Design in the Dynamics of Urban Landscape Recovery

This course challenges you to envision urban development across scales in a metropolitan setting, and to think beyond the distinct categories of brownfields and greenfields, open space and developed land, high density and low density. It asks you to consider the possibilities for your work as a design intervention in an urban place dynamic in which the landscape is constantly and simultaneously changing at different scales that have different but related drivers. This urban place dynamic includes, of course, ecological and hydrological factors, as well as atmospheric and geological factors, site engineering and construction; introduction, fate, and transport of pollutants and contaminants; economic use, design, development, occupancy and management, and abandonment of the site by different communities and for different purposes, and different aesthetic, spiritual, and cultural interpretations and interventions by people who “own” the place in different ways. Among these drivers, your focus this term is design – not only as a proposal for place making and ecosystem intervention - but as an imaginative cultural intervention that inherently opens possibilities for future landscapes.

Your design intervention takes place in Flint, Michigan, under a plausible future scenario for 2020. In other words, the scenario below very well could occur, but it is not based on any current plans or commitments of the Genesee Regional Chamber of Commerce (GRCC), the City of Flint, or any current developers or firms.

Assume the year is 2020. Your interdisciplinary ecological design practice has thrived in a bumpy global economy because your approach offers demonstrable long term local environmental benefits and amenities that attract economic growth even in uncertain times. Known for ensuring that local site development builds metropolitan ecosystem services and neighborhood identity, your firm has been asked to develop a master plan for the 275-acre Flint Buick City Neighborhood North (BCNN), defined as the area. south of Stewart, west of the railroad r.o.w, east of Saginaw, and north of Leith.

Flint was once the center of automotive manufacturing in America. Since 2010, Flint has begun to be a regional center for manufacture and recycling of components for vehicles and solar energy systems. Kettering University, north of Chevy Workers Memorial State Park on the west edge of the Grand Traverse district, has attracted and developed a new generation of materials engineers who are continuing to grow these materials engineering industries. The Flint population is growing. It has edged up to 140,000, from a low of 105,000 in 2010 and a high of 250,000 in 1960. Downtown Flint now includes a full service grocery store, a down-scaled “big box” department store, banks, the local newspaper, many specialty shops, professional offices, hotels, and a theatre and many restaurants. Crime rates are down, but safety remains an issue especially in neighborhoods where vacant properties have not yet been integrated into the overall natural assets plan for the city. However, the plan has enhanced the amenity character and ecological quality of terrestrial ecosystems adjacent to the Flint River, which ultimately drains into the Saginaw Bay of Lake Huron. A pedestrian and bicycle trail now runs the entire length of the Flint River throughout the City of Flint. The small inflatable “Faber” dam (1979) at the confluence of the Flint River and Swartz Creek was removed in 2015, improving riparian habitats as well. Despite residual contaminants that remain in river sediments and the 1960’s concrete flood control channel that remains in place downstream of downtown in the Chevy Workers Memorial
State Park site, the walleye run that reappeared in the Middle Flint River in the 1980’s has thrived. While the fish are contaminated with PCB’s, the sport fishery is enjoyed by many.

North of downtown and upstream of the state park, the BCNN includes the north 140 acres of the 300 acre Buick City brownfield site, all of which was remediated to residential standards as part of federal investment in industrial redevelopment during the past decade. The 300 – acre Buick City site has been reserved for industrial development by the City of Flint working with the GRCC. The north parcel (between Leith and Stewart) will be sold and developed as a single parcel to maximize flexibility for different industrial uses.

Saginaw Street, bounding the neighborhood on the west is a major city arterial route, with bus service to and from downtown and U of M-Flint with connections to Kettering University 4 times per hour. The city continues to encourage mixed use development on Saginaw. The neighborhood is home to the hallowed Berston Field House and Playground, which opened in 1923. According to the Flint Historic District Commission. The field house was:

“Designed by the Cambridge, Massachusetts, city planning firm of John Nolan, it was developed on land deeded to the city by members of the Neil J. Berston family in 1920. The field house contained an auditorium, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, community meeting rooms and a branch of the public library. At Berston people participated in sports, exercised, performed and learned new skills. During the mid-1930s, Berston became the first community center to admit African Americans living in the surrounding neighborhood. “


Berston is very much alive in as a center of local culture. It is where local boys have practiced to become national basketball stars, as described here:


Sadly, the residential blocks on the west side of the neighborhood continued to suffer foreclosures and necessary demolitions between 2010 and 2020, and very few houses were occupied in 2020. Fewer than 100 residents remained in homes on those blocks, and they all have agreed to move to nearby homes in Smith Village that were owned and recently refurbished by the Genesee County Land Bank Authority. Federal infrastructure enhancement funding makes it possible for sewer, water, and energy infrastructure to be replaced as the new master plan is implemented.

The RFP for the BCNN master plan is prompted by negotiations between a potential industrial occupant for the BCNN industrial site and the State of Michigan, along with the City of Flint, the Genesee County Land Bank Authority (GCLBA), and the GCCC. As the Michigan economy has recovered, a global glass manufacturer (GlassUK) and recycler has proposed a 135-acre facility for the part of the Buick City site north of Leith Street and south of Stewart Avenue. As part of negotiations for selecting the Flint site, GlassUK has communicated a need for attractive housing for 600 workers (from mid-management to staff and factory floor workers) to be located adjacent to the site, and an overall high amenity setting for its facilities and workers. GlassUK has a high level of concern for neighborhood appearance in order to attract new employees to move to Flint as well as to attract high quality employees from within Flint.
In response, the GRCC has requested a master plan for a residential community of 1000 (400 single family homes and 600 homes in multiple-family dwellings). The master plan should also accommodate three major manufacturing, research and development, and shipping facilities for Glass UK. Glass UK plans to occupy the entire Buick City site north of Leith Street. Any public rights-of-way that subdivide the site should ensure that all parcels within the industrial area are at least 40 acres with rail, highway, and road access appropriate to their function. In addition, the master plan request entails a complementary district plan, required to feature the strong connection between the Buick City/ Glass UK site and freeway and railroad access, as well as strengthening connections between residential neighborhoods, existing parks and open spaces, and the Flint River Corridor.

Your task is to provide:

A district plan that allows the BCNN master plan to inform and enrich its context. This will show neighborhood frameworks and development patterns within the site as they connect from the site to key nodes and systems within the City of Flint.

A neighborhood master plan that includes street and open space frameworks, development pattern (parcelization and lot types: typical building types and set backs), urban ecosystems specifications (typical patch types and vertical structure for street, open space, and lot types).

Analyses of the broader context(s), district, and site that explain the underlying landscape logic of your district plan and neighborhood master plan.
Course Themes and Reading

Reading set 1 (required): Neighborhood Development framework patterns
Girling and Kellert, **Skinny Streets** pp 1 — 103
Urban Design Associates, **The Urban Design Handbook**. pp. 30-43 (CTools)

Reading set 2: Working across scales: a landscape ecology framework
Girling and Kellert, **Skinny Streets** pp 104-134

Supporting reading (optional)
[http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=21627](http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=21627)

COURSE GRADES
Sketch project 1 (P/F) .05
Sketch project 2 (P/F) .05
Framework Interim .10
Design interim .10
Final Project .70
Total 1.00
Class participation, with particular emphasis on being prepared for board crits with new drawings for discussion every day, is required and may affect your grade by as much as one full grade level. Late work will receive a reduced grade.
**Winter 2010 Course Schedule**

**Development framework : Connecting to the city**
January 6 - Course Introduction. Sketch Project 1: New Industrial Neighborhood. Due: 4 pm.
January 8- Critique of sketch project from the perspective of Reading set 1.

**Development framework: Ecological dynamics**
January 11- Critique of sketch project from the perspective of Reading set 2. Begin Sketch Project 2: New Industrial Neighborhood.
January 13 - 3 pm – Sketch Project 2 is due.

**Neighborhood in a District Development framework phase** (200’=1” scale)
*Jan 15 - Field trip to Buick City neighborhood – Depart Dana at 12:30 pm and return at 5 pm.*
Jan 18 - Martin Luther King Day
Jan 20-22 Work days (app’ts.)
Jan 25 - FRAMEWORK INTERIM: Pin-up critique of neighborhood frameworks
January 27-29 Work days (app’ts.)

**Urban ecosystems, block and lot design pattern phase** (40’=1” scale)
Feb 1-3 Work days (app’ts.)
Feb 5 - DESIGN INTERIM. Pin-up critique of design pattern for selected example blocks within the broader framework.

**Design iteration**
February 8-10 Work days (app’ts.)
Feb. 12 Work day

**Representation**
February 15- Work days (app’ts.)
February 17 - Work days
Feb. 19 - Office pin-up of representation cartoons
**February 26 – 4 p.m. Project is due.**

**Presentation**
March 8, 1 – 4 pm – Presentations
March 10, 1 - 3 pm – Presentations

**Reflection**
If they wish to, students may schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss their work in the course. Meetings will be scheduled March 24 -26.