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February 1, 2021

Greetings friend,

My name is Bianca Tylek. I am the Executive Director of Worth Rises, a non-profit organization dedicated to dismantling the prison industry and ending the exploitation of those it touches.

I am writing to welcome you to *The Prison Industry: The Curriculum*, a free, public, self-study course about the prison industry and the fight to build a world without it. The course is based on our recent report, *The Prison Industry: How it Started, How it Works, How it Harms*, which covers the history, business, and impact of each sector of the prison industry — from telecom to healthcare to equipment. The report will serve as the textbook for this course.

Now, you may be wondering why you are receiving this letter? It is because you have either written to us previously or you are among the hundreds we randomly selected. Together, you now comprise a cohort of more than 1,000 incarcerated people across the country, covering all 50 states and the federal system, who will receive the course content each week, including reading assignments, discussion questions, and other opportunities to engage, through mid-May. We are so excited to have you with us, and we hope you are too!

Enclosed you'll find course materials for Week 1: Introduction and Week 2: Architecture + Construction. Included is the (1) report cover, (2) table of contents, (3) introduction, (4) Chapter 1: Architecture + Construction, and (5) related discussion guide questions.

Throughout the course, you should feel free to write to us. You can send your thoughts on a reading assignment, answers to discussion questions, or personal testimonials related to the material. We would love to share your reflections with those taking the course on the outside and in our advocacy efforts. Please note that Worth Rises does not provide legal services.

Unfortunately, we do not have the budget to add people to our list. So, please share the material with others in your facility. It is also available online at worthrises.org/thecurriculum, where your loved ones can sign up themselves and access all the content, accompanying webinars, and even a discussion forum exclusively for directly impacted community members. Of course, please also kindly let us know if you would like us to remove you from the list.

We hope you're as excited about this opportunity as we are to have you participate! In all of our work, we rely on the support, guidance, and expertise of directly impacted community members like you and your loved ones. It's a pleasure to be able to give this back to you.

In solidarity,

Bianca



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■ INTRODUCTION

We are living in a watershed moment. In the wake of brutal police killings, people in more than 2,000 cities and towns, across all 50 states, have responded by demanding the defunding of the police and the abolition of the carceral state. To observers, and to those of us who have done this work for years, it is truly remarkable to hear abolition – a word that felt far from mainstream only months prior – discussed in forums, teach-ins, boardrooms, and media. In moments like this, one easily forgets the decades of work that shaped this moment.

But to do so would be to lose sight of the truth that meaningful victories are won not in days, but through generations of principled struggle. We stand on the shoulders of giants and their tireless work – Black, Brown, and Indigenous people like Angela Davis, George Jackson, Jalil Mutaquim, Assata Shakur, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Joy James, Michelle Alexander, and countless others.

If we are truly to abolish police and prisons, we must understand the systems we wish to destroy. The prison industry is comprised of a vast matrix of public-private partnerships that undergird the nation's commitment to human caging and control. It is a seemingly amorphous system of more than 4,100 corporations, and their government conspirators, that profit from the incarceration of mothers, and fathers, and nieces, and cousins, and grandparents. It is a system built on bleeding people and communities of their resources, and then even further exploiting their devastation.

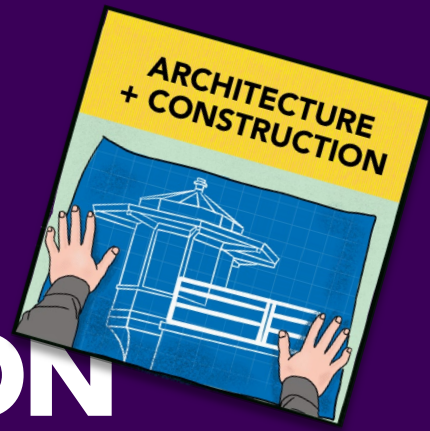
This report maps the twelve sectors of the prison industry and details the extraction of wealth from the families that have been most disproportionately brutalized by over-policing, mass criminalization, mass incarceration, and mass surveillance. This report details how the carceral state has metastasized with the help of the private sector across our economy and evolved to maintain systems of oppression in the face of shifting public opinion.

With this report, we hope to offer a blueprint for the constantly changing prison industry we seek to dismantle. In each chapter, we share the origin story of privatization for that sector, how much money is in it for the corporations involved, the methods they use to extract resources from public coffers and communities, which corporations are most active, and the harm they cause people, families, and communities. We also share powerful first-person narratives that are critical to understanding the impact privatization has had on people.

We must know where we came from to change the course of where we are going, especially as corporations and their correctional partners pivot to new forms of shackling, such as electronic monitoring and other forms of community surveillance, to profit from mass human control. By mapping the past and present, we hope that readers can imagine and design a better future because abolition, as the formidable geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore reminds us, is not only about the dismantling of systems, but also about the visioning of what we collectively build in its place.

We hope this report in its conveyance of information serves as a tool in the dismantling of the prison industry and destruction of this wholly oppressive system; and that from there, we can create a world built on care not cages.

ARCHITECTURE + CONSTRUCTION



“ This [layout] improves security and floods the facility with natural light, making the white-painted cells feel more spacious.

HOK, architecture & engineering firm¹

Following the civil rights movement of the 1960s, state-sponsored deindustrialization and suburbanization supported white flight and hollowed out urban centers. In 1971, U.S. President Richard Nixon launched the war on drugs to intentionally disrupt urban Black communities.⁶ Incarceration quickly swelled, and jails and prisons began popping up all over the country, particularly in rural areas that were struggling to replace jobs in waning industries like farming and mining.⁷

By the 1990s, the racist war on drugs and rising crime rates stemming from increased structural inequities had spurred the vilification of Black people in the media and bipartisan consensus on “tough-on-crime” policies. The 1994 Omnibus Crime Bill represented the culmination of these ideologies, dramatically escalating jail and prison expansion by offering states federal subsidies – totaling \$9 billion – to enact harsh sentencing laws, including mandatory minimums.⁸ Consequently, between 1984 and 2005, a new prison or jail was built every 8.5 days in the U.S.⁹ – 70 percent of which were in rural communities continuing to suffer job loss that eagerly bought into exaggerated promises of economic prosperity.¹⁰ All the while, jail and prison architects, designers, and contractors raked in billions of dollars.

Description: Government agencies contract with corporate architects, designers, engineers, and contractors to design, construct, renovate, and maintain prisons, jails, immigrations detention centers, and youth facilities.

\$4.6 billion

Annual spending on correctional construction²

> 7,000

Correctional facilities across the U.S.³

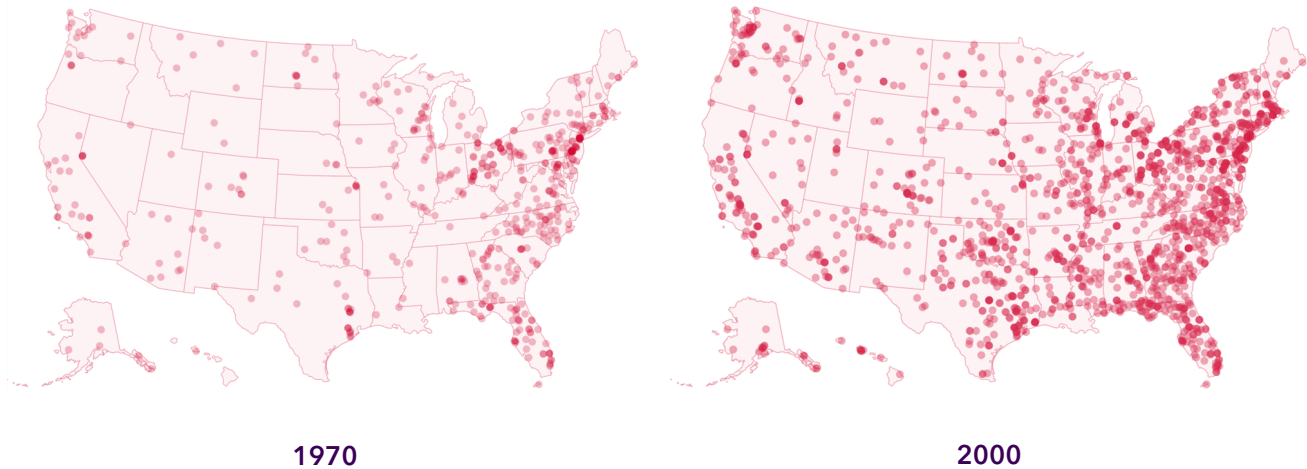
277%

Jail capacity growth 1970 - 2017⁴

907,000

Jail beds across the U.S.⁵

Correctional Facilities in the U.S.¹¹



While correctional facilities are no longer being built with such haste, there is still plenty of business for those who build them. Despite bipartisan efforts to drive down carceral populations in recent years, old and decaying facilities continue to be restored or replaced with larger, more modern structures. Across the country, law enforcement and policy makers alike have extolled the notion of modernization as a means to make prisons and jails more humane, sinking millions and sometimes billions of dollars into projects that do nothing to address the harms of the institutions themselves.

And architecture and construction firms are chomping at the bit to design and build this next iteration of cells, boasting of innovation like window slats that allow natural light to pass through. Architects, designers, and contractors that erect prisons and jails eagerly lay the foundation and framework for mass incarceration, literally.

■ HOW MUCH MONEY IS AT STAKE?

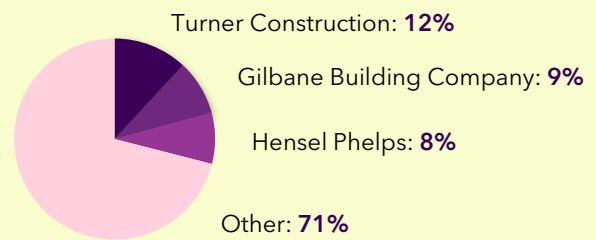
Federal, state, and local governments infuse the correctional construction industry with billions of dollars every year. Government spending on correctional construction peaked at \$8.0 billion in 2008 but fell to \$4.6 billion by 2018 as public spending constricted after the market crash and the carceral population began to fall.¹² Though some players exited the market amid concerns that it would never bounce back to pre-2008 recession levels, many firms consolidated operations to capitalize on economies of scale and pressed on.¹³

Current spending is enough to grow bed capacity every year, particularly in rural jails where debunked economic arguments still control the expansion narrative¹⁴ and architecture, engineering, and construction firms fund sheriff races. In fact, nationally, in the past decade, the jail population has declined by roughly 40,000 while the number of jail beds has climbed by more than 86,000.¹⁵ Many of the largest correctional constructions projects today are new jails, ranging from \$130 million for a county jail in Land O'Lakes, Florida¹⁶ to \$8.7 billion for the plan to close the Rikers Island jail complex in New York City and build four community-based jails in its stead.¹⁷

WHAT CORPORATIONS ARE INVOLVED?

Architecture, engineering, and construction firms work hand-in-hand to design and build correctional facilities. The largest architecture players in the market are also some of the nation's largest firm: HDR and HOK. HDR has designed over 275 correctional facilities¹⁹ and HOK has designed more than 100,000 correctional beds.²⁰

Market Share¹⁸



While there are similarly dominant construction companies, construction contracts are often split among large national corporations and regional firms in order to meet local job creation goals. Still, the largest construction players in the correctional market include Turner Construction Company, Gilbane Building Company, and Hensel Phelps, which together hold roughly 30 percent of the market. Turner, a subsidiary of HOCHTIEF, the German company that built public infrastructure for the Nazi party using forced labor,²¹ generated \$1.4 billion in revenue on prison and jail construction between 2007 and 2012.²²

Gilbane boasts of being one of the top five correctional builders for over a decade now.²³ Hensel Phelps has built nearly 100 million square feet of correctional space.²⁴ Other major players in the field include the Clark Construction Group, which has completed over \$4.5 billion in correctional and judicial projects round the country,²⁵ and McCarthy Building Companies, which was contracted by Los Angeles County in 2019 to build a \$2.2 billion new jail until activists forced the county to cancel the project.²⁶

CORRECTIONAL DESIGN

A well-designed, humane prison is a perverse fallacy. No number of architectural bells and whistles can change the fact that a more modern cage is still a cage.

The average size of a correctional cell – the closest thing to personal space an incarcerated person has and must, at times, still share with one or two others – is not much larger than the size of a parking space. Walls, floors, doors, and gates are constructed with the coldest building materials, an assortment of stone, cement, cinder, iron, and steel.²⁷

Natural light is limited to what passes through barred windows even in facilities with no outdoor spaces.²⁸ Toilet and shower stalls are built without doors or curtains. Visit rooms are designed to prohibit contact with loved ones. And all these indignities are explained away with one claim: security.

The worst manifestation of this torture architecture is a solitary confinement cell, a box the size of an elevator in which people are confined for 22 to 24



Government officials break ground at location of new Utah prison²⁹

hours a day.³⁰ On any given day, between 61,000 and 100,000 people nationwide are tortured in solitary,³¹ and many will spend weeks, months, years, and even decades in solitary.

These cells are designed to remove human contact; a single slot in a metal door serves as the pass through for food, mail, sound, and even light.³² The use of solitary confinement in the U.S. has been condemned by the United Nations and human rights organizations for its severe psychological effects, and yet private architects, engineers, and contractors continue to design and build these spaces.³³

In recent years, architecture, engineering, and construction firms have changed their narrative about their role in prison construction, moving from silence to hyperbolic claims that they design facilities that minimize dehumanization and promote rehabilitation.³⁴ They gloat about wall murals of naturescapes and floor glazing that extends the reach of natural light as they design expansion projects meant to facilitate incarceration.³⁵

Solitary Confinement Is Shockingly Small

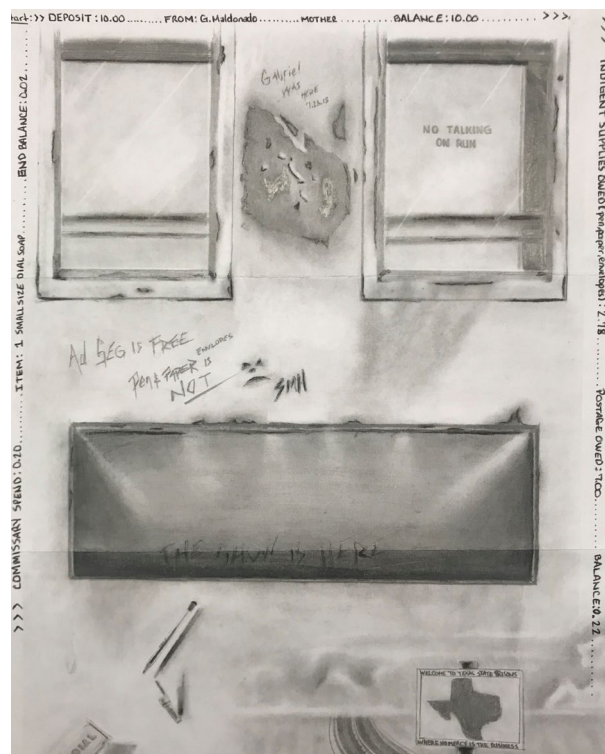
Measuring 6ft X 9ft, the average solitary cell is smaller than your apartment bathroom

■ average one bedroom apartment | ■ solitary confinement cell

19 solitary cells would fit into the average one bedroom apartment

R.A. Di Ieso / Vocativ

Comparison of solitary cell to average one-bedroom apartment³⁶



Gabriel (b. 1986), Laredo, TX, No Mercy is the Best Business

"Here is the inside view of my solitary cell door. Two windows look onto the tier where staff escort other prisoners. But the real show happens in the slot below them. Everything passes through the slot: mail, clothes, commissary, food, light."

JOHNNY'S STORY



Johnny Perez
New York

During the 13 years I was incarcerated, I spent three years in solitary confinement in increments of anywhere from three to ten months – all for minor infractions. Solitary is devoid of human contact, and so much more: light, sound, and color. My gray cells had just one interior-facing window with frosted glass. It was the same window through which guards served me the meals that helped me assess whether it was morning or night – breakfast was at 7 a.m. and dinner at 4 p.m.

In solitary, it was quiet – so quiet that you could hear your thoughts, your heartbeat, even small animals outside in the yard. I found inspiration any way I could. I read the Bible – the only text I was allowed – at least ten times over the course of my sentence. Other times, I read the ingredients on my toothpaste and the few other products I could have. Desperate for human connection, I shouted through vents to others in my solitary units, forging deep bonds with people whose faces I never saw.

When I was younger, I sat in solitary blaming myself with a sense of hostility. As I grew older, those thoughts morphed into anger, and I questioned how such a space could even exist? Who conceived of it? Who designed it? Who built it? Who condemned me to it?

I am home now, but years later, I am still acclimating to life outside. Small spaces like public bathrooms trigger memories of solitary. Nightmares about being incarcerated again sometimes creep into my sleep. Despite it all, hope drives my dedication to criminal justice advocacy. As the National Director of U.S. Prison Programs at the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, today, I advocate for an end to solitary confinement and train other solitary survivors to do the same.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Nearly 600 prisons have been built on or in close proximity to Superfund sites, contaminated land zones identified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as toxic to human and environmental health and requiring the sustained removal of hazardous materials.³⁷ The toxins in these locations have been linked to cancer, heart disease, pulmonary disease, birth defects, depression, and tooth decay.³⁸ Despite decades of environmental justice advocacy originating from inside prisons with the Black Liberation Political Prisoners in the late 1980s,³⁹ government agencies and complicit architects and contractors continue to build prisons and jails on Superfund sites and other environmentally hazardous areas with blatant disregard for the health and wellbeing of incarcerated people and correctional staff.

However, fights for environmental safety are starting to see modest returns. In 2015, Escambia County, Florida sought to build a jail on a Superfund site in Pensacola. Advocates successfully demanded a different site, though the county went on to build the jail in a hazardous flood zone.⁴⁰ In 2016, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) planned to build a \$444 million facility in Whitesburg, Kentucky, located atop an old mine, next to a coal processing plant and sludge pond.⁴¹ After vigorous challenges by incarcerated people and allied advocates, the BOP withdrew its plan for the new facility.⁴² While the environmental justice efforts of advocates in these two instances proved successful, many are not.

For instance, people incarcerated at the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution - Fayette have been exposed to hazardous pollution for decades due to the dumping of millions of tons of coal ash near the prison.⁴³ Toxic dust filled with mercury, lead, and arsenic runs off into the prison water. Advocates have wrestled for years with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections for legal relief but have repeatedly been told that exposure levels are safe, an assertion plainly contradicted by the stories of the ailing people inside.⁴⁴



[Contractors] extract all the good stuff from the land, then they sell it to waste companies that contaminate the land, and then they sell it to prisons. Then they start shipping inmates there, and people start getting sick.

Richard Mosley, former incarcerated advocate in Pennsylvania⁴⁵

Architecture, engineering, and construction firms are not just complicit in the building of prisons on toxic land, they also often introduce health hazards through their design and construction. For example, in Texas, where temperatures routinely exceed 100°F, architects, engineers, and contractors designed and built state prisons without air conditioning; 23 people have died from overheating in those facilities.⁴⁶ In California, someone died in a correctional medical facility from Legionnaires' disease⁴⁷ caused by bacteria in the building's water system.⁴⁸ The facility was built by McCarthy Building Companies in 2010. By 2016, it was receiving failing grades from the state inspector general.⁴⁹ Through their indifference to and exacerbation of environmental hazards in correctional facilities, architecture, engineering, and construction firms have devalued the lives of incarcerated people.

■ CONSTRUCTION FINANCING

Government agencies typically consider several factors when deciding whether to build a new or replacement facility: overcrowding, dilapidation, need for specialized services, economic impact, job creation, and revenue opportunities.⁵⁰ However, jail and prison construction has not always panned out as expected. In fact, in many cases, it has been a financial sinkhole for taxpayers – and windfall for architects, engineers, and contractors – with projects running over in cost and time estimates even with the grossly underpaid labor of incarcerated people.

For instance, a recent prison project in Salt Lake City, Utah, a joint venture between Layton Construction and Oakland Construction,⁵¹ ran 18 months behind schedule and 20 percent over its original \$650 million budget.⁵² In Santa Barbara, California, a new jail build that was originally estimated to cost \$77 million and slated for completion in the spring of 2019 culminated in a lawsuit against contractor Rosser International after it went out of business in the summer of 2019 and abandoned the project what it was only 80 percent completed and nearly 40 percent over budget.⁵³ And in Eureka, California, the construction of a youth jail was due to be completed in 2018, but a year past the due date, the county was forced to release the contractor, Hal Hays Construction, for failure to make adequate progress and go after its bond agent, Western Surety Company, to demand the project be completed.⁵⁴

These projects only scratch the surface of the fiscal waste in the construction of cages for incarcerated people that has diverted billions of tax dollars from the community investments in education, mental health care, substance use treatment, affordable housing, and restorative justice.

MAINTENANCE

Construction firms are not just contracted for new construction projects, but also for renovations and simple maintenance projects. While the firms contracted by government agencies for these projects are often smaller, local firms, their role is nevertheless critical to the upkeep on facilities – which is often questionable at best. In fact, the staff at these corporations regularly see the atrocity of conditions in our nation’s prisons and jails, and yet they do little more than the bare minimum to keep their walls standing. Notably, much like they do with new construction projects, these corporations often use prison labor to complete contracted work, allowing them to save on staffing costs and increase their profit margins on even small projects. Incarcerated people are also employed directly by facilities to do everyday grounds maintenance from painting walls to mowing the grass. Maintenance jobs are actually the most common jobs offered to incarcerated people without whom facilities simply could not operate.

While architects, engineers, and contractors masquerade as reformists and claim to design better and more humane facilities, human rights advocates have seen through their guises.

No matter how much natural light reflects off a polyurethane floor or how many beautiful naturescapes are painted on visit room walls, a building designed to cage and hide people will not address the divestment from Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities that feeds mass incarceration or heal the mass trauma caused further perpetuated by it.

Social justice architect Raphael Sperry explains that communities do not need “better prison design, but better community design, and especially funding for community development.”⁵⁵

LEARN MORE

- *Broken Ground: Why America Keeps Building More Jails and What it Can Do Instead*, Vera Institute of Justice (2019)
- *Deadly Delays in Jail Construction Cost Lives and Dollars Across California*, ProPublica (2019)
- *We Need to Rethink the Rikers Island Replacement Jails*, *The Architect’s Newspaper* (2019)
- *County Failures, Not State Reforms, are Killing People in California Jails*, *The Appeal* (2019)
- *How Prisons are Poisoning Their Inmates*, *The Outline* (2018)
- *Can the Rural Prison Economy Survive Decarceration Era?*, *Associated Press* (2018)
- *Is There Such Thing as “Good” Prison Design?*, *Architectural Digest* (2018)
- *Big House on the Prairie: Rise of the Rural Ghetto and Prison Proliferation*, John M. Eason (2017)
- *Prisons as Panacea or Pariah? The Countervailing Consequences of the Prison Boom on the Political Economy of Rural Towns*, Bryan L. Skyes (2016)
- *Is “Justice Architecture” Just? Aggregate* (2014)
- *Architects are Part of the Prison Industrial Complex, Too*, *City Lab* (2013)
- *Should Architects Design Prisons?*, *Architect Magazine* (2012)
- *A Billion Dollars and Growing: Why Prison Bonding is Tougher on Florida’s Taxpayers than on Crime*, Collins Center for Public Policy and Florida Tax Watch (2011)

CHAPTER 1: ARCHITECTURE + CONSTRUCTION

1. The surge in prison and jail construction between 1970 and 2017 targeted rural areas with waning industries and in need of jobs. Despite short-term gains, in what ways were rural communities eventually hurt by the corrections boom? How can we ensure rural areas have a healthy jobs market without risking anyone's freedom and dignity?
2. While the jail population has been declining, new jail construction continues to grow bed capacity each year. How can we prepare and protect our communities against carceral campaigns, like those of the '70s, '80s, and '90s, aimed at increasing jail populations to meet the ever-increasing jail capacity?
3. Many of the architectural "security features" built into prisons and jails are dehumanizing and cause psychological damage to those forced to live with them on a daily basis. How do these designs actually undermine security? How do they expand the profit margins of carceral corporations and the carceral state?
4. We know that the labor of enslaved people has been used to build our nation's infrastructure. How have corporations and governments used prison labor to expand and maintain the carceral infrastructure?
5. Why don't modernization projects alleviate the harm caused by incarceration? While modernization cannot make prisons humane, it's also true that, even as we call for decarceration, many of our loved ones and community members are still inside. What demands can we make that will improve conditions for those inside, weaken the prison industry, and support abolition? What set of criteria might we use to determine these potential demands?
6. Where do you see the need for better community design? Imagine an alternative infrastructure for addressing the harm in your community. Start small, how is harm addressed? Now, on a mass scale, how might you spend the \$4.6 billion that is currently spent on correctional construction annually? How do we ensure that this alternative infrastructure does not replicate the carceral system?