

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*INTRODUCTION*

*PARTICIPANTS*

*CONTEXT*

*PLAN ELEMENTS*

## Visioning Framework Diagram.....

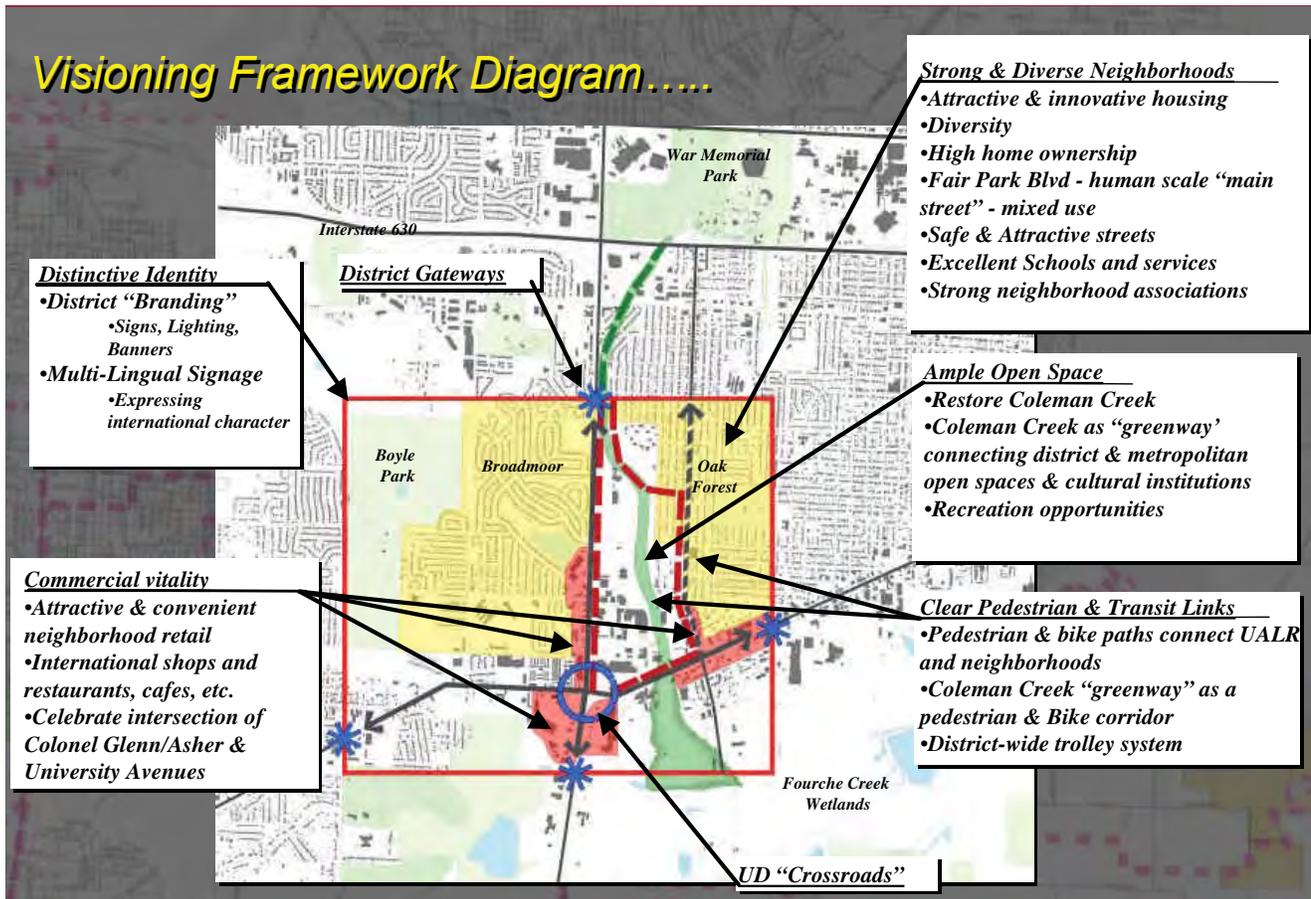


Diagram from the 2004 Visioning workshop

## INTRODUCTION

*How can revitalization of Little Rock’s mid-city area currently known as the University District (UD) be directed to obtain maximum benefits for its neighborhoods, businesses, institutions, and the city at large?*

This question is addressed in this University District Revitalization Plan (UDRP), and a companion document, the University District Strategic Plan, prepared by the University District Partnership.

The UDRP brings together many issues facing urban areas today; revitalization of obsolete commercial and light industrial areas; preservation of heritage natural resources; strengthening of residential neighborhoods, schools and community institutions; creation of livable, safe, and people-focused district centers; and enhancement of opportunities for racial and economic diversity in the district. A series of recommendations address the reuse and revitalization of the district for residential, natural resources, commercial, and institutional uses with comprehensive circulation improvements that would create a multi-modal, people-focused movement network.

The revitalization plan seeks to achieve community objectives for the UD that were first articulated in a 2004 “visioning process” that involved over 100 local neighborhood, business, and institutional participants. Out of that effort came a Vision Statement that describes the community’s aspirations for the district over a ten-year period:

In 2014...

*The University District is a thriving cultural and entertainment destination, regarded throughout the city as a neighborhood of choice—a walkable in-town district with excellent schools and services, vibrant commercial areas, rich cultural resources, and connections to open space and transit. A mix of single-family and higher-density housing attracts a diverse community, including many University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) faculty and staff who choose to live as well as work in the district. The university’s presence in the district is leveraged into resources for improving the area:*



*Obsolescent commercial*



*Limited access neighborhoods*

*technical assistance for small businesses, faculty research linked to emerging companies, improved K-12 schools, supporting families in the district, and green space for the community created by the restoration and enhancement of Coleman Creek.*

The vision is grounded in establishing an area with a unique distinctive district identity, commercial vitality, strong and diverse neighborhoods, safe and attractive streets, excellent schools, ample open space, and clear pedestrian and transit links. Land use standards, urban design criteria, resource preservation, adaptive re-use, traffic access and congestion management, pedestrian and alternative transit, and an open space network are the framework within which revitalization will occur.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The plan was developed in close coordination with numerous local, regional, and state participants that included, but were not limited to, the:

### **University District Partnership:**

- A coalition of neighborhood, business, community and institutional leaders, as well as city, regional, and state department and agency representatives



*UD Partnership Workshop*

The revitalization plan is compatible with the UALR 2004 Campus Master Plan, and numerous mid-city community planning efforts, such as the Hillcrest Design Overlay District and the Midtown Redevelopment Plan. The plan reaffirms the significance of the UD to the city and region, and stresses the important role of private/public partnerships, community anchors, and vibrant and healthy neighborhoods.

## **CONTEXT**

The dominant characteristics of the larger UD are its traditional people-scaled neighborhoods that are interspersed by active and resource parks, the Coleman and Rock creek waterways, local schools and houses of worship, and the UALR campus. Unfortunately, many in the metropolitan region view district's dominant characteristic as a pass-through corridor lined with unsafe and obsolete shopping center 'strip-malls' with large expanse of bleak, un-landscaped asphalt parking areas.

The UD is home to approximately 10,000 residents (2005), roughly six percent of Little Rock's overall population. In general, UD residents are less affluent and more diverse than those of the city.



*Traditional neighborhood single-family housing*

**B**uilding on consensus, the UDRP creates the tools and techniques that will allow for revitalization of the area into a unique and sustainable urban district with distinctive neighborhood, community-focused commerce, and activity centers. With faithful and consistent application of the plan's design principles, the UD will in the future become one of the region's most desirable destinations, recognized for its outstanding aesthetic quality and active urban ambience, its protected open spaces, and its scenic streetscapes and livable neighborhoods.

The following chapters of this report describe in detail the various tools and techniques that will help the UD achieve its long-term vision. The key components of the UDRP are:

**Revitalization Framework**, which articulates existing patterns for land uses, urban design character, as well as development criteria that will shape and improve UD open space and circulation into an integrated system of parks, trails, greenways, streetscapes and natural resources.

**Prototype Projects**, which identifies appropriate short- and long-term development scenarios for critical, under-utilized and/or obsolescent areas of the UD, and includes suitable development types, characters and intensities.

**Regulatory Recommendations**, which articulate regulatory overlay districts and design and development principles that are meant to improve the quality of future commercial and residential development. The principles are intended to produce neighborhoods, mixed-use commercial areas and activity centers of aesthetic variety, character, and distinct sense of place.

**Implementation Strategy**, which articulates a comprehensive UD organizational structure that would guide and oversee programmatic and revitalization efforts, and identifies a strategy for realization of early-action and long-term tasks and projects.

