

Market Square

Infill and intensification in Winnipeg

Presentation Notes

Like many downtowns, there are problems with the urbanism we see in Winnipeg. There are also important opportunities.

1. MTS centre, Portage Avenue, Winnipeg

Like Modernist buildings completed since the 1940's the MTS centre "Turns its Back on the Street". The result is most apparent in the resulting quality of the street space. Just two blocks from Main Street, in the most central section of downtown, on a warm and sunny autumn afternoon, the street is not working for people.

2. Other downtown streets in the Heart of Winnipeg are also bad places for pedestrians... Why?

Many downtown places do not function as "People Places". Two reasons are clearly evident:

- (a) Lack of investment in designing streets for people.
- (b) It would appear that the fundamentals of urban design are either not understood, or consistently disregarded.

3. Portage & Main

This could be anywhere. Even in early afternoon, the street is practically engulfed in shadows. The amount of pedestrian infrastructure provided here in the 'heart' of Winnipeg is bare minimum. Even the center median is not welcoming. And the fronting buildings contribute very little to shape the urbanism.

Yet, downtown Winnipeg has a "people place" right in its midst. We can address most of the fundamentals of urbanism simply by studying Market Square and its surrounding district.

5. Aerial View of Downtown Winnipeg

- Portage & Main
- Market Square
- 2,000 x 2,000' Grid
- The square is "just west" of Main Street. Far enough to be protected from the high traffic impacts; close enough to be accessible from the main artery.

6. Intersection of McDermot & Albert

- A dog-leg bend in the grid creates a Terminated Street End Vista on McDermot as it crosses Albert.
- Each of the four corner sites is built out with strong period buildings. The bend in the grid at this intersection forms a pivot point, a gateway, to the "urban room" created by Market Square.
- Approaching from the east, Main street "Terminates the Street End Vista" at a distance of 275'. The "Streetwall Ratio" of 1:5.5 is within the limits for human perception.
- Just one block south of McDermot, a bend on Albert closes the street end vista south.
- Civic Center (see 'Problems north of Market Square' below) "Terminates the Street End Vista" on Albert at a distance of 1100 feet. Precisely the distance of the East Façade of the Louvre as seen from Ponte Neuf; thought to be the ideal maximum distance for a street vista in urban space.
- This combination of Albert Street's closed street end vistas, and its link to an urban room, makes Albert Street an "Urban Spine" in need of other destinations to link to. Even in its present condition, it ranks with the best Canadian Urbanism.

7. Market Square

Market Square partakes of some of the oldest traditions in urbanism:

- "Closed Street End Vistas" on McDermot inflect to the square.

- Market Square is one block off Main street, and 764 ft. from Portage Avenue.
- The district around the square built out in a consistent building type that is still relevant and prevalent in spite of the many "missing teeth" caused by demolition.
- The "footprint" of the neighborhood becomes apparent when a "Pedestrian Shed" is centered on Market Square. *[work out the Streetwall Ratios]*

8. Market Square characteristics that make it function as an "Urban Room"

- Presents the ratios for human-scale square making it an "urban room".
- Is a place marker, or memory device, providing the focus for an entire district.
- Continuity of streetwall (assuming in-fill)
- Continuity of the ground plane
- Tree planting is very strong, yet could stand re-enforcement.
- The buildout around the square is problematic. Some of the buildings are too low; some are too high.

9. Civic Center: Problems north of Market Square

- Clean slate urban renewal arrived to the north side of Market Square in the form of a Civic Precinct. By mid-twentieth century urban design issues are not valued.
- Re-integration could begin by paying attention to the sites that would present the streetwall on the north side of Market Square.

10. Block Pattern or Platting

- Platting on the south side is also robust. Arthur, McDermot and Alberto form a triangular block fronting the south side of the square setting up the conditions for a landmark flat-iron building. The fact that it has never been built is problematic, presenting conflicting options for future infill around the square.
- This triangular block, reminiscent of the

Patte d'oie intersection, attracts pedestrians from two different, but clearly identified directions, enhancing the square's role as a central destination.

- The west side of the square inflects west, opening up the space to additional solar gain—a notable design in a winter city.
- Orientation of Albert Street, the East Side of Market Square, is "true north". The platting for this street corrects for the fact that Main Street is slightly off the cardinal points. *[Check: Albert looks to be damn near 1/4 mile long. Scales as 1,600']*
- West of the square platting is fine grain and walkable. The blocks are 200' wide and 4, 5, 6 chain long (264 or 330 ft). Streets are assumed to be one chain (66 ft) wide, and there is a 20 ft lane system in place.

11. Pedestrian Shed

Centering a pedestrian shed on Market Square shows that the most important blocks downtown are within “Easy Walking Distance”.

- An entire neighborhood is within “easy walking distance” of the square.
- The core are platted to make walking convenient.
- Market Square functioning to anchor this district is one of its most important urban characteristics.
- The “Pedestrian Shed”—a useful measure for walking distance— is also a useful tool for quantification of a “Market Square Precinct”.

12. Core Area

- Once the precinct of district is established we can expect that a “Core-Periphery” pattern will set up within the “Pedestrian Shed” itself.
- The middle 40 acres immediately surrounding the square will form as a “Core”, concentrating the bulk of the neighborhood services.
- Its footprint can be approximated by a 440-foot radius circle centered on Market Square (1/3 of the pedestrian shed).
- Buildings in the “Core” are less than a 2 minute walk from the Square.
- Today, “Continuity of Character” is strongest within this precinct.
- As important, the architecture is rich with a display of “Diversity of Form”. Not only does the architecture avoid repetition, but the variety it serves up helps to animate the experience of “Streets as Public Open Spaces”.

13. Redevelopment & Infill

North of the Square, redevelopment opportunities should inflect to enhance the spatial boundaries of the “urban room”. Use of “Perimeter Block Massing” will repair

the “Continuity of the Streetwall”, and help figurate vistas into and out of the square.

A great deal of demolition—especially on the eastern side of the square—has opened up opportunities for repair and infill. This study locates infill within a “Core Area” immediately surrounding Market Square. Of course, other similar opportunities abound within easy walking distance of Market Square.

- The build out scenario: 800,000 sq. ft. of new space.
- New tax revenues from redevelopment could service a 20-year bond issue in the order of... *Expect: \$15 Million dollars. [Calculate Tax Increment Financing with MFA].*
- These moneys would pay for improvements to public and pedestrian infrastructure on the square, and the streets and lanes within a new Market Square Precinct—improvements all that would attract the balance of the private sector investment necessary to build out the district.
- In order for this “Revitalization Strategy” to work, the local economy has to be shown to be strong enough to welcome (absorb) 5,000 new residents into the area.
- Ultimately, the Market Square neighborhood could be home to 25,000, putting to rest the notion that we need to build residential towers in order to achieve high density, livable districts in downtown locations.
- One of the competitive advantages of this “Revitalization Strategy” is that it achieves equivalent densities to “Mega Project Redevelopment Sites” without requiring land assembly. The savings to the developers can be captured by the city.

14. Urban Fabric

Within the “Market Square Precinct” there is enough remaining urban fabric that it is possible to establish the “Form and Character” for the new architecture, including [\[show in photography\]](#):

- Building Footprint
- Block Massing
- Continuity of the Streetwall
- Doors on the street
- Fenestration Pattern
- Store Fronts
- Special Architectural Elements
- Parking

Challenging new architecture that tries to look old, considerations in specifying a district-wide building type for “Market Square Precinct” should take into account characteristics that relate to the neighborhood as a whole, including [\[show in photography\]](#):

- Street tree planting
- Townscape Markers
- Sites terminating Street End Vistas
- Hierarchy of Streets
- Urban Spines
- New Urban Rooms
- Public Transportation

14. Urban Design Plan

Together with a funding formula, the combined characteristics found (or found missing) in the urban fabric shape the outline of an “Urban Design Plan” for the intensification and revitalization of the “Market Square District”.



MTS centre, Portage Avenue



Portage Looking West: Modern Architecture turns its back on the street with disastrous results on the resulting quality of public space.



Downtown Streets



Too much open space can be a bad thing. Lack of “Streetwall Continuity” and distances to buildings that exceed the limits of human perception create the feeling this is an empty, barren place.



When the limits of human perception are exceeded in the design of public open spaces it results in places with no human scale

- A "Street End Vista" is terminated with a building walled off from people
- Lack of "Continuity in the Ground Plane" puts plaza out of view and out of use
- A Looming-towers-landscape looks impressive from the distance, but gives few cues why one would approach on foot.

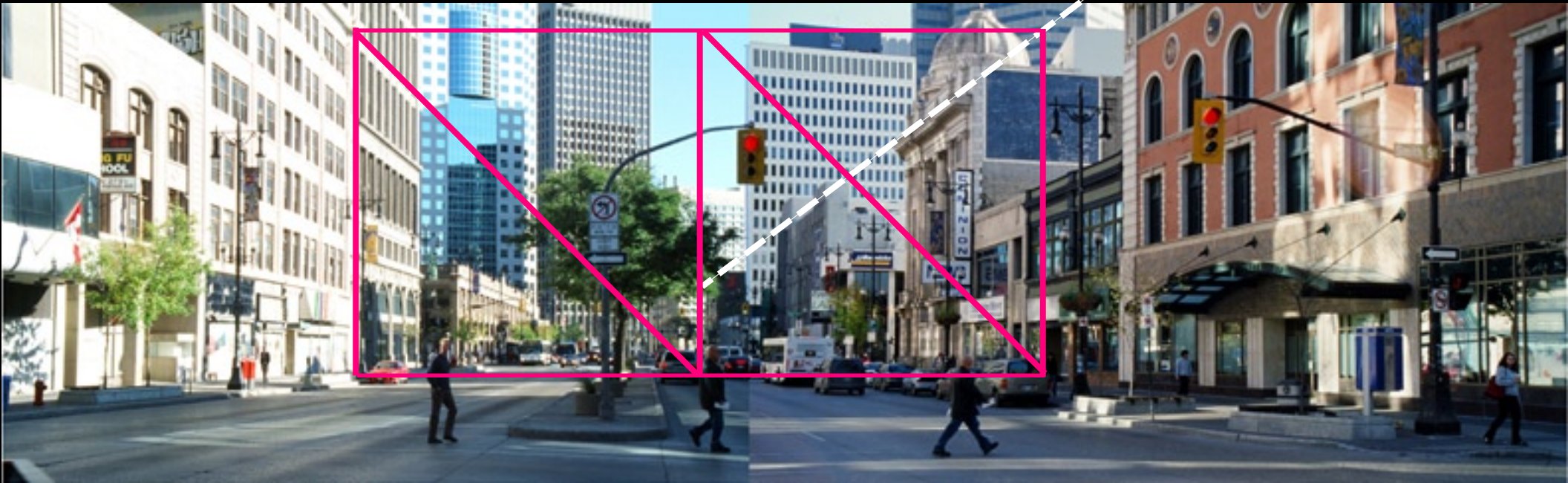


Portage and Main, Winnipeg's infamous intersection



Portage approaching Main, no investment in design of important streets:

- Street scaled for traffic volume, not people
- No elements to “correct” for human scale
- Uneven build-out



Testing for Human Scale

- 1:2 proportion in “Streetwall Height” was in place at some point. This is the ratio of the Haussmann Avenues of the 1850-70’s.
- “Continuous Tree Planting” along both sides needed to adjust human scale (not in use)
- 36 ft. “Pedestrian Crossing Distance” with center median is good, but 22 ft. is better.



A tradition of tree planting in this Winter City already exists in residential quarters.

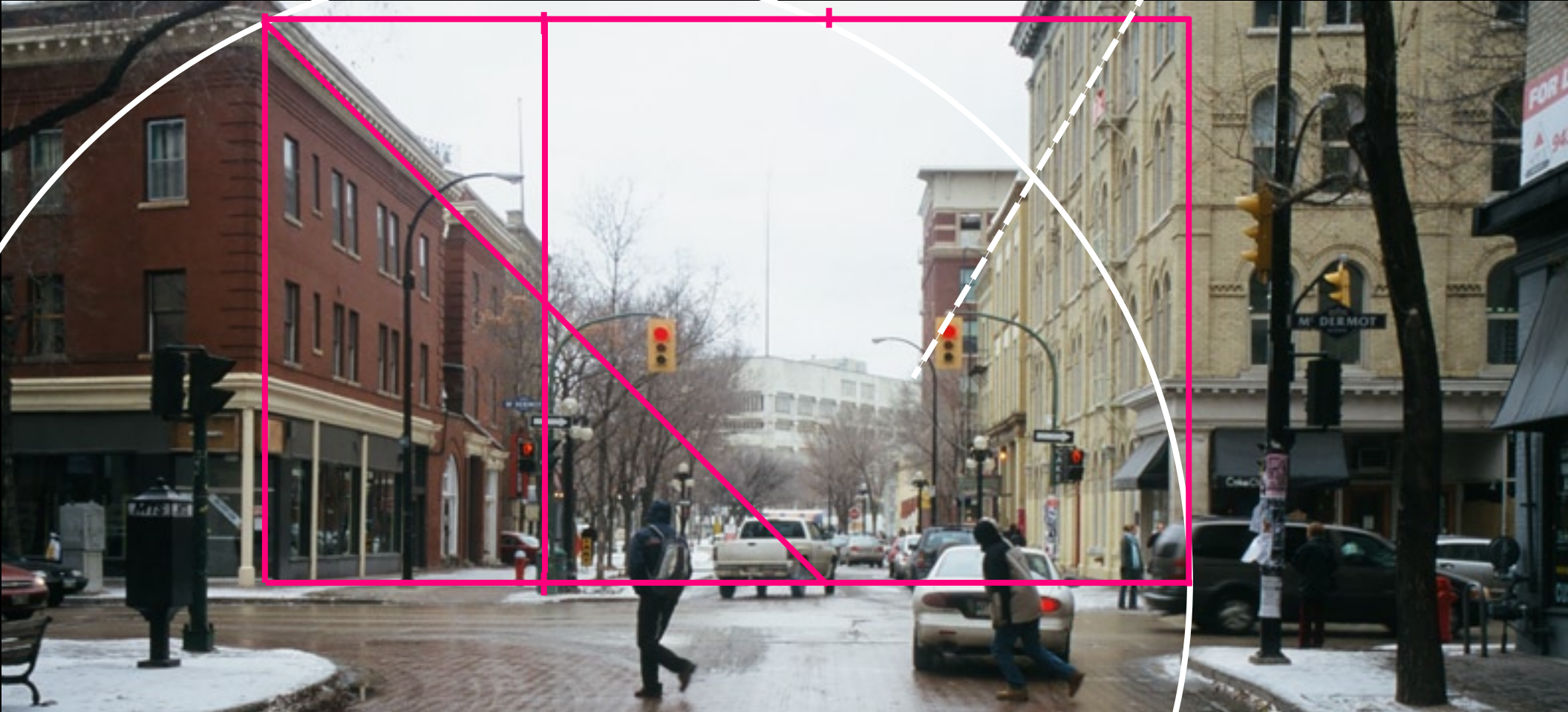


There is Tree Planting in the heart of a Winter City: Albert Street (looking North) in Winnipeg's CPR-era Market Square District



The "Street End Vista" is 1130 ft away. It is part of City Hall Precinct, a 1960's style clean-slate approach to urban renewal that did as much harm as good.

Same street in early spring: Albert Street (looking North) in the Market Square District—The changing face of the Winter City.



In spite of being the wrong kind of "Street End Vista", 1100 ft is the right distance for human perception. A better destination, and a better landmark needs to be put in its place.

The proportion of "Streetwall Height" on Albert Street is 1:1.6, the Golden Section on the west (left side).

Proportion on the east (right side) is 1:1, steep for solar penetration, but within the limits for human perception.



Tree Planting creates the “sense of place” by adjusting for human scale. This stretch of Albert Street feels as good as the best streets in Montreal, Greenwich Village, or Beacon Hill. In the afternoon, the tall streetwall on the east side does not shadow the street.

block pattern



Platting the Market Square District

A 2,000 x 2,000 ft grid is laid just north of Portage Avenue encompassing 92 acres.

Three rows of regular blocks are laid out along the center, each 250 ft deep. Block lengths are 4, 5, 6 chain, and 500 ft.

Albert Street is the only street in this vicinity with a true north-south alignment.

Market Square is positioned in relation to the bend in Main Street much like the Roman Castrum of Firenze is set along the Arno, or the City of London is laid on the north bank of the Tames.

Market Square terminates the north Street End Vista of Albert.

This is not a typical CPR townsite grid which would put Main Street perpendicular to the main trunk, with a Railway Avenue running parallel to the track just one block away.

The most distinctive feature in the District, the presence of Market Square in the center, but inflecting to the bend in Main, is not typical of CPR townsites.



Approach to the "Warehouse District" on MacDermot Street



McDermot and Albert Streets: All four corners are built out, enhancing the definition of urban space. Turning right along Albert Street, the "Urban Room" is just 300 feet away.



Market Square, Winnipeg

- Unforgettable sense of open space in the middle of a well established District.
- Uneven build-out of the "Streetwall"
- The tall buildings are too tall; and the short buildings are too short
- By classical standards, this is a very, very large "Urban Room"
- Good presence of "Urban Trees" should be strengthened
- "Continuity of the Ground Plane" (east side; left) won at the price of cutting off all vehicular access.
- East side of the square is the most devastated by demolition; needs infill



- Strong planting of "Urban Trees"
- Strong "Continuity of the Ground Plane"
- Decimated "Streetwall" needs infill
- 2 storey buildings are too short
- Shutting out the cars probably hurt business prospects
- More aggressive use of public open space for business needed



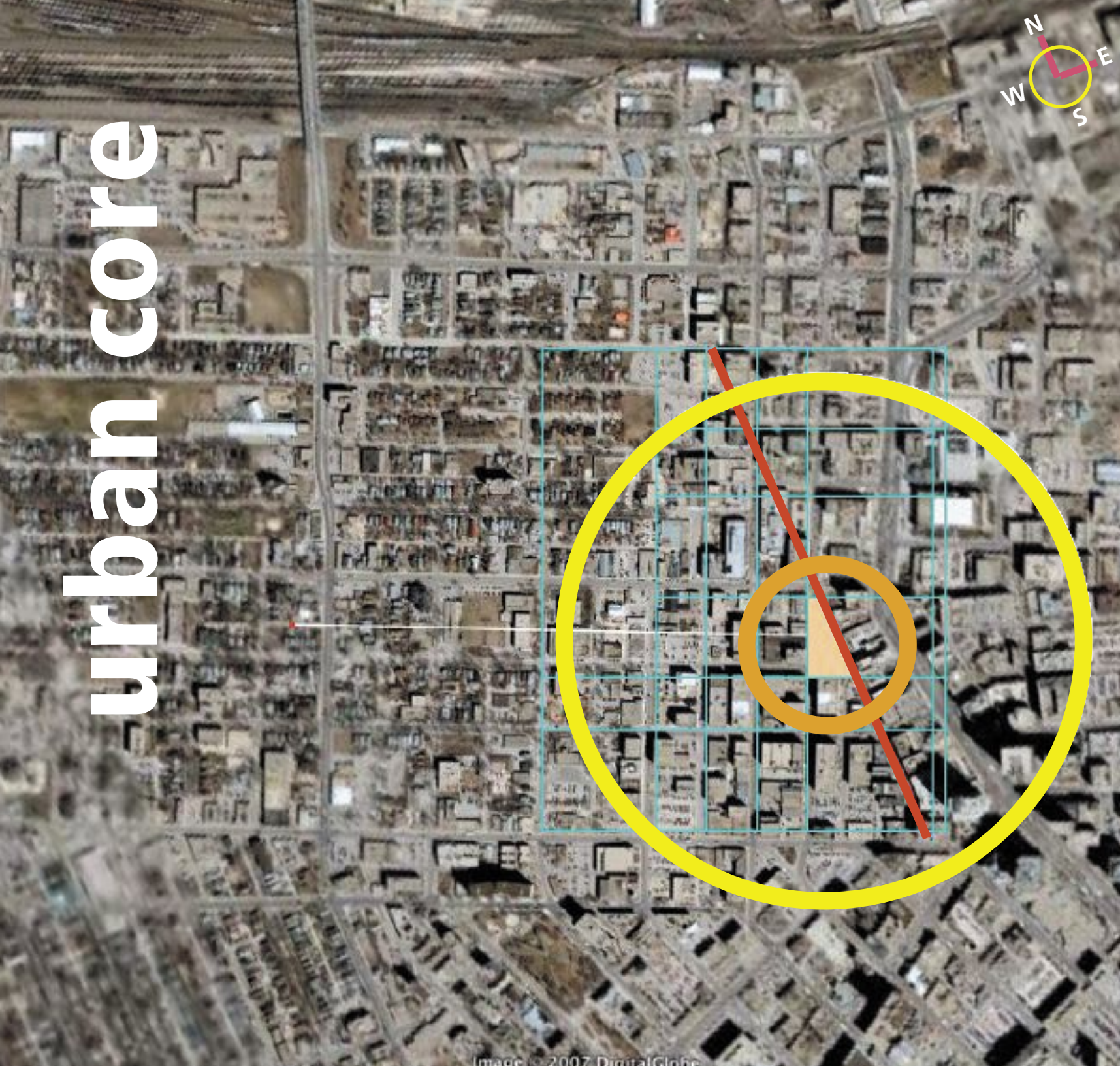
The south end of Market Square is problematic. The site of a missing Flat Iron building is occupied by a small outdoor cafe. While the building opposite provides strong definition for the café, urban space leaks out on the right—Market Square’s southern edge.



[this is a 4-slide panorama. I have not been able to establish the name of the building in the center, much less its fenestration pattern. However, it will be possible to "fill in the missing windows" in Photoshop. The panoramas are small and may not project well on a single screen. I'm hoping that we can "pan across" the panoramas on these pages using Apple's Keynote].

The southern boundary of Market Square lacks definition. Infill with a Flat Iron building creating a brand new landmark in the city.

urban core



A “Pedestrian Shed” [yellow] measuring 1/4 mile in radius easily covers the entire Market Square District.

A smaller core, one third in size, identifies the inner most 40 acres [orange]. These core lots are the most likely candidates for the bulk of the district’s commercial uses, with residential above the ground level. The remaining 80 acres of the pedestrian shed should be seen as principally residential infill opportunities.

Without exceeding the “Built Form and Density” characteristic in the District, the core population could reach 6,500 persons, with an additional 16,000 living in the balance of the “Pedestrian Shed” at full build out.

Achieving a total population of 25,000 living within “Easy Walking Distance” of Market Square should prove sufficient to transform the place. Reversing the worst effects accumulating over time, it would preserve this unique place in a manner that would build on the existing tradition of place.



900 ft. from the heart of Market Square redevelopment opportunities are everywhere. Empty downtown lots used for parking can be re-generated with infill buildings and outdoor spaces. The buildings themselves can be retrofitted from commercial to residential use.



Above: the windows in the rear of a commercial building have a ready-made relationship to the ground plane that once inhabited would deliver defended neighborhood spaces. Suite access doors from the lane and from the street would keep the place in use, peopled, and safe.



400 ft. from the heart of Market Square, infill opportunities present as opportunities to fill the “missing teeth” and repair the continuity of the streetwall.



infill

Redevelopmnt
50,000 s.f.
(15k floorplate)

Infill
75,000
(2k-15k floorplate)



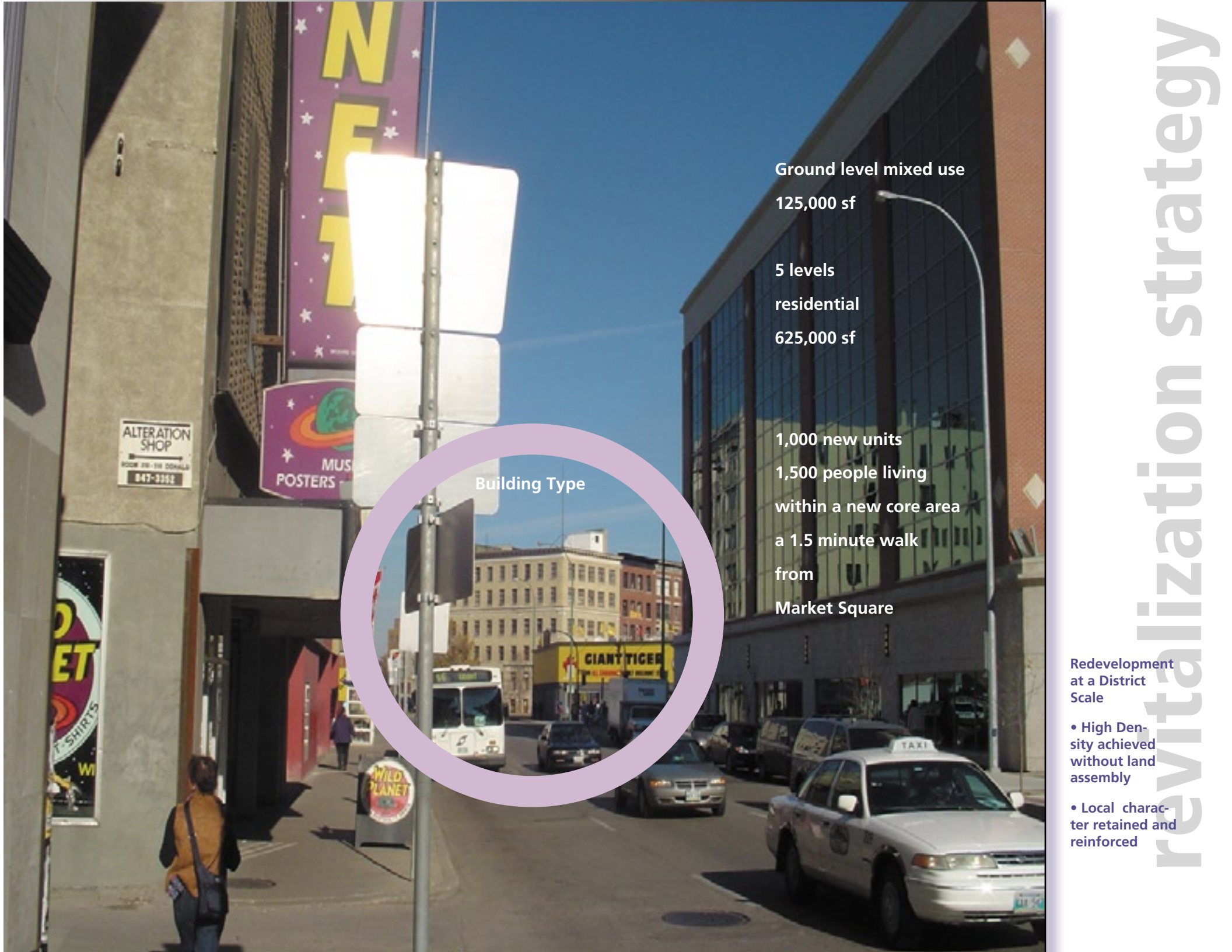
440 feet

440 feet

Redevelopmnt
50,000 s.f.
(15k floorplate)

Infill
75,000
(2k-15k floorplate)

core area infill



revitalization strategy

Ground level mixed use

125,000 sf

5 levels

residential

625,000 sf



Building Type

1,000 new units
1,500 people living
within a new core area
a 1.5 minute walk
from
Market Square

Redevelopment
at a District
Scale

- High Density achieved without land assembly
- Local character retained and reinforced