# Individual Collectivism

Resident Driven Economic Development in Brightmoor Detroit

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**"** Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other. *John Steinbeck*

# Contents

Individualism is the idea that everyone is responsible for his or herself and has an inalienable right to live the life of their choosing. Everyone is sovereign, an end in themselves, and the only unit of concern. While the central tenants of individualism ring true, western society often operates on a falsified version of the super-empowered individual. Through the glorification of the self, western culture has taught us to prioritize our own needs over those of others. The cultural bias that hyper inflates the value of individual action makes it near impossible for humans to exist in a healthy society.
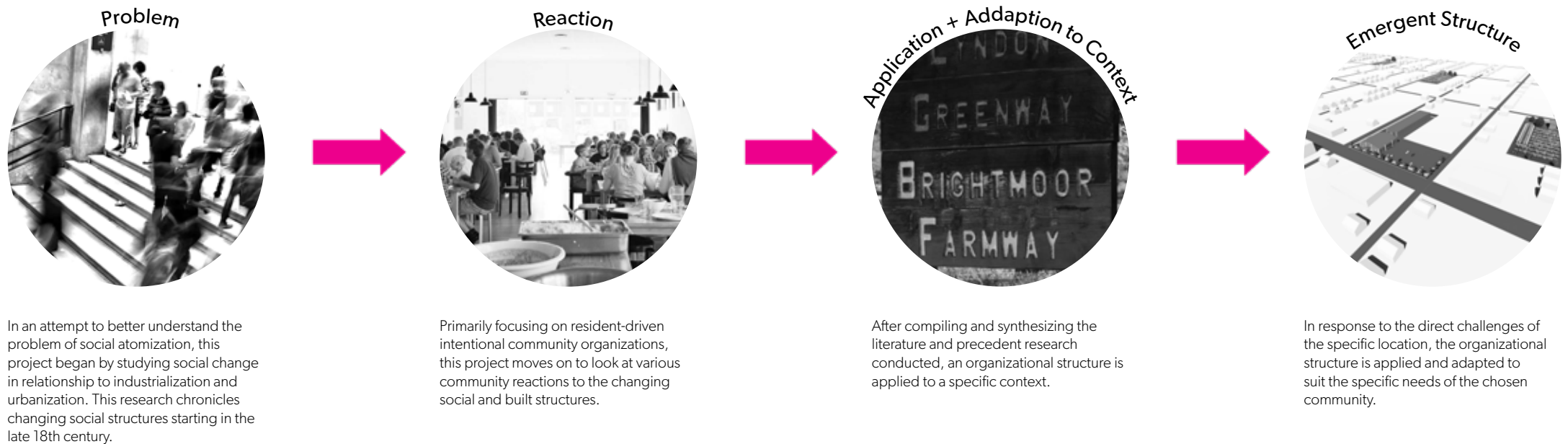
In contrast to individualism, collectivism stresses the importance of the community. It is mostly concerned with unity and selflessness with a focus on the greater good of the whole. The main principles of collectivist societies include public ownership, cooperation, collective interest, and economic equality. While extreme examples of this philosophy have shown themselves to be fatally flawed, the question must become, can collectivist principles improve the western concept of society?

Throughout the United States, previously forgotten urban neighborhoods are seeing a resurgence of speculation. Housing costs have risen exponentially due to profit-driven speculation, displacing life long residents, and paving the way for re-imagined communities suited to market trends rather than the needs of residents. The motivation for this thesis is to reconcile the seemingly opposing philosophies of individualism and collectivism by applying the benefits of cooperative action to resident-driven community development in the Brightmoor neighborhood of Detroit, Michigan.

This project focuses on an organizational structure that provides a framework for an economically sustainable resident-led development strategy in the Brightmoor neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. Through studying the history and precedent examples of intentional communities as well as building relationships with community members, the author will argue that collective ownership is an economic development strategy that struggling communities can implement to provide services for both future and existing residents.



**Figure 1** - Lonely House

## Problem



In an attempt to better understand the problem of social atomization, this project began by studying social change in relationship to industrialization and urbanization. This research chronicles changing social structures starting in the late 18th century.

## Reaction



Primarily focusing on resident-driven intentional community organizations, this project moves on to look at various community reactions to the changing social and built structures.

## Application + Addaption to Context



After compiling and synthesizing the literature and precedent research conducted, an organizational structure is applied to a specific context.

## Emergent Structure



In response to the direct challenges of the specific location, the organizational structure is applied and adapted to suit the specific needs of the chosen community.

In order from left to right. **Figure 2** - Social Atomization. **Figure 3** - Intentional Living . **Figure 4** - Brightmoor Detroit. **Figure 5** - The Commons.

Industrialization - A World in Flux

**Figure 6** - Industrialization

### From Village to City

Beginning In the 18th century, industrialization brought about monumental economic changes that forever changed the world. As factories replaced the home as the center of production, many farmers moved to cities in order to find jobs in factories. Consequently, cities grew at a fast pace bringing millions of job-seeking immigrants. Within less than a century, the population living in rural communities shrank by more than fifty percent as the western world gave rise to urbanization (Hirschman and Mogford).

Before industrialized society, most people lived and worked on their farms, and the simple necessities of life -water and food, were more easily accessible to them.

They often lived within small rural communities that relied heavily on the interdependence of individual skill sets. As agricultural villages disintegrated, interdependent communities began to disappear and growth in urban centers skyrocketed. Due to the rise of industrial employment, new social classes began to emerge in society.

In the United States, the industrial revolution came in two waves. The first saw the rise of factories and mechanized production in the late 1700s and early 1800s and included steam-powered spinning and weaving machines, the cotton gin, steamboats, locomotives, and the telegraph (Peterson 1) . The Second Industrial Revolution took off following the Civil War with the introduction of interchangeable parts, assembly-line production, and

new technologies, including the telephone, automobile, electrification of homes and businesses, and more.

The businesses and factories behind the industrial revolution were located in the nation's towns and cities. Eleven million Americans migrated from the countryside to cities in the fifty years between 1870 and 1920. During these same years, an additional 25 million immigrants, mostly from Europe, moved to the United States—one of the most massive mass migrations in human history—and while some settled on farms, most moved into the nation's growing towns and cities (Hirschman and Mogford).

Cities in this period were studies in contrast. The wealthy lived in urban mansions while the poor crowded into tenement houses. The Second Industrial Revolution also

changed the physical composition of cities. The invention in the 1850s of the Otis elevator and the Bessemer steelmaking process (an inexpensive process for the mass production of steel) created the material means for the rise of tall city buildings (Rees 6).

The rapid economic shift catalyzed by industrialization radically altered the way an individual defined their place in the world. The natural reliance on community, the earth, and physical skill that had once determined one's livelihood was no longer as necessary. In the newly industrializing world, existence was contingent on a single entity, the corporation. Rather than work directly for tangible goods, the reward for employment became monetary.
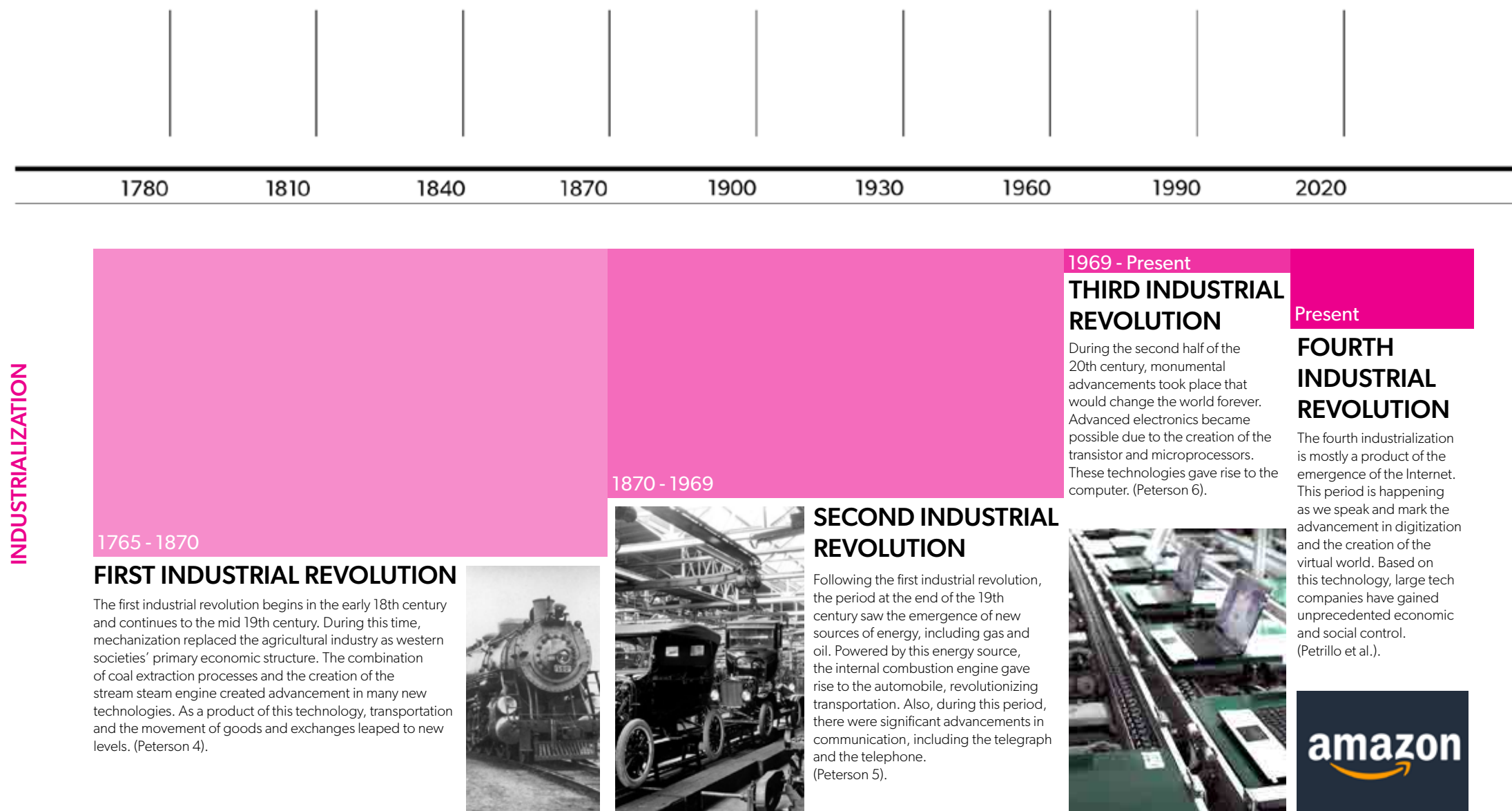
| 1780 | 1810 | 1840 | 1870 | 1900 | 1930 | 1960 | 1990 | 2020 |

**INDUSTRIALIZATION**

**1765 - 1870**

## FIRST INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The first industrial revolution begins in the early 18th century and continues to the mid 19th century. During this time, mechanization replaced the agricultural industry as western societies' primary economic structure. The combination of coal extraction processes and the creation of the stream steam engine created advancement in many new technologies. As a product of this technology, transportation and the movement of goods and exchanges leaped to new levels. (Peterson 4).

**1870 - 1969**

## SECOND INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Following the first industrial revolution, the period at the end of the 19th century saw the emergence of new sources of energy, including gas and oil. Powered by this energy source, the internal combustion engine gave rise to the automobile, revolutionizing transportation. Also, during this period, there were significant advancements in communication, including the telegraph and the telephone. (Peterson 5).

**1969 - Present**

## THIRD INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

During the second half of the 20th century, monumental advancements took place that would change the world forever. Advanced electronics became possible due to the creation of the transistor and microprocessors. These technologies gave rise to the computer. (Peterson 6).

**Present**

## FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The fourth industrialization is mostly a product of the emergence of the Internet. This period is happening as we speak and mark the advancement in digitization and the creation of the virtual world. Based on this technology, large tech companies have gained unprecedented economic and social control. (Petrillo et al.).

**Figure 7** - Industrial Revolution

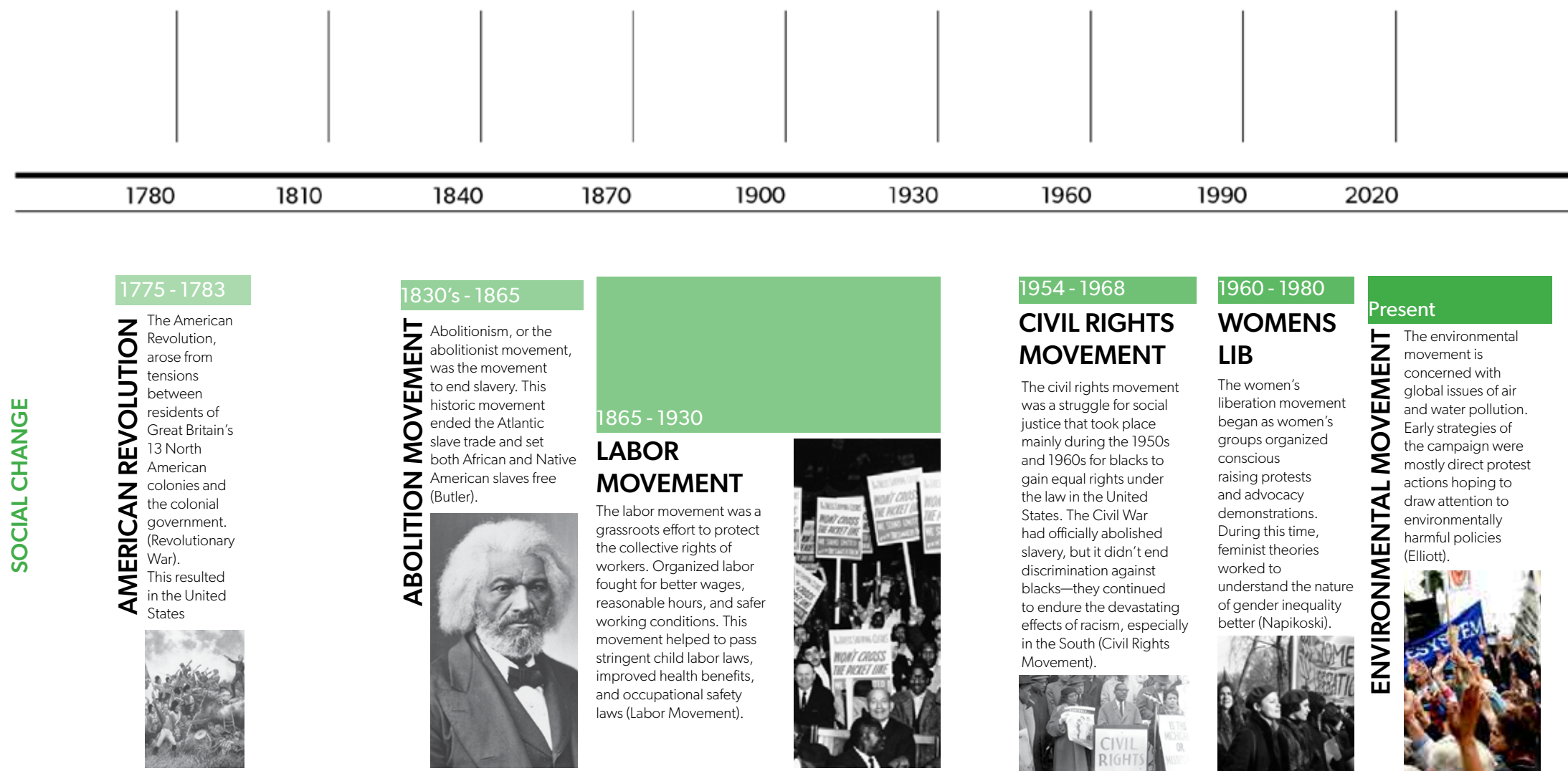Images from left to right. **Figure 7.1** - Steam Engine. **Figure 7.2** - Assembly Line. **Figure 7.3** - Technology. **Figure 7.4** - Amazon Logo.

**1780**   **1810**   **1840**   **1870**   **1900**   **1930**   **1960**   **1990**   **2020**

SOCIAL CHANGE

### 1775 - 1783

**AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

The American Revolution, arose from tensions between residents of Great Britain's 13 North American colonies and the colonial government. (Revolutionary War). This resulted in the United States



### 1830's - 1865

**ABOLITION MOVEMENT**

Abolitionism, or the abolitionist movement, was the movement to end slavery. This historic movement ended the Atlantic slave trade and set both African and Native American slaves free (Butler).



### 1865 - 1930

**LABOR MOVEMENT**

The labor movement was a grassroots effort to protect the collective rights of workers. Organized labor fought for better wages, reasonable hours, and safer working conditions. This movement helped to pass stringent child labor laws, improved health benefits, and occupational safety laws (Labor Movement).



### 1954 - 1968

**CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

The civil rights movement was a struggle for social justice that took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s for blacks to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. The Civil War had officially abolished slavery, but it didn't end discrimination against blacks—they continued to endure the devastating effects of racism, especially in the South (Civil Rights Movement).



### 1960 - 1980

**WOMENS LIB**

The women's liberation movement began as women's groups organized conscious raising protests and advocacy demonstrations. During this time, feminist theories worked to understand the nature of gender inequality better (Napikoski).



### Present

**ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT**

The environmental movement is concerned with global issues of air and water pollution. Early strategies of the campaign were mostly direct protest actions hoping to draw attention to environmentally harmful policies (Elliott).



Figure 8 - Social Change

Images from left to right. **Figure 8.1** - Revolutionary War. **Figure 8.2** - Frederick Douglass. **Figure 8.3** - Labor Movement. **Figure 8.4** - Civil Rights Movement. **Figure 8.5** - Womens Liberation. **Figure 8.6** - Environmental Movement.

| 1780 | 1810 | 1840 | 1870 | 1900 | 1930 | 1960 | 1990 | 2020 |

**WAR**

**1775 - 1783**

**REVOLUTIONARY WAR**

The American Revolution, arose from tensions between residents of Great Britain's 13 North American colonies and the colonial government. (Revolutionary War). This resulted in the United States

**1812 - 15**

**WAR OF 1812**

The war of 1812 was a short conflict between the United States and Great Britain. The war began to keep Britain from the unlawful seizure of United States ships.

**1861 - 65**

**CIVIL WAR**

The United States fought the civil war between the years 1861 and 1865. This war was an effort to keep eleven southern states from seceding from the union.

**1914 - 18**

**WORLD WAR I**

The First World War began in 1914 with the assassination of arch-duke Frank Ferdinand and ended in 1918 with the Treaty of Versailles. This conflict engaged most of Europe, the United States, and Russia. The war was so brutal; it was known as "the war to end all wars."

**1939 - 45**

**WORLD WAR II**

World War II lasted from 1939 to 1945. Most of the countries of the world were involved and broken into two military forces: the allies and the Axis.

**1955 - 1975**

**VIETNAM**

The Vietnam War began in 1955 ended with the fall of Saigon in 1975. This war was between communist North Korea and pro-western, southern Vietnam. Many countries joined both sides, either supporting or fighting against communism.

**03 - Present**

**IRAQ**

The Iraq War began in 2003 when the United States invaded Iraq in search of weapons of mass destruction.

**Figure 9** - American Wars

1780   1810   1840   1870   1900   1930   1960   1990   2020

**LITERARY PERIOD**

**COLONIAL**

1607 - 1800



Colonial American literature emerged between 1607 to the late 1700s. Highly influenced by British writers of the time, this style is exemplified through poems, journals, letters, narratives, and histories.

1800 - 1860

**ROMANTICISM**

Romanticism originated in Europe during the 19th century. It a musical, literary and intellectual movement. The Romantic style focuses on the individual and the glorification of the past.



1850 - 1900

**REALISM**



Realism focuses on everyday experience in its attempt to depict daily activities without the stylization found in three Romantic movements.

1900 - 1950

**MODERNS**



Modernism in concern to literature began in Europe and the United States around the late 19th century. This approach self-consciously breaks from traditional styles.

1950 - Present

**POST MODERNS**



Postmodernism in concern to philosophy and literature defines itself through skepticism, relativism, and general suspicion.

**Figure 10** - Literary Periods.

Images from left to right. **Figure 10.1** - Anne Bradstreet. **Figure 10.2** - Walt Whitman. **Figure 10.3** - Ernest Hemingway. **Figure 10.4** - Mark Twain. **Figure 10.5** - Allen Ginsberg

1780    1810    1840    1870    1900    1930    1960    1990    2020

**URBANIZATION**

81.2% OF US POPULATION LIVING
IN URBANIZED AREAS IN 2020

64.2% OF US POPULATION LIVING
IN URBANIZED AREAS IN 1950

39.6% OF US POPULATION LIVING
IN URBANIZED AREAS 1900

6.10% OF US POPULATION LIVING
IN URBANIZED AREAS 1800

**Figure 11** - Urbanization Over Time.

Suburbanization - Living Divided

### American Suburbanization

Following the years of mass industrialization and urbanization, there came another migration that would define American life. Before World War II, about 13% of the United States lived in suburban locations. By 2010, the population living in the suburbs increased to over half the population (Massey and Tannen). Due to this, politics, economics, and social structures have also suburbanized. Suburbanization has shaped our relationship to transportation, creating an automobile dependency as well as forever changing patterns of commuting. Homeownership, defined by a single-family residence, surrounded by a yard and set outside the urban core, has come to define the expectations of many Americans. In the decades following the urban exodus, American politics have come to rest on the suburban majority and has become the critical setting for American life.

The foundation of post-war suburbanization was an offshoot of the existing metropolitan landscape characterized by "segregated diversity." Before WWII, the commuter suburbs that existed were defined by large single-family houses located near lush landscapes, modest streetcar suburbs, and Mainstreet shopping districts. According to geographers Richard Harris and Robert Lewis, "Prewar suburbs were as socially diverse as the cities they surrounded."(Brover) The surrounding landscape, especially open spaces, was to become the stage for post-war suburban sprawl.

Following World War II, the United States found itself in a severe housing shortage. In 1945, there was an estimated deficit of about five million homes. Veterans returned to low vacancy rates and high rent costs. In response to this problem, the Federal government provided a stimulus to suburbanization through policies created to revolutionize the home building industry and improve home lending organizations. Also, the country built critical infrastructure, such as the new interstate highway system.

During this time, the construction industry changed in revolutionary new ways. In response to the housing shortage, developers and builders sought to modernize the home building industry to achieve mass production. By implementing standardized parts and floor plans, and encouraging a subdivision of labor to reduce the need for skilled or unionized labor, housing costs were reduced.

These events forever changed the fabric of the American landscape. No longer did a house, a neighborhood, or even a city need to respond to its specific location. Materials were produced and shipped to the site instead of being sourced locally. The automobile connected residents to resources reducing the need for walkable planning. Architectural elements, such as the porch, were eliminated to save cost. Both homes and neighborhoods were built to promote ownership, symbolize success and reinforce the need for an individual to provide for themselves.



**Figure 12** - From City to Suburb

### The Levittown

One of the most significant examples of post-war suburban home building is by Abraham Levitt and his sons, William and Alfred. Through their development typology, the home became a commodity to be produced as quickly and cheaply as possible. Elements such as a functioning front porch gave way to superficial structures built to mimic details that consumers expected in a home. It was no longer necessary to consider how a house or, more importantly, an occupant was to interface with the broader context of a surrounding community.
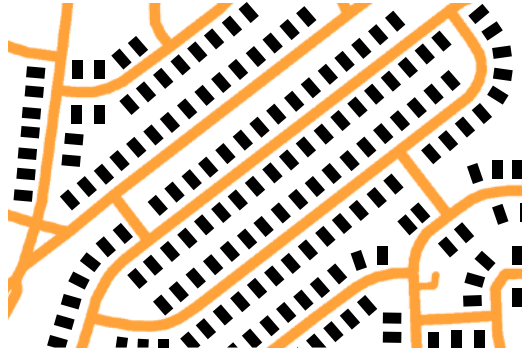


Figure 13 - The Levittown



Figure 16 - Livittown in Construction



Figure 17 - Levittown Sprawl

### Paving Over the Neighborhood

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the United States built the interstate highway system across the country. While this was beneficial for suburban and rural areas, it decimated urban environments tearing neighborhoods to pieces and gutting pedestrian centered forms of accessibility. By this time, many cities had removed their streetcar systems that were no longer economically viable, and road building was seen as a public responsibility largely spearheaded by automotive corporations.
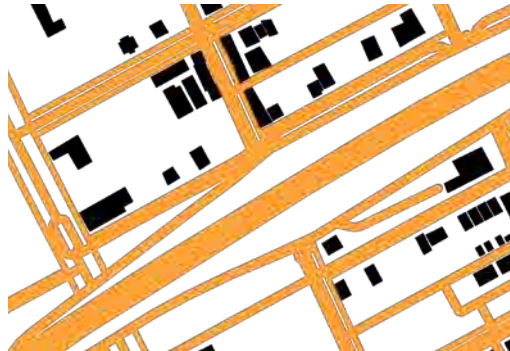


Figure 14 - Paving Over the Neighborhood



Figure 18 - Freeway Dividing City



Figure 19 - Freeway Dividing City 2

### The Projects

As freeways tore through low income, African American neighborhoods, increasing numbers of families were displaced. To address housing for this demographic, giant apartment blocks were developed. As maintenance and upkeep declined, crime rates rose. Because of this, the projects were viewed as substandard and dangerous. Famous examples of these developments were Pruitt Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri, and the Brewster-Douglas housing in Detroit, Michigan.
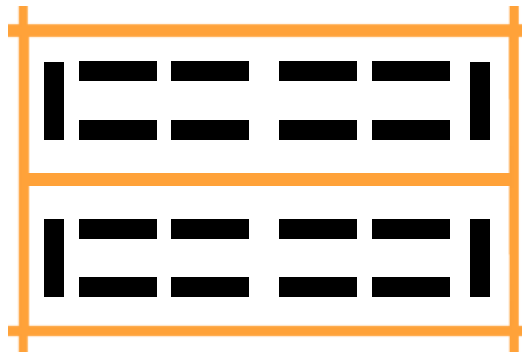


Figure 15 - The Projects



Figure 20 - The Projects Create Affordable Housing



Figure 21 - The Projects Fall into Disrepair

### The Problem of Suburbanization

The perceived experience of a suburban neighborhood seems to unfold itself in layers. At first glance, it appears to be almost cozy. There are shutters on either side of the windows, concrete paths that connect porches to sidewalks, and perfectly groomed garden beds garnish the front facades. After further inspection, something feels strange, like it appeared from an episode of the popular television show "Twilight Zone." There are no hinges on the shutters, no space for people on the porches, and the sidewalks lead to severed ends. Aside from the steady trickle of vehicles moving to and from the residences, the atmosphere is desolate. The environment seems to be a caricature or a fabrication of something that was once real. In an attempt to define ownership and privacy, fences differentiate the "us" from the "them."

One of the causes of this phenomenon is the deeply seeded nature of profit-driven development. To provide a product (housing) with the lowest cost and highest return, developers and city planners have thrown out millennia of architectural knowledge and relied on the life support of infrastructure and transportation to connect residents. Homes design caters to curb appeal rather than those who will dwell within.

Suburbanism, in many ways, has become economic segregation. In traditional neighborhoods, multiple building typologies co-exist, resulting in the possibility for the poor, middle class, and rich people to live side by side. Suburban building ordinances aggressively disallow this to bolster property values.

Both consciously and unconsciously, the built world has come to reflect the social divisions we have constructed. By compartmentalizing and quarantining difference, the neighborhoods we live in have become homogenized and disconnected. In addition to apparent separations between race and socioeconomic status, communities have become internally atomized, promoting the separation and distrust of neighbors.

### A Phenomenology of Suburban Isolation

Sam Mallin's method of using body hermeneutics is a way to help one think about existence, existing thought, and the surrounding world. It is an approach to connect with a subject based on lived experience rather than a preconceived understanding. Through Mallin's body hermeneutics, one can bracket or reduce away a natural attitude. In order to implement this method, I will use my own lived experience through the lens of memory.

When contemplating isolation in the context of a suburban neighborhood, my mind wanders back to an experience visiting a friend living in a somewhat typical subdivision. The memory remains clear in my mind, yet the experience is striking only in its anonymity.

I am driving down a nondescript road, every so often, an unremarkable building surfaces in my peripherals, but quickly fades as the vehicle hurtles forward. I am looking for a neighborhood, the name I don't quite recall. Eventually, I see the sign that designates the entry, but I have passed it before my brain registers to slow down. Slightly perturbed, I turn around and head back, paying careful attention not to miss the entry.
There is one entrance to the neighborhood; the road is broad to facilitate the coming and going of vehicles in both directions and divided by a short median. In the center of the small greenbelt is a sign written in all italic font declaring the land a neighborhood. I drive past and pull my vehicle over to the side of the road, move the gearshift to park and switch off the ignition.

I climb out of the vehicle and notice a small pergola located near the entrance sign. Something seems strange. The more I think about it, the more I begin to understand what feels out of place. It is small, the size allows for two, maybe three people, but there is no entrance to the structure. It seems to communicate an interaction among neighbors that is physically impossible due to the nature of its construction. It is merely a symbol.

The perceived experience of this subdivision continues to unfold itself in layers. At first glance, the houses appear to be almost cozy. There are shutters on either side of the windows, concrete paths that connect porches to the sidewalks, and perfectly groomed garden beds garnishing the front facades. As I continue by foot, my vision begins to focus, and I notice missing pieces. There are no hinges on the shutters, no space for people on the porches, and the sidewalks lead to severed ends. Aside from the steady trickle of vehicles moving to and from the residences, the atmosphere is desolate. The environment seems to be a caricature or a fabrication of something that was once real.

This experience speaks to the body in a variety of ways. When walking through the neighborhood, the sidewalks tell me to keep moving and the closed doors seem to agree, so I continue walking. Eventually, without warning, the sidewalk terminates. I stop abruptly and try to decide whether to turn around or attempt to traverse the seemingly endless sea of manicured grass. Turning back seems to be the right decision, so I turn around and retreat to the vehicle I arrived in. The neighborhood seems to suggest a sense of leaving.

During my time spent in this neighborhood, I feel out of place but safe. I feel isolated, disoriented, but secure. I feel that there is life happening somewhere, but I am not part of it. I feel like I have entered a separate world, one that was created for those who live within the boundaries. There is no place for "others". Most importantly, I felt Alone.

Aloneness is often perceived as the absence of people. Although these conditions may exist, a person may not feel alone, especially if they have no desire to be with another person. Similarly, a person may be surrounded by other people and still experience a sense of being alone, particularly if he or she feels excluded. Aloneness does not refer to an objective circumstance but to a psychological state of being and how it is experienced given the context.

In an article published by David A. Diekema, aloneness is categorized as a function of social form. According to the paper Aloneness and Social Form, aloneness is based on the relationship between self and other. "Other-imposed" aloneness creates isolation, self-imposed aloneness creates escapism, and "mutually constructed" aloneness creates solitude.

This methodology is important in understanding the root of the suburban problem. If it is a matter of choice, who is making the decision? Do we choose to live in removed locations as a form of escapism, solitude, or is it imposed on us as a form of isolation? To understand this, one must first understand the context. Housing is a commodity created and marketed for a profit. The planning of a neighborhood is a derivative of a capitalist culture that promotes whatever has the highest monetary reward. Residents are helpless in the development of the places they live and must settle for what the developer-driven market produces.

Given the role of the developer who imposes neighborhood typologies onto the housing market based on what will be most profitable, the notion of choice as a home buyer is severely limited. Because of few options in housing, many homebuyers choose their neighborhoods not with motivations of solitude, but rather because other options are limited or unavailable. Given that housing options are imposed rather than elected, it seems that Diekema's theory of isolation fits well in the description of the suburban neighborhood.

To understand the phenomenology of a disconnected suburban neighborhood, it is essential to understand the effects of a lifestyle disconnected from other human beings. As social creatures, living apart from other humans produces a sense of aloneness. If this aloneness is imposed by an "other," this becomes isolation. Living in isolation, we begin to view the outside world as dangerous and our houses as the only safe place. As a result, we become more and more focused on our intimate relationships within our household and disconnect from external connections.



**Figure 22** - Subdivision Planned With Little Thought to Life Within.

American Individualism + Isolation

### Individualism

The fragmentation of the contemporary neighborhood is a result of many factors, but most importantly, it is rooted in western cultural values. At an early age, children learn that success hangs just above the top rung of the proverbial "ladder." The proscribed version of this journey begins with a young adult leaving their parents and moving into a shared living arrangement in a University setting. After finishing a traditional four-year program, successful completion is celebrated by purchasing an apartment and eliminating roommates. As one continues to ascend the ladder, milestones such as children and wage increases spur the purchase of a small starter home. As social prowess increases, more extensive properties are purchased, thus increasing the distance from others.

With the increasing scale of personal property and accumulated possessions, it becomes necessary to protect the status accrued. Porches disappear from streets as interaction is limited to invitation only. Neighbors become a threat to wealth, privacy, a perceived sense of security. In this way, self-interest begins to erode a sense of community within neighborhoods. To be reliant on others is considered a weakness.

The individualistic identity that has come to characterize the United States dates to the very beginning of western settlement in North America. The story of the lone frontiersman, single-handedly settling the land, has come to define not only our past but also our future. American classics like Walden by Henry David Thoreau, prescribe self-sufficiency and detachment from fellow humans as a recipe for happiness. This image has left a strong imprint on the American consciousness.

Individualism is the idea that everyone is responsible for his or herself and has an inalienable right to live the life of their choosing. It means they have the right to act on their judgment, to keep and use what they earn, and to follow their own unique set of values. Everyone is sovereign and an end in themselves and the only unit of concern (Biddle).

While the central tenants of this philosophy have a distinct benefit, there is a lacking sense of responsibility to the social "whole." Community is a complex system of relationships - when societal links disintegrate, the entire chain of connections weaken. The cultural bias that hyper inflates the value of individual action makes it near impossible for humans to exist in a society. If one's priority is always personal interest, shared decision making becomes secondary. By operating in this manner, society becomes atomized to the extent that it is unable to find collective solutions even when they are useful and necessary.

### Social Isolation

Social isolation is a growing epidemic — one that recognized as having dire physical, mental, and emotional consequences. Reports of loneliness have skyrocketed, resulting in increased rates of depression and even suicide. This problem stems from cultural and economic transformations that have taken place in the modern West. Industrialization, the growth of the consumer economy, the declining influence of religion, and the popularity of evolutionary biology all served to emphasize that the individual was what mattered – not traditional, visions of a society in which everyone had a place.



Reports of loneliness and social isolation highest among those with fewer close relationships. Based on percent who say they always or often feel lonely, left out, Isolated, or they lack companionship.



2015
2019

Diagnosis Rate and Rate of Change for Major Depression in the United States by age (2015 Compared to 2019)
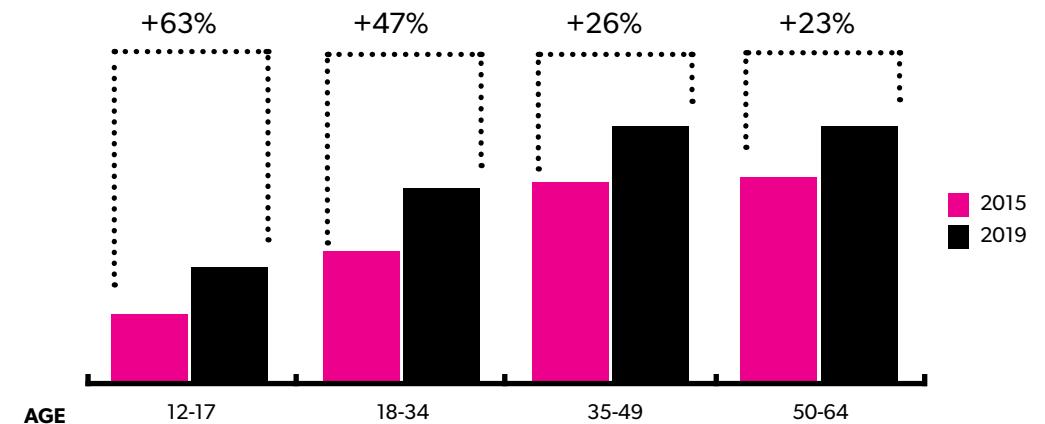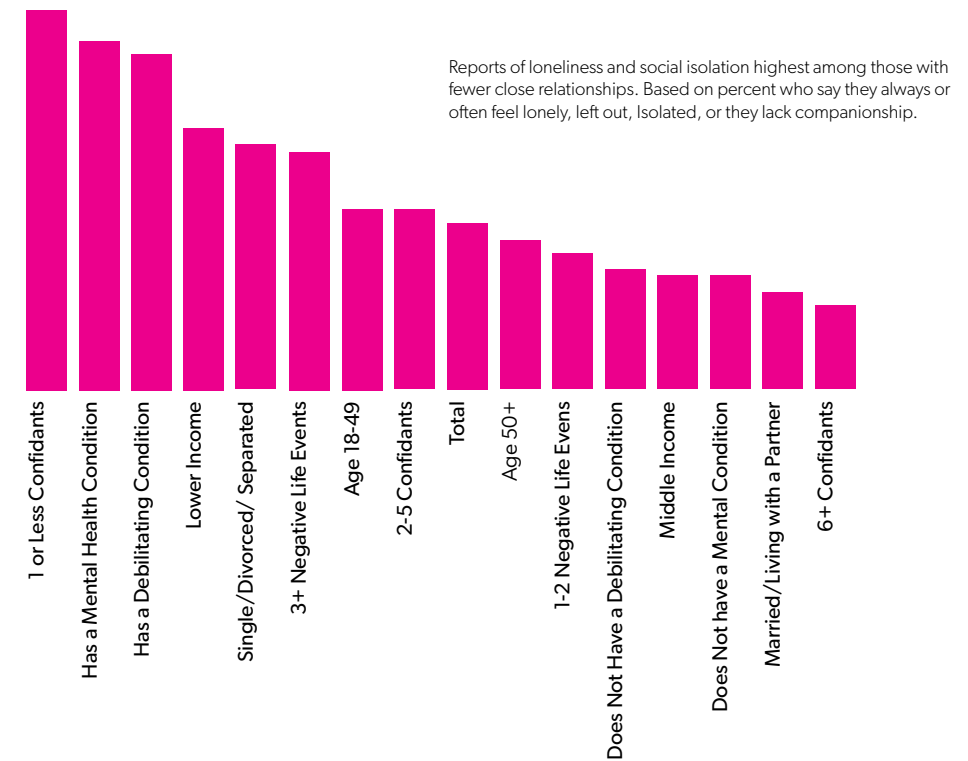
From top to Bottom. **Figure 23** - Reports of loneliness and social isolation highest among those with fewer close relationships. **Figure 24** - Diagnosis Rate and Rate of Change for Major Depression in the United States by age.
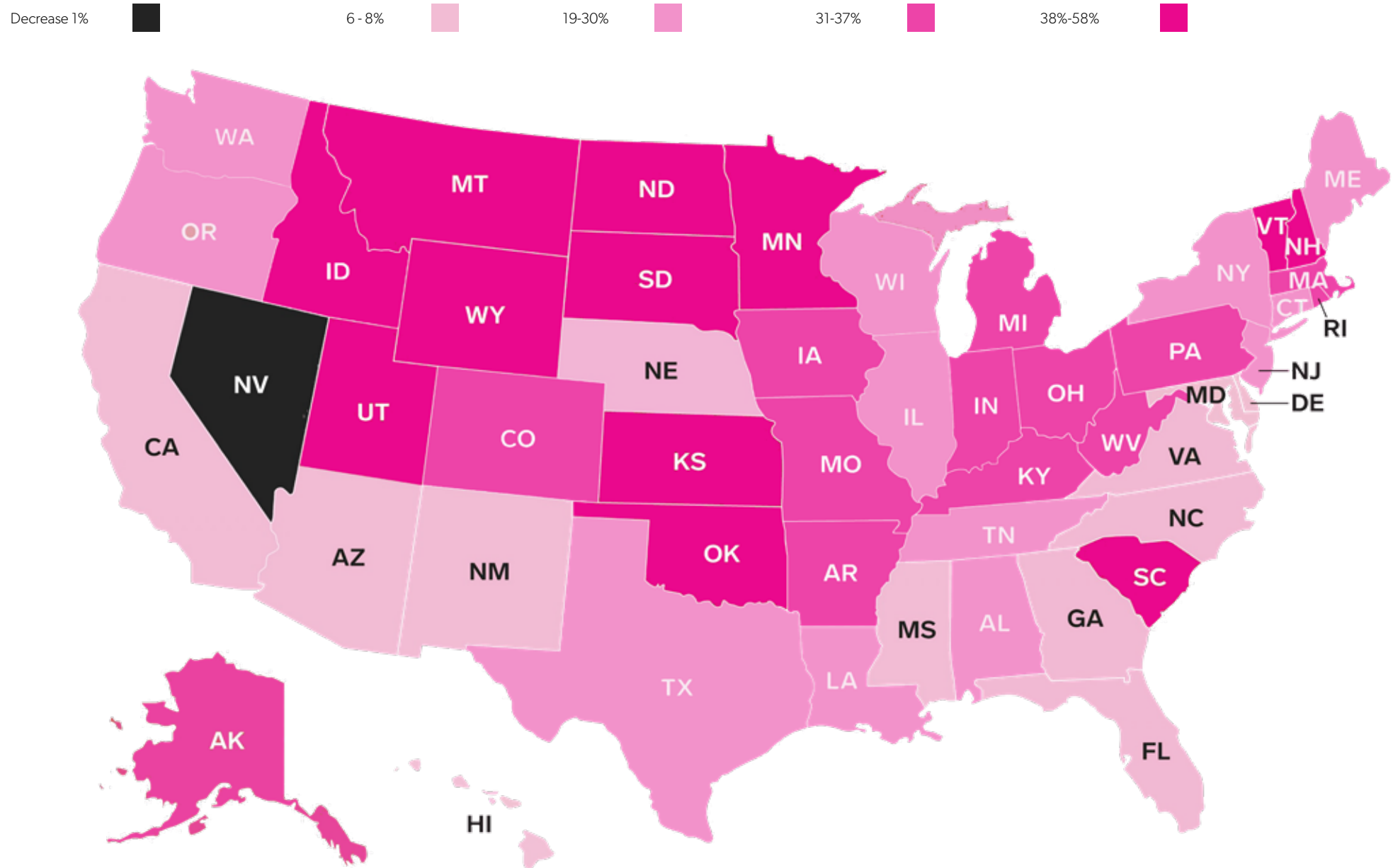
Figure 25 - Increased Suicide Since 2000.

Increase in Suicide Since 2000

## Collectivism

In contrast to individualism, collectivism stresses the importance of the community. It is mostly concerned with unity and selflessness with a focus on the greater good of the whole. Those living within a collectivist culture will likely feel a need to sacrifice their own goals for the greater good of the group while those from individualistic cultures may feel that personal well being should carry higher weight (Gorodnichenko).

Some of the main principles of collectivist societies include economic equality, public ownership, cooperation, collective interest, and economic equality (Gorodnichenko). These principles became prominent throughout the nineteenth and 20th centuries in response to the popularization of capitalism. Collectivism became a response to correct problems associated with the economic right. While collectivism is most commonly associated with political systems such as Communism, Marxism, and Socialism, many modern democratic countries implement collectivism while still maintaining individualistic principles.

The three most important tenants of collectivism are public ownership, cooperation, and collective regulation. Through public ownership, a central organization becomes responsible for the continuation of an essential service. The intention is that through collective oversite, services remain accessible and safe from failure. This principle works to eliminate the exploitation of a minority party by a majority.

Cooperation is another critical component that believes constituents within a group should work towards a common goal rather than compete against each other. It believes that the group should act economically in the interest of all individuals. A collectivist society would support a central organization (government) that funds and operates social programs that serve the interest of most, if not all, members.

Collective regulation becomes a method to ensure the equitable distribution of resources. In this approach, the distribution of assets is divided equally among members ensuring that everyone receives equal treatment. Although commonly associated with the Marxist notion of a redistribution of wealth, it is also evident in policies such as a minimum wage.

From Top to Bottom - **Figure 26** - Individualism. **Figure 27** - Collectivism



**Individualism** stresses individual goals and the rights of the individual person.



**Collectivism** focuses on group goals, what is best for the collective group, and personal relationships.

| **Individualism** | | **Collectivism** |
|---|---|---|
| Acts on own judgment | | Acts on majority's judgment |
| Pursues values of personal choice | | Acts on majority's judgment |
| All about 'self' | | All about 'others' |
| Individual rights | | Obligations to others |
| Continuously improves practices | | Maintains traditional practices |
| Seeks help if needed | | Takes care of own |
| Seeks individual goals or interests | | Fulfills roles of group |
| Competition between groups | | Competition between individuals |
| Makes own decision | | Makes group decisions |

Figure 28 - Individualism vs Collectivism

Intentional Communities

### A Resident-Led Reaction

In response to a changing society and the underlying cultural values that reinforce a sense of isolationism, residents have discovered ways to organize and collectively build community structures that provide for greater connection. Because social dependence has become a choice, the inter reliant community that once occurred naturally must now be fabricated. Attempts to do so are known as intentional communities.

An intentional community is an association consisting of two primary characteristics. The foundational requirement for any community is the system of self-governance that it chooses. The second aspect is the extent to which they decide to implement joint actions, such as shared ownership of property and assets. It is through these collective agreements that it becomes classified as an intentional community. Without a shared understanding, an association becomes a circumstantial community such as a city, town, or neighborhood in which individuals live in proximity by chance.

To better understand examples of intentional communities, it becomes vital to distinguish two primary typologies. Some intentional structures require a shared religious belief system, and others do not. From this distinction, two classifications emerge, secular and religious. Examples of religious communities are the Holy Orders, Amish communities, Shaker communities, and the Jewish model of Kibbutz. Secular variations are the Commune, the Eco-village, Cooperative organizations, and the Cohousing model.

While various institutions may fall under the same organizational structure, each community is innately different. This differentiation rises from the particular needs and individualization of the particular group of organizing residents. Although the most apparent benefit of intentional living is the bridge it creates between societally disconnected individuals, the less obvious aspect is the planning power it gives to its members.

In comparison, most modern neighborhoods are a product of a developer-led, profit-driven model in which resale value determines the outcome. Neighborhoods become a vehicle for economic gain rather than an environment that reflects the needs of residents. Most modern subdivisions manifest this problem through their inhumane landscapes. Through intentional planning structures, decision making is reinvested in the residents allowing neighborhoods to reflect the values of its inhabitants once again.

For this project, it became essential to focus on resident-led strategies whose purpose was not that of religious affiliation. Eliminating the requirement of spirituality associated with membership led to a look at secular typologies. To understand the peculiarities of these variations, it became necessary to organize them in terms of the level of community participation required.

### The Commune

A commune is an intentional community of individuals who agree on a communal economy, consensus decision making, non-hierarchical structures, and ecological living. Concerning other secular communities, the commune requires near-complete participation and commitment to the community. Commonly, members share possessions, resources, work, income, and most assets.

### The Cooperative

A cooperative community provides for collective ownership. There are many forms this structure can take; however, the most common examples are housing and business. Concerning housing, a cooperative is an organization with complete ownership of units. Each member of the cooperative (also a resident) purchases a share in t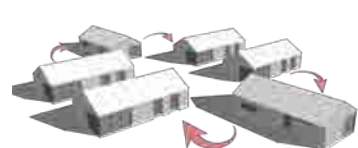he organization. Rather than individual ownership of a residence, the occupant has a fractional share in the ownership of the organization. This method results in complete collective ownership of the physical buildings and associated property.
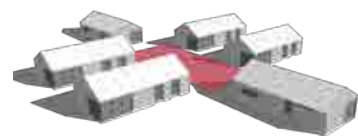
### Cohousing

Cohousing communities are a collective of privately-owned homes clustered around shared open space and a shared facility. This approach attempts to interject certain benefits of collectivism while preserving a sense of individual control. While residents have private ownership of their homes, the collective organization owns and operates all shared spaces such as a common house.
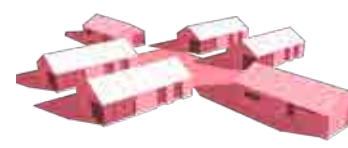
### The Eco-Village

An ecovillage is an intentional community that strives to be more socially, culturally, and ecologically sustainable. An ecovillage emphasizes practices that minimize the impact on the natural environment through intentional physical design and resident behavior. Aside from the shared interest of environmentally sustainable living, participation from the community is relatively minimal.



Eco-Village - Individual Resources + Shared Values.



Cohousing - Individual Residences + Shared Communal Spaces.

Figure 29 - Intentional Living in order of Community Level.



The Cooperative - Shared Ownership of All Spaces



The Commune - Shared Ownership of All Spaces and Resources + Values.

Secular                                                    Religious

A commune is an intentional community of people living together, sharing common interests, often having common values and beliefs, as well as shared property, possessions, resources, and, in some communes, work, income or assets.

**Commune**                    Holy Orders

A religious order is a lineage of communities and organizations of people who live in some way set apart from society in accordance with their specific religious devotion, usually characterized by the principles of its founder's religious practice. The order is composed of laypeople and, in some orders, clergy.

An ecovillage is a traditional or intentional community with the goal of becoming more socially, culturally, economically, and ecologically sustainable. It is consciously designed through locally owned, participatory processes to regenerate and restore its social and natural environments.

**Eco-Village**                    Amish

The Amish are a group of traditionalist Christian church fellowships with Swiss German Anabaptist origins. They are closely related to, but distinct from, Mennonite churches. The Amish are known for simple living, plain dress, and reluctance to adopt many conveniences of modern technology.

A housing cooperative, or co-op is a legal entity, which owns real estate, consisting of one or more residential buildings. Each resident purchases a fractional share in ownership.

**Cooperative**                    Shaker

The Shakers are a sect of Christianity which practices celibacy, communal living, confession of sin, egalitarianism, and pacifism.

Cohousing is an intentional community of private homes clustered around shared space. Each attached or single-family home has traditional amenities, including a private kitchen. All public spaces are typically commonly owned.

**Cohousing**                    Kibbutz

A kibbutz is a collective community in Israel that was traditionally based on agriculture. The first kibbutz, established in 1909, was Degania. Today, farming has been partly supplanted by other economic branches, including industrial plants and high-tech enterprises.

**Figure 30** - Intentional Typologies Divided According to Religious Requirement

Cohousing

**Figure 30.1** - Typical Residence at Skraplanet cohousing community.

### Cohousing

After investigating different forms of intentional communities, it was clear that the organizational structure that best merged collectivist and individualistic ideologies is the cohousing model. This perspective attempts to seek a balance between public and private. When applied to a western context, this approach is best suited to the existing social and cultural values.

### About

In 1964, Danish architect Jan Gudmand-Hoyer began publically writing about a collaborative housing movement that embraced a strong sense of community, an antidote to less than friendly subdivisions. While this concept was considered somewhat revolutionary, it was rooted in the time-honored tradition of the village. After

receiving interest from a close group of friends, a group formed, and ideas discussed. Later that year, the group of friends had purchased a site and developed plans for 12 homes set around a common house. Although they received city approval for their project, neighbors would not allow it, and the site sold without anything built.

Following the failure of the original community, the group continued to write and draw attention to their ideas. Eventually, in 1968, a larger group joined forces and purchased two sites in a small village outside of Copenhagen and another near Hillerod. By the end of 1973, both communities, Saettedammen and Skraplanet, had completed construction. The success of these communities began to propagate, resulting in a duplication of the model throughout the world (McCamant et al.).

Although cohousing originated in Denmark in the late 1960s, it is not necessarily a new concept. In many less industrialized countries, many people continue to live in small communities that share certain interdependencies. Within these communities, people work together to build a schoolhouse, raise a barn, harvest crops, and celebrate the harvest. Similarly, cohousing works to enjoy the benefits of cooperation by sharing in activities such as child care, shared dinners, or social activities.

Because residents plan all cohousing establishments, each community is slightly different and vary in size, location, type of ownership, and design priorities. Though there are many nuances, there are four overarching common characteristics that define cohousing: participatory process, intentional neighborhood design, shared facilities, and complete resident management.

### Participatory Process

Cohousing requires the active participation of residents from the initial planning process through construction. Although the number of residents who participate in planning varies, there is typically a core group of six to twelve families. The participatory process has its strengths and weaknesses. All decision making is made on a consensus basis, meaning that there must be a total agreement. The planning process for cohousing requires a great deal of time for group meetings, research, and decision making. While this is a long and arduous process, it is through the initial planning that many individuals begin to foster relationships.

### Intentional Neighborhood Design

Many people dream of living in an area where they know their neighbors and feel secure. The planning of a cohousing community intends to make this happen. The layout of public and private spaces are designed in a way to encourage unexpected interaction among residents. Often parking is placed at the edge of the site, allowing the majority of the site to be pedestrian-oriented. Physical design is critical to facilitating a social atmosphere.

### Common Facilities

The most distinguishing element of a cohousing community is the common house, which supplements the individual residences. It is a place for community activities

and becomes the heart of the neighborhood. The amenities within this house can vary, but typical features are a kitchen, community dining area, children's play area, workshops, office space, additional guest rooms, and sometimes even a workshop.

These facilities provide both practical and social benefits. By building a program such as a work facility, there is no longer a need for each individual to own personal tools and workspace. In this instance, larger shop equipment becomes more affordable as the cost divides among residences. A secondary benefit of shared resources is the opportunity to collaborate with others.

### Resident Management

Maintaining and managing the neighborhood is the responsibility of all residents. All major decision making happens in periodic community meetings that provide an environment to discuss and solve issues. Mandatory workgroups form in order to cook shared dinners, clean the common house, maintain the grounds, and accomplish all other necessary duties.
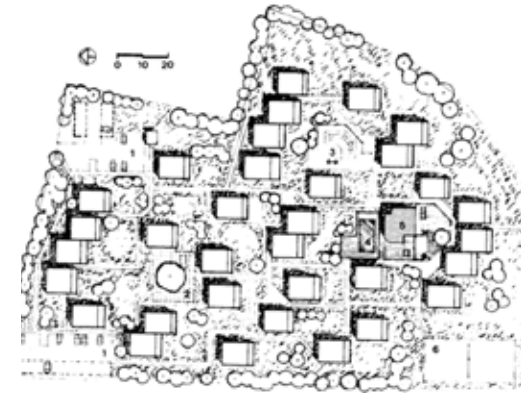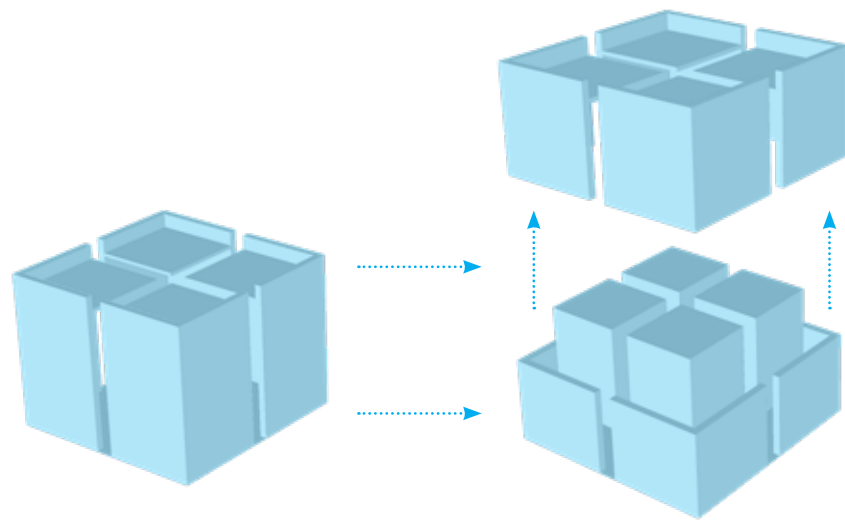


**Figure 31** - The 33 residences of Skraplanet are situated on a sloped site so that every living room has a view to the south.

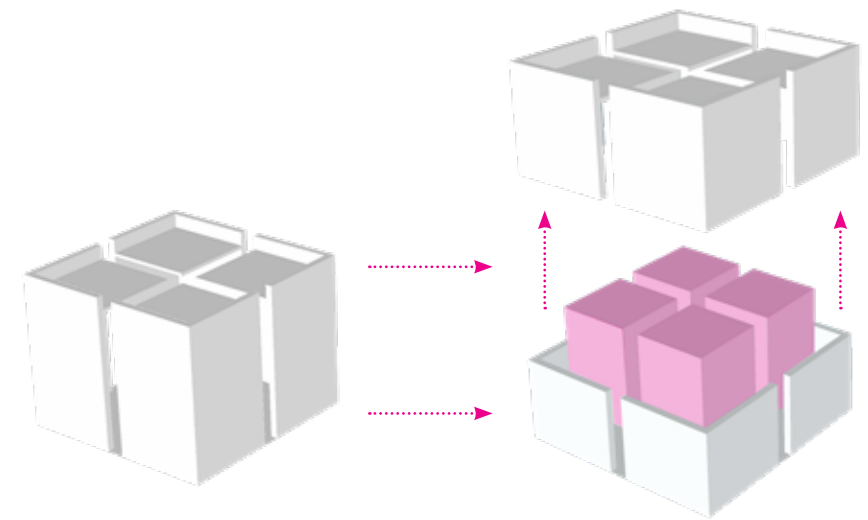Individual Residences

Shared Space



**Figure 32** - Cohousing Diagramatic Axonometric Drawing

Shared ownership of communal space.

Shared ownership of all residences

Shared ownership of communal space.

Individually owned residences

Co-housing communities in the U.S. currently rely on one of two existing legal forms of real estate ownership: individually titled houses with common areas owned by a condominium association or a housing cooperative. Condominium ownership is most common because it fits financial institutions' and city models for multi-unit owner-occupied housing development. U.S. banks lend more readily to single-family homes and condominiums than housing cooperatives.

**Cooperatives Associations**

Cooperative housing is a product of its legal structure. A cooperative is owned collectively through an organization, and each member owns a share in the organization. Each share typically equates to the use of

a housing unit. Residents are responsible for the shared governance of the organization and are responsible for all management duties. While cooperatives are mostly associated with student housing, they are quite prevalent in artist communities, elderly or disabled communities, and have gained much traction in large cities where affordable housing is necessary.

There are three forms of cooperatives, rental or leasehold, market rate, and zero equity. A rental or leasehold cooperative is an organization comprised of tenants that equitably share costs of renting or leasing a building owned by another party. Often the resident organization has some responsibility for the management of the building and has more power collectively than traditional single renters. In this variation, nonprofits can purchase a

building and rent it out to those who cannot afford shares. Shared housing can save costs and reduce foreclosures.

A market-rate Cooperative requires that residents purchase shares at a market rate. The shares cover the cost of the overall mortgage, reserve funds, maintenance, and other operational costs.

A zero equity cooperative is eligible to receive grants and other subsidies to reduce the cost of cooperative share prices. This ensures that housing costs are permanently affordable by placing restrictions on the amount of profit gained on the sale of shares. Many times this is an agreement by a group of low-income residents who purchase the building they already rent from a nonprofit.

**Condominium Associations**

Condominium ownership is quite different from cooperative ownership. In this method, the occupant purchases a real property, generally the space within the walls of the unit. Also, they will own a share of all communal spaces. Like a cooperative, condo owners contribute to financially sustaining building services. This contribution is through the form of an HOA or a homeowners association payment. A board of residents elected to manage the community, known as the condo board, manege these payments.

**Figure 34** - Cohousing Development Process

CONSTRUCTION

DESIGN + DOCUMENTATION

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

GETTING STARTED

1

2

3

4

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

FIND OTHERS
ESTABLISH ORGANIZING GROUP
AGREE ON GOALS & LOCATION
DEFINE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
DEFINE DECISION MAKING PROCESSES
DRAW UP INITIAL LEGAL AGREEMENT

SPECIFY GOALS AND ESTABLISH PRIORITIES
SELECT ARCHITECT AND ATTORNEY
IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SITES
FORMULATE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
CONSIDER FINANCING OPTIONS
DEVELOP A DESIGN PROGRAM
DRAW UP LEGAL AGREEMENTS
AQUIRE SITE
ESTABLISH PROJECT TIMELINE

DEVELOP SCHEMATIC DESIGN PROGRAM
COMPLETE DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
OBTAIN PLANNING APPROVALS
SECURE FINANCING
COMPLETE WORKING DRAWINGS + SPECS
OBTAIN BUILDING PERMITS
SOLICIT CONSTRUCTION BIDS
SELECT CONTRACTOR
CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT, LOAN , + SCHEDULE

MONITOR CONTRACTED WORK
SECURE MORTGAGE OR SHARE LOAN
COMPLETE RESIDENT-BUILT WORK

Community Visits

Figure 35 - Pedestrian Trails Wind Through Sunward Cohousing

### Sunward Cohousing

The first community visited was Sunward cohousing located in west Ann Arbor, Michigan. It is an example of traditional, danish style cohousing and designed by the architecture firm McCamant and Durrett, a company specializing in cohousing communities in the United States. The community sits on 20 acres of land with woods and a pond and comprises 40 units, housing roughly 100 people, a third of which are children. Homes are clustered in the center so that members cross paths. Parking is intentionally located on the periphery without through traffic for the safety of pedestrians and homeowners.

The community prides itself on the diversity of its residents, who are families, singles, and people of all ages. These individuals come from many professional backgrounds, and they claim diversity in cultural, ethnic, and spiritual backgrounds. While there is some diversity of housing type (one, two, and three-bedroom condominiums as well as some rental units), it seems to be mostly upper-middle-class as the cost per SF of living space is near double the median of the state.

Sunward is a subdivision located on what was once undeveloped land on the periphery of the city of Ann Arbor. After winding through a loosely planned office park located just off the main thoroughfare, one finds themselves at the main parking lot for the Sunward community. This parking lot acts as a buffer or threshold to the housing beyond. As a visitor, the community feels insular, as if an outsider may not be welcome, and permission for entry is likely required.

This community visit took place on a weekly tour hosted by a community member. The tour began in a centrally located common house, which flanks the parking lot, acting as a physical separation between the residences and the public road. Upon entry to the common house, visitors are welcomed by a friendly, yet somewhat guarded host who gives a brief overview of the community and outlines the rules of engagement within the neighborhood.

The guide winds the visitor party through a tour of the common house following a walk through the inner pedestrian-only roadways, dotted with chalk murals created by children. The occasional resident nods a quick greeting as the group passes. The community is full of natural beauty as it is surrounded on three sides by undeveloped woodland. Finally, the tour concludes with a tour of an open yet somewhat small (1200 SF), two-bedroom condominium.

Upon reflection, Sunward is a well maintained and organized cohousing community, and it is evident that the residents within not only know each other but also care for one another. As described by the host, consensus decision making is challenging, and while there are occasional disagreements among neighbors, the benefits seem always to outweigh the struggles.

It is also evident that the neighborhood is insular to the context that surrounds it. It is physically detached from the city and even from other housing that surrounds it. While there is undeniably a diversity of age and some degree of ethnicity, it is clear that this form of housing can be very prohibitive to those of little and even average economic means.

The physical environment of the community offers a connection within and protection from the outside. There is a perceived border that is immediately felt by an outsider. A non-resident is likely to feel unsure of how and if to engage with the residents within.



Figure 36 - Sunward Cohousing Community Kitchen Located Within the Common House



Figure 37 - Dining Area Within the Sunward Cohousing Common House

Figure 38 - A Pedestrian Path Within Sunward Cohousing Leads into a Wooded Area.



Figure 39 - Sunward Cohousing Shared Garden Space



Figure 40 - Though Residences are Tightly Packed, Privacy is Attained Through Natural Barriers

Figure 41 - Sign Displayed Near Genesee Gardens Common Outdoor Space.

## Genesee Gardens Cohousing

Another intentional community visited during this thesis process is Genesee Gardens Cohousing, located in Lansing, Michigan. This organization is particularly unique in that it is one of the few examples of retrofit cohousing. Sited within an existing densely housed urban area, the group of cohousers integrates seamlessly into the existing fabric of the neighborhood. There is no perceived boundary separating members from non-members.

This community began in 2003 with a group of four households that purchased an additional single-family home to use as their common house. Since then, the community has grown to twenty-four units, including two rental rooms located on the second floor of the common house. Also, they have jointly purchased three other properties for raising chickens, farming, and outdoor gathering. Like any other neighborhood, each member owns their own house and lot, but also pay into a small monthly Home Owners Association to fund the shared house and properties.

While the project boundary is only a few blocks in size, not all houses within this boundary are cohousers. To address this, Genessee Gardens has an open invitation for potential members to purchase houses within the boundaries, then join the group. Additionally, residents who live outside of the boundary of the project have an optional associate membership in which they can participate in group activities.

This project is unique in that it has re-imagined a way to create an intentional community within an existing neighborhood. It is also unique in its accessibility to residents of many incomes. Within this area, most homes sell with an average cost of around $50,000.00, making the cost of buy-in approachable to many. Given the low property cost, the monthly membership fee for payment and upkeep of shared spaces hovers just around $60.00 a month.

Outside of the apparent advantages previously described, Genessee is a unique approach to urban development. It illustrates a method in which residents can collectively organize to provide amenities they desire. Through joint action, they have also leveraged a unique way to fill vacant homes, further connecting both new and existing residents. Through their method of community development, they have successfully added improved physical and social value to their neighborhood.



Figure 42 - Genesee Residents Enjoying a Community Picnic.



Figure 43 - Genesee Gardens Community Cul-de-sac

Figures 44 - Genesee Gardens Common Spaces
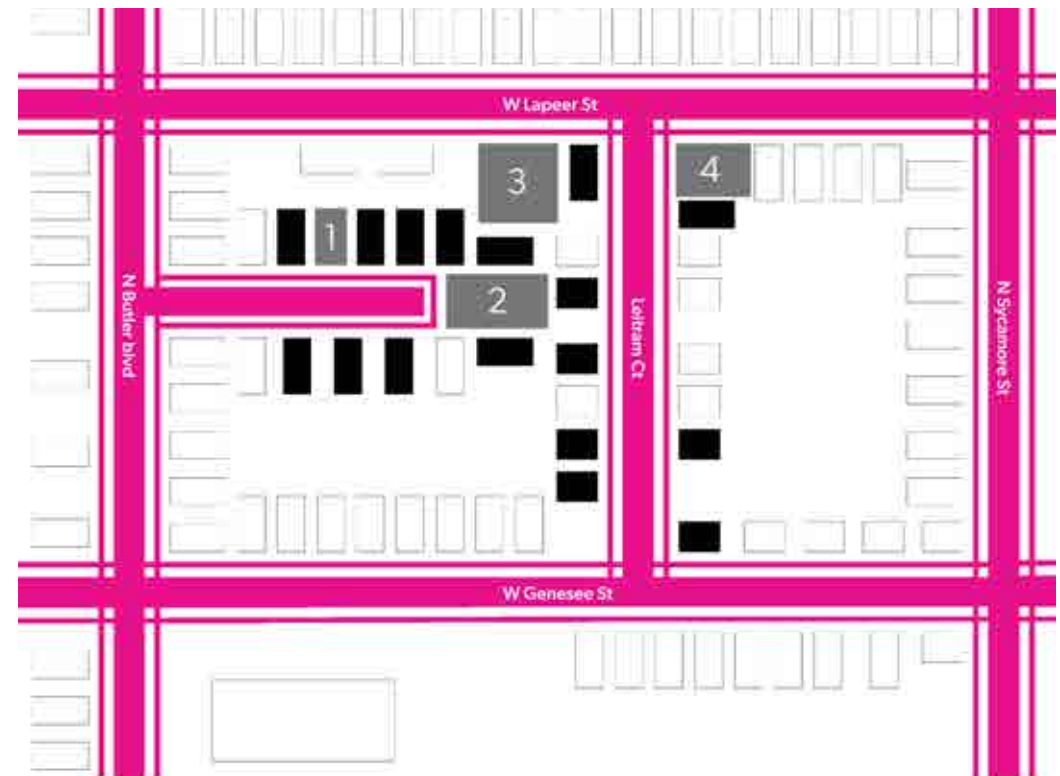


Public

Cohouser Private Residence

Non-Cohouser Private Residence

Common Space

Figure 45 - Genesee Gardens Boundary Map

**The Common House Sketch Problem**

A sketch problem is a brief exercise that requires a designed reaction to a particular area of research. It requires a quick synthesis of information and challenges one to begin to make the connection between research and design. This sketch problem reacted to conversations with residents of Genesee Gardens Cohousing regarding the problem of retrofitting existing single-family homes to serve as a shared house. Through conversations discussing the needs of the Genesee residents, this sketch problem attempted to create a schematic plan for a common house in an existing urban neighborhood.



Rentable Rooms
Community Lounge Space
Private Bathroom
Library

Kids Play Room
Dining Space
Bathroom
Kitchen
Shared Laundry Facility

Second Floor

First Floor



Mezzanine lounge space for movie night.

2 private rooms and shared bathroom for rent.

Open floor to promote connectivity

Library and reading area

Shared laundry facilities

Playroom for children

Large kitchen for meal preparation.

Large dining area to accommodate community dining and game nights.

Covered porch at grade level to promote connectivity and accessibility.



View From Bancroft

**Figures 46** - Schematic Design for an Urban Infil Common House

Application to Context - Brightmoor Detroit

**Figure 47** - Brightmoor Location Map

The investigation began with the city target neighborhoods Northwest-Grand River, Warrendale-Cody Rouge, Livernois-McNichols, Russel Woods, Southwest - Vernor, Island view - The Villages, Jefferson Chalmers, East Warren - Cadieux, and Gratiot - 7 Mile. After researching each location, the Brightmoor neighborhood became of particular interest.

### Brightmoor Detroit

Brightmoor is an isolated neighborhood located in the Northwest corner of the city of Detroit. Over the last few decades, this neighborhood has come to epitomize urban vacancy and blight, having one of the highest rates of residents living beneath the poverty line. Although Brightmoor appears to reflect other severely distressed areas of the city, community-led organizations have collectively organized to achieve the betterment of the location at large.

As a result of an influential culture of grassroots organization, Brightmoor has gained the attention of many. Visually Brightmoor is a surprise as many traditional urban indicators of density are missing. Given the lack of care, nature has grown up and reclaimed much of the area reconnecting itself to the adjacent Eliza Howell Park. As a result, the community could just as easily appear in a rural Appalachian context. Inspired by the naturally "greening" neighborhood, residents and newcomers alike have gained inspiration to build gardens, farms, and other agriculturally focused elements throughout the community.

### History

Before the early rapid development in the 1920s, Brightmoor was farmland located in the jurisdiction of Redford Township. Due to the mass migration of autoworkers from Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee coming to work for the Ford Motor Company, there was suddenly a spike in demand for affordable housing. In 1923, the developer Burt Eddy Taylor bought 160 acres of land to create a community of inexpensive housing. A few years later, an additional 2,913 acres were added to the community. The city of Detroit annexed Brightmoor in 1926 (Di Palo 11).

The housing stock consisted of poorly built, low-cost, mass-produced houses purposely built for the influx of

job-seeking immigrants. The housing typology is known as a "kitchen house" and is usually 400-600 SF, including a kitchen, bedrooms, and multi-purpose room. Many of these houses were never improved as the population began to shift as owners followed jobs to the suburbs. This continuous cycle of departure has resulted in an 80% loss of the original housing stock.

### Population

According to the 2010 Census, the population of Brightmoor was 12,836, which is a 36% drop since 2000; it represented a higher decline than the City of Detroit as a whole, which lost 25% of their population during the same period (Di Palo).
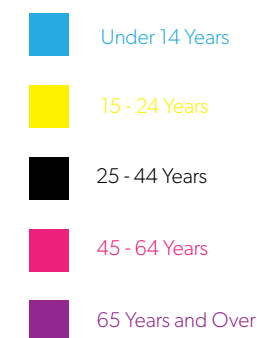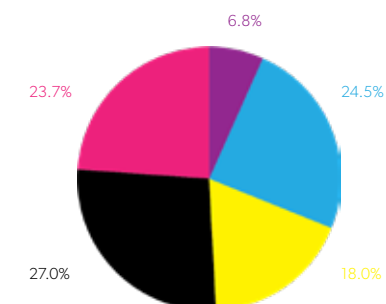
Population by Age



| | |
|---|---|
| 6.8% | |
| 23.7% | 24.5% |
| 27.0% | 18.0% |

| | |
|---|---|
| ▮ | Under 14 Years |
| ▮ | 15 - 24 Years |
| ▮ | 25 - 44 Years |
| ▮ | 45 - 64 Years |
| ▮ | 65 Years and Over |

**Figure 48** - Population by Age

### Determining a Location

After a thorough investigation of the events and motivations that inspired intentional living and conducting focused research on the cohousing typology, it became necessary to select a location in which to experiment with a design interjection. During the exercise of choosing a site, a question began to surface. How can the research conducted begin to engage with the unique challenges of a neighborhood located in Detroit, Michigan?

Detroit is known for its influential resident organizations that collectively work to improve neighborhoods and community institutions. Because of the unique circumstances of vacancy, blight, poverty, and failed city

services, locals have learned to sustain themselves by working cooperatively. These conditions make Detroit of particular interest to this project.

### Choosing A Site

Determining a site for the project was a challenge. The research up to this point had emphasized the importance of resident-led development. This project could not merely be an interjected intervention applied by an outside force; rather, it should be a product that surfaces from existing residents. In order to be successful, the site location should be one with a strong sense of local cooperation.

## Population Continued

Like Detroit, the Brightmoor population is mostly African American. Since the year 2000, the African American population of Brightmoor has declined 31.8%. However, because White, Latino, Native American, and the Asian population significantly decreased, in comparison, the African American population has increased from 81% to 86%. The White population decreased by 56.9%, and the Asian population moved out almost entirety (Di Palo).
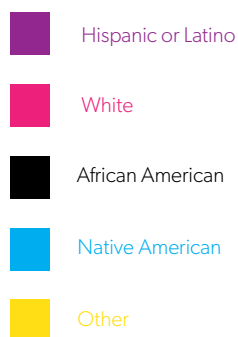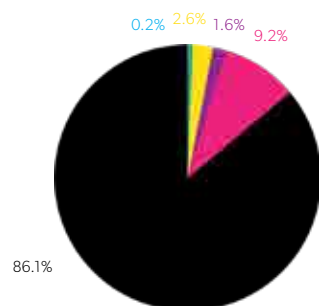
High school graduation rates within the city of Detroit are known for being extremely low at 12.1%. While the high school graduation rate within Brightmoor is higher than the city as a whole; it has a lower shares of college graduates (Di Palo).

## Brightmoor Vacancy

Most survey information regarding vacancy in the Brightmoor neighborhood is unreliable. In order to get a real understanding of the current status of blighted and abandoned homes, data was compiled by physically walking or driving each street in an attempt to understand the actual vacancy rate better. As illustrated, there is a significant amount of empty and blighted lots. The Detroit Landbank Owns most of these lots.

**Race + Ethnicity**



0.2%  2.6%  1.6%  9.2%
86.1%

Legend:
- Hispanic or Latino
- White
- African American
- Native American
- Other

**Educational Attainment**



21.30%
9.50%
7.40%
61.8%

Legend:
- No High School Diploma
- High School Diploma or GED
- Associates as Highest Degree
- Batchelors or Higher
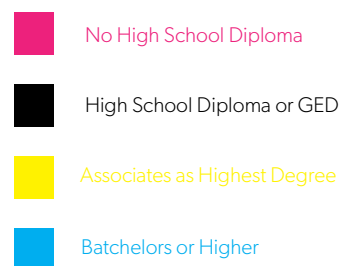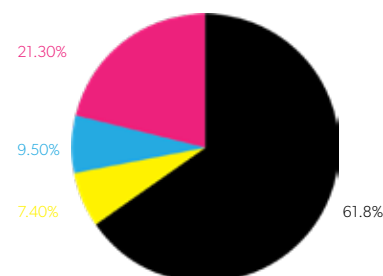
**Brightmoor Vacancy - 2000**



11%
89%
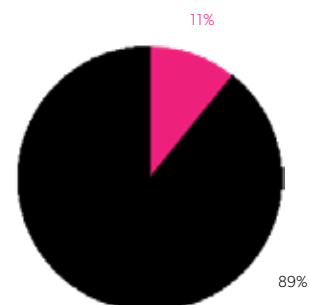
**Brightmoor Vacancy - Current**



34%
76%



Legend:
- Vacant
- Occupied
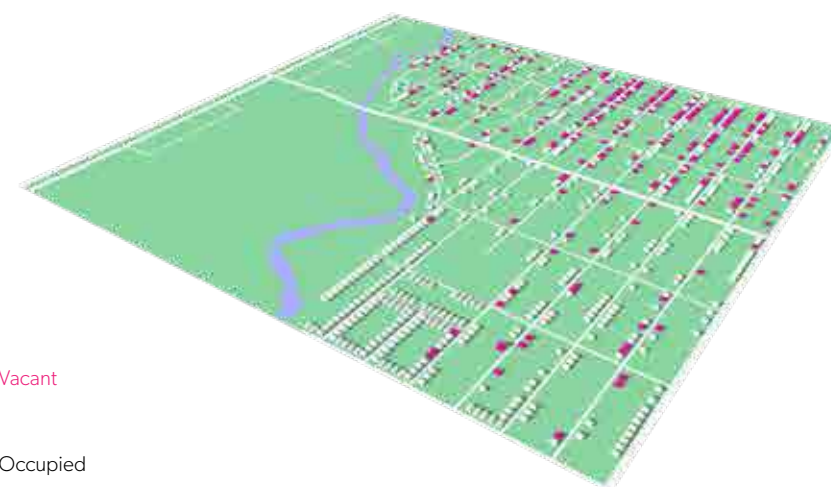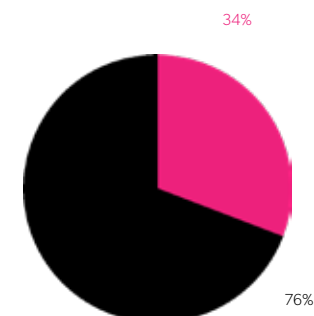
From left to right. **Figure 49** - Race + Ethnicity. **Figure 50** - Education Attainment

**Figure 51** - Brightmoor Vacancy Information

Brightmoor has been referred to as the next American frontier because it reflects a location that seems to have reached its lowest point. For some, the neighborhood represents the possibility of what could be, but for others, it merely represents home. Given that the city of Detroit had primarily abandoned the community, residents have organized to provide for themselves out of necessity.

Community organizations have played a key role in providing services. The two leading organizations that have been highly influential are The Brightmoor Alliance and Neighbors Building Brightmoor. The Brightmoor Alliance's core objectives are to provide residents a venue in which to be heard and to ensure that Brightmoor's environmental and economic health will be improved. To achieve this goal, the organization focuses on convening, coordinated service delivery support, blight reduction efforts, and fiscal oversite for others.

Neighbors Building Brightmoor is a community-driven organization that has accomplished large scale cleanups and helped reduce crime in the area while improving conditions for young people. They have implemented many community projects, including blight removal, local murals, a community tool bank, an artisan collective, and shared gardens.

Through monthly meetings, neighbors gather for shared meals and share information, make connections, and request volunteers. In these meetings, neighbors form groups to create and maintain community assets, board up houses, and beautify the neighborhood.

A lesser know organization is the Brightmoor Survivors Club. This group formed of residents who have settled in Brightmoor as a last resort. Displaced from surrounding areas within the city of Detroit, this group looks to solve the immediate problems of a severely low-income population.

This group is implementing housing solutions for the homeless. They have created a proto-type structure out of recycled materials. They hope to offer individuals the resources to self-build a shelter of their own through a material yard and reproducible building plans.

### The Brightmoor Alliance

The Brightmoor Alliance is a coalition of nearly 50 organizations dedicated to serving northwest Detroit's Brightmoor community. Together, they pursue a vision for the Brightmoor community that is built on faith and provides opportunities for all residents of this community to pray, grow, learn, thrive and play (Brightmoor Alliance).

### Neighbors Building Brightmoor

Neighbors Building Brightmoor is a non-profit organization composed of a group of neighbors "dedicated to mobilizing, equipping, and helping each other to create a beautiful, healthy and sustainable community for ourselves and our children (Neighbors Building Brightmoor).

### The Brightmoor Survivors Club

The Brightmoor Survivors Club is a group of homeless individuals working to better the status of those displaced within the neighborhood and the greater city.


Figure 52 - A Typical Abandoned Home in Brightmoor, Detroit.


Figure 53 - An Abandoned Home Becomes an Art Installment


Figure 54 - Volunteers Paint the Brightmoor Artisans Collective


Figure 55 - Members of The Brightmoor Alliance


Figure 56 - An Abandoned Property Re-purposed by Neighbors Building Brightmoor


Figure 57 - A Shelter Built of Repurposed Materials by the Brightmoor Survivors Club

1 Eliza Howell Park

5 Eddies Place

9 Brightmoor Flower Farm

2 Brightmoor Artisans Collective

6 Urban Country Tea House

10 Lyndon Greenway

3 Brightmoor Community Tool Bank

7 Brightmoor Community Playground

11 Artesian Farms

4 Eliza Howell Nature Trail

8 Beaverland Farms

**Community Assets**

**Figures 58** - Brightmoor Community Asset Map

Arterial Road

Abandoned + Blighted Homes

Occupied Homes

Community Engagement - Meeting the Neighborhood

## Meeting the Neighborhood

At this time in the research, it was unclear what direction the project would take. In light of the many community projects, it was apparent that there is a real appetite for grassroots organization among residents, but it was still unclear how that might influence the work. The most critical next steps were meeting locals and forming connections.

### Jeff Adams

Jeff Adams is the owner of Artesian Farms, a small hydroponic farming startup. He is a prominent member of The Brightmoor Alliance organization and came by referral. Jeff and his wife have been active volunteers in the local church community for over twenty years. Upon retirement in the early 2000s, Jeff and his wife sold their home in the suburbs and purchased a small home in Brightmoor, where they have lived ever since.

Jeff describes the neighborhood as an unusually strong community made up of many demographics and backgrounds. Compared to his experience living in the suburbs, Brightmoor is a very connected place, almost like living in the quintessential small town where everyone knows each other and relies on one another. In the time that Jeff has lived in the area, the community has grown even more robust, and while dangerous activity in the area still exists, it has, in his experience, lessened over time.

As the winner of a local grant incentive, Jeff opened Artesian Farms in 2005 and has grown a successful farming operation. The business hires and trains residents to work in the company. He explains that due to the housing and lot vacancies, much of the neighborhood has gone back to nature. The truth of this statement is evident while driving through the area, as one feels like they are in a remote and rural area due to a lack of density and abundant natural overgrowth. Because of this phenomenon, both non-profit and for-profit farming operations have proliferated.

Artesian Farms is concerned with providing sustainable, year-round organic produce both for the neighborhood and the city as a whole. It is concerned with the creation of an economic driver that provides training and employment for the community. Although the company has been successful, Jeff and his wife will be leaving the area to be closer to distant family members and are in the process of selling the business.

### Luella

Luella is a neighborhood transplant who has lived in the area for the last five years and is now an active member of the organization Neighbors Building Brightmoor. Formerly a tech employee in the silicon valley company, Apple enterprises, Louella has since moved her ambitions to write professionally. Before moving to Brightmoor, Louella had lived in numerous locations throughout the world, rarely staying in one place for more than a year.

Brightmoor is a neighborhood primarily forgotten. Loella describes it as a place of action. Due to the lack of oversite, residents have learned to do what is necessary for survival. Tired of waiting for an unresponsive local government to solve the growing number of concerns, residents have taken matters into their own hands.

Under the non-profit organization Neighbors Building Brightmoor, residents have banded together to address issues such as dangerously blighted homes and empty lots that have become garbage dumping grounds. Homes have lain dangerously abandoned for so long that they have become a prominent concern to public safety. Rather than wait or ask permission, residents secure or demolish the property collectively. These once-blighted sites become the canvas for community murals, shared communal areas, and extensive farming operations.

Luella has chosen to live in this location with no intention of leaving. She is drawn in by the unusual personality types that reside within this location. Some of her neighbors are young creative entrepreneurs who come to express their interests freely, and others come to live homeless as a last resort destination. While Brightmoor exemplifies differences, it also represents a unique sense of unity expressed through a common goal.

### Bill and Eddie

Introduced by Louella, both Bill and Eddie are two locals working together to build a shelter. Made nearly entirely from recycled components salvaged from abandoned houses, this structure will be Eddies home for the foreseeable future. The roughly 300 square foot structure rises from a foundation made of old railroad ties and shelters an open floor and a small sleeping loft with a simple gabled roof. Light enters the space through small semi-transparent acrylic windows.

It is only 10 degrees Fahrenheit, and Bill keeps a fire burning to keep warm while Eddie prepares the site for the impending snowstorm. A tarpaulin lays over the recently split wood to protect it from the coming snow. It is bitter cold, and aside from the propane heater located inside the shelter, fire is the only source of heat.

Warming hands around the fire, Bill describes their project. Both he and Eddie are founding members of a small organization named the Brightmoor Survivors Club. This club consists of a group of homeless individuals concerned with the well being of those displaced from other areas of the city. They look for ways in which they immediately provide essential resources to this demographic.

Bill is something of a visionary and does most of the talking. Currently, the Brightmoor Survivors Club is working to provide an immediate resource to the homeless community in the area consisting of a material yard stocking salvaged building components. This material yard will be a location where those without resources can source supplies and building plans to create a similar shelter to Eddies.

The material yard addresses an immediate need; however, this is only one component of a broader vision. Bill envisions Brightmoor as a village centered around a shared resource. Within this location, residents can access all resources such as a bazaar market, public rest facilities, public showers, a woodshop, activity space, and a public kitchen. This facility is what Bill calls the commons.

To better describe this situation, he uses a campground as an analogy. When camping, each visitor makes camp on their personal site, while bathrooms and running water are communal. To further this point, he believes that the common element should be within a fifteen-minute walking distance from the satellite locations.

### Kieran

Referred by Bill, Kieran is a transplant to the area, originally from the state of Indiana, and now the owner of the for-profit business Beaverland Farms. He is also an active member of Neighbors Building Brightmoor and responsible for managing a community tool bank and greenhouse.

Kieran and his partner Brittney opened Beaverland Farms intending to create a beneficial environmental change that can sustain and build a local resource base. They have structured the farm to mimic the complexity and resiliency of the natural eco-system. They have developed the farm to generate a sufficient income and hope to expand the enterprise for future stakeholders.

Kieran enjoys keeping busy and though he has generously made time to meet, he continues working on various things while talking. Eventually, he offers to continue the interview in his truck as he drives into the city center to return a trailer. While he drives, he begins to describe the state of his involvement with Neighbors Building Brightmoor.
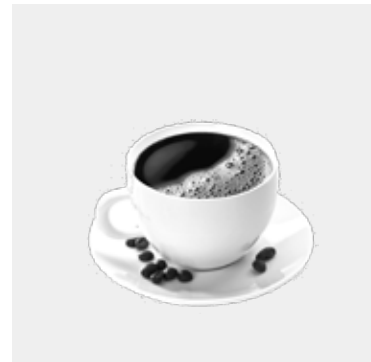
The Brightmoor tool bank and community greenhouse are two community assets that he is responsible for managing. Both of these assets currently rely on a volunteer base to manage and maintain them. Due to the ebb and flow of volunteers, the future of these and other projects is unclear. Kieran is interested in creating a structure that can financially sustain community assets while subsidizing resources to those who can not afford them.
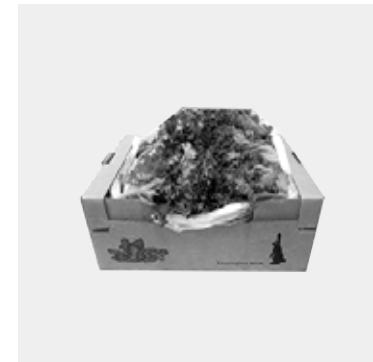
Name
**Bill**

Age
**60-80**

Organization
**Brightmoor Survival Club**
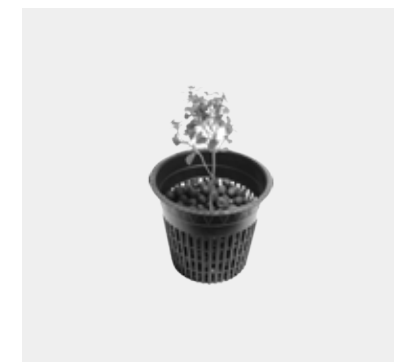
Level of Involvement

Dwelling Type

Stays with Son

Bill is especially concerned with creating a neighborhood resource that addresses the immediate needs of severely low income and homeless residents for whom Brightmoor has become a last resort. The Commons should be something that creates a "20 Minute" neighborhood geared towards severely low income individuals.



Name
**Eddie**

Age
**40-60**

Organization
**Brightmoor Survival Club**

Level of Involvement

Dwelling Type

Self Built Structure

Eddie is concerned with creating shelters from materials sourced from abandoned homes in the area. He envisions a resource that provides homeless individuals with the information and materials necessary to create their own dwelling. In addition, this resource could provide things such as restrooms, showers and a cooking facility.



Name
**Louella**

Age
**40-60**

Organization
**Neighbors Building Brightmoor**

Level of Involvement

Dwelling Type

Home Owner

Loella is most concerned with educating residents in the area who struggle to pay their property taxes. She believes it is criminal that many of her neighbors are unaware of the legality of the taxes they pay and the reality of illegal tax foreclosures in the area. She is concerned with addressing the day to day issues the neighborhood faces.



Name
**Kieran**

Age
**25-40**

Organization
**Beaverland Farms/ Neighbors Building Brightmoor**

Level of Involvement

Dwelling Type

Farm Owner

Kieran is concerned with creating community resources that are able to sustainably support themselves financially. He struggles to work within organizations that have inconsistent volunteer support. Because he is a farmer himself, he is largely concerned with agricultural operations and resources in the area.



Name
**Jeff**

Age
**60-80**

Organization
**Artesian Farms/Brightmoor Alliance**

Level of Involvement

Dwelling Type

Farm Owner

Jeff is mainly concerned with leveraging small business to provide both jobs and healthy food resource to the neighborhood. After nearly 17 years of residency in Brightmoor, he and his wife have decided to leave due to family reasons. His business "Artesian Farms" will be sold.
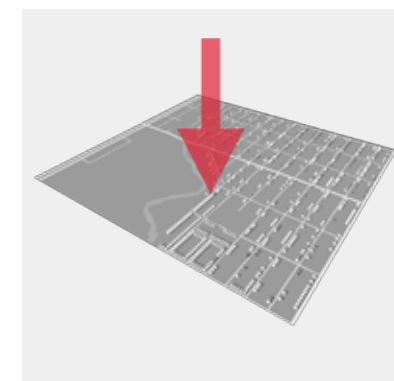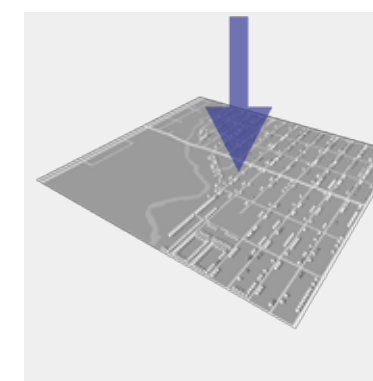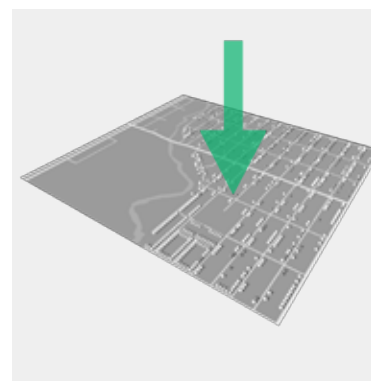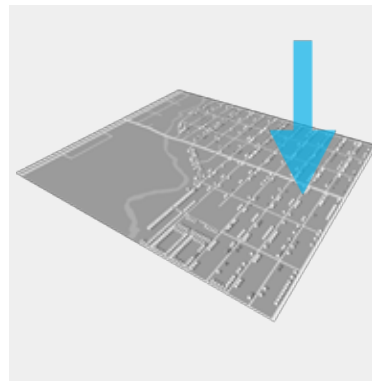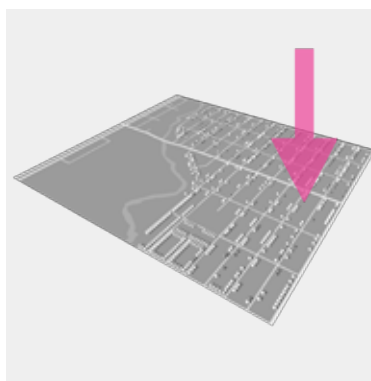










**Figures 59** - Brightmoor Contact Information Mapping

"Brightmoor is one **big web of buy, sell and trade activity twenty four seven**. People do for each other and locate resources and spread the news about where to get clothes, furniture or whatever. **News travels fast on the perpetual grapevine wherever excluded people struggle to survive.** Therefore, what is the common theme that can inspire everybody to get on the same page or should i say...in the same pot? Brightmoor Gumbo Brain (each of us is an ingredient). "

"I think something to consider is **"The Brightmoor Commons" as an emergent property of the neighborhood.** Neighbors Building Brightmoor is a resource hub, and the tool bank, and greenhouse represent tools that can be used to build out these new spaces, new buildings, new areas of production in the neighborhood (common or shared and more private). Getting people to pay into the NBB membership and leverage our resources here to build their own common areas then create multiple hubs across the neighborhood which in total, The Commons.

"**How do you establish an overarching collective entity that helps fund development/ management or at least helps navigate a shared legal basis for the community.** A non - municipal entity."

There is no monolithic vision for the neighborhood. You have to talk to each individual person to find out what they want. **I'm all about eliminating blight before it starts** by stopping illegal tax foreclosure. Thats my thing, I'm like, its criminal that almost everybody in my neighborhood who has trouble paying their property taxes - its criminal that they don't know they shouldn't be paying them".

"So what would a Community center of one village (Brightmoor) look like - based on what functions? The Artisans Cafe has a small clientele and small scale of operation. St. Christine's has the soup kitchen which is a bigger scale - feeds a few hundred. The St. Christine's staff now is about ten or so - off and on with a coupla full time. They are a human resource hub that could be instumental in a community center. A lot of ends could be woven - **A public space/welcome center kinda thing, public toilet, shower, kid space - I dunno - home made is fine with a lil help".**
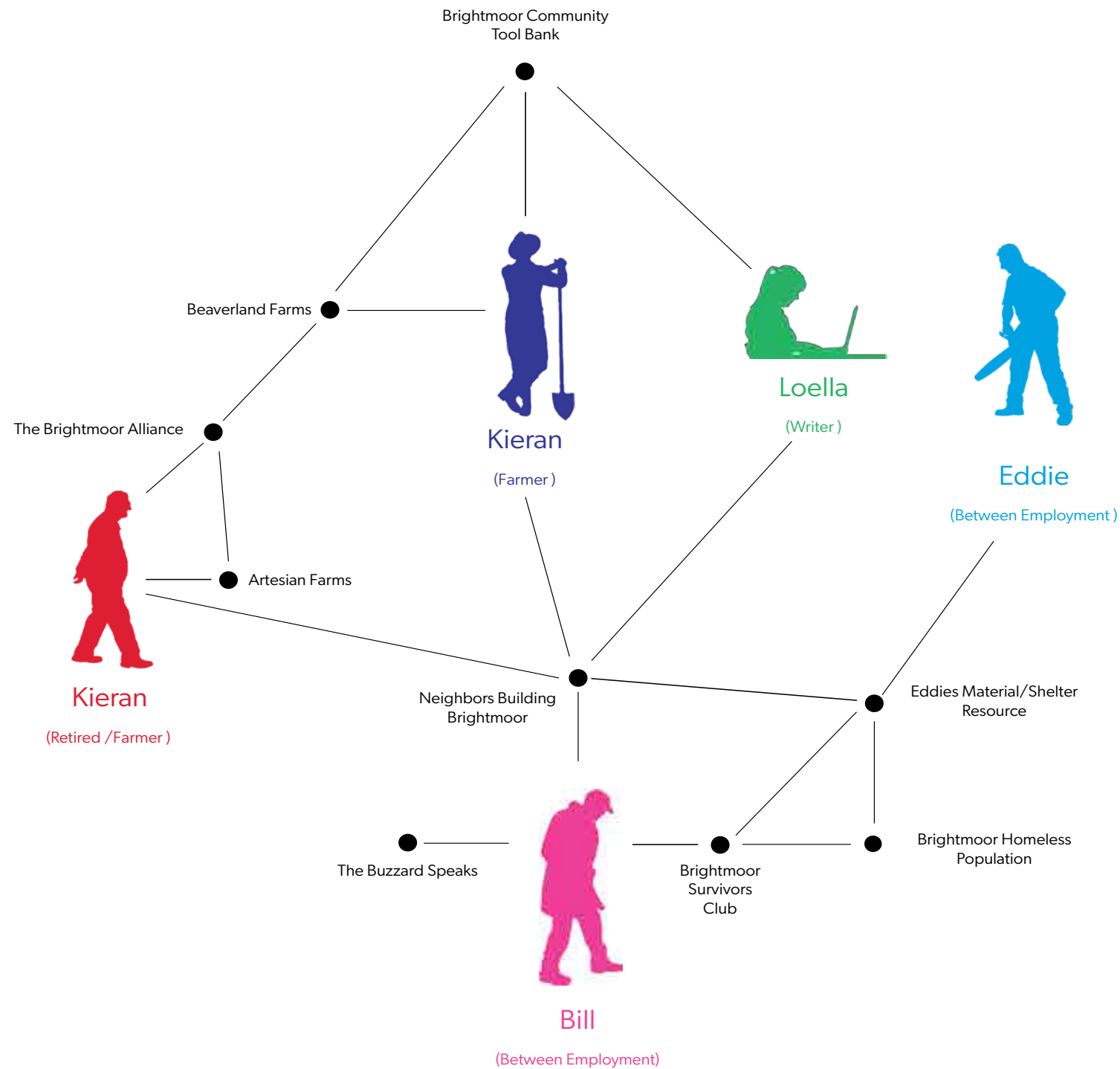
**Figures 60** - Brightmoor Contact Quotations

Brightmoor Community
Tool Bank

Beaverland Farms

The Brightmoor Alliance

Kieran
(Farmer )

Loella
(Writer )

Eddie
(Between Employment )

Artesian Farms

Kieran
(Retired /Farmer )

Neighbors Building
Brightmoor

Eddies Material/Shelter
Resource

The Buzzard Speaks

Brightmoor
Survivors
Club

Brightmoor Homeless
Population

Bill
(Between Employment)

**Figure 61** - Brightmoor Relationship Map

Emmergent Structure - The Commons

After meeting and making connections with residents, it was evident that there were clear overlaps between particular resident's visions for the neighborhood and the direction of the research project. It was also apparent that specific issues, such as social isolation, were not as problematic here. What was relevant was the need for an organizational structure that could sustainably provide residents the economic tools for promoting desired resources. The strength of the community is its ability to operate collectively, and its weakness is the ability to leverage it.

### Community Needs

There are many needs within the Brightmoor community. There is an urgent need for life-sustaining essentials such as shelter, access to clean water, public rest facilities, and healthy food accessibility. Also, there is a need for a common element that binds existing resident groups and organizations together to unite all interests under one central feature.

There is an appetite to investigate and experiment with development methods that can provide for an existing community while potentially welcoming new residents. In many areas around the city and country, development tactics have principally focused on attracting a new economic base without addressing the needs of existing residents creating a strong wave of gentrifying forces.

Though gentrification has not become particularly problematic in Brightmoor, residents fear it may become an issue in the future. The Detroit Land Bank Authority owns the vast majority of abandoned property in the area. This concentration of ownership has caused unease as residents are mostly unaware of the intentions of the organization.

As a result, many feel there must be a form of collective ownership held through resident stakeholders as a means of protection against the development interests of outside forces. Some believe that in the future, conditions could result in a "turf war" in which residents must forcibly fight to protect their homes.

### Community Challenges

The main challenge that many non-profit organizations in the area face is the ebb and flow of organizational productivity. During times of significant participation, groups are highly productive, creating, and maintaining many assets. While this incredible presence is something to be celebrated, it becomes problematic as community participation decreases over time.

The problem becomes how to sustain these community projects over time financially. Maintaining and supporting existing community infrastructure can be a heavy burden for volunteers, and success becomes unreliable. Is there an organizational structure that can create an economic base in which to fund itself over time?

### Objectives

Taken directly from conversations with residents, the focus of the project began to narrow. The objectives of the project became:

1 - Provide resources to local and community organizations and businesses.

2- Subsidize essential amenities to the severely low income and homeless residents.

3- Leverage blighted and vacant properties to the advantage of the neighborhood.

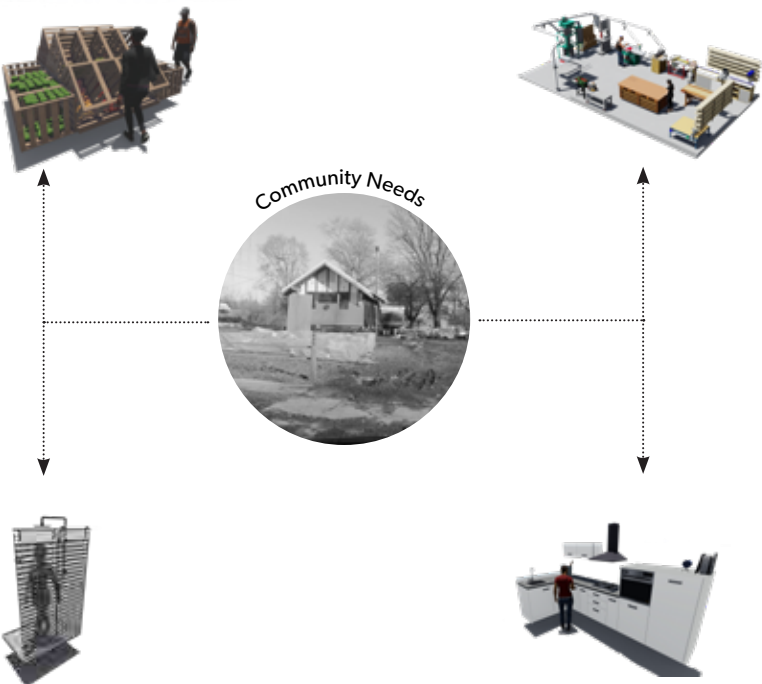4- Provide a structure for economically sustaining a resident-led community development.



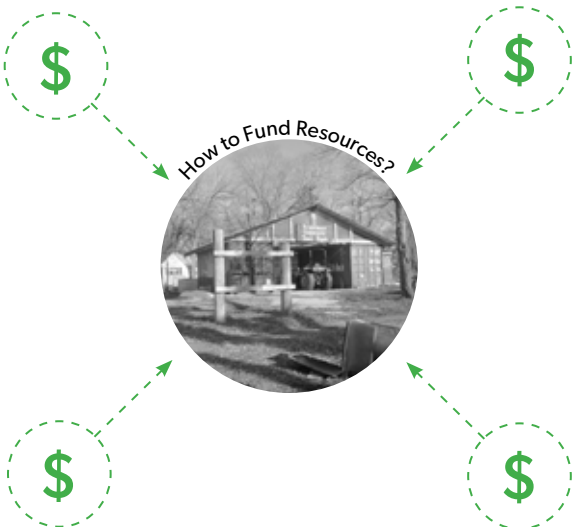**Figure 62** - Community Needs Diagram



**Figure 63** - Community Challenges Diagram

**The Church**

With the help of Bill and Eddie, a recently vacated church, becomes a central location for a resource hub. The church is approximately 12000 square feet in total and comprised of two buildings. The main structure houses the worship sanctuary, and the secondary structure houses what was once office and community space. The church sits on the main commercial corridor that runs east and west through the neighborhood. Centrally located on a 15-minute walking radius of the majority of existing community functions, the church is a near-perfect location. While this building is a near-perfect location, the physical structure is not the focus of the project; it is a mere placeholder representing what a centralized resource hub could be.



**Figure 64** - A Vacant Church is Selected as the Site of the Resource Hub



**Figure 65** - Located North of the Sanctuary Structure is the Connected Classroom + Office Space

Arterial Road

Abandoned + Blighted Homes

Occupied Homes

## The Commons

Motivated by a synthesis of all research completed, this project began to focus on an organizational structure to provide a framework for an economically sustainable resident-led development in the Brightmoor neighborhood. The organizational structures of cohousing and other cooperative typologies are adapted to meet the needs of the particular site. This exercise results in a new cooperative typology called The Commons.

Within the commons organizational structure, there are two primary components: the resource hub and the homesteads. The resource hub houses all the shared amenities. The homesteads are a series of bundled lots marketed to homestead micro-enterprise startups or existing for-profit farms in the area. The homestead locations are based on current neighboring vacant or blighted lots within a fifteen-minute walking distance of the resource hub.

Similar to the cohousing concept of a common house, the resource hub houses all the amenities that can be collectively shared. The resource hub serves three primary purposes.

1) To provide tools and amenities that support each of the homestead businesses.

2) To provide a brick and mortar point of sale for goods produced.

3) To subsidize essential resources for struggling residents within the community.
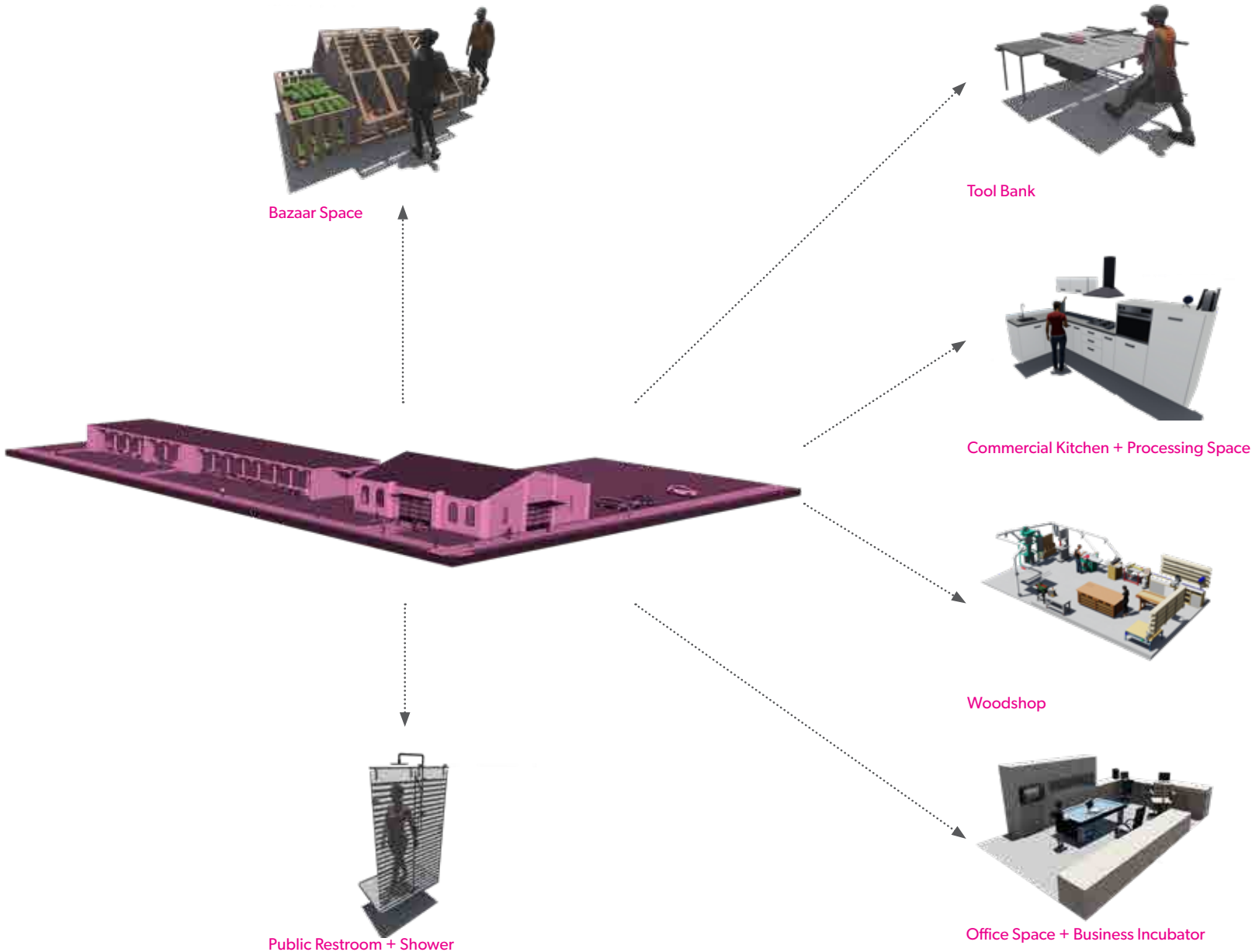


The Resource Hub

The Homesteads

**Figures 66** - The Commons and Homesteads Diagrams

Arterial Road

Abandoned + Blighted Homes

Occupied Homes

**Figure 67** - The Commons and Homesteads Perspective Diagram

Bazaar Space

Tool Bank

Commercial Kitchen + Processing Space

Woodshop

Office Space + Business Incubator

Public Restroom + Shower

**Figure 68** - The Commons Amenities Diagram

### Bazaar Space

The largest programmed area of the resource hub is a public bazaar market where the homestead members and other locals businesses can market their goods. The resource hub becomes a shared, brick and mortar, point of sale for both the commons enterprises and other local business while becoming an asset to locals with no place to source healthy foods.

### Tool Bank

The tool bank provides tools and some construction equipment. As most if not all homes in the area require extensive repair, this function gives the members of the commons the ability to perform work themselves. Although funded through the homestead fee, this resource becomes a subsidy to other community members such as the Brightmoor Survivors Club.

### Commercial kitchen + Processing Space

The kitchen provides a space that farms can use to process their products. A facility of this nature may be harder to provide on the homestead lot and this saves costs through collective ownership. While providing a critical business resource, the kitchen also provides a subsidy to those of limited economic means.

### Woodshop

The woodshop is primarily a space for members of the commons organization who are practicing artisans and tradespeople. In addition to equipment provided within the space, this becomes a place for craftspeople to engage and collaborate.

### Office Space + Business Incubator

Within the resource hub, there is an allotted office space for rent. Start-up enterprises that need a central location of operation can rent these rooms. A percentage of space is also for the staff of The Commons.

### Public Restroom + Showers

One of the essential features housed within the resource hub is a public restroom and shower facility. This becomes an obvious asset to The Commons members and locals.
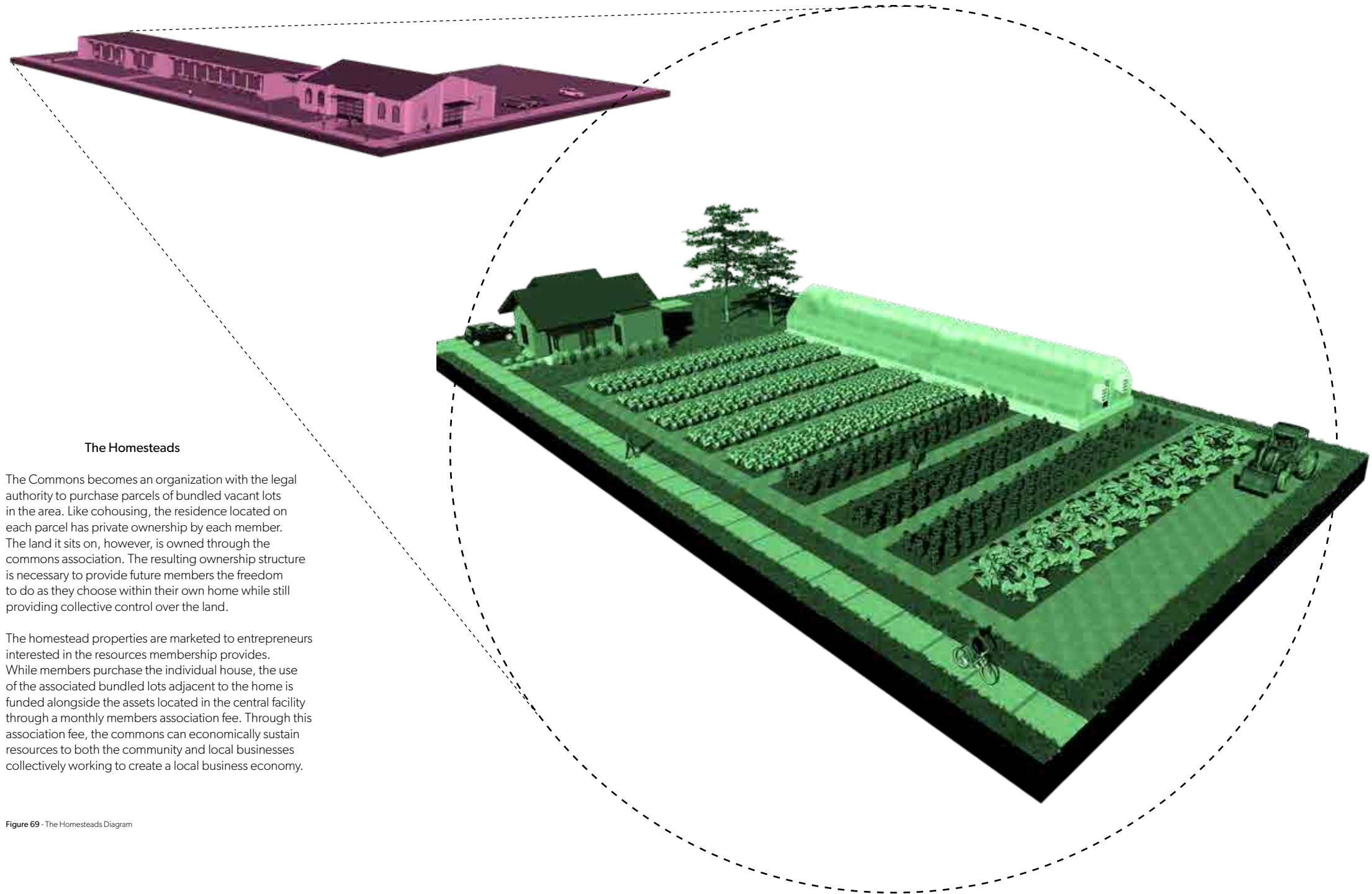
### The Homesteads

The Commons becomes an organization with the legal authority to purchase parcels of bundled vacant lots in the area. Like cohousing, the residence located on each parcel has private ownership by each member. The land it sits on, however, is owned through the commons association. The resulting ownership structure is necessary to provide future members the freedom to do as they choose within their own home while still providing collective control over the land.

The homestead properties are marketed to entrepreneurs interested in the resources membership provides. While members purchase the individual house, the use of the associated bundled lots adjacent to the home is funded alongside the assets located in the central facility through a monthly members association fee. Through this association fee, the commons can economically sustain resources to both the community and local businesses collectively working to create a local business economy.

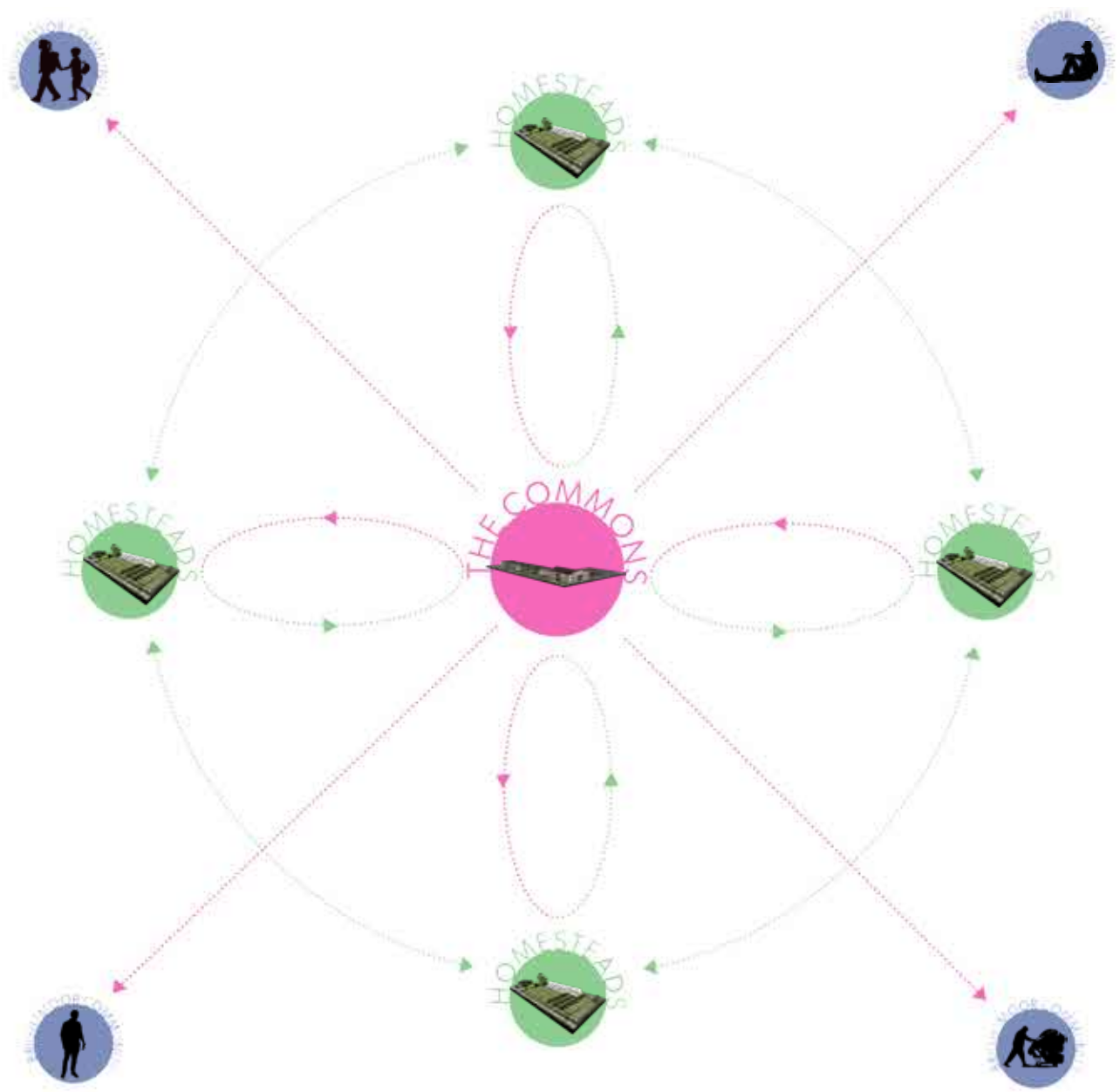**Figure 69** - The Homesteads Diagram
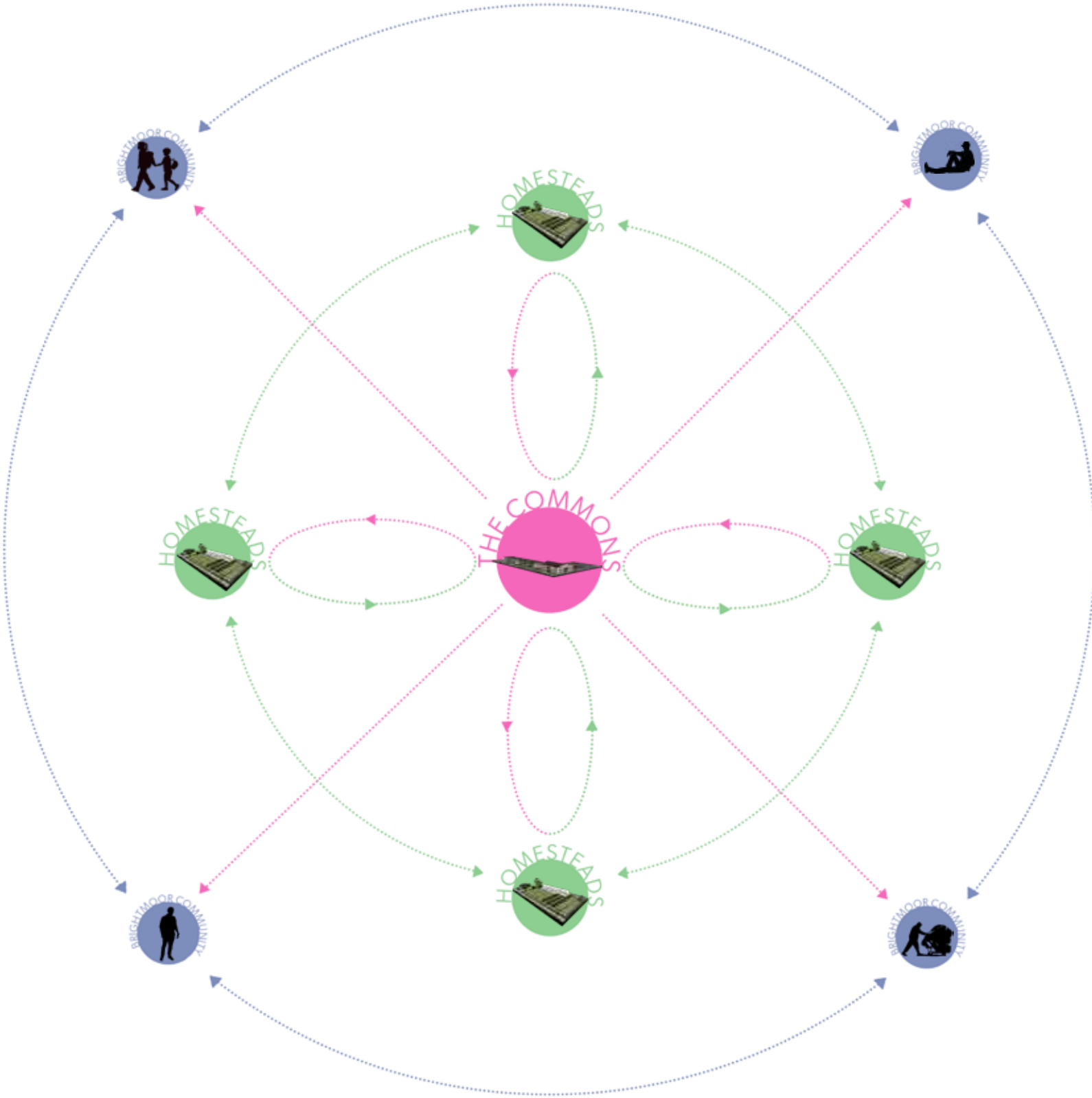
Figure 70 - The Commons Organizational Structure

**Figure 71** - The Commons Organizational Structure Illustrating Community Connection

What are the Implications?

Throughout the nation, previously forgotten urban neighborhoods are seeing a resurgence of interest. Profit-driven development has begun paving the way for re-imagined neighborhoods targeting wealthy new constituents rather than existing residents. Though gentrifying forces have been present in cities for many years, the rate of current reinvestment in urban locations is at a tremendously higher rate and pace than ever before. Major urban centers like New York City have, in many areas, entirely transformed over the last three decades. Neighborhoods that laid devastated for decades are now home to economically advantaged upper class professionals.

Though it may only appear to be neighborhood improvement, gentrification is a process of class transformation. This process takes the space that belongs to an established working-class and transforms it to meet the needs of the middle and upper classes. When these areas become attractive to developers and investors, residents become fearful that they may lose control over their homes and communities.

Though the gentrification process can be problematic, many communities appreciate and need neighborhood improvements. In order to create beneficial physical and economic change, current residents must find ways to leverage their collective power as a neighborhood.

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**Figure 4 - Brightmoor Detroit**

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**Figure 5 - The Commons**

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**Figure 6 Industrialization**

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**Figure 11 - Urbanization Over Time.**

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**Figure 12 - From City to Suburb**

Graphic design by Albert Sacheteleben

**Figure 13 - The Levittown**

Graphic design by Albert Sacheteleben

**Figure 14 - Paving Over the Neighborhood**

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**Figure 15 - The Projects**

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**Figure 16 - Livittown in Construction**

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**Figure 26 – Individualism**

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Graphic design by Albert Sacheteleben

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Figure 31 - The 33 residences of Skraplanet are situated on a sloped site so that every living room has a view to the south.

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Figure 32 - Cohousing Diagramatic Axonometric Drawing

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Graphic design by Albert Sacheteleben

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Graphic design by Albert Sacheteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben
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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Created by Albert Sachteleben

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Created by Albert Sachteleben

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Created by Albert Sachteleben. Data retrieved from Google Earth.

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Graphic design created by Albert Sachteleben. Data retrieved from:

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Graphic design and data created by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Images created by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Photo captured by Albert Sachteleben

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Image created by Albert Sachteleben

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Image created by Albert Sachteleben

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