



# IDENTITY ON THE WATERFRONT

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Master's Thesis  
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2016- 2017





## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family, especially my parents who were with me every step of the way. I appreciate everything you have done to help me over the last 23 years.

I would also like to thank my graduate advisor, Noah Resnick. Thank you for challenging me, opening up my mind and continuously pushing me.

I must also thank my other advisor, Veronika Moggyrody. You have helped me and supported me every step of the way these last five years, and that means more to me than I can express.

I would like to thank everyone who has experienced my journey with me. I have to thank my friends who have stuck with me through these last five years.

**“...CLARITY WITH WHICH IT CAN BE PERCEIVED AND IDENTIFIED, AND THE EASE WITH WHICH ITS ELEMENTS CAN BE LINKED WITH OTHER EVENTS AND PLACES IN A COHERENT MENTAL REPRESENTATION CAN BE CONNECTED WITH NON-SPATIAL CONCEPTS AND VALUES.”**

**- KEVIN LYNCH, GOOD CITY FORM**

**“THE MORE SUCCESSFULLY A CITY MINGLES EVERYDAY DIVERSITY OF  
USES AND USERS IN ITS EVERYDAY STREETS THE MORE SUCCESSFULLY,  
CASUALLY (AND ECONOMICALLY) ITS PEOPLE THEREBY ENLIVEN AND  
SUPPORT WELL LOCATED PARKS THAT CAN THUS GIVE BACK GRACE AND  
DELIGHT TO THEIR NEIGHBOURHOODS INSTEAD OF VACUITY.”**

**- JANE JACOBS, THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES**

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# 1 ABSTRACT

**“COMMUNITY IS A SIGN THAT LOVE IS POSSIBLE IN A MATERIALISTIC WORLD WHERE PEOPLE SO OFTEN EITHER IGNORE OR FIGHT EACH OTHER. IT IS A SIGN THAT WE DON'T NEED A LOT OF MONEY TO BE HAPPY.”**

**- JEAN VANIER, COMMUNITY AND GROWTH**

Using the existing natural landscape and infrastructure that has been forgotten to help reconnect the identity of the town to its waterfront. Reintroducing identity to a town can help improve the quality of the town.

Many communities experience an identity crisis at some point in their history, especially after large changes have been made to the area. The downtown core can have a major impact in bringing an identity to these towns, and an even larger impact if it fails. If a town loses its commercial strip, the town starts to become a large neighbourhood. Large neighbourhoods are often victims of urban sprawl, which eliminates the walkability of a town, decreases the sense of community and often become bedroom communities (communities where the majority of the people work outside of their community).

Focusing on creating an identity for a town can have many positive effects. It becomes easier to market the town for tourism and gives the residents a reason to participate in activities and shopping located within the town, instead of leaving.

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## 2 INTRODUCTION

**“A PROGRESSIVE TOWN OF HEALTHY, INTEGRATED COMMUNITIES.”**

**- BELLE RIVER’S TOWN VISION**

This thesis began with a desire to study architecture at the urban scale. Viewing architecture at a larger scale allows for a larger understanding of context and a better understanding of adapting to existing conditions. Architecture in the form of a building does not stand alone and is greatly influenced by it's surrounding context. Instead of always creating new architecture in order to replace something, why can't we focus on improving what is already existing? Viewing architecture at a larger scale allows the focus to be on improving existing landscape and infrastructure. Urban planning also allows a study of architecture without the building. Urban planning does not require the addition of buildings, although some may be added if they are needed, but can be more focused on site planning.

This thesis was also influenced by the town I grew up in, Belle River, Ontario. This town was the inspiration to look at architecture from the urban scale because as a town it contains very little inspiration itself. It is a town that lacks identity and 'joie de vivre'. It is also a town that has been stuck in time, that has not been growing or adjusting to the people moving into the area. Although it seems like a very stereotypical small town from the outside, it presents some interesting and unique problems. As a small isolated town, it is often forgotten when planners are looking at the city of Windsor or the historic areas of Walkerville and Amherstburg.

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## 3 BELLE RIVER

**“TO NURTURE A UNIFIED TOWN THAT SEES POSSIBILITY, INSPIRES INNOVATION AND  
REALIZES POTENTIAL.”**

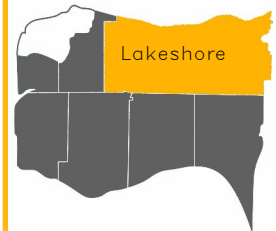
**- BELLE RIVER’S MISSION STATEMENT**

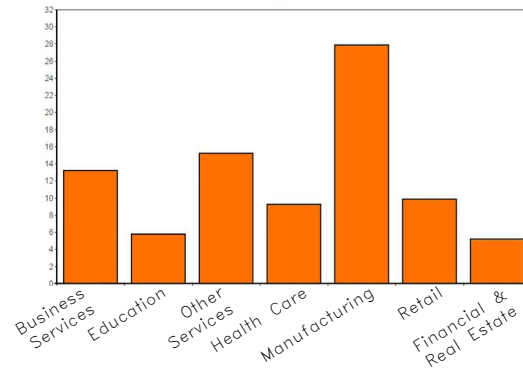


The small town of Belle River is located 35 minutes East of Windsor, Ontario. Over the last decade, the town of Belle River has overcome some major changes to its identity. A little over ten years ago Essex County decided there were too many small independently run towns within the county. Therefore, 16 different towns located within Essex County were amalgamated to create Lakeshore. Officially, the name Belle River no longer exists. For roughly five years, the town council of Lakeshore attempted to remove the name, even though many of its existing residents were still adamant about calling the area Belle River. Currently, the area originally known as Belle River has been renamed Belle River on the Lake, and it is still part of Lakeshore.

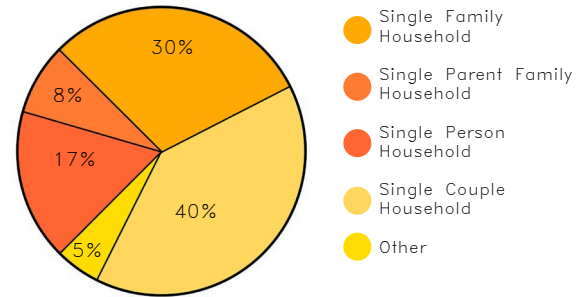
Belle River was founded in 1793 along the Belle River that feeds into Lake St. Clair. It was founded by primarily French Canadians who came from along the Detroit River. Belle River was originally created as a farming and fishing community. Fishing was originally a main attraction and industry to the town, but it no longer exists. The town began to truly become a settlement in 1853 when the Great Western Railway constructed a station in Belle River (this station no longer exists). The Ouellette family then created Belle River's first industry, a steam grist-mill and a sawmill. It took until 1874 for Belle River to be renamed as the Village of Belle River when it finally reached 750 inhabitants. It then took until 1969 for the population to increase enough to become a town (Archaeological and Historical Sites Board, Lions Park). Belle River was a popular place to be in the 1920's during the Rum Running days. In 1920, the Cooper Court Hotel was built by James Scott Cooper, a millionaire philanthropist and rum runner, and good friend with Blaise "King Canada" Diesbourg, a famous rum runner, and Al Capone (Gervais). After the end of Rum Running, the town of Belle River settled into the category of 'small town'.

## History



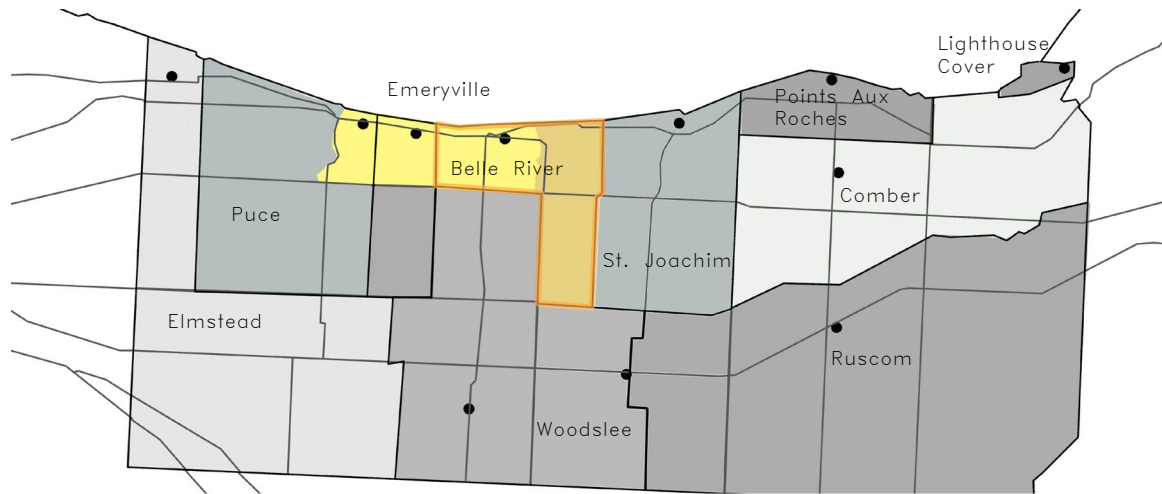


Occupations



Household Types

Official Boundary  
Perceived Boundary



Lakeshore Counties

## Current Conditions

Belle River is often viewed as a very traditional and stereotypical small Ontario town. Although there is no official population to Belle River, because everything has been merged to create Lakeshore, it is estimated that there are about 15 000 people living in what the majority of the residents consider to be Belle River. Many of the residents who grew up in Belle River, never leave, or often return. Over 92% of the residents have lived at their same address their entire lives and over 94% of the residents have never lived outside of Belle River (City-Data). There is very little diversity in town, with it being 95.5% Caucasian. The only focus of diversity is whether or not someone's native language is English or French. The family dynamics are also very traditional in this area. The vast majority of households are either couples of two parent families. The residents of Belle River are considered to be middle class with the average income of 35 000\$, which is about 6 000\$ higher than the provincial average (City-Data). The majority of residents work in trades or industry outside of town. Only 17.4% of people, work in Belle River. Even though the majority of residents are employed in trades or industry, there is no industry or manufacturer within the census boundary of Belle River.

But Belle River is unique in some ways. One term that is sometimes used to describe Belle River is the term 'Summer Town'. A summer town is a town which relies on the warmer months to provide for the colder months. In other words, there are festivals, activities and some tourist attractions that happen only during the summer months, and then a section of the population leaves during the winter months. During the summer Belle River could be considered 'alive' because there are some people who walk around town and the beach becomes a popular destination for locals, but it almost considered a ghost town during the winter. The problem

with this is that Ontario only has four months of summer during the year. Although Belle River provides entertainment or activities during the summer, the town provides almost nothing for the citizens during the winter. The other unique aspect of Belle River is its very high density of schooling options for elementary and high school children. Within a five minute drive from the town centre there are 7 elementary and high schools. Outside of the five minute driving boundary there are two other popular schools (école secondaire catholique l'Essor and école élémentaire catholique Saint-Ambroise) that are used by the town's children. There are five elementary schools (St. William Catholic School, école élémentaire catholique Pavillon des Jeune, St John the Baptist Catholic School, Lakeshore Discovery School and Belle River Public School) and two high schools (St Anne Secondary School and Belle River District High School). Belle River has the highest density of schooling options in all of Windsor Essex County. The average child across Windsor Essex County is surrounded by 4.5 schools.



Belle River Marina Restaurant



Storefront located in the commercial strip

One of the many reasons for an increase in population in Belle River is because of the schooling options. Many people move to the area because of the many options and because Lakeshore Discovery School is very new (built in 2008). There is a large variety of Catholic, Public and French schools in the area.

Belle River became a point of focus because it is a small town that lacks identity. The name Belle River (also known as Belle Rivière), which shows its French heritage, translates to Pretty River. The name itself plays a part of the town's lack of identity because the majority of the Belle River and Lake St. Clair is not accessible to the residents because it is hidden behind private dwellings. Not only is not accessible, it is often not visible to people who travel along 'waterfront' roads. It is also not visible at all from the main road, County Road 22, which contains the highest density of traffic in the area. It is not visibly connected to County Road



Main intersection (County Road 22 & 1st St.)



Storefront located in the commercial strip





Lake St. Clair

Belle River Marina Restaurant

East Beach

East Beach Ice Cream

West Beach Park

Optimist Park

County Road 22

Belle River

Lion's Park

B.R. High School

B.R. Elem.  
School

St. John's  
Elem. School

22 or physically connected other than the bridge that crosses the Belle River. The water front is currently separated from the south side of the town by a residential neighbourhood and is not often considered a destination as there is very little to attract people to or to lead them to it. Currently, the only places Lake St. Clair or the Belle River is accessible to the public within a one mile radius of the East Beach is the West Beach Pier, and a single spot along West Belle River Road for boaters.



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## 4 WHAT IS A TOWN?

"A GOOD CITY IS LIKE A GOOD PARTY. PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO LEAVE EARLY."

- JAN GEHL

What is a town? Although it seems like a simple question, there are many answers to this question. Some state that a town is simply a community with no government power (Rosenburg), while others state it is just a congregation of people (Merriam-Webster.com). The problem with these vague definitions is that they are remarkably similar to the definition of a neighbourhood, “A section lived in by neighbours and usually having distinguishing characteristics,” (Merriam-Webster.com). The traditional definition of town states that simply a market is required. This differs from a village which does not have a market but does have a church, and from a city which requires a cathedral or a university (City, town). The other problem with defining a town is that it is commonly stated that town’s are “usually larger than a village but smaller than a city,” (Merriam-Webster.com). The difference between a village, town and city is the population, but there is no standard number that states what the population must be to be categorized as village, town or city.

This leads to the question, of how the town of Belle River would be described? It could be described in multiple ways, each definition giving specific focus to a different aspect of the town. It could be described as a town with many different shops that very few people use, and most of the store fronts are empty of patrons, for these shops sell knick-knacks. It could also be described as an almost walkable town, until the groceries need to be brought home. As a place where someone could walk, but no one does. And how about stating it is the pure definition of a small town with only one traffic light and everyone knows everyone, But it is also a place where everyone knows each other by face or car, but not truly knowing them.

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# 5 SENSE

"...ONE CRUCIAL FEATURE OF SENSIBILITY IS THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE IMAGE OF A PLACE IS WIDELY SHARED."

- KEVIN LYNCH, GOOD CITY FORM



According to Kevin Lynch in his book Good City Form, there are five dimensions that are required to make a city and/ or town successful. They are vitality, sense, fit, access and control. These five dimensions are to be used together to create and improve the spatial qualities of cities.

1. Vitality is the idea that the form supports the needs, “vital functions, the biological requirements and capabilities” (Lynch 118) of those who use the space.
2. Sense is the identity of a place. According to Lynch, having a defined sense to a place allows for a mental match “between environment, our sensory and mental capabilities, and our cultural constructs,” (118).
3. Fit is the idea that the form of a space allows people to move freely in their daily activities, “match the pattern and quantity of actions that people customarily engage in,” (Lynch 118).
4. Access is the ability to access other people, services and places.
5. Control is allowing a space to be controlled by those who use it.

- Natural Zone T1
- Rural Zone T2
- Sub-Urban Zone T3
- General Zone T4
- Urban Center Zone T5
- Core Urban Zone T6
- Community Zone
- Community Building



Urban Transect Map

Sense is the one dimension the town of Belle River lacks the most. Currently vitality, fit, access and control are all a part of the design of Belle River, although they are not necessarily well executed or used. But, Belle River does not have any sense or identity. Although the town is named Belle River, very few people identify the town with the Belle River, which cuts through the middle of the town. Not only does the town not identify with its river, it also does not identify with Lake St. Clair, even though it is a waterfront town. Part of this lack of sense is because the majority of the waterfront property is residential. Very few people have access to the Belle River or to Lake St. Clair. Within a one mile radius from the East Beach there are 266 residential houses, two government facilities and three commercial buildings located along the waterfront (both the Belle River and Lake St. Clair). Across that one mile radius there were 0.82 miles of clearly visible water and of that 0.82 miles, only 0.6 miles of that was accessible for public use.

The town of Belle River could begin re-identifying with lake and the river if the waterfront properties became public spaces instead of residential zones. It could be proposed that the West Beach Park became more pedestrian friendly and included more usable spaces to increase the amount of people spending time at the waterfront. There are also areas along West Belle River Road that could transition from residential to commercial/ public space. Solutions such as these are ways to increase peoples' use of the waterfront, which would help in including the lake and river as Belle River's sense of identity.

## 6 DE-FAMILIARIZING BELLE RIVER

“ARRIVING AT EACH NEW CITY, THE TRAVELER FINDS AGAIN A PAST OF HIS THAT HE DID NOT KNOW HE HAD: THE FOREIGNNESS OF WHAT YOU NO LONGER ARE OR NO LONGER POSSESS LIES IN WAIT FOR YOU IN FOREIGN, UNPOSSESSED PLACES.”

- ITALO CALVINO, INVISIBLE CITIES

The term eidetic refers to “extraordinarily accurate and vivid recall especially of visual images,” (Merriam- Webster). Eidetic images are not used to solely represent a perfect visual accurate representation of something. The eidetic process used to create images is often used to combine multiple images and text to create an abstract image that represents the feeling or importance of a place.

The first series of eidetics was used to represent multiple areas in Belle River. The images were not only used to represent the town but to also help with the defamiliarizing process. Many of the eidetics combine photographs of Belle River, Google Images, charcoal experiments and writings about Belle River in both English and French. The process lead to the creation of 24 different eidetics, each representing different areas within the town.

Using the eidetic process to study Belle River was inspired by the text *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. In the text Marco Polo is describing many different wonderful cities to Kublai Khan. Every city he describes is vastly different from all the other ones, each with its own charm and character. It is later revealed that Marco Polo is actually only describing Venice. He describes Venice using 55 very different experiences and points of view.

One of the very first eidetics studied the aerial of Belle River without using any images of the town itself. This image analysed the aerial view and different scales of a plan. It focused on how an image can be viewed differently at different scales. This was a useful image in the eidetic process to understand an area at different scales.

The top image was one of the more effective images in aiding in the defamiliarization of Belle River. All of the images used are taken from Google, forcing a restriction of available images and the use of unfamiliar images. The overlay of text was part of a series of writings done on folding paper about different aspects of Belle River. The folding of the paper forced the interruption of thought and allowed for the writings to be less cohesive and familiar when reading them.

The bottom eidetic was successful in way the previous two images were not. This became a image that used light, line and texture to create a new space. This eidetic is familiar in feeling to being on the Belle River during the hot summer heat but the image itself is physically not representative of Belle River. This was the first image to portray a feeling of experience within Belle River.





The other eidetic images were also helpful in the defamiliarizing process, utilizing the blurring of images to create new places and spaces. Although, there was a lot to learn from the eidetic process, there were some images that were less informative and helpful than others. Some of the images were too familiar, too literal in their interpretations, or became redundant over time, all illustrating similar things. These images were mostly helpful in just targeting different spots of town.

This was a process that relied on the use trial and error to determine certain techniques that worked the best to create images that were not physically representative of Belle River. Certain techniques that worked the best was the overlay of multiple images, the addition of a second element (text or charcoal) and trying not to predetermine the image.

Overall, this series of eidetics was very useful in the defamiliarizing process of Belle River and in understand which techniques are helpful in the eidetic making process. This process led into a second eidetic study of a more concentrated area, West Belle River Road.



utiliser. Les trois  
pour une raison ou autre...  
par populaire. Il y a aussi cinq écoles  
élémentaires dans la région et  
deux écoles secondaires. Ils sont  
École Pavillion des Jeunes, École  
Belle Rivière Publique, École  
Ste. Williams catholique, École  
Belle Rivière secondaire,  
École Ste. Anne secondaire,  
École publique  
élémentaire Lakonah  
Discovery et  
École Ste. Jean  
Jean le baptiste.  
alors, il y

beaucoup d'écoles pour une petite région. C'est  
ville mais c'est tellement ennuyeux à l'école  
faire. Pendant l'été je joue la tennis à l'école  
publique et je ne peux pas  
rien! Et je ne peux pas  
deux activités pendant  
l'hiver. Mot dit.  
L'an.  
vi.  
in

Ma ville  
mille pe  
pas

terrible! dl  
ou tu pour  
s. et.

à jour  
e jouet et trois  
ment pour des enfants  
vit ons. L'ai mangé  
He année et  
sense qu'ils  
ies suées.  
dépanneurs  
autres shops  
acheter les  
Il y a

re première centre de communauté Il y  
e bibliothèque, quatre glaciers pour le hockey,  
track pour marcher et plusieurs cliniques  
bres. C'est très grand. Le plus grand  
ême avec le centre de communauté et  
ation. C'est tellement isolée du ville et  
maisons. Pendant les prochaines années  
ont probablement construire des maison  
ti du centre. Ma da, je ne sais pas  
is d'autre a dire. C'est une très petite

ville, il n'y a pas beau co  
a dire. Une page, deux co  
par main est impossib  
Il n'y a pas beaucoup  
signifiant adre de ma

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# 7 SKETCH PROBLEM

"MAKE NO LITTLE PLANS, THEY HAVE NO MAGIC TO STIR MEN'S BLOOD AND PROBABLY THEMSELVES NOT BE REALIZED. MAKE BIG PLANS."

- DANIEL BURNHAM

The sketch problem was focused on taking a small section of town and completely redesigning it. There were several different areas in Belle River that could be redesigned; the intersection at County Road 22 and West Belle River Road, the road that ran behind Tetreault's Valu-Mart or the intersection at 11th Street and County Road 22. After reading Community Improvement Area: Design Guidelines and Community Improvement Plan: Revitalization Strategy, two documents created by the Town of Lakeshore in 2014, it was determined that the North side of West Belle River Road would be the site. The Community Improvement Plan: Revitalization Strategy was a particularly useful document because it is "a municipal planning tool that outlines a strategy for community improvements as well as a framework for providing a coordinated plan for improvements and rehabilitation to public and private lands..."(6). According to the goals of the Community Improvement Plan: Revitalization Strategy, the goals for the County Plan included attracting tourism related businesses, ensuring access to Lake St. Clair is maintained, encouraging mixed use buildings and land, creating linked networks of pedestrian pathways and public spaces, and encouraging community and urban design (14- 17). Using these goals provided by the Town of Lakeshore, the North side of West Belle River Road was picked to create a pedestrian friendly, commercial strip to connect County Road 22 with Lake St. Clair.

Although, the Town of Lakeshore expressed the want of turning First Street into a commercial strip to connect downtown Belle River with Lake St. Clair (MMM Group Limited 6), West Belle River Road has less dense residential and significantly worse road conditions. It is also more closely connected to the Belle River, and follows the Belle River for a much longer distance than First Street. Currently, West Belle River Road has about five houses on either side of the road,



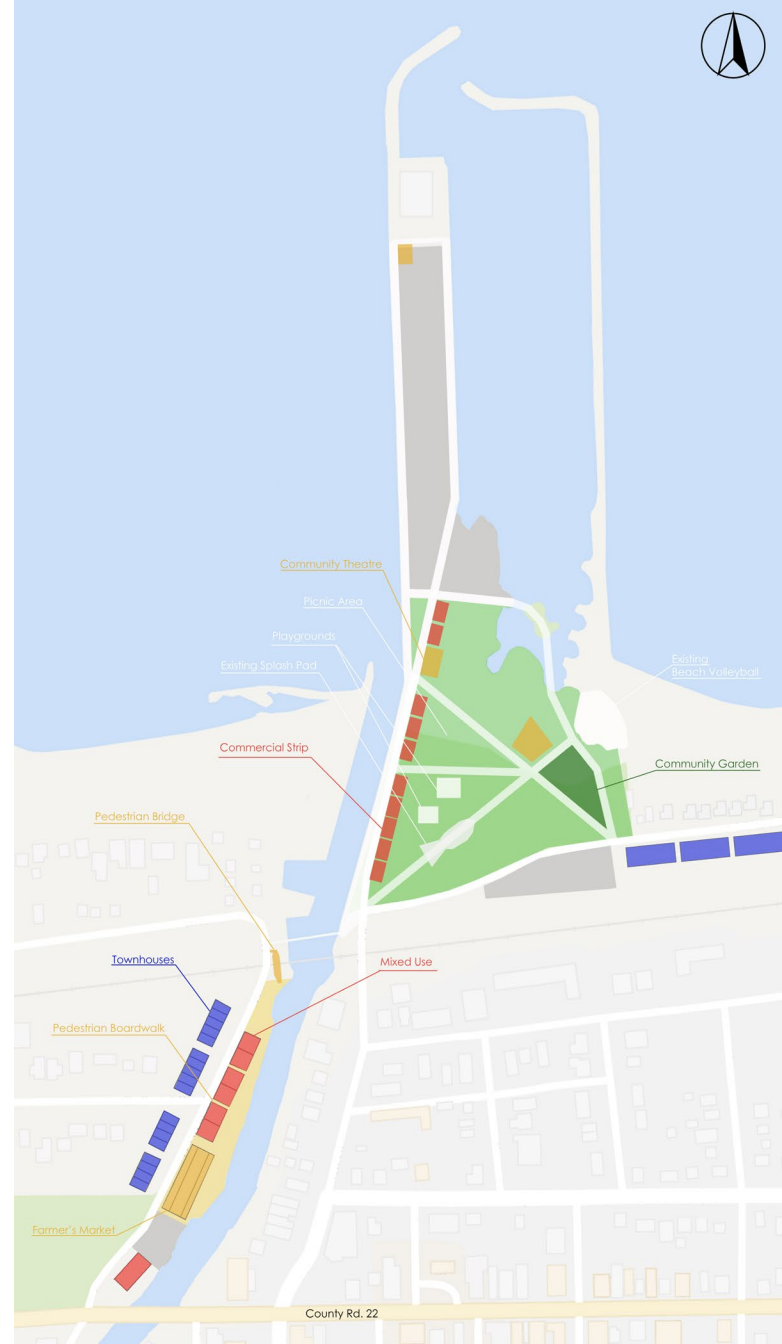
covering a stretch of roughly 1000 ft (300 m). This road also does not have a sidewalk that runs the entire length of the road and the sidewalk that does exist is not in good condition. Not only is it level with the road, but the buffer between the sidewalk and the road is a foot of loose gravel. This is not an accessible road for pedestrians, whereas First Street is very accessible.

The initial design for West Belle River Road was to remove the sparse housing and replace it with a river walk, mixed-use buildings and making the area pedestrian oriented. On the West side of the road, the residential housings would be replaced with dense town houses. Town houses are a current building trend in Belle River and Lakeshore because of the density it creates. On the opposite side of the street, along the riverfront itself, would be the addition of a public pedestrian boardwalk. It would be used as a way to lead people from County Road 22 down to Lakeview Park which sits on Lake St. Clair. The boardwalk would be designed specifically for pedestrians and cyclists, and to move the circulation to the riverfront. The boardwalk would include two different types of buildings; mixed-use commercial and a farmers market. The mixed-use commercial buildings would be two stories tall, a similar height of the 'historic' buildings located in downtown Belle River. There would be specialty commercial shops (a request from the town) and restaurants on the first floor, and apartments on the second floor. Currently in Belle River, there is only one waterfront restaurant, but it is not



ADA accessible and it is only open in the summer. The second type of building, would be the focal point of the boardwalk; a multi-season farmers market. A farmers market has recently started in Belle River, but it is outside in the grass of the Optimist Park next to a senior resident's home. Its location makes its appearance very contingent on the weather and it is not accessible to people with walkers, wheelchairs or strollers. This new farmers market would be easily accessible and very permeable. It would have the ability to completely open up during the warmer months and spill out into the plaza/ large open space on the boardwalk, and to close up in the winter. The goal of the new farmers market, would be to give it the ability to be used 12 months a year. The boardwalk would then continue to a pedestrian commercial bridge linking the boardwalk and East Beach by crossing over the train tracks. The pedestrian bridge was added as a way to continue to pedestrian walkway without the interruption of the train tracks. The pedestrian bridge would be wide enough to accommodate one or two small commercial booths.

The second half of the design is focused on Lakeview Park, which is located to the West. This park was unsuccessfully redesigned less than 10 years ago. The main goal of the design was to turn this side of the park into a destination. Currently First Street, which runs along the water, is vehicle dominant, making parking easier to access than the sidewalks. This road would become more pedestrian friendly with the removal of



the street parking and the addition of bike lanes and proper sidewalks. Along the edge of First Street and the park is the possibility to include small commercial or community buildings. The addition of these buildings could increase the use of the space during the colder months. Within these commercial and community buildings would be the inclusion of a community theater. According to Sarah Ilijanich, a resident of Belle River, two years ago the community theater located in Belle River was closed because the Town of Lakeshore sold the building. The program was very popular and there is a demand for the theater to re-open. The paths within the park are designed to break up the large amount of green spaces and to create pockets of activities. There would be a splash pad, a more condensed playground area, a picnic area, a music pavilion and a community/ public garden. The splash pad is an existing part of the park and is currently the most popular attraction for local residents in town. The three playgrounds which are currently on the site would be condensed to one playground, considering two out of three of the playgrounds are rarely used. The picnic area would include the addition of picnic tables, as there are only five park benches currently across the site. The addition of the community garden is in line with the Town of Lakeshore's statements to increase sustainable landscaping and community engagement (MMM Group Limited 24). Outside of the park, there would be the possibility to add dense residential housing in what is now an empty stretch of grass. Lakeview Drive, the road that runs along Lake St. Clair, would be widened to include sidewalks and bike lanes, which would connect with the West Beach Park.



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## 8 WALKING WEST BELLE RIVER ROAD

“WHETHER YOU LIVE IN A CITY OR A SMALL TOWN, AND WHETHER YOU DRIVE A CAR, TAKE THE BUST OR RIDE A TRAIN, AT SOME POINT IN THE DAY, EVERYONE IS A PEDESTRIAN.”

- ANTHONY FOXX



This second eidetic study was very different from the first study. This series of eidetics was concentrated along a one mile stretch of West Belle River Road. The intention of this study was to determine how pedestrian friendly West Belle River Road was. This was an important study because West Belle River Road leads directly to the primary site.

West Belle River Road is located on the West side of the Belle River and begins at the West Beach. West Belle River Road is 6.8 km long, ending at the 401 Highway, and is the road that most closely follows the Belle River. This eidetic study focused on the walking conditions along a one mile stretch of West Belle River Road, starting at the West Beach Ice Cream Shop. Ten pictures were taken every 0.1 miles, focusing on the overall conditions of the street and the sidewalk.

Many important aspects of West Belle River Road were revealed during this eidetic study. This is not a pedestrian friendly road. The sidewalk is only on the East side of the road, the side farthest from river, the sidewalk is less than a mile long, and it is interrupted in many places. There are also many spots along the sidewalk that are level with the road, and do not have a physical buffer between it and the road, making the pedestrian feel as though they are on the road themselves.

But the most important discovery in this process was the lack of relationship between West Belle River Road and the Belle River. Although West Belle River Road is the road that follows the Belle River the most closely, there are many areas where the road does not have any connection with the river. After the first half of a mile from the East Beach, drivers along West Belle River Road would have no idea that 20 feet away is a river. Even more disconcerting, is the fact that when it was possible to see the Belle River, it was not physically accessible to the public. Almost the entire length of the Belle River is privately owned. Even though it is possible to see the river, it is often only visible between houses.



Overall, this eidetic study was useful in giving a better understanding of the different conditions that occur along West Belle River Road. It brought to light the inconsistent sidewalk road relation, where the sidewalk ended and most importantly, where the Belle River is visible from the road. There is only a sidewalk on the East side of the road, the side farthest from the water. Also, the sidewalk is level with the ground and at some points was directly next to the road, while at other points it was separated by mud or grass.

This study was able to help determine the physical starting point of the riverfront design intervention. About half a mile into the study, the Belle River was no longer visible from the road. The point where the Belle River becomes no longer visible from the road, is where the design intervention will begin.





- Visible Water ●
- No Visible Water ●
- Intervention Starting Point ○



## 9 THE SITES

“ANY WIDE PIECE OF GROUND IS THE POTENTIAL SITE OF A PALACE, BUT THERE’S  
NO PALACE TILL IT’S BUILT.”

- FERNANDO PESSOA, POET

The final sites are located at the West Beach and on West Belle River Road, starting at County Road 22 and ending at the East Beach. These two sites were chosen because they are both close to each other, have a large amount of waterfront property and are terribly designed.

The West Beach is currently the largest park in Belle River and is located on Lake St. Clair. It has a restaurant at the end of the pier, a well used splash pad, a couple different play areas, a basketball court, a music pavilion and large expanses of grass. There are two main problems with the West Beach: vehicular circulation and pedestrian access. The pier, the area that has the most access to Lake St. Clair is a very large parking lot. The cars have more access to the water than the pedestrian. All of the pedestrian access and activities are located in land. This is a problem because the most ideal land has been given to vehicles instead of people. The pedestrian part of the park is not well designed or user friendly. All of the pedestrian walkways and sidewalks circle the park, leaving a large empty expanse of grass in the center. This does not make circulation efficient at all. Also, many of the pedestrian activities, such as the playground are not easily accessible. None of the playgrounds or picnic tables have any paths leading to them. The design was not done in a way that accommodates pedestrians.

West Belle Rive Road is the road that most closely follows the Belle River. It is also the closest to the waterfront. On this site there are 12 single family homes (six houses on either side of



the road). These private residents have very large properties and hide the waterfront from the rest of the locals. Sometimes there is a glimpse of the Belle River between the houses. This section of West Belle River Road also intersects with County Road 22, the busiest road in Belle River. This area of road is very visible to everyone who drives through Belle River. This is an area that could easily be given back to the community.



West Belle River Road Waterfront



West Belle River Road facing South



West Belle River Road facing South



West Belle River Road & County Road 22





West Beach Pier



West Beach Pier



West Beach Park



West Beach Park



West Beach Pier

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# 10 DESIGN INTERVENTION

“[SIDEWALKS] BRING TOGETHER PEOPLE WHO DO NOT KNOW EACH OTHER IN AN INTIMATE PRIVATE SOCIAL FASHION.”

- JANE JACOBS, THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES

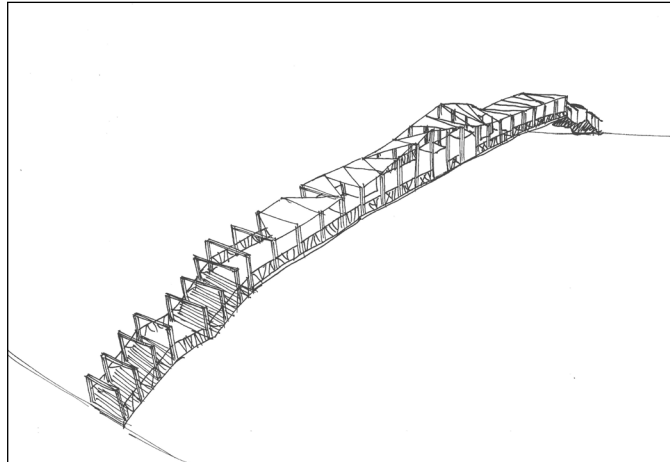
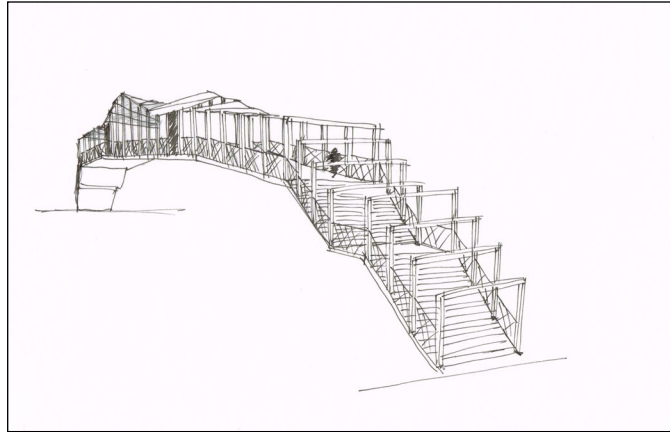
The sketch problem gave a lot of insight on the import aspects the design intervention should focus on. Some of these things included pedestrian relationship with the water, walkability and programmable space. This design focuses on using existing infrastructure and redesigning it to make it more user friendly.

The master plan consists of four main components: a pedestrian bridge, a river walk, a waterfront park and identifying street furniture. The river walk will be located on West Belle River Road between County Road 22 and the Via Rail train tracks. The goal of the river walk is to increase pedestrian traffic near the river and lake and to re-associate the town of Belle River with it's waterfront. Within river walk would include a large farmers market that would act as a visual focal point and anchor to the design intervention. It would be located on the corner of West Belle River Road and County Road 22. As previously mentioned, it would be used to replace the existing farmers market that happens during the winter months, and extend it's period of use. The other buildings that would located along the river walk would be mixed-use two story buildings. The commercial storefronts would include specialty shops and restaurants. The intention is for each storefront to be accessible from the street and from the river walk. West Belle River Road would be expanded to include angled street parking and bike lanes. The widening of this road would transform this section of road from residential to commercial, encouraging the use of the area by non-residents. On the other side of West Belle River Road the few houses that are there would be replaced either with town houses to give the area a more dense feel or more mix-use buildings.

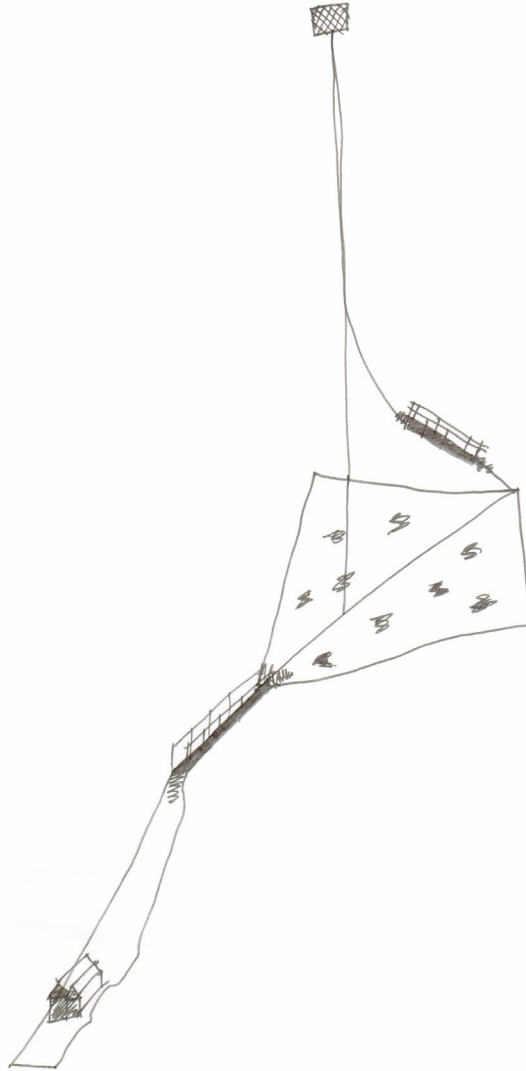
The pedestrian bridge would be a large design feature. It would connect the river walk with the West Beach Park by going over the train tracks and crossing the Belle River. The 200 foot-long pedestrian bridge would contain several small stalls and shops. The design of the pedestrian bridge, would carry over to the design of the farmers market located on the river walk. The pedestrian bridge raises 25 feet in the air, allowing users to have an unobstructed view of the town of Belle River, the Belle River and Lake St. Clair. The proposed design for the bridge used columns of varying heights to create an undulating canopy. Some areas of the canopy are removed to allow for both shaded areas and open air areas. The geometry of the canopy also carries through to railings and the arches over the stairs. This is only a proposed design for the pedestrian bridge. The most important aspect of the design of this pedestrian bridge would be that it is designed and that those design elements carry through to the farmers market and small pedestrian bridge located in the West Beach Park.



The largest part of the design intervention would be the redesign of the West Beach Park. Currently, the West Beach Park is dominated by vehicle access to the pier and large undesigned expanses of grass. The redesign of the park would focus on moving all vehicle access and parking inland, and moving pedestrian access and areas closer to the water. The existing splash pad and music pavilion would both be left where they currently lay, as they are the only two popular features of the park. There would be sidewalks allowing easy access to different parts of the park to help break up the large expanse of grass. Different areas of the park would provide different functions for the users; outdoor seating, picnic tables for lunch, a playground, garden, etc. There would also be a small pedestrian bridge on the North East side of the park connecting a small 'island' and the park. This small



Pedestrian Bridge

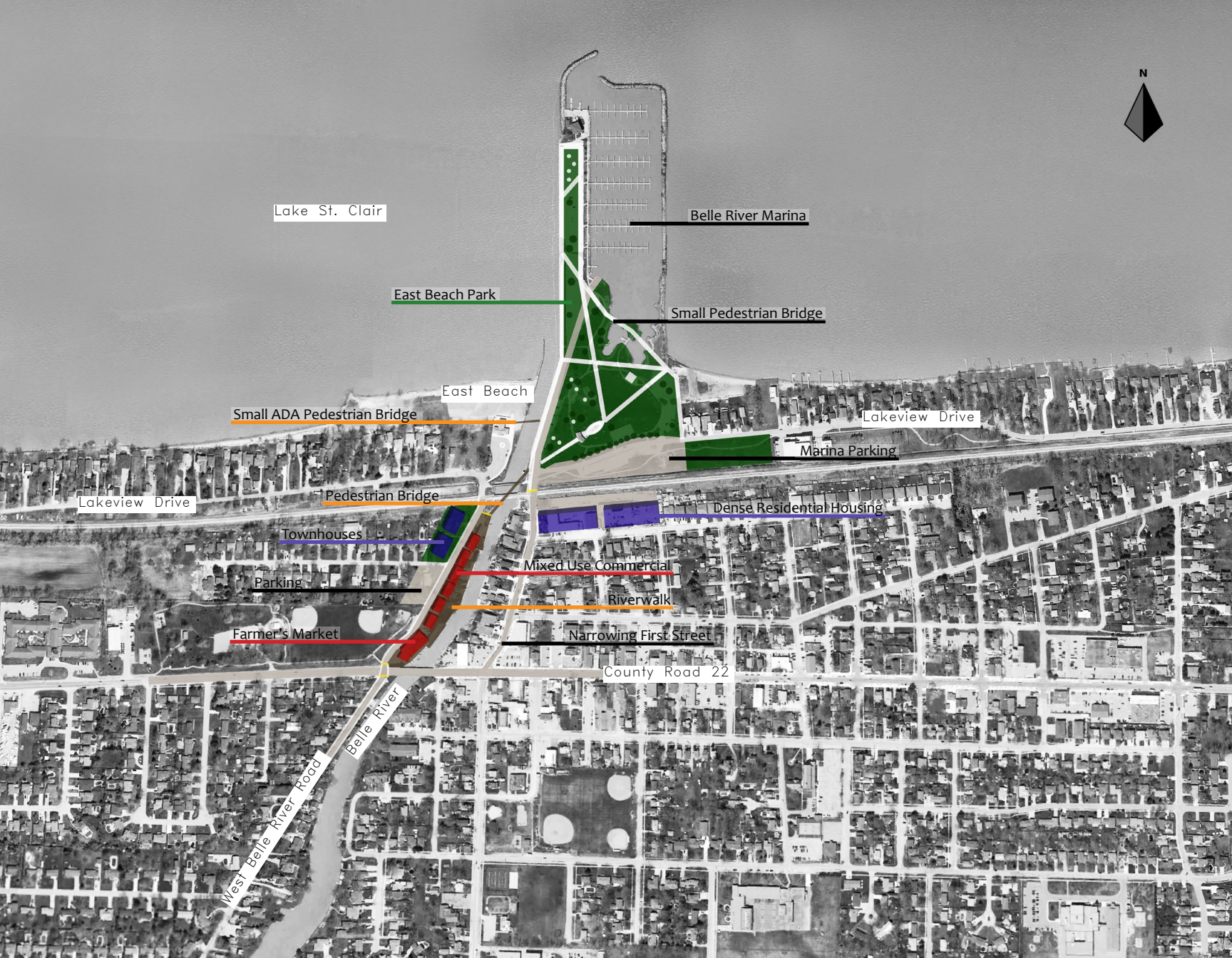


bridge would use the same design elements as the large pedestrian bridge.

Unlike the other aspects of the design intervention, the street furniture would not be located in one spot or area. The street furniture would be used to indicate to people that they are entering a specific district in Belle River. It would work in a similar fashion to the arches in Chicago, which act as a guide to pedestrians to lead them to the boardwalk. It would be strategically based in Belle River to help lead people to the riverfront. The piece would be placed the intersection of West Belle River Road and County Road 22, at the end of the pedestrian bridge, along County Road 22 and Lakeview Drive and at the spot along West Belle River Road where the design intervention will start (see Chapter 8). The design of the street furniture has not yet been designed.

There will also be dense residential housing (either town houses or small apartment buildings) between Lakeview Drive and the train tracks. The area it would be placed in is currently a large expanse of unused grass.





Lake St. Clair

Belle River Marina

East Beach Park

Small Pedestrian Bridge

East Beach

Small ADA Pedestrian Bridge

Lakeview Drive

Marina Parking

Lakeview Drive

Pedestrian Bridge

Dense Residential Housing

Townhouses

Mixed Use Commercial

Parking

Riverwalk





Farmer's Market

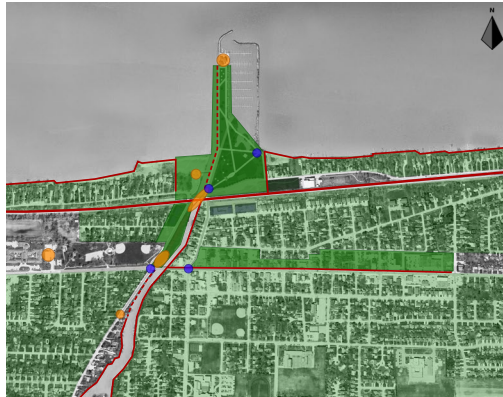
Narrowing First Street

County Road 22

West Belle River Road  
Belle River







- Landmarks 
- Nodes 
- Edge 
- Districts 



Lynch Diagram



Parti Diagram

- Primary Circulation
- Pedestrian Only 
- Vehicular & Pedestrian 
- Secondary Circulation
- Pedestrian Only 
- Vehicular & Pedestrian 



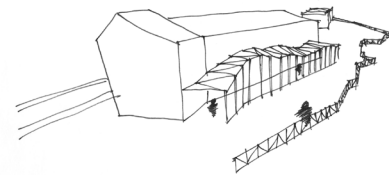
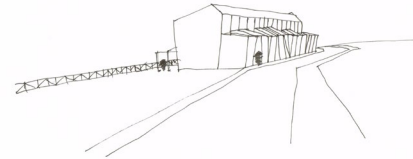
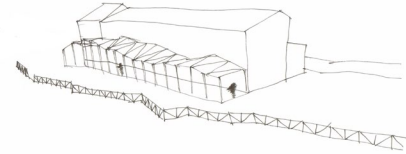
Proposed Circulation

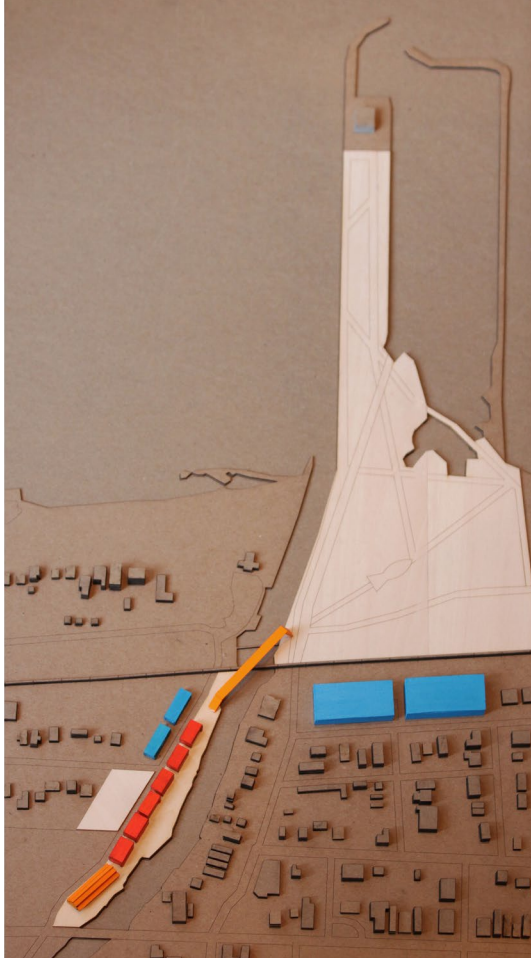


There would also be a small ADA accessible pedestrian bridge connecting the East Beach and the West Beach Park. As with the other small pedestrian bridge, it will also use the same design elements from the large pedestrian bridge.

If this project were to be realised it would be done in phases, as it is not possible for this design to be built all at once. The first area that would be built would be the river walk. The river walk would be built first it would reconnect the residents of Belle River with the waterfront the quickest. The second phase of the project would be redesigning and rebuilding the West Beach Park. This part of the design would also help in reconnecting the town of Belle River with it's waterfront. The third phase would be building the pedestrian bridge that would connect the designs from phases one and two. The final phase of the project would be in introduction of street furniture. This street furniture would be the final step in leading people to the riverfront.

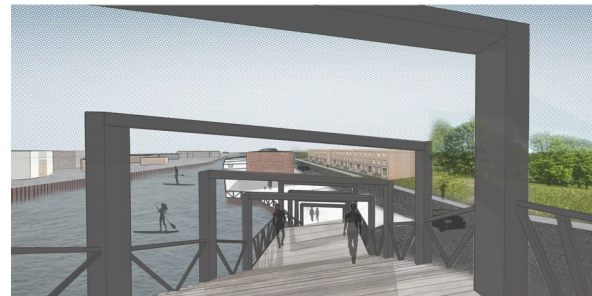
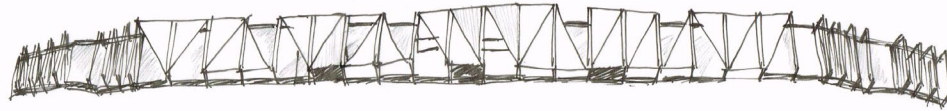






Walkability and pedestrian access is such an important factor in this design because Belle River, much like the City of Windsor, is a car dependent town. In theory Belle River is considered walkable because it only take about 15 minutes to walk from one side of downtown to the other. But according to the Walk Score, there is a range from 0 to 66. Downtown Belle River has Walk Score of 66. This means that the area is considered somewhat walkable and that “some errands can be accomplished on foot,” (Walkscore). For a resident living outside of the downtown area the Walk Score ranged from 0 to 40. This means that the areas outside of downtown are car dependent and that almost/ most errands require a car (Walkscore). Walk Score also included a transit score and bike score, but Belle River does not qualify for either score. This is because there is no public transit in Belle River and there is no bike infrastructure in town. Although cycling has become quite popular in the recent years, the cyclists must bike on the side of the road as there has been no addition of bike lanes.







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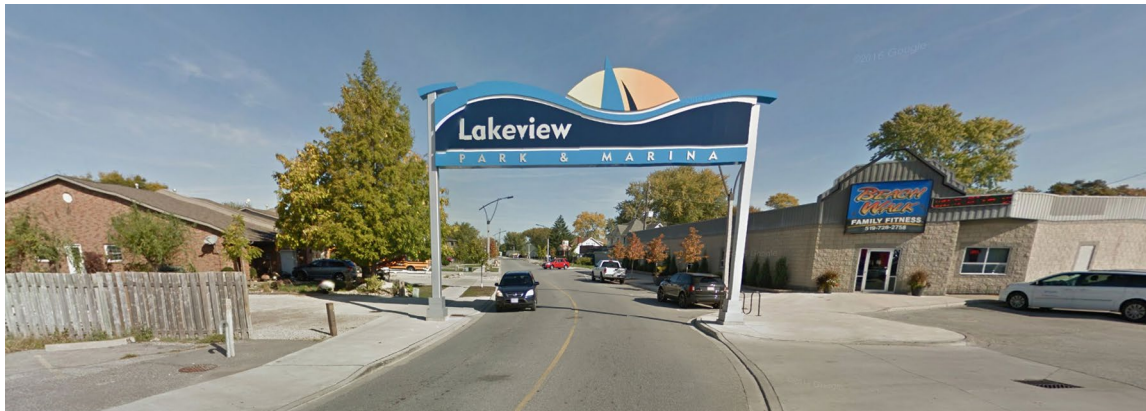
# 11 CONCLUSION

“THE STUDIO IS A LABORATORY, NOT A FACTORY. AN EXHIBITION IS THE RESULT OF YOUR EXPERIMENTS, BUT THE PROCESS IS NEVER-ENDING. SO AN EXHIBITION IS NOT A CONCLUSION.”

- CHRIS OFILI, ARTIST

Through urban design initiatives the town of Belle River could re-identify itself with the waterfront. The addition of an identity to Belle River could increase tourism and could help the locals reconnect with the area. The design intervention would return the waterfront to the citizens.

The design intervention focuses on increasing commercial density, providing accessible spaces that can be used 12 months of the year, increase pedestrian circulation and add identifying features. These are all things that can improve the quality of Belle River. The design would not only give the locals a unique functional space, but also bring in outside people.



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“IF THE PATH BE BEAUTIFUL, LET US NOT ASK WHERE IT LEADS.”

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