

# EVOLVING MAIN STREET







# EVOLVING MAIN STREET

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MASTERS THESIS

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Fall 2017 - Winter 2018



WELCOME TO  
CEDAR SPRINGS

STOP

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# INTRODUCTION

Walking down a small town Main Street, the mind starts to drift—recalling a nostalgic sense of better times, where happy people stroll the streets, read the newspaper, and greet each other as they ask the store clerk for their order. Flashback to reality—the street is lonely, half the buildings are vacant, and instead of people walking by, cars drive past. Many small town Main Streets have become either empty spaces or hollowed out tourist zones. People long for their cute Main Street to thrive, but how can they ever be what they once were? Is it even possible?

Main Streets have faded in functional relevancy, suffering at the hands of big box stores, online retailers, and automobile-centered life. In many aspects, they are becoming an antiquated response to today's lifestyles. Even as many

towns seek to draw upon the nostalgia of better days, they have waned in their ability to reflect social conditions and meet the needs of today. Small town Main Streets often have a difficult time generating enough economic power to spark new developments. When this does happen, though, developers tend to look backwards, drawing on what they perceive as comfortable, safe forms, but in doing so edge on degrading the comfortable into kitsch. Seeking that lost aura of yesterday, Main Streets are becoming a dime in a dozen. What is Main Street in the modern age? Can a new intervention simultaneously harmonize with the existing context and evolve with the future?



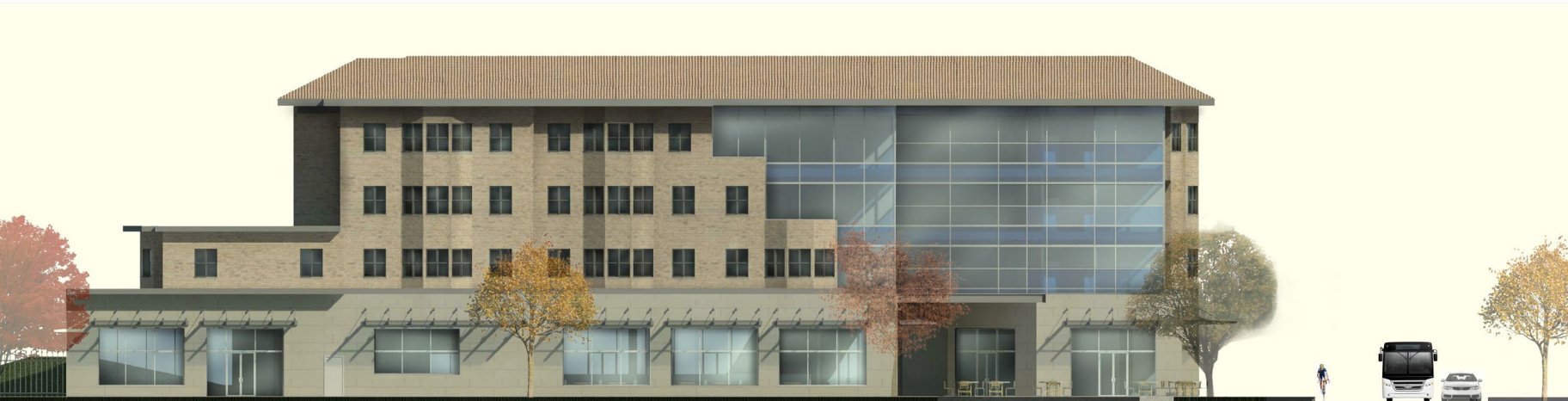
## HOW DID I GET STARTED?

Throughout my experience in architecture studio, I have worked with many projects dealing with responding to existing contexts of often historic buildings. While some of my designs did a better job than did others of responding to these contexts, I was intrigued as to why some attitudes of contextualism worked better than others. I started looking at various ways architects related their interventions to the neighboring structures. While studying abroad in Europe, I observed a great variety in the way cultures and localities approached designing next to their historic buildings. At the same time, I spent a good part of my life living in a small town that I watched struggle with vacancy and lack of investment. While I saw the community treasure its sparsely populated Main Street, I also saw the continued growth of chain stores near the highway, while Main Street buildings were left to one by one burn to the ground. When presented with the prospect of writing a thesis, then, it is fitting I continue my exploration of contextual design while relating it to a problem closer to home — the fading relevancy of small town Main Streets.



## SMALL TOWN STUDIES

Looking at Main Streets throughout Michigan, they often seem cute, picturesque, and in part symbolic of how life should be lived. However, one does not have to look very deep to see how the current state of Main Street does not entirely coincide with the reality of today's lifestyles. The following brief look at four towns shows buildings and streets that seemingly follow the prevailing best practices of contextual design for Main Streets, yet still show a number of issues. How can this be? This is not a coincidence, but rather a symptom of the need to rethink contextual design.



## BOUTIQUES AND BARS

*Lake Orion, MI*

Main Streets used to be the economic core of small towns. Now, new development is often limited to auto-oriented bypasses, while the old Main Street is relegated to boutiques and bars



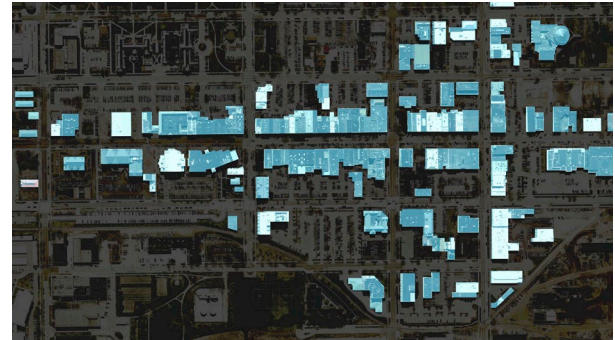




## SCALING UP

*Holland, MI*

Many new developments are much larger than their context. The result trades variety of expression for homogeneity. Some of these buildings try to break up their facades, but look like scaled up versions of smaller buildings.





## COLUMNS AND CORNICES

*Northville, MI*

Infill buildings often use “traditional” elements or materials such as columns and cornices, or brick in an effort to “fit in.” Such buildings often look kitschy, or monotonous and uninspired



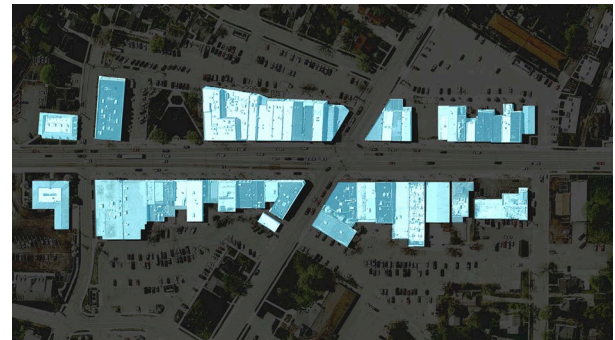


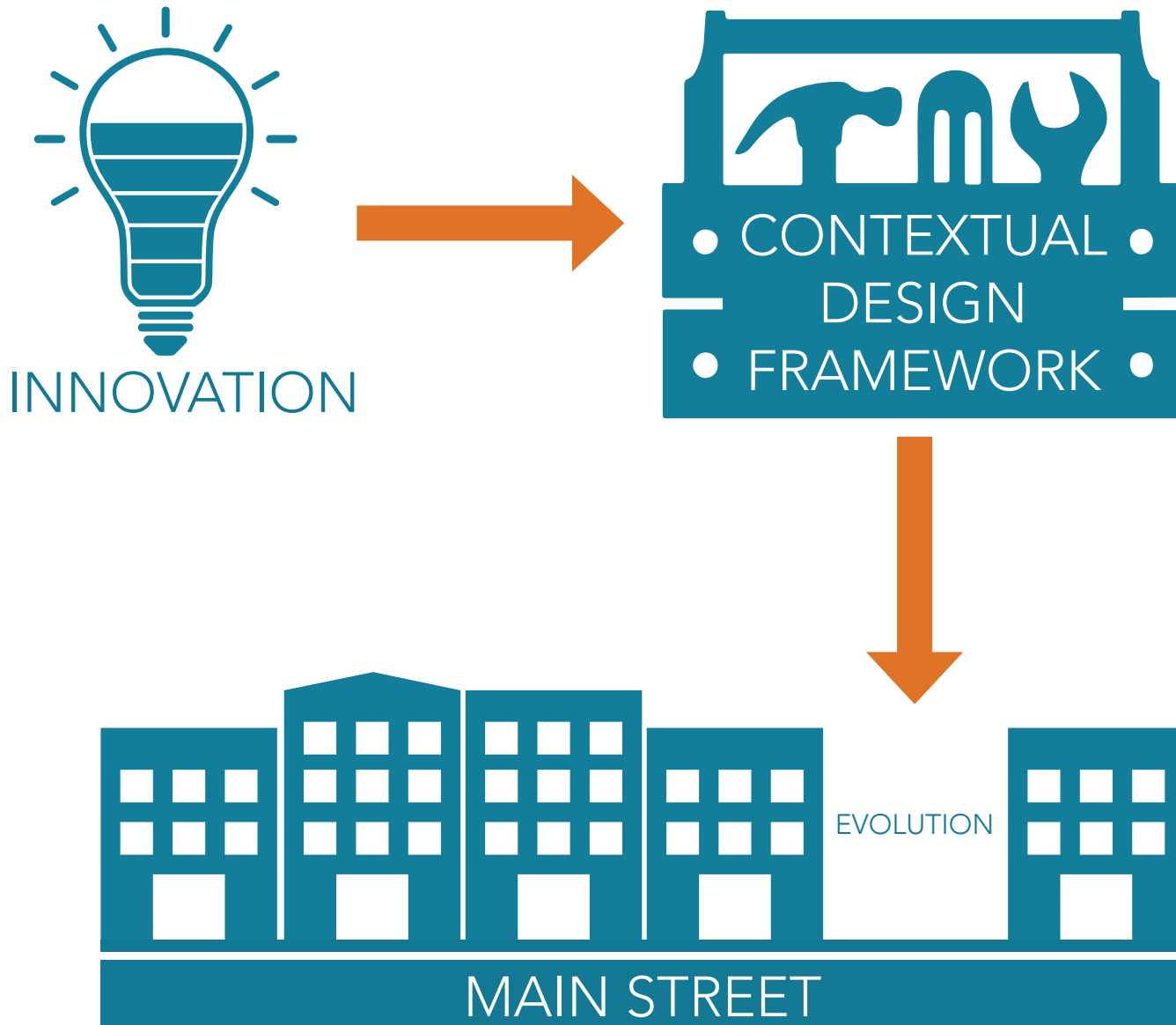


## WHERE DO THE CARS GO?

*Oxford, MI*

To stay viable, Main Street must accommodate the automobile. Does it continue to be a large-scale thoroughfare, or does this take away from the pedestrian experience? How is parking accommodated while keeping a street wall?





## THESIS STRUCTURE

To best address the topic of Main Street's evolution, this thesis is broken into three parts. It begins by setting up a new framework for understanding contextual design based on social conditions rather than aesthetic or formal relationships. This includes gathering a vocabulary to discuss contextual design, examining differing philosophies towards historic buildings as contexts, explaining the current prevailing view of designing new buildings next to old buildings, and looking at design guidelines. It concludes by evaluating the commonly held ideas of contextual design, then introducing social conditions and lifestyles as another context that should be addressed. Based off of this foundation, the second part of this research delves into Main Street America. It analyzes the history of Main Streets, and shows that they have been evolving for the last hundred and fifty years, and must keep evolving to stay viable. This section then uses the framework of social conditions to identify a new set of design guidelines for Main Street. Finally, the third part of this thesis uses Cedar Springs (a Michigan small town) to explore potential ways that this necessary evolution could take form, and begins to test their effectiveness and sensitivity to their context.

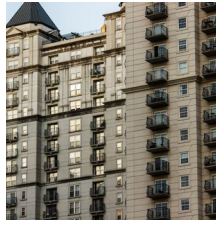


PART I

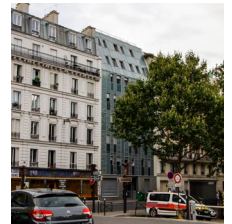
## RETHINKING CONTEXTUAL DESIGN



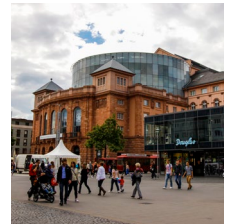
# MATCHING



# ABSTRACT REFERENCE



# INTENTIONAL OPPOSITION



## CHAPTER 01

# PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

What should a new building next to an old building look like? Need the new intervention take on the style of its existing neighbors to “fit in,” or ought it differentiate itself with a modern style to “be true” to itself? This was the initial question that this thesis sought to answer. However, the debate often presented as a dichotomy of embracing either harmony and unity or progress and expression, is actually one full of subtleties and evolution in the thoughts themselves. Investigation into the question led to many varying philosophical viewpoints. Thus, to understand the attitudes of contextual design, one should start with these various philosophical opinions and attitudes towards respecting historic or existing contexts.



## VIOLLET-LE-DUC — LIVING HISTORY

Viollet-le-Duc was one of the first people to rigorously pursue preserving and restoring buildings. A 19th century French architect, he saw buildings as living entities, and did not shy away from restoring or even improving historic structures. He was one of the first people to systematize building in a contextually sensitive manner, and created many invaluable stylistic studies. Though very talented and science/research oriented in his work, he was criticized for being too inventive or heavy-handed with conjecture. For example, while restoring churches and castles, he would often recreate many elements that he saw as improvements to the original design.

## JOHN RUSKIN — SACRED HISTORY

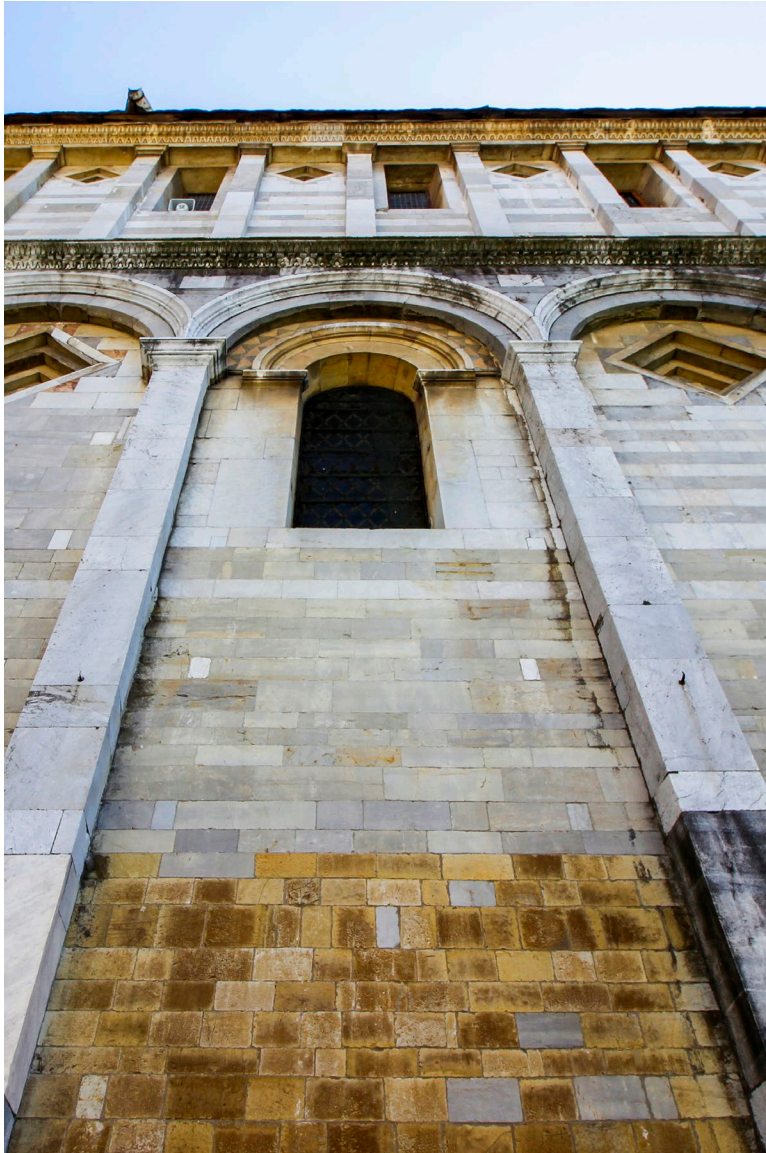
John Ruskin, A leading English art critic of the Victorian era, argued for a very hands-off approach to historic preservation. He promoted a non-interventionism, which held the existing historic structure with a near sacred status. He believed that such buildings only need good stewardship to preserve what has been handed down to the present generation, and that restoration was nearly always a bad idea.



*Château de Pierrefonds by Viollet-Le-Duc*



*Abbeville Church of St Wulfran by John Ruskin*



*Restoration work on the Pisa Cathedral. Pisa, Italy*

## THE ITALIAN SCHOOL — HISTORY AS A STORY

Finally, the Italian school (originating with Raffaello Stern's and Valadier's restoration work on the Arch of Titus in the early 1800s) strikes a middle road. It allows for restoration of a historic building as long as the work is minimal and clearly distinct from the existing structure. This philosophy is, even today, apparent all throughout Italy, as the history of a building can often be read through its façade. The Pisan Cathedral, for instance, has walls that, when damaged in WWII, were reconstructed, but out of tan sandstone instead of the original white marble. Thus, the observer sees the complete expression of the building, but is not confused with what the newer intervention is and what is the more historic. Note, they do not make the straight-cut distinction of modern and historic, because when there is thousands of years of history, all is not equal. Rather, it is a timeline, where any given intervention is judged as newer or older than another given interventions.

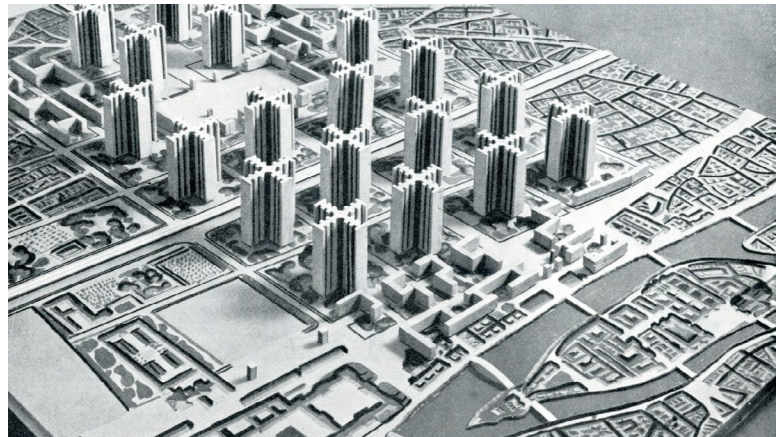


## MODERNISM — HISTORICAL APATHY

Le Corbusier, like many other modernists, saw this association with the past as a weight that hampered progress, and thus sought to free architecture and design from their semiotic histories. The modernists saw program and function as the primary originators of form. In this light, Corbusier developed his Five Points of Architecture, as a way for buildings to evolve to meet the needs of industrialized society. On an urban scale, Corbusier and other modernists often saw buildings as objects, rather than continuously integrated with the surrounding contexts. This attitude varied in degree, ranging from ambivalence towards context—in which their buildings stand alone and contrast their neighbors, to hostility—to where the context is intentionally wiped away to make a clean slate for the new. This was attitude of urban renewal efforts, such as Corbu's ill-fated Plan for Paris and actualized projects like Mies van der Rohe's Lafayette Park. Not many people today argue that demolishing the historic core of Paris for concrete housing towers would have been a good idea, but Lafayette Park is praised with often little regard to Detroit's Black Bottom neighborhood it replaced.



*Unité d'Habitation; Le Corbusier, Marseille*



*Ville Radieuse (Plan for Paris), Le Corbusier*



*Lafayette Park Mies; Van Der Rohe, Detroit*





*M2 Building; Kengo Kuma, Tokyo*



*Grand Castle Apartments, Grand Rapids*

## POST-MODERNISM AND KITSCH — OVER-RELIANCE ON THE FAMILIAR

Post-Modernism reacted against Modernism's shirking of historical form and ornamentation. In turn, the new movement embraced kitsch as a valid element of design. What is kitsch, though? Kitsch has become a damning adjective in the world of art and architecture. It relies on using familiar elements (often out of context), to evoke a comforting emotional response. A copy of a copy, it makes no advancements to the practice, and it misses an opportunity to evoke a new pull on the emotion — stronger than just nostalgia and comfort. Art and architecture drawing on the familiar is not intrinsically wrong. Critics may bemoan faux historic towns, such as Frankenmuth, MI (discussed later, as a little Bavaria), just as others decry Frank Ghery's and Zaha Hadid's buildings' extreme lack of aesthetic contextual deference. In moderation, leaning on the familiar is common practice. It is when the forms are overused as a crutch to the point where people don't notice them or grow tired of them that the comfortable can become kitsch.

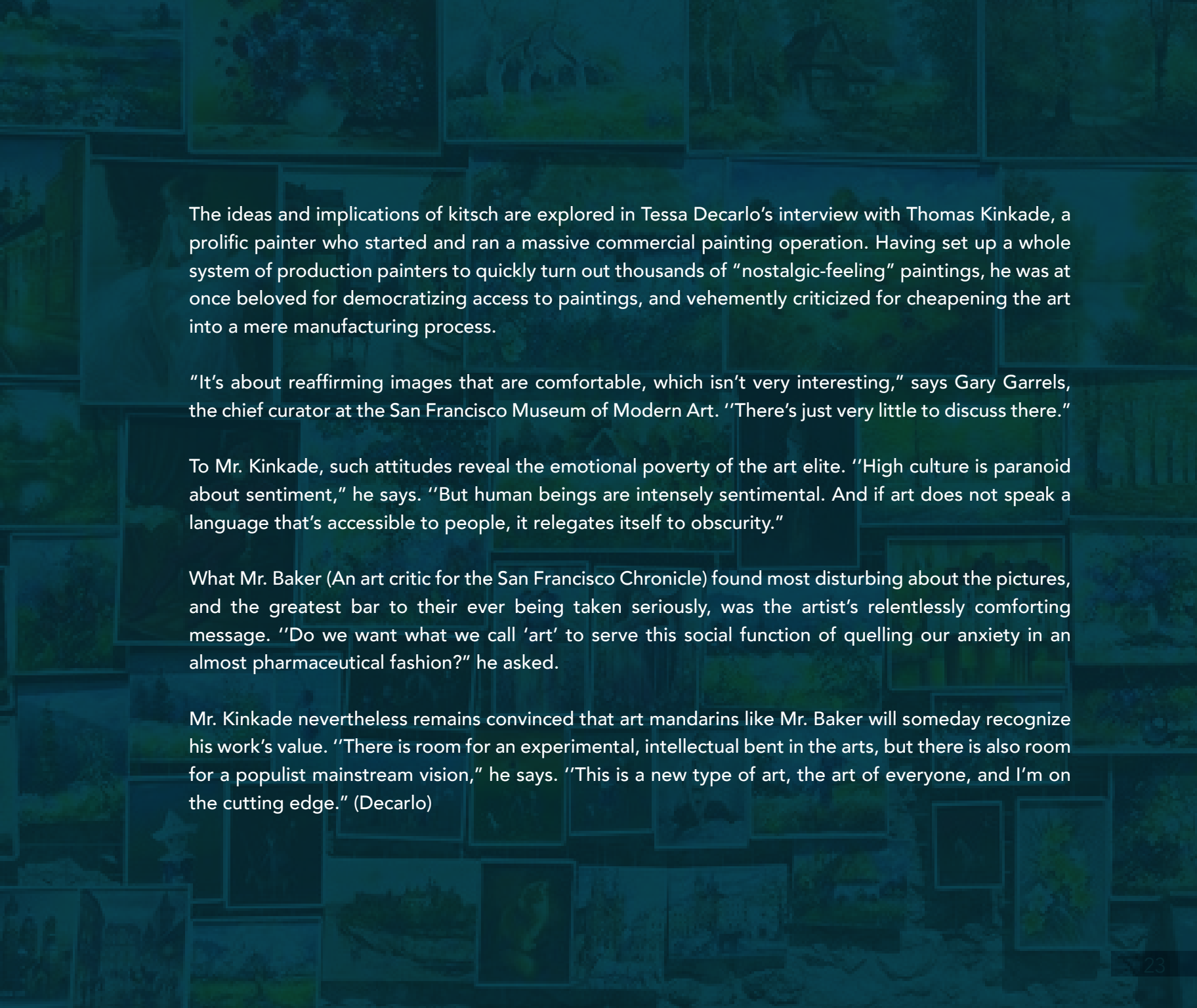
The problem with kitsch is that it cheapens the original to the point that we lose appreciation for it, or even gain a distaste for the original. As the villain, Syndrome, from Pixar's *The Incredibles* said, "When everyone is super, no one will be." While fun to see Bavarian buildings in Frankenmuth, people would soon lose their bemusement if they started popping up all over the suburbs. Where kitsch can be most destructive is when it is used for consciously contriving and repeating something for commercial gain, especially when doing it poorly.



Frankenmuth



Hometown Morning; Thomas Kinkadee Painting



The ideas and implications of kitsch are explored in Tessa Decarlo's interview with Thomas Kinkade, a prolific painter who started and ran a massive commercial painting operation. Having set up a whole system of production painters to quickly turn out thousands of "nostalgic-feeling" paintings, he was at once beloved for democratizing access to paintings, and vehemently criticized for cheapening the art into a mere manufacturing process.

"It's about reaffirming images that are comfortable, which isn't very interesting," says Gary Garrels, the chief curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. "There's just very little to discuss there."

To Mr. Kinkade, such attitudes reveal the emotional poverty of the art elite. "High culture is paranoid about sentiment," he says. "But human beings are intensely sentimental. And if art does not speak a language that's accessible to people, it relegates itself to obscurity."

What Mr. Baker (An art critic for the San Francisco Chronicle) found most disturbing about the pictures, and the greatest bar to their ever being taken seriously, was the artist's relentlessly comforting message. "Do we want what we call 'art' to serve this social function of quelling our anxiety in an almost pharmaceutical fashion?" he asked.

Mr. Kinkade nevertheless remains convinced that art mandarins like Mr. Baker will someday recognize his work's value. "There is room for an experimental, intellectual bent in the arts, but there is also room for a populist mainstream vision," he says. "This is a new type of art, the art of everyone, and I'm on the cutting edge." (Decarlo)



# VENICE CHARTER

## THE PAST IS IMPORTANT TO PRESERVE

*"Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions...It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity."*

## WHEN POSSIBLE, PRESERVE HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE AS IS

*"The conservation of a monument implies preserving a setting which is not out of scale. Wherever the traditional setting exists, it must be kept. No new construction, demolition or modification which would alter the relations of mass and colour must be allowed."*

## RESTORE WITHOUT CONJECTURE

*"The process of restoration is a highly specialized operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents. It must stop at the point where conjecture begins, and in this case moreover any extra work which is indispensable must be distinct from the architectural composition and must bear a contemporary stamp."*

## MAKE ADDITIONS DISTINCT

*"Replacements of missing parts must integrate harmoniously with the whole, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence."*

## PRESERVE, BUT DO NOT FAKE HISTORY

## VENICE CHARTER – PRESERVATION FROM FAKE HISTORY

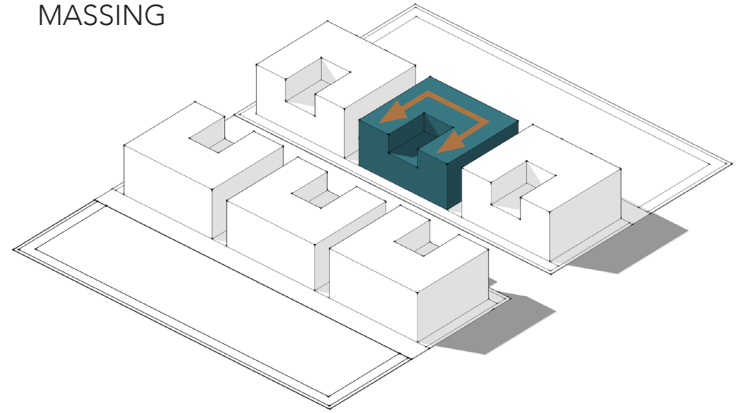
In 1964, a group of conservation professionals from around the world met in Venice to develop a more coherent strategy towards historic preservation, and to counter the fears of “fake history.” Together, they wrote *The Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*. While based on previous documents to the same effect (such as the Athens Charter of 1931), the Venice Charter was the most comprehensive attempt at systematizing the historic preservation movement.

This document went on to serve as the basis for contemporary preservation philosophy, as well as the prevailing mindset of how to build new buildings next to old buildings. The farthest reaching clause of the Charter was that new interventions “must bear a contemporary stamp.” (IInd Int. Congress of Architects)

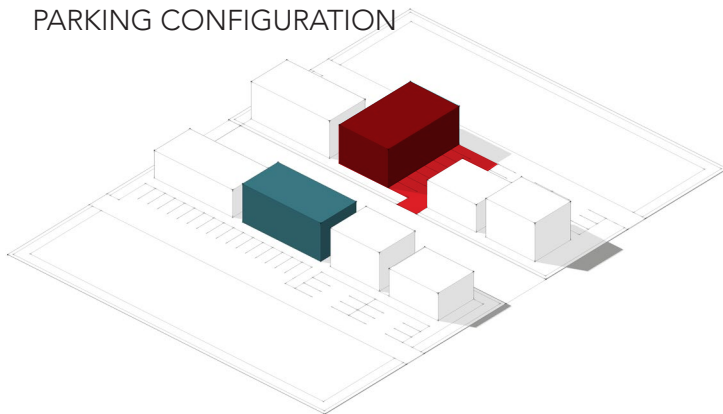
## FORM BASED RELATIONSHIPS

As compared to style-based relationships, form-based contextual relationships look much more at how the patterning of buildings interact with each other. They generally offer a more abstract, flexible way to relate to the existing context, but can edge on creating a “checklist” of design requirements.

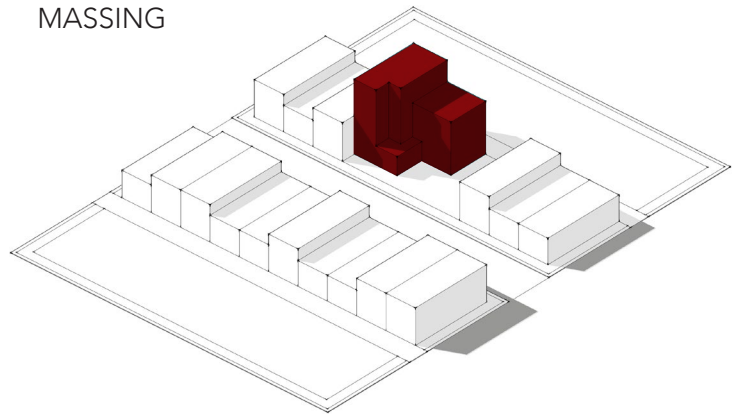
MASSING



PARKING CONFIGURATION

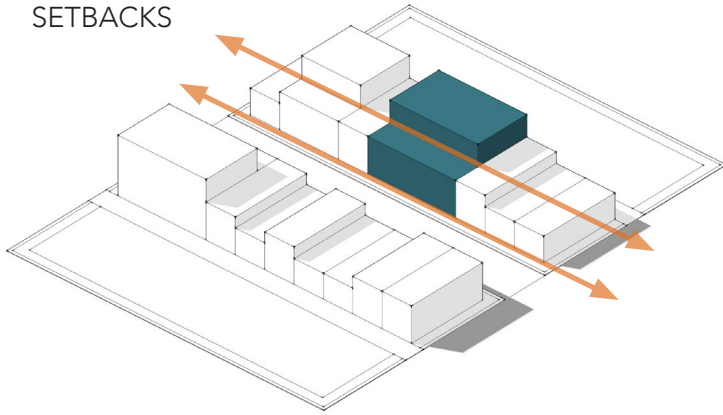


MASSING





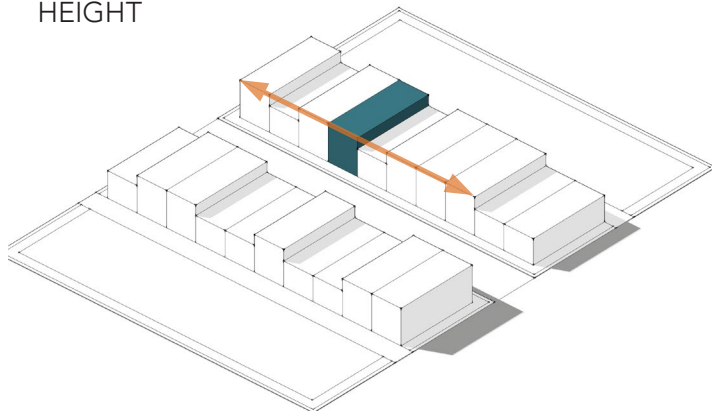
SETBACKS



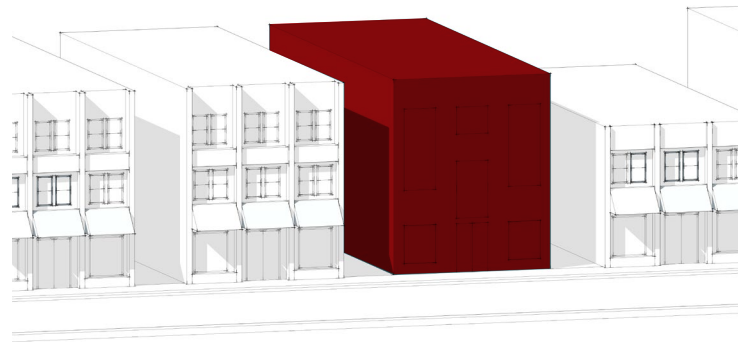
FENESTRATION RHYTHM



HEIGHT



SCALE/LEVEL OF ORNAMENT



*National and University Library of Slovenia, Jože Plečnik, 1941*





## CHAPTER 02

# NEW TRADITIONALISM

Steven Semes, an architecture professor at Notre Dame, makes the case for a more contextual approach to architectural interventions in historic contexts. He explains how today's approach, as exemplified by the Charter of Venice of 1964, focuses on creating "architecture of our time." In an infill situation, then, an architect seeks to design a building that contrasts its context, fearing that emulating a historic style too closely is not only difficult due to lack of trade skills, but also disingenuous. The Charter's philosophy holds that new construction should maintain compatibility with its context through abstract relationships, such as size, massing, facade rhythm, and the like. However, Semes argues that this vague sense of abstract relationships coupled with the desire for contrast leads to visual dissonance and discord, where the buildings are disjointed and ill-fitting rather than contributing to a sense of wholeness. He goes on to say how architects need not worry as much about avoiding drawing from historic styles, as contemporary architecture is not one style, but a diverse blend that can and should utilize other styles as a means of creating coherence without compromising its authenticity. In this way, continuity is emphasized over contrast (Semes).

At the same time, it is worth it to note that Semes is a professor at Notre Dame, a school that is unique in its emphasis on teaching classical architecture. Whereas most architecture programs believe it is not authentic and often inappropriate to build new buildings in the classical style, Notre Dame sees it as a style still alive and usable. In his book *A Future of the Past*, he outlines ways for effecting this sense of continuity within the contemporary and historic through a "new traditional" architecture.



## CONTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIPS — ACCORDING TO NEW TRADITIONALISTS

### LITERAL REPLICATION

Here, the existing building is literally copied in the new construction, so that it appears seamless from old to new. For instance, the Carson Pirie Scott building in Chicago was originally built in 1899 by Louis Sullivan, but had multiple additions up until the 60s. The Lambs Club (in which the building was mirrored with a new addition) is criticized as a poor example of replication because it breaks the classical principle of avoiding duality. Semes explains how replication can be a useful tool so long as the replication is used in small portions that don't detract or ellipse the larger whole.



*Lambs Club; New York. Built in 1905, renovated in 1915*



*Carson Pirie Scott Building; Louis Sullivan, Chicago*

## INVENTION WITHIN A STYLE

In this approach, new interventions are built in the same or similar style, but add or change elements in a manner more free than replication. The emphasis is continuity through consistency of building culture. Thus, the importance is placed on using the same language as the existing structure, rather than just the forms. The Louvre, for instance, was the subject of continuous additions in the same style. However, the fact that buildings were continually changed or added onto then, does not solidly justify doing so now, as the stylistic gap (and building culture) from 1900 to 2017 is arguably much larger than that of 1570 to 1870. Looking at more contemporary times, the Carhart Mansion (added onto in 2000) and Whitman College at Princeton are prime examples of new traditional architecture.



*Whitman College, Princeton University. Built in 2007*



*Carhart Mansion with 2000 Addition. New York*

## ABSTRACT REFERENCE

In this approach, compatibility is sought while working within the modern building culture. "It is the attempt to the modernist designer to maintain visual continuity with traditional architecture without actually practicing or reproducing it." (Semes 209) Thus, things like horizontal lines, fenestration patterns, and massing are carried over, while stripping down most of the ornament and often using modern materials. Semes poses Seaman's Church Institute as a rare good example of a method that generally is internally incompatible with itself. The Seaman's Church Institute makes use of more modern methods, to the point of using crispness as detail in its own right. Semes says how this approach works better when working vernacular architecture, rather than high style. He also mentions Colin Rowe as a one of the better proponents of this view. He sees Aldo Rossi's Scholastic Building as a building that attempts an abstract reference but fails to achieve a respectful continuity, even though it received much positive acclaim. He says it is merely cartoonish. (210)



*Seaman's Church Institute, New York, 1991*



*Scholastic Building, Aldo Rossi. New York, 2002*



## INTENTIONAL OPPOSITION

Semes states that this is not a new strategy. "Emperor Augustus found Rome a city of brick and left it a city of marble." (223)

Renaissance architects also used this strategy not to make something new, but to return to something old, as in, Ancient Greece and Rome. It can be used to alleviate current damages to a site. The designer must be careful to preserve the character. Semes praises Michaelangelo for his work, but it was all still using traditional language. He says that relationships such as mass and height are not enough, and that there should be a common language. Often new contrasting work has an object quality, which shirks its contextual relationship. "Success is then largely a matter of scale and the degree to which the contrasting new work impinges on the observer's perceptions of the original setting." (224)

Carlos Scarpa is a strong proponent of this view. Semes believes that it leads to a fragmented ruin, rather than a recomposed whole. When speaking of Scarpa's Castelvechio, Semes says, "he disfigures it." (230)



*Pierpont Morgan Library, Renzo Piano, New York, 2006*



*Castelvechio, Restoration by Carlos Scarpa, Verona, 1973*

## THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

<b>Space</b>	Space is well defined, as would be a solid body.
<b>Structure</b>	The structural system is articulated in a logical manner to show how loads are transferred.
<b>Elements</b>	Buildings and their surrounds are made up of elements that help define the character, adapt the form to varying and changing needs, and cater to the human scale.
<b>Composition</b>	<p>"Traditional buildings are arrangements of nested composite forms." The three canons of arrangement are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Number — odd numbered, to avoid a duality of focus</li><li>Punctuation — gracefully joining building parts by transitions</li><li>Inflection — hierarchy</li></ul>
<b>Proportion</b>	<p>A traditional building should keep consistent internal proportions. The three proportional relationships are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Equality — elements the same size</li><li>Punctuation — one element is much smaller than the other, such as a border</li><li>Differentiation — elements are different sizes, but not to extremes</li></ul>
<b>Ornament</b>	Small pieces that, while subservient to the larger whole, act as reinforcement to the expression of the building
<b>Character</b>	This is what binds buildings together — how the other principles come together. Character is the "phenomenological aspect of architecture as it is actually experienced..." (Semmes)

The seven principles (per Steven Semes) serve to convey the meaning of the building: essentially, what does the building have to say? Meaning can be direct through the forms themselves, as with empathic ("expressive of emotional state," as with the Vatican being embrative), symbolic (like a church being in the shape of a cross), or conventional (commonly understood to mean x) meanings. They can also be indirect through non-architectural means, as through associations. New Traditionalists argue that modern architecture takes essentially the opposite view from traditional architecture with respect to each of the seven

principles. Traditional and modern architecture are thus "antithetical." Accordingly, modern buildings should not be built next to existing traditional buildings, but should be built with other modern buildings. The New Traditionalists seem to be suggesting traditional and modern districts in cities; this brings to mind Paris or Warsaw, in which the old town is preserved as distinct from the modern developments. For a practical example of this antithetical relationship, they believe that buildings should be interesting at varying scales, and that modern buildings often are not.



*Palais Garnier, Charles Garnier, Paris, 1861*



In a way, New Traditionalists seem to be arguing for a system that can be continually added onto in a cohesive fashion, as with the Palais Garnier (a seeming extension of the form and ornamentation surrounding it), rather than like the Seagram building, which is already an individual, pure form in itself. This is seemingly the distinction of striated and smooth space, where the former is infinitely extendable, and the latter is uniquely arranged in a non-repeatable pattern. However, could not the city as a whole be the next extension of the Seagram building? It seems rather narrow minded in this aspect.

In his book, Semes decries the desire for novelty, saying how when designers often “call into question what x (a sink, door, window, building, etc) can be,” it strains the new intervention’s ability to communicate with historic architecture. Much of the modern avant garde seeks to be free of semantics. Semes sees this as degrading. He would rather the design industry pursue beauty, as the harmonious relationship of complexity and unity, instead of novelty.

He also attacks modernist urban planning, using

Corbu’s plan for replacing the historic areas of Paris with high-rise “object-buildings” and forgoing neighborhood streets with highways. He goes on to question how people can effectively use modern architecture detached from its failed urban planning counterpart. (80)

Semes explains how modern buildings often use abstract references to reflect the context of existing buildings, but because they lack a common language, they fail to achieve cohesion with the context. High-style and vernacular architecture should thus interact in a creative dialog. (87) He then praises various Post-Modernists for integrating more traditional techniques, materials, and elements. However, is not such Post-Modernist architecture often criticized by others as being untrue to itself or even schizophrenic in its stylistic mashups? He gives the example of Robert A.M. Stern as a good example. While some of Stern’s buildings are interesting and seemingly appropriate, others could be seen to go too far in their partial emulation of traditional architecture.



*Seagram Building, Mies van der Rohe, New York, 1958*



*The Clarendon, Robert A.M. Stern, Boston, 2010*

## MOVING BEYOND AESTHETICS

In the process of researching for a thesis, it is good to occasionally step back, take stock of tangents and the squabbles of differing viewpoints, and assess how they fit into the larger picture. Based on the previous research, there seems to be not one but many plausible (albeit often opposing) answers to the question of “how to design new buildings next to old buildings.” Therefore, trying to answer this question with any singular set of specific principles or stylistic mandates (without being extremely broad) becomes quite laborious, and could quite possibly be contrary to the very idea of contextual design. There are presumably many wrong answers to the question, but no one right answer. Modern architecture is often criticized (e.g. by the likes of Semes) as being cold and out-

of-place with its neighbors. However, what makes the neighboring buildings, specifically traditional buildings, intrinsically better than modern buildings? The modern age brought many advances in all aspects of life; was this not true for architecture too? As told by the likes of Semes, traditional architecture is guided by a set of principles and has a certain building culture; what makes these principles and their respective culture the best? Could they be improved upon? As the history of architecture has shown, the obvious answer is yes, architectural design and its accompanying building culture can always be improved. So there are many ways to approach building in a historical context. Which is the best way? It depends. Many designers refer to the various approaches (be it replication, invention within





a style, abstract reference, or intentional opposition) as just tools in a toolbox.

What should be apparent upon further examination, though, is that modern architecture can be really quite exciting, especially when examining Michigan's contributions. The fresh wave of design coursing through the state's veins brought a new level of efficiency, comfort, and aesthetic pleasure to wide range of people. The industry's current mindset, then, accepts modern innovation as a good thing, and shifts the focus towards striking a balance between empathizing with context and progress.

It is easy to get caught up in the debate between building in a contemporary style versus a traditional one. However, if they are really just tools in a toolbox of approaches, what deeper principles should guide contextual design? Many tools can be applied in any given context, though one or two may be more appropriate than the others. The following are general guidelines for contextual design garnered from the previous research.

## CONTEXTUAL FINDINGS

**The older and more significant the context, the less appropriate to emulate it,** and the more care must be taken to both distinguish the intervention from and not compete with the existing. Some neighborhoods beg more respect for their harmonious character, while others are more open to or benefit from a collage of styles

More often than not, **the quality of outcome is not a matter of what contextual relationship is chosen** (Copying, Compatible, or Contrasting), **but how well it is implemented.** Depending on the context, one method may be much easier to implement well.

**People like interesting buildings.** Pedestrian buildings should relate to a pedestrian scale. Newer buildings are often stripped down versions of their older neighbors: less interesting. However, the crisp, clean connections of modern architecture can be the detail of interest, just as classical ornamentation is an detail of interest.

And finally, **unity does not require uniformity.**

## SO WHY NOT BUILD "TRADITIONAL BUILDINGS?"

ANYTHING CAN BE DONE WELL, BUT...



COPYING



COMPATIBLE



CONTRASTING

TRADITIONALLY STYLED NEW  
BUILDINGS CHEAPEN THE  
ORIGINALS



+

MODERN BUILDINGS CAN  
BETTER RESPOND TO  
MODERN NEEDS







## CHAPTER 03

# FRANKENMUTH

To quickly test this research and its findings, this study looks at the town of Frankenmuth, MI, analyzing its complex character, and then delving into designing a building that begins to show ways to respond to such a character in a contextually sensitive manner.

The town is known as a Little Bavaria. Immigrants came from Rostal, Germany in 1845. The hilly area reminded them of their homeland. They were a strict Lutheran society. Originally, the immigrants constructed a town with pretty typical American architecture of brick and stick built wood. However, the 1950s saw hard economic times. A young businessman from Fischer's Hotel went to Germany and fell in love with the Bavarian architecture. He came back and remodeled his place as the Bavarian Inn. The rest of the town saw his success, and quickly followed in his footsteps. Today, the main street does indeed look like a little Bavaria. The surrounding buildings, though, are often a sad mishmash of oddly placed angled-timber trims, and frilly balconies.

The Frankenmuth History Museum was built in 1905 as a hotel, and has lived as a saloon and a newspaper building. This study focuses on designing a building adjacent to the museum.



## HOW DOES FRANKENMUTH SEE ITSELF?

Frankenmuth is a rural, farming community that cherishes and protects its agricultural roots. Below are excerpts from a study put together by the town defining its character and mission

"The city center has also been enhanced as downtown businesses are vital and diverse, and no new strip malls, regional shopping malls or 'big-box' stores have been built at the edge of the city. All new commercial development is aesthetically pleasing, and designed to be compatible with adjoining land uses."

"Goal 1: The downtown maintains its unique and appealing Bavarian architectural style and new buildings capture the human scale, level of detail and compact arrangement of structures from earlier periods. Structures and places of historical and architectural significance have been renewed and serve as reinforcing elements of visual character."

"Goal 2: Preserve and promote the rights of the individual property owner while maintaining a simple, small town Bavarian character. "

(City of Frankenmuth)





When looking at the context of Frankenmuth, three things stand out:

**History** — Town began with American stick built buildings.

**Aesthetic** — The town is a Disneyland of Bavarian architecture, some of which are better than others.

**Culture** — Traditional Bavarian architecture is heavy and massive (responding to the cold), with lots of timber and stucco. However, what does contemporary architecture look like in modern day Bavaria? Germany is at the forefront of modern architecture. Does Frankenmuth feel a connection to their old homeland as it evolves?

*Contemporary Frankenmuth*



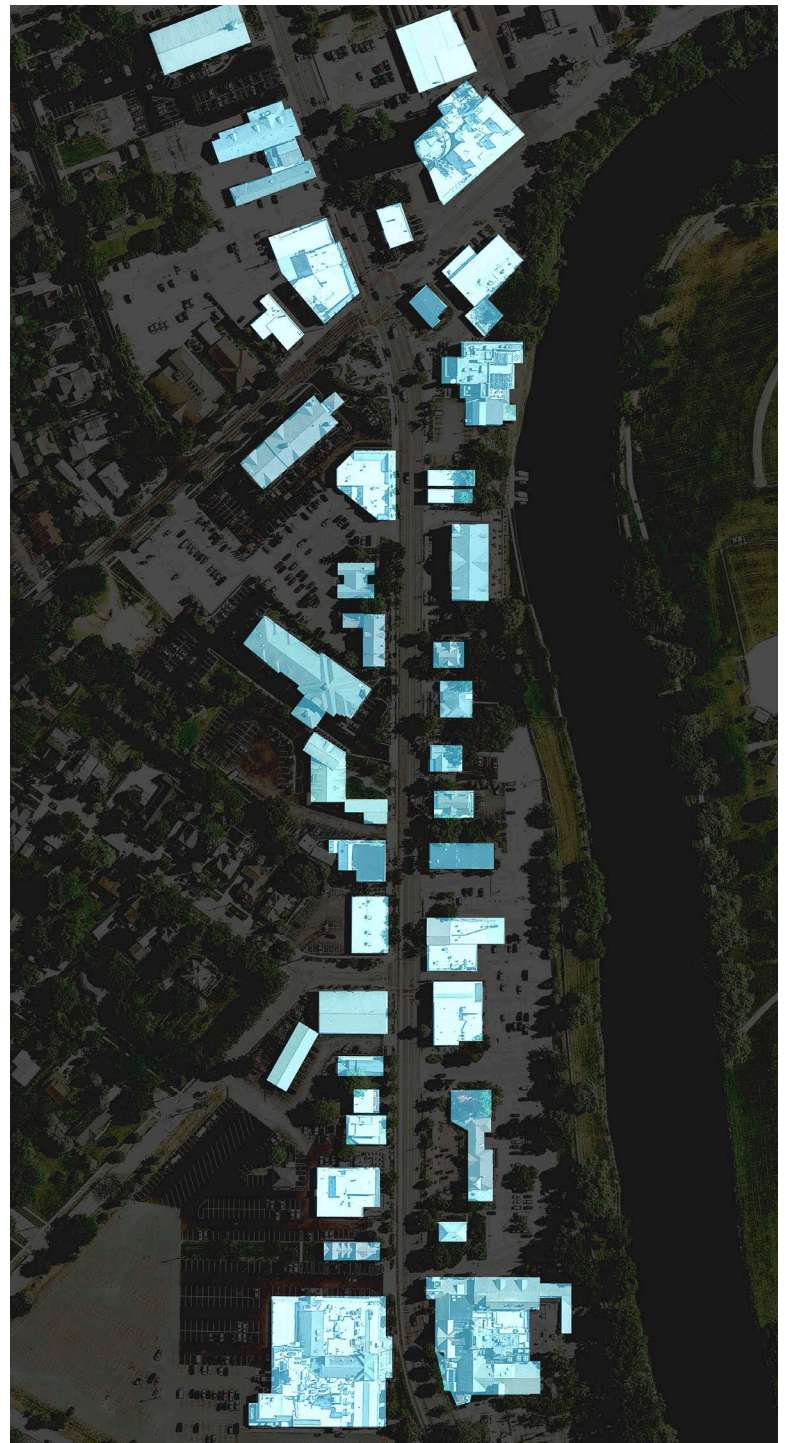


What is the full cultural history of Frankenmuth?  
Why does the current architecture not reflect  
modern day Bavaria? What about the beginnings  
of the town?

19th Century Frankenmuth



Mittelfränkischen, Germany







Leavenworth, WA



Helen, GA



Solvang, CA

## BAVARIAN-STYLED TOWNS.

Solvang, CA, Leavenworth, WA, Helen, GA

Both Helen and Leavenworth were logging towns without much German culture. They fell upon hard economic times, and started converting their towns to look like Bavaria. Helen has it written in its zoning ordinance that buildings must be in the Bavarian style, and has a population of less than 600. Solvang was actually founded by Danish Lutheran immigrants, and seems closer to Frankenmuth than are the other two towns; However, it too originally was a typical brick and wood town, and it wasn't until the 1940s that Bavarian styled renovations appeared.



School built in 1914, Demolished in 1970  
Solvang, CA



## MUSEUM HISTORY

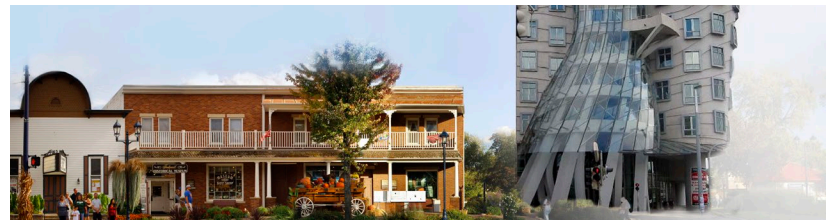
"The Frankenmuth Historical Association has owned and operated this museum and gift shop since 1974. It contains original artifacts from the Frankenmuth area dating back to the Chippewa Indian occupation. A major renovation of exhibits occurred in 1995. The building itself dates back to the Frankenmuth's thriving hotel beginnings. It was built near the turn of the century, and was originally the Commerce Hotel. It is a red brick building, with a pillared porch and balcony, and is located at 613 S. Main."

## FACADE COLLAGES

Contextual design can be successful without copying the existing buildings. In fact, the elevation studies show that literal duplication lessens the impact of the original building. In the other examples, the level of contextual success is tied to multiple contextual references working in unison, rather than any one adequately establishing the relationship by itself.

## REFLECTION

In the process of designing a building for Frankenmuth, it became apparent that there are many larger considerations at play than just aesthetics.





## SKETCH DESIGN 1

- The brick patterning references the adjacent building's material, but in an innovative manner
- The balcony is reinterpreted as an overhang, and keeps the horizontal lines
- Overall, though, the building is of a more course scale, and seems out of place



## SKETCH DESIGN 2

- The ornament breaking up the facade into smaller elements better speaks to the more fine, pedestrian scale of the context
- The smaller fenestration to solid ratio better aligns with the context
- The addition of street furniture would strengthen the pedestrian scale





Columbus, IN



## CHAPTER 04

# SOCIAL CONTEXT

In contextual design, there is more than just the physical context. Often social conditions and lifestyles play a much more important role in the success or failure of a building. The following examinations of architectural philosophies unearth a new importance of considering social conditions and lifestyles as a context to consider in contextual design.

## KENNETH FRAMPTON - CRITICAL REGIONALISM

In his essay *Towards a Critical Regionalism*, Kenneth Frampton tries to reconcile the cutting-edge drive towards universality with the resistive regionalism opposing any sort of change. His answer to this dialectical struggle is critical regionalism. Frampton explains how unfettered traditional regionalism is nostalgic, populist sentimentalism that often leads to oppressive, dead architecture that is stuck in the past, but also how pure modernism destroys local culture. He talks of critical regionalism as the attitude of filtering the avante-garde in a way that mediates and integrates modernist progress and drive towards universality (Frampton). Thus, the fads are filtered out, and the lasting innovations are integrated into the local fabric of architecture. In this way, the local culture keeps its identity but is able to advance and grow (e.g. sustainability, lifestyle changes, affordability).



Säämätsalo Town Hall, Alvar Aalto. Finland, 1951. Noted as an example of applied Critical Regionalism



19th Century Paris, Charles Marville.

## WALTER BENJAMIN - CRITICAL ARCHITECTURE

In his essay *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, Walter Benjamin examines Parisian architectural innovations during the Industrial Revolution. He describes the abundance of “critical architecture” as a response to major cultural changes, where ideas of social hierarchy, urban identity, and the private individuality were all being rethought in vivid manner. The four architectural aspects he speaks of—arcades, private interiors, boulevards, and barricades—all saw major evolutions due to social issues of the time. New construction often looked to the future for desired ideals, and sought a way for the built environment to effect them: e.g, arcades as small, independent, urban utopias; interiors and the importance of the private individual; the experience of walking city streets; and the order-inducing regularity of the boulevards. In essence, architecture has great potential to reflect, critique, and advance socio-economic conditions (Benjamin).



## ROBERT VENTURI - COMPLEXITY AND THE WELL-DONE WHOLE

In his book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Robert Venturi critiques the modern architecture movement as oversimplifying. The same could also be said of New Traditionalists, who view classical architecture as a silver bullet solution. Venturi speaks of complexity in architecture as necessary to reflect the complexity of life and life's needs. He states that many modern buildings are pure only because they selectively choose the problems to address (Venturi) Venturi uses residential projects as examples of over-abstracting house life. This often results in leaky roofs, or layouts that do not reflect the user's needs. Less is a bore, compared to the richness of meaning offered by complexity of expression. A city too, can be seen as a well done whole — a composition of parts that may not relate well outside the whole, but come together to form something great than the sum of its parts. The city is a complicated place, and it is difficult to design the whole thing as the designer sees fit, then try to fit the city's needs into the premade style. Humanity, especially now, is rapidly progressing, and thus cities need to adapt to these changes. Classical architecture by itself simply does not comprehensively serve these needs anymore.



Children's Museum of Houston, Robert Venturi. 1980.



Metropolis, Paul Citroen. 1923. Imagined example of a collage city

## COLIN ROWE - COLLAGE CITY

Indeed, total design systems are inherently flawed, as they are utopias that offer a single answer, which inevitably does not reflect the complexity of the city. Rather, as Colin Rowe explains in his work, *Collage City*, a city should be like a bricolage — by working with the given elements in a given place and time, a collage of responses that arise naturally in a collage of mashup of ideas. It does not exclusively imitate the past nor shun it for the future. Furthermore, this idea can be extended to a collage of cities. Paris may decide to remain largely homogeneous, but Boston may want to be on the cutting edge of brutalist innovations. In this way, the varying approaches enrich the collective experience. Rowe speaks of the prevailing view of architecture as a mix of science, collective will, with a bit of Darwism, “which is very largely, a notion of the architect as a sort of human ouiji-board or planchette, as a sensitive antenna who receives and transmutes the logical messages of destiny” (Rowe 8).

## SOCIAL CONDITIONS AS CONTEXT

These four writings all speak of ways to relate architecture to place other aesthetic or formal relationships. In essence, they all see architecture as a response, in one form or another, to social conditions. This paradigm shift in the way the design profession see contextual relationship is the root of this thesis. Rather than merely relating new buildings to the aesthetic and formal context of their neighboring buildings, the most important context is the social context. The question changes from if this new building respects the height of the surrounding buildings, to whether it foster a positive impact in the given social context. The formerly discussed topics of aesthetics and form are still relevant and helpful, but should be considered subservient to the larger issue of addressing the activities and life that play out within the given context.

This view of contextual design better relates to the actual people affected by buildings. It becomes more about the people and their activities within than the structures themselves.

## BUT WAIT, WHAT ABOUT THE 1970S?

Unfortunately, changing social conditions can leave buildings as outdated fads. The more architecture closely reflects or critiques a temporal social condition, the greater the risk it runs of becoming outdated as conditions change. Advocates for New Traditionalism claim that Classical buildings appeal to more timeless conditions and ideals (though the reality of this can be disputed). On the other hand, Brutalism sought to exude the honestly arising from social hardship of its time with its austere concrete. However, this sentiment is just not a resonating message anymore.

“For any significant building in any style, the period between its 30th and 60th birthdays is awkward. By 30, it has been around too long to seem new or edgy. Its style has probably fallen out of fashion, and most likely it needs repairs. But it’s not yet old enough to be distinguished — to seem properly historical. What do you do with a building that is tired but not venerated?” (Hurley)





*Boston City Hall, Kallmann McKinnell & Knowles Architects. 1968. Widely hated as an ugly, yet critically acclaimed as a prime example of Brutalism*

In many cases, buildings are first valued for their relationship to current/future social conditions, then later valued for their character and historic aura. Character is largely a result of the people that inhabit the place and the activities that happen within. Thus, after they begin life as a social critique, but before they become historic, their historic value can come from how well its message and activities within continue to resonate.

Often, communities seem to be faced with choosing between copies and experiments. This does not have to be true. Whether people save “questionable” buildings to let the future decide their fate or try to better everything now is not a question that begs a single answer. It must be a natural process of evolution. A major issue is that many buildings in the 1970s and 1980s were too large of scale to allow for this evolution. Rather than integrating into a context and allowing the space to evolve, they scrap the whole thing and start over. Zooming in, such buildings often did not adequately respond to the scale of the users. While brutalist buildings make an impact to people passing by at 70 miles per hour on the interstate, they often are too bleak for the pedestrian. It is jarring.



*Building in Lapeer, MI. Note the out of scale facade elements*



It is not for lack of cornices that many 1970s buildings are despised for not “fitting in” contextually, but a mix of misjudging the longevity of social conditions, being too large a scale, and just poor design.



Typical 1970s retail building - note lack of interaction with the pedestrian





## PART 2

### MAIN STREET

1920s Holland, MI





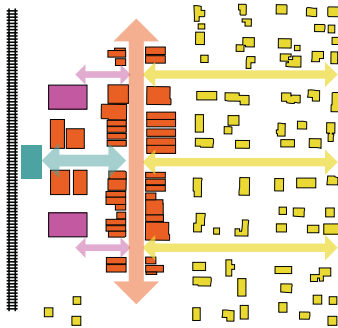
## CHAPTER 05

# HISTORY OF MAIN STREET

Now that a new framework for understanding contextual design has been set up, this research can refocus on Main Street America. If contextual design is to be based primarily on social context, then an acute understanding of this context is needed. There is most definitely the nostalgic vision of the idyllic Main Street form, however, this is actually a relatively recent thought construction. Indeed, Main Streets have been changing and evolving for their entire existence. What people generally think of as the “perfect” Main Street is in reality closer to an idealized form of Main Streets from the 1920s. The following timeline shows how Main Streets are not a static form, and must continue to evolve to adapt to changing social conditions.

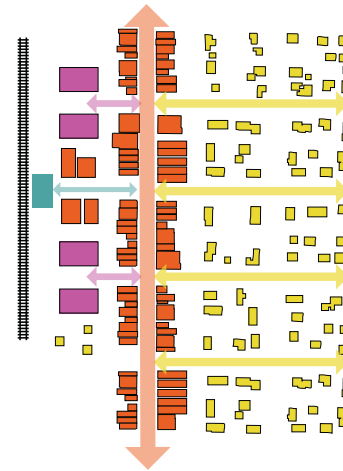
## 1800s

Main Streets form around  
Train Depots



## 1910s-1920s

Main Streets expand outwards  
with the Automobile



- The Main Street forms as a filter of commerce: train / community, & town's industry / train
- Development is clustered together, as people can only walk or move goods so far from the station without being very inconvenient.
- Buildings generally are two, three, or more stories, of an Italianate style.
- The community walks, or rides a horse or carriage into town, which they would often just tie up in front of a building.



- Introduction of the automobile. Motorists park their cars alongside the road, like horses
- Small towns see more traffic as people have more freedom of transportation.
- The Main Streets often expand into longer strips.
- Chain Retailers start to appear



## 1930s-1940s

Development continues to adapt to the automobile, becoming less dense



- Stores continue to expand further outside the downtown, generally as one-story buildings
- As traffic increases, so does congestion and the need for parking. Lots have larger setbacks or varying building orientation for more parking.
- Store sizes start to expand into supermarkets, Chain retailing rises to commercial dominance.
- The 1930s brings a wave of "modernizing" storefronts.



## 1950s

Highways draw development away from Main Street



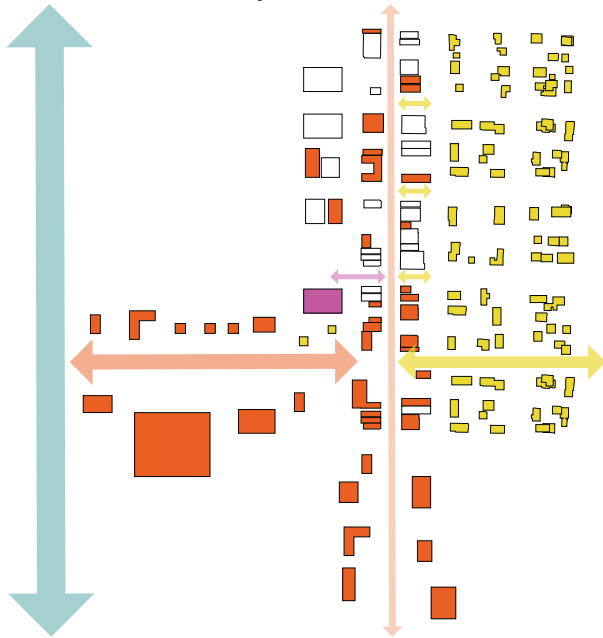
- For want of faster, congestion free travel, bypasses, followed by highways diverts the primary traffic flow away from Main Street.
- Development quickly follows suit, and grows along the on/off ramps.
- These new buildings are generally set back from the road, with a private parking lot in front or to the side.





## 1960s-1990s

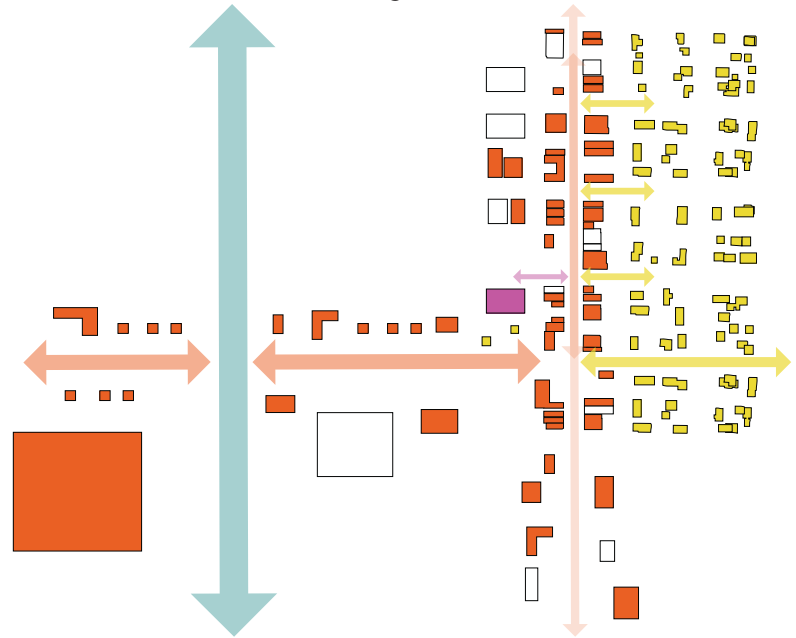
Rise of Big Box Stores and increasing vacancy on Main Street



- With the increasing ease of transportation, consumers are more willing to drive further distances to shop
- Increased competition and need for efficiency.
- This leads to even larger "big-box" stores.
- Main Street becomes increasingly vacant and unused.

## 2000-2010s

New Urbanism brings Main Street cutification, but big-box culture continues



- Main Streets see a resurgence with movements such as New Urbanism, relying on a nostalgic view of the past.
- Main such strips are "cutified" and filled with boutiques and bars, drawing a more touristy crowd.
- All the while, though, everyday retail continues to grow away from the downtown.



# 2020s - Beyond

How Does Main Street  
Continue to Evolve?



Online retailing, overabundance of shopping centers, and consumer shifts towards service and dining/drinking leads to shrinkage of retail brick and mortar stores. People now, more than ever, value a vibrant Main Street, but how can it evolve to today's conditions? Does it just embrace its leisurely aspirations, or can it also seek to regain its place as a integral piece of the functional and social life of small towns?



## RISE OF THE TAXPAYER

As towns were growing in the 1910s and 1920s, investors saw the potential in the cheaply-priced land along new transit routes and paved roads. Indeed, development of urban cores tended to follow these routes as they expanded. Thus, as the Main Streets grew, these pieces of adjacent land would grow in value with the demand for development. Thus, such investors bought the plots while they were still cheap, and built smaller buildings on them as a sort of placeholder. These buildings usually had retail storefronts on the first floor, and sometimes had a story of office space or residences on top. They were simply built, and often plastered in signs promoting their business. Such buildings could provide a modest revenue stream, enough to pay the property tax, and possibly produce a small profit, but were really anticipatory of bigger, greater things to come. As such, this style of building became known as “taxpayers” and were found extending from growing cities throughout the country at the turn of the century (Liebs 10). However, it was also the beginning of a larger shift in retail.

Investors and retailers soon saw the economic power of these taxpayer strips along thoroughfares. Main Streets were gaining a

negative perception for being overly crowded with automobiles and people, and people often desired a convenient alternative for smaller shopping tasks. As people commuted to and from their home, business, job, or day-on-the-town, they could be presented with a convenient opportunity to both fulfill their daily errands, and essentially window shop from the comfort of their car’s seat. In a way, it was like forced window shopping, as the passerby commuting along the routes was greeted by a wall of signs and advertisements. No longer did the consumer need to wade through the congestion of downtown to find a given store that sold what they wanted, or walk to a local market, but now the stores were brought to the consumers on their commutes. This model of buying cheap land along thoroughfares, away from the congestion of the town’s core, ended up being so economically profitable that the interim buildings tended to stay longer than expected. In many cases, these developments did not grow vertically as initially expected, but multiplied horizontally, as the strips stretched further and further from the urban core into cheap land. Even larger department stores started opening locations on these strips.





The taxpayer model, then, morphed from one of transition and anticipation, to an end in and of itself.

This development of commercial corridors thrived with the explosion of the automobile. Personal car usage surged with the advent of the Model T and affordable automobiles, and consumers were now free to drive to their store of choice. Thus, stores strove to cater even more to their customers' convenience by adapting their buildings to the car. Up until this point, storefronts were right on the road, and cars would park up front like horses tied at the reins. However, with the increased automotive usage, this arrangement led to parking congestion, and difficulty seeing the storefronts from the road. To alleviate these new problems, business owners started buying adjacent lots and demolishing the building (or saving it from development in the first place) to serve as a parking lot. Retail magazines and design guidelines started recommending that retailers set their buildings back from the road an additional amount to allow for more parking. The strips continued to sprawl further outward with the expansion of residential neighborhoods through the 1920s.







## MODERNIZING MAIN STREET – IN THE 1930s

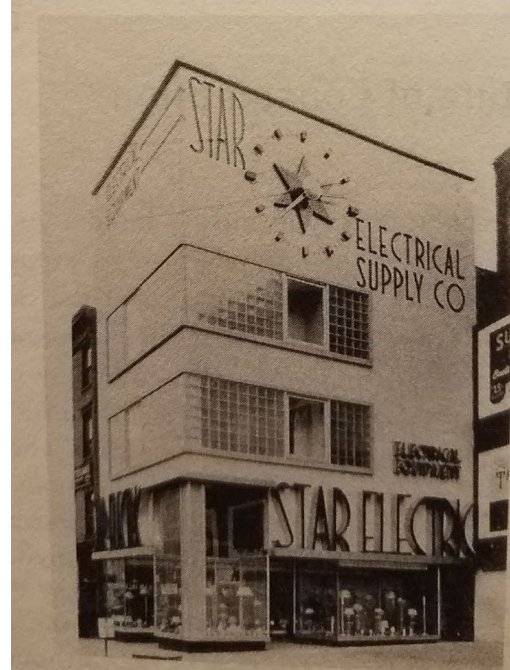
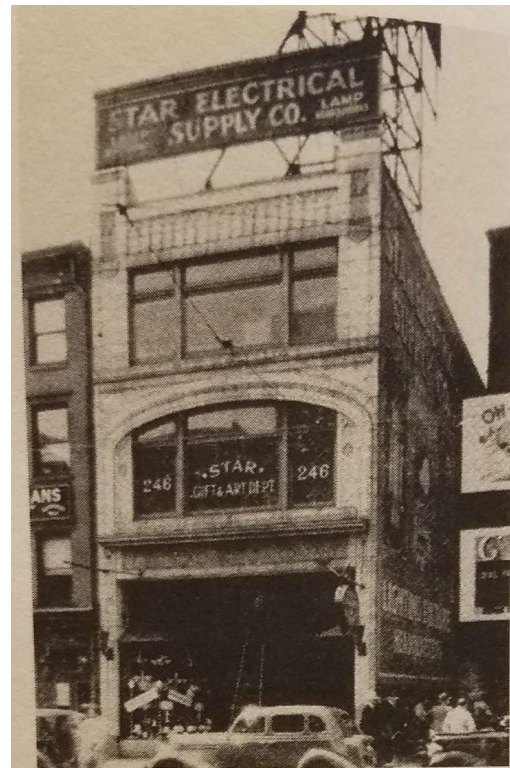
A particularly interesting period in Main Street's history was the 1930s, when an influx of federal money and credit spurred a wave of modernization. In response to the Depression, The New Deal consisted of a lot of initiatives to spur more credit and lending, but it was not extremely evident to the working class people. By directing this cash flow towards Main Streets, it was a visual symbol of the country's resurgence, recovery, and sense of stability. Gabrielle Esperdy details this period in her book, *Modernizing Main Street*. Such Main Streets were modernized with glass and metal facades, serving as a source of work when larger projects had seemingly dried up in the industry. (Esperdy 4) There followed a wave of standardization and consumerism. Main Streets were seen as modern, as they all could contain the same brands, newspapers, and stores, hotels, and stores as both each other and Fifth Avenue. (14) "Across the country, Main Streets possessed an 'essential homogeneity' regardless of size and location: 'Breakfast Number Three is likely to consist of the same orange juice, toast, and coffee in New York, N.Y. as in New Albany, Ind., and the drug store in which it is served is sure to be as nearly like its big-



city prototype as the proprietor can make it" (15).

Title 1 of the National House Act (passed in 1934) helped spur financing for Main Street improvements and storefront modernizations. This was in large part by guaranteeing loans to businesses for improvements (for \$5000, then \$50,000) that otherwise would be unable to get credit. It was known as the Modernization Credit Plan (MCP). Envisioned as a temporary measure, it lasted until 1943. There was also a very large public awareness and advertising campaign: "Modernize for Profit" (71). This was led by the Better Housing Program (BHP). "Enough money was ultimately spent on commercial modernization during this period (1934-1943)--as estimated \$4 to \$6 Billion in MCP loans and cash payments--to provide a new storefront for each of the 1.5 million retail establishments then operating in the United States" (222).

Obsolescence was seen as "the psychological wearing out of a property:" thus, a matter of style (154). There was a large push to convince store owners that they had to keep their building on the cutting stylistic edge to continuously appeal to consumers and stay competitive with their neighbors. "New is better." To this point, traditional ornamentation become associated with being old and antiquated; thus, a stylistic update was often accomplished by chopping off and covering up such ornamentation with a "modern" material. Much of the



modernization was essentially facadism—cosmetic surgery for buildings. They stripped off markers of age to portray a youthful, even ageless building. (176) Unfortunately, this meant that the modernization dealt mostly with the surface, but not the root of the larger lifestyle shift towards auto-centric commercial corridors.

Can the MCP inform a way forward today? People often comment on projects, “that’s great, but how are you going to convince people?” If the MCP is any evidence, the answer lays in very aggressive marketing and selling the idea: getting business owners to sign on the dotted line by dangling the promise of profits. This program also spurred new developments and advancements in storefront technologies (e.g. curved glass) but also in methods of appealing to consumer wants and behaviors.





## SO WHERE DID THE NOSTALGIC MAIN STREET VISION COME FROM?

Through people have generally always thought fondly of small town Main Streets, today's idealized image was largely popularized by Walt Disney's Main Street U.S.A. Turns out, Disney was inspired by his old hometown of Marceline, MO. Though he only lived there from 1905 to 1910, he fondly recalled his time there. So much so, that he sought to spread his nostalgia, and modeled a key part of his theme park after the town in 1955. This image was then spread far and wide.





- WALKABILITY
- CONNECTIVITY
- MIXED-USE & DIVERSITY
- MIXED HOUSING
- QUALITY DESIGN
- INCREASED DENSITY
- GREEN TRANSPORTATION
- SUSTAINABILITY
- QUALITY OF LIFE
- TRADITIONAL STRUCTURE



## NEW URBANISM

New Urbanism rose to counter suburban sprawl and poor town planning. Still influential today, it promotes walkability, mixed-use development, quality of architecture, and sustainability. It is generally applied as large-scale, homogeneous developments using a traditional style. The resulting towns have been featured in movies, such as the Truman Show, as utopian. New Urbanism has a lot of good things about it. What's not to love? The issues arise when an all-encompassing view creates neighborhoods in one fell, homogeneous swoop. While the proponents of the movement do state that the principles can be applied at any scale, it is most apparent when developers embrace it for new community developments. The issue is that the buildings hearken back to an older age, and seems like a Williamsburg-esque place where things are just a bit too perfect. Is it really genuine? Many of the principles are good, but the resulting buildings rely very heavily on colonial or similar traditional architecture. These neighborhoods do not have the layering of history that makes older communities so desirable.



## Successful Main Street Districts provide:

- Walkable, human-scale environments
- Unique, historic, and attractive architecture
- A mix of uses, activities, and consumers
- A strong existing tax base that attracts new businesses and creates jobs
- A center for activity and community life
- Positive community image and identity
- Opportunities for public-private partnerships
- A place for the community to define its identity through a shared vision of place

## MAIN STREET AMERICA PROGRAM

“The Main Street Approach is a historic preservation based economic development strategy that focuses on leveraging existing social, economic, physical and cultural assets to energize community revitalization efforts and help manage success for the long term. The approach leads to tangible outcomes that benefit the entire community through encouraging communities to enact long-term change while also implementing short-term, inexpensive and place-based activities that attract people to the commercial core and create a sense of enthusiasm about the community.” (Main Street America)

The Main Street America program (started in 1980) has been applied in hundreds of small towns across the country, and has found relatively good success. If this is the case, why not just accept it as the go to solution? The issue is that it largely focuses on preserving the aura of historic structures, and reinforcing that. Many towns, though, do not have a good, historic building stock. These towns, then, feel pressured to “fake it” through conjecture and new construction, which, as the previous research has shown, is less than ideal. Furthermore, while the program definitely enhances the towns, it does not address the underlying need for continuing evolution, and thus still heavily relies on nostalgia.



## National Main Street Center

a subsidiary of the  
National Trust *for* Historic Preservation



Build a diverse economic base / Catalyze smart new investment / Cultivate a strong entrepreneurship ecosystem

### ECONOMIC VITALITY

Create an inviting, inclusive atmosphere / Celebrate historic character / Foster accessible people-centered public spaces

### DESIGN

## COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

### ORGANIZATION

Build leadership and strong organizational capacity / ensure broad community engagement / Forge partnerships

### PROMOTION

Market district's defining assets / communicate unique features / Support buy-local experience

(Main Street America)





## CHAPTER 06

# EVOLVING MAIN STREET

Be it rising with the logging industry, or falling to the malls, Main Streets need to adapt as society changes. How can they evolve with the digital age? Small towns often seek to preserve an aura from better times, but the result is either unsuccessful, kitschy, or grasping at a reality that no longer exists. Successful Main Street need not merely exist for the high-end shopper who prefers (and can afford) the experience, but rather can seek to regain its prowess as the functional core of the small town.

FACTORS OF EVOLUTION...

AWAY FROM MAIN STREET

TRANSPORTATION



CONVENIENT  
PARKING



TRAFFIC  
CONGESTION



SHORT WALKING  
DISTANCES



DRAWING HIGHWAY  
TRAFFIC



EASE OF GETTING  
PURCHASES HOME

COMMERCIAL TRENDS



CHEAP LAND  
& TAXES



EFFICIENCY THROUGH  
SIZE & STANDARDIZATION



CHAIN  
RETAILING

TOWARDS MAIN STREET

SOCIAL CULTURE



WALKING AND  
BIKING CULTURE



SENSE OF  
NOSTALGIA



PROTECTING  
ENVIRONMENT



PROMOTING HEALTH

ECONOMIC POTENTIAL



SMALL  
BUSINESSES



ATTRACTING TOURISM



LOCAL SERVICE  
ECONOMY



## EVOLVING MAIN STREET

Main Streets across America, once the main strips of shopping and urban life, are now painfully undergoing this process of adapting to changing lifestyle of social conditions. As things like the automobile, malls, and the internet arose, the main street became an antiquated response, even as many towns seek to draw upon the nostalgia of better days. While many main streets are vibrant areas of walkable life, many others (especially in small towns) have become either empty spaces or hollowed out to cater mostly just to tourists—without serving much functional purpose for the residents.

Many municipalities may be hesitant to build anything with much of a contemporary style for the fear of it becoming a failed experimentation and receiving the public's ire. People often look at much the architecture of the 1970s, which is widely disdained, and are afraid to build anything new, lest their intervention be similarly despised once it goes out of style. However, it is not necessarily the fault of brutalism, per say, but poor execution and poor contextual relationships that make

these buildings suffer.

When every town bases itself off of nostalgia, eventually their appeal is going to run out, and the towns (having frozen themselves from continued evolution), will no longer be very viable or relevant anymore. Nostalgia can be great, but the system should ideally be independently viable, and not just altruistic. Rather, design for Main Streets (as with any scene in the built environment) should be based off of fostering the activities within.

For instance, possible evolutions could include a greater diversity of mixed uses, or inclusion of new retail strategies. Towns often like to tout their vibrant life, but the vibrancy often only extends to SHOPPING and PLAYING. A “complete” community could also include LIVE + WORK + MAKE spaces. Even looking just at shopping, one can see room for evolution. Considering the need for viability in new developments in today's economy, do big box stores and online retailers have a place on Main Street? Retailers such as Warby Parker and Amazon have started opening brick and mortar stores as showrooms for their online stock. Larger chains like Target have launched downsized stores for urban locations.

## HUMAN SCALE

Main Street can offer a much desired (yet condensed) urban experience, but it needs to court the pedestrian

SAFE



TRANSPARENT



STIMULATING



HIGH DENSITY

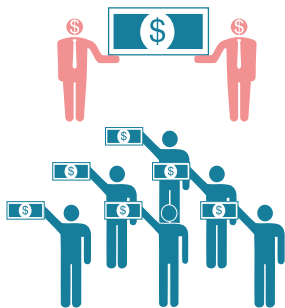


STREET FURNITURE & GREENERY

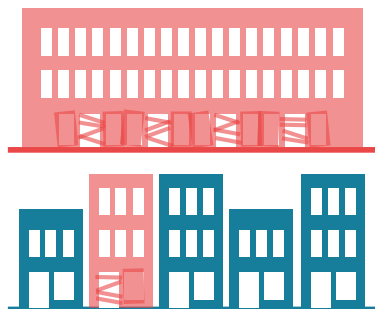


SIZE/LEVEL OF MATERIAL DETAIL





## LOWER ENTRY COST TO PLAY



## LESS FINANCIALLY RISKY & MORE DYNAMIC



## FINE-GRAINED

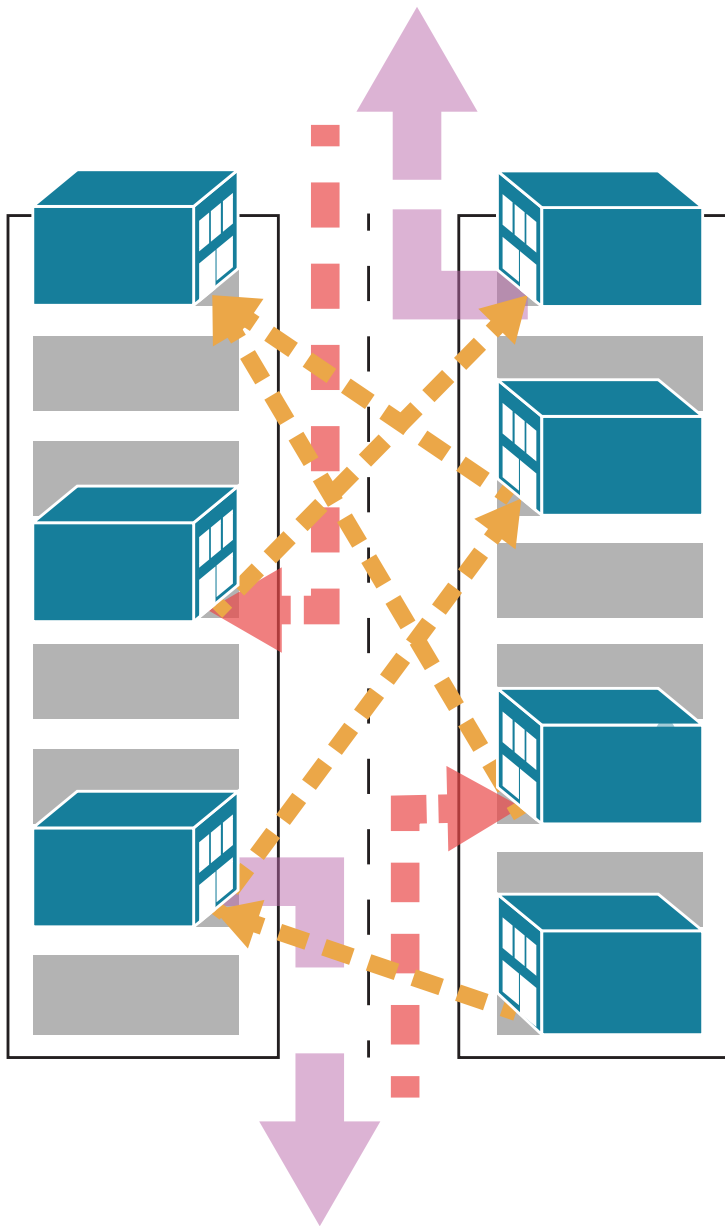
In the age big-box stores and the drive for efficiency, smaller developments can actually be more sustainable. They lead to a more inclusive market & promotes design equity. Additionally, if the development goes under, or is considered ugly it does not necessarily kill the whole block. Larger developments should be limited and dispersed.



## CORE OF COMMUNITY LIFE

Main Streets started as the center of small towns' life and identity. This is key element to their continued success, and entails a holistic approach of getting the community excited and engaged.

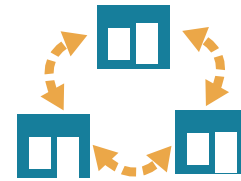




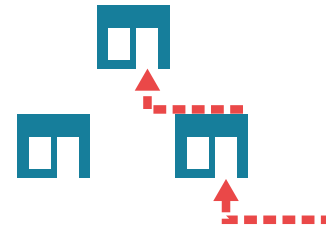
## MULTIPLE SCALES OF MARKETS

Businesses and programs should at once create a sustainable system - at once internally supporting each other, while also drawing from outside markets

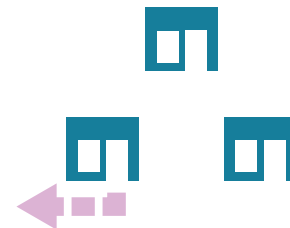
### LOCAL COMMUNITY



### SURROUNDING AREA



### GLOBAL MARKETS



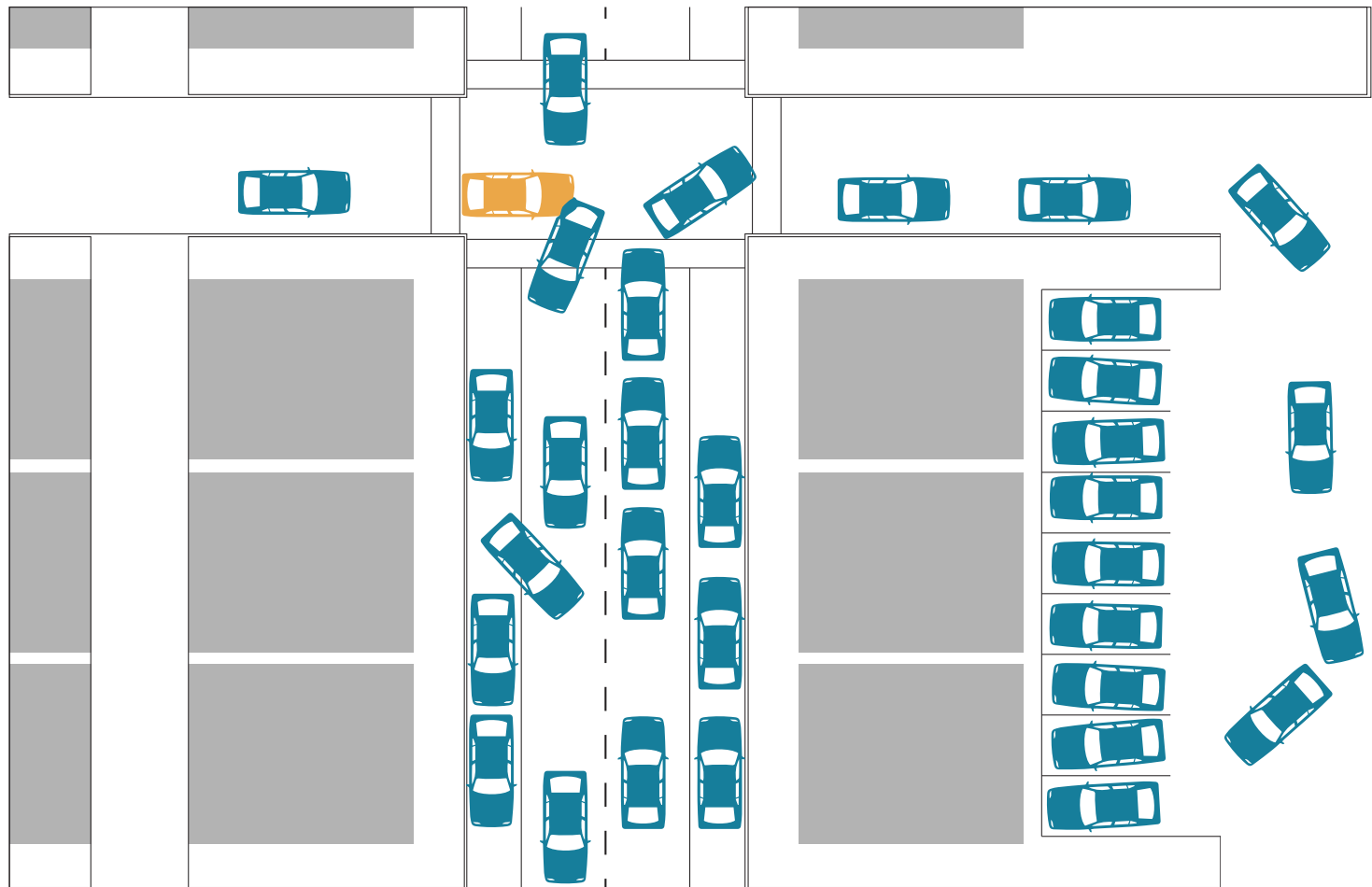
## AUTO-FRIENDLY

Address inherent problems of congestion and lack of convenient parking with creative solutions.

## ENCOURAGE WALKING

## FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS

## PARKING STRUCTURES







## USEFUL PROGRAMMING

Move beyond the boutiques and bars, to include a more wholistic, diverse offering. This will position the town to hold a higher place of relevancy in the day-to-day life of residents.

*MORE SUSTAINABLE*

**USEFUL AND  
RELEVANT**

*BETTER URBAN  
EXPERIENCE*



**NOSTALGIC  
AND AMUSING**

## EXPANDING THE VALUES

While not an all-inclusive listing, these design values begin to give a better picture of how buildings on Main Street can respond to their conditions, beyond aesthetics and formal arrangement. These values would then serve as a basis for further investigation into the particularities of a given town. This process can be applied to any context, with the understanding that it would yield different results. For example, a development along the highway would not have such an emphasis on human scale design, but rather, it would be designed to attract the attention of a motorist traveling by at 70 mph. Thus, the design considerations and expressions would be very different. Case in point, the LA Cathedral was designed to be very massive, but it is designed to be seen from the highway—not the sidewalk.

Additionally, these Main Street values can be expanded upon. For instance, how do fine grained developments square with the growing trend of efficiency through size? There are indeed still benefits of larger buildings. They often offer a cheaper means of density, share funding sources, and give space for larger tenants. However, fine



*Los Angeles Cathedral, Rafael Moneo. 2002. Note the Massive Scale*

grained does not preclude large developments. It is good to have a mix of larger and smaller developments, but they should be limited and dispersed. Blocks having just one large building should be avoided. Thus, the larger buildings should be spread out, and creatively placed/ shaped to still allow for a diverse, fine-grained streetfront. This should not mean arbitrarily cutting up large lots, but working with the local conditions to infill in interesting, creative ways.

Parking is another thing. While not every building needs parking, there should be convenient parking available. This can take form as a central parking structure, or as flexible spaces. If people are walking from a garage already, they are more

likely to continue walking around a bit before or after their intended destination. Thus, it is a balance of convenience and destination building.

How can these ideas be implemented? This can take the form of policies such as tax incentives (e.g. taxing development of virgin land at a higher rate), community engagement & advertising strategies (like the MCP program in the 30s), and public/private partnerships. Towns would have to convince businesses that moving to Main Street and putting money into the community is not just altruistic, but also good for them too. For instance, maybe everyone gets a tax write off for improving their sidewalk. It benefits them to improve their streets.

Develop Plan & Educate  
Community and Business  
Owners

Relate General Main Street  
Design Values to Individual  
Town

Attract Quality Architects  
to Design Solutions

Facade Improvements &  
Greenscape & Parking, and  
Innovative Programming

Balancing Tax Code to Favor  
Main Street over Virgin Land

Update Zoning for  
Higher Density and New  
Uses





# PART 3

## CEDAR SPRINGS



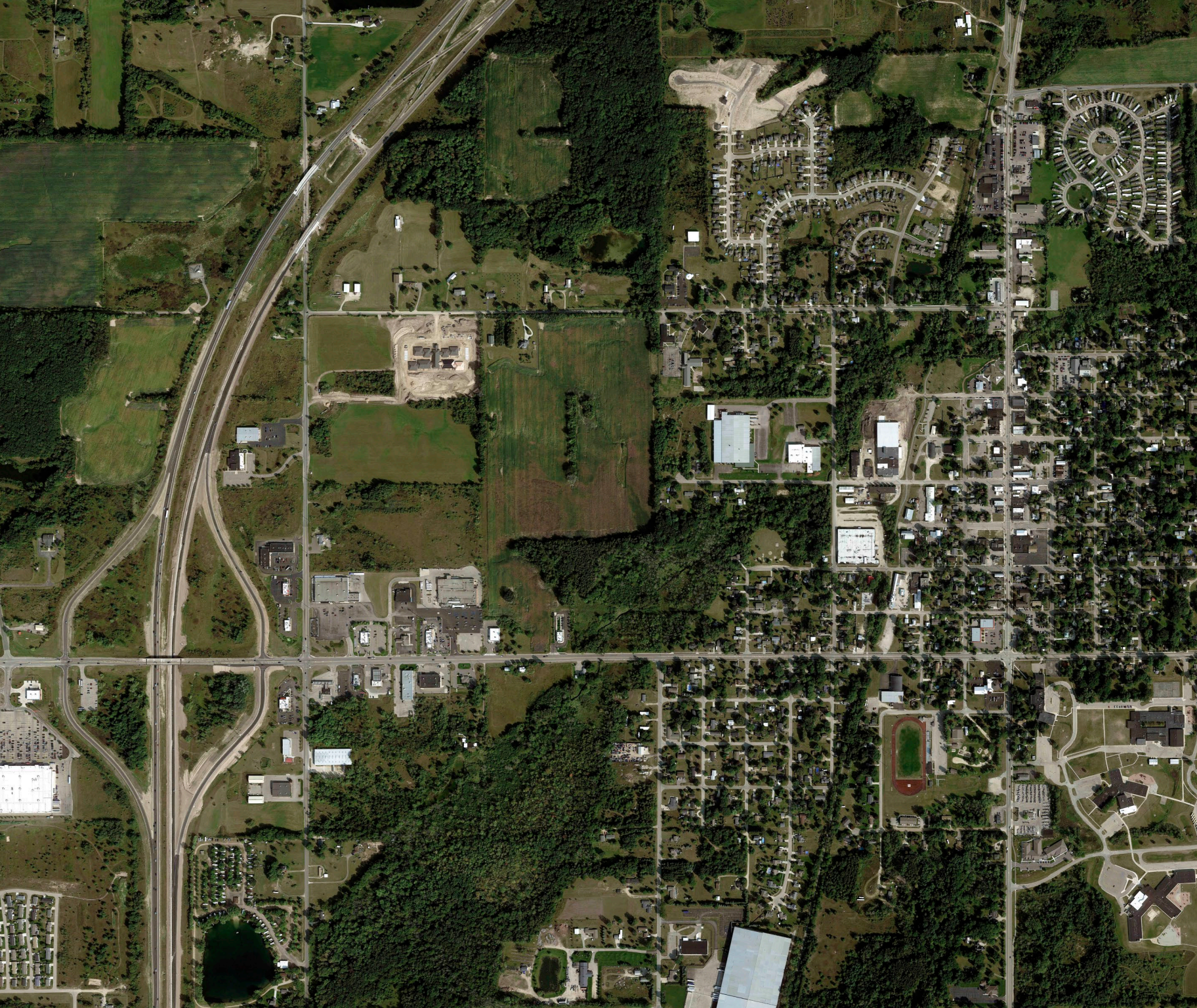


## CHAPTER 07

# CONSIDERING THE CONDITIONS

Cedar Springs is a small town of roughly 3600 people in Western Michigan, located thirty minutes north of Grand Rapids. It is a prime example of the hundreds of small towns across America — sharing many common characteristics, assets, and struggles, but each also having a multitude of unique conditions. There has not been much new development on Main Street for the last couple decades, but with a successful brewery recently opening and a new library, the town seems to be on the cusp of a revitalization movement. What form will this movement take? Will it take the accepted route of cutification, or truly evolve to adapt to the today's conditions? This thesis will use Cedar Springs to prototype the process of applying the ideas of contextual design as a function of social conditions and their evolution.









ESTABLISHED  
IN 1856 AS A  
LOGGING  
TOWN



HOME TO THE  
SECOND MEIJER  
LOCATION



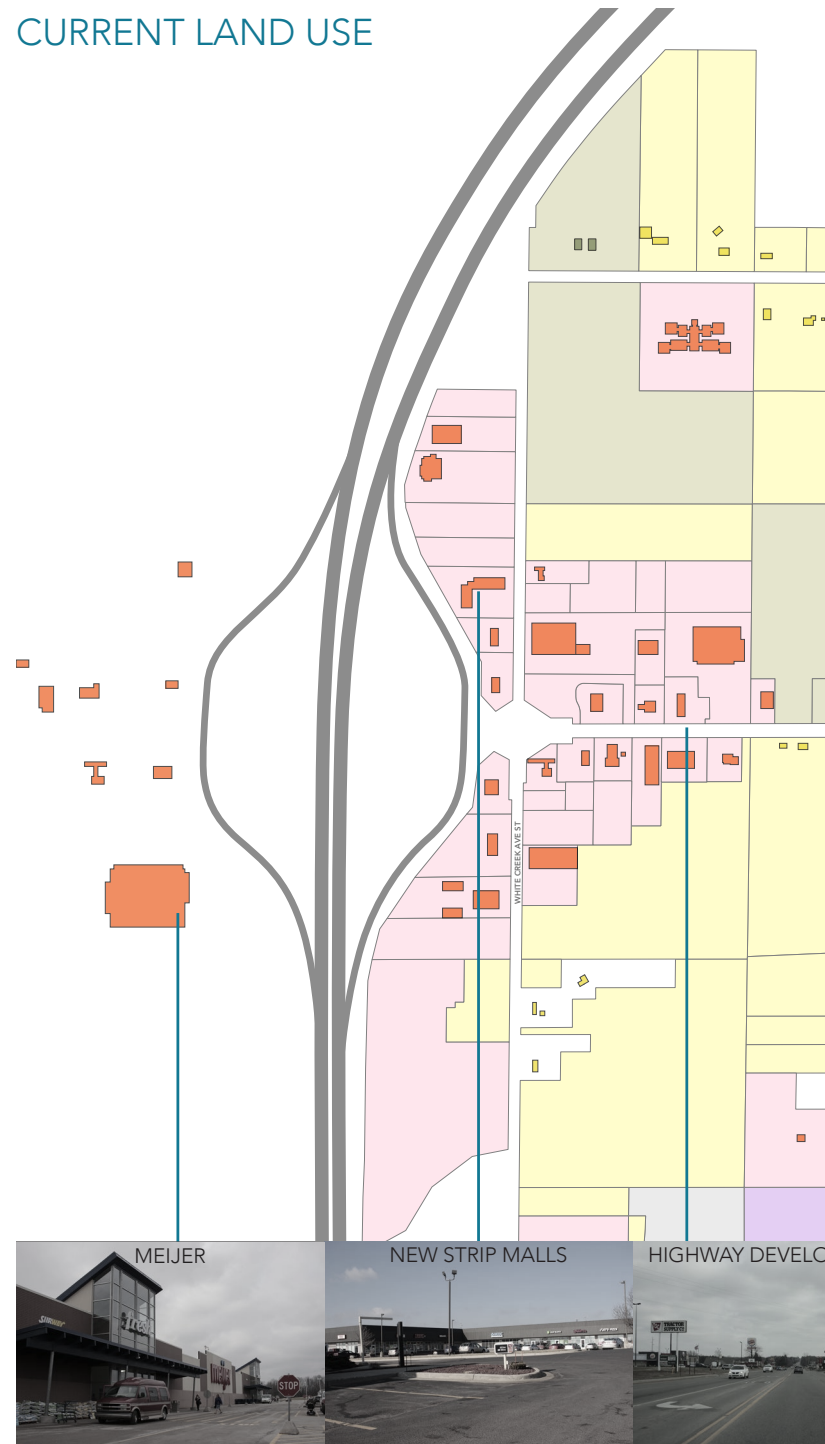
RED FLANNEL  
CAPITAL  
OF THE  
WORLD

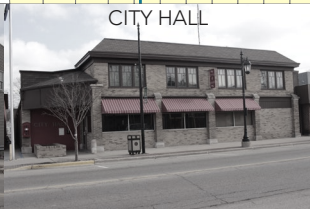
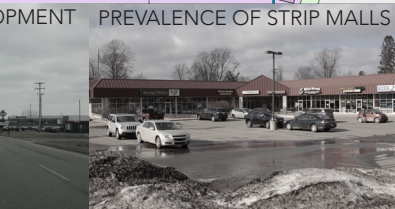
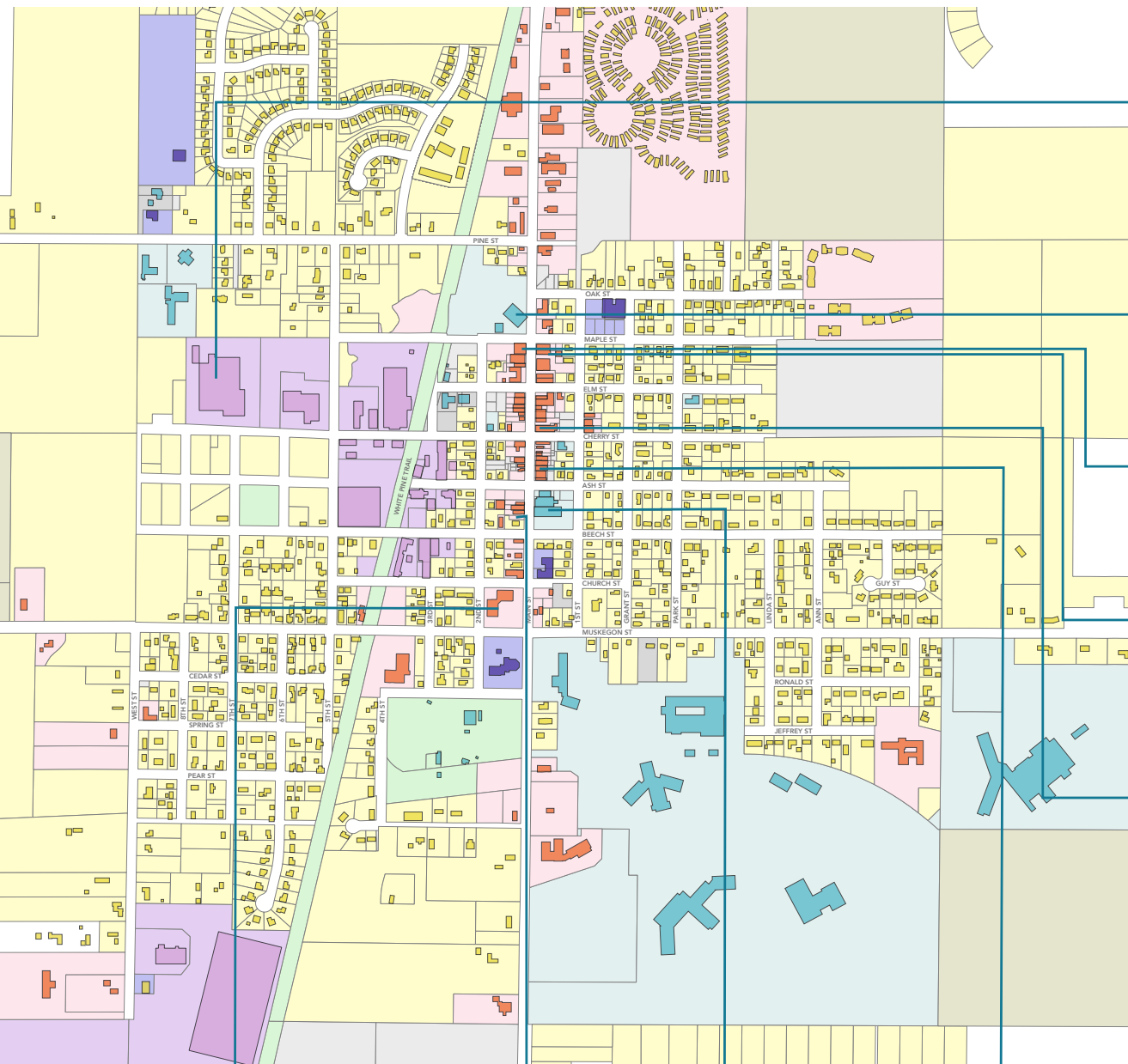




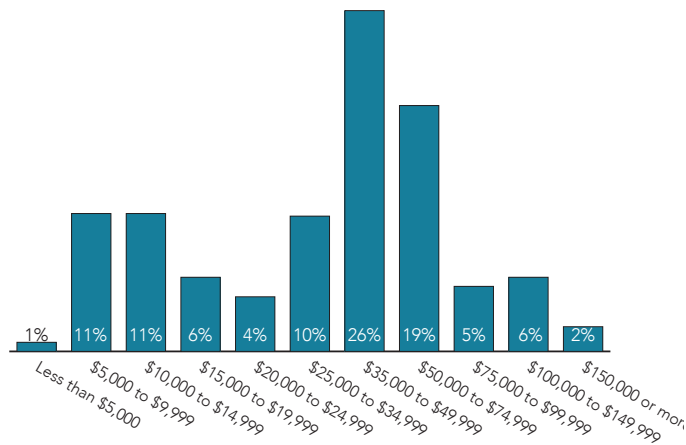
### PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

Like many other small towns, Cedar Springs first developed along a rail line and a major auto thoroughfare. The residential neighborhood expanded perpendicular from Main Street, and the West side of town includes a mix of both residential and industrial functions. This allowed residents the ability to walk to their jobs and shopping needs. With the advent of the interstate, though, development shifted towards the new highway, away from both Main Street and the houses. Thus, while more conveniently accessible to automobile traffic passing by, the new developments lost much of their sense of connection to the town. The Main Street, in turn, became increasingly vacant as the influx of highway-focused chain stores continued. Today, newer housing developments with curving streets have started sprouting up on the outskirts of town. The two significant, recent developments, though, are the Cedar Springs Brewery and the Library. Additionally, it is worthy to note that there is more than ample parking available on lots off the Main Street.





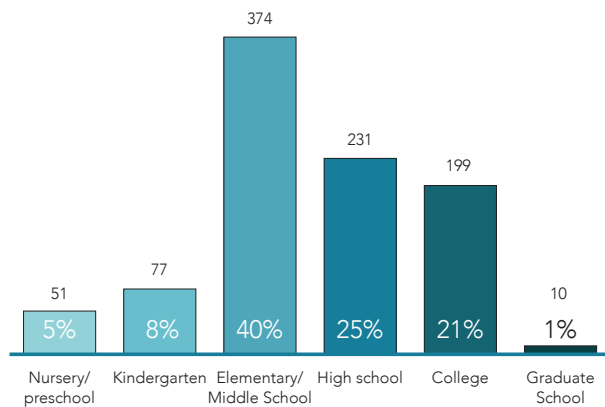
## Household Income



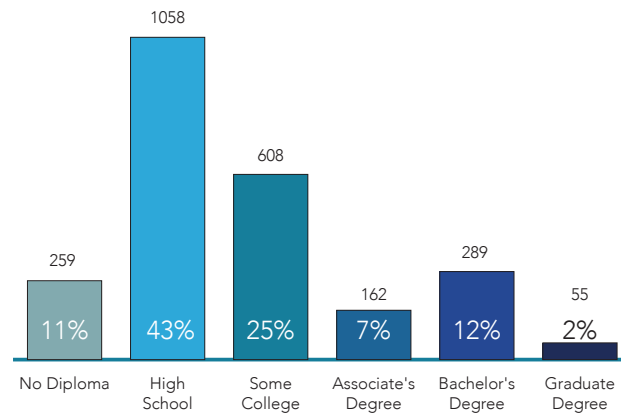
## Poverty Rate: 25.6%

Persons in Household	2017 Federal Poverty Level	Medicaid Eligibility (138% of FPL)
1	\$12,060	\$16,643
2	\$16,240	\$22,411
3	\$20,420	\$28,180
4	\$24,600	\$33,948
5	\$28,780	\$39,716
6	\$32,960	\$45,485
7	\$37,140	\$51,253
8	\$41,320	\$57,022

## Educational Enrollment

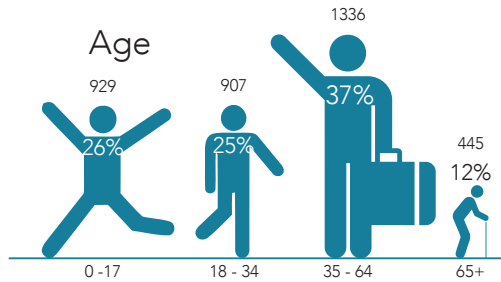


## Educational Attainment (25 Years or Older)

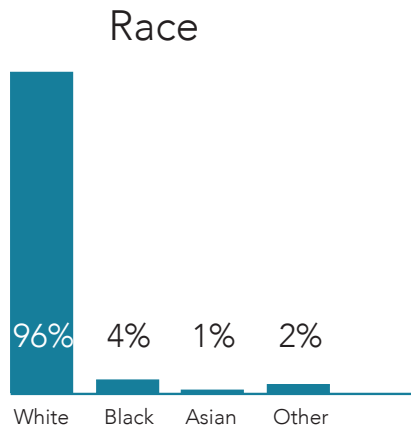




## Population: 3,617

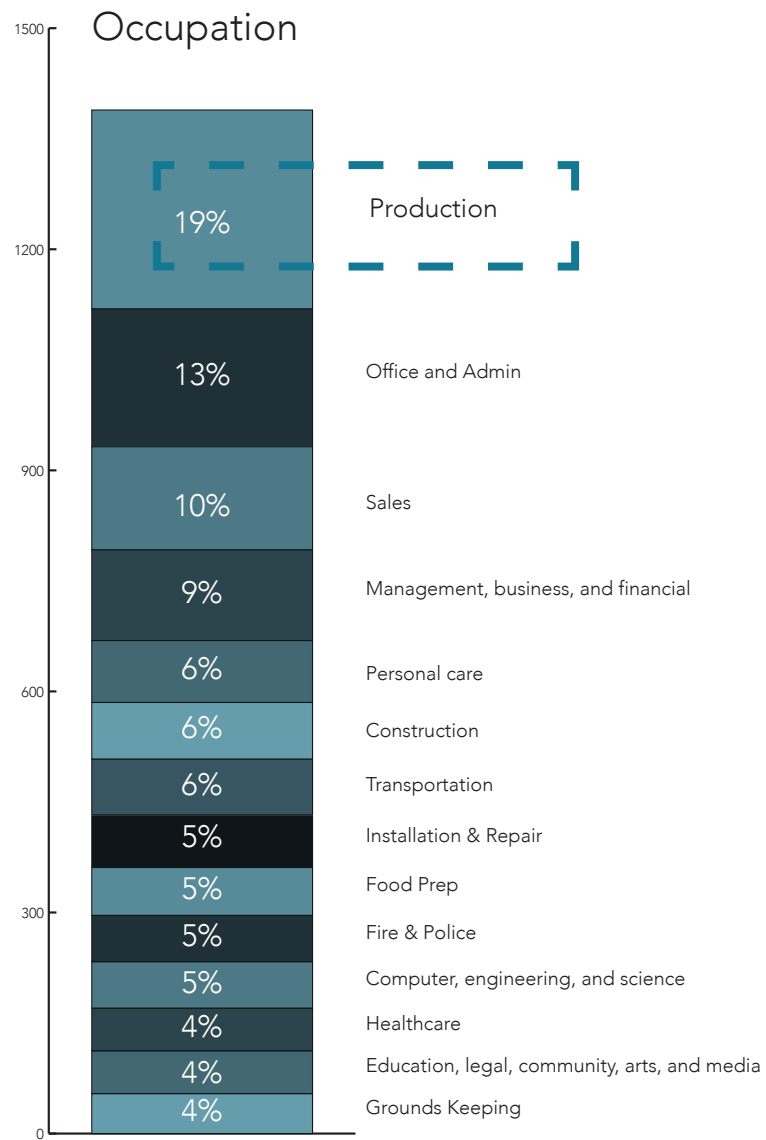
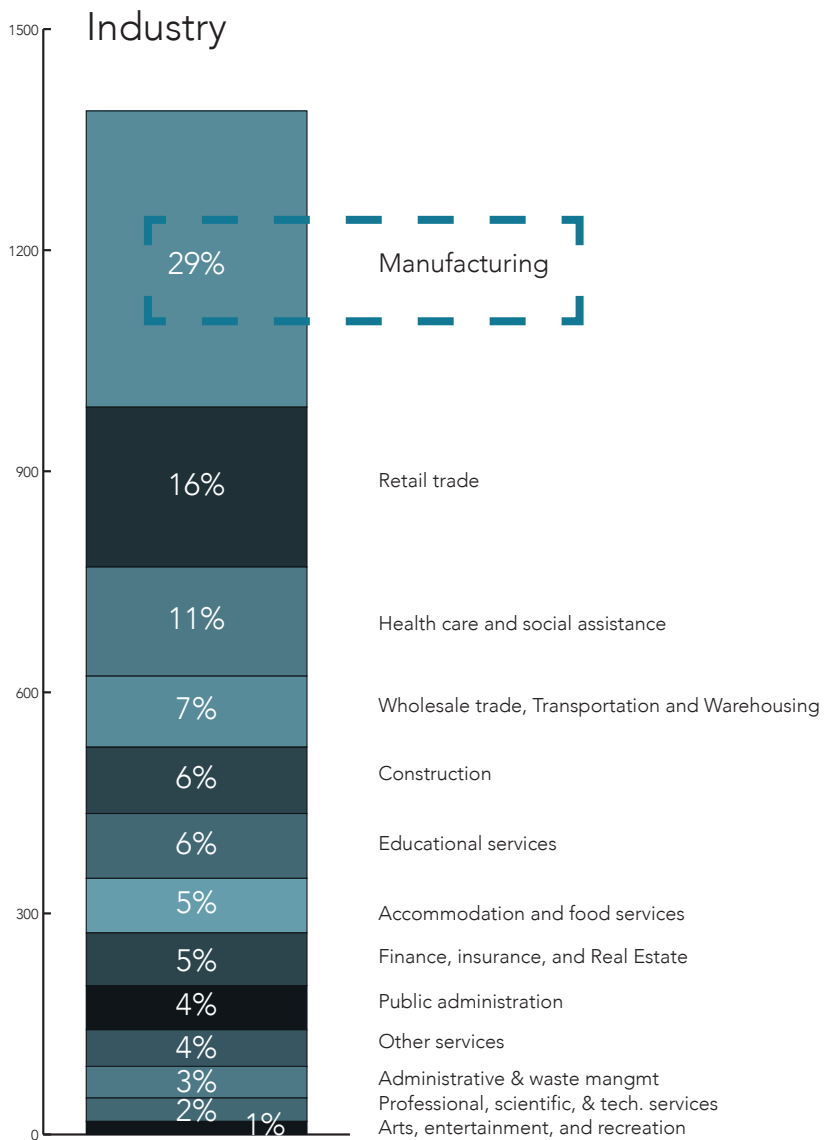


**Median Age: 34.6 Years Old**



## SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Demographic data can be an important piece of understanding in the holistic process of contextual design. Looking at Cedar Springs, one can see that the town actually has a fairly high poverty rate and low educational attainment. Only 21% of people (25 and older) have completed a college degree. Interestingly, enough, though, is that the number of residents currently enrolled in college is two-thirds of the number of total college graduates in town. What that signals is likely a trend of Brain Drain — where young people leave town after receiving a higher education. This would suggest that the town should at once cater to a non-college-educated population that makes up the base of the town, but also appeal to the younger generation to stay after they return from college.

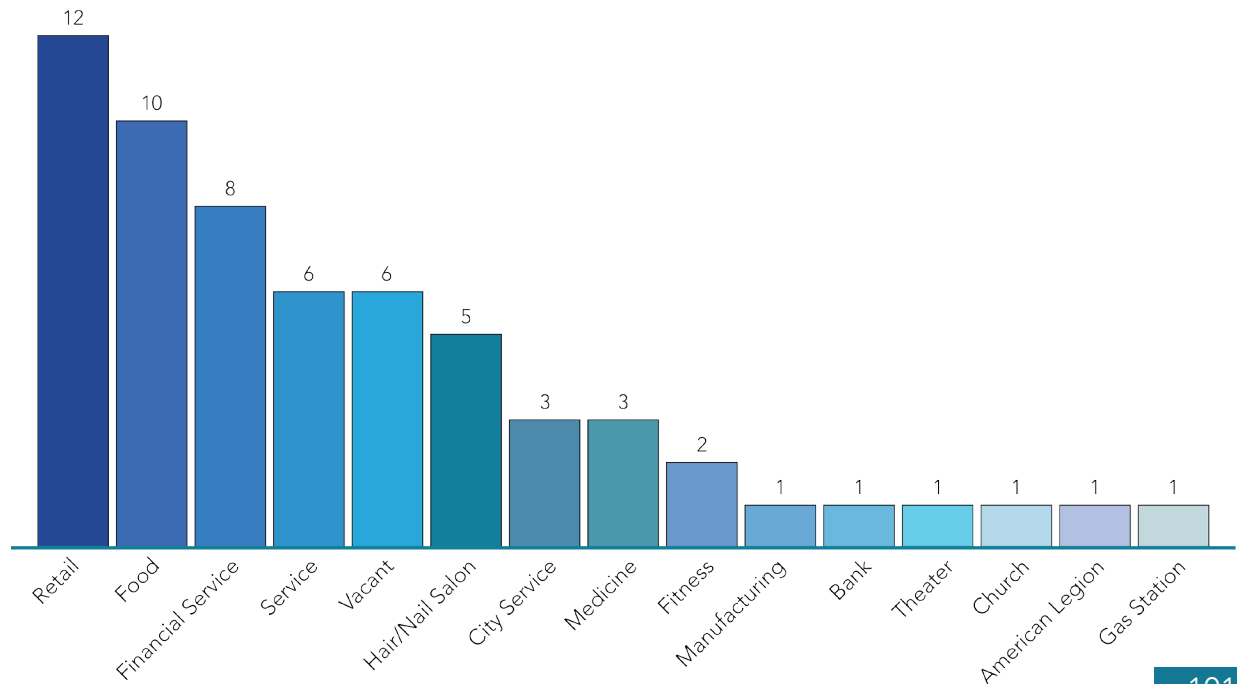


BUSINESS TYPE	COUNT
Food - Restaurant	11
Auto Repair	10
Food - Fast Food	9
Financial Service	8
Manufacturing	8
Hair/Nail Salon	8
School	7
Vacant	7
Retail	6
Retail - Construction	6
Church	5
Service	4
Bank	4
Dance	4
City Service	4
Insurance	4
Gas Station	4
Dollar Store	3
Retail - Clothes	3
Fitness	3
Food - Bar	3
Service - Printing/Graphics	3
Medicine	3
Trailer Home Park	2
Retail - Furniture	2
Retail - Electronics	2
Park	2
Service Retail	2
Realtor	2
Auto Sales	2
Chiropracter	2
Retail - Gaming	2
Video Store	1
Pharmacy	1
Service - Vet	1
Laundry	1
Nursing Home	1
Food - Coffee	1
Service - Staffing	1
Library	1
Jeweler	1
Dental	1
Theater	1
American Legion	1
Funeral Home	1
Grain Mill	1
Copy Shop	1
Grocery	1
Service - Tanning Salon	1
Food - Ice Cream	1
Treatment	1
Eye Care	1
Retail - Brewing	1
Service	1
Museum	1
Florist	1
Retail - Tea	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>170</b>

## ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

Correlating with the finding that 79% of the town's adult population has not finished a college degree, there is a high percentage (29%) of people employed in the manufacturing industry. New developments should thus consider the blue collar background of the town. Looking at the local businesses, one can see that there are many more retail and food based businesses, but not as many neighborhood service establishments.

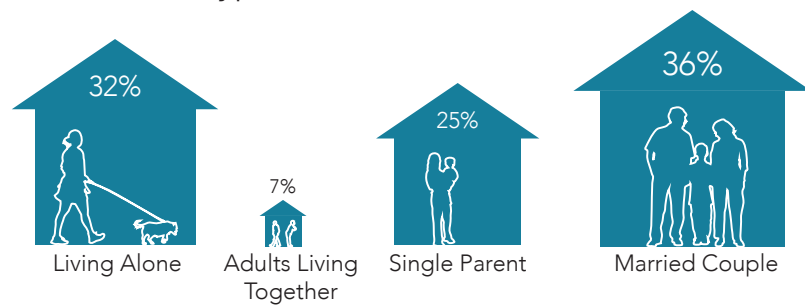
Main Street Businesses



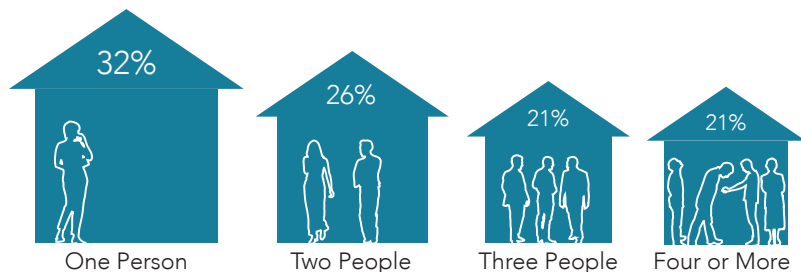




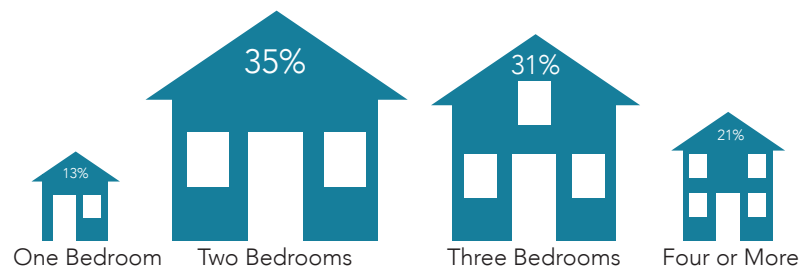
### Household Type (Total Households: 1,324)



### Household Size (Total Households: 1,324)



### Bedrooms per Housing Unit (Total Units: 1,380)

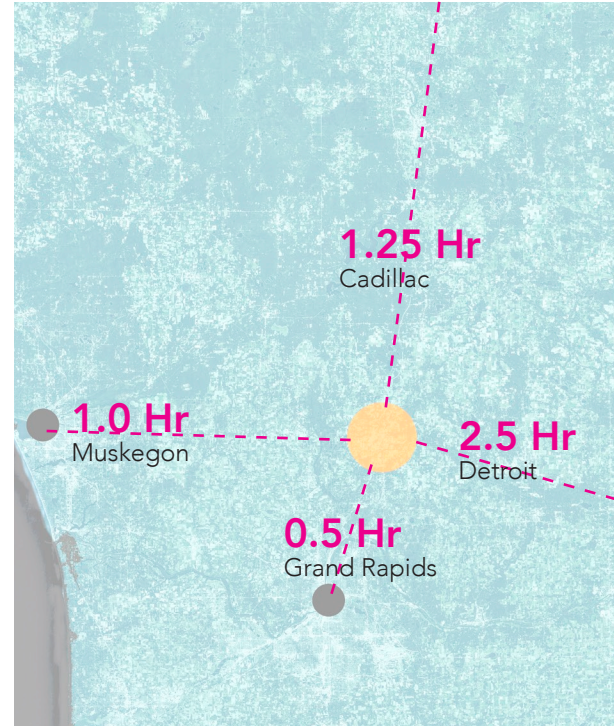
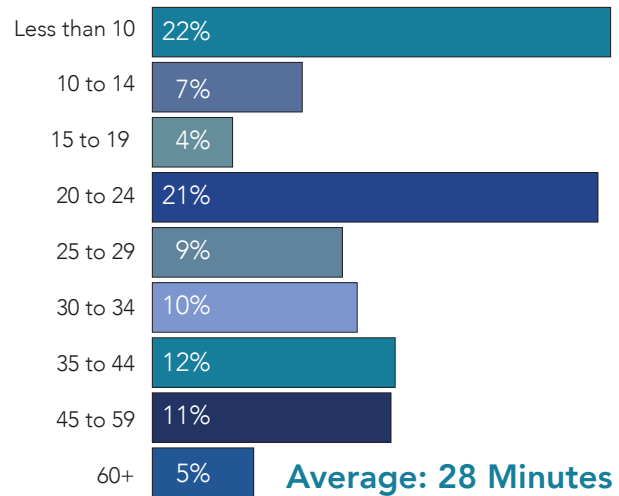


## HOUSING LANDSCAPE

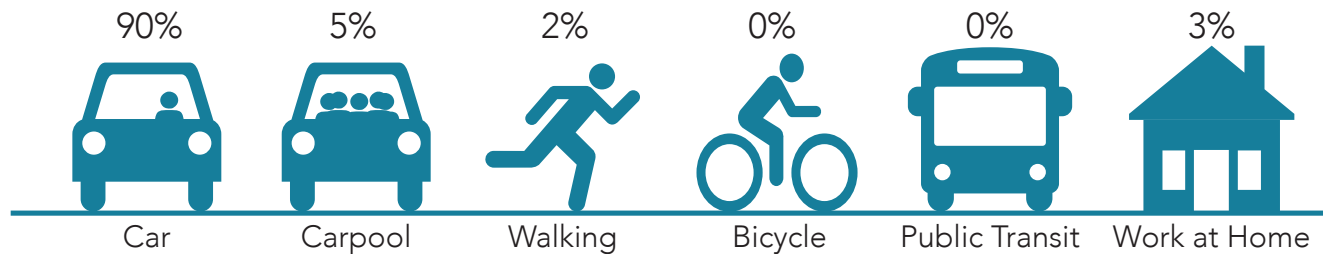
Another opportunity for evolution could come in the form of finding alternative housing solutions. Nearly a third of the town is living alone, as a single occupant in a residence. However, only 13% of the housing stock is one bedroom. As the town trends towards more living-alone situations, could its housing stock evolve to include more single-occupancy options? Since a quarter of the population is living below the poverty line, this may be a matter of efficiency for economic benefit.



## Commute Time (Minutes)



## Commute Transportation







## TRANSPORTATION LANDSCAPE

As much as planners like to predict the demise of the automobile, cars are often a necessary reality of life in many small towns, as public transit does not run through the towns. Furthermore, many of the residents work outside of town, with the average commute being 28 minutes (roughly the time it takes to drive to Grand Rapids). Thus, any significant plan for the town needs to acknowledge the reality of the automobile's importance, with amenities such as parking.



## WHITE PINE TRAIL

One of the town's major assets is the White Pine Trail. A converted rail line, the trail runs 90 miles from Grand Rapids to Cadillac and cuts directly through town. While the town has a strong cycling culture and does see a bit of outside cycling traffic from the trail, the connection from trail to Main Street is very weak. Additionally, none of the town commutes on bike. Thus, there is a great opportunity to foster the existing bike culture into a more functional and supported means of transportation.

**LEGEND**

- Major Buildings
- Municipal Boundaries
- Public Land Survey Sections
- Lakes & Ponds
- Rivers & Streams
- Street Centerlines
- Freeway
- Freeway Ramp
- Highway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Proposed Under Const.
- Private
- Alley

**ZONING LEGEND**

- B-1 Neighborhood Business
- B-2 Central Business District
- B-3 Highway Business District
- HC Highway Commercial
- MU Mixed Use
- I-1 Industrial
- R-1 Single Family Residential
- R-2 Single & Two Family Residential
- R-3 Multiple Family Residential
- R-4 Mobile Home Residential
- R-R Rural Residential

**CITY OF CEDAR SPRINGS**  
KENT COUNTY, MICHIGAN  
**ZONING MAP 2007**

Printed February 20, 2008

A copy of the City Zoning Ordinance may be obtained by accessing the City of Cedar Springs web site at <http://www.cedar-springs.mi.us>. Click on "City Ordinances" at the bottom of the homepage; then click on the "Zoning Ordinance" link on the next page.

© 2008 City of Cedar Springs and KEGSS. **REGIS**

**Map 4: Future Land Use**

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles

Sources: REGIS, City of Cedar Springs, LSL Planning

**Action Plan 19**

## PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS



## FUTURE LANDSCAPE

Cedar Springs recently put together a Masterplan (in 2017) that details their plan for the future. It proposes concentrating development to the blocks adjacent to the Main Street, exploring new housing options, and creating a new recreation center on the north side of town. It also proposes clearing a vast tract of forested land in an effort to attract large R&D developments. However, much of the development proposed by the plan is not on the Main Street itself, but in the areas surrounding it.





## CHAPTER 08

# EVOLVING THE MASTERPLAN

Upon examining the various conditions of Cedar Springs, the actual needs start to become apparent. The town does not need buildings of a certain height or buildings of a certain material, the town needs services to support the community life and grow the local economy. There are four findings that this thesis will focus on.

1. The **housing stock** does not correlate with the current distribution of living situations; there are a disproportionately high number of people living alone. Since a quarter of the town is below the poverty line, this is an opportunity to offer more efficient housing than the prevalent single family house.

2. The White Pine Trail (converted rail line) is a major asset both to the residents, and to cyclists passing through. However, the connection to the

trail is very underdeveloped. The town should embrace the regional **cycling culture**.

3. Even with the cycling culture, car usage is very high, and the Main Street has already lost a lot of business at the hands of development adjacent to the interstate. Any new masterplan needs to consider **convenience for the automobile**.

4 There is a large contingency of **manufacturing-**industry workers in the town. As these jobs slowly disappear, it would be helpful to develop **services** that complement these making skills.

With these in mind, the next step is to identify assets and spaces open for development. The masterplan then envisions potential matches for sites and programs in a way that one starts to support another.

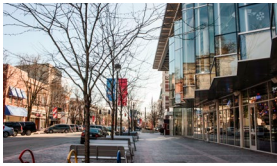






## PROVIDE RELEVANT LIVING OPPORTUNITIES

OFFER URBAN LIFESTYLE ON A SMALL SCALE



STEM BRAIN DRAIN



## TAP INTO REGIONAL CYCLING CULTURE

WAYFINDING FROM TRAIL



ATTRACT CYCLISTS



OFFER PARKING



## DEVELOP PARKING STRATEGY

RECLAIMING PARKING LOTS



PHASING IN SMALL PARKING STRUCTURE



## EXPLORE VIABLE RETAIL AND SERVICES

USEFUL SERVICES



VIRTUAL RETAILING



BIG & SMALL BOX







## CHAPTER 09

# LIVING ON MAIN STREET

Small towns have the opportunity to provide a quality urban experience on a small scale. They can offer many of the same amenities such as cafes, pharmacies, groceries, barbers, and parks, all within an easily walkable distance. In its masterplan, Cedar Springs recognizes this potential, but is seemingly very optimistic as to how many people will be moving into the town. Rather than just looking at young adults wanting a hip experience, though, who else could benefit from this urban experience “lite edition”? The elderly population is often overlooked, when they could actually benefit the most from this situation. In many cases, they would prefer to not (or cannot)

drive anymore, and can struggle staying active and engaged in society. By locating an assisted living care home directly on Main Street, the residents can more easily stay active and keep a level of independence. They also become a de-facto user base for the local businesses, and bring visitor traffic as well.

This project, then, consists of three stories of assisted living care residences, on top of the added program of a daycare, based around an intergenerational model of living and learning. In this way, the emphasis is really directed at supporting the town’s community, rather than relying on drawing tourists to boutiques.



## MOVING TO MAIN STREET

Green Acres is a newly built assisted living home in Cedar Springs. It serves the growing need of caring for the elderly population. Built less than a mile South of Main Street, it emulates a Main Street environment by putting fake facades on all the rooms in its hallways. Thus, a hair cutting room becomes "the barber shop." Rather than just copying such an environment with fake facades, what if the facility was placed directly on the Main Street? While there are benefits of having every function enclosed with one facility, it would provide the seniors with a more wholesome, respectable experience if they actually had easy access to the amenities that Main Street offers. The seniors (as well as the people who visit) would also become a de facto user base to support local businesses.





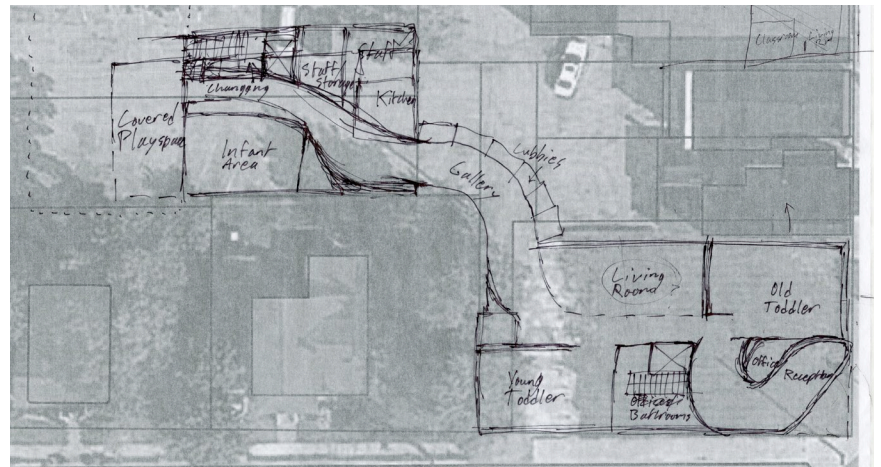
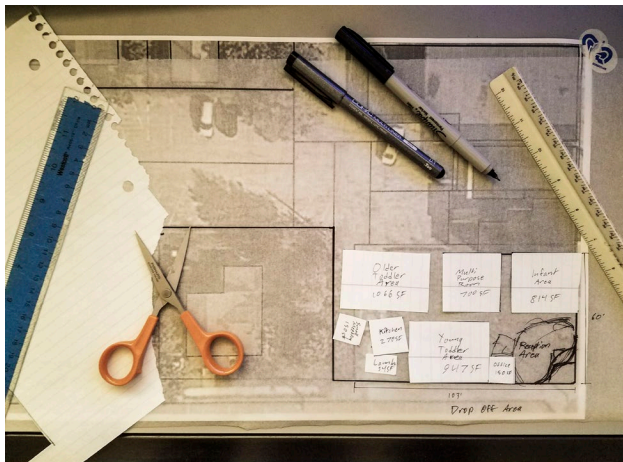
## INTERGENERATIONAL MODELS

Providence Mount St. Vincent in Seattle is a prime example of an intergenerational living/learning center. Under its roof is both a nursing home and a preschool.

"At the Mount, there are plenty of opportunities for intergenerational engagement between residents and the children. Six times a week, teachers take their groups to the residential floors to visit the elders for anywhere from 20 minutes for the infants to 60 minutes for the older children. Residents are welcome to observe in the classrooms, and structured activities for the children and residents to participate in together are scheduled daily. Because they share the same building, there are opportunities for spontaneous engagement, too—when inclement weather strikes, and the children must make do with the halls, lobby, and vacant rooms as their playground, for example. Or when an area musician comes around to play tunes for the children to sing and dance to along with the elders." (Jansen)

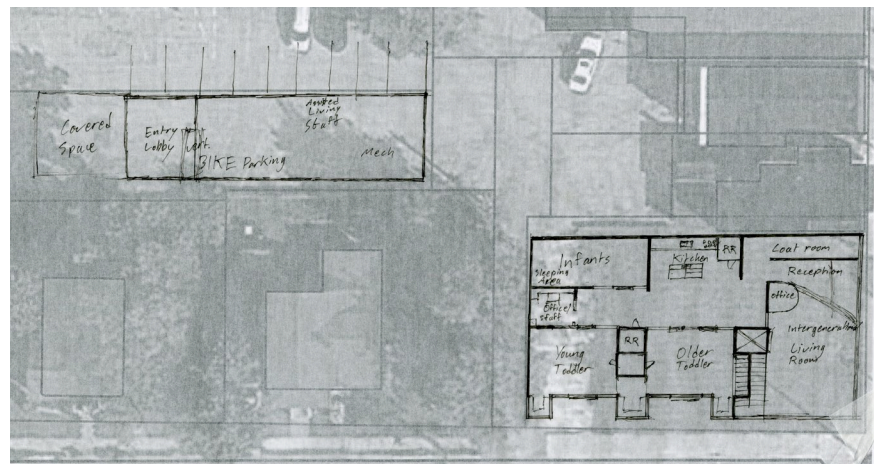
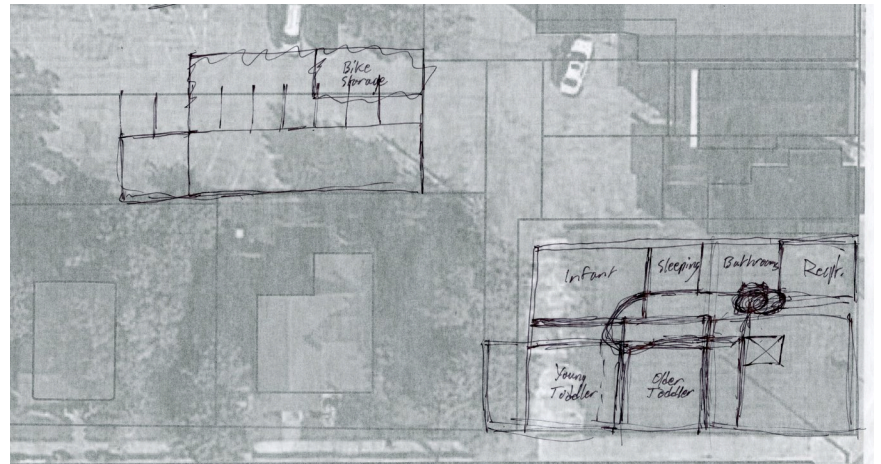
*WHERE THE PEOPLE GO TO LIVE,  
NOT TO DIE.*



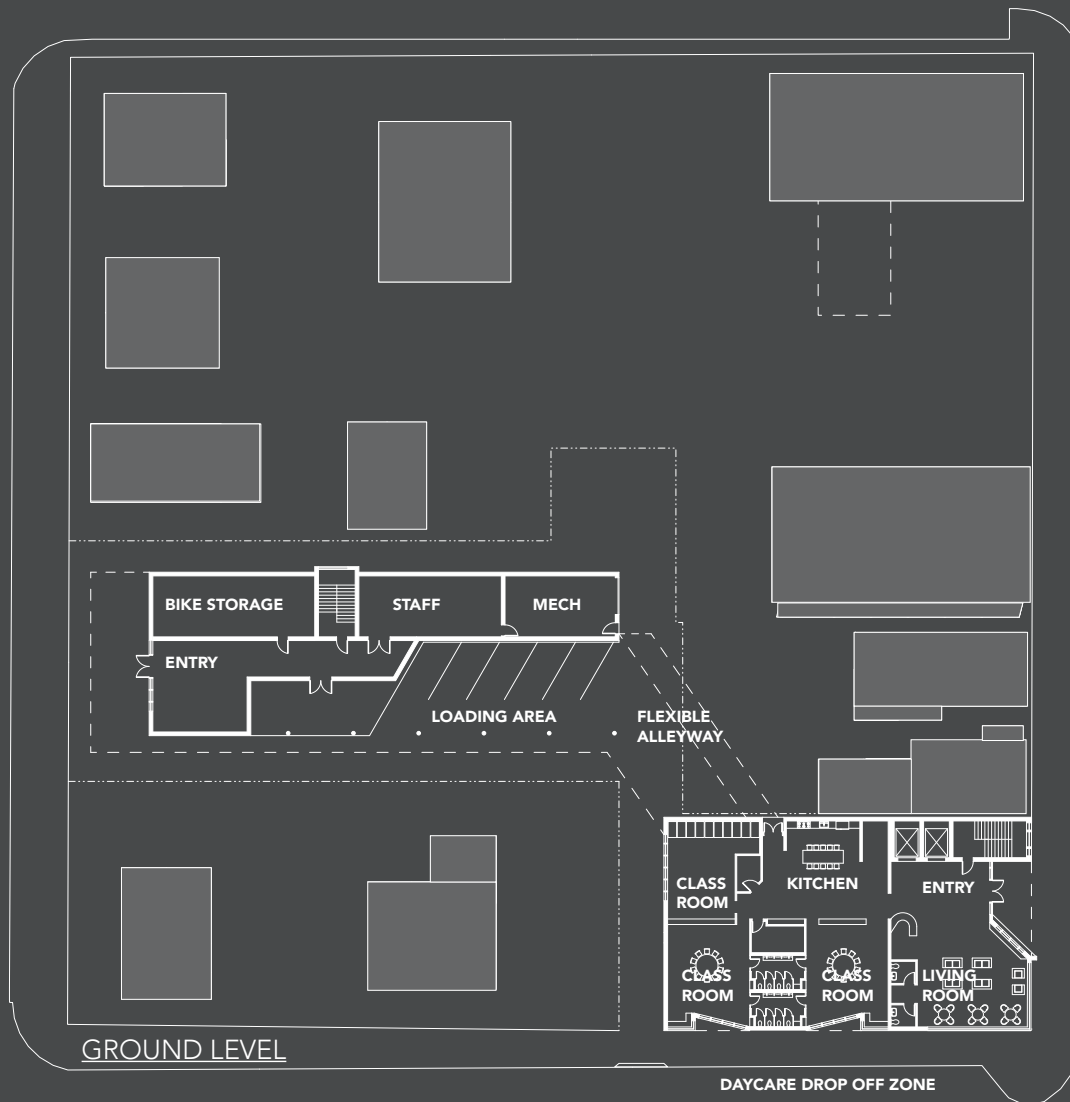


## ADAPTING THE PROGRAM

The first step in putting an assisted living care and daycare facility on Main Street was researching requirements and best design practices for the programs. The program was then adapted to take advantage of its Main Street location. For instance, the first iterations spread the daycare's classrooms throughout the first floor, snaking across the alley way to provide ample interior space. After further evaluation, though, it made more sense to condense the spaces in the front, opening up the alley, and shifting the focus outward to Main Street, rather than inwards with a sprawling interior. Some of the spaces could thus be shrunk, presuming that they will be supplemented by other spaces in the town, e.g. the local park.







MAIN STREET

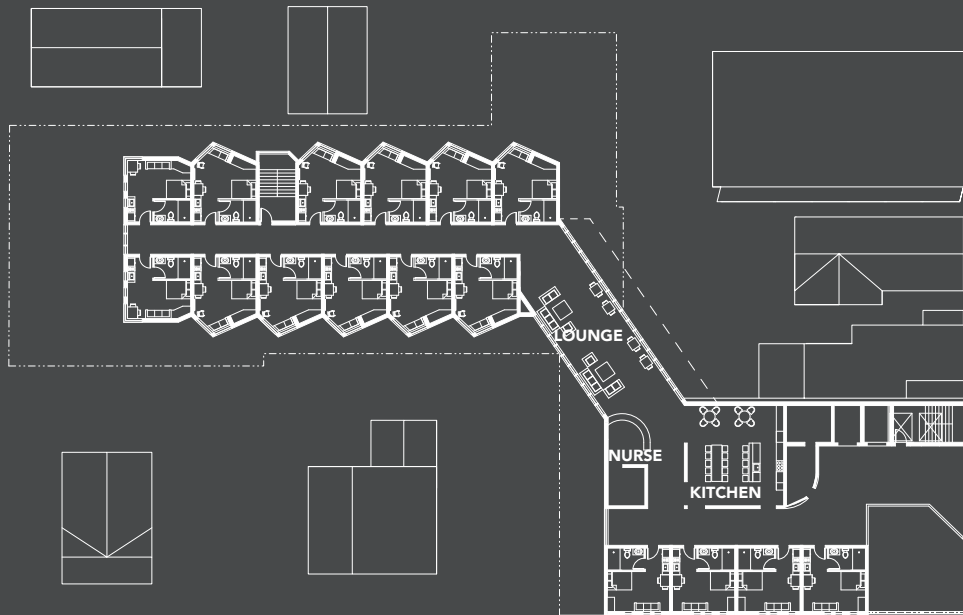
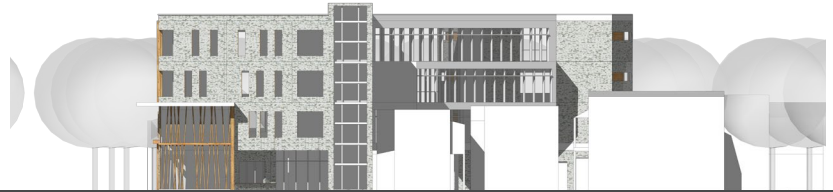
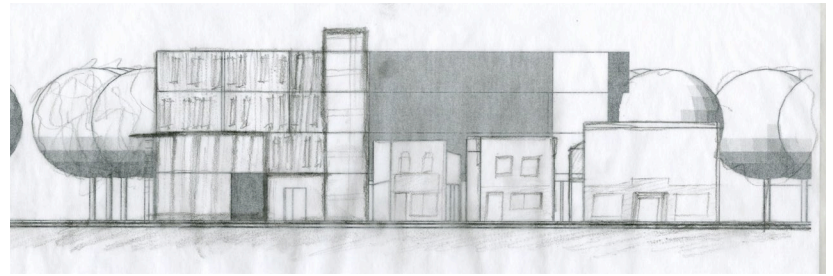
ASH STREET



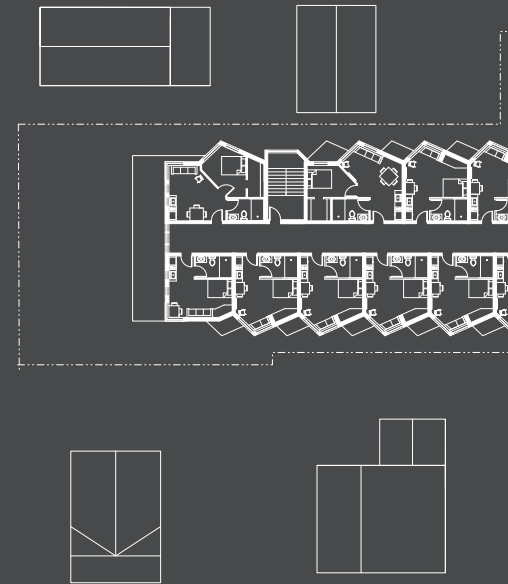
0 10 20 50  
SCALE: 3/64" = 1'

## MATERIALITY

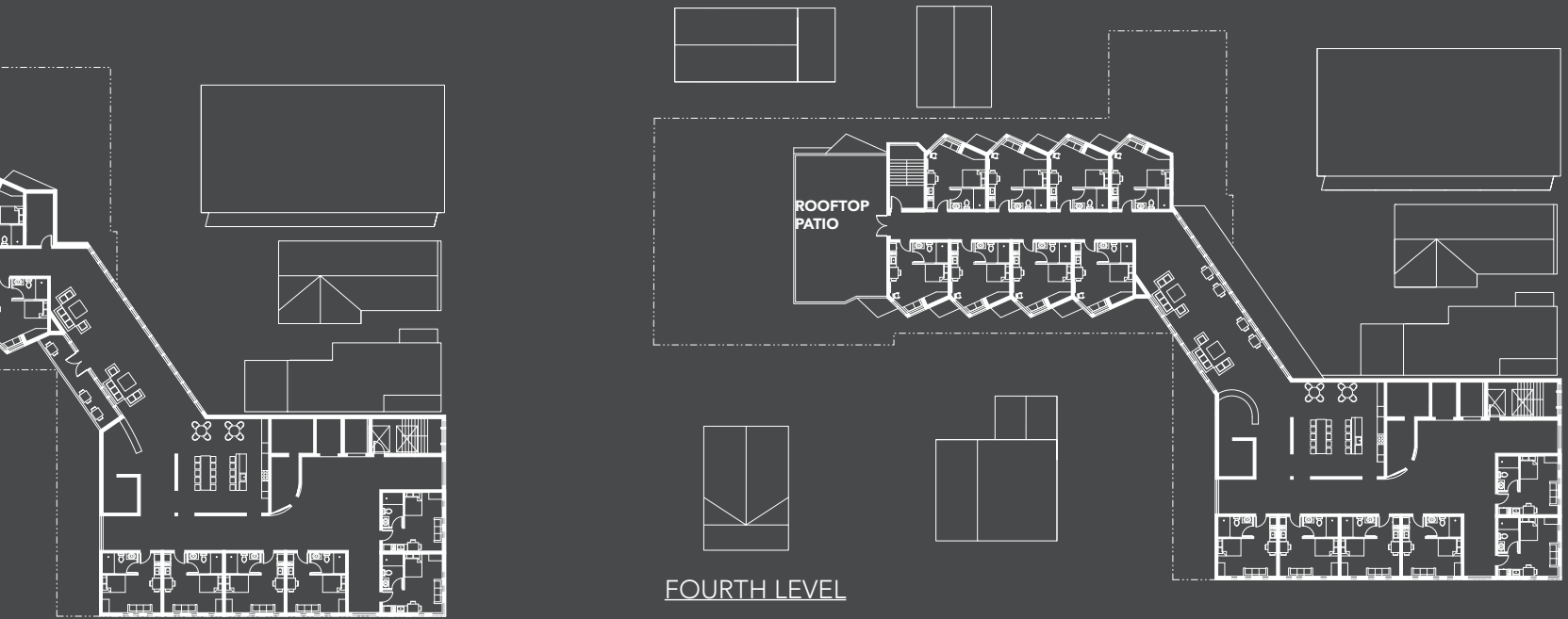
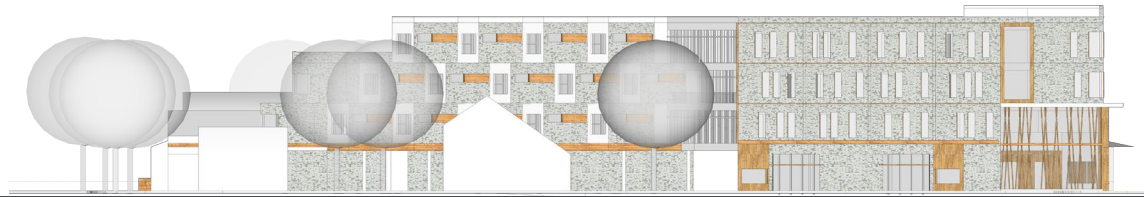
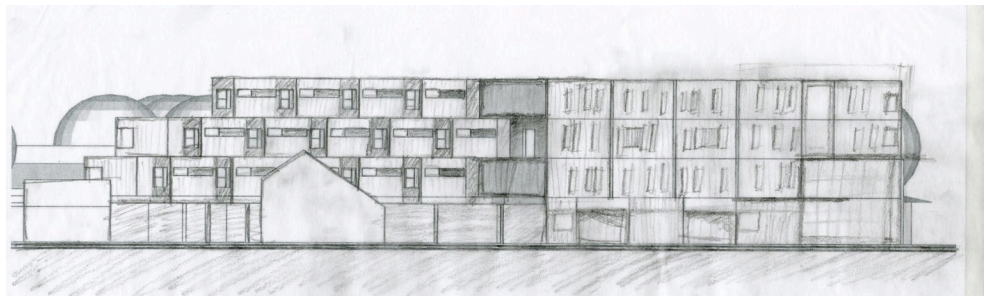
The material of the building, too, relates the building to the life of Main Street. Brick is used for its fire resistance properties, but is expressed in a modern fashion, and accented with wood: resulting in an visually stimulating, yet not overwhelming set of facades.



SECOND LEVEL



THIRD LEVEL

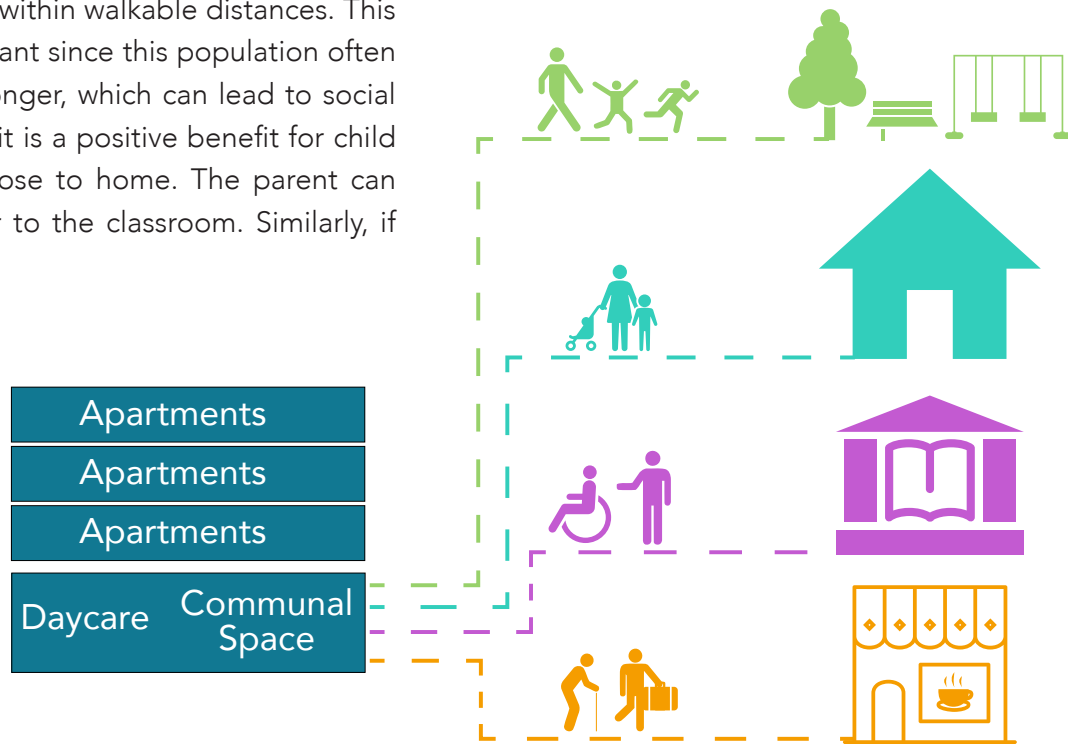


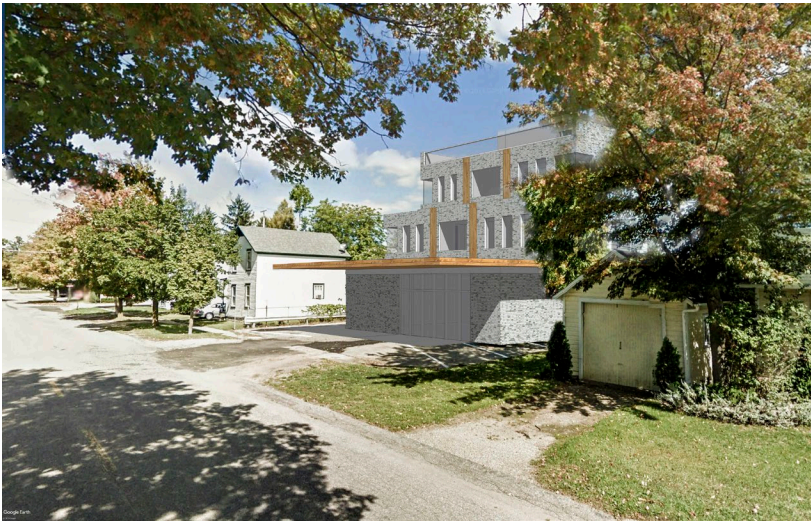


## INCREASING ACCESSIBILITY TO LOCAL ASSETS

Living on Main Street, seniors will have access to a much greater range of services and amenities than they would in a traditional facility, or even their own home. Instead of only eating in their room or a cafeteria, they can easily go across the street to a cafe. Likewise, the library, park, theater, and other assets are all within walkable distances. This is especially important since this population often cannot drive any longer, which can lead to social isolation. Similarly, it is a positive benefit for child to have daycare close to home. The parent can walk the child over to the classroom. Similarly, if

the parent works on the Main Street, too, he or she can easily join the child for lunch or other events. In this way, the center's location adds to the sense of community, and fosters a self-supporting ecosystem of programs.

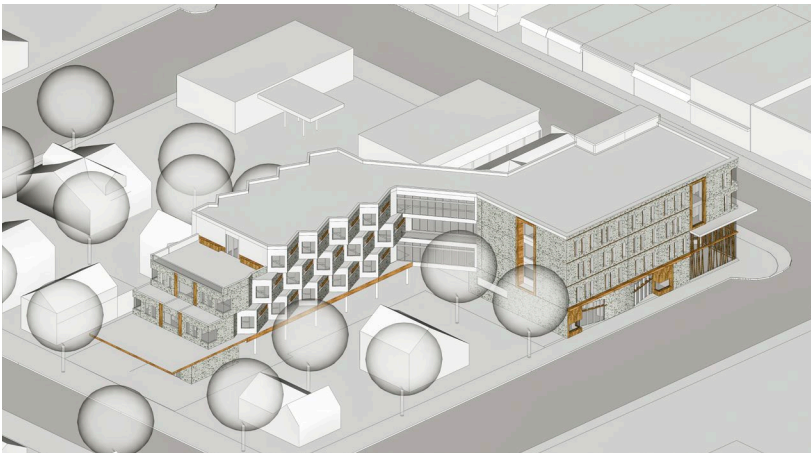
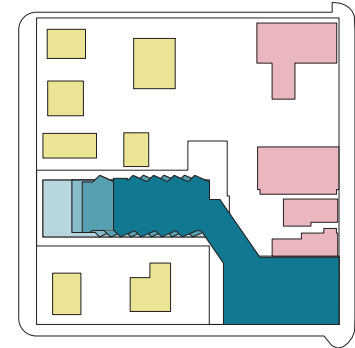




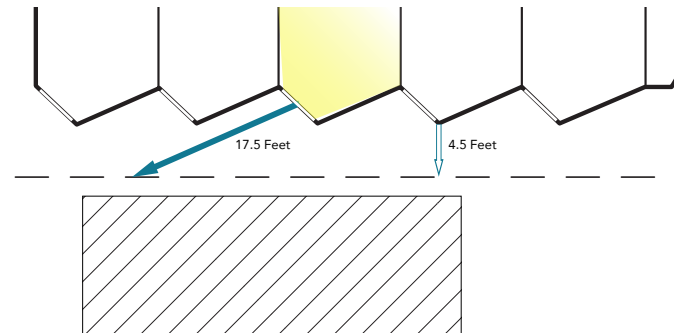
## FINE GRAINED MINDSET

Larger developments often are needed for economic viability.

Keeping a fine-grained mindset, the middle of the block is utilized as way to expand the overall size, but keep the frontage at a minimum. The rear keeps a smaller, more residential scale.



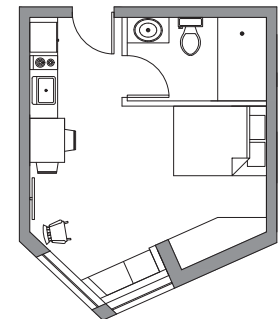
## OPTIMIZING LIGHT AND VIEWS ON NARROW LOT



## ASSISTED LIVING MICRO-APARTMENTS

46 UNITS  
TYPICAL: 300 SF

As the center offers many communal amenities, the rooms themselves can be smaller and more efficient.



## LEARNING ON MAIN STREET

Designing “through the eyes of a child,” the daycare spaces provide a range of experiences, catered to kid-sized scale. The large windows accentuate their location on Main Street, allowing the children to watch the activity — stimulating their developing senses. The center also provides quieter, more personal spaces for reflection.

Childcare centers should be “Providing an intriguing environment, yet one devoid of overpowering colors, features and literal ‘themes.’ The designer should avoid such literalness because it inhibits the child’s ability to imagine a series of alternate meanings to objects and features.” The design must support a balance of activities:

- Indoor and Outdoor
- Quiet and active
- Individual and group
- Large and small motor activity
- Child and staff initiated (US GSA)







## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY WITH INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING

1. The kids learn to be comfortable around older people
  2. Spending time with kids helps seniors fight off loneliness.
  3. Having kids around makes seniors more active.
  4. Kids don't care about the signs of dementia.
  5. Putting kids in contact with seniors fights ageism.
- (Hicks)

## COMMUNAL LIVING ROOM

Located on the corner of the block, the communal living room becomes the life of the project. It provides a place for old and young to come together for a variety of activities. The openness to Main Street at once activates the sidewalk and invites people in, but also activates the inside with connection to the energy of the street.



## CHAPTER 10

# MAKING ON MAIN STREET

Cedar Springs is a working class town with a high percentage of skilled laborers and workers in the manufacturing industry. While it is good and worthwhile to attract more manufacturing jobs, the industry is shrinking in a way that makes the likelihood of a larger company moving to the town rather slim. Rather, the town could look to help support its manufacturing base as jobs become more scarce, in a way that the residents can use their skills to start a business or retrain themselves for a new career. Much like a co-working space, a makerspace would be an incubator where this population could put their skills to work. Furthermore, many other people in the town could benefit from having such tools available. As such, the second proposal for Cedar Springs is a community workshop.







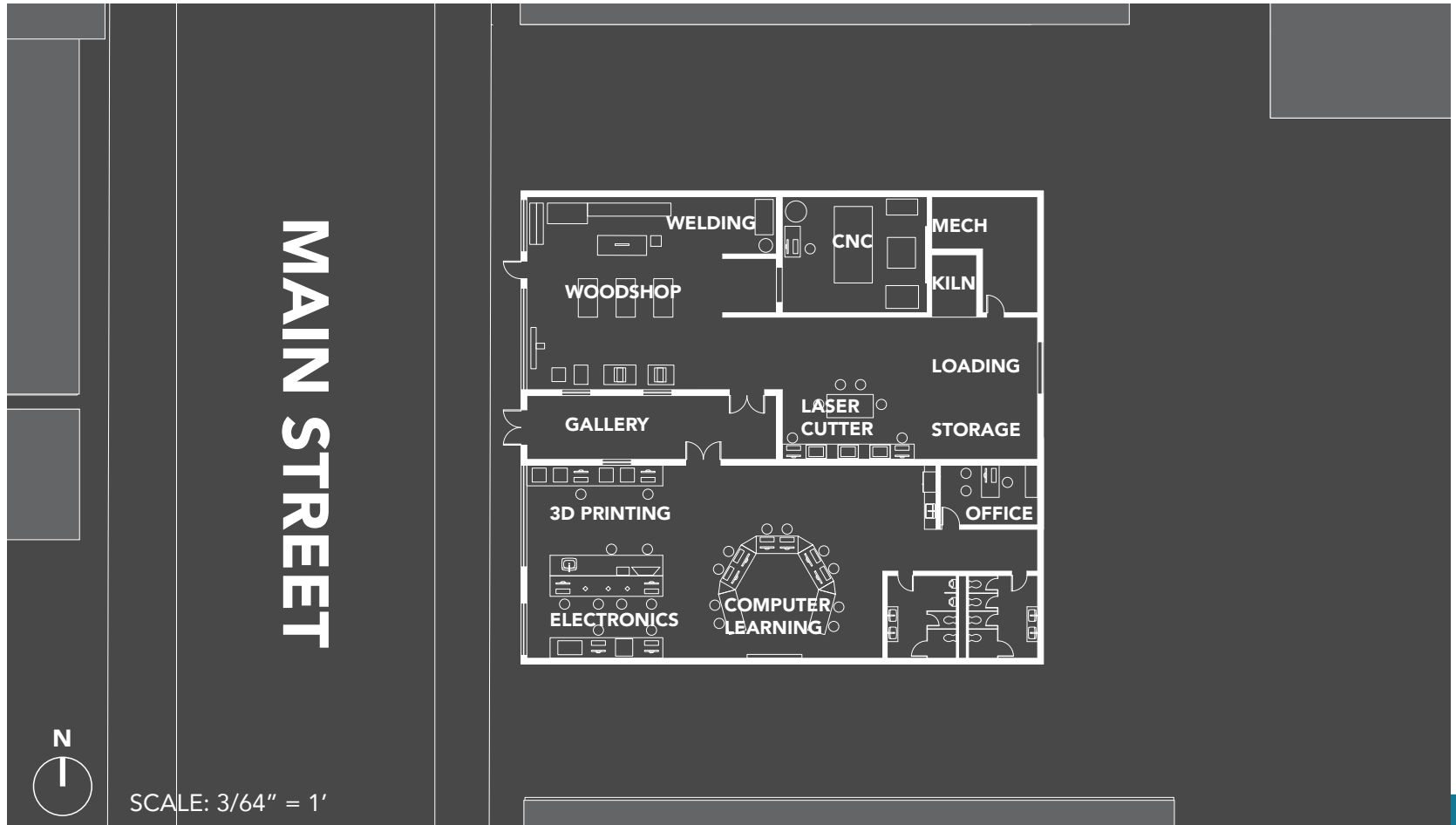
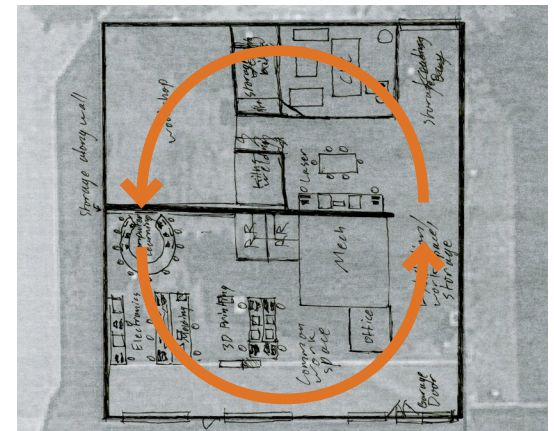
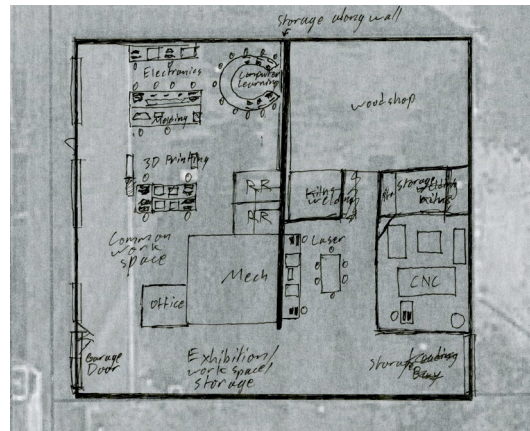
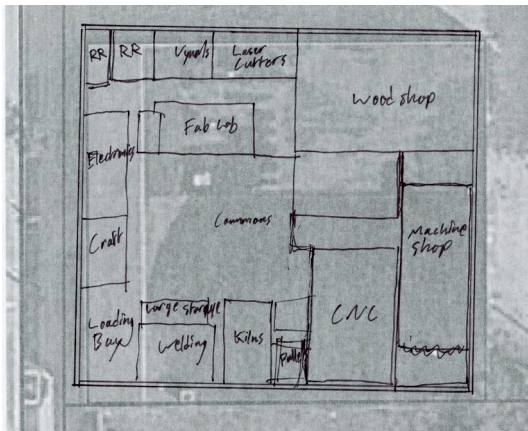


In keeping with the efficient, working-nature of the program, a vacant auto parts store on the North end of the Main Street is an ideal site for the community workshop. The building is opened up, uncovering the large windows. The facade is enliven by accentuating structural elements, entryways, and transitions. It also invites interaction with functional elements such as overhangs and benches.

The first attempt at laying out the space shows a mix of 3D printers, laser cutters, computers, and electronics near the front, and a woodshop with CNC near the back. However, by rotating the layout by 90 degrees, both the electronic and shop zones become visually connected to the sidewalk and community as a whole. This, then, showcases an important point: a human scale building can activate the sidewalk and add interest not just with its facade and materiality, but also with a view inside through its windows. The passerby is thus invited to watch the maker work, or come in and check out the space.













## CHAPTER 11

# RECLAIMED SURFACE LOT

Surface parking lots provide unique opportunities. The town currently has an overabundance of parking spaces, to the point that they fragment the experience of walking the Main Street. Some of these lots could be re-purposed to allow for a more pedestrian or cyclist-centric experience. One such lot is outside a gym on the North end of town. It could be reclaimed as a pocket park with much needed bike parking. Not every building needs its own parking, but there should be convenient parking. This can take form as a central parking structure or as system of flexible spaces. If people are walking from a parking spot already, they are more likely to continue walking around a bit before or after their intended destination.

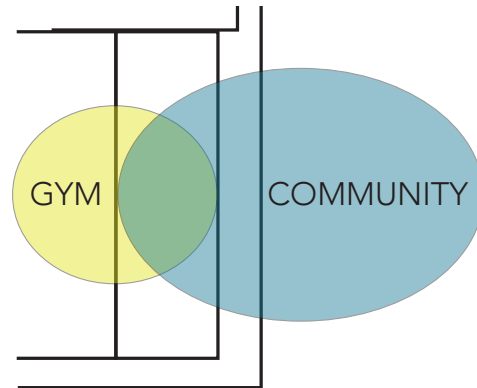




## INTEGRATED BIKE PARKING FOR MAIN STREET USERS



## EXTENSION OF GYM THAT ALSO BENEFITS COMMUNITY

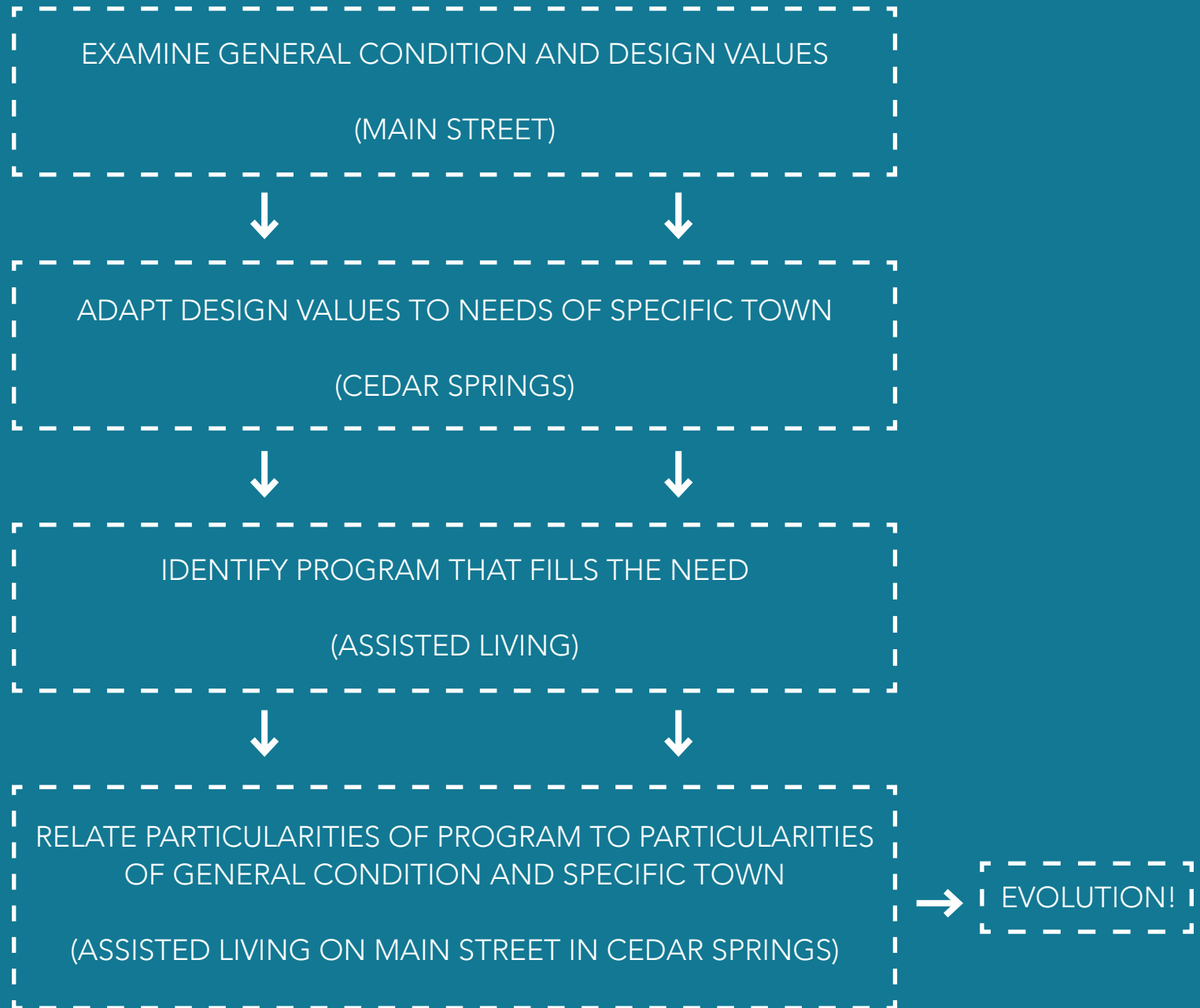






## CONCLUSION

# CONTEXTUAL DESIGN PROCESS



## FINAL THOUGHTS

By allowing for a greater freedom for evolution and encouraging diversity of design, towns can achieve a greater level of local character and identity. Rather than seeking to become a nostalgic tourist attraction, towns can spark a more vibrant community and stronger economy, making Main Street relevant beyond boutiques and bars. Many municipalities may be hesitant to build anything with a contemporary style or function for fear drawing public ire. However, unity does not require uniformity. By giving emphasis to social conditions in contextual design, new developments can transcend the columns & cornices and seek out creative and dynamic ways to respond to the actual needs of the residents. Be it new forms of retail, an assisted living care home, a makerspace, or things more radical, Main Streets have an infinity of potential ways to evolve towards the needs of today and tomorrow.



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