


OMGIVNING

# Reimagining Spaces: A Post-Pandemic Design Report

## Urban Reprogramming



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# Reimagining Spaces:

## Our Post-Pandemic Design Report

Amid the upheaval from today's ongoing pandemic, spaces that affect all of our lives are undergoing tectonic and likely irreversible shifts. Since March 2020, Omgivning has been exploring the design characteristics of this new era and reimagining three space types in particular:  
Workplace, Multifamily and Commercial.

As with all of Omgivning's work, our goal with this design report is to inspire people to take a closer look at the potential of an existing space or property.

Together, we can reveal and attain a site's highest and best use, even under challenging conditions.

# Reimagining Spaces:

## Our Consistent Themes

While developing our concepts, we noticed certain themes recurring across all three types of spaces (Workplace, Multifamily and Commercial).

Like many in our field, we had already been moving towards these findings, but today's shifts have filled us with a new sense of urgency.

### Theme 1: Prioritize Human-Centered Design

Recent events have underscored exactly what all humans need to survive and thrive. By operating with these principles as our guide, we achieve a more human-centered design. They compel us to:

- Promote equality and diversity through design
- Balance socialization and privacy
- Create a sense of safe shelter
- Connect people to nature
- Promote ergonomics and physical activity
- Allow for interpersonal connections
- Facilitate mental and physical wellbeing

These ideas are intended to work in tandem with the following themes.

### Theme 2: Flexibility & Adaptability are Now Crucial to Success

Spaces must be transformable to accommodate different uses, allowing interior spaces to accommodate both living and working, for example, or to allow for a retail space to turn easily into a workspace. No matter the use, these spaces must fulfill the need for privacy, socialization and a connection to the outdoors. We must demand greater resilience from our spaces, whether in a pandemic, natural disaster or economic depression. Our focus comes from our belief that we shouldn't need to tear down a building simply because our standards of living and working are changing. Our goal is to design and adapt spaces that suit many varieties of users for a very long time.

### Theme 3: Beyond Mixed Use: Blended Uses

Especially in Los Angeles, distinct uses once occupied distinct areas of the city. Accessing each use meant driving to those areas. Then came the idea of a "mixed-use building," where multiple purposes could be fulfilled in a single structure. Now, we are moving toward blended uses, where individual interior spaces serve multiple functions simultaneously. Long before the pandemic, we had been moving toward spaces blended by use. That natural evolution has been suddenly supercharged, reinforcing the point that users must be able to do just about anything, anywhere, at any time. People can now say: This is my bedroom *and* my workspace. That restaurant is for dining, working *and* buying groceries. This gym is a place where I can easily hold a virtual work meeting. Our design work should be able to support those assertions.

### Theme 4: A Space is Inextricable from its Economic Context

Reimagining spaces now means that all members of the project team must work to keep things simple and limit excess. As economic inequality increases the distance between the haves and have nots, we must acknowledge our power to reduce that distance: to design spaces where a high quality of life is more attainable for more people. Likewise, during any downturn, residents and businesses must cut back and turn creative with their budgeting. Today's spaces must facilitate cost-sharing and revenue-generating models, in their design and operational programs.



# Urban Reprogramming

## Our Concepts



Among the many economic impacts of today's pandemic, the commercial sector will experience long term shifts in how its spaces are used. Increased vacancies and dwindling revenue already loomed large for retail spaces prior to the pandemic, the impact of which will likely increase to many forms of commercial space, including office, retail and restaurants. Given these new market conditions, experts anticipate that 90% of real estate development in the next decade will focus on the renovation and reuse of existing structures.<sup>1</sup> Omgivning's focus on the creative reuse of commercial spaces allows us to help clients navigate this unprecedented landscape with innovative and cost-effective solutions.

There is profound socioeconomic and cultural value in reusing our existing building stock. As Jane Jacobs wrote, "Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them."<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the environmental value of reuse was famously summarized by architect Carl Elefante, who wrote "the greenest building is the one that is already built."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, according to a report by Preservation Green Lab, "...it takes 10 to 80 years for a new building that is 30 percent more efficient than an average performing existing building to overcome, through efficient operations, the negative climate change impacts related to the construction process."<sup>4</sup>

To understand the future of urban spaces, we analyzed existing conditions at specific sites in Los Angeles. Through these studies, we have developed five concepts that highlight building types or space types that, even prior to the pandemic, were underutilized. Our vision incorporates new operational models along with recommendations for their adaptive reuse.

<sup>1</sup> Fred D. Burkhardt, "Embracing Adaptive Reuse for Corporate Real Estate," Trade & Industry Development, May 5, 2017, <https://www.tradeandindustrydev.com/industry/embracing-adaptive-reuse-corporate-real-estate-12810>

<sup>2</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death And Life Of Great American Cities*, New York: Random House, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Elefante, "The Greenest Building Is One That Is Already Built," Forum Journal, vol. 21 no. 4, 2007, [http://www.ipedconference.com/referencematerials/Article\\_The\\_Greenest\\_Building\\_Is\\_One\\_That\\_Is\\_Already\\_Built\\_by\\_Carl\\_Elefante\\_AIA\\_LEED\\_AP\\_Forum\\_Journal\\_Summer\\_2007.pdf](http://www.ipedconference.com/referencematerials/Article_The_Greenest_Building_Is_One_That_Is_Already_Built_by_Carl_Elefante_AIA_LEED_AP_Forum_Journal_Summer_2007.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Preservation Green Lab, "The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse," National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2011, [https://living-future.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The\\_Greenest\\_Building.pdf](https://living-future.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The_Greenest_Building.pdf)

# Urban Reprogramming

## Our Concepts



### Concept 1: Reuse of Strip Mall Shopping Centers

There are approximately 675 strip mall shopping centers in the city of Los Angeles. With commercial vacancies already increasing and likely to stay at or near record levels, what options exist for bringing new life to these buildings?

### Concept 2: Reuse of Big Box Retail

As online retail and next-day shipping become the default, more big box retail operators are leaving the shells of these retail spaces vacant. How can these large volumes and any adjacent parking areas be redeveloped to maximize their potential?



### Concept 3: Reuse of Light Industrial

Just outside downtown Los Angeles, there are large districts with industrial and warehouse buildings that sit vacant or underutilized, lacking any vision for their reuse. Given the richness of their character, contribution to their respective neighborhood, and the scale of their potential contribution to our city's future, how can we reinvigorate these buildings?

### Concept 4: Urban Ground Floor Commercial Space

In downtown Los Angeles, new buildings are expected or even required to have ground floor commercial space. While the residential or office uses above typically thrive, the success of the ground floor is less certain. What are some creative strategies for filling these empty spaces and strengthening connections to the public realm?



### Concept 5: Urban Revitalization

Through the City of Los Angeles' LA Alfresco Dining Initiative, restaurants have the potential to open and serve customers at partial capacity through outdoor dining areas, or on adjacent public sidewalks. How can we use the design implications of this new initiative to connect our neighborhood restaurants and bars?

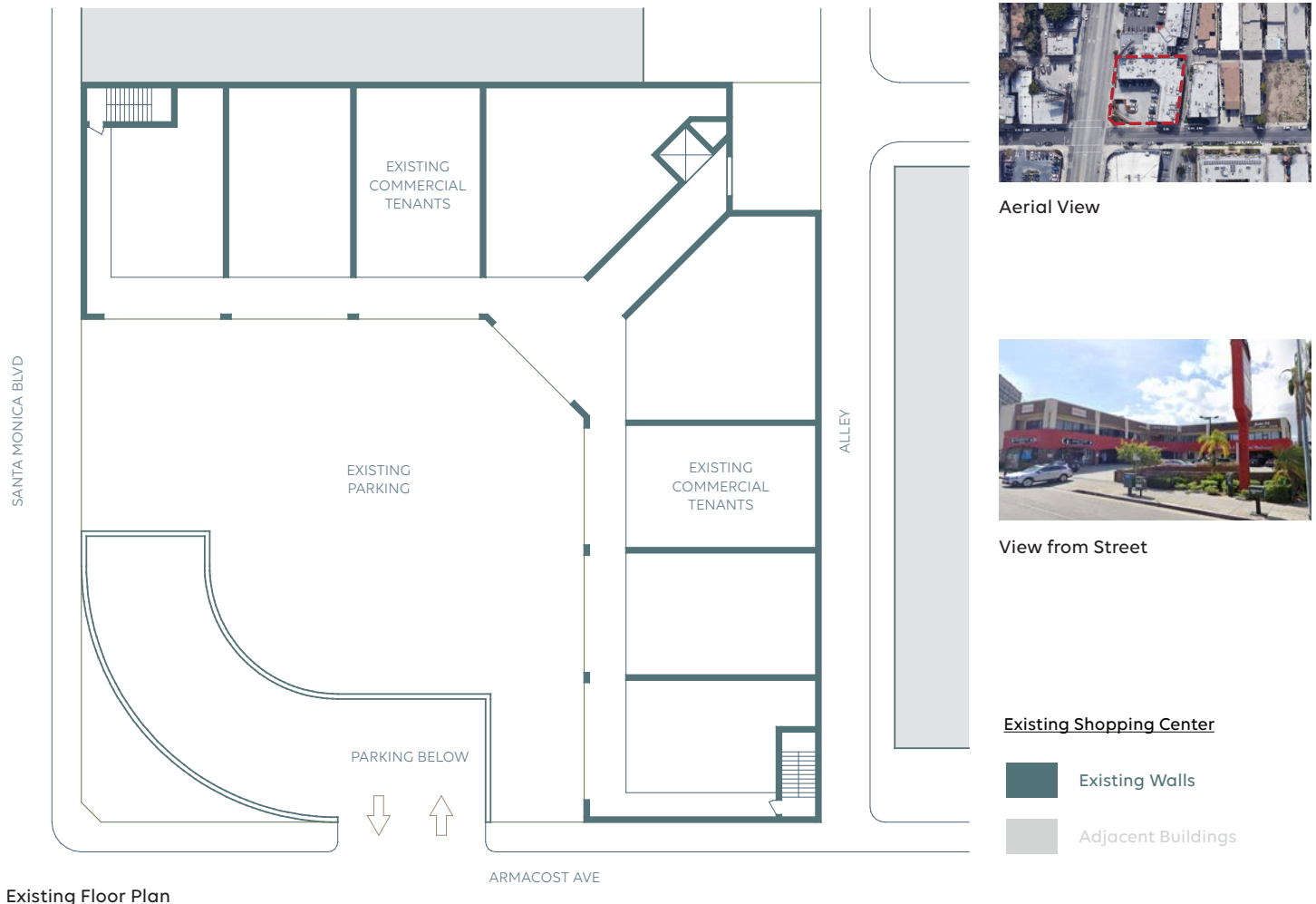
# Reuse of Strip Mall Shopping Centers

## Introduction

In the coming post-pandemic economy, vacancies of commercial spaces are expected to remain high. Meanwhile, Los Angeles has a shortage of affordable housing that generates a true sense of community. We believe that strip malls offer rich potential for conversion to residential use, a process that could help to alleviate some of the affordable housing crisis by creating new units.

The city of Los Angeles has roughly 675 strip malls that consume about 24 million sf of ground area, including associated parking. Their design characteristics descend from drive-in markets with multiple independent vendors, a typology that began appearing in the region in the 1920s. Mini-malls are a smaller variety of strip malls often found on corner lots among the city's extensive commercial corridors. They were born in Los Angeles after the 1973 oil crisis, when the bankruptcy of many gas stations freed up their corner lots for development, allowing mini-malls to spread across the city. In 1988, a restrictive ordinance placed guidelines on the development of mini-malls and gave the city discretion over their approval.

Mini-malls are set back from the street with ample surface parking, while some also provide additional below-grade parking. Often located on corner lots among the city's long commercial corridors, these buildings are situated to provide convenient access to other areas of the city by a variety of transit options that include subway, bus, light rail, and bike lanes. The particular mini-mall used in our concept is a 20,000 sf building located at the corner of Santa Monica Boulevard and Armacost Avenue in West Los Angeles.

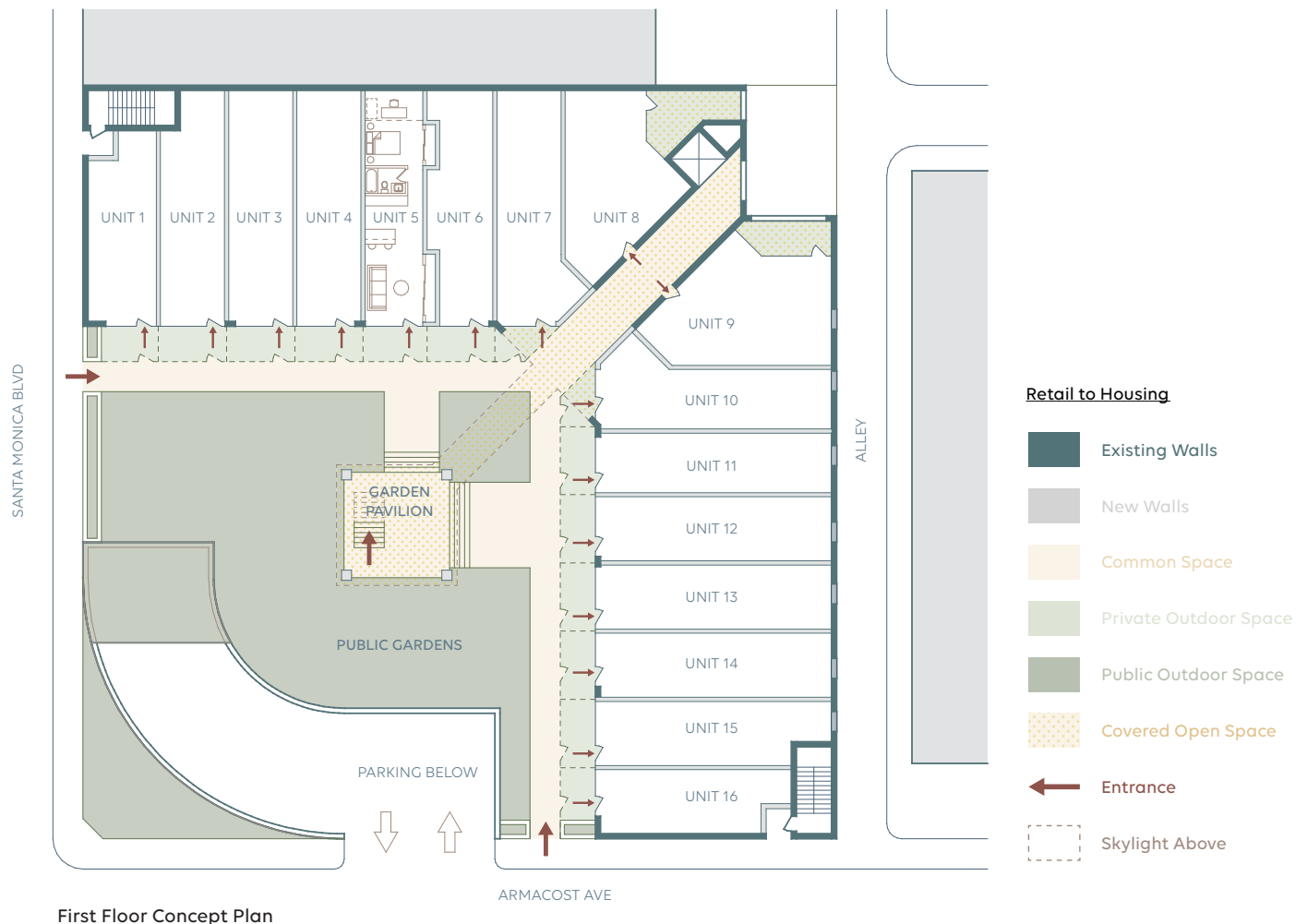


Existing Floor Plan

# Reuse of Strip Mall Shopping Centers

## Retail to Housing

In our vision for the reuse of a two-story L-shaped building, the majority of the structure remains intact, including circulation, stairways, and below-grade parking. In order to increase density, each previous commercial unit is divided up into two residential units. This configuration shows the mini-mall has the capacity to hold thirty 600 sf affordable residential units. Each unit would be outfitted with work from home capabilities, as well as an outdoor patio or courtyard to provide natural light and cross ventilation through the unit. The existing facade would be modified to maximize natural light and cross ventilation throughout the units, including new glazing and entryways at the existing large openings at the front of each unit.

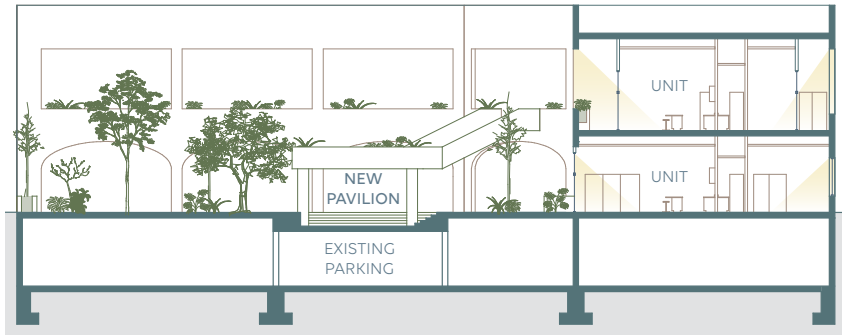




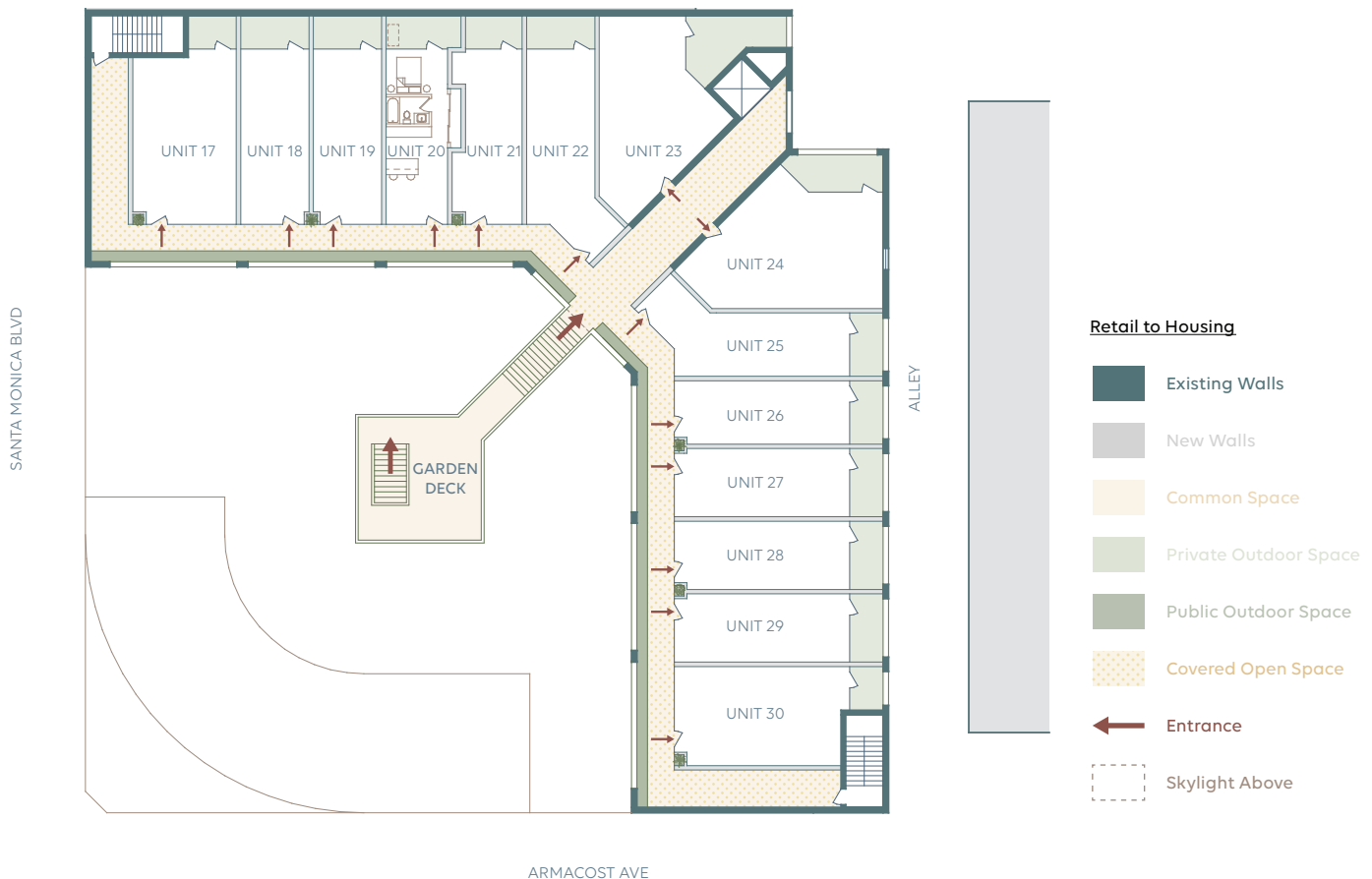
# Reuse of Strip Mall Shopping Centers

## Retail to Housing

In this multifamily concept, the parking requirement is reduced by changing the building's use from retail to residential. As a result, the existing surface parking area could turn into a shared garden with the potential to also include a lounge, grilling area, and garden pavilion that would serve as a communal space for all of the tenants.



Building Section



Second Floor Concept Plan

# Reuse of Big Box Retail

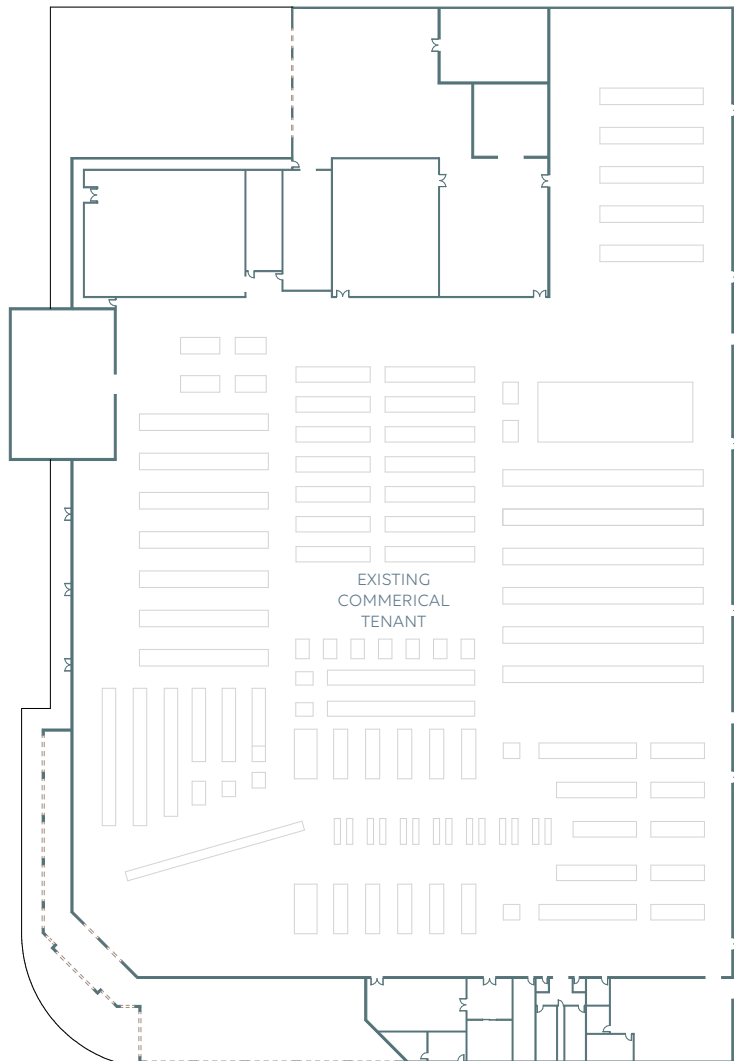
## Introduction

Originating in the 1960s, the big box retail model has become a signature of the American retail environment. The United States holds roughly 8.5 billion sf of retail space or 25 sf per person.<sup>1</sup> As of this writing, retail analysts say that Wal-Mart operates roughly 4,600 stores, Target over 1,800 stores and Best Buy almost 1,000. The rise of Amazon has even forced many of these big box retailers to close specific locations or shutter operations entirely. In 2017, when Toys "R" Us went bankrupt, the ensuing store closures left over 800 locations vacant.<sup>2</sup>

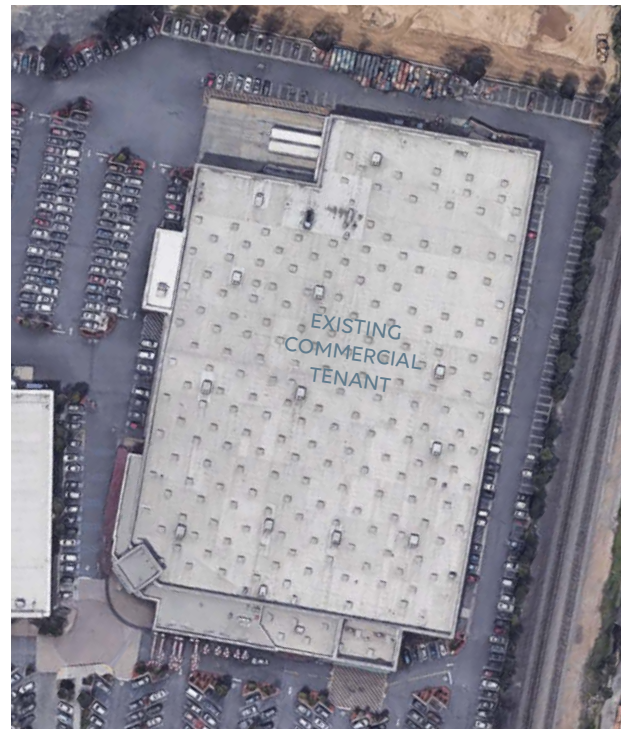
Across the nation, the shells of empty big box retail locations and associated parking lots represent extraordinary opportunities for reuse. They sit on acres of undeveloped land with the potential for additional development and greening. These empty shells and their associated sites demonstrate another underutilized building typology with the potential to relieve a portion of the city's shortage of multifamily units and affordable housing, while also creating a micro-community with amenities and outdoor spaces that can serve the surrounding neighborhood. This concept looks at the potential of an existing 150,000 sf Costco and its associated surface parking on an 11.7 acre site on Los Feliz Boulevard in Atwater Village.

1. Gregory Scruggs, "The Unmallings of America," Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, December 16, 2019, <https://www.lincolninstitute.org/publications/articles/2019-12-unmallings-of-america-municipalities-navigating-changing-retail-landscape>

2. Eleanor Cummins, "Big box stores are dying: What do we do with all the bodies?," Popular Science, March 28, 2018, <https://www.popsci.com/repurposing-big-box-stores/>



Existing Floor Plan



Aerial View



View from Street

# Reuse of Big Box Retail

## Retail to Housing & Community Spaces

This concept reuses the structure's shell through the creation of two-story townhome-style residential units. To maximize the density of residential units while providing access to natural light and ventilation, we propose two communal courtyards at the center of the existing shell. The courtyards act as gathering hubs for the immediate community and include a pool and green space extending out to the greater site with landscaped primary circulation paths. Arranged around these central outdoor spaces and within the existing building shell are 110 two-story townhome units, ranging in size from 1,200 sf to 1,600 sf. Each unit has access to its own private patio space connecting residents to the outdoors and allowing for neighborly interactions. A restaurant, market, and last-mile distribution facility fills out a program that prioritizes the engagement of tenants and the immediate vicinity.

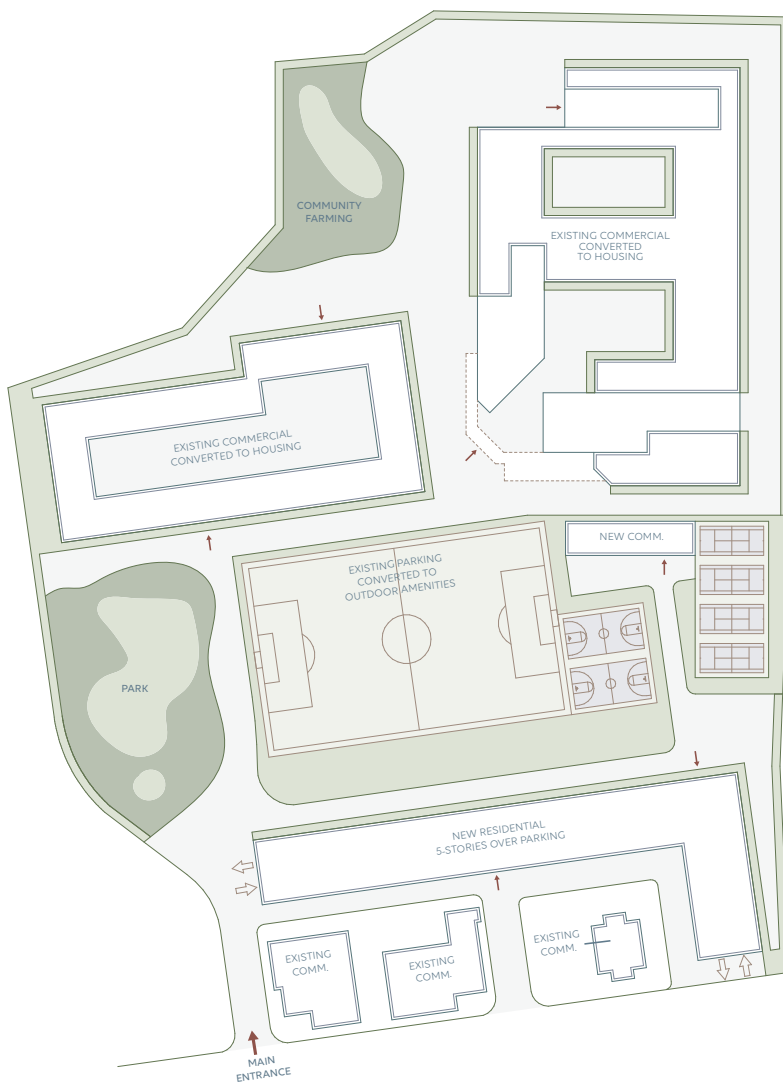


# Reuse of Big Box Retail

## Retail to Housing & Community Spaces

This concept proposes a five-story new construction residential development closer to Los Feliz Boulevard, while the adjacent retail shells (a former Toys "R" Us and a current Best Buy) could be converted to multifamily use to further densify the site. We also explore potential ways to activate acres of surface parking to benefit the future residents and community at large.

Any required parking would remain on grade along the periphery of the existing buildings, while the proposed new construction residential development would host below-grade parking. The remainder of the surface parking area is dedicated to green space for residents and the public, including athletic fields, sports courts, community farming area, and a park.



Conceptual Site Plan



Aerial View

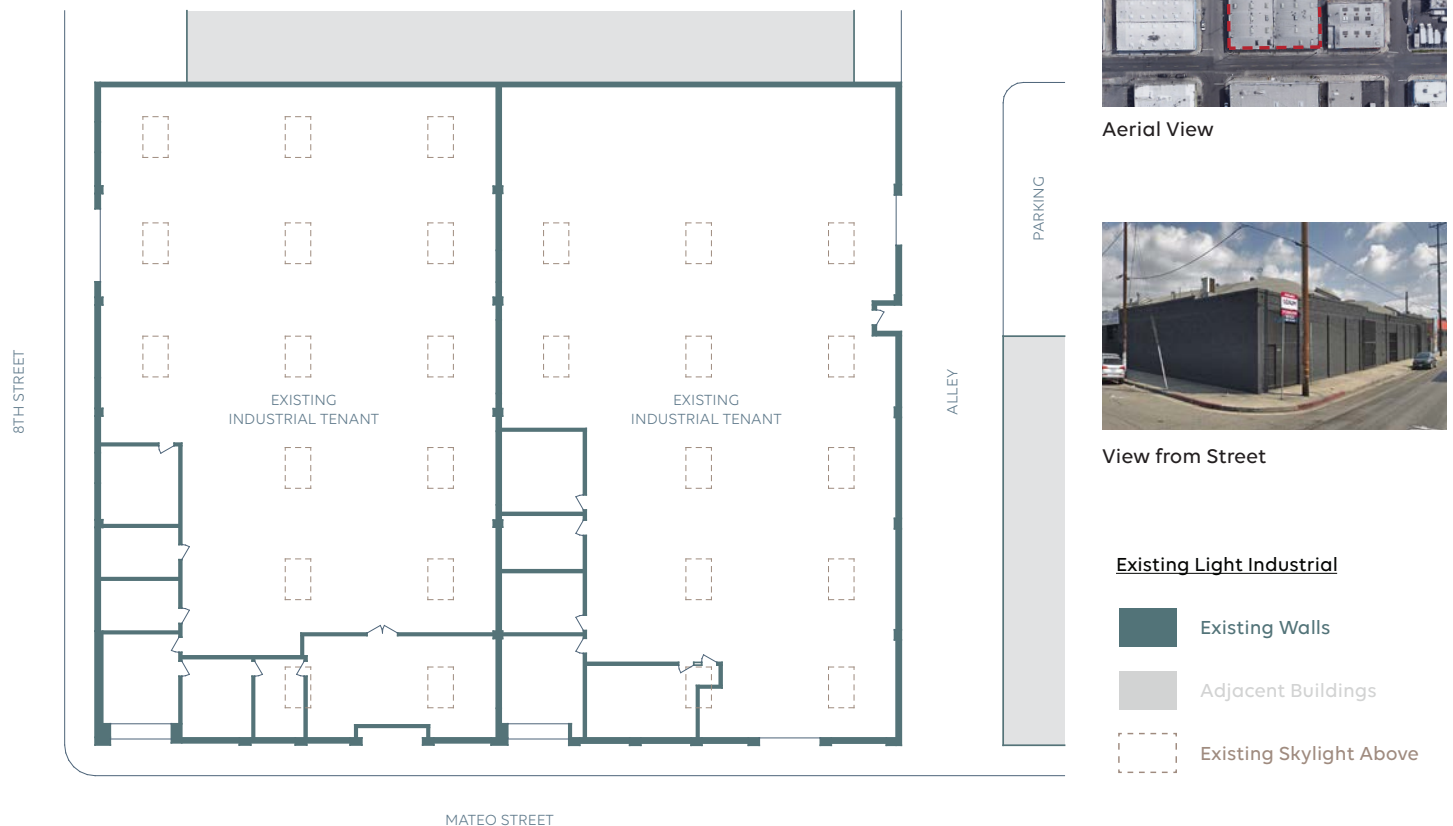
# Reuse of Light Industrial

## Introduction

Just outside of downtown Los Angeles and across LA County, we see thousands of existing industrial buildings that are too small and outdated to be useful to today's industries. Their wide-scale demolition risks annihilating their rich potential. Typically, these industrial buildings are close to urban cores that have undergone revitalization, meaning that their purchase price is relatively high. These buildings are also typically located in neighborhoods that see little after-hours activity and may lack sidewalks and associated parking. These factors make their purchase not financially attractive to most investors, so they lie dormant.

Despite the shortcomings related to cost or neighborhood, these industrial buildings are loaded with character from former uses. They may possess beautiful bow trusses, high ceilings, or raw concrete and brick walls, characteristics that make them highly sought after. They also tell a story of Los Angeles's industrial past that should be preserved. We must consider new and creative uses that will reactivate these spaces and give these buildings a chance to engage the surrounding neighborhood.

The following two concepts focus on creating a new, smaller community within an existing building located at the corner of 8th and Mateo Streets in the Arts District. Both concepts focus on human-centered design while creating greater economic value for the respective tenants.



Existing Floor Plan



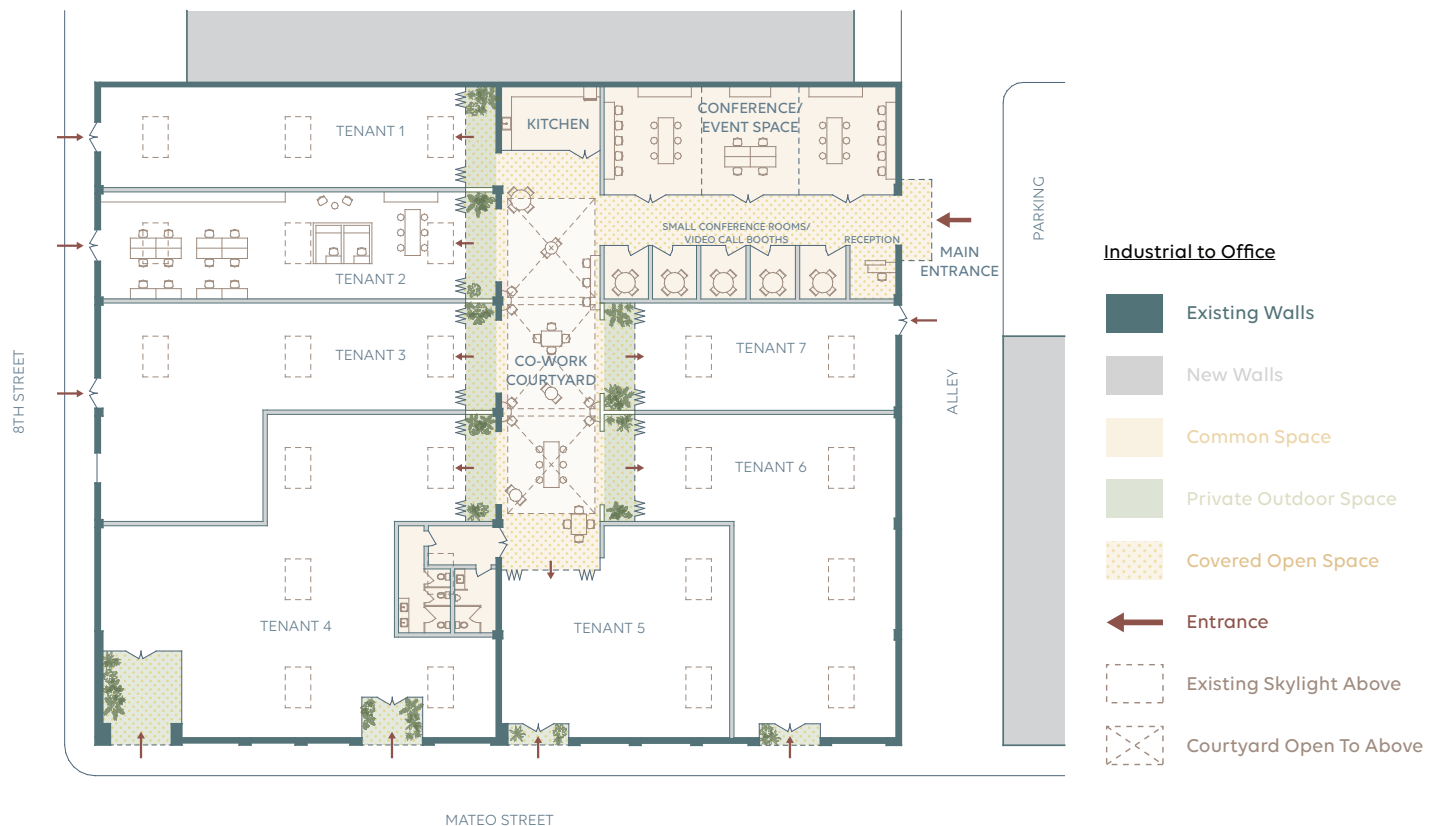
# Reuse of Light Industrial

## Industrial to Office

Building owners are now fully aware of the need for design-based flexibility and financial resilience in navigating the ebb and flow of economic cycles.

This office concept is organized around a centrally located courtyard that enhances well being by providing users with cross ventilation, natural light, and connection to green outdoor spaces. There also exists potential to create a subculture of specific industry-focused environments to foster collaboration and partnership among the respective tenants. The smaller, private tenant spaces share comprehensive common areas that are typically the most expensive to build out. These areas include high-tech conference rooms, video/phone call booths, kitchens, lounge areas, outdoor garden areas, event spaces, restrooms, and richly landscaped courtyards/ outdoor spaces.

Each tenant pays a portion of their monthly rent to operate and use these common areas, while also reducing their private office footprint. The shell of each tenant space is a low-cost buildout with easily moveable demising walls for flexibility. Furniture can easily be added or subtracted from each space to meet the demands of each particular office tenant. The communal areas remain intact to provide consistent amenities for the tenant community.



Conceptual Floor Plan

# Reuse of Light Industrial

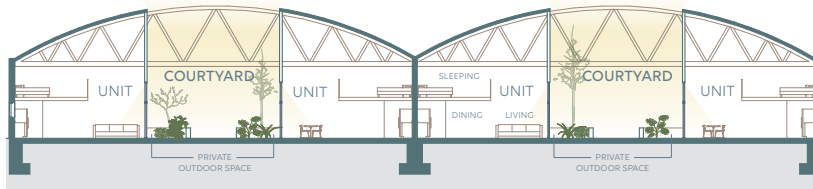
## Industrial to Live/Work

With the supply of large artist-occupied lofts left dwindling and almost gone, the demand for live/work lofts in authentic warehouse and industrial spaces vastly outweighs the supply.

This housing concept explores carving up the building into smaller, more affordable live/work lofts that are linked through outdoor courtyards and circulation rich with greenery and opportunities to enjoy elements of nature. These outdoor and common areas create a sense of community and safety amongst the tenants, as well as enhance tenant wellbeing through cross ventilation, abundant natural light, and a connection to the outdoors. All units possess a private outdoor space that acts as a buffer between their unit and the common areas.

Residents of this community may choose to prioritize specific common interests or shared experiences and design their spaces accordingly. Families with young children may call for large, grassy common areas or play structures, while a community of makers could require a shared space for woodworking, metal shop, or high-end digital printers.

Building Section



Conceptual Floor Plan

# Urban Ground Floor Commercial Space

## Introduction

In downtown Los Angeles, ground floor commercial spaces are typical to new residential and office buildings. Leaseholders of these spaces can present so much income volatility that they're sometimes not even reflected in a developer's proforma. It is now crucial to fill the long-vacant commercial spaces below, especially when residential or office uses above are performing well. Through creative thinking and blended uses, our goal is to reinvigorate ground-floor spaces by creating revenue, making sure the lights stay on, and helping tenants engage the adjacent street frontage. Doing so reactivates connections to the public realm and allows the surrounding community to thrive.

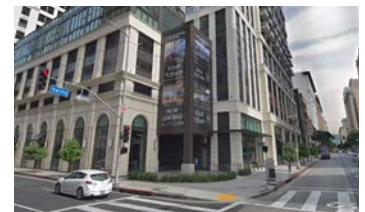
The following two concepts focus on activating a ground-floor commercial space at the corner of the Griffin, an Omgiving interiors project located at the corner of 8th and Spring streets. Both options seek to energize an empty corner amid the urban fabric of downtown LA's Fashion District. Their intent goes beyond the standards of traditional commercial spaces, instead becoming a platform for micro-communities that invigorate the immediate area.



Existing Floor Plan



Aerial View



View from Street

### Existing Urban Commercial Space

- Existing Walls
- Existing Space To Remain
- Ceiling Above

# Urban Ground Floor Commercial Space

## Makers Collective

This concept brings the typology of a food hall to non-culinary uses. Food halls can thrive because of an economic model that allows for smaller startups to gain traction in the local marketplace, drawing invaluable benefits while operating on a relatively cost-effective platform.

In this Makers Collective concept, a master tenant, or even an existing building management company can lease a large space and subdivide it into smaller units for individuals or small startups.

Smaller individual spaces lend themselves to affordable leases. They generate clear opportunities for people to create and market their own products while expanding their connections to like-minded individuals. Each tenant would have their own portion of the storefront and would be required to connect visually and physically to the sidewalk and surrounding community. Each unit could also be outfitted to accommodate live/work conditions according to a tenant's specific needs.

Through the Makers Collective model, the management company or master tenant effectively offers tenants the chance to grow their company, product, and vision. They could also oversee a media platform for the entire group to increase their visibility and outreach. The program also consists of shared space to house equipment needed by the tenants including high quality printers and scanners and a shared space for events and periodic showcases of the community's products. An outdoor lounge and garden provide a communal gathering space. A portion of each tenant's monthly rent would cover the use and operation of these common areas.



Conceptual Floor Plan

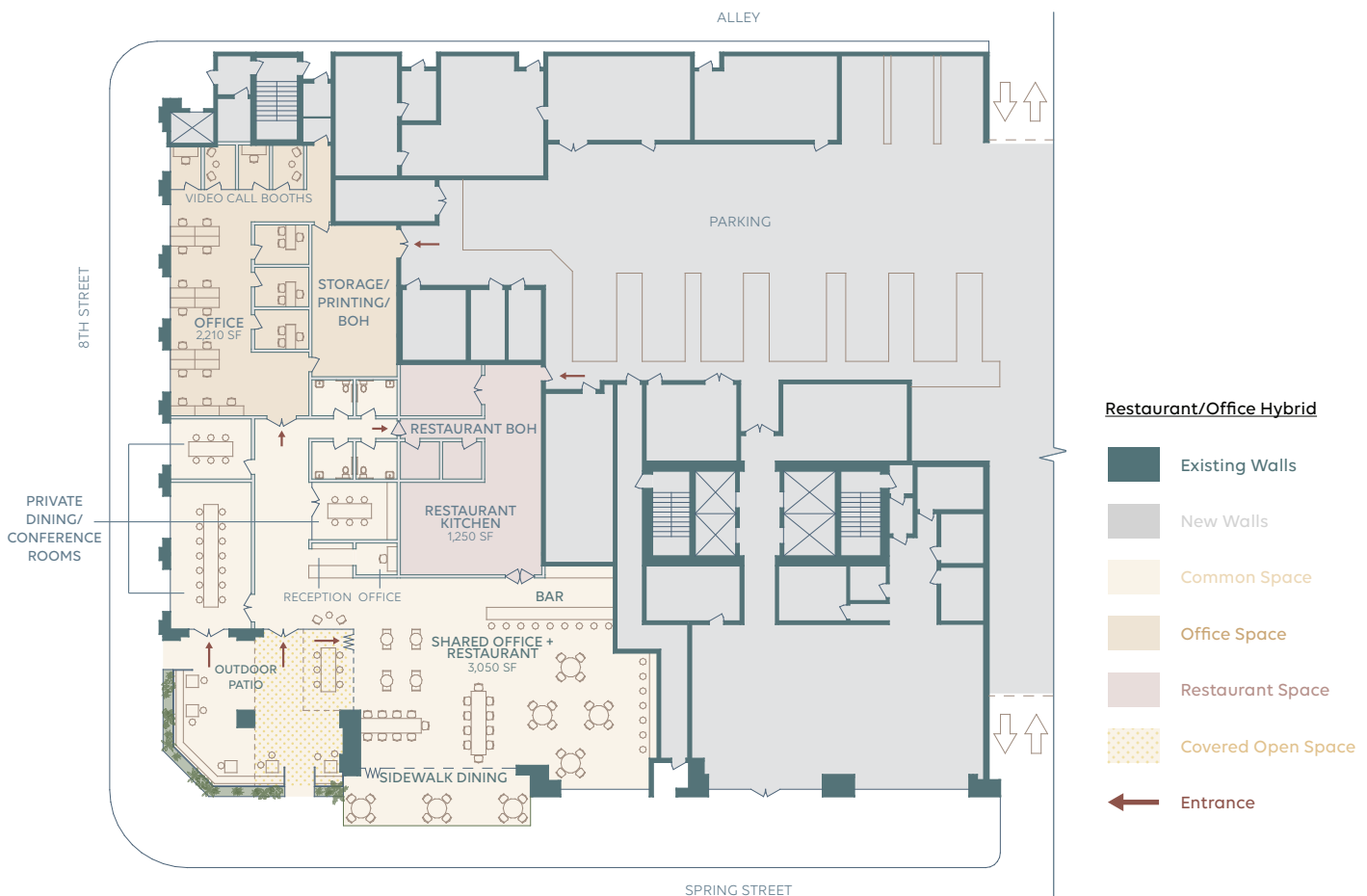
# Urban Ground Floor Commercial Space

## Restaurant/Office Hybrid

Even before the pandemic, both restaurants and offices in Los Angeles faced considerable operating-cost issues. As of early 2020, the average cost of Class A office space in Los Angeles was \$3.66/sf. For just over 3,000 sf of office space, a company could potentially be paying over \$11,000 per month for rent making up a significant percentage of their operational costs. Similarly, the rising costs of rent, payroll, and food are significant financial challenges for most restaurants. The average lifespan of a restaurant is five years, and by some estimates, up to 90 percent of new ones fail within the first year. The goal of this concept is to reduce operational costs for both the restaurant and office spaces while maximizing space for critical uses, as there already exists a precedent for coworking office spaces coexisting with restaurant spaces.

Operationally, the office space would be open during normal business hours, while the restaurant use would function in the evening in order for both entities to remain separate and secure. There is potential for each use to have limited crossover. In the evening, while the restaurant is open, any remaining office workers could return to the designated office space. A single operator or partners with joint ownership could potentially host the two ventures in this hybrid concept.

The Restaurant/Office Hybrid concept aims to reduce the footprint for both the office and restaurant use by sharing the varied seating arrangements provided by the restaurant that can accommodate both individual work and collaboration in groups. By sharing this significant amount of space, the office can focus on higher quality support spaces including printing capabilities, media labs, IT, and personal video call booths while benefiting from the hospitality component of the restaurant space. This concept also includes an outdoor patio and larger, more private rooms used for conferences or large-scale private dining opportunities.



Conceptual Floor Plan

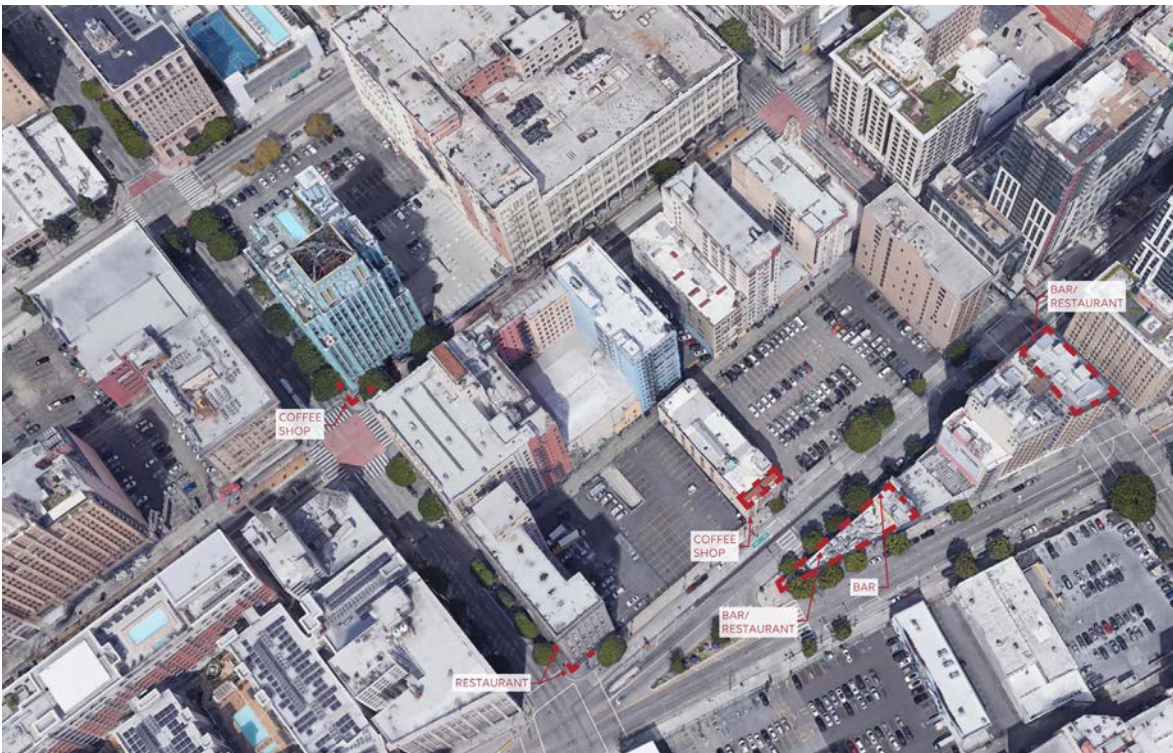


# Urban Revitalization

## Introduction

The pandemic has severely affected the restaurant industry across Los Angeles, with downtown Los Angeles hit particularly hard. The LA Alfresco Dining Initiative that is in effect for the duration of the Safer at Home order allows restaurants to open and serve customers at partial capacity by temporarily relaxing the rules that regulate outdoor dining while still maintaining safe physical distancing. The initiative enables restaurants to maximize the 60% indoor dining capacity required by the state allowing dining on sidewalk, in on-street parking spaces, and in private parking lots; it also enables street closures for additional potential seating.

Our exploration shows the potential for the LA Alfresco Dining Initiative to reactivate the public realm and invigorate the livelihood of streets in the Historic Core and Fashion District of downtown Los Angeles. This concept aims at finding ways to support our neighbors, many of whom operate some of our go-to places for lunch or office happy hours.



Aerial View

# Urban Revitalization

## Al Fresco Dining & Connections

There are currently eight bars and restaurants with adjacent retail at the area bordered by Spring Street, Broadway, 8th and 9th Streets. Some street parking lanes along Broadway have already been converted to outdoor seating, but the parking lanes along Spring Street remain. Parklets can incorporate public art and bring vibrancy and culture, similar to DTLA's monthly Art Walk. Several large surface parking lots and alleys serve as connections between the streets. By connecting these parking lanes, surface lots, and alleyways, we amplify neighborhood pedestrian networks. The application of wayfinding supergraphics to these pathways directs pedestrians to bars and restaurants. These areas are also suitable for new pop-up spaces within portable structures.

Larger surface parking areas could be further activated with temporary farmers markets. Underutilized hardscape spaces can be softened with outdoor parklet-style seating, greenery, and shade trees. Shipping containers provide alternatives to parking areas, offering accessory spaces for restaurant, retail, and bar pop-ups.

