

THEME 4 - LIVING IN THE DISTRICT: ESTABLISHING DOWNTOWN AS A PLACE FOR PROFESSIONALS TO LIVE AND WORK

Overview

Downtown State College enjoys a vibrant pedestrian-oriented environment with numerous restaurants, shopping and cultural venues. However, there is concern that downtown is becoming too student oriented and less attractive to locals. In particular there are few downtown housing options for non-students including young professionals, seniors and the general workforce. Penn State has indicated that it is difficult to sell downtown living to new employees because there are so few opportunities. Additionally, there are limited opportunities for entrepreneurship and places for young professionals to work.

While earlier master plan themes addressed ways to attract locals and young professionals to downtown through marketing and branding, events and improving public space, Theme 4 addresses opportunities for new development that will support and sustain a non-student population. It is important to note, however, that student housing remains an important component of downtown housing, particularly in key areas. When compared with other Big 10 schools, Penn State has the least amount of graduate student housing, presenting a real opportunity for downtown. The recent State College Sustainable Neighborhoods Report indicates that the Borough has for the first time in years, not had a year over year increase in single family conversions to student rentals. Denser student developments closer to campus that also are well designed and amenity rich will attract the type of student (grad students and more mature students) than will the “least common denominator” housing. Providing appropriate student housing in the right locations will also help to protect opportunities for young professionals and families to live in the close-in neighborhoods.

In order to attract the right kind of development, it is important to minimize frustrations on the part of the Borough

and investors and provide clear development criteria and procedures. It will also be important to increase the quality of development to attract people to downtown. This is particularly important as State College loses its tax base to surrounding townships which are rapidly developing. If these townships continue to be successful with retail development and are able to create housing that is appealing to young professionals, State College will be left “holding the bag.”

The Case for Density

Dense development patterns are critical for successful vibrant communities. Communities have historically built density in their cores where there is the hub of government functions, transportation systems, services and major employment, such as PSU. Density is critical to maintain walkable communities where it is easier and preferable to walk rather than drive. Dense communities result in less dependency on the automobile and allow for a significant reduction in vehicle miles traveled; and density enables transit to be cost effective. Yet, the word “density” often creates unease and negative reactions. These negative reactions to density tend not to be directed at density itself, rather they are usually associated with badly executed density.

High quality design is critical for effectively implementing dense development patterns. While the term “high quality” can be interpreted differently by many people, for this instance it refers to development that includes the following characteristics, many of which are already present in downtown State College:

- Buildings that orient to and define the street edge with parking located behind or underneath (or above).
- Articulated first floors with taller ceiling heights, use of overhangs and awnings, uses that activate the sidewalk area with large display windows, entrances and outdoor dining.
- Articulated overall building form with a clear “base”, “middle” and “top”, regardless of the number of floors.

- Changes in the façade elevation to articulate corners, entrances, window areas.
- Façade elements that relate to adjacent architectural context.

In some instances, the current zoning ordinance strives to achieve some of the above elements but in other instances, zoning requirements present barriers to high quality dense development. This is discussed further later in this section of the report.

Opportunity Sites

The overall master plan for downtown integrates the mobility and public realm enhancements described in Themes 2 and 3 with the redevelopment opportunities described in this section. While downtown has a distinct core, the downtown area is much broader and is comprised of five sub-districts within three broader districts. The broader districts include the West End Urban Village, The Traditional Downtown and the East End Collegiate District and are illustrated in *Exhibit 19: Downtown Districts* (page 158). Please note that while the five districts are identified with firmer boundaries, the three broader districts are more “fluid.” This is done deliberately to illustrate that downtown’s character will evolve and overlap as new development and redevelopment takes place. Within downtown, there are numerous sites that, in particular, present opportunities for redevelopment within each of the districts described above. Many of these sites have been identified based on discussions with the property owners while others have been identified based on existing uses that don’t represent the highest and best use for their location. Still others are identified because of their adjacencies to other properties that, if combined and planned in a coordinated manner, could result in a significantly more effective redevelopment than if they were to develop on their own in an uncoordinated manner. This is particularly important given the small lot sizes and narrow lot dimensions of many downtown properties.



Bethesda, MD (top left) and Arlington, VA (bottom left) are excellent examples of a downtown areas that increased density through high quality design.



Some of these sites would likely redevelop earlier than others and some may never redevelop at all. Additionally, there will likely be others that redevelop that are not shown in this master plan. It is important, however, to identify the potential opportunities and to illustrate their potential so that redevelopment can occur in a planned, proactive manner vs. a reactive one. Opportunity sites are identified in *Exhibit 20: Master Plan Framework* (page 159) in conjunction with the public realm enhancements described under Theme 3.

Master Plan Framework

As mentioned on the previous page, State College has several sites that represent key opportunities for redevelopment. These are illustrated in context with the overall downtown and with the public realm enhancements described in Theme #3 in *Exhibit 21: Illustrative Master Plan*. Conceptual site considerations for each of these sites are further detailed under specific recommendations outlined in Theme 4 on the following pages. The recommendations are arranged within the three broad districts mentioned above and illustrate how many of the opportunity sites can be developed using the existing zoning and incentive zoning available in downtown. Several sites require a zoning modification which is described for each of those sites.

Following the site specific recommendations outlined by district, this chapter also includes recommendations that address ways to explore zoning code changes to clarify some regulations, recommend changes to other regulations and provide for added incentives for high quality development. It is important to note that the market potential for all of these sites to develop with the density illustrated here is unlikely (particularly in the short term) and that the bulk and massing illustrations show full build-out potential under current and proposed regulations. These model views and the accompanying sketches provide a tool that the Borough can use on any potential redevelopment site in downtown and can also serve as examples for properties not illustrated in this plan.

This section concludes with some recommendations about facilitating redevelopment in Downtown State College. In the case of downtown development and redevelopment, regardless of location, the best projects are a result of the cooperation of a pro-active local government working with the development community on projects. This proactive approach, quite different from the typical “applicant and regulatory review” process will foster developments that both satisfy key goals of the Borough while providing the developer a marketable product. The result is that development on opportunity sites will add to the tax base while enhancing the quality of life of State College. Both the Borough and Downtown Improvement District can play an important partnering role with the property owners to market the properties, work on conceptual plans when needed, and facilitate input from the community.

Creating a proactive and cooperative process is just the first step in ensuring successful developments and redevelopments. Market inducements even in vibrant communities like State College encourage creative thinking and higher quality projects. This section explores tools such as housing trust funds, employer assisted housing, and employment space such as co-working to create a broader array of uses downtown attractive to permanent residents.

Recommendations

For the recommendations on the following pages, the primary implementation partners (the organizations that takes the lead in implementation) are bolded and other potential supporting partners appear unbolded.

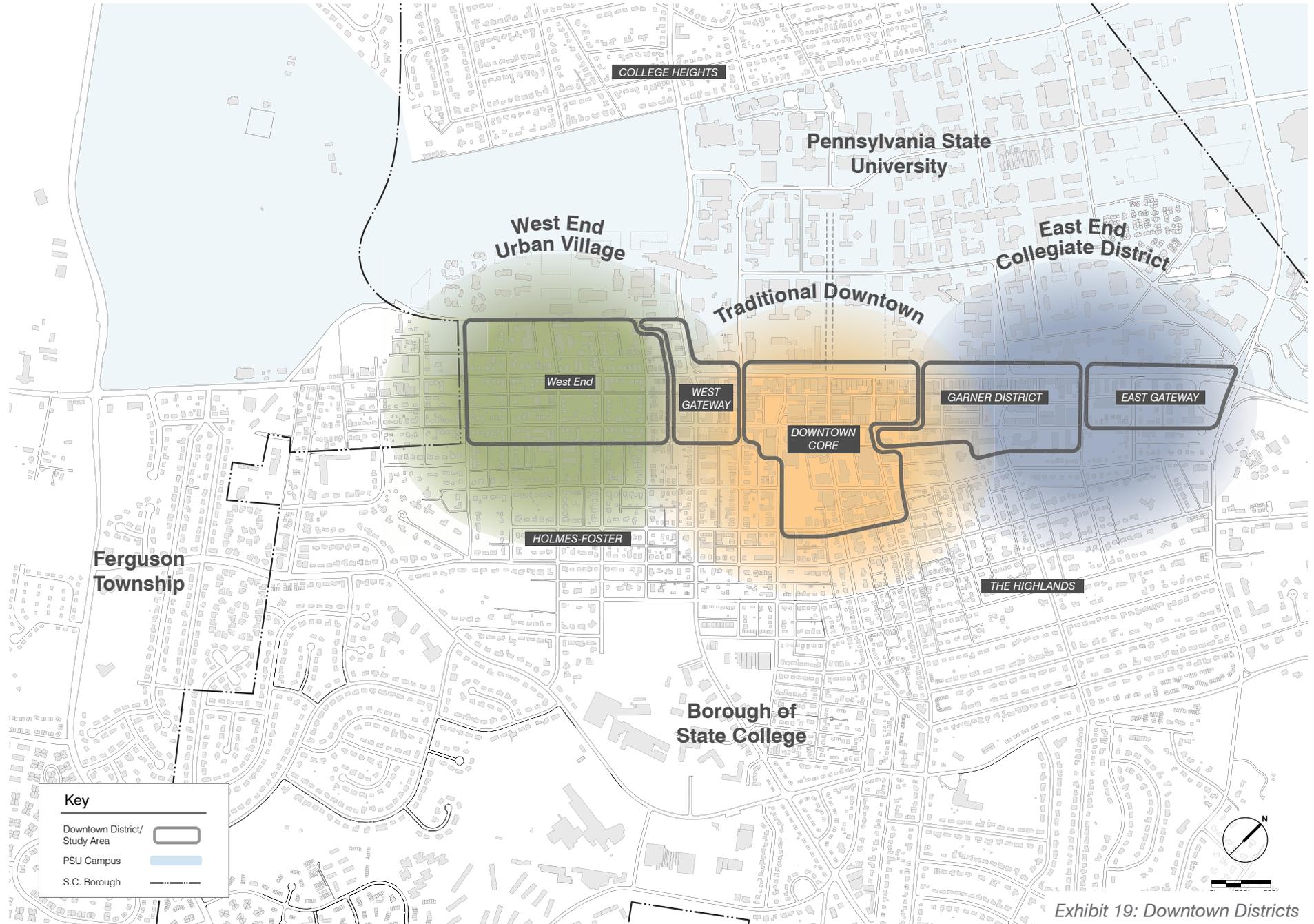
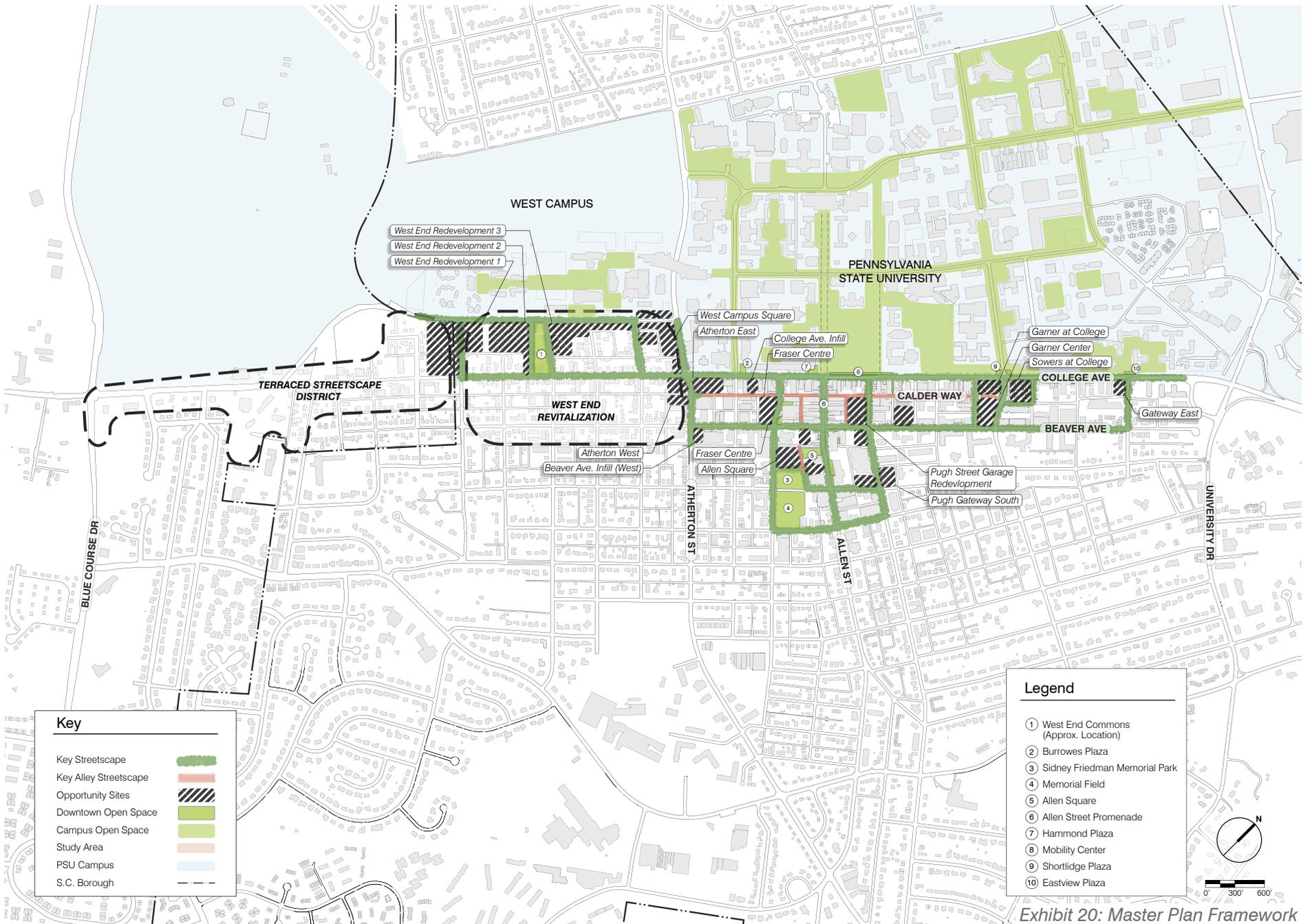


Exhibit 19: Downtown Districts



Key

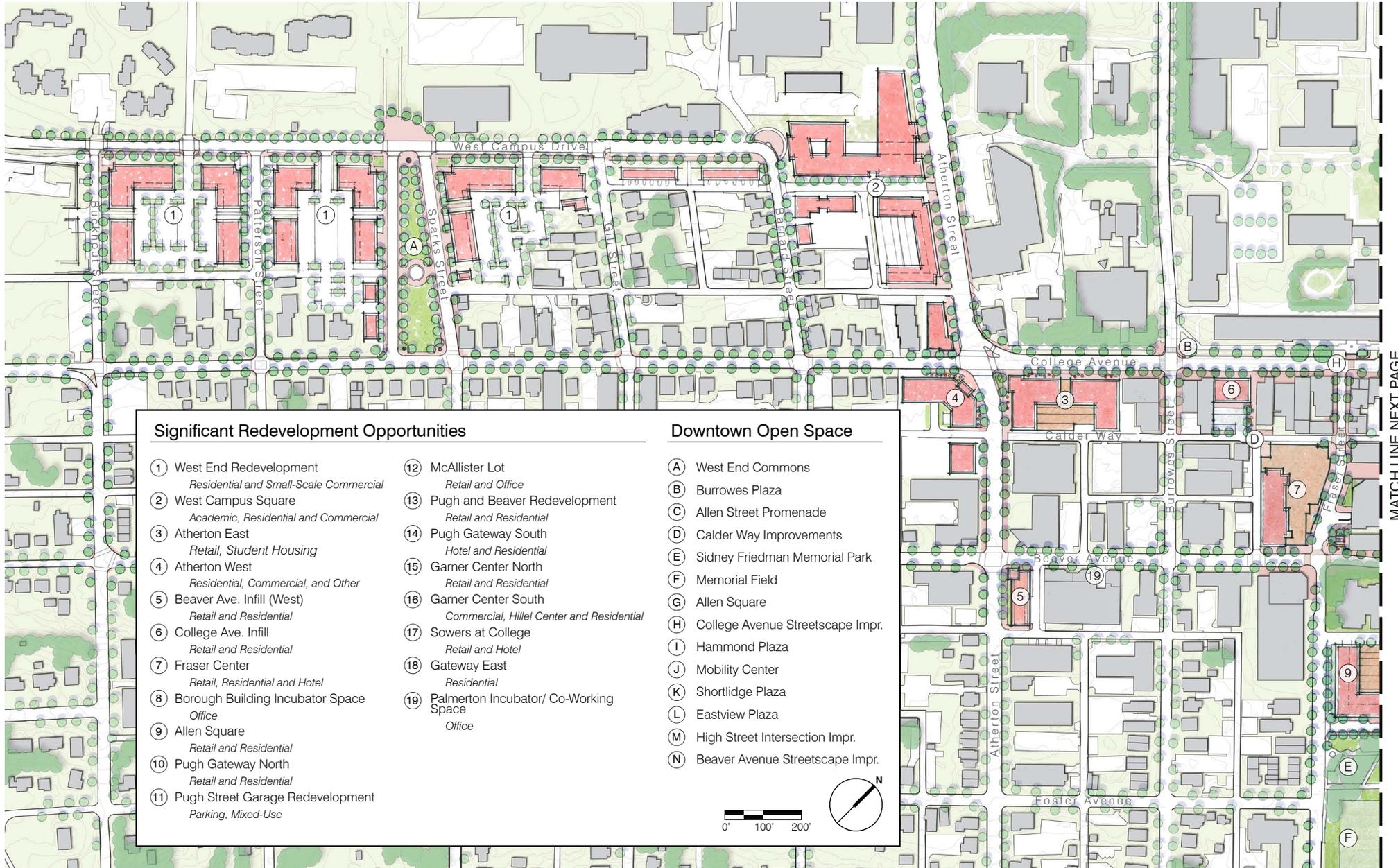
- Key Streetscape
- Key Alley Streetscape
- Opportunity Sites
- Downtown Open Space
- Campus Open Space
- Study Area
- PSU Campus
- S.C. Borough

Legend

- ① West End Commons (Approx. Location)
- ② Burrows Plaza
- ③ Sidney Friedman Memorial Park
- ④ Memorial Field
- ⑤ Allen Square
- ⑥ Allen Street Promenade
- ⑦ Hammond Plaza
- ⑧ Mobility Center
- ⑨ Shortlidge Plaza
- ⑩ Eastview Plaza

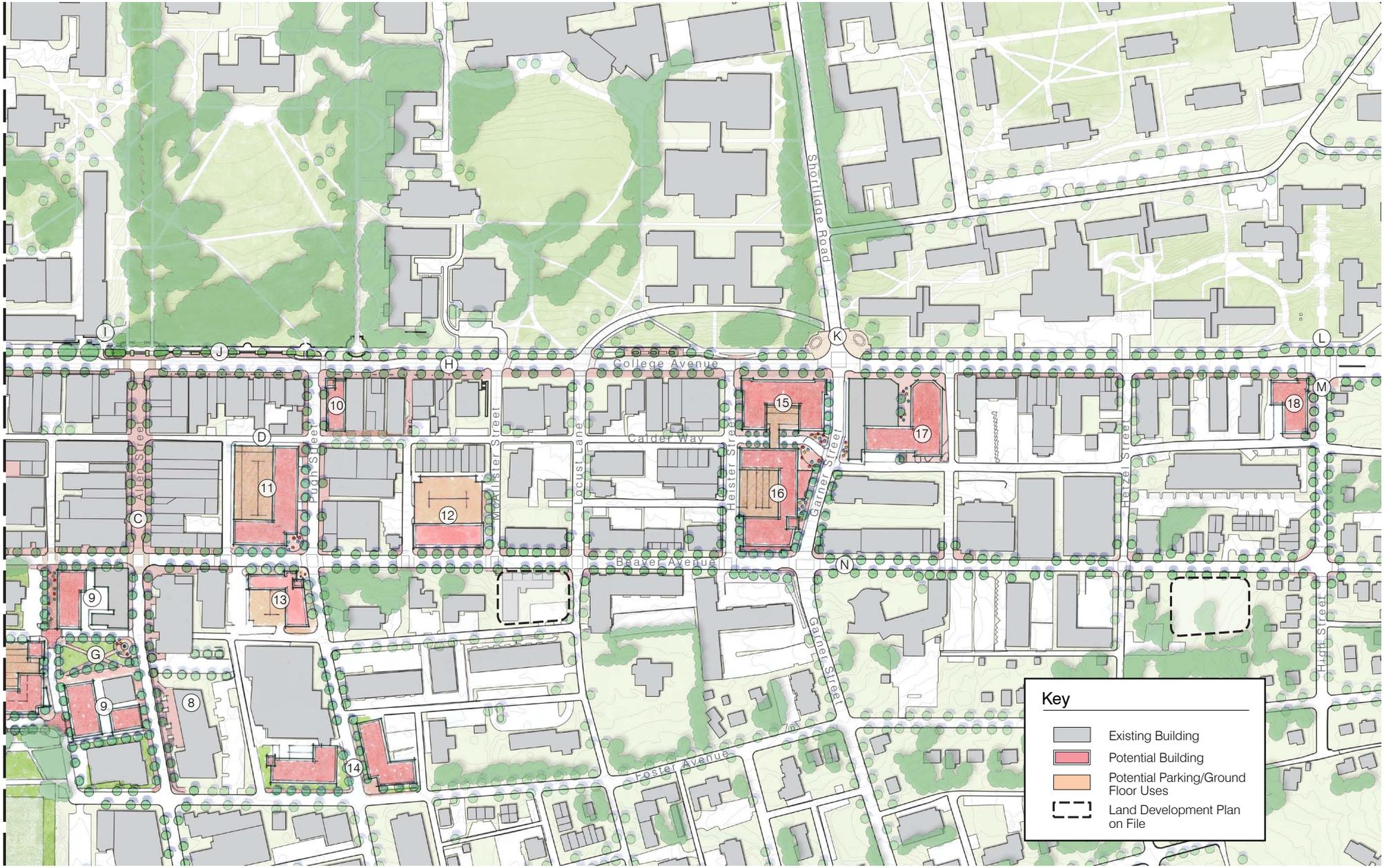
Exhibit 20: Master Plan Framework

State College Downtown Master Plan



Significant Redevelopment Opportunities		Downtown Open Space	
① West End Redevelopment <i>Residential and Small-Scale Commercial</i>	⑫ McAllister Lot <i>Retail and Office</i>	Ⓐ West End Commons	
② West Campus Square <i>Academic, Residential and Commercial</i>	⑬ Pugh and Beaver Redevelopment <i>Retail and Residential</i>	Ⓑ Burrowes Plaza	
③ Atherton East <i>Retail, Student Housing</i>	⑭ Pugh Gateway South <i>Hotel and Residential</i>	Ⓒ Allen Street Promenade	
④ Atherton West <i>Residential, Commercial, and Other</i>	⑮ Garner Center North <i>Retail and Residential</i>	Ⓓ Calder Way Improvements	
⑤ Beaver Ave. Infill (West) <i>Retail and Residential</i>	⑯ Garner Center South <i>Commercial, Hillel Center and Residential</i>	Ⓔ Sidney Friedman Memorial Park	
⑥ College Ave. Infill <i>Retail and Residential</i>	⑰ Sowers at College <i>Retail and Hotel</i>	Ⓕ Memorial Field	
⑦ Fraser Center <i>Retail, Residential and Hotel</i>	⑱ Gateway East <i>Residential</i>	Ⓖ Allen Square	
⑧ Borough Building Incubator Space <i>Office</i>	⑲ Palmerton Incubator/ Co-Working Space <i>Office</i>	Ⓗ College Avenue Streetscape Impr.	
⑨ Allen Square <i>Retail and Residential</i>		Ⓘ Hammond Plaza	
⑩ Pugh Gateway North <i>Retail and Residential</i>		⓵ Mobility Center	
⑪ Pugh Street Garage Redevelopment <i>Parking, Mixed-Use</i>		⓶ Shortlidge Plaza	
		⓷ Eastview Plaza	
		⓸ High Street Intersection Impr.	
		⓹ Beaver Avenue Streetscape Impr.	

MATCH LINE PREVIOUS PAGE



Key

- Existing Building
- Potential Building
- Potential Parking/Ground Floor Uses
- Land Development Plan on File