avenue, the front entrance of the Alumni Quad complex. A 25 ft. wide asphalt driveway surrounds the Courtyard, and disabled accessibility is limited to a steep asphalt road.

Recommendations
Parking spaces adjoining the Quad Courtyard should be eliminated, the road around the Courtyard should be narrowed from 25 to 15 feet in width, and use of the road should be limited to emergency and maintenance vehicles only. The services of a highly qualified landscape design firm should be retained to redesign the Courtyard to include intersecting walkways, shade trees and seating areas.
Additional ways to access the Courtyard should be provided, such as by placing a doorway from the dining room leading out to the patio overlooking the Courtyard. Architectural services should also be retained to examine the feasibility of reconfiguring the Alumni Quad complex to front more directly and positively onto Western Avenue, and make the Quad Courtyard more visible and easily accessible from Western Avenue. To accomplish this will require relocating the servicing and waste storage facilities of the complex, inasmuch as the current accessway from Western Avenue into the Alumni Quad is used for garbage storage. Several large fans also blow out onto this area. If the dumpsters and exhaust fans can be moved, the entrance to the Quad Courtyard can be greatly enhanced.

**Public Transportation**

The UAlbany Shuttle Bus provides reliable and frequent bus service linking the Downtown Campus and Alumni Quad to the Uptown Campuses. During most of the day, shuttle buses run approximately every 20 minutes. The CDTA’s #11 bus also provides frequent service between the Downtown and Uptown Campuses along Western Avenue, and like the UAlbany Shuttle takes riders into the Uptown Campus. Additional frequent bus service between the Downtown and Uptown campuses is provided by CDTA’s #12 bus, which travels along Washington Avenue, and enters the Uptown Campus via Collins Circle. These combined and overlapping bus routes provide students, faculty and staff a remarkably high level of bus service between the Downtown and Uptown Campuses, and points in between.

The major problem affecting transit riders traveling to and from the Downtown Campus is that the bus stops where people wait for buses are woefully inadequate. Several bus stops serve the downtown Campus and Alumni Quad, but only some of them are equipped with shelters. Currently, there are two bus shelters serving the Alumni Quad (one at Western and Partridge and one at Western and Ontario) and three bus shelters serving the Downtown Campus: one on the northeast side of Western Avenue, one mid-block on the Washington Avenue side of the campus, and one at Western Avenue and Thurlow Terrace. Bus stops surrounding the Downtown Campus without bus shelters, and without any place for people to sit while waiting for a bus, are located on Washington Avenue eastbound in front of Draper Hall, at the corner of Washington Avenue and Robin Street, and along Robin Street going south. Just think how unpleasant it must be for students waiting for a bus in a driving rain, in the dark, without any protection from the elements. Even where shelters are provided, the shelters are fairly small and can only accommodate a relatively small number of people at a time.
Other major deficiencies related to current bus stops are that they tend to be very poorly lit, and lack posted schedules letting riders know when the next bus is scheduled to arrive. One other notable problem is that crosswalks in the vicinity of bus stops are poorly marked and in many instances poorly placed, often forcing students and bus riders to take unnecessary risks when crossing streets going to and from bus stops.

**Recommendations**
- Improve bus stop facilities and amenities to make the transit experience more comfortable and appealing, including more attractive and comfortable seating.
- In cooperation with CDTA, consider developing a distinctive University at Albany, or university-related design for bus shelters to define and communicate the special character of the Mid-City University District.
- Install improved pedestrian-scale lighting at bus stops
- Post up-to-date bus schedules and maps at bus stops.

**Mid-City Bikeway**
There are currently no safe corridors for bicyclists to safely ride between the Uptown and Downtown UAlbany campuses. Instead, both Western and Washington Avenues force bicyclists to share traffic lanes with automobiles.

**Recommendations**
Creating a Mid-City Bikeway connecting the Uptown and Downtown campuses, but will also provide connections to the Alumni Quad, Washington Park, the College of St. Rose, Albany High School, Albany Middle School, the Harriman Campus, and numerous neighborhoods. In the long run, this bikeway could end up being a key element in overall strategy aimed at revitalizing the city of Albany by greatly improving its livability and quality of life.

The proposed bikeway route could begin along the Hudson River, go up State Street along the northerly edge of Washington Park, and travel west along the Western Avenue frontage of the Downtown Campus.
At the intersection of Western Avenue and North Lake Avenue, the bikeway would make a right turn (north) and then a left turn (west) through a parcel that is currently vacant. Proceeding west, the bikeway would cut through the block to Cortland Place and continue its westerly path up State Street. After crossing Quail and Ontario Streets, the bikeway would pass along the front of Brubacher Hall at the Alumni Quad, and then cross O’Leary Blvd., where it would thread its way between the athletic fields of Albany High School and the LaSalle School for Boys, the College of St. Rose and the R.E. May School. After crossing North Main Avenue, the bikeway would pass onto Lancaster Street, and proceed in a westerly direction, crossing West Lawrence St., North Allen St., and North Pine Ave., before entering onto Manning Blvd. Traveling southwest along Manning Blvd., the bikeway could cut through the block to Winthrop Avenue and continue onto Melrose Avenue. It would then cross Route 85 via a pedestrian/bicycle bridge and connect to the proposed Harriman Campus bike path, which is planned to connect to the Purple Path which is being constructed around the Uptown UAlbany Campus. 

To complete a bike path of this magnitude will require the close cooperation and support of a number of institutions (such as the College of St. Rose and the Albany School District, etc.) as well as the City of Albany, the State of New York and residents in a number of neighborhoods. Nevertheless it is an undertaking that could be well worth the effort, in that it will weave together the various components of the Mid-City University District, and create an environmentally beneficial mode of transportation connecting major employment centers and destinations in the city to a large number of city neighborhoods.

Figure 7: Proposed Bikeway shown in Red Dotted Line
The Washington Park/Robin St./State St./Englewood Place/Western Avenue intersection at the Southeast Corner of the Downtown Campus is a six-way intersection that is unnecessarily complicated and difficult for pedestrians walking to and from the Downtown Campus, and those walking from the Downtown Campus to Washington Park. The Downtown Campus' proximity to Washington park should be a major amenity that is readily enjoyed by UAlbany students, faculty and staff. Pedestrians should be able to flow easily between the Campus and Washington Park. Instead, this intersection acts as an obstacle by requiring most pedestrians to cross two or three streets to reach the park.

**Recommendations**

This intersection should be reconfigured to produce an intersection that is much safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. The solution we recommend calls for removing the triangular-shaped island that currently funnels traffic from Western Avenue (a two-way street) onto State Street (a one-way street), and constructing a roundabout, which would serve as a traffic calming measure. This way of reconfiguring the intersection would actually add land to Washington Park and the UAlbany downtown Campus. To further uncomplicate the intersection, and make it safer for pedestrians, Washington Park Road should be redirected to terminate at Englewood Place. Bringing traffic from Washington Park Road onto Englewood Place, instead of allowing it to flow independently into the intersection, significantly reduces the complexity of the intersection (i.e. from a six-way to a five-way intersection). Moreover, since traffic on State Street is a one-way street going way from the intersection, pedestrians crossing at the intersection would be essentially confronted with only a four-way intersection. A pedestrian pathway should be provided leading into Washington Park from the intersection along parkland created through the closure of part of Washington Park Road.
The Mid-City Bikeway leading from Downtown Albany to the Downtown Campus (see earlier section on Mid-City Bikeway) could be located around the outside of the traffic circle. A well-designed marker, appropriate piece of sculpture, or fountain could be placed in the center of the roundabout to mark the gateway to the Mid-City University District. The pathway leading to Washington Park should align with the intersection so that there is immediate pedestrian access.

**Student Housing**

“As the housing stock deteriorated, more and more single family homes were rented out, increasingly to undergraduates. Potential homebuyers were not anxious to buy a house next door to one that was occupied by a group of students. Penn undergrads, like undergrads anywhere, can be loud, boisterous, and messy—taking out the trash is just not a priority for a twenty-year-old, and parties lasting till 2 A.M. were routine. In fact, this was another reason to bring our undergraduate students back to on-campus living, a goal already designated as one of our highest academic priorities.” [Judith Rodin, 2007, *The University and Urban Revival*, University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 86-87.]

Relying on privately-owned residential structures to meet the need for student housing can be harmful to affected neighborhoods. “Owners stop reinvesting in their homes, opting to capitalize on student rents....” [Kenny et al., *Mission and Place*, 2005, 230]

**Potential Development Sites**

Presently there is a pressing need for additional quality student housing. Housing facilities on the University’s Uptown Campus and Alumni Quad are crowded and cannot support an ever-growing student population. Housing options for graduate and international students are also limited, and many of these students have unpleasant experiences living in privately-owned off-campus housing.
There are a number of opportunities for developing additional student housing within the Mid-City University District. In fact, the development of high-quality student housing could considerably improve the relationship between the University and residents of the Mid-City University District. One of the alternatives the University could pursue to provide additional student housing might be to acquire some privately owned apartment buildings, such as the “New Eloise” apartment building on the northwest corner of S. Lake Street and Washington Avenue. Another approach might be to seek to acquire some sites for infill development of new student housing within the District.

Lot 1 (see images 37 and 38), at the southeast corner of Ontario Street and Washington Avenue, is a commercial structure (reportedly a former dry-cleaner business, and a “brownfield”) which has been boarded-up and vacant for years. Redeveloping this property for student housing would eliminate a neighborhood eyesore. Alternatively, the property could be redeveloped to house a student mentoring program and resource center. The location of the site is ideal for this purpose—one block away from Albany High School, one block away from the Albany Quad, and on the Washington Avenue bus route. UAlbany already has an extensive tutoring and mentoring program with Albany High School. It was created in 2005 with the school district. Tutoring is done both on-site at the high school and online. The program currently has a full-time program coordinator, about 45 tutors and 30 mentors.

Lot 2, at the northeast corner of the same intersection, (see again image 37) is presently a beer distributor with a large amount of parking in front. This site is larger than the one across the street, and could accommodate a good-sized mixed-use building, with student housing on the upper floors.

Image 39 shows a vacant, decaying multi-story apartment building located at the southeast corner of S. Main and Myrtle Avenues. If UAlbany were to acquire and substantially rehabilitate the property for student housing, it would remove a blighting influence from the neighborhood, and for that reason would probably be greatly welcomed by neighborhood residents. If rehabilitation proves not to be feasible, UAlbany could start fresh by constructing new student housing on the site.
Public-Private Partnership for Student Housing

University Village, Chicago, IL

University Village in Chicago is a project produced through a public-private partnership between the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC) and the South Campus Development Team, a consortium of three private development firms: Mesirow Stein Real Estate, Inc.; The New Frontier Companies; and The Harlem Irving Companies. University Village was a part of a larger UIC South Campus redevelopment program initiated in 1997.

University Village is a New Urbanist-style, mixed-use development project that includes residential units for sale and rent, retail and commercial uses. When completed, the $650 million project will include more than 900 privately developed condominiums, townhomes and lofts, and a mixture of retail shops, restaurants and parking. The private residential component of the project is valued at $300 million and is being constructed on 25 acres of land located at the south end of the campus. It consists of 646 condominiums and lofts, 210 townhomes, and 31 single-family dwellings, with 185 affordable units. Over 75 percent of all homes in the project look out onto a park or open space that leads to university athletic fields. Stores and restaurants are mainly located in the middle of the south Campus along Halsted and Maxwell Streets. A Metro (commuter rail) station is located a block south of University Village. Student apartments and other university-related components of the project are located in the northern part of the site.

University Village greatly enhances the UIC campus, providing expanded housing opportunities to students and staff as well as city residents. Almost all the residential properties at University Village are registered in the UIC off-campus housing database, which is maintained by UIC for the benefit of UIC students, faculty and staff.
In addition to the key role played by UIC, the city of Chicago was also a participant in the University Village Project. The project benefited from the creation of a special Roosevelt-Union Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District. Through the TIF incentive, the City was able to invest $75 million in land acquisition, development of infrastructure and environmental remediation. The development team worked closely with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to make sure that all environmental regulations were met during the redevelopment process.

California State University (CSU), San Marcos, CA

The San Marcos Campus of California State University (CSU) formerly did not have any on-campus housing. Instead, it managed a number of off-campus housing units. In 1999, as a result of an increased student enrollment and housing demand, the University completed a study of the feasibility of developing on-campus housing at the San Marcos campus. The study determined that there was a need for about 400 on-campus housing units. A follow-up study in 2001 revealed an even greater housing need, due to increased market rents in the area.

As a result of these findings, the University decided to pursue the development of a new student housing complex. After evaluating various development scenarios, the University decided to proceed using a public-private partnership model. Through an RFP/RFQ process, the University selected a developer who was the best match for the project.

The CSU-San Marcos University Village apartment complex was developed on a vacant site owned by the University. It consists of a total of four buildings—three residential buildings with 475 beds and one building used as a Commons. The development took about two years to complete, and was ready for occupancy in August 2003.
University Off-Campus Housing Service

Many of the UAlbany students we spoke to reported having experienced problems and disputes related to their off-campus rental housing. We believe this is an indication that it is imperative that an effective mechanism be put in place by the University to ensure safe and sound off-campus housing for students. The University has a section on its website dedicated to off-campus housing, which includes an off-campus housing search. However, prospective students need an off-campus housing service that has a permanent staff that is able to warn students away from disreputable landlords and poor quality properties.

Recommendations

We recommend the establishment of an off-campus housing office that can advise and assist students in their search for housing of a reliable quality from reputable landlords. The proposed University Housing Service (UHS) could be developed in cooperation with the College of St. Rose, and should have a permanent staff, including graduate assistants and a legal aid representative. The UHS staff would coordinate with city officials and United Tenants of Albany to create an off-campus housing website with pertinent information about landlords in the area, information on tenant’s rights, and up-to-date listings of available properties. The UHS would also conduct walkthroughs and assessments of potential rental listings before they were posted on the ad section of the UHS website, so as to ensure safety and livability. In addition, the University Housing Service would conduct orientation programs for students living off-campus for the first time, and advise them regarding the responsibilities that go along with renting an apartment.

Both the University of Michigan and the University of New Hampshire have off-campus housing services. The University of Michigan’s Off-Campus Housing Program offers a conflict resolution service to resolve tenant-landlord disputes. The University of New Hampshire’s Off-Campus and Commuter Student Division have dedicated resources and support staff to assist students in locating off-campus housing. Information regarding these programs can be found on their respective websites: University of Michigan’s at www.offcampus.housing.umich.edu/l/ general.cfm; and the University of New Hampshire’s at www.unh.edu/housing/housinginfo/offcampus.html.

Off-Campus Housing Orientation

All students entering UAlbany are currently offered an Orientation Program which familiarizes them with University facilities and all the various services the University has to offer. A somewhat similar Orientation Program should be offered to students planning to move into private, off-campus housing to inform them concerning what they should know and expect when renting housing units off-campus. The Off-Campus Housing Orientation Program could be conducted by the proposed University Off-Campus Housing Office, and go a long way toward decreasing the distressing housing-related problems many UAlbany students experience during their college careers. The Off-Campus Housing Orientation Program could also sensitize students regarding their own responsibilities not only to the housing units and structures they live in, but also to the neighborhoods within which they are going to inhabit. The fact that UAlbany students living in the “Student Ghetto” all too often conduct themselves in ways that undermine the livability of MCUD neighborhoods, thereby discouraging families and households from buying and living in MCUD homes year-round, underscores the need for such an Orientation.
Public Safety

Students living at the Alumni Quad and in private off-campus housing within the Mid-City University District express concern about what they perceive to be the high level of criminal activity, and overall lack of public safety in the area, particularly at night. Reported crime statistics indicate that property crimes such as larceny are most prevalent; violent crimes involving assaults, rape and homicides are extremely rare. Nevertheless, many students, as they move about their daily lives, often feel that their personal safety is at risk, and this perception undoubtedly colors their college experience.

University efforts directed toward improving student safety have produced actions such as “Operation Safe Corridor,” the installation of emergency call boxes with flashing blue lights, and stepped up patrols. Some neighborhood associations have created “Neighborhood Watch” programs, including a “No Trespassing” initiative aimed at preventing loitering and property crimes. These are all positive steps. Another action that can and should be taken to improve safety at night, that will be expensive, is to install bright, pedestrian-scale sidewalk lighting along the main corridors that students are likely to walk: Western Avenue between the Downtown Campus and the Alumni Quad; along Washington Avenue east and west from the Campus; and along north-south streets such as Robin, N. Lake and Quail Streets, and on Partridge Street between Western and Washington Avenues (along the west side of the Alumni Quad).

To achieve a high level of safety within the MCUD will require addressing the full range of issues discussed in this report, such as: the need to stimulate greater private investment in rehabilitating aging residential structures and creating new housing within the District; the need to achieve more of a balance between owner-occupied and renter-occupied housing; and the need to add new retail, commercial and service establishments to make the District a more vital and appealing place to live and spend time in. In the final analysis, what really makes places safe is a high level pedestrian activity 24-7, which can be done by adding pedestrian-scale lighting that makes people feel safe and comfortable walking outdoors at night, by adding new housing units and additional owner-occupied housing, and by adding commercial establishments and restaurants that generate more people at street level, and more eyes on the street.
### Private Housing

78.3% of all housing units in the Mid-City University District are currently renter-occupied—meaning that only 21.7% of units are owner-occupied. Because students account for such a large proportion of renters in the area, and because they have often been willing to live in poor quality structures because they intend only to live in the area for a short period of time, landlords tend to regard them as a “captive market.” As a result, the District’s overall rental housing stock has been disinvested in and become progressively run down.

Private homeowners experience a number of disadvantages living in an area with such high proportion of renters—particularly one in which so many residents are students who live in the area less than nine months a year. First of all, the deterioration quality of many of the properties rented out to students, has undermined the value of nearby owner-occupied residential properties, and caused the MCUD to be seen as an undesirable area to buy a home and raise a family. Another factor that has undermined the District’s residential appeal is that 995 (7.6%) of the District’s 12,565 housing units in 2000 were vacant. At the same time, year-round residents and families in the area find that businesses in the area cater primarily to college students (e.g. pizza outlets and bars), while the area lacks the full-range of commercial establishments, service outlets and restaurants that one would normally find in a densely populated area—of year-round residents.

Concerted action must be taken by the City of Albany, the University at Albany, the College of St. Rose, and neighborhood associations in the District to rebuild neighborhood confidence, and make the District more attract for owner-occupancy so as to stimulate private investment in upgrading existing housing and building new housing.

One way to encourage more of a year-round population and more owner-occupants, and at the same time introduce more commercial and service establishments to meet the needs of year-round residents, is to encourage the development of mixed-use buildings, with stores and businesses on the first floor and condominiums on the upper floors. Such upper floor housing units would be ideal for new graduates, young professionals, and even some University faculty and staff. Introducing mixed-use development would make the MCUD safer by providing more “eyes on the street.” The University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia did just that, by leasing University-owned land to a private developer, who then built a mixed-use building with ground floor retail and market rate housing units above. Unfortunately, such in-town housing options are not currently offered anywhere in the MCUD.
A majority of the faculty and staff of UAlbany currently live outside of Albany and drive cars to work, which means that the University is being continually pressured to provide more and more parking. At the Downtown Campus possibilities for adding parking are already extremely limited. The University at Albany should therefore seriously consider implementing a home-ownership program (similar to what a number of other urban universities have done) to encourage and assist faculty and staff to buy homes and live within the Mid-City University District. Such a program would bring faculty and staff closer to the University, and allow more faculty and staff to reach the Downtown and Uptown Campuses using public transit—thereby reducing the costs the University incurs providing parking. It would also increase the number of owner-occupied homes in the District—an essential element in the strategy for revitalizing the MCUD.

The University of Pennsylvania provides an excellent example of such a program. Penn offers two types of home-ownership programs. The Guaranteed Mortgage Program offers financing assistance to any full-time faculty and staff member who wishes to live within the University District. The total loan amount for a single family home cannot exceed $417,000, or $533,000 for a two-unit structure. In addition to guaranteeing the loan (thereby significantly reducing the interest rate), the University provides a percentage of the loan, thereby enabling staff and faculty to purchase homes with little or no down payment. The Enhanced Mortgage Program gives faculty and staff purchasing a home within the University District a $7500 forgivable loan. The loan can be used for renovations, home improvements, closing costs or down payments. Existing homeowners can apply for the loan only for home improvements valued at the median price of homes in the area. Union College in Schenectady, a much smaller institution than Penn, has operated a similar program to assist and encourage their faculty and staff to purchase and renovate houses surrounding its campus.

**Code Enforcement**

The ongoing problem of inadequate code enforcement in the Mid-City University District must be addressed. When building code, sanitary code, trash, fire and noise violations occur in the Mid-City University District, city agency officials and police called to the scene typically distribute warnings and notices of violation. However, residents often remain unsatisfied with the end result. First, they complain that it takes Police and department personnel responsible for enforcing the codes too long to respond to complaints. Second, residents complain that when city officers issue warnings, all too often there are no follow-up visits to make sure the violation has been corrected. The problem of code enforcement has been repeatedly recognized by the Council of Albany Neighborhood Associations, and was reiterated in the recently delivered report of the Sustainable Development Assessment Team. We don’t have a solution to the problem. We simply note that it continues to be a problem, and that if it continues to adversely affect the quality of life of MCUD residents.
Two-Family Structures
As noted previously, Albany’s Mid-City University District suffers from a serious imbalance between rental and owner-occupied housing. Another important characteristic of the MCUD that needs to be underscored is that roughly 30% (3830) of the 12,565 housing units in the District are in two-family structures. A large number of additional housing units are in structures containing 3 units. The vast majority of such 2 and 3-unit structures are absentee owned.

Achieving a greater balance between owner and renter-occupied housing is critically important to the ongoing health of the MCUD. In this regard, it is important to recognize that two and three-unit structures (hereafter referred to as “plex” housing) are highly adaptable and uniquely suited to meeting a range of housing needs, including a balance of owner-occupied and rental housing.

Economic and Social Advantages of Plex Housing

- People not able to afford to purchase a single-family home are often able to purchase a two-family structure. Income generated by renting the second unit helps the owner pay off the mortgage costs.
- Rents are typically lower in owner-occupied two-family structures than in absentee-owned apartment developments. The rent paid by a tenant in a two-family owner-occupied home is usually established by the amount the owner needs to pay the mortgage. While rents in absentee-owned apartments tend to rise steadily over time, rents of plex rental units rise more slowly, since having a good tenant paying a reasonable rent usually means more to an owner-occupant than maximizing income. As a result, tenants who rent units in owner-occupied plex structures are encouraged to remain in the same unit for many years.
- The presence of rental units in owner-occupied structures provides a way for families to help other family members needing affordable accommodations. In Montreal, Quebec (a city with a high proportion of plex housing structures) a large proportion of rental units in plex structures are rented to kin (i.e. an adult child, niece or nephew).
• Owner-occupied plex housing assures a mixture of incomes within neighborhoods (building owners with generally higher incomes and tenants with generally lower incomes). In this way, it combats the physical segregation of people with lower incomes into distinctly identified rental areas (such as the notorious “Student Ghetto” in Albany).

• Owner-occupied plex structures tend to be better maintained than absentee-owned rental properties. The owner-occupant of a plex building shares an interest in keeping the property in a safe, sanitary and attractive condition. A tenant having a maintenance issue can easily contact the owner to correct the situation.

Recommendations
The current $300,000 grant program that has been established to encourage home-ownership in the Mid-City area of Albany should be aggressively marketed to encourage owner-occupant purchases of two and three-family structures. As an added incentive, the grant amount for purchases of structures containing two or three units should probably be greater than $5,000.

The City of Albany should also be encouraged to establish a new program offering renovation grants and low interest loans targeted to encourage owner-occupants to renovate existing two and three-unit structures. Such a program should be funded by ear-marking some proportion of the City of Albany’s annual CDBG grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Grants of up to $10,000 per unit ($20,000 for a two-unit structure) would probably be needed in the early years to encourage purchasers to undertake renovations that could easily cost two to three times that amount. The quid pro quo for receiving such grants would be that recipients would need to commit to living in the property for at least 7 years. If a grant recipient sold the property or ceased to live at the address before the seven year period ended, the grant would have to be repaid, and the funds would added back into the grant program.

An attempt should be made to geographically target and grants on certain blocks so as to achieve a critical mass and have a readily discernible impact. The amounts of the grants could be scaled back once the value and desirability of owner-occupied plex housing is established.

Last but not least, the University at Albany’s Department of Geography and Planning should seek grant support and spear-head a research effort aimed at fulfilling the following objectives:

• Identify major prototypes of plex housing in Albany
• Explore and develop design alternatives for modifying and upgrading these prototypes to demonstrate their adaptability and capacity to meet contemporary housing needs.
• Identify funding mechanisms and sources that could increase the economic feasibility and attractiveness of renovating existing plex housing structures.
• Develop a marketing and promotional campaign aimed at couples and households in their 30s just starting out on their path to homeownership, and couples/individuals aged 50+ seeking more affordable housing in urban neighborhoods served by public transit. The grant proposal could be framed as a residential revitalization strategy applicable to a number of Upstate New York cities, not only Albany.
Adaptive Reuse of Existing Structures

Private Housing
There is definitely a need for more high-quality private housing in the Mid-City University District — particularly loft style and studio and one-bedroom units for working professionals and couples without children.

There are a number of historic and architecturally distinctive structures in the MCUD that could be adaptively reused and redeveloped into housing — either apartments or condominiums. For example, the old Albany High School building on N. Lake Street between Washington and Western Avenues, (currently being used as the temporary home of the Hackett Middle School while that structure is undergoing renovation), is ideally suited for conversion to housing. The AHS structure’s proximity to the Downtown Campus would be a major selling point in marketing the units. Adding 50 or more new housing units adjacent to Milne and Page Halls would also generate more “life” and pedestrian-activity around the Downtown Campus at night after class hours and on weekends. The Downtown Campus would no longer be an “academic enclave”, as students have described it. Last but not least, the addition of 50 or more new year-round housing units could provide the impetus for the development of new commercial and service establishments to serve the area.

Adaptive reuse of this kind has been done successfully in many places, such as the Queen Anne High School lofts in Seattle (see Image 48). The former Hawley Middle School in downtown Northampton, MA., a multi-story structure similar in size and scale to Albany’s former High School, has been handsomely converted to condominiums (see Image 50). The new loft-style housing units created within the former school, with high ceilings and plenty of light through the large windows, have proven highly marketable. The adding of 50 new housing units within the downtown also proved to be a boon for downtown shops and restaurants.
Opportunities and Development Sites

“Some universities have bought up land in surrounding neighborhoods... and have torn down housing to create surface parking for the campus. These barren parking lots can destroy neighborhood character, isolate the institutions from their host communities, and perhaps even cause neighborhood decline.” [Kenny et al., Mission and Place, 2005, 234]

Lexington and Washington Avenues

The parcel at the northwest corner of the intersection of Lexington and Washington Avenue is currently owned by the City of Albany and is used as a surface parking lot. This is not the best use of such a visually prominent parcel, so close to the Downtown Campus. Rather, it creates an empty space and absence of “eyes on the street” that not only fragments the urban fabric surrounding the Downtown Campus, but also creates an unwelcoming and potentially unsafe environment for pedestrians and people waiting at the Lexington/Washington Avenue CDTA bus stop.

Development of a multi-story, mixed-use structure on this parcel, with retail on the first floor and housing above, would be extremely beneficial to the Washington Square neighborhood and the Downtown Campus by creating a more unified and continuous, pedestrian-oriented streetscape along Washington Avenue leading to the Downtown Campus. The housing developed in such a structure would be particularly attractive to married graduate students enrolled in programs at the Downtown Campus. For such a mixed use development to occur, however, will require a re-zoning of the site, since it is currently zoned solely for residential use.

An alternative approach might be to develop a building with commercial uses on the first floor and a shallow, liner building of housing or offices on the second and third floors, wrapped around structured parking. Image 54 shows such a structure that was built on a corner lot in Boulder, CO., not unlike the corner lot at Washington Avenue and Lexington.
The Adult Learning Center

The Adult Learning Center, currently owned by the Albany School District, is crucially situated with respect to the Downtown Campus. Not only does it face directly onto the Downtown Campus, but it also projects a powerful presence onto Washington Avenue, Robin Street and Western Avenue, forming an important bridge between the Downtown Campus and the area east of the campus. What happens to and within the Adult Learning Center will exert a major influence on the Downtown Campus and its environs.

The substantial renovation and redevelopment of this property for University-related purposes would represent a very positive step toward integrating the Downtown Campus with the surrounding community. Among the uses that might be placed in the renovated building are:

- A student center, student lounge
- Library, to replace Dewey Library
- Café, copy and shipping services
- Lockers, showers and indoor bicycle storage—to encourage and support alternative transportation, as well as jogging in Washington Park
- Space for new urban-centered programs

Image 56 shows the SUNY Binghamton Downtown Center opened in August 2007. The facility contains 11 state-of-the-art classrooms, an Information Commons/Library with computer workstations and study spaces, undergrad and grad-student lounges, a café/restaurant, locker and shower facilities (to encourage riding bikes to work and exercising) and a three-story atrium that opens onto an exterior landscaped plaza.
Ethnic Food District along Central Avenue

Central Avenue is host to a wide variety of ethnic food restaurants, including Middle Eastern, Indian, Caribbean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Filipino and Thai cuisines—all of which are within reasonable walking distance of the UAlbany Downtown Campus.

Students, faculty and residents interviewed for this study expressed interest in frequenting these distinctive Central Avenue restaurants. However, fears about crime, and the generally unattractive streetscape along Central Avenue and the streets leading to Central Avenue, have discouraged much of this patronage. Some students interviewed were actually aware that these restaurants existed.

A concerted effort should be undertaken by the Central Avenue Business Improvement District, with the support of the Downtown Campus, to market and promote the stretch of Central Avenue between Lark and Quail Streets as an Ethnic Food District. Ideally the District should extend down Robin Street between Washington and Central Avenue—since the scale and sense of enclosure of this short street lends itself to accommodating campus-oriented cafes. A “Passport” could be offered by the Central Avenue BID giving cost savings to UAlbany students, faculty and staff who patronize Central Avenue ethnic restaurants. The “passport” could be included in orientation packets given to incoming students at the beginning of each academic year.
New Overlay District for Central Avenue

The AveNew2000 plan, which was completed in September 2000, envisions reviving the “College Town” segment of Central Avenue as a hub of economic, cultural and entertainment vitality. However, current Central Avenue zoning regulations do not allow the kind of mixed-use development that the plan hopes to stimulate. Currently, the only way to carry out a mixed use development, such as a restaurant on the first floor and housing above, is to apply for a parcel by parcel zoning change or zoning variance—a very time-consuming and expensive process. This process also carries a high risk of denial.

Traditionally, overlay districts have been applied to conserve natural resources. However, overlay district regulations can be written and mapped to incorporate and enhance whatever features are most important to a municipality. Several communities have taken steps to use overlay districts in such a creative way.

To make possible and encourage the kind of mixed use development that would truly revitalize Central Avenue, a Central Avenue Overlay District (CAOD) should be devised and applied along Central Avenue stretching from Lark Street to Ontario Street (See figure 11). This Overlay District should allow, as a permitted use, any and all developments that conform to the AveNew2000 Plan. The provisions of the COAD would only apply if the applicant “opts in”; in other words, the applicant would have the option of “opting out” – in which case the underlying zoning requirements would apply. Developments undertaken under the COAD would still have to be reviewed under the City of Albany’s site plan review procedure. In addition, design guidelines and height and bulk requirements will need to be drafted. Preliminary design guidelines were drafted by the consultant that prepared the AveNew2000 plan and should be reviewed and adopted by the City of Albany.

Adoption of the CAOD will provide property and business owners, developers, and organizations such as the Central Avenue BID and WAMC a pathway for realizing the vision of the AveNew2000 plan.
A New Vision for Beverwyck Park

Beverwyck Park is an important open space resource within the Mid-City University District. It also forms the backyard of UAlbany’s Alumni Quad residential complex.

Beverwyck Park is currently a vast, undifferentiated open space that is used primarily for active sports like baseball, football and soccer, and occasional frisbee throwing. Interviews with Albany High School students indicate that even using the park for active sports can be problematic and unenjoyable due to the prevalence of dog waste on grassy areas.

Other possible activities and uses are overlooked and unsupported. There are no play facilities for young children, and no shaded sitting areas where parents and care-givers can watch children and enjoy being outdoors. Indeed, there are few if any trees, providing no relief from the bright hot sun in summer.

Beverwyck Park’s ample size (5.7 acres) could easily support many more uses than it does as present. It would be presumptuous at this point for us to say exactly how Beverwyck Park should be redesigned and what it should look like in the future. Rather, we propose that a collaborative planning and design process be undertaken involving all stakeholders and parties of interest, such as the Beverwyck Neighborhood Association, Albany High School, the City of Albany’s Department of Development and Planning, Department of Recreation and Department of General Services, the College of Saint Rose and the University at Albany. The University at Albany could take the initiative of convening the parties, and faculty and graduate students at UAlbany’s Masters in Urban Planning Program can help support and facilitate the process. However, we strongly recommend that a qualified planning and landscape architecture firm, experienced in park and recreation area planning, be hired to generate alternative design plans that would be presented and discussed with all involved stakeholders. It is also important that the replanning and redesign of Beverwyck Park be coordinated with the replanning and redevelopment of University housing at the Alumni Quad.

The collaborative planning and design process focusing on Beverwyck Park could prove doubly beneficial, in that it could build the foundation for stronger University-City-Community cooperation and collaboration in the future.
Appendix A
Existing Plans for Study Area

AveNew2000 Strategic Revitalization Plan
The AveNew2000 Strategic Revitalization Plan was commissioned by the Central Avenue Business Improvement District and the City of Albany, and prepared by Goody, Clancy & Associates, a nationally recognized planning and urban design consulting firm based in Boston, MA. The geographic area encompassed by the plan extends the full-length of Central Avenue within the City of Albany, from Lark Street west to the Railroad where the City of Albany ends and the Village of Colonie begins.

The plan recognizes the prime importance of Central Avenue as the main gateway into Albany, and aims to restore the prominence of Central Avenue as a focal point for economic, social and cultural activity in the city of Albany. At the same time, it recognizes that the character and function of Central Avenue varies significantly along the length of the corridor. To strengthen and enhance these differences in character and function, the plan defines five districts from the Albany/Colonie boundary to easterly terminus at Townsend Park/Lark Street. Of these five districts, the one that most directly affects quality of life within the Mid-City University District is the “College Town District”, which stretches from Henry Johnson Blvd. west to Ontario Street.

The AveNew2000 Plan envisions the “College Town” District as a mixed use urban district that is a hub for music, culture and entertainment, and that supports 18-hour a day activity that capitalizes upon the thousands of UAlbany and St. Rose students who live and attend classes in close proximity to Central Avenue. The character of the “College Town” district is envisioned as distinctly pedestrian-oriented, with “hip” retail stores on the ground floor, combined with upper floor residences. Infill development and renovations should be encouraged to contribute to the Avenue’s historic, Main Street flavor. New buildings built along the corridor in this section should ideally be 3 to 4 stories in height, should be built close to the sidewalk to define the street edge and should contain active ground-floor uses to generate pedestrian activity. Buildings with retractable doors that open up ground-floor space to the street are especially desirable. Automobile-oriented businesses, and parking lots in front of buildings should be prohibited. The streetscape of the “College Town” District should include: wide sidewalks and clearly designated pedestrian crossings; “neck-widenings” and “bump-outs” at intersections to protect pedestrians crossing the street; and distinctive street lighting (with flower baskets), street furniture and street trees to create a comfortable pedestrian atmosphere.

WAMC’s development of the Linda Norris Performing Arts Studio at Quail St. and Central Avenue, and year-round programming of performances and events at that venue, represents a significant step toward fulfilling the aims of the AveNew2000 Plan. To expand the district’s role as a center for music and entertainment, the plan proposes that the Norris Studio be expanded to include an outdoor portion, and that a three-screen movie house and other arts-oriented venues and clubs be developed nearby.
Other uses recommended for development in the College Town section of Central Avenue are: vintage clothing shops, bookstores, music stores (the Blue Note Record Store, an excellent record store, is already located on Central Avenue), a copy and package/mailing center (i.e. Kinkos/FedEx), delis, bagel shops, bakeries, unique eateries, a fitness center, a billiards hall, bowling alley, laundromats and other establishments serving the daily and recreational needs of college students, university faculty and staff.

A major recommendation of the AveNew2000 plan is that major streetscape, landscape design and pedestrian lighting improvements be made along Robin Street between Washington Avenue and Central Avenue, to make a strong physical connection between the Downtown UAlbany Campus and Central Avenue, and to encourage increased pedestrian movement between the Downtown Campus and Central Avenue restaurants and businesses. The plan also urges that UAlbany consider locating certain University offices and activities on Central Avenue, to build an even stronger connection between Central Avenue and the UAlbany Downtown Campus.

Midtown Colleges and University District Plan, June 2005

The Midtown Colleges and University District Plan was developed in 2005 through a collaboration of the City of Albany, educational institutions located within this district, and Citizens Bank. The Plan was developed through support of a Midtown Technical Committee, with representatives from each collegiate institution, and other stakeholders. The Plan is described as a “comprehensive, multimillion-dollar community investment plan to increase homeownership, strengthen commercial retail districts and create an education district in the Midtown area of Albany.”

The district boundaries incorporate the UAlbany Downtown Campus, the College of Saint Rose, Albany Medical Center, Albany Medical College, The Sage Colleges, Albany College of Pharmacy, and Albany College of Law. The area houses over 19,700 residents, 75% of whom are renters. The institutions within this study area, many of which are growing, educate over 10,400 students.

The Midtown Colleges and University District Plan looked at ways in which the investment and development opportunities of the collegiate institutions within this area could be leveraged by the Albany community, as a way to revitalize the surrounding neighborhoods. The study area delineated within the plan encompasses the entirety of the area we have delineated under the Mid-City University District. As such, the recommendations outlined in this plan are highly relevant to the needs and issues that face our study area.

The plan is organized into three focus areas: Homeownership, a Midtown Education district, and Neighborhood Commercial Districts. The guiding principles under homeownership include provisions for a homeownership assistance program that utilizes the local collegiate employment base, rehabilitation assistance for existing homeowners, and a comprehensive marketing campaign to attract new residents within the area, while still protecting the mixed income nature of the study area neighborhoods.
Homeownership Action Items:
- Work with the colleges to create an Employer Assisted Housing Program
- Identify additional funding sources for both homeownership and rehabilitation grants/loans
- Form a marketing committee consisting of college and neighborhood representatives to help market homeownership and rehabilitation programs
- Create a Homeownership Zone and outline the phasing of the Zone
- Identify additional incentives to be offered within the Homeownership Zone
- Perform a windshield survey of the housing stock to target homes to participate in rehabilitation programs.
- Review City’s current tax abatement program.
- The guiding principles for the Midtown Education district encourage institutional collaboration in a way that enhances the quality of the area and supports an understanding of the needs and objectives of each instructions future growth strategies.

Midtown Education District Action Items:
- Encourage institutions to update/create their campus master plans
- Complete a housing conditions survey of Education District sub-area
- Utilize conditions survey and campus plans to conduct block-planning initiatives within Education sub-area.
- Pursue community-university partnerships with public schools, community-outreach and volunteer organizations.
- Utilize the Community-University Relations Board to strengthen dialogue about public safety and quality of life issues between institutions, students, residents, and business owners.
- Create a Parking sub-committee of the Midtown Technical Committee to explore parking and traffic issues among institutions and possible shared solutions.

The guiding principles for the neighborhood commercial districts are to strengthen the commercial uses of the district, encourage new uses and promote a pedestrian friendly environment in which these businesses can thrive.

Neighborhood Commercial District Action Items:
- Work with institutions to determine what retail and commercial needs students have a demand for that are not being serviced on campus.
- Work with residents and business owners create a priority list of improvement needs for existing C-1 districts as well as building consensus own what uses are wanted and unwanted within the district.
- Develop a framework for block planning within each C-1 district with neighborhood representatives, business owners, and City representatives.
- Enhance and enforce design standards within the C-1 districts to ensure that their character will not be impacted by any adaptive reuse or redevelopment.
- Utilize the Neighborhood Marketing Committees being formed to promote homeownership to also focus on marketing the C-1 districts as amenities to City Living.
- Focus on recruitment of new businesses that will be compatible within existing C-1 districts where there are vacancies.

\[^1\]UAlbany participates in the Midtown Employer Assisted Homeownership Program and through the University at Albany Foundation, has committed $50,000 for ten $5,000 assistance packages for down-payment and closing costs.
The Plan outlines key participants to carry out each action item, the majority of which are delegated to the City of Albany Planning Department. The Plan also called for the development of multiple sub-committees under the Midtown Colleges Technical Committee to help explore and implement the action items.

**Citizens Bank Funded Initiatives**
- $5 million in financing set aside for land acquisition and construction by for-profit developers within the Midtown area. Financing could potentially be used to build new college libraries, student dormitories and other facilities.
- $1 million reserved to assist community development corporations and other non-profit organizations to acquire land and vacant property within Midtown targeted for future development.
- $3 million in financing for below market rate mortgage loans for anyone purchasing a home within the targeted area. Financing will be available at up to one percent below market rate on a standard 30-year loan. Financing will be available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- $600,000 in low-interest financing for home improvement projects, available to both homeowners and renters. Citizens Bank will provide $1,000 loans at a financing rate of one-percent or up to $10,000 at a rate of six-percent. The program is unique in that no contract estimates or inspections will be required for loan approval. The program is also unique in that it provides a home equity type product to non-home owners, e.g. renters.
- $3.1 million in small business loans to qualified small and micro businesses operating within the Midtown target area. Financing will be available to small business owners to help spur business growth and expansion.
- $300,000 set aside for down payment assistance for homes purchased in Midtown. Citizens Bank will offer $5,000 in loan forgiveness for homebuyers over a five-year period (20% of the loan, or $1,000, will be forgiven each year on the anniversary of the loan). The loans are available to anyone purchasing a home within the target areas.
- Institutional Funded Initiative: Six institutions, including UAlbany and the College of St. Rose, have each contributed $50,000 to create a $300,000 fund aimed at providing down payment assistance to employees of those institutions wishing to purchase homes in the Midtown district.
Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) Document

In 2007, the City of Albany was selected by the American Institute of Architects Center for Communities by Design to participate in the Sustainable Design Assessment Team (SDAT) program. Through this program, the AIA brought a team of volunteer professionals who were foreign to the City of Albany to host a three-day public charrette for local citizens, decision makers and stakeholders. During the charrettes, held in August 2007, a series of public meetings were held to develop a vision for how Albany can become more sustainable. At the conclusion of the three-day charrette, held the SDAT team gave a final presentation that synthesized the most salient concerns of the public, as well as their own recommendations. The goals and objectives outlined in the final presentation will be solidified into a final report at a future date. However, a few of the overall recommendations highlighted in the presentation are applicable to our study area.

Overall, the SDAT team concluded that the City of Albany’s employment stability serves as a foundation for further residential and commercial investment within the City. However, the regions low commute time and ease of access to suburban areas poses a challenge for the urban areas, as they continue to compete with the suburbs. As such, the SDAT team recommended that the City focus on improving the services and issues associated with supporting quality of life for homeowners and renters, to maintain current population and attract new residents to the City. The presentation made the general recommendation to support rehabilitation and preservation of abandoned or deteriorating properties in a way that builds “economically inclusive neighborhoods.” Further, the City should develop cohesive, livable areas to attract residents and businesses.

The SDAT also made a couple of specific recommendations relevant to our study area. First, the SDAT team recommended that the City focus revitalizing the area surrounding the intersection of Central and Lark streets. The team recommends attracting 3rd stage investment to this area to compliment existing businesses, by adding clothing stores and other soft goods retail establishments into the area. Second, the Linda Norris Auditorium and performing arts center at WAMC, located on Central Ave, should be seen as a potential hub for an arts and entertainment district.

A number of general recommendations made by the team also support the objective of our study, including strengthening access to and reliability of public transport, rehabilitating historic housing, and developing a partnership between the City and its institutions of higher education.
CANA/NRC Code Enforcement Task Force Report, April 5, 2006

The CANA/NRC Code Enforcement Task Force which includes landlords, homeowners, tenants, and representatives of neighborhood associations was formed in November 2004 to investigate the state of code enforcement and make recommendations for improvement, if necessary. This report by the taskforce is a combination of findings and recommendations that the taskforce has compiled since its founding in 2004. The main findings included that the city of Albany’s code enforcement is divided into multiple departments including Public Safety which includes the Division of Building and Codes, Fire and Police Departments, and Department of General Services and that there was general public confusion about what department handles what. Findings also highlighted the lack of public transparency inherent in the process of code enforcement, lack of interagency cooperation and communication, inconsistent inspections, and that there were very few city-initiated “sweeps” of code violations. Also included in the taskforce’s findings was that there is no central point of intake of resident complaints or tracking method for those complaints, limited public access to violation information and lack of annual management reports from the Division of Building and Codes. The Task force’s recommendations included increasing the number of city-initiated sweeps and periodic inspections; establishing a “code compliance fund” to be used for financial assistance for delinquent properties and to upgrade technical capacity of the Division of Building and Codes; providing a central point of contact for intake of resident complaints including online intake; educating residents about code enforcement procedures; online inspection and violation data; upgrading of code enforcement technology to include data analysis software; establishing an interagency code enforcement data base; improving the owner identification system; the establishment of a vacant building registry; and developing a more consistent and heavy-handed strategy for persistent non-compliance. It was also recommended that the city undertake a professional management study of the Division of Building and Codes and the Department of General Services.

Upper Madison Block Planning Initiative: A Neighborhood-Guided Plan of Action, Final Report, April 7, 2006

This initiative is the first of Albany’s block by block planning strategy to engage residents in identifying precise improvements to the city’s neighborhoods. Two surveys and a charrette were held with the help of the city’s planning consultant Troy Architectural Program (TAP, Inc). Overall, it was found that residents do not want huge change and are mostly satisfied with their unique pedestrian –oriented “village” in the city. The main issues included: the lack of parking, the underutilized Yates Street, a desire for more diverse retail, code enforcement, pedestrian amenities, and public safety. Recommendations (from TAP and residents), included installing bump-outs at intersections, more lighting and better crosswalks, increasing the police presence, reducing the lanes on Madison Avenue to allow for diagonal parking, tree planting and overall beautification. The creation of a merchant’s association, more outdoor seating and street furniture, and better use of underutilized buildings such as the Elk’s Lodge on Yates and South Allen Streets.
Appendix B
Community Interviews

Public Administration Student Interviews
During the course of our data collection, members of the planning studio sat down with members of the Public Affairs Student Association to discuss their opinions and recommendations on the Mid-City University District and the UAlbany Downtown Campus. It was particularly valuable to obtain their opinions on these matters, since the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy is located on the UAlbany Downtown Campus.

Our discussion began with the students pointing out the fact that the downtown campus is oriented toward Western Avenue, so that the Washington Avenue side becomes similar to a “back alley” with a particularly uninviting feel. Also, the fact that the old Albany High School and the Adult Learning Center “bookend” the downtown campus was pointed out in discussion, with the recommendation that these buildings be acquired for university-related uses. The students also expressed their desire for nearby copy services and a coffee shop or a “local hangout” that would inspire more of a “community feel” for the downtown campus. In addition, students emphasized that while they would like to see more housing options around the downtown campus, the housing units should be geared towards graduate students and young professionals. Lastly, the students admitted to rarely patronizing Central Avenue businesses or restaurants because of the negative perception and sterile pedestrian environment. When asked their opinion about the marketing of an ethnic food district on Central Avenue and pedestrian improvements on Robin Street, the students expressed their approval of these ideas.

Student Interviews, Residents of Study Area
Group Interview: Students around the Alumni Quad on Western Avenue and on Madison Avenue near Ontario Street were interviewed. Three students were UAlbany undergraduates, and one student was a St. Rose undergraduate. The UAlbany students expressed concerns with the lack of parking, trash and street conditions in the area, but appreciated the “cheap” cost of living. The students did want more of a police presence to reassure them of the safe nature of the neighborhood. All students felt a new grocery should be added to the neighborhood. In addition, the UAlbany students who did rent enjoyed relatively good relations with their landlords. Many students however, have trouble with “slum landlords” in the Pine Hills area. All of the UAlbany students that were interviewed relied on their personal automobiles for transportation. In contrast, the one St. Rose student stated she did not have any use for a car and walked everywhere. She also was very content with the “cute and quaint nature” of the area immediately surrounding St. Rose and felt safe walking alone there, an opinion conflicting with the views expressed by UAlbany students.

Undergraduate Junior Student: The undergraduate junior student, who lives in the study area, first stated that Albany is cold, dark and uninviting to walk around during the winter. He mentioned, that growing up in New York City, he was used to having to walk everywhere and would like to be able to do the same in Albany. From his knowledge, the Alumni Quad is mostly made up mostly of “transfers” and international students. Many students there find it hard to make friends and become connected to the community; overall the “5th quad” is isolated. Other students live in private rental homes.
Mid-City University District

Slum lords are common, people “own entire blocks” and do not keep up their homes. The student feels that there is “no social center or fabric” of the community; he suggested that “something be done with the Beverwyck Park fields” to make them more inviting. In addition, he mentioned that there is no coffee shop that is typical of many college towns. The neighborhood has mostly bars, which are good for college students but some other businesses would be desirable as well.

*Group Interview:* Of the five UAlbany students interviewed in this group, four were graduate students and one was a junior. All the students live off campus. The graduate student attends classes at the Downtown Campus. Two students stated that they use the University Library often because the Hawley Library is not open late enough. Four out of the five students were from the Albany area, but because the rent is less expensive in the study area they chose the location for the duration of their college careers. All five students rent and have a good relationship with their landlords. Each student said they knew their neighbors. Overall, the students feel crime is an issue in the neighborhood. Each student was asked if they had heard about Operation Safe Corridor and only two said they had. Overall they all felt safe at home, but choose not to walk alone at night.

*Group Interview:* The students claimed the community is lacking in public and retail services. The common observation made by the students is that the majority of retail is on Central Avenue and entertainment is on and around Lark St. When asked what they would like to see in this community and near the downtown campus, the students replied: more on-foot police officers, more parking for the students on Downtown Campus, seating in the lawn area and a small eatery to relax or do work.

*Community Stakeholders*

*Business Owner:* This business owner decided to locate her business in the Pine Hills neighborhood because it is in the heart of student housing and just a block and a half from the UAlbany Downtown Campus. Based on her experience pizza, fast-food, restaurants, bars, and convenience stores are most successful in the neighborhood. She believes that better landlord accountability is needed to attract a variety of other businesses to the area. She believes that Safe Corridor Program is having somewhat of a positive effect on the neighborhood. The business owner believes that the strict parking regulations are having a negative effect on the neighborhood. In addition, the business owner does not like the trash and run-down nature of the community. She does like the students, the “young-minds” as well as general “happy” nature of the community. She believes that the quality of public services are adequate, although she thinks that the city’s recycling program and trash collection could be improved. She thinks that a combination of tree planting as well as more trash cans and recycling bins could improve the community. She also suggests the idea of business-sponsored recycling bins and trash cans. She does know some other business owners in the area. Overall, the business owner does feel safe in the community, but she says that could be because she walks with her dog.
**Business Manager:** The respondent works in the area for a local business and likes the convenient character of the community specifically to retail establishments, parks, and major transportation arteries. In addition, the respondent believes the strong neighborhood association has been vital for the community. The respondent noted some problems in the area; he does not like the petty theft, lack of property upkeep, and code enforcement in the community. The respondent believes the people are the most unique aspect of the area in the sense that they are “tied to the community and appreciate the convenience”. He feels that the presence of prime educational institutions such as the College of St. Rose and UAlbany is beneficial in creating a culturally diverse and dynamic environment. The respondent believes that urban revitalization policies that stress retail services and the arts are having a positive effect on the neighborhood, while he cannot tell which policies are having a distinctly negative effect on the neighborhood. Furthermore, the respondent believes that the quality of public services in the area is decent but could use some improvement, specifically in transportation, sanitation, and policing. The respondent thinks the area needs a better grocery store. Finally, he thinks that better code enforcement, street cleaning, and more visible policing could improve the community.

**UAlbany Employee:** As an overall assessment of the campus the respondent stated that the downtown campus is “a wonderful historic asset that is worth preserving, but on the other hand the facility has the challenge of meeting modern needs [of students and faculty] and the adjacent neighborhood.” The respondent believes the Western Avenue side of the campus is a beautiful asset while the Washington Avenue site needs to be fixed. When asked what attributes of the area were liked or disliked the respondent stated a concern shared by many staff members--the adult learning center adjacent to the university is an eyesore and causes security as well as parking problems. For example, people who attend the Learning Center, park in the Faculty/Staff lot and congregate on the open lawn leaving cigarette butts on the ground and in the grass. As an idea for improvement the UAlbany employee believes the University needs to take a more active role in the neighborhood and be more involved in City decision making.

**College of St. Rose Employee:** The respondent likes the small, interconnected nature of the community, but does not like the “unrealistic expectations” surrounding the community in regards to the homeownership initiative for the Pine Hills neighborhood. He believes it will stay a mixed community and that “we can make that work”. He believes the diversity of land uses as well as the pedestrian-oriented atmosphere is the most unique aspect of the community. He says that the St. Rose Security station on the corner of Western and Partridge is having a positive effect on the community and is a visible sign of safety. He does not believe that any city/police/neighborhood policies are having a negative effect on the community. The respondent is satisfied with public services in the area, although he would like to see more public parking. He is also satisfied with the retail services in the area, highlighting the Upper Madison Retail district as a neighborhood amenity. Overall, he feels safe in the neighborhood. To improve the community, the respondent thinks that the perception of the schools in the area needs to be improved, that a program for new employees (of the universities) to live in the city should be embarked upon, that more public parking should be added to the area, and that there should be more collaborations between community stakeholders.
**Area Resident:** The respondent has lived in the study area for about six years and currently owns her own home. She moved to the area to buy a first home and was attracted to the neighborhood because of its rich history and diversity; many homes are over 140 years old. The respondent thinks more money could be pumped into the neighborhood to clean it up and encourage special events. Trash on the streets has been and continues to be a problem, especially in the city-owned parking lots. One major problem in the neighborhood is the large number of vacant buildings. Another issue is the city-owned parking lot at the corner of Lexington Avenue and Washington Avenue.

The respondent overall feels somewhat safe, but would not walk around in the middle of the night. She notes there have been shootings, police chases and problems with intoxicated patrons from many Central Avenue bars. She even mentioned that the neighborhood association has been pushing the State Liquor Authority to close some of the drinking establishments along Central because of some of the problems such as illegal drug use and crime.

Overall, the respondent is satisfied with the services within walking distance of her neighborhood. She wants her neighborhood to remain residential, but would be willing to see development along Robin Street to Draper Hall. She noted the neighborhood is in desperate need of a café where people can sit and read a newspaper and just “hang out”. There is currently no place to do that she claims. She likes being able to walk to the numerous restaurants along Central Avenue and downtown.

The respondent either drives or walks to work and uses her private automobile for errands that she cannot walk to. She notes the neighborhood is well-served by many CDTA bus routes. She would like the city and the University to help with parking as it is currently a major issues for residents. She does not understand why residents in her neighborhood are unable to use the large UAlbany parking lot at night, especially during a snow emergency. She thinks the University should work more closely with its neighbors. She did, however, believe Kermit Hall initiated dialogue and excited everyone, but not much has happened since his tragic passing.

**Albany High School Students:** A number of students at Albany High School were asked their opinions of the Mid-City University District and if they had any recommendations to improve the district. The discussion focused around the near by Beverwyck Park (located just next to AHS on Washington Avenue). In particular, students expressed that they would like to see a variety of infrastructure improvements made to the park. Students recommended reforming the park into a more “structured space” with benches and other pedestrian amenities. Students also expressed that trash and dog clean up should be enforced in Beverwyck Park, making the space more attractive and enjoyable. In addition, students discussed the idea of improving the perception of Albany Public Schools to make the district more attractive to young families. Students agreed that improvements to the city of Albany school district would improve the perception of the district and keep existing residents from “voting with their feet” by moving out of the district.
Appendix C
Mid-City University Advisory Board Meeting
SWOT ANALYSIS
Oct 24, 2007 4:30 PM

Participants included members from the following: UAlbany faculty and staff, CDTA, Historic Albany Foundation, WAMC, Central Ave BID, College of Saint Rose, First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, City of Albany, Equinox Inc., local neighborhood association presidents, local residents

Strengths
- Student buying power
- Civic involvement
- Niche – businesses that cater to student needs
- Large ethnic diversity, density and student population
- Student housing (existing and potential) and additional housing potential
- Energy and “life” in area
- Available park /open space such as Washington and Beverwyck Parks
- University as a Center of the neighborhood
- Pedestrian Traffic
- Proximity of Recreation, Housing, Commercial
- Historic Character
- Restaurants
- Urban environment
- Physical infrastructure in place
- Institutions with common needs and interests
- Active neighborhood associations and businesses members within the community
- Public transit
- No physical barriers to improvement (no freeway, river)

Weaknesses
- Disconnect between university and residents (perceived unwillingness) for university to work with residents
- Lack of plan and unwillingness
- Underutilized annex (adult learning center)
- Lack of free parking- leads to loss of business
- Competition for available spaces between students and residents
- Resident unable to park at UAlbany facilities
- Need for more 2 way communication btw university and community
- Presence of 9 month transient (student) population
- Perception of crime and proven lack of safety
- Fragmentation of community and no sense of place or identity
- No neighborhood feel
- Not appealing to area for new businesses to locate to
Mid-City University District

- Not enough incentive to come and live and own
- Trash/garbage issues
- Abandoned Buildings, Deteriorated Infrastructure
- Roads, Sidewalks, Lighting, Trees, Utilities
- Lack of structured planning
- Lack of oversight – no steering committee
- Lack of Integrated planning work
- Landlords (absentee)
- Not enough services for a young family
- No understanding of potential (people who don't live near don't see it) - need for marketing
- Lack of leadership, vision, and resources ($)
- Lack of a social gathering space
- Lack of adequate services for residents and campus population
- Area is unsafe for pedestrians
- Business turnover rate

Opportunities
- Existing programs that are available and existing partnerships that could be built upon
- Pilot projects (Robin St., Mixed use to spark ideas, more commercial on Washington)
- Expand Midtown Neighborhood Watch
- Potential to use university space for community activities and events
- Benches, chess table and flower planting to bring in the residents into the university community
- Pointed out example of the Pine Hill Library and how seniors and international students interact
- Page Hall Lawn is in use by children from the school next to Milne Hall
- Potential for placement of students to work with community organizations
- YMCA as a conduit for community/student interaction/exchange
- YMCA can connect the old and the young
- Housing and presence of historic structures
- Vacant structures
- Potential for infill redevelopment (UAlbany as the developer)
- Campaigns to promote area
- Needs assessment to determine what to encourage
- Update zoning to encourage businesses
- Partnerships and networking (increase voices)
- Vacant storefronts
- Private Development and UAlbany Partnership for housing
- Affordable housing money is available
- A relationship should be established between landlords and the University
- Create development corporation where all institutions work together
- Establish relationship with MBA program to research small business enterprising in the study area
- Research the density requirements to support businesses in the area (coffee shops, printing, etc.)
- Encourage formation of “satellite” grocers to provide smaller, yet affordable grocery store options
- Acquire/Lease properties adjacent to UAlbany Downtown to alleviate faculty-space constraints and provide student housing.
- Elementary School (corner of Lake and Western)
- Adult learning center
- Western/Lake high rise – “The Eloise”
- Western/Lake senior housing “Thurlow” (However, senior residents will need to be relocated)
- Mixed-use parking: Basement level used for parking to alleviate need for snow-removal on top level
- Studios should inventory intersections, sidewalks, crosswalks, lighting and signage that pose a threat/risk to pedestrians
- Expand bus service to include an additional BRT route along Western Ave. connecting the Downtown and Uptown campuses

**Threats**
- Residents frustration may enable them to “vote with their feet”
- Speculators
- Absentee owners that do not maintain property
- Not enough graduate students in area and many absentee owners
- Lack of graduate/international student housing
- Lack of attractiveness to students
- Doing nothing
- No available money from CDBG- it’s going downtown
- Lack of involvement- no grassroots
- Lack of commitment
- Deteriorating infrastructure just continuing without anything being done
- All Downtown Campus programs are expanding
- There may not be enough foot traffic to support additional retail