

Extractable Units of Bywater

by  
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EXTRACTABLE UNITS OF BYWATER

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*The choice is not between two landscapes, one with and one without a human influence; it is between two human ways of living, two ways of belonging to an ecosystem.*

*-William Cronon*

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## ABSTRACT

“Seeing landscapes in terms of commodities meant something else as well: it treated members of an ecosystem as isolated and extractable units. Explorers describing a new countryside with an eye to its mercantile possibilities all too easily fall into this way of looking at things, so that their descriptions often degenerated into little more than lists.” William Cronon, Changes in the Land

William Cronon argues that incoming settlers to the New England landscape could only define their findings in terms of their marketable value rather than their collective value as a system of growth. The danger of extracting profitable elements from an existing ecosystem is that it not only detracts from the overall richness of the place, but hinders any potential for future growth. The Bywater neighborhood in New Orleans is an ecosystem facing this same calculated extraction of its profitable parts: it lays on a natural levee; its located on the Mississippi River; it is in close proximity to downtown; there is cheap property due to the devastation of Katrina. Developers moving into the area buy out parts of the land based off these marketable values without understanding the complexity of the urban fabric. The Bywater neighborhood has a rich history of development from plantation lands to industrial barges to its current identity as an art and residential district. This thesis will seek to develop a rich and equitable infrastructure for the cultivation of both old and new cultural communities while still allowing space for growth in a place that has been historically defined and divided by its profitable parts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prospectus

- Thesis Statement
- Introduction to Bywater

Analysis

- History of Olivier
- Extractable Units
- Environments and Micro-Environments
- Site Analysis
- Program

Design Statement

- Masterplan Design
- Play Space
- Social Gathering
- Cultural Spaces
- Productive Landscapes

Drawings and Models

Precedents

Bibliography





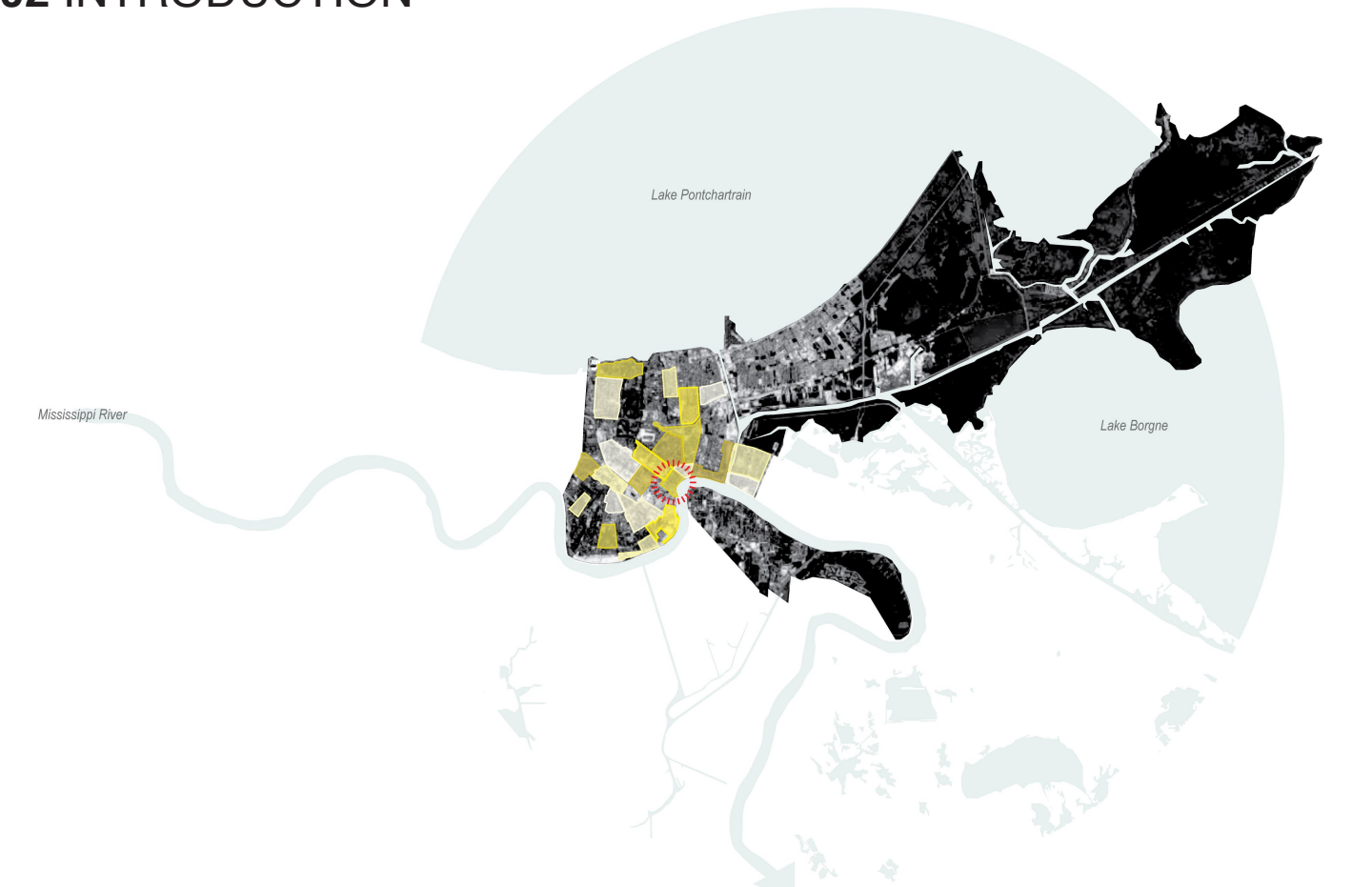
# 01 THESIS STATEMENT

“Seeing landscapes in terms of commodities meant something else as well: it treated members of an ecosystem as isolated and extractable units. Explorers describing a new countryside with an eye to its mercantile possibilities all too easily fall into this way of looking at things, so that their descriptions often degenerated into little more than lists.”  
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William Cronon argues that incoming settlers to the New England landscape could only define their findings in terms of their marketable value rather than their collective value as a system of growth. The danger of extracting profitable elements from an existing ecosystem is that it not only detracts from the overall richness of the place, but hinders any potential for future growth. The Bywater neighborhood in New Orleans is an ecosystem facing this same calculated extraction of its profitable parts: it lays on a natural levee; its located on the Mississippi River; it is in close proximity to downtown; there is cheap property due to the devastation of Katrina. Developers moving into the area buy out parts of the land based off these marketable values without understanding the complexity of the urban fabric. The Bywater neighborhood has a rich history of development from plantation lands to industrial barges to its current identity as an art and residential district. This thesis will seek to develop a rich and equitable infrastructure for the cultivation of both old and new cultural communities while still allowing space for growth in a place that has been historically defined and divided by its profitable parts.



# 02 INTRODUCTION



## A Trending Neighborhood

The Bywater neighborhood has a complex history that can still be witnessed in the architectural fragments of its past identities. Bordered by a natural levee, the neighborhood boasts of a lower flood risk than surrounding areas and newly developed urban parks provide an even bigger draw. This has created an influx of development over the past few years. Rather than filling in the gaps of the existing neighborhood these developments have inserted themselves into the community in isolated and extractable units of space. The drastic juxtaposition of the space creates an unsustainable environment for both architectural typologies. The existing neighborhood is facing climbing rent costs while the newer neighborhood becomes isolated from the culture and life that once drew them to the neighborhood.

Shifting dynamics in the neighborhood’s basic structure result in a constantly adaptive and evolving urban fabric. Much like the New England landscape adapting to New England settlers,

Bywater is experiencing the same growing pains. The results of which have brought positive changes in the form of community gardens and investment into infrastructure, but at the cost of the community’s rent security and the historical integrity of this long standing neighborhood. This isn’t a new trend in the Bywater neighborhood. Post-Katrina Louisiana felt a lot of change in the years following the storm, and before that, many other cycles in demographics have shaped and changed the urban fabric.

## Creole, French American, and American Rural

Bywater is among the oldest of the now twenty-three defined neighborhoods in New Orleans Parish. Though the official name of the neighborhood did not come about until 1948, archaeologists have traced the tract of land all the way back to a Mississippi band of Choctaw Indians. The oldest historical references begin in the “lower banlieue” period of the 18th century, when the neighborhood was cited as “a formidable collection of high end Creole, French American,



and American rural architecture” (Campanella). During this time a large amount of immigrants, primarily Irish Catholic men, moved in to cash in on rich agricultural lands primed for sugarcane and cotton growing. Plantations quickly populated the attracts of land adjacent to the French Quarter.

The land along the Mississippi was a huge commodity to early settlers of the New Orleans territory. In fact, the proximity to major waterways and rich agricultural lands is what drove the Choctaw to first settle the area. Upon arrival, the French took full advantage of the land for use. Strips or “arpents” of land were parceled out for immigrating French and Irish men looking to make their fortune in plantations. The depth of the Mississippi River where it bends to meet New Orleans proper is the deepest section of the river at two hundred feet. This has always made New Orleans prime real estate as a port for goods. These plantations supplied those ports with everything from cotton to sugarcane - the main cash crop.

Agriculture remained extremely lucrative and profitable until the mid-1800's when prices of sugarcane started to decline. Plantation owners found that they could sell the land they grew the crops on for more than they could sell the product. For this reason, they began to partition off land from their own acreage to housing authorities and developers. This in turn created a shift in the urban fabric and demographic of the Bywater neighborhood. A community that, up until that point, had been completely reliant on their agricultural

prospects started to diversify and turn to industrial production and labor. Creole cottages and shotgun homes sprang up to meet the demand of housing for workers.

## Industry Along the Mississippi

By 1896, the Bywater neighborhood had become a exportation hub. The land closest to the river housed warehouses for everything from ice to beer refineries (Sanborn Maps). A rail line now served as the border between residences and the Mississippi River. The beginnings of the present day, built up levee were begun along those tracks.

Through careful study of the Sanborn maps from 1896, there seems to have been a clear economic and racial divide that existed in the neighborhood. After plantations went out of commission, freed African Americans started to build up on the community left behind in the plantation's shadow. Plentiful work became a

lucrative opportunity that kept many black families in the neighborhood. The Eastern side of Bywater is often referred to as part of the greater ninth ward due to this change in demographic.

The agrarian roots of the community were not lost under all the new steel and storage sheds. The eastern edges of Bywater still showed evidence to the arpent's agrarian past. There the density of the built environment lessens into an almost sporadic field of farming space and small dwellings. This urban plan imprinted itself on the neighborhood and is still evident in the north east corner of the site; however, no relic stood more steadily of the past than that of the now abandoned plantation homes.

## Plantations and the Church

The French and Irish men that had bought up these plantations and passed them along through the generations tended to have one major thing in common - Catholicism. New Orleans is historically an extremely religious and superstitious city. This deep tie to the faith is the reason that they refer to geographical areas as “parishes” rather than the more common term “county”. The church also had a heavy hand in dictating zoning practices in the city.

Looking for a way out of their plantation homes, many Catholic land owners turned to the church as a simple way to get the property off their hands. The church would have space for schools and convents while the property owner would have a clear conscience. The timing of this transition could not have come at a better time for the circumstances the city would face. The cholera epidemic of 1852, yellow fever epidemic of 1853, the Civil War, and WWI led to an increased number of orphans. The church worked as the top housing authority to act as refuges for these children and old plantation homes slowly transitioned into educational spaces with on-site churches and newly built dormitories. By 1896 there were five different religiously affiliated refuges in the Bywater neighborhood alone (Sanborn Maps).

## Post-Katrina New Orleans

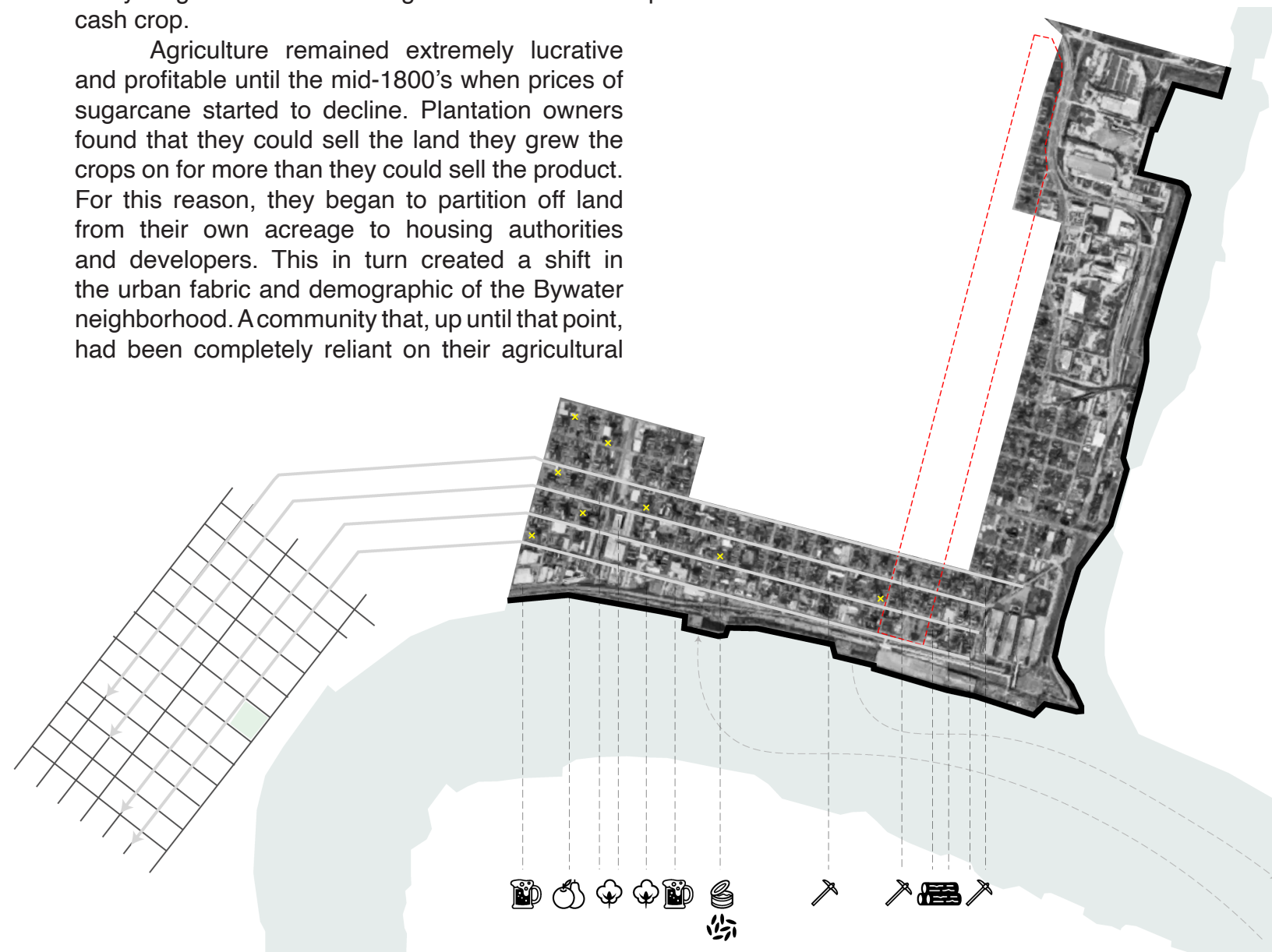
Hurricane Katrina left a deep and lasting scar on every community in the New Orleans

area. Even those neighborhoods that experienced minimal flood damage, such as Bywater, were not able to recover. A large reason for the exodus from the crescent city was attributed to the economic backlash of the storm.

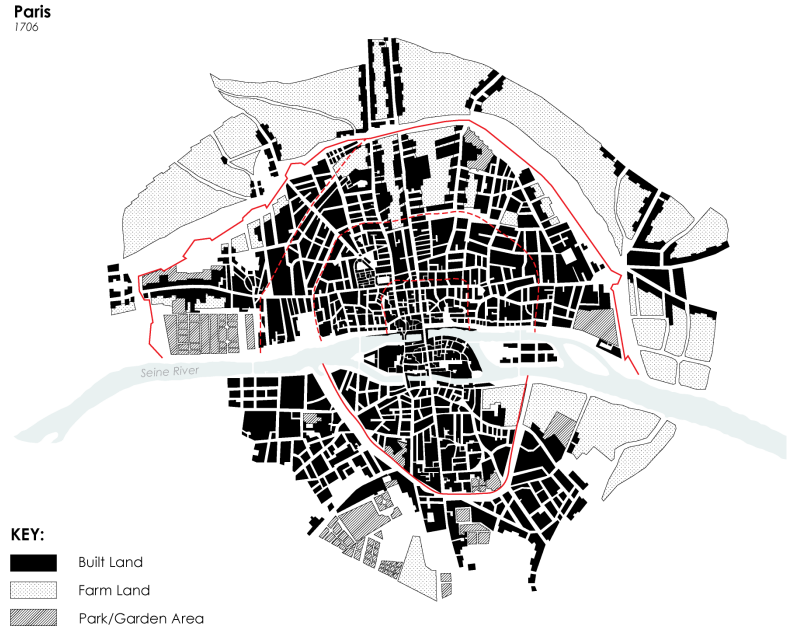
Bywater has always been a predominantly black and low income neighborhood. That is a marginalized group already at higher risk for displacement. Many people, especially black families, were not financially capable of moving back after the storm. The one's that did find their way back to their old neighborhood found increased levels of poverty. New Orleans saw rent hikes between thirty and forty percent after the storm, and that was just the beginning of the problems residents faced (Quigley).

Prior to Katrina, all New Orleans Public schools were overseen by a singular school board. As of 2015, a decade past the storm, there were forty-four school boards (Quigley). Currently New Orleans holds the records for highest percentage of charter schools as well as highest percentage of children living below the poverty line. The students most impacted by these statistics are low income, African American children; Large discrepancies based off race are also seen in median incomes. While black households have seen marginal rise in income, the incomes of their white neighbors has increased by three times the rate of a black family.

New Orleans has lost 64,856 people from its population from Katrina (Quigley). The people moving into the city now are newcomers and a majority are Hispanic. This change in demographic will have a direct effect on the urban landscape. One issue Bywater and other historic neighborhood's face is that there is not much left to alter. These historic communities are in decay and on the verge of total erasure. The current views and values of urban planning are what allow these things to happen. The existing community is discounted in favor of a possible, wealthier user group. Rather than looking to traditional methods of urbanization, a "mad-lib" urbanism approach maintains the historical integrity of the neighborhood and its residents while allowing opportunities for economic growth for many rather than the few.



03 HISTORY OF OLIVIER



Agrarian Roots

William Cronon argues that the most destructive thing to the New England landscape was this approach and appeal to the ecosystem’s “mercantile possibilities” rather than how those units interfaced with each other in the environment (Cronon 21). New England Indians that inhabited the land prior to European colonization lived as a nomadic group. They felt no possessive ownership of the land and, due to seasonal changes, saw the land in terms of its use rather than product. This system was effective in protecting and maintaining the landscape prior to colonization, but once the Europeans arrived they found the blank canvas to be theirs for the taking.

The Mississippi Band of the Choctaw had a different relationship with their environment that made it much less convenient for French settlers to upheave the natural ecosystem. Due to the mild climate of New Orleans, the Choctaw had time to lay roots and worked to maintain productive landscapes. Their choices for settlement had to be made off a number of factors that would make it easier for them to survive in the marsh environment. They cultivated the land that was primely located off the Mississippi for agriculture and were successful enough to build flourishing communities.

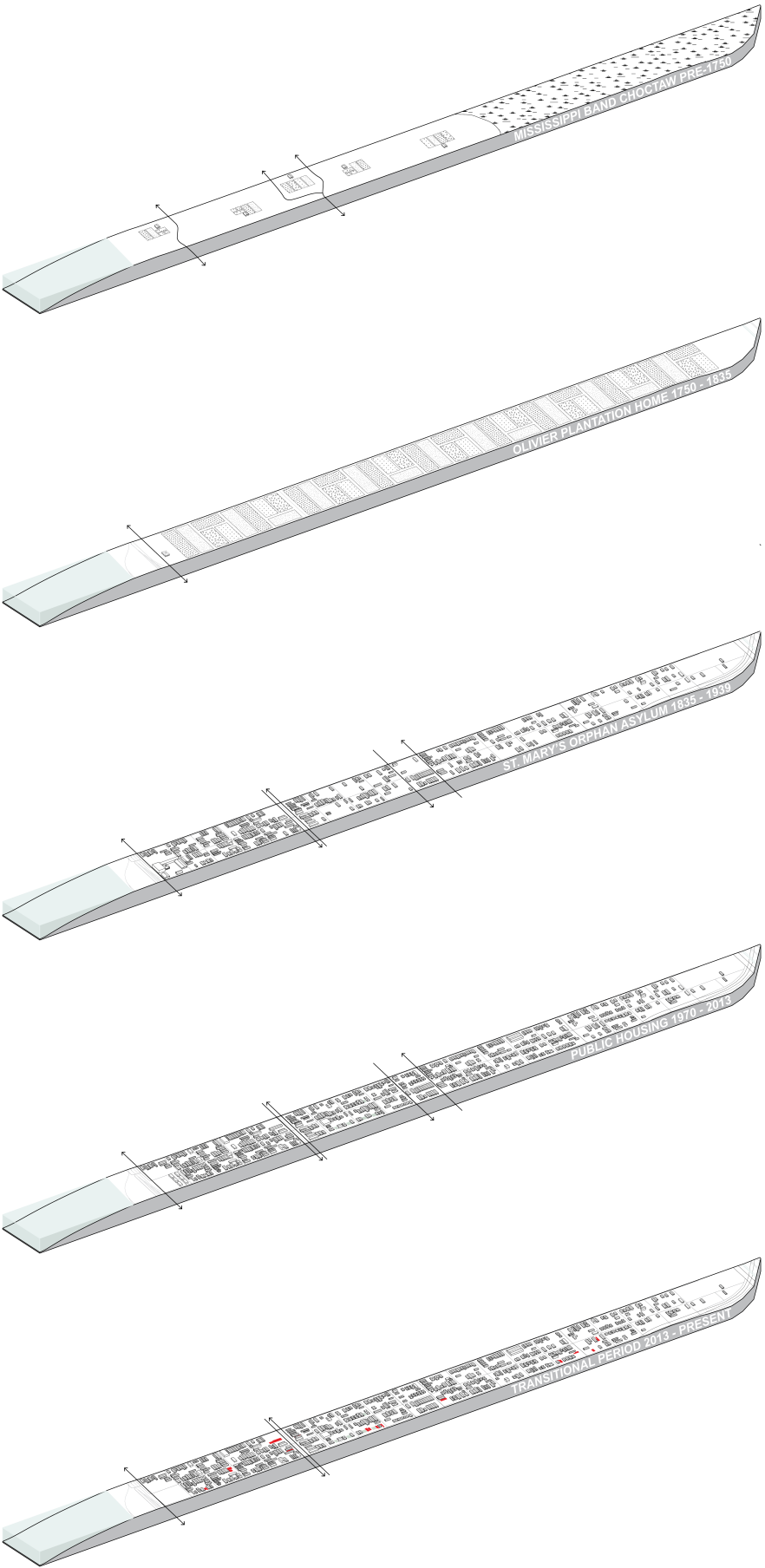
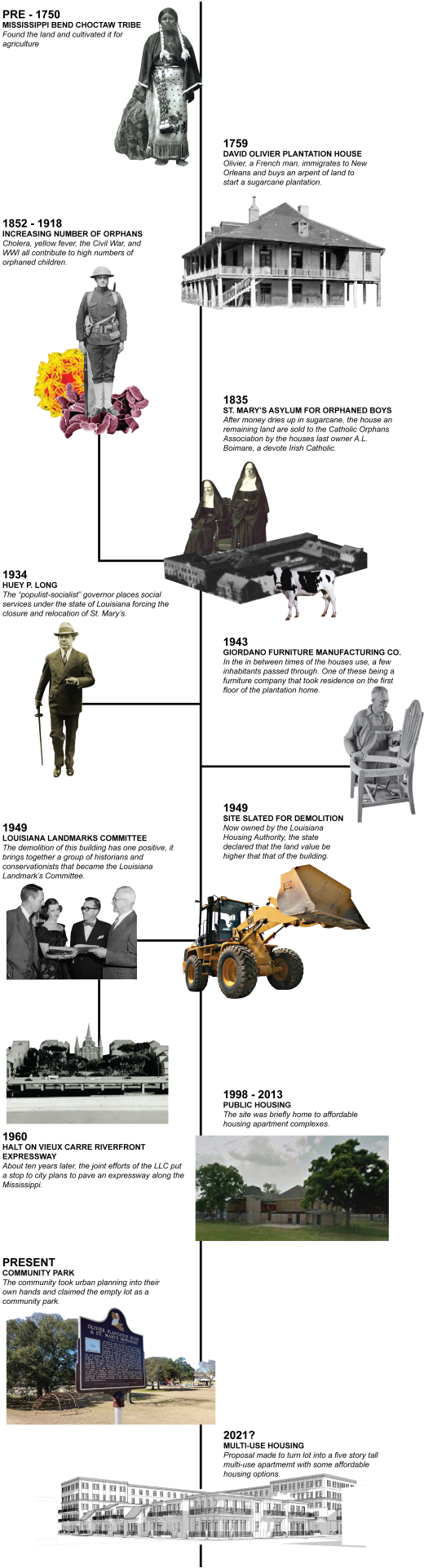
This had the benefit of serving as a blueprint for the French whenever they began colonization. Rather than taking whatever resources available,



the French set up their city grid in the center of Choctaw settlement and turned agriculture from a survival based practice to a cash crop industry. They gifted and sold off pieces of land to new property owners who went on to cultivate plantations of sugarcane and cotton. This came at the cost of the Choctaw who were then enslaved in order to harvest the crops.

These arpents of land are still clearly distinguishable in the city grid of the city today. New Orleans sowed the roots of its infrastructure in agriculture. The abundance of fertile land to be cultivated took precedence over traditional French city planning types. Comparatively looking at the influences to organization, Paris and New Orleans seem to have many things in common. They both were planned and inhabited by the French and both border a river. Yet, looking at both there is clear differentiation in strategy.

Paris was built as a walled city. The primary concern for the French at that time was protection from foreign enemies and maintaining order and control over the city’s inhabitants. In this plan, farm lands are treated as an afterthought that help demarcate the boundary between city and wilderness. New Orleans is in a lot of ways the complete counter to that ideology. The primary concern of settlement was focused on the cultivation of a productive landscape. This methodology worked in protecting the ecosystem to an extent but limited the city from ever creating a strong urban fabric.







### Mississippi Band of the Choctaw

The Mississippi band of the Choctaw were uniquely diverse in makeup. Not only did tribes consist of Native Americans but also African Americans. In 1509 the Spanish trade ships were rushing to the Caribbean Islands over rumors of gold (Douglas). The rush was so dire that it caused some traders to abandon their haul entirely and catch smaller, faster ships that were island bound. The abandoned “cargo” happened to be Africans on slave ships heading to North America. Working together, the abandoned men and women would manage to limp the ship along to shore where they would then disembark and flee into the wilderness near present day Florida.

These shipwrecked Africans were able to form alliances with Native American tribes, especially the Choctaw. While they were still seen as secondary to original tribe members in the beginning, there was a definite partnership between the two racial groups. By the time the French arrived on the banks of the Mississippi, communities with both Native and African Americans had been well established. At first the entirety of the Choctaw were subjugated to working the fields of the newly growing plantations. When that population was exhausted the French started to import new slaves. This led to an unexpected shift in the balance of power. Paranoid Frenchmen were afraid of the close relationship between

natives and slaves. At this time, the Choctaw still retained their original community structure. This gave them a feeling of superiority over African Slaves that were brought in on ships.

Word spreading of the Natchez Uprising of 1729 seemed to cement these fears amongst the French and they began to actively push for separation between the Native American and African American communities. This sentiment in the South is ultimately what led to the Trail of Tears starting in 1831.

### The Olivier Plantation

In 1759, David Olivier signed off ownership for his arpent of land, the Olivier Plantation. The land, already cultivated by the Choctaw was mostly cultivated to grow sugarcane. The home that Olivier built there was the epitome of French Creole architecture. The plantation home has an “airy wrap-around gallery sup- ported by cypress spindle colonnades and brick Doric columns” supporting a hip roof (Campanella). The most Americanized piece of the structure was a private central hallway that is argued to be one of the first pre-cursors of New Orleans architecture turning to Americanization.

The plantation remained working until the price of sugarcane dropped in the mid-1800’s. Plantation owners found that they could sell the land they were cultivating for a lot more than they could sell the crop and thus began the third cycle of alteration to the New Orleans landscape. Slice by slice of land was cut from the arpent until the urban grid rendered the original northern boundaries invisible.

### St. Mary’s Orphan Asylum for Boys

The final owner of the Olivier Plantation house, A.L. Boimare, donates the property and remaining land to the Catholic Orphans Association in 1835. The school builds the lot into a campus and surrounds the old plantation home with dormitories, a dairy barn, a church, and some playing fields (Campanella).

The campus soon became one of the premier parochial schools in the region with around four hundred students in attendance. One of the reasons for the boom in students was due

to the dramatic increase in orphans. The cholera epidemic of 1852, Yellow fever epidemic of 1853, the Civil War and WWI were a devastating blow across the country and left many children without parents.

By the early 1920’s the school was a thriving private school. Way outperforming the public schools of the area, these parochial schools became the standard for any child wishing to succeed - if they could pay. Increasing divisions between classes and populations within New Orleans made it a perfect testing ground for progressive socialist programs.



### Populist-Socialist Huey P. Long

Louisiana as a whole has been a historically conservative state. Even in New Orleans where outsiders may think residents to be more liberal, there is a heavy handed influence from the church. This is why Governor Huey P. Long became such a shock to New Orleanians. Long had many progressive propositions for New Orleans, but the most impactful were his plans to expand public housing and lessen the influence and division of parochial schools. During his time as Governor, the New Orleans Housing Department bought up many plots of land to convert to public housing. One of these plots was the land that the Olivier

Plantation house and St. Mary’s School stood on.

His progressive ideas and “Share the Wealth” mentality made him an extremely controversial character. On September 10, 1935, Huey P. Long was assassinated before any of his public housing dreams were realized.

### Vacancy

Economic pressures following WWII forced the city to reconsider ownership of historical property due to liability (Campanella). This led to the relocation of St. Mary’s to make way for the modernization of Bywater. During its vacancy period, the house was briefly inhabited by an elderly woman with two children in 1939. Four years later, in 1943, a Giordano Furniture Manufacturing Co, began operating out of the first story of the home (Haines). Six years after that time, the building was slated for demolition.

### Louisiana Landmarks Society

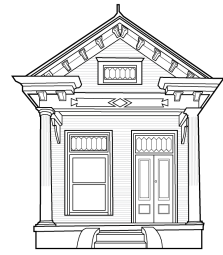
1949 marked the heroic end to the Olivier Plantation house. A young architectural historian, Richard Koch, so happened to be visiting the site of the historic French Creole mansion when he encountered the demolition crew. Throwing himself in front of the bulldozer, Koch manages to hold off crews. In an attempt to save the building he bands together with a group of historians and preservationists that go on to become the Louisiana Landmarks Society. While they are unable to save the plantation home, the formation of this group plays a pivotal role in stopping the Vieux Carre Riverfront Expressway project (Campanella).

### Public Housing to Park

The cleared land eventually was used for low income and senior housing in the 1970’s before being leveled again by the 1990’s. In 1998 ten multi-unit public housing apartments went up on the block. These lasted until 2013 until the park was leveled for the third and final time. For now, the land is operating as a community park, even though it is still owned by the New Orleans housing authority. The biggest question for the community is what comes next. Currently, plans are being drawn out for a modern housing complex wat out of scale for the community.



## 04 EXTRACTABLE UNITS



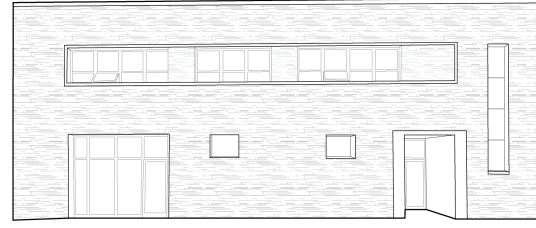
Shotgun



Creole Cottages



Commercial



Industrial

### Architectural Typologies within Olivier

The distinctive cycles and identities that the Bywater neighborhood has adapted to left their imprint in the form of architectural typologies. Mapping these typologies works as a time machine of sorts to see the evolution of the neighborhood. Due to the fact that Bywater is part of a protected historical district, the buildings and homes it contains are often protected from demolition. Commercial storefronts from 1896 still stand proudly on street corners demarcating what were once bustling neighborhood corridors. Decaying creole cottages stand as reminders of the history of African Americans within that community. All these buildings share a collective story and ecology, but, as the neighborhood begins to wither away, they become more and more disjointed.

The four most prominent architectural typologies within the Olivier arpent are shotgun homes, creole cottages, commercial storefronts, and forgotten industrial buildings. The housing types of the neighborhood are extremely indicative of typical New Orleans residential style. The homes are ornately decorated on the front with bright colors differentiating them from one another. The industrial buildings are mainly focused toward the southern half of the arpent nearest the Mississippi River. These structures date back to the industrial era of the site as a trading mecca. Lastly, the commercial buildings are indicative of historically commercial streets. These help to illustrate the demarcating line between the predominately white and the historically black communities of Bywater.

### Paths and Places

Another contributing factor to the neighborhood's decay is the lack of connectivity and planned public infrastructure. The bus routes, shown on the map of the following page, run heavily

through the predominantly white neighborhoods while neglecting minority spaces. Bike paths are also non-existent in these neglected sections of the community and sidewalks are not upkept. This creates a dependency on vehicular transportation and increases fossil fuel emissions. There are no real options for those reliant on public transportation rather than to have to deal with the complicated route of the existing bus system.

Another contributing factor to the lack of connectivity is the lack of landmarks there are to connect. New Orleans economy and primary focus is always towards the steady income of tourists. Right now the only two major attractions to the Bywater neighborhood are the Villalobos Rescue Center and the newly completed Crescent Park. Crescent Park is the largest sign of gentrification of the riverfront properties. While meant as a community space for the benefit of the neighborhood, the bridged park is only accessible through three small access points along Chartres Street. This renders it practically inaccessible to residents on the northern end of Bywater and those of the Upper Ninth Ward.

A green corridor and more accessible road networks would help to close some of these existing holes of the urban fabric. Better connectivity and traffic through these spaces will be mutually beneficial to residents on either end of the neighborhood. Currently, the neighborhood sits in a stale mate with itself. Newcomers investing into the neighborhood are arriving just in time to watch the local restaurants and the soul of the neighborhood to die out. Meanwhile, existing residents are being pushed from their homes by mounting rent costs. Stitching together bike lanes, pedestrian walkways, and public transport amenities will not only make it easier for residents to travel, but will also help to bring tourists into the area and work as a booster to the local economy.





# 05 ENVIRONMENTS AND MICRO-ENVIRONMENTS

## Fallen Trees and Adaptive Re-Use

In his book, Cronon speaks about explorers mapping new areas of land in terms of vegetational zones. He warns that this is dangerous in the fact that it makes blanket assumptions and over simplifies the complexity of a healthy ecosystem. The same logic can be applied to Bywater. In recent years, the Bywater neighborhood has been known as the artsy section of town. From this blanket description assumptions can be made as to the types of buildings that may be in that area or the cost of rent. The same assumptions could be made by seeing the scale of different buildings within the community.

The reality of the matter is that the urban fabric is far more complex than that of its architectural typologies or the inhabitants to its storefronts. Bywater has a rich and complex history that needs to be acknowledged in order to move forward with any understanding of the place. In this way, the neighborhood can be broken down into its environments and its micro-environments.

Environments are looking at the same scope as the vegetational zones. Certain aspects of the neighborhood operate as they seem they should; St. Vincent de Paul still holds mass and some historic storefronts are still open for business. These environments give a base understanding of the spatial qualities of the neighborhood. In order to get into the visual and visceral qualities, there has to be a study of the micro-environments.

Cronon describes the micro-environment as the environments that appear out of circumstance. For example, a toppled tree can become host to a small ecosystem of fungus. Within that ecosystem the water availability, humidity, temperature and vegetation may be severely different from an area ten feet away. This same concept applies to many of the buildings and spaces within the arpent. For instance, old industrial buildings that are no longer being used as storage for agricultural goods have become artist studios for large scale projects. Changing traffic corridors have also facilitated the transformation of existing residential properties being converted into store fronts. These examples

show the under the surface complexities of the historic neighborhood.

## Programmatic Elements of the Arpent

The local community has already taken on some tactical urbanism strategies in order to combat the decay in the city blocks. Different instances of community gardens and pocket parks are scattered throughout the area. While a step in the right direction, these changes are usually kept behind some built barrier and become inaccessible to the majority of the public. These interventions further push the idealistic narrative of developers and inadvertently further damages the neighborhood. Community gardens sandwiched between plots of vacated land and trash are evidence of this factor.

The basic cycles of the Olivier Plantation over time were: agriculture, housing, education, industrial, secular, and community space. These same programmatic elements are echoed in the community led interventions that exist on the southwestern edge of the neighborhood. Industrial storehouses have become artist studios and galleries, old retaining walls have become pocket parks with art walls, empty plots have been cultivated into gardens, and factories have been turned into storefronts. Seeing these elements existing in the urban landscape already despite not being specifically designed for is a strong indicator that this is what the community wishes to see more of. These different categories can be further broken down considering their specific scale components. From there a masterplan on the phasing of the project can be deduced.

The designed units will work with the existing built environment to create growth. Especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, communities are realizing the importance of the businesses and neighbors directly around them. Food shortages and scarcity have led to many keeping their own gardens to supply fresh fruits and vegetables. Small luxuries of having available fresh food options and the ability to go outdoors should not be a luxury reserved to those that can pay for it. These tools will help restore communities and give them the jump start they need in order to create and shape the environment around them into one of equity and inclusion.





# 06 SITE ANALYSIS

## Disintegrating Space

As time goes on and vacancies continue to rise, the course of nature will slowly start to take back the built landscape atop of it. This has led to an interesting condition of disjointed infrastructure. Sidewalks begin and end in the middle of blocks and road maintenance in some streets has been neglected to the point of caution. The neighborhood projects this idea that there is no place to go besides home and whatever there is to do outside of the home.

Much of the disintegration of space is due to the unbuilt barriers between sections of the neighborhood. St. Claude Avenue has heavy traffic that deters pedestrians and the broken line of retail facing the street leads to drivers flying straight through. Finding a way to address the street wall and pedestrian access across these main thoroughfares will be crucial to destroying socio-economic barriers.

North Clairborne also marks a change in the neighborhood. Once a heavily trafficked retail corridor, this section of North Clairborne now mostly consists of abandoned buildings and vandalized walls. The street’s lack of immediate appeal to vehicular traffic could be its saving grace in creating a pedestrian friendly zone.

## Abandoned Structures

Ideally this designed infrastructure would weave as non-invasively as possible through the neighborhood. Some specifically located structures can be re-purposed rather than demolished to make new forms of community buildings. Spaces owned by the people of Bywater that work to create a more productive urban space.

Urban planning is traditionally focused on the idea of exploitable values. It focuses on creating commercial property and high rent housing in a way that profits larger companies but not local economies. This thesis challenges the notion of what it means to design a successful community structure. It creates a cycle of economic and environmental sustainability so that the Bywater Neighborhood can function as a small town within its urban context. Exploring the possibilities of established communities can serve as a blueprint

for dying cities across the nation. Theaster Gates is an urban planning student turned artist that is testing these ideas within the south side of Chicago. He focuses his work on the relationship between blackness and urban design. All of the selected buildings he has transformed work towards the common goal of protecting the historical integrity of the community as well as creating economic opportunity for locals.

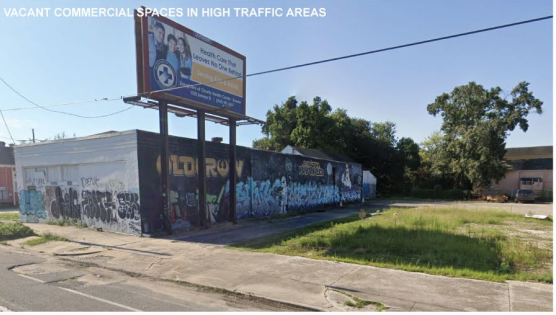
## Low Impact, High Rewards

Cronon states that “the complexity of the precolonial ecosystem was not one merely of space but of time” (Cronon 32). Time is going to be a critical aspect to consider when designing. With a neighborhood already on the brink of failing, it will be important to phase the implementation of these tool kits.

Small urban tactics will create the base for the final design project. These small tactics could consist of creating community gardens and farmer’s markets, creating community gathering spaces and temporary park space, and beginning the planning for a more accessible public transportation system. Not only will these moves beautify the community, but they will also ensure community involvement and enthusiasm from all corners of the neighborhood.

The second phase will consist of goal oriented projects and event planning. In order to raise both awareness and funding for the project in the area, it will be important to focus on outreach as well as keeping public interest. By creating a reward system for community planning and fundraising, it is more likely that the end goal will be achieved. These events will also serve as tourist attractions and give the local government more reason to seriously consider the re-design proposal. Events could range from small scale farmer’s markets of produce grown in community gardens, to small music festivals or concerts put on by local artists.

Finally, the third phase of the project would consist of a total redesign on the existing community infrastructure keeping in mind the existing reparative units in play. The scale of the intervention would be totally dependent on the programmatic function. The goal is that these larger projects will work to solidify the work done in the first two phases. These larger spaces will be community workshops and educational services that provide opportunity to a currently disenfranchised community.





# 07 PROGRAM

## Two Ways of Living

Unlike typical environmentalists, William Cronon does not deny the interdependent relationship between human beings and their environment. He argues that erasing humanity from the planet is not the answer but instead solving the riddle between two human ways of living. In the book he references this in terms of studying how the Native Americans treated their surrounding landscape in comparison to the treatment given by the European settlers.

Bywater is at a crossroads of that riddle at this point in time. The landscape it lays on is in a transitional period that is trending towards decay unless serious efforts are put forth to save the community. Keeping that in mind there are two ways in order to mediate the situation: money or community.

The first method, and one that is commonly in place, is to invest money into the neighborhood. This process started in Bywater in 2005 after Katrina came through. Developers saw the disaster as an opportunity and were quite successful in capitalizing on that. This methodology works well for restoring the infrastructure but does not take into account the toll on the existing community. With vacancy and rent both on the rise, the neighborhood is likely to crash completely and then be slowly re-assembled in an unrecognizable fashion by those looking to cash in on their investment. This methodology is comparable to that of the European settlers. Both groups saw their ecosystem as something that could be extracted from and capitalized on until supply runs out. Then, when supply inevitably does run out, pick up and move on to the next up and coming section of New Orleans.

The second methodology, which this thesis will try to create is that of re-igniting and germinating growth within the existing community. This requires the recognition that all parts of the urban ecosystem are interdependent on one another. Those with money move to dying sections of town in order to be in close proximity to the local restaurants and shops. Those living in the lower income communities require a decent amount of foot traffic in order to stay profitable.

Total Built : 86,760 SQ FT  
Total Lot Space : 90,000 SQ FT

Abandoned Buildings  
31,000 SQFT.

Shotgun Housing  
2,600 SQFT.  
Creole Cottages  
1,800 SQFT.

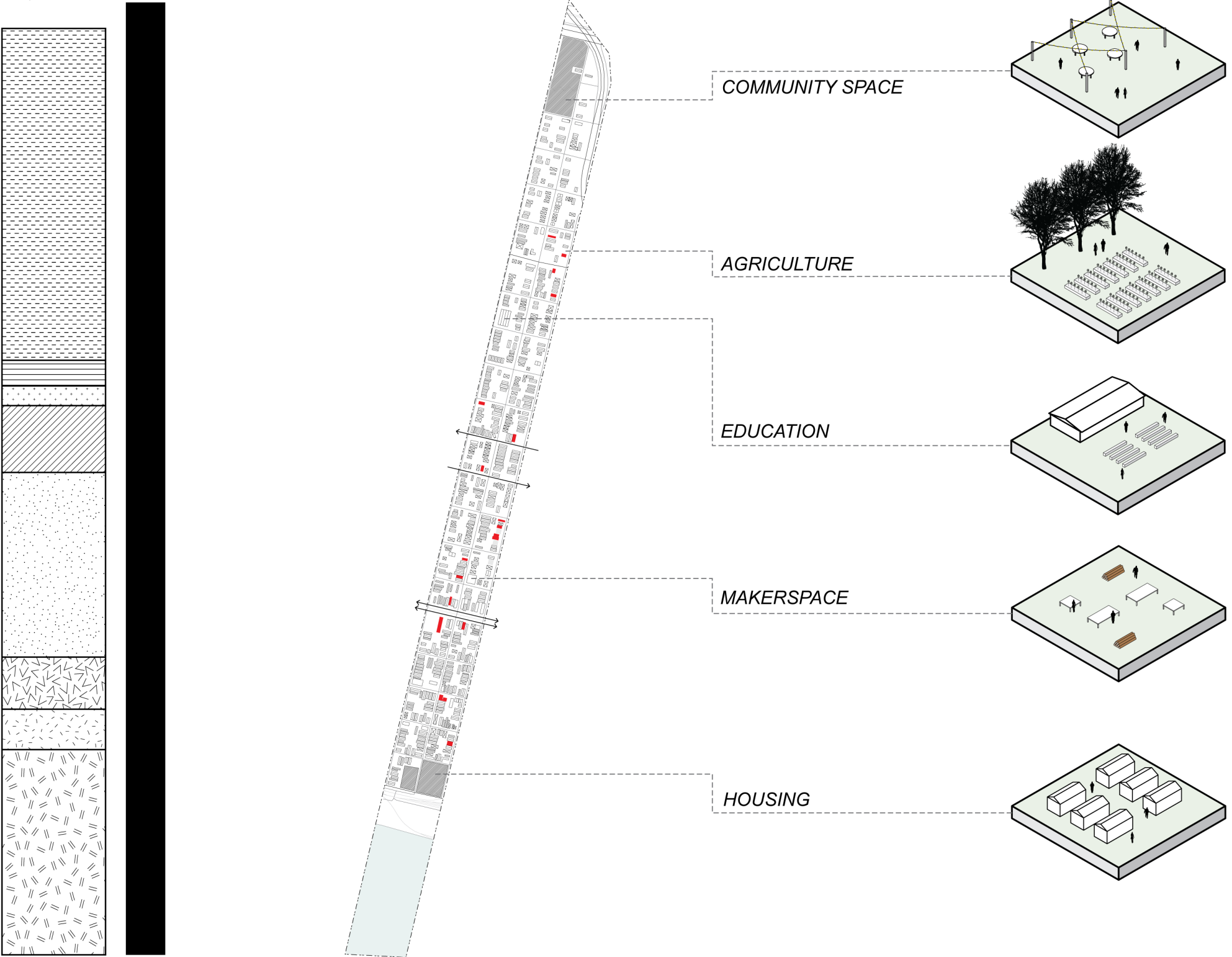
Brick Housing  
6,260 SQFT.

Industrial Workspaces  
17,200 SQFT.

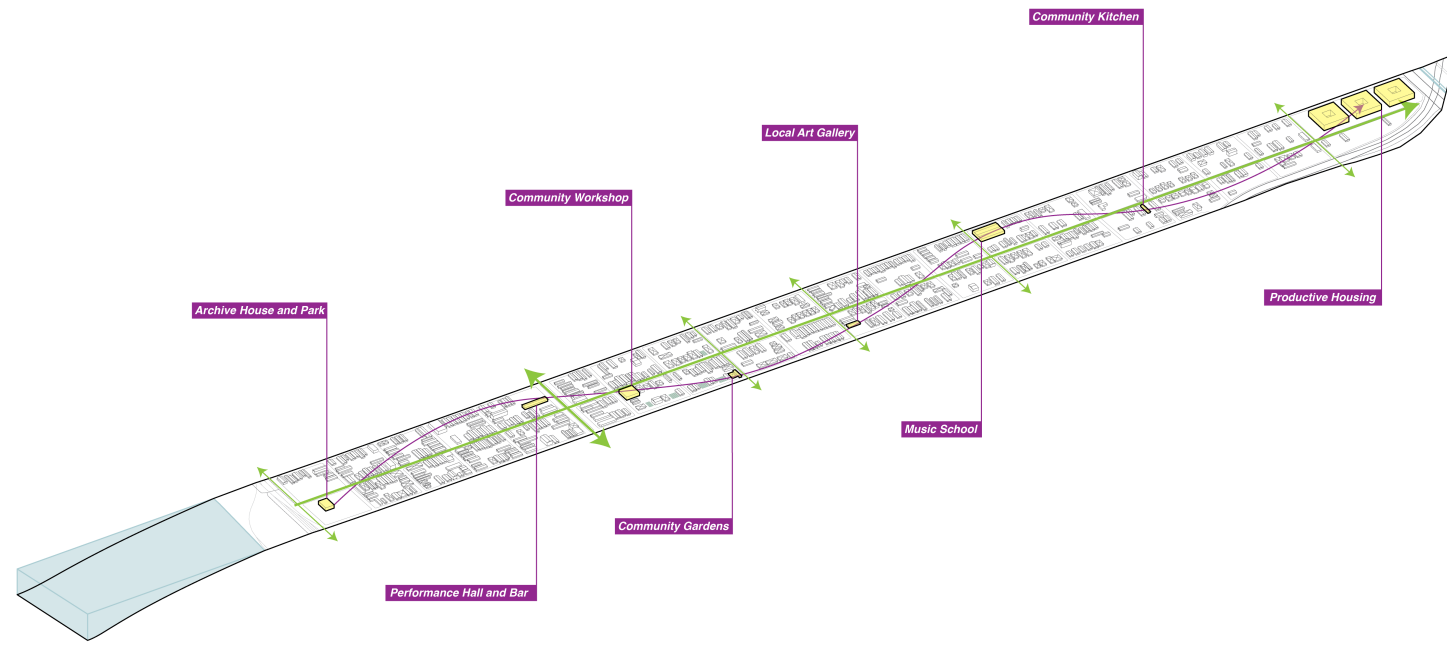
Churches  
5,000 SQFT.

Commercial Space  
3,800 SQFT.

Educational Space  
19,100



## 10 MASTER PLAN DESIGN



### Defining Boundaries and Goals

The Olivier arpent is a thirty-eight block strip of land spanning two neighborhoods that hasn't been planned as a cohesive urban area since its time as a plantation. In order to better serve these separate sections of the community, it was important to define the opportunities and current pitfalls of the existing urban landscape.

This study began very pragmatically by looking at the existing zoning qualifications of empty lot spaces along the arpent. While many of the smaller lots still belonged to independent owners, a much larger percentage of available lot land was owned by the city and had been designated as a mixed-use historic core. These parcels of land had been designated for "agricultural, recreational, and community facilities" to be put in place as long as they "increase convenience and walkability for neighborhood residents and visitors" (New Orleans City Council).

With the questions of agency and programmatic possibility resolved, the next step was dividing up the land depending on their current need for specific interventions. For example, the northernmost section of the site has a majority of vacated overgrown land with homes in the worst condition. An agricultural intervention in this area would probably be more impactful and plausible than having it as a hub for community facilities.

When traveling northbound through the

neighborhood, starting at the river, there are distinctive shifts in the built environment. Scale, spacing, and maintenance of the buildings seems to shift without obvious reason. Deeper study reveals the clear demarcating lines of urban growth in the strip. The first being the highway; the second being what once was a main street but is now just a slightly wider side street with abandoned businesses on either side; the third is what is currently the main commercial street cutting through; and the fourth being the levy wall standing between the neighborhood and the banks of the Mississippi.

These lines were used to split the project into four quadrants responding to the needs of the immediate context: play space, social gathering, cultural space, and productive landscapes. In these sections would be a mix of larger scale adaptive re-use projects and smaller, lot scaled interventions to help bring the community together. A main connecting road through the center would be altered to allow for more pedestrian and bicycle friendly pathways that would work to create a more lively street face but also encourage the residents of the neighborhood to move and explore throughout the entire length of the project. Select cross streets were also determined to be transformed into pedestrian and bike corridors to lead directly to the larger scaled pieces of the design as well as tie into the rest of the Bywater area.

## 11 PLAYSACE



### High Urban Density and Greenspace

One of the over-arching demands already set forth by the neighborhood council is their request for the vacated lot of what was once the Olivier Plantation house to be used as a public park. The lot is currently owned by the city housing authority with plans to turn the space into a highly imposing four story mixed-income housing complex. Directly adjacent to the lot, land has already been bought to turn into a large hostel for visiting tourists as well. While the hostel is not being welcomed with open arms, the community is unable to use the land it sits on. The area is gated and broken slabs cover its entirety. Plus a place for tourists to stay in such close proximity to many local restaurants and shops would be a welcome relief to struggling store owners. These things are what separate the two developments.

The southernmost section of the Bywater area has a comparable urban density to that of the French Quarter. Houses are squeezed in side by side and the typical shotgun style emphasizes the clustering. The fronts of the home encroach on the street and create a tunneling effect and leave little room for green space. This is why the empty lot has so many active users on a day to day basis. The current function of the space is completely flexible, being used for yoga classes, dog walking areas, and space for children to run and play. The park is so heavily visited because of the fact that

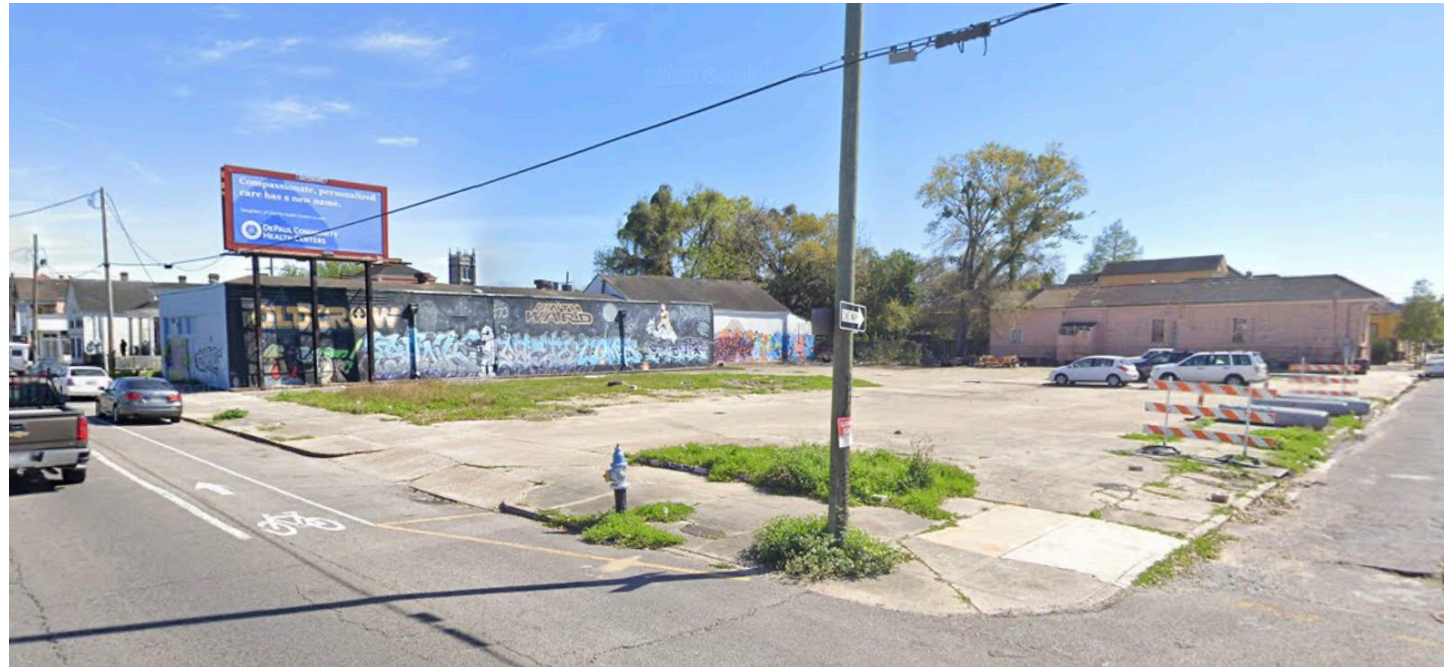
there simply is no other option.

In 2014, Crescent Park was completed along the abandoned piers of Bywater by Eskew+Dumez+Ripple. The park hosts a variety of activities and visitors, yet feels extremely disconnected from the residents it is meant to serve. A lot of this is due to the lack of accessibility to the park. Due to the levy and the infrastructural remnants of the site's industrial past, there are many barriers on the journey between street and shore. Eskew+Dumez+Ripple combatted this issue with a series of bridged access points, of which there are currently three for the seventeen block span. The limited entry points, and where those entry points were chosen to be placed, raises the question of who the park is truly meant for.

The play space segment of this project is meant to be a highly visible, highly accessible means to connecting the residents to usable green space. The units are small and fully transformable to fit in small in between moments of green as well as tie into the existing Crescent Park infrastructure. Small sheltered areas connected to these playground scaffolding areas can serve as stalls and stands for farmer's markets, event space stalls, or just areas to sit sheltered from the sun.



## 12 SOCIAL GATHERING



### St. Claude Street Wall

St. Claude is the main roadway cutting through the site. It is the only road in the area with designated bike lanes as well as a median area and stretches all the way back through the French Quarter. In order for the neighborhood to enter a boom of activity, it will need to draw people in on this street wall.

Much like any historic city, the New Orleans's economy is mostly sustained by tourism. When hurricane Katrina hit and took many historic sites and local businesses out of commission for visitors, the city was hit hard. Businesses were abandoned and lots like this one became a common occurrence along once busy main streets.

The reason for choosing this location is because of its prime location along this main strip. Directly across the street from this space is a restaurant called The Sneaky Pickle that is a favorite amongst locals and tourists. Throughout everything, the farm to table restaurant has managed to keep a steady stream of visitors coming through the doors. The intervention for this area of town is to build off of that momentum and create a social hub where people can see live music, have a drink, or visit with friends without the crowds and noise of the French Quarter. The hope of this intervention is to draw people in to explore the neighborhood as well as creating opportunities for resident business owners.



### Existing Opportunities

Within this area of the neighborhood there is already a community photography workshop that has taken up residents in an abandoned industrial building as well as poorly maintained community gardens. Small interventions for these areas would be used in order to bring attention to these areas. A better organizational structure and an initial maintenance effort will bring the community gardens back to a re-usable state, and better infrastructure and more walkable streets will help bring people to the community workshop. Each individual area of study here is meant to focus on the collaboration of individuals of the community towards some shared, tangible goal.

## 13 CULTURAL SPACE



### The Culture of New Orleans

One of the most successful parts of New Orleans has been its ability to maintain its rich and deep culture. No where was that more evident in this site study than in this small culture museum in the middle of a residential block that had taken residence in an old home. This section of Bywater between St. Claude and the area influenced by the high way was a residential area of homes with large yards and neighbors all sitting on their front porches. A few blocks down from this building is a newly built music school built across from newly renovated affordable housing and across from a pocket park with a jazz theme. It was easily the most vibrant section of the arpent but all the locations were too disjointed to offer any clear movement through the spaces.

The main proposal focus of this area was an abandoned creole cottage and adjoining abandoned corner lot on the much more highly trafficked street of North Clairborne to work as a secondary hub for these activities. The main home would function as an art gallery and classroom to community members, as well as a place to host exhibitions of the history of the area and of black culture. The adjoining lot would be much like a park space with a sculptural garden, pin up spaces, and solitary spaces for reflection on what had been learned inside. These enclosed exterior spaces could also serve as practice rooms for

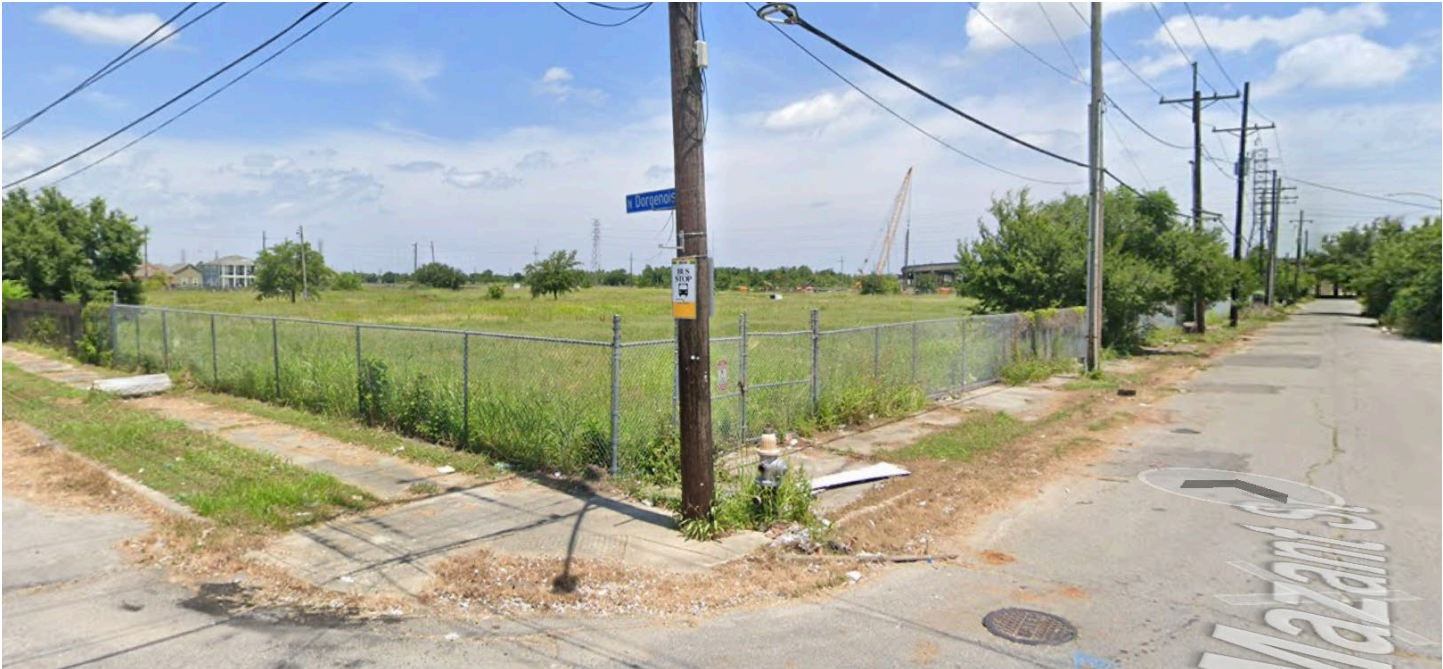


those students of the nearby music school and local residents looking to test their own talent.

Another benefit of its location on North Clairborne is its proximity to the Villalobos Animal Rescue made famous by the Animal Planet reality show *Pitbulls and Parolees*. It remains a heavily visited tourist attraction in the area. For this reason the incorporation of a dog park into the lot space would allow for possible partnership opportunities with the rescue for different events or for adoptions, bringing people and press to the location.



# 14 PRODUCTIVE LANDSCAPES



## Abandoned Land and Architecture

The productive landscapes area of the project allowed the most liberty for design intervention. While other segments try to tip toe around the existing urban structure, this area had vast areas of land with nothing to encroach upon. The thesis proposes that this abandoned lot, formerly an expiremental affordable housing complex, be used for that exact purpose again. The city of New Orleans owns both this lot and the abandoned lot of the play space and while the heavily used lot is threatened by construction, this segment has yet to have a purpose determined.

In order to satisfy the need for housing while still respecting the scale and needs of the neighborhood, this became the site for productive housing. These units are designed to be additive and self sustaining. Green wall and growing areas on southern facade scaffolding allow opportunities for natural cooling while also providing plants with the southern light exposure that they need to thrive. Bridges between scaffolding allow for circulation between upper units while a series of pathways and plazas allow for circulation on the ground.

The design of the housing is a compilation of the goals and efforts of the other three sections of the arpent. The stacking and clustering of the housing units is meant to mimic the urban density present in the Play Space region of the project.

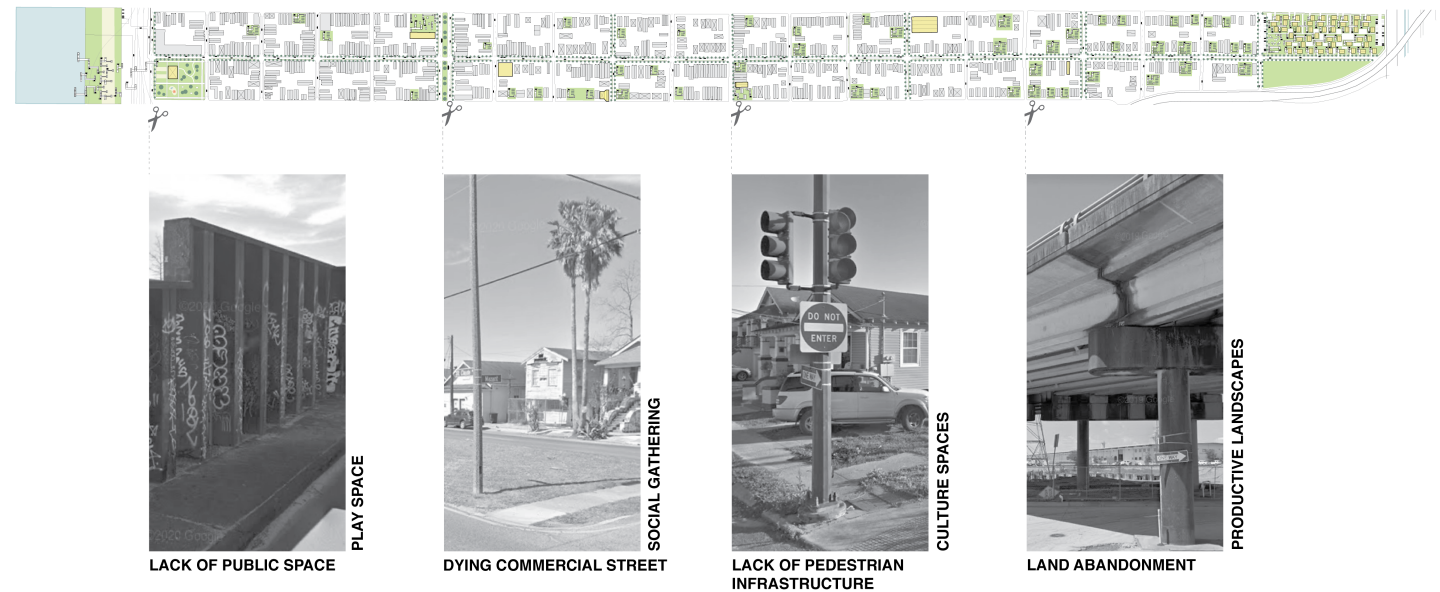
Social plazas in the connecting pathways allow for group gathering much in the same way as the Social Gathering quadrant is meant to do. The interconnected floor plan and shared garden space is also meant to inspire the same community connection and intergenerational relationship of the cultural spaces.

In a way this housing project is the repeating of the cycle for this piece of land. First inhabited and used for agriculture by the Choctaw, then the French, and now modern New Orleanians. It also works as a counter to the French plantation period form of wealth. What started as an agricultural economy with no power of the individual and wealth going to a singular family is now an agricultural economy completely run by individuals to their own individual benefit.

The goal of this housing project and this Productive Landscapes segment is for people to re-think their relationship with their own environment and community. As Cronon states, “it is between two human ways of living” (Cronon 12).

# MASTER PLAN

## Site Plan Showing Existing Barriers



## Site Plan Showing Intervention Locations





PLAY SPACE

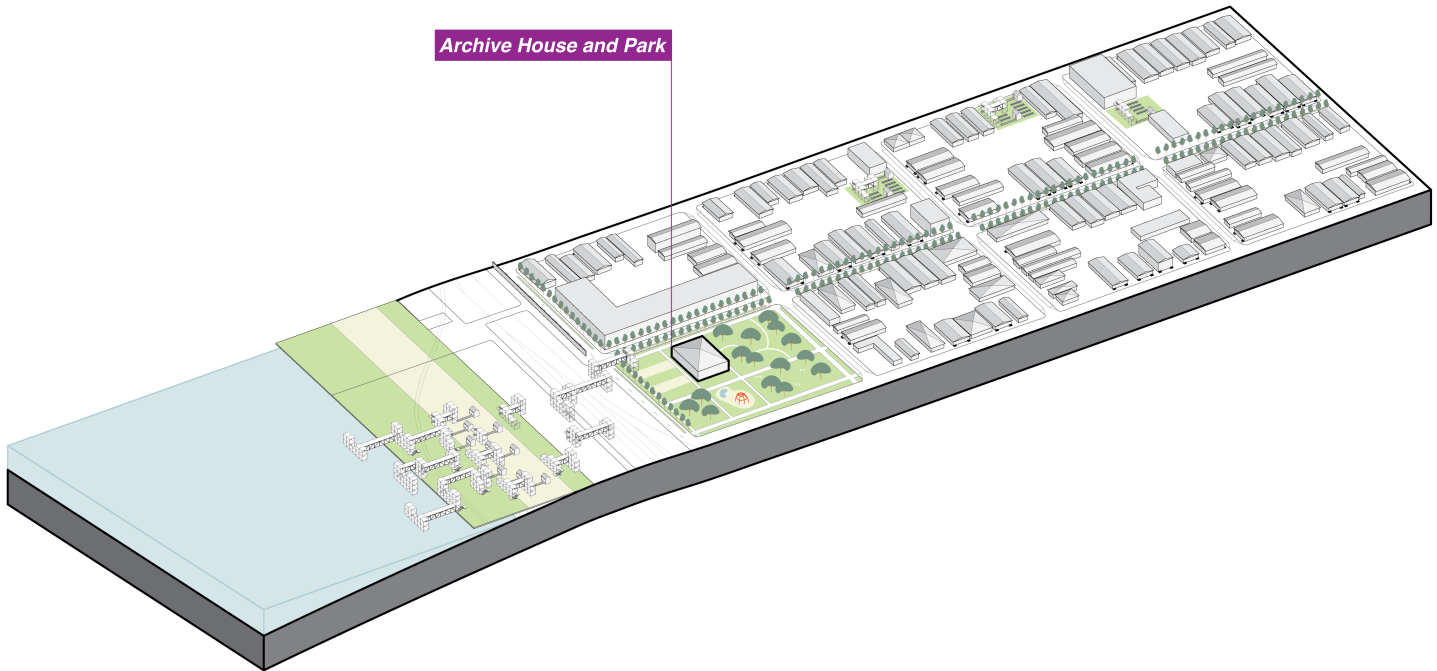


Plan Diagram of Project Stages

Isometric of “Play Space” Unit



Perspective of “Play Space” Area



Isometric of Final Segment Plan

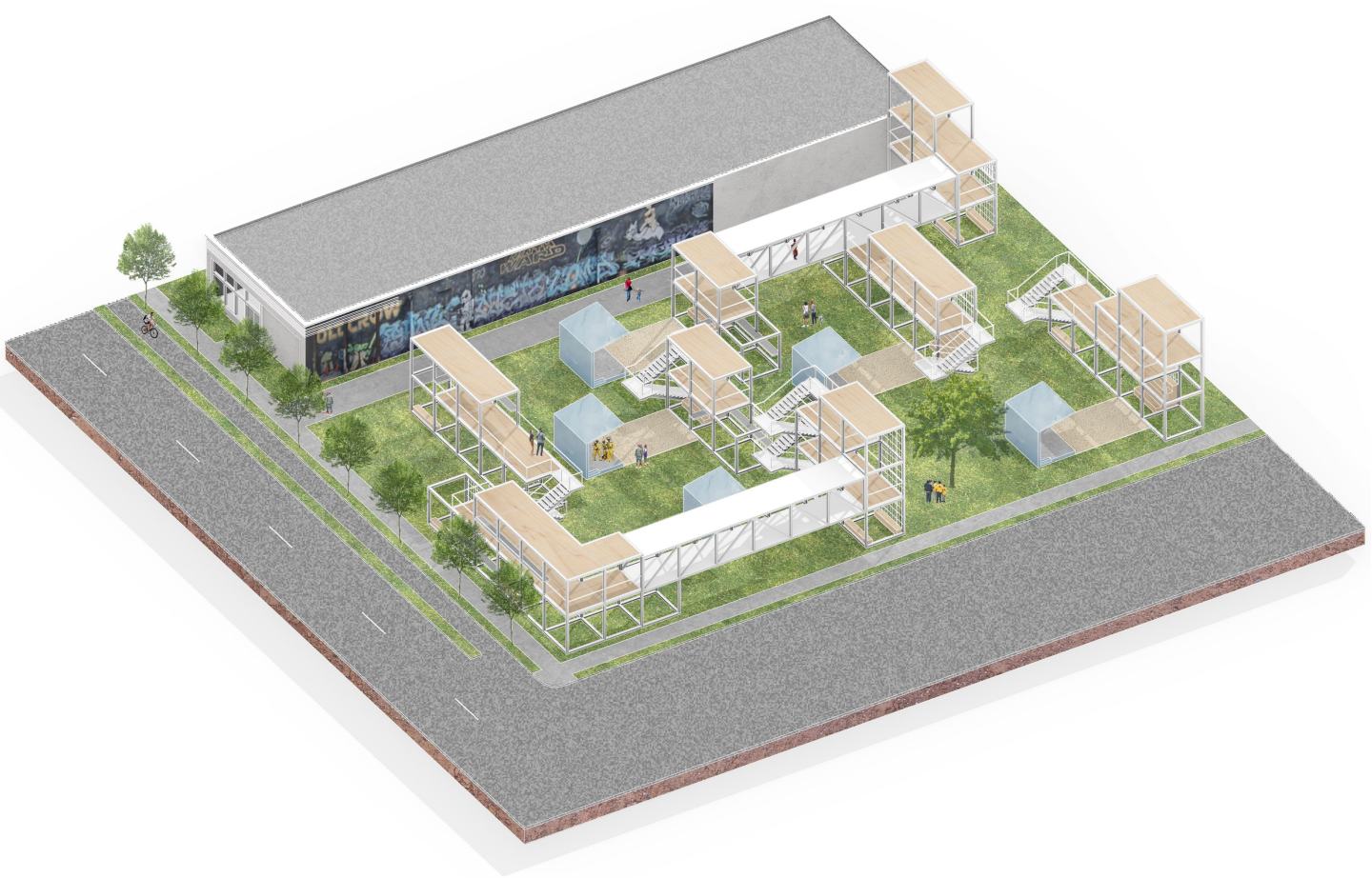


SOCIAL GATHERING



Plan Diagram of Project Stages

Isometric of Performance Hall and Bar



Perspective of Performance Hall and Bar



Isometric of Final Segment Plan

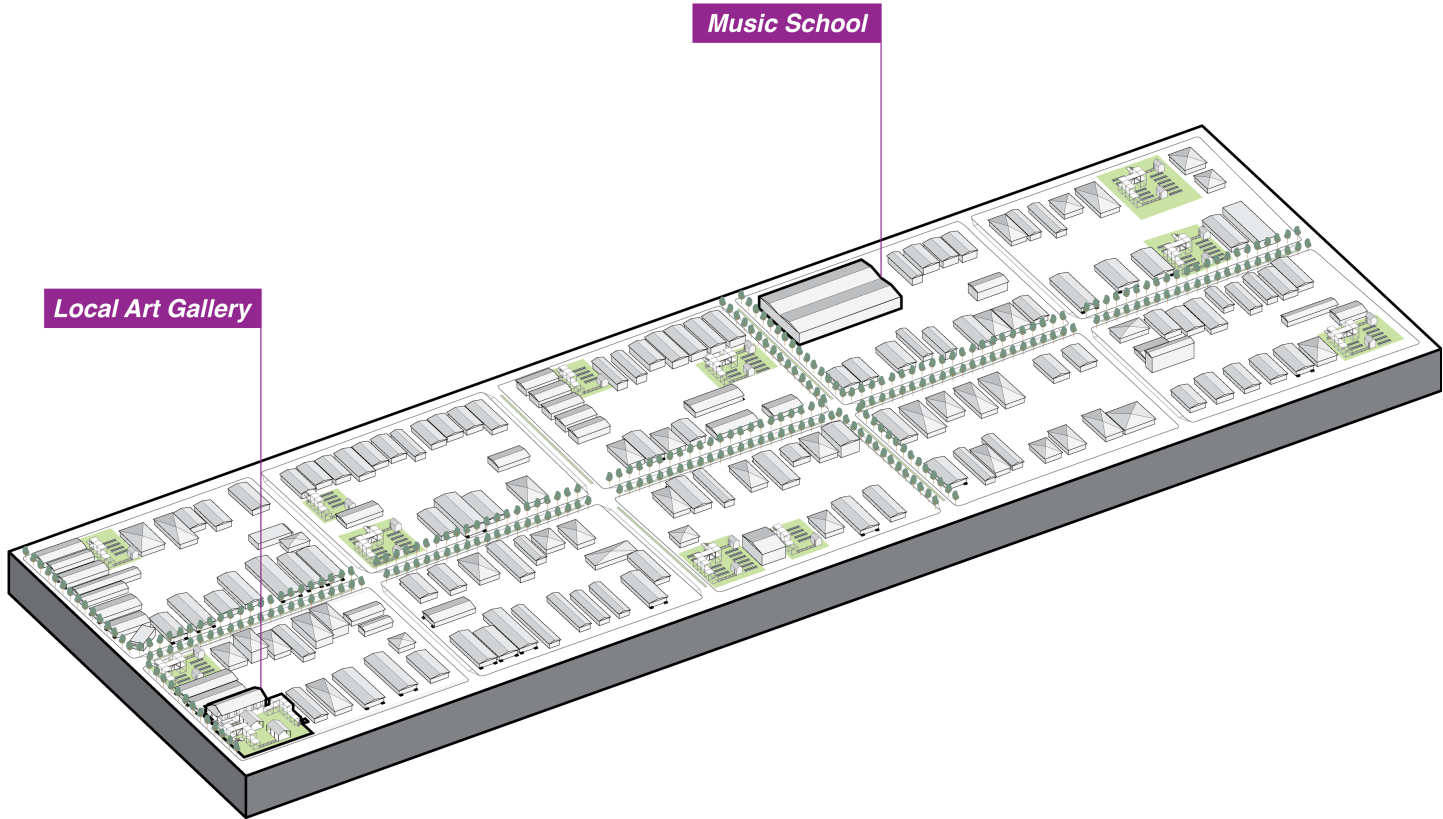




SOCIAL GATHERING

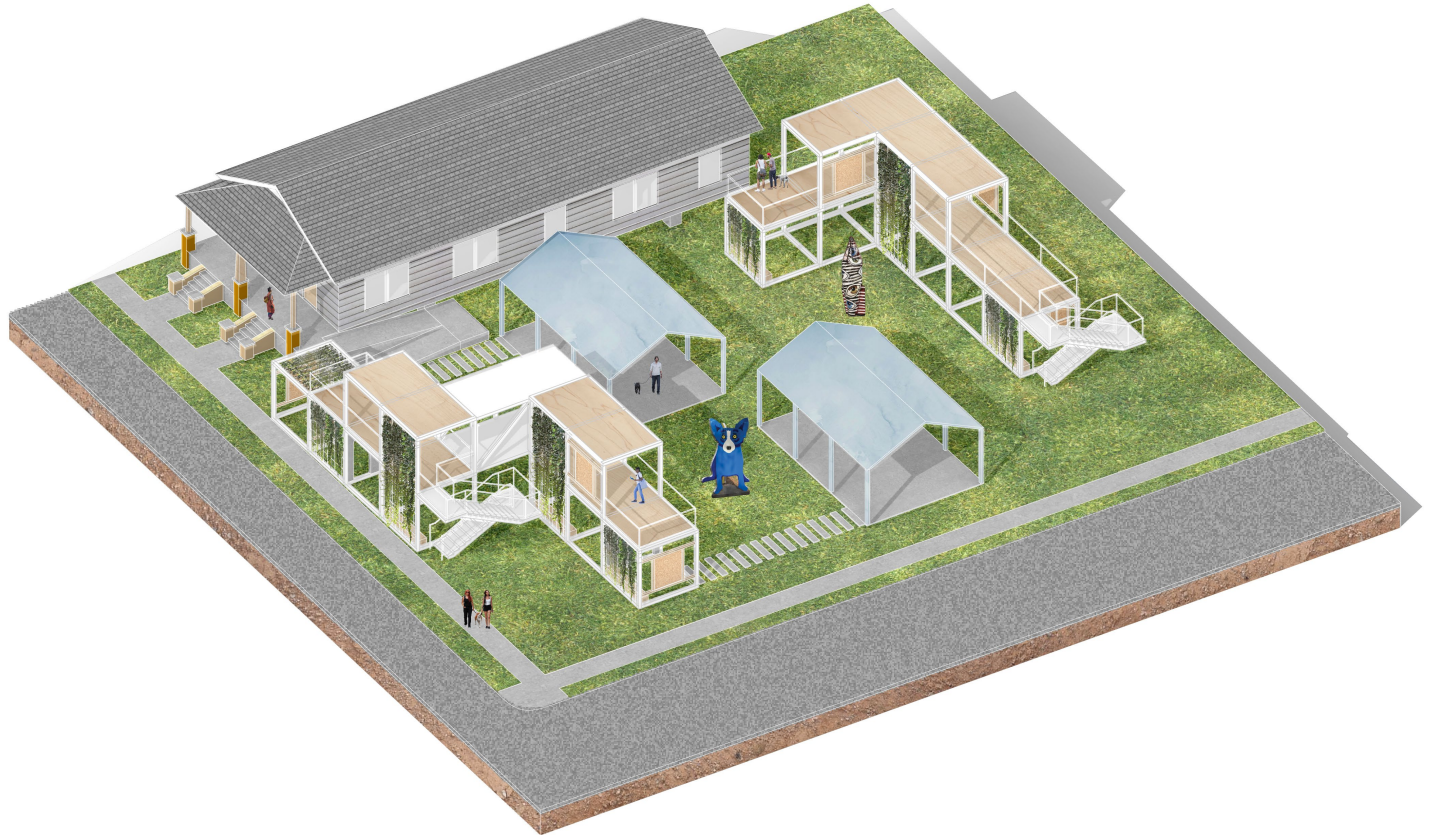


Plan Diagram of Project Stages



Isometric of Final Segment Plan

Isometric of Local Art Gallery

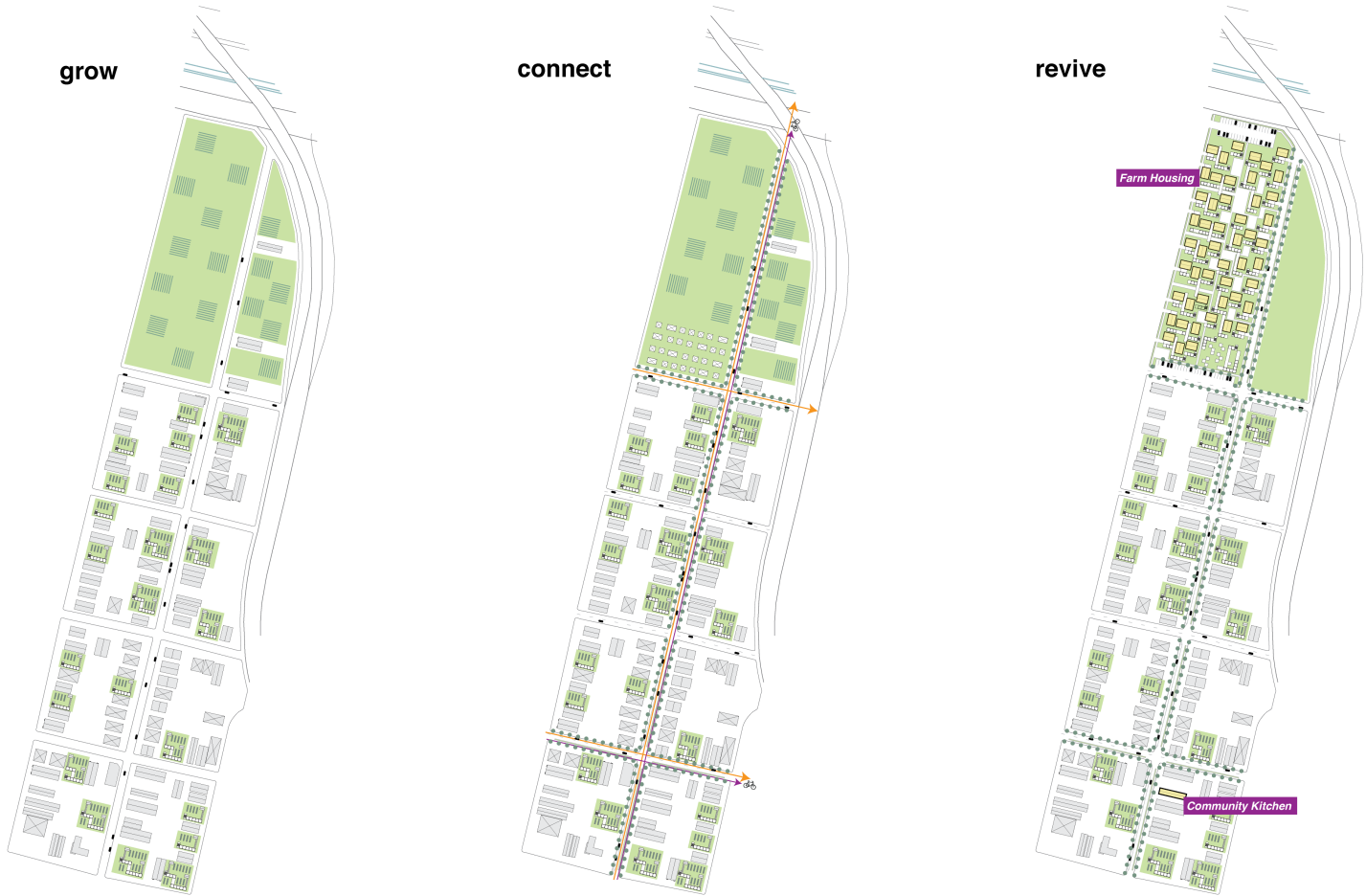


Perspective of Local Art Gallery

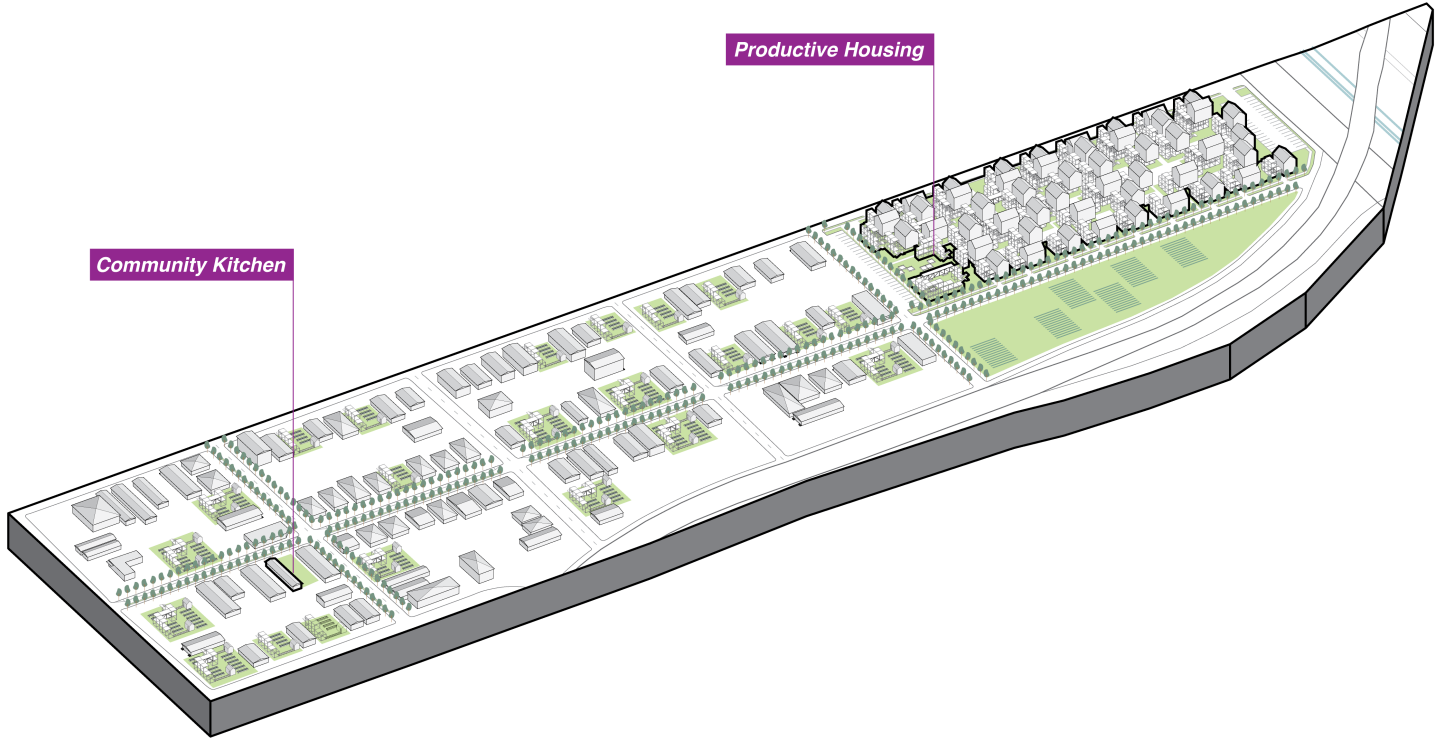




SOCIAL GATHERING



Plan Diagram of Project Stages



Isometric of Final Segment Plan

Isometric of Productive Housing



Perspective of Productive Housing





Project Name : Rooms for Ruins

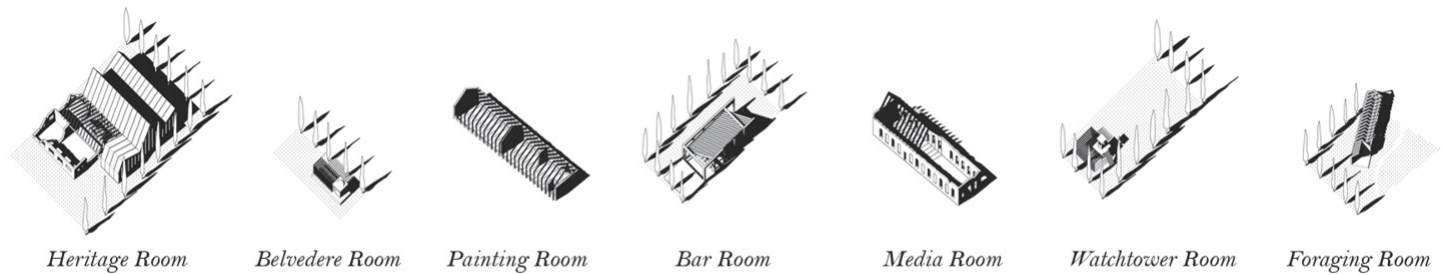
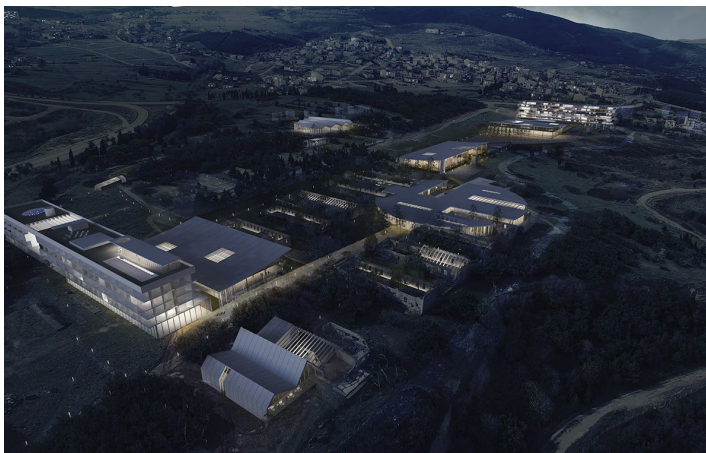
Firm : Lateral Office

Location : Bandirma, Balıkesir, Turkey

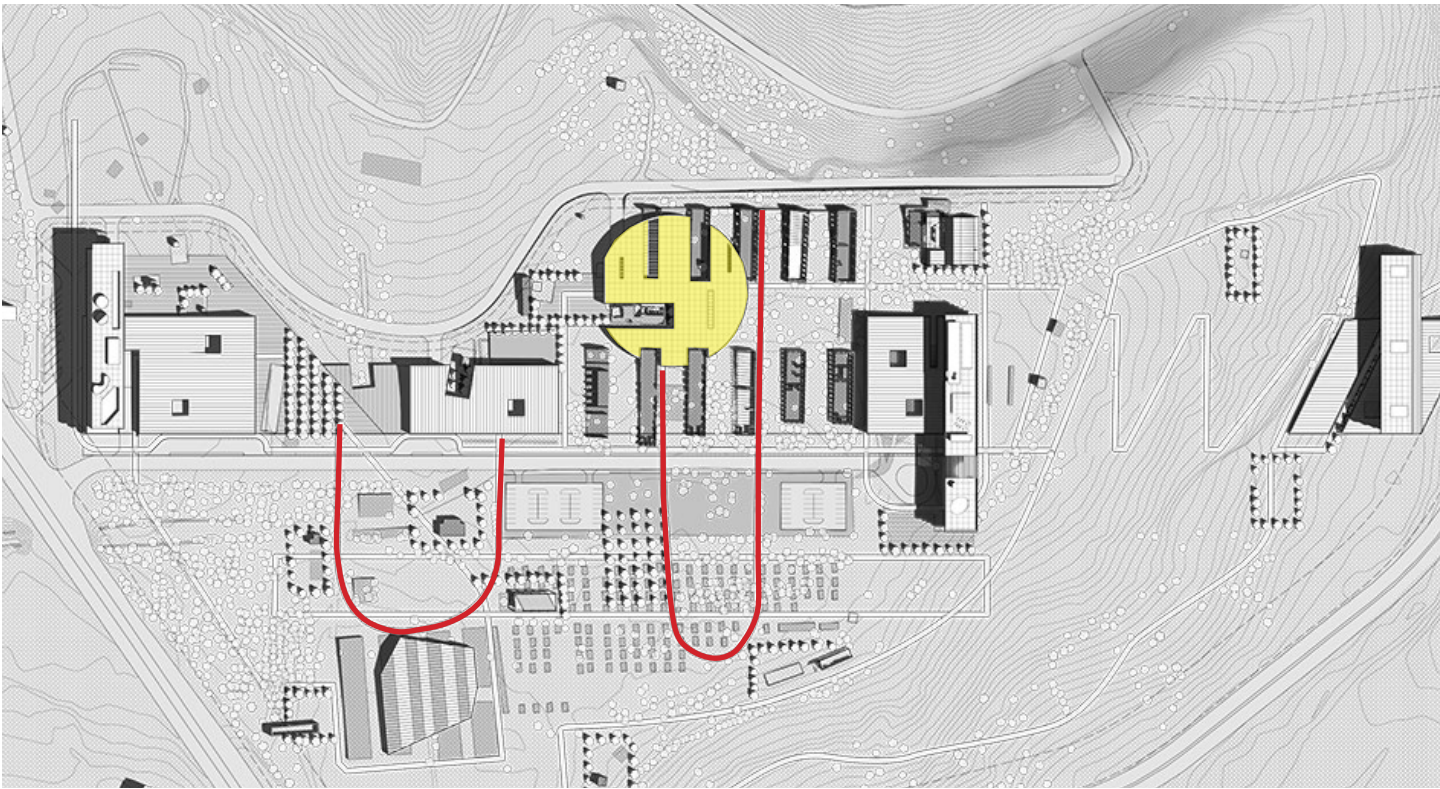
Year : 2017

This project focuses on the idea of designing around a set of variables. In this way, they activate the space of the ruins without actually changing or harming the archaeological site.

Something similar can be adapted to the idea of the equitable infrastructure and the handling of existing structures. There can be variations in moments in which the project weaves around the existing with grand moments of interaction between the intervention and abandones space.



*Little Landscape Rooms for Bandirma Park*





Project Name : Detroit Future City

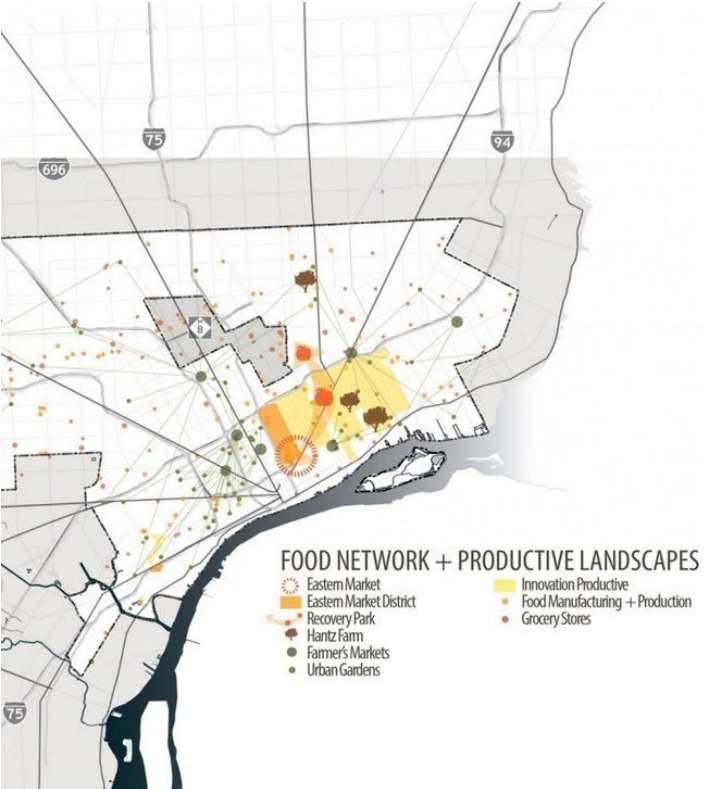
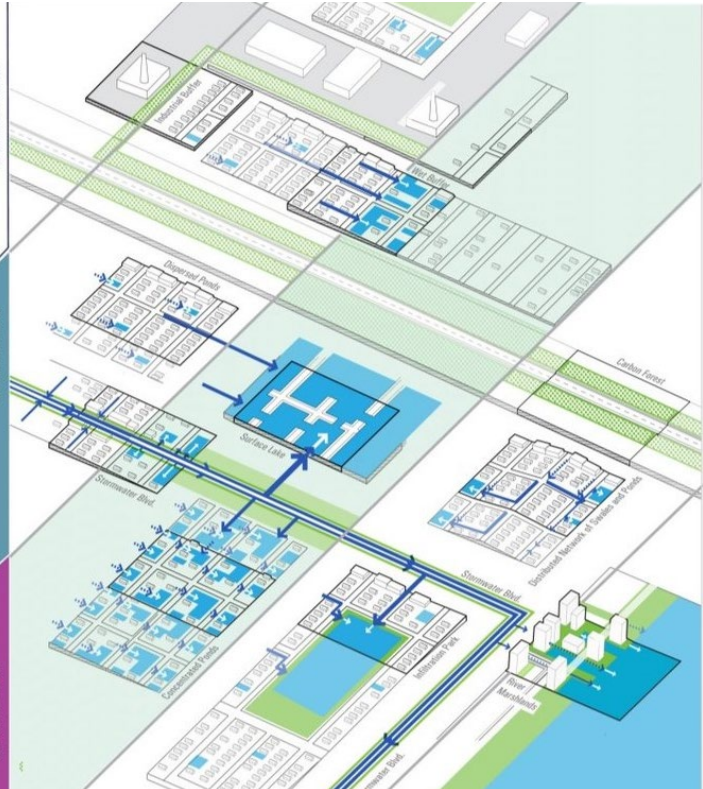
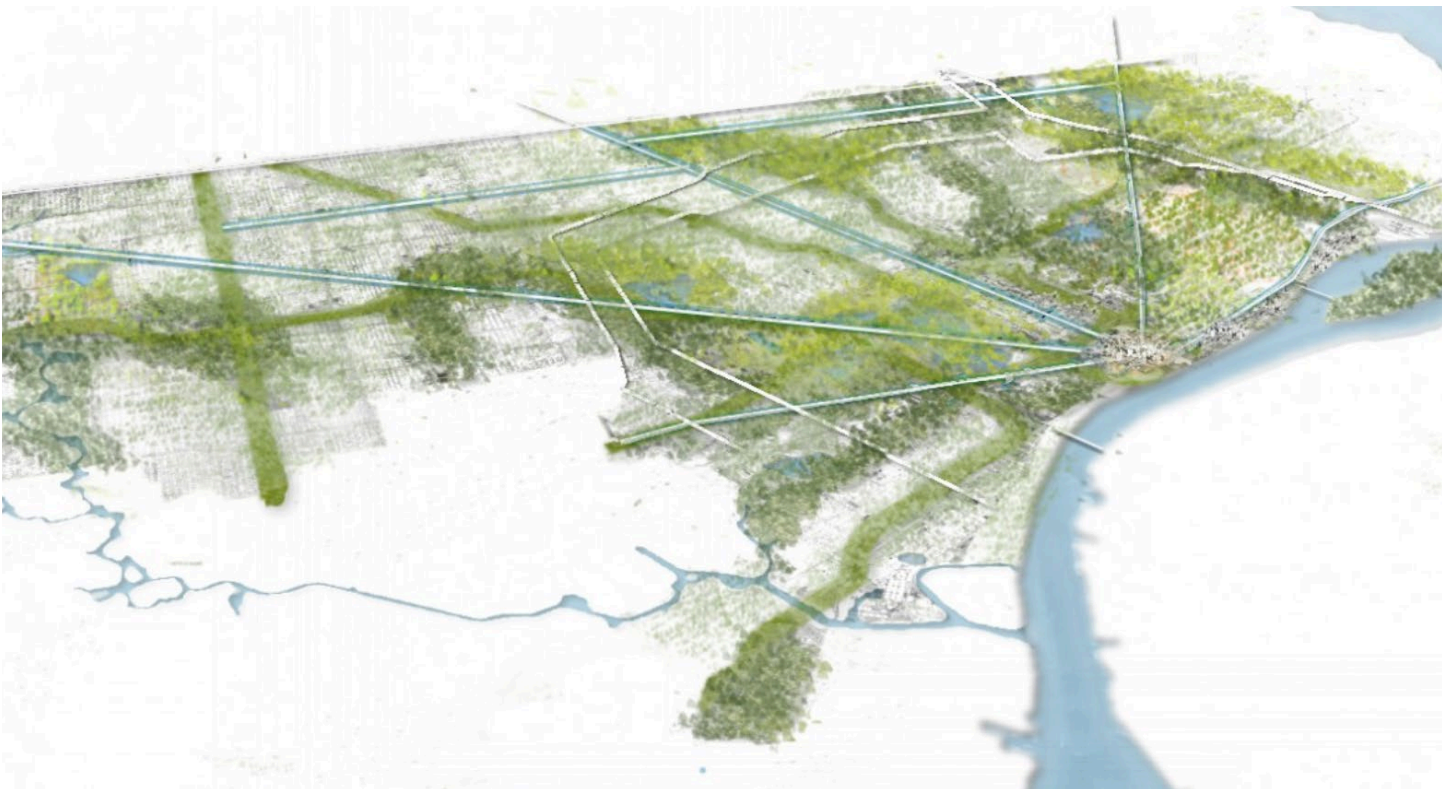
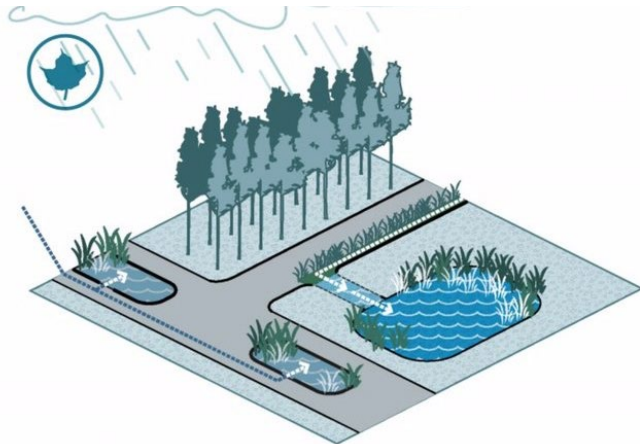
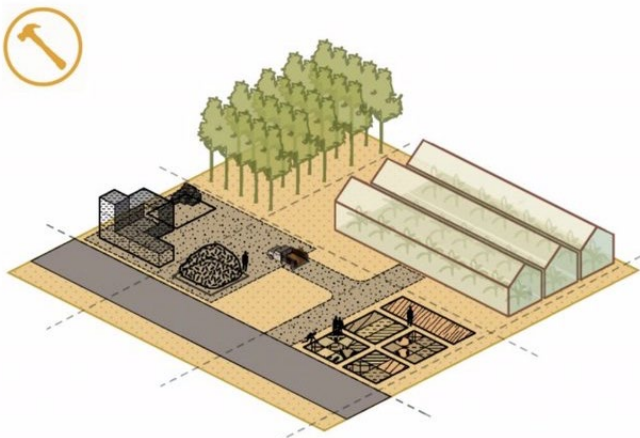
Firm : Stoss

Location : Detroit, Michigan

Scale : 139 square miles

This project focuses on productive and resporative landscapes. Not only do they focus on what is need for the community to succeed, they also highly design and detail that landscape as its own plane.

This can be applied to the idea of productive and community spaces within the project. Detroit is another dying American city that can be used as precedent for design intervention and strategies.





Project Name : Rebuild Foundation

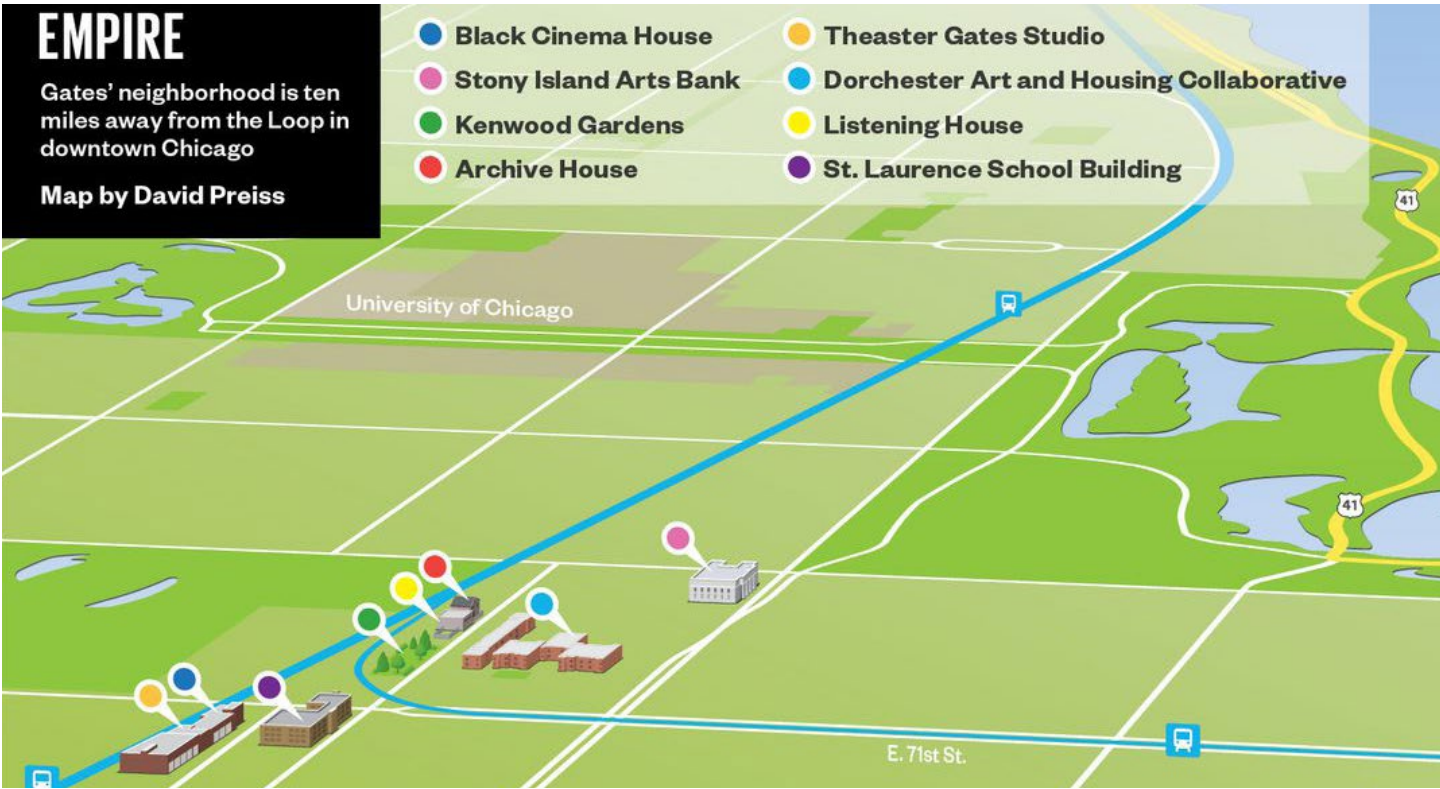
Designer : Theaster Gates

Location : Chicago, Illinois

Scale : Community

The work of Theaster gates focuses on what he refers to as “mad-lib” urbanism. It challenges the idea that urban design is planned without communities of color in mind, specifically the black community of southside Chicago. Through planned interventions and adaptive reuse of existing structures, Gates plans to create an urbanism that responds to a community rather than a community being forced to adapt to urban change.

This idea has many parallels to the study in Bywater. Studying different buildings in key areas of the neighborhood can serve as anchor points for the rest of the project interventions.





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