

SoMa EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Main Street (SoMa) is the commercial core for a cluster of neighborhoods known, before construction of the I-630 freeway, as Little Rock's "East Side." Dating from the mid-19th century, SoMa and related neighborhoods are located just south of downtown Little Rock. Construction of the I-630 freeway in the 1970's severed their connection to downtown. I-630 became the new southern boundary for the downtown core, cutting it off from its historic residential neighborhoods and its second tier commercial businesses. Although no longer the vital part of the city it once was, SoMa and its related neighborhoods have managed to maintain their historical identity and have been experiencing renewed interest and reinvestment.

This plan (referred to throughout as the [SoMa Plan](#)) applies urban design strategies to South Main Street in the form of specific concepts for energizing its commercial and cultural activity. The Plan intends also for these concepts to influence the stability of and improvements to its adjacent neighborhoods. Redevelopment of South Main Street is an effort to envision and evaluate SoMa and these neighborhoods as whole, defining their physical area and envisioning a future consistent with their historic significance and residents' desires. The Plan presents ideas for desirable patterns of development throughout the area. It includes specific strategic projects that have the potential to stimulate revitalization and significant new development. We more fully discuss the points described in this summary in the complete planning document (its web address is listed below).

The chapter, [Anatomy of SoMa](#), reveals the SoMa area, as it is now, dissecting it block by block. [SoMa Today](#) identifies eight sub-areas and organizes and identifies the characteristics and potentials of each of them. [Creating an Identity](#) discusses concepts and approaches to renewal such as new parks, streetcar, transit, streetscape, identification gateways, and residential types to attract new markets, commercial revitalization for Main Street and, finally, a new organization to implement the plan.

It identifies five strategic projects, the implementation of any one of which would greatly contribute to the SoMa area's continuing growth and vitality. They are:

[A. Freeway Park](#) [B. Gateways](#) [C. Streetscape](#) [D. Streetcar](#) [E. Roosevelt Park](#)

Following chapters discuss an [Urban Design Plan](#) for the Soma area as a whole and its eight existing sub-areas as well as an additional proposed sub-area, Freeway Park. The Plan includes different development approaches for each sub-area, and suggests planning and design criteria for each.

The plan recommends the following actions and projects:

1. Extension of the streetcar route to SoMa.
2. Additional streetscape projects throughout the area.
3. A parking and circulation plan to encourage development and slow traffic.
4. Designated bike lanes that follow a bike route coordinated with downtown.
5. Gateways, artist-created identifying elements, marking entrances into the neighborhood
6. Mending the freeway chasm by overlaying it with a new park – thereby reconnecting SoMa to downtown.
7. An organizational strategy for implementing the plan.

Finally, the Plan identifies the need for a single entity charged both with promoting/guiding the development of SoMa and coordinating with the private and governmental entities that protect the Area.

The complete planning document is available for viewing at www.ualr.edu/urbanstudies.



URBAN DESIGN VISION PLAN
for the
SOUTHSIDE MAIN STREET NEIGHBORHOOD

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Project A – Freeway Park

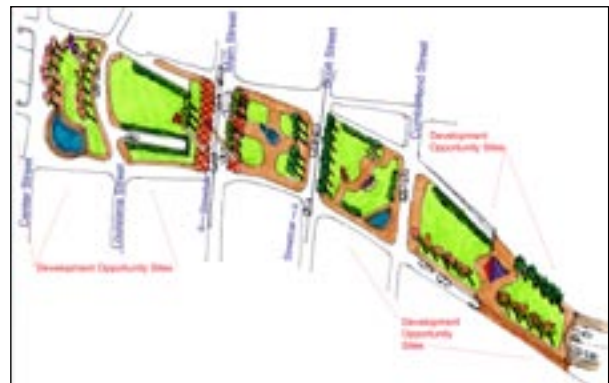
The depressed – and negative - I-630 freeway can be spanned with a park, knitting back together the severed historic neighborhoods of the downtown. The freeway ditch, a gaping wound in the historic grid of downtown, can be closed and designed as a new inner city park for the areas north and south along it. This project can extend from the Center Street overpass to the pedestrian bridge at MacArthur Park, linking the SoMa gateways at Main and Broadway to MacArthur Park.



View of Atlanta Fifth St. Pedestrian Bridge



View of Atlanta Fifth St. Pedestrian Bridge



"Vision" sketch of proposed Little Rock Freeway Park

Project B – The Gateways

Recognizing the entrances to this downtown neighborhood with physical Gateways will mark these as actual entrances to the neighborhood. They will symbolically express to all, "you are entering a special place". A visitor to an older European city knows when they have entered the historic and original city when they walk through the city's ancient wall and gateway. Since Little Rock was not a walled city, it does not have such gateways, but they can be created, based on neighborhood boundaries.



Gateway - proposed for Texarkana's Stateline Avenue



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Project C – Streetscape

There will be several types and scales of streetscaping in a neighborhood. At the minimum, streets will have trees planted along new and/or repaired sidewalks with new light fixtures. As the development scale increases, based on budget and appropriateness, more elements will be included on designated streets.



Sketch of streetscape at a typical major intersection



Plan showing proposed streetcar route

Project D – Streetcar

The route of the streetcar down Main Street (once again!) will add value to the redevelopment of the street as well as provide needed transportation links for the neighborhood. It's a proven redevelopment reality that streetcar lines spawn development. This route for the next future phase of the streetcar will strategically reinforce the SoMa Plan by stimulating redevelopment along its historic Main Street core.



River Rail station at Clinton Presidential Library



Streetcar station in Portland



Biker on Main Street shoulder adjacent to the streetcar line



Views of the Seattle Freeway Park



Project E – VA Park

This strategic project is to convert the original VA property into a new park. The concept envisions the land area as a mixed-use park comprised of public uses, non-profits, etc... surrounded by an active public park.



Landscape details for VA Park



VA Property & historic Lightfoot Cabin

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Implementation Strategy

The complete planning document includes a strategy to assist Southside Main Street in its efforts to implement the recommendations outlined in the plan. It recommends that a new organizational entity be created to implement the SoMa Plan. With SoMa Board oversight, the organization would act as an “ad hoc” urban design group, its primary objective being to review and encourage the proper development of the area as defined in the SoMa Plan. The following outline suggests these tasks to begin the process:

1. Work with existing jurisdictional districts
 - Develop a review process policy for all proposed development in the planning area
 - Review SoMa Plan objectives with Board and committees
 - Set priorities for project implementation
 - Meet with Mayor Stodola, City Manager Moore and City Planning Director Bozynski to learn of current plans for the area, and to promote the SoMa strategies
2. Consider design guideline changes for SoMa planning areas
 - Capital Zoning District (CZD)– Mansion Area
 - Remove parking requirements for Upper Main Street Blocks
 - Review design goals for specific SoMa Plan project areas
 - MacArthur Park Historic District (MPHD) - new design guidelines for targeted areas
3. Create a new organizational entity
 - Investigate the feasibility of an overlay district in targeted areas
 - Create an ad hoc review committee comprised of members of the CZD, DNA, MPHD, QQA , BID and SoMa and the City of Little Rock
 - Meet to review projects and set priorities
 - Devise agreement for notification and review of projects

This graphic describes a vision for a park over the Expressway. A project like this (as discussed in Project A) could be built in phases beginning with Main Street.



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