



TULSA'S GREAT URBAN DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

# CATHEDRAL SQUARE

# THE POTENTIAL

Downtown Tulsa is on a roll. Finally an authentically urban live-work-play lifestyle is taking shape in and around the historic central business district. Most of this revival is occurring at the northern end of downtown, but what about the southern end? Sometimes referred to by city boosters as “Cathedral Square,” most of the city’s great downtown churches are located in this part of downtown, including a 12 story world-renowned Art Deco church. Moreover since Tulsa’s pattern of sprawl spread the city to the South and East, the Cathedral Square district is the gate way to the downtown for most of the region.

From a distance, approaching downtown Tulsa at 60 miles an hour, the view of downtown Tulsa is impressive and inviting. The urban core of Tulsa’s skyscrapers sits in the center of the downtown, and the low rise buildings and spires of Cathedral Square are set in front of this backdrop like a front porch to the city’s historic core.

However, arriving in downtown via Cathedral Square expectations quickly are deadened. Cathedral Square is one of Tulsa’s most tattered urban environments. In light of the many interesting developments happening in the northern and western sections of Tulsa’s downtown, such as the revival of the Brady Arts District and Historic Greenwood, the successful completion of the BOK auditorium, the recently developed ONECO Baseball Stadium, the emergence of the Blue Dome nightlife strip, and plans to turn some of Tulsa’s historic art deco office buildings into residences, it is a shame that the first impression of the area is a bleak rather than vibrant Cathedral Square.

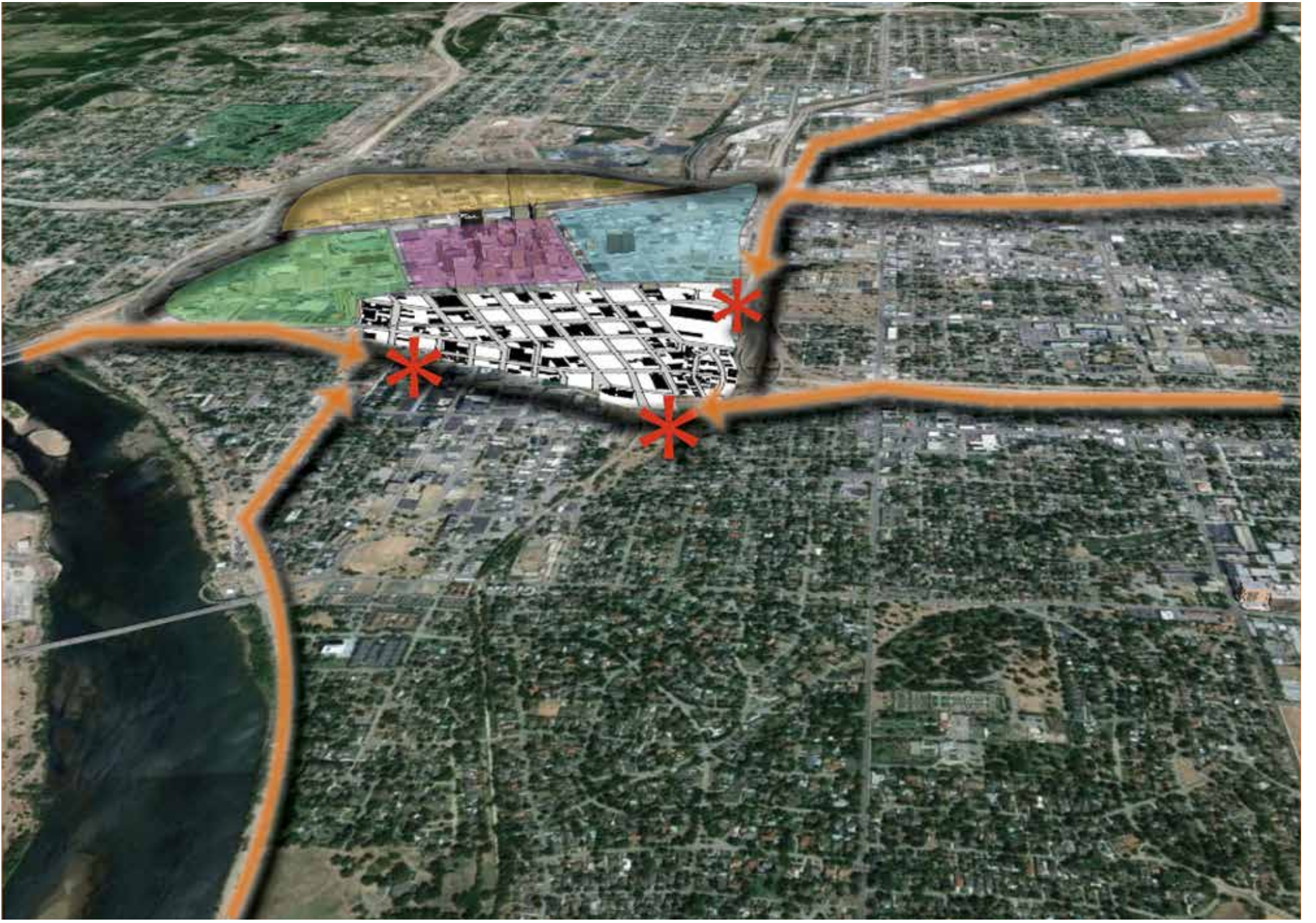
## **CATHEDRAL SQUARE:**

Roughly 8 blocks long and 5 blocks wide; Home to:

- Six large historic churches,
- A community college
- A handful of office buildings
- A smattering of historic urban fabric
- A remnant of a bungalow neighborhood,
- An out of place Home Depot
- And a majority of land used for surface parking

While the large churches and Tulsa Community College Campus have locked up a lot of Cathedral Square for their parking needs, the bright side is that these institutions have already consolidated the land into just a few owners. While the issue is not currently on Tulsa’s radar, as the land in the north and the core of downtown fills up with urban development, land opportunities such as Cathedral Square will become increasingly attractive. Ultimately this land will be developed.

Urban developers who approach the city and the institutions of Cathedral Square with a design and development plan that accentuates the district’s value should have the most success, creating a winning product for everyone.



# THE PROBLEM

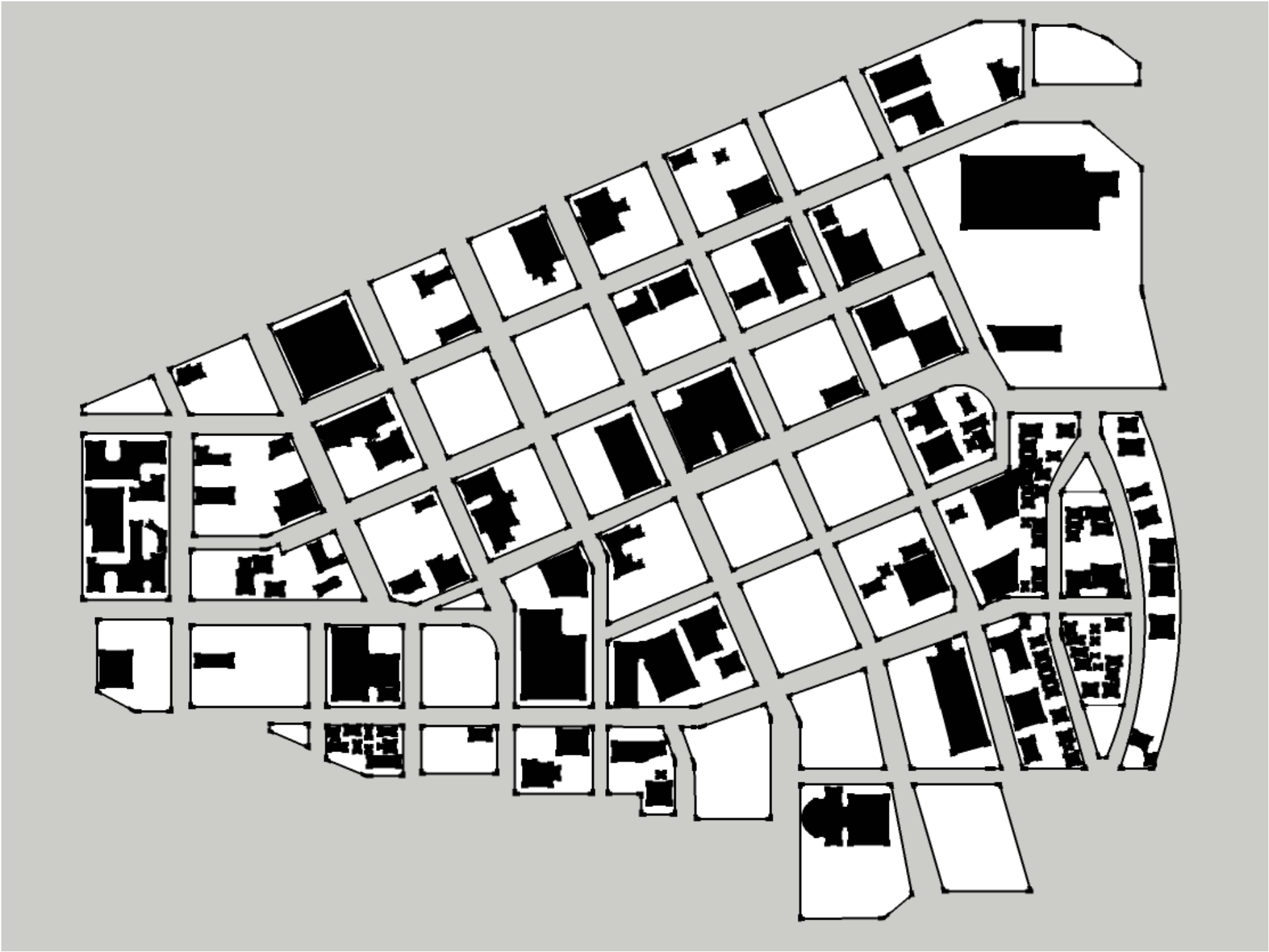
Tulsa's historic pattern of sprawl spread the city to the South and East and thus Cathedral Square became the gateway to downtown for most of the region. In the 1970's highway engineers mowed away several bungalow streets abutting the downtown to bring the region to its historic core by automobile.

Watching the destruction from my family's station wagon every Sunday on the way to church was a sad and formative experience for me. This auto-centric destruction did not end with nearby neighborhoods though. While the key historic art deco buildings were preserved, I watched in my teen years as the downtown fabric between them was slowly replaced by surface parking lots, many of them for the churches. You could get downtown but increasingly all there was to do was park your car and go to church. The cumulative result of all this surface parking is that by 2010 instead of a grand gateway to a great downtown, Tulsans can enjoy views not just of art deco buildings and church spires but by some measures the nation's third most asphalt covered downtown. A more fitting moniker for the district might be "Cathedral Car Lot". The figure ground diagram demonstrates just how non-urban the morphology of this section of Downtown Tulsa has become.

In the new Comprehensive Plan residents would like downtown Tulsa to become "a popular place to live. Newly developed with high density condominiums and apartments, often with pocket parks, fountains and plazas" Moreover, despite the national

downturn the Tulsa economy is relatively strong, and a market for urban living exists but is being poorly met. The Cathedral Square area will likely develop over the next few decades, but simply filling in lots, while improving this figure ground image, would not do justice to this location. Tulsa needs a vision for Cathedral Square that rises to the potential and the importance of this location.

Moreover, if Tulsans truly hope to graft more traditional urban fabric onto their city's 20th century sprawl beyond downtown the city will need more finally grained visions from within Tulsa. Few examples of more innovative planning and design ideas suggested in the various visioning plans of the early 2000's use Tulsa locations to make their points. There is a need for Tulsa-centric demonstrations. Few Tulsa districts are better suited for such a demonstration than the current parking lot moonscape of Cathedral Square. Transforming these surface lots will likely have a psychological impact on the region that no other district in the Tulsa region could achieve.



# THE PARTI

Architects often describe the main idea that informs their work as “the parti”. For Cathedral Square the parti is a cross that bisects the district as a green pedestrian boulevard.

The streets making up this cross are Boston Avenue and Route 66 as it runs along 10th Street. Key landmark buildings such as the many cathedrals of the area are represented in orange. The cross binds most of these landmarks together.

Additionally, in the middle of the district where the cross meets at the TCC campus, a current surface parking lot has been reserved as an actual square, authenticating the area's christening.



# THE THEORY

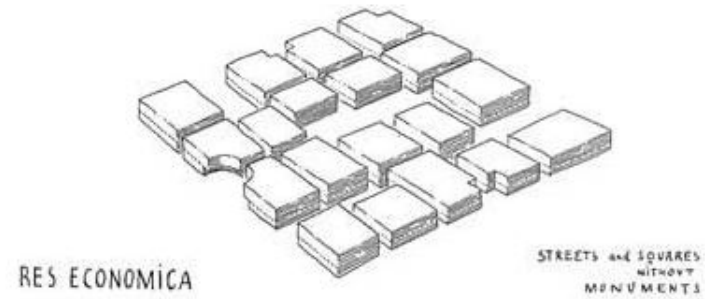
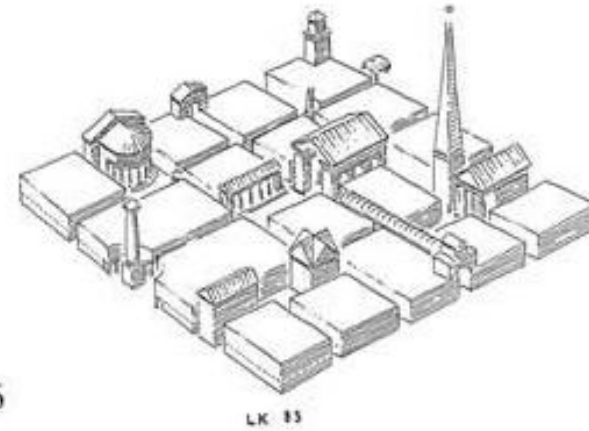
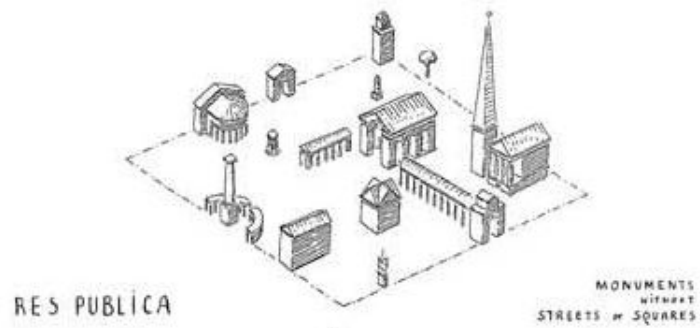
Leon Krier is an architectural theorist and urban planner promoting a return to neo-traditional city designs. In the US he has been most influential in the New Urbanism movement.

Since Cathedral Square is an historic district with many of Tulsa's most important ecclesiastical monuments, Krier's traditional views on urban design are most appropriate for the area. In this visual Krier explains how a "true city" is a harmonious collection of streets and functional buildings punctuated by monuments such as the churches of Cathedral Square. Interestingly, the current condition of the district with its landscape of monuments and parking lots looks like the first half of Krier's equation. Its time to install the other half of this urban design formula.

Although it may be hard to fathom that such a vision is possible in a district that has lost most of its historic fabric, since the landmarks and solid urban design bones of small and frequent blocks remain, only the background buildings need to be restored. Of the three key conditions, that is the easiest part to be achieved.

Interestingly restoring that fabric is a kind of preservation, not of the buildings as objects, although it will also be important to protect the landmarks and whatever else remains from the early 20th century, but rather it is a preservation of the buildings' *roles* in the landscape. In other words, while one certainly hopes that the best architecture will be developed, it is not necessary. It should be possible to reweave a true urban fabric in Cathedral Square even with mediocre architecture, as long as that architecture stays within some critical parameters and does not overwhelm the monuments.





# THE PLAN:

## 1. ESTABLISH A STREET & PARKING HIERARCHY

The first priority is to get the streets and parking configuration of the district back into a pattern appropriate for an urban location. This infrastructure is the lattice on which every other investment will hang.

Fortunately downtown Tulsa is blessed with relatively small blocks, roughly 300 ft square, as well as alleys to serve them. However, this historic pattern is a diamond in the rough as traffic engineers and modern parking requirements have obliterated its value by turning all the streets into high speed roads.

People still must be able to drive and park in the district. The key is to accommodate this requirement with in reason. Not all streets should be equal. Some streets and lots should be designed primarily for cars while others designed primarily for pedestrians and a third set of streets as more balanced multi-modal thoroughfares. Such a hierarchy will cause some congestion and slow traffic down in certain sections of the district, but that is by design.

**AUTHENTIC URBAN DISTRICTS  
ARE CONGESTED. THAT IS THEIR POINT.  
RATHER THAN OBLITERATING IT,  
DESIGN FOR IT.**

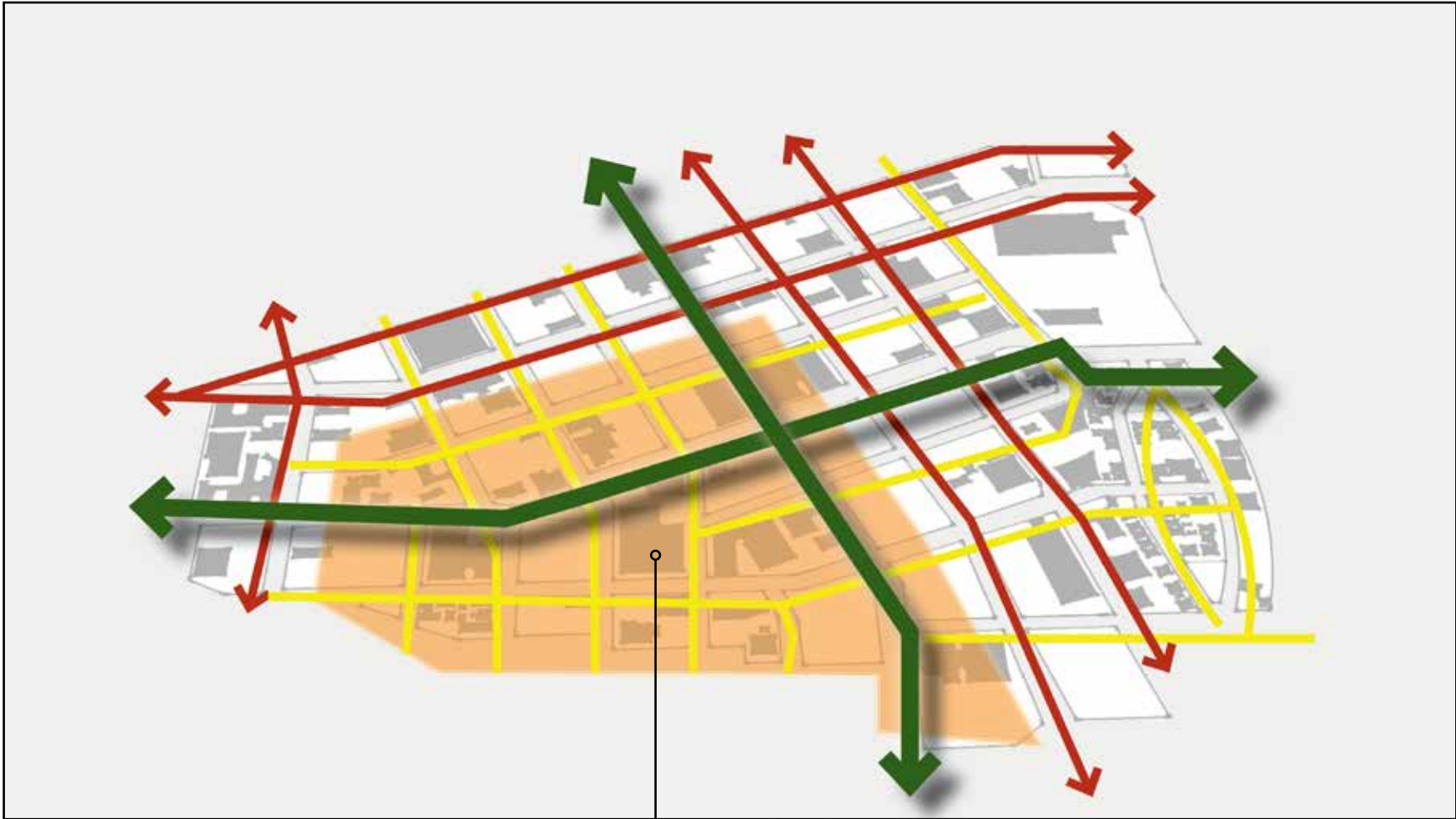
In this plan there are three sets of streets with different designs and dimensions. Most of the streets in the district, should be designed for pedestrian dominance. These are the streets in yellow. There are different ways to do it, parking could be angled, planters could be placed in the center of the street, but whatever

the method chosen these streets should be placed on road diets and turned into neighborhood streets where traffic is kept at a crawl. Parking should be kept behind buildings and the number of entrances to hidden parking courtyards or garages should be limited. Investments in design details and landscaping also make sense on these streets.

The next set of streets are in red. These are the high traffic arterials which all of the district is currently designed for. These streets can keep their harsh traffic design. Details and landscaping won't be worth the investment here. These streets will be great for garage access. On street parking is not necessary on these streets.

The last set of streets are represented in green and create the parti. These two streets should be designed as destinations. The ground floors should be retail, the side walks wide, and the streets well detailed and landscaped. Parking should be hidden with no garage access points from these streets, since it would destroy the strolling experience. However, on street parallel parking is recommended. Additionally, if a streetcar or bike network with dedicated lanes is introduced into the district, they should run on these two streets.

The overall effect is that most people access the district via the arterials but they quickly park their cars and walk to destinations. Walking is part of the experience. Additionally a pocket of residential neighborhood has been established in the southeastern part of the district, giving Cathedral Square the personality of a dense but quiet place flanked by two active boulevards. This character will create a distinct ambiance.



■ URBAN ACCESS ROADS

■ MULTI-MODAL THOROUGHFARES

■ URBAN RESIDENTIAL STREETS

○  
QUIET RESIDENTIAL CORE

# THE PLAN:

## 2. CONTAIN BUILDING HEIGHT AND MASS

The city should establish Cathedral Square as a special district that uses form based codes rather than traditional zoning controls.

Form-based codes mainly address the relationship between building facades and the public realm, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, as well as the scale of buildings in relation to the types of streets and blocks on which they sit. The regulations and standards in form-based codes are not simply as text but more importantly as diagrams and other visuals. These visuals are keyed to a regulating plan that designates the appropriate form and scale and thus character of a development rather than traditional zoning and land use controls, FAR, setbacks, traffic levels of service or parking ratios. One should not confuse form based codes with design guidelines, although form based codes may also have architecture, streetscaping, or landscaping standards which control items such as external architectural materials, plant materials, or allowable signs.

The most important item to control for in Cathedral Square will be the massing of the buildings. Cathedral Square should limit its buildings to roughly six stories. This will create a unique district still dominated by the architectural heritage of its historic churches.

The following visual depicts the difference between a district with controlled and uncontrolled building mass. Figure A is based on a district where just six developable sites replicate the mass and scale of the 110 West 7th Building, a 1970's era office tower on the Northern edge of the district and the tallest building in the area. At 28 stories and 388 ft. high, "West 7th" is a podium building type. Such buildings have many draw backs. For starters they tend to concentrate access into one point, and the podiums are often awkward in relation to the street, but more importantly for Cathedral Square, such buildings will easily swamp the historic landmarks that make this district a special place.

Figure B depicts how the unique character of the district is maintained by limiting new construction to roughly six stories, which is a common urban residential building height. A current Tulsa example of this scale building is the Metro at Brady Arts District. Future Cathedral Square development should be modeled after Metro at Brady rather than West 7th.

If a market for high rise towers emerges in the future, rather than special districts such as Brady or Cathedral Square, the Downtown core or Uptown would be more appropriate locations for them.



# THE PLAN:

## 3. DESIGN PRIMARY THOROUGHFARES

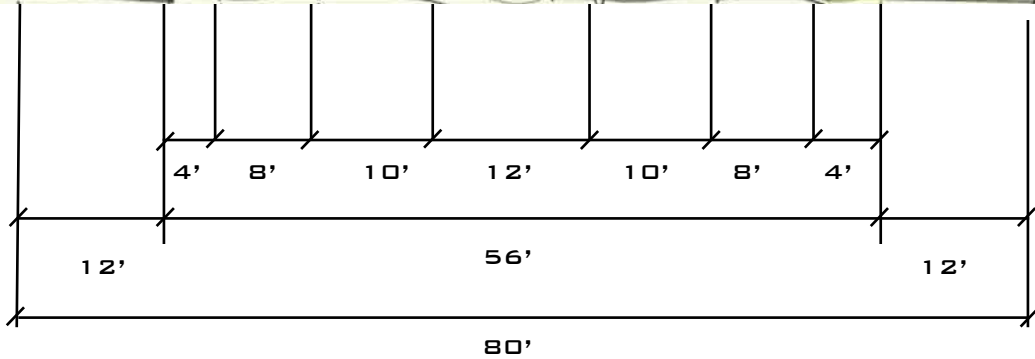
The most critical and controlled investments in the revived district should be along the two main thoroughfares: Boston Avenue and 10th streets. This is the crux of the parti. The retail based buildings, the detailed sidewalks and the parallel parking are non-optional. Street cars and bike lanes are recommended but are optional.

The following section is an approximation of what these two streets could become. The buildings' mass does not go over the requirements for the district. Uses are residential with neighborhood retail on the ground floors as much as the market can bare. But it is possible a contiguous street of retail with restaurants and other regional attractions could develop here.

The sidewalks are an ample 12 ft, which is actually the current width. They are also well articulated with plantings and street furniture. However the street core has been transformed into a multi-modal or "complete street." Dedicated bike lanes are in green, parallel parking lanes follow, with two way traffic lanes of 10 ft each for automobiles. In this example a street car lane is also shown. It is 12 ft. But this could just as easily be a line of planters

or a narrow sitting area, with turn lanes on either end of the block to facilitate traffic flow somewhat.

There are many traditional shopping streets in America in much denser cities that take this form. One great example is the Walnut Street corridor in Philadelphia, whose block and street widths are similar to downtown Tulsa's. Walnut street has only two lanes and accommodates traffic adequately. Boston Avenue if revived under the right design and planning rules could easily one day become Tulsa's premier outdoor shopping street, like Philadelphia's Walnut Street, or Chicago's Magnificent Mile.



# THE PLAN:

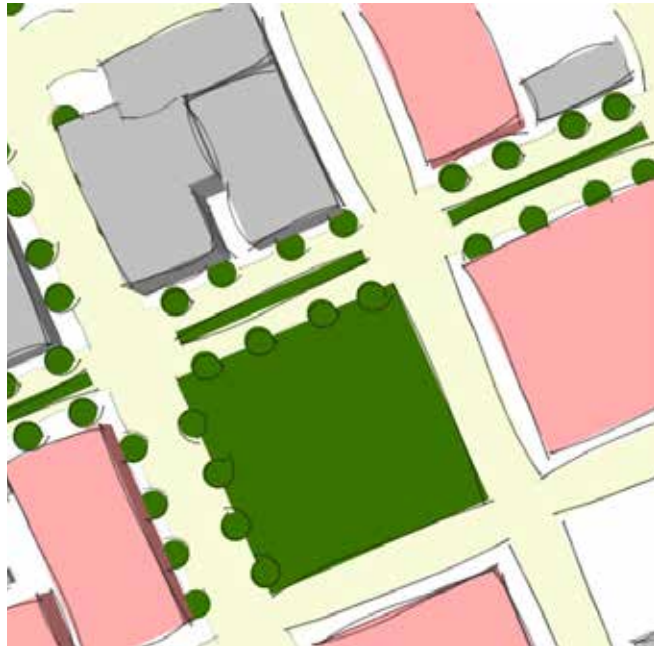
## 4. MAKE SPACE FOR THE SIGNATURE SQUARE

While design should be left to competent landscape architects, at the very least space should be land banked to become the districts signature square. Examples of great American squares include Savannah and Philadelphia's colonial squares, and in more modern times, Portland Oregon's Pioneer Courthouse Square, which has become known as that city's outdoor living room.

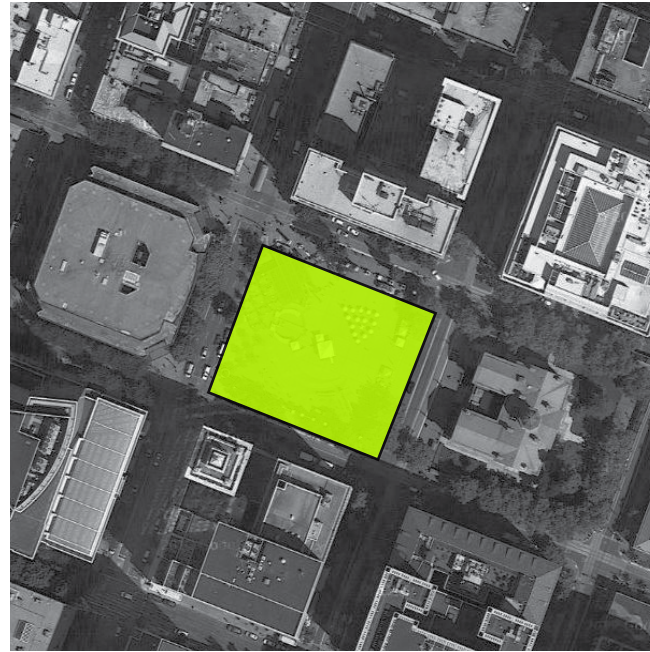
The project for public spaces list 12 great North American squares. When designing the square, Tulsa should study these examples well.

1. Jackson Square New Orleans, LA
2. Rockefeller Square New York, NY
3. Pioneer Courthouse Square, Portland, OR
4. Campus Martius, Detroit, MI
5. Union Square Park and Greenmarket, New York, NY
6. Bryant Park, New York, NY
7. Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, PA
8. Portsmouth Square, San Francisco
9. Washington Square, San Francisco
10. Square St. Louis, Montreal, Quebec
11. Squares of Savannah, GA
12. Washington Square Park, New York, NY





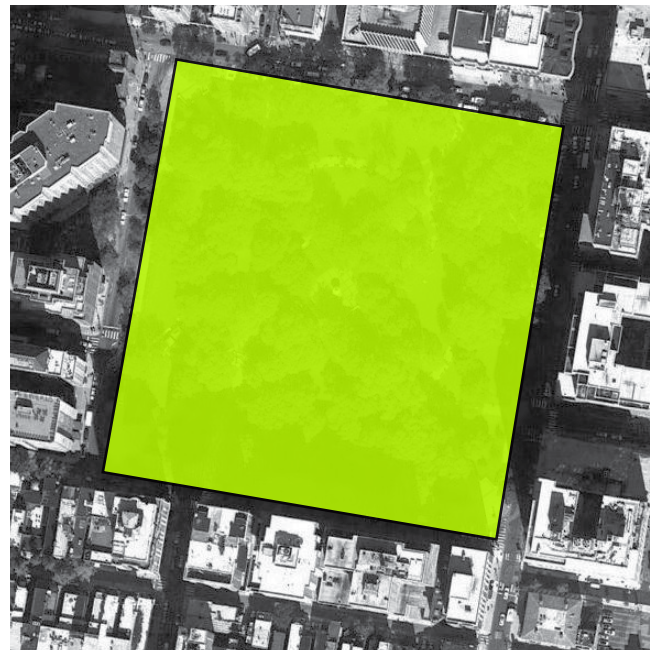
**TULSA, OK, CATHEDRAL SQUARE**



**PORTLAND, OR, PIONEER SQUARE 200 X 200**



**SAVANNAH, GA, JOHNSON SQUARE 200 X 300**



**PHILADELPHIA, PA, RITTENHOUSE SQUARE 550 X 550**

# THE PLAN:

## 5. CONNECT THE NEW DISTRICT TO “HOT SPOTS”

Perhaps the greatest surprise of 21st century urban design is the reemergence of the street car. Street cars are much slower even than light-rail trains and they typically are not dedicated, usually running with auto traffic in the street. Yet they're cropping up all over the country as a downtown circulator that will generate new real estate development as well as accelerate pedestrians, and Tulsa is definitely behind the curve on this trend.

Virtually all streetcar projects seek to connect disparate destinations in or near downtowns. All of America's current crop of street cars are beginning with only a few miles of service. On average they are costing about \$100 million to install.

When urban developers promote (and sometimes fund) a transit project, it has an economic development purpose rather than a strict mobility goal. Instead of transit oriented development this is development oriented transit.

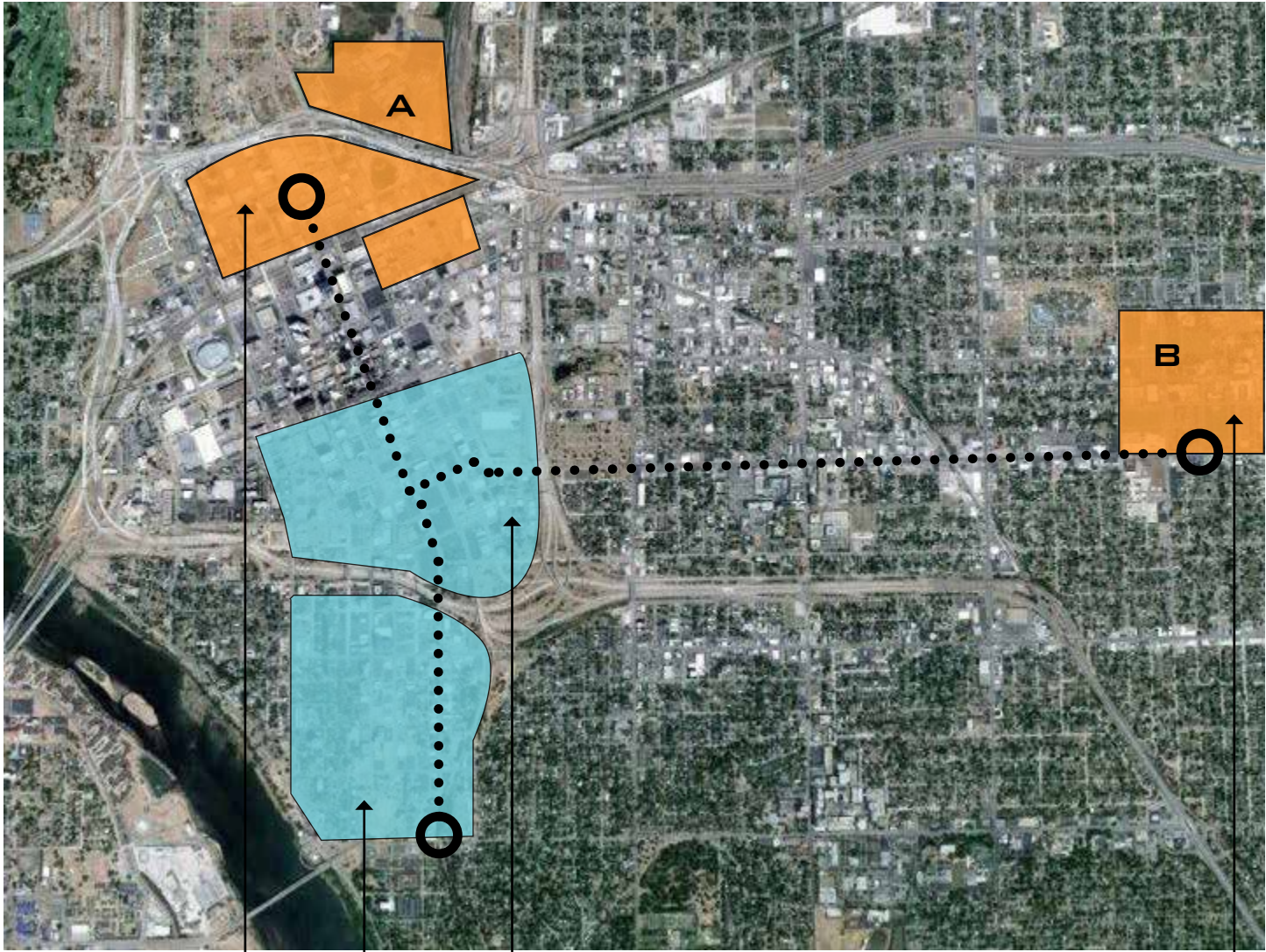
Street car experts claim that one must link places that are “hot” in the real estate market with those that aren't. This is what is attributed to the success of the Portland Oregon Pearl District streetcar. Portland's streetcar extended the hot market to new locations.

Another type of “hot” area are universities. The success of the Phoenix light rail is attributed to the fact it links Arizona State in Mesa with urban amenities along Central Avenue in Phoenix. The student demographic of the ridership bore this out and actually surprised the transportation planners.

If Tulsa were to follow these models in Portland and Phoenix the undeveloped urban residential potential of Cathedral Square as well as Uptown to its South are great candidates for being linked by street car to two Tulsa hot spots.

Hot spot A is the booming urban real estate market of the Brady District plus the student population of OSU Tulsa. Hot Spot B is the University of Tulsa 2.5 miles down 11th street. Both of these areas could be linked into Cathedral Square along its main multi-modal thoroughfares of Route 66 and Boston Avenue.

While the street car would crisscross Cathedral Square at the end of the line it should circle around the “hot” districts. The fact that this street car would also pass by major employers along 11th and in the core of Downtown Tulsa is a gravy that should add a few commuters to its ridership.



- UNDERDEVELOPED URBAN DISTRICTS
- "HOTSPOTS"

BRADY, GREENWOOD & BLUEDOME

UPTOWN DISTRICT

CATHEDRAL SQUARE DISTRICT

UNIVERSITY OF TULSA

# THE PLAN:

## 6. RESPECT ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY

### 1. FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:

1928, "PROTESTANT CATHEDRAL OF THE SOUTH"

### 2. WAREHOUSE MARKET BUILDING: 1929, ART DECO ICON

### 3. FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH: 1926

### 4. FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH: 1920

### 5. REMAINING BITS OF PRE-WAR FABRIC IN THE DISTRICT

### 6. HOLY FAMILY CATHEDRAL & 110 WEST 7TH: 1912 AND 1971

### 7. BOSTON AVENUE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH:

1929, CONSIDERED BEST EXAMPLE OF ECCLESIASTICAL ART DECO IN THE US.



# THE FUTURE

