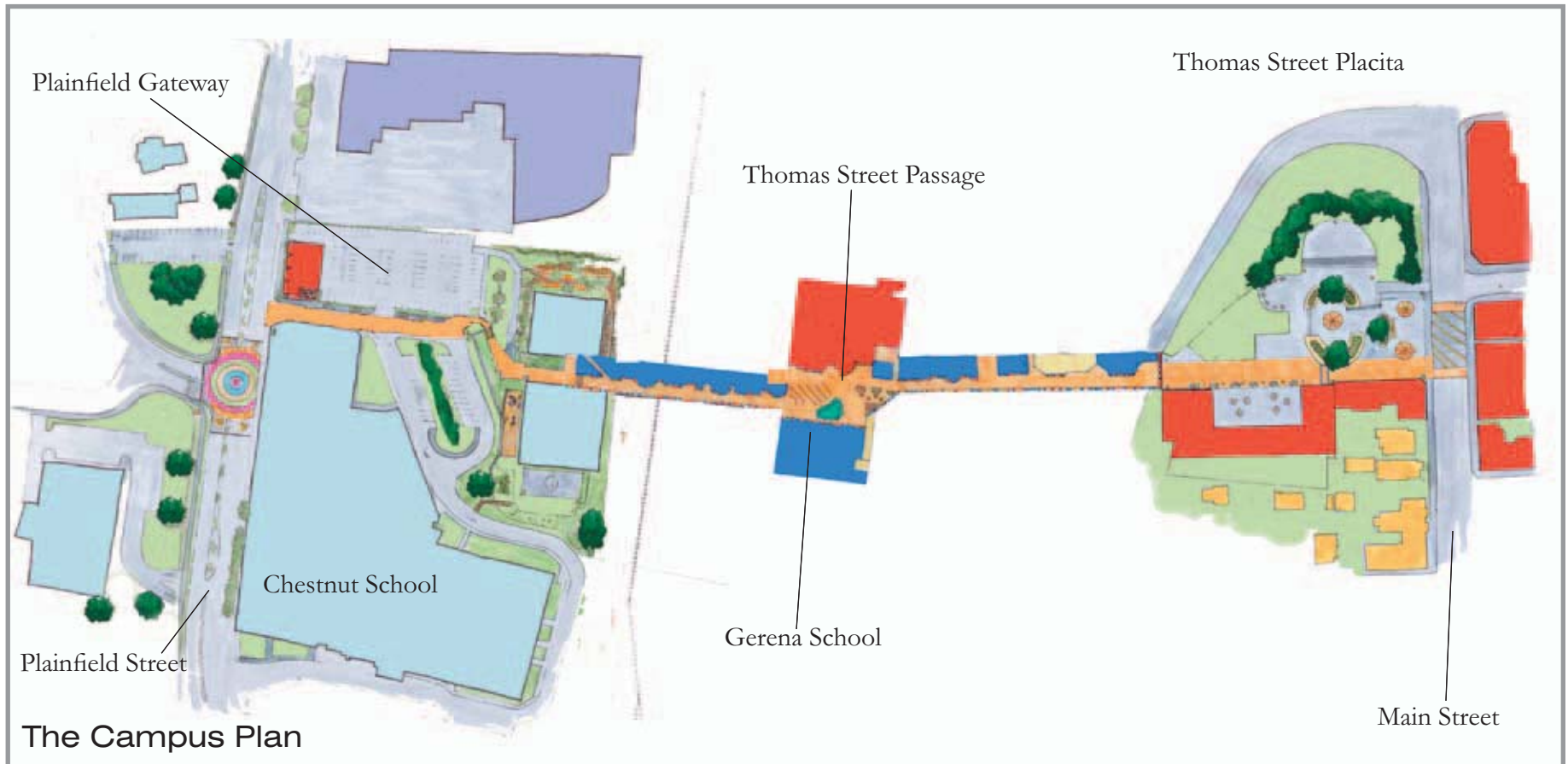


4. The Campus Plan

The Campus Plan proposes both subtle and dramatic physical design improvements to the west and east sides of the Gerena School, as well as to the school itself. The physical design improvements range from simple beautification projects to improved signage, streetscaping, security measures, and retail construction. These improvements will

enhance the quality of these spaces. Furthermore, they will reinforce the vision for Thomas Street as a subterranean passageway, enabling economic, social, and programmatic activity to flow between these two vital plaza areas and the Memorial and Plainfield sides of the community.



Thomas Street Placita

The Gerena School is not only tucked under I-91, but is also set quite far back from the streets to either side. To its east, it is separated from Main Street by a large passive open space known as Thomas Street Park. Though this space serves as an entrance to the Gerena School and fronts Main Street, Thomas Street Park today neither embodies the character and social vitality of Main Street nor encourages people to stop and linger in it. It is not a destination but rather merely a large swath of space to get across before you are able to enter or leave the school.

Accordingly, there have been enormous efforts to revitalize the space. The following *re*-vision for the space draws upon some of the best of these efforts as interpreted from the existing Thomas Street Park Plan and takes advantage of the park's key location in the neighborhood and its role as a spatial connector between Main Street and Campus activity.

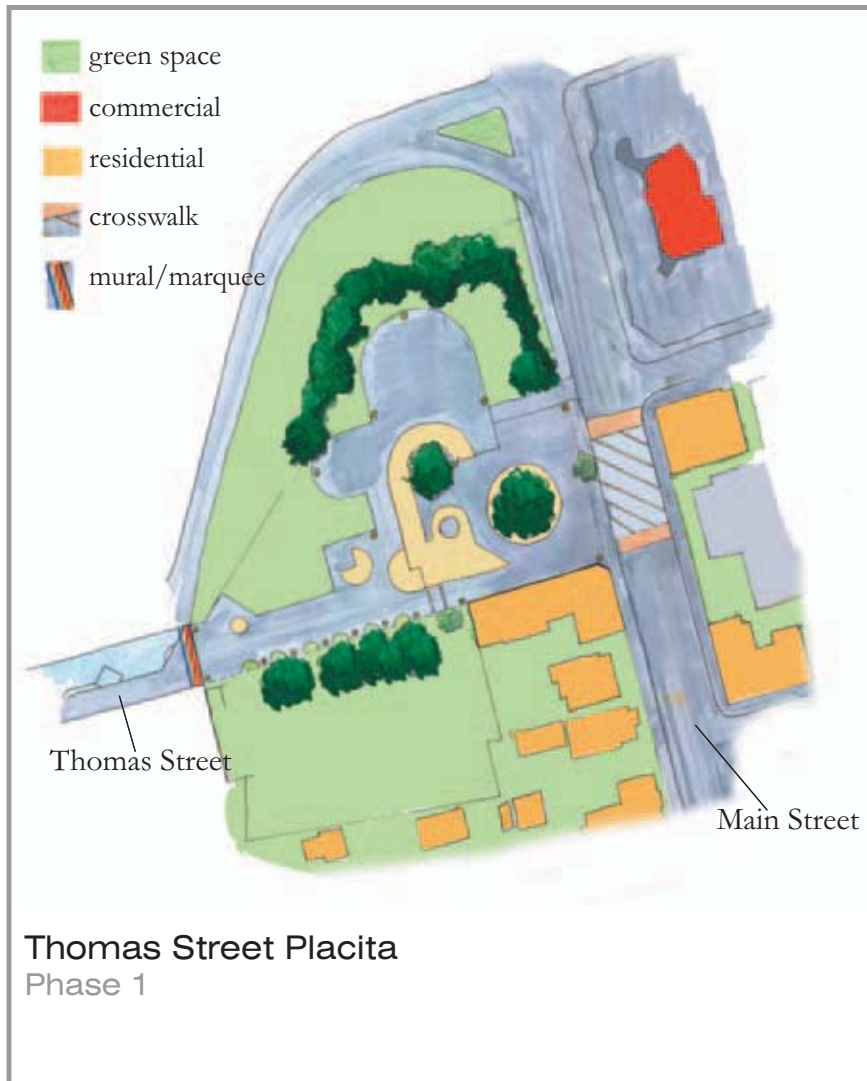
A typical scene . . .

. . . the placita is filled with a variety of activities and people. Community residents and visitors enjoy the commercial, social, and natural amenities of the space, eating lunch and listening to live music from the gazebo or simply playing dominos and socializing...



An example of a ceramic tile community history mural

The new vision for the space converts the space into a small plaza or *placita* creating both an attractive and active space that promotes diverse social and economic activity at all hours of the day and night. As envisioned, Thomas Street Placita will combine green landscaping with recreation facilities, programmed activities, and informal and formal commercial opportunities to showcase the vitality of the North End's Campus and take advantage of the Placita's location on Main Street. Thomas Street Placita will be filled with a variety of activities and people. Community residents and visitors could enjoy the commercial, social, and natural amenities of the space while eating lunch and listening to live music from the gazebo or simply playing dominos and socializing



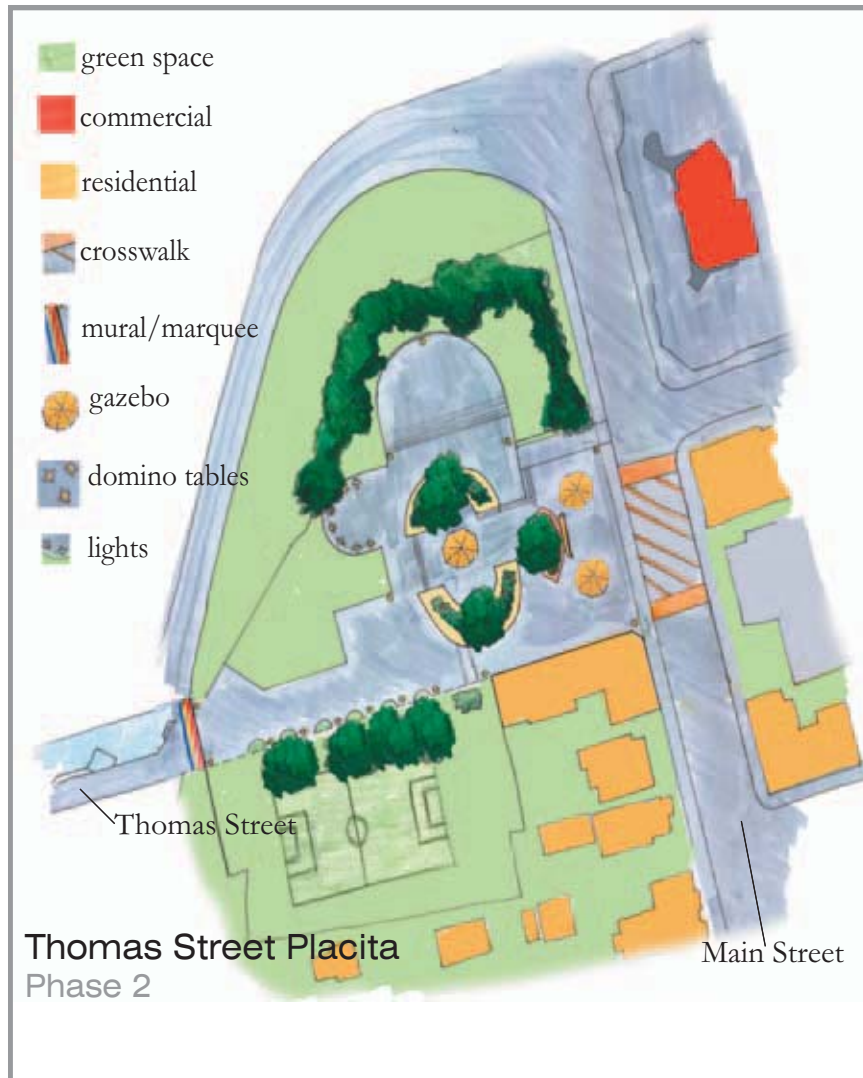
First Steps (phase one)

The area's revitalization process begins with a beautification project scheduled to begin on May 24th 2004 with a clean-up and mural painting organized by the Campus Committee. These initial efforts which require minimal resources, and willing volunteers will

dramatically impact the perception of the value of this space and the importance of its initial communal care. The passageway into the Gerena School, the heart of The Campus, at the west side of the park will be announced through a visible and bright sign above its entry way. To improve pedestrian safety, a raised and painted pedestrian pathway will replace the neglected crosswalk leading across Main Street in front of the park. Pleasant lighting will be placed throughout the park to simultaneously improve both the safety and intimacy of the budding placita.



An example of a community mural project



Growth and Experimentation (phase two)

The second phase, spanning the following year and a half, is characterized by growth and creative experimentation. It is recommended that a name for the placita be created and adopted through a community charrette (workshop). Improved physical



Placita with surrounding residential and commercial, San Juan Puerto Rico

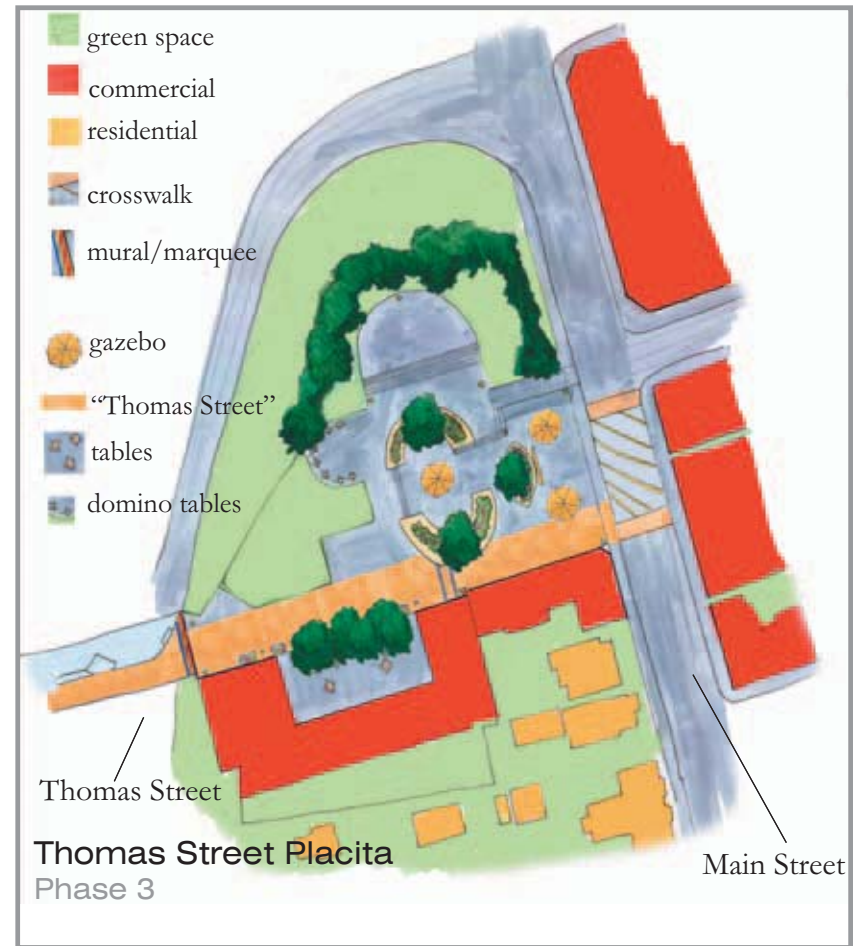
infrastructure and small commercial space uses, possibly with business kiosks, will develop the Placita's active character. Increased signage will be implemented in the form of a marquee, readerboard and map placed above the school's front entrance and the Main Street promenade. This signage will help orient residents and visitors to the wealth of The Campus's programs and activities. The signage includes a major marquee on the face of the school to the west of the placita. The existing outdoor performance space will be enlarged and complimented by a gazebo for both gathering in the shade and more intimate performance or community events. Domino benches and small refreshment kiosks will promote social and economic activity.

Also in this second phase, the physical landscape of the placita will evolve to accentuate more the direct and circular flow of pedestrian activity around the gazebo area and along Thomas Street. Ideas to develop the open space abutting Gerena to the south of the park should be pursued. Strong functions for this space include participatory community gardens or a playground which creates a meeting space for parents and children alike.

Expansion and Community Agency (phase three)

Ultimately, commercial development inside the plaza will strengthen the edges and functions of the Thomas Street Placita. The development of mixed-use residential and commercial buildings is encouraged along Main Street on existing vacant and underdeveloped lots, creating new affordable housing opportunities. This mixed-use development will help support the vitality of Main Street and will strengthen the plaza as the front yard of the community while taking advantage of the Main Street location.

The placita should develop the capability to take advantage of its proximity to the Gerena School, Main Street, and the highway off-ramp and to capture the activity of North End residents, Bay State employees and others who pass through the area. As an extension of Main Street, the placita will bring attention to the entrance of the Gerena School.



Gazebo and
marquee at
Thomas
Street
Placita

The Park's maintenance will require the collaboration of both the Parks and Recreation Department and the Gerena School unified under the goals and voice of The Campus. Maintenance is essential to securing the future of the place as an inviting space. As described in the Implementation section of this report, it is ultimately recommended that the existing or a newly created Community Development Corporation (CDC) head the development of commercial retail along the placita, though most of its space will remain open to mixed programming and spontaneous activity.