

Community
DESIGN
charrette

March 7-11, 1999

making Metter even better

Metter, Georgia

A Better Hometown Design Charrette 1999

Sponsors:

City and Citizens of Metter

Georgia Department of Community Affairs

The University of Georgia's School of
Environmental Design (SED)

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Acknowledgements

Landscape architecture (MLA, BLA) and historic preservation (MHP) students at the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design produced this study, after collaborating with professionals and citizens of Metter, Georgia.

We would like to acknowledge our instructors, Associate Professor Pratt Cassity and Dean Jack Crowley, and Irina Kukina, visiting faculty from Russia for their leadership and direction.

We would also like to thank Chrissy Marlowe, DCA Regional Representative for Region 8, for her analysis of the Zoning Ordinance of Metter. We also thank Cindy Thilenius, Martha Reimann, and Peter Drey for their professional expertise.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the generous citizens of Metter, who attended the sessions and shared with us their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about where Metter has been, and where it should go. It was their commitment and motivation that energized the design charrette; and, ultimately, it will be that same commitment and motivation that will see this plan to completion.

*Everything's Better in Metter...*and this is only the beginning!

OVERVIEW

Across Georgia, and the nation, small communities are finding it increasingly challenging to compete in the changing market economy. Small family farms are sold to agribusiness, “mom-and-pop” stores are eclipsed by discount retailers on the highway bypass, and young people are leaving town for the attractions of larger metropolitan areas.

These challenges, however, do not inevitably signal the loss of qualities that define the character of a small town amidst a rural environment, qualities that make these areas some of the most livable places in America. Consider, “Rural America has enjoyed a net inflow of 2 million Americans this decade—that is, 2 million more people have moved from metropolitan centers to rural areas than have gone the traditional small-town-to-big-city route. (In the 1980s, by contrast, rural areas suffered a net loss of 1.4 million people.)”¹

Throughout Georgia, the Better Hometown Program and Downtown Development Authorities have demonstrated that investment in community design can make the difference between a community’s survival or its decay.

Initiated by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Better Hometown Program (BHT) helps Georgia communities with populations between 1,000 and 5,000. BHT’s revitalization strategy focuses on four programmatic areas:

Design—preserving and reusing existing resources;

Organization—organizing the community leadership;

Economic Restructuring—working to restructure the local economy by attracting small business downtown; and

Promotion—promoting the city and the downtown area.

It will take time and effort to focus on these four areas to revitalize Metter. A local approach with citizens participating in the process will ensure improvement. Community change is inevitable. Metter need not be overwhelmed by it—they will manage it!

¹ Eric Pooley, “The Great Escape,” *Time*, December 8, 1997.

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Participants

A design charrette was conducted March 7 – 11, 1999, with activities based at the rehabilitated Metter Depot. A charrette refers to a design assembly whereby different teams participate on the same design challenge within a limited amount of time. The goal of the charrette was to illustrate Metter's potential by proposing new designs and concepts, with consideration for its developmental history.

Participants included:

University of Georgia Students:

Andrea Greco, MLA, New York
Marianne Happek, BLA, Germany
Winslow Hastie, MHP, South Carolina
Mike Kidd, MLA, Louisiana
Jennifer Lewis, MHP, South Carolina
Eleonora Machado, MLA, Brazil
Julie Miller, MLA, Texas
Lawton Myrick, MLA, South Carolina
Angie Parker, MLA, Kentucky
Tom Pfister, MHP, Michigan
Stephanie Smith, MLA, Massachusetts
Matt Whitaker, MLA, Alabama

University of Georgia Faculty and Staff:

Pratt Cassity, Director, Public Service and Outreach (PS&O)
Jack Crowley, Dean, School of Environmental Design
Chris Cochran, Program Coordinator, PS&O
Irina Kukina, Visiting Faculty from Russia
Bill Russell, Business Outreach Services

Professionals:

Shay Brantley, DCA
Chrissy Marlowe, DCA
Martha Reimann, DCA
Cindy Thilenius, DCA
Peter Drey, Peter Drey & Associates

OBSERVATIONS AND
INTERVIEW RESULTS
Observations and interview results

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Citizens of Metter shared with us their observations about their city. We compiled the results in the categories of existing advantages, existing disadvantages, and future desires for Metter.

Existing Advantages

- Plenty of downtown parking
- Employee parking well managed
- Central Park West with fountain
- An increase in professional services
- “Another Bloomin’ Festival”
- Perception of low crime rate
- A great place to live and raise children
- Perception of bicycle friendly
- The boulevards’ azaleas and oaks
- Interest in façade programs
- Tree City USA/tree survey
- Candler County Hospital
- Well-paying jobs
- City’s original grid plan is good
- Combination hardware store/soda fountain
- Farmers’ Market
- Industrial Park with its walking trail, nature trail, pond & picnic areas
- Depot—Outstanding Historic Preservation
- Proximity to Statesboro,

Savannah, Swainsboro, Vidalia, and Interstate 16

- Potential to attract small businesses

Existing Disadvantages

- Dangerous parking conditions
- Poorly defined crosswalks
- Decline in retail business
- Not enough outdoor seating
- Not enough parking
- Lack of youth activities
- Lack of retailers helping during festival(s)
- Poor curbcuts with bad lighting
- Unattractive streetlights
- Some trees and shrubs overgrown
- Need a tree maintenance plan
- Lack of middle-aged population
- No public pool
- Too much bad signage on buildings
- Some façade work is needed
- Sidewalks are messy
- Too few sidewalks along and within squares

- Highway 46 east and west corridors are ugly
- Downtown needs directional signs for tourists
- “The Strip” (to Interstate) is hard to drive
- Americans with Disabilities Act improvements needed
- Proximity to Statesboro and Savannah
- Drug problem in town: buying, selling, and using
- Underage drinking
- Loitering and its consequences
- Teens don’t have a designated place to go downtown
- I-16 interchange is unattractive
- Very few social activities and cultural events

Future Desires for Metter

- Built environment needs cohesive connection
 - Economic development/critical business mass
 - Balanced government
 - Market Metter better
 - Focus on quality of life issues
 - TEA-21 grant project
 - A greater understanding of the built environment
 - Monitor façade improvements
 - Monitor public improvements
 - High quality new school, its design, and its siting
 - More antique stores
 - Need places for teens to hangout
 - A coffee shop that is “cool”
 - Public fitness center with focus on non-team teens
 - Recreational elements
- such as: bowling alley, miniature golf course, and skating rink for rollerblades
- Playground-safe areas at parks for children
 - Movie theater, possibly with second-run shows
 - Tree maintenance and personnel
 - Adding greenspace to parking lots
 - Trash cans should be attractive and accessible



Community and UGA students discussing important issues for the city of Metter

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Zoning Ordinance Review and Suggestions

The Zoning Ordinance of Metter should reinforce historic dwelling patterns and historic uses to fully benefit the civic heart of downtown.

Currently, permissible uses in the Central Business District (CBD) do not include:

Dwellings (conditional only);
Produce, fruits, vegetables;
Off-site signs

Effect: These exclusions limit the CBD's economic diversity and aesthetic character.

Currently, permissible uses in the Neighborhood/General Commercial District (CR) which surrounds the CBD include:

Bottle gas, storage and distribution
Welding shop (conditional)
Cesspool builder, sales-service
Tire repairing-supplies (conditional)
Disposal plant, sewage (conditional)
Storage yard, equipment (conditional)
Dwelling, single-family (conditional)
Paving, temporary batch plant (cond.)
Manufacturing, light, limited (cond.)

Effect: These permissible uses are not compatible with the traditional and existing uses of the area and could detract from the CBD as well as the CR district.

CBD and CR District Schedules:

	CBD	CR
lot area	6,000 feet	6,000 feet
lot width	60 feet	75 feet
setback	15 feet	15 feet
height	-	35 or 50'
Total building coverage	80%	85%

Effect: Lot areas allowances are much larger than existing lots, especially in the CBD. The setback requirement is too large and does not reflect traditional development patterns. There are no height restrictions for the CBD. The ordinance should state that new infill construction be no taller than the tallest building and no shorter than the shortest building existing in the CBD.

Buffer screens around parking

lots: A width of 10 feet with 1 evergreen shrub or tree every 25 linear feet; OR 64 square feet with 1 evergreen shrub or tree per 10 cars.

Effect: The buffer screen is a good planning tool. The requirement should be well enforced. The requirements should be strengthened to provide a more solid screening effect with even more

evergreen shrubs or trees.

Recommendations:

The zoning ordinance needs review and adjusting to reflect historic character and traditional land use. In the process, the ordinance should encourage future *desired* land use. Enforcement of the ordinance is key toward encouraging the revitalization of Metter.

Consider adopting a historic preservation ordinance. A local preservation ordinance enhances a zoning ordinance. A district designated under a preservation ordinance will be an overlay district upon existing zoning.

Community Assets and Recommendations



Metter Depot and Greenbelt

Visitors are reminded that Metter used to be a railroad town by the presence of the rehabilitated depot on the east edge of downtown. Creating a green corridor that runs into the city along Georgia Highway 46 will invite travelers to explore Metter, and should moderate summer temperature due to increased tree canopy. The same tree species found in the downtown square are recommended for planting along the depot property and the lot across the street, allowing for a harmonious appearance and regularly scheduled maintenance.

Thanks to recent rehabilitation of the depot, Metter realizes the historic nature of its downtown. In an effort to continue economic development, a façade improvement program has been established in Metter. The historic character of buildings should be maintained as a sign of financial health and to attract more small businesses.



Candler County Courthouse

Candler County Courthouse, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, deserves an impressive landscape. As this is the westerly corridor to downtown, a planting of oaks is indicated to balance the oaks located in the square across South Broad Street. A formal garden of various plantings is also suggested for the courthouse lot.

Removing the existing flagpole from the central walk and replacing with two in the center of opposing lawns will open up the view to the front steps of the courthouse.

Lewis Street Median

The city layout has been preserved since its inception. Boulevards lead into downtown with stately oaks and azaleas. In keeping with that tradition, an extension of the boulevard down Lewis Street toward Interstate 16 will serve to entice highway travelers into downtown. A welcome sign will also encourage visitors to venture even farther into Historic Metter.

Downtown Squares

Downtown Metter's three squares represent untapped resources. Enhancing the existing parking lots by incorporating green space will create a more desirable destination. Hardscape materials should be consistent through all three squares and through town. Scored concrete walking paths would reflect where

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the railroad tracks once ran.

Benches of similar construction would be easy to maintain, as would exterior light posts that are 8 feet to 10 feet tall, excluding globes. This treatment will personalize the outdoor space and complement downtown businesses.

Streetscape

To make the downtown more walkable for pedestrians, installing traffic calming devices like crosswalks and “bumpouts” would be beneficial. “Bumpouts” also create extra space on sidewalks for outdoor seating and plant materials.

Extending sidewalks from residential neighborhoods to downtown will allow easy walking to the CBD. They should be constructed of materials that are currently used for sidewalks in downtown.

Old School Complex

To better serve Metter’s younger generation, an adaptive-use feasibility study is recommended for the old school. This would determine costs and best uses for the building and can aid in a fundraising campaign.

IMPLEMENTING THE
RECOMMENDATIONS
Implementing the Recommendations

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Implementing the Recommendations

Key aspects of successful community collaborations include:

Keep it simple.

Consider that to collaborate is to work together. Pretty simple. Pretty simple to forget.

You get what you pay for.

This document makes initial, cursory recommendations. The City of Metter must hire an architect, engineer, and/or landscape architect to produce construction documents before any of the recommendations can be built.

Empowerment.

When communities are empowered, they take responsibility for solving problems, and through their own efforts, they will succeed. Empowerment allows for cooperation and collaboration. Each person views their role as essential to the success of the group—and together, they make a difference.

Training leaders is necessary.

Community leaders are always in short supply. The only way to get the leadership that is needed is to

identify those capable, and then train them.

Community planning must be inclusive.

It is important to be inclusive in all phases. Both public and private sectors can leverage resources by developing partnerships and collaboration.

Teamwork is essential.

New partnerships must be formed. Creative new partnerships are needed to address problems more efficiently by pooling interests and resources.

“We’re in it for the long haul.”

Metter’s problems developed over the years, and therefore it is not realistic to expect solutions overnight. It will take time to experience the real difference that investing in the community can make.

Building collaborative efforts takes a long time; the work is incremental and organic. However, collaboration is worth the long hours required on the front end. There are no short cuts to success.

“If you build it,
they will come.”

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Study Areas

The community of Metter hosted students and faculty from the University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design, along with landscape and preservation professionals from across Georgia for a five-day design charrette. A charrette is an intensive design process whereby different teams participate on the same design challenge with a limited amount of time.



At the Metter Depot, Community members expressed their design priorities. These comments were interpreted by the University students and design professionals to create an improved plan based on the city's existing resources.



building façades

boulevard / streetscape



depot/ bi-lo gateway



courthouse



downtown squares

Design Goals

- create a more pedestrian friendly downtown
-
- enhance history and architecture
-
- landscape existing lots around courthouse and depot
-
- manage parking
-
- market Metter as a destination
-
- re-greening of downtown squares



Façade Program

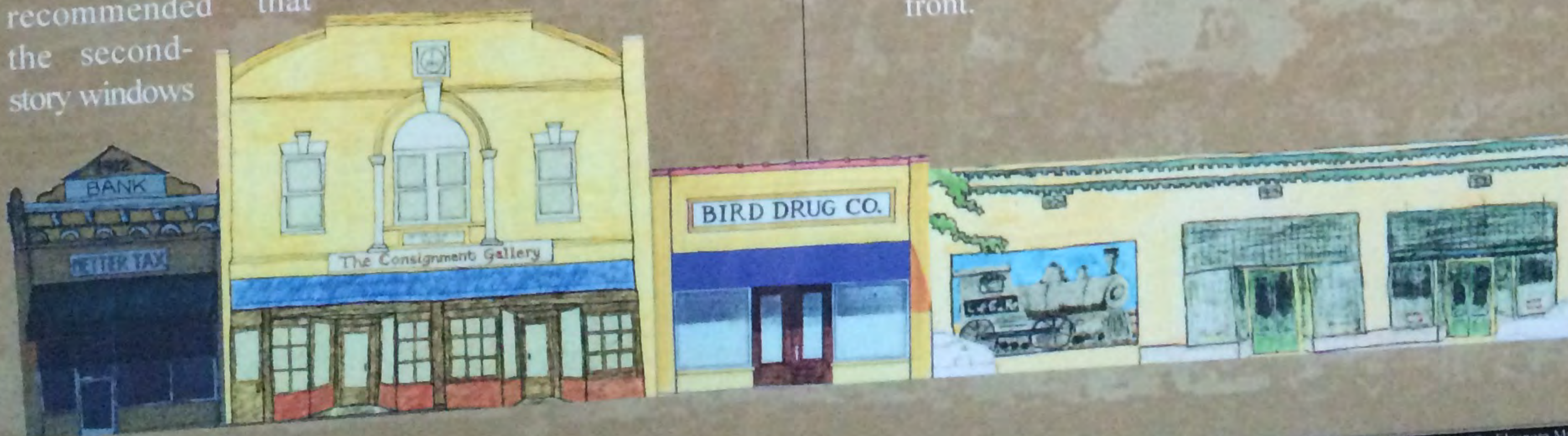
One of Metter's greatest assets is the design of its downtown core. The layout of the three central parks enveloped by a commercial area creates a wonderful pedestrian space and unique shopping experience. Like many historic downtown areas, the years have taken their toll on the commercial buildings as property owners attempted to keep up with changing trends. Many downtown buildings, across the country as well as in Metter, were covered up in the 1960s with aluminum or other materials in an attempt to make the building appear more "modern". One of the first recommendations for Metter's buildings is to remove any non-historic material that has been applied to a historic façade. These cover-ups were usually applied as a "quick-fix" and are generally easy to remove.

There are many notable downtown commercial buildings in Metter and several of these were highlighted during the charrette. The former Allied Department Store is the largest building in downtown Metter and has a prominent corner location. Before becoming a department store, this building was a corner service station. This is evidenced by the large open bays that have since been bricked in. As illustrated during the charrette, it is recommended that these bays be opened and traditional storefronts constructed. The design of these storefront windows should be similar to the other existing historic storefronts in the building. The doors should be wooden with long glass panels. It is also recommended that the second-story windows

be replaced with traditional one-over-one wooden-framed windows as shown in the illustration. The opportunities for this building are numerous. The upper-story could serve as apartments and/or office space while the street level could be a combination of individual stores, a restaurant and an antique mall all in the same building.

The old theatre is a good example of how the traditional façade can be preserved while a new business(es) is located in the building. Some of the recommendations for the theatre building included replacing the upper-story windows with a more traditional Art Deco configuration. Signage for each business should be on a hand-painted wooden or metal signboard or individual letters attached directly to the façade. Signs should be lit externally by gooseneck lamps. Avoid using interior-lit plastic signs, as they are expensive, hard to maintain and contribute to light pollution.

The Bird Drug company building is a good example of a traditional one-story brick commercial building. The recommendations made during the charrette included removing the wooden shingle awning that was inappropriate for the building and was badly deteriorated. Instead, a canvas shed-style awning was recommended to be placed within the transom area above the storefront. The existing signage is good and was kept in the new design. Traditional wooden double doors with long glass panels were recommended for the storefront.



Produced by

The University of Georgia,
School of Environmental Design
and DCA - BHT
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Metter, Georgia

charrette

Charrette Coordinator:

Pratt Cassity



Park Plan & Streetscape



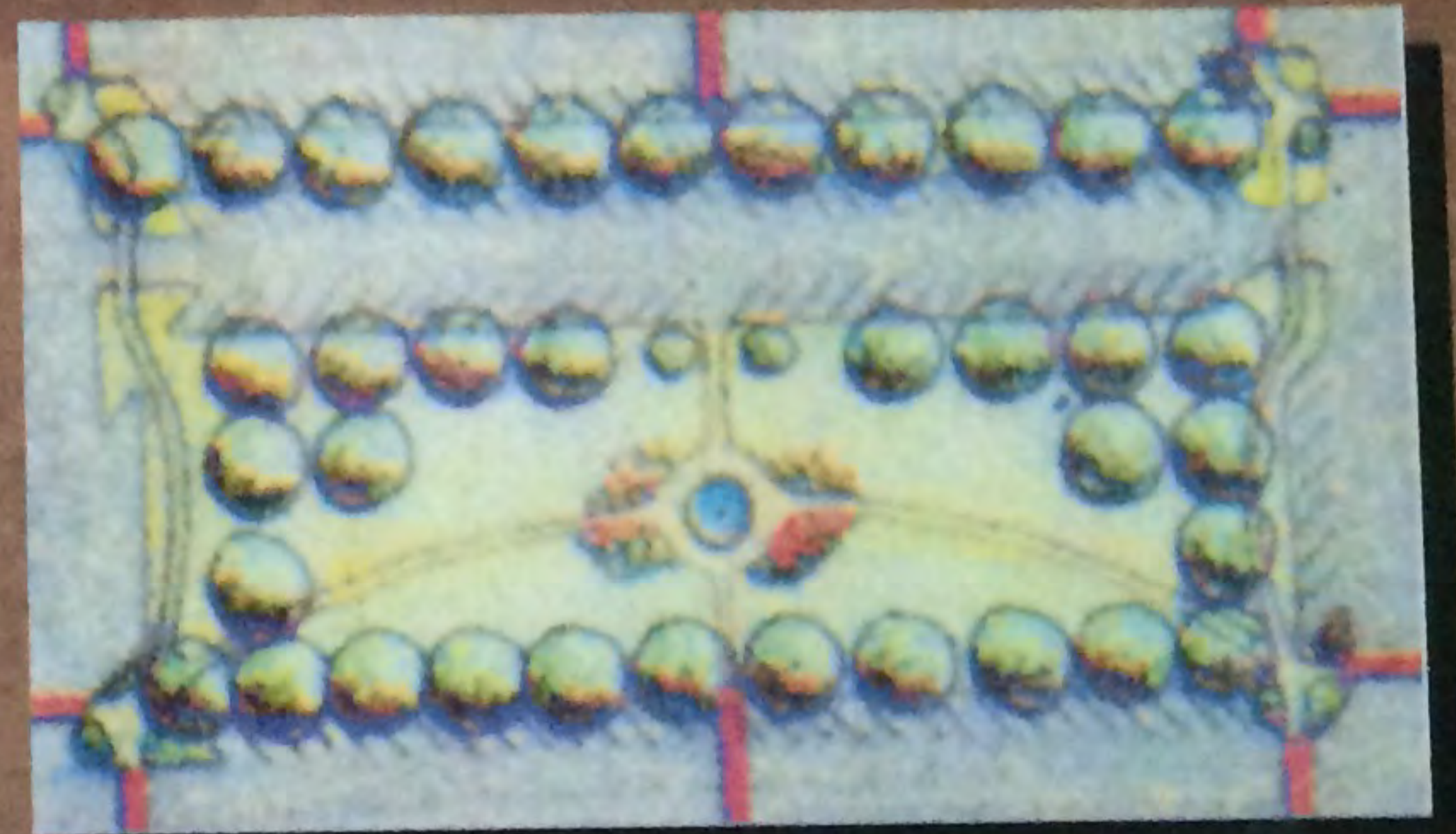
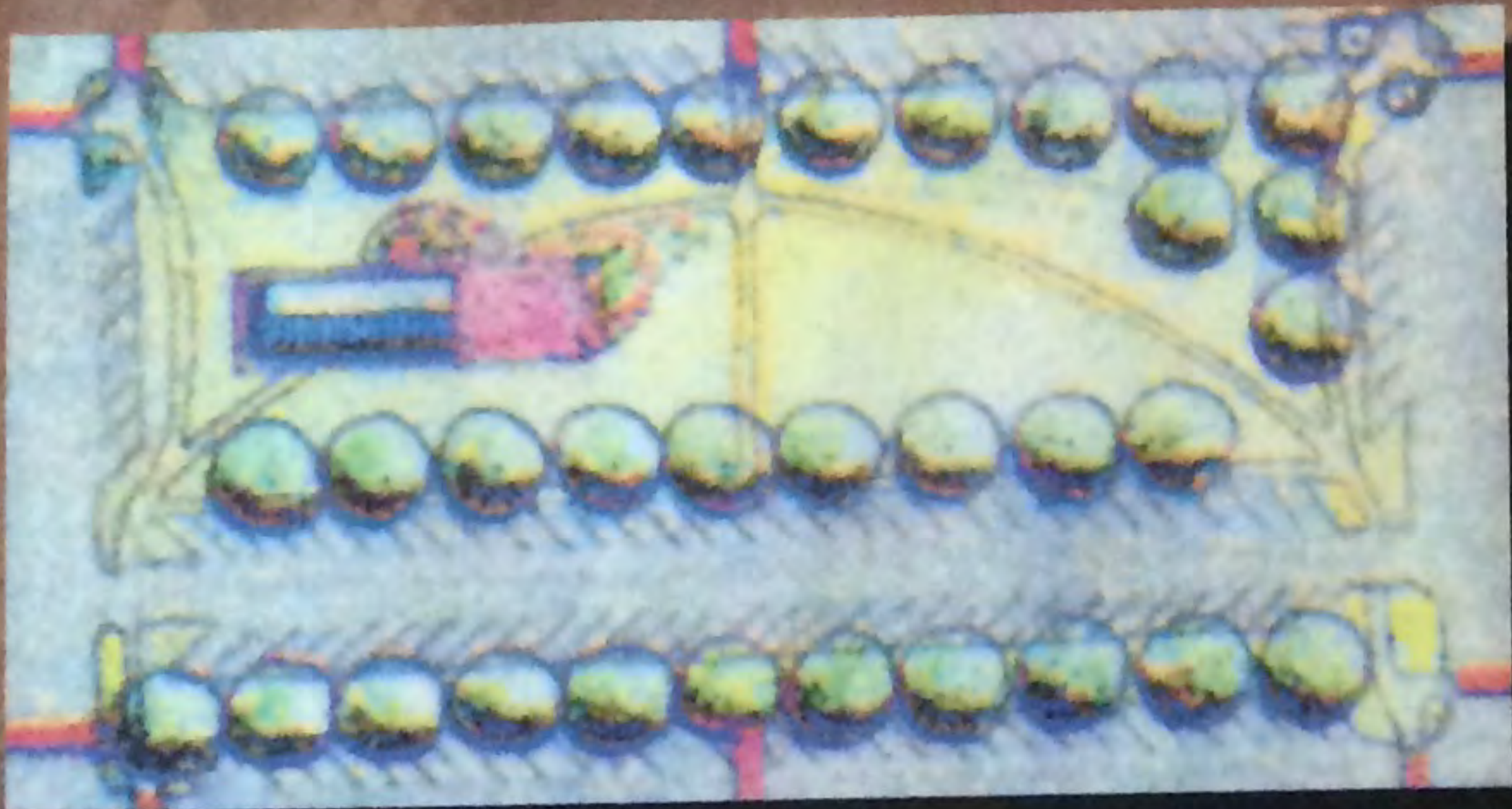
Park Plan

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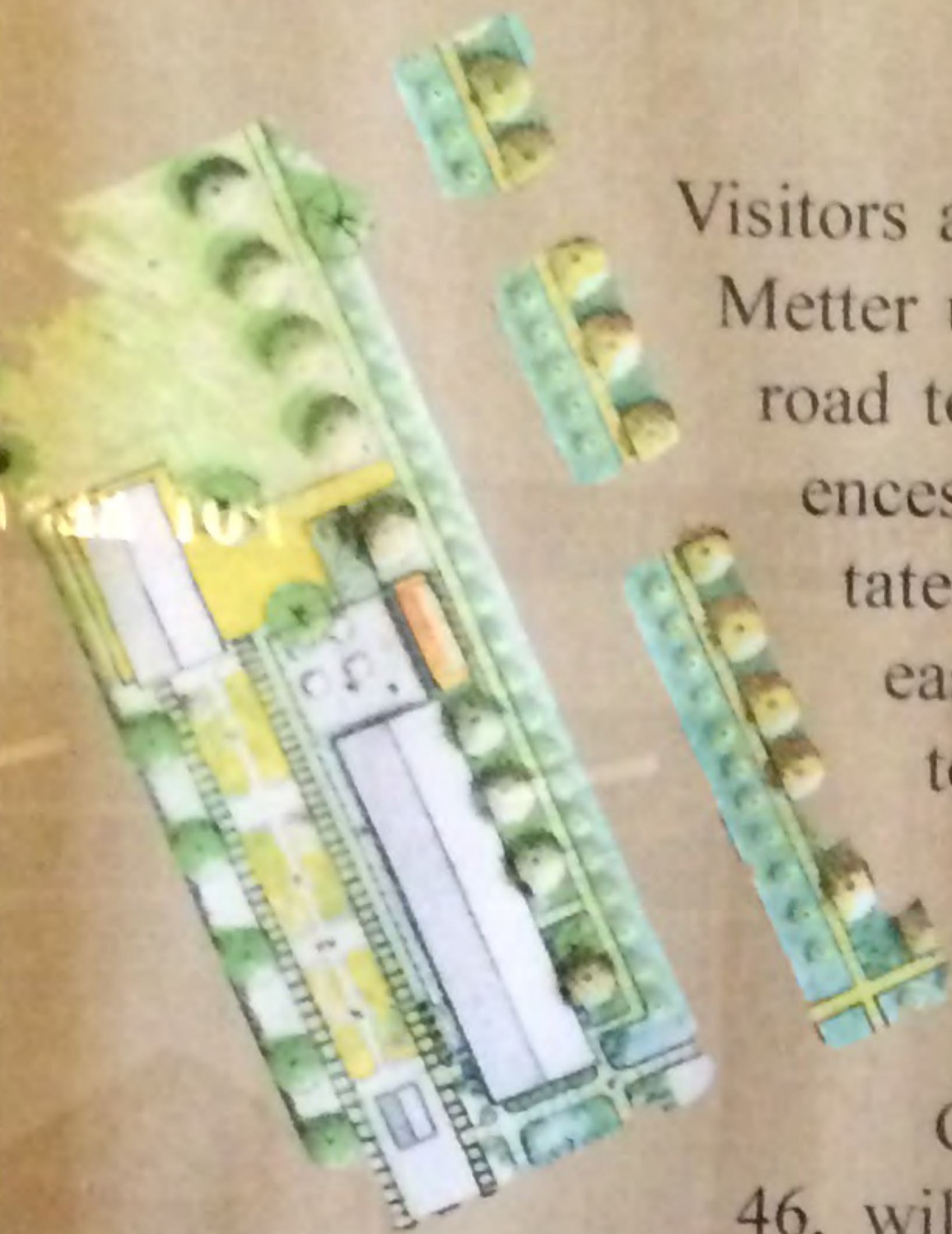
To make the downtown more walkable for pedestrians, installation of crosswalks and bumpouts would help to slow traffic. Bumpouts also create extra space on sidewalks for outdoor seating. Extending sidewalks from residential neighborhoods to downtown will allow for pedestrian-friendly travel to the CBD.



Metter, Georgia

Charrette Coordinator:
Pratt Cassity

DEPOT



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South Broad. A formal garden of various plantings is also suggested for the courthouse lot. Removing the existing flagpole from the central walk and replacing

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