A Garden Community

If you replaced conventional solutions with pull-out-the-stops creativity, what vision would you have for a struggling neighborhood? That’s the mindset of students at the University of Cincinnati’s Niehoff Urban Studio, where project teams are challenged to develop solutions for problems of the urban core. In this one, students imagine transforming Over-the-Rhine’s narrow Pleasant Street into a pedestrian pathway, replacing empty, dilapidated buildings and vacant lots with single-family housing along its length. The plan creates a “green” corridor—with trees, courtyards, and eco-friendly permeable pavement—that links up with the north end of Washington Park. The goal is to strengthen the connection to the park, encourage a sense of community, and discourage outsiders from cutting through the neighborhood.

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**TIMETABLE:** There's no plan for a class project like this to become reality. But city leaders and developers who are serious about utilizing the talents of the “Creative Class” should pay attention.
Students worked closely with an affordable housing provider and a citywide development corporation to vision three scenarios for a revitalized housing district in the four block area north of Washington Park in Over-the-Rhine. Students were able to use their design work to attempt to resolve potential conflict between two organizations with opposing missions, ReSTOC, and affordable housing provider, and the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation, pro-development organization. In the process, a fruitful relationship was developed with the outreach program of another institution, Miami University Center for Community Engagement in which faculty and students cross-collaborated. This project received an award from the Community Development Corporation Association of Greater Cincinnati for the “Most Outstanding Collaborative Effort” between ReSTOC, Miami University, and the University of Cincinnati (6/17/05) UC Community Design Center followed this academic project by providing technical data services for the Washington Park District Housing Inventory and Mapping Project for the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation.
Regional Influence- High Arts
Music Hall, a high art institution in Cincinnati for over 100 years, and the recently completed Cincinnati Ballet building combine with Final Friday to make Over the Rhine a regional attraction for arts in Cincinnati.

City Influence- Mainstream Arts
The new Art Academy of Cincinnati and School for Creative and Performing Arts anchor the city scale art interest in OTR. These institutions generate a smaller scale art loop including galleries and art services on 13th, 14th, Race and Main Street.

Community Influence- Urban Arts
Building from the existing urban arts culture in Over the Rhine, a community based art loop that incorporates 15th St. and Vine St. revitalizes the neighborhood from within. This smaller scale loop highlights non-traditional and subculture arts such as textiles, cars, hair, and graffiti art. Embracing these arts empowers the existing residents by supporting their lifestyles and legitimizing their interests in alternative forms of expression by providing a positive outlet for their energy. Utilizing the existing church on the corner of 15th and Race as an arts consortium for work and performances, and providing live/work lofts creates spaces that support these activities. Buildings designed as canvases, and parking lots as showcases give importance and validation to a new kind of art.

Washington Park Art Market
Envisioning the intersection of 14th and Elm as an important crossroads of three tiers of the arts, we determined the need for a market of interaction for these arts. Located at the north end of Washington Park, this proposed art market will provide a venue for the interaction of art factions, an area for programmable park events, and an anchor to improve the connection between Findlay Market and Washington Park.

Cluster Benefits
Understanding the large scope of the area of concern, we divided the neighborhood into community clusters. Organized in response to the existing building conditions and proposed new uses, these clusters each possess distinct characters that allow for more manageable development assembly and construction phasing. These clusters reflect the varied nature of the existing community groupings found throughout Over-The-Rhine.

See and be seen
Neighborhood vitality is created through an active and engaging street life. The streets and sidewalk of Over the Rhine are impromptu gallery spaces where people go to show their works, or to see the work of others. Balconies and large picture windows that overlook the streets keep residents connected to the living gallery spaces below.

Security and community
Each cluster is secured by limiting access to no more than one public entrance. Secured access points also promote resident use of front doors to encourage monitoring of the cluster from the periphery and interaction with the larger realm of the neighborhood.

Zones of Influence
The foremost design feature of these clusters is a shared interior courtyard. Each house or rental unit has a private patio or balcony to provide a physical and visual connection, and thus ownership, to the space. Each courtyard can be tailored to each cluster.
Proposed Medium Density Mixed-Use Building
- Four 1300 S.F. First Floor Commercial Storefronts
- Extensive Green Roof
- Recessed Balconies Provide Views to the Street Life
- Pull in Parking Spaces to Display Modified Cars
- Common Stairwell Fosters Neighorly Interaction - CNBSEEN
- Operable Windows Utilize Cross Ventilation

Proposed Medium Density Multi-Family Lofts
- Residential Live-Work Artists Studios on First Floor
- Medium Density Residential Lofts Above
- Recessed Balconies Provide Views to the Street Life
- Common Stairwell Fosters Neighorly Interaction - CNBSEEN
- Operable Windows Utilize Cross Ventilation

Proposed High-Density Residential With Commercial First Floor And Concealed 2-Story Commercial Parking Lot

Proposed Rehabilitated Multi-Use Building & Access To Parking Garage

Proposed Resident Parking Lot

Typical Shared Courtyard

Proposed Landscape/Parking Lane

Resident Garages With Garden Roof

Proposed Alley And Resident Parking

Proposed Mixed-Use With Green Roof

Proposed Pull-In Parking To Serve Storefronts

Proposed 15Th As 2-Way Street

Proposed Rehabilitated Church For Artist

Proposed Multifamily Infill To Restore

Proposed Widened Alley With Rear Access

Proposed Art Market

Music Hall
The redesign of Washington Park is an important step in the revitalization of Cincinnati. The promise of a clean, secure area for the residents of Over the Rhine should not be limited to the park, but extend outward to the entire community. In order to do so, it is necessary to reinstate Pleasant Street as a vital artery that connects Washington Park and Findlay Market. We envision Pleasant, the lifeblood of this new neighborhood, open to pedestrians but closed to cars. In place of traditional pavement, the Pleasant Street pedestrian way will feature an environmentally sensitive material. The first gesture in the creation of a new identity for the Washington Park neighborhood, the greening of Pleasant Street will extend to yards, courtyards, walls, roofs and buildings in the neighborhood and create a truly sustainable place to live.
The environmental focus of the garden community supports the reuse and renovation of existing structures, those unoccupied/beyond repair and those least adaptable to the new vision for the neighborhood will be demolished.

Alleys & Parking
The addition of alleys in the north blocks and widening of alleys in the south blocks provide infrastructure to accommodate parking, garbage trucks, rear garages for new single-family and provide additional spots for existing and new multi-family housing.

Traffic Flow
Race, Elm, 14th and 15th Streets remain one-way. Pleasant Street is closed to vehicles from 14th Street to Liberty. The alleys run north/south with slight jogs at 15th Street to discourage people from using them as shortcuts through the neighborhood.

Green Corridor
The green corridor is a symbol of an ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable community. Removing the car from Pleasant Street strengthens the connection to the outdoors and to Findlay Market and Washington Park.
The Washington Park Housing District strives to maintain the diversity that is unique to Over the Rhine. We hope to create a vibrant neighborhood composed of a variety of races, incomes and religions. This diversity is key to bringing new life into Over the Rhine without stifling the lives that already exist in this unique area. Over the Rhine is an area like no other. The rich history of this once vibrant neighborhood still permeates the streets. The beauty of Italianate architecture is complimented by a sprinkling of modern and traditional infill housing and restored to its past radiance. The Washington Park Housing District is also conveniently centered in Over the Rhine and within walking distance of Music Hall, Findlay Market, the Central Business District and Washington Park. Unifying the community is one of the best ways to maintain the development of the Washington Park Housing District. By taking ownership of the neighborhood, residents would be responsible for the area’s character. Whether it be a gathering in the community core, or a party in Washington Park, the utilization of community will contribute to the success of the Washington Park Housing District.
Permeable Pavements

Permeable pavements reduce water runoff by allowing water to percolate through them back into the groundwater, eliminating the use of a collection system or sewer system. This provides purification at the pavement level, eliminating costly storm drainage systems.

Living Walls

Cultivating plants on the south façade of residences provides shading from the harsh southern sun which has been shown to improve thermal insulation 5-10%. The plants also provide a habitat and food source for numerous animals and insects, and brings touch of nature to cramped city environments according to Living Spaces by Gunter, Abraham, and Fischer.

Visual Access

Large courtyard openings provide visual access of landscaped areas to Pleasant Street, while providing an architectural spatial barrier. This allows some “policing” of courtyard areas to occur from Pleasant Street, while maintaining a private atmosphere in the courtyards.

Businesses Creating Community

There are certain types of commercial development that are social by nature. Laundromats, coffee shops, salons and gallery spaces are just a few examples of commercial spaces that promote gathering and social events while supporting the needs of the community. By making these businesses centrally located, we are bringing people into the community core and creating a reason to frequent this vibrant space.

Designing for Spatial Awareness

There are several ways to define space. In the community core, there is a set back on the buildings creating small outdoor rooms for community use. The pavement on Pleasant Street changes around the intersection of 15th Street and Pleasant to alert the car and pedestrian that they have arrived at a different place. This differentiation helps to call out the importance of this space.

Outdoor Living Rooms

Inactive space can be dangerous space. You can attempt to eliminate some crime activity by creating community spaces that are used by active community groups and businesses. We propose outdoor seating for a deli, checker/chess boards surrounding a water feature, benches and a small stage.

Ventilation through the Stack Effect

Openings between floors in shafts, such as a stair tower, provide opportunity for warm air to rise between floors. When an operable opening is placed at the top, heat is drawn out of the structure creating a stack effect.

Mixed Use

Multi Family

Single Family

Parking Structure

Existing