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mtP: An Urban Tactic

by

Michael Miller Morrow

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Master of Architecture

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Houston, Texas

May, 2000
ABSTRACT

mtP: An Urban Tactic

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Michael Miller Morrow

The means of operating at the urban scale in the contemporary metropolis requires a reassessment of forces too often considered beyond the grasp of the architect and too often ignored by the planner. In Houston, the difficulty of engaging the machinations of private development may constitute the greatest challenge to the project of urbanism. The redevelopment of Midtown Houston, a high-traffic corridor situated between Downtown and the Texas Medical Center, issues a prompt to create alternative tactics for reshaping the city.

Midtown Parking (mtP) is a system of eleven hybridized parking garages that exploits the ever-present need for more parking as a means to intervene in the climate of private development, organize existing potentials, and influence the reshaping of the district. mtP offers a way of rethinking how urbanity might emerge from the confluence of an existing private development paradigm and a desire to make coherent and vital urban form.
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mtP

midtownPARKING*
*parking structures as urban tactic
Midtown is a centrally-located, high-traffic corridor between Downtown Houston and the Texas Medical Center, Montrose and Third Ward. The reurbanization of the district stems directly from the potentials of this condition. Whether to, from, or through, these paths make Midtown valuable.

How can the shape of Midtown truly capitalize on the condition of connectivity that relates it to the greater metropolis?
Midtown offers little in its built fabric that clearly defines traditional civic character. This condition elicits in many the desire to impose visions based upon treacly historical notions of urban civility.

Can't we find the potential character of Midtown in its existing paths and routines, proximities and growth patterns?
Over the past few decades businesses and residences of all kinds have established themselves in Midtown. The variety of these existing both reveals an essential character of the district and beckons its mixed-use future. If increasing density with sustained use-mix is the goal, these existing homes and businesses are the origin. While they may disappear with time and further development, it is essential to retain the climate that allows the area to grow diversely and organically.

Is there a way to actively promote higher density development and maintain a plastic mixed-use environment?
It is clear that private development is a veritable juggernaut in the reurbanization of Midtown. Lured by the almighty buck new projects establish themselves quickly. Most often what appears are dysfunctional enclaves, insulated fortifications against the as-yet ill-defined possibilities of the district. It is unthinkable that master planning can operate in this climate and foolish to deny the potence of the developer.

Are there ways to create a vital and coherant environent in Midtown by tactical intervention into the prevailing mode of private development?
Light rail will establish a major transortation infrastructure element down the spine of Midtown. The line will reinforce the districts connectivity to downtown and the Texas Medical Center and will foster new development within a 1/4 mile radius of the proposed stations.

Are there other infrastructural tactics that can complement existing infrastructures, promote higher density, and influence the shape of new development?
More than 50% of Midtown is deemed available for future private development. By current estimations 30% of that portion will be developed by 2005. At this staggering rate, the district will take shape quickly. Any moves taken towards realizing the full potential of Midtown will require calculated and willful participation in the forces already at work and the willingness to look forward, not back, to find the shape of the city.

What are the tactics of intervention that can be used to find the shape of a new Midtown?
vital, urban, mid-density, pedestrian-friendly, car-culture, loft living, mid-rise, cultural, boutique, street, mixed-use, redeveloped, metropolitan, safe, entertaining, diverse, active, accessible
midtown PARKING proposes a system of eleven parking structures arrayed throughout the district. Amid the questions about how Midtown will develop, mtP suggests an intervention at the level of one certain need, parking. mtP posits that a new way of thinking about parking may necessarily affect the shape of development in Midtown and thus the characteristic vitality of the area itself. By capitalizing on factors already driving Midtown development (commuting, residential and mixed-use development) and perceived accompanying desires (cohesive and legible Midtown environment, civic identity, public space, easy access to goods and services) mtP takes on a role that far exceeds the simple provision of a place to put one’s car.
mtP offers an infrastructural system of parking for the shared use of adjacent and proximal interests. Each structure, based upon a flexible prototype, is tailored through a partnership with the TIRZ, Parks and Rec, Metro, and surrounding private developers to provide types of parking, amenities, and services appropriate to current needs and attractive to developers interested in investing in new Midtown projects. By reorganizing how and where parking happens in ways particular to differing conditions and local contexts, mtP instrumentalizes the terminal problem of parking and creates new choices in the normally mundane paths of its users.
A non-profit venture administered by the TIRZ, mtP is funded in several ways. Aspects of the project that fall in the catagory of capital improvement (utility upgrades, streetscaping, etc) are reimbursed by the TIRZ tax increment. Houston Department of Parks and Recreation and Metro fund portions of the project related to public park space and transportation. The bulk of the project outside of these allocations is fulfilled by loans or a revenue bond issue underwritten by the city. Rent and fees paid for parking by developers and the lease of commercial space will pay off the loan or the bond and provide for the maintenance and operation of the mtP garages.
criteria
proximity to undeveloped land
proximity to transportation
relationship to land use patterns
growth potential
perceived need
impact potential
visibility

Eleven sites were chosen at which mtP structures had the greatest potential to affect change in the structure of development. As a group the sites represent a variety of different conditions and contexts yet share similar potentials.
Area Designation:
Commercial
Development Climate:
Very Active  62% Adjacent Potential

Anchored by Fiesta this high traffic area offers even greater potential to serve the consumer needs of Midtown, Museum District, Third Ward, and Montrose residents. mtp1 provides parking essential for a shopping area while providing supplementary programs to help draw drivers, rail-riders, and, subsequently, new commercial development.

mt 1

Program

Parking Spaces

Visitor   55%
Tenant    25%
PARK+RAIL  20%

Fannin          Eagle          S Jacinto

Public
Eateries       Dry Cleaners
Bank           Photo Processing
Book Store     Hair Salon
Shipping Store Gas Station
Card Store     Video/Music Store

Open
ATM
Kiosk
USPO Express

Tables and Benches
Basketball Court
P
Program

Coffee Bar
Newsstand
Art Gallery
Bookstore

Bar/Restaurant
Dance Club
Theatre
Music Store

MAD Office
Banquet Facility

Amphitheater
Kiosk

Tables and Benches
ATM
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<tr>
<td>Eateries</td>
<td>Newstand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shipping Store</td>
<td>Copy Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Wash</td>
<td>Bank</td>
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Conference and Teleconferencing Facilities

Kiosk

ATM

Tables and Benches

USPO/ FedEx Express
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<th>Program</th>
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<td>Eateries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Club</td>
<td>Newsstand</td>
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<tr>
<td>Video Rental</td>
<td>Gas Station</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leasing Office</td>
<td>Dry Cleaners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tennis Courts</td>
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<td>Playground</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basketball Court</td>
<td>Tables and Benches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiosk</td>
<td>ATM</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Area Designation:</th>
<th>Commercial</th>
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<tr>
<td>Development Climate:</td>
<td>Very Active 79% Adjacent Potential</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Prominent central location with high adjacent development potential. Existing programs and area trends favor commercial and office development. mtP7 with its PARK+RAIL facilities becomes a major cohering element to drive commercial density and promote business identity along the Main corridor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partners:</th>
<th>Travis</th>
<th>McGowan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIRZ</td>
<td></td>
<td>Main</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Business Owners</td>
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<td>Commercial Developers</td>
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<td>Metro</td>
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<tr>
<th>Parking Spaces</th>
<th>Travis</th>
<th>McGowan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitor 25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tenant 55%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PARK+RAIL 20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dedicated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open</td>
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MetroPARK+RAIL
Program

Eateries
Shipping Store
Car Wash
Newstand
Copy Store
Bank

Conference and Teleconferencing Facilities

Kiosk
ATM
Tables and Benches
USPO/ FedEx Express
P

Program

- Eateries
- Video Store
- Dry Cleaner
- Public Storage
- Convenience Store
- Gym
- Gas Station
- Kiosk
- ATM
- Playground
- Tables and Benches
- Basketball Court
## Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coffee Bar</th>
<th>Restaurant</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dry Cleaner</td>
<td>Newsstand</td>
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<td>Video Rental</td>
<td>Convenience Store</td>
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<td>Gym</td>
<td>Pool</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rental Office</td>
<td>Business Center</td>
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<td>Daycare</td>
<td>Recreation Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog Run</td>
<td>Tennis Courts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>Tables and Benches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiosk</td>
<td>ATM</td>
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<tr>
<td>MetroSHUTTLE</td>
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300' defines the radius around parking considered to be "close". This catchment constitutes the most direct relationship with parking. For the typical site eight square blocks may enjoy close/adjacent parking. The development in those blocks may be dramatically affected in this catchment. This is significant for all kinds of new development, particularly multi-tenant residential and retail programs.
At 500', the distance most people are willing to walk for daily errands, 20 blocks are impacted on the typical site. Development in blocks within this range (beyond the adjacent eight) is significantly affected particularly with regard to visitor, special generator, and day-tenant parkers.
At 1000', identified as a reasonable distance for work parking, somewhere between 30 and 40 square blocks are affected. At this range, considering all eleven sites, nearly all of the Midtown district is impacted. The potential of a poly-nuclear system is revealed.
subgrade

The prototype is based on the typical 250' x 250' block of the midtown grid. One to two floors of concrete construction underground parking comprise the base of the building.
ground floor

The ground floor plane, also concrete construction is the basic interface of the garage. In addition from ramping up and down to parking at the perimeter, the planes primary function is that of public space. Heights to parking range from 10-35' above this area, so a considerable amount of space is dedicated to bringing light and space to this area, essentially creating a plaza condition. While mostly pedestrian friendly, a portion of this space is dedicated to car program (eg. service station).
ramps

Ramps direct cars to parking above at different levels. Ramping from three sides makes the garage flexible to different orientations that reflect site-specific needs. An additional ramped element with a 12% slope is dedicated to pedestrian use (amphitheater, circulation) and continues the simple logic of the ramping ground plain.
public commercial space

Commercial pavillons are arrayed in the space on and above the ground plane. In most cases the pavillons take advantage of street frontage. The size and orientation of these pavillons is flexible to different program needs. Shown are the smallest of the possible configurations. The pavillons are arranged on the ground plane and at a low 12’ second level. An alley through the center of the sight serves the delivery and waste disposal needs of these pieces.
circulation

circulation is accomplished by elevators and stairs which delivery users to the center of the ground plain where they may take advantage of commercial program or go there merry way. Addition stair are located at the perimeter for express exiting.
Above the ground plain a steel parking deck system rises. The system is based on the continuous single helix ramp parking model with the addition of express ramps. The organization of this important element is predicated on the flexibility to zone the garage into different types of parking that suit the needs of different users according to site conditions. The ratio of long-term tenant parking to short-visitor parking, for instance, varies widely from site to site. By combing color and signage with the addition or subtraction of express ramps this zoning becomes possible.
6 bays are arrayed with center cross-overs. This allows the creation of an atrium condition while still permitting free and continuous circulation throughout the garage. Again, by ramping, color, and signage a flexibility for zoning of parking is accomplished.
The amount of parking may be adjusted per site requirements by adding or removing whole levels.
Within the system, a push pull of the bays is possible allowing light and proximity to circulation to vary.
At the top of each of the structures dedicated or special generator programs are accommodated. This is where program that is not associated with daily public use is located. This space vacillates from park to roof garden to specialized program depending on site requirements. The buildings use the same construction as the ground floor program but may become larger and more specialized.
The envelope of the structure is composed of a flexible system of panels that may be sheathed or stretched with different materials, from transparent to opaque, blank or printed with imagery. The system is the interface with the approaching car or pedestrian and carries information about the garage, the kinds of parking and program, as well as other timely rotating announcements or imagery. The color coding of the mtP system is made clear through this element. The logic of the graphics of this system orient the user quickly so that signage and color coding inside are more legible. Additionally, different shading and visibility issues are addressed by the organization of the panels.