



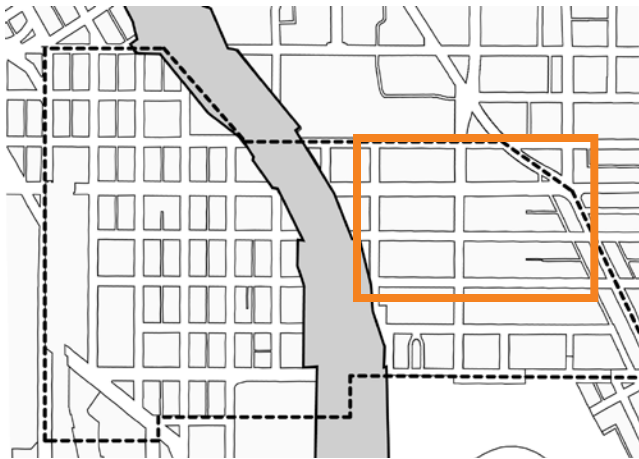
Little Saigon

Community Open Space Initiatives

Community Design Studio Report 2005

Department of Landscape Architecture / University of Washington





Source: Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle



S. Jackson Street

Executive Summary

The Little Saigon neighborhood sits on the cusp of dramatic change. This neighborhood has gone through many changes; from the early regrading, to the home of the Seattle Jazz scene, an increase in poverty and crime, the settling of the Vietnamese community, and now the planning for the future.

As the population of Seattle increases and the core of Seattle is being developed and built up. It is only a short time before development will begin in the Little Saigon neighborhood. With its close proximity to downtown, Capitol Hill, and views of Elliot Bay, the Little Saigon neighborhood has many attractive characteristics for developers.

Currently there is a large homeless population in the area, which is related to the fact that many of the resources for the homeless are also located in or near the area. There are also issues of drug use, dealing, prostitution, public drunkenness, crime and vehicle prowls.

There are few residents or opportunities for people to live with in the neighborhood. The neighborhood is primarily made up of commercial businesses, warehouses and light industrial businesses. At night most business owners go home outside the neighborhood, leaving the neighborhood unwatched.

Whether the crime situation is improved first or if new development and the addition of permanent residents to the neighborhood pushes the drug and prostitution out of the neighborhood, there are going to be changes in the future of the Little Saigon neighborhood regardless.

Many of the business owners that were talked with, welcome improvements to the current problems. For them improvements to the neighborhood will help bring more customers and patrons to their businesses.

Most of the business owners rent and do not own their property. There is concern that as development increases in the Little Saigon neighborhood, the characteristic of the Vietnamese community will be changed and higher rents will force out Vietnamese businesses.

It is important that as development begins, steps be made to preserve the character of the Vietnamese community and maintain affordable rents for the businesses that make up much of the Little Saigon character.

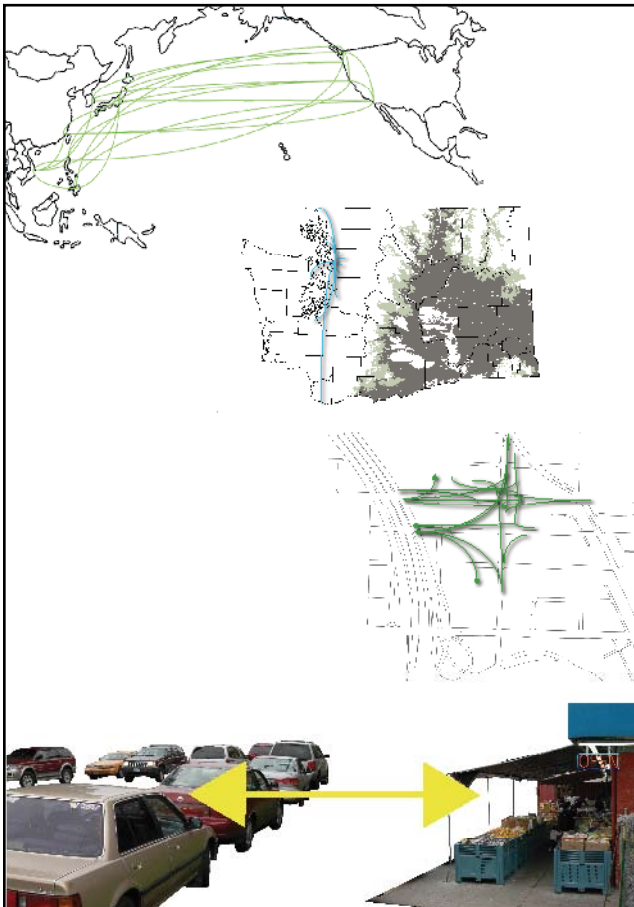
1. Overview of Site Study

Little Saigon is the easternmost part Seattle’s International District. It is roughly bounded by Interstate 5 to the west, South Main Street to the north, Rainier Avenue South to the east and South Dearborn Street to the south. Its major core lies on the intersection of South Jackson Street and 12th Avenue South. A steep climb combined with Interstate-5 separate Little Saigon from the rest of the International District.

In the past, the area was settled by African American and Jewish residents. High crime combined with low rents has given the neighborhood a rundown reputation. Vietnamese-American business owners moved into the neighborhood several decades ago, and have begun to revitalize it. Although the neighborhood still contain crime, it has improved since the Vietnamese community moved here. Several business owners have expressed a feeling of struggle and perseverance in their attempts to establish businesses and communities. They moved to this neighborhood despite the issues of crime because it was affordable for them. They have worked hard and continue to work hard to maintain their businesses. Many business owners want to improve and clean up their neighborhood but struggle with time, energy, money and the knowledge of how to implement changes. Much work is yet to be done, however.

There are many grocery stores in the Little Saigon neighborhood. Customers come from all over Western Washington to shop at these Vietnamese markets. Some customers come form as far as Portland and Vancouver B.C. These markets offer some of the best deals for fruits and vegetables as well as providing a wide assortment Asian foods.

The large influx of people and cars into the neighborhood for shopping causes traffic congestion problems, especially on the weekends. Parking spaces are limited in the Little Saigon neighborhood. The poor sidewalk conditions and unsafe feeling of the neighborhood prevent some people from parking and walking around the neighborhood for their shopping, especially after dark.





2. Neighborhood Assets and Issues

Little Saigon differs from the nearby neighborhood in numerous ways. Relatively young and cut-off from the rest of Seattle's Asian enclave by Interstate 5, it lacks the vibrancy and identity of its cousin, Chinatown. The urban form is more akin to suburban than urban, containing large block sizes and strip-mall type development. The zoning designations are Commercial, Light Industrial, and Neighborhood Commercial, generating a predominant land use of shopping centers as well as the warehouses that support them. Thus, the community stakeholders consist of business owners rather than residents, and the need for parks and open space has been neglected.

Interviews with stakeholders were conducted. In addition, this team's initial conceptual diagrams were presented to the members of the Vietnamese-American Economic Development Association (VAEDA), the responses to which were enormously informative. Of primary concern to the community is safety. Like the rest of International District, delinquent behavior blatantly takes place on the streets. Drug use and prostitution make the streets of Little Saigon intimidating come nightfall. Because of this, business owners are wary of implementing enhancements such as street benches. They fear that benches will attract further drug users and homeless.

Parking lots, though heavily used, are poorly configured, mixing cars, pedestrians, and delivery trucks in an alarming way. It is not uncommon to see a forklift crossing 12th Avenue to deliver goods from warehouse to supermarket. When considering its urban setting, a great amount of Little Saigon's land is devoted to parking lots, full on weekdays, and overflowing on weekends. Because of its lack of a residential population, most of the strip mall patrons drive in to pick up their groceries, take-out food, or visit one of the many shops and businesses. Much of the traffic comes from Rainier Valley, which has a large Asian population. Some new shopping centers, such as the How How Shopping Center and the Ding How Shopping Center have built underground parking to accommodate their patrons. Other businesses are not able to conduct such an expensive venture, however. Cars incessantly double-park or park in No Parking zones.

This combination of concerns for safety and need for parking has left the prospects for a traditional city park low. Any undeveloped land in the core is needed for parking, and the community fears that a park would simply be overrun with delinquents. Because of this, the recommendations presented in this report aim to improve the community's existing forms, such as its streetscapes. It also aims to make use of the spaces around the existing shopping centers, addressing new models of open space.

Lack of investment by the city has allowed the sidewalks to fall into disrepair and street lighting to be inadequate. Little Saigon lacks the residential population needed to create strong grassroots initiatives. The primary stakeholders in the community are business owners, who operate their businesses personally for most of the day. It is difficult for them to find the time to meet. When they do meet, their variety of backgrounds, combined with the fact that many of them are in direct competition with one another, makes it difficult for them to agree.

Despite the factors working against them, Little Saigon's stakeholders have great hopes for the future. The members of VAEDA, "dedicated to the economic development of the Vietnamese American community of the Greater Seattle area," (<http://www.vaeda.org/>), have great aspirations for the community. They envision cleaning up the streets, improving storefronts and updating facades. They dream of grand gateways into the community, and a vibrant night market.

Currently, the City of Seattle is strategizing a major rezone in South Downtown, including Little Saigon. Though it is unknown what the exact results of the rezone will be, major changes will undoubtedly be occurring. Perhaps the influx of money and development will allow these dreams to come true. Until then, however, the short-term, small fixes outlined in this report will give the community a chance organize and gain momentum, preparing them for the future.





3. Planning and Design Strategies

Safety and Appeal

Increasing the element and perception of safety is an important part of the Little Saigon neighborhood. In order to attract people to this neighborhood and develop elements such as late night cafes and night markets, people need to be and feel comfortable walking around the neighborhood. Several elements can help with neighborhood safety.

- Increased lighting
- Sidewalk maintenance
- Regular litter clean up
- "eyes on the street"
- Tree pruning and vegetation maintenance
- Develop "focal points"



Activate Sidewalks and Parking Lots

There is very little open space available in the Little Saigon neighborhood. Small implementation methods are required to better utilize areas along sidewalks and surrounding parking lots.

- Street trees
- Creative ground vegetation
- Moveable tables and chairs
- "Blurring boundaries"



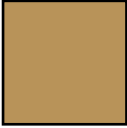
Identity

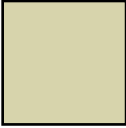
Maintaining a connection to the Vietnamese community and culture is a key element to design strategies. It is important to balance elements of development, relationships with the International District and Vietnamese identity in all design strategies.


- Light posts and banners
- Customized sidewalks
- Night markets
- Cafes and restaurants
- Fruit and vegetable stands







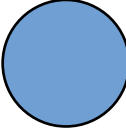
 The I-5 corridor cuts the International District in half, isolating the Little Saigon neighborhood. The space under I-5 is also a place where many homeless people live and an area of high crime.

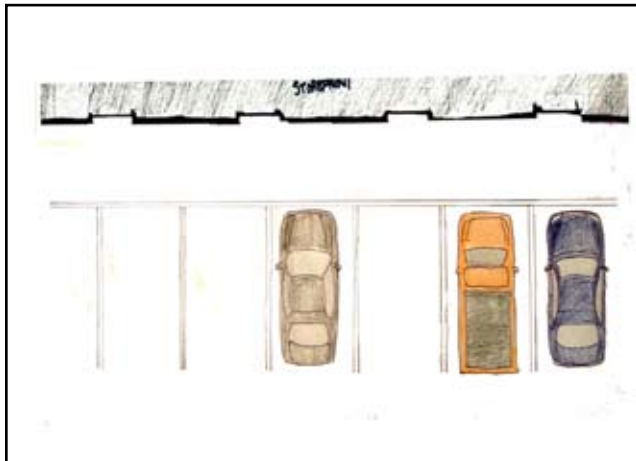
 Extra long blocks make it difficult for pedestrians to walk around the Little Saigon neighborhood.

 Future developments should consider creating pedestrian easements between blocks to facilitate easier pedestrian movement and increase open space.

 South Jackson Street and 12th Ave . South provide the best opportunities to implement design strategies to create an identity for the Little Saigon neighborhood.

 Sidewalks provide a large amount of public open space. Their improvement and safety are key to improving the Little Saigon neighborhood.

 Parking spaces are a premium in the Little Saigon neighborhood. Better use and design can create more room and enhance open space opportunities.



Existing Conditions of Parking Space

4. Design Projects

Little Saigon Shopping Center Enhancements

Irene Tang

As the previous sections have detailed, Little Saigon's most prevalent land use is its shopping centers. At the same time, there is a multitude of criminal behavior and safety issues. Because of this, community stakeholders are wary of creating any environment conducive to gathering – they fear that these places will simply be overrun with delinquents. With the exception of one bench at the 12th and Jackson intersection, there are no outdoor places to sit, eat, talk, or simply gather. There are no focal points for people to congregate about. Shopping center patrons leave directly after completing their errands, abandoning the community's unclaimed open spaces to delinquent activity. Despite the multitude of shopping activity occurring in Little Saigon seven days per week, the community lacks vibrancy. People come and go at an amazing rate, yet few people stay because there is nowhere to be.

Vibrancy and safety are endogenously related, however. The more vibrant a neighborhood, the safer it becomes, as legitimate activity pushes out the illegitimate. Furthermore, as safety increases, people feel more comfortable filling the space. As the community becomes more attractive, new groups of people, such as children, contribute to the growing liveliness.

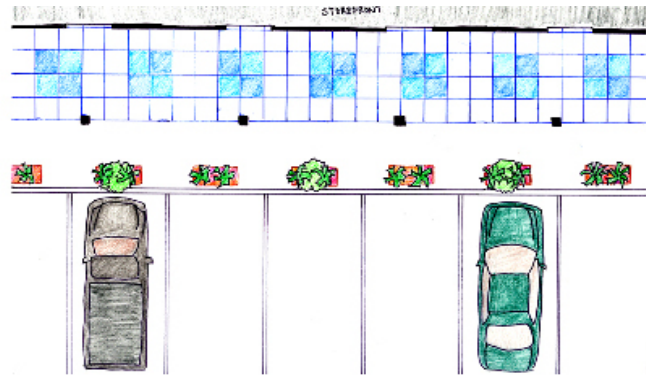
This section details three strategies for enhancing the open space in the shopping centers in Little Saigon, then applies them to two sites, Asian Plaza and Jackson Square.

Figure on the left details the current configuration of parking lot to storefront in most of the shopping centers in Little Saigon.

Between the storefront and parking lot is a brief walkway (some only 4 feet in width). Upon exiting the businesses, patrons are immediately confronted by their cars. The following three designs – landscaping, seating and focal point – attempt to distract the patrons from their cars, and attract them back into the shopping center. They give the patrons a place to gather, enhancing the vibrancy of these locations.

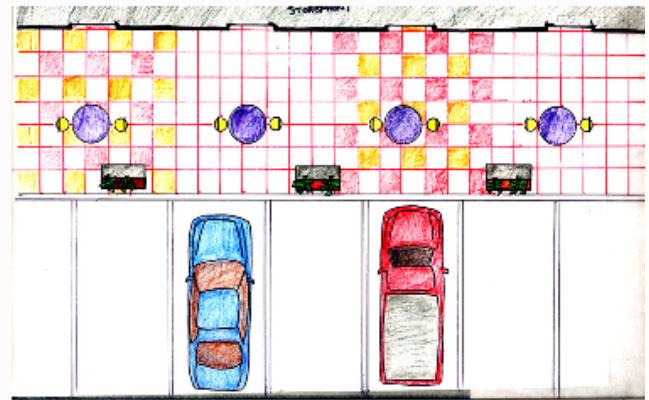
Landscaping

This scheme erects a barrier between the storefront and the cars, encouraging customers to explore further, rather than leaving immediately. It is ideal for a center with many shops.



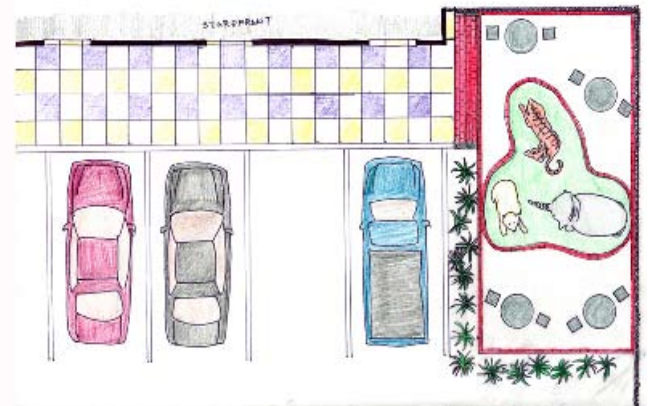
Seating

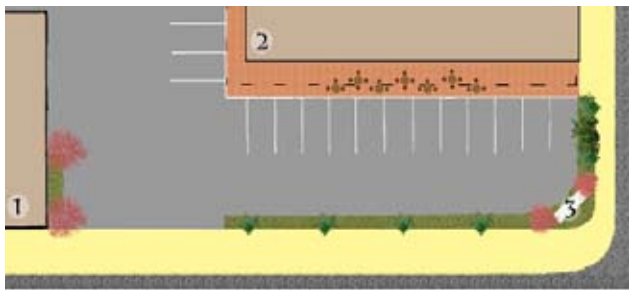
This scheme encourages restaurant “take-out” customers to eat their meals inside the shopping center, rather than taking it home. Their presence may attract further patrons. It is ideal for a center with many restaurants, cafes and bakeries.



Focal Point

This scheme creates a focal point using sculpture, a water feature, or any public art. Its addition can freshen the appearance of shopping centers and create foci of activity. It is ideal for a center lacking a strong identity.





Two locations were identified as ideal candidates for these schemes:

Asian Plaza

Asian Plaza space had the space necessary to implement (1) a focal point and (2) seating.

1) Focal Point

The addition of a mural to this wall adds to the identity of Asian Plaza. Though the mural could contain any image, this image is from the Forbidden City in Vietnam.



2) Seating

These tables and chairs are placed outside two restaurants in Asian Plaza that conduct a large amount of "take-out" dinner business. A variety of types of chairs and tables can be used, depending on the store owner's preference. Concrete furniture cannot be stolen, but movable chairs are more yielding to change, and can be taken indoors at night.



Potential Improvements

The walkway in front of the storefront was extended to accommodate the second enhancement, pushing the parking lot further towards the sidewalk. A landscape barrier between the parking lot and sidewalk is also implemented. Cherry trees and a more elegant sign “clean up” the look of Asian Plaza, making it a more welcoming environment.



Jackson Square

Jackson Square had the space necessary to implement (1) landscaping and (2) seating.

1) Landscaping

Cherry trees beautify the storefront and erect a “screen” between the patrons and their cars. Though a variety of trees or shrubs can be used, cherry trees lend a very Asian feel.



Potential Improvements

2) Seating

Benches, though convenient for customers, attract homeless populations. This may be undesirable to business owners. The walkway in front of the storefront was extended to accommodate both enhancements, decreasing the roadway between the two rows of parking. A variety of pavement options are available for the walkway.





Existing Conditions



- S. Jackson Street
- King Street
- 12th Ave. South
- Major Intersections

Streetscape Improvements

Garrett Devier

The Little Saigon neighborhood with the help of some small implementations has the potential to become a vibrant, safe, enjoyable and unique neighborhood.

Currently the neighborhood struggles with issues of safety, poor lighting, neglect of street trees, and littered sidewalks.

The following design strategies are meant to be a toolbox of options to be considered through out the neighborhood. Each business or neighborhood block can work together to string together a set of strategies that will create a network of opportunities and functions through out the entire neighborhood.

These designs are meant to be a springboard for business owners to build upon and compliment with their own interests, styles, culture, and tastes. By allowing businesses and community members to place and use these strategies, the goal is to have a neighborhood shaped and designed more by its residents rather than an outside designer.

Pedestrian Corridors

South Jackson, King Street and 12th Ave South are the three main corridors on the Little Saigon neighborhood. The main intersections of this neighborhood are at 12th and Jackson and 12th and King. The following design opportunities can be implemented to enhance the pedestrian movement and community identity in these locations.

South Jackson Street is the main road through Little Saigon. With the highest car, bus and pedestrian traffic, S. Jackson provides more opportunities for commercial businesses and community identity.

King Street is a quieter street that contains a few commercial businesses, warehouses, light industrial and a few residential buildings. King Street connects to the core of the China Town neighborhood and has potential for being the main pedestrian corridor between the neighborhoods.

12th Avenue South crosses both S. Jackson and King Street providing a north south connection through the neighborhood.

The 12th Ave and S. Jackson intersection is the center of Little Saigon. This intersection has four bus stops and has the most potential for creating identity for the Little Saigon neighborhood.

Blurring Boundaries

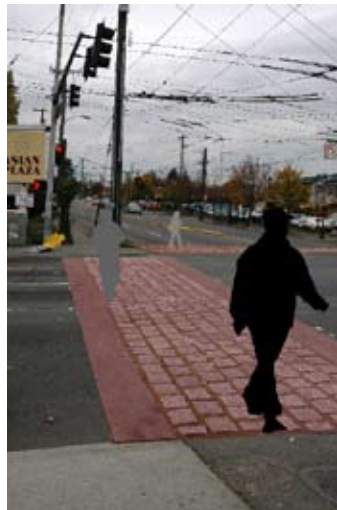
A main design goal was to break down and “blur the boundaries” between the street, sidewalk and building. By breaking the boundaries down, businesses can spill out onto sidewalks and sidewalks draw people into businesses. Outdoor markets, fruits, vegetables and cafes are all elements that can facilitate breaking down these boundaries.

The use of moveable tables, chairs and counters can be used during business hours for patrons. At night these items can be put away preventing unwanted use and loitering.

Fruit stands and extendable canopies can be used during the day and pulled into the building during non business hours.

Allowing owners to adopt and use the sidewalks in front of their business can create a sense of ownership and stewardship of the spaces. Maintenance of vegetation and trees, litter clean up and an “eyes on the street” approach will all help in making the Little Saigon neighborhood cleaner, safer and more enjoyable.





Identity and Safety

Two of the main issues with the Little Saigon neighborhood were preserving the character and identity of the Vietnamese community and improving the safety of the neighborhood. Many of the issues regarding safety such as crime and drug use require more than design solutions to alleviate these problems. However, the following design solutions combined with active participation and an “eyes on the street” approach from business owners can make improve the safety of the Little Saigon neighborhood.

Lighting

There are several methods for improving the lighting through out the Little Saigon neighborhood. Light posts, lighted bollards and ambient storefront lighting are three methods that could be used individually or in combination with each other.

S. Jackson street is the location for most of the commercial businesses and will likely be the location for new businesses moving into the neighborhood. Businesses such as cafes and restaurants that stay open late at night can contribute to lighting the neighborhood with ambient lighting.

If enough businesses remain open at night the combination of ambient light and lighted bollards could be used to create a well lit and safe feeling environment.

King street currently has fewer commercial businesses and none that remain open at night, To create a safer and well lighted environment, the use of lamp posts would be necessary to properly light this part of the neighborhood.

Identity

Maintaining a sense of identity is important to the Little Saigon neighborhood. Sidewalk cafes, restaurants, signage, color, and outdoor markets contribute to the Vietnamese identity.

Two subtle methods for identifying the Little Saigon neighborhood are banners and customizing the crosswalks / intersections.

Combining street banners with light posts along Jackson street will help in identifying the Little Saigon neighborhood.

Creating custom crosswalks at the intersection of 12th and Jackson, will create a break in the pavement along Jackson street and better identify the heart of Little Saigon.

Open Space Acquisition, Placement and Use

The Seattle Department of Parks & Recreation has funds to purchase property in Seattle's International District to be used as a public park/open space.

The Little Saigon neighborhood currently is lacking any public park or large open space. The addition of a public park to the Little Saigon neighborhood will provide opportunities to strengthen community identity and create a place for a outdoor public and night market.



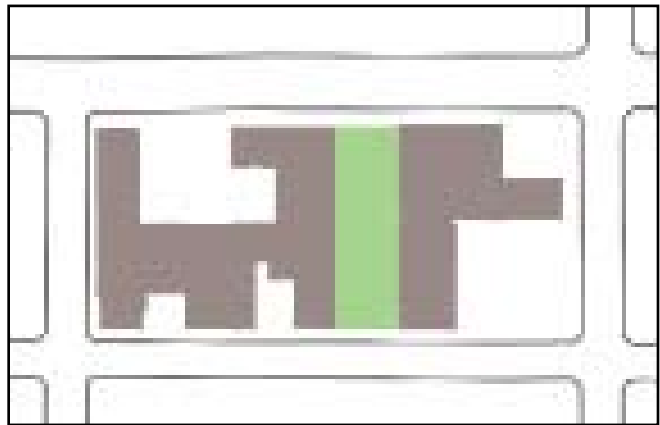
Vancouver BC Night Market

<http://www.urbanphoto.net>

Alternative 1: Block Connection

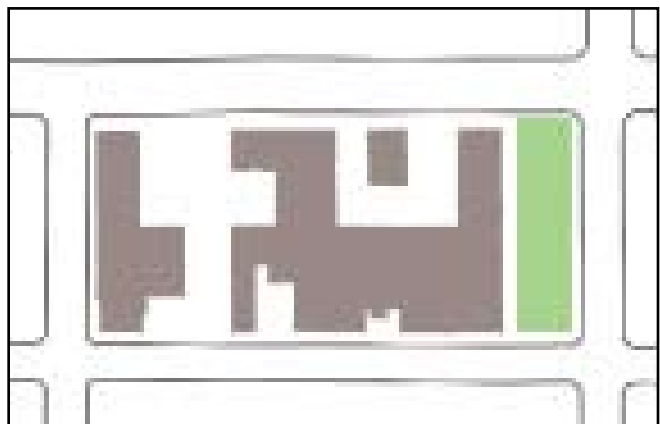
The Little Saigon neighborhood has long city blocks that run east and west. These long blocks inhibit pedestrian movement through the Little Saigon neighborhood. Purchasing two half lots that create an easement in the middle of the block, will create a public open space and allow for better pedestrian movement through the neighborhood.

This site would benefit by having the neighboring businesses facing towards the open space to create an "eyes on the street" effect, to prevent the site from being used for unwanted purposes.



Alternative 2: End Of A Block

Acquiring two half lots to create a public park at the end of a block provides another opportunity for the Little Saigon neighborhood. If this option were to be purchased by one of the main intersections in the neighborhood it could be used as a main community focus and gathering point. The elongated property is ideal for creating an open night market environment. The commercial space next to the park could use part of this space for sidewalk cafes.



Alternative 3: Block Corner

This possibility would require purchasing a piece of property at the corner of a block. If a corner lot could be purchased near one of the main intersections in the Little Saigon neighborhood, this option would be more successful. A corner lot par near a main intersection could serve as a community gathering place for festivals and night markets. Similar to the end of the block option, the site would benefit by having businesses such as restaurants and cafes that face and border the site. Site lines and visibility should be addresses with this option to prevent unwanted activities from taking place in the back corner of the park.



5. Major Recommendations

- Extend the walkways in front of Asian Plaza and Jackson Square storefronts.
- Implement seating and landscaping as appropriate to encourage patrons to gather make use of the space.
- Implement water features, sculptures or other public art.
- Organize business owners to implement these enhancements. Organizing the business owners will prepare them for the changes to come following the South Downtown rezone.
- Improve neighborhood sidewalk and street lighting.
- Develop neighborhood maintenance plan for street trees, vegetation and litter clean up.
- Encourage grocery stores, cafes and restaurants to use and be open to sidewalks.
- Implement elements that will contribute to the identity of the Vietnamese community. Such as banners, custom crosswalk markings, building awnings, etc.
- Encourage future development to maintain affordable rents for Vietnamese businesses.
- Encourage future developments to be consistent with Vietnamese styles and culture.
- Use Department of Neighborhood funding to purchase open space and park for the Little Saigon neighborhood.

Community Open Space Initiative:
Chinatown, Japantown, Little Saigon—
International District, Seattle

2005 Community Design Studio Report

**Part 4. Little Saigon -- Garrett Devier,
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