

Downtown Richmond Permanent Transfer Hub

Final Report

May 2024

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01

INTRODUCTION

ORIGINS AND PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY

GRTC is pursuing a Permanent Transfer Hub facility to better enable transfers where the city's bus lines converge in Downtown Richmond.

To facilitate this project, GRTC sought to evaluate the potential for transit-oriented development above the facility across 18 potential sites throughout Downtown. HR&A, with support from VHB and Design Collective, conducted a site screening and evaluation process to prioritize a preferred site for GRTC to pursue.

This analysis combines insights from market knowledge and data, land use and zoning, technical transportation requirements, and community priorities. This study positions GRTC to apply for state and federal funding and identify a development partner for the Permanent Transfer Hub.



TRANSFER HUB HISTORY

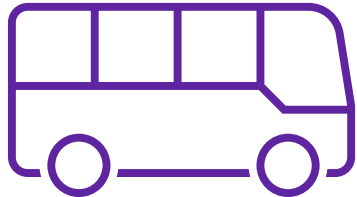
For over 15 years, GRTC has sought a permanent downtown bus transfer location, but past attempts have not been able to secure a long-term site.

- 2013** GRTC planning study identifies 17 sites for a potential bus transfer center. While many have received studies, they have not moved forward due to shifting priorities or alternate development plans.
- 2018** A temporary on-street transfer hub is set up on two sites in anticipation of a proposed permanent facility development. The proposal is not implemented, leaving the temporary system in place.
- 2020** One of the temporary transfer sites is removed, reducing the transfer hub to one site
- 2023** Current temporary bus transfer station completed on a short-term lease (pictured)
- 2027** Lease for current transfer station ends



TRANSFER HUB IMPACT

The temporary GRTC transfer hub facilitates more than 7,500 daily transfers and supports connections for all local routes in GRTC's network.



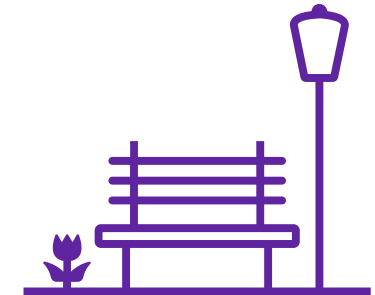
Accessible Mobility

The current temporary Downtown transfer hub **facilitates more than 7,500 daily transfers** and trip destinations, making it vital transit infrastructure for Richmond region commuters across various incomes.



Transit Operations

A permanent transfer hub is needed to provide relief services such as food, bathrooms, and climate-controlled resting and waiting space for riders and operators. **There is currently no central location for these services** throughout the GRTC network.

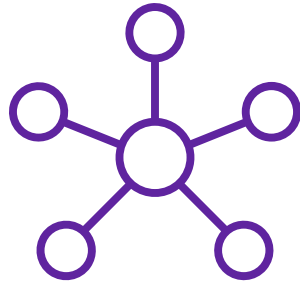


Elevating Transit

The concentration of employment, amenities, and housing around transit creates a **highly active and visible center for the GRTC system**, uplifting its role as an essential transportation resource and public service.

WHY DOWNTOWN?

Locating the Permanent Transfer Hub downtown will drive catalytic economic development opportunities for Downtown Richmond while serving the needs of transit riders.



Improved Connectivity

Downtown Richmond is the most transit-dense area of the city as **every GRTC bus line** and several intercity bus services converge. An efficient transfer hub is therefore necessary to better connect local routes and maintain on-time service.



Catalytic Impact

A joint development project can introduce residents, amenities, and transit connections to the area, building a more compelling market for future development activities and missing urban amenities. **Specifically, development of the Permanent Transfer Hub can be a catalyst for the City Center project.**



Proving the Concept

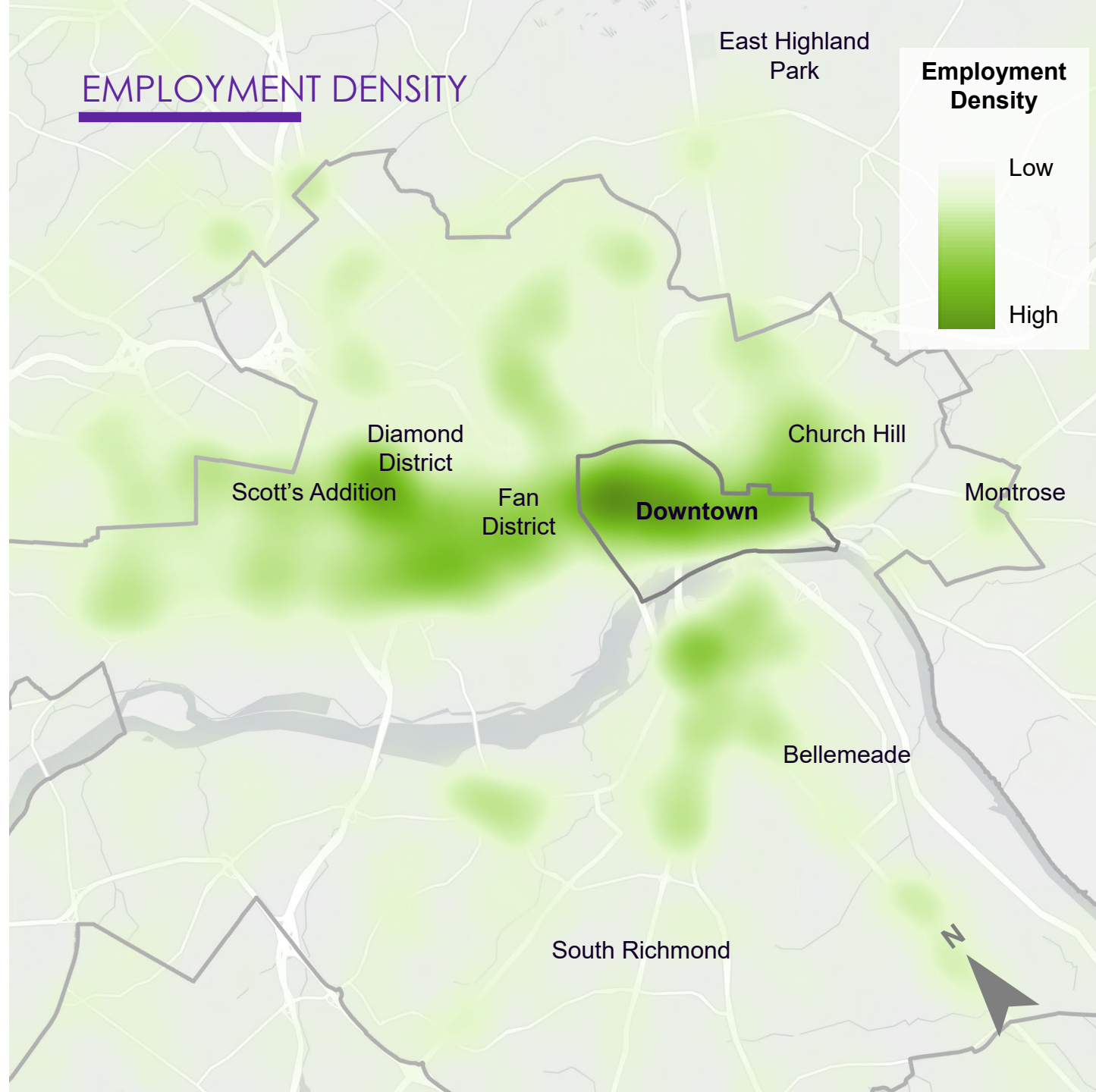
Leveraging established demand for the current transfer hub, the project can provide long-term stability to the GRTC network and demonstrate the market for TOD in Richmond, which can inform future transit investments throughout the Richmond region and **enhance developer interest in TOD opportunities.**

WHY DOWNTOWN?

The study area is also central to the highest density of job locations for residents across the Richmond MSA, making Downtown an ideal location for the transfer station.

Downtown Richmond contains over a third of all office space in the Richmond MSA, serving as the city's center of employment. While many major employers are located between Downtown and Scott's Addition, **the greatest concentration of jobs is located within the Downtown study area.**

Following GRTC's 2018 system redesign which introduced the Pulse Bus Rapid Transit, several major connection nodes for local routes were created in the Downtown core, making the area central to the system's operation.



PROJECT GOALS

Identifying the right location for the transfer station will meet mobility needs of riders and support downtown economic development efforts.

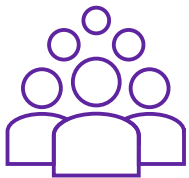
This project can support Richmond's long-term planning goals, such as



Prioritize
Equitable Transit



Develop
Inclusive Housing



Foster a
Diverse Economy



Create and Support
High-quality Places



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RICHMOND CONTEXT

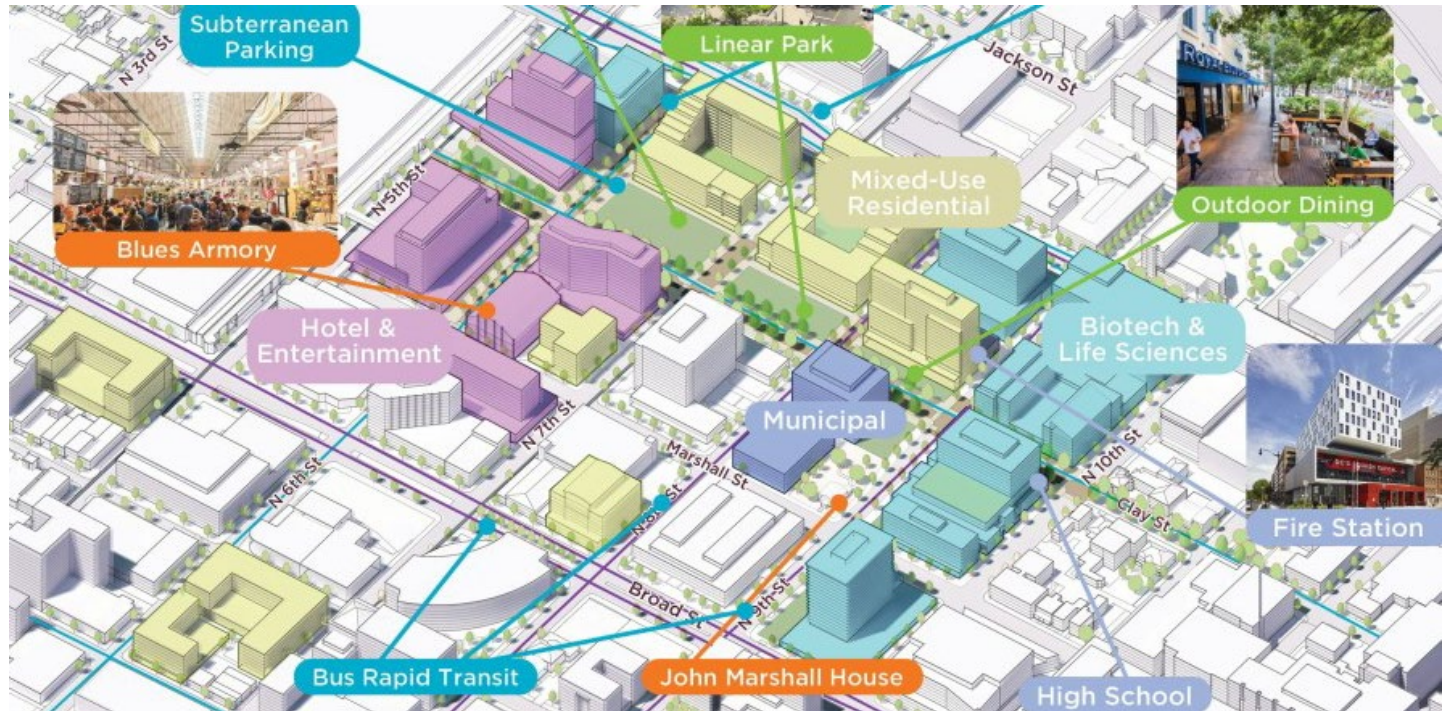
RICHMOND TODAY

Richmond has recently made historic investments in Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Downtown. These investments are helping the City attract new residents and catalyze projects like City Center.



(Top) The **East-West Pulse Bus Rapid Transit** system opened in 2018. Plans for a second North-South line through downtown are in progress.

(Bottom) Potential uses shown in the **City Center Small Area Plan** draft (2021) will strengthen downtown vibrancy in an area adjacent to the evaluated sites. The City of Richmond is currently evaluating finalist proposals for a development partner.



RICHMOND CONTEXT

Downtown Richmond has benefited from regional growth, experiencing a resurgence over the past decade that coincides with the expansion of finance, real estate, and professional services.

DOWNTOWN RESURGENCE

Downtown Richmond has experienced strong population growth over the past decade. **The Downtown population has increased by 42% since 2012**, compared to 4% population growth in the overall MSA.

DOWNTOWN DOMINATED BY OFFICE SPACE

Most of Richmond's office space is located Downtown, including the Biotech District, which is almost exclusively office space, with some hotels proximate to the Coliseum.

MIXED-USE DOWNTOWN

In general, Downtown Richmond has the highest mix of uses in the region, with a balance of office, hotel, multifamily, and retail.

POCKETS OF SINGLE-USE NEIGHBORHOODS

Several Downtown neighborhoods are dominated by single uses. The Jackson and Monroe Ward neighborhoods provide a significant portion of Downtown's multifamily space. The Biotech District is dominated by office space.

RICHMOND CONTEXT

Building on this regional momentum, Downtown Richmond has strong potential for additional high density mixed-use transit-oriented development.

RESIDENTIAL

Downtown Richmond has witnessed **consistent multifamily growth over the past decade** and continues to demonstrate high levels of demand. Despite a 7% premium on Downtown Class A space relative to Citywide space, **Downtown vacancy has outperformed or kept track with citywide vacancy.**

OFFICE

Office activity overall has yet to advance since the beginning of the pandemic. Outside of “built-to-suit” space for company expansions (e.g. CoStar and Activation Capital), there has been minimal planned speculative office space. Additionally, leasing activity remains low compared to pre-pandemic trends.

HOTEL

Richmond is a **center for tourism and events**, and hotels are performing well in terms of average daily rates (ADR) and RevPAR. However, **hotel space has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels of occupancy.**

RETAIL

Richmond retail is primarily restaurants and cafes, with **limited amenities** like pharmacies and general retail. Additionally, **portions of Downtown have a notable lack of retail space**, such as the Biotech District.

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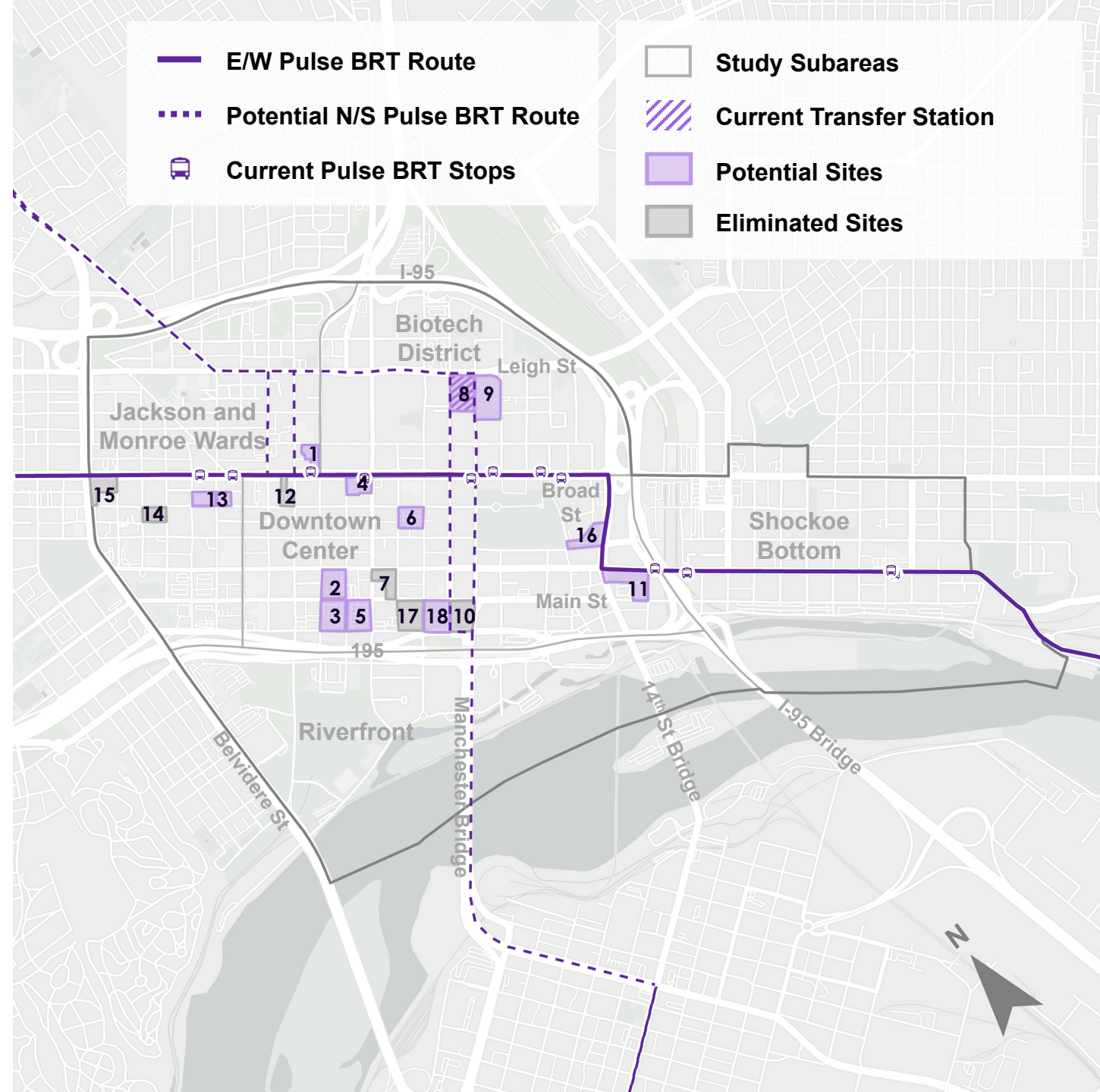
SITE SELECTION

SITE SELECTION

HR&A assessed the viability of the 18 sites provided by GRTC. Six of the 18 sites were eliminated immediately due to substantial existing or planned development.

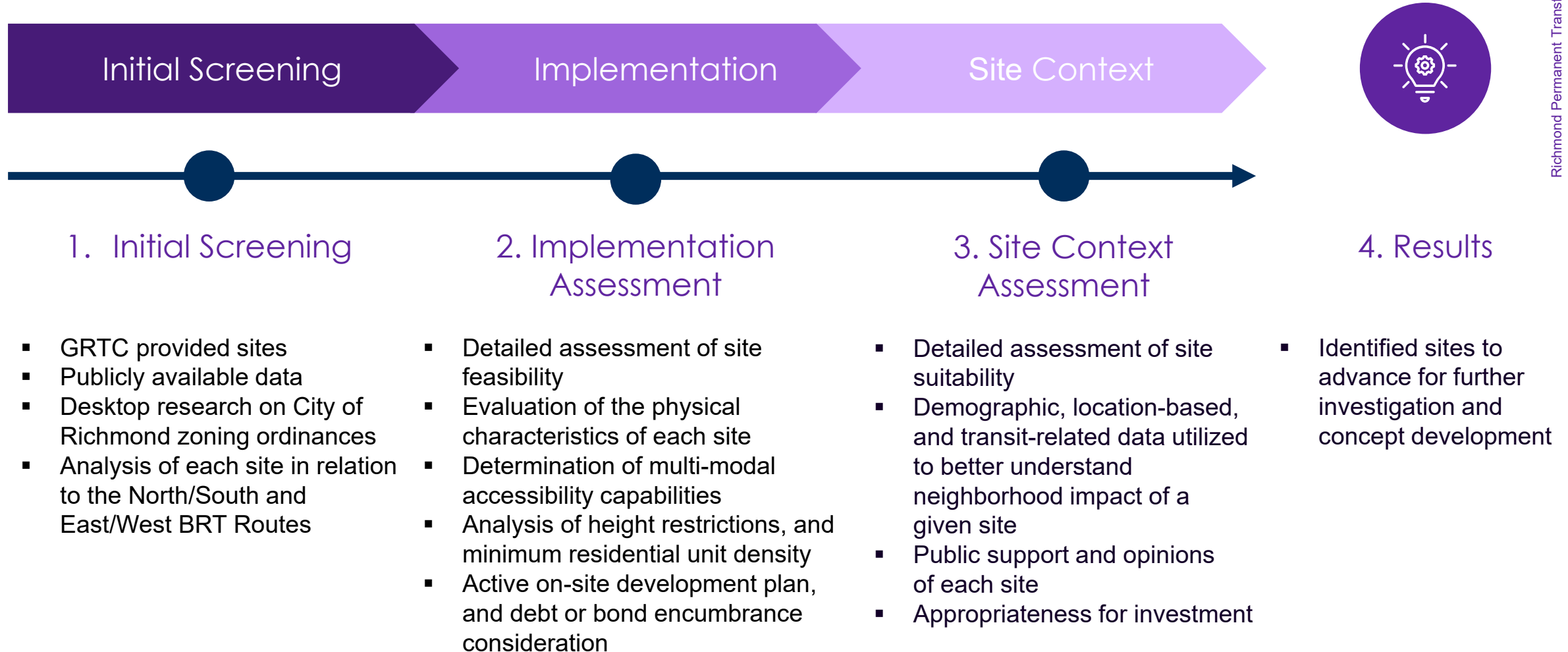
The 18 sites evaluated include 17 sites identified in GRTC's 2011 study of possible permanent locations for a downtown transfer hub, plus one additional site (site 18) created by the demolition of Dominion Energy's former headquarters.

No sites outside the Downtown core bounded by I-95, Belvidere St, and the James River were considered due to the density of bus service lines converging in Downtown and the area's economic and cultural significance.



SITE SELECTION PROCESS

The site selection assessment was completed in three phases, focusing on eliminating non-viable sites and assessing ability to accommodate transit needs and support development.

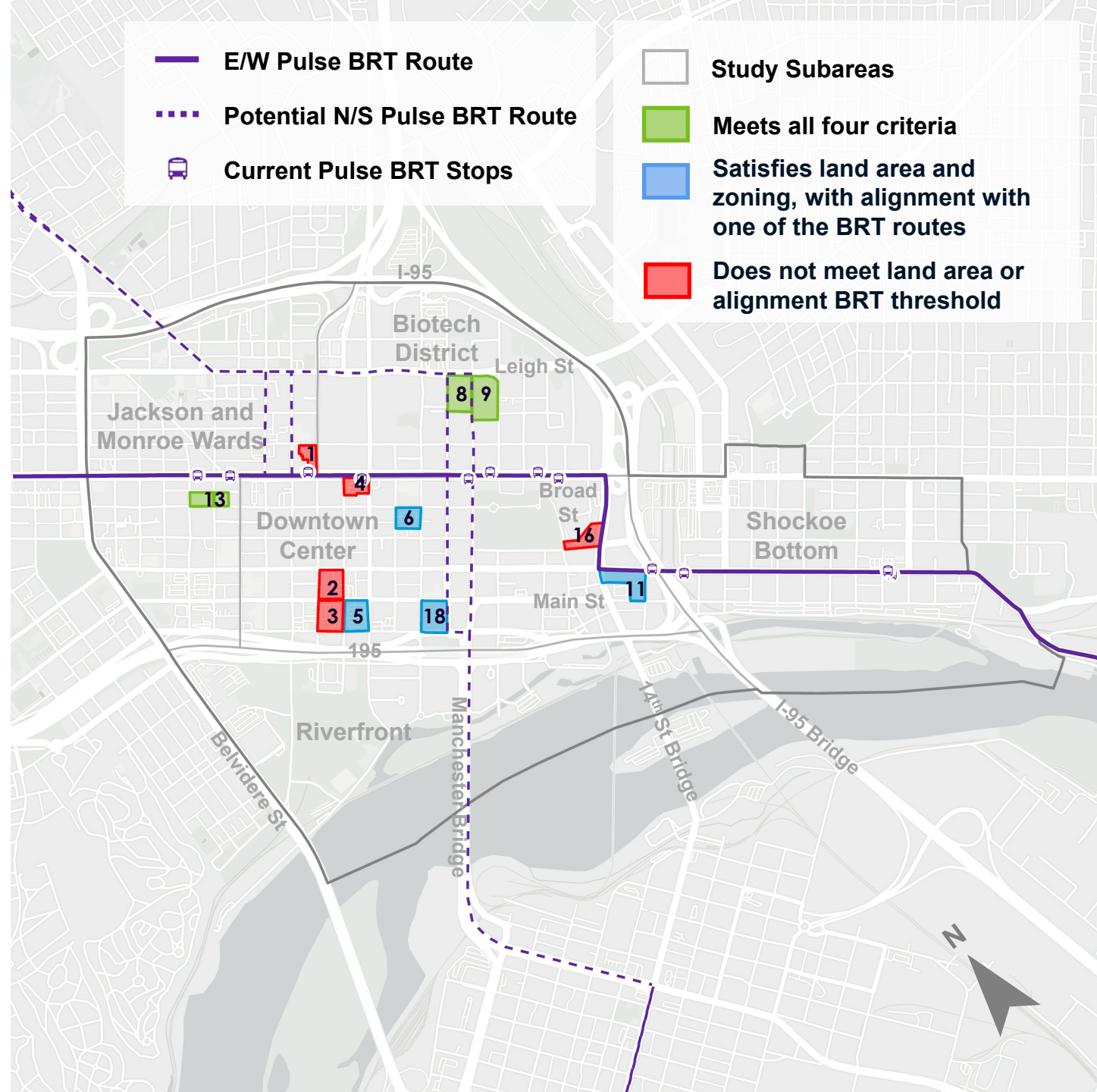


INITIAL SCREENING

Five sites were eliminated after initial screening. These sites did not meet the land area threshold or were more than a 5-minute walk from the existing and potential BRT routes.

Selection Criteria

1. Sufficient land area to support transit program and mixed-use development
2. 5-minute walk to E/W Pulse Station
3. 5-minute walk to potential N/S Pulse route
4. Zoning allows for transfer station



SITE SELECTION | IMPLEMENTATION ASSESSMENT

The implementation assessment process identified Sites 8 and 9 the best candidates to successfully meet transit facility needs while also achieving economic development goals

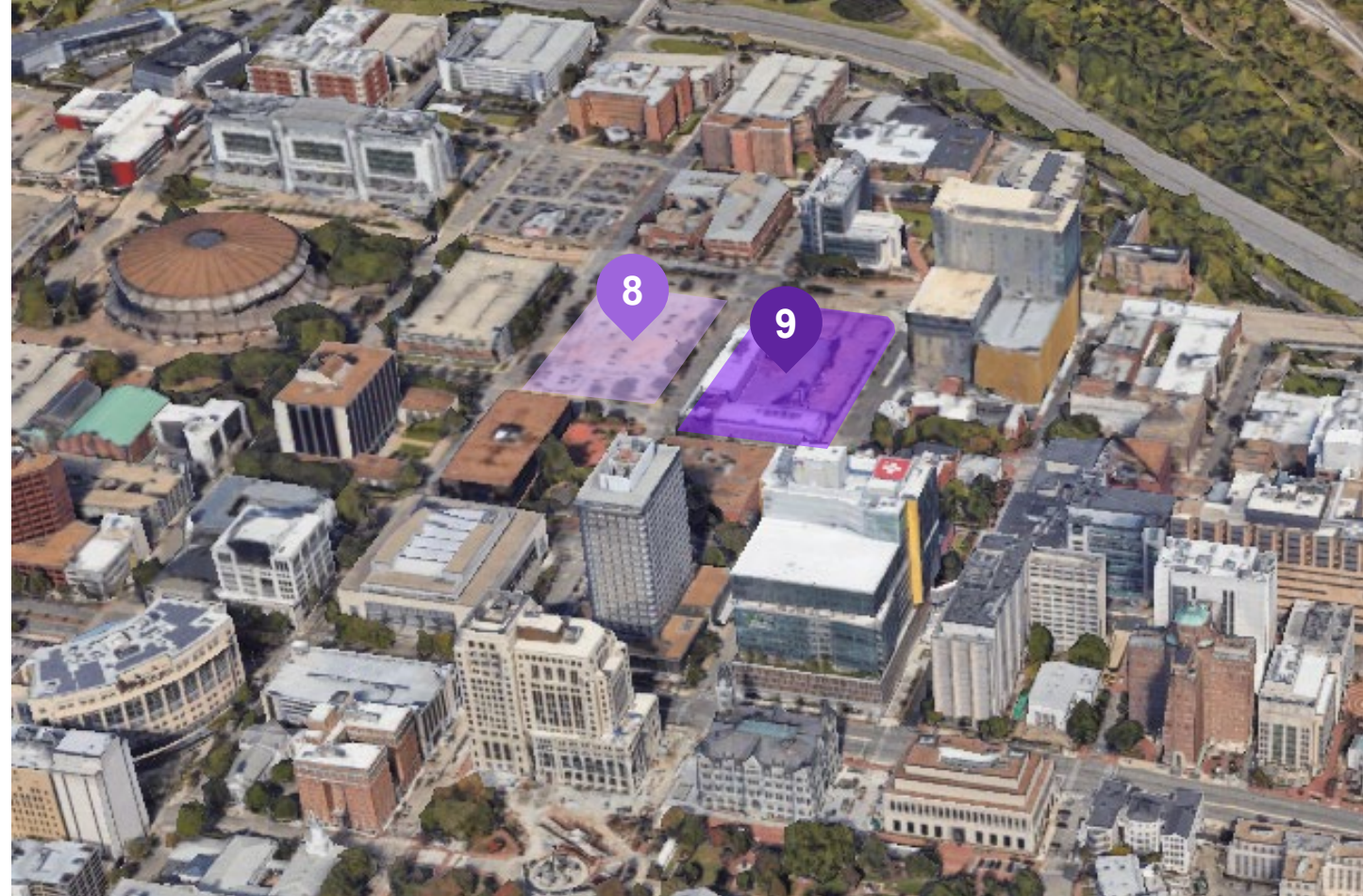
Site 5	Site 6	Site 8	Site 9
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None of the parcels are publicly owned• Satisfactory sidewalk network• Height restricted by centerline ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need to acquire private parcels to make feasible• Only two points of access• Capacity for transit program unlikely	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All the parcels are publicly owned• Only two points of access• No height restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All the parcels are publicly owned• Excellent sidewalk network• No height restrictions
Site 11	Site 13	Site 18	Key
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None of the parcels are publicly owned• Capacity for transit program unlikely• Height restricted to less than 5 stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• About 1/3 of the parcels publicly owned• Capacity for transit program unlikely• Height restricted by the centerline ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• None of the parcels are publicly owned• Satisfactory sidewalk network• Height restricted by Centerline ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Advanced■ Eliminated

CONTEXT ASSESSMENT

The candidate sites can each support at least 500 multifamily units, 10K to 30K square feet of retail space, and office or institutional uses to support surrounding businesses and organizations.

Sites 8 and 9 demonstrated the greatest potential through the implementation assessment and received strong positive public support through both stakeholder engagement meetings. **When asked, stakeholders consistently stated a preference for Site 9.**

The sites are notably adjacent to the planned **City Center** redevelopment project, creating opportunities for partnership with other initiatives and to create **stronger economic development and multimodal connectivity benefits.**



Site 8

- 450 – 550 Multifamily units
- Up to 10K SF Retail Space
- Office and institutional uses could support surrounding organizations

Site 9

- 450 – 550 Multifamily units
- Up to 30K SF Retail Space
- Office and institutional uses could support surrounding organizations

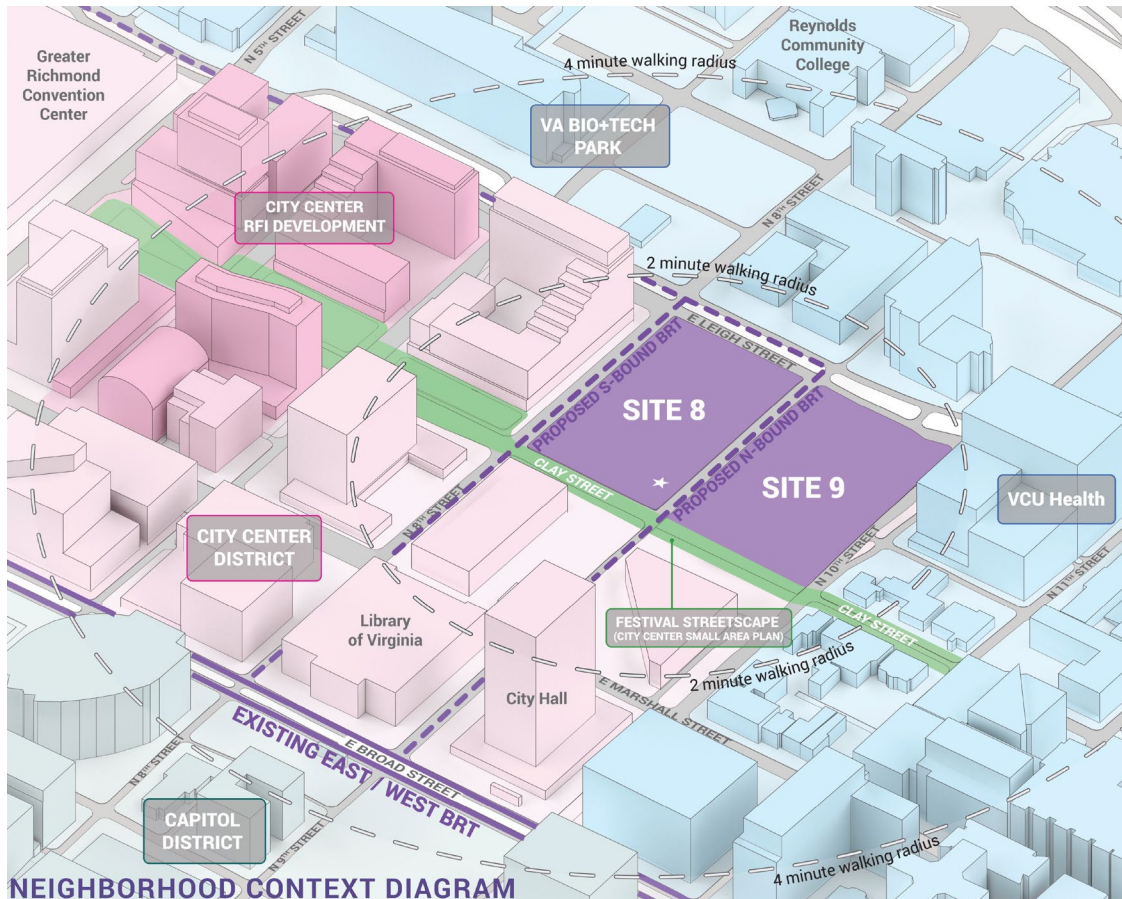
SITE SELECTION | STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Both sites align with the existing and proposed BRT routes and are completely publicly owned. Site 9 is slightly larger than Site 8, providing more space for the Permanent Transfer Hub.

	SITE 8	SITE 9
PROS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alignment with both BRT routes, facilitating easier connections across the GRTC network• All the parcels are publicly owned• Proximity to streets slated for green street design, creating a better multimodal experience• Proximity to and compatibility with envisioned City Center plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alignment with both BRT routes, facilitating easier connections across the GRTC network• All the parcels are publicly owned• Increased flexibility from having more than two possible points of entry• Proximity to streets slated for green street design, creating a better multimodal experience• Avoids displacement of current transfer station• Proximity to and compatibility with with envisioned City Center plan
CONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only two points of entry, constraining bus circulation and complicating operations.• Current transfer station would need to be temporarily relocated during construction• Bays along the East side may be reduced to allow for ground floor frontage on one side	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The steep grade of 10th St introduces some complications for the layout• Demolition of the former Department of Public Safety building currently on the site could delay timing

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Stakeholders supported locating the permanent transfer hub at Sites 8 or 9, citing connection with the City Center development and continuity with the existing temporary transfer station.



SITE 8

SITE 9

"The location of sites 8 and 9 work well with the City Center plan. There's currently not a lot of activity in this part of Downtown but the new development could change this area a lot."

"These are the biggest sites – they would be good for high rises, larger amenities, or could help add green space that's missing from downtown."

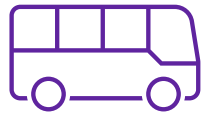
"I like where the bus transfer station is today, and I'd like to keep this location."

"Using this site, we won't need to transfer on the street again while the station is being built"

"Removing the building here can reconnect Clay St and the interesting streetscapes nearby."

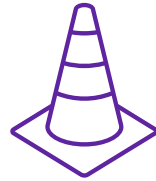
ADVANTAGES OF SITE 9

Site 9, however, has several distinct advantages over other finalists, including avoiding disruption of the temporary hub and a stronger opportunity for integrating mixed-use development.



System Needs

Adjacent streets allow for more entrances and alignment with the BRT routes



Project Phasing

Allows the current transfer hub to continue operating during construction



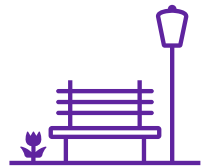
City Center

Proximity to the City Center project enables future partnerships



Topography

Elevation differences allow for the transfer hub to extend under Clay St



Connecting Clay St

A green street corridor can be connected across the city on Clay St



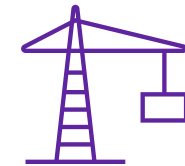
Preferred Location

Existing riders like the current location of the transfer hub



Site Size

The scale of the site allows for more amenities to be built together



Height Allowance

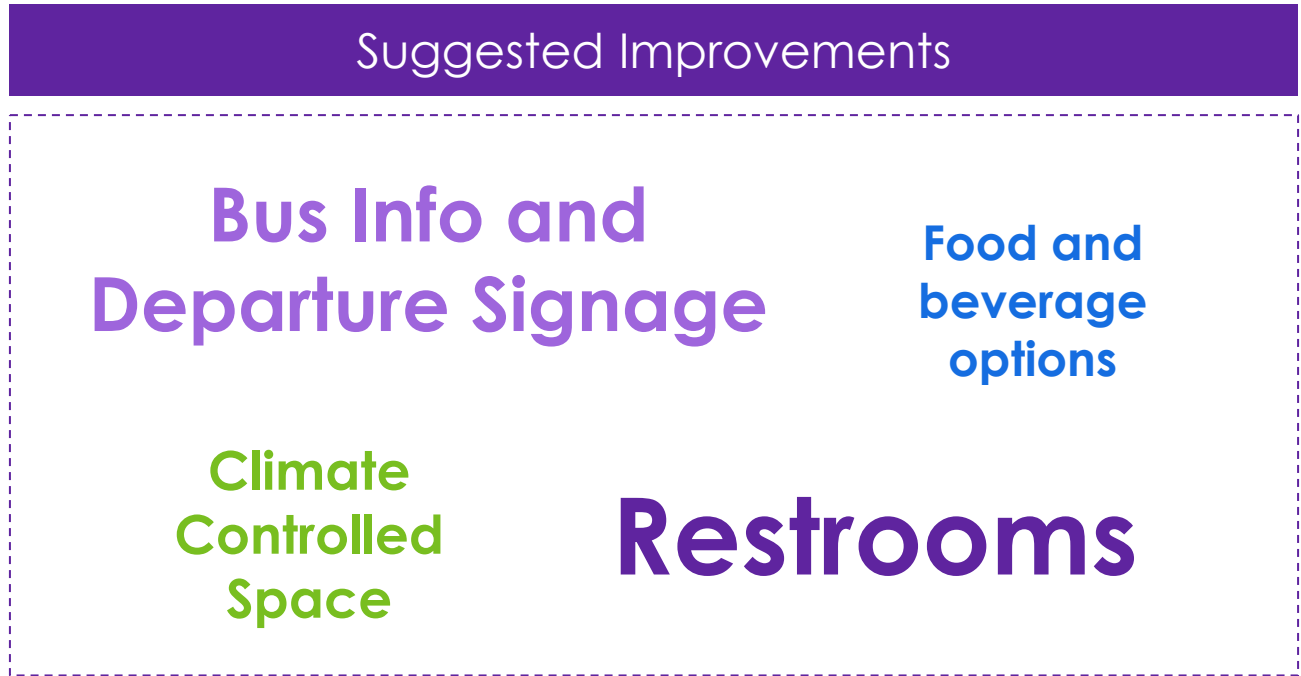
Zoning and the character of the area enables higher buildings

RIDER SURVEY

GRTC surveyed 72 riders at the existing transfer station who provided insightful comments regarding desired enhancements and additions to the new transfer hub.

Underscoring feedback provided at the public meetings, survey recipients identified restrooms and improved signage as priority improvements for the new facility. Climate controlled space and food and beverage vendors were also seen as important.

Survey results also identified the current temporary transfer hub as important infrastructure for commuters in the Northside neighborhood via the route 1 bus and for transfers to the route 50 bus serving the Broad St corridor. The survey also demonstrated the current facility's value for supporting transfers for the GRTC system.



Number of Respondents	72
Percentage of transferring respondents	78%
Most common arrival bus	1
Most common transfer bus	50

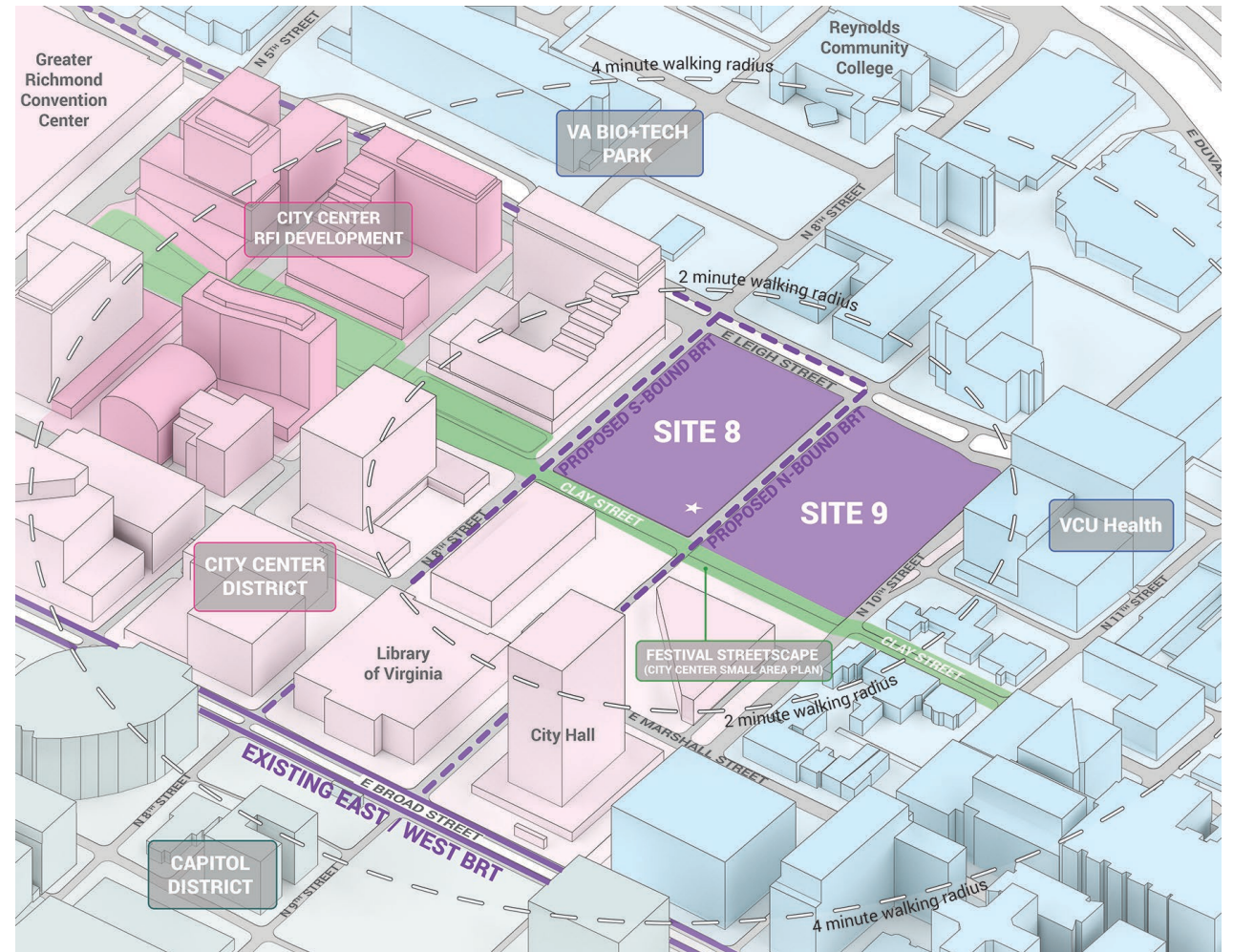
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DESIGN CONCEPTS

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The proposed concepts follow five design principles.

1. Focus on street level activation through retail, residential, and other commercial program, with an emphasis on the 9th & Clay Street corridors
2. Holistic integration of the transfer hub design into the greater block architecture
3. Placement of the main transfer hub lobby and program in the most visible and accessible location
4. Design flexibility for the program mix above the transfer hub
5. Concepts developed for the preferred sites to establish a visionary outcome for the Permanent Transfer Hub



SITE 9 | HIGH RISE

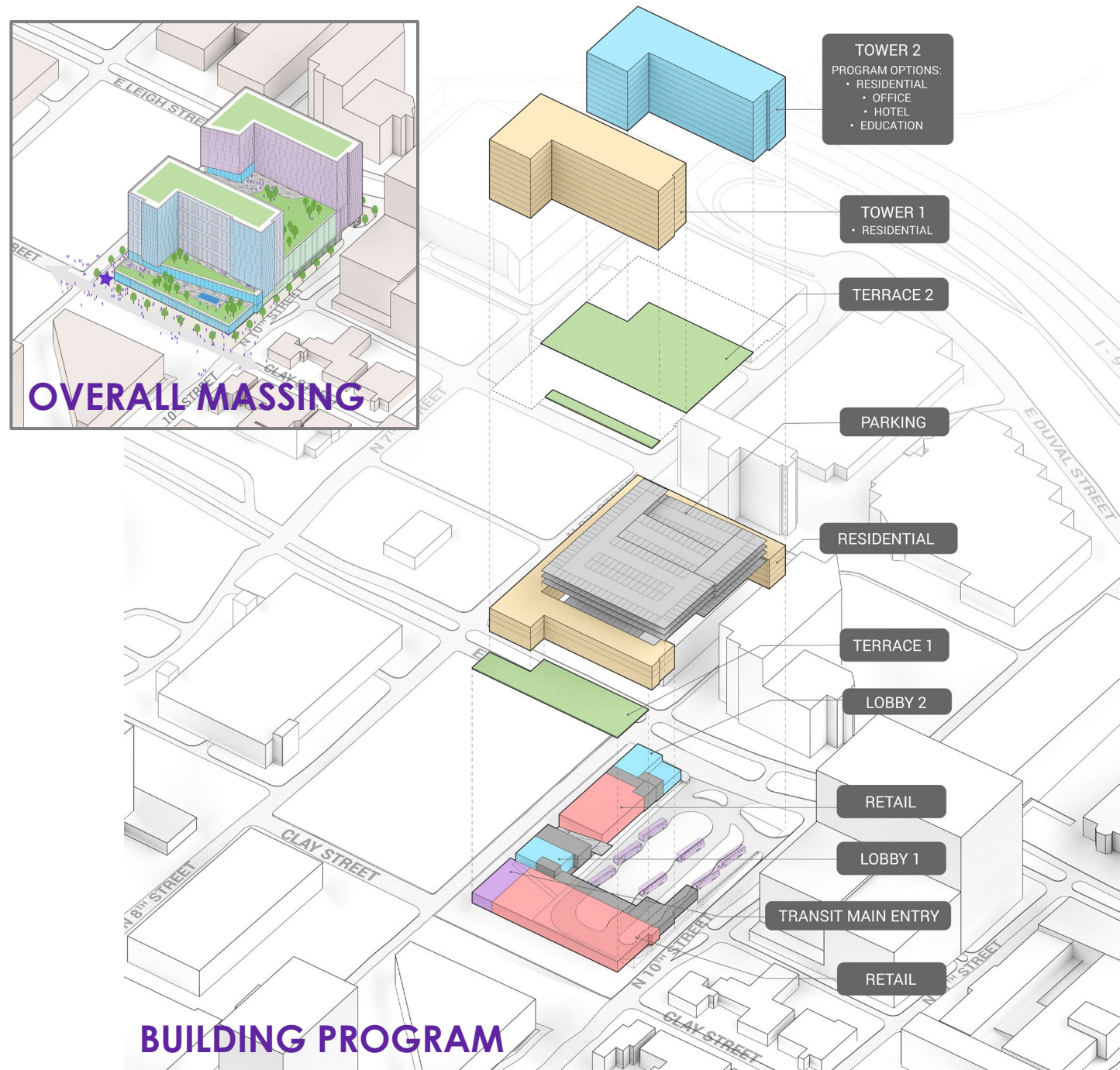
This site offers several unique attributes which allow for an increase in complementary street level program and overall design flexibility.

The existing grading of the site allows for program to be located above the bus loop at street level fronting Clay Street, with the bus loop located below at the lower existing level.

The longer and narrower loop along with a wider site dimension, as compared to Site 8, allows for program integration along the entire 9th Street frontage.

The high-rise scenario proposes two towers above the transfer hub, including residential and mixed-use typologies.

This scenario represents a higher upfront construction cost but has potential to drive greater benefits for residents and the City of Richmond.



SITE 9 | LOW-RISE

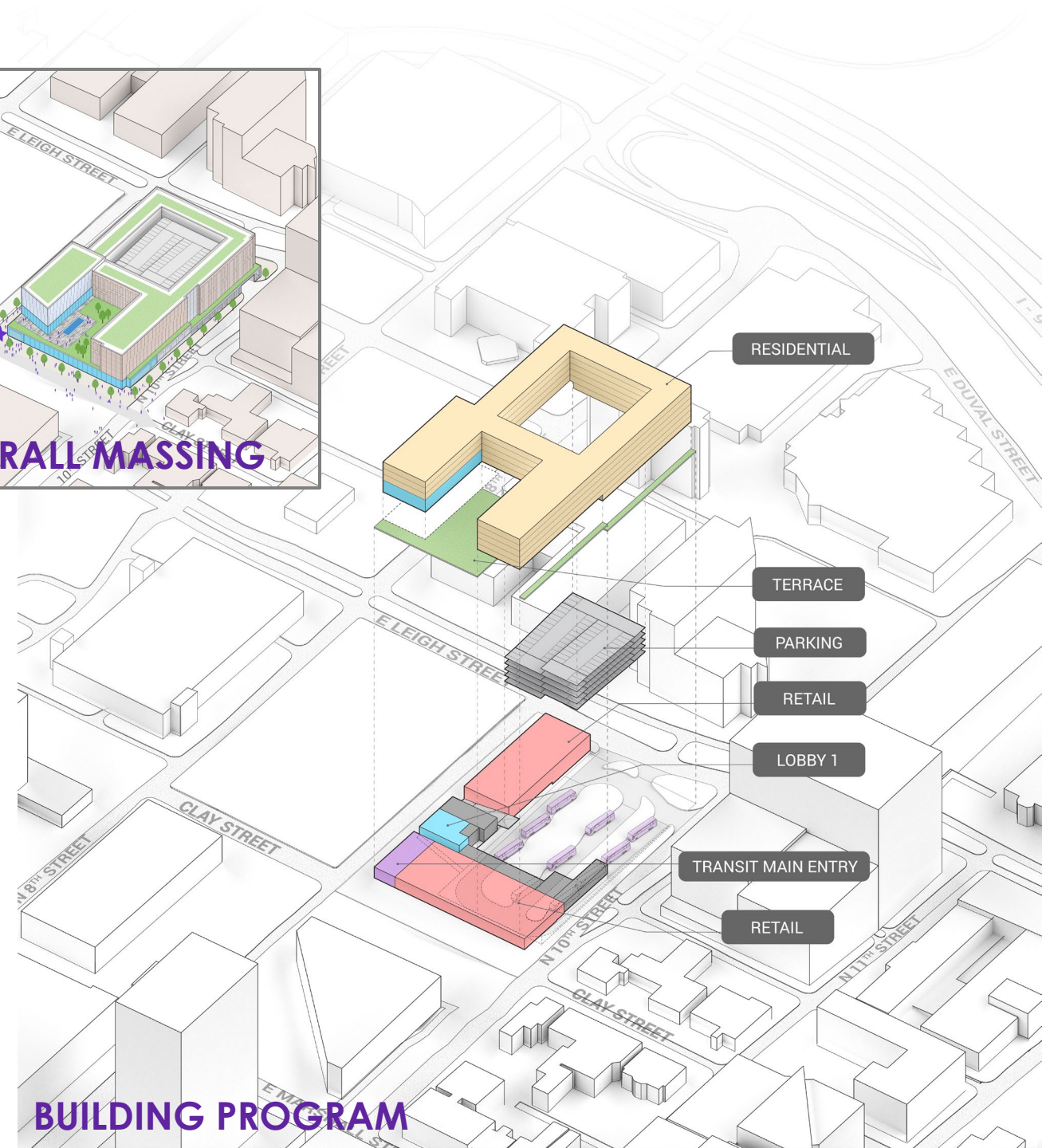
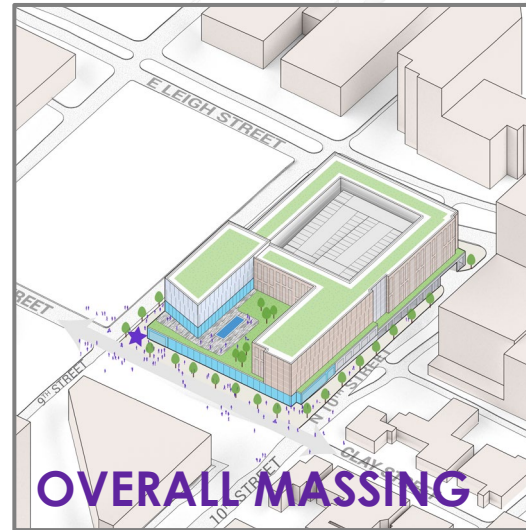
This site offers several unique attributes which allow for an increase in complementary street level program and overall design flexibility.

The street level program and bus loop design remains largely the same as the high-rise scheme.

The low-rise scenario proposes a wood/Type 3A residential building above the transfer center concrete podium, leading to lower construction costs.

The structure of the transfer center bus loop will also be simplified as the columns will not have to coordinate with the building above.

The height of the overall building is aligned with the context located to the southeast.

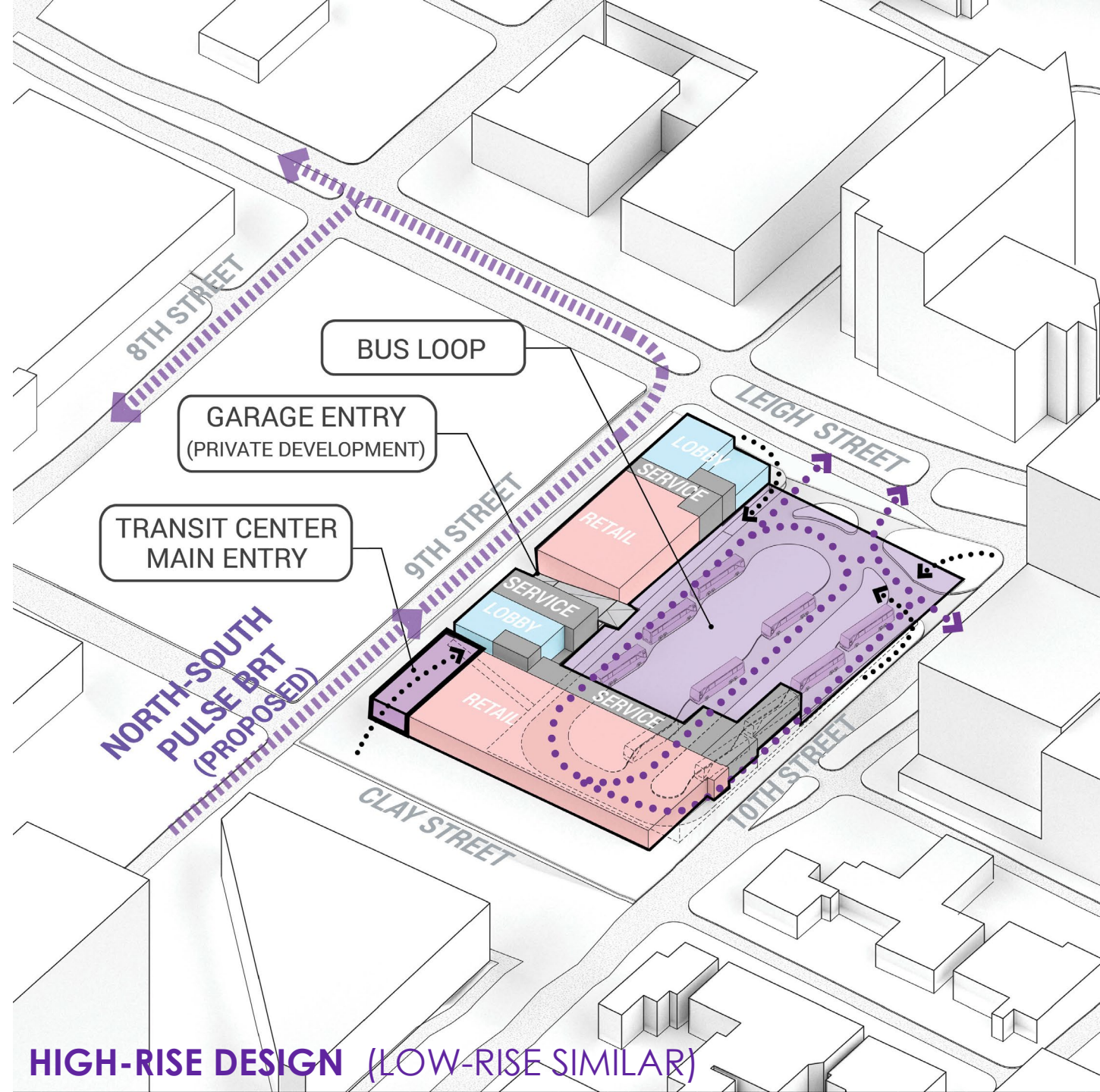


SITE 9 | TRANSIT FACILITY & GROUND FLOOR

The modeled ground floor transit program can accommodate 10 bays, using site topography to maximize available ground floor frontage.

The transit program is a key driver of the program and layout on the ground floor. The bus loop will feature a minimum of 10 bays, with multiple access points allowing for flexibility and redundancy in operations. The design would seek to take advantage of the topography to tuck a portion of the loop below street-level frontage along Clay Street.

Customer convenience and comfort will be a priority for the configuration and design of the transfer hub. The facility will feature pedestrian access from multiple sides of the site, with a main entry oriented to facilitate transfers to the two Pulse lines and the surrounding neighborhood.



STATE-OF-THE-ART TRANSIT

The new Permanent Transfer Hub would feature a 10-bay bus loop designed to provide a first-rate customer experience, prioritizing comfort and ease of access.

Features such as restrooms, high-visibility digital signage, climate-controlled waiting and seating areas, and accessible design features are standard to modern transit hubs across the United States and abroad. These elements featured prominently in stakeholder feedback and would represent a significant improvement over the current temporary facility.

The design of the transfer hub would provide intuitive and convenient connections between the facility and the surrounding neighborhood, celebrating the role of transit as a unifying element in a reactivated Downtown Richmond.



Toronto, ON



Denver, CO



Boston, MA

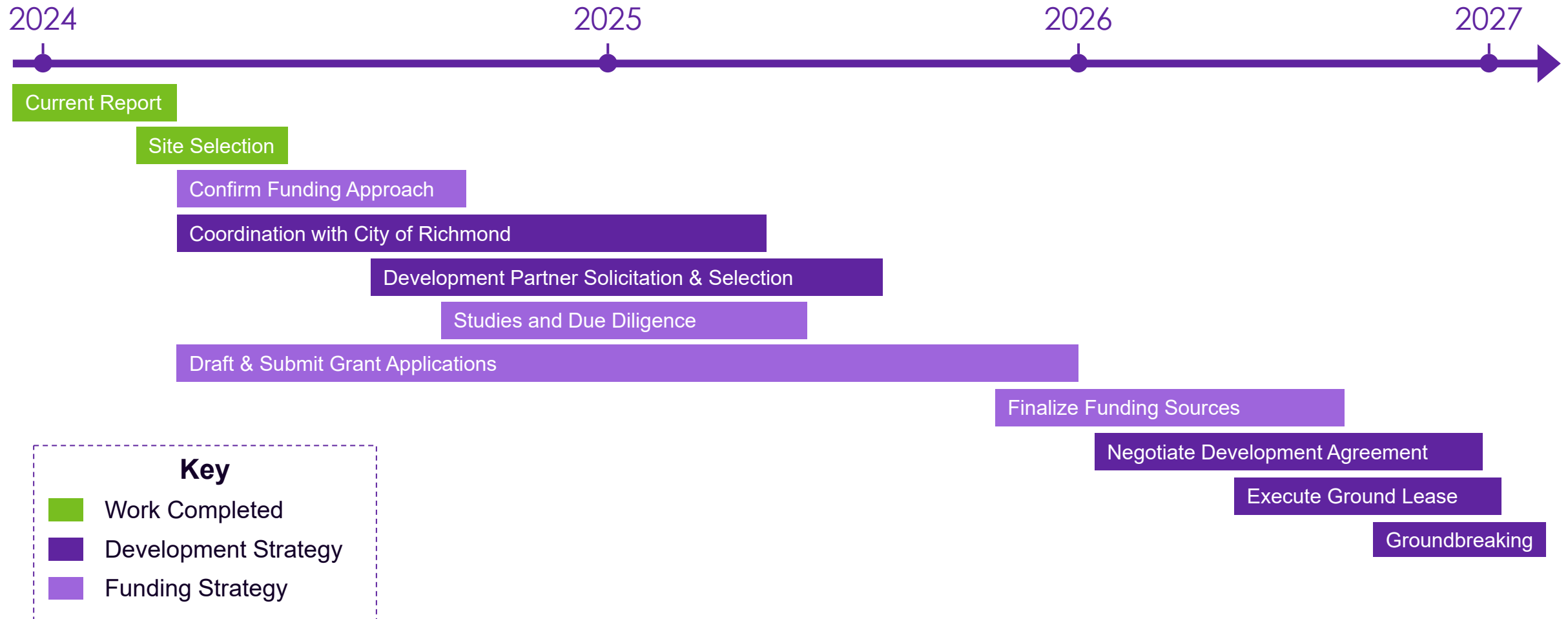
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IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

GRTC PERMANENT TRANSFER HUB PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

GRTC is positioned to execute two parallel tasks to advance the project: City of Richmond Coordination and development partner selection, and execution of the funding strategy.

Example Timeline Dependent on Securing a Development Parcel



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

GRTC is positioned to execute two parallel tasks to advance the project: site acquisition and development partner selection, and execution of the funding strategy.

GRTC needs to verify its preferred funding approach, as this will inform which site acquisition strategies are preferable for future grant applications. Once this approach has been confirmed, GRTC will need to coordinate with the City of Richmond to advance state and federal grant applications and identify a strategy for selecting development partners. **Securing a site is crucial for landing state and federal funding.**

As GRTC secures its funding sources and a development partner is selected, the focus will move towards final negotiations with the development partner, execution of development agreements and ground leases, and finally, groundbreaking and construction.



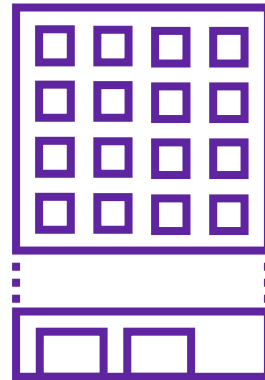
ELEMENTS OF IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Three key components of the implementation strategy are partnerships with other stakeholders, the joint development framework, and State and Federal grant funding opportunities.



Partnerships

Adjacent public and private development activity (such as City Center), State and Federal Government entities, and area property owners can be engaged to support project execution and benefits. **Partnerships can enable the development to catalyze the City Center project.**



Joint Development

Sharing the site with private development activity **improves the project's feasibility** and allows it to develop relationships with its neighbors over time that add to the value of a downtown transfer hub.



State and Federal Funding

Competitive grant programs at the State and Federal level can reduce GRTC and its development partner's burden on providing the public infrastructure components of the project. **Site control is a requirement of most state and federal grants.**

PARTNERSHIPS

GRTC will need to engage in public-private partnerships, leverage State and Federal support, and build partnerships with adjacent projects to successfully advance implementation.



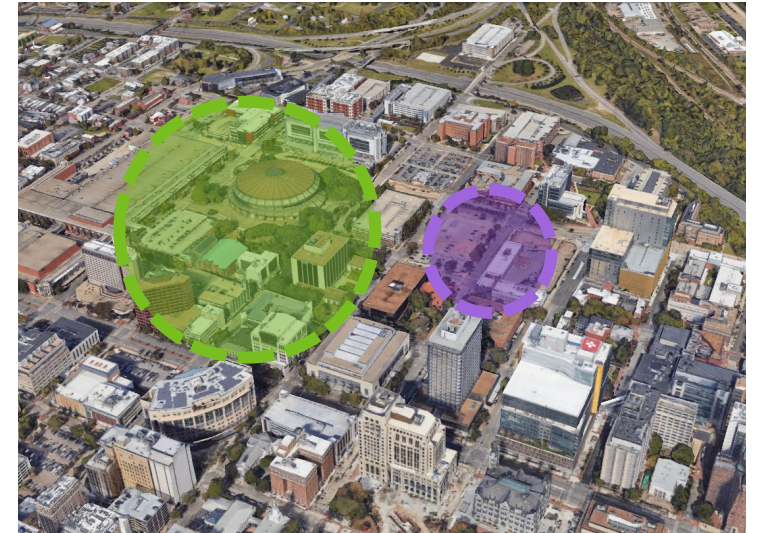
Public Private Partnership

Joint development reduces financial burdens on GRTC and makes the project more attractive to various stakeholders or potential funders.



State and Federal Funding Support

The Permanent Transfer Hub has strong equity, sustainability, and economic development impacts which make it competitive for several large-scale grant programs.



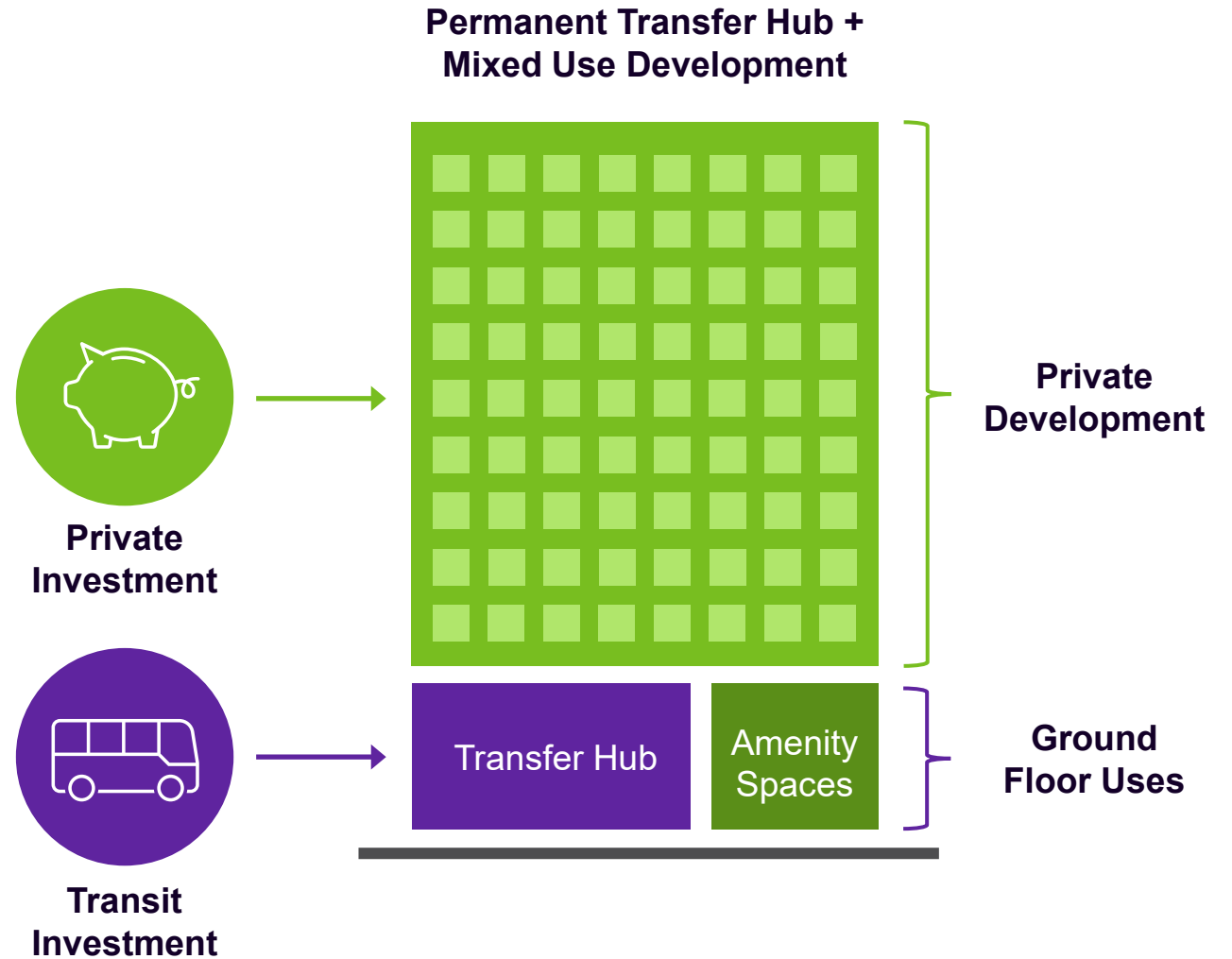
Integration with Catalytic Development

Adjacency to the City Center project, VCU, the Biotech District, and major Downtown investments create opportunities for partnership and expanded support.

JOINT DEVELOPMENT

Joint Development is a public-private partnership approach to coordinating investments in transportation improvement to deliver mixed-use development alongside transit infrastructure.

Pursuing joint development has several advantages. Additional development above the transfer hub will allow the site to generate tax revenue for the City of Richmond and build housing, amenities, and employment opportunities within walking distance of public transportation. Joint Development can also create additional financing opportunities to help construct and maintain the Permanent Transfer Hub.



TARGET GRANTS

The City has secured \$6.5M in CVTA for the project. The transfer hub’s benefits to sustainability, equity, and economic development make it a strong candidate for competitive funding programs.

Program	Description	FY2023 Awards
Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)	Nationally competitive Federal surface transportation infrastructure grant program prioritizing projects with transformative impacts on sustainability and equity.	\$5M to \$25M
Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods (RCN)	Combined application for two Federal funding sources designed to support community-centered transportation projects which expand opportunity for disadvantaged communities.	<u>Planning</u> : \$100K to \$7M <u>Capital Construction</u> : \$2.6M to \$335M <u>Regional Partnerships</u> : \$300K to \$139M
Innovative Finance and Asset Concession Grant Program (IFACGP)	Federal funding for capacity building, technical assistance, and advisor support funding for public entities to facilitate and evaluate public-private partnerships and asset concession agreements.	Up to \$1M with no match or up to \$2M with 50% local match, subject to a maximum of \$4M in grants to each State in a 3-year period
MERIT - Capital Assistance	DRPT grants for maintaining, improving, or expanding public transportation infrastructure.	Up to 50% State match, subject to funding available after statutory allocation for State of Good Repair and Minor Improvement Projects
Smart Scale	Virginia’s Statewide competitive transportation grant program. Uses a prioritization system to fund high-impact projects, covering up to 100% of eligible project costs.	\$400K to \$161M

06

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

1

Based on the Consulting Team’s analysis, Site 9 is the preferred site for Richmond’s Permanent Transfer Hub due to its size, topography, proximity to transit and planned development, public support, phasing, and policy context. Advancing implementation on this site would:

1. **Serve as catalyst to spark subsequent development of other nearby City-owned parcels.** This can support the implementation of City Center and create stronger market conditions that can support greater benefits for Richmond residents.
2. **Create opportunities for equitable impact** through improved transit accessibility, new affordable housing units, and new urban amenities
3. **Position Site 8 for redevelopment alongside the City Center project** on a timeline advantageously aligned with the City Center redevelopment

2

As a secondary option, Site 8 still shares some of the same locational and policy advantages of Site 9 relative to other available sites. However, Site 8 introduces complications which limit the project’s potential due to its more restrictive size, topography, street layout, and disruption of the current transfer station.

3

A streamlined standalone solicitation is most likely to attract a stronger response from development partners and enable a quicker implementation and realization of project benefits.

4

The analyses done in this study have positioned GRTC to immediately begin predevelopment activities and advance the project on an accelerated timeline utilizing unprecedented federal funding opportunities which are set to expire in the coming years, while also taking advantage of strong developer interest in the project.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

With the completion of this site assessment and feasibility study, there are three priority tasks that GRTC should take to continue advancing the Permanent Transfer Hub:



Coordinate with City of Richmond to memorialize a process to advance implementation on Site 9. Specifically, define site control, roles and responsibilities, and a decision-making framework through a Memorandum of Understanding or other formal agreement.



Apply for State and Federal Grants to support the transit infrastructure component of the project. Priority Federal programs should include RAISE, RCN, and IFACGP, while State programs should include Smart Scale and MERIT Capital Assistance.



Initiate outreach to developers to build additional interest in the project. This could occur via a developer workshop or townhall to introduce the project opportunity and to collect additional input from developers on key parameters that they would want to see in a subsequent formal solicitation.

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Appendix

SITE 8 | HIGH RISE

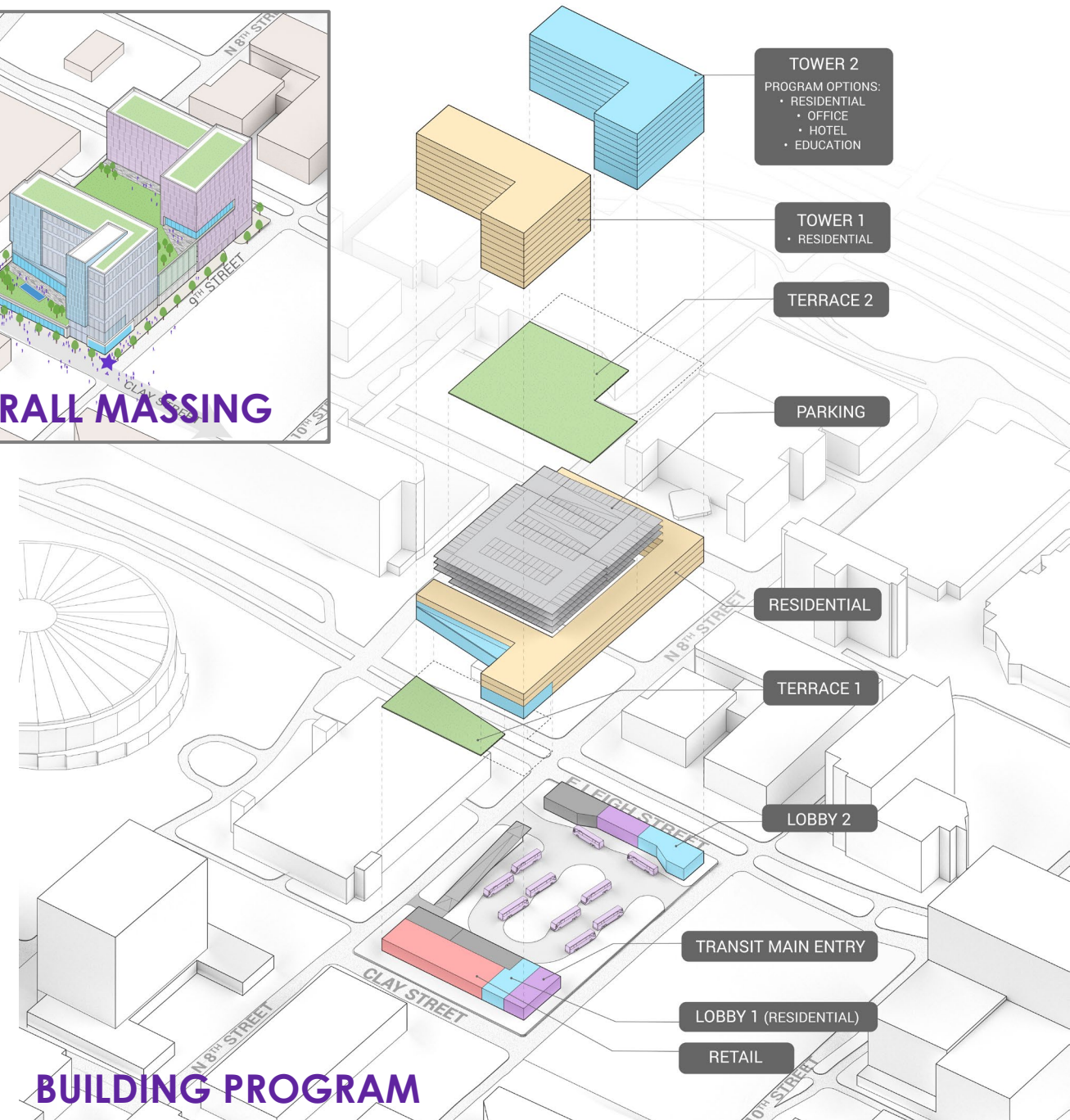
This site is the location of the current temporary transfer station. It can accommodate additional complementary program along the Clay Street frontage.

The site has minimal grading/slopes, allowing for greater flexibility in arranging the bus loop entry/exit locations and pedestrian access points.

The narrower site dimension, as compared to Site 9, allows for minimal program along the 9th street frontage.

The high-rise scenario proposes two towers above the transfer hub, including residential and mixed-use typologies.

This scenario represents a higher upfront construction cost but has potential to drive greater benefits for residents and the City of Richmond.



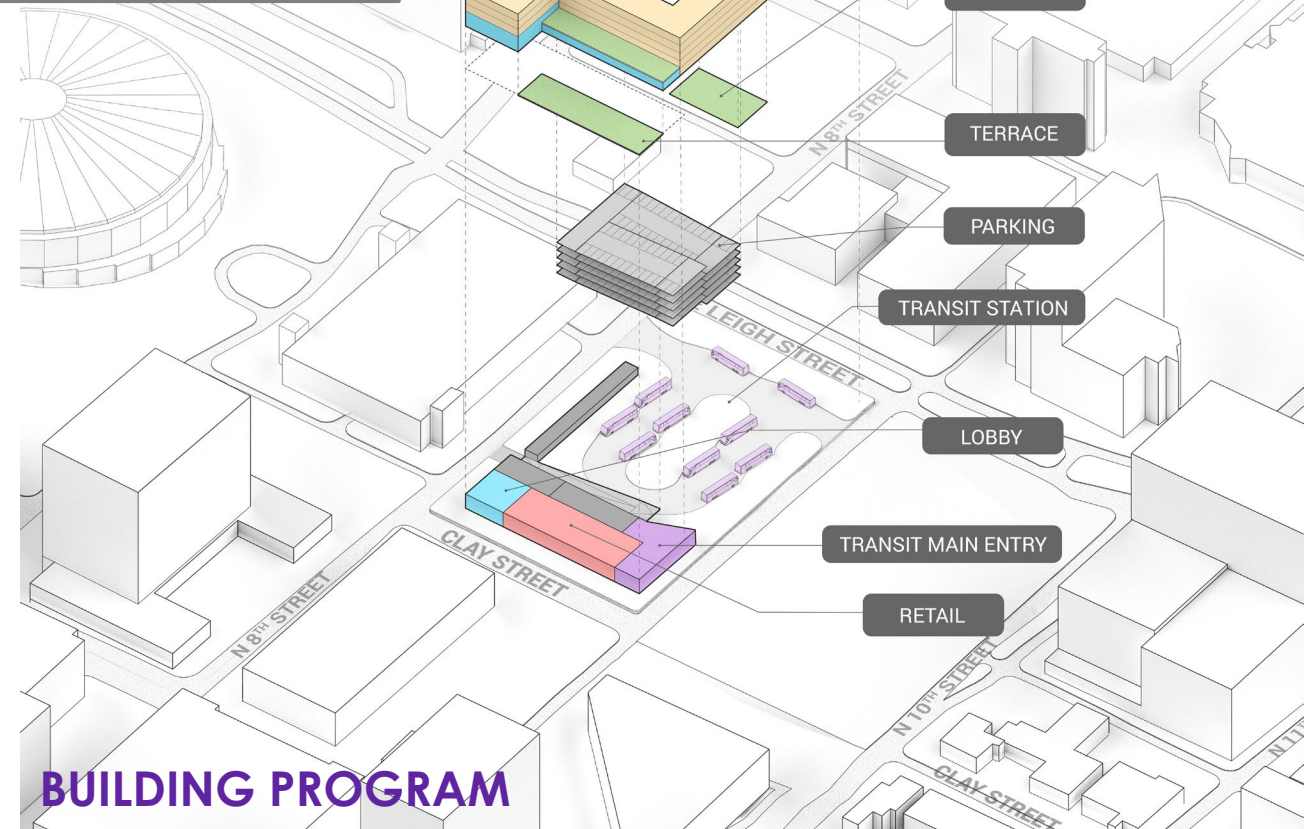
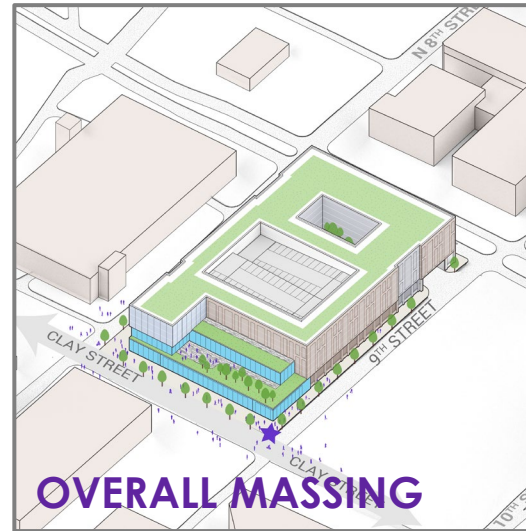
SITE 8 | LOW-RISE

This site is the location of the current temporary transfer station. It can accommodate additional complementary program along the Clay Street frontage.

The street level program and bus loop design remains largely the same as the high-rise scheme.

The low-rise scenario proposes a wood/Type 3A residential building above the transfer center concrete podium, leading to lower construction costs.

The structure of the transfer hub bus loop will also be simplified as the columns will not have to coordinate with the building above.

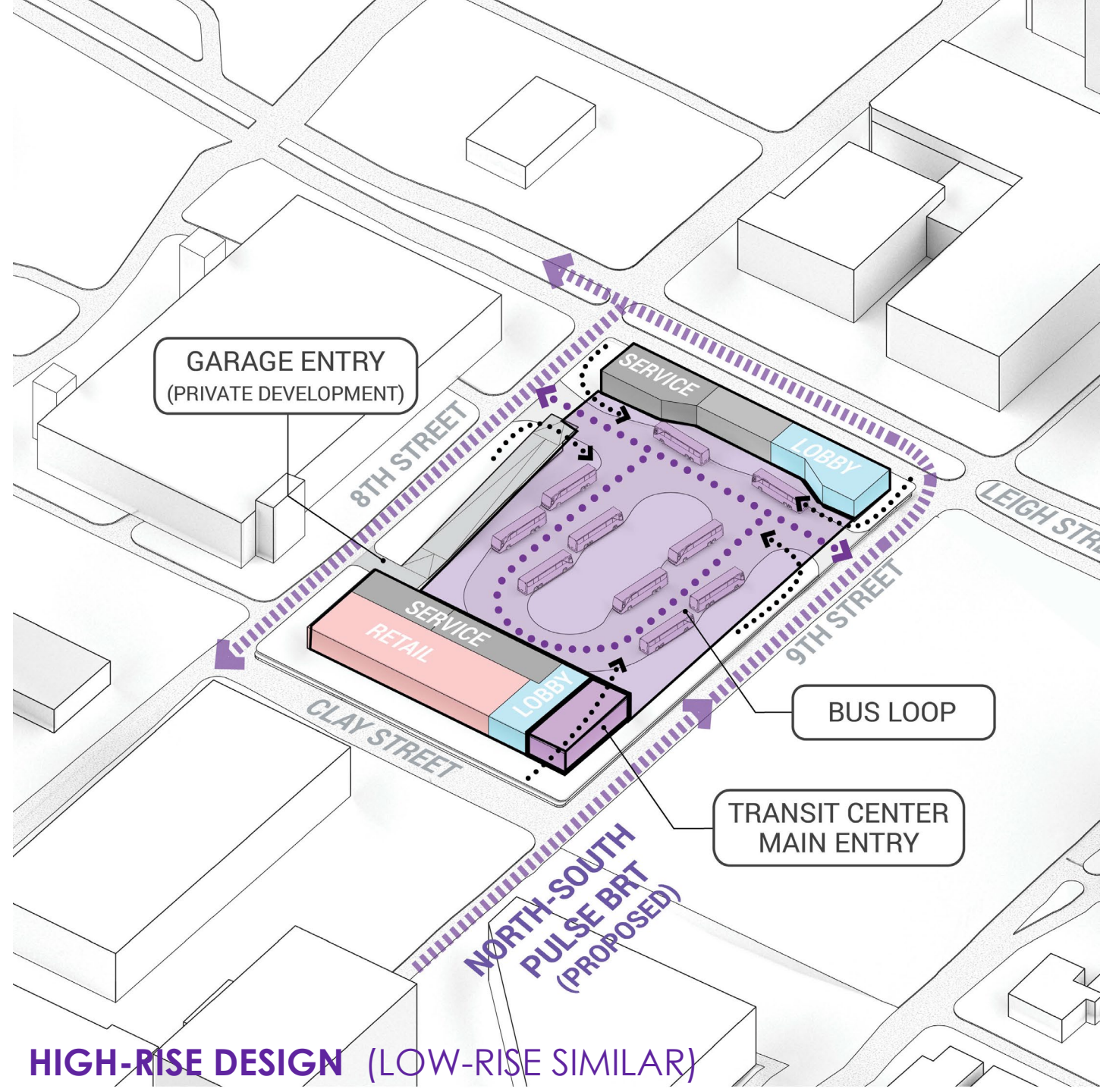


SITE 8 | TRANSIT FACILITY & GROUND FLOOR

The modeled transit program can accommodate 10 bays, taking up a greater component of the ground floor relative to Site 9 due to the site's size.

As with Site 9, the transit program is a key driver of the program and layout on the ground floor. The bus loop will feature 10 bays, with multiple access points allowing for flexibility and redundancy in operations. Given size constraints at this site, the transit program would take up a higher proportion of the ground floor than at Site 9.

Customer convenience and comfort will be a priority for the configuration and design of the transfer hub. The facility will feature pedestrian access from multiple sides of the site, with a main entry oriented to facilitate transfers to the two Pulse lines and the surrounding neighborhood.



Downtown Richmond Permanent Transfer Hub

Final Report

May 2024