

GATEWAY DISTRICT

DISTRICT PLAN and PROGRAM Charleston Commercial Revitalization Program

Prepared for the City of Charleston, South Carolina by Barton-Aschman Associates · March 1977

This report is one of a series of work papers focused on the future of downtown Charleston, South Carolina. These papers summarize the consultant's recommendations to the City and Downtown Revitalization Commission. Each paper describes a specific part of the overall revitalization program.

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INTRODUCTION

This report is one of several dealing with the improvement of the King Street commercial area of the Charleston peninsula. It is part of the Charleston Commercial Revitalization Program which focuses on development opportunities in five distinct commercial areas of the peninsula. A District Plan is being prepared for these areas in order to take maximum advantage of individual area strengths and potentials.

The Gateway District differs somewhat from the other districts in that it offers a greater amount of development potential, it is less commercial/shopping oriented, and it has already been subject to significant redevelopment. Its situation at the major northern "entry" to the commercial area, providing first glimpses of the downtown area for those entering from U.S. 17 and I-26, suggests that it has a critical role to play as part of the commercial area. Accordingly, the focus of this District Plan is upon guiding development changes, rather than enhancing the shopping environment as is appropriate for the other

districts.

This District Plan has essentially a threefold purpose: First, to describe the key improvement issues in the district. Second, to propose a framework for the arrangement of the district via land-use, circulation changes and guidelines for potential development. Finally, to briefly identify the development opportunities that exist in the Gateway District.

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DISTRICT ISSUES

The Gateway District is an eleven-block segment of the King Street corridor between Meeting and St. Philip Streets. This area is at the northern end of the commercial corridor and as such becomes the primary entry or gateway into the lower peninsula from U.S. 17 and Interstate 26. It does not provide a pleasant introduction to the lower peninsula.

The issues affecting this district fall into three principal categories. These include land-use arrangement, movement systems, and design. The problems and opportunities under each of these categories are briefly explored.

LAND-USE ARRANGEMENT

The Gateway District is an area of mixed land-uses. Existing uses include clusters of residential development, general commercial and business uses, (in the southern portion of the district along King

Street), some industrial, and transportation-related uses including the News and Courier Building and some distribution functions, as well as neighborhood retail, such as the Piggly-Wiggly Supermarket. There are also several vacant and underutilized parcels within the area as well as several large off-street parking areas. An additional characteristic of the Gateway District is the presence of a railroad right-of-way halfway between and parallel to King and Meeting Streets. A major portion of the district is devoted to two relatively recent uses, (the Piggly-Wiggly and the News-Courier operation) and vacant or underutilized parcels of land.

In general, existing properties in the Gateway District are in poor condition with the exception of the newer uses. Extensive vacant areas, dilapidated structures, a haphazard arrangement of uses, and poorly screened parking and service areas, all contribute to a negative visual impression as one moves through the Gateway District to

other sections of the lower peninsula. Such an impression is particularly unfortunate, since it tends to influence the viewer's impression of the entire peninsula. Since little in the way of historic structures and neighborhoods remain in the Gateway District, efforts at improving the District and changing it into a viable, attractive area will be truly challenging and dependent upon new development.

Still, several characteristics of the Gateway District do hold potential for helping to bring about an improvement of the area. Some uses, such as the newspaper complex and the new supermarket, are currently viable activities and will be determinative of new uses in the area. Several enclaves of residential development within the district relate well to neighborhoods to the east and west of the area and hold potential for further infilling of residential uses. For that matter, relatively simple design treatment, careful reuse of available parcels for new development, and expansion space for existing uses can make a significant difference in the area's appearance and pattern of development. The potential for this area to provide employment opportunities, necessary services for nearby residential neighborhoods, and an attractive gateway into the lower peninsula should all be considered in the arrangement and design treatment of the Gateway District.

VEHICULAR CIRCULATION

Currently, the major streets serving and affecting the Gateway District are Meeting Street, the one-way pair of Cannon and Spring Streets, and St. Philip and King Streets. Line Street is a minor arterial serving east-west traffic along the northern edge of the area. All other streets serve local service functions.

Previous traffic studies have indicated the need for a connection between southbound King Street and St. Philip Street to help de-emphasize King Street as a major traffic carrier through the shopping district. This diversion would also help facilitate more direct access to parking facilities located adjacent to St. Philip Street in both the Upper King and Lower King Street districts.

There are fewer pedestrian/vehicular conflicts along King Street in the Gateway District than is evident in other King Street districts to the south. This is partly due to the nature of the uses along King Street, which are less shopper-oriented than in other districts. However, pedestrian movement from the residential neighborhoods to the east and west is of some concern. This is especially true of the pedestrian access to the Piggly-Wiggly Supermarket.

DESIGN AND APPEARANCE

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the Gateway District is its appearance. As already indicated, the area contains a variety of land-uses including many vacant and underutilized parcels. This, coupled with the age and lack of maintenance of many of the older structures and properties, contributes to the appearance of a neglected area -- in contrast with some of the newer buildings such as the newspaper operation. This condition is particularly significant in that this district is functionally the "gateway" into the lower peninsula from the north and from the major approach routes.

Since there are significant opportunities for new development in the Gateway District, these opportunities for change also permit the creation of an improved appearance for the area. There is also a need to clearly identify the appropriate approach routes from U.S. 17 and Interstate 26 into the major streets which penetrate and provide access to the lower peninsula.

Although the elevated roadways providing the interchange between I-26, U.S. 17 and other major streets are not wholly within the Gateway District, their visual impact is clearly evident. These routes have fragmented blocks, terminated views, and created an unattractive and somewhat confusing vehicular entrance into the lower

peninsula. The need for improved visitor orientation is obvious. The adverse impact on the daily user of this area, in terms of affecting attitudes and impressions of this portion of the city, is also a factor that should be addressed.

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DISTRICT PLAN CONCEPT

The District Plan is a general guide for the physical arrangement and improvement of the Gateway District. Its importance lies in its ability to describe how the district should be arranged and treated and where people and vehicles should move -- without being submerged in plan details. Since changes and improvements within the Gateway area are likely to be more directly tied to private development activities, detailed physical improvements and projects to be implemented by the public sector, are not described at this time. Although appropriate, public improvements should be related to private development and initiative in the Gateway District.

LAND-USE ARRANGEMENT

Relatively few land-uses within the district are fixed. Notable fixed uses in the district include the News and Courier building and adjacent parking areas, the Piggly-Wiggly Supermarket, the Citizens

Southern National Bank, and to some degree, the currently used railroad trackage. These uses help anchor the district; it is unlikely that any of these uses will become inactive in the foreseeable future. Some of the scattered residential properties along the St. Philip Street edge and north of Line Street are also likely to remain an influence on reuse of nearby areas.

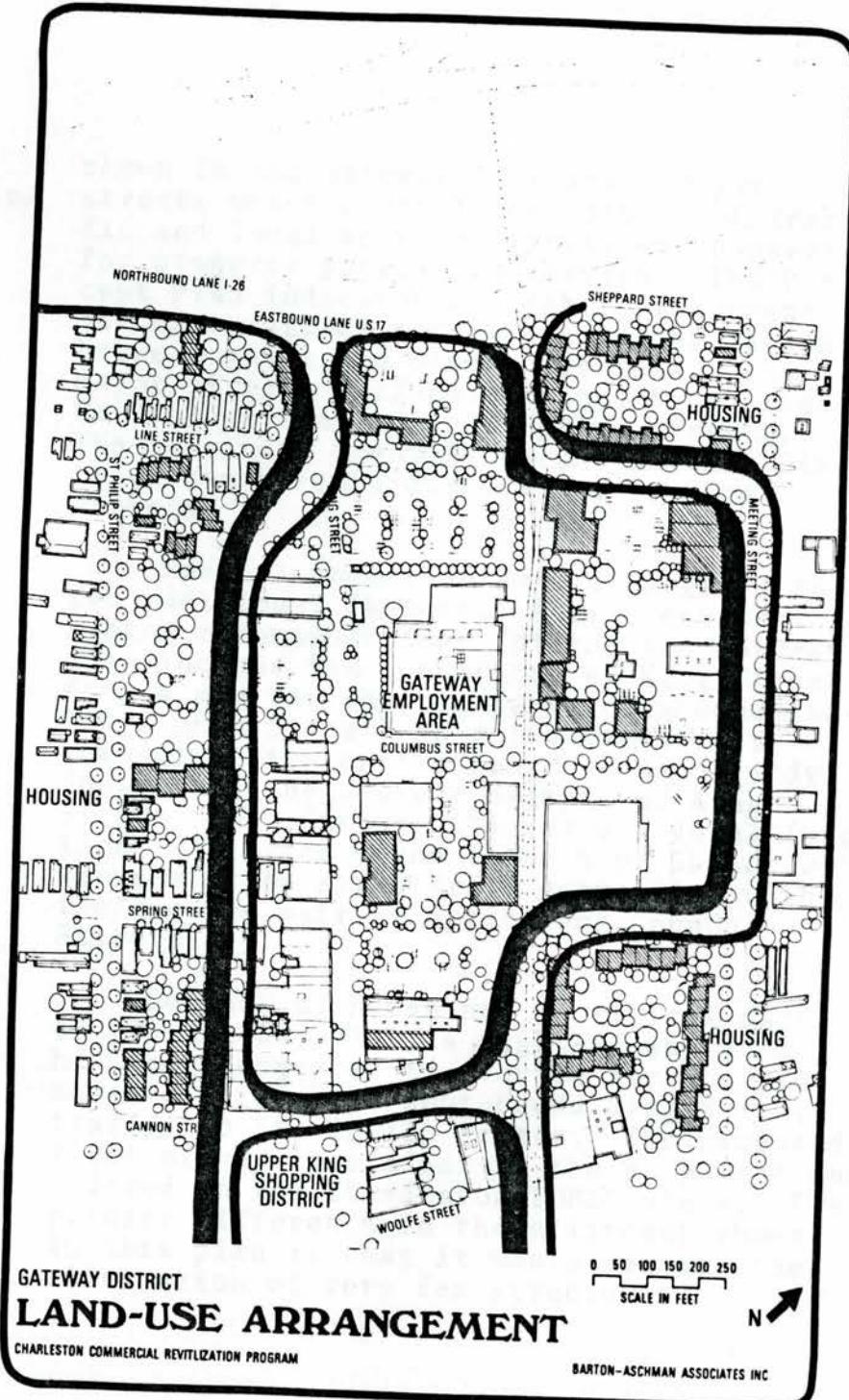
A number of the commercial structures fronting on King Street are also likely to remain for some time although the uses within them are likely to continue to change.

The Gateway District should be essentially divided into two distinct land-use areas. The first is an office/industrial park encompassing clean, labor-intensive uses in a campus-style development. (Similar to that already initiated by the News and Courier complex.) The other land-use, housing, is recommended for infilling in existing residential areas and as newly created residential development. These

housing areas should be viewed as extensions of the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The News and Courier Building, together with the unusual amount of open area already present within the Gateway District, provides an excellent opportunity for the development of office/industrial uses. This type of development is one which: contains clean, non-polluting facilities; has development arranged in well-spaced and landscaped, and moderate to low density patterns; encompasses office, distribution and warehouse uses as well as other appropriate industrial uses; and generally seeks to accommodate activities in a manner which enhances positive impacts and improves the visual character of this important gateway into the lower peninsula. The types of uses which should be encouraged in this area are those which: (1) benefit from a location in the central area of Charleston, in other words, serve users and businesses in the lower peninsula, (2) capitalize on the high accessibility of the area from U.S. 17 and Interstate 26 and other major routes, and (3) will generate a positive impact on this "entrance" into the lower peninsula.

The Gateway District is bounded on the east and west sides by residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods penetrate, to a limited extent, into the district beyond Meeting and St. Philip Streets. Some of the existing residential uses within the



district should be retained and enhanced. Such areas are found mainly along St. Philip Street and north of Line Street.

In addition to the reinforcement of existing residential areas, additional new housing development is proposed for several currently vacant parcels within the district.

The shopping-oriented commercial uses prevalent south of Cannon Street, in the Upper King Street District, should not be encouraged north of Cannon and into the Gateway area. Discouragement of shopping uses north of Cannon would help to compact the shopping district within the Upper King District and in turn allow for an orientation of the King Street frontage within the Gateway District toward service and employment-related activities. Accordingly, major traffic functions will still remain on King Street through this district. As already indicated, King Street south of Cannon will be de-emphasized as a major through route and traffic carrier and in turn will emphasize pedestrian movement and shopping.

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

As is true of all the district plans, proposed land-uses and proposed movement systems should be highly complementary and supportive of each other.

In general, two types of streets are

shown in the Gateway District. Major streets which carry large volumes of traffic and local service streets which provide for property access and service. The Concept Plan indicates a further refinement of the major street system by distinguishing between major and minor arterials. The major streets include Meeting, King, Line, St. Philip, Cannon, and Spring Streets. The remaining roadways in the Gateway District can be considered local service streets.

Special attention should be given to two additional factors. First, movement system recommendations for the King Street area include the conversion of King Street from a one-way thoroughfare southbound (below Cannon Street) to a two-way street throughout its entire length. As already indicated, the two-way segment of King Street below Cannon will serve a local function, while the segment north of Cannon will serve a major street role connecting with the one-way pair of Spring and Cannon Streets.

Second, although not a critical part of the Gateway plan, a right-of-way area has been suggested to provide for the proposed diversion of southbound King Street traffic to St. Philip Street. The proposed right-of-way is similar to the alignment considered in the Charleston TOPIC Study. The primary difference in the alignment shown in this plan is that it would require the elimination of very few structures.

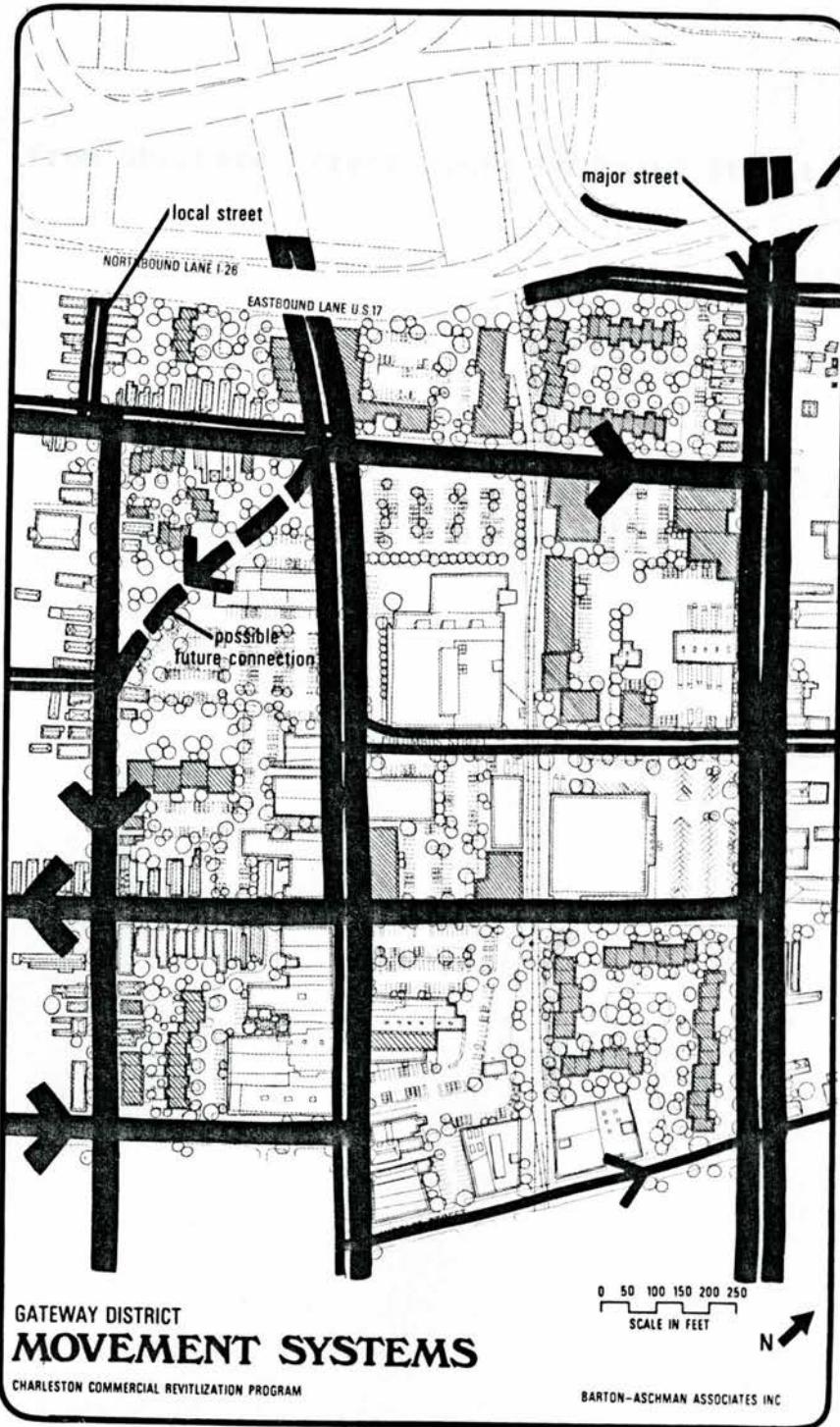
No overall parking system has been recommended for the Gateway District. Since this area contains a number of distinct activities and is likely to continue to do so in the future, there are limited opportunities and advantages to providing a unified parking system. However, parking requirements for each activity must be met in relatively close proximity to that activity. The Illustrative Site Plan suggests a number of areas where additional parking can be provided to serve both existing and potential future uses.

DESIGN TREATMENT

Design treatment required in the Gateway District relates primarily to changes in the overall appearance of the district and improvements required to provide an improved "entranceway" into the lower peninsula.

With respect to overall appearance of the district, all new development should be encouraged to provide landscaped setbacks from the street right-of-way. In addition, all off-street parking and loading areas should also be well-screened from street views. Off-street parking areas, if allowed in front yards, should be well-screened and should provide a landscaped edge between parking areas and the public right-of-way.

Each of the major streets in the area should be provided with distinctive street



tree landscaping which would help to identify these rights-of-way as major traffic carriers. In addition, the key entry points to the district from the north (U.S. Highway 17 and Interstate 26) should receive special landscaping and lighting as well as graphics control to improve this approach and entrance into the commercial area. This will no doubt require that attention be given to these approach routes north of U.S. 17 and essentially outside of the Gateway District, in order for appropriate positive impact to be created. Careful use of landscape materials, to both screen objectionable views and to guide and reinforce the approach routes is important. Moreover, careful use of signs and special lighting should also be considered in order to reinforce these entrances into the lower peninsula.

Meeting Street has been identified as part of the overall design concept for the commercial corridor as an "identity" street. Meeting Street will continue to provide an important vehicular route in the lower peninsula serving the commercial corridor and all of the commercial districts. Its alignment adjacent to the Gateway District is perhaps in need of improvement more than any other segment of Meeting Street. The design criteria to be followed in improving Meeting Street is thoroughly discussed in the Design Guideline Manual. Meeting Street in this area as well as throughout the commercial corridor, should become an attractive, well-landscaped and lighted "grand thoroughfare" that has a distinctive unity

from Shepherd Street south to Broad Street.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

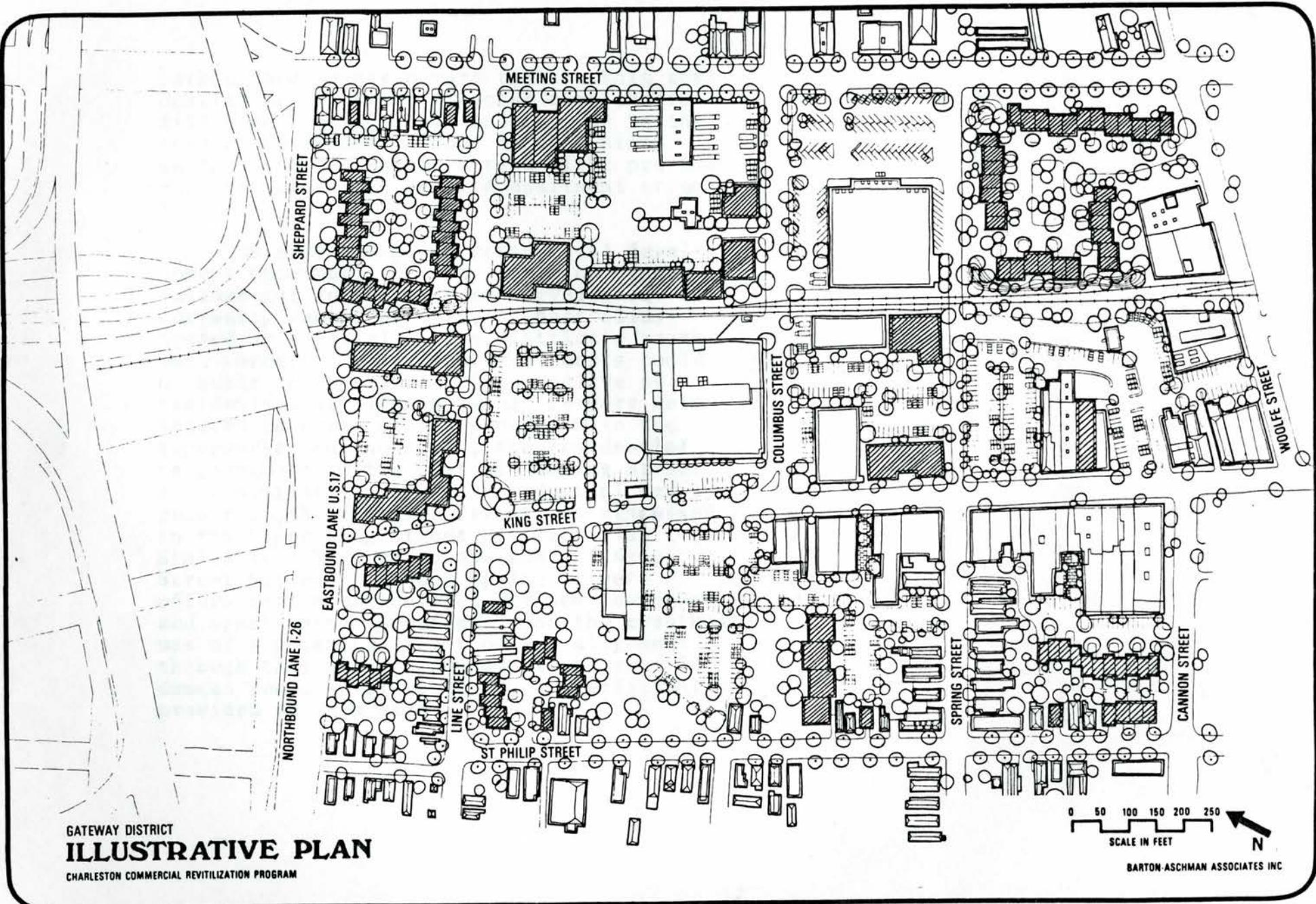
As indicated previously, there are a number of opportunities for new development in the Gateway District. The Illustrative Site Plan is intended to illustrate how some of these opportunities might be capitalized on, but is not intended to preclude consideration of alternative arrangements and layouts. A brief discussion of some of these opportunities follows.

The Gateway office/industrial area encompasses at least three major parcels which offer notable development potential. The first parcel is north of Line Street between King and the railroad tracks. One or more buildings supported by adequate parking facilities and landscaping are envisioned for this area. Similar development is envisioned for a second parcel to the south of Line Street between the rail line and Meeting Street. Development here may require removal of several older existing structures. Unified vehicular access locations from Line and Columbus should be encouraged to serve common parking and service areas. The third parcel, south of Spring

between King and the railroad lines may also entail the elimination of some older structures. Parking areas should be partly screened from street view -- with access provided from east-west streets, rather than King or Meeting.

A number of residential development opportunities are also present in the Gateway District. They are essentially of two types: one consisting of "infilling" of residential properties and improving of the overall residential environment, and secondly, creating new residential development on presently vacant land.

With respect to the first type of residential development opportunity, the best opportunities are found in the northeastern and northwestern corners of the district. These two predominantly residential areas currently have a number of vacant areas or incompatible uses that provide an opportunity for infill housing. The infill housing units would help to improve the environment, provide additional landscaping and off-street



parking and create a more tightly knit residential area. It is expected that the infill type housing would probably be in the form of townhouses. Some of the infill units along St. Philip Street might provide opportunities for low-rise apartment structures.

The second type of residential development opportunity -- the creation of new residential environment and development on currently vacant parcels, is best illustrated by a parcel in the district's southeast corner. Approximately 30 units could be built on this site. This enclave of residential development would be very well located in terms of its proximity to the supermarket on the north, the residential neighborhood to the west of Meeting Street and a similarly proposed residential development south of Woolfe Street, as discussed in the Upper King Street District Plan. Similarly, the area to the west of King Street between Line and Spring Streets offers real opportunities for new townhouses and apartments. Dependent upon the eventual use of a potential right-of-way alignment through this area, a number of new residences could be attractively and efficiently provided on this site.