

**ARCHITECTURE OF URBAN SPACES:  
A PROPOSAL FOR QUALITY URBAN DESIGN**

by  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Architecture

at  
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**DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis proposes a design that explores the transformation of inefficient urban areas into quality spaces. The relationship between urban space and people is fundamental to architecture and design, and it is the role of the architect to create quality spaces that encourage use, interaction, and a sense of community. Using Amherstburg, Ontario as an example, it investigates an approach to improving the urban setting and how the architect can influence the way people experience a space. With this approach, the project strives to create a vision for urban change where we can build on quality spaces and improve cities as a whole.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Philosophy

Architecture has the potential to create significant change in the way we live. It can be used to explore new ideas and possibilities in individual contexts and, as a result, cause noticeable transformations.

Architecture is about creating a sense of harmony between spaces and the individuals who use them. This notion of harmony is perhaps most important in an urban setting. The close proximity of these urban components makes it important for the architect to build off of surroundings and offer creations that will inspire and influence subsequent designs. In designing for this context, it is important to define the meaning of urban space.

In today's society, people tend to conceive space in terms of an empty volume. In an urban setting, this limits the definition of space to areas such as parks and courtyards. One can argue, however, that this definition is too restrictive. Any space located within an urban grid should be considered an urban space. Regardless of their level of efficiency, all aspects of a city such as parks, buildings, and streets are part of and operate together as a larger whole. The role of the architect as urban designer includes creating diverse spaces that function efficiently as individual entities and to maximize the relationship between spaces to facilitate their collective functioning.

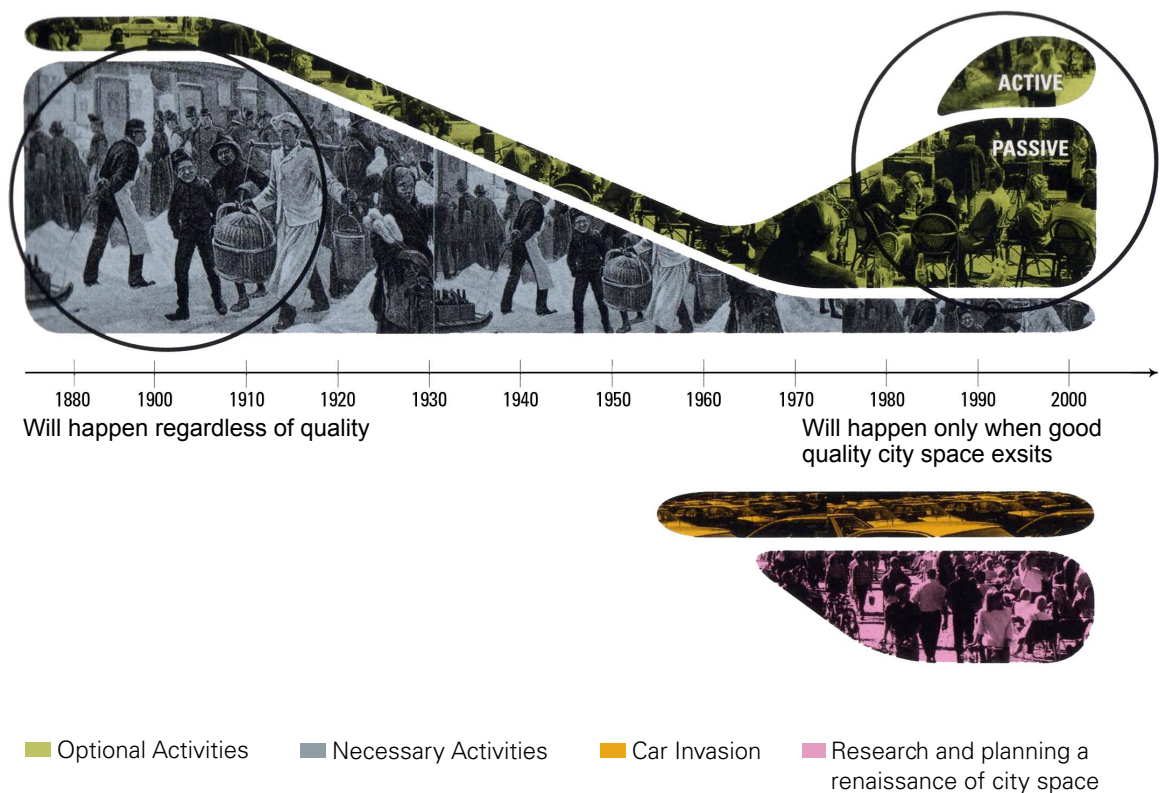
## Thesis Topic

At the foundation of this thesis lies the long term vision for what cities have the potential to become. It strives to emphasize the process of growth and development in terms of designing quality urban spaces. This is especially relevant to towns and cities that have experienced decline and decay. In order to realize this vision, we must consider “not only the visible image of the city and the sum of its different architecture, but... the construction of the city over time” (Rossi. 1984, 21).

Cities have played an important role in the development of society throughout history. Their unique compositions contribute to defining who we are and what we experience. As a result, the quality of spaces in an urban setting and the interaction between urban space and people are significant to the concept of design. How individuals perceive, use, and understand spaces is directly related to the attributes created through design and the way they are articulated to their audiences by the architect.

There is a fundamental difference between the cities of the past and those of today: necessity. In *New City Life*, the idea of the abandoned city is presented along with the notion that the use of city spaces is a matter of choice for the people of today's societies (Gehl et al. 2006, 10). There has been a shift away from the need to visit the city to access services and amenities. As a result, these spaces can become neglected and disused. In response to this problem, architects and urban planners must focus on producing efficient design in order to make urban spaces inviting and encourage individuals to return to the city centers that they no longer find essential.

Given that the success of an urban space is largely based on its use, architects must reflect on the characteristics that will instill quality into the space. Architectural form, texture, material, colour, the transition of light and shade must all be considered. In order to ensure that spaces remain desirable over time, attention should also be paid to the surroundings. The relationship between the space and its surroundings will play a significant role in the ultimate success of this space. If the vision is to facilitate the development of quality cities, a broader purpose and scope is needed. As Edmond Bacon States, “there should be skillful development of architectural energy so that the influence of fine buildings radiates outward, articulating the whole fabric of the city” (Bacon. 1974, 17).



Development of City Life  
(Gehl 2006, 9)



## References

The importance of quality when designing is well-recognized within the architectural community. The decisions made by an architect can make a significant impact on how a space is used and whether individuals will find enjoyment in it. By considering relevant conditions and characteristics of a space and the needs of individuals and the community as a whole, architects can discover efficient ways of incorporating them into the design of urban spaces. This helps to achieve a sense of cohesion and encourages the use of these spaces.

In studying this relationship between urban spaces and people, it is essential to draw on the knowledge and experience of individuals within the field of architecture. The contributions of Moshe Safdie, Kevin Lynch, and Jan Gehl have been instrumental in helping to define the meaning of effective and successful urban spaces. Their approaches and philosophies demonstrate the significance of incorporating a holistic view of usability into the design of spaces, which served as an important inspiration for this thesis. Together, the ideas and works of these influential designers offer a comprehensive methodology, which inspired the search for a solution to Amherstburg's current situation and has informed the resulting design of this project.

The relationship between urban design and design of the block has been a focus for this thesis. Urban design borrows from the above authors in searching for design principles that give guidance to individual design solutions.

## *Moshe Safdie*

We conceive architecture as a natural extension of its surroundings... and recognize its responsibility to contribute richly to its setting and enduringly to its community. (Safdie 2009)

Through his various contributions to architecture, Moshe Safdie has demonstrated his commitment to creating buildings with social value and humane environments. With a focus on city design, Safdie emphasizes the need to rethink the way we build cities and cultivate urban living and experience.

Safdie's latest book, *The City after the Automobile*, is largely a discussion on social theory. It addresses the technological advancements and changes that have occurred within the urban context and how architecture has not effectively embraced these changes. Through these observations, however, Safdie's vision illustrates his fundamental philosophy that architecture and the city are inseparable their interdependence impacts how each operates within the urban context and influences their collective success.

Many of Safdie's works illustrate a conscious effort to consider existing elements of the setting and how the new design interacts with the surrounding context. Examples include, the West Edge, Springfield Federal Courthouse, and Wharf Parks, which present very different urban designs that incorporate site characteristics, public space, and basic haptic qualities. He emphasizes people's desire for interactive spaces and responds with designs that support this relationship.

## *Kevin Lynch*

A highly imageable (apparent, legible, or visible) city... would seem well formed, distinct, remarkable; it would invite the eye and ear to greater attention and participation. The sensuous grasp upon such surroundings would not merely be simplified, but also extended and deepened. Such a city would be one that could be apprehended over time as a pattern of high continuity with many distinctive parts clearly inter-connected. (Lynch 1960, 10)

Kevin Lynch, renowned researcher and designer, has illustrated a profound interest in how individuals perceive and understand cities. As a result, he has contributed to the understanding of how to develop successful urban designs. A major strength in Lynch's philosophy is that he emphasizes the importance of continuity and recognizing how city elements relate to and depend on one another. No single urban space exists in isolation. It must successfully interact with its surroundings in order to create a collective image, thereby allowing it to function efficiently and contribute to a positive user experience.

One of Lynch's innovations was the concept of place legibility, the ease with which individuals understand the layout of a place. By introducing this idea, Lynch was able to isolate distinct features of a city and determine what makes it so vibrant and attractive to people. It is the interdependence of five basic types of elements – paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks – that help individuals establish mental maps of their cities and work to facilitate navigation and the creation of understanding. Lynch's theory prompts architects to consider the factors that influence city design in order to maximize its effectiveness and overall user experience.

## *Jan Gehl*

In a society becoming steadily more privatized with private homes, cars, computers, offices and shopping the public component of our lives is disappearing. It is more and more important to make the cities inviting, so we can meet our fellow citizens face to face and experience directly through our senses. Public life in good quality public spaces is an important part of a democratic life and a full life. (Project for Public Spaces 2009)

Urban Design Consultant, Jan Gehl, has focused on understanding how to design spaces that support and enhance people's experience with a public context. His research on the form and use of public spaces has been instrumental in demonstrating how small changes can create significant transformations.

Through his work, Gehl outlines an approach for evaluating city quality and provides recommendations for the design process that encourage active use of public space. Under his direction, Denmark's Centre for Public Space Research developed a list of twelve major quality criteria that create city spaces fulfilling three basic requirements: protection, comfort, and enjoyment. As a result of incorporating these attributes into a space, individuals are shielded from unpleasant experiences and conditions such as crime and insecurity. They also have the opportunity to experience their surroundings according to their unique needs and preferences and enjoy the space through various activities that engage the human senses. These criteria can be addressed in many ways; however, the fundamental message is that designers must examine both the physical environment and the people who use the space. Only then can appropriate urban design relationships be established.

## **Thesis Question**

In an effort to improve our cities and the way people experience them, how do architectural developments offer the opportunity to improve urban spaces? Do these designs have the potential to initiate greater change to the larger urban contexts in which they exist?

This thesis intends to examine an approach for improving the quality of urban living by investigating urban spaces from the perspectives of the city block, street, as well as the city as a whole.

## PRECEDENTS

### Copenhagen, Denmark



Louise Bourgeois' Spider Sculpture at Nytorv (2003)  
[Gehl 2006, 62]



Radhuspladsen Benches on Radhuspladsen and Garmeltorv  
[Gehl 2006, 87]



Storget Street  
[Gehl 2006, 115]

In 1962, designers began a transformation that would span decades and produce an urban centre celebrated as one of the world's best pedestrian cities. The change began with the tradition of main street. Originally dominated by cars, it was altered into a pedestrian-only space. Over the years, architects and city planners worked together to improve the quality of life for residents and make Copenhagen a people-friendly space. Decades later, an entire network of pedestrian streets was in place, and Copenhagen was recognized as a city that had made some of the most significant advancements in improving city space (Gehl 2006, 10).

The change to Copenhagen's design was a gradual process, but Jan Gehl emphasizes that the process followed a systematic approach to address the needs of the city's people. This transformation from a car-oriented place to a "reconquered city" that focuses on providing for the people who use the space was based on a ten-step program.

1. Convert streets into pedestrian thoroughfares;
2. Reduce traffic and parking;
3. Turn parking lots into public squares;
4. Keep scale dense and low;
5. Honour the human scale;
6. Populate the city core;
7. Encourage student living;
8. Adapt the cityscape to changing seasons;
9. Promote cycling as a major mode of transportation;
10. Make bicycles available.



Nyhavn Waterfront  
[Gehl 2006, 115]



City Bikes [Gehl 2006, 26]

Study and research has demonstrated that these gradual changes have created four times more public life in Copenhagen, which has greatly improved the overall quality of life for residents and visitors. In an effort to further illustrate the difference between spaces where conscious design elements were incorporated and those where they were not, researchers evaluated a representative selection of Copenhagen's city spaces in 2005 using the twelve key quality criteria identified by the Centre for Public Space Research. Results indicated that spaces meeting the most requirements were identified as the most popular and visited areas of the city. Space, that met few or none of the criteria, were the least visited sites (Gehl 2006, 106). These findings clearly support the notion that individuals see the use of city spaces as a choice. If a site does not present characteristics that address certain expectations or needs, they are unlikely to be utilized.



Copenhagen aerial view [Steensen]



## Portland, Oregon



Park path [Project for Public Spaces 2009]

Home to 1.5 million people, Portland has found a way to balance a busy urban setting with quality design. Portland has carefully designed its urban centre based on specific guidelines that govern development. The “Central City Plan Fundamental Design Guidelines”(1990) outline a series of specific quality criteria for Portland’s city spaces. The intent of this policy is to “encourage partnership between the public and private sectors to compliment the urban setting in the spirit of design excellence” (Gehl 2006, 63), and create a high quality environment for residents and pedestrians.



Sky Tram [Jewett]

In an effort to preserve Portland’s overall features, the guidelines focus on methods that help retain the shape and quality of its spaces. The use of unusually small city blocks is significant. In comparison to most cities, Portland’s blocks are very small, measuring 61 x 61 meters long. The shorter distances between street corners provide more opportunities for alternate routes to desired locations thereby minimizing pedestrian and vehicular congestion. The smaller block size also creates a more balanced relationship between buildings and spaces. This spaciousness also allows more light and air into the city’s core, which encourages the use of squares, parks, and other outdoor spaces.

The pedestrian priority strives to promote urban design that creates a quality environment not dominated by vehicles. Public spaces are well-defined, friendly and safe, and a conscious effort has been made to link pedestrian areas throughout the city. Features such as wide sidewalks, attractive surfaces, and places to stop and rest are incorporated. A significant component of Portland’s success is its approach





Portland streetscape [Rail]

towards accommodating navigation through the city. The public transportation system includes a series of buses and tram lines that are free to passengers within the city centre. This encourages individuals to take advantage of this amenity, thereby reducing the amount of parking needed within this area.

The design of individual buildings and structures within the city are governed by guidelines that ensure projects are based on quality and consider their surroundings. The relationship between buildings and public space and the transition between interiors and outdoor space must be addressed to ensure both visual and atmospheric continuity.

These guidelines have established an urban environment that is very different from the norm. New developments must consider the individuals for which they are intended, and Portland has discovered how to unite urban efficiency with quality in ways that benefit both the city and its people.



Portland aerial view [Gehl 2006, 61]

## Lessons Learned

Copenhagen and Portland are both good examples of positive change that can occur as a result of deliberate and attentive design. The specific actions taken within Copenhagen and Portland were based on the use of specific qualities that produce a shared place capturing the attention and interest of residents and visitors. These spaces welcome individuals and encourage them to participate in the variety of urban activities made possible through effective design. The efforts of the architects and planners resulted in the creation of forums that facilitated a sense of community and provided a place where people want to gather. While this is certainly a commendable achievement, it is important to note that these changes were gradual. In both cases, modifications have happened in stages over time and have slowly developed and expanded. It is essential to recognize the significance of even the smallest change such as the introduction of more bike racks and trees because they help to produce a large overall impact.

Using these examples, there is an opportunity to investigate the rejuvenation of other urban spaces. There is considerable value in establishing successful city centers. In 1943, during a meeting in the House of Lords, Winston Churchill stated, “we shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us”. This speaks strongly to the meaningful relationship between people and their urban surroundings, which emphasizes the importance of successful design.

## PLACEMAKING

The goal of good urban design can perhaps be best summarized as placemaking, a concept originating in the 1960s to describe the process of creating spaces such as parks, streets, and waterfronts that attract individuals because they are enjoyable and interesting. According to Project for Public Spaces (PPS), “placemaking capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, ultimately creating good public spaces that promote people’s health, happiness, and well being” (PPS 2009). The importance of a concept such as placemaking rests on the fact that present day urban design is often based on the perspective of a few individuals despite the fact that the result of a project will impact the lives of hundreds or even thousands.

Edmond Bacon’s discussion of architecture in *Design of Cities* further supports the notion of placemaking. He speaks to the strength and value of defining spaces in ways that help establish its purpose and communicate the intended atmosphere. “It is one thing to delimit space by structural devices such as walls. It is quite another to infuse the space with a spirit which relates to the activities that take place in it and which stirs the senses and emotions of the people who use it” (Bacon 1974, 18). Urban design is a conscious activity that addresses specific needs and helps individuals create meaningful associations with place.

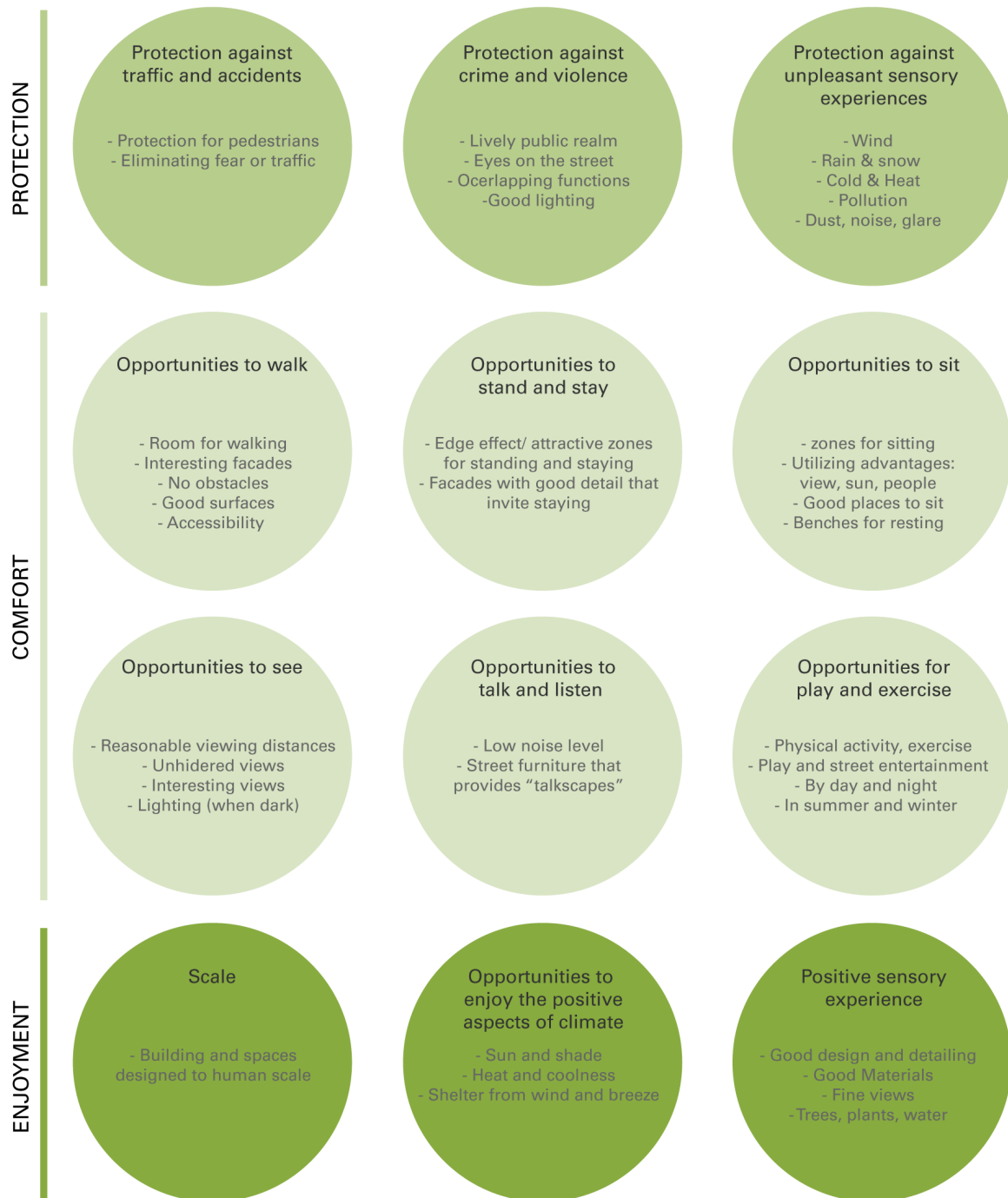
## **Evaluating Placemaking**

Although most architects and planners can agree on the value and importance of quality in terms of design, the definition of this quality can take many forms. Awareness of what constitutes a successful place is essential in order to evaluate the success of a design. In the context of this project, two individuals were referenced and applied to the proposed design.

Kevin Lynch's five elements of city form provide a useful means of understanding the general town scale of Amherstburg. Through his research, Lynch demonstrates the value of considering the presence of paths, landmarks, nodes, edges, and districts and of making a conscious effort in designing these elements to facilitate positive urban experiences. Because these elements influence how individuals interact with and navigate through a city, their existence is vital. Lynch argues for components that must be considered and addressed when designing for urban contexts. His list of elements is a simple but useful guide to help in the design process.

To evaluate the success of his own designs, Jan Gehl developed a series of key quality criteria that help define project results. The twelve criteria address the complete urban experience and evaluate a design's ability to provide individuals with protection, comfort, and enjoyment by outlining guidelines and suggestions on how to achieve the ideal urban space. Related to design evaluation is Gehl's philosophy of project implementation. While the goals and objectives of a project must be clear from the outset, Gehl argues that a gradual, phased approach should be used to execute the

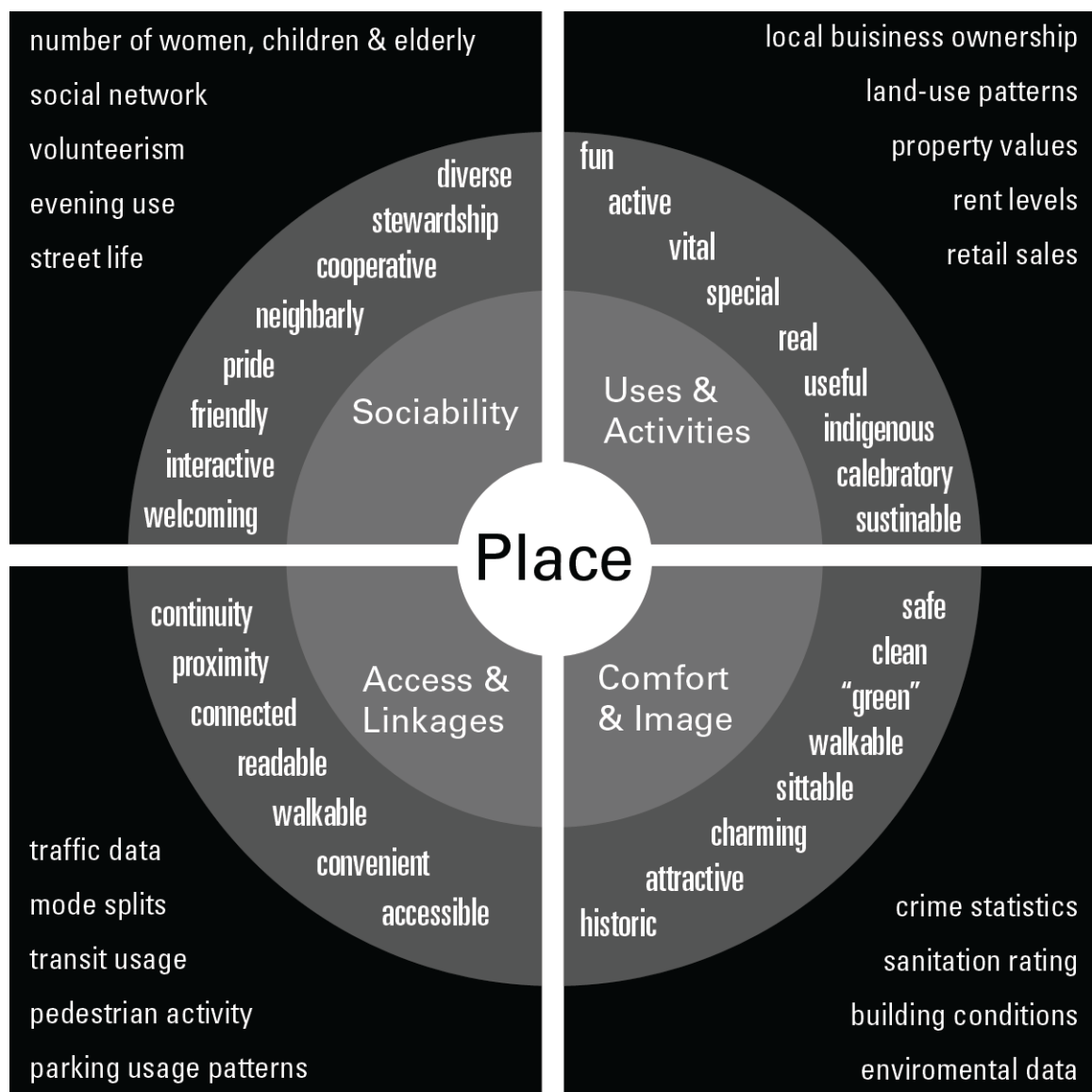
plan. This allows designers to measure the impact of small changes based on the application of the 12 quality criteria and the reactions of individuals interacting with the space.



12 Key Quality Criteria  
[Gehl. 2006, 107]

## Design Considerations

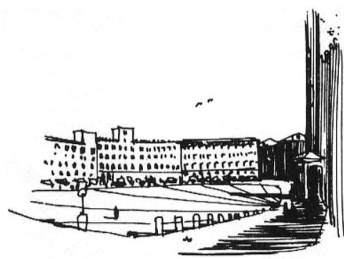
Effective urban spaces depend on a series of important design considerations. Leveraging the opinions, knowledge, and experiences of Kevin Lynch and Jan Gehl, a series of guidelines or considerations for achieving effective urban spaces was developed. The intent of this exercise was to identify some important ideas to reflect on when creating a design.



Explaining placemaking  
[Project for Public Spaces 2009]

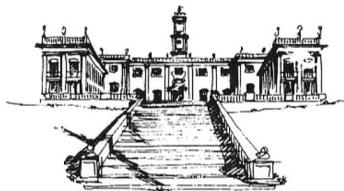
## *Sociability*

It is important that urban settings are welcoming and inviting. Urban spaces should, therefore, be designed with qualities that encourage and promote social interaction. This interaction should occur with physical components of the space as well as with other individuals using the space. Specific steps that can be taken to facilitate the sociability of an area include the following:



Quality not size  
[Spreiregen 1965, 10]

- Emphasize public spaces and services by placing buildings such as libraries, community centres, police and fire stations, and government offices as well as squares and courtyards in central and visible locations. This will create a civic focus that will help to encourage a sense of community and identity.



Create a focal entry  
[Spreiregen 1965,17]

- Focus on quality not size. The ability to care for open spaces must be manageable. Urban open spaces should be a source of pride.

- Welcome people into key spaces and buildings by creating a focal entrance.

- Create focal points using open spaces by locating them strategically within the urban setting to attract individuals and encourage use.

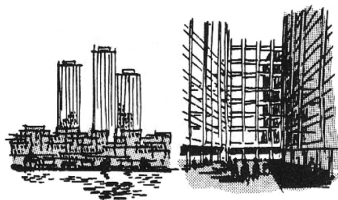


Create focal points  
[Spreiregen 1965,55]

## *Uses and Activities*

The success of a space is closely linked to its usability. How a space is used is largely determined by the design approach used. It is, therefore, essential to consider possibilities and incorporate components that accommodate a variety of uses and activities. This diverse design scope will encourage individuals to enjoy the space. Methods that can be applied to help establish this diversity include the following:

- Consider the characteristics and orientations of nearby buildings, which can influence access to the space and define the scope of activities it can accommodate.
- Incorporate elements such as seating, paths, public art, fountains, vegetation and landscaping to enhance various uses for the space and create relationships to surrounding components of the urban setting (e.g. buildings, other open spaces, adjacent blocks).
- Set guidelines for new developments established around open spaces to prevent the height, size, and shadows from negatively impacting the space and the activities for which it is used.
- Create buildings with both a front and back façade. One may be the more prominent street-face; however, the rear of the building can be designed to face onto a public space. This will encourage the use of all urban real estate and reduce the possibility of poorly used back alleys forming.
- Create an environment that allows people to benefit from the variety of available activities and opportunities. This means considering both the pedestrian and the driver.



Front and back façade  
[Spreiregen 1965, 77]

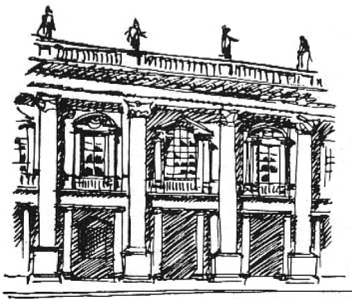


Create an environment  
[Spreiregen 1965, 60]



## *Comfort and Image*

Spaces that are comfortable and inviting are obviously more appealing and are more likely to encourage individuals to use them. Characteristics that create a particular impression and an atmosphere of security and comfort should, therefore, be incorporated into a space. This positive association attracts individuals and promotes its use, which leads to a more vibrant setting. Approaches that can help build associations of comfort and image include the following:



Appealing features  
[Spreiregen 1965, 17]

- Incorporate visually appealing features into urban structures and spaces such as interesting façades that include display windows and large patios and seating areas that extend from buildings. Collectively, these elements establish a sense of character.

- Consider the type of vegetation that exists or will be added to the urban landscape in order to understand the impact it will have on access to sunlight and shadows.

- Create focal points both on a large urban area scale (e.g. through the positioning of streetlights, benches, and trees) and for individual buildings and structures (e.g. awnings, roof forms, and choice of building materials).

- When possible, reuse existing structures that are consistent with the overall atmosphere and identity of the area (e.g. historic buildings) or integrate materials that are characteristic of the area into new developments.



Maximize walkability  
[Spreiregen 1965, 127]

- Strive for the 200-foot block structure, which maximizes walkability. This may mean introducing new streets to resize

small blocks or opening paths and spaces to help break up larger blocks.

- Resize lot lines to a width of 25 feet to help densify the urban setting and prevent large scale developments from overpowering the downtown core.

### *Access and Linkages*

While the specific characteristics of an individual space must be considered to ensure its quality and success, its consistency and relationship to surrounding areas, must also be addressed. Aspects that create a physical or visual connection with surrounding spaces or establish a cohesive identity within a space establish a strong and meaningful design. Ways of promoting access and linkages include the following:



Enhance pedestrian network  
[Spreiregen 1965, 69]

- Provide access to and through nearby waterfront properties in the form of walking and bike paths, seating and picnic areas. This enhances the pedestrian network and urban connection to spaces that would otherwise remain separate.



Visual connection with surroundings  
[Spreiregen 1965, 62]

- Orient windows, balconies, and rooftop terraces towards views of water or green space to provide a visual connection with these amenities.

- Develop buildings to incorporate visual connections with surrounding buildings (e.g. window style, balconies, rooftop terraces) and spaces (e.g. architectural and sculptural elements, sidewalk brick patterns, vegetation and landscaping) to communicate a common theme. Old and new elements of

the block should maintain a similar scale and quality through the use of materials, patterns, design styles, and colours. Creating stylistic contrasts can also establish consistency.



Use of sidewalks  
[Spreiregen 1965, 69]

- Design buildings that will encourage the use of sidewalks and, therefore, promote pedestrian activity. This may be accomplished by incorporating large windows and doors and sheltered areas for outdoor seating. Placing entrances to residential buildings on the ground level will also contribute to more foot traffic.

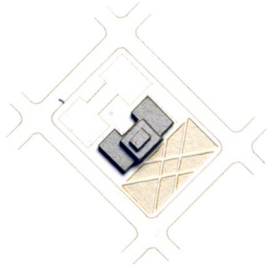
- Use the relationship between open space and built space to compliment the block size. It is important to find a balance that creates the appropriate amount of urban density without creating a sense of overcrowding and confusion.



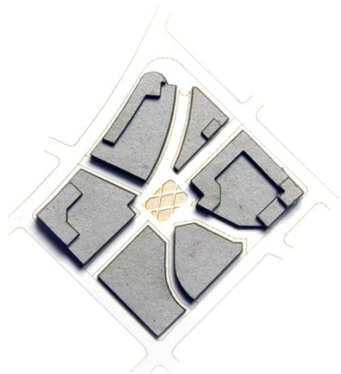
Create a common scale  
[Spreiregen 1965, 78]

- Use built elements such as the sizes of buildings and their individual components (e.g. awnings, signage) to create a common scale that is proportioned to the surrounding context and the block size.

## *Typology of Spaces*



Square centered on key civic building



Court located at block interior



Circus at street intersection



Plaza as extended forecourt space

Within an urban setting, open space can appear in a variety of forms. The important consideration is ensuring that the form is aligned with the intended use and addresses the needs and characteristics of the urban fabric in which it is found. Urban Design Compendium outlines a series of open space types, which are based on location. The purpose of classifying open spaces is to be cognizant of the distinct characteristics and functions associated with a particular type. This facilitates the design process by helping to identify the appropriate type of space for a given setting.

## *Block Types*

As a result of examining the typology of open spaces outlined in Urban Design Compendium, a study of possible block types for the Amherstburg design project was completed. The intent was to investigate options to determine the best method of developing the project site in terms of access, privacy, sunlight, and the type of street fronts resulting from the design. Each of the styles are defined by its form, which is established through the relationship between the physical urban block, the positioning of the buildings along the perimeter, and the resulting interior space.



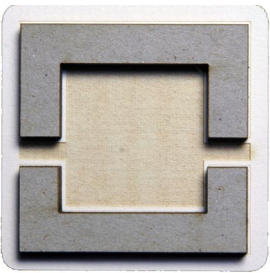
#### Fully-enclosed

A private urban space is created at the interior of the block. This keeps individuals protected from the street and traffic and provides some refuge from the urban setting.



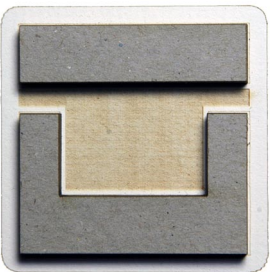
#### Common access

The interior space is easily accessible from all surrounding streets, which encourages public use of the space.



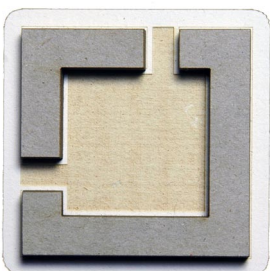
#### Semi-enclosed

A partially-segregated space is created by restricting access to the interior square from only two of the four surrounding streets. Positioning of the buildings can impact the amount of privacy (i.e. openings may be located on busy streets or quiet streets).



#### Pass-through

The position of buildings creates a focal path that opens to a larger urban space. The majority of traffic will appear along this path; however, this will increase the likelihood that individuals use the square.



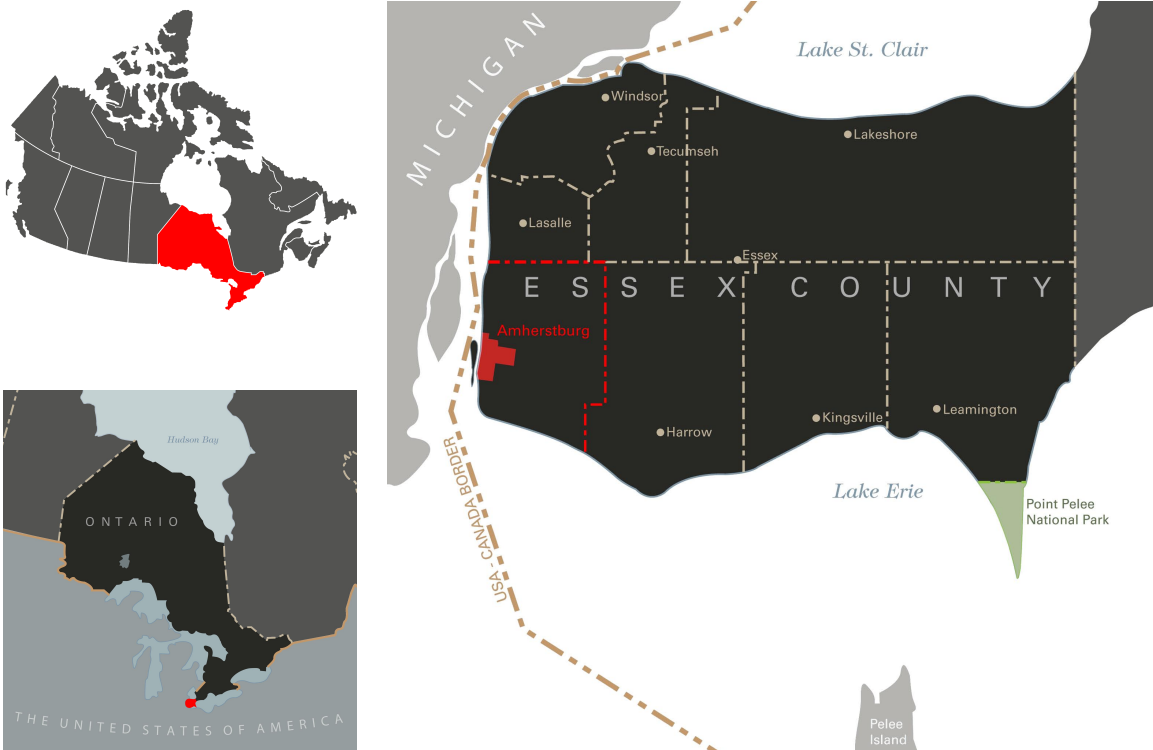
#### Controlled access

Access to the interior urban space is restricted to designated openings, thereby reducing the amount of pedestrian traffic and creating a less active space.

## UNDERSTANDING THE THESIS SITE

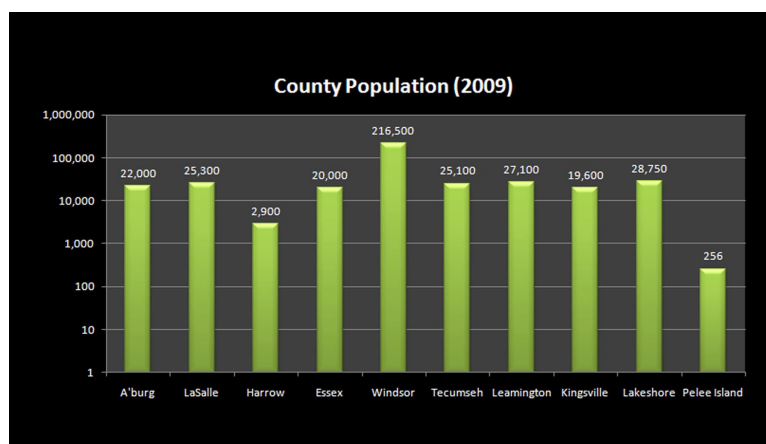
### Amherstburg

The Town of Amherstburg is found within the County of Essex, located in the most southwestern region of Ontario. Situated along the west bank of the Detroit River, it is approximately 25 kilometers south of Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan. Amherstburg is connected to the greater Windsor area via a highway that allows transportation between the two urban centers in less than 30 minutes. Amherstburg is also in close proximity to some of the Essex County region's popular tourist attractions such as the Caesars Windsor Casino, Leamington's Pelee Island and Point Pelee National Park, and the South Western Ontario Wine Route.

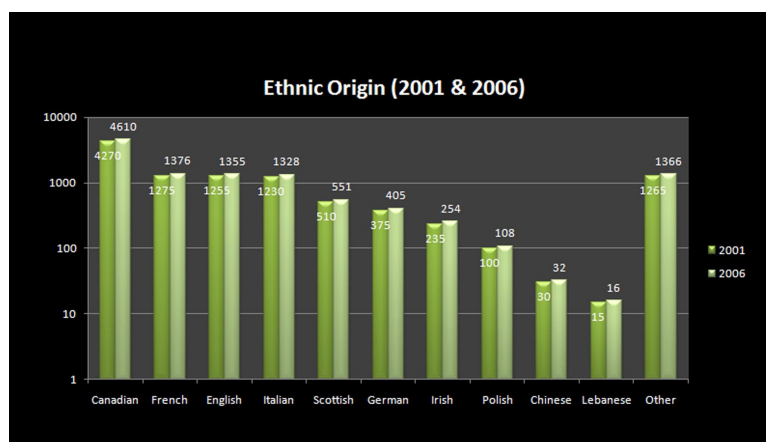


Geographic context: Amherstburg is located in Essex County found in the southwestern most region of the province of Ontario. It occupies the western shore of the county along the Detroit River and across from Michigan, USA.

Amherstburg's urban population is currently 22,000. This is twice the number of residents needed for a municipality to become eligible for city status according to the provincial government. The town's population has increased steadily over the years and has had a projected average annual growth rate of 1.39% over the last decade. This is higher than both the national and provincial averages. The physical boundaries of Amherstburg have also expanded over the years, which have contributed to the overall growth in population. The town's population is also quite multicultural. While the majority of Amherstburg residents report their ethnic origin as "Canadian," French, English, and Italian are the largest ethnic groups in the area.

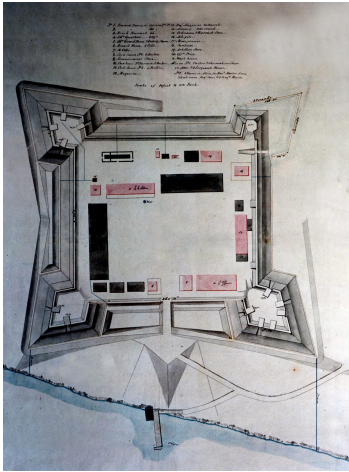


[2009 Community Profile Town of Amherstburg]



[2009 Community Profile Town of Amherstburg]





Fort Malden  
[Marsh Collection Society]

Amherstburg is one of the oldest towns in southwestern Ontario and, therefore, one of significant historical value. As early as 1640, missionaries and French explorers are known to have paddled down the Detroit River along what is now Amherstburg. A site of significant historical importance, the town, its dockyard, and the original Fort Amherstburg, which was constructed in 1796, played a strategic role in the defense and development of Upper Canada. The original Fort was destroyed by the British then occupied by the Americans from 1813 until 1815 when the British regained control of the area. Fort Malden was built as a replacement in 1838 and played a vital role in the British defense during the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837-1839. Amherstburg was among the first towns to become an independent “village with town powers” when the Municipal Act was passed in 1851.



Black Historical Museum

Amherstburg also played a significant role in other historical events. For example, its location at the narrowest point on the Detroit River made the town a major link in the underground railway used by black slaves escaping to Canada from the United States. The North American Black Historical Museum, located in Amherstburg, celebrates this important history. The thriving rum-running operation on the Detroit River during the prohibition era of the 1920s also made the town an important export centre.



View of The Detroit River  
[Marsh Collection Society]

Beginning as a small settlement, Amherstburg has experienced significant growth since its inception. Over the years, it slowly expanded to include much of the surrounding area. The following maps illustrate the town’s expansion from 1796 to 2009. Accounts of Amherstburg and its growth illustrate that, at one time, it was progressing and appeared to hold much promise in becoming a key municipality.

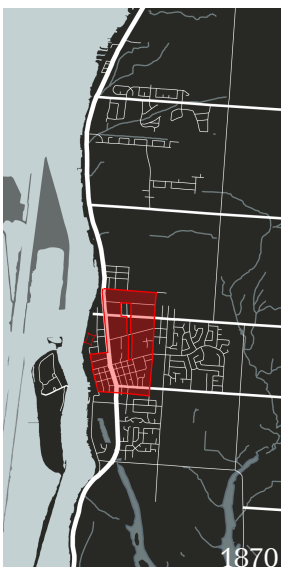




- Amherstburg was established as a British military fort (1796)
- The town is used as base to capture Detroit (1812)
- Amherstburg becomes a vital link in the Underground Railroad (1786)



- Approximately 400 blacks living in the town as a result of the Underground Railroad (1832)
- Municipal Act passed making Amherstburg one of the first towns to be incorporated as a "village with town powers" (1851)



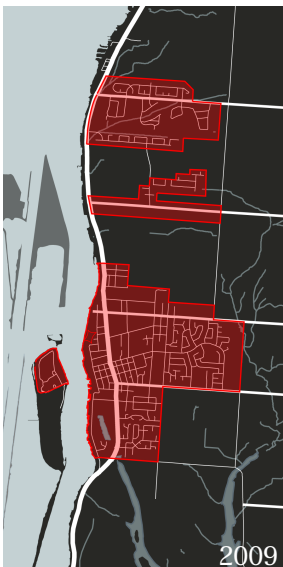
- Amherstburg Echo newspaper founded (1874)
- First train left Michigan Railroad Station in Amherstburg (1896)
- Gordon Station built near town centre (1892)
- Michigan Central Railroad line extended into Amherstburg from the Gordon Station (1894)



- First annual Art by the River (1967)



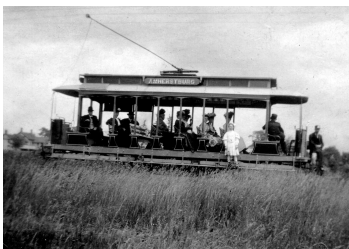
- Amherstburg Echo sold to Bowes Publishing Ltd (early 1990s)  
 - Amherstburg amalgamated with townships of Anderdon and Malden (1998)



- First annual Shores of Erie Wine Festival (2006)



Stagecoach (1848-1907)  
[Marsh Collection Society]



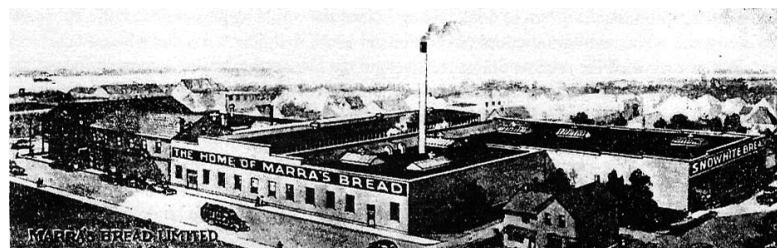
Amherstburg Streetcar (1903)  
[Marsh Collection Society]



First Bus in Amherstburg  
(1938)  
[Marsh Collection Society]

One of the biggest differences between the Amherstburg of today and that of the past is its transportation. The 1800s was a period when the town witnessed some significant developments in terms of transportation. From 1848 to 1907, Amherstburg had four regular stagecoach services connecting residents to nearby towns and to Windsor and Detroit. In 1872, a railway terminal was constructed one mile from the town and was extended into Amherstburg in 1894. This service continued until September of 1923. Streetcars emerged in 1903 and provided transportation services within the town and to neighbouring areas. They were replaced by buses in 1938 and within 5 years, there were 27 southbound and 28 northbound daily weekday busses arriving in Amherstburg. These developments illustrate the transition to more efficient methods of transportation and the movement towards meaningful urban growth. By the late 1960s however, busses were eliminated. Despite the expansion of the town, public transportation has never been reinstated.

The focus of economic development in Amherstburg has not changed very much over the years. Manufacturing has been the main industry in the town, with a large percentage of the workforce, over 30%, still employed within this sector. This industry, however, is not as vibrant as it once was. Many factory closures have resulted in a shift in the town's economic focus and contributed to economic decline. Other sectors such as the wine industry have worked to give new life to the area.



Marra's Bread Factory [Marsh Collection Society]

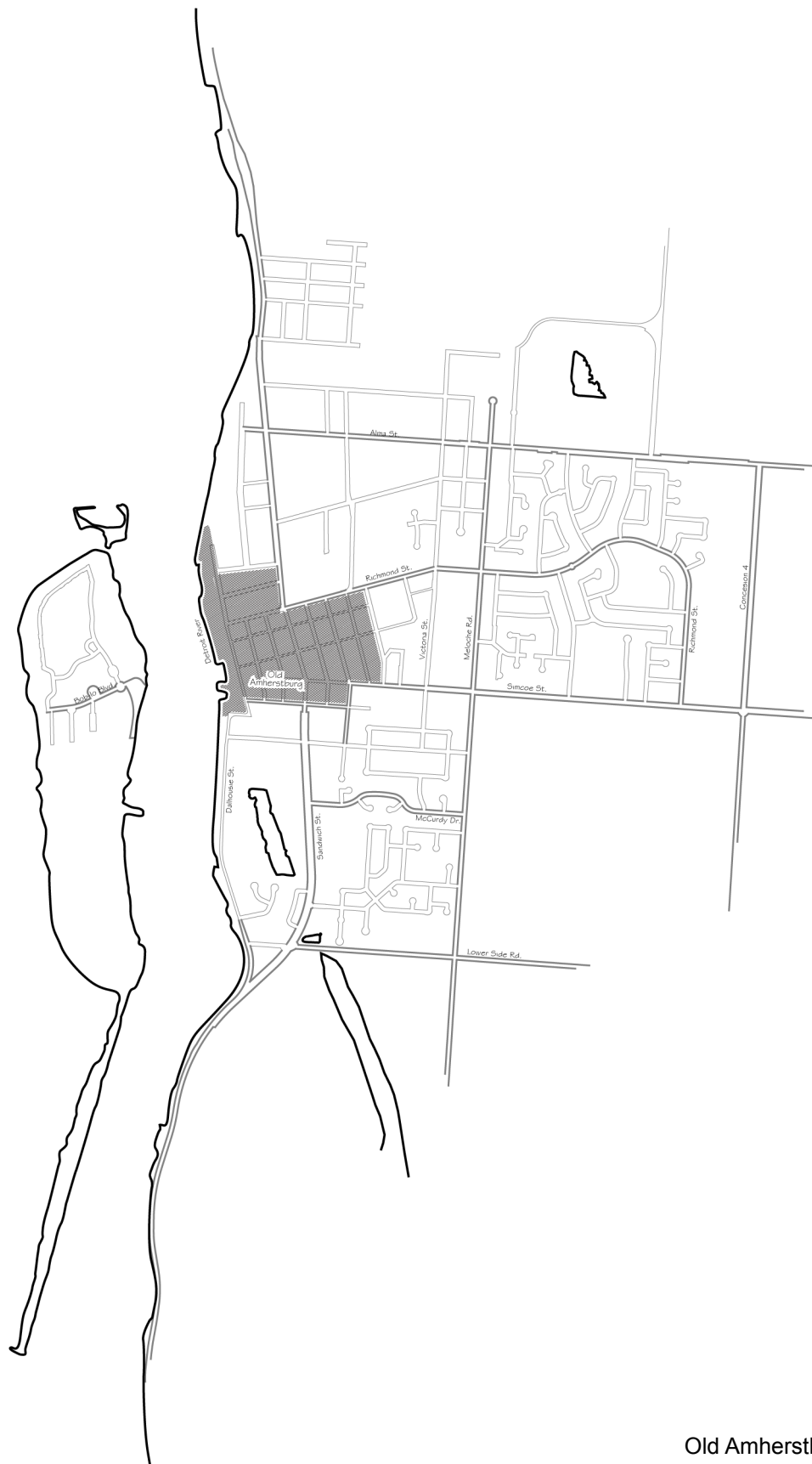


In order to understand the relevance of Amherstburg, it is necessary to perform a more detailed study of its urban components. This investigation provides a deeper understanding of the existing conditions and how to best proceed with the proposed design. The results of this analysis are outlined in the following section, and explain Amherstburg's urban context in terms of three separate scales: the town, the block, and the street.

## **The Town**

The relationship between a design and its surroundings is a significant consideration. To begin defining this relationship in the context of this project, an analysis of Amherstburg at the general town scale was initiated. The goal was to gain a better understanding of the larger urban fabric in which the proposed development would exist. This insight formed the basic framework for the design in order to create something that would support and be supported by its environment.

Since its inception, Amherstburg has experienced much growth. For the purposes of facilitating a more focused study, an attempt was made to define a specific area of the town that was most relevant to the topic of this project. After reviewing the history of the town's expansion, the decision was made to focus on a district called old Amherstburg. This refers to the original boundaries of the town before it began amalgamating and expanding into the surrounding area. Given that the goal of this thesis is to investigate ideas associated with successful urban spaces, it seemed logical to focus the study of the site on the central urban grid.



Old Amherstburg

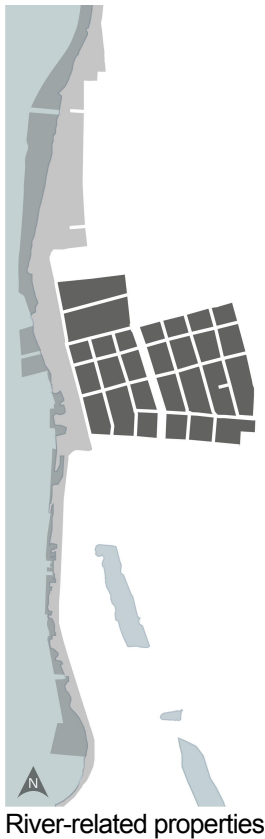


In addition to the old Amherstburg district, there are other clearly defined regions of the town and it is interesting to note their placement around the focal district of this project. The physical characteristics of an environment have a significant impact on how individuals perceive an area and interact with it. As a means of better understanding the existing condition of this environment, a visual analysis of the town was developed based on Kevin Lynch's concept of key urban elements including paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks. By identifying these major and minor elements, one can begin to form an idea of the town's visual form and how individuals navigate through this urban area.

In relation to Lynch's discussion of elements, a review of this visual study brings several details to light. The paths within Amherstburg are mainly streets, which promotes a vehicle dominated area. Although pedestrian paths do exist, they are limited and often become secondary because they are not designed as part of a coherent network. Landmarks appear to be scattered through the area and are generally not connected to pedestrian paths, which could be used to enhance the experience of navigating through the town. There is also an overall lack of nodes in Amherstburg, aside from the intersections of the more well-used streets.

Lynch emphasizes that the most successful urban spaces combine all five elements. Collectively, these components form an interesting and engaging space that creates a positive experience for those who interact with it. Within Amherstburg, the waterfront district, located at the town's edge, is the best example of this achievement. Here, there are examples of prominent streets and pedestrian paths and recognizable landmarks.





It is also located at a key intersection between Richmond and Dalhousie Streets. In comparison to other areas in the town, this area experiences more activity. Individuals use this space frequently and it is often the site of local events. This clearly illustrates Lynch's argument and provides a business case for designing urban spaces that include the five elements.

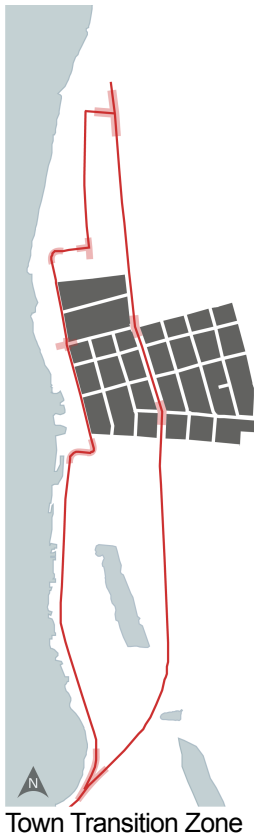
It was also important to examine individual characteristics of the urban context to gain a more thorough comprehension of the resources, amenities, activities, and physical infrastructure existing within Amherstburg.

Given that Amherstburg is located along the Detroit River, a series of river-related properties are situated along the western edge of the town. These properties offer a different type of environment compared to the block form that exists throughout the rest of the area. These perimeter lots include both land and water properties that create a distinct border of various shapes and sizes along and extending from the shoreline. The properties have experienced some transformation over the years, but have continued to be important strategic sites that greatly impact the activities of the town and especially the downtown core.



A study of the urban block form of Amherstburg indicates that the downtown structure is a unique angled pattern that is set back from the river's edge. The blocks create an ordered grid with streets oriented north to south. This highlights the importance of Dalhousie Street, which runs along the river-front and fills the gap between the Navy Yard Park and the urban block form.

Within Amherstburg, the transition zone is the area between

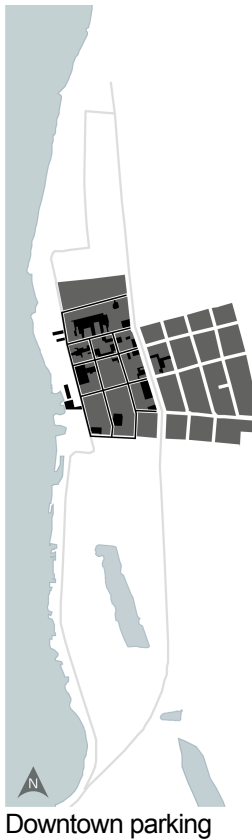


the waterfront district and the outer urban grid that leads to a relatively dense commercial area and bleeds into the surrounding residential space. It is within this transition zone that you begin to see a change in the town's configuration. There is a gradual reduction in the density of the area as you move east, away from the water, and the space between buildings begins to grow. What is significant is that many of Amherstburg's unique establishments such as small specialty shops, restaurants, and historic sites, locations that correspond to the town's cultural and historic urban identity, exist within the transition zone. Unfortunately there seems to be a lack in the connection of this area to the space outside of this zone.

Downtown Amherstburg is not an extremely dense area. There are, however, enough buildings to allow for a fairly good general analysis. When looking at Richmond Street, where the project site is located, there is a noted difference in the form of the structures closest to the waterfront district. This is part of old Amherstburg, which likely explains why there is a more consistent form in these buildings. The most common design is low and narrow rather than high and wide. Many of the comparatively recent buildings occupy much more land area; however, few exceed the standard two storeys.



Within the town's building structure, there is also a fairly large amount of empty space in the form of parking lots. This underutilized land within the downtown area is an unfortunate reality given that the district is relatively small. The larger lots often remain empty because they are not conveniently placed in relation to the shopping and dining establishments. The more convenient street parking is desirable, but is limited and can interfere with the flow of traffic.



Another problem area is an existing trail that runs throughout the downtown district. This path is designated as a town tourist attraction, which is intended to guide individuals to locations of historical and cultural significance throughout Amherstburg; however, it misses certain key sites such as the Black Historic Museum. Furthermore, the trail does not connect with existing parks and open spaces in the area and is not visually distinguishable within the urban context. Although it is intended to be a self-guided path, there are no markers that help individuals navigate and find their way along the path. Despite the drawbacks, the trail is based on an appropriate idea that is well-suited for an urban setting with a cultural identity like Amherstburg's.

There are many other amenities scattered throughout the town that provide residents and visitors with an array of resources and activities. A visual detail of the town's urban, cultural, and tourist-related amenities illustrates that the majority of restaurants, shops, museums, art galleries, hotels, and recreation facilities are located within or very close to old Amherstburg. This emphasizes the importance of using design as a means of attracting individuals to this urban area so they can take advantage of these amenities within the evolving town fabric.







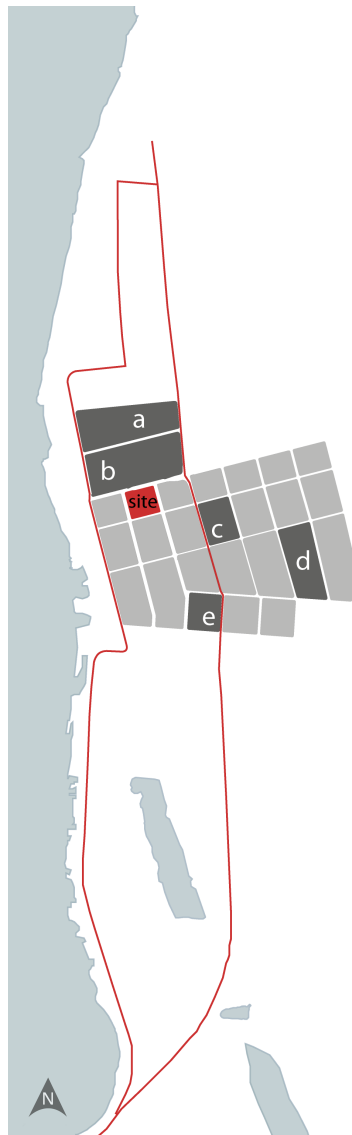
## The Block

The urban block can have a significant impact on the quality of design at both the larger town scale and the effectiveness of individual urban spaces. For the purposes of a proposed design, a broader analysis facilitates a better understanding of how the new development will work with and relate to the characteristics and conditions of the surrounding block structure. It also influences how the design progresses in order to develop an approach that will build on and enhance the positive qualities.



Old Amherstburg: Buildings & Streets

A detailed map of the street pattern and building coverage within old Amherstburg provides a visual overview of the structure on which the town's design is based. This district shows an organized grid-like pattern of similarly-sized blocks. There is some variation in the block structure within the downtown core where large and small blocks sit parallel to one another. The order of Amherstburg's urban grid is reminiscent of both the rigid 200 x 200 structure of Portland, Oregon and the long, narrow blocks of Philadelphia. In the context of proposing a new development, this insight encourages the consideration of how the existing pattern will impact and be impacted by the new design.



- a- Victorian Form
- b- Mixed Use
- c- Civic Structures
- d- Uniform Pattern
- e- Irregular Pattern

#### Urban Block Types

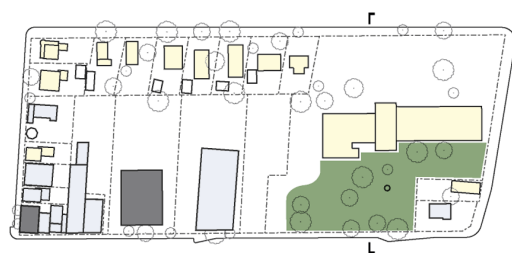
Building on this examination of Amherstburg's block structure, a study was done to gain a better understanding of the town's block types. A sample of six blocks including examples from the downtown core, the surrounding area, and the proposed design site, were studied in detail. Each sample block represented a "type" or particular size and shape that is repeated throughout the town's structure. The analysis was done through various drawings and a review of their associated details and characteristics such as size, density, and land and building use were reviewed.

The result was a summary of what is common within Amherstburg's urban block context. Findings illustrate that the number of commercial and institutional units are quite low. Within the sampled blocks, the number of parks was also very low. A comparison of similarities and differences between the block types provided the opportunity to consider how they relate to and impact one another and other surrounding blocks. This insight facilitates a reflection on what is working and what could be changed to promote improvement.



Block A

- 80m wide x 290m long
- Victorian architecture
- 3 to 4 storey structures
- North to south orientation
- Private lots



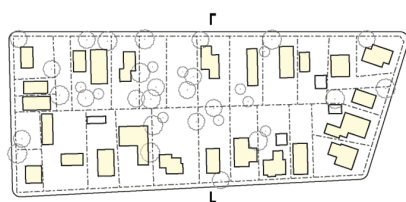
Block B

- 123m wide x 283m long
- Combination of residential, commercial, & institutional uses
- Includes a significant amount of undeveloped space



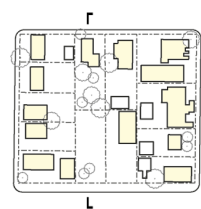
Block C

- 91m wide x 125m long
- Important or iconic building is prominent on the site
- Green spaces located near important structure
- Include a significant amount of undeveloped space



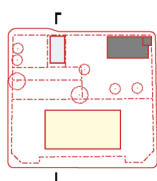
Block D

- 94m wide x 230m long
- Residential use only
- Found within the transitional zone
- Consistent and ordered residential pattern
- 1 to 2 storey structures only
- East to west orientation



Block E

- 94m wide x 107m long
- Victorian architecture
- 3 to 4 storey structures
- North to south orientation
- Private lots



Site

- Institutional
- Commercial
- Residential
- Parks

0 50m

- 84m wide x 80m long
- Victorian architecture
- 3 to 4 storey structures
- North to south orientation
- Private lots

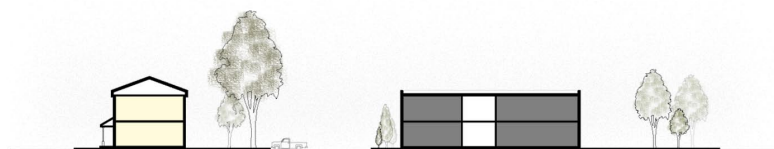




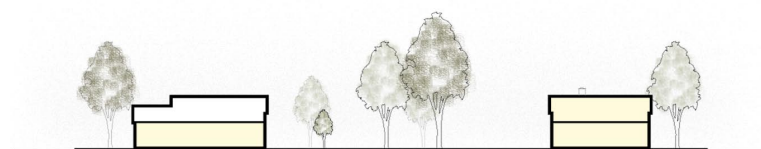
Block A Section



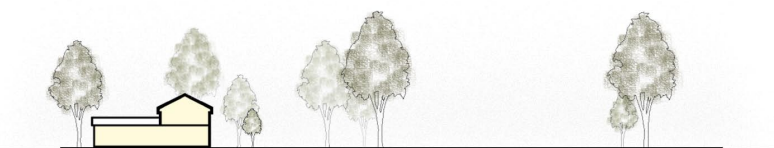
Block B Section



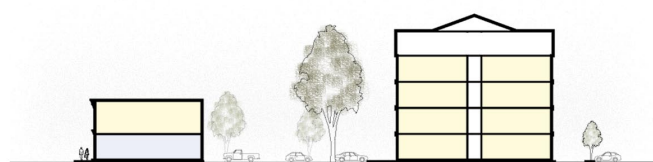
Block C Section



Block D Section



Block E Section

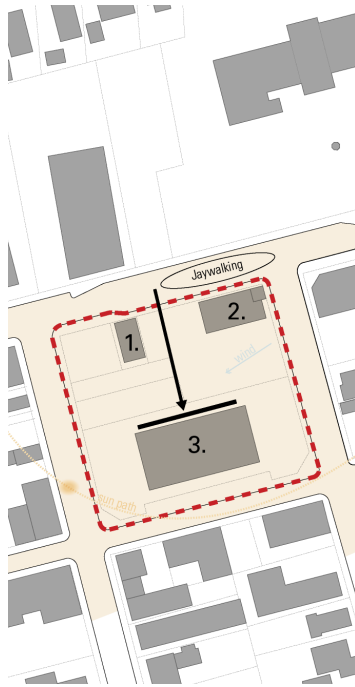


Site Section

0 12.5m

Knowledge of the urban block was further enhanced by studying the positive and negative elements of the different block settings in the town. Each of the identified block types was examined to gain insight on their specific problems and potentials. By summarizing the existing issues associated with the block, a better understanding of the components that have negatively impacted the success of the space was discovered. This also identified elements that the new design should avoid or, in the case of the project site, change.

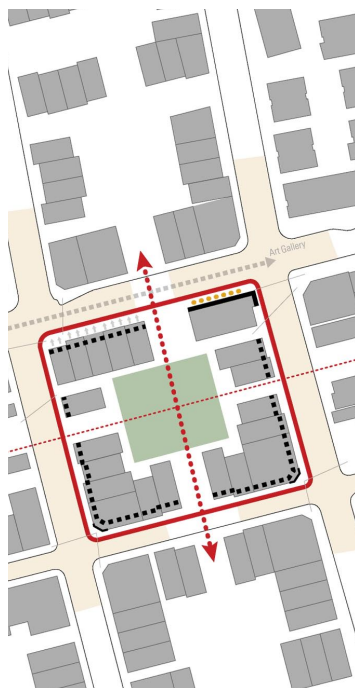
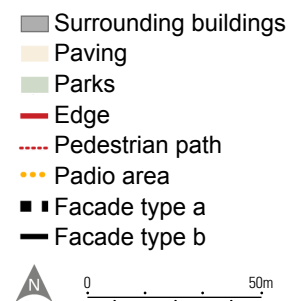
This study also provided the opportunity to define some of the more positive components of each block type. Each of the block types illustrated the potential for change that could greatly impact the quality of the area. In many cases, elements of the block demonstrated ways that the existing setting could be changed or improved to create a more successful, quality urban space.



Site (Mixed use type)

Existing problems for block type B include:

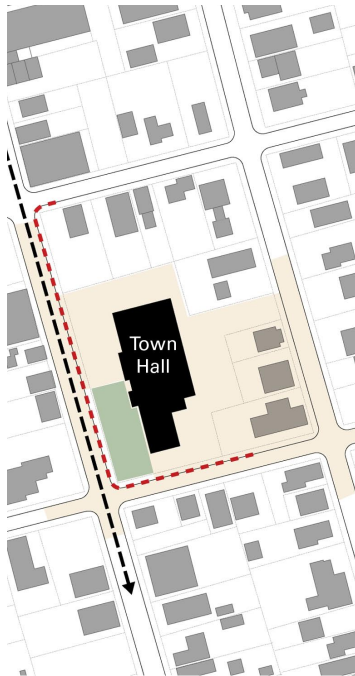
- Lack of edge definition
- Safety issues at night due to inadequate lighting
- Lack of benches or alternative resting options
- Building structure on south end of site obscures connection with adjacent block
- No shelter from weather throughout the block
- No reference to human scale throughout the space
- Jaywalking common along Richmond street



Site (Mixed use type)

Potential improvements to block type B include:

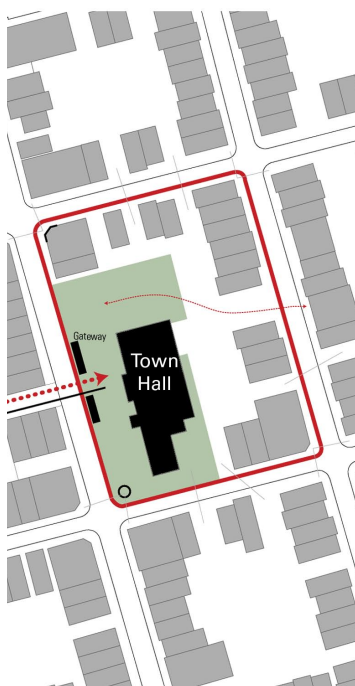
- An increase in residential population will improve block activity in the future
- Incorporating a square of city and regional importance that could help Establish an artisan district
- Use of the space could vary during the day and according to the season
- Proximity to the water, offer opportunities for creating
- Views towards the library, Church and waterfront
- Located in the heart of the town



Block C (Civic structures type)

Existing problems for block type C include:

- Poor connection to the spaces surrounding the block and thus poorly integrated and connected to the city centre
- Noise along main traffic route
- Cut off from the rest of the downtown
- Few benches
- Forecourt lacks identity and scale



Block C (Civic structures type)

Potential improvements to block type C include:

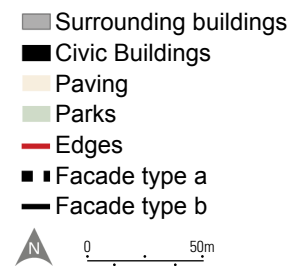
- Views to the waterfront
- Creating a gateway
- Block has a strong established iconic structure located at the centre of site
- Close proximity to pedestrian network
- Space could be designed to enhance a visual connection to park



Block E (Residential type)

Existing problems for block type E include:

- Parts of the block appear poorly maintained and run down
- Oversized and underused parking area
- Side streets are poorly lit at night
- Special definitions are lacking due to uniform paving
- The edge is not well defined in the Southeaster corner



Block E (Residential type)

Potential improvements to block type E include:

- Located along the main highway
- Nearby green areas and important buildings
- Good location for networking
- Good visual link to adjacent block
- Pedestrian friendly block size (60m x 60m)

## The Street



Liberty Theatre (1919-1961)  
[Marsh Collection Society]



Tea Garden Restaurant (1946-1969)  
[Marsh Collection Society]



Richmond Street (1935)  
[Marsh Collection Society]

The streetscape is an important public space within an urban context. It serves many functions such as providing access to buildings and urban amenities and allowing people to navigate through and around the city. Streets also provide a valuable venue for urban social activities.

Within a specific urban setting, there is an important relationship between the street and the buildings that frame it. Together, they should work to create a cohesive identity, environment, and atmosphere that is, in some ways, unique to that location. In Amherstburg, Richmond Street has experienced some changes over the years that have impacted its identity. Originally, the street was a key destination for residents and visitors, a place where entertainment could be found. Important amenities such as the Amherstburg Street Car and buildings such as the Liberty Theatre (1919-1961) and the Tea Garden Restaurant (1946-1969) no longer exist. Over time, the Richmond Street streetscape has become less consistent.

Richmond Street is one of the oldest in the town. It is a very straight street that runs east to west and leads directly to Dalhousie Street, Richmond Street's counterpart in terms of historic form and cultural importance. The street also leads to the waterfront, an important town amenity. These are two significant reasons why Richmond Street should have an important urban identity in the town.

A study of Richmond Street provided insight on the existing characteristics and conditions, which is relevant to the proposed design given that this is where the site is located.

This visual study illustrates the rhythm of the street including the flow of the buildings and the voids between them. It shows the building heights, architecture, and types of entries along the street as well as the quality of the spaces around the buildings, the location of trees and how they relate to the streetscape. This visual summary allows for simple evaluations that provide important insight. For example, there is limited seating along Richmond Street and many of the available benches are not positioned near trees that could provide protection from the sun. Seemingly insignificant observations such as this can contribute to the overall success and quality of the urban setting.

The visual study highlights entryways into building, which indicate areas where pedestrians may be more likely found because they are visiting area establishments. An illustration of paths, landmarks, seating, and trees offers a means of understanding how individuals may use, experience, and navigate Richmond Street. The study also reveals a distinct lack of lighting, especially for a downtown urban area. This contributes to the fact that Richmond Street is poorly used during the evening.

To help gain a better understanding of the urban landscape, the streets of Amherstburg were examined and categorized into various types. As was completed with the block types, it was essential to identify the problems and potentials associated with the street setting. This evaluation provided useful insight on the challenges that have an impact on the existing project site and that should be considered in the development of the proposed design. The identified opportunities also provided valuable insight, which were leveraged for the site design.



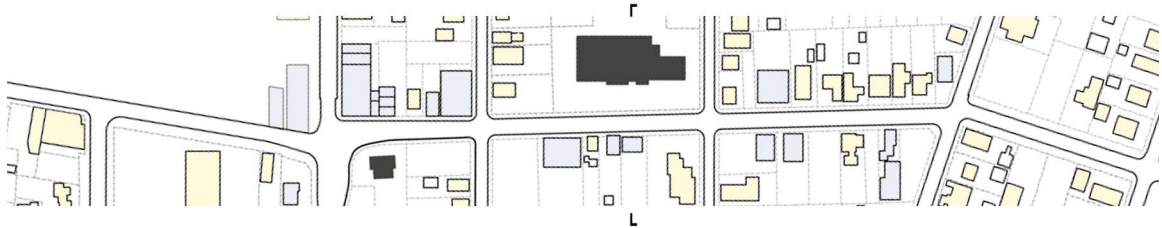
a- Main  
b- Commercial  
c- Residential

Urban street types



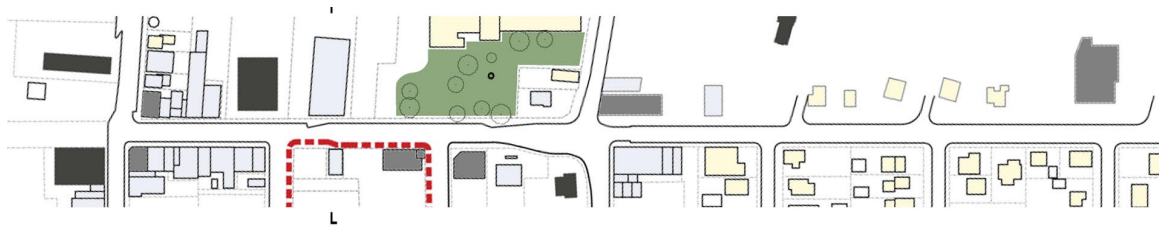






- Main town entrance & exit route
- Concrete sidewalk
- 2-lane Street parking
- Traffic lights
- Wide lanes

Street A



- Primarily bordered by commercial buildings
- Unique paving material
- 1 and 2 lane parking
- Historic street lights
- Patios and outdoor seating
- Links waterfront to areas beyond urban grid boundaries
- East to west orientation

Street B

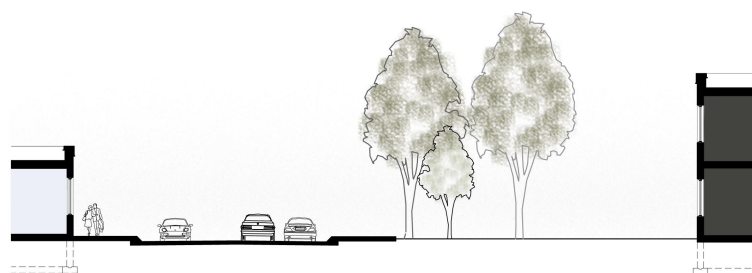


- Primarily residential surroundings
- Lined by trees
- 2-lane parking
- Lack of street lighting
- Large setbacks
- Stop signs
- North to south orientation

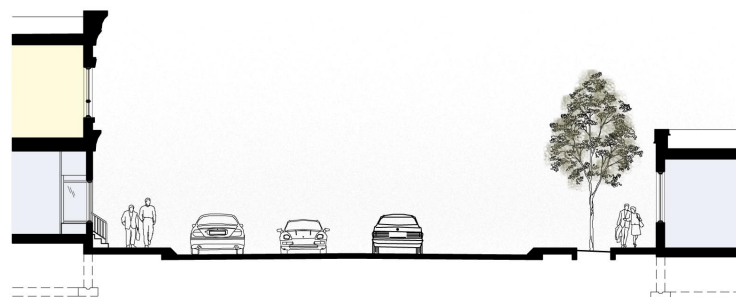
Street C

■ Institutional  
 ■ Commercial  
 ■ Residential  
 ■ Parks

0 50m



Street A Section

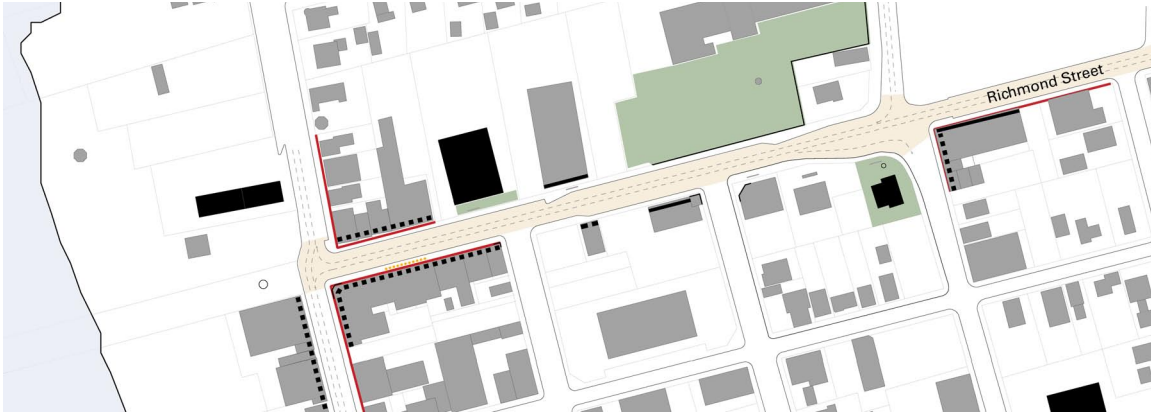


Street B Section



Street C Section

0 12.5m



Existing problems for street type A include:

- Lack of structural rhythm to the street
- Unattractive edges
- Lack of good lighting at night
- Only six benches to invite people to stay and sit

Street A (commercial type)



Potential improvements to street type A include:

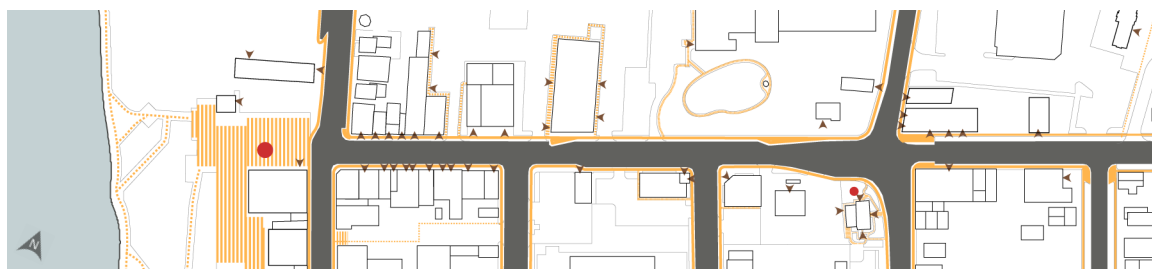
- Nice ground floor façades interacting with the street
- Connecting to waterfront, Art Gallery and Town Park
- Active edges (outdoor cafes and street vendors)
- Identity as a pedestrian commercial street

Street A (commercial type)



Richmond St. Aerial View 2008 [Google Maps Canada]

0 50m



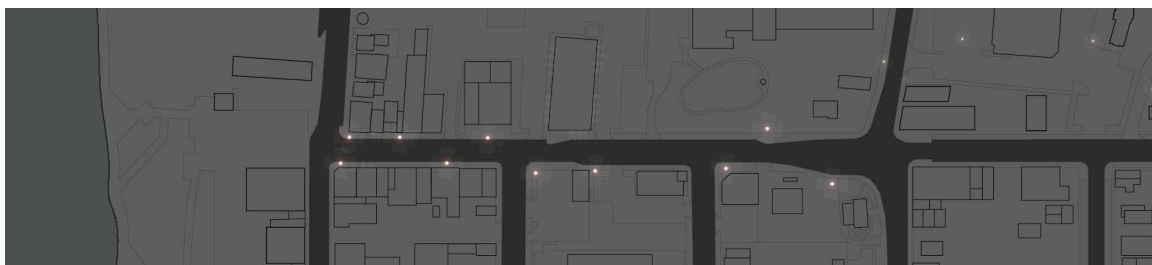
Richmond St. Study    ■ Building Entry    ■ Pedestrian Path    ■ Landmark

0 50m



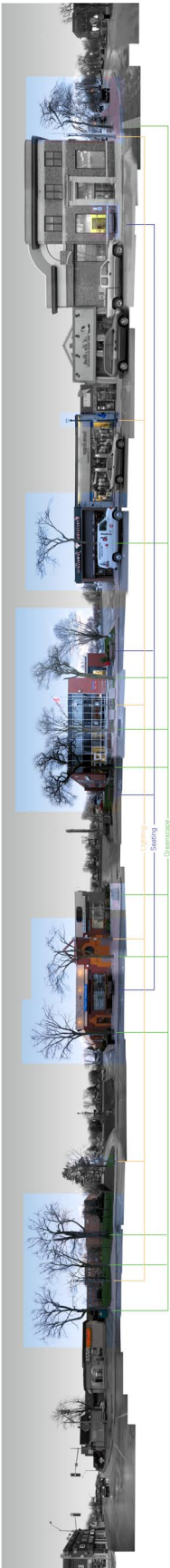
Richmond St. Study    ■ Greenscape    ■ Street Seating

0 50m

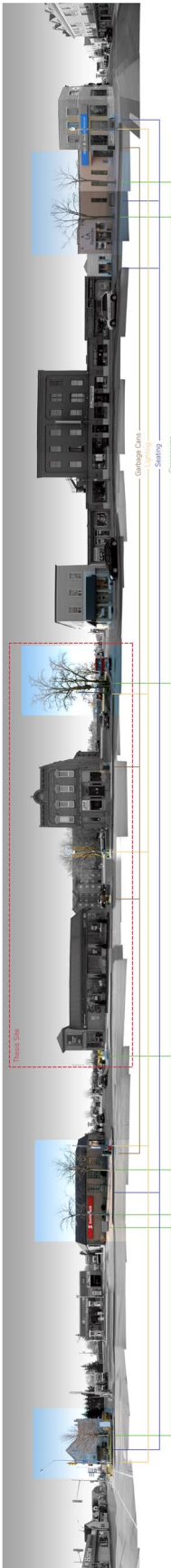


Richmond St. Light Study

0 50m



Richmond St. North Elevation Study



Richmond St. South Elevation Study





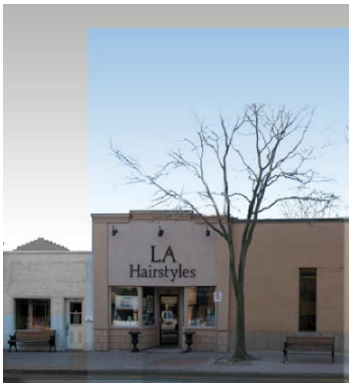
Library Park

## Pros

- Green space is located near a civic building
- Prominent landmark helps to identify entrance to downtown area
- Visual appeal of the water feature
- Interesting stone façade and historic form

## Cons

- Located near a busy intersection, which can impact pedestrian traffic
- Limited protection from the elements
- No visual connections with surrounding buildings and spaces



LA Hairstyles

## Pros

- Seating provided for pedestrians
- Tree provides shade during summer months

## Cons

- Lack of focal entry
- Façade lacking in visual interest
- Seating options do not provide a welcoming atmosphere



Towne Shoppe

## Pros

- Good visual connection with surrounding buildings
- Good scale relation
- Large windows create engaging store fronts

## Cons

- Lack of street lighting
- Lack of green space or vegetation
- No seating



Richmond Street Mall

## Pros

- Existence of elements such as trees, benches, planters, street lamp
- Good scale relation
- Wide sidewalk

## Cons

- Poor use of surrounding space
- Lack of focal entrance
- Mixture of materials create a confused façade



TD Canada Trust

## Pros

- Focal entrance
- Wide sidewalk
- Presence of elements such as planters and vegetation

## Cons

- Façade lacking in visual interest
- Seating options do not provide a welcoming atmosphere



Site

## Pros

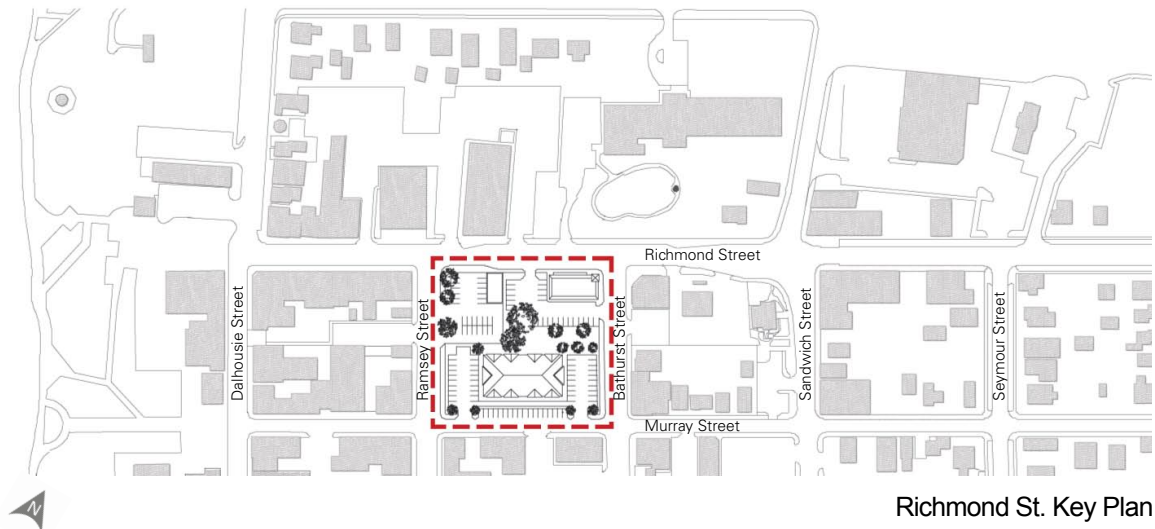
- Good visual connection with surrounding buildings
- Good scale relation
- Engaging building façades

## Cons

- Lack of street lighting
- Narrow sidewalks limit pedestrian protection
- Lack of seating

## PROJECT SITE

Based upon an analysis of the town, an ideal project site was identified on Richmond Street. This site is located near the intersection with Sandwich Street, a busy avenue that runs from one end of Amherstburg to the other.



Historical Form

Currently, it is a collection of mismatched buildings resulting from structural change over the years. Marra's Bread Factory (1850-1971), one of the town's oldest businesses, made its home on this Richmond Street block. It has since been demolished and replaced by an apartment building, bank, and sizable parking lot. Only one building illustrating the historic form of Amherstburg's architecture remains and has been home to an array of commercial occupants.



Anchoring the corner

In comparison to its surroundings, the site, in its existing form, does not adhere to the rhythm of Richmond Street. For instance, it is less dense than the downtown core, which creates a sense of void and incompleteness. It also does not establish a successful pedestrian scale. Buildings are taller on this block and, paired with the openness of the space,

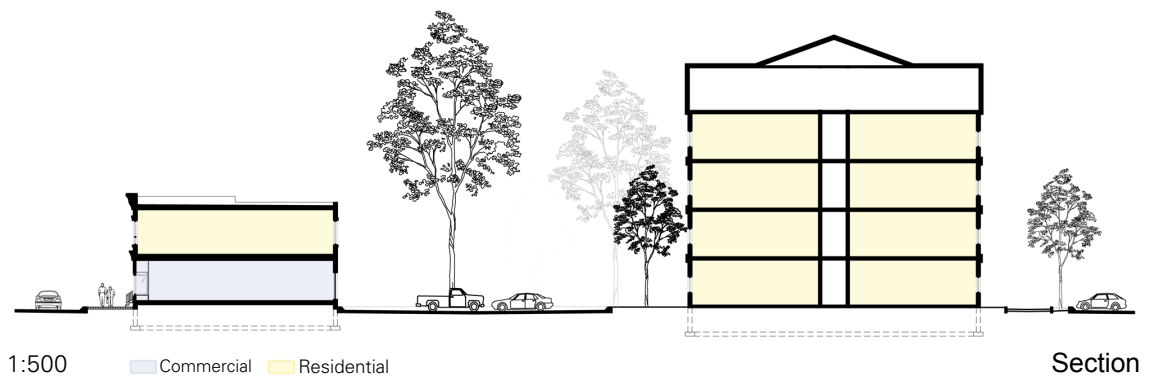
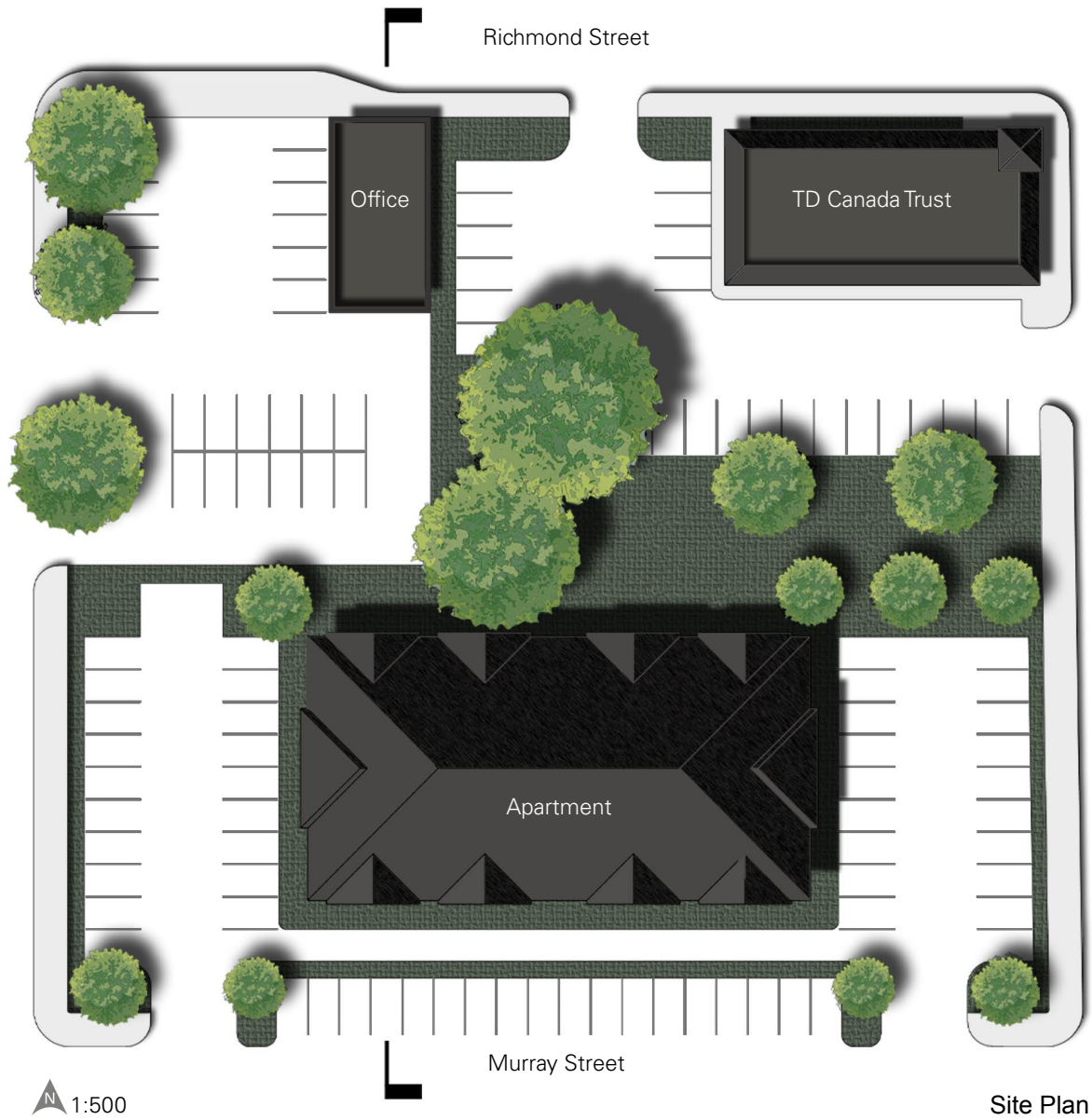


there is a lack of balance between the two. There is little on the site that encourages individuals to interact with and enjoy the space. No seating or green space exists.

While Amherstburg's downtown area demonstrates room for improvement in general, the project site is particularly lacking in certain important qualities. It, therefore, presents itself as an opportunity. The block is strategically located between Amherstburg's Navy Yard Park and the Gibson Art Gallery making it a valuable property for urban development and improvement. Currently, the space is poorly used; however, the location and land area offer the setting for a quality space that could provide visual interest and promote urban activity.



Site looking East

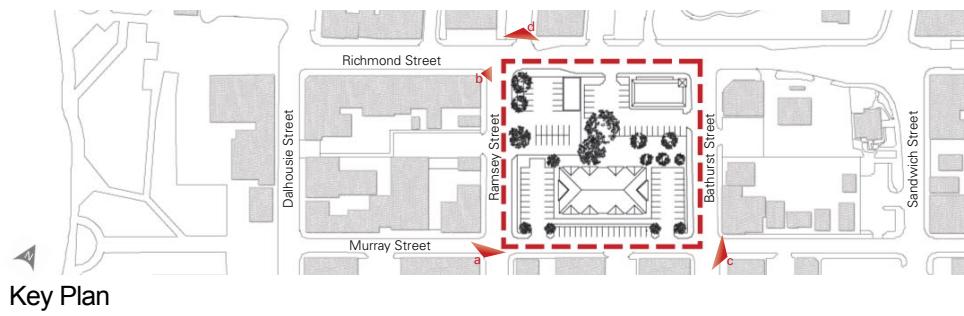




Site looking Northeast



Site looking East

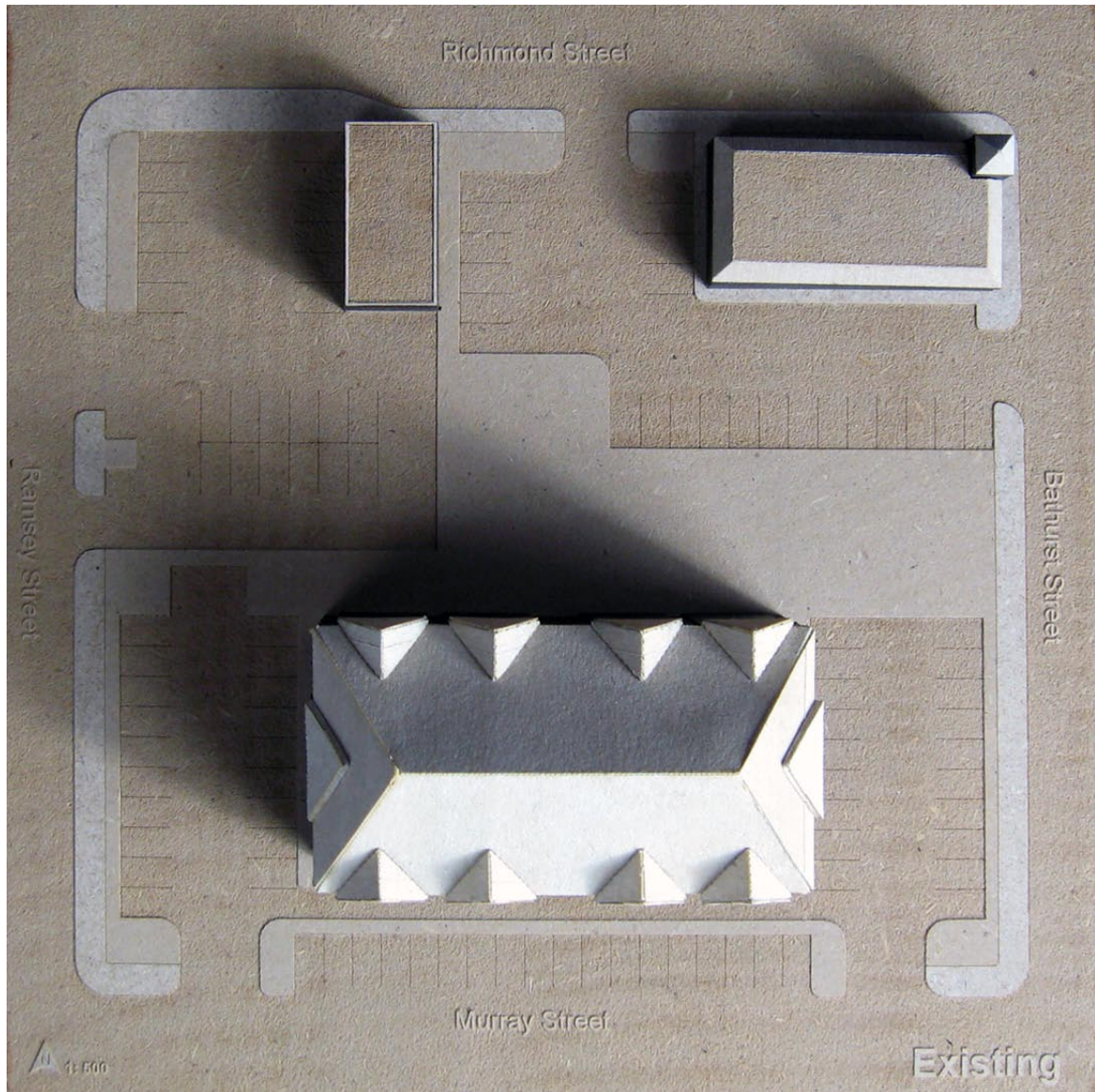


Site looking Northwest

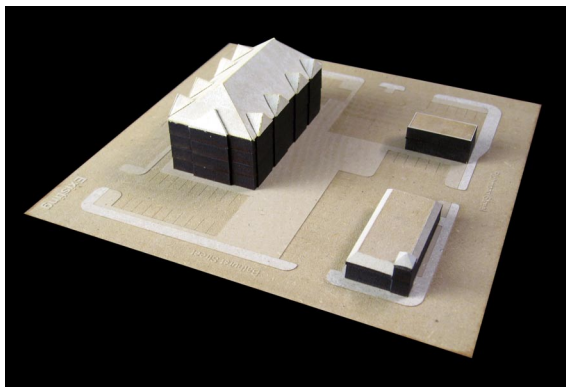


Site looking Southeast

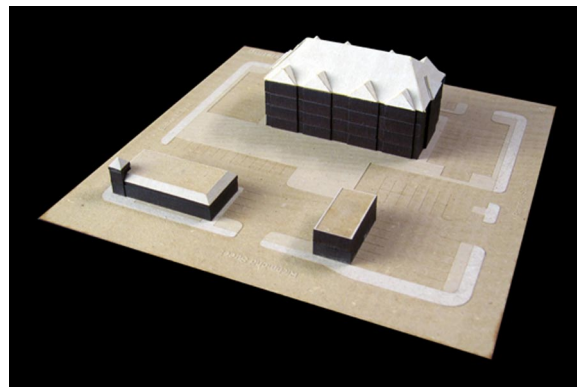




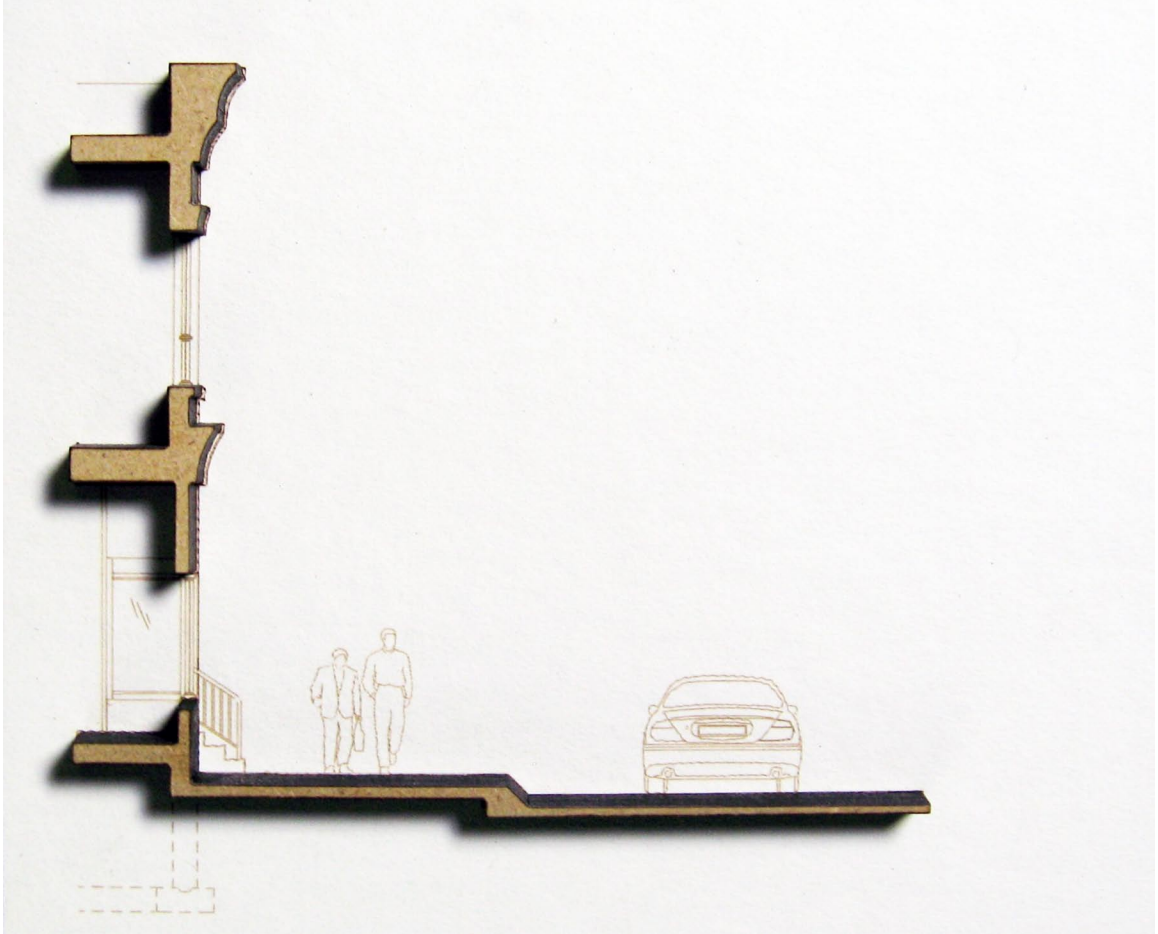
Plan view



Looking Southwest



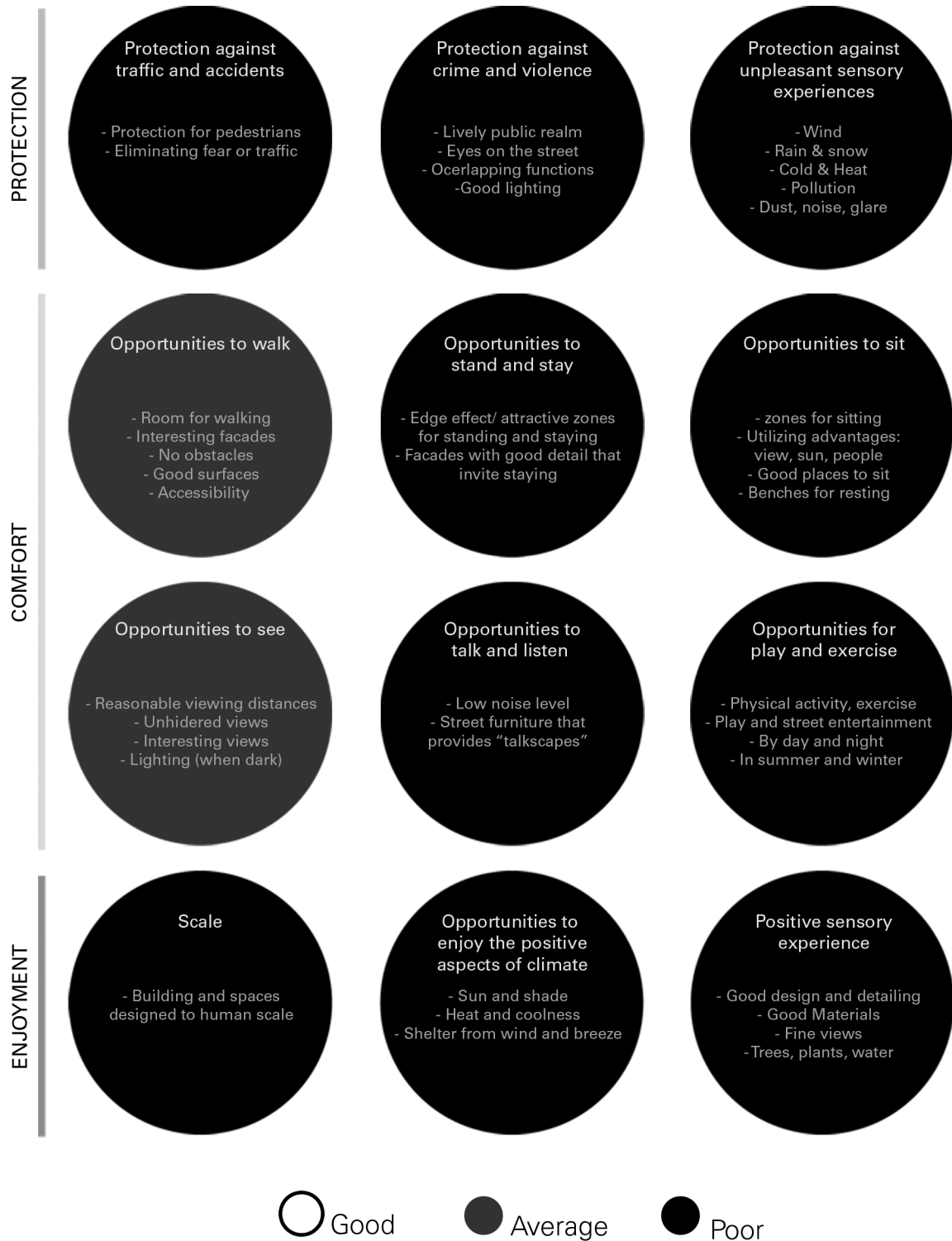
Looking Southeast



Existing threshold conditions include:

- Lack of street furniture, which creates a bare and unwelcoming streetscape
- No visual or physical barriers between the sidewalk and street, which leaves pedestrians exposed

Existing Richmond street threshold condition



## URBAN DESIGN APPROACH

Growth and prosperity are goals shared by all communities. The realization of these objectives, however, is dependent on many factors. What becomes of an urban area depends largely on the investments made and the actions taken to build and better it. Planning change that will work towards developing the area into something that appeals to and provides for its residents is extremely important. Without change, a city remains stagnant and cannot experience efficient growth. At times, however, change has the potential to work against a city's quest for development and prosperity, making these difficult realities to achieve. Finding a balance between the familiar and the new is, therefore, essential to design.

### Methods of Exploration

To facilitate the development of a quality design, a detailed exploration of the selected site was completed. The intent was to propose three potential designs for the project site using the information and insight gathered through research. Each of the three methods explores possible ways of working with the site by addressing key design decisions. Each proposal applies a particular block type in order to understand the resulting relationships between the buildings and street and between the buildings and central open space. The structures incorporated into the design are based on a unique program that is emphasized by a key feature. Characteristics such as building height, density, and urban scale were also considered. As a result of developing three distinct designs, a comparison was made to identify the spaces and forms resulting from the decisions made and determine the design that is best suited for the selected thesis site.



### Option A



Colonnade as a outdoor room  
[Flutter]



Colonnade [Kerrigan]

This design approach works with the existing elements of the site to create a more complete urban setting. Buildings that mirror the size and style of the existing historic structure are added along Richmond Street. Together, these buildings create a uniform edge along the street boarder linking the two urban identities.

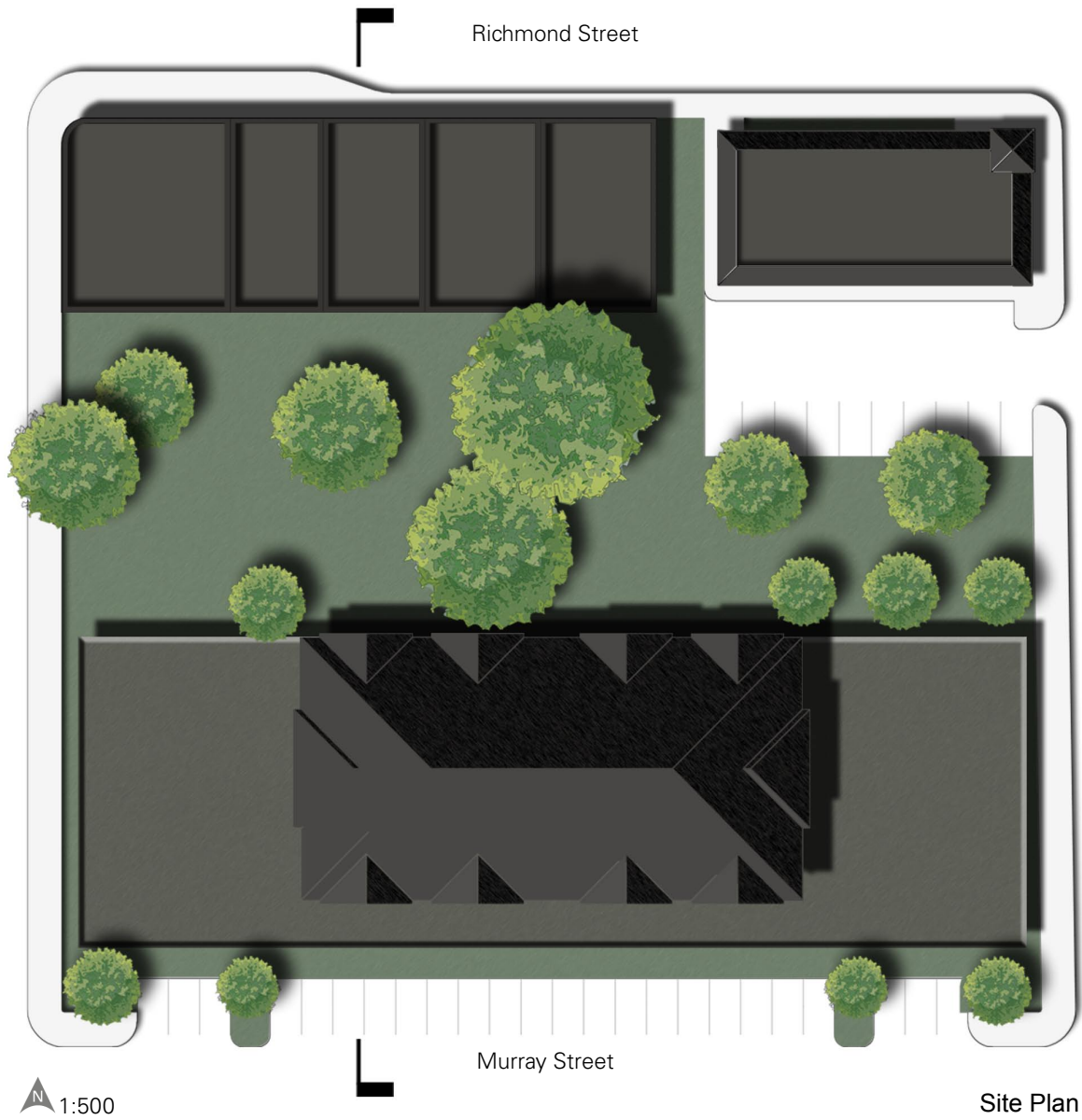
The mixed-use program incorporates commercial uses on the main floor of the buildings with residences on the upper levels. To maintain consistency with this new program, the first level of the existing apartment building is converted to commercial space. A new colonnade structure has been added to the building, which brings the structure to the street and spans the south perimeter of the block. This colonnade creates a focal point and provides a unique setting for public activities. It also opens up to the new central green space, another new public area.

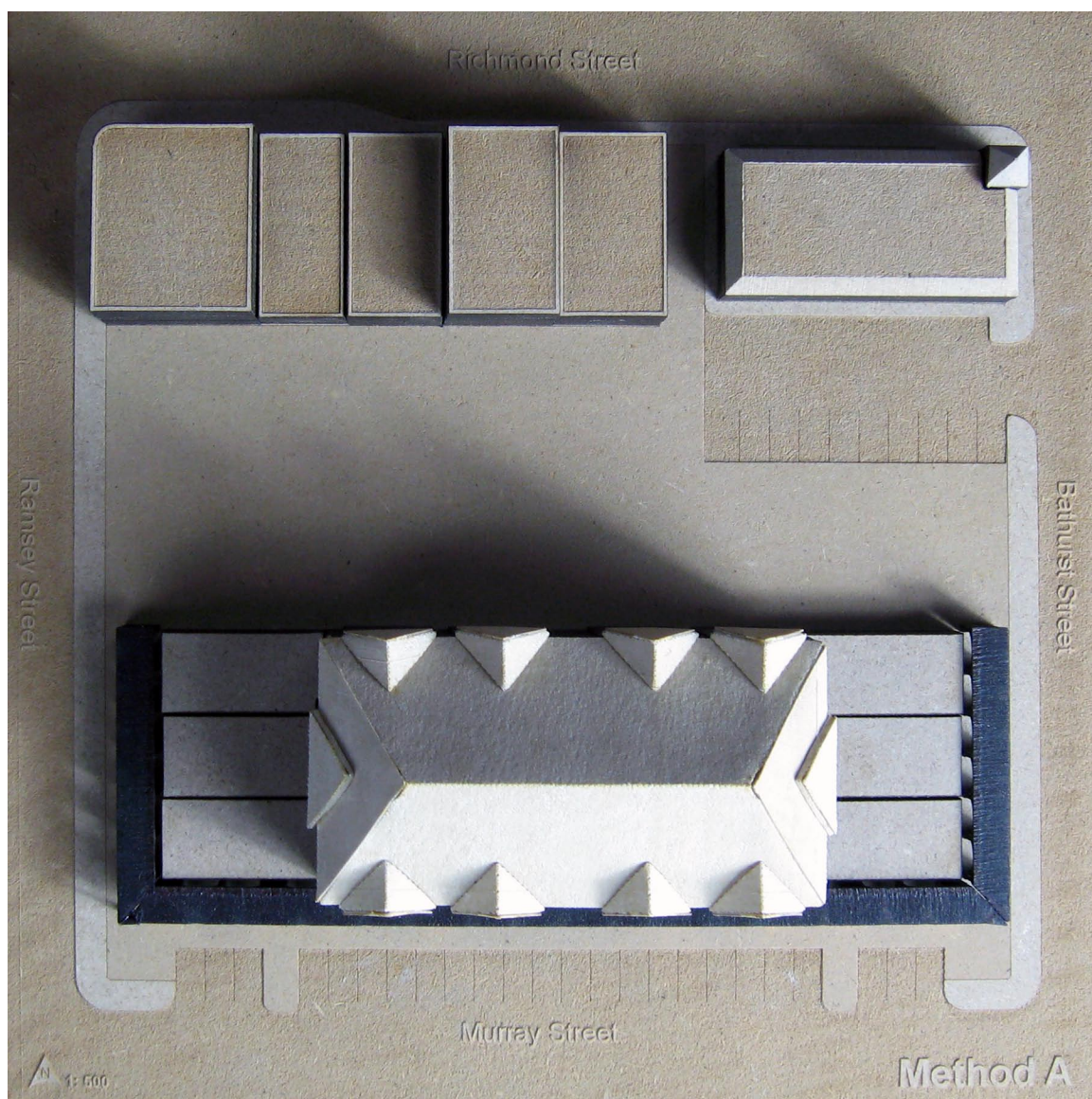
Option A uses the pass-through block style, making the central public space easily accessible from the quieter east and west sides of the block. Parking has been reduced significantly to maximize the use of space.



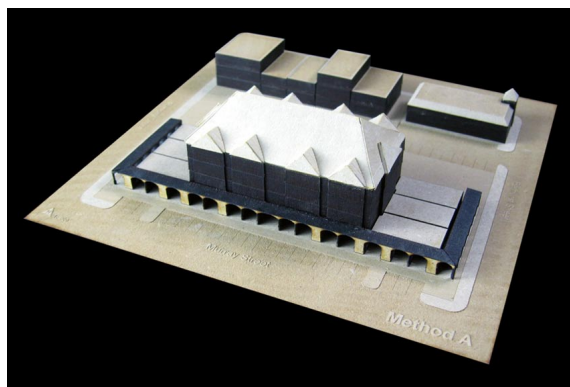
The Mill Colonnade, Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic.  
[Ha'Eri]



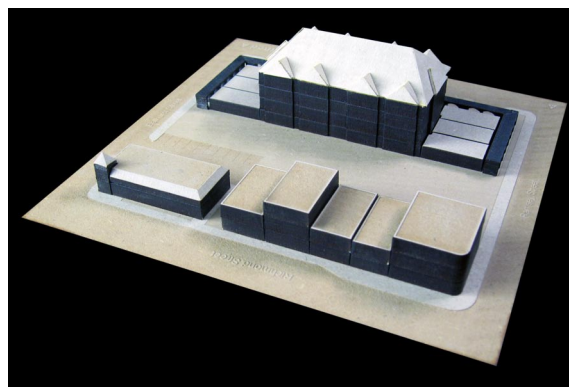




Plan view

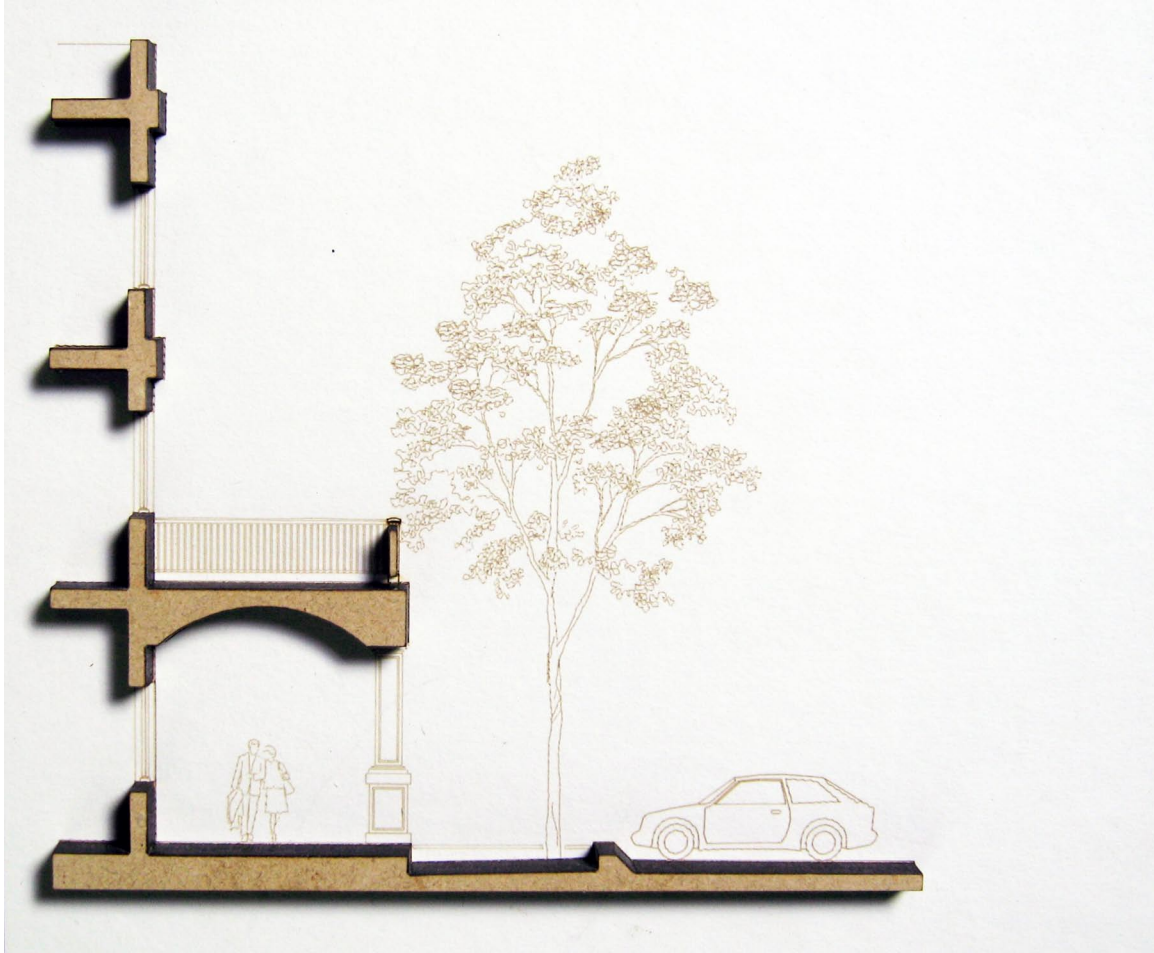


Site looking Northwest



Site looking Southeast

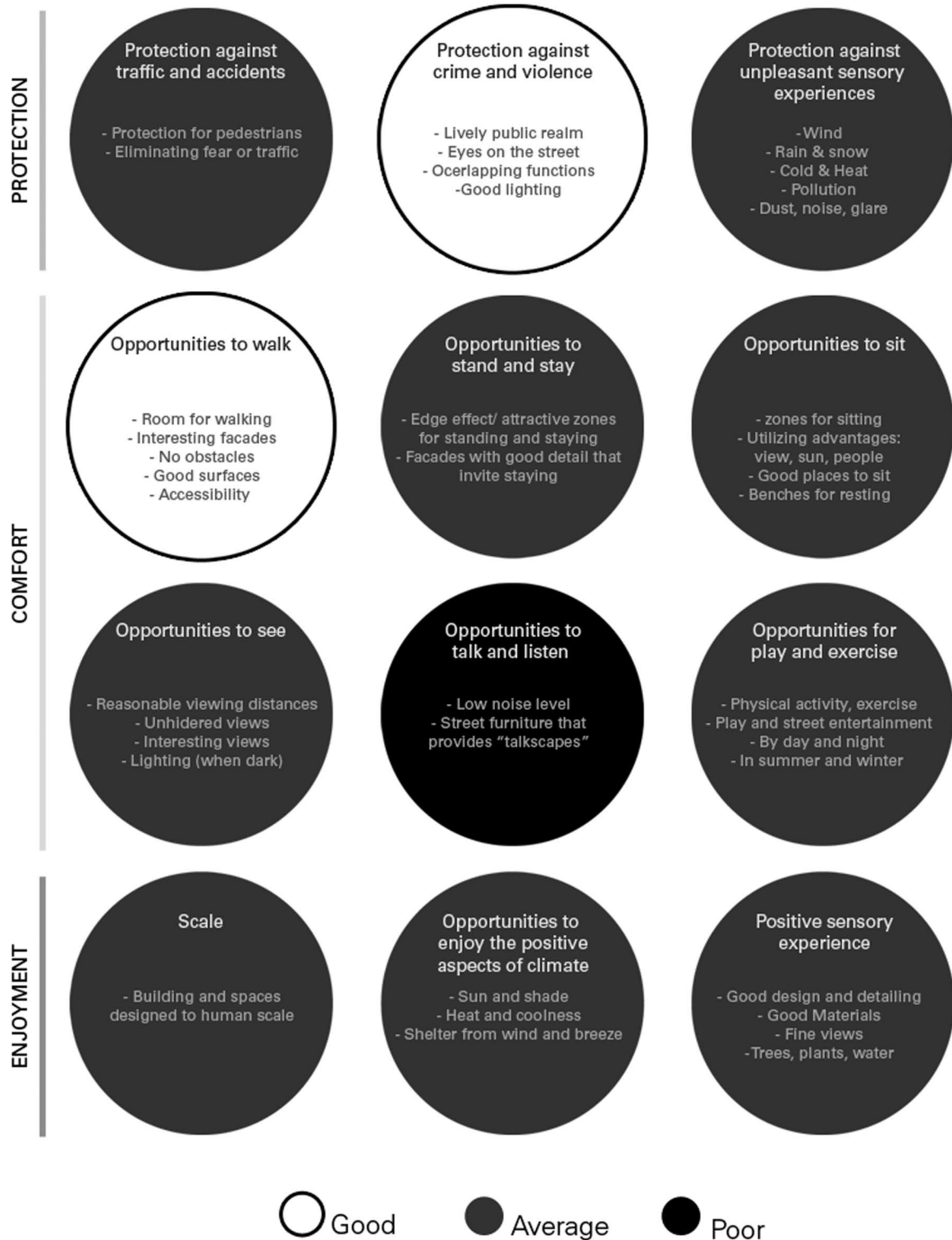




Proposed threshold conditions include:

- Covered walkway that provides a focal area drawing attention to the facade
- Pillars and a green buffer provide a physical and visual barrier from vehicles
- Combination of colonnade and tree create a full and balanced streetscape

Proposed street threshold condition

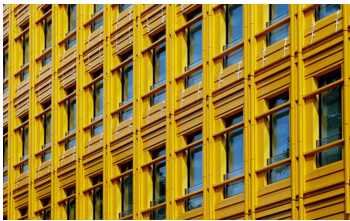


### *Option B*



Public square  
[Gehl 2006, 23]

This design offers a unique solution that eliminates all existing elements and presents a fresh new idea. The added components create a high density space that is much different than the surrounding setting. The new structure is designed for lower commercial space and upper residential space. To help create a consistent environment, the intent is for a single developer to take responsibility of the entire site. This would ensure a sense of cohesion and unity. The scale, however, is much larger than any of Amherstburg's other blocks, which offers both advantages and disadvantages. The design makes good use of the area and eliminates the voids currently plaguing the block. The massive structure does, however, pose a challenge in terms of creating buildings with unique character and identity.

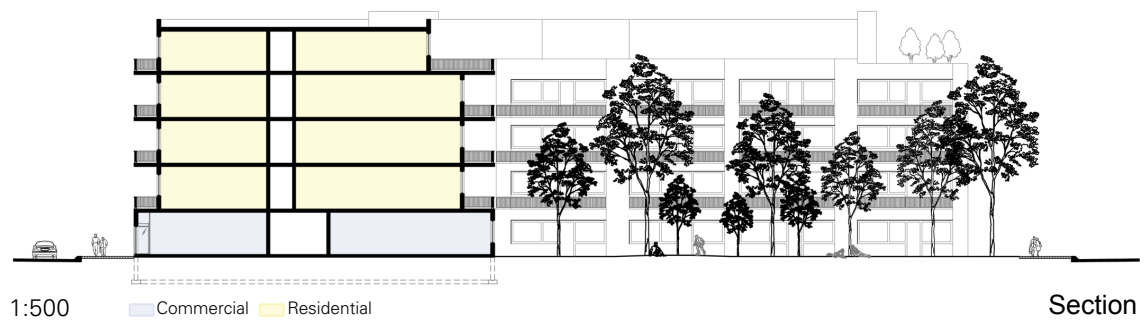
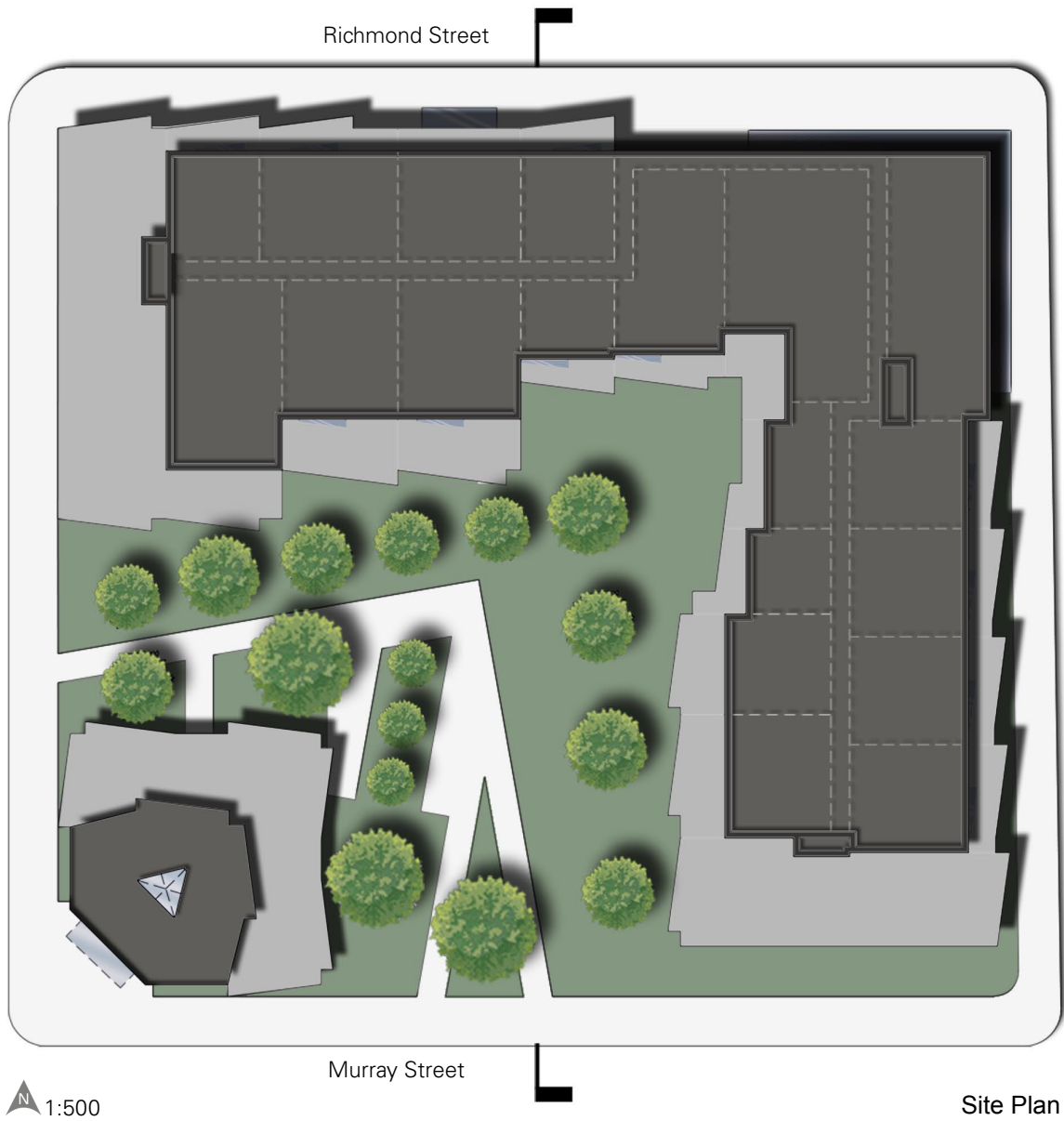


Curtain wall [Hill]

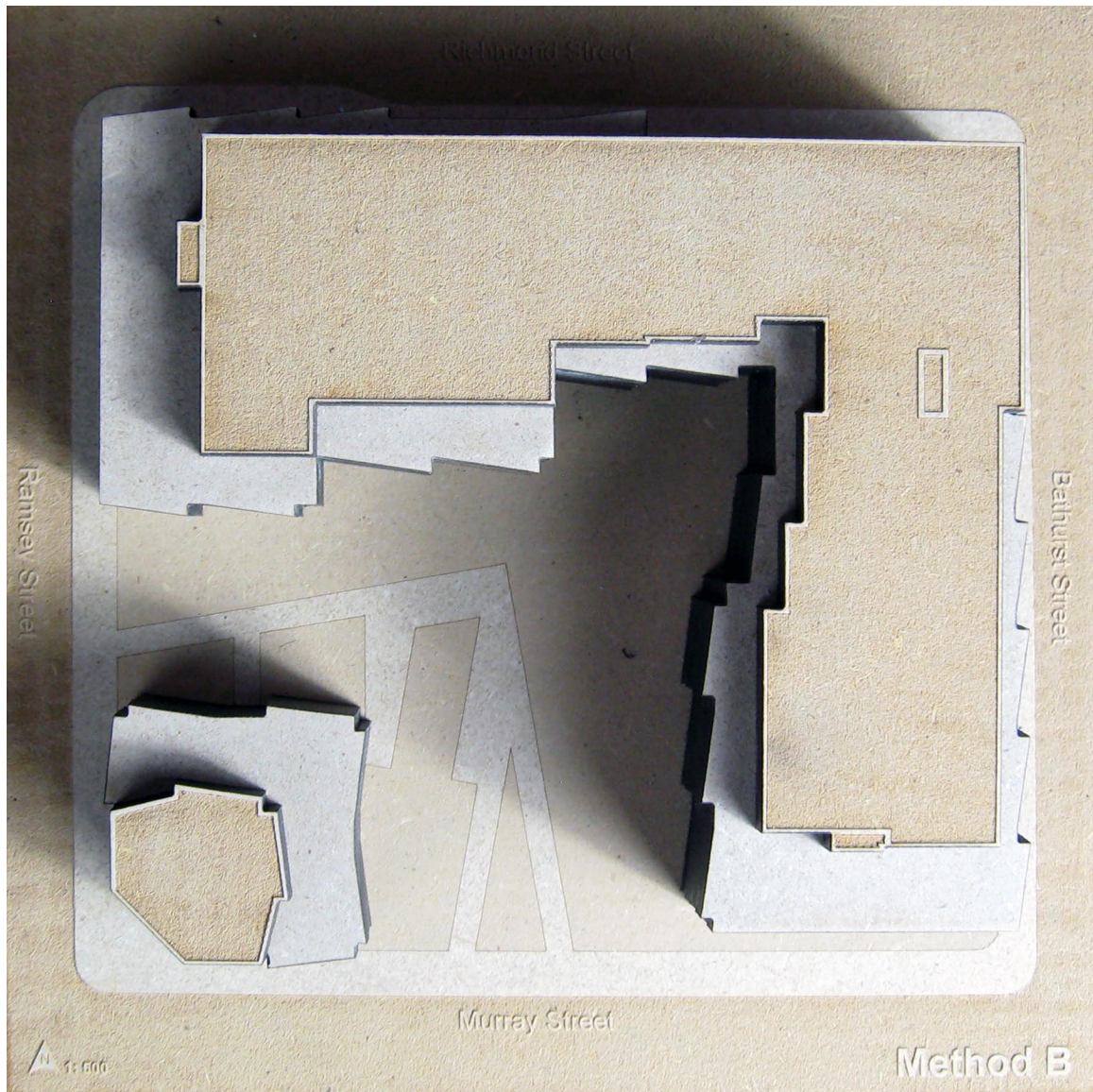
The large structure establishes an effective anchor along the north-east perimeter, while providing a significant amount of green space. Rooftop patios, which open onto this green space, are a prominent feature of the new buildings. The controlled-access block style creates a more private area within the surrounding urban context.



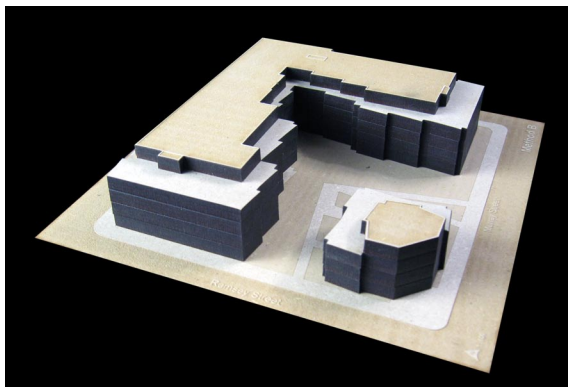
Mixed use development  
[macroworld]



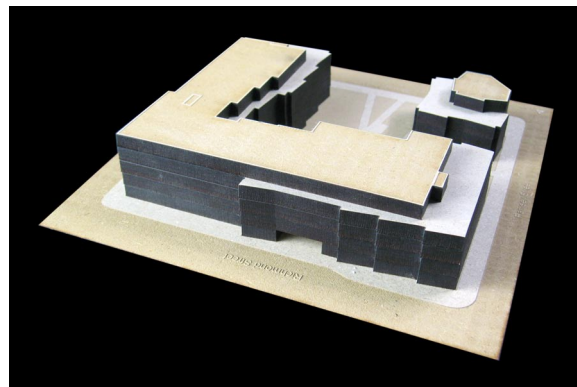




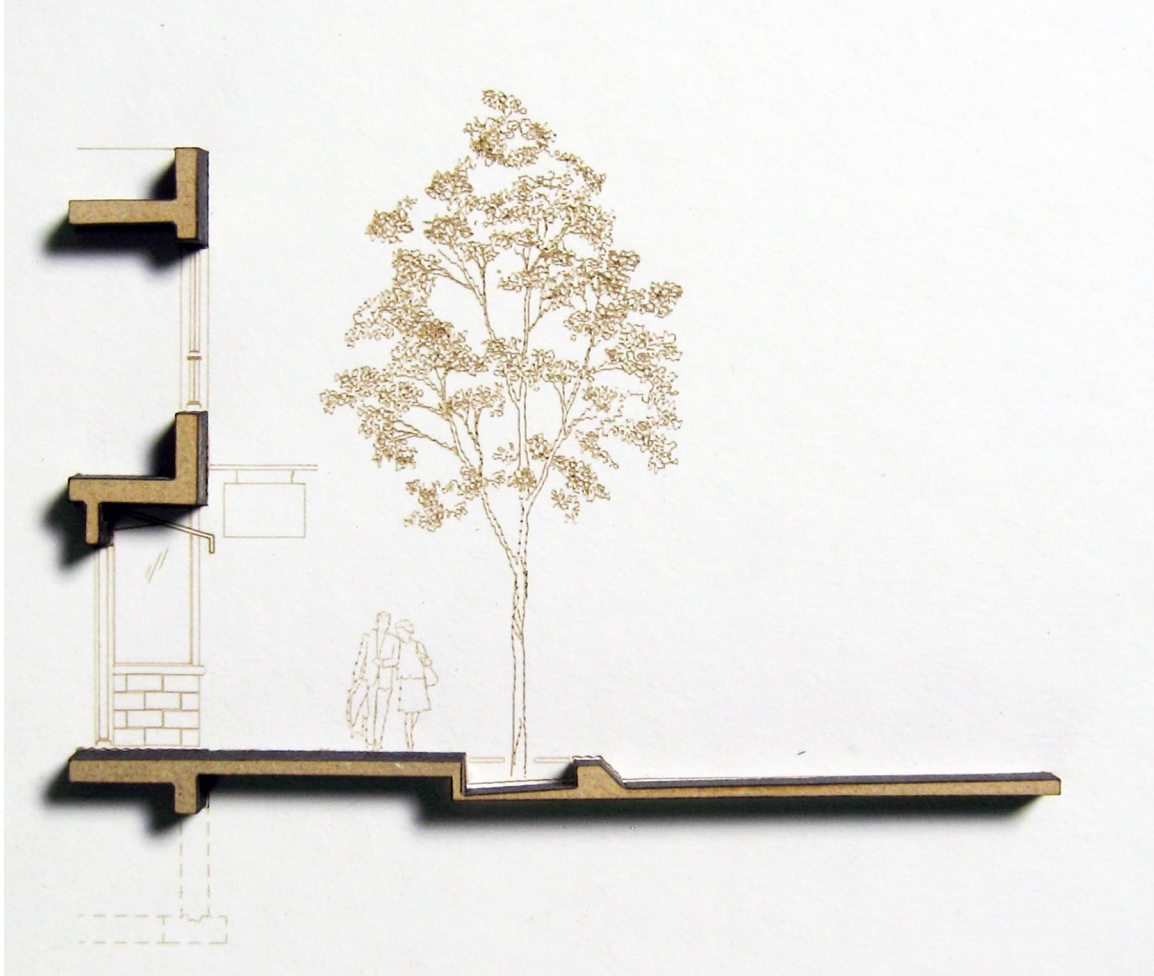
Plan view



Site looking Northeast



Site looking Southeast

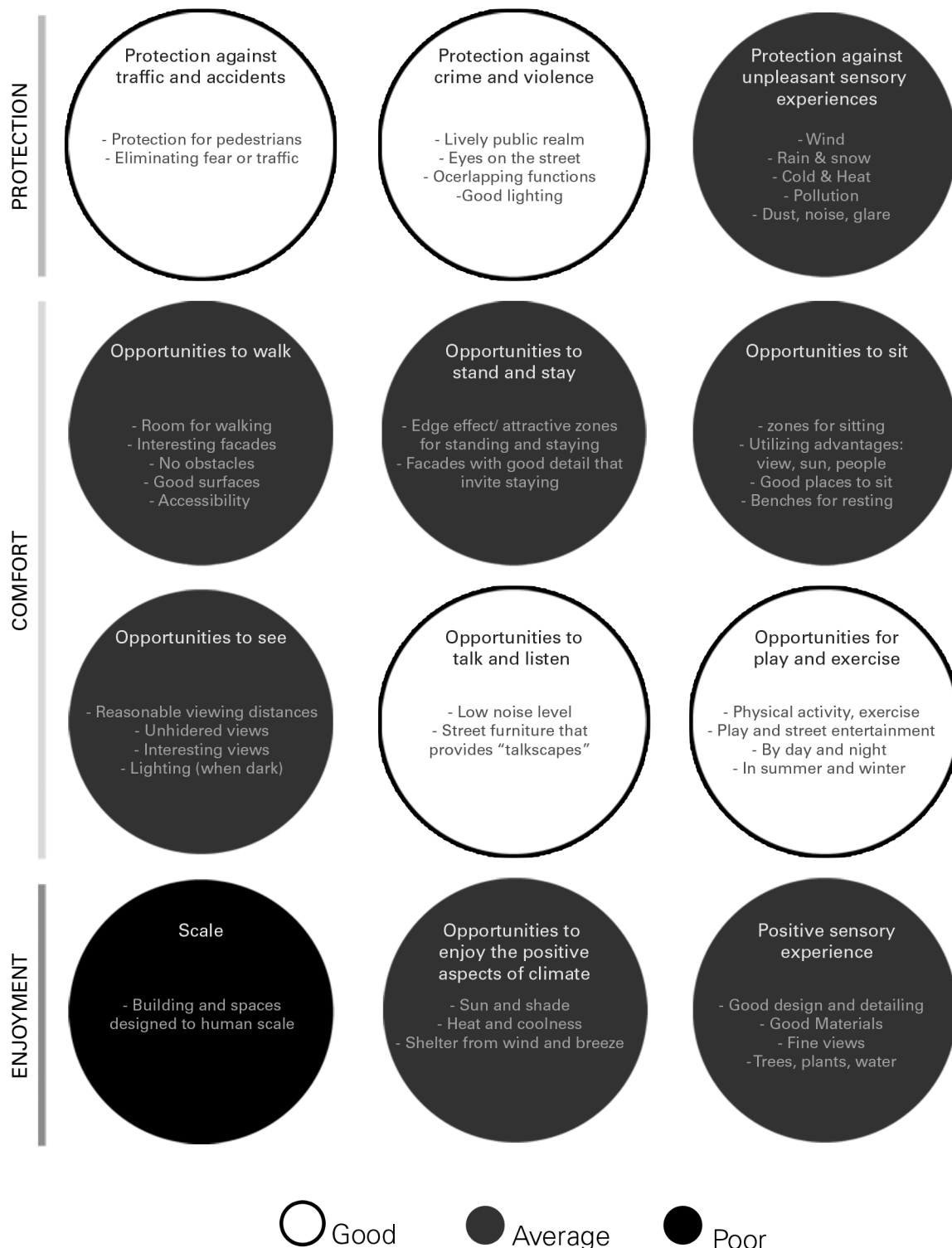


Proposed threshold conditions include:

- Signs hang away from the buildings welcoming pedestrians from afar
- Protruding signs and trees help create a more sheltered pedestrian space
- Smaller sidewalks are set apart from the street by a planting strip

Proposed street threshold condition





### Option C



Stratford, Ontario [Flar 2008]

This design attempts to build on the existing conditions of the site, but places a focus on new developments. The architecture is based on the historic form representative of a prominent existing building. New structures follow a similar ratio to create a harmonious setting. Many of the residences include balconies that overlook the central square.



Pioneer Courthouse Square,  
Portland [Gehl. 2006, 64]

In order to establish a cohesive urban identity, while still promoting the individual personality of each structure, the design is intended to be based on independent ownership. This will encourage a sense of ownership and pride in the space, which can feed a similar atmosphere throughout the rest of the town. This mood is well-suited for a space designed to be an artistic district.

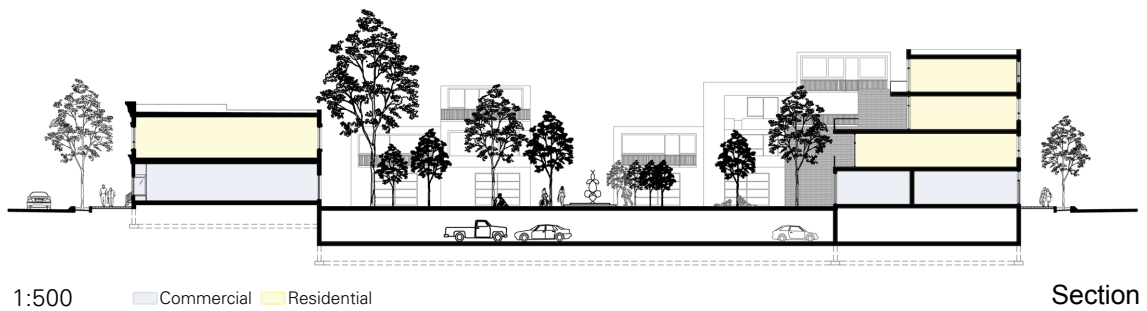
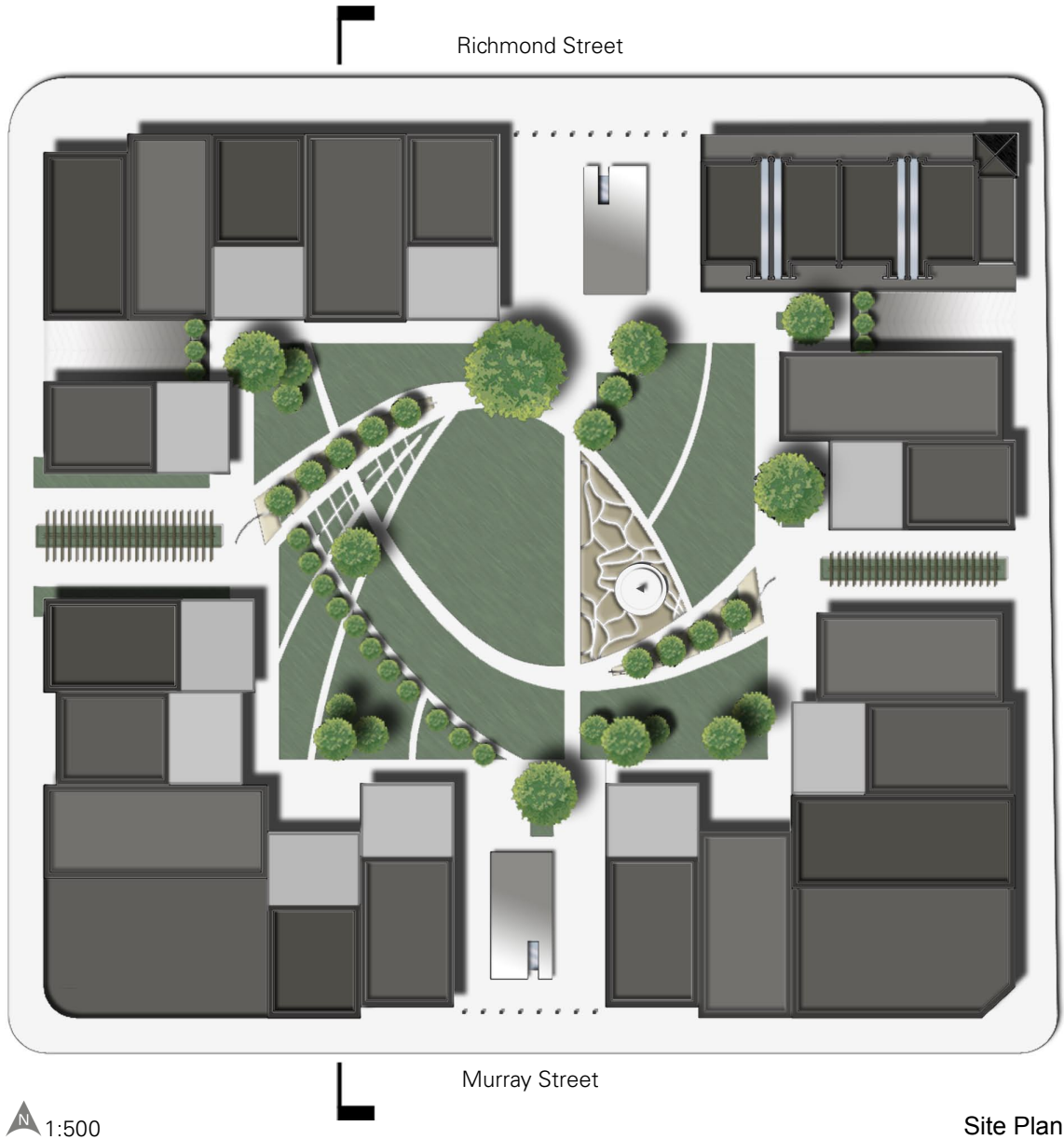


Public square  
[Project for Public Spaces]

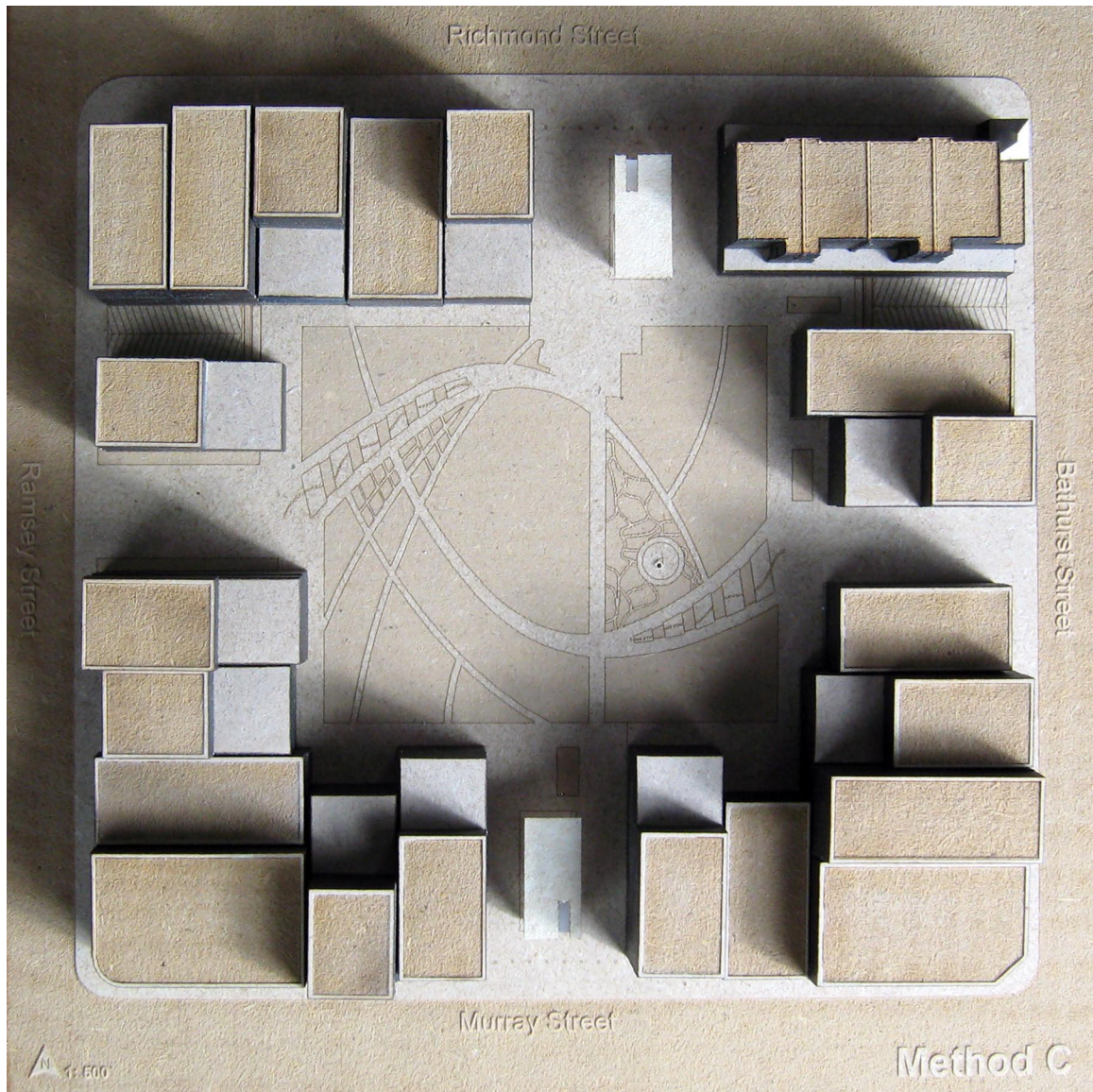
The importance of focal points is demonstrated in the sculpture found in the central green space. This landmark is designed to be seen from Sandwich Street to the waterfront area in the downtown core as a subtle method of linking the urban setting. Unique features have also been incorporated into each of the four corners of the block to mark it as an anchor. The common access block style encourages individuals to use the public space, which can occupy a significant amount of area due to the underground parking.



Stratford, Ontario panorama  
[Flar 2008]







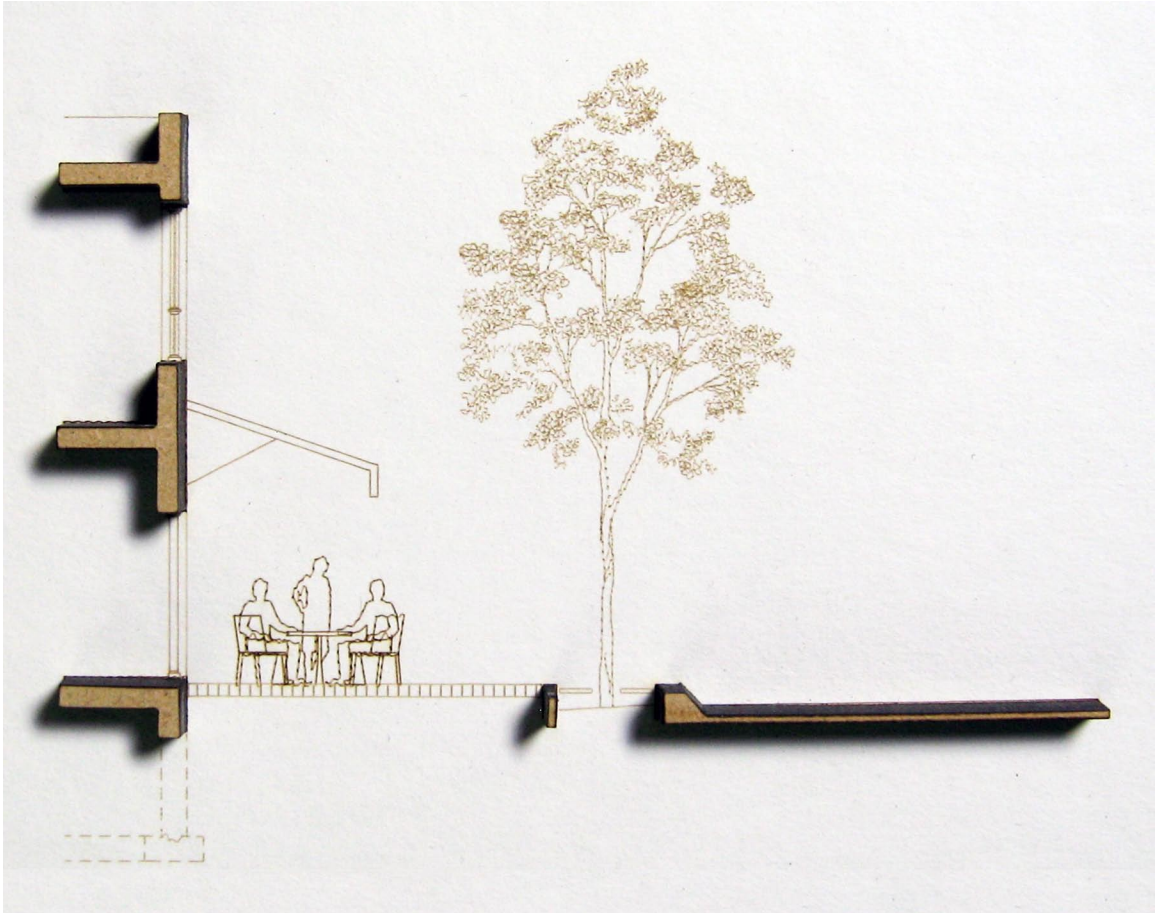
Plan view



Site looking Northwest



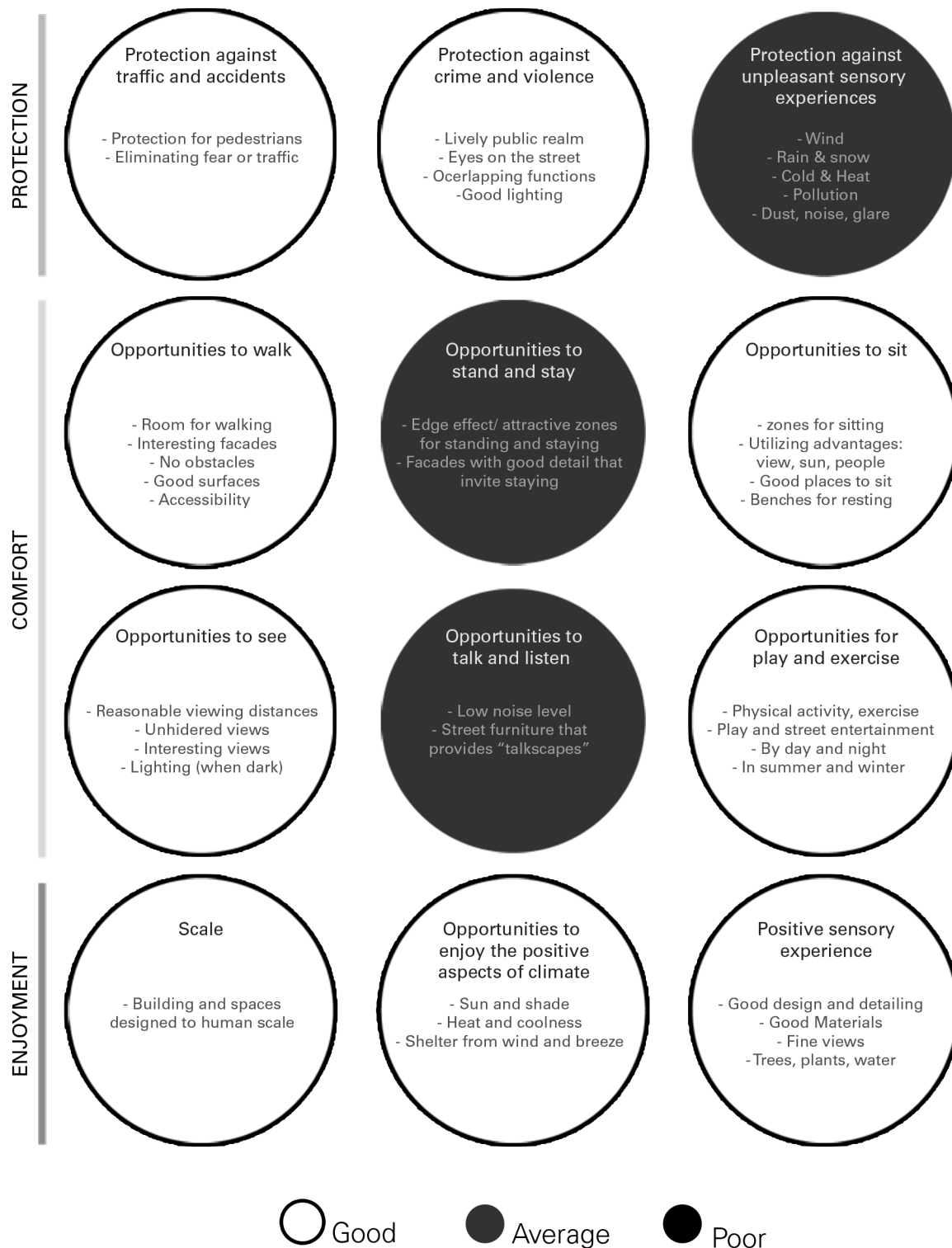
Site looking Southeast



Proposed threshold conditions include:

- Permeable material keeps front patio dry to encourage visitors to stay
- Canopy and seating provide a welcoming storefront setting
- Widened sidewalks and planting strip provide a visual separation of pedestrian and vehicular areas

Proposed street threshold condition

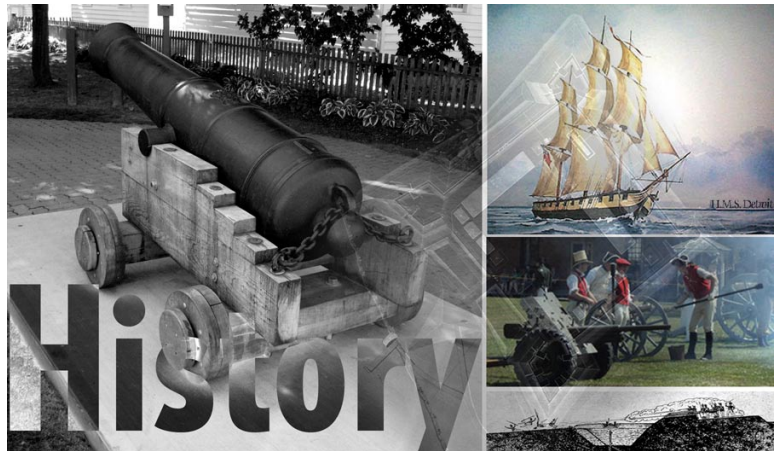




## Selected Method of Exploration

After reviewing and examining the three proposed methods of execution in more detail, option C was selected as the most suitable design for the project site.

The program was further clarified as an architectural celebration of history, culture, and craft, three prominent associations with Amherstburg. The conscious effort to replicate the architectural form of the existing historic structure present on the site illustrates the importance of incorporating the town's past into the development of its future. Amherstburg's historic significance is an important component of its identity and the proposed design makes an effort to promote this quality, which has often been neglected in past urban improvements.



Over the years, Amherstburg has gained more and more recognition for its community events. The Shores of Erie Wine Festival, Jazz Festival, and Art in the Park event have become prominent affairs in the Essex County area. Art galleries, museums, freelance artists, and festivals related to arts and crafts are a reality in Amherstburg, and they have been associated with a distinct sense of community pride. The proposed design attempts to provide a new venue to promote

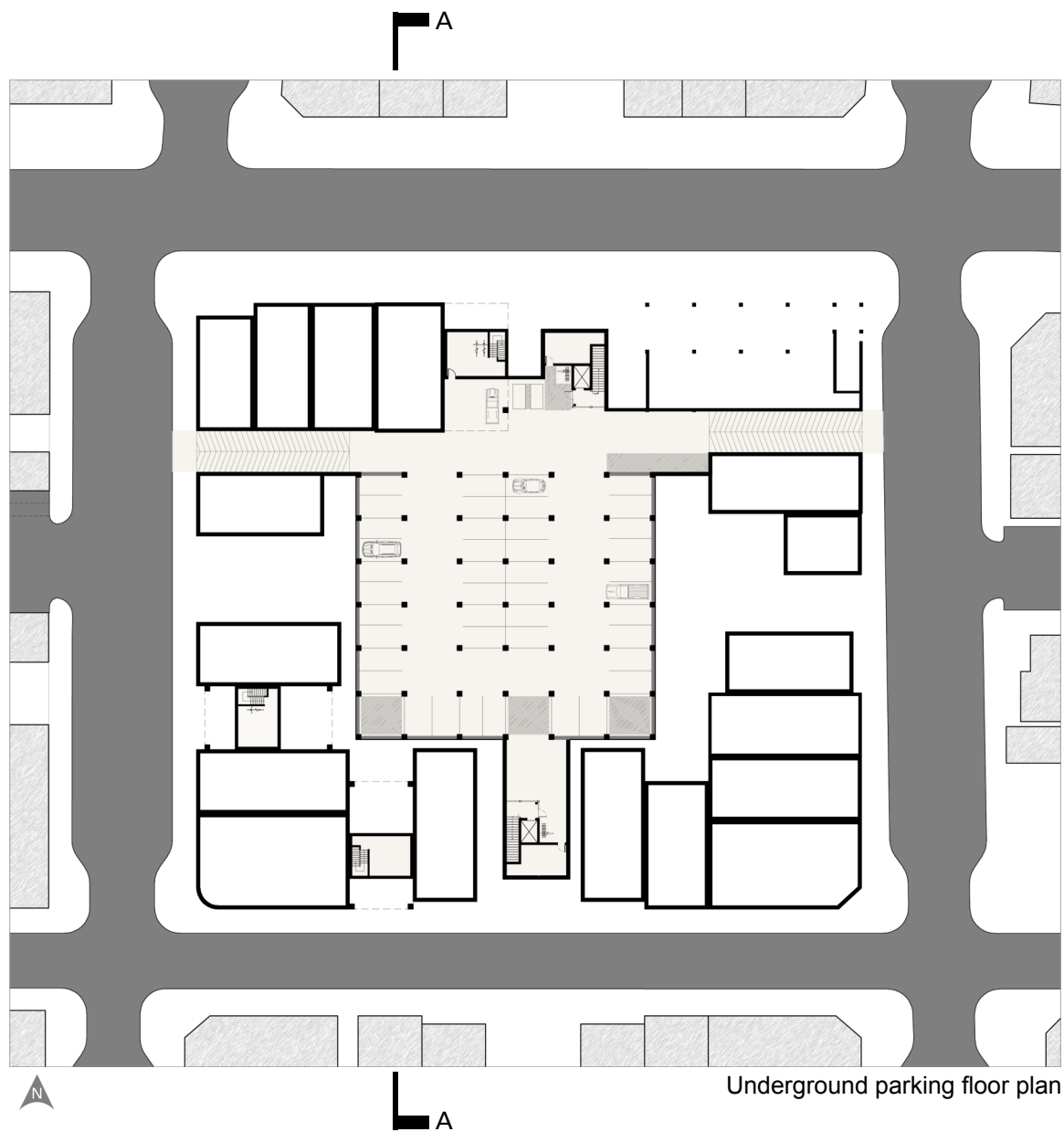
this culture of innovation and creativity. Ground level shops offer the perfect setting for a small art studio or café, which open both onto the street and onto the central public square, which can host smaller cultural events.

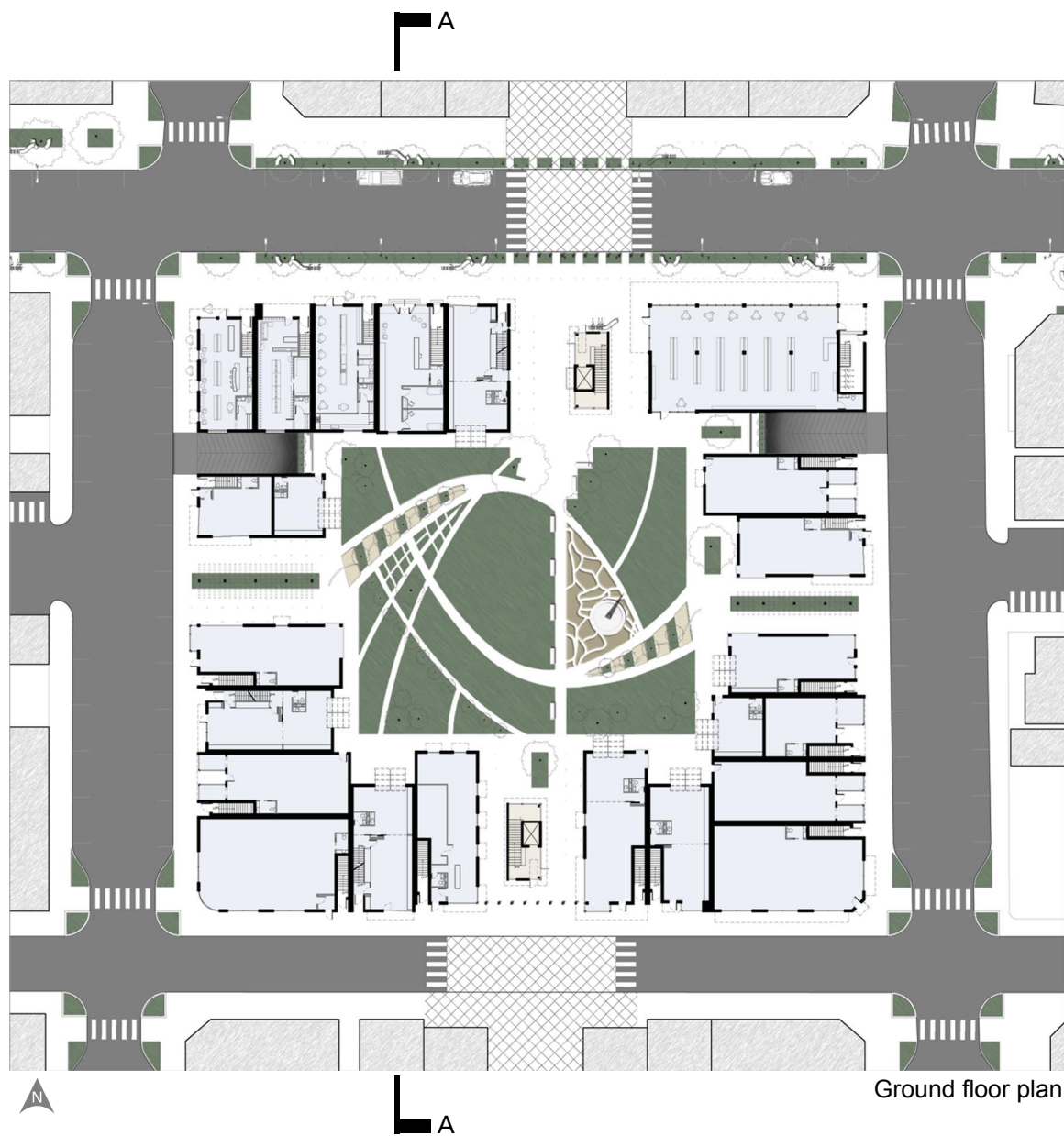


Amherstburg also has a long history of crafts and manufacturing including creative skills such as tinsmithing, woodworking, and metalwork. Initially done out of necessity, these crafts have now become artistic activities that commemorate the past. In the context of the design, a celebration of this past is evident in the use of brick, metal, and wood in the buildings' façades. The unique sculptural quality of the green space is also reminiscent of the precision and skill needed to perform the creative crafts of Amherstburg's past.



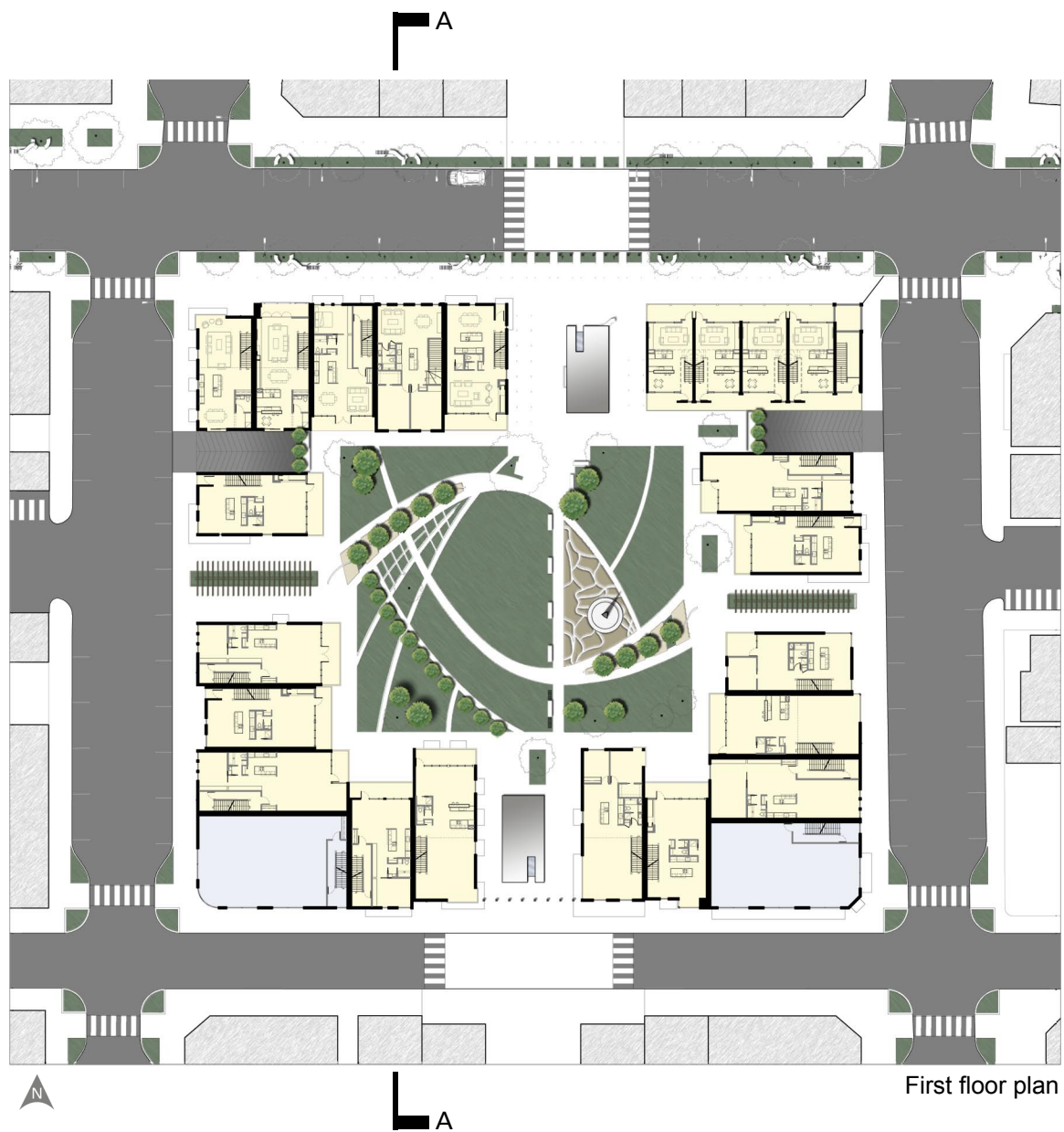






- Surrounding buildings
- Access to parking
- Commercial
- Square

0 50m



- Surrounding buildings
- Commercial
- Residential
- Square

0 50m



- Surrounding buildings
- Commercial
- Residential
- Square

0 50m



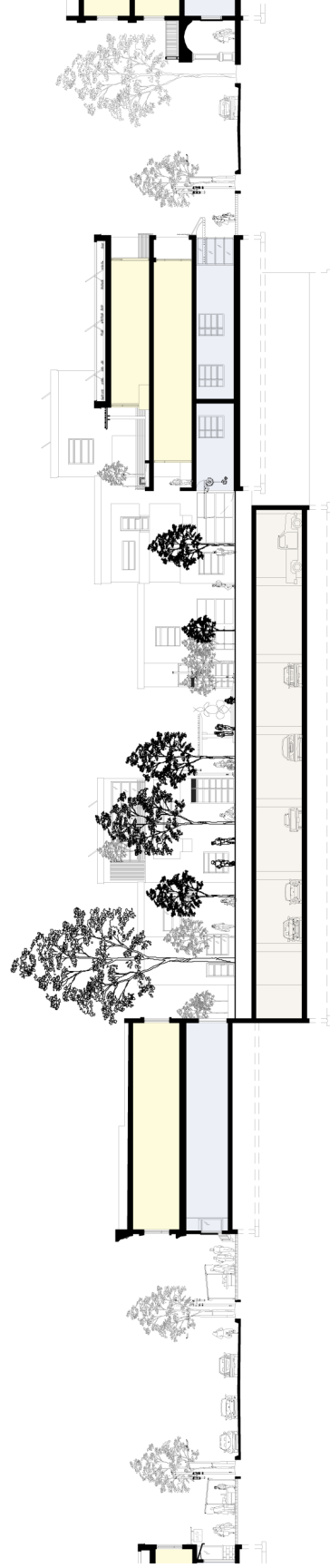
- Surrounding buildings
- Commercial
- Residential
- Square

0 50m



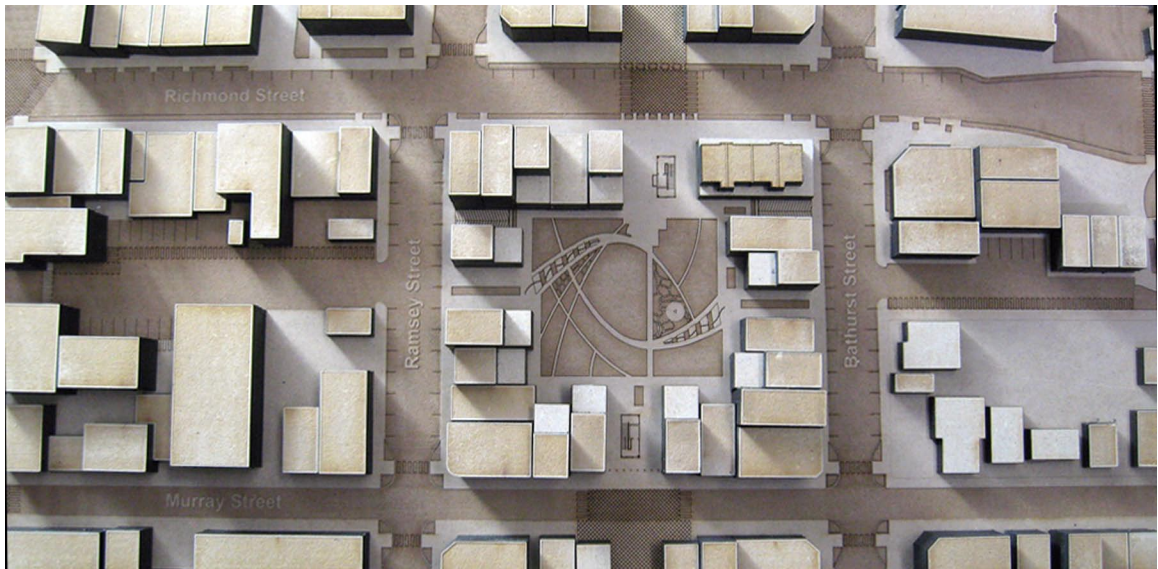


Site model plan view



Section AA

Underground parking   Commercial   Residential



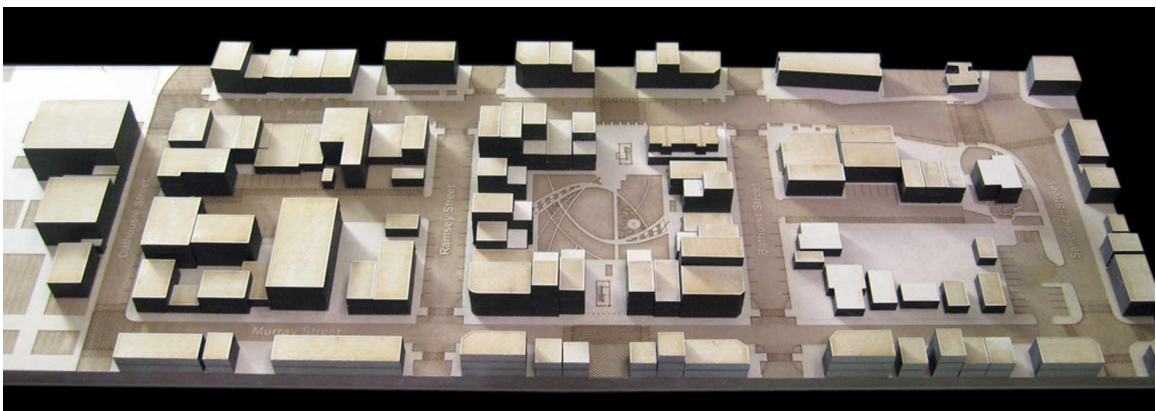
Plan view



Looking Southwest

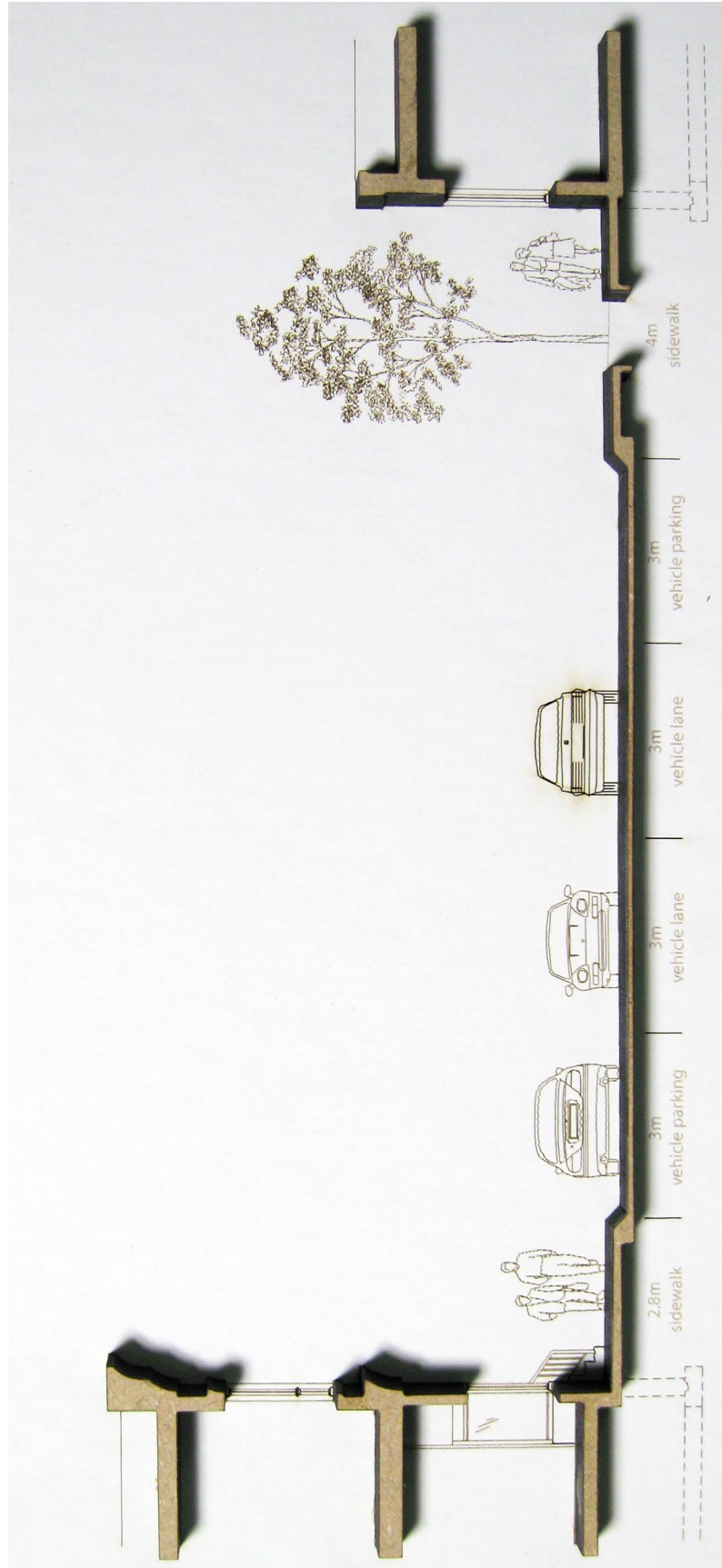


Looking Northwest



Bird's eye view looking North





Existing street conditions





Proposed street conditions



Landmark sculpture - as an example of art and craft in the public square. Sculpted by Sal Criscenzo

## URBAN PHASING PLAN

### Existing Visual Form

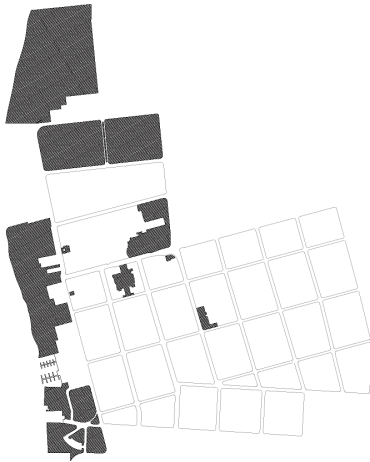
In accordance with the design approach of Jan Gehl, the implementation of the project design is intended to occur over time. The selected method of design represented the initial phase of a sequential and gradual plan. It is representative of the overall goal and illustrates the first step towards transforming the visual form of Amherstburg. Based on a visual study of the town's existing urban form, the opportunity for improvement is clearly identified a visual study of Amherstburg's existing urban form illustrates that there is room for improvement.



## Phasing Plan



Phase One: Existing urban state



Phase Two: Develop artistic centre and adjust block structure



Phase Three: Create pedestrian shopping district and develop civic green space.



Phase Four: Connect block to water's edge and develop public parks



Phase Five: Expand pedestrian shopping district and further adjust block structure



Phase Six: Complete pedestrian Greenway and introduce transportation nodes.



## Proposed Visual Form

The proposed visual form resulting from the implementation of the selected design will contribute to the improvement of the urban grid in terms of new urban elements and enhancements to existing elements. The introduction of new nodes and landmarks creates focal points that did not exist. Paths are more clearly defined and accommodate pedestrians over vehicles. The pedestrian focus is further enhanced by the introduction of distinct districts that are linked by a central corridor connecting the entire urban grid from north to south. The outcome of these changes will be a significant improvement on continuity.



## THE URBAN GREENWAY

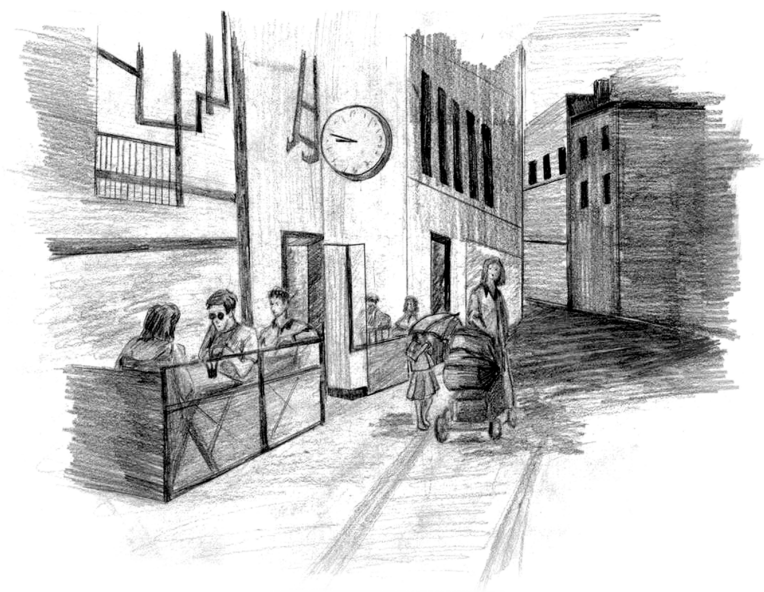
The urban greenway is a proposal aimed at helping Amherstburg regain its promising identity. It presents a series of connected and related districts that celebrate various aspects of urban life. The goal is that, together, they work to create a comprehensive and cohesive setting made of different spaces that build off of and enhance each other. It is important to note, however, that this proposal is only intended to depict a possible scenario for the town. Using the ideas implemented in the project design and applying these same concepts to the surrounding areas, the urban greenway represents a solution that creates quality spaces for people. It focuses on the pedestrian and developing spaces that facilitate positive experiences.





## Neighbourhood District

The most northern block of the urban greenway, the neighbourhood district continues to focus on the residential purpose of the nearby areas. The intention is to promote socialization and create an environment that celebrates the friendliness and comfort of a neighbourhood. Venues such as cafés, bistros, and intimate parks are, therefore, incorporated to provide ideal settings where individuals can gather. Incorporating historic form and elements into the design of structures and public areas contribute to a sense of identity, and the spacious and appealing qualities of a boulevard setting also help to establish this inviting setting. Spaces that provide the opportunity to walk, sit, and play are part of the design. This neighbourhood district is meant to celebrate the potential to include a comfortable and pleasant residential area within the inner core of an urban area, which helps to create a successful and multi-functional space.





Neighbourhood District map

- Surrounding buildings
- Paving
- Parks
- Pedestrian path
- Link to adjacent district
- Padio area
- Facade type a
- Gathering area

0 40m

## Community Renewal District

The community renewal district is a celebration of Amherstburg's revival. Incorporated into the space are areas where people can gather for the opportunity to sit and talk and enjoy the amenities provided within the urban setting. Commercial buildings are found throughout the space to promote economic development and provide a convenient shopping area for residents in nearby neighbourhoods. To help establish a flow between surrounding districts, residential spaces and building materials and styles that are aligned with the town's historic identity are incorporated into the area. An effort is also made to face residential spaces towards the central urban square to provide "eyes on the street" that help promote a sense of community and safety. A focal landmark is also added to the square to help identify the area.





Community Renewal District map

- Surrounding buildings
- Civic buildings
- Square
- Parks
- Gathering area
- Pedestrian path
- Important view
- Link to adjacent district
- Facade type a
- Facade type b
- Landmark

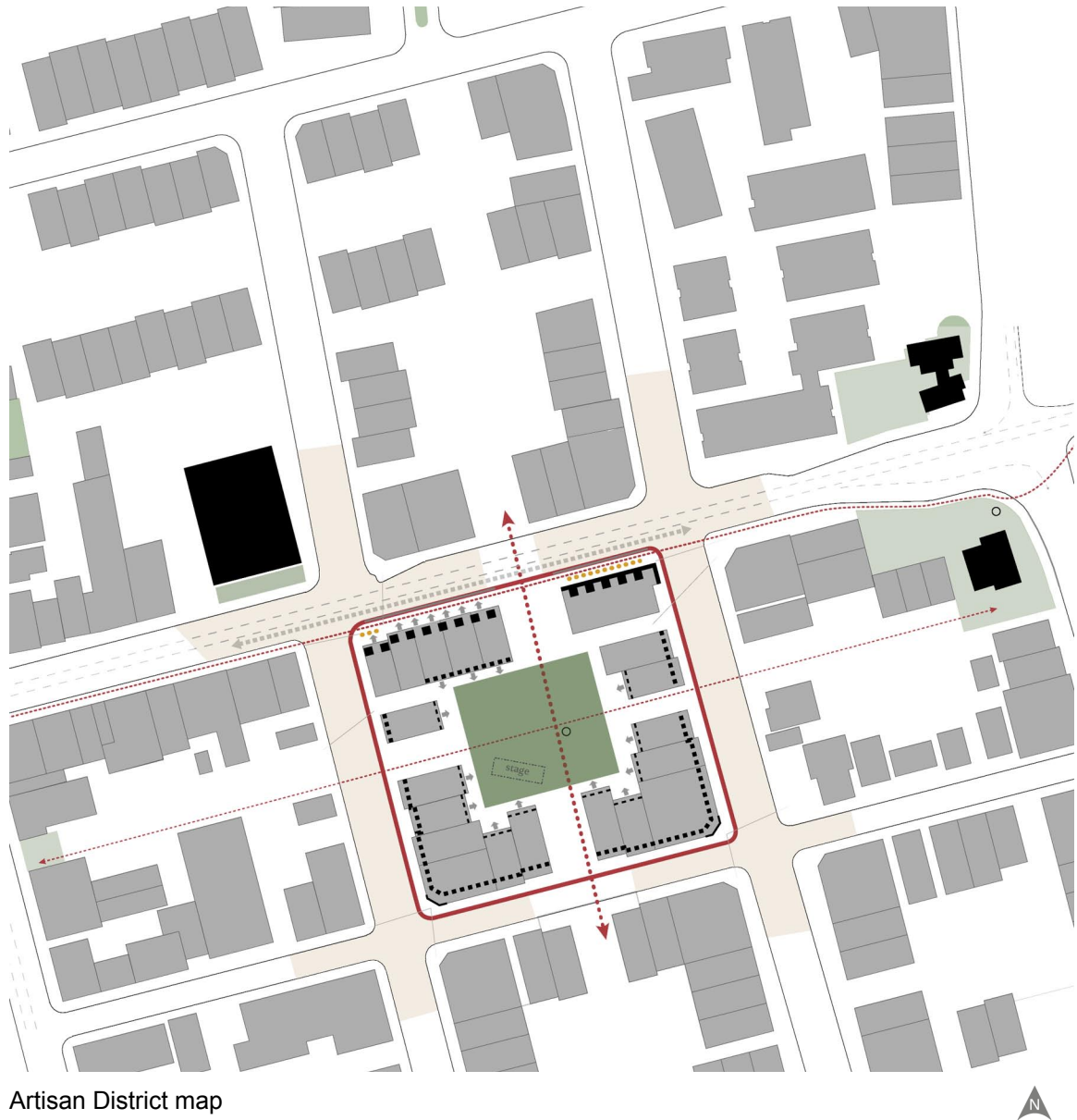
0 40m

## Artisan District

The artisan district represents the proposed design for this project. The intention is to engage pedestrians and create a welcoming urban area. This is accomplished through storefront seating and widened sidewalks which encourage individuals to use the space. Creating buildings with a main streetfront façade as well as a finished rear façade that faces a central courtyard furthers this cause. Studio spaces are designed on the main level of buildings that face onto the courtyard. The goal is to encourage an artistic identity to celebrate the history and culture of Amherstburg's artists and trades people. The use of this courtyard as a community-based venue is encouraged by incorporating seating, walking paths, and a central sculpture. It must be a multi-functional space with elements such as a removable stage to provide an area for town events, which can attract both residents and visitors to the urban core. Views are also important to this district. For instance, residential spaces include balconies that face onto the urban courtyard and its sculptural qualities.







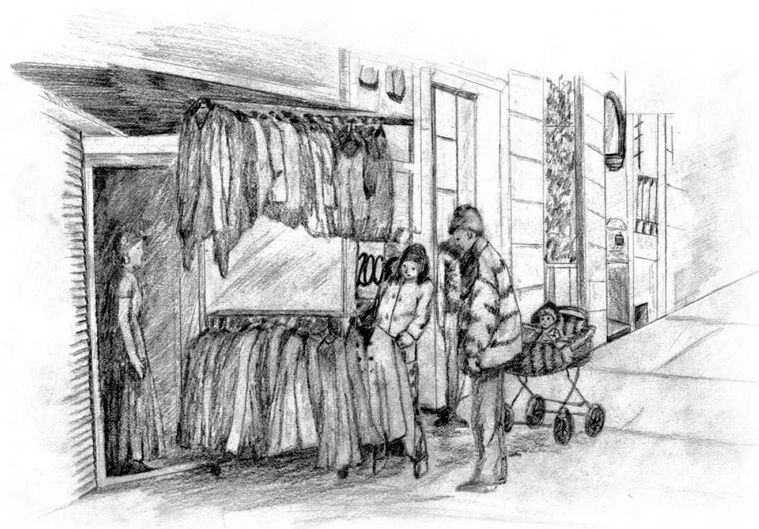
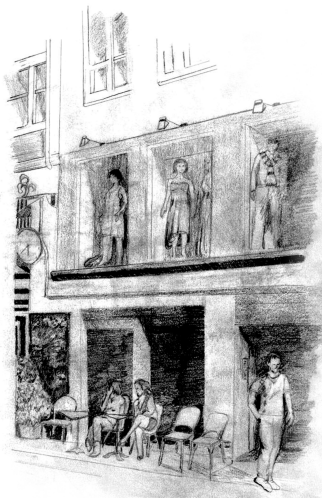
Artisan District map

- Surrounding buildings
- Civiv buildings
- Paving
- Parks
- Edge
- ... Pedestrian path
- ... Link to adjacent district
- ... Padio area
- Facade type a
- Facade type b
- Landmark

0 40m

## Commercial District

The commercial district is a celebration of urban activity. It is intended to be a bustling area full of people and action. The goal is to attract pedestrians to the area to help promote Amherstburg's commercial activity. This is accomplished by using a variety of building materials to create façades that are distinctive and visually appealing. Building entrances and features should also create an inviting environment. Each structure must have a unique identity while still relating to the overall cohesiveness of the block. Opportunities to stand and stay such as patios and benches should be incorporated into the streetscape to encourage individuals to enjoy the urban setting and activities. Details such as paving markings that indicate market stall layout can help establish order while facilitating the commercial activities intended for this space. As a central district within the urban greenway, this area should facilitate a pedestrian link between the waterfront properties and the recreation district at the eastern edge of the development. Views to the water should also be enhanced by limiting building heights.





Commercial District map



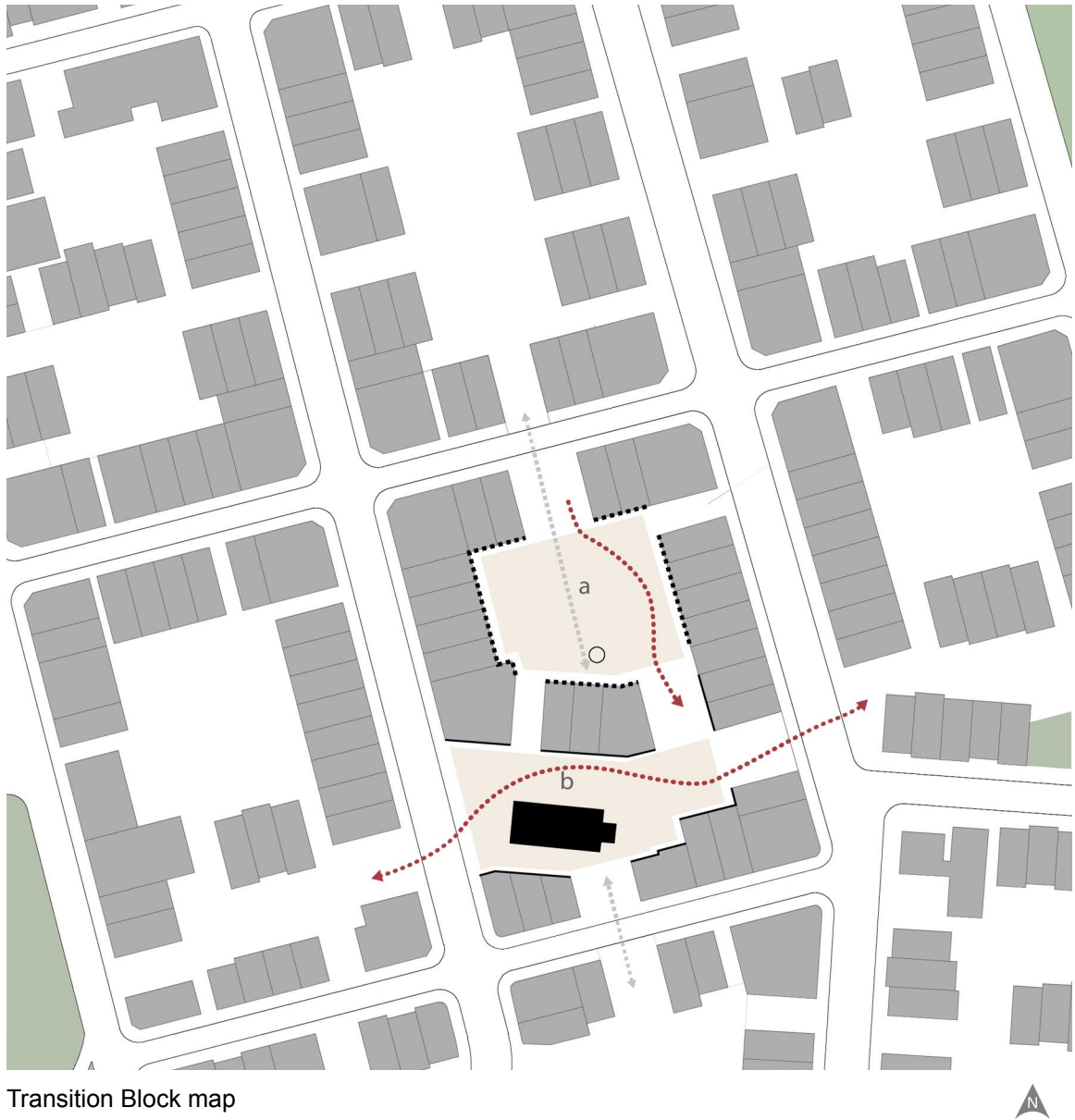
- Surrounding buildings
- Civic building
- Square
- Parks
- Gathering area
- Pedestrian path
- Important view
- - - Link to adjacent district
- Facade type a
- Facade type b

0 40m

## Transition Block

The role of the transition block is to create a somewhat gradual flow between the liveliness of the commercial district and the tranquility of the urban sanctuary. It allows pedestrians to travel between these two extremes through a neutral transition zone. This is facilitated by limiting commercial use to the north end of the block, which is closest to the commercial district. Residential spaces are closest to the urban sanctuary at the block's south end. This block is designed around a focal path that is created using unique materials, lighting emphasis, and visual landmarks to promote navigation to and through the space. The usability of the block is facilitated through building positioning, which creates defined spaces that allows simultaneous use. For instance, a structure sitting in the centre of the square helps to divide the block into two distinct areas that can be used for separate purposes.





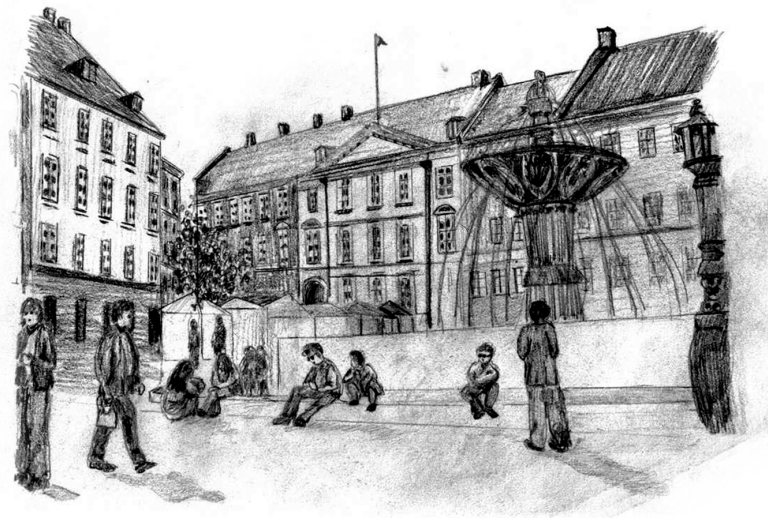
Transition Block map

- Surrounding buildings
- Church
- Square
- Parks
- Pedestrian path
- Link to adjacent district
- Facade type a
- Facade type b
- Landmark

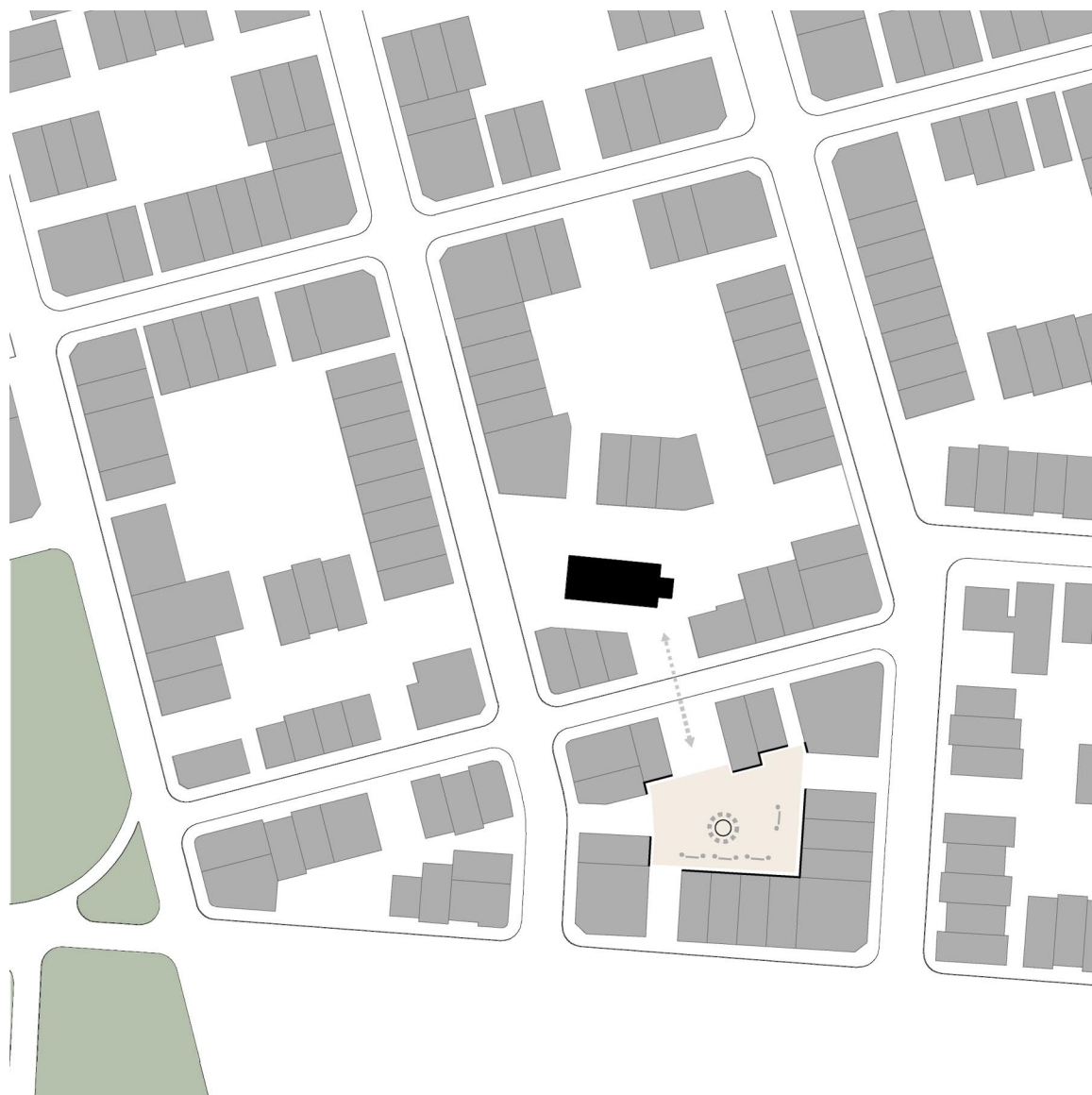
0 40m

## Urban Sanctuary

Located at the far south of the urban greenway, the urban sanctuary provides a quieter and more secluded setting for individuals to enjoy. The intent is to create a space within the downtown area that provides a more intimate public venue. Limited access points to the block's centre creates a more private and secluded atmosphere that establishes a sense of calm and safety. Building characteristics such as wood, warm tones of colour, and historic form further enhance this calming and welcoming environment. Commercial use should also be limited in this space and street furniture, trees, and other elements can be used to promote “talkscapes” where individuals can meet with companions and enjoy the outdoors.







Urban sanctuary map

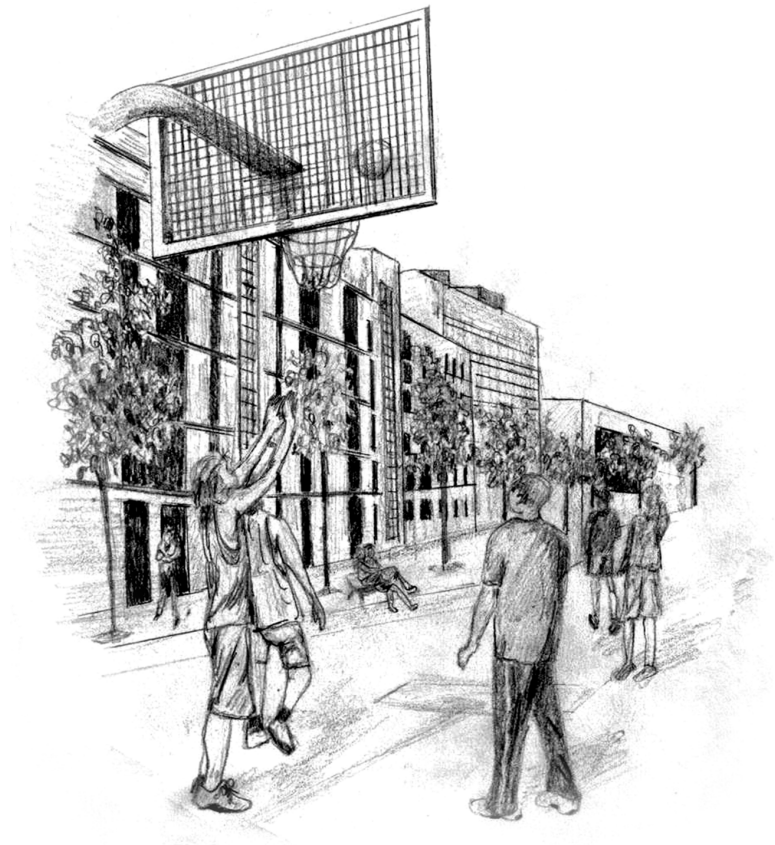


- Surrounding buildings
- Civic building
- Square
- Parks
- Link to adjacent district
- Facade type a
- Facade type b
- Landmark

0 40m

## Recreation District

A recreation district must provide opportunities for physical activity and enjoying the outdoor setting. It must also provide a broad range of activities in order to attract a diverse spectrum of individuals and have the potential to accommodate all members of the community. Infrastructure such as basketball courts would be incorporated to facilitate a variety of activities. These features should also allow year-round use. For instance, a basketball court can be designed to transform into an ice rink during winter months. A sufficient amount of open space must also be kept to provide opportunities for walking and general active use. Small structures such as pergolas should be included to offer protection from the elements, thereby allowing individuals to use the space in various climate conditions.

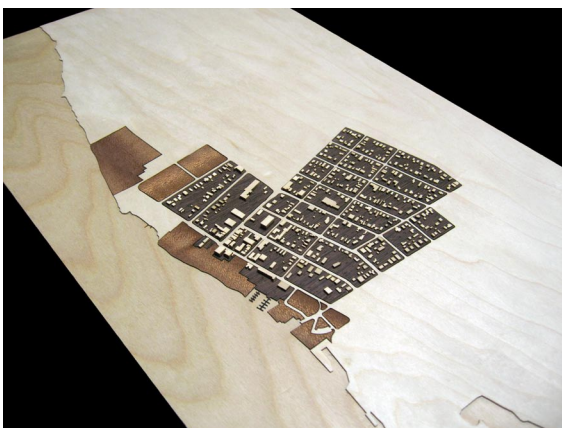
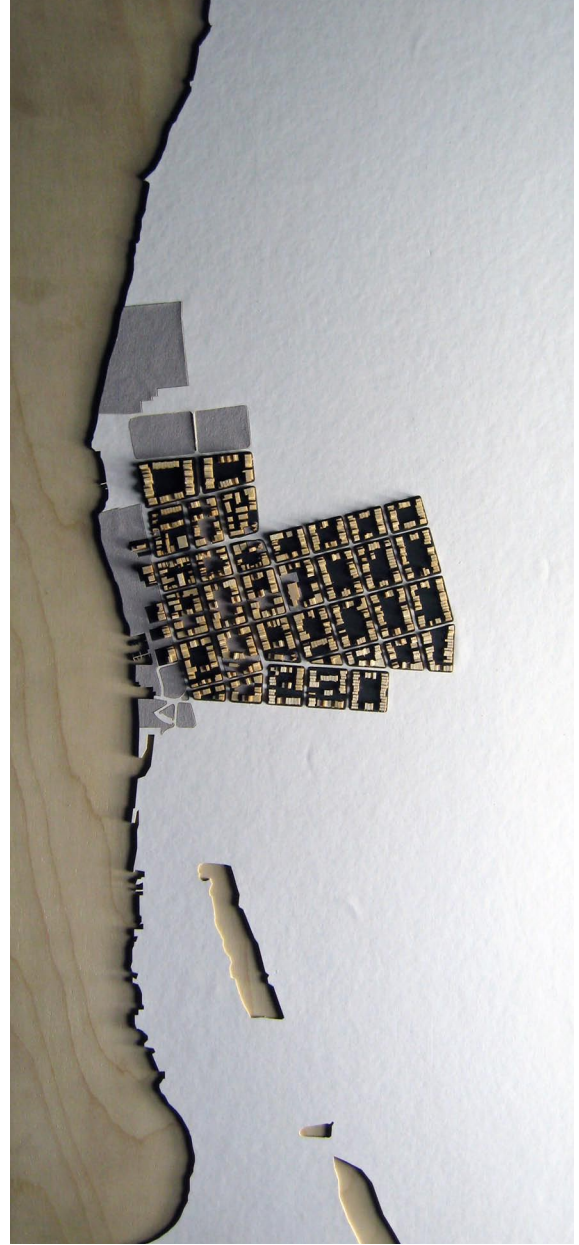
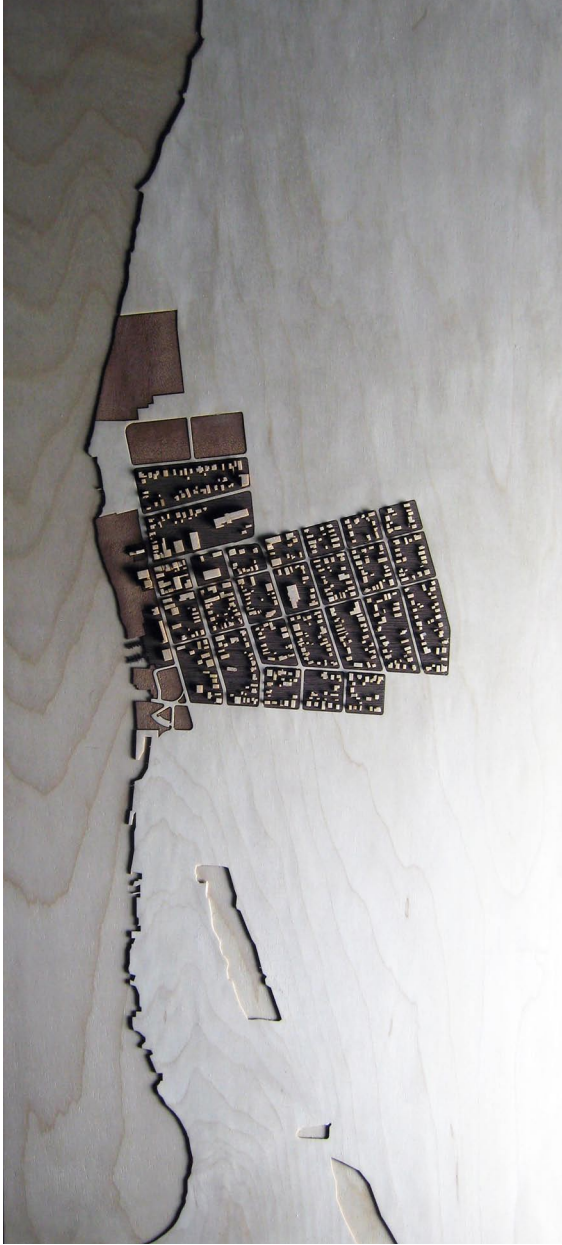




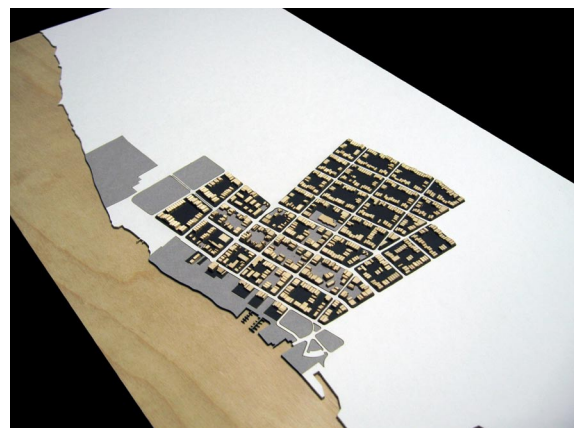
Recreation District map

- Surrounding buildings
- Civic building
- Parks
- Pedestrian path
- Important view
- Facade type a
- Facade type b
- Landmark

0 40m

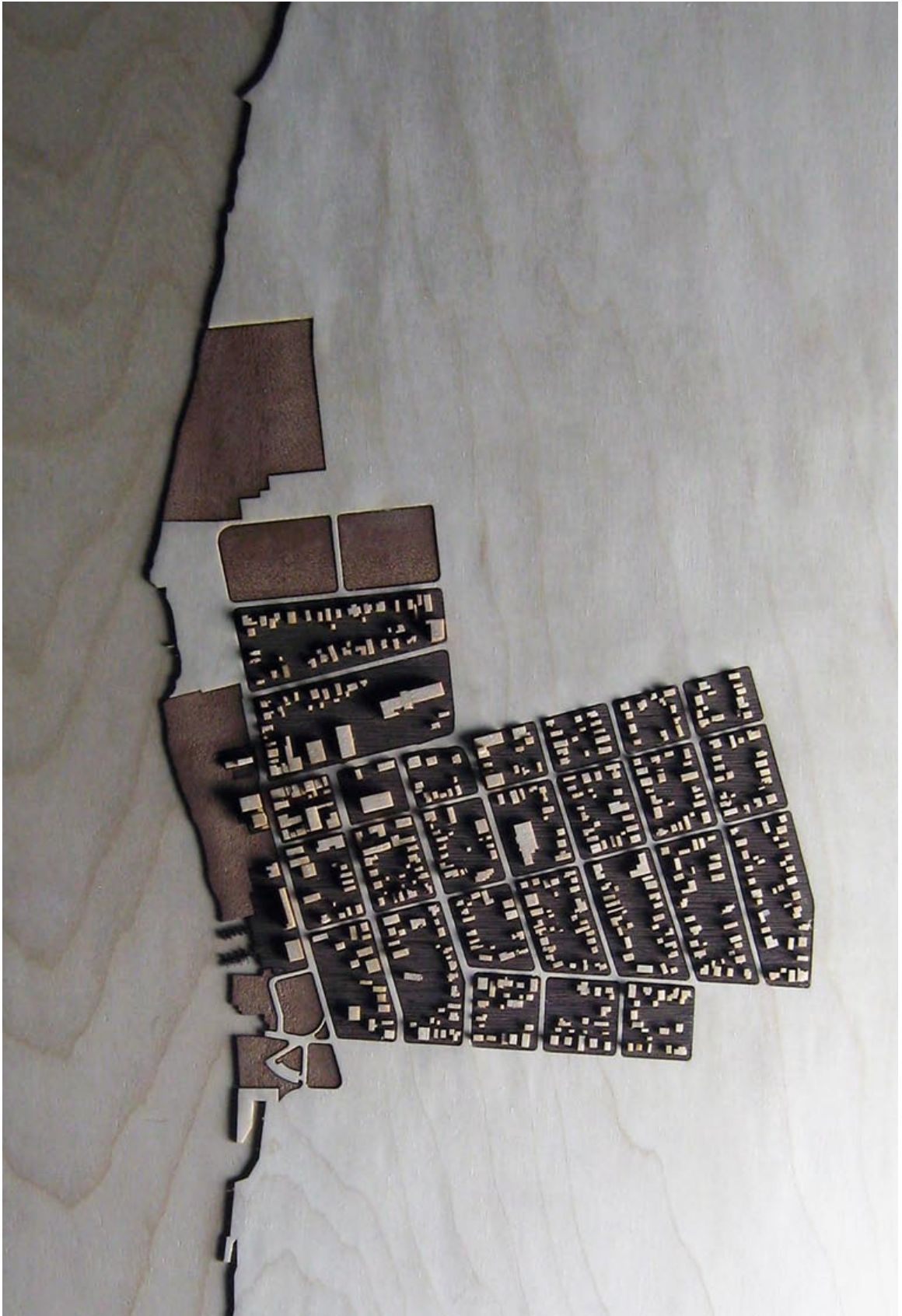


Existing urban form

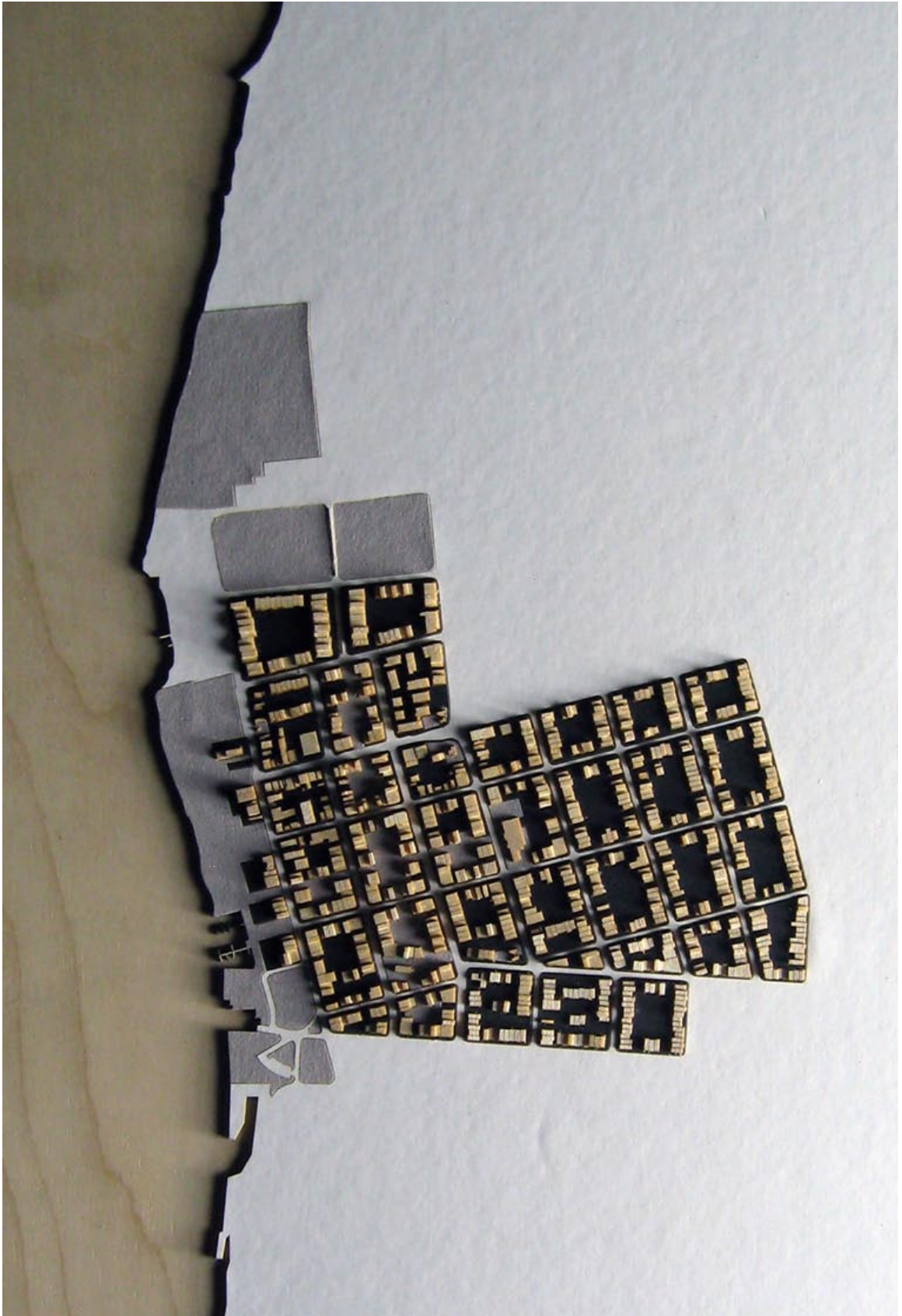


Proposed urban form





Existing urban form



Proposed urban form



## SUMMARY

When addressing the issue of inefficient urban spaces, it is important to realize that there is no single solution. Various factors and conditions must be considered in order to arrive at a solution that is best suited to the specific needs and situation of a given urban context. To find this solution, however, it is essential to draw upon proven principles for good design. This thesis has presented a series of guidelines based on the knowledge and experience of influential members of the architectural community. While each of the designers referenced in this report have been commended for their individual contributions, their design philosophies and approaches are fundamentally similar. Their recommendations can be examined as a whole to outline a summary of the essential steps for creating quality urban spaces.

### *- Celebrate unique urban identities:*

This notion of identity relates to Kevin Lynch's idea of districts in terms of establishing a collective purpose for an area of a city, or to the element of landmarks, which can be used to help define a space. It is this recognizable identity that contributes to a sense of community, which in turn promotes the use of a space.

### *- Define the urban edge:*

A well-designed urban block is one where spaces include defined "starts" and "stops". This is not to say that a streetscape must become a series of disjointed elements. Rather, the goal should be to create a street edge and line it with buildings that create a distinctive backdrop. The design should also allow them to meet in the middle to show the harmony and rhythm that exists between them.

*- Use variety to create dynamic spaces:*

Successful spaces are those that are used; therefore, urban spaces must be designed with a particular purpose in mind so that the appropriate elements can be incorporated. These spaces should also be able to change, however. This means that spaces should accommodate a variety of activities and be able to adjust should changes arise in the larger urban context. This flexibility will ensure that they will continue to promote and experience activity.

*- Create connections throughout the urban context:*

While each individual space will have unique elements, they must fit effectively into a larger setting. The urban greenway presented in the design proposal demonstrates the potential to link areas and create a complete urban environment by considering both similarities and differences. Learning how to achieve connections effectively will help our towns and cities grow and expand.

*- Design to the pedestrian scale:*

An urban setting populated by people is much more successful than one overrun by vehicles. Finding ways to invite and encourage individuals to use urban spaces greatly impacts their overall success. The design proposed in this thesis focuses on achieving this pedestrian scale by incorporating smaller structures. The idea of incorporating commercial spaces that promote creative, niche products also builds on this idea. This helps to establish a sense of ownership and pride, a more personal manifestation of the pedestrian scale.

*- Develop engaging building façades:*

Incorporating visually appealing structural elements into urban design is closely related to the pedestrian-focus. Individuals

enjoy environments that are attractive and interesting; therefore, ensuring that buildings possess these characteristics can greatly impact the use of an urban space.

*- Leverage open public spaces:*

While many people think of buildings and other structures when talking of cities, open space is equally important. Successful urban settings find effective ways of balancing built space with open space. This prevents crowding and over-density, which has been shown to nudge people out of the downtown area and into the suburbs.

*- Combine commercial and residential uses to promote density and diversity:*

Mixed-use buildings can add a lot of value to an urban setting. Incorporating both residential and commercial spaces into an area can have a positive impact on local economies. Individuals who live in the area are in need of products and services that can now be easily accessed. Providing interesting products and services, and appealing venues for them, helps attract visitors living outside of the downtown area. The building program and central courtyard of the proposed thesis design is an example of how to support this multi-functional purpose.

Collectively, these principles offer a thorough approach for transforming disused or poorly designed areas into diverse urban spaces. They offer valuable guidelines without dictating specific form or style, which provides designers with the necessary freedom. This thesis emphasizes the importance of leveraging proven guidelines to create quality spaces. Whether a space takes on a historic, traditional, or contemporary form is not significant. Rather, what is important is that the project considers the principles that will promote

success, and that the new design stays true to the environment and respects patterns and traditions while promoting new developments.

There is one final guideline, that should be considered. As designers, we must accept that change should be implemented gradually. Care must be taken to ensure that the decisions made will produce a cumulative effect that responds to place and time. Beginning small and allowing the people and the environment to shape the solution will produce the most appropriate results. This design project has followed that approach and it represents another step in the architect's continuous journey to building a better environment.

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