



REVIVING SWEETGRASS: RETROSPECTIVE JUSTICE

EXIT STUDIO FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL



CAITLYN VAN DE MEULEBROECKE
FALL 2021 | LARC 4530 KEY ISSUES | MARY G. PADUA, PHD, RLA



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HISTORY OF THE GULLUH/GEECHEE

Gullah/Geechee Origins

The Gullah/Geechee culture emerged from the enslavement of Africans and their forced migration to America. Since slaves were taken from various regions of West Africa, they came from a multitude of different cultures and “eventually common institutions and a synthesized new creole (but still very West African) culture and language – now known as Gullah/Geechee – emerged on these isolated island and coastal plantations” (Hodges). The Gullah/Geechee were essential to the agricultural economy of the American South, not only because of the free labor that they provided but also because of the knowledge of rice production that they brought with them from their homelands.

Emergence of Sweetgrass Baskets

Basket weaving is a West African tradition that was primarily used to create baskets called fanners that served to winnow the rice collected on plantations. These original Gullah/Geechee baskets were commonly woven by men and were made with Black Rush (*Juncus roemerianus*), a more durable material, rather than sweetgrass. Sweetgrass was eventually introduced into basket weaving due to its flexibility and more pleasing visual aesthetic when baskets began to be created for more of a decorative function (Sweetgrass Baskets). The Gullah community started making decorative baskets in the early 1900s to be sold for profit during the various economic depressions that plagued the South during that time (Hart). In the 1930s, sweetgrass basket stands began to pop up along the then newly built Highway 17 in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. The selling of baskets at these stands served as a source of income for African American women in which they could be independent and have control over their businesses at a low cost, creating a level of freedom in stark contrast to the bondages their close ancestors had faced (Rosengarten). This was important in a time when racism was commonplace in the South, resulting in limited job opportunities for African Americans that were often undignified and low-paying. Since this time, the sweetgrass basket stands have become an important cultural landscape along the now bustling highway, reminding passersby of the Gullah culture that once thrived in this area.



→ Black Rush Fanner Basket (1840-1860)
[Source: Gund Gallery]



→ Sweetgrass Basket (1970)
[Source: Gund Gallery]

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THE ISSUE

The Gullah/Geechee community is an important part of Charleston County's heritage and has helped to shape the rich culture present in the area. One of the most notable additions to the cultural landscape is the sweetgrass baskets that are sold at stands that line Highway 17, at the Historic Charleston City Market, the Four Corners of Law, and in other areas throughout Downtown Charleston and Mount Pleasant. Unfortunately, the art of sweetgrass basket weaving has been endangered by the loss of sweetgrass habitat as a result of increased development in the surrounding area. Even where sweetgrass does still grow, harvesters are often unable to access the plant due to private land ownership. Seabrook, Fripp, Hilton Head, and Debordieu islands have historically had an abundance of sweetgrass, but now “resorts and private neighborhoods dominate all four of these islands, restricting access to remaining sweetgrass habitats” (Grabbatin). As a result, sweetgrass basket weavers have had to buy sweetgrass from collectors rather than collect it themselves. In a survey of basket weavers, 78% responded that they had purchased sweetgrass from collectors (Hart). Purchasing sweetgrass from a collector is often expensive and contributes to higher basket prices that are already seen as expensive to tourists.

There have been some attempts at increasing the availability of sweetgrass to be harvested by basket makers. Many basket makers collect at a hunting club located near Hardeeville during its off-season in the summer. There is a formal arrangement between the basket weavers and property owners in which harvesters must obtain permits to access the property and collect there (Grabbatin). This is a system that seems to work well, but is limiting in that Hardeeville is 95 miles away from Charleston County, where the greatest proportion of basket makers are located. There is a similar arrangement at Dewees Island, where restoration efforts of sweetgrass have occurred. Karl Ohlandt, who has been leading restoration efforts, has helped support basket maker access through his research that harvesting sweetgrass actually supports its growth (Grabbatin). While this has been an asset to growers, the amount of sweetgrass it provides is not enough to sustain the basket weavers in Charleston. Another strategy has been to allow sweetgrass basket weavers to harvest cultivated sweetgrass in more ornamental landscaped settings, but this sweetgrass is of a much lower quality as a result of fertilization (Hurley). Some basket weavers have even attempted to grow sweetgrass in their own backyards, but due to limited space the sweetgrass produced is minimal and does not nearly meet the needs of the weavers (Hurley). Even with these sources of sweetgrass, there is still a need for greater accessibility of sweetgrass for basket weavers. These strategies could likely be learned from and expanded upon.

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Beyond the accessibility of sweetgrass, there is also the issue of where sweetgrass baskets are sold. The historic location of selling from stands off of Highway 17 has become increasingly more difficult with the recent widening of the highway. The creation of a curb where there was otherwise a direct transition from pavement to grass, as well as the increased speed limit, makes it harder for buyers to pull off at the stands. Furthermore, the 57 basket stands that are not within the Sweetgrass Basket Overlay District are unprotected and must negotiate with property owners to allow their stands to remain (Hurley). These factors are endangering both the economic viability of selling sweetgrass baskets and the preservation of the stands as a historical and cultural marker. Another key selling location, Charleston City Market, allows sweetgrass basket sellers to lease a spot for a reduced fee. This provides a place with high tourist traffic, but is not accessible to any basket weaver as spots are limited and some are unable to travel easily from where they live in Mount Pleasant to Downtown Charleston. The City of Mount Pleasant has attempted to provide an alternative selling node with the creation of the Sweetgrass Basket Pavilion. The Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival Association leases the pavilion space out to sweetgrass basket sellers. Sweetgrass basket weavers have been critical of this arrangement in that they must be a member of SCAFA in order to lease out the space, and that the location does not attract many tourists and has no visibility from a major road like the traditional basket stands do. It is clear that an alternative selling site or improvements to the accessibility of the basket stands along 17 would be beneficial to basket weavers.

It is disheartening that with the negative impact that development has had on the sweetgrass basket weavers and the positive impact that weavers have had on the cultural identity of the Southeast that there has not been better attempts at commemorating this group of people and their past. Previous means of commemorating this culture have held little meaning, such as sites being named after the sweetgrass that they have destroyed or placing a sweetgrass basket sculpture in the middle of a shopping development. Sweetgrass basket weavers should be honored for their craft in a more meaningful and genuine way.



↳ Harvesting at the Hardeeville hunting club
[Photographer: Pete Marovich]



↳ Sweetgrass basket stand along Hwy 17
[Source: Google Earth]

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DESIGN PRECEDENTS

1 John Chavis Memorial Park | Surface 678

The John Chavis Memorial Park was originally created to appease separate but equal laws that after the Civil Rights Act became obsolete. As a result, funding for the park diminished and the park eventually fell to ruin. Plans to tear the park down and build an aquatic center led to community members leading a push to revitalize the park and commemorate its past (Napier).

Takeaways → This is a prime example of using community engagement to implement retrospective justice. To truly create a site that is meaningful to the community requires extensive community engagement. In this example, the community members knew much more about the park's past than those on city council, making them a vital resource in creating the new park design.



[Source: City of Raleigh]

2 International African American Museum | Hood Design Studios

The International African American Museum memorializes the slaves that passed through Gadsden's Wharf with the implementation of a memorial garden and water feature. The water feature consists of full sized outlines of bodies in the arrangement they would be in on a slave ship, a clear visual of the tragic events that occurred on the site (Mock). The design also includes a small sweetgrass field that basket weavers could potentially harvest from.

Takeaways → Cultural landscapes should acknowledge its past in a way that is meaningful and creates an experience for those visiting it. The past, no matter how dark, should be presented in a way that is truthful but still sensitive to those who were impacted. Even at a small scale, sweetgrass can be included in a design to both honor its cultural significance and serve as a resource for the basket weaving community.



[Source: Hood Design Studios]

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DESIGN GOALS

Retrospective Justice

My overall goal with this project is to provide the Gullah/Geechee community with retrospective justice for the negative impacts that development has had on their cultural practices, and for the horrors that their ancestors faced when enslaved. To do so, there are multiple goals that I would like to achieve with my site(s):

1 Help to preserve the practice of sweetgrass basket weaving

I hope to mitigate the effects of development by making sweetgrass once more easily accessible to harvest. This can be done by creating a system of sites that fall under one program that would manage the harvesting of the sweetgrass to allow for equitable distribution across interest groups. These sweetgrass fields could be located on private lands in which agreements with property owners would be made, as well as public lands funded in part by local governments or national funding through the association of the sites with the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. My project will focus on how these sites should be selected based on various criteria.

Another issue plaguing the sweetgrass basket weaving community is the ability to sell sweetgrass baskets in locations that are easily accessible to tourists and affordable for the sellers. Along with selecting a series of harvesting sites, I intend to specifically focus on the design of a key site that would provide sweetgrass to be harvested but would also be a destination for locals and tourists, and as such could be an ideal location for selling sweetgrass baskets.

2 Honor the Gullah/Geechee culture and its past

Another aspect of the primary site that I will be designing will be to commemorate and memorialize the art and culture of sweetgrass baskets and the weavers that create them. This will allow the project to go beyond just giving back what was taken from the Gullah culture and show that the community has a respect and appreciation for the impact that these people have had on the Southeast. The form of this "memorial" will be inspired by Walter Hood's design of the International African American Museum in that it will create a meaningful experience for those viewing it rather than just being something to look at. To determine what would be the most meaningful to the Gullah community, community engagement will play a significant role in determining what this space will look like.

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3 Create a sense of community across different cultures

The system of harvesting sites, and especially the more central site I will be designing, have the capability to not only be places targeted towards the Gullah/Geechee community, but can also be an opportunity to bring together diverse groups of people. I envision the act of harvesting the sweetgrass to be an educational opportunity, as well as a method by which the community can give back to the Gullah/Geechee by volunteering their time and labor towards helping them collect material for their baskets. This could be manifested through school programs, coordinating with service groups, or even an annual harvesting festival. The central site will have educational programming to help people better understand the Gullah/Geechee culture and provide a space to celebrate this culture and allow diverse groups to interact with one another and repair the divisions caused by the past.

I believe that with the successful implementation of these three goals that my design will have a significant positive impact on the sweetgrass basket weavers and the surrounding community as a whole.



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SWEETGRASS HABITAT AND CHARACTERISTICS

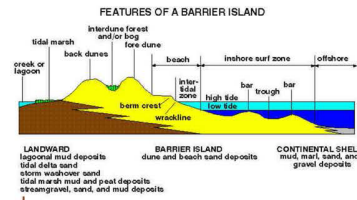
To determine locations for harvesting sites, it is important to have an understanding of sweetgrass (*Muhlenbergia filipes*) and its habitat and growing requirements.

Habitat

Sweetgrass (*Muhlenbergia filipes*) is native to the Southeast. It can be found in maritime wet grasslands, which includes interdunes and back dunes on a beach, marsh edges, and barrier islands. This plant thrives in wet, sandy soils in full sun (Sea Islands Germplasm Sweetgrass).



Location of back dune
[Source: Utrecht University]



Location of back & interdune on barrier island
[Creators: Phil Stoffer and Paula Messina]

Characteristics

- Harvested from May to August
- Flowers from mid-September to late October
- Blades become brown and brittle after flowering
- Seed collected between Thanksgiving and Christmas
- Cut plants nearly to the ground in late winter to encourage fresh new growth
- Takes 2 to 3 years before the "threads" are of reasonable length and strength to use in baskets
- Requires fires to keep other plants from taking over
- Fertilized sweetgrass creates blades of lesser quality



Sweetgrass in the fall
[Source: NC State]

SITE SCOPE

The scope of my project will consist of a larger scale analysis of sweetgrass harvesting sites as well as a more in-depth design of a particular site. My scope focuses on the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor since sweetgrass basket weaving is a practice that is very specific to that cultural landscape. Furthermore, The Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor's purpose is to recognize Gullah/Geechee contributions to the United States, help interpret the story of the Gullah/Geechee and preserve Gullah/Geechee folklore, arts, crafts, & music, and aid in preserving sites, historical data, artifacts, and objects associated with the Gullah/Geechee culture for the benefit and education of the public (Gullah Geechee). These goals align with the goals of the project and so the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission could potentially play a role in the selected sites. Some cities in particular are popular areas for sweetgrass basket weavers to reside in which I have noted below. In selecting sites, I will be prioritizing these cities and their surrounding areas so that sweetgrass basket weavers can have easier access to the sites.



Nodes of sweetgrass basket weavers along the Gullah Geechee Corridor
[Base map from the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor]

The primary site that I will be designing will be located in the Charleston area due to its particular prominence of sweetgrass basket weavers and historical significance. My hope is that I will be able to find a site in Charleston that has an existing historical or ecological amenity in order to draw in more visitors to experience and engage with the Gullah culture.

NEXT STEPS

Interviews with Sweetgrass Basket Weavers

I intend to conduct informal interviews with basket sellers at stands along Highway 17, the City Market, the Four Corners of Law, and the Sweetgrass Basket Pavilion. Through these interviews I would like to determine:

1. The sweetgrass supply needs of the Gullah community
 - Quantity of sweetgrass needed to sustain the basket weaver community
 - Frequency/specific times that are ideal for sweetgrass to be harvested
 - Any locations that are known by the community that have existing sweetgrass populations that would be beneficial to have access to
 - Mobility of sweetgrass basket weavers to access sites
2. How sweetgrass basket weavers can be meaningfully commemorated
 - Significant aspects of history/culture that should be acknowledged
 - Other forms of memorializing beyond a static plaque that they feel would be meaningful
3. Additional methods of providing retrospective justice that they envision
 - Programming or design elements that would benefit sweetgrass basket weavers

GIS Site Selection

Based off of the following factors that I have determined for my site, as well as new information gained from the interviews with basket weavers, I will conduct a suitability analysis to identify potential sites in GIS.

- Parcel Size: At least 50 AC for primary site, at least 10 AC for satellite sites
- Primary Soil Type: Sandy
- Ecology: Maritime wet grassland
- Accessibility: Proximity to basket weavers/location in relation to bus routes

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EXIT STUDIO PROPOSAL

Reconnecting The West End Greenville, SC



Photo: Upstate Business Journal



Photo: Loopnet



Photo: Visit Greenville



Photo: Visit Greenville

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Topics of Study

Urban Regeneration

Adaptive reuse and regeneration projects that aim to breathe new life into neighborhoods and open spaces, activating disused sites into active areas that respond to urban life today. I believe the topic of urban regeneration to be exceedingly important in the growing and expanding world we live in today. Studying and finding new ways of connecting people in cities to green space is a huge side of landscape architecture that is only becoming more prevalent as more people move towards these quickly growing urban areas. Urban regeneration not only concerns the landscape, but also the health of people and our planet. I believe there is a strong need to protect the environment in these areas through urban design that connects the landscape back to its natural form.

Social Equity

Social equity: "...impartiality, fairness and justice for all people in social policy. Social equity takes into account systemic inequalities to ensure everyone in a community has access to the same opportunities and outcomes. Equity of all kinds acknowledges that inequalities exist and works to eliminate them" (Unitedwaynca.org). The social scene is not just our country, but all around the world, is a constant topic of discussion. I believe that all people have the right to the same experiences and opportunities. In our country, minority populations are often being neglected when it comes to the amount of greenspace and aesthetic landscapes available around their homes. They are also often pushed out of their living spaces due to gentrification when the areas around them are given design attention. I think this is a huge problem in the US today, and finding ways to reconnect these people to greenspaces and to bustling and nice areas in and around their cities is extremely important. Landscape architects have the ability to help with this issue, and make everyone feel included and equal through design.

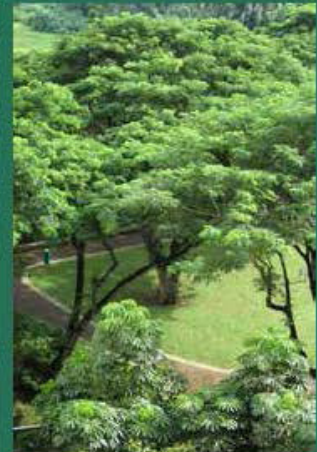
Reclaiming Natural Ecology

The process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. Reclaiming the natural ecology of an area is about ecologically-based land planning, design restoration, and management. It is creating functional and resilient landscapes that address landscape and ecosystem health. This is an important subject to consider when planning and designing landscapes, especially around cities. Natural areas are hard to find in many urban areas, and claiming degraded parts of cities to bring back to their natural health can help the overall resilience of the city and positively influence both the people and the planet.

Design Precedents / Case Studies

From Slums to Sky Gardens

Singapore



Photos: The Field ASLA blog

Overview:

Proposed "sky gardens" to keep people on higher floors connected to nature. The sky gardens have landscaped areas and facilities including playgrounds with children's play structures, adult fitness equipment, and seating areas so the different generations (and races) can interact, and parents or grandparents can supervise the children

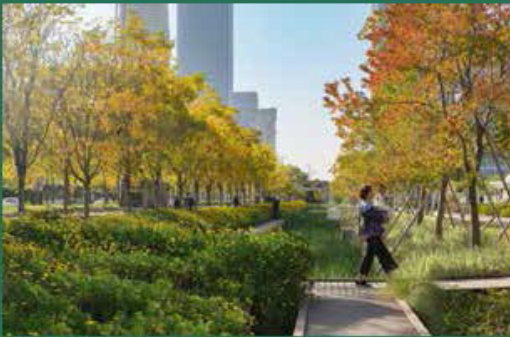
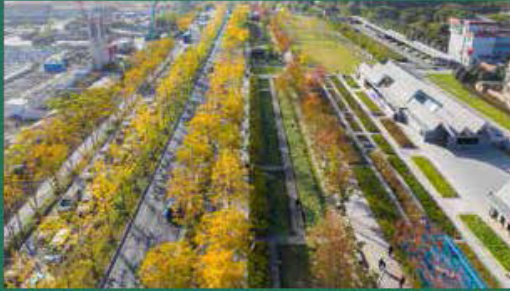
Features:

- Accessibility and inclusion of all ages
- Open greenspace
- Finding unusual areas to implement green
- Play and health equipment
- Programming
- Stimulation of economy
- Housing for all

"...there was also an increasing awareness of the importance of landscape architecture to the environment and to people's well-being"

Xuhui Runway Park

Shanghai



Photos: Sasaki



Overview:

Catalyst for the urban regeneration of Shanghai's Xuhui Riverfront District, public realm in former industrial district, series of linear spaces for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians creates one interconnected sequence. Provides recreational space for nearby office workers, students, and residents and offers respite from busy city life.

Features:

- Programming and Social Equity: public transit, bicycle use, accessibility, community recreation
- Stormwater mitigation
- Habitat creation, material preservation and reuses
- Environmental Sustainability
- Context Sensitive Design

"The runway of modern life..."

Park System Plan

Dallas, TX



Photos: The Field ASLA blog

Overview:

A long-range development plan that was founded upon a vision for Dallas to have one of the premier park and recreation systems in the United States. Yet, the scarcity of available land downtown called for innovative thinking and reclamation of urban land in order to achieve this vision.

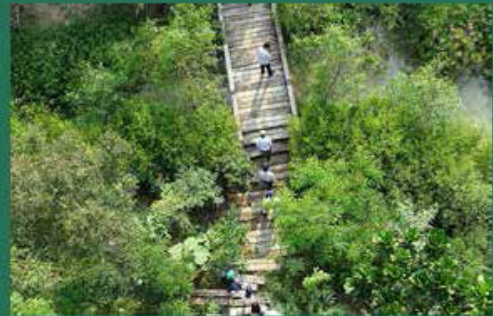
Features:

- Add greater value to the city's context
- Promoting healthy and viable places to live for a growing and changing population
- Economic value
- Social value
- Environmental value

"A Renaissance Plan for its park system.."

The Metro Forest Project

Thailand



Photos: ASLA



Overview:

Ecological regeneration project designed to cultivate environmental awareness and educate on local ecology. An abandoned site, aimed to reclaim 4.75 acres of land and reverse the trends of suburban sprawl, urban heat island, and flood-prone developments through native and introduced lowland species.

Features:

- Forest canopy of multiple layers that will look for the forest to manage itself
- History and context analysis
- Planting for succession
- Low maintenance
- Diverse ecology
- Rejuvenate people and place

"A forest in the city"

Case Study Takeaways

- Nature-based solutions showcased in these projects are replicable
- Think about the connection between people and the natural environment
- Landscapes can be low maintenance, and flourish by themselves
- Think about how to save the most amount of space for green while still being functional to the city and people
- Think about user groups and different types of programming
- Resident and visitor experiences are both important to consider
- Mix of stopping and walking places are good to consider
- Open, safe-feeling environments in cities are important
- Think about gateways and how to welcome people in

Taking the Case Study to a Project

Questions to Answer

- Who is this project going to affect? What are their needs and wants?
- What is the native environment of the region? What plants are going to help and not hinder this environment?
- What is the most sustainable, effective, functional, and aesthetic design for this space?

Design Goals

- Create a healthy environment for people and for the environment
- Focus on inclusion, social equity, and avoiding gentrification
- Make an accessible environment for residents and visitors
- Create something that is eye catching and interesting while still being full functional and useful

Project Overview

Reconnecting The West End Pendleton Road Streetscape Design + Nodes Greenville, SC



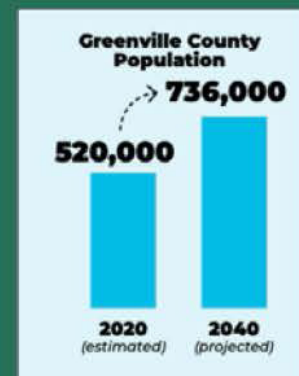
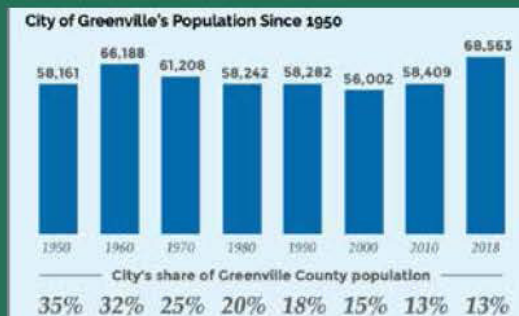
Photo: SC Picture Project



Photo: Greenville Journal

City of Greenville, SC

Greenville is a very quickly growing city in the upstate of South Carolina. It is known for its beauty, programming, and hospitable nature. The downtown portion of Greenville is the most well known and visited part of town, including the famous "Falls Park". The Downtown itself was designed by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin and is a very beautiful and effective design that many people enjoy walking through. However, Some of the streets connecting other residents into the downtown are far less beautiful and not nearly as inviting or safe for pedestrians as other parts of downtown. The city is only expected to grow more, and the amount of people traveling by car is exponential. There is also currently a loss of greenspace due to expansion.



Primary Means of Travel to Work for Greenville Residents

	2000	2010	2017
Drove alone	71.4%	77.3%	80.9%
Carpooled	14.0%	8.0%	7.7%
Public transit	1.1%	1.0%	1.2%
Walked	7.8%	7.7%	3.6%
Bicycle	0.2%	0.3%	0.7%
Worked at home	2.4%	4.8%	4.6%

The city's tree canopy coverage is reduced almost proportionately to the amount of new development

The road network's capacity to absorb further growth will diminish over the next 20 years

NODES

In the context of GVL2040, a node is an area that evolves over the next 20 years into a **mixed-use community hub** that features housing (some of it with income-restrictions to achieve affordability goals), employment opportunities, and a wide variety of retail, services, and community functions.

Photos: GVL.gov

Greenville's West End

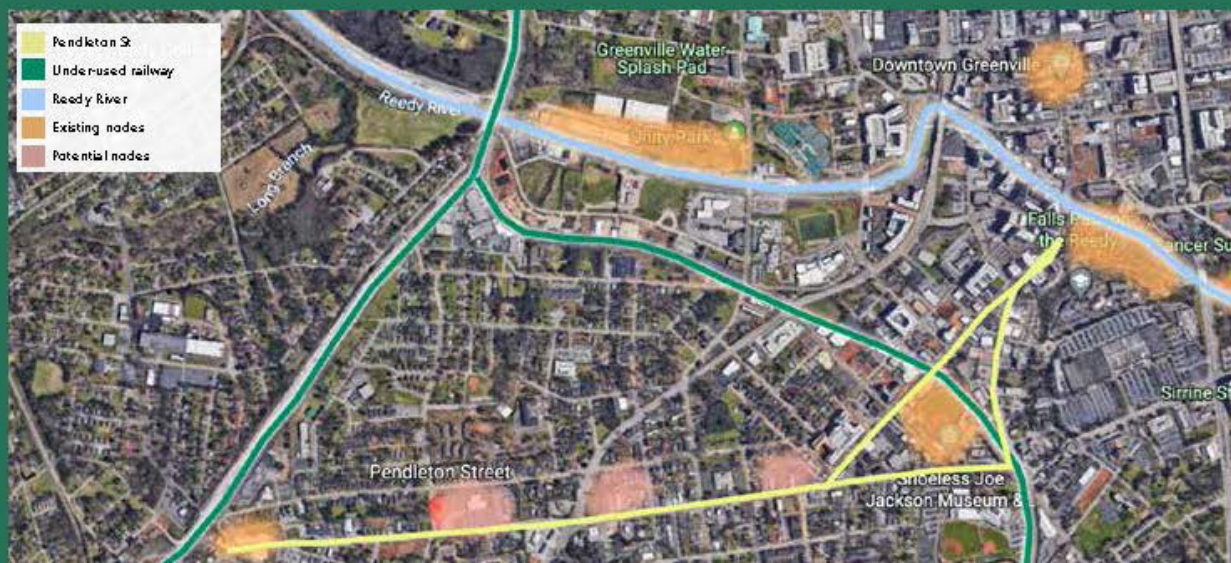
The West End of Greenville is located on the western side of downtown. It is a historically African American area, and has been a prevalent part of the city for the past decades. This area was established as a historic district in 1993. Commercial development accelerated here after the Civil War; Cotton and fertilizer warehouses and other commercial activities sprang up, and the West End was a thriving commercial district (second in importance to downtown). Right now, it is described as: "The submarket with the greatest concentration of low-income residents, West Side faces challenges of providing quality affordable housing, and has the opportunity to leverage its location near downtown" (greenvillesc.gov). This area is slowly becoming overrun by richer individuals who want to be close to downtown, and the minority populations that have lived here for decades are being forced out. The median household income for black residents in West Greenville and Southern side is less than half of the city at-large. Southern side and West Greenville's numbers also hide racial inequalities. The average white household in those areas earns three times more than its Black counterpart. I want to focus on reconnecting these people with the area, and providing a safer streetscape that better connects the West End to downtown through the use of nodes, better transportation options, and more sustainable living.



Photos: GVL.gov

Pendleton Street Connections

Pendleton Street is one of the roadways that connects from the West End into Downtown Greenville. This street has great potential for a design that better connects pedestrians in a safer way to the center of town. It also has the potential for new nodes along the way that can limit the need to go all the way into the city, and pull some of the pressure off of the city for housing and programming space. Its current condition is lack-luster and new improvements could really benefit this area and is an opportunity to extend the beauty of Downtown Greenville.

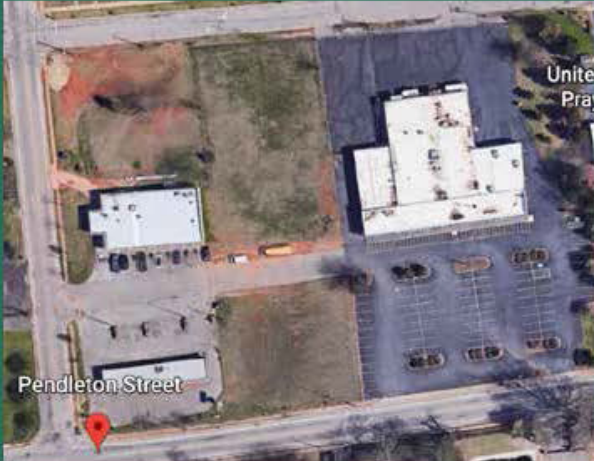


Map: original

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Potential Nodes

I have selected three potential nodes along Pendleton Street as you approach the heart of downtown. These nodes will serve as stopping places with programming that can limit the need to go into downtown, and provide opportunities for residents of the area and visitors alike.



1

- Potential for low income housing
- Closest to western-most existing node
- Potential for added greenspace / community garden



2

- Potential for park and open space development
- Old underused architecture that can be repurposed or removed
- Potential for added greenspace



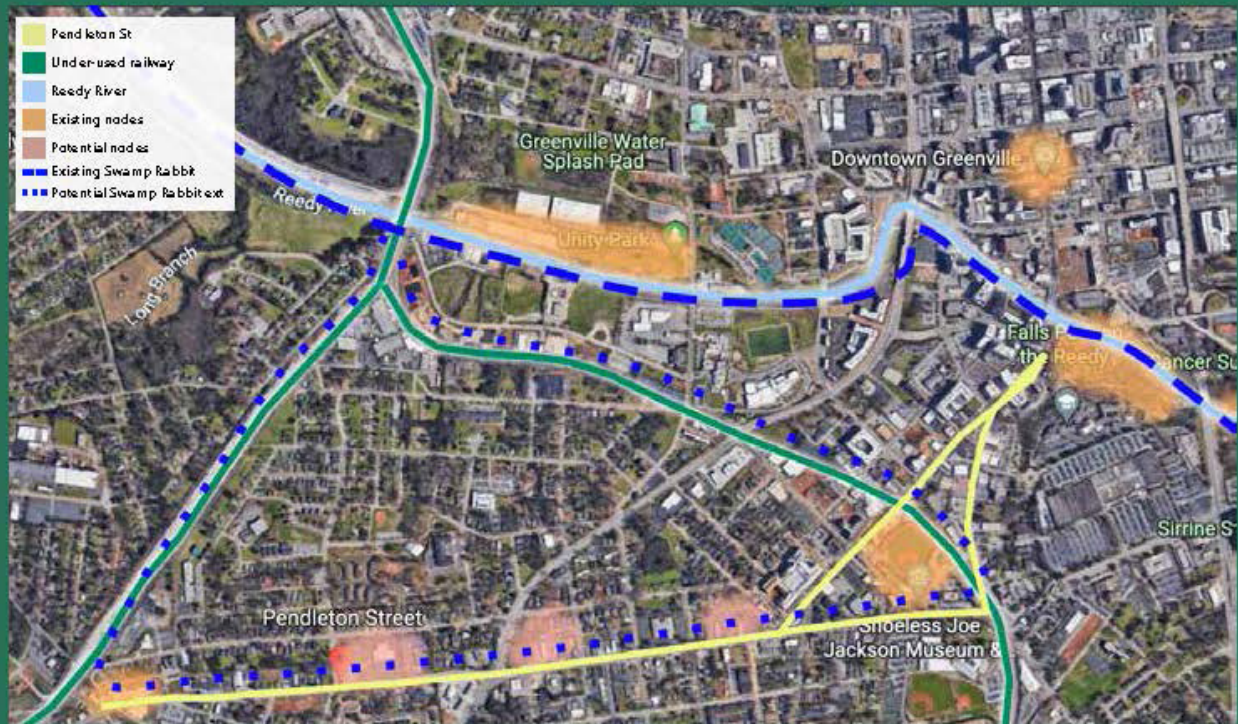
3

- Potential for amenities, retail, community hub
- Potential to be a new gateway from West End into downtown

Photos: Google Earth

Swamp Rabbit Trail Connections

There is also potential to connect Pendleton Street to the existing Swamp Rabbit Trail, which is a greenway system that already runs through downtown Greenville but does not currently connect as well directly to the West End. This extension could be important for encouraging bike and pedestrian transportation in the area.



Map: original



Photo: Greenville Journal



Photo: Prisma Health

Existing Conditions of Pendleton Street



Photos: Google Earth

Key Issues to Address

- Social and environmental equity
- Displacement of people
- Historical significance
- Vacant, underutilized land
- Transportation
- Lacking public green areas
- Places for connection

Strategies to Consider

- Survey of the areas affected
- Opinions of the people affected
- Research needs of the citizens and visitors
- Research programming that can provide opportunities that will limit the need to go downtown
- Research social inequity and ways it can be overcome through design
- Look into low-income housing and landscape design strategies
- Research community engagement strategies and programs
- Visit the site both driving and walking
- Research day and nightlife of the area

First Steps

- Plan out an in-depth timeline of research needs
- Visit the site
- Plan out the analysis phase and what will be most helpful for design
- Research more case studies similar to the project
- Break down key issues and how to solve them

Summary

Overall, the people of the West End deserve a safer, more beautiful landscape strategy to better connect them into the heart of downtown Greenville. Many of these people have special connections to this area, and should be given a way to ensure that they can stay here where their families have lived for generations. This design will serve as a way to limit the amount of people downtown and provide programming that extends the functionality of the city into the outskirts of Greenville. It will benefit the health of the citizens and the environment and serve as a connection between people and place, people and their community, and people and nature. This road has already been highlighted by the City of Greenville as a space that needs attention, and I think that should begin right now. Both for the people of Greenville and for the environment. Downtown Greenville is a beautiful and welcoming area which is one of the main reasons it attracts so many people. This beauty and functionality can be extended to connect and include people from the western portion of the city.



Photo: GVLtoday

Project Timeline

JANUARY

- Begin gathering data for site analysis
- Research the area and its history more in-depth
- Research the existing design of downtown Greenville for precedent
- Look into existing conditions

FEBRUARY

- Visit the site (driving and walking)
- Compile analysis into more concrete data
- Make maps and diagrams about the existing conditions
- Translate this information into thoughts about conceptual design
- Compare the collected data with case studies

MARCH

- Create conceptual designs
- Choose a specific design and begin developing it
- Finalize design and begin creating supporting documentation

APRIL

- Work on perspectives, sections, diagrams, and mapping
- Put final boards together

MAY

- Present information and final design

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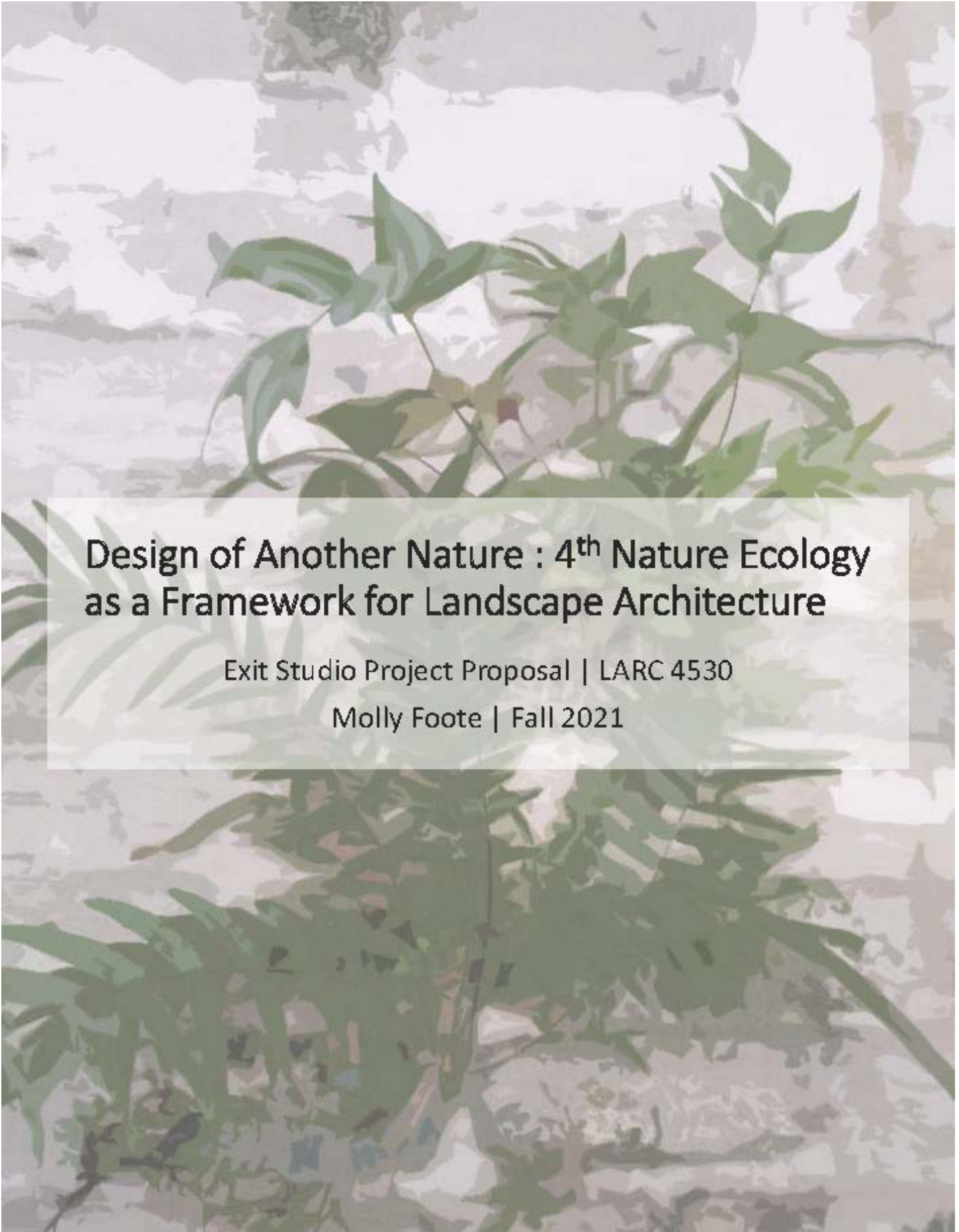
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Design of Another Nature : 4th Nature Ecology as a Framework for Landscape Architecture

Exit Studio Project Proposal | LARC 4530

Molly Foote | Fall 2021

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4th Nature

When people move on or leave a space unmanaged, nature will begin to find its way back into the area. This new ecology is not pre-human 1st nature or economically streamlined 2nd nature or artistic 3rd nature. Instead, it is something entirely unprecedented- the succession of both native and introduced plant communities and animals which return a feeling of 'wild' to the space. Unfortunately, this 4th nature ecology can be cast in a negative light. Especially due to the recent resurgence of native species in planting design, many nonnative plants have come to be seen as damaging to native ecosystems. While it is true that some nonnative plants are invasive species which outcompete native plants and establish unmanageable monocultures, some nonnative plants are harmless or even beneficial to their host environment. Researching the balance and succession of these emerging 4th nature plant communities is necessary to understand how to design resilient, self-sufficient, and sustainable landscapes which account for future.

Site Restoration

4th nature is synonymously linked with abandoned landscapes such as grayfields and brownfields. These post-commercial and post-industrial sites are hotspots for the emergence of 4th nature when left unmaintained. They also have great potential as restored attractions for the surrounding community since they are usually associated with the local history and economy. However, there are several hurdles which must be overcome in designing grayfields and brownfields. These sites are typically laden with chemicals and materials from built structures, pavement, waste, or industrial processes. While plants are often used in planting designs to pull toxins from the soil and prevent water pollution, the altered soil quality will affect which native or introduced plant species are able to grow at the site.

Temporality in Succession

The relationship of time and succession in natural landscapes is another theme which must be considered in 4th nature design. Landscape architecture is unique in the world of design in that the 'finished product' is never truly finished. Landscapes are constantly growing, changing, and adapting, even under the watchful eye of those doing the design or maintenance. Integrating succession into a long-term design may provide some temporary semblance of control but in the end, nature will always outpace the designer. This proves even more true for 4th nature ecology, which revolves around the succession of new, hybrid plant communities. Understanding and allowing for the eventual takeover of natural succession in design will be key in 4th nature landscape architecture

Project Type

The project will be research-focused and develop a loose instructional approach to designing with 4th nature which will then be utilized in several site designs. Given that 4th nature is an emerging concept in landscape architecture, the project will be heavily focused on research in the initial stages. This research will be oriented towards understanding plant communities within the local region, as well as the introduced species which intermingle with native plants at 4th nature sites. Visiting various sites to study 4th nature in the field will also add another dimension of information to the process. Once an understanding of 4th nature plant communities is reached, the next step will be to develop a loose, instructional approach to designing for 4th nature. Since few projects exist which expressly use 4th nature in the design, establishing a general approach to this design method is crucial. Lastly, this researched approach will be applied to several sites of varying type and scale.

Project Goals

In the end, there are several outcomes anticipated for this project. The first goal is to build a solid foundation of research into 4th nature, both in how it has been used in landscape architecture and in how it occurs naturally in abandoned or wild landscapes. The second goal is to use this research to design a loosely standardized approach or 'kit of parts' for incorporating 4th nature into landscape architecture. The final goal is to display the validity of this approach through several example sites and designs.

Project Challenges

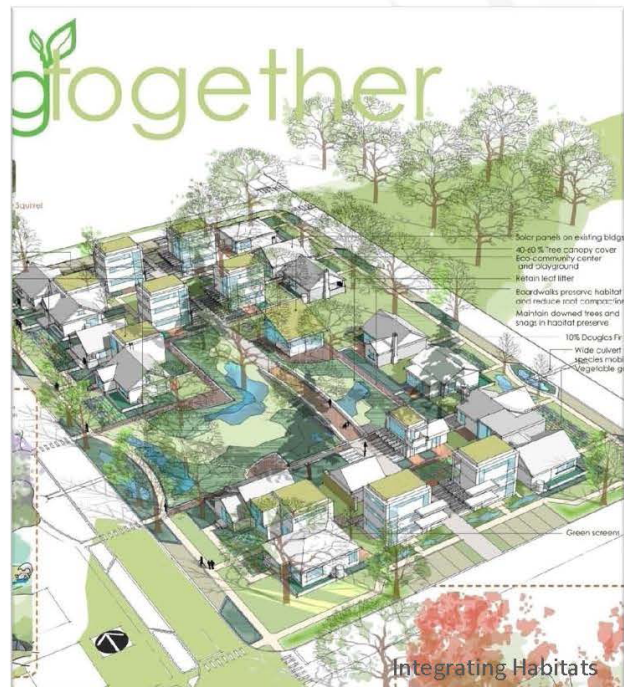
. Some foreseeable challenges for this project arise from the lack of existing data or research on 4th nature plant communities, especially in the specific region of South Carolina where the research will be focused. With so little information, it is difficult to foresee how the resulting data will affect the plan for designing and showcasing standard guidelines for 4th nature design. This holds the unfortunate potential for a sunk cost of time, only to pivot the concept later to better utilize the research results. Another challenge will be keeping the design and concept tight and focused. The broad and virtually unexplored field of 4th nature holds many related concepts, such as ecological restoration, its relationship to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd nature, combatting harmful invasives, agriculture, patch and corridor, cultural and historical landscapes, and much more. While the project may come to include some of the themes, trying to address every issue will end up stretching the final project until it is frayed and full of holes.

Case Studies

There are a couple of case studies which provide precedence for site selection based on the project type and approach. The first project is Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, a post-industrial park which was designed by Latz+Partner. One of few projects which embraces 4th nature in its design, the large-scale design contrasts aging structures with newly emerging plant growth to create an exciting cultural space. This design displays the value and success of brownfield sites for 4th nature design. The second project is a concept called "Integrating Habitats: 'Growing Together'" by AECOM. This project shows how a standardized approach to ecological design can be incorporated into small, residential neighborhoods. Similarly, 4th nature can expand beyond post-commercial and post-industrial sites to include residential sites, where nonnative and introduced species are more diverse and abundant.



Landschaftspark



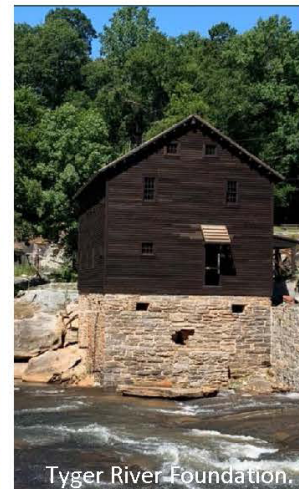
Integrating Habitats

Site Typology and Selection

Ideally, several different sites of varying scales and typologies will be selected as examples for this project. Creating several small designs across different sites, from larger brownfield and grayfield sites to smaller residential projects, from physical to theoretical, will showcase the widespread potential of 4th nature. At the same time, the project sites will be selected from the same region, the upstate of South Carolina, so that research can remain focused on the same general bioregion and plant communities.

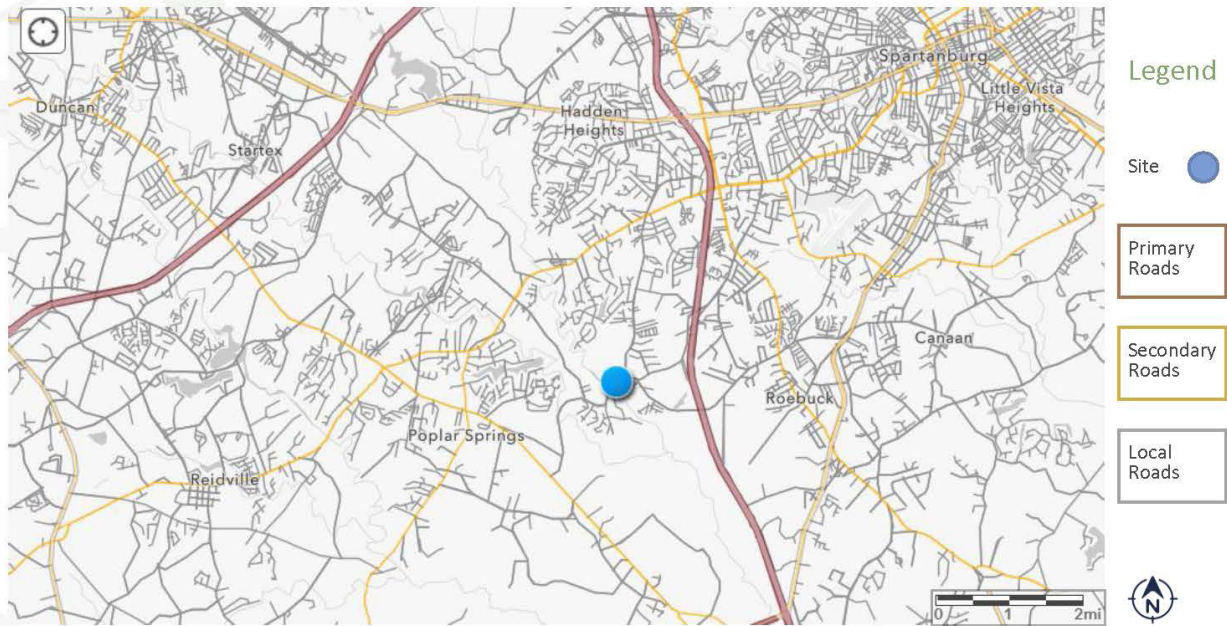
Anderson's Old Grist Mill

One potential site for the implementation stage of this project is Anderson's Old Grist Mill in Spartanburg, SC (not to be confused with the many mills in Anderson, SC). According to historical records, this mill is oldest of its kind in South Carolina with its foundations still intact. Located near the city of Spartanburg on North Tyger River, this mill stayed operational for many years, changing hands and names several times. It is also the 1785 court setting of the "birthplace of Spartanburg County government" ("Historic Anderson Mill"). Though it is considered a historic and social landmark in the local area, it has mostly remained closed for several years due to a variety of reasons, including flood damages and an ongoing restoration project by the Tyger River Foundation.



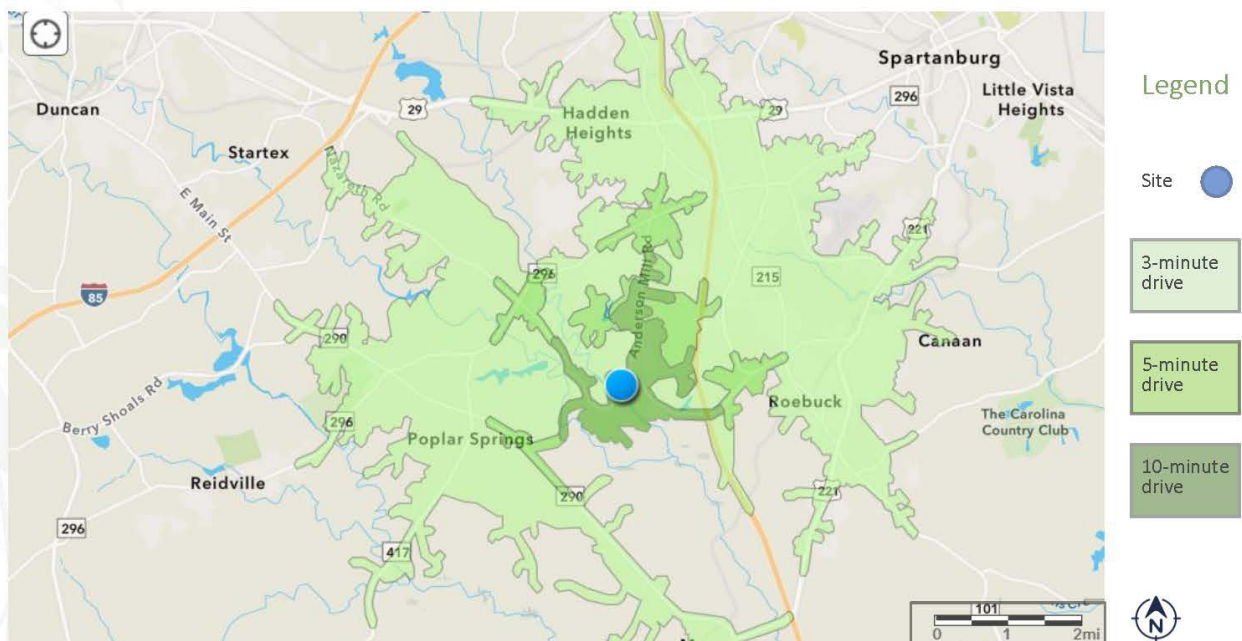
Tyger River Foundation Restoration Project

Currently, Anderson's Mill being restored by the Tyger River Foundation, a non-profit conservation group which focuses its efforts on the expansive Tyger River Basin. In addition to restoring the mill building to a functional state, the group also uses the site to test water quality of the North Tyger River. The foundation has helped to maintain the site since 2005 and held ownership of the site since 2010. While efforts are being made transform the site into an open and appealing site with historical significance, accompanying greenspace, and access the river, the site has remained closed to the general public. Currently, the site is only open for purchasable photo sessions which "generate revenue for the ongoing maintenance of this site" ("Historic Anderson Mill"). As such, the local community and visitors to Spartanburg continue to miss out on this potential park.



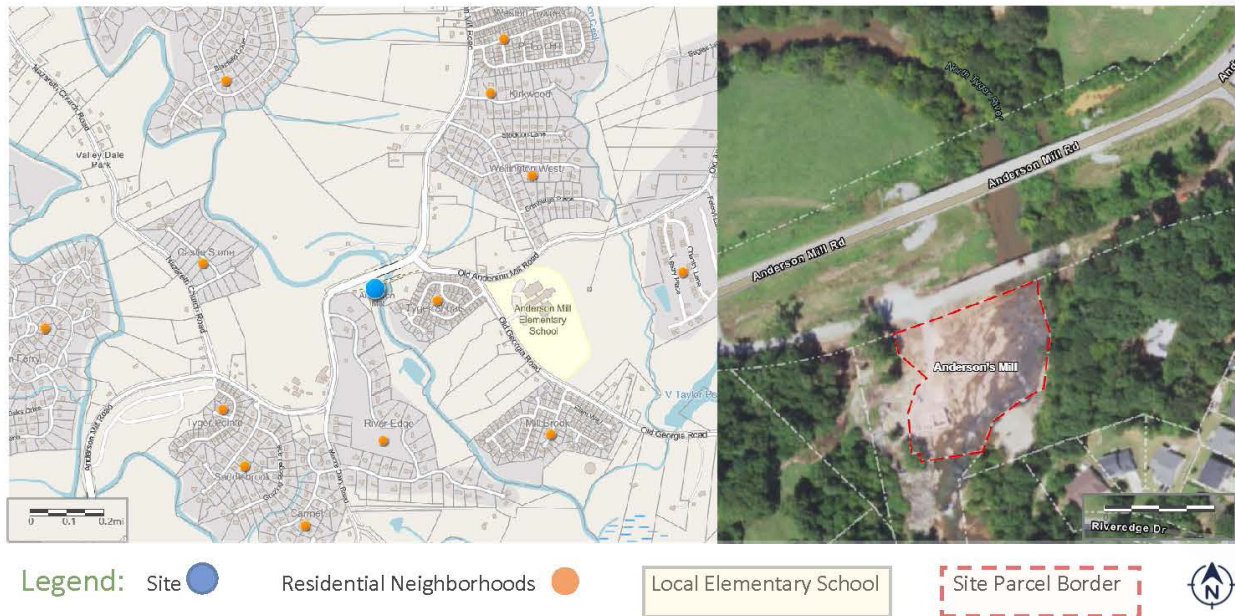
Regional Context

The site of Anderson's Mill is located just beyond the dense suburban outskirts of the city of Spartanburg, SC. The mill bridges the divide between the cultural and historical identity of the city and its surrounding environmental context. The mill also sits near several major roads, giving it a broad range of access by car. In particular, the site can be reached within 3-5 minutes by many of the surrounding residential areas, making it an ideal location for a community park.



Local Context

Within the local context, the site is surrounded by numerous housing subdivisions and sits in close proximity to Anderson Mill Elementary School. Not only does this mean the site is potentially accessible by most of the community, but it is also an education resource for the nearby school. This area of Spartanburg itself is split between several education levels ranging from above average to below average. Opening the mill as an educational opportunity would serve to enrich the local community. While the site itself has little in the way of green space, it is within an expandable distance to several surrounding green spaces.



4th Nature at Anderson's Mill

The site of Anderson's Mill is uniquely suited for 4th nature design because of its history and surrounding context. The site has a long history of human cultivation and maintenance which was briefly suspended by a period of inactivity after floods damaged the mill. Though the Tyger River Foundation has been maintaining the site, it is likely that 4th nature plant communities have begun to develop here. Located in Spartanburg county, the mill also falls within the target region for the example design sites. Additionally, the site's proximity to residential neighborhoods means that nonnative ornamental plants are likely to have spread beyond the boundary. Understanding how these ornamental plants interact with native plant communities is important not only for the mill site, but for other natural areas as well. Lastly, while the Tyger River Foundation is using the site to conduct research into water quality, there is currently no research being done into the plants which are found at and around the site.



Next Steps

Before the project is solidified, several more steps remain to be taken. First and foremost is contacting the Tyger River Foundation as one of the potential clients for the project and discussing access to the site. Without proper access to study existing conditions and plant life, the design will fall short of its goals. At the same time, several other sites will need to be identified either as additional examples or as replacements. Defining a specific region will also help to narrow down these sites, as well as provide a start to the research portion of the project.

Even as further site appraisal and selection is done, it is crucial that research into 4th nature and local plant communities begins. Building a database of plant communities within the specified ecoregions will be a solid foundation for further research.

Lastly, searching for more written and online resources will help to build a reliable framework for 4th nature in landscape architecture. While few resources exist which specifically speak to the concept of 4th nature, the term itself has not quite caught on in current landscape architecture projects. Nevertheless, the core concepts of 4th nature, the aim to design low-maintenance, restorative, adaptable, and even hybrid plant communities, exist in a plethora of resources. Going forward, it will take communication, redefining, and research to firmly establish this project.

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DESIGNING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES THROUGH NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS

EXIT PROJECT PROPOSAL

SAM BOST

LARC 4530 | FALL 2023
DR. MARY G. PADUA

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THE PROBLEM

In many cities and communities, there is an increasing risk of natural hazards that threaten to destroy infrastructure and invaluable community programs. These risks include flooding, drought, hurricanes, landslides, wildfires and other natural disasters that have increased as a result of climate change and biodiversity loss.



Lauter, Bernd. July 15, 2021. A man walks through the floods towards destroyed houses in Schuld near Bad Neuenahr, western Germany. Available at <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/08/number-of-rainy-days-and-intense-rainfall-can-affect-economy-study.html>.

The legacy of harnessing the environment and resources for development has disrupted the natural processes that exist in these areas and, as a result, we are seeing both community integrity, and natural systems suffering. This has led to the unique challenge of finding solutions that combat the issues specific communities face while simultaneously improving the conditions of environmental challenges.



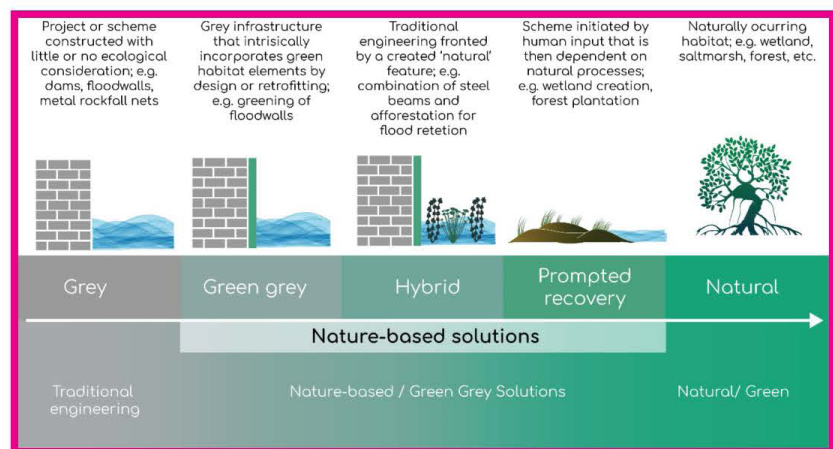
Widstrand, Staffan. Biodiversity loss is being caused by a variety of human activities, a confluence of climate change and other factors, such as habitat loss and pollution. Available at [Getty Images]

THE PROBLEM

Many cities and communities have begun investing in restoration projects to improve and adapt to these risks by analyzing the natural processes of ecosystems and forming solutions that mimic them. These projects are creating solutions that in turn not only benefit humans and socio-economic issues at the community scale, but also help combat the environmental crisis that our world is facing at the global level.

By looking at the natural processes that already exist, we find design solutions to the issues that people and communities are facing. This process is defined as Nature based Solutions (NbS) and is a strategy that Landscape Architects and designers use. NbS is defined not by a single solution, but as a systematic way of thinking that reconsiders the relationship between humans and nature.

The following diagram represent the transition from traditional “grey” methods into “green” solutions.



Mangrove by Ruliani, wall by Aliya Nafisa, dunes by Deaan, sea plant by Agne Alesiute, Seaweed by Vladimir Belochkin from the Noun Project; Design: Juliette C. G. Martin 2019.. Figure 1: The Grey-Green Continuum of Infrastructure Approaches.. Available at [<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/4/1971#B46-sustainability-13-01971>]

The intersection between environmental and human issues is revealed as we begin to understand the natural processes. Many solutions to these issues come from restoring the natural process that existed and in turn also restoring the communities connection to the environment.

THE PROJECT

SCOPE

My Exit Studio project will seek to restore vital community programs such as infrastructure as well as combat the global issues of climate change and biodiversity loss by promoting ecology. When seeking to create solutions to local level environmental issues, we can begin to see improvements at the global or regional scale as all of the ecological processes are interrelated.

The project will also be designed to achieve goals specific to the community.

SCALE

Ideal potential project would be local level landscapes that are significant to the function of the community but is also significant in its ecological value to the surrounding area.

CATEGORY

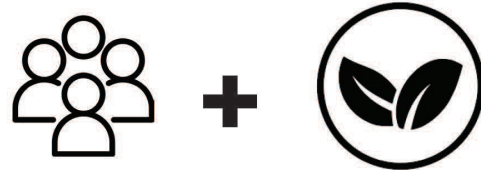
Designing Resilient Communities through Nature Based Solutions (NbS).

SPECIFIC DESIGN GOALS

01

RECONNECTING PEOPLE + THE ENVIRONMENT

The project will seek to reconnect people and cultures with the natural environment through specific programs and consideration of the surrounding environmental conditions.



02

EQUITY

The project will seek to provide equal and accessible programs that can be utilized and benefit all of the communities users and groups.



03

RESILIENCE

The project will be designed to create an overall stronger community to withstand the risks of natural disasters and promote community connectedness and wholeness.



04

EXPERIENCE

The project will also create an experience unique to the community to promote the character and history of the community.



CASE STUDIES

RIVERFRONT SPOKANE BERGER PARTNERSHIP | SPOKANE, WA

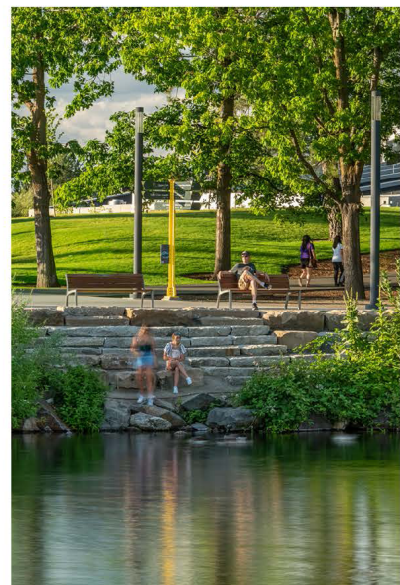


Sky Definition Photography, 2022. Riverfront Park Shines Again!. Available at [<https://www.asla.org/2022awards/5571.html>]

The Spokane Riverfront park has been the heart of the region's community since it was established and before that has been a sacred gathering place for the Spokane tribes. An unfortunate history of industrial use has led to a decline of the ecology and soundness of the riverfront which in turn has declined its function and value to the community. This led to a \$64 million dollar reimagined park design that not only revitalized the park as the community's cultural heart, but also restored vital ecology to the region.

The overall main goal or achievement of this project was reconnecting the people, the city and the river back into one community. The revitalization of the river's ecology was achieved through riparian planting and that re-established the soundness of the riverbank. The restoration of the riverbank ecology reconnected people to the environment by giving new experiences and opportunities for the community to interact with the river and understand its ecology.

Through these types of design programs, we begin to see a phenomenon of redesigning our world and the environment to intertwine and support each other instead of being designed separately. We see that the more we seek to understand the natural processes and systems that exist, we find solutions that not only benefit us, but also bring about new opportunities to improve our communities' health and well-being.



Built Work Photography, 2022. Reconnecting to the River. Available at [<https://www.asla.org/2022awards/5571.html>]

CASE STUDIES

BISHAN-ANG MO KIO PARK RAMBOLL STUDIO | SINGAPORE



Lim Shiang Han. 2016. A Biophillic Design Available at [<https://www.asla.org/2016awards/169669.html>]

This park is at the center of the community in Singapore and used to be separated by a concrete channel that is vital to helping Singapore deal with drainage and water supply from the Kallang River. The concrete channel was redesigned to function beyond their use of drainage and water supply to increase beauty and and create vibrant new spaces that the community can enjoy. The park created a new naturalized water way that was designed based on a floodplain concept. With the new design, people can enjoy the water and recreational activities along the generous river banks when water level is low, and during heavy rain, park land that is next to the river doubles up as a conveyance channel, carrying the water flow downstream. The design enables multiple land uses within the park and creates more spaces for communal activities.



This project is a great case study for providing examples of how we can mimic the natural processes (for example of a river) and in turn create opportunities for community engagement.

Ramboll Studio. 2016. More River, More Park [<https://www.asla.org/2016awards/169669.html>]

NEXT STEPS

- The next phase of the project will include an investigation into potential sites in the Southeast United States.
- In order to understand the full scope of potential sites I plan on reaching out to firms that have worked on similar projects and getting an understanding of their design approaches and how they chose their sites.
- Once I have spoken with other firms and have chosen a specific site, I will begin my research into the environmental conditions of the community.
- The environmental issues will require more research and will likely require outside sources for me to have a complete understanding.
- I would also like to reach out to the community to find out what they would specifically want to see out of this type of project so that it supports their goals.
- Once I have done extensive research in all of these areas, I can begin developing design solutions that will benefit the community and its surrounding ecology.

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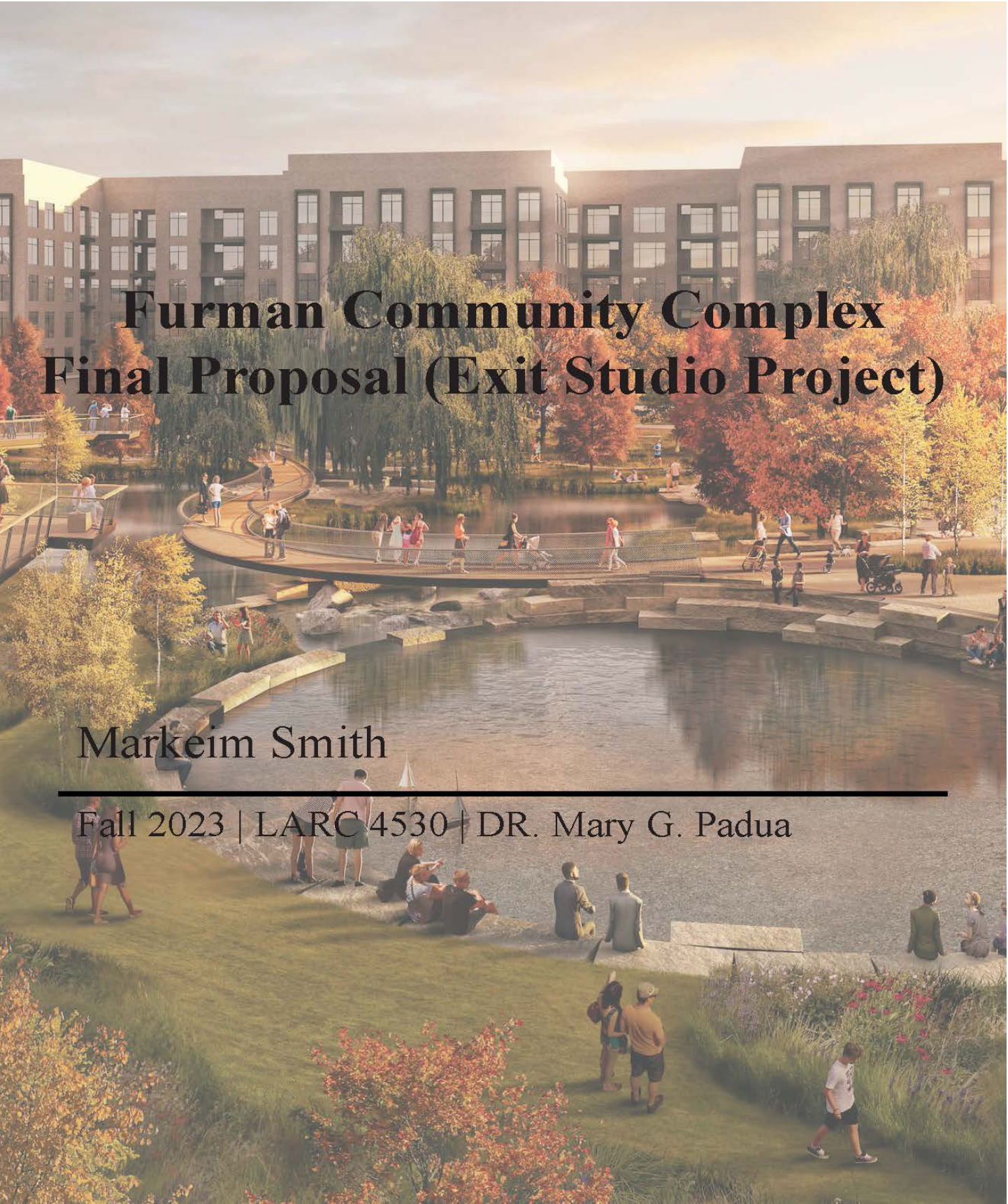
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Furman Community Complex Final Proposal (Exit Studio Project)

Markeim Smith

Fall 2023 | LARC 4530 | DR. Mary G. Padua

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Site and Project Type

This is a park and recreation development that I want to design in my hometown. The key issues that is necessary is to revitalize what is already there because it could be great for the community. There were old festivals that was at this same place that made the community come together. While the park started to go down, the festival stopped and now people barely come to the park unless its to play basketball. Although people may come to play basketball it's not a lot of people, maybe two or three.



This park is located in Furman, South Carolina a little bit outside of Estill, South Carolina. Furman is a small town on the outskirts of Estill with a population of 226 people. I believe with this park being revitalized it will draw people from Estill (population of 1,825), Scotia, SC (166), Hampton (2,791), Savannah (147,088), Rincon (11,016), Pooler (26,930), etc. This would be a lot of people and bring sight to the small town as a whole. It is a 170 acre piece of land that I think brings a lot of opportunity for the people of the surrounding communities.



Site Inventory and Analysis

The site has a lot of space for opportunity, and a lot of pedestrian circulation as well. There is not a lot of parking so during festivals people have to park across the street. It is surrounded by residential areas so this could be a place not only for events but also for visitors and people in the surrounding neighborhoods. There isn't really any plants besides big trees that provide shade and are needed to be cut down, especially by the basketball court. My client would be the city's park and recreation department as well as the Furman Town Hall Council. The Town Hall is on the site in the middle of the park as well. This is good because it brings more people and provides bathrooms for the events that are hosted here. The site currently has a basketball court, playground, town hall with space in front of it, and a big baseball field used for games behind the town hall. I was thinking about revitalizing the basketball court and the playground, while adding another sports activity with a shaded structure area for nice seating. As well as a meadow of grasses or nice trees to bring color and draw others to the park. While the land is not used a lot right now, when the festival used to happen, the site was heavily circulated with people. There were different people at different spots with vendors selling their own materials that they made. The baseball field had games where the different neighborhoods go against each other so that was packed with people watching it as well as games going on at the basketball court. I believe something that would draw more people during that time and especially now would be how appealing the site is or the visual quality of the site. The site holds up pretty nice and doesn't flood when thunderstorms come. This is good for my design to be implemented.



My Approach



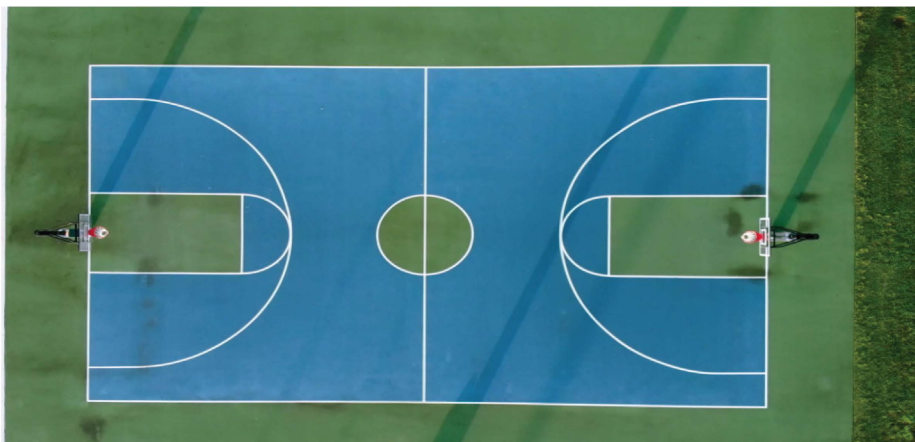
My approach is to do whatever I can do to get this land back to the way it was and even better than it was. This used to be a site to bring people together. People use to love the festival and could not wait for the fair to come again so why not bring it back for other people to come and enjoy. That fair was a big part of my childhood from the games we played to watching other people play and even the play fights we had. A lot of older people always say they wish we was able to experience what they had back then so why don't we let the kids coming up after us have what we have. By my site investigations I can tell that I would have to definitely keep the basketball court and baseball field as they are heavily used and loved by a lot of people. It is also encouraged to keep the layground for the kids to have fun. I do think that I should innovate the site and all those courts and fields so they can be more visually appealing and bring people in. I want to design so for future reference like 10 to 20 years from now we can still have these newer and nicer courts and fields still looking the same as when they were first implemented. I also want to add a mini amphitheater as well as a play and water garden to bring peace to the site. This would bring the public health aspect to the site. So right now I want to separate the sports courts or sports aspect of the site away from the garden and meadow area and then connect them by generous pathways. When envisioning the park's redesign, sustainability and inclusivity should be at the forefront. Implementing eco-friendly features such as rain gardens, solar-powered lighting, and water-efficient landscaping ensures that the park is welcoming to everyone, fostering a sense of inclusivity and community. The redesigning park, adorned with gardens, a basketball court, and a baseball field, becomes a multi-faceted haven for the community. It promotes physical well-being, social interaction and environmental consciousness. By incorporating elements that cater to a diverse range of interests and ages, the park emerges as a symbol of community cohesion and well-being. As urban spaces continue to evolve, investing in the redesign of parks to reflect the needs and aspirations of the community ensures that these spaces remain vital and cherished components of city life.

Why a Garden?



The inclusion of gardens in my park redesign is a nod to the therapeutic benefits of nature. Imagine walking through winding pathways adorned with vibrant flowers, aromatic herbs, and towering trees. Community members can engage in gardening activities, fostering a sense of ownership and connection to the green space. Furthermore, well-designed gardens contribute to biodiversity, attracting butterflies, bees, and birds, creating a harmonious environment for both humans and wildlife.

Why a basketball court?



Why a Baseball Field?



The baseball field introduces an element of nostalgia and sportsmanship to the park. Families can enjoy weekend afternoons cheering on local teams, creating a sense of community pride. The field can also serve as a venue for youth leagues, providing a platform for skill development and teamwork. Additionally, a well-maintained baseball field can attract regional tournaments, boosting local tourism and the park's overall economic impact. The presence of the field transforms the park into a dynamic space that caters to various interests and age groups.



Preliminary/Precedents

My goals and objective is to revitalize a park so I could bring the community together more and combine the two alternatives of publi health and play. I feel like having both would help people come out more because it would be good for people to calm their mind and have fun to take things off their mind.



McIntire Botanical Garden - MIK Young Kim Design

The plan brings to life a garden in the woods focused on inclusion, exploration, and the natural world's transformative power to start a dialogue and heal community.



Edinburg Residence - Julie Moir Messervy

Stones cut through the lushes garden that brings peace surrounded by plant specimens that the designers found out about after visiting nurseries.



Martin's Park - Micheal Van Valkenburg

Unusual play structures and a large ship provide endless variations of play that can engage every child. The various methods of play have different means of access, allowing kids who are able to scramble up hills, while mobility-disabled children can use the sloping paths.



A urban regeneration project that allows the community to be engaged in designing the court and having food trucks, shaded structures, and a lot of seats for people to get together and talk to each other.



Burlington Parks and Recreation - Sasaki

The diverse system of parks, trails, open spaces, and recreation opportunities serve myriad roles for the city. Waterfront serves as a source of pride for residents.



Ralph C Wilson Centennial Park - Micheal Van Valkenburg

Throughout the park, smaller lawns, gardens, groves, promenade, and plazas complement the most prominent landscape destinations. Comfort stations and two “park houses” containing facilities for indoor sports.

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