

BROOKLYN/ROCKSPRINGS CHARRETTE ATHENS, GA

DATE:

February 22-24, 2013

PARTNERS:

Athens Land Trust
Athens Housing Authority

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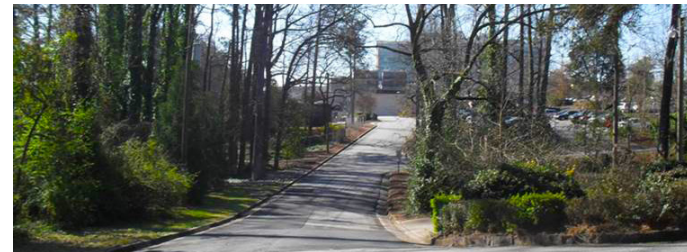
OVERVIEW

During the past decade, many governmental and non-profit agencies have worked to remove blight, reduce crime, provide affordable housing, improve educational opportunities, and create jobs in the historic African American neighborhood known by a variety of monikers – Brooklyn, Rocksprings, Waddell, Henderson, Moe's Hill, Jackson Town Community, and "The Rock."

The UGA College of Environment and Design (CED) partnered with the Athens Land Trust and the Athens Housing Authority to develop a conceptual master plan for the neighborhood in Athens bounded by Baxter St., Rocksprings St., West Broad St. and Evans St. Additional partners include the Hancock Community Development Corporation, the University of Georgia (UGA) Law School's Community Economic Development Clinic and the UGA College of Family and Consumer Sciences.



TARGET AREAS



Old West Broad Street School and Market Garden

The new community garden and market is the first activity on the historic school campus in several years. As a priority area for the neighborhood and the Athens Land Trust, the charrette conducted a site inventory and suggestions for phased improvements to use as a decision-making tool for the future of the property.

Magnolia Street

Magnolia Street is the only shortcut in the Rocksprings community that directly links W. Broad St. and Baxter St. The residents on this road would simply like to feel safer when walking along the street (due to the lack of sidewalks), and not have to worry about cars speeding through the neighborhood.

American Legion Property

Magnolia Street is home to a historic, boarded up, two-story Art Deco building originally housed the American Legion. Currently, the structure is owned by the nearby Bethel A.M.E. Church on Rose Street and is zoned as residential.

St. Mary's/Alps Plaza "Healthway" Path and Program

Access to the Kroger-anchored Alps Road Shopping Center from adjacent Magnolia Street is much more difficult than it should be, especially for pedestrians. St. Mary's Hospital and a 20' retaining wall sits in between the neighborhood and the shopping center, thwarting direct pedestrian access.

PLANNING GOALS

1. Conduct neighborhood meetings and interviews to obtain and record resident input
2. Develop a partnership with organizations and individuals who want to be part of the redevelopment process
3. Develop a plan with an implementation strategy, based on resident input and available resources
4. Present a strategy for the redevelopment of the West Broad School site
5. Provide neighborhood residents with a greater sense of involvement and empowerment, knowledge of their heritage and of existing programs, and increased income.

ACTION ITEMS

- Revive, coalesce, and strengthen neighborhood association of stakeholders. Create a strategic plan and develop an annual work program. Make the collection of oral histories a top priority.
- Agencies and organizations should partner on planning for resource assistance to avoid duplication and distribute assistance throughout the neighborhood equitably. To achieve this, partnering agencies must have coordinated access to GIS mapping tools that fits needs and budgets.
- Host – along with UGA, St. Mary's Healthcare and others – a day-long symposium addressing creative ways to partner to improve neighborhood health in all forms.



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GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM 1



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MAPPING THE FUTURE

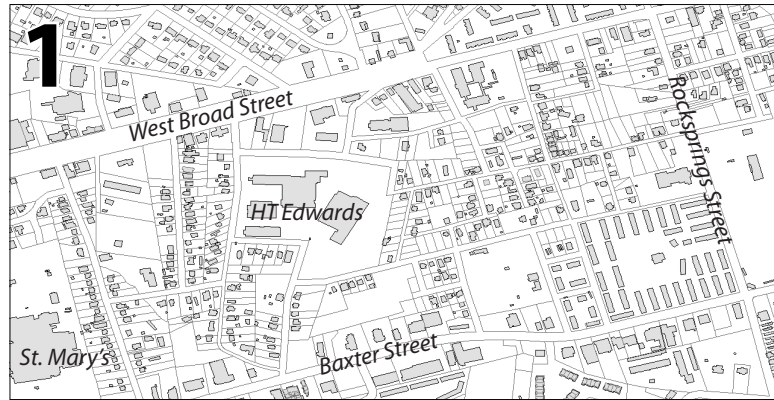
Decision-making based on consistent information available to all is key in making fair, transparent and democratic choices. In discussions with partnering agencies active in the neighborhood, it became apparent that having updated and readily-available information on properties in the neighborhood would assist in the coordination of services to residents and adoption of a neighborhood improvement strategy.

INPUT SESSION

On February 2, 2013, a Public Input Session was held at the H.T. Edwards Complex in Athens, GA to discuss the Brooklyn/Rocksprings Neighborhood. Participants were asked to identify areas within the neighborhood where they felt good things were happening and where they felt the neighborhood could use improvement. Common topics of concern included West Broad Street School and Community Garden, neighborhood circulation and connectivity, Magnolia Street traffic control, the former American Legion Building, and lack of public green space.



Students and community members at the input session.



1) BEGIN WITH NEIGHBORHOOD BASEMAP
The analysis began by providing a neighborhood map at the community input session. Residents and stakeholders placed green adhesive dots on areas of positive activity and red dots on areas that need improvement.



2) ADD PUBLIC INPUT SESSION DATA
Next, the data gathered at the public input session was mapped along with the public's associated comments. Concentrations of red dots emerged as "target areas" from repeated and intense comments. These are places that students focused on during the charrette.



3) INTERPRETATION/ANALYSIS/DESIGN
The image above shows the input session data correlated with historic building data from the neighborhood (orange). This is an example of how additional information can be added to become a dynamic planning tool for stakeholders and partner agencies.

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM: A METHODOLOGY FOR DESIGN ANALYSIS AND DATA COLLECTION

A Geographic Information System (GIS) is a computer-aided mapping and analysis. Like paper maps, it can show you the distance and relationship with places on the surface of the earth, but with much more speed and accuracy. Using GIS as a tool, analysts can derive the answers they need to make the most informed decisions in regards to all types of land use planning.

The diagrams to the left demonstrate how the GIS process informs decision making. One simply adds desired layers of data to visualize and identify various relationships and patterns. The charrette process used the data collected at the public input session, combined with data concerning historic buildings, to identify "target areas" on which to focus.



Porches, historic retaining walls, shallow setbacks and engaging yards give the neighborhood a unique physical identity.



Brooklyn/Rocksprings neighborhood with charrette target areas shown.

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WEST BROAD STREET SCHOOL



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WEST BROAD STREET SCHOOL: VISION

Four stages of property improvement emerged from the charrette and should help guide decisions about phased improvements at the site. No improvement should compromise the current levels of parking, security, or reduce space for planting. The priorities are organized based on site needs, affordability, and feasibility:

First, site visibility and courtyard conditions should be addressed immediately. The courtyard is in good order to function for several programs, but requires maintenance and regular upkeep, even out of the growing season.

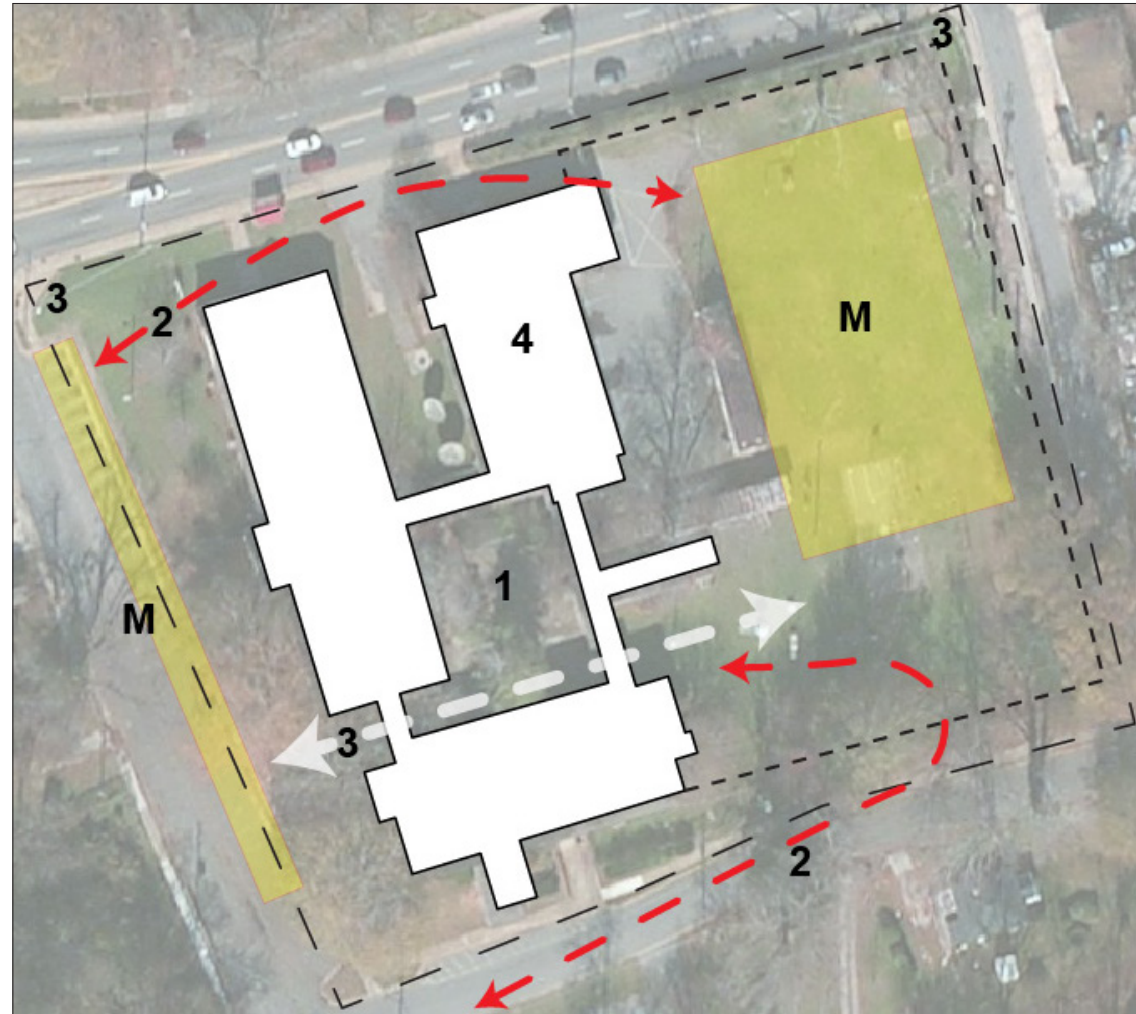
Second, site circulation and access should be addressed to create a better connection between parking areas and the garden/courtyard areas is needed.

Third, larger scale site design issues like more entrances, better monitoring and improvements marking the property's corners are a third-level priority.

Fourth, the final phase of property improvement would be total building rehabilitation that includes community-related services and garden-related activities. The security fence should be replaced with an equally effective but friendlier perimeter fence, possibly augmented with permanent art installations and publically-available fruit and vegetable plants outside the fence to discourage stealing from private plots.



Unique ceramic art adds to the history of the school and enhances the courtyard.



KEY:

WEST BROAD STREET SCHOOL

Maintain (M): Parking and Plots

- Existing West and South parking
- Existing garden plot space

Priority 1: Courtyard Improvements

- Minimal intervention
- Improve visibility
- Improve condition
- Implement maintenance plan

Priority 2: Circulation and Pathways

- Improve circulation paths from parking to site interior
- Address access issues
- Improve southern entry

Priority 3: Street frontage/Pedestrian

- Northeast corner planting design
- Street-front improvements especially along West Broad Street
- Improve connectivity

Priority 4: Building Rehabilitation

- Building rehabilitation
- Building program
- Fence replacement
- Fundraising



Current condition of courtyard. Simple maintenance and up-keep -- such as pressure-washing the brick patio to avoid slips -- would greatly improve the usability of the space.



Potential arrangement of courtyard space and product display tables. Existing retaining walls could serve as seating for vendors, and existing tree canopy provides shade.

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COMMUNITY GARDEN 3

COMMUNITY GARDEN: BEAUTIFICATION

How can chain link fences and unattractive walls be disguised with vines? Although a cost effective option, chain link is not the most attractive type of fence. Fortunately, it is easy and inexpensive to naturalize a chain link fence with vines. Typically, hardy perennial vines (preferably evergreen) will create a permanent "green fence." However, annual, food-producing vines are an option to consider in some cases. Fruit trees and some ornamentals can be pruned and trained (espalier) to grow horizontally to camouflage unattractive areas. The fence also provides an opportunity for displaying permanent art, perhaps commission from neighborhood residents.



Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*) hiding chain-link fence



The fence provides an opportunity for hanging permanent art.



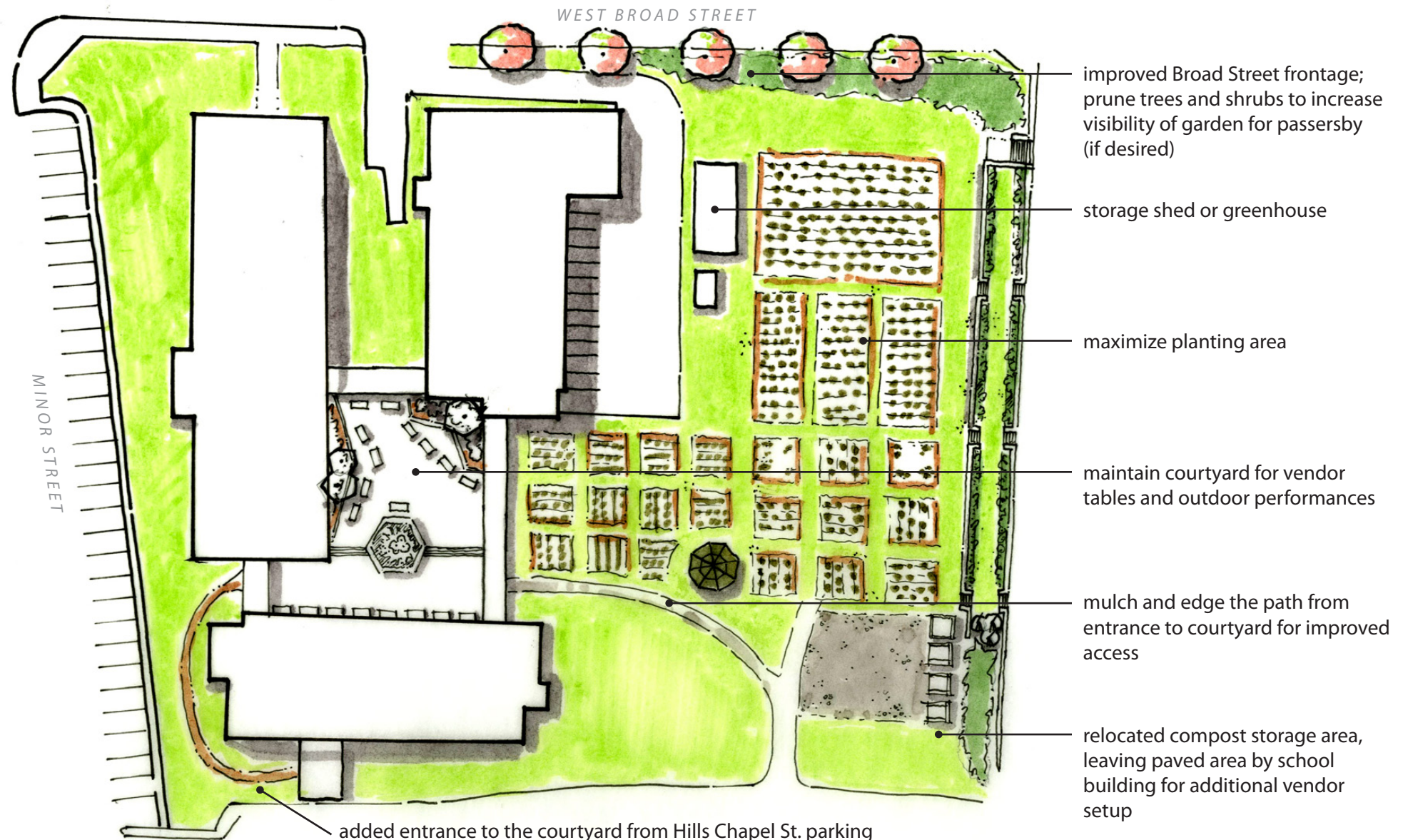
Example of a Pear Tree Espalier

COMMUNITY GARDEN: ACCESS/VISIBILITY

Improving visibility into the garden will celebrate and promote its existence. By implementing larger, additional signage and/or by removing sections of vegetation along W. Broad St. would allow passersby to realize the historic school has a new community function.

Addressing the site's circulation could improve access for community members of all ages and abilities; a vital key to promoting community engagement.

Suggested improvements to the West Broad Market & Garden include maintaining what works, maximizing space, and improving visibility.



Use the existing blank signboard along West Broad Street to identify the school's new function.



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MAGNOLIA STREET 4



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AMERICAN LEGION

Magnolia Street is home to a historic two-story Art Deco building that residents say was originally used by the American Legion. Currently, the structure is owned by the Bethel A.M.E. church on Rose St. and is zoned as residential. The church should consider re-using the American Legion building in a way that meets the needs of the neighborhood and fulfills their Christian mission.

The church might partner with other organizations, such as the Athens Land Trust, to turn the building into affordable housing. This would allow the building to retain its current zoning and make it more affordable for both parties to restore the building.

Other potential uses suggested by residents include temporary housing, after-school programming, multi-generational classes, or a laundromat.



Existing American Legion Building condition



Potential rehabilitation

ST. MARY'S ACCESS ROUTE



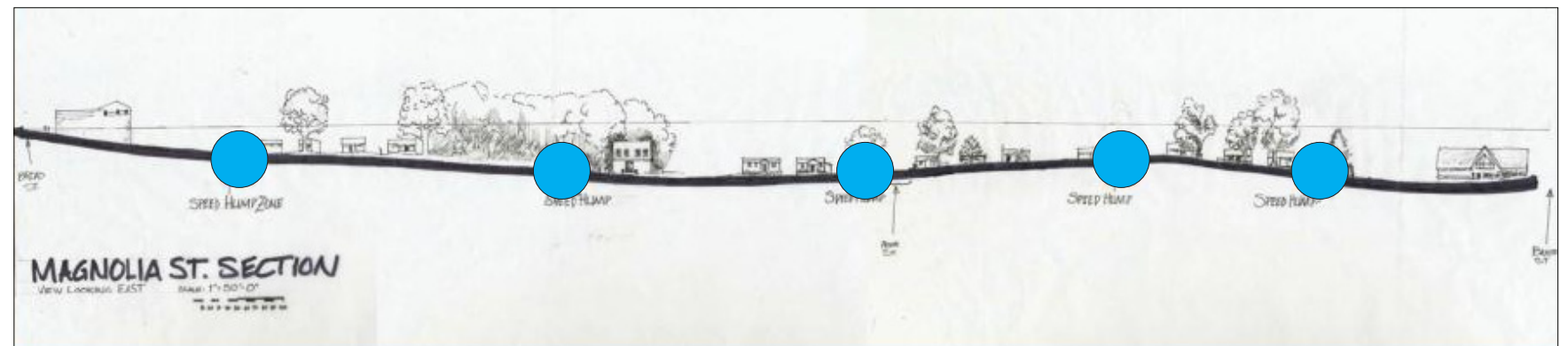
1. SIDEWALK DISTANCE .6 MILES
Pedestrian access to the Alps Road Shopping Center is much more circuitous than need be. Baxter St is at an incline that many walkers avoid, despite its having sidewalks.



2. PEDESTRIAN DISTANCE .5 MILES
Most walkers avoid the Baxter hill by walking behind St. Mary's parking lot, but a 20' retaining wall forces them to go out to Baxter and around to the shopping center's front entrance.



3. PROPOSED ROUTE .25 MILES
Being able to traverse the wall with stairs or a switchback ramp would cut residents' walking times by half, plus it would provide hospital employees and visitors with more direct access to stores and restaurants.



Proposed speed table locations



Speed tables and radar detection signs



TRAFFIC CALMING: SPEED TABLES, LIGHTS AND RADAR

Because there is not neighborhood consensus regarding which side of the street should give up frontage or on-street parking to accommodate a sidewalk, the most feasible and effective traffic calming solution is the use of speed tables/humps. Adding speed tables under or near each of the five existing street lights (above) will assure even placement, good visibility at night, and will allow the speed tables to double as crosswalks. Augmenting the sporadic street lighting with pedestrian-scale lights on existing power poles will give evening foot traffic a sense of security. Additionally, implementing radar speed signs is a proven way to decrease speeding.