

Auburn University Samford Park at Toomer's Corner Redevelopment Report

February 15, 2013



AUBURN UNIVERSITY
FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

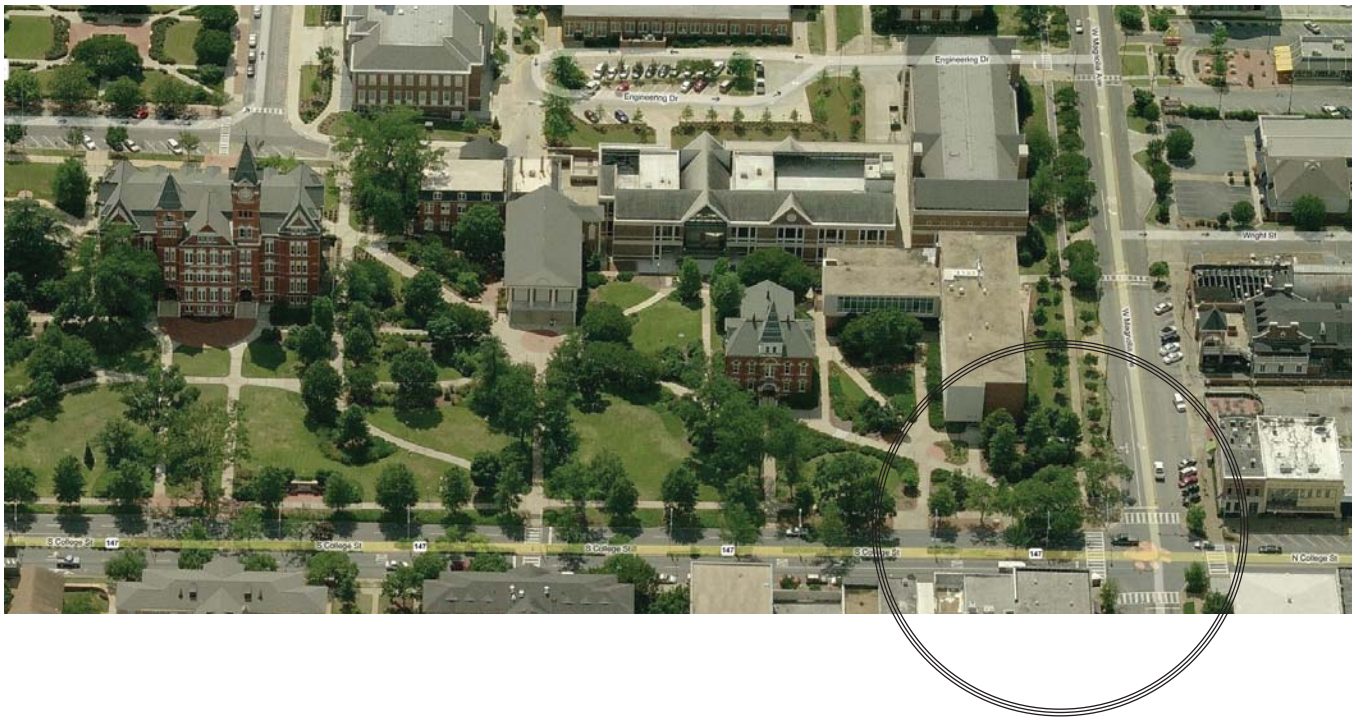


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Executive Summary

Auburn University is currently engaged in two master planning efforts, the Comprehensive Campus Master Plan 2012 Update and the Campus Landscape Master Plan, to provide an all-inclusive framework for the University's facilities capital investment program and set guidelines for all future University development of campus buildings and landscape. The Landscape Master Plan is designed to function as a companion plan to the Comprehensive Master Plan and more specifically detail the role of the campus landscape, including all open space, roadways, and parking facilities within the boundaries of Auburn University.

For the development of the Campus Landscape Master Plan, Auburn University hired a consultant team consisting of two renowned firms: jB+a and Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, led by John Fish and Warren Byrd, respectively. In addition to outlining a strategy for 21st Century landscape vision, they are assisting the University with a project concerning the potential redevelopment of Samford Park at Toomer's Corner, which has served as the traditional location for Auburn University celebrations and events for many decades. Samford Park, which begins at this intersection of College Street and Magnolia Avenue, is the most visible pedestrian entryway to the campus and forms the relationship between the University and downtown Auburn.

As part of the Campus Landscape Master Plan, the University is proactively exploring potential site reconfigurations of Samford Park at Toomer's Corner. The University is taking this opportunity to reach out to the Auburn Family for input and consensus on the proposed changes and to ensure that the important ceremonial traditions and historic character of this special place are preserved and enhanced for future generations.

The redevelopment process for Samford Park at Toomer's Corner began with two public workshops, held in October 2012, to gain community input on important criteria and design themes, identifying the historic nature of the corner, the entry gates, and the connection to the City, among others. The CLMP consultant team

used these criteria to develop four initial concept schemes, presenting them to the public at another workshop in November 2012. As concept schemes, they were designed and drawn to ask questions about how well they achieved and advanced the criteria themes as well as elicit reactions regarding their spatial and organization arrangements for the corner.

Auburn University extended the presentation of these schemes to the broader Auburn Family by means of an internet survey, in hopes of achieving consensus on the direction of the redevelopment project from a range of affiliate parties: students, faculty, staff, administration, alumni, and supporters. Active December 18, 2012 to January 22, 2013, it guided participants through a short video describing the four schemes, after which they were asked to answer questions in four categories: initial reactions to the schemes, the relative importance of each of the planning themes, the effectiveness of the schemes in meeting the criteria of these themes, and the two overall most appropriate schemes.

The survey received over 10,000 responses, results of which indicated that the broad Auburn Family most warmly reacted to schemes A and B. Participants indicated that the most important themes are the retention and enhancement of the historic character of the corner as well as the retention and enhancement of the 1917 entry gates. Overall, scheme B, the Olmsted Arc Path, received the highest approval rating and best addressed all but one of the planning themes, and schemes A and B were deemed most appropriate for another iteration of ideation, drawings, and public presentation.

Based on the results of this survey, public forum input, guidance from senior leadership, and the professional opinion from our CLMP consultants, two revised concepts will be presented at the next CLMP public workshop in February 2013.

Introduction

Auburn University is currently reshaping its approach to facilities planning for the 21st century. The University is updating its Comprehensive Campus Master Plan (CMPU) to provide an all-inclusive framework for the University's facilities capital investment program and set policy for all future University development of campus buildings and landscape. In addition, the University is initiating the development of a Campus Landscape Master Plan (CLMP) as a companion plan, specifically formulated to reference, inform, and implement the CMPU, while advancing in more detail the role of campus landscape.

The Auburn University landscape is defined as the sum of all open space, including roadways and parking, requiring a comprehensive approach to address the environmental and social objectives of the University. Conceptually, the campus is made up of two landscapes: the ecological landscape, governed by biophysical processes; and, the cultural landscape, governed by the social activities and experience of Auburn's students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other supporters. The CLMP should engender the performance and value of both of these conceptual landscapes through a holistic approach based on Ecology, to foster the development of an integrated, thriving open space system.

The intent in the development of the CLMP is fourfold:

- Develop an integrated, Ecologically-based landscape and open space management system that helps Auburn University achieve its goals of environmental sustainability;
- Develop a campus landscape management system that enhances the living, working, learning, and research environment to foster Auburn University's goals of academic excellence;
- Develop a landscape management system that unifies the campus, protecting and enhancing the image and character of Auburn University; and
- Create a companion tool to the Comprehensive Campus Master Plan that will advance the role of the campus landscape.

As part of the CLMP, the University's consultant team is focusing on several areas of campus for a more detailed study of potential landscape enhancements. One of these locations is Samford Park at Toomer's Corner, formed by the intersection of College Street and Magnolia Avenue. This iconic space delineates the spatial town-gown relationship between Auburn University and downtown Auburn.

Planning Assumptions for the redevelopment of Samford Park at Toomer's Corner:

- This planning exercise focuses primarily on enhancements to Auburn University property adjacent to Toomer's Corner. However, the team is collaborating with the City of Auburn to investigate planning and design treatments for all four corners of the intersection.
- The Office of Communications and Marketing recently announced that the last public opportunity for the Auburn Family to roll the existing oak trees will occur after the A-Day football game on April 20, 2013. However, a date for their removal has not been set and the status of the existing trees will be addressed by forestry and horticulture experts at another time.
- Recommendations of the Committee to Study the Future of Rolling Toomer's Corner serve as the starting point for planning. The Committee recommended that should the oak trees be replaced: a.) They would be replaced with one or more live, large transplanted trees; and b.) A temporary rolling structure would be installed until the new trees are established.
- Enhancements to hardscape (i.e. walks, furniture, seat walls, etc.) and new plant material generally define the immediate scope of this planning exercise.

Historical Development of Toomer's Corner



1890's



1937



1910



1939



1924



1942



1929

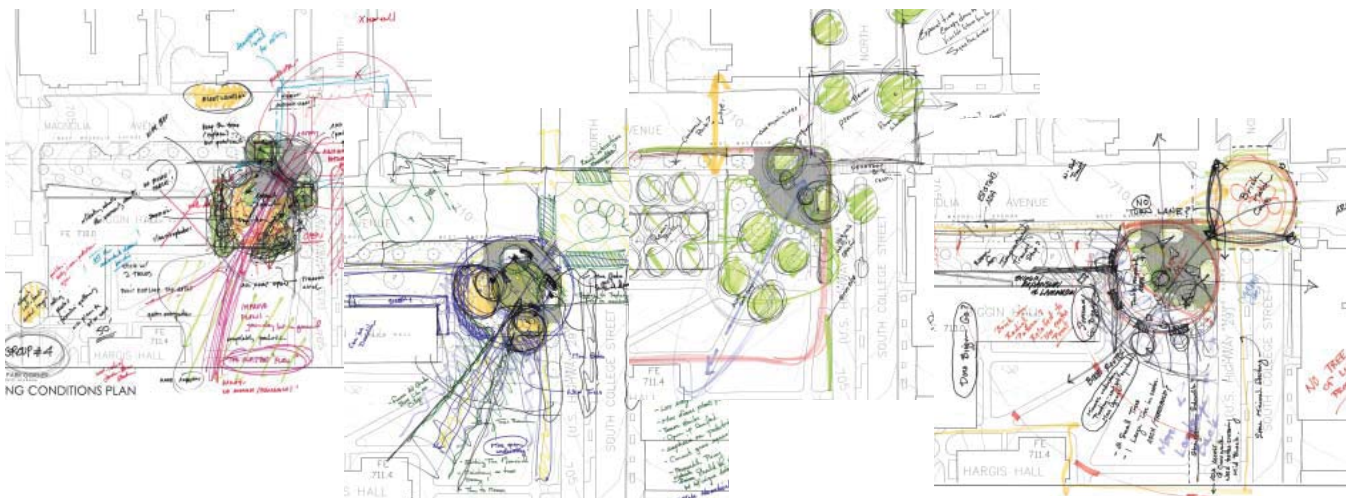
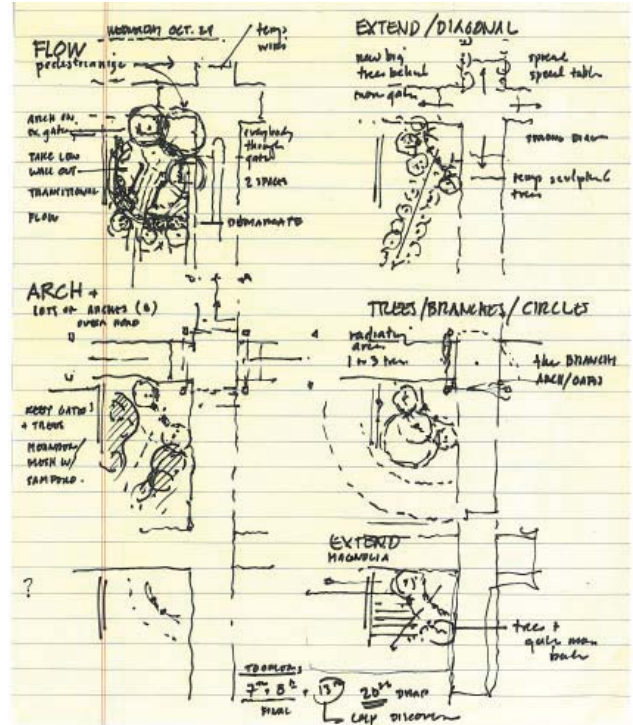


1957

Planning Themes

The initial public workshops in October were designed to gather input from the campus community on the direction of concept redevelopment. After a short presentation and purpose statement, attendees grouped together in small teams to diagram their thoughts, highlight important existing components, and discuss potential improvements. Several key themes arose out of this exercise:

- Retain and enhance the existing and historic character of the corner
- Include at least two large replacement trees
- Consider the entire intersection and City context
- Retain 1917 gates
- Retain and enhance the pedestrian (and service) access into the campus from the corner
- Strive to improve openness, visibility, access, and usability
- Expand usable / occupiable space behind (to the southwest of) the existing brick wall
- Provide additional seating and shade areas



Scheme A - Circle and Center

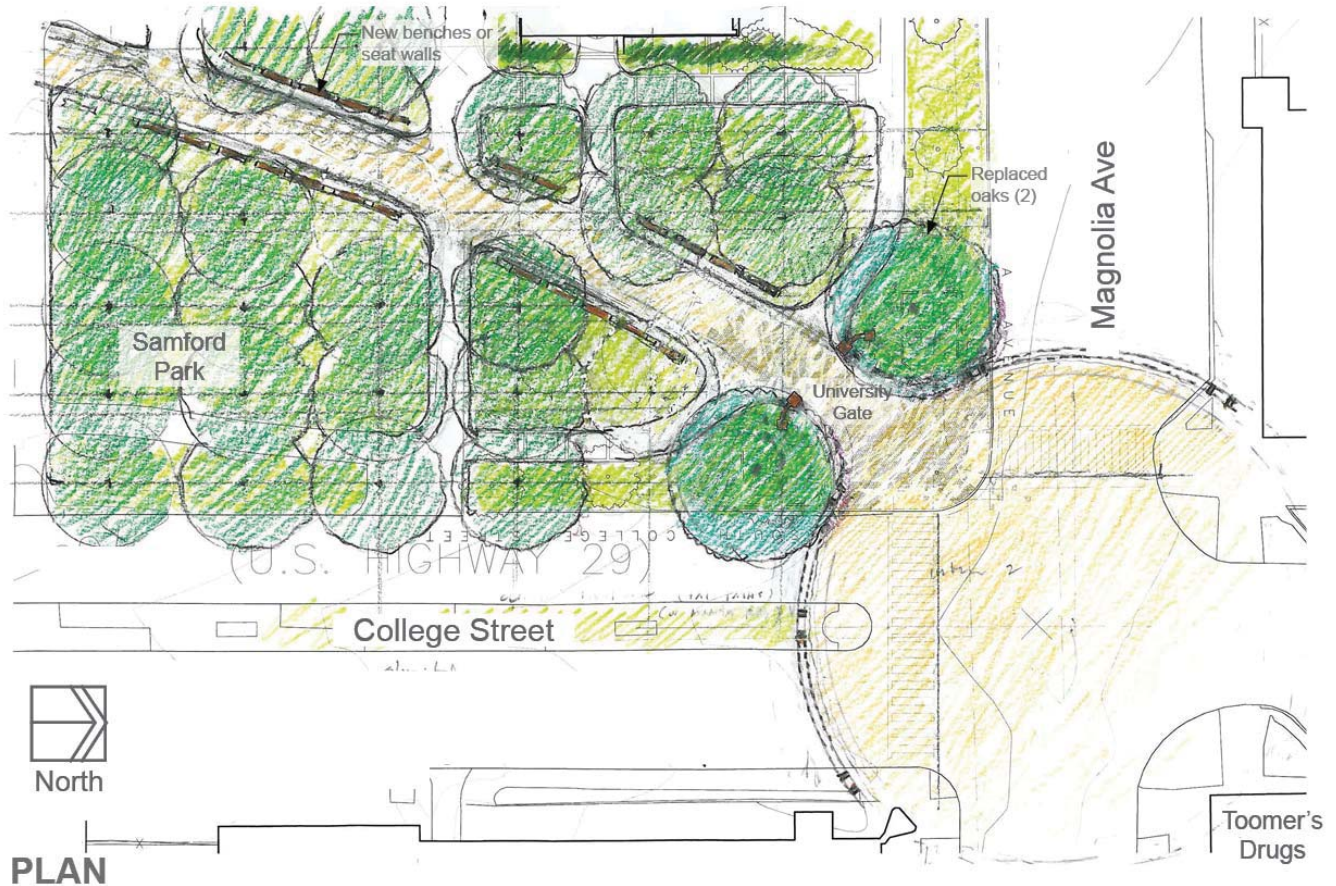


Scheme A - Circle and Center, emphasizes the circular geometry of the corner. It keeps the gates in their current position, replaces the two existing oaks, moving them slightly back along the path into the park, and adds a third oak, centering on the diagonal relationship of the gates to the park. The seat wall is pushed back to open up the gathering space, and new diagonal pathway from the corner connects directly towards the tower at Samford Hall. This strategy dominates the plaza and extends minimally into the intersection, possibly repaving it for improved pedestrian access.



PERSPECTIVE (view from Toomer's Drugs webcam)

Scheme B – Olmsted Arc Path



PERSPECTIVE (view from Toomer's Drugs webcam)

Scheme B - Olmsted Arc Path, stresses a long, meandering path to connect Samford Park to the corner. The gates are kept in their current location, enabling an arcing, broad promenade behind them for pedestrian sitting. This is accompanied by an open grove of shade trees which quickly transforms into Underneath the canopy, the ground plane could be lawn or expanded paving. Additionally, both of the current sidewalks along College Street and Magnolia Avenue are bent around to go through the gates, reinforcing their importance. This scheme could also incorporate archways over College and/or Magnolia.

Scheme C – Arcs & Radials

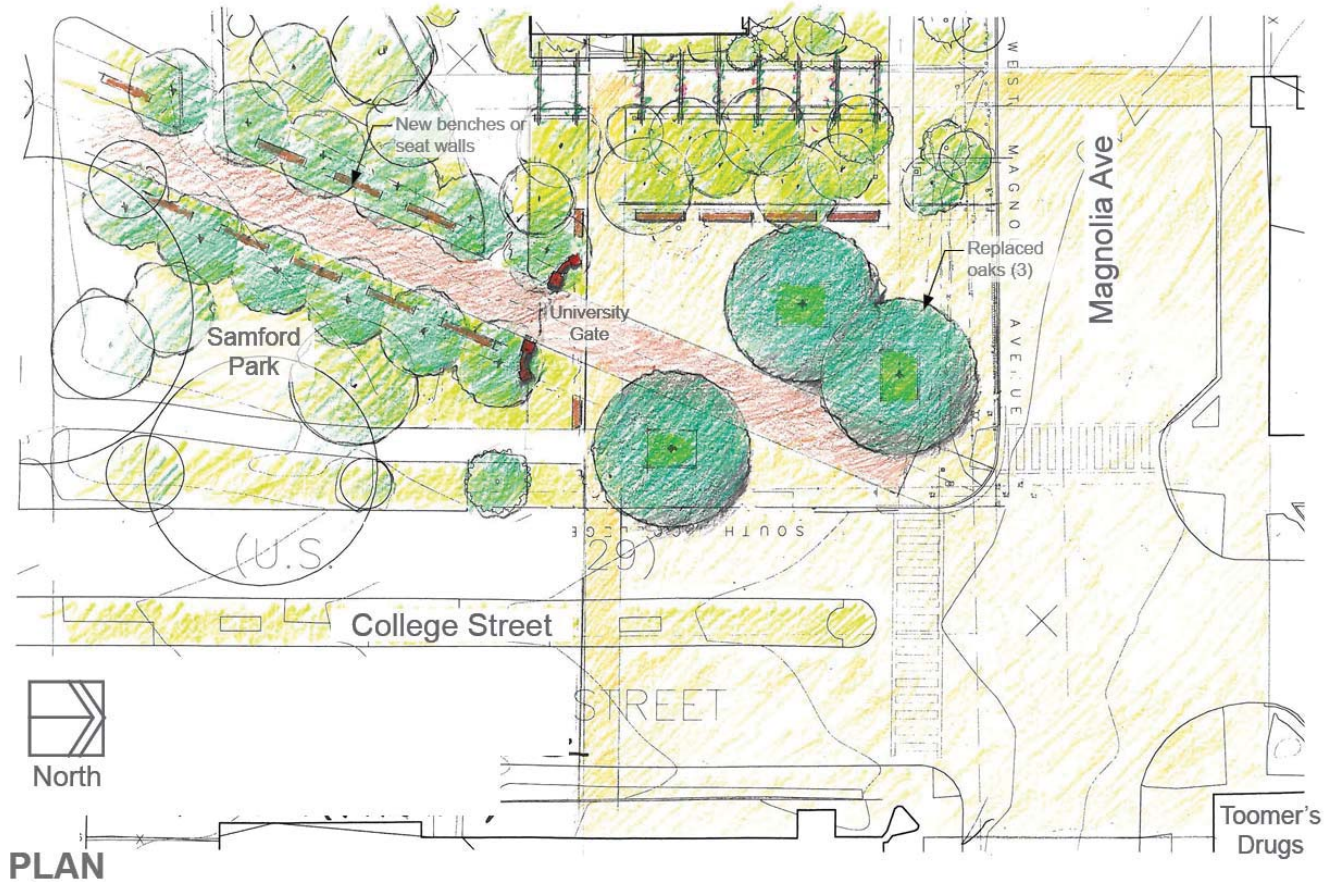


In Scheme C – Arcs & Radials, the gates are moved slightly back to open up the access at the corner and suggest a larger expansion of the intersection and territory behind the gates, leading to a low seat wall. Behind this, the paving opens onto a lawn and the proposed pathways seamlessly connect with the exiting pathway system and create a new linkage with Samford Hall.



PERSPECTIVE (view from Toomer's Drugs webcam)

Scheme D – The Samford Diagonal



PERSPECTIVE (view from Toomer's Drugs webcam)

Scheme D – The Samford Diagonal, more aggressively states the connection of the Corner to Samford Hall. Additionally, it expands the pedestrian territory of the design back to Biggin Hall and down College Street. The gates are moved back, realigning them to the diagonal pathway leading to Samford, and distinguishing the expanded space at the Corner with the threshold to the historic Samford Park. Along this pathway, an allee of trees knits into the park-like setting and three large, asymmetrical planted oaks also flank the pathway at the corner.

Survey Process

After the concept schemes were presented in November, Auburn University created a survey, summarizing the presentations into a short video and creating a series of questions in response to which participants were asked to give initial reactions, identify the most important themes, assess which schemes most effectively addressed the themes, and provide an overall best-fit scheme analysis. Created with and hosted by Qualtrics, the survey was active December 18, 2012 through January 22, 2013 and received 10,879 complete responses. It also included an optional open-ended comment page, through which over 3,000 participants gave additional feedback.

Summary of Findings

- Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ (69%) of participants either loved (40%) or liked (29%) Scheme B. This is the only scheme approaching mass approval.
- Participants generally liked (54%) Scheme A and disliked or felt neutral towards (70%) Scheme C.
- Scheme D, in contrast, was highly unsupported, with 60% of participants feeling uneasy about its fit.
- Participants thought that schemes A & B were by far the most appropriate. Following this lead were combinations of B & C, and B & D, respectively. This suggests that Scheme B is the most popular, followed by A, C, then D.
- The vast majority of participants identified themselves as Alumni (7,759), with current undergraduate students coming in a distant second (1,898). Participants were allowed to identify with multiple Auburn University affiliations; this resulted in 12,969 responses to this question.

Summary of Comments

- A majority of comments specifically requested that the gates not be moved. The renovated space should be designed around and incorporate them where they currently stand.
- Many requested memorials (plaques, inscriptions, etc.) to the two existing oaks.
- Specific lighting and security strategies (for both pedestrians and the trees) were often requested.
- An estimated 1-3% of participants requested absolutely no change – simply replace the existing trees, while an estimated 40% verbally reiterated a strong interest in at least one of the schemes presented.
- Many survey participants commented on the practice of rolling the trees during celebrations. Some felt strongly that the practice of rolling live trees should not change. Others felt equally strongly that rolling should be allowed to continue, but perhaps be directed towards objects that are not living. Still others believed that the practice of rolling Samford Park at Toomer's Corner should end completely.



Toomer's Corner after the National Championship Victory

Conclusion + Next Steps

Results indicate that schemes B and A were most warmly accepted by survey participants, respectively.

Based on the results of this survey, public forum input, guidance from senior leadership, and professional opinion from our Campus Landscape Master Plan consultants, two revised concepts will be presented at the next CLMP public workshop:

Wednesday, February 27, 3-5 PM in 258 Foy Hall and
Wednesday, February 27, 7-9 PM in 258 Foy Hall on the
Auburn University Main Campus.

Please mark your calendars and join Auburn University
Facilities Management Campus Planning and Space
Management for this exciting event.



Appendix:

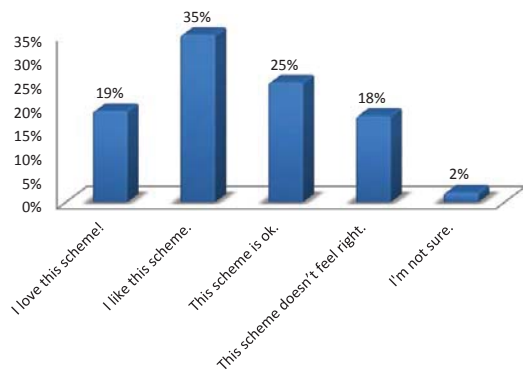
Samford Park at Toomer's Corner
Online Survey to Review Initial
Enhancement Concepts

Initial Participant Reactions

Question 1 of 13: Please tell us how you feel about the “Circle & Center” Scheme



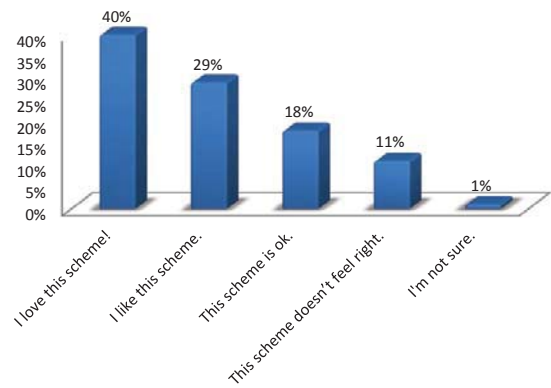
Scheme A



Question 2 of 13: Please tell us how you feel about the “Olmsted Arc Path” Scheme



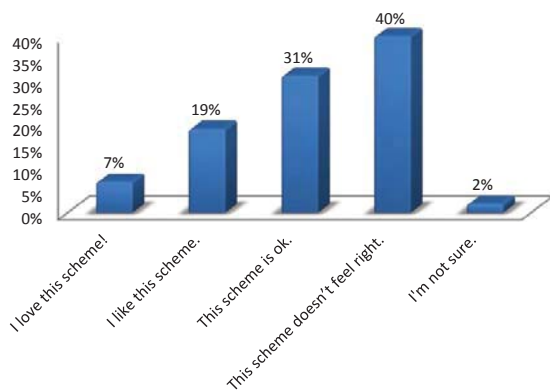
Scheme B



Question 3 of 13: Please tell us how you feel about the “Arcs and Radials” Scheme



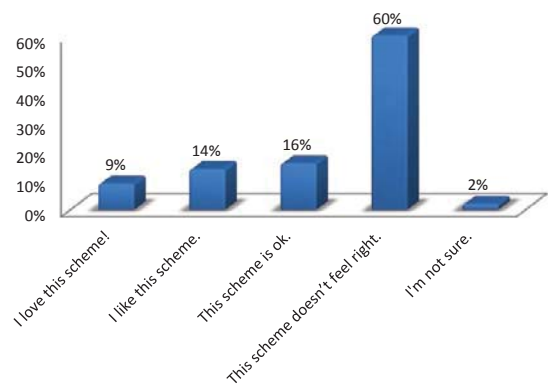
Scheme C



Question 4 of 13: Please tell us how you feel about the “Samford Diagonal” Scheme

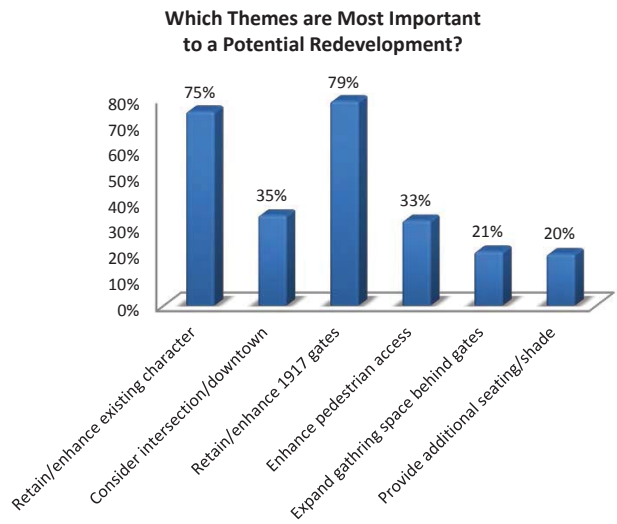


Scheme D



Themes

Question 5 of 13: The following themes were identified in the initial workshops. Please identify which themes are most important to the revitalization of the Corner. (Select up to 3)



Questions 6 through 11 of 13:

Which scheme best provides additional seating and shade areas?

Which scheme best expands the gathering space behind the University gates?

Which scheme best enhances the pedestrian access into the campus from the corner?

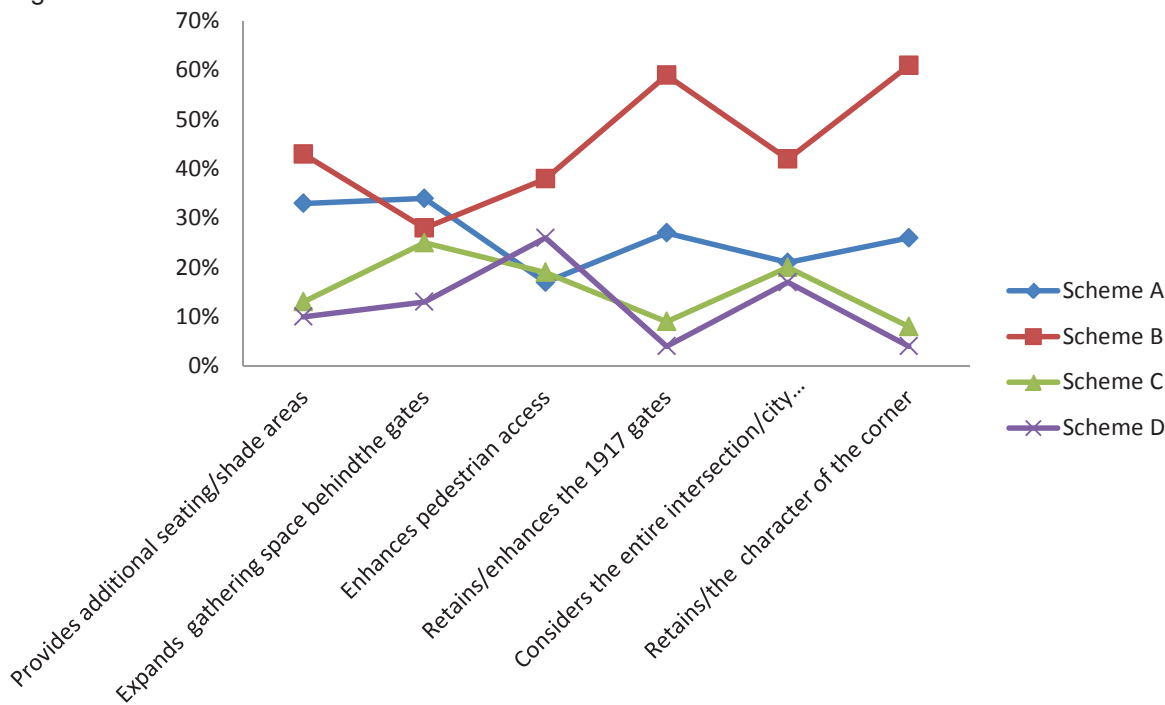
Which scheme best enhances the 1917 gates as a historic component of the corner?

Which scheme best considers the entire intersection and City context?

Which scheme best retains and enhances the existing and historic character of the corner?

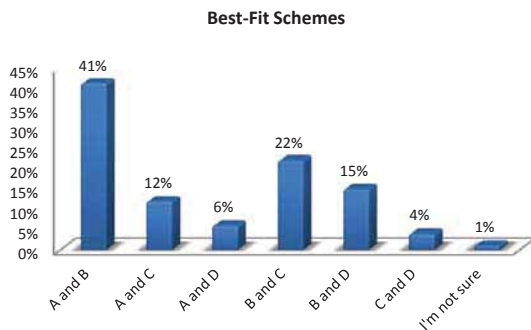
Questions 6 through 11:

Which Scheme Best Addresses the Initial Design Themes?



Best Fit Schemes

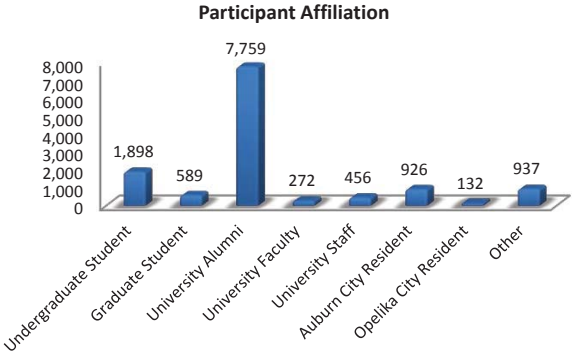
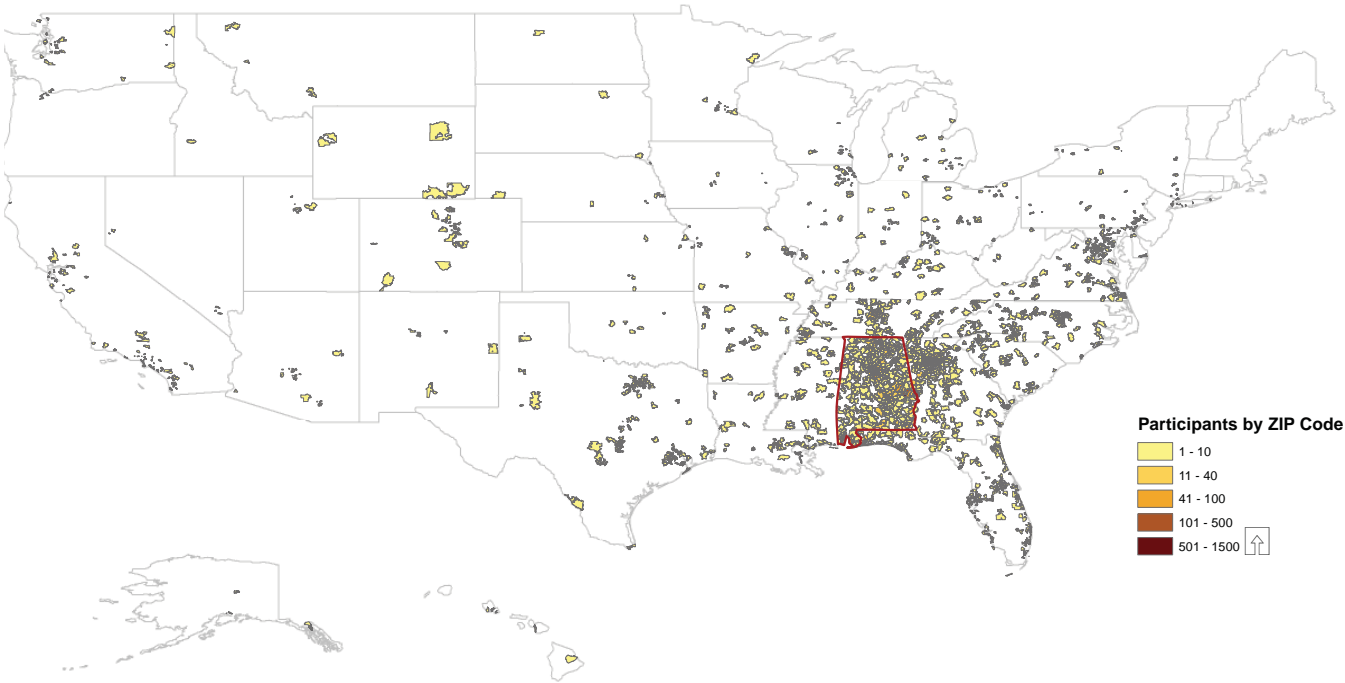
Question 12 of 13: To sum it all up, out of the four options presented, please tell us which two schemes best fit and are the greatest overall enhancement for Samford Park at Toomer's Corner?



Question 13 of 13: Finally, please offer any additional comments you may have. Are the four concepts missing anything? Is there anything else which you believe would be important to include to revitalize the Corner?

- A majority of comments specifically requested that the gates not be moved. The renovated space should be designed around and incorporate them where they currently stand.
- Many requested memorials (plaques, inscriptions, etc.) to the two existing oaks.
- Specific lighting and security strategies (for both pedestrians and the trees) were often requested.
- An estimated 1-3% of participants requested absolutely no change – simply replace the existing trees, while an estimated 40% verbally reiterated a strong interest in at least one of the schemes presented.
- Many survey participants commented on the practice of rolling the trees during celebrations. Some felt strongly that the practice of rolling live trees should not change. Others felt equally strongly that rolling should be allowed to continue, but perhaps be directed towards objects that are not living. Still others believed that the practice of rolling Samford Park at Toomer's Corner should end completely.

Participant Affiliation



Of the 10,879 survey participants, the vast majority self-identified as alumni, while the undergraduate student classification came in a distant second. Participants were allowed to choose as many affiliations as were applicable.

Responses came in from nearly every state in the US, although the highest concentrations occurred in nearby cities in the Southeast.

Participant Affiliation

