

THE SPACE BETWEEN: SMALL-SCALE DESIGN FOR URBAN REVITALIZATION

by

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(Under the Direction of Amitabh Verma)

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks a new urban design strategy that addresses small spaces within underserved communities. These physically-dilapidated neighborhoods often lack open-space amenities. This problem is intensified by constraints such as limited resources and increasing residual space. Several methods are used to determine a strategy that ameliorates the physical landscape of underserved neighborhoods. A case study analysis examines how small, in-between spaces can activate change in the urban landscape. These informal, community-driven designs can catalyze neighborhoods in need of revitalization. A literature review highlights the role of public space in the urban environment and its importance for social cohesion. Finally, the principles garnered from the case studies and urban design theories will inform the design of a derelict site in Washington, D.C.

INDEX WORDS: Community-driven design, Urban revitalization, Public space, Washington, D.C.

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DEDICATION

To my family.

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Thanks to my committee members for their feedback and donated time—both for this thesis and other academic endeavors. Also, to those who edited these chapters when I could no longer read the same words over and over.

Many thanks to my colleagues and mentors of *Axis Mundi*, for shaping my belief in the beauty of small things and the power of community design, no matter the size.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

If asked to imagine landscapes of the quintessential American city, one might visualize large urban parks, grand plazas, iconic architecture and vibrant neighborhoods. The National Mall, Georgetown, Central Park, Times Square, Pacific Heights, Golden Gate Park, and Fisherman's Wharf are a few places that might come to mind. However, many areas outside of these places are home to the majority of urban populations and diverge greatly from the character of well-known landscapes.

The challenge for urban designers and citizens alike is to determine how to address these 'outside' areas to serve local needs and repair landscapes which have deteriorated over. These neighborhood areas often lack design, planning and financial investments inherent in larger, urban landscapes mentioned above. While larger landscapes attract attention and care, small spaces within neighborhoods suffer. The resources available for the creation and maintenance of these outside areas, including parks, plazas, and other shared spaces are limited.

Large urban design schemes either do not sufficiently address public space needs in various neighborhoods or are too unwieldy to come to fruition. Often, community groups do not have the social or economic tools to draw attention to their needs. Certain neighborhoods are overlooked regarding physical improvements, as more prominent, well-connected areas receive a larger share of city investments. Jane Jacobs, a prominent urban theorist, states that small neighborhoods are "shortchanged on improvements and services because they lack the power to get them" (Jacobs 1961, p.166).

Many of these economically disadvantaged neighborhoods possess great social and architectural interest while shared, community spaces are deteriorated. Though undervalued in a

market-driven society, public space serves as a social good and often as the backbone of vibrant and diverse landscapes. The government struggles to provide sufficient public space due to political or financial factors and as a result, many public lands are left abandoned. Investments in public spaces, especially in neighborhoods lacking in economic capital, are limited during times of financial hardship. In this environment, project scopes, budget constraints and decision-making processes limit urban design programs and thus, public lands are left derelict. Beginning at a neighborhood level, these ignored spaces often contribute to a decreased sense of security, civic engagement and aesthetic character of the urban landscape.

Additionally, the city form in these dense areas prevents the creation of large spaces for public squares and plazas. Residual areas, such as small lots, sidewalks and streets, provide a resource from which these needed spaces may be derived. Although overlooked as a social space, “the street is the building block of urban design and, by extension, of urban life; the city with vibrant street life is the city that works as a viable urban environment” (Goldberger 1996, p.135).

It is the goal of urban design schemes to provide legible form, functional elements and lively places for social interaction. As long as cities have existed, so has the debate on the method to achieve these goals. A new paradigm for the contemporary city places emphasis on the confluence of ecological and social factors (Hester 2006; Ellin 2006). Ellin explains that as “ecological success is measured by the capacity of our planet to support all life forms, so urban design success and excellence should be measured by its capacity to support humanity” (Ellin 2006, p.xxxv).

This thesis seeks to build off this new paradigm and identify an appropriate model for the issues of the modern city. The economic and physical limitations to large-scale design efforts and the persistence of abandoned spaces that disrupt the urban fabric present a challenge to urban designers, architects and landscape architects. The problem, therefore, is how to devise a method by which underserved community uses and needs for public space are addressed and readily implemented.

Purpose

In response to the problem, this thesis will explore the potential for small, community-driven designs that can revitalize the urban fabric. These small spaces should not be overlooked, but viewed collectively and used as a tool to improve the urban fabric of underserved neighborhoods. The local community can initiate and implement these site-specific designs incrementally with varying budgets and in the absence of larger planning efforts.

The purpose of this inquiry is to illustrate successful processes and designs which have improved the urban fabric of neighborhoods. The question is then: How can small-scale design interventions catalyze the revitalization of existing urban fabric? Furthermore, how can these designs promote social diversity and community cohesion? These questions will be answered through a case study analysis, literature review and subsequently, through a design application in Washington, D.C.

First, a definition of terms and scope is needed. Small-scale is defined as a lot typically not sought out for traditional development that is between 3,000 square feet to one acre in size. Put simply, to revitalize means to impart new life or vigor. This can be achieved through physical, economic, social and political change; this thesis will primarily focus on physical changes in the landscape. Multi-faceted issues face the neighborhoods described above—the rehabilitation of public spaces cannot serve as a panacea. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine if small-scale design is the primary catalyst for revitalization or an indicator of or a complement to incremental changes in these communities. Regardless, these spaces are instrumental to a comprehensive approach and can initiate change in the larger process of transformation.

To return to the urban design issues our cities face, Nan Ellin states “from ‘less is more’, to ‘more is more’ the byword has become ‘more from less’” (Ellin 2006, p.2). This statement succinctly explains the evolution of theories on urban design. The new sentiment, ‘more from less’, suggests that a greater impact must be made from smaller budgets, resources and spaces.

The dwindling municipal budgets and persistence of neighborhoods with dilapidated landscapes lacking in open spaces calls for a new strategy that relies on incremental, innovative design of the space between. In essence, the *space between* refers to physical spaces not owned by individuals and left out of large-scale government planning schemes. This thesis advocates for a process that seeks small, underused spaces to mend the urban fabric.

The study site for this thesis represents the *space between*, as it is larger than a sidewalk and smaller than a traditional park or plaza. The lot lies between a privately-owned parcel, sidewalk, alley and roadway. As the site is wedged between these elements, its potential to serve as a useful, lively public space has previously been overlooked.

The concept of the *space between* has implications outside the physical realm. These small but meaningful projects can be implemented in less time than their traditional counterparts. In the amount of time it takes for private projects or government programs to be implemented, these residual spaces can be redesigned for local use and serve as an impetus for greater urban revitalization efforts. In addition, these smaller projects allow landscape architects to operate outside of strictly-defined public or private roles and as act an agent for the community, improving the physical landscape. Landscape architects are equipped to move between collaborators such as nonprofits, design firms, and city governments.

The study site representing the *space between* in this thesis is a narrow, corner lot with an abandoned building and surrounding site at the intersection of 2nd Street and Florida Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. Located at the outer edge of L'Enfant's original plan, the site straddles the line between the old and new portions of the city, the Northwest and Northeast Quadrants and is the nexus of three neighborhoods: Bloomingdale, Truxton Circle, and LeDroit Park. This lot is currently owned by the Washington, D.C. Department of Transportation and classified as public space. Though less than two

miles from the majority of Washington, D.C.'s public open spaces, much of the urban landscape in this area is neglected, as seen in the degraded condition of this visually prominent corner (Figure 1-1).



Figure 1-1: Study site on the corner of Florida Avenue and 2nd Street, N.W. Washington, D.C.
(Sara Fiore, 2009)

The historic neighborhood surrounding the site has great social and architectural diversity, yet is lacking in quality of public spaces amenities. In the absence of a more suitable space, the site is currently being used as a practice area for a local Kung Fu organization, The Wong People Association, as well as a cut-through space for pedestrians. In a charrette-style meeting held in November 2009, these users expressed concerns over the condition of the site—overexposure to street traffic, unsafe areas which facilitate illicit activity, and decreased overall aesthetic character. This site is essentially the face of the neighborhood as it is located along a large urban corridor. Instead of representing a strong, vibrant community, this corner projects a negative and abandoned image.

Axis Mundi, an architectural nonprofit with a strong presence in this community, initiated the charrette and intends to lead the design and construction process for the site. Meghan Walsh, the director and founder, lives less than a block from the site, and after walking past the site daily, decided that a redesign for this public space would benefit the local community. Her decision was reaffirmed

when she learned that the Wong People Kung Fu Association had been using the site as an informal practice area for over twenty-five years. *Axis Mundi* organized the charrette and initiated the involvement of the Kung Fu organization and community members. The results of this meeting and supporting documents are included in this thesis. A step towards collaboration has been made—the hope is to gain additional support from various citizens and organizations as the project progresses.

The design of this site as an open, functional space could begin to tip the scales towards increased public space production. Not only could this site serve as a small, open space for the community, but could also increase usage by the public at large and serve to project a positive image of the neighborhood's social and cultural stock of this neighborhood. Additionally, the location of the site provides the visibility and significance needed to serve as a catalyst for revitalization.

Incremental design interventions support the organic processes through which cities are built. Rather than devise schemes to control large urban areas, small projects can reflect community interests and operate as a network of lively spaces. Based on their scale and scope, these spaces are easily implemented and can physically bring change to the landscape of underserved neighborhoods. Therefore, this thesis challenges the paradigm of large-scale, formal projects that do not reach certain areas of the city.

This thesis contends that a proactive design approach which targets communities through interstitial projects could serve as a new model for urban revitalization. Landscape architects can serve as advocates for communities through the design of these spaces. By identifying residual spaces between the traditional lots ideal for development, new opportunities arise for small, impactful gestures to repair and animate these dilapidated landscapes.

Methodology

A precedent analysis illustrates the process and intent of small, community-driven site designs and therefore provides a model for this design intervention. These case studies share similar

neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics, are located outside of prominent, well-developed areas and, with the initiative of the local community, have reclaimed a small site as public space. The aforementioned quintessential urban landscapes are located in Washington, D.C. as well as in the two case study cities, New York and San Francisco. All of the case study projects hinged on a collaboration of designers, local citizens and central planning departments. The intent of the precedent analysis is to examine the process and qualify the effects that these efforts have had on the local community and identify elements essential to their success.

A literature review evaluates the significance of the case study processes and designs. This theoretical analysis extracts the essence and implications of public space. Analyzed through economic, physical and social lenses, the concept of public space is evaluated in a larger context. The chosen scholarly research highlights the production and role of these sites within cities. The principles garnered from various authors, in concert with case study analysis, will inform the resulting design of the Washington, D.C. site.

Outline

This thesis is organized into four parts which support and build off one another. Chapter two examines the city of Washington, D.C. through a historical, social and physical analysis. It then provides a brief introduction to the current condition of the study site. Chapter three outlines two cities with successful small-scale design initiatives and illustrates products and processes which could be applied to the study site in Washington, D.C. Chapter four presents a theoretical argument for public space creation and its collective significance within the larger urban fabric. Chapter five presents a design for the study site based on the case studies and literature review. Lastly, chapter six will discuss the implications and importance of small-scale designs and opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER 2

WASHINGTON, D.C.: CITY AND SITE

PART I. WASHINGTON, D.C.: A HISTORY OF PLANNING

The original planning principles applied to Washington D.C. are marked by grandeur, lofty ideals and formality. As the nation's capital, Washington D.C. represents the health and power of the country and its citizens. The city is now over 200 years old; these years have brought about changes that have contributed to a cohesive urban fabric. However, many spaces between the grand avenues, government buildings, and public parklands have been neglected. Many neighborhoods lack amenities and open space, the basic needs that support a high quality of urban life. To understand the current urban condition of this city, the following section will analyze historic design efforts.

Washington D.C. became the capital of the newly formed United States of America in 1790. To symbolically sever ties with the British Empire, city officials chose a French architect, Pierre Charles L'Enfant, to design the city. Besides a consideration of several topographic and natural features, the plan was derived almost entirely from a blank slate (Rogers 2001). Based on principles of the French Baroque and, more specifically, Versailles, the axial plan imparted a sense of grandeur as well as an inadvertent homage to the French autocratic monarch. Perhaps this influence set the stage for a design which often overlooked the space between monumental and grand design elements. Diagonal avenues, named for states of the union, were imposed onto an orthogonal grid. These diagonal avenues serve as major thoroughfares which connect significant landmarks and buildings. The final plan was submitted in August 1791 (Figure 2-1).

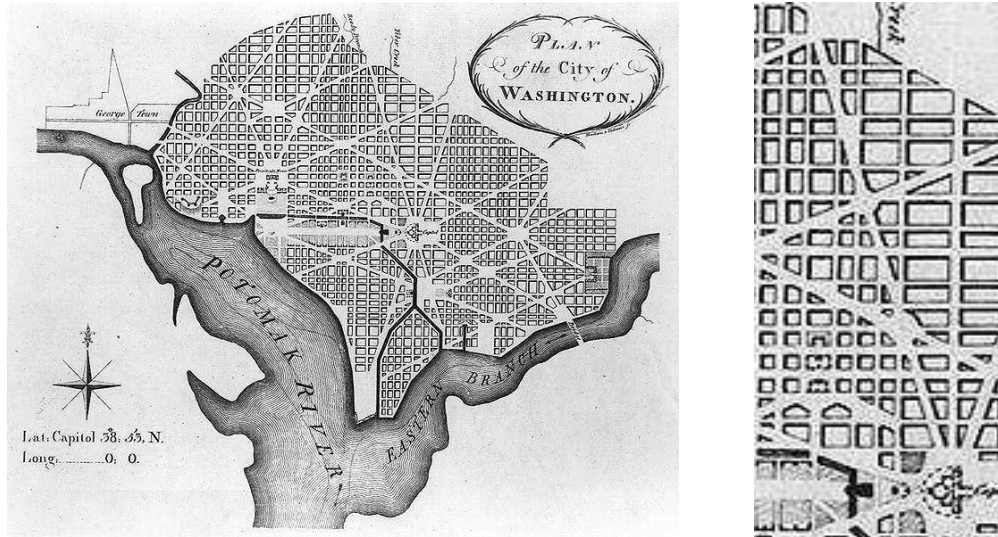


Figure 2-1: L'Enfant's Plan of the City of Washington and detail of triangular corner lots.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:L%27Enfant_plan.jpg

Over the next century, prominent landscape architects and planners completed additional plans for Washington D.C. Frederick Law Olmstead designed the grounds of the Capitol, A.J. Downing expanded the Smithsonian campus, and finally the McMillan Plan of 1901 enhanced the National Mall and citywide park system. All of these projects were centered on the concept of public space, yet had a greater concern for the symbolic representation of the United States over the needs and interests of local constituents or areas outside the historic and ceremonial.

This changed several decades later as a new plan, in response to community needs, was approved in the 1920s. The Eliot Plan sought to address many of the vacant lands resulting from L'Enfant's original plan and proposed the creation of twenty neighborhood parks throughout the city. However, only three parks were implemented before the Great Depression rendered the plan ineffective.

Since the implementation of L'Enfant's plan, the boundaries of Washington D.C. have pushed outward to form three quarters of a diamond. Over the years, for governance and organizational purposes, the city was divided into four quadrants and seven wards (Figure 2-2). However, planning efforts in these outer areas have been scattered and inconsistent.

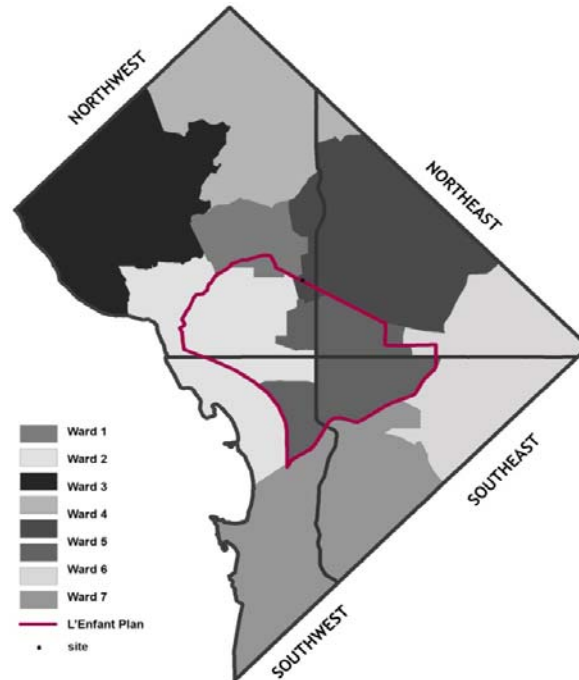


Figure 2-2: Washington, D.C.'s original and current boundary, four quadrants and seven wards.

In his book *Finding Lost Space*, Roger Trancik explores the inadequate use of space in urban cores. He analyzes the connections and quality of public spaces in several cities, including Washington D.C. Built on the traditional grid and diagonal overlay, the city has strong connections, yet many of the areas between these networks are ignored (Trancik 1986). These strengths and weakness arise from the first plan for the nation's capital. Of the implications of L'Enfant's original plan, he states:

This grand plan was not without its problems at the microlevel, particularly at the intersections where the grid meets the diagonal, points where residual gaps occur in both the grid and the diagonal system. These two ordering structures of space left numerous unresolved connections at specific sites. (Trancik 1986, p.153)

These residual gaps, in the form of small triangle wedges, are smaller than the traditional orthogonal city corner. Scattered throughout Washington D.C., these spaces exist both within the boundaries of L'Enfant's original plan and beyond as the city expanded with the same diagonal pattern. Currently these spaces, all under one acre, account for 550 of the city's 750 parks yet only represent 2% of the city's open space (CapitalSpace 2010). An ensuing analysis of the urban fabric and design of the study site will highlight these triangular spaces.

Some of these corners anchor narrow buildings, some create small plazas and many others are simply left blank. In the past many of these corners, referred to as reservations by the D.C. government, were aesthetically treated with post-and-fence chains demarcating the edges. Below, 1927 and 1992 photographs of a triangular corner on Florida Ave and R Street N.W., catty-corner from the study site, reveal the disparity of site conditions over the years (Figure 2-3). Instead of design elements which highlight the importance of the corner, the site has been over-taken by abandoned automobiles and chain-link fences. The study site is in the background of the 1992 photograph and graffiti on the now abandoned building highlights the presence of the Kung Fu organization.



Figure 2-3: 1927 and 1992 photographs of the corner of Florida Avenue and R Street, N.W.
(Library of Congress)

The evolution of this particular corner is indicative of the decreased care and attention given to these spaces over time. Often, these leftover spaces are not owned by individuals or the government, but fall in the jurisdiction of the Department of Transportation (DOT). Primarily concerned with transportation infrastructure and restrained by budgetary limitations, this organization is not positioned to design substantial pedestrian and community amenities.

The historic planning efforts have created strengths as well as challenges for the city's development strategies. Of these design implications, Trancik states:

In the urban design of Washington, it is desirable and even necessary to maintain the open spaciousness and strong linkages of L'Enfant's monumentality and at the same time provide enclosed, well formed spaces for human activity. (Trancik 1986, p.157)

The triangular shapes created from the plan's strong linkages provide an opportunity to create these spaces Trancik calls for. The strength of the public realm and urban landscape relies heavily on the success of these prominent corners. A closer examination of the context and potential of these residual spaces can inform urban design strategies for Washington D.C. This thesis will examine one of these spaces; a derelict corner along a primary transportation corridor, owned by all yet owned by none.

PART II. STUDY SITE

Neighborhood Context

Balancing on the northern edge of L'Enfant's Plan, the 3,700 square foot site is located along Florida Avenue; it almost straddles the Northwest and Northeast Quadrants as it lies two blocks west of North Capitol Street. Florida Avenue was once the outer edge of L'Enfant's Plan and as such, was deemed Boundary Street. This site is located in the Northwest Quadrant, 5th Ward and Neighborhood Cluster 21 which is made up of Eckington, Edgewood, Bloomingdale, and Truxton Circle neighborhoods. The site is located on the western border of this cluster; therefore, LeDroit Park and Shaw will be included as contextual neighborhoods (Figure 2-4). Neighborhood cluster boundaries are determined by

the D.C. Planning Department and are often somewhat arbitrary in nature. Therefore, this analysis will focus on the smaller neighborhood units which relate more closely with the social demarcations.



Figure 2-4: Location of the site within surrounding neighborhoods and L'Enfant's original plan.

The prominent location and ownership of the site enhances its potential as well as importance. The lot is designated as public space- “all the publically owned property lines of a street and includes, but is not limited to, the roadways, tree spaces, sidewalks and alleys” (DDOT 2010). The District DOT has responsibility for these places and seeks to “achieve and maintain safe and beautiful streets.” However, this site falls dramatically short of these goals; cracked concrete, dying street trees and lack of aesthetic concern plague the site. This derelict public space supports an equally abandoned and dilapidated building; these compounding conditions degrade the quality of the surrounding built environment (Figure 2-5).



Figure 2-5: Site Condition. (Sara Fiore)

Before the relationship of the site and the larger context is analyzed, it is necessary to discuss the human dimension. This information will highlight the need for quality public spaces in an area with historic and social significance.

The neighborhoods of LeDroit Park, Eckington, Edgewood, Bloomingdale and Truxton Circle were developed in the late 1800's; adjacent to the outermost paved road, Boundary Street (today Florida Avenue) this area housed the rural residential population, light industry and train yards (ECA 2010). During this period, Howard University and Glenwood Cemetery moved directly north of Boundary Street, an indication of early signs of development. In the late 1890's, the city expanded outward as a result of the influx of workers and freedmen following the Civil War. The rural character of these neighborhoods diminished as the streets were improved and paved for streetcar access.

Development continued into the 20th century; Victorian style row-houses, churches and schools popped up throughout the area. Figure 2-6 reveals the architectural style of these residences. As these photographs reveal, the historic character of this area is intact. The previously mentioned McMillan Plan produced the McMillan Reservoir in 1902, located at the northern end of Bloomingdale. This facility is now a D.C. historic landmark. The Gage School was built in 1904, just a few blocks north of the site on 2nd Street. This historic school building has recently been converted to apartments and received an AIA award for excellence in historic renovation in 2008 (Figure 2-7).



Figure 2-6: Local architectural style. (Author)



Figure 2-7: The historic Gage School converted to Parker Flats.
<http://www.aianova.org/DA08/HI02.htm>

The second half of the twentieth century brought a large amount of change to this neighborhood. A strong-knit community persisted through the 1960s. However, by the 1970s, this sense of community was degraded by violence resulting from heavy drug use and trafficking. It was not until the end of the 1990s when these activities began to lessen and the neighborhood could begin to reverse these deleterious effects (Nicholson 2005).

According to the 2000 Census, the population in this area (defined by six Census Tracts) was 18,429, which is roughly 3% of the total population of D.C. Historically, the majority of the population in this neighborhood cluster is black, a demographic statistic which is largely unchanged. As of 2000, 92% of the 18,429 residents were black, 4% white, 3.7% Hispanic and .2% Asian (NeighborhoodInfo 2010). The poverty rate is 23%, slightly higher than the average for Washington D.C. as a whole.

Figure 2-7 maps the socioeconomic distribution of Washington D.C. This delineation highlights the areas that are part of the Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaborative Council. This nonprofit, formed in 1997, operates in communities which face “intergenerational economic, social and safety challenges” (HFTCC 2010). Much of the wealth and capital investments in the District have been concentrated in the Northwest Quadrant and areas under ownership of the United States Government, namely the White House, Capitol, and National Mall. HFTCCC advocates for the often overlooked communities outside these bounds. Each of the six areas has a community collaborative, providing leadership and technical assistance to residents and institutions to “re-weave the social fabric.”

This area is in need of more than economic and social assistance. A map of parks, wooded areas and open space in Washington D.C. reveals a dearth of these spaces within the site and neighborhood vicinity (Figure 2-8). It is the presence of collaborative community organizations and lack of green space amenities in this area of Washington, D.C. that demand further public space investments.

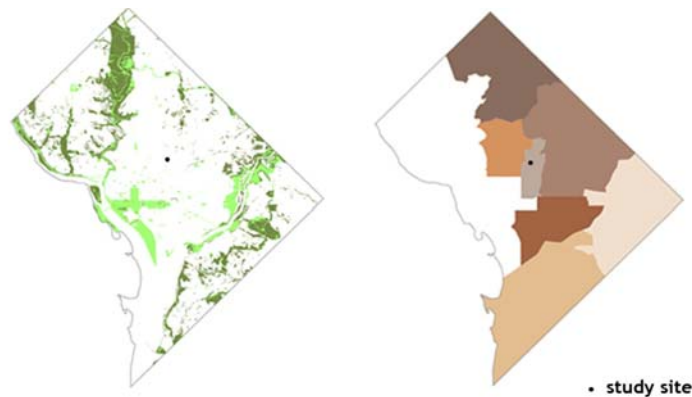


Figure 2-8: Left image: Location of the parks and woodlands of Washington, D.C. Right image: Neighborhoods included in the HFTCC are shaded. (Author)

Site Conditions

Now that the historical, social and economic characteristics of the larger neighborhood have been explored, further context of the specific site is needed. Though the site may appear vacant and neglected, pedestrian and community use provides sporadic life. The inherent potential of this site for the local and larger community lies just below the surface, waiting to be brought out.

Meghan Walsh, local architect and founder of the nonprofit *Axis Mundi*, lives one block away from the site in Bloomingdale and recognized the potential of the site. *Axis Mundi* advocates for cross-cultural design centered on collaboration between architects, artists, educators, and students. The organization has completed several urban projects based on this process in Washington, D.C. and Brazil. These economically feasible projects seek to fulfill aesthetic and functional needs of communities. One of these projects involved designers and students in an art installation at the Columbia Heights Metro Station, located near the neighborhood and study site. When Walsh learned that a local organization, The Wong People Kung Fu Association, used the site at the corner of Florida Avenue and 2nd, she was further convinced that this site could be redesigned to serve local community needs while increasing safety, stimulating civic pride, and enhancing the physical landscape of the neighborhood.

The Wong People Kung Fu Association's headquarters is directly across the street, at 218 Florida Avenue NW. This Washington D.C. based group was formed in 1986 by Raymond Wong, a Hong Kong native who immigrated to the United States as a child. This organization is one of the few groups committed to the practice and preservation of the noncommercial form of Kung Fu and Tai Chi. The Wong People Kung Fu Association has been informally using the site as an outdoor practice area for over 20 years.

The uses and condition of the site were discussed with Wong and several other community members in a charrette-style meeting facilitated by *Axis Mundi* on November 22, 2009. The goal of the charrette was to start the design process for the site by identifying site specific uses and needs. In this

meeting, Wong explained the deleterious effects of the heavy traffic along Florida Avenue; noise and pollution permeate the vicinity and it is not uncommon for vehicles to traverse the curb and endanger pedestrians on the site. Additionally, gun and drug related crimes have occurred on the site, closer to the north-end of the site which abuts an alley. Wong stated the need for a traffic buffer, an increased feeling of safety and an enhanced ground-plane on which to practice.

In addition to facilitating cultural activities of Wong's group, the site is large-scale sidewalk space which serves as a cut-through to and from residences. A photograph shows this use despite several feet of snow, a natural feature which highlights pedestrian travel trajectories, or "desire lines" (Figure 2-9). Community members outside of the Wong Association also expressed a need for a functional and more aesthetically-pleasing space which could reverse the sense of insecurity and dereliction.



Figure 2-9: Pedestrian movement through the middle of the site; the yellow building which houses the Wong People Kung Fu Association is seen in the background. (Author)

The reach of the site goes beyond the immediate community due to its location along the Florida Avenue corridor; passersby experience the site on foot, bicycle, city bus and vehicle. 2nd Street

provides an additional circulatory route past this space. Therefore, this site is at the nexus of transportation networks and local activities.

In *A Pattern Language*, Christopher Alexander deems this type of space an “activity node.” This book explores successful architectural and urban design strategies. He argues that “activity nodes” throughout communities will enhance livability and a cohesive urban fabric. A prerequisite for this element is to identify “existing spots in the community where action seems to concentrate itself” (Alexander, Ishikawa, and Silverstein 1977, p. 166). The path network should then revolve around this node. Both of these conditions are met in this site. According to this urban design principle, “activity node,” the final step is to make each node a public square, in this case a triangle, no larger than 4,000 SF with nearby community amenities.

Several “community amenities”, in the form of local businesses have sprouted within a block or two of this site in the past few years. Incidentally, these establishments are also located on prominent corners. Windows Café and Market moved into the neighborhood in 2005, followed by Big Bear Café and the Timor Bodega in 2007 and 2008. All three of these businesses are housed in unique buildings which visually, economically and functionally activate corner lots. Timor Bodega offers local and organic groceries in a building that retains its historic character. Windows Café and Market has extended its influence beyond its walls as the sidewalk has been reclaimed with seating and vegetation. Big Bear Café was rehabilitated to provide authenticity and uniqueness of place. This business opened after the construction of a small park in the triangular wedge across the street, and the local Bloomingdale Farmers Market currently utilizes the roadway between the park and storefront. Prior to Big Bear Café, this corner was an abandoned lot that encouraged loitering (Brown 2010).

These local, neighborhood-focused business operations have enhanced the urban fabric of the neighborhood and further reinforce the need for a public space. Several other vested community groups own buildings in this area. These provide a strong basis for urban development in this area; however,

much work remains to be done. A focused analysis of this segment of the Florida and Rhode Island Avenue corridors reveals newly established corner businesses as well as abandoned corners (Figure 2-10). The corners with active uses contribute towards an improved landscape while the inactive corners take away from the urban fabric. The abandoned site is physically detracting as well as visually prominent; a design intervention could provide new life and contribute to positive neighborhood growth.

Historically, socially and functionally, this lot is significant. Therefore, design consideration for the site and supporting building must reflect this significance. Several buildings have been rehabilitated and local businesses are beginning to form, and this incremental development appears to be improving the urban fabric. However, there is much work to be done regarding the public space between these buildings and circulation networks. This particular site could contribute to the quality of public space and urban fabric and function as an asset, rather than a liability, for the local community.

The following chapter will present examples of sites with similar conditions. These sites were reclaimed and designed by local citizens to revitalize the urban fabric. Additionally, the neighborhoods and city character are somewhat similar to Washington D.C. These precedents reveal the potential of small and abandoned spaces to work for the public good and urban landscape.



1



2



3



4



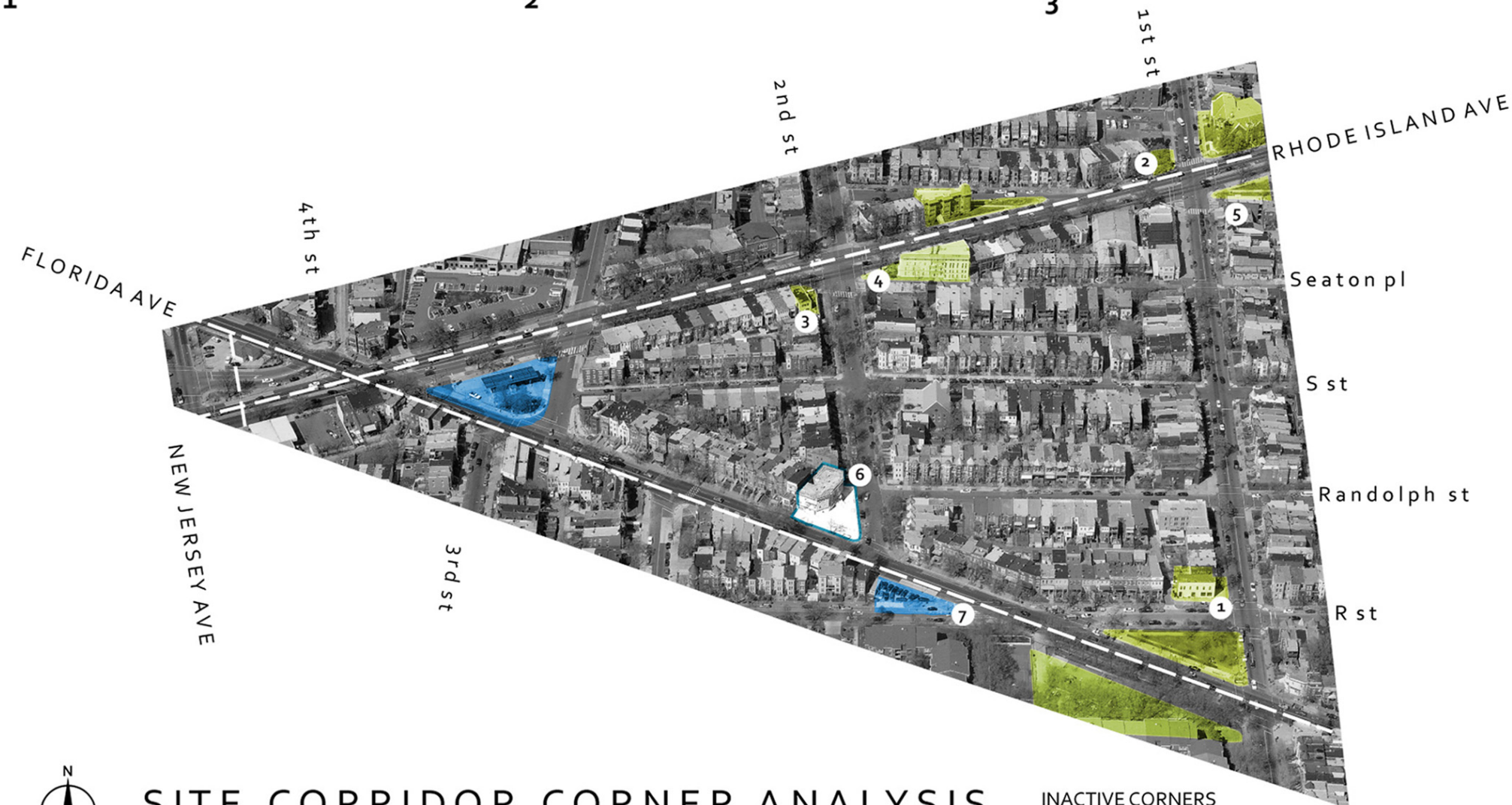
5



6



7



SITE, CORRIDOR, CORNER ANALYSIS site +/- 1 city block

INACTIVE CORNERS
[BLUE]
ACTIVE CORNERS
[GREEN]

- 1 BIG BEAR CAFE
- 2 WINDOWS CAFE + MARKET
- 3 TIMOR BODEGA
- 4 APARTMENT BUILDING
- 5 CORNER PARK
- 6 STUDY SITE
- 7 ABANDONED CAR LOT

Figure 2-10: Florida Avenue and Rhode Island Avenue corridor analysis.

CHAPTER 3

PRECEDENT ANALYSIS

Every great city has been created and saved by its citizens. Julie Vitullo-Martin

In order to illustrate the potential and explore the possibilities of a derelict site such as the one at the corner of 2nd Street and Florida Avenue NW, precedents with similar conditions will be examined. This chapter will address small-scale site designs that have catalyzed urban revitalization efforts. Additionally, this chapter will examine city-led initiatives that support incremental interventions to transform public space and enhance the urban landscape. It is with these two precedents that the study site might be designed and implemented in Washington, D.C.

Similar to Washington, D.C., New York and San Francisco are products of diverse social structures that have woven a rich urban fabric over time. These dense cities are made up of unique neighborhoods, each contributing to the overall urban character. The neighborhoods examined in this chapter are similar to the Washington, D.C. site area, as they have been abandoned politically, physically, or economically and lack public, open space.

The case study sites were determined by two criteria. First, the central sites explored are similar in size and existing condition of the study site. Second, community and designer-driven interventions provided the impetus for renewing these spaces and surrounding neighborhoods. The process and product of these case studies will provide guidance and inspiration to this thesis' intent.

PART I. COMMUNITY DESIGN INITIATIVES

New York City: Hunts Point

Bronx County, the northern-most borough of New York City has a rich cultural history marred by disinvestment, crime, and poverty in the past 50 years; a large portion of these negative statistics manifested in the southern portion of this borough. Prior to this degeneration, the 1940's marked a period of architectural, cultural and economic growth. Much of this development occurred in Hunts Point Peninsula, a prominent area of the South Bronx. This area's population growth was largely due to Puerto Ricans and African Americans leaving Harlem. The many steel mills provided jobs and fed the thriving neighborhoods. Burgeoning jazz and blues clubs settled in Hunts Point, bringing in headliners such as James Brown (Cormier 2010). However, 20 years later, a decrease in manufacturing jobs initiated a downward economic spiral that would continue through the end of the century. During the 1960s and 1970s, Hunts Point was plagued by poverty and violence, resulting in many families moving out of the area (Holloway 2008).

Deleterious infrastructure and industry replaced the steel mills and the vibrant urban landscape fell into disrepair. The Cross Bronx Expressway cut through the heart of the Bronx and left abandoned and unusable lots in its path. By the 1990s Hunts Point had one of the largest food distribution centers in the world and received 40% of New York City's commercial trash. In 1997, the city was planning a new waste transfer station which would have brought 40% of the city's municipal waste to Hunts Point (Walker 2001).

According to the 2000 census, 75% of the population was Latino, 20% African American and over half were below the poverty line. An area largely ignored by the city and viewed as a dumping ground of trash and industry, Hunts Point only had its own strong-willed residents to restore the culture and economy which once was. Though lacking in economic wealth, this neighborhood's strength was in its social stock.

The seed of future green development was sown in 2000 when Majora Carter, a native resident of the South Bronx, stumbled upon an abandoned trash-filled lot while walking her dog in the neighborhood. This fortuitous event, though seemingly trivial, would prove to have far-reaching effects for this area.

Located at the confluence of the Bronx and East River, Hunts Point is bounded by six miles of waterfront land, yet, up to this time, only 300 feet was accessible by the public. This explained Carter's surprise when she realized that this small, dog-leg shaped property had river frontage (Figure 3-1). The dead-end site was part of the Department of Transportation right-of-way; a residual space left from a defunct Robert Moses bridge project of the 1960s (Rockwell 2006). Located amongst industrial lots, this space had become an illegal dumping site, abused by many and used by none.



Figure 3-1: Location of the abandoned site in Hunts Point. (<http://gis.nyc.gov/doitt/nycitymap/>)

In 2000, Majora Carter was employed at The Point Community Development Corporation in Hunts Point. She recognized the potential of this discovered derelict land and organized local residents in several clean-up efforts. In 2001, Carter formed the Sustainable South Bronx organization and continued to advocate for the development of the site as a community asset. Both of these nonprofits began to use the site for ad-hoc community gatherings (NYC.gov 2004).

Small steps taken by local residents such as site clean-up and low budget renovations initiated a catalytic process of urban reclamation at Hunts Point (Figure 3-2). Only a couple of years following the community's reclamation of the derelict land at the end of Lafayette St., funding was provided to bring the park to fruition. A seed grant of \$10,000 from Partnership for Parks turned into \$3.27 million in funding from the NYC Planning Department over several years. The 1.4 acre park was designed by George Bloomer and a ground breaking ceremony in 2004 marked the beginning of the partnership with the City of New York. Hunts Point Riverside Park was opened to the public in the fall of 2007.



Figure 3-2: Before and after initial interventions by the community.
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunts_Point_Riverside_Park)

Brightly colored structures coupled with large trees serve to visually screen the industrial surroundings of the park. The park's waterfront location and use by a local environmental nonprofit, Rocking the Boat, inspired a nautical theme. Creative and contextual design was integral to the success of this community asset (Figure 3-3).



Figure 3-3: The fully completely Hunts Point Riverside Park.
[\(http://www.notesondesign.net/inspiration/design/the-conversation-part-3/\)](http://www.notesondesign.net/inspiration/design/the-conversation-part-3/)

Another innovative aspect of this community project lies in the park's maintenance. A grant from the Clinton Global Initiative provides short-term funding until a long-term maintenance scheme is determined (McIntyre 2007). According to Hector Aponte, the Park's Department Bronx Borough Commissioner, several completed and slated parks in the South Bronx may warrant the creation of a nonprofit or conservancy group to handle upkeep of parkland.

The significance of Hunts Point Riverside Park goes beyond design details and maintenance schemes. The reclamation of this small site has incited a period of incremental urbanism for the Hunts Point district revealing the power of an individual's vision and community's will. A unique partnership of nonprofits and local community members made a small change to the physical landscape, which then brought about action from the New York City Planning Department and other private development firms.

Hunts Point Riverside Park catalyzed the planning department, along with private landscape architecture firms to design and build a neighboring five acre park along the rediscovered waterfront. Additionally, Hunts Point Park will mark the beginning of a greenway that will carry pedestrian and bicycle traffic along a twenty-three mile river-side route ending in Westchester, New York. "The parks

have and will bring momentum to the South Bronx Greenway project,” says Linda McIntyre, a journalist for Landscape Architecture Magazine. The first groundbreaking for this greenway project came in 2004. This project has grown exponentially since this time. 15 miles of the greenway are now open to the public and the remaining portions are slated to be finished within the next decade (Cox 2010).

Investment flowed to this area, especially for the South Bronx Greenway Project, when the then-mayor, Rudy Giuliani initiated a Hunts Point Task Force which produced the Hunts Point Visioning Document in 2004 (Hunts Point Vision Plan 2004). The strength of the task force was in its diverse make-up: government agencies, community groups, local residents, elected officials and business representatives. The primary focus of this document was to optimize land use to stimulate a revitalization of this neighborhood district. Secondary goals included work force solutions, creating connections, and improving traffic safety and efficiency. The most recent planning amendment in May 2008 proposed actions to lessen the industrial presence; this included limiting trash dumping, creating residential buffer sub-districts and rezoning various properties. These planning efforts injected financial and policy support to address the myriad urban issues facing this community.

Majora Carter believes that the greenway can stimulate economic development in addition to improving environmental quality (Walker 2001). This asset-based development model is at the heart of the Majora Carter Group’s mission. This model uses the local population to grow the economy and turn problems into community assets. Hidden amongst industry and abandoned lots, the waterfront was rediscovered when Carter stumbled upon the abandoned lot. The reclamation of this site for public space led to an unprecedented growth of open space in the South Bronx; infusing the neighborhood with greenery and a new life. Growing out of the recognition of the redesigned abandoned lot and the community surrounding, Hunts Point Riverside Park, in part, catalyzed the neighborhood; the river is now an asset, accessible to all.

These are significant achievements for an area characterized by disinvestment and environmental degradation. Aponte asserts that the parks and greenway will enhance the neighborhoods appeal; incrementally, and slowly, industrial warehouses and factories will be replaced (McIntyre 2007). The future of Hunts Point is unknown. However, with nonprofits such as the Majora Carter Group and local residents' involvement, this momentum will not slow.

The Majora Carter Group asserts that parks increase a phenomenon known as collective efficacy. Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods defines this term as the "cohesion among neighborhood residents combined with shared expectations for informal social control of public space." Several studies conducted by the group reveal that community involvement with local parks reduces crime levels (Sherer 2003). Now that one park has come to Hunts Point, a self-sustaining process has begun; green investment furthers collective efficacy that, in turn, encourages more investment in the neighborhood.

Christopher Walker of the Urban Institute interviewed Majora Carter and Tupper Thomas of the Prospect Park Alliance and said this in reference to collaborative efforts to revitalize the urban landscapes in the South Bronx.

Majora's story illustrates a couple of the really big themes of urban change over the last decade. Public agencies...are increasingly partnering with nonprofits as a way to get done what they need to get done. And the Sustainable South Bronx and its collaboration with 60 other agencies, I think, is a pretty good illustration of that. (Walker 2001)

Hunts Point illustrates the catalytic power of a small urban site. Physical improvements came incrementally, yet were able to bring about further change. A community often left out of park, open space and green infrastructure plans altered perceptions of Hunts Point's capabilities and potential through reclamation of a public space; a testament both to physical design and the human spirit.

Since the discovery of the derelict site in 2000, the development of Hunts Point Riverside Park has increased public green space and brought about myriad investment to the Hunts Point

neighborhood. “It was the seed from which many new plans for our community have grown,” says Majora Carter in an interview with National Public Radio in 2009 (Carter 2009). Creative partnerships between nonprofits, community members, and planning representatives have created an authentic development scheme built from within; a process which that has contributed to Carter’s belief that “you don’t have to move out of your neighborhood to live in a better one.”

San Francisco: The Tenderloin

2,576 orthodromic miles west of New York City is San Francisco, California, a densely-populated urban agglomerate with diverse cultural, economic and historical assets. Built on hundreds of years of development, San Francisco has a strong urban fabric. However, great discrepancies between economic and physical aspects of various neighborhoods fragment the city.

Wedged between two prominent commercial and civic areas in San Francisco, City Hall and Union Square, is the Tenderloin. The Tenderloin differs from areas such as the South Bronx, as it is an economically depressed neighborhood located in the heart of the city. Centrally located, most San Franciscans and tourists cannot avoid this area of the city (Figure 3-4). Often described by San Francisco’s media as “seedy,” this neighborhood is known for its high levels of crime, prostitution and public drunkenness (Shaw 1996).

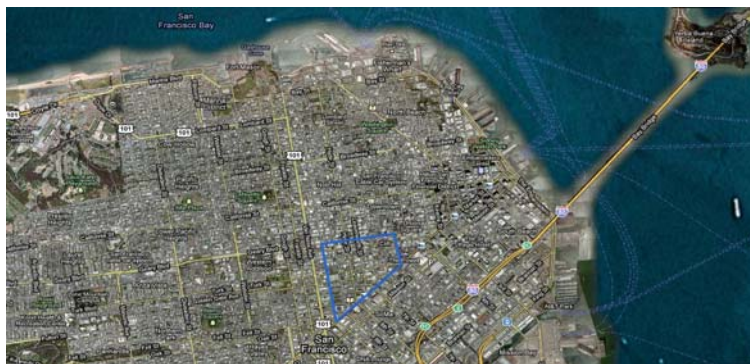


Figure 3-4: The location of the Tenderloin in downtown San Francisco. (Google Maps)

The Tenderloin, 35 blocks at its core, is comprised of single-room occupancy hotels, theatres, and restaurants. Over the years, these buildings and inhabitants contributed a great deal of vitality and

life to this area. An eclectic mix of architectural styles, this neighborhood is associated with hotel and apartment life of San Francisco from the turn of the century to the late 1950's as it facilitated great social development during this time (*Uptown Tenderloin Historic District* 2010). Figure 3-5 depicts a prominent hotel from this period, the Senator. Between the Senator and adjacent building is the small space around which this case study unfolds.



Figure 3-5: Hotel Senator in the 1920's. (<http://www.luggagestoregallery.org>)

The Tenderloin contains a diverse mix of ethnic and religious backgrounds; it is one of the most heterogeneous urban areas in the country. However, economically this area is fairly homogenous as most of its residents are poor. Poverty indicators have improved over the years, yet as of 2008, 27% of the population was below the poverty line as compared to 11% of the rest of San Francisco's population (CityData 2010).

Several local nonprofits were created in the 1980's to attempt to improve the deteriorating urban landscape of the Tenderloin. In response to growing crime, The Tenderloin Crime Abatement Committee was created in 1984 (Shaw 1996). Another organization, the Tenderloin Neighborhood

Development Corporation (TNDC) was formed in 1981 and continues today. This organization provides “safe, affordable housing and support services in order to lay the foundation for a better quality of life for low-income people in San Francisco’s Tenderloin community” (TNDC 2010). TNDC and other nonprofits, powered by the desire of local residents to improve their quality of life, began efforts in the 1980’s. The nascent efforts of the 1980’s have led to programs which are still instrumental in supporting small-scale interventions today.

In this run-down and crime-filled area of the city a small, yet powerful physical transformation has taken place in the past decade. In an alley 23 feet wide and 136 feet deep, a literal “seed of change” was planted (Smith 2010).

Darryl Smith was a notable leader in the community in the 1980s and, with the help of Laurie Lazer, founded The Luggage Store in 1987. This nonprofit’s mission was, and is still today, “to build community by organizing multidisciplinary arts programming accessible to and reflective of the Bay Area’s residents.”

Two years after the organization was formed, Smith discovered Cohen Alley, located off of a heavily trafficked street running through the heart of the Tenderloin neighborhood. He planted a redwood sapling in the alley. Of all of the alleys in San Francisco, Cohen Place Alley was one of the most filthy, drug and crime infested (Figure 3-6). From this single tree in an urban alley, Smith “imagined a wild canyon reaching the sky through the tall city buildings”(CarbonFarm 2010).



Figure 3-6: Photograph of the alley in 1989. (<http://www.luggagestoregallery.org>)

Save the barely discernible growth of the solitary redwood and small-scale cleanups by Smith and local volunteers, Cohen Place Alley lay dormant until 2000. At this point, Smith and Lazer secured tenure on the property through a \$1 per year lease, a transaction facilitated by the mayor, Willie Brown. A first step to enhance the identity of the alley and drive out deleterious activity, The Luggage Store commissioned artist Kevin Leeper to design and install a sculpted gate at the entrance of the dead-end street.

Funding and design assistance continued to flow into the alley for the next nine years. Local, citywide and national organizations involved in the alley project included: The Luggage Store, Tenderloin Community Fund, The San Francisco Art Commission/Creative Space Fund, The Mayor's Office of San Francisco: Community Challenge Grant, Green Lab Design Studio, California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

A plethora of design elements contributed to the eclectic and organic development of Cohen Place Alley (Figure 3-7). In 2005, Darryl Smith collaborated with a local artist, Julie Glanville, to build a wattle and daub house for the alley and installed a sod lawn with Stephen Clifford. The Portuguese artist Rigo crafted a stone walkway through the alley. Brightly colored murals were added to the three

towering walls enclosing the space. Activities such as art exhibitions, street performances, and community events coincided with and supported the construction process.



Figure 3-7: Design details of Cohen Alley, transformed as Tenderloin National Forest.
(Megan Clark)

Several trees were planted through the years and in 2006, a professor from San Francisco State University, Sarah Lewison, infused the space with herbs, plants, and flowers as part of her art residency. It was during this period that Marco Crescenti, a SFSU student, gave this alley a new name. Cohen Place Alley was reincarnated as Tenderloin National Forest, a verdant gem in the midst of the inner city.

This alley reclamation project was fully completed in May 2009; this space has fostered local community interaction as well as drawn interest from outsiders. The significance of this space as a

“National Forest” goes beyond the nominal. National Forests are preserves, protected in perpetuity, which ultimately serve the public. The majority of National Forests are not in close proximity to urban populations. For those without cars or cash, Tenderloin National Forest is a local destination with biological diversity and social interest. Although the alley is not under control of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this is something that perhaps could become a reality in the future. This designation would fully protect this land and provide federal subsidies.

As the primary green space within Tenderloin’s dense urban neighborhood, this alley serves as a community asset. Two of the adjacent buildings provide housing for low-income residents. One of these will house an arts residency project that will rotate artists to contribute to design and lifecycle of Tenderloin National Forest. This public art and garden space provides a calm, quiet oasis amidst the frenetic environment of San Francisco.

Tenderloin National Forest, by name and intent, is meant to function as a public space. An in-depth analysis of public space will be presented in the following chapter. An accepted prerequisite of public space is that it does not exclude anyone. Tenderloin National Forest fulfills this definition as all people, regardless of political beliefs, ethnicity and socioeconomic class, are encouraged to use this space. Functionally, it is a semi-public space, as the gates are only opened during the day for visitors. This allows for the maintenance and preservation of the art pieces in Tenderloin National Forest. With local ownership and control, this serves its purpose as a place where the local community is represented and visitors are welcomed.

The catalytic power of this small space is not as obvious or linear of a progression as Hunts Point Riverside Park; perhaps it is too soon to tell. However, several milestones in the past couple of years reveal the physical momentum Tenderloin is gaining.

The historic stock of buildings in the Tenderloin district is impressive; the uniqueness of this area comprised of almost 500 single-room occupancy hotels, theatres, restaurants, and live music venues.

The process to add this district to the National Register of Historic Places began as a building survey in 1983 and did not come to fruition for more than two decades (Shaw 2008). The process regained momentum with the help of North of Market Community Benefits District. Formed in 2004, this organization's goal was to promote a positive identity and economic development for the neighborhood. The Uptown Tenderloin Historic District was officially incorporated as a historic district under the National Park Service on February 5, 2009 (NPS.gov 2009). In a 2008 article, Randy Shaw explains the significance of the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District:

After decades of being primarily described by the media as “seedy,” the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District finally gives the community defined boundaries and a positive identity. The District's creation also means that the dream of maintaining the Tenderloin as a rare urban neighborhood combining affordable housing, primarily low-income residents and a high quality of life is a large step closer to reality. (Shaw 2008)

The Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, one of the resident nonprofits formed over twenty years ago, has reclaimed and rehabilitated dozens of properties to provide affordable housing for the poorest of Tenderloin's residents. This nonprofit has increased its commitment to improving the urban fabric that the reclamation of Cohen Place Alley initiated in 2000.

A property in close proximity to the Tenderloin National Forest, the Curran House, transformed an abandoned lot to an urban green space which now serves as an entrance to the new building. Designed by Landscape Architect Andrea Cochran, this garden and several others associated with this complex appear to be anything but “affordable,” breaking stereotypes of this housing type. The money saved by not including parking and using reclaimed materials allowed for design details often not included in housing projects with a strict budget. Cochran received a 2007 ASLA award for her ability to create “interstitial places fundamental to quality of life” that are beautiful as well as economical (ASLA 2007).

Accompanied by the completion of the formerly dilapidated Cohen Place Alley, the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District designation and Curran House project highlight the recent changes to the

physical landscape of Tenderloin. Entrenched in poverty and dereliction for years, the community has initiated incremental changes to develop local physical assets—green space, enhanced identity, and improved housing. Ignored for years by planning efforts at the city level, residents collectively exhibited an endogenous, or internal, growth model. Fundraising efforts, leadership, design inspirations were all facilitated by the local community. This is similar to the concept of collective efficacy around which Hunts Point was revitalized.

The Tenderloin is in the nascent stages of revitalization; if synergistic projects undertaken by residents and local nonprofits continue, the urban fabric of the neighborhood can be improved. Constellated efforts can improve the urban condition if social agents, development models and physical design are connected (Kahn 2007). Tenderloin National Forest exemplifies incremental urbanity, fueled by physical and nonphysical relationships. This small urban space in the heart of the Tenderloin facilitates diverse activities, contains unique elements and was built from the historical and social capital of the neighborhood.

At over thirty feet tall, the pioneering redwood tree is a testament and witness to the work completed in the past twenty years. The bulk of the physical change was completed in the past ten years, when Cohen Place Alley was brought to life by the focused actions of many individuals and organizations. Tenderloin National Forest, with a new name and a new purpose for the once abandoned alley has incited a confluence of community, ecology and economic growth.

Summary

Hunts Point Riverside Park and Tenderloin National Forest reveal the catalytic potential of small abandoned spaces reclaimed by, and for, local communities. Though a direct casual relationship is often difficult to discern, these spaces are, at the very least, indicators of growth and revitalization. For years, these residual lands lay dormant and became breeding grounds for crime and illegal dumping. Each

space was redesigned to provide a shared place for local community events, passive recreation and to stimulate a positive identity.

PART II. CITY-WIDE DESIGN INITIATIVES

These two case studies represent physical design interventions initiated at the neighborhood level. However, two programs in these same cities have initiated urban changes on a wider scale. The interstitial designs remain small in size, but their strategic nature covers a variety of neighborhoods through the city. By identifying and upgrading residual, commonplace spaces - roadways - reclamation efforts have created social spaces that revitalize urban landscape.

Both New York City and San Francisco have enacted official programs to improve the urban quality of their cities through public realm improvements. Much of the public realm in both of these cities is comprised of roadways. These innovative programs reclaim these spaces, in the form of left over DOT right-of-ways, for the local resident or random passerby. The New York City Planning Department, as part of PlaNYC 2030, began the NYC Plaza Program in 2008. Following New York's example, San Francisco created Pavement to Parks in 2009. Both of these schemes repurpose excess roadways to enhance the quantity and quality of open space throughout the city.

The planning department of Washington D.C. could learn much from these two programs. These case studies highlight design precedents for small urban spaces and the organizational framework for incremental revitalization. Both public space reclamation projects employ strategic efforts to fuel urban development projects, initiated at the community level.

New York City: Public Plaza Initiative

Currently, public right-of-way land accounts for sixty-four square miles of New York City, an area more than 48 times the size of Central Park and larger than all of the New York City parkland combined (NYC.gov 2010). The goal of the NYC Plaza Program is to “re-invent New York City’s public realm” and

appropriate underused vehicular circulation to pedestrians, in the form of vibrant, social spaces for the people and visitors of New York City.

Launched by the Department of Transportation in June of 2008, the NYC Plaza Program initiated a call for proposals from nonprofits across the city. This community-based planning program was formed to create neighborhood plazas and increase collaboration at city and local levels; the process therefore begins at the community level. Nonprofits draft proposals for underused street segments and work with City Planning officials, the Parks Department, Department of Design and Construction and the Department of Small Businesses to implement plazas in these space (StreetsBlog 2008). These in-between spaces are often traffic islands, extra-wide roadways, and service roads which become sidewalk cafés, performance spaces or tree-lined promenades.

Any projects that include a nonprofit sponsor and DOT site are eligible to apply to the program. The proposals will be judged on five categories: amount of existing open space in the area, community initiative, site context, organizational and maintenance capacity, and income eligibility. Additionally, the city will give priority to sites in neighborhoods lacking in open space and those with community groups that exhibit a commitment to caring for the site in perpetuity.

The inaugural recipients of NYC Plaza Program were announced in April of 2009. The nine selected sites are located in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. Currently in the design stage, the projects are slated to begin construction in 2011. The program's website lists all of the public plazas in this phase and the sponsoring nonprofit. Many of these organizations are local economic development groups—a testament to the innovative collaboration of economic interests, social constituencies and design efforts.

Community input from public visioning workshops, facilitated by the nonprofits, and contextual design concerns will be incorporated into a final design. This design is brought to fruition by DOT's Department of Design and Construction and professional landscape architects and engineers.

Many of these plazas are corner spaces; their prominent location either greatly detracts from or contributes to the vibrancy of an urban zone. Knickerbocker Plaza will be designed from a triangular corner ruled by vehicles, similar to the study site of this thesis. This new plaza will serve as a commercial and transportation node where streets vendors and commuters can intermingle (Short 2010). A proposed design on Fulton Street and Marcy Avenue in Brooklyn will create 8,000 square feet of new pedestrian space. The existing condition and proposed design of this roadway reclamation project can be seen in Figure 3-9. A narrow, barren corner is expanded and infused with street trees, circulation patterns and seating.



Figure 3-9: Before photograph and rendering of the proposed Marcy Avenue Plaza.
(http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/sidewalks/publicplaza_round1.shtml)

The Fort Green-Clinton Hill neighborhood blog, an online media extension of the CUNY Graduate School of New York and the New York Times, explores the Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project (MARP), one of the recipients of the first round of plaza redesigns (Best 2009). The 25,000 square foot plaza will

replace an underused service road; adjacent to myriad storefronts, this project is expected to serve as an economic stimulant to local businesses (Figure 3-10).



Figure 3-10: Underused service road on Myrtle Avenue (left) to be transformed into a plaza.
(<http://www.streetsblog.org/2010/02/08/>)

MARP, a boon to the local neighborhood, has invested in urban planning and environmental stewardship projects throughout the years. The plaza design will support and enhance a variety of efforts in this Brooklyn neighborhood. At over \$6 million, this project is one of the largest financed by the NYC Plaza Program and has community members excited at the prospect of more open space. In an article published February 8, 2010, visioning meetings with the public have revealed the desire for public art, environmental sustainability and unplanned performance space (Kazis 2010). These themes will be communicated to the final design team.

Round Two of this program began in 2009; all applications have been received and the winners will be announced in April 2010. The media coverage of this program has ranged from nonprofits such as Project for Public Spaces to neighborhood blogs. In terms of strategic efficacy, this program is strong and gaining momentum.

Limitations to this program are the cost, timeline for implementation, and reach across the city. The program's website states that the projects are "contingent upon existing levels of funding" (NYC.gov 2010). Additionally, while better than no change at all, nine projects over three years in one of the

largest cities in the United States could be seen as inadequate. However, if the program reaches enough communities, perhaps these small sites can catalyze neighborhoods once initial physical changes occur.

San Francisco: Pavements to Parks Initiative

Similar to New York City, San Francisco's streets and public right of ways exceed the combined area of its parklands (SFPlanning.org 2009). This program was inspired by the recent success of the NYC Plaza Program and initiated less than one year later. An equally innovative response completed on a shorter timeline and smaller budget, San Francisco's Pavement to Parks program is incrementally gaining public space for pedestrians. These residual spaces are designed and built in a month's time and intended to last for six months. Leftover traffic wedges, excess lanes, and defunct roadways projects become the canvas for new pedestrian plazas.

Pavement to Parks is a collaboration of several San Francisco agencies: the Mayor's Office, the Department of Public Works, the Planning Department, and the Municipal Transportation Agency. Organizations such as Public Architecture, ReBar Group, Shift Design Studio and local community groups contribute their services for nomination, design and implementation.

The program is similar to NYC Plaza Program in intent, yet differs in execution. San Francisco residents can suggest sites that meet the following criteria: a large under-utilized roadway, dearth of open space in the surrounding neighborhood, existing community support at the location, potential to increase pedestrian and bicyclist safety, surrounding uses that can attract pedestrians, and an identified sponsor. If selected, the space is temporarily closed, the design installed in a matter of weeks and monitored at two month intervals.

Per the program's website, "during the temporary closure, the success of these plazas will be evaluated to understand what adjustments need to be made in the short term, and ultimately, whether the temporary closure should be a long term community investment" (SFPlanning.org 2009). As a "public laboratory," the potential of these sites can be tested. Consequently, materials are often

salvaged or donated and design elements are simple and moveable; completed sites contain seating, a limited amount of plant material and enhanced asphalt treatments.

The nonprofit organization Public Architecture played an integral role with the pioneering plaza, “Castro Commons.” This public reclamation project fits their mission statement - to “identify and solve practical problems of human interaction in the built environment and act as a catalyst for public discourse through education, advocacy and the design of public spaces and amenities” (Public Architecture 2010). Located in the Castro Community, this small, dog-leg-shaped swath of pavement was redesigned and blocked off to traffic in May 2009 (Figure 3-11). Public Architecture provided the design guidance and gathered construction materials for this street to plaza conversion.

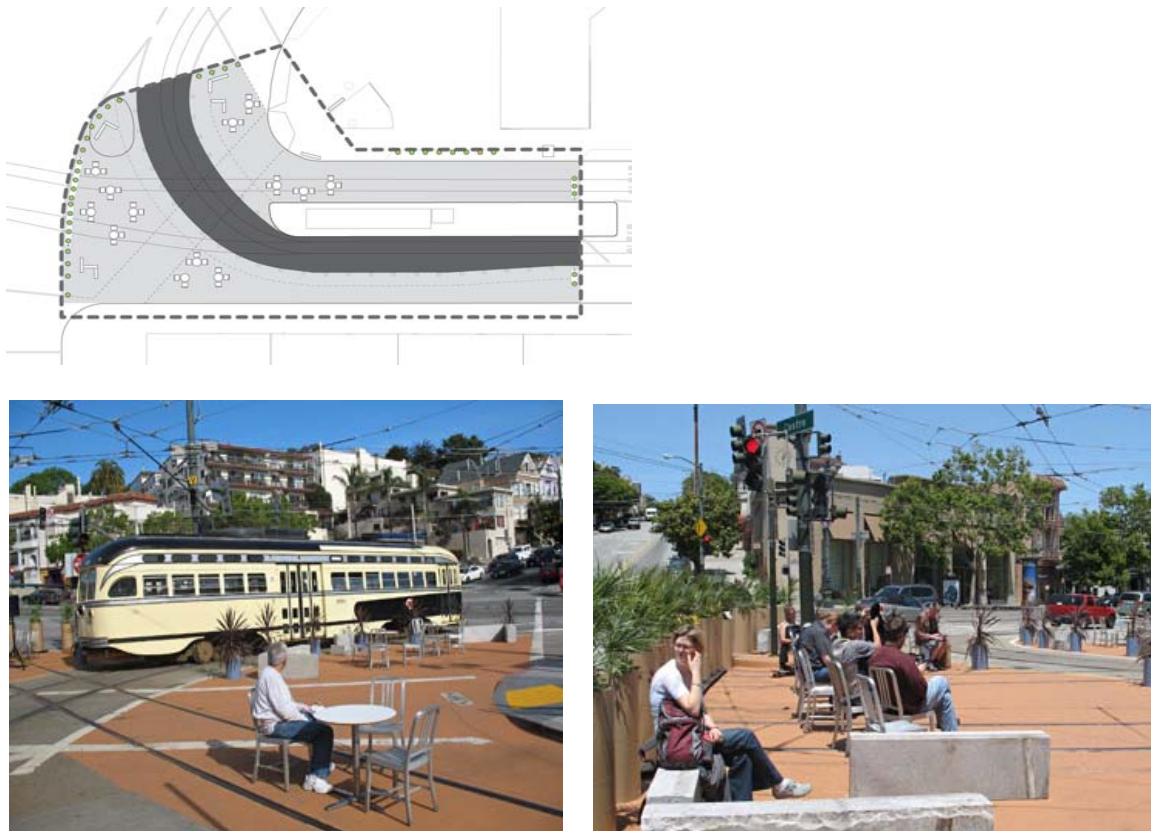


Figure 3-11: Castro Commons proposed and implemented design.
(<http://sfpavementtoparks.sfplanning.org/>)

The primary design elements include Sonotube-formed concrete bollards/planters, salvaged granite curb benches, donated cafe chairs and tables and asphalt painted a terra-cotta hue. The plaza is literally integrated with the public transportation system of San Francisco as the historic F-Liner Streetcar terminates in this site, providing a pedestrian-friendly drop-off and pick-up spot. Furthermore, these brightly-colored public vehicles imbue energy and life to Castro Commons.

With a price tag of \$25,000, a lifecycle of five months and area of 7,800 square feet, Castro Commons was a feasible street reclamation project (King 2009). This “fresh example of incremental urbanity, the conversion of small bits of found space into spots of potential and life” has not gone unnoticed. After press from the San Francisco Chronicle, New York Times, StreetBlog San Francisco and active use by pedestrians, this temporary project was extended six months past the trial period (Public Architecture 2010). A few cosmetic changes accompanied this extension; the surface was re-treated and several design elements updated. Permanent materials are scheduled to be installed in May 2010, an indication of the success of this space.

The San Francisco Great Streets Program conducted a study to analyze the use and perception of Castro Commons by interviewing users at the inception of the plaza and after its opening. The study revealed that the space became a destination rather than a route. It imbued a greater sense of community and increased the desire for additional public space in the Castro Street Commercial area (GreatStreets 2010).

Two more plazas followed Castro Commons in September 2009. Different design firms and local community sponsors supported financing and design endeavors, while the initiation process and intent remained the same.

One of these designs sought to utilize an area produced from the relocation of a block of houses in preparation for a 1947 highway project which never came to fruition. Consequently, a small wedge of land was left floating in the middle of two intersecting roadways in San Francisco’s Mission District. This

lot was redesigned as “Guerrero Park”. Jane Martin of Shift Design Studio used reclaimed logs as planters with native plants, stainless steel ducting to denote plaza boundaries and moveable seating that is placed out during the day and stored inside at night (Figure 3-12).



Figure 3-12: Before and after photographs of Guerrero Park.
(<http://sfpavementtoparks.sfplanning.org/>)

ReBar Art Collective, a local nonprofit that promotes user generated urbanism, provided the time and resources for the final plaza, “Showplace Triangle,” in Lower Potrero. A loose rendering provided a basic design yet left room for specific material elements that were to be determined. Salvaged granite curbs form green islands and seating, donated debris boxes were painted and serve as tree planters, and terra-cotta sewer pipes provide a visual edge to the space. As testament to the

potential of underused right-of-ways; a vibrant, public space now stands in place of a vehicular wasteland. ReBar's John Bela explains this new urban landscape type:

You walk into the space and you recognize that it's not a street anymore but it's not a park either. It's a street park or street plaza. It's a new category of spaces that is being created and we want to create a new language to explain that. We call this user generated urbanism, participatory urbanism. People are getting involved in space making, defining the properties of their space.(Roth 2009)

A similar study performed by the Great Streets Project revealed that Showplace Triangle brought about a 40% increase in survey respondents with a positive perception of the overall area, 29% increase in pedestrian traffic, and 60% increase in respondents who considered the space a good spot to stop, relax and socialize (GreatStreets 2010).

The San Francisco Planning Department recently added twelve additional sites that will be installed throughout the city in 2010, proof of the program's success.

Pavement to Parks reduces excessive roadways for the public good, thereby enhancing community interaction, commerce and open space in a dense urban environment. According to studies by the University of California Berkeley, lowered traffic congestion improves social stability (*Public Architecture* 2010). These colloquial spaces—from the Latin root colloquium, meaning “speaking together”—physically enable social interaction and strengthen neighborhoods connections once severed by traffic.

The Pavement to Parks program provides visual precedents for incremental urbanism with quick results. The process by which these plazas are implemented and maintained is what makes this program unique (Arieff 2009). An unprecedented idea, this urban design mechanism is unlike anything done by the planning department in the past. Andres Power, an urban designer at the San Francisco Planning Department and head of this program, states that the program “fundamentally changes the old impasse of years of planning and just lets the space evolve over time.”

The strength of this program lies in its experimental and economic nature. These spaces might not have been brought to fruition under higher budgets in the current economy. The program is not without faults, as these interventions are not necessarily permanent and could foster a precedent for a decrease in budgets for public, open spaces. However, this is an innovative way to experiment with public space reclamation. It proceeds with the hope that these spaces will be enhanced and stimulate a desire for similar projects.

Summary

Both Parks to Pavements and the NYC Plaza Program employ innovative planning strategies with a strong community focus. Pavement to Parks is a temporary, laboratory-style design intervention, while NYC Plaza employs a formal design process and long-lasting infrastructure. Long-term efficacy and success cannot be fully realized at this time as these programs are in their nascent stages. However, media attention and community use has affirmed these innovative strategies for neighborhood revitalization; strategies made possible by collaborative efforts of city planning departments, design firms and local communities.

The NYC Plaza Program has provided a significant, long-term investment in the public realm, while Pavement to Parks has enacted a temporary framework to garner buzz and grassroots interest. Based on budgetary and political support, Washington D.C. could fall at either end of this spectrum. Either way, a small commitment to the public realm and the city residents' quality of life would be better than none at all.

This chapter has answered the “how” of small scale design. A mix of innovative and invested groups can transform underused lots for local use and as a result enhance neighborhoods. Urban theories can provide the “why” of this topic and bolster these community-centered projects and programs. The following chapter will further explore the concept of public space—its importance as an economic, social and physical construct and relationship with larger urban design strategies. In a

market-driven society dominated by ownership concerns, public space must be created in unlikely places; residual lots left abandoned in the urban space between.

CHAPTER 4

THE THEORY OF THE SPACE BETWEEN

Great knowledge...does not belittle what is small or make much of what is big. Chuang Chou

The case studies presented in the previous chapter highlight successful interventions designed with the input and spirit of the local community. These efforts served as a social and physical impetus for further revitalization and increased civic pride within the neighborhood. Though these precedents reveal a great deal about the power of community-driven design, several questions remain. For instance, what is the significance of these spaces as part of the public realm? How do these sites contribute to, and function, in a larger urban design context?

First, this chapter will examine the significance of small public sites, a category of space under which this thesis' study site falls, to illustrate how even the smallest space contributes to the public realm. Three valuations will highlight the significance of public space in the urban condition: economic, physical and social. Both the larger public and the local community component will be examined. Second, these spaces will be placed in the context of several urban design theories. The concept of Integral Urbanism succinctly addresses issues of the contemporary urban landscape—the proliferation of visually unappealing places, impoverishment of public space, diminished sense of community, and environmental degradation (Ellin 2006). As such, this theory will provide the organizational framework to understand the larger urban context.

I. PUBLIC SPACE: CITY IN THE SITE

We have to imagine that the construction of public space has a wider sense of urgency beyond the duality of the park or plaza. José Castillo

The urban landscape varies from city to city, yet several characteristics remain the same, specifically that physical development and ownership patterns create a complex landscape mosaic. Some of these patterns are intended, others unintended. What makes a city successful lies not in the intention and ownership of these patterns, but in how these spaces are designed to serve and represent their residents; this is especially true of often overlooked small, public spaces. These inadvertent spaces may be neglected, but they embody the potential, especially when viewed collectively, to become a powerful, transformative force in the public realm.

As discussed previously, leftover triangular parcels dot Washington, D.C. This is not an isolated phenomenon. Transportation infrastructure and architecture often carve out small, residual spaces. This process and result has “[shrunk] the stock of public domain land towards a minimum” (Webster 2007). In an article entitled *Property Rights, Public Space and Urban Design*, Chris Webster examines urban design concerns in the public realm. Small, irregular-shaped parcels are often left untouched as property investors seek more desirable lots for development. With the exception of architectural infill such as the Flatiron Building in New York, many of these lots persist in their abandoned state.

However, there is hope for these spaces. Webster points out that “some [prominent] public spaces have emerged over centuries as a result of an awkward geometry or an unpropitious geography” (Webster 2007). Broadway in New York City began as a trail through Manhattan and became a major urban corridor. The irregular trajectory of this street was revealed when the grid system was overlaid onto the island. Rather than reengineer this diagonal path, the original street persisted and the surrounding development left strangely shaped land parcels in its wake. Over time, several of these

parcels became New York's most prominent public spaces: Times Square, Herald Square and Madison Square.

Though categorized as public space, private controls abound in all of these squares. According to Webster, "the evolutionary path is towards a residual public domain" as urban space "fragments physically and proprietarily in search of additional value". In order to fight this trend, the economic incentives for this process must be addressed. The influence of market forces on public space will be explored in the following section.

A Brief Economic Analysis

A definition of public space from an economic perspective will set the stage for this analysis. Essentially, public space operates as a public good that is both non-rival and non-excludable. According to basic microeconomic theory, non-rivalry means that the use of the good by one individual does not diminish availability of the good for others and non-excludability means that a user can not be prevented from using the good. Public goods are closely paired with the concept of public space, yet the non-rivalry component has limitations. There is a point where the site capacity will be reached and the site's quality will be degraded by additional use. However, a purely theoretical definition of a public good is sufficient for this examination.

An economic construct effectively explains the physical manifestation and marginalization of public space. The economics of the public realm make the fight for public space difficult; the state lacks incentive to maintain an adequate investment for shared space and private interests take over (Webster 2007). The quantity and quality of urban public space is determined by "patterns of market, government and individual power." The latter two players influence the behavior of the market and hence the physical public-domain.

The tragedy of the commons, a theory first published by Garrett Hardin in 1968, explains the patterns of individual behavior at odds with the concept of shared public goods. The "commons" is most

simply defined as physical places in which a group shares a set of rights. He illustrates this idea with a hypothetical situation of medieval land tenure in Europe. Put simply, herders share a common parcel of land that will be depleted if each herder acts in their own best interest - to add additional cows and thus exceed the capacity of the land (Hardin 1968). Essentially, the theory reveals that if multiple individuals behave in their self-interest shared resources will be degraded. Of course, this does not account for all individual behavior, but provides a fairly accurate aggregate model. Often referred to as the tragedy of the urban commons, this theory explains the dearth of public space supply in many cities.

The government is often the actor who seeks to act on behalf of the collective whole; this is done in an attempt to reverse the effects of individual behavior outlined above. This response, though noble, does not always provide the best mechanism for the creation and design of public space. Webster examines the problem with the government as the sole advocate for public space and offers a solution:

The problem with a municipal government monopolistically supplying open space (or open-space quality control) is that the incentive to innovate is dulled. Diversification of the agencies and institutions supplying open space is likely to increase quality and diversity through competition. (Webster).

The economic incentives for both individuals and government entities explain how the public sphere is often marginalized and neglected. This phenomenon produces small, derelict parcels, similar to the study site in Washington, D.C. However, by understanding these tendencies and resulting consequences, a conscious decision can be made to reverse the trends. A diversity of institutions, individuals and agencies must contribute to the design of these undersupplied places; a process for which this thesis seeks to advocate and argue.

A Brief Physical Analysis

In her seminal work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs examines innate and necessary elements of the urban condition to understand how to rebuild and develop cities. One concept she explores is that of visual order. Jacobs does not advocate for a design intervention that

controls all visual aspects of the city, but for a strategy that seeks to “illuminate, clarify and explain the order of cities” (Jacobs 1961). When there is a complete lack of order, a “shapeless murk” persists. In a similar analysis, Kevin Lynch, an urban design theorist, deems these areas “lost.” These places lack structure and therefore are lost in the overall city form (Lynch 1960). It may seem that these spaces should remain murky and shapeless if they have fallen into this condition. However, these places often possess great potential to escape their fate as lost and shapeless, especially if they are in visually prominent locations.

Urban spaces exist within a hierarchy of importance; the design of those with higher visibility is crucial to improving city form. Jacobs calls these spaces “eye-catchers.” A large portion of these elements are made up by visual street interruptions. These spaces must be deliberately designed and incorporated into urban design schemes. Jacobs elaborates:

By taking care with the relatively very few spots that are inevitable eye-catchers, much character, interest and accent can be given to a whole scene by suggestion, and with the least design regimentation and the greatest economy of means and tactics (Jacobs 1961, p.507)

Though it may seem paradoxical, it is possible for spaces to be both lost and eye-catchers. If the structure of a city creates a space which is visually prominent yet lacks vitality and interest, this space detracts from the urban condition. Urban dwellers may not be able to recall the visual or functional character of the area, but are drawn to the space on account that the space is located at a roadway intersection or break in building rhythms. For example, people may view an intersection as a landmark around which to navigate, but are not able to identify the elements in the area, on account of their unremarkable qualities.

What can be done with these spaces? To remedy but not go so far as to create “disciplined works of art” (Jacobs 1961), small efforts must be made to bring life and legibility to an urban area. Intricacy and vitality of use can provide this remedy. In this case, the study site is both lost and eye-catching simultaneously. This space at the corner of 2nd and Florida is fully integrated with the urban

fabric and visually prominent but exists in the murk – the building is lifeless and is surrounded by a space equally as lifeless.

A Brief Social Analysis

Small design interventions can bring intricacy and vitality to the urban form. These interventions are brought about, in part, by social impetus. Therefore, it is essential to understand the social motivations for public space. In a definition which will be explored in this section, Lucy Lippard explains that “places that are merely accessible to citizens, rather than controlled by them through use, are not truly public places” (Lippard 1997, p.243).

This social analysis will explain the need for these spaces and advocate for a strong public realm. As the case study analysis and existing condition of the site is heavily influenced by the social environment, so is this section, which will focus on the importance of the social component to urban design.

“The Public” of Public Space

Jane Jacobs provides a ground-up social analysis of small pedestrian spaces. “Lowly, unpurposeful and random as they may appear, sidewalk contacts are the small change from which a city's wealth of public life may grow” (Jacobs 1961, p.95). She advocates for a strong public realm, beginning with the most basic and ubiquitous urban component: sidewalks. Sidewalks facilitate pedestrian movement and as a consequence, social interaction. These spaces are small in size, yet permeate the city. Sidewalks often exceed their scope as narrow corridors and function as small plazas; this is the case of the site on the corner of Florida Avenue and 2nd Street in Washington D.C.

Another advocate for public space, Enrique Peñalosa asserts that public space can serve as an agent of social interaction and change. During his tenure as the mayor of Bogotá, Colombia Peñalosa invested in public infrastructure across the city. Issues of equality and inclusion abound in Bogotá as some of the richest and poorest members of society live in close proximity. Peñalosa believes that the

construction of cities can either foster or inhibit social integration. Many people cannot afford automobiles, but many can use their physical capacities to move about the city. Therefore, priority shall first be given to the pedestrian, through the provision of urban infrastructure to include sidewalks, open space, plazas, and greenways. These elements “can be an equalizer – a means to a more inclusive society. In public space, people meet as equals, stripped bare of their social hierarchies” (Peñalosa 2007, p.311). Though his efforts were implemented on a larger scale, the concept of public space as a facilitator of social interaction remains similar to the intent of this thesis and site.

Perhaps the concept of public space as an instigator of social change is oversimplified. There are certainly complex factors which contribute to a socially stratified urban condition. However, these small investments must not be undervalued. These design initiatives have in part “turned Bogotá from a chaotic, unsafe city into a capital with a progressive transport system, public parks, pedestrian and cycle networks” (Fajardo and Kawashima 2007, p.84).

A final, philosophical dimension bolsters the argument for public space. Henri Lefebvre, a French Marxist philosopher, contributed much to the social discourse literature on urban space. Urban activist and geographer, Don Mitchell provides insight and clarity to Lefebvre’s words in his book, *The Right to the City*. Lefebvre asserts that cities are inherently public and therefore demand heterogeneous places for interaction of all members of society (Mitchell 2003).

While this idea encourages the creation of open and public spaces in an urban context, Mitchell takes these theories further to explain how social groups operate in these physical spaces, a condition present in the existing function of this thesis study site. He explains that physical space is not a void which is *filled* by social activities, but rather is produced *by* social actions. A key axiom to his concept of public space, Lefebvre refers to this as “representation”. In Mitchell’s words, a group “*takes* space and through its actions makes it public” (Mitchell 1995, p.35). This act initiates a cyclical process in which “representation both demands space and creates space”.

According to this theory, urban spaces should be designed in the interest and spirit of those who use them. This process provides physicality to social norms, one of the foundations upon which our society is built. In this theory, spaces are social products which affect spatial practices, or in this case, design strategies. However, this is not often how urban schemes operate. Mitchell emphasizes that “spaces in the modern city are being produced *for* us rather than *by* us” (Mitchell 1995). This phenomenon either leads to insincere urban designs or exclusion of various social groups.

It is the intention of this thesis to provide a designed space for the Wong People Kung Fu Association and local community to use. These informal social uses exist, yet these groups are not physically represented in the urban landscape. This process can complement the value of social uses of public spaces, one small space at a time.

“The Community” of Public Space

The social elements thus far have focused on the concept of the public as a whole, rather than a specific community. This whole, referred to as the “public realm”, is a concept best described as “those areas of urban settlements in which individuals in co-presence tend to be personally unknown or only categorically known to one another” (Lofland 1998, p.9). While this function of public spaces adds a dynamic aspect to the urban fabric, these spaces can simultaneously facilitate interaction of local residents; the design of this site seeks to achieve this duality.

In his book, *Squares*, Mark Childs explores the character and nature of vital public spaces, described as “spaces of conviviality” (Childs 2004). Conviviality, “a vibrant sense of belonging to a settlement”, can either be enhanced or impeded by architectural interventions. This statement reveals the purpose of his book – to explore the connection between the social and physical aspect of public spaces.

Childs refers to public space as “the commons”, a term previously introduced in an economic construct. In this case, these physically shared spaces function as civic places. An important term in his

research, Childs defines civic as “the relationship of the commons to the settlement as a whole and to the collective value of the commons” (Childs 2004, p. 22).

Figure 4-1 presents the three main types of commons and the physical manifestations of these spaces. The study site falls between a “civic commons” and “neighborhood commons”. The former is defined as a physical space “open to all people for the exercise of their rights” while the latter differs as the users are dominated by neighbors and acquaintances. The site’s location along a major urban corridor opens itself up for public use, yet facilitates local, community use. Additionally, the site straddles Child’s architectural categories of the commons – “civic coves” are small, informal squares and “public streets” are public paths which engage both building frontages and roadways.

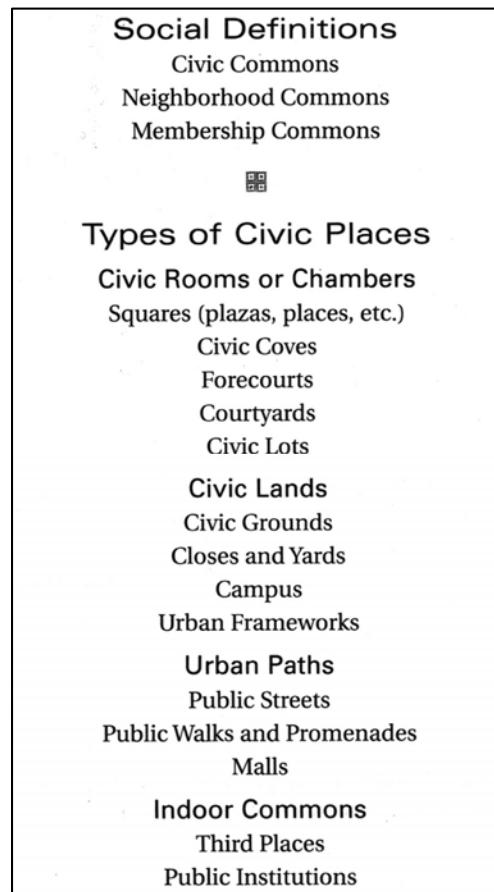


Figure 4-1: Types of Commons. (Childs)

Childs' classification of these spaces reveals the purpose and function of the public site within the community. He also provides an in-depth exploration of design elements for each of these typologies. These elements will be incorporated into design features to enhance the civic nature of the site.

The civic focus of Child's theories directly relates to the themes of the case studies in New York and San Francisco. The community provided an impetus for the design interventions which served as a public space within the neighborhood and, through an iterative process, increased social cohesion. Referred to as collective efficacy, this term is not dissimilar to the concept of the civic commons. These "built spaces which support conviviality" essentially "knit together the structure and infrastructure of the city" (Childs 2004).

Washington, D.C. has numerous underused and abandoned spaces with the potential to serve as a network of civic commons. It is the intent of this thesis to design the study site based on existing social use and stimulate a greater investment in the urban fabric through incremental public interventions.

Summary

The theories reviewed thus far place public space at the confluence of social and physical elements. The next section will explore the nature and intentions of these interventions. A more in depth analysis will extend the significance of a small site to the larger whole. A closing thought by Jane Jacobs reveals this connection – "emphasis on bits and pieces is of the essence: this is what a city is, bits and pieces that supplement each other and support each other" (Jacobs 1961 p.509)

II. PUBLIC SPACE: SITE IN THE CITY

Site as Part

To understand the design of small public spaces, one must understand the larger motivations of urban design in which these "bits and pieces" exist. Urban design is concerned with the appearance and

functionality of various city elements, to include public space, architecture, and transportation.

Therefore a site's design, regardless of scale, must be cognizant of surrounding functions which will influence and be influenced by the design.

In *Site Matters*, Andrea Kahn explores the importance of a single site; a space which may appear insignificant within a field of competing and complex issues. She devises a concept –the *unbound site* – to explain how the influence of a space can be extended beyond its borders and intentions once activated (Burns and Kahn 2005). Kahn explains the role of the site as the backbone of urban design:

Each recasts received ideas of boundary and scale in a slightly different way, yet all rebound around the same underlying point: that for urban design what matters is gaining understanding of the city *in* the site. (Kahn 2005, p.295)

In order to be designed and therefore controlled, a site must be physically demarcated. Yet designers must see past these limitations and think beyond the property line. Boundary porosity and scale permeability allow for the site to exert influence beyond its initial, physical scope. If a public space is integrated and open to its surrounds, a larger public realm can be forged. Intangible effects – social, cultural, economic - flow from and to a site if integrated in the urban fabric.

Henceforth, small and large concerns must simultaneously be addressed. Kahn continues site-level theory to make this connection through both a concept and process termed *urban constellations*. The word constellation, in this context, is defined as a group of characteristics that are related in some way. Kahn describes urban constellation as a process which integrates “knowledge of local place-based urban characteristics with knowledge of larger-scale spatial logics that underlie contemporary urbanism in all its forms” (Kahn 2005). This theory supports a connection between the city as whole and site as part and linking site characteristics with the urban context.

This site-based approach can open possibilities and importance for sites of all sizes and types, yet lacks a clear strategic approach to city design. Rather, these ideas represent a more theoretical

mindset. An analysis of urban design literature will provide a clear link between urban concepts and physical elements.

Site as Whole

Urban design approaches evolve with ever-changing historic, cultural and political factors. It is not within the scope of this thesis to explore the evolution of these theories, but to choose those which best answer to the demands of our current urban condition. Additionally this thesis seeks an appropriate theory for revitalizing existing urban fabric in a manner which promotes social and physical integrity. These two purposes serve as the driving force from which to examine urban design theories.

Thus far, small public spaces have been represented as the confluence of physical and social contexts. These in-between spaces are often ignored and therefore lack vitality. Two prominent theorists, separated by almost half a century provide a sound structure to examine these spaces and how, strategically, they can improve the urban fabric. When analyzed in tandem, Kevin Lynch's and Nan Ellin's approaches are able to bridge the gap between spatial and conceptual aspects of urban design.

Kevin Lynch, in his seminal work *The Image of the City*, examines "the look of cities, and whether this look is of any importance, and whether it can be changed" (Lynch 1960, p.12). In the process of interviewing city denizens and reading the urban landscape himself, he outlines five organizing elements: Paths, Edges, Districts, Nodes and Landmarks. Lynch posits that these elements must reinforce one another to provide a satisfying city form.

This theory provides a neat, physical structure to the complexity of cities. However, it is not without weaknesses; much emphasis is placed on the functioning of individual objects, not on symbiotic relationships or issues outside the physical realm. Furthermore, the purpose of this thesis is not to devise a ground-up planning scheme for cities, but to examine physically mature urban areas in need of revitalization.

Nan Ellin adds another dimension through her concept, *Integral Urbanism*, as she seeks to answer some of the less-tangible questions inherent in urban revitalization and development. In her book by the same name, she proposes five qualities to “inform, inspire, and incite a better human habitat”: Hybridity, Connectivity, Porosity, Authenticity, and Vulnerability (Ellin 2006). These have direct parallels to those outlined by Lynch in 1960 (Figure 4-2). Viewed individually, each theory does not provide a comprehensive approach as Lynch focuses more on the physical city while Ellin on the social, process-driven city.

ELLIN	LYNCH
<i>Integral Urbanism</i>	<i>Image of the City</i>
HYBRIDITY	NODES
CONNECTIVITY	PATHS
POROSITY	EDGES
AUTHENTICITY	DISTRICITS
	LANDMARKS
VULNERABILITY	

Figure 4-2: A comparison of Nan Ellin and Kevin Lynch’s urban theories.

These two strategies provide strength to the intention of small scale site design. The subsequent sections will outline the five qualities of Integral Urbanism interwoven with supporting urban design principles. Ellin explains how this theory can serve as an appropriate lens through which to view urban issues:

Integral Urbanism proposes more punctual interventions that contribute to activating places by making connections and caring for neglected or abandoned “in-between” spaces or “no-man’s lands”. In the best-case scenarios, these interventions have a tentacular or domino effect, catalyzing other inventions in an ongoing and never-ending process. (Ellin 2006, p.9)

The following sections will analyze the intent and implication of each of the five tenets of Integral Urbanism.

Hybridity

The concept of hybridity is centered, literally, on points of intensity within the city. These points serve as nodes – defined as strategic foci around which certain characteristics are concentrated (Lynch 1960). These spaces connect activities with people. Nan Ellin adds a qualitative dimension to nodes through a concept of hybridity. Programmatic hybridity encourages a variety of designers, diversity of uses and user groups. Hybridity is not a wildly novel idea as many urbanists tout this concept as an integral aspect of urban richness and interest (Trancik 1986; Jacobs 1961; Koolhaas et al. 1995). The challenge lies in marrying the physical concept of the node with diverse social purposes.

A node is often easily understood as a discreet and small space such as squares, plazas and transit stops. However, this is not always the case. A node can be made up by a thematic concentration which is derived by nonphysical elements (Lynch 1960). This is seen in shopping districts or residential areas. Additionally nodes are not always intentionally designed like the central plaza, but occur as a junction, or a break in transportation. Often, roadway intersections are nodes which end up as abandoned lots, a category of space best filled with hybrid designs (Ellin 2006).

Community groups around the country are bringing vacant lots back to life with temporary uses such as tree nurseries, community gardens and public art either interchanged throughout time or implemented simultaneously. The prominent landscape architect Walter Hood designed a public park in Macon, Georgia to serve as a “typological hybrid of Street/Yard/Infrastructure” where a boulevard once stood (Hood 2010). A creator of innovative public spaces, Hood successfully melded existing and new purposes for this multi-faceted design.

Hybridity seeks to answer the “what” of the design process. Multiple uses enhance the success of a site, regardless of size. The importance of nodes within the urban fabric lies in its social as well as spatial implications. These building blocks begin the process of building cities which exudes vitality and diversity.

Connectivity

Connectivity provides structure for the urban skeleton, yet must exist at a level above this basic function. This principle is similar to Lynch's path element – a network around which the points of intensity are organized. Nodes provide strength to the concept of connectivity as “paths with clear and well-known origins and destinations had strong identities [and] helped tie the city together” (Lynch 1960, p.102).

These corridors facilitate movement throughout cities, yet also possess the power to create successful nodes. A legible path contains a diversity of points of interests and can emphasize these points. Therefore the quality of architecture, activities and visual interest must not be ignored. Similar to the previous principle, these spaces must not simply be designed for one transport type with a monotony of streetscape elements but should resemble an *Urban Network*, a term coined by Peter Calthorpe. These corridors, regardless of size, can successfully mix cars, transit, bicycles and pedestrians.

Facilitating movement within and between urban nodes is both a goal of Integral Urbanism and increasingly, of city jurisdictions across the county (Ellin 2006). This is achieved through either reclaiming abandoned infrastructures or building new ones. The High Line in New York City is one of these reclaimed spaces. This linear park is able to surpass the quotidian circulation experience of the urban dweller. Interest and vitality are heightened through a diversity of plantings, architectural details, activities, and views. The temporal qualities of this space heighten its importance. Once a railroad line, the Highline is now a prominent pedestrian corridor which “savor[s] the nuances of everyday life” (Ouroussoff 2004).

Though not a new idea, connectivity is a necessary element to integrate and enhance the urban environment. This concept varies from city to city, as context becomes the variable. Interestingly, the term “context” derives its meaning from the Latin word *contextere*, to weave together or make

connections (Ellin 2006) p.56. As such, designers must forge meaningful and creative connections between people and the places in which they live.

Porosity

It is now becoming obvious that although these principles can be evaluated separately, they are interdependent. Porosity incorporates ideas of hybridity and connectivity. Divisions between activity nodes and paths must be identifiable, yet flexible enough to operate as one functioning whole.

This principle is an extension of Lynch's concept of an edge. Similar to paths, as they are often linear in nature, edges act as a boundary between two areas. The primary function of this element is to provide a physical transition between various character areas of the urban condition. These edges enhance the legibility of the city and provide orienting clues for the urban user. Lynch focuses on the continuity and visibility aspects of these spaces, yet he hints at the idea of porosity as he states that these places must not be "isolating barriers", but "uniting seams" (Lynch 1960) p. 65.

Ellin's definition of porosity expands the concept of an edge. To enhance the experience of the city, these boundaries must not be impenetrable or completely free-flowing, but allow for "seepage". She interchangeably refers to this as translucent urbanism, or "revealing through concealing". These permeable edges – rivers, transportation corridors, topographic divisions – if designed with intent, can become urban thresholds which are "lively, unpredictable and sustainable" (Ellin 2006).

The landscape of many cities often lands on opposite ends of the porosity spectrum. Walled properties, gated parks, and fortified neighborhoods are examples of built elements which are purposely isolated to prevent infiltration. Meanwhile, sprawling suburbs of subdivisions and big box stores make few distinctions between their parts and hence are monotonous and indiscriminate. Therefore, the design challenge is to "make connections without losing the integrity of individual parts, providing something greater than their sum" (Ellin 2006, p.82).

Ellin explores manifestations of this translucent urbanism. Of these, experiential, temporal and circulatory porosity relate most specifically to this thesis. Experiential and temporal porosity encourage unprogrammed yet flexible spaces for users to claim as their own. These spaces change over time and based on group needs. Circulatory porosity exists when streets, sidewalks, and parking are integrated and viewed as complementary design elements. These elements do not need to be seen as mutually exclusive.

Randolph Hester offers an ecological approach to city and community building in his book *Designing for Ecological Democracy*. He discusses a similar idea to those presented above through the concept of landscape adaptability. Parks and open space shall be less defined and more flexible to allow for any recreational or social purpose (Hester 2006). The edge is the primary element which provides an invitation to these spaces and must therefore be interesting as well as permeable.

What design strategies can be garnered from this concept of porosity? All elements must be integrated with the existing urban fabric but project individuality and uniqueness of character. Ellin urges urban designers to be mindful that “nothing exists in isolation, only in relation” (Ellin 2006, p.91). Thus, a site must acknowledge its position within the city and use this as a guiding principle throughout the design process.

Authenticity

Authenticity seeks to redress deleterious consequences of globalization and capitalism seen in portions of the urban landscape of the United States. The following descriptors are used to describe these landscapes: abandoned, vacant, generic, and anonymous (Ellin 2006, p.99). Ellin’s principle of authenticity provides an antidote to these ills.

On a more physical level, this concept is related to two of Lynch’s final urban elements, districts and landmarks. Districts are “large city areas with common character” while landmarks are reference points with visual or symbolic importance (Lynch 1960). Both of these categories are derived from

cultural, social, environmental, and historical contexts. Authenticity looks beyond these tangible elements and analyzes the spirit from which they arise.

An authentic-city results from a combination of large-scale and small-scale interventions, both systematic and serendipitous. How it happens is just as important – and goes hand in hand – with what happens. An authentic-city is responsive to community needs and tastes, which have to do with local climate, topography, history and culture. (Ellin 2006, p.103)

This search for the local and authentic is not a new one. Ellin is one of the many urbanists seeking to explain the issues and methods of this aim.

In an article entitled *The Rise of the Private City*, Paul Goldberger explores the paradigm of the modern city. Cities struggle with the concept of the public realm and often straddle the line between an urban and suburban landscape. He echoes Ellin's sentiments in his statement regarding the modern urban model:

The new American urbanism is packaged for easy use; it disdains the randomness, the difficulty, and the inconsistency of real cities. It is without hard edges, without a past, and with a respect for the pain and complexity of authentic urban experience. (Goldberger 1996, p.147)

This lack of authenticity permeates public space in cities across the country. These pseudo-public spaces are commercialized, controlled and therefore not a true urbanism. Large scale interventions are often driven by the market and create monotonous and economically driven design.

A counter to this strategy, small and scattered interventions ensure that diverse ideas are manifested in the physical landscape. In order to support plans initiated by different people with a wide range of ideas, overarching efforts by the public sector must be made (Ellin 2006). City or district-level groups such as redevelopment agencies, affordable housing program and arts districts can support independent retail, social diversity, revitalization efforts, and infrastructural improvements.

It is designers, policy makers and citizens who must fight for an authentic urban experience. Authenticity outlines a method to achieve these goals as it provides the “how” of hybridity, porosity and connectivity. Authenticity “responds creatively and compassionately by remaining connected to our environment, to our communities and to ourselves” (Ellin 2006, p.102)

Put simply, design must emanate from the spirit of local people and places. This strategy rejects the paradigm of an imported and replicated pattern of development which remains unchanged from city to city. The built environment must reflect the social capital and needs from within. A desire for interconnectedness with our surrounds will incite an “authenti-city”.

Vulnerability

The twentieth century was marked by an attempt by planners and architecture to control the inner-workings of the built environment (Ellin 2006). Vulnerability seeks to relinquish this control.

This principle does not have a physical counterpart from Lynch’s *The Image of the City*; instead it is based on a shift in attitude. Vulnerability seeks to move away from the rigid imposition of master planning towards flexible, responsive interventions which “[go] with the flow and graciously accommodate activities that have been taking place spontaneously” (Ellin 2006, p.128). This concept does not advocate a *tabula rasa* approach for cities, but builds from the existing fabric and recognizes that these places are constantly a work in progress rather than final products. Thus, incremental design efforts straddle the line between permanence and impermanence. Change and evolution, similar to the natural world, are valued processes.

The aforementioned landscape architect Walter Hood is recognized for his transformations of public space. He incorporates surrounding sites and both existing and new constituencies into his design considerations. This process was employed in the design Lafayette Square Park in Oakland, California; this park has an open-ended design aesthetic and rejects the concept of exerting absolute control over a site with existing social and physical cues.

Public space is a key element of vulnerability. This space allows for chance and free expression which increases diversity and culture. Though vulnerability is centered on a relinquishing of control, designers must lead the way to an improved urbanity:

For designers, [vulnerability] translates into an enhanced receptivity towards the client, the site, and culture, as well as logistical issues. Rather than constraints, these become opportunities and sources of inspiration (Ellin 2006, p.131)

Summary

It is with these principles that Integral Urbanism forges a new paradigm for urban revitalization. The compounding sociological and ecological breakdowns of our society necessitate a focus on restoring these lost connections. Rather than simply reacting to problems to ensure that our cities *survive*, the design theories explored in this thesis offer a proactive approach to ensure that our cities *thrive*.

Integral Urbanism proposes punctual interventions to create thresholds which in turn, activate cities and their inhabitants. Built on theories and ideas of urbanists from the past century, Nan Ellin constructs this theory to explain where the urban design profession has come from and where it is headed. This thesis attempts to apply and enhance these ideas through the analysis and design of a small urban space.

The case studies presented in the previous chapter embody the principles of Integral Urbanism as a means for urban revitalization. The New York City and San Francisco design interventions embody the five qualities of this strategy: Hybridity, Connectivity, Porosity, Authenticity, and Vulnerability. These examples must not be reduced to a manifestation of these principles alone but should provide, with this analysis, a deeper understanding of their intent and significance. Hunts Point Riverside Park has reconnected people and place to facilitate diverse activities and enhance connections on the small and large scale. Tenderloin National Forest effectively engages social interactions and remains true to the spirit of its designers and users. By relinquishing control over certain urban operations, the planning departments of New York City and San Francisco have created authentic and porous public spaces to strengthen the surrounding urban fabric.

It is in the spirit of these precedents and theories that the study site in Washington, D.C. will be designed.

CHAPTER 5

DESIGN APPLICATION

The case studies and literature review reveal a tendency towards incremental, community-driven designs which contribute to the public realm. Additionally, these collaborative efforts are enacted through a lead advocate, whether an individual or city program. Several themes have emerged thus far: the informal and inventive over the institutional and formulaic; authenticity over monotony; and neighborhood projects over comprehensive planning schemes. All of these themes inform the design of this study site.

The crux of this urban design strategy is collaborative and process-based—qualities that this thesis seeks to initiate. The focus, therefore, will be on the first steps of this process: site context and design. The intent of this thesis is to initiate a process which will attract additional artists, architects, community members in the fundraising, design and construction of this site design. This chapter will call attention to the use of the *space between* and its role as catalyst for public space creation and revitalization of the urban landscape.

PART I: ANALYSIS

Site Conditions

A detailed analysis of the site's condition will provide the final layer of understanding necessary to begin the design process. Most of the existing features of the site are constraints (Figure 5-1); the design seeks to mitigate these elements. Cracked concrete, lack of vegetation and errant trash piles degrade the ground plane and leave the site open and exposed to vehicular traffic. The building, anchoring the corner, furthers the negative perception of the site with broken windows, barred doorways and a

deteriorating façade. The design will first focus on an interim landscape intervention to activate the corner and will then determine future scenarios for the building and surrounding landscape.



Figure 5-1: Dilapidated condition of the study site. (Sara Fiore)



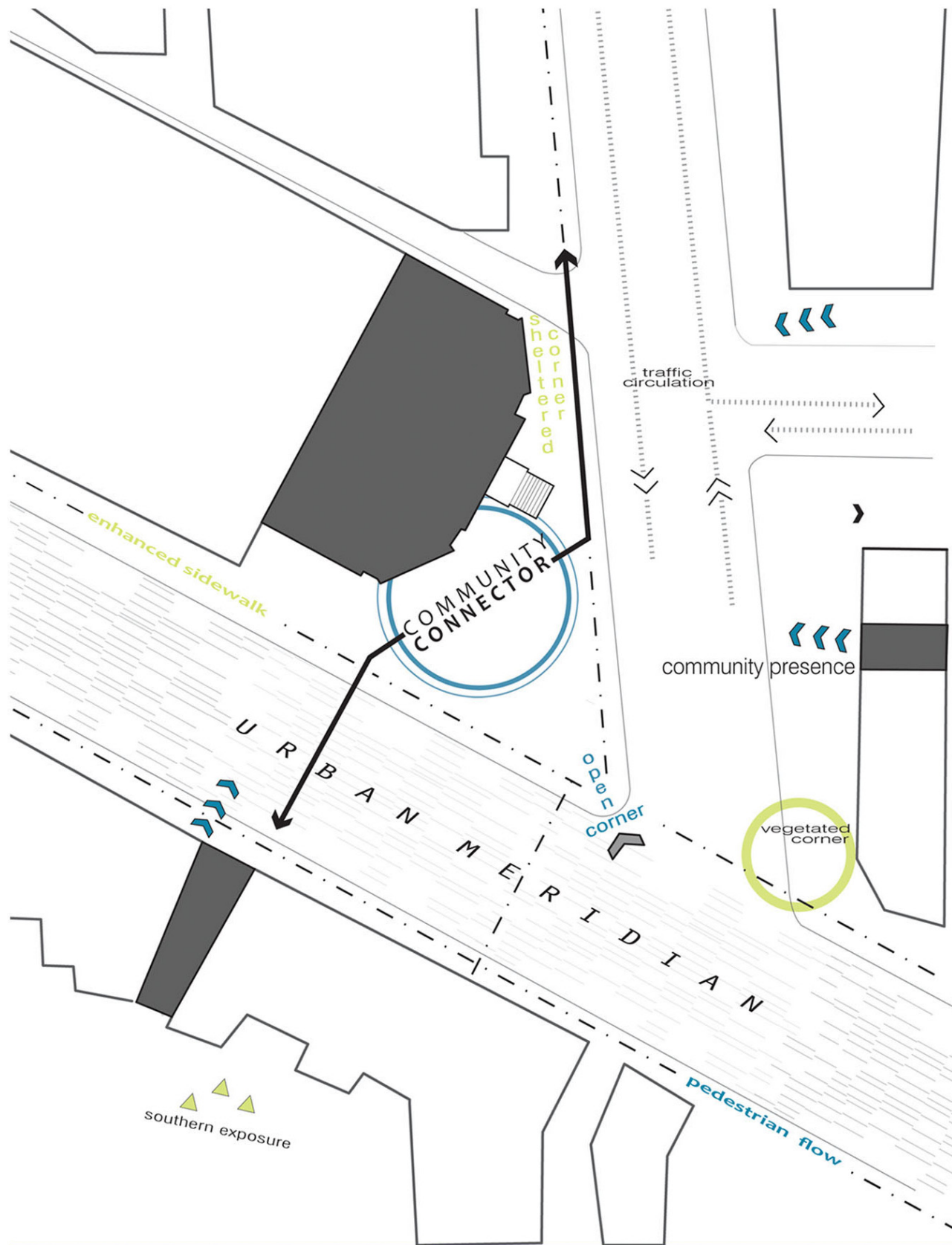
Figure 5-2: Aerial photograph and topography of the site.

Figure 5-2 shows the site conditions, from a 2008 aerial photograph, and topography of the site. The plat of the building and surrounding site features in Figure 5-3 is from the Washington, D.C. Planning Department. The 3,700 square foot site is 110' along the Florida Avenue side, 122' along 2nd Second Street and 85' when walking diagonally across the site. The Florida Avenue side of the site has new sidewalks and planter edgings, yet one of the street trees is dead and the other is absent. Additionally, the stark delineation between the sidewalks improvements and the main portion of the site accentuates the abandoned character of the site.



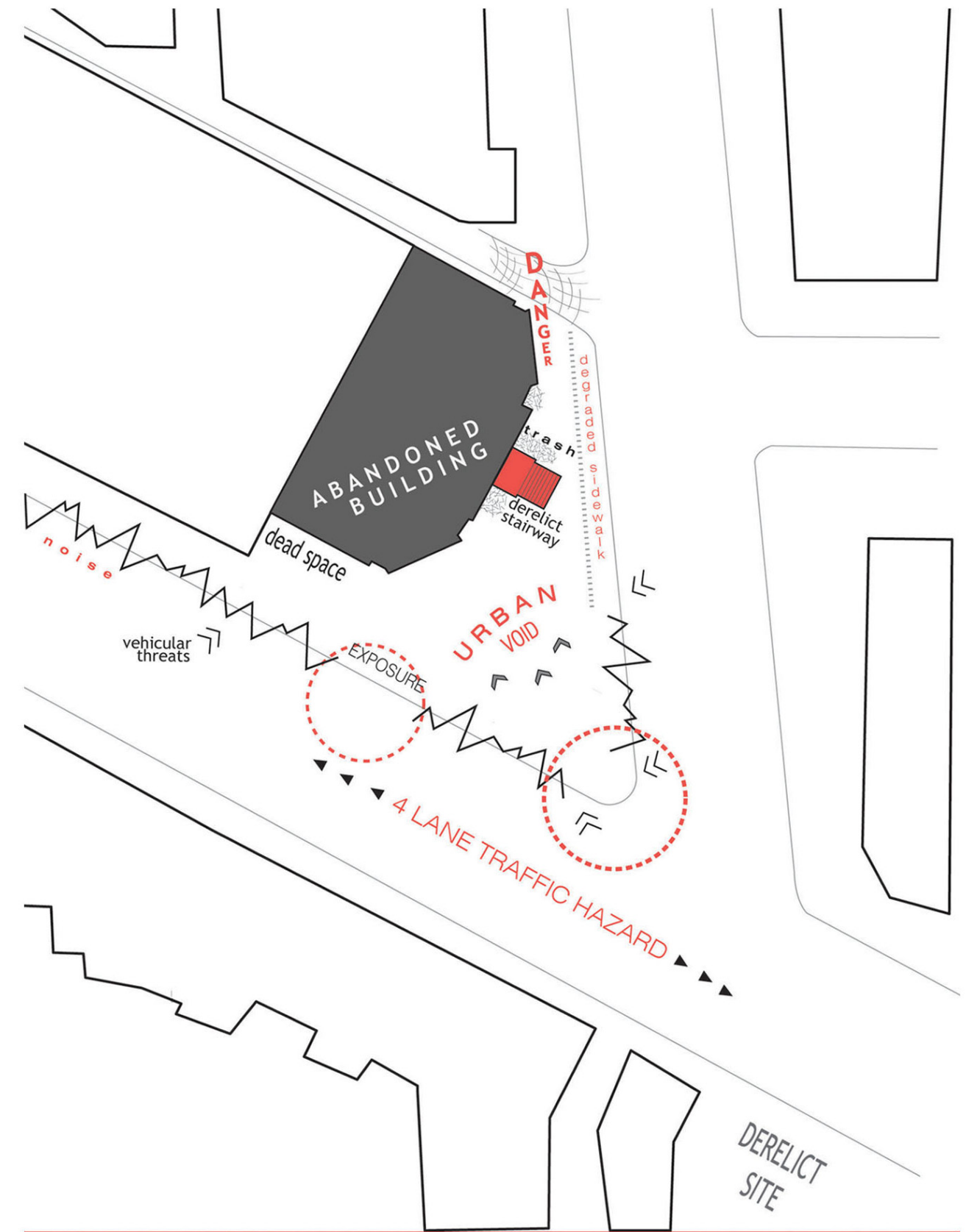
Figure 5-3: Plat of the corner with surrounding site features.
(plat: Washington, D.C. Planning Department, photographs: Sara Fiore)

While the deteriorated quality of the site presents challenges, there are also inherent opportunities. Both the negative and positive conditions are explored in two opposing site analyses which incorporate spatial, physical, social, and environmental factors (Figure 5-4). A hybrid image of words and symbols is used to communicate effectively with constituents and collaborators. Additionally, these figures incorporate thoughts presented by the local community in the November 2009 charrette regarding the physical landscape in and around the site.



OPPORTUNITIES

Figure 5-4: Two opposing site analyses.



CONSTRAINTS

Larger Context

Jane Jacobs devises three typologies through which self-governing functions of neighborhoods are manifested: the city as a whole; street neighborhoods; and districts the size of 100,000 people or more. This site context falls within the street neighborhood category and includes Bloomingdale, LeDroit Park and Truxton Circle (figure 5-5). Similar to city streets, the purpose of street neighborhoods is “to weave webs of public surveillance and thus to protect strangers as well as themselves; to grow networks of small-scale, everyday public life and thus of trust and social control” (Jacobs 1961, p.156).

Furthermore, she expands on the importance of this scale of urban life:

Successful street neighborhoods, in short, are not discrete units. They are physical, social and economic continuities – small scale to be sure, but small scale in the sense that the lengths of these fibers making up a rope are small scale. (Jacobs 1961, p.157)



Figure 5-5: The site as a nexus of three neighborhoods. (Author)

It is in that light that the analysis will highlight physical “lengths of fiber” which weave together to form the neighborhood “rope.” This will provide a ground up examination of the parts which contribute to the whole. The analysis will focus on a quarter mile radius around the site. Included in this area are several main corridors: North Capitol Street, Florida Avenue, Rhode Island Avenue, and New Jersey Avenue. The “fibers”, or elements, include transportation networks, contributing and detracting sites, land use categorization, and figure-ground analysis.

Transportation is the functional backbone of the urban fabric as it provides connectivity and structure, especially to the small triangular corner lots which constellate the neighborhood. These circulatory spaces facilitate traffic and life around and through the site and highlight its prominence (Figure 5-6). Roadways serve as the primary organizing element. Several public bus lines and bike routes provide additional circulation near the site. Bus stops dot the streets and provide pedestrian life to these corridors. The MetroRail is the primary and most permanent public transit infrastructure of Washington, D.C. One of the five lines has a stop five city blocks from the site, providing accessibility to this neighborhood. Additionally, the city is initiating several new public transit systems throughout the city. This includes a streetcar and bus rapid transit. Two of these routes are within several blocks of the study site. Therefore, the public space design of the study site could complement these infrastructural improvements. Hybrid initiatives support and enhance integrated urban design efforts.

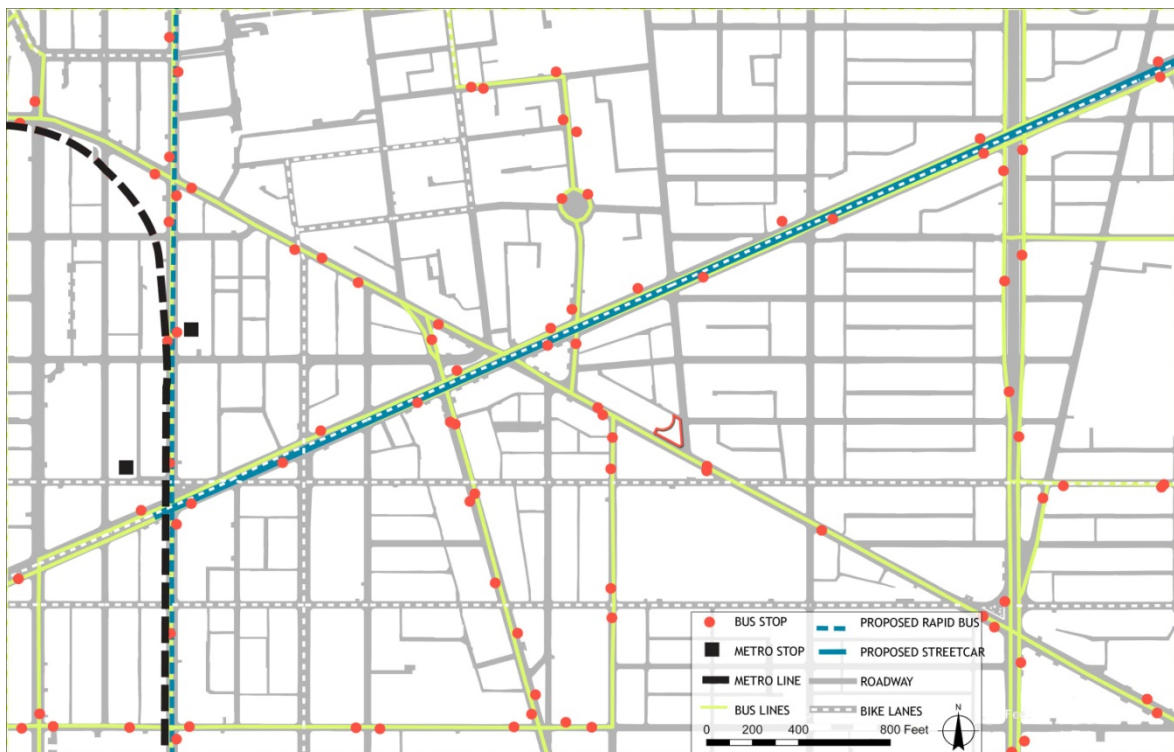


Figure 5-6: Transportation networks surrounding the site.

An analysis of zoning and land-use reveals the residential character of inner portions of the urban fabric and the commercial nature of the transportation corridors (Figure 5-7 and 5-8). Three primary zoning categories dominate the neighborhood: commercial, residential and institutional. A land-use map provides a greater level of detail to the zoning pattern. Parks and public uses are scattered throughout with a few industrial remnants of past development. This analysis reveals the scarcity of open space; much of the land designated as parks or quasi-public space is comprised of educational facilities. Many of these facilities are buildings, and thus cannot be accessed at all times.

The site straddles the line between commerce and community and must therefore unite these zones to function as an urban seam. These existing land-uses highlight the need for this site to serve as a public open space. This small public space could complement and serve as a central node for the surrounding residential, commercial and institutional uses. The abandoned building could be repurposed as a community space with a supporting commercial use; an idea which will be discussed as the design unfolds.



Figure 5-7: Zoning classifications surrounding the site.



Figure 5-8: Land-use surrounding the site.

The final contextual analyses focus on the *space between*. Figure 5-9 examines the relationship between roadways and parcels owned by individuals, the federal government and the city. The residual space between these areas occurs in the form of triangular parcels or widened sidewalks. Collectively, these spaces account for a large portion of the land cover, which, according to the Washington D.C. Department of Transportation (DDOT), can be redesigned through a permitting process. As the map reveals, narrow sidewalks dominate the Florida Avenue corridor. An enhanced site could encourage and facilitate pedestrian flows.

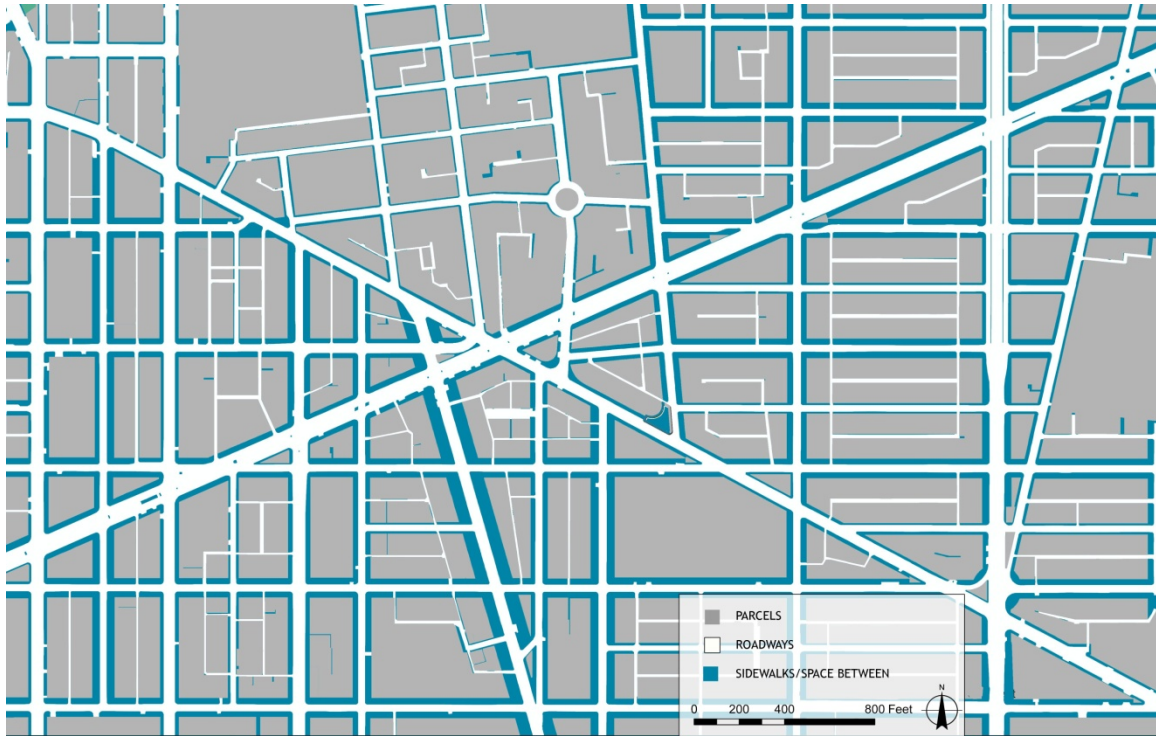


Figure 5-9: Public spaces as widened sidewalks surrounding the site.

While these spaces are defined as public space by the city, residual spaces owned by individuals also contribute to or detract from the architectural urban fabric. Odd shaped lots and small properties can contribute to a vibrant urban atmosphere as verdant, functional spaces. These areas have the potential to serve as public spaces which can be entered and used by passersby and residents.

Figure 5-10 maps wide disparities in the physical quality of these residual spaces. A figure-ground analysis highlights the strong building relationships and wide corridors through which enlarged sidewalks and residual triangular parcels were created. Four organizing categories provide insight to the character of these residual spaces along the primary corridors surrounding the site: public and active; public and inactive; private and active; and private and inactive. “Active” is defined as those spaces which are functional for pedestrians and aesthetically pleasing. “Inactive” implies the opposite. Several publicly owned lots function as active, lively spaces which enhance the character of the street. However, there are those left abandoned and derelict, such as the study site. The last two categories represent

sites owned by individuals which, due to their permeable edges and unprogrammed nature, function as public spaces. One of these lots is a circular park with trees, walkways and seating and serves as a small public space for the community.



PART II. DESIGN

After the design charrette, site analysis and examination of the larger urban area, three primary constituents arise: the local community, the greater, public Washington, D.C. community, and the Wong People Association. These interests provide a program and organization of the triangular site which will be manifested in the design (Figure 5-11).

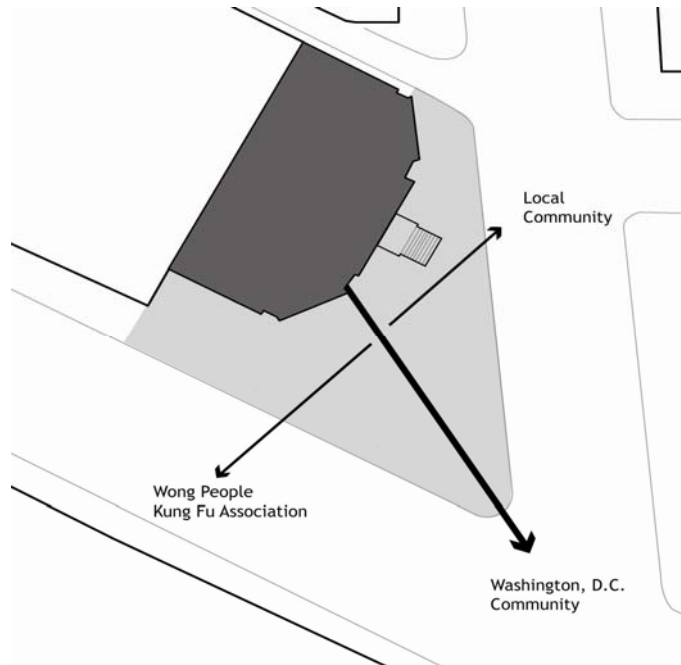


Figure 5-11: Site Concept

The designs presented in this section will address several scenarios which could occur over time. First, the site will be designed with the abandoned building as is. The intent of this temporary intervention is to make the site a lively, usable space which mitigates the physical effect of the derelict building and initiates further development of the corner. This phase of the design is critical in catalyzing further efforts and therefore, will be the focus of this section. Two future scenarios will be presented to explore the direction in which the lot could evolve after the initial intervention. All of these designs will focus on community inspiration and uses.

Five interconnected principles, informed by the case study and theory analysis, provide strength to the concept of this project: activation, collectivism, flexibility, reclamation, and seasonality (Figure 5-12). Manifested in both the product and process, these principles inform the design as well as its graphic representation.

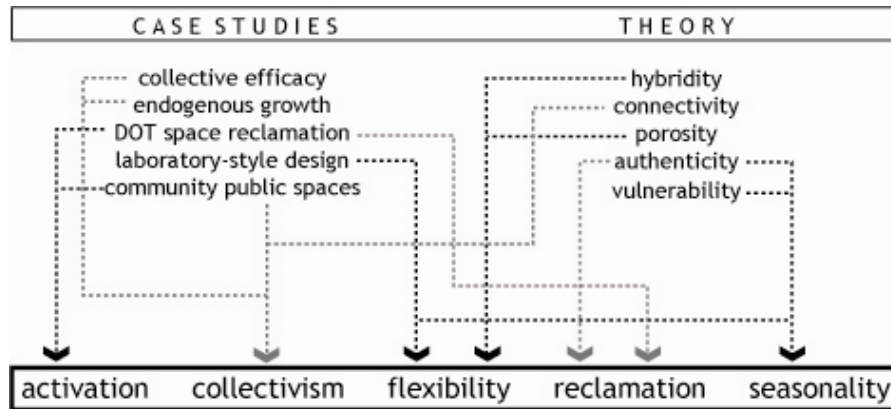


Figure 5-12: Origination of design principles.

The primary intent of this design is to activate the corner. Thus, **activation** is the driving principle. Currently the site is an eye-sore, projecting a negative impression of the neighborhood. The intent of this intervention is to infuse the corner with elements which will draw positive attention to the space. Vegetation, lighting, an enhanced ground-plane and bright colors serve this purpose. As the site bridges several neighborhoods, it can act as a gateway, marking the presence of these communities. The site is not a literal gateway with permanent signage, but one characterized by a variety of art pieces and temporary signs which serve this intent.

Activation can begin with small physical changes, rather than a complete design. This concept is similar to those explored in the case studies. In each case the entire project was not implemented at one time. The projects instead gained momentum incrementally with each new effort. Small steps can initiate fundraising efforts and gain community as well as city government involvement. The ground could be painted, several planters put into place and a portion of the lighting installed to bring about momentum for the project. These efforts can be implemented quickly and on a smaller budget while

working towards the final, public space design. Manifested physically, these actions communicate to current and potential collaborators that the site has begun to evolve and grow.

The community focus of this thesis is the basis for the second principle—**collectivism**. The site design and implementation, therefore, hinges on this principle. This term is used to describe any “moral, political, or social outlook that emphasizes the interdependence of every human in some collective group” (Chakrabarty 2009) and relates to the philosophical meaning —“the whole is greater than the sum of its parts/pieces” (Agassi 1960).

In the same way that small spaces such as this site could provide a larger impact on the urban fabric when viewed collectively, so can the individual elements of the design. The use of a mosaic paving pattern is a simple, literal manifestation of this idea. The small, colored tiles may not amount to much on their own, but as a whole, serve as a powerful and distinctive feature of the site.

The primary intent of this site design, to activate the corner, must also incorporate needs of the local community. The bamboo, mural and red color reflects the cultural influence of the Wong People Kung Fu Association. In response to this group’s need for urban garden space, three raised beds across from the headquarters are proposed. The open, center portion of the site serves as a practice zone for this organization and maintains the cut-through access desired by residents. The light fixtures, bright colors, and flexible public art space reflect the character and fulfill the desires of the immediate neighborhood. Each area of the sites relates to adjacent properties and seeks to complement existing community uses and establishments. For example the site could be used as a local market venue to complement and build on the farmers market one block away.

The concept of collectivism applies to the product as well as the implementation process. Currently, the project has support from the Kung Fu organization and Axis Mundi. Several additional organizations could provide strength to the design. These include the Washington, D.C. Planning Department, CapitalSpace Initiative, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC 5C), Bloomingdale

neighborhood group, Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaborative and various other nonprofits and art groups. The head of the local ANC 5C established Big Bear Café and brought a local farmers market to the once abandoned corner with his wife who is a landscape architect by training. By identifying people and organizations with similar interests, the project could be successful. Additionally, a diversity of experience levels is suggested. Based on Axis Mundi's mission statement and the academic inception of this design, a mix of students and educators would bring another perspective and expanded cooperation to the project.

Flexibility serves as a functional model for the design; materials can be modified and interchanged during the construction process and uses of the site can change with user needs. The site plan represents features which serve as flexible suggestions rather than inflexible specifications. These elements will vary based on the availability of materials during the implementation phase. Additionally, the involvement of collaborators and the design process is built on a loose, organic structure.

Various elements of the site design allow for flexibility of use. Proposed features such as the anchor poles of the overhead LED beams can be affixed with movable signs to highlight the neighborhoods, local organizations or events. The 2nd Street portion of the site has space for light and art installations by local artisans which can rotate throughout the year. Several corrugated metal panels can mitigate the dilapidated façade of the building and can also serve as an overhang by moving the panel with a hinge mechanism. The planters throughout the site can be painted different colors to enhance interest and highlight change.

The flexible design is programmed to meet the needs of multiple constituents. The Wong People Association can practice Kung Fu and Tai Chi in the large, flat portion of the site. A change in the paving pattern highlights the desire lines of passersby using the site as a cut-through. This design move does not split the site, yet provides a subtle visual cue to current activities on the site. The layout allows the

site to be used a local market venue for art, food or music. The stairs, which currently fragment the site, could be painted and used as a space for selling goods.

Several of the community members at the November charrette expressed concern about seating in the site as it may attract homeless populations. To increase the functionality of the site as well as respect this concern, several 18"x18" modular seats are proposed. These blocks are scattered throughout the site and their small size and variation in height prevents unwanted loiterers from sleeping on the site. Furthermore, as the site increases in aesthetic value and use, the issue of seating harboring undesirable activity will be diminished.

The fourth principle, **reclamation**, provides insight into both the material selection and intent of the design. This intervention will reclaim the vacant site for the local community as an asset, rather than a liability. The use that has and continues to take place on the site will be revealed. The 1992 photograph in Chapter two depicts the words "Kung Fu" on the now abandoned building. This design allows for rotating signage which could be used to bring back this element and reveal the cultural activities which take place on the corner.

Not only will the design reverse the vacant character of the site, but also the erosion of natural elements. The corner lot is almost entirely devoid of vegetation within and along the edges. Two street trees are absent from the grass plots and one is dead. The design proposes three new street trees to fill these spaces. A small planted bed provides a base to a steel trellis on the northeast portion of the site. This element mimics the building fenestration and integrates natural elements with an industrial, man-made structure. Planters and container gardens throughout the site bring plant life back to this space.

Additionally, the decrepit concrete prevents permeability, a condition which partially contributes to the degraded condition of the street trees. The porous paving pattern absorbs runoff and reveals the direction in which the water moves below the surface and connects the two street planters. If structural soils or soil cells are used, the integrity of the newly planted tree roots will be maintained.

The roof of the building can divert a significant amount of water into cisterns on the site to water the garden beds in the southwest corner of the site. Hydrologic systems are reclaimed on the site through a water catchment system and porous pavement.

All of the proposed features of the initial phase of the design will be derived from reclaimed materials. At this time, there are no permits or plans to develop the adjacent building. However, there is still uncertainty to the evolution of the corner's development. The materials should be inexpensive and interchangeable to allow for the possibility that the initial design installation is short-lived.

Donations and purchases from the Department of Public Works, Department of Transportation, various corporations, local nurseries and junk yards will be sought out. The concrete that will be removed from the ground-plane can be used in the proposed gabion which serves as a platform for vegetated planters. The planters can be made from reclaimed pipes from city infrastructure projects, shipping containers no longer in use and galvanized agricultural troughs from farms (Figure 5-13). These recycled and reused materials could lower the cost of the design as well support a sustainable model of construction.



Figure 5-13: Two examples of reclaimed materials which can be used as planters.
(left photo: http://www.asla.org/awards/2007/07winners/049_acla.html, right photo: Author)

Seasonality, the final principle, references the natural growth and evolution upon which cities are built. Temporal changes are encouraged and facilitated in this design. This principle supports Nan Ellin's statement—"just as cities have evolved organically over time, so must small incremental interventions to improve the urban landscape" (Ellin 2006, p.10).

The four seasons provide different aesthetic qualities and opportunities for use, as represented in the vignettes of the first year in the life of the design. Beyond the literal interpretations of the four seasons of a year, the concept of seasonality implies that urban sites change and evolve with the passage of time, users and neighborhood needs. The site can serve as a small public space until the community decides that a new use is necessary. An indefinite number of phases and seasons of use can follow the immediate intervention. Many factors will determine the development lifecycle of this corner, but two future scenarios will be presented. One scenario incorporates a new building which engages the public space and the other scenario envisions the site as a large green space. The site in each scenario serves as a public community asset which can facilitate economic growth, community connectivity and social cohesion.

The physical aspects of the five principles explained above are manifested in the plan of the site design, named "Northside Triangle" (Figure 5-14). The initial design seeks to lessen the impact of the abandoned building and enhance the space to serve local needs. As a hybrid plaza-sidewalk space, the edges are porous yet provide a sense of enclosure. The three corners of the site relate to the three constituents represented in the concept diagram. Five perspectives which span four seasons of a year highlight the potential uses of the site. Users can alter site features based on the time of day, events and weather conditions (Figure 5-15 to 5-19).

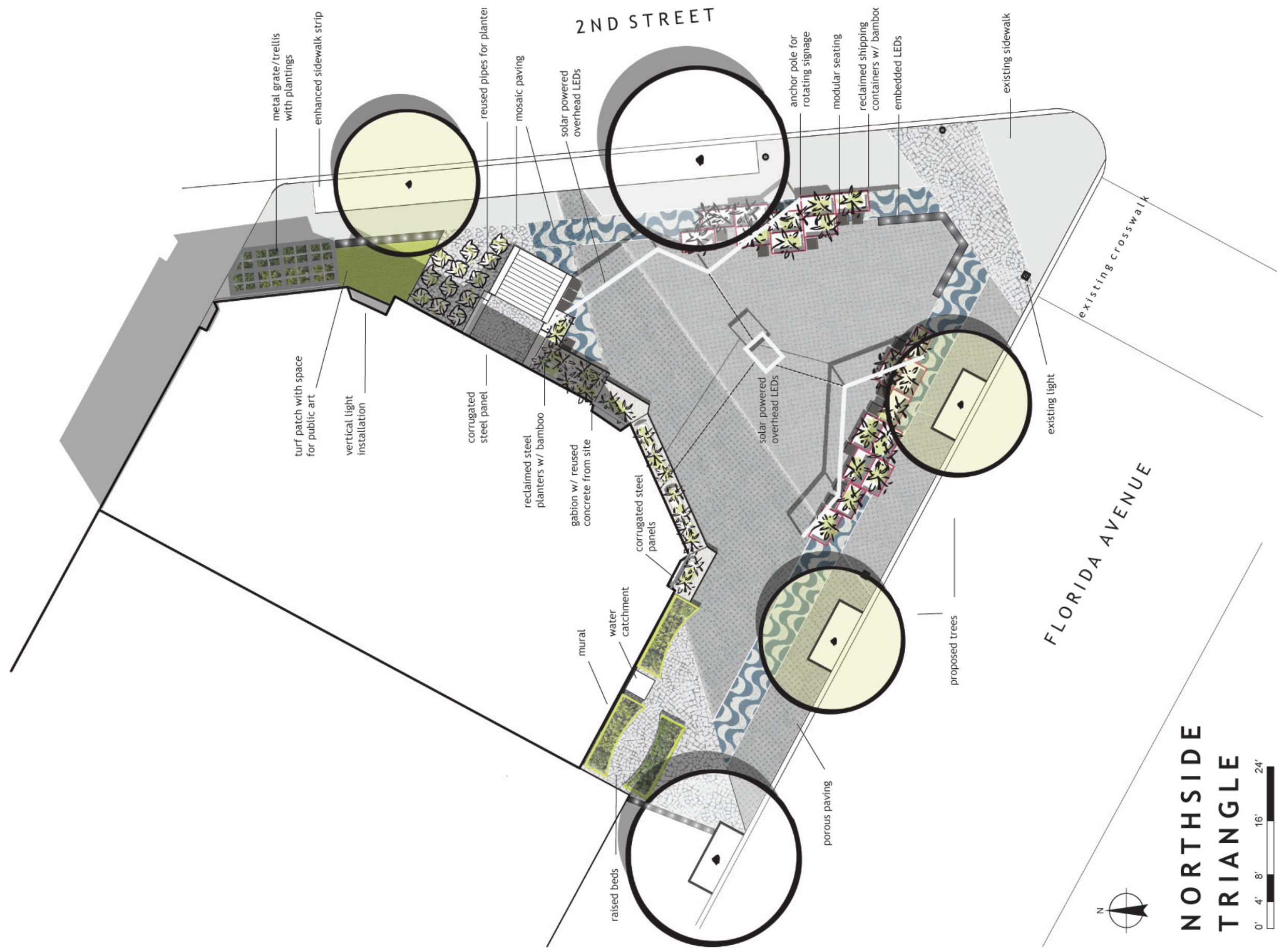


Figure 5-14: Site Plan: "Northside Triangle".



Figure 5-15: YEAR ONE -- SPRING. An open space for Tai Chi or Kung Fu practice.



Figure 5-16: YEAR ONE -- SUMMER. Local art on display and kids circled around an ice cream vendor.



Figure 5-17: YEAR ONE -- FALL. Autumnal market for the local community.



Figure 5-18: YEAR ONE -- WINTER. Lighted gateway and cut-through space for pedestrians.



Figure 5-19: YEAR TWO -- SPRING. Gardening in the raised beds.

The site can exceed its initial reach as a small public space to catalyze further development in the area. An analysis of surrounding uses which complement this site and those which could be improved highlights the constellated nature of this site design (Figure 5-20). The analysis in the previous section, evaluating active and inactive small spaces in the area, is incorporated in this figure. The principles garnered from the study site design could be applied to the underused or dilapidated sites, shown in red, within a five minute walking distance of the site and create a network of small, public community spaces.



Figure 5-20: A network of successful, complementary nodes to the study site and further opportunities for small, public space designs.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to surmise the resulting effects of this intervention, but rather to visualize the evolution of this corner. Two possible scenarios are presented here (Figure 5-21).

The first scenario hinges on a replacement of the existing building and expansion of the surrounding public space. In this scenario, the public space is more than half of the footprint of the building. The structure could house local groups, nonprofits and provide a physical space for ad-hoc meetings and events, all functions desired by the community in the November 2009 charrette. Similar to Tenderloin National Forest with the sponsoring nonprofit and art residency apartments adjacent to the space, a strong connection between the building and space would strengthen the corner.

As the adjacent lots are zoned for commercial use, a portion of the new building could be given to a local business with an adjoining outdoor café space. This would increase the hybridity and thus, vitality of the site. To provide an area for the outdoor café, the sidewalk could be expanded into existing parking spaces.

The current building does not fit with the historic character of the surrounding architecture and therefore does not need to be retained. The use of glazing employs a modern style for this urban infill development. The three faces of the site, depicted in the conceptual diagram, are manifested in the three faces of the building.

Another possible future trajectory of the site is to remove the building entirely and expand the space to serve as a small park. This park could complement the small triangular park one block away and provide much needed green-space in the area. A mural could be painted on the large adjacent wall and a sheltered structure would provide a functional space for community use. Figure 5-22 depicts examples of these elements found in nearby amenities.



Figure 5-22: Photographs of elements within walking distance from the site: two local parks and a mural painted on a building bordering a park. (Sara Fiore)

Both of these scenarios envision the site as a community asset. Whether comprised of a park, plaza, mixed use building or a combination thereof, this corner space can provide a social value and enhance the urban fabric of the neighborhood. A collaboration of designers, planners and local citizens can use this intervention to “tip the scales towards proactivity” (Ellin 2006, p.3) and give new life to a forgotten space.

CHAPTER 6

FUTURE POTENTIAL FOR THE SPACE BETWEEN

Proceed and be bold. Samuel Mockbee

The ‘design application’ of this thesis is, perhaps, misleading. The previous chapter has not presented a completed design, but rather, has initiated a first step to a process that is just beginning. The power of this design lies in implementation, as the crux of this strategy is to discover overlooked spaces and take action. Therefore, the challenge of this thesis is to move forward with input and collaboration from designers, nonprofits, city government officials and community members. After this step, the catalytic effect of this small design could be evaluated in this neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

In the same month in which this thesis was coming to a close, March 2010, a publication entitled *Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington, D.C.’s Parks and Open Space* was released. This report was published by the CapitalSpace initiative, a collaborative group comprised of the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Park Service and several other D.C. agencies. The purpose of the study is to address the need for parks and open spaces. One of the strategies outlined is directly in line with the intent of this thesis—to utilize the numerous small, triangular spaces across the city for open space. As the document states, the “sheer number and location of these small parks within neighborhoods provide an opportunity to improve the park system at a small, manageable scale with big results” (CapitalSpace 2010). This initiative recognizes these spaces as untapped resources which can be knitted together to magnify their impact.

The CapitalSpace initiative could serve as a funding source and organizational collaborator for this design. In the same way that San Francisco and New York City planning departments provide

support to small-scale design, this organization can provide an impetus to this site design in Washington, D.C. Another aspect that adds to the feasibility of this project is the fact that the site is deemed public space and therefore can be redesigned through a permitting process. The stipulations which guide this process are under found under the *Public Space Permits* section of the Washington, D.C. Department of Transportation website (<http://ddot.washingtondc.gov>).

One challenge to this design is the abandoned building. Raymond Wong, the head of the Wong People Kung Fu Association, knows Donald Williams, the owner. Yet, as of now, has not been able to determine what his development plans are. The design, however, has taken this uncertainty into account. It is the future scenarios which may not evolve as envisioned based on Williams' actions.

Several lessons have been garnered through this inquiry thus far. In designing a site adjacent to an abandoned building, the traditional scenario in which the site is an afterthought to the architectural design is reversed. The site itself, as a public, community space, has the potential to drive the future use and image of the building. This presents an opportunity to utilize small changes in the landscape to catalyze further development both within and outside the original site boundary.

There are several opportunities for further research. Additional research could be done to track the landscape changes in Hunts Point and Tenderloin neighborhoods across time. Both the Pavement to Parks and NYC Plaza Program are less than a year old and therefore many of the projects are not fully realized. Several years would be an appropriate timeframe in which to evaluate the success and reach that these programs have had.

Similar to the San Francisco and New York City programs, underused street space could be appropriated for pedestrians in Washington, D.C. In the neighborhood explored in this thesis, the short portion of R Street, N.W. bounded by 1st Street and Florida Avenue could be converted to public, pedestrian space. This area already takes on this role once a week during the Bloomingdale Farmers Market. If made a permanent open space, it could link the adjoining park and Big Bear Café. Another

roadway typology which permeates this urban neighborhood is the alley. The closed nature of these areas often increases the likelihood of illicit activities. However, these spaces could be designed to inhibit these activities and be both aesthetically pleasing and functional. Crispus Attucks Park, located several blocks from the site demonstrates this potential. This community park was created out of the center space of four adjoining alleyways.

This urban design strategy is not without limitations. Small-scale designs cannot serve as a panacea to revitalization challenges. Larger strategic efforts are necessary to comprehensively address urban development of cities. Additionally, the temporary nature of some of these designs allows for experimentation and activation, yet could set a precedent of reducing overall investment of public space. Parks to Pavement struggles with this issue. Yet without this program, San Francisco would be short a dozen vibrant pedestrian plazas. It is the assertion of this thesis that these spaces will grow in size and permanence throughout time.

The efficacy of small-scale design as a tool for revitalization has focused on three cities in the United States. However, there is an opportunity to apply small community-driven designs principles to other cities, both domestic and international. For cities with limited resources, especially those in developing countries, a strategy focused on implementable interventions may benefit neighborhoods that lack public space—a land-use type which seeks to meet the needs of all citizens, regardless of socioeconomic status. Public space is an area of physical development which can bridge the gap between disparate interests and be implemented through natural, incremental means.

Though designing small-scale spaces could be seen as insignificant disjointed efforts, much can be gained by approaching this type of design as a unified strategy. A loose organizational structure which values site-specific, community-driven designs can often be more effective and easily implemented than inflexible, large-scale master plans. Intangible effects can lead to further landscape improvements, which, when viewed collectively have a far-reaching effect on the urban condition.

As cities evolve, so must urban design strategies. These strategies respond to constraints considered in this thesis—limited resources, dwindling budgets and increasing residual space. A framework for action as well as future research leads the way for design of the *space between*. A systematic plan for these spaces coupled with contextual site-specific designs could benefit communities and cities as a whole. A new paradigm based on innovations and strategic action, regardless of scale, offers a fresh way to approach traditional urban design. This strategy can be strengthened by the convergence of diverse professionals—politicians, architects, planners, economists, and citizens themselves. As synthesizers and leaders, landscape architects can take on a proactive role and work within these fields. The goal of this thesis is to incite action to improve community landscapes and thus, the greater urban fabric, one unlikely space at a time.

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APPENDIX

Two documents produced at the November 22, 1009 charrette in Washington, D.C.



