ROOTS & BLOOMS: MAKING AVONDALE SUSTAINABLE

1-71 Avondale
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Vision Statement

Our vision for Avondale involves the community to enhance economic sustainability, social equity, neighbor vitality and identity, and environmental health and education through an improved network of multi-modal accessible transportation, urban food and agricultural design initiatives, commercial revitalization.

Goals, Strategies and Actions

The following matrix illustrates the goals we are trying to achieve and rates them according to their importance in the areas of economic development, neighborhood development, environmental impacts and transportation and other infrastructure. Each area of focus has a total score that reflects the total impact that our goals will have on that area. Neighborhood development came in first with 33 points, economic is second with 23 points, transportation and infrastructure has 22 points, and environmental has 21 points.
The following goals are overviews of what the program is aiming to accomplish. Each description further explains the social, environmental, and economic implications of that goal, while giving strategies and actions for the implementation of that goal as well.

- **Goal: Give the Avondale Community a Nearby Source of Food**
  The creation of a public food co-op is vital to community to fill the void that is left in the community since ALDI left. The vision is to have a Co-Op that is a combination of centralized and decentralized food distribution network. There would be one centralized building that would serve as a hub for local food produces that residents could shop. For those unable to make the journey to the central building, truck would deliver product to prearranged destinations throughout the community.

- **Goal: Use Environmentally-Ethical Standards in the Distribution of Goods**
  The use of eco-friendly trucks can come in the form of alternative fuel vehicles. The use of bio-diesel is an important first step. Bio-diesel can be used as a direct substitute for regular diesel fuel. Bio-diesel can be made in small-scale reactors from used cooking oil. This can create a cottage industry that allows individuals to profit while also supporting the community as a whole. Other alternative fuels such as hydrogen fuel cells can eventually be implemented as money becomes available and cost have been reduced.

- **Goal: Improve Parks and Quality of Life**
  Improvement of parks and quality of life would come through many forms. The Cincinnati park board is in the process of creating annual flower displays in large pots that would line the local business district of Avondale. There is also the creation of a gateway at Forest and Reading Roads to serve as a first impression of the community on commuters and as a sense of pride for those living in Avondale.

- **Goal: Filter Local and Commuter Traffic**
  This goal of filtering traffic also plays into our goal of having a wider range of alternative transportation in Avondale. Not only would the pedestrian oriented part of Reading Road encourage more of the residents to walk, but it would make way for more bus stops in this area.

- **Goal: Offer Wider Range of Transit Options**
  The new interchange at MLK could also lead to the formation of new bus routes through this area. The buses would be able to enter and exit the highway here and would have easier access to the businesses in the Avondale area. This could encourage more of those employees who live outside of Avondale to use the buses or other methods of alternative transportation to commute to work. This will also help the environment if more people are commuting or carpooling rather than driving separately. On average, 300,000 vehicles drive into the uptown area daily and then leave [Uptown Transportation Study]. If less people are driving in, there will be a positive effect on the environment and the transportation infrastructure in Avondale. Socially, the more choices the Avondale residents have for alternative transportation, the more they can get around the community and get involved. There is currently a
shortage of basic stores, such as dry cleaners, pharmacies, grocers, etc. The residents of Avondale need to be able to access these necessities. This will also help the economics of the area if the residents can get around to buy their goods and services from the businesses located in Avondale.

- **Goal: Focus on Serving Less Mobile People**
  There is also the need to focus on the community members who are less mobile. This would be accomplished through multiple forms of transportation and distribution. The food delivery truck that would be delivering to areas closer to a person home would reduce the distance traveled and help to bring a vital resource into the grasp of those less mobile. Metro also has routes serving door-to-door service in most of the northern reaches of Avondale.

- **Goal: Create Experiences of Heterotopia**
  The Concept of heterotopia according to Michel Foucault means “Des Espace Autres” or, Of Other Spaces, is a piece of a space, rather “a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself. These spaces are created at every grocery truck stop when the doors open to the public. A space is created that supports the event of a market, only to vacate after a period of time leaving the sidewalk as it was before as simply a pedestrian path.

- **Goal: Create Flexible Space for Social Interaction**
  There is also the need in the community to have flexible use spaces that would be available to the community and would serve more than one purpose. The spaces would be vacant properties and would become stops for the food trucks and serve as a gathering place for the community. The flexible spaces would become focal points for the community a place to gather and to bridge the community together.

- **Goal: Connect Clusters**
  Children’s Hospital, Burnet Avenue, and Reading Road are three of the major clusters located in Avondale. It is important to connect these clusters to successfully redevelop Avondale socially, environmentally, and economically. While there is a lot of redevelopment currently being done on Burnet Avenue, it creates a form of disconnect between it and the Reading Road corridor. We have proposed the creation of green spaces between these clusters to connect Avondale and for social interaction of its residents. These green spaces are also beneficial to the environment. These green spaces will also be prime locations for the truck stops of the food co-op. These truck stops will encourage the Avondale residents to come to these locations and through the purchase of produce and other goods, they will be helping the economy of Avondale as well.

- **Goal: Revitalize Avondale’s Image**
  One of the most important goals is the improvement of Avondale’s image. The image can be improved through the implementation of all of our goals. The food co-op will be a positive image for the neighborhood and can help the social, economic, and neighborhood redevelopment of the area. With the improved image of Avondale,
the neighborhood can succeed socially because there will be an improved sense of community. The improved image will also encourage more businesses into the neighborhood, which will trickle down and promote more people to do their shopping in the Avondale area.

- **Goal: Employ Local Residents**
  Local employment needs to be increased to redevelop Avondale. The implementation of a local food co-op can help with the creation of jobs through gardening, jobs at the co-op and truck drivers. The unemployment rate and percentage of residents living below the poverty level are some of the highest in the uptown region. An increase in local employment can help the neighborhood and economic redevelopment. The creation of gardens to help supply the food co-op can help sustain jobs and help the economy, but it is also beneficial for the environment.

- **Goal: Connect Small-Scale Retail & Stakeholders**
  Avondale must also connect small-scaled retail with the stake holders of the community. This can be accomplished through the use of a neighborhood scaled business district and the use of more small-scale business over large chain retailers. In this form the individuals of the community have a direct stake in the success of the business and the community as a whole. Were the money spent at local business are funneled back into the community.

- **Goal: Create a New Economic Market**
  The creation of a new market through the food co-op and distribution will socially benefit the neighborhood. The new market will help to provide jobs, a sense of community, and can redefine the area. There is currently a lack of grocery stores in the area since ALDI left. The food co-op will make it easier for the residents to have access to fresh produce. It will also help to put money back into the economy through the creation of jobs and people buying the produce from local gardens that were created. These gardens help the environment as well and will be an innovative new idea for redevelopment unlike any cities in the area have witnessed.
**Rationale**

Due to the new interchange at MLK, our goal of filtering local and commuter traffic will be accomplished. Since commuter traffic will be diverted off of Reading Road to the new MLK interchange, we can successfully make the northern part of Reading pedestrian oriented. Local traffic will also have easier access to neighborhood businesses. This will not only help with the neighborhood redevelopment, but also the economic redevelopment. Local businesses will be better able to prosper and offer more jobs. The less commuter traffic there is traveling the neighborhood minor streets affects the environment positively. There will be less noise pollution and less stop-and-go traffic. Our plan of the food co-op and truck stops will also benefit from the filtering of local and commuter traffic. The pedestrian oriented portion of Reading Road will be able to sponsor and house the food co-op. Additionally, more members of the community will be able to access the food co-op if they can walk there.

**Existing Conditions**

The zoning map shown here was created as a guide as we surveyed the area for existing conditions.
6 Stakeholder Input

After receiving essential feedback from Bill Witten, a project manager of the Avondale Community Council, one of the group members attended an Avondale Community Council meeting to better understand the current efforts of other stakeholders in Avondale. A wealth of information was presented, which helped to guide the path of our programs within our project immensely.

The Uptown Consortium is a non-profit organization that includes Uptown’s five largest employers: Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, The Health Alliance of Greater Cincinnati, TriHealth, Inc. and the University of Cincinnati. They focus mostly on physical development plans in Uptown communities, but also fund community development initiatives. The Uptown Consortium holds a large stake in the future community of Avondale and is an entity even controls the functionality of several other local organizations and efforts. The Entire Burnet Avenue Redevelopment initiative is through the Uptown Consortium.

The Avondale Youth Council is funded by an Anti-Litter and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) grant through the Uptown Consortium. The Avondale Youth Council is another extremely active organization in Avondale. They announced upcoming trash collection days as well as their participation in a PBS forum debate about the Closing the Achievement Gap initiative in schools. The council is a way for Avondale youth to stay off the streets and active in raising the quality of life in Avondale. Another community organization, CeaseFire Cincinnati is dedicated to stopping the shootings and killings that happen in Avondale.

The Community Council is interested in obtaining foreclosed properties along Ridgeway Avenue after the city gains ownership from the county. The Avondale Redevelopment Corporation is involved with a Place Matters initiative called the Vacant Building Maintenance Program that would eventually take over and redevelop the properties. The program aims to eliminate vacant buildings and distressed properties in Avondale by allocating resources to markets in need of development.

Proposed 1-71 Changes

We believe this new interchange at MLK would greatly impact Avondale. It would impact the transportation and infrastructure in the area due to the increased traffic volume on MLK. MLK is a major throughway for students of the University of Cincinnati and employees of several of the regions’ leading employers, such as UC and Children’s Hospital. As the traffic network is setup now in the uptown region, there is a large amount of traffic traveling minor arterial streets through the area attempting to access an interchange for I-71.

There is a lot of vehicular traffic on Reading Road as well as an alternate route for I-71. This interchange at MLK would alleviate some of the commuter traffic on Reading Road, and would help us to achieve one of goals of our framework plan, that being making
Reading Road a more pedestrian oriented road. A better sense of community can be addressed with the change in Reading Road from a vehicular oriented community to a pedestrian oriented community. This new interchange could also bring new businesses to the Avondale area because people will be more able to access these businesses. These new businesses would positively affect the neighborhood redevelopment and the economic redevelopment by bringing more money and more jobs to the Avondale neighborhood. The new interchange also helps the environment positively by eliminating the noise pollution and the stop-and-go traffic on the local arterial streets from cars attempting to access the highway.

Existing Plans

In order to better understand the current situation in Avondale, as well as the direction that the community is headed, reviewing current plans was an extremely helpful part of this planning process. The following plans contributed to the framework plan we propose.

_Uptown Transportation Plan_

This study by Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments provided us with an aspect of our I-71 interchange alternative for Martin Luther King. We chose option S-3 based on the low impact and accessibility of the Directional Service Roads.

_Burnet Avenue Revitalization Plan_

Uptown’s efforts in the Burnet Avenue Revitalization are currently underway. Their area for redevelopment covers about five blocks between Forest and Erkenbrecher avenues, and Harvey and Drury avenues. The Herald Building and accompanying parking garage are almost completed, with plans for an adjacent buffer park to separate the institutional area from the residential area.

_Uptown Strategic Opportunity Plan_

This plan offered much insight for the transportation aspects of our project. “A revised interchange would also provide greater access to Reading Road and may support future "technology park" plans and retail” refers to the Technology Corridor Study Area that is proposed in the “Urban Design and Transportation” chapter. Acknowledging the desire for expansion of technology office space, our group decided not to focus on the southern area of Avondale as strong potential for community efforts. This plan also expresses the desire for 9 lanes on Martin Luther King, and roadway improvements at the intersection of Reading Road and Forest Avenue, in anticipation of increased traffic flow. While acknowledging these recommendations, we did not agree with them and decided to search for alternatives to incorporate into our framework. The “Frontage Road Alternative” on page 30 is similar to the desired outcome of the service roads on our framework.
Traffic and Transportation

An additional exit at Martin Luther King Drive could greatly affect the uptown area around Avondale. It would not only affect the transportation of the neighborhood, but would affect neighborhood and economic development as well as the environment. OKI, the group working on the Uptown Transportation Project, currently has several proposed plans for an exit at MLK. We are proposing to use Alternative S-3 in our framework plan. This alternative has two access roads running on the east and west sides of I-71. On I-71N, the access road would begin before the Taft/McMillan interchange. Drivers entering the access road would then have the option of exiting at Taft or continuing on to exit at the new interchange at Martin Luther King Drive. Drivers wishing to enter the highway at either Taft or MLK would join the access road, which merges on with I-71N north of the MLK interchange [Uptown Transportation Study]. These access roads would function as service roads with a lower speed limit and signalized intersections at Oak and Lincoln.

Our idea of the interchange at MLK is a two-lane roundabout. These two lanes would be controlled by signals to allow for easier access to the roundabout by those vehicles exiting the highway. We would also leave right-of-way access through the center of the roundabout for a streetcar to travel, should the city of Cincinnati ever implement the proposed Streetcar system. This type of interchange is called a roundabout interchange and is common in the United Kingdom; however, the state of New York has implemented a couple of this type of interchange [Roundabout Interchange]. Based on our proposed two-lane roundabout and the current traffic flow on MLK, the inscribed circle of the roundabout should be 200'-250'. [Roundabouts]. Multiple lane roundabouts have a capacity of 40,000 to 50,000 vehicles per day [TFHRC]. The 2005 traffic count for MLK near Reading Road was 21,680 vehicles per day and the future 2030 count is 37,481 vehicles per day, an increase of 73% [Uptown Transportation Study]. Therefore, the two-lane proposed roundabout...
will support both current vehicular traffic and future vehicular traffic. Roundabouts have several benefits that make them the best solution for intersections. Roundabouts are much safer than intersections due to the decrease in the number of conflict points. Injury accidents and fatalities have decreased up to 76% where roundabouts are implemented. Roundabouts have slower speeds which also makes them safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. The most beneficial factors to roundabouts from traffic standpoints are the reduced delay and increased capacity [Roundabout USA].

Decentralized & Centralized Food System

The vision is to have a Co-Op that is a combination of centralized and decentralized food distribution network. There would be one centralized building that would serve as a hub for local food produces that residents could shop. For those unable to make the journey to the central building, truck would deliver product to prearranged destinations throughout the community.

Streetscaping in Avondale

The imbalance of streetscaping in Avondale is visible when comparing residential, commercial, and institutional routes. In order to enhance the aesthetic appeal for both pedestrians and vehicular observers, we are recommending streetscape improvements in two clusters of activity. The purpose of this is to transform the image of Avondale by improving aesthetic appeal, enhancing the character, relating paths with neighborhood activity, and strengthening the relationships of the community.

The first cluster is located along Burnet Avenue, from the edge of the hospital development to Forest Avenue. Since this is a major cluster of business in the community, it is important that it is a space where people want to be. Improving the streetscape will allow and encourage people to move through this area. The second cluster of proposed improvements is on the northern portion of Reading road. As we look to transition this section as more pedestrian oriented, it is important that the paths people take are visibly appeal as well as serving an efficient function.

Implementation will be include enhanced landscaping along roads, the addition of street furniture, and improved lighting. In addition, the placement of things such as gateways and corner landscaping will connect Avondale with some of the signage and street care that is present at the Hospital and Zoo. With a more balanced visual survey of the area, the barriers of districts will be mitigated. These street improvements open up the paths for communication and allow new spaces for people to interact.

The purpose of streetscaping is to create specific paths that draw attention to various nodes and underutilized spaces within the neighborhood. Bringing people along these areas attracts attention to neglected areas that can be
possible open public spaces for pocket parks, grocery truck stops, or future commercial or residential development. The other purpose of streetscaping is to promote pedestrian movement. Increasing incentive to walk brings the community down to a human scale and negates the need for vehicular traffic. Finally, along the lines of heterotopias, we look to create a space within a space so that these paths open up to become backgrounds to movement, life, and culture within the neighborhood.

Symbolic and physical gateways let people know they are entering the neighborhood. These markers create a sense of place and also distinguish the character and importance of a specific area. Each gateway will be a neighborhood identification sign, which will also be a means of serving as a starting point and direct people to certain areas of focus. Four gateways will be located along the boundary of the neighborhood as a means of welcoming people into the community. The remaining gateway is centrally located on Reading as a symbolic divide of the separation of pedestrian and vehicular oriented movement. An additional, more symbolic gateway will be the roundabout at MLK. This is a unique structure within Cincinnati that allows people to associate an object with a place. Components of the gateway system will be a mix of welcoming and identification structures, banners, wayfinding, and enhanced landscaping on street corners. One final key aspect of these neighborhood improvements is their material. Elements of the existing surroundings will compile the material. For example, signs near the park will incorporate the wrought iron fencing that is prominent and cross walks will be brick paved for areas near more historic buildings. The increase in landscaping is mainly under the purpose of aesthetic appeal, but also ties in the idea of a sustainable environment, natural elements, and the gardening that is occurring within the area.

**Urban Food District**

Our urban food district is an area that hosts the gardening, preparation, and consumption of food in Avondale. The district is designed to harmonize with the existing structures, while putting under-utilized space to work feeding Avondale and the surrounding communities. Produce from the network of gardens will be sold at the Avondale Co-op and distributed by grocery trucks throughout the neighborhood.

**Phase one** includes raised-bed gardening and container gardening, which allows for more compact garden layouts. Phase one is occurring primarily at 736, 740, and 750 Ridgeway Avenue, in addition to any acquired and foreclosed properties. Park benches and picnic tables will also
be on the site to allow the space to function as a social area as well. Installation of grills encourages residents to use the space for gathering socially and casually.

**Phase two** begins with the acquisition of larger properties, particularly those at 3362 Reading Road (currently owned by the city) and the intersection of Whittier and Wehrman (currently owned by the Corinthian Baptist Church). These larger areas will allow for a greater variety of produce, function, and layout. A shelter for casual or formal functions should be erected along with more diverse gardening.

**Phase three** begins construction of a greenhouse for year-round gardening, and renovations of nearby abandoned structures for kitchen and preparation space. These spaces would largely serve as an educational component that would attract individuals and groups from within and outside Avondale.

To spearhead these efforts as well as the Avondale Co-op, we have created the **Avondale Roots & Blooms Organization (ARBO)**. We are encouraging nearby residents, church members, and students to have a part in creating these gardens, as they will be a part of the community landscape. By working with some of the existing organizations in Avondale, ARBO wants to employ local residents to tend to the gardens. Cooperation with the City of Cincinnati could allow for the use foreclosed properties for garden and community space as well.

**Additional steps:** ARBO would like the theme of local urban agriculture to spread throughout the Uptown communities as well as the entire city and region. Continuous use of foreclosed properties as community garden space is essential to realizing the potential of every square foot of land.

The organic produces are locally grown in several urban farms, spread out over the neighborhood. These gardens provide extra jobs and knowledge about healthy food and farming. They are also defining a new market in the neighborhood, giving it an additional asset to its character.

Assets:

“to promote and encourage interest in the local growing of food crops and to provide for the consumers of ... locally grown, nutritious and non-chemically produced foodstuffs; to educate the community to the economic, social and other beneficial values inherent in organizing community services, and in offering locally produced consumer goods and foodstuffs; and to help provide low cost food and consumer services to the indigent members of the Co-op and to the local community as a whole whenever possible. “

http://www.bloomingfoods.coop/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=74&Itemid=127
The food is brought to a central community market, for this project located on the old ALDI site. This market is accessible not only for every member of the community, but also to those living outside of it. But mainly, the mode of distribution of goods will be by market trucks, driving to several destinations and neighborhoods, creating a spontaneous heterotopian marketplace at each of its stops.

**Urban Agriculture Revitalizing the Neighborhood Business District**

*A Vision for a Urban Agriculture and Learning Center and Redevelopment*

The Neighborhood Business District will be an area for engaging the Avondale Roots and Blooms Organization with the local community and residents of Avondale. Not only is this community center the central hub and distribution point for the Urban Garden Initiative, it is a focused site for education and community interaction, for all ages and all economic groups. In an effort to retrofit the existing commercial strip at the corner of Reading Road and Forest, this plan proposes a renovation of the exiting shopping mall into the food coop store and affordable multi-family housing units.

The Neighborhood Business District proposes phased development that incorporates a community-centered commercial, retail, and residential uses. In the first phase of development, the strip mall will be stripped, and part of its existing structure will be retrofitted for the Urban Agriculture Learning Center. This center will have a rooftop garden and commercial kitchen. These gardens and kitchens are at the heart of community meeting and garden instruction for kids and adults. In addition, social housing units will also be incorporated to this southwest part of the site. Surrounding this area will be open pavers for parking and impromptu social events like farmers markets, and minimal landscaping with areas designated plots for gardening and farming (in collaboration with the Roots and Blooms Organization (ARBO) network of urban farms). This phase of development also constructs a new building for the community food coop, which not only sells local produce from ARBO, but also other conventional commercial items, providing a much needed grocery store for the neighborhood, consisting a larger group of low income or senior residents. In looking at some of the lower price point coop case studies, some principals of a successful food coop have been listed here.

**Necessary Elements of Success for a Food Co-op Center**
- Board Experience and Organization (Business, Adminstration, Management)
- Active Participation of the Members and Community
- Develop Strong Connection and Support Structure with Community Members and Local Government Resources
- Building Maintenance and Accountability
- Business that Caters to the Member Interests
- Business sited in Commercial Favorable area

The second and third phase of development looks to create open plots and new building construction for retail, restaurant, and other office and commercial uses. These uses will be located in small plug-in units, modelled after local building scales. In addition, these phases of construction envision commercial aggregate building principles. The open paver plots also accommodate for informal businesses, like local food and retail vendors to have a designated location to set up shop. This is beneficial not only for the vendor, but also for consumers, which may include the local institutional employees, who can always count on easy access to a local grocery store and local vendor foods.

**Illustrative Examples: Case Study Precedents**

**Wheatsville Food Co-op – Austin, Texas**

Wheatsville markets a diverse selection of locally produce food and food products, in addition to commercial grocer products. They aim to support the local economy and provide a community location for meeting and neighborhood events.

They require a one-time investment of $70 for membership, which can be paid in installments. For hesitant applicants, they accept a $15 joining fee which an upgrade to full membership. Even if you’re not a member, everyone is welcome to patronage at the market.

Wheatsville has been successful enough to evolve their business labor from volunteer hours to now a paid staff that handle the day to day operations of the market. This
community grocer, however, does not operate to generate a profit, but all surplus income is reinvest in the market to increase grocers services or distributed patronage refunds.

Bloomingfoods Farmer’s Market – Bloomington, Indiana

A regional neighbor, Bloomingfoods Market provides a hub for high quality, sustainable and environmental conscious food products at a fair price. They work with local farmers and producers to enhance community involvement and sustainable living.

Bloomingfoods was started in 1975 in a vacant building. By 1990, the co-op posted annual sales of $1.3 million with $100,000 in the bank. To grow their market base in order to compete with corporate grocers, they started a second store. Despite initial financial troubles, Bloomingfoods was able to regain their foothold and have been able to distribute patronage rebates for 4 of 5 years.

The organization continues to look for further opportunities to grow membership and grocer locations, with the prospects of café locations to come.

In addition to providing an accessible space for healthy foods, Bloomingfoods principals its organization around democratic membership participation and control, education, training and information for the public in natural foods and cooperative action, support and promotion of sustainable development, and developing ties among other cooperative organizations.

The Peaches & Greens Truck – Detroit, Michigan
Case Study: “Detroit Truck Brings Fruits And Vegetables To The Hood” The Peaches & Greens truck in Detroit, Michigan offers a more convenient option for residents who do not have easy access to a grocery store. The truck runs five days a week at locations where these underserved groups are concentrated. The truck offers produce grown at the community gardens and is run by volunteers of the Central Detroit Christian Community Development Corporation.

Detroit has been experiencing a significant amount of foreclosures because of the mortgage crisis, leaving unused vacant properties—about 7,000 of them—under control of the county. A non-profit group called Urban Farming is turning 20 properties into gardens to produce food for the needy. Since the plots of land aren’t fenced off, the fruits and vegetables are available to anyone. It is a joint effort from the county who is donating the land to the non-profit who is voluntarily tending to the gardens, while the city donates water to keep the gardens growing. The project’s costs are minimal compared to the great benefits it brings to the neighborhood.

"People are coming out of their homes who wouldn't come out under other circumstances because they didn't think there was still a community or a neighbor or a friendly person nearby,"

– Gail Carr, one of the Detroit City Managers


Park Slope Food Coop – Brooklyn, New York


The Park Slope Food Co-op in Brooklyn, New York boasts a business lineage that dates back to 1973. Currently the organization has about 14,000 members and gross sales of $32 million annual. Members are required to contribute 2.75 hours of labor per month. To become a member of the food co-op, a non-refundable fee of $25.00 and $100 investment fund is required. Special
memberships are available to low income and disabled applicants at a reduced cost.

Despite growing food prices in heart of an urban district of New York, Park Slope markets that members average a 20-40% grocery saving and is a viable competitive low price grocer in their community. In addition to providing conventionally grown produce and commerical products, they are also concious of their environmental impact and offer a large range of organic and socially conscious foods.

**Tretmont Gardeners**

Gateway designs done by Tretmont Gardeners replace unattractive sidewalks and curbs with aesthetically pleasing indicators of place. Physical conditions of the area reflected Avondale and achieved a highly pleasing ‘after’ image of what could be home to these pathways.

Source: [http://www.tremontgardeners.org/gateways.htm](http://www.tremontgardeners.org/gateways.htm)

**City of Evanston, Illinois Central Street: Streetscape Design Study**

The City of evaluated their main business corridor by placing the value of poor, fair, or good to each street. By separating the areas of in this category it made the flow of movement more apparent and helped dictate which areas were creating barriers to other places. Using this approach in Avondale would be helpful to distinguish the hierarchy or streets and to mitigate the amount of barriers in the neighborhood.
City of San Clemente: Pier Bowl Specific Plan

The City of San Clemente, California displays a larger scale gateway that welcomes you in the community at an intersection. This deliberate placement of welcome allows people to be aware of where they are and initial judgments about the area can be made from the structure’s design. Avondale can dictate the image and perception of the neighborhood by simple gateways and structures. While the identification signs are at a much larger scale in San Clemente, they are still a method from which Avondale can learn.

Retrofitting Suburbia: Adaptive Reuse for Community-Orientated Service

When looking for opportunities to retrofit the site on Reading Road and Rockdale, we looked to Ellen Dunham-Jones and June Williamson’s Retrofitting Suburbia for a case study that might help us reuse the existing strip mall building at the site. Even one option for the site, would include demolishing the building, it is important to consider the existing resources and environment cost which have already been spent in creating the existing building. These resources, already spent, are a necessary calculation in considering the environmental sustainability and efficiency of how to deal with new and additional construction on the site.

Given Dunham-Jones and Williamson’s examples, specifically the Denton Public Library in Denton, Texas, where a previous Food Lion grocery store and parking lot was retrofitted to a branch library, the site provided for us an opportunity to reuse the existing
structure.\(^1\) This option provided not only a reuse of existing resources, but more importantly, it signifies an environmental principle of reuse and creative adaptation for the history of the site. Even if the move is merely a symbolic environmental action, since the retrofit may end up slightly more expensive than demolition the entire building and site and starting with a clean state, the statement expressed by retrofitting a strip mall to a community building and also a residential use - affordable housing as we have proposed, sends a clear and visually impactful attitude towards a commitment to environmental considerations and creative alternatives to block-raising construction for future redevelopments in Avondale.

Moreover, this is a political statement. In imagining the future of Avondale and the agency of its existing residents, it is important to consider that existing plans to develop the Burnet Avenue Business District, considers less of the low income community and caters more to a high price point consumer. In order not to lose the neighborhood identity, which currently is centered on existing social and non-profit organizations that have grown from grass-root initiatives at the neighborhood scale, retrofitting an under-utilized strip mall to a community space is a statement of strength and neighborhood pride, of self-reliance, reclamation of existing neighborhood resources, and value of existing social capital.

Architect firm Lacaton & Vassal were inspirational in the search for an architectural character that might integrate ideas of adaptive reuse and commercial, community, and residential building models. Lacaton & Vassal have been successful in retrofitting underutilized buildings across Europe, which have lead to the revival of local economies and neighborhoods. Furthermore, the firm grounds its practice in construction innovation and sustainable alternatives to conventional retrofitting practices, based on environmental-friendly designs and socially conscious budgets.

In particular, we examined the social housing project in Mulhouse, France as a model for the kind of housing and mixed used building that might be imagined for the retrofit of the strip mall. Even though the Mulhouse project is not a retrofit project, it would be easy to rework the standard beam and column construction that currently characterizes the existing strip mall construction. This low-income housing project incorporates many of ideas of environmental conscious living and building efficiencies we would look for in developing a new housing type for the city of Avondale. Many social housing projects are often accompanied with the idea of drab, heavy, and small spaced living units. The Mulhouse projects promotes not only greater building energy efficiencies, but a visually impactful attitude towards outdoor living, daylight-rich units, and low budget construction.

Figure 2, Top to Bottom: Denton Public Library in Denton, Texas before and after retrofitted grocery store anchored strip mall to public building by architects Meyer Scherer & Rockcastle, Image Sourced: Wiley & Sons Inc.
This housing project includes 14 single-family units, in a row house style building. These housing units have been created at the cost of 75000 Euros a unit, roughly $110,500 (December 2009), and yet have considerably larger square footages than standard social housing units. These structures are enveloped in translucent materials, which help to create a greenhouse effect between the roof and ceiling of the building. This creates a pocket of air that has been designed to insulate the building from heat loss during cold weather, creates a bio climate for rooftop gardens. These units promote daylight accessibility and private outdoor living, which is often not available in social housing projects. This simple post and beam construction maximizes floor space and allows for the easy reconfiguration of the interior for diverse life styles.²

Figure 4, Building section showing the greenhouse effect in the building Image Source:
http://www.Lacatonvassal.com
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