ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: CITIES OF HISTORY: PRESERVATION AND INTERPRETATION IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

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Degree and year: Master of Architecture, 2004 Certificate in Historic Preservation

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This thesis proposes the use of memory and interpretation in the preservation, urban design, and physical definition of a community. The study area is Southwest Washington D.C. The thesis will explore questions of preservation and intervention: How might theories of preservation shape the urban form of a neighborhood? How are narrative potential, historic significance and existing fabric mediated? What is the symbolic importance of memory and its architectural use?

Southwest was an integral part of L'Enfant’s plan for Washington. Currently it is severed physically and psychically from the rest of the city. The dominant symbolic importance of the Mall and post-McMillan Commission Federal Core development strategies de-emphasized the significance of the Rivers and the physical relationship
between the Mall and Southwest. Urban renewal strategies of the 1950’s destroyed most of the urban fabric south of the Mall, layering an essentially suburban street typology over the existing grid pattern. Although partially offset by an architectural Modernism unique in Washington D.C., the resultant system of disconnected streets and poorly defined open space provide no sense of center, little relation to the rest of the city, and no relation to the larger landscape. An intention of this project is the exploration of the significance of site and its evolving role in shaping the city. Design should encourage a dialogue between memory and the present. L’Enfant’s plan for Washington is reinterpreted as establishing vital relationships between the natural and the urbanized, the symbolic and the mundane, the federal city and the metropolitan city.
CITIES OF HISTORY: PRESERVATION AND INTERPRETATION IN THE DESIGN PROCESS

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture 2004

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Jody, without whose love, patience, and support it would not have been possible, and who, with Stella and Jonah, gave the last four years meaning and purpose.
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I. INTRODUCTION

The public realm of the City of Collective Memory should entail a continuous urban topography, a spatial structure that covers both rich and poor places, honorific and humble monuments, permanent and ephemeral forms, and should include places for public assemblage and public debate, as well as private memory walks and personal retreats.¹

Imperial grandiosity as an ideal – that is the great danger to Washington. Spacious monumentality may produce great beauty, but let there be a hair’s breadth of deviation from good taste and nothing remains but pompous banality. Too great an emphasis on the national scale, the impersonally monumental, is more likely to produce dullness than grandeur.²

This project proposes the investigation of a site’s history and context in the identification of potential areas of intervention. The intention is the restoration, recreation, and/or reinterpretation of history and context through design process and solution as an aspect of community definition. As a cultural landscape, Southwest Washington D.C. is uniquely suited for this analysis. The clear relationship between Washington D.C.’s urban form and its natural edges should be prominent in Southwest due to its location on the Potomac River. Within Southwest are some of Washington’s oldest buildings, including Wheat Row and the Thomas Law House. Juxtaposed to these historic components is the Modern fabric that dominates post-urban renewal Southwest. As a neighborhood, Southwest lacks clear identity, either based on a relationship with its natural features or due to a clear definition of center. However, the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly (SWNA) is strong enough to bridge the vast economic gaps of the community’s residents and was the first racially integrated civic association in the

nation’s capitol. The SWNA represents a group of citizens committed to the particularities of a place. Recent studies funded by the SWNA seek to respond to the nebulous nature of the neighborhood while protecting its character.

Gwendolyn Wright, in *The Politics of French Colonial Urbanism*, describes four types of cities recognized by French architect-urbanists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Urban design strategies incorporating formal and functional definitions of the imperial city, the industrial city, the republican city, and the historic city promoted policies of European power and social hierarchies. Typically these colonial strategies posited a clear sense of cultural superiority and reflected latent racist and paternalistic overtones. Preservation of historic quarters tended to fetishize indigenous cultures, freezing cultural evolution in the belief that the juxtaposition of the pre-industrial, pre-colonial “historic” city with a rationalized European model of urbanism would maintain indigenous cultural continuity while providing direction and definition through didacticism and example. The strict separation of city types – typically distinct components within a city rather than actual separate cities - provided a symbolic and functional legibility to what were ultimately European capital cities. Wright’s analysis provides a framework through which one can interpret the symbolic and functional patterns of the city.

The L’Enfant plan for Washington D.C. provides an analogous reading of the city as a composition of types. Planned as a capital city for a growing nation, L’Enfant’s plan organized the city both as symbol and as place (Figure 1). The clear hierarchy of the Mall, the organization of the city based on ideas of approach and entry, and the system of

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radial avenues describe the federal city and symbolize the values and beliefs of the young republic (Figure 2). However, this reading is tempered by the clear significance given to the mapping over the city of an insistent grid. The Mall and the system of squares relate to this grid system as well as to the radials (Figure 3a and b). Unlike the colonial examples that clearly distinguish between imperial and republican components of the city, L’Enfant’s plan layers symbolic readings of the federal city and the metropolitan city of everyday life and activity. Subsequent development has favored the dominance of the federal reading over, and often at the expense of, the metropolitan reading.

The McMillan Plan for Washington D.C. reaffirmed elements of L’Enfant’s plan and provided a framework for development over the last century (Figure 4a-d). This framework established a vision for growth and provided clarity to the federal image of the city. However, the concentration of interest in the federal triangle has not always been sympathetic to the notion of a city, with a population of complex needs, interests, and relationships. The image of the Monumental Core is powerful, but the fabric of the city, that which allows the city to function, is often ignored. By reasserting the significance of the metropolitan fabric as a component of neighborhood revitalization, richness and sophistication intrinsic to an evolving landscape becomes legible as an overlay of the political and the vernacular, the symbolic and the mundane.

Sensitive intervention in the environment follows an understanding of site and context. Exploration of narrative potential through design process is predicated on a site analysis that is inclusive of historical uses and meanings. Analysis of Southwest Washington D.C. provokes fundamental questions regarding the site’s present and historical context: What is the site’s history? What is the role of Southwest in
Washington, both symbolic and real? What is the relationship between the urban fabric and the water’s edge? How are these various concepts resolved in the physical form of the place? Is there a neighborhood or neighborhoods? What is and what should be the relationship between the federal city and the metropolitan city and how might that relation be expressed?
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II. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

L’Enfant’s Washington D.C. plan resulted from a close relationship between natural conditions of the place and urban form. The placement of monumental figures – open space, significant buildings, water features – are enhanced by the careful planning of these urban features according to specifics of topography and water (Figure 5-8). Approach and entry to the new capital city are conceptually part of a sequence literally moving from the ocean to the Capitol Building. From the Atlantic Ocean one enters the Chesapeake. Imagistically one begins to read the transition from the Chesapeake Bay to the Potomac River, from the Potomac to the Anacostia, and from the Anacostia to a formal place at the termination of East Capitol, now in full view of the Capitol (Figure 9a-c). The layered readings of this sequence are impressive. The vast, virtually incomprehensible scale of the ocean, uncontrolled and forever untamed by human intervention, contrasts with the urbanized landscape of the city: the human imprint on the landscape is a document of control and taming, imposing limits and making the unknowable known. The radial avenues symbolically gathered the states into the Capital City, simultaneously invoking the expansiveness of the new nation through representation. Sitting above the flat plain of the Mall, from the Capitol and the Executive Mansion one can survey this symbolic dominion.

L’Enfant’s prioritization of the dialectical relationship between the urban and the natural is reasserted in the connections of the city’s form to the waterfront. The grid is platted to the water’s edge (Figure 10). The open ended mall links the vista from both the Capitol building and the Executive Mansion to the Potomac, resolving their cross axial relationships in the River (Figure 11). Paired with these clear monumental connections
and federal readings are the planned 12th Street overlook and the organization of 8th Street as a continuous vista threading together a series of squares from north to south (Figure 12). Both visually and physically re-establish connections between the city and the Potomac River. The 12th Street overlook was to be an important urban space emphasizing the view down river; the 8th Street corridor culminated in a proposed Naval monument at the river’s edge, terminating the otherwise open axis (Figure 13a and b).

Southwest Washington D.C. in particular played an important role in the reading of the federal city. From the Potomac, a visitor’s initial experience of the city was Southwest’s peninsular point at the confluence of the Potomac and the Anacostia rivers. The present location of Ft. McNair, this point was envisioned as a hard urban edge, a protective and decidedly political landscape (Figure 14). Literally an island created by the formal canalization of the Tyber River and St. James Creek, Southwest bore the city’s closest physical relationship with the water and contained the monumental space of the Mall within its topographic boundaries (Figure 15). Cresting above the relatively flat plain of Southwest and the Mall, the Capitol building and the Executive Mansion were dominant figures in the landscape. The topographic separation of Southwest and the Mall from the rest of the city was counteracted by strong, figural connections piercing the quadrant, effectually mooring the island to the higher ground north of the Mall and east of the Capitol building (Figure 16). In addition the 8th and 12th Streets, 4th Street and Delaware Avenue were the most significant of these predominantly North-South links.

The symbolic reading of Washington D.C. as capital was to be complimented by the economic importance of the city. Washington D.C. was envisioned as a major port city, juxtaposing the mundane and the symbolic. Southwest developed in response to the
port along the Potomac, never achieving the symbolic import of L’Enfant’s plan.

Comparable to the French colonial industrial city, warehouses, industry, and market uses was combined with the fine-grained residential fabric serving the working classes and urban poor who settled near the working waterfront. The relative consistency of form of the urban structure and the waterfront is evident in historic maps (Figure 17a and b). Alley houses and substandard services were documented in this period, and targeted as areas for early urban renewal efforts (Figure 18). The Alley Dwelling Authority, created as a slum clearance mechanism, proposed literal replacement of existing, sub-standard alley housing with courtyard and mews based housing. Southwest became a testing ground for new ideas in housing, eventually paving the way for the widespread urban renewal and highway administration decisions that created the neighborhood’s current conditions (Figure 19).

The 1950 Comprehensive Plan targeted Southwest as a ‘problem area.’ Although Elbert Peets prepared a plan for Southwest proposing the retention and rehabilitation of its existing fabric (1952), the Redevelopment and Land Agency (RLA) “felt the plan was impractical on physical and financial grounds.” The RLA had been established to execute urban renewal plans as part of the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act of 1945. The Southwest Urban Renewal Area, designated as a potential threat to public health, was considered symbolically important as an example of redevelopment due to its proximity to the Capitol. Louis Justement and Cloethial Woodward Smith were

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commissioned to prepare a plan for the 560-acre Southwest Urban Renewal Area (SWURA). With very few exceptions, the entire area bordered on the west by the Southwest waterfront, the east by Canal Road and Capitol Street, on the North by Independence Avenue, and on the south by P Street, was demolished.\footnote{Perhaps the most fascinating visual document of this is the collection of slides included in the Garnet Jex Collection of the City Museum. Garnet Jex photographed the destruction of Southwest between 1958 and 1965 in support of his critique of these urban renewal efforts in a presentation entitled “The Bulldozer and The Rose,” the text of which is included in the collection. Clearly knowledgeable about the community and its past and present residents, Jex’s commentary is a reflection on the devastation and destruction of a once vibrant neighborhood, both socially and architecturally.}

The city succeeded in luring prominent developers and architects to Southwest, and its successes were well documented. William Zeckendorf, I. M. Pei, James Satterlee, Cloethial Woodward Smith, Keyes, Lethbridge and Condon, Charles Goodman, Dan Kiley, and Harry Weese are all attached to the legacy of the SWURA. However, to claim this as an unmitigated success would be erroneous. Many of the projects from this area provided articulate and sequenced semi public space in the form of interior courts, ignoring the traditional relationship between street and residence as exemplified by Capitol Hill or Georgetown. Although public and accessible, these spaces act as private zones. Additionally, many of the street connections through Southwest were severed in favor of a suburban street typology of cul de sacs and privatized rights of way. The resultant pattern breaks down the visual clarity of Southwest, and contributes to the isolation of its neighborhoods.

Beyond the boundaries of the SWURA the area remains largely unimproved. Public housing south of M Street and east of Capitol Street is in markedly poor condition. South of P Street to Buzzard Point and the St. James Marina, housing gives way to dilapidated industrial land, including scrap yards, gas storage areas and the
Buzzard Point Power Plant. Along the edge of Ft. McNair and tracing the path of the St. James Canal is a swath of primarily undeveloped land reaching up to M Street. This no man’s land forms a perceptual boundary between the higher income properties of the SWURA and the public housing to the east. This entire area was designated a ‘redevelopment area’ in the 1982 Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital.8

Currently, Southwest is severed from the rest of the city. The pattern set by the railroad lines and reinforced by 395 physically and visually cleave the neighborhood from the mall and north D.C. (Figure 20a & b) The development of the Federal Center south of the mall and north of 395 creates an additional barrier, based on both land use and the cold, monolithic character of late Federal Modernism (Figure 21). Physical connections are maintained only along 4th Street, 7th Street, 10th Street, and 14th Street, although these connections are poorly resolved in Southwest (Figure 22). The federal layer represented by Maryland, Virginia and Delaware Avenues are also poorly defined due to their discontinuity and lack of integration with the street grid (Figure 23). These problems are compounded by the importation of an essentially suburban street typology during the urban renewal era (Figure 24).

Recent planning studies and proposals seek to change the role and vision of Southwest Washington. The National Capital Parks and Planning Commission’s Vision Plan (1997) recognizes the problems created by the present location of 395 and the Rail lines. The Vision Plan advocates the removal of these barriers and the restoration of F Street SW and the partial restoration of Maryland and Virginia Avenues (Figure 25). Additionally, the Vision Plan proposes the potential redevelopment of the Buzzard Point

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area as a Capitol gateway and the site for a new Supreme Court complex (Figure 26). The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI), in concert with the Vision Plan, targets the Southwest waterfront as an urban amenity and part of a linked system of waterfront parks and recreation areas (Figure 27a and b). The Southwest waterfront has recently been slated for redevelopment according to the AWI’s proposals.\(^9\) An Urban Land Institute (ULI) study (March 1998) has found that Waterside Mall could accommodate more retail, commercial and office space than it currently does if it was broken up and 4\(^{th}\) Street reintroduced (Figure 28). The D.C. Department of Transportation’s study of traffic patterns in Southwest further supports the reconfiguration of 4\(^{th}\) Street. Waterside Mall, a remnant of the megastructure era, is now recognized as clearly out of place within the scale of the urban fabric.

Although these strategies are admirable, their scope is limited. With the exception of the ULI proposal for 4\(^{th}\) Street, north-south connections are minimally reestablished and the reclamation of squares and radials based on L’Enfant’s plan are limited to the zone bordered on the north by the Mall (Independence Avenue) and on the south by F Street/395. The waterfront revitalization focuses on the potential redevelopment of a commercial and retail promenade as a tourist destination rather than proposing the reintegration of the waterfront with both the Mall to the north and Southwest to the east. M Street SE is proposed for revitalization as an important neighborhood retail corridor in Southeast Washington, but the Vision Plan does not attempt to extend M Street redevelopment across South Capitol Street to reinvigorate an important east-west connection. Finally, the primacy of interest in the periphery ignores the core area of

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Southwest and the possibility of neighborhood development. This central area remains a system of disconnected streets, poorly defined open space, and segregated neighborhoods (Figure 29). Comparison with a 1948 land use proposal for Southwest provides an amazing parallel. The Comprehensive Plan of 1948 proposed a high-density residential core surrounded by industrial uses to the west and east and government uses to the north and south for Southwest. Although the land use designations have changed, the diagram is virtually identical: the residential fabric of Southwest is isolated from the rest of the city by virtue of its surrounding shell (Figure 30a-c).

The Vision Plan strategy for Southwest essentially prioritizes the reading of the city at the federal scale. Although more defensible than the 1948 industrial city proposal, Southwest is not reintegrated with the city, nor do proposals begin to look at Southwest at the neighborhood scale. Current plans significantly stifle the opportunity to reestablish a more nuanced reading of Southwest as a participant in an ongoing dialogue between the federal city and the metropolitan city, between the urbanized and the natural. The opportunity to reconnect the neighborhood with its historically defining elements also provides the opportunity to reexamine L’Enfant’s strategies for pairing the urban and the natural. This necessarily becomes both a new design and a preservation issue: how much, and to what desired end, is L’Enfant’s plan for Southwest reconstructed? Does this reconstruction occur at a literal or metaphorical level, and how? What is the role of the existing building fabric in a reconstruction?

Traces of history can be read in the landscape of Southwest despite the near devastation of its fabric during urban renewal. The existing figure-ground registers a pre-urban renewal street and block network, as does a comparison of existing and historic
street patterns (Figure 31a–c). The St. James Creek, rendered in concrete along Canal Road, can be read in the rift between developed areas (Figure 32). Analysis, evocation and imagination can be used in a design theory and process to expose traces of the cultural landscape. As a preservation based methodology, this provokes questions concerning history and interpretation: how are site history and context used in the design process? What concepts and strategies discovered in the analysis stage are reinforced, nuanced, or challenged? What are the values being maintained, strengthened, or questioned as a result? How are evocation and memory used both at the urban scale and at the building scale?
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Figure 31b. Existing figure-ground with historic block structure
Figure 31c. Existing street pattern with historic block structure.
Figure 32. Isolating comparable urban fabric clarifies the spatial separation of neighborhoods along the former St. James Canal site.
III. METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Countless cultural landscapes, ranging in scale from specific sites to entire regions, exist as possible subjects for preservation activity. Since there are so many cultural landscapes and because they reveal multiple layers of history and meaning, those individuals, institutions, and organizations interested in their protection and preservation must consider several issues: Which cultural landscapes and time periods should be preserved, and why and how should they be preserved?\(^\text{10}\)

Perhaps the whole field of cultural landscape preservation needs to be renamed *cultural landscape interpretation*. It would be helpful, certainly, to unload the inaccurate connotations of *preservation* and put the emphasis on an expanded understanding of *interpretation*, which in fact begins with the research phase, is inseparable from every design decision, and is then documented through the interpretive program that visitors experience.\(^\text{11}\)

Presupposing the definition of a particular site or landscape as a cultural landscape by distinguishing it from whatever might be outside of its limits denies the possibility that all landscapes are examples of cultural landscapes. Rather than limiting the considerations described by Melnick and Alanen to preservation based projects, the argument should be made that every intervention in the landscape, built or natural, has the potential to reveal layers of history and meaning. Southwest Washington D.C. is an environment in which the historic and cultural landscape has been largely concealed or removed. However, its history is rich and the potential for re-presenting historic relationships are many. This is complimented by the uniqueness of its fabric in the city. How does a preservation-based methodology interpret and mediate urban form, built fabric, and historic and cultural landscapes?


\(^{11}\) Catherine Howett, “Integrity as a Value in Cultural Landscape Preservation,” In Alanen and Melnick, p. 205-6.
Although analysis demonstrates the hostility of the existing urban form of Southwest towards the area’s physical location and history, the building fabric does not entirely share this hostility. A reconstruction based on a period of significance is not only wantonly destructive of the potential quality of what is currently there; it is also antithetical to an evolutionary model of cultural landscape. Rather than preservation as arrested development, preservation should inform direction through interpretation and value relationships. The question of which cultural landscapes should be preserved changes to one of how analysis of the cultural landscape shapes place.

METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Peter Eisenman’s metaphor of the palimpsest and the quarry are particularly relevant as the beginning of a design methodology that looks at history and possibility through correlation: “beyond the actual conditions of the site as given to the architect, the palimpsest holds the traces of the site’s memories. Conversely, the quarry represents immanence, or latent transformations.” Eisenman uses multiple scales, multiple layers, and shifting in a method called superpositioning (Figure 33). Ultimately this expresses the architect’s hand significantly more than the specificity of the site, as scaling, shifting, and the preservation of fragments is an artistic process. The process is thus simultaneously rooted to and completely independent of the site. This split in the process reflects ultimately the distinction between an analytical method involving investigation and recreation and an artistic method of choice and interpretation.

The palimpsest provides a way out of the potential impasse created by the question of which cultural landscapes one preserves. Eisenman’s method allows for the

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layering and subsequent registering of every layer, inclusive of a site’s history, its context (local and regional), and finally even the cartographic techniques used in two-dimensional representation. By the inclusion of each layer, the cultural landscape is not limited to the physical site; prior documentation and representation, including the cartographer’s Mercado lines, are engaged in the design process. The reinterpretation of a site based on a broad, historically inclusive method potentially allows for the recovery of memory through evocation. This can be particularly powerful where physical remnants of a site’s landscape are largely eradicated, such as Eisenman’s proposal for a block in South Friedrichstadt, Berlin. Eisenman’s proposal references an eighteenth century city wall, nineteenth century foundation walls, the Berlin Wall, and the Mercator grid (Figure 34a-b).

Eisenman’s express purpose in superpositioning is both to broaden the concept of context and its use in form generation from the figure/ground method emphasizing form and field resolution and to challenge formal and identifiable relationships. Whether or not he ultimately achieves this end, the limitation of the method to an essentially plan based process and the latent denial of the present in the articulation of poles – what was and what could be – describes the missing elements needed to allow memory or evocation to inform experience. The potential for temporal exploration and resonance is replaced with an inherently Modernist idea of transformation as rupture. Lack of investigation into the possibilities for an experiential reading of the palimpsest obscures the possibilities of memory and interpretation.

Contrasting Eisenman’s process and plan-based method is the very direct use of experiential evocation used by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown for the Franklin
Court “ghost” house (Figure 35: Franklin Court). The conceptual approach to the Franklin Court commission was articulated in Venturi’s 1968 article for *Architectural Forum*, “A Billdingboard involving Movies, Relics, and Space.” A submission for the National Football Hall of Fame, the project literally combines a sign – a billboard – with a building. Sign and architectural form are inextricably combined in a “billdingboard,” a collage in which each piece informs the other. Venturi describes this process as mixed media: “Our mixed media include symbolic and representational elements, that is, billboards and words, along with the abstract elements of space, form, and structure. Symbols with architecture enrich meaning.”13 The National Football Hall of Fame was intended to house ‘relics’ as well as reflect contemporary cultural values. The dialogue between symbol and form is paralleled by the dialogue between the artifact and contemporary cultural values.

Scott Brown had described the architectural use of symbol and form as *heraldry* and *physiognomy* in a 1965 article for the *AIA Journal*. Physiognomy was defined as “the sizes and shapes of buildings and the spaces around them;” heraldry as “written and graphic signs.”14 The National Football Hall of Fame is a straightforward application of the combination of form and sign. The Franklin Court commission is a considerably more subtle and poignant layering of form and sign, fluctuating between literal and metaphorical. Pushing the museum program underground, Venturi and Rauch outlined Franklin’s house and print shop in steel tubing, depressing the area immediately around and including the frame below grade and inscribing the house plan in slate. Tone differentiation of the slate indicates floor, wall, window openings, steps, and hearth. The

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14 Brownlee, David B., “Form and Content,” in *Out of the Ordinary*, p. 29.
courtyard was then developed as an exaggerated recreation of an eighteenth-century garden. Typical elements are reinterpreted and oversized. Within the “ghost” house, viewing ports allow visitors to see the excavated portions of Franklin’s original house.

The Franklin Court solution interpreted the intentions of the project in a variety of compelling ways. Rather than recreate the house from the available evidence, Venturi and Rauch created a decidedly contemporary garden in which the house as garden pavilion acts as a representation or evocation of what might have been. The stepped depression of the house on all four sides creates a sunken garden, or garden room within the whole. The form becomes symbol, layering the heraldic and physiognomic capacities of architecture. These capacities are then rearticulated both in the rendering of architectural form on the ground plane and in the engraving on the slate of diary fragments referring to the house. The literal heraldry of the words increases our understanding of the historic significance of the site. The rendered ground plane is both an architectural short hand implying the form of the house and a graphic sign.

The raw historical data, the intact physical record, is clearly differentiated from the representation. This heightens the potential dialogue between past and present. The experiential character of this dialogue is prioritized, creating a whole out of fragments. Rather than research and analysis leading to a literal recreation, the site is reinterpreted as a totality. The decision to render Franklin’s house and print shop as sign is theoretically clarified by Venturi and Scott Brown’s attitude towards archeologically based recreations: “We question whether architecture can be archeologically correct now, in the way it was on occasion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Are not moments for apt tours de force of literal certainty very rare in our time? …Also, you never are
archeologically correct, so why try?" The Franklin Court project makes no pretense to historical accuracy, acknowledging the limits of archeological certainty. The clear contemporaneity of the Franklin Court solution conceptually reformulates preservation as interpretation and representation.

Venturi and Scott Brown’s method is more inclusive of the experiential layers of a site. Literalism is paired with interpretation within a clear conception of context, both historical and present. Eisenman’s metaphor of the quarry, with its emphasis on possibility, is rooted in Enlightenment progressivism. Venturi and Scott Brown place experience and memory in a dialogue. The past and the present are inextricably related in this project, as interpretation becomes part of memory. The referential is allowed to exist in a clearly articulated form rather than obscured from recognition. In the reconstruction of a cultural landscape, Venturi and Scott Brown’s method demonstrates that literal reconstruction can be complimented by and replaced by referential reconstruction. This is a potentially powerful tool in the definition and application of preservation. Rather than rebuilding what is gone, reconstruction becomes contemporary interpretation.

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Figure 33. Example of Peter Eisenman’s process of superpositioning. Topographic and historic analyses are mapped onto the site as a series of layers. (Bédard)

Figure 34a. Diagrams of Eisenman’s Berlin proposal. (Bédard)
Figure 34b. Eisenman’s Berlin proposal is intended to register the location of the Berlin Wall, the Mercator grid, an 18th century city wall, and 19th century foundation walls. Some of these ‘historic’ elements are fictional. (Bédard)

Figure 35. Franklin Court, Venturi, Rauch and Scott-Brown. (Venturi)
IV. INITIAL SITE STRATEGIES AND IDENTIFICATION

Preservation as interpretation informs a strategy of making apparent the layered cultural landscape of Southwest. The formal articulation of this interpretation is intended to reassert the significance of Southwest in the figure of Washington D.C. Using Eisenman’s metaphor of the palimpsest, this project uses site and historical analysis in the exploration of urban design strategies for Southwest Washington. Layering these readings over the existing fabric, the intention is to re-present site and place specific readings in the urban form. Topography and urban form are reintegrated both to sharpen awareness of the specificity of L’Enfant’s use of topography in the planning of Washington D.C. and to redefine a sense of place for Southwest.

These explorations are intended to make more manifest both the federal layer and the metropolitan layer within the neighborhood. The federal layer, established primarily through the clarity of north-south connections and Delaware Avenue, are tenuous at best. In addition to the fragmentation of these connections due to the existing urban form, Delaware Avenue in particular is not developed as a powerful symbol, despite both visual connection to the Capitol and the figural significance of the radial avenues in L’Enfant’s plan (Figure 36a and b). M Street SW is both scaled and used as an important east-west artery. However, urban renewal development turns its back to the street; townhouses and apartment buildings face internalized courtyards, a privatized public realm (Figure 37). The result is an unexploited matrix of public space that could develop as a parallel to a more rigorously engaged and active M Street (Figure 38a and b). M Street, in accord with the proposed redevelopment of 4th Street, is proposed by the DC Department of
Transportation as an artery for an at grade light rail, connecting the Anacostia River to the Washington Channel through the city.

Federal, metropolitan, and natural ordering systems can be explored through both the urban design strategy and site development. The intersection of M Street, Delaware Avenue and the former St. James Canal sits at the approximate center of the developed residential areas of Southwest Washington. This site has the capacity to address the relationship of overlapping symbolic landscapes. The site is currently underutilized, primarily a swath of undeveloped land with some recreational use and the location of two public housing projects (Figure 39, 40a-f). Although the site is zoned primarily for residential use, the entire area south of M Street and east of Delaware Avenue in Southwest has been targeted for unspecified redirection since the D.C Comprehensive Plan of 1982 (Figure 41). As part of an urban design strategy, this project challenges the current zoning ordinance, proposing instead that this site be developed for civic use. This proposal is intended to compliment the nature of a redeveloped M Street as a significant retail and commercial corridor and primary east-west connection.

**URBAN DESIGN PARTIS**

Initial urban design strategies (Figure 42-46) focus primarily on a clarification of east-west connections across Southwest Washington to the waterfront, north-south connections to Buzzard Point and Ft. McNair, and investigations into the reconstitution of the St. James Creek or canal. Ft. McNair is treated both as sacrosanct and as a potential area for development. Squares relating back to L’Enfant’s plan for the city are used to clarify formal order. The canal is mostly treated as a stream restoration project in these schemes, and appears naturalistic. This is primarily notational; the St. James will be
considered both as a naturalistic and a formalized body of water. The degree of its invasiveness into the urban fabric will be further explored.

The rift remaining from burying the St. James below the surface of the city in a culvert is treated as a possible seam and place of interaction. This has precedence in the restoration of ‘the cut’ on the campus of Carnegie Mellon University. A significant component of the natural conditions upon which the campus was built, the cut had been filled and leveled. Michael Dennis’ master plan proposal included the restoration of the cut as a figural landscape piece, creating distinction and definition of the two campus quadrangles (Figure 47). The cut was recognized as a landscape element, which through engagement serves as a seam between discrete spaces. The intention behind restoring the St. James is both a re-presentation of the relationship between the natural conditions and L’Enfant’s planned city and the seaming together of discrete neighborhoods through a shared landscape.

Each of the urban design partis proposes the strengthening of the existing street grid, the superimposition of select historical streets, and the creation of squares or spaces. The use of figural open space in the ordering of the city is a primary component of Washington, and legible at both the federal and the metropolitan scales. Koetter/Kim’s project for Chinatown in Boston redevelops a series of blocks through the clarification and embellishment of the existing fabric (Figure 48). The project combines disparate uses in a collage of formal elements to create a sense of cohesiveness to the whole as well as the pieces. The cohesiveness of Southwest Washington’s fabric breaks down at the formal level. In the initial partis similar strategies have been employed, both in reference to the historic layers of the city and the existing fabric.
Figure 36a. Delaware Avenue SW looking north from M Street SW. Although the dome of the Capitol is in view, potential monumentality of the street is rendered mute by its fragmentation and poor definition.

Figure 36b. Delaware Avenue SW looking south. The street abruptly shifts, terminating at the site of the former St. James Canal.
Figure 37. Apartments and townhouses front an internal courtyard.

Figure 38a. An underutilized terrace could become part of a system of connected spaces.
Figure 38b. Public space becomes a private world in the area most heavily redeveloped during urban renewal.
Figure 39. Initial site in context
Figure 40a. Towards M Street and the northeast corner of the site. Greenleaf Gardens is visible on the left.

Figure 40b. Townhouse residential along the southeast edge.

Figure 40c. River Park apartments along Delaware Avenue, west edge of site.
Figure 40d. Looking through site towards N Street.

Figure 40e. From Delaware Avenue through Greenleaf Gardens.
Figure 40f. Greenleaf Gardens sits at the corner of M Street and Delaware Avenues, SW.

Figure 41. Zoning (Government of the District of Columbia)
Figure 42. The St. James winds through a linear park, crosses beneath M Street, and terminates in a formal pool adjacent to Bowen Elementary School. M Street is conceived of as a market street with a head building at the intersection of M and Delaware Avenues. A circle at Buzzard Point is borrowed from L’Enfant’s plan. Ft. McNair is in filled to around U Street. U Street, P Street, and M Street cross the St. James.
Figure 43. The M Street connection to the Washington Channel is balanced by a significant square at the intersection of M and Delaware. 4th Street, equidistant from both the water and this square, organizes two opposing squares, at Eye and P Streets respectively. The P Street square is intended as a recentering device, resolving Ft. McNair’s axis.
Figure 44. Ft. McNair is treated as an urban park, with a piece of the St. James Creek creating a naturalistic pond that in turn feeds a formal pool fronting the Army War College. This axis is complimented by a cross axis along V street, slipping along the edge of a formalized park acting as a new front to the Buzzard Point Power Station, envisioned as a civic building. The St. James, restored as a creek, is terminated south of P Street. The space left by the canal becomes highly figural, essentially insular at the urban scale. The intention is to create a public space as a compliment to the internalized courtyard spaces, linking together a public realm of courtyards and walkways. The building wrapping this figural space is shaped on the street side by reclaiming an existing void between Bowen Elementary School and the fire station. M Street is a threshold to the waterfront. The waterfront in turn is treated as a hard edge along the water, with a linear arcade paralleling a deep promenade.
Figure 45. 1st Street extends the full length of this scheme, linking a square at Delaware and F Streets to a formalized waterfront at Buzzard Point. Circles along Half Street denote east-west linkages at P and S streets. P Street provides access to the waterfront, S street to an urban park at Ft. McNair, potentially the location for a new school. A significant square terminates a loose, sometimes buried, sometimes exposed St James Creek. This square is bounded by M Street, Delaware Avenue, and 1st Street. An additional square opens up off of 4th Street and Delaware Avenue.
Figure 46. Delaware Avenue is restored deep into Southwest Washington, where it is terminated by a square intended to resolve the intersection of 4th Street, P Street, Delaware Avenue and Ft. McNair. Ft. McNair is infilled to V Street, which links 1st Street to the waterfront along the Channel. Maine Avenue and Water Street register across Buzzard Point, meeting at 1st Street and a formal protrusion into the river. The St. James is not restored in this scheme. The built edge of the Washington Channel is pulled back to reveal a more naturalistic park rather than a hard promenade.
Figure 47. Campus master plan, Carnegie Mellon University, Michael Dennis and Associates. The cut at once renders the hierarchical open spaces discrete and establishes the link between these spaces. (MDA)

Figure 48. Chinatown, Boston, Koetter/Kim. Formal elements, collaging references and examples, are derived from the fabric. (Koetter/Kim)
V. PROGRAMMATIC AND DESIGN PROPOSALS

The conceptual ordering of Southwest Washington through the exploration of urban design clarifies the need for a shared central space, integral to the neighborhood. The identified site is to be developed as a community resource, incorporating exterior space and civic uses. The intention is to both design and program the space occupied by the existing rift as a place of interaction both as a challenge and a compliment to the network of privatized public space throughout Southwest. The building program thus combines social, recreational, and cultural uses. The primary programmatic components are a meeting hall for public assembly, relocation of the Southwest Branch Library, and a community gymnasium or natatorium. Outdoor space is both programmed for specific, site related functions, and part of the urban design strategy described.

MEETING HALL

The Meeting Hall is a place for public assembly. A primary meeting room comprises the most significant element of the Meeting Hall. This room, typically referred to as a multipurpose room, can accommodate a variety of functions, including public lectures, community organization meetings, staff meetings and events, and receptions and parties. Generally it is supported by a kitchenette and has provisions for Audio/Visual uses and might contain some display cabinets or shelves.

The Meeting Hall requires an entry lobby where information can be found and that can serve as a public gathering spot before and after events. It is desirable that this has amenable access to the outside, as well as provisions for storage of coats and belongings.
ATHLETIC CENTER

Interior recreation space is usually defined by its primary size determinant: a basketball court and gymnasium. Additionally, a natatorium, once as urban fixture, is a great public amenity. Both can be supported by shared locker rooms and a shared point of entry. Outdoor space can be programmed for a variety of recreational uses, both on hardscape and softscape surfaces. Recreational outdoor space can be merged with less specifically use defined space.

LIBRARY

The Southwest Branch Public Library is currently housed in an underwhelming and unsuitable structure on K Street, behind Waterside Mall. The Library’s restrooms are not accessible, and the whole is uninviting as a civic building. The relocation of the Library to the proposed site allows a greater degree of visibility for the Library and a closer relationship with the center of Southwest Washington’s residential fabric. The Library should include a reading room, stacks, a circulation area, and a public entry. Study, research and reference areas, a children’s room and a media room are usually necessary, as are support spaces for staff.

EXHIBITION HALL

This is intended as a compliment to the Library and Meeting Hall, a space dedicated to temporary exhibits including student work, local history, and interpretation. Although this can be part of a lobby sequence, it is important that the Exhibition Hall be controllable and that access to storage and shipping are nearby and easily accessible.
SUPPORT SPACES

As a community resource, the program includes classrooms and conference rooms for adult education and job training, as well as a small daycare center. Offices for support staff of all different functions are also accommodated. Finally, retail and leasable space may be included at street level as part of an urban design. Although potentially incorporated into the volume of the building, leasable space is separate and not controlled by the public structure.

PROGRAM TABULATION

The following program tabulation is based on primary spatial requirements and major spaces. Depending on the organization of the whole, these major components can share generalized support spaces, or be developed as discrete pieces, with support spaces particularized.

MEETING HALL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Square Feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multipurpose Room</td>
<td>2000 s. f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby and Information Desk</td>
<td>400 s. f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchenette</td>
<td>200 s. f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio-Visual Projection and Storage</td>
<td>200 s. f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coat Room</td>
<td>140 s. f.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GYMNASIUM – NATATORIUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Square Feet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gymnasium</td>
<td>8000 s. f.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natatorium</td>
<td>3500 s. f.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lockers Room 2 @ 200 s. f.

LIBRARY
Reading Room 3000 s. f.
Stacks 2000 s. f.
Study, Research, and Reference Areas 1000 s. f.
Children’s Room 500 s. f.
Media Room 500 s. f.
Entry and Circulation Desk 400 s. f.
Exhibition Space 1000 – 2000 s. f.
Exterior Space (gathering, reading areas, court, etc.)

GENERAL SPACES
Classrooms 6 @ 900 s. f.
Conference Rooms 2 @ 800 s. f.
Seminar Rooms 4 @ 300 s. f.
Offices 8 @ 120 s. f.
Staff Conference Room 240 s. f.
Storage Closet 240 s. f.
Maintenance and Custodial 800 s. f.
Mechanical and Electrical 10% of net program: 3468 s. f.

Subtotal 38148 s. f.
Grossing Factor 20% of subtotal: 7627.6 s. f.
Total Preliminary Square Footage 45777.6 s. f.

Retail Frontage not included in program tabulation
VI. PRECEDENT ANALYSIS AND CONCEPTUAL PARTIS

Precedent analysis of both individual buildings representing types within the project statement and groups of buildings of comparable type are considered along with urban strategies at the scale of the building. The Partis are largely conceptualizations of potential site and urban strategies, defining possible directions and site organization strategies.

**PRECEDEENTS**

![Figure 49. The Baths of Caracalla. (Hamlin)](image)

The Baths of Caracalla incorporated athletic, social, and cultural functions within a single structure. Discrete spaces helps to shelter potentially disparate uses while all uses maintain connections to the outdoor space. The clearly defined perimeter demarcates the Baths as a single, unified space, but also divides internal activities from the outside world. This could provide a sense of sanctity and security, but loses power as a place of public assembly by privatizing the activities of assembly.
Midway Gardens organizes a series of programmed outdoor spaces relative to indoor spaces. The organization is similar to the Baths of Caracalla, in that the entirety is defined by a walled perimeter, veiling the interior from the activities of the street. For an urban garden it is a decidedly anti-urban gesture. However, an alternative reading might be of Midway Gardens as a courtyard scheme; one leaves the street and passes through a layer of building before reaching a rear courtyard. The courtyard is organized as a series of terraces of uniform texture stepping down from the building mass.
Figure 51. Stockholm Town Hall, Ragnar Ostberg. (Ostberg)

Ostberg’s Stockholm Town Hall is a courtyard scheme, entered directly off the street. The street is defined by the continuous wall of the Town Hall, which serves as a support for the small square opening up off the street on the north side. Unlike Wright’s Midway Gardens, the courtyard for Stockholm Town Hall is porous along one side, opening through an arcade onto a series of terraces stepping down to the water. Each façade was treated differently based on the obligations the Town Hall played to the different historic sectors of the city and to the waterfront.
Oakland Park Village Center was planned as a community campus. Centered on the green is the Village Hall, its figural bowed back pushing into the naturalistic retention pond that becomes a significant landscape feature. Flanking the side of the formal green is an Exhibition Hall. The Exhibition Hall and The Village Hall meet in the center of an amphitheatre jutting into the pond and linking both buildings and the rectangular green to an athletic center for the community. Not shown is an additional portion of the Exhibition Hall that slides along the south side of the green, stopping short of center and clarifying the figural importance of the Village Hall.
The San Juan Capistrano Library encloses within its volume a courtyard as the primary space and central reading room. Small reading gardens are hung off the courtyard, outdoor reading nooks at the scale of the landscape. Internal organization is based on a spine, linked cross axially to the major axis running from the figure of the children’s room at the bottom of the plan to the similar figure of the auditorium lobby.
The entry and dressing rooms of the Trenton Bath House form a cruciform plan with an open-air central atrium. The overlapping of the square volumes defining this atrium allow for entry into the servant spaces. The atrium is the primary space of activity.

PARTIS AND SITE STRATEGIES

PARTI 1 (Figure 55a-d)

Intended to be read with figure 44 as an urban design strategy, this parti explores a strict adherence to the shaping of an internalized garden space. Unlike Wright’s Midway Gardens or the Baths of Caracalla, this garden court is intended as a public space. This space links tertiary and pedestrian paths through the building flanking its left (west) side to similar paths to the east. The garden space opens to the south, eventually ending at P Street. Major program components are organized both along the pedestrian path and along M and N Streets.
PARTI 2 (Figure 56a-e)

Parti 2 wraps a semi-enclosed courtyard with the program as a series of linked but discrete building elements. At the urban design scale, this scheme proposes a termination for Delaware Avenue just south of M Street in a small square formed by the existing church on the west side, a portico for the Meeting Hall on the east, and the lobby entry for the Gymnasium and Natatorium on the south. The Library reading room occupies a significant space on M Street, elevated sectionally to allow retail at the ground level. The reading room, Meeting Hall and Natatorium all address the courtyard; the Gymnasium is related axially to the end of the St. James, terminating in a formalized element to the south.

PARTI 3 (Figure 57a-d)

Arranged as a campus, parti 3 pulls the majority of the program away from M Street, organizing the Meeting Hall and Gymnasium complex along N Street. The Library sits on M Street, and helps to terminate Delaware Avenue through a slip of space leading to the Meeting Hall. A lateral green links the pedestrian paths from the apartment and townhouse complexes to the west with a significant open space incorporating play fields. The Natatorium terminates the St. James Creek.
Figure 55a. Parti 1, concept plan

Figure 55b. Parti 1, Nolli Plan
Figure 55c. Parti 1, sections

Figure 55d. Parti 1, axonometric
Figure 56a. Parti 2, urban design concept.
Figure 56b. Parti 2, concept plan.

Figure 56c. Parti 2, Nolli plan.
Figure 56d. Parti 2, sections.

Figure 56e. Parti 2, axonometric.
Figure 57a. Parti 3, urban design concept.
Figure 57b. Parti 3, concept plan.

Figure 57c. Parti 3, Nolli plan.
Figure 57d. Parti 3, axonometric.
VII. THEORETICAL AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT: THE DESIGN PROCESS

Memory in the city is the recollection of past situations and places or buildings through the quotation of materials, forms or even details. Woven together, elements in the city fall into layers created in different times, simultaneously referring to historic incidents and cultures as well as their adaptation to later actions and lifestyles.\(^\text{16}\)

To cultural geographers, the landscape is not something to be admired or denounced. Instead, it is like one vast archeological dig – a layered accumulation of artifacts created by that disorderly accumulation of people we call our ancestors. A gift from the past, it speaks to us truthfully of who our ancestors were. The landscape is a document we can read – if we only know how to do it.\(^\text{17}\)

The architect and theorist Also Rossi argues that in the course of its evolution a city “grows upon itself: it acquires a consciousness and a memory.”\(^\text{18}\) For Rossi, the city gives voice to its development and evidence of the process of change. Rossi embraces an analogical methodology in order to elaborate on and reaffirm a city’s enduring elements while permitting the morphological process necessary to a city’s survival and growth. This can be seen in contrast to traditional forms of preservation that focus narrowly on issues of integrity and a site’s ‘period of significance.’ According to Catherine Howett, integrity requires that the “the physical record must be sufficiently intact – still on the ground, so to speak – to allow today’s visitors to experience an environment that existed at a specific time in the past.”\(^\text{19}\) Unlike the analogical, allowing memory and evocation in the act of giving voice to the process of change, the focus on integrity attempts to fix or


stabilize a site at a particular moment. It should be stressed that this moment is, if anything, fictive: “Historic preservation’s sense of history is not aimed at telling dynamic stories in which urban life is constructing itself, but instead is aimed at establishing a static Past When Things Were Nicer…To present to us a history of the process of urbanization with all its changes, mistakes, and progress is not preservation’s aim.”

Further complicating this issue is the increasingly expanding awareness of the difficulty in responding to the variety of users and stakeholders in any preservation project.

Inherent in the preservation project is interpretation, the careful selection and editing of facts and assumptions. The implication of objectivity that accompanies the perception of history ignores the present centeredness and inherent subjectivity of interpretation: “It is as the inheritors of modernism that the preservation movement continues to tolerate the misconception that a line, a date, divides the past from the present and that from our vantage point within the present it is possible to describe the past accurately, analyze it objectively, and interpret it with absolute fidelity to some absolute standard of truth or reality.” Consciousness of the role of the present in interpretation allows for a potentially richer role of history in the present.

This project is primarily concerned with issues of preservation and interpretation as they relate to the design process. As a critique of the concept that preservation is applicable only to architecturally or historically canonical fabric, the intention is to demonstrate that meaningful intervention in the built environment is predicated on an

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21 Howett, p. 199.
understanding of the specificity of place and its potential to cultivate memory. Mason argues that multivalence is a fundamental quality of the historic built environment: “The historical, cultural, and aesthetic values traditionally at the center of preservation discourse, as well as economic, social, educational/research, ecological values, are equally present. These values, said to be a place’s ‘heritage values,’ are the source of the place’s significance.” The edges between the historic built environment and an ahistoric built environment are a posteriori, not a priori; they are the remnants of a process.

Rather than preservation as arrested development, preservation should inform direction through interpretation and value relationships, becoming part of a dynamic process through which we give shape to our cities and imbue them with meaning. The act of interpretation is an opportunity to reflect both on the past and on the present, recognizing our role in interpretation and pairing the traditional values of preservation with present needs and values. Howett describes this expanded view of interpretation as transformation: “If we saw our task from the beginning as transformative – artfully to transform the raw data, the physical facts, the historical record, into a comprehensible vision with potential meaning for men and women today (even if the meaning has to do with the discovery of otherness, difference, the mysterious or finally unknowable) – we might be less afraid to expand rather than to restrict the options for interpretation.”

Preservation as an interactive and interpretive process challenges the implied objectivity of the criteria of integrity and asserts the significance of both present and future needs.

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24 Howett, p. 207.
Exploration of narrative potential to give voice to these multiple values is predicated on a site analysis and design process that is inclusive of historical uses and meanings as well as evolution and morphology, encouraging a dialogue between memory and the present. The eradication of landscape in Southwest Washington is not unique. Mid-twentieth century urban renewal and more recent redevelopment of blighted areas, including brown field developments and gentrification, are common to cities in the United States. Preservation theories and methodologies can ensure a richer development, increasing awareness of a site’s history and its potential to communicate memory.

Research into the history of a place and analysis of its topographic, historic and existing form should be fundamental to the design process and proposals. The interpretation of existing conditions in light of basic formal principles can give greater structure to a form that incorporates memory through representation or symbolic recreation. A comparison of Southwest Washington’s natural condition and the historic form based on L’Enfant’s plan clearly establishes the St. James Creek and the significance of the waterway in the formation of the urban pattern (Figure 58). A map of the city’s canals circa 1867 demonstrates the urban grid’s deference to the canal, as it slices through blocks in parallel to Delaware Avenue, one of L’Enfant’s planned diagonals (Figure 59). The canal system was intended to be both functional and symbolic – providing for passage through the city for shipping interests as well as linking together a series of natural springs and symbolically significant locations. The canal also represents the attempt to harness and control nature, a regularized and controlled stream through the urban fabric, Venetian in intent.
A series of initial explorations at the urban design scale seek to reinterpret existing conditions in order to strengthen legibility of the formal order of the city. Rossi describes the ability to ‘summarize’ a city from its primary elements, that which gives a city its characteristic form: “As the core of the hypothesis of the city as a man-made object, primary elements have an absolute clarity: they are distinguishable on the basis of their form and in a certain sense their exceptional nature within the urban fabric; they are characteristic, or better, *that which characterizes* a city.”\(^{25}\) The intention of these studies was to give structure to the urban form, providing for the existing fabric and accommodating potential needs. Rather than reconstruct rote the historic street and block pattern, these urban design strategies are primarily referential and began to introduce basic interpretive strategies and design intentions. Common to each is an interest in reestablishing the canal or the St. James Creek in some fashion; the use of squares and circles in an adaptation of L’Enfant’s formal palette; the reassertion of both the basic grid and significant diagonals; and an interest in pulling the existing fabric together through infill and extension (Figure 60).

These strategies developed largely in response to analysis of existing conditions, particularly neighborhood structure, and as a critique of the ULI and Vision Plan proposals. Although apparently formal in the use of historic patterns, the intention is also to address existing social and economic divisions in the neighborhood. The geographer Deryck W. Holdsworth writes that “[the] historical record provides a useful additional lens for viewing what does survive, illuminating earlier phases of place making and of

\(^{25}\text{Rossi, p. 99 (emphasis in original).}\)
economic and social restructuring.” The existing configuration of Southwest reflects its history of change and the clear relationship between urban form, political power, economic interest and class. Indeed, the housing built as part of the SWURA was an effort at an economic and social restructuring of this part of the city, as is clear by the testimony of contemporary articles lauding the successes of these developers and architects in providing new spatial forms and in turning their backs to the remaining public housing, reinforcing the spatial void between adjacent neighborhoods.

The transformation of a negative landscape into a shared space is intended to challenge the existing socio-political formation of the area, reinforcing opportunities for shared civic life. As an essential part of the design process, what is being interpreted are not only historic and natural forms, but primarily how to restructure the void. Rather than literal replication, the interpretive act is intended to give voice to present and future needs as well as comment critically on past decisions: “Acts of interpretation can also make people aware there are alternatives to any given design,” writes Ronald Fleming, and the critical observation is that this includes what exists as well as what is proposed. Preservation as interpretation informs a strategy of making apparent the layered cultural landscape of Southwest through intervention that is cognizant of historical development and contemporaneity.

The continued development of the urban design is a reflection on these issues paired with the development of site and building strategies based on a series of idealized or typological studies. Legibility of the civic nature of the program is a vital concern, and

27 See bibliography for list of articles documenting the SWURA.
28 Fleming, p. 75.
the exploration of recognizable types furthers the use of analogy while allowing all three scales to come into focus together. The adaptation of three clear building types or configurations – linear, courtyard, and object – and similarly three recognizable site strategies – based on the Uffizi Palace, the agora at Pergamon, and the New York Public Library – presents the possibility of introducing fragments and historical allusions integrated with the urban design (Figures 61 and 62). Typological study focuses attention on the three primary programmatic components (cultural, social, and recreational), provides the opportunity to consider the role of building form in legibility, and clarifies relationships between individual elements, urban form, and the historic landscape.

The site selected for project development is a result of these studies and is closely related to the interpretive strategy. The St. James Creek and later St. James Canal formerly defined the eastern edge of a peninsular point along the Potomac (now the Washington Channel) at the mouth of the Anacostia River. Now the location of Ft. McNair, this peninsula has historically existed in isolation from the neighborhood. The filling in of the canal established a no-man’s land between the Fort and the neighborhood, alternately occupied and abandoned according to the Fort’s needs and generally neglected. A visual blight, this area is symbolic of the relationship between the Federal and the local, of power and change. 2nd Street SW currently marks the eastern boundary between what is definably neighborhood and this swath of ambiguous territory. The historic fort wall follows the original edge of the canal, along what would have been 3rd Street SW before turning parallel to Delaware Avenue at R Street. Restructuring this ambiguous space as clearly neighborhood oriented and civic in nature challenges the existing political relationship between the federal and the local, and is both a land and
power reclamation. Additionally, the opportunity that the Fort might someday become truly public or part of Southwest as residential fabric suggests treating this area as a positive seam.

P Street marks the northern edge of Fort McNair, the southern edge of the SWURA, and generally the change in land use patterns between residential and industrial fabric in Southwest. Additionally, P Street is the southernmost east-west link between Southeast and Southwest Washington D.C., potentially providing a connection for the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers across the urban fabric between the former Navy Yard and its transformation in Near Southeast and the southern terminus of the public promenade along the Southwest waterfront. Based on an analysis of existing Southwest as a series of discrete neighborhoods and potential neighborhood development in the current brownfield areas stretching south of P Street to Buzzard Point, the intersection of P and 2nd Streets sits astride the approximate overlap between adjoining neighborhoods (Figure 63). The assumed redevelopment of the Carrollsburg area of Southwest is based on the 1982 Comprehensive Plan for the District of Columbia, which characterized this area as blighted and in need of redefinition, as well as the NCPPC Vision Plan, describing this area as a new federal center for the Supreme Court and government offices. Acknowledging this possibility of or need for change can be an assertion of power and participation as well as a recognition of the multiple perspectives and values that should be taken into consideration.

The proposed urban form seeks to strengthen the clarity of primary spatial elements linking Southwest to the larger urban landscape of Washington (Figure 64). This is done both in the reconnection of severed streets, thus recreating the historic street
and block network where appropriate, and through the reinterpretation of primary
elements or characteristics in a partial transformation of the historic form. Most
significantly, this reinterpretation occurs along the route of the canal and to the east and
west of South Capitol Street. The canal space is variously reinterpreted as park, civic
building group and boulevard in an effort to allow what currently exists as a void
between neighborhoods and interests to be expressed as a shared landscape and point of
merger (Figure 65a & b). Returning to Rossi’s concept of the ‘analogous city,’ the
transformation of this landscape, from natural waterway, to canal, to void, to urban
amenity, is intended to refer to its history and process of change: “built analogies – the
original object as well as the representation or symbolic recreation – evoke associations:
they indicate a broader context than the building itself, allowing the building to be
understood as part of a legible system.”

The rearticulation of this landscape spine refers back to the development of civic
space in North American cities during the City Beautiful movement. Natural landscapes
were developed both in an effort to shape infrastructure and promote civic pride and
provide civic space. The opportunity to reinterpret a space of distinction and uniqueness
within the city is analogous to similar motives during this earlier era: “Public parks
became icons of cities, imprinting them with physical spaces that reflected unique
environmental and naturalistic features purported to connect the culture of a city to its
locale.” The space of the canal specifically refers to the heritage and culture of the
natural landscape and its influence on the city of Washington, as well as its later

29 Schultz, p. 50.
No. 3 (Summer 2003), p. 15.
transformation prior to and after urban renewal. Reestablishing this space as public landscape is an opportunity to redirect attention to the importance of the rivers and related topographic features to the founding and development of Washington. In addition to and potentially more valuable than this historic value, the development of park space out of a perceived boundary between different social and economic communities represents a reinvestment in the conceptualization of public space as places of overlap and sharing, a ‘landscape of community.’ “Urban parks are vital to community-building because they are one of the few places where people from different backgrounds can come together in peace to meet, play, and learn from one another.”31 The transformation of this neglected and unoccupied zone into a shared, community space is symbolic of the transformation of an area of discrete and disconnected neighborhood groups into a larger community with ties to one another.

As significant civic networks, urban parks during the development of late nineteenth and early twentieth century North American urbanism typically contained some combination of civic buildings addressing different stakeholders and intended to engage a variety of potential users: “[Urban parks] often also included a fieldhouse, composed of separate men’s and women’s gymnasia, reading rooms, a library, and a community meeting hall. Such buildings highlighted the larger civic role these parks were intended to play in bringing neighborhood residents together for shared activity and dialogue.”32 This project proposes a similar program, grouping an athletic facility

31 Steve Coleman, “The Invisible Park: Revitalizing the Ten Invisible Landscapes,” Places, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Summer 2003), p. 53. The ten landscapes Coleman articulates are Memory; Myth and Meaning; Imagination, Possibility, and Play; Hospitality; Freedom; Community; Cultural Expression and Understanding; Learning and Enrichment; Sustainability and Livability; and Stewardship and Stakeholdership.
(gymnasium/natatorium), branch library and community center as part of the urban infrastructure. Forming an urban headpiece to the park, these elements are intended to engage athletic, cultural, and social needs of adjoining neighborhoods and provide a regional center or focus. Although internally distinct, the three buildings are grouped to form an urban perimeter block at the intersection of P and 2nd Streets. Drawing from the typological studies, the community center and library are clear bar buildings, employing a linear parti, while the gymnasium and natatorium is derived from the study of this building type as object (Figure 66-72).

Site development for this civic group originated with the proposal based on Pergamon as a precedent, but was eventually reconceptualized as a traditional inner block courtyard. The protected courtyard responds both to present needs, clarifying the urbanity of the individual components while offering a defensible and accessible internal space, and becomes an important element in the interpretive or transformative act. The courtyard acts as a space of containment, a figural, occupiable void, referring to the canal and its system of basins. A shared landscape between the three buildings, the courtyard allows overlapping of the three programmatic components. Finally, the courtyard compliments both the park space and the assembly hall within the community center, providing a gathering space for public events and contributing to the political and social life of the community. Rather than a reconstruction of a canal element in a literal sense, the development of analogy or metaphor is intended to evoke associations or memories while responding to contemporary and future uses.

The courtyard as an analogous or metaphorical expression of the site’s history developed in response to a design process inclusive of historic meanings and possibilities
but which ultimately did not seek to reconstruct or replicate historic forms. Rossi writes “analogy expresses itself through a process of architectural design whose elements are preexisting and formally defined, but whose true meaning is unforeseen at the beginning and unfolds only at the end of the process. Thus the true meaning of the process is identified with the meaning of the city.”

Evocation is complimented by the possibility of provocation. Development of the landscape as courtyard and urban park clarifies both the interpretation of the history and context of the site and the relationship between this new landscape and its place in Southwest and the city (Figures 73-76).

The development of this project as preservation poses an essential question to the process of interpretation and its role in preservation: when is interpretation fiction and no longer preservation? A related, and equally significant question, should also be asked: when is that fiction more appropriate? The artist Jane Greengold argues that a valid historic context is necessary to support the fictional element: “It is crucial to know what did happen in order to have a basis for conjecture about what might have happened…I believe that one of the functions of art is to nudge and provoke creative insight into how things are, how they might have been and how they might be. At minimum I would like to inspire recognition of some of the complexities of history.”

The intention behind the interpretation of the shifting cultural landscape of Southwest is to give voice to its particularization, both historically and as reconceptualized. A significant component of this reconceptualization is the transformation of role. Not only was this landscape part of the political, federally oriented system of radials and defined spaces at its inception, but most recently this landscape has been a neglected piece of federal property, clearly

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33 Rossi, p. 18.

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demarcated from the neighborhood by fencing. Reclaiming this as not only neighborhood but specifically civic and public is an important step in this transformation. This step requires an architectural response to the complex location, clarifying both the civic and local nature of the building.

The federal presence in Washington D.C. adds complexity to the architectural elaboration of civic buildings. The white stone favored during the City Beautiful movement and still a clear indicator of civic function is in Washington predominantly associated with the federal presence. Washington is often referred to as a brick city, and indeed its fabric tends to be predominantly brick. However, brick is questionable due to both its residential associations and the adjacency of Ft. McNair, constructed entirely of red brick. In order to clearly declare the public nature of this building group, it must be differentiated from Ft. McNair. The elevations, in an effort to establish their importance in signifying the role of a civic building, are a combination of both cut stone and brick, and turn outward to the street. In general, a continuous stone base wraps the whole to the level of the second floor. This base relates to the internal disposition of both the library and the community center, both of which house their primary public spaces one floor above grade. The community center, with its façade on P Street facing a triangular forecourt as the street opens up, is composed of panels of stone framed in coated steel and seemingly laid up against a brick back-up wall. The brick and stone, rather than being banded horizontally, are allowed to slip past one another and relate to a pattern of larger figures and local symmetries on the façade (Figure 77 and 78). The library, more clearly composed of a stone base supporting brick at the piano nobile level, is given greater civic clarity by the use of a double height colonnade running the length of its face
Underneath the colonnade, a series of bays reconnect the reading rooms with the activity of the street (Figure 80 and 81). The gymnasium and natatorium adapt a system similar to the community center in the use of perceived panels of stone, but the primary volumes are rendered more simply (Figure 82).

The elevations, in the layering of materials and articulation of volumes and spaces, are intended to continue the language of analogy or reference, incorporating familiar, definable materials and elements in the articulation of civic importance. Although predicated on the conceptual value of a clearly public landscape to its current users and the possibility that this engenders vitality and promotes community, the processes of change have been of fundamental importance in the project’s particularization. Anne-Catrin Schultz describes the possibility that buildings can be understood in the context of the ageing of the city, as both incorporating memory and possibility. According to Schultz, “Although not directly expressed, content in the form of memory or association can be incorporated into built objects. There are two kinds of memory: direct, referring to the building’s original shape or style; and indirect, a narrative component evoking historic places or elements. The conscious handling of indirect and direct memory incorporates narratives into buildings. These components add profound meaning to architecture that exceeds merely fulfilling practical functions.”

Allowing the complexities of change and history to inform the design process is intended to both promote the formal articulation of these narrative and evocative possibilities and communicate place specificity.

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35 Schultz, p. 48.
Figure 58. Southwest Washington, reconstruction of natural and historic conditions.

Figure 59. Map of the Canals of Washington D.C., 1867. (Myer)
Figure 60. Urban design schemes, plan view.

Figure 61. Diagram of ideal types – pure volume, courtyard, and linear.
Figure 62. Typology studies based on the Uffizi Palace, Pergamon and the New York Public Library.
Figure 63. Seams between adjoining neighborhoods should be places of engagement.
Figure 64. Before and after figure-ground.
Figure 65a & b. Existing and proposed conditions, Southwest Washington D.C.
Figure 66. Ground floor plan.
Figure 67. Second floor plan.
Figure 68. Third floor plan.
Figure 69. Site section through Community Center entry and courtyard.

Figure 70. Site section through Assembly Hall and courtyard.
Figure 71. Section through Library and courtyard.

Figure 72. Transverse section through Library.
Figure 73 & 74. Looking north toward gymnasium from park (reconstituted 3rd Street) and along 2nd Street.
Figure 75 & 76. Courtyard views from the loggia.
Figure 77. Towards Community Center from 2nd Street.
Figure 78. North Elevation - Community Center.

Figure 79. West Elevation – Library and Athletic Center.
Figure 80. Underneath the colonnade, 2nd Street.
Figure 81. Wall Section at Library through typical bay.
Figure 82. South elevation.
VIII. ADDITIONAL IMAGES

Figure 83. Figure ground without insertion and insertion independently.
Figure 84. Process models.

Figure 85. Final model, from north.
Figure 86. Final model, from east.

Figure 87. Final model, from south.
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