Mt. Auburn Urban Framework Proposal

I have accepted the proposal set forth by Cheryl Nachbauer, Stephanie Leirs, Scott McGrath, and myself, with a few minor modifications concerning the details of the parks connection and the proposed park on Southern Avenue.
INTERVENTION 1: School and Community Center

**Location**
We propose to reprogram Inwood Park with a particular focus around the circle at the west end of Wellington Avenue. Also, the empty hillside between Hollister and McMillan Avenues to the northwest of Inwood has potential use.

**Suggested Land Use**
First, we propose to place a new elementary school on the northwest side of the circle, with a place for a playground to the west of the school. A faculty parking lot could be located northeast of the school and could be accessed from Hollister Avenue. Second, we propose to place a new community center on the south side of Wellington circle, with parking to the east of the building. While the school and the community center would front the majority of the circle drive, the park would still be available for public use. Lastly, we propose to introduce a new street between Hollister and McMillan Avenues to be fronted with approximately 24 new single family housing units.

**Existing Site Conditions**

Existing Circle drive at the east end of Wellington. Proposed Elementary school would be located to the right.

View from Vine Street back at the proposed hill location for the new school.

Existing tennis courts off of Hollister Avenue to be relocated.

View of Hollister Avenue, looking west at potential street addition at tree line on the left side.
Proposed locations for new community center on Wellington Avenue. There is a parking lot at the top of the embankment where the building could be located, which would leave as much of the park in tact as possible (right photo).

*Existing Cincinnati Zoning and Development Restrictions*

Inwood Park Zoning. This park is currently zoned as SF-6, single family development. Schools are permitted under this zoning with conditions. Lots are limited to 6000 s.f. And can only be 50 feet wide. The front yard setback is 25 feet. The side yard has a minimum setback of 7 feet, and must be 16 feet in total. The rear yard setback is 25 feet. And the maximum height of the building is 35 feet. Cluster housing is also allowed under certain conditions.

*Current Mt. Auburn Community Plan*

Both Hollister and Wellington Avenues are considered historic resources. And Wellington Avenue is zoned for suburban low-density office use. The current community plan proposes that Wellington and Hollister be included in the medical corridor proposed for Auburn Avenue. Also suggested is making the northwest corner of Inwood Park a business district at the intersection of McMillan and Vine.

*New Cincinnati Park Board and Uptown Consortium Plan*

The new plan suggests selling off the land between Hollister and McMicken Avenues for mixed-use development with retail space on the ground level and housing above. It also suggests filling in gaps in the housing fabric around the park to define the park edge and to encourage use of the park by residents.

*Conclusions*

Though the proposal of a new elementary school and a new community center deviates from the community’s plan and the school district’s plan for schools, the existing plans for Wellington and Hollister to be included in the medical corridor would not be affected by our proposal because the corresponding zoning stops short of Inwood Park. If the Park Board is willing to make a trade for the necessary park land, another park location could be provided along Southern Avenue.

Creating a street between McMillan and Hollister Avenues might prove to be problematic because Hollister Avenue is considered an historic resource. Nonetheless, the land is currently vacant and like the Park Board plan suggests, could be developed into single-family units that could eventually contribute and utilize the proposed school and community center.

**INTERVENTION 2: Parks Connection**

*Location*

Inwood Park is located immediately north of Christ Hospital and Jackson Hill Park is located immediately south of the same hospital at the west end of Dorchester Avenue. West of the hospital is a sprawling collection of medium density housing units. One focus is on both parks and the neighborhood west of the hospital. A second focus area is at the east end of Southern Avenue where the College Prep Academy and Community Center are currently located.

*Suggested Land Use*

First, we propose to separate the uses of Inwood and Jackson Hill Parks. Allow Inwood Park to become an activities park for our proposed school, for surrounding housing, and upcoming residents of the new Inwood Village development just to the South of Inwood Park. Relocate the park’s existing tennis courts and basketball court, and incorporate new playing fields and a pavilion. Jackson Hill Park is left to be a scenic overlook park to take advantage of the spectacular views from the peninsula. Second, we propose to connect the two parks by way of adding bike and walking trails to existing neighborhood streets (namely Eleanor, Gage, and Hill). Infrastructure, such as signs, a bridge, and benches, would be added to facilitate ease of navigation. Third, we propose to add a park at the east end of Southern Avenue.
A. Andrews, Niehoff Studio, Fall 2006
Avenue to compensate the Park Board for the loss of land in Inwood Park, which will also be connected to Jackson Hill Park via Mason Street.

Existing Site Conditions

Progression down the proposed path. First photo is terrain to be negotiated at the end of Gage Street.

Neighborhood along the proposed park connection path.

Vegetation at the end of the path.

Existing Cincinnati Zoning and Development Restrictions
Inwood Park Zoning. This park is currently zoned as SF-6, single family development. Park development requires conditional approval. Jackson Hill Zoning. This park is currently broken into two zones: RMX and SF-2. RMX, Residential Multifamily Mixed development, both of which will be expounded upon in Intervention 3 of this proposal. For the purposes of this intervention, development of parks and recreation is permitted in this zone. Single-family or SF-2 also allows the development of park and recreation space. Proposed park. Zoning details will be expanded upon in the proposal at the end of this report, but development of park and recreation space is also permitted in the corresponding zones.

Current Mt. Auburn Community Plan
According to the current community plan, Inwood Park has no zoning issues. Jackson Hill is being considered to become an Environmental Quality hillside district. It also acknowledges open land around the west perimeter of Christ Hospital. Also, the plan designates the neighborhood west of the hospital to be a highest priority housing target area for concentrated rehabilitation and blight removal. Also the Vine and Hill Street intersection is zoned as a business district that does not reflect neighborhood character. The school on Southern Avenue is considered a potential historic resource. And the community plan suggests institutional zoning for the entire area off of Southern Avenue and Young Street.

**New Cincinnati Park Board and Uptown Consortium Plan**

This plan suggested separating the uses of Inwood and Jackson Hill Parks—particularly enhancing access to views at Jackson Hill, and providing lookouts at appropriate locations. Jackson Hill’s presence on the street of Eleanor will be improved with a plaza and new shelters. Inwood Park will be infused with paths and separated into different uses, i.e. a dog park, more parking, micro gardens, and rentable spaces.

**Conclusions**

It does not appear that any attempt to connect the two parks through the existing neighborhood west of Christ Hospital would oppose any existing plans. It actually offers an opportunity to begin to address the desire to clean up the neighborhood through which the proposed path will meander. The only real challenge in the scheme would be navigating the elevation change at the end of Gage. Nor does the notion of differentiating the uses of Jackson and Inwood seem to diverge from the Park Board’s plan.

For conclusions about the proposed park, refer to the proposal at the end of this article.

**INTERVENTION 3: Commercial Center**

**Location**

The entirety of Dorchester Avenue from I-71 west to Eleanor at Jackson Hill Park. Also, Auburn Avenue between Christ Hospital and Sycamore Road.

**Suggested Land Use**

We propose to create a commercial corridor the entire length of Dorchester Avenue that could be fronted by two to four story mixed use buildings. Parking would be located off street, behind the buildings. The climax of the street would be located at the top of Dorchester, in Jackson Hill Park, and consist of an open plaza surrounded by four to five story mixed use buildings, open to views of the park, Main Street, and downtown to the southwest. An elliptical loop would run the perimeter of the buildings to allow for parking and use of the park. The existing Main Street Steps to the south of the park would be enhanced with green spaces at street levels. Also, along Auburn Avenue from Christ Hospital to the intersection of Auburn and Sycamore, would also be more commercial development. Second, we propose to improve the intersection of Dorchester, Auburn and Sycamore to function more like a 4 way intersection. To facilitate the development of Dorchester as a commercial corridor, the eastern portion of the street will be shifted slightly to line up with the western portion. Also, where possible, the western portion will be widened. Also, the sidewalk will be widened on the south side of the triangular corner to help shift the angle at which the road meets Auburn Avenue. Auburn avenue south of Dorchester will be closed and traffic redirected to Bigelow. **The connection to I-71 has been negated.**

**Existing Site Conditions**

Entrance to Jackson Hill Park at the west end of Dorchester. Awkward street width and turn around. The Park does not have much presence on the street.
Progression of Auburn Avenue, heading south. Right is existing intersection of Dorchester, Auburn, and Sycamore. There is no density, no implications that the street is a major corridor. The intersection is difficult to navigate.

Proposed location of the new park plot on Southern Avenue. To the Left is the existing school. Center is the existing community center and playing fields. Right is the juvenile center. The area is already open and relatively flat and could easily be transformed into more playing fields.

Existing Cincinnati Zoning and Development Restrictions

Jackson Hill Zoning. This park is currently broken into two zones: RMX and SF-2. RMX, Residential Multifamily Mixed development, allows housing development in buildings consisting of 3 units or less per building. Maximum land area for dwellings is 2000 s.f. Single-family or SF-2 does not allow retail development. Lots are limited to 2000 s.f. And can only be 25 feet wide. The front yard setback is 5 feet. The side yard does not have a minimum setback, but must be 5 feet in total. The rear yard setback is 20 feet. And the maximum height of the building is 35 feet. Cluster housing is also allowed under certain conditions.

Dorchester Avenue Zoning. This proposed corridor is currently divided into 5 zones. OG, office general, permits development of businesses, banks, etc. Minimum lot size is 700 s.f. Maximum building height is 100 feet. In the front and rear, setbacks are 20 feet. On the side of the property, the minimum setback is 5 feet and the maximum is 20 feet. For each 10 foot increment of building above 25 feet, 3 feet must be added to side and rear setbacks. For each 10 foot increment of building above 25 feet, 2 feet must be added to the front setback. SF-2 and SF-4 do not allow commercial or retail development. RM-1.2, residential multi-family, requires a minimum land area for residences of 1200 s.f. Business, office, medical, cultural, community services, and recreation development are all permitted in this zone. Food markets are permitted with the condition that they be attached to 50 or more dwelling units. CN-M development, commercial neighborhood mixed, is supposed to serve the immediate neighborhood. Most uses are permitted under 15,000 s.f. Minimum building height is 15 feet and maximum building height is 50 feet. Maximum front yard is 12 feet. 60% of the building must be built to the front of the lot. Transparency requirements for the portion of the building within 2.5’ to 7.5’ off the ground along the primary street are 80% for 0’-40’ expanses. If the façade is between 40-80’, the requirement is 70%. Parking must be located to the side and may not occupy more than 50% of the frontage.

Current Mt. Auburn Community Plan

Every part of the existing community plan mentions the intersection of Auburn Avenue, Sycamore, and Dorchester as a focus for development a business district. It is a conglomeration of several different business use zones. It has also been noted as an area and a corridor in need of major improvements. Several vacant buildings exist on the Jackson Hill side of Dorchester. Also, the western part of Dorchester has been targeted as the highest priority for housing development and rehabilitation. And yet, the street is also prospective historic resource—especially the triangular building at the intersection. The eastern portion of Dorchester is currently zoned for high-density residential use, but potential for rezoning exists. The western portion of Dorchester is slated to become high-density residential use also. Auburn Avenue is currently zoned for suburban low-density office use. Also, plans to remove some street parking along Auburn Avenue exists for traffic flow reasons.

New Cincinnati Park Board and Uptown Consortium Plan

The Park Board Plan for Jackson Hill suggests enhancing the western portion of Dorchester with green space and pedestrian areas. It proposes minimal mixed-use development along Eleanor to make it the attraction for the park. Single family units are proposed to infill.
Conclusions

Our proposal to create a commercial corridor simply extends the existing community plan to make a central business district. The existing residential zoning could limit plans for the restructuring. Also, our proposal opposes target housing areas along eastern and western ends of Dorchester. High-density housing units could still be developed behind the commercial corridor. Also, the Park Board's plan suggests Eleanor as the artery, not Dorchester as we have. However, the opportunity to make Jackson Hill Park the climax of Dorchester fully exists. The vacant buildings and lack of zoning in the area are key elements.

INTERVENTION 4: Entrances

Locations

Intersections at 1) McMillan and Auburn Avenue, 2) Auburn Avenue and Liberty Street, and 3) Dorchester and Reading Road.

Suggested Land Use

We propose to add landscaping and signs to the corners to create awareness of the Mt. Auburn neighborhood. Also, portions of the street would be repaved in decorative pavers to help create distinction between Mt. Auburn and surrounding neighborhoods.

Existing Site Conditions

Existing Cincinnati Zoning and Development Restrictions

Zones of the locations of the intersections are as follows: RM-1.2, SF-2, and OG. All of these zones support the development of park and recreation space. RM-1.2 single family requires that the front yard setback be 20 feet. The side yard does not have a minimum setback, but must be 5 feet in total. The rear yard setback is 20 feet. And the maximum height of the building is 35 feet. For SF-2, the minimum front yard set back is 5 feet. The side yard set back is 5 feet in total. The rear yard setback is 20 feet. And building height is 35 feet. OG permits front and rear setbacks of 20 feet. On the side of the property, the minimum setback is 5 feet and the maximum is 20 feet.

Current Mt. Auburn Community Plan

All of the listed intersections are currently zoned for commercial uses right now. Additionally, the intersection of Sycamore and Liberty Street is listed by the community as in significant need of concentrated rehabilitation and blight removal. Also, the zoning at the same intersection is currently business that does not reflect neighborhood character.

New Cincinnati Park Board and Uptown Consortium Plan

Neither Park Board plan indicates any activity in any of these areas.

Conclusions

The entrances to the neighborhood already exist to some extent, with some trees and landscaping, but they simply need to be further enhanced. Entrances proposed at the south and west sides of the neighborhood should implement easily, as they concur with the current plan for improvements. The entrance proposed for McMillan and Auburn would require the cooperation of the building owners because the property is not vacant.
Site.15
Highland Park Proposal
What happens to the fabric of Southern Avenue if the community center and elementary school are moved to another location? Currently Taft Elementary and Mt. Auburn Community Center anchor the end of Southern Avenue, a street across from Christ Hospital. If the institutions are removed, an already sparsely populated, declining area will be left with another void to fill.

A Brief Introduction to Site.15 Existing Conditions.
There are few existing buildings on Southern Avenue and Young Street, even with the school and the community center in tact. An enormous historic resource houses the College Prep Academy on the north side of Southern Avenue, which must be kept in tact. A juvenile center is located to the south of Southern Avenue, which will also remain in tact. Virtually no housing is located along Southern Avenue or Young Street. Other than the curb, there is little to define the street space. It is wide open and mostly vacant. A very dramatic change in grade exists between the end of Southern Avenue and Highland Street beyond that provides opportunities for pleasant views. The streets north and south of Southern Avenue are defined by medium-density single family housing. At a glance, there average house seems to date from the first decade of the twentieth century and in serviceable condition. Highland Avenue and Dorchester Avenue are both well-used and well-defined streets. There are signs of efforts made to keep them in good repair.
A Closer Look at Site.15

Existing Cincinnati Zoning and Development Restrictions

This area is broken into RM-1.2 and SF-4 zones:

The RM-1.2 concerns the proposed YMCA. Minimum land use is 1200 sf. Clubs and lodges cannot exceed 3000 feet per floor. A 20 foot setback is required for the front yard. A 5 foot minimum setback is required for the side yards, and 17 feet in total. 30 foot setbacks are required for the rear yard. There is no maximum height requirement. And facilities (including mechanical equipment and trash) must be located on the side or rear of the building away from public streets, and away from the boundary side if the building borders another zone type. Currently, these requirements pose no problems for reuse.

SF-4 concerns the rest of the proposed park area, and allows the development of park and recreation space with conditional approval. Any housing built has a maximum lot size of 4000 s.f., and a maximum width of 40 feet. The front yard set back is 20 feet. The side yard setback minimum is 3 feet, with a total of 12 feet. The rear yard setback is 25 feet. Maximum building height is 35 feet.

Cluster housing is allowed under this zoning. Attached and detached single family units only. All parcels must be contiguous. A 25 foot buffer yard is required around a development, in which parking, driveways, of accessory uses are not permitted. Setbacks do not apply to cluster housing, but height restrictions do. Each lot is not required to have frontage, but the development must have at least 25 feet of frontage. And 10% of the developable area, which excludes the buffer area, must be left open space.

Current Mt. Auburn Community Plan

The academy on Southern Avenue is considered a potential historic resource. The community plan suggests institutional zoning for the entire area adjacent to Southern Avenue and Young Street.

New Cincinnati Park Board and Uptown Consortium Plan

This area is not considered in the proposed plans.

Photos of Site.15.

A view from Southern Avenue Circle, looking west down Southern Avenue (right). The juvenile center is the square building in the center of the photo. The Community center and Elementary school is to the left. The Academy is the four story brick building to the right.

A view down Southern Avenue, looking east. The Academy buildings are to the left. The community center and elementary school is in the center. Young Street runs parallel with the elementary school.

Both photos illustrate the sparseness of site and the scale of the institutions that currently occupy the site that will have to be acknowledged, despite the zoning.
Left. Southern Avenue, looking east. One large building dominates the empty street. Center. Looking south down Young Street, another vastly empty street. Right. Looking north up Young Street. There is nothing for the street to terminate into. And nothing to define the street space.

Project Proposal.

As part of the overall scheme to create a family neighborhood between downtown and uptown, a park bounded by single family housing will take the places of the elementary school and community center. Additionally, the academy will be replaced by a YMCA and a community learning center. Multi-family housing will be added to both sides of Southern Avenue. A total of 74 units of housing will be added to the site.
**Goals.**

*Define the Edges.* One of the most problematic aspects of Jackson Hill and Inwood Parks is that they are sprawling parks with no definite edges on all sides. The creation of a new park requires this issue to address physical and perceived edges of the park.

*Create a presence for the park in the neighborhood.* The park must have a physical and visual place in the neighborhood to be successful. Lining it with housing, connecting it physically and visually to the main arteries of Mt. Auburn are a couple of desirable strategies.

*Preserve the views.* One of the neatest aspects of this neighborhood, because of its topography, are the views that few people are aware of. Taking advantage of the available resources could offer a possible amenity for future residents.

**Precedent.**

Much of the existing housing stock on the east side of Auburn Avenue are late nineteenth/early twentieth century shotgun houses that are long and thing. At most, they are 25 feet wide. New housing in this area is zoned for wider lots—nearly twice as wide. Any design of new housing will have to acknowledge the disparity between the old and new. Architect Hiroaki Ohtani’s Layer House is an excellent example that acknowledges the context of the site and adds something new. The house is a mere 355 square feet—much smaller than houses will be in Mt. Auburn, but of the same long, thin plan.

Also, Ohtani created definite layers of space for the exterior of the tiny building. First, he walled in the entrance which creates a definite boundary between the house and the street. But rather than leaving the wall solid, he inserted voids, which reduces the severity of the gesture. Actually, it creates a rather enticing opportunity to peek into a space that becomes a semi-private layer of the façade through the addition of the openings. There is even room for a tiny garden in this entrance, a bit of necessary whimsy. The combination of all of these elements efficiently and completely defines the different levels of space for users and creates a welcoming street face for the building.

Additions of the Mt. Auburn neighborhood will follow the example set fort by the Layer House. The different spaces that make up a neighborhood, streets, yards, parks, houses, backyards, sidewalks, etc., need to be defined for the space to be successful. Also, the kind of space (public, private, semi-private) needs to be delineate for the comfort and safety of users.

**Design Intent.**

*Vista.* A vista is a long view through a site or from a site. With regard to this particular site, the idea of vista was used to connect the park to the surrounding neighborhood at major roads. The vista from Auburn Avenue terminates in a new lookout on the east side of the new park. Also, a vista establishes a connection from Highland Avenue below to the park above.

*Edges.* The definition of edges of space was critical for this site. Public, private, pedestrian, vehicular, etc., the array of kinds of space required an array of approaches. Decisions about what to which degree to define the edge of space were based on the use of the space. The next challenge came when it was time to decide how the edge would materialize, and this project only began to explore the possibilities.
Site.15 Proposed Land Use.
The majority of the land at the current location of Taft Elementary is to be made into a neighborhood park, Highland Park, in exchange for taking land from Inwood Park to build a school. Taft Elementary and Mt. Auburn Community Center would be taken down to facilitate the redevelopment of the proposed park and new housing units.

The new park would be a passive park with open fields for play, a playground, walking paths, seating, picnic areas, a pavilion, and a lookout. Highland Park would be connected to Highland Avenue by way of a visual and pedestrian connection. The park would be visible from Auburn Avenue by way of the vista made possible by the conversion of Southern Avenue to a green boulevard.

Left. Proposed lookout in Highland Park.

Left. Proposed Pedestrian Plaza on Highland Avenue.
The park edge will be established by a new road, Park Circle. New housing will line the road. The SF-4 zoning for the area that the park is to be created in dictates that the housing around the park will be a mixture of single family units (10) and cluster housing (14). Both types of units will have off-street parking available as required by code. Just to the south of the park, another cul-de-sac will be created for a mixture of cluster housing (6) and single family housing (5). A pedestrian connection will connect this street to the park and to Highland Avenue below.

Along Southern Avenue, the zoning allows multi-family development (RM 1.2). The insertion of 35 units of multi-family housing along the avenue will help to address the scale and density issues of the currently sparse street in relation to the sizeable existing buildings. The new housing will have access to off street parking behind the buildings. The existing academy building and corresponding parking areas would be reused for a new YMCA. Also, a vegetative barrier would be created around the perimeter of the Juvenile center to the south west of the new park location.
Cluster Housing.
The cluster housing units propose an interesting design challenge and an opportunity to apply Ohtani’s design precedent to the compact housing. The result is a single-family studio townhouse that is focused around the views available on the site. Because three of the four walls are to be shared with neighboring units, the circulation has been moved to the rear of the building and made into a light well to allow light into the floors below. The design makes a gesture to create levels of space that connect the building to the street.

The partial floor plates on the second and third floor also allow light to wash down the side walls from the roof lite above.

Conclusions.
The redevelopment of this area into Highland Park is possible. Although the current Mt. Auburn community plan suggests this area for institutional development, it does not appear that current city zoning regulations would be a hindrance to a new park. The new housing would be geared toward an assorted target group. Obviously, families would be the main target group. The cluster housing and single family homes would be owned and the multi-family would be rented. The single family homes could appeal to any buyer, but will probably be the most
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expensive to own. The cluster housing will attract a crowd seeking an urban family experience and will probably be mid-range prices. The multi-family housing will accommodate a low to mid-range of renters.

As for implementation, the park must happen for the body of the development to occur. Without the park, the quality of living for residents declines significantly. The housing along Southern Avenue could be added at any time, but it would not necessarily spark further development of the area in need of density. This park and new housing could fill a much needed position this part of Mt. Auburn.