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Georgia Planning Association  
Spring Conference

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**Deciding the Fate of the  
Heart of Savannah:  
*The Civic Legacy Project***

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*March 13, 2025*

**Facility**

**Community**

**Future**

# ***Strategic Approach***

**Facility**

**Community**

**Future**

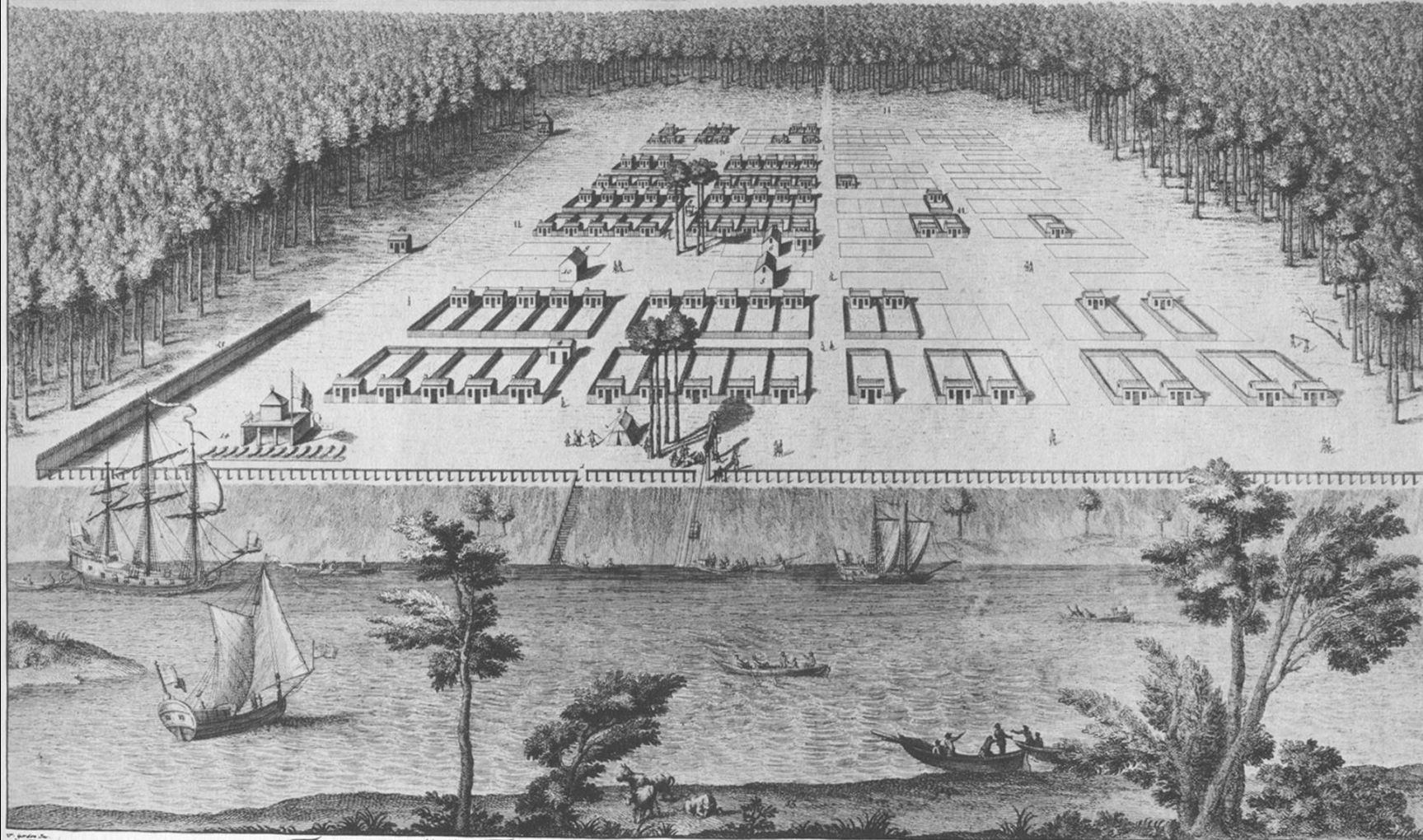


# Facility

***Overview and Background...***

**A Brief Overview of  
Elbert & Jackson Wards**

# In the Beginning...

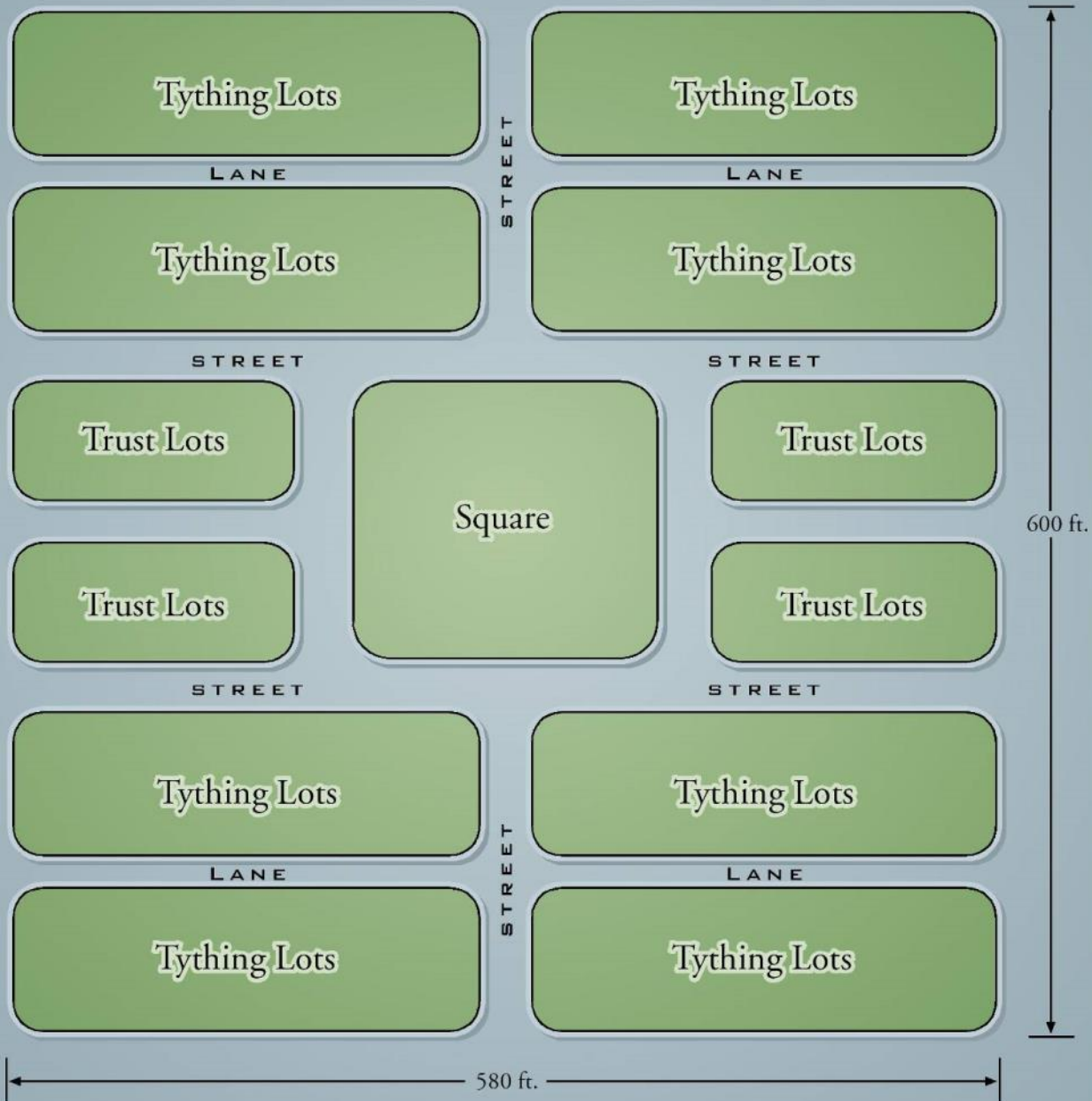


1. The ships going up.
2. Mr. Oglethorpe's Tent.
3. The Crane & Bell.
4. The Tabernacle & Court House.
5. The publick Mills.
6. The House for Strangers.
7. The publick Oven.
8. The down M<sup>l</sup>l.

To the Hon.<sup>ble</sup> the Trustees for establishing the Colony of Georgia in America  
This View of the Town of Savannah is humbly dedicated by their Honours

Obliged and most Obedient Servant  
Peter Gordon

9. The Lot for the Church.
10. The publick Store.
11. The Fort.
12. The Prisoners House.
13. The Palisades.
14. The Guard House and Battery of Cannon.
15. Hutchinsons Island.





1733



1735



1790



1799



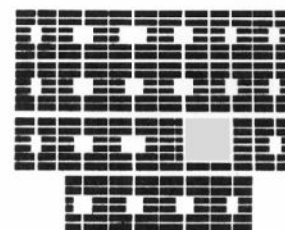
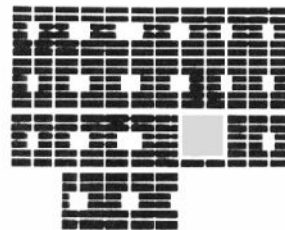
1801

1841



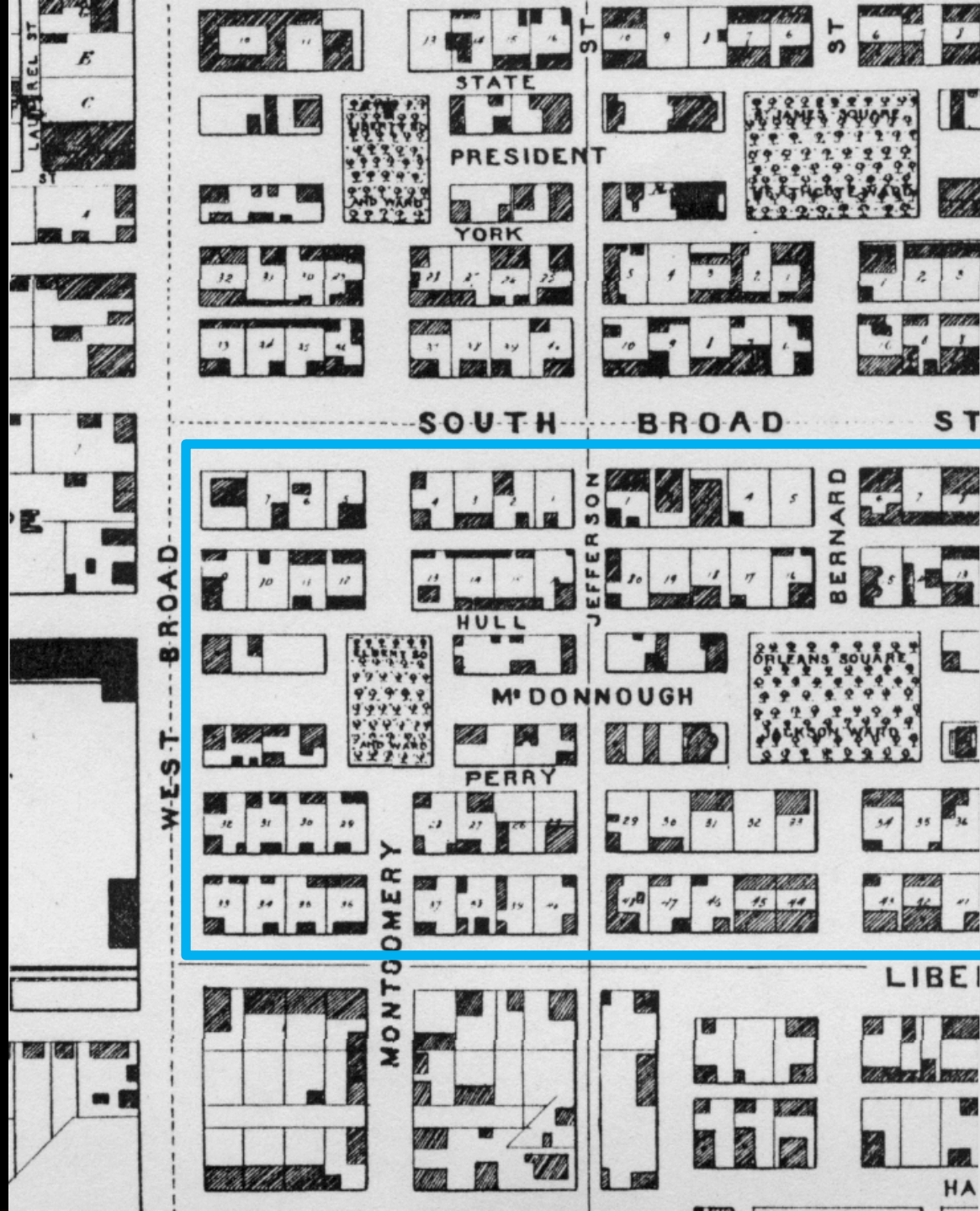
1815

1856



***Elbert and  
Orleans  
Laid Out  
in Early 1800's***





*Early  
Development  
Pattern*







*Elbert Square*



	M	
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F R A N K L I N		
	N	
	T	
S Q U A R E		
	G	
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	L I B E R T Y	
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	Y	
	S Q U A R E	

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S Q U A R E		
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**1930's**  
**Loss of Three**  
**Squares**



***The Former Civic Auditorium  
On Orleans Square....***



***The Municipal Auditorium on Orleans Square***



*From the Ralph Mark Gilbert Civil Rights Museum, Frederic Baldwin Collection*

***Later Developments...***

**Greatest Hits  
of the  
60's 70's and 80's...**



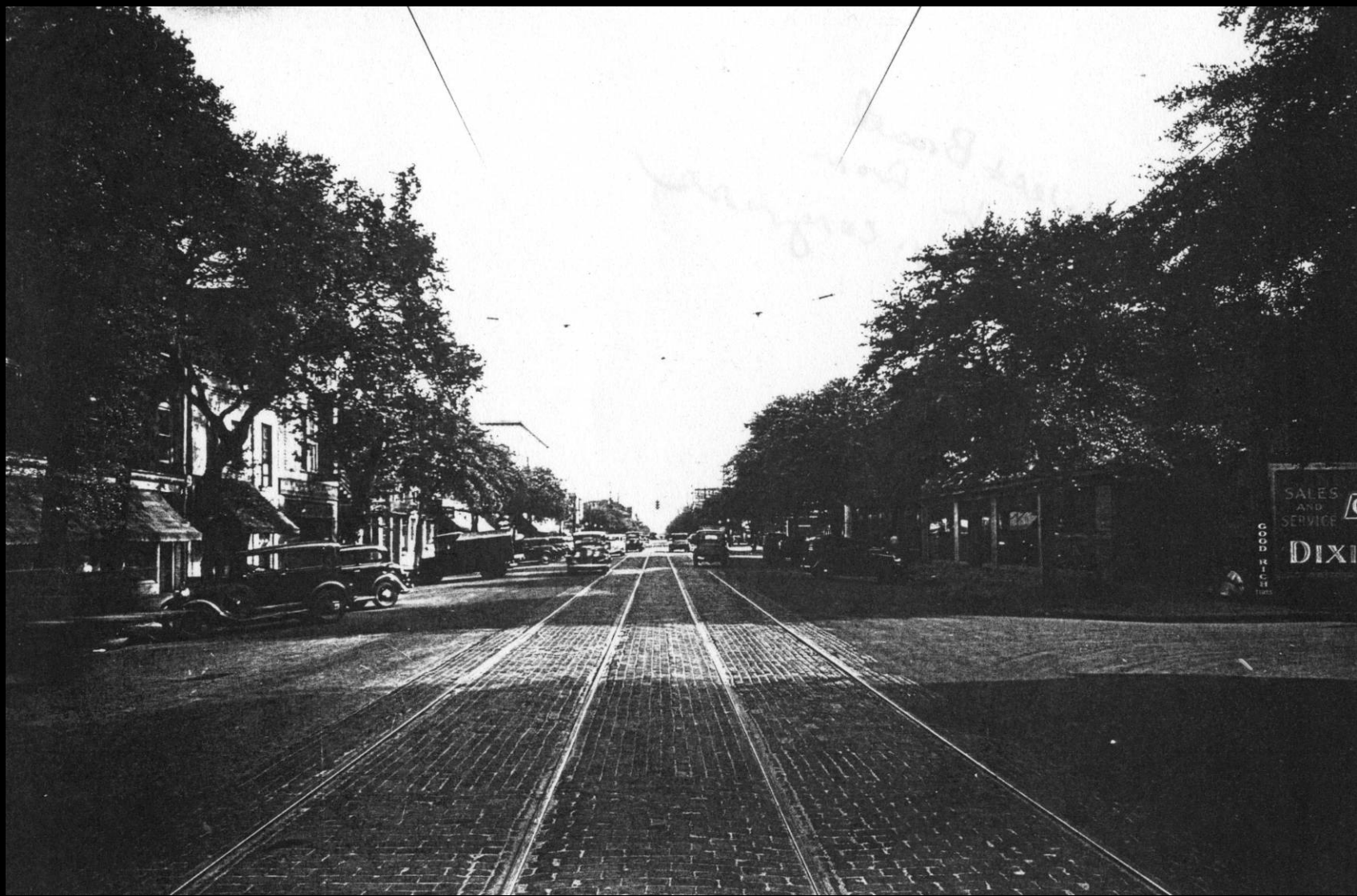








**Evolution & Loss...**







1955

Elbert  
Square

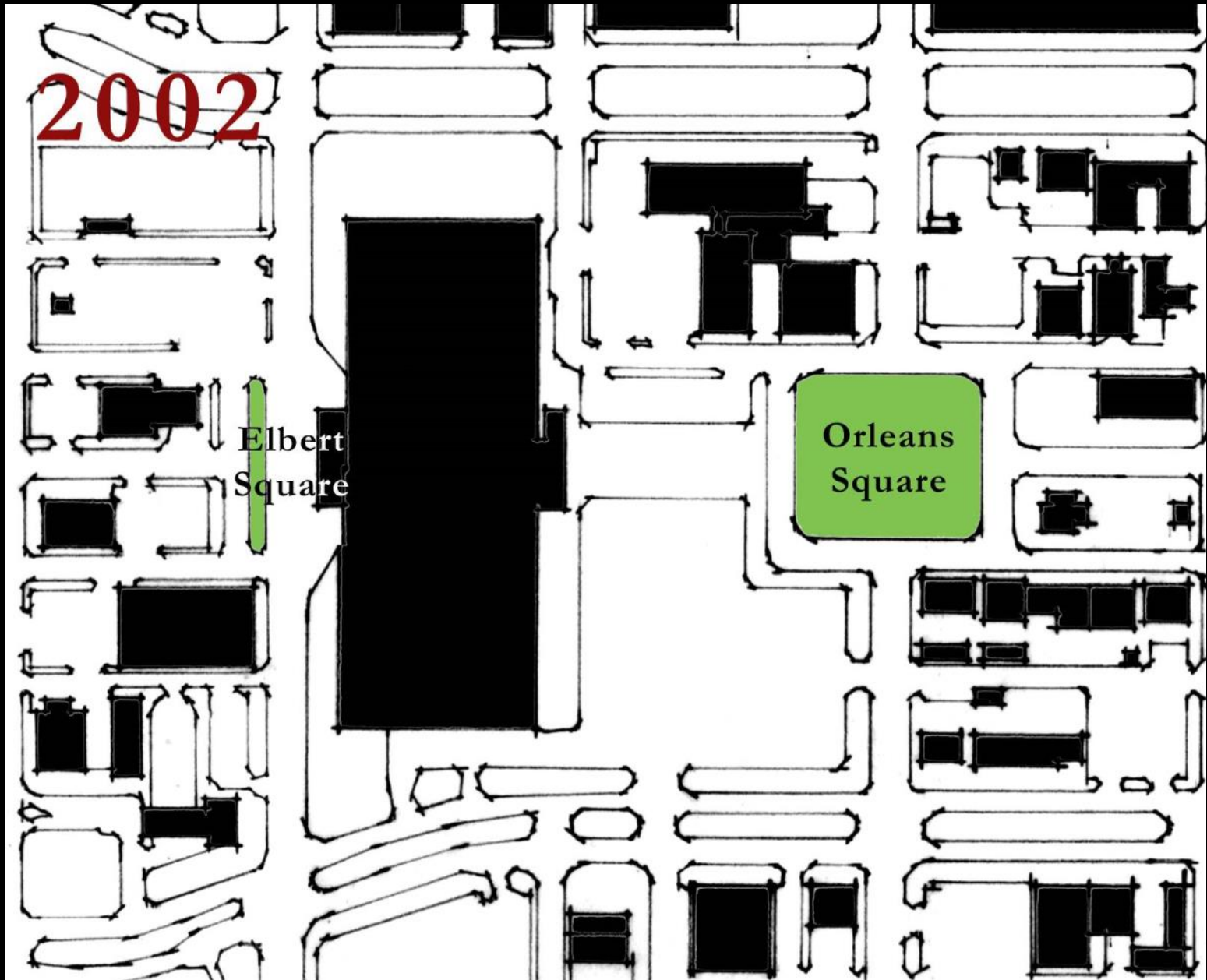
Orleans  
Square



2002

Elbert  
Square

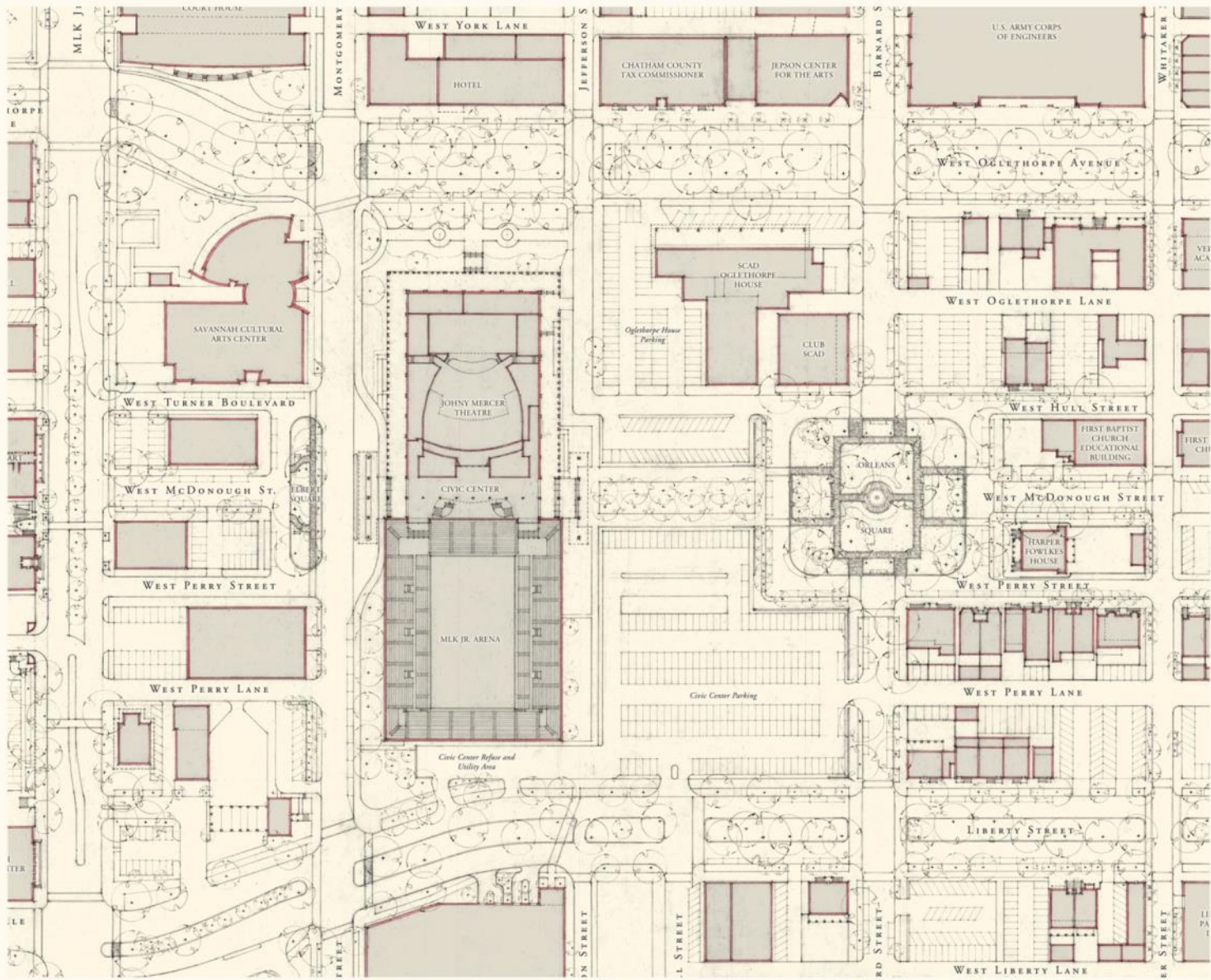
Orleans  
Square



# Evaluating the Site...

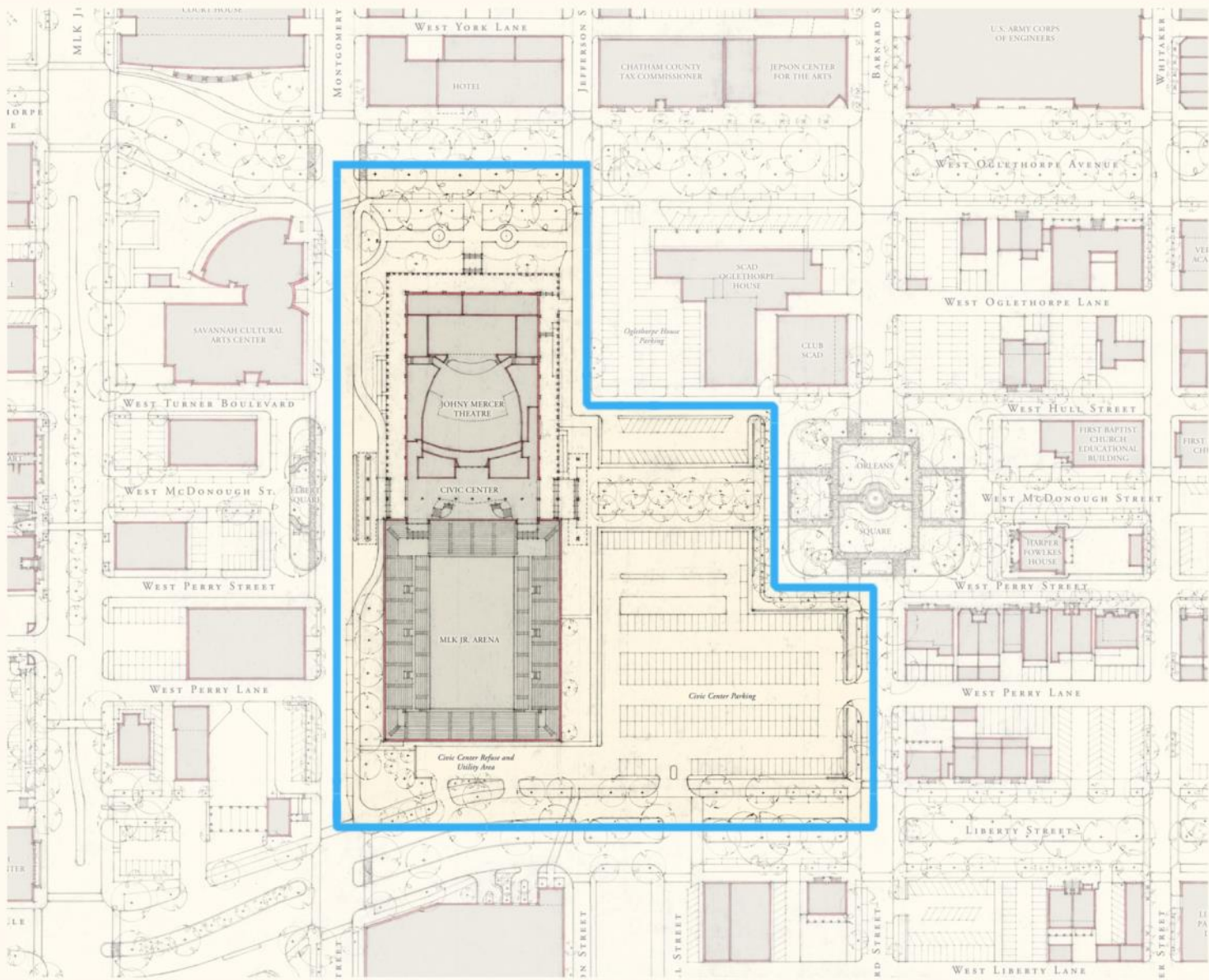
*Old Civic Center Complex*





## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

### *Existing Elbert-Orleans Wards*



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## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

### *Existing Civic Center Site*

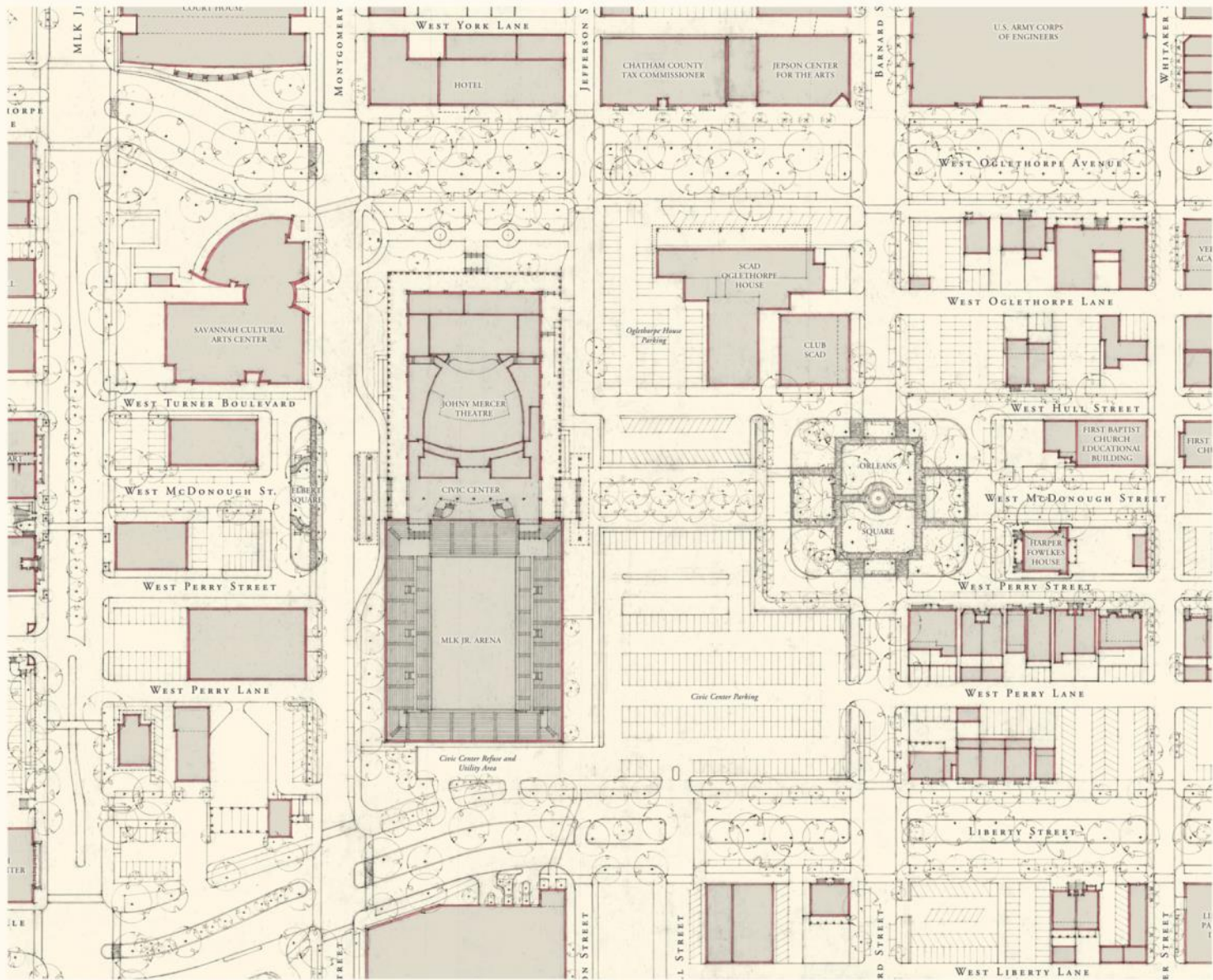
# The Civic Center Structure

*Urban Overview...*





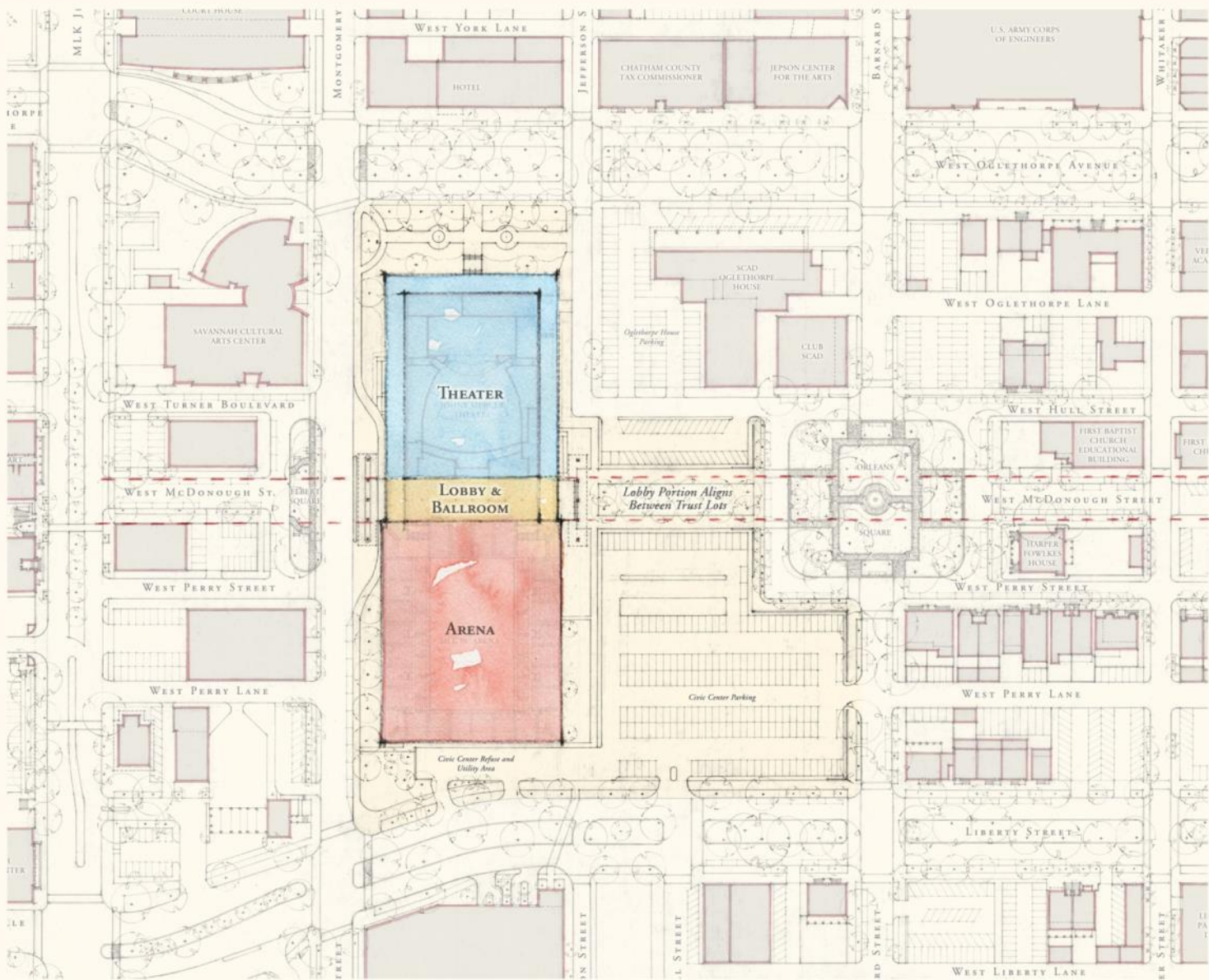
**How the Building Works...**



## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

### *Existing Elbert-Orleans Wards*





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## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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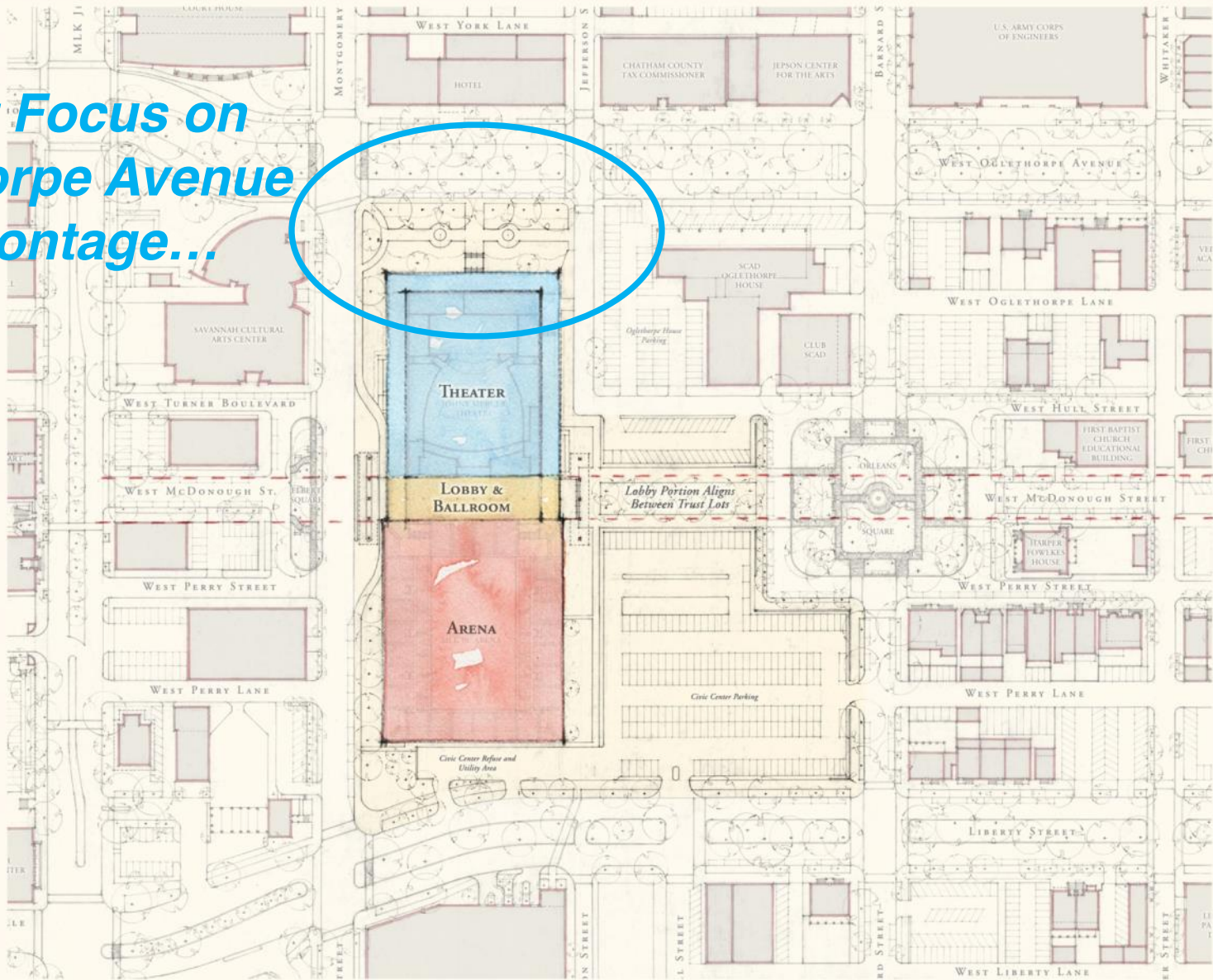
### *Key Components of the Existing Civic Center*



**The Civic Center and its frontages**



*First Focus on  
Oglethorpe Avenue  
Frontage...*



—CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES—

*Key Components of the Existing Civic Center*





***Oglethorpe Avenue  
An Unsuccessful Frontage Condition...***





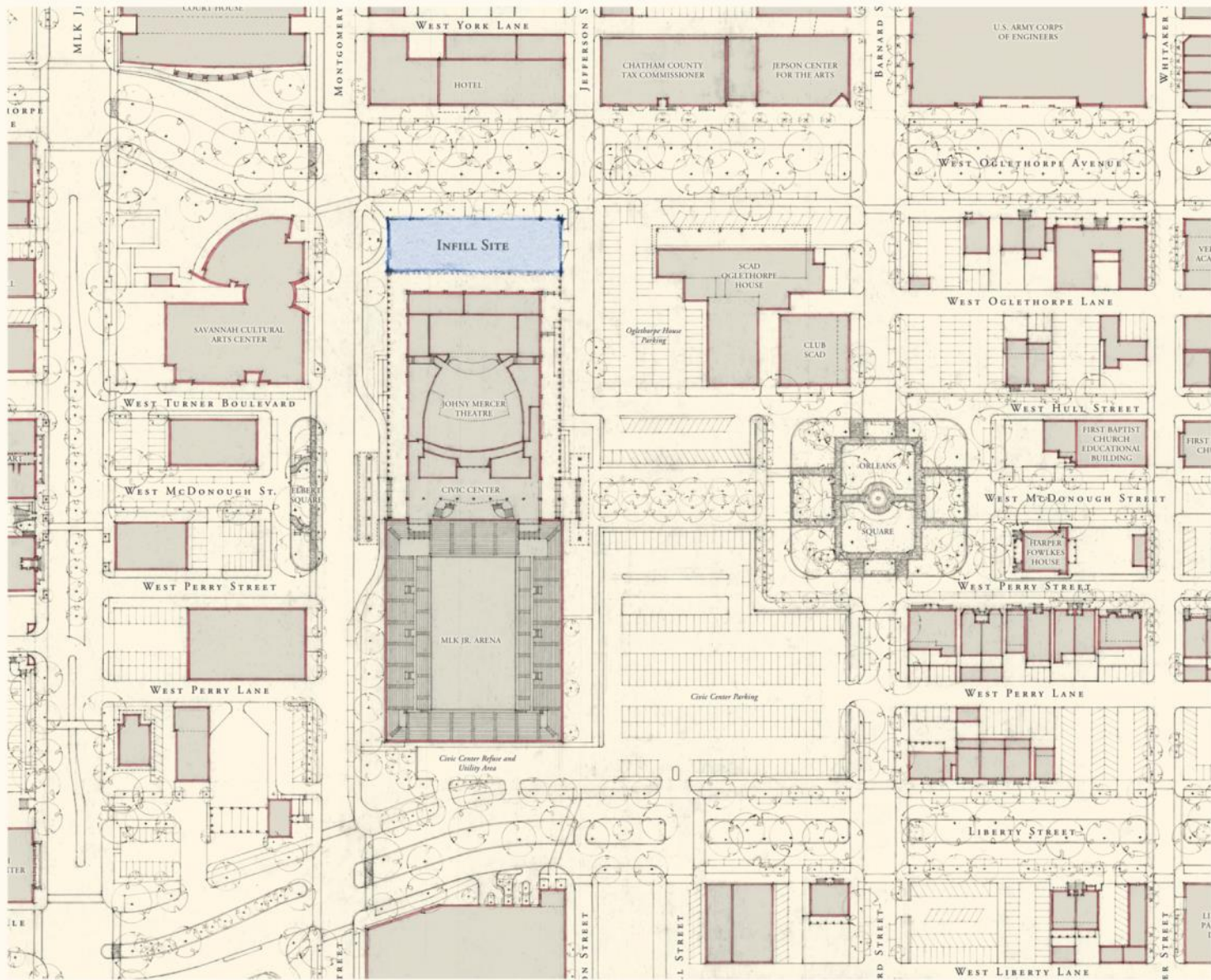


NO  
SKATEBOARDING

ATTENTION REQUIRED

PLEASE BE CAREFUL WHEN CROSSING THE STREET. THE CROSSWALK IS LOCATED AT THE CORNER OF THE STREET AND THE AVENUE. THE CROSSWALK IS MARKED WITH WHITE PAINT AND IS LOCATED AT THE CORNER OF THE STREET AND THE AVENUE. THE CROSSWALK IS MARKED WITH WHITE PAINT AND IS LOCATED AT THE CORNER OF THE STREET AND THE AVENUE. THE CROSSWALK IS MARKED WITH WHITE PAINT AND IS LOCATED AT THE CORNER OF THE STREET AND THE AVENUE.





Potential for 60,000 or 120,000SF of Space for Infill

Mixed-Use Retail / Office / Municipal Space





***Large Infill Site on Oglethorpe Avenue***



***Recent Mixed-Use Space  
in the City Center...***

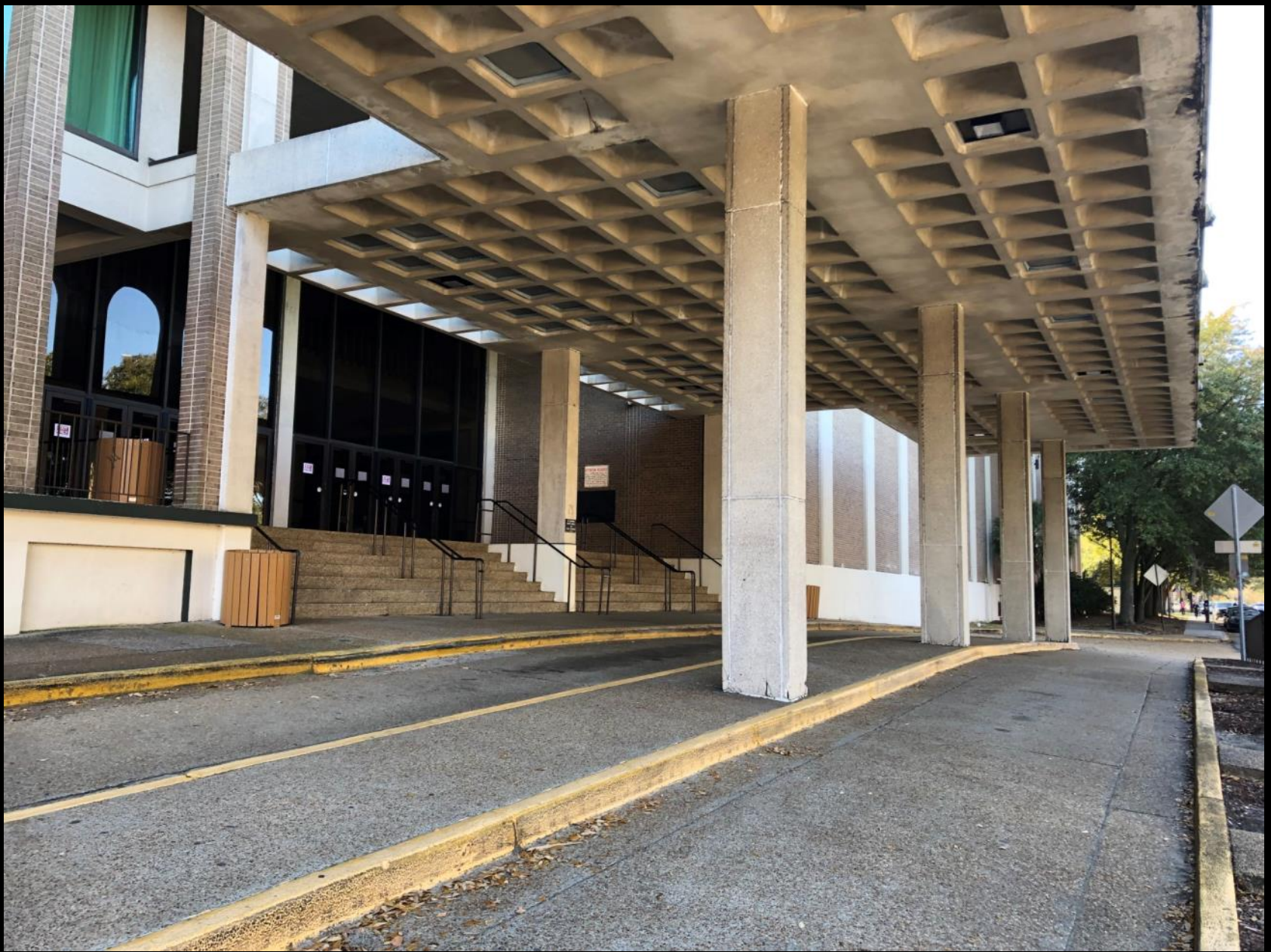


***Retail and U.S. Attorneys Offices, Ellis Square***

# **The Johnny Mercer Theatre**

## ***Taking a closer look***





***Entrance Can be Challenging for Pedestrians and Visitors***





***The Existing Civic Center Lobby***





© Sean Sellers

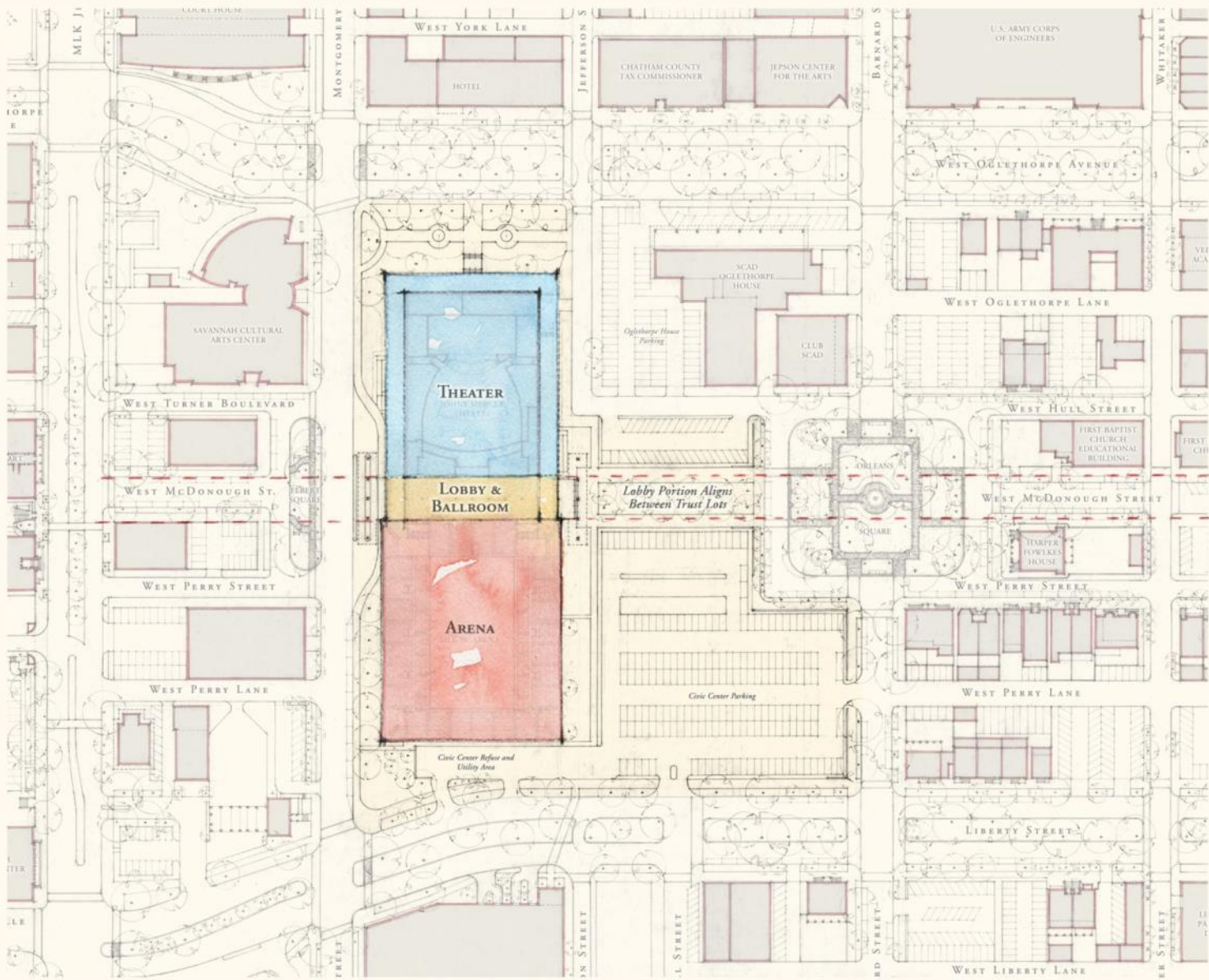
***The Theater can be Retained, Renovated, and Provide Continued use to the Community***





*The Civic Center Community Ballroom*

***Now to the Old Arena...***



## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

### *Key Components of the Existing Civic Center*









***New City Arena***



***Is Retaining the Arena a Practical  
Option?***

## ***Observing the Current State of the Civic Center...***

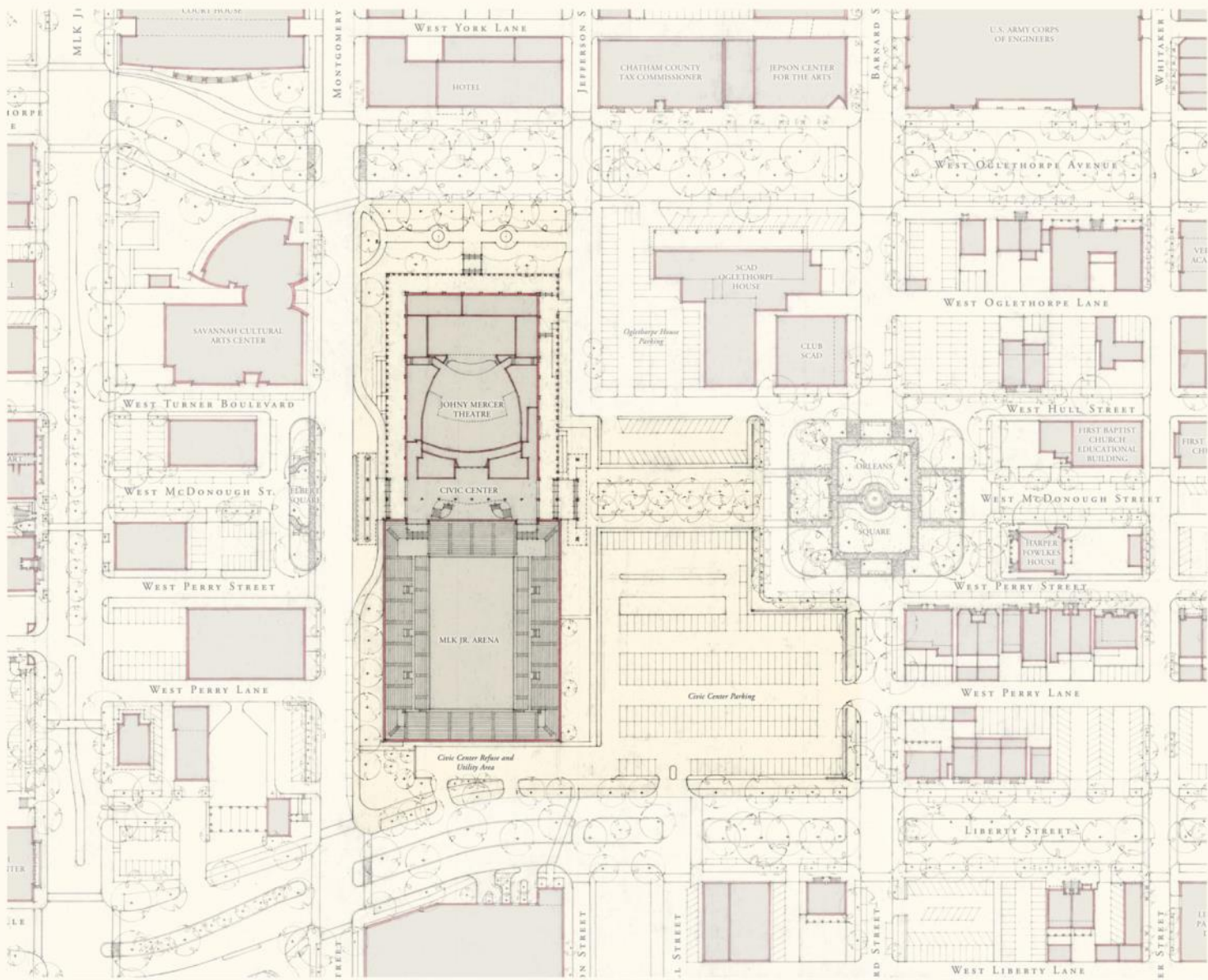
- The Johnny Mercer Theatre is still profitable and serves a unique function.
- The Old Arena is not profitable and no longer serves a unique function.
- Significant Repairs to Old Arena needed.

# *Conceptual Studies for Redeveloping the Civic Center*

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## **Restoration of Elbert and Jackson Wards**

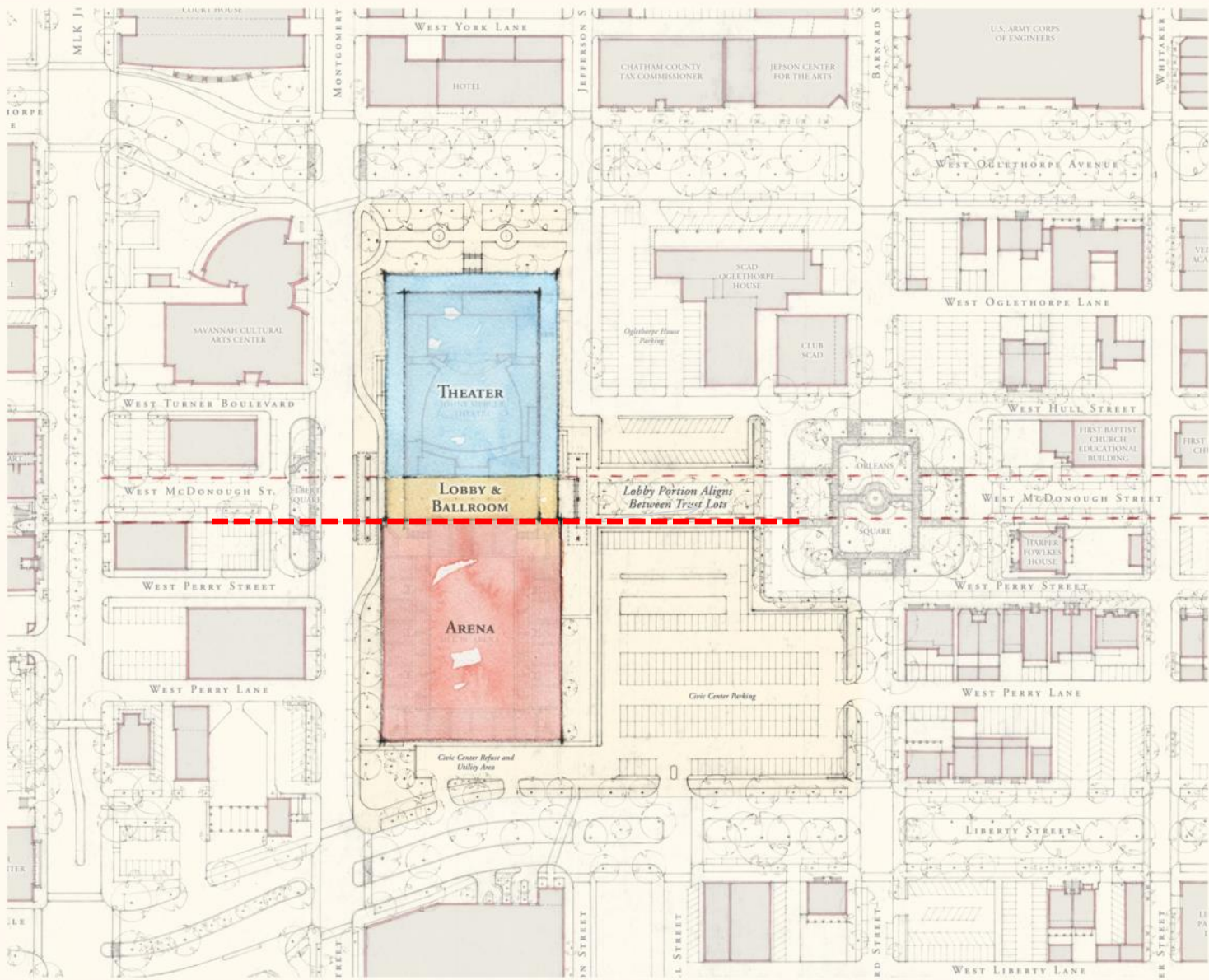


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## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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### *Existing Civic Center Site*



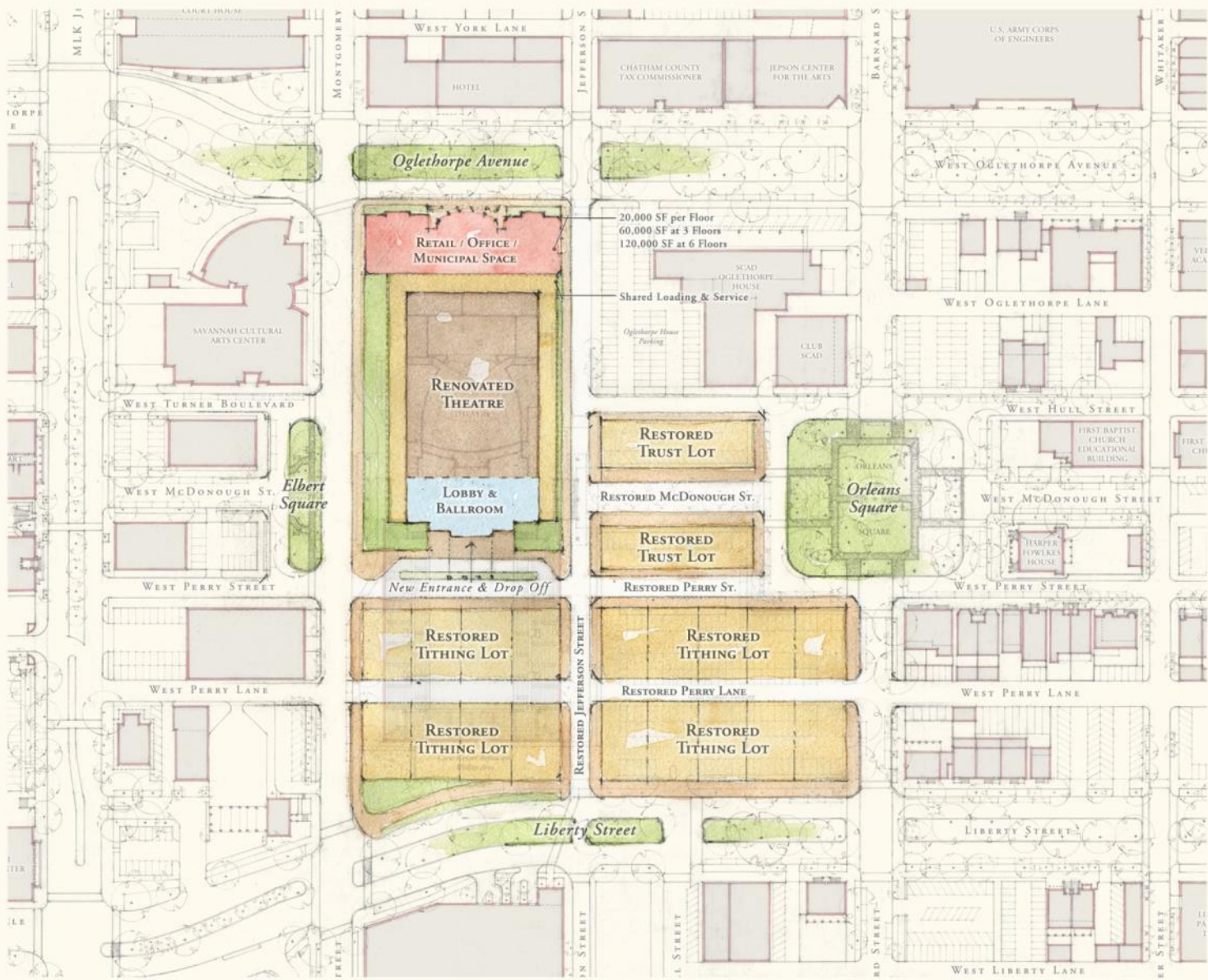
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## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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### *Key Components of the Existing Civic Center*



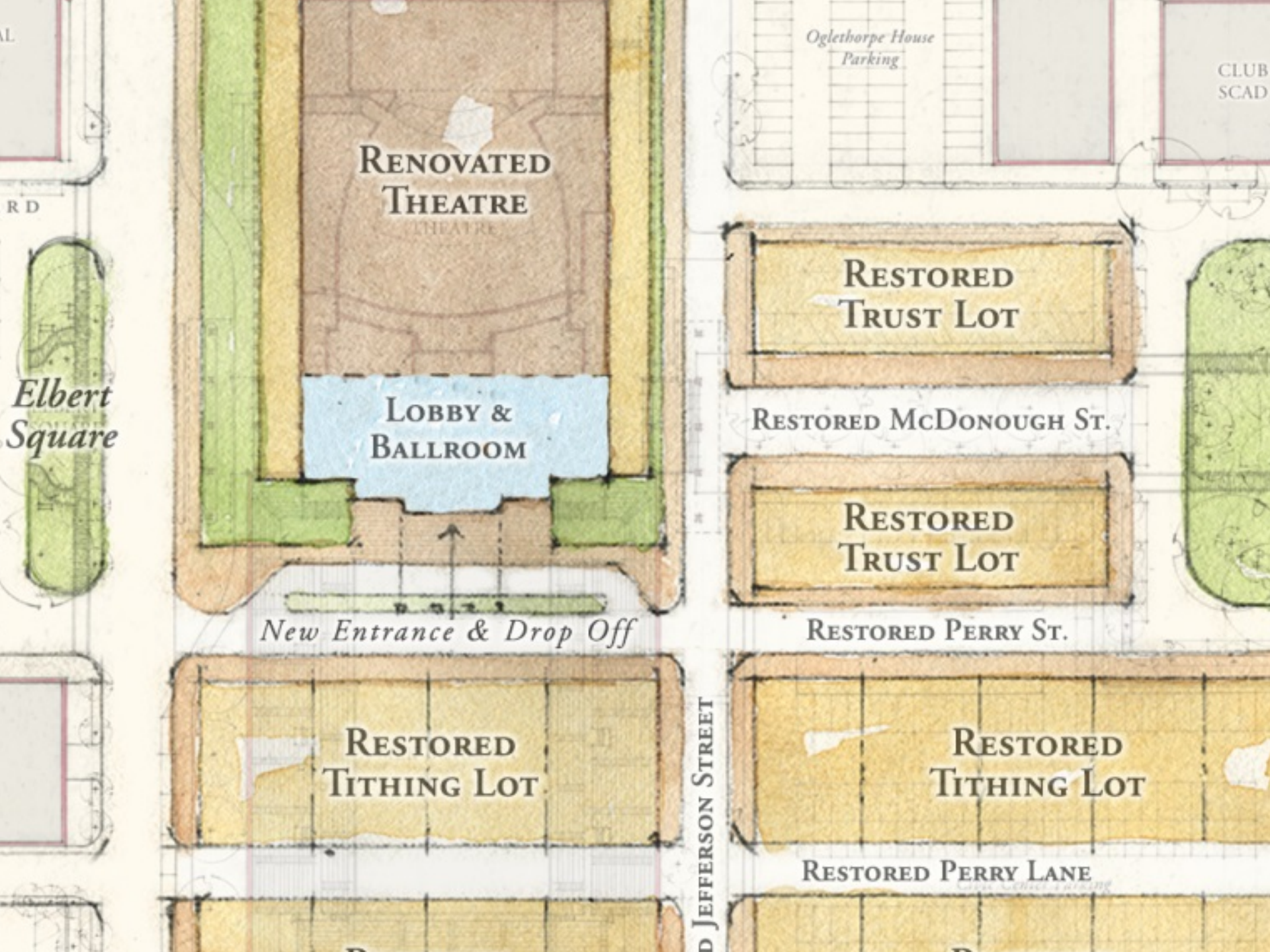
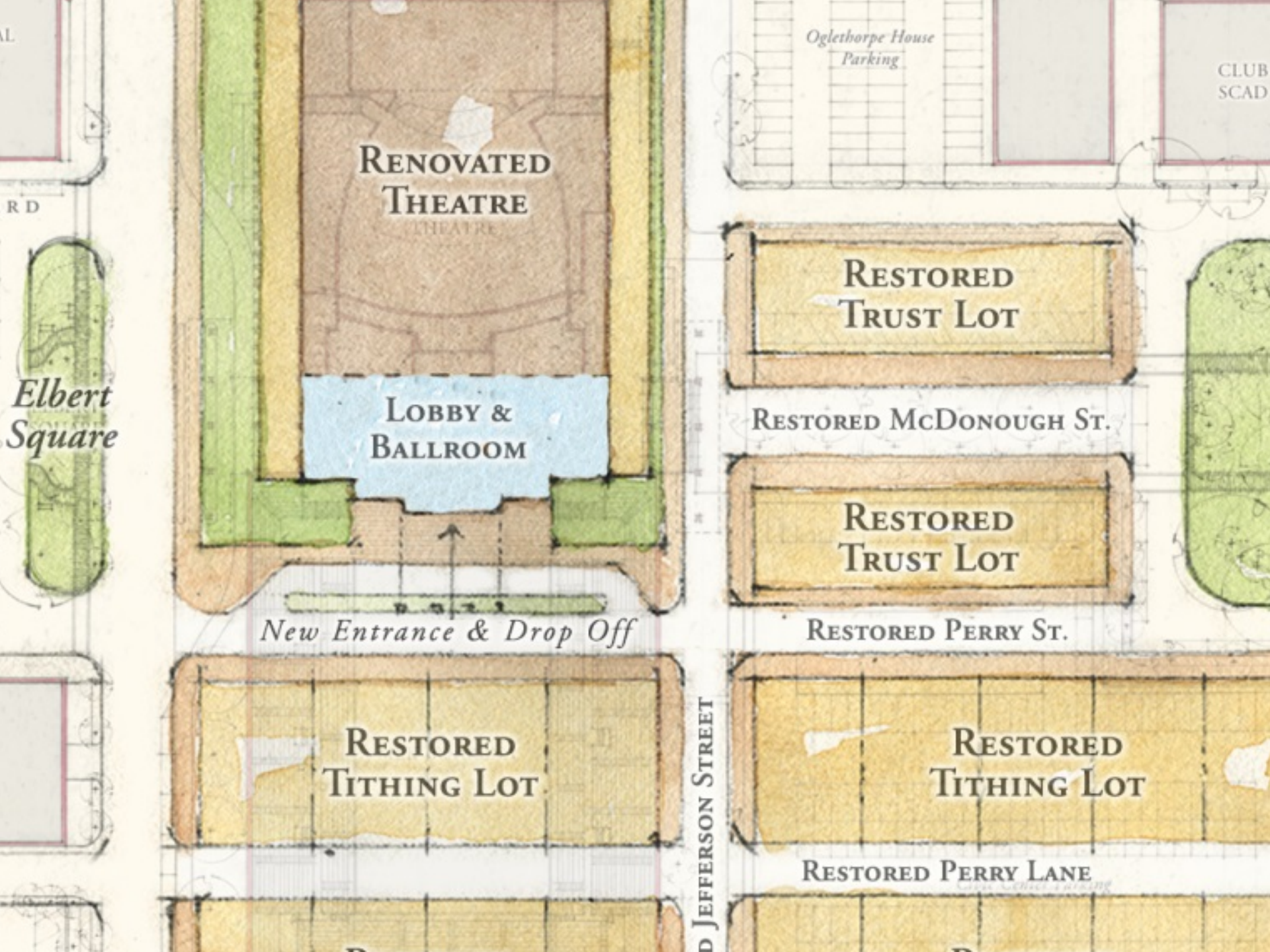
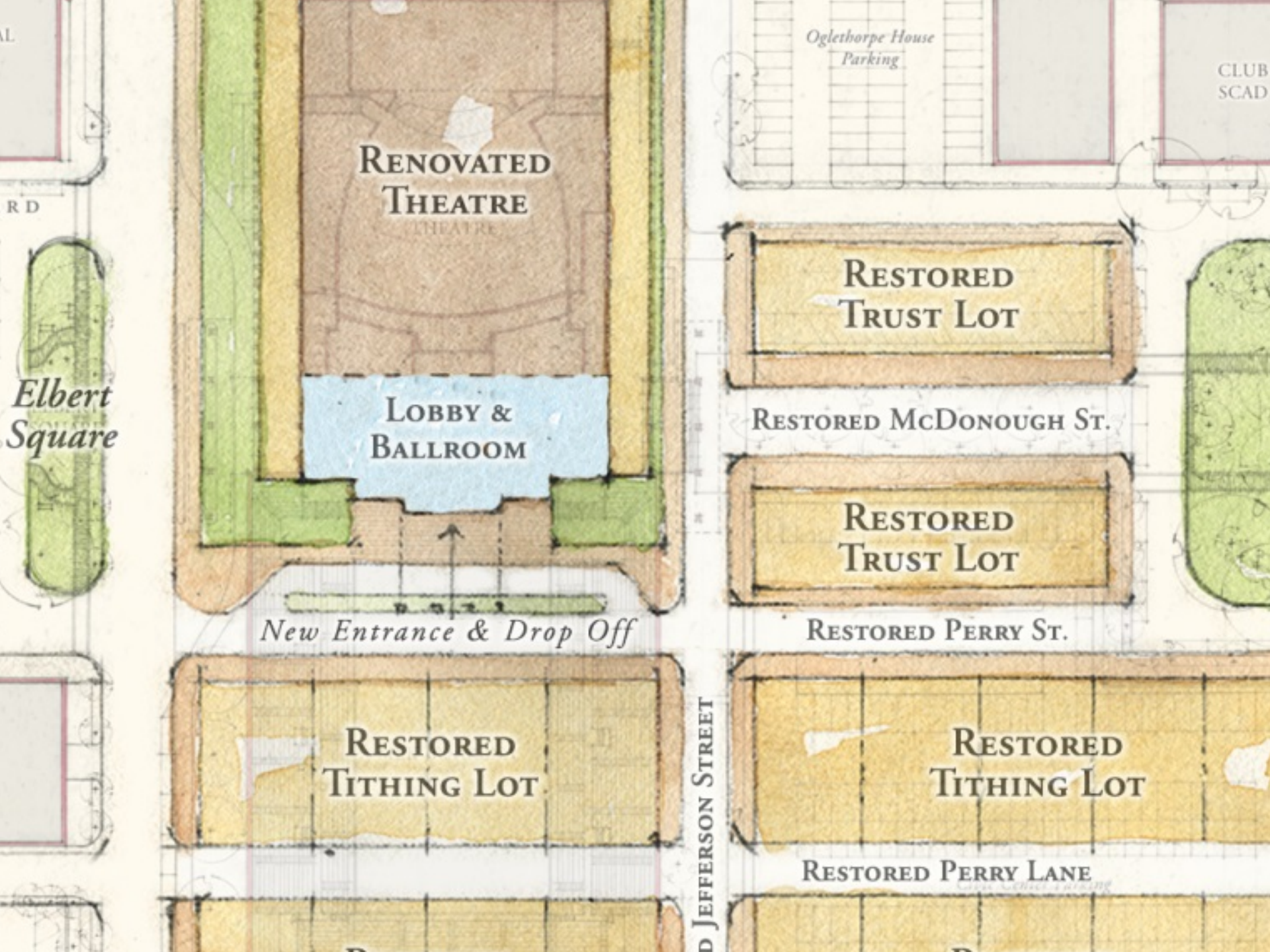
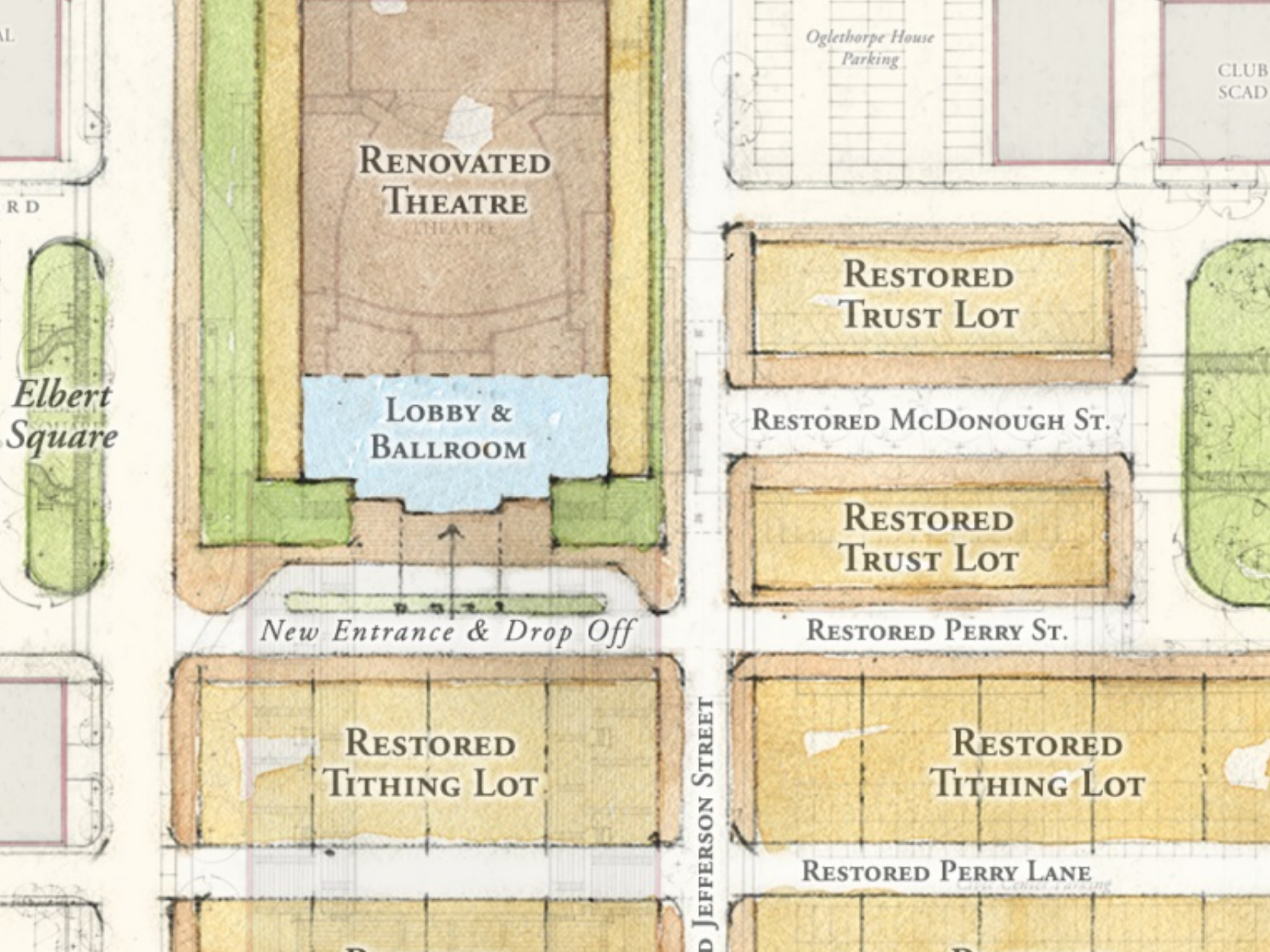
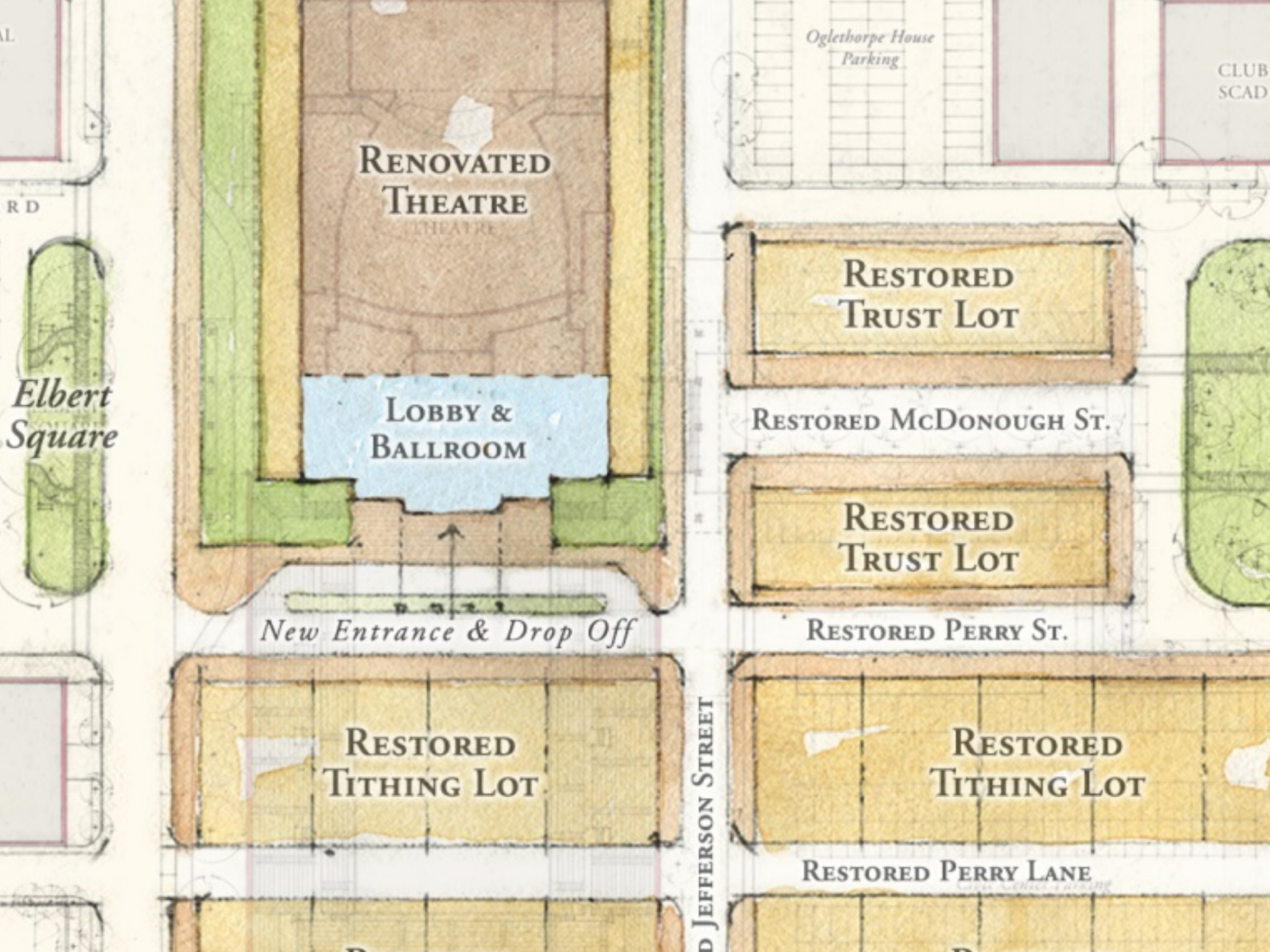
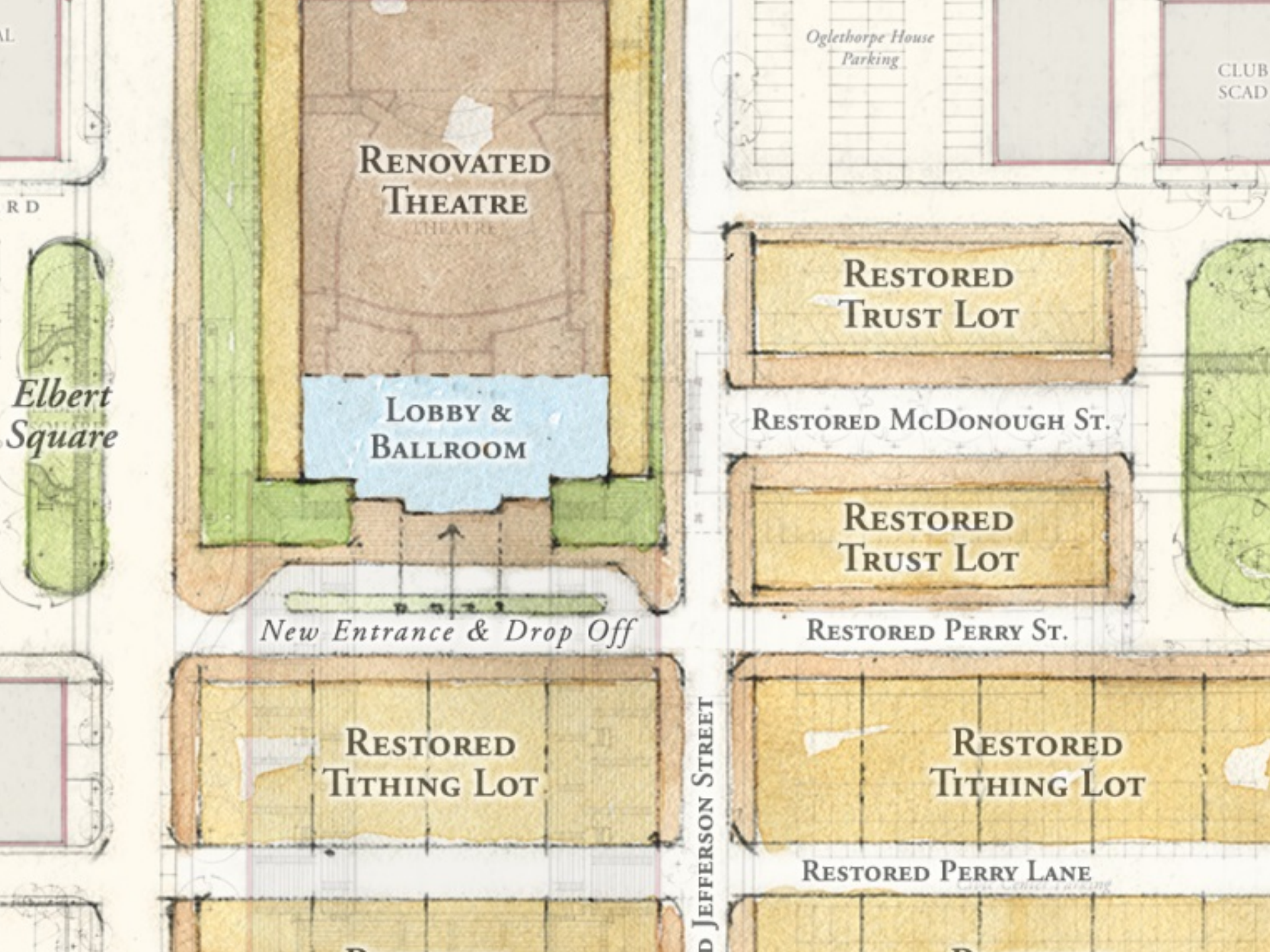
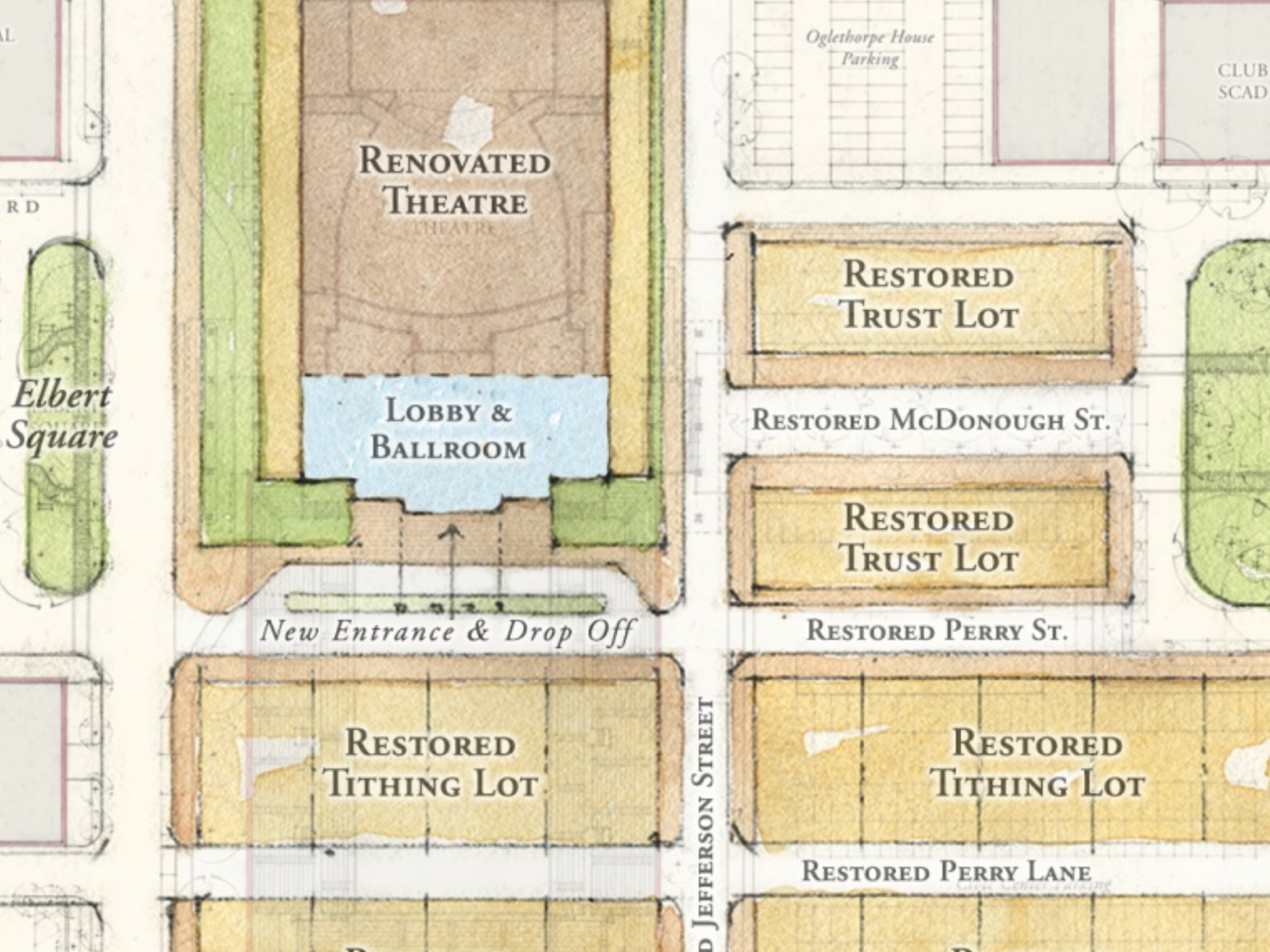
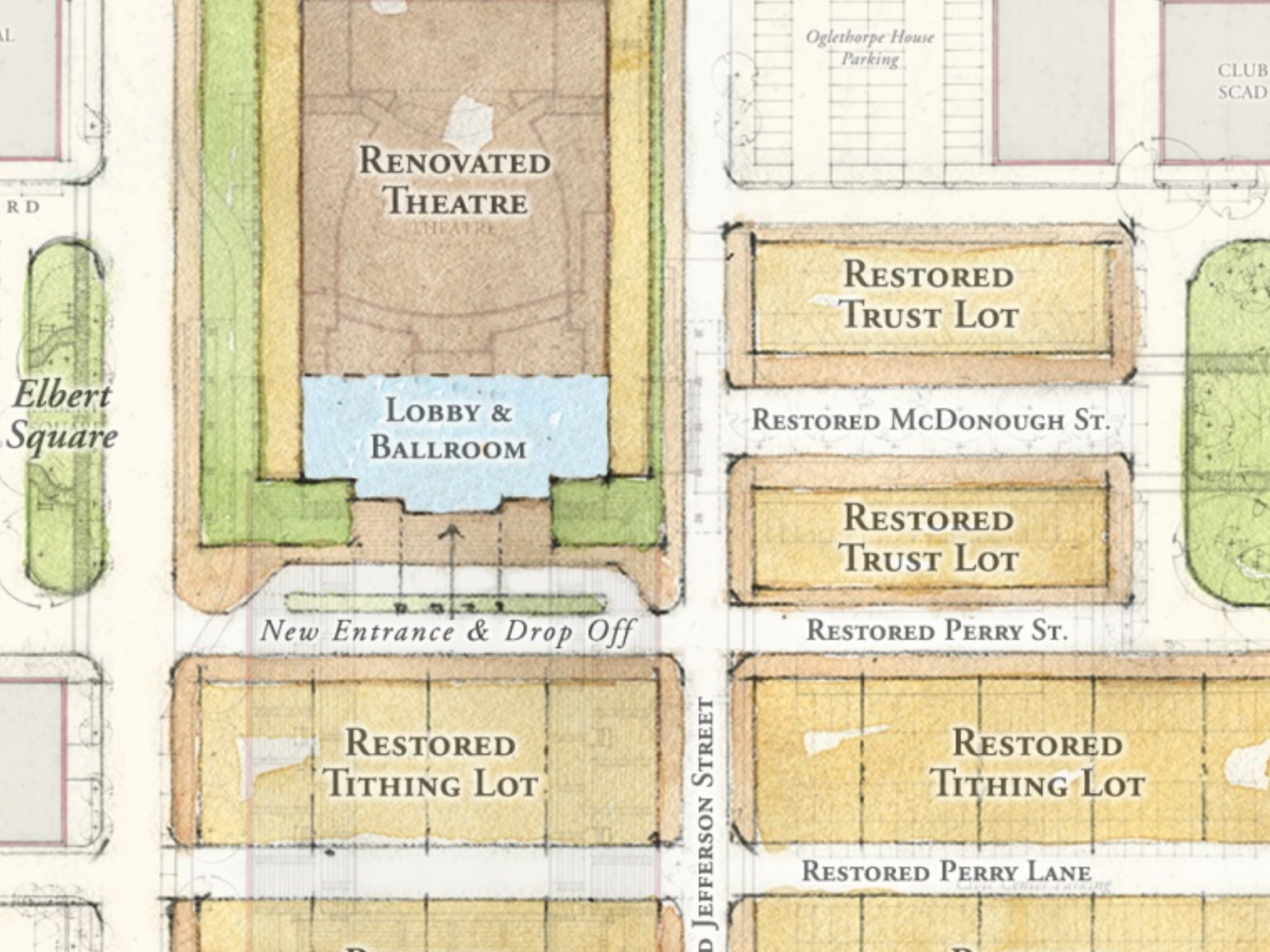
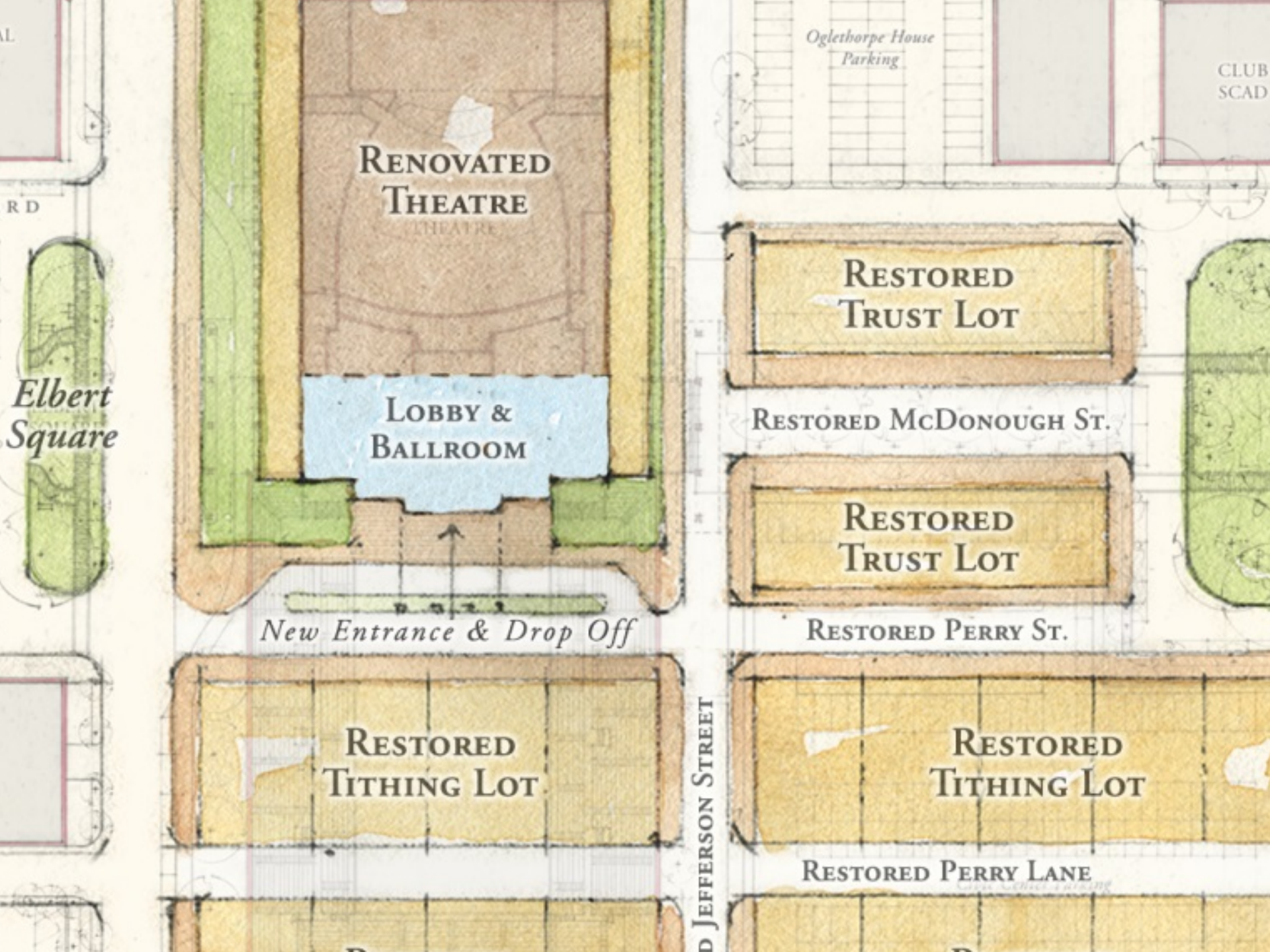
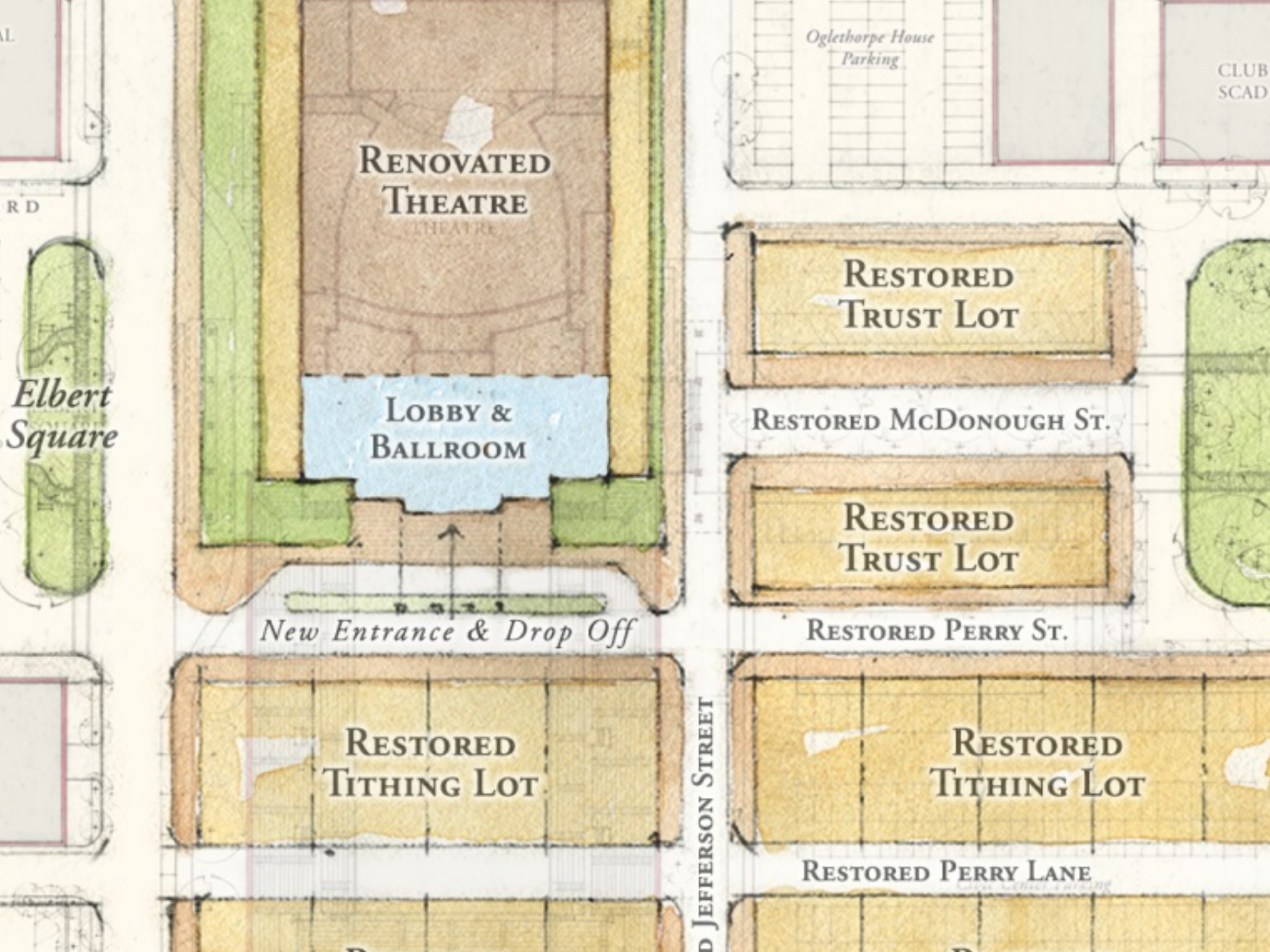
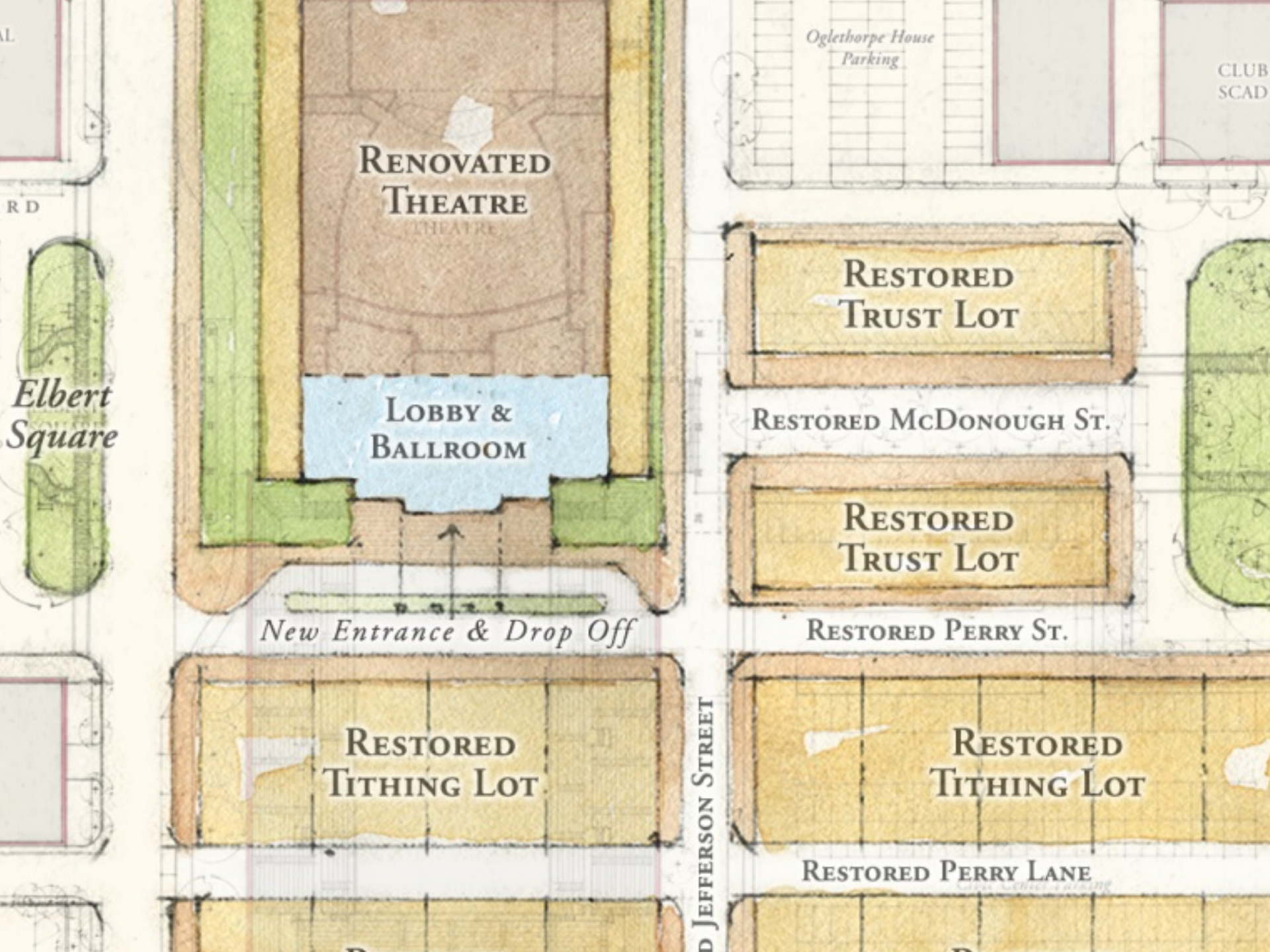
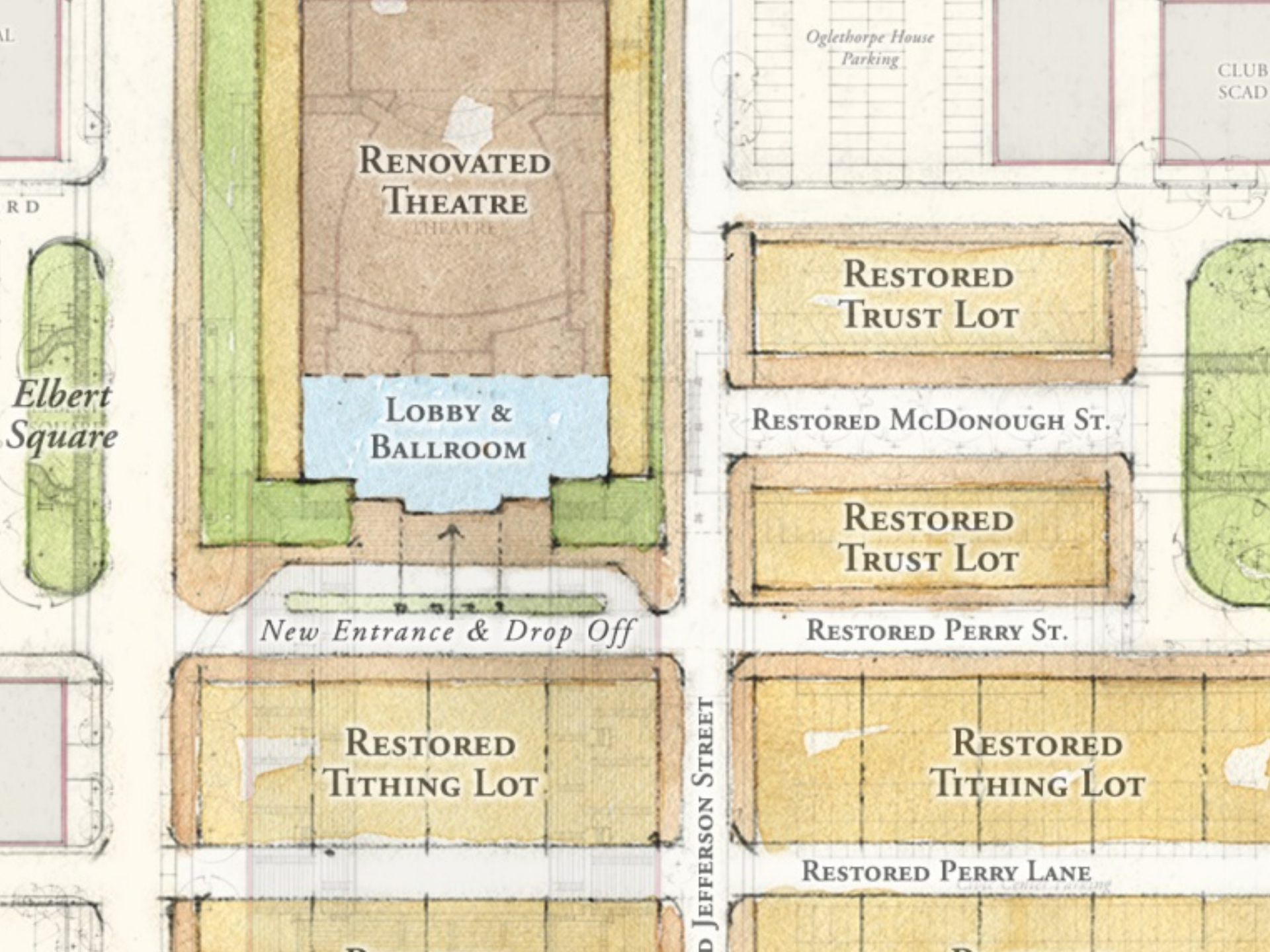
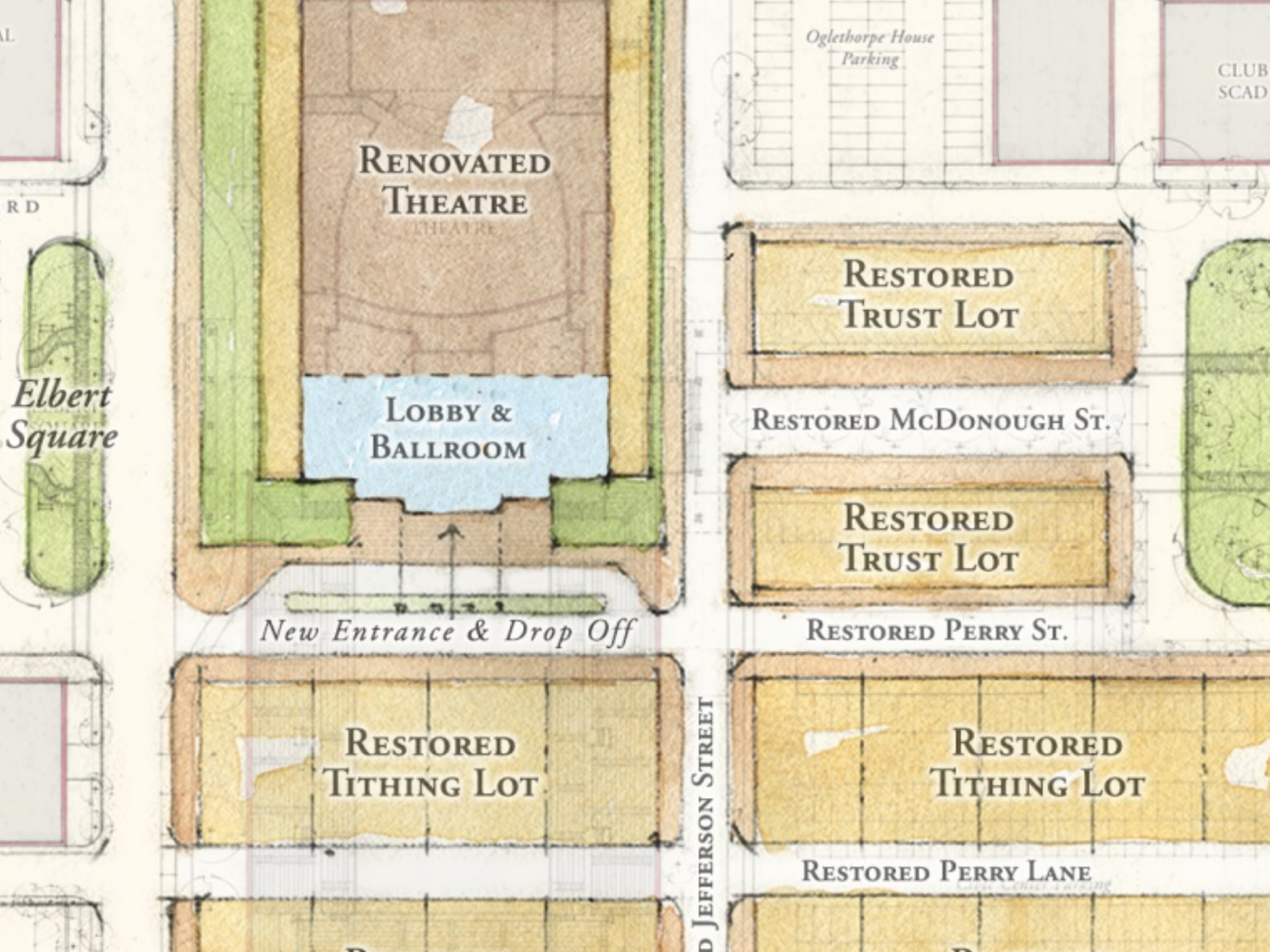
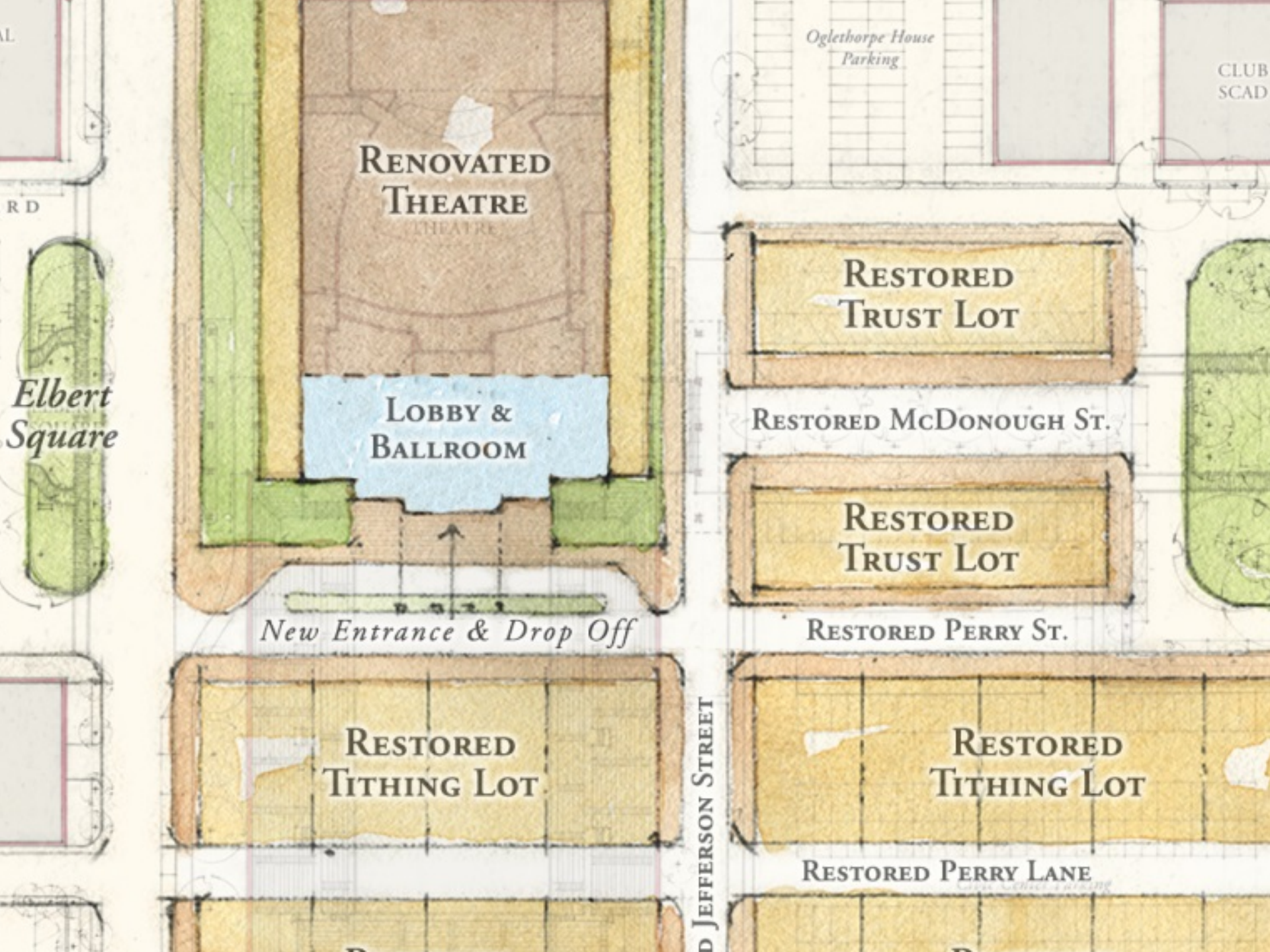
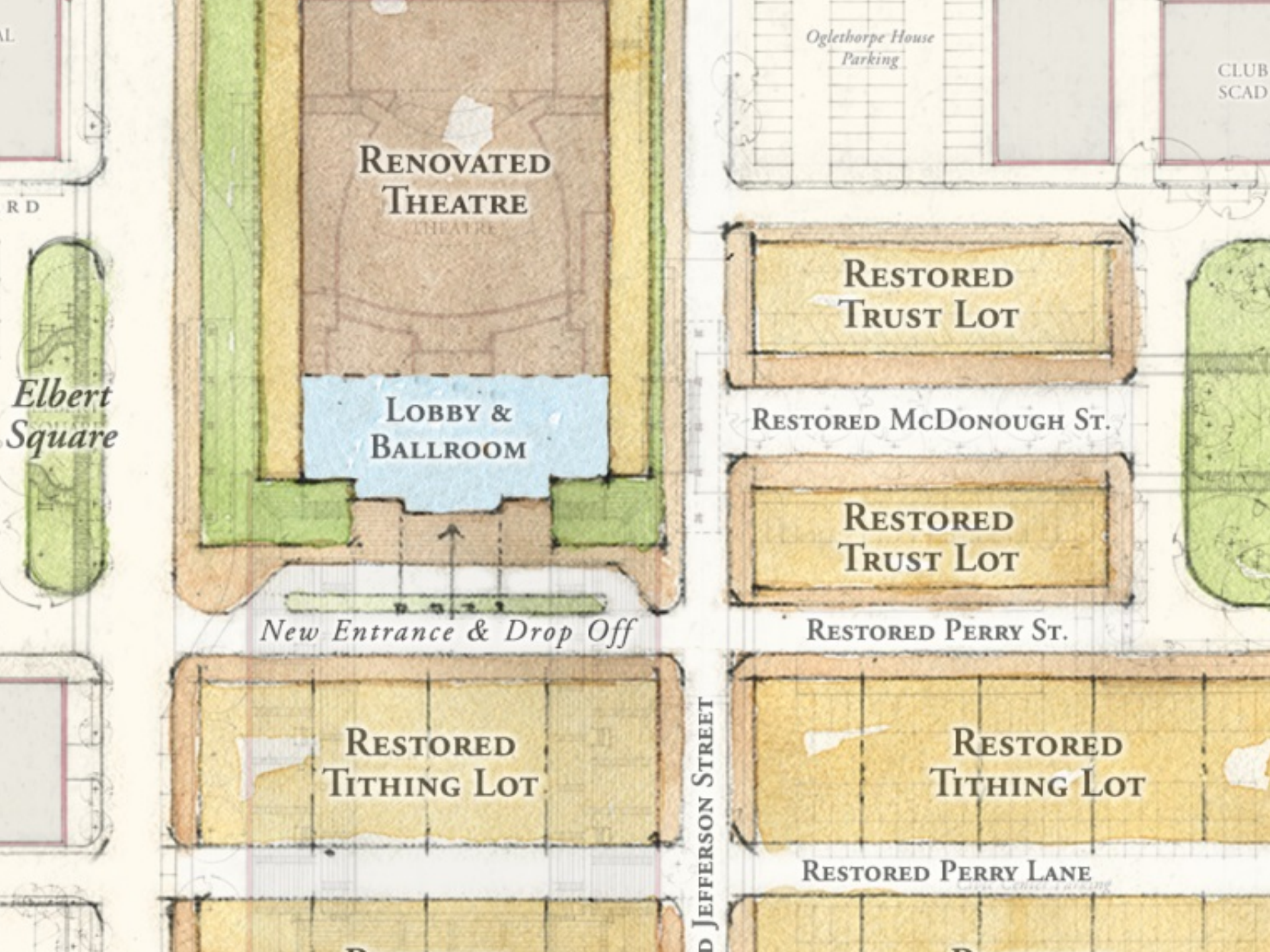
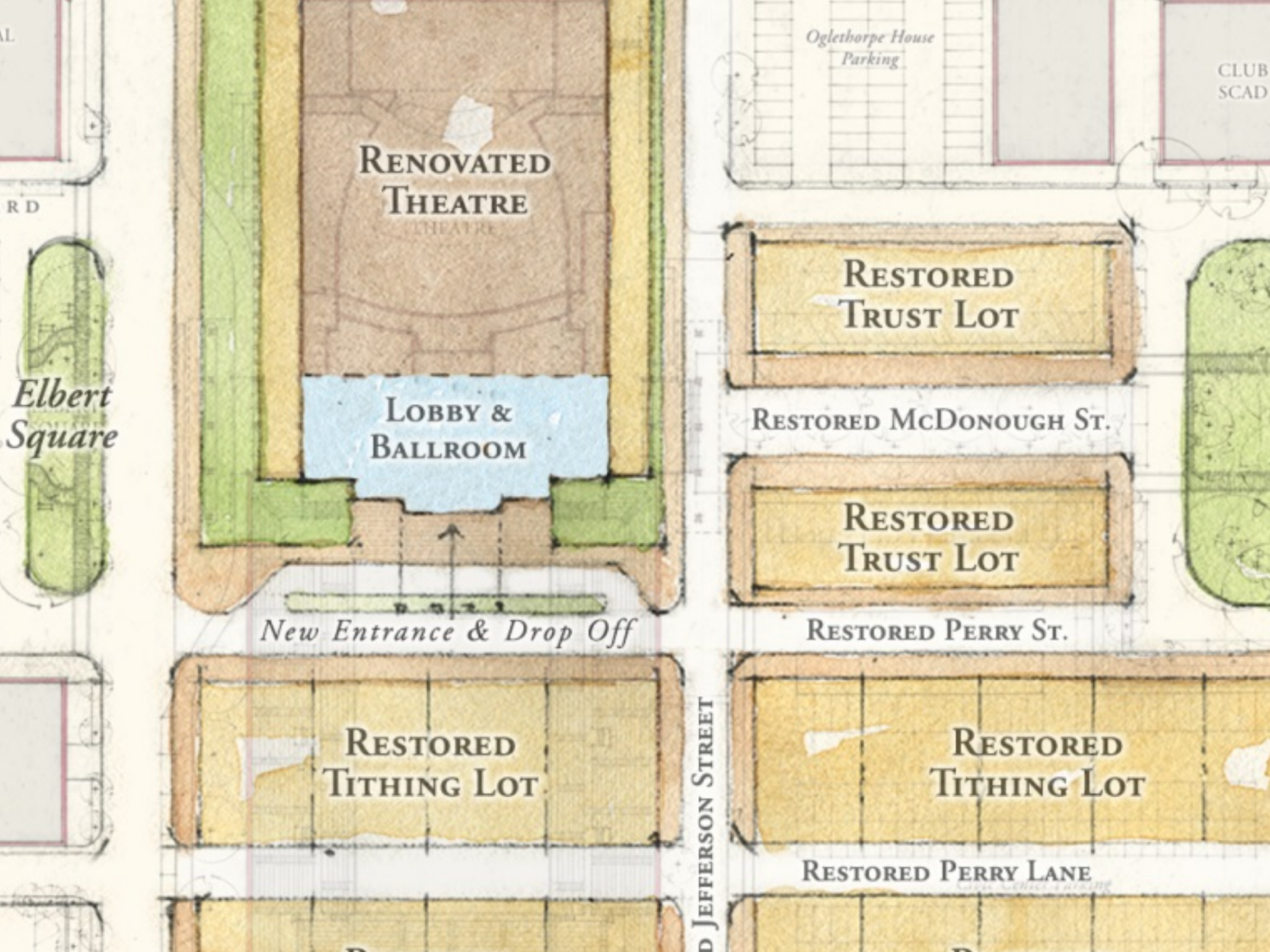
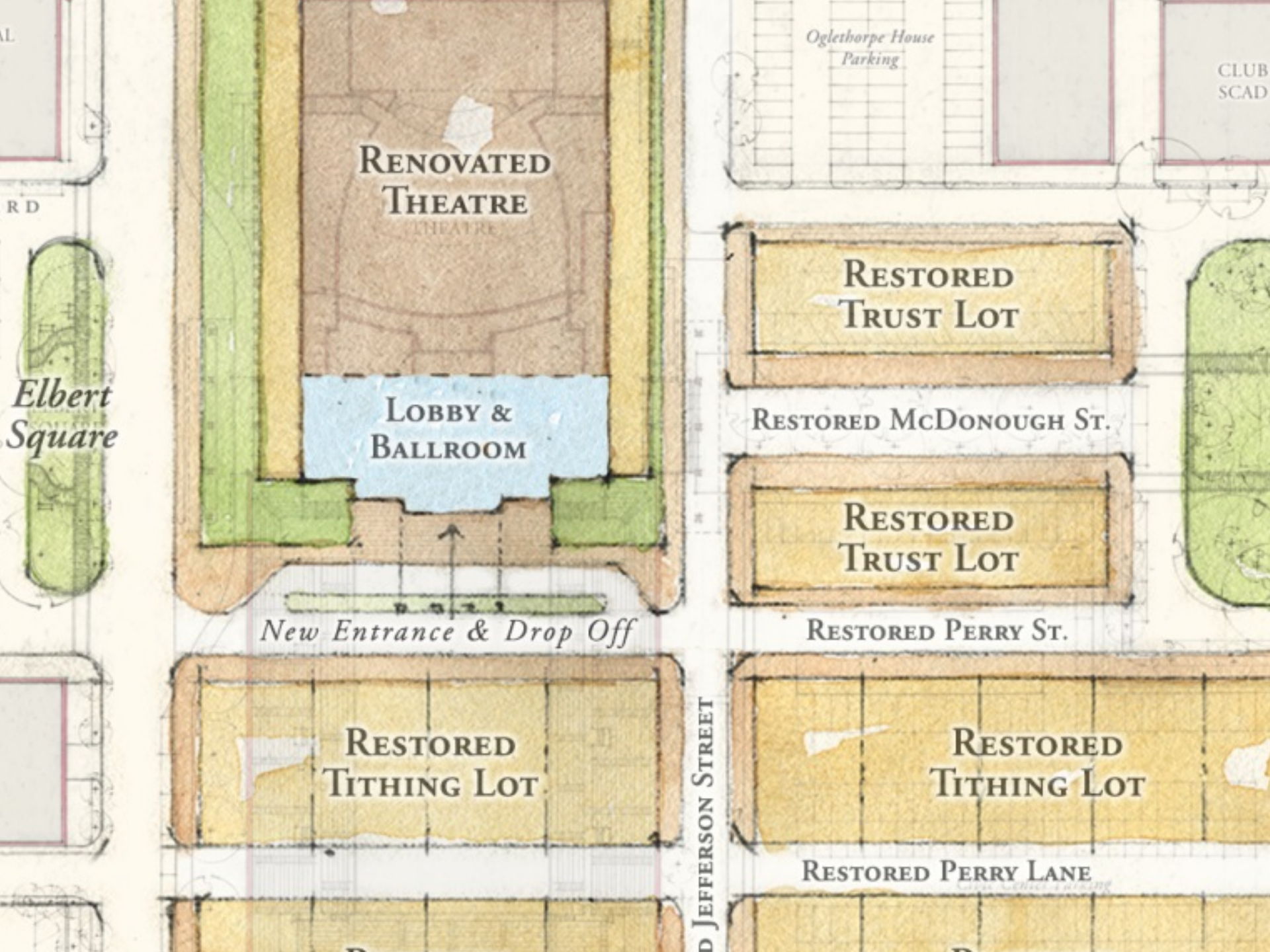
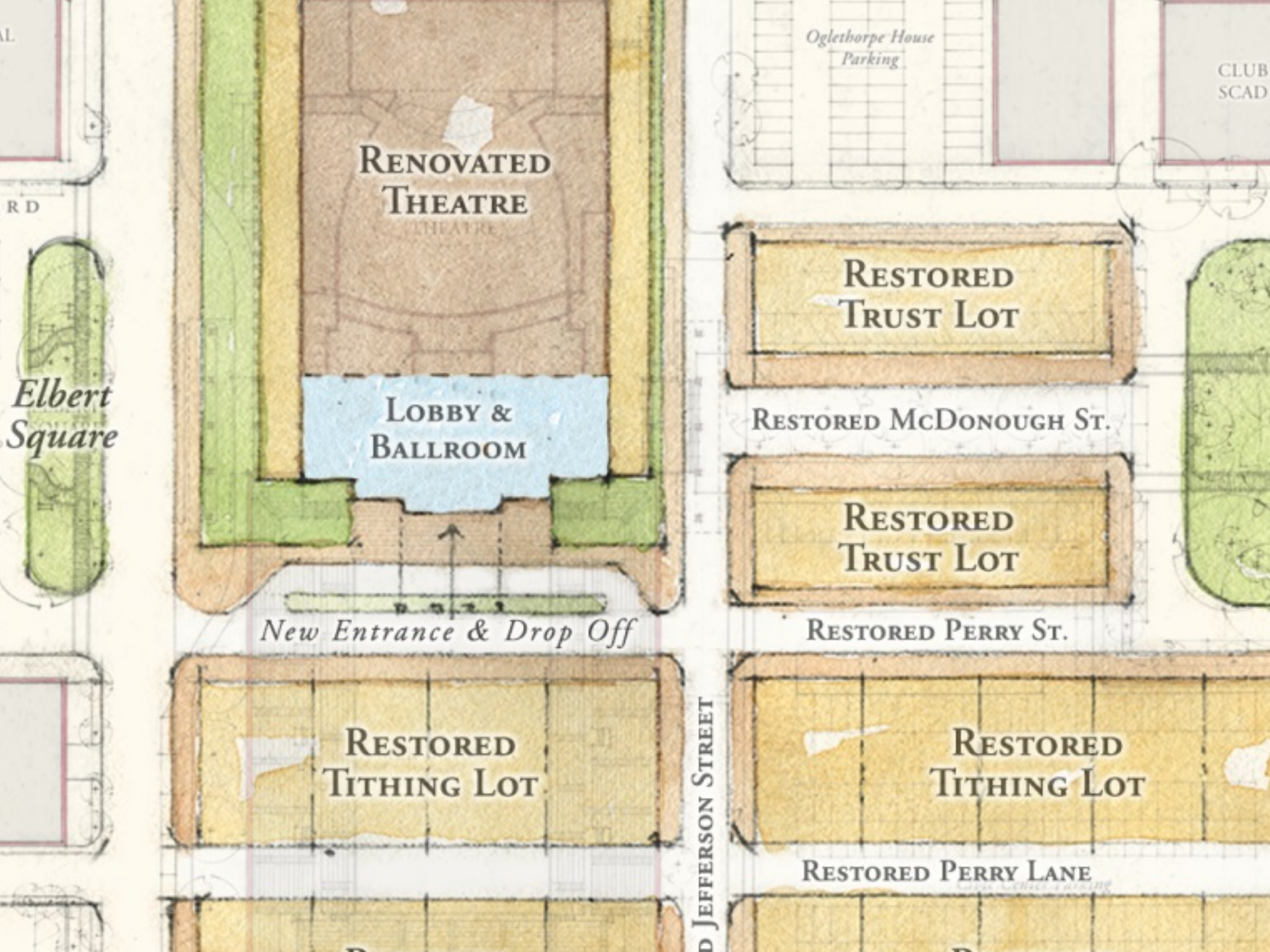
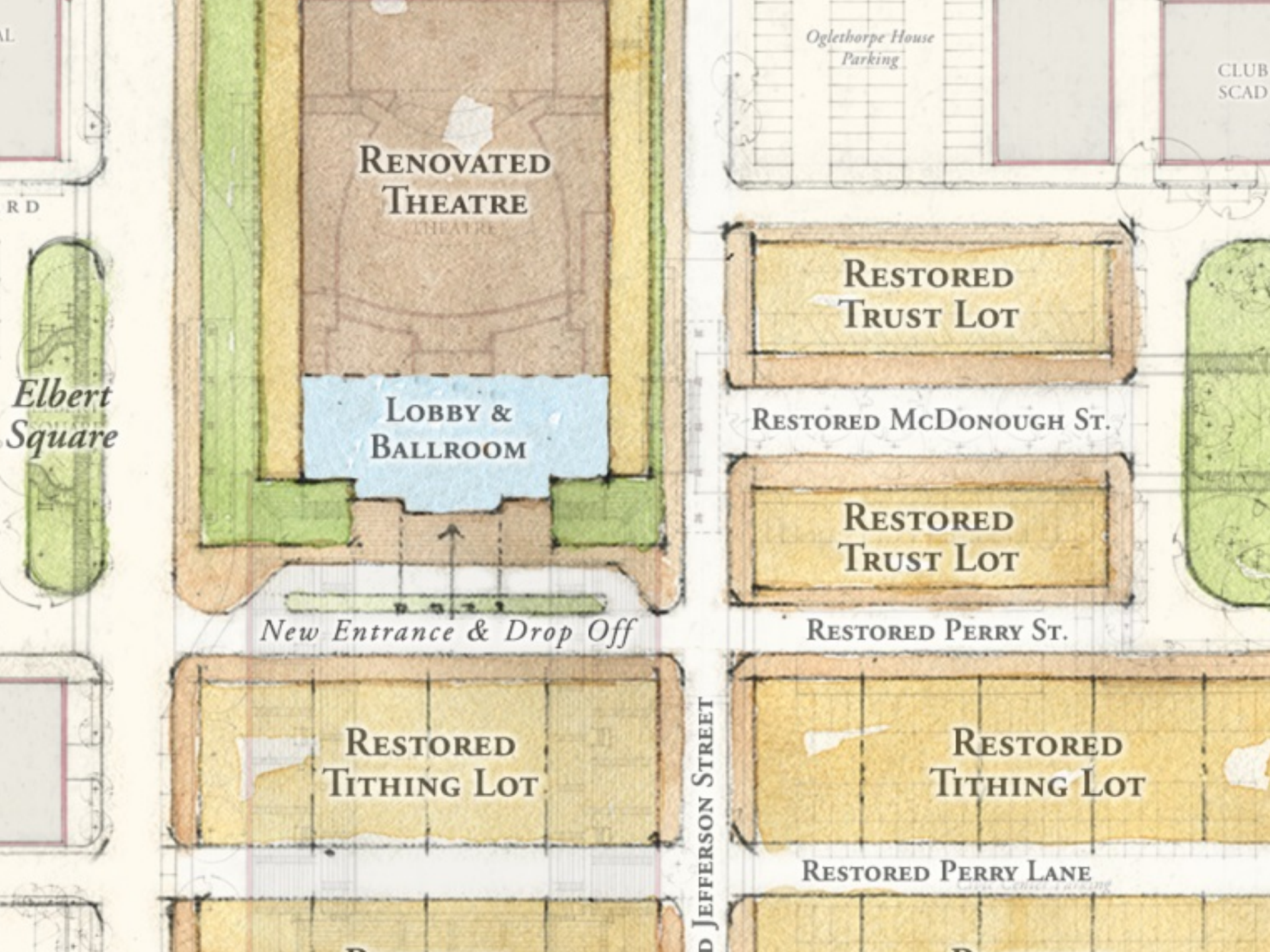
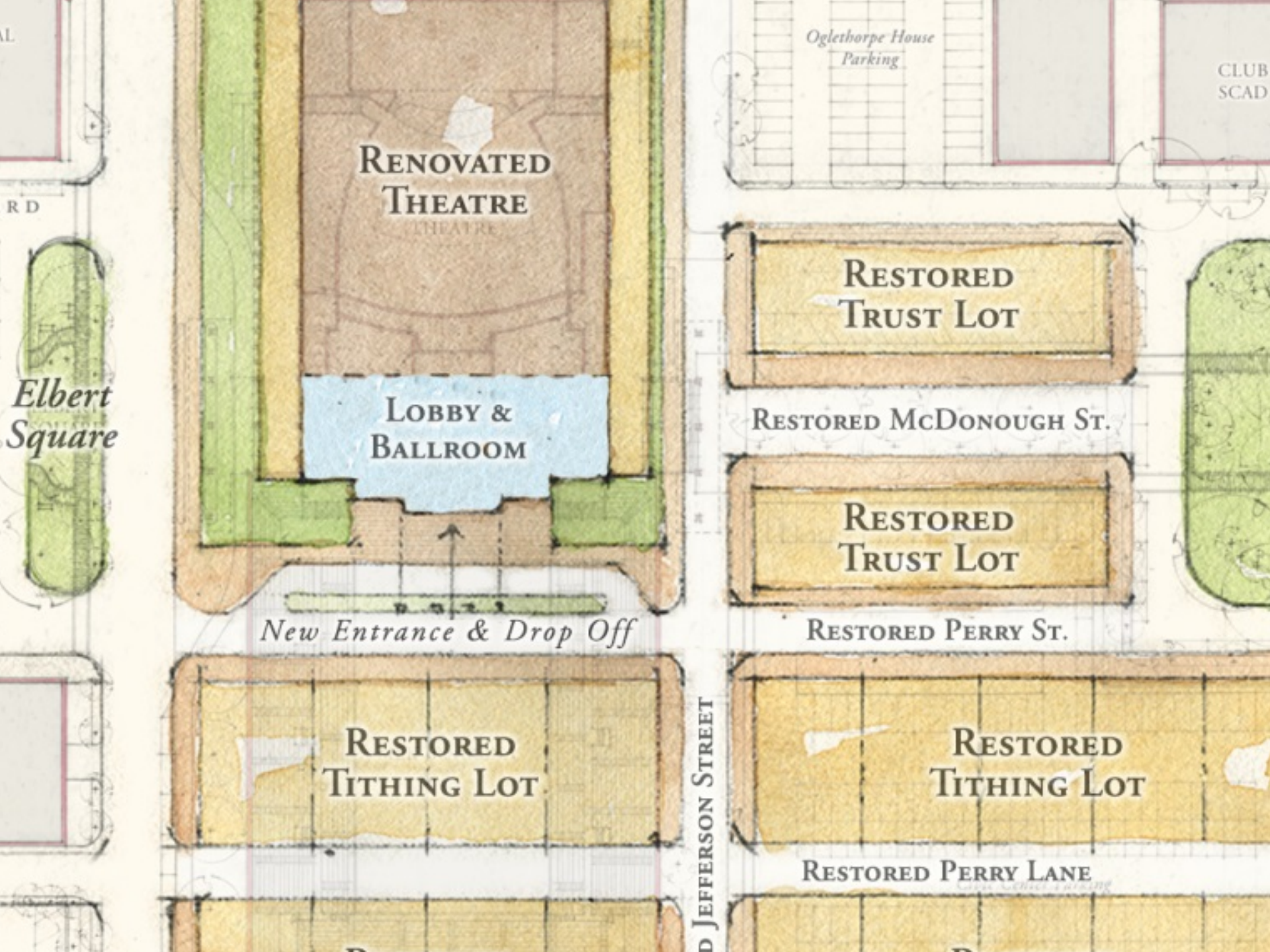
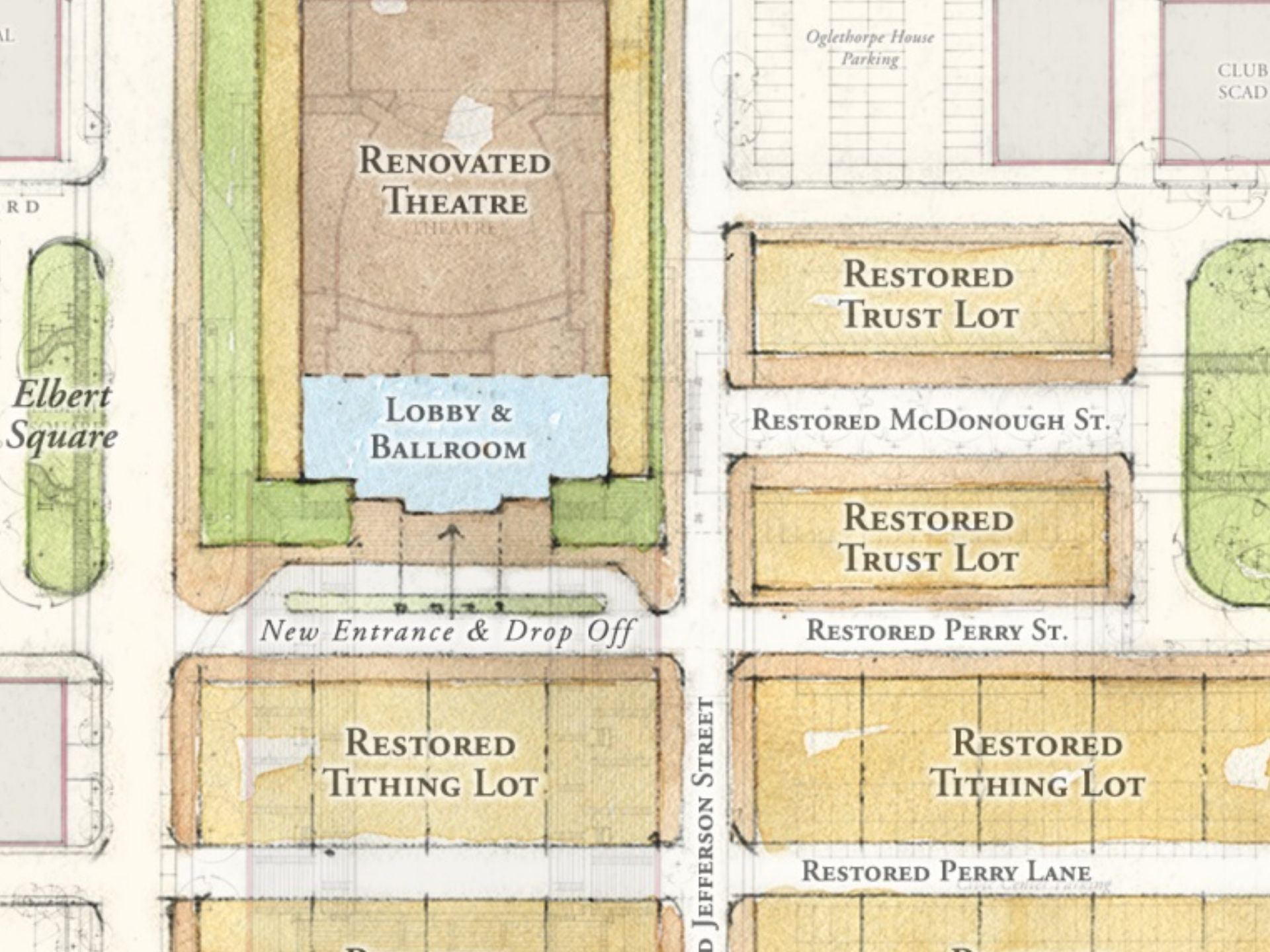
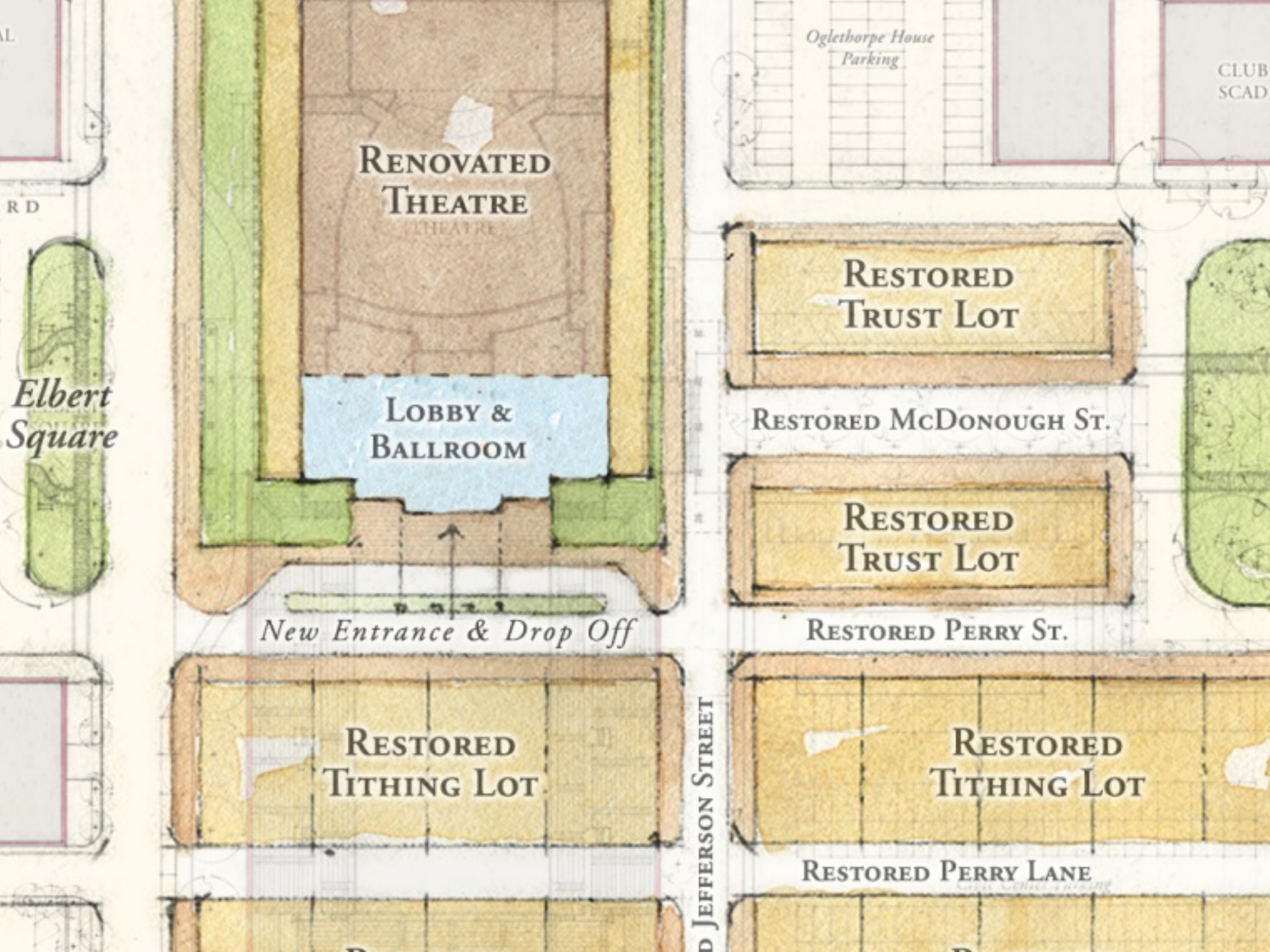
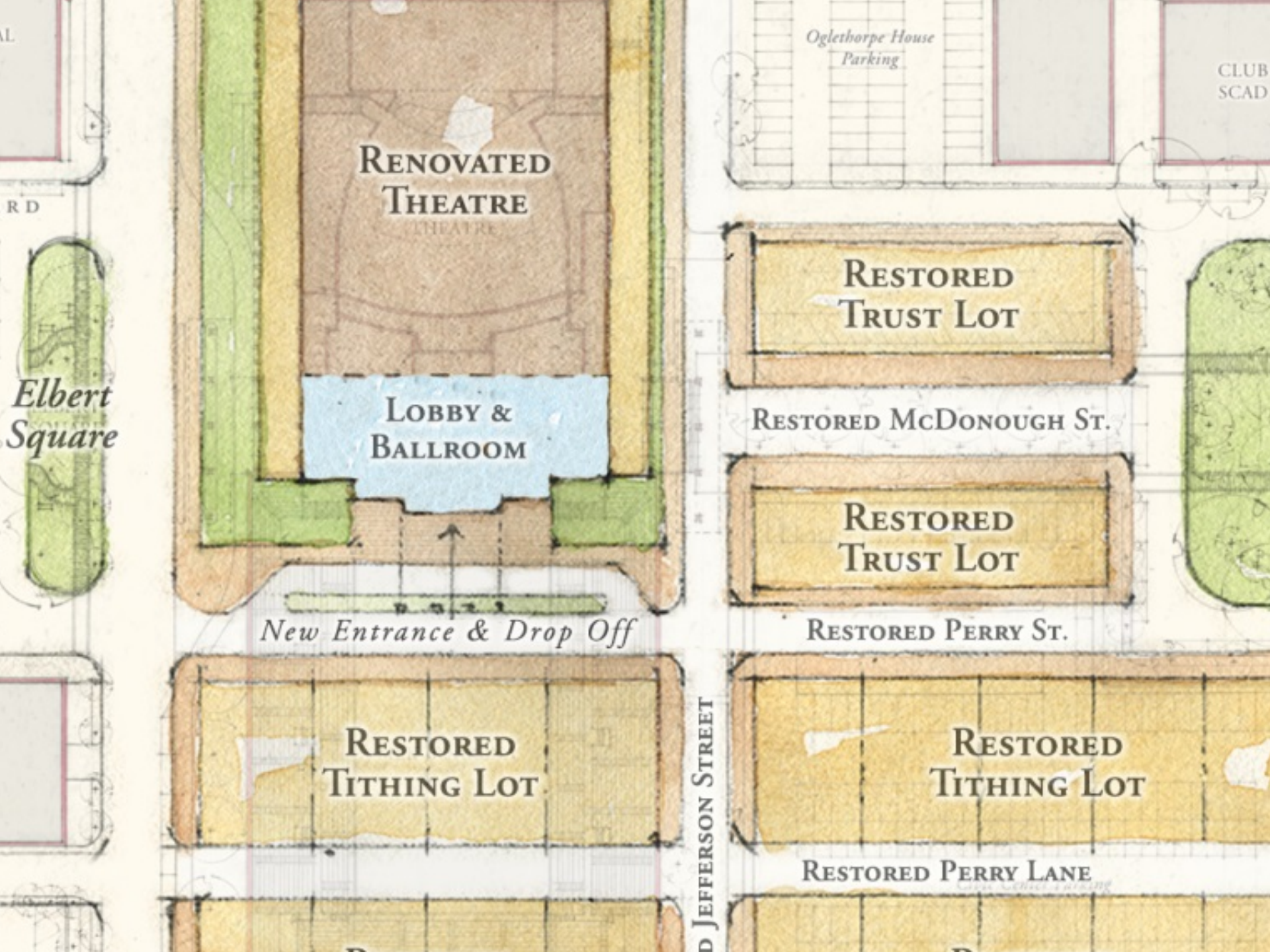
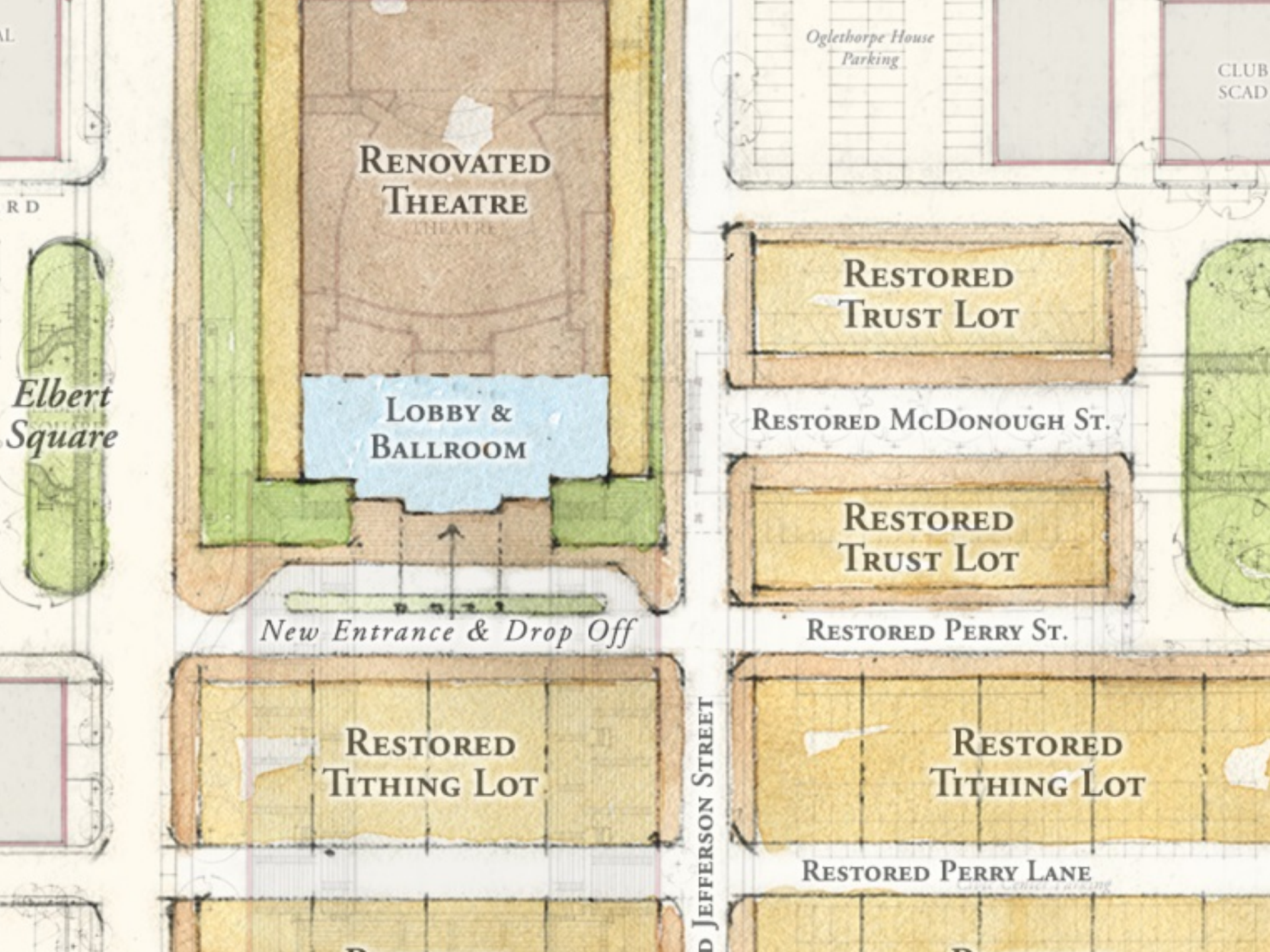
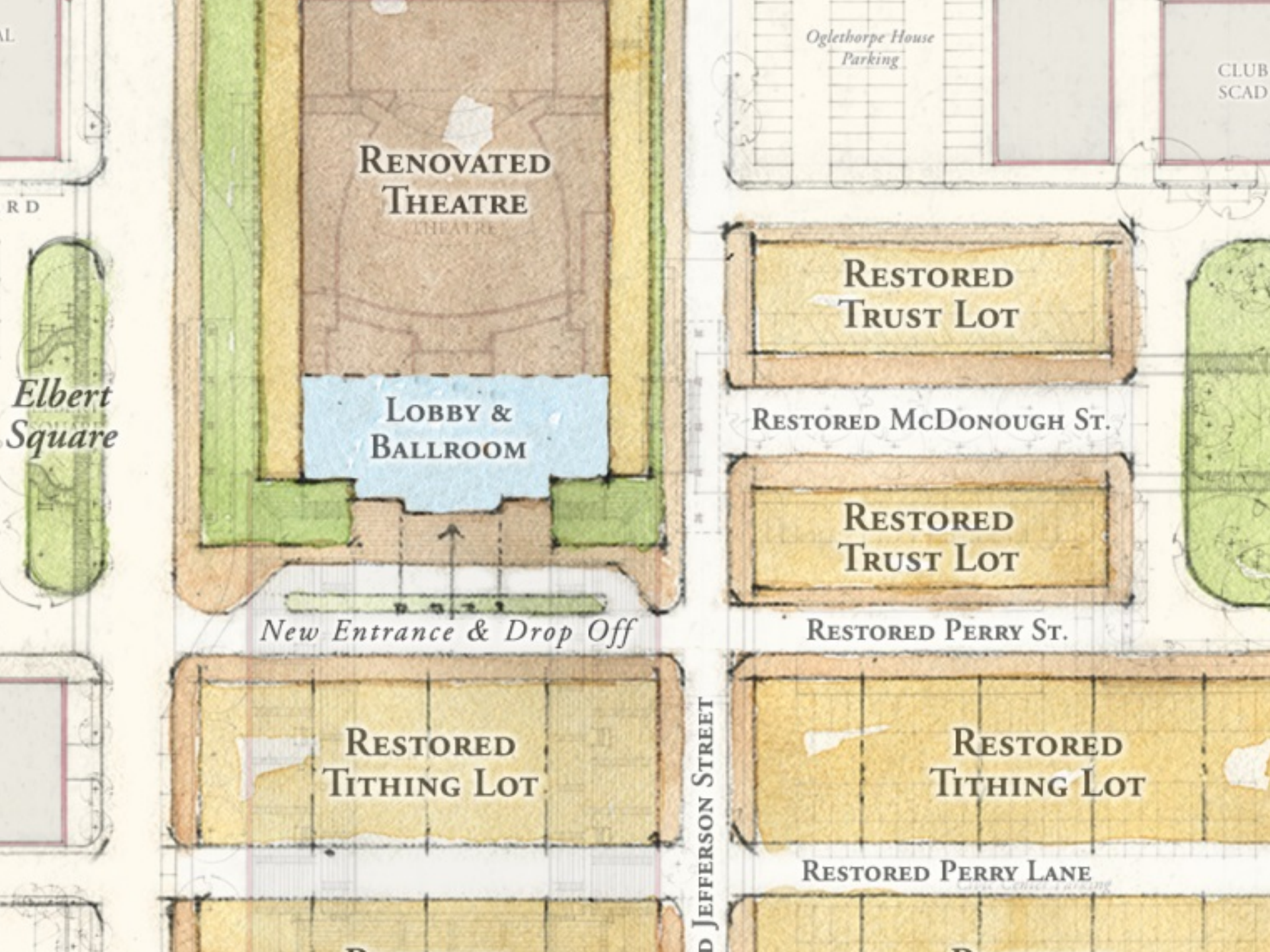
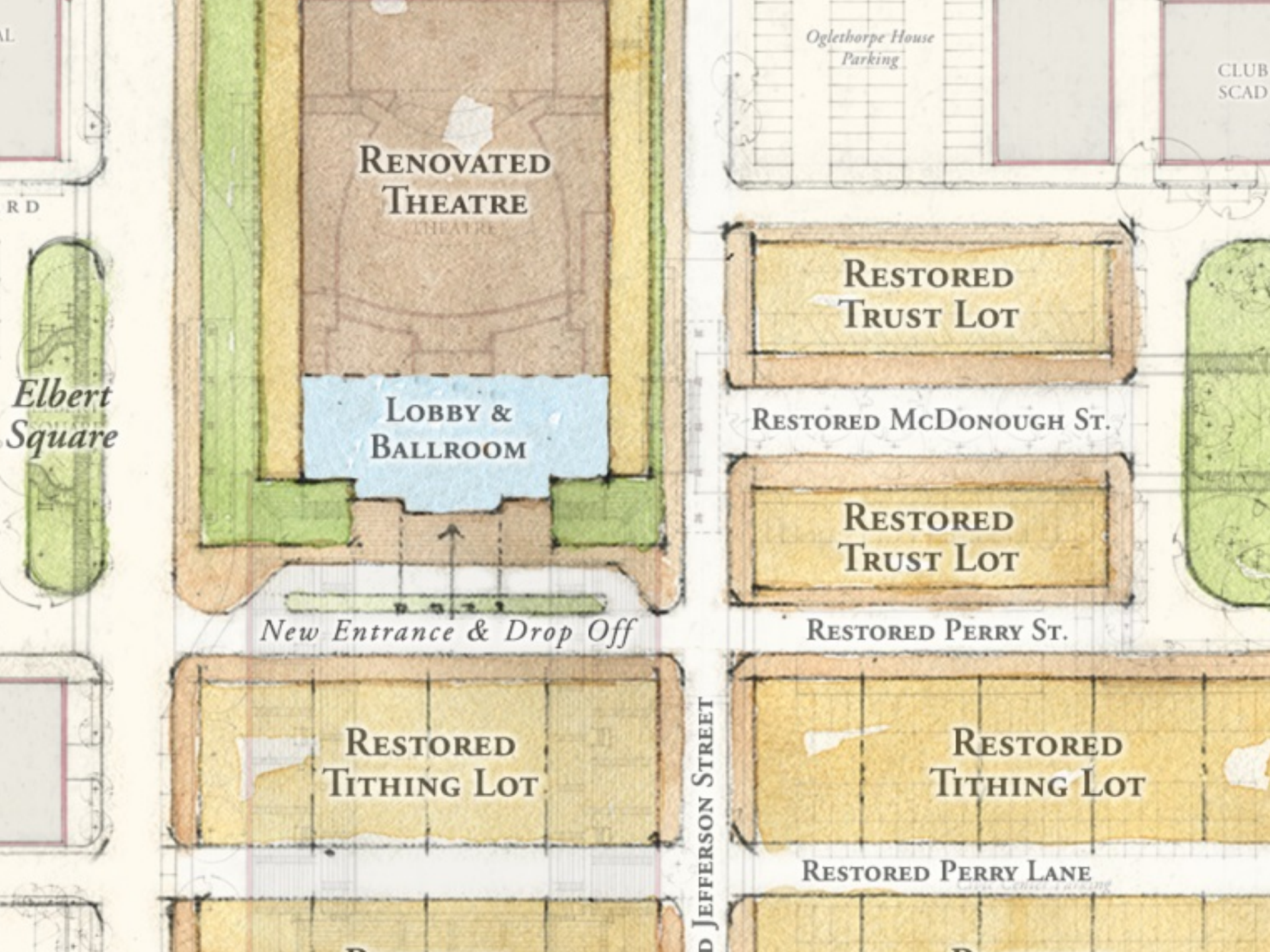
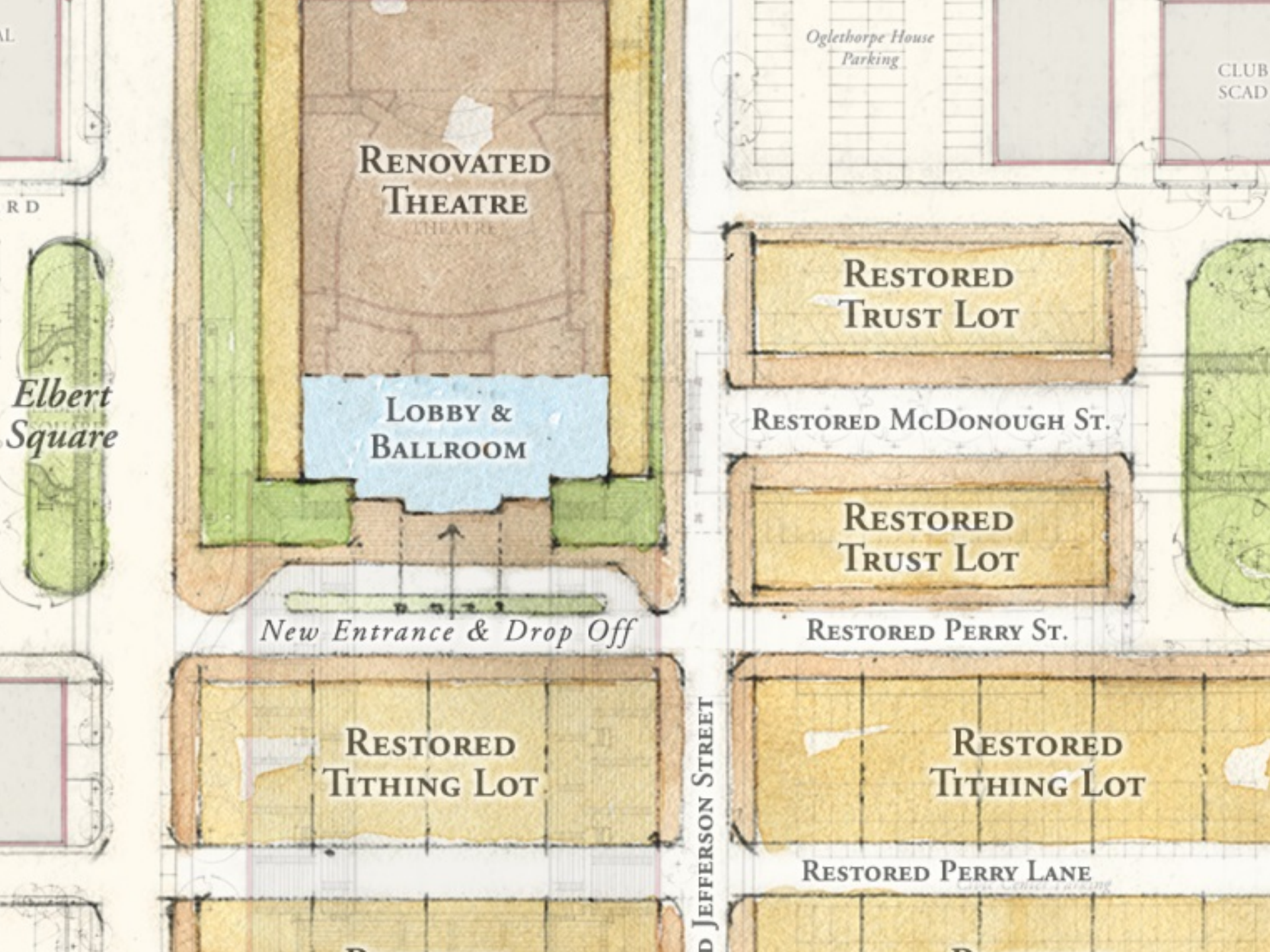
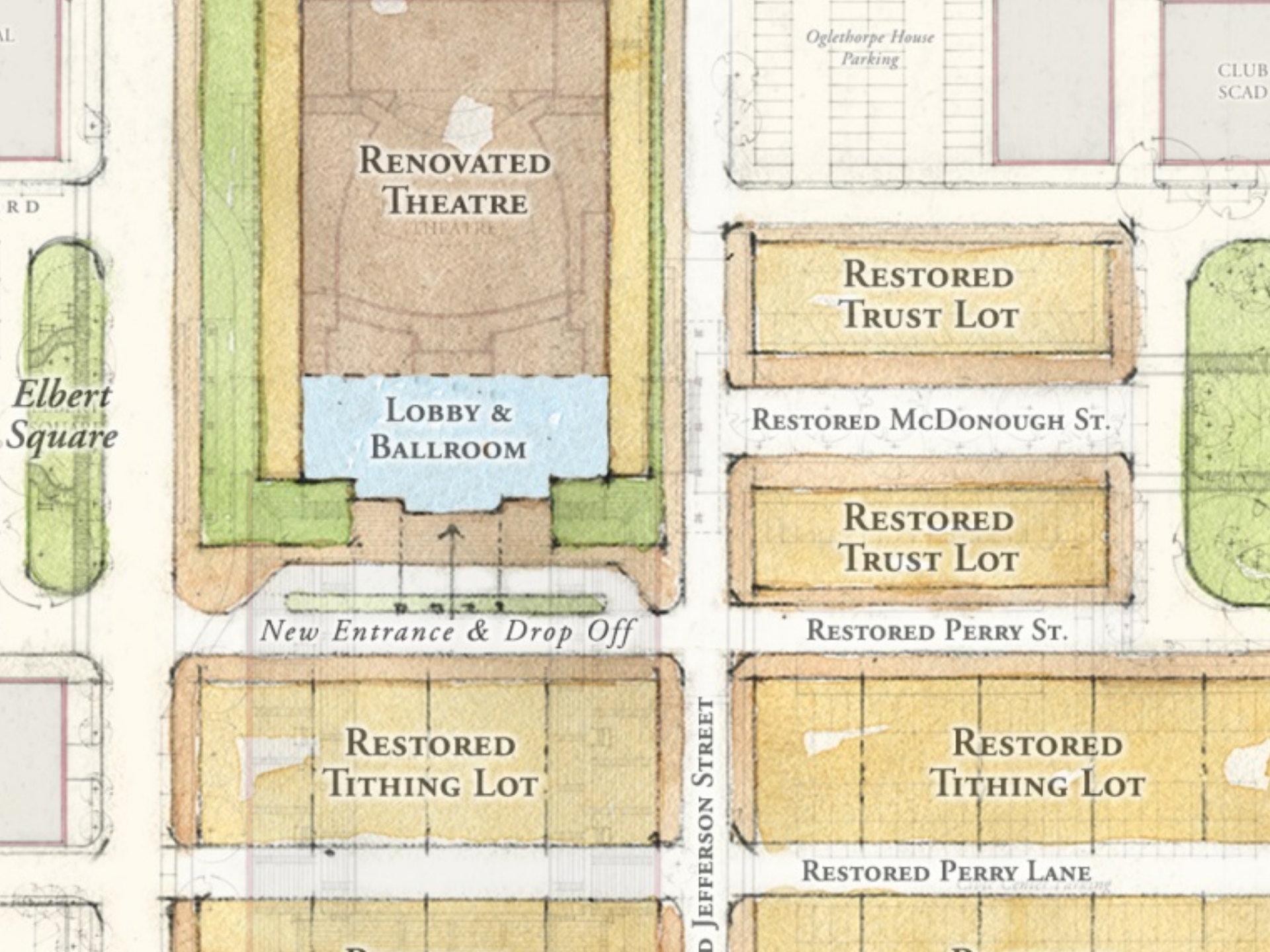
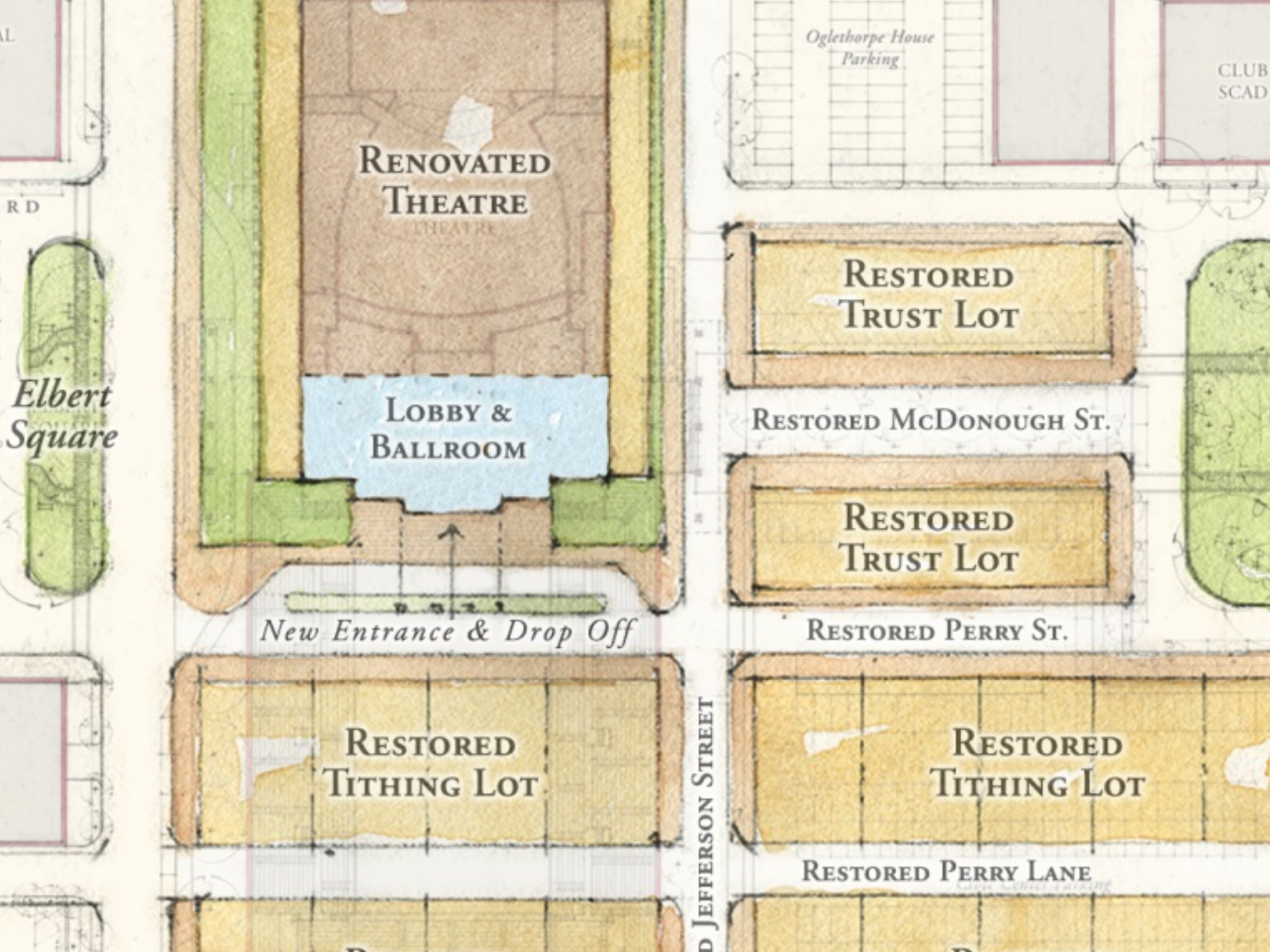
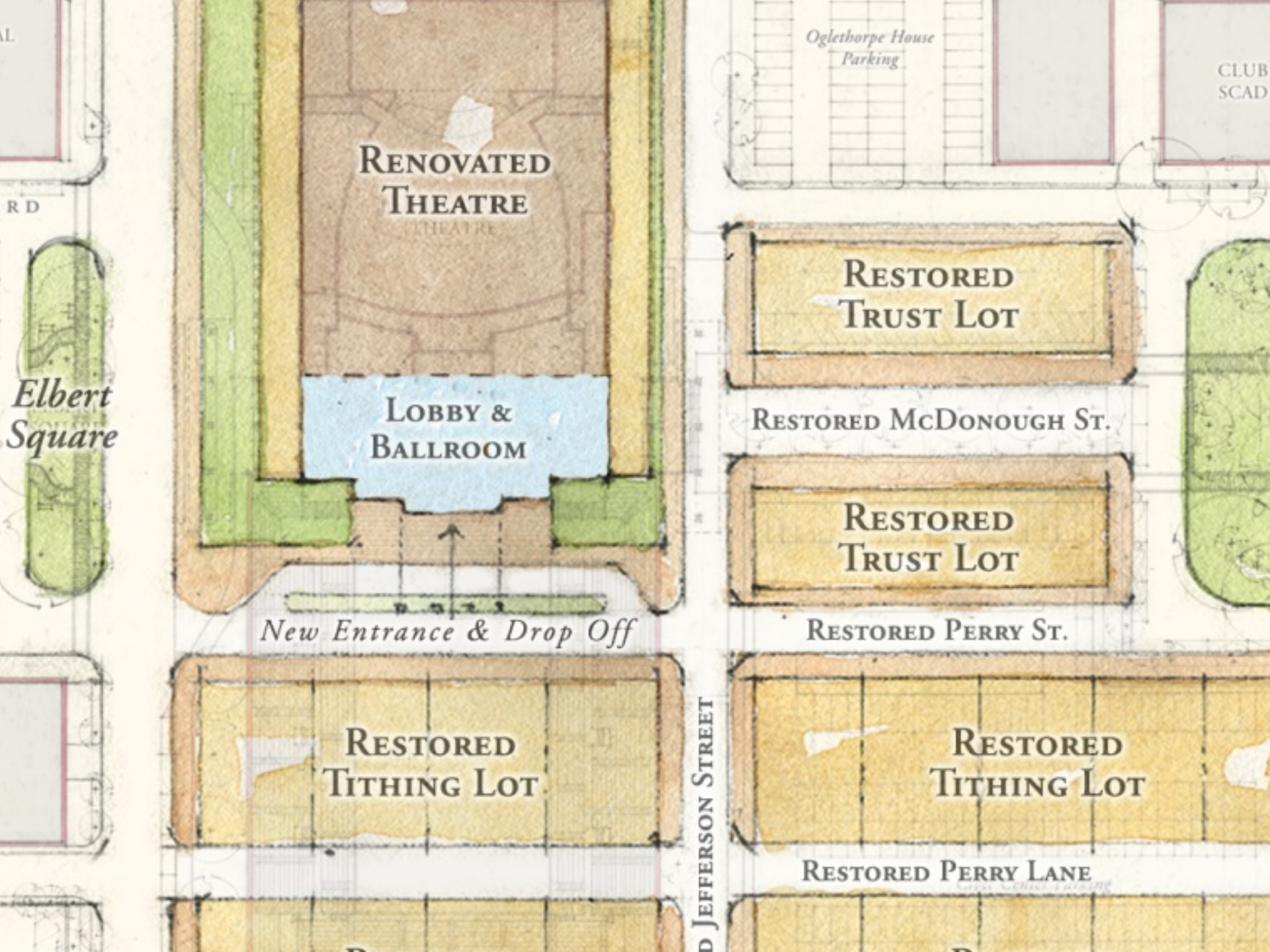
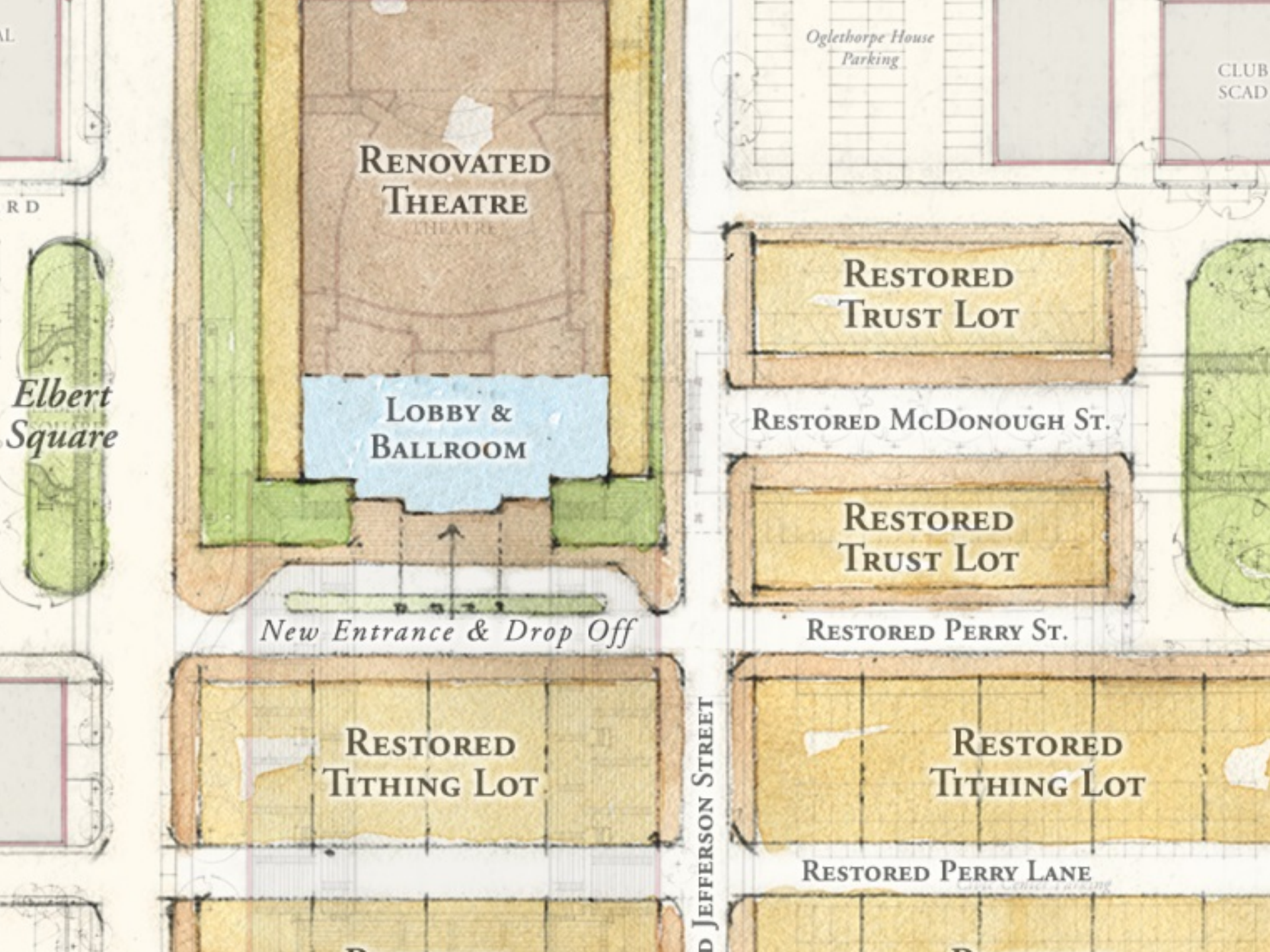
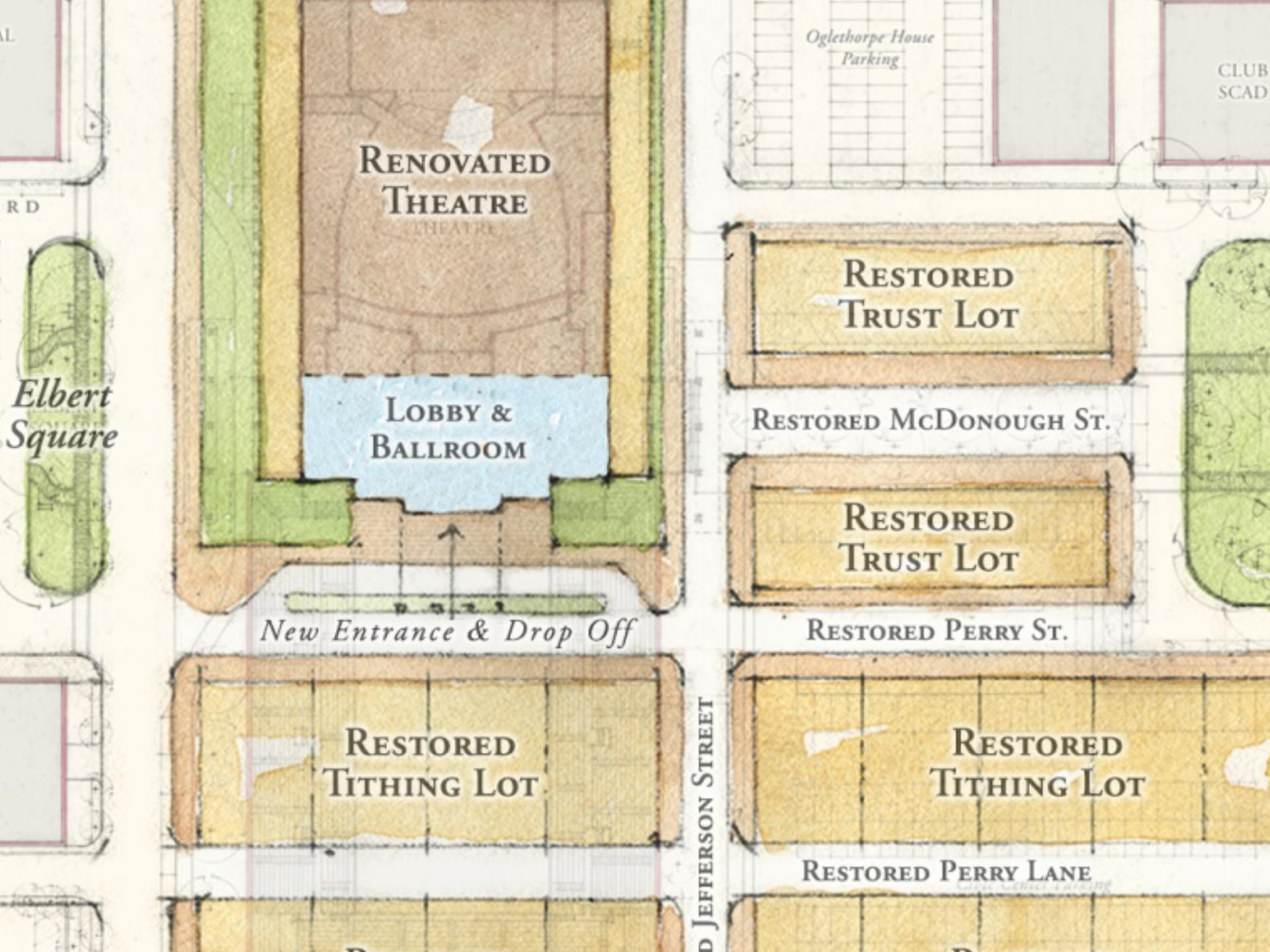
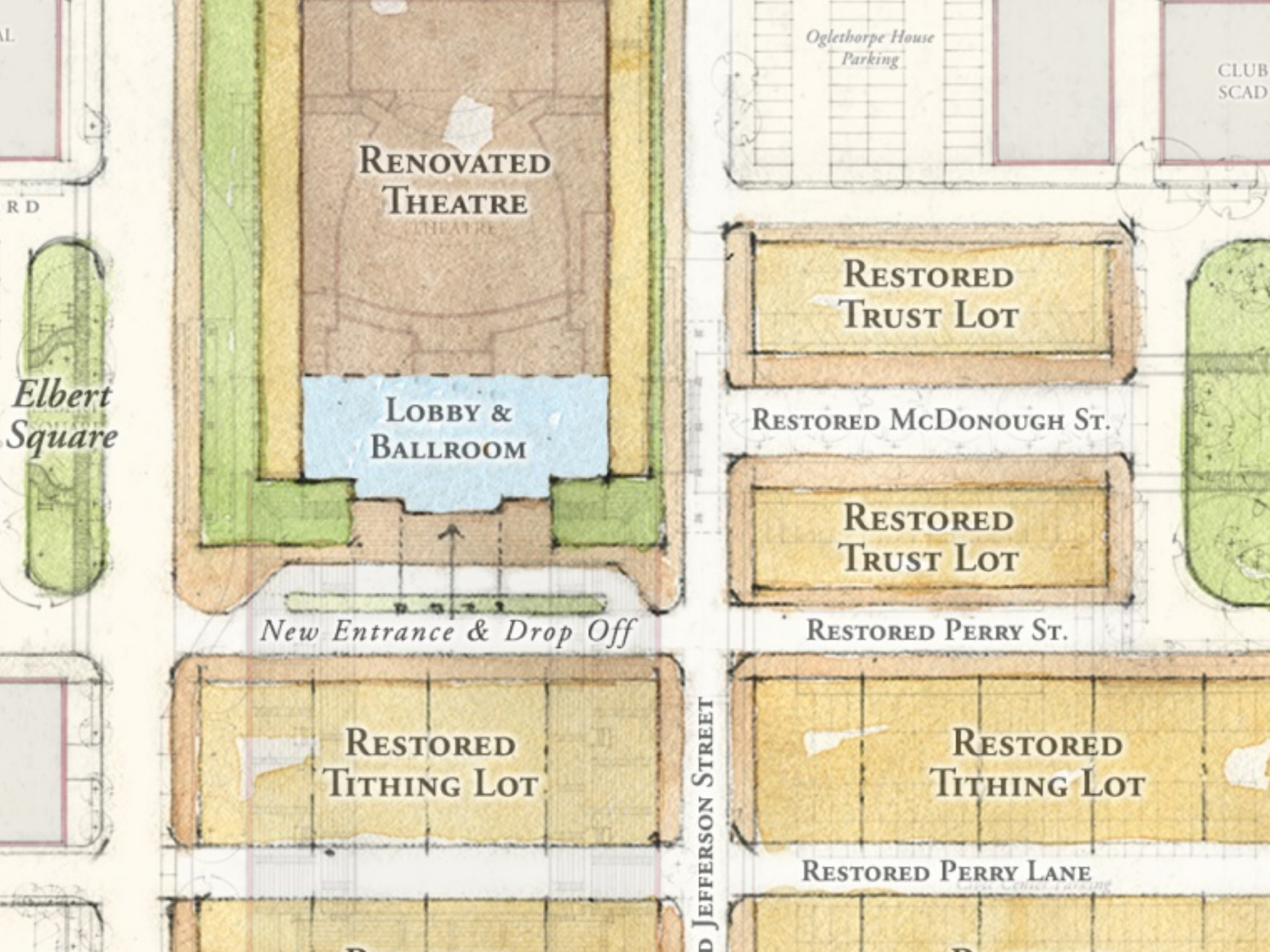
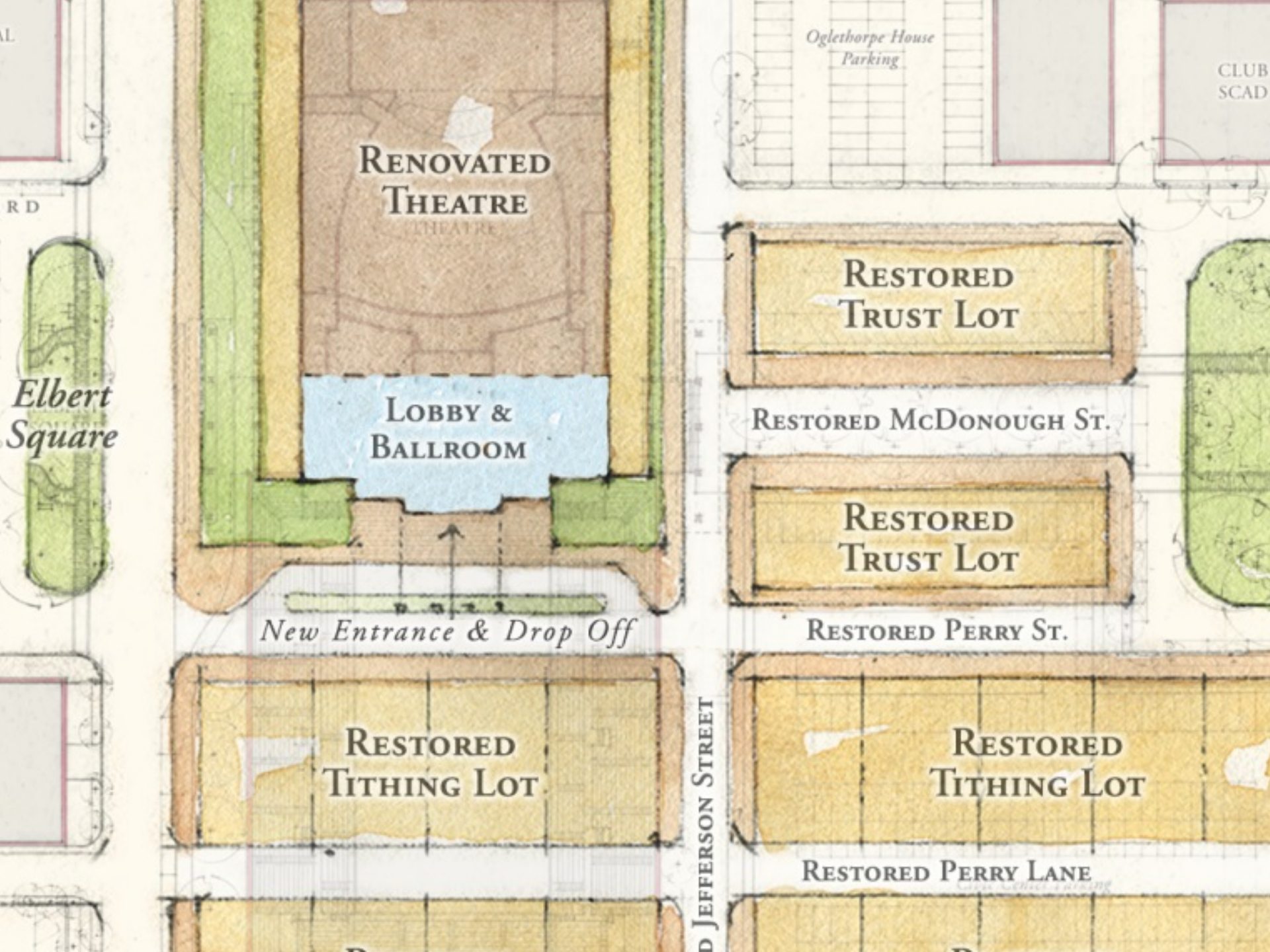
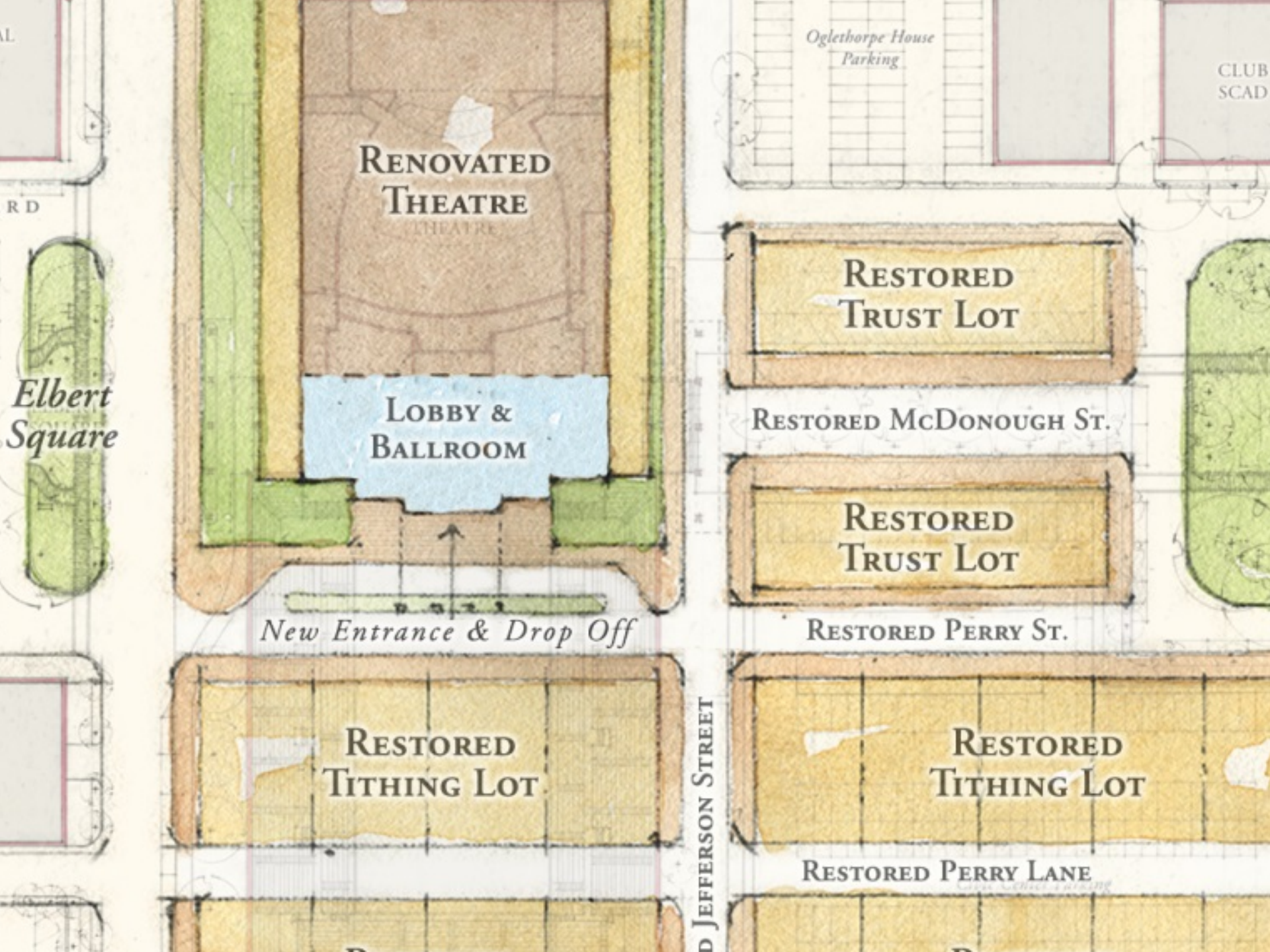
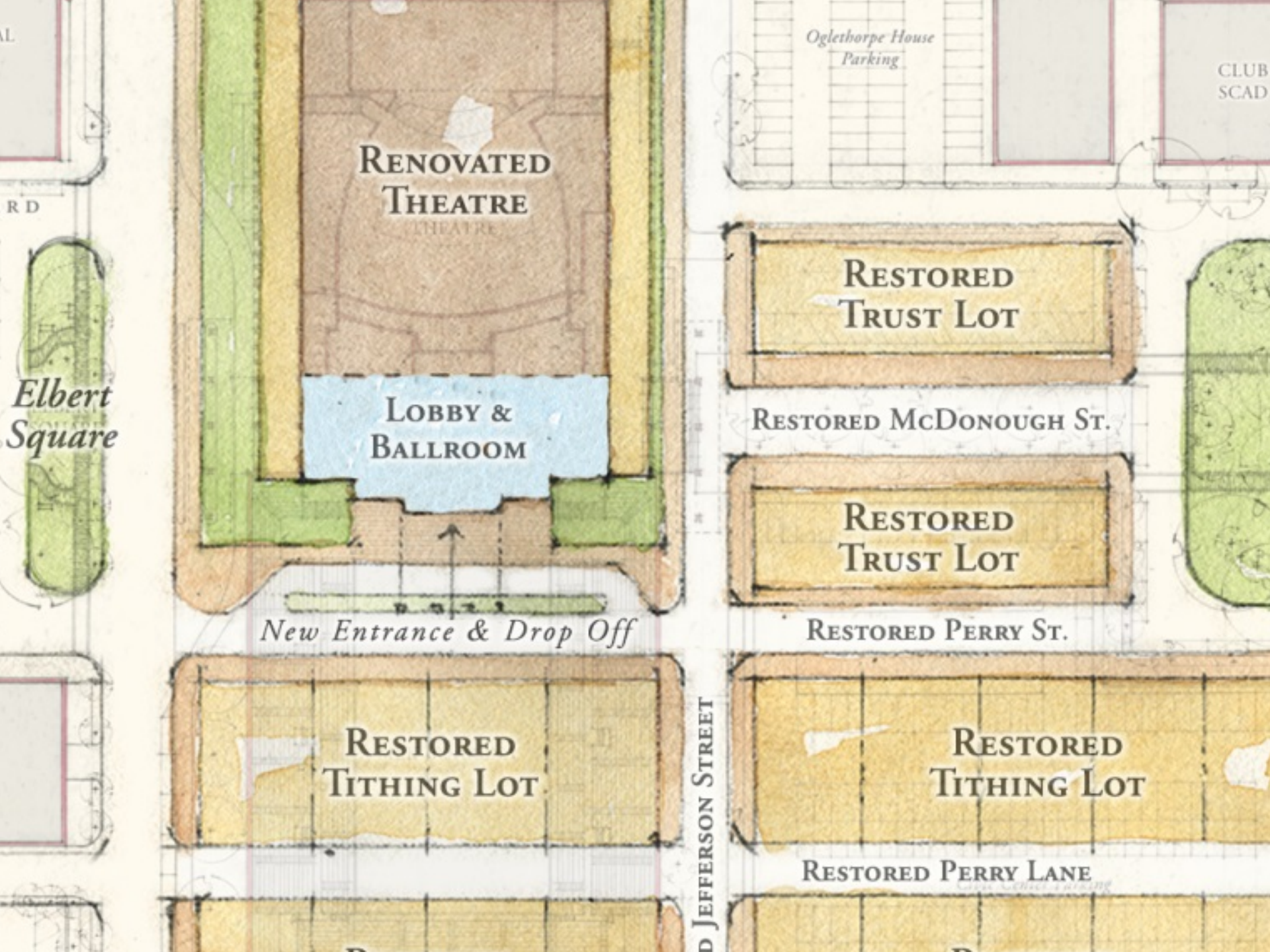
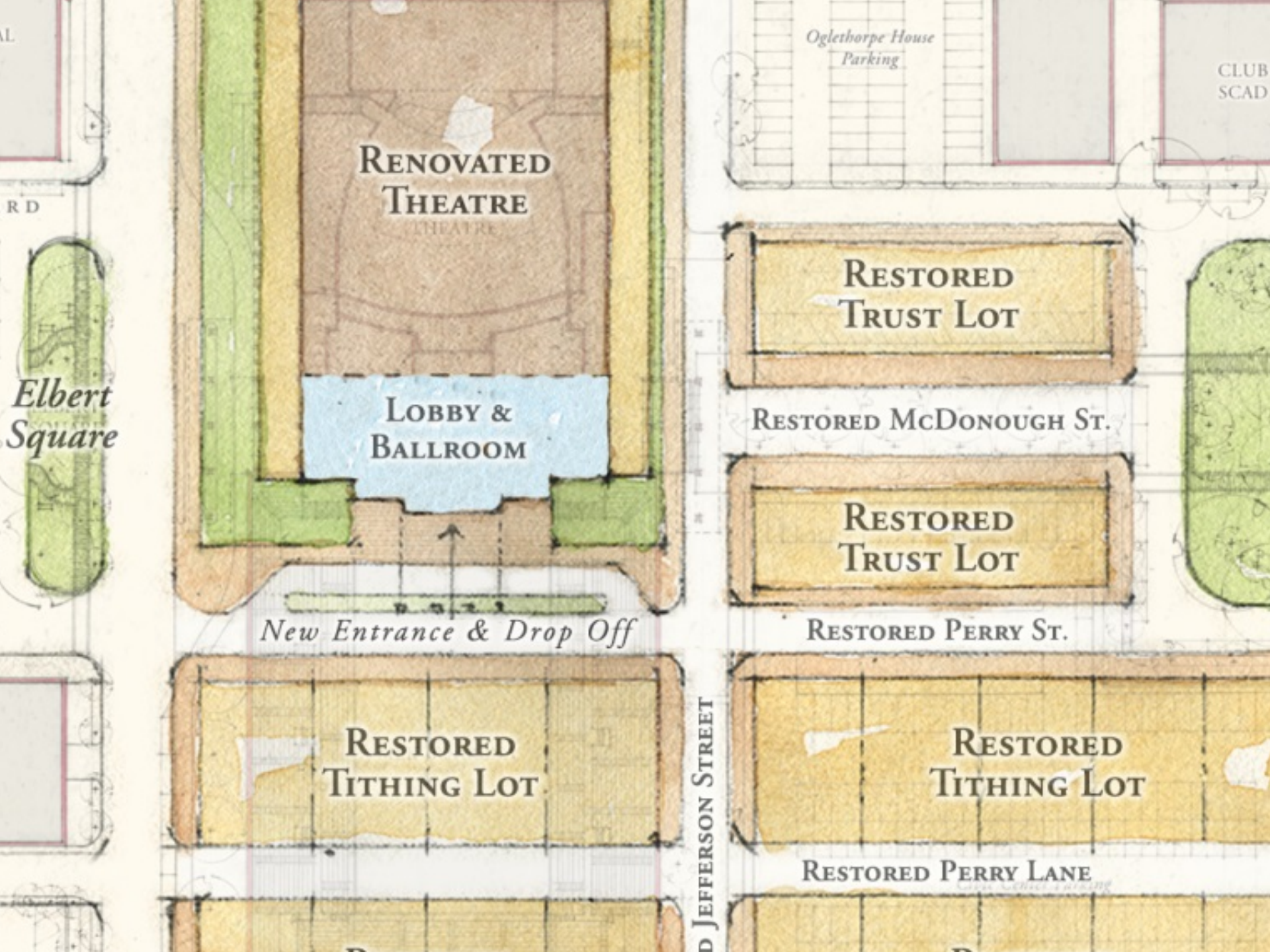
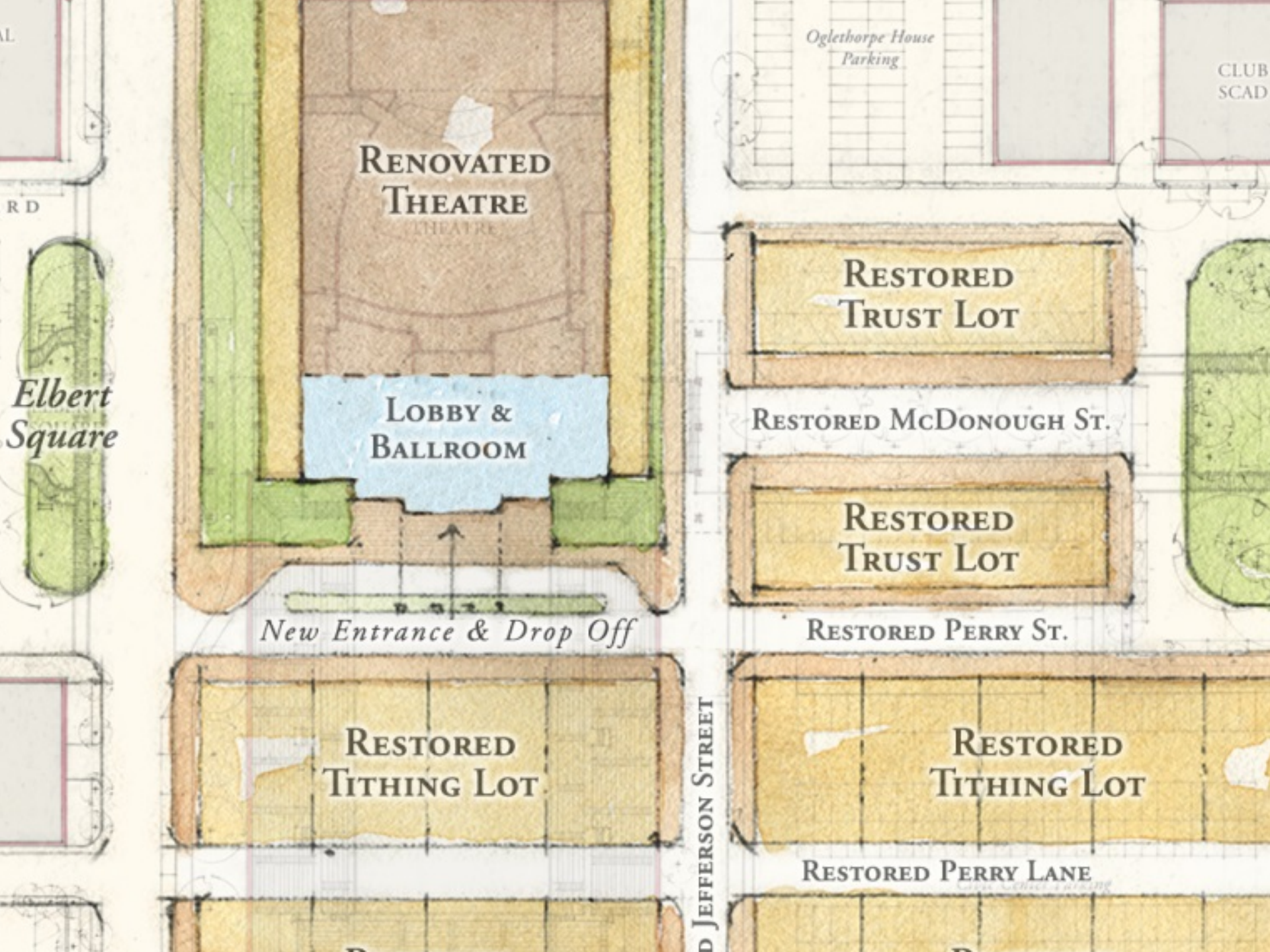
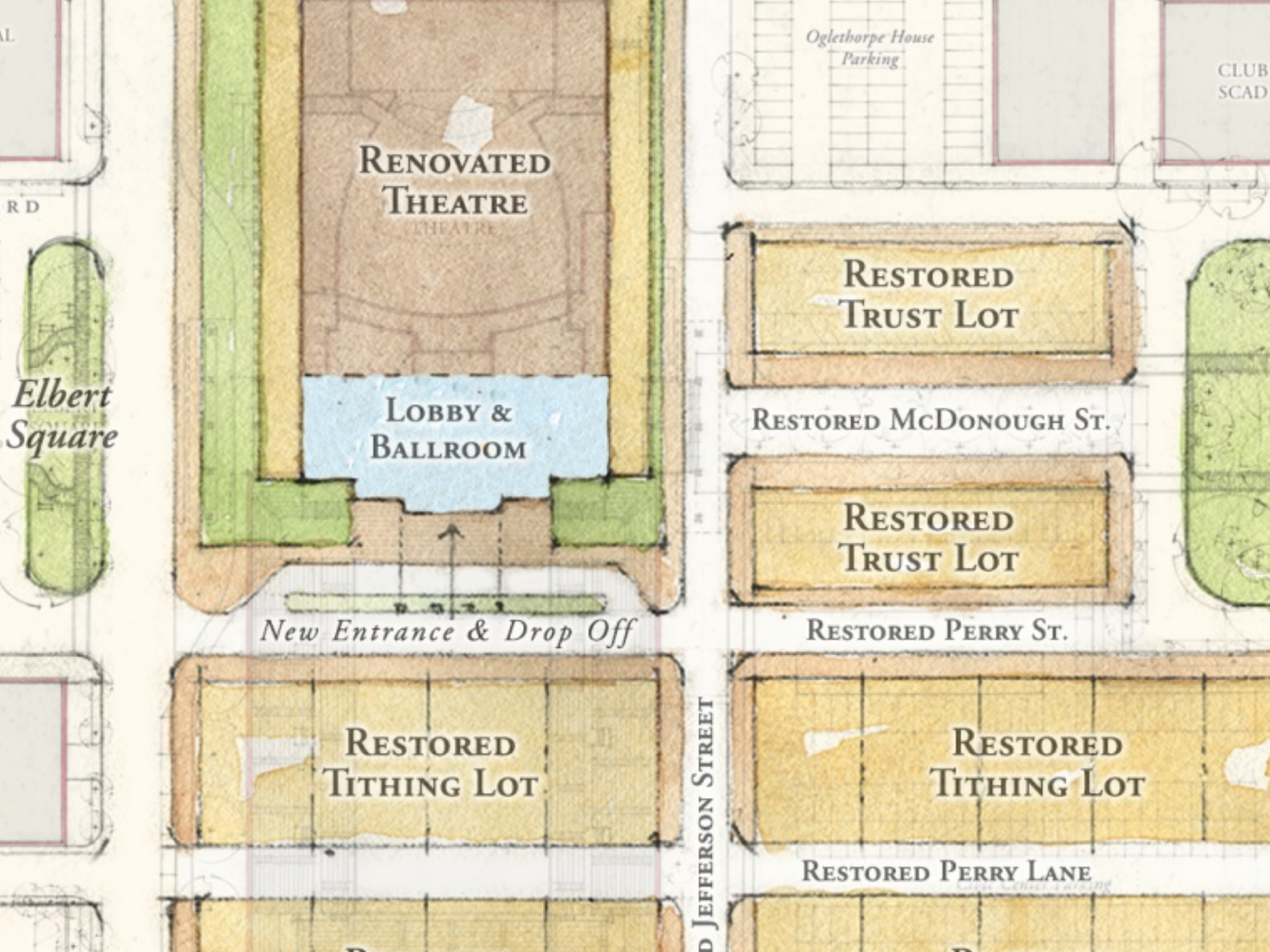
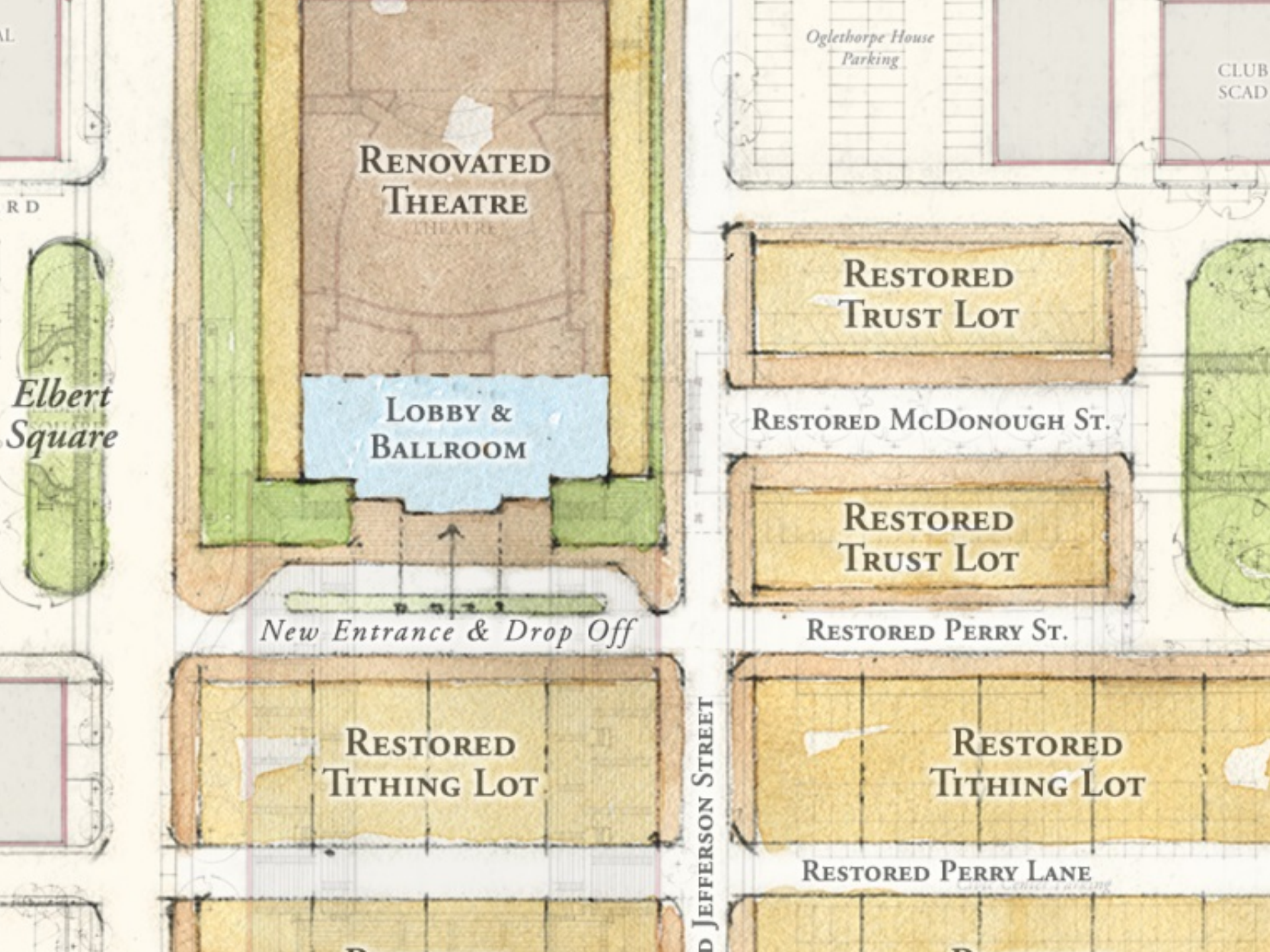
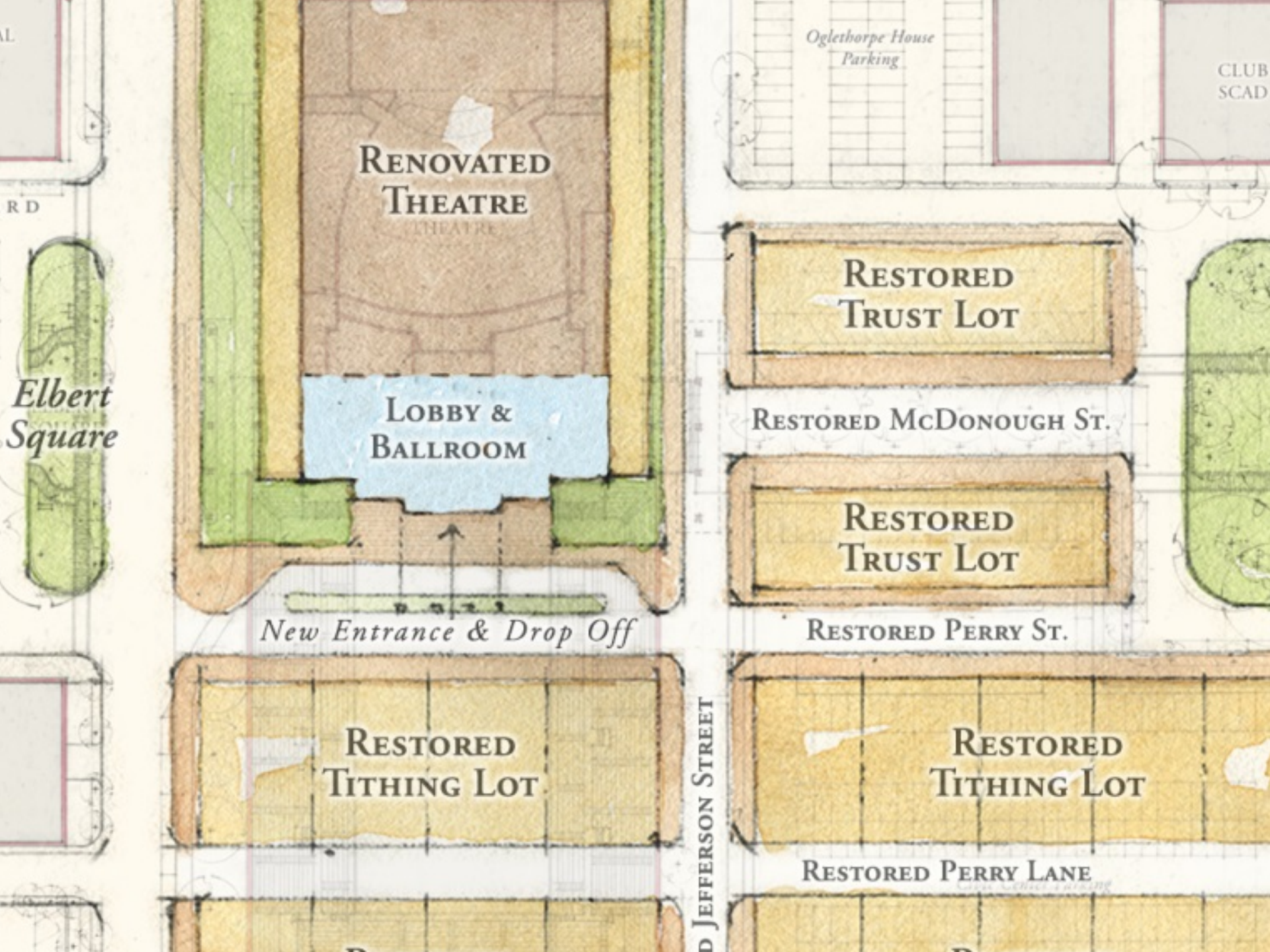
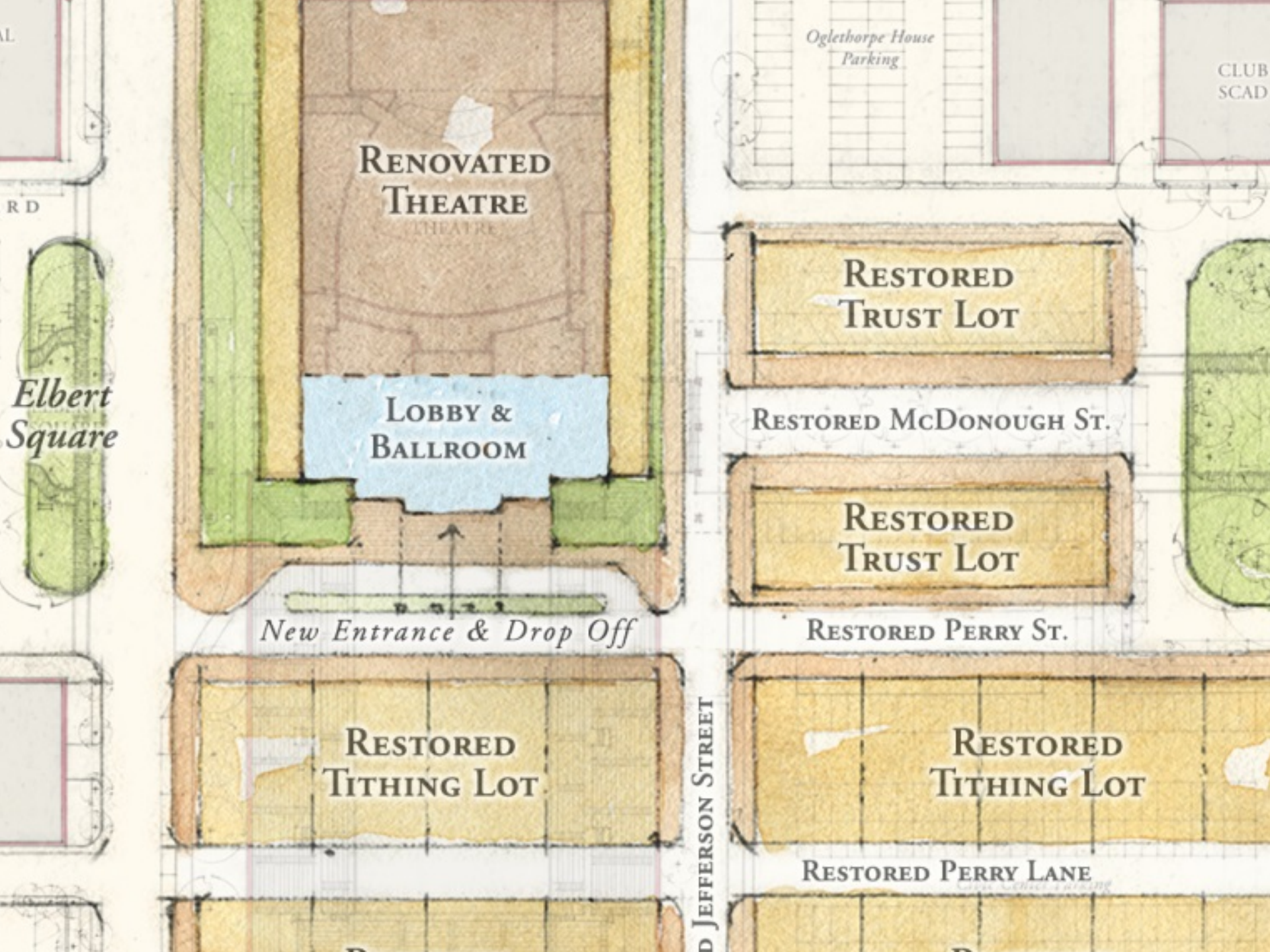
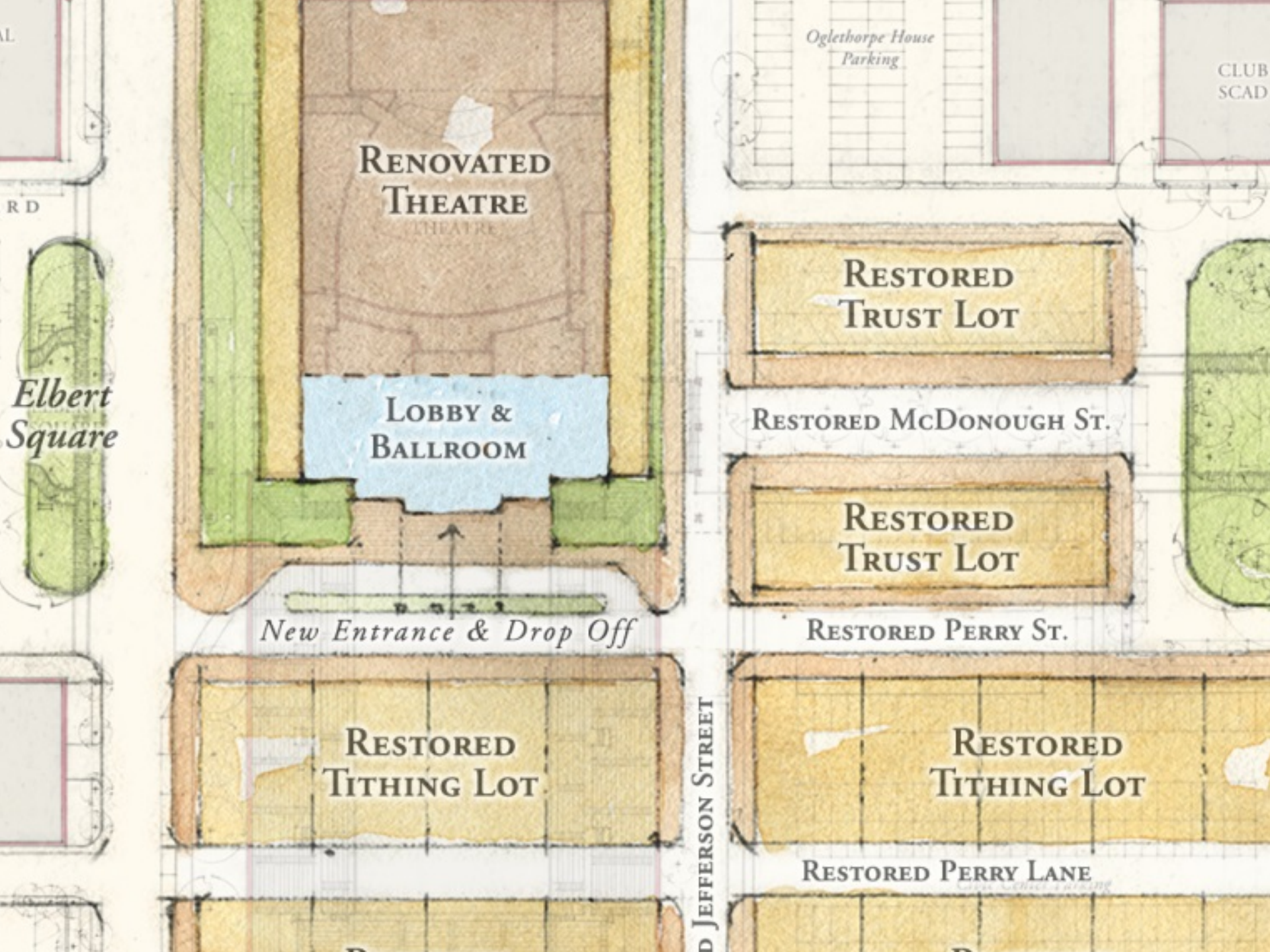
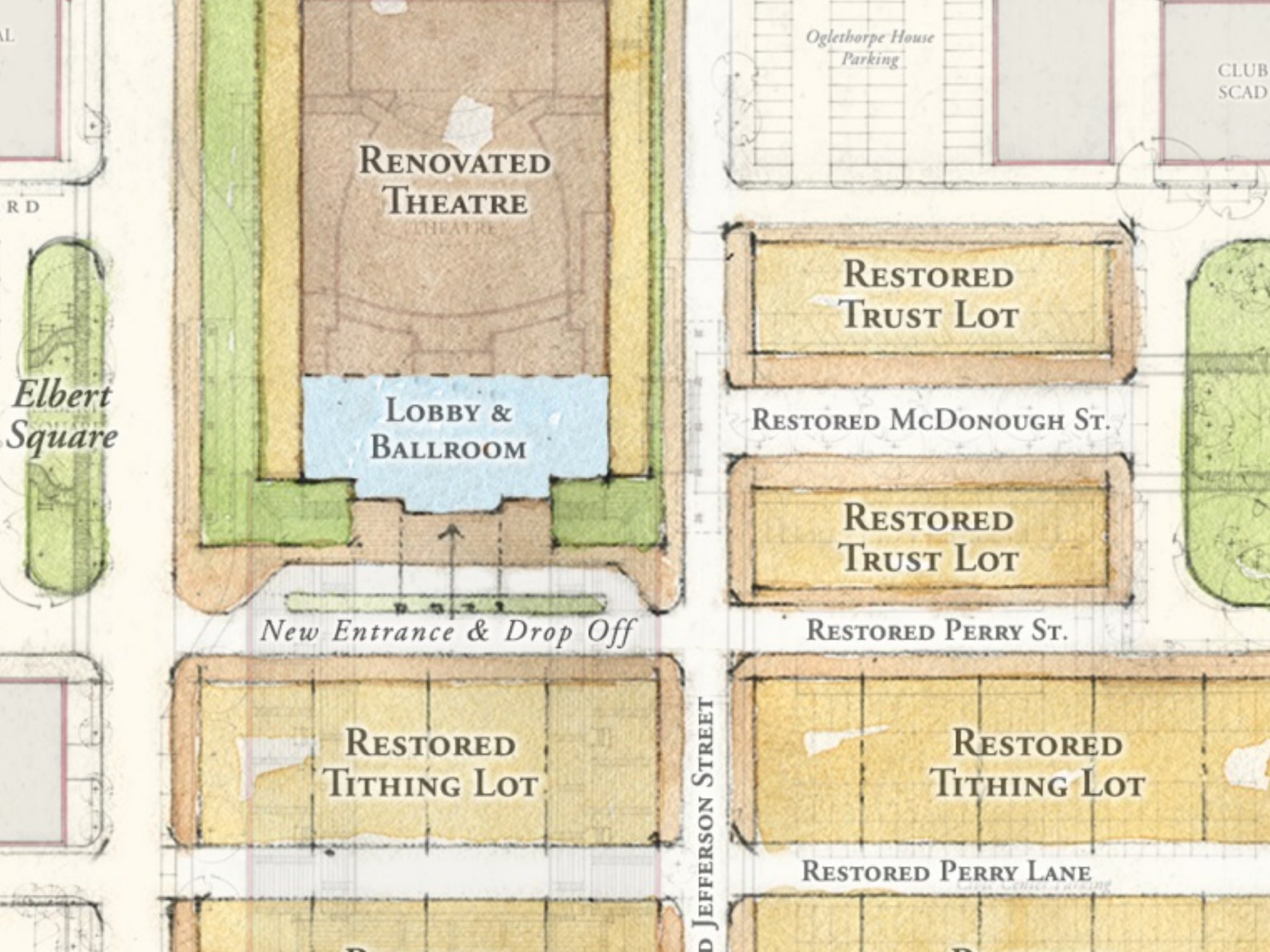
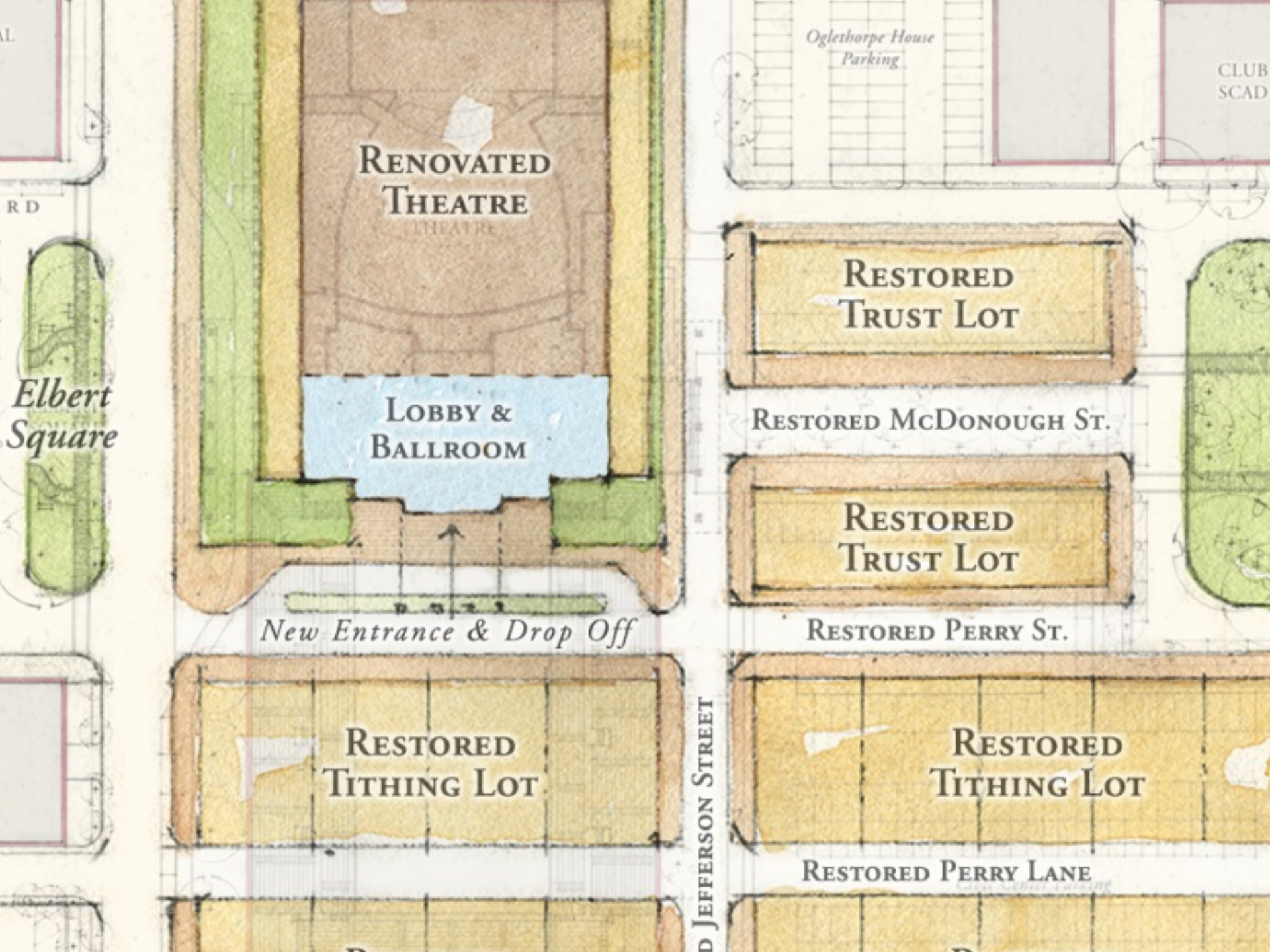
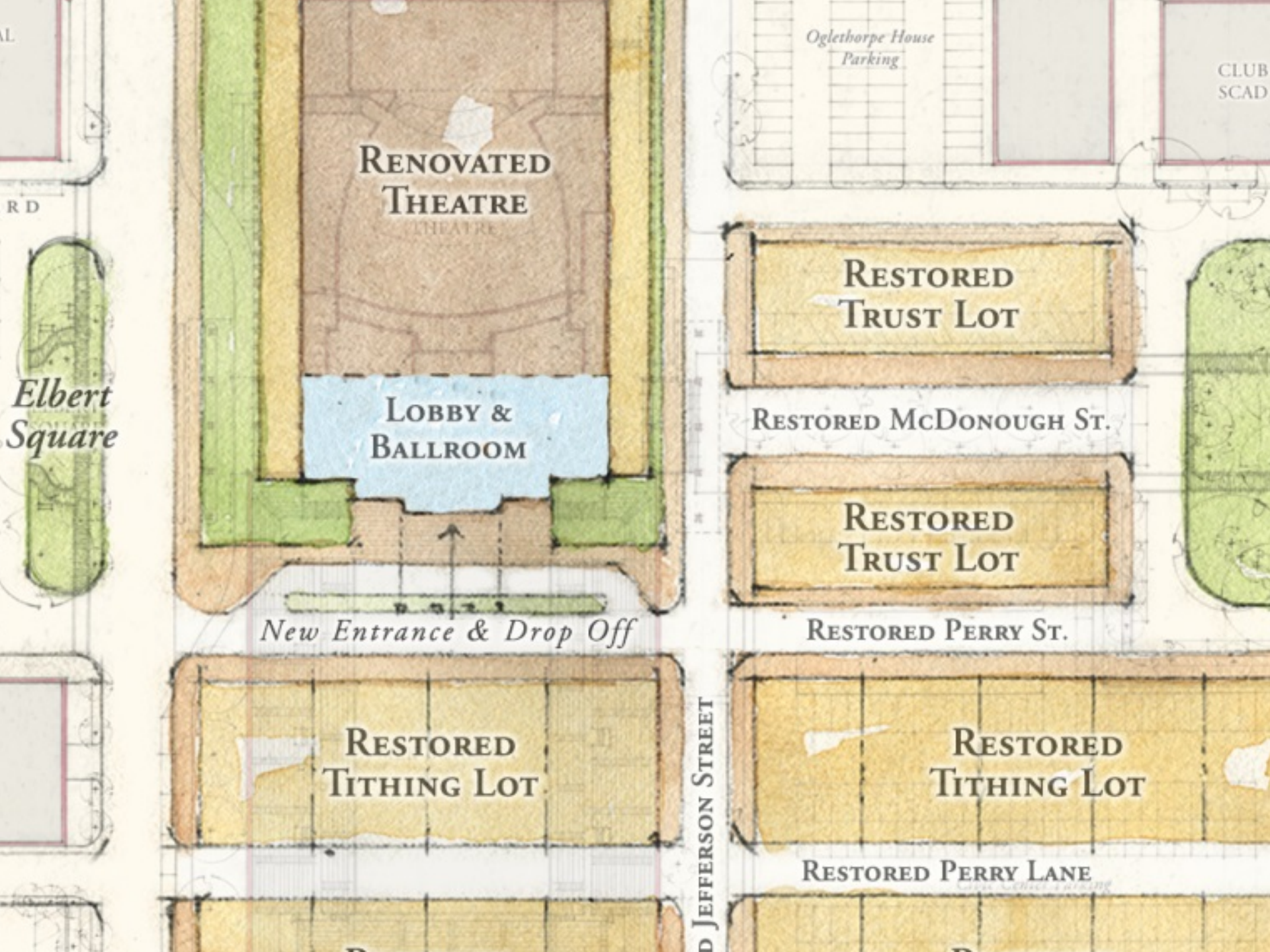
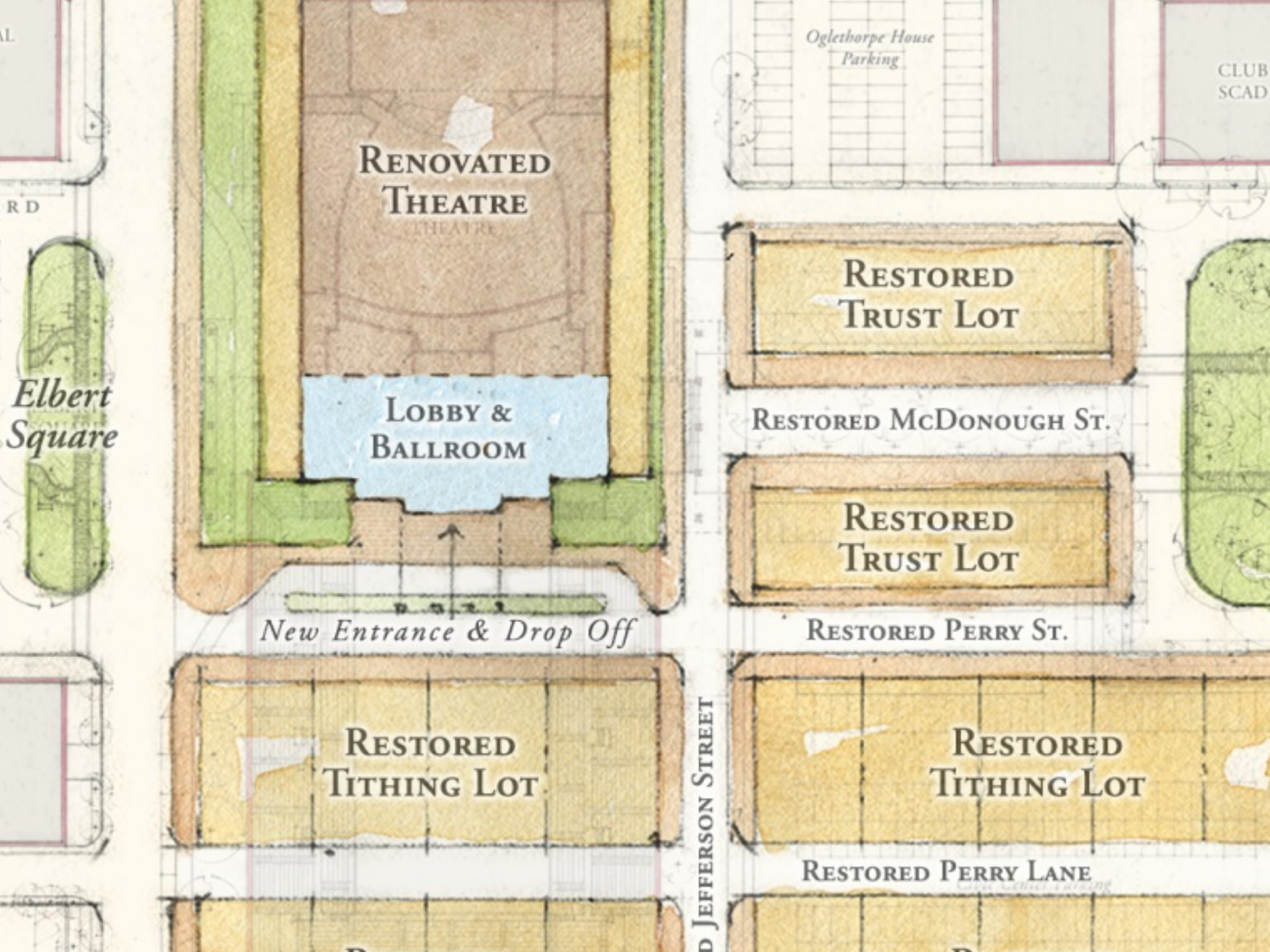
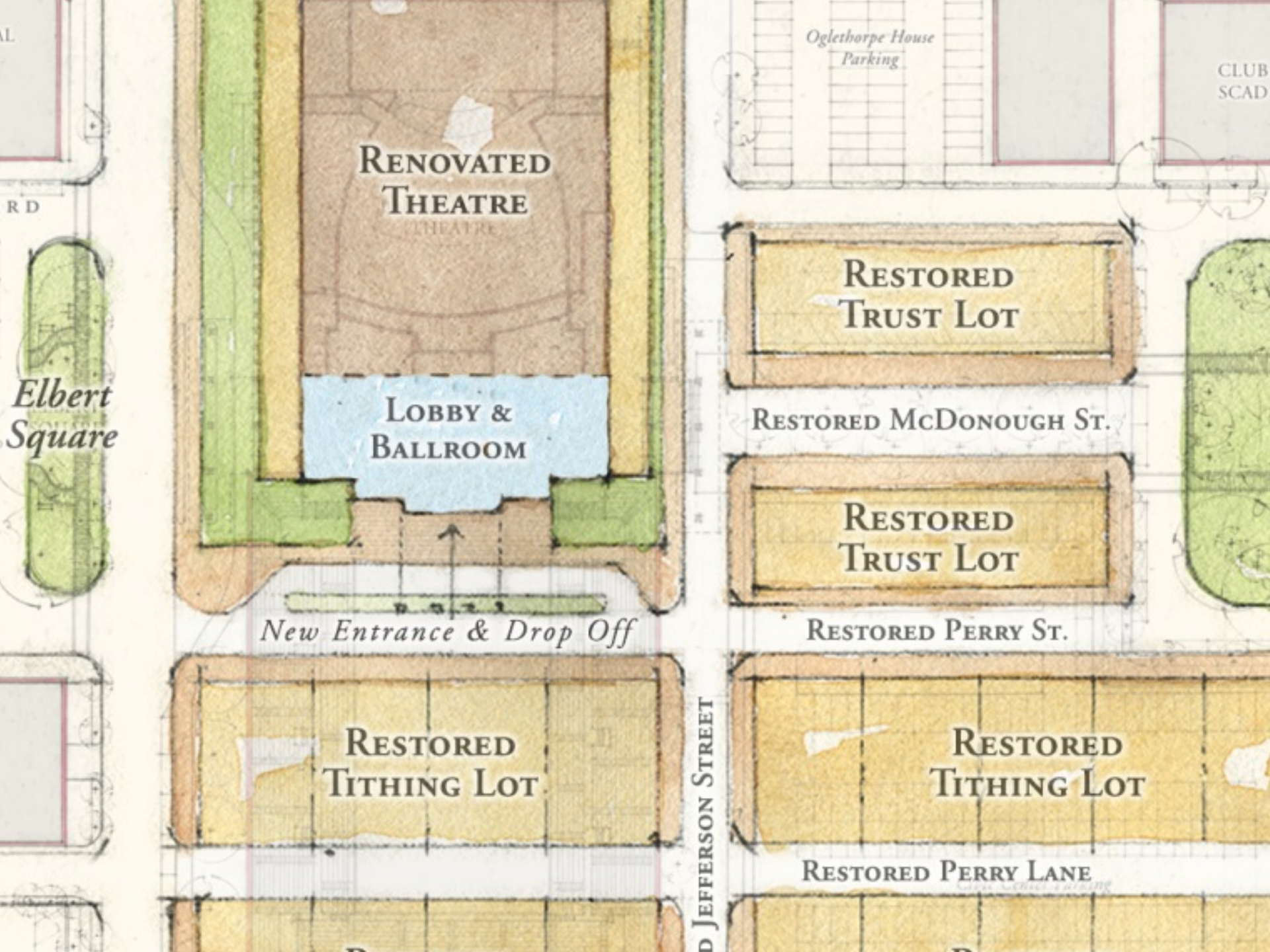
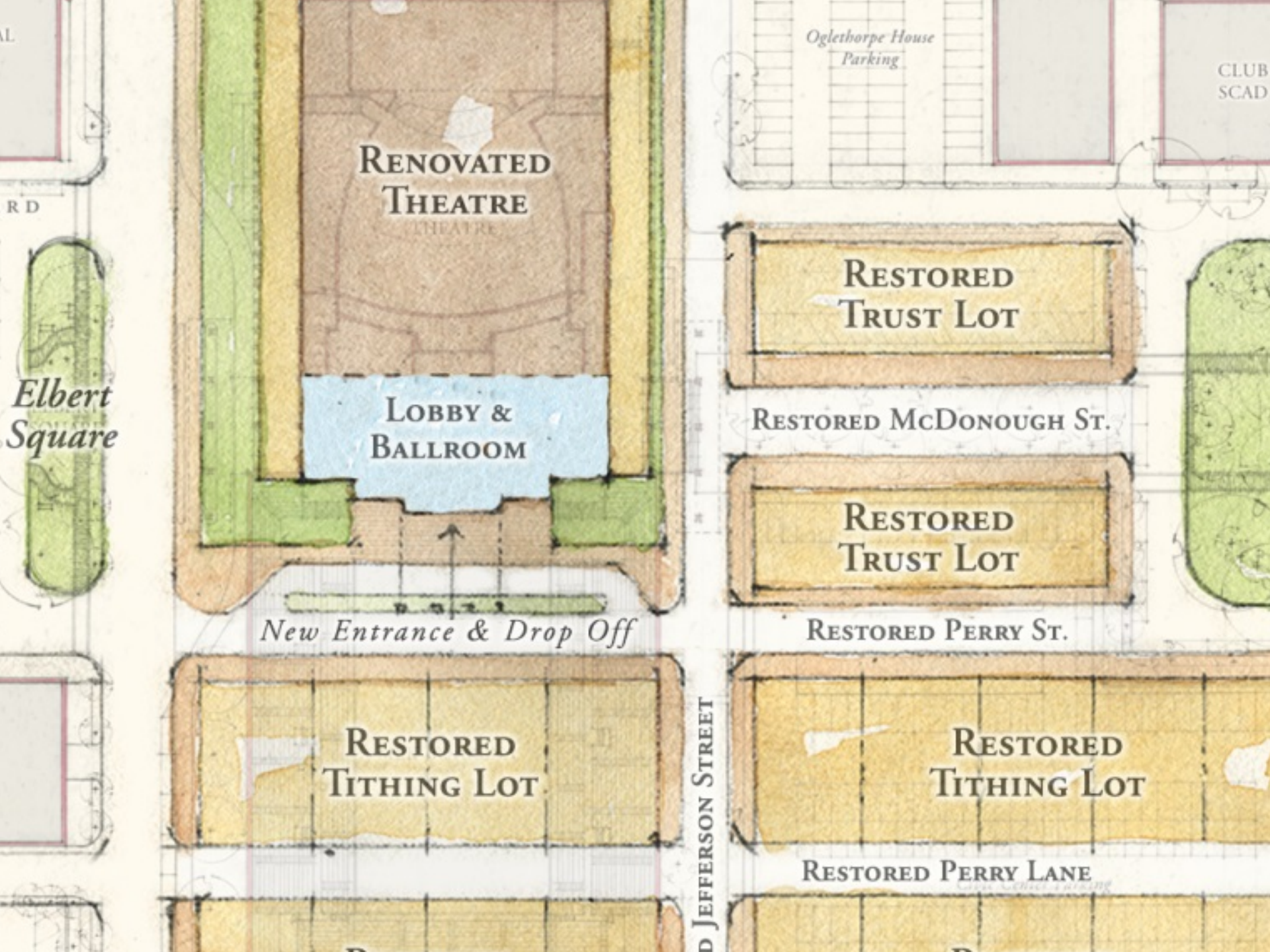
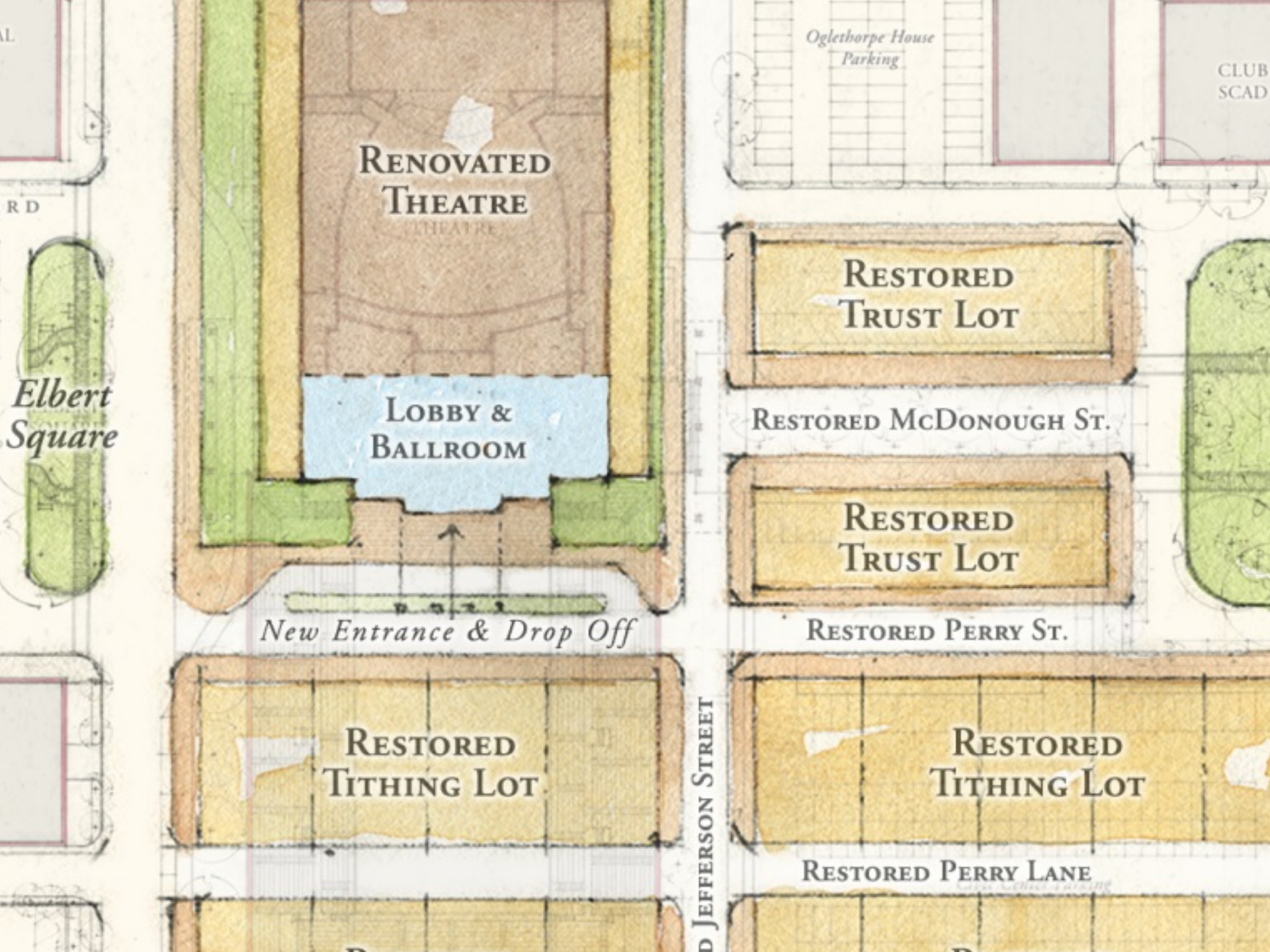
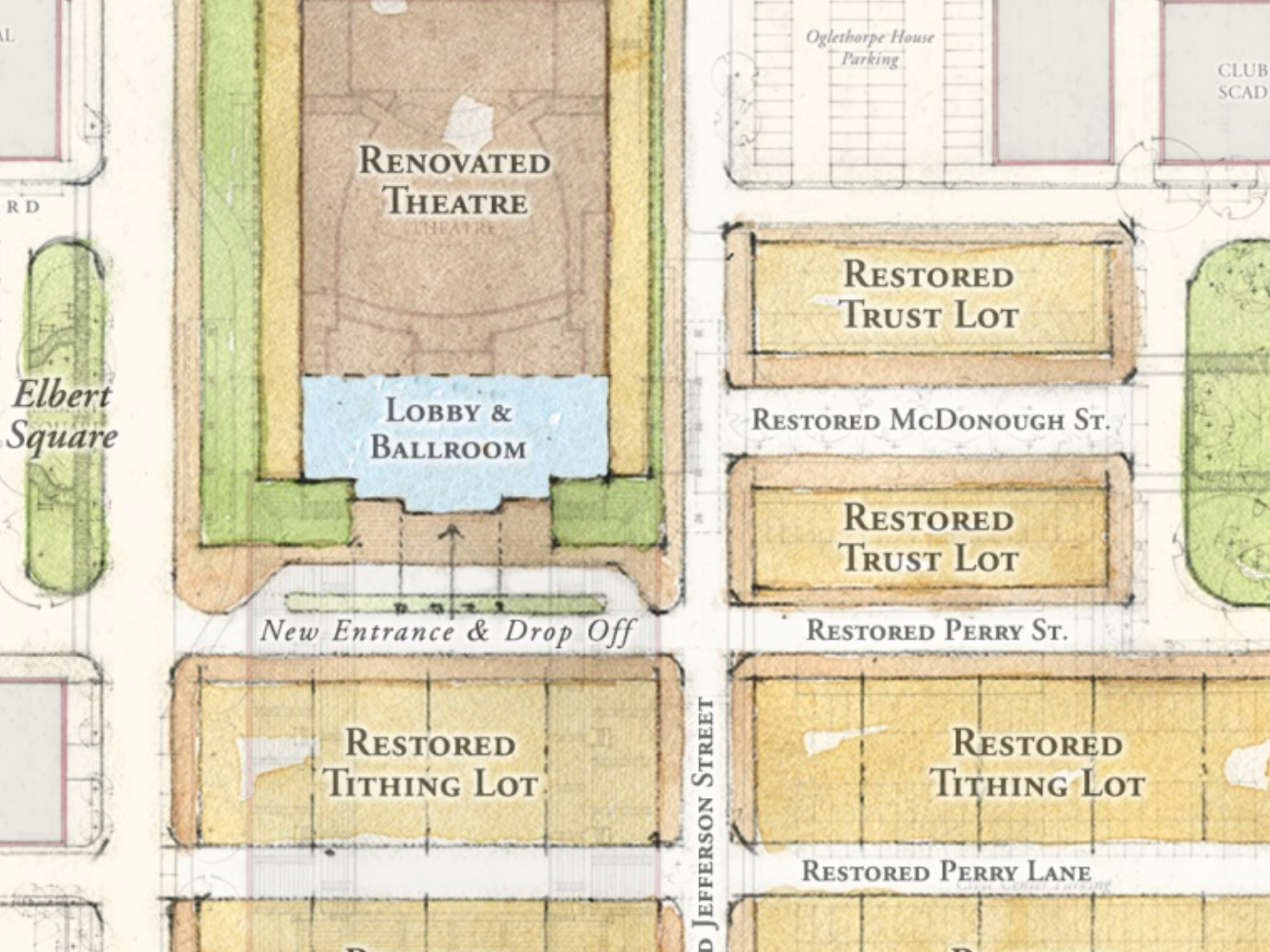
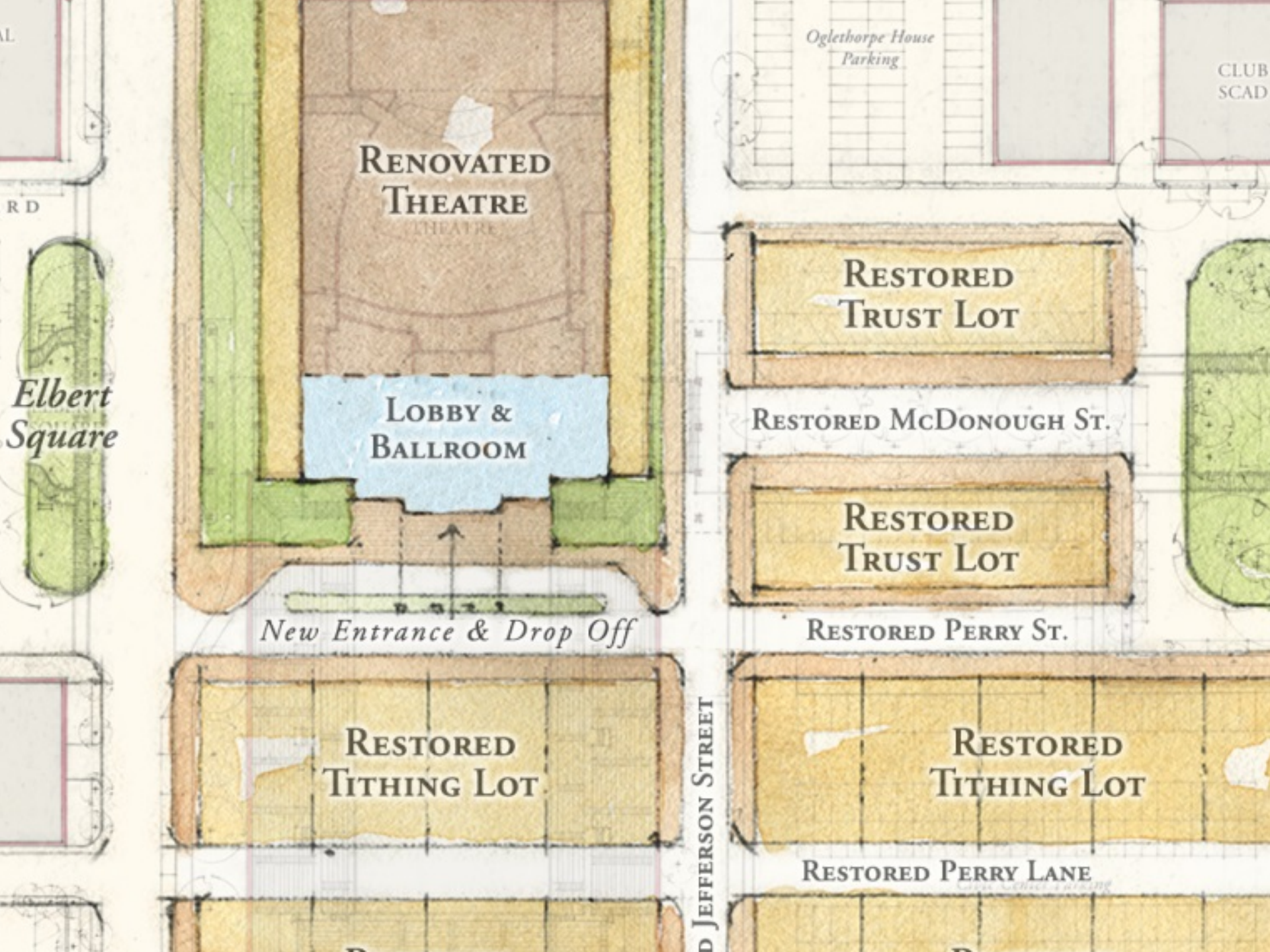
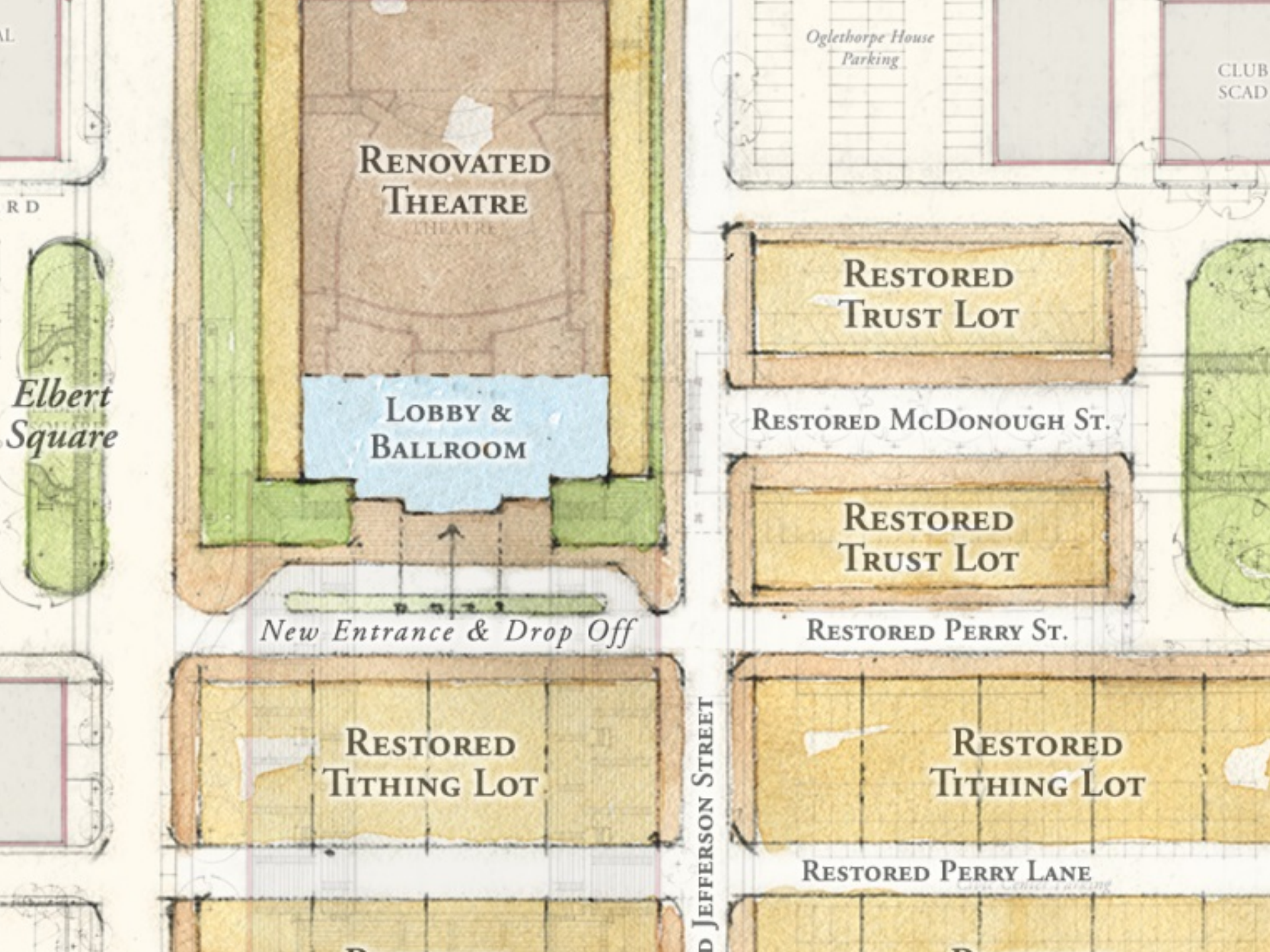
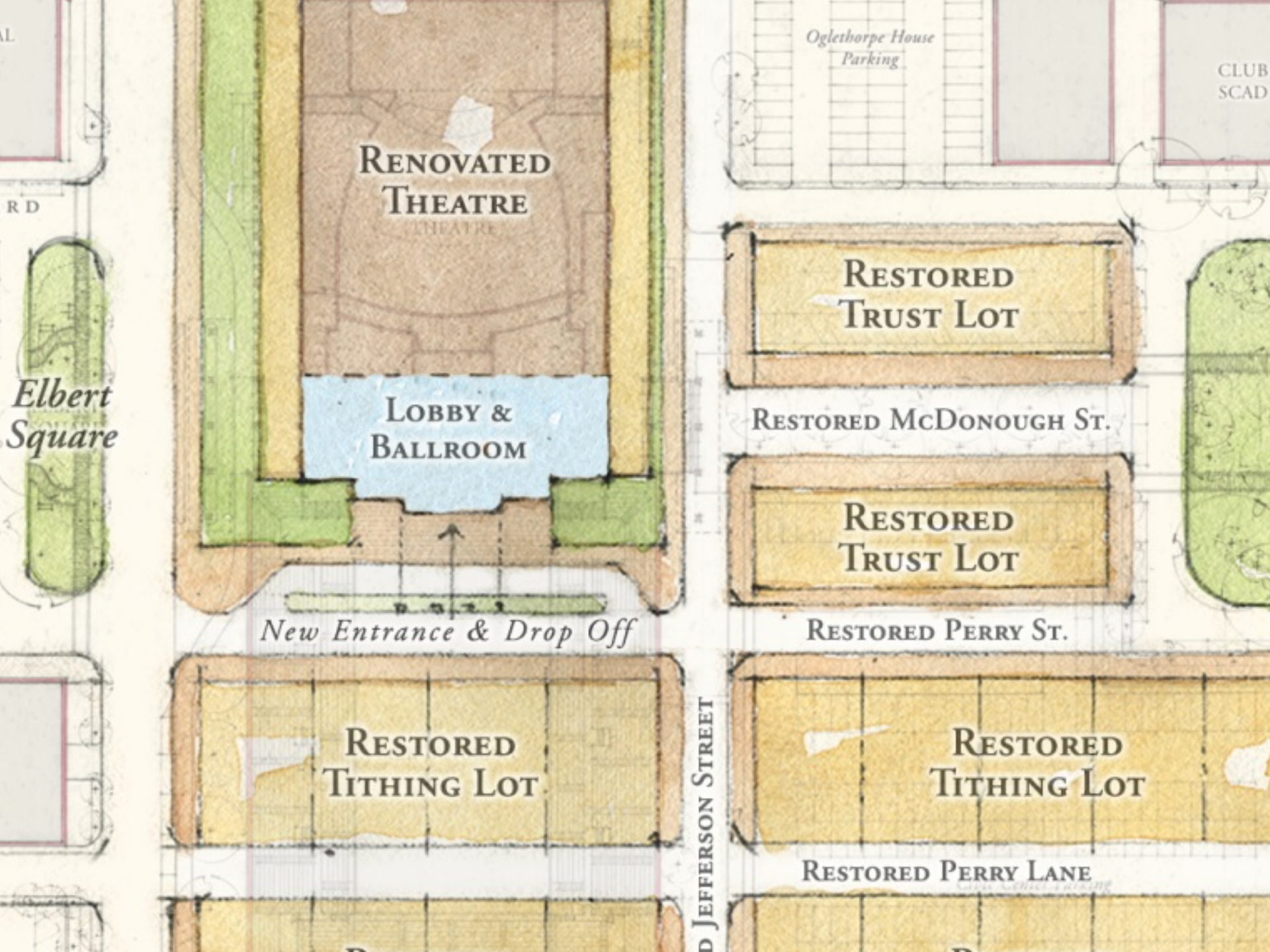
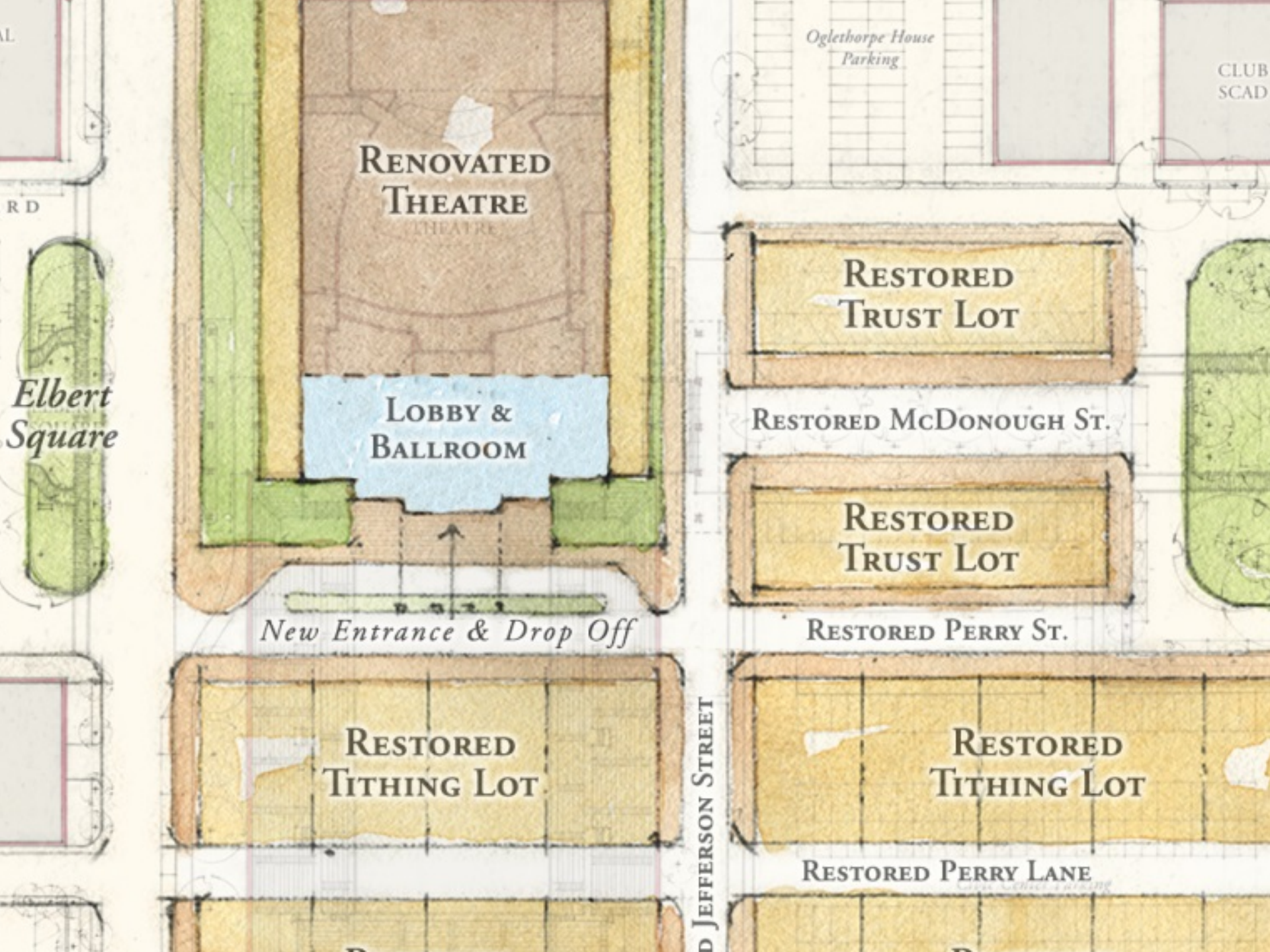
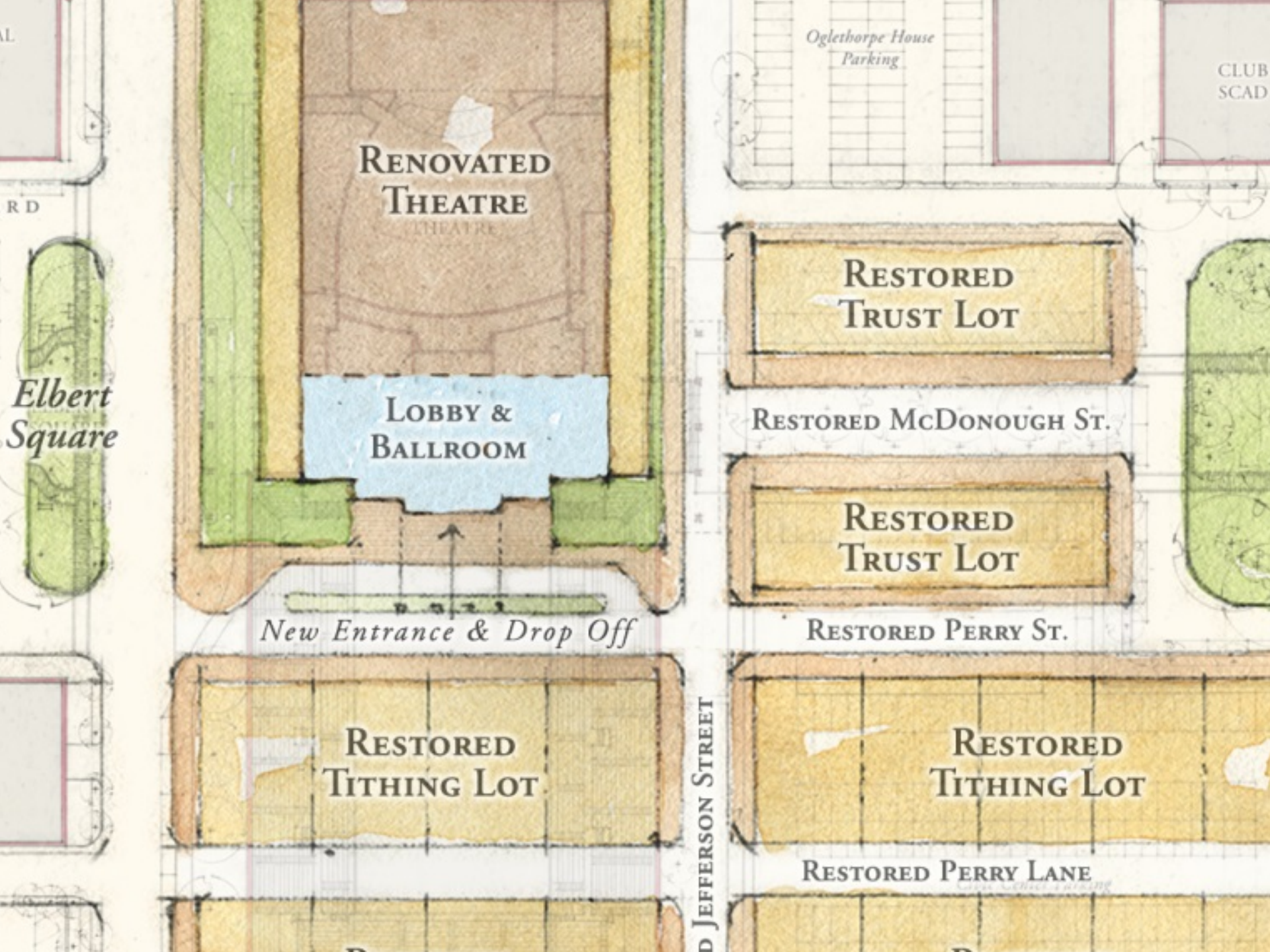
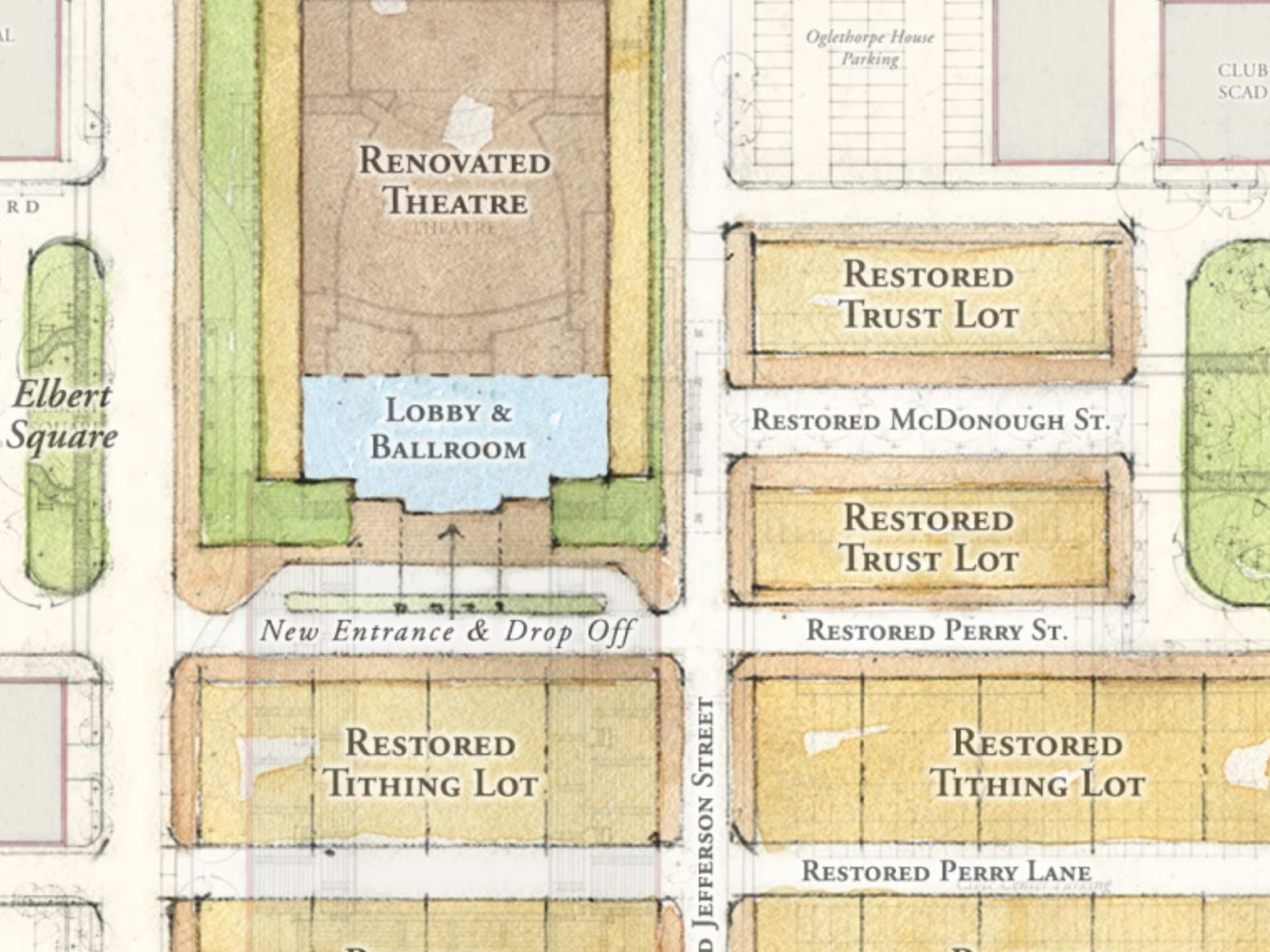
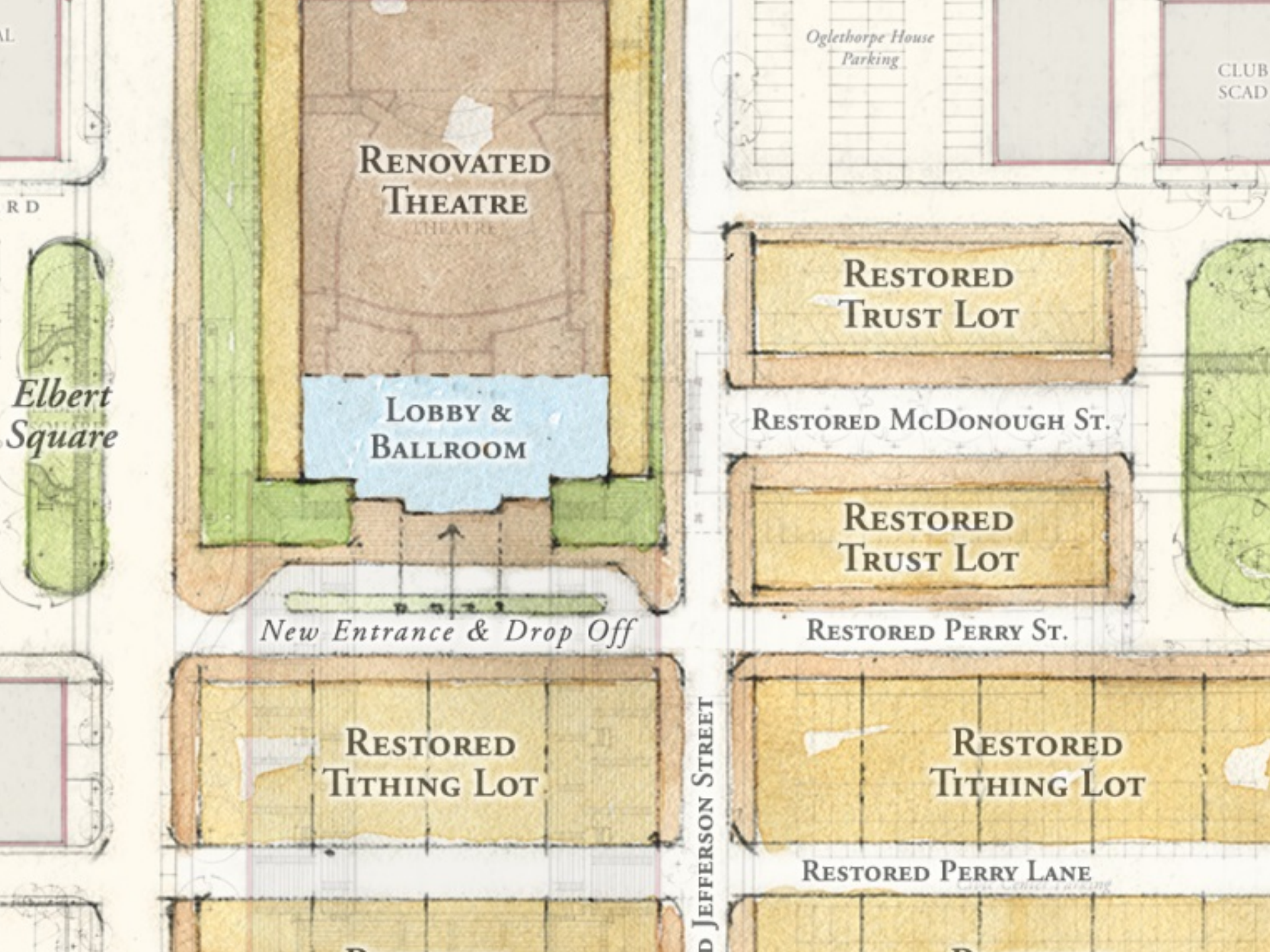
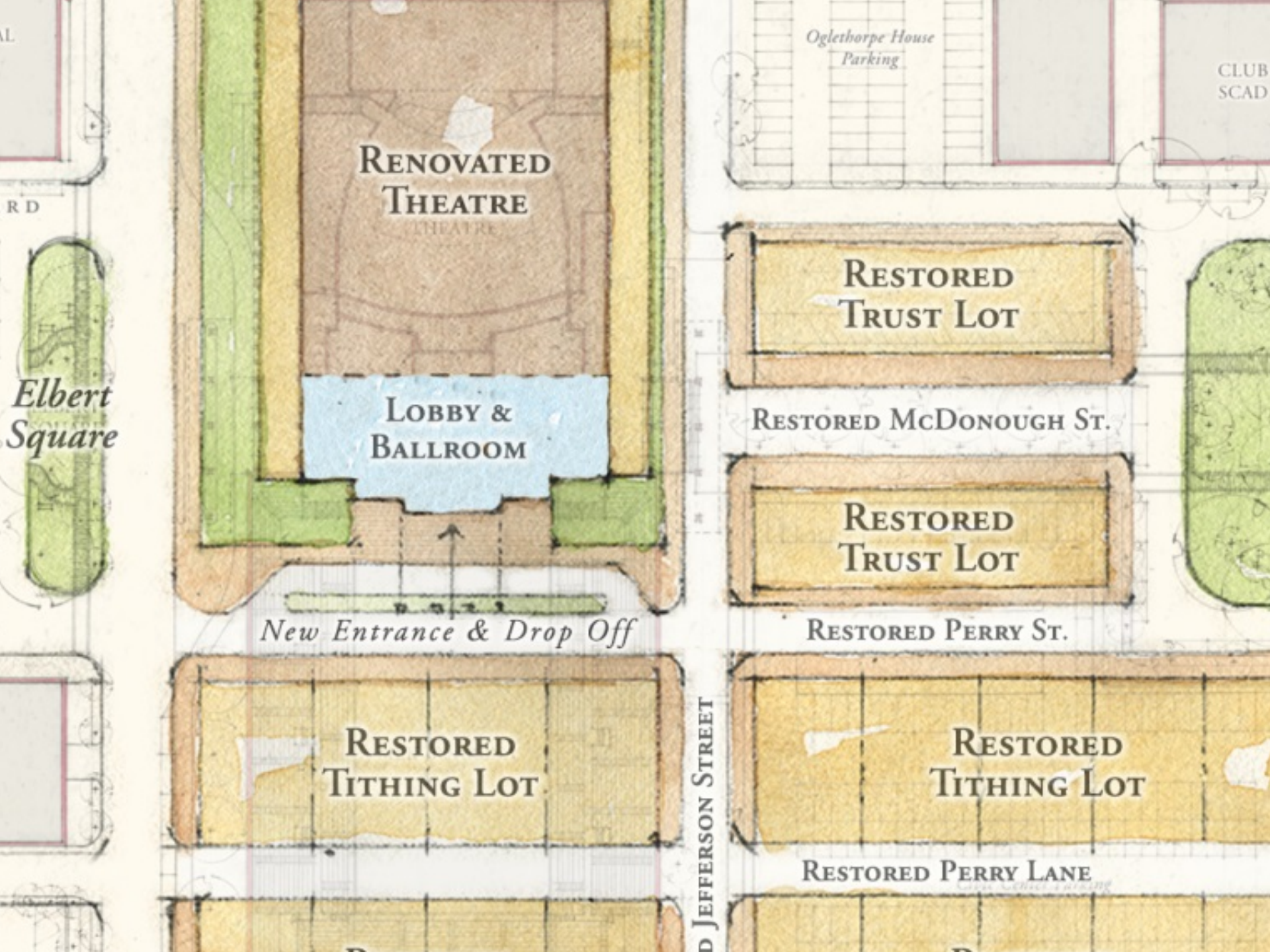
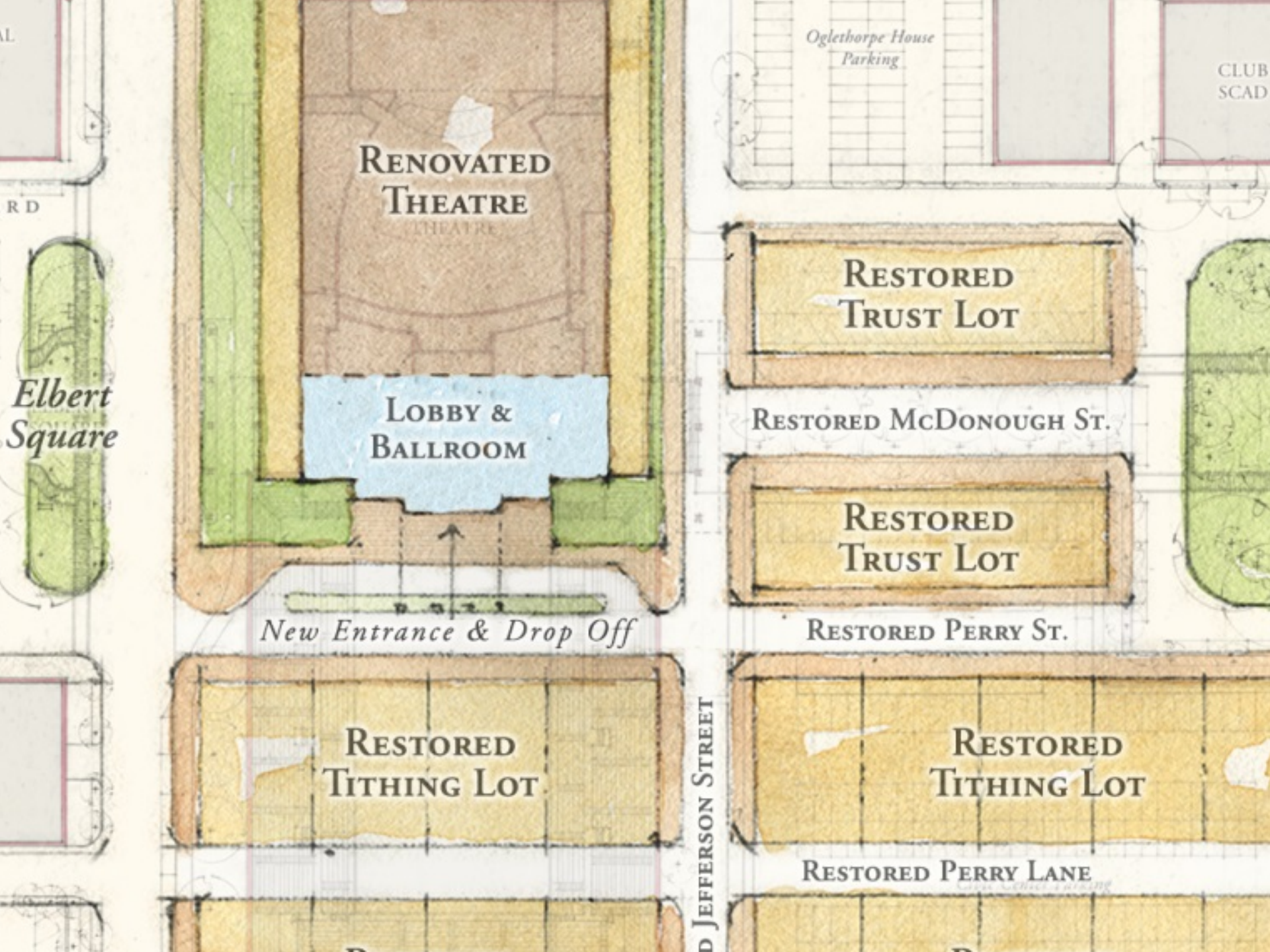


## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

### *Incremental Ward Restoration*

***A New Entry Facade for the  
Johnny Mercer Theatre...***





# ***Potential Usable Space***

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***Retail / Office / Municipal Space  
on Oglethorpe Avenue...***



MONTGOMERY

HOTEL

JEFFERSON

CHATHAM COUNTY  
TAX COMMISSIONER

JEPSON  
FOR T

*Oglethorpe Avenue*

RETAIL / OFFICE /  
MUNICIPAL SPACE

20,000 SF per Floor  
60,000 SF at 3 Floors  
120,000 SF at 6 Floors

SCAD  
OGLETHORPE  
HOUSE

Shared Loading & Service

*Oglethorpe House  
Parking*

RENOVATED  
THEATRE  
THEATRE

RESTORED

CULTURAL  
CENTER

LEAVARD

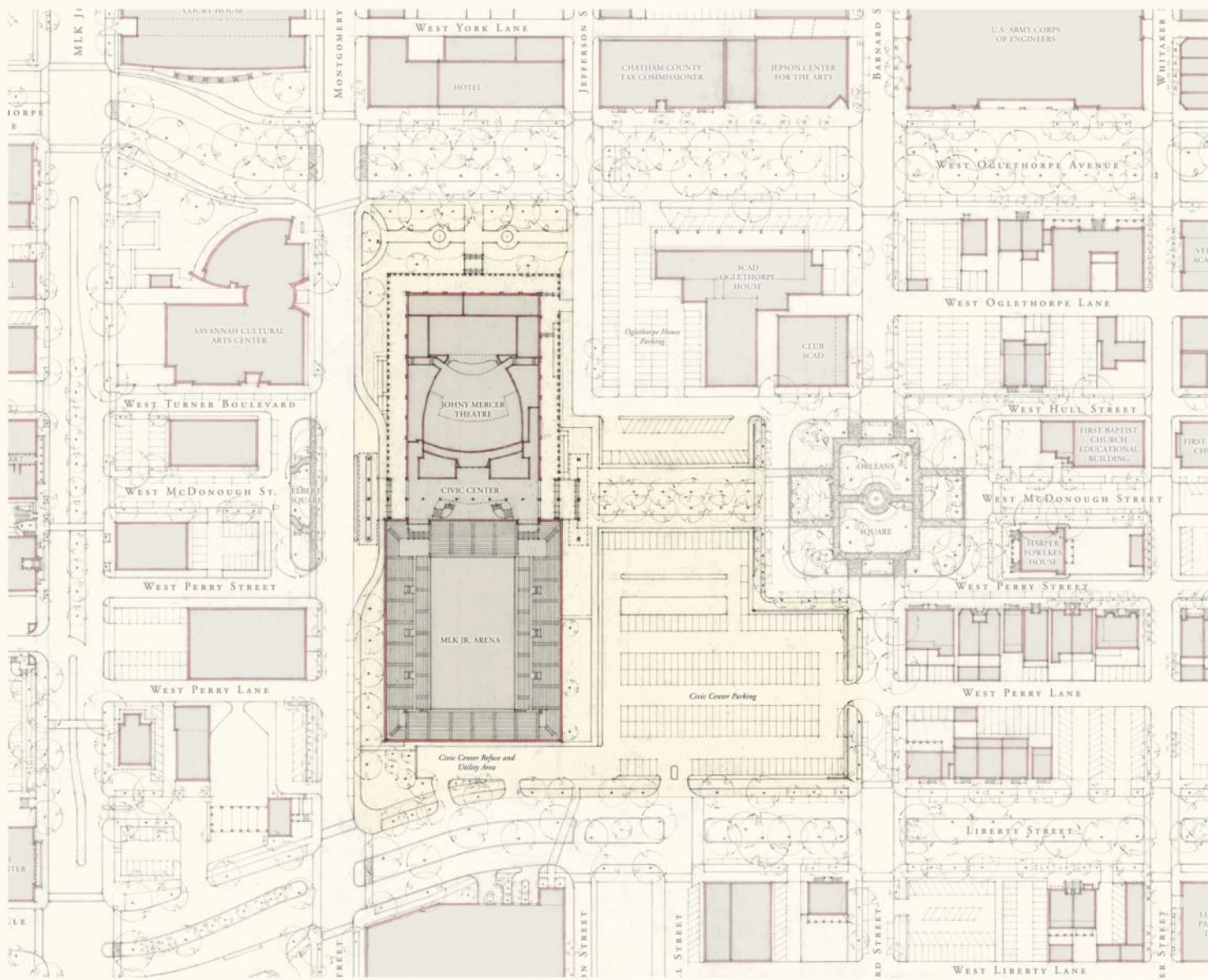
# **Elbert & Jackson Wards**

## *Long-Term Scenario*

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### Complete Ward Restoration

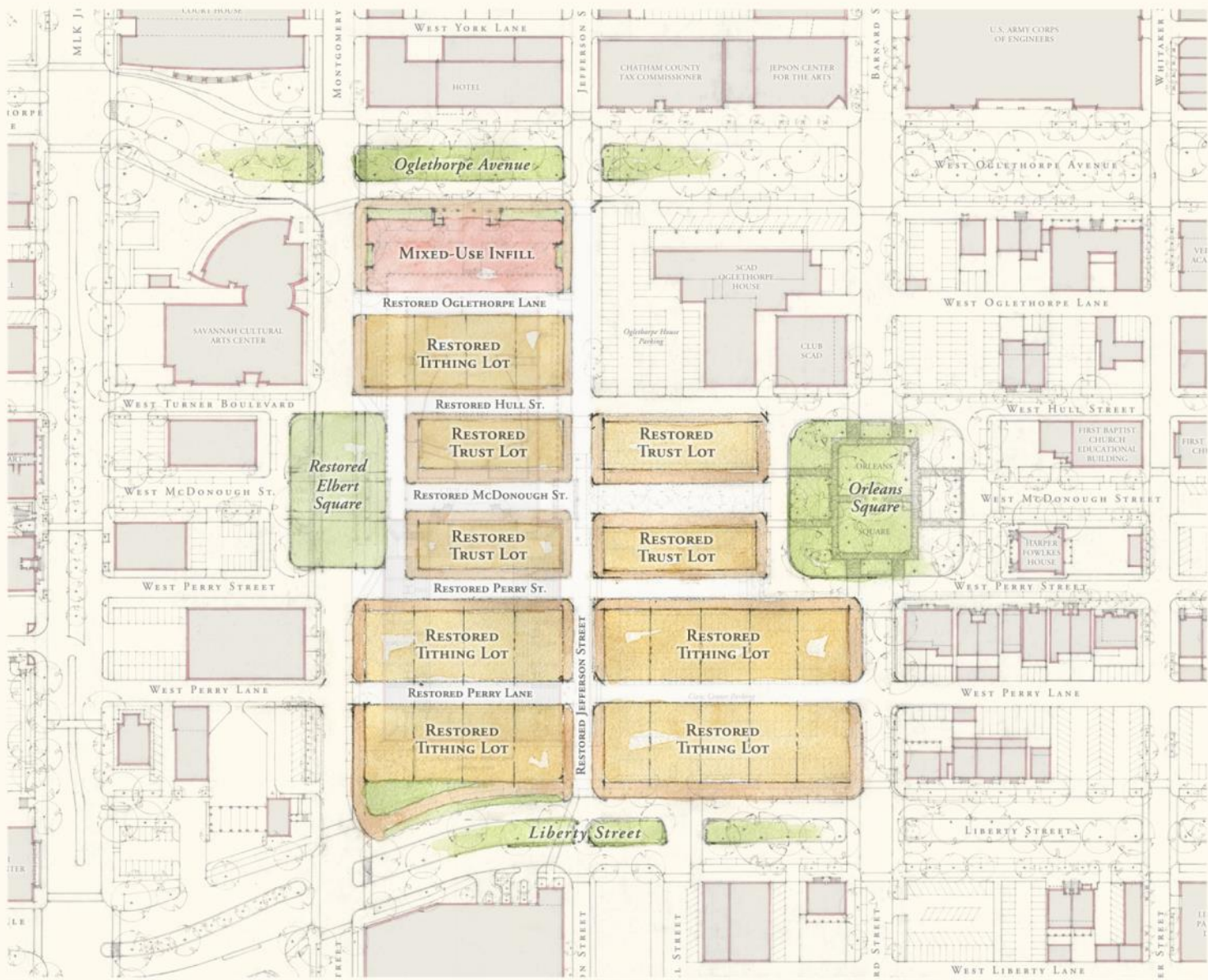
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## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

### *Existing Civic Center Site*



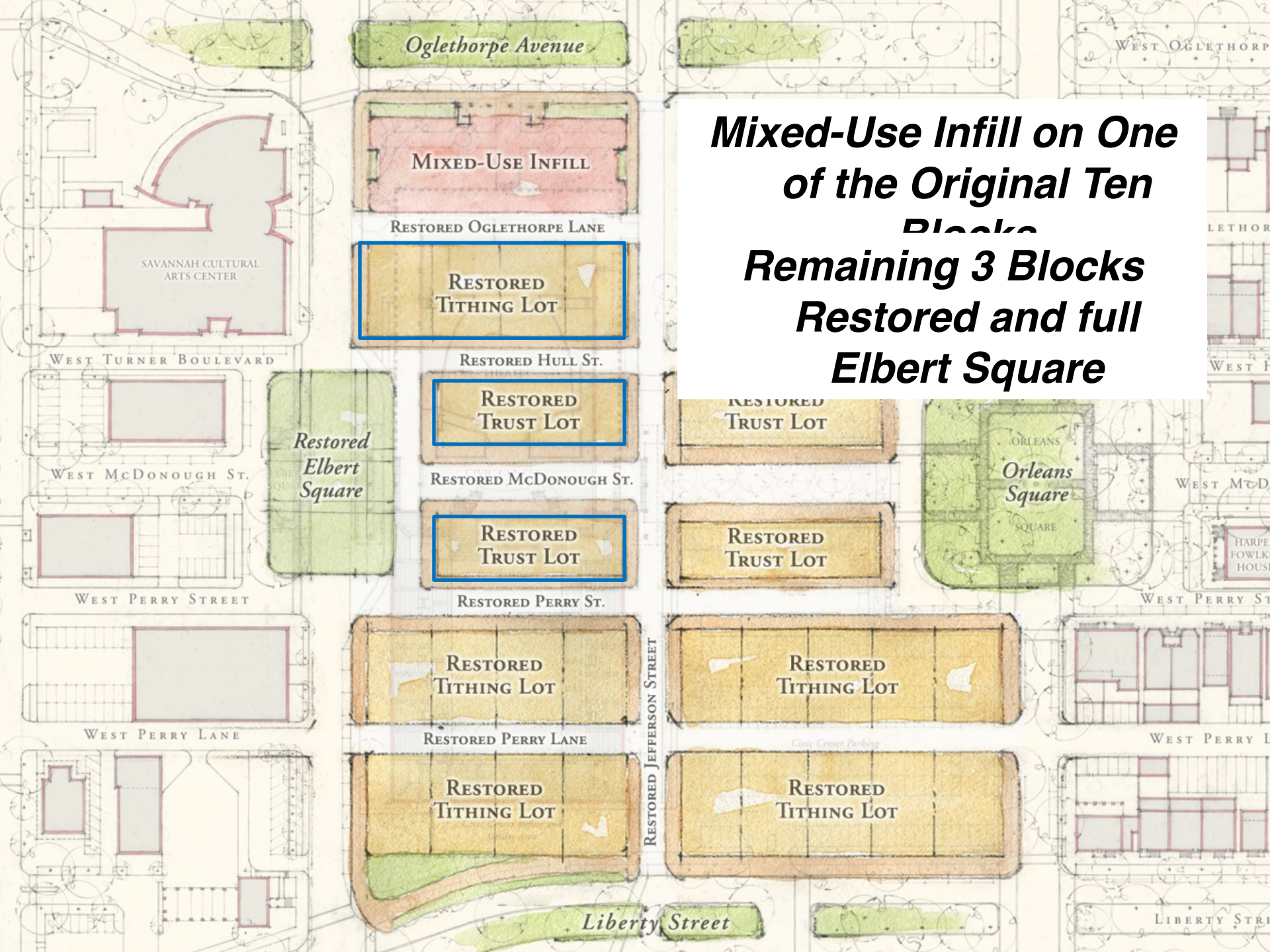


CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDIES

*Complete Ward Restoration*

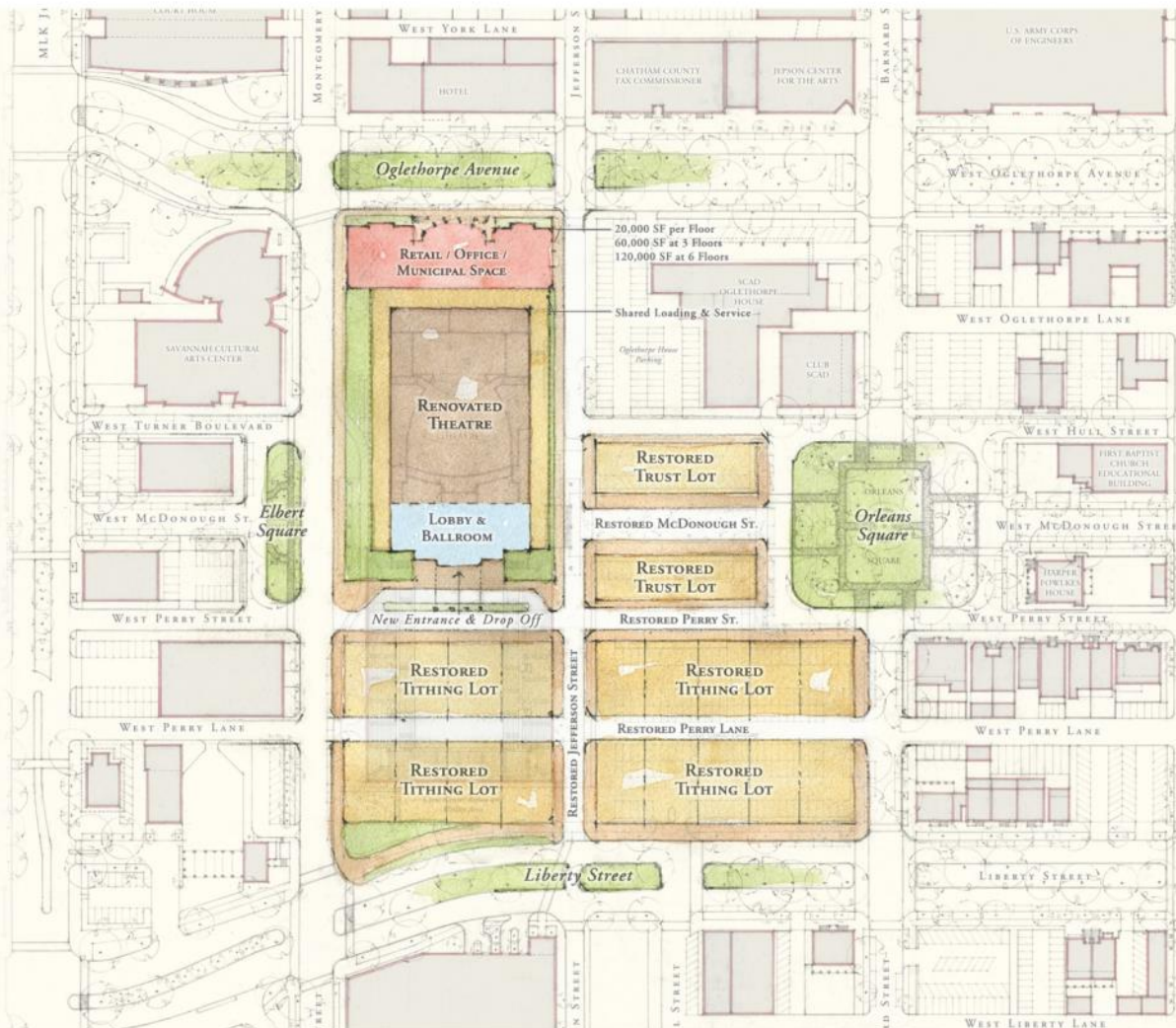


***Mixed-Use Infill on One  
of the Original Ten  
Blocks  
Remaining 3 Blocks  
Restored and full  
Elbert Square***



***City Council Direction  
for  
Further Study***





## CIVIC CENTER REDEVELOPMENT STUDY

### Incremental Ward Restoration

Information contained herein is conceptual. Information has been compiled from various sources and does not claim complete accuracy nor guarantee zoning or other types of development approvals. It is intended to provide an overview and analysis of urban conditions and strategies for revitalization. Seattle & Seattle, 2022

### Re-Establishing the Oglethorpe Plan

The structure of the Oglethorpe Plan has been proven as a successful and sustainable model of urban development over time. Re-establishing the street network in this area would be much more than a historic recreation, it would provide a framework for development that is inherently balanced and compatibly scaled with the rest of the Historic District.

The Master Plan provides an interim strategy for reclaiming a significant portion of an internationally celebrated urban plan that has proven to be a viable and sustainable model of development for nearly three hundred years.

### Restoring Elbert and Jackson Wards

Large-scale monolithic uses have damaged the urban character of this area. By bringing back the block structure, and diversity of building uses, these wards can eventually reestablish a well-knit connection with the rest of the district.

The Master Plan illustrates how re-imaging the Johnny Mercer Theatre with a new facade on a restored Perry Street and a new Civic Building addressing the Oglethorpe Avenue frontage allows for the re-establishment of seven of the original 10 blocks lost to the Civic Center complex in the 1960's. The Civic Master Plan is designed to allow for the possible full restoration of the three remaining original blocks in the future, at a point when the Theatre may no longer be a viable or necessary use.

### Future of the Civic Center

The Civic Center, and its surrounding land, will certainly evolve over the long-term future. As pieces of the urban fabric become available again for redevelopment, it is important to establish a vision that can anticipate this evolution and is consistent with the city plan.

The Civic Master Plan envisions the removal of the old arena of the Civic Center complex, the rehabilitation of the theatre, its lobby, meeting rooms, and ballrooms for continued use, a new mixed-use building that incorporates offices as well as active street level uses on Oglethorpe Avenue, and the re-establishment of much of the original Public Realm of these two historic Savannah wards.

Civic Master Plan for  
ELBERT & JACKSON WARDS  
National Historic Landmark District  
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA



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*Additional Preparation*

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- **Acoustical and Facility Analysis**
- **Cultural Landscape Analysis**
- **Phase I Archaeology Report**
- **Detailed Civil Site Survey**

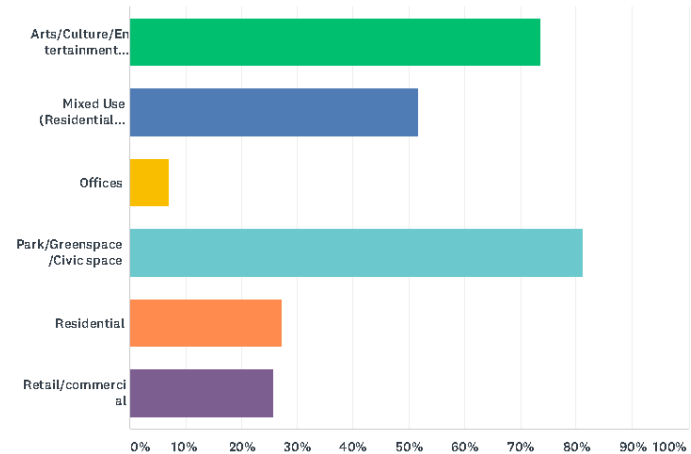
# ***Recommendation of the ULI Atlanta Study***

***Acoustical and Facility Analysis...***



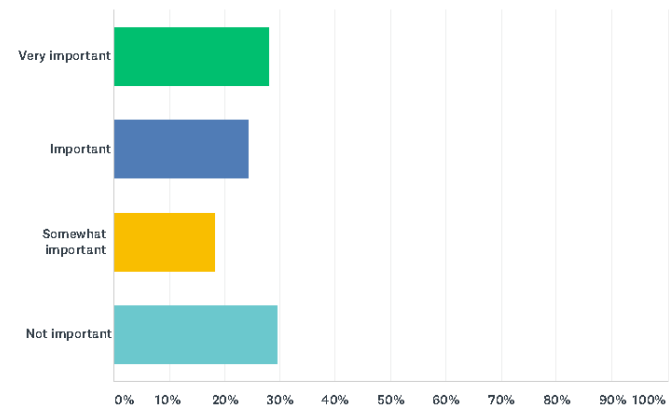
## Q2 Please select three uses you would like to see at the Civic Center site

Answered: 510 Skipped: 0



## Q5 How important is it to you that the City continue to offer a venue for the existing services at this location?

Answered: 510 Skipped: 0







## ***Economic Viability of the Civic Center Site***

Panelists spent two days using the Civic Center as a base for this project. ...included in the process was a tour of the facility, use of the meeting rooms, and a walk around the exterior of the site.

Though this review was very high-level and brief, the team explored the condition of the building, the possibility of re-use/repurposing, along with possible scenarios of partial re-use. We recommend a detailed assessment by a consultant.

---



[n, pl. defining sound for the next generation]

Preliminary Renovation Feasibility Assessment  
for the

# Johnny Mercer Theatre

Prepared for:  
City of Savannah  
Savannah, Georgia

Sottile & Sottile  
Savannah, Georgia

Akustiks Project No. 23-0961  
20 September 2023



[n, pl. defining sound for the next generation]

20 September 2023

Mr. Christian Sottile  
Mr. William Santiago  
Sottile & Sottile  
10 West Taylor Street  
Savannah, Georgia 31401

Re: Johnny Mercer Theatre – Preliminary Renovation Feasibility Assessment  
AKS Project No. 23-0961

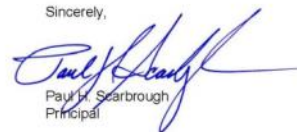
Dear Christian and William,

It was such a pleasure to be in Savannah and to meet you both. That my visit was so productive was, in no small measure, due to your efforts to organize my time and arrange meetings with so many key stakeholders. While the existing Johnny Mercer Theatre is certainly very tired from aesthetic and functional perspectives, there is no doubt in my mind that the facility is a valuable community asset that could be transformed to play a leading role once again in the cultural life of Savannah. Were it to be demolished, its loss would be keenly felt by many segments of the community.

Enclosed is my final report outlining the assessment of the Johnny Mercer Theatre along with specific concepts and strategies that could be considered to bring the auditorium up to contemporary levels of acoustical and theatrical functionality while refreshing the architecture to be more welcoming and engaging.

I hope that you find the enclosed to be both informative and interesting. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Paul H. Searbrough  
Principal

***“While the existing Johnny Mercer  
Theatre***

***is certainly very tired from aesthetic  
and functional perspectives, there is no  
doubt that the facility is a valuable  
community asset that could be  
transformed to play a leading role once  
again in the cultural life of Savannah.***

***Paul Scarbrough***













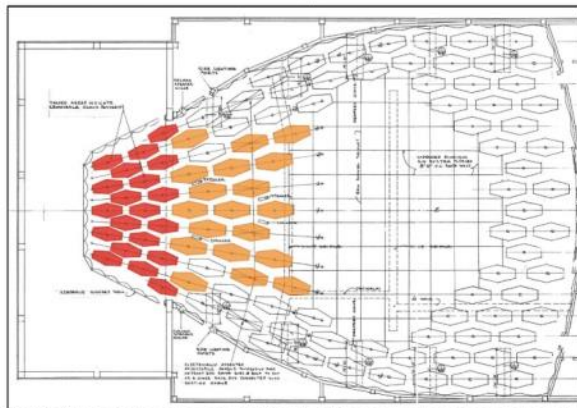




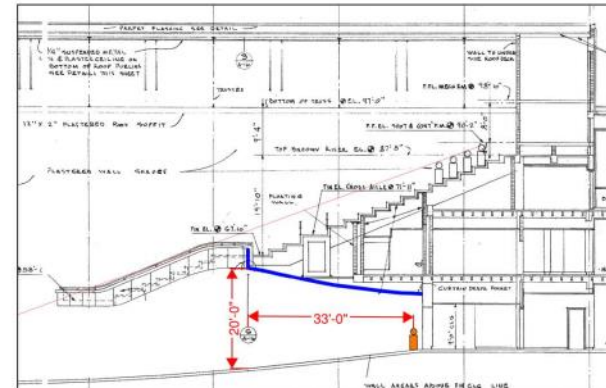




- 2.03 The shape of the auditorium (in plan) would commonly be referred to as fan-shaped, with the side walls of the auditorium flaring from a proscenium width of 60-feet to a fairly sizable width of over 120-feet by the rear of the auditorium.
- 2.04 The walls of the auditorium largely appear to be plaster that has been shaped into folded planes to diffuse sound energy. The original concept for the ceiling comprised a very high plaster ceiling resiliently hung from the underside of the roof with some 86 lightweight glass-fiber reinforced plastic acoustical clouds suspended below. Within a few years after the opening of the hall in 1974, a number of the clouds nearest the stage were removed, ostensibly on a temporary basis to facilitate theatrical lighting for a specific touring Broadway production. Unfortunately, these clouds were never reinstalled, and it appears that additional panels were removed over subsequent years, much to the consternation of the original acoustical designer of the facility, J. Christopher Jaffe. Refer to Drawing #1 below.
- 2.05 The orchestra shell comprises a series of demountable towers, which look to be the originals from 1974. The stage crew noted that the orchestra shell towers are quite hard to align and that the individual towers must be lashed together to avoid unsightly gaps being visible from the audience. The original shell ceiling comprised a series of 20 glass-fiber reinforced acoustical clouds that were designed to blend seamlessly with the clouds in the auditorium itself. At some point, these were removed and destroyed. Refer to Drawing #1 below. The current orchestra shell ceiling is a system of standard Wenger acoustical ceiling panels (from either the Diva or Maestro lines). This system originally comprised three separate canopy panels. According to sources at the Theatre, the upstage canopy panel was damaged and subsequently removed from the building. This leaves approximately 25-30% of the upstage area of the shell with no overhead acoustical support.



Drawing #1: A reflected ceiling plan showing the original configuration of acoustical clouds in the Johnny Mercer. The yellow panels are the ones that appear (from photographs) to have been removed from the auditorium. The red ones are the shell ceiling panels that were removed and later replaced with Wenger acoustical panels.



Drawing #2: A longitudinal section through the Johnny Mercer. The balcony overhang is shown in blue. The height of the opening at the leading edge of the balcony is 20'-0" while the depth to the last listener under the balcony is 33'-0", a ratio of height to depth of 1:1.65. Well-designed multiple-use performance halls keep this ratio at or below 1:1.25.

- 4.03 The preliminary acoustical findings are encouraging, as many of the deficiencies noted can be explained by alterations to the original acoustical designs or can be addressed by replacing outdated technology or introducing new understandings about acoustics, theatre design, architecture and/or building systems. The bottom-line finding is that the Johnny Mercer has much that can be built upon to create a first-class performing arts venue. Leveraging this potential would seem to offer a cost-effective alternative to demolition and replacement.

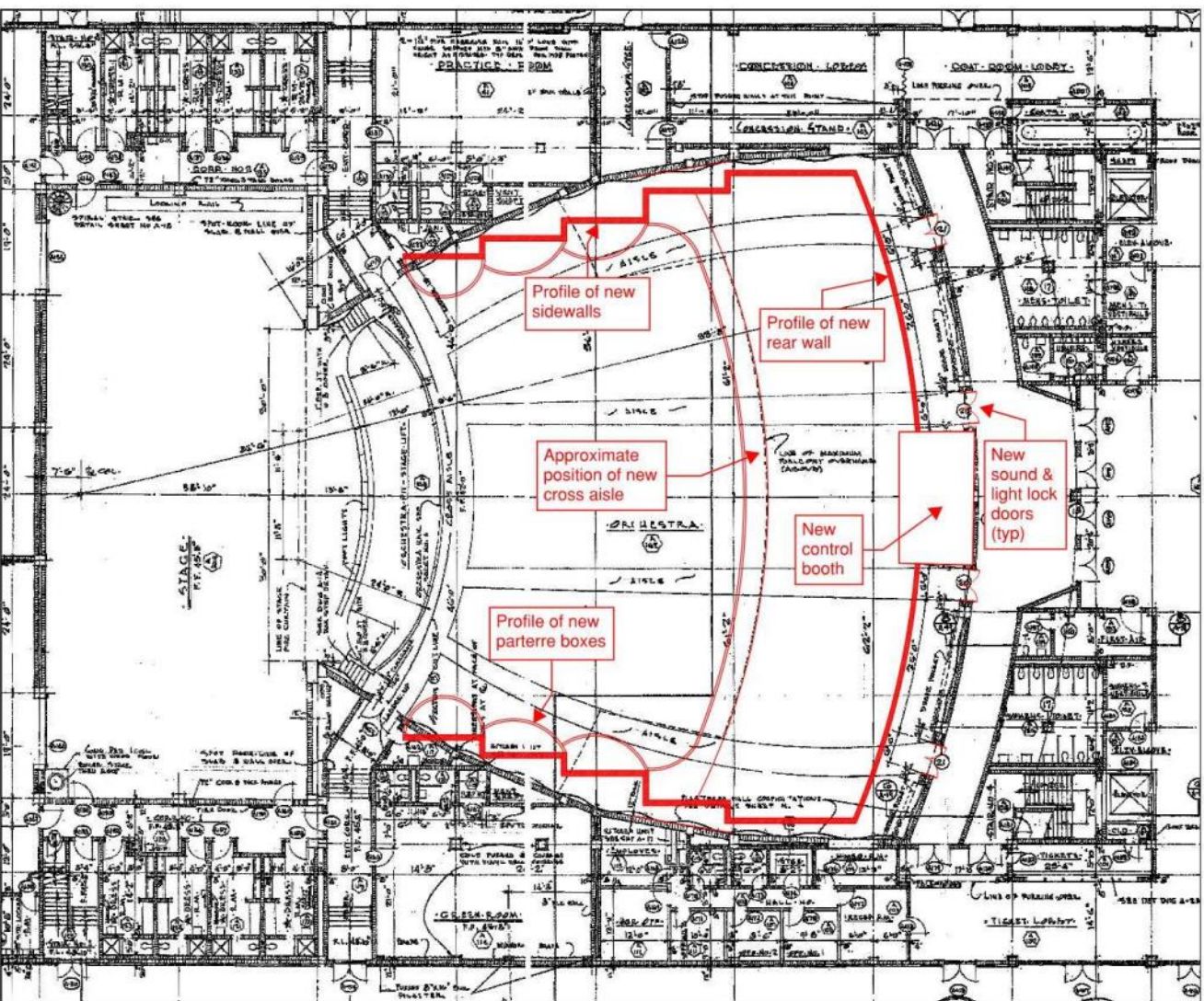
## 5.0 Detailed Discussion of Acoustical Characteristics

There are a variety of acoustical characteristics that acousticians consider in the design of space for natural acoustic performance. The following outlines these characteristics and the degree they are reflected in the Johnny Mercer Theatre:

- 5.01 **Acoustical Intimacy, Presence & Immediacy**  
These qualities are governed by what are called early reflections. Early reflections are the first sounds to arrive at the listener after the direct sound arrives in a straight-line path from the source to the listener. Reflections that arrive within 15 to 50 milliseconds of the direct sound contribute to intimacy and immediacy. The fan shape of the auditorium, at least in its current configuration, would not tend to support strong early reflections. This could be mitigated by redesigning the sidewalls of the hall in the forward portion of the room and/or by adding a raised parterre of seating around the sides of the orchestra floor.

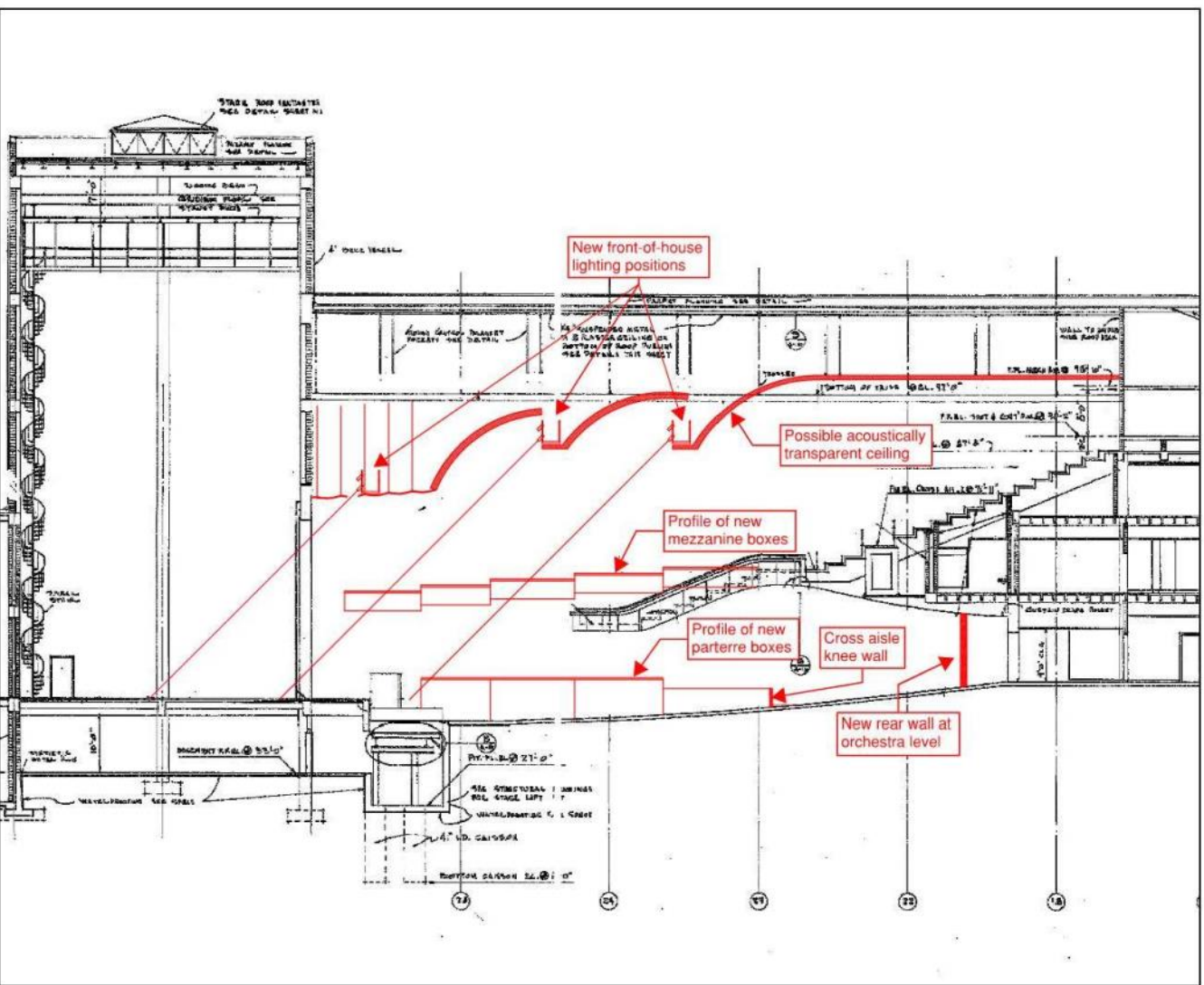


## Appendix A: Scenario 1 Drawings



Drawing #3 – Scenario 1: Orchestra level floor plan showing the profile of potential new sidewalls at this level along with the parterre boxes, cross aisle, rear wall and control room.

# Scenario 1

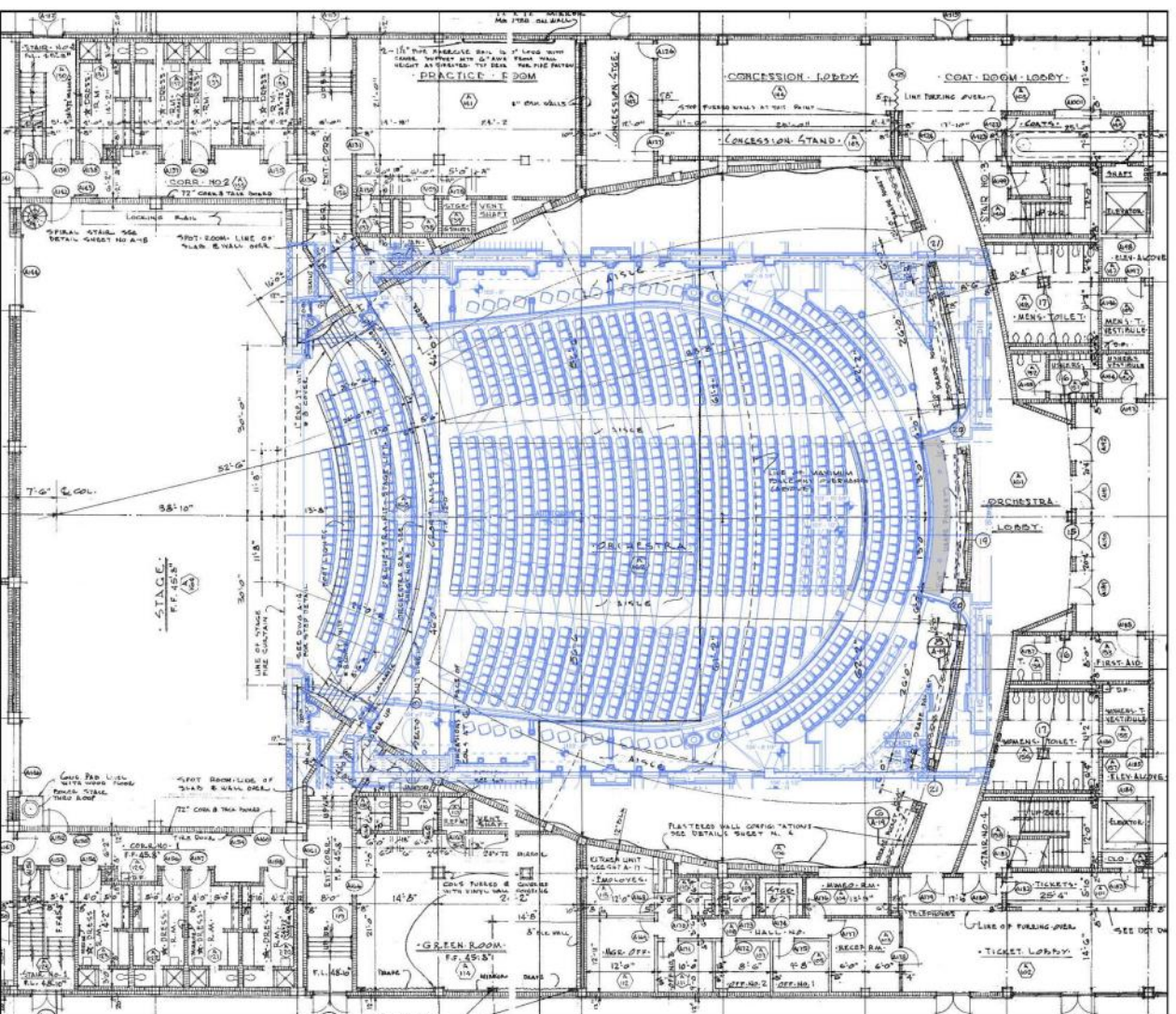


Drawing #5 – Scenario 1: Longitudinal section through the theatre showing potential new mezzanine and parterre boxes, new forestage canopy, cross aisle knee wall, orchestra level rear wall, front-of-house lighting catwalks and the potential for a new acoustical transparent ceiling to screen the truss space and catwalks from view.

# Scenario 1



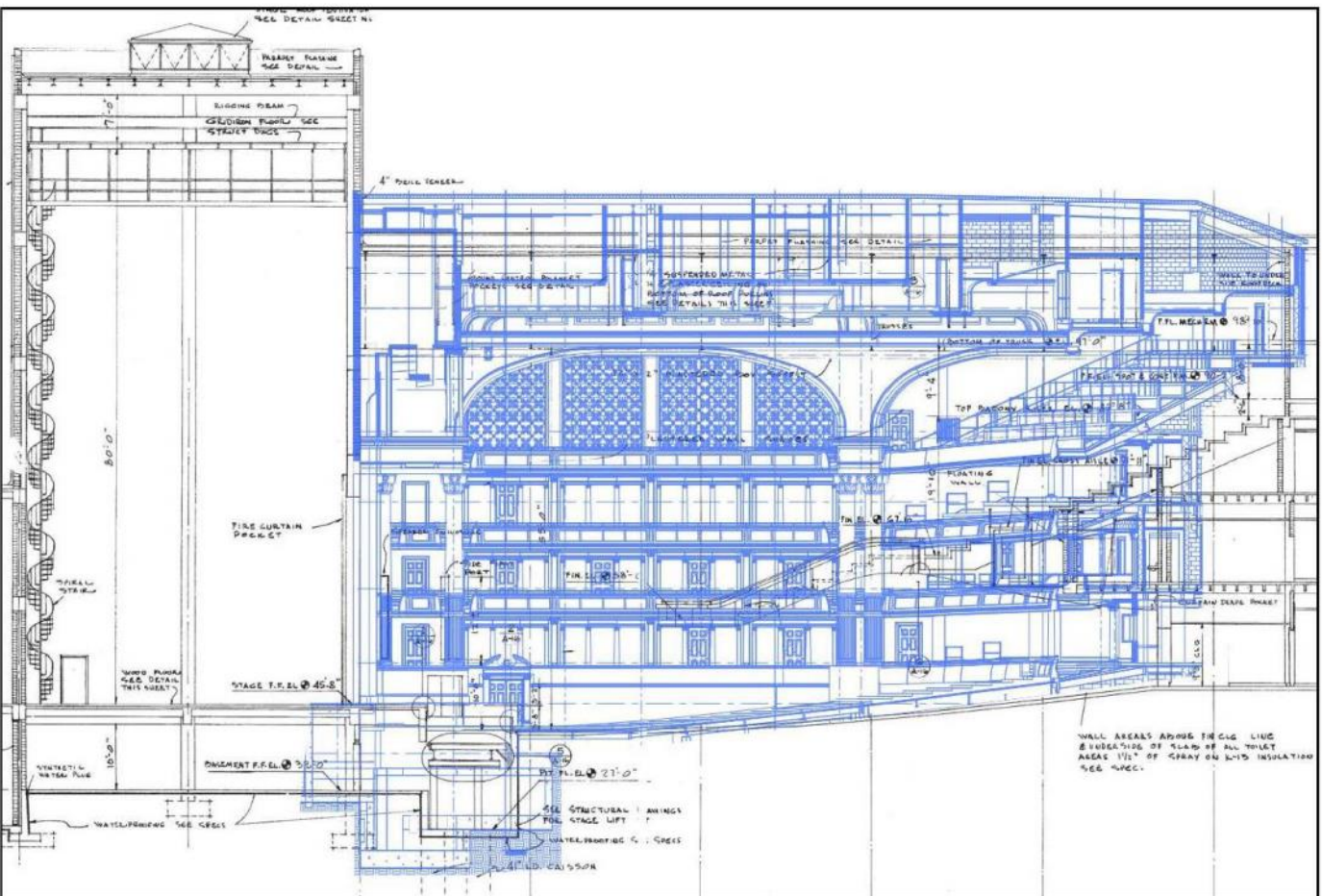
## Appendix B: Scenario 2 Drawings



Drawing #6 – Scenario 2: The Gaiillard Performance Hall orchestra level overlaid on the orchestra level plan for the Johnny Mercer Theatre. The Gaiillard diagram fits quite well within the John Mercer auditorium.

## Scenario 2





**Drawing #8 – Scenario 2.** Longitudinal section of the Gaillard overlaid on the Johnny Mercer. Although the roof of the Gaillard is higher, a different ceiling design could keep it comfortably under the Johnny Mercer roof without compromising acoustical or theatrical functionality.

## Scenario 2

***“We believe that there is great potential for redeveloping the Johnny Mercer Theatre to bring it up to contemporary standards of acoustics, theatrical functionality, audience comfort, and performer accommodations while greatly improving its architectural ambiance.”***

***Cultural Landscape Analysis...***

---

***Ethos Preservation***





# CIVIC LEGACY PROJECT


CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS  
History and Evaluation of Elbert and Jackson Wards



*Report prepared by  
Ethos Preservation for the City of Savannah  
April 2024*

*Civic Center, Savannah, Georgia*





W Bay St

Liberty St

## CHAPTER 01

### INTRODUCTION

CIVIC LEGACY PROJECT - CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

#### Overall Summary

The seven-acre Civic Center site in downtown Savannah is the largest single parcel in the Savannah National Historic Landmark District (SNHLD). This large site, crossing both Elbert and Jackson Wards, stands in contrast to the small land division pattern of the Oglethorpe Plan for which Savannah is nationally significant. The Civic Center has served Savannah for decades as a community, event, and conference space, and the community is now contemplating how this site can best continue to serve its citizens. Working with the National Park Service (NPS), the City of Savannah recently committed to updating the SNHLD documentation to more accurately capture the full story of Savannah's history and reflect current NPS standards for such documentation. The large-scale size of the Civic Center site means that it will have an impact on the integrity of the SNHLD going forward. The City desired a comprehensive understanding of not only the Civic Center site, but also Elbert and Jackson Wards as a whole. This information will be used to make sound decisions that minimize the loss of historic fabric, maintain the Civic Center site as a community amenity, and ensure that future development is appropriate to the character of the SNHLD.

The NPS cultural landscape report methodology was chosen for its utility as a treatment document and a tool for long-term management of this seven-acre cultural landscape.<sup>1</sup> This cultural landscape analysis addresses the historic development and modifications over time of both Elbert and Jackson Wards. Additionally, the analysis documents the existing conditions and landscape features, and the degree to which those features that define the area's historic significance are still present. The next steps in the process are to seek public input and make recommendations for appropriate treatment of the study area consistent with its significance, condition, and planned future use,<sup>2</sup> which will occur as part of the site's redevelopment process.

3D aerial view of downtown Savannah, 2023. Google Earth.

<sup>1</sup> According to the National Park Service, a cultural landscape is a historically significant property that shows evidence of human interaction with the physical environment.

<sup>2</sup> Robert R. Page, et. al, "A Guide To Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques," U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, 1998, 5.



1950 - Most residences in Elbert and Jackson Wards had become rental housing. Sanborn surveyors noted multiple buildings as apartments, rooming houses, or duplexes. Besides the construction of the Municipal Auditorium and the demolition of one structure in the northwestern part of Elbert Ward, the density of the wards was largely the same as it was in 1916. Elbert Ward contained 60 commercial structures, 31 residential buildings, and one institutional building. Jackson Ward had 36 commercial buildings, 56 residential structures, and two institutional buildings, including one church.<sup>33</sup>

1950-51 - After being used for several years by the Savannah Female Orphan Asylum, the Wetter House was demolished to make room for a used car lot. Only one supporting lane building was left standing on the rear of the property. That building remains on the Cultural Arts Center property today.<sup>34</sup>



The Wetter House serving as the Savannah Female Orphan Asylum, 1934. Library of Congress.

#### The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights movement is the common term used to describe the advocacy of African Americans to achieve legal and social equality in the United States during the twentieth century. In Georgia, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) made significant progress late during World War II in registering Black voters, but white backlash led to limited protests during the 1950s. By the 1960s, cities all over Georgia saw significant protests by African Americans. In Savannah, many efforts were led by Reverend Ralph Mark Gilbert and Westley Wallace Law, including marches, sit-ins, and boycotts. The Municipal Auditorium had been built in 1916 with segregated seating and restrooms. The building was desegregated along with all public facilities in Savannah on October 1, 1963, prior to the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>35</sup>



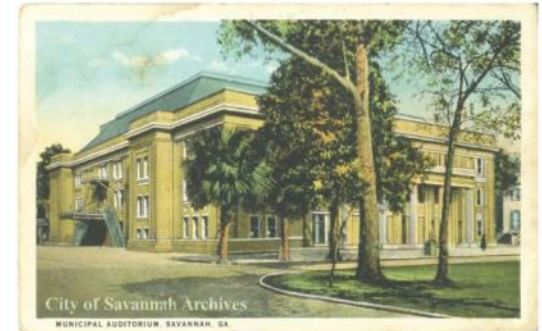
WW. Law speaking at a church meeting, c. 1960. City of Savannah Municipal Archives.

1955 - Sanborn Fire Insurance surveyors recorded 53 commercial buildings and 28 residential buildings in Elbert Ward, and 19 commercial buildings, 50 residential buildings, and three institutional buildings, including one church in Jackson Ward.<sup>36</sup>

1955 - During the course of a renovation of the Municipal Auditorium, Architect Ben P. Ritzert drew the existing conditions of the building, including recording the "Colored" restrooms on the third floor.<sup>37</sup>

June 1960 - A City Council-appointed committee began to consider replacing the Municipal Auditorium.<sup>38</sup>

August 1963 - The Auditorium Study Committee recommended a combination convention center and concert hall or theater to replace the Municipal Auditorium.<sup>39</sup>



The Municipal Auditorium, 1916. City of Savannah Municipal Archives.

1964 - The City Auditorium was renovated with interior painting, new and re-upholstered seats, and stage improvements.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of 1950, *University of Georgia*, 13, 14, and 23.

<sup>34</sup> Curl, "Cultural arts center site."

<sup>35</sup> Georgia Historical Society, "Marker Monday: The Georgia Civil Rights Trail: The Savannah Protest Movement," 2019, <https://georgiahistory.com/marker-monday-the-georgia-civil-rights-trail-the-savannah-protest-movement/>.

<sup>36</sup> The graphs in the Suburbanization and Changing Density sidebar contain an illustration of these changes. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of 1955, *University of Georgia*, 13, 14, and 23.

<sup>37</sup> Ben P. Ritzert, "Alterations & Additions: The Municipal Auditorium Building," 1955, A-4, on file at the City of Savannah Municipal Archives.

<sup>38</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, June 1960.

<sup>39</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, August 1963.

<sup>40</sup> City of Savannah Annual Report 1964.



**March 1966** - City of Savannah adopted the Coliseum Site Urban Renewal Plan. This plan used the Federal Urban Renewal process to raze buildings necessary for the construction of the Civic Center and the supporting parking lot. The adoption of this plan included the first official record noting the Civic Center site was a "slum" and thus an eligible project area for Urban Renewal funds.<sup>48</sup>



204 Hull Street, demolished for the construction of the Civic Center, c.1940. Library of Congress.

**July 1966** - Levy and Kiley Architects and George Ryad Fisher presented preliminary floor plans and elevations to City Council. The proposed building included convention space and multipurpose space that could accommodate many different sporting events. The design allowed for future additions, and as the team stated, "the preservation of the charm and spirit of Savannah was of particular concern to the Architects. It was their purpose to provide a building which is thoroughly up to date in function and technology, and which is respectful of the character and tradition of Savannah. This they feel they have done: the coliseum, acknowledging that open spaces contribute immeasurably to the 'feel' of Savannah, stands in a paved and landscaped plaza overlooking Orleans Square, which remains intact."<sup>49</sup>

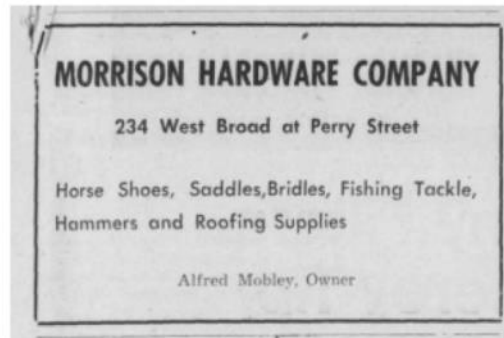
**July 1966** - City Council banned parking on Whitaker and Drayton

48 Central Area General Neighborhood Renewal Plan Urban Renewal Area, Project GA R-107.

49 Official Proceedings of City Council, July 13, 1966.

Streets, creating two lanes of traffic in a single direction on each street.<sup>50</sup>

**1966** - In Elbert Ward, West Broad Street was home to both offices related to the railroad and a number of Black and immigrant-owned businesses. Morrison Hardware Company, an African American-owned business, was located at 234 West Broad Street. The business and building were gone by 1970.<sup>51</sup>



An advertisement for Morrison Hardware Company from 1956 in the Savannah Tribune, a Black-owned newspaper. Savannah Tribune.

**July 1966** - The Little Theater, Inc. requested that the City include land for a new theater or that the proposed new development include a theater.<sup>52</sup> This request generated new discussion about whether or not the Municipal Auditorium should be replaced as part of the project.

**September 1966** - The Department of Housing and Urban Development granted City officials permission to acquire the necessary land for the Civic Center using federal urban renewal funds.<sup>53</sup>

**October 1966** - The City Manager informed City Council that the Civic Center would require 1800 parking spaces and proposed acquiring 12 acres in order to accommodate 1400 parking spaces.<sup>54</sup>

**October 1966** - The Housing Authority purchased the first parcels of land for the Civic Center from the Hebrew Academy of Savannah, Inc. The lot contained a three-story brick building that was addressed 318 Montgomery Street.<sup>55</sup>

50 "Whitaker, Drayton Parking Abolished," Savannah Evening Press, July 15, 1965.

51 Savannah City Directories, 1966 and 1970.

52 Official Proceedings of City Council, July 27, 1966.

53 City of Savannah Annual Report 1966.

54 Memo "Coliseum Project," City Manager to Mayor and Aldermen October 17, 1966.

55 "Coliseum Land Portion Bought," Savannah Morning News, October 20, 1966.

**November 1966** - The Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall approved the listing of the Savannah Historic District as a National Historic Landmark, the highest official recognition of historical significance by the US government.<sup>56</sup>

**February 1967** - The Historic Savannah Foundation requested options for saving buildings that were set to be demolished for the project. The request was approved if it did not cost the City any money.<sup>57</sup>



Eppinger-Lane House moved from Orleans Square to avoid demolition, 1967. Savannah Morning News.

**March 1967** - The City approved the first demolition contract for the area.<sup>58</sup> Demolition continued until the Municipal Auditorium was razed in 1971.<sup>59</sup>

56 "Old Savannah Made National Landmark," Savannah Morning News, November 6, 1966.

57 Official Proceedings of City Council, February 10, 1967.

58 Official Proceedings of City Council, March 1967.

59 Official Proceedings of City Council, September 16, 1971.

### Demolished and Moved Buildings

By nature of its large size, the Civic Center replaced dozens of smaller structures in Elbert and Jackson Wards. Many of those buildings were demolished. However, the Historic Savannah Foundation's advocacy made it possible for some of the buildings to be moved. Banker Mills B. Lane and other private individuals personally paid to move at least three buildings, saving them from demolition. Many of these buildings are still in the Savannah National Landmark Historic District today, in wards to the east.



ABOVE: SLOW PROGRESS ON BAY STREET FOR TWO HISTORIC HOMES  
Below: Sunday On-lookers Watch Dunlap House Brush by the Trees

The Savannah Morning News photographer captured the Dunlap House moving to save it from demolition. Bechive Foundation Archives.

March 1967 - Max Edwards, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, confirmed to the Savannah Evening Press that the Civic Center project could cause the Department of the Interior to revoke the National Historic Landmark status for the Savannah Historic District because the nature of the district would be substantially altered.<sup>60</sup>

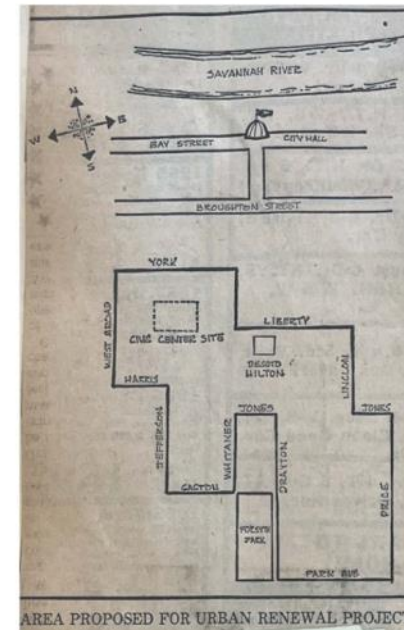
May 1967 - Debate continued on where the Civic Center should be located, and the Junior Chamber of Commerce formally presented their reasoning for why the new development should be located downtown.<sup>61</sup>

May 1967 - City Council also approved a new contract for Ben Ritzert and Vernon Howell to design a combined convention center and auditorium.<sup>62</sup>

May 1967 - Montgomery Street was converted to a one-way street between Jones and Bay Streets. This change was implemented to alleviate traffic suggestions due to Interstate 16.<sup>63</sup>

June 1967 - City Council approved the name Civic Center and the final site on Orleans Square. This vote was the final decision on the location, and it approved a combination auditorium convention center building.<sup>64</sup>

September 1967 - City Council approved Savannah's largest ever urban renewal project to date. The project covered 200 acres in downtown including the Civic Center site. The project was also designed to provide additional downtown parking facilities and remove "substandard" housing situations through either demolition or rehabilitation.<sup>65</sup>



Sketch of the proposed largest urban renewal project in Savannah's history, 1967. Savannah Morning News.

November 1967 - Voters approved the bond resolution to finance the construction of the Civic Center.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> David R. Lawson, "Federal Official Confirms: Coliseum Site Possible Historic District Threat," Savannah Evening Press, March 18, 1967.

<sup>61</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, April 28, 1967.

<sup>62</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, May 5, 1967.

<sup>63</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, April 28, 1967.

<sup>64</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, June 9, 1967.

<sup>65</sup> Barbara Dlugozima, "Huge Urban Renewal Project is Approved: Covers 200 Acres In Downtown Area," Savannah Morning News, September 23, 1967.

<sup>66</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, November 7, 1967.



**March 1969** - The Civic Center project was expanded to include an ice rink at the direct request of the community.<sup>74</sup>

**March 1969** - The Housing Authority requested that City Council include the Municipal Auditorium in the urban renewal land acquisition map for the project, acknowledging the building would eventually be demolished. This vote is the only formal vote for demolition of the Municipal Auditorium contained within the official proceedings of City Council.<sup>75</sup>

**April 1969** - City Council approved expanding Ben Ritzert and Vernon Howell's architectural contract to include overseeing the furnishings of the Civic Center.<sup>76</sup>

**April 1969** - The National Park Service (NPS) sent the City a memo indicating concern that the proposed parking area for the Civic Center would adversely affect the historic integrity between Pulaski, Orleans, and Telfair Squares, which were still intact along Barnard Street. NPS was also concerned about the number of buildings that would be demolished as part of the project.<sup>77</sup>



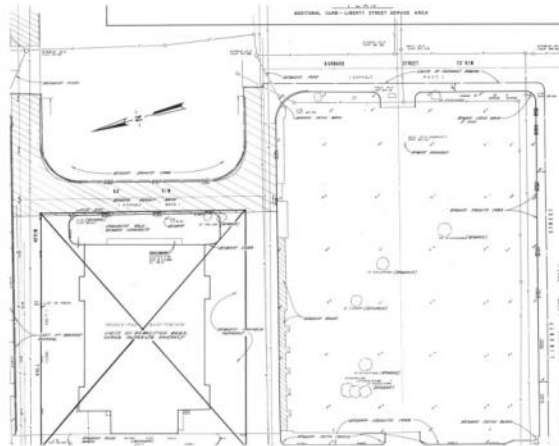
Civic Center under construction, 1969. City of Savannah Municipal Archives.

**June 1969** - City Council granted Savannah Post #135 American Legion permission to install the "Flame of Freedom," a Freedom Torch, in Elbert Square.<sup>78</sup>



Rendering of proposed Civic Center, c.1970. City of Savannah Municipal Archives.

**October 1971** - The Municipal Auditorium was demolished to make room for the parking lot and sidewalk that accompany the Civic Center.<sup>79</sup>



Demolition Plan, 1971. City of Savannah Municipal Archives.

**December 1971** - The first event at the Civic Center was the opening performance of the Savannah Symphony's Orchestra's 19th season on December 18. The building was not fully complete.<sup>80</sup>



The "Chinese tapestry" behind the staircase to the main ballroom, which was "one of the Savannah Convention and Civic Center's most remarkable decorations," according to an official Civic Center brochure, c.1972. Savannah Civic Center.

**February 1972** - Johnny Mercer presided over the official grand opening of the Civic Center on February 11.<sup>81</sup>

**March 1972** - City Council awarded the contract for the parking facilities to Eastern Construction Company including hardscaping to accommodate 250 automobiles, landscaping, lighting, a grass mall and walkway, and the eight foot high wall screening the parking lot from along Barnard Street to separate the surface parking from Orleans Square. The wall was designed to screen the surface parking lot from Orleans Square and Barnard Street and to represent the building masses that would have historically been present.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Savannah Morning News clippings as found in the Savannah Area Local Reference Files-Civic Center at the City of Savannah Municipal Archives.

<sup>81</sup> Savannah Morning News clippings as found in the Savannah Area Local Reference Files-Civic Center at the City of Savannah Municipal Archives.

<sup>82</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, March 30, 1972.

<sup>74</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, March 21, 1969.

<sup>75</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, March 21, 1969.

<sup>76</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, April 1, 1967.

<sup>77</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, February 21, 1969.

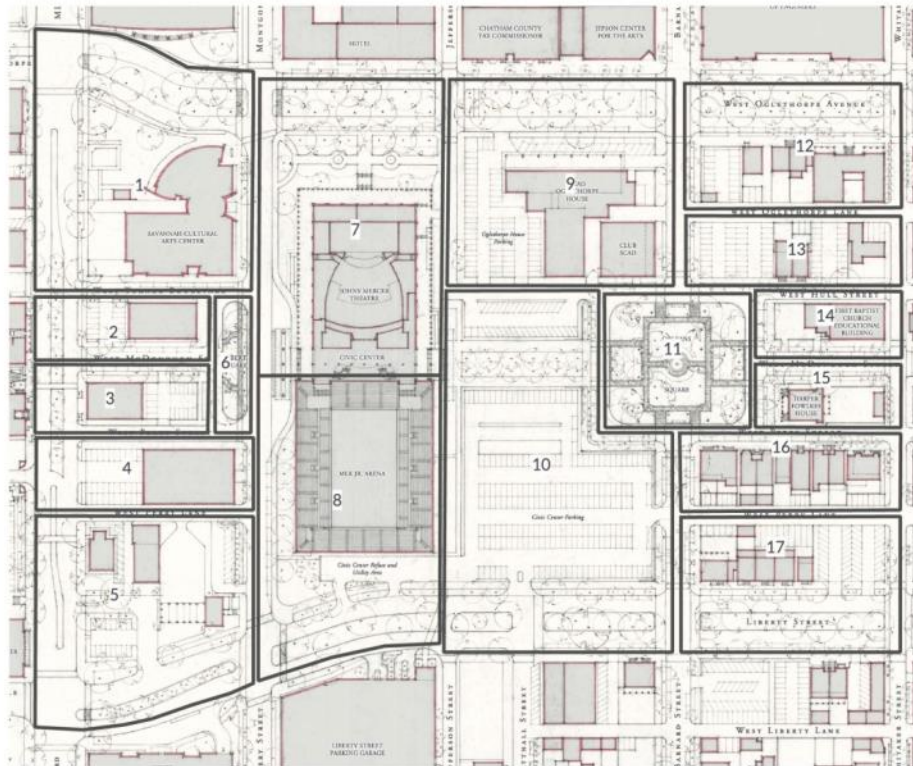
<sup>78</sup> Official Proceedings of City Council, June 13, 1969.

<sup>79</sup> Duncan and Underwood, *The Showy Town of Savannah*, 196.



The existing conditions survey documents 211 features and 13 streets and lanes within the study area, divided into 17 "survey blocks" following the Oglethorpe Plan where discernable. The features of each block are noted with photos, a map, and survey table. Buildings make up the largest portion of the features, followed by curbs and medians, parking lots, and sidewalks. The majority of features in the study area are considered nonhistoric, as many of the nonbuilding features are modern. Most features are in good or very good condition. The largest share of features in the study area are delineated as contributing, followed by noncontributing, and intrusions.

The study area includes the boundaries of Elbert and Jackson Wards. Collectively the wards are bounded by West Oglethorpe Avenue to the north, Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the west, West Liberty Street to the south, and Whitaker Street to the east. The study area includes the medians on both West Oglethorpe Avenue and West Liberty Street, extending to and including the curb on the north side of West Oglethorpe Avenue and the south side of West Liberty Street. The existing conditions survey documents extant features and utilized the Chatham County-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) building supplement map to determine year built. Additional archival evidence, maps, and research were used to determine what year or time period a particular feature was built, and other features were labeled as "n/a" if the year built was not applicable.



2022 Existing Conditions  
with Survey Blocks Denoted.  
Sottile & Sottile.

#### Existing Conditions Survey - Features:

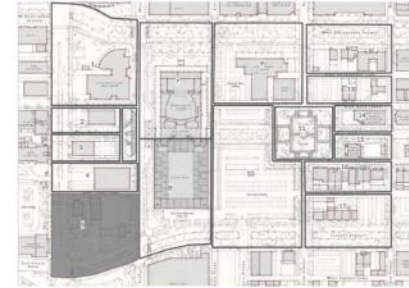
- Feature Number - Labeled one through 211 and corresponding photo
- Ward - Elbert or Jackson
- Survey Block - One through 17
- Land Use - Commercial, Government/Institutional, Park/Greenspace, or Residential
- Characteristic of each feature - Buildings & Structures, Circulation, Parking Lot, Significant Views/Vistas, Small Scale Feature, Vegetation
- Feature Type - Bench, Bike Rack, Bollard, Building, Carriage Step, Curb/Median, East-West Connecting Street, East-West Through Street, Fence, Fountain, Ground Plaque, Horse Hitching Post, Knee Wall, Lane, Lightwell, North-South Connecting Street, North-South Service Street, Parking Lot, Picnic Table, Planter, Sidewalk, Sign, Square, Structure, Trash Can, Significant Vegetation, Trust Street, Wall
- Description - Brief description of each feature type including materials
- Address/Location - Street address or approximate location
- Date Built - Date built if known following MPC documentation
- Source - Field survey and/or MPC
- Historic/Nonhistoric - Present during the period of significance and possesses historic integrity
- Character Defining
  - » Contributing - Feature adds to the historic character of the district, or represents a high quality of materials
  - » Noncontributing - Feature does not contribute to the historic character of the district, was not present during the period of significance, or due to alterations, additions or other changes no longer possesses historical integrity
  - » Intrusion - Feature represents an encroachment or detracts from the Oglethorpe Plan and historic character of the district
- Condition (physical condition)
  - » Excellent - Pristine condition
  - » Very Good - Well maintained
  - » Good - Normal "wear and tear," few or no evidence of deferred maintenance
  - » Fair - Notable deferred maintenance
  - » Poor - Structural issues and major repairs needed

Streets: Thirteen streets and lanes are described in narrative format.

## Block 5 | Elbert Ward | Southwest Tything Block

Description: Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the west, West Perry Lane to the north, West Liberty Street to the south, and Montgomery Street to the east.

Extant features include: 416 West Liberty Street (1902), Old Town Trolley Tours Office (1973), Bank of America (1983), and the Citizens & Southern National Bank Clock sign (1903).



Feature Number	Ward	Survey Block	Land Use	Characteristic	Feature Type	Description	Address/Location	Date Built	Source	Historic/Nonhistoric	Character Defining	Condition
46	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Significant Views/Vistas	E-W Through Street	Former West Liberty St looking east, E-W view blocked by bank building	Driveway accessed from Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd between West Liberty St and West Perry Lane	n/a	Field Survey	n/a	Noncontributing	n/a
47	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Significant Views/Vistas	N-S Service Street	Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd looking north	Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd	n/a	Field survey	n/a	Contributing	na
48	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Significant Views/Vistas	N-S Connecting Street	Montgomery St looking north, view historically included Elbert Square	Montgomery St	n/a	Field Survey	n/a	Contributing	n/a
49	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Significant Views/Vistas	E-W Through Street	West Liberty St looking west, view interrupted by curve of the road and bank building	West Liberty St	n/a	Field survey	n/a	Noncontributing	n/a
50	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Significant Views/Vistas	E-W Through Street	West Liberty St looking east, view interrupted by curve of the St	West Liberty St	n/a	Field Survey	n/a	Noncontributing	n/a
51	Elbert	5	Commercial	Buildings & Structures	Building	416 West Liberty St	416 West Liberty St	1902	Field Survey/ MPC Building Map	Historic	Contributing	Good
52	Elbert	5	Commercial	Buildings & Structures	Building	Old Town Trolley Tours office	250 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd	1973	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Intrusion	Excellent
53	Elbert	5	Commercial	Buildings & Structures	Building	Bank of America building, brick with drive through	255 Montgomery St	1983	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Intrusion	Good
54	Elbert	5	Commercial	Small Scale Feature	Sign	Citizens & Southern National Bank clock sign	West Liberty St	c.1915	Field Survey	Historic	Contributing	Good
55	Elbert	5	Park/Greenspace	Circulation	Curb/Median	Granite curbing	Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Contributing	Very Good
56	Elbert	5	Park/Greenspace	Small Scale Feature	Sign	Historic marker	West Liberty St	n/a	Field Survey	Historic	Contributing	Good
57	Elbert	5	Park/Greenspace	Small Scale Feature	Sign	Marker - Savannah's African American Medical Pioneers	West Liberty St	2008	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Contributing	Very Good
58	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Circulation	Sidewalk	Brick sidewalk	200 Block Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Contributing	Very Good
59	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Vegetation	Significant Vegetation	Tree lawn with 8 trees	200 Block Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Contributing	Good
60	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Vegetation	Significant Vegetation	3 trees located in sidewalk	200 Block Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Contributing	Good
61	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Vegetation	Significant Vegetation	Tree lawn with 2 trees	200 Block Montgomery St	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Contributing	Good
62	Elbert	5	Commercial	Vegetation	Significant Vegetation	Beds with 6 trees	200 Block Montgomery St	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Contributing	Good
63	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Vegetation	Significant Vegetation	Median with 15 trees	400 Block West Liberty St	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Noncontributing	Good
64	Elbert	5	Government/Institutional	Vegetation	Significant Vegetation	Tree lawn with 4 trees	400 Block West Liberty St	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Noncontributing	Good
65	Elbert	5	Commercial	Vegetation	Significant Vegetation	Plantings on property including 2 trees	400 Block West Liberty St	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Noncontributing	Good
66	Elbert	5	Commercial	Vegetation	Significant Vegetation	Corner bed with 2 trees	Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd at West Liberty St	n/a	Field Survey	Nonhistoric	Noncontributing	Good

Feature numbers correspond to Photo Key on the following page.





CHAPTER  
**05**

**ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION**

CIVIC LEGACY PROJECT - CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS



***Phase I***  
***Archaeological Report***

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***Completed***

***Detailed Site Survey***

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***Completed***

**Facility**

**Community**

**Future**



# Community

# ***Public Input Events***

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- **Stakeholder Meetings**

Thursday, April 25: Series of sessions with representatives from the business community, Metropolitan Planning Commission, Neighborhood Associations, Arts community, and other community stakeholders.

- **Community-wide Open House**

Tuesday, May 7, from 6 to 8 p.m., Civic Center Ballroom

- **Virtual Community Meeting**

Thursday, May 16, at 6 p.m. , See: [www.SavannahGa.gov](http://www.SavannahGa.gov)

- **Community-wide Open House**

Saturday, May 18, from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., John Delaware Community Center

- **Community-wide Open House**

Monday, May 20, from 6 to 8 p.m., The Armstrong Center Southside









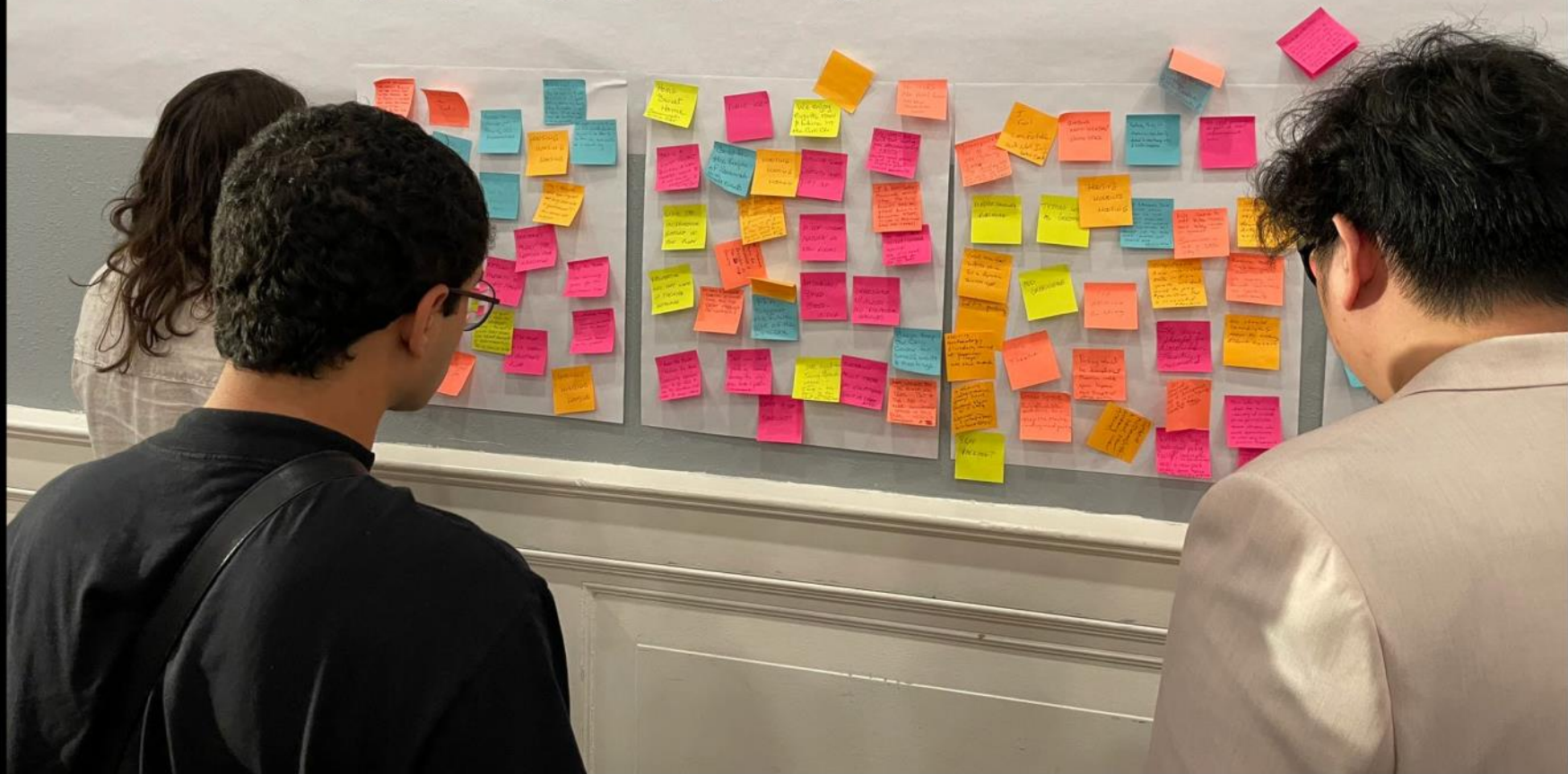
## A photograph of a community meeting for the 'Facility' project. A man in a suit stands in the center, addressing a group of people. A large white banner with the word 'Facility' in cursive is on the wall behind him. To the left, a framed image of a theater interior is displayed. To the right, a map of the project area is visible. An 'EXIT' sign is above a door in the background.







# *Future*



Ballroom is used for a lot of events! Expand the ballroom.

Artistic space – all should be welcome

Add a new park and public green space and underground parking.

Historic plan is good for our small businesses

Need affordable housing for low to middle incomes

Keep the theater. It is vital for community use.

It's important to retain MLK's presence. Make this a place for gathering.





Any new builds  
should be  
"Savannah style",  
not "cookie cutter"  
generic builds

The Oglethorpe  
Plan is what  
makes Savannah  
unique.

Keep the  
community  
informed on all  
changes

We need a theatre  
the size of Johnny  
Mercer - Arts  
Center is too small,  
Arena too big and  
not meant for all  
concerts

Restored streets  
with mixed use  
development and  
affordable housing

The theater and  
ballrooms should  
stay. How long would  
renovations take?

Have artist space  
in the upstairs  
room, not just  
offices.

A city is only as  
good as its Arts  
scene. It's the  
basis of culture!





# Overall Themes

- Preserve the Theatre
- Maintain the name of Dr. King
- Consider parking in plans
- Need for affordable housing
- Restore the Oglethorpe Plan
- Support for the arts community
- Keep affordable community space (ballroom)
- Questions over future plans for potentially restored tithing and trust lots

# Facility

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Theater

Arena Space

Ballroom

Multi-Purpose Rooms

Lobby

# Community

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MLK, Jr. Legacy

Historic Preservation/Cultural Landscape

Arts Community

Businesses / Retail

Neighborhoods



# Future

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Affordable Housing

Mixed-Use Retail / Office / Municipal Space

Parking

Future Land Use

Public Green Spaces

Gateway Entrances

**Facility**

**Community**

**Future**

# Future



# Thinking About the Future...

*20 Years of Planning*

# ***Timeline of Civic Center Redevelopment***

**2001:** Existing Civic Center site ranked as least favorable site for new arena.

**2005:** Liberty Street Parking Garage opens to serve the Civic Center and allow for the future redevelopment of its surface parking lot.

**2013:** The Mayor and Aldermen endorse the Springfield Canal City Lot site as the location for the new arena.

**2014:** The City establishes six advisory subcommittees to provide input during the initial phase of the new arena project.

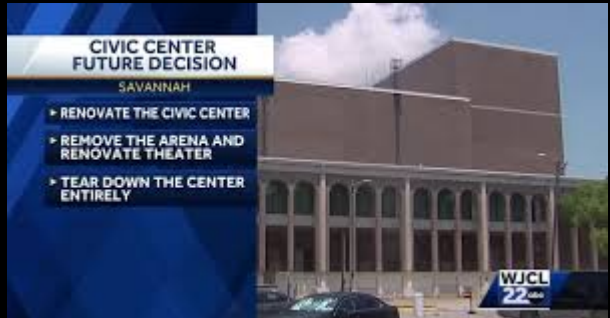
**2016:** Arena Advisory Committee for Utilization of the Current Civic Center recommended retaining the Civic Center. Concurrently, the Proposed Arena Feasibility Study, advised against preserving the arena due to substantial costs associated with repairs to bring the building into life safety compliance.

# ***Deciding the Fate of the Heart of Savannah***

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## ***Mayor and Council Vote***





## **June 2024:**

The Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah vote to proceed with the removal of the arena and renovation of the theatre, ballroom, and community meeting rooms.

# City Council Resolution

## A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF THE CITY OF SAVANNAH, GEORGIA TO PROCEED WITH THE REMOVAL OF THE ARENA AND RENOVATION OF THE THEATRE, BALLROOM, AND COMMUNITY MEETING ROOMS.

**WHEREAS**, in 1972, the City of Savannah completed the construction of the Savannah Civic Center on the site of the former Municipal Auditorium; the seven-acre site includes the 9,700-seat Martin Luther King, Jr. Arena, 2,500-seat Johnny Mercer Theatre, Community Ballroom, several multi-purpose rooms, two levels of lobby space, and a 225-space surface parking lot; and

**WHEREAS**, the Mayor and Aldermen recognize the Civic Center has served as the site for important milestones for individuals and families, as well as for visitors to Savannah over the years since its construction; and

**WHEREAS**, the Civic Center stands as the largest single parcel in the Savannah National Historic Landmark District (SNHLD). Its construction preceded the enactment of the Historic District Ordinance, and the development was classified as an Urban Renewal project. This designation led to recombinations of the Oglethorpe Plan, including the claiming portions of the Elbert and Jackson wards, the diminishment of Elbert Square's size and prominence, the alteration of the street pattern, and a decrease in connectivity to neighborhoods to the west; and

**WHEREAS**, recognizing the significance of the Savannah National Historic Landmark District, the City has endeavored to restore the lost elements of the Oglethorpe Plan at this location. This goal emerged in the late 1990s, when the City explored the possibility of demolishing the arena, constructing a garage on its site, and relocating the arena while preserving the Theatre, Ballrooms, and multi-purpose rooms; and

**WHEREAS**, in 1984, the Mayor and Aldermen approved a request from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by naming the Civic Center Arena in his memory; and

**WHEREAS**, a 2001 Civic Center Arena Analysis ranked the existing Civic Center site as the least favorable of eight potential sites for a new arena due to limitations stemming from traffic congestion, the size of the parcel for future development, and inadequate parking facilities; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2013, the Mayor and Aldermen endorsed the Springfield Canal-City Lot site as the location for a new arena; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2014, the City established six advisory subcommittees comprising local community members and City staff to provide input during the initial phase of the new arena project. These subcommittees, tasked with considering the future of the Civic Center, convened regularly to discuss and conduct research pertaining to their respective areas of focus; and

Resolution 3: Remove Arena & Renovate Theatre, Ballroom & Community Meeting Rooms

1

Advisory Committee for Utilization of the Current Civic Center the Johnny Mercer Theatre, Ballroom, and multi-purpose rooms, locally sponsored events, and restoring the two existing blocks to lot lots to the east of the site. Concurrently, the Proposed Arena envisioned by the Mayor and Aldermen, advised against preserving financial costs associated with renovations and repairs necessary to compliance with development standards, including life safety, and

requested the Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Technical Assistance and best uses for the Civic Center site; the Mayor and approved the ULI report which strongly recommended that the arena be removed in preparation for the restoration of the

Market Arena, located at 620 Stiles Avenue, opened west of the arena, while aiming to preserve and enhance the Johnny Mercer Ballroom, and multi-purpose rooms; construction of a new entrance to the building's south façade; development of a new municipal lot on the north side of the Civic Center to reduce the City's need for leased land of a larger section of the Oglethorpe Plan, including two blocks lost during the development of the Civic Center. Following City Manager was directed to study the proposed conceptual plan;

City engaged Akustiks, LLC conducted an assessment of the existing Johnny Mercer Theatre at the Civic Center community asset and could be transformed to play a leading role in the life of Savannah, recognizing its demolition would be felt by the community; and

the Cultural Landscape Analysis to provide a comprehensive study of the Civic Center site, as well as Elbert and Jackson wards, to inform the loss of historic fabric, maintain the Civic Center site as a historic landmark, ensure that future development is appropriate to the character of the Historic Landmark District; and

conducting a Phase I Archaeology Assessment of the Civic Center site;

**WHEREAS**, the City is conducting a comprehensive civil site survey of the study area to facilitate the redevelopment of the Civic Center area;

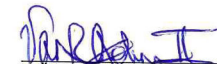
Resolution 3: Remove Arena & Renovate Theatre, Ballroom & Community Meeting Rooms

2

**WHEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah, Georgia adopt this resolution and direct the City Manager to prepare and execute a plan, inclusive of robust community engagement and the required Council approval on annual amended budgets, project financing, zoning, contracts and agreements, that does the following:

1. Proceeds with the removal of the arena and renovation of the theatre, ballroom, and community meeting rooms;
2. Achieves an equitable approach to redevelopment of the area;
3. Retains the name and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;
4. Restores as much of the Oglethorpe Plan as feasible;
5. Prioritizes housing, including affordable and workforce housing;
6. Prohibits the development of new hotels and restricts the use of short-term vacation rentals;
7. Optimizes space for public and municipal use, as well as appropriate retail and commercial spaces; and
8. Achieves future parking needs.

**AND APPROVED** by the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Savannah, Georgia this the 27th day of June, 2024.

  
Van R. Johnson, II  
Mayor



Resolution 3: Remove Arena & Renovate Theatre, Ballroom & Community Meeting Rooms

3



# ***City Council Resolution Requirements***

- Achieves an equitable approach to redevelopment of the area
- Retains the name and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Restores as much of the Oglethorpe Plan as feasible
- Prioritizes housing, including affordable and workforce housing
- Prohibits the development of new hotels and restricts the use of short-term vacation rentals
- Optimizes space for public and municipal use, as well as appropriate retail and commercial spaces
- Achieves future parking needs

**Facility**

**Community**

**Future**

*Thank you!*





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Georgia Planning Association  
Spring Conference

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**Deciding the Fate of the  
Heart of Savannah:  
*The Civic Legacy Project***

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*March 13, 2025*