ABSTRACT

Title Thesis:	Connecting the Past, Contextualizing the Present, Constructing the Future: Bladensburg Interpretive Center
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This thesis proposes to investigate how the built environment can mediate the past, present, and future. By creating a narrative path through history and community, this design will show how the built environment can connect a place throughout time, help a community value what has created today and focus on what will create a better tomorrow

This thesis will address these issues through the lens of a War of 1812 Bicentennial Interpretive Center located in Bladensburg, Maryland. Although the town witnessed one of the most momentous battles in American history, and is among the oldest municipalities in the region, modern Bladensburg under-utilizes its significant historic capital. Additionally, in-sensitive responses to environmental and regional transportation issues have torn through the city, dividing many of the potential amenities from Bladensburg citizens and stifling any hopes of commercial development

CONNECTING THE PAST, CONTEXTUALIZING THE PRESENT, CONSTRUCTING
THE FUTURE
BLADENSBURG INTERPRETIVE CENTER

By

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Introduction

It is said that truth is stranger than fiction; the story of our past can be more

fascinating than any invented narrative. History has always been a fascination for me.

This belief, however, has put in the minority. Many people, bored by the manner in

which it is frequently taught, disregard its value and fail to connect the intrigues of the

past with the dramas of today. Textbooks which transmit the story through dry text

with limited graphics do no justice to history. The emphasis on memorization of names

and dates at the expense of critical analysis on how the lessons can be applied today

similarly is problematic. It was my objective to help others connect to these dynamic

stories by incorporating built form into their re-telling.

While history inherently connects to all fields, it has an especially strong link with

architecture. Most history now is written in text, but it is equally embodied within our

buildings. The study of most ancient civilizations is rooted in archaeological

investigations of their buildings. For pre-literate civilizations archaeology is our only

insight. In this way the built environment serves to document the beliefs and values of

each culture, each generation.

In this thesis I wanted to look more closely at this connection, and examine how

both history and architecture can help each other. It is my belief that by incorporating

historical context into the design process, a building will have a stronger connection to

its occupants/users. Similarly, by incorporating spaces into the narrative process, a history will also form a deeper connection to its audience. I seek to prove through this thesis that combining history and building will create a whole that is greater than its parts.

The specifics of a Bladensburg War of 1812 Bicentennial Interpretive Center fell into my lap incidentally. The serendipitous suggestion was brought to me because of a real project. In order to promote historical tourism for the upcoming Bicentennial, Maryland has funded efforts to create tourist infrastructure along the "Star Spangled Trail" linking the various War of 1812 sites statewide. The most prominent stop is Baltimore's Fort McHenry, the site of the battle which saw Francis Scott Key pen our national anthem. The Battle of Bladensburg is just as significant in our nation's history, but it has largely been forgotten by our society in the last two hundred years.

Bladensburg proved to be an excellent case study to examine the ideas that interest me. The city is rich in history, being one of the oldest towns and densest concentration of 18th century buildings in the area. Contemporary Bladensburg combines a forgotten dynamic story and buildings of little architectural value, the two problems I was hoping to address. Bladensburg also offered up urban issues that I had not initially intended on examining, adding another layer into the design problem. This layer tied in nicely with the idea of historical contextually, re-emphasizing the living nature of history.

1_ Site

1.A History

1.A.1 Bladensburg History

   *ORIGINS_*In 1632 King Charles I of England granted a royal charter to Cecil Calvert,

2nd Baron of Baltimore, authorizing the creation of a new colony on the lands north of

the Potomac River. This colony was named Maryland in honor of Queen Henrietta

Maria. With the oldest English settlements focused in the south, Maryland expanded

northwards along the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay. Bladensburg, Maryland,

located on the eastern bank of the Anacostia River in Prince George's County, was

chartered by the colonial government of Maryland in 1742 [fig.1], making it one of the

oldest towns in both the state and region. (The capital of Maryland was moved to

Annapolis in 1708, Baltimore was founded in 1729, Alexandria was founded in 1749, the

Mason-Dixon Line established a border between Maryland and Pennsylvania in 1750,

Georgetown was founded in 1751, and Washington, DC was chartered in 1790.) [fig.2]

   *PORT TOWN_*The economy of Maryland was focused around agriculture,

specifically tobacco. Tobacco exported from the colony was the lifeline of the

community. This being the case, the Maryland government had a vested interest in

creating port towns where tobacco could be collected, concentrated, taxed, and

shipped. In 1742, Bladensburg was chartered for this purpose, and served as a deep

water port where tobacco from the surrounding plantations could be brought to market
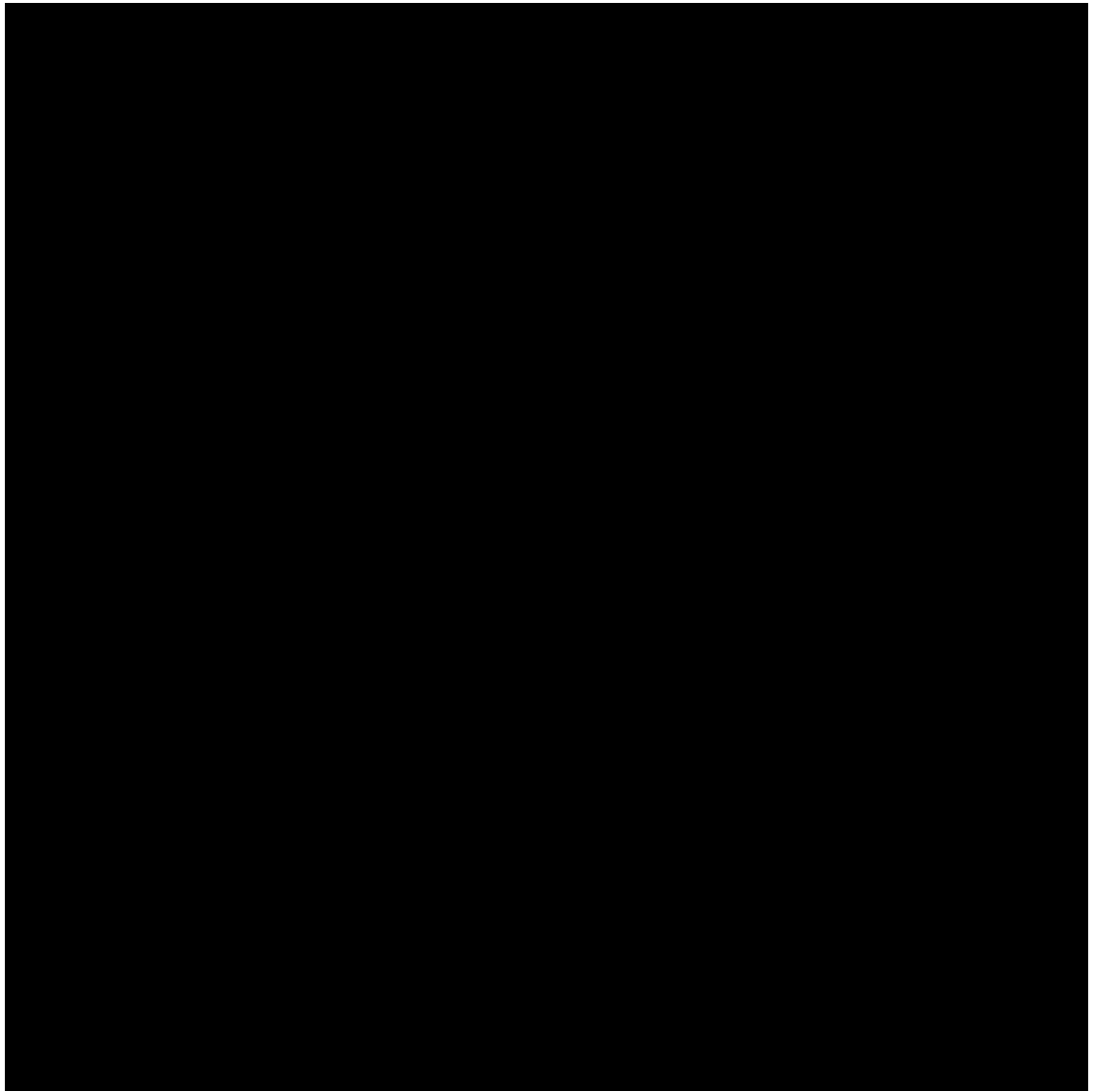
Figure 1_ 1742 plat [Aman Memorial Trust]

political

1638: Maryland Colony founded

1742-1765: Magruder, Bostwick, Geo. Washington, Market Master Houses built

1751: Georgetown chartered by Maryland government

1749: Alexandria chartered by Virginia government

1742: Bladensburg chartered by Maryland government

historic fabric

1804: Bladensburg designated an official tobacco inspection station

1790: Washington, DC chartered by US government

environmental

1840: Anacostia un-navigable

1818: Free Hope Baptist Church built

1860s: Fort Lincoln built Civil War

1920s: Cottage City, Colmar Manor incorporate

1910s: Cottage City, Colmar Manor developed

1925: Peace Cross Finished

1921: Fort Lincoln Cemetery chartered

historiography

1985: PG museum closes

1976: US Bicentenial, PG museum opens

1954: US Army Corp of Engineers reworks Anacostia

transportation

1832: B&O RR comes to Bladensburg

1835: B&O RR bypasses Bladensburg

1910: Street car service begins

1921: Street car service ends

1950s: Kenilworth Ave extended through Bladensburg

1972: Kenilworth Ave Bridge constructed

2009: csx rail bridge over md-450 finished

battle

1814: Battle of Bladensburg

2014: War of 1812 bicentenial

1600 1650 1700 1750 1800 1850 1900 1950 2000 2050

Figure 2_timeline [Fischer]

and subsequently exported [fig.3].   At the time, the Anacostia River was navigable by ocean worthy ships. The brackish port at Bladensburg, where salty seawater meets freshwater from upstream, was just south of where the river became too shallow for such vessels.   This fact that Bladensburg was founded to serve as a port for the export of tobacco is reinforced by the state government's designation of the town as one of the few official tobacco inspection stations in 1784 to ensure the quality of tobacco exported from Maryland. The nature of the river orchestrated the siting of the town, just as the nature of the river has continued to define the town ever since. While it dates back to before the industrial revolution and the formation of contemporary mass-production conceptions of industry, the town gained an industrial flavor due to its port function. This industrial ethos remains to this day. The most notable industry during the functioning port era was the rope walk operated by Thomas Lowndes, an early Bladensburg power player also behind the construction of Bostwick and Market Master's Houses (see 1.B.2_Historic Fabric).

   *TRANSITION*_Various forces combined to toll the death knell for the Port of Bladensburg, with the final deep sea vessel sailing from its docks in the 1840s. Both the Chesapeake and Ohio [C&O] canal and the Baltimore and Ohio [B&O] railroad were founded in the early 19th century, providing a means for raw goods from the interior of the state to be brought to port towns for export. Their battle, a perfect allegory of the industrial revolution, was epic with the B&O and rail technology ultimately winning out.

Figure 3_ port of Bladensburg diorama [Fischer]

Figure 4_Ernest Maier Block Company headquarters [Fischer]

Regardless of who won, Bladensburg would have lost. Neither the rail nor canal terminated in Bladensburg nor the vast riches of the American interior were funneled to competing ports in Baltimore and Georgetown. Coupled with these disasters was the silting up of the Anacostia River. The natural process of soil erosion, accelerated by deforestation and soil exposure caused by the explosion of tobacco farming made the port no longer accessible by the deep hulled vessels needed to weather rough ocean waters. Since goods from inland were bypassing the port anyway, no infrastructure projects were initiated to combat this silting. Despite the death of the port, Industry continues play a large role in defining the town. In fact, Bladensburg Industrial Park along Kenilworth Avenue is the face of the town that travelers from the north first experience.   Most of the historic core is used in a light industrial capacity. The most notable contemporary industrial institution is the Ernest Maier Block Company, a successful CMU manufacturer founded in Bladensburg in 1926 [fig.4].

*CROSSROADS*_With the end of the port, the nature of the city drastically changed in many ways, while remaining the same in others. Situated strategically on the primary post roads between Baltimore to the north, Annapolis to the east, and Washington to the south-west, Bladensburg transitioned to a crossroad town. Before trains, planes and automobiles became accessible to average travelers, Bladensburg was one of the resting points for slow travel along the eastern seaport. George Washington, of the eponymous George Washington House (see 1.B.2_Historic Fabric) stopped in Bladensburg at the end of the first day of any travel north from Mt. Vernon

[fig.5]. This crossroad character remains today in contemporary Bladensburg which lies along the commuting route of many in the region. As a result, regional transportation issues have taken precedence over municipal interests, drastically altering the urban fabric of the town. The most significant examples within the historic core of Bladensburg are seen at the intersections of (1) Bladensburg Road/MD-450 and Baltimore Avenue/US-1 Alt, (2) Annapolis Road and Kenilworth Avenue/MD-201, and (3) Annapolis Road/MD-450 and the CSX rail (*See 1.B.4_Transportation).* The intersection of Baltimore Avenue and Bladensburg Road was reworked in the 1950s into a highway system of ramps. Kenilworth Avenue was extended through Bladensburg in the 1950s contemporaneously with the Baltimore-Washington Parkway in order to funnel commuters into city centers. Kenilworth bridges over Annapolis Road, the "Main Street" of Bladensburg, and is accessed via highway style cloverleaf on-ramps [fig.6]. The B&O railroad came to Bladensburg in 1832, but quickly bypassed the town in 1835. Currently the line through town carries freight only, and acts as a bypass around Washington, DC along the northeast corridor. This line is very active, and trains frequently pass across Bladensburg Road. An overpass was completed in 2009 to alleviate backups on Bladensburg Road. These moves all promoted the efficiency of the interchanges and increased the rate of travel through Bladensburg.

*SPRAWL*_Bladensburg was quickly overrun by the expansion of suburbs encircling Washington, DC. As the federal government grew, so did Washington. By the turn of

Figure 5_ painting of George Washington House [Fischer]

Figure 6_Bridges over Annapolis Road [Fischer]

the 20th century, the city had expanded well beyond its L'Enfant plan origins,

necessitating the McMillen Commission Plan of 1904 to orchestrate the rapid growth.

Situated just over one mile from the district border, sprawl quickly absorbed

Bladensburg, transforming it from a town into a suburb. Across the water, on the

western bank of the Anacostia River what had been farmland was developed in the

1910s, and ultimately incorporated into the municipalities of Cottage City and Colmar

Manor [fig.7]. Today, nearly all of the land within the Beltway (US I-495) has been

developed, sparing land owned by federal, state or municipal government and

protected as parks. The area directly around Bladensburg is stereotypical post-war

sprawl, consisting of single family tract housing, strict Euclidean zoning, automobile

centered with little public transportation. There is a cohesive street grid, with

connections through different developments.

1.A2_Battle of Bladensburg History

*CAUSES*_The war of 1812 is a significant, yet oft forgotten war in our nation's

history. While the war is referred to the second war of independence, the actual causes

are not so clear. The first proposed cause is the issue of rights of neutrals. Great

Britain, embroiled in the Napoleonic wars for over a decade, was employing a blockade

of goods into the continent. At the same time, Great Britain was also impressing

American sailors (many of whom had ran away from oppressive conditions on British

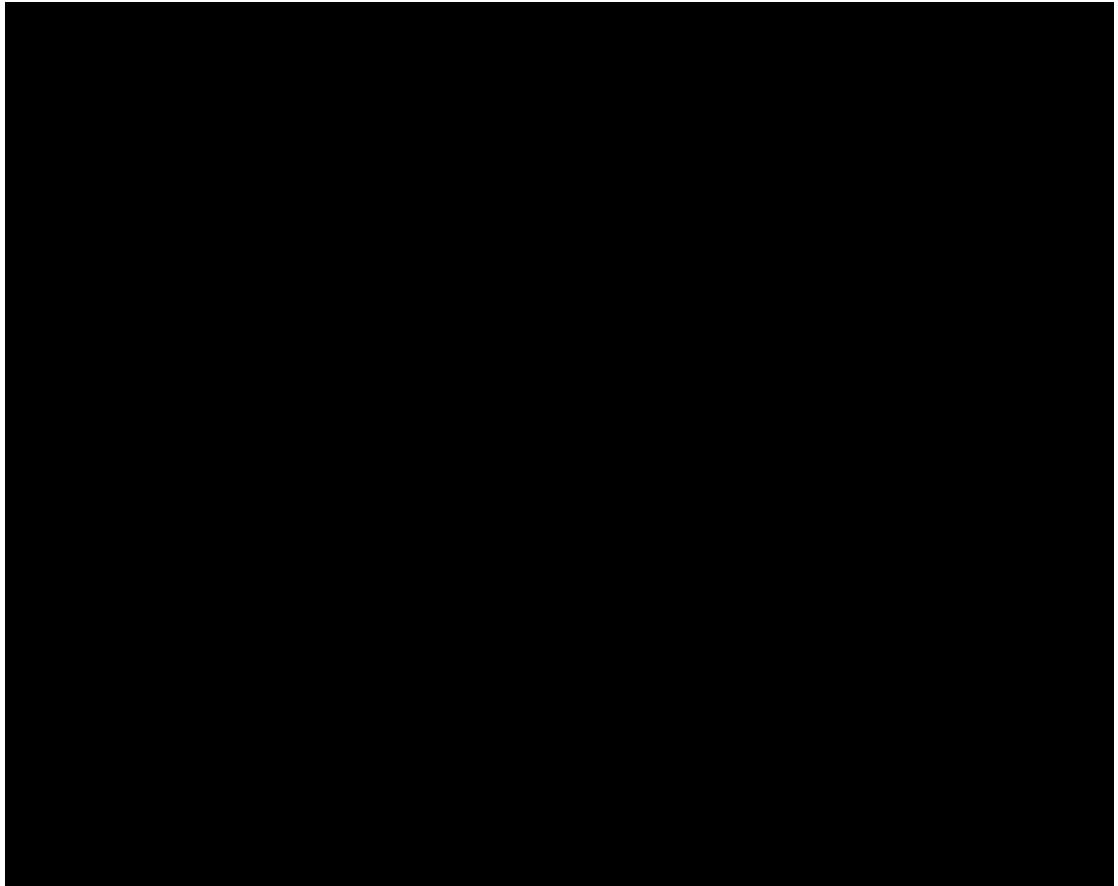ship) into service in the Royal Navy. The second proposed cause is the American

Figure 7_ Suburban Strip on Bladensburg road in Colmar Manor [Bing Maps]

expansionist drive. Efforts to settle the wilderness of the Northwest Territories

(modern Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin & Illinois) were frustrated by the Native

Americans tribes inhabiting the land. The British were proponents of a neutral Native

American state in this territory, and it is widely held that they were providing these

tribes with munitions to resist American westward advances. Less clear is the issue of

American expansion into Canada, where much of the war was fought. Current

academic research holds that the invasion of Canada was for bargaining power rather

than annexation.   A third cause is thought to be the general dislike of the two nations

for each other. Britain still resented American independence, and found American

shipping a potential threat to its domination over international commerce. Americans

also still resented the British, and felt that Britain did not give the fledgling nation the

respect an independent state deserved.

   *RESULTS*_Regardless of the causes, the war of 1812 resulted in little change. The

Treaty of Ghent, signed in December 1814, mandated no geographic or major policy

changes. The context changed during the war and many of the causing issues no longer

mattered. The Napoleonic Wars were coming to a close and impressments were no

longer needed. The British policy of seizing American cargo had been abandoned

months before the war had even started. The Native-American coalition had been

defeated; rendering the proposition of a Native-American buffer state was no longer

plausible. Both sides were sick of fighting and were eager to return to business as usual.

BLADENSBURG _In the spring of 1814, Napoleon was defeated and exiled to the Isle of Elba. With this continental threat nullified, the British turned their attention to the Americans. Irritated by the American invasion of Canada, and its burning of many Canadian cities, the British now sought to bring the fight onto American soil. In what is referred to the as the Chesapeake Campaign, the British sailed a fleet into the bay, wrecking havoc along coastal towns. One of the primary defenders of the area was Commodore Joshua Barney and his fleet of gun boats. In August of 1814, British General Robert Ross and Admiral George Cockburn set out to destroy Barney's Flotilla. Barney sought refuge in the Patuxent River, and the British followed. On August 19th, 1814 a British fleet of 38 ships laid anchor at Benedict, MD, a small village on the Patuxent less than 30 miles south east of Washington. The American Federal government was wildly unprepared, having been positive that the British would never come near the militarily unimportant capitol. There were no regular soldiers stationed in the capitol prior to June 1814. The defense of Washington was left to General William Winder, a lawyer given command of the ill-supplied and untrained District Militia. His commission was granted due to his political friends rather than any military background. With the British attack evident, Maryland did send soldiers under General Tobias Stansbury to assist Winder. In the end, by August 20th Winder's army of 7,500 soldiers outnumbered the 4,500 British troops. The American forces, however, were

spread out across the region, coming from DC, Baltimore, Annapolis, and Fort Washington. Communication was poor, and the military chain of command was unclear. The meeting point was set at Bladensburg, a natural location. Bladensburg was the crossroad between Washington and Baltimore. The British would pass through here regardless of which city they were attacking. Furthermore, Bladensburg stood at the point where the Anacostia became fordable (although the defenders never destroyed the bridges across the river).

On August 22nd Ross's red coats began their march towards on Bladensburg from its camp in Upper Marlboro [fig.8]. Stansbury was in position on the high ground of Lowdnes Hill, with orders to defend the town, but Winder, who had been following Ross, had retreated back to Washington the previous night. Stansbury was given orders from Secretary of State James Monroe to attack the British troops in Upper Marlboro. He was also given orders to defend Bladensburg if the British came. Stansbury instead decided to give up the high ground and retreat to the western bank of the river. He did not destroy the bridge behind him. By the morning of the 23rd it was clear that the British were moving on Bladensburg. Monroe arrived that morning, rearranging Stansbury's lines so that the rear could not support the forward artillery. Winder, along with other reinforcements, arrived shortly before the British and organized a third line of defenders at a point too far back to support the second line. Winder's final order before the battle began was to retreat via the Georgetown Road in case of defeat.
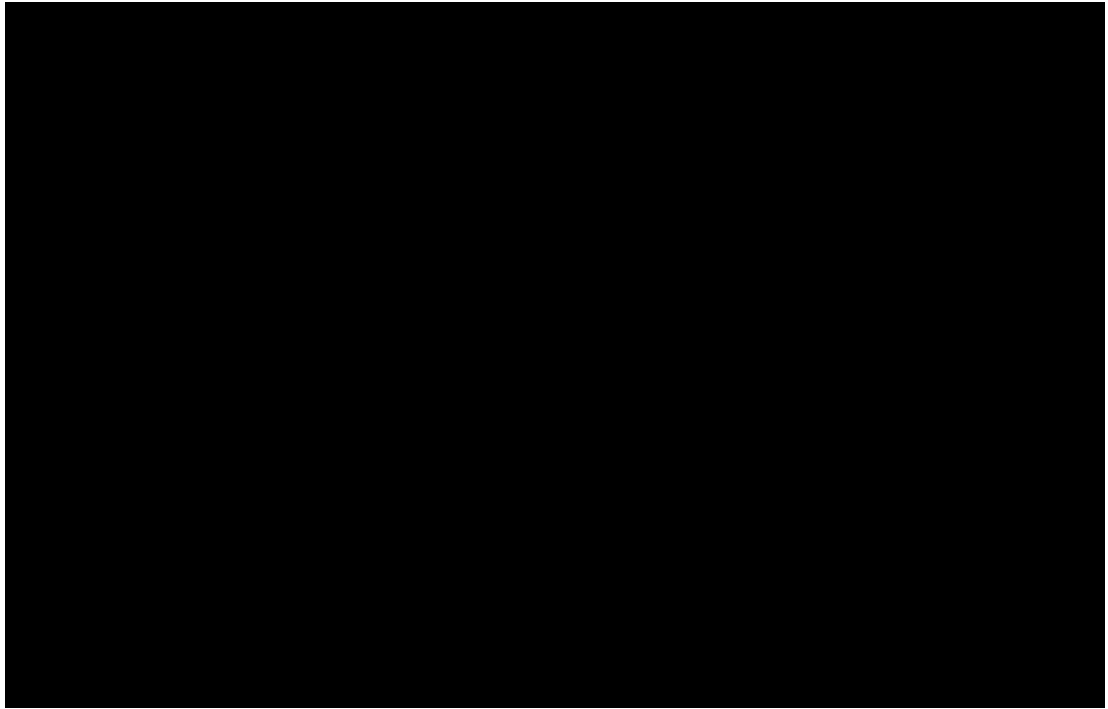
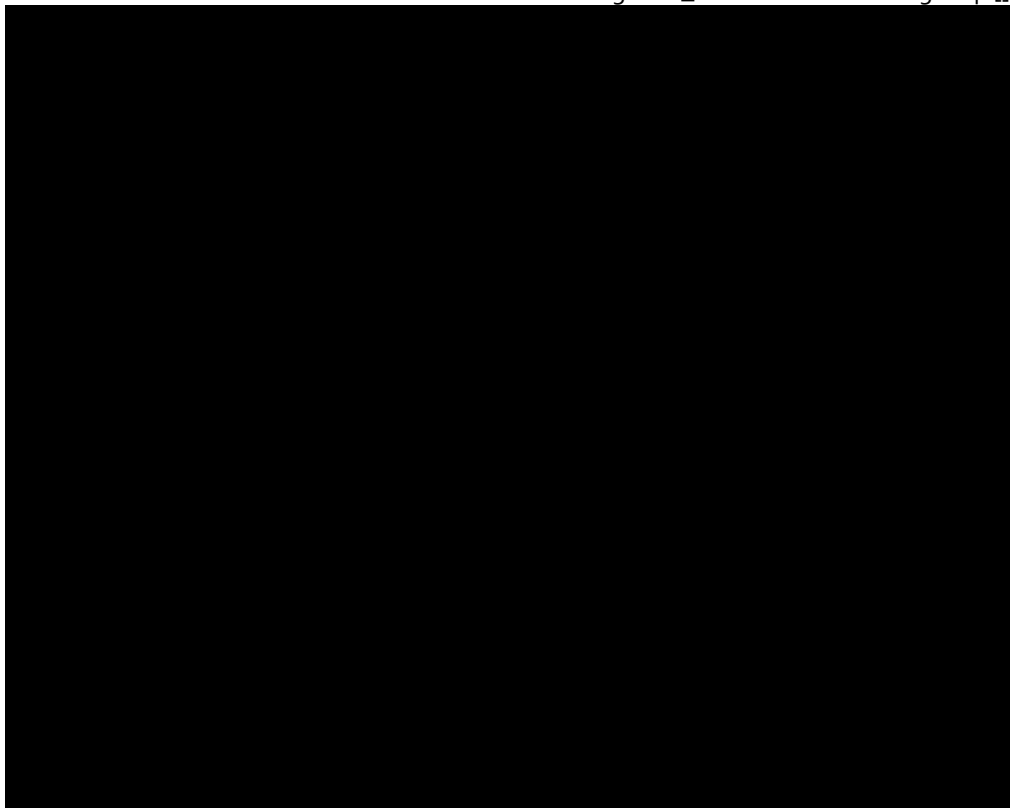Figure 8_Battle of Bladensburg Map []

Figure 9_the Burning of Washington []

Early in the already hot afternoon, Ross's Red Coats slowly moved through Bladensburg, finding it inexplicably undefended. From the high ground on Lowdnes Hill they spotted the American defenders across the inexplicably still-standing bridge on the western side of the Anacostia. The British began their advance towards the bridge, sustaining heavy fire and casualties. While the British losses mounted as they began crossing the bridge, the red coats were able to gain a foothold on the western bank of the river. More British troops forded the river north of the bridge, outflanking and breaking the American's first line of defense. While the British ahead no artillery to support their attack, they did have a new weapon, the Congreve rocket, which they unleashed upon the American second line. The new weapon sent the Americans running before British troops reached their positions. General Winder, President Madison, Secretaries of State, War and the Navy and poet Francis Scott Key, watched this unfold from the third and final line. Fearing defeat the politicians ceded command to Winder and fled to Leesburg, Virginia. Winder then issued orders to retreat and fled himself. No orders for regrouping were issued, and the forces scattered, with many militiamen simply abandoning the fight and returning to their homes.

Only an hour after commencing, the battle was practically over. All the Americans had fled, save Commodore Barney, who's 500 marines remained on the district line to confront the British. They had the higher ground, fought nobly, and held for two advances before being outflanked by British. Barney was shot in the hip, and seeing his inevitable defeat ordered his men to retreat. Barney was seen as a noble warrior, given

medical care and commended for his bravery by the victorious British troops. Tradition

holds that Barney's last stand took place in what is now Fort Lincoln Cemetery.

Memorials stand in the cemetery marking the spot. Current historians hold that the

stand actually took place on Bladensburg Road next to, rather than in, the cemetery.

The battle was over. British casualties (8 British for every 1 American) were brought

to a building in Bladensburg (possibly Magruder House) which was being used as a

hospital. After resting his men, Ross advanced on Washington with his freshest troops

and proceeded to raze most of the federal buildings [fig.9]. The following morning he

retreated through Bladensburg, where he picked up the rest of his men, onwards to

Benedict where he reunited with Cockburn's fleet. Three weeks later Ross and

Benedict were defeated in the Battle of Baltimore.

1.A3_Bladensburg Historiography

*BICENTENIAL_*The bicentennial of the war of 1812 is not Bladensburg's first foray

into historic interpretation. In1972, in preparation of the 1976 bicentennial of American

independence, the run-down George Washington House was purchased by the Prince

George's Jaycees, a local community service group with the intention of a renovation to

transform the tavern into a Prince George's County history museum [fig.10]. The

renovation was predicated on restoring the building to accurately recreate its original

18th century state. The focal piece of this re-created space was a series of seven large

dioramas, 3 dimensional representations of snapshots in Bladensburg

Figure 10_ 1975 renovation of George Washington House [Fischer]

Figure 11_Historic marker in Bladensburg Waterfront Park [Fischer]

history. Of the seven, one was of the battle of Bladensburg, focusing on British troops crossing the Anacostia onto a pastoral western bank occupied with defending American militia. Financial troubles plagued the museum, ultimately closing in 1985.

*MARKERS*_Although there is no longer a museum space devoted to explaining the area's history, there currently are several historic markers, in the form of plaques and signs, around the Bladensburg region. Nearly all of these are located within the Anacostia Waterfront Park, with notable exceptions being plaques devoted to Commodore Barney within Fort Lincoln Cemetery [fig.11]. Beyond the graphic formatting of the markers within the park, there is little linking between the markers. Between the markers there are no physical or visual connections, such as a map, distinct paving patterns, vertical elements or even references within the text.   Within the park, the siting of the markers has little connection to their topics, often referring to places or events unrelated to either the river or the park.

1.B_Site context

1.B.1_Topography

There are 3 principle topographic factors in the historic core of Bladensburg. The

primary topographic concern is that of the US Army Corp of Engineers levee system

[fig.12]. The system is composed of a levee, a 10' to 12' high earthen ridge, and a

drainage ditch, a 4' to 6' deep water channel running parallel to the river. The second

topographic concern is the embankments formed for the bridges over Annapolis Road

[fig.13]. The Kenilworth Avenue bridge over Annapolis road which steeply rises 22'

vertically in a horizontal run of only 50'. The embankment of the CSX Bridge rises

directly perpendicularly from the ground, held within concrete retaining walls. The

third topographic issue is Lowdnes hill, sited just north-east of Bostwick house, the

current location of Bladensburg Elementary School. This is the highpoint of the historic

core, a strategic value which lead to its impact on the Battle of Bladensburg. The

highpoint across the river approximately a mile away at the peak of Fort Lincoln

Cemetery in modern day Colmar Manor played a more integral role in the battle

[fig.14].

1.B.2_Historic fabric

18TH century structures include: Bostwick House [a], Market Master's House [b],

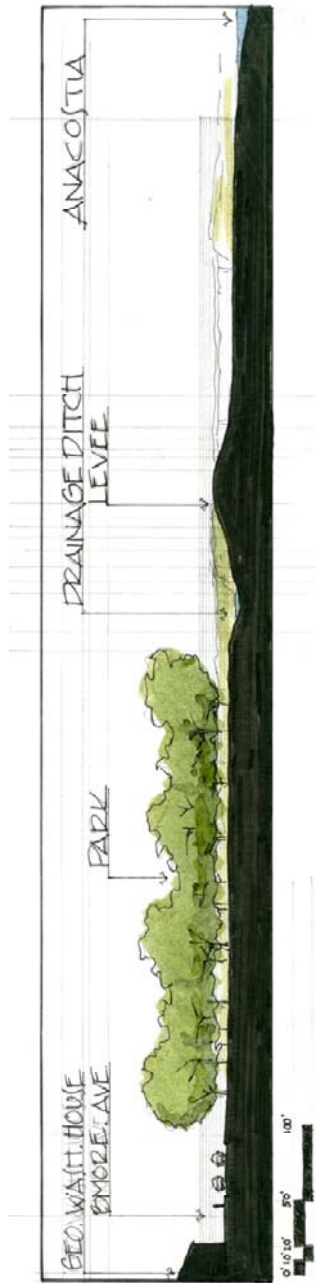Magruder House [c], and George Washington House [d]
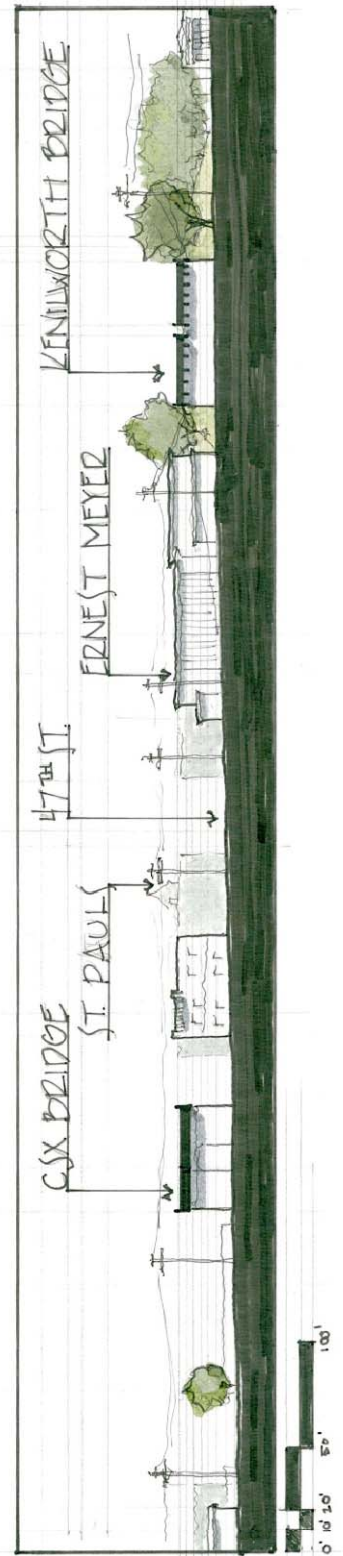
Figure 12_Levee Site Section [Fischer]   Figure 13_Annapolis Road Section [Fischer]
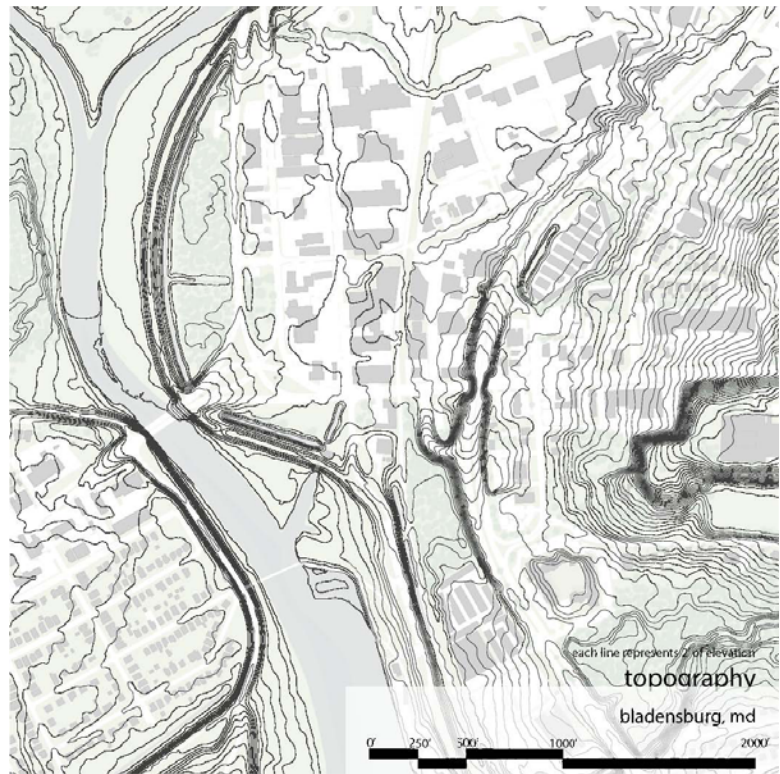
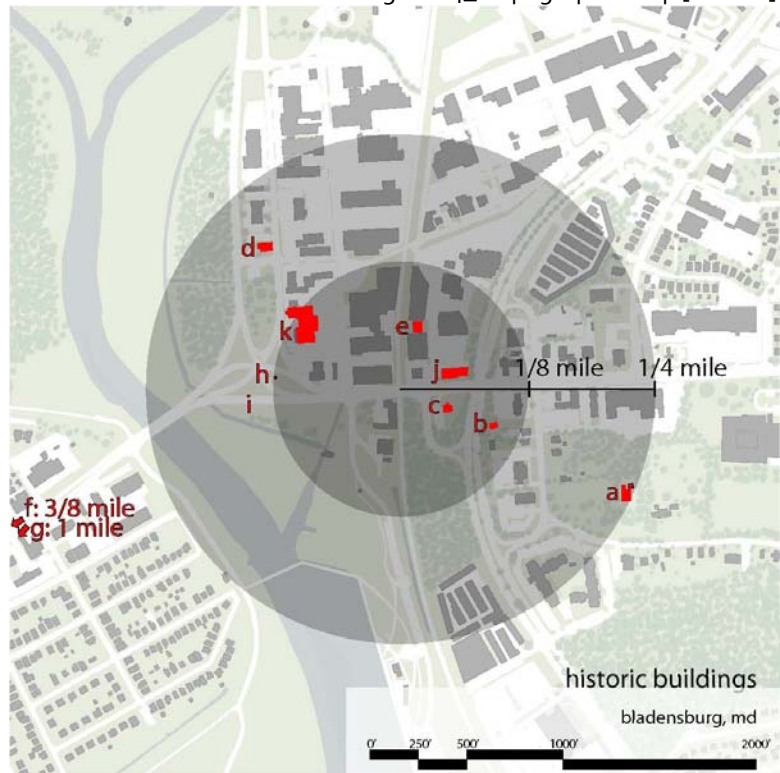Figure 14_ Topographic Map [Fischer]

Figure 15_Historic Buildings [Fischer]

19th century structures include: Saint Paul's/Free Hope Baptist Church [e], dueling creek [f] and Fort Lincoln Cemetery [g]

20th century structures include the Peace Cross [h], World War II and Vietnam War Memorials[i], Ernest Maier Block Company [j], Crossroads Nightclub [k] [fig.15]

Most all of the above structures, excluding Fort Lincoln Cemetery and Dueling Creek are within ¼ mile/5 minute walk of each other.   All, excluding Fort Lincoln Cemetery and Dueling Creek, are within ½ mile/10 minute walk of each other.

1.B.3_Transportation

[figs.16-19]

Highways: Primary highways in the area are the **Beltway (I-495) and Baltimore/Washington Parkway (MD-295) and New York Avenue / John Hanson Highway (US-50).** Bladensburg is approximately: 4.5 miles inside of I-495, the primary highway for going around the Metro area; 1.5 miles west of MD-295, a major north-south route with heavy commuter traffic; and 2.5 miles west of US-50, a major east-west route with heavy commuter traffic.

Arterials: Arterials in the area are Bladensburg/Annapolis Road (MD-450), Kenilworth Avenue (MD-201), and Baltimore/Rhode Island Avenue (US-1). **Bladensburg/Annapolis Road** is an old post road that passes directly through
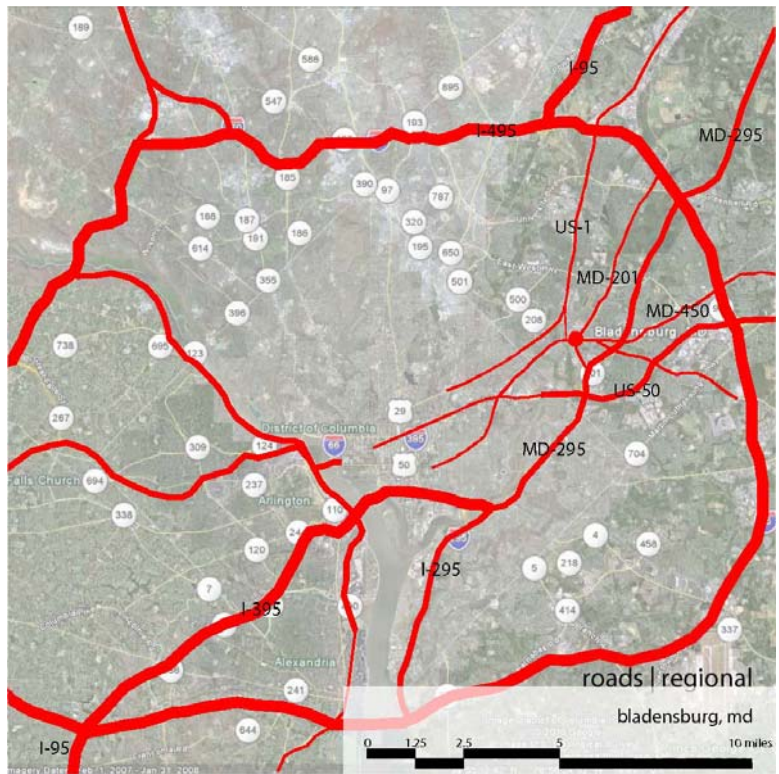
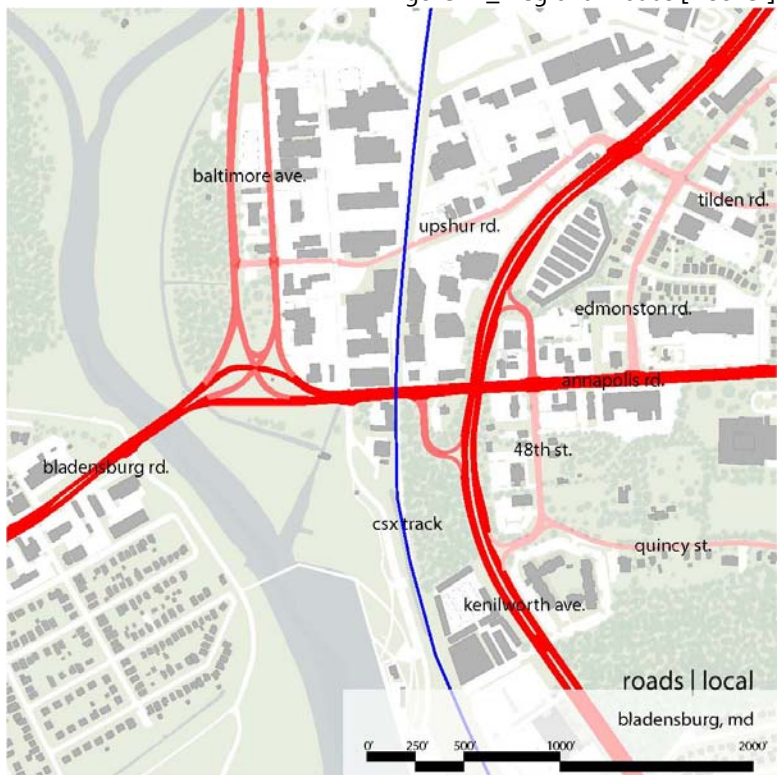Figure 16_ Regional Roads [Fischer]
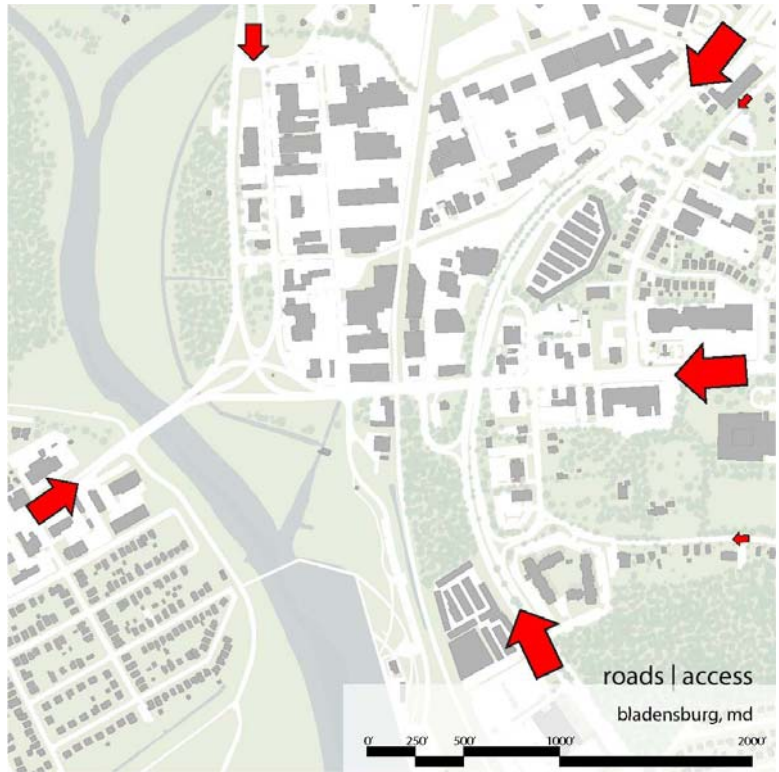

Figure 17_Local Roads [Fischer]

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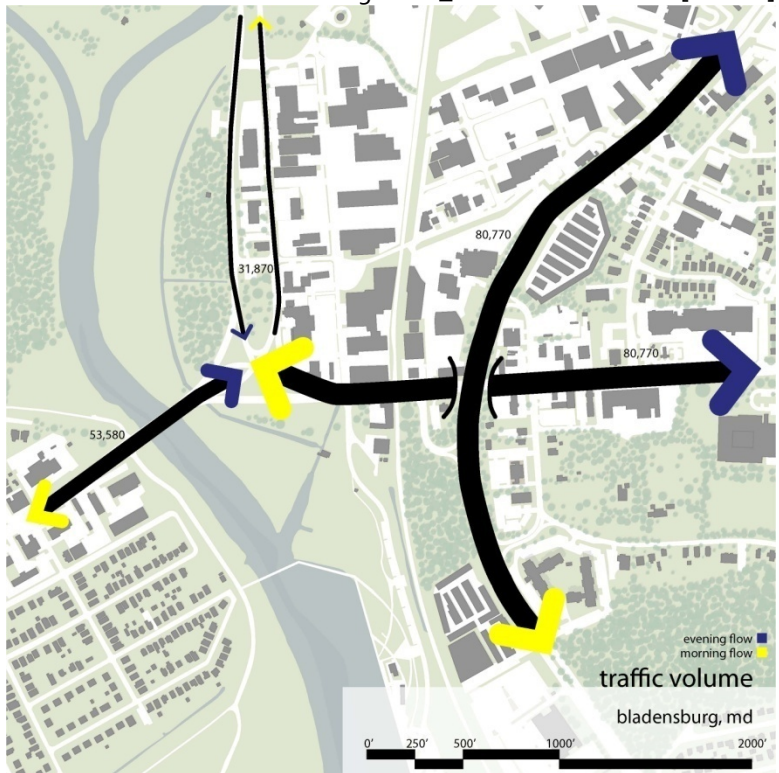Figure 18_ Directions of access [Fischer]

Figure 19_Traffic Volume [Fischer]

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Bladensburg, and has historically served as the town's "main street." It directly connects Annapolis (from the St. Anne's Church Circle) to Washington, DC (where it frames into Maryland Avenue at the edge of the L'Enfant plan), serving as the primary connection between the two cities until the construction of US-50 in the 1950s. **This road is the primary access road for drivers coming from Washington, or from points north** (via MD-295), n**orth-west** (via I-495 to MD-295), **or east** (via US-50). **Kenilworth Avenue** also passes directly through Bladensburg. It is nearly a highway, bridging over the town, accessing Annapolis Road via an off ramp rather than an intersection. This road was constructed in the 1950s as a commuter road to connect the suburbs of Prince George's county with the city. **This road is the primary access for drivers coming from points south** (via MD-295), **south-west** (via I 495 to MD-295), **and east** (via US-50). **It is the secondary access road for drivers coming from points north or north west** (via I-495). Bladensburg is approximately 0.5 miles south east of US-1.

Collectors: Collectors in the area are Baltimore Avenue (US-1 Alt) and Landover Road (MD 202). **Baltimore Avenue** is an old post road that passes directly through Bladensburg, intersecting with Bladensburg Road right before it bridges over the Anacostia to Colmar Manor. It was historically Bladensburg second main street, connecting north to Baltimore. It merges into US-1 approximately 0.9 miles north of Bladensburg in Hyattsville. **This is the primary access road for drivers coming from local points north or north-west.**

Other roads of note: Edmonston Road (MD-769B) is a north south routes that runs parallel to Kenilworth Avenue. It is only approximately 1.2 miles, connecting Bladensburg with Edmonston and to the north and is used primarily for locals on short trips to avoid congestion on Kenilworth. Upshur Road is an east west road connecting Kenilworth Avenue to Baltimore Avenue primarily used for access to and from the industrial park. Tilden Road is an east west road that connects the residential neighborhoods north of Annapolis road to Kenilworth. 48th Street/Quincy Street also serves as a main access route to Kenilworth.

Rail: CSX freight rail passes directly through Bladensburg, bridging over Annapolis Road. Two MARC commuter rail bypass Bladensburg on their routes into Washington. The closest station is located approximately 1.7miles north in Riversdale. A new MARC Station is planned for Cottage City, approximately 0.6 miles to the south-west. The Metro Subway system does not stop in Bladensburg; the closest stations are West Hyattsville Station (Green Line) approximately 2.25 miles to the north or Cheverly Station (Orange Line) approximately 2.5 miles to the south.

Buses: There are 7 WMATA Metrobus and PG County The Bus lines passing through Bladensburg, with mostly running along Kenilworth Avenue and Annapolis Road. These primarily connect to Metro stations [fig.20].

1.B.4_Pedestrian access

The Historic core of Bladensburg is very pedestrian unfriendly. Most buildings are set back from the curb with parking lots in front. Many of the primary streets lack sidewalks entirely. Those sidewalks that do exist are not inviting, limited to 4' in width, and directly against the curb with no grass or trees dividing them from the fast moving traffic [fig.21].

The speed limit on Baltimore and Annapolis Roads is 35 mph, and 40 mph on Kenilworth Avenue. Road design on Baltimore Road and Kenilworth Avenue encourages speeding beyond the limit. This is especially evident at the intersection of Baltimore and Annapolis Roads. Designed like a highway interchange (by separating traffic moving in opposite directions and widening turn radii), this intersection encourages high-speed movement and makes pedestrian crossing extremely difficult.

There are few traffic lights to stop traffic making crossing the street on foot very difficult. Walking parallel to Annapolis road is also difficult. The high traffic onramp to Kenilworth Avenue from Annapolis road also has no signal or stop sign. The rail and Kenilworth Avenue encroach on the sidewalks, especially the tunnel through the Kenilworth embankment.
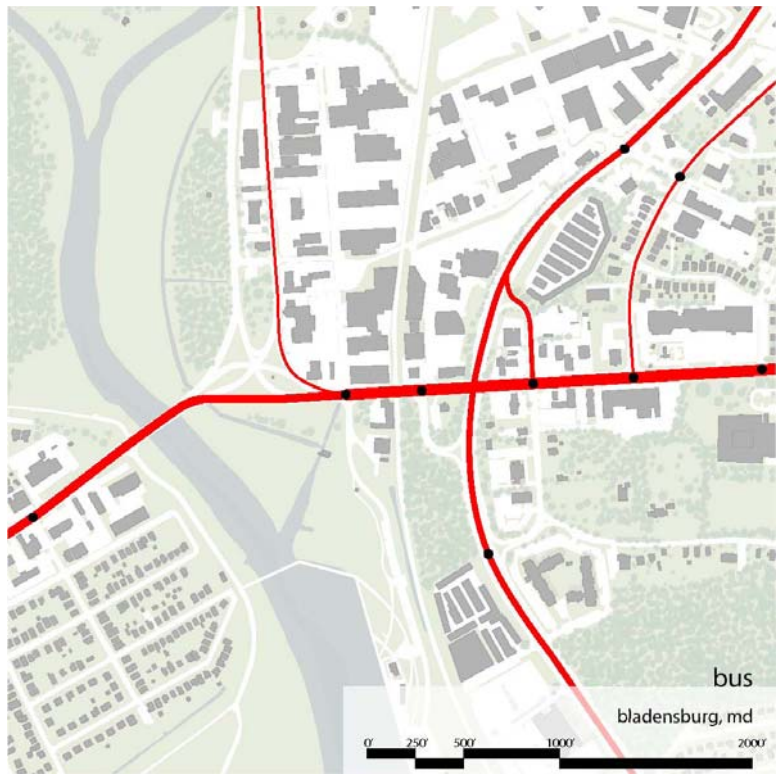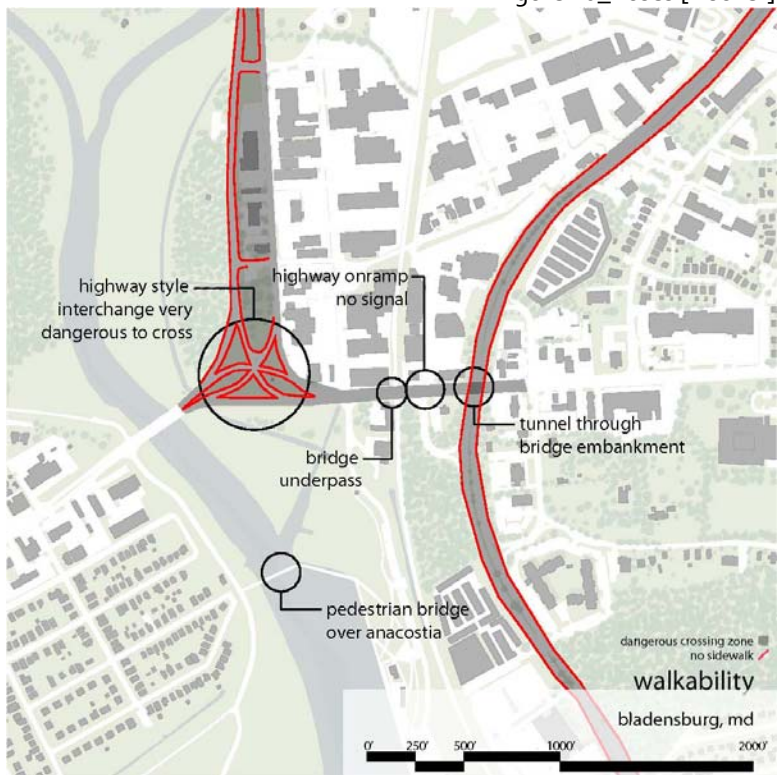
Figure 20_Buses [Fischer]

highway style
interchange very
dangerous to cross

highway onramp
no signal

tunnel through
bridge embankment

bridge
underpass

pedestrian bridge
over anacostia

dangerous crossing zone
no sidewalk

walkability

bladensburg, md

0'   250'   500'   1000'   2000'

Figure 21_Walkability [Fischer]

31

1.B.5_Solar

Solar exposure in Bladensburg causes problems in the summer months. Sun rays coming down at angles higher than 60 degrees and less than 30 degrees south of west should be avoided [fig.22].

1.B.6_Climate

Bladensburg is in a temperate climate, with distinct seasons. The summers are also hot and humid. The winters are on the mild side, with little snow accumulation, and average low temperatures never reaching below 25 °f. Wind speeds are at their highest during the winter. Precipitation and cloud coverage remain relatively consistent throughout the year, with slightly more rain and clearer skies in the summer [fig.23].

1.B.7_Water management

Flooding has been a regular problem in Bladensburg since its inception. With the increasing urbanization of the area in the early 20th century, greater amounts of impermeable horizontal surfaces were created, limiting the amount of water absorbing into the ground, and increasing the amount of runoff draining into the Anacostia. In addition to polluting the river, this also resulted in more flooding. In 1954 the US Army Corp of Engineers addressed the issue with a dramatic reworking of the river [figs.24-25]. The river was straightened, channeled, and widened. Wetlands
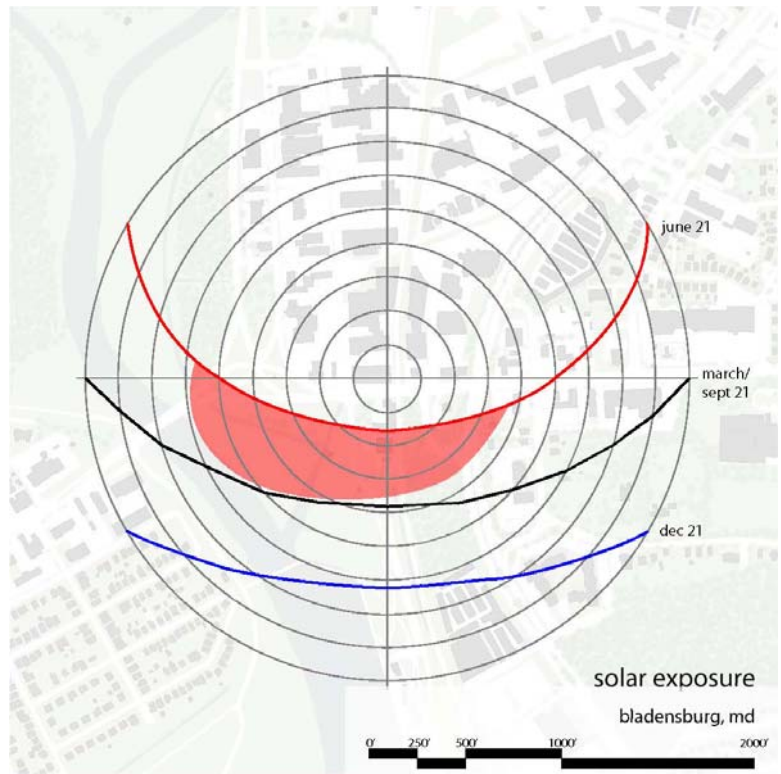
june 21

march/
sept 21

dec 21

solar exposure

bladensburg, md

0'   250'   500'   1000'   2000'

Figure 22_ Solar Exposure [Fischer]

33

Figure 23_ Climate Data [http://www.city-data.com/city/Bladensburg-Maryland.html]
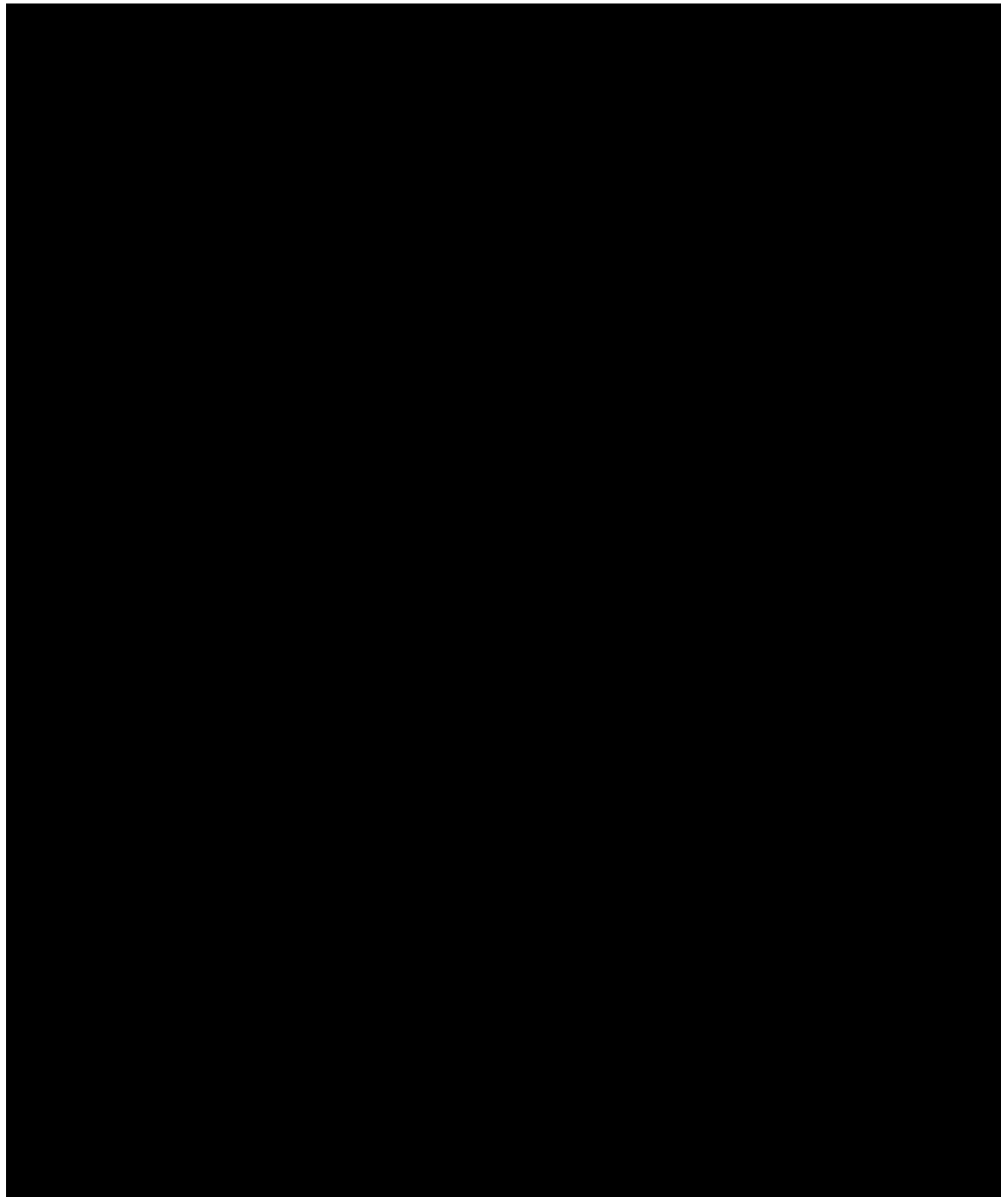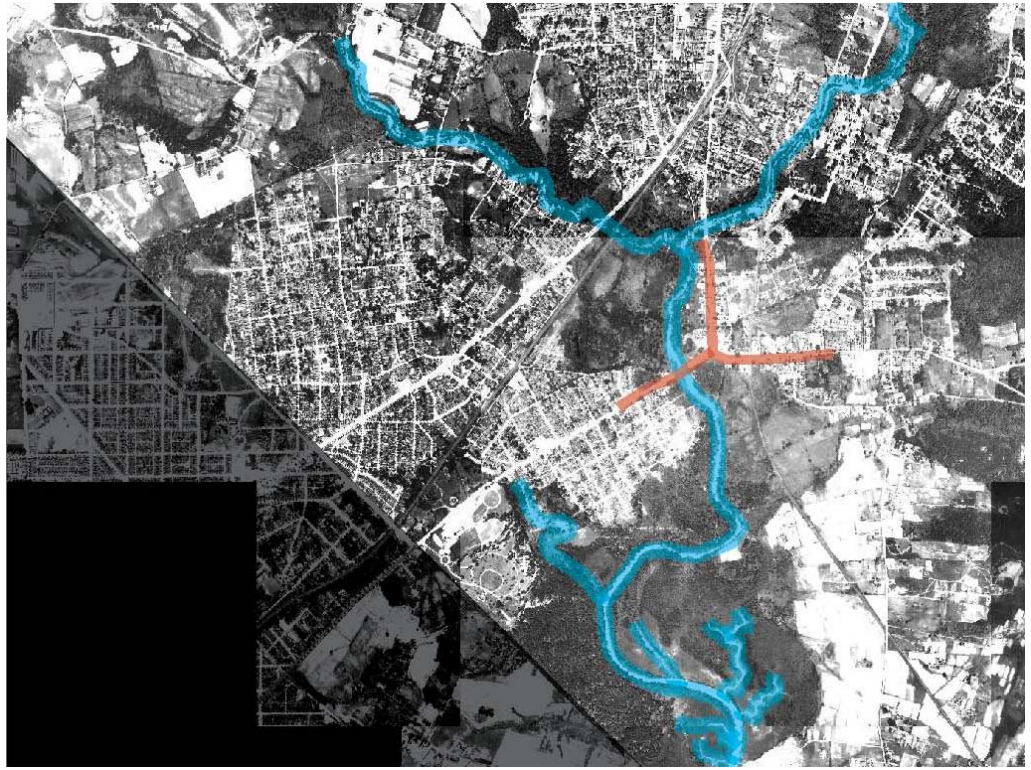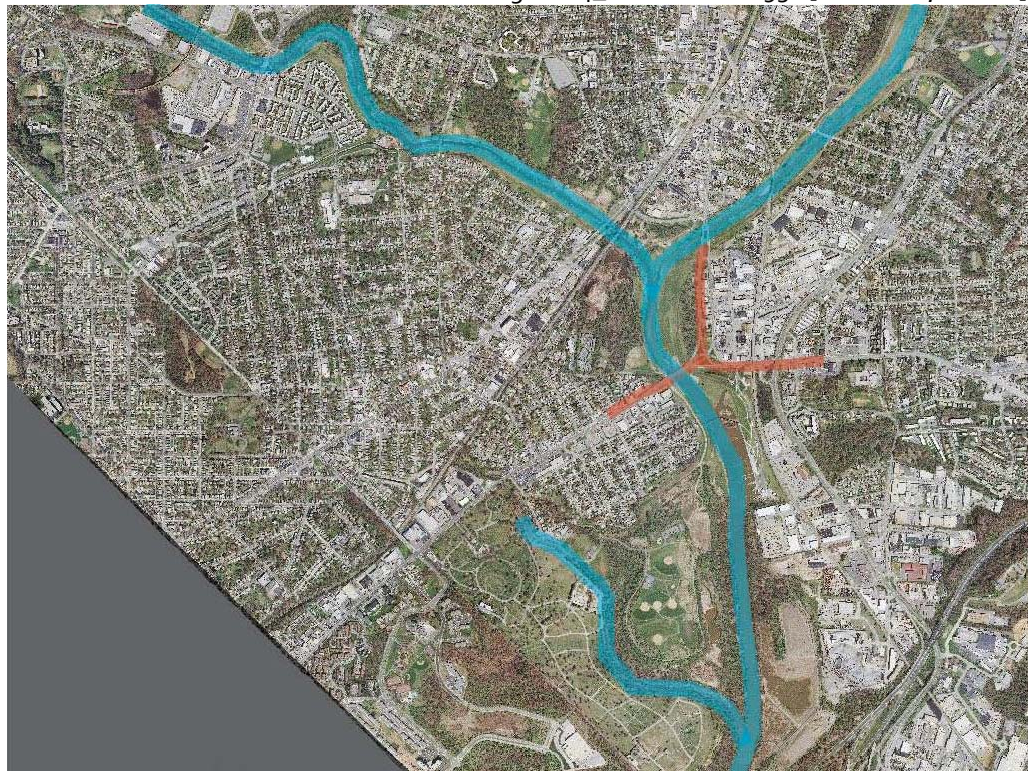
Figure 24_ Anacostia in 1936 [M-NCPPC, Fischer]

Figure 25_Anacostia in 2008 [M-NCPPC, Fischer]

surrounding the formerly meandering river were in-filled, limiting the ability for storm water and other runoff to be naturally remediated. A series of tall earth work levees were constructed surrounding the river, providing a solid physical barrier addressing any flood water [fig.26]. Drainage ditches, coupled with a mechanical pumping system prevent water from being trapped on the city side of the levees.

1.B.8_Environment

The areas within the 100 year flood plain are enclosed by the levees. [fig.27] Wetlands and protected woodlands exist, although they are independent of each other. [fig.28] [fig.29]

1.B.9_Zoning

In general, plots along Bladensburg/Annapolis and Baltimore Roads are zoned for commercial uses. Some commercial usage spills onto Edmonston Road as well. Plots along the river are zoned for open space. The plots between Kenilworth Avenue and the CSX tracks are zoned industrial. The primary industrial park is bounded by Kenilworth Avenue (to the east), Annapolis Road (to the south), Baltimore Road (to the west), and the flood levees (to the north). The residential is primarily low density single family homes, with the notable exception of Kenilworth Towers [fig.30].
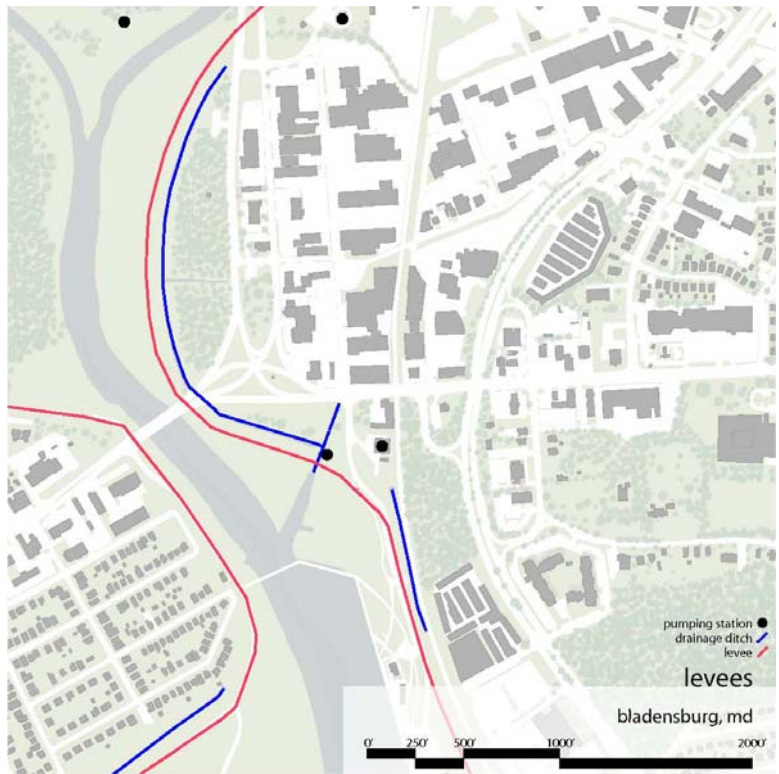
Figure 26_ Levees [Fischer]
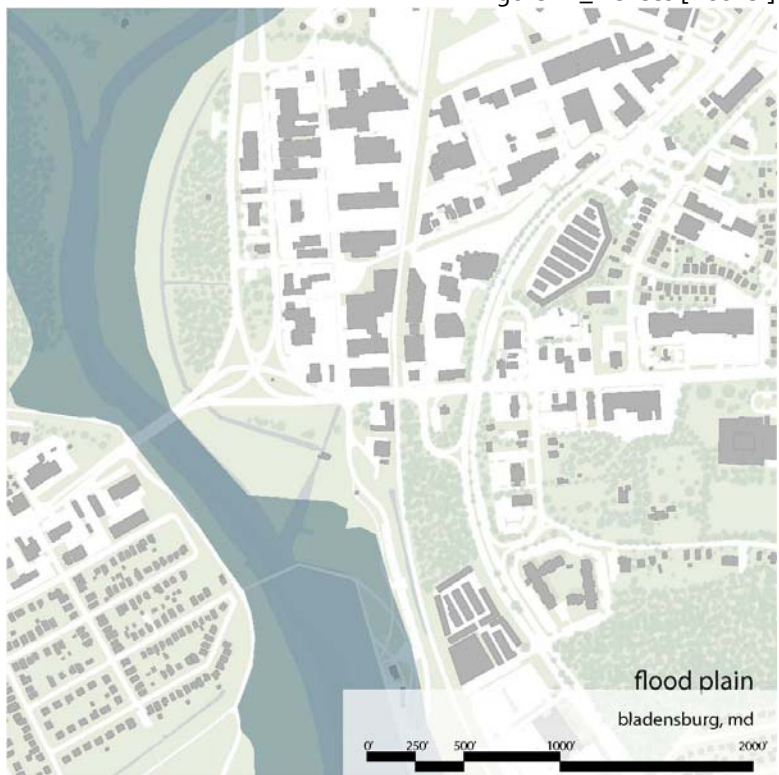
Figure 27_Flood Plain [Fischer]

wetlands
bladensburg, md

0'   250'   500'   1000'   2000'

Figure 28_ Wetlands [Fischer]

protected woodlands
bladensburg, md

0'   250'   500'   1000'   2000'

Figure 29_Protected Woodlands [Fischer]

38

Figure 30_ Zoning [Fischer]

Zoning oddities include the Commercial zoning of the waterfront park, and the Industrial zoning of the wetlands between Kenilworth Avenue and the CSX tracks south of Annapolis Road.

1.B.10_M-NCPPC Sector Plan

In 2009 the Prince George's County division of the Maryland-National Capitol Parks and Planning Commission [PG M-NCPPC] completed a preliminary Sector Plan and Proposed Sectional Map Amendment for the Port Towns Sector, an area of Prince George's County encompassing Bladensburg as well as neighboring municipalities of Colmar Manor, Cottage City, and Edmonston. In this plan they outlined a rethinking of the area in order to promote development. The primary goals were to create transportation oriented mixed-use developments to promote higher density and more commercial businesses, as well as define place specific areas marked by gateway/threshold zones. The most important elements of the plan were the creation of a MARC station in Cottage City, the redevelopment of Decatur Street, the reworking of the intersection of Annapolis Road and Landover Road, and, most directly affecting the site, a re-envisioning of the Bladensburg Waterfront as a central destination point for the Port Towns area. This proposal includes the creating: (1) a lower speed 'T' intersection for Baltimore Avenue and Annapolis Road (as opposed to the existing highway interchange); (2) more effective signalized access into Bladensburg Waterfront Park; (3) a pedestrian friendly civic green focused around the Peace Cross and framed

by retail shops; (4) an entertainment district along Baltimore Avenue (incorporating the historic Crossroads Nightclub); (5) a restored riparian landscape; (6)a nature center on the levee parallel to Baltimore Avenue; and lastly (7) dividing regional from local traffic on Baltimore Avenue [figs.31-33].
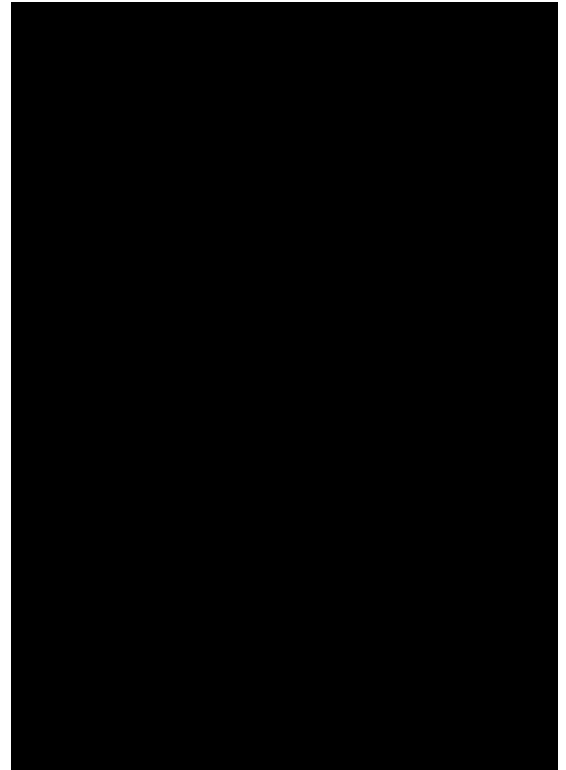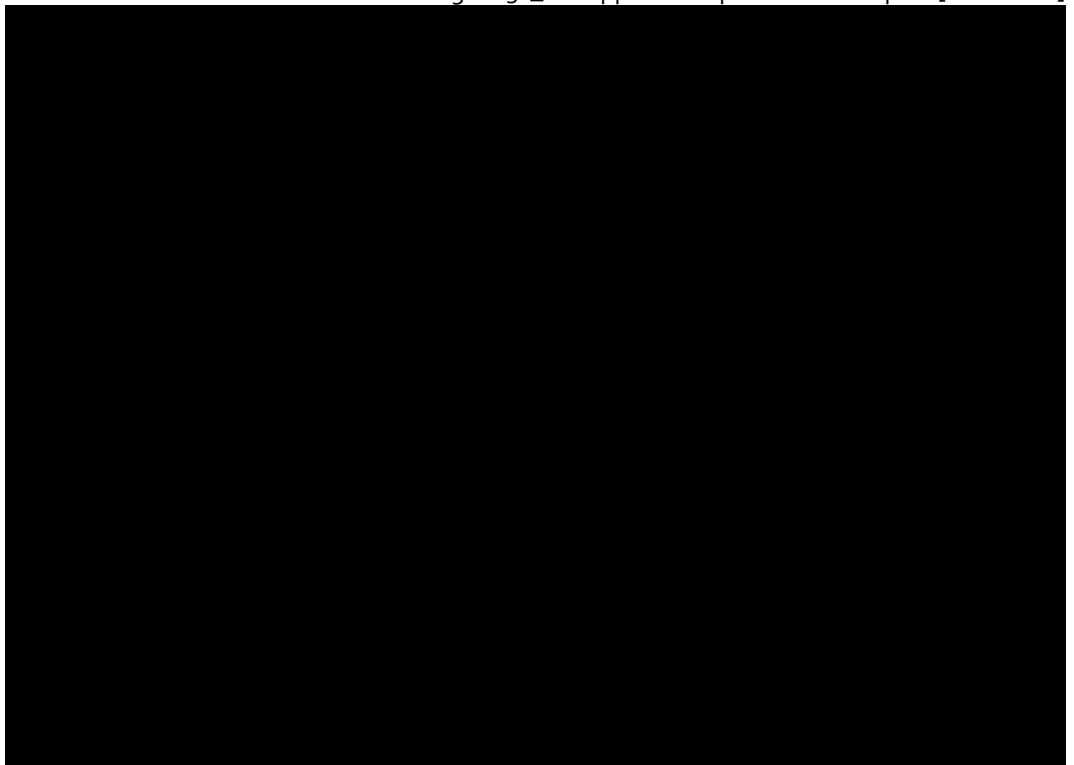
Figure 31_m-ncppc sector plan: rendered plan [M-NCPPC]

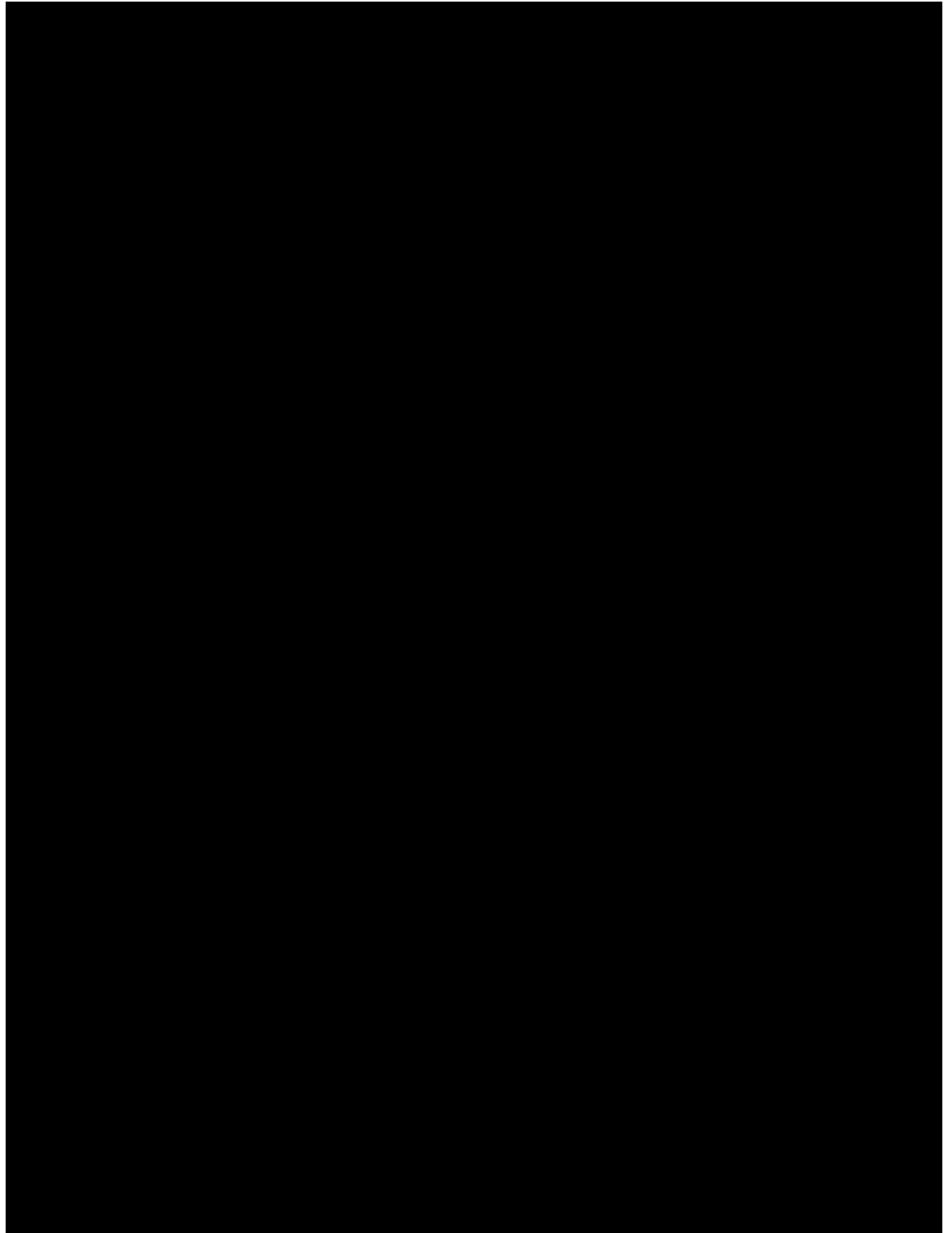Figure 32_m-ncppc sector plan: rendered axonometric [M-NCPPC]

Figure 33_m-ncppc sector plan rendering of town square [M-NCPPC]

1.C_Site selection

1.C.1_Historic trail

This thesis proposes three trails showing the linked histories of the town [fig.34].

The first trail, marked in Red, follows the Battle of Bladensburg, linking sites of historic

pertinence.   The primary trail, marked by the thicker line, is approximately 0.5 miles

long, or a 10 minute walk. The trail extends another 1.0 miles, or 20 minute walk. The

stops are: Bostwick House, Market Master's House, Magruder House, Historic Port

[design site], War Memorials, Anacostia Bridge, (extension stops: Dueling Creek, and

Fort Lincoln Cemetery).

The second trail, marked in Green, follows environmental history, with a primary

trail of 0.75 miles, or 15 minutes, with extensions of 1.0 miles, or 20 minutes. The stops

are: Historic Port, George Washington House/Anacostia Waterfront Society, Nature

Center, Anacostia Bridge, Waterfront Park, Anacostia Pedestrian Bridge, (extension

stops: Wetlands Infill, and Dueling Creek)

The third trail, marked in Black, follows town history, with a primary trail of 1.0

miles, or 20 minutes, and multiple extensions totaling 2.0 miles, or 40 minutes. The

stops are: Bostwick House, Market Master's House, (0.25 mile extension east to Old

Post Office, Old High School,) Magruder House, St. Paul's, Historic Port, George

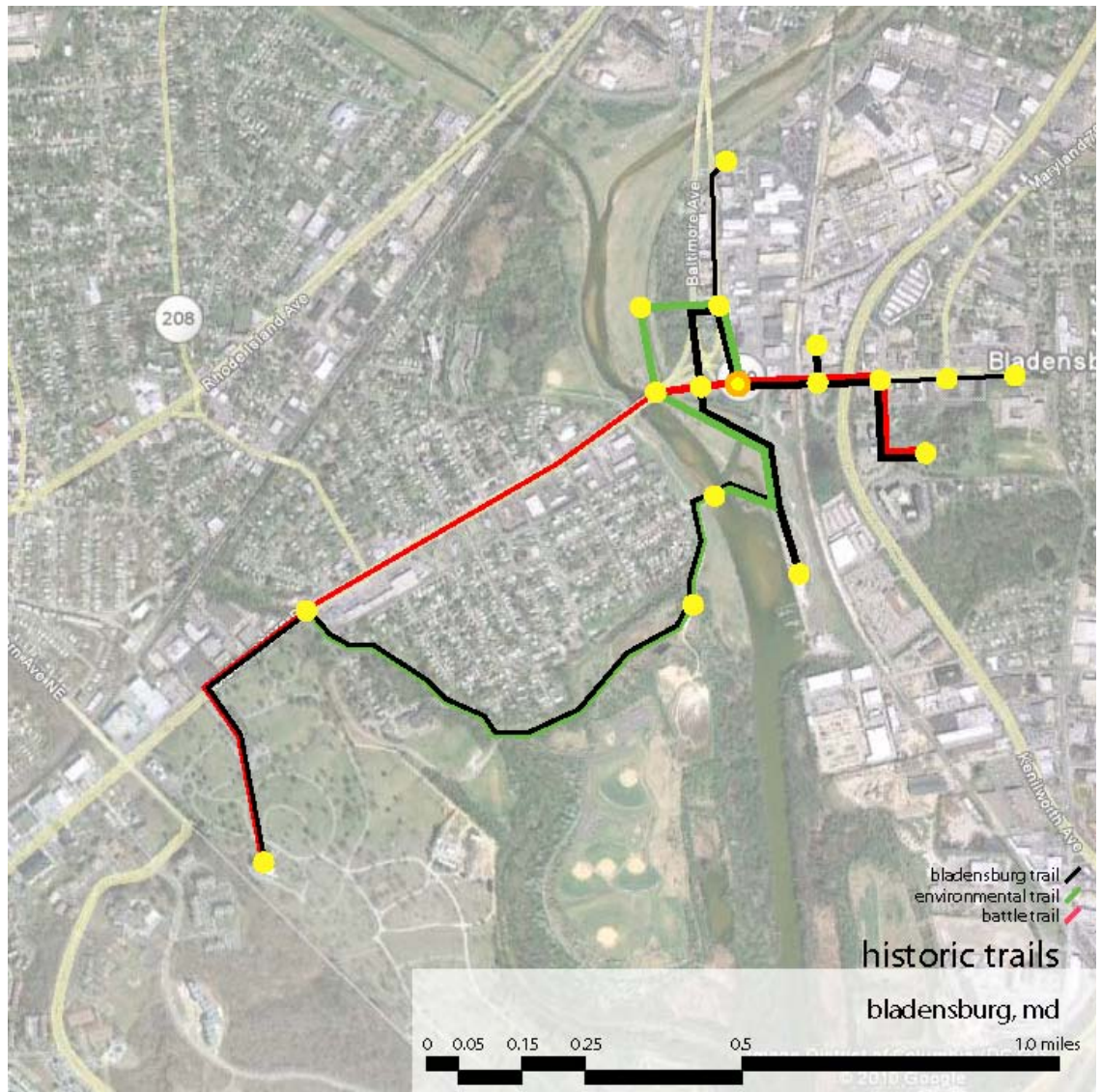Washington House, (0.25 mile extension north to Historic Spring,) War Memorials,

Figure 34_ Proposed historic trails [Fischer]

Waterfront Park, (1.5 mile extension west to Anacostia Pedestrian Bridge, Wetlands

Infill, Dueling Creek, Fort Lincoln Cemetery.)

All primary trails are of easily walkable distance, with longer options for those who

want more. Each stop on the primary trail is within eye lines of the next. The trails

intersect to showcase the intersecting nature of historic threads.

1.C.2_Building Site

This thesis proposes two sites for the interpretive center, both of which will be on

the new civic green proposed by the M-NCPPC sector plan [fig.35-36]. These two sites,

offer distinct advantages over the other sites examined. They are environmentally

sound, located outside of protected woodland, wetlands or the FEMA 100 year flood

plain. They have good car accessibility on Annapolis Road and will be highly visible and

easy to locate for visitors. These sites are also centrally located (1/4 mile or less) to

most of the historic fabric, and the public parks along the water's edge. The site itself

draws on the battle, town and environmental stories integral to the program. They are

on the site of the former harbor, central to the development of the town. They are near

the river, right next to levees, drainage ditches and a pumping station, all at the heart of

environmental issues of the town.   The sites also have a visual connection to the

Anacostia Bridge, an integral part of the battle. By being by the bridge these sites also

offer an opportunity to provide a gateway building to reinforce an identity for the

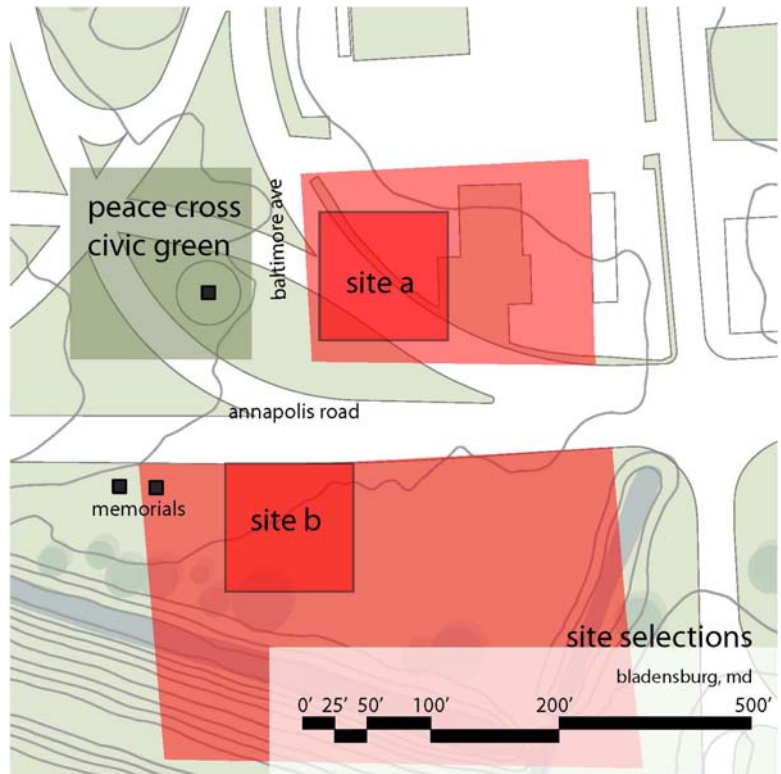community. Both sites share these qualities but, despite

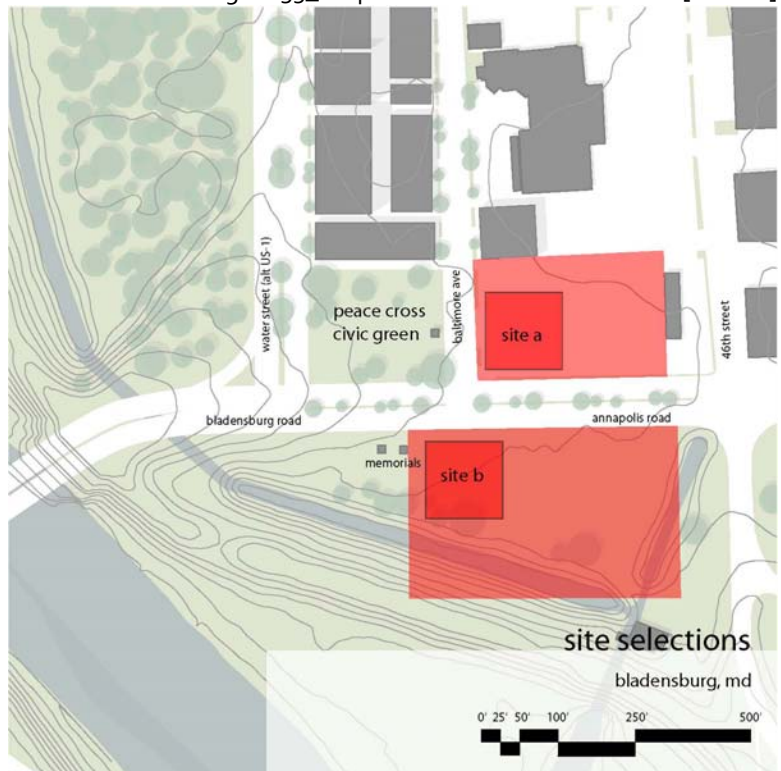Figure 35_Proposed site on current context [Fischer]

Figure 36_Proposed site on proposed context [Fischer]

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being across the street from each-other, they are far from being identical. And each has its own advantages and disadvantages

Site A, on the north side of Annapolis Road, currently is occupied by a pawn shop. As an already developed site it has pre-existing utility infrastructure. Building on this fully paved site here would not increase but rather likely reduce the current amount of impervious surface.   The site is on a major corner, and service access from 46th street could be easily provided by an alleyway. The primary benefit of this site is its location across the peace cross and civic green from the bridge, making it the first building a driver sees when entering Bladensburg along Bladensburg Road, thereby strengthening its gateway building role. Its relative distance from the river is a disadvantage, necessitating more height to gain river views. Its primary facades are oriented to the south and west, making solar gain a large challenge.

Site B, on the south side of Annapolis Road, currently is occupied by a small park composed of a hemicycle of young trees framing turf and benches. This site is within the area platted for the harbor in the original 1742 town plan, and adjacent to the WWII and Vietnam War Memorials, two strong connections to the civic story. It also backs onto a drainage ditch and levee, providing a strong connection to the environmental story of Bladensburg, and easier ability to provide views over the levee to the river. The primary façade is oriented north, providing quality light with low solar gain. The building also terminates Baltimore Avenue, providing high visibility and a ceremonial position within the community.   This site also could provide a stronger street presence

for the entry into Bladensburg Waterfront Park which currently lacks street presence. The site is not previously developed which is a disadvantage, since building here will necessitate new utility hookups and an increase in impermeable surfaces.   Service access to the site will also be more difficult since there are no streets or alleys to the rear.

2_Program

2.A_Administrative
    2.A.1_curator
    2.A.2_rental offices
    2.A.3_docent lounge
    2.A.4_conference room
    2.A.5_reception
    2.A.6_closet
    2.A.7_bathroom

2.B_Archive
    2.B.1_reading room
    2.B.2_archive
    2.B.3_archivist office

2.C_Exhibition
    2.C.1_permanent galleries
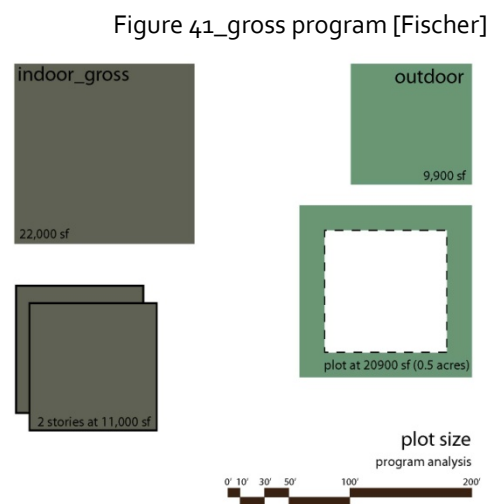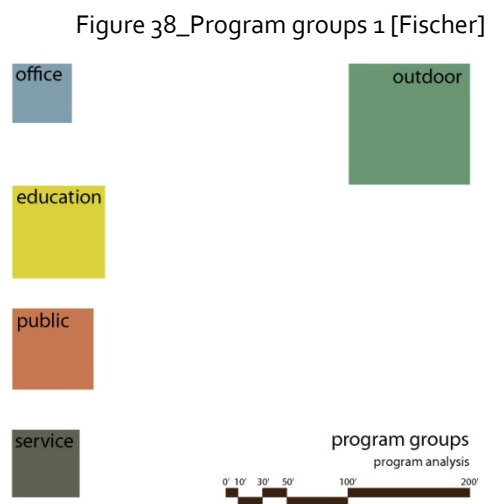   2.C.2_temporary exhibit space
    2.C.3_auditorium

2.D_Public
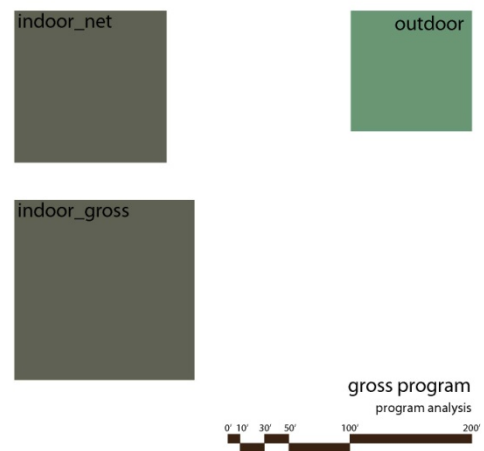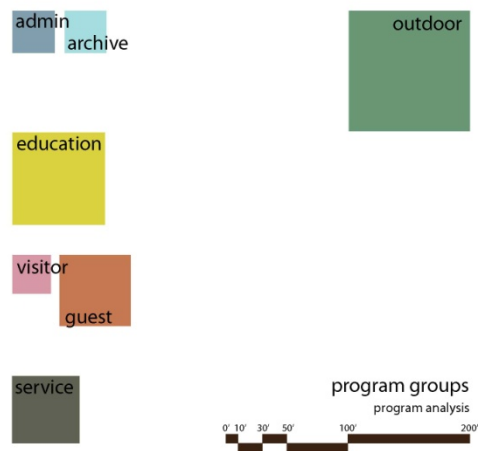   2.D.1_vestibule
    2.D.2_lobby
    2.D.3_information desk
    2.D.4_event space
    2.D.5_meeting rooms
    2.D.6_shop
    2.D.7_warming kitchen

2.E_Service
    2.E.1_bathroom
    2.E.2_mechanical
    2.E.3_storage
    2.E.4_janitorial closets
    2.E.5_loading dock

2.F_Outdoor
    2.F.1_river viewing deck
    2.F.2_wetland experience
    2.F.3_entry
    2.F.4_parking

Figure 37_Program elements [Fischer]

Figure 40_indoor/outdoor program [Fischer]

Figure 38_Program groups 1 [Fischer]

Figure 41_gross program [Fischer]

Figure 39_Program groups 2 [Fischer]

Figure 42_Plot size [Fischer]
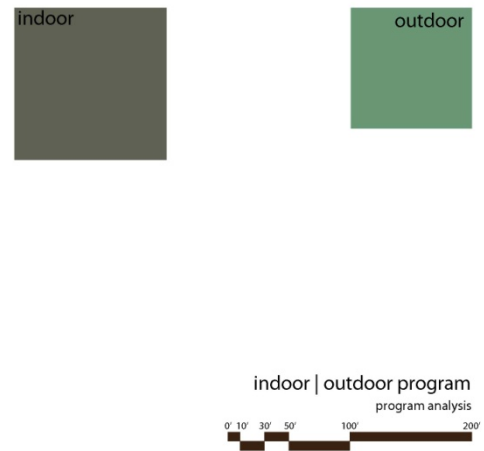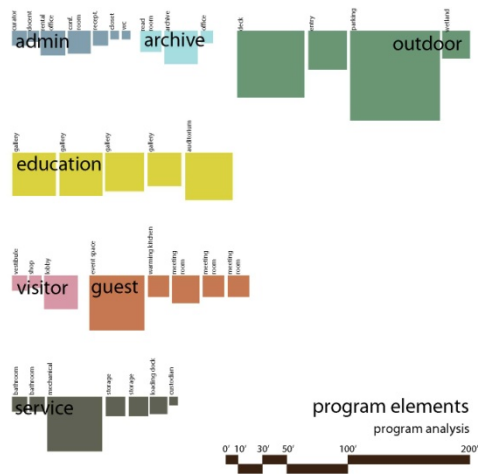
2.A_Administrative – 1205 sf

Offices and support spaces dedicated to the management/operation and promotion of

institutional goals of interpretive center. Private space not open to public.

2.A.1_curator [125 sf x 1]

-office for one curator

2.A.2_rental offices [400 sf x 1]

-office for four workers

-Below market rate rental to local history group (such as Prince George's Heritage)

2.A.3_docent lounge [80 sf x 1]

-space for up to 5 docents

-equipment: kitchenette

2.A.4_conference room [350 sf x 1]

-meeting space for up to 8 people

-equipment: projector

2.A.5_reception [150 sf x 1]

-working space for one support staffer

-waiting space for up to four visitors

-equipment: copier machine

2.A.6_closet [50 sf x 1]

-shared storage space for administrative program

2.A.7_bathroom [50 sf x 1]

-one individual water closet/lav.

_2.B_Archive- 1150 sf_

Study center for Prince George's County history. Primary goal of creating central collection of primary source materials focused on Prince George's County. Uses to include promoting local awareness of history and continuing historical research. Private space open to public by appointment.

2.B.1_reading room [300 sf x 1]

-seating/study space for five researchers

-display for rare Prince George's County artifacts

-equipment: computer workstation

2.B.2_archive [750 sf x 1]

-storage for 5,000 volumes on Prince George's County

2.B.3_archivist office [100 sf x 1]

-work space for one archivist

-visual connection, sound barrier from reading room

2.C_Exhibition – 5750 sf

Primary spaces for public interactive and educational program. Public space open to all

during operational hours

2.C.1_permanent galleries [1250 sf x 2]

-two large galleries with permanent exhibits, one focusing on the cultural/political and

the other the environmental/natural history of the county.

-galleries will be intertwined to highlight the interrelationship of these two typically

differentiated genres.

2.C.2_temporary exhibit space [1000 sf x 1, 750 sf x 1]

-two flexible galleries for rotating exhibits. The exhibit on the Battle of Bladensburg

will occupy one of the galleries upon opening to capitalize on historic tourism

generated by the War of 1812 Bicentennial, and will remain until bicentennial activity

has died down.

-galleries will change bi-annually to encourage revisiting by community members and

engage more topics of interest to a wider audience.

2.C.3_auditorium [1500 sf x 1]

-seating for up to 200 audience members

-typically to be used for movies related to exhibitions, can be transformed into speaking

venue for keynote lectures and community group gatherings.

-equipment: projector, audio, lighting

2.D_Public – 4500 sf

Primary spaces for community outreach/strengthening. Public space open during

operational hours, some open to groups for scheduled after-hour events.

2.D.1_vestibule [150 sf x 1]

-airlock to ensure efficient operation of mechanical conditioning

2.D.2_lobby [750 sf x 1]

-space for up to 200 visitors

-gathering point for large groups, such as school groups or event attendees before

moving onto their eventual destination

2.D.3_information desk [100 sf]

-working space for up to two attendants

-strong connection to entry, visibility from street

2.D.4_event space [2000 sf x 1]

-space for up to 200 guests

-connection to outdoor spaces, and view to river

-connection to entertainment district along Baltimore Avenue

-for interpretive center opening and fundraising events or renting out to individuals or

companies for private events

2.D.5_meeting rooms [500 sf x 1, 300 sf x 2]

-Multiple sized meeting rooms for up to 50, 20, and 10 people

-for smaller lectures or events held by interpretive center, use by community groups, or

rental for private events

2.D.6_shop [100 sf x 1]

-space for employee and 5-10 customers

-must be closable for private events

2.D.7_warming kitchen [300 sf x 1]

-space for catering staff

-staging of service is primary use, not cooking

-equipment: oven, fridges

2.E_Service-3053 sf

2.E.1_bathroom [150 sf x 2]

-easily accessible, but visually disconnected from all non-administrative program, with

primary link to lobby

-for public use

2.E.2_mechanical [2003 sf x 1]

-calculated at 15% of total conditioned area

-private, inaccessible to general public

2.E.3_storage [250 sf x 2]

-for storage of exhibition materials (displays, artifacts, etc.), as well as operational

materials (chairs, tables, signs, etc.)

-private, inaccessible to general public

-primary connections to exhibition and event spaces

2.E.4_janitorial closet [50 sf x 1]

-for storage of cleaning supplies

-equipment: industrial sink

-private, inaccessible to general public

2.F_Outdoor-9900 sf

2.F.1_river viewing deck [3000 sf x 1]

-space for up to 150 people at 20 sf/person

-primary use in conjunction with event space

-preferred western orientation to see sunset behind river

2.F.2_wetland experience [500 sf x 1]

-not necessarily inhabitable

2.F.3_entry [1000 sf x 1]

-room for up to 2 buses to unload at a time

-room for gathering of groups up to 200

-historic trail orientation point

2.F.4_parking [5400 sf x 1]

-room for 20 cars at 270 sf/spot

-2 handicap spaces

- 2 bus spaces (potentially)
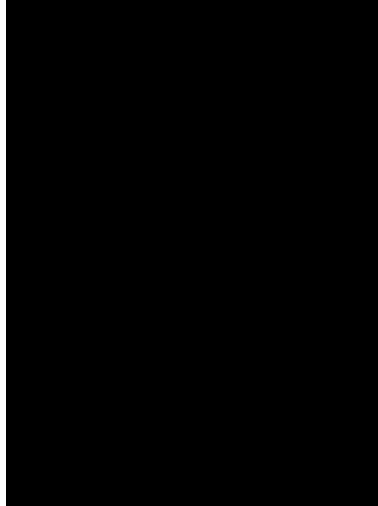
3_Precedent Analysis

3.A _Franklin Court; Philadelphia, PA

This 1972 project, an interpretive center focused on the life of Benjamin Franklin, was done by Venturi, Rouch & Scott Brown in preparation for the 1976 celebration of the American Independence Bicentennial [figs. 43-49]. It is focused on the foundations of the original Franklin house found in the center of an existing city block in Center City. The project is accessed off Market Street by passing through a façade of restored historic townhouses, which house the information desk, gift shop and exhibits focused on archeology and issues tangential to Franklin. Once past the townhouses, visitors enter a landscaped courtyard. At the center of the courtyard are two 'ghosted' buildings, outlining where Franklin's house and printing shop were located in the 18th century. These frames enclose viewing stations to look at the original foundations, the only remaining feature of the buildings. Located on the side of the courtyard is a long trellis, which encloses an outdoor exhibit about Franklin's house, and marks the entrance to the primary exhibit below grade. A system of ramps draws visitors below the courtyard and into a looping enfilade of galleries, leading to a movie theater, all exhibiting information on Franklin, and ultimately to a ramp back up to the courtyard trellis.

Franklin Court also provides an examination of the treatment of an altered landscape in an urbanized area. By creating a courtyard enclosed by tall solid walls as the primary space, the architects try to remove the project from its
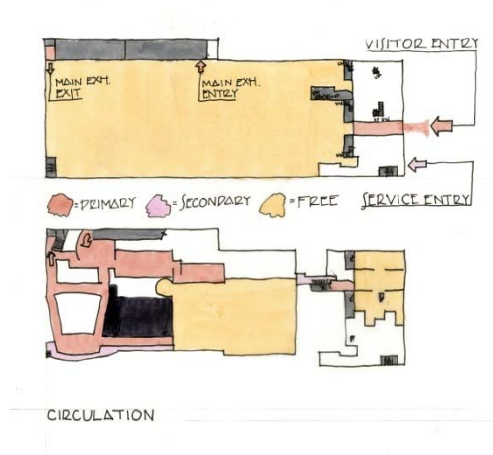
Figure 43_Franklin Court Courtyard [A+U]

CONDITIONED SPACES

Figure 47_Conditioned program [Fischer]

Figures 44 & 45_Plans and Section [A+U]

SERVICE / SERVED

Figure 48_Service/served [Fischer]

CIRCULATION
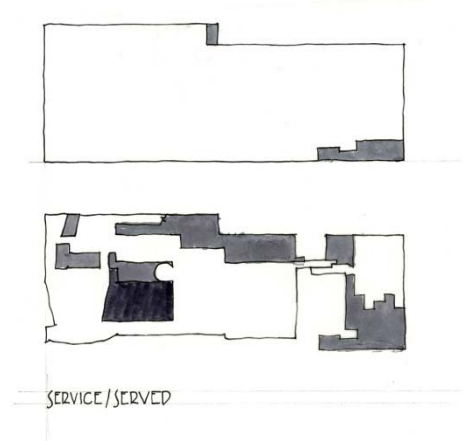
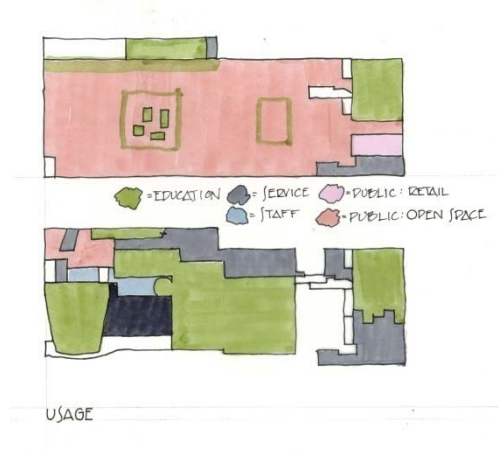Figure 46_Circulation [Fischer]

USAGE

Figure 49_Usage [Fischer]

contemporary urban context, and transport the visitor back to the long gone 18th century context.

Franklin Court also plays with ideas of re-creation and re-presentation. The initial experience is that of re-creation. The townhouse exteriors are restored to their historic appearance, and focuses on archaeological views of what still exists from the re-created time period. The second experience, the courtyard, blurs the line between re-creation and re-presentation, by figuratively re-creating the print shop, house and gardens of Franklin's time. These re-creations are not historically accurate, nor do they attempt to appear historically accurate. Instead they abstractly re-create and re-present the facts that are known to allow visitors to re-create in their mind. The third experience, the underground exhibit, is totally one of re-presentation. By completely removing the exhibition from any visual connection to the landscape and architectural artifacts of Franklin's life, the project gives a re-presentation of Franklin's life, presenting facts and artifacts in an underground vacuum.

Circulation is significant in examination of Franklin Court as well. The underground exhibit has one set route; the narrative is strictly ordered, and the parts cannot be rearranged. The technique of re-presentation requires more prescriptive circulation. In the courtyard and townhouses, the visitors are allowed freedom to look at whatever they want in any order. These are the areas involving re-creation, implying that this technique requires more interactivity and less

prescription. The town houses, complete re-construction, have no clear path through them, and each has their own entrance. The only axis through them, in the basement level, is perpendicular to the primary axis of the individual rooms. The courtyard, where both techniques are utilized has a free circulation, but its rigid lateral symmetry forms a strong axis implying a prescript path The entrance to the underground exhibit, however, is on neither the primary axis or any minor cross axis, implying that some level of experiential and interactive exploration is needed.

3.B_ Monticello Visitor Center; Charlottesville, VA

This 2008 project by Ayers Saint Gross is a visitor center for the house museum Monticello, the plantation home of President Thomas Jefferson [figs. 50-54]. It serves as a mediation point between the parking lot, and the house at the top of the hill, where visitors arrive, purchase tickets, receive information about the Jefferson's life and times, and be taken up to the house in a controlled fashion (ensuring that there are not too many visitors in Monticello itself at any one time). It is organized around a central courtyard, with outdoor covered circulation connecting the various programmatic blocks. These program blocks shift around the center, sliding out to accommodating the pinwheel circulation paths off the courtyard. The section plays an important role, terracing the visitor center into the landscape, placing the more private functions in the lower level, with services

Figure 50_Monticello VC Rendering [ASG Architects]
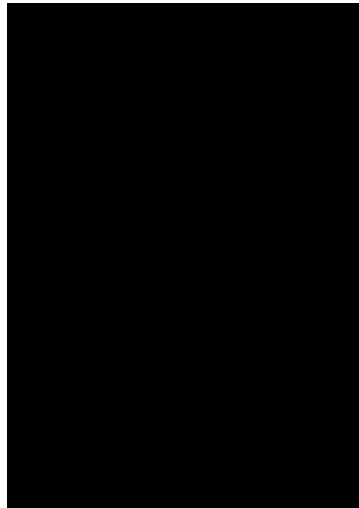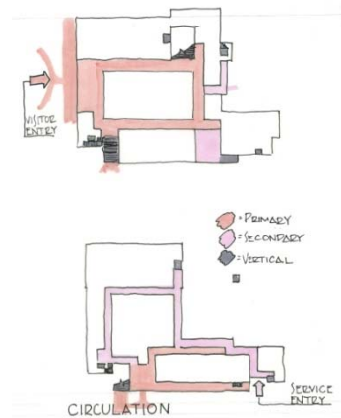

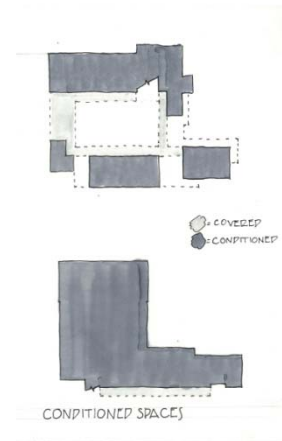Figures 51 _Plans [ASG Architects]

Figure 52_Circulation [Fischer]

CONDITIONED SPACES

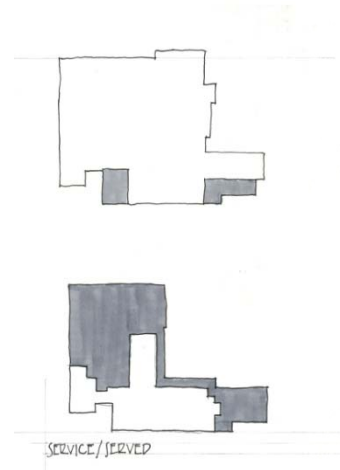Figure 53_Conditioned program [Fischer]

SERVICE/SERVED

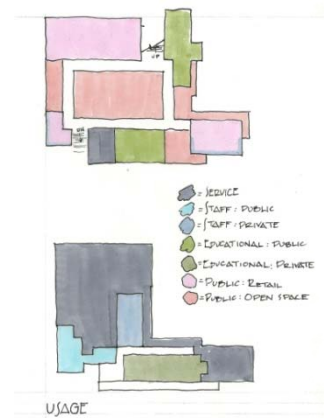Figure 54_Service/served [Fischer]

USAGE

Figure 55_Usage [Fischer]

65

bermed underground. This more private level can be accessed independently of the

rest of the program from its own parking lot at on the lower level. The galleries

move up with the landscape towards Monticello.

Formally, the visitor center does not try to replicate the Neo-Palladian

architecture of Monticello, choosing instead to merge with the landscape that

surrounds the historic site. Just as the visitor center is forming a context for

understanding the life of Jefferson, the landscape forms the context for Jefferson's

home (and all Palladian villas).

The building divides program from circulation, leaving independence to the

experience of the visitor. Each programmatic element may or may not be accessed

along the path through the courtyard up to the house. Circulation space is framed

by columns and roof plane, distinguishing itself from and thereby freeing the other

outdoor spaces as gathering spaces. Programmatic hierarchy is emphasized by the

circulation. The widths of the passages out from the courtyard changes in each

direction, with the entry being the widest, followed in size by the stairs towards the

house, the stairs to the classrooms, and lastly the hall to the café.

3.C_ Homestead National Monument of America; Beatrice, NE

This 2007 interpretive center, designed by GWWO Architects, is located on the

site of the first homestead created under the seminal 1862 Homestead Act [figs. 55-

58]. This interpretive center attempts to tell narratives of manifest destiny and

Figure 56_Homestead National Monument Entrance [GWWO Architects]

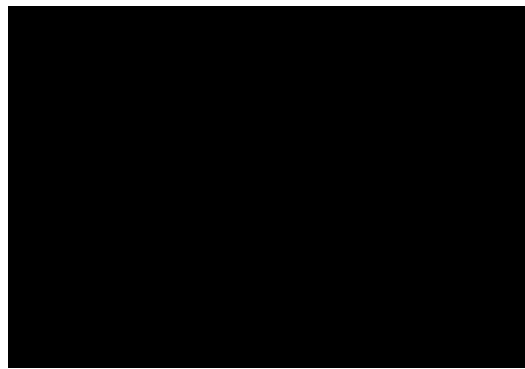Figure 59_Interpretive sculpture [GWWO Architects]
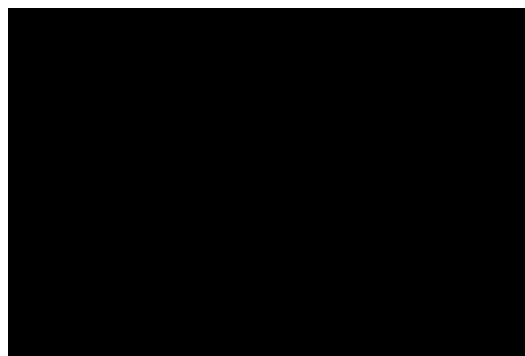
Figure 57_Entrance lobby [GWWO Architects]

Figure 58_Building Prow [GWWO Architects]

man's interaction with natural landscapes. The primary function of the building, beyond providing interpretive material, is to direct visitors onto a view of the westward open plains. The view is celebrated through the sequence of movement throughout the space. The wide expanses are foreshadowed in the parking garden, where parking spaces are centered on a scale homestead plot planted with native vegetation. The entrance to the museum is within a transparent window wall, framed on both sides by solid, opaque, and uninterrupted masonry walls, and funneling visitors onto a framed view. Once inside, the far wall of the center dissolves into a transparent curtain system, open to an overlook onto the wild plains. This view in the background is reinforced by the placement of interpretive material in the foreground. Entering onto a mezzanine forces visitors to stop moving and experience the view before moving perpendicularly to travel down to the gallery spaces below.

The narrative is addressed formally as well. The building reads as a plow or boat crashing into the sea of grasses. The detail and artwork also references back into the narrative. The entrance is linked to the parking garden by a rammed earth wall adorned with steel sculptures. Each of the 50 sculptures is shaped like a state, with a scaled square representing the amount of land settled under the Homestead Act removed from its center. The glass railing panels are accented by images of barbed wire, an invention integral and directly relating to the success of the homesteading act.

3.D_ Freedom Trail; Boston, MA

This trail, 2.5 miles in length connects 16 historic sites throughout Boston [figs. 59-62]. The trail begins at the Boston Commons, where there is a visitor center which gives out maps and sells tickets for guided tours. The primary link between stops is a path of red bricks 2 wide, laid end to end on the horizontal ground plane. In places where everything is paved in red brick, the brick line is framed with granite of approximately the same width as the brick. In some places on concrete sidewalks, bricks are replaced with a red painted line. Points of interest are marked with signs on the buildings, as well as a metal plaque on the ground breaking the red line. The trail is primarily linear, with only three forks in the path, all of which are clustered at the end of the trail in Charleston. Of special interest to this thesis is the crossing of the Charles River into Charleston. There are two visitor centers/ information booths in Charleston at the two ends of the trail after the split.

3.E_Civil War to Civil Rights: Downtown Heritage Trail; Washington, DC

This trail is composed of three separate 'loops,' each approximately between 0.75 and 1.25 miles long [figs. 63-64]. There are connected by a suggested route of approximately 1.0 miles. There is no set starting or end point for the trails. The multiple loops allows for multiple experiences on multiple visits, especially since each is long enough fulfill their own trip. The points of interest are marked with
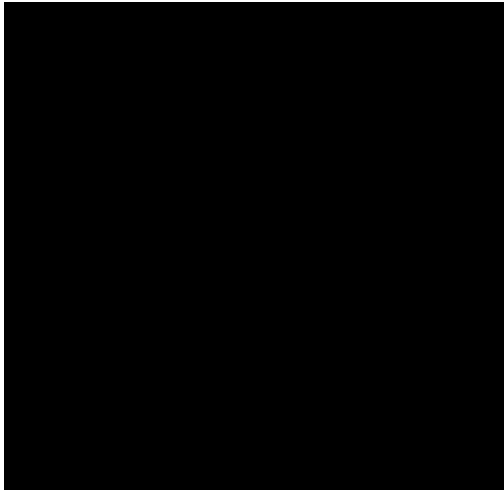
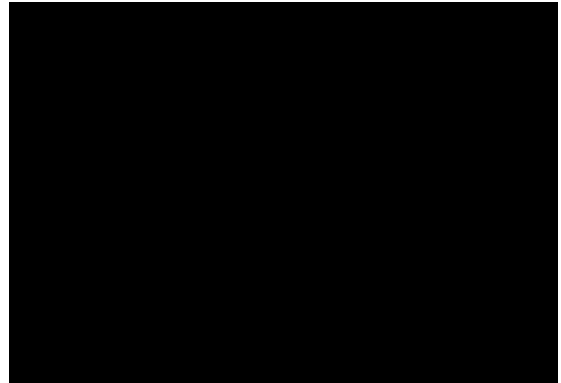Figure 60_Freedom Trail map [City of Boston]

Figure 63_Trail crossing the Charles river [Google maps]

Figures 61_Trail plaque [City of Boston]
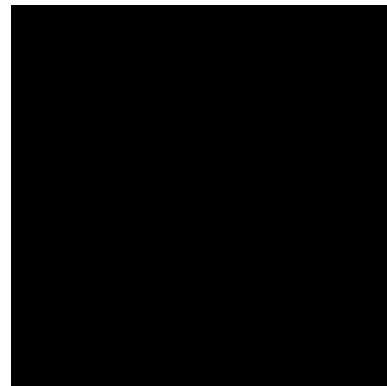
Figure 64_Hertiage Trail [Cultural Tourism DC]
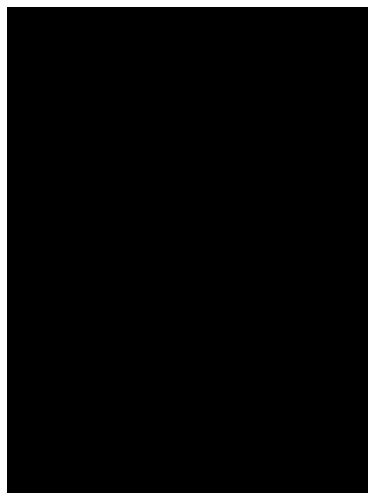
Figure 62_Broken bricks[Flickr]

Figure 65_Interpretive Material [Fischer]

signs on the buildings, as well as graphic vertical signposts which present a narrative

to explain the significance of each stop. The sign posts also provide the trail map,

directing you towards the next stop. There is no visitor center for the trail, but

brochures and podcast audio-tours are available online from Cultural Tourism DC

which created this trail system in addition to others in different Washington, DC

neighborhoods.

4_Design Approach

4.A_Design Problems

    <u>Narrative Architecture:</u> The first goal of this thesis design is to explore the narrative nature of architecture. A building's design can be informed by the stories from which it was inspired. This impact on the design of the building could be seen in its siting, programming, aesthetic, form, volumetric, etc. Furthermore, the building can then turn around and tell this story to its inhabitants through its experiential content. In this manner the building is both informed by, and informative of the narrative.

    The legibility of the narrative is plays a crucial role. The degree and manner of legibility depends on the narrative itself. Two different examples of how the nature of a narrative impacts the needed legibility are Guiseppe Terragni's Danteum, which refers to a fictional story, and Richard Neutra's Cyclorama, which refers to an historical event. The Danteum is inspired by a fictional story, and an allegorical story at that. This narrative lends itself well to the abstract representation which Terragni employs. The story is subtly woven into this project through numerology and circulation. The Cyclorama, alternatively, is inspired by a historical battle, an event lacking in subtlety. Here Neutra employs a more literal technique, taking visitors from an immersive graphic representation and projecting them through explanatory exhibits out into battlefield.

    These examples also show how the intent of the architect effects the manner of representation. Terragni's target audience are already immersed in Dante's literature. For Terragni a detailed knowledge is a prerequisite for experiencing the project;

subtlety and abstraction are tools he employs to weed out the uninitiated. Neutra

intends his cyclorama to be experienced by visitors with a more diverse range of

understanding. Built as a part of Mission 66, the goal of the building is make the park

more accessible to all; the use of more literal techniques assures that all visitors will

take something home from their visit.

These two examples are clearly oversimplified for the purposes of argument. In

reality, a layering of legibilities, each at a different depth of previous understanding of

the narrative, is essential to the success of narrative architecture. To explain this

concept, a direct comparison with literature is appropriate. Just as a good novel unfolds

more and more deeply with each reading, so should architecture. Rather than expressly

stating the lesson as truth, a more nuanced explanation allows individuals to approach

the story from their own individual perspective. By being less of a lecture and more of a

dialogue, the narrative is more accessible and can reach a wider audience. An expert

and a novice should both be able to experience the narrative in a new way in a

successfully executed narrative building. Architecture which allows for different

experiences from different users is inherently non-static, and will be visited again and

again.

The design context for this thesis raises three narratives to potentially be

addressed: (1) the Battle of Bladensburg and the War of 1812; (2) the evolution of

Anacostia watershed, its impact on Bladensburg, and vice versa; and (3) a socio-political

history of the town, focusing on the ways in which its nature has both changed and

remained constant in its 268 years. Each of these rich topics provides more than

enough intrigue to drive an architectural design.

Re-Connecting the Waterfront: Another objective of this thesis is derived more

directly from the context of Bladensburg.   The history of the town is inseparable from

its location on the Anacostia River. The river front, a commercial trade/ industrial draw

in the 18th century, now provides excellent commercial retail/residential opportunities.

Unfortunately, the proximity of the water is not experienced in current Bladensburg.

The drastic flood control measures have hidden the river from the town.   Using this

design to reconnect the town with the water will combat Bladensburg's current

anonymous strip tendencies and help restore the town's original character. This

connection needs to be achieved through a sensory experience with the river, be it the

sight of water, the smell of the river, the sound of moving water, or some actual

physical contact. All of these are currently lacking.

4.B_Partis

4.B.1_Building as Object

This parti centers on conceiving of the building as an object within the town square

[figs. 66-67]. This design attempts to create an amorphous or grouped square in the

terminology of Paul Zucker. In this parti, the interpretive center is based within the

town square, dividing the space into a set of smaller intersecting spaces. In this fashion,

the square would have a series of spaces on different scales for locals or visitors to

occupy in different fashions. To create more of a public atmosphere, the lobby/visitor

center functions would be separated from the rest of the program by an open air

walkway. The second, larger volume would consist of the exhibition and archive

program, while the administrative and rental functions would be moved to one of the

buildings framing the square. In this manner, the cultural elements would be

celebrated in the center of the square, while the more mundane facets could help form
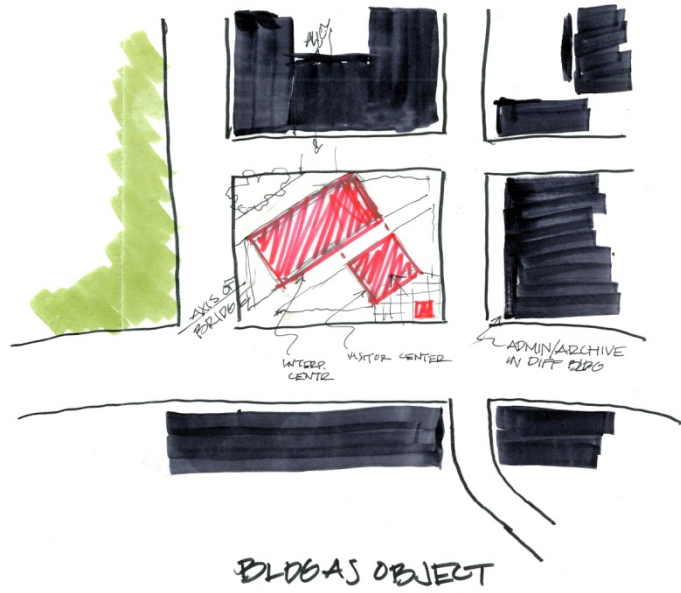
the backdrop.

BLDG AS OBJECT

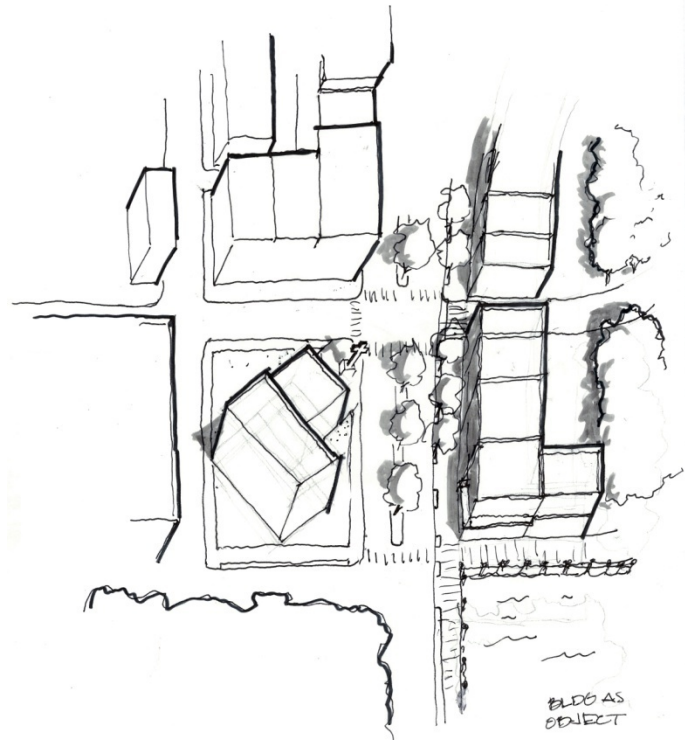Figure 66_Building as object: plan [Fischer]

BLDG AS OBJECT

Figure 67_Building as object: axon [Fischer]

4.B.2_Building as Terminus

This parti centers on conceiving of the building as a terminus or head for the town square [figs. 68-70]. This design attempts to create a dominated square in the terminology of Paul Zucker. In this parti, the interpretive center is aligned on a ceremonial axis through the Peace Cross. In this fashion, the square functions as a forecourt to the civic interpretive museum. The lobby/visitor center and galleries are in a central volume, with the event space in a western wing, and the archive & administrative functions in an eastern wing. The wings are separated from eachother by a covered unconditioned walkway, one of which serving as a drop off point. The symmetric massing of the building reinforces the ceremonial axis through the square. This axis is continued through the building by opening up onto views of the river to the south.
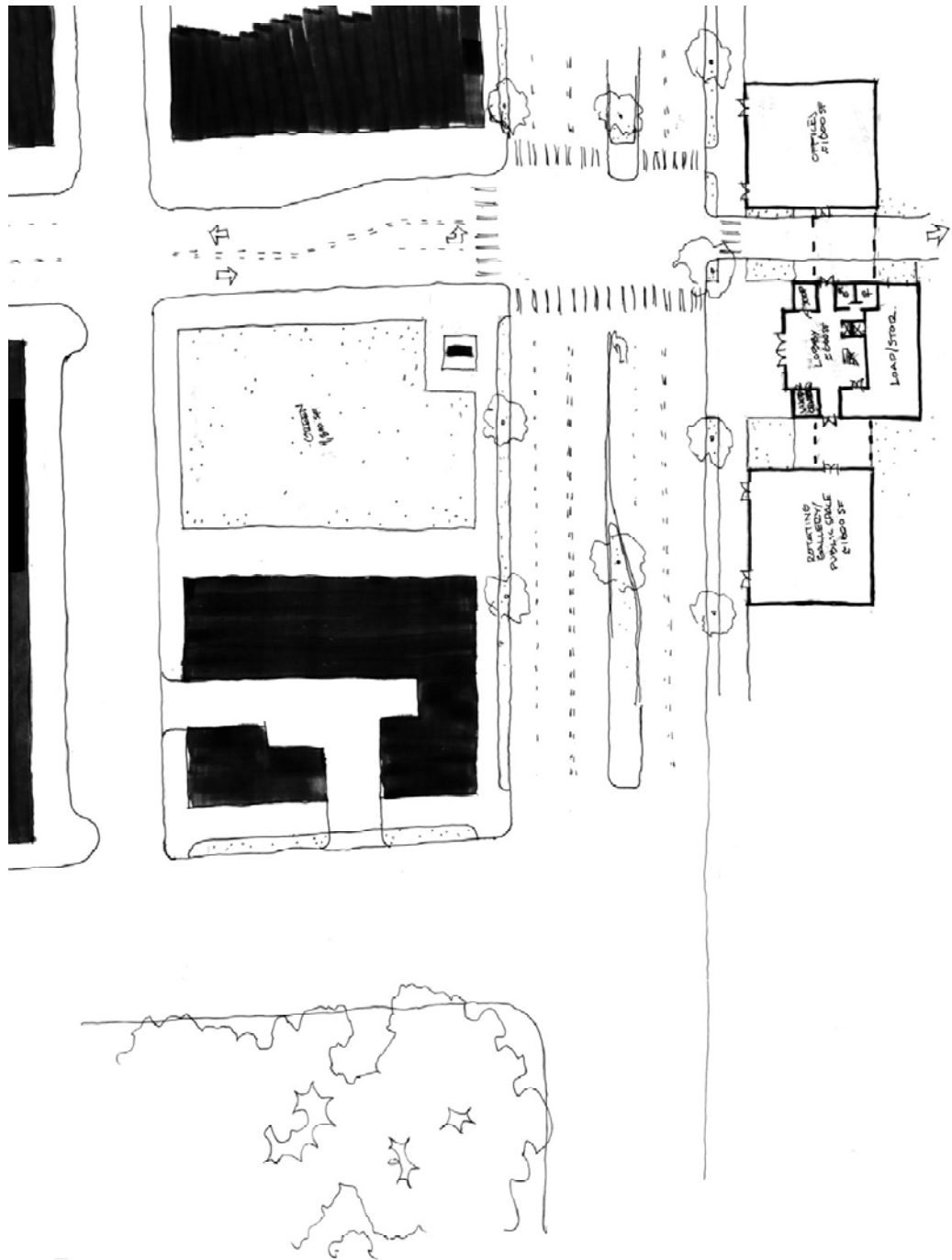
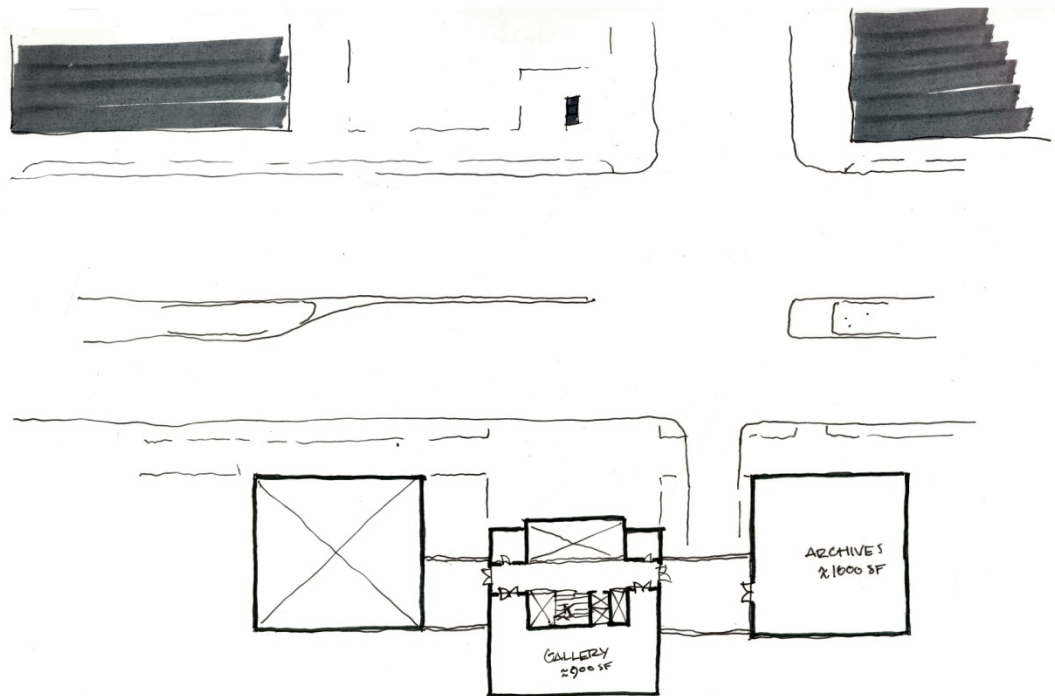Figure 68_Building as terminus: ground floor plan [Fischer]

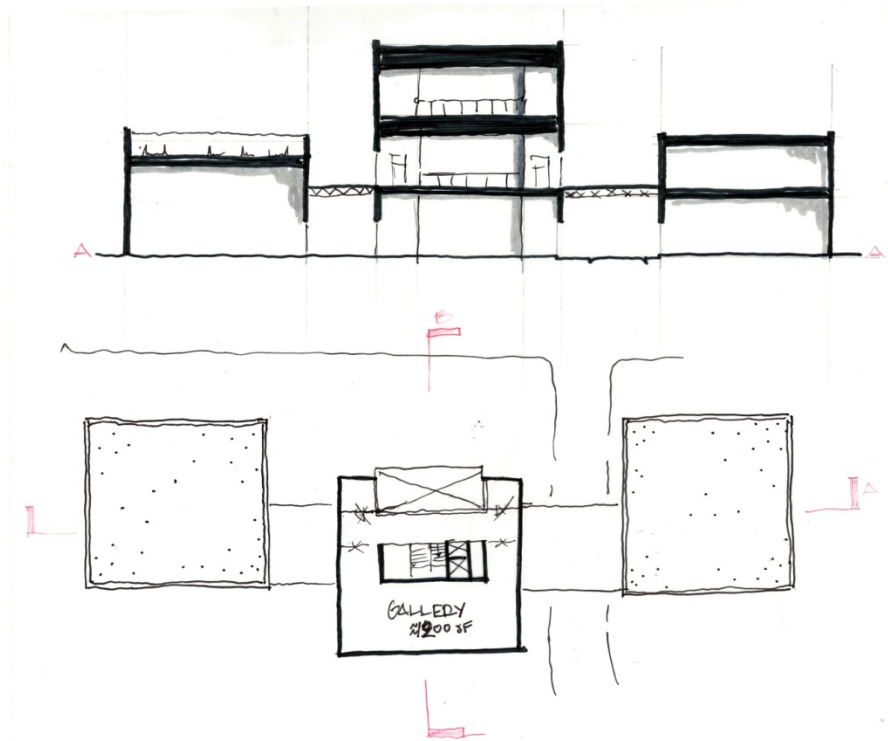Figure 69_Building as terminus: second floor plan [Fischer]

Figure 70_Building as terminus: section and top floor plan [Fischer]

4.B.3_Building as Edge

This parti centers on conceiving of the building as part of the edge framing the town square [figs. 71-73]. This design attempts to create a nuclear square in the terminology of Paul Zucker, with the Peace Cross functioning as the central focus. In this parti, the interpretive center is fronted by rental commercial functions, all rising only two stories, or just below the height of the Peace Cross. In this fashion, the square acts as a focal point on its own. The surrounding buildings serve as walls for the outdoor living room of the port-town community. The interpretive center is accessed through an entryway in line with US1a north (to be made two way). Through this entrance, visitors reach a grand court, cranked onto an angle separate from the grid of the town, and aligned onto the bridge and river. The gallery and event spaces are raised up onto the second level for better views, all organized around this central courtyard.
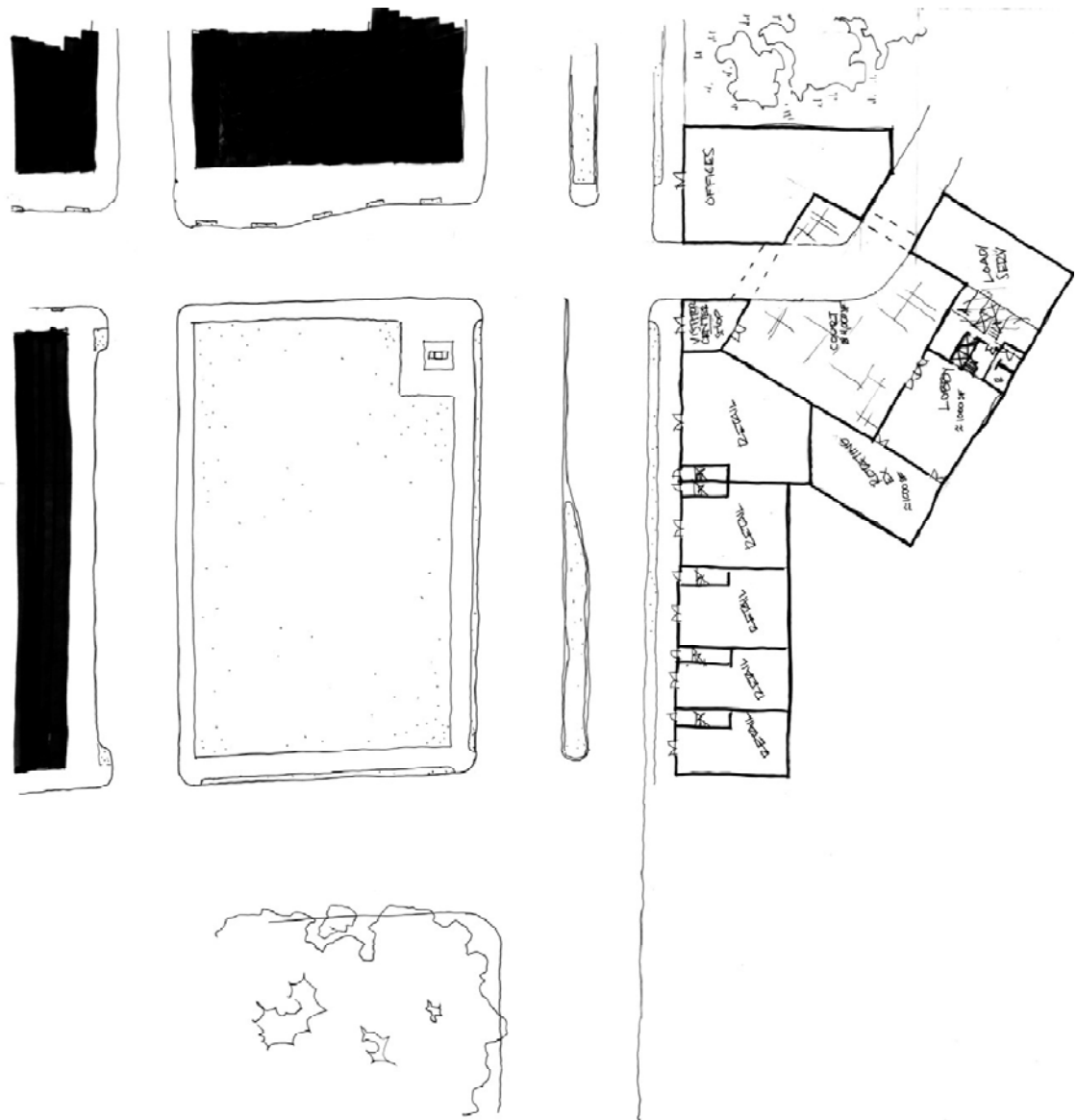
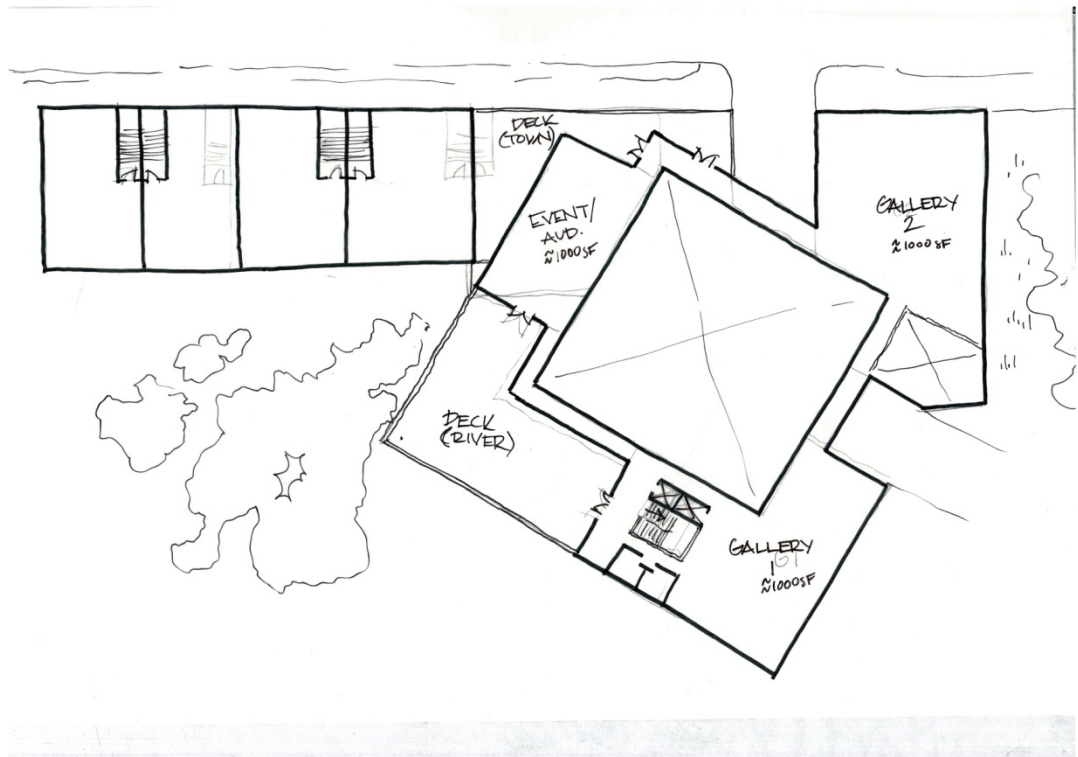Figure 71_Building as edge: ground floor plan [Fischer]

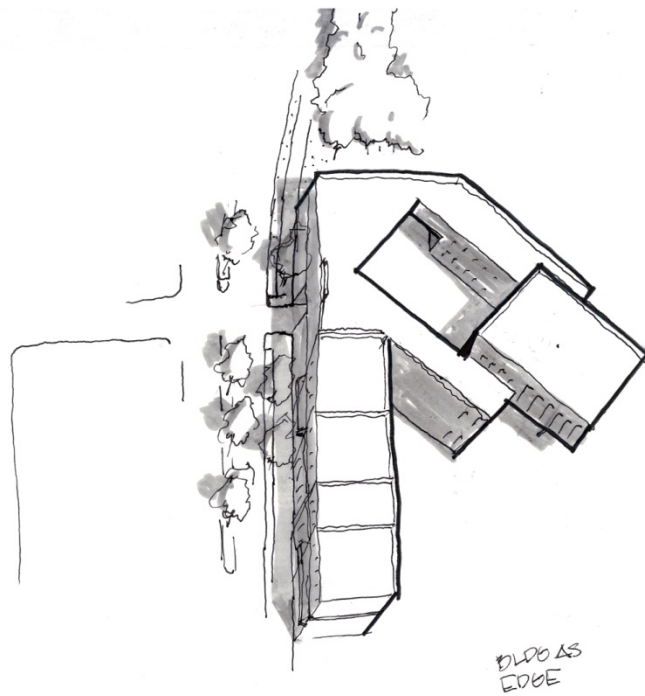Figure 72_Building as edge: second floor plan [Fischer]

Figure 73_Building as edge: axon [Fischer]

5_Conclusions

5.A_Shifting emphasis

Over the course of the design semester the emphasis of my design shifted. The project initially sought to seek a connection between narrative and architecture. The basis of this narrative was specific to an event. As the investigation got deeper into Bladensburg, it became clear that the story of the place was more intriguing. While Bladensburg may be older than most, it is average American town; it is more populist than powerful, more humble than heroic. Due to this nature, it made more sense to celebrate the hardworking humble character of the town rather than any one event. In exploring the narrative of place and character, the thesis transformed into an exercise in critical regionalism rooted in historic examination.

The design focuses on connection between architecture and the flow of time. It attempts to show how the built environment can capture visions of the past, present and future all at the same time. The project rejects a nostalgic vision of the past, asserting that stylistic recreation without critical examination of the context, both present and past, adds little to place. Furthermore, selecting a specific time from the past as the most significant era of a place, denies the chance for a significant future. Rather than looking at the past as a frozen idea, this project seeks to show that an architecture which connects the stories of the past, present and future will enrich and provide enduring value for its community

5.B_The design

5.B.1_Urban design

The first step in this process was to reconfigure the urban fabric in a manner that better promoted a pedestrian environment. Street-scaping and rezoning to enforce a stronger streetwall will go a long way to transform the area. The two most significant moves were to restructure the traffic star into a town square and to install closure structures in the levee system to strategically bring water back into Bladensburg. Regional traffic along Baltimore Avenue would be rerouted to the widened right of way to the west (now two way), while the eastern road would return to its original name (Water Street) and nature as a local mixed use main street.

This road would be the base for a new entertainment district for inner PG County.   The museum, a movie theater, and two existing local nightlife venues (the historic Crossroads night club, and relocated Mango Restaurant, which is already a semi-public private venture currently located down the street on a repurposed Roy Rodgers), will form a critical mass be centered on the new square. This first phase would be infill in nature, razing only one building, a single story pawn shop, which could be relocated into the new construction.

Ideally expansion of this mixed use district north along Water Street could slowly push the light industrial businesses to within the confines of the CSX and

Figure 74_Existing context [Fischer]

Figure 75_New square with interpretive center [Fischer]

Figure 76_Existing view from bridge [Fischer]

Figure 79_Proposed view from bridge [Fischer]

Figure 77_Existing view up us-1a [Fischer]

Figure 80_Proposed view up Water St. [Fischer]

Figure 78_Existing view under CSX [Fischer]
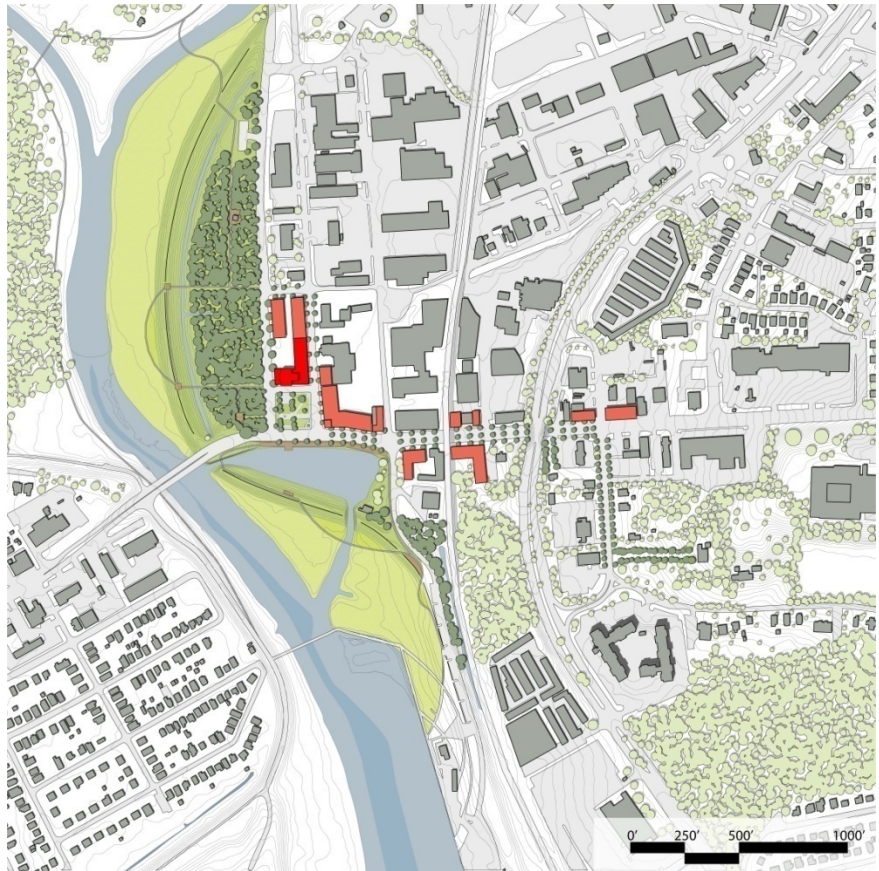

Figure 81_Proposed view under CSX [Fischer]

Figure 82_Rendered Site plan of proposal [Fischer]

Figure 83_Existing site plan [Fischer]

Figure 84_Plan of new town square [Fischer]

Kenilworth Avenue embankments. These moves would re-establish the waterfront nature of the town & reaffirm the corner as a hub for the region.

5.B.2_Historic trail

The design also proposes a historic trail system that links the significant places of Bladensburg and provides interpretive material for tourists . The three trails are based on thematic material, Bladensburg, watershed, and battle. The trails interweave through a single set of way-finding stations, emphasizing the interdependence of the three themes. The way-finding stations all feature a brick portal, utilizing this structure to orient visitors, as well as frame significant views. Interpretive material placed on the side of these portals would explain the significance of the stop, as well as provide a rendering of what the framed view would have looked like at different points in time.

There are four zones of the trail, Urban, Woods, Levee, & Flood plain, each utilizing the brick frames in a different fashion. In the urban zone, the frames would function as part of the street furniture and orientation between stations. In the Woods zone, the frames would form entrances into clearings in the forest for quiet contemplation. In the Levee zone, the frames are perpendicular to the trail orienting views out towards the river on one side and the town on the other. In this zone the trail itself follows the crest of the levees, emphasized by a long sitting wall. In the flood Plain zone, the frames are oriented along the sweep of the constructed sitting wall,

anacostia trail
bladensburg trail
battle trail

frame
frame with structure
existing landmark

confluence

forest

george washington house

free hope church

csx bridge   market master house

war memorials
resevoir

peace cross

harbor

magruder house/
ernest maier

levee

bostwick

anacostia

map

waterfront park

existing anacostia trail

bladensburg, md_trail system

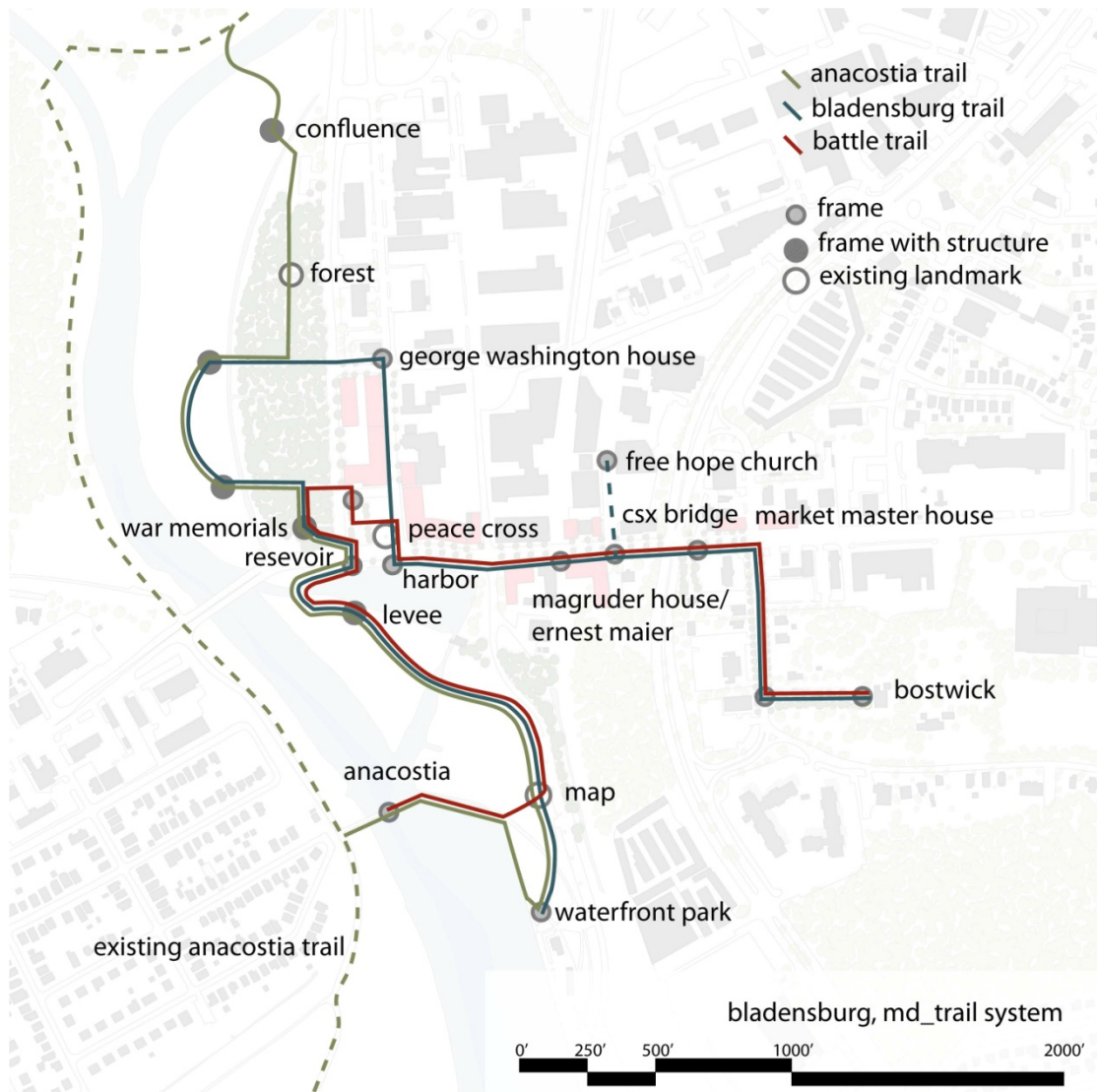0'   250'   500'   1000'   2000'

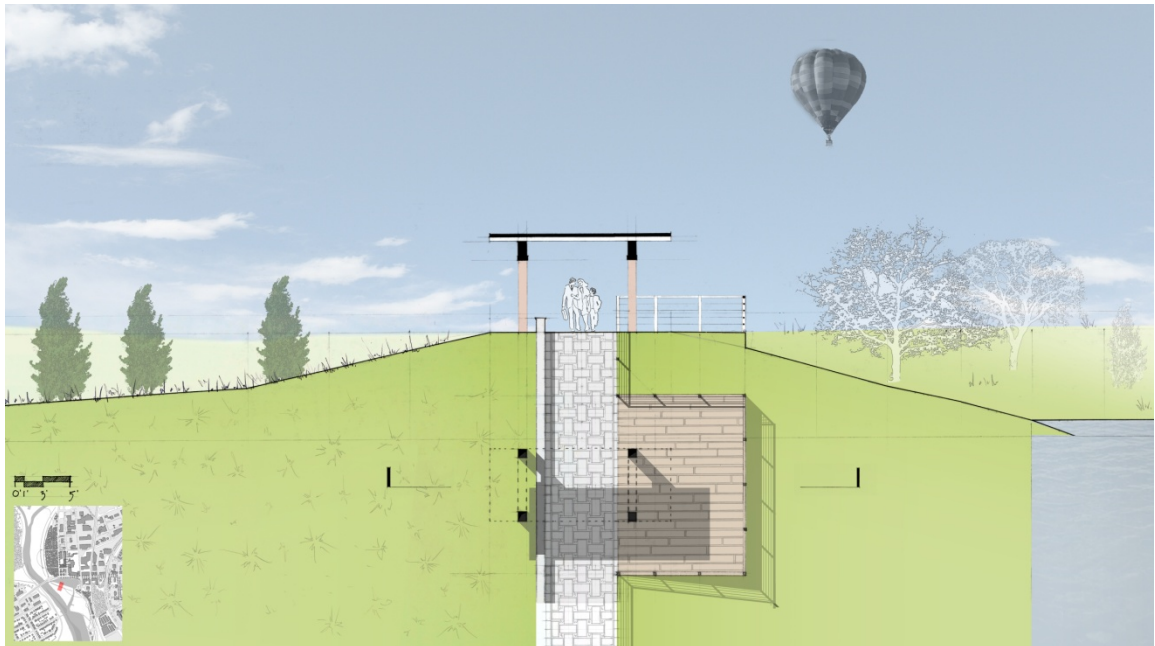Figure 85_Historic trail map [Fischer]
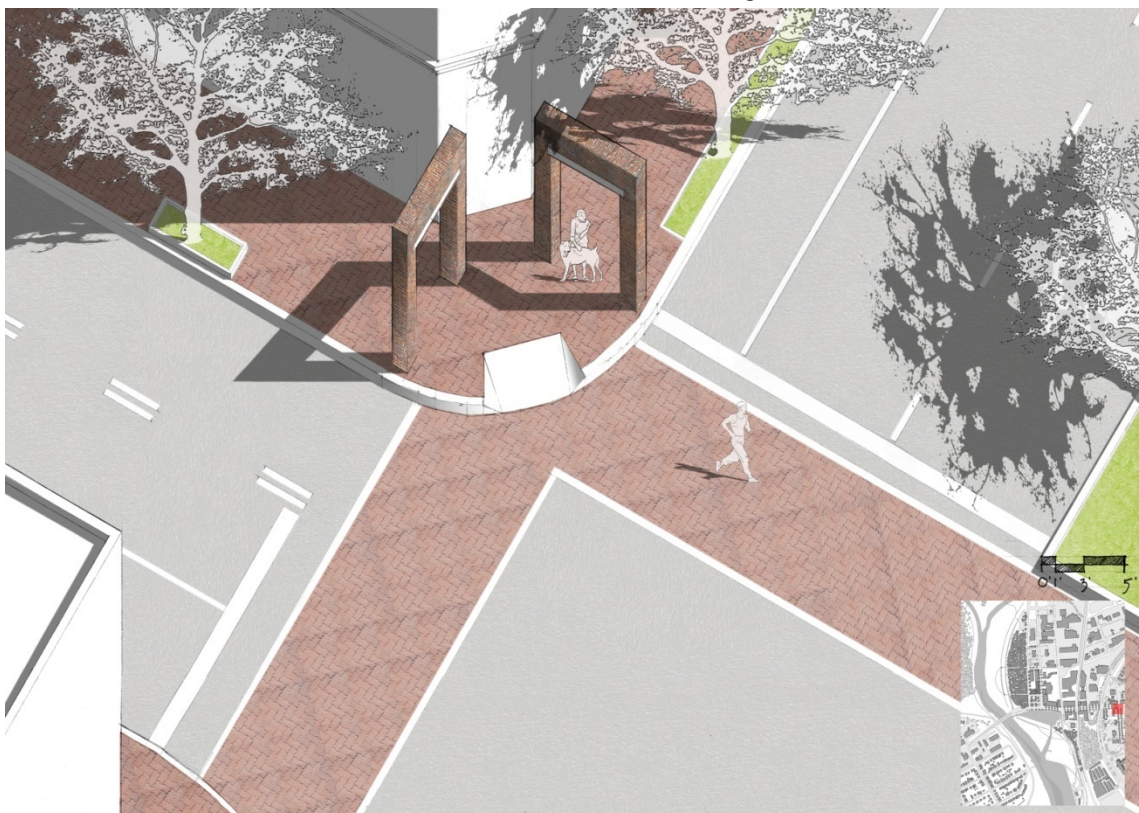
Figure 86_Trail detail: Levee [Fischer]

Figure 87_Trail detail: Urban [Fischer]

Figure 88_Trail detail: woods [Fischer]

while the trail itself meanders in and out around it, framing water gardens on the river side and sitting areas on the town side.

5.B.3_Interpretive center

The interpretive center serves as an anchor for the whole design. It forms a head to the public square, draws people towards the redeveloping water street, and serves as a point of orientation at the center of the historic trails. The ground floor holds rental units to add to the commercial viability of the development, serve as an incubator for local businesses, and, eventually, create revenue to support the interpretive center.

The building exterior is clad in a ground face cmu block, both speaking to the heroic within this industrial town, and utilizing a material made around the corner. Upon passing though the portico at the entrance visitors enter a covered gathering area. Here they encounter a brick wall, bringing the masonry of the building down to a finer scale. This wall is the exterior of a brick volume which forms the core of the building. The town's 1742 charter required all landowners to build a masonry hearth within one year or else their deeds would be revoked. The masonry hearth was a symbol of permanence and commitment to the fledgling town. This volume is a monumental re-affirmation of that commitment. Inside visitors are reoriented onto an east-west axis, speaking to the dialogue between the river to the west, and the town to the east. The brick core is a pass through space, programmed primarily for circulation,
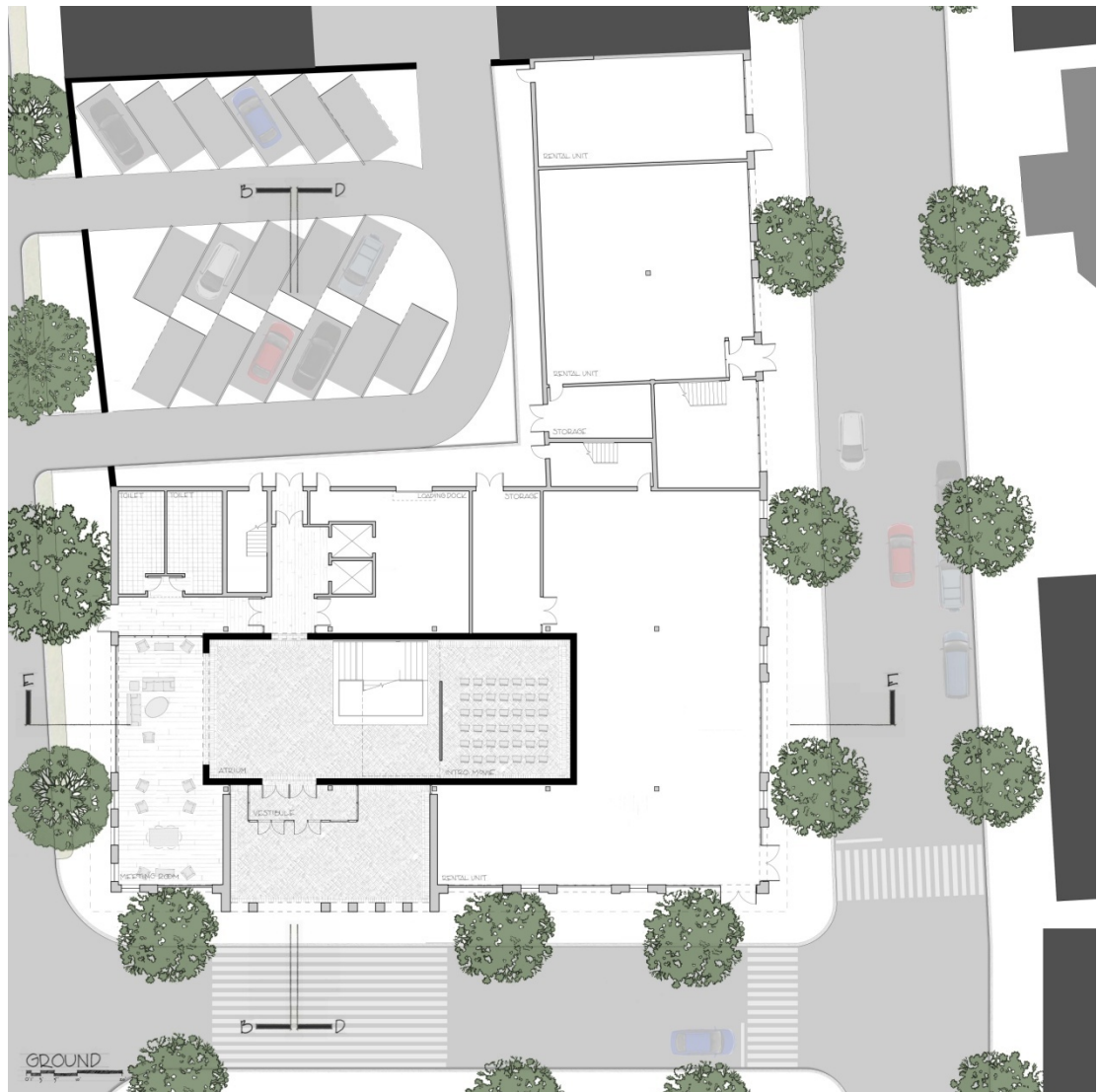
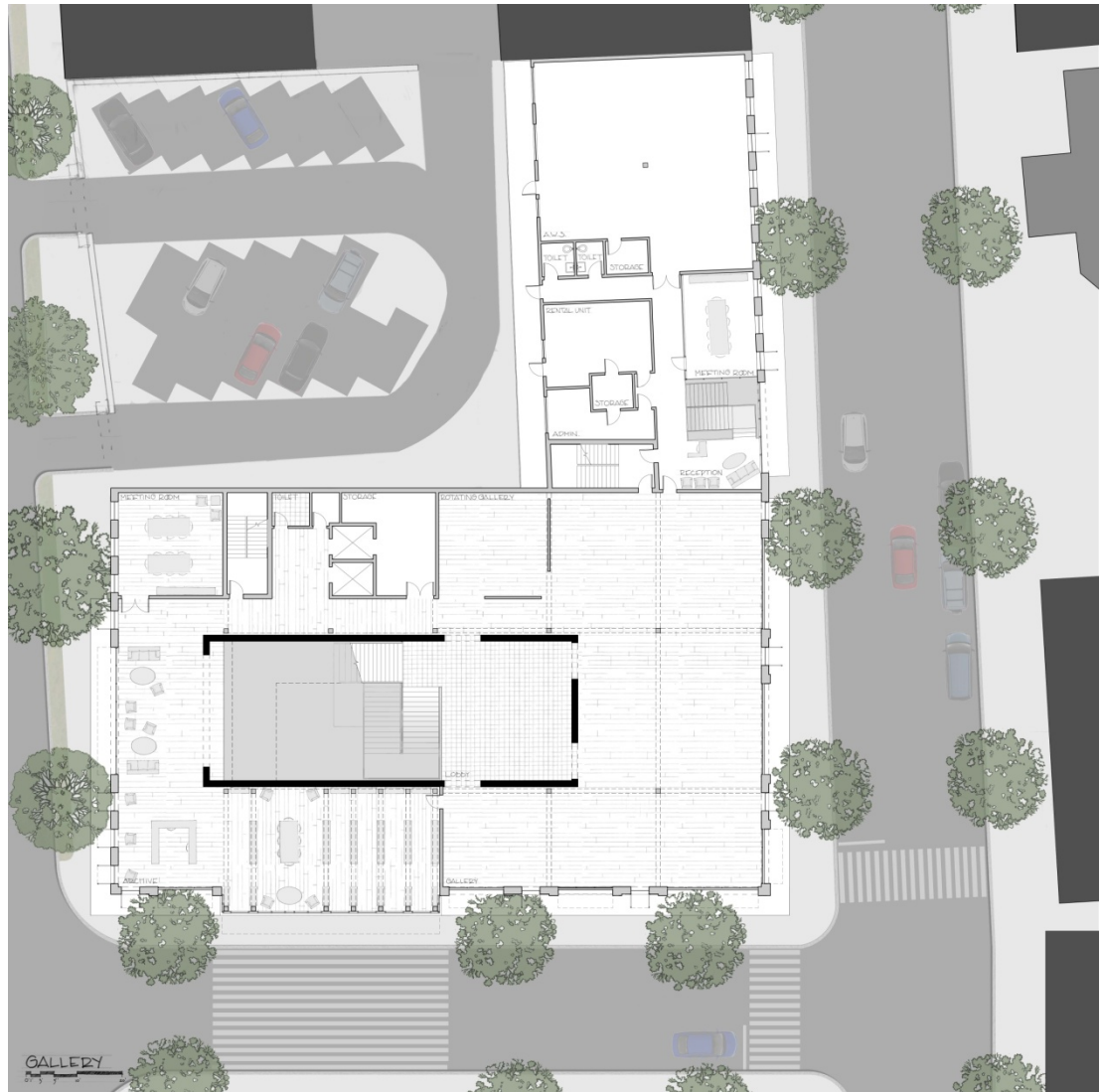Figure 89_Ground floor plan [Fischer]

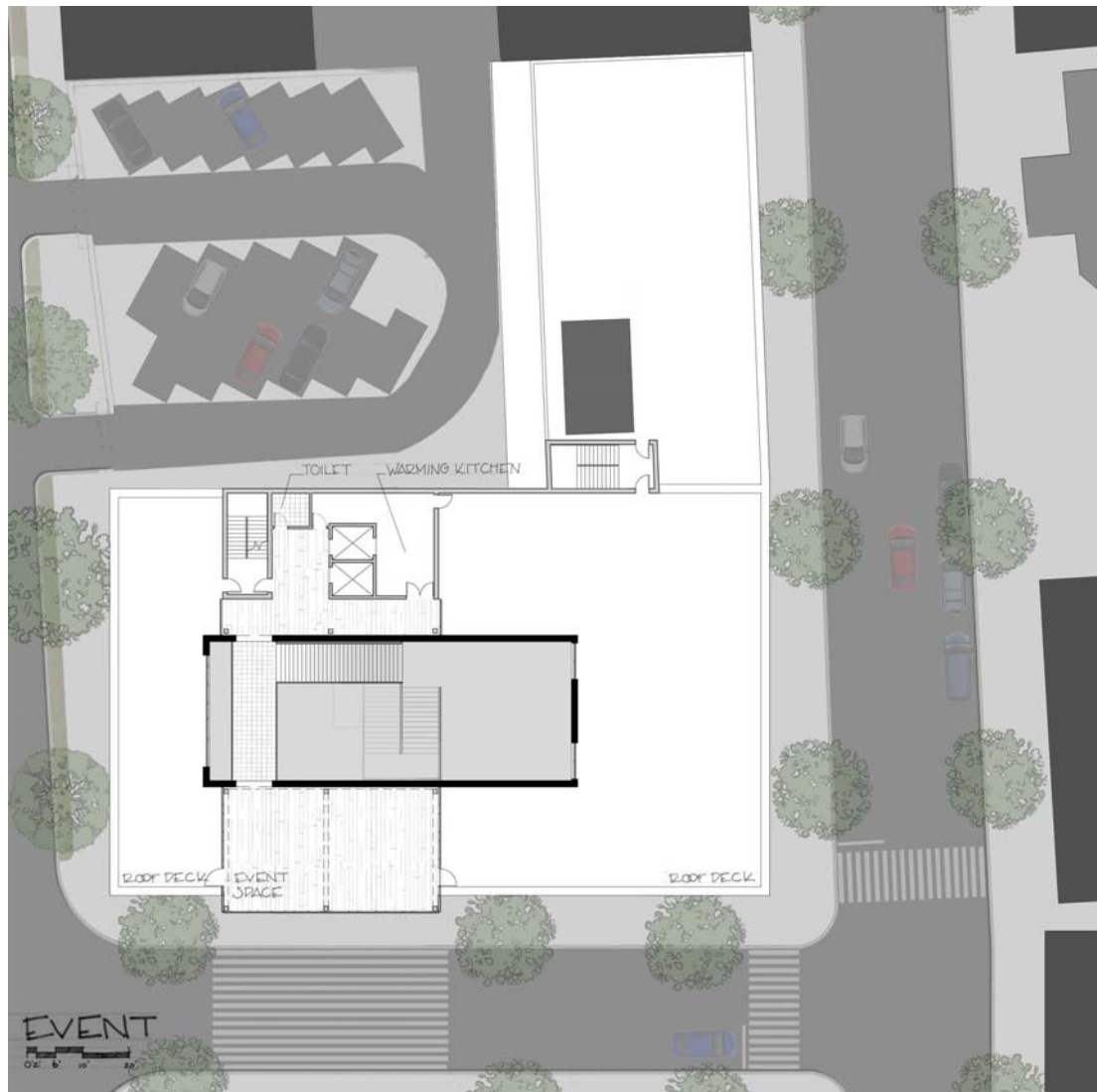Figure 90_Gallery level plan [Fischer]

Figure 91_Event level plan [Fischer]

Figure 92_South elevation detail [Fischer]

Figure 93_South elevation [Fischer]

Figure 94_East (Water Street) elevation [Fischer]

Figure 95_Atrium section [Fischer]

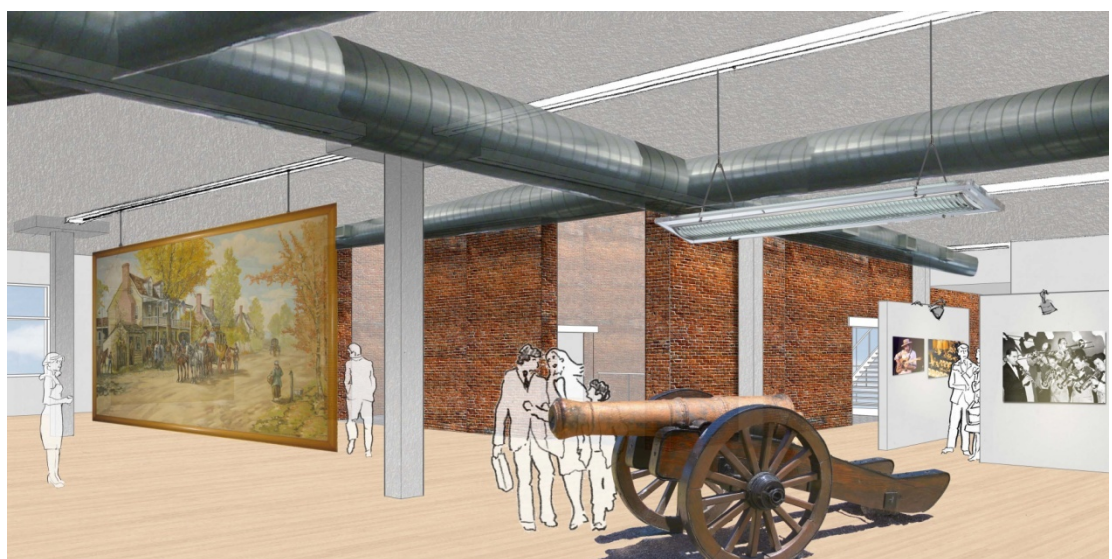Figure 96_Atrium [Fischer]

Figure 97_Gallery [Fischer]

Figure 98_Lobby [Fischer]

Figure 99_Bridge to event space [Fischer]

much like Bladensburg today. The volume's scale, however, celebrates the informal

everyday events that occur within.

An intro movie welcomes visitors on the ground floor. A ceremonial staircase

brings visitors up to the museum lobby. From here they can access the galleries,

archive, or offices.   Admin & rental office spaces for local history groups and the

Anacostia Watershed society support each other with shared meeting rooms and

service spaces. From the lobby, another stair brings visitors up to a bridge that crosses

the brick volume. The reorientation onto the ceremonial n-s axis of the park leads to an

event space with scenic water views over the levees. The event space is flanked by

decks for outdoor events.

5.B.4_Design conclusions

In conclusion, this thesis is a case study of how historic context, both old and

recent, heroic and pedestrian, can be utilized to create engaging spaces. The design is

rooted in complicated historic ethos of Bladensburg. Bladensburg is not glamorous,

but it is a place in which many glamorous things have quietly happened. Rather than

grasping at the stylistic elements of the past, this project attempts to interpret the

evolving historical character of the town for design influences. This is easier in this case

since there is little high style in Bladensburg on which to fixate.   The ideas, however,

could be applied to anywhere to enrich and celebrate place in a populist fashion.

Everywhere has history, good or bad, from which we can learn and shape a better

future. Everyone is formed by the shared history from which they create their own

futures. The built environment, with its multigenerational lifespan provides an

excellent medium for addressing these issues.

5.C_Next steps

By the end of the semester there were still many loose ends in the design. The

next steps In terms of the urban design would be to investigate deeper into future

phases of development. This project addressed the seed to begin a redevelopment of

the historic core of Bladensburg. Developing land usage plans for the further

development up Water Street needs to be more deeply investigated, specifically the

role of water-view residential development. More significantly lacking in the thesis is

an investigation on developing Annapolis Road, the other of Bladensburg's original

main streets emanating out from the public landing. The development focused on in

the design served more as a regional center. With more time the development of a

walkable center for Bladensburg itself would have been another next step in the urban

design. The research done indicates that a successful municipal center, anchored

(more traditionally) by political/civic functions would be appropriate on Edmonston

Road, protected from the regional traffic of Annapolis Road.

In terms of the historic trail, with more time the next design step would be

addressing the interpretive material. Successful interpretive material would be

integrated with the design of the trail. In particular, the design would focus on how the

brick frames integrated with the interpretive material, both in physical terms (how the

material interfaces with the frames) and graphic design terms (how the material

coheres with the idea of framed views executed within the brick frames). Also

appropriate for further investigation would be the materiality of the trails themselves.

Paving materials within the trail itself, as well as the paving of the resting areas along

the trails needs much deeper explanation.

The interpretive center too needs much further development. The main facet of

the design that should be addressed next is the façade. The issue of transparency was

raised within the public defense. The discussion covered whether the gallery program

could or could not be read from the exterior, specifically along the corner where the

building turned up onto Water Street.   The issue of programmatic legibility is tricky.

The design attempts to express the civic/gallery function of the building on the

protruding entry volume on axis with the park rather than literally on the parts of the

façade covering the gallery function. This expression could be made much more clearly

and needs to be addressed in future design development. This could be further

reinforced by a better integration of the museum program out into the town square

along the ceremonial axis towards the water.

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