

# Park:

*Reassessing patterns of life in small urban communities:  
Designing the interface between living, working and playing*

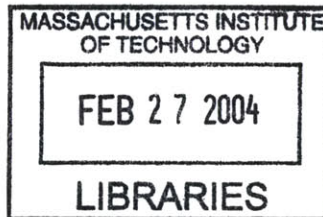
by  
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Submitted to the Department of Architecture in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
February 2004

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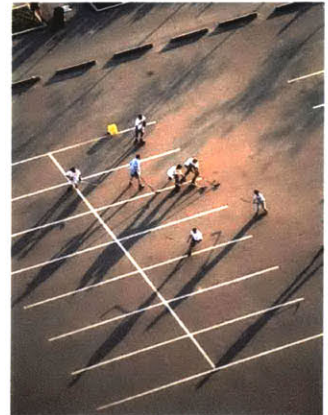
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Jeffrey Taylor\_MIT\_MArch Thesis\_Fall 2003

ROTCH



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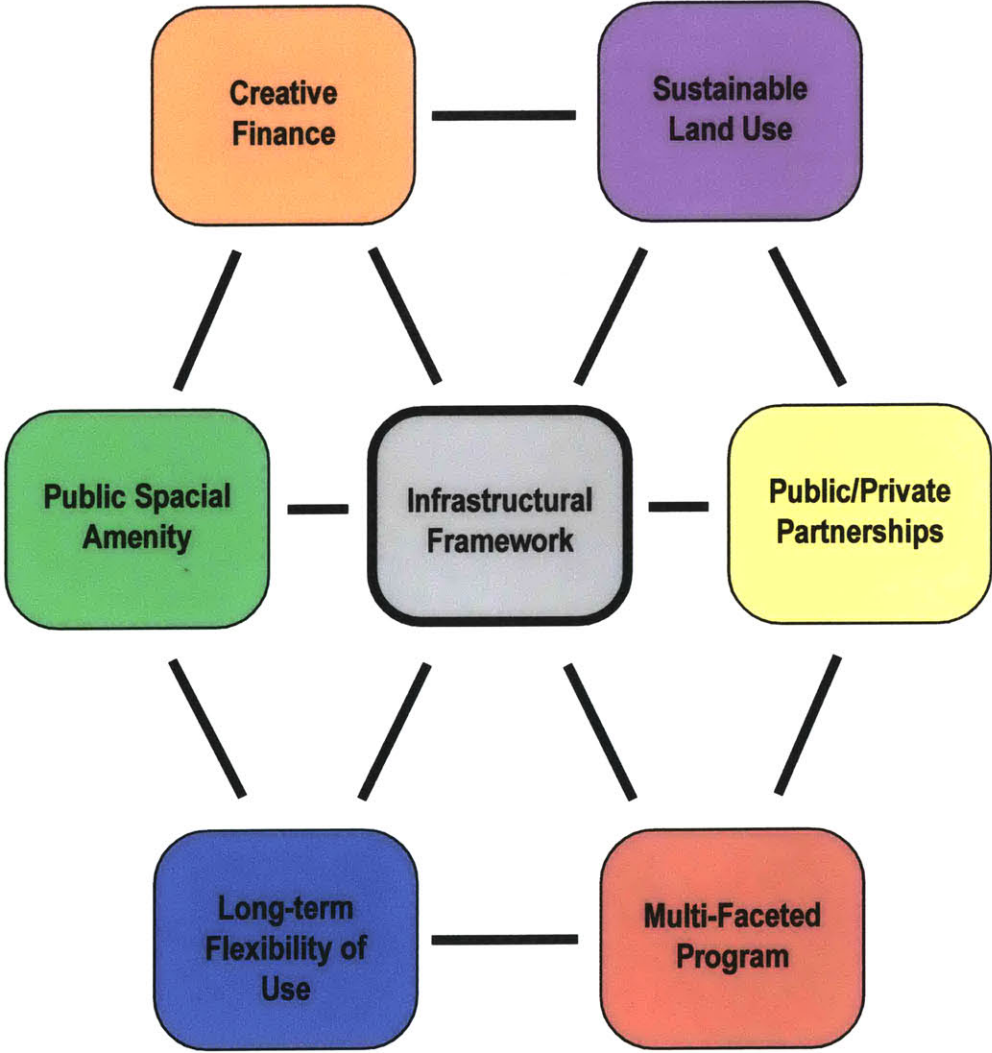
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Essential elements of an Urban Ecological approach to design and development



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## abstract:

Today, many small urban communities look to their historic downtown districts as a great resource for regenerating economic vitality and creating cultural identity. However, one common problem experienced by many of these communities lies in the incompatibility between contemporary patterns of living and the existing built fabric of these downtowns. Sociocultural shifts in the American life-style as well as shifts in our transportation patterns have created a mismatch between places of work, places of residence and places of recreation, rendering these downtown areas ill-adapted to meet contemporary patterns of living. Although the building stock in these places may adequately meet the budding demand, the fundamental inadequacy in parking facilities creates a problem limiting the potential habitation of the district.

The parking infrastructure and municipal parking policies become key elements in the eventual health of these communities. Because most people who live, work, or shop in these areas own an automobile, a bottleneck occurs for those attempting to utilize the area. Vital nodes of many downtown districts tend to cluster around existing parking garages, however, these parking facilities are expensive to build, and when constructed, are often physically removed from the center of activity rendering them underutilized or they inadvertently occupy precious real estate, obliterating the continuity of the street and pedestrian activity necessary for healthy businesses.

Many communities attempt to solve their needs for parking in a nearsighted manner, looking only at parking in terms of supply and de-

mand. **However, ultimately, the downtown neighborhood needs to be viewed as a type of ecosystem consisting of interrelated parts that make up a whole. Equal consideration should be given to all these parts of this urban ecology if it is to develop in a sustainable fashion.**

Pittsfield, Massachusetts typifies this kind of community. I use the setting of Pittsfield to first address the problem at an urban design level, identifying areas for parking and mixed-use development which can be utilized to bolster investment in underdeveloped areas of downtown, to steer growth in a way which connects urban nodes, and to extend the benefits of this growth into the neighboring areas.

Second, to address the issue on an architectural level, I explore the design of a prototypical parking structure, demonstrating how careful consideration of pedestrian activity to and from one's automobile can play a part in the design of the parking as well as adjacent buildings, and in turn, how these various buildings activate a healthy urban life-style. **The parking garage becomes a vital piece of the city, which begins to provide a framework in and around which the Urban Ecosystem can begin to flourish.**

The result is a typological shift in the fabric of the downtown, one which improves the area's capacity to host the myriad of activities found in healthy urban communities. The thesis demonstrates how the design of typically mundane buildings such as parking facilities can be approached more comprehensively to facilitate and moderate the interaction between people, automobiles, and the environment.

Thesis Advisor: Jan Wampler  
Title: Professor of Architecture

# historical context



Downtown streetcar scene. Courtesy National Railway Historical Society.

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America is full of small urban communities. Whether they be the urban core of a rural region boasting 40,000 in population, or exist as what used to be small turn of the century suburban centers that have become engrossed by the growth of their larger metropolitan areas, commonalities exist in their physical make-up.

Some, like Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the specific site of this thesis, struggle in today's sociocultural environment to establish an identity and share in the economic growth that many of their civic neighbors enjoy. Others may already be participating in an urban renaissance of sorts but are experiencing growing pains caused by their characteristic urban foundations.

These cities were born in an era whose cultural fabric was very different than ours today. The advent of the automobile has been perhaps the single most affecting invention of the past century. Not only has the face of the country changed drastically with the national highway system sprawling acres of concrete and pavement across the land, but our cities have changed drastically as well in response to their inhabitants change in life patterns afforded by the new mobility of the automobile.<sup>1</sup>

Cities that have their inception before or around the turn of the century, developed characteristically different than towns born after car culture was ingrained in our society. They developed tightly knit street systems around which their central business districts flourished. These street systems were often serviced by municipal streetcars which claimed territory at the center of the street with lanes on either side for horse carriage traffic. The streetcar systems often extended local lines beyond the central business district and into residential neighborhoods at the perimeter of the city. Depending on the size of the city, streets parallel to the main street developed to absorb the economic growth of the town.

More importantly than the physical character of these downtowns was the life pattern of the city's inhabitants that populated these places. The downtown was the center of all activities ranging

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1. Kunstler, p.29-57

from working to shopping to playing. All of the city's inhabitants would have the downtown as their destination for everything from frequenting their place of business, to shopping for everything ranging from hardware to clothing.

In response to these life patterns, the physique of the downtown was designed with a pedestrian oriented character. The streets were usually narrower, retail development and storefront windows lined the streets. Vendors would set up their shops in an attempt to attract the random pedestrian traveling from point A to point B in the downtown. Most everyday necessities were located within walking distance from one another.

The residential neighborhoods flanking the downtown enjoy a specific characteristic as well. Located within walking distance from a trolley stop, the homes were spaced closer together, all possessed porches facing the street, and every plot existed with a tree-lined city owned easement next to the street. Those of the upper class possessed a detached carriage house at the rear of the property however; many existed quite comfortably without space to store a carriage. Nowadays, these neighborhoods are known for their quaint character and enjoy a high demand in today's housing market.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, car culture began to change this way of life. With the advent of the automobile came suburban development. Suddenly, a city's inhabitants could occupy residential real estate further from the city's core enjoying shorter commute times into the center of the town with the facility of their personal automobile. Indeed, the milestone of this cultural change was demarcated by the demise of the streetcar systems throughout the Nation. The fall of municipal transportation systems, and the rise in personal automobile traffic to the downtown area created a congestion in all urban and metropolitan areas which gave rise to an entire field of engineering dedicated to the



Streetcar system with local line in residential neighborhood. Courtesy National Railway Historical Society



Contemporary sprawling suburban development.

2. Two drawbacks exist in the marketing of these "street car" neighborhood homes, the first being their age and the amount of renovation and maintenance required for their upkeep and inhabitation, and the second, the fact that many exist with out a garage or the available property to construct a garage. Today's American home touts an average of a three car garage. See Miller for more detail.



design and control of the automobile forces acting on the infrastructure of downtowns.<sup>3</sup> Many businessmen of the era began to foresee the effects of this automobile culture and the demise of downtown business. They attempted (ineffectively) to ban together to lobby against the decentralization of the urban core.<sup>4</sup>

Alas, suburban living prevailed and with the invention of suburban strip mall type retail centers, the downtowns experienced an exodus of people and activity from which they never recovered.<sup>5</sup>

People today are beginning to lament over the character of life that existed in this bygone era. Indeed, preservationist attitudes have developed across the country. Some, like the new urbanists are attempting to infuse new developments with the physical character of old neighborhoods, however, they have fallen to criticism that their pastiche of romantic style doesn't allow the flexibility of life that is necessary for human inhabitation. Others attempt to build new buildings with a thin veil of historical veneer over contemporary structures, resulting in places and buildings that pale in comparison to their authentic counterparts which have stood the test of time.

One sociocultural trend is that many cities are looking toward their historic downtowns as a potential source of revitalization. However, many are paying the price of urban renewal attitudes of previous decades, which have claimed countless buildings, some of high historical value by today's standards.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Fogelson, pp. 249-316.

4. Fogelson, pp. 218-248.

5. Gratz, pp.33-57.

6. Pittsfield boasts a prime example of this tragic sort of loss. In the nineteen eighties, the city approved the demolition of the old train station in order to make way for a new suburban styled supermarket flanked by acres of asphalt parking. Today, the city government is heralding the recent construction of an intermodal transportation center in the heart of the downtown area. The building, which is a welcome addition to the downtown has been traditionally designed with the best of intention toward its integration into the character of the area, yet like most buildings constructed today attempting traditional aesthetic, it pales in contrast to what was lost to the supermarket development.

However, as cities today attempt to reintegrate their downtown districts, they are realizing an incompatibility with the life-style of today's citizen. Most people today own multiple automobiles and virtually everyone expects the *right* to drive to and from the destination of their choosing. Downtown areas typically lack the most valuable asset that suburban developments boast; acres of parking. Indeed, many downtown business districts struggle to meet the current demands of parking posed by the businesses and residents dedicated enough to seek existence in the downtown, let alone the increased demand that their revitalization dreams would bring. In addition, most downtowns fail to meet the formulaic approach to spatial requirements needed to attract big box retailers such as Wal-Mart, which pervade today's retail market.<sup>7</sup>

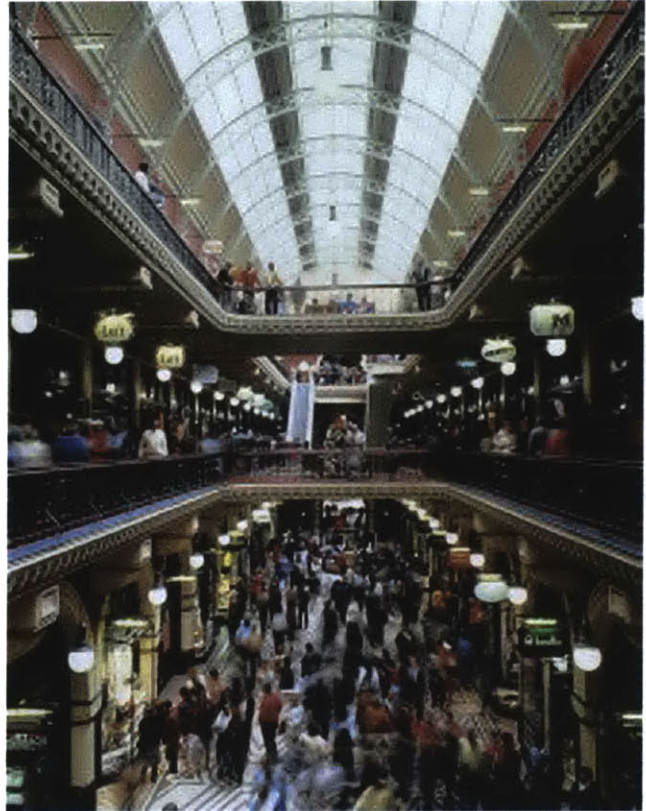
Many downtowns have addressed the problem by creating intermittent surface parking lots behind buildings or in vacant lots. True to urban renewal form, many small urban communities have taken to razing decaying buildings with the sole intention of reducing the potential load on the parking infrastructure and at the same time creating new space for surface lots.<sup>8</sup> This approach to parking has led to the new character of downtowns, which is that of a ghost town with pedestrian sapping holes in the urban fabric.<sup>9</sup>

The invention of a new building type, the parking garage has been a more additive approach to fulfilling parking needs in the downtown district. Like its skyscraper cousin, the parking garage seeks to capitalize on the scarce resource of real estate by stacking parking decks one on top of another.

7. Gratz and Mintz, Chapt. 8.

8. Even today, the Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission recommends such practices as an approach to assuaging the parking problems of downtown Pittsfield, see BRPC Downtown Parking Study, March 31, 1999: p. 15.

9. Roberta Gratz and Norman Mintz talk in-depth about the value of the pedestrian to downtown areas and how vacancies in the urban fabric (buildings) create holes in the continuum of pedestrian traffic. Furthermore, they explain how the additive rather than subtractive parking policies and practices can help bolster pedestrian traffic which ultimately benefits health of downtown communities.



The evolution of American consumerism and its host environments. (opposite and above)



The business of parking.

While it makes for efficient parking, garages often work counter to the fabric of downtowns. Their sheer size is counter to the scale of the typical downtown building size. They often fail to address the street scape omitting retail or commercial development at the ground level, obliterating pedestrian activity. They are often sequestered from the heart of the district forcing unwilling pedestrians to travel a circuitous route to their destination. Parking garages have become notorious for crime. Many people fear for their safety within the dimly lit labyrinthine interiors of these spaces. These structures have often become the white elephant sitting in the living room of the downtown district.

However, recent trends in the design of parking garages show that in the best cases, the mass and sometimes the function of these buildings are screened or embellished from the pedestrian eye. When the site permits, the garages can be embedded within mixed-use development making them virtually invisible and more integrated into the fabric of the downtown.

Today, parking has become an industry in itself. Markets exist in dense metropolitan areas, which support the high investment necessary for the creation of high density parking facilities. While these markets are much softer in small urban communities, the demand is still high enough to warrant the development of condensed parking. In addition, many unintended uses are ascribed to parking lots and garages. Often times, parking lots stand in for cities that develop without large public plazas suitable for civic gatherings. Parking lots can often be seen as the site of impromptu recreation such as roller hockey or farmer's markets. Sometimes, parking garages are the sites of adaptive reuse, housing commercial and retail development.

Planners today need to be conscious of the flexibility of space needed to host the myriad of functions necessary for urban environments. Parking facilities not only need to be utilitarian but also must consciously be recognized as the venue for other uses happening in the present as well as have the flexibility to adapt to changes in the urban environment.



Ascribed use patterns.

# context (specific)

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Pittsfield Massachusetts enjoys a rather unique blend of influences as an urban community existing within a rural destination. Like other towns in the Berkshire region of western Massachusetts, it operates in the “pleasure periphery”<sup>10</sup> of New York City, Boston and Albany. Other towns in the Berkshires such as Great Barrington, Stockbridge, Lenox and more recently, North Adams, have capitalized on this tourist phenomenon and have become vibrant towns with rejuvenated downtown areas, healthy economies, and steady growth.<sup>11</sup>

It enjoyed much prosperity through the years with its main economic contributor being the manufacturing facilities of General Electric. GE downsized its Pittsfield plant in the economic slump of the eighties and as a result, Pittsfield lost about a third of its population. At about the same time, the vibrant downtown, which up to this time had been able to resist the effect of economic decentralization felt by other such communities, suffered a particularly deadly blow with the construction of a new regional mall, which effectively tapped the downtown of its retail base.

Pittsfield has struggled in recent years and contrary to the regional trends, has suffered a developmental decline during the last twenty years. It currently suffers a negative conception by the inhabitants of the region.

However, as the working class hub of the Berkshires, Pittsfield does support the largest population in the region. It is the governmental county seat and possesses a wealthy infrastructure of quality buildings, businesses, and amenities not present in the smaller “villages” surrounding it. It also is the last bastion of affordable property in the region with real estate values soaring in most of the other “second home” communities.

Many attempts to rejuvenate Pittsfield have failed. Most recently, the city has recognized the negative ramifications of planning decisions made in

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10. Mike Robinson coins the term “pleasure peripheries” as the easily accessible destination sites for metropolitan inhabitants. He speaks of the appropriation of a place by tourists and the cultural conflicts created by the tourism industry.

11. However, in most other areas of the county, the growth has been inextricably linked to the tourist economy. Pittsfield to the contrary enjoys a more diverse economic base.

the 1980's, which effectively drained the historic downtown area of its vibrant commerce and subsequently its pedestrians. City leaders currently focus much of their energy on strategies for revitalizing the downtown area. They rely heavily on plans to tap the tourist market, which has proven success to its regional neighbors. Although the city has experienced some isolated successes in the form of renovations to specific buildings in the downtown areas, and enjoys some long time stable commercial tenants, the city still suffers from a negative perception. The high vacancy rate of the commercial buildings and poor public image is evidence of its continued struggle.

In the past, some groups have proposed large ticket building projects downtown in the hope of spurring development. One such project, which elicited much debate, was a proposal to build a new minor league baseball stadium on property adjacent to the city's main commercial street. Another such project recently proposed in which the city has invested seed money, is the conversion of one of the downtown buildings to house a cinema center and mixed-use development including high-end corporate condominiums.

Some grass roots efforts to revitalize the city center have begun to surface. For example, one member of the region's burgeoning artist population has formed a collaborative artists' program with local property owners. Building owners allow artists to set up storefront studio spaces with free rent for a specified duration of time. It is hoped that the inhabitation of the vacant storefronts as well as the spectator quality of the artist studios will increase pedestrian traffic as well as infuse a bohemian quality to the downtown area. It is collectively understood that paying tenants will eventually displace the artist. This fits with the common trend of gentrification. Developers and city planners capitalize on the aesthetization of the arts community to spark interest in an area with the end result of sparking development.<sup>12</sup>

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12. To some, Gentrification in its classical sense represents an unhealthy development pattern with eventual negative ramifications such as the local population in the specific area being eventually driven out of the habitat by the soaring property values that eventually follow gentrification practices. In some communities such as Jamaica Plain in the Boston outskirts, residents have banded together to block the migration of artists into their neighborhood for fear of the ill effects of the gentrification cycle. See also Deutsche and Ryan:pp. 91-111.

While this grass roots effort may elicit the desired outcome, it doesn't address the key issue of increasing residency in the area. The artist/owner collaboration specifies that the artists may not live in the studio. This means that most if not all of the artists commute into their work environment. Furthermore, the ambiguous nature of art studio uses has posed zoning issues in other communities. Currently, the resident population of the apartments above the commercial spaces downtown is a community comprised mainly of senior citizens (there is a senior center located in a renovated cinema), mentally ill people (social service facilities occupy some of the commercial property), and of course, low income individuals.

Now that Pittsfield retail has decentralized from the downtown, it struggles to compete with the basic auto-centric amenities of the suburban style shopping centers of the region. One common complaint from the downtown businesses owners is that there is no available parking for their patrons. Indeed, recent parking surveys have illuminated this problem and suggest the inclusion of at least 500 more parking spaces to meet the current need. The parking survey also sheds light on the nature of the parking situation downtown in that the local corporate businesses, which have located downtown utilize the majority of the parking rendering the public supply of parking spaces inadequate.<sup>13</sup>

The city has recently formed a parking commission comprised of multi-disciplinary individuals from the community to address the issue of parking downtown. The commission's proposals focus primarily on changing the municipal parking policies which currently prohibit overnight parking, or the physical attributes of curbside parking, such as changing parallel parking to diagonal parking. In the past, similar commissions under different mayoral administrations have proposed off-site parking with shuttle service to the downtown area. There is much debate about proposed parking solutions and their possible effects on the health of the downtown area.

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13. BRPC: Downtown Pittsfield Parking Study, 3/31/99.



# revitalization strategy

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Expanding the parking capacity of a downtown area alone is not going to ensure its revitalization. Primary to revitalization is the identification of a place's *collective identity*. The leaders of a struggling downtown need to collectively agree upon the image and identity that they wish to portray before they can effectively develop their town. For a town to be marketed successfully, it needs an image, which is unique and unpossessed by neighboring communities. A close and honest look at a community's assets will yield an impression of how it should be portrayed. A place cannot be made to be something that it is not; instead it should capitalize on *what it already is*. Until it clearly defines its identity, it cannot form a strategy for its revitalization.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of Pittsfield, some of the community's strongest qualities are its unique claim as Berkshire counties largest *urban* community, its industrial base, its strong artists community, and most importantly, its strong multi-cultural and socioeconomic mix of people. In fact, Pittsfield offers the only potential for a truly urban life-style in the Berkshires. This has tremendous potential for marketability to those people who find themselves torn between the rural life-style already present in the Berkshires and the urban life-style afforded by the not so physically distant (yet perhaps financially distant) metropolitan areas of Boston and New York City. Pittsfield offers the unique potential to live and work within an urban environment while having the amenities of rural life minutes away.

If the creation and facilitation of a strong urban life-style is Pittsfield's end goal, it has only to inventory its preexisting assets to find its answer about what steps to take in realizing that goal. **This thesis provides an example about how to address the urban ecological needs of a community within one development strategy.** It proposes to not only address the parking needs, but more importantly it seeks to bolster its potential for urban life-style by creating a stronger residential community within the downtown area. In addition it seeks to create the more integrated spatial amenities present in urban environments

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14. In the past, Pittsfield has paid outside consultants to help assess and define its identity. However, it offers little suggestion about how to actualize this development. See Hunter Interests Inc. Final Report, 1999. and David Dixon/Goody Clancy.

so that the downtown inhabitants do not necessarily leave the environment to carry out their daily lives.

**The inclusion of mixed-income housing<sup>15</sup> in the development is a key facet of the strategy. It not only provides the city with an opportunity to elevate the standards of living in the downtown area, but also opens the accessibility to state and federal community development grants. These grants can be utilized to finance the housing as well as the portion of the parking facility utilized by the inhabitants. Any recreation facilities incorporated into the development can also be earmarked for grant money. Perhaps even more important, the inclusion of mixed income housing to the development strategy opens up the possibility of affording tax credits to corporate and private investors further facilitating the public private partnership approach to the actualization of the project.**

In addition, Pittsfield possesses a strong local artist community, which has long been active in attempting to revitalize the downtown area. For the purpose of the proposed development, willing members of the local artists community can be given priority in the selection of those participating in the housing program. The housing should be designed within the mind set of the pre-defined downtown identity and can easily take on a loft style similar to that of other artists districts in other metropolitan areas. In addition, the inclusion of multifunctional work / studio spaces in the development offers the potential for artists or industrious individuals to live and work within the same neighborhood. Gallery spaces throughout the development offer the potential for artists to showcase their work, and for cottage industries to sell their wares.<sup>16</sup>

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15. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has officially converted from an affordable housing approach to raising housing standards to that of mixed income housing. It is a less stigmatizing, more holistic approach to raising the housing standards and if implemented appropriately, yields very successful results. Implementation strategies should include architectural designs which afford many amenities and which can in now way be distinguished from market rate housing.

16. See Hunter Interests Inc. "Strategic Link 3: The Pittsfield Arts Center", pp. 37-42

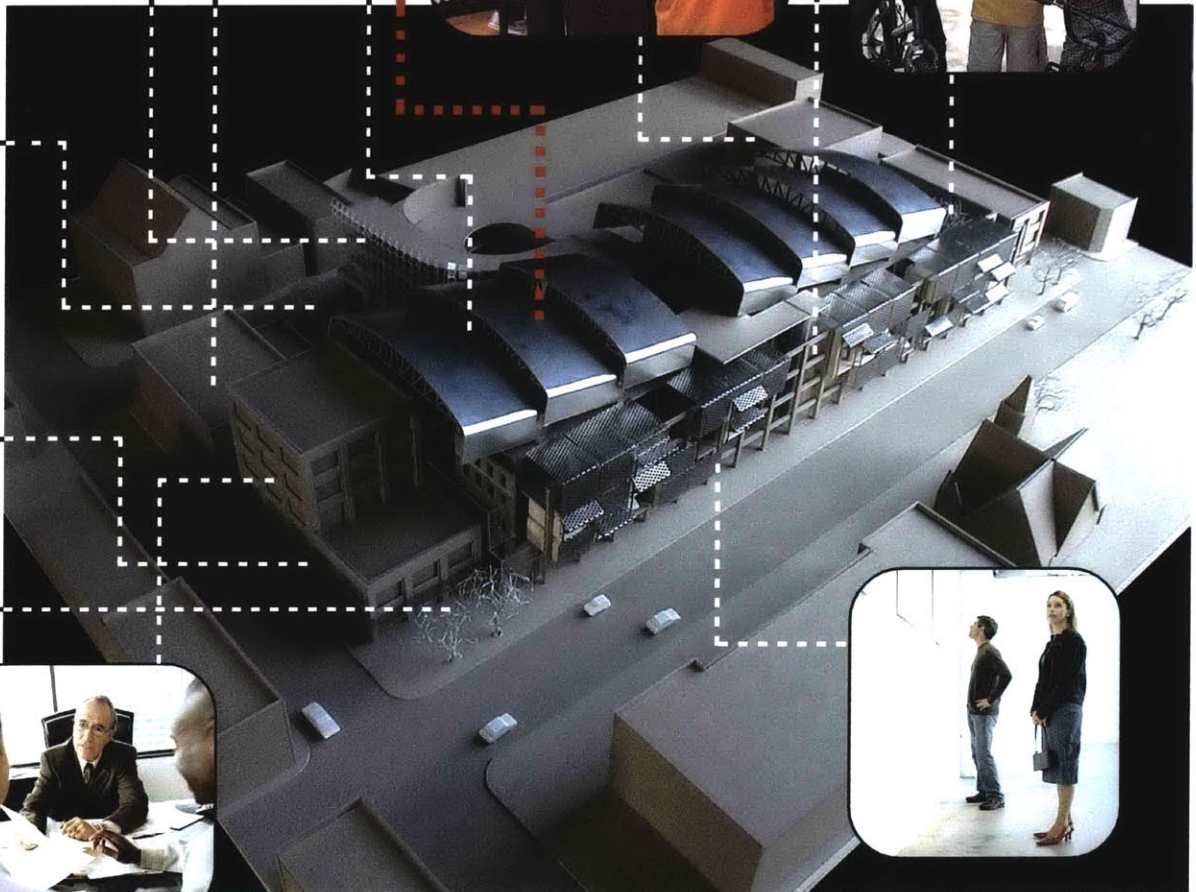
# thesis vision

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The vision of Pittsfield, which this thesis seeks to promote, is one, which has at its core an urban life-style. There should be spaces and amenities which facilitate the spontaneous interaction of the downtown inhabitants in a number of different activities ranging from living and working to sports recreation, healthful activities, gardening, spiritual activities, and various forms of night life. In addition, at the core of this thesis is an understanding of today's society, which has at its root, an inextricable link to the automobile. The starting point for the thesis therefore is the automobile and its inclusion, not its exclusion from this urban life-style.<sup>17</sup>



17. Some environmentalist visionaries have put forth plans for automobile-free communities. These plans rely heavily on extensive mass transit systems and are usually plans for the creation of a completely new infrastructure and road system geared toward easy travel by pedestrians. However, these pedestrian-centric visions do not fit well into our preestablished auto-centric reality.



# site survey

Site Survey Photo Legend







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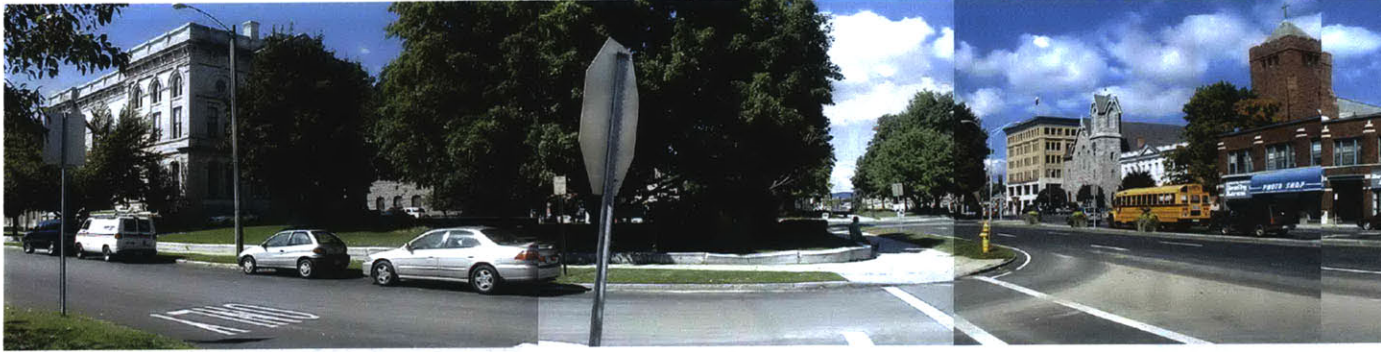
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8

# thesis site



14





9



10



11



12



13





10:00 am



1:00 pm



5:00 pm

# urban ideology

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The urban ideology employed in this thesis is one that recognizes the catalytic power of parking amenities. As pedestrians travel to and from their automobiles they create a traffic pattern which can be utilized toward an economic end. The retail stores of yesteryear identified this with their storefront displays geared toward enticing unplanned purchases from pedestrians in the same way which grocery stores today utilize the magazine rack at the checkout counter to spur spontaneous purchases.

In a similar capacity, routes to and from parking areas can be capitalized upon to create new retail areas as well as bolster existing ones. In addition, from a less capitalistic and a more municipal sensibility, these predictable paths can be targeted for the creation of public spaces. New plazas and courtyards flanking these routes can begin to embellish and enrich a pedestrian's experience of the city.

Furthermore, the presence of a parking infrastructure element within a city can catalyze development in the adjacent properties. In this way, the placement of the parking facility should be strategically chosen to bolster marginal areas of town. They should be located in the fringe just outside the strongest area of the neighborhood but not too far sequestered into a declining area of town.

The new structures should be thought of as an element which begins to work in conjunction with other condensed parking areas. It should begin to triangulate and network the existing parking areas in a way which addresses the current specific parking needs of the community while consciously placing itself in a way which will address the needs of future development.



Existing Condensed Parking 1



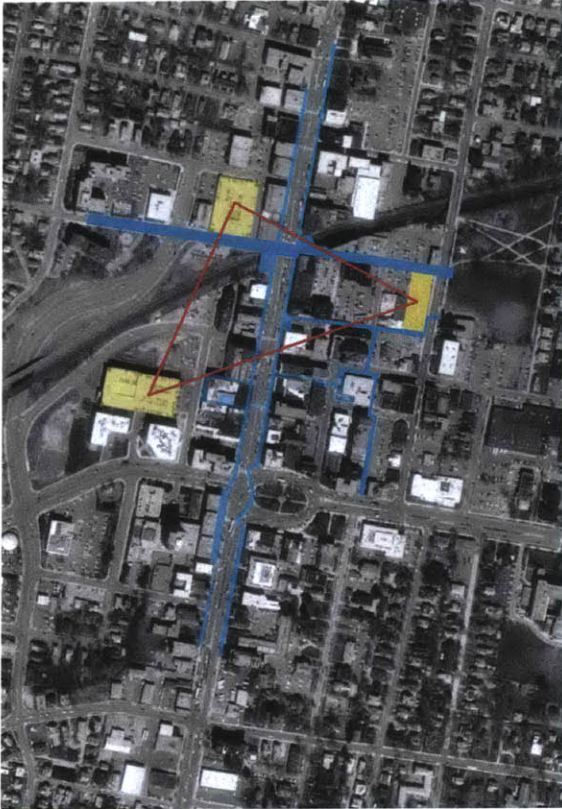
Proposed Condensed Parking 2



Triangulation 3



Existing Pedestrian Linkage 4



New Pedestrian Links

5



Public Development

6



Private Investment

7



Sparked Private Development

8



Future Condensed Parking and Triangulation 9



Future Links and Development 10

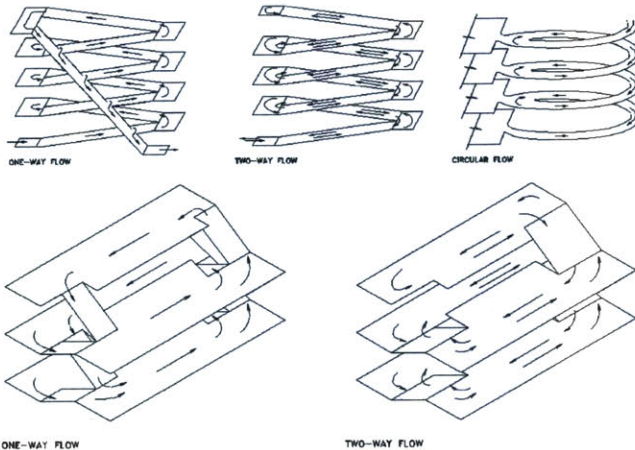


Future Network Expansion 11

# architectural ideology

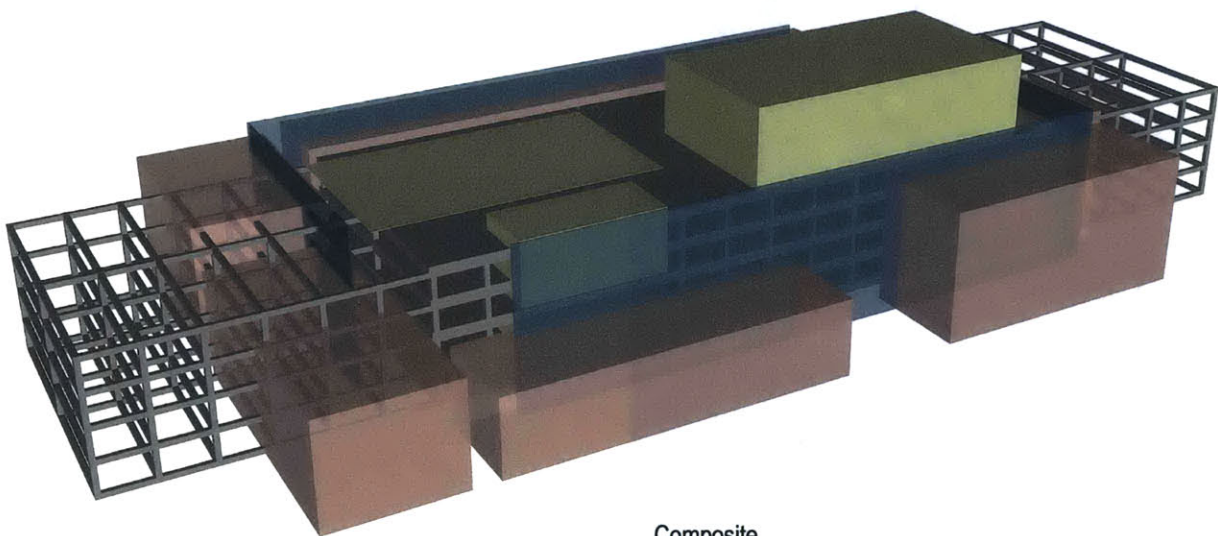
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Condensed parking has been addressed with different architectural attitudes. At their worst, parking garages are not considered at all and remain utilitarian buildings. Often the design of these buildings stops at the American Graphic Standards prescribed solutions to parking garages. However, some owners and architects have addressed the problem of a parking structure's sensitivity to its surrounding context by attempting to screen or embellish one or more of its facades. Some designers and developers have taken this a step further by embedding the parking structure within some sort of programmatic element, rendering the parking structure invisible from view. The perimeter buildings are of course served by the parking infrastructure at the development's core. This approach, however, requires a large amount of property to enable the requisite amount of space for mixed use programming as well as the required amount of parking to serve the various use groups.



"Plug and Play" parking garage schemes as prescribed by American Graphic Standards

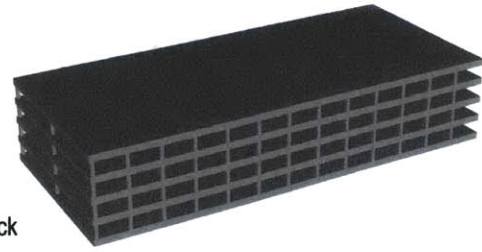
For the purpose of this thesis, the concept of parking has been pushed to another level in that the base parking structure is now conceived as a conceptual and structural framework into which various programmatic elements may be inserted or flanked. The result is that the parking becomes an armature of sorts, which begins to support uses other than parking and one, which promotes future growth over time.



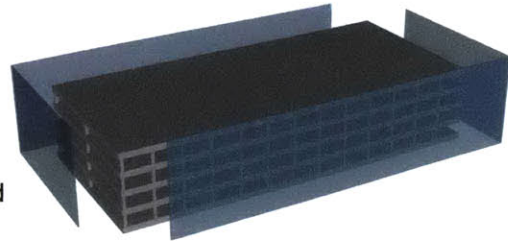
Composite

Ultimately, a composite approach can be used which utilizes all of these design directives. The composite structure is free to shift its “weight” around to meet various site conditions. For example, when appropriate, the designer can front the garage with mixed-use programming. If the site’s size is constrained, the designer may utilize a combination of screening and armature program to help ease the scale or monotony of one or more facades of the parking garage. In addition, the parking decks themselves may be programmed with uses, which can further enliven the parking structure.

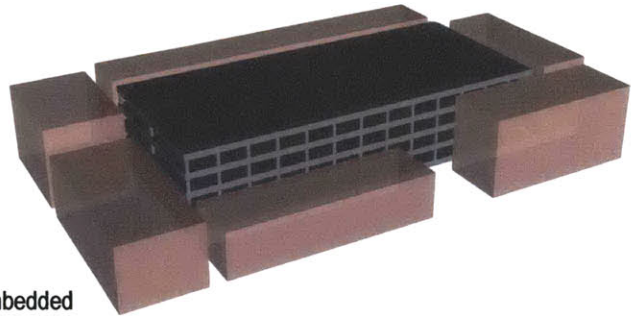
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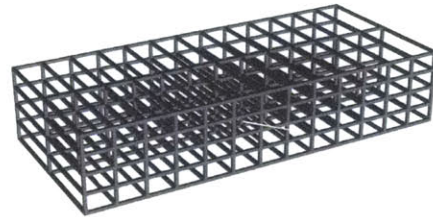
Big Block



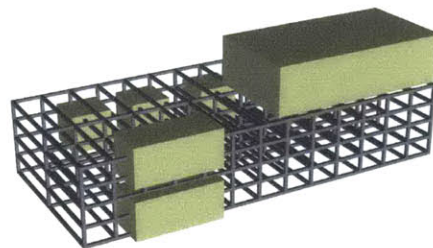
Screened



Embedded



Framework



Armature

# implementation

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For the purpose of this thesis, the existing city owned property at the block bound by First Street and Fenn Street is developed with a combination of uses including parking, housing, studio spaces, retail and commercial spaces, a winter garden, recreation spaces and large venue spaces. This block was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it is predominantly city owned and therefore, theoretically, the development can more immediately be implemented. Second, by locating the development in this property, the thesis attempts to capitalize upon the in-fill development to infuse new life into a marginal area of the downtown as well as to create linkages to the existing town common. And third, the block has close proximity to the Central Block, the new Inter-modal Transportation Hub, and the Courthouse area, which all exhibit a demand for more parking.

To this end, the thesis works within the existing spatial parameters excluding from development, yet planning for future acquisition, the preexisting buildings on the block. Currently, there exists a plastics research laboratory, a bank building, and a row of commercial buildings along Fenn Street. The thesis takes the liberty of acquiring the latter property at the corner of Fenn and First Streets. This property is significantly decayed and underutilized. Prototypical interfaces between housing, retail / commercial or studio spaces are proposed and can be applied to future development should these properties become available.

The development locates the majority of housing uses toward the north end of the site creating a street with a quieter neighborhood atmosphere. The housing blocks, while not defined in detail by this thesis could take on the aesthetic of brownstone / stoop type development at the street level while maintaining a more loft style development above the street with large windows, high ceilings and industrial interiors.

The building facade along First Street is enlivened by the insertion of studio spaces into the parking structure framework. The studios can be linked in any fashion and feature large industrial style overhead doors creating a screen be-

tween the studios and the street. The operation of the screen element gives depth to the facade while signaling inhabitation in a way, which obscures the function of the parking structure.

The parking structure utilizes flat parking decks and barrel style automotive circulation. This creates the opportunity for varied function of the parking facility and ensures the potential for adaptive reuse. The addition of a clear-span canopy to the upper deck minimizes the maintenance of the facility, increases the value of parking spaces on this deck as well as creates the opportunity for large venue programming to occur on this deck such as public markets, antique car shows, or recreation and assembly.

The pedestrian experience between the parking decks and the ground level is enriched by the implementation of an enclosed winter garden surrounding the vehicular circulation drum. It affords the pedestrian refuge from the cold during winter months as well as provides the inhabitants the opportunity to garden during the winter. The artist residents can also showcase their work within the winter garden.

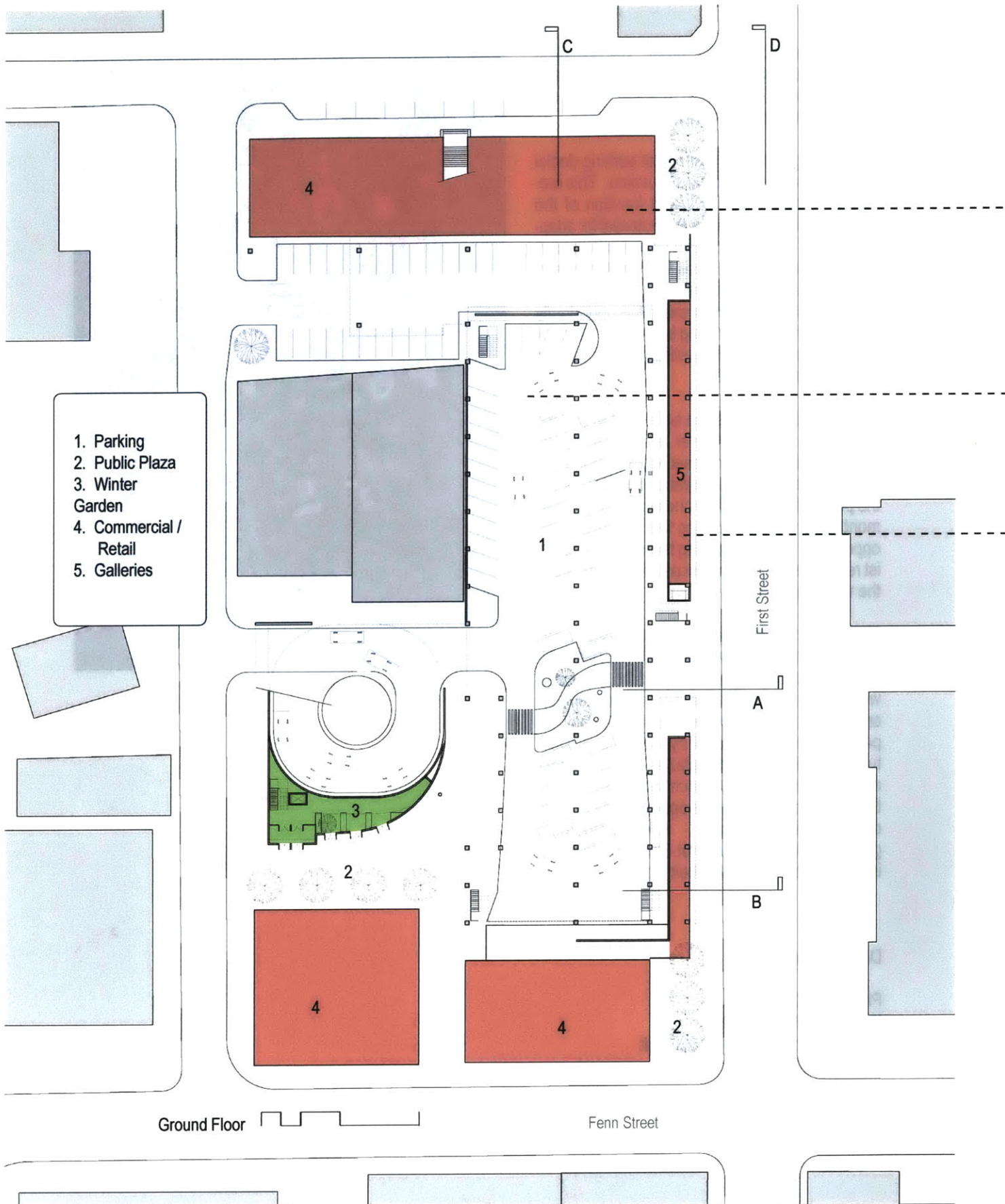
Throughout the development, sensitivity is shown to the urban scale of the surroundings, the building masses have been reduced or expanded where appropriate. Retail and commercial spaces enliven the street level and capitalize upon new pedestrian routes created by the parking structure. In addition, public plazas located at specific pedestrian nodes enrich the experience of the place as well as create opportunities for successful retail inhabitants. A linear storefront gallery is created along First Street in which artist residents may exhibit their work.

#### Development Specs:

Parking = 420 spaces  
 Housing = 30,000 sqft  
 Retail / Commercial = 25,000 sqft  
 Studios = 5800 sqft



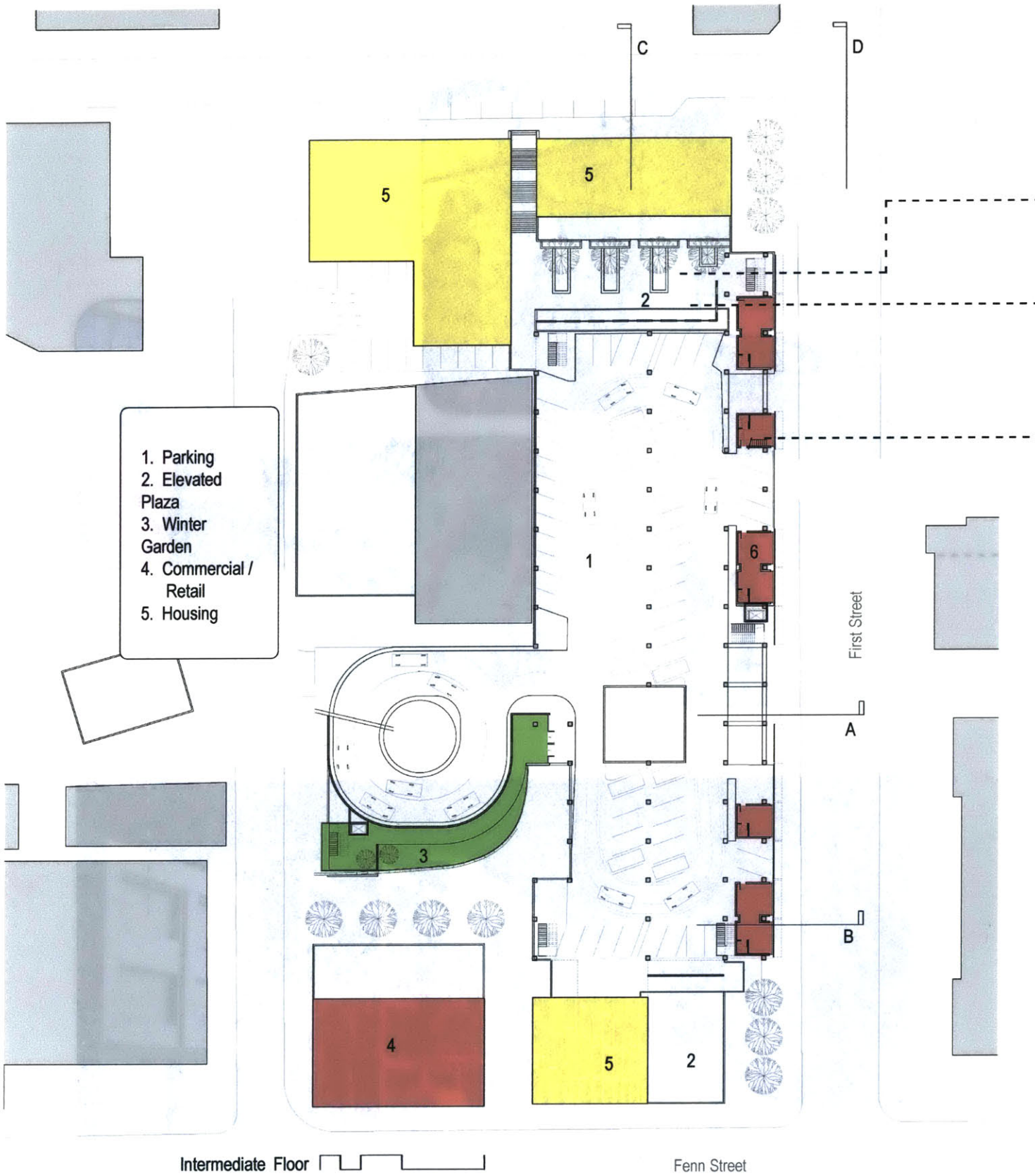
Aerial plan with location of development.





View from Common



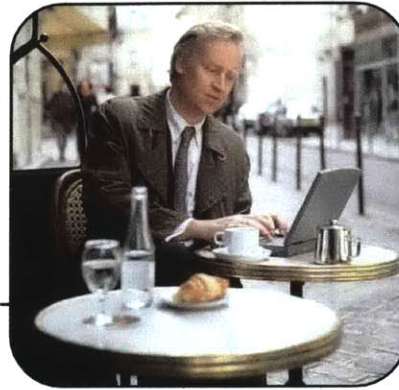
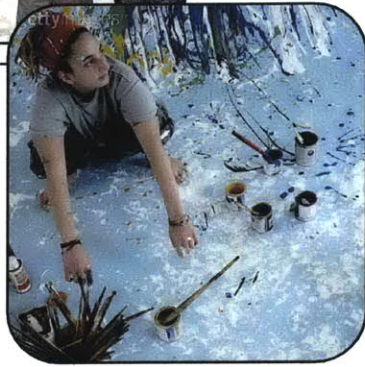


- 1. Parking
- 2. Elevated Plaza
- 3. Winter Garden
- 4. Commercial / Retail
- 5. Housing

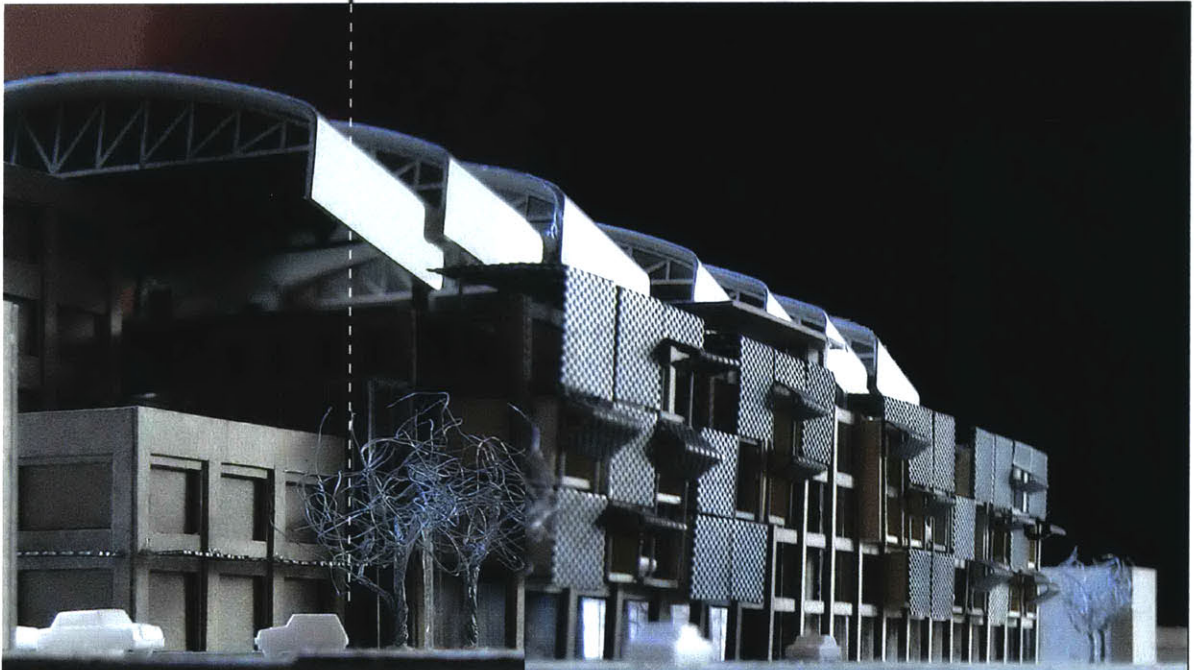
Intermediate Floor

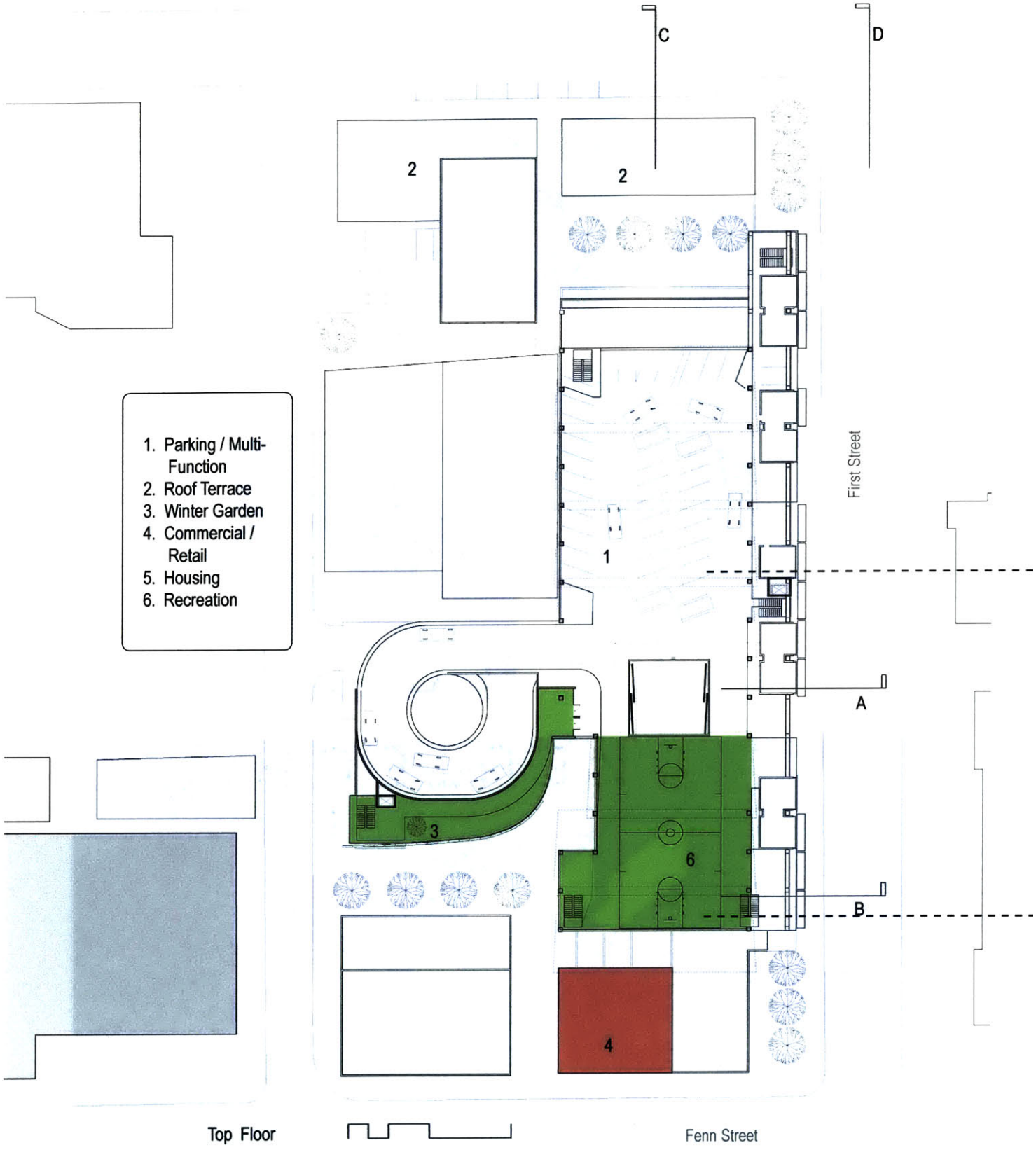
Fenn Street

First Street

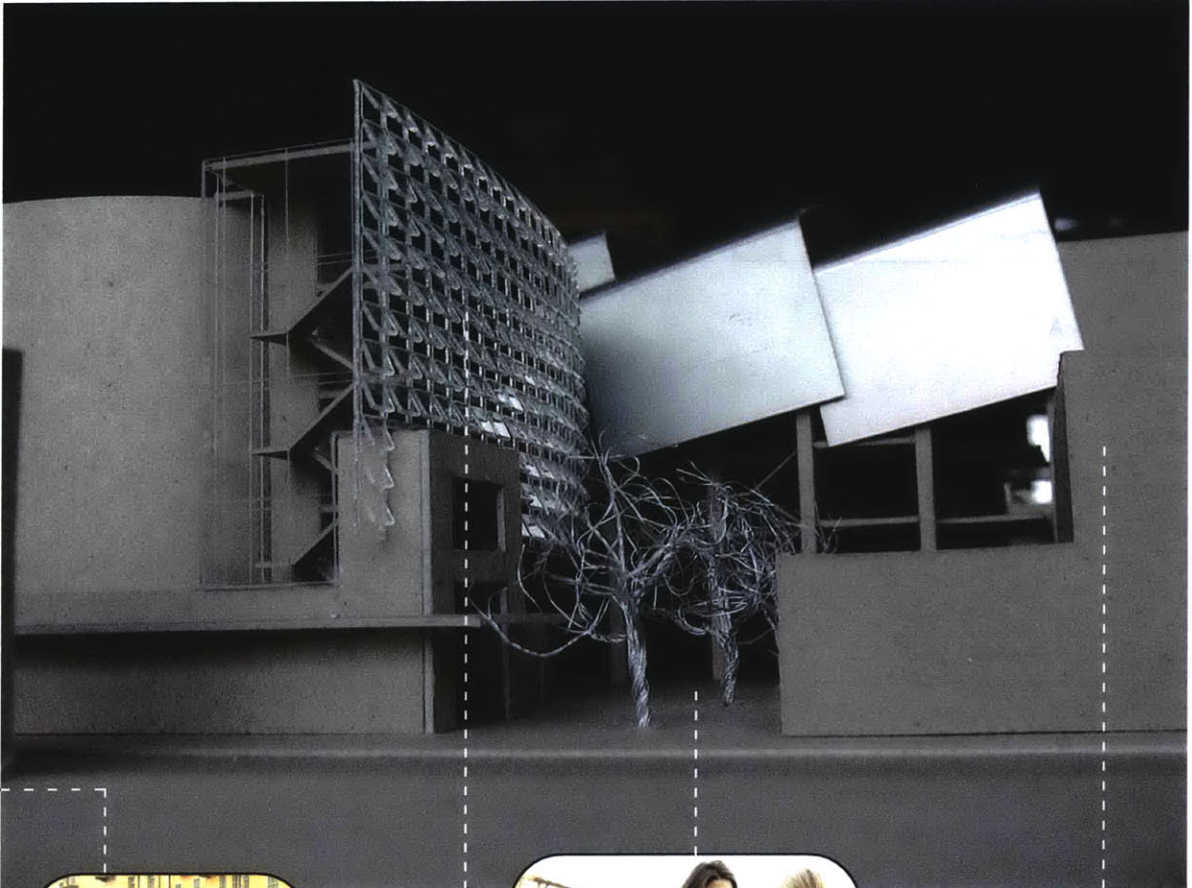


View from First and Fenn



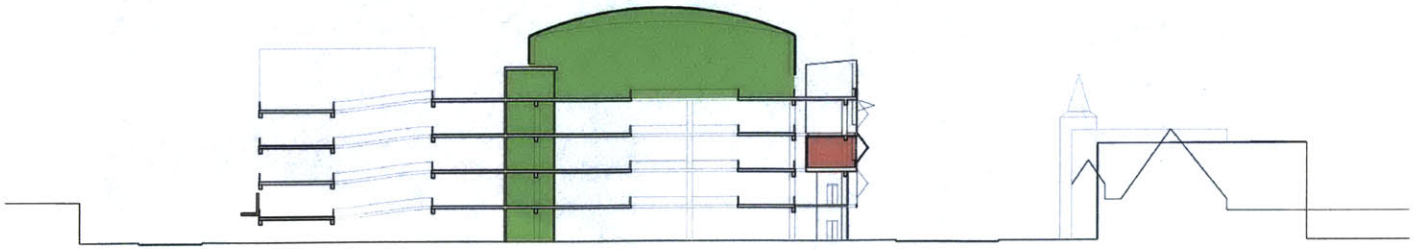


- 1. Parking / Multi-Function
- 2. Roof Terrace
- 3. Winter Garden
- 4. Commercial / Retail
- 5. Housing
- 6. Recreation

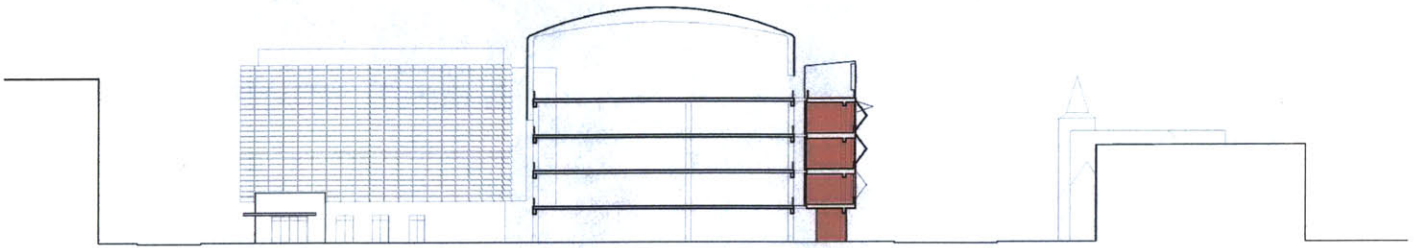


The winter garden and public plaza

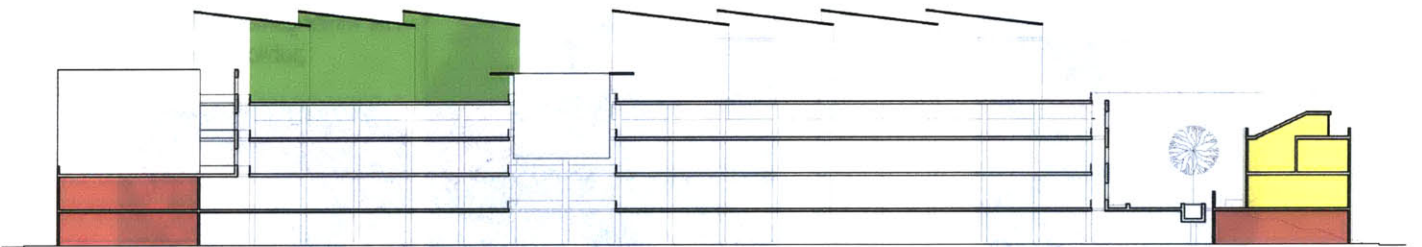




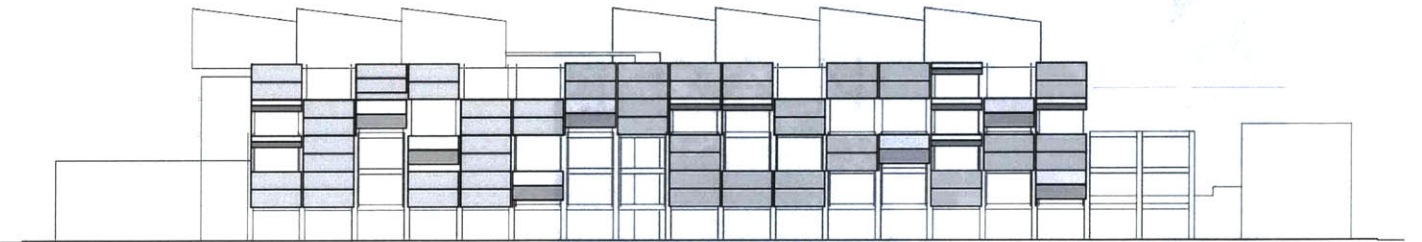
A



B



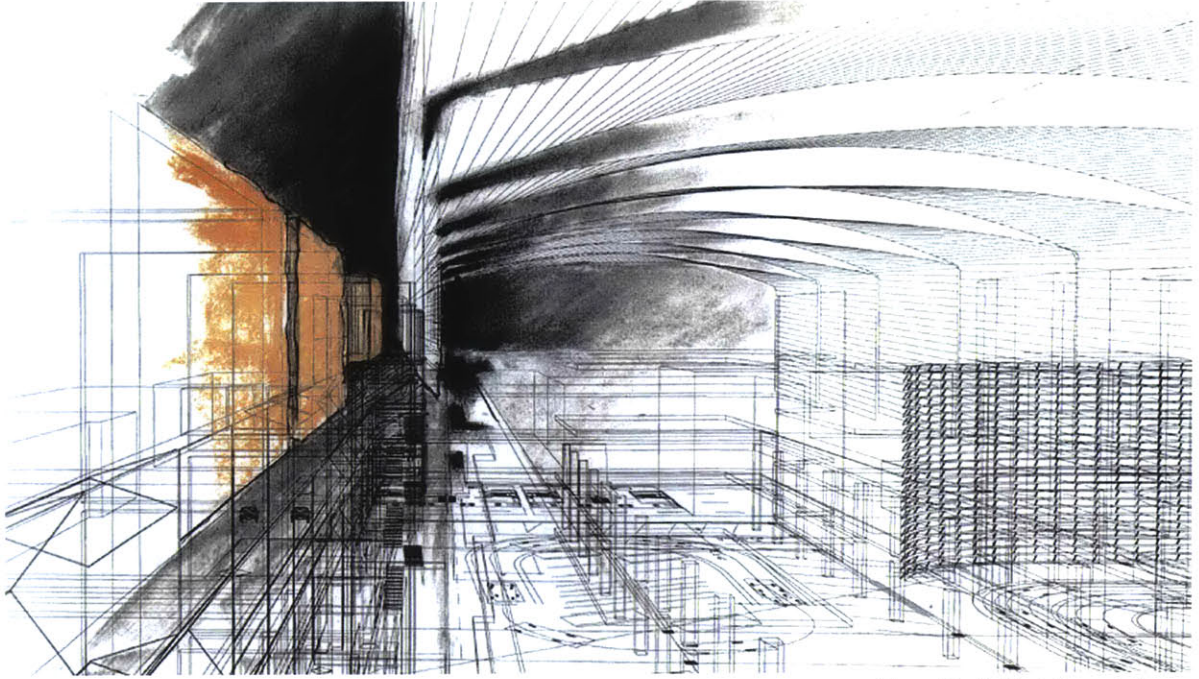
C



D

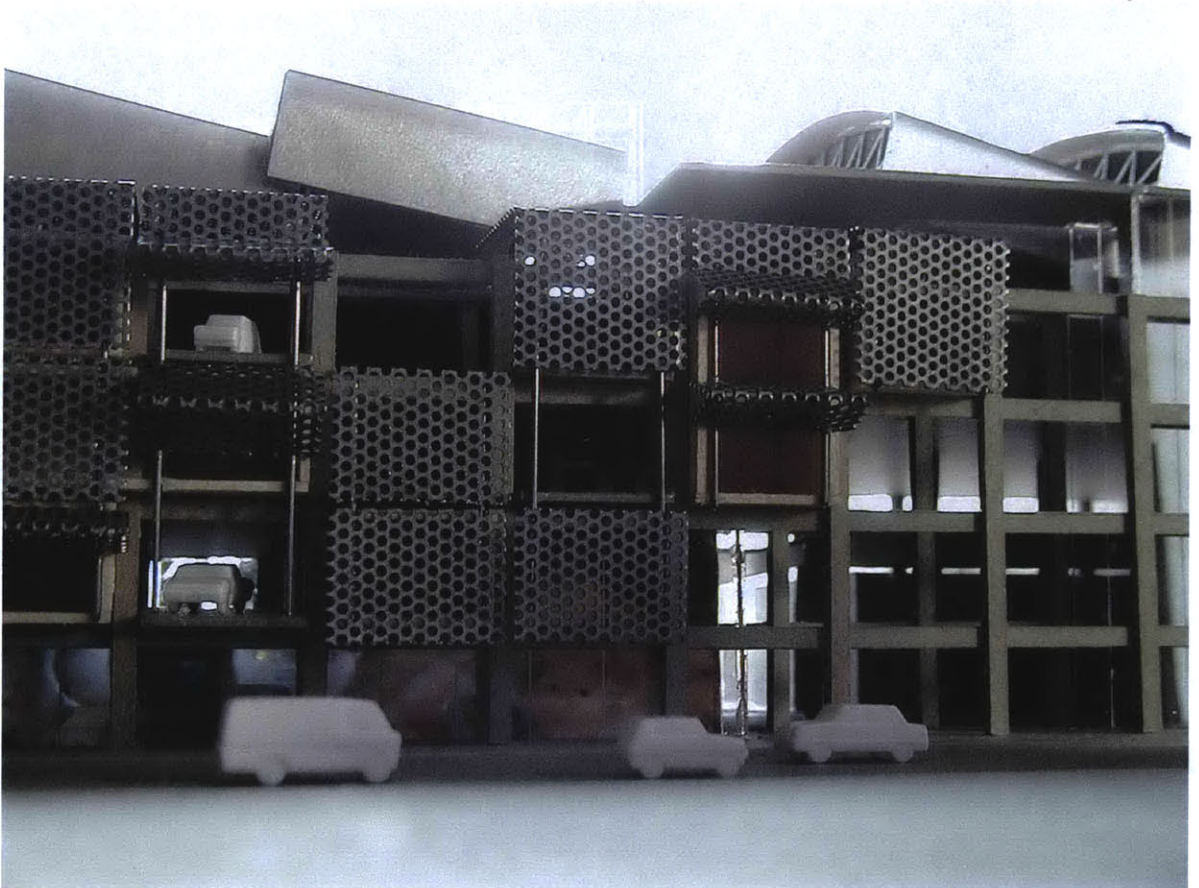
Sections / Elevations

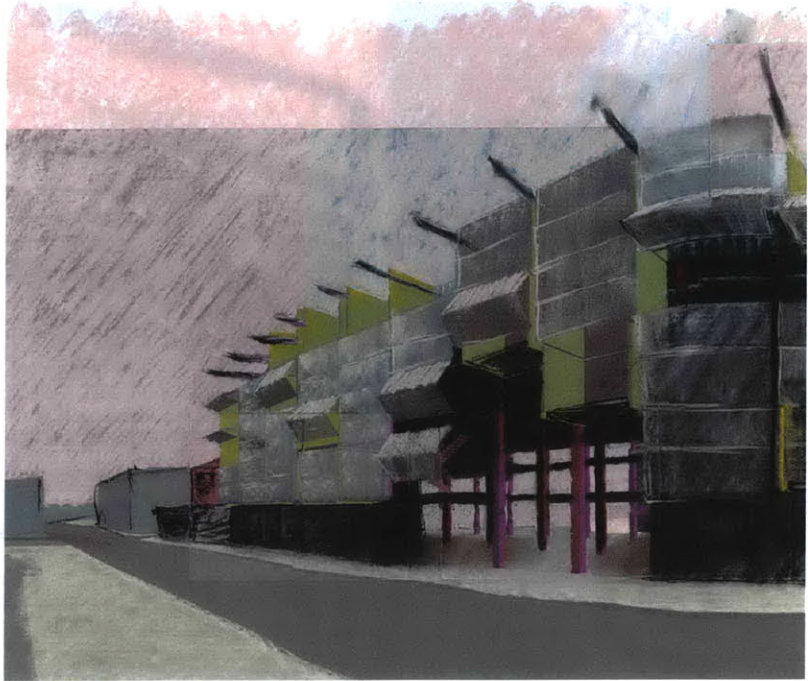
**Park** *Reassessing patterns of life in small urban communities: Designing the interface between living, working and playing*



Upper Deck, Pastel on wireframe

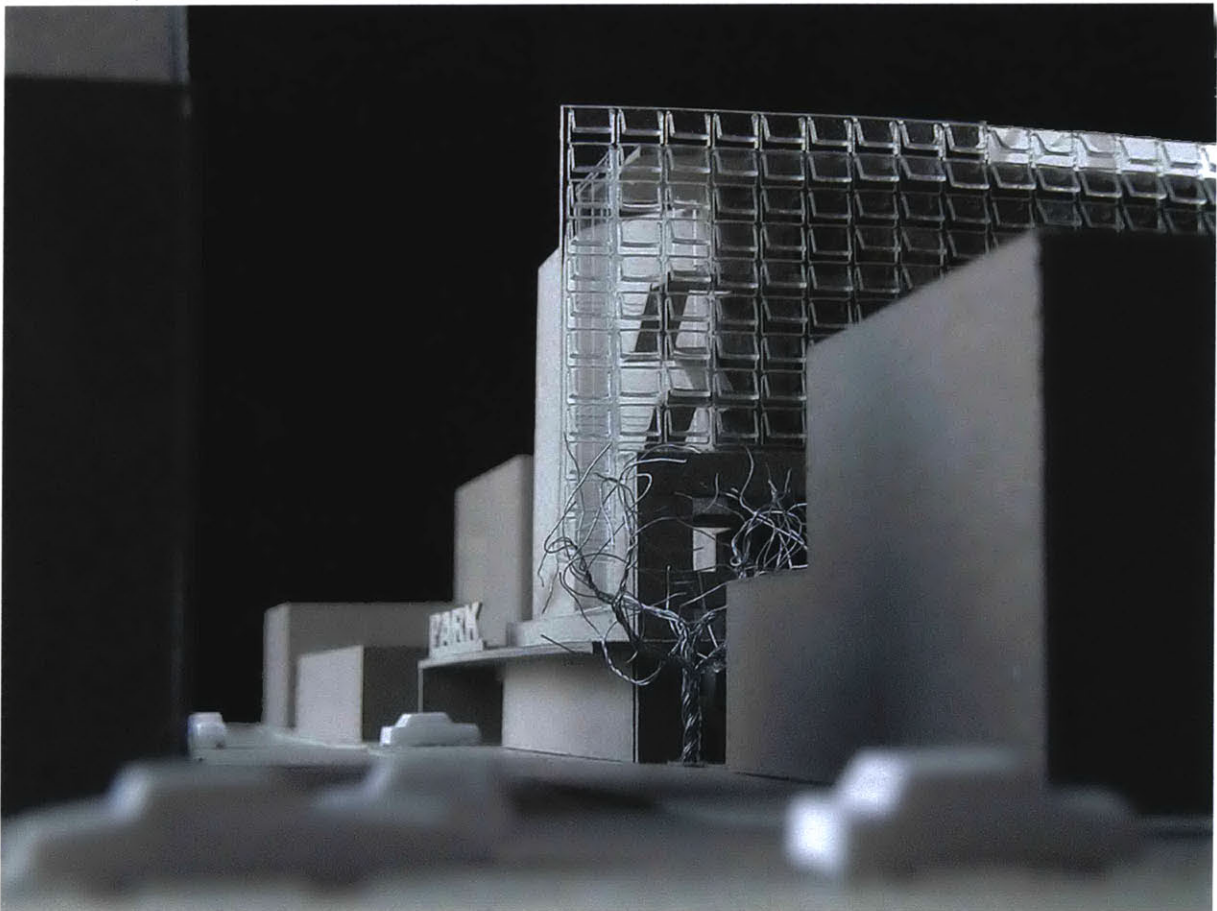
First Street Facade





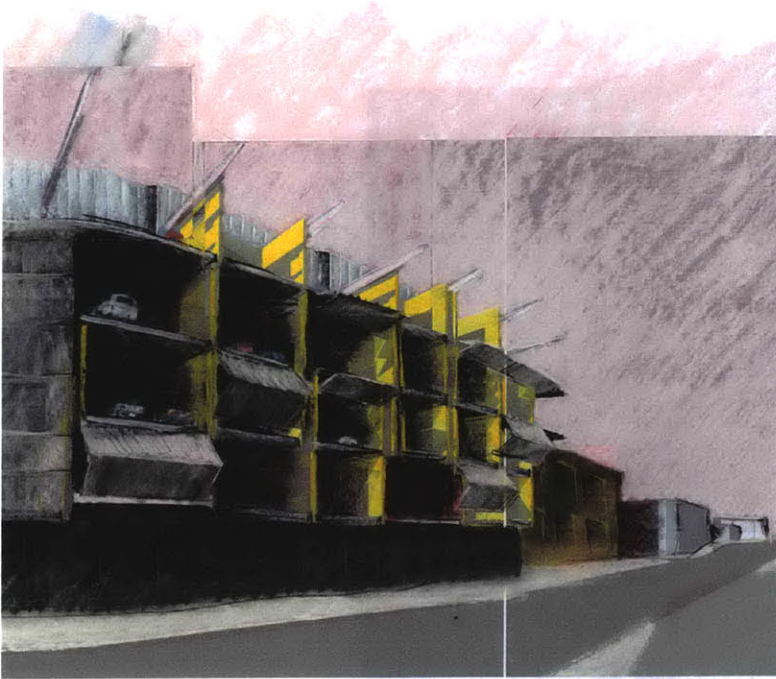
View Down 1St. Street  
Composite drawing, pastel over computer rendering

View from City Hall



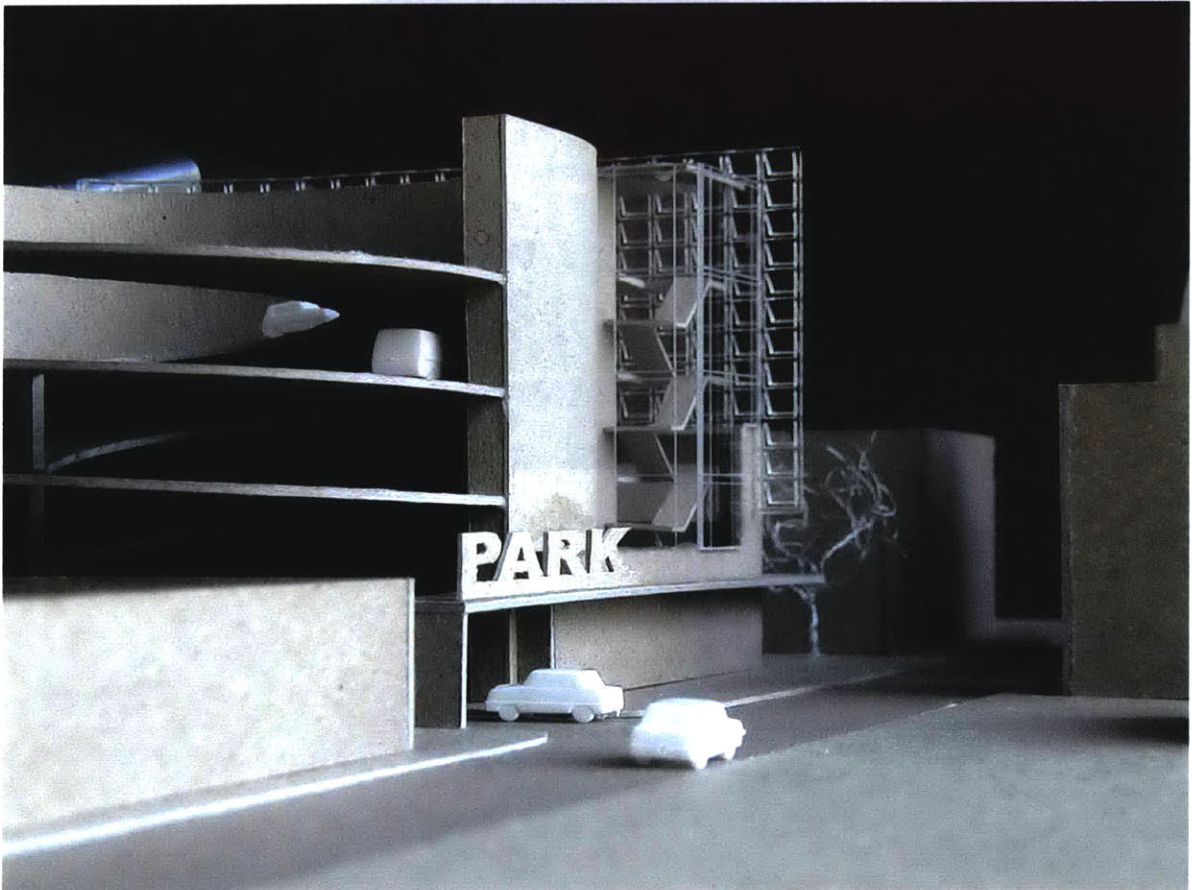
# Park

*Reassessing patterns of life in small urban communities: Designing the interface between living, working and playing*



View Up 1St. Street  
Composite drawing, pastel over computer rendering

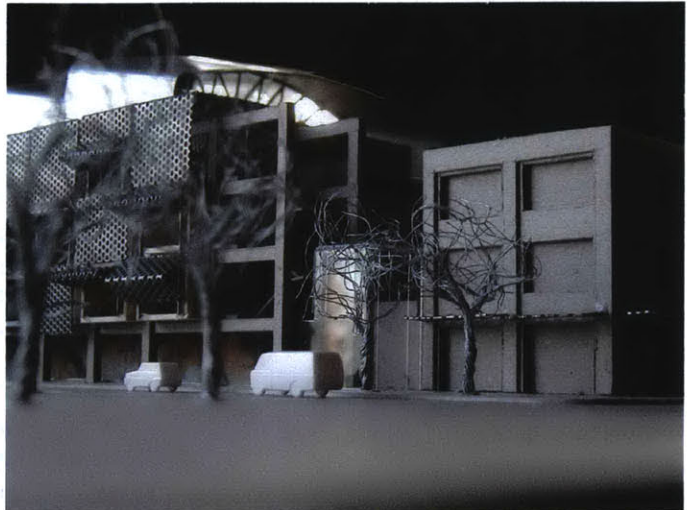
Pearl Street Automobile Entrance



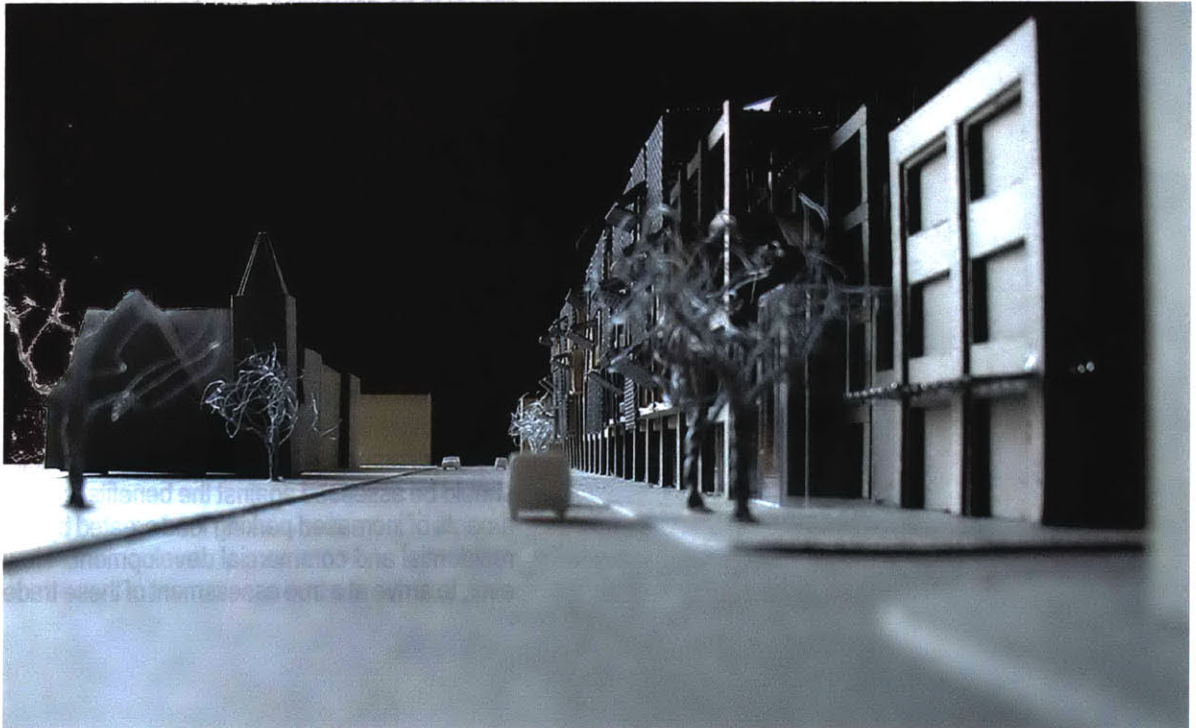


View of lightwell.  
Composite drawing, pastel over computer  
rendering

From the Common Playground



Driving down First Street



# conclusion

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Within recent years, the common perception of Pittsfield and its downtown has been slowly changing toward a positive light. Part of this may be due to the lack of affordable real estate in other overdeveloped parts of the region. Part of it may be due to a demographic shift in the inhabitants of Berkshire County. And it may be just part of a normal cycle of life and death of urban communities. Whatever the cause, Pittsfield like other communities of similar size and character, is on the rise.

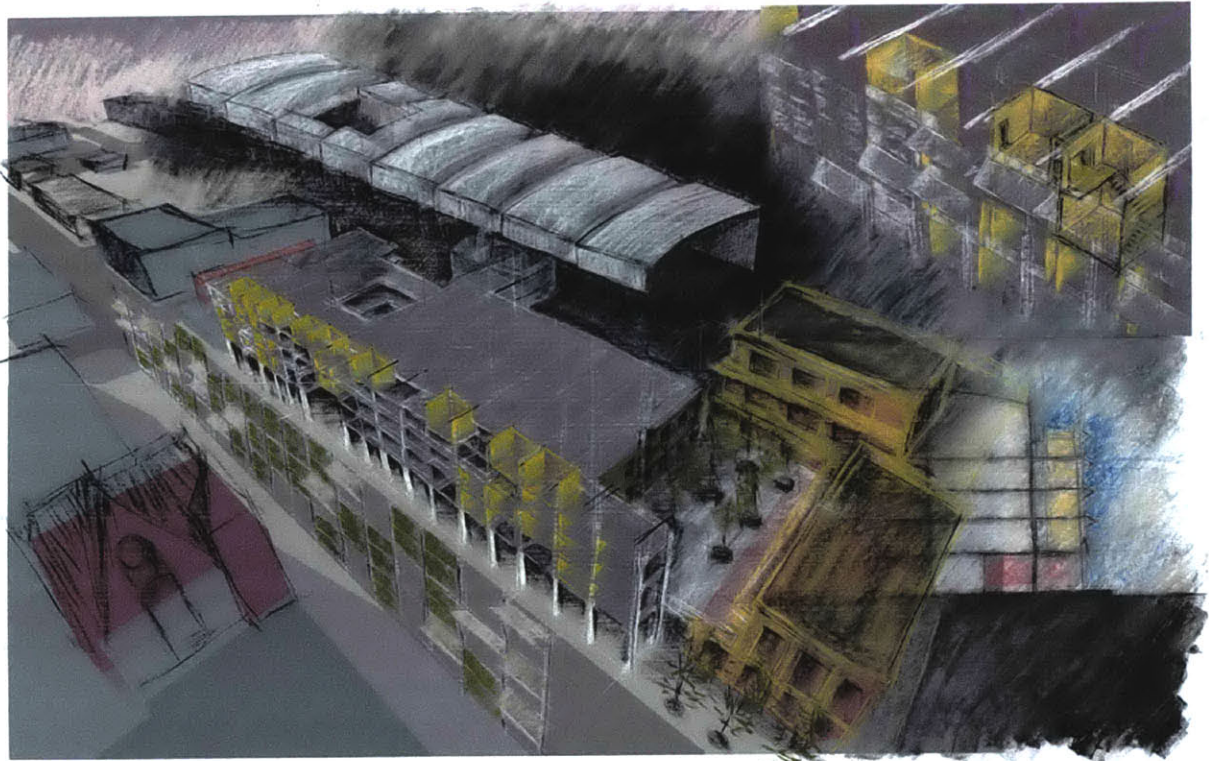
A shift in thinking is now imperative. The leaders and citizens of the city should now begin to contemplate how Pittsfield's revitalization should be moderated and facilitated to insure development true to a collective vision and identity. To fail to do this will only result in the loss of the downtown character and the creation of yet another ubiquitous, corporate owned, gentrified area. To succeed in this task will produce a vital neighborhood rich with local, year-round inhabitants as well as locally owned and operated businesses.

To this end, this thesis has been successful in demonstrating a more comprehensive and holistic approach to an urban ecosystem's development. It demonstrates that a more encompassing approach to programming and ultimately financing can yield a development with more potential to be actualized. It suggests a manner of development flexible to today's changing lifestyles as well as one suitable to today's fashion.

Architecturally, this thesis presents but one example of how the physical artifact might be produced. Within the conceptual framework, many different architectural permutations are possible. Ultimately, the thesis needs to be coupled with a multi-disciplinary study of its feasibility in terms of its programmatic proportions, meeting existing and future demand, real estate values, and the role and responsibilities of the public and private sectors in its development. Trade-offs between the amount of parking added or subtracted should be assessed against the benefits and detriments of increased parking load created by new residential and commercial development. However, to arrive at a true assessment of these trade-

offs, consideration must also be given to the existing downtown residents whose living conditions will be improved as well as to the individuals currently commuting to work in the area who would reside as well as work within the same area, thus minimizing the load on parking.

While less extensive solutions such as conversion to diagonal parking or policy changes are valuable in the short term, a more far reaching proposal is necessary to create an urban fabric, which responds to the way people and automobiles coexist in today's culture. If we are to create a community which reflects favorably upon its past and looks eagerly into its future, careful consideration of today's life-styles is necessary. Ultimately, Pittsfield will be a model for a city developing to more effectively meet its citizen's needs, a model, which can be adopted by countless communities across the country.



Exploded Aerial Perspective view from Common.  
Composite drawing, pastel over computer  
rendering



# appendix

(typological precedent,  
historical archives)



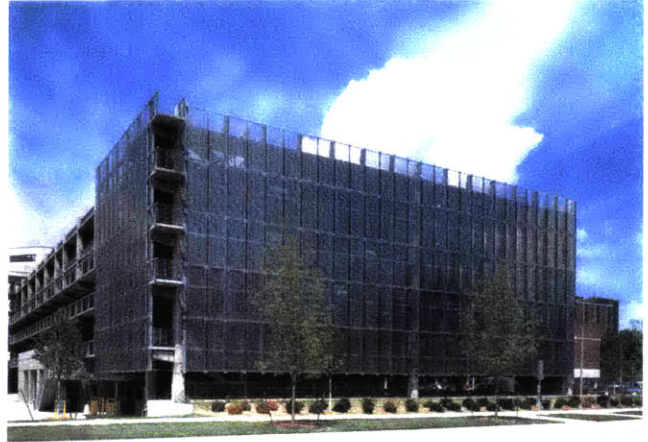


Some early examples of more inventive conceptions of parking facilities and their detailing.

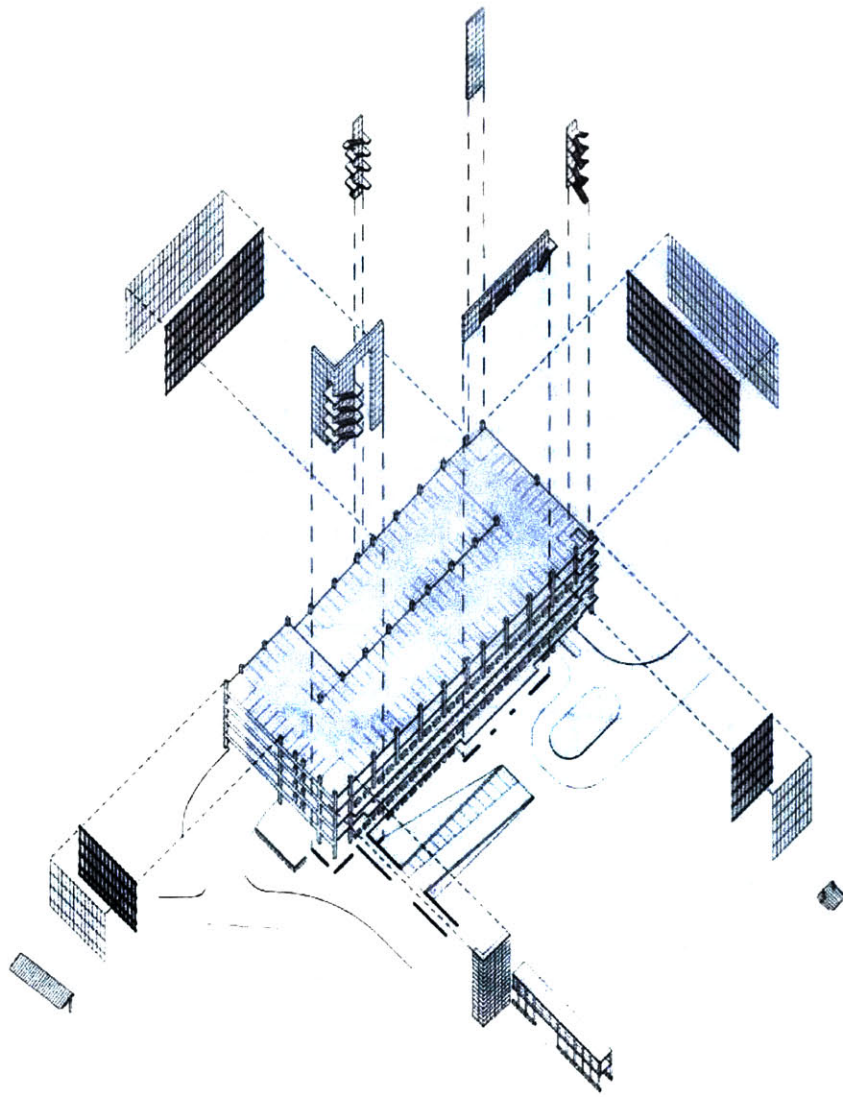




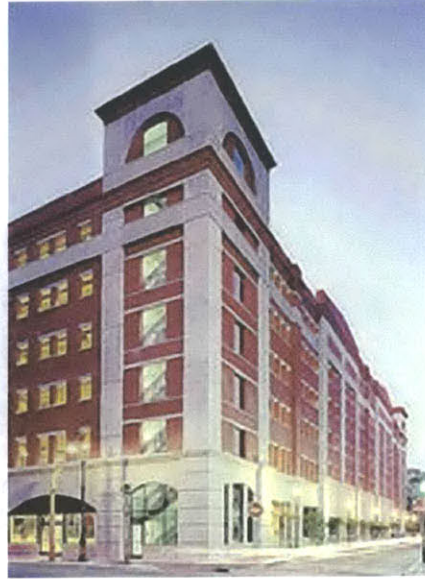
Bertrand Goldberg's 1964 Marina City Towers offers an example of early thinking about the integration of uses into one structure.



A contemporary "screening" example. Melrose Avenue Parking Facility, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa. By HLKB Architects



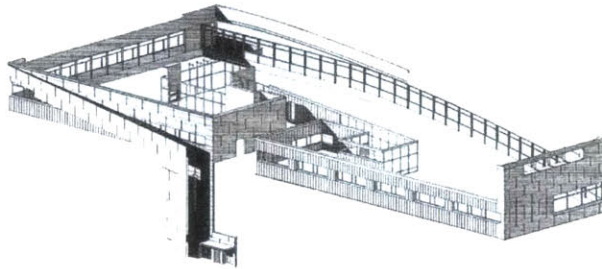
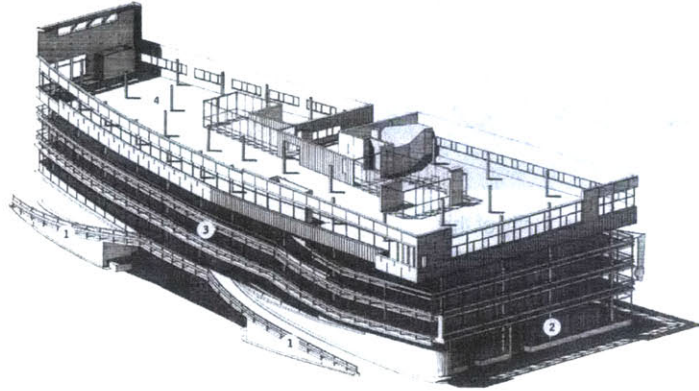
Exploded axonometric



If the site allows, parking structures can be completely hidden by embedding them within programmatic elements.



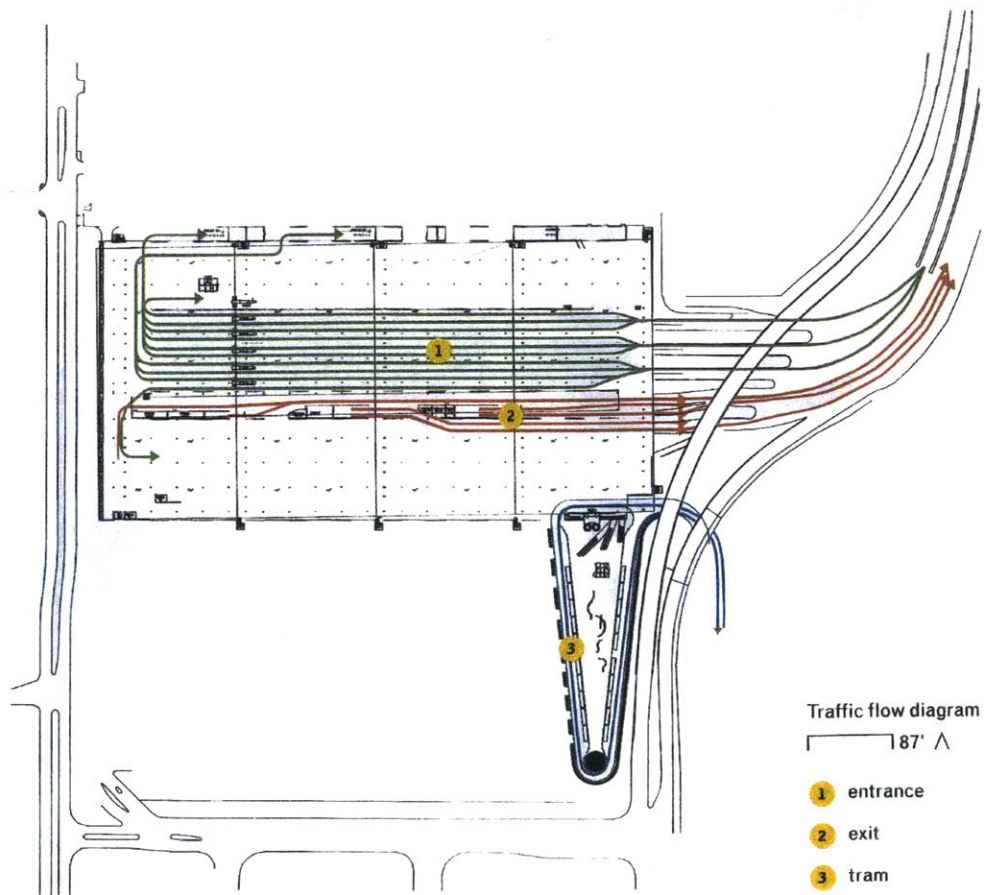
The ubiquitous “big block” approach to parking garages. Primarily driven by economics, they frequently attempt to utilize precast structural elements with relief patterns or minimally veneered surfaces to dress up their facades. Little attention is given to the scale of their surroundings.

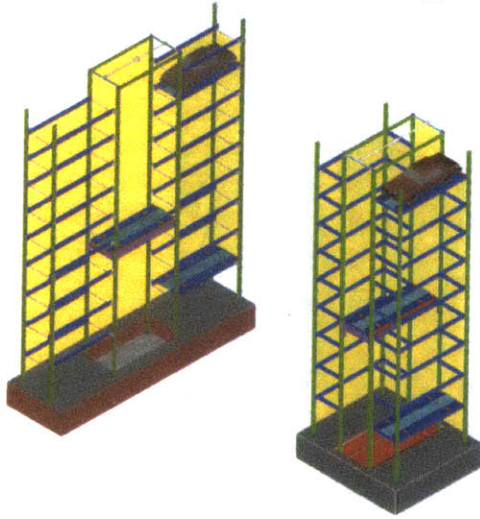


This renovated parking structure in Boston's China Town begins to suggest more integration between multiple program and function. Brian Healy Architects

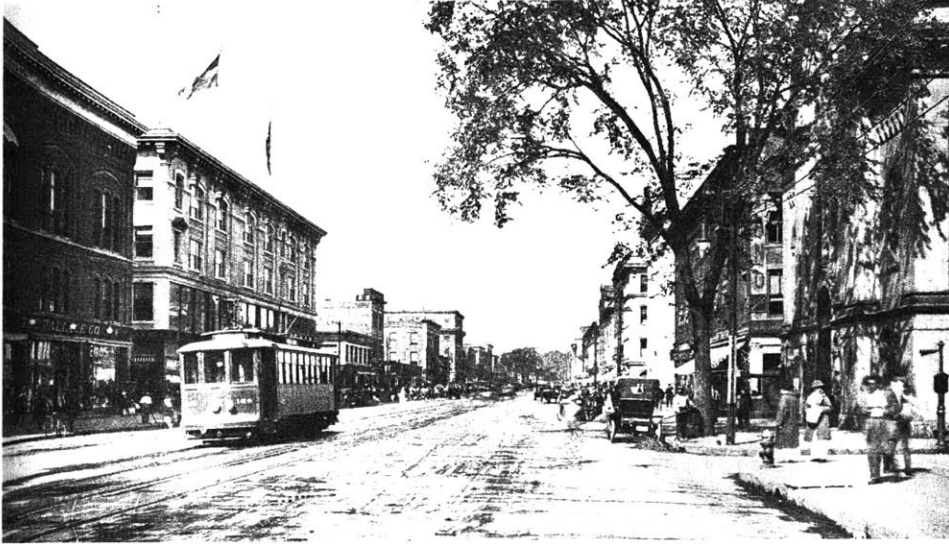


Contemporary examples range in scale from the enormity of this garage designed for Dinsney Land which is as long as the Chrysler building is high. One of its primary design parameters is the efficiency by which cars can enter and leave the facility.





Recently, automated parking structures are now employed to utilize extremely tight sites as well as to make spectacle of the parking process as with this car tower for a toyota car dealership.



Downtown Pittsfield streetcar system photos circa 1915.  
Courtesy National Railway Historical Society.



Retrofitting streetcar infrastructure downtown Pittsfield and residential line circa 1926.  
Courtesy National Railway Historical Society.



The new building typology of the auto station, photos circa 1910.  
 Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.



Downtown and residential streetcar scenes circa 1920.  
Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.



First generation rail station 1865-1890. Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.



Second generation rail station 1914-1968. Courtesy of the Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts.



Third generation rail station 2004-. Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

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Stock photographs courtesy of gettyimages.com

Unless otherwise noted, illustrations by the author

# biography

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Jeff Taylor is a resident of Pittsfield Massachusetts and grew up in Pueblo, Colorado, a city much like Pittsfield.

He was the 2002 recipient of the MIT Murcutt fellowship and was recipient of the 2002 award for Energy Conservation in Building Design along with classmates Karim Hanna and Robert Morgan.

Prior to his MArch degree from MIT, he graduated with honors from the Architecture Department at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

He holds construction supervisor licenses in both Massachusetts and California and for ten years, has operated as an independent design / build contractor in the Berkshire County of Western Massachusetts and formerly in the San Francisco Bay area of Northern California.

He has served as a Teaching Assistant to undergraduate architecture students at MIT.

He has served as a Community Coordinator for the City of Pittsburg, California, and as Program Director for Mt. Diablo Habitat for Humanity in Walnut Creek, California.

He is a loving husband to Amy Taylor and proud father of Cullen and Antonia Taylor. This thesis was prepared in sincere appreciation of their love, patience and support.

Other theoretical work and studies by the author include:

"Architectural Pedagogy: Rethinking Studio Culture," 2004.

"Prefabrication and Affordability in Home Delivery," 2003.

"dialectic2.doc: The Interrelationship of New and Old," 2003.

"Havana: A Study in Sustainable Community Development," 2002.

"Social Distinctions Among Architecture Students," 2002.



