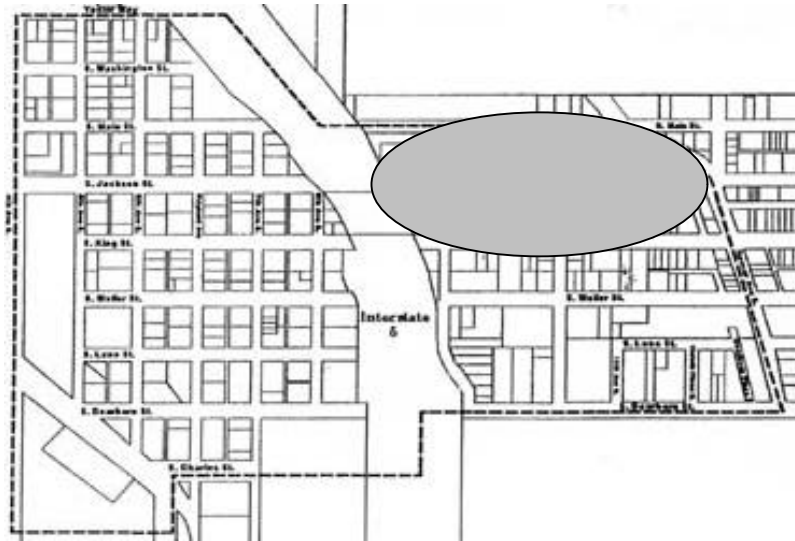


## Little Saigon Urban Design Guideline

Ellen Fitzsimmons



- Little Saigon located at 12<sup>th</sup> and Jackson and extends a block in all directions
- Part of Chinatown/International District but not International District Special Review District

The heart of Little Saigon is the intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> and Jackson with activity stretching out about a block in all directions. While part of the Chinatown/International District, east of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Little Saigon is not part of the International District Special Review District.

The physical character of Little Saigon is quite different than that of historic Chinatown. Buildings are newer and almost entirely one and two story commercial structures. Many buildings are set back from the street to allow for off-street parking in front of and next to businesses.

### Site and Situation

1. Physical character different from Chinatown
2. Newer buildings
3. One and two story commercial structures
4. Off-street parking in front of stores allowed by zoning
5. Jackson Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue support heavy volumes of traffic

### Zoning

1. Neighborhood has three zoning designations
2. NC3 (Neighborhood Commercial 3) allows for pedestrian-oriented shopping district
3. C1 (Commercial 1) allows for a auto-oriented, commercial area
4. IC (Industrial Commercial) allows for a mix of industrial and commercial activities

### Community Involvement

1. Business have made improvements to the area
2. Businesses helped to create a Vietnamese community
3. Some business leaders feel these contributions have not been acknowledged

### Design Guideline

1. Renovate building facades to create a more attractive neighborhood
2. Building entrances clearly identified to emphasize human activity on the street
3. Blank walls along sidewalks avoided
4. Building improvements may necessitate encroachments into the public right of way
5. Sidewalks wide enough to allow for improvements such as seating areas and planting strips without impeding pedestrians
6. Parking lots made more attractive through devices such as screening (walls or shrubs)
7. Pedestrian access to buildings increased by creating well marked paths through parking lots
8. Parking lots shared by neighboring businesses. Consolidation of lots allows for open spaces such as parks and plazas
9. Parking lots used for purposes such as community events

## 4. Design Proposals

Jackson Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue South are the neighborhood's major thoroughfares. Both are arterials and support heavy volumes of bus, automobile, and pedestrian traffic. Jackson Street, the main axis of the neighborhood, is approximately 70' wide with 15'-18' sidewalks on either side. West of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue on-street parking is permitted on the south side of the street; two lanes of traffic run in both directions and there is a center turning lane. East of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue parking is permitted on both sides of the street and two lanes of traffic run in both directions. On 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, no parking is allowed, two lanes of traffic run north and south, and sidewalks are approximately 10' wide.

### Zoning

The neighborhood includes three different zoning designations. Jackson Street west of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue is zoned NC3 (Neighborhood Commercial 3). According to the city zoning code, areas zoned NC3 should exhibit the following characteristics:

- Pedestrian-oriented shopping district serving the neighborhood and larger surrounding community
- Allow for a wide range of retail and other commercial activities that do not detract from the retail character of the area
- Multi-story residential housing permitted
- Neighborhood is located to provide for access by car, bus, bike, or on foot and surrounded by medium to high-density residential or commercial areas
- A variety of retail businesses at street level and continuous storefronts built to the front property line

Jackson Street east of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue is zoned C1 (Commercial 1). The characteristics of a C1 area are:

- Auto-oriented, primarily retail/service commercial area serving both the surrounding neighborhood and the entire city
- Allows for office, retail, and business support services
- Residential use permitted at limited densities

- Located with easy access from a major arterial
- Shopping areas where customers drive from one business to another, large lots, limited pedestrian access, and off-street parking lots

12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, south of Jackson is zoned IC (Industrial Commercial). The characteristics of an IC area are:

- A mix of industrial and commercial activities including light manufacturing and research and development
- Located in areas that are located close to amenities, downtown, and other similar commercial centers but that would not support other types of development

### Community Involvement

During the focus-group interviews, community members expressed their feelings about the neighborhood. They expressed pride in the improvements businesses had made to the area and the creation of a Vietnamese community. Community members also voiced their concerns that their accomplishments were unacknowledged by the city and that there were several problems that needed to be addressed. These problems are detailed in the Little Saigon Business Association interview in the Focus Groups section.

### Design guidelines

Design guidelines alone cannot address all community concerns and they are not without expense or limitations. Still, neighborhood design guidelines provide a focused opportunity to recognize local concerns and design issues. Design guidelines can give more specific direction to the character of design in Little Saigon, help community members address their concerns for the neighborhood, and create a neighborhood center that reflects community members' pride in their culture and accomplishments.

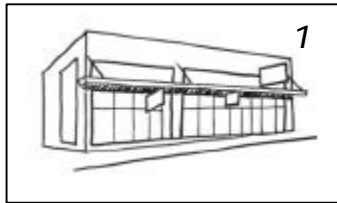
Business owners mentioned excessive regulation as one of their concerns about the International Special Review District. Excessive regulation is a common criticism of design guidelines. If design guidelines are implemented and administered correctly the benefits

of design guidelines far outweigh the extra effort they require. As part of the implementation and administration of the guidelines, community leaders should ensure that all community members' voices are heard throughout the design review process and efforts are made to provide funds to offset the cost of improvements.

**1. Building Façades**

Improvement and renovation to buildings along Jackson Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue can help to address the community's concerns about safety, gathering spaces, visual community identity, and overall appearance.

Entrances



To emphasize pedestrian activities along the street, clearly identifiable storefront entrances should be oriented to the street. Entrances should be located to provide direct access from both the sidewalk and the parking lot. To accentuate entrances businesses

and building owners should consider the addition of pedestrian oriented signs, canopies, or awnings. These additions must be at least 7' from ground level to prevent interference with pedestrians. (Figure 1)

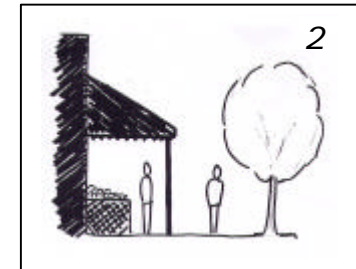
Walls

Blank walls along sidewalks should be avoided. Ground floor windows add interest to the street and increase pedestrian security. Walls without windows can be covered with vertical trellises or the addition of planters.

Encroachments

These additions may require extending building elements into the public right of way. Sidewalks in the neighborhood are wide enough to allow for businesses to make use of the sidewalk without limiting pedestrian access. Already, many businesses have added market

awnings and stalls. The addition of exterior display or restaurant seating requires approval. Businesses west of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue must follow the International Special Review District guidelines. Businesses east of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue require a permit from the City. Business owners should work with the Special Review Board and City to facilitate the appropriate and beneficial uses of the sidewalk. These uses could include the extension of awnings or canopies to enclose the sidewalk, outside seating for restaurants, or additional display space. (Figure 2)

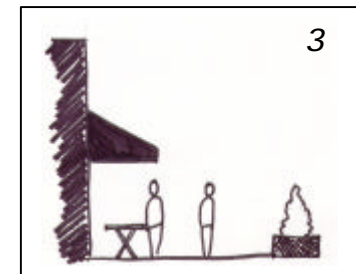


Sidewalk Improvements

As already mentioned, sidewalks in Little Saigon are approximately 15'-18' wide. This provides ample space for making a variety of improvements without significant changes to the existing street and sidewalk system. Because community members specifically mentioned a lack of green space and informal gathering areas, safety concerns, and general dissatisfaction with the appearance of Jackson, a variety of sidewalk improvements to address these concerns should be considered.

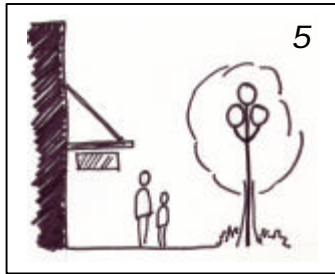
Some sidewalk standards to be considered when making sidewalk improvements are:

- Sidewalks at least 16' wide are large enough to allow for outdoors sales space or small seating areas. (Figure 3)
- 12' sidewalks allow two couples to pass comfortably on commercial streets.
- Sidewalks should allow a minimum of 6' for pedestrian through passage.



## 4. Design Proposals

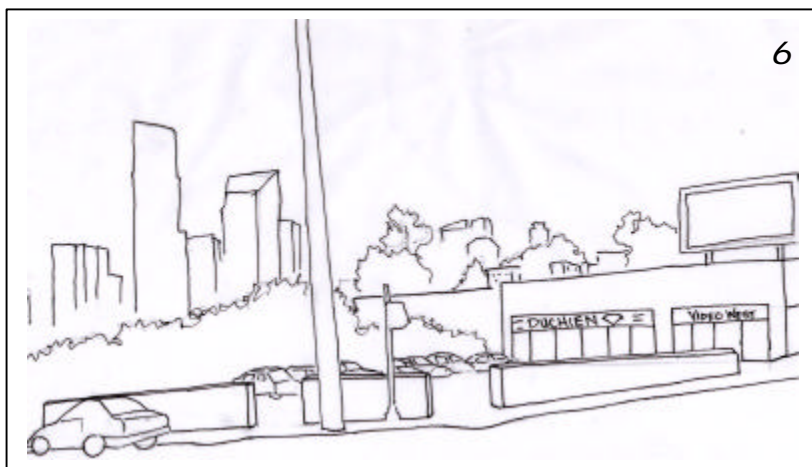
- Planting strips can be included with a minimum of 3' but 5' is preferable. (Figure 4)
- Pedestrian level lighting should be 12' from the ground and use reflected fixtures to reduce glare. (Figure 5)



### 2. Parking

Street front parking lots tend to give streets an empty, exposed feeling. Unfortunately, this is the case in Jackson Street corridor. However, business owners believe that off-street parking is essential to their success. Because of this, the neighborhood should consider several design elements to mitigate the negative impacts of street front parking lots.

#### Screening

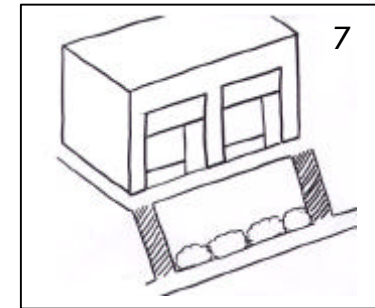


Parking lots should be enclosed with screening walls not taller than waist height. This height adequately separates parking from the sidewalk, but still allows visibility for businesses and security. Walls or shrubs can be used for screening, but walls are often preferred because they take up less space and require less upkeep than landscaping. Benches, spaces to lean, or areas for signs can be incorporated into the design of the wall. (Figure 6)

Large parking lots should be visually broken down into smaller lots with the use of appropriate landscaping. By narrowing drive lanes, a 3'-4' wide planting strip or 4' cutouts can be used without losing parking spaces.

#### Access

Direct paths should extend from the public sidewalk to building entrances when pedestrians must cut through parking lots to reach store entrances. These paths should be well marked, safe, and convenient for pedestrians to use. (Figure 7)



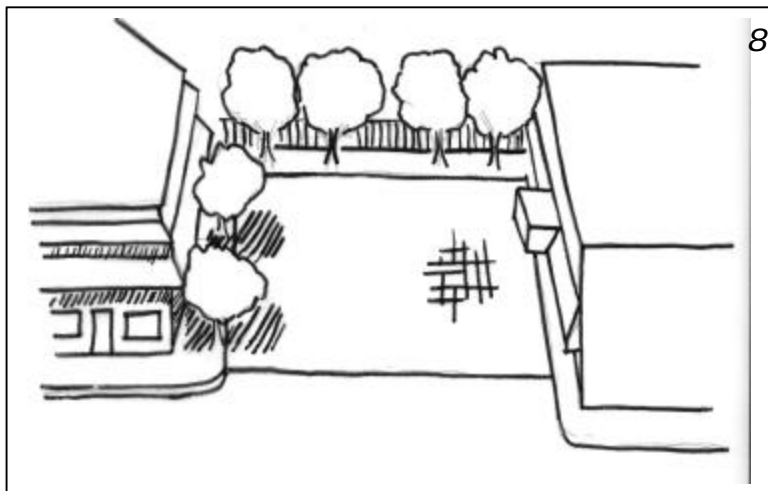
Minimize the number and width of driveway curb cuts through sidewalks. When possible, driveways for adjacent properties should be shared. Narrower driveways force cars to slow down when entering and exiting, thus making driveways safer for pedestrians. Where sidewalks cross curb cuts, sidewalks should be continually marked to insure visibility for pedestrians and drivers.

#### Multiple Uses

Near-by businesses should consider sharing parking facilities. Businesses can promote the idea of parking once but shopping at many businesses by incorporating paths between parking lots near by businesses.

Parking lots should be considered multipurpose areas. Appropriate paving, landscaping, and lighting can offer additional community

open space when parking is not needed. This dual-purpose role for parking lots, as well as consolidating parking lots can create opportunities for the establishment of small open spaces in the area. These open spaces could be designed as small plazas, parks, courtyards, or gardens.



Small parks or plazas should be well designed and contribute to the visual appeal of the streetscape. They should be located close to bus stops or other areas with a high pedestrian traffic and situated in such a way to allow for maximum sun exposure. Plaza frontage should contain retail windows, street vendors, or building entrances to ensure a high level of activity and to promote safety and use. These areas should include ample landscaping, public art or other decoration, and amenities that offer recreation and seating for pedestrians and shoppers. (Figure 8)

### 3. Future Development

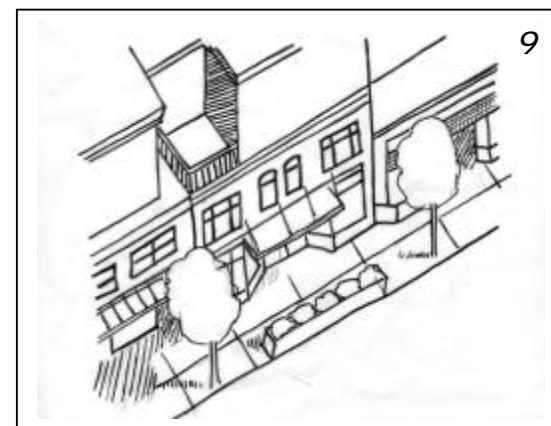
There are many opportunities for future development in Little Saigon. Because of this, community members can take a proactive approach to designing their neighborhood by guiding the type of development that may take place. Currently, Jackson Street east of I-5 lacks visual interest and seems very long and uninviting. This is due largely to the predominance of single-story, setback buildings. To

improve the appearance of the streetscape and make the street more comfortable and appealing, the Little Saigon community should require new development to include the aforementioned guidelines as well as the other guidelines that are more easily implemented in new development.

### Building Design

New development should be multistory. Taller buildings will help to make Jackson Street appear narrower and pedestrians to feel less exposed. Additional stories will allow for denser development in the area. Community members talked about their desire to make the District more of a true residential area. Adding housing above commercial development will increase the amount of activity in the area and help to strengthen the community.

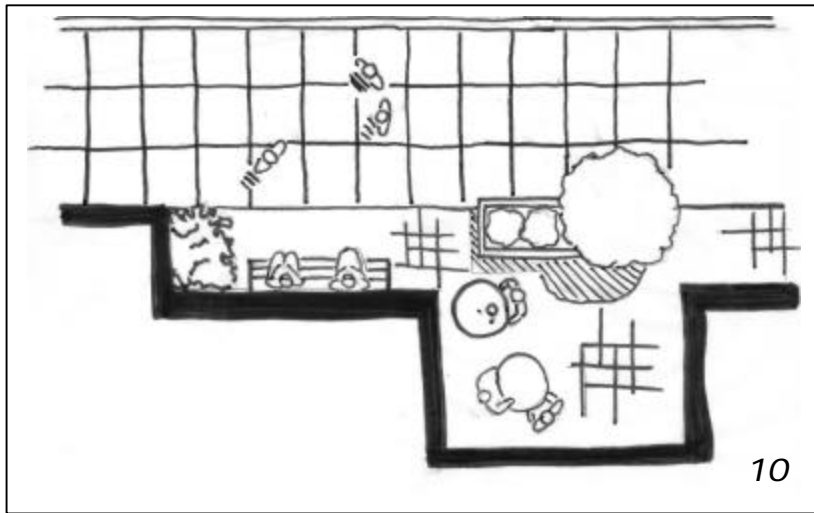
Careful attention to building mass and design are essential to creating a strong streetscape. Long buildings should use architectural techniques to articulate building façades. These techniques include modulation, broken rooflines, color, texture, and material. Architectural elements like prominent or recessed entrances, fenestration with perceptible molding, and landscaping can also improve the appearance of buildings. (Figure 9)



Setting back the first floor can provide more areas for pedestrian activity. Recessed entries are especially encouraged at corners to promote pedestrian movement and prevent blind corners. Storefront displays with overhead weather protection allow the business owners to provide seating or additional sales space outside the store without having to apply for permission to use the right of way. Even if the

## 4. Design Proposals

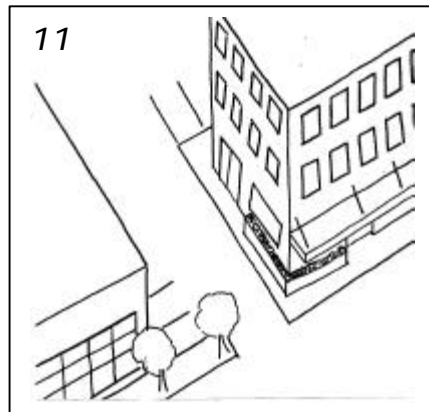
building sits on the property line, ground floor storefronts should be transparent so pedestrians can see activity inside the building. (Figure 10)



### Encouraging Activity

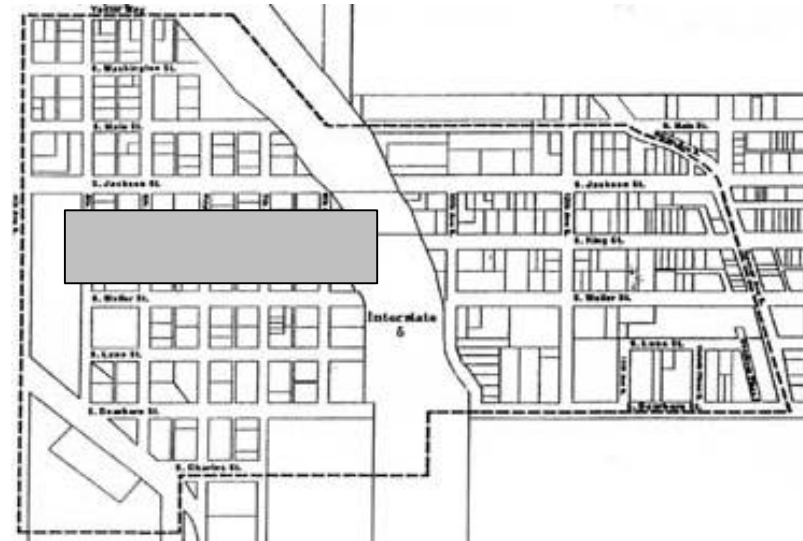
Building entrances should encourage pedestrian circulation. Parking lots should be located behind or on the side of buildings; parking lots that do front the street should not be longer than 60'. Pedestrian entrances and parking entrances should be equally important. Pedestrian and open space amenities should be included at entrances.

These amenities could include seating, vending, artwork, special surface treatments, plantings and pedestrian scaled lighting. (Figure 11)



## Street as Symbolic Landscape

Sunny C-W. Ho



- Street appearance reflects cultures in the District
- Strengthens Asian-American identity and increases diversity of uses and visitors to the neighborhood
- Chinese gate and space for street festivals created
- Node intersections created to slow down car speeds and create a superior pedestrian thoroughfare
- Sidewalks widened to create more space for vendors, residents and tourists
- Sidewalks on King Street widened, as well as other changes, to create a space for festivals
- Paving patterns created to improve appearance of street
- Street trees planted on King Street
- Street furniture installed such as benches to increase sidewalks' function as a gathering place
- Additional light poles installed to improve appearance and safety

Focusing on South King Street in the core Chinatown area, the *Street as Symbolic Landscape* design proposal suggests ways that the appearance of the street can reflect the cultures that reside in the District. Such changes include installing a Chinese Gate and creating space for a Street Festival. Such changes will have a number of advantages for the community. They will increase the Asian-American identity of the area. They will increase the diversity of uses of the neighborhood as well as the people attracted to it. The neighborhood will become more accessible to a wider range of people and more people will be able to participate in the community. Other benefits will include traffic improvements, safety, security, comfort and economic revitalization.

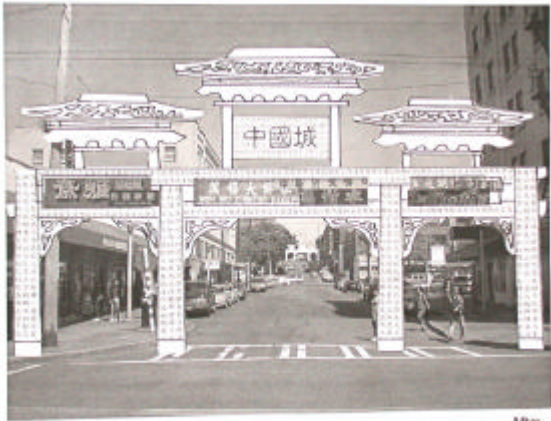
In this design proposal, the combined elements of Chinese poems and characters would be used in the design of a unique, modern gate for the Seattle Chinatown. This would do much to reinforce the identity of the Chinese community in the District.

Another construction project would be the redesigning of intersections as *Node Intersections*. Typically the node intersection can slow down car speeds and give pedestrians a more comfortable walking space. During special events such as street festivals or holiday markets, the node intersection can become a place for artists or performers.

Another infrastructure change designed to enhance safety and create more public spaces would be the redesigning of sidewalks. The original sidewalks would be widened to create more space for vendors, residents and tourists. After being extended and repaved, sidewalks can be used in diverse ways such as becoming a commercial space to display vendors' merchandise or become an outdoor eating space for restaurants.

To create a better space for street festivals it is suggested that a number of improvements be made to King Street. 13.5' wide sidewalks and curbs should be installed to create more pedestrian space when the street is not closed. The street itself would be redesigned to make it a two-lane thoroughfare along with two lanes for parking. Special paving patterns and details would be included to

improve the visual attractiveness of the street. Street trees would also be planted on King Street to improve its appearance as well. Street furniture would be installed as an amenity to pedestrians and to increase its function as a gathering place. Finally, additional light poles would be installed, and existing poles relocated, to enhance the appearance of the area and increase safety.

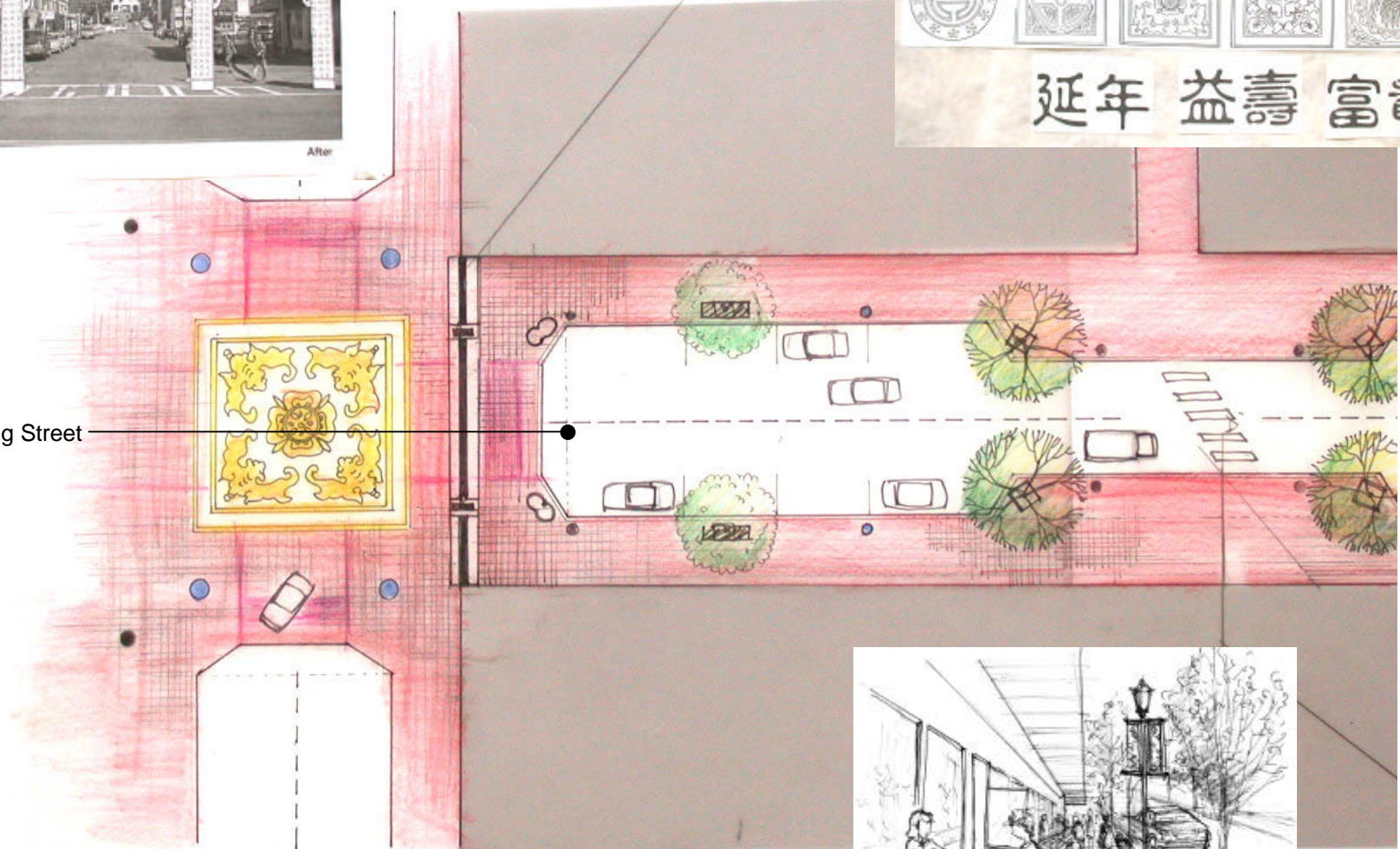


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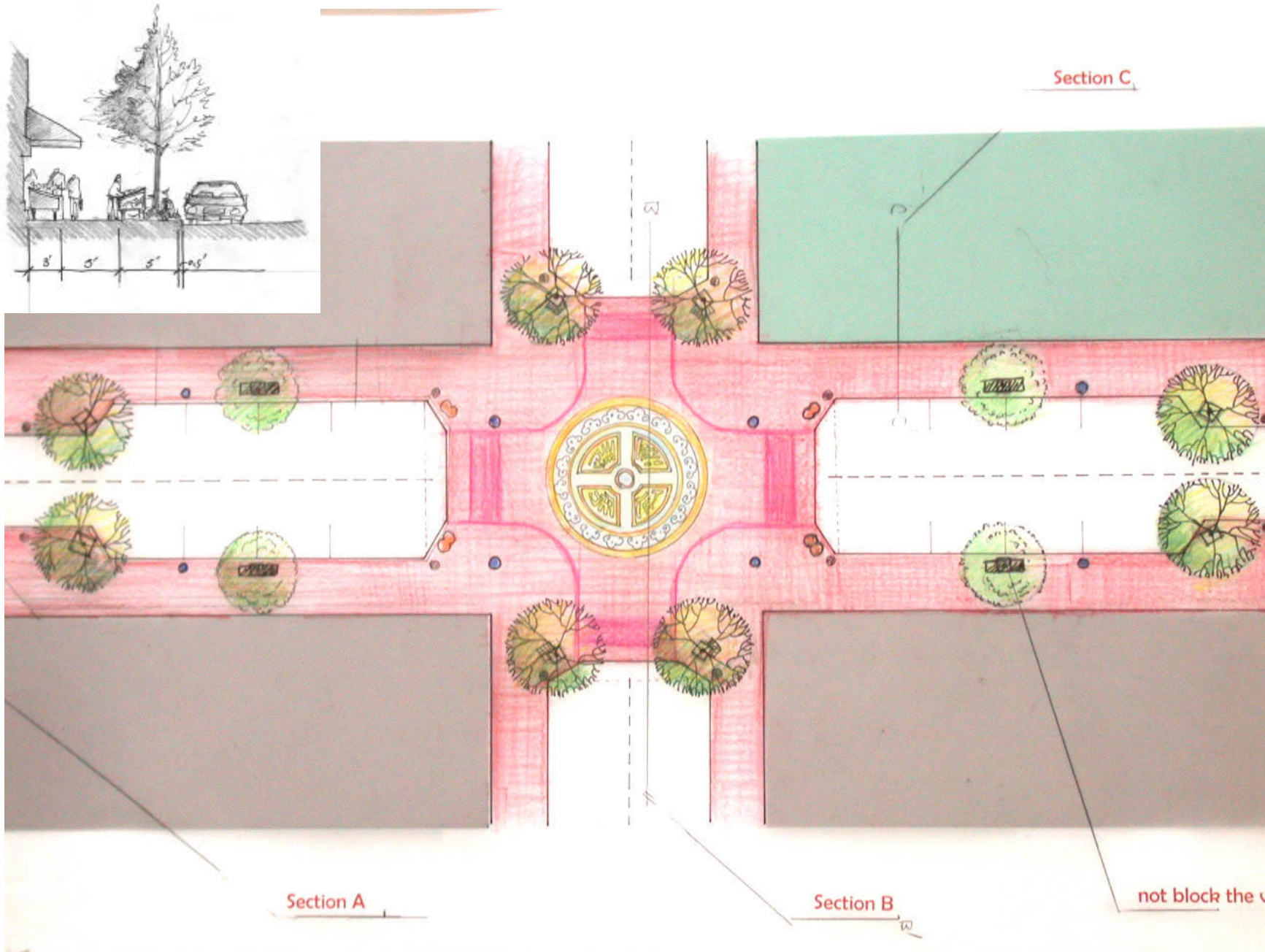
gateway position 1



S. King Street







4. Design Proposals

