



RICE | KINDER  
INSTITUTE FOR URBAN RESEARCH



# Rice Village: Parking, Management and the Built Environment



A Vital Communities Pilot Project

August 2015

Rice University  
Kinder Institute for Urban Research–MS 208  
6100 Main St.  
Houston, TX 77005  
Telephone: 713-348-4132  
<http://kinder.rice.edu>

Authored by  
Kyle K. Shelton, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Kinder Institute

For more information, contact us at [kinder@rice.edu](mailto:kinder@rice.edu).

Copyright © 2015 by Rice Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
All rights reserved



# Rice Village: Parking, Management and the Built Environment

## A Vital Communities Pilot Project

### Executive Summary

The Kinder Institute's Vital Communities initiative — part of the Urban Development, Transportation and Placemaking Program — is designed to help bring meaningful place-making, governance and infrastructural improvements to metropolitan neighborhoods. A pilot effort focused on Rice Village inaugurates the initiative.

The following report offers an analysis of three major issues facing Rice Village — parking, management and infrastructure.

These issues are interconnected. Access to parking is a persistent problem in the Rice Village area. The creation of a managing special district could help facilitate conversations between the city of Houston and private stakeholders to resolve parking and other issues. A district also could collect a pool of funds to spend on pressing infrastructural improvements.

Our report offers recommendations on each of these three topics, but these are meant as suggestions, not conclusions. In each section our recommendation is placed alongside several other possible approaches. The Kinder Institute looks forward to continuing to work with area stakeholders on selecting the ways to best improve Rice Village.

### Key Observations:

#### *Parking*

- Even at times of peak demand at least 1,000 parking spaces are empty and unused in Rice Village.
- The perceived parking problem, then, lies not in the amount of parking, but rather in the availability of parking that already exists and the management of the parking supply so that it can effectively meet the demand.
- The most comprehensive solution to the parking situation would be to permit the City of Houston Parking Management Division to operate all public and private parking spaces and lots, price those spaces according to demand and create a parking benefits district. However, several smaller steps, such as contracted employee parking in private lots and garages, also could be undertaken.

#### *Management*

- Cohesive management of the Rice Village area's upkeep, signage and built environment by a dedicated entity would greatly benefit the area.
- Several special district options exist for Rice Village and are laid out in the report. Our research indicates that the combination of a municipal management district and parking benefit district represents a feasible and productive option for the Village.

#### *Infrastructure*

- Much of Rice Village's infrastructure is in disrepair. Special district or management entity funds could be used to address this issue.
- Pedestrian, bicycle and roadway improvements would help make Rice Village a more welcoming and useable space.
- These improvements also can be a part of addressing parking problems by encouraging users to come to Rice Village by other modes of transportation or to park once and visit several destinations.
- Other Houston developments such as Bagby Street and Discovery Green offer examples of what might be pursued in the Village.

# Table of Contents

- Rice Village: Parking, Management and the Built Environment ..... 3
- Introduction: Rice Village ..... 3
- What are the challenges? ..... 3
- What is the opportunity? ..... 4
  - 1. Rice Village Parking: Current Conditions and Options ..... 4
  - 2. Rice Village Special District Options ..... 17
  - 3. Improving the Built Environment: Pedestrians, Placemaking and Wayfinding ..... 20
- Conclusion ..... 28





## Rice Village: Parking, Management and the Built Environment

### A Vital Communities Pilot Project

The Kinder Institute's Vital Communities initiative — part of the Urban Development, Transportation and Placemaking Program — is designed to help bring meaningful place-making, governance and infrastructural improvements to metropolitan neighborhoods. In the years to come, the Kinder Institute hopes to widen the Vital Communities Initiative and work with areas throughout the Houston metropolitan region.

Rather than forwarding particular policies prescriptions as the “correct” choice, Kinder Institute reports seek instead to study and frame on-the-ground realities in Houston communities. Based on conclusions drawn from data collection and research, Kinder reports offer stakeholders a set of potential policy, governance and placemaking choices that may help address the challenges facing our communities. After a report's release, the Kinder Institute will then join a wider discussion about how a community's stakeholders can proceed to accomplish their aims.

The Rice Village area makes a natural choice as a pilot for this program given its proximity and close connection with Rice University.

### Introduction: Rice Village

Rice Village is a historically important, economically successful, and popular commercial and residential district in the heart of Houston. Its nearly 400 businesses — a mixture of local and national retail businesses, restaurants, bars and other amenities — make the Village area a dining and shopping destination for many Houstonians, especially those associated with Rice University and the Texas Medical Center.

Despite its small size, Rice Village is a major commercial destination within the city. For this reason, nearby residents — from both apartments and single-family homes — represent only a small slice of the Village's clientele. However, several physical and logistical challenges are keeping Rice Village from becoming an even more successful economic and social hub.

Through this report, the Kinder Institute hopes to spark conversations with Rice Village stakeholders and city officials about how to make the district into the best space it can be. Achievement of this goal can be measured in a number of ways — economically, socially or aesthetically. It is not the aim of the Kinder Institute to select which outcomes to pursue or decide when they should be implemented, but rather to stimulate a discussion by providing solid information and a set of possible solutions.

### What are the challenges?

Despite its popularity, almost any user of Rice Village can point out immediate, physical problems that prevent the district from becoming a more efficient and welcoming space: unfriendly pedestrian spaces, competition for parking, lack of shade and heavy car traffic to name a few.

While parking problems have dominated the public discussion, parking is just one of many challenges that confront the area. Larger issues include an overall lack of district-level management (despite the existence of a merchants association) and poor pedestrian infrastructure. Parking solutions, therefore, must be considered in the context of a larger effort to improve the area as whole.

Thus, Rice Village's challenges fall into three categories: parking, management and infrastructure.

#### *Parking*

- Individual management of private parking lots and dedicated parking spaces.
- Little-used private garages not open to public parking.
- Employee parking in on-street spaces and in business lots
- Uncoordinated system of free and paid parking.
- Lack of clarity about which spaces are paid and which are free.
- Lack of signage to streamline parking in desired areas.
- Poor pedestrian environment, which discourages people from taking advantage of available parking farther from their destination.

## Management

- Little to no district branding/signage
- No centralized advocate for district

## Infrastructure

- Streets and sidewalks in need of maintenance
- Unwelcoming pedestrian and biking environment
  - ▷ Lack of well marked and controlled crosswalks
  - ▷ Heavy automobile traffic
  - ▷ Dearth of public communal spaces
  - ▷ Lack of bike racks/lanes
  - ▷ Few tree-lined streets beyond Morningside Drive

## What is the opportunity?

A number of ongoing initiatives and pending public projects make this moment potentially fruitful for further discussion of Rice Village's future:

- Parking solutions push
  - ▷ Houston neighborhood district parking studies by the city of Houston and consulting firm Kimley-Horn; Kinder Institute
  - ▷ Changes to the Residential Parking Permit program
  - ▷ Possibility of metering curb parking by city
  - ▷ Ongoing development of the Washington Avenue Parking Benefits District
  - ▷ New parking policies put in place around the Menil Collection
- City of Houston is set to redesign and remake key area streets
  - ▷ Greenbriar Drive (FY17)
  - ▷ University Boulevard (TBA)
- City of Houston has undertaken a bicycle master plan effort.
- Renewed interest from Rice Village merchants and property owners to create a cohesive approach to improving development
  - ▷ New branding is in development
  - ▷ Desire for one voice with city decision-makers
  - ▷ Visioning for improving the district overall

## 1. Rice Village Parking: Current Conditions and Options

Conflicts over parking have been a major issue in Rice Village for decades. Curb parking is limited, and most lots and spaces are claimed and monitored by one business or another. Attempts to keep certain spots limited to particular users has led to a mishmash of parking regulation signs. As a result, available curb parking is usually occupied and drivers circle the Village in search of an open on-street spot or in the lot where they intend to shop, leading to traffic congestion.

This constant shuffle for prime curb spaces and spaces in front of popular businesses has created a perception that there is an overall shortage of parking in the district. To address this perceived gap, many have called for the construction of more parking facilities in Rice Village. However, little information has been available regarding the actual availability of parking in Rice Village.

In April 2015, the Kinder Institute conducted a parking utilization study in Rice Village. This study found that, while demand is high for curb parking in popular locations, overall there is a surplus of parking in the Village, though much of that parking is not publicly available. Thus, our conclusion is that the problem lies not in the amount of parking, but rather in the availability of parking that already exists and the management of the parking supply so that it can effectively meet the demand.

The parking utilization study consisted of seven hourly counts across a Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The count times were selected to represent both high- and low-usage periods. Counters went out during each of these times and checked the status of every parking space in Rice Village.

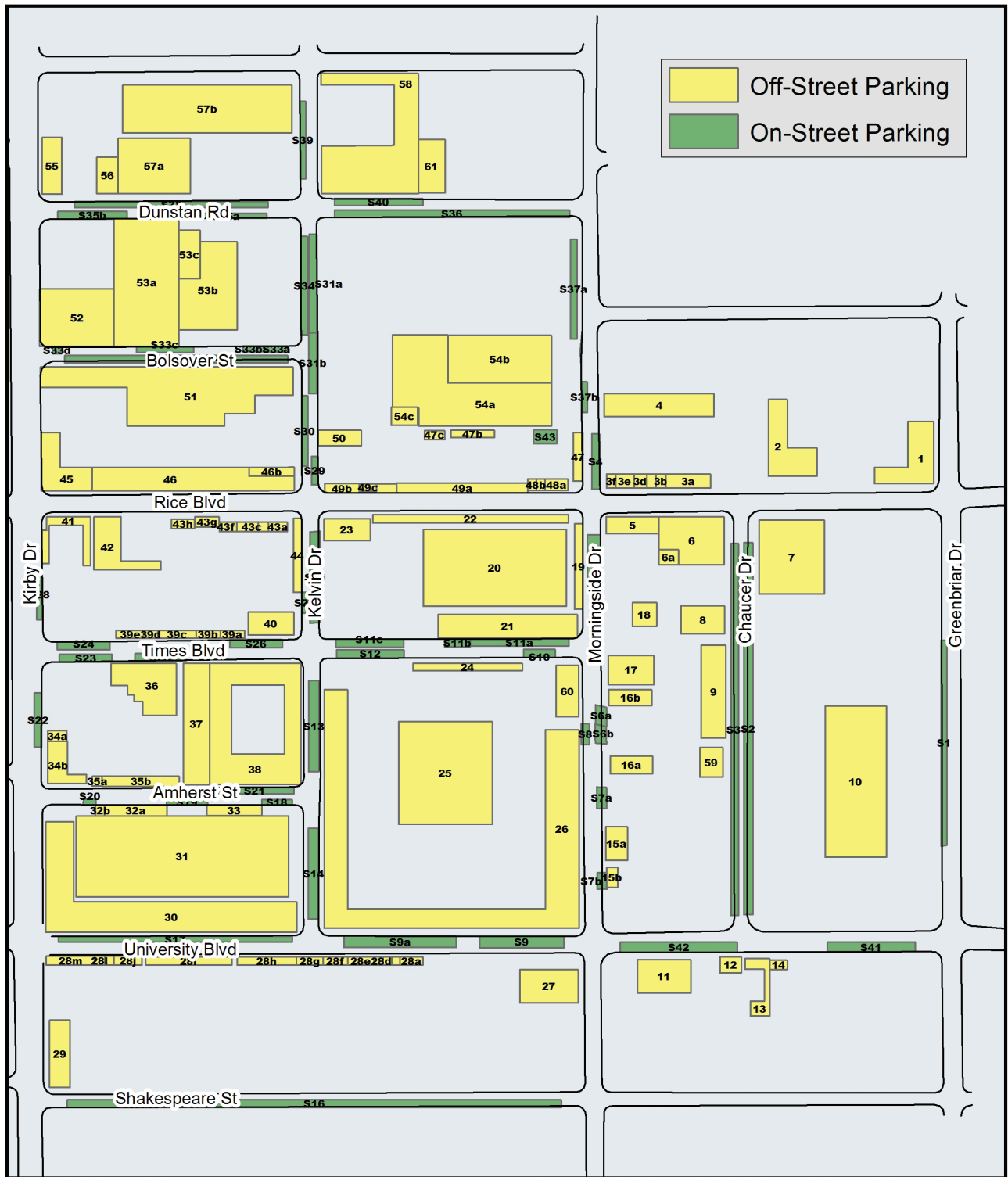
The count included nearly every private and public lot, garage and on-street parking in the district. The only garage left out was the Hanover Building's residential garage, as it is fully restricted to residents and unlikely to be made available for nonresidential parking.

The count includes:

- 395 on-street spaces
  - ▷ This number consists of diagonal and parallel parking spaces directly on the public right of way. Twenty-nine of these spaces are reserved for particular businesses or uses (valet; law enforcement parking; loading and commercial zones). All on-street spots are free of charge except those metered spots around the Hanover Building on Kelvin, Dunstan and Morningside.
- 3,587 off-street spaces, including 1,713 in surface lots and spots and 1,874 in garages and rooftop lots
  - ▷ The surface off-street number includes all Village pull-in parking (inset from the right-of-way, either diagonal or head in). Some of these pull-in spaces are publically managed, some are jointly owned by the city and a private owner and some are completely private. There is no up-to-date listing of which spots fall into which category, so all have been counted as off street. These pull-in areas are identified in Figure 1.
  - ▷ All nonpull-in surface lots and garages are privately owned and nearly all are restricted to customers or patrons. Only the Rice Village Arcade Garage (No. 25 in Figure 1) is open to nonshoppers who pay a fee to park.



# Rice Village Parking Inventory



Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton

Figure 1 depicts the off- and on-street parking sections included in the Kinder Institute count. Yellow represents off-street garages and rooftop lots (20, 25, 31, 36, 53, 54, 57), surfaces lots and pull-in spots (3, 19, 22, 24, 28, 32, 33, 35, 39, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49). Green sections represent on street, public parking.

What are the Village-wide trends for parking? As Figure 2 below shows, on-street parking is heavily used at peak times, but approximately half of all parking lot spaces are available even at those same peak times. At all times, at least 1,000 parking spaces in Rice Village were unused. The vast majority of these spaces are located off street and many — though not all — are located in lots and garages not available to the general public.

Figures 3–9 offer snapshots of the parking situation in the Village during each count. These overhead views provide a visual tracking of the shifts in parking throughout the day. In each map, the off-street and on-street parking occupancy rates are represented in four categories. Blue and green sections reflect underutilized parking. Yellow and red depict areas with high occupancy.

General trends to track across each map:

- There is unbalanced distribution of parking supply, with some areas, like the northwestern quadrant of the Village possessing significant supply and little demand. This imbalance is most likely contributing to the perception of a parking shortage.
- Most garage parking is located a bit further away from high-demand parking areas and is extremely underutilized, partly because it is controlled by private tenants.
- Even conveniently located garage parking (i.e., the Village Arcade garage) is underused.
- Curb parking is obviously at a premium, as is surface parking when it is free and located in close proximity to popular destinations.
- Much of the conveniently located off-street surface parking is underutilized because it is controlled by private owners and merchants who seek to limit parkers to their own patrons.

**Rice Village Total Parking Lot and On Street Occupancy**

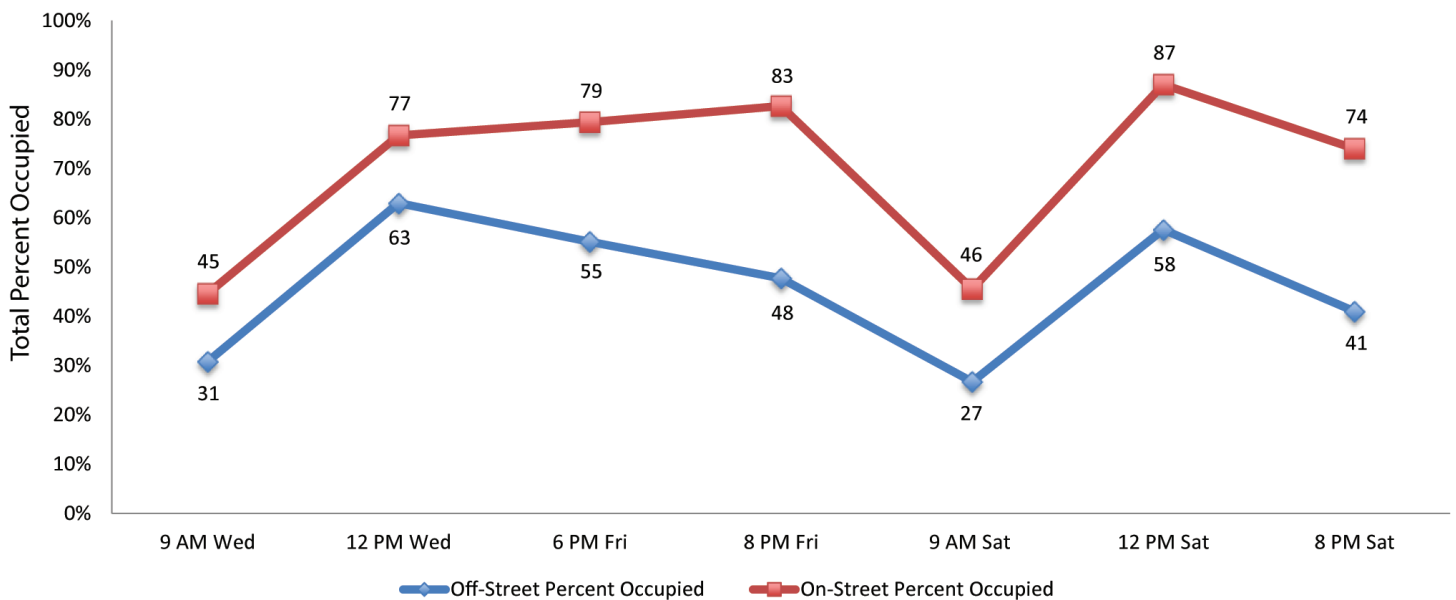
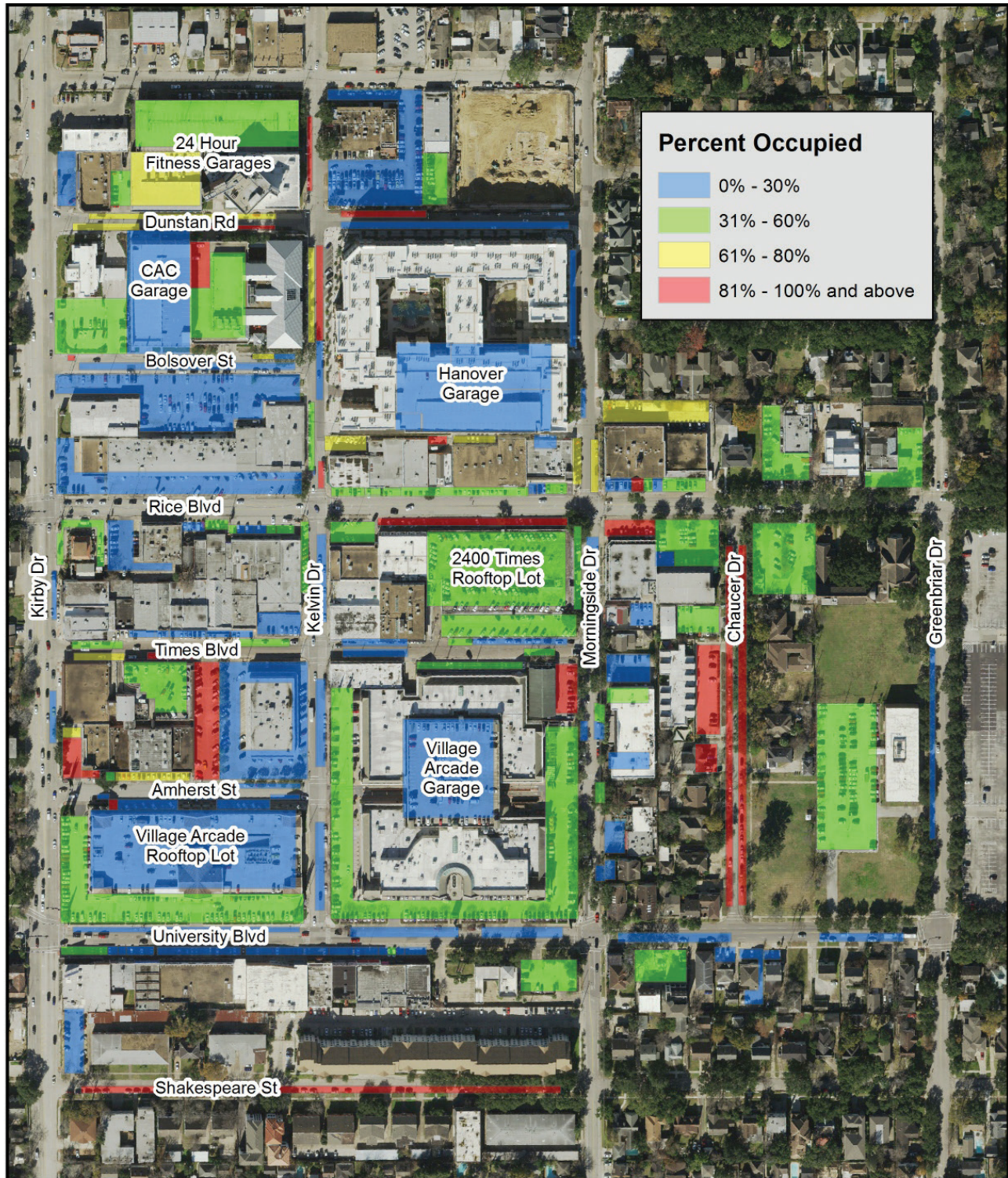


Figure 2



## Rice Village Lot and Street Parking Occupancy Wednesday, April 1, 2015, 9 a.m.



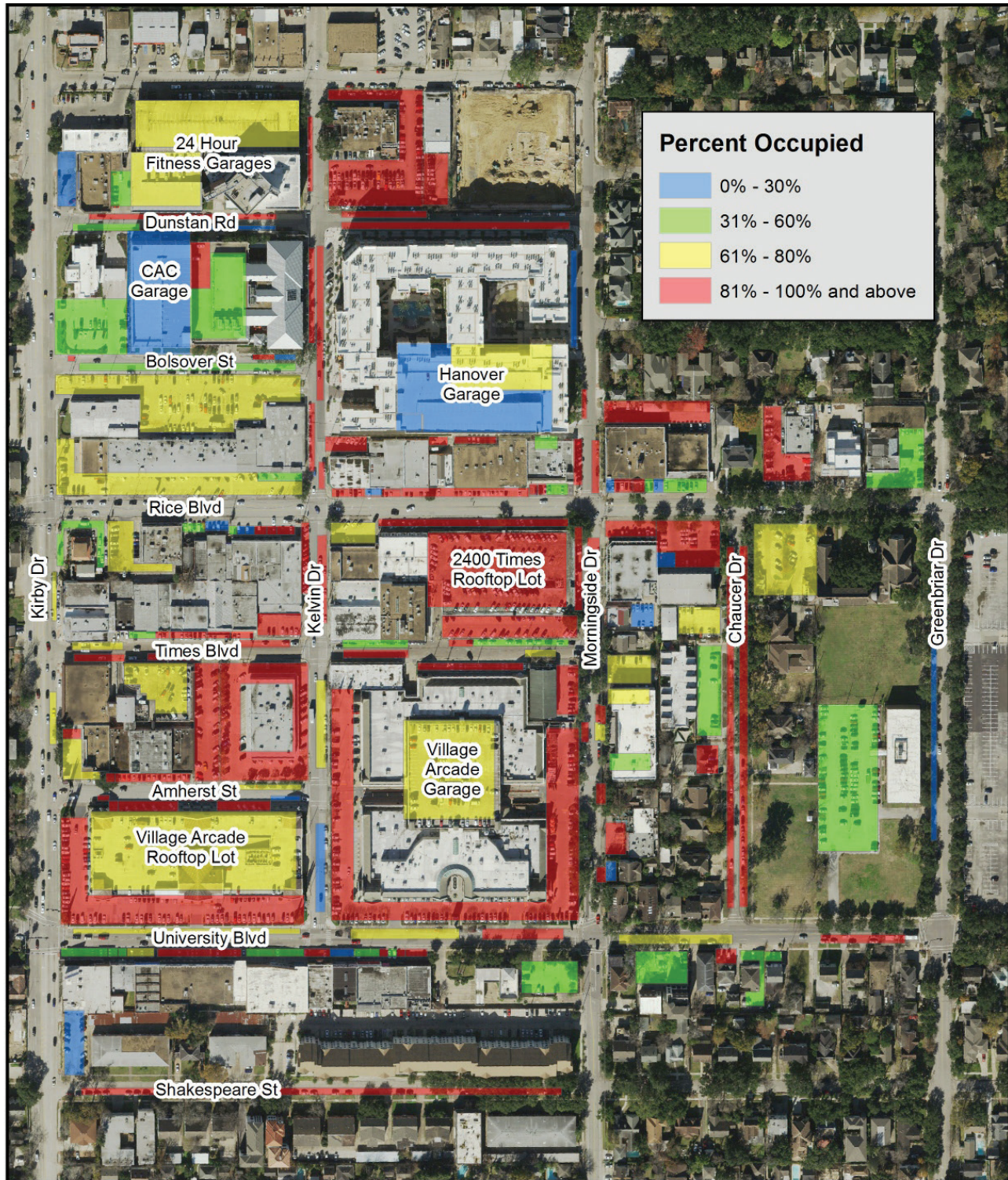
Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton



Figure 3: On Wednesday mornings at 9 a.m., much of the Village’s parking is available. However, on-street parking along Chaucer Drive and Shakespeare Street, where there are no parking limits, is high. High demand exists for both off- and on-street parking near businesses heavily used in the morning, like the 24-Hour Fitness and the popular breakfast restaurant Le Peep.



## Rice Village Lot and Street Parking Occupancy Wednesday, April 1, 2015, Noon



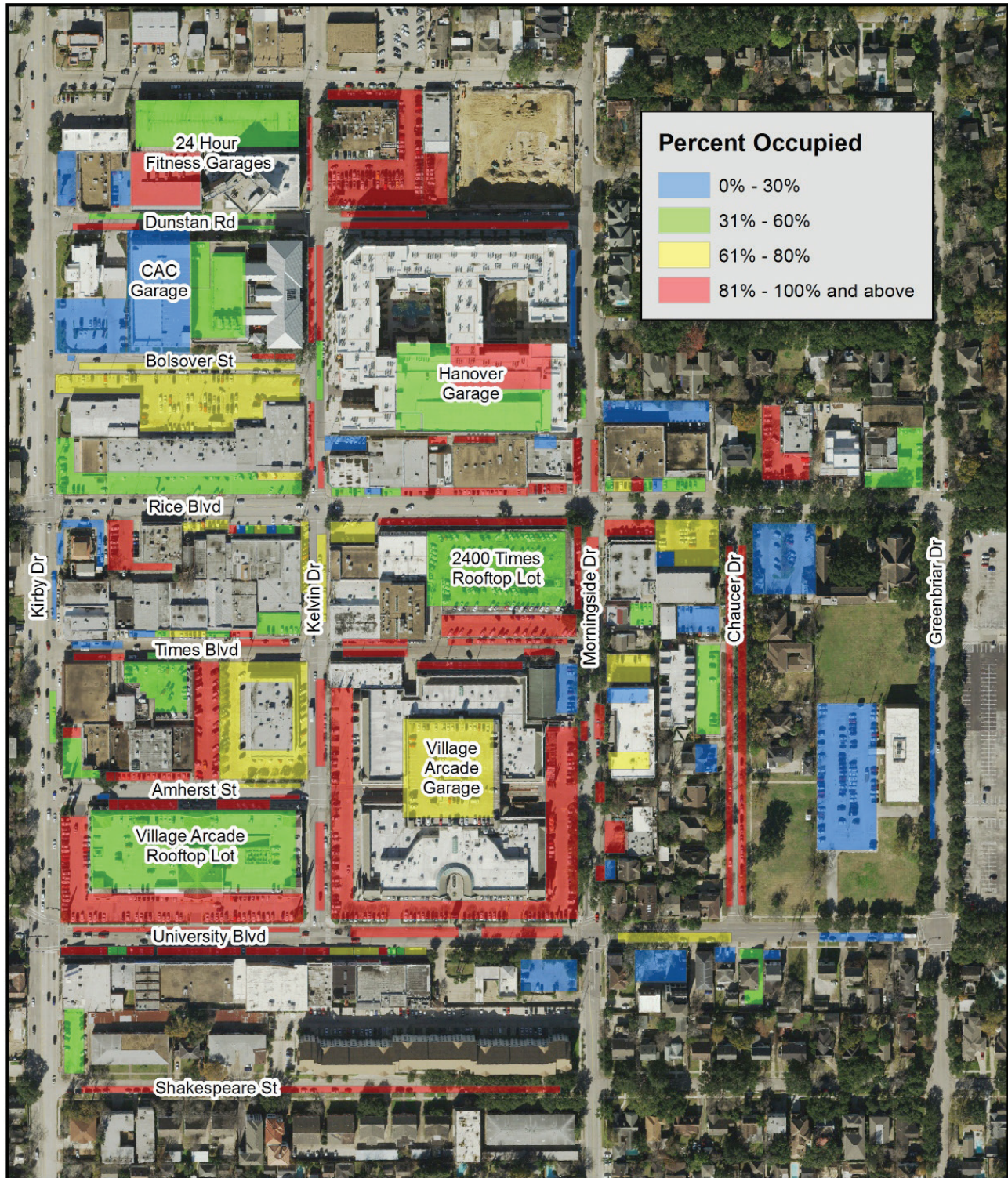
Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton



Figure 4: Wednesdays at noon looks quite different than earlier in the day. Both on- and off-street parking is in demand, with the majority of sections registering at least 61 percent occupancy. This is particularly true in areas nearby restaurants. Wednesday at noon is the peak off-street parking time in our study, but both the Village Arcade garage and rooftop lots possess some open spots.



## Rice Village Lot and Street Parking Occupancy Friday, April 10, 2015, 6 p.m.



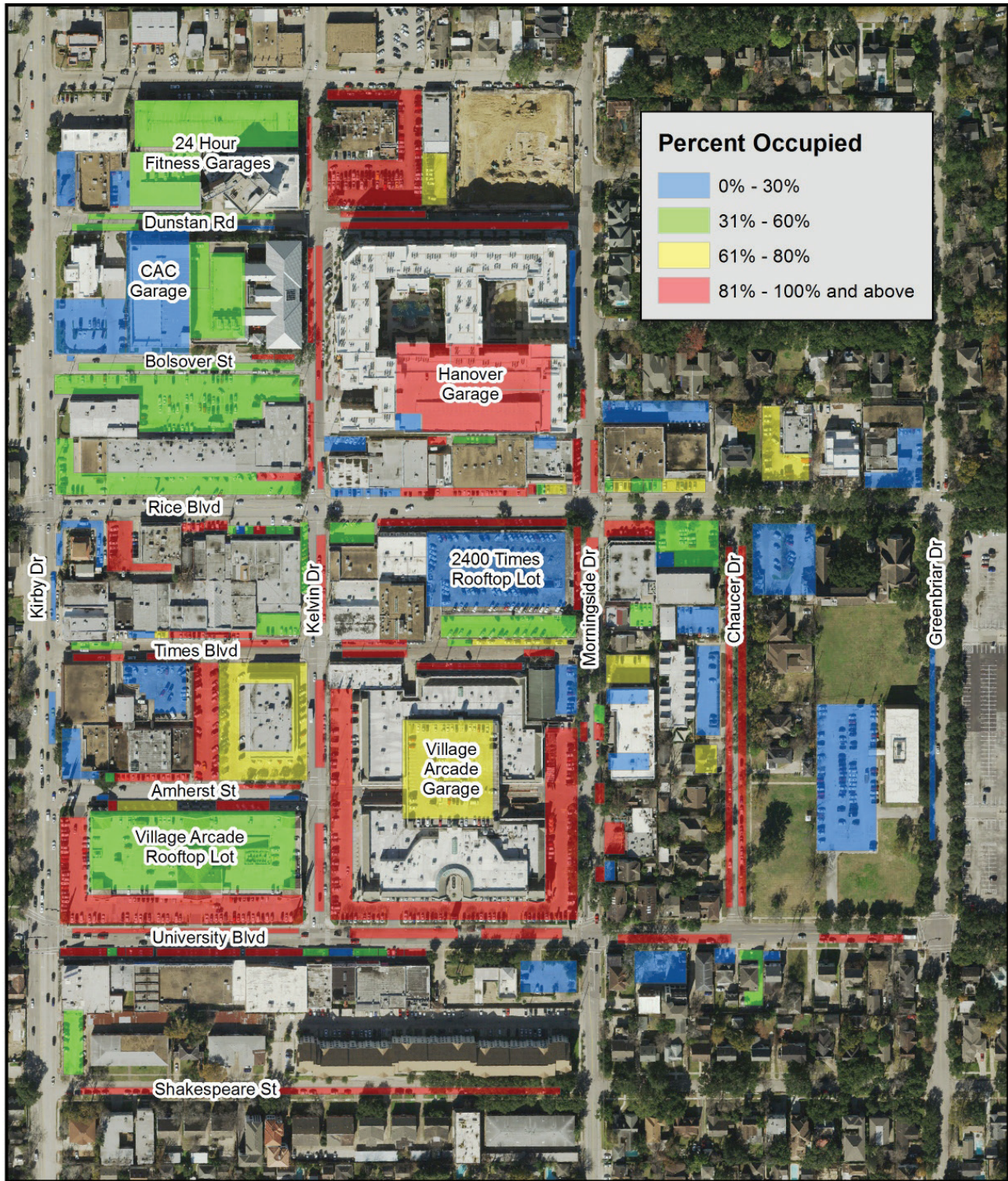
Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton



Figure 5: On Friday evenings at 6 p.m. parking pressure is located on those off- and on-street areas in close proximity to restaurants and bars. Interestingly, the Arcade Rooftop lot is below 60 percent occupied, even while surrounding lots are near capacity. Outlying parking spaces experience low demand, aside from one of the 24-Hour Fitness garages.



## Rice Village Lot and Street Parking Occupancy Friday, April 10, 2015, 8 p.m.



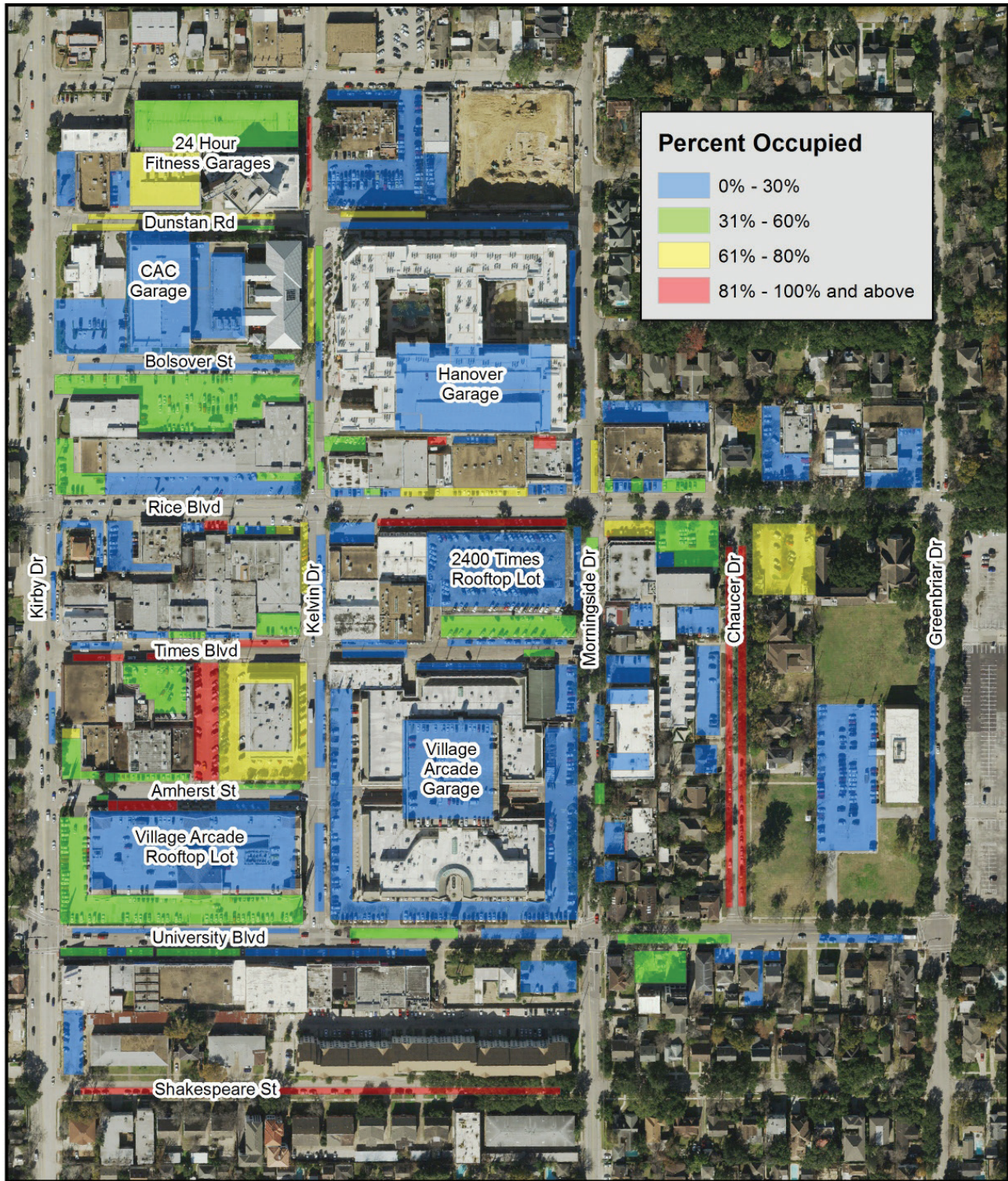
Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton



Figure 6: On Friday evening at 8 p.m., parking in close proximity to restaurants and bars remains in demand. Outlying areas have little to no pressure. Most garages and rooftop lots have openings, despite high demand on the surface lots and on-street parking areas. The Hanover garage is filled with valet parked cars using the building's many restaurants.



## Rice Village Lot and Street Parking Occupancy Saturday, April 11, 2015, 9 a.m.



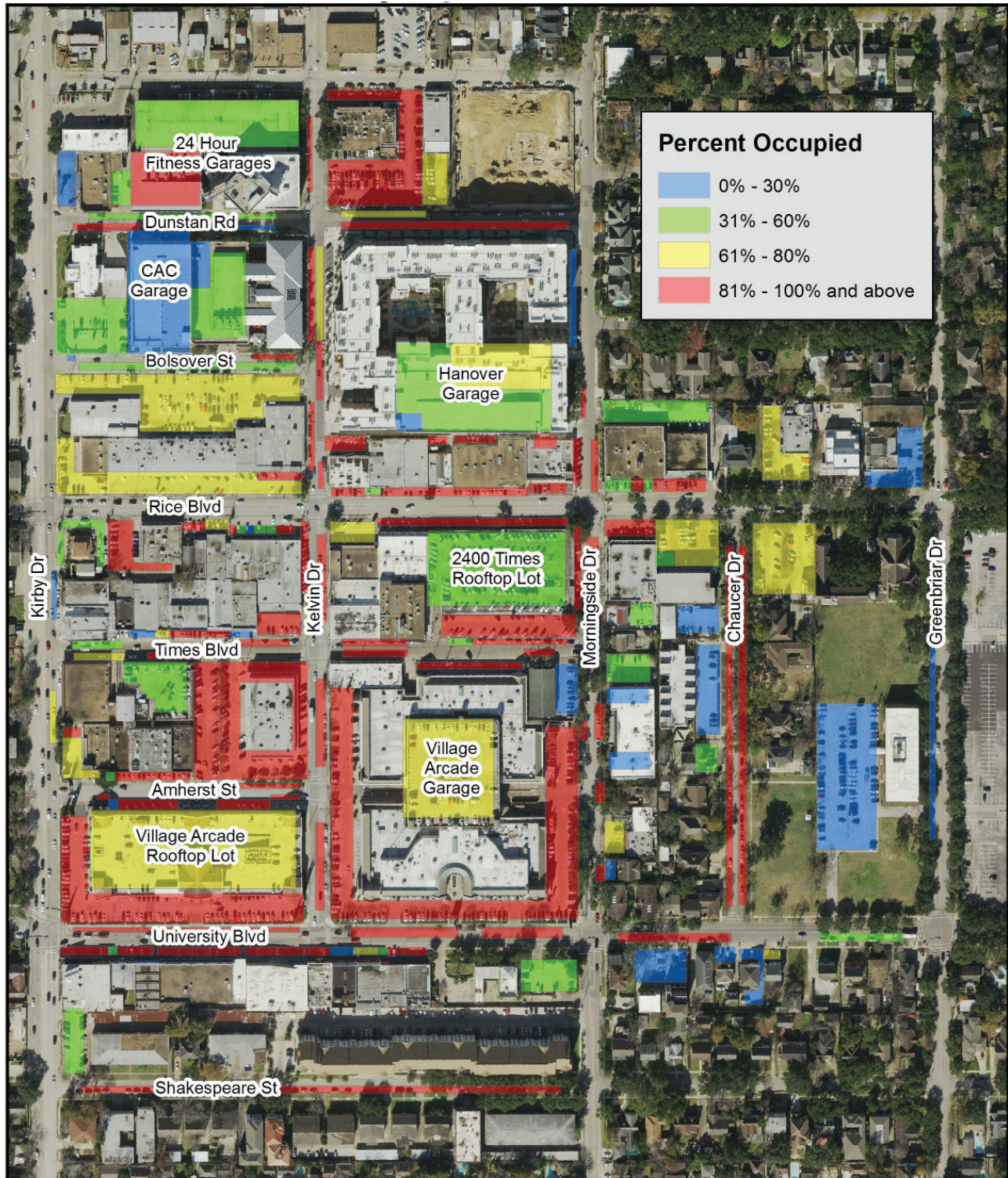
Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton



Figure 7: Saturday morning at 9 a.m. is similar to Wednesday morning: light demand in most areas, with spaces in proximity to 24-Hour Fitness and Le Peep higher in occupancy. On-street parking on Chaucer and Shakespeare remains full.



## Rice Village Lot and Street Parking Occupancy Saturday, April 11, 2015, Noon



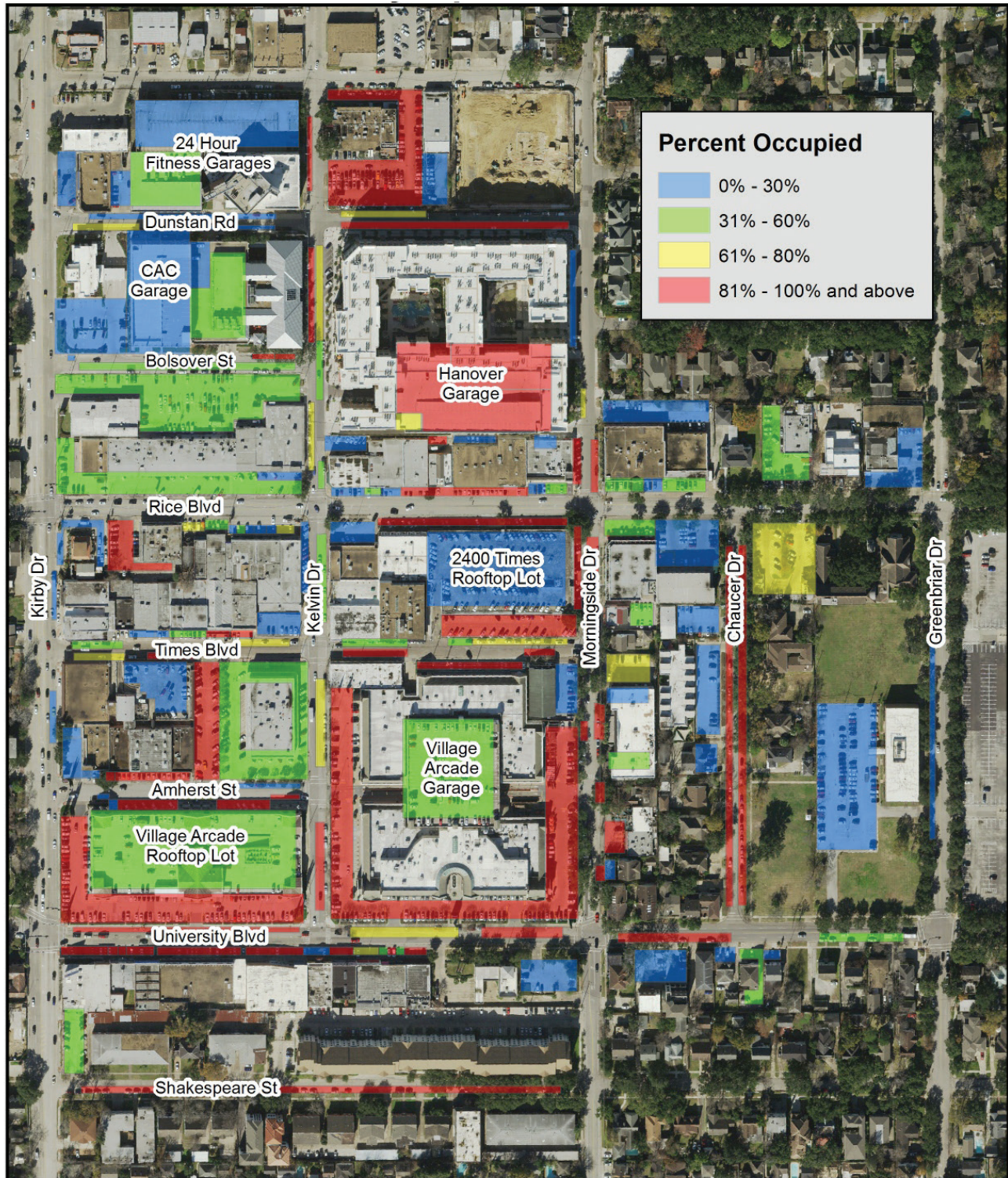
Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton



Figure 8: Saturday at noon, similar to lunchtime on Wednesday, has high demand near restaurants and shops. But again, rooftop lots and garages remain below capacity. Nearly all on-street parking south of Rice Boulevard is occupied. Saturday at noon is the peak of on-street demand and second highest off-street demand.



## Rice Village Lot and Street Parking Occupancy Saturday, April 11, 2015, 8 p.m.



Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton



Figure 9: Similar to Friday evening, Saturday at 8 p.m. sees the most demand near restaurants and bars. Outlying spots are again far underutilized, especially at the northwestern corner of the Village. Again, garages and rooftop lots are generally under far less pressure than surface lots.

The overview maps show that while there are obvious bottlenecks around areas with a heavy concentration of restaurants and bars at lunchtime and in the evening, at almost every count period there are significant amounts of unused parking spaces.

As an example, the Rice Village Arcade surface lot and garage at 2400 University Blvd., exemplifies occupancy trends in other similarly high-demand sections (Figure 10).

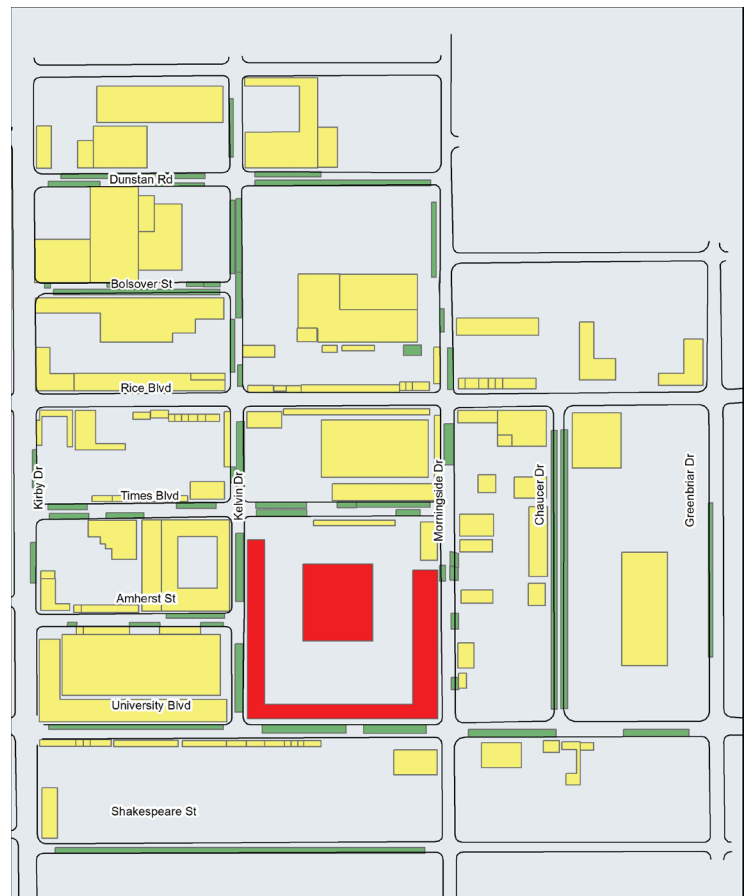
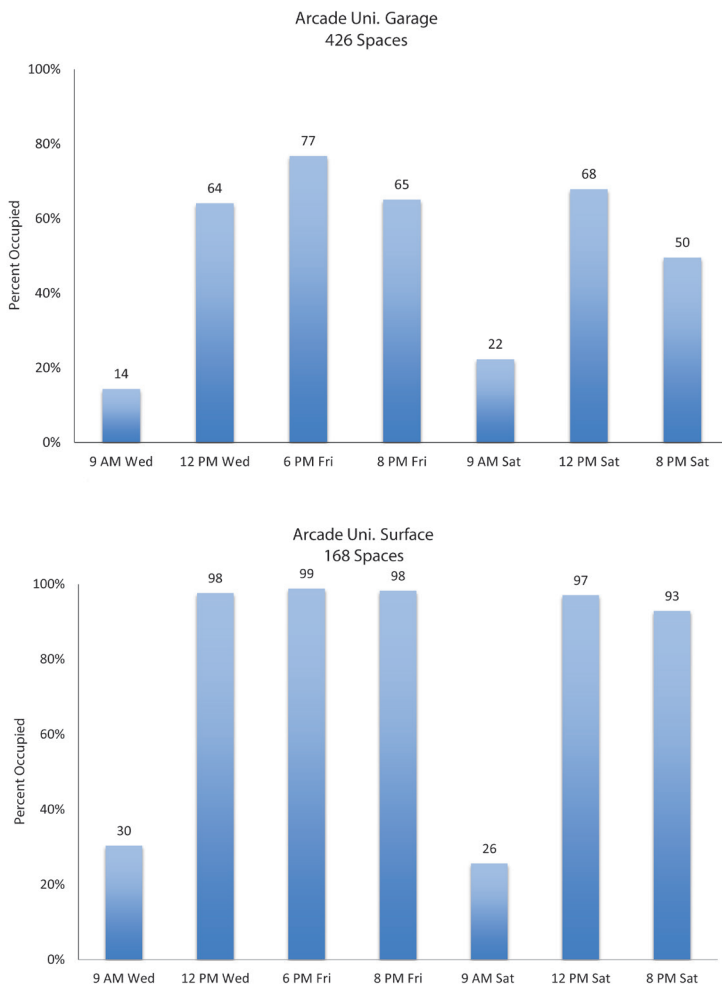
This section of the Village Arcade, a relatively newer development at the center of the Village with a mix of shops, restaurants and bars, includes a surface parking lot with 168 parking spots available for patrons at no cost, as well as a four-level paid-parking garage with 426 spots. The garage is open to any Village user for a fee but offers free parking to Arcade patrons with validation from businesses.

Not surprisingly, the free surface spaces fill up faster than the paid garage spaces. At peak times, the surface parking is completely used, but the Arcade garage is between 50 percent and 77 percent full. This means that even at peak times, when there is no surface parking available, there are between 100 and 200 unused parking spaces in the Arcade garage.

The Children’s Assessment Center, a nonprofit children’s advocacy center, has a garage on Bolsover Street that highlights the fact that Rice Village contains significant unused parking capacity. This garage is located about two blocks away from the Rice Village Arcade but is not available for general public use.

At the time of the count, the center possessed two large garages (one containing 411 spaces and one with 139). In the coming months, the 139-space garage will be removed. The graph in Figure 11 combines the occupancy of the two garages

**Figure 10: Village Arcade Parking Occupancy and Location**

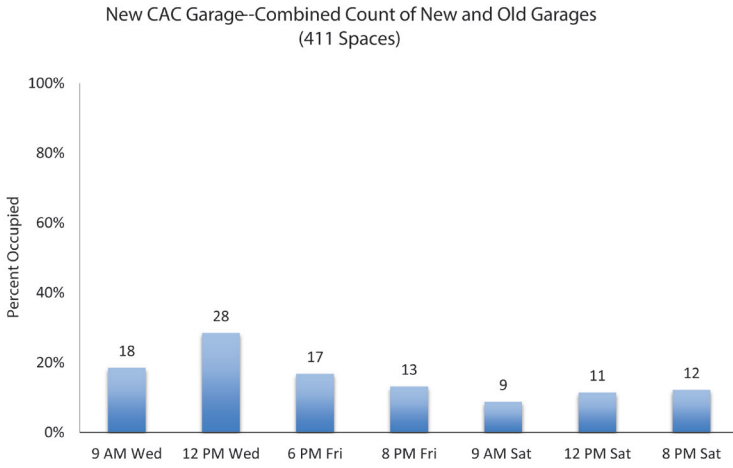


Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
 Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
 Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton

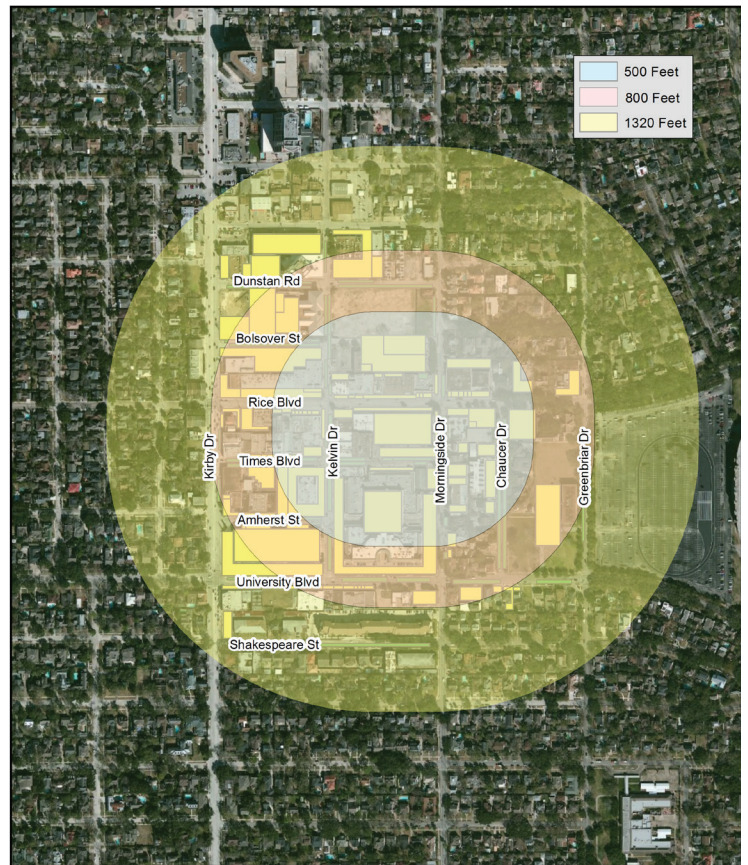




**Figure 11: Children’s Assessment Center Parking Occupancy and Location**



Map by: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research  
Aerial Source: Houston-Galveston Area Council  
Parking Lot Boundaries Source: Kyle Shelton



Basemap : ESRI  
Parking Lot Boundaries/Buffer Source: Kyle Shelton, Kinder Institute for Urban Research

**Figure 12**

and presents an occupancy rate for the 411-space garage as if the cars from both garages were parked there. Even when combined, at no time was the center’s parking more than 28 percent full and at most times it is only 10–15 percent full. So, for example, at the peak hour of 6 p.m. Friday, when the Village Arcade surface lot was full and the Village Arcade garage was 77 percent full, the Children’s Assessment Center garage was only 17 percent full, meaning approximately 340 spaces were unused.

Not only are there many open parking spaces within Rice Village, but the available parking spots are within an easy walking distance of high-demand areas. Figure 12 overlays several walking distance rings onto the Rice Village area. The map shows that most of the high-demand parking areas are within a radius of 800 feet of available parking.



## Parking Conclusions

Based on the parking utilization study, we present the following conclusions about parking in Rice Village:

1. Taking all parking stock into consideration, there is significantly more supply than demand. At all times, Rice Village contains more than 1,000 unused parking spaces.
2. On-street parking throughout the district faces more consistent demand than off-street parking.
3. Off-street surface lots fill much faster than adjoining off-street garages and rooftops.
4. Significant parking supply exists in off-street garages and rooftop lots at all times.
5. The northwest quadrant of Rice Village presents an important piece in the attempt to solve the parking puzzle in Rice Village. The privately controlled garages in that area have the greatest parking supply and the lowest parking demand.
6. Visitors to Rice Village seem to be either unaware of parking availability a short distance from their destination, unwilling to park in those locations or are unable to use some parking because of the restrictions of private owners.

## Possible Parking Solutions

The challenge in Rice Village is not parking supply but making current supply available to visitors and managing the supply to better facilitate use of existing spaces. Because much of the underutilized parking supply is in private hands — and therefore not available to many Rice Village users — the issue of overall management can be a difficult one.

However, recent efforts by the city of Houston make it clear that the city is a willing partner in the pursuit of parking solutions. The Washington Avenue Benefit District and the approval of a special parking district for the area around the Menil Collection each demonstrate the city's willingness to discuss potentially fruitful parking changes (such as changing parking requirements for businesses or creating revenues for area improvements) with area stakeholders. Rice Village actors should capitalize on this willingness.

The most comprehensive approach to improving the parking situation in the Village would be to permit the City of Houston Parking Management Division to operate all public and private parking spaces, price those spaces according to demand and create a Parking Benefits District (or another special district entity that would benefit from the collected revenue). This ap-

proach would provide shared parking for the district, allow for better management of existing supply, and bring in revenue for both public improvements and private landowners if the parking proceeds could be shared as well.

If given management of the entire system, the city could price different spots and lots in ways that direct parkers to outlying, low-demand areas and relieve pressure on both on street and popular parking lots. Those users willing to pay slightly higher parking prices to park near the destination could do so. In most cases such pricing models have the effect of keeping a number of spots open in the most in-demand areas at all times.

Of course, some private parties that currently control their own parking may not want to participate in a parking district. However, it might be possible to create an opt-in system that would give merchants and property owners the option of joining the program. Experience from other cities suggests that once a comprehensive system is in place and the financial benefits of participation become clear, more and more private parties will opt in and the district will work more effectively for everyone's benefit.

If a parking district is not immediately feasible, the city could begin by simply installing meters on all on-street spaces, as it did on Washington Avenue. This step, though, would increase pressure on the private lots and surrounding neighborhood streets, as drivers would likely expand their search for free parking. So, instead of introducing a piecemeal effort, it would be best to team the metering of public on-street spots with a parking district that includes an opt-in lot management system and with the continued refinement of neighborhood residential parking permits.

If the will to implement such a large-scale approach is not immediately feasible, the city and district stakeholders could consider undertaking several possible shorter-term or smaller-scale options for the area, which could be combined with on-street paid parking and with each other. For example:

1. Owners of underutilized lots could contract with Rice Village businesses to provide low-cost parking for employees and/or patrons.
2. Better signage and other parking technology can assist visitors in understanding where available parking is located.

Each of these shorter-term fixes would work best within the context of a districtwide approach, however. They are not likely to be effective if public on-street parking or private off-street parking remains free, simply because visitors will continue to cruise for free parking spaces close to their desired location rather than seek alternatives.

## 2. Rice Village Special District Options:

The lack of comprehensive parking management in Rice Village highlights another, deeper problem: the lack of management in the district generally.

Rice Village is a successful neighborhood-scale business district. However, unlike other such districts, Rice Village has no quasi-public management entity. The Rice Village Alliance is a voluntary association of merchants that plays an important role in advocating for Rice Village businesses. However, most successful neighborhood-scale business districts have some kind of management entity that helps to organize not only parking but also marketing, district management, clean-and-safe programs, and a wide variety of other functions.

their completion. Many boards and cities around the U.S. have used parking revenues to provide a reliable revenue stream for a bond issue, thus allowing infrastructure projects to be undertaken more quickly. Others, such as the Washington Avenue PBD, collect revenues until a certain funding threshold has been reached before starting projects. Advisory boards in Houston are comprised of seven community and business members and five ex-officio city department directors.

Current Houston parking benefits ordinances allow for any larger special district that is created over a PBD to automatically become the organizing body for that PBD. A Municipal Management District board, for example, could take over for the PBD advisory board in prioritizing and completing projects if it were created after the PBD. This would be advantageous

<b>Management Structure</b>	<b>PBD</b>	<b>MMD</b>	<b>PID</b>	<b>TIRZ</b>	<b>Sales Tax</b>
<i>Created by</i>	City	State	City	City	City
<i>Income source</i>	Meter Revenue	Property Assessment	Assessment of Members	Property Tax Increment	Sales Tax Increment
<i>Managed by</i>	City and Appointed Advisory Board	State/City Approved Board	City and Appointed Advisory Board	Locally Appointed Board	Board of larger special district
<i>Houston/Texas examples</i>	Washington Avenue Parking Benefit District	East End Management District	Downtown Austin Alliance	Downtown Houston Redevelopment Authority (Market Square TIRZ)	Midtown economic development agreement rebate

Under Texas law, several options are available for creating a quasi-public management entity. Many are currently in use in other Houston business districts. Each of these district options offer not only a pool of money (drawn from a variety of means as discussed below) from which to fund particular improvements, but, just as importantly, constitute an entity that could advocate for the Village and its stakeholders. Above is a chart comparing some of their key characteristics. The chart is followed by a more in-depth summary of each option.

### Parking Benefit District

A parking benefit district (PBD) is a municipal tool to redirect a portion of parking revenue collected from within a defined area back into infrastructure and other projects in that district.

Municipalities in Texas can create a PBD by ordinance. The ordinance designates the area of the PBD and sets rates for sharing revenue. Houston's sole PBD, the Washington Avenue Parking District, is currently set at a 60 percent district/40 percent city split. A city-appointed advisory board makes choices about priority projects and cooperates with the city to pursue

for the Rice Village area because a PBD could get off the ground much more quickly than any state-approved districts.

#### *Benefits of PBD for Rice Village:*

1. Can be easily and quickly created by city.
2. Creates meaningful/dedicated revenue channel (City of Houston study suggests that a Rice Village PBD could create \$976,280 for a district in the first three years of operation.)
3. Can be instrumental in helping to regulate parking problems
4. Can easily be teamed with other district initiatives.

#### *Challenges of PBD for Rice Village:*

1. Requires negotiation and implementation of paid parking across district
2. Requires creation of a community advisory board to decide on projects, an inherently political process.

#### *Pertinent Local Examples:*

- Washington Avenue Parking Benefit District

## Municipal Management District

A Municipal Management District (MMD) is a state-created economic development district that is tied to a legislatively defined area (Texas Local Gov. Code, Chapter 375). An MMD can be created either by special hearing of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality or through legislation passed by the Texas Legislature. The legislative approach is far more common and less controversial.

Most MMDs levy a set assessment based on the value of commercial and multifamily properties within the district's defined area. The assessment is an additional payment for property owners, separate from taxes, and is dedicated to the MMD for use in the service area. Some MMDs are enabled to levy an ad valorem property tax or sales tax instead of an assessment, however. In these cases, a tax is used instead of an assessment because local stakeholders chose that route, often in order to tie it directly to appraisal district valuations and streamline the payment process by adding the collection to the annual tax bill. In the case of both the assessment and the tax, payment rates typically ranges from \$0.045 to \$0.12/\$100 of value.

These funds can be used to complete projects prioritized by the district's board. Improvements tend to focus on clean-and-safe programs, economic development, signage or small infrastructure projects. An MMD may use projected revenue to secure bonds. While an MMD is a government unit, it does not have the right of eminent domain.

MMD boards are initially approved by the TCEQ. In Houston, subsequent members are nominated by the existing MMD board and approved by Houston City Council. The board can include both nonproperty owners (business tenants) and non-assessment payers (residential home owners) only if they are designated agents of assessment paying property owners, in addition to assessment-paying property owners. This arrangement increases the likelihood of good stakeholder engagement. Before beginning operation, the initial board creates a service plan and then must gain approval of 50 percent of assessment or taxpayers to be instituted. Service plans must be renewed every five to eight years.

MMDs are well established within the Houston region, with 29 active MMDs either fully or partially within Houston city limits.<sup>1</sup> Many of the current MMDs are tied to Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (described below), but this is not a requirement. There are several MMDs in close proximity to Rice Village so one possibility would be for the area to be "annexed" by an existing MMD. This might be easier to accomplish but it would provide less direct benefit to the Village area because Village needs would not be the only ones being addressed.

### *Benefits of MMDs for Rice Village:*

1. Board makeup permits good balance of stakeholders, while still giving largest say to assessment payers.
2. Establishment of an MMD is well understood at both the state and local level, can be organized relatively quickly.
3. Can provide an entity through which Rice Village stakeholders could advocate for area needs at the local, county and state levels.
4. Does not collect a massive amount of money, nor does it earmark public tax funds for dedicated use in a smaller unit of the city as does a TIRZ (discussed below).

### *Challenges of MMDs in Rice Village:*

1. Local officials have less direct oversight on MMDs than other entities, but the district is not autonomous and the city of Houston does approve new board members, subject to the district nominating directors.
2. As the board is not mandated to include nonproperty owners, it could be construed as serving only a small segment's interests.
3. Levy of an additional assessment is not always welcome by those who pay.
4. Establishment of a board is a political process.
5. Creation of MMD would probably require approval of the state legislature, which only meets every other year. Therefore, it requires both support of a local state politician and proper timing. Could not be pursued formally until the 2017 legislative session. It is possible to create a district through the TCEQ, though the process is unpredictable.

### *Pertinent Local Examples:*

- Uptown Houston Management District
- Houston Downtown Management District
- Greater East End Management District
- Upper Kirby District

## Public Improvement District

Public Improvement Districts are special government districts created by city or county ordinance following a petition of property owners or tenants (Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 372). Once the district is created, the city or county collects an annual assessment that can be based on any number of measures, depending upon the makeup of the districts assessment payers. If it's a tenant-based district, PID assessments are often a set amount charged through a business license fee or other fee businesses must pay. If it's a property-based PID, assessments can be based on square footage, property value, or even number of full-time employees. Those petitioning for the creation of a PID can decide on the assessment mechanism. Comparable assessments in other Texas cities hover around \$0.10 to \$0.15/\$100 of value.

<sup>1</sup> Map of COH MMDs available at <http://mycity.houstontx.gov/home/>

Unlike MMDs, PIDs are managed by the creating city or county. The city or county collects fees, approves projects and pays for their implementation. An advisory board is created and operates in the same capacity as a PBD's board.

Houston has relied on MMDs instead of PIDs, but there are some PIDs in other parts of the state that are helpful models.

#### *Benefits of PID for Rice Village:*

1. Entirely city managed and relatively easy to set up.
2. Could include both tenants and property owners within the assessment.

#### *Challenges of PID for Rice Village:*

1. Dependent on city approval and maintenance. Changing administration attitudes or fiscal situation could change efficacy of PID.
2. Levy of an additional assessment is not always welcomed by those who pay.
3. Establishment of a board is a political challenge.
4. As with MMDs, the board is not mandated to include nonassessment payers; it could be construed as serving only a small segment's interests.
5. Tenant-based PID is unlikely to create much income in Rice Village if based just on a set assessment.

#### *Pertinent State Examples:*

- Downtown Austin Alliance
- Downtown Dallas Improvement District

## **Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ)**

Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones are entities created by municipalities (Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 311) in order to spur future development within a designated zone. TIRZs operate by freezing the collected property taxes for the zone at a set (usually the current) level then collecting all additional tax monies that come as a product of new development (the increment) into a fund to be used within the district.

The main aim of investment zones is to help counties and municipalities encourage beneficial development in communities struggling with infrastructural issues or a deteriorating built environment. A zone also can be established in underdeveloped areas or those with platting and planning mechanisms that halt growth. Property owners may also petition to have a TIRZ created. Each of these mechanisms have been used as justification for creating TIRZs in Houston.

Houston contains 25 TIRZs.<sup>2</sup> The amount of money a TIRZ has at its disposal depends upon the amount of development that has occurred within the zone since its creation. Some like the Uptown and Downtown TIRZs have large budgets and the ability to participate in large-scale projects, such as the current bus rapid transit proposal in uptown or major street improvements downtown. Other TIRZs have been less successful

because development has not taken off as expected and little to no increment has been created.

While a TIRZ can have a standalone, appointed board of five to 15 members (nine if created by a petition), the creating government unit often makes a local redevelopment authority, which is a not-for-profit government corporation, the manager of the TIRZ funds. TIRZs and redevelopment authority boards are created in a similar manner. Both are appointed boards that consist of members from specific government units. Each taxing unit within the zone appoints at least one member and that number increases depending upon the ratio of a unit's taxable property within the TIRZ. In a petition-formed TIRZ, the state representative and state senator who represent the zone are also given a position. Once appointed, the TIRZ board creates an improvement plan that must be approved by the creating entity.

In a typical TIRZ, the increment is still split among several taxing jurisdictions. This split is worked out during the original creation of the TIRZ. Often increment money is still given to or used for education and mobility needs both inside and outside the district. In addition to having work plans renewed, the TIRZ itself must be reapproved periodically. Most TIRZs have a life span of 10 to 30 years.

Similar to the situation with MMDs, there is a TIRZ — the Upper Kirby TIRZ — in close proximity to Rice Village. The Village could be annexed by this existing entity. Again, though, this would dilute the Village's ability to focus on Village-centric projects.

In the past few years, TIRZs have been the subject of much political controversy. Because TIRZ money is most often dedicated to the TIRZ district, the entities have been accused of siphoning general tax revenues into wealthier areas. The negative press around TIRZs may make creating a new one politically untenable.

#### *Benefits of TIRZ for Rice Village:*

1. Creates a large fund of money that can be leveraged for immediate large projects. Biggest fund of all potential districts.
2. Local leaders and taxing entities possess the most power over TIRZs.
3. Creation is relatively quick and at the city's discretion.

#### *Challenges of TIRZ for Rice Village:*

1. Creation of TIRZs has become politically unpopular in Houston.
2. Requires a healthy increase in property tax growth. TIRZs work in quickly redeveloping areas, but are potentially not as fruitful for Rice Village area, which is relatively developed with no larger projects pending.
3. TIRZ boards contains representatives from many jurisdictions, complicating governance.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.houstontx.gov/ecodev/tirzmap.pdf>



#### *Pertinent Local Examples:*

- Downtown Redevelopment Authority TIRZ
- Upper Kirby TIRZ

## Sales Tax Increment Zone

Similar to the TIRZ, a Sales Tax Increment Zone is created by a municipality and uses increases in sales tax revenue above a set amount for the fund source. A Sales Tax Increment Zone must be attached to a larger existing entity such as a management district or a redevelopment authority. Once approved, a management district or authority would collect and manage the sales tax increment.

#### *Benefits of Sales Tax Increment for Rice Village:*

1. Creation is easy and can work with an existing authority.

#### *Challenges of Sales Tax Increment in Rice Village:*

1. Sales tax growth is needed to succeed. Not guaranteed and if slow to develop the increment produces little funding.
2. Existing authority is needed to manage an increment fund. Rice Village has no entity.
3. Approach has rarely been used in Houston. Would take more convincing of local stakeholders and politicians, especially considering the importance of sales tax revenue to local budgets in Texas.

#### *Pertinent Local Examples:*

- Midtown Sales Tax Increment Zone (economic development agreement rebate)

## Conclusion

Each of these options offers distinct advantages and disadvantages. Discussions of each option should be a part of any long-term decision making. Parking Benefits Districts, Municipal Management Districts, and Public Improvement Districts all offer meaningful local involvement, create small but helpful pools of funding, and have several well-functioning precedents upon which new entities could be based in both Houston and Texas.

From our point of view, the combination of a municipal management district and parking benefit district appears to represent a feasible and productive option. The two districts would mix local and state-level control, create a meaningful and consistent funding stream and provide for input from all local stakeholders.

## 3. Improving the Built Environment: Pedestrians, Placemaking and Wayfinding

If a management entity is created and begins to receive a revenue flow, the next question will be, what infrastructure improvements would most benefit Rice Village? Based on our analysis of the Village, it would appear as though a combination of pedestrian-friendly placemaking improvements and better wayfinding would provide the most value for the investment.

The Village is an auto-centric commercial space with the streetscape dominated by parking and active car lanes. However, the Village also is pedestrian friendly in scale and the nature of its shopping patterns — where people walk from shop complex to shop complex — creates many potential hazard points for conflicts between pedestrians and cars.

Moreover, the area lacks a clear sense of place. It has a shortage of gathering spaces in which users can rest or recreate. The area also is short on wayfinding, branding and informational signage. These shortcomings reduce the Village's ability to improve its business potential and, at the same time, contribute to the traffic congestion and parking problems. Without good pedestrian facilities, common spaces and wayfinding signage, visitors are more likely to come to the Village for a short time to visit one specific business and to seek parking only in close proximity to that business. Improved pedestrian facilities, common areas and wayfinding would encourage visitors to linger in the Village and walk from one business to another rather than drive. This would help ease parking problems and spend more money in the area.

The following examples are options for improving all of these conditions in the Rice Village area. Each example is a project that could be supported by the funds raised by any of the special district options. Some of the larger projects, such as road reconstruction, would require cooperation with government entities, especially the city of Houston. We offer examples from elsewhere in Houston, where possible.

The city of Houston's commitment to a complete streets effort (which aims to design streets for all users) offers an opportunity for a Village entity to work with city departments to improve the Rice Village area for drivers, pedestrians and people on bikes.

One potential approach to creating these improvements would be to embrace the principles proposed by Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia in their new work "Tactical Urbanism."<sup>3</sup> Lydon and Garcia argue that small-scale, temporary actions — such as changing a parking spot into a park for a month or adding temporary bike lanes to a road — can offer citizens a chance to experience potential changes without being saddled with huge start-up costs or permanent infrastructure. This approach allows for testing, feedback and refinement before permanent pieces are put into place. Rice Village stakeholders and city depart-

---

<sup>3</sup>Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, "Tactical Urbanism: Short-term Action for Long-term Change" (Island Press: Washington, D.C., 2015).



ments could work jointly to create test-projects, which can then be refined based on observation and public feedback.

## From Auto Centric to Pedestrian Centric

The car-centric design of Rice Village manifests itself most clearly on Rice and University Boulevards. Each roadway is dominated by active traffic lanes and on-street parking. On both streets, pedestrians are given very little room, with sidewalks that are 5 to 7 feet wide, as opposed to the more roomy width of 12 to 15 feet in more pedestrian-friendly areas.

Road reconfiguration offers one way to make these and other roads in the Rice Village area more pedestrian friendly. The city of Houston has a complete streets program in place and is committed to building roads that serve vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians. By reducing the amount of space devoted to automobile traffic lanes and parking, streets can have wider sidewalks with room for more amenities such as benches, bike racks and wayfinding signs. Likewise, green streets initiatives turn streets not only into more pedestrian-friendly spaces, but also into places that use landscaping and design elements to promote better drainage, lower water consumption and reduced heat island effects.

Houston already has an exemplary model of a complete and green street — Bagby Street. A joint project of Midtown Houston, a redevelopment authority which operates the Midtown TIRZ, and the city of Houston, the Bagby Street reconstruction turned a four-lane highway feeder road into a two-lane bike and pedestrian friendly space with wide sidewalks, pedestrian amenities and green landscaping. The project has been a



Bagby Street (Image: Midtown Houston)

rousing success and won numerous design awards. Rice Village could consider a similar type of project for any of its internal streets.

A special district would be an ideal entity to undertake such a project in cooperation with the city of Houston. Remaking the street to such a scale would require negotiation with and the cooperation of private landowners. A special district would already include key stakeholders from the commercial and tenant community.

## Wayfinding/Signage

Rice Village's lack of an overall brand identity and the absence of an organized local district body makes the creation and posting of effective wayfinding or other signage within the Village itself difficult.

There are very few wayfinding markers around Rice Village. Likewise, there is not a central website or smartphone application that easily presents all Village-area businesses and other opportunities. Improved wayfinding signage for the entire district, either physical or digital, could encourage shoppers to linger in the Village.

Initial wayfinding signage could begin as temporary, low-cost installations. The website Walk [Your City], for example, allows users to easily create signage with destinations and walking times that can be posted throughout an area to encourage pedestrian trips. The QR code on each sign could provide information about the destination — such as dinner menus or background about a site of interest.



Walk [Your City] Example from San Jose, CA.  
(Image: Richard Masoner/Flickr)

More permanent signage and wayfinding examples abound in Houston. The Uptown District in Houston presents an excellent model of the type of branding and signage that Rice Village might pursue.





**Uptown Houston Wayfinding and Branding**  
(Image: Uptown Houston)

## Creating Public Space

The Village lacks public and communal spaces. The few small courtyards on Village Arcade properties and the outdoor seating areas of various businesses are welcoming, but are private spaces where users are expected to be customers.

The absence of public, useable space drives potentially lingering shoppers away from the Village and represents a missed opportunity to bring additional users to the area for reasons other than shopping.

One need not look beyond Houston for examples of what public spaces can do for a commercial area. Discovery Green in downtown Houston and the green at CityCentre both offer excellent examples of how public space can anchor a shopping area and activity center.

Several potential solutions to these problems exist. Temporary events such as block parties, movie nights or concerts could be used to draw people to the Village. Physical changes to the area could also be implemented, most on a temporary, low-cost basis and then scaled up if successful.



**Discovery Green** (Image: Wikimedia Commons)



**CityCentre Green** (Image: Courtesy of CITYCENTRE)



## Parklets

Parklets are built by turning parking spaces into small, public spaces used for sitting, conversation or a meal. While there are hundreds of permanent parklets built in cities across America, they are often built first on a temporary, experimental basis. The City of Houston Parking Management District has teamed with community partners to install such temporary parklets on National Park(ing) Day, which aims to turn parking spots into parks for a single day. Here's an example from 2014 in Rice Village:



**Park(ing) Day Houston 2014, (Image: The Rice Design Alliance)**

Houston does have one permanent parklet, which opened in July 2014 along the 19th St. shopping corridor in the Heights neighborhood. The parklet was created through the cooperation of a private business and the city. The business, New Living Bedroom, gave up one of its assigned parking spots for the project. The 19th St. corridor, like the Rice Village area, lacks public seating and the parklet provides a rest and gathering spot for pedestrians traveling along the street. The busi-



**Houston Heights Parklet (Image: Raj Mankad)**

ness owner and city worked jointly to create the parklet. The business helped design and build the space. The city made sure it could legally be constructed.

Rice Village could consider both the temporary and permanent parklet options. Spaces that are directly in front of businesses with heavy foot traffic and existing sidewalks would be especially effective test cases. A temporary parklet assembled with cheap, removable materials could eventually give way to a more permanent installation.

### *Benefits of Parklets for Rice Village:*

1. Creates public space.
2. Easily built and tested. City of Houston has already cooperated on one.
3. Can be seasonal installations if need be.
4. Parking surplus makes them feasible.

### *Challenges of Parklets for Rice Village:*

1. Requires businesses or property owners to voluntarily give up a spot.
2. Placement of parklet could cause conflicts with tenants/owners who want to benefit from extra space or who contest the loss of parking spaces.

## Lots/Streets to Plazas

There are several examples across the country of shopping and commercial districts that have transformed parts of parking lots or public streets into pedestrian malls and plazas. The Rice Village area could consider converting less-trafficked streets or parts of surface lots into public spaces such as a pedestrian mall or plaza.

Again this could happen at first as one-off, pop-up events: surface lots could be used for markets or movie nights. A street section also could be closed for a block party or Sunday Streets event, where streets are closed for a half-day to encourage biking, walking and other exercise.

A temporary plaza or closed street could also transition toward permanence by following the same process of public plaza implementation at Times Square in New York City. Through a series of temporary steps, the city moved cars off, first one part then the entire length of Broadway through Times Square, eventually turning five blocks into a pedestrian plaza. The piecemeal testing and construction process allowed the city to gain information on users' interactions with the space and address potential problems. The plaza has made Times Square an even more welcoming and open gathering space.

### *Benefits of Plazas/Pedestrian Spaces for Rice Village:*

1. Conversion could create public or greenspace.
2. Creates a pedestrian-only space for relaxation, programming or additional seating for area businesses.
3. Either part of a parking lot or section of a street could be used for conversion.
4. Public spaces promote walking within the district.





New York (Images: Jim Henderson/Wikimedia Commons; Mario Roberto Durán Ortiz/Wikimedia Commons)

5. Easily created using relatively cheap materials.
6. Can be pursued at first on a temporary basis and then scaled up or back depending on response.
7. Can be created by the city in cooperation with merchants/property owners.

#### *Challenges of Plazas/Pedestrian Spaces for Rice Village:*

1. Placement and duration of projects difficult to negotiate.
2. Programming, equipping and maintaining spaces requires cooperation of city and merchants/owners.
3. Closing streets or parking lots might create traffic flow issues.

## Sidewalks and Crosswalks

Sidewalk improvement and repair represent some of the most needed infrastructure and public space improvements in Rice Village. Several areas have awkward, nonaccessible curb heights and stairs. Others have disconnected or poorly maintained sidewalks. In many locations sidewalks lead pedestrians into parking lots. In the larger parking lots there are no pedestrian walkways, and walkers and cars openly mix.

The Village's position between two major north-south roadways means that a large amount of through traffic crosses the district. University Boulevard is particularly difficult to cross. The only light-controlled pedestrian crosswalks on University Boulevard are at Kirby Drive and Morningside Drive, which are nearly one-quarter mile apart. There are two uncontrolled crosswalks at the intersection of Kelvin Drive and University, but on the southside these feed directly into parking spots. Many pedestrians jaywalk because of the lack of midstreet crosswalks. Moreover, crosswalks at all nonlight controlled intersections are small, and cars rarely yield to pedestrians as required by state law.

In addition to funding rudimentary sidewalk repairs and completing the construction of sidewalks throughout the area, a

special district or the city might pursue several other physical improvements to help create a safer environment for both pedestrians and drivers.

### General Sidewalk Amenities

A number of relatively simple amenities could greatly enhance the pedestrian landscape in the Rice Village area.

- **Trees and Landscaping:** There are very few shade trees beyond Morningside Drive and almost no street greenery throughout the Village. Improved landscaping could enhance the user experience immensely.
- **Benches and seating areas:** Separate from larger scale improvements such as parklets, the installation of benches or street furniture could make people more likely to walk from store to store and see the Village as a space for mingling, relaxing and experiencing.
- **Public Art:** Whether through murals, painted intersections (see below) or temporary installations, public art would help make the district more vibrant and create additional draws to the area.

Direct improvements to the existing infrastructure through small amenities would be a good first step but can only go so far. To most effectively address pedestrian issues, larger-scale projects will be necessary. A few suggested ideas are outlined below.

### Bulb-out/Extended Curbs at Intersections

One of the simplest ways to improve pedestrian safety is to shorten the distance pedestrians are crossing and to improve drivers' ability to see them by building bulb out or extended curbs at intersections. These improvements are now becoming common practice across the nation.



As shown in the image below, a bulb out curb consists of extending the space where pedestrians wait to enter a crosswalk by a few feet into the roadway from its existing position in line with the roadway.



(Image: Dylan Passmore)

The Bagby Street Project again presents an interesting example of this approach.



Bagby Street with Bulb-out Curb (Image: Midtown Houston)

The brick section of this sidewalk leading up to the bollards is an extension of the corner into the intersection. This type of improvement works well at corners that are adjacent to perpendicular or on-street parking.

#### *Benefits of Curb Extensions for Rice Village:*

1. Improves pedestrian safety: Increases pedestrian visibility; shortens crossing distance; reduces turning speeds; increases size of pedestrian waiting areas.
2. Creates additional space for street amenities.
3. Reduces illegal parking at corners, crosswalks and bus stops.
4. Can be constructed without remaking entire streets.
5. Could be built at first as temporary elements.

#### *Challenges of Curb Extensions for Rice Village:*

1. Requires alerting drivers to new structures/controls.
2. Could cause traffic backups until drivers are accustomed to new patterns.
3. Could result in the removal of one or two parking spaces per intersection.

#### **Crosswalk Visibility**

Another, even simpler, way to improve pedestrian safety would be to make existing and future crosswalks more visible to drivers. Crosswalks might be painted in bolder colors to increase visibility. They could be rebuilt with materials that are different from the road itself, such as brick or pavers. Finally, they could be raised slightly above the height of the road surface. All these methods act as a signal to drivers to be aware of and to yield to pedestrians.

Painting a crosswalk or intersection with a striking pattern or image not only functions as a nice form of public art (the painting of it could be used as a public event), but it also alerts drivers to the potential presence of pedestrians. Midtown Houston recently installed a painted intersection at the corner of Louisiana Street and Elgin Street. The image below is particularly bright crosswalk from Vancouver.



(Image: Anita Hart)



Crosswalks made out of different materials accomplish a similar safety outcome by demarcating pedestrian space. When spaces are outlined cars tend to stop well behind the intersection at marked stop lines, rather than leaking into the pedestrians space. Bagby Street in Houston used darker concrete to offset some of its crosswalks.



**Bagby Street with Bulb-out Curb (Image: Midtown Houston)**

Raised crosswalks or speed tables are the final form of intersection improvement that can signal to drivers to slow down and be aware of pedestrians. Raised crosswalks require more resources and reconstruction than either painted or materially demarcated crosswalks. But they also offer the most benefit for slowing vehicles, especially if they are located midblock.



**(Image: Wikimedia Commons)**

***Benefits of Crosswalk Visibility for Rice Village:***

1. Less vehicle encroachment on pedestrian space.
2. Greater visibility of pedestrians.
3. Public art/decorative opportunities.
4. Traffic calming outcomes.

***Challenges of Crosswalk Visibility for Rice Village:***

1. Requires the collection of resources and participation of city departments.
2. Could cause traffic backups until drivers are accustomed to new structures.
3. Construction could disrupt commerce.

**Midblock Crosswalks and Pedestrian Stoplights**

As mentioned above University Boulevard currently only has two stoplight-controlled crosswalks, approximately a quarter-mile apart. Because there are businesses on both sides of the street, however, customers routinely jaywalk. Constructing a controlled midblock crosswalk could help address the situation.

The photo below demonstrates a permanent midblock crosswalk with a stoplight.



**Toronto (Image: Dylan Passmore, Wikimedia Commons)**

The Norfolk, Va., example on the next page shows how a midblock intersection can also be installed as a temporary measure. Again, this can allow time for testing and observation of usage, traffic-flow changes and efficacy. Midblock crosswalks can be outfitted with additional protections by painting or raising them.





Norfolk, VA (Image: Norfolk Better Block)

*Benefits of Midblock Crosswalks for Rice Village:*

1. Safer crossing at midblocks. Less jaywalking, more visible pedestrians.
2. Encourages shop-hopping by customers.
3. Can be put in temporarily.
4. Traffic calming outcomes.
5. Implementable by city of Houston.

*Challenges of Midblock Crosswalk Visibility for Rice Village:*

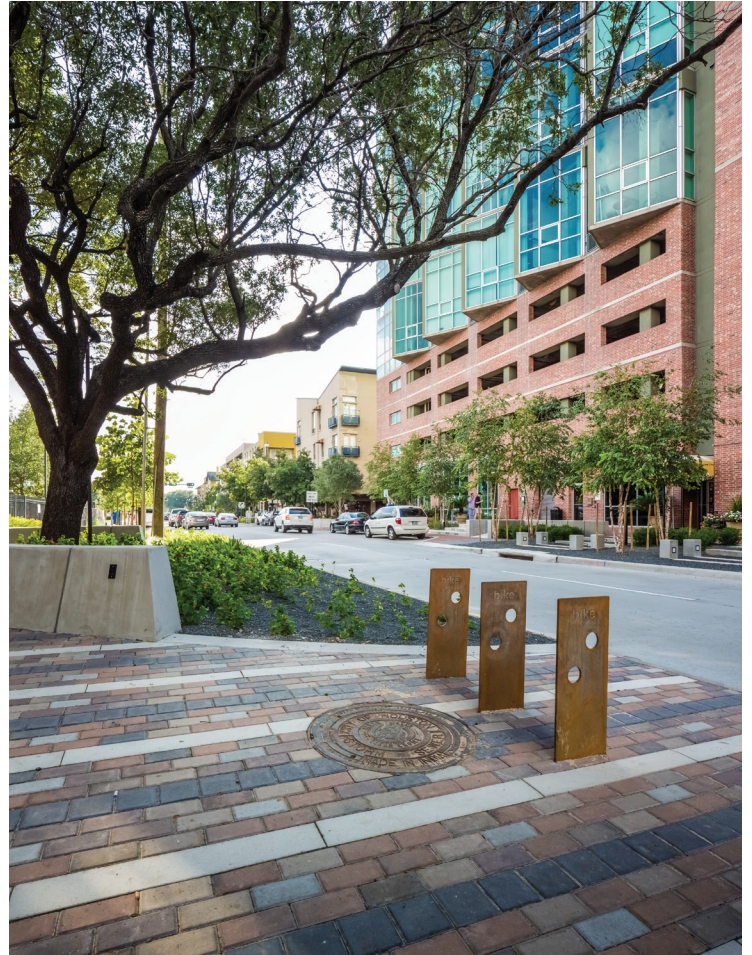
1. Requires collaboration between city departments and tenants/property owners.
2. Could cause traffic backups until drivers are accustomed to new structures.
3. Construction could disrupt commerce.
4. Businesses losing parking spaces might object.

**Biking Infrastructure**

Similar to the majority of Houston, the Rice Village area is lacking bicycle infrastructure of any kind. Biking is gaining popularity in the city, and there are a number of growing off-street pathways. On-street facilities and protections for cyclists are deficient, however. In the Village there are no marked bike lanes. There are very few bike racks. The racks that do exist are often on the interior of parking lots, requiring bikers to ride through active lots. Pull-in parking spots likewise present a major threat to bikers who are in the main traffic lanes behind them.

The most basic step in making the Village more bicycle friendly would be to install more bike racks in convenient and visible spaces. The Midtown District has installed artistic yet functional racks along Bagby.

Most pedestrian improvements, particularly those that would result in more controlled intersections, would also benefit cyclists. Additional improvement projects could be connected to other general street redesigns or reconstruction.



Bike Racks on Bagby (Image: Midtown Houston)



Houston's first protected bike lane (Image: Whit Bones)



Adding signage, sharrows and bike lanes to Rice Village streets could help encourage more users to bike to the district. Bike improvements could prove incredibly fruitful if they are connected to existing bike-friendly streets and included as a part of the Houston Bike Plan process, which is currently underway. These features have been added in many cities on a temporary basis using road tape to test routes and traffic patterns. Rice Village should also consider working with the B-Cycle Program to add bike-share stations to the area.

Protected bike lanes in the district would solve some of the most pressing bicycle issues by separating cyclists from traffic with parked cars or some other barrier. Houston recently opened its first protected bike lane on Lamar Street downtown, so there is a precedent for these lanes in the city.

#### *Benefits of Biking Infrastructure Rice Village:*

1. Bike-friendly space could encourage more people on bikes.
2. Could connect to wider city bike network.
3. Can help make Village area safer for people on bikes.
4. Village could take advantage of city of Houston commitments to complete streets and bike master plan.
5. Many solutions can be installed as temporary, evaluative measures.

#### *Challenges of Biking Infrastructure for Rice Village:*

1. Requires collaboration between city departments and tenants/property owners.
2. Negotiating pull-in parking spaces and bikes could be difficult.
3. Perceptions of low bike ridership may effect support for improvements.
4. If protected lanes are selected, construction could cause disruption.

## **Additional Recommendations**

1. Conduct further design work on pedestrian improvements, possibly with a second, more defined Rice Design Alliance charrette component to augment one done in 2014.
2. Consider bringing in a walkability consultant to do a more in-depth analysis of the built environment needs in Rice Village.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing Rice Village's most pressing problems — parking, the lack of an identity or special district organization, and infrastructure issues — would allow the area to build upon its existing success. This report has laid out several possible ways that area stakeholders might begin this effort.

Others will certainly possess different ideas about what the Village's problems are and how we ought to respond to them. The Kinder Institute welcomes these thoughts and encourages a wide-ranging conversation about Rice Village's future.







**The mission of the Kinder Institute is to:**

- Advance understanding of the most important issues facing Houston and other leading urban centers through rigorous research, policy analysis and public outreach; and
- Collaborate with civic and political leaders to implement promising solutions to these critical urban issues.