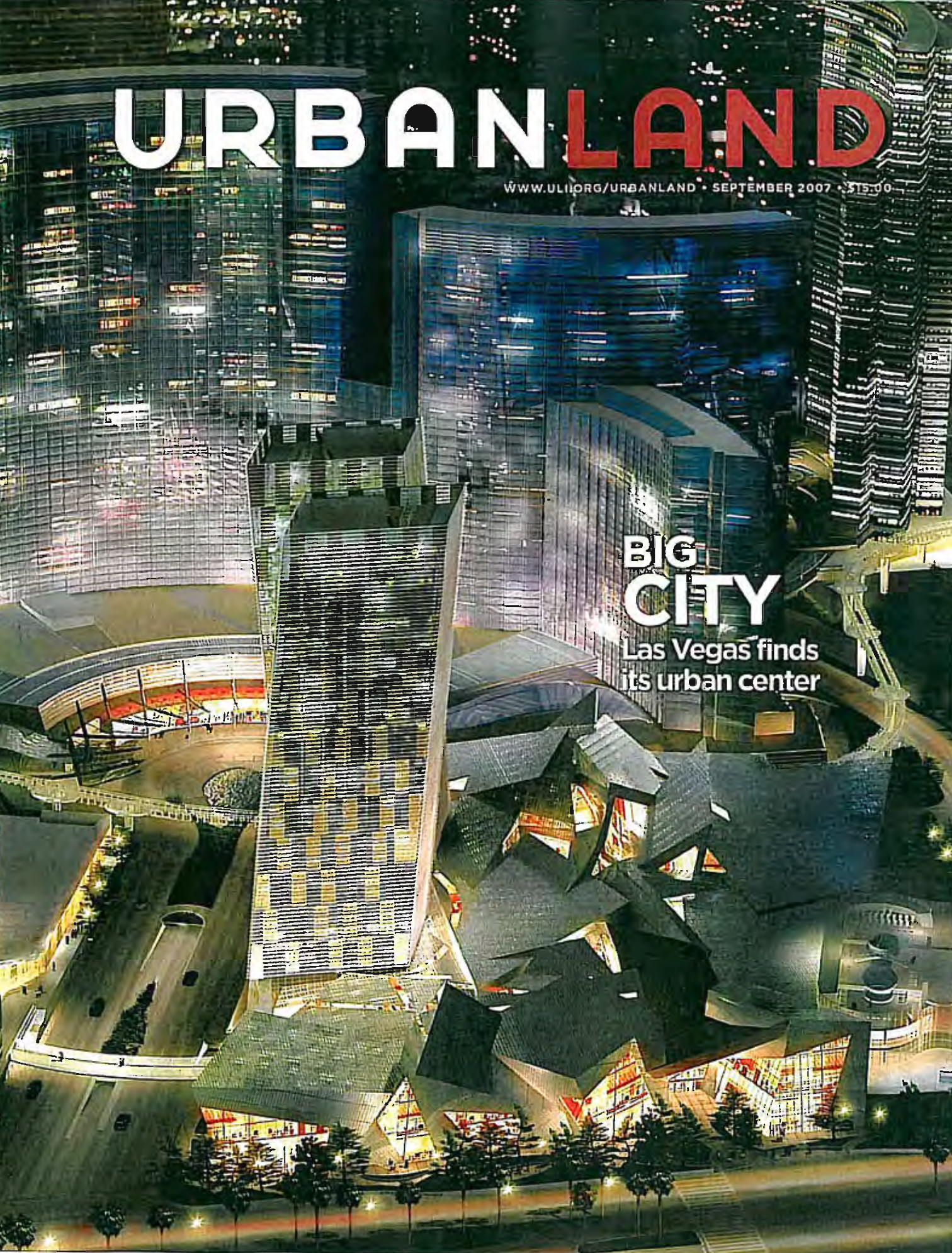


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BIG CITY

Las Vegas finds its urban center



Houston's Midtown Anchored by College

Houston's Midtown area, situated between Houston's thriving downtown and the city's world-class medical center, is ripe with potential. It recently has gained increased accessibility from the Houston Metro light-rail system that connects the two hubs. It also is seeing an influx of visitors and a significant amount of new residential and commercial construction.

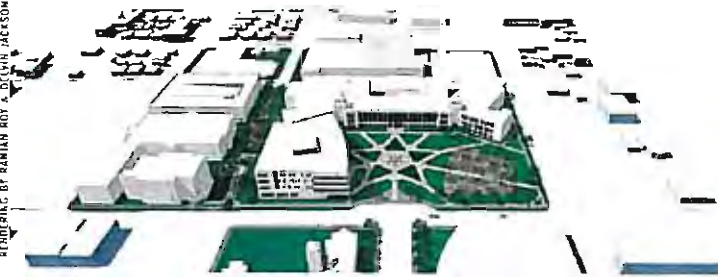
The largest landholding in Midtown is the Central College campus of the Houston Community College (HCC) System, which has the largest international student enrollment of any community college system in the nation. The Central campus—the first in the HCC System, which will comprise nine campuses throughout Houston by next year—spans 16 city blocks in the core of Midtown and is built around the 1914 San Jacinto High School building. The campus, like the HCC System itself, is growing, requiring that processes be put in place to ensure sustained growth that will benefit students, faculty, the surrounding community, and the environment.

Because of its origins as part of the Houston Independent School District (HISD), its subsequent separation from HISD, and its significant growth in scattered sites, HCC has little visual identity in the community and limited interaction with its neighborhoods. HCC has partnered with Houston-based Llewellyn-Davies Sahni (LDS), an architecture and campus and urban design firm, to engineer a coordinated approach creating a cohesive face for all HCC campuses while leveraging redevelopment in surrounding neighborhoods—a key component of the system's mission.

The first target was the Central campus, which has been evolving since 1979 when HCC began transforming the historic 1914 San Jacinto High School building into a college campus. With demand for space exceeding the campus's capacity, plans were being put in place in 2004 to accommodate future growth when campus administrators and LDS planners saw the opportunity to preserve some of the history of the site as well as revitalize the entire community. The project is intended to be a bellwether for Houston, whose business leaders and city planners are focused on attracting

An aerial rendering of the campus depicts the new star plaza.

DESIGN BY LLEWELYN-DAVIES SAHNI
RENDERING BY RAMANARAO & JAYATI JACKSON



more growth to urban locations in order to preserve open space and stem the tide of urban sprawl.

HCC and LDS are now working with the Midtown Redevelopment Authority to create an anchor for the college system, as well as for Midtown, and thereby establish an education landmark for the city. The initial phase of the campus transformation is already underway and expected to be completed within three years. The project is rooted in three key elements: contributions to academic learning, the image of the campus, and its potential as the focal point of Midtown.

The approach began with analysis of the campus's land use, access, circulation, growth, and ground plane treatment—factors that people experience as they walk

through the site. The next step was an exploration of how to attract potential students—as well as the community—to the campus, leading to more general questions of what makes a great open space and what makes a great streetscape.

Tying back to the international appeal of HCC, the partners drew inspiration from famed open spaces around the world: the Piazza San Marco in Venice; the Spanish Steps in Rome; the Royal Crescent in Bath, England; and Bryant Park in New York City, among others. Each served as an example of how best to exploit elements such as lighting, benches, ground plane treatment, and water to bring out the best in the college design.

The final design for the campus's new Star Plaza, a space directly in front of the San Jacinto building, will complement its historical nature. The plaza, shaped to evoke the Lone Star of Texas, will be built around a scale replica of the San Jacinto Monument—a 570-foot (174-m) column honoring those who fought for Texas's independence from Mexico—and will feature trees and greenery. The high school's alumni, including such notables as Walter Cronkite, heart surgeon Dr. Denton Cooley, and two former Houston mayors, are helping raise \$4 million to fund the plaza work.

Redeveloping the routes into the campus became a major consideration in its overall transformation. The Midtown Management District is improving Caroline Street, the major thoroughfare connecting the



The Central campus (left) currently spans 16 city blocks in the core of Midtown, and is also built around the 1914 San Jacinto High School Building.

A rendering (bottom) of the same site as it will appear after the redevelopment.



Central campus to downtown and one of Houston's grand old boulevards. Drawing inspiration from the Champs-Élysées in Paris, it will serve as the ceremonial approach to the campus. The college is also closing sections of two streets to create a seamless campus and improve the pedestrian environment.

The project will include construction of a new hub building containing student services, the biosciences department, and a two-story library; creation of other open spaces on campus; and renovation of the San Jacinto building itself. The work is projected to cost more than \$50 million, though that could rise significantly as funding is approved to redevelop the surrounding streets in Midtown.

The Star Plaza and street improvements will provide badly needed open space in the community and create equity for the college by stimulating neighborhood redevelopment. Establishing a destination for Houstonians, too, can only serve to bolster commerce in Midtown, helping revitalize the area while serving the needs of the HCC System and its students.

RHANDIR SAHNI is president of Houston-based Jewelliro-Davies Sahni Inc.

Providing Affordable Housing

Concern is apparent within the business community, particularly among larger employers, about the lack of affordable housing for employees, according to a recent survey released by the Urban Land Institute. The same survey showed interest among moderate-income workers in moving closer to work if affordable housing were available.

A Harris Interactive survey, conducted April 26 to May 1, gauged perceptions by employers and commuters regarding the impact of long distances between housing and jobs