URBAN DESIGN FOR VANDALIA CORRIDOR
Northside & South Cumminsville
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Goal(s)

Vandalia Corridor sits on the path of an abandoned railroad, which provides a wonderful opportunity for a corridor of natural sustainability and open space. The previous framework plan created emphasizes on this corridor as a major opportunity for public space, educational space, and leisure space for both Northside and South Cumminsville. Through the framework plan I was able to create an idea of how a transformation of the corridor into a green corridor would benefit the community.

Economically the corridor would be a great asset to these communities. Creating a system of urban farming, leisure space, educational space, art exhibits, and public parks would increase the interest in the neighborhoods and bring in more green industry or businesses along the corridor. The corridor would also raise aesthetics of the surrounding areas that would have a positive effect on property values and interest of outside buyers in the housing stock. The incorporation of green technologies, such as solar panels, would create a wonderful way to help support the corridor. Solar panels could provide a source of energy for lighting and many other utilities within the corridor. Environmentally the use of native plants and trees as buffering along with urban farming would have a huge impact on not only the neighborhoods aesthetics but also its environmental quality. The corridor will have many wonderful impacts on these two communities but one of the most important impact is the ability to be able to get from Northside to South Cumminsville, or vice versa, on bike or foot. The creation of a tunnel will allow residents that were previously unable to walk or bike through Interstate 74 to have a leisurely ride or stroll to their previous neighbors.

The three aspects of sustainability (social, environmental, and economic) play a critical role in the goals I have set. Socially I want the corridor to reconnect the community that Interstate 74 had torn in half. For residents to be able to grow their own vegetables, or restaurant owners to grow their own produce will give the communities a wonderful sense of sustainability. Residents will have the benefit of being surrounded in native plantings and crops of organic produce. The increased interest in the community
due to Vandalia Corridor will create an environment for green industries to develop and thrive. Green industries would bring in more jobs as well as a unique sense of place for the communities.

**Project Description**

I have chosen to focus on four major areas of interest for Vandalia Corridor. These include the North-East Gateway, Hamilton Crossing, the Tunnel Connector, and Mill Creek Access Way. The area named the North-East Gateway lies along the intersection of Crawford Avenue and Chase Avenue in Northside. This area is a major gateway for the corridor. When visiting this location I discovered much of the remaining right-of-way for the railroad was overgrown with native plantings. There is also a large industry building on the corner of Crawford Avenue and Chase Avenue. This building I identified as being an ideal location for Mixed-Use or Live-Work artist space. The picture below is of the building as it sits today. The picture clearly shows bricked in windows. This building would be wonderful space for artists. I see the building as a blank canvas. Murals could take place over the bricked-in windows. Just to the right of the picture is a large parking area for trucks to come and go from the business. I am proposing this loading area be retrofitted into an outdoor plaza. The existing loading docks could remain and serve as a wonderful space for indoor/outdoor studio space. Artists could display their work in the safety of the building but still make their work visible to the plaza outside.

On the other corner of the intersection of Crawford Avenue and Chase Avenue is another industrial business. When visiting the site, I noticed the business created a lot of traffic and machinery noise. This instantly created a need for the corridor to be sheltered from these noises. Adding native plants as a buffer will give pedestrians along the corridor more peace of mind. Additional streetscape improvements that include landscaping, shrubbery, lighting, and furniture will also help to shield pedestrians from the surrounding industrial businesses. Overall, this design location has great potential for possible connections to other communities. The gateway into Spring Grove Cemetery could easily connect Northside to Spring Grove Village.
Design location two is a major pedestrian and vehicular intersection for Northside. In this location, Vandalia Corridor crosses the intersection of Hamilton Avenue and Blue Rock Street creating a wonderful opportunity for pedestrian and vehicular traffic to interact. On that very corner and just south of Plum Street and east of Apple Street is a newly created park that would make a wonderful entertainment and exhibit space for festivals or other community events. The corridor would allow this new park to be used fully. Streetscape elements and increased buffering would help to spread the greening effect the corridor will have out into the community. Our group determined a number of buildings that have potential in green technologies. This design location, named Hamilton Crossing, is a major hot spot for these buildings. The American Can Building, now vacant, lies along Blue Rock Street just east of the corridor. This building along with a few others to the north of the corridor would be wonderful opportunities for green roofs, solar panels, and green industry uses. My group member, Annie, is taking a closer look at these locations.

Design location three, named the Tunnel Connector, creates possibly one of the biggest opportunities for these two neighborhoods. In the 1820’s Northside and South Cumminsville was jointly one neighborhood of Cumminsville. The development of I-74 split the community in half and created the two neighborhoods we know today. Along with creating two separate neighborhoods, I-74 created identity and connection issues in and between these two neighborhoods. The Interstate created an impassible barrier for these former neighbors. When talking with our group’s engineers we originally focused on creating a bridge that went over I-74. When visiting the site and talking with community members I decided it would be better to create a tunnel going underneath I-74. Below is an image of the proposed tunnel. A tunnel would
create less of a visual barrier for pedestrians walking along the corridor as well as create a wonderful opportunity for artists to display their work. This tunnel allows former neighbors to be connected while retaining their own unique community identities. The removal of one existing vacant structure is needed to create the space for the tunnel and paths. This building is located on Powers Place and would open up an entire section of space that can be used for the tunnel, as a public park or plaza, or even as garden space for residents and local restaurants.

Design location four, named the Mill Creek Access Way, would become a major area for natural surroundings. Many of the area for the corridor in this location are very close to residences. This corridor would have positive effects on these structures values and the interest in them. Llewellyn Avenue, as it exists today, does not run all the way past Borden Street to Dawson Avenue. Instead, it runs into a parking lot. I am recommending that parking lot be replaced as an extension to Llewellyn Avenue, running all the way down to Dawson Avenue, and the rest be transformed into public space for gardens, parks, or recreational space. The transformation of this parking lot into open space will allow ample room for Vandalia Corridor to continue a path to the Mill Creek Bike Path. This connection to the Mill Creek would create a wonderful continuous loop for cyclist and joggers to enjoy. This last design location would bring the entire corridor together and create a unique and new identity for Northside and South Cumminsville while still giving them their own identities and cultures.

**Rationale**

The existing conditions in Northside and South Cumminssville are rather bad. Much of the corridor is either overgrown or developed over. In the North-East Gateway, design location one, the corridor is impassible due to the native plants that have overgrown the space. The sidewalks of surrounding streets and dreary and somewhat unsafe which would pose a huge problem in developing the corridor. The surrounding buildings are not in much better shape. Many of the buildings are zoned industrial and are
not the most aesthetically pleasing to look at. The building I identified as being a major opportunity for an artist live-work space is the least aesthetically pleasing of all. The transformation of this building into artist space would revitalize the building to be more pleasing to pedestrians. The corridor itself would also create a huge impact on outside perceptions, and even residents perceptions, of the neighborhood.

Hamilton Crossing, design location two, has much better conditions than the other three. The corridor as it sits today has been cleared and mostly redeveloped into storage units or street. This creates a much easier area to redevelop into Vandalia Corridor. The storage units that lie in the path of the corridor are temporary structures and could easily be relocated to another site. The asphalt and concrete of the existing street along the storage units could be reused in the corridor or other projects in the area. Below is a picture of the street along the storage units as it exists today. The street is barely wide enough for two cars and can only handle the little amount of traffic these storage units produce. The park that was newly built on the corner of Hamilton Avenue and Blue Rock Avenue is in much better condition. The park is a wonderful space for gathering and celebrating which would enhance and promote the corridor itself. This park is one of the greatest assets Northside would have in conjunction with the corridor.

The Tunnel Connector, design location three, has conditions that are in-between those of Hamilton Crossing and the North-East Gateway. The corridor in this section runs straight through I-74. As well as the Interstate being in the way, an abandoned vacant industrial building lies directly in the path of the corridor. This structure would have to be removed in order to create room for the path to pass under the Interstate in a tunnel. Directly on the other side of I-74 is a clearing that provides a perfect entrance or exit to and from South Cumminsville to Northside. The Interstate is the only major obstacle in the way of the corridors development. It may be the most costly part of the corridor but it will be the most rewarding.

The Mill Creek Access Way, design location four, has the most suburban feeling of all the locations. The corridor is surrounded by residential properties and many properties have rear yards that butt up to the corridor itself. A large surface parking lot along Llewellyn Avenue lies directly in the path of the corridors connection to the Mill Creek Bike Path. This surface parking would have to be reduced by half its capacity in order to allow ample room for the corridor to follow the Mill Creek Tributary down to the
Mill Creek Bike Path. This would also leave ample room for gardens, parks, plazas, or recreational space along the tributary. The areas past the surface parking lot that follows the tributary east to the Mill Creek is largely overgrown and undeveloped. This would be a wonderful place for a more natural and serene section of the path. There is ample room for possible trails for biking or hiking along the corridor to connect the corridor in with the already existing bike path along the Mill Creek.

There are proposed changes to the layout of the off ramp for I-74. This new change to the off ramp would make traffic travel through Northside rather than around it. The increased traffic would be a huge way for visitors to experience this new vision or Northside and South Cumminsville. The traffic would be forced to drive directly past or through the corridor and would increase the number of people aware of the neighborhoods as well as the corridor itself. When talking with the President of Northside’s Community Council he expressed his opinion of Northside’s need for such a greenbelt. He specifically had an impact on the connection from Northside to South Cumminsville. When discussing the bridge idea, I as well as the engineers had decided upon, he was very adamant about the need to create as minimal of a visual and physical barrier as possible for the residents. “I want them to feel like there was never an Interstate put in” he expressed genuinely. On the same thought, a gateway from Northside into Spring Grove Cemetery, and beyond into Spring Grove Village, sparked his interest. He wanted to have this corridor be a passageway for residents of all neighborhoods to walk and bike. He wanted everyone to experience Northside the way he does by living there.

**Implementation/Funding Strategies**

While our projects were largely individual, we did try to work jointly on many aspects of the corridor. Allison Hudson, urban planning student, focused her entire project on how to implement and fund this massive undertaking. Through the existing conditions of the neighborhoods, the proposed improvements to the neighborhoods, and the availability of grants and funding she created a strategy for the funding and development of the corridor. She worked jointly with the engineers in the group to work on LEED and LEAN certification as well as many other federal, state, and local grants.

**Precedent Studies**

New South Whales, Australia, had one major purpose in creating a greenbelt. Their main objective is to preserve and promote the conservation of their natural resources and surrounding habitats. This included the growth and preservation of certain species, the improvement of the resident’s lifestyles, and the improvement of the area for future generations. Their corridor is not yet development but they have made huge strides to making their goals into successes. The group has described themselves as being “extremely effective in raising awareness within the community… empower(ing) conservation and community groups and individuals in the community with a strategic vision” (Our Green Corridor). They have also “made a giant leap towards achieving its goal with more than 16,500 hectares of land having better biodiversity protection now…”
sustained an innovative, multi-faceted campaign against intense pressure of inappropriate urban development, forest logging and environmental degradation and neglect” (Our Green Corridor). Although this specific project in Australia is much more rural and environmentally centered, there are great implications that can show us how other cultures take their natural resources and use them to their advantage.

The cities of Wakefield, Barnsley, and Doncaster have a more urban situation than New South Whales. Their focus is on much more than just the environmental aspects a greenbelt can affect. “The Green Corridor project is an alliance between Barnsley, Doncaster and Wakefield local authorities, set up to tackle issues of low housing demand and market vulnerability in defined adjoining areas. These areas have a coalfield legacy in common within a green and rural context” (Wakefield, Barnsley, and Doncaster). The project began in 2003 and has continually been worked on since. The cities are currently working on a master plan for all three of the cities, community consultations, acquisitions of almost 200 properties, and much more. They have found funding for their housing projects in three main sources. The Regional Housing Board, the Housing Corporation, and Local Authorities are these three main sources. They plan to create ample housing opportunities using these sources inside the green corridor. At the same time, these housing opportunities are created a new growth in job opportunities as well. This corridor is also largely supported by the rail network that is in place. The rail would be a major way for most of the residents of this corridor to commute to and from work. This example is much more applicable to our corridor but is still on a much larger scale. This corridor encompasses three entire cities while ours would only encompass two or three neighborhoods.

Windsor, Ontario, is the last example of a green corridor I studied. This specific project is “a groundbreaking initiative for generating a green redevelopment of the international bridge corridor linking Canada to the United States” (Environmental Gateway to Canada). Spanning two kilometers in length it is on a much smaller scale and therefore much similar to Vandalia Corridor’s scale. This corridor has also already began construction. A number of project has been complete, such as pedestrian nature bridges, and much is still yet to be started. These future projects consist of green facades, public artwork, an eco parking lot, native plantings, urban forests, wetland stormwater treatment, solar gardens, a remote sensing project, and a traffic pump. Much like our assignment, this corridor is part of the University of Windsor Interdisciplinary Course. The University of Windsor has taken on this project as a task to its students. Of all the corridors I examined I believe this corridor in Windsor to be the most relevant and insightful to our corridor. They have taken ideas from students very similar to ourselves and have turned them into new and innovative way to solve sustainability problems as well as creating unique connection between the United States and Canada.
Bibliography

