

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: BALTIMORE COMMUNITY THEATRE  
PROJECT: ACTIVATING NEIGHBORHOODS  
THROUGH EXPOSURE TO PROCESS  
OF PRODUCTION

Louis Peter Soraruf V, Master of Architecture, 2008

Directed By: Professor of Practice, Peter Noonan, School of  
Architecture, Planning, and Preservation

Mount Vernon neighborhood in Baltimore, MD is well known for its housing of schools and businesses for the arts. On the western edge of this vibrant neighborhood lies a social and cultural barrier that breaks up the tightly knit fabric of the city. There exists a node along this edge where six neighborhoods as well as the city's road grid come to a physical and socioeconomic confluence.

This thesis contends that by involving a surrounding community in the process of theatrical production, there can be a nurturing of interest and exposure to the diverse skills and practices that go into process of performance. Exposing the process makes the final production more interesting in that this new model for theatrical performance challenges the performers by leaving them more exposed to the surrounding community while at the same time building a reciprocal bond of learning and cultural understanding.

BALTIMORE COMMUNITY THEATRE PROJECT:  
ACTIVATING NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH EXPOSURE  
TO PROCESS OF PRODUCTION

By

Louis Peter Soraruf V

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
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## **Dedication**

To Mom and Dad,

Who have always been there for me and encouraging me to follow my dreams

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my committee for guiding me in the development of my thesis.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Baltimore is a city that has reemerged over the past 30 years and is starting to redefine its image from a poor and crime-ridden city to one that is culturally rich in the arts and a beautiful redeveloped port city. Despite progress in redeveloping the waterfront and the arts district of Mount Vernon, Baltimore continues its struggle to integrate its diverse cultural population and socioeconomic class system that reinforce its label as a fractured patchwork city.

This thesis proposes to develop a community theatre project that would celebrate the diverse background of the city and bring the surrounding neighborhoods together in an initiative of learning, teaching, and exposure to the diverse processes that go into the development of theatrical performance. The intent is to reach out to the community through teaching and exposure, in attempts to draw new understanding to the process of theatre production with the ends of neighborhood cohesion. The exposure of the process of production would branch out to a new type of theatrical patron, maybe not one with an inherent interest in the end result of performance, but rather an interest in the various applied skills of process.

The site being proposed for this thesis is a lot adjacent to the State Center in Baltimore, located on the western edge of the historic Mount Vernon Neighborhood. The site is currently occupied by Arena Players, a non-profit African American theater group. This thesis will respond to the theater groups' history on the site and suggest that it can play a new role in a new time. The site is unique in that it is at the confluence of 5 uniquely diverse neighborhoods, while being bordered by the physical and socioeconomic edge condition of Martin Luther King Boulevard (MLK). This area is ripe for renovation and redevelopment as it exist at a nexus of crime, affluence, the arts district, a government center, project housing, citywide transportation, and commuter access.

There is currently a master plan in development for the nearby State Center Site by Design Collective (DCI), which would transform the neighboring sight into a high density, mixed use, transportation hub with an emphasis on walk-ability and community accessibility. This thesis will adopt the proposed master plan, but expand upon its concepts and propose an integrated solution to mend the seams of the neighborhoods on the east and west sides of MLK Boulevard.

## Chapter 2: Design Process as Performance

The idea of nurturing ideas through incubation is a concept similar to the design process of the architectural profession as well as that of the performing arts. The contemporary practice of architecture (or at least as it is typically done in the profession) is exactly one of incubation. Incubation begins with a germ (an idea), which is then nurtured/grown in a controlled/optimized environment. It is only revealed publicly after the idea has sufficiently matured. In the case of both architecture and performance art, ideas are developed in the relative safety of the studio and then presented through finished (mature) performances/drawings/models/animations.

This model, however, has not assumed that the process should be transparent which is the major contention of this thesis. Artists are incredibly possessive of their ideas and very unwilling to publicly show paintings, drawings, performances etc., (for fear that the community will misinterpret the ideas, amongst other reasons) until they have precisely crafted a story/image. This lack of transparency often creates misunderstandings about how things are actually done (*the magic of theater*). The challenge is then to design a situation in which the process is both nurtured and allowed to develop freely, but at the same time visible and didactic to those who might take interest. Making the process more transparent might also give the community a greater

stake/personal commitment/interest in the final “production”, and the life of the theater as well.

Dance/theatre/performing arts are very similar, in that the final production is generally all the public ever sees. Exposing the process (set making, scoring, scripting, practicing, costuming, etc.) makes the final production more interesting while this newly proposed model for theatrical performance invites the artists/community to partake in a constant challenge / opportunity of exposure. This exposed process would appeal to a whole new audience, in that it makes the surrounding community part of the performance. The process of development, or nurturing of this germ, could act as its own advertisement. It could turn the *entire process* into a performance, not just what happens on the stage when the curtains are open.

Inherent in the architectural agenda of this thesis is a cycle of growth and evolution. The investigation of architectural nurturing contends that the germination process could be a vibrant and exciting condition that is an experience shared with the surrounding community. Together, the performers and community can share in the cultivation and nurturing of the performance. The evolution of the program as transient exposed units of innovative growth will generate a new typology for architectural form and spatial ordering. At the end of the growth cycle for a given activity, the entire community will have a vested interest in the resulting production. The architecture of process will manifest itself as a catalyst for stitching together the patchwork fabric of the

surrounding neighborhoods in addition to generating a place to work, teach, and learn about the process of designing a performance.

*Role of building: “To animate the ideas that have developed in the spaces created and to nurture a participatory culture where all members feel welcome to bring their ideas and leave their fingerprints”<sup>1</sup>*

*-Eric Meerkamper*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.socialinnovation.ca/about/theory-of-change>

### **Chapter 3: Community Theater Project**

The program for the Community Theatre Project is in response to the social need for engaging a diverse population into the arts. The current model for theatrical production is directed towards the affluent cultured upper class who have the time/money/education to appreciate the performing arts. This project proposes a contemporary/cutting edge community interest theatre that would serve as a springboard for learning about theater, acting, scripting, set design, lighting, ect. It would engage the surrounding performing arts schools and the surrounding neighborhood residents who might wish to explore new hobbies or careers in the realm of theatrical process. By adding a layer of transparency to the previously mysterious back of house theatre process, this will draw a completely new demographic to the arts. This will strengthen the surrounding neighborhoods by exposing everyone to the process and final expression of the product. The program expands the current mission of the theatre on site (Arena Players), an African American theatre group, which has always been about integrating the surrounding community with the performing arts, but lacks the funding and consistent membership and support.

### Program Elements

The Community Theatre Project is composed of three primary elements

- 1) Internal Theater Spaces- these would serve as the primary enclosures for final productions or community events.
- 2) Artist Lofts and Teaching Studios- this is where visiting professionals or local professors would live and teach their trade to the surrounding community.
- 3) Theatrical Process Areas- these transparent zones would expose the diverse processes of theatrical production to the surrounding community.

### Community Theater Project Program

Public Internal Facilities.....(12,000)

Lobby 6,000

Coat Room 300

Cafe & Kitchen 2,500

Box Office 400

Multipurpose Rooms (2 @ 500) 1,000

Public Restrooms - Male 600

Public Restrooms – Female 1,200

Internal Theater Space (7,900)

Black Box Theater.....1,800

Theater 1,600 (150 seats)

Control Room 200

Social Theater.....4,000

Theater 3,400 (400 seats)

Control Room 250

Trap Room 350

Offices & Misc. ....2,100

Theater Management Office 600

Misc. Offices (4@150) 600

Locker/Shower, Male 300

Locker/Shower, Female 600

<u>Exposed Process</u>	(10,150)
Performance Process.....	3,800
Assembly/Warm-Up 300	
Practice Studios (2 @1,000) 2,000	
Choreography Studio 1,200	
Video Lab 150	
Audio Lab 150	
Set Design.....	3,700
Properties Shop 1,000	
Studio/Shop 1,500	
Lighting Shop 1,200	
Costume Design.....	2,650
Studio Space -1,500	
Fitting Room (2 @ 50) 100	
Laundry Room 150	
Costume Storage 900	
<u>Artisan Lofts &amp; Apprentice Training</u> .....	(4,000)
Lofts for resident artisans and performers (3@800) 2,400	
Training Studios (4@400) 1,600	
<u>Outdoor Public Space</u> .....	(15,000)
Living Street 3,000	
Community gathering and performance 12,000	
Maintenance.....	3,000
General Storage 1,500	
Loading Dock/Receiving 1,000	
Maintenance Closets 200	
Trash/Recycling 200	
Mechanical & Electrical (@ 10%).....	4,000
Circulation.....	6,000
Total Building SF.....	(47,050)

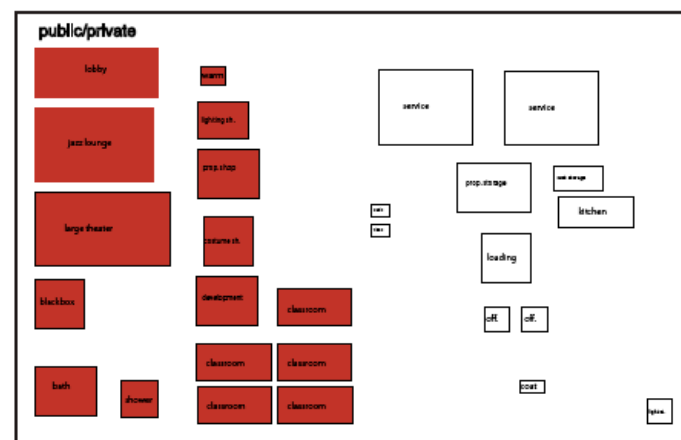
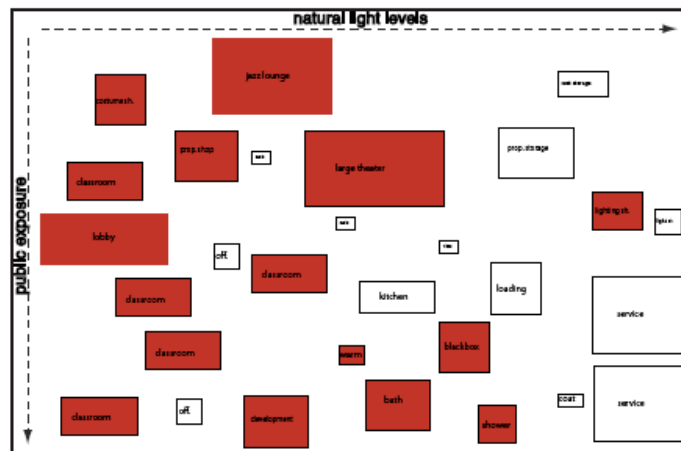
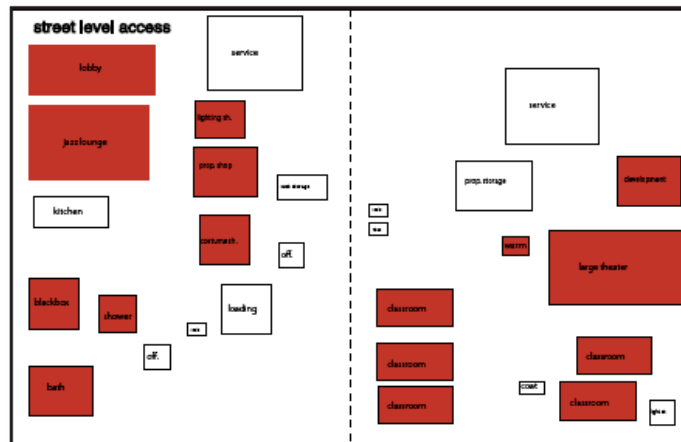
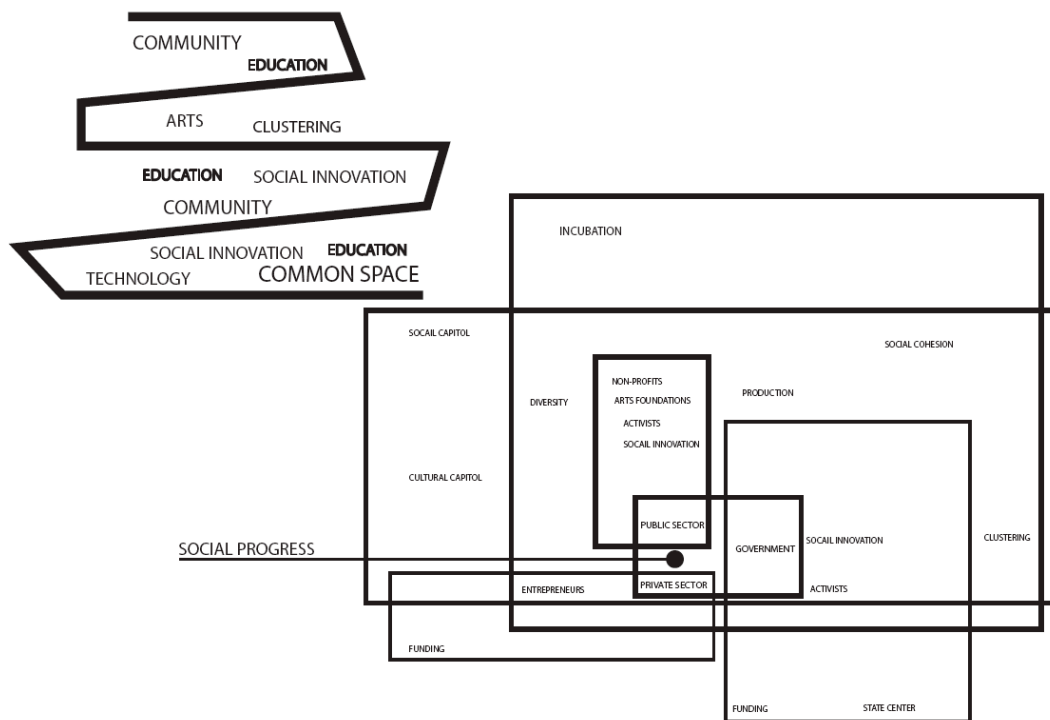


Figure 1: Preliminary program analysis

The arts are a strong part of our understanding of other cultures. Exposure and learning of the arts serve as a stimulus for community growth and understanding. By fostering an environment that would cater to the teaching, production and interaction with visiting artisans, the designed environment could serve as a place for the sale, production and distribution of their acquired skill set. This would be a place for people to live, gather and work as to activate the building at all hours of the day. By creating a community that is rich in multiple areas of the arts, the interaction between artisan and surrounding community would inspire new design techniques and ways of reflecting the culture and expression of a diverse community.



**Figure 2: Early studies of Public Private overlap**

Because of the diverse time based functions and activities that will occur on site, there needs to be multiple levels of porosity and interaction while maintaining separation of public and private space. The buildings program of a live, work, and performance

environment, will require multiple levels of phenomenal and conceptual overlap to create an environment that is both inviting and transparent to the surrounding community but still controlled and safe for learning and performance.

Precedent studies:

*Woolley Mammoth Theater Company, Washington, DC*

McInturff Architects



Figure 3: Theater entrance [image courtesy of McInturff Architects]



Figure 4: Internal Street [image courtesy of McInturff Architects]



Figure 5: Cafe [image courtesy of McInturff Architects]



Figure 6: Section through building [image courtesy of McInturff Architects]

The Woolley Mammoth Theater is a new cutting edge theatre designed by architect Mark McInturff in Washington, DC. It has been dubbed a “transparent theatrical laboratory” because of its transparent construction that gives the patrons views of the inner workings of the theatre company such as rehearsal rooms and practice studios. The front entrance of the theatre blends in with the historic city block, as it requires attendees to walk back around the corner of a historic storefront before entering through a modest facade. The internal circulation and theatrical spaces are the most intriguing and compelling of the composition. The promenade into the building becomes an internal pedestrian street. Along the movement to the back of the “street”, where the theater is located, patrons catch glimpses of rehearsals and back of the house management.

*Sidney Harmon Hall, Washington, DC*  
Shakespeare Theatre Company  
Diamond Schmitt Architects



Figure 7: Building Entrance [image courtesy of Diamond Schmitt Architects]

The Sidney Harmon Hall was designed for the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, DC. It houses a flexible theatre space for 800 patrons. The theater is a four story sound insulated block with an eleven-story office building above. The glass façade of the building activates the community by connecting them to the box office and retail stores at the ground level while creating a visual connection to the theatre lobby above:<sup>2</sup>



Figure 8: Proscenium configuration [image courtesy of Diamond Schmitt Architects]

“In the proscenium configuration the playing area before the 800 seat auditorium will be framed by a movable structure above and on each side of the stage floor. The first four rows can be lowered and stored to create an orchestra pit for musicals”

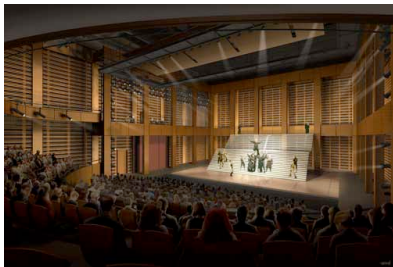


Figure 9: Open configuration [image courtesy of Diamond Schmitt Architects]

“The hall can be configured without a proscenium so that the playing space is open before the same 800 seats.”



Figure 10: Thrust stage configuration [image courtesy of Diamond Schmitt Architects]

“The first four rows of seats in the proscenium or end-stage configuration can be moved to the sides of the playing space, creating a thrust stage format.”

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.potomacstages.com/ShakespeareConst.htm>

*Clarice Smith Performing Art Center, College Park, MD*  
University of Maryland  
Moore Ruble Yudell Associates

The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center house a multitude of theatre types for the University of Maryland. The promenade through the building takes you into a “Grand Pavillion”, off of which lies all the various theaters. This space can be used for gatherings, functional circulation, or impromptu performance.

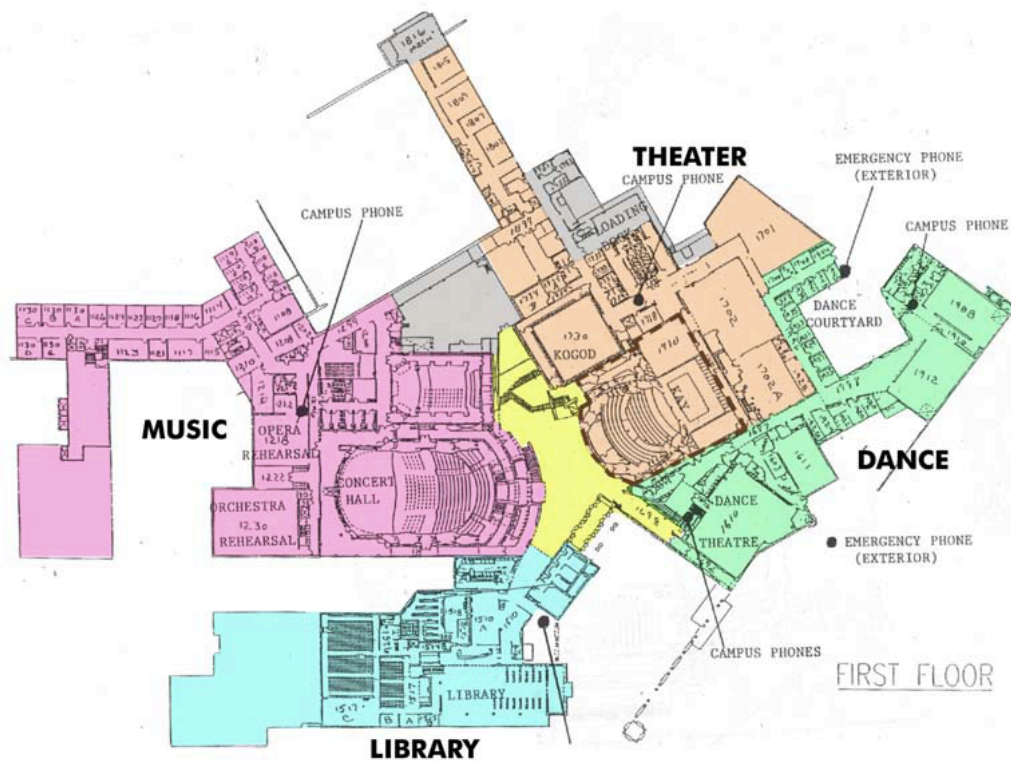


Figure 11: First floor plan of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts School highlighting major programs organized in a pinwheel fashion around a grand lobby space. [map courtesy of Clarice Smith Performing Arts School]

Major Program Elements .....	Seating Capacity	NASF
Grand Pavilion	325	3,800
Elsie & Marvin Dekelboum Concert Hall	1100	15,600
Ina & Jack Kay Theater	650	10,148
Dance Theater	190	3,500
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall	300	5,300
Laboratory Theater	120	1,430
Robert & Arlene Kogod Theater	195	2,860
Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library		23,100

Table 1: Major program elements of Maryland Center for Performing Arts [University of Maryland College Park. Maryland Center for Performing Arts: Facility Program. Sept. 2003].

## Chapter 4: Site Investigation

### Location

Baltimore, MD was once a thriving port city located on a natural harbor on the Chesapeake Bay. By 1900, it was developing into a successful industrial city with the emergence of the canning industry, shipbuilding and transportation industries. “It was also an active port of entry for European Immigrants as well as rural residents from the Upper South.”<sup>3</sup> In 1904, fires in Baltimore destroyed over 1,500 structures while the city was hit hard by the depression in 1929. After World War II, Baltimore’s economy began to thrive again and the city seemed to be back on track. But as the economy continued to get better and the residents got wealthier, suburban flight set in, and the majority of affluent residents moved to the suburbs to seek newer housing and cleaner environments.

By the 1960’s, Baltimore was experiencing its own insular depression while other United States cities were flourishing. Redevelopment projects were set in work for the waterfront and business districts, and the city has been rebuilding ever since. The economic and culturally diverse residents of Baltimore have been separated into a patchwork of divided fabric that changes sometimes from block to block.

There are some that view this broken integration as a bad thing that results in violence, jealousy and fear, but as a designer, one must view it as an opportunity to unite and strengthen the fabric of our diverse urban culture.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://pages.baltimorecountymd.com/history.htm>

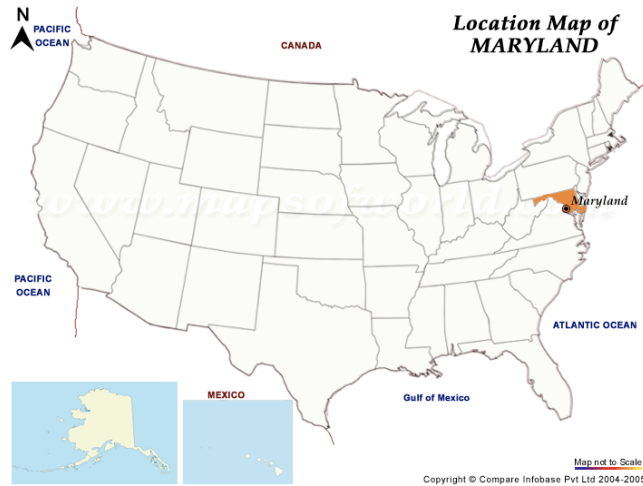


Figure 12: Maryland Location [image courtesy geology.com]

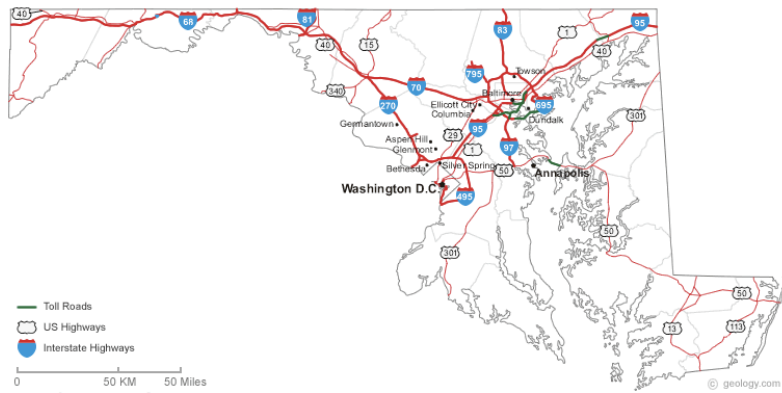
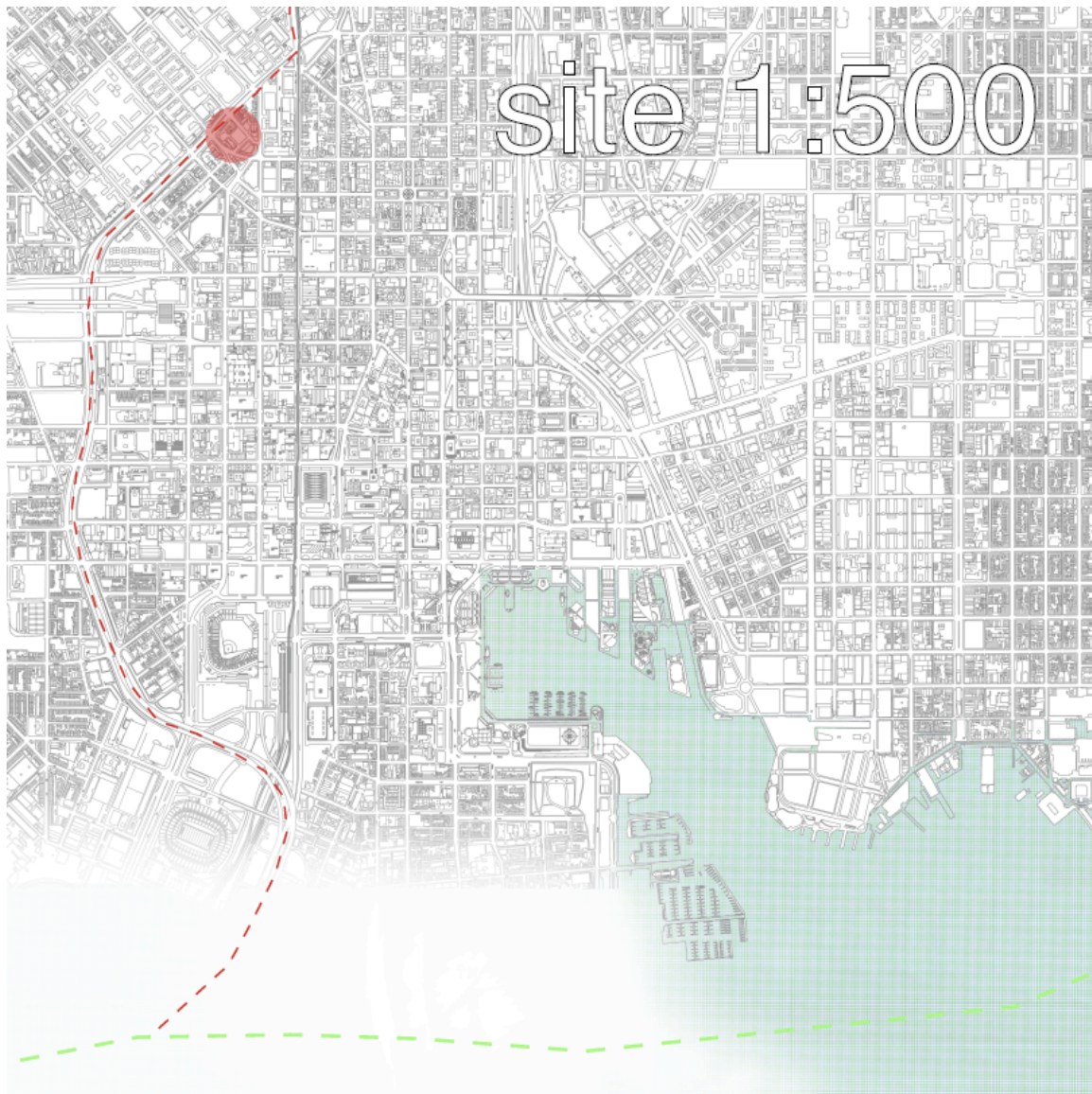


Figure 13: Maryland Roads [image courtesy geology.com]



Figure 14: Maryland Waterways [image courtesy geology.com]



**Figure 15: Baltimore site location** (the green dashed line represents I-95 while the red dashed line represents Martin Luther King Boulevard which runs north-south through Baltimore)



Figure 16: Midtown Baltimore Figure/Ground 1914 [image courtesy of the Design Collective]



Figure 17: Midtown Baltimore Figure/Ground 1952 [image courtesy of the Design Collective]



Figure 18: Midtown Baltimore Figure/Ground 2006 [image courtesy of the Design Collective]

### Neighboring Communities and Districts

The site of this thesis will occupy an edge within the urban fabric of Baltimore, which strikes a divide between the affluent region of Mt. Vernon and the forgotten neighborhoods of Upton and Madison Park. The response will act as a stitch in the city's social and economic fabric and will serve as enabler for growth and community revitalization. The site is nestled in the Arts District of Baltimore and is within walking distance of the Meyerhoff Symphony Center, Lyric Opera House, the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), and many small arts supply stores. Baltimore School for the Arts, a nationally renowned high school for exceptional students in the arts is located 2 blocks east of the site. The arts high school along with the Peabody Institute and MICA, would be used as a resource for performance production, learning and community exposure.

The site is located along Martin Luther King Boulevard, which acts as a strong social, cultural and economic edge in the city. The east side of the MLK, where the site is located, is connected to the affluence of the arts district and Historic Mount Vernon. The typical response in the City's growth pattern has been to build inward from this edge and to turn the buildings' backsides to the roadway. This is a condition that needs to be addressed for future growth. The west side of MLK has been known for its public housing and related crime and its depressed and forgotten communities. This thesis will address this issue by acting as a conceptual urban stitch in the broken city fabric and reconnect these repressed communities back into Baltimore's movement toward revitalization.



Figure 19: Site with MLK Boulevard edge condition



Figure 20: Site with neighborhood divisions

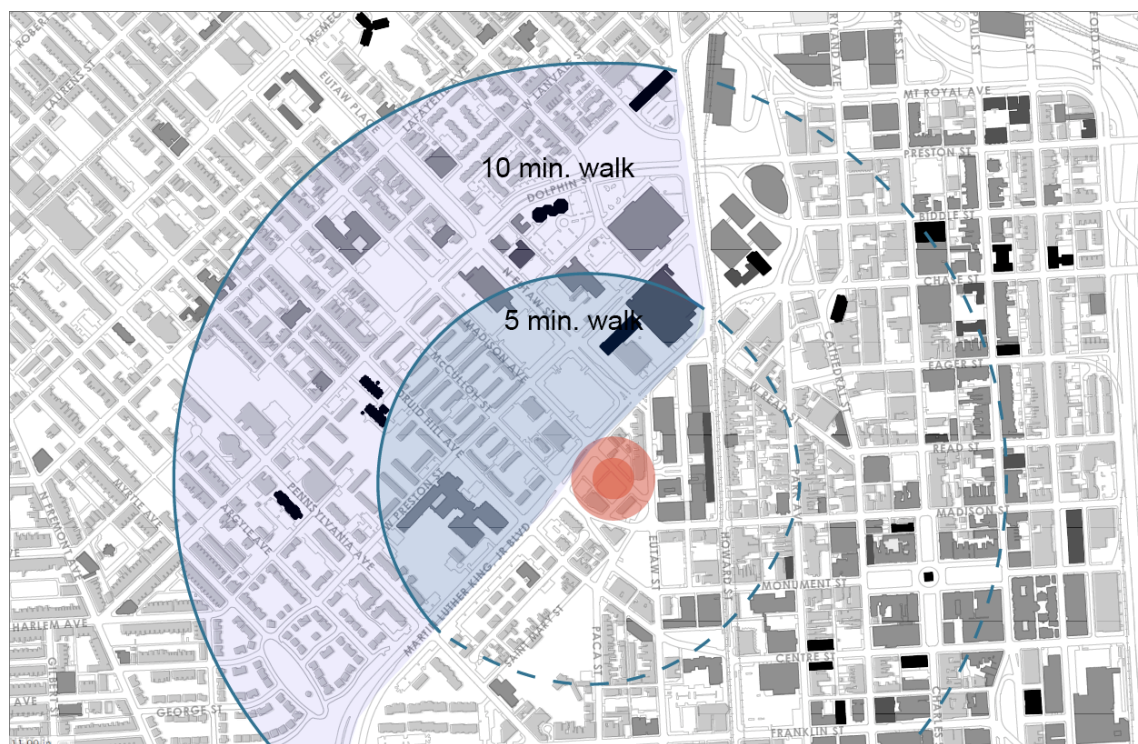


Figure 21: Site map with pedestrian walking times to metro/light rail access and Amtrak Station respectively

Across the street from the site is Baltimore's State Center. This is a great public access point for the surrounding city because it offers both light rail and metro stops.

*"This ubiquitous principle is the need of cities for a most intricate and close-grained diversity of uses that give each other constant mutual support, both economically and socially. The components of this diversity can differ enormously, but they must supplement each other in certain concrete ways" -Jane Jacobs*

### Existing Site Use

The Arena Players Inc., which is an African American theatre company that was started in 1953, currently occupies the proposed thesis site. The conception for this company was community based theatre. It was an outlet for the African American community to express their cultural heritage and artistic ability in a positive and community driven way. Despite its fifty years of giving back to the community as an expressive avenue of the arts, the company has struggled to stay afloat financially. They exist purely on donations and community involvement and with a growing list of competition in the surrounding area, keeping the building up and running has become a very difficult task. The thesis would propose the demolition of the existing playhouse, although, because of the important roots of the theatre to the area, the company would continue to exist within the proposed Community Theater Project.



Figure 22: Existing Site with Arena Players Theatre Company  
[image courtesy of Microsoft Live Earth]

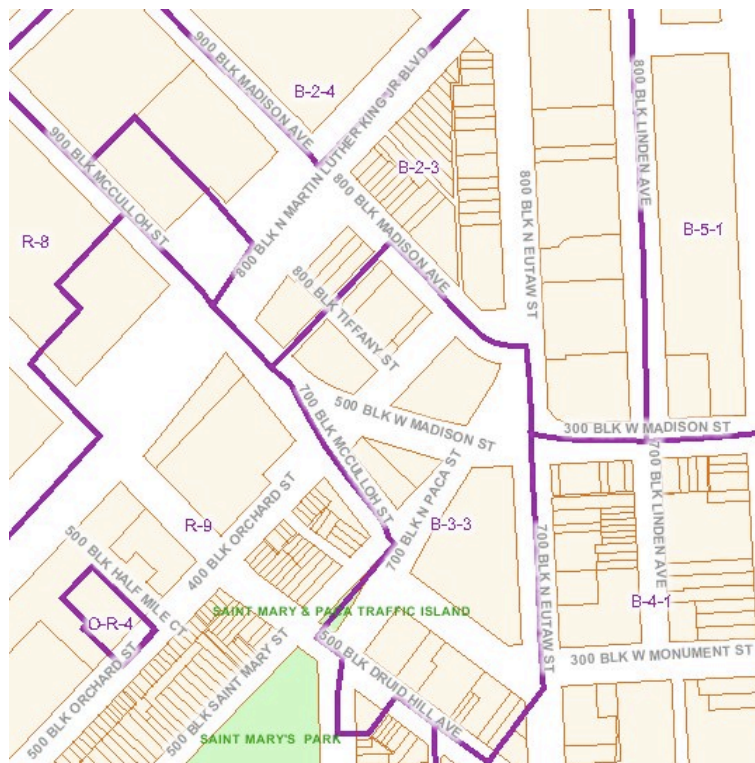
*The Arena Players, Inc. enters its fifth decade fully mindful of its responsibility to sustain an institution that has woven its way deep into the fabric of theater in the community and indeed the nation. Those who have been closest to the growth of the organization throughout its almost fifty years pause to reassess their experiences, which frequently reached the lowest depths of frustration but more often found renewal in glorious success.*<sup>4</sup>

### Zoning

The city zoning for this site adds to the peculiarity of the site in that it occupies two separate zoning conditions. The distinction between the two zones is set by the dirt road running north/south through the site. The western portion of the site is zoned as a B-2-3 while the eastern portion of the site is zoned as a B-2-2. The difference between the two sides of the site, is that the side facing Martin Luther King Boulevard can house afterhours entertainment, live performances, as well as the ability to serve and sell liquor.

<sup>4</sup> <http://arena-players.strategiccommercegroup.com/>

This presents some constraints as to where the performance space and jazz lounge can occur within the confines of the site. A set back line for proximity to churches also limits the B-2-2 portion of the site. The church located to the northeast of the site would require the consideration of fronting a public green space or hardscaped public plaza.



**Figure 23: Existing Site with Zoning Boundaries**  
[image courtesy of [http://maps.baltimorecity.gov/imap/imap\\_L.aspx](http://maps.baltimorecity.gov/imap/imap_L.aspx)]

## Chapter 5: Design Collective's State Center Master Plan

### Preferred Development Concept

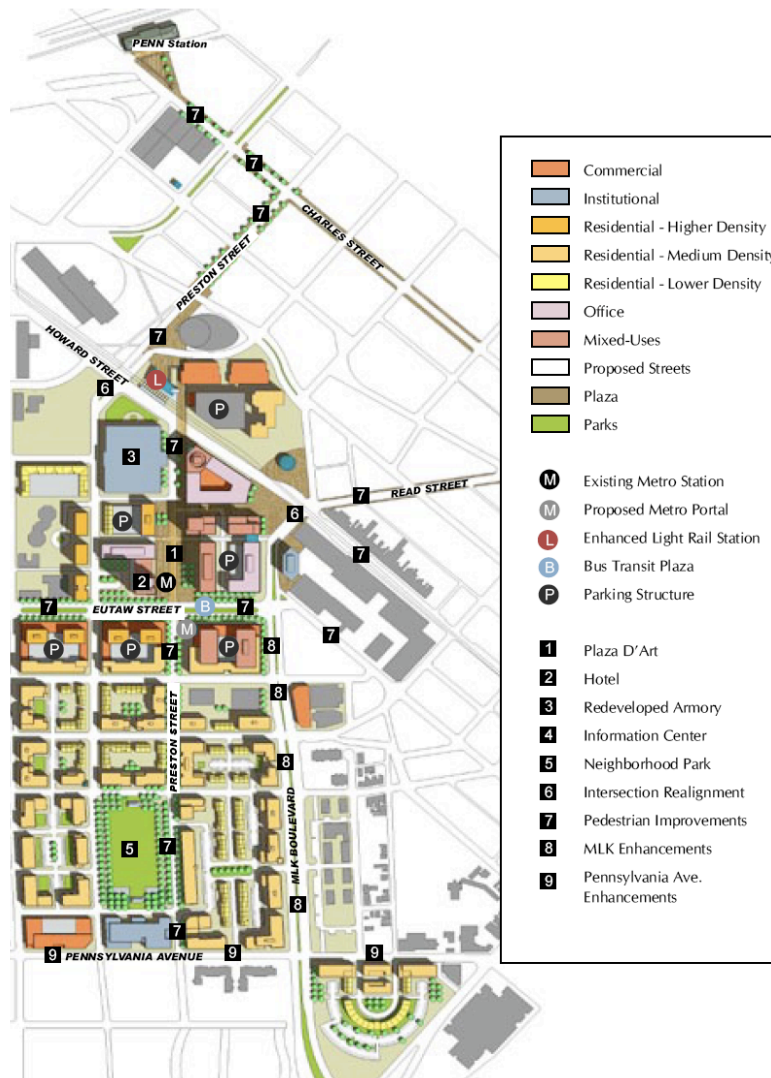


Figure 24: Preliminary Master Plan for All Three Phases  
[image courtesy of [www.statecenter.org](http://www.statecenter.org)]

### Critique

The Design Collective's exploration for the development of the State Center Site has tested many of the issues confronting this thesis and I feel their current resolution is for the most part responsible. They are looking at increasing the density of the housing,

retail and office buildings at the government center which is a primary hub for transportation within the city. There is both a metro stop and a light rail stop on site, while Penn Station is a short walk to the northeast.

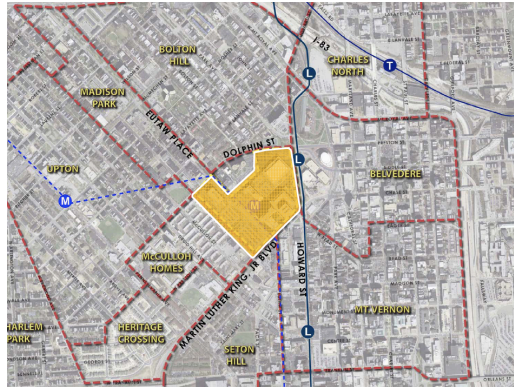


Figure 25: State Center Site With Neighborhood Boundaries  
[image courtesy of www.statecenter.org]

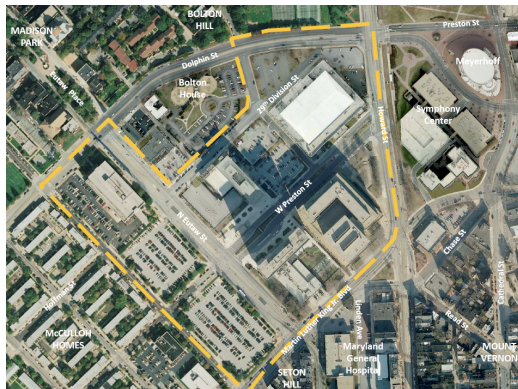


Figure 26: State Center Site as it currently exists  
[image courtesy of www.statecenter.org]

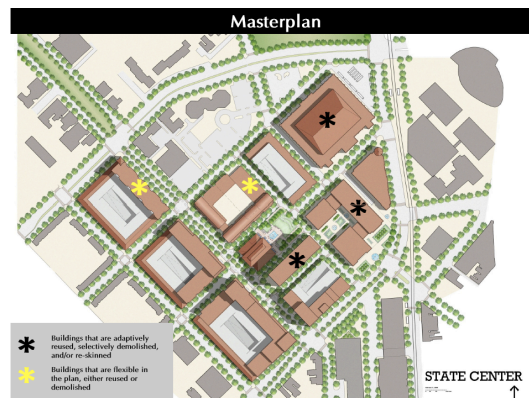


Figure 27: State Center Master plan  
[image courtesy of www.statecenter.org]

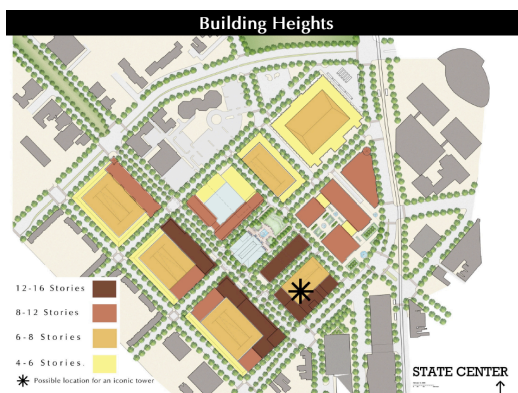


Figure 28: Proposed Building Heights  
[image courtesy of www.statecenter.org]

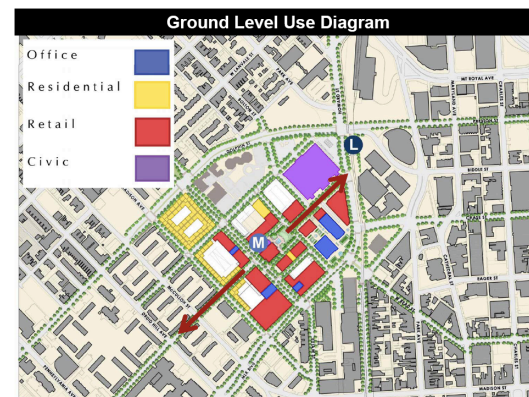


Figure 29: Proposed ground level use  
[image courtesy of www.statecenter.org]

Currently, the site exists as a brutalist government complex with an abundance of empty parking lots that consume the entirety of a city block. The redesign looks to create a more friendly pedestrian street system that encourages outdoor community interaction. The first phase of the development, deals with the lot to the northwest of the proposed thesis site and is primarily composed of mid to high-rise mixed-use buildings. The second phasing of the project would build down to the western side of my site with three to four story housing and midrise retail along MLK Boulevard. The proposal does make a nice attempt at incorporating greenery into the foreboding desolate site and also creates places for community gatherings.

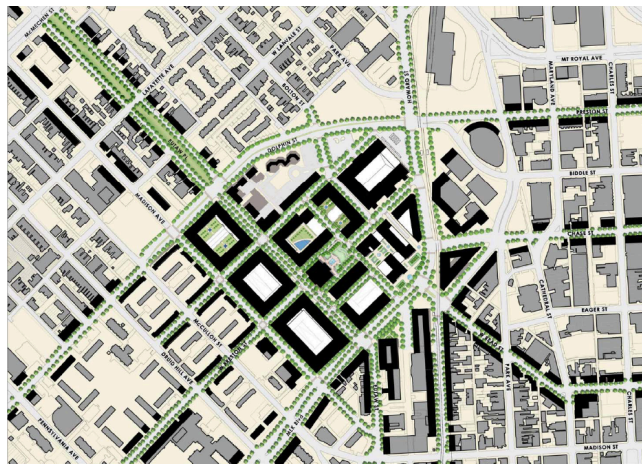


Figure 30: Proposed Cityscape  
[image courtesy of [www.statecenter.org](http://www.statecenter.org)]

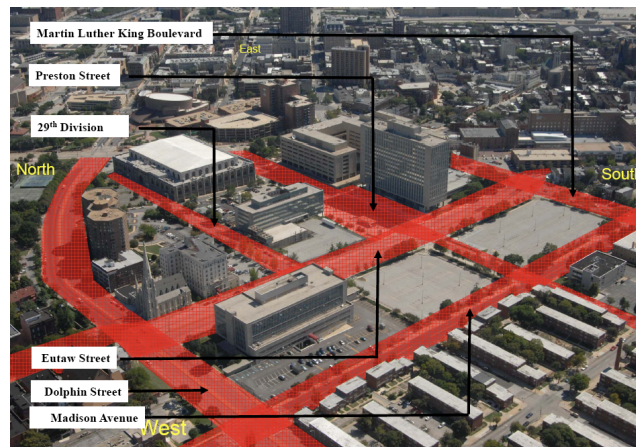
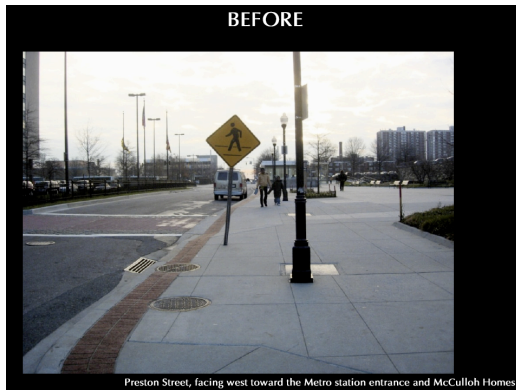
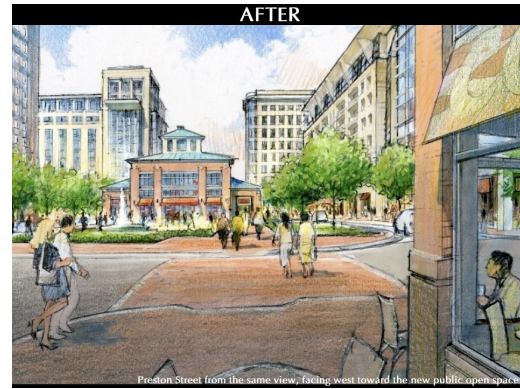


Figure 31: State Center Street Grid  
[image courtesy of [www.statecenter.org](http://www.statecenter.org)]



**Figure 32: Preexisting Street Condition**  
[image courtesy of www.statecenter.org]



**Figure 33: Proposed Street Condition**  
[image courtesy of www.statecenter.org]



**Figure 34: Proposed Central Pedestrian Zone**  
[image courtesy of www.statecenter.org]

## Response

The one thing that the proposed master plan starts to refer to, but never resolves, is the physical divider of Martin Luther King Boulevard. The DCI design process talks all about developing continuity in pedestrian circulation as well as extending the historic

street grid, but the only place they attempt to tackle the issue of MLK Boulevard is at the northeast corner of the State Center Site. It is clearly not an easy task, but the proposed designs are exclusively limited to the western side of the MLK. My site response will build off DCI's proposed development, but will attempt to extend the continuity of the street grid and circulation east-west across MLK rather than a strictly north-south response. This will be resolved by formal gestures responding to the communities on both sides of MLK as well as an incorporated massing that will respond to the scale of the proposed adjacent development.



Figure 35: Existing MLK Intersection  
[image courtesy of [www.statecenter.org](http://www.statecenter.org)]

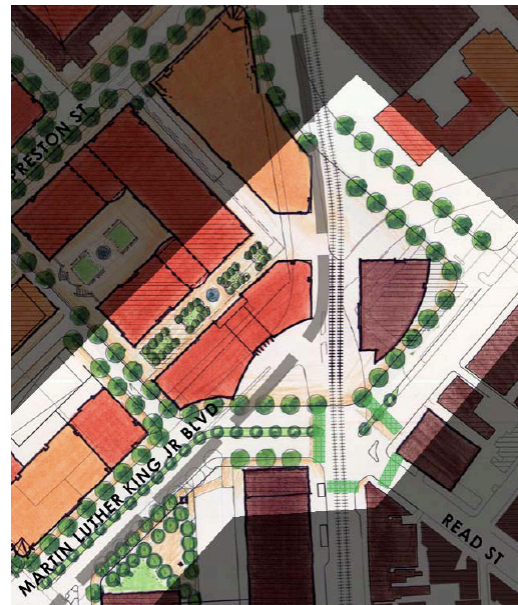


Figure 36: Proposed MLK Intersection  
[image courtesy of [www.statecenter.org](http://www.statecenter.org)]

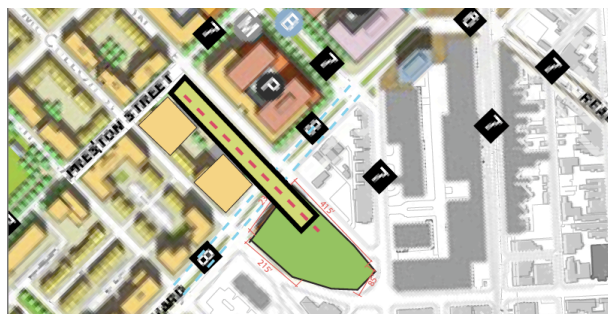


Figure 37: Proposed East-West Continuity

## Chapter 6: Neighborhood Identity

### Why does it need an identity? How will it get it?

In its current state, the site exists as a neglected parcel with the northern portion retaining two freestanding row homes attempting to maintain a semblance of a street wall along MLK Boulevard. The low density results in a poorly defined street edge that forces the backsides of the row homes on the adjacent street to front onto MLK Boulevard. It is in the treatment of this triangular parcel in conjuncture with the building proposal that the site will redefine its image as an iconic community-gathering place that will serve as a new front yard for the edge of MLK.

### Urban Precedents

*Commonwealth Avenue, Boston MA*



Figure 38: Commonwealth Ave., Boston Underpass  
[image courtesy of [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)]

Martin Luther King Boulevard in Baltimore and Massachusetts Avenue in Boston are two similar roadway in function, but employ vastly different forms of application. Both roadways are primary routs through the city that are fed from interstate highways. Where MLK fails at creating a pedestrian friendly environment, Mass. Ave. excels for a multitude of reasons. When one compares a street section of the two roadways, the immediately obvious discrepancy is the property line set back as well as the use of greenery and narrower lanes to slow down traffic. Because of MLK Boulevard's wide building setbacks and narrow internal median, it acts as a divisive edge in Baltimore's urban and cultural fabric. This thesis proposes to widen the Boulevard to let the building setbacks respond to similar scaled successful precedent studies. In widening MLK Boulevard, the opportunity is presented to thicken the interior edge condition which would allow the surrounding community to occupy and enliven the resulting in-between space.



**Figure 39: Commonwealth Ave., Boston Aerial View**  
[image courtesy of [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)]

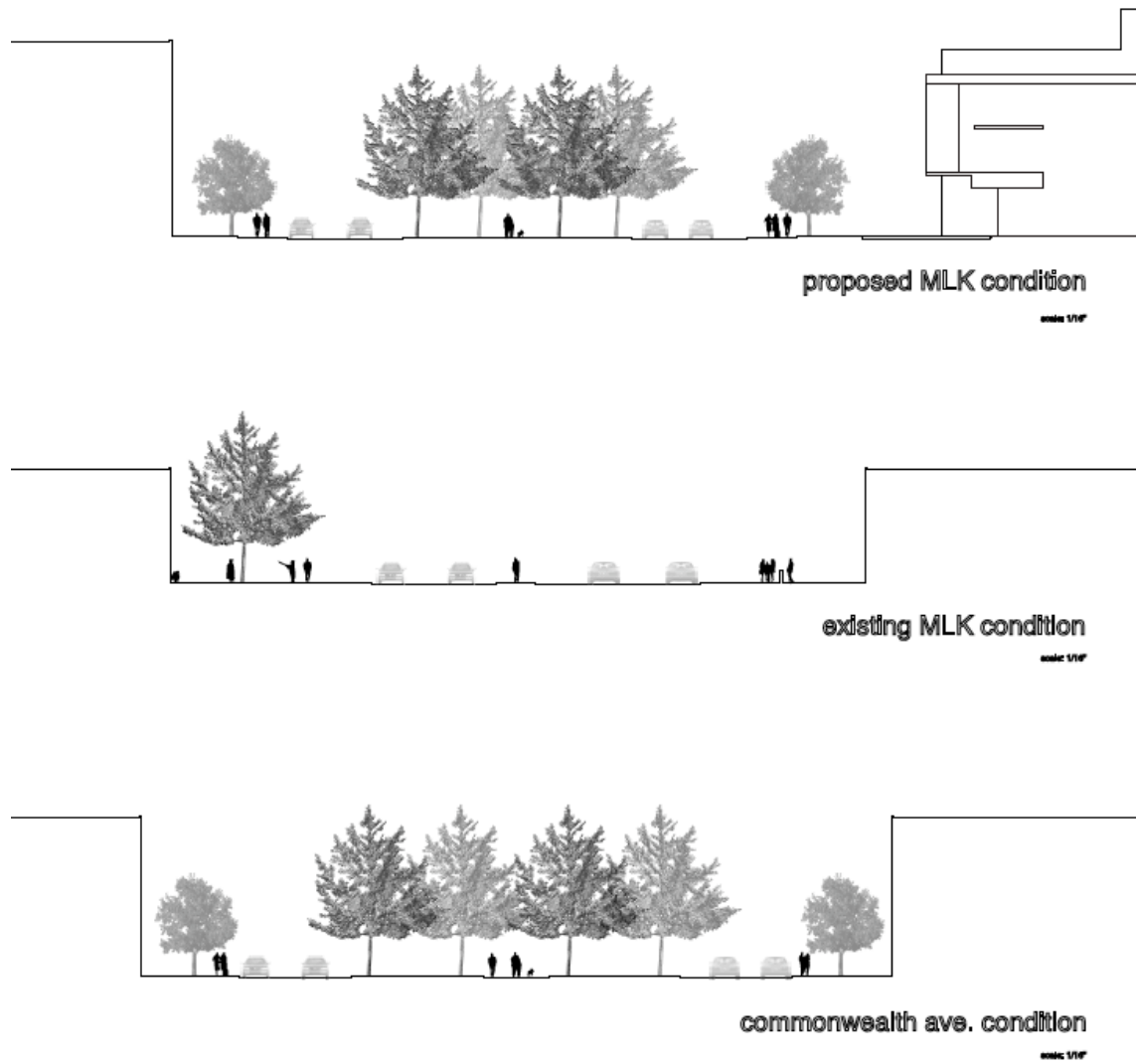


Figure 40: Existing and proposed street sections at MLK Boulevard

## Chapter 7: Design Strategies

### Site Interventions

In site parti #1, the courtyard scheme, the process functions of the program would be pushed to the ground floor so the community could experience them externally as well as internally. The performance space would be elevated to the upper levels to signify the end result of the everyday functions of the building. Movement toward the center would be a celebrated voyage with multiple points of entry.



Figure 41: Site Parti #1

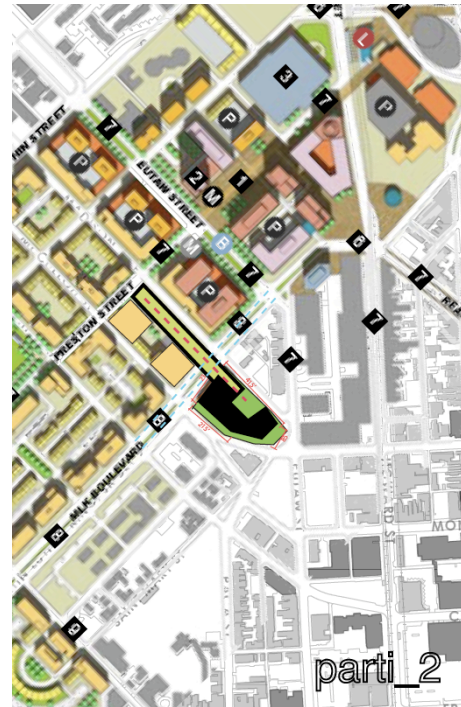


Figure 42: Site Parti #2

In site parti #2, the U shaped scheme, the building would hold the street edge while receiving the east-west proposed open space extension into its central courtyard. The building entrance would not face MLK Boulevard, but rather let the community

experience the building along the street face and let the extension of promenade space lead them around the corner and into the courtyard. The building would also open up toward the church on the northeast corner of the site reinforcing the function of public community space.



Figure 43: Site Parti #3

In site parti #3, the building serves as a split structure with an internal community street. This would allow the surrounding community to freely move through the building at all hours of day for maximum exposure to the programs various time based functions. This also allows for the reinforcing of the connectivity back across to the western side of Martin Luther King Boulevard. This parti would also suggest activating the triangular parcel north of the site in some way, as to take advantage of its prominence as an objectified corner to the five surrounding neighborhoods. This could be accomplished through the built environment or sculpted landscape.

### Urban Design Goals

At the urban scale, this thesis proposes to adopt the existing program of the on site Arena Players Theater Company and develop a Community theater group that responds to the current cultural and economic diversity of the surrounding community.

This thesis also proposes to build a large-scale student-housing tower on top of the existing Baltimore Gas and Electric sub-station located on the eastern portion of the site. The scale of the housing parcel would be large enough to respond to the proposed mid and high-rise development planned for the adjacent state center site. The housing tower would be set back from MLK Boulevard to activate the existing bland cap of the substation, but also to create a sense of threshold while moving towards the newly proposed transit and mixed use nucleus of midtown Baltimore. By allowing the tower to shift back from MLK, it makes a responsive gesture towards the new development across MLK without defining the proposed community theater project as an iconic formal building.

By letting the stage of the large internal theater gesture towards the reclaimed triangular communal parcel on the northern portion of the site, there is an inherent gesture that the project is being designed for all members of the community rather than for a singular demographic or clientele.

Internal to the site, is a proposed community plaza space that can be used for private performance, teaching, community markets, or a place for the adjacent church to activate on Sunday afternoons after a service. It was the intent of this thesis to pull this space back towards the neighboring church for civic use but also to give some privacy and sound buffer from the traffic of MLK Boulevard.

### *Building Design Goals*

This thesis proposes to create a community experience of exposure to theatrical process while moving through the proposed building as well as while circulating through or along the periphery of the site. The promenade sequences of moving towards, in and through the building are ripe with potential for experiences of learning. Visual as well as tactile interactions with the set makers, costume designers, dancers, and stage designers at various points through out the project allow members of the community to experience and understand the magic of production that is often hidden from the public eye.

The project also proposes that all active functions such as dance and movement based activities be pushed to the street face of MLK Boulevard in response to the high-speed frenetic vehicular traffic. The more static activities such as art, sculpting, woodworking, set design, ect., would be pushed to internal moments, or points along Madison street which require intimate pedestrian interaction.

Because of the rich cultural history of Arena Players Company and its ties to the existing site, this thesis will take opportunities to leave vestigial traces of the wall murals prominently displayed on the existing buildings façade. It is proposed that this imagery could be the western face of the building during the daytime hours and when internally active at night, this porous skin of projected imagery could dissolve to express the community activities occurring within.

### Schematic Building Partis

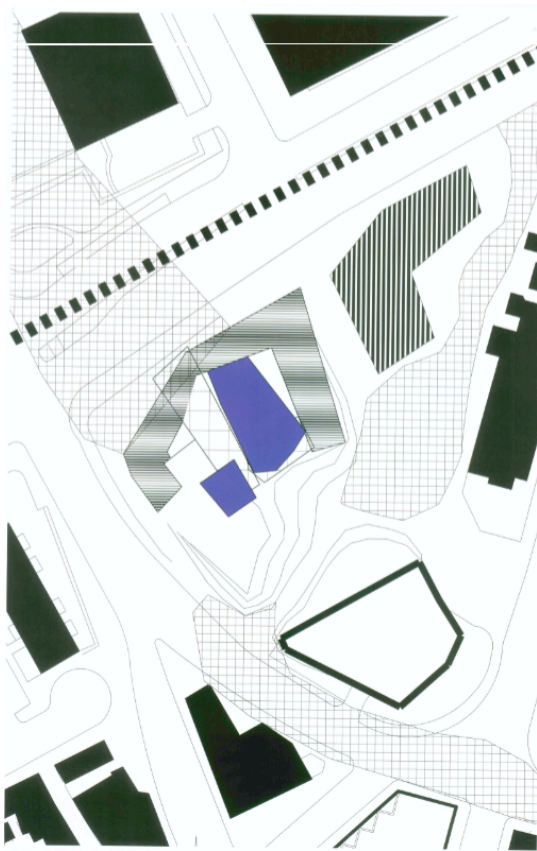


Figure 44: Preliminary building parti #1

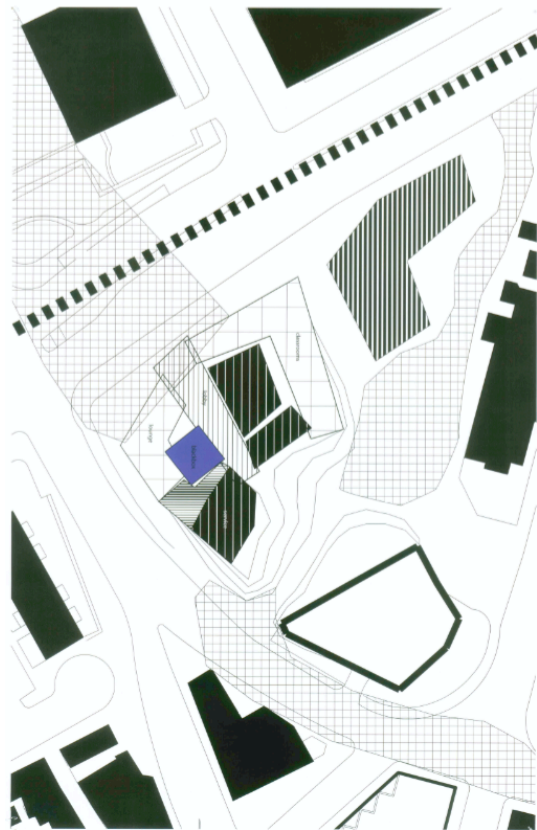
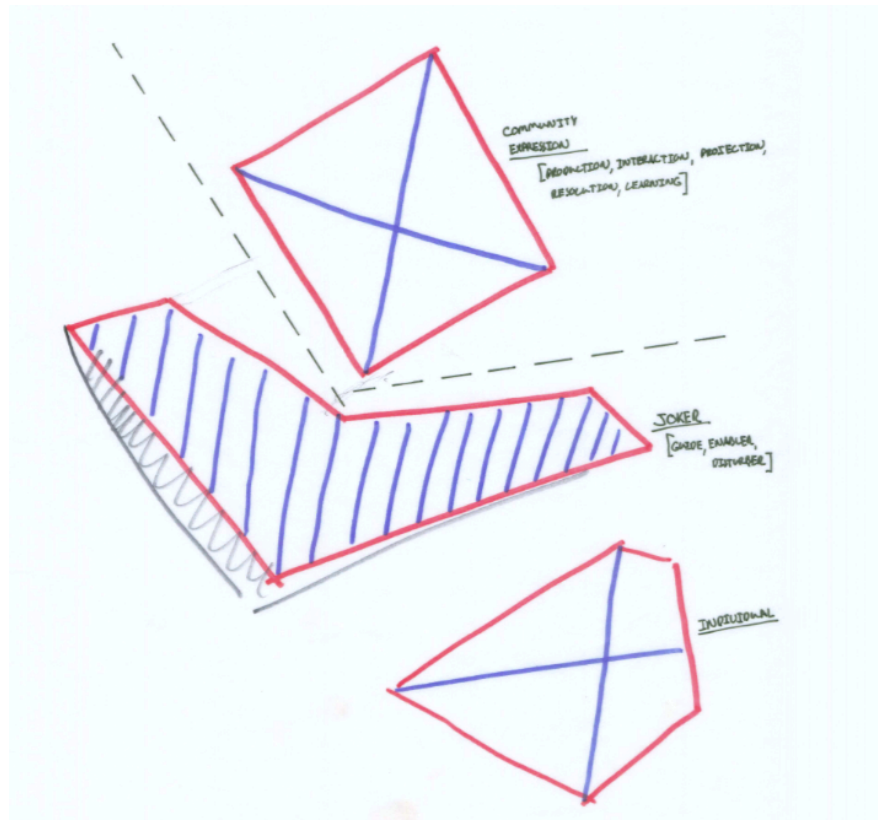
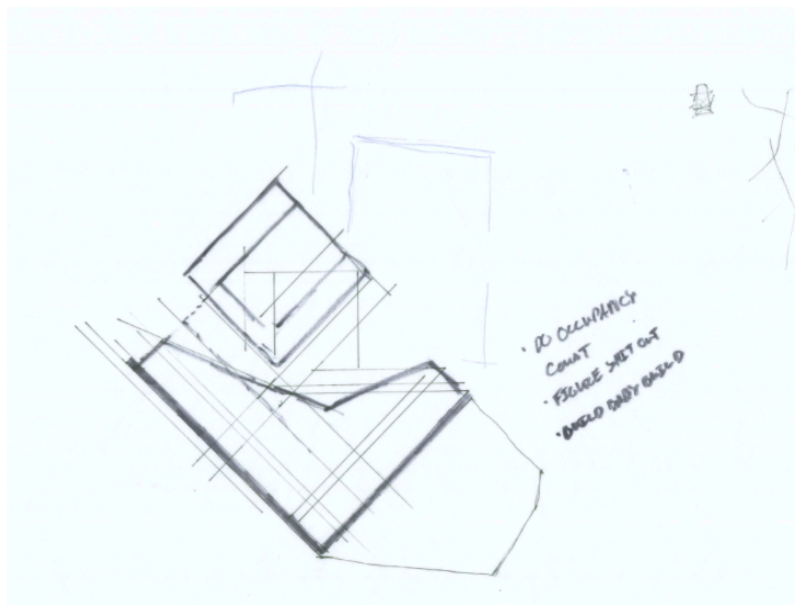


Figure 45: Preliminary building parti #2



**Figure 46: Conceptual building parti** (developed around existing site conditions and in response to David Diamond's writings on community theater in "Theatre for living")



**Figure 47: Schematic development of formal parti**

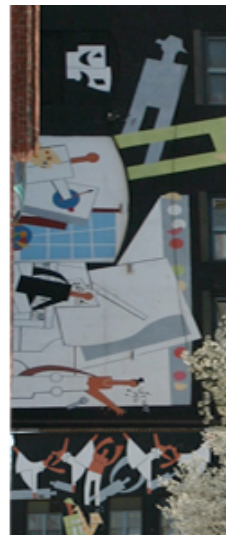
## Surface Treatment



**Figure 48: Material Collage** ( the building face fronting MLK Boulevard should have a strong edged dominance, but be adaptable to express the versatility of the interior spaces

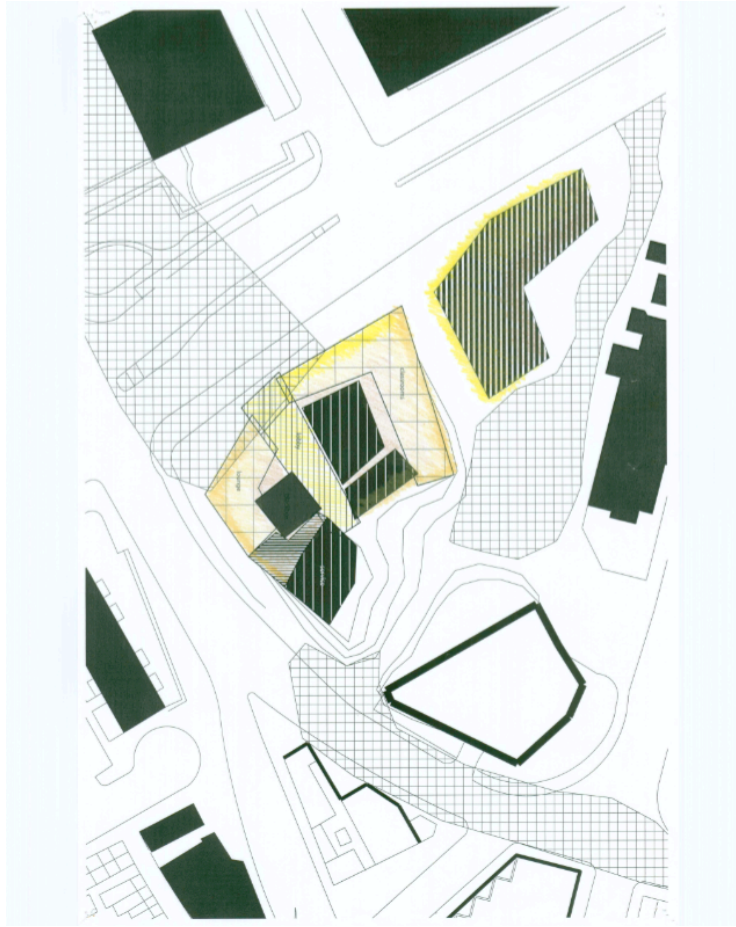


**Figure 49: Today Art Museum** (the nature of this project requires an informality of materials that is responsive to diverse range of cultural and economic living conditions on site. There is also a need for adaptability in the material reading of the building so that it the buildings appearance may respond to different uses at different times of the day)

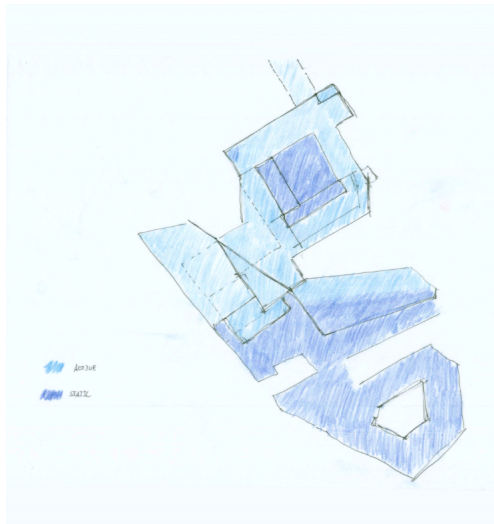


**Figure 50: Arena Players' wall murals** (adaptation of existing wall art into new proposal as a vestigial reference to the importance and rich historic significance of the adopted program)

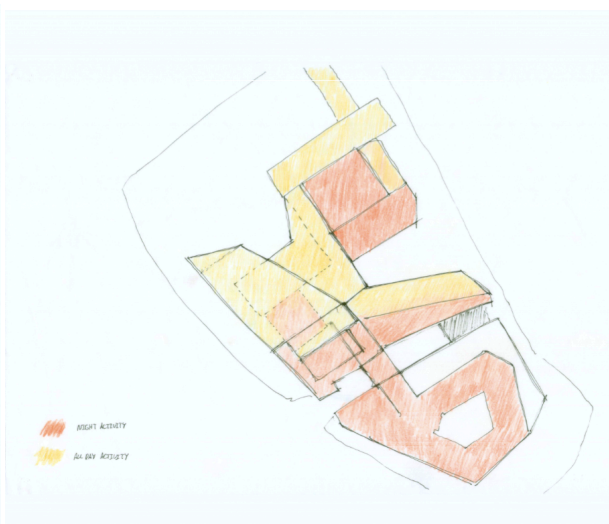
## Chapter 8: Design Process Documentation



**Figure 51: Early schematic of building parti and site response** (natural light levels indicated by lightness of yellow highlights)



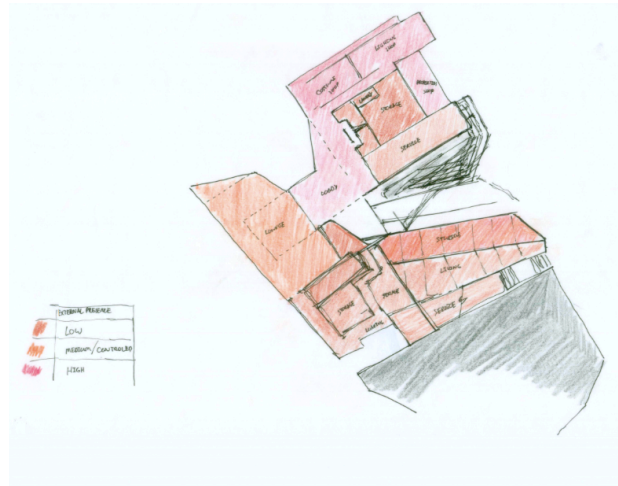
**Figure 52: Schematic diagram of intended static vs. active building faces**



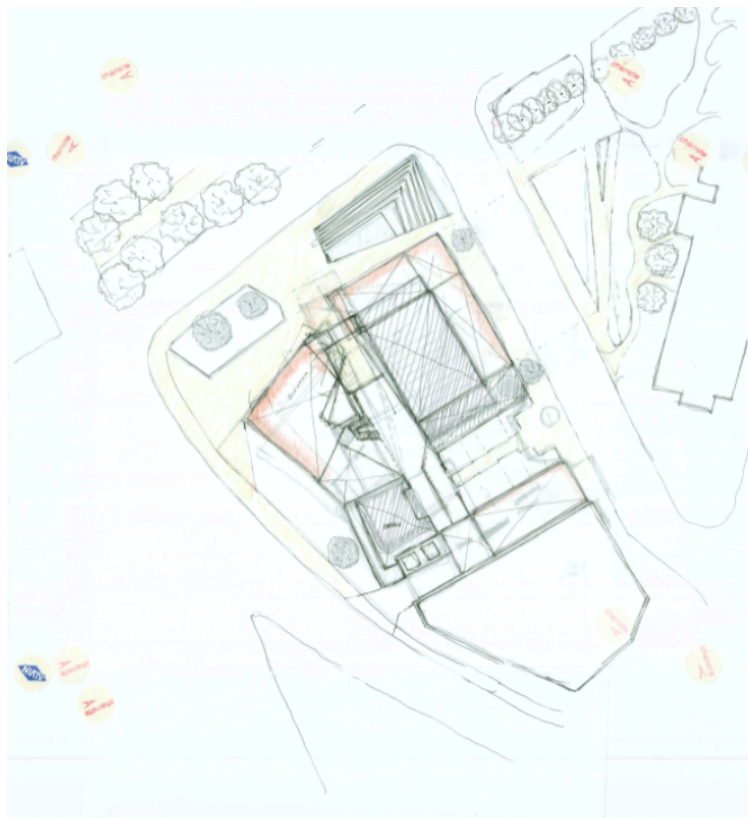
**Figure 53: Schematic diagram of nighttime vs. daytime activities and building use**



**Figure 54: Schematic program diagram of day-lighting needs.**



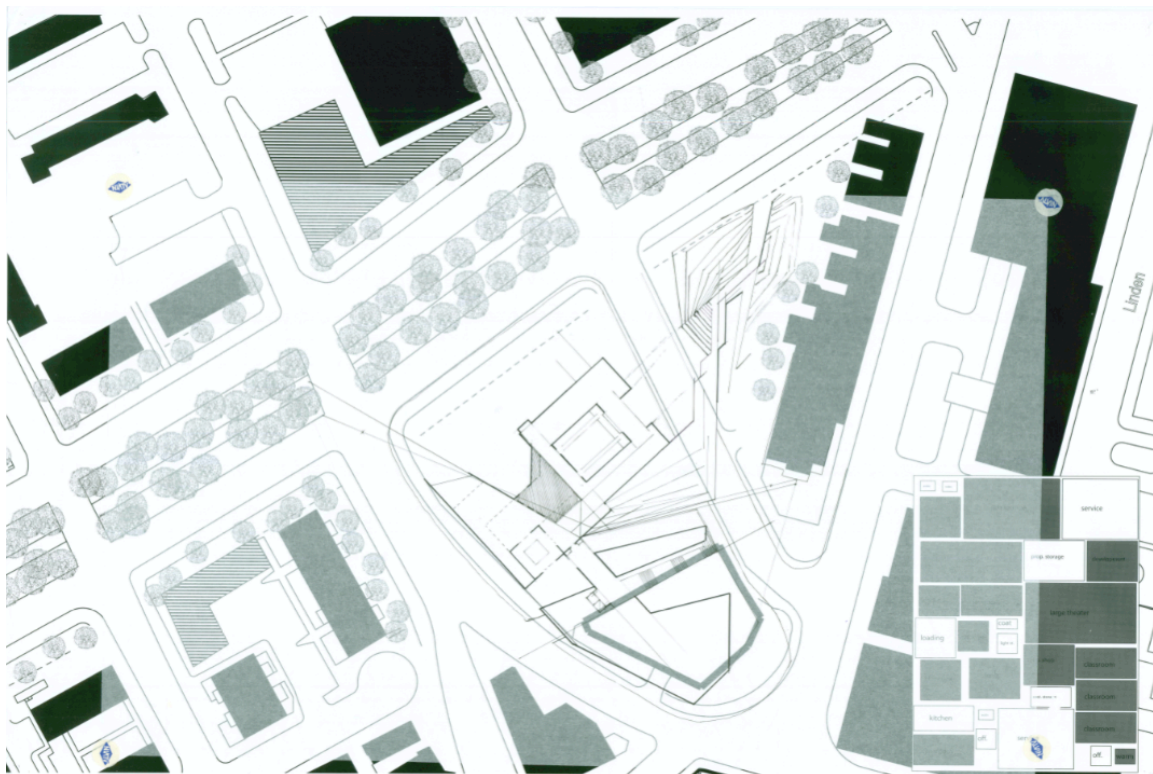
**Figure 55: Schematic program diagram of preferred external presence by use.**



**Figure 56: Schematic rationalization of program and site geometries**



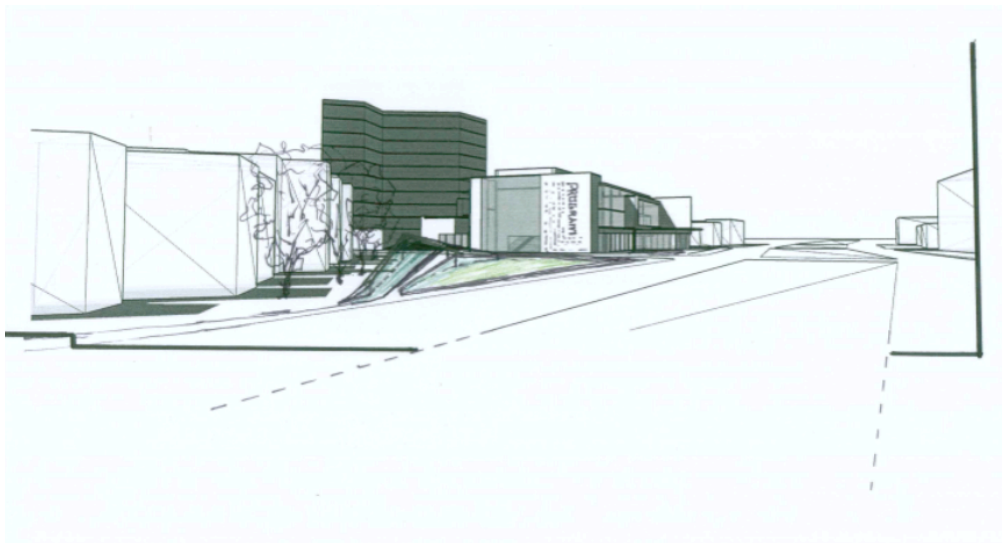
**Figure 57: Schematic development of program and site geometries**



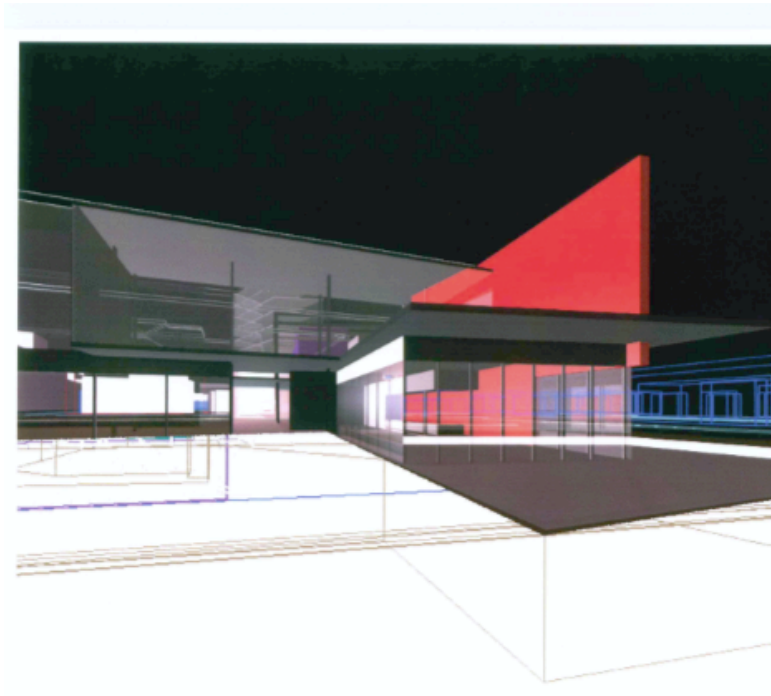
**Figure 58: Development of formal parametric site conditions** (analysis based upon circulation, public congregation, vehicular/pedestrian traffic, and prevalent sight lines)



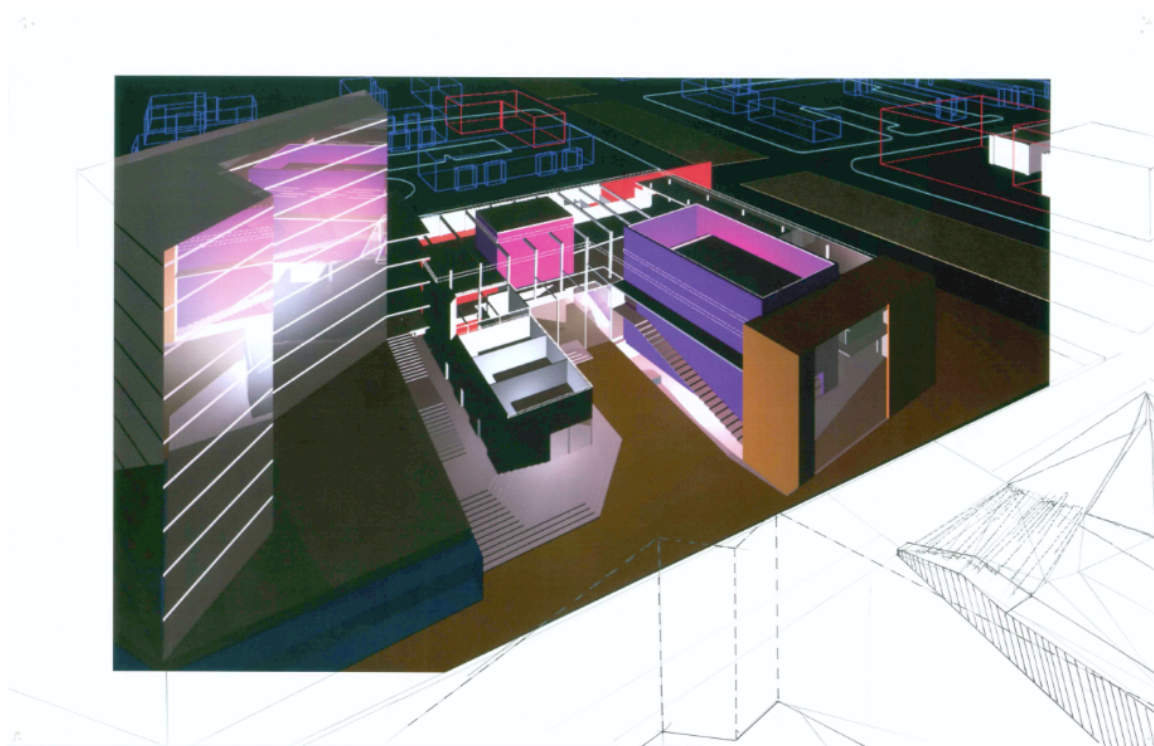
**Figure 59: Development of landscape connecting external spaces to internal programmatic void spaces**



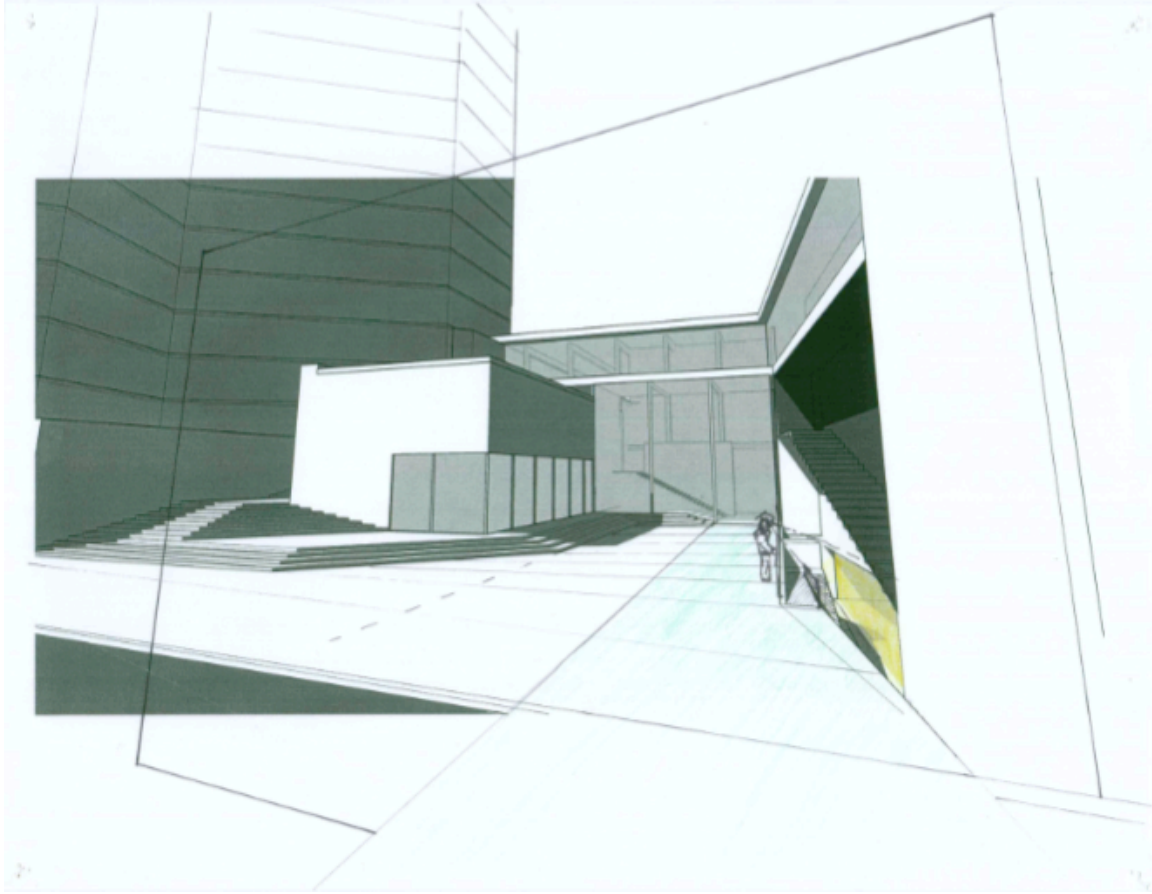
**Figure 60: Sketch vignette of folded landscape (Approach from north on MLK Boulevard)**



**Figure 61: Exploration of perceptual entry sequence at MLK Boulevard**

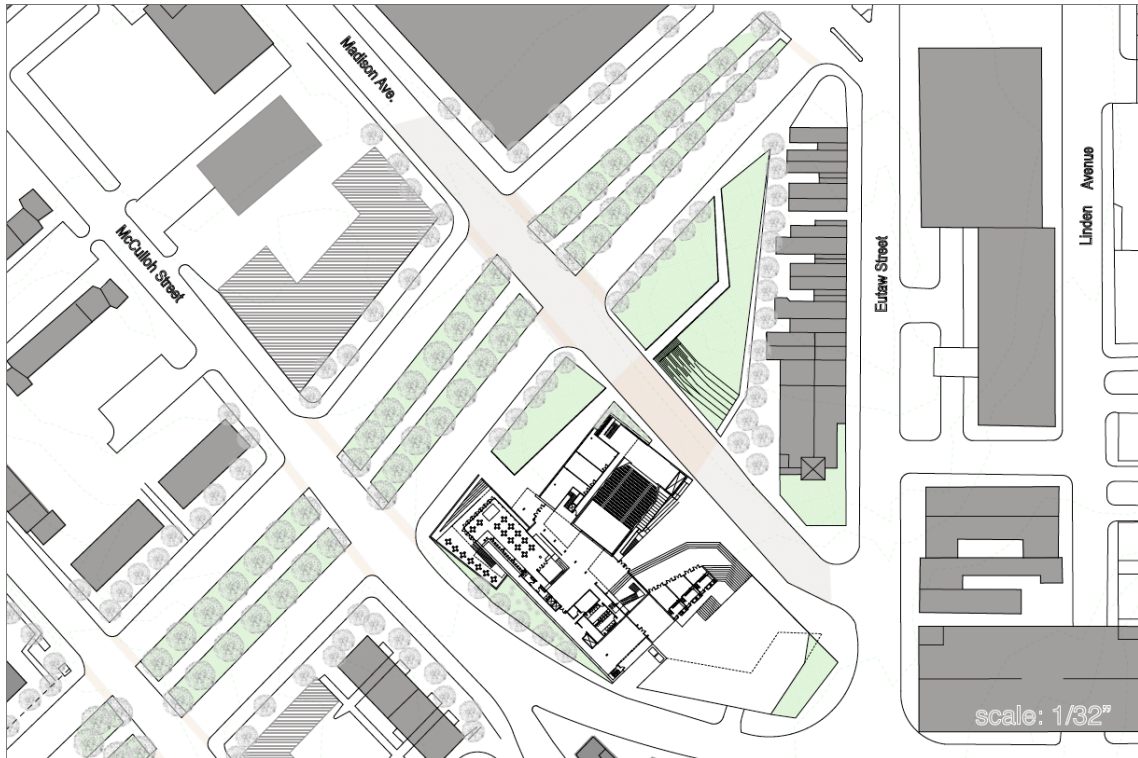


**Figure 62: Theater massing relationship** (exploration of extending stage into reclaimed community landscape)

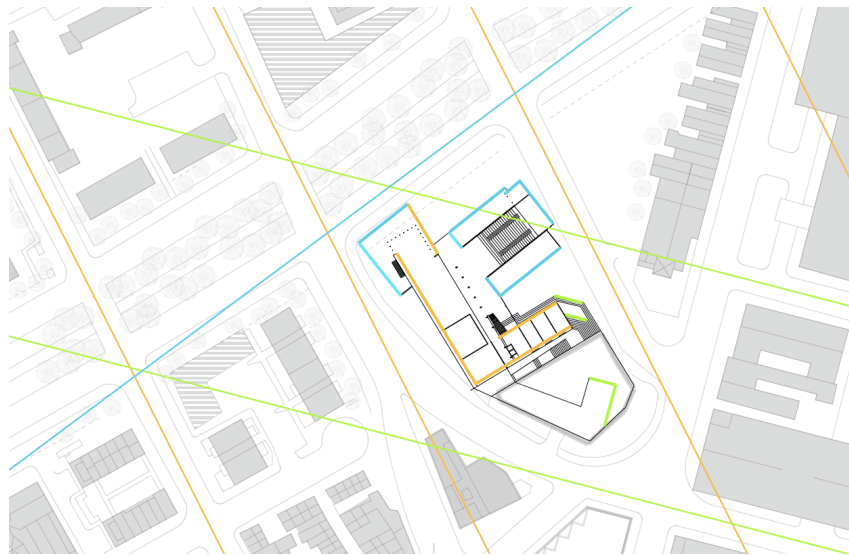


**Figure 63: Vignette of external building fold to express internal process along edge of northern entry sequence/community plaza**

## Chapter 9: Public Review Documentation



**Figure 64: Contextual first floor plan with envisioned redevelopment of MLK Boulevard**



**Figure 65: Confluence of historic street grid (the three primary street geometries on site, set the parameters for the generation of the building massing)**

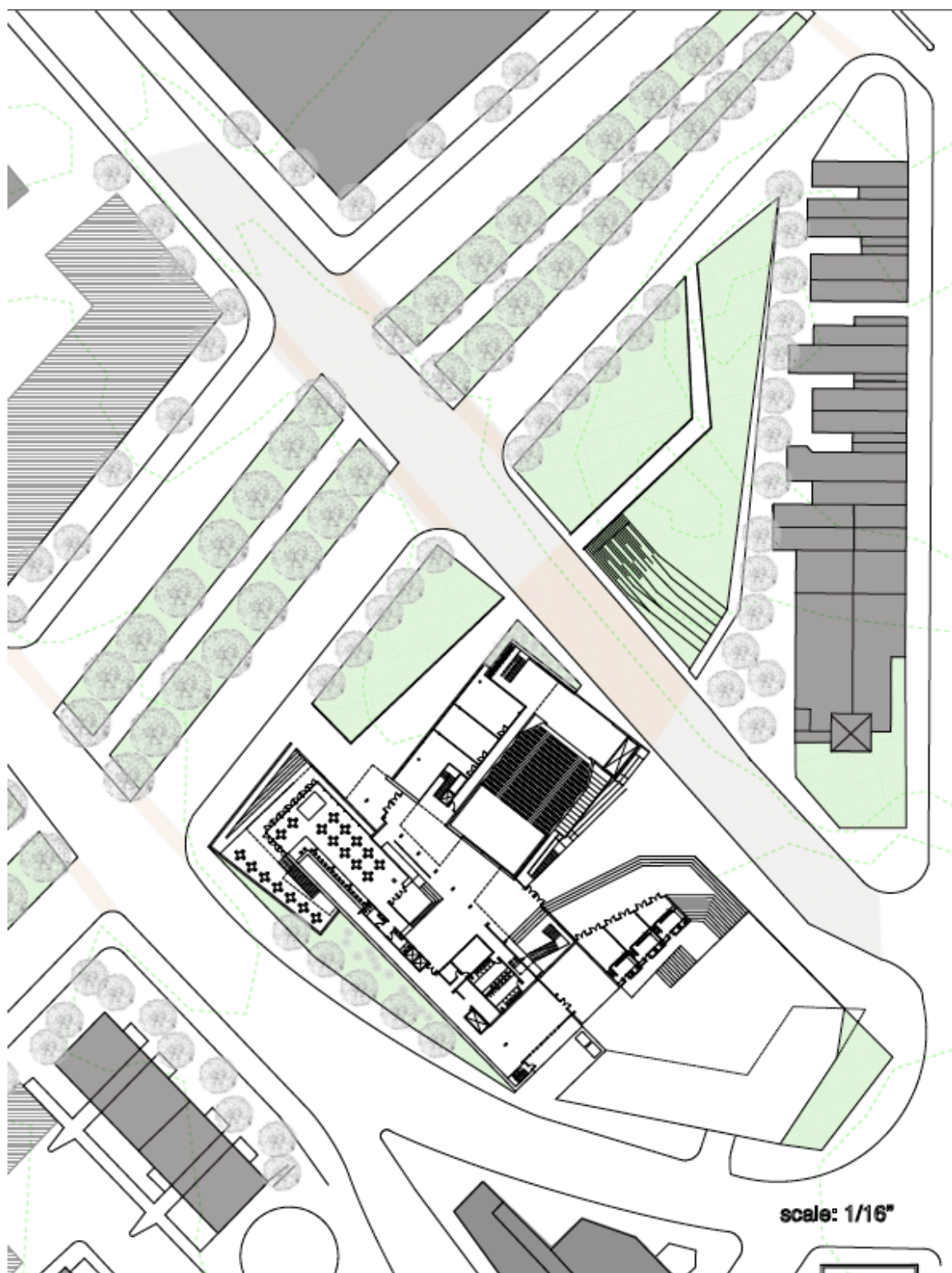


Figure 66: Enlarged first floor plan

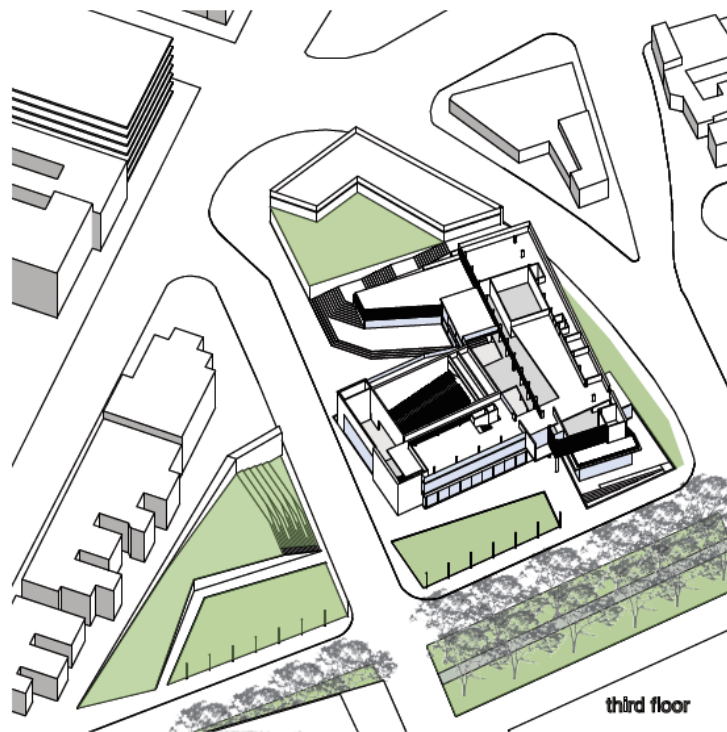
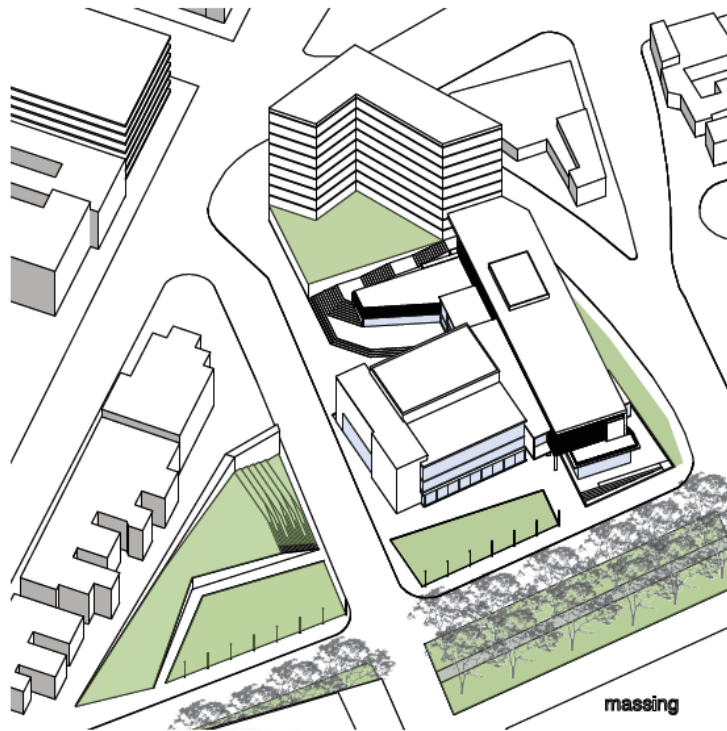


Figure 67: Axonometric plans of the third floor and building massing

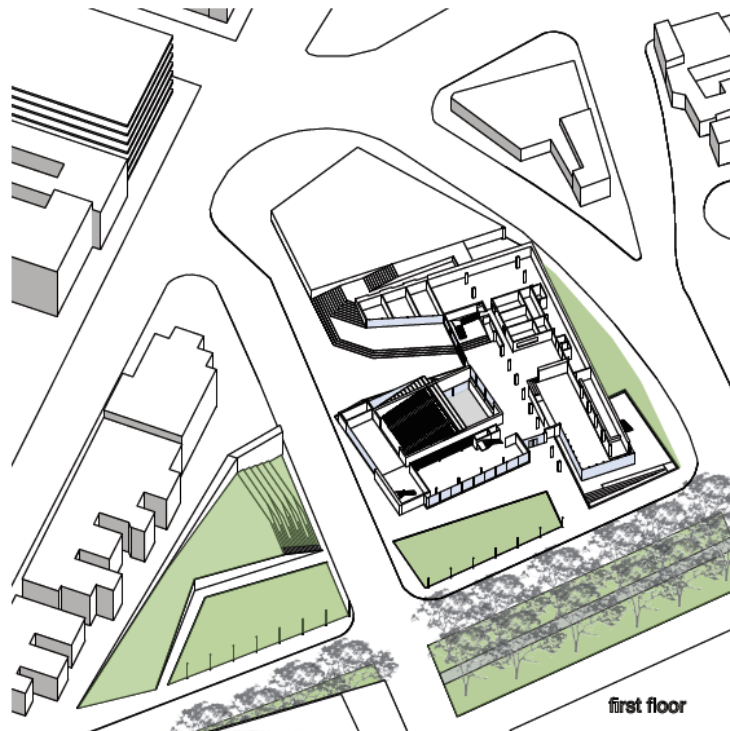
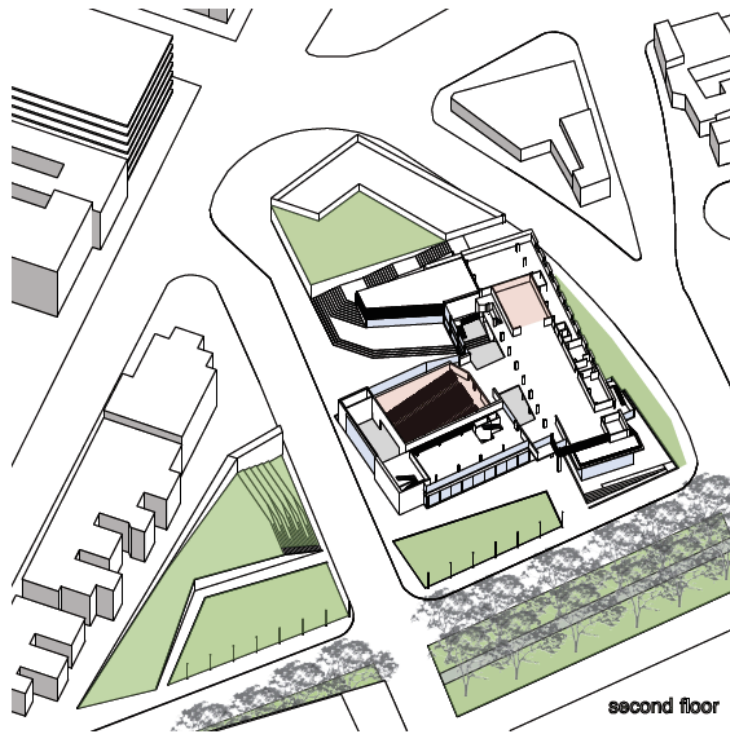
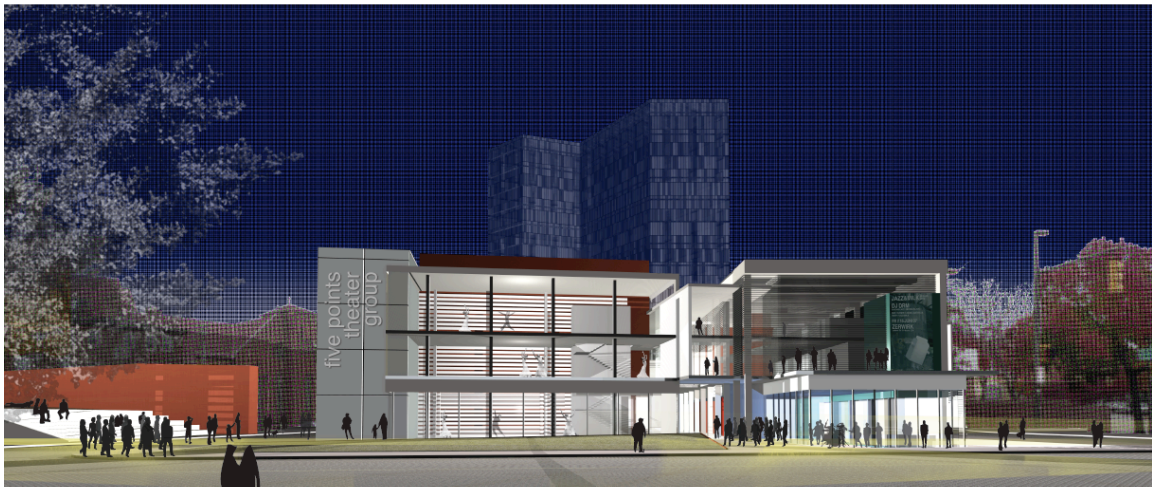
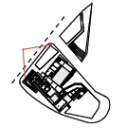


Figure 68: Axonometric plans of the first and second floors



**Figure 69: Day and nighttime western elevations viewed from MLK Boulevard**

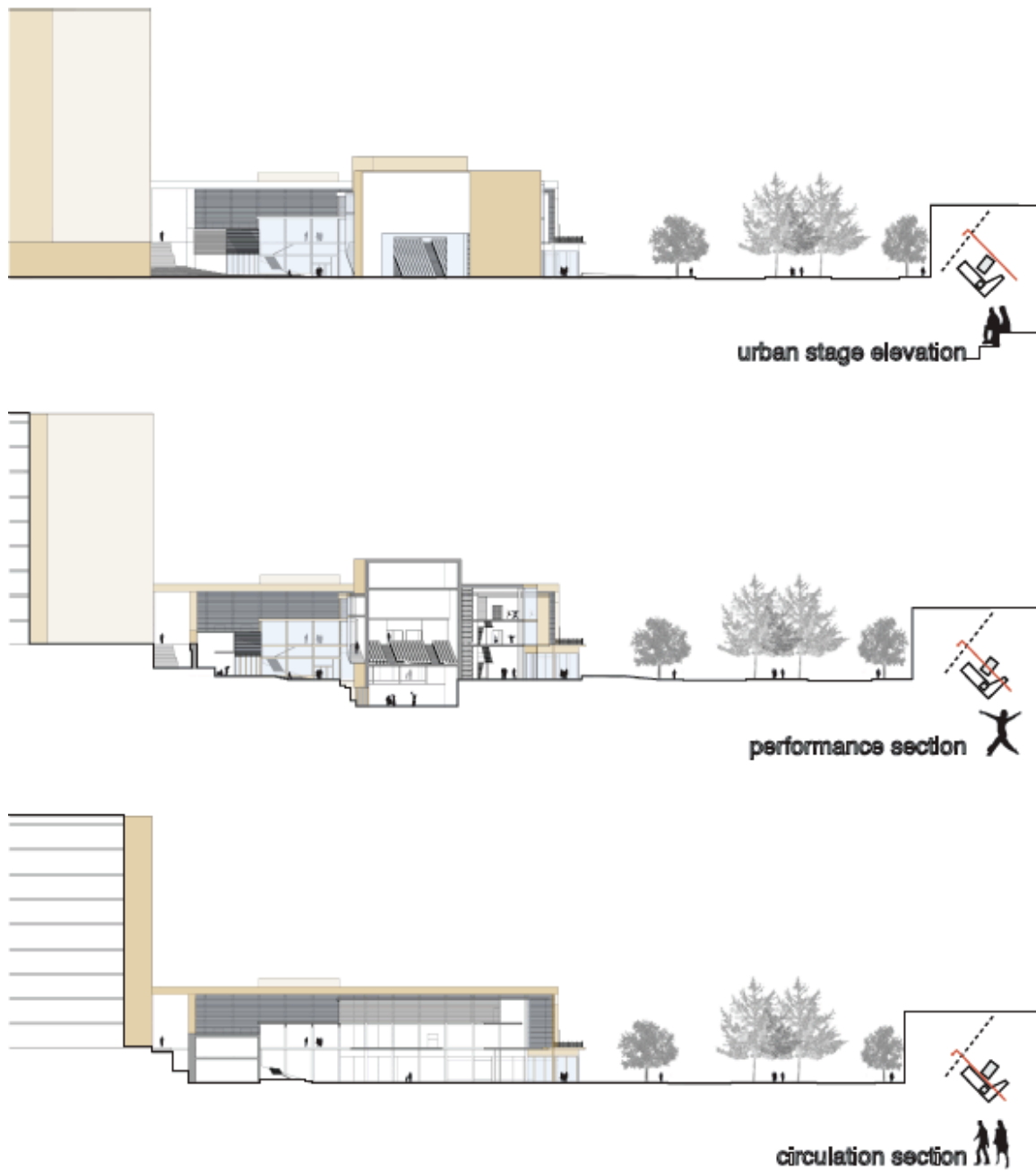


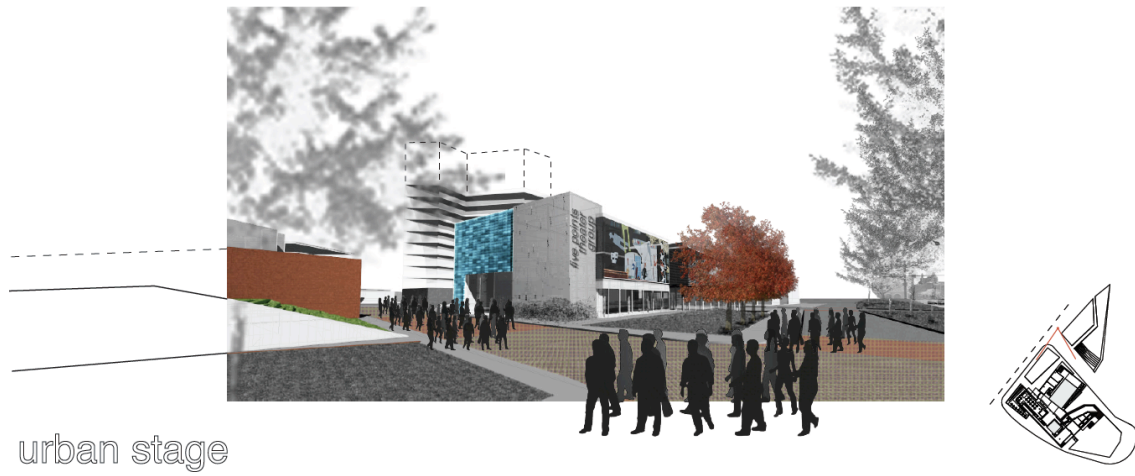
Figure 70: Staged elevations and sections moving north-south along MLK Boulevard

**Figure 71: North-South section through the primary theater and proposed community park landscape**  
 (note: back of theater opens to create new urban stage between interior seating and constructed landscape.)

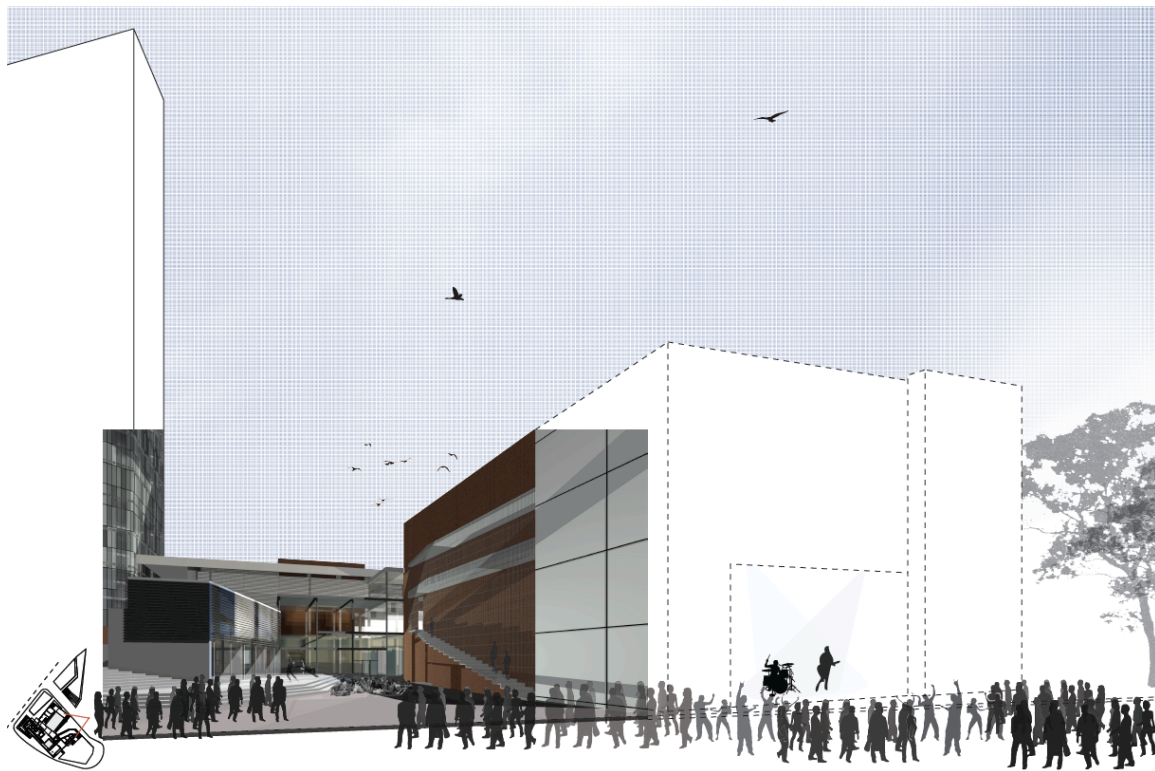




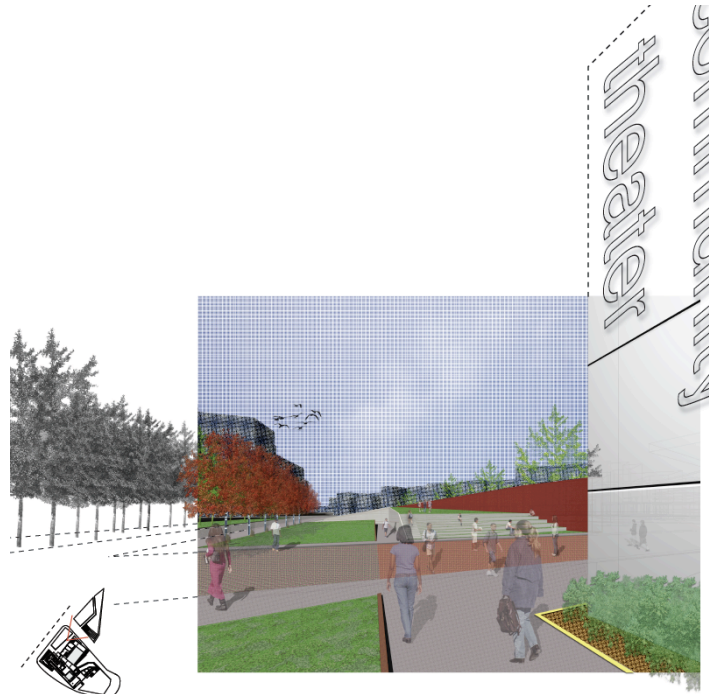
**Figure 72: East-West section through the circulation zone of the project** (note views down into production space along sequence of entry)



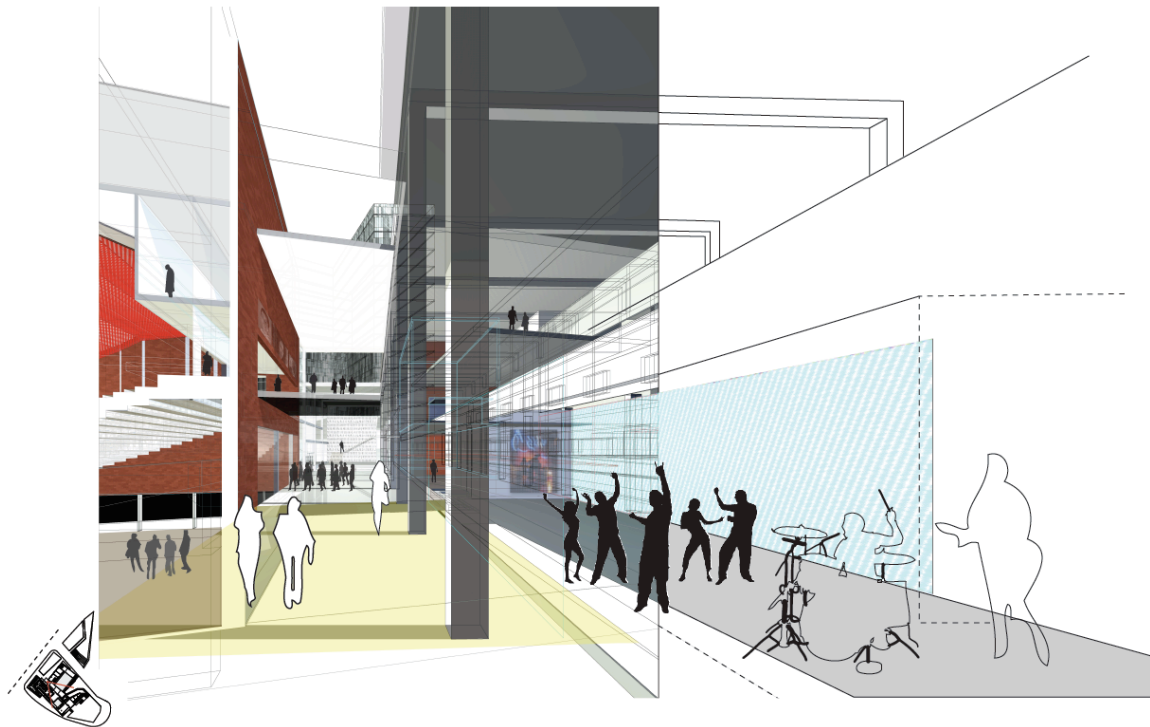
**Figure 73: Community experience of project while walking south along MLK Boulevard**



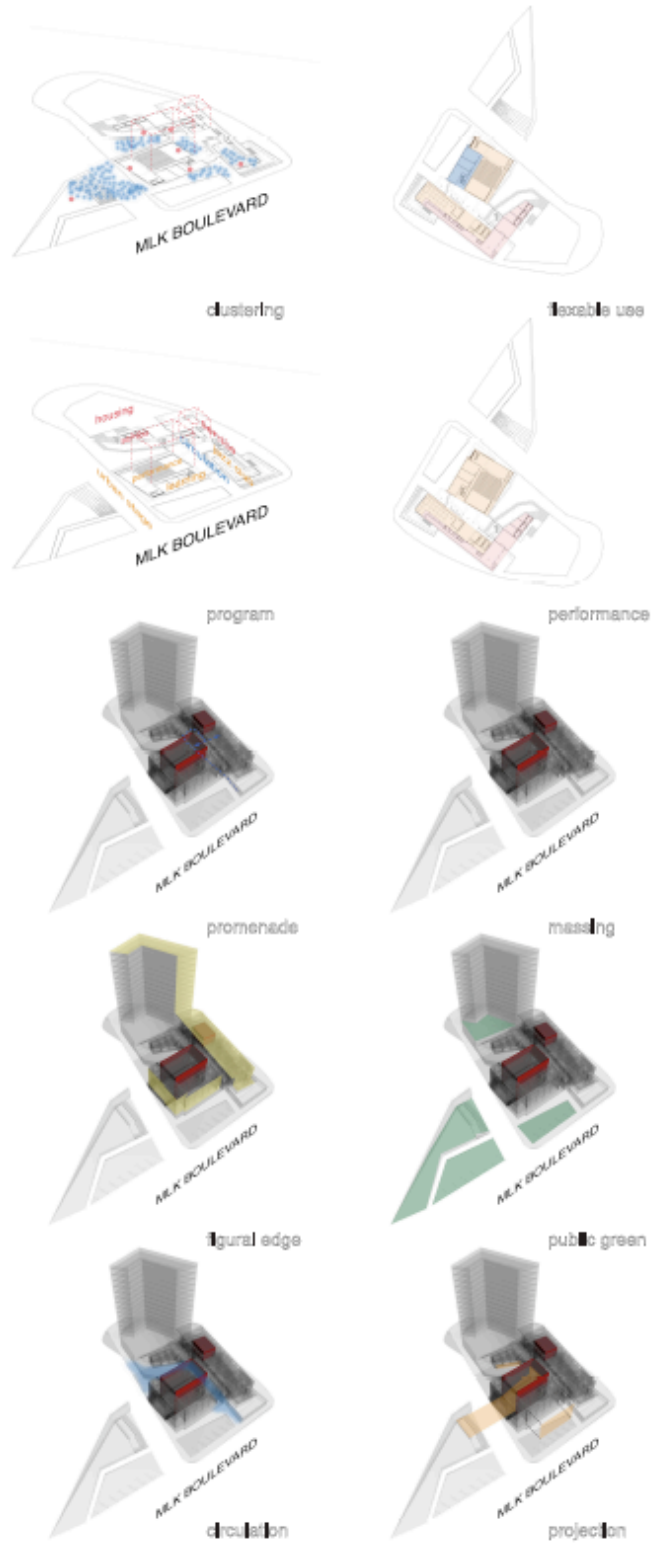
**Figure 74: Performance opportunities developed at northern approach**



**Figure 75: Community stage/theatrical mediator between theater and extension of building landscape**



**Figure 76: Perceptual experience of entry from MLK plaza**



**Figure 77: building diagram series** (clustering, flexible use, program, performance, promenade, massing, figural edge, public green space, circulation, and projection)

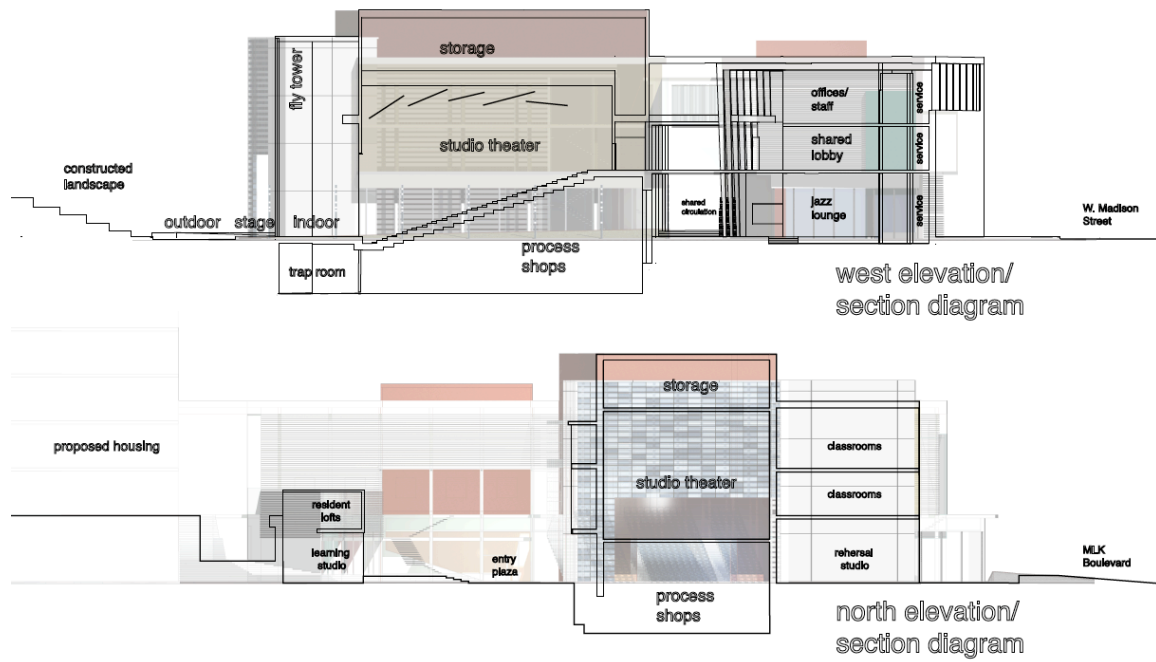
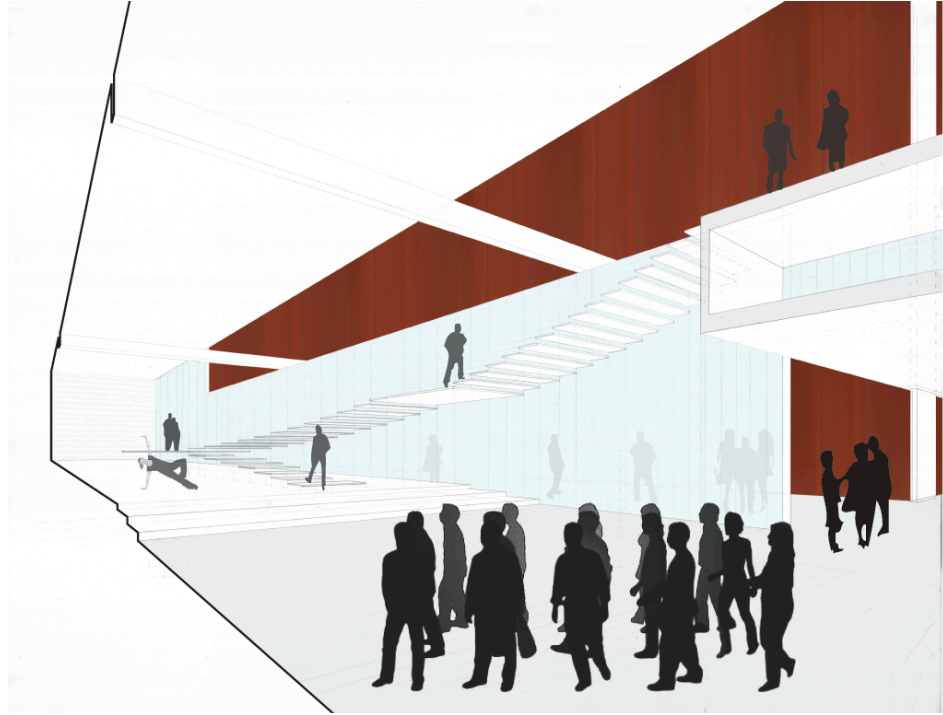


Figure 78: section diagrams with overlaid western and northern elevations

## Chapter 10: Design Retrospective



**Figure 79: proposed circulation sequence in response to public review suggestions**

In response to the Public Review jury suggestions, further study will focus on the following:

- *Presence of the building's face on MLK Boulevard.* It was suggested that the building could possibly push up to the street to reinforce proposal of densification of urban condition

- *Stair location and sequence of vertical circulation.* It was suggested that the current stair sequence could be further developed to allow a more objectified and ceremonial vertical ascension.
- *Truncation of landscaped terracing.* It was suggested that the wall in the terraced landscape could pull back from the street edge, effectively allowing the terrace to slide further down Madison street to further define the urban plaza developed around the existing church. This would also suggest the continuation of the community without over exposing the backside of the adjacent townhouses.
- *Investigate interior detailing and graphics as a didactic mediator between public and private.*
- *Investigate multiple scales of materiality and continuity of surface treatment.*

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<http://www.potomacstages.com/ShakespeareConst.htm>

<http://www.statecenter.org/statecenter>

<http://www.socialinnovation.ca>

Design Collective, Baltimore, MD