STRATA

MICHAEL TUZZO

THESIS PROJECT

2026

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Auburn University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Architecture

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CONTENTS

Thesis Intent — 8

Site — 10

Objectives — 18

Precedents — 20

STRATA — 26

Conclusion — 46

THESIS INTENT

This thesis explores the design of a sports-anchored mixed-use district where recreation, retail, and housing operate as a unified pedestrian environment. The project positions sports as the primary organizing element, using athletic activity not as a secondary amenity, but as the central driver of spatial and social interaction. By integrating daily recreation into the built environment, the proposal aims to create a place that is active beyond scheduled events and supports continuous use throughout the day.

A key focus of the project is the relationship between architecture and topography. Rather than treating the site as a flat condition, the design leverages changes in elevation to shape program, circulation, and spatial experience. The project also emphasizes the creation of an active public realm, where open space, movement, and gathering are embedded into everyday life. Mixed-use density is integrated with the landscape to form a cohesive system in which buildings, fields, and public spaces work together rather than as isolated components.

SITE

5597 Buford Hwy, Doraville, GA



The project is located at 5597 Buford Highway in Doraville, Georgia, within a rapidly developing commercial corridor. The site, currently cleared and largely undeveloped, presents a unique opportunity for large-scale intervention within an urbanizing context. The site sits adjacent to major infrastructure and is surrounded by a mix of commercial and residential development.

The existing condition of the site is defined by its openness and its noticeable changes in elevation. The site is shaped by raw and uneven terrain, which becomes a critical driver in the design process. Rather than leveling the site, the project embraces these topographic conditions as an opportunity to organize program and create spatial variation across the development.





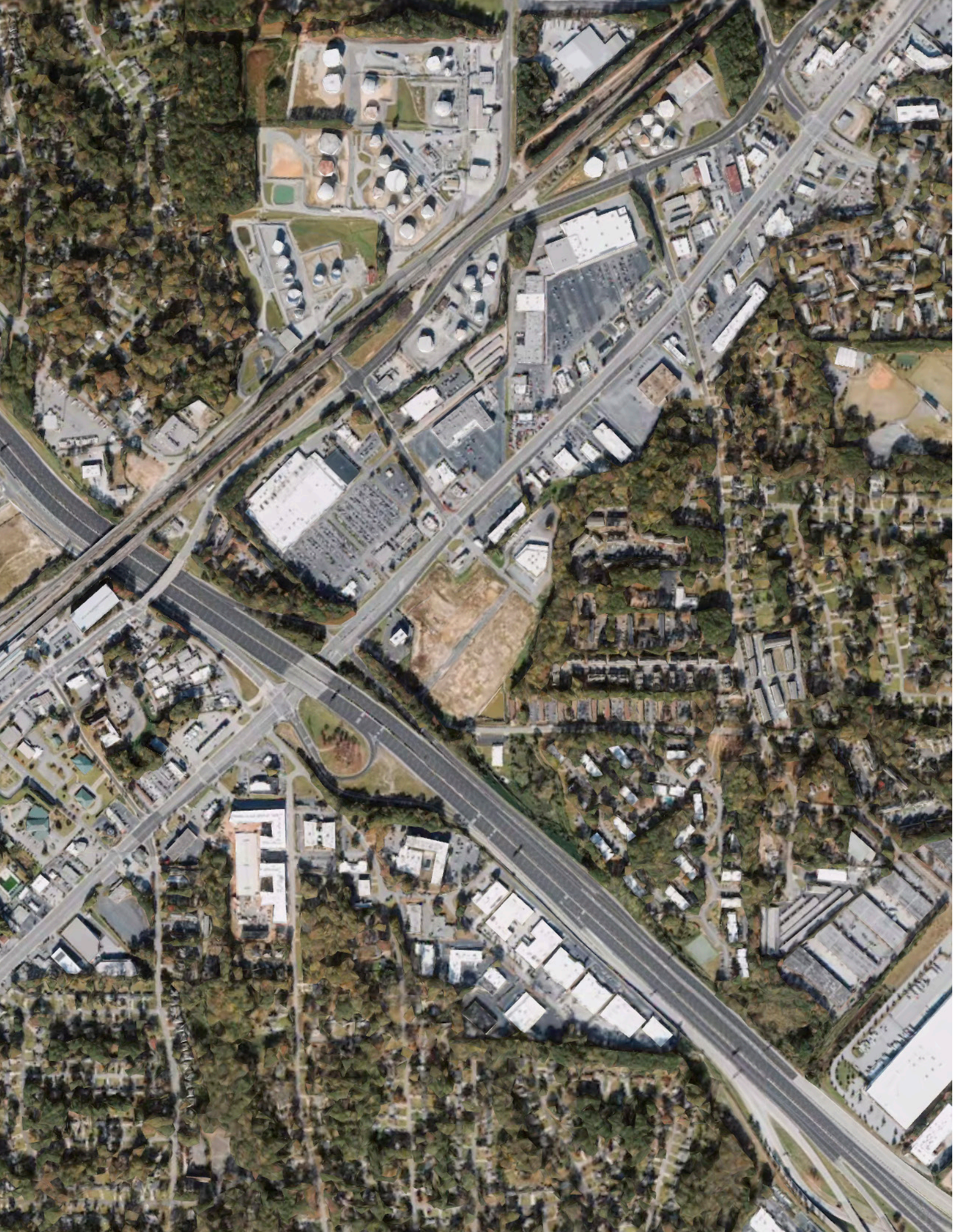






The site is situated along Buford Highway, a commercially active corridor characterized by a diverse mix of retail, restaurants, and small shopping centers. The surrounding area is currently transitioning from low-rise, single-use commercial development toward a more dense, mixed-use urban fabric.

Its proximity to Interstate 285 positions the site within a highly accessible regional network, making it an ideal location for a destination-oriented development. However, despite its strong vehicular connectivity, the surrounding environment lacks a cohesive identity and does not currently function as a unified district. This transitional condition provides an opportunity to introduce a more integrated and pedestrian-oriented development model.



The site benefits from strong vehicular access, with heavy traffic flow along Buford Highway and immediate connectivity to Interstate 285. These conditions make the site highly visible and easily accessible by car. However, pedestrian infrastructure is limited, with only moderate sidewalk conditions and a lack of cohesive walkable systems.

Transit access is present but underutilized, with bus stops located along Buford Highway and the Doraville MARTA station approximately ten minutes away. The project responds to these conditions by shifting the focus from vehicular dominance to pedestrian prioritization, creating a more balanced and accessible environment for both local and regional users.

The existing urban condition is largely defined by automobile-oriented planning. The area is characterized by low-density, single-use development dominated by surface parking. Public space is minimal, and there is little emphasis on pedestrian comfort or walkability.

Additionally, the site and its surroundings lack a cohesive architectural identity and do not provide a central gathering space or community anchor. This absence of spatial and social cohesion results in an environment that is fragmented and underutilized. These challenges form the basis for the project's intervention, which seeks to redefine the site as an active and connected urban district.

OBJECTIVES

In response to these conditions, the project establishes a set of design objectives centered on integration, density, and activation. At its core, the proposal seeks to position recreation as a primary driver of urban form, embedding both indoor and outdoor athletic program into the everyday experience of the site. Rather than functioning as a secondary amenity, the sports complex is intended to act as the central organizing element, shaping circulation, spatial relationships, and public life.

A continuous pedestrian spine is proposed to connect retail directly to the athletic fields, creating both visual and physical continuity across the site while reinforcing movement through the district. Density is pursued through vertical stacking, with retail and residential programs layered to maximize land use and reduce reliance on horizontal sprawl. The site's topography is leveraged as a generative design tool, producing a sectional condition that allows multiple programs to coexist across varying elevations while maintaining accessibility. Surface parking is consolidated into structured systems, with the goal of freeing the ground plane for active public space and establishing a pedestrian-first environment.

PRECEDENTS

TITLETOWN











Titletown District is a 45-acre sports-anchored mixed-use development adjacent to Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin, conceived as a year-round extension of the stadium environment. Organized around a central public park and plaza, the district integrates residential, commercial, and recreational programming into a cohesive framework that prioritizes daily use over event-based activity. Key elements include a regulation athletic field, community play areas, hospitality, and office space, all structured to support continuous engagement across seasons.

BALLPARK VILLAGE









Ballpark Village is a mixed-use development in downtown St. Louis, Missouri, positioned directly adjacent to Busch Stadium and designed as an extension of the stadium's urban presence. The project organizes a dense mix of retail, dining, residential, office, and entertainment program around a central plaza that functions as the primary civic space. This plaza operates as both an event venue and an everyday gathering space, enabling continuous activity beyond scheduled sporting events.

XFINITY LIVE!









Xfinity Live! is a sports and entertainment complex located within the South Philadelphia Sports Complex, positioned between multiple major league stadiums. Organized around a large open plaza and supported by interior entertainment venues, the complex is designed to capture and extend the energy of surrounding sporting events while also functioning as a standalone destination. The space accommodates large crowds through flexible indoor and outdoor environments, including live screenings, concerts, and social events.

THE BATTERY







SCHEME 1	TOTAL AREA REQUIRED	TOTAL AREA PROPOSED	SITE AREA*
PHASE 1	1,060,000 SF	1,256,400 SF	32.2 acres
PHASE 2A	246,400 SF	240,000 SF	2.8 acres
PHASE 2B	577,500 SF	480,000 SF	4.5 acres
PHASE 3	400,000 SF	342,000 SF	4.8 acres
TOTAL	2,283,900 SF	2,318,400 SF	54.1 acres
FAR = .9			

* Not including 15 acres for stadium



The Battery Atlanta is a large-scale mixed-use development located adjacent to Truist Park, designed as a sports-anchored urban district that extends activity beyond the stadium itself. The project integrates residential, retail, office, hospitality, and entertainment program into a cohesive environment organized around a network of public plazas and pedestrian streets. The district is structured to maintain strong visual and physical connections to the stadium while functioning independently as a destination.

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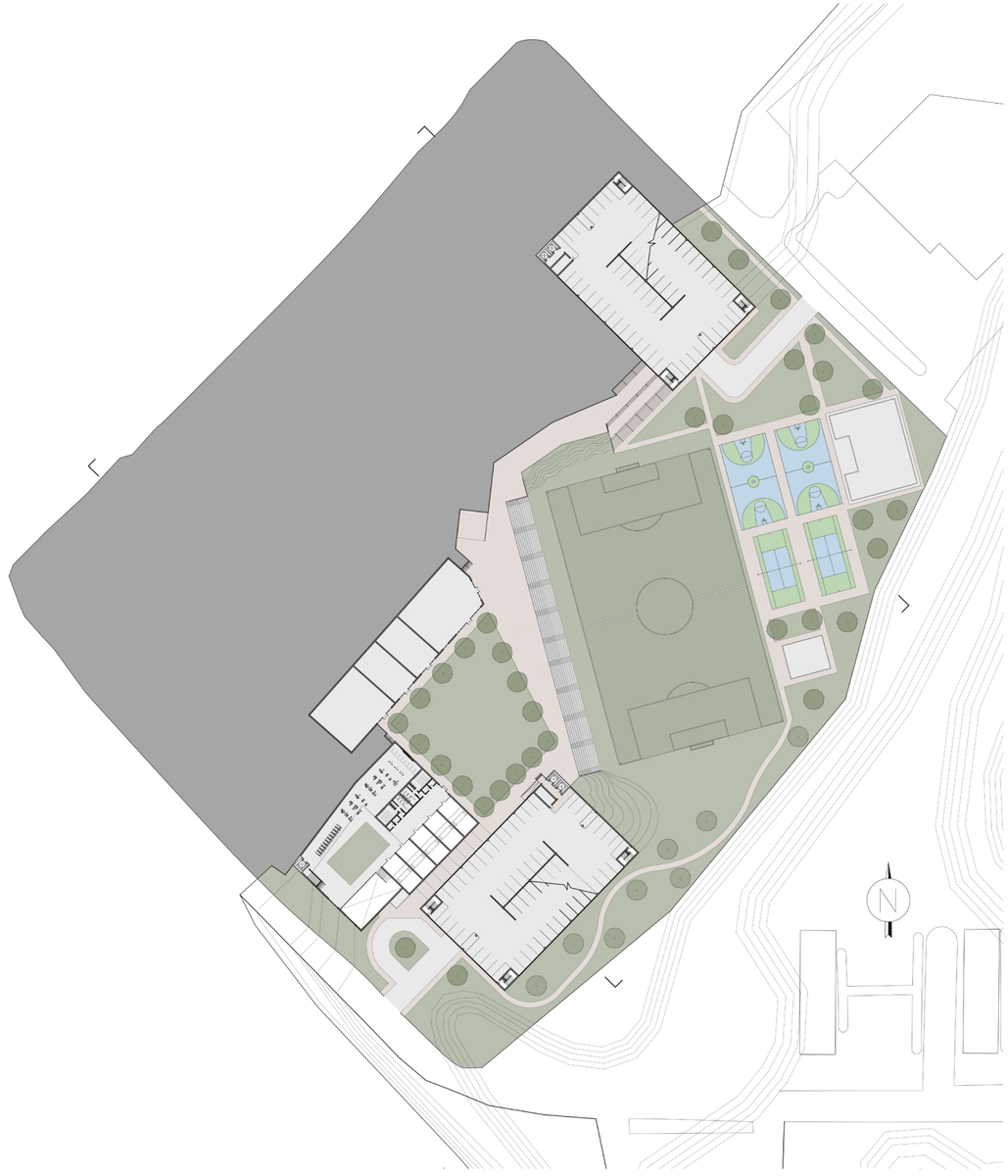
This project investigates the relationship between ground, movement, and occupation through the design of a sports-anchored mixed-use district in Doraville, Georgia. Positioned along Buford Highway, the proposal reimagines a car-dominated site as a pedestrian-oriented environment where housing, retail, and recreation operate as a unified system. Using topography as a primary organizational tool, the design layers program into the landscape through sectional strategies, embedding athletic spaces within the ground while maintaining active edges and accessible public space above. Rather than separating uses across the site, the project integrates them vertically, creating a continuous field of activity where sports act as a daily driver of movement, shaping both the architecture and the public realm.



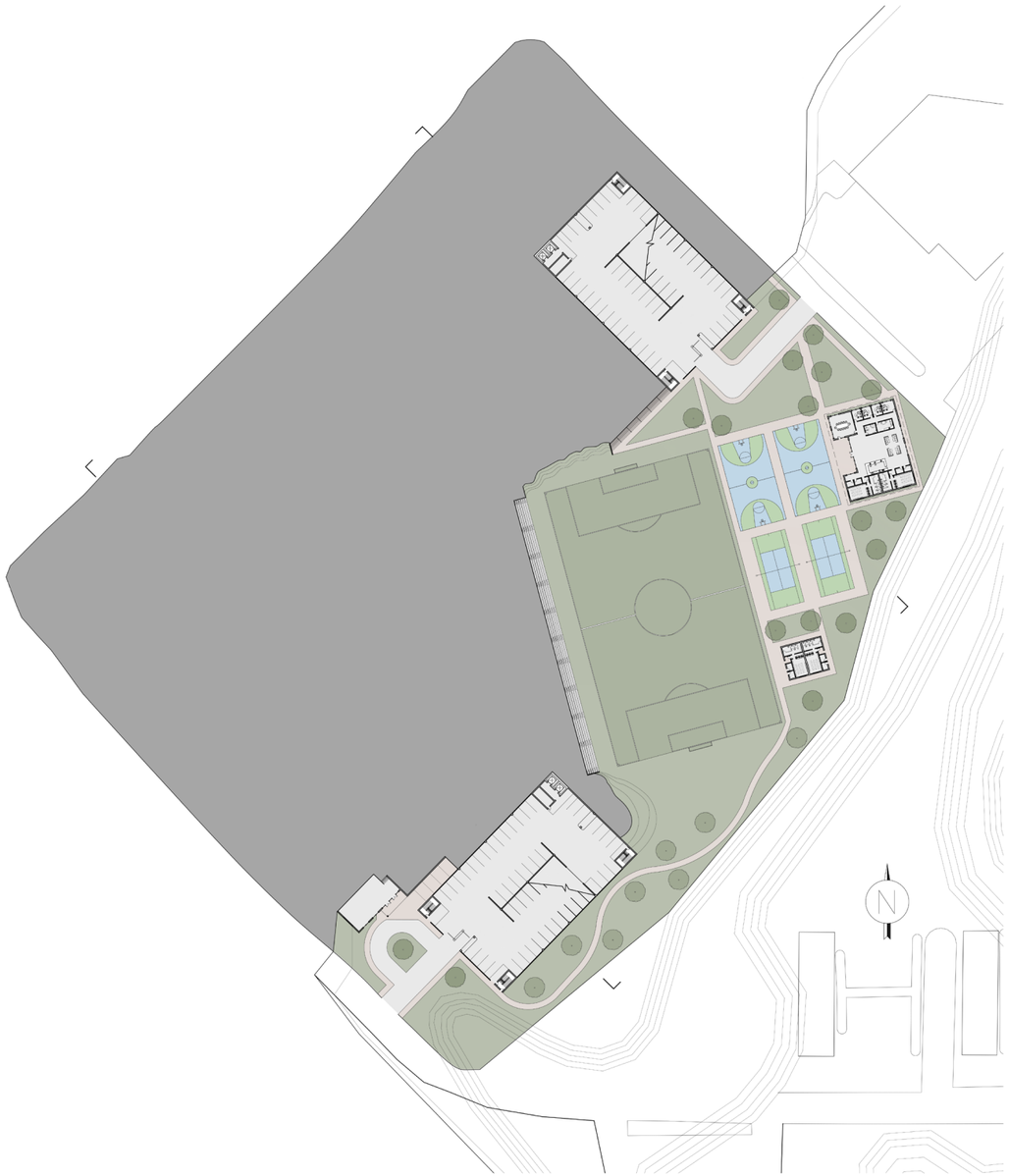
0′ – Street Level
Street-level plan showing primary access to residential units and upper-level retail, establishing the main pedestrian entry and connection to Buford Highway.



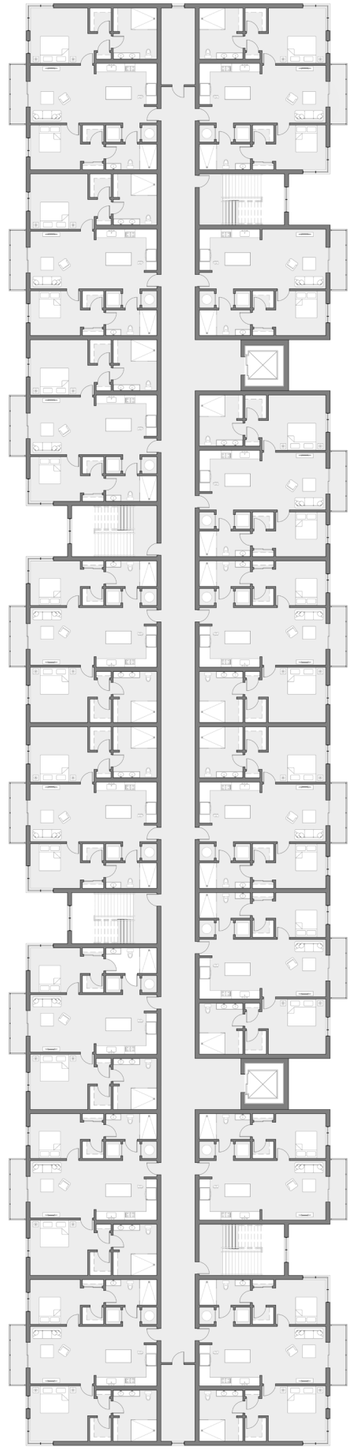
-10′ – Intermediate Retail Level
Intermediate level where retail continues along the slope, maintaining visual and physical connections between upper residential areas and lower athletic spaces.

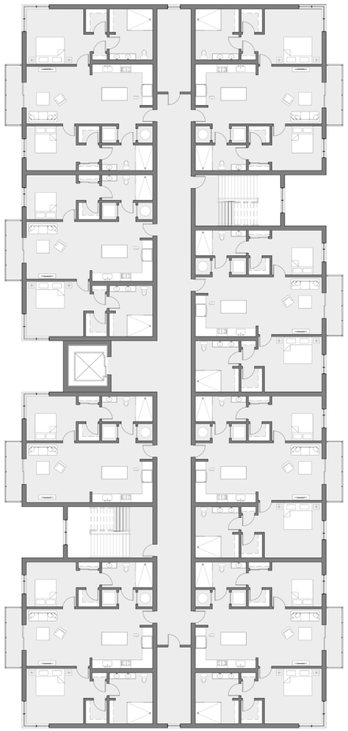


-22′ – Gym + Retail Level
Lower-level plan integrating indoor recreation and gym facilities into the site's topography, creating a transitional zone between commercial activity and athletic program.



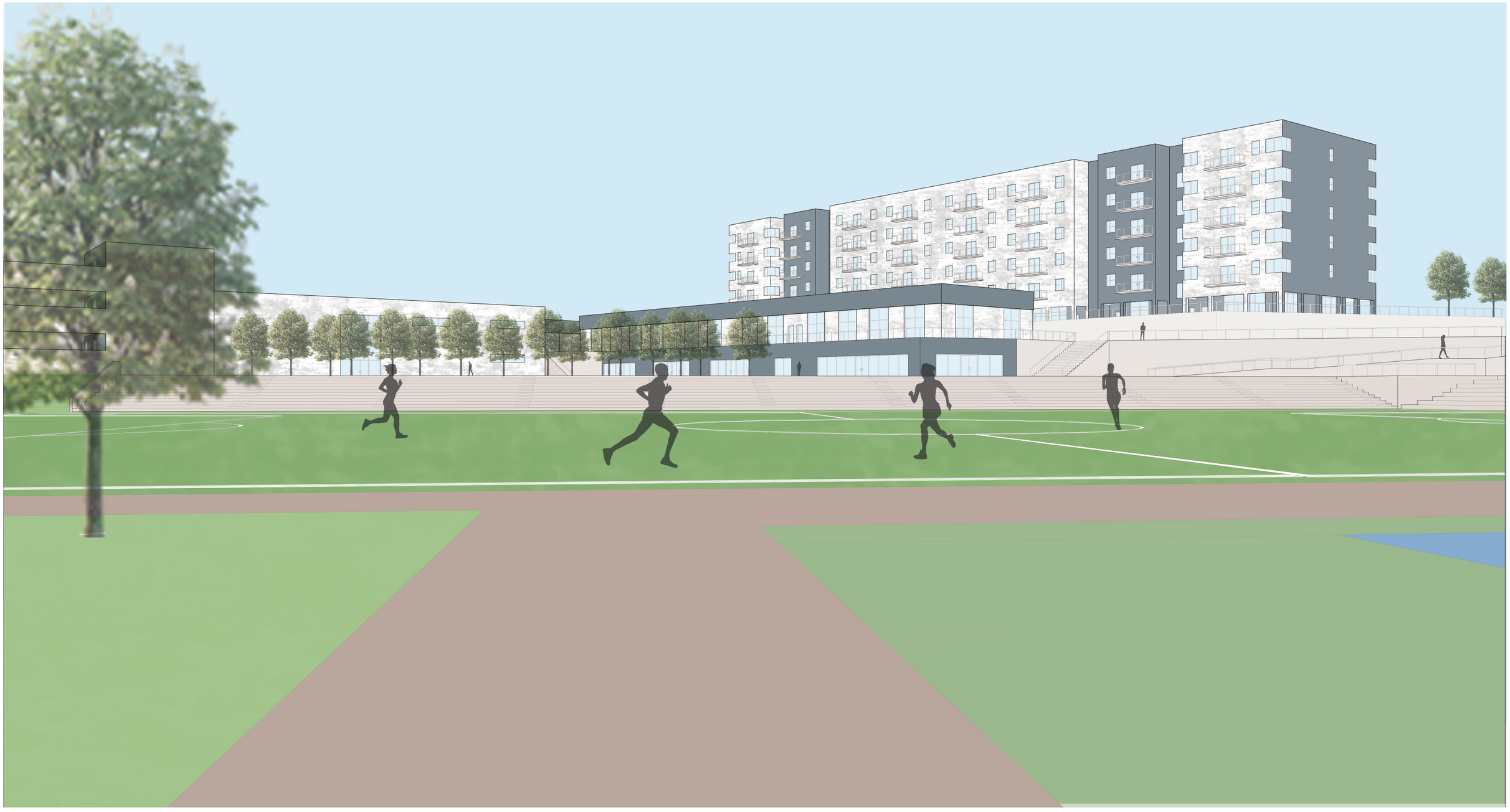
-30′ – Field + Parking Level
Ground-level plan at the base of the site, where outdoor athletic fields and parking are organized as the central active space of the development.



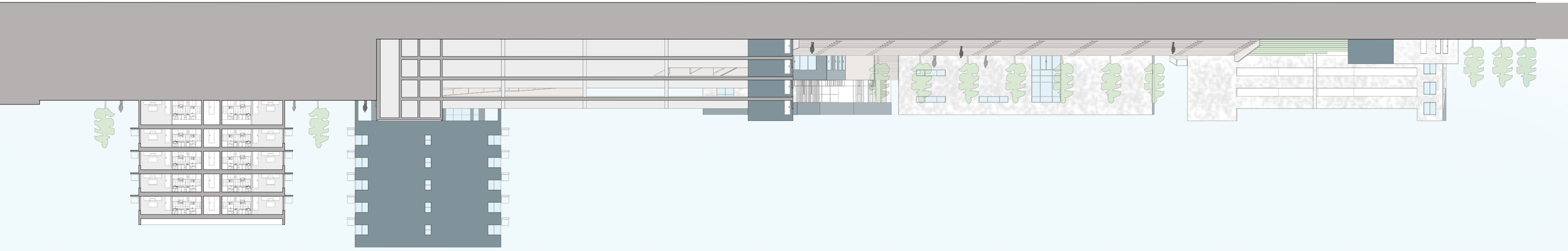


Apartment plans are organized to support density within the overall mixed-use system, with units positioned above retail and directly connected to the pedestrian spine that links the site's recreational and public spaces.


285
285
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Doraville
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PROJECT STATS

- **Residential**
  - 118 Units
  - 134,520 SF Total
  - ~1,140 SF Avg Unit Size
  - ~275 Residents
- **Retail**
  - 17 Shops
  - 40,557 SF Total
  - ~2,385 SF Avg Shop Size
- **Recreation / Fitness**
  - 26,015 SF Gym Facility
  - 5 Racquetball Courts (indoor)

SPORT + ACTIVITY

- 1 Soccer Field
- 2 Basketball Courts
- 2 Pickleball Courts
- **Estimated Simultaneous Users:**
  - Soccer: ~22 players + spectators
  - Basketball: ~20 users
  - Pickleball: ~8 users
  - Gym + Racquetball: ~60–80 users

SITE + DENSITY

- Site Area: ~13 Acres
- Residential Density: ~9 units/acre

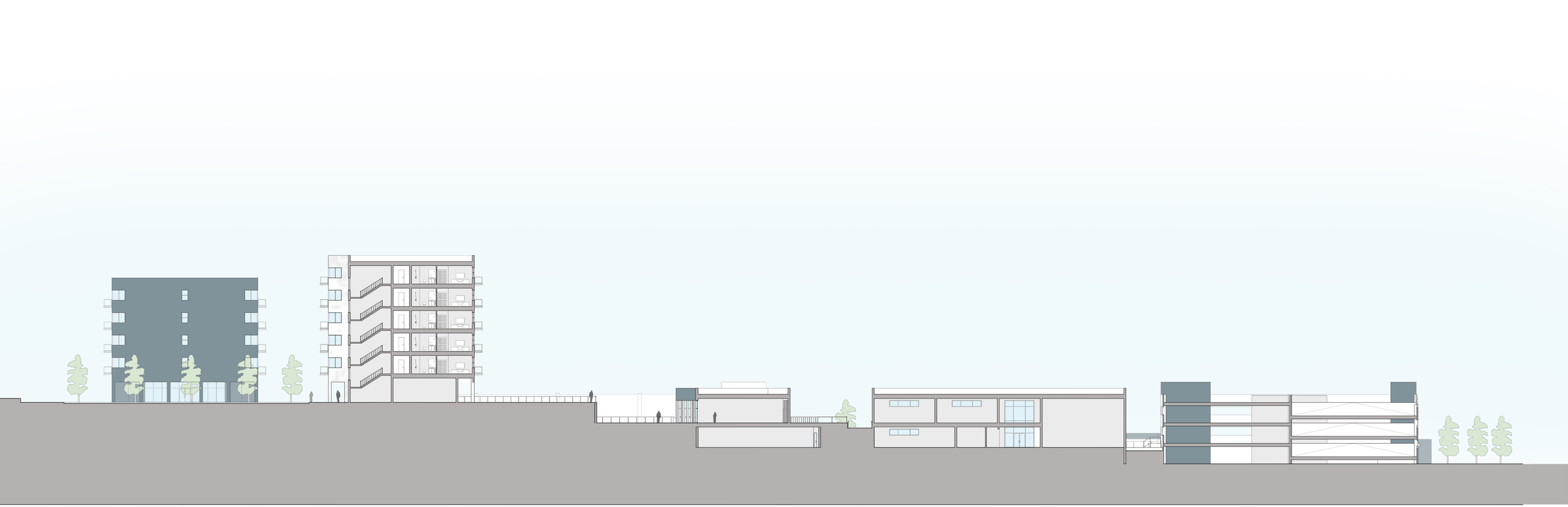
PARKING

- 546 Total Spaces
- Street Level Parking Lot + Structured Parking (2 garages)

SECTION + ACCESS

- 30 ft elevation change across site
- Dual access condition:
  - Upper level: retail + residential
  - Lower level: athletic fields + courts
- Integrated stairs + accessible ramp system





CONCLUSION

This project set out to explore how sports can function as a primary driver of urban design, organizing a mixed-use development through topography, circulation, and public space. The use of the site's natural grade change proved to be one of the most successful strategies, allowing program to be layered and creating a series of public spaces that support both activity and gathering. The pedestrian spine effectively establishes a clear organizational framework, connecting the site from top to bottom while reinforcing the relationship between retail, residential, and recreation.

However, the project revealed opportunities for further development, particularly in its overall density and programmatic intensity. The site has the capacity to support additional uses, and a more concentrated approach could strengthen both the urban condition and the vitality of the development. Additionally, while the spine succeeds at connecting spaces, the pedestrian experience along it could be more refined through tighter, more intimate moments that enhance movement between levels. Questions of ownership and maintenance, particularly regarding the athletic fields, also highlight the complexity of integrating multiple program types within a single development.

Ultimately, the project reinforces the potential of sports as a catalyst for urban life, demonstrating how recreation, when integrated with mixed-use programming and shaped by topography, can generate a connected and socially driven environment.

IMAGES

SITE

Google Earth. “5597 Buford Hwy NE, Atlanta, Georgia, United States.” Google, https://earth google.com.

PRECEDENTS

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Avenir Next
Designed by Adrian Frutiger, 1988
Redesigned by Akira Kobayashi, 2004