

# **CORRIDOR SUSTAINABILITY IMPROVEMENTS**

## **BURRILL HALL /MORRILL HALL PEDESTRIAN CORRIDOR**



### **INITIAL SITE ASSESSMENT & CONCEPTUAL PLANNING**

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## Project Purpose: Burrill Hall and Morrill Hall Walkway Sustainable Improvements

This project makes aesthetic and sustainable improvements to a high-profile area of campus thus transforming the campus walkway into a multifunctional landscape. The corridor is estimated to host approximately 30,000 visitors annually and is included in the “Million Dollar Tour” circuit, which introduces potential University donors to the campus.

This project addresses several needs of the corridor.

1. Assists the University in meeting sustainability goals through water quality improvement, habitat creation, groundwater recharge, and a plant selection that benefit pollinators.
2. Increases the visibility of University efforts in sustainability.
3. Improves aesthetic appearance of the corridor.
4. Improves stormwater management of a localized drainage problem within the walkway.

### Context : The Tour of Influence

In addition to creating a daily experience for students and faculty, the Burrill and Morrill Hall corridor is included in the campus tour for alumni and potential donors. This corridor connects the Alice Campbell Alumni Center, Krannert Center for Performing Arts with Harker Hall, the University of Illinois Foundation and the Illini Union. University of Illinois Facilities and Services estimate that approximately 30,000 visitors utilize the corridor each year. With such a high profile, this corridor could significantly influence potential donors by communicating a message that the University of Illinois is dedicated to sustainability and maintains the highest quality campus.

### Context: THE TOUR OF INFLUENCE



Alice Campbell Alumni Center



Krannert Center for Performing Arts



Burrill / Morrill / Medical Sciences Corridor



Harker Hall:  
University of Illinois  
Foundation



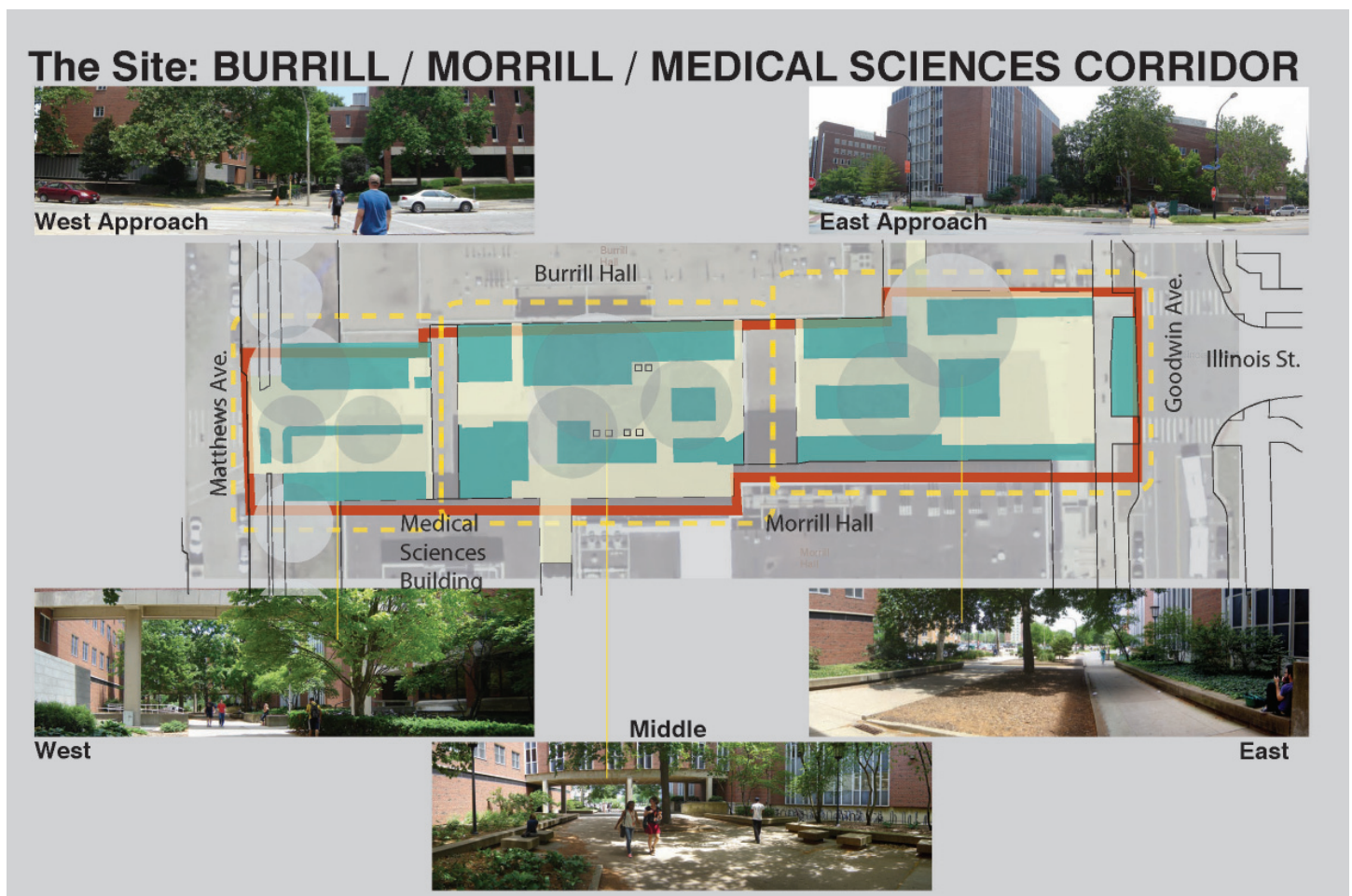
Illini Union

## The Site: Burrill / Morrill Hall / Medical Sciences Corridor

The site occupies the corridor between Burrill Hall, Morrill Hall, and the Medical Sciences building. It is a pedestrian area which extends Illinois Street between Goodwin Ave. and Matthews Ave in Urbana. As mentioned, it is used as a connection between the Illini Union, the Quad, and Krannert Center and the Alumni Center.

The corridor was developed as part of the development of Burrill and Morrill Halls. It is unique within the campus experience because of the canyon-like character of this developed plaza and corridor. The tall brick walls of Burrill and Morrill Hall isolate the pedestrian from the general openness of the campus. Additionally, two skywalks exaggerate the feeling of enclosure.

The existing corridor contains numerous landscape beds, places to sit, as well as bike racks. Because of the two skywalks, three primary areas (shown outlined in yellow below) can be experienced within the corridor: the east approach, west approach and "middle" area. The green areas shown below are the existing landscape beds--some extend off of the building walls, while others are landscape islands. Several existing large trees are growing within the corridor (shown as grey circles below).





## ATMOSPHERE



### The Site: Atmosphere

Dappled light and shade cover most of the area of the corridor. Concrete landscape walls serve as seat walls. Concrete blocks are clustered in a few areas creating additional seating. The pedestrian traffic is frequent, even during the summer semester. Cyclists maneuver between skywalk columns, landscape beds, and pedestrians. This atmosphere is unique within the University of Illinois campus.

### The Site: Assessment

#### Plant Palette

There are several landscape designs which do not relate to each other visually and thus create a disconnected or incongruous patchwork of plants within the corridor. These types include a planting of native landscaping at the east approach, a woodland wildflower planting in the middle area, as well as more traditional plants such as ivy, hostas, viburnum, and dogwoods.

#### Plant Health

Many areas of landscape beds contain only wood chips. In the middle plaza, a row of amelanchiers appear to be showing signs of stress and have likely grown past their prime maturity. Most of the large trees seem to be well adapted to the site and appear to be in mostly good health. However, one small maple tree was planted too close to the edge of the building and has been trimmed so that only one quarter of its canopy is growing.

## Hardscape

The corridor and plaza exemplifies good design thinking of the time period during which Burrill Hall and Morrill Hall were built. However, by contemporary standards, these spaces feel dated. The original designers of this corridor should be praised for their work because the number of people who still utilize the space for momentary resting and relaxing indicates that the design still succeeds in meeting some of the needs of the University community. However, in order to address the broader needs and goals of the University, the corridor hardscape is in area in need of improvement in order to address drainage and aesthetic goals.





## **Discussion: Additional Issues, Concerns, and Design Strategies**

On July 1, 2013, Anna Hochhalter, a recent graduate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Landscape Architecture Graduate Program, facilitated a discussion with several staff from Facilities and Services in order to assess additional issues, design goals, and levels of potential investment related to the corridor sustainability improvement project. The following section documents that discussion and reports the additional issues for consideration, design goals and potential design strategies discussed with University staff.

### **Regarding the corridor experience:**

Hardscape should be reshaped or sharpened.

The existing pavement and seat walls are an eyesore.

The existing wood chips create a visual void that is undesirable.

The facade on the columns could be aesthetically improved.

The middle landscape beds have difficulty supporting plants other than the existing canopy trees.

Plants have not grown well at all in these areas.

Changes to the hardscape and changes which are not made through plant material may be well suited to this dark, urban corridor.

Hostas and ground ivy have grown well there through the years.

The existing canopy trees are in good health.

Lighting could be used as an aesthetic interest as well as for improved safety.

More interaction with the landscape plants is desirable.

Creating a less linear design is desirable. This could be done with sculptural artwork or pavers.

Breaking the long concrete lines should be a goal. Even changing the height of a concrete wall at 20' can give the impression that it is not a continuous concrete wall.

The corridor is a wind tunnel.

### **Regarding safety:**

Landscape beds surrounded by walkway need to be lower than three feet.

Landscape beds against buildings can be taller.

Should add LED lights to increase the brightness at night.

Shrubs must not be too thick next to the building.

Access for emergency services is not included in the existing design and is not an issue.

### **Regarding design implementation:**

They have an earlier conceptual plan to replace the Amalanchiers.

A strategy of moderate ambition is best suited with the Campus goals at this time.

## **Conclusion:**

The Burrill/ Morrill Hall corridor offers a unique opportunity to explore methods of sustainable design through conventional practices of rain garden design as well as hardscaping improvements, lighting installations and additional non-plant strategies. A moderate strategy is advised. In this conversation moderate is understood to mean more than a creating only rain garden while leaving the existing vegetation, but less than a full redesign which would completely reshape the hardscaping. A moderate strategy addresses the creation of the rain garden, all the landscape beds while leaving the mature canopy trees in place, and makes some alterations to the existing hardscape. Perhaps the most difficult challenges of the corridor will be to unify the character of the corridor landscape beds and to design a solution suitable for the harsh conditions of very little sun, significant wind, and heavy pedestrian use.