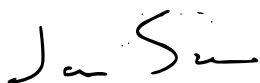Growing Pains: Land Use Conflicts Within Night-Oriented Districts

by

Alexander D. DeWitt

Received and approved:

_____ Date___January 11, 2021_____
Thesis Advisor Signature

John Shapiro_____
Thesis Advisor Name

_____ Date___January 11, 2021_____
Thesis Advisor Signature

David Burney
Thesis Advisor Name

_____ Date_____
Chairperson Signature

_____
Chairperson Name

GROWING PAINS: LAND USE CONFLICTS WITHIN NIGHT-ORIENTED DISTRICTS

Student: Alex DeWitt
Institution: Pratt Institute
Date: January 11, 2021

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to explore the issue of land-use conflicts in the context of the nighttime economy. There is little research on nighttime planning in general and as cities evolve and expand, there will be a growing need to better understand issues after dark. This report consists of an extended literature review regarding the origins of the Nighttime Economy and various texts regarding the many facets of the 24-hour City Agenda. This review is followed by a brief history of Midtown Houston, Texas and a SWOT Analysis of the neighborhood informed by various interviews with local experts. There is then an extended inventory of local night-oriented businesses and their closing times. Lastly, recommendations are made for the improvement of the neighborhood, and specifically the night-oriented businesses there. One goal is to identify potentially synergistic mixed-use configurations that have occurred naturally and are successful. These can be cataloged and studied to improve policy surrounding nightlife and the nighttime economy.

Keywords: Nighttime Economy, Land Use Conflicts, 24-hour Cities, Houston, Night-oriented Businesses, Nighttime Design.

ISSUE STATEMENT

Mixed-use zoning is becoming prevalent as more cities attempt to become vibrant and alive for extended periods beyond the average working hours of nine-to-five. Mixed-use zoning brings inherent conflicts as cities try to meet the needs of different user groups. The dominance of the nighttime economy has exacerbated this problem since the early aughts (2000's).

The topic of this report is to explore how modern planning efforts navigate the conflicts inherently associated with night-oriented mixed-use districts. Uncovering this balancing act would allow us to view the issue from all sides and help create and collect recommendations for use in future communities going through mixed-use related conflict mediation.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal and Objectives

This study explores the life cycle and tensions of night districts by looking at Midtown Houston as a case study. This exploration will be done through a combined approach of interviews with local experts, historical research, data collection and analysis. Five objectives were outlined below as a roadmap.

1.   Understand Night Economy + 24 Hour City Framework
2.   Identify Issues
3.   Consult Local Experts
4.   Compile Inventory of Night Oriented Businesses and Mixed Uses
5.   Explore Precedents and Make Recommendations

1) Understand Night Economy + 24 Hour City Framework

To understand the current situation that cities find themselves in, it is imperative to comprehend the origins of the Nighttime Economy (NTE) and this new 24-hour city framework. Working knowledge of these issues provides both insight into the types of conflict that the NTE raises, and information on how market forces drive NTE scenarios. From this research, we can learn how cities have dealt with similar past issues. This objective was accomplished through a litera-ture review that was supplemented by interviews and knowledge gathered from stakeholders in the study area.

2) Identify Issues

To understand the NTE district, it is important to understand what issues are playing out across its boundaries. The case study explores tensions between visitors and residents of Midtown Houston. This "friction" has arisen as the district has evolved and played host to more diverse activities and residents.

3) Consult Local Experts

To better understand the conflicts, local experts can provide insight and feedback about the conflicts as well as inform my recommendations. For such expert guidance, I sought out:

•   The Midtown Redevelopment Authority, the organization in charge of development, public realm improvements, and neighborhood planning.

•   CGES | Bailey Planning, one of Houston's leading urbanism consultancies, also headquartered in Midtown.

•   The Rice University-Kinder Center for Urban Research, a multi-disciplinary think-tank centered around urban issues and design.

4) Compile Inventory of Night Oriented Businesses (NOB) and Mixed Uses

To uncover how the neighborhood's night-oriented businesses (NOBs) manifest themselves in the urban fabric, I compiled an inventory of most of NOBs in the neighborhood and recorded if they were in mixed-use buildings, and, if so, what the other uses were on the site. This was also done to explore what if any synergistic land uses occur naturally in NTE districts.

5) Explore Precedents and Make Recommendations

Once the problems are understood with input from local experts, recommendations can be made. While the recommendations can draw on existing efforts elsewhere, these must be recalibrated mindful of the specific issues uncovered for the Midtown Houston case study. Inferences can then be made for general practice.

METHODOLOGY

1) Literature Review

The literature review was conducted to explore peer-reviewed articles and books on urban nighttime topics. These topics focused mainly on the advent and implementation of the NTE as well as experiences of the urban night. These sources were divided up by relevant themes to better assist future readers in finding sources sought by reading this thesis.

2) Historical Analysis

The main source for the historical analysis was the Midtown Redevelopment Authority Website, encyclopedia entries on the neighborhood, and internet research from other historical sources. This culminated in a timeline to succinctly explain the evolution of Midtown Houston. This timeline puts special emphasis on milestones relevant to the history of nightlife in the area as well.

3) Interviews

Interviews were conducted entirely via Zoom due to the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020. An interview format (see the form in the Appendix) was used to guide a seemingly natural conversations about Midtown, its history, and the relevant planning efforts of the City government. The interviews afforded a unique "insider" knowledge of the area and plans that will affect it in the future. Interviews were conducted with staff from the following institutions:

• The Midtown Redevelopment Authority, the organization in charge of development, public realm improvements, and neighborhood planning. Marlon Marshall- Director, Engineering and Construction.

• CGES|Bailey, a local advocacy planning organization that is headquartered in Midtown. Carlos G. Espinoza Sanchez, Co-Founder.

• Rice University-Kinder Center for Urban Research, a multi-disciplinary think-tank centered around urban issues and design. Luis Guajardo, Urban Policy Research Manager.

Initially, there were more prospective interviewees. However, due to the unfolding pandemic, difficulties with scheduling and response times increased, given the unprecedented strain on many people during this time of unrest.

4) Inventory and Analysis of Night-Oriented Businesses

An Inventory of night-oriented businesses (NOBs) was collected by accessing the list of nightlife venues via the official Midtown Houston website: https://midtownhouston.com/explore/map/nightlife/. This list was expanded upon with local knowledge to the best of my ability. The list was then brought into excel and populated with approximate closing times for each business based on data from their website. This schedule was then color-coded based on weekday and weekend hours. The closing times were then compared to the hours of operation for the METRORail and Bus Service. Additionally, a list of whether each NOB is operating in a mixed-use configuration was collected. The type and number of approximate uses for each building were codified, and a list of the type of adjacent businesses was recorded. This data was collected through personal observations in the neighborhood.

5) Document Review

A document review was conducted to familiarize the reader with relevant plans and policies associated with either existing conditions or future recommendations for Midtown Houston. In order of relevance, these documents were:

• 2013 Strategic Plan for Midtown, Midtown Redevelopment Authority

• Plan Houston 2015, City of Houston

• Souly Austin 2019, City of Austin

• Austin Legacy Business Relief Grant 2020, City of Austin Economic Development

• San Antonio World Heritage Area Legacy Business Program 2018, City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation.

• San Francisco Legacy Business Program 2013, City of San Francisco Office of Small Business

LITERATURE REVIEW

The 24-Hour City Agenda

The concept of the 24-hour city evolved out of the work of Jane Jacobs. in her acclaimed work, The Death and Life of American Cities, Jacobs's chapters on the street ballet also included mentions of certain stores and businesses staying open 18 hours a day. She records that certain businesses tend to show up in clusters such as cafes and bars (Roberts & Turner, 2005). Stemming from her accounts of the vibrant street life after dark, planners in the United Kingdom proposed a series of policies extending business hours and looking to attract culture to city centers after conventional working hours as a way to revitalize the economy during the recession of the 1990s. These policies began in Leeds, Cardiff, Manchester and Westminster, in the United Kingdom (Roberts & Turner, 2005). This new vision for urban centers was a utopian view of leisure-focused urban nighttime that was inclusive, vibrant, and economically beneficial. Roberts suggests that this concept had good intentions at its inception, i.e., to revitalize underused urban centers and aid in the recovery from the recession that hit the United Kingdom during the 1990s. However, the concept was co-opted by the entertainment industry and has become less multi-faceted and more market-driven (Roberts & Eldridge, 2009, p. 24).

As this concept became more popular and increasingly linked to related topics such as the NTE, it has become an entire movement to transform urban centers worldwide. It has become a category or typology for certain types of urban centers with the following criteria: 24-Hour cities (a) are high-density cities with (b) vibrant nighttime economies, (c) have mixed-use development, (d) offer robust public transit that often runs late into the nighttime, and (e) are easily walkable and pedestrian-friendly with (f) a high concentration of late-night or 24-hour businesses. These criteria can be referred to as the 24-hour City Agenda as it is the end goal for the policies involved in making this vision of the urban night a reality (Kelly, 2016).

The 24-hour cities are often compared to their counterparts: 18-hour cities, and nine-to-five cities. The 18-hour cities are growing dense urban centers with extended hours, entertainment districts, developed public transit, and smaller markets. In contrast, the nine-to-five cities tend to be sprawling, spread-out, automobile-oriented, single-zoning dominated cities, where people work in the urban center and commute to and from the suburbs, mostly in private transit (Kelly,2016).

Hugh Kelly, an American Professor at Fordham University, has worked extensively to further codify and define this term in an American context. His book (2016) lists what factors can be used to measure and discover whether a city is a 24-hour city, 18-hour city, or nine-to-five city. His goal was to determine investment performances for the real-estate sector. For his latest article on the topic, he teamed up with another researcher, Emil Malizia, who measured the "vibrancy" of urban areas using several factors. Together they examined 42 cities in the United States and categorized them into tiers as either 24-hour,18-hour, or nine-to-five cities. Their goal was to determine which market was most favorable for new development. They determined that six cities are 24-hour cities, nine are 18-hour cities, and 27 are nine-to-five cities. Kelly's methodology includes a statistical analysis of the following indicators: full-service drug stores open 24-hours within ten miles of the city center, city population density, regional distinctiveness scale, Federal Bureau of Investigation "index crimes" per 100,000 people, proportion of workers using non-automobile transit for their commute, and the number of people living in or near downtown who also worked there. Malizia (2015) used an urban form matrix made of several factors to determine vibrancy, density, diversity, connectivity, and walkability. This was then averaged and given a scale from 1-100. Thus, it produced a tiered taxonomy of city activity based on a city's hours of activity. Their findings showed that 24-hour cities, which comprise the first tier, had a better return on investment than those in tiers two or three, 18-hour, or nine-to-five-cities, respectively. The same authors found that offices located in 24-hour and 18-hour cities also reported higher productivity than those in nine-to-five cities. Lastly, Kelly and Malizia called for more analysis to better distinguish 18-hour cities from nine-to-five cities (Kelly & Malizia, 2017). David Turner, in the United Kingdom, outlined how the policies that regulate or govern the 24-hour city agenda line up. They involve local authorities working in tandem with the police and business operators

with the premise that extended night and weekend hours benefit the community and businesses. This is undoubtedly a more staged and collaborative effort than the market-driven response seen in the United States (U.S.). It seems that in the United Kingdom, local business owners are more open and eager to work with the police and local lawmakers to bring about this vision of the urban night, which is starkly different from the war that is playing out between cities, business owners and alcohol controlling bodies in the U.S.(Turner et al., 1999).

In his article "Understanding the 24-hour City…", Michael Glass invited a reevaluation of the production of knowledge during the policymaking and community engagement process in the U.S. (Glass, 2018). Glass examined civic engagement strategies during a policymaking session in Pittsburgh South Side and suggested that community engagement be used as a strong indicator for policy success. However, that engagement means many different things to many groups. Researchers should be reflective on their positionality because it contextualizes and co-constructs the data used to make policy. Glass reminds us that the researcher is an active participant in defining space. For Glass, the policies that make up the 24-hour city concept in the U.S. encourage evening consumption and "ameliorate negative externalities that can occur when businesses comingle with residential populations" (Glass, 2018). Although Glasses makes a point about researcher's roles in knowledge production, he highlights something important: policies in place for the U.S. concept of the 24-hour city are less utopian and more economics-driven and consumer-oriented than those found in the United Kingdom.

Underlying Cultural Changes and Commodification

A little earlier, in the late 1980s before the idea of 24-hour cities had coalesced in the United Kingdom, Renato Nicolini—a politician in Rome, Italy—coined the term "Nighttime Economy" or NTE to describe his summer program for the revitalization of some of Rome's urban centers. For Nicolini, the West's urban centers had become merely "daytime-office or shopping centers" and the "urban wilderness after rush hour" (Bianchini,1995). His NTE program—the Estate Romana—was culturally focused and directed to city centers with no activity taking place after evening rush hours. Nicolini's Estata Romana lit up Rome's deserted

office centers with lights and activities. People ate, took photos and films, walked around, danced, listened to music, and socialized. This concept has then evolved into a more measurable economic sector centered around entertainment, leisure time activities, alcohol sales, and food services (Bianchini, 1995).

This NTE concept was brought about by more than just one politician's drive to use under-utilized urban areas. The cultural revolution started in the 1960s blurred the lines between culture and politics, and provided an increasing availability of leisure-time and disposable income. Feminism, community action, gay activism and black activism began to populate the city at night with activities. An early slogan from the feminist movement was "Take Back the Night" presumably from an unsafe or unsavory atmosphere that handicapped the ability of women, specifically, to enjoy the city after dark (Bianchini 1995). There was a zeitgeist that Nicolini took advantage of. Although successful in activating downtown Rome after dark, seniors and unemployed youth were two groups that were excluded as target populations by the market. As the Estate Romana grew and expanded, it stratified the city after dark by tailoring activities to specific demographies relating especially age and social standing, excluding seniors and unemployed youth (Bianchini, 1995)

Back in the United Kingdom, nighttime activity was at first culturally opposed, as anything after dark was considered a borderline "unholy activity" in 1940s Britain (Bianchini, 1995). When the ethos of planning shifted from a business management perspective of the 1970s and 1980s towards a more culturally focused perspective in the 1990s, there was tremendous interest in the NTE, and it proliferated as more and more policies were adopted in the United Kingdom and Europe based off the early success in Italy.

Lovatt and O'Connor (1995) postulate that the NTE was partly a response to the deindustrialization of large parts of many cities worldwide during the 1970s and 1980s (Lovatt & O'Connor, 1995). It was even more so a response to the loss of purpose and the shattering of collective identity within urban centers. Without industry, the cities were struggling to see what their purpose was. The new NTE model concept appeared in the mid-1980s as a saving grace. The NTE became a regeneration strategy as the Central Business District (CBD) evolved from a center of production to a center of consumption. Competition between cities became fierce as each tried to jumpstart their own NTE (Lovatt

& O'Connor, 1995). The ethos of planning shifted from the business management perspective of the 1970's and 1980's towards a more culturally focused perspective in the 1990's, there was tremendous interest in the NTE and it grew quickly as more and more policies were adopted in Europe.

In the U.K, this new centralization of the culture sector caused tension due to heavy-handed policy. "High culture" took precedence for funding. Things like the theatre, ballet, and symphony received subsidies and funds over music venues or cafes. There was a more central role ascribed to leisure and art and an emphasis on play. Once seen as secondary to "real" business, these things were suddenly cast into the spotlight and legitimized overnight (pun intended). Similarly, there was a shift in the definition of culture as good for economic development, as a commodity to be marketed (Lovatt & O'Connor, 1995).

Conflicts After Dark

As these two ideas (the advent of the NTE and the 24-hour city movement) coalesced into what we know as the urban night, there began to be saturation within the new night market. This, coupled with a drive towards mixed-use development, meant that the awake city and the sleeping city overlapped more and more. The conflicts arose manly from residential communities coexisting in space and time with the commodification of youth-oriented, entertainment-based, and alcohol-fueled nightlife.

As Giordano summed up, "If the NTE is often the strategy used for urban development and to regenerate disadvantaged neighborhoods, it is also the source of conflict" (Giordano et al., 2019).

What to do? City administrations in Bologna and Montpellier attempted to solve the problem of loose space where people gather in front of NOBs due to overcrowding and stuffy conditions, with increased liquor licensing regulations, specified closing times, and strict disciplinary measures (Giordano et al., 2019). Other literature refers to this loose space as the "Fuse Zone," as it is where the fuse is lit for conflicts (Bromley, 2000). For Giordano et al. (2019), the solution was to be mindful of the overlap between nocturnal practices, existing regulations, and public spaces design. They argued in favor of increasing hours and budgets of public spaces—and reducing regulations—to increase night activity and people's flow around night districts and decrease massing around open spaces.

Not all conflicts are of the same ilk or impact. Giordano (2019) broke conflicts down into three parts: noise, social degradation, and recorded crime. Bromley identified a typology that generates the most fear, "drinking streets." These are akin to Jane Jacobs's idea of Clusters, or sometimes they are referred to as Lanes. These clusters of bars are identified as significant generators of anxiety and avoided by most people that are not there to drink. Bromley's suggestion was to deconcentrate these businesses and spread them around the urban core with intermittent mixes of businesses that cater to a different client mix (Bromley et al., 2000). Also, on the topic of safety, Bromley explored this in the cities of Swansea and Cardiff, in the United Kingdom (Bromley, 2000). Bromley identified anxiety at night as central and determined that it was focused on and around places exhibiting fear-generating "design" derived from the place's history, recorded crime, perceptions of safety, and natural surveillance. This is a similar concept to Oscar Newman's idea of Crime Prevention Through Urban Design (Newman, 1978).

Land-use conflicts are handled in different areas of planning. Geoffrey Etnire outlines a novel solution for much bigger land-use conflicts that could be applied to more specific problems within the night city. Etnire believes the use of simple collaborative easements solves these land-use conflicts. These easements are codified in a formal agreement between existing adjacent businesses that cause nuisances such as noise or pollution. This agreement is then accompanied by a disclosure agreement letting the prospective buyer of the adjacent property know in advance that these activities occur nearby (Etnire, 2019). This approach should cut down on registered complaints as buyers know adjacent activities before moving in. This solution could be considered in night-districts that could attract a tenant interested in these night districts and not averse to their nocturnal activity.

Management Strategies for Urban Night Districts

With more and more conflicts appearing in the night city, calls for management strategies increased. Tiesdell and Slater answered this call with their research on managing space and time within the NTE (Tiesdell & Slater, 2006). This United Kingdom-based study asserted that although the different land-uses associated with urban mixed-use are often considered a component of urban vitality, they often lead to

conflicts. The study identified control over location and timing as necessary tools for mitigating conflict. The study used a behavioral model invented for crime prevention. The study suggested that behavior is influenced by three things: spatial and physical design, social and cultural context, and regulation context. For the urban night, the study determined that the main conflict stems from the struggle between "Natural Time" vs. "Mechanical Time." We have a natural circadian rhythm, continually being challenged by arbitrary things such as schedules and work structure. With the advent of the NTE, this mechanical time has increasingly been put in conflict with natural time. Staggered closing times throughout NTE districts are recommended to control better the level of activity and flow of people in the "Fuse Zone" and on the street; i.e., to avoid a new "rush hour" as venues empty out masses of people into the public realm (Tiesdell & Slater, 2006).

Sensory Experiences of the Urban Night

Moving beyond conflict into what urban dwellers experience at night, we delve into an adjacent realm to the NTE. Robert Shaw modifies the language of French philosophers to get at the roots of night activity. He suggests that the Night City is made up of Assemblages, a word from Deleuze, larger than structures, forms, or processes—that are in fact amalgams of these things. Assemblages refer to objects and processes. He goes on to say that the Night City is made up of atmospheric boundaries that are penetrated by certain objects. This night atmosphere is made of small details such as refuse on the ground, spilled food, urine, and vomit, groups of partiers and taxis (Shaw, 2014).

Hollands goes into detail regarding the stratification of youth throughout the Night City and that these youths experience quite different and segregated forms of the NTE (Hollands, 2002).

Lastly, Adams (2007) brings a sensory perspective to the table. They suggest that the urban night, and therefore conflict, is experienced with the entire body and that much of these conflicts are not visual but olfactory such as the smell of urine or vomit in the morning after a larger party. Adams recommends maximizing the urban night's positive sensory experiences and mitigating the negative through policy (Adams, 2007).

Conclusion

Much of the existing literature is United Kingdom and European-focused, but the ideas raised seem to be universal problems experienced by everyone touched by the NTE. This literature suggests that it is possible to mitigate conflict in the urban night but does not address recent developments within retail real estate or affirm a search for symbiotic land uses that exist in night districts.

"Loose Space" In Front of Bars

Estate Romana

HOUSTON MIDTOWN:
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

The Houston Midtown is located in the heart of the city, just south of Downtown and separated from Downtown by an elevated section of Interstate 45 (the "Pierce Elevated"). Midtown is bordered by Montrose to the west, the Museum District to the south, and Interstate 69 (highway 59) to the east. Midtown is characterized by a continuation of Downtown's street grid, anchored by Main Street and the METRORail Red Line. Midtown's 325 blocks cover 1.24 square miles (3.2 km2) and contain an estimated population of nearly 8,600 people in 2015 (Super Neighborhood Resource Assessment 2016).

Midtown is one of 88 Super Neighborhoods in Houston. Super Neighborhoods function similarly to community boards in New York, where residents of neighboring communities are encouraged to work together to identify, plan, and set priorities to address their community's needs and concerns. The Super Neighborhoods are organized into a council that serves as a forum where residents and stakeholders can discuss issues, establish priority projects for the area and develop a Super Neighborhood Action Plan (equivalent to a 197-A Plan in New York City) to help them meet their goals. In some cases, more than one of the Super Neighborhoods have joined together to create a stronger, more active Council.


Midtown

Houston Area

Land use

Although one of the largest cities in the United States, Houston has no zoning laws and instead relies on a Code of Ordinances and deed restrictions to conduct its land-use regulation, primarily by governing how property can be subdivided. The municipal government regulates uses in relation to one another but not where they uses occur, since each parcel of land comes with limitations in the form of deed restrictions. The nuances of this unusual division of authority is discussed further below.

As a municipality, Houston gained the ability to enact residential guidelines in 1963, and by 1965 these guidelines expanded into a rudimentary system of land-use policies organized around private deed restrictions. The City used its resources to uphold private restrictions on individual parcels of land. These restrictions included many of the conventional things found in the zoning ordinances of other cities, such as lot setbacks, lot sizes, and the ability to deny building permits based on non-compliance with private deed restrictions. In 1982, the Houston City Planning Commission passed a development ordinance that allowed them to review and regulate apartment and commercial development and mandate open space requirements as well as mandate parking requirements. In 1998, this development ordinance was further
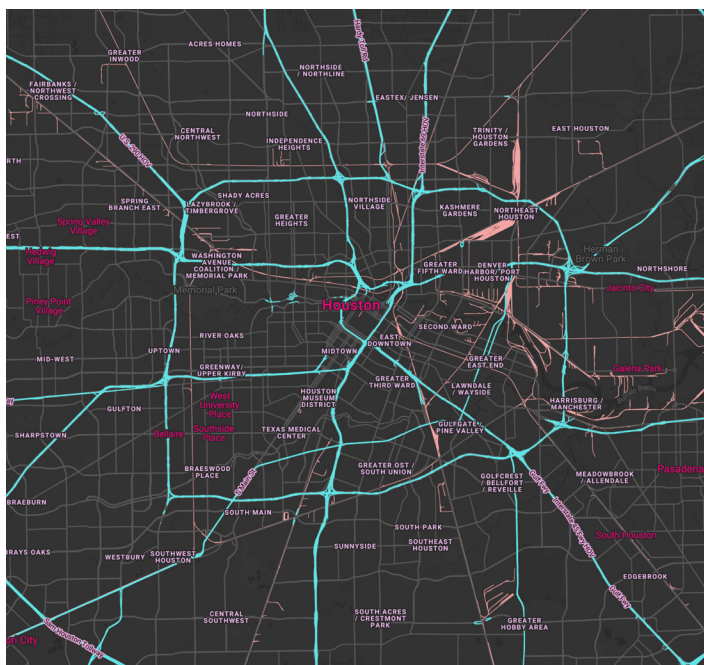
expanded to allow the City to divide parcels into two categories similar to zoning designations, Suburban and Urban, each with their own land use regulations. In 2001 a lot size provision prevented developers from splitting lots on existing parcels, further bolstering the City's oversight. The last major development came in 2003 with the extension of city enforcement of private deed restrictions ("Forget What You've Heard, Houston Really Does Have Zoning (Sort Of)," n.d.). This development serves as a proxy for the contemporary municipal code enforcement and includes oversight of garbage disposal, landscaping, noise, architectural character, and activity type. The City Council does have the ability to create and vote on new ordinances; the only difficulty is that these can just as easily be abolished whenever the Council sees fit.

History of Midtown

Midtown began life as one of the first residential districts near downtown in the 1890s. It was primarily made up of single-family Victorian-style homes on small lots (History – Houston Midtown, n.d.). These homes were occupied by the founders of the Humble Oil and Refinery Company.

As the city expanded and downtown grew busier, pushing commercial activity into the area, many of the residents moved farther away to seek the quiet of the country. By the 1950s, a slow decline began, which was then hastened by the sudden decline in oil production throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Although its original residents sought greener pastures elsewhere, the neighborhood became a new home for the incoming wave of immigrants from Vietnam. In the 1970s, after the war, many people came to Houston to start a new life. These hard-working small business owners managed to keep part of the area thriving and vibrant throughout the oil decline, and Midtown took on new life as Little Saigon. The city officially recognized these immigrant communities' efforts and dedicated a plaza in Elizabeth Baldwin Park to commemorate the Vietnamese settlement in Midtown. Aside from the ethnic enclave, the only stability offered to the neighborhood came in the form of the Houston Community College and numerous churches in the neighborhood.

One of these churches, the Trinity Episcopal Church, initiated efforts to revitalize the neighborhood, which transformed into the Midtown Redevelopment Authority (MRA). The MRA petitioned to make midtown into a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF District) in 1995, which allowed the area to take a portion of the taxes in the area and use it to improve the neighborhood. This effort kickstarted the revitalization and development seen today.

The MRA focused its early efforts to attract more residential uses back to the neighborhood; this was primarily to increase its stable tax revenue. This push through the early aughts eventually led to more development, pushing many Vietnamese businesses out of the district. This effort continued into the mid-aughts until the economic bust of the great 2008 recession. The MRA then focused its efforts on public realm improvements culminating in the Bagby street redevelopment, which overhauled the entire public realm along Bagby street to be more pedestrian-friendly and walkable. In 2009 the MRA territory was expanded, and there began a shift to focus on more mixed-use in the neighborhood. This balanced approach has netted the district much popularity and resulted in it being voted the favorite neighborhood amongst millennials in 2014. Since then, the district has become the site of a pilot program for more walkable development and has grown significantly.


Victorian Home in Midtown

Local Favorite Mai's Vietnamese

Timeline

19th Century	20th Century	21st Century
• Humble Oil Refinery Founded • Victorian residential district founded	• 40's residential housing boom • 50's families leave to less crowded neighborhoods • '62 Spec's Opens • 70's New life with immigration from Vietnam • Ensemble Theatre Opens • 80's Oil Bust leaves area dilapidated • Rich's Houston - Gay night club opens • 90's Little Saigon flourishes • 95 MRA established	• 04 Development boom spurred by need to increase tax base • Vietnamese Immigrants pushed out due to high rents • '06 Economy bust • Bagby Redevelopment • Nightlife pushed out to Washington Ave • '09 Expansion of MRA • Shift towards MX- Use • '10 Nightlife begins returning • ' 13 Rich's closes • '14 Favorite neighborhood for millenials • '16 Rich's re-opens • '19 Rich's Moves to Montrose • '20 Covid-19

Nightlife in Midtown

Nightlife in midtown can be seen as cyclical, which seems to point to a broader pattern for night-oriented districts outlined in the findings section. Starting in the 20th Century, night-oriented businesses began flocking to midtown due to cheap rents, ample room, and downtown proximity. Spec's liquor store opened in 1962 and quickly became an anchor for the district with its fun atmosphere and events. In the 1970s, The Ensemble Theatre began to call midtown home, and today it is the largest African American theater company in the United States. In the 1980s, Rich's nightclub, a local legendary club for the gay community, opened. Rich's can be seen as a bellwether for nightlife in the area as it has a cyclical relationship with the neighborhood that ebbs and flows. In recent months, Rich's decided to relocate to Montrose, a nearby neighborhood to Midtown. As the area developed in the early aughts, many original night-oriented businesses were pushed out of the neighborhood to nearby Washington Ave. As the MRA shifted its focus back to mixed-use, it attracted these businesses once again in the early 10's. However, in the middle teens, as the district's popularity surged once again, night-oriented businesses were priced out. The MRA has made it a point to attract these businesses once again. In recent months, due to increased development and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the NOBs are in a precarious predicament once again.
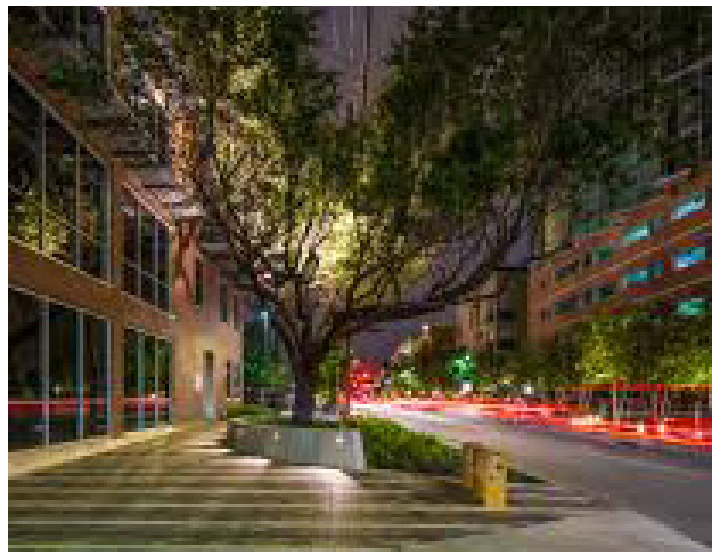
Bagby Street

Poster for Rich's

FINDINGS

Introduction

The process of investigating, discussing with experts, and reviewing current plans for the district yielded a surprising set of Midtown issues. The main issue was related to parking disputes throughout the area as night visitors parked in residential districts and walked to their preferred destination. Closing times for NOBs followed a typical pattern. However, they did not line up with local public transit options, and there has been a steady increase of dense residential development within the neighborhood's night-oriented areas. Covid-19 could accelerate this onward march of housing as construction has sped up, and there is more turnover due to small business closures.

The section begins with the resulting information from the interviews organized into a SWOT analysis of the neighborhood, followed by a diagram of the cyclical nature of nightlife, and lastly, an analysis of the NOB Inventory.

Interview results

The results of the various interviews with local experts are compiled and summarized in this section.

To begin, all interviewees confirmed the presence of land-use conflicts within Midtown. The conflicts were characterized in various ways, such as East vs. West Midtown, or as a conflict between residents and night users. This is an interesting result because the MRA has been trying to keep separate the residential areas from the commercial hubs and has created a natural division between the east and west sides of the district. These conflicts primarily manifest as parking issues as visitors park in residential areas and walk around the district to various commercial establishments. Additionally, the MRA has partnered with the Houston Police Department to work with businesses to provide increased presence and parking enforcement in the district. The MRA sees the nightlife as a positive aspect of the neighborhood and provides special incentives for NOBs such as waiving mandatory parking minimums. The MRA sees themselves primarily as administrators instead of stewards and thus take a more distant approach than a Business Improvement District. Their role is to facilitate development to increase the tax base in the area and provide public realm improvements. The MRA has sister organizations that do more hands-on activities, such as Midtown Management District and Midtown Park Conservancy.

Development in the area has sped up due to the Covid-19 pandemic and timetables have been accelerated due to favorable conditions such as light traffic. This is good, but the pandemic could cause a real-estate flip when the return on investment (ROI) from NOBs no longer outweighs speculative land value for developments. Although the MRA is concerned about the fallout from Covid-19, there are no programs currently in place to offer assistance or aid at this time. This development puts increased pressure on many non-profit organizations in the neighborhood as there is a growing concern of being priced out when the land goes up in value.
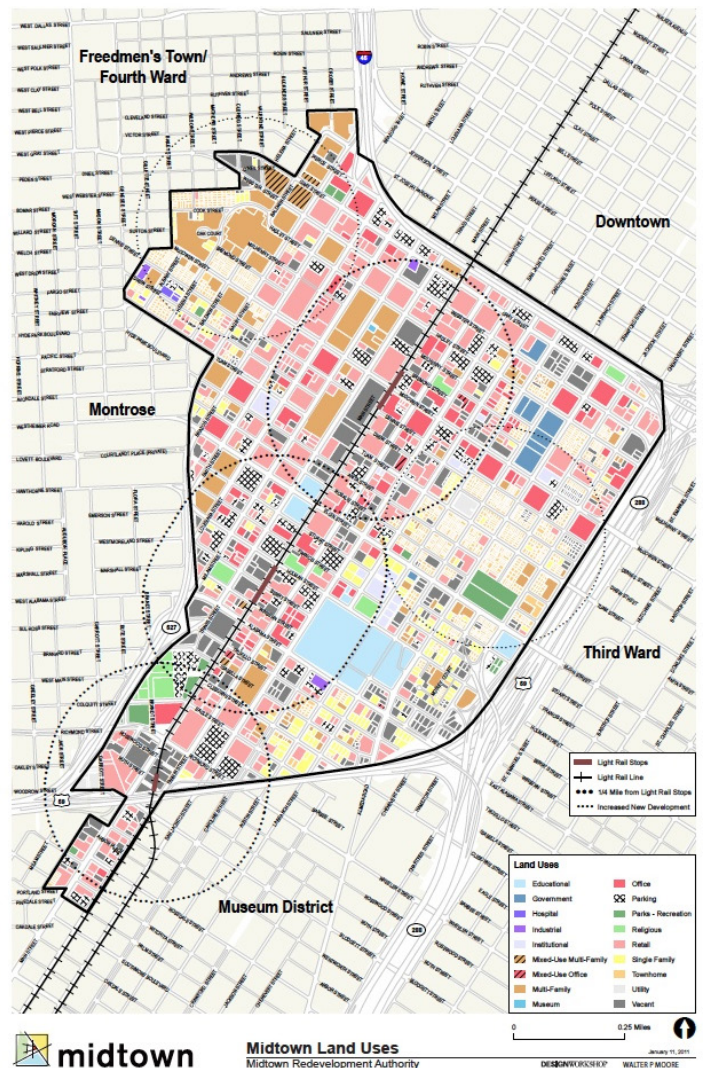
Conflict Occurs Where Residential Abuts Commercial

SWOT Analysis

Strengths:

The major strength of Midtown is its flexibility as a district. It is a true mix of uses and has changed its character over time, lending it the unique ability to appeal to a wide demographic and evolve when needed to. This quality is in part due to its mixed-use developments. These developments allow a high density and a wide variety of activities in the neighborhood. Specific to these activities is a high concentration of night-oriented businesses (NOBs), which bring in the activity long after working hours. This development and cultivated growth are all possible due to the Midtown Redevelopment Authority (MRA), which uses local taxes to finance public realm improvements and provide growth plans. In addition to this character, it has strong anchoring attractions such as the METRORail and Houston Community College. The METRORail stops along Main street allow the area to attract visitors from downtown easily and serve as a beautiful first glimpse of the neighborhood. This first impression goes beyond the METRORail stops and continues throughout all the walkable pedestrian-friendly streets that connect the neighborhood from Bagby to Caroline.

METRORail Red Line

Weaknesses

Weaknesses in Midtown primarily revolve around existing land-use conflicts such as parking issues and lack of proper enforcement for mixed-use development. For example, current guidelines dictate ground-floor active space but do not elaborate on this, leaving the door open for developers to include parking in this active space. This negatively affects the built environment because although the bottom floors of some developments look aesthetically pleasing, these facades have no interaction with the street. It obstructs pedestrian momentum and isolates more active streets in the district. Additionally, many streets are not as walkable and pedestrian-friendly and are interspersed between very walkable areas. This leads to isolated nodes of activity that do not make the neighborhood look or feel cohesive or inviting. Lastly, although a tremendous resource for the area, the METRORail does not actually connect many parts of the Houston-area. Its limitations and drawbacks are then passed on to the district.

Developer Using Mandated "Active Space" For Parking

Opportunities

Midtown has many upcoming opportunities, including the Green Loop proposal, which takes a major hard boundary in Midtown and turns into a place of connection and collaboration with downtown. Midtown's most important opportunity is the newly approved Walkable Places Ordinance, which rolls out pedestrian-friendly, form-based design guidelines and street improvements in Houston areas. Midtown is currently included as a pilot area for this ordinance, bringing more policy and funding opportunities to make Midtown an active, walkable urban community. Lastly, although troubling, the North Houston Highway Improvement Project brings Midtown an opportunity to attract more NOBs from East of Downtown or EaDo. Many NOBs are currently in a position of potential displacement by the highway expansion project and could find a new home in Midtown.

Render For Green Loop

Threats

Although there are not many threats to Midtown, the few that exist need to be taken seriously. These include the increased residential development activity in commercial areas, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and a single development company's dominance. If left unchecked, the increase in residential development will push much of the variety that the neighborhood is known for away and increase friction between residents and businesses. This relates to the ongoing pandemic because currently, many commercial uses are not financially sustainable, with nightlife being hit the hardest between consumer pattern shifts, lockdowns, and health regulations. This situation could snowball into a land grab for the future development of even more residential development. This represents a threat because Midtown is known for its mixed-use character and a wide variety of activities. With this set of circumstances, it is at risk of becoming a mostly residential district. This threat is again compounded as there is one primary developer in the area, which means that if they re-evaluate their ideas for the neighborhood, there will be major changes occurring all at once.
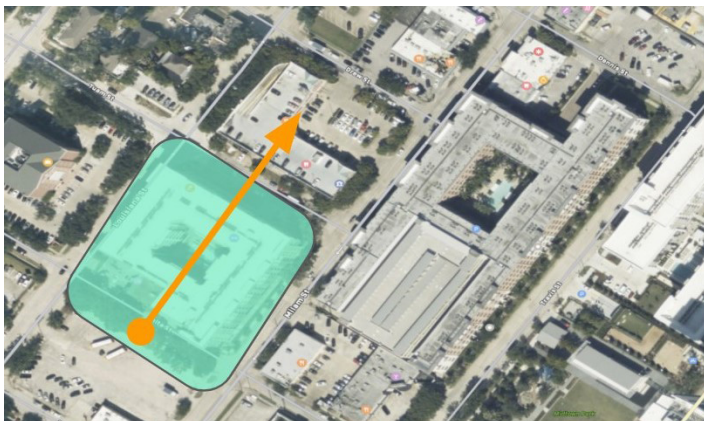
The March of Residential Development

Life Cycle of a Night District

By integrating the literature review, historical research, and discussions with experts, a pattern began to emerge that highlights the life cycle typical of night-oriented districts. This cycle points more towards a city paradigm as a series of processes playing out at different rates over time. If we understand the city as a series of life cycles that revolve at different rates, we can better understand the flux and churn occurring in the built environment.

One such cycle is that of night districts. This cycle begins when the right conditions are met; typically, cheap rents for larger lot sizes near the urban core or central business district. These conditions act as the

sparks to a flame and attract businesses with the need for large spaces and high noise tolerance. Businesses become popular, and the area gains fame over time and "catches fire". Reputation, in turn, attracts early gentrifiers. Seeing the possibility of a new market, developers become interested in the area and invest in improvements and new building stock. Improvements to the land drive up rents and make the area more exclusive and popular while also beginning to push out the very businesses that made the area attractive, to begin with, and the district immolates. These businesses rise from the ashes and migrate to new areas with the initial starting conditions, and the cycle repeats.

Pattern of a Night District
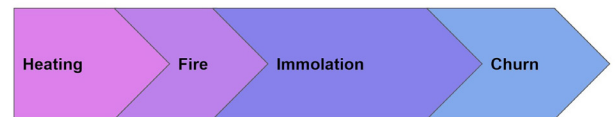
Inventory

An inventory of NOBs was compiled that includes their closing times, whether they were in mixed-use developments, what the shared uses were, and a record of what uses were nearby. This inventory consists of 37 businesses operating within Midtown.

Beginning with the closing time inventory, a few patterns emerge:

Most of the businesses consider Sunday to be a weekday. Almost all businesses that are open on Sunday operate under weekday hours. Thursday is used inconsistently, with some businesses claiming Thursday for their weekend hours while others are operating under weekday hours. This leads to weekend hours being from Friday to Saturday with a separate category for Thursday.

A vast majority of businesses split their hours between weekday hours and extended weekend hours. Only nine businesses operate under the same hours every day they were open.

There is little variation in closing times throughout the neighborhood, with only a few deviating from the majority. The most common closing time in the area for Sundays and weekdays is 12 am, while for Thursday

and the weekend, it is 2 am.

The latest closing time in the area is 3 am every day. The earliest is on Sunday around 4:30 pm. The earliest weekday closing time is 8 pm. The earliest weekend closing time is 9 pm. The most surprising finding was when this list was compared to the METRORail and Bus hours of operation. Although the METRORail Red line is a major highlight of the neighborhood, its operation hours are not integrated with the local nightlife. The METRORail and bus service closing times are listed at the bottom of the timetable and are as follows:

Sunday: 11:40 am

Monday-Thursday: 12 am

Friday-Saturday: 2:20 am

This schedule means that on a given weekday, if someone is at a night-oriented business and stay till the last call, they will not have a public transit option as the trains close at the same time. On the weekend, if someone were to stay till the last call, they would only have 20 minutes to catch the last train. Sunday service will cease well before the average closing times in the district as well.

Moving to the Inventory of mixed-use NOBs, we can see that rather positively, 68 percent of them are operating in mixed-use developments. The most common configuration is four adjacent businesses together in one development, followed closely by three clustered together, and then a few with just one other business under the same roof. Most often, businesses group together with other NOBs. For example, if we looked at a NOB, then the most common shared business would be another bar, restaurant, or club. If we exclude other NOBs, then the most common shared business would be something in the beauty category, such as a spa, nail salon, barber, or gym. Other popular non-NOB configurations include health and services such as urgent-cares, pharmacies, dentist offices, watch repair, and banks.

Land Use Mutualism

This phenomenon warrants a more in-depth look in the future. It can be theorized that this configuration of mixed uses is acting as a type of "Land Use Mutualism". Mutualism is a biology concept defined as an ecological interaction between two or more species where each species has a net benefit. The concept can be extrapolated to understanding these configurations if we see each business as a type of organism and the benefits as exposure and convenience. For example, if

we take the Maple Leaf Pub, we can see that its mixed-uses include a dental office. This relationship should be observed as a limited symbiotic one because the dental office and pub do not compete for the same customer pool but benefit from having exposure from each other's patrons. If someone were a customer at the Maple Leaf and needed a dentist, there is a strong chance that they would choose the adjacent dentist, given their familiarity with them and vice versa. Since these businesses do not have overlapping hours, this reduces the parking required for both businesses as their hours will not overlap significantly. This would also mitigate noise complaints.

Name	Sunday	Mon-Wed	Thursday	Fri-Sat			
Escape Hunt Houston	8pm	8pm	8pm	10pm			
Under the Radar Brewery	9pm	8pm	9pm	9pm			
Painting with a Twist	4:30pm	9pm	9pm	9pm			
Clé Day/Night Club	X	X	X	2			
Nouveau Antique Art Bar	X	X	X	12, 2			
360 Midtown	X	X	2	2			
Reflect HTX	X	X	2	2			
Shot Bar Houston	X	X	2	2			
The Continental Club	X	X	2	2			
Howl at the Moon	X	X	2	2			
Set	2	X	2	2			
Mai's Vietnamese	X	10pm	10pm	3			
Alley Kat Bar & Lounge	X	12	2	2			
Shoeshine Charley's Big Top Longe	X	1:45	1:45	1:45			
Spotlight Karoake Midtown	X	Wed 2	2	2			
Electric Feel Good	10pm	10pm	10pm	2			
Coaches Pub	11pm	11pm	11pm	12			
Axelrad Beer Garden	12	12	12	2			
Beer Market Co.	12	12	12	2			
Double Trouble Caffeine & Cocktails	12	12	12	2			
Pour Behavior	12	12	12	2			
Pub Fiction	12	12	12	2			
The Maple Leaf Pub	12	12	12	2			
Wooster's Garden	12	12	12	2			
Holman Draft Hall	12	12	1	2			
The Brass Tap	1	12	1	2			
13 celsius	12	12	2	2			
Capitol Bar	12	12	2	2			
Khon's Wine Darts Coffee Art	12	2	2	2			
Community Bar	2	2	2	2			
Glitter Karaoke	2	2	2	2			
Little Woodrows	2	2	2	2			
Red Dwarf	2	2	2	2			
ROSE GOLD	2	2	2	2			
The Dog House Tavern	2	2	2	2			
The Dogwood	2	2	2	2			
Barbarella	3	3	3	3			
Metro Rail Close Time	11:40AM	12	12	2:20			
closed							
Amount of time open (gradated)							
Closing times sorted by how late they stay open (gradated)							
METRORail Red Line Close times (gradated)							
Metro Rail	5:30 a.m. to 11:40 a.m	4:30 a.m. to 12 a.m.	4:30 a.m. to 12 a.m.	FRI 4:30 a.m. to 2:20 a.m. - SAT 5:30 a.m. to 2:20 a.m.			
Latest	3	3	3	3			
Earliest	4:30pm	8pm	8pm	9pm			
majority	12	12	2	2			

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NOB INVENTORY: MIXED USES

Name	MX?	Type	Code	Adjacent
Set	1	café	1	park/residential/garage
Clé Day/Night Club	1	bar	1	Community health/res/office/garage
ROSE GOLD	1	night club	1	Community health/res/office/garage
Spotlight Karaoke Midtown	1	restaurant/sandwich	1.1	jewler/dental/urgent care
Painting with a Twist	1	boba/salon/restaurant	1.1.4	church/auto repair/discount
Khon's Wine Darts Coffee Art	1	café/nails salon/restaurant/dental/bank	1,1,4,7,8	residential/garage/restaraunts
360 Midtown	1	restaurant/bar	1.2	nightlife/restaurant
Electric Feel Good	1	bar/restaurant	1.2	spec's/nightlife
Howl at the Moon	1	bar/restaurant	1.2	gas/restaurant/bar
Alley Kat Bar & Lounge	1	restaurant/bar/club	1,2,3	vacant/nightlife
Shoeshine Charley's Big Top Lounge	1	restaurant/bar/club	1,2,3	residential/restaurant/antique
The Continental Club	1	restaurant/bar/club	1,2,3	restaurant/nightlife
The Dogwood	1	bar/restaurant/nightlife	1,2,3	nightlife/restaurant
The Dog House Tavern	1	restaurant/bar/barber/dental	1,2,4,8	residential/nightlife
Coaches Pub	1	Tan/Pizza/Spa	1,4,4	gas/grocery/parking
Escape Hunt Houston	1	residential/restaurant/TV installation	1,7,9	residential/garage/church
The Brass Tap	1	residential/restaurant	1,9	restaurant/ bar/theatre
Reflect HTX	1	gym/document center/bar	2,7,8	restaurant/gas/nightlife/grocery
Pub Fiction	1	gym/document center/club	3,7,8	restaurant/gas/nightlife/grocery
Glitter Karaoke	1	hair/nailcare/vietnamese pharmacy	4,4,8	urgent care/restaurant/winery
Double Trouble Caffeine & Cocktails	1	recordshop/barber/clothing	4,6,6	restaurant/parking garage/nightlife
Community Bar	1	retail, office	5,6 / 5,7	bank/office
Nouveau Antique Art Bar	1	watch repair/crime stoppers	5,7	parking/residential
Shot Bar Houston	1	Cleaners/foodmart	6,7	nightlife/restaurant
The Maple Leaf Pub	1	dentist		8 residential/grocery
13 celsius	0		Tally of additional in MX	warehouse/ storage
Axelrad Beer Garden	0		4 single adtns	pizza/residential
Barbarella	0		8 double adtns	residential/parking/martial arts
Beer Market Co.	0		11 triple adtns	parking/dentist
Capitol Bar	0		1 quad adtns	office/residential
Holman Draft Hall	0		1 quint adtns	law offices/ computer hospital/theatre
Little Woodrows	0			nightlife/restaurant/garage/residential
Mai's	0			salon/bar/office/parking
Pour Behavior	0			restaurant/bank/gas
Red Dwarf	0			offices/food distribution center/parking
Under the Radar Brewery	0			residential/gym
Wooster's Garden	0			restaurant/parking
majority	1			
total	25/37=68%			

key	code	talley
Restaurant	1	18
Bar	2	10
Beauty	4	8
Club	3	6
Service	7	6
Health	8	6
Retail	6	4
Office	5	2
Residential	9	2

most frequent-exclude 1,2,3
4- beauty-8
7-service-6
8-health-6
NOBs denoted with this color >

RECOMMENDATIONS

METRORail Hours Adjustment

The first recommendation for Midtown is to bring the schedule of the METRORail in line with business hours. This would foster a more integrated and walkable public realm by making public transit a legitimate option for Midtown visitors after hours. The train hours should extend past the average hours of operation for the area, in this case, past midnight during the week and past two on the weekend. Currently, the train operates until midnight during the week and until two-twenty on the weekends. These hours could be extended to be at the very least twelve-thirty or one in the morning during the week and two-thirty to three during the weekend. Such change could ensure that public transit is an option for visiting and leaving the district. The current set up conflicts with business hours during the week and only leaves twenty minutes to make the last train on the weekends. This time could be borrowed from the start time as well. The trains currently start at four-thirty in the morning during the week and five-thirty on the weekends. If we borrow a half-hour or an hour from this start time, we could achieve extended evening hours that fall in line with local businesses.

Staggered Closing

Control over location and timing becomes the tool necessary to mitigate conflict and friction. Staggering closing times throughout NTE districts allow for better control over people's flow in the "Fuse Zone," or open space in front of buildings and on the street. It also extends or shortens levels of activity in the area. It is a way to mitigate costs associated with the risk of collaborative parking programs in the area. An added benefit is reducing both vehicular traffic and people getting on the train. As the district's popularity increases and there is more density in the future, staggered closing should be considered an improvement measure.

Parking Improvements

Although parking is abundant in the district in designated parking garages, lots, and on-street parking, there are still conflicts occurring over parking spots in the residential areas. This points to a usability issue. It could be a design issue regarding the parking garages and an issue regarding the shared use of existing private parking lots. There are some barriers to collaboration regarding parking. For example, if there is an open parking lot near a few NOBs and the parking lot belongs to a typical daytime business, in a perfect world, that parking lot should then double as area parking in the evening. In reality, there is a high cost associated with this. This cost is consisting of additional maintenance costs and security concerns. This issue can be addressed with a voluntary program for parking collaboration supported with a tax or measures to ensure parking in the proper areas. These measures could be in the form of design changes to parking structures or policies for employee parking. Suppose employees are given complimentary parking in areas that are not popular with visitors or are incentivized to commute to work with public transit. In that case, this frees up more desirable parking in the area, thus reducing conflicts associated with parking in residential or other restricted areas.

Legacy Business Ordinances

Legacy Business Ordinances or LBOs can be used to address long term change in the district or short-term problems such as the unfolding Covid-19 Pandemic. Typically, LBOs are tools used to make sure that small businesses operating in a city or neighborhood for over twenty to thirty years have the means to continue and remain as stable attractions and assets for the community. This strategy has been implemented in many ways to address different needs in different communities. For example, in Austin, there are two types of LBO policies being implemented. One is a short-term relief grant for legacy businesses impacted by the coronavirus. This money is allotted based on the number of employees, among other qualifications for legacy businesses. The other type is a longer-term strategy entitled the Souly Austin Plan, which aims to protect culturally significant commercial corridors in the Austin Texas area to preserve the city's musical character. In San Antonio Texas, LBOs are organized through their world heritage department and aim to preserve historically significant, craft-based businesses around the Riverwalk area. Lastly, in San Francisco, California, LBOs have been implemented through the Office of Small Business to incentivize landlords

to keep legacy businesses as tenants. They are also eligible for grants up to 22,500 dollars. To acquire these grants, landlords and property owners must agree with a legacy business for at least ten years. These types of agreements can be used to preserve midtown's character in the event of sudden changes or through the long-term.

Collaborative Easements

Simple collaborative easements solve the land-use conflicts as these easements are entered into an agreement between existing adjacent businesses, causing nuisances such as noise or pollution. This agreement is then accompanied by a disclosure agreement letting the prospective buyer of an adjacent property know in advance that these activities occur nearby. These can be implemented as part of the "mutualism" policy or on their own. Easements could play a role in conflict mitigation by ensuring all adjacent parties are aware of what activities will be occurring as residential areas and commercial areas become more interrelated.

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC)

Suppose a long-term goal for the neighborhood is to preserve nightlife and stop the oncoming residential development wave. In that case, LQC approaches to urban design can bring attention and activity to an area without larger-scale public realm improvement projects that increase interest from developers looking for new projects. Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper approaches, invented by Project for Public Spaces, center around impermanent, low-cost, rapidly deployable design interventions typically in front of businesses along the street. These include painting the public realm in vibrant colors, temporary park spaces such as plazas and parklets, limited art projects, and programmed activities. These types of planning interventions can be deployed along inactive building facades and improve open spaces between businesses and parking garages. The activity will bring attention to the small businesses in the area with little cost to the businesses or MRA and aid in economic recovery efforts after disasters and pandemics.

Mutualism policy

There is currently an emphasis on incentivizing mixed-use development within the neighborhood. Although discussed on the MRA website and the Midtown Plan, there is no written and implemented

policy that incentivizes mixed-use. I believe that this policy could be written based on the idea of "mutualism" discussed in the findings section. Pointing out naturally occurring benefits to mixed-use and facilitating a process that matches tenants together based on synergy will be both economically and aesthetically beneficial because the result of mixed-use is more active streets in a denser urban fabric. When this idea of mutualism is combined with other tools that incentivize activity and long-lasting tenants such as LQC design interventions and LBOs, midtown's identity becomes more defined. This definition allows for more intense collaboration as all players work towards this new, self-determined identity. These over-arching ideas can be combined will small changes to existing policy such as restricting the use of parking in ground floor active spaces for the first 80 feet of depth, therefore giving more teeth to mixed-use design guidelines.

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper Approach In the U.K.

Houston Downtown By Shannon O' Hara

NEXT STEPS

Next Steps

If the study were given more time and resources, the next steps taken would include an expanded inventory of the night, a compilation of successful naturally occurring mixed-use typologies, an ownership map of the district, more interviews with organizations, and research into a transfer of development right's ordinance. The purpose would be to get a larger and more accurate picture of all of the district's nightlife and better understand who controls developments in the area. I would additionally try and schedule interviews with the Houston Police Department, Midtown Management District, and Midtown Park Conservancy.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, although known for its variety and mixture of uses, Midtown is a robust night-oriented neighborhood. This crucial piece of neighborhood identity is being threatened by increasing residential development and economic pressures from the Covid-19 pandemic. This evolving situation creates an ominous set of circumstances that could change the neighborhood's shape moving forward. Applying what we can understand from an in-depth look at the Nighttime Economy as well as what other cities are doing to preserve unique aspects of the neighborhood character, we can start to understand why the nightlife in Midtown should be preserved.

Nightlife can be seen as a figurative "golden goose" for the neighborhood as NOBs are major attractors and an integral part of Midtown's increase in popularity in recent years. The proliferation of nightlife was not an accident and can be traced back to a particular set of circumstances threatened today. If nightlife is preserved, the district can continue to maintain its trendy reputation and accommodate growth in other areas. As it stands, there is an increase in residential development throughout the district that, without a set of policies for how these two uses should interact,

will push out the exciting variety of NOBs in the future. This district is a unique place in Houston's urban fabric worthy of preservation not only because it is immensely popular but because it represents the best of what Houston could be. Midtown is on its way to becoming a vibrant, walkable, pedestrian-friendly extension of Downtown serviced by public transportation. Not many other night-oriented districts in the city can offer the transit options that Midtown currently does, which is crucial for a city striving for vision-zero and one that holds a zero-tolerance policy for drinking and driving.

Midtown represents a part of the city where multiple demographics coalesce and interact, especially at night. It is enjoyed as a multi-racial neighborhood by all economic statuses and in these trying times this point alone is a strong reason for its preservation. There is truly something for everyone, and if we are not careful to cultivate this vibrant nightlife, it will disperse to different areas of the city. Mosaics get their beauty from their intricate designs but more so from their variety of colors, and if we are not willing to design and curate these pieces ourselves, we will lose a treasure in the heart of the city.

Rico's Kiosk

Lively Midtown Nightlife

APPENDIX

Terms
Mixed-Use
Mixed-use development is characterized as pedestrian-friendly development that blends two or more residential, commercial, cultural, institutional, and/or industrial uses. It is not just limited to a multi-story development that incorporates commercial use on the first floor with residential uses on upper floors. The Urban Land Institute's Mixed-Use Development Handbook characterizes mixed-use development as one that 1) provides three or more significant revenue-producing uses (such as retail/entertainment, office, residential, hotel, and/or civic/cultural/recreation), 2) fosters integration, density, and compatibility of land uses, and 3) creates a walkable community with uninterrupted pedestrian connections.

NOBs
Night-oriented businesses such as bars, clubs, and restaurants with extended nighttime hours.
Land-use Conflicts
Friction between different user groups in overlapping, shared, or close space within the urban realm. This can manifest in something such as parking issues, or it can be as evident as crime.

24-Hour City
This concept evolved out of the thoughts of Jane Jacobs. According to the literature, Jane Jacob's chapters on the street ballet in her critical work, "The Death and Life of American Cities" also included mentions of certain stores and businesses staying open 18 hours a day. She also records that certain businesses tend to show up in clusters such as cafes and bars. Stemming from her accounts of the vibrant street life after dark, planners in the United Kingdom proposed a series of policies extending business hours and looking to attract culture to city centers after conventional working hours as a way to revitalize the economy during the recession of the 1990s. These policies began in Leeds, Cardiff, Manchester, and Westminster. This new vision for urban centers was a utopian view of leisure-focused urban nighttime that was inclusive, vibrant, and economically beneficial.

Nighttime Economy (NTE)
A little earlier in the late 1980s, before the idea of 24-hour cities had coalesced, a politician in Rome named Renato Nicolini coined the term "Nighttime Economy" to describe his summer program for revitalization of some of Rome's urban centers. This program was culturally focused and took place in city centers with no activity after evening rush hour. He considered them the urban wilderness. Nicolini's Estata Romana lit up Rome's deserted office centers with lights and activities. People ate, took films, walked around, danced, listened to music, and socialized. This concept has then evolved into a more measurable economic sector centered around entertainment, leisure time activities, alcohol sales, and food services.

Nighttime City
Throughout this work, I will use the term Nighttime City as a catch-all word to describe Urban Night concepts. Generally, the city and activities take place within it after business hours, commonly 9 am to 5:30 pm.

Pedestrian Friendly Development Guidelines: City of Houston

Interview Guideline (Questions)

BASICS
- Who loves the nightlife? Where do they live? What are their demographics
- Do you have a mediation, strategy, approach for dealing with unintended consequences
- Are there symbiotic mixed uses with the nightlife?
- Do you see opportunities that the nightlife can spur?
- Are you happy with nightlife in general, in the

district?
- What are the night life's greatest assets (being specific)?
- Liabilities?
- Who do you think of as your prime client / stakeholder group? Whose interests need be held paramount? Development? Retailers / restaurants? Residents? Of course, all of them and more; but, for instance, which of these groups dominate the discussion at the board meetings?

COVID19
- How is the nightlife effected?
- What actions, if any, is being taken to help it survive?
- At what point will it be impossible to go back to what it was—6 more months, one more year?
- If that threshold is crossed, what do you think it will take to bring it back?

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES
- What happens when there is aging in place—or don't you expect that?
- Catching fire

PRISONERS DILEMNA
- What are the threats to the night life's sustainability?
- Developers want nightlife, but not in their buildings (upstairs tenants don't like)—is this true?
- Everyone wants placemaking, not on their block—is this true?
- Everyone wants variety, but pile into a few—is this true?
- And for those that are true, how has it played out, and what has been your role?

HISTORY
- Do we have the right idea of the history of the area?
- When did the night life come in?
- How has it changed?
- What were the original magnets and anchors? Are they the same?
- What has been the lifecycle of neighborhood change?
- What do you think is the gentrification story?
- Policing, security, no

URBAN DESIGN AT NIGHT (PLACEMAKING)
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- Any actions – e.g., night lighting plan
- Any studies?
- Any thoughts?
- Any happy accidents?
- Any problem areas?

OTHER IMPLEMENTATION
- If nightlife can't survive here, where would it go in your opinion?
- For good, bad, indifferent results as far as you are concerned?
- Is the City supportive of your efforts or approach to night life? How have they shown this? Has it changed over time?

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END

Student: Alex DeWitt
Institution: Pratt Institute
Date: January 11, 2021