



Texas Medical Center, looking north. Main Street (left) will look more like Fannin (right) following construction of ten new buildings.

The Profit Zone

Things at the Texas Medical Center are looking up, up, up

“Historically, the corridor bounded by Main and Fannin is not part of the original land covenant set aside for the Texas Medical Center, where non-profit activities of research, education, and health care take place. We call this area of the Medical Center the ‘profit zone’ because it has typically been built up by developers with tenants engaged in for-profit business.”

Paul Sanders, Vice President for Architecture and Planning, Texas Medical Center

BY BARRIE SCARDINO

RUMORS ABOUT THE NEAR FUTURE

of South Main Street along the Texas Medical Center and Rice University are being whispered in every nearby Starbucks: *Can you believe five gigantic buildings are going up on South Main? Did you know that Rice is conspiring with the Medical Center to build a high-rise with more retail than the Galleria? Have you heard that “they” are planning to take out all the live oaks along Main in the Medical Center? The Shamrock was only the first—historic buildings all along South Main are going to be demolished. UT is buying up all the property between Main and Fannin across from Rice to build a new hospital...*

Rather than take the grapevine at its word, let's examine the facts:

FACT: Ten new buildings are on the drawing board or under construction in the Rice/TMC area along South Main.

FACT: Rice recently renewed its contract with TMC, becoming the 43rd member of the TMC Institute. As part of its new Master Plan, Rice is planning a multi-story Collaborative Research Center with a relatively small retail component on the old Tidelands site (at the southwest corner of University and Main).

FACT: “They” are the developers of the Memorial Hermann Ambulatory Care Center on the southeast corner of Main and North MacGregor (across from Rice entrance No. 3). A number of live oaks have been removed, with a promise

to replant. There are no other plans to remove trees on South Main.

FACT: The only two historic buildings along the Main/Fannin strip between North MacGregor and Holcombe are the Hermann Professional Building (1948, 1958; Kenneth Franzheim with Hedrick & Lindsey, architects) and the Medical Towers Building (1959; Golemon & Rolfe with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects). The Hermann Professional Building was completely refurbished following Tropical Storm Allison in 2001 by Willis, Bricker & Cannady and is in good condition. There are no plans to alter or demolish this building, its garage, or the Medical Towers Building—at least for a while.

FACT: In September 2004 the UT Health Science Center bought the Hermann Professional Building and its garage. Memorial Hermann has retained ownership of the land, giving UT a 99-year lease. There is no new hospital; Hermann Professional Building tenants will stay but write their rising rent checks to UT instead of Memorial Hermann.

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The construction boomlet on South Main is a sign of prosperity and will provide new state-of-the-art facilities for the practice of medicine. That is good news. But with so much new construction along the western edge of TMC, concern about the ecological and aesthetic future of this area is appropriate. What will these new buildings and concomitant traffic do to one of the most beautiful tree-lined stretches in Houston? How will Rice University and Hermann Park be affected? Will there be enough parking (see “Med Center Mobility,” page 29)? Is care being taken to ensure that another Allison-level flood will not devastate the Medical Center?

PROFIT ZONE

Both Rice and the Medical Center have long turned their backs to Main Street. Rice has hidden itself behind hedges, and worse, most buildings on the TMC side of the street face Fannin—their unsightly (or, at best, humdrum) parking structures line South Main. New construction generally adheres to this established pattern. The new Memorial Hermann Ambulatory Care Center and Hermann Eye Center at North MacGregor and Main Street

will be, by its location, the Main Street “entrance” to the Medical Center. With it, Mischer Development and Kirksey Architects have lost an opportunity to engage Main Street or even acknowledge the venerable Hermann Hospital (1925; Berlin & Swern and Alfred C. Finn, architects) across Fannin.¹ Memorial Hermann’s building will be a 30-story, glass-skinned skyscraper, built out to the street. (The City of Houston granted a setback waiver allowing construction to the lot lines because pre-ordinance buildings along this strip were built out to the street.) A slightly curving façade will look across North MacGregor to the historic Palmer Memorial Episcopal Church complex. The first two floors will contain retail space, and an office tower will rise over the parking garage, which will contain a whopping 2,500 spaces. The building is expected to be completed sometime in 2006.

The Memorial Hermann Building will literally overshadow the pleasant, 15-story Moderne Hermann Professional Building. Houston Mod, take note: One can only guess that it is a matter of time before UT plans something new on this site. South of the Hermann Garage the next new building on the east side of Main nears completion: the Prairie View A&M University College of Nursing (see rendering, this page). The project architect, Mark Green of Watkins Hamilton Ross, confirms that eight stories of parking will face Main; the Fannin Street façade rises to 12 stories (four for the nursing school on top of the eight-story garage).

“Part of the program for Fannin Street dictated that the entire 12 stories appear to be the nursing college and not garage,” says Green. Renderings show an architectural delineation between the nursing school and the garage, but the parking section is not obviously a garage. The glassed circulation towers facing Fannin at the corners of the building may eventually feature Turrellesque colored lights. An image of the Main Street façade is not available, but Green reports that it will be clad with aluminum louvers flanked by precast concrete. Foundations for this building allow for another 12 stories to be added in the future.

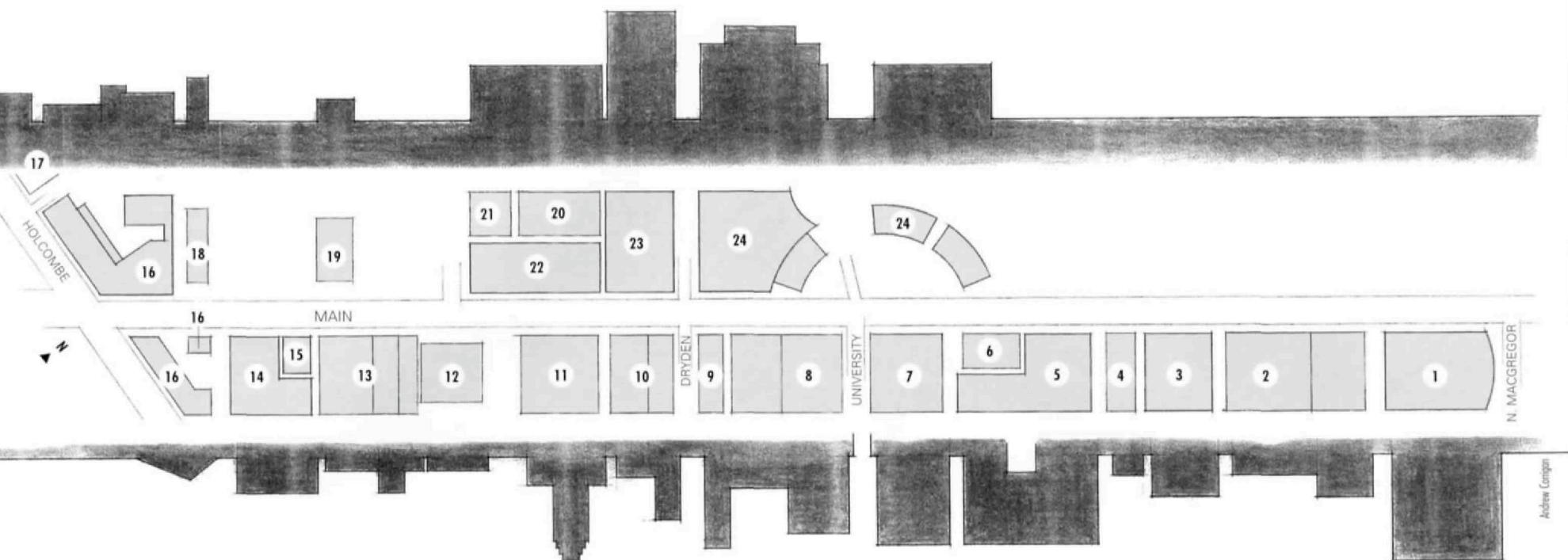
The most prominent landlord along this stretch of Main/Fannin, the profit zone, is Methodist Hospital. Methodist is planning the largest structure going up in the next few years. Its West Pavilion Professional Building will be demolished



Top: Texas Women's University Institute of Health Sciences, Fannin Street façade, scheduled for completion 2006; Prairie View A&M University College of Nursing, Fannin Street façade, under construction (above).

Courtesy Kirksey

Courtesy Watkins Hamilton Ross



Courtesy Gensler
Jon Jerde and Jean Nouvel's Tokyo Shiodome. Inspiration for Holcombe Square?

next summer for an 820,000-square-foot, L-shaped building that will wrap around the Methodist Diagnostic Hospital (which will remain on the site). A team from Watkins Hamilton Ross Architects is in the design phase for this new outpatient center and research institute, which is scheduled for completion in 2008. The first two stories (as in other new buildings) will be devoted to retail; a parking garage will occupy the next ten stories. The Methodist Research Institute, with an address and entrance on Main, will occupy the next five floors with a two-floor shell above for expansion. The Outpatient Center, entered from Fannin, will fill the rest of the tower, and the top floor will have a state-of-the-art conference center with 25th-floor views of the Rice campus and TMC.

The most interesting part of this project—and most daunting for the architects—is Methodist's desire to open John Freeman Boulevard through to Main Street. This will help traffic congestion on Fannin and could include a grand sallyport, which would create a meaningful cross-axis entrance into the heart of the Medical Center. The City of Houston and the Texas Medical Center understandably are enthusiastic about this concession. Methodist should be lauded for its attempt to reach beyond its own agenda for the good of the community.²

The last project on the east side of Main about to break ground is the Texas Woman's University Institute of Health Sciences, designed by Kirksey. It will be located on vacant Methodist Hospital-owned property just south of the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Construction documents are nearly finished, anticipating a January 2005 groundbreaking. The project is

expected to be complete in April or May 2006. The precast concrete building with curtain wall will be L-shaped and built around an 11-level garage constructed by Methodist (see rendering, previous page). The garage, which will face Main, is a design-build project with Vaughn Construction and Morris Architects. The TWU building will house offices and research facilities in addition to student services and classrooms for nursing, physical therapy, and occupational therapy students. In this building, Kirksey has another opportunity to address a gateway into the Medical Center at Main and Holcombe, where the most creative new project is being studied: Holcombe Square.

HOLCOMBE SQUARE

The Holcombe Square idea grew out of the Main Street Revitalization Project, sponsored by the City of Houston and the Main Street Coalition. A Main Street Corridor Master Plan developed by Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects of Los Angeles (August 2000) identified several distinct districts along Main, including the Texas Medical Center. In part the master plan recommends, "At the southern edge of the Medical Center, a new 'Gateway Plaza' is proposed at Holcombe by eliminating the grade-separated intersections at Fannin and Main with new development opportunities for adjacent properties. This new civic plaza will establish a more favorable first impression for the Medical Center and create a new gathering place for outdoor activities."³

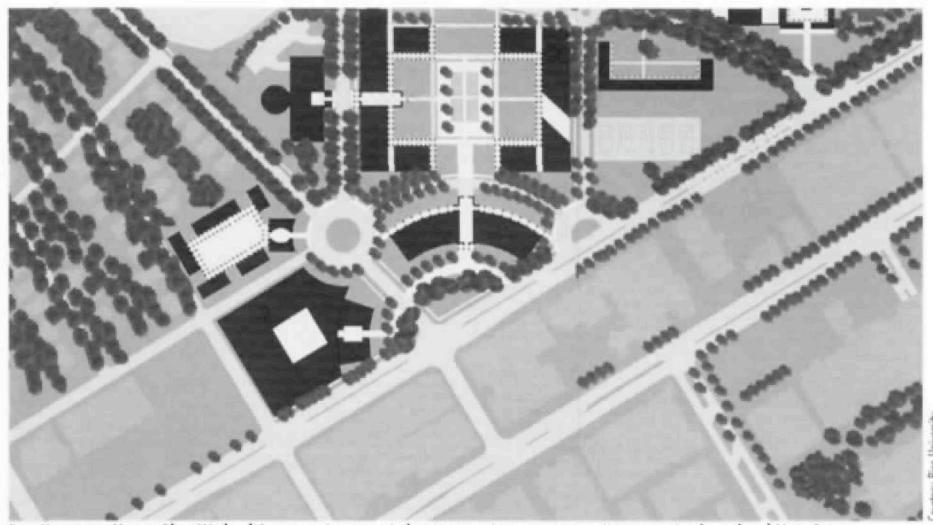
Gensler has been commissioned to do a nine-month study, out of

which will come specific recommendations. The project is being undertaken through a public-private partnership, which includes the South Main Center Association, Main Street Coalition, the Texas Medical Center, the Texas Medical Center Transportation Management Organization, METRO, and private property owners, particularly Norvin Partners of New York, which owns the Bank of America Building and the triangle of land between Old Main and Holcombe, where the Bank of America drive-in bank is now located. Phase I is being funded by a Federal Highway Administration Transportation and Community Systems Preservation grant.

Dan Brents of Gensler is leading this study. He is an experienced architect and planner who formerly worked for Euro-Disney, so an imaginative solution may result. Brents says the preliminary studies are complete, but circulation diagrams, land use maps, and proposal sketches are not available at this time. Brents notes that the plans do incorporate the Bank of America triangle and the Pizza Hut-Burger King site on the northwest corner of Main and Holcombe. He envisions a new multi-level plaza and/or building, which will have a variety of functions, including a food court.⁴ So don't fret, BK and Pizza Hut will not disappear.

Gensler is using three benchmark references in planning Holcombe Square: First is Tokyo's Shiodome, a multi-level development over streets with innovative linkages to surrounding buildings (see image, this page). The planning ideal behind the Shiodome project was to build in harmony with nature and to combine living and working functions in its new skyscrapers. Designed by American archi-

	BUILDING	#STORIES	#SQUARE FEET	#PARKING SPACES
1	Memorial Hermann Ambulatory Care Center 6400 Fannin Kirksey; 2004-2006	30	511,000	2,500
2	Hermann Professional Building and Garage 6410 and 6414 Fannin K. Franzheim with Hedrick & Lindsley 1949, 1958 addition	15	361,000	1,250
3	Prairie View A&M College of Nursing 6436 Fannin Watkins, Hamilton, Ross; 2005	12	120,000	1,000
4	Kindred Hospital 6441 Main architect unknown; 1971	6	168,000	118
5	Methodist Hospital Outpatient Center and Research Tower 6448 Fannin Watkins, Hamilton, Ross; 2005-2008	25	820,000	1,200
6	Methodist Diagnostic Hospital 6450 Fannin	12	192,000	0
7	Smith Tower and Garage 6500 Fannin Lloyd, Jones, Fillpot; 1989	25	430,000	1340
8	Scurlock Tower and Garage 6560 Fannin S. I. Morris; 1980	22	480,000	1660
9	Houston Marriott Medical Center 6580 Fannin Sikes, Jennings, Kelly, 1984	26		0
10	Medical Towers Building 1709 Dryden Golemon & Rolfe with SOM; 1959	18	160,000	1,200
11	St. Luke's Medical Tower 6724 Fannin Cesar Pelli and Kendall/Heaton; 1991	29	386,000	1,219
12	Wells Fargo Bank 6631 Main Street	4	40,000	43
13	Crowne Plaza Hotel and Garage 6701 South Main Street	10		
14	Texas Womens University Institute of Health Sciences 6800 Fannin Kirksey; 2006	10	200,000	0
15	Methodist Hospital Garage 6801 Main Morris Architects; 2006	11	n/a	1,050
16	Holcombe Square Project Main-Holcombe intersection Gensler; 2006-	? -3	?	?
17	Life Sciences Plaza 2130 West Holcombe Street 2006	11	210,000	
18	Holiday Inn and Suites 6800 Main Street	12		
19	Best Western Plaza Hotel 6700 Main	6	125 rooms	125
20	Hilton Houston Plaza Hotel 6633 Travis	18		0
21	Houston Medical Center Building 6655 Travis	9	129,000	400
22	St. Lukes Parking Garage 6620 Main Street Kirksey; 2004	15	180,000	1,450
23	Baylor Outpatient Center 6600 Main Street ?	? -30	?	?
24	Rice University Collaborative Research Center corner University and Main ?	? -25	400,000	?



Rice University Master Plan (Michael Graves & Associates) showing new Rice entrance at University Boulevard and Main Street, with Rice's plan for its Main Street face across from the Texas Medical Center.

Courtesy Rice University



Vacant land on the west side of Main Street, soon to be developed.

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architect Jon Jerde and French architect Jean Nouvel, Shiodome's multi-level plaza has specific implications for Holcombe Square, including ample landscaping.

The second project from which Gensler hopes to learn is also in Japan. The Roppongi Hills residential office project outside Tokyo, developed by Minoru Mori, opened to international acclaim in the summer of 2003. Kohn Pederson Fox of New York with the Jerde Partnership designed the complex. The walks, gardens and waterwalls are built over parking decks, also a possibility at Holcombe Square.

The third project under study is another Jean Nouvel creation: the redevelopment of Les Halles in Paris. Here redevelopment entailed a central park as a roofscape over the completed Paris Metro station and several below-grade levels of retail. This type of grand design would have been wonderful in Houston had it been implemented before so many parking garages were built. Such a scheme may be a pipe dream now, but another roundabout with a substantial fountain at this end of South Main echoing the Mecom Fountain circle would be Parisian, too. What we can reasonably hope for is

a very green and blue plaza with pedestrian connections to METRORail, the Medical Center, and on through to Rice.

RICE UNIVERSITY

At the north end of this corridor, another grand idea is being implemented. At Rice there seems to be a new spirit of concern for the community beyond the hedges. Rice Provost Eugene Levy several years ago began exploring the notion that the corner of University Boulevard and Main Street could be a hub of collaboration between Rice and TMC institutions. Instead of envisioning university expansion to the west toward Rice Village, Levy began to look at the future of Rice in intellectual terms. His premise that biomedical science will play a role in the 21st century (analogous to the role played by electronics, computation, and communication in the 20th) received wide support at Rice. Consequently, the desire to strengthen the academic partnership between Rice (with engineering, physical science, computation, and nanotechnology) and the TMC institutions (with clinical research, biology, and biomedicine) led Rice to commission Michael Graves to produce a new campus Master Plan, with the



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Top: The wall of parking garages on Main Street; Fannin Street in the Texas Medical Center area has effectively become Main Street (above).

specific directive that the campus should physically reach out toward the Medical Center and Main Street (see image, previous page).⁵

The Graves plan proposes a new north-south axis defined by a second academic court terminating at the University-Main corner. Although a good deal of the land to be redeveloped along this new axis is vacant, some buildings will be demolished, and the track stadium will be moved to the west end of campus near other athletic facilities. This new entrance plaza to Rice will be flanked by structures that are planned to curve, enfolding a pedestrian-only entrance and completing a semi-circular configuration that continues across University to the new Collaborative Research Center, which will be built on the 2.8-acre Tidelands site. This building, which Levy calls the “driver” of the Graves Master Plan, will be designed during the coming year with groundbreaking expected in early 2006. Several design teams are now being interviewed, but an architect has not been chosen. Barbara White Bryson says this will be a high-rise building of approximately 400,000 square feet. The building will include parking and a two-level mall with a large academic bookstore (for both Rice and TMC) as well as cafes and retail stores. Above, academic floors will contain high-tech wet labs and research facilities for, according to Levy, “joint complementary programs and expertise at the nexus of biomedical science, nanotechnology, computation, bioengineering and physical science and engineering.”

WEST SIDE

Baylor College of Medicine is constructing its new outpatient center at Main and Dryden next to St. Luke’s new parking garage. An architect has not been chosen. Lori Williams, director of communications at Baylor, was unable at the time of this writing to supply details about the building. It will most certainly be a high-rise and by its location will be forced to confront Main Street. The Baylor outpatient building also will have to include parking and probably will be physically connected to the St. Luke’s garage next door, which was designed by Kirksey and opened in 2004. The 15-story St. Luke’s garage building has approximately 1,450 parking spaces below four floors of doctors’ offices. Its most noticeable feature is the green glass skywalk—the first to cross Main Street—connecting it to St. Luke’s Medical

Tower, which unlike the Methodist buildings actually has a Main Street façade. Designed by Cesar Pelli & Associates with Kendall/Heaton Associates, this striking building was completed in 1991. In many ways it is the jewel of the Medical Center. This twin-domed tower was planned as a six-pack with clones on either side of the first. As good as the building is, it would have been overwhelming in triplicate. Wells Fargo Bank and The Medical Towers, both of which would have been demolished, are safe for the time being.

Hidden behind St. Luke's garage are the first two Medical Center buildings to be constructed across Main from the Medical Center. The Southgate Neighborhood Association lost its battle to protect its Travis Street boundary when the Houston Medical Center Building and adjacent Hilton Houston Plaza Hotel were constructed in the early '80s. Across Southgate Boulevard, where the Best Western and Holiday Inn are strung out amid a good deal of vacant property, a long strip is ripe for development. Various interests are holding this land with no immediate plans. Already, though, one new building has been announced. Behind Pizza Hut and Burger King, the Metrontario Group is developing Life Sciences Plaza, a medical office building with parking garage. Stay tuned.

WHERE IS MAIN STREET?

Interestingly, Fannin has become the "main street" through the Medical Center. This stretch is perhaps the most urban streetscape in Houston, one block away from speeding traffic on Main. A constant stream of pedestrians, patients, and TMC workers flows from one building to another, or to restaurants, banks, parking, and other "urban" amenities along the street. All Fannin needs is some flower shops, little delis, and a dry cleaner to start looking like New York. The bustle of the METRORail adds to the urban feel of this stretch. So, where Main Street has become the back door and lost its mainness, Fannin has usurped it, which might be all for the best if Main Street can somehow regain its dignity.

Main Street from Mecom Fountain to the Holcombe Square site is now virtually a six-lane highway. Perhaps all or some of those lanes could be submerged, creating below-grade through-traffic with underground access to parking garages. Or a public parking facility could be built

under Main Street, making it possible to demolish some of the older garages in favor of open space.

Main Street should be a safe and pleasant crossing from the westside medical buildings and Rice University to TMC's east side, extending safe access to public transportation at the numerous METRORail stops along Fannin and just beyond the Holcombe Square site at the TMC Transit Center station. But can underground facilities be made safe from flooding?

According to Paul Sanders of TMC, codes established in 2002 have new, more stringent requirements for below-grade construction that should prevent catastrophic flooding in the future. A long-range plan is being developed by the Corps of Engineers using FEMA money to look at both the Rice area and TMC. The City of Houston is installing new storm lines down North MacGregor to Brays Bayou. TMC institutions have all upgraded storm protection procedures and equipment in older buildings, sealing their basements against floodwaters. Sanders says that TMC is coordinating underground utilities for new construction and noted that Memorial Hermann is building new power substations in anticipation of the Ambulatory Care Center/Eye Center and the Heart Center, now in the planning stages.

So, as usual, the circulating rumors contain at least half-truths. But there is indeed a surge of new construction activity, new ideas, and new energy infusing this part of Houston. And floodwaters apparently won't be allowed to dampen them. ■

1 Shockingly, Memorial Hermann is planning to build a huge Heart Center in front of Hermann Hospital (now called the Cullen Building).

2 Interview with Richard C. Gremillion, Vice President Facilities, Planning and Development, The Methodist Hospital and Madeline B. Wicker, Director of Leasing and Marketing for The Methodist Hospital Office Buildings. Smith Tower, August 31, 2004.

3 "Main Street Corridor Master Plan: Design Concepts for Main Street," Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects. August 2000, p. 76. Also interview with Susan Young, Executive Director, South Main Center, August 24, 2004.

4 Telephone interview with Dan Brents, Gensler. August 25, 2004.

5 Interview with Eugene H. Levy, Provost, and Barbara White Bryson, Associate Vice President of Facilities, Engineering and Planning, Rice University, August 30, 2004. See also *Cite* 59, page 8.

Med Center Mobility

The traffic stops here

BY RIVES TAYLOR

Moving people and their cars around the Texas Medical Center represents a major challenge for planners. Scale is part of the problem. TMC has:

- 740-plus acres with more than 100 permanent buildings
- 20 miles of private and public streets and roadways
- 42,430-plus parking spaces

(Nine thousand of those parking spaces are located in the one-block-wide profit zone, with at least 5,700 more planned within the next three to five years.)

Considerations at work in this dense urban area include:

- Getting the employees, visitors, students, and patients into the area via highway exits and city streets (and back out again);
- Encouraging commuters and visitors to use vanpools, METRORail, and buses (the latter two of which restrict traffic flow);
- Strategically locating full-day commuter parking versus hourly visitor parking;
- Offering directional signs to help unfamiliarized visitors find their destinations; and
- Expanding roadways and intersections to handle all of the current and projected traffic.

In its off-street parking ordinances, the City of Houston mandates a parking count based on the size of the building served. This corridor has about the right average of three-and-a-half spots for every 1,000 square feet of professional or medical office building. However, the one-size-fits-all ordinance does not take into account the corridor's proximity to mass transit, the high cost of the real estate for surface or garage parking (including the cost premiums for stacking these garages over eight levels), or the unfortunate reality of gridlock.

It is this last reality that has the planners within TMC emphasizing a mobility strategy learned from other urban areas with large health care centers. Rather than encourage parking close by for those other than visitors and physicians, the plan is to position mass transit or shuttles to force staff members to park at the periphery—often with monthly parking fees. This strategy reduces the number of parking spots on valuable and expensive land and also minimizes the traffic load on the streets. Additionally, the planners are developing integrated way-finding that will minimize the lost number of visitors who slow

traffic, as well as limit the general confusion of urban driving.

This area has the extra challenge of being sandwiched between a street that has had its traffic flow reduced (Fannin, with the rail line) and another street that will see only more development of parking structures in the future (Main). For years Houstonians have used primarily Main and Fannin as the means of access into the health science complex. With the increase of projects and their parking requirements, traffic on these streets will only worsen.

No major highways offer easy access to TMC. It is almost equidistant from U.S. 59, Loop 610 South, and Texas 288. From any direction city boulevards carry traffic to and from these highways, often through quiet residential neighborhoods or already congested commercial districts. Recognizing this emerging problem early in the 1990s, TMC realigned its strategy to encourage greater access from the east and south while working with local governments to improve or create new access from the highways.

In the corridor along Main and Fannin, however, the superloading of so many new parking entrances and exits with the existing parking areas will necessitate either: 1) more traffic control points (e.g., signals); or 2) a cadre of traffic police during rush hour (whenever that really is for the Medical Center). In a highly competitive health care market with multiple venues of clinics throughout the region, the keys to success for outpatient health care delivery are easy access and parking for the paying patients. It would seem that these keys are out of reach for this corridor just by the limitations of the existing arteries (and veins).

The success of these large projected patient care developments in the profit zone hinges on a strategy that might have to dramatically limit parking spaces, with the few remaining reserved for the outpatient visitor alone. At the same time, the medical staff would have to switch to some form of mass transit to get to the heart of the Texas Medical Center. In the car-centric city of Houston, where even recruitment for hospital staff hinges on inexpensive and nearby parking, this necessary good seems hard to fathom. ■