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## **Acknowledgements**

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**Interviews & Input** 

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### **Liberty Heritage Historic District**

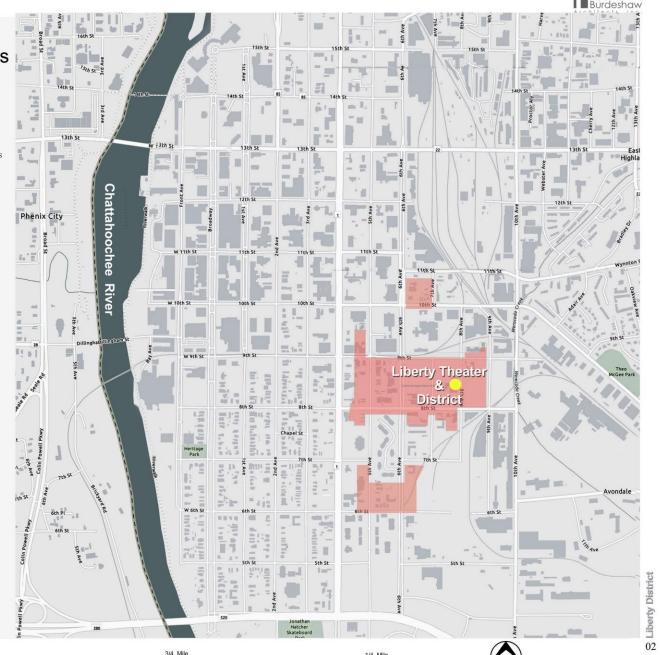
#### The historic center of black life in Columbus

## From the 1984 nomination form of the National Register of Historic Places application.

The Liberty District also boasts several historic churches, schools, businesses, and homes that reflect the diverse and vibrant history of the neighborhood. Some examples are the St. James AME Church, which was founded in 1876 and is one of the oldest black churches in Columbus; the Spencer High School, which was established in 1930 as the first public high school for African Americans in Columbus; the Claffin School, which was built in 1868 as one of the first schools for freed slaves in Georgia; and the Ma Rainey House and Museum, which was the residence of the legendary blues singer known as the "Mother of the Blues".



The Liberty District is a valuable part of the historic districts of Columbus, Georgia that showcase the rich and diverse heritage of the city. The district is a testament to the resilience, creativity, and achievements of the African American community that has shaped the history and culture of Columbus for over a century.







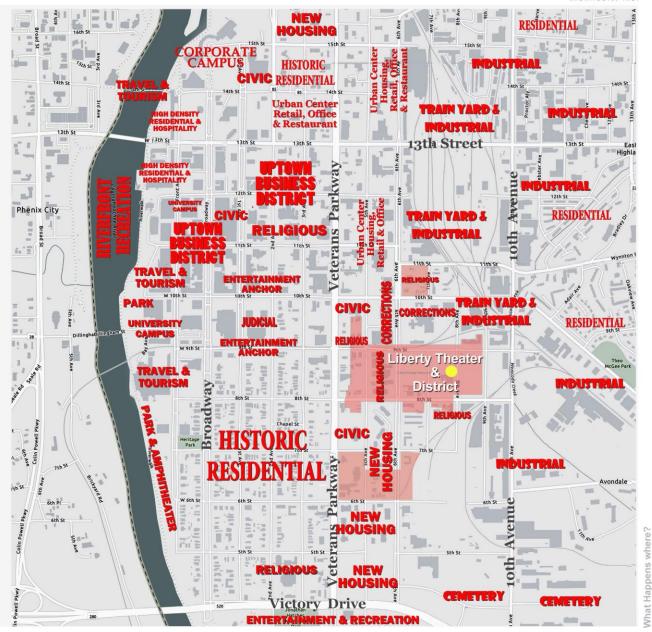
## What happens where?

## A guide to general land uses in the Liberty District and surroundings

**Location:** The Liberty Heritage Historic District is situated in Columbus, Georgia, just east of downtown. It serves as a bridge connecting the oldest historic residential district to the extensive railroad yards and industrial district further east.

**Liberty Theater:** The heart of this neighborhood is the Liberty Theater, which opened in 1924. The theater was a center of black entertainment and hosted famous performers like Bessie Smith, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, and Ma Rainey.

**Historic Preservation**: The Historic Columbus Foundation plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting the area's heritage. Located at 1440 2nd Avenue, HCF offers programs, events, and educational initiatives to deepen visitors' appreciation for Columbus's cultural significance.





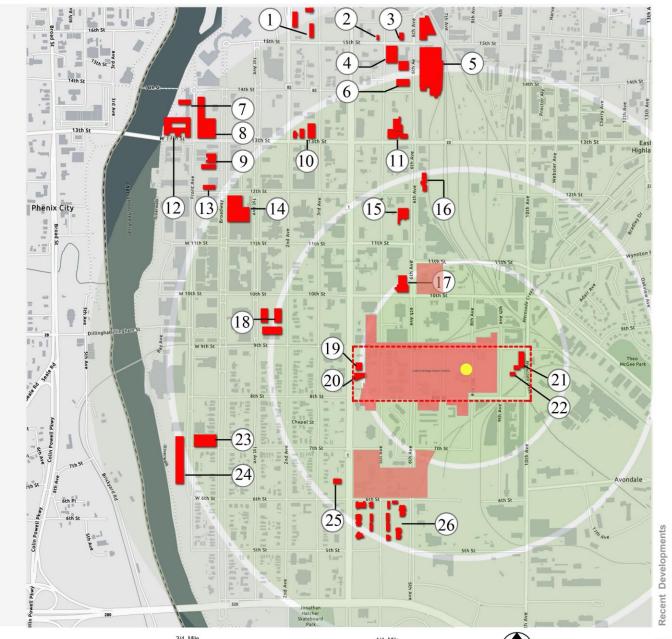


## **Recent Developments**

(Quarter mile walking range increments)

## Legend

- 1. New Loft Housing
- 2. Sputnik Bar
- 3. Stumpy's
- 4. Fetch Dog Park
- 5. Swift Mill Lofts and Office
- 6. Moes BBQ
- 7. Hotel Indigo
- 8. Synovus
- 9. Ram Hotels
- 10. Uptown Provisions
- 11. Chattabrewchee/ Vintageville
- 12. The Rapids
- 13. Hampton Inn
- 14. City Offices Renovation
- 15. Salt life
- 16. New Law Offices
- 17. Sheriff's Department
- 18. New Judicial Building
- 19. Family Dollar
- 20. Trailways Bus Depot
- 21. Warehouse 9
- 22. SpeedWay
- 23. New Historic Home Sites
- 24. Chattahoochee Promenade Renovation
- 25. Neighborworks
- 26. Columbus Commons Residential





### Churches

#### The spiritual center of the Liberty District

## Houses of Worship as Institutional Anchors for the Liberty Neighborhood

The churches within the Liberty District play a significant role as anchor institutions in preserving this historic neighborhood, and their presence is one of the truly unique aspects of the Liberty District's charm. The presence of churches in the Liberty District dates back to the 1840's, shortly after the founding of Columbus in 1828. Some churches were off-shoots of larger churches as a way to segregate their congregations while others were founded by slaves and their descendents for the black citizenry.

Churches have been in the Liberty District for the good times and the bad. When residents and businesses were leaving the district in the 60's, 70's and 80's, the churches made the decision to stay. And the former Liberty residents still came back to worship in the Liberty District churches, just as they always have done, because churches serve as more than just places of worship; they are hubs of cultural, social, and economic activities that contribute to the lives of their parishoners, as well as to the preservation and revitalization of the Liberty District.

**Community Organizing:** Churches have a long history of mobilizing their congregations and the broader community for social and political change. They often serve as catalysts for community organizing efforts aimed at preserving historic neighborhoods by advocating for policies and resources that benefit the community.

**Historic Preservation:** Many churches are themselves historic landmarks. Preserving these church buildings can be a symbol of the neighborhood's history and cultural identity. Churches often work with preservation organizations to secure funding for restoration and maintenance of their historic structures.

Cultural and Educational Programs: Churches may offer cultural programs, workshops, and educational initiatives that promote the heritage and history of the neighborhood. This helps maintain a sense of identity and pride among residents.

**Social Services:** Some churches provide social services such as food banks, counseling, job training, and housing assistance. These services can help stabilize the neighborhood population and prevent displacement due to gentrification.

**Economic Development:** Churches can support local businesses and entrepreneurs through partnerships, mentoring, and space rental. Churches have payrolls too, during the good years and the lean. They can also promote economic development initiatives that create jobs and improve the overall financial health of the neighborhood.

**Housing Initiatives:** Some churches engage in affordable housing projects to ensure that long-time residents can continue to live in the neighborhood. This can involve developing affordable housing units or advocating for housing policies that protect residents from eviction and rising rents.

**Community Events:** Churches often host community events, such as festivals, health fairs, and educational workshops. These events bring residents together and promote a sense of belonging and cohesion within the neighborhood.

Youth and Family Support: Many churches offer programs for youth and families, such as after-school programs, mentoring, and family counseling. These services can help address issues that may threaten the stability of the neighborhood.

Crisis Response: In times of crisis, such as natural disasters or community emergencies, churches often serve as hubs for disaster relief efforts and community support, further solidifying their role as anchor institutions.

## **Greater Beaulah Baptist Church**

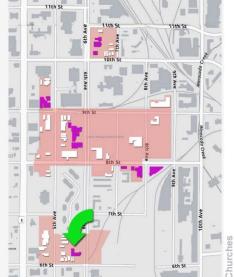


In 1959, the trustees and the pastor found three plots of land located at 609, 611, and 613 6th Avenue. On these plots a brick structure was erected and incorporated. At the same time, the word "Greater" was added. The church was renamed "The Greater Beulah Baptist Church, Inc." On May 3, 1959, the first service was held for the Greater Beulah Baptist Church, Inc. In 2020, Dr. C. Medley Hayes retired as pastor of Greater Beulah after 30 years of service. Dr. Maurice K. Mickles succeeded him as pastor.















### Planning Goals

## Encourage existing property owners to invest in renovations

Having a well-crafted master plan for the Liberty District can encourage property owners to invest in renovating their buildings by creating a supportive regulatory / zoning environment, offering financial incentives, improving infrastructure, and fostering a sense of community and pride in the neighborhood. The combination of these strategies can stimulate private investment and contribute to the overall revitalization of the Liberty District area.

## Plan a complete neighborhood with a renovated Liberty Theater at its center.

There was a time when the Liberty District had many elements needed for a successful neighborhood - a plentiful housing stock in a location close to employment opportunities, schools, churches, a community meeting house, thriving businesses, entertainment and cultural venues, and access to public transportation. This master plan will provide a map for neighborhood renewal by staying true to the elements of the past that made the neighborhood a special and unique part of Columbus, Georgia.

## Envision the success of the Ma Rainey House Museum

The Museum exists within the four walls of Ma Rainey's home. This plan envisions a way of expanding the telling of her story through new site elements - a blues garden and an intimate outdoor performance space, as well as collaborative exhibits and performances at the Liberty Theater.

## Every neighborhood needs a great neighborhood park

A neighborhood park in the Liberty area can play a vital role in enhancing the quality of life in a community. It fosters physical and mental well-being, strengthens social bonds, and contributes to the overall attractiveness and vitality of the neighborhood. As such, investing in the creation and maintenance of neighborhood parks is often seen as a valuable community development strategy.

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6th St

7

## Create a plan that will facilitate moving city-owned property from public to private initiatives.

This transfer could be to a single lot to a person interested in a home or duplex home, or to a developer who is interested in multiple lots and willing to work within the master plan intent to renew the Liberty neighborhood.

By following a structured and transparent process, the City can effectively move city-owned property within the Liberty District into private hands while ensuring that the transfer aligns with the city's goals, benefits the neighborhood, satisfies the city's investment costs and adheres to legal and regulatory requirements.

The resulting construction projects can demonstrate the power of Public-Private Partnerships in enabling seed projects of various sizes that can jump-start further private investments and initiatives that will help to renew the Liberty District.

### Include a variety of housing types and sizes

A variety of housing types in the Liberty neighborhood creates a dynamic, inclusive, and adaptable community. It addresses the diverse needs and preferences of residents, supports economic vitality, enhances social cohesion, and contributes to a more sustainable and resilient urban environment.

A mix of housing types can include options like apartments, condos, townhouses, and single-family homes, catering to residents with varying budget constraints. This can help address housing affordability challenges within the community.

Peanure

6th St

A Liberty District with various housing options can support residents at different stages of life. Seniors may choose to downsize to smaller homes or apartments, allowing them to remain in the same Liberty neighborhood - year after year.

6th St

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## Walkability

## Approximate walking and biking times in the Liberty District and surroundings

In urban planning, walkability refers to the accessibility of amenities by foot, and is based on the idea that urban spaces should be more than just transport corridors designed for maximum vehicle throughput. Walkability is about creating neighborhoods where people can easily walk to services and amenities within a reasonable distance, typically defined as a walk of 30 minutes or less. Factors influencing walkability include the quality of paths, pavements, crossings, road design, lighting, building accessibility, and perceptions of safety.

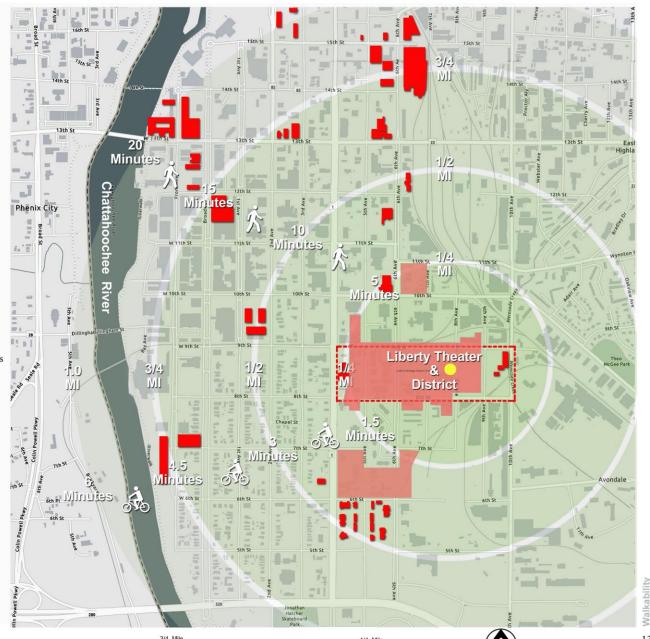
The Liberty District already has many advantages in developing a walkable neighborhood. Much of the infrastructure is already in place. When a major public works project a few years ago was undertaken to help with lessen the flooding issues in the neighborhood, Sixth Avenue was completely renovated in the Liberty District area with all new pedestrian and bike friendly intersections, underground utility lines, safe roadway lighting, and landscaped with trees to provide areas of shade adjacent to all new sidewalks along this important corridor.

In the three block area around the Liberty Theater, every street right-of-way is generously proportioned with sidewalks and mature trees giving shade to the area.

Residents of walkable neighborhoods can see a health benefit when taking advantage of increased walkability. The exercise is good for them, and can promote other advantages of a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, cities with good public transit and access to public amenities can promote happiness.

Walkable neighborhoods reduce reliance on cars, which helps lower CO2 emissions. A higher Walk Score in the Liberty District can increase property value as new developments are undertaken. Walkability fosters community interaction, combatting loneliness. People walking around town have more opportunities to engage with neighbors and participate in civic activities.

As the neighborhood begins to change, every project can contribute to a better walking environment within the neighborhood, and the city can plan to expand it's public infrastructure to connect the Liberty District to Uptown Columbus with innovative transportation options beyond the car.





## **Transportation**

### METRA Bus Routes

Metra bus routes are intended to connect larger areas of our community with a robust public transportation system, and the layout of existing bus routes will do just that for the Liberty District. Using a bus can help the city lower transport emissions, which will make Columbus a cleaner and healthier place. It will also contribute to less congestion by reducing the number of cars on the roadways.

Public transportation is generally more affordable than owning and maintaining a private car Many of the current and future residents of the Liberty District will fit the profile of a typical transit user - lower income residents, students, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The Liberty District can be the location for a large number of new housing units, many of them in higher density housing configurations. This residential potential will be attractive to many people who want to live and work in the Liberty District, while utilizing the retail, educational, entertainment and recreation aspects of the Uptown area.

Metra will have the opportunity to develop more short distance routes that can connect the Liberty District to Uptown Columbus and nearby areas of development such as the Midcity Yards, the Highside Market, and Riverfront Place among others.

The Liberty District can leverage this transit advantage to become the place to live where a world of opportunities are just a short ride away!

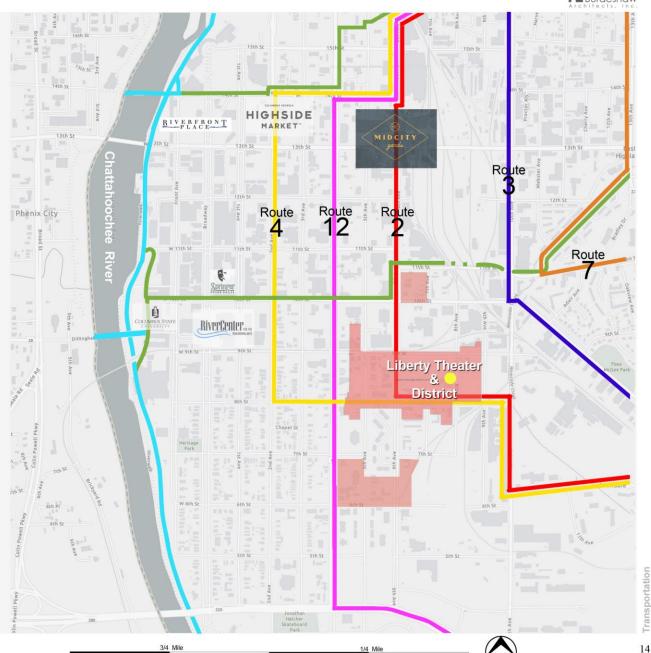
### **Dragonfly Trail**

The Dragonfly Trail is network of bike and pedestrian walkways that connect the Uptown area to many other neighborhoods around the city. All of these paths lead directly to the Chattahoochee River, which is the center of outdoor recreation in Columbus.

The Dragonfly Trail is just a block away from the heart of the Liberty District, and the District is already connected to this trail by the sidewalks of the Sixth Avenue corridor.

#### Chattahoochee Riverwalk

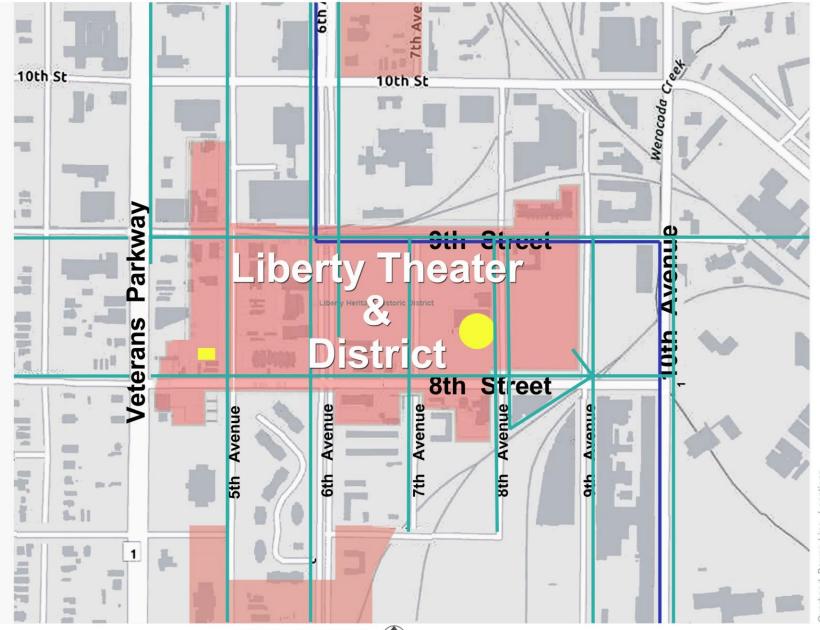
The Chattahoochee Riverwalk has now been two decades in its creation, and offers the residents of the Liberty District with a wonderful pedestrian and bicycling venue for their families. It is a linear park that spans 14 miles along this beautiful waterfront.



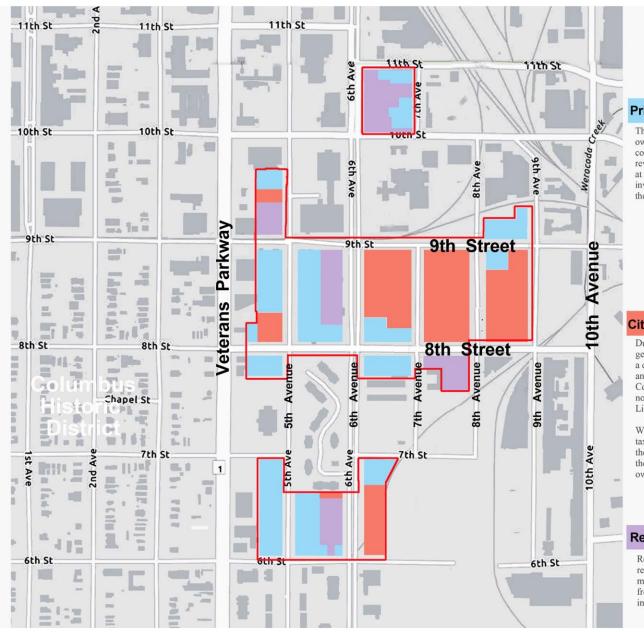












### Property Ownership Within the

#### Within the Liberty District

#### **Private**

The steady decrease of private property ownership in the Liberty District has contributed to a decrease in property tax revenues for the City. This has occurred at the same time that significant infrastructure investments have been made in reducing the Liberty areas subject to flooding.

#### **City of Columbus**

Due to a variety of factors such as general disinvestment in the Liberty area, a decline in upkeep of private property, and an increase in rental properties, the City of Columbus issued "demolition by neglect" notices on a significant number of Liberty District properties over the years.

When owners cease to pay their property taxes, property ownership transfers to the City of Columbus. This has resulted in the City becoming the largest property owner in the Liberty District.

#### Religious

Religious property ownership has remained relatively constant over the decades. Since most religious organizations are exempt from taxation, the City receives no tax income from these properties.

#### Hecht Burdeshaw

## Building Occupancy

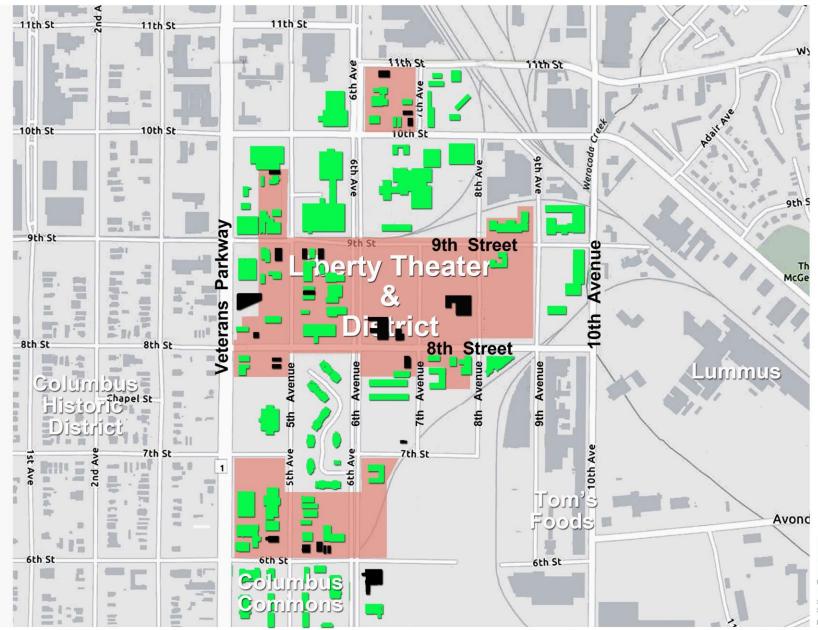
#### **Observations**

The Liberty District is home to a wide variety of building types and condition, from historic churches built in the early 1800's to new housing developments at Columbus Commons.

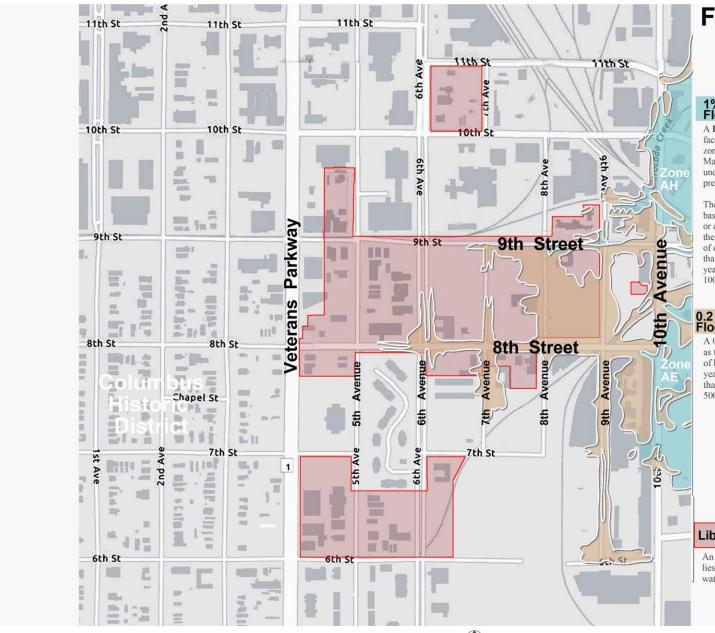
Tom's Foods and Lummus properties are currently under-utilized but may be considered for significant developments in the future as the Liberty District continues to attract investment by the City the Columbus Housing Authority, and developers within the community.

## Legend

- Existing structures outside of study area
- Liberty Historic District
- Building vacant or under-utilized
- Building Occupied







### Flood Hazard Zones

Within the Liberty District

## 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard

A Flood Hazard Zone refers to an area that faces a significant risk of flooding. These zones are identified on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), which communities use to understand flood risk and take necessary precautions.

The 1% annual flood, also known as the base flood, has a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. It represents the flood level with the highest likelihood of occurrence. In other words, it's the flood that has a 1 in 100 chance of happening each year. This is often referred to as a 100-year flood.

### 0.2 % Annual Chance Flood Hazard

A 0.2% annual chance flood, also known as the 500-year flood, has a 0.2% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year. In other words, it's the flood event that occurs approximately once every 500 years.

#### Liberty District Limits

An eastern portion of the Liberty District lies within the Weracoba Creek watershed area.



## **Public Finance Options**

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Veterans

#### **Enterprise Zone**

The Columbus Business Development Center, the city's Enterprise Zone, was established to revitalize the area's residential neighborhoods, while creating and retaining jobs for its residents. Business and residential developments, which plan to invest in this area, are given special state and local tax incentives as well as other possible fee exemptions

The following businesses and service enterprise 9th St developments may qualify for location within the Columbus Business Development Center:

Business Enterprise Retail Manufacturing Warehouse and Distribution Processing Telecommunications Tourism Research and Development New Residential Construction Residential Rehabilitation

## **Historic Columbus Foundation**

Loans will be made up to a maximum of \$100,000.00 with payment terms varying based on project and loan recipient

#### lillion. Liberty / 6th Avenue Tax Allocation District (TAD) 10th St Tax Allocation Districts (TAD) are established for the purpose of catalyzing 100

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11th St

investment by financing certain redevelopment activities in underdeveloped or blighted areas using public dollars.

Redevelopment costs are financed through the pledge of future incremental increases in property taxes generated by the resulting new development. Typically, upon creation, TADs have vacant commercial and residential properties, blighted conditions and numerous vacant buildings or are in need of significant environmental remediation.

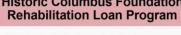
The 1985 Georgia Redevelopment Powers Law gave additional powers to local municipalities in order to facilitate the redevelopment of blighted or economically depressed areas. One of the powers granted to local governments is the ability to issue tax allocation bonds to finance infrastructure and other redevelopment costs within a tax allocation district.

#### Federal **Opportunity Zone**

The entire Liberty District is within the boundaries of the Federal Opportunity Zone.

Opportunity Zones are an economic development tool that allows people to invest in distressed areas in the United States. Their purpose is to spur economic growth and job creation in low-income communities while providing tax benefits to investors.

Opportunity Zones were created under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. Thousands of low-income communities in all 50 states, are designated as Qualified Opportunity Zones.



The Historic Columbus Rehabilitation Loan Program provides rehabilitation funds for historic commercial or residential structures. Rehabilitation loan funds may be used to make repairs or improvements on the interior or exterior of qualifying properties.

underwriting.

Loan underwriting and servicing provided by NeighborWorks Columbus









## The Pines - 808 9th Street



## Legacy Terrace - 906 9th Street

























## **Public Safety Building**







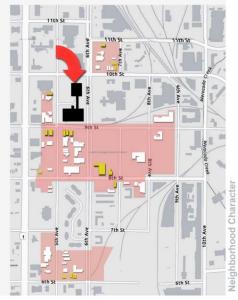
















## **Tom Huston Peanuts**



In 1925, the Tom Huston Peanut Company began operating in Columbus, and was an immediate business success. The company was bought several times over the past century, most recently in 2018 by the Campbell Soup Company. The company has plans to eventually close the entire plant, and has begun to lease some buildings as warehouse and office space. The future of this complex of buildings just south of the Liberty District has yet to be determined.









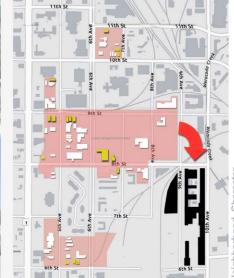
















## **Columbus Commons**

Columbus Commons is a relatively new multifamily housing complex that provides 106 units in an urban setting that also offers new landscaping mixed with the mature trees that were saved as part of the project. With the success of Phase One, the Columbus Housing Authority is now in the planning stages for Phase Two which will extend the multifamily housing mix south to Victory Drive.









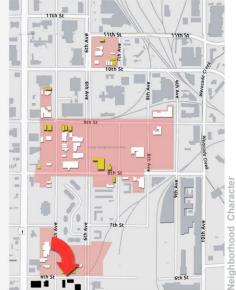


















## **The Liberty Theater**

One of the most notable landmarks in the Liberty District is the Liberty Theatre, which was built in 1924 as the first and only theater for African Americans in Columbus. The theater hosted local and national performers, such as Ma Rainey, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, and Bessie Smith, and served as a cultural hub for the community. The theater also screened movies and hosted community events, such as graduations, weddings, and civic meetings.

The theater was closed in 1974 due to urban renewal and decay, but was restored and reopened in 1992 as a cultural center that offers educational programs, art exhibits, and live performances.



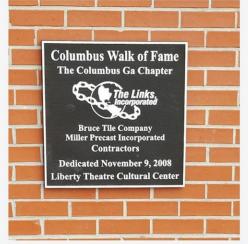






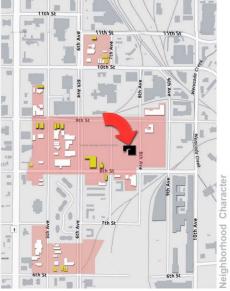


















## The Ma Rainey House and Museum

Gertrude Pridgett "Ma" Rainey, famed "Mother of the Blues", lived in this house after 1935 during retirement in her native city. In 1904 she introduced blues as part of her traveling act. For 30 years, her performances contributed to the growing popularity of this truly American musical art form. A pioneer female recording artist, she made 94 blues records for Paramount before 1928.

While this neighborhood was once filled with one and two story simple frame houses such as this, most have been demolished.













#### Hecht Burdeshaw

## Opportunity Site Locations

#### **Observations**

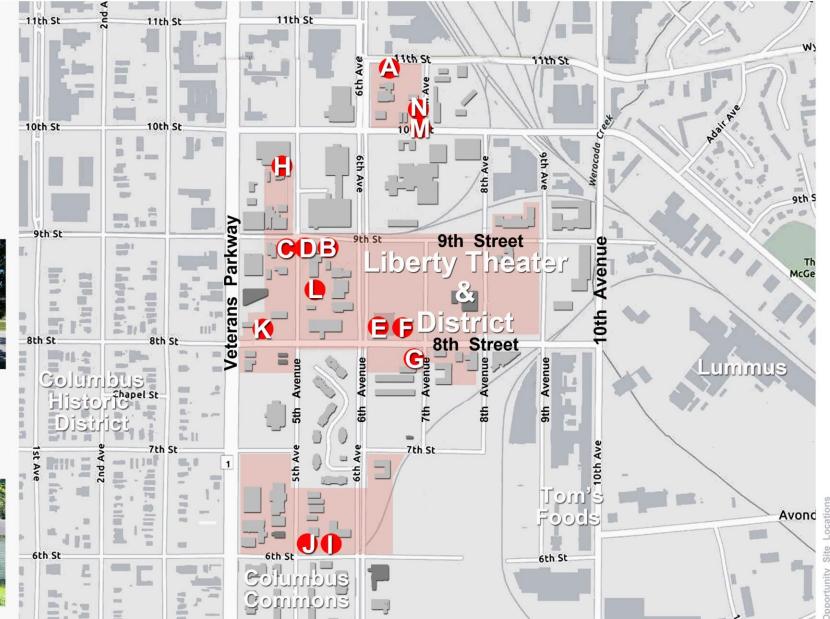
For the purposes of this master plan, an "Opportunity Site" is an existing building that is privately owned and is in need of repair to various extents. These buildings should be on the front line of efforts to salvage the remaining building stock that provide a vital link to the stories of the Liberty community.

They establish the materials and details of the original neighborhood, which is important in setting the standard for any new development to meet.



The Liberty District and individual property owners should coordinate with the Historic Columbus Foundation in pursuing low interest construction loans or grants that are available for use in preserving and redeveloping this neighborhood.







## Opportunity Sites With Existing Building

## 424 9th Street



## 500 & 506 9th Street









# Site Data Lot Area: 10,890 SF Building footprint: 3,700 SF Building GSF: 11,100 SF

Current Zoning:



**UPT** 

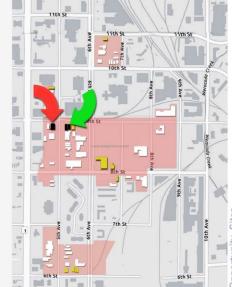


## Site Data

Lot Area: 6,534 SF
Building footprint: 2,774 SF
Building GSF: 8,322 SF
Current Zoning: UPT









## Opportunity Sites With Existing Building

511, 515, 517 6th Street

## 600 5th Avenue















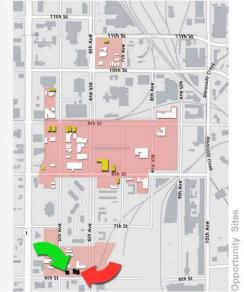
Lot Area: 9103SF Building footprint: 3459 SF Building GSF: 3459 SF Current Zoning:



### Site Data

Lot Area: 8802SF Building footprint: 2525 SF 2525 SF Building GSF: GC Current Zoning:





#### Hecht Burdeshaw

## Gateway Locations

#### **Observations**

The Liberty District is in need of new imagery and branding. Installation of a gateway element will let visitors know that they have arrived at a special place. The gateway should have imagery, color and texture that bring to mind the character and history of this special neighborhood.

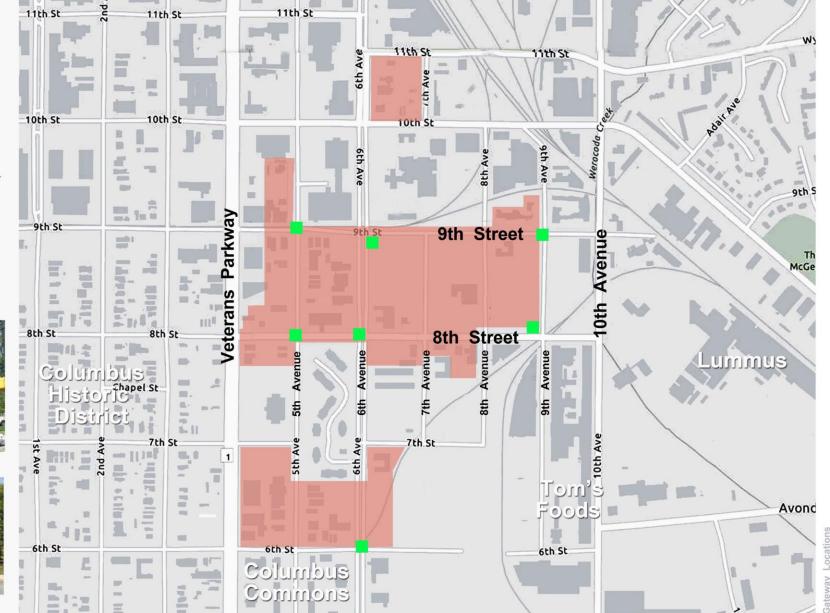
The Uptown area has a comprhensive signage design, and this should be a point of review and coordination for any updated design effort.

## Legend

Potential location of Gateway element





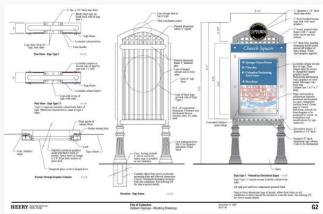


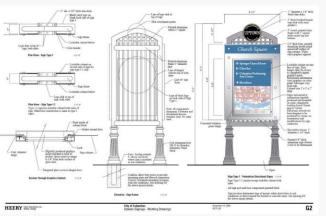
## Signage & Branding

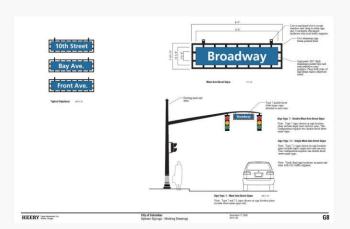
#### **Observations**

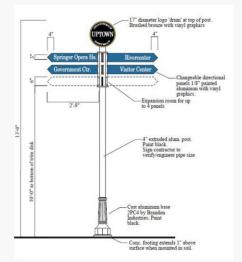
Signage needs to be approached in a comprehensive way to be effective in delivering a message of "you have arrived".

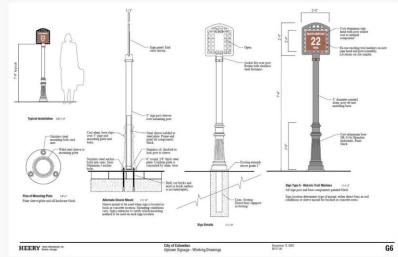
This is a sampling of the signage design involved in creating the place we call Uptown.

















## Missing Middle Housing Renewing a neighborhood while resisting gentrification

## A variety of housing types will benefit the future Liberty neighborhood

"Missing middle housing" refers to a range of housing types that fall between single-family homes and large apartment buildings, such as duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, and small apartment buildings. These neighborhoods can become inviting and walkable places, located in proximity to both jobs and the cultural heart of the city. Strengthening a historically black neighborhood such as the Liberty, in decline through decades of disinvestment, can begin with the introduction of missing middle housing.

- Affordability: Missing middle housing typically offers a more affordable option for residents compared to single-family
  homes or large apartment complexes. This can make it easier for existing residents to remain in the neighborhood,
  preventing displacement due to rising housing costs. Additionally, it can attract new residents who are looking for more
  affordable housing options.
- 2. Diverse Housing Options: Historically black neighborhoods may have limited housing options due to decades of neglect and disinvestment. Introducing missing middle housing can diversify the housing stock, accommodating different household sizes and income levels. This can make the neighborhood more inclusive and vibrant.
- 3. Community Stabilization: As affordable housing options increase, more families may choose to invest in these neighborhoods, stabilizing the community. Stable communities are more likely to have engaged residents who are invested in the well-being and improvement of the neighborhood.
- **4. Economic Opportunities:** The construction and renovation of missing middle housing can stimulate economic development in the area. It creates jobs and encourages local businesses to flourish, contributing to the overall revitalization of the neighborhood.
- 5. Preservation of Historic Character: Missing middle housing can be designed to blend with the historic architecture and character of the neighborhood. This allows for the preservation of the cultural heritage of historically black neighborhoods while still accommodating new development.
- 6. Density and Walkability: These housing types often promote higher population density, which can support local businesses and public transit. Walkable neighborhoods with mixed housing types can reduce the reliance on cars, making it easier for residents to access the amenities and services that the entire Uptown Columbus area has to offer.
- 7. Community Engagement: The process of planning and implementing missing middle housing can provide opportunities for community input and engagement. Engaging citizens in the decision-making process can ensure that development aligns with their needs and desires.
- **8. Investment Attraction:** The introduction of missing middle housing can signal to investors and developers that the neighborhood is undergoing positive changes. This can attract private and public investment in infrastructure, parks, and other essential services.
- 9. Social Equity: By addressing housing affordability and promoting economic opportunities, missing middle housing can contribute to greater social equity within historically black neighborhoods. It can help rectify past injustices and create a more equitable future for the citizens of Columbus.

Strong and financially resilient communities are comprised of a variety of housing types. Not just single-family detached homes on one end of the spectrum and huge apartment complexes on the other, but a wide range of "middle housing" options in-between: duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes, courtyard cottages, bungalow apartments, and more. Yet these middle housing types—so familiar to our grandparents and great-grandparents—are rarely built today.

Dan Parolek of Opticos Design coined the term "missing middle housing" in 2011 to describe middle housing options that are in high-demand (across all age groups) but getting harder and harder to find.

All too often, the market isn't supplying these housing options. The Liberty neighborhood has the oppotunity to lead the city in providing attractive housing options that are increasingly hard to find in Columbus.







Supply Middle House

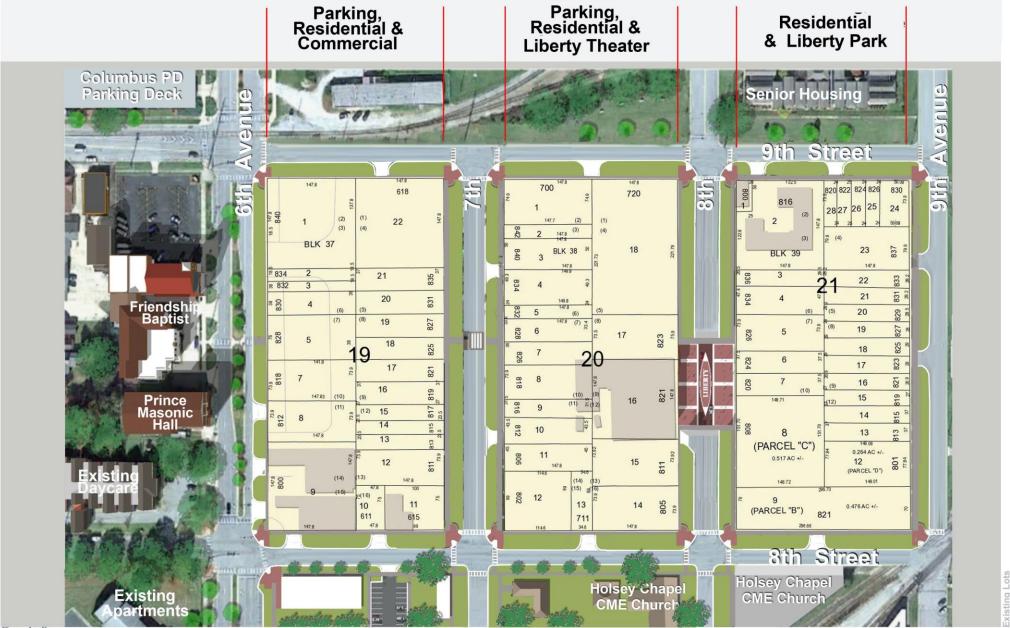


## **Project Gateway Design**









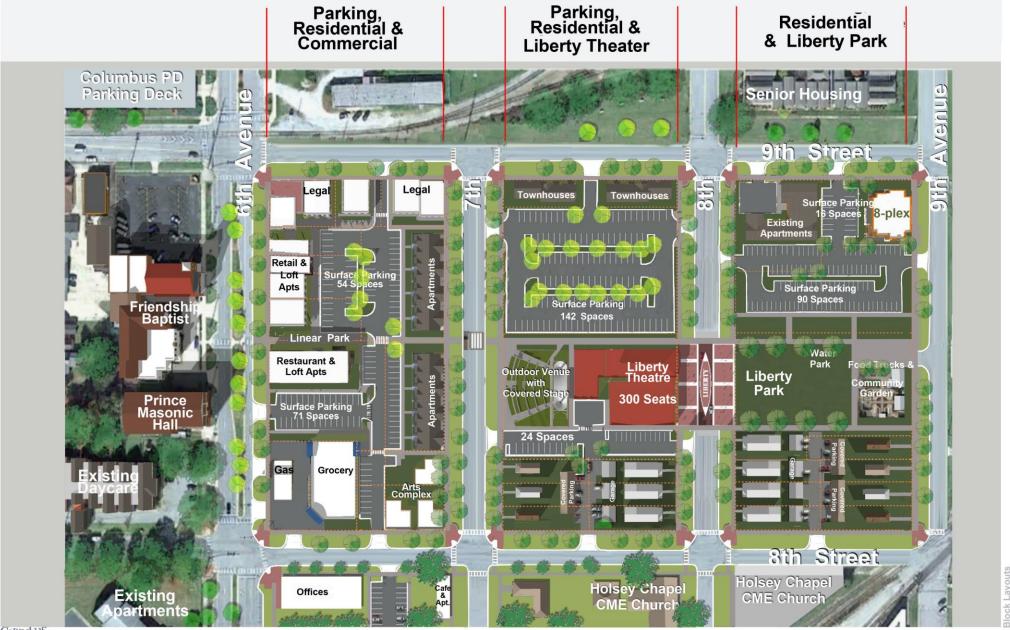




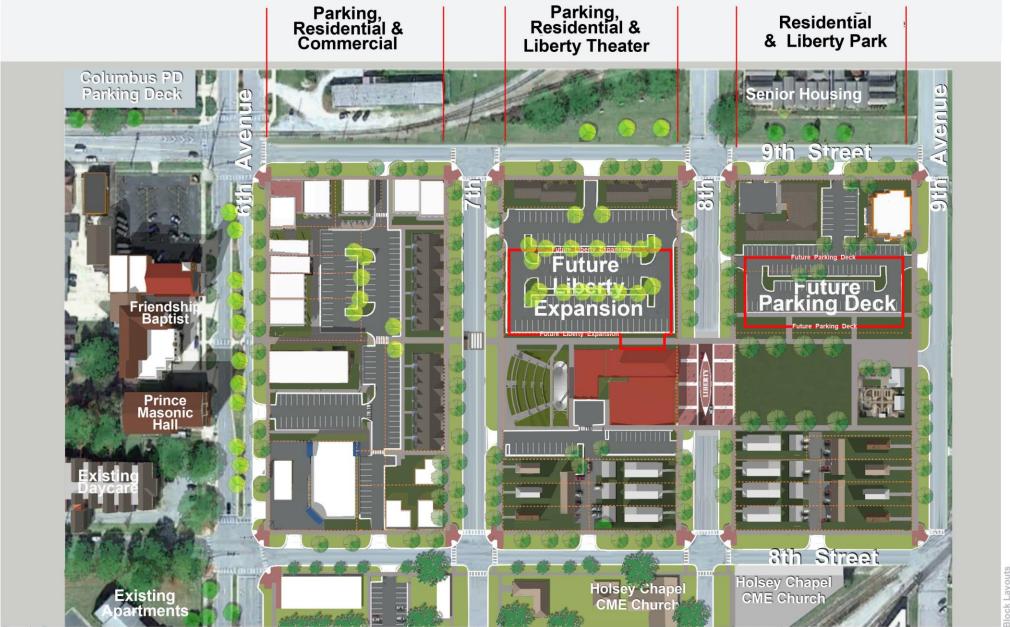






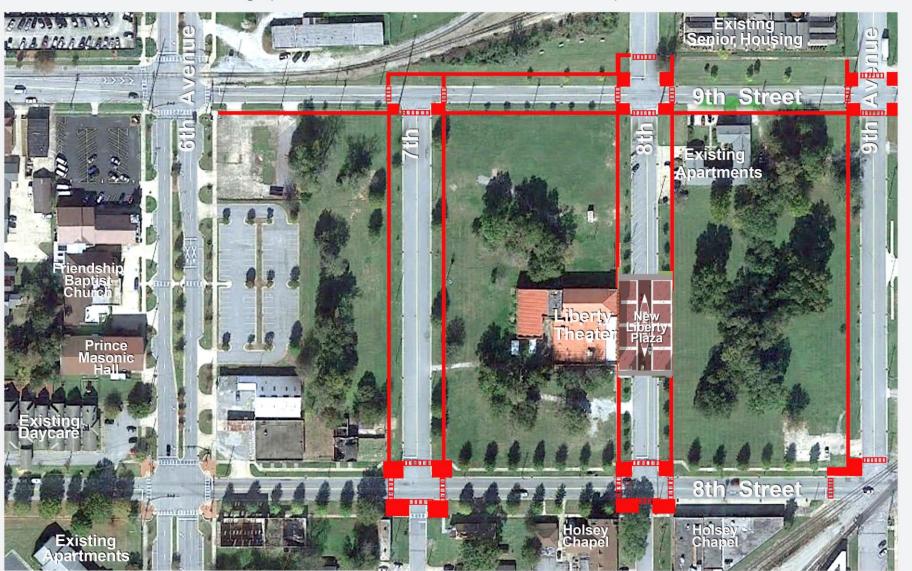








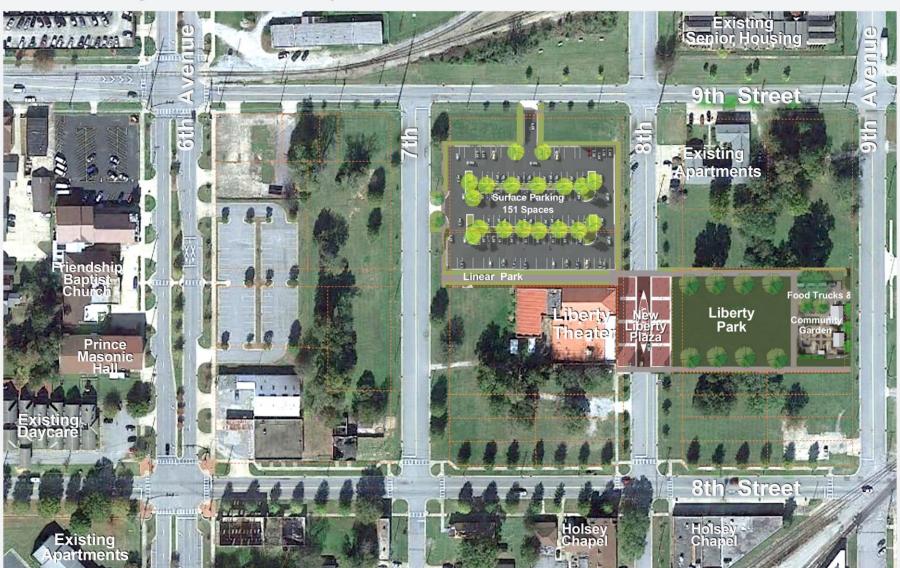
New Sidewalks & Street Crossings (to match 6th Avenue & 8th Street Intersection)







Install New Parking Area and Park for Liberty District Use

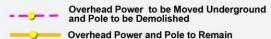


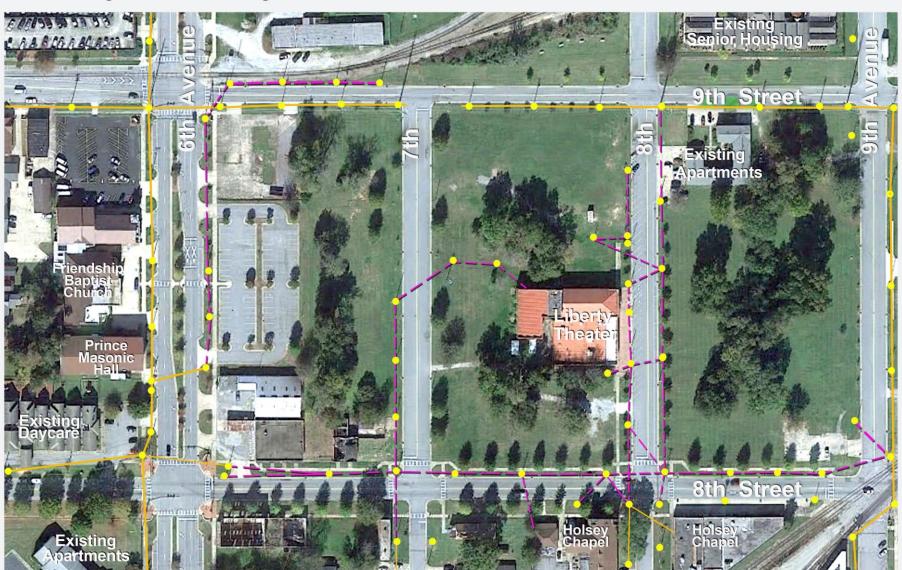






**Move Existing Power Lines Underground** 











Install New Parking Area and Park for Liberty District Use











