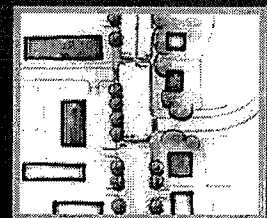
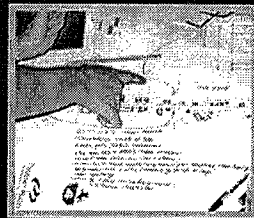


Town Center Vision Plan University Boulevard

City of Jacksonville
Planning and Development Department
Town Center Program
Phase I Initiative



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April 2005



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A special recognition is due JaxPride, a nonprofit coalition for visual enhancement, for their early and ongoing community visioning activities in Jacksonville. Their volunteer efforts have helped raise community awareness about the importance of having a Vision for neighborhood improvement.

Thanks is also extended to the Blue Cypress Park Community Center for graciously hosting the public workshop.

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1 Overview

What is a town center? The phrase conjures an image of Main Street, of activity and livelihood, of a space that is historic, active, interesting, and inviting. A Town Center can take several forms. It may be an urbanized area, condensed and pedestrian oriented, with commercial enterprises that serve the local community and other amenities such as parks and plazas. Alternatively, it may be a commercial corridor that links several neighborhoods together, serving both vehicles and pedestrians. Because they serve as community hubs, Town Centers should be attractive and well maintained.

This report represents an effort by the University Boulevard community to redefine their Town Center with assistance from the City of Jacksonville. To be part of the City's Town Center Program, a Town Center must be at least 30 years old and must have been at one time an established commercial district or corridor at the heart of an existing community or neighborhood.

The University Boulevard commercial corridor is a prime example of a Town Center that once actively supported the community but has experienced changes over time that have lessened its function. Despite some decline, the University Boulevard community recognizes the value of this area as a neighborhood and cultural resource. This Vision Plan is an effort to restore and improve this Town Center through a community-

based initiative and with the help and resources of the City of Jacksonville.

Background

The City of Jacksonville, through the leadership of City Council member Suzanne Jenkins, developed the Town Center Program as a means of providing support to local organizations for redeveloping areas of town that have served the community and that still retain some character, historically, aesthetically, or otherwise. The City also recognizes the role these Town Centers can serve as Jacksonville grows: to provide shopping, service, and entertainment alternatives, support

small and local businesses, and create meaningful and memorable places that define the City's cultural and economic identity.

"Older communities want their commercial corridors that are the front doors to their neighborhood to reflect the character of their community...It's

about the community first coming together because the plan has to be put together by the community – not done to them or for them, but done with them."

*- Suzanne Jenkins,
Jacksonville City Council*

In the spring of 2004, University Park Civic Association (UPCA) and Charter Point Community Association (CPCA) applied for and received a grant from the City of Jacksonville for Phase I Visioning as part of the Town Center



Program. Specifically, this Phase I effort creates a Vision for redeveloping the Town Center located along University Boulevard, from Arlington Road north to Merrill Road. The Town Center corridor was originally envisioned to extend north to Fort Caroline Road, however, given the amount of funding and the prioritized needs, the focus was directed to the south end of the corridor from Arlington to Merrill Road. Once a Phase I Vision is completed, organizations are eligible to apply for Phase II funding which will enable development of construction plans. Phase I recipients, however, are not guaranteed Phase II funding through the program. If Phase II funding is granted, applicants can seek Phase III construction funds to apply toward implementation. Although the City of Jacksonville has expressed its commitment to continuing the Town Center Program, currently funding for Phase II and Phase III projects in the Greater Arlington CPAC is not available at this time. The Town Center Program is administered by the City of Jacksonville Planning and Development Department.

Mission

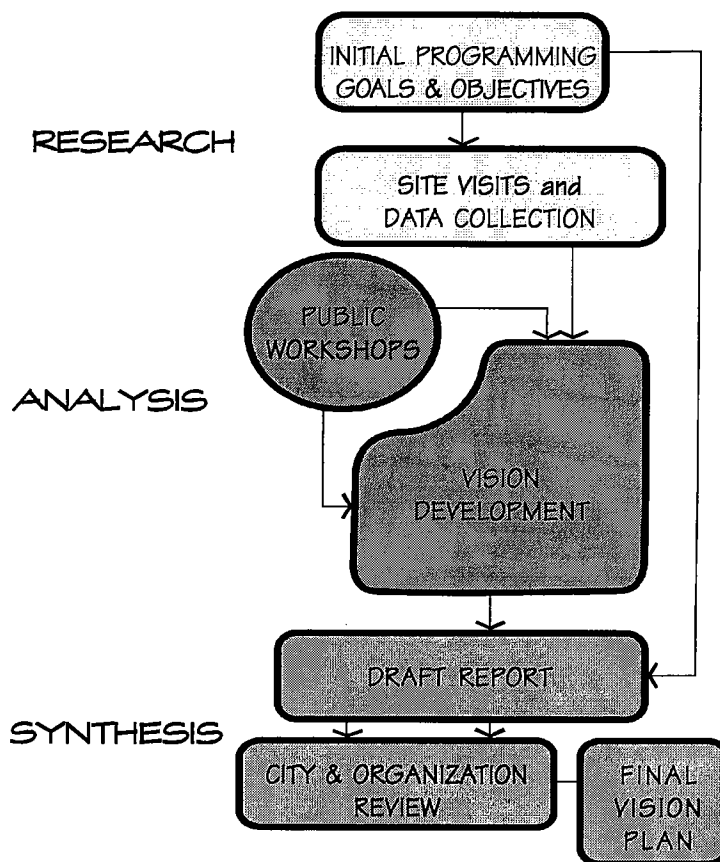
The mission of this project is to develop a Vision for the University Boulevard corridor that satisfies the needs and desires of the local community while incorporating the realities of cost, conditions, and other constraints. A neighborhood workshop was conducted on January 27, 2005 to gather community ideas and opinions. This Vision Plan report is a direct result of that input.

Planning Process

To generate a Vision, the City formed a Project Team composed of staff from the Planning and Development Department, and profes-

sional planners, landscape architects, and engineers from Prosser Hallock, Inc. The Team developed a streamlined process to encourage as much public participation and input as possible. Team leaders initiated the process by meeting with UPCA and CPCA representatives to identify key issues in the area. The Project Team then conducted a series of site visits to walk the area, discuss opportunities and constraints, and record information.

After preliminary analysis and information gathering, the Team conducted a public workshop that was carefully organized to allow direct input of the participants at both a personal and communal levels. Participants concluded the workshop by prioritizing projects based on desirability and estimated cost. This input, detailed in the next section, allowed the Team to develop plans for Phase II and Phase III implementations, as presented in this report.



Neighborhood Action Plan

The City of Jacksonville is currently in the process of completing a Neighborhood Action Plan for Old Arlington that will include recommendations specific to Arlington Road and University Boulevard. The Action Plan will provide a framework for the local community to document its issues and concerns that they feel need to be addressed in order to enhance the social, economic, and physical condition of the neighborhood. Some of the major issues addressed by the Action Plan include septic tank and water well replacement, overhead utilities, garbage collection, zoning and code enforcement, the promotion of Arlington Road as a cultural corridor, as well as housing and economic development. While many of these issues are beyond the scope of the Town Center Initiative, the improvement of the University Boulevard corridor should be viewed in the broader context of the revitalization program prescribed by the Old Arlington Neighborhood Action Plan.

Plan Area

The University Boulevard Town Center is the commercial corridor along University Boulevard, from Arlington Road north to Merrill Road. This area is made up of residential subdivisions including: Monterey, Old Arlington, Lake Lucina, and Arlington Manor, and is also adjacent to the southern portion of Jacksonville University. A map depicting the plan area is shown on the following page.

Area History

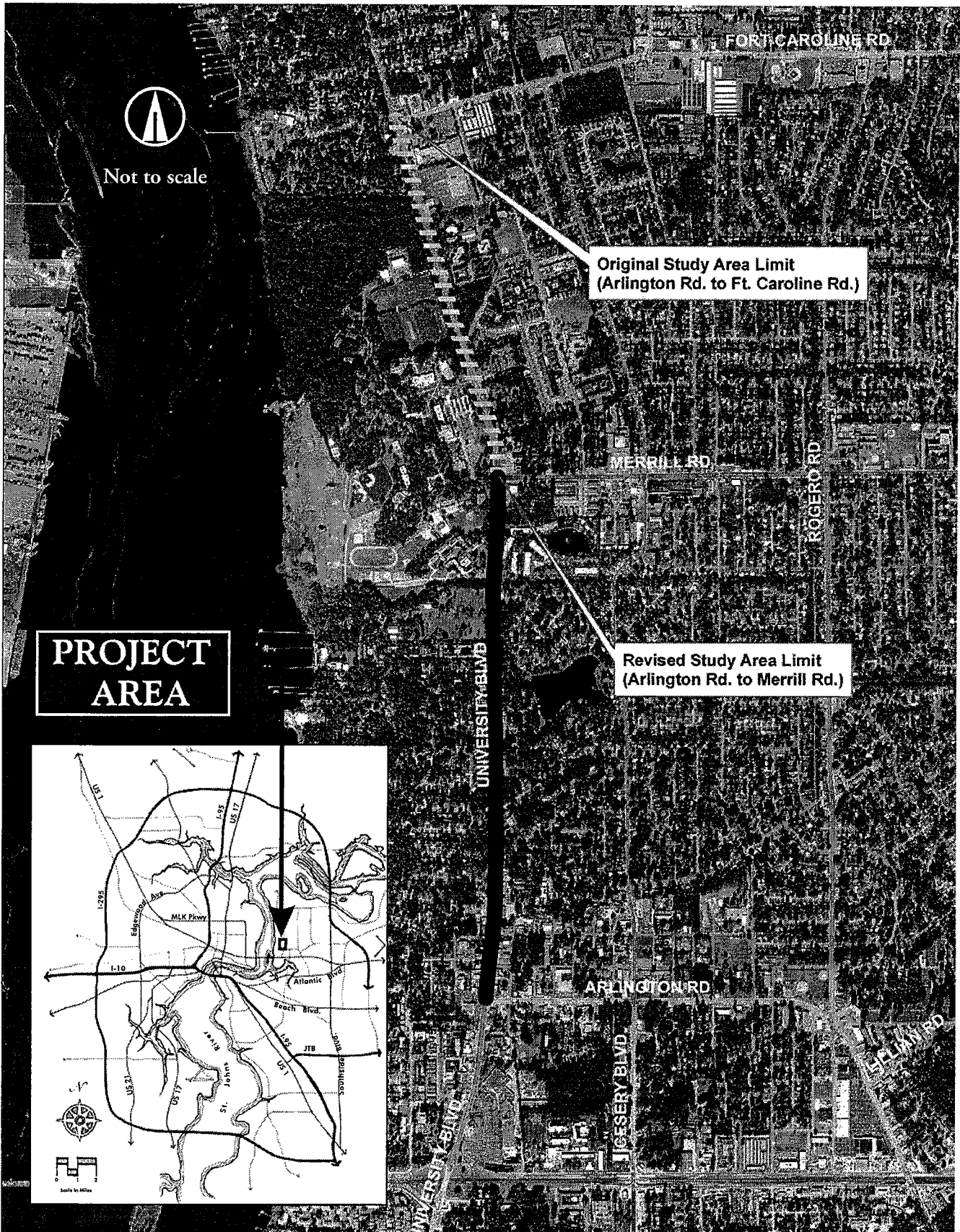
While University Boulevard is not part of a designated historic district, nor does it contain any locally designated landmarks at this time, the corridor is located within the Arlington neighborhood, an area that is not without a very rich history. In 1913, the Alderman Realty Company began developing land of the old Francis Richard Grant to the east and west of the University Boulevard and Arlington Road intersection. Known as the “Crossroads”, the intersection symbolizes the historic center of Arlington. The

area was connected to Downtown Jacksonville by a ferry service, and for several decades was the only developed portion of what is now the greater Arlington area.

This community included stores, gas stations, a school, churches, a post office, a free public library, a volunteer fire department, as well as electric and water utilities. The blocks along both sides of Arlington Road from University Boulevard to the St. John’s River had over fifty residences by 1937 and were the center of the original Alderman Realty plats. Beyond this area, the countryside around Arlington was sparsely populated and remained rural in nature.

After WWII, the character of the area took a dramatic shift with the opening of the Mathews Bridge in 1953, which provided a direct connection to Downtown. From 1950 to 1970, the Arlington area was the fastest growing part of Duval County, eventually becoming part of the City of Jacksonville following the 1968 Consolidation. These decades witnessed new shopping centers and subdivisions filling the areas surrounding the Old Arlington neighborhood. Combined with the relocation of Jacksonville University to its present site, the area grew into one large, continuous development, lacking any focal point. This expanded to include Jacksonville’s first and largest regional shopping center with the development of Regency Square to the east of Arlington.

Most notably, Arlington was a prominent filmmaking hub during the first part of the twentieth century. Norman Studios, a silent film studio, was located a few blocks east of University Boulevard. The buildings that housed Norman Studios are still standing and there is an effort underway to preserve these structures. The site is of national historic significance since it is one of the last silent film studios still standing. An effort is underway to preserve the site.

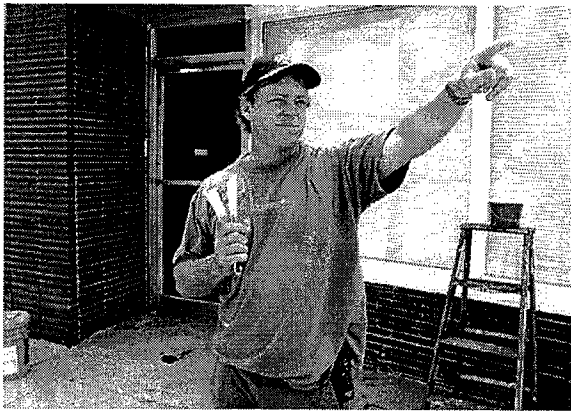


2 Community Vision

At the heart of this Visioning process are the comments, concerns, and dreams of the area residents. These are the people who know the University Boulevard corridor the best, who live and work in the area, who use the roads and sidewalks, who work to improve local conditions, and who enjoy the use of the neighborhood businesses and community facilities. A realistic Vision for redevelopment and revitalization of this area must include their input. Therefore, the Project Team developed a careful program to gather as much direct input as possible within a short time frame.

Background Data

Prior to the workshop on January 27th, 2005 the Team conducted a site visit and analysis to confirm significant existing conditions that would likely influence Town Center planning. The following section includes a demographic profile of the community, while a background data summary and zoning map are provided at the end of this section.



Local business owner discussing improvements with project team.

The Florida Department of Transportation maintains jurisdiction over University Boulevard

from the Arlington Expressway north to approximately 1/2 mile north of Merrill Road. A right-of-way enhancement project funded through TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century) is underway for University Boulevard south of Arlington Road. The design for this project has been completed, although a construction timeline has not been established. The plan calls for pedestrian improvements, such as brick pavers, decorative mast arms and bases, as well as tree plantings along University Boulevard to the Arlington Road intersection. The proposed Town Center design recommendations for this particular intersection will utilize these new features for further enhancement of the intersection and the University Boulevard corridor.

5

Community Demographics

The following census data summary is based on an analysis of census tracts 148, 152 (block group 3), 153 (block groups 1 and 2), and 154 (block groups 2 and 3). These boundaries are all immediately adjacent to the University Boulevard corridor between Arlington and Merrill Road. This sample provides a profile of the community proximate to the Town Center.

- The total population has increased approximately 10% from 1990 to 2000 (9,902 in 1990 to 10,903 in 2000)
- The median age has also increased from 29.3 in 1990 to 35 in 2000.
- While changes in the Census 2000 reporting methods have made direct racial comparisons with previous censuses difficult, the total minority population has increased 92% from 2,369 in 1990 to 4,554 in 2000. Likewise, the population of whites has decreased 15%.

- The percentage of high school graduates increased from 80% in 1990 to 85% in 2000, while the rate of individuals attaining a bachelor's degree or higher remained constant over the same period at 20%
- The median household income rose from \$27,004 in 1989 dollars to \$32,760 in 1999 dollars. When adjusting for inflation using the consumer price index, this actually yields a 10% decrease in buying power.
- While median home value increased from \$57,050 in 1989 dollars to \$65,850 in 1999 dollars, a 12% decline in actual value is exhibited when adjusting for inflation.
- The median year for structures built is 1963.
- The vast majority (71%) of the study area is commercial, characterized by CCG-1 and CCG-2 zoning, while the remaining parcels are public buildings and facilities, and scattered low density residential.

Census Conclusions

The University Boulevard corridor is within the eastern edge of the designated Old Arlington Neighborhood Action Plan Study Area. While the data from the Old Arlington neighborhood as a whole, suggests a relatively stable and healthy middle class community, it is not without areas that are in need of attention. The census data characterizes the areas adjacent to the University Boulevard Town Center as an increasingly diverse and aging population facing problems common to World War II-era suburbs. Middle class flight to newer residential areas and deteriorating commercial corridors reflect the decrease in median household incomes and home values during the previous two census periods. Benefiting this community, however, is its affordability, historic character, and central location to Downtown Jackson-



ville, which should make the area more attractive as Duval County continues to grow.

Community Vision Workshop

Community contributions are the heart of this Visioning effort. The Town Center Program was initiated not only to provide a physical improvement of Jacksonville neighborhoods, but also to help bring the people of each community together and encourage renewed interest, activity, relationships, and organization.

A cross-section of 36 area residents and business owners attended the public workshop held on January 27, 2005 at the Blue Cypress Park Clubhouse. The workshop was carefully organized to garner as much input and participation as possible from attendees. The project Team utilized a simple and streamlined approach

that enabled small groups to formulate their own creative ideas for improving the community.

To supplement the community workshop, surveys were administered to gather demographic information and to ask property

owners and workshop participants to consider two important questions: "Where are we now?" and "Where would we like to be?" Participants reflected on these questions in a personal way to try to identify important issues, concerns, and visions for the future that would not be influenced or overshadowed in the open discussion to follow. The following is a brief summary of their responses to these questions. These answers and those collected from the open discussion were synthesized to create a master list of prioritized items used to guide the overall Vision concept.

Who are we?

The following questions were asked in the survey. Of the approximately 36 participants at the first workshop, 31 completed the surveys.

Your age?

- Under 15: 0%
- 15-24: 3%
- 25-40: 3%
- 41-60: 39%
- Over 60: 55%

Are you married?

- Yes: 90%
- No: 10%

Do you have school age children?

- Yes: 80%
- No: 20%

What neighborhood do you live in?

- Alderman Park: 3%
- Charter Point: 23%
- Colony Cove: 3%
- Mandarin: 3%
- St. John's Landing: 3%
- University Park: 65%

How long have you lived there?

- Less than 5 years: 13%
- 5 to 15 years: 19%
- Over 15 years: 68%

Is your home within walking distance of the Town Center?

- Yes: 55%
- No: 36%

How often do you visit the Town Center?

- Once a week or more: 45%
- Monthly: 10%
- Less than once per month: 13%

Do you own a business or work in the Town Center area?

- Own business: 10%
- Work: 3%
- Neither: 77%

Where do you typically go for dinner and entertainment?

Regency area, Beaches, Nero's, Tinseltown, San Marco, Tonino's Trattatoria, Publix, River City Brewing Company

Where are we now?

To evaluate each participant's perspective on current conditions affecting the University Boulevard corridor conditions and issues, the survey included a section that asked "Where are we now?" Participants were asked to consider how they feel about their Town Center today and to list their top three concerns. This question created a reference point on which to base the emerging Vision. Some of the top survey responses are listed below:

University Boulevard today...

- is "rapidly decaying and property values are declining"
- is lacking an "attractive center, or focal point"
- is facing "economic and social degradation"
- is "unsafe for pedestrians and schoolchildren"
- is "blighted and needs trash removed"

Where would we like to be?

Participants were also asked in the survey to answer the question “Where would we like to be?” They were instructed to share the top three changes they would like to see in their Town Center in the future. The intent of the survey questions was to gather an unbiased and personal vision from each individual. Again, some of the primary responses are listed below:

University Boulevard in the future needs...

- “new and better businesses taking pride in the area”
- “A vibrant, growing community”
- more “pedestrian character and vehicular traffic control”
- more “lighting and landscaping along corridor”
- “a public feature such as a clock or fountain”

The survey responses indicate an older neighborhood in need of maintenance but with a strong motivation for improving its condition, whether to protect property values, preserve resident safety and quality of life, revitalize commercial properties, or create a desirable, noteworthy community. While residents, business owners, and workshop participants recognize the issues in their community, they remain optimistic about its future, recognizing the potential of University Boulevard to serve as a vital commercial asset to the community.

Group Planning

Following the workshop introductions and surveys, the Project Team directed participants into small groups to begin the process of examining their community and formulating ideas and strategies for improvement. The Team provided plan sheets, aerial photographs, zoning maps, as well as pens, markers, scales, tape, tracing paper, and other tools needed to translate group ideas

into images. Team members were on hand to help in the translation process, with the goal of developing a graphic vision that represented group concerns or ideas.



After capturing their initial ideas, each group presented their plan or Vision concept to the overall group and responded to questions and comments. Project Team members recorded group ideas by table:

Group 1

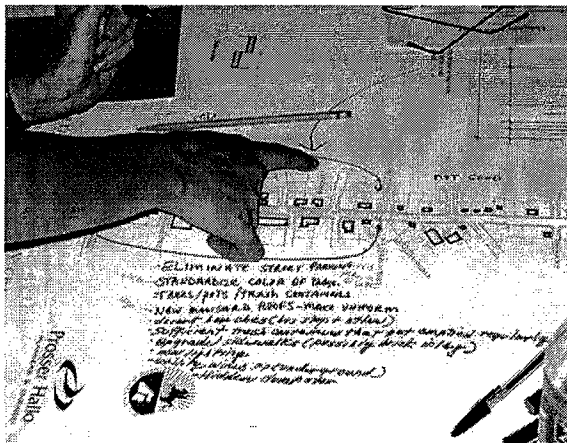
- “Focus on area from Boys Home south to Arlington Road”
- “Lots of accidents at Dickson and Floral Bluff intersections”
- “Sidewalks in front of businesses closer to Arlington Road with landscaping”
- “Slow traffic down on University”
- “Keep businesses accessible”
- “Landscaped medians”
- “Code enforcement to deal with abundance of abandoned/junk vehicles, burnt out buildings, (Particularly Shell station), and poor signage”
- “Amnesia night club is a sore spot”
- “Crime associated with apartments”
- “Would like facade improvements like Springfield and establish a common aesthetic theme”
- “Low interest financing for funding business improvements”

Group 2

- “Focus efforts on the south end of University”
- “Need Code Enforcement to step up”

Group 3

- “Major concentration on south end”
- “Clean up private businesses (i.e. tires in front of buildings)”
- “Establish a “go-to place” such as a coffee-shop”
- “Emphasize pedestrians, green medians, better lighting”
- “Connect the area to the arts, such as a new small theatre”



- “Create partnership with J.U. to develop a public feature such as a “Dolphin” fountain or landscaped roundabout”
- “Construct new skate park at Justina Terrace”
- “Fix problem with semi-trucks parked on the north side of University Blvd. adjacent to J.U.”
- “Need more restaurants at Gazebo (Publix) shopping center on Ft. Caroline Rd.”

Group 4

- “Lots of blight near Arlington Rd.”
- “Need new benches and bus stops with uniform facades”

- “Add crepe myrtles, distinct crosswalks, more landscaping”
- “Add more lighting with period light fixtures”
- “Put wiring underground”
- “Cover and screen dumpsters facing the road”
- “Sidewalks with brick in-lays”
- “Improve the aesthetics of the Gazebo (Publix) shopping center on Ft. Caroline”

Group 5

- “Work with Old Arlington, Inc.”
- “Create University Blvd. Merchants Association”
- “Old strip commercial centers should have landscaping (pots, curb extensions/bulb-outs, reclaim R.O.W.)
- “Historic lighting standards”
- “Distinctive town clock at library, more public art”
- “Ensure bus stops have trash cans”
- “Curbing all along University Blvd. with pavers”
- “Remove the ability (space) for semi-trucks to park near J.U.”
- “Land for a park”
- “Eliminate parking in front of Amnesia night club”

Group 6

- “Increase zoning and code enforcement efforts”
- “Provide incentives and grants to improve property such as Facade Program”
- “Connect with Neighborhood Action Plan program in Old Arlington”
- “Start north work south”

