High-Density Residential Development
Madison-MLK Corridor

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of the Niehoff Urban Studio this past Autumn Quarter 2008 was an examination of the Madison-MLK Corridor within an understanding of its role as one of Cincinnati’s “Great Streets and Gateways.” The GO Cincinnati Report recently published in 2008 was seen as and instigator in our involvement and thus served as a primary means of information and findings collected primarily by the Brookings Institute.

Among other areas such as office park and green industry, the report dictated an apparent need for higher density residential development along the corridor, drawing on the inherently attractive nature of Cincinnati’s neighborhoods as “walkable urban places.” By capturing the unmet potential of these “centers of daily living,” Cincinnati could greatly benefit with development of higher density residential development alongside targeted investments in streetfront retail, parks, and open space, restaurants and transit. Correspondingly, the report named two key market segments that could serve to stimulate the residential real estate markets in the Cincinnati region: young professionals and empty nesters.

As such, I was led to an objective central to “ENHANCING RESIDENTIAL MIX AND COHESIVENESS ALONG THE CORRIDOR”:

“The Madison Road-MLK Corridor provides a linear organization for some of Cincinnati’s finest, most eclectic, and historically diverse residential communities. Despite their proven viability, there remain factors inhibiting the healthy growth and development needed to sustain these neighborhoods: a lack of neighborhood interconnectivity, an inadequate mix of housing options, and an unmet demand for housing, primarily produced by the growth of the university and area hospitals. Thus, I propose an integrated approach aimed at enhancing the corridor through a design solution that looks at existing street networks, how these affect patterns and forms of residential development, and the related quality of life along the corridor.”

SOURCE Google Street View

SELECTION METHODOLOGY

These six areas were designated as prime areas for high density residential development along the Madison-MLK Corridor due to varying factors of proximity to: 1. greenspace/openspace 2. commercial/retail activity (neighborhood business district) 3. accessibility to potential mass transit systems* 4. stable residential area/good existing building stock 5. strong neighborhood identity
DESIGN METHODOLOGY:  
THE FRACTAL CITY

The origins of my vision for the corridor were formulated in an idea that these unique and distinct neighborhoods could be further nurtured and stimulated in a residential growth pattern, propelling a notion of intimate, walkable environments entirely differentiated by this element from their suburban counterparts and yet, at the same time appearing more attractive to these targeted audiences. This would mean that our city and indeed neighborhoods would become a hybrid of both humanistic traditional neighborhood design and car-centric modern architecture and transit patterns.

It was in this thinking that I turned to urban theorist and mathematician Nikos Salingaros and his notions of “the fractal city.” Carrying a belief that these “living cities have intrinsically fractal properties, in common with all living systems,” he concerns himself with how to encourage the “connective geometry” to rebuild a new pedestrian network into our car-dominated cities. He proffers that these “anti-fractal geometrical typologies” of modern development are resultants of the pressure to accommodate the automobile and increased population growth.

 Appropriately, Salingaros aims for a solution in the fractal city that not only replaces many “dirty” connections of the older city, freeing up infrastructure and fuel consumption, but also offers a structural template to follow in rebuilding the urban fabric. Thus, he promotes an idea of greater variety and variability of paths for both pedestrian and car, increased residential and commercial typology to bolster the smaller-scale end that has become destroyed up by zoning restrictions and commercial standards, and a more thorough fractalization in open spaces and parks to fully create human scale activity and natural stimulation.

If further interested in his concepts, please see any of his works, particularly “‘Small-World’ Networks and the Fractal City” or “Connecting the Fractal City.”

His thoughts on how to ameliorate these problems of the contemporary city reside in two simple concepts that are found in fractal patterns of some of the finest and most human urban environments:

**scaling**_ an understanding that different processes and mechanisms of the city operate on different scales (i.e. parks, open spaces, buildings, neighborhoods, etc.)

+ **connectivity**_ fundamentally important for the exchange of information achieved through “alternative paths by permutation” and multi layered transportation systems (i.e. pedestrian paths, bikeways, streetcar, limited access vehicular streets, woonerfs, etc.)

It is through such a simplistic understanding of fractility that I will approach these six areas to examine and suggest the most suitable sites, configurations, and typologies for high-density residential development along the Madison-MLK Corridor.
Already proven a successful residential locale as in the case of Stratford Heights on the south side of Martin Luther King Drive, this site currently consumed by parking and university vehicle services has a proximal relationship to UC’s Children’s Hospital, the Corryville NBD along Short Vine, and public transit opportunities.

**DENSITY gradient**

- **height**: 3 - 10 story
- **type**: apartments, condos, townhouses, and duplexes
**SCALING**
The inherent dominance of surrounding institutions suggests a need for a more gradual understanding of scale while transitioning to more traditional neighborhood blocks.

**CONNECTIVITY**
Following similar ideas of scale to manipulate this juxtaposition, the circuitry of streets, pedestrian paths, and vehicular right of way should allow residents and visitors to travel safely from one point to another.

**BIG IDEA...** Movement towards residential buildings that have a language of fractility would not only supply greater capacity for the growing hospital and university, but at the same time perform in scaling that visually responds to both the motorist and pedestrian, hospital and residential neighborhood.

The use of south-oriented buildings promotes the ability of these buildings to be more sustainable living environments, utilizing the advantages of daylighting as well as green roof and solar panel technology. This sort of mounding of density as means of buffering and transitioning enables this assortment of living opportunities to become integrated as one holistic environment, sharing a campus-like configuration.
The intersection of Madison Road and Woodburn Avenue ignites a moment of authentic urbanism upon the reveal of the monumental Saint Francis De Sales Church and surrounding historic built form. These sensational qualities make the area conducive to furthering higher-density residential development that community amenities.

**DENSITY**

**gradient**

**height** 2-6 story

**type** condos, apartments, flats, rowhouses, townhouses, duplexes
SCALING
The uniquely urban architectural attributes of this area act as a truly great amenity for the neighborhood. Yet, at the same time they serve to create disparate shifts and at times voids in form and thus, scale, that may unjustly conjure an image of an unsafe or unwelcoming environment.

CONNECTIVITY
Quite appropriately, the connectivity of the corner's distinctive block formation is essential in weaving the high density residential development into the surrounding lower density housing.

BIG IDEA... Infill development that serves to enhance and celebrate the urban environment and historic integrity of the buildings can be accomplished through the addition of buildings that exude the same fractal nature as the existing traditional Italianate architecture, yet contributes to the typological morphology of the corner.

By creating a higher density not only directly adjacent to the corridor, but also further in along Chapel Street and Woodburn Avenue, a true sense of the authentic urban environment can be felt. This is further encourage by increased opportunities for open space and parks. The most northern development capitalizes on park views as a selling point for these apartments and condos.
An intervention of a dramatic insertion of higher density residential forms along the corridor would deftly change the way that DeSales corridor is perceived as a residential living environment. The following suggestions are likely to produce approximately:

- townhouses: 20-24 units
- condos: 48-56 units
- apartments: 96-124 units
- duplexes: 6 units
*Aesthetically the addition may not match an intended result for DeSales, but the concept of utilizing existing historic buildings to better integrate new development is an idea which should be considered in future development and planning.*

**Brooklyn Brownstone**
Brooklyn, NY
Architect: 1100 Architects

This residential intervention explored modern renovation of an old structure being a Brooklyn Brownstone. By performing a dramatic transformation to the rear of the building design successfully navigates three complex relationships: “historic and contemporary design sensibilities, interior and exterior, and familial and personal spaces.”

**Atelier 505**
Boston, MA
Architect: Machado and Silvetti and ADD Architects

As one of the Boston's premier condominium residences, the successful mixed-use building serves as a gateway to the Back Bay and the Financial District and originated from an EPA brownfield project.

*European examples offer some keen solutions and urban patterns resulting from an inherent of architects, designers, and residents interacting within some of the oldest and in fact, most fractal, urban places in the world.*
This area was chosen for study due to its proximity to the corridor, adjacency to the successful O’Bayonville business district, as well as a stable, however increasingly obsolete and monotonous housing stock. In a family-oriented neighborhood that remains most active during the middle hours of the day, providing greater housing options for a wider variety of generations will allow the neighborhood to flourish as a more sustainable community, allowing residents to “age in place.”
SCALING
The fragmented sandwiching of single family homes, surface lot parking, and retail businesses in O’Bryonville signals a deficit in diverse housing types and densities.

CONNECTIVITY
Mirroring the monotonous scale of the housing stock, the area's street network would be better served through greater lateral connections and a variety of paths and differentiated open spaces.

BIG IDEA...
This area seems to be a prime market for some of the targeted market especially the empty nesters who are looking for walkable residential opportunities. By inserting a high rise residential tower north of the corridor, this need for luxury apartments and condos would be addressed, framing this unique living opportunity as nestled in a park. Hopefully, an increase in residential users would help to extend and diversify the business hours and activities occurring along the corridor to further attract residents.

The more graduated step down from the density of the business district to the existing single-family typology allows for a more comfortable transition to a more urban lifestyle closer to Madison Road. The residential high rise, at the same time, offers O’Bryonville the capacity to offer an urban lifestyle in a park setting being so near to two of the most integral parks along the corridor: Owl’s Nest Park and Ann Park.
The further integration of higher density residential forms begins to suggest greater diversity in housing options, including townhouses, rowhouses, and flats. The following interventions are expected to produce approximately:

- modular-single family: 12-16 units
- townhouses: 28-32 units
- condos: 24-38 units
- apartments: 78-104 units
- flats: 12 units
High-Density Residential Development

**Thin Flats**  
(Philadelphia, PA)  
Architect:

The 8-unit sustainable urban housing LEED-H Platinum certified development profuses an eclectic charm in an aesthetic of high density detail and is located just one block from public transit. Some features include “green roof gardens, rainwater harvesting cisterns, and solar thermal panels.”

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**Amsterdam and the Netherlands in general provide many fantastic examples of urban living that is both dense, practical, and beautiful.**

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**Pile Up**  
(Rheinfelden, Switzerland)  
Architect: Hans Zwimpfer

In a proactive reaction to sprawl, he uses modularity to: “Take single-family houses, whose benefits — space, privacy, light, a yard... Then simply stack the houses, one on top of another. Voilà: The comforts of suburban living, with the convenience and ecological benefits of urban density.”

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**321 West Second Street**  
(Boston, MA)  
Architect: Utile, Inc.

The 15-unit condominium building utilizes a circulation strategy that maximizes living areas within the units by eliminating common corridors. Ground floor structured parking, central courtyards that allow all units to have at least two exposures, continuous wood planter boxes, and French windows permit residents to “open their living rooms to the street.”
Norwood offers many amenities to the city, one being Rookwood Commons, a “walkable retail experience. However, in its current use, parking and driving predominates the central activity of the enclosed area. This could be changed to not only enhance the neighborhood open space, but also connectivity in promoting greater walkability to the shops.
High-Density Residential Development

**SCALING**
Complacent to the standard “commercial floorplate” the low-lying buildings on most of the site provide an interesting opportunity for incremental mixed-use development with an introduction of housing over the shops and within the center parking area.

**CONNECTIVITY**
The nature of the highly commercialized area of Rookwood Common could benefit from a more structured paths with not only an increase in residents, but additionally within a foresight toward greater mass transit opportunities.

**BIG IDEA...** Utilizing these residential buildings as cornerstones for a gateway into Norwood and as recognizable markers of proximity to Rookwood Commons would enhance the information exchange along various roots. Additionally, the insertion of housing into the center of the parking area and above the shops would further structure, humanize, and diversify paths within the area, complimenting not only a residential lifestyle but a retail experience.

The buildings mixed-use office/residential buildings along Madison Road compliment what is currently existing, while working to further enhance the very low profile of the retail as it exists today.
Oakley survives on a presence of contrived traffic patterns and building configurations that result in an original and dynamic urban form. However, at present the existence of large and obtrusive parking lots prevent the vivacity of information exchange felt by the pedestrian in similarly urban settings.
SCALING
High density residential development occurring along this part of the corridor should employ a sensitivity to contextual dimensions of the business district and the impact of converging streets in seaming together a coherent and connected neighborhood.

CONNECTIVITY
Despite its increasingly popular housing stock and restaurant scene, a narrative void remains in the parking lots that line the northern side of the business district hindering its sense of human comfort and differentiated paths by which to travel.

BIG IDEA...
The introduction of more diverse and interactive housing stock, such as condos and apartments with private decks would serve to enhance the urban atmosphere of the residential area while attracting young professionals who desire to be within walking distance of popular restaurants, bars, and shops.

The restoration of a more solidary street wall will gesture a greater sense of arrival into the area. Additionally, this development will encourage a greater pattern for future development that creates a more healthy and cross-cultural engagement by both pedestrian and motorist.
Madisonville’s historic past provides an objective to aim for in revitalizing this part of the corridor to the point that it reassumes an active civic and commercial environment. As of today, the building stock remains one of its few assets, as urban decline and blight have cast away any major economic development in past years.
SCALING
While Madisonville’s historic commercial district has submitted to vacancy and auto-oriented development patterns, a resurgence of denser patterns of residential development could be anchored by a neighborhood grocer and amenities that could catalyze a stronger density of development.

CONNECTIVITY
The grid system established throughout much of the neighborhood works to the advantage of resident motorists. However, the introduction of greater pedestrian linkages through residential blocks could potentially strengthen the neighborhood’s sense of place.

This opportunity for greater residential development will serve to restore not only the urban form of the neighborhood, but also sponsor positive and beneficial movement within the area that will hopefully begin more lively existence of the NBD.