

December 2020

## Reinvigorating Englewood, Chicago Through New Public Spaces and Mixed-Income Housing

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REINVIGORATING ENGLEWOOD, CHICAGO TROUGH NEW PUBLIC SPACES  
AND MIXED-INCOME RESIDENCES

A Thesis Presented

By

GIVAN JESSICA CARRERO

Submitted to the  
Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

September 2020

Architecture

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## ABSTRACT

# REINVIGORATING ENGLEWOOD, CHICAGO THROUGH NEW PUBLIC SPACES AND MIXED INCOME RESIDENCES

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At the start of the second industrial revolution, Chicago was home to many workers from the Union Stock Yard meat packing industry located in what is now known as the Back of the Yards neighborhood. As business grew, so did the need for housing, leading to the development of a new neighborhood, Englewood. For years, the neighborhood was prosperous and was home to the second largest business corridor in the city.<sup>1</sup> During the Great Migration, much of that changed. Racially Restrictive Covenants forced African Americans to live in the Black Belt, and the eastern side of Englewood slowly transformed, paving the way for the prominently African American community that exists in Englewood today. Inevitably, due to disinvestment stemming from harsh FHA sanctioned policy during the Great Migration, the town began to deteriorate, and has remained in a state of decay for decades. Businesses and residences were abandoned and much of the neighborhood is desolate. The economy is stagnant, and many of the residents remain unemployed. The crime rate is amongst the worst in the

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Schmidt, "Englewood, past and present," accessed April 20, 2020

city, and gang violence plagues the streets at night. Englewood has fallen victim to many urban ills.

The goal of this project is to reverse some of those issues through designing new public spaces and Mixed-Income Housing. In providing the residents of Englewood with safe outdoor recreational spaces, a local source of healthy food, community gardens and markets, equal opportunity housing, job opportunity and social services, the community will be given the tools to repair itself. The question remains: What will attract local residents and small business owners from across the entire neighborhood of Englewood, what will keep them safe? What will keep them connected?

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
CHAPTER	
1. MY LIFE IN CHICAGO .....	1
2. INTRODUCTION.....	4
3. CHICAGO HISTORY .....	7
3.1 Providing More Perspective on Segregation in Chicago .....	7
3.2 The Formation of Chicago and Englewood .....	9
3.3 The Great Migration, Jim Crow Laws and the Black Belt .....	10
3.4 Redlining Today.....	12
4. ENGLEWOOD RESEARCH .....	18
5. DESIGN AS ACTIVISM .....	26
6. PRECEDENTS.....	31
7. DESIGN PROCESS .....	39
8. PUBLIC SPACE AND RESIDENTIAL DESIGN .....	44
8.1 Final Design .....	44
8.2 Conclusion .....	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	54



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1	Historic Images of Englewood Business Corridor, “Englewood, past and present,” WBEZ, <a href="https://www.wbez.org">https://www.wbez.org</a> .....10
2	African American Population Compared to Unemployment Levels in Chicago, “Rethinking Affordable Housing” <i>TEDTalk</i> , <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZvKY9tb9Kw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZvKY9tb9Kw</a> ..... 17
3	Median Income and Affordable Rent Gap, “Rethinking Affordable Housing” <i>TEDTalk</i> , <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZvKY9tb9Kw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZvKY9tb9Kw</a> .....17
4	Mapping Englewood’s Residential, Communal and Economic Regions ..... 19
5	Mapping Englewood’s Residential Densities ..... 21
6	Mapping Englewood’s Economic Breakdown .....23
7	Mapping Englewood’s Communal Spaces ..... 25
8	Hegeman Supportive Housing Renderings, “The Hegeman,” <a href="http://breakingground.org">breakingground.org</a> ..... 32
9	Hegeman Supportive Housing Site Plan and Floor Plans, “The Hegeman,” <a href="http://breakingground.org">breakingground.org</a> ..... 32
10	Gotham Greens Greenhouse Aerial View, “Gotham Greens – Pullman” <a href="http://CNIGroup.org">CNIGroup.org</a> ..... 34
11	Gotham Greens Greenhouse Interior View, “Gotham Greens – Pullman” <a href="http://CNIGroup.org">CNIGroup.org</a> ..... 34
12	Pilsen Mural Park Timber Support, <a href="http://Muralpark.com">Muralpark.com</a> ..... 35
13	Pilsen Mural Project Axonometric, <a href="http://Muralpark.com">Muralpark.com</a> .....36
14	Pilsen Mural Project Diagram, <a href="http://Muralpark.com">Muralpark.com</a> ..... 36
15	Can Escandell Park: Connecting to Existing Walkways, <i>Public Space Acupuncture</i> ..... 38
16	Englewood Virtual Walkthrough Sketches ..... 39

17	Stitching the Rift in Englewood Diagram .....	40
18	Acrylic Etching and Diagonal Patterns .....	41
19	Pedestrian Circulation Diagram .....	43
20	Site plan and Landscaping .....	44
21	Natural Safety Buffer and Line-of-sight Diagram .....	46
22	First Floor Plan .....	47
23	Second Floor Plan .....	48
24	Third Floor Plan .....	49
25	One and Two Bedroom Floor Plans .....	50
26	Fourth Floor Plan .....	50
27	Elevations .....	51
28	Market/Café Lounge Rendering .....	52
29	Section .....	52
30	Community Center Lobby .....	52

## CHAPTER 1

### MY LIFE IN CHICAGO

Growing up on the South Side of Chicago in Little Village, a predominantly Mexican neighborhood, had its privileges. My Spanish-speaking Ecuadorian grandmother could take a walk down 26<sup>th</sup> Street, also known as the *Mexican Magnificent Mile*, where all of the *Mercado* signs were in Spanish and she could purchase freshly made *bolillos*. During the weekdays, she would purchase fruit cups and Mexican corn from street vendors on her way back from church where her favorite Spanish-speaking *Padre* would converse with her and the locals in her native tongue. Since she didn't know English, her interaction with the community was vital and allowed for a soft transition in her assimilation to an American life-style. When my grandfather first came to America, he chose that town just for her, and from that small neighborhood, our family would prosper. The trouble was, once we left Little Village, and drove away from *La Villita's* archway, we would feel lost. The nearby neighborhoods such as Little Italy to the northeast, China Town to the west, and McKinley Park to the south were unlike our corner of Chicago. And while I appreciated the diversity of Chicago, knowing that authentic Mexican, Italian, and Chinese foods, goods and culture were a short drive away, I hadn't questioned their origins and the implications of their segregation until now. When I moved away from Little Village as a young girl, I experienced this segregation first-hand.

In the late 90s when my sister was bound for high school, our parents moved us to a "better" neighborhood. We found ourselves moving further southwest, to the town of

Clearing, closer to the suburbs. In this neighborhood the crime rate was significantly lower, creating less boundaries between homes. There were fewer fences separating lots, neighbors developed relationships with one another and children played outside together. It was a strange place for me as my previous neighbors, though bound by racial likeness, were often guarded and fearful, as the crime rate due to gang activity was significantly higher. What was the main difference? Race and investment in the locale. Financial stability was apparent in the maintenance of homes, cleanliness of yards and the quality of vehicles being driven. The majority of the neighborhood was white, and I stuck out like a sore thumb. For a long time, I didn't understand why moving further away from the core of the city would create such a difference in characteristics of a neighborhood. What I've come to learn is that the further away we moved from the historic Black Belt district, and the closer we moved to the suburban outskirts of the city, the cleaner, safer and more invested neighborhoods became. This idea is now solidified by comparing my previous experiences in Little Village and Clearing, to the final neighborhood I resided in before ultimately leaving to New England.

When it became my turn to attend High School, my parents again chose to move closer to my school of choice, an opportunity I am forever grateful for. I was accepted to Curie Metropolitan High School, the visual and performing arts school on the South Side of Chicago. While other schools required you live in their district, Curie accepted students from across the city, given that one's academic standings met their requirements. We moved to the Back of the Yards neighborhood, two blocks away from a train station. The "L" (elevated rail line) was a portal to the city, a passage I used often to escape my neighborhood, as Back of the Yards was part of a cluster of neighborhoods characterized

as the most dangerous in Chicago. The murder rate: high, the schools: dangerous, and the homes made mostly of light wood framing and vinyl and wood paneling, deteriorating with every passing season. Yards were unkept and garbage littered the streets. Police and ambulance sirens contributed to the fearful ambiance of my neighborhood. I loved attending Curie, and was fortunate that I lived so close to the “L,” so that I could commute to it, however the five minute walk from my house to the station was dangerous. I was monitored by gang members as they kept a tally of who entered and left their block. I was even pursed and attacked on some occasions. This was life on the *South Side*, and you either became a part of the feedback loop or you stepped away from it. The fact is, this neighborhood and others like it are severely disinvested. The schools are overcrowded due to a lack of funding, the parks which completely lack a sense of place, serve as dominions for gangs, and the communal resources are lacking. And sadly, the other unifying quality was that the majority of residents were African American and Hispanic. The correlation between poverty, disinvestment and race is so closely tied, however the reasons move much further beyond stereotypes and stigmas. Only by looking at the historic data can we begin to understand why these neighborhoods fall into such degradation.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION

Towns that have fallen into disrepair due to disinvestment have a complex history. Sadly, many of those towns are comprised of minorities such as African Americans and Hispanics. These statistics are common across cities in the United States, and Chicago is a prime example of that fact. In order to demystify and remove stereotypes and stigmas, a broader understanding of the historic stages of town and neighborhood formation need to be understood. For many of the neighborhoods in Chicago, that history is intertwined with larger economic and historic movements, and can be tracked through property procurement and policies set forth by cities. In the case of Chicago, a city which grew due to the second industrial revolution, where a boom of industry formed districts and neighborhoods to accommodate the demand of the country, and along with the surge of African Americans evacuating the South during the Great Migration, one can begin to understand how the segregation of Chicago began and why disinvested neighborhoods are predominantly occupied by minorities. The Chicago neighborhood in focus is Englewood, and a deeper understanding of the historic events that caused its current state must be addressed before evaluating how the implementation of new public spaces and mixed-income residential interventions can begin to reinvigorate it.

The decision to focus on Englewood resulted from investigating several of the seventy-seven neighborhoods of Chicago. In knowing that there is a large socioeconomic

gap between the *North Side* and *South Side* of the city, with the north being more affluent and the south being rife with poverty and violence, the decision to focus on the *South Side* became critical. In combination with new development gentrifying the *South Side*, it became clear that attention needed to be paid to a neighborhood at risk of new development displacing residents in a poor economic status. Next, I chose to focus on a neighborhood close to my last residence in Chicago, and so I began researching where new development was surging. As a result, Englewood became my ultimate choice.

As a result of research, solutions to improve the crisis in Englewood became more apparent. Englewood, which was once one of the most prolific neighborhoods<sup>2</sup> in the Midwest fell into the shadows of economic disparity and local resources began depleting. Today there is a lack of resources in the form of employment, health services, educational funding, indoor and outdoor communal spaces, healthy residential dwellings and the availability of fresh food. Large swaths of decayed land can be seen where residential and commercial buildings once stood. To understand the current socioeconomic state, further inquiries were needed regarding Englewood's creation and involvement during the second industrial revolution, the housing policies and Racially Restrictive Covenants set forth by city officials resulting in the Black Belt, and the wide spread mass exodus dubbed *White Flight*.<sup>3</sup> Other issues assessed were the crime rate created by gang activity requiring a level of safety implemented into overall design.

While there is a sense of pride emanating from Chicagoans, for neighborhoods like Englewood, there is also a sense of fear and insecurity. If Englewood is to prosper, a communal effort in combination with a series of complexes providing a setting for

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<sup>2</sup> John R. Schmidt, "Englewood, past and present," accessed April 20, 2020

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

economic opportunities, local agriculture on a small and large scale, indoor and outdoor communal spaces to cultivate connectivity for all residents, and equal opportunity mixed income housing is key.



## CHAPTER 3

### CHICAGO HISTORY

#### 3.1 Providing More Perspective on Segregation in Chicago

In a city with a complex history like Chicago, the first step is understanding the events that lead to the imbalance, to which Moore provides much insight. Moore makes the claim that, "...Chicago is compromised by the specter of segregation, which is often swept under the rug. We can't honestly talk about the problems such as violence and unemployment without addressing segregation."<sup>4</sup> Neighborhoods across Chicago are woven like a quilt, many representing a unique identity, often clearly defined by unofficial boundaries, bolstering cultural pride. For the neighborhoods on the *North Side* of Chicago, as Moore would call, the "white" part of the city, the issues of economic disparity are fewer between. But for those on the *South Side*, disparity is a crisis which correlates with segregation which often demarcates racial differences: i.e. blacks, whites, and Latinos, sadly causing vulnerability to shifts in economic trends due to lack of resources, and that lack of resource is not a coincidence. In a firm stance, Moore recalls a statement in the Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, (1968) "What white Americans have never fully understood—but what the Negro can never forget—is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."<sup>5</sup> Moore takes a closer

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<sup>4</sup> Moore, *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation*, 1

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 5

look at the events and issues revolving segregation by putting a spotlight on her own family during the Great Migration.

In the first chapter, *Legacy Threatened: I am a Child of Chatham*, Moore paints a picture of her youth, family, and the housing policies that impacted her family and families similar to hers. She starts by explaining that she comes from a black middle-class family who lived in a middle-class neighborhood, unique in that it is predominantly black. She talks very lovingly about her father and how he worked hard and provided for their family, but also volunteered his time to the community. Living in that neighborhood, as she explains, didn't mean it was immune from urban ills.<sup>6</sup> Moore references Chicago sociologist Mary Pattillo in explaining, "...Black middle-class neighborhoods are characterized by "more poverty, higher crime, worse schools and fewer services than white middle-class neighborhoods."<sup>7</sup> Issues like the one mentioned above often derive from stereotypes, as they cultivate fear and deter more affluent residents and investors, therefore resulting in a lack of resources for a community. Ideas have a way of manifesting into reality. She often commuted by rail, and had an epiphany one day when the Chicago White Sox were playing, and an influx of whites occupied the train at a stop she boarded, only to watch them all filter out near the stadium. This was the moment she realized she lived in segregation, and she says she felt her world pivot. "I wasn't scared or angry, just disoriented."<sup>8</sup> As will be discussed later, Jim Crow laws had impacted the way the Chicago's towns organized, and neighborhoods like Chatham, Back of the Yards and Englewood, to name a few, were part of them.

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<sup>6</sup> Moore, *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation*, 16

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 16

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 17

### 3.2 The Formation of Chicago and Englewood

The formation of Chicago began around the Chicago River. While the area was initially a military base in the early 1800s, people soon realized that the city was a prime location for transportation. It became the hub of the most important transportation network of America comprised of road, rail, water and air connections. By the 1860s, Chicago was the leading transshipping and warehousing center in the country, attracting many Europeans such as Germans, Irish, Scandinavian, Jewish, Czechoslovakians, Polish, and Italians to work and reside in the area. Many businesses grew and nestled their factories and warehouses along the river, with emphasis on the *South Side*. One of the more relevant industries was meat packaging. The Union Stock Yards, once situated in what is now known as Back of the Yards, butchered approximately 400 million livestock between the years 1865 and 1900<sup>9</sup>. The expansive operation employed 25,000 people, requiring a new development to flourish nearby, thus birthing the neighborhood of Englewood.

As people began developing Englewood, with the majority of the homes built in the late 1880s, the Irish community in the area climbed the economic ladder. Gothic schools and churches displayed an “upper class pretention.” Soon, stores like Sears Roebuck & Co moved in to 63rd and Halsted along with Becker Ryan Store, and the Mahoney Brothers. When WWII erupted, and the Great Depression struck, businesses began to fold. Small business owners were either drafted or lost their financial footings. Stores closed their doors while industry giants such as Sears maintained their dominance. As an example, Sears was able to tear down their store, and reopen anew. They spent

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<sup>9</sup> Wikipedia, “Union Stock Yards” Accessed April 20, 2020

\$8000 a square foot to rebuild a new \$1.5 million store, dwarfing any businesses that remained. This ripple effect was the beginning of the decay of Englewood.



Figure 1 Historic Images of Englewood Business Corridor, “Englewood, past and present,” WBEZ, <https://www.wbez.org>

### 3.3 The Great Migration, Jim Crow Laws and the Black Belt

Much of Chicago was reorganized by the Great Migration, and although the Jim Crow laws pertained to the Southern states, cities like Chicago began a set of housing policies with a similar disposition, which formed the segregation of our neighborhoods as will be explained in this section. During the Great Migration, many blacks fled due to Southern oppression “Between 1916 and 1970, Chicago gained more than 500,000 African Americans... [T]he black population went from under 44,103 at the start of the Great Migration to more than 1 million by the end.”<sup>10</sup> In the 1920s, the real estate profession along with reinforcement by the FHA and insurance companies developed

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<sup>10</sup> Moore, *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation*, 40

Socially Restrictive Covenants to large areas of Chicago, and set forth property deeds which prohibited the sale, lease or occupation of a property by African Americans.<sup>11</sup> By 1933, The Home Owners' Loan Corporation started incorporating redlining, (a practice that excluded blacks by color coding black neighborhoods based on loan risks).<sup>12</sup> This practice created the *South Side* of Chicago, which isolated black families and left them to fall prey to irregular mortgages by contract buyers who would use their name to purchase houses for African Americans, but would apply harsh stipulations and higher rates. By the 1940s, in the case, *Hansberry v. Lee*, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of invalidating racial covenants and opened up the purchase of 500 homes in the Hyde Park and Woodlawn areas.<sup>13</sup> In 1948, in the case of *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the Supreme Court ruled that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment would, "...prohibit the enforcement of the covenant, therefore ending this crushing form of racial discrimination."<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, this ruling would lead to *White Flight*, and whites started leaving the city and moving to suburbs, where they received financial support by the banks, therefore syphoning resources from the core of city. This laid the foundation of black neighborhoods which spread throughout the *South Side* of Chicago, and Englewood is a prime example of that demographic shift. What was originally inhabited predominantly by Irish with a mix of other European ethnicities in the late 1800s due to their employment at the Union Stock Yard and other booming industries, converted to what is now 99% African American. There were even scare tactics employed by real estate agents to parade blacks around white neighborhoods in an effort to evacuate whites from their homes where they could then inflate prices and

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<sup>11</sup> Moore, *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation*, 41

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 42

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 45

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 48

immorally gouge African Americans. They were steered into subprime loans and charged higher interest rates and fees on mortgages than their white counterparts.”<sup>15</sup> More than a century later, and racial discrimination continues to be a guiding factor for real estate agents and financial brokers.

### **3.4 Redlining Today**

Leaders and officials from community organizations, attorneys representing the disinvested, members of the justice department, bankers with direct witness to redlining practices, city council people, scholars researching the epidemic, and those afflicted, have provided testimonies to shed light on redlining that has occurred in minority and underdeveloped communities, which is compiled in the book, “Redlining and Disinvestment as a Discriminatory Practice in Residential Mortgage Loans,” released by the University of Illinois Chicago Circle and Urban-Suburban Investment Study Group.<sup>16</sup> The information was also quantified, by analyzing patterns of disinvestment in communities across urban cities such as Chicago, Washington, Milwaukee, Los Angeles, San Diego, Memphis, and Baltimore. This text serves in the development of mixed-income housing and equal opportunity residences without contributing to overdevelopment or further deterioration of neighborhoods by contributing to low-income or high-risk stigmas that contribute to redlining practices by mortgage lenders. As a foundation for thought, historic accounts of redlining and the legislation passed to support or suppress disinvestment will follow.

In 1968, after years of redlining and disinvestment in urban areas, the Civil Rights Act created a nation policy of fair housing. The Policy also, “prohibits discrimination on

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<sup>15</sup> Moore, *The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation*, 26

<sup>16</sup> Shurin, David. *Redlining and Disinvestment as a Discriminatory Practice in Residential*, 1

the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in the sale, financing and advertising of housing.”<sup>17</sup> This law encouraged citizens to learn their rights and placed the responsibility of fair treatment on a federal level. Section 808 € reads, “All executive departments and agencies shall administer their programs and activities relating to housing and urban development in a manner affirmatively to further the purposes of this title and shall cooperate with the Secretary to further such purposes.”<sup>18</sup> If the country was to achieve equal housing opportunities, the government would have to encourage all of their agencies to abide by the new regulations. By 1971, thirteen civil rights groups and a number of community organizations began actively addressing unfair policies still subtly in affect by lenders. By 1975, the issue of redlining and disinvestment reached a national audience and the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975 was put into effect. This act required lenders to disclose the reasons for rejecting loans and inflating interest costs, which allowed the public to monitor which investment organizations targeted minorities. However, there are always loopholes.

Unfortunately, if a lending company wanted to discriminate against a person of color or from a high risk neighborhood, there were always more subtle ways to redline. Some of those practices include: higher down payments, higher fixed interest rates, higher closing costs, refusal of loans under a certain value, refusal of loans to small homes, appraising property at a low price etc.<sup>19</sup> And while these practices affected all minorities or people from under resourced neighborhoods, the group that was most affected was African Americans.

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<sup>17</sup> Shurin, David. *Redlining and Disinvestment as a Discriminatory Practice in Residential*, 1

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 2

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 9

One witness, Edward Schwartz, a young attorney working at a mortgage department for a bank made the claim, “Everyone describes a complicated process whereby banks make mortgage lending decisions about a neighborhood. It’s nonsense. The guys look out a window and if they see the neighborhood is Black, they redline it.”<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Leo B Blaber, President of Saint Paul Federal Savings and Loan Association of Chicago made the claim that the neighborhood’s quality, not the race, were large factors in the redlining process, such as price of homes, width of homes, asbestos shingles, mixed or “inharmonious” land uses etc. However, the main problem with this claim is that some of the neighborhoods in Chicago have been under resourced since the start of the Black Belt, causing a lesser quality of housing. With banks reluctant to provide loans to these areas once shunned by the banking industry, the issue perpetuates. It doesn’t matter whether it was rejection by racial discrimination or by locale.

Another topic of debate is whether redlining is the cause or the effect of deteriorating neighborhoods. For the cause argument, the idea is that redlining becomes a self-fulfilled prophecy. Meaning if a city or community doesn’t investing in a neighborhood, it becomes high risk. A bank can thereby target a neighborhood, disinvest, and watch it crumble, creating the risk of investment. For African Americans in the Black Belt, this was true. The other side of the argument is that redlining is effect, where a neighborhood is in disrepair and redlining results because of it. Cause, assumes responsibility of the act, while the effect evades it.

The information compiled in this text was in part thanks to that Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975. However, in 2017, the Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and

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<sup>20</sup> Shurin, David. *Redlining and Disinvestment as a Discriminatory Practice in Residential*, 11



Consumer Protection Act, touted as #ReliefForMainStreet, which provides regulations scaled to smaller businesses also provided said businesses, along with large lending organizations, amends to the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, thus eliminating the law requiring lending organizations to disclose who they are accepting and rejecting.<sup>21</sup> The Act reads, “(Sec. 104) The bill amends the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975 to exempt from specified public disclosure requirements depository institutions and credit unions that originate fewer than a specified number of closed-end mortgages or open-end lines of credit.”<sup>22</sup> Minorities and persons from disinvested communities can continue to be rejected or be inflicted with higher penalties for high risk status, and that information is now no longer disclosed. As designers, developers, city planners and communities themselves attempt to restore neighborhoods in disrepair, no longer is the information available to hold banks accountable for redlining, and instead hope that #ReliefForMainStreet stimulates local economies and resources begin to flourish.

In the images and figures that follow, one can see the direct correlation between race and unemployment, and how the events of the Great Migration, redlining and disinvestment have had a long-term impacts on neighborhoods on the *South Side* of Chicago. On the top row, the red colorization pertains to unemployment while in the second row, it pertains to African Americans. The correlation being, when the Great Migration ended in the 1970s, the area sanctioned by the FHA and CHA as the Black Belt is essentially the same footprint as the afflicted areas shown below. While the historic events mentioned above pertain to the past, those issues are very prevalent today.

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21 Crapo, “Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act”

22 Ibid

In figure 3, we see how the overall affordability of rent juxtaposed to median income, and the gap it creates. For neighborhoods like Englewood, with entire city blocks abandoned, one could safely assume that redlining and disinvestment caused a high unemployment rate and either drove people out of their homes or resulted in the lack of funding to repair and maintain them. Further information on the widespread condemning of Englewood is available in following chapter.

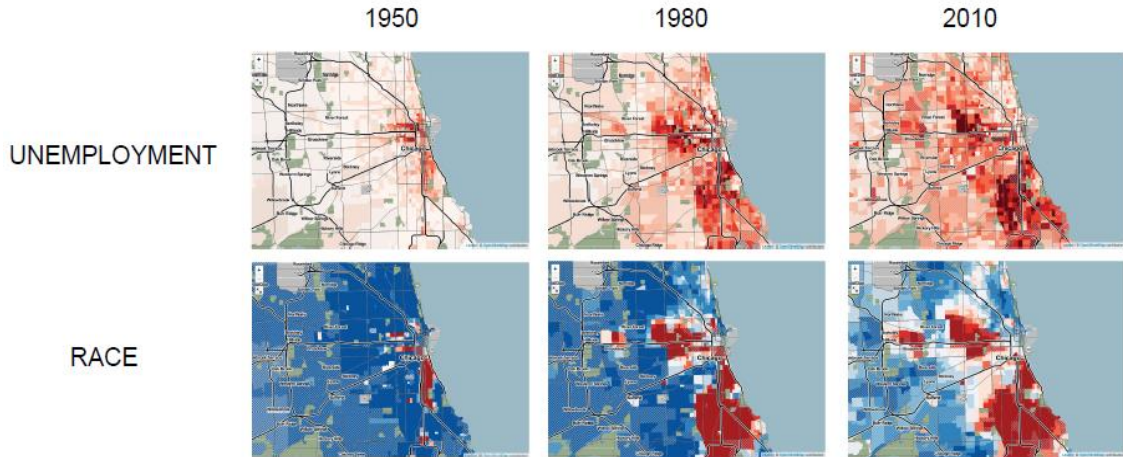


Figure 2 African American Population Compared to Unemployment Levels in Chicago, “Rethinking Affordable Housing” TEDTalk, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZvKY9tb9Kw>

INCOME	HOUSEHOLDS	AFFORDABLE RENT	GAP
<\$30,000	351,616	\$750	\$426
<\$20,000	242,596	\$500	\$676
<\$10,000	120,555	\$250	\$926

AVERAGE COST FOR 2 BEDROOM APARTMENT = \$1180

Figure 3 Median Income and Affordable Rent Gap, “Rethinking Affordable Housing” TEDTalk, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZvKY9tb9Kw>

## CHAPTER 4

### ENGLEWOOD RESEARCH

The history of Englewood detailed above provides the cause of the degradation of the neighborhood, while Chapter 4 assess the effect through mapping. In order to assess the needs of Englewood, one needs to understand how widespread the deterioration is. In the series of maps that follow, the residential density, business statuses and community spaces are mapped.

In the map that follows (figure 4) one can begin to understand the overall status of Englewood. While other neighborhoods, mostly located away from the historic Black Belt, contain city blocks saturated with residences, businesses and communal spaces, Englewood contains large voids where buildings once stood. Of the buildings that remain on the lots, many are condemned. The effect of decay causes a lack of interest to the area, deterring further investment, causing small businesses to struggle. In extreme cases, the sweeping dilapidation caused entire areas of Englewood to be vacant. Lack of inhabitants causes a depletion of resources such as school funding, communal spaces of quality, and a shortage of demand which cripples business. For further clarity, this map has been separated into three categories.

The map on figure 5 was created to assess residential density and serves to locate the most problematic of areas. As previously mentioned, many of the residential buildings were built between the late 1880s and early 1900s. Due to disinvestment and

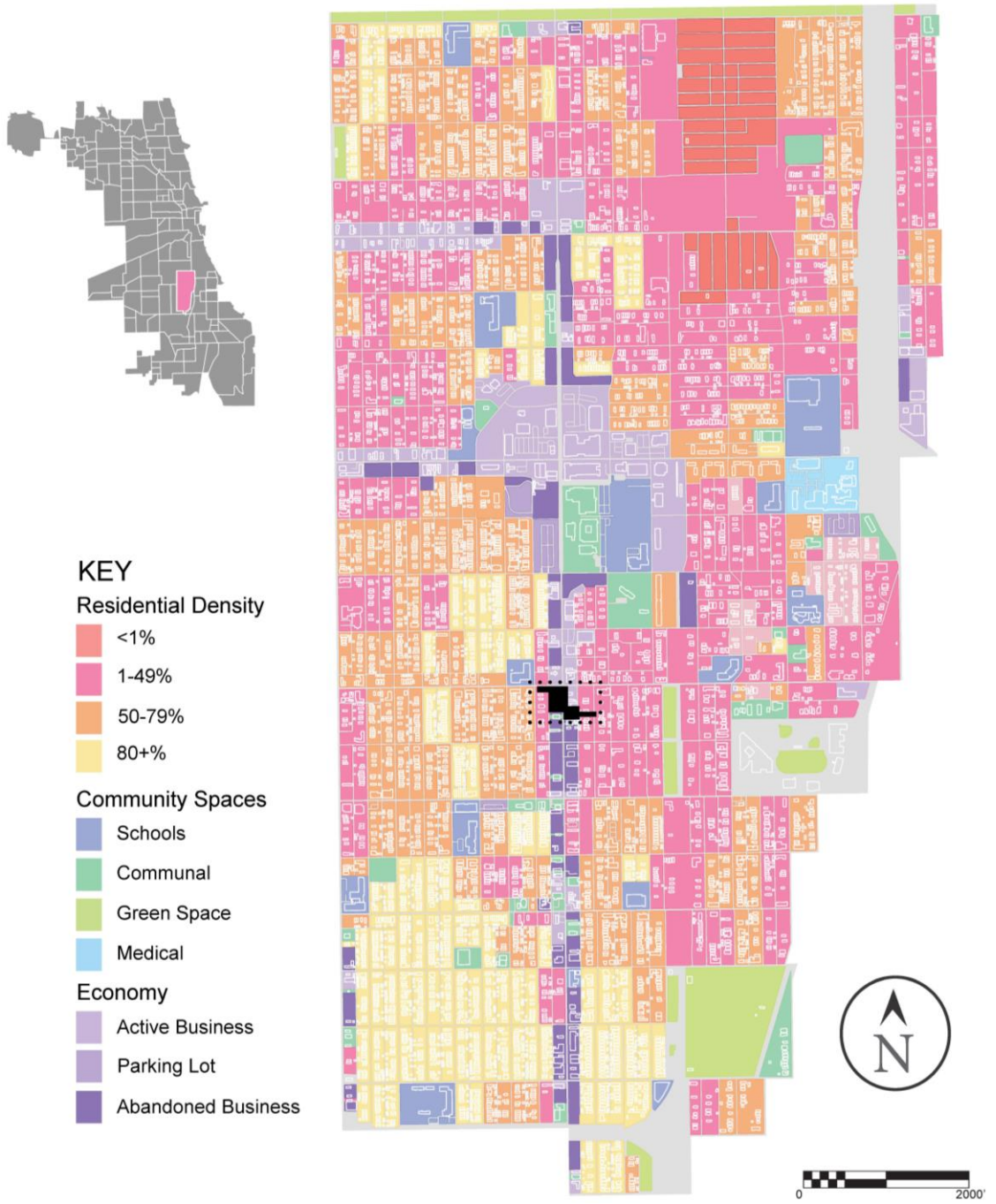


Figure 4 Mapping Englewood’s Residential, Communal and Economic Regions

*White Flight*, a lack of resources caused many of these buildings to fall into disrepair. To measure the density, a formula was implemented which took the total number of plots and residential buildings that could possibly exist on each city block, which varied between thirty-two and forty-five units, and was divided into the actual number units that exist. I then created four different brackets to clearly color code Englewood.

In the case of the blocks highlighted in red, less than 1% of the block is inhabited. In extreme cases, as can be seen on the north side of Englewood, an entire area has been vacated. For the bright pink blocks, a density of 1-49% was calculated. In other areas, such as the southwest side, many of the blocks fall within the 50-79% density category. And on the southern tip, lies the richest density of blocks, occupying over 80%. The breakdown created a clean visual representation of where Englewood was mostly struck with decay.

The third map of figure 6, Englewood Economic Breakdown, takes a closer look at the economic status of Englewood. One of the main reasons for choosing Englewood as the site for my thesis project was the development of the Englewood Square<sup>23</sup>, seen in the central cluster of active business. Whole Foods, Chipotle, Starbucks and other industry giants converted what was an abandoned district into a strip mall. As is a trend in other neighborhoods across the city, when big corporations move into an area, gentrification soon follows. Some of the residents even complained that the prices of foods and goods in these stores were so high, they couldn't afford to shop there. The other issue concerns small business. For any small businesses nearby struggling, the larger chains would surely syphon much of their business. However, there is some hope

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<sup>23</sup> Trotter, "A year in, Wholes' Englewood project still a work in progress," accessed April 20, 2020

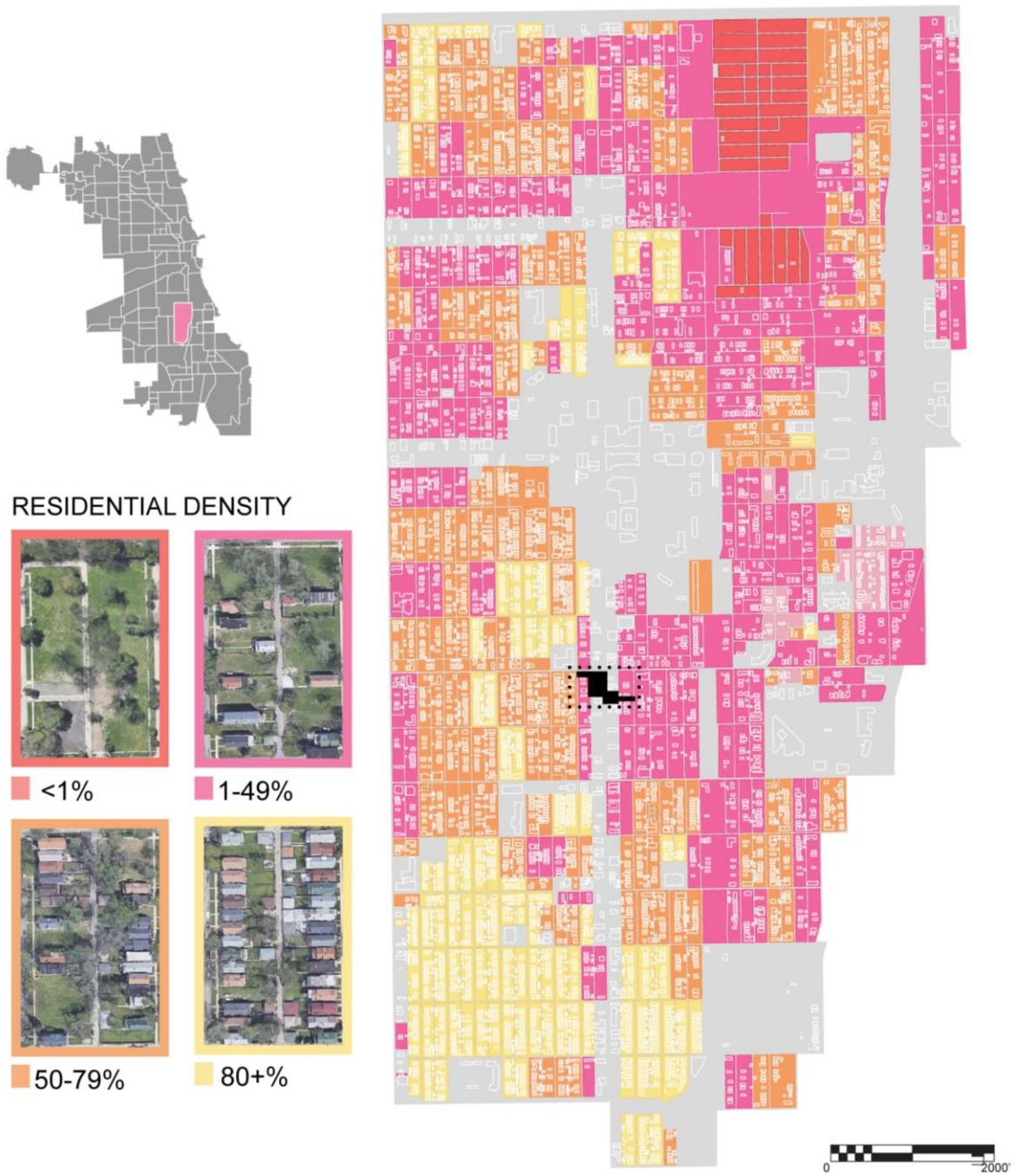


Figure 5 Mapping Englewood's Residential Densities



that the Englewood Square will rehabilitate the neighborhood. One solution Whole Foods provided was to employ people living in Englewood, however with only forty residents of the neighborhood being employed at the opening of the store<sup>24</sup>, in comparison to the over twenty-six thousand people living in Englewood, of which, 34.1%<sup>25</sup> are unemployed, the solution has its shortcomings. Another positive aspect of the new complex is an open market located in the parking lot. Local vendors are able to peddle goods during warm seasons. The overall hope is that this new development will attract enough customers and pedestrian foot traffic to the area that other business can begin to reopen, however the worry is that it will only encourage other big industries to move in, stifling small business. For my Project Site, I have chosen a low-key site south of the Square, also visible in figure 6. In an effort to move away from the larger development, I chose to focus on rehabilitating two abandoned business/residential buildings down South Halsted Street, where many of the business have either become condemned or have been demolished.

In the final map that follows, communal spaces are highlighted such as academic, social services, green spaces/parks, and medical facilities. There are currently fifteen schools located in Englewood along with a dozen churches, several rehabilitative organizations and a dozen fields or parks. Located just northwest of my site is a communal space called IMPACT Family Center, which serves as a "...human service organization dedicated to creating social change in low socio-economic areas by

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<sup>24</sup> Trotter, "A year in, Wholes' Englewood project still a work in progress," accessed April 20, 2020

<sup>25</sup> CMAP.org "Community Data Snapshot: Englewood, Chicago Community Area" accessed April 22, 2020





Figure 6 Mapping Englewood's Economic Breakdown

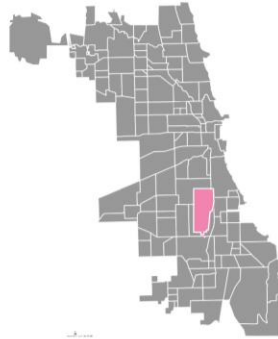
improving social and emotional well-being of youth, and families through educational, technological, mentoring, business, arts and wellness programs.”<sup>26</sup> The services rendered at this facility in conjunction with my project would extend the program from the west side of Halsted Street through to the east, and more deteriorated, side of Englewood.

Also highlighted in the map is a “park” located to the east of my site. One of the main criticisms I have developed while analyzing the green spaces created in Englewood, are their lack of place making. The majority of green spaces are similar to the one in the image, where they dedicate a large barren plot of land and incorporate a generic playground. When Daniel Burnham created the master plan of the city, he incorporated many of these standard parks in an effort to provide outdoor space in walking distance to all citizens of Chicago. However, when much of the funding for the city gets syphoned to larger development, especially to grand parks like Millennium Park and the waterfront, these smaller lots fall into disrepair due to lack of funding, making them void of cultural relevance and ultimately providing a Band-Aid solution to the necessity for outdoor gathering space.

Evaluating the residential, socioeconomic and communal imbalances of Englewood helped crystalize much of the historic research I had gathered. It was daunting to see a neighborhood so void of life, stricken with poverty and collapse, in a major city such as Chicago. Englewood falls way below the radar and is at the bottom of the priority list for the city that needed to become the top of mine.

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<sup>26</sup> “IMPACT Family Center: About,” accessed March 27, 2020



IMPACT Family



Harris Memorial Park

**KEY**

Community Spaces

- Schools
- Communal
- Green Space
- Medical

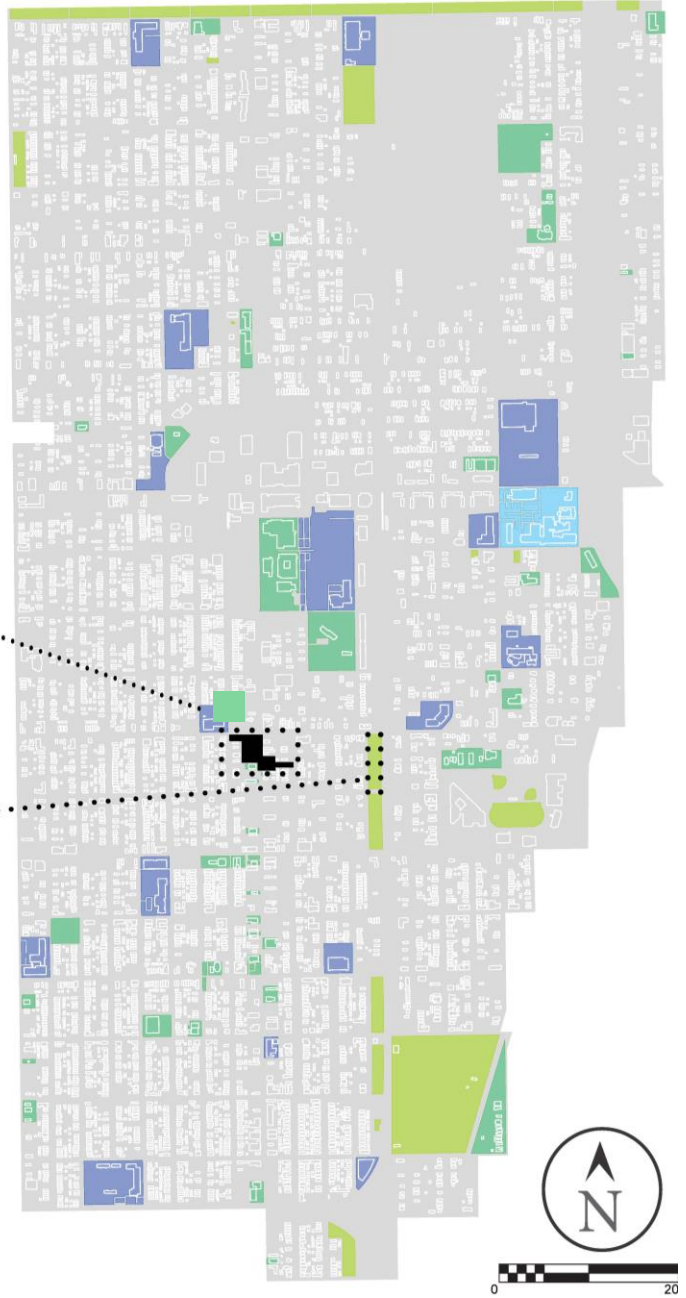


Figure 7 Mapping Englewood's Communal Spaces

## CHAPTER 5

### DESIGN AS ACTIVISM

Form is neither stylistic nor prescribed, it develops through interpretations of programmatic needs. In my understanding, form serves function. Form is a solution to function, and thus that form will be different per project in the hopes that the two aims will fuse into one. In my thesis project, with the aim of reinvigorating a community through revitalized public and private spaces in an area in deep need for function in the form of community engagement and economic stimulation, it was imperative that the overall form and aesthetics of the buildings follow the programmatic and spatial needs of the community. Whereas one could easily design a building(s) meant to beautify a place, the real complexity and challenge was to identify what the community was lacking and use that research to inform how the overall form of the building could provide a place of connectivity, both symbolically and physically, and for the form of the building to arise from necessity; that true beauty will only arise from form that is based on function and intention. In pursuit of that delicate balance, I turned to the teachings of architectural activists.

Samuel Mockbee, who was an optimist, dedicated to humanitarian design, and who passed away in 2001, left behind a generation of architects who learned a valuable lesson early in their careers. “If you really pay attention to what’s around you...if you really look, and see, and feel – it’s not hard to say that there’s a lot to be done right here

in our own backyard”<sup>27</sup> The Mockbee Rural Studio, now under the direction of Andrew Freear, provide their students with a hands on experience where they engage with the community that they are a part of, understand the needs of the impoverished patrons they are building for, and provide for them a space where the dwellers aren’t being forced to change or to conform to their new “architectural” homes, but can allow there, “...spirit to move freely through the space...”<sup>28</sup> along with making the way they live their lives better and healthier by providing air circulation and running water amongst other necessities. For architects like Mockbee, Bell and Wakeford, that is what architecture is. In an effort to promote the ideas and foster a further sense of community, Bell and Wakeford’s book, *Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism*, contains a collection of case studies explained by the designers who facilitated them, seeking to create a constructed collaboration with communities. Of those case studies, I have chosen two that provide insight into my own project.

The first chapter I will discuss is *Claiming Public Space: The Case for Proactive Democratic Design* by Peter Aeschbacher and Michael Rios. Both are committed to social change, and have written numerous periodicals concerning the improvement of communities through awareness and design. Throughout this chapter, ideas concerning the citizen and democratic design thematically encourage social responsibility amongst citizen-designers. They write, “As citizens we have a personal obligation to define our values and ethics as the foundation for participation in the public area. As citizen-designers, we must define the role of the design and planning disciplines in an

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<sup>27</sup> *Citizen Architect: Samuel Mockbee and the Spirit of the Rural Studio*. Directed by Sam Wainwright Douglas. 2010. USA: Big Beard Films, DVD

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*

increasingly pluralistic and global culture.”<sup>29</sup> They advocate that a focus on community engagement during the design education will encourage a paradigmatic shift. They also make a compelling case for the redistribution of public land back to the public. They explain how in, “...the best circumstances, the built environment embodies the highest common aspirations and ideals of community’s citizens. More often it reflects dominant values...For this reason it is crucial to claim space for engagement through participation and design.”<sup>30</sup>

The writers also explain the difference between *Democratic Design* and *Agonistic Design*. Whereas the Democratic design would encourage the cultivation of common interests in a unified liberal public that, “...deliberates on issues of common interest and concern in a public forum...”<sup>31</sup> In a communal built space, the Agonistic Design would foster individuality. The goal here is to avoid imposing an authoritarian order. To avoid such an issue, full participation, “...in the creation of the built environment inspires competing visions of the common good. Within a reinvigorated vision of agonistic democracy, participation enables empowerment and bestows responsibility for realizing a vision of the future.”<sup>32</sup> The aim of my project is to foster both commonality and individuality. By dedicating a large portion of my project to rentable spaces of varying size, in different economic brackets, with only some limits and restrictions as to the activities, services and goods being sold, I am encouraging democratic design in a collective way while still promoting the individuality of each unit.

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<sup>29</sup> Aeschbacher & Rios, “Claiming Public Space: The case for Proactive Democratic Design” 87

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 89

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 90

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 90

The optimistic and idealistic views set forth in this chapter are inspiring, and in conjunction with the work Bryan Bell and the Mockbee Rural Studio, make plausible and possible the for young designers to feel a sense of empowerment and also a sense of responsibility to their community and served to define the programmatic needs of my project.

Very prevalent in my project is the use of ecological design to provide resources for the community in the form of agriculture and safety. As defined by Hodsini and Marvin, “*Ecological Urbanism* is a new style of urbanism that provides the technological solutions and market frameworks to overcome what we would have conventionally understood as limits while anticipating a period of climate change and ensuring continued reproduction under a period of resource constraint.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, accepting the limitations of a place and converting them into parameters for solving issues on resource depletion in the face of climate change. Applying that idea to Englewood means creating a framework that provides communal agriculture with the aim of providing food security. This is vitally important in Englewood, as food scarcity has been a recent issue. Aside from Whole Foods, who recently moved into the area, fresh organic produce was limited in Englewood. And while Whole Foods is one viable option for those who can afford it, the most economical and environmentally sustainable option would be if Englewood could produce and sell their own, on both a large and small scale. Meaning, Englewood would benefit greatly from having several rooftop greenhouses, land used for large scale agriculture, and most importantly community gardens. Hodsini and Marvin go on further to explain this idea.

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<sup>33</sup> Hodsini And Marvin, *Ecological Urbanism*, 208

[I]ncreasing concerns over ‘urban ecological security’ are giving rise to strategies to reconfigure cities and their infrastructures in ways that help to secure their ecological and material reproduction—that is, their capacity to secure the resources (such as water, energy, but also including waste disposal and protection from flooding) required to ensure their continued economic and social development.<sup>34</sup>

In the following chapter I will discuss how these design principles are implemented, and how they helped enhance my project.

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<sup>34</sup> Hodsinn And Marvin, *Ecological Urbanism*, 212



## CHAPTER 6

### PRECEDENTS

The Hegeman Supportive Housing complex in Brownsville, Brooklyn NY provides housing for low-income and formerly homeless individuals, in a model known as Supportive Housing. Developed by Breaking Ground, a non-profit organization aiming to end homelessness, and designed by Cook + Fox Architects, this residential community promotes healthy living by providing public and private gardens which encourages urban farming, equal opportunity housing, fitness rooms, ample daylighting, but most important, an entire Social Supportive Services facility seeking to stimulate the town. In the 1970s, the area was devastated by arson, and much of the community was rebuilt and designated as “low-income” which brought on a wave of crime, drug use, low test scores, and student truancy. Organizations like Common Ground Community seek to reverse some of those negative effects.

The ground floor provides the Social Supportive Services facility, making it easily accessible. The L-Shaped configuration allows for a privatized garden while a smaller community garden adjacent to the road not only invites the surrounding community but creates a buffer for the private garden. The above residential floors are elevated off the street level and the double loaded corridors allow for maximum efficiency for the equal opportunity housing. The glass connection between the two buildings creates a light filled communal space, while the brick façade punctuated by fenestration and Juliet balconies creates a sense of stability while also providing safe outdoor spaces for each apartment.

The Hegeman

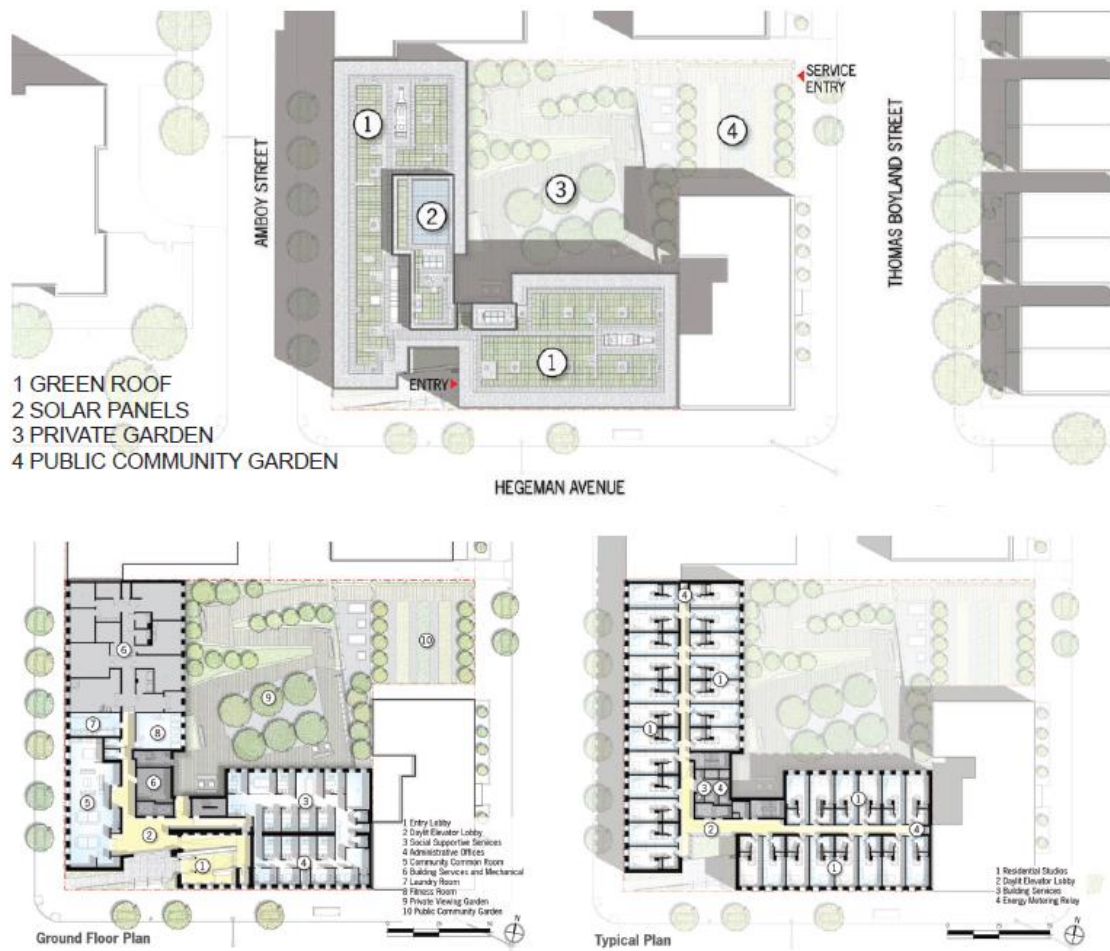


Figure 8 Hegeman Supportive Housing Renderings, “The Hegeman,” breakingground.org



Figure 9 Hegeman Supportive Housing Site Plan and Floor Plans, “The Hegeman,” breakingground.org

Another project is the SOUTH SIDE SOAP BOX + GOTHAM GREENS by Chicago Neighborhood Initiatives, designed by William McDonough + Partners. Their goal was to, "...build the world's first and only LEED Platinum certified plan in its industry. The manufacturing facility features a refurbished 230-foot wind turbine, combined with the solar energy from solar panels...which provides approximately half of the facility's electrical needs. Method's Pullman plant currently employs 100 people."<sup>35</sup> In areas, such as the South Side, where many neighborhoods are nestled within food deserts, the rooftop garden not only provides employment to locals but a viable source of healthy food.

This project is relevant as utilizes the rooftop of a commercial building as a greenhouse on the *South Side* of Chicago. One important aspect of my project is the implementation of a greenhouse atop of a new structure nestled between two condemned existing buildings. By utilizing the upper level of the building as a greenhouse daylighting is used as a source of energy for the growing operation. The availability of locally sourced organic food grown by residents of Englewood provides economic stimulation along with sustenance for the community.

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<sup>35</sup> "Gotham Greens - Pullman" accessed June 8, 2020

Gotham Greens



Figure 10 Gotham Greens Greenhouse Aerial View,  
“Gotham Greens – Pullman” CNIGroup.org



Figure 11 Gotham Greens Greenhouse Interior View,  
“Gotham Greens – Pullman” CNIGroup.org



Creating a sense of place in the heart of Englewood is another main goal for this project, and I have chosen to utilize two existing three-story red brick buildings and the space between as my community center and commercial space. The Pilsen Mural project provides an example of how that can be accomplished. The project consists of renovating two four-story brick factory buildings as office and commercial spaces, with public green space on the rooves. The interiors were gutted, and heavy timber framing combined with steel connections and concrete floors were used to strengthen the building.

The two buildings are spaced apart, creating a central void and opportunity for a communal green space where the Mural Park is located. A glass walkway is used to connect the two buildings on the ground floor along with all glass facades on the first floors of each building, blurring the boundary between interior and exterior space, but also allowing for the mural and public green space to be visible from the interior.

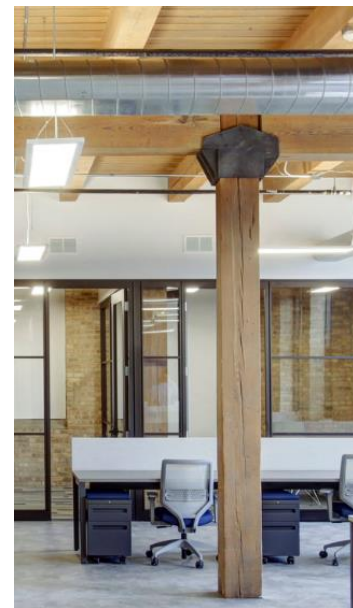


Figure 12 Pilsen Mural Park Timber Support, Muralpark.com

Utilizing a similar tactic, I have designed a more enclosed space between the two existing buildings on my site. The space houses a communal recreational space and commercial spaces, with a walkway on the upper floor to connect the two buildings and create more circulation. A tall curtain wall at the face of the building allows a visual connection to the residential building and greenspaces also a part of my project which is located directly across Halsted Street.

Pilsen Mural Project



Figure 13 Pilsen Mural Project Axonometric, Muralpark.com

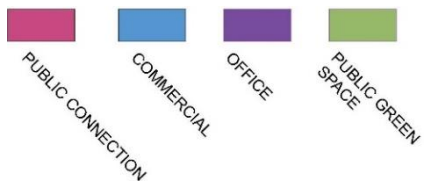
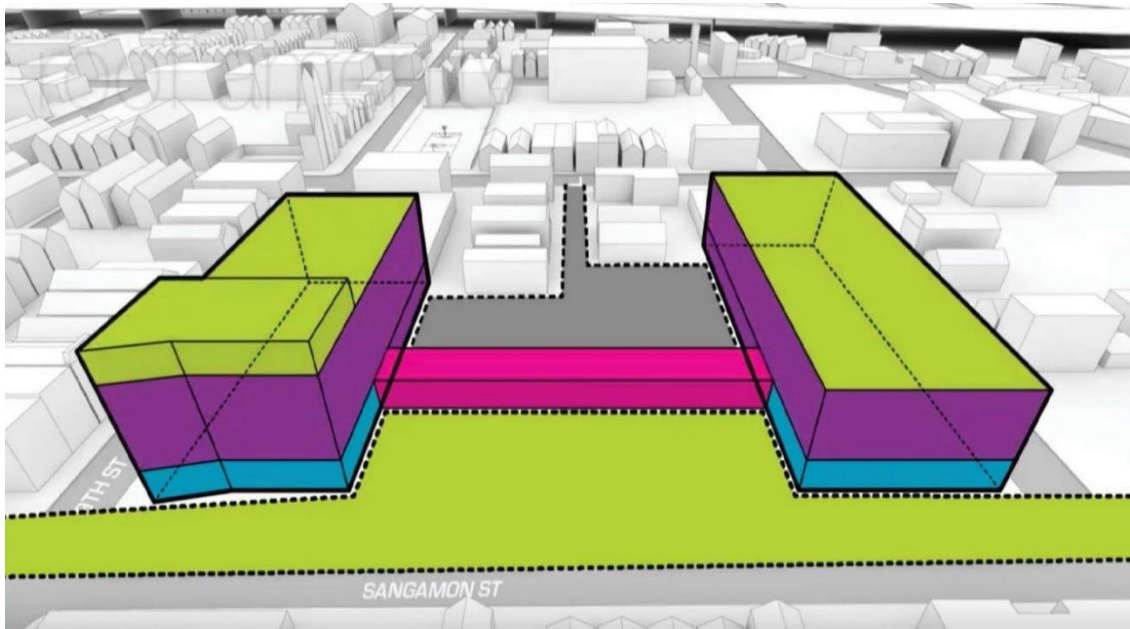


Figure 14 Pilsen Mural Project Diagram, Muralpark.com

Circulation through the buildings and across the grounds of my project is meant to be cohesive and promote a flow of pedestrian traffic at a diagonal axis. The complication was that Chicago's infrastructure was planned as a highly organized coordinate grid. Any attempt to implement landscape across the three buildings of my site (interrupted by a main road and two alleyways) meant the connections from every new and existing sidewalk and crosswalk, and interior corridors of my buildings, needed to be interlaced. A theoretical project that successfully embeds the pathways of a park into an existing coordinate grid is the Can Escandell Park.

The Can Escandell Park project conceives of organic pathways moving in north-south and east-west directions are woven into the existing grid, which provides multiple points of entry, utilizes existing pathways, and creates the opportunity for rounded and more naturalized landscape. According to Casanova+Hernandez, "The grid of path through the park is designed to establish continuity with the network of adjacent streets, connecting with the urban residential zone to the south, the new Can Escandell urban development to the north and the historic center of Ibiza Town to the east."<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, the paths of my project tap into the existing infrastructure to ensure connectivity from one side of Englewood to the other, which allows people to move from a residential area on the west side, across a business corridor, on into the residential area on the east side, promoting healthy communal interaction. Furthermore, the diagonality enhanced the exterior space by creating interesting intersecting secondary pathways and fun landscape opportunities.

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<sup>36</sup> Casanova+Hernandez, *Public Space Acupuncture*, 153

# Can Escandell Park

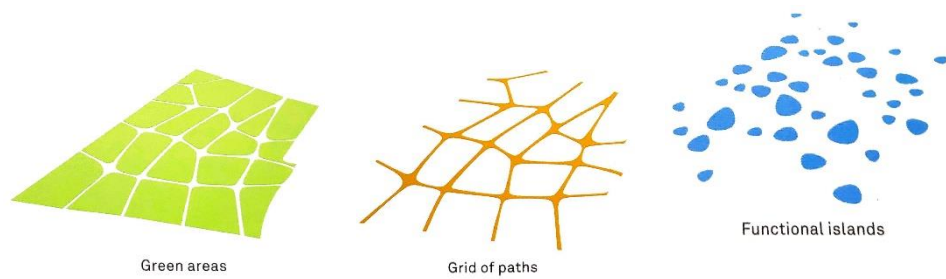


Figure 15 Can Escandell Park: Connecting to Existing Walkways  
*Public Space Acupuncture*



## CHAPTER 7

### DESIGN PROCESS

Through careful analysis of the residential, communal and commercial regions of Englewood, I began to see patterns which informed the spatial configuration of my project. In combination with research on other design strategies and implementing the programmatic needs of the community, daylighting, lines of sight, and safety factors, the project began to take shape.

As part of another investigatory exercise, I took a virtual walkthrough down the East side of Englewood where disinvestment afflicted residents the most. Starting from the northern edge of the neighborhood, moving south toward my site, images were captured using Google Earth at increments of 150 to 180 meters. I then created sketch overlays with pencil, ink and color pencils to further familiarize myself the surrounds. In these images, overgrown grass can be seen in areas of desolation left behind by demolished buildings. Of the buildings still standing, many are abandoned and windows



Figure 16 Englewood Virtual Walkthrough Sketches

are boarded up. The vast majority of buildings are multiple unit residences, which were mostly comprised of red brick.

Another discovery made during the research component is the divide down the business corridor on South Halsted Street, causing a major rift in the community. As previously mentioned, the west side of Englewood is heavily settled, whereas the east side contains many leveled sites causing large voids between buildings. The diagram below depicts how the mending of that rift requires movement to flow from one side of the neighborhood to the other. New public and private spaces that promotes circulation for the residents of Englewood to meander from the east and west sides of the town was

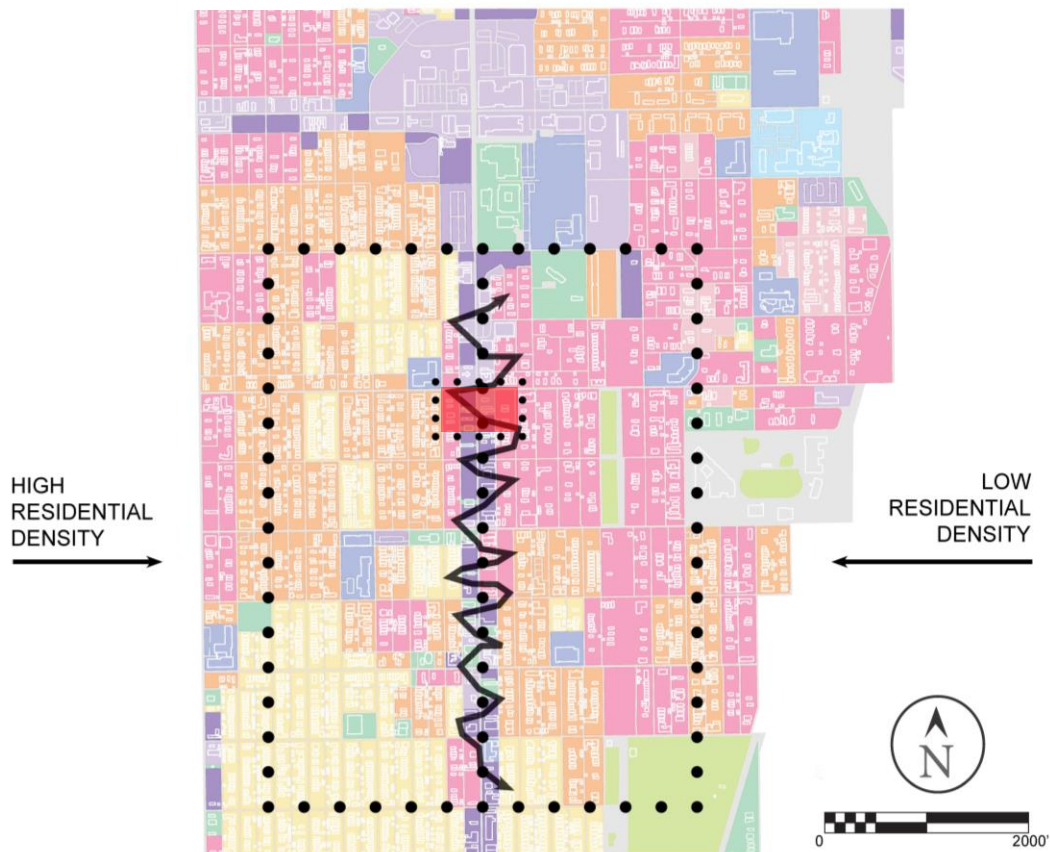


Figure 17 Stitching the Rift in Englewood Diagram

enforced an effort to connect the community. While I focused on one area of Englewood, as depicted by the red portion in figure 13, the same diagonality could be used down the business district, stitching the socioeconomic rift that it creates. Implementing diagonal connectivity for my specific site is one example of a larger scheme that could be implemented down Englewood's business corridor.

Next, an analysis on movement was created by etching the footprint of every existing building and lot onto an acrylic sheet and overlaying colored tape which represents movement and pathways. The goal was to locate all of the voids in the area and find ways to connect them. It was essential that the overall site maintain cohesive connections with existing sidewalks and crosswalks, in order to embed the project into existing modes of travel. For that reason, I also paid close attention to aerial views of Englewood, locating beaten pathways created by pedestrians taking short cuts through the vacated lots. Diagonal movement can already be seen throughout the neighborhood,

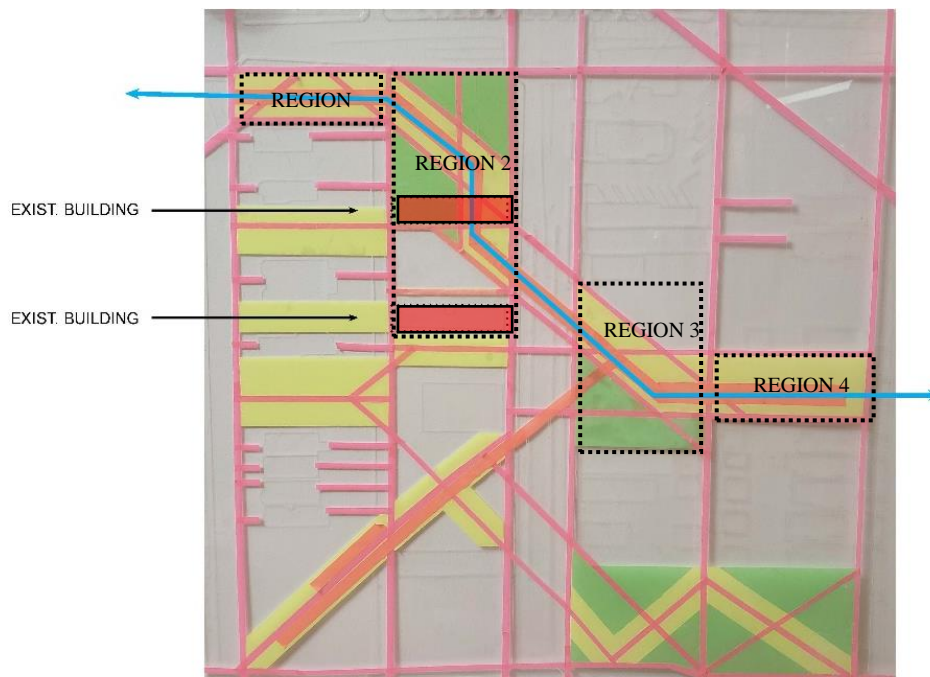


Figure 18 Acrylic Etching and Diagonal Patterns

and the voids allowed for that movement.

As part of the goal to create connectivity across the Englewood rift, was the implementation of landscaping that visually and physically connected the four major regions of my site as seen in figure 14. A major road and two alley ways cut through the overall site, but with the use of landscaping, I was able to direct foot traffic and lines of sight. Creating pathways through the four regions ensured a safe connection and created cohesion between the regions.

Adaptive reuse was another major aspect of the project. Also seen in figure 14 is the footprint of two existing three story abandoned brick buildings. In the commitment to embed the project into the community, the two buildings maintained their original facades while bookending the main community center. A heavy timber structure nestles in between the two buildings, which provide structural support for the exterior walls facing the central vacuole. The heavy timber supports also allowed for the exterior facades to be punctuated with doorways, creating a connection between the two existing buildings and the central structure which aided in unifying the main community center.

The following diagram further explains the connectivity of the site, as previously mentioned, was a guiding factor for this project. The overall geometry of the complex resulted from creating diagonal movement. The exterior pathways in combination with interior hallways creates a variety of ways to meander through the site. A crosswalk and medians were implemented on South Halsted Street to provide a safe transition from one zone of my project to the other.

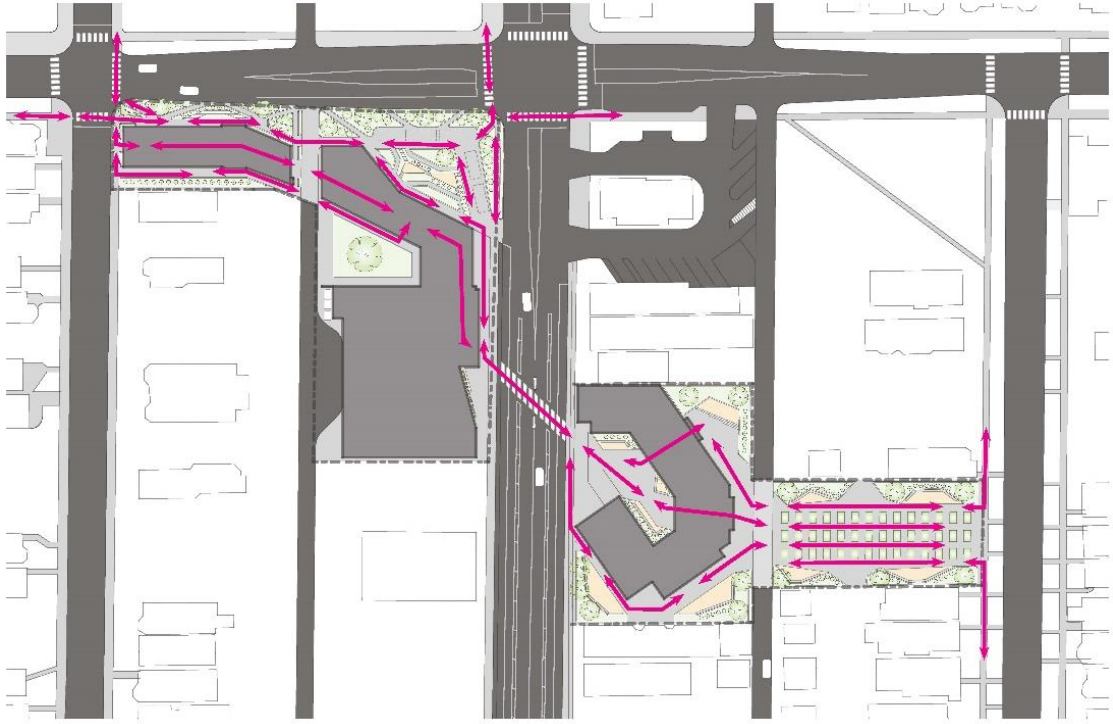


Figure 19 Pedestrian Circulation Diagram

## CHAPTER 8

### PUBLIC SPACE AND RESIDENTIAL DESIGN

#### 8.1 Final Design

Defining new public and private spaces in a neighborhood stricken with poverty, disinvestment and widespread decay, meant creating spaces which empowered the community and provided a platform for identity, economic advancement, food security and safety. In addition, the project intends to bridge the two sides of the neighborhood separated by a decayed business corridor, further segregated by an imbalance of wealth and resources. And lastly the project aspires to create a welcoming residential building that provides equal housing opportunities for mixed income families.

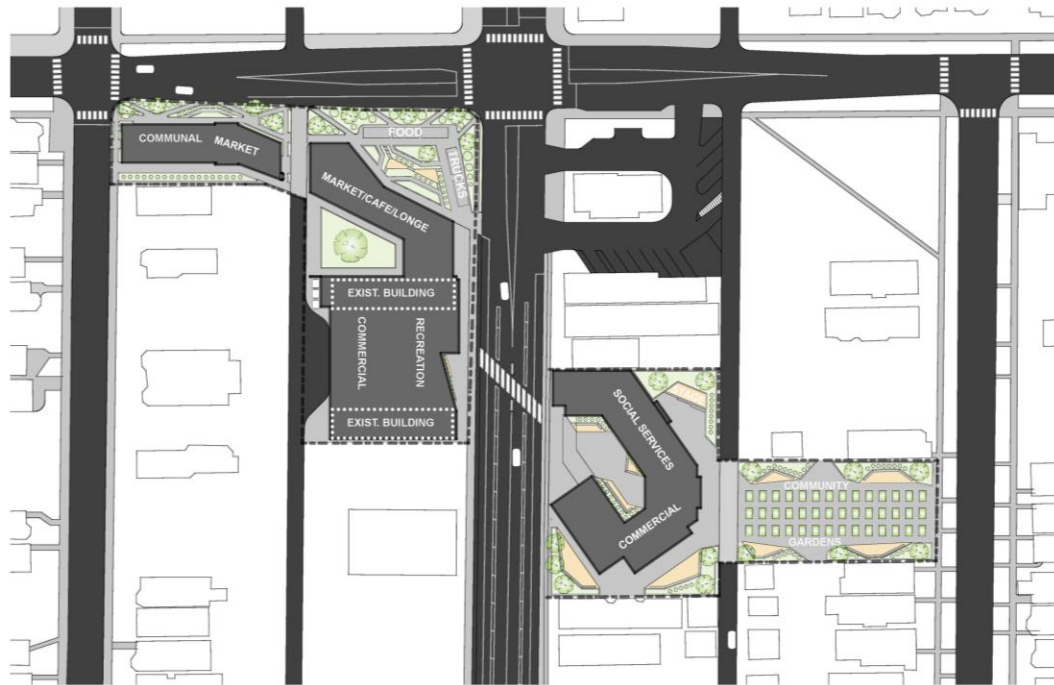


Figure 20 Site Plan and Landscaping



Upon spatial analysis and carving out a site amidst the voids and remnants of a district once bolstered as the most prolific in the Midwest, but now sadly abandoned and desolate, the larger gestures of the site were generated and programmatic needs began sculpting the buildings.

Of the many programmatic requirements incorporated into the overall scheme of the complex, I focused on the following:

1. Communal market
2. Lounge/café
3. Commercial spaces
4. Indoor recreational areas
5. Social services
6. Outdoor community gathering space
7. Community agriculture garden
8. Equal Opportunity Mixed-Income Residences

On the northwest corner of the new complex, facing the more affluent side of the neighborhood is now the Communal Market. Small spaces available for rent at low cost provide the locals with an all year-round space to be utilized in their own manner. The idea was to create a safe and simple wood frame structure with large bay doors facing the exterior garden at each rentable unit. During the cold seasons, the building would close its doors and operate internally, however during the warm seasons, the doors could all be raised, creating a porosity that blurs the boundaries between indoor and outdoor space. Across the alleyway, is the continuation of marketplace, maintaining a similar configuration, but with larger rentable units. The Market/Lounge/Café sits behind a

community garden with spaces for food trucks and outdoor recreational areas. Parallel to the street, creating a naturalist safety buffer setback, is a thicket of trees and planting, making the outdoor spaces in front of the markets and lounge/café a safer place to congregate as lines of sight are diminished. A similar tactic was used to surround the residential building and frame the community gardens as can be seen in figure 16 by the green areas. Lines of sight can be seen by the yellow cones which create a visual connection across the business corridor.



Figure 21 Natural Safety Buffer and Line-of-Sight Diagram



The ground floor of the complex was developed to have a hierarchical organization of space along with a continuation of diagonality and circulation, as has been a major theme in this project. The overarching goal was to connect the community in three ways. First, from the already discussed west and east sides of Englewood. Secondly, to create a permeable façade allowing for patrons of the individual rentable units to interact with pedestrians. And overall, to create an agonistic and democratic atmosphere which unifies people of like goals in commerce and trade while providing a tabula rasa assortment of spaces where individuals can apply their own interests and identities. Additionally, by creating several scales of rentable units, economic progression can be achieved. Across the street, at the bottom floor of the residential units, a space dedicated to social services and more commercial space. Entrances from the exterior creates a flow of movement through and around the building

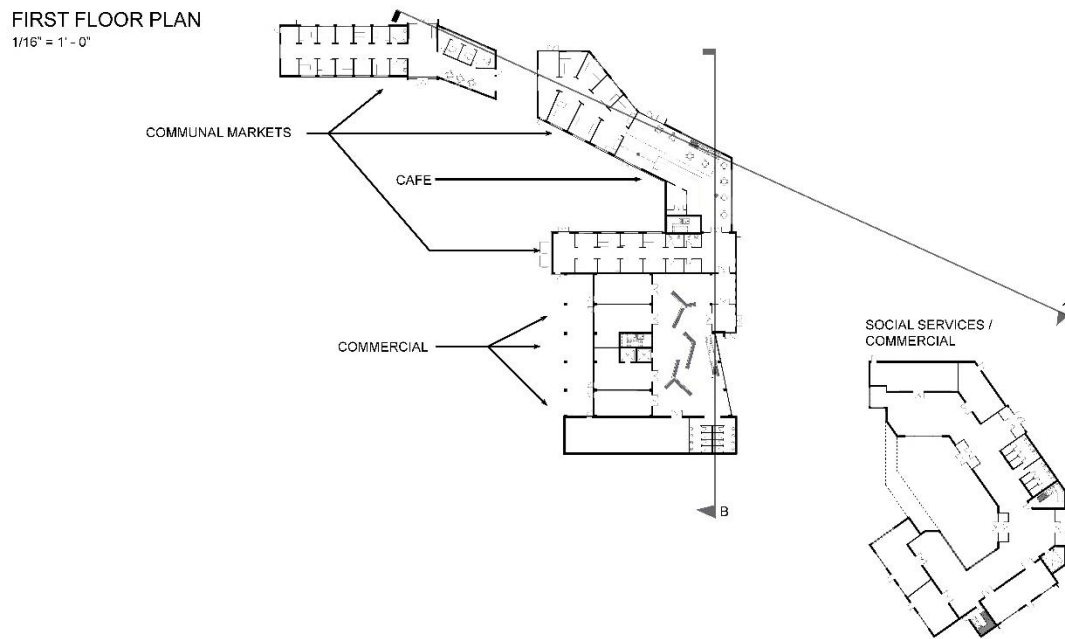


Figure 22 First Floor Plan

The next floor provides three major functions. The lounge situated above the café provides an elevated space for locals to convene. To the north of the café is a small outdoor garden equipped with flower boxes and trellises. South of the café is a gallery space with moveable or removable partitions. The goal was never to implement a rigid plan, but to instead create the opportunity for these spaces to evolve. South of the gallery is a second level of commercial spaces, the largest in the complex. A diagonal staircase, running parallel to the curtain wall allows for egress back down to the communal lobby on the first floor. Across the street, residential units can be seen circulating a central courtyard. At each residential floor, a circular walkway and outdoor balcony is provided to encourage the dwellers to unite on the exterior.

SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
1/16" = 1' - 0"

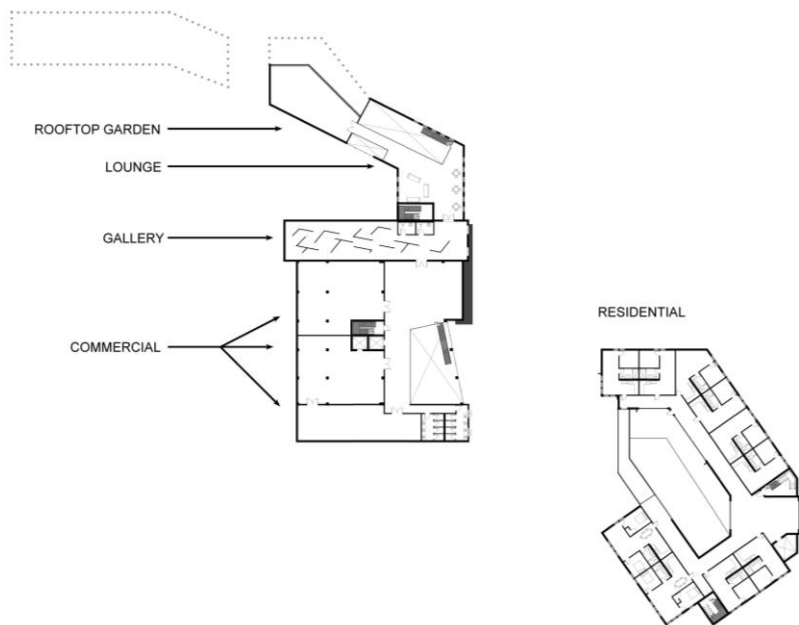


Figure 23 Second Floor Plan

The third floor of the community center, the most simplistic of plans yet possibly the most benefit in the entire project, is dedicated to a rooftop greenhouse. Heavy timber structures rise up through the floorplates and supports a light aluminum structure. The glass roof has a saw tooth configuration, allowing for each panel open for ventilation. To the north of the greenhouse, a space dedicated to packaging, refrigeration, mechanical equipment and storage for all materials and resources needed to operate the greenhouse. South of the greenhouse is a space that could be used as an office housing administration, sales and/or marketing for the greenhouse. Across the street, another layer of residential units.

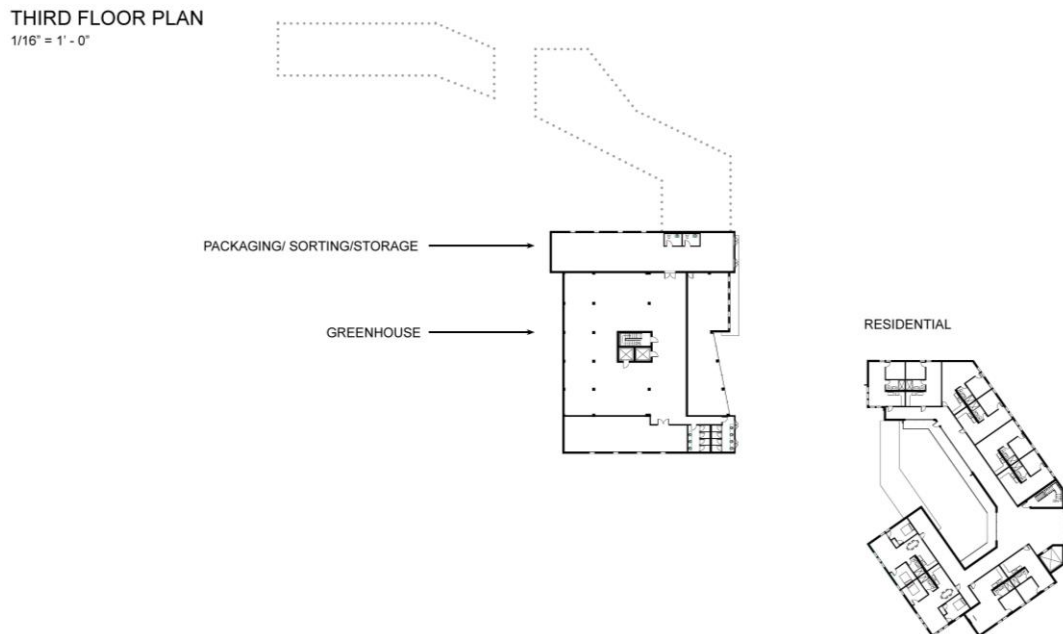


Figure 24 Third Floor Plan

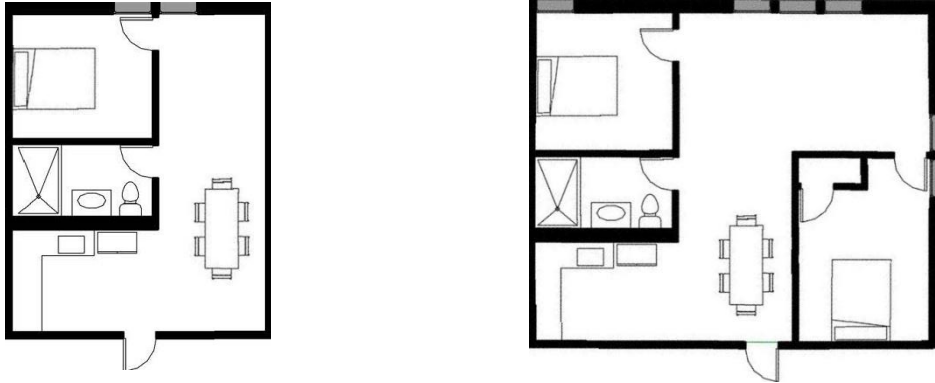
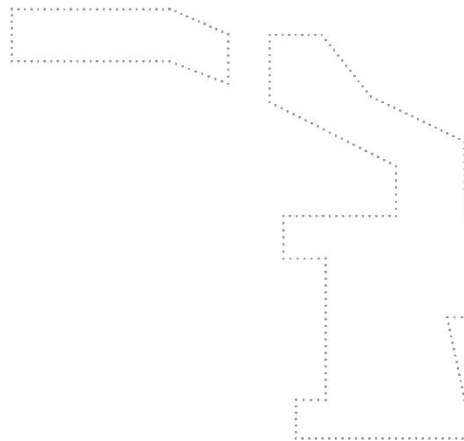


Figure 25 One and Two Bedroom Floor Plans

Finally, the fourth floor of the residential complex, which is identical to the floors below it. On each of the three residential floors are two sized units as seen in figure 24. There are a total of 24 one bedroom units at 500 sq ft and 6 two bedroom at 1000 sq ft. Affordability was a main factor when sizing the units as was providing daylighting to each living quarter.

FOURTH FLOOR PLAN  
1/16" = 1' - 0"



RESIDENTIAL

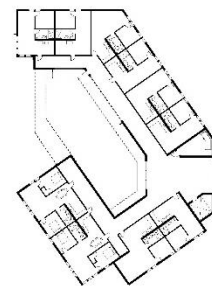


Figure 26 Fourth Floor Plan

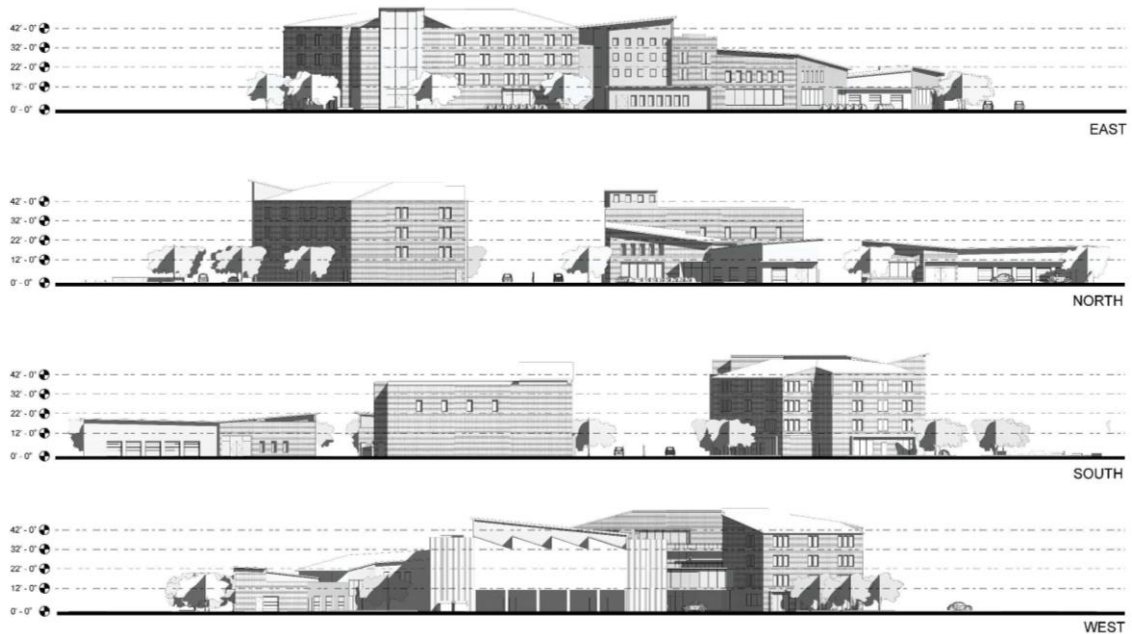


Figure 27 Elevations

The scale of the community market center, located on the north east corner of the complex and seen best in the right side of the north elevation is meant to welcome the community by not being too tall and overpowering. Since there are three roads (one main and two alleyways) that divide the complex, the language of the rooves also needed to gesture toward one another. Since the existing building is a tall three-stories, the rooves also needed to grow in height as they docked onto the side. While the buildings are fractured, they play off of one another cohesively.

The renderings that follow provide a quick snapshot of the two main recreational spaces. The first rendering is the café situated in front of the food trucks. The second rendering, is at the ground floor of the main community space located between the two renovated buildings on site.

Renderings and Section



Figure 28 Market Café/Lounge



Figure 29 Section



Figure 30 Community Center Lobby

## 8.2 Conclusion

Having been born and raised in Chicago was inspiring, as I was in proximity to beautiful historic buildings and skyscrapers. As a teenager, I envisioned myself creating grand buildings and gaining world renowned fame. The city skyline inspired big dreams, though it looked small in the distance as I sat atop the “L” station waiting for my train to take me to school, and away from my neighborhood. Upon leaving Chicago, and moving to New England, I was introduced to a different life. Cityscapes turned to landscapes and the boundaries that separated homes in the city, disappeared. There was a sense of community, and a loss of fear. When faced with the conundrum of what I wanted to focus on for thesis, I knew almost instantly that I wanted to take the values I had learned here in Massachusetts, from the lessons learned through relationships with the locals to the education instilled in me through the rigors of architecture school.

Creating a sense of community, providing a platform for socioeconomic change and developing a connectivity to one’s surroundings were the ultimate goals of my project. By taking a deeper look at historic facts and figures, a process of spatial analysis, and guiding principles in architectural activism, I developed a complex where people from all over the community can gather, share experiences, and be given the tools to raise themselves out of disparity. For neighborhoods like Englewood Chicago, disinvested over decades, funding and opportunity need to become a priority, and my goal was to provide one example for how that could be accomplished.

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