

HISTORY

William Penn's Plan

Philadelphia stands as a rare example of early American urbanism, born from the vision of William Penn, as one of the first cities to be planned prior to its construction. Penn imagined Philadelphia as a "great town" based on a grid design that would emerge as a center for government and shipping placed along the Delaware River. Concerned with problems plaguing cities of the time – congestion, squalor, and poor health – Penn sought to infuse urban life with the serenity of the rural setting by incorporating public open spaces and neighborhood parks. Philadelphia thrived on an influx of immigrants and rapid industrialization, growing beyond Penn's vision of a "green country town" to a modern urban center.

Industrialization and Growth

Already a significant cultural and economic center on the Eastern Seaboard, Philadelphia remained an important American shipping port and utilized the advent of rail, manufacturing, and metal-works to become one of the country's first industrial cities. As Philadelphia continued to grow, a sizable portion of its population settled in newly formed suburban satellite communities. This trend, evident in many American cities, resulted in the construction of an interstate highway system throughout Philadelphia – most notably Interstate 95. This North to South corridor, intended to facilitate efficient transportation through the city, created a physical barrier between the heart of Philadelphia and its waterfront.

Realities of the Site Today

Since the construction of the interstate, the I-95 corridor has suffered from reduced land values, lack of pedestrian activity, and a separation from the center city. With a viable waterfront currently underutilized for public space, and proximity to historic and economic centers, the I-95 corridor holds great potential for reconfiguration according to traditional urban principles. We propose a network of boulevards that allow for pedestrian traffic, dispersal of motorized vehicles, and economic revitalization all within a beautiful public space. This design aims to uphold the vision of a "great town" put forth by William Penn, while serving the needs of modern Philadelphia.



Map of Philadelphia, 1875



Map of Philadelphia, 1910



Map of Philadelphia, 1962

PHASING

The first phase of this proposal is the demolition of the section of I-95 from the Benjamin Franklin Bridge to the Walt Whitman Bridge. The demolition can be paid for, in part, by programs like the TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant, which recently gave money to New Orleans, New York City, and New Haven to tear down stretches of urban highway and replace them with more context-sensitive solutions. Once I-95 is cleared, the boulevard system will be installed, followed by the extension of the city grid out to the riverfront.

As the extended city grid becomes usable, property development can begin. Rather than developing in phases of use or type, this plan will be developed in neighborhood units. The center of the neighborhood will be developed first with high-density, mixed-use buildings, and the area immediately surrounding it will be dedicated to slightly lower-density, mostly residential buildings radiating outward. Each neighborhood will have its own distinct center, as well as at least one neighborhood pocket park within a 5 minute walk.

Developing in neighborhood modules is beneficial on many levels. Neighborhood-scale development ensures that each riverfront neighborhood will develop its own sense of place and identity. The neighborhood boundaries will eventually blur together, but because each one has its own clearly defined center, each neighborhood will have its own unique character.

In addition to having its own distinct characteristics, each neighborhood will develop its own individual economy and become economically self-sufficient. People living along the waterfront could go to their own neighborhood center for milk, eggs, and a haircut, and could travel to other neighborhoods or into the center city for more specialized shopping.

This type of modular development is also attractive to prospective developers who want to prove the market viability of a plan before buying into a large-scale project. The lessons learned in one neighborhood development could be incorporated into the next one and each successive development could be improved by the experience of the previous ones. This plan also allows for some flexibility in order to react to the boom and bust of the economy. If, in the middle of development, the economy slows down, one small neighborhood could be developed and it would still be coherent. When the economy picks up again, the area surrounding the completed neighborhood could be built and the next neighborhood center begun. By establishing this neighborhood development phasing program, the Philadelphia riverfront neighborhoods can create a model for future growth.

PLAN FOR PHILADELPHIA
Mid and Long Range Benefits of Returning Philadelphia to its Riverfront

The current I-95 corridor solves one problem while creating several others. Replacing I-95 with a network of boulevards and extending the traditional Philadelphia street grid will solve the problem of safe and efficient automobile transportation, while supporting and strengthening the community and culture that make urban life desirable.

A network of boulevards will handle the faster moving traffic currently served by I-95. Designed within the guidelines of the Institute for Traffic Engineers' "Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares," these boulevards will support automobile, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic, as well as provide on-street parking on local side streets. The two parallel boulevards will maintain or increase the number of lanes on I-95 and will improve the quality of the experience for drivers and pedestrians alike.

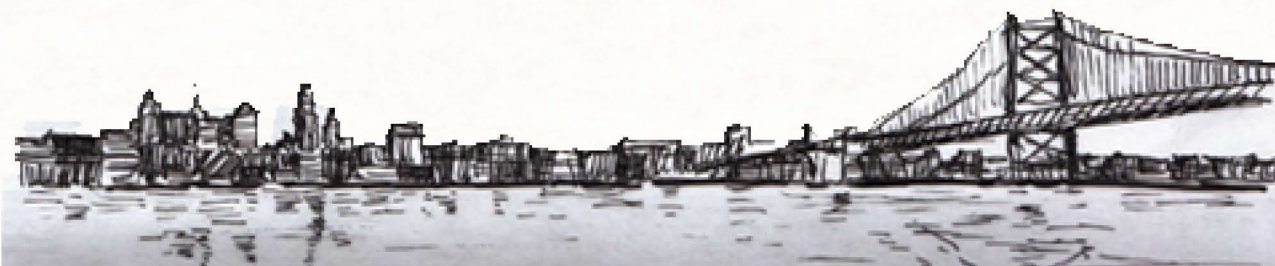
Extending the existing grid out from the city will improve local traffic conditions by increasing the number of possible paths from point A to point B. The grid will also provide blocks that allow for maximum flexibility in future development. When developed within a tightly knit grid system, houses, shops, offices, and industry can co-exist within the neighborhood. Building use will inevitably change over time, but the grid has and will continue to serve the needs of the dynamic city. Extending the grid out to the river also allows pedestrians and cyclists to walk from the city to the waterfront and utilize a new riverfront pathway.

The combination of the pedestrian-friendly boulevards and tightly knit grid system will reconnect the city center with the riverfront and open it up for development. The proposed plan reinvents the riverfront and creates a major destination – a vast improvement from its current state. Cultural, entertainment, and industrial sites can be housed along the river, shipping could be re-introduced, and the network of streets would be able to absorb and enrich them all.

Walkable, mixed-use streets allow people who are unable or cannot afford to drive to still find their basic needs within a comfortable walking distance of their homes. Mixed-use developments are especially well suited to a wide range of housing types, encouraging socio-economic diversity. Housing and commerce are mutually reinforcing, therefore allowing them to grow together creates the most sustainable pattern of growth. Designing for the human-scale also gives the pedestrian a pleasant walking experience and promotes a friendly public sphere.

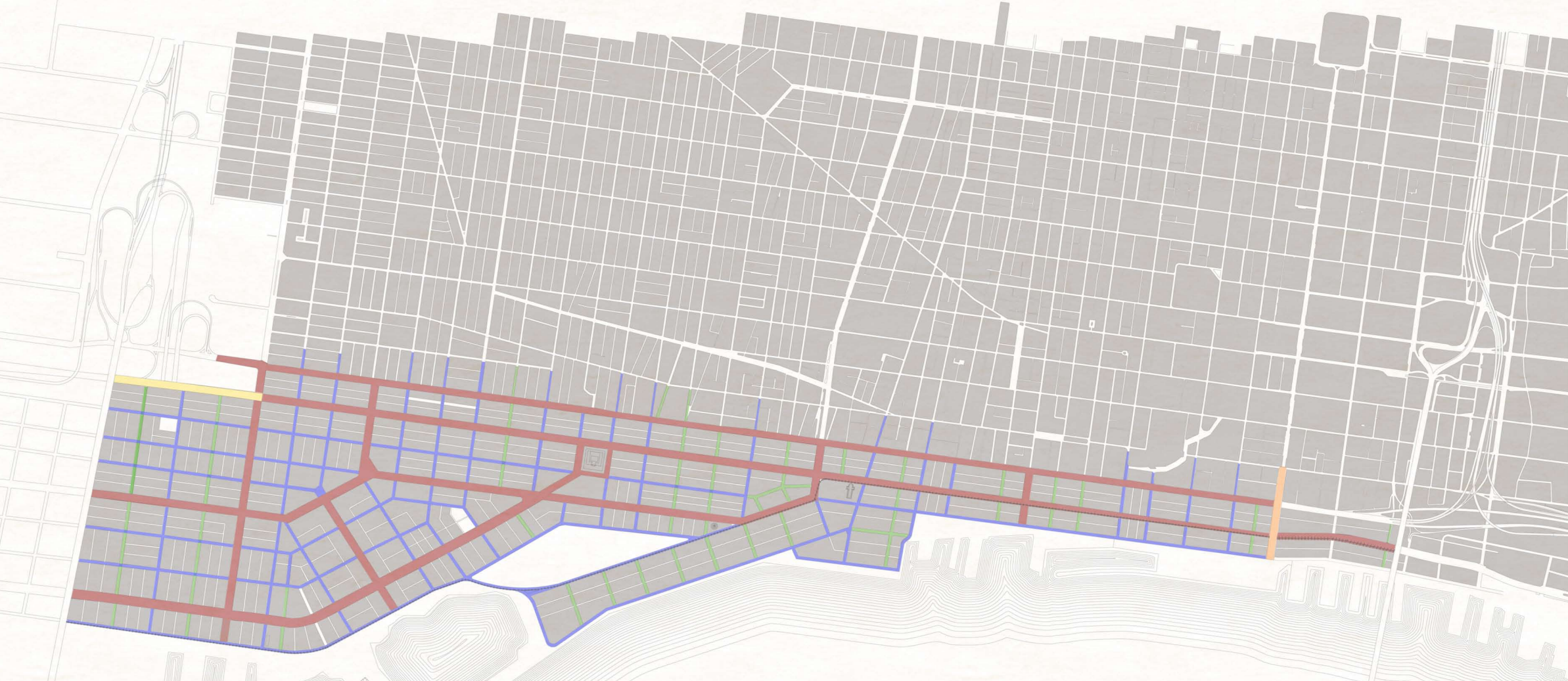
As the price of oil continues to rise, travelers will seek alternatives to the automobile for everyday travel. Both high speed and light rail will increase in popularity, and citizens will demand that their cities provide well-developed rail options for city-to-city trips, as well as within the city limits. Philadelphia will either acquire the existing CSX rails or utilize the median of one of the boulevards to develop a light rail or trolley line along the river. This initial investment would be the first phase of an entire light rail network that would connect the center city to the riverfront, the airport, and the Amtrak station.

Learning from the success of the riverfront development, the Vine Street Expressway will eventually be turned into a boulevard sequence of a different sort. The portions of the street currently below grade may be used as underground parking. Outside of the city, people will look to Philadelphia as a model for responsible development along major transportation corridors that reinforces, rather than detract from, the goals of the city.



TRAFFIC

- Central Arterial - Local traffic traveling at a lower rate of speed serving the neighborhood centers
- External Arterial - Through traffic traveling at a higher rate of speed located on the periphery of neighborhoods
- Volume - Currently, I-95 contains eight to twelve lanes. The proposed road network increases travel lanes to sixteen through the site, expanding out to 8, allowing the city to absorb the traffic through a network rather than one large highway that can the riverfront off from the city. Increased intersection frequency, building heights proportional correctly to the width of right of way, and planned medians with on-street parking will all serve as traffic-calming devices to reduce the speed of traffic through the city.



STREET TYPES

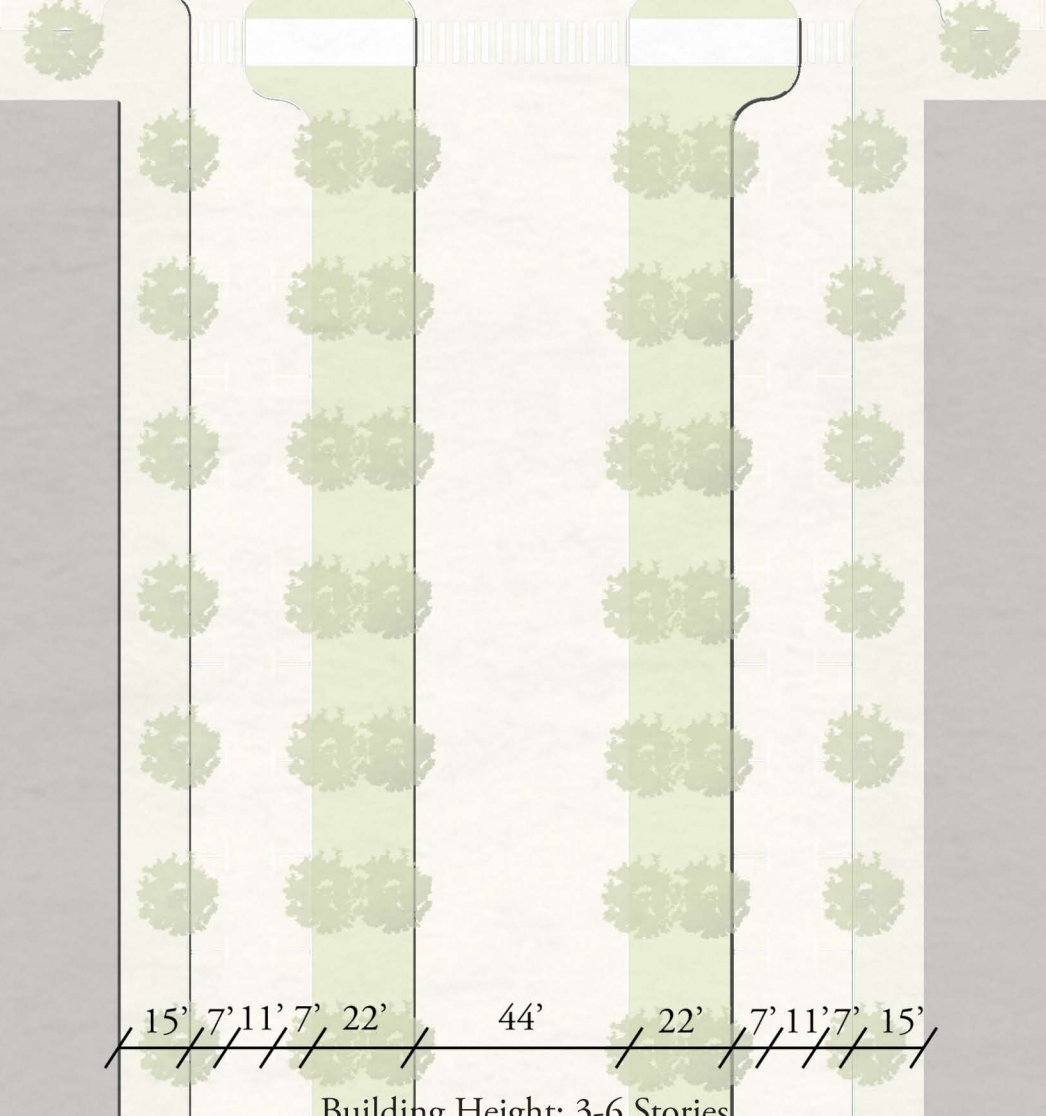
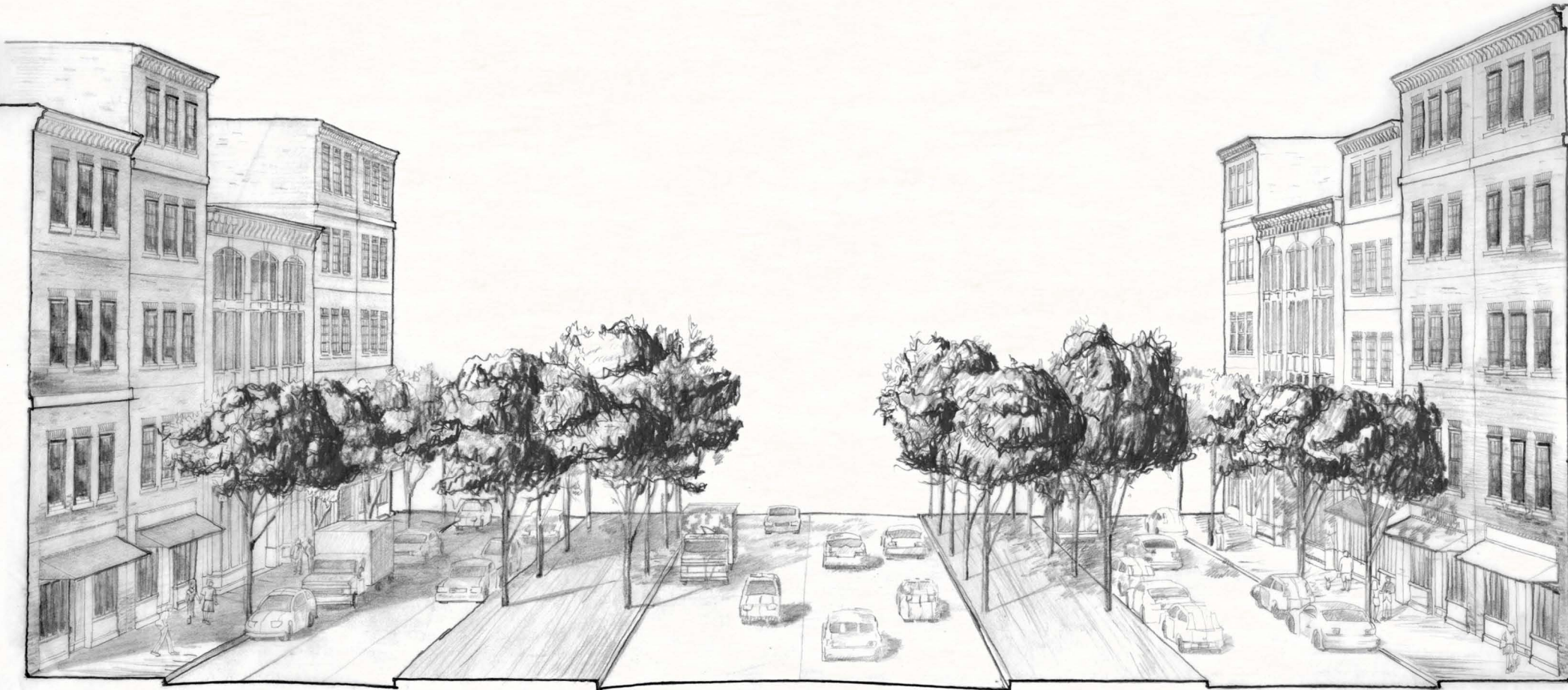
- Avenue - Major commercial street; handles high volumes of traffic through the city with a concentration of dense building types. Parking is maximized by creating on-street parking on both sides of the street.
- Boulevard A - Allows for a large volume of pedestrians to move from Center City to the waterfront for public events and provides a space for daily leisure activity.
- Boulevard B - Provides a transition from I-95 to the proposed network of boulevards by decreasing the number of lanes to six and utilizing traffic-calming devices. The medians can be programmed with light rail, bike paths, or recreation. Side roads serve local shops and offices.
- Street A - Main neighborhood street with some commercial development. Bike lanes and generous sidewalks accommodate passive modes of transportation.
- Street B - Minor neighborhood street; mostly residential. Bike lanes and generous sidewalks accommodate passive modes of transportation.



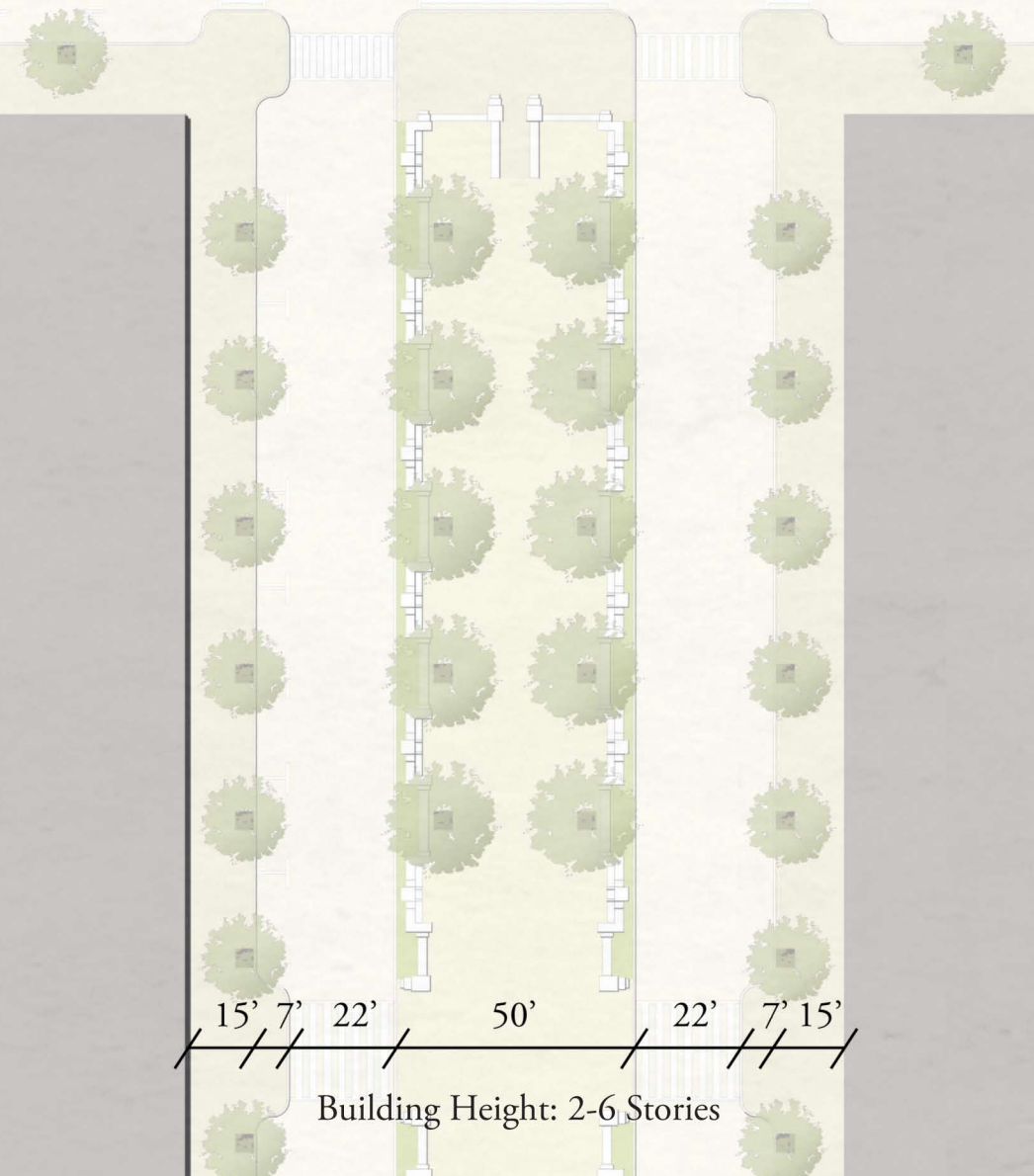
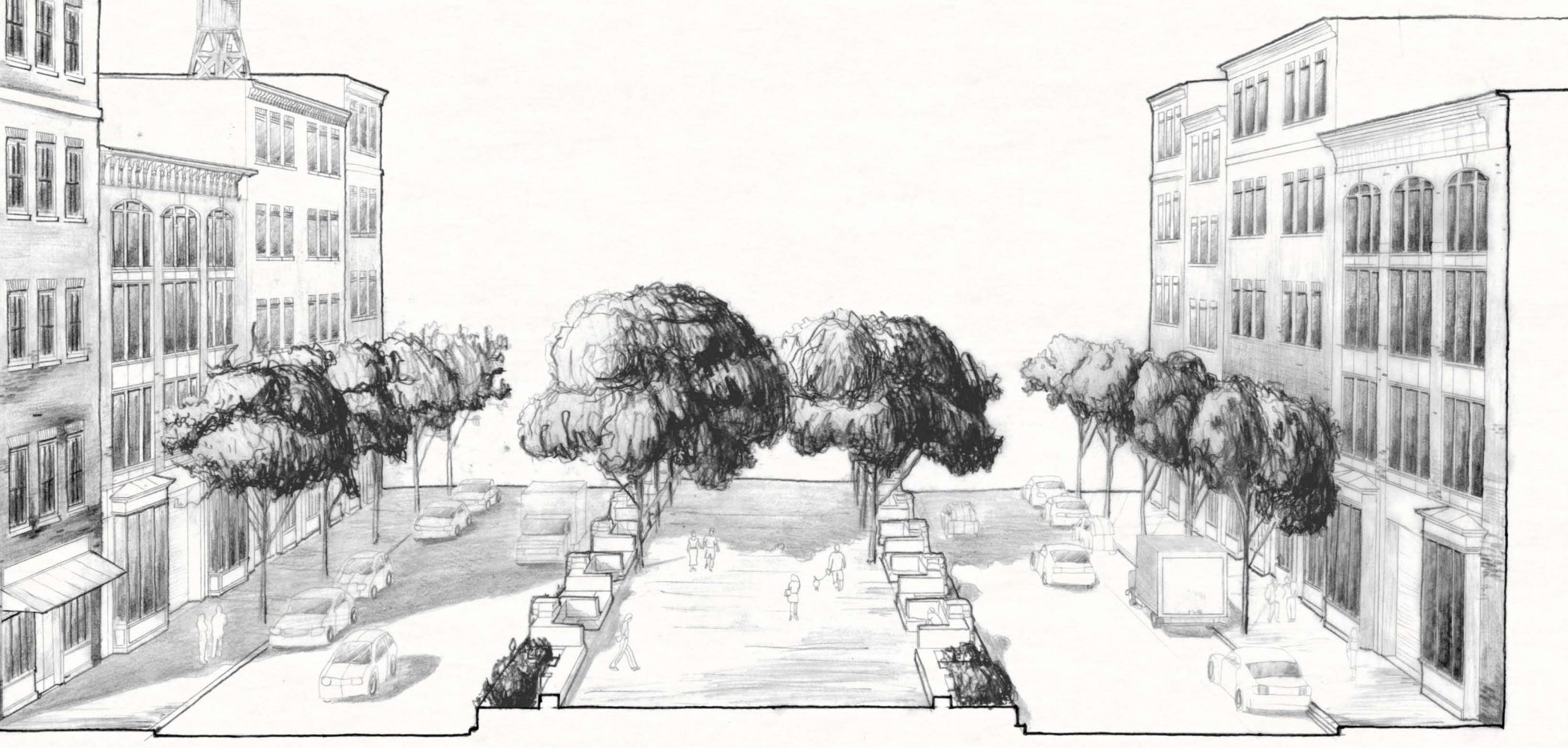
NEIGHBORHOODS

- Axis through the site will terminate views on civic buildings as well as focus views back to Center City.
- Neighborhoods focus their centers so everyday services can be reached within a 5-minute walk.
- Parks are strung together by the boulevard system and are always located within a 5-minute walk of the neighborhoods. Larger parks are focused at the waterfront for public events as well as daily recreational use.
- Civic buildings are used to activate prominent sites in the master plan as well as emphasize a major axis.
- Water recreation creates active spaces around the waterfront and encourages development on these sites.

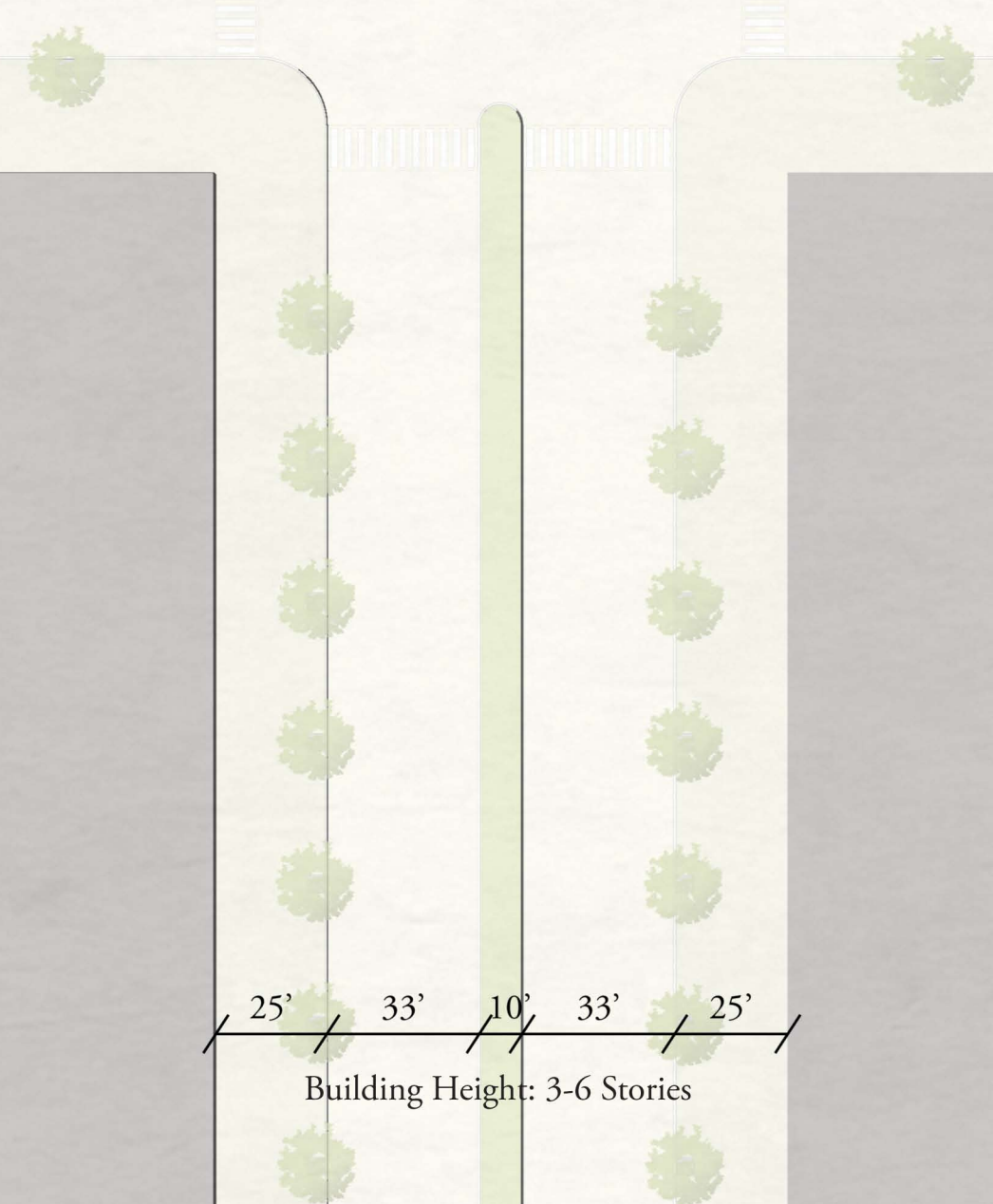
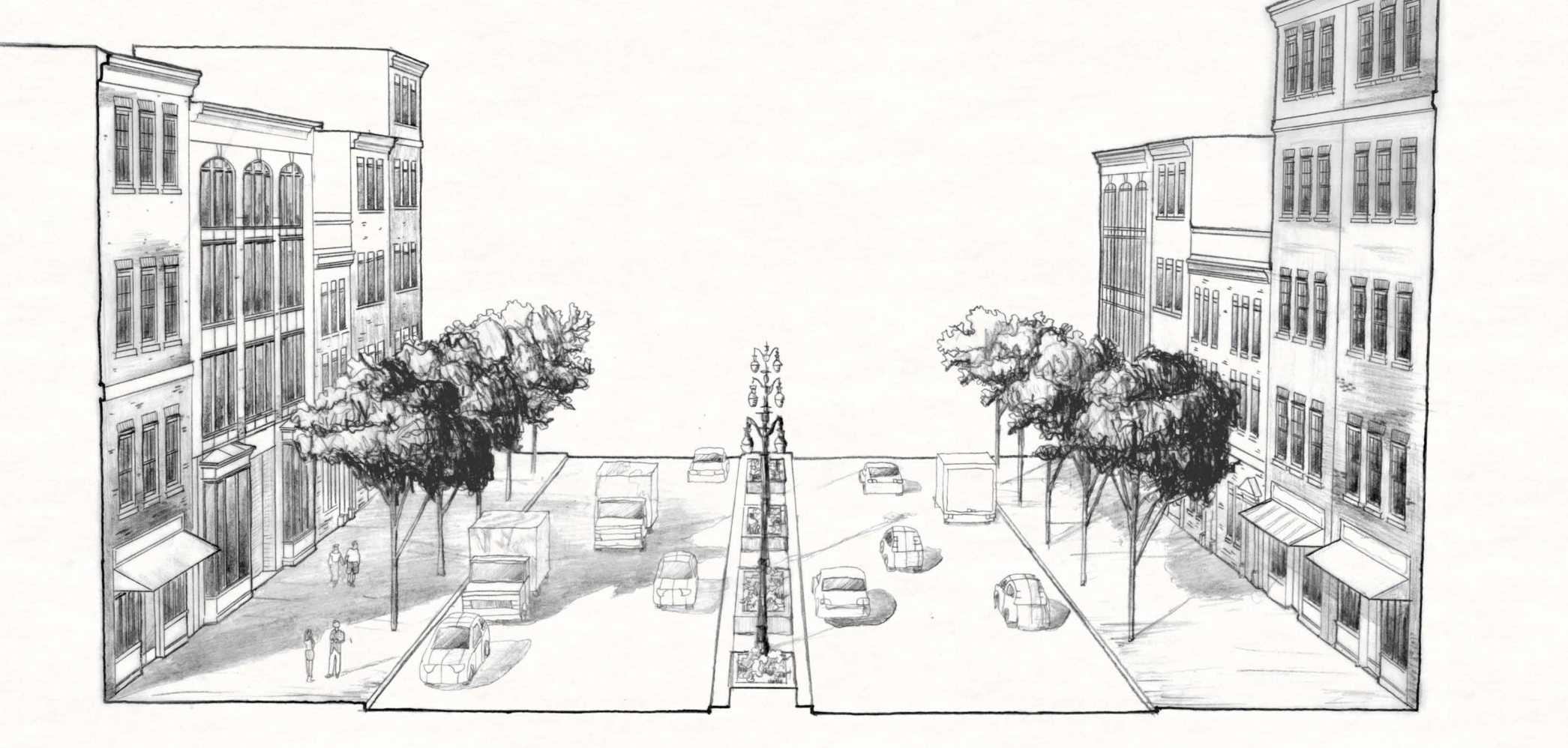
AVENUE



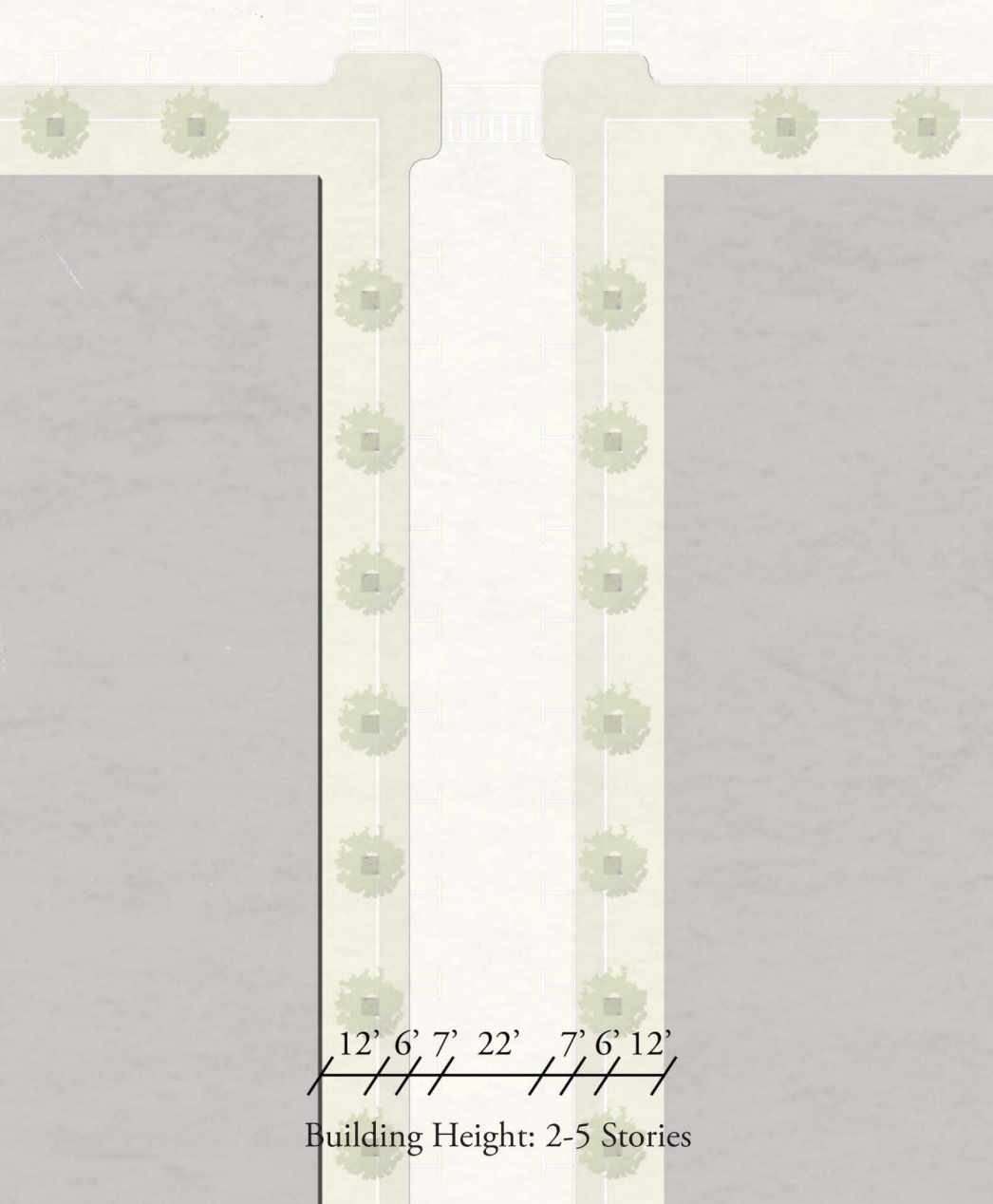
BOULEVARD A



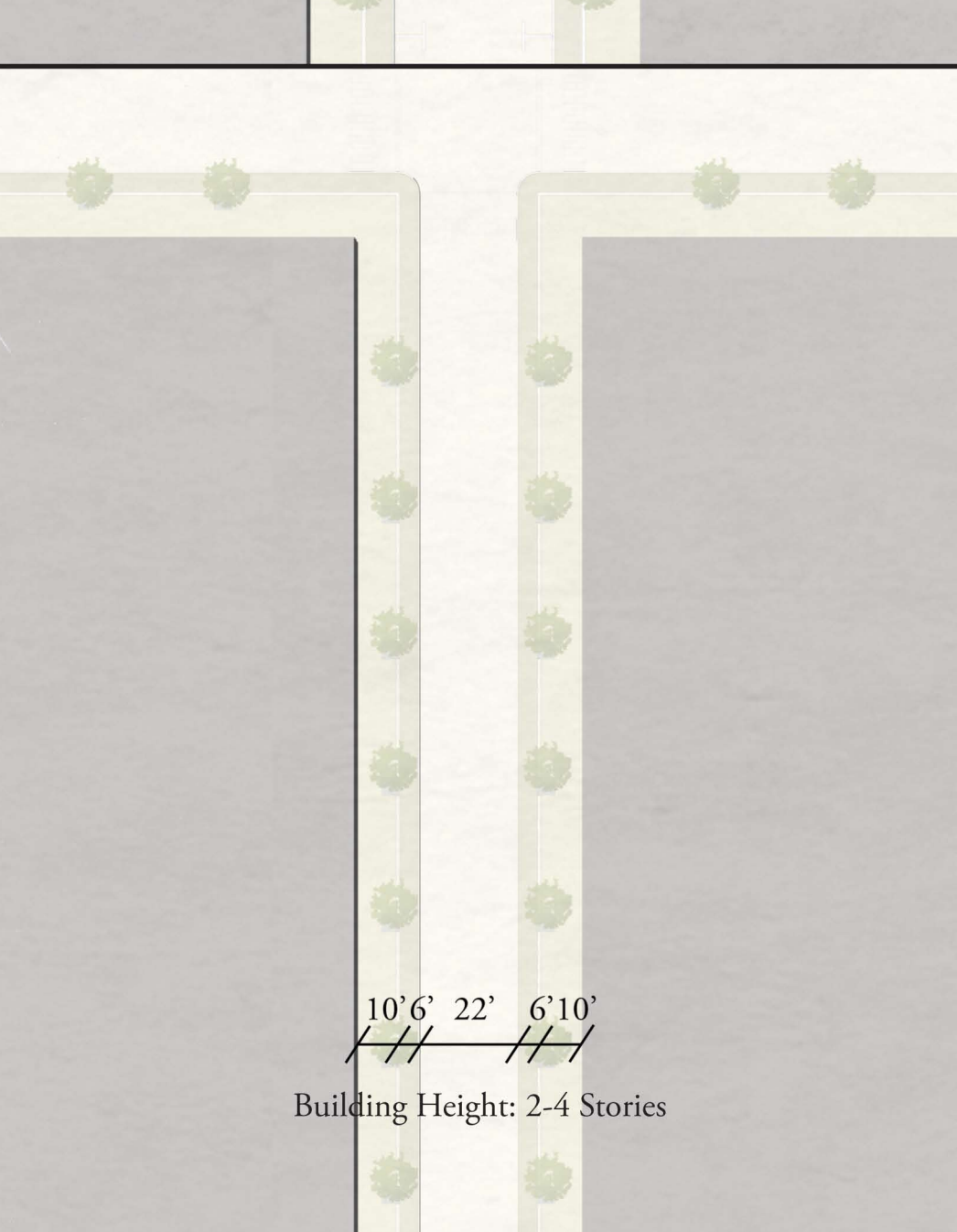
BOULEVARD B



STREET A



STREET B



CONNECTIVITY & CONTINUITY
RETURNING THE WATERFRONT TO PHILADELPHIA