

Walkable Midtown:

The Midtown-St. Albans Area Plan

FEBRUARY 2020

Walkable Midtown: Executive Summary

Executive Summary

The Vision

The history of Raleigh's Midtown–St. Albans area is the story of an evolving dream of the future. Born in the auto age of city planning, Midtown's origins reflect a vision of a future where cars whoosh occupants to their destinations – from carport to parking lot and back again. The new I-440 Beltline facilitated high-speed motion to all corners of the City. Parking lots proliferated to accommodate vehicles at rest. Land uses could be widely separated, because the future was an open road, and sidewalks were optional.

Today's Midtown–St. Albans area is at the edge of a different future – one where cars are but one means of transportation, and where a clearer understanding of the health and environmental benefits of an active lifestyle make walking as exciting as driving once was.

The Beltline is still a critical piece of infrastructure and an economic engine for the City – but it, and the wide arterial streets that frame Midtown, are also barriers to walkability.

The Midtown–St. Albans area plan takes the best of the original vision and infuses it with goals that reflect the current needs of the area and overarching considerations such as sustainability, economic vibrancy, and housing options. It creates a future Midtown that:

- Continues to evolve from a place to go through to a destination
- Creates a blue and green network of natural places and waterways that address stormwater issues, slows traffic in neighborhoods, and provides safe spaces for people to walk or bike
- Transcends the physical barrier created by the I-440 Beltline

- Encourages healthy living, reduces carbon emissions, and creates beautiful, green places
- Provides more reliable travel for people driving while creating more options beyond cars
- Offers housing choices to residents at all phases of life
- Begins to accomplish these goals not in a distant future but now

Process

The Midtown–St. Albans area is a growing, diverse place with a population that swells dramatically during the workday with employees and students while welcoming visitors to shopping and recreational offerings throughout the day. One significant goal of the planning process was to simply hear from everyone.

Public outreach was guided by a “confirmation group” of residents and other stakeholders, who spoke to the process from the perspective of a participant. They shaped the form and feel of events and helped to create a process that made it easy for participants to take part in and to understand the plan’s ideas and recommendations.

Accordingly, this process included:

- **Multiple opportunities to shape the vision and weigh in on the details.** This took place over four meeting phases with a total of 10 “big” in-person events.
- **Alternatives to meetings.** In-person meetings just did not work for everyone. Workers with evening shifts, busy parents, people who did not like meetings – the standard weekday evening format could serve as a barrier. Accordingly, each phase included more than one event, with at least one



meeting on a weekend. More importantly, each phase included extensive online participation.

- **Proactive outreach.** Instead of requiring people to come to the meeting, this process brought the meeting to people with multiple “pop-up” events at various locations across Midtown.
- **Inclusion.** The process included the City’s first-ever planning event conducted entirely in Spanish, and major surveys included both English and Spanish versions. At each key phase, several thousand postcards were mailed to all addresses – not just property owners – to let them know about input opportunities.



In Your Words: Midtown 2040

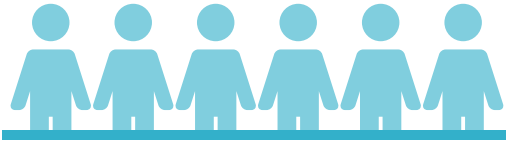
“Still livable by all income levels. With manageable traffic. And increased walking and biking opportunities.”

No plan achieves perfect consensus. Stakeholders bring not only diverse ideas but different values to the table. But common ground can be found. *This process uncovered a desire for a human-scaled Midtown–St. Albans area that works for people walking as well as driving, that blends natural systems with public places, that accommodates job and housing opportunities.* That shared vision created a foundation for specific ideas that received robust testing from the public. No recommendations moved forward without significant support – and some were archived for future consideration.

The final result is a plan for the Midtown–St. Albans area that can enjoy broad support, which is critical to implementing its recommendations.



The Planning Process by the Numbers



More than
600 participants
at the in-person events



More than
1,500 participants
in online surveys



More than
**20 Citizens Advisory
Council meetings**
with updates or in-depth
presentations



One vision
for the Midtown-
St. Albans area



In Your Words: Midtown 2040

“The kind of ‘neighborhood’ that can have the reputation for both (i) the best restaurants in walking distance, and (ii) the best trick or treating!”

Seven Big Moves

This plan is guided by a vision that is achieved by many supporting projects, all described in detail in this report and appendices. There is a lot to digest and consider. However, if residents and policymakers want the big picture, described clearly and concisely, it is here. Understand the following seven transformative projects, and one understands the plan.



Crossing the Beltline

Crossing the Beltline

The I-440 Beltline is arguably Raleigh’s most impactful single piece of infrastructure, and it helps connect people with opportunity in Midtown and elsewhere across the City. It also funnels trips into a few congested intersections and essentially acts as a moat dividing the Midtown St.-Albans in half for people walking and biking.

The Midtown–St. Albans plan envisions overcoming the barrier with two new Beltline crossings; one for cars and pedestrians, and one for people walking and biking only, providing transportation options that currently do not exist.



In Your Words: Midtown 2040

“A place where many people can find housing, groceries, access to transit, and access to jobs without needing a car.”



Green Streets



Midtown Green and Blue: Green Streets/Stormwater Infrastructure

Nature and infrastructure weave together in the plan's vision for a network of "Green Streets." These streets will perform quadruple duty:

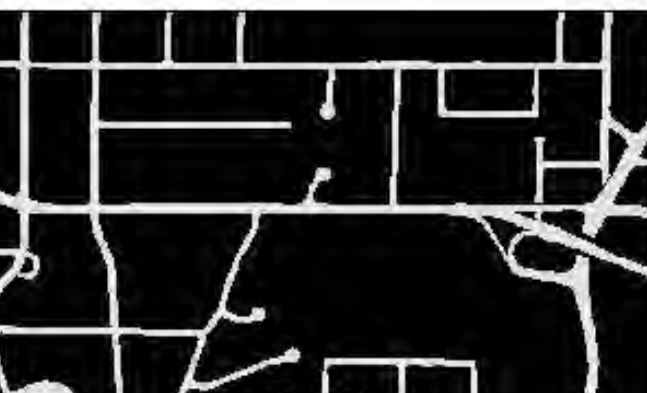
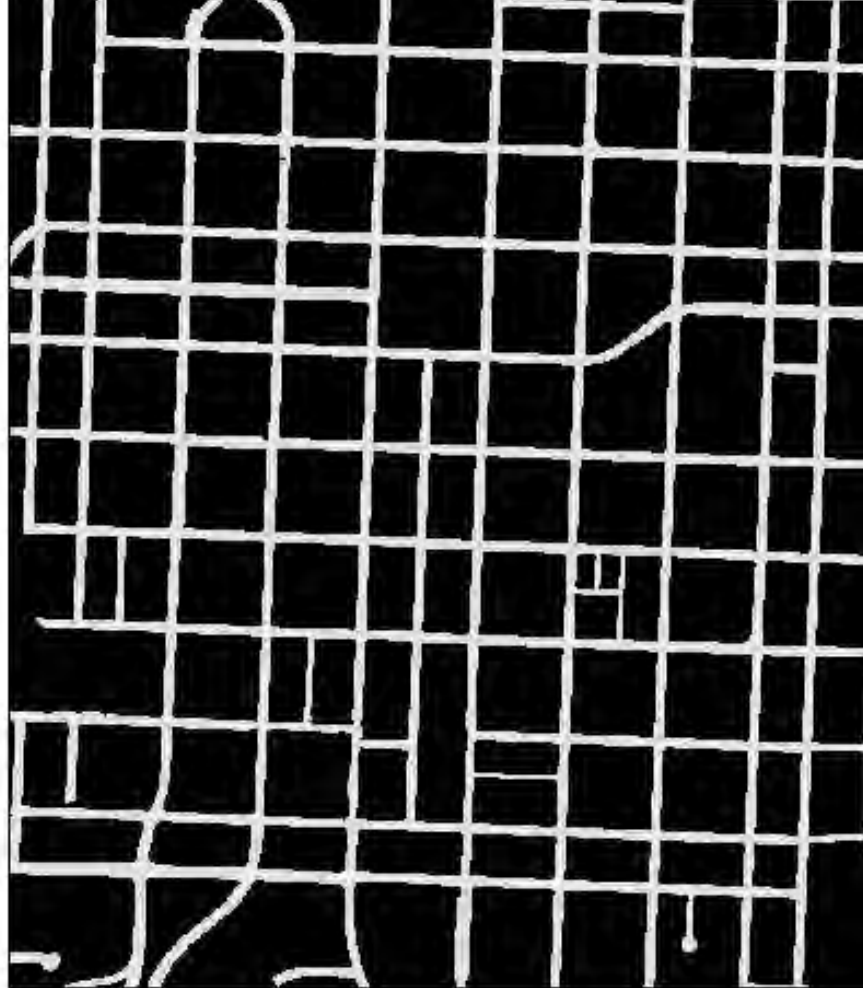
- Taming vehicle speeds on wide streets with potentially growing traffic volumes
- Providing safer, more comfortable places for people to walk or bike
- Retaining stormwater before it goes places where it can cause flooding
- Greening and beautifying area streets



In Your Words: Midtown 2040

"Walkable, inclusive, safe."





Connected Streets



Connected Streets and Travel Reliability

The goal for future Midtown transportation is not speed. It is reliability and safety. Midtown is not a place to pass through as fast as possible – it is a distinct place. Future traffic speeds will be slower than those of the past decades, but the plan’s vision is to improve travel time reliability and predictability by providing alternatives to the places where congestion is worst. A key strategy is creating, for the first time, a true street network in Midtown.

Raleigh’s older neighborhoods and commercial centers are characterized by a close-knit grid of streets. By contrast, the street network in the heart of Midtown is fragmented and connects only in a few congested and pedestrian-hostile intersections. This plan creates a friendly street grid that provides new options, whether for driving or walking.



In Your Words: Midtown 2040

“Somewhere that my children can safely navigate by bike or foot with public transportation options. urban and green with open space.”



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Serious Transit

Serious Transit

A successful transit system works when it is easy and comfortable for the rider, the vehicle arrives on time, travels to the right destinations, and operates on a schedule compatible with its riders. The future of Midtown–St. Albans transit is a network that lets riders throw away the schedule, because the next bus is always coming soon. Connections to Downtown, to N.C. State, and job and shopping centers along the Beltline are frequent and easy. And a future bus rapid transit (BRT) connection between Midtown and Downtown ties together the biggest employment centers in the City with the highest levels of bus service possible.



In Your Words: Midtown 2040

“A well-planned, pedestrian-friendly urban/residential area with great parks and great transportation (light rail, bus, bike lanes).”





The Midtown Ring

The Midtown Ring

Midtown is packed with major job centers, shopping and dining options, educational facilities, and natural places. But for many people who would like to walk or bike, they are out of reach. The Beltline and wide, busy roads such as Wake Forest Road and Six Forks Road divide a large section of the City into small disconnected islands.

This plan imagines a safe, comfortable facility that guarantees safe passage for people walking or biking. That is the Midtown Ring – a complete loop of greenways, green streets, separated bike lanes and paths that connects every major destination in the area with each other and the residential neighborhoods nearby.





Midtown Waterfront District



The Midtown Waterfront District



The historical decision to locate North Carolina’s capital on a backwoods farm instead of the bustling Town of Fayetteville means Raleigh has long been a city without a waterfront.

However, a perfect opportunity exists along the banks of the Crabtree – a waterway larger than many of the state’s rivers – to change that fact.

The Midtown Waterfront District is a place where urban life and activity will take occur along the water’s edge, a place that serves as a destination for Midtown residents and beyond. New crossings of the Crabtree, a restored and opened-up waterway, and a storm-resistant and runoff-absorbing park will combine with housing and retail to create a place unlike any other in the City.



In Your Words: Midtown 2040

“A direct connection to downtown Raleigh but also an area with its own identity and offerings.”



An aerial photograph of a city skyline. In the foreground, there are several modern buildings, including a large glass-fronted one. A red crane is visible on a construction site. A multi-lane highway runs through the middle of the image. The background shows a dense forest and a body of water under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

Midtown Living/ Midtown Works

Midtown Living/Midtown Works

Raleigh continues to be a city of opportunity – a place that provides both existing residents and newcomers the chance to make a living and to live in a welcoming, diverse city. As a growing hub of employment, Midtown has played an important role in providing jobs and housing opportunities. This plan includes attention to ensuring new mixed-use development respects the scale of older residential neighborhoods. But it also finds targeted new locations where additional office and housing space can add opportunity in a location where future transit service, walkability, and other infrastructure means a lower carbon impact than in farther-flung areas of the region.





