Due Diligence and Discovery

The purpose of the Engagement, Due Diligence & Discovery phase of work was to learn as much as possible about Georgia State and its six campuses - culturally, programmatically and physically, including their history and the larger contexts in which they are situated - before proffering design solutions.

Engagement began with the Strategic Plan and continued with “listening tours”, where all key constituent groups were interviewed. Over the first many weeks of the project some twenty-five interviews were conducted with well over thirty stakeholders such as the President, Provost, Vice Provost, Associate Provosts, Senior Vice Presidents, Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, Directors, Deans, Chief Information Officer, Chief of Police, Vice Chancellor, Special Advisors and others. The discussions were open, candid and animated - and themes began to emerge that would influence the later phases of work. Those themes were synthesized into Guiding Principles which would form the basis of the Options phase of work.

Each of the six campuses were visited multiple times and the physical settings - including land-use patterns, existing open space networks, circulatory systems, landscape palette, lighting standards, street furniture, infrastructure, parking, and athletic and recreational facilities - were analyzed; as well as, on the downtown campus, the character and quality of street level uses and frontages. Regulatory and environmental issues impacting the campuses and the ultimate Plan were researched and itemized. From this Opportunities & Constraints were identified.

Additionally, previous master plans, prepared in 1999, 2006 and 2012 were reviewed thoroughly and vetted for their current applicability and usefulness - as was the 2017 Library Master Plan.
“GSU has a clear and present presence in downtown Atlanta; especially as a result of its community outreach, clinics et al.”
LISTENING TOUR

The following key stakeholders and leaders at Georgia State were interviewed as part of the Engagement, Due Diligence & Discovery phase of work:

Dr. Mark Becker, President
Risa Palm, Sr VP for Academic Affairs & Provost
Jerry Rackliffe, Sr VP for Finance & Administration
Tim Renick, VP for Enrollment Mgmt & Student Success
Charlie Cobb, Dir., of Athletics
Walter Massey, VP for Development & Alumni Affairs
James Weyhenmeyer, VP Research & Economic Development
Mary Beth Walker, Assoc Provost, Strategic Initiatives
Chip Hill, Asst. Provost for Admin Operations
Phil Ventimiglia, Chief Innovation Officer
Rick Parker, Dir., Research Facilities
Peter Lyons, VP, Dean, Perimeter College
Sara Rosen, Arts & Sciences
Rich Phillips, Dean, Business
Paul Alberto, Dean, Education & Human Development
Nancy Kropf, Dean, Nursing & Health Professions
Michael Eriksen, Dean, Public Health
Wendy Hensel, Interim Dean, Law
Sally Wallace, Interim Dean, Policy Studies
Wade Weast, Dean, Arts
Larry Berman, Honors College
Jeff Steely, Dean, University Library
Douglas Covey, VP for Student Affairs
Darryl Holloman, Assoc VP for Student Affairs & Dean of Students
Randy Brown, Dir., Univ. Housing
Jeffrey Coleman, Dir., Multicultural Center
C. Bernard McCrary, Dir., Black Student Achievement
Ramesh Vakamudi, Assoc VP Facilities
Russ Seagren, Dir., Facilities Planning
Alvin Clark, Manager, Facilities Information
Joseph Spillane, Chief of Police
Beth Jones, Assoc VP for Finance & Admin
Boyd Beckwith, Senior Dir., Student Center

Tim Keane, Commissioner, Department of City Planning
Jennifer Ball, VP, Planning & Economic Development, Central Atlanta Progress
KEY FINDINGS

Certain themes emerged from the interviews with key stakeholders and university leadership, which are outlined below:

**GSU is a very different place** than it was five years ago

The [positive] "**GSU Impact**" on Downtown Atlanta, and the **beautification of downtown Atlanta**, is Extraordinary and Unequivocal.

**Student Housing is an essential component of enhancing the student experience at GSU**, student success, participation, engagement and retention, and the continued revitalization of downtown Atlanta; "community living architecture" is preferred.

A high percentage of **GSU students have jobs**; and a high percentage of **GSU students have families**.

**GSU has clear and present presence** in downtown Atlanta; especially as a result of its community outreach, clinics et al.

There is a **sense that the campus is un-safe**; even though the facts/statistics do not bear that out; **Hurt Park** is a culprit.

There should be **greater visual identity for the campus**; greater visual indicators you are on campus; and one should know when you walk into a GSU classroom, that it is GSU.

**Hurt Park** is a lynch-pin for the betterment of the GSU downtown campus.

The Priorities at GSU are **Students and Research**.

That **GSU is diverse** is a draw, but getting students to actually engage and navigate that diversity remains a challenge.

**Student Housing at the Five Perimeter Colleges** does not seem to be a promising idea.
Most of GSU's buildings were acquired or inherited and were designed for other purposes; and, therefore, do not always serve the mission of the school and its programs as effectively as they might had they been designed for academic, rather than commercial purposes.

There is a need for **more classroom space** (GSU has enough office space).

There is a **need for lecture halls and auditoriums**.

There is a **need for “advance classrooms”** and “specialized rooms”.

There is a **need for “swing space”** in each of the colleges.

There is a **need for an entertainment space** that seats about 300 people for alumni and fundraising events.

There might be a **need for a “University Guest House”**.

There is a **need to connect the six campuses** through technology and transportation.

**Nursing and its five (5) related Health Profession programs, is scarce on space** and does not have the right kinds of space; “nursing” is not taught like English or history. GSU should be educating greater numbers of students to enter the Health Care Industry, because the demand and the need is there and growing.

Many are **salivating over the opportunities to place programs at the GSU Football Stadium**.

There is **not enough parking and the parking access control systems** are antiquated and ineffective; students can't find the parking they need when they need it.

How can GSU **leverage technology in its pedagogy**, transform the “one-to-the-many” into a more intimate educational experience, move toward experiential learning and look for ways to create opportunistic collisions.

If GSU grows the **“branch campuses”** at what point does the institution hit the threshold of having to provide substantial “parallel” services?
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First impressions are lasting and “first take” observations are useful because they are made without preconceptions or prejudices. A fundamental first impression is that Georgia State University lacks a sense of place – an identity that distinguishes itself as its own while still being an integral part of the fabric of downtown Atlanta, which become an overarching preoccupation in the Master Planning effort. Currently, it does not “feel like a campus” and is more akin to New York University or Pace University in Manhattan than it is like the Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania, which sit in the heart of Philadelphia, or Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. NYU and Pace University are indistinguishable from their urban context, while UPenn, Drexel and VCU make great strides to a distinct setting within an urban context. How to do that at Georgia State became an overarching preoccupation of the master planning effort. The following are first impressions from early visits to the University.
Possible Macro to Micro Interventions

The Master Plan strives to address Georgia State’s physical planning issues from a global to a granular scale.

Globally, the University should identify sites for strategic acquisition – properties that will allow the University to strengthen its physical setting with new buildings and/or open spaces; in-fill sites that will, by definition, better connect existing GSU facilities. This could include buildings to be re-purposed or demolished to make way for new uses, as well as vacant lots and surface parking lots that are a blight to the physical campus and are the equivalent of “missing teeth”. Further, there should be a comprehensive and holistic streetscape vision, to create an aesthetic “glue” that connects otherwise disparate elements of Georgia State. This would include hardscape, landscape, lighting, way-finding and street furniture. Strategies for parking are critical to this – by consolidating surface parking and two to three level parking structures to larger parking structures – creating opportunity sites – to satellite parking at the former Turner Field property, with shuttle service and bicycle lanes to campus.

More granularly, the University should focus its investment in capital improvements on “everything from fifteen feet (15’) down” – with façade improvements, more active ground floor uses, and a highly improved streetscape environment of “Complete Streets” comprised of special hardscape, street trees, street lighting, bicycle lanes, street diets, widened sidewalks, on-street parking, bicycle lanes (both shared and dedicated) and street furniture.