

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

CAMPUS MASTER PLAN

Centennial Plan 2027

October 2023

designLAB

 **Gerald D. Hines College
of Architecture and Design**
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Figure 1. Roy G. Cullen Memorial Hall, Science Building, Lamar Q. Cato, 1939

01

University of Houston in 2023

University of Houston is the oldest and largest component of the four-component University of Houston System. In 1927, the Houston Independent School District established Houston Junior College to provide workforce skills and post-secondary education to the sons and daughters of Houston's working families. After a period in interim quarters at a local church and then at San Jacinto High School, the university moved to its permanent campus in 1939 with the opening of two new academic buildings, Roy Gustav Cullen Memorial Hall and the Science Building. The original 110 acres that comprised the early campus had been assembled from gifts of two civic leaders, Ben Taub (75 acres) and the Settegest Family (35 acres). Together these original gifts form the historic core of the University of Houston campus today.

In just over 95 years, University of Houston has grown to become a comprehensive research university recognized with Carnegie Tier One designation and a stated commitment to undergraduate, graduate and professional education. Today the campus encompasses 576-acres along Cullen Boulevard and Martin Luther King Boulevard. In addition, the university operates instructional sites at Sugar Land (272 acres) and Katy (46 acres), as well as facilities in the Texas Medical Center and at the UH Coastal Center (939 acres) at the former Camp Wallace near Hitchcock.

As the university approaches its centennial in 2027, it strives to be a destination where people are drawn to study, work, live and play. An enhanced campus environment strengthens the university's primary strategic initiatives toward student success, research, athletics, arts and energy. The campus itself can become a catalyst for innovation in a vibrant, collaborative community. More than just the university's location, Houston is inextricably linked to its eponymous university. Houston serves as the home of more than 136,000 of the 316,000 UH alumni and the city benefits from more than \$6.4 billion in annual economic impact from the university.

The mission of the University of Houston is to offer nationally competitive and internationally recognized opportunities for learning, discovery and engagement to a diverse population of students in a real-world setting. The vision of its current strategic plan is to build a top 50 public university. To realize this vision, the University has established five goals: student success, nationally competitive research, social responsibility, nationally relevant athletics and competitive funding. The five goals of the strategic plan inform the Centennial Master Plan.

To become a top 50 public university, University of Houston requires a campus environment that supports and embodies this ambition. The Centennial Plan defines five master planning goals toward becoming a top tier campus.



Figure 2. University of Houston Building, at San Jacinto High School, 1935



Figure 3. Reflecting Pool under Construction, Hare & Hare, 1938



Figure 4. Reflecting Pool and Science Building, Lamar Q. Cato, 1939



Figure 5. Cullen Family Plaza Fountain, Cornell, Bridgers and Troller / Fred Buxton, 1970

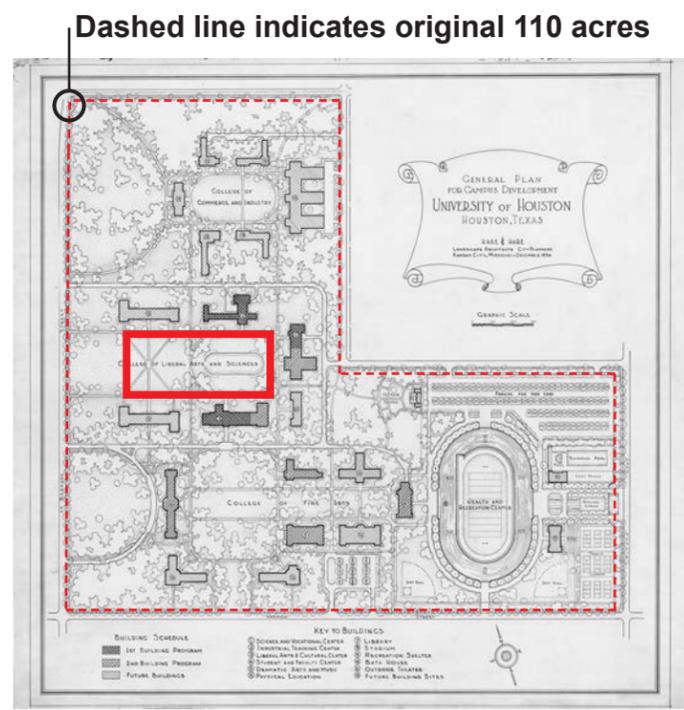


Figure 6. The General Plan for Campus Development, Hare & Hare, 1936-37

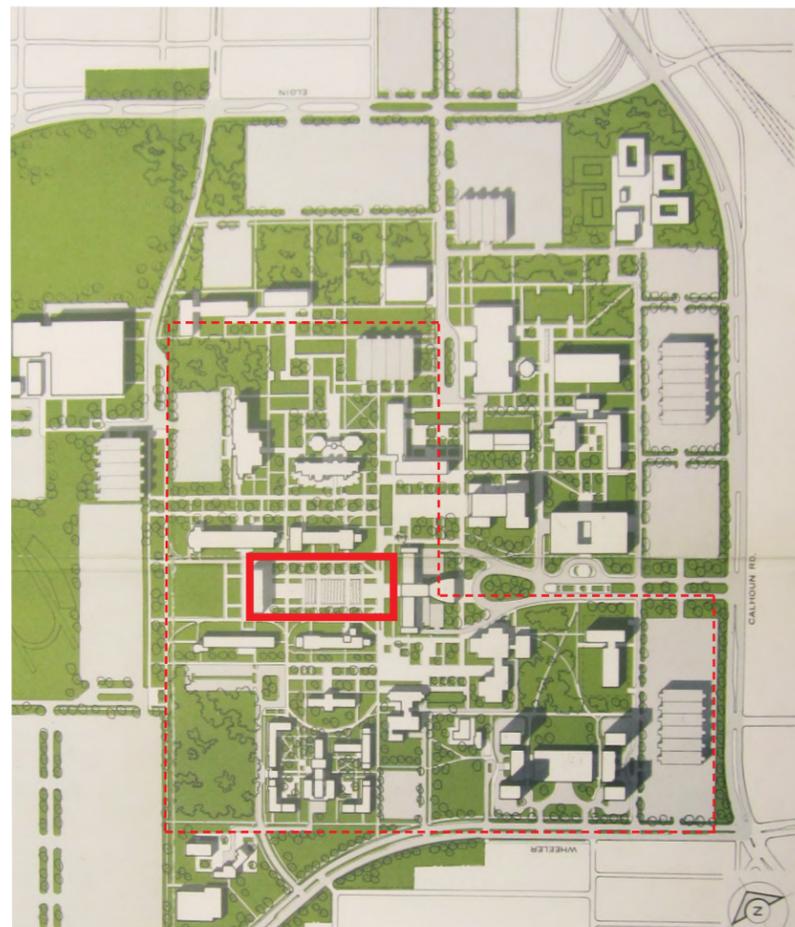


Figure 7. Comprehensive Campus Plan, CRS, 1966

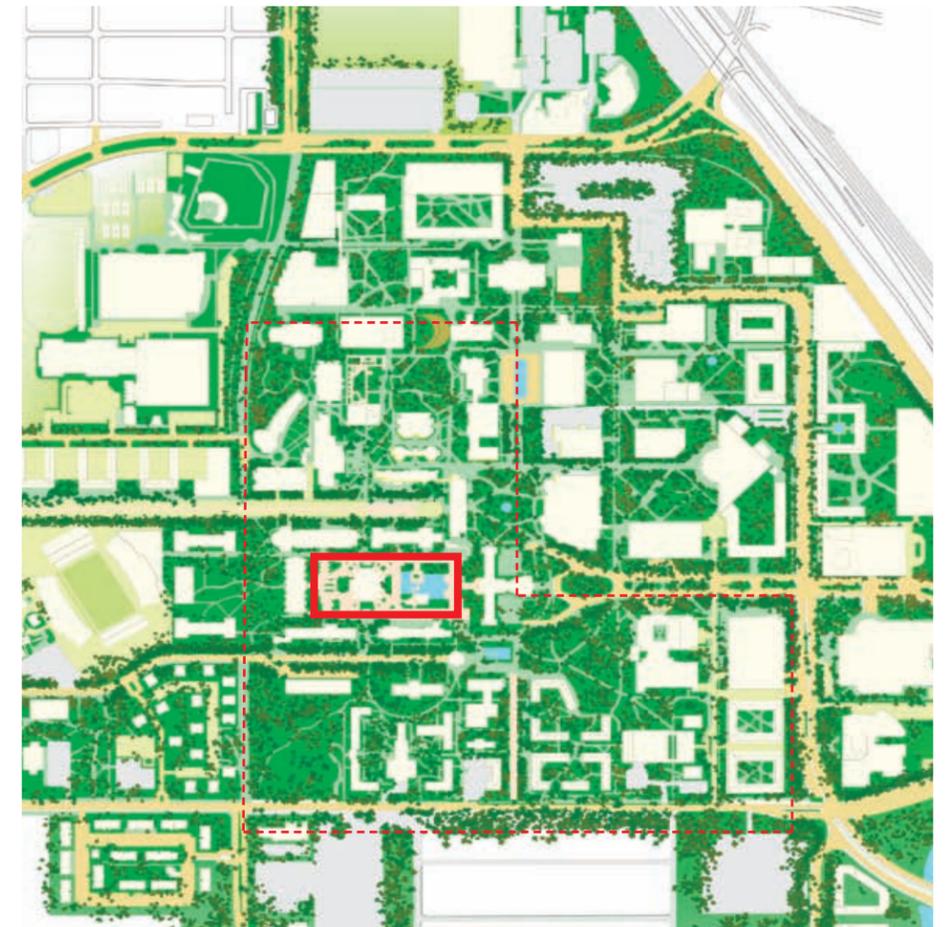


Figure 8. The Framework Plan, open space, Cooper, Robertson & Partners, Inc., 2006

02

A Tradition of Master Planning

The origin of the existing character of the University of Houston campus lies within the 1936-37 *General Plan for Campus Development* by the esteemed landscape architects Hare & Hare of Kansas City, Missouri. Influenced by Fredrich Law Olmsted, Hare & Hare promoted the defining principles of the City Beautiful movement throughout the United States. In Houston, the firm left a rich legacy in the plans of many of the city's most endearing outdoor environments, including Hermann Park, the Houston Zoological Gardens, the Museum of Fine Arts, City Hall Plaza, Memorial Park and Texas Southern University, in addition to University of Houston.

Within an "L"-shaped property configuration of the original 110-acre gifts, the General Plan and an accompanying aerial rendering titled *The University of Houston, A Prospectus* set out the key features of the plan. Buildings framed quadrangles, axes ordered the placement of buildings, trees shaded new paths to enhance the pedestrian experience, quadrangles defined like-use districts and the overall plan protected existing native tree groves. Further, the *Prospectus* provided direction for future buildings by establishing a vocabulary of simple linear massing, limestone surfaces with minimal ornamentation and red-tile hipped roofs.

From the beginning, there was an evident commitment to establishing intentional green spaces. The original Reflecting Pool, the construction of which began in advance of the first building, anchored the 1937 plan and provided a model going forward for constructing planned, well-defined outdoor places. Over time the Reflecting Pool was replaced by the Cullen Family Plaza Fountain, but the framed open space and its central water element continue to serve as the ceremonial heart of the university campus.



Figure 9. The University of Houston: A Prospectus, Hare & Hare, 1936-37

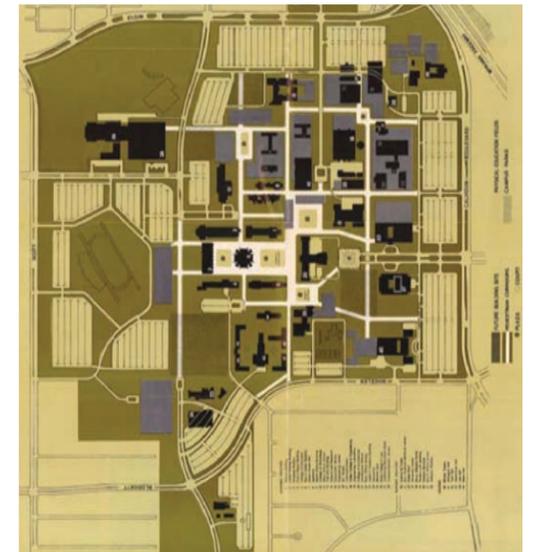


Figure 10. Plan for the Seventies, UH FPC, 1970

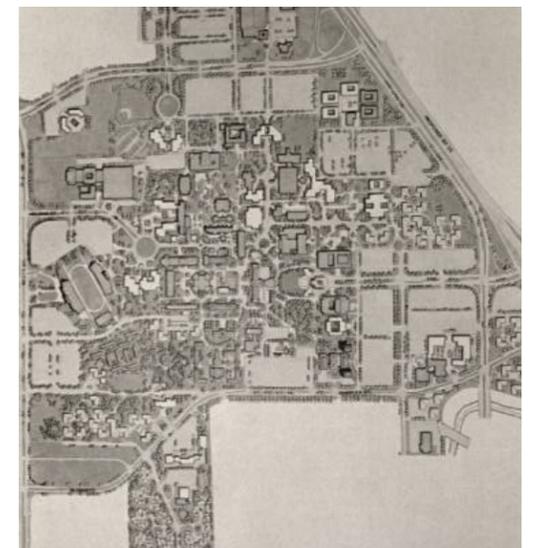
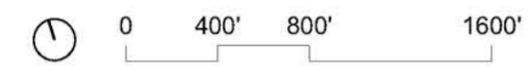


Figure 11. UH Campus Plan, 3D/International, 1982



- Purple
RESIDENTIAL
- Green
TECHNOLOGY BRIDGE
- Red
ATHLETICS
- Teal
ARTS
- Blue
PROFESSIONAL
- Tan
CULLEN NORTH
- Magenta
HEALTH
- Yellow
CENTRAL

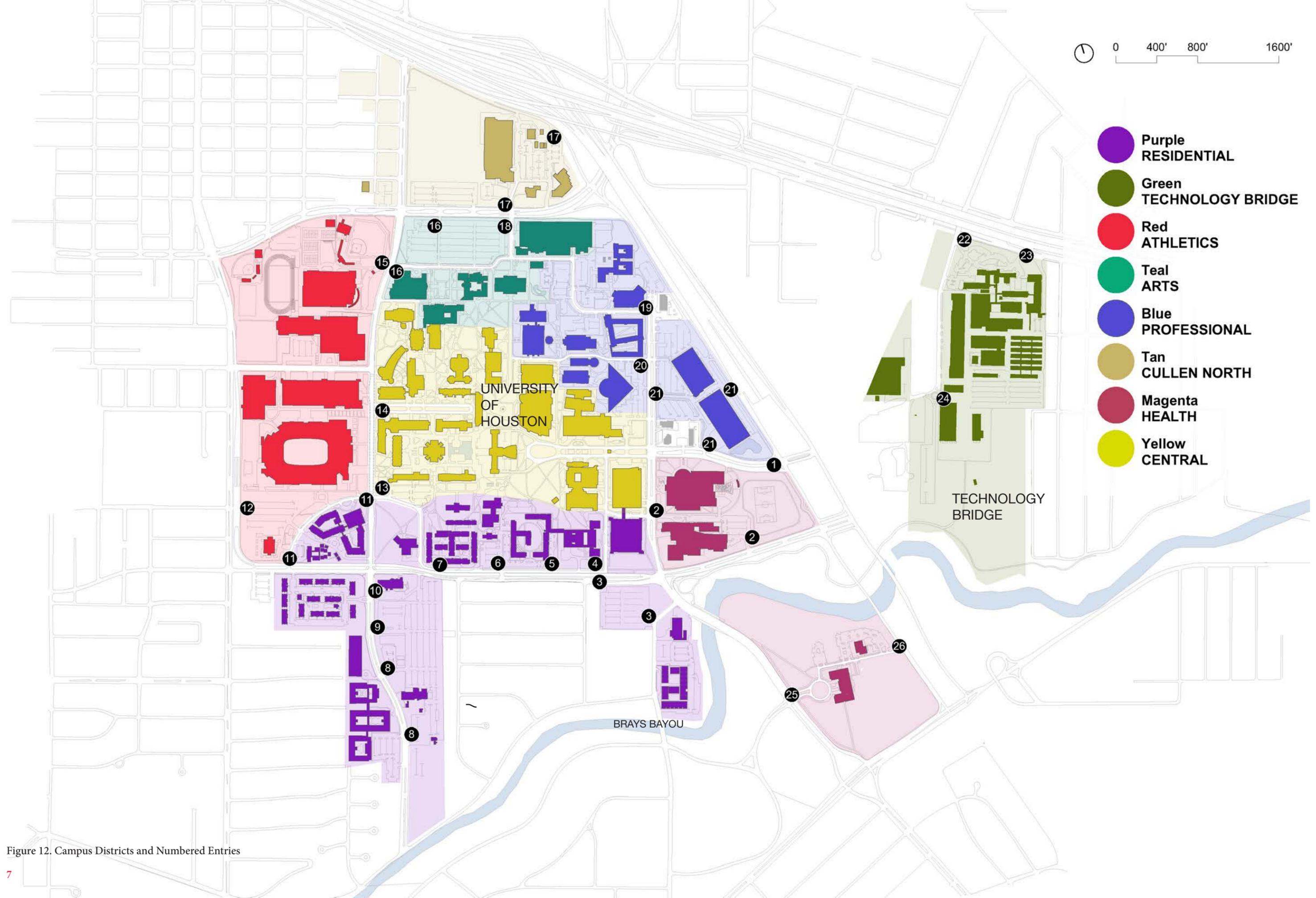


Figure 12. Campus Districts and Numbered Entries

From its origin, the campus's proximity to Brays Bayou has shaped its development. Recent development of the Bayou Greenways initiative by the Houston Parks Board has significantly expanded the value of this bayou location, making amenities available to the University of Houston community through trail linkages to the larger Houston region. With the university's purchases of the former Schlumberger Drilling Services facility as the UH Technology Bridge (74 acres) and the MacGregor Tract as the site of the Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine (43 acres), the wooded landscape fronting the bayou and its multi-use trails provide the opportunity to knit three disparate campus parcels together into one integrated campus.

A common perception of the University of Houston campus today is that its most attractive areas derive their character not from the individual buildings, but from the trees that offer cooling shade and an organic foil to street and parking lot pavement. While much of Houston has become more forested over the last ninety years, the UH campus has become less so in that time. Five, distinct urban forest fragments are noteworthy and require deliberate protection as open spaces and remnants of the original coastal forest. These five urban forest fragments, along with the Brays Bayou woodlands and tree planting for streetscapes, pathways and the campus greenbelt, make up the catalysts to reforest the campus. From this reforestation, the university will realize tangible benefits including an enhanced, shaded pedestrian environment, a reduction in the heat island effect, massive rainwater absorption for flood mitigation and effective carbon sequestration over time.



Figure 13. Canopy in 110 Acres, 1944

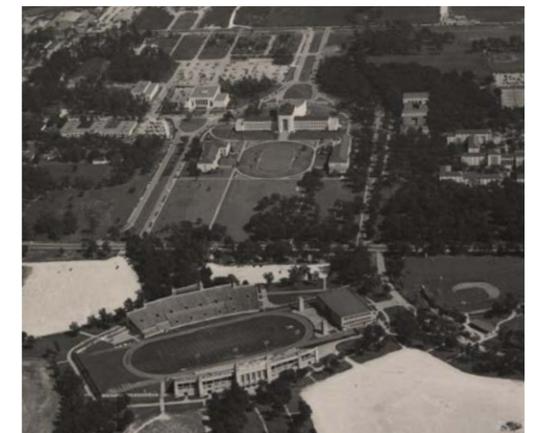


Figure 14. Academic Quadrangle, 1950

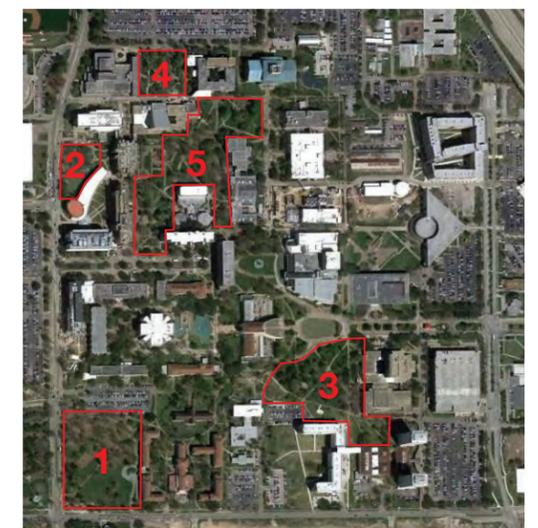


Figure 15. Five Urban Forest Fragments, SWA Group, 2011



Figure 16. 2027 Centennial Plan Axonometric

03

The Goals of the Centennial Master Plan

The places we create today will become new landmarks that establish the University of Houston campus as the memorable experience it was always intended to be. The Centennial Master Plan has five goals:

- 1 Create a Strong First Impression
- 2 Celebrate the Heart and Life of the University
- 3 Build a Walkable, Welcoming, Memorable Campus
- 4 Connect People, Places and Disciplines
- 5 Design a Sustainable, Resilient Campus

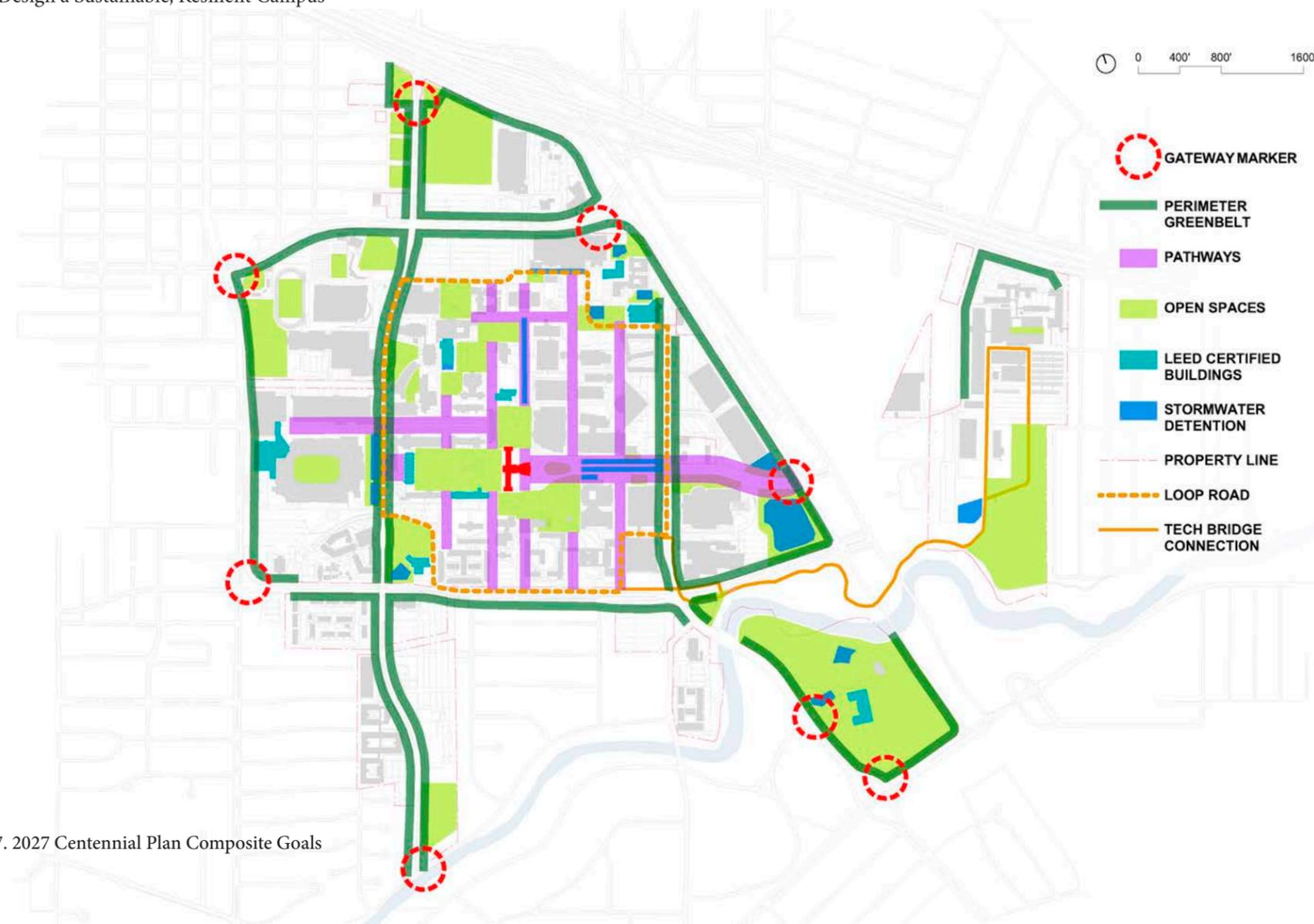


Figure 17. 2027 Centennial Plan Composite Goals



Figure 18. The new gateway at the medical school campus is both a marker and a threshold.

Goal 1 Create a Strong First Impression

Creating a strong first impression is a key advantage in recruiting top students and faculty. First impressions also can communicate to the Houston community the values held by the institution.

The master plan achieves a strong first impression by defining the campus boundary with a consistent perimeter greenbelt of live oak trees and by marking the main entries with gateway monuments at that boundary. Gateway monuments will establish a hierarchy of primary entrances among the more than twenty numbered access points throughout the campus. This dual design strategy of live oaks and entry monuments seeks to signal arrival on campus, a special challenge for urban universities where city and campus intermingle.



Figure 19. 2027 Centennial Plan Goal 1



Figure 20. Split Obelisk, SWA Group



Figure 21. Live Oak Greenbelt



Figure 22. University Drive Concept: First impressions count. New trees and walkways create a pedestrian-friendly entrance to campus.

Goal 2 Celebrate the Heart and Life of the University

One can walk from the University Gateway Garage on the east to TDECU Stadium on the west and experience on one path an entire cross-section of campus life: student recreation, student center, theater, university leadership, library, classes, scientific research, Big 12 athletics. This master plan goal seeks to enhance the central narrative of the university in three ways: by transforming University Drive into a “pedestrian-first” environment; by returning the original quad to its historical importance and as a place for new campus traditions; and by reimagining the adjacent University Park as a new public space for gathering, food and transit.



Figure 23. 2027 Centennial Plan Goal 2



Figure 24. University Drive Concept: A shaded central walkway transforms the student experience in the heart of campus.



Figure 25. University Drive Concept: The 9-11 Memorial anchors an "outdoor room" along the transformed University Drive.



Figure 26. Centennial Plaza Concept: A graduation ceremony fills the original quad, with Cullen Family Plaza and the Ezekiel Cullen Building as a backdrop.



Figure 27. Centennial Plaza Concept: An elevated outdoor room overlooks the central plaza and fountain with the iconic Ezekiel Cullen Building in the distance.



Figure 28. University Park Concept: A new student plaza becomes a welcoming front yard for P. G. Hoffman Hall and connects to a central transit hub at Entrance 14.



Figure 29. University Park Concept: The new student plaza leads to the breezeway at P. G. Hoffman Hall.



Figure 30. *Double Psychromie*, Carlos Cruz-Diez, 2009 (resited 2018), Public Art of the University of Houston System

Goal 3 **Build a Walkable, Welcoming, Memorable Campus**

Intentional and interconnected pathways celebrate the journeys that students, faculty and staff take each day. Enhanced with consistent lighting, generous shade trees, standard benches and wide walking surfaces, these paths allow one to reach any point from the center of campus in 10 minutes.

The master plan envisions a network of north-south and east-west paths that provide easy access from parking and transit to most destinations on campus. These pedestrian paths include Arts Walk, which connects the College of Architecture and Design at the north to Butler Plaza at the south, and Scholars Walk, which begins at University Drive at the Student Center and extends north to the planned location of a future STEM building. The largest paths also serve as fire lanes.

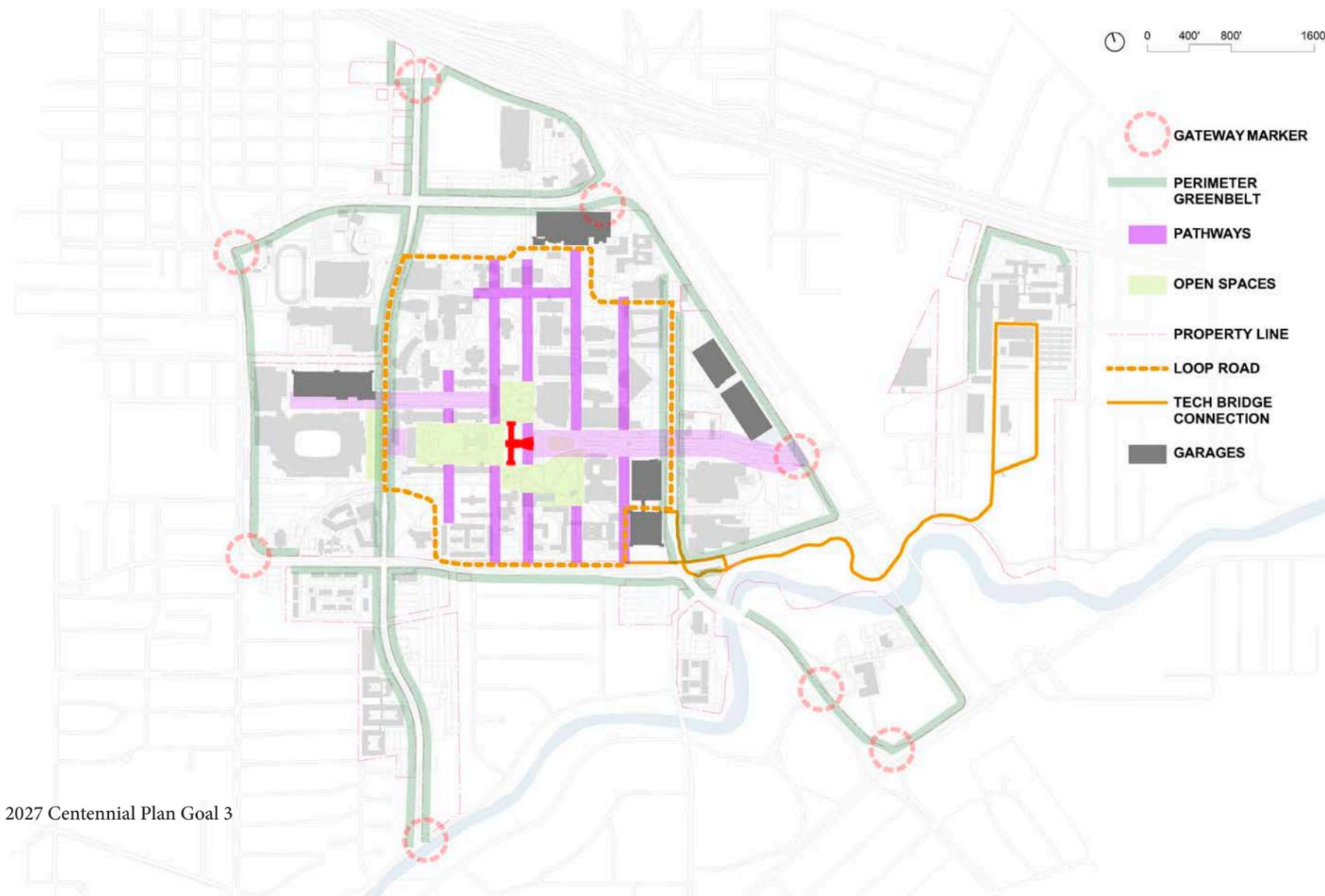


Figure 31. 2027 Centennial Plan Goal 3



Figure 32. Loop Road Streetscape

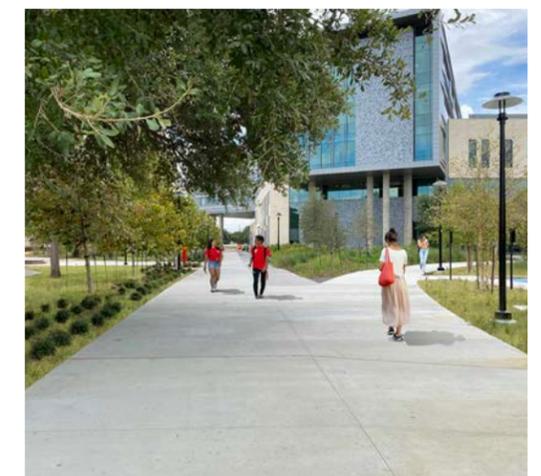


Figure 33. O'Quinn Law Building Firelane Streetscape



Figure 34. Arts Walk Concept: The new Arts Walk converts a former street into a vibrant pedestrian walkway connecting Butler Plaza, M. D. Anderson Library and the Arts District.



Figure 35. Arts Walk Concept: A place to see and be seen, the Arts Walk provides shaded paths and gathering spaces along the way.



Figure 36. Scholars Walk Concept: Scholars Walk begins at University Drive and ends at a new STEM building in the distance.



Figure 37. Scholars Walk Concept: The new walk provides a variety of informal gathering spaces along the path to a new STEM building.



Figure 38. Wilhelmina's Grove Concept: A reforested park provides shaded spaces for gathering and a dedicated home for temporary Public Art installations.

Goal 4 **Connect People, Places and Disciplines**

The network of pedestrian paths links small parks and open spaces in a green campus necklace. Pedestrian paths feature small gathering spaces along the way—outdoor rooms for Public Art, food, conversation or study. Wilhelmina’s Grove anchors the Arts District and brings the disciplines of music, theater, dance, art and communication together in a communal space. A proposed new park in the Professional District connects multiple disciplines—law, engineering, public affairs and architecture—and provides a strong identity and shared address for all.



Figure 39. 2027 Centennial Plan Goal 4



Figure 40. Wilhelmina's Grove Concept: A small amphitheater and water feature invites an informal student theater practice.



Figure 41. Wilhemina's Grove Concept: The central exhibit and performance space emerges through the grove of trees.



Figure 42. Inspiration Commons Concept: A new campus park replaces parking lots and creates a great address for the new John M. O'Quinn Law Building and future STEM building.



Figure 43. Inspiration Commons Concept: Students study and socialize in the shade of a new park with a view of the new John M. O'Quinn Law Building in the distance.



Figure 44. Stormwater detention is an open space amenity at the John M. O'Quinn Law Building, LEED Silver, Shepley Bulfinch.

Goal 5 **Design a Sustainable, Resilient Campus**

This master plan goal underpins the first four goals. Shifting parking to the perimeter promotes walkability and pedestrian safety and reduces adverse vehicle impacts on the campus experience. By restoring the campus woodlands, the resulting greening of the campus promotes stormwater absorption, reduction of the heat island effect and carbon sequestration. Designing new buildings and major renovations to achieve LEED Silver or better ratings contributes to the overall healthiness of the indoor and outdoor campus environment and the wellness of campus users. LEED-certified buildings teach responsible practices of energy and material conservation while integrating with memorable and pleasant surroundings.

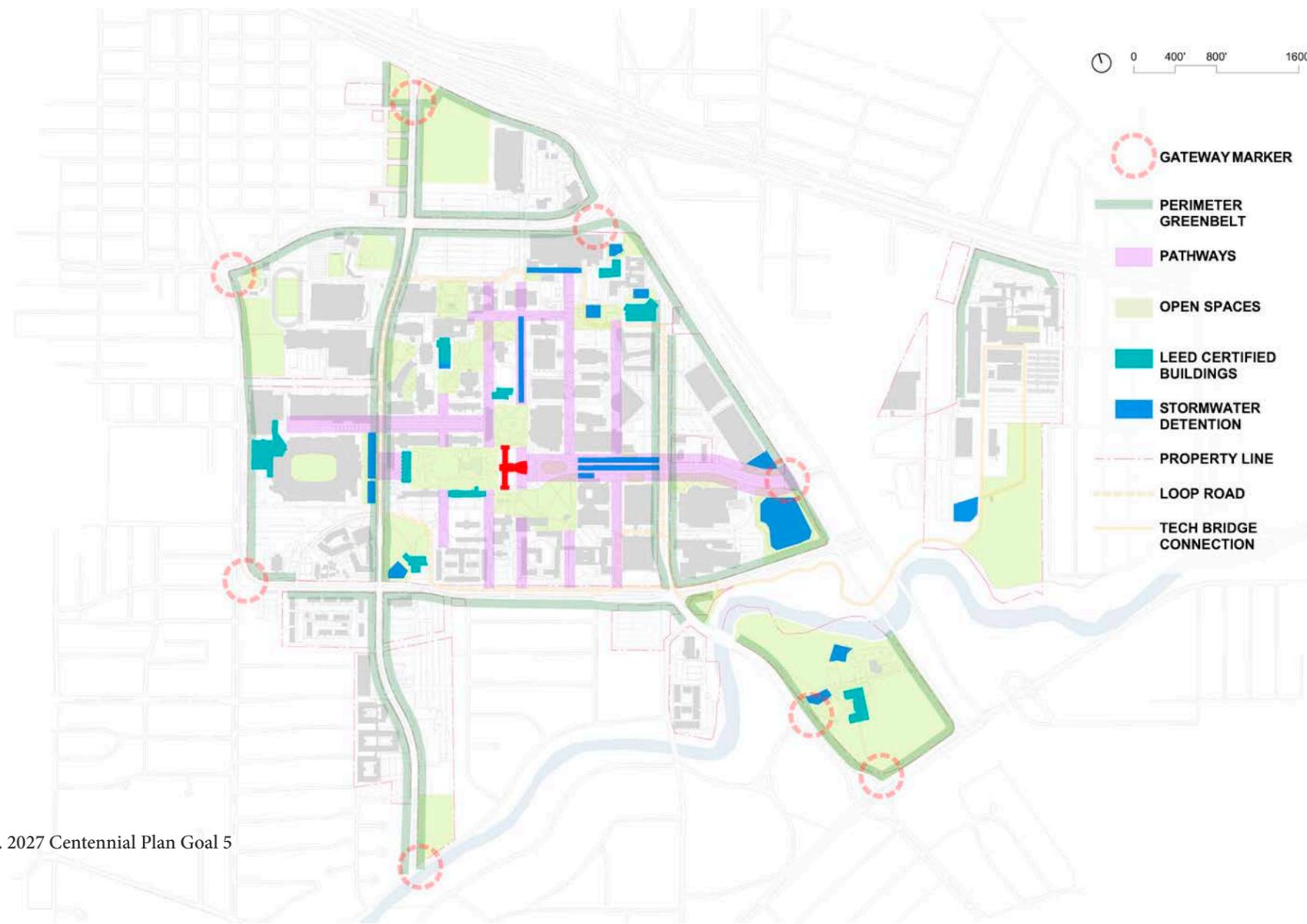


Figure 45. 2027 Centennial Plan Goal 5



Figure 46. Existing Campus Woodlands, 2014

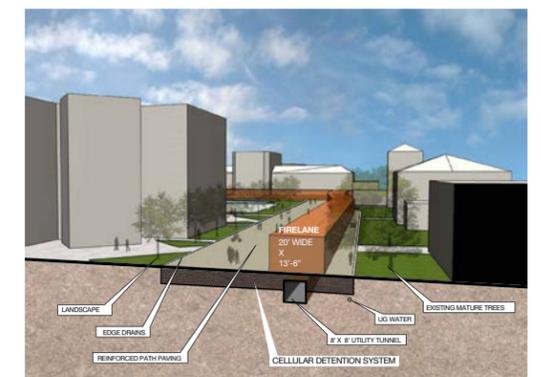


Figure 47. Detention Below Paths, 2014



Figure 48. The new Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine achieved LEED Gold, Page/.



Figure 49. Plan for Campus Woodlands Reforestation

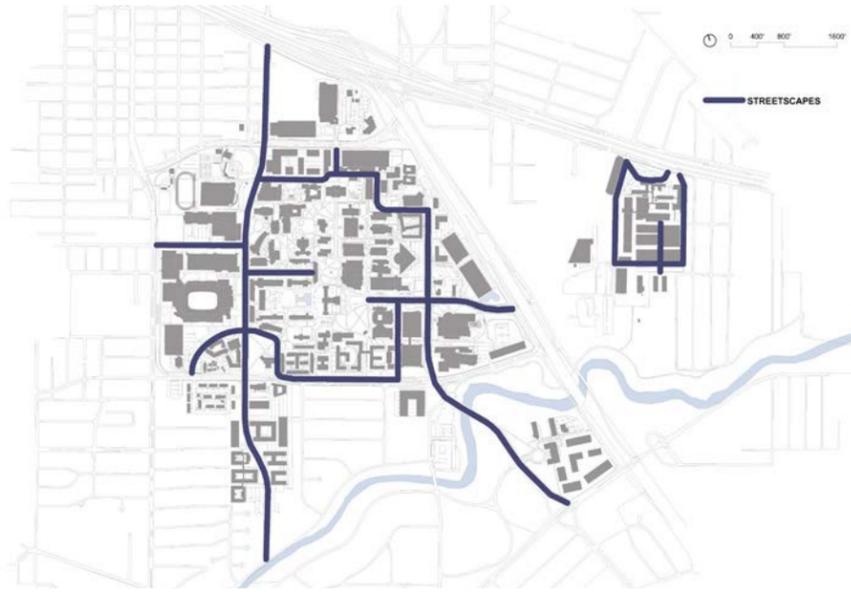
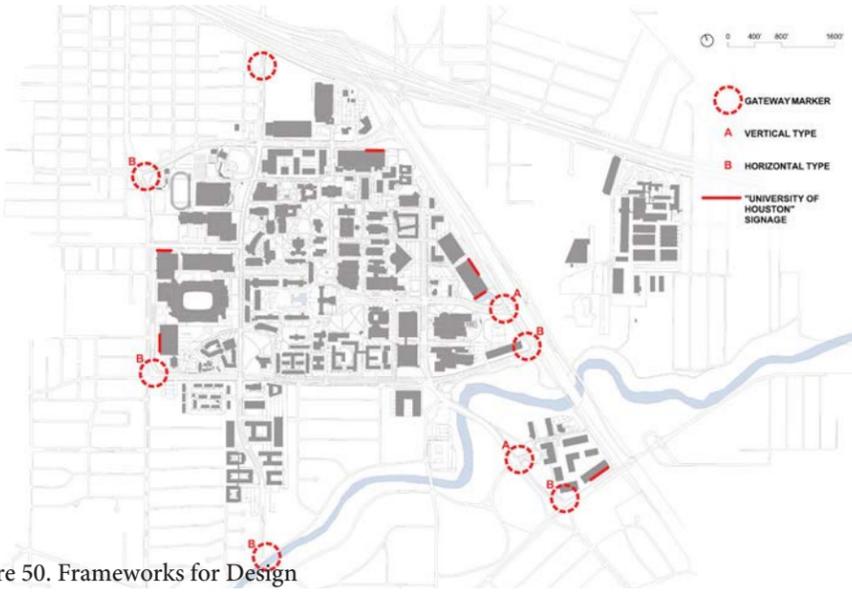
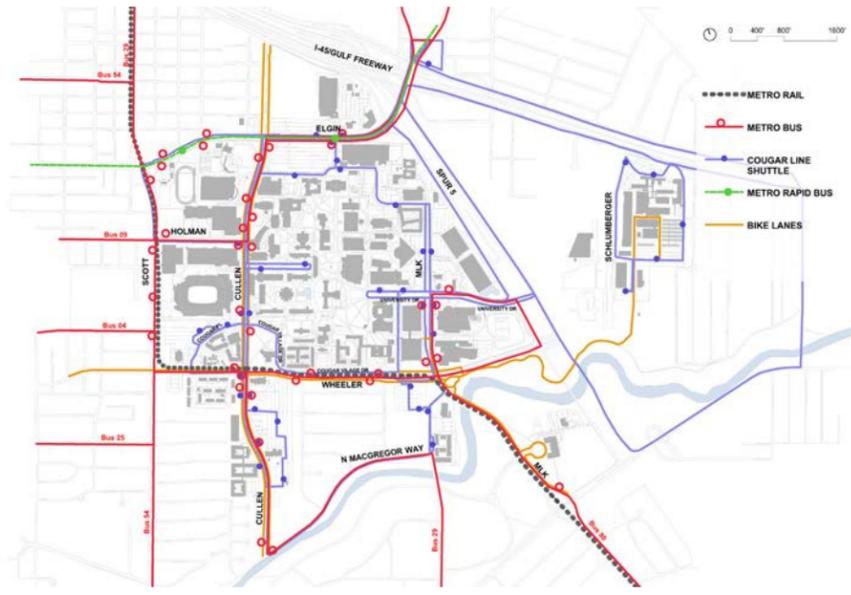
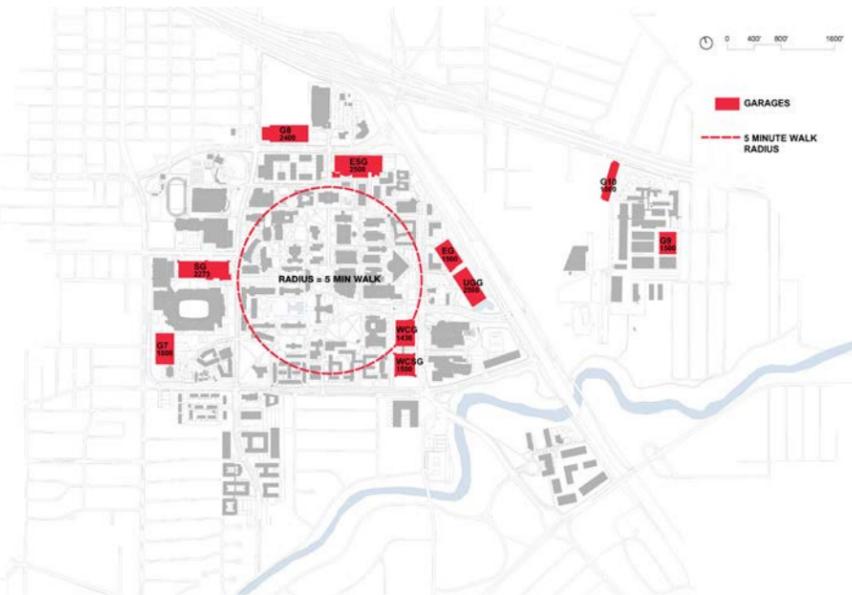
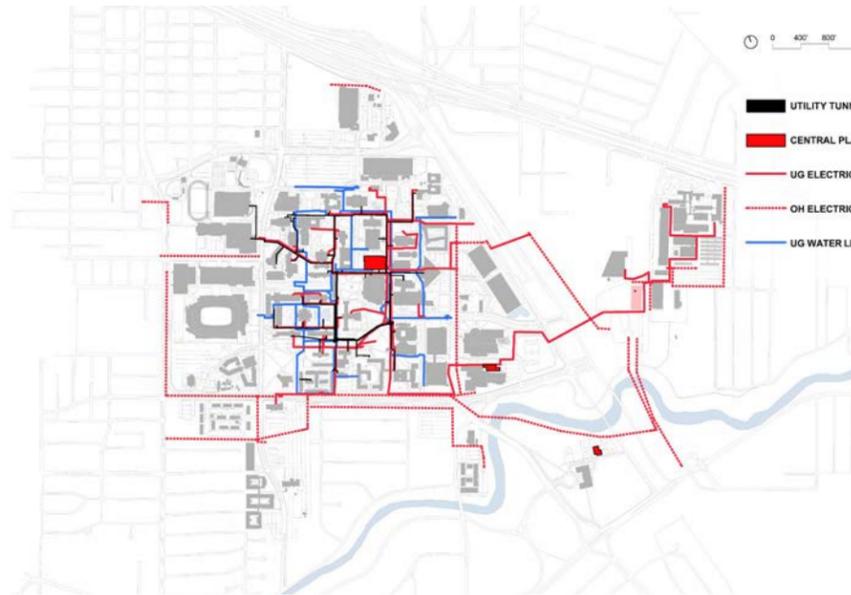
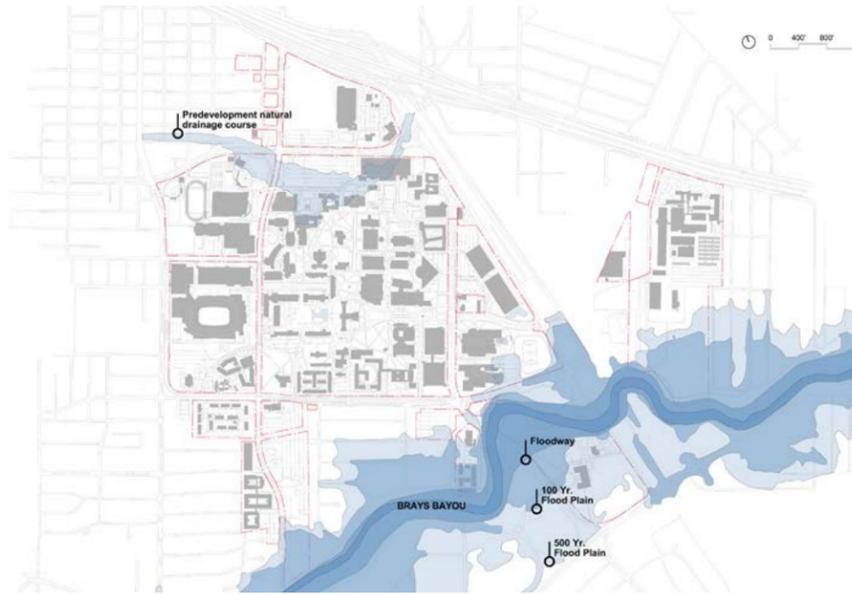


Figure 50. Frameworks for Design

04

Frameworks for Design

The university campus can be understood as a series of frameworks, both existing and aspirational. The locations of existing trees, buildings, utilities, natural systems and other infrastructure become valuable tools for determining future building sites, new open spaces and pedestrian paths.

Growth of the Campus

In 1938, the 110-acre campus was bounded by city streets on the east (formerly Calhoun, now Martin Luther King Boulevard); west (formerly St. Bernard, now Cullen Boulevard); and south (Wheeler Avenue). On the north were open woodlands.

By 1946, the university had acquired these wooded parcels to the north, which became sites of hastily relocated industrial sheds, trailers, and cottages to meet the burgeoning demand of returning veterans. By 1958, the campus had more than doubled to 250 acres. The campus has continued to grow through acquisitions and gifts to reach its current size of approximately 600 acres.

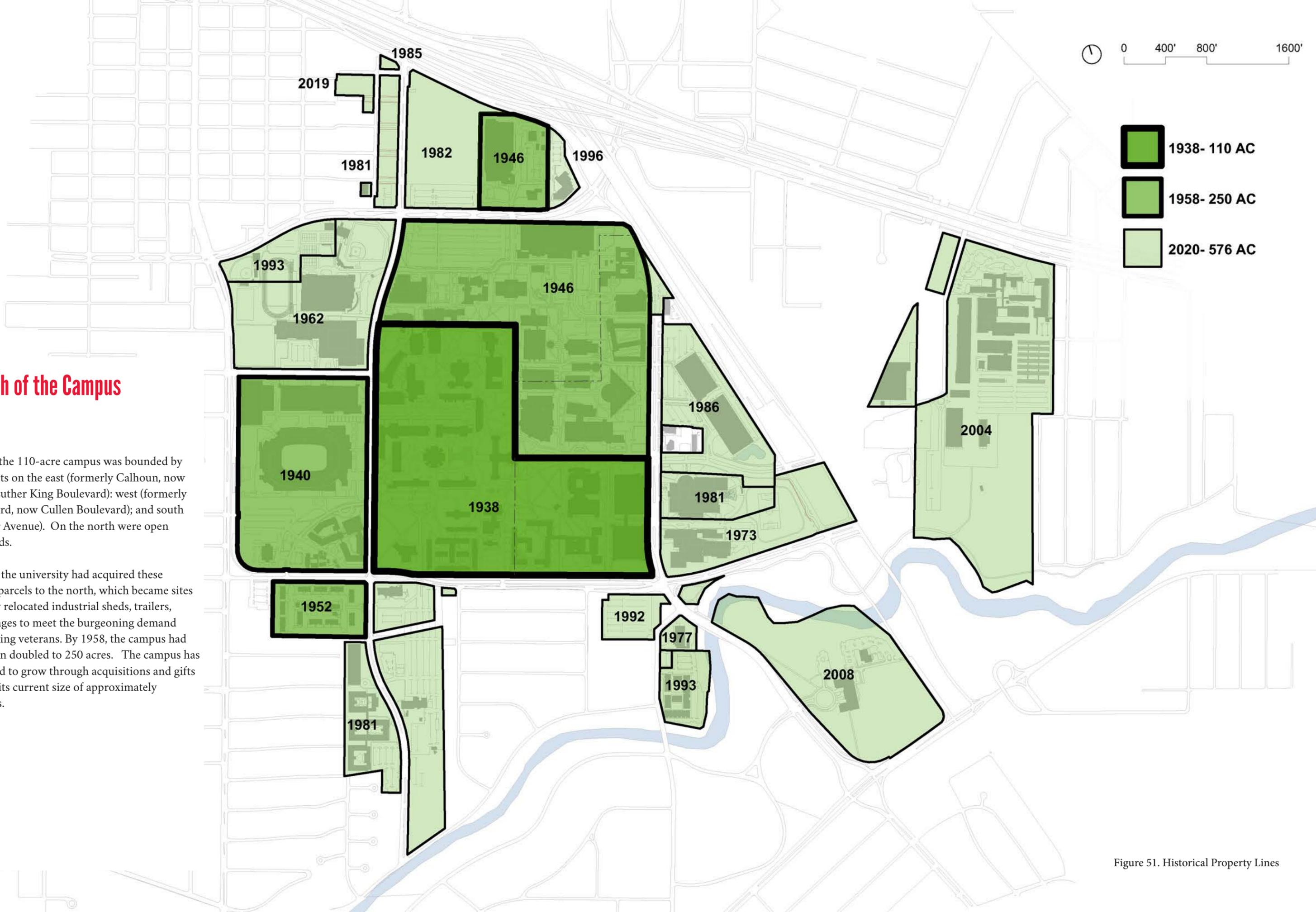


Figure 51. Historical Property Lines

Water

The university's location along Brays Bayou is an asset and a challenge. Much of the university's stormwater infrastructure dates from the middle of the twentieth century.

The primary drainage asset, a 10'x 15' box culvert, collects stormwater from City of Houston storm sewers on Cullen Boulevard and passes through the center of campus and under University Drive before emptying into Brays Bayou.

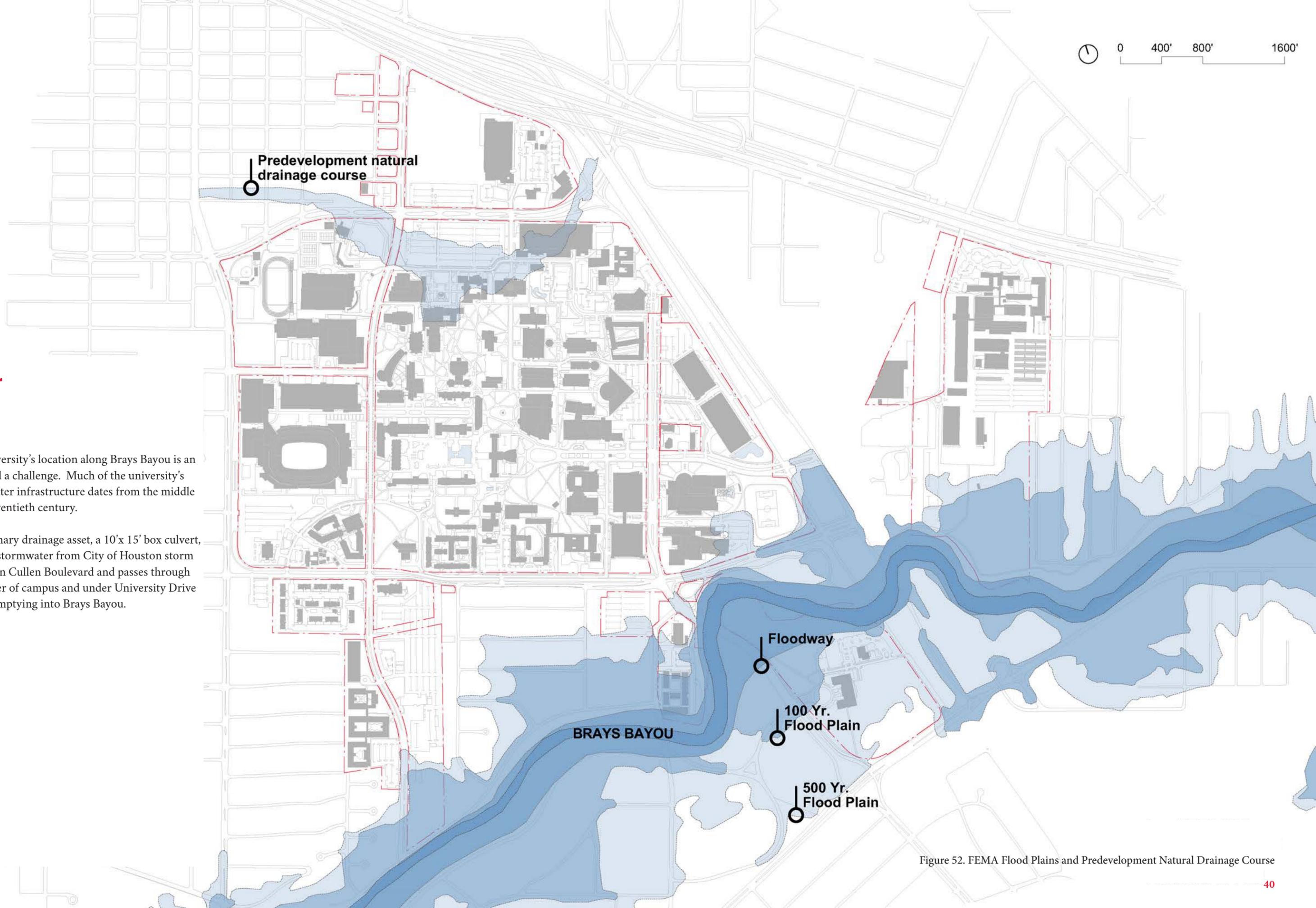
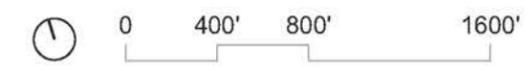


Figure 52. FEMA Flood Plains and Predevelopment Natural Drainage Course

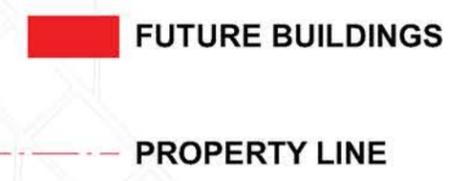
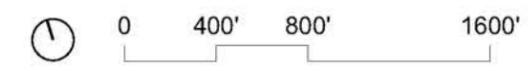


Buildings Today

The original Campus Plan by Hare & Hare positioned buildings so that their edges defined outdoor spaces or quadrangles. Following the CRS Plan of 1966, buildings came to be designed as objects in a continuous spatial field, sometimes creating interior courtyards or courtyards between adjacent buildings.



Figure 53. Buildings Today



Building Sites

The Centennial Master Plan seeks to place and design buildings to form a campus fabric that features outdoor spaces intentionally shaped by building faces. Relatively few open sites remain for buildings, as surface parking lots have been replaced by buildings and garages.

Campus density may continue to increase by replacing lower, less productive buildings with taller, higher-performing structures. With the exception of the legacy buildings at the heart of campus, the fabric of the campus is shifting from two- and three-story buildings to four- and five-story buildings, with even taller buildings in the Residential and Health Districts.

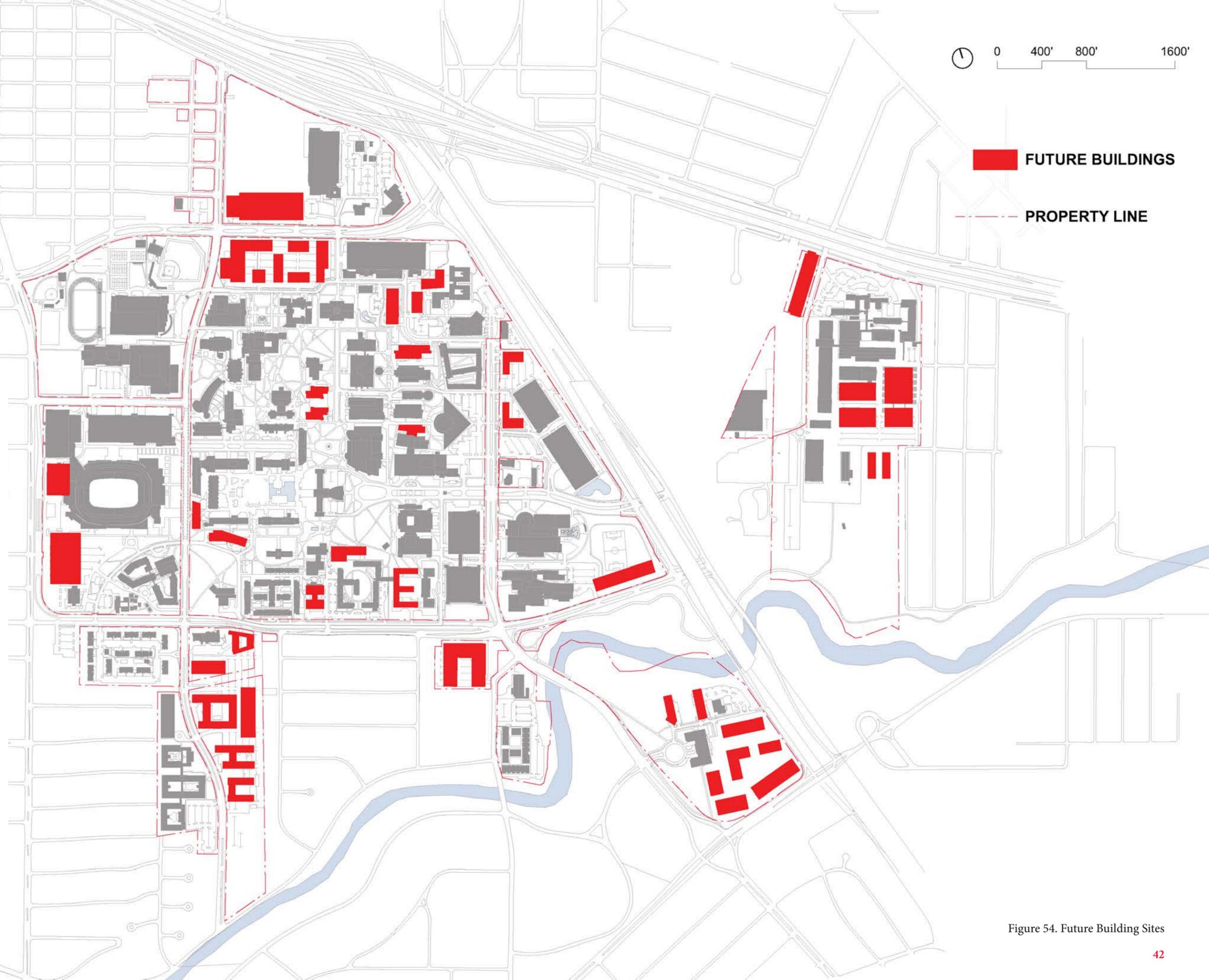


Figure 54. Future Building Sites

PERIMETER GREENBELT

Campus Greenbelt

The master plan envisions a perimeter greenbelt of live oaks to establish a consistent first impression and signal arrival at the university.

The greenbelt contributes to reforestation of the campus and thereby to overall beautification, enhanced, pedestrian-friendly paths, reduced heat island effects, increased storm water capture and carbon sequestration.

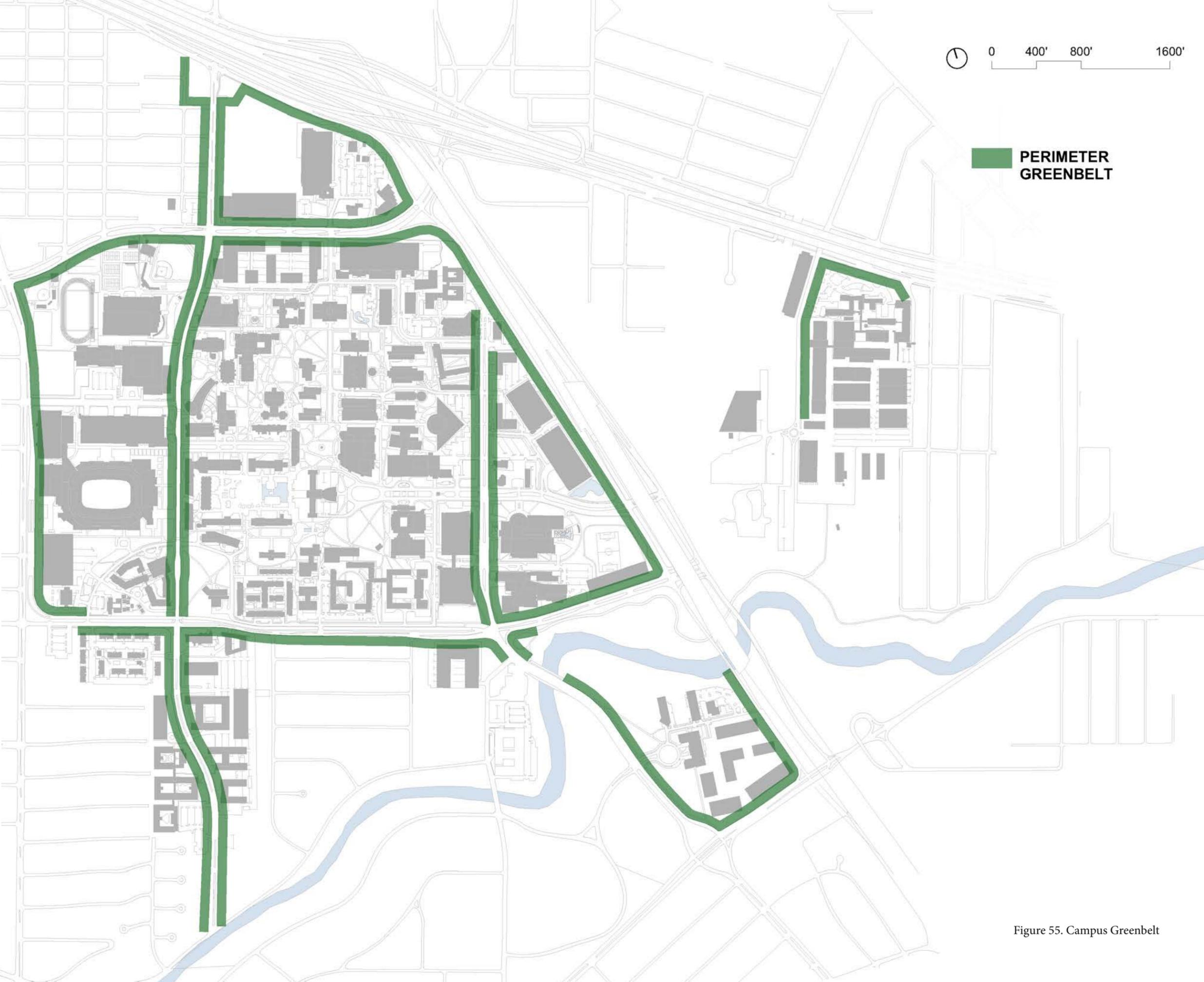
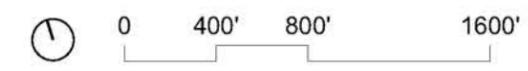


Figure 55. Campus Greenbelt



-  GATEWAY MARKER
- A** VERTICAL TYPE
- B** HORIZONTAL TYPE
-  "UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON" SIGNAGE

Gateways

As the university has grown so has the number of entrances to campus. To mark arrival on campus at the most important entrances, the master plan calls for gateway monuments at eight locations.

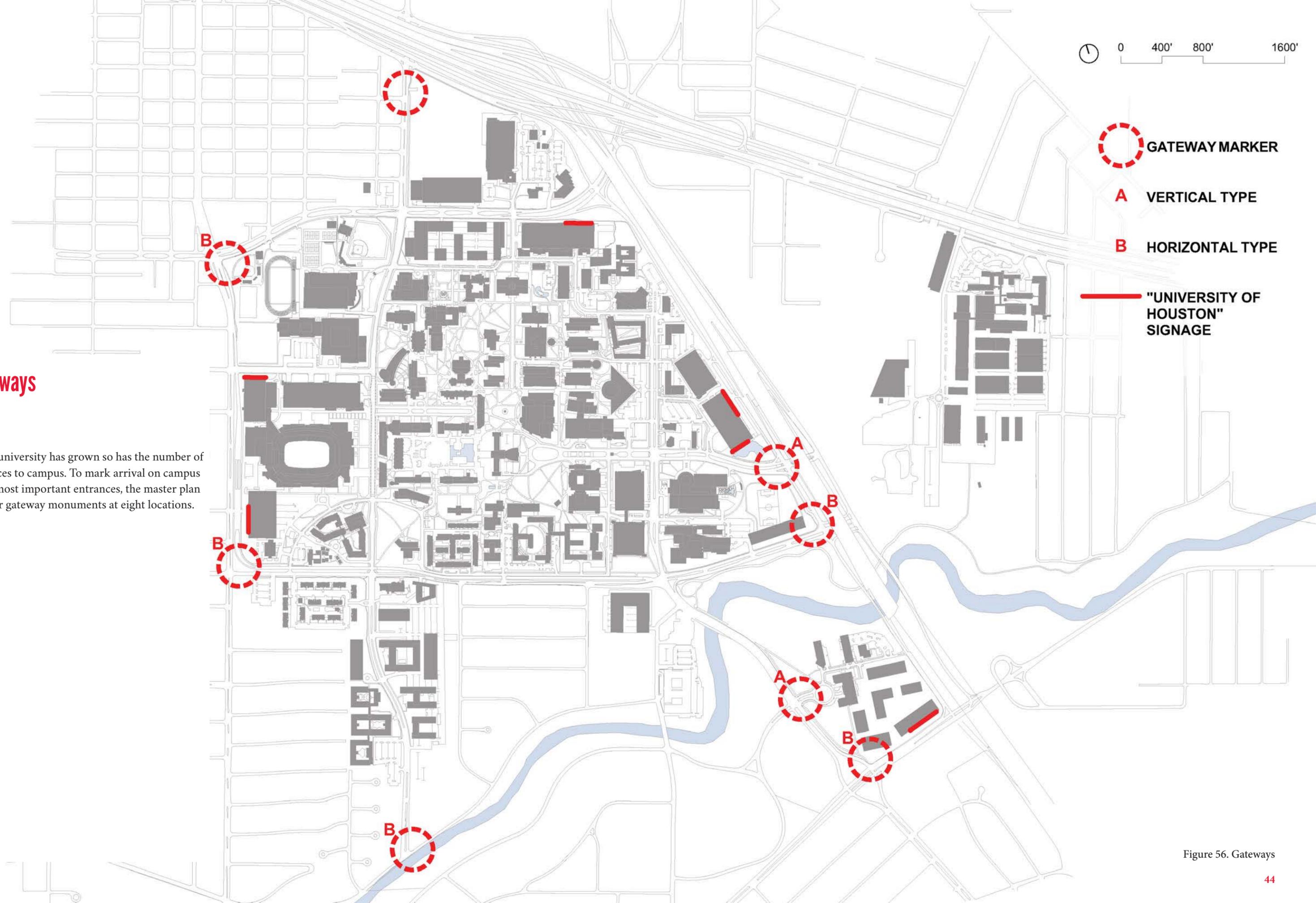
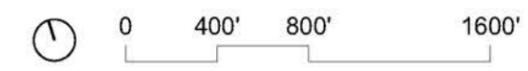


Figure 56. Gateways



Utilities

The locations of underground utility tunnels, underground electrical duct banks, water lines, and storm and sanitary sewers follow the pattern of former roads and drives.

Utility routes north and south, and east and west, provide a logical basis for primary pedestrian circulation paths through the campus.

-  UTILITY TUNNEL
-  CENTRAL PLANTS
-  UG ELECTRICAL
-  OH ELECTRICAL
-  UG WATER LINE

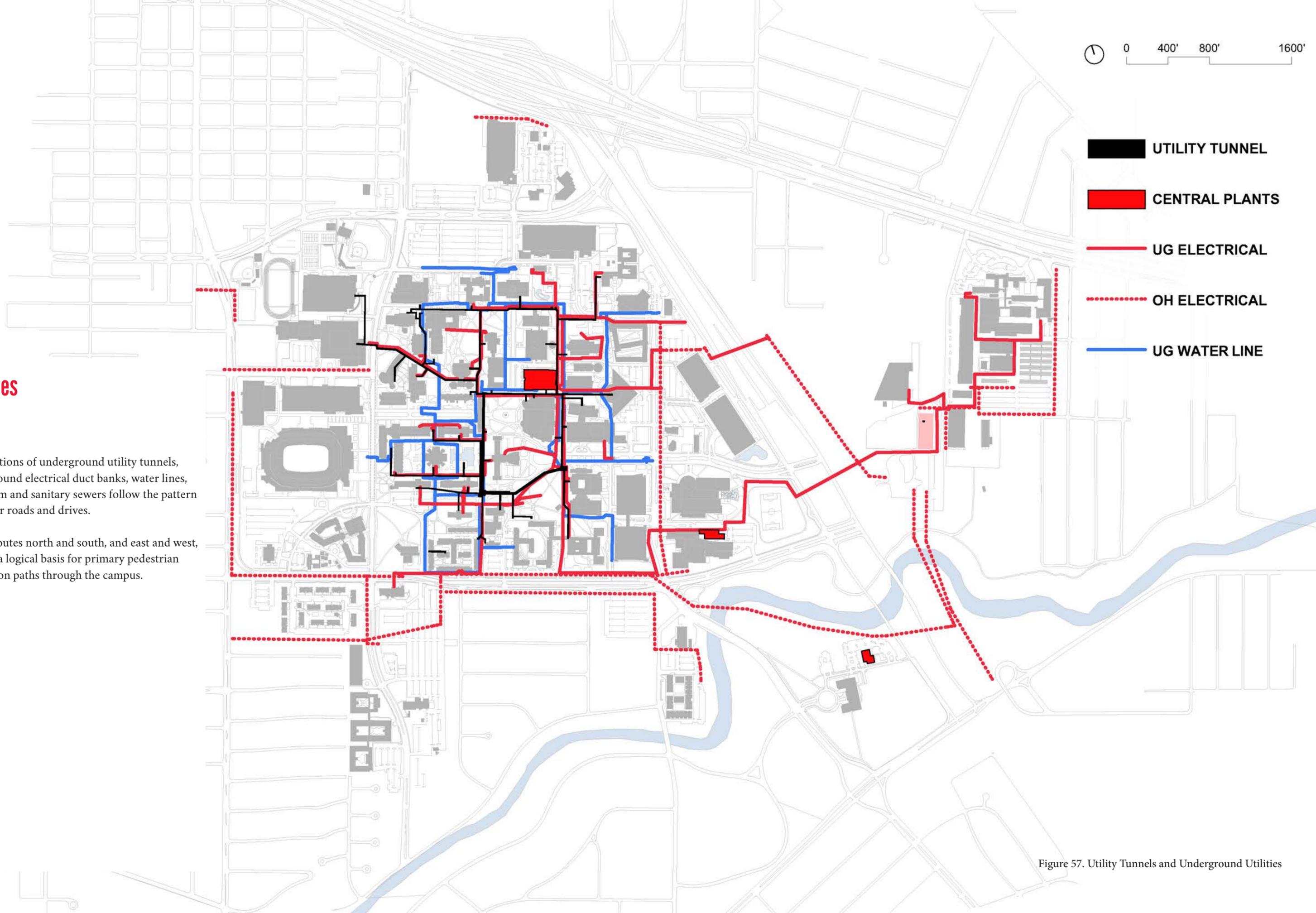
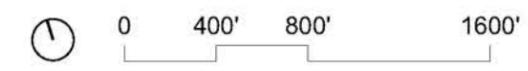


Figure 57. Utility Tunnels and Underground Utilities



- 20' SIGNATURE PEDESTRIAN PATHS (EXISTING)
- - - - 20' SIGNATURE PEDESTRIAN PATHS (FUTURE)
- 10' ENHANCED PATHS

Hierarchy of Paths

A network of sidewalks connects campus districts and public spaces. In the master plan, the most important cross-campus paths are built to a minimum width of 20 feet, both to accommodate the heaviest flow of pedestrians and service carts and to serve as fire lanes. Longer paths connecting destinations are 10 to 12 feet wide. Secondary paths are a minimum 8 feet wide.

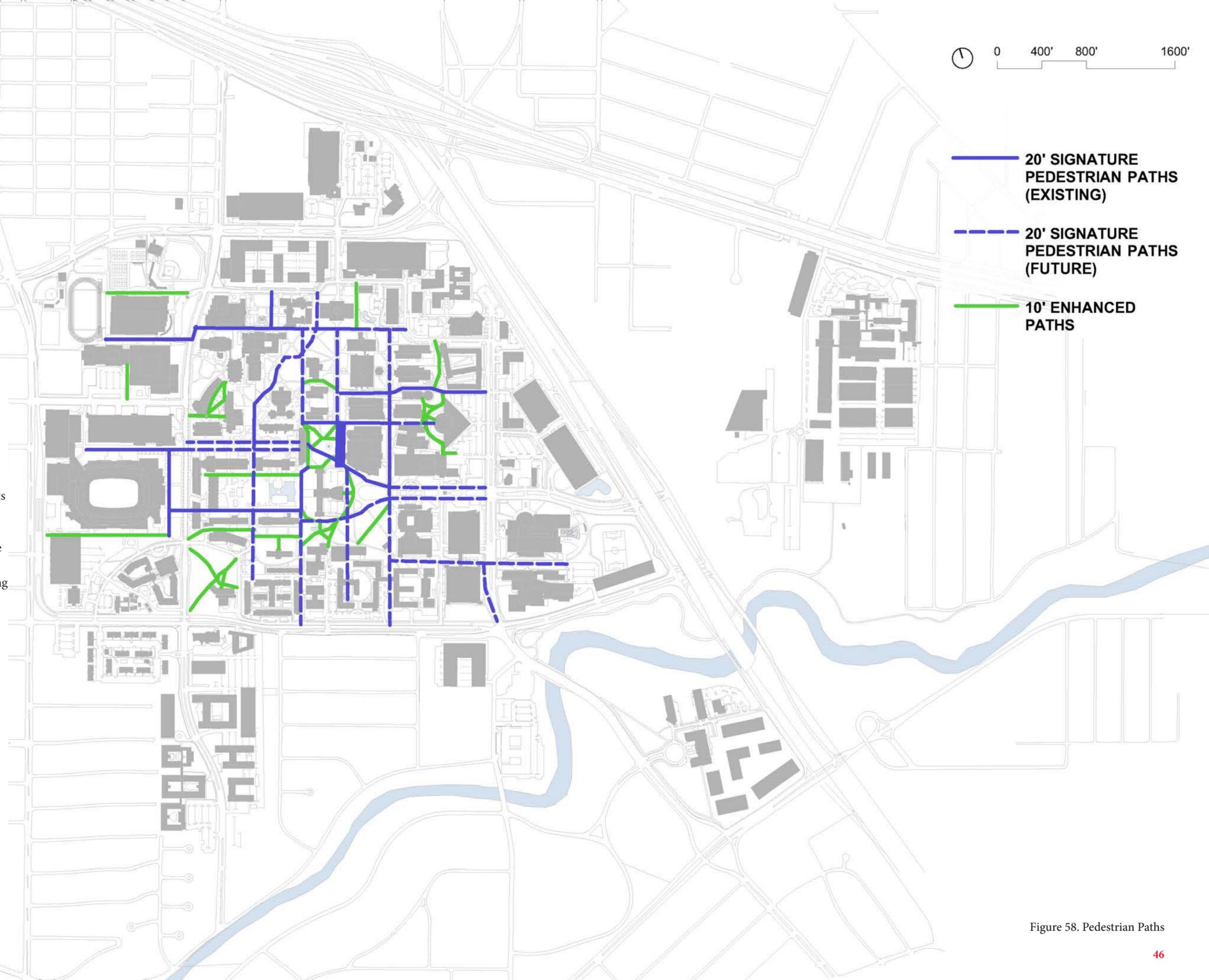
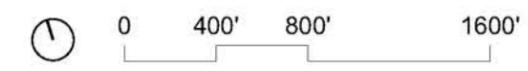


Figure 58. Pedestrian Paths



GARAGES

5 MINUTE WALK RADIUS

Garages

Building a pedestrian campus has meant reducing the number of surface parking lots and building parking garages at the edge of campus.

Two recent, 2500-space facilities, the Elgin Street Garage (ESG) and the University Gateway Garage (UGG), replaced surface parking lots with structured parking facilities.

The master plan identifies possible future sites for additional garages, all on the perimeter of the campus.

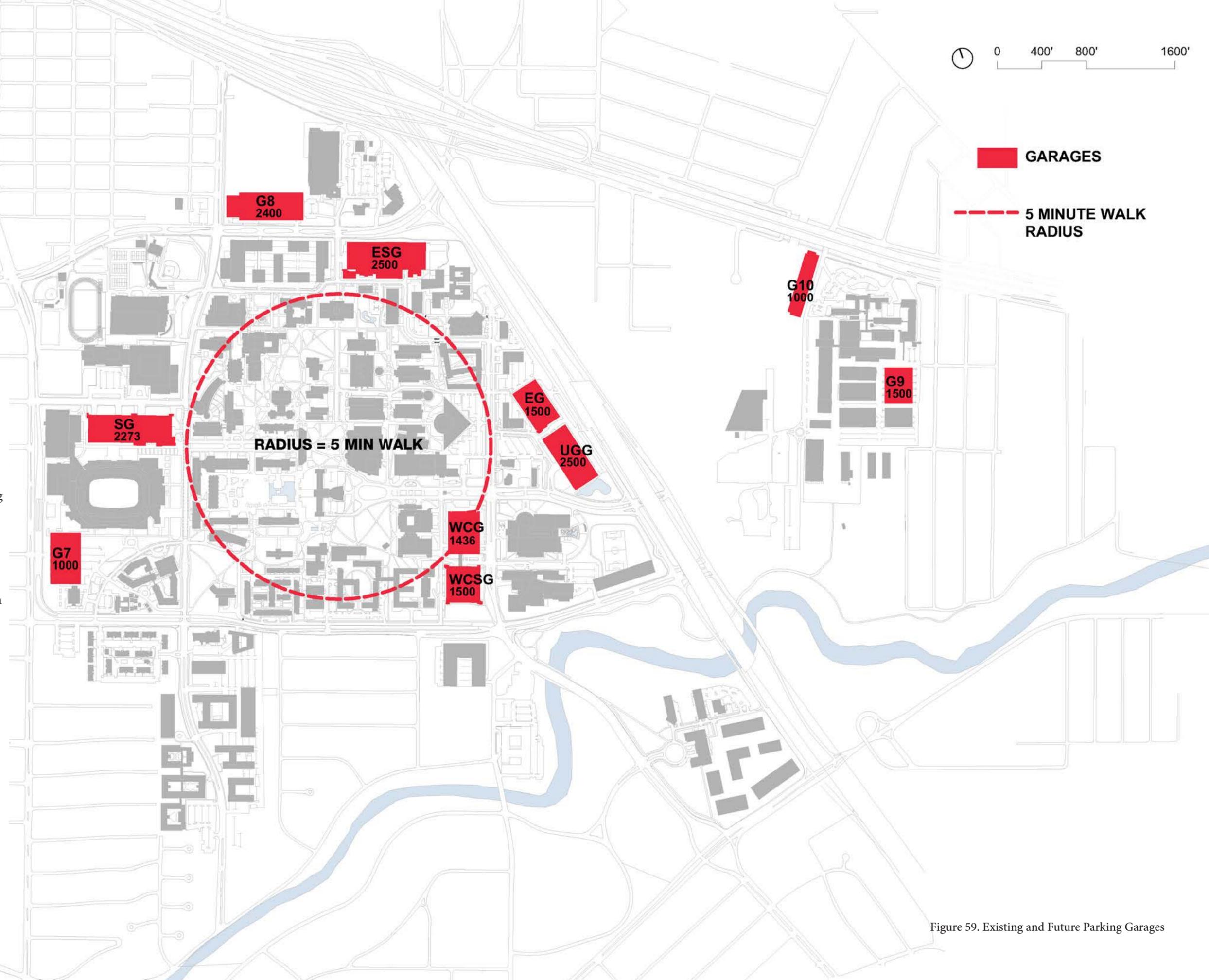
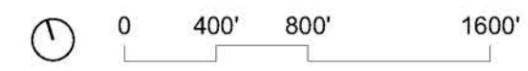


Figure 59. Existing and Future Parking Garages



Public Transportation

The campus is served by a significant public transportation network, including METRORail and many bus routes. The Cougar Line shuttle follows an interior loop and enhances campus mobility.

A future "METRO Bus Rapid Transit" route along Elgin Street will change the character of the street and the northern part of the campus.

- METRO RAIL
- METRO BUS
- COUGAR LINE SHUTTLE
- METRO RAPID BUS
- BIKE LANES

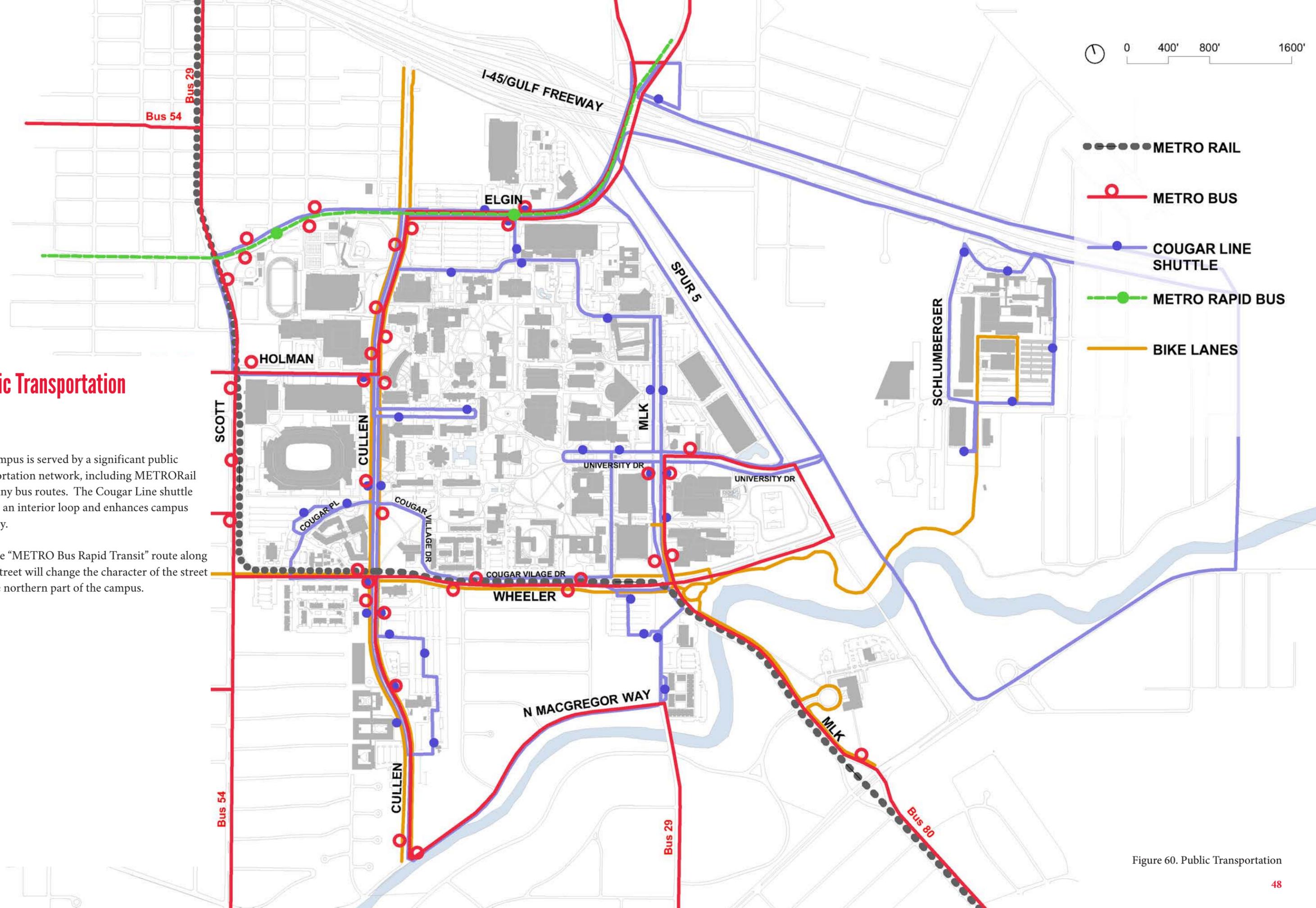


Figure 60. Public Transportation

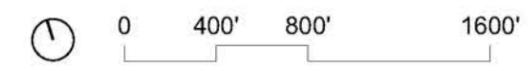
Streetscapes

The master plan includes enhanced streetscapes with consistent, even pedestrian lighting, accessible sidewalks with curb ramps, and a continuous tree canopy for shade and pedestrian comfort.

Sidewalks and pedestrians are separated from vehicular traffic by generous planting strips with street trees and pedestrian light poles.



Figure 61. Streetscapes



 OPEN SPACES

Open Spaces

The master plan envisions at least one central green space in each district of the campus.

Well-designed open spaces—the ‘space between’ buildings—support student success, collaborative learning and innovation. Each gathering space should provide three key ingredients: generous shade for human comfort, robust WiFi and ready access to coffee and food.



Figure 62. Open Spaces



Figure 63. 2027 Centennial Plan

05

Centennial Plan 2027

Having achieved the goal of becoming a Tier One research university, University of Houston has turned to a new goal of becoming a top 50 public university. A top 50 public university requires a top tier campus. The places we create today will be the new landmarks that make the university distinctive, memorable and inviting tomorrow.

This Centennial Master Plan celebrates many aspects of the campus of lasting value: its trees, the scale of its outdoor spaces, its shaded paths that weave these spaces together, and its public places animated by art that give these spaces distinct character and make them memorable places. After a period of astonishing growth and facilities investment, a renewed focus shifts to the spaces that connect and celebrate the university community. The work that we accomplish for the centennial in 2027 will have profound and lasting impacts on the future of the university.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

All illustrations are by designLAB except the following:

- Figure 1. Roy G. Cullen Memorial Hall, Science Building, Lamar Q. Cato, 1939
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- Figure 2. University of Houston Building, at San Jacinto High School
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- Figure 3. Reflecting Pool under Construction, Hare & Hare, 1938
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- Figure 5. Cullen Family Plaza Fountain, Cornell, Bridgers and Troller with Fred Buxton & Associates, 1970
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- Figure 6. The General Plan for Campus Development, Hare & Hare, 1936-37
Houston Public Library Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Stephen Fox Architectural Archives, Hare and Hare Papers.
- Figure 7. Comprehensive Campus Plan, CRS, 1966
Comprehensive campus plan. (1966). Caudill, Rowlett, Scott. Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
- Figure 8. The Framework Plan, open space, Cooper, Robertson & Partners, Inc., 2006
The Framework Plan, Cooper, Robertson & Partners, Inc., 2006.
- Figure 9. The University of Houston: A Prospectus, Hare & Hare, 1936-37
A Prospectus, 1969-037, Box 19, Folder 27 University of Houston Archives, UH Photographs Collection, <https://id.lib.uh.edu/ark:/84475/do6313zv14k>, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
- Figure 10. Plan for the Seventies, UH FPC, 1970
University of Houston campus plan for the seventies. (1970). Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
- Figure 11. UH Campus Plan, 1982, 3D/International Campus Plan, 1982, Campus Plan Source Book, September 1996,
University of Houston Office of Facilities Planning and Construction, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
- Figure 13. Canopy in 110 acres, 1944
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- Figure 14. Academic Quadrangle, ca. 1950. Aerial view of University of Houston including Robertson Stadium,
UH Photographs Collection, ID 1969-037, Box 19, Folder 22, University of Houston Buildings, <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195col3>, Digital Library, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
- Figure 15. Five Urban Forest Fragments, SWA Group, 2011
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