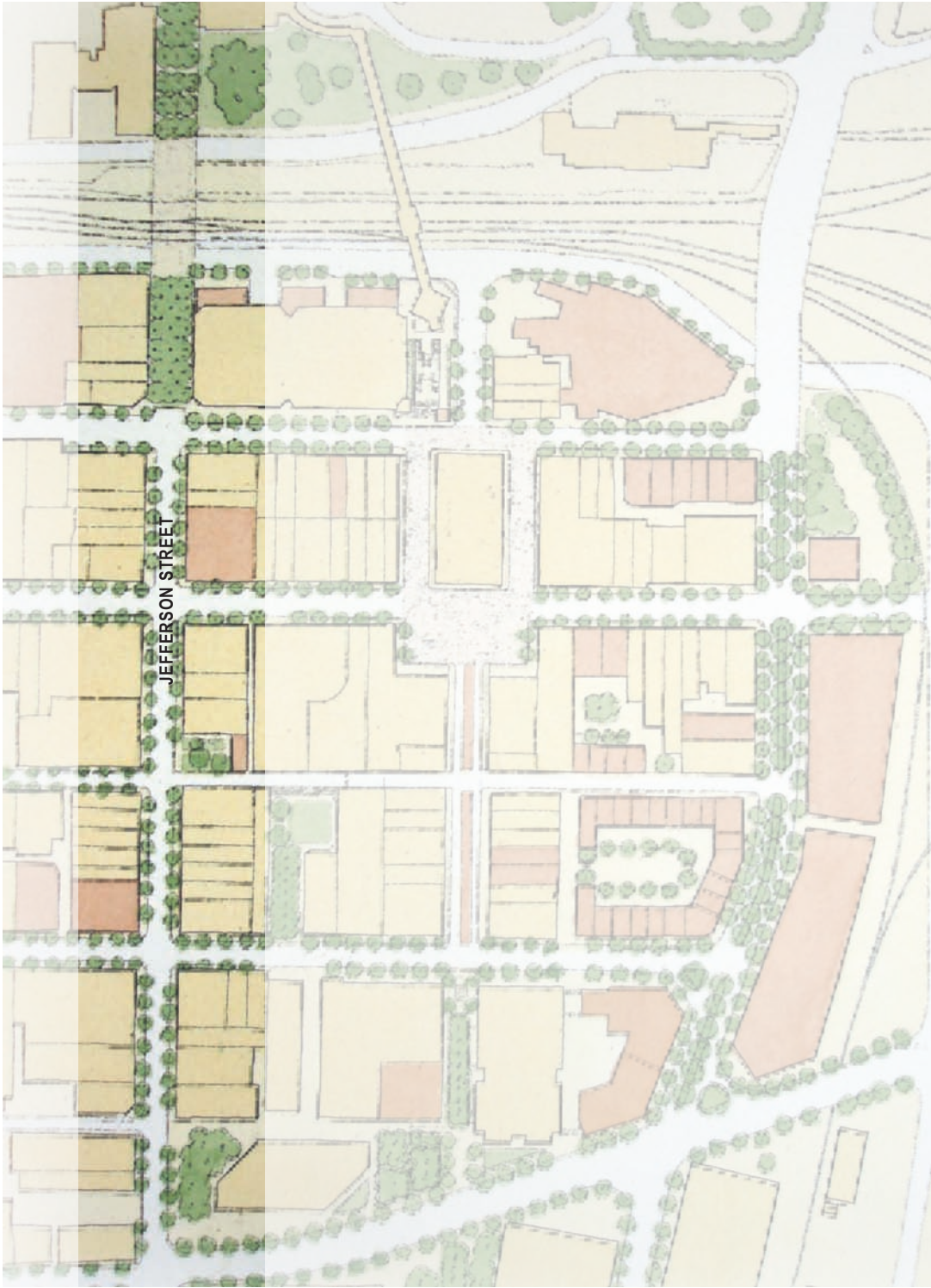


JEFFERSON  
STREET



### DRAWING SHOPPERS TO JEFFERSON STREET

#### OBSERVATION:

Drawing shoppers to Jefferson Street

#### DISCUSSION:

The southern end of Market Street terminates at the Sister Cities Fountain at Church Street between the Norfolk Southern Building and the Century Station Parking Garage. A wide walkway continues past the fountain towards Elmwood Park. The street termination is not conducive to making good urban connections to other areas beyond the City Market.

Today, when a person walks down Market Street to the Church Avenue corner, the experience of an urban shopping district is lost because of the nondescript view. The Norfolk Southern building on this corner is raised stylistically from street level grade. The main entry doors provide little relief to the plane of the facade. The glazed openings are primarily smoked glass curtain wall. Raised planter boxes near the building act as barriers.

The Century Station Parking Garage also sends a very anti-urban message at this prominent corner with its wide concrete ramp. A blank wall of concrete and brick on the parking garage extends towards Elmwood Park; an empty retail space extends in the direction of Jefferson Street.

These factors all serve as a psychological barrier preventing pedestrians from continuing to

walk down the street.

Eliminating the garage entrance ramp and replacing it with a shop front entrance will provide an appealing anchor in the base of the parking garage. These improvements, mentioned previously in this report, would compliment the activities associated with the proposed Roanoke Valley Food Ventures (an FDA-approved kitchen for farmers) or some other viable tenant leasing the retail space available within the Century Station Parking Garage.

Other building fronts along Church Avenue, especially those to the west, need to be inviting. Fire Station #1 is an historic building that has always been an important player in the urban fabric of Roanoke. Parents bring their children to the fire station because it functions like a living museum. Firemen, always happy to entertain visitors, explain the work of the fire department. Kids love it. But pedestrians can't always tell from the exterior that the fire station is so interesting and inviting.

To provide an inviting vista to draw more people in this direction, the fire department could be encouraged to create an atmosphere similar to a front porch for the firehouse. The front porch might have benches and rocking chairs so the firefighters could relax between answering calls. Perhaps there could even be a Dalmatian napping at the feet of the firefighters.

In addition to this civic institution, other businesses need to enhance the visual experience of the ground floor shops that extend west towards Jefferson Street. Ground floor uses along Church Avenue should ideally be presented as inviting retail spaces. Currently, the commercial offices house workers in rooms with mini-blinds



and curtains covering smoked glass storefront windows.

Such a visual experience will not draw shoppers down the street. Good merchandizing relies on a linear progression of interesting shops and displays. Shopping center consultants know that even a 20-foot gap in the visual experience is enough to discourage a shopper from continuing to walk down a street. The experience of shopping along Church Avenue needs to be a seamless retail experience if people are to be drawn to Jefferson Street.

The reorganization of the street frontage along an existing street is not an easy task to accomplish, but the message must be to hasten the

reorganization to make shopping more exciting as other changes occur. Obtaining a strong anchor tenant to occupy the Heironimus Building will serve as a catalyst for this corridor.

#### FINDINGS:

- Renovation of the Century Station Parking Garage will result in more pedestrian shopping on Church Avenue
- The city should support efforts to make Fire Station #1 as visually inviting as possible while preserving its function as a working fire station. This includes encouraging those staffing the fire station to enjoy the front porch environment mentioned earlier. The fire department should also mount a plaque, similar to the proposed farmers' information plaque, to describe the history of the station house. Although there is some degree of public outreach, it needs to be more obvious than it is now.
- The leasing of ground floor space as offices needs to be phased out to provide additional space for inviting retail businesses.
- Owners of the Heironimus Building should seek a strong anchor tenant as part of the merchandizing goals of the City Market area and Jefferson Street. Upscale national tenants would be ideal along this section of the streetscape.
- More local/regional venues including an urban public library or a large bookstore like the original Borders would enliven the street.



Area of view



Existing Jefferson Street



Jefferson Street with restored street car line

### JEFFERSON STREET STREETCAR

**OBSERVATION:**

Bring the streetcar back to Jefferson Street

**DISCUSSION:**

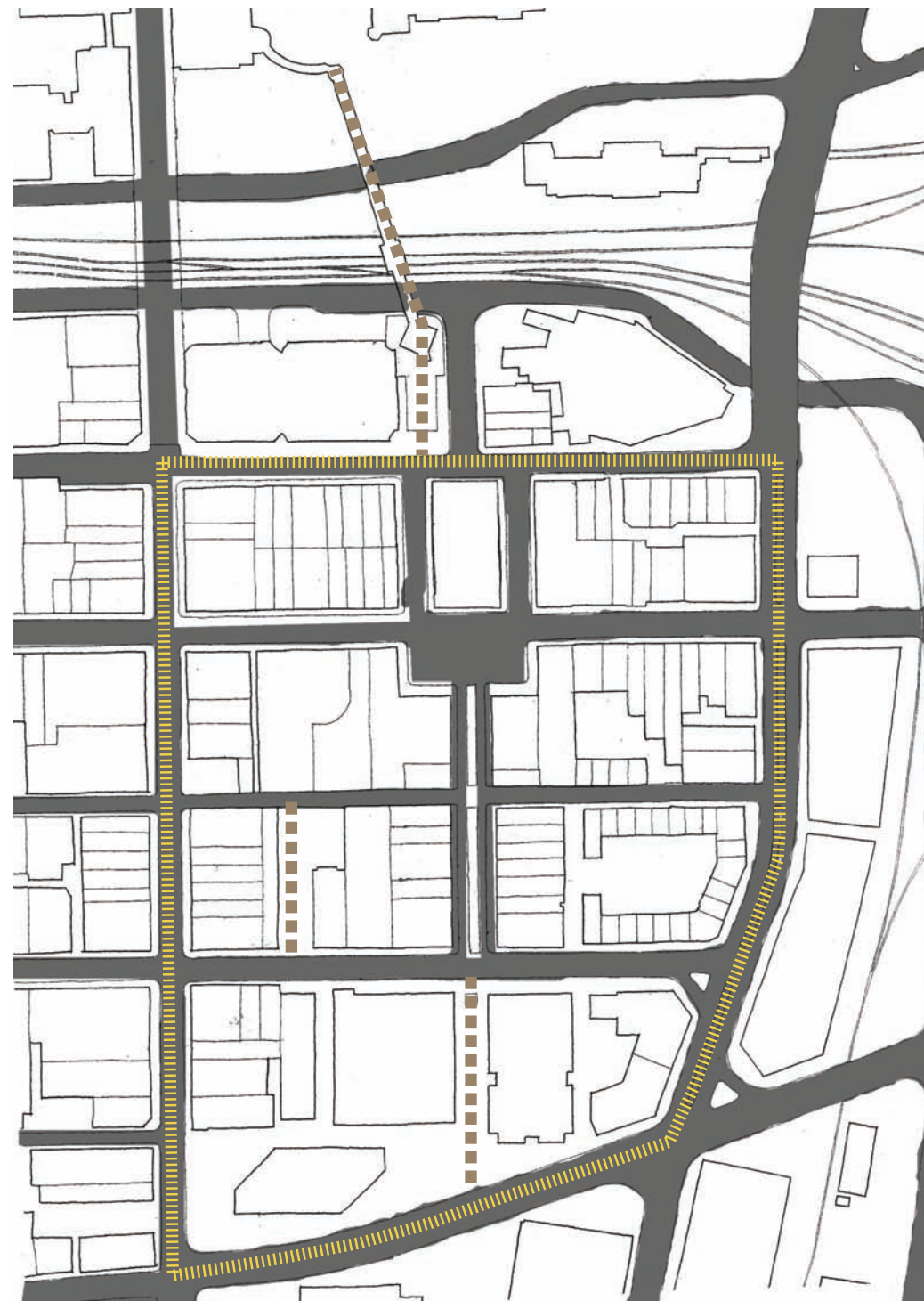
A big idea should be a highlight of any comprehensive plan. Since the design team wants to encourage efforts to make the City Market a park once destination, other forms of transportation warrant consideration.

For some time, there has been an idea on the table of connecting the new Bio-Tech Park at the Carillon Hospital and downtown Roanoke with a streetcar line along Jefferson Street. The design team completely supports this concept; it is more realistic and feasible than some people may think.

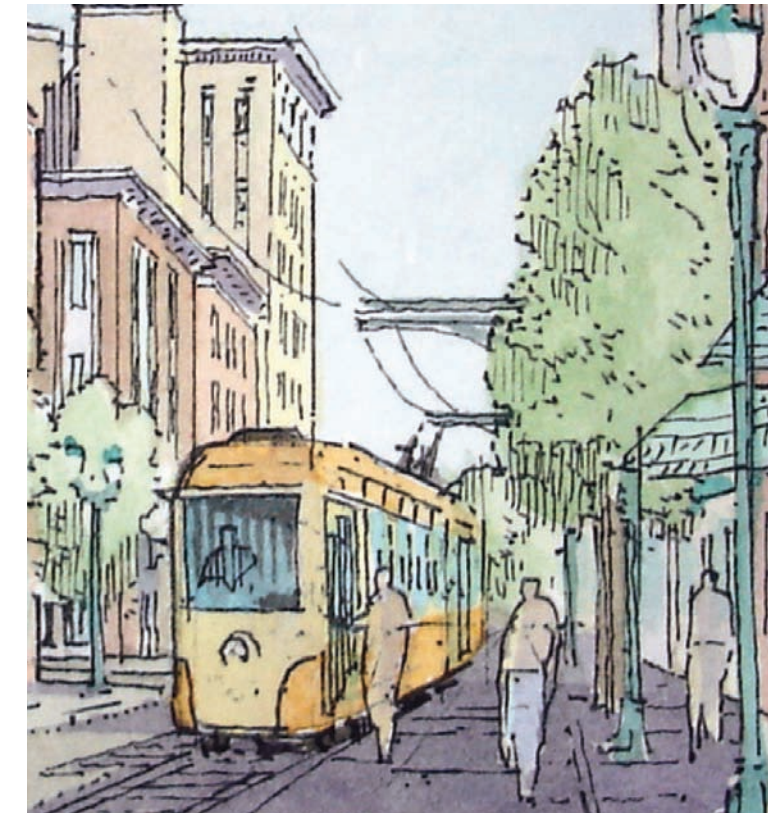
The team has created a transportation plan showing how an additional streetcar loop could be created around the City Market area to connect all the perimeter anchor buildings. Initially, the streetcar would serve to connect the downtown area to points south along Jefferson Street.

**FINDING:**

Support the concept of the streetcar line and act quickly to energize Jefferson Street.



*Proposed street car circulation plan*



- Streets
- Pedestrian Passages
- Street Car Loop

## JEFFERSON STREET NEEDS HELP

### OBSERVATION:

Jefferson Street needs help!

### DISCUSSION:

Jefferson Street is Roanoke's main street. In Roanoke's heyday, Jefferson Street was the busiest retail spine in the downtown. Not that long ago, it was a bustling shopping street filled with people and activity. Sadly, Jefferson Street feels vacant now. A variety of factors have contributed to its decline including the power of suburban malls and strip shopping centers to siphon off retail business. Jefferson Street has become a hollow shell of its former self; empty storefronts and bland office facades dominate the streetscape.

The loss of Main Street retail businesses is a national problem for which there is no simple solution, but the commercial real estate industry has rediscovered the value of traditional town centers and their walkable shopping streets. In preparation for Roanoke's planned revitalization, a strong local advocacy group should be created to seek new tenants and storefront uses consistent with the study's proposals for creating a better Main Street for Roanoke. The nucleus of such a group exists, but it needs more organization if it is to work effectively with DRI to implement change. A Merchandizing Plan for the City Market area has been created to support efforts to secure new retail establishments. Also, the return of the streetcar to Jefferson Street will be a major attraction for the shoppers that retailers require.

The proposed Merchandizing Plan gives the public and private sectors an opportunity to join forces in marketing the entire City Market area as a single destination. The plan highlights the area's potential for multiple anchors interspersed with a variety of small and medium scale shops.

Jefferson Street is a major component of the proposed shopping loop, but attracting the right tenants is a key element. New retail tenants will enliven the streetscape with inviting storefronts that are designed to entice shoppers to browse. Attractive, inviting storefronts are vital to a delightful shopping experience. Proper design of enticing retail storefronts is infectious; one good design will lead to another.

The Jefferson Street rendering promotes the return of the streetcar as a common thread of Roanoke's urban activity. The rendering also illustrates some proposed changes to the handsome storefront façades that still exist today; however, they are often hidden behind metal panels, solid walls and makeshift spandrel glass. The architecture of the buildings along Jefferson Street, although changed or hidden from view, still has many of the original details that make Roanoke's building stock special and unique. The perspective also shows simple techniques that could be used to replace the out-of-date ground floor shop fronts with newly designed shop fronts to produce a streetscape better suited for urban retailing.



*Jefferson Street in the early 20th century*

Designing excellent storefronts seems to be a lost art within the architectural profession with the exception of a few savvy designers who specialize in retail. There exists, however, a recognized kit-of-parts necessary for designing good retail storefronts. First introduced during Design '79, these parts or elements are essential to the look and functionality of the façade. This kit of parts includes awnings; crank-out awnings are ideal. Awnings should be open on the sides and extend over the sidewalk. They create a shadow box for shoppers to view merchandise through transparent glazing rather than bronze or tinted glass. A well-designed storefront lets light into the shop and still provides cover for the street in front of the shop.

Signage bands should be incorporated into the first floor cornice. Pedestrian-level signage should be hung perpendicular to the sidewalk and below the awnings. Blade signs are easily visible to shoppers in slow moving cars.



*Jefferson Street today*

New storefronts need high quality detailing, much like the level of detailing found in the construction of fine cabinetry. This provides a far more elegant appearance than the usual hollow-metal, smoked-glass suburban shopping center systems so prevalent today. The rendering shows how a collection of these correctly designed façades along Jefferson Street would contribute to the ambience of a gracious shopping street.

### FINDINGS:

- Use the Merchandizing Plan to attract the best retail tenants for Jefferson Street.
- Produce a pattern book or kit-of-parts for the design of shop fronts (storefronts) to be used for restorations. It should provide examples of first-rate retail facades that would compliment the historic character of downtown Roanoke.

## JEFFERSON STREET GRADE CROSSING

### OBSERVATION:

Enhance Jefferson Street north of Campbell Avenue including restoring the grade-crossing across the tracks.

### DISCUSSION:

The design team was compelled to look at the streetscape between the Wachovia Bank tower and the group of existing buildings on Jefferson Street north of Salem Avenue.

Another anchor building and additional structured parking has been mentioned to further develop this area. A number of years ago, some columnar trees were planted in that location; they have grown to make this section of Jefferson Street a quaint, tree-shaded plaza. The design team studied three different ways to reinforce this special space. The team wanted to emphasize that this corridor is more than just a cut-through for cars or an access to the parking garage beyond.

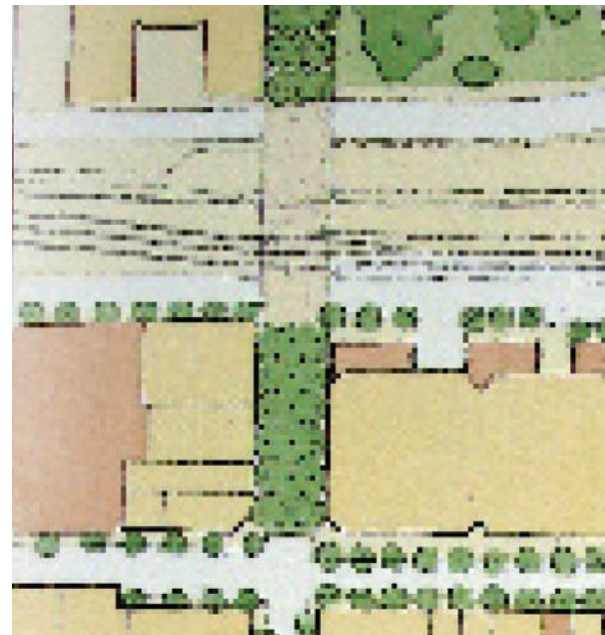
The team was also intrigued with the idea of actually crossing the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks at Jefferson Street again. A number of years ago it was the location of a grade crossing. Most people

said, “That will never happen in our lifetime.” There are probably a number of valid reasons for their doubts, but seeds of ideas like this need to be planted in citizens’ minds as long-term goals. In fact, construction of a grade crossing at this location is an essential step in providing connections within the traffic grid pattern. Whether because of new technology, different transportation needs, or changing ownership patterns, a grade crossing becomes important to reconnect the grid.

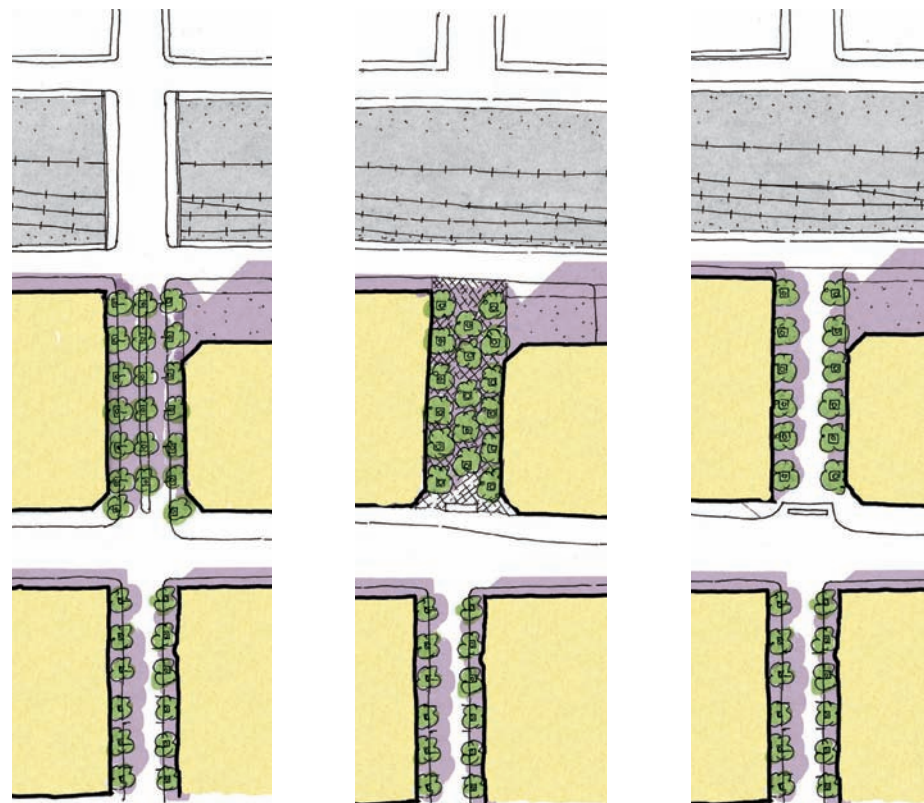
The design team stressed the importance of making all possible connections for recreating this transportation link to the area north of downtown Roanoke.

### FINDINGS:

- Enhance the streetscape on Jefferson Street north of Salem Avenue.
- Support the idea of reconnecting Jefferson Street with a grade crossing to directly connect the cultural district with the downtown.



Location of Jefferson Street Grade Crossing



Three options for plantings along Jefferson Street