



# **The Main Campus**

**Concepts for a New  
Neighborhood for  
Norman**





## The Site: History

The Griffin Memorial Hospital site has a long history in the City of Norman. Its story stretches back to 1890, with the opening of a short-lived college for girls by the United Methodist Church. Five years later, the school closed and the campus was sold to the Oklahoma Sanitarium Company for use as a private mental hospital. In 1915, the State of Oklahoma bought the facility from the company and retained its superintendent Dr. David , who served in that capacity until 1950 and presided over the growth and evolution of the institution as a “place of relaxation, recreation, and spiritual as well as mental rejuvenation” for patients and employees. Under his administration, a campus of over 30 buildings developed, following a campus master plan organized around the axis of Main Street as it radiated from downtown Norman. In 1953, the previously named Central State Hospital was renamed in Dr Griffin’s honor.

Later in the 20th century, philosophies of mental health care changed and de-institutionalization became prevalent. Griffin Memorial Hospital responded by establishing a community mental health center on campus. Gradually, though, in Norman and elsewhere, changing therapy models made the large buildings and campuses obsolete and increasingly disused. The likelihood that the campus would eventually be vacated and redeveloped led to substantial local interest in the site’s future. To this end, the City of Norman and the State of Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) sponsored a four-day planning and design exercise executed by the Urban Land Institute’s Advisory Services Program in 2015. The conceptual plan called for commercial/mixed use development along the north (Robinson Street) and east (12th Avenue NE) perimeter of the site with new residential uses on the balance of the land.

In 2023, ODMHAS announced plans to replace Griffin Memorial Hospital with a new, 330-bed facility in Oklahoma City, rekindling public interest in the redevelopment of the site. The AIM Norman planning process and newly adopted (2025) comprehensive plan viewed the main campus as a key development opportunity for the City. This concept study grows directly out of this focus and the ideas presented by members of the community during the planning process. It is an exploration of the possibilities presented by the site and presents a strategy plan by which the City of Norman can realize it the development potential of the Main Campus, bounded by Robinson Street , 12th Avenue NE, Main Street, and Carter Street.

The study includes:

- A consideration of the importance of the Main Campus to Norman.
- A summary of exterior context and interior features of the subject property.
- Guiding goals and principles that formed the approaches to the stre design.
- Five related but different concepts that illustrate the design process.
- Developed graphics of the two preferred options.
- Guidance on the implementation process.

Moving forward, the site will more than likely be defined separately from Griffin Memorial Hospital, for this purpose the site is referenced as “The Main Campus”, until further defined by City Council or future ownership.



## **Why the Main Campus Site is Important to Norman**

Sound development of the Main Campus site is especially important, given the city's growth potential and development patterns.

### **The Main Campus site can efficiently accommodate a substantial amount of Norman's projected residential growth.**

AIM Norman projects a need for about 23,000 housing units between 2025 and 2045. During the planning process, the density and extent of growth were significant issues – specifically the need to balance market preferences with a practical limit of the eastward extent of urban density development. This site is unique in Norman for its size, location, ownership, and ability to accommodate a mix of urban densities. Also, as Norman's largest single infill development site, its full development can reduce the need for greenfield growth to the east.

### **The site can provide housing types that are in demand but in limited supply.**

The housing element of AIM Norman indicates that much of the city's new housing production is either single-family or student-oriented high-density development. Significant demand appears to exist for such intermediate density products as small-lot single-family detached, single-family attached, townhome, and urban apartments. A comprehensively planned and developed Main Campus project can test and satisfy these markets in a high quality setting.

### **The site can provide a unifying civic bridge between the east and west sides of Norman.**

During the AIM process, we became aware of an east side/west-side dichotomy in Norman, a phenomenon that is common but rarely productive in cities. The Main Campus, combined with Griffin Community Park and Sutton Wilderness Park, is located along the theoretical dividing line between the two sides of the city. To date, the hospital campus has reinforced this geographic division, but a successful project design can provide common territory for people from both sides of town.

### **A Main Campus development can strengthen Core Norman and reduce pressure on downtown-adjacent neighborhoods.**

The Main Campus has a direct and close connection at its southwest corner

to Downtown along Main Street, and this short distance of less than half a mile means that a strong and well-populated development produces energy for the city center. Similarly, this direct connection places the Main Campus within easy bicycle and transit reach of the future RTA rail station, making it attractive to Norman residents commuting to Oklahoma City or other points along the line. Additionally, high-density residential at the Main Campus is likely to reduce development pressure on Downtown-proximate neighborhoods, preserving both their character and their supply of affordable housing.

### **The Main Campus provides an opportunity to meet or advance a number of community goals.**

A comprehensive development plan can address a variety of other community goals. The city has a lively arts community but no public center for the arts. Advocates have viewed the American Legion Memorial Chapel, built in 1936, as an opportunity for establishing such a participatory center. The site's two drainageways have an impact on stormwater management for neighborhoods to the south. The hospital site has several important historical and architectural resources in addition to the Chapel that may be available for productive reuse. Finally, the site can be a fundamental part of a trail and greenway.



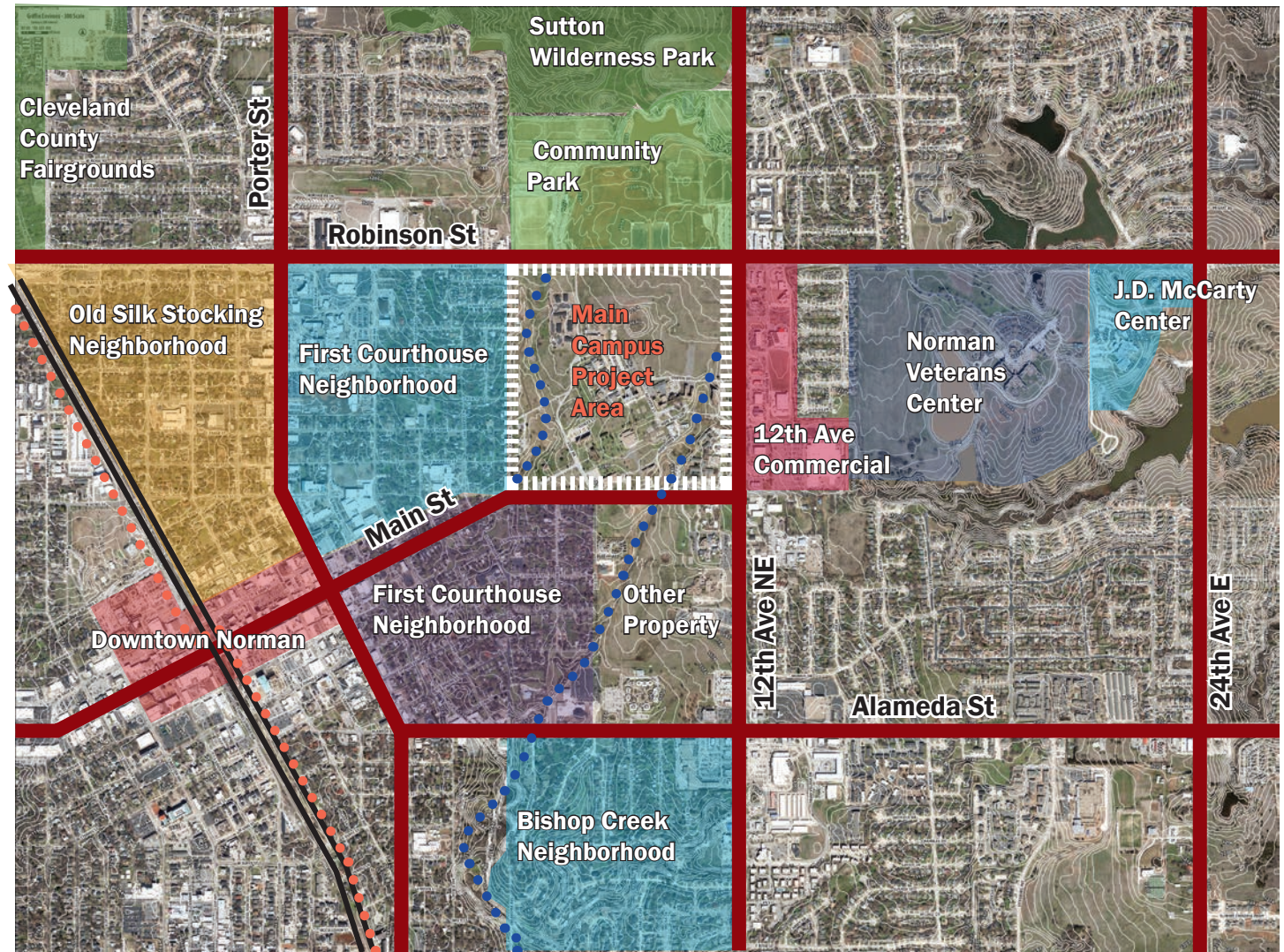


## Area Context: Major Attributes

The following diagrams describe site characteristics that can affect the design and development potential of the hospital site. Features of the external environment include:

- Proximity to Downtown with direct Main Street connection to core district.
- Adjacent to established neighborhoods with strong local character and community history, each of which has had a previous specific neighborhood plan.
- Adjacency to two major open space resources (Griffin Community Park and Sutton Wilderness Park) and major civic resources and service centers.
- Adjacent community commercial along 12th Avenue NE.
- Transit service by three EM-BARK routes, and near to future RTA passenger rail.
- Upstream location on Bishop Creek streamway corridor.

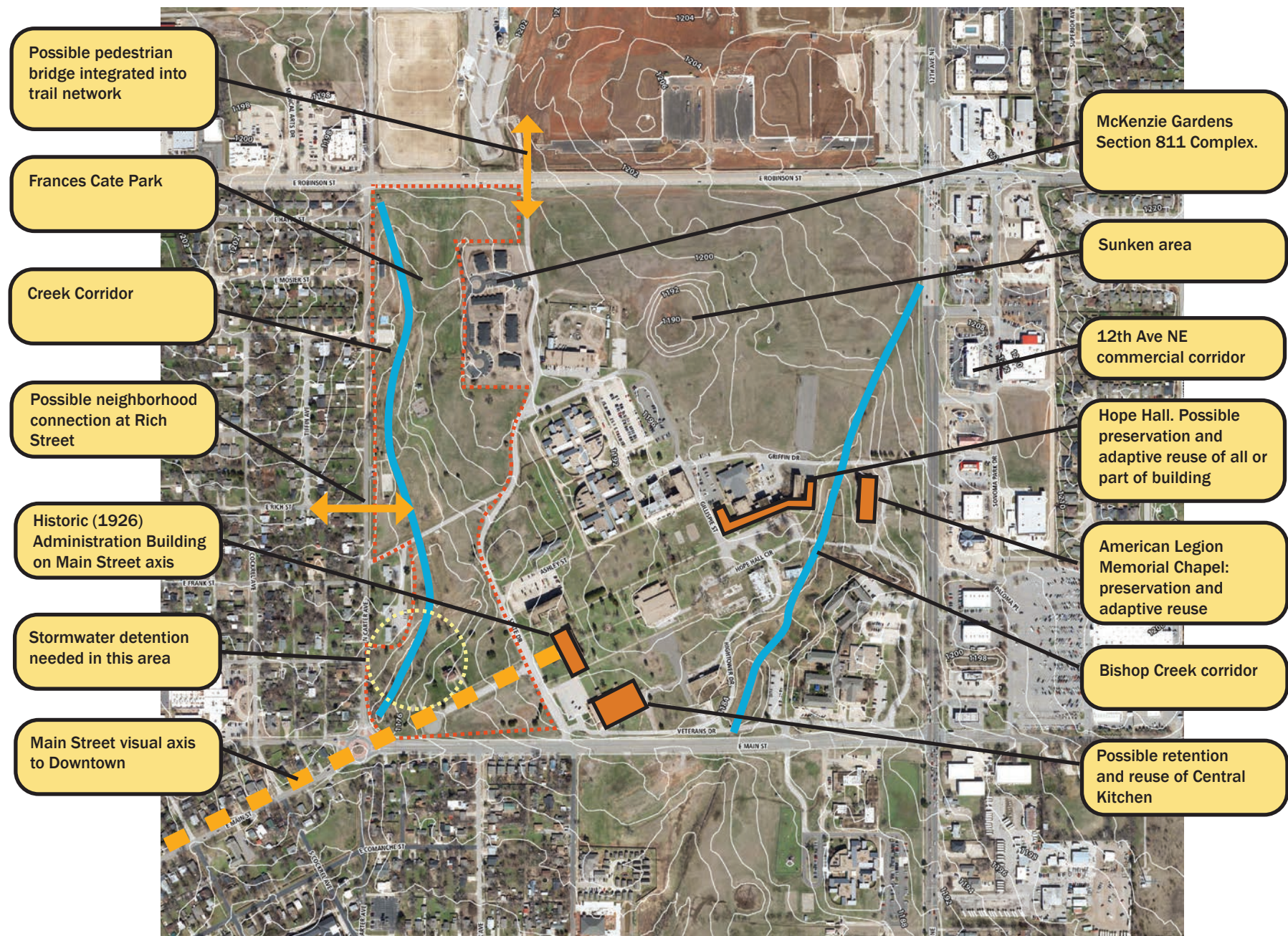
The following page identifies attributes within the site that help frame the land development concept.



- Principal streets**
- BNSF Railroad/Future RTA Line**
- Heritage Trail**
- Drainageways**



Site Considerations and Opportunities





## Guiding Principles

**A new development on the Main Campus property should be guided by the following goals and principles. The Main Campus should:**

### **1. Be an iconic urban destination for Norman.**

New development should be more than a typical group of commercial and residential land uses. It should provide a place that attracts people to spend time in it, whether or not they live or work within it. The ability to attract people to a place also increases its value to potential residents, investors, and businesses.

### **2. Become a bridge between the east and west side by providing connections and civic space that link the two.**

The plan should use amenities and public space to connect in both directions, but most notably to tie the traditional entrance at Main and Carter to 12th Avenue NE and existing and future neighborhoods envisioned by AIM Norman.

### **3. Accommodate 5-8% of the city's projected housing demand to 2045/2050.**

Land use and growth policies are primarily driven by residential development. Maximizing residential infill reduces the need for Norman to expand farther east to meet its potential housing needs. The Main Campus site, the largest available parcel under single ownership, is unique for its ability to accommodate a mix of medium- and high-density urban housing types. Based on the projections in AIM Norman for 2045, this percentage corresponds to between 1,200 and 1,800 units. Considering a 10- to 15-year build-out for a project of this scale, the Main Campus would account for about 10% to 16% of the city's new housing production during that period.

### **4. Provide a great neighborhood experience.**

The opportunity exists at the Main Campus to create a true, mixed use urban neighborhood that combines housing, civic space, a manageable amount of commercial, an employment center, and arts facilities in a connected, walking distance environment. In addition to a variety of uses, this project should strive to produce a sense of neighborliness, a degree of caring and mutual identification that is often found in traditional neighborhoods.



### **5. Respond to resident preferences, be affordable to a wide range of households, and have the flexibility to respond to market acceptance.**

A great neighborhood affordable to a few does not address the community-wide housing needs identified in AIM Norman. The Main Campus concept should provide for a range of housing types while respecting the preferences of the Norman market. For some, the single-family detached house at affordable prices is preferred; others find attached units and rowhomes attractive; while still other consumers are in a multifamily market. This leads to the concept of a “building block” – a module capable of satisfying different preferences and the flexibility to change course if certain housing types are more successful than others.

### **6. Connect to surrounding neighborhoods.**

It is easy for a “master-planned” community to become a separated enclave, but that runs counter to the vision for the Main Campus. While differences are unavoidable, the development should be seen as an organic part of the surrounding neighborhoods, with streets and paths that connect, and features that blur the boundaries of the site. In addition, Frances Cate Park is a potentially important neighborhood open space for both the adjacent First



Courthouse neighborhood and future development at the Main Campus.

### **7. Become a key link in a central community greenway.**

AIM Norman envisions a central north-south trail and greenway that will incorporate Sutton Wilderness Park, Griffin Community Park, the Griffin Hospital site, and Bishop Creek corridor, connecting to the OU campus. The Main Campus plan should include a logical trail path and greenway continuity to implement this connection.

### **8. Respect and interpret the history of the place.**

This site's history goes back almost as far as that of Norman itself and the hospital has been a major employer of residents. Some of the relatively few buildings tell the story of the hospital's evolution and ultimate decline as mental health models changed. Dr. David Griffin himself was an innovator in believing that mental illness should be treated with the same perspective and patient care as physical illness. Several of the remaining buildings are architecturally and emotionally significant, while others like the Central Kitchen retain functional value.

### **9. Manage stormwater effectively.**

Stormwater management emerged as an especially important issue during the AIM Norman process, both in terms of protecting the integrity and water quality of Lake Thunderbird and in addressing local drainage and environmental issues. The Main Campus site includes two drainage corridors: the creek that runs through Frances Cate Park on the west and Bishop Creek on the south. Upstream detention and occasional overflows are significant issues along both streamways.

### **10. Complement both Downtown and the 12th Avenue NE commercial corridor.**

The 2015 ULI study proposed large amounts of auto-oriented commercial development along Robinson Street and 12th Avenue NE. However, many contemporary mixed use projects have overestimated demand for brick-and-mortar commercial space and have had to downsize their original projections. Existing commercial along 12th Avenue NE, including a Walmart Supercenter, and Downtown Norman are very different, but are significant anchors for development at the Main Campus. New commercial adds activity and appeal to an urban project, but its character and business mix should complement rather than compete with these existing activity centers.

### **11. Be a home for the arts.**

Norman's arts community has been interested in the restoration of the American Legion Memorial Chapel as an arts center. While it is hard at this point to judge whether that is feasible, given the nature and condition of the space, the plan concept should account for this possibility. Other arts themed facilities, industries, and features can also add distinctiveness to the project and add to the features that Norman offers.



## The Residential Building Block Module

One of the goals of this effort is to demonstrate the potential yield and character of a unified development at the Main Campus site, guided by the principles outlined above. The five test concepts presented here assume a predominately but not exclusively residential project. Because the site includes a city park, two stream corridors, the McKenzie Gardens development, and other potential constraints, much of the site is not available for residential use. This leads to a relatively high density solution in order to meet the housing unit target for the site. In addition, this solution should have the flexibility to accommodate a variety of housing types that address user needs. The “building block” module presented here appears to accomplish this need and is a useful device to test site designs. Aspects of the module include:

- A small lot that is adaptable to single-family detached, attached, patio, and rowhouse configurations. The concept uses a 40'x70' building lot, based on a very successful ownership project adjacent to Downtown Omaha, Nebraska.
- Rear alley access to garages. The rear access allows narrower lots, a pedestrian street environment free of driveway interruptions, and smaller front-yard setbacks.
- Front access to both street and 30' wide greenways. The building block provides four rows of lots within a 350 foot space between street frontages.
- Greenways are connected from block to block, providing continuous paths to activity centers and amenities on the site.
- A 60' right-of-way on local streets, including a 28' curb-to-curb width, sufficient for one-sided parking, 8' tree lawn, 5' sidewalk, and 3' buffer to the front lot line.



**Towns at Little Italy, Omaha, NE.** Model for the “Building Block” test concept at the Main Campus. The 40'x70' lot module suggested here is somewhat larger than these lots. Current (July, 2025) unit prices range from \$310,000 to \$410,000.

The Residential Building Block Module

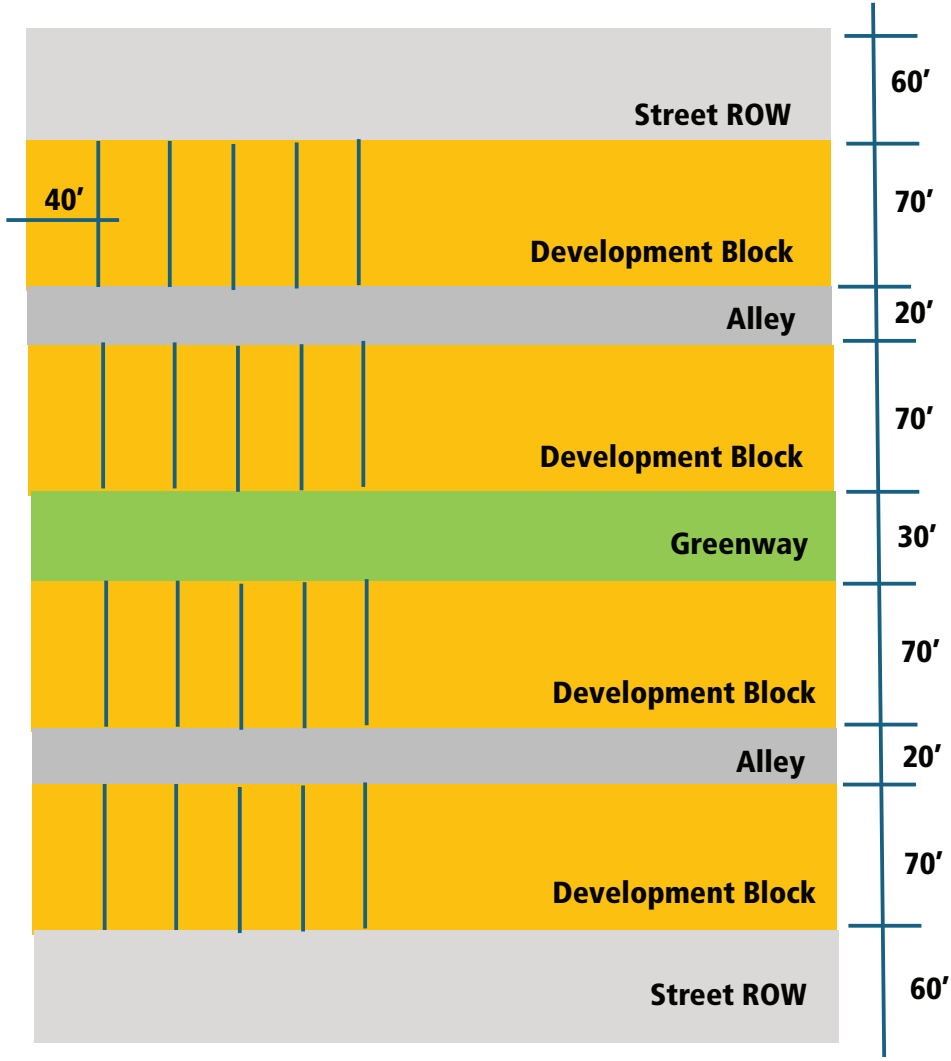


Building Block: Basic Street Section

The basic street section proposes 60’ between lot lines, with adequate street width for single-sided parking and a substantial sidewalk setback, providing adequate space for street trees.



Single-family and townhome units with front doors facing greenways. Distance between building fronts in townhomes is 50 feet, similar to that anticipated in the Building Block Module.



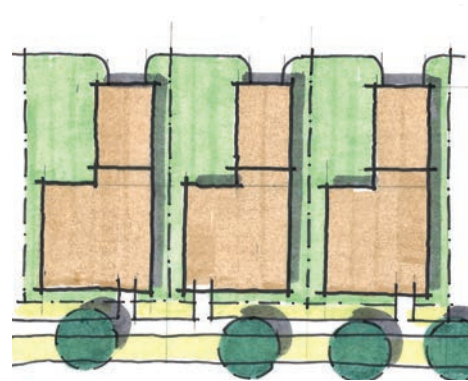
Building Block: Block Module

The street to street block module fits four rows of building lots with a 350 foot space. Outer rows have direct street exposure, while inner rows face toward greenways. All units have alley loaded garages.



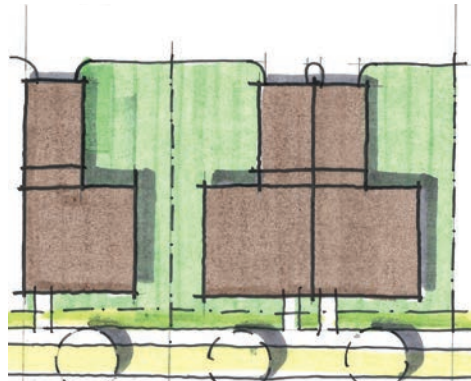
## The Residential Building Block Module

The 40x70 foot lot (or other modular dimension) can adapt to a number of different housing configurations. These are definitely not attractive or appropriate for every housing consumer, but these various forms serve a number of populations, including singles, couples, small families, and empty nesters. These building types can also be combined on a single block, or be modified to adapt to market preferences.



### Small Lot Single-Family

Provides single-car attached garage and substantial backyard for an urban setting.

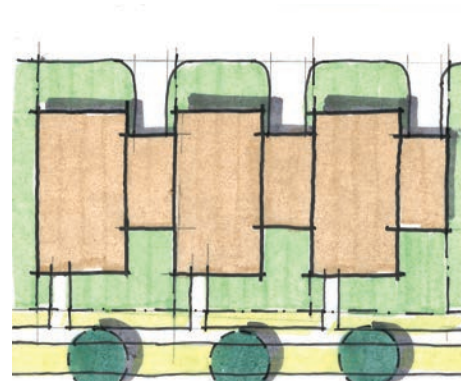


### Single-Family Attached

Common wall units with outdoor space comparable to single-family.

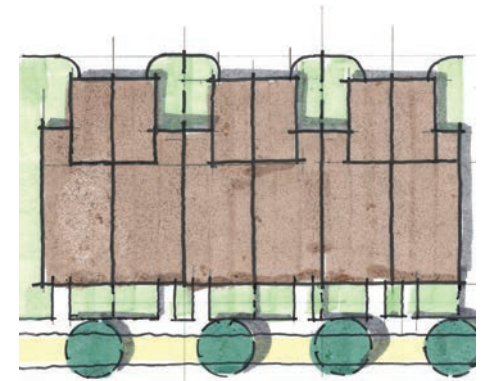
## Concept Ideas

The following pages summarize five related but different approaches to the site. They are shown in order of development, and to some degree have interchangeable parts. Alternatives 3 and 5 are developed and presented in greater detail.



### Single-Family Semi-Attached

Units are separated by garages, provides driveway length sufficient for a second car.



### Townhome/Rowhome

Attached units typically in a four-unit building. Provides higher density, typically 50% higher than other configurations.



Concept 1: Greenbelt



A major feature of this concept, first in the series, is a greenbelt, extending along Frances Cate Park and Bishop Creek, connected by a new greenway and trail through an entrance roundabout encircling a sunken area south of Robinson Street. An elliptical drive surrounds a rehabilitated Hope Hall and the Chapel, forming the core of an arts district. A “main street” with limited commercial, live/work development, and small scale multifamily connects the north roundabout and the arts ellipse. High-density multifamily development in a “Texas doughnut” configuration lines Robinson Street with walk-up multifamily to the south. In this concept, a sizeable production studio is located on the southeast corner of the site. Medium-density residential using the Building Block Module predominates on the balance of the site.

Evaluation:

- Greenbelt and small-scale main street linking the north entrance to the Ellipse are strong design concepts.
- Stormwater management and detention is not addressed well.
- Texas “doughnuts” may require rents well above the achievable market for the area.
- The connection and axis to Main Street is relatively weak, limited to a greenway between residential units.

Estimated Residential Yield

	Type	Units
	Small site single-family	285
	Walk-ups	492
	Texas Doughnut	900
	Mixed-use upper level	60
	Historic	48
	Total	1,785

Key Features Introduced in Concept 1



**The Building Block Concept.** Variety of medium density housing types on a small lot and block module.



**Arts Ellipse.** Reuse of Chapel as an arts center, with reused Hope Hall as supporting housing and studio space, surrounded by elliptical drive.



**Greenbelt.** U-shaped greenbelt and trail, made up of Frances Cate Park, the Bishop Creek corridor, and an east-west green corridor and gateway circle.



**“Doughnut” multifamily.** Most multifamily in high-density units surrounding internal parking structure.



**Production studio.** Concept created by growing demand for productions in lower cost, decentralized locations assuming availability of this parcel.



**Robinson Overpass.** Pedestrian/bike crossing connecting with Community Park, for continuous north-south trail.



Concept 2: Main Street Promenade



This concept continues a strong axis of Main Street into the site, then realigning it to meet 12th Avenue NE. This main element is a promenade as a major amenity, here using a canal, lined by high-density multifamily development. Mixed use buildings with residential over retail use surround a town square just off the promenade. Multi-family development is also located along Robinson Street, These units include both walk-up and elevator structures with interior structured parking. Medium density residential is located in a neighborhood grid with a neighborhood square in the depressed open space, re-envisioned as a “sunks” park. The Chapel is retained as an arts center, with a new mixed use project flanking it to the south. A feature of this idea are public steps that link different levels of the adjacent buildings. The arts theme is continued with a smaller scale production studio. Greenway corridors formed by the drainageways are important elements and a major retention feature a marks the Main Street entrance into the district.

Evaluation:

- Strong axis relates to surrounding areas and creates a good east-west connection.
- Connection between the medium-density blocks and open spaces depend on streets.
- Possible over-reliance on high-cost elevator units with parking structures.
- Removes original administrative building to provide a clear view into the site.
- Incorporates Central Kitchen into a proposed restaurant.

Estimated Residential Yield

	Type	Units
	Small site single-family	269
	Walk-ups	567
	Texas Doughnut	740
	Mixed-use upper level	48
	Historic	48
	Total	1,672

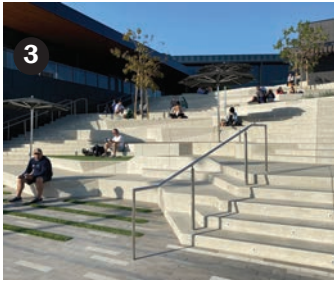
Key Features Introduced in Concept 2



**Promenade and Canal.** Strong linear feature and amenity to make east and west connection and form a catalyst for development. Canal in the images above is the Molengracht in Pella, Iowa.



**Promenade and Canal.** Small version of the production studio in Concept 1. Image above and model for the plan is the Jim Henson Studio in Hollywood.



**Mixed use development and public “Steps.”** Steps provide access to building levels and rise above a public plaza. Parking is under the building. Image is Culver Steps,Culver City, CA.



**“Sunks Park”** Multi-use public space slightly below street level, forming both privacy and affordability. Image is a seasonal whiffleball “ballpark” in Omaha, NE.



**Town Square and new development.** Residential above retail around a new town square in a redevelopment area. Image is Founders Square in Portage, IN.



Concept 3: Main Street Promenade Refined



This concept retains most of the design elements of Concept 2, but makes some significant changes. More of the multifamily units are placed in less costly walk-up buildings. Two groups of walk-ups border the promenade in quadrangles enclosing surface parking. Two multi-family “doughnuts” with some commercial or flexible space are located at the Robinson and 12th Avenue NE, surrounding a center explaining the history of the site and its role in mental health treatment. This concept retains and reuses the 1926-vintage administration building and shortens the canal or other linear amenity. The promenade encircles the administration building and provides a dining deck for a future restaurant that reuses the Central Kitchen.

Evaluation:

- Retains the administration building, which includes a stairway that provides a downtown view.
- Increases economic feasibility by reducing number of units in structured parking.
- Like previous concepts, does not address permanent retention along Bishop Creek but broadens the greenway along the stream.
- Maintains clear street connections to surroundings.

Estimated Residential Yield

	Type	Units
	Small site single-family	242
	Walk-ups	849
	Texas Doughnut	600
	Mixed-use upper level	86
	Historic	66
	Total	1,843

Key Features Introduced in Concept 3



**Administration Building.** Maintains and reuses historic administration building, probably with conversion to residential use.



**Walk-up Residential.** Greater emphasis on surface-parked walk-up buildings over higher-rise buildings with structured parking.



**History Center.** Provides a building for interpretation and presentation of the history of the site. Includes parking and commercial possibility in street level of adjacent residential buildings.



**Concept 2 features.** Maintains other features of Concept 2.



**Concept 4: Arts Campus and Curved Grid**



This concept combines aspects of Concepts 1 and 3. It establishes a larger continuous “arts campus” composed of the Chapel, the “Steps” mixed use concept, and the central and eastern wings of Hope Hall. Bishop Creek runs through the center of the road arc, which distributes local traffic to 12th Avenue NE. It maintains the Main Street axis, but changes its character from a processional promenade to a greenway. The concept maximizes area given to the medium-density building block and locates most multi-family to northeastern parts of the site. The concept establishes a mixed use corridor connecting the “sunks” to the arts campus, lining it with small mixed use or live/work buildings. The overall site design uses an informal grid for local circulation, which allows local streets to provide changes in views and perspectives as people move through them. In place of a production studio, this concept locates a flex building development, introducing an employment and new businesses.

**Evaluation:**

- Maximizes medium-density products, although other concepts could also be adapted accordingly.
- Most but not all internal greenways of the building block lead to significant site features.
- Main Street axis is present but less significant as an amenity than in other concepts.

	Type	Units
	Small site single-family	312
	Walk-ups	628
	Texas Doughnut	600
	Mixed-use upper level	72
	Historic	48
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,660</b>

**Key Features Introduced in Concept 4**



**Enterprise flex campus.** Substitutes space for workshops, limited industry, galleries, or other related uses in place of a production studio. Image is from a similar concept on the northern edge of Oklahoma City.



**Commercial/mixed use street.** An intimate, small scale street combining commercial, residential, and live/work uses. Corridor links the “sunks” area with the arts area. Image is at Wheeler district in Oklahoma City.



**Enlarged arts circle.** Expands the ellipse concept in Concept One to include Hope Hall and the “Steps” in addition to the Chapel.



**Curved grid.** Curved streets maintain connectivity but change perspectives and add interest and scale not always found on straight streets.



**Concept 5: Walk-Up Market**



This concept includes elements of the previous four ideas, but places a heavy emphasis on the proven demand for a market-driven multi-family neighborhood not driven by student housing. New residential buildings are three-story walk-ups supported by surface parking. Hope Hall and the Administration Building are both reused for housing. The concept includes the promenade along the Main Street axis, but as a green mall in place of a canal. A significant retention/pond is incorporated into the Chapel and Steps area and terminates the Main Street axis. A small-scale mixed use street connects the “sunks” open space to the Chapel campus as in Concept 4.

**Evaluation:**

- Probably most responsive concept to the present market.
- Circulation pattern is less regular than other concepts, with through connections present but less direct. This may be seen as a positive.
- Provides greenway continuity from the north and along Bishop Creek.
- Stormwater retention on Bishop Creek is a downstream asset and adds to the value of the southeastern part of the site.
- Smallest number of medium-density units, although apartment blocks could be modified to meet demand.

**Estimated Residential Yield**

	Type	Units
	Small site single-family	176
	Walk-ups	1,030
	Texas Doughnut	0
	Mixed-use upper level	96
	Historic	90
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,392</b>

**Key Features Introduced in Concept 5**



**Main Street Mall.** Green promenade lined with housing and limited commercial extends Main Street axis without higher cost of a canal. Image is the Runway at Playa Vista, Los Angeles.



**3-story Mixed Use.** Building provides both street level retail and some parking under residential levels. Image is at Harmonee Square, Wauwatosa, WI.



**Centralized surface parking.** Walk-up buildings with centralized parking hide cars and maintain a strong street presence. Image from New Orleans.



**Convertible street level.** Three-story walk-up building with surface parking behind, with street level suitable for either residential or commercial use. Image at Prairie Queen, Omaha, NE.



## Illustrations

The concepts presented here are intended to illustrate alternatives, evaluate features, and calculate yields for different approaches to unified development of the Main Campus site. Actual developments will undoubtedly take different forms, based on the nature and preferences of future developers and their land planners and urban designers. But these concepts do illustrate certain relationships that should be reflected in the ultimate use of the Main Campus. These relationships are identified in the Development Principles and illustrated by these concepts. To provide further guidance, more refined illustrations of Concepts 3 and 5 are presented on the following pages. Both fall within the residential unit targets and illustrate substantially different approaches to the site and its opportunities.





**Concept 3: Main Street Promenade Refined:  
Axonometric View**







**View of the Main Street Promenade.** Original Administration Building is in the foreground with the Main Street Promenade with canal to the east. The mall is lined by three-story multifamily buildings, with a potential restaurant and the existing Central Kitchen to the right (south).



**“Sunks” Neighborhood Park and “center of town.”** View looks southeast from the neighborhood park toward the Promenade and Town Square with the Chapel and Production Studio in the background.



**Town Square and Residential Neighborhood.** Hope Hall is in the foreground and forms one leg of the Town Square off the Promenade. View looks over the historic building toward the residential neighborhood and Sunks neighborhood park. High-density multi-family along Robinson Street is in the background.



**State Drive.** View of slightly realigned street looking south toward the retention pond and retail/live-work district. Curvature of the street added interest to the development. “Building Block Modules” for medium-density housing are in the foreground, with the retention pond in the background.



**Concept 5: Walk-Up Market:  
Axonometric View**







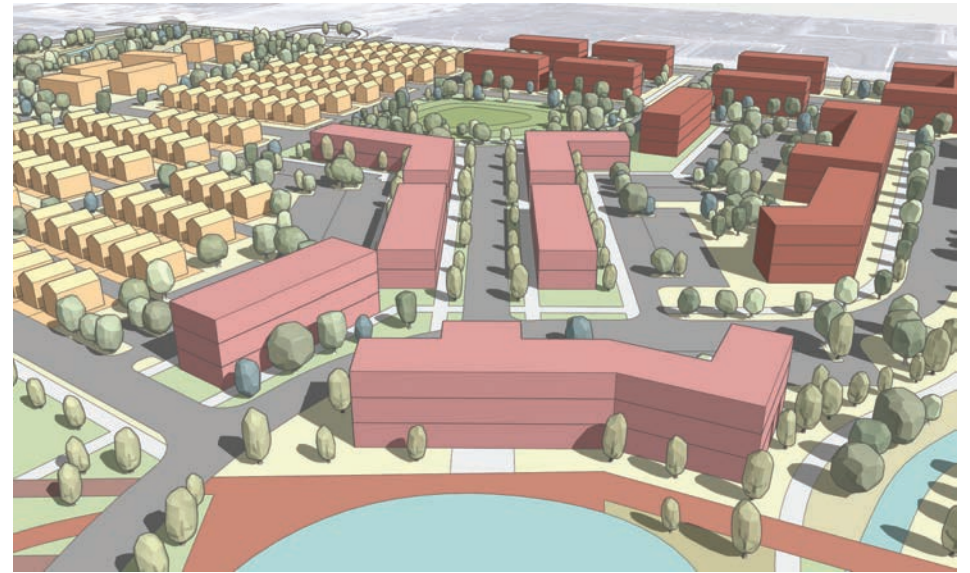
**View of the Main Street “Mall.”** Original Administration Building is in the foreground with the Main Street Mall behind to the east. The mall is lined by three-story multifamily buildings, with a potential restaurant and the existing Central Kitchen to the right (south).



**“Sunks” Park and Retail/Live-Work District.** The district’s street links the Sunks neighborhood park with a restored Hope Hall and the junction of the Main Street Mall and Arts District.



**State Drive.** View of slightly realigned street looking south toward the retention pond and retail/live-work district. Curvature of the street added interest to the development. “Building Block Modules” for medium-density housing are in the foreground.



**“Sunks” Park and Retail/Live-Work District looking northwest.** Opposite view the Live-Work District, looking toward the Sunks. Three-story walk-up apartments located to the east toward 12th Avenue NE, with medium-density neighborhoods to the west. Bishop Creek retention pond is in the foreground.





## Moving Forward: An Implementation Strategy

The Griffin Hospital Main Campus presents an exciting opportunity for the City of Norman and even for the larger Oklahoma City metropolitan area. But transformational projects like this are very complex. Even after the site is assembled, there are buildings to clear, plans and guidelines to prepare, public utilities to extend or adapt, streets to build, builders and developers to find, and ultimately residents and businesses to locate. A project like this will also not be built at one time and will require careful phasing. However, developments at this scale have been done around the country and people in the metropolitan area can definitely make it happen. This section will introduce some of the steps needed to implement the Main Campus project.

### Step One: State and City Partnership

Forging a partnership and arrangement to keep the Main Campus site unified is an essential first step in this process. The ODMHAS could be tempted to sell off the most marketable commercial properties along the Robinson and 12th Avenue NE frontage, with likely buyers being fast food, secondary retail, and possibly some multifamily development. However, it is doubtful

that the combined sales value of those “strip” sites would make a substantial contribution to the cost of the planned Oklahoma City facility. It would also leave the interior of the site open. The cost of land, building demolition, site preparation, and infrastructure adaptation is likely to make the cost of development higher than that of greenfield sites. This, given the relatively low value of houses in surrounding neighborhoods (under \$200,000 on average), would be very discouraging to current developers at work in the area. In order to elevate the site to full potential for the city, it must remain unified to achieve critical mass and a major change in character. Therefore, the city and state must pursue this project together, keep the site in unified ownership, and maintain a long-term perspective.

### Step Two: Solidify Local Support and Identification as a Community Priority

The vision for the Main Campus described here is more ambitious than a mixed use subdivision with commercial and residential uses. It is intended as an urban project that creates community and has something of value for everyone in the city. It is also intended as a crossroads and bridge that connects east and west. Accomplishing this will require significant community investments in open space, amenities, and civic features. This can only happen if both the private sector and the community at large understand the benefits of redevelopment and public investment – if they share the vision. That kind of consensus has been achieved in other places with larger projects.

### Step Three: Conveyance of the Site

This is most logically a State to City transaction. The City of Norman should not be the developer, but will be the pass-through to another development entity, as described in later steps. Ideally, the site would be conveyed without front-end cost, instead executing a deal structured so that the State of Oklahoma recovers some of the land value over time and with eventual development. However, if necessary the City should be prepared to buy the site outright at a reasonable market price. The price should be based on a typical market value for developable area for the potential commercial strips along 12th Avenue NE and Robinson Street (approximately 15 acres) and a residential land value for the balance (approximately 65 acres) minus the cost of demotion and site preparation. It would also be important to complete a Phase One environmental review and soils test prior to completing the transaction.



#### Step Four: Determine a Development Entity

Once the City has established ownership or control of the site, its next action will be to determine who will ultimately develop the site. The developer will not necessarily be the entity that will actually build and market buildings, There are two different strategies to consider:

- **A private, nonprofit project development corporation or authority.** In this model, a private agency would manage the process of market analysis, master plan development, engineering and subdivision, and potential sale of individual sites to private builders. In this model, the City and other public agencies would be responsible for design and construction of elements of the public realm – streets, infrastructure, stormwater facilities, open spaces, and public amenities. An example of this process is the Highlander development in Omaha. A nonprofit development corporation acquired the site (in this case a former public housing project) and selected an experienced private developer to execute the actual development of the site.
- **A private master developer,** who would manage the market work, master planning, and development process with continued city partnership. The master developer would have the ability to convey specific parcels or sites to other developers or builders, who would then work within the framework and guidelines of the site master plan. Examples of this approach are the Mueller development in Austin or the Stapleton (now Central Park) development in Denver, both of which reused former airports.

This step will include designation of the developer and negotiation regarding the responsibilities if each party.

#### Step Five: Master Plan Development

This step will involve a close partnership between the developer and the City of Norman, and is likely to involve significant community engagement. The result will be a development master plan that includes the layout of streets and development types, land design, preliminary engineering for infrastructure, parceling, and other requirements of a preliminary plat. It will also include development and design standards. It is very likely that will be approved as a planned unit development with setbacks and other requirements consistent with development standards specific to its land use mix and urban design characteristics.



The master plan should also include key implementation elements that include projected development value at full buildout, preliminary engineering cost and staging of phasing areas. The phasing of a complex, long-term project is especially challenging and important to the success of a project. A first phase must be in a location that is visible and marketable, large enough in size to offer the security of scale to residents and businesses. Additionally, a magnet project or public investment will have an impact on phasing. For example, an art center conversion of the Chapel can accelerate development in the adjacent area; or development of the Main Street axis could be a catalyst for adjacent projects. The diagrams in this section show an illustration of phasing for Concepts 3 and 5.

#### Step Six: Financing Plan

The development process will include a detailed and feasible funding plan, which will form the basis for individual redevelopment agreements. The cost of site preparation, streets and infrastructure, open space development, and public amenities that will be difficult or impossible for a conventional private development to bear. The most likely financing tool will be Tax Increment Financing or TIF, which directs the added property taxes generated by new



development. Because the Main Campus is publicly owned, its tax basis is zero, enabling the full new assessed value to be allocated toward the increment. In Oklahoma, TIF may be used for a period up to 25 years.

A very preliminary calculation can illustrate the magnitude of TIF for this project. A preliminary estimate if the total value of a completed Main Campus project ranges from \$450 million to \$600 million. Assuming a Cleveland County property tax rate of 1.08%, the development at full build-out creates an annual tax increment between \$4,84 and \$6,47 million. Assuming a 25 year term at 5%, this level would support a bond issue between about \$45 and \$60 million.

Clearly, a project of this magnitude will not be built at once. The maximum TIF will be realized by synchronizing TIF bond issues with individual development phases. However, this gets more complicated when a significant public investment such as the Main Street axis extension is required as an initial catalyst for the project. Other financing instruments will probably be required to execute the project. These sources may include municipal bonds, grants, private philanthropy, and interim loans.

This step will include preparation of a blight declaration and a final TIF Plan in accordance with Oklahoma state statutes.

### **Step Seven: Agreements, Entitlements, and Subdivision**

This step incorporates the various approvals and agreements necessary to move the project into the development phase. These components will include but not be limited to:

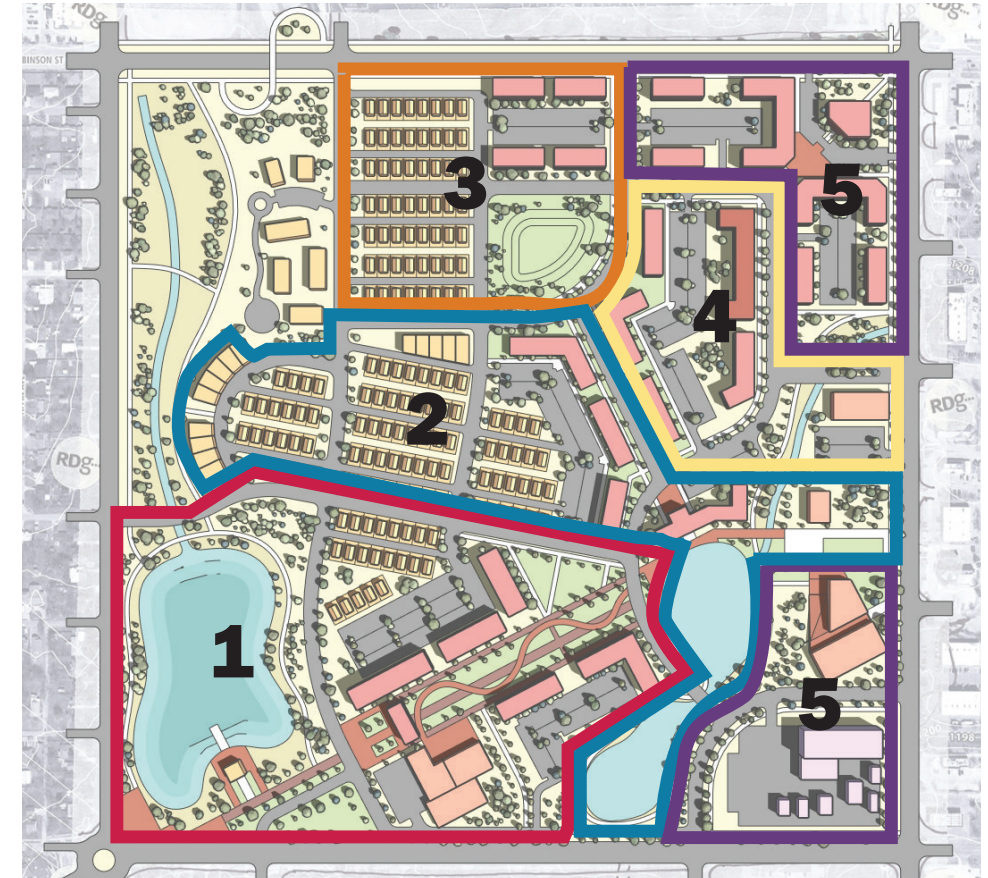
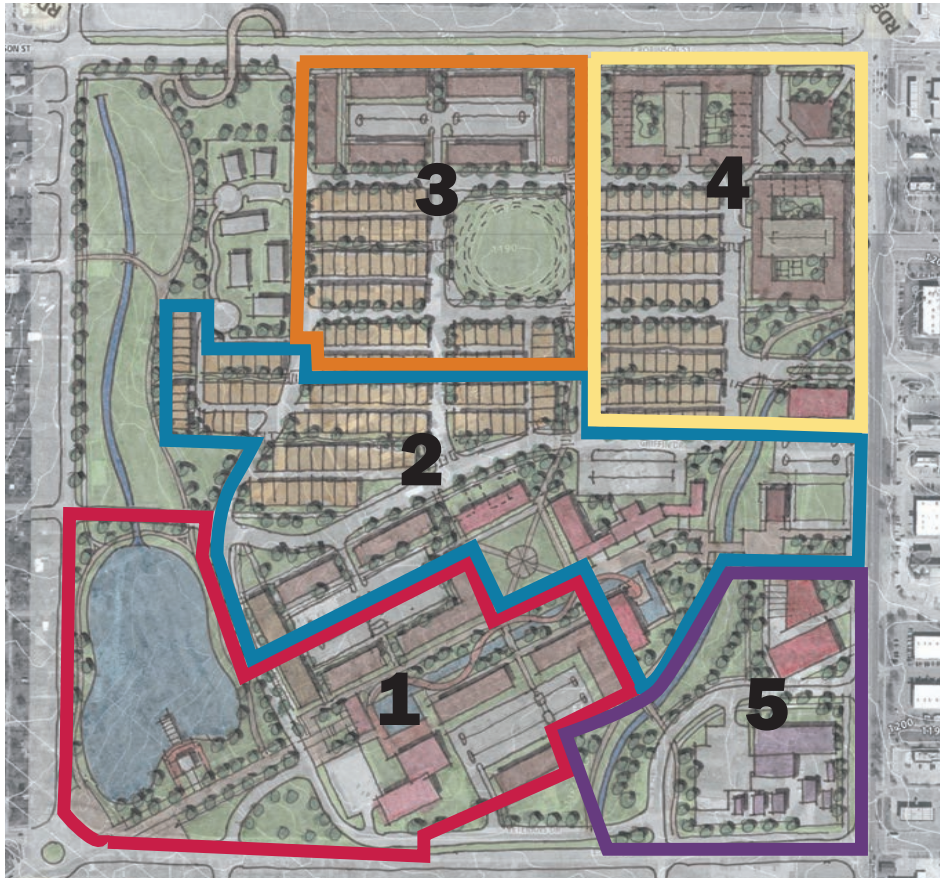
- Zoning requirements. Depending on the nature of the new development ordinance that Norman is planning, the Main Campus project is likely to be approved as a planned unit development, incorporating the land use plan and development standards identified in the Master Development Plan. This PUD will be particularly important to ensure that development in different phases and possibly by different parties is coherent and true to the intentions of the project.
- Subdivision. Depending on the nature of the development entity, individual parcels could be developed by other parties. In addition, blocks or areas intended for sale to individual owners will also require lot subdivisions. The concepts proposed in this document envision parceling and

lot subdivision.

- Redevelopment agreements. This document will establish the responsibilities of all parties to the development, including the State, City, master developer, other involved private parties, and others. This will address such issues as site conveyance, financing, performance guarantees, public utilities and improvements, and scheduling.
- TIF agreements and documents. This will include necessary loan and bond offering documents to execute the TIF Plan, assuming that technique is used to finance site preparation, infrastructure, and other public improvements.







## Phasing Concepts

These diagrams display phasing concepts for Concepts 3 and 5. Both follow similar strategic considerations, specifically:

- The first stage of the development builds on a significant site amenity, the extension of the Main Street axis either as a canal as in Concept 3 (left) or a multipurpose mall (Concept 5), and the relationship to Downtown Norman.
- Most of the development in a first phase is the most readily demonstrable market, high quality three level walk-up rental apartments separate from student housing.
- A second phase completes the connection to 12th Avenue and introduces the “Building Block,” implying an ownership product. This phase also

includes some mixed use retail/workshop opportunities. Phase Two also projects the launch of the arts district with the restoration and reuse of the Chapel.

- Phases 3 and 4 build toward Robinson Street, complete the ownership and walk-up multifamily products. The higher cost “doughnut” buildings occur in Phase 4, on the assumption that rents will have grown to the level that this building type becomes feasible.
- Phase 5 completes the development with the Steps, a project that may require nearly full completion of the rest of the project to support its uses. The studio concepts could move ahead in an earlier phases, but in the meantime, existing educational uses on the site are viable.
- Stormwater retention ponds and water features are incorporated into earlier phases of the project.



## Afterword

The redevelopment of the Main Campus presents a unique opportunity for the City of Norman. It includes respect for history and historic preservation, new public spaces and activity centers, connections to surrounding neighborhoods and community features, spaces for creativity and entrepreneurship, parks and recreation, and environmental protection and stormwater management into a new urban district. It can do this while contributing significantly to the city's future housing demand with a variety of housing types that address community needs. Perhaps even more important, though, effective and thoughtful development here can be a bridge between east and west, a project that faces both directions and in so doing can help make Norman a more unified and stronger community.

Executing this project will not be easy but there are examples throughout the country of comparable developments. However, fundamental success of a Main Campus site development will be very close cooperation between the City and the State of Oklahoma. It is essential that the site remain unified as a cohesive development, with individual parts that relate to a common vision of possibilities. We hope that this concept plan can be a useful tool in moving this important project forward.

