Patterns of Incremental Transformation: Fostering Kinship and Generosity in Seattle Residential Neighborhoods

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Abstract

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The current practices of planning, design, and development of neighborhoods do not foster the creation of kinship in communities and do not sufficiently address the inherent nuances of place. Neighborhood ecosystems should be viewed through a lens of kinship, where the patterns of a place guide its incremental transformation and encourage the creation of generous places to live, for both humans and all other living beings that we share this world with. We must change the way we see neighborhoods, the way we plan and prescribe their design, and how we build them if we are to create lasting and resilient communities that truly foster connection and generosity in our world. This thesis design project examines the ecosystem of neighborhoods in Seattle, Washington, and searches for patterns of place that might inform their incremental transformation.

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Introduction

The current practices of planning, design, and development of neighborhoods do not foster the creation of kinship in communities and do not sufficiently address the inherent nuances of place. Neighborhood ecosystems should be viewed through a lens of kinship, where the patterns of a place guide its incremental transformation and encourage the creation of generous places to live, for both humans and all other living beings that we share this world with. We must change the way we see neighborhoods, the way we plan and prescribe their design, and how we build them if we are to create lasting and resilient communities that truly foster connection and generosity in our world.

Seattle is grappling with addressing a rapid growth in population, and all the accompanying challenges of housing access, affordability, and equity. Between 2024-2044, the City of Seattle's Office of Planning & Community Development (OPCD) estimates a population growth of approximately 200,000 people, from ~750,000 people in 2024 to nearly 1 million by 2044, and with this comes growth targets of at least 80,000 housing units and 159,000 jobs. To address these challenges the city is proposing a variety of strategies, including the update of "Neighborhood Residential" zoned parcels, which are

predominantly single-family homes in Seattle, to the designation of “Urban Neighborhood” that will allow for more middle-housing options with limited commercial development (OPCD 2024). In recognizing the inevitable, and necessary, change that Seattle neighborhoods must undergo to adapt to the needs of current and future times, I take a critical look at our current practice of what I am calling design for ‘current optimum’ – which is to discretely optimize projects and their proposed outcomes for whatever the current view of ‘best’, ‘maximal’, or ‘optimal’ is in terms of use, zoning, density, etc., in a way that does not fully account for the abundance and nuance of place, and inhibits the design and creation of spaces that are able to incrementally transform, adapt, and thrive across time.

This thesis design project examines the ecosystem of neighborhoods in Seattle, Washington, and searches for patterns of place that might inform their transformation through the investigation of three neighborhoods: Columbia City, Wedgwood, and Beacon Hill. It is not a proposal for a new building typology or change in zoning laws, but rather a framework for thinking about and seeing a neighborhood. Seeing the people. Seeing the buildings. Seeing the place. The result of this design thesis is not a thing, but a starting point for conversation. If we truly observe and synthesize what is already in front of us with the ambition of creating generous places to live that foster kinship, then the design interventions to help accommodate and nurture that outcome will naturally crystallize.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

This thesis draws on existing literature regarding how we live together in this world and looks to apply these concepts to our process as architects, urban designers, policy makers, and other actors on the built environment in terms of how we look at the complex set of interwoven characteristics that make up a neighborhood. An ever-growing body of both quantitative and qualitative research on loneliness highlights both its prevalence in our society and the negative health outcomes for which it is associated. Evidence of loneliness can be seen in patterns of our built and social environments in what I am calling 'conditions of loneliness'. Pulling from various perspectives on kinship such as those of Donna Haraway, I examine how shifting to a focus on kinship in the neighborhood can encourage social conditions that foster generosity and may help remedy some of these conditions of loneliness. Extending the idea of "care-full cities" by Miriam J. Williams, I propose the idea of 'kin-full' neighborhoods. Inherent in the conversation of kinship is the notion of multigenerational interaction and the connection of people, ideas, and our world across time. By looking at examples and research of multigenerational living we can find not just arguments for its advantages, but for its necessity in how we think about neighborhoods. A brief overview of OPCD's March 2024 draft update to the "One Seattle

Plan" and its proposals for 'Urban Neighborhoods' connects the ideas of this thesis to real-world policy and finds both common threads between the two as well as offering a subject for critique when viewed through this proposed framework. Lastly, several precedent projects serve as examples of designers, citizens, and communities who are pushing the boundaries of the status-quo in the pursuit of generous transformation of neighborhoods.

Conditions of Loneliness

One of the initial drivers of this thesis research was realizing the loneliness present in our culture. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this for many, but more importantly was an indicator of the already existing conditions where there was a lack of connection and support, and maybe we just hadn't fully realized it yet. This led to a question: What are the conditions of our lives, both the everyday and the exceptional, that contribute to our feeling of loneliness, and how could we inform the design of the places we live in to address these conditions? This portion of research examines trends and relationships of loneliness and well-being and hypothesizes conditions that may be exacerbating these trends. The baseline conditions of loneliness are then meant to inform the design work and the pursuit of generous spaces.

In a 2023 report titled "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation", the Office of the Surgeon General (OSD) outlines the state of loneliness and social connection in the United States, the impact on the well-being of both individuals and communities, and provides recommendations and strategies to advance social connection. They found that

approximately half of U.S adults report experiencing loneliness, defined as “subjective distressing experience that results from perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connections, where inadequate refers to the discrepancy or unmet need between an individual’s preferred and actual experience” (OSG 2023). When examining social connectedness between 2003-2020 as reported in the American Time Use Survey, researchers found that trends show an overall increase in the time we spend alone, and a decrease in the time spent with family, friends, others, and in companionship (Kannan and Veazie 2022; Atalay 2022). Despite living in an era where we are capable of being more ‘connected’ than ever through technology and digital means, the prevalence of self-reported loneliness seems to indicate that the emotional and psychological perception of connectedness is lacking. Technology, at times, may even be more of a harm than a good, with an analysis of numerous studies finding that interaction with technology often “displaces in-person engagement, monopolizes our attention, reduces the quality of our interactions, and even diminishes our self-esteem” (OSG 2023).

Loneliness must also be considered in terms of its effect on varying demographics, one of which is age. The COVID-19 pandemic raised even more concerns about the effects of loneliness and isolation on well-being, and one group that was at the forefront of concern was children and adolescents. One cross-sectional study found that loneliness increased compared to pre-pandemic, and that the “higher levels of loneliness were significantly associated with poorer wellbeing, including higher depression symptoms, anxiety symptoms, gaming addiction, and sleep problems”, the researchers also specifically mention that their research highlighted the challenge of finding data on youth

and adolescents, especially before the pandemic (Farrell, Vitoroulis, Eriksson, & Vaillancourt 2023). The importance of these effects on children and adolescents cannot be understated, as another review of 63 studies found that loneliness and social isolation in children not only increased risk of depression and anxiety, but that it can have lasting high-risk effects up to nine years later (OSG 2023).

When examining the trends and effects on older adults, there is also stark evidence that addressing loneliness is paramount in promoting well-being. In a 2020 report on the "Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults", researchers found that social isolation has been associated with increased risk of premature mortality from all causes, a 50 percent increase in risk of developing dementia, and that older adults are at increased risk for facing social isolation due to living alone, loss of family and friends, chronic illness, and sensory impairments (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020). This report was also meant to provide recommendations for addressing loneliness and social isolation, but with a focus on the health care system in the United States. However, many of the recommendations are clearly translatable to life outside of the clinical setting, and I would argue are more effectively handled through community networks. One such intervention was finding ways for the clinical setting to do "Social Prescribing", or giving access to non-clinical forms of support that are often provided by the community sector such as volunteer organizations, community groups, and social events (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2020). Neighborhoods and local communities are well positioned to provide these services and can give agency over decision making back to people rather than a corporation or broader healthcare system.

So, what are conditions in our built space, infrastructure, and other areas of life that may be contributing to loneliness, social isolation, and negative impacts on well-being? When thinking about this question, many of the answers below are personal, anecdotal, and are not meant to serve as causal elements in relation to loneliness. They are instead meant to be thought-provoking and encourage introspection and examination of conditions you or others might experience or observe.

- Solitary Housing: Also known as apodments (**Fig. 1**), micro-studios, or most any typical unit-by-unit building. A hallway of doors, windowless. No front porches, yards, or places to interact. Except the awkwardly quiet elevator rides. A pursuit of the optimal use of space, a challenge of finding how small of a space can we make for one person to occupy. Some have roof decks, or spaces you can reserve for private parties. What are my neighbors' names again? It doesn't matter, I'll probably hangout with my friends next weekend anyways.

Anthony Felder asks, "How much space do you need for one human?" KELLY O

Figure 1. Photograph from a news article in "The Stranger", critiquing micro-apartments and how it is "like living in a closet" (Groover 2015).

- Instant Delivery: Uber Eats and Amazon Prime. Apartment lobbies filled with McDonalds Bags and blue-taped boxes. Instant gratification, anything you want, and zero hassle of human interaction. No need to waste your time running errands to a local store, it can be here by 5pm tonight. Instead of navigating the swarm of people at the farmers market, prepping and cooking dinner together tonight, let's just order something again. We might even be able to squeeze in one more episode of Netflix now that there aren't as many dishes clean up.

- My space, not our space: Ownership claimed by the separation of space and marking of territory. I think of a backyard fence, standing 6 feet tall and opaque to the world around. A perfect device to prevent you from seeing your neighbor, talking to your neighbor, and sharing with your neighbor. Let's not forget to keep those pesky wild plants and animals in check, so as not to disturb the manicured lawn. It's also way safer. Nobody can get in here. And much less annoying. There's no room for the neighbor kids to play and make noise.
- Work from home, or Working alone?: Finally no more wasteful commute. I'm going to gain at least an extra hour a day of alone time now. I hate the small talk at lunch or going to grab a coffee with coworkers during a break. I also don't need to deal with those in-person meetings anymore, I can just turn off my video and work on something else. Oh shoot, it's already 7pm. Maybe I'll work just one more hour. Wait, I haven't left the house today? Maybe tomorrow.

While the accounts above are satirical in nature, they are also all too real. We have set up our ways of life, and the spaces we make, in a way that makes loneliness the easier and almost default mode of operation. This isn't to say everyone wants to be social all the time, or that we don't individually seek moments of privacy and peace, but there is a difference between solitude and isolation. It also doesn't mean all places are lonely, or that we don't have places where we feel supported and fulfilled. It means that we should be trying to identify those places, their characteristics, and learn from them.

Kinship in the Neighborhood

In response to the conditions of loneliness in our society, the inherent connectedness of kinship stands as a guiding framework to encourage generosity in the transformation of neighborhoods. The significance of kinship as a way of thinking about our world is eloquently summarized in by Donna Haraway in an interview on the For The Wild podcast:

> "If you have a kin, a kin has you. If you have a relative, a relative has you. Kinship is reciprocal and it's not optional. And it goes on into the future: it reaches into the past, it reaches into the future. It's generational. Kinship has to loop through time. So what kind of kinship invention, as well as inheritance, are we talking about" (Haraway 2019a).

Understanding that our relationships and connections work in both directions changes the narrative of design from being service oriented, designed to best 'serve me' or 'serve the user' to instead be reciprocal and thought of as 'accommodate all'. This removes some of the hierarchy of deciding to optimize for one party at the expense of another. Every decision is instead a negotiation, one that looks to find the most accommodating outcome to benefit all. The second essential element is the temporal element, both forward in time and backward, and the linkage to inheritance. Transformation is not just about a forward march of progress through time, but about what is already there and has been there before.

It's about what has been inherited, what we are inheriting, and what we will leave as an inheritance for future generations.

Expanding our Definition of Kinship

Many scholars and thinkers have gone beyond the conventional definition of *kin* that typically refers to one's blood or familial relatives. The first I will reference here is a series of perspectives offered by Donna Haraway. Haraway is an interdisciplinary Professor at the University of California Santa Cruz, teaching and writing in the topics of science and technology studies, feminist theory, and multispecies studies. Her work extends thinking of what we consider to be kin to include those beyond our familial ties, and encompasses the interrelatedness of humans and other nonhuman "critters", and when discussing kin she says "By kin I mean those who have an enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can't-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient, enduring relatedness that carries consequences" (Haraway 2019b). By expanding who and what we consider kin, we can then begin to find mutual connections and make decisions that accommodate and contribute generosity to all life.

In her book *Staying With The Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene,* Haraway states in the introduction "The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present" (Haraway 2016). We are in a world of inequitable living conditions, a rapidly changing climate, and a degrading biosphere that are fueled by overconsumption. Haraway is advocating for embedding ourselves in the trouble and 'thick present', embracing and understanding the

myriad connections that we have with each other and the world so that we can learn to live together and accommodate a more generous future. When applied to this project of neighborhood transformation, kinship and its connections happen at and across a variety of scales.

In a neighborhood, we have more stereotypically clear examples of kinship like those between parents, children, and grandparents. Maybe some cousins live nearby, too. There are also more 'inventive' forms of kinship that many of us can relate to. There are your neighbors, such as the ones I grew up with who were like grandparents to me and my brother. They were there if we ever needed emergency babysitting, someone to watch the dogs, or needed to borrow a last-minute grocery item rather than driving 10 minutes to the store. We in turn helped them with tasks that became more difficult as they aged, did yard work, or provided a second set of hands when working on the car or boat. There are your friends, whether that be a network of childhood companions, roommates, or coworkers. A group of people who support you, and in turn you support them. Then there are the connections to the non-human. The pets we grow up with, take for walks, and devote time and attention to for years, sometimes decades, all for the sake of companionship and joy. The ecology that surrounds us, from the carefully tended plants in a garden to the parks and shorelines we walk, recreate, gather, and volunteer in. We as humans clearly place value, feel an obligation and connection to, and care for the systems around us. We should be building on these existing connections, and searching for new ones, when we think about how we live and what we build.

Another contributing perspective to the expansion of typical western, White, perspectives on kinship is that of the Black community, such as 'fictive kinship' as described by authors like Dr. Hettie V. Williams, a Professor of African American History, where she explains " fictive kinship refers to a relationship that is developed between non-related members of a given group that develops out of common ancestry, history, social experience, or predicament" (Williams 2020). She discusses the creation and necessity of these fictive kin networks in the Black community before, during, and after slavery, particularly the women-centered networks of "other mothers" that replace and assist biological mothers in the raising and care of children in the community (Williams 2020). This expansion of kinship networks in the Black community is echoed in an article titled "The Unapologetically Black tradition of Expanding the definition of Family" where the author discusses her community's long history of connection through love regardless of biology. (Meadows-Fernandez 2024). She also presents ideas of Dr. Raquel Martin that puts "family of origin and family of choice on equal ground" and that "We understand family as more than nuclear; it is intergenerational and communal. We hope our child experiences family and community as a wide, creative net of love" (Meadows-Fernandez 2024). This mindset and framing of kinship is an example of the type of interrelated networks that our neighborhoods should transform around.

The Kin-Full Neighborhood

What do our decisions and ideas regarding neighborhood transformation look like if we have the goal of creating conditions for kinship, what one could call a 'kin-full' neighborhood? This idea and terminology draw inspiration from an article titled "The

possibility of care-full cities" where Miriam J. Williams reflects on ideas of a feminist ethic of care and proposes the relation of care-full practices to urban theory. Care and kinship are interwoven, and I try to extend the work of her and others before her to think of neighborhoods and kinship in a comparable manner.

Williams starts by defining care as "both an orientation and embodied practice that holds the possibility, in other words, of facilitating new ways of being together", acknowledging that while "caring can be hard work: it can be messy, dirty, exhausting, burdensome, and boring", it can also be "joyful, bountiful, and beautiful" (M. Williams 2020). Williams goes on to critique the paradigm of modern-day care and the perpetuation of "three problematic assumptions about responsibilities for care: firstly care is cast as a 'personal responsibility', secondly as a 'market problem', and thirdly as having to take place within families". In contrast to this "neoliberal ethic of care", Williams proposes consideration of the commonly cited definition of a "feminist ethic of care" developed by Joan Tronto: a "species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web." Extending this model to the theories, policies, and actions in our built urban environments is how we can create what Williams calls "Care-full urban worlds."

When discussing the practice of care, Williams states that "We are dependent upon care for our individual and collective survival, yet our collective capacity to care exceeds what we are individually able to practice" (M. Williams 2020). Accepting and understanding this fundamental idea means that the neighborhood is optimally situated to support the

collective networks and systems of care in our world. In addition, I would argue that these same networks and systems are connected through a common thread: kinship. Therefore, creating conditions for kinship connections in the neighborhood, a 'kin-full' neighborhood, is the mechanism from which we can jumpstart this life sustaining web of care.

So, what does a kin-full neighborhood look like? We do not need to look too hard to find clear examples that already exist, and with some creative and thoughtful inspection we can begin to identify possible "kinship inventions" that Donna Haraway calls for. The following narrative stories are just some of the existing and imagined connections that I have observed or invented while theorizing about neighborhood transformation in Seattle.

- Neighbors as Family: During my childhood, our neighbors were part of what I considered extended family. Some were like grandparents and were routinely involved in my life as I grew, others were like the cousins you see once in a while at a family reunion. In either case, there was a reciprocal level of care that extended to how we treated and helped one another. This is not to say we need to be on familial terms with every neighbor or invite them all over for weekly dinner or drinks, but wouldn't we all benefit from having an expanded, mutual, support network? For those moments when we need help moving a couch, have an important meeting or urgent appointment and need to borrow a car because ours won't start, or just want someone to check in on your kids, pets, or parents while you're away. They say you can't choose your family, but the reality is we choose our kin every day based on who we care about and are cared for by.

- Growing and Aging in Community: Imagine living in a place where you can grow and age within your systems of support and kinship. Rather than trying to make a 'safe' neighborhood, I think 'generous' is a more appropriate term. Safety implies a level of restriction, protection from exposure, and judgement of elements that are deemed risks. Generosity is focused on abundance, giving, and kindness. Children can play, explore, and grow in an environment that provides generous spaces and social networks. They can walk to their friend's house, gather in shared space, and be cared for within the community. Rather than driving 20 minutes to a daycare or needing to schedule times to play at an auxiliary park or location, the neighborhood transforms to accommodate these needs. As people age, abilities and needs change. Maybe places need to be not just walk-able, but also roll-able. Rather than seniors being sent to a corporatized institution of elder care, homes or buildings transform to accommodate accessible movement and create places for caregivers to live and thrive within the community as well.
- Multi Generation Home: At some point in many of our lives, we experience living in separation from, but trying to remain connected to, our families. Take the example of grandparents, parents, and their children. Three generations in different stages of life, often living separately. Grandparents living alone, maybe retired, possibly in a house large enough to house six or in a small room at a senior home. Parents with young children who are trying to balance their careers with childcare, then eventually the hectic teen years, and finally empty nesters as their children grow up and move out to start their adult lives. Children, in constant need of attention and

care when they are younger, who are eager to explore and venture as they grow, and who end up renting a room in a house or a small apartment to find their own way as young adults. And so, the cycle repeats. We have separated out the stages and events of life as being their own discrete elements, but what if we imagined this cycle as happening with each other and together? Creating places to dwell that allow for continued connection, but also provide varying scales of independence to accommodate the needs and desires of shifting situations. Grandparents care for grandchildren. Parents help aging grandparents. Grandchildren educate and connect their parents and grandparents to the shifts in social perspectives, technology, and popular culture relevant to the times.

- A Garden for Connecting: The garden has always been a place for connection, to each other and to the cycles of life in the non-human world. It is a place to step away from the technological buzz of the world around us. We pass knowledge to and from each other in learning to cultivate life in the soil. There is also an understanding that is gained of the systems and cycles that support the life around us. We gain an understanding of how much water is needed for plants to grow, whether to handle weeds and pests with harmful pesticides or instead to accommodate natural systems of management through choice of planting and biodiversity, and how the seasonal cycles and weather conditions affect conditions for growth. In the case of agricultural growing, we also understand the cycle of harvest and consumption of resources as food or materials. This system requires intentionality and thrives best when we understand and accommodate the

ecological systems that underpin their existence. A lesson we can hopefully translate and apply to other areas of our life.

- Open Gates, Less Fences: I think of the ecosystem of yards that link a neighborhood, often partitioned off by fences and gates to mark the boundaries of separately owned property. Imagine that these fences were gone, at least most of them. Maybe four, six, or eight separate lots with contiguous backyard spaces to form a neighbor-yard collective. Space that is not entirely public, but is shared amongst those we live closest to, know, and trust. More room for everyone to gather and play, the creation of park-like spaces on almost every block, and even the potential for ecological backyard corridors that accommodate the movement and habitation of other critters.

Life is full of inconveniences. There are unexpected changes in plans, extra work to finish, and always something else we feel like we need to be planning for. If we can shift our view to see how a minor individual inconvenience can result in a multitude of collective convenience, then the benefits of that trade-off are clear. The narrative stories above articulate what I see as being examples of creating collective good and encouraging a kin-full neighborhood.

Multigenerational – Living, Caring, & Learning

Kinship is multigenerational. It is a constant cycle through time, linking the past, present, and future. Our neighborhoods are, and always have been, systems of

multigenerational interaction. Multigenerational living is not a new concept. Whether for cultural, practical, or circumstantial reasons the practice of living with multiple generations has always, and continues, to exist. The purpose of this section is to highlight research and stories that articulates the benefits of multigenerational living and interaction to investigate potential regions of generational overlap that could be nurtured in the transformation of neighborhoods.

Do we choose to live together because we need to, or because we want to? The cited benefits of living in a multigenerational household often originate from a circumstance of crisis or stress, proposed as a solution to some sort of problem rather than default arrangement for thriving. Circumstances like financial insecurity from unemployment, lack of housing units due to the housing crisis, or a need for care due to an accident, birth of a child, or aging parent (Keene, Reid, & Batson 2010). While it might often be born out of necessity, instead of seeing multigenerational living as the backup or last resort option, we should be finding the opportunities and richness it brings as the intentionally preferred way of living. Economic resources can be pooled and utilized collectively, buffering periods of economic strain, and providing an increased cost-effectiveness compared to living separately (Glick and Van Hook 2011). Social capital, or the social organization features that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit, can be increased with multigenerational interaction (Nemoto et al. 2022). Older adults may burden a higher proportion of the economic demands while the younger adults build financial security in exchange for social resources like interaction and care. Maybe later the

young adults take on more financial responsibility in exchange for childcare. As situations change over time, the household can react and adapt.

Although multigenerational living is typically thought of us multiple generations under one roof, as part of the same household, I see the scale of the neighborhood as an opportunity for expanding what it means to live with and across multiple generations. A group of aging residents could choose to come together so that they can age in and with their community, pooling resources to transform an existing house into a neighborhood group home that is tailored to accommodate the needs of older adults. This could be something that resembles a small apartment building, with accessible access to all levels and living quarters for a caretaker. Maybe a group of friends transform a lot, or series of lots, into a cooperative living arrangement that allows young adults to have shared ownership of space. These young adults who would otherwise be stuck in an endless rent cycle or be forced to move outside of the city to afford any sort of ownership. These types of community-initiated and community-controlled versions of transformation put agency back in the hands of people, rather than a disconnected developer or corporation.

In choosing to live with and near our multigenerational kin, we are surrounding ourselves with people who we care for and who care for us. The trust and investment that comes with kinship connections stabilizes and strengthens our systems of care for one another. Whether truly altruistic, out of a sense of obligation, or in an exchange, multigenerational living provides the opportunity for increased interactions of care (Keene, Reid, & Batson 2010). Benefits of this care include improved well-being in older age, with research indicating improved physical and mental states for older adults who interacted

with younger adults and children (Courtin, Emilie, & Avendano 2016). Care can come in the more traditional forms of providing childcare or eldercare, but it can also be the more subtle and everyday actions that we take. Actions like listening to someone and having a conversation, helping someone with a mundane task, or cooking someone a meal during a period of commotion in their lives. These small, but meaningful, interactions only happen if we start to view our neighbors as part of our kinship network and not as strangers who live down the street or across the hall.

Exchange of generational knowledge and opportunities for learning can become part of everyday life in the neighborhood. It gives us the opportunity to reengage with the world around us in new ways and through new perspectives. As technology rapidly changes and some older adults struggle to keep up, younger generations can help them stay connected to the current goings on in the world. Adults with decades of knowledge, experiences, and skills can pass these on to generations below. As mentioned prior, learning extends beyond strictly human needs and can encompass the broader natural world around us.

One case study that represents an example of multigenerational overlap is a place in Tokyo, Japan called Kotoen. This larger facility houses a nursing home for elderly adults, a childcare center, and a day service center that provides meals and other support resources for older adults that first started in 1962. A book titled “Generations in Touch: Linking the Old and the Young in a Tokyo Neighborhood” by Leng Leng Thang gives an in-depth analysis and shares the stories of Kotoen as experienced over the course of a year from 1995 to 1996. While much of the facilities structure and staffing is like other nursing

home facilities in Japan, the main difference is the presence of various common spaces that overlap between old and young, and the active engagement of older adults with the routines of the children (Thang 2018). Thang observes the formation of bonds between the young and old that resemble those of a grandparent to grandchild and notes the bonds her own family formed with residents, other children, and staff members and their families during her time there. This brings to light the multiple overlaps that happen when generations are brought together. While the primary narrative of Kotoen is the unique connection of the elderly with children, Thang also sees and experiences the relationships that happen between staff members, residents, children, and extended families that are connected to the place. Connection is inevitable when people are intentionally and thoughtfully brought together.

"One Seattle Plan" and Residential Neighborhoods

Here I will offer only a brief overview of the "One Seattle Plan", Seattle's comprehensive plan for managing the growth of Seattle. The latest update was recently released as a draft version in March of 2024. Most relevant to this thesis' area of inquiry is the shift in terminology and zoning policy of areas the City now proposes be called "Urban Neighborhoods", which are currently called "Neighborhood Residential" (NR) and were previously called "Single Family" (SF) prior to 2021. I will outline some of the major changes in what the new Urban Neighborhood zoning proposes and what the goals of these changes are to articulate the relevance of this design thesis in the broader conversation of Seattle's neighborhood transformation.

In **Figure 2** we see maps of the existing Neighborhood Residential Zones, and a map of the proposed changes in the 2024 update.

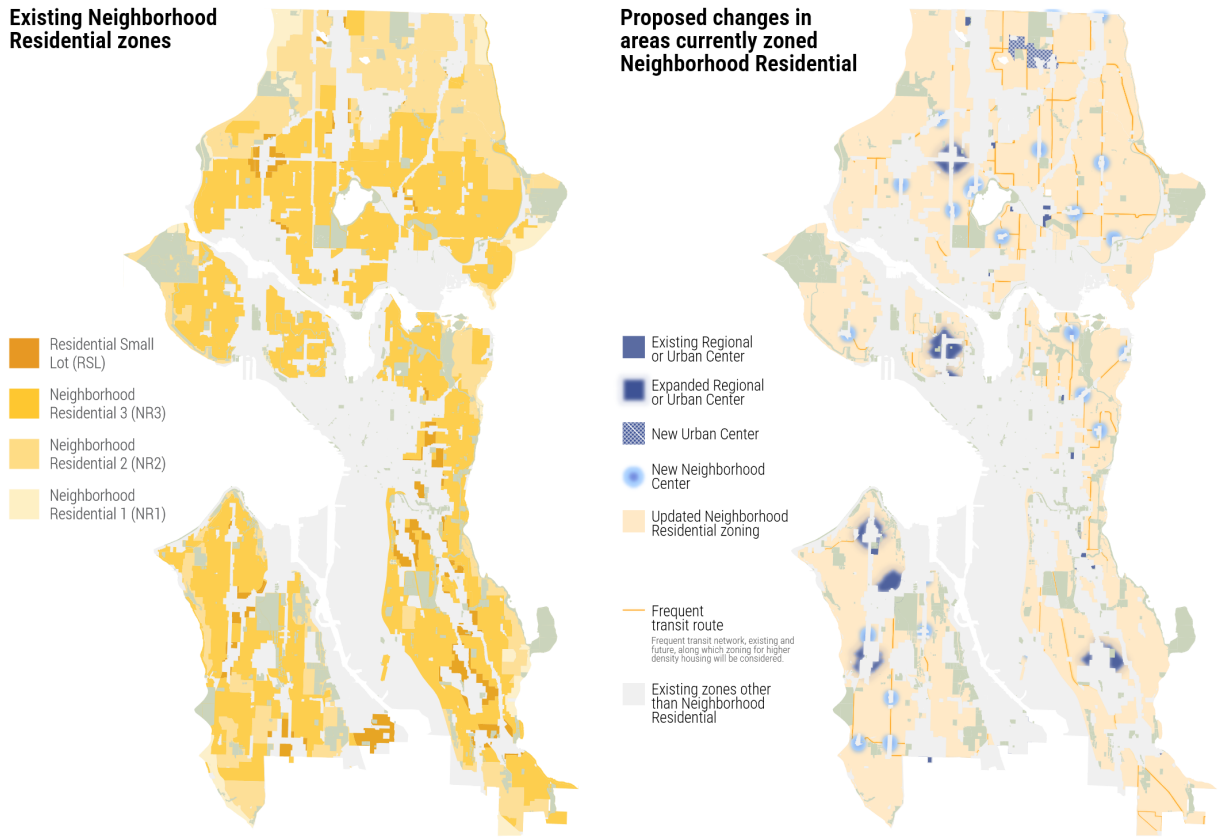


Figure 2. Two maps of Seattle showing current and proposed residential zoning. Proposed map also shows the relationship of these residential zones to Urban centers and New Neighborhood Centers (City of Seattle and MAKERS 2024).

A driving factor for this update in zoning was the passing of HB1110 in 2023, a new state law that requires cities across the state of Washington to allow for a greater quantity and variety of housing in areas that are currently detached homes, which in Seattle is the more than two-thirds of the city that falls within NR zoning (City of Seattle and MAKERS 2024). While Seattle has allowed Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) since 1994 and DADUs Detached Accessory Dwelling Units (DADUs) since 2009, restrictive regulations made them

unfeasible on many lots (Cohen 2019). In 2019 many restrictive regulations were relaxed, and Seattle allowed NR zoned lots to have up to two accessory residences: an attached accessory dwelling unit (AADU) and a DADU, but this bill requires that cities must now allow at least four units on all residential lots, and at least six units on residential lots within a quarter mile major transit stops or where at least two units are income-restricted affordable housing (City of Seattle and MAKERS 2024). The City will also place development restrictions on certain areas, up to 25% of lots as allowed in HB1110, such as areas with high risk of displacement.

An additional layer of change in the zoning beyond strictly housing is policies that "Allow a range of commercial and mixed-use development on major streets and smaller-scale non-residential uses such as small institutions, corner stores, and at home businesses throughout Urban Neighborhood areas" (OPCD 2024a). The addition of "corner stores" is the primary strategy proposed for residential neighborhoods that are outside urban centers, where the ground floor and basement levels of corner lots would have reduced setbacks of two feet from street lot lines and two additional feet of allowable height (City of Seattle and MAKERS 2024). These changes proposed by the City are meant to accommodate a limited set of commercial uses, like retail, food, and beverage services, and require the upper floors to be for residential use. These spaces could be achieved through renovation of existing space, like a garage being expanded and retrofitted for a cafe, or they can be incorporated into new construction. One of the primary challenges with this approach in Seattle is the high cost of construction, complexity and cost of the

permitting process, and the limited scope of allowable change and uses that make economic investment high for the amount and type of space that could be created.

The city provides diagrams like those in **Figure 3** and **Figure 4** of various optimized prototypes that could replace and fill lots that currently have single family homes.

Figure 3. Some of the four-unit prototypes for middle provided by the City of Seattle (OPCD 2024b).

Figure 4. A six-unit prototype (left) and neighborhood "corner store" prototype (right) provided by the City of Seattle (OPCD 2024b).

Thinking Beyond the Current Optimum

Much of the background research and initial design work of this thesis occurred before the March 2024 release of the One Seattle Plan. Beyond the proposed policy and zoning changes, I think the important notes to take away from reviewing the "One Seattle Plan" draft proposal are the city's goals: increase the supply of housing, increase the diversity of housing options, allow more affordable rental and ownership, create more opportunities for income restricted affordable housing, reduce residential displacement, address past and ongoing harms from housing discrimination, and create more complete and walkable neighborhoods (City of Seattle and MAKERS 2024). These goals align with the concepts of a generous and kin-full neighborhood that are described in this thesis. The question is, how do we get there?

In trying to accommodate these goals, the City is trying to find the most efficient, optimized, and broadly applicable solutions. However, in doing this are we furthering the commodification of space into the hands of developers and entities that have near-term profit, rather than people or the planet, at the center of their agenda? In a recent article in the Urbanist, discussions about the plan update and potential revisions to allow for more building types describes the "City's discussion with for-profit developers has indicated townhomes are a more popular product" and states "if someone cracks the code to build stacked flats on 5,000-square-foot formerly single-family lots at scale, it could suddenly become the product of choice" (Trumm 2024). Economics are undoubtedly a crucial

element of development, but if the monetary bottom-line and forward march of capitalism is the driving element, then what are we potentially missing when we look at the transformation of these neighborhoods?

This thesis calls for a more nuanced, creative, and expansive approach that encourages neighborhoods to transform in ways that support kinship. We need to allow flexibility in design solutions and accommodate out of the norm approaches that contribute meaningfully to place. We must find ways to incentivize this change, making grassroots development economically and logistically feasible. We need to look across time and imagine how these transformations integrate with the community so that they provide sustainable and lasting spaces that won't just be torn down in thirty years when the next perfect solution or the then-current optimum is theorized.

Precedents for Informing Neighborhood Transformation

These precedents highlight transformation at multiple scales, from the building to the broader neighborhood, that are pushing the boundaries of how we approach their design and development. Each provides lessons about space, design approach, and development process that is different from standard practice.

Corvidae Co-op

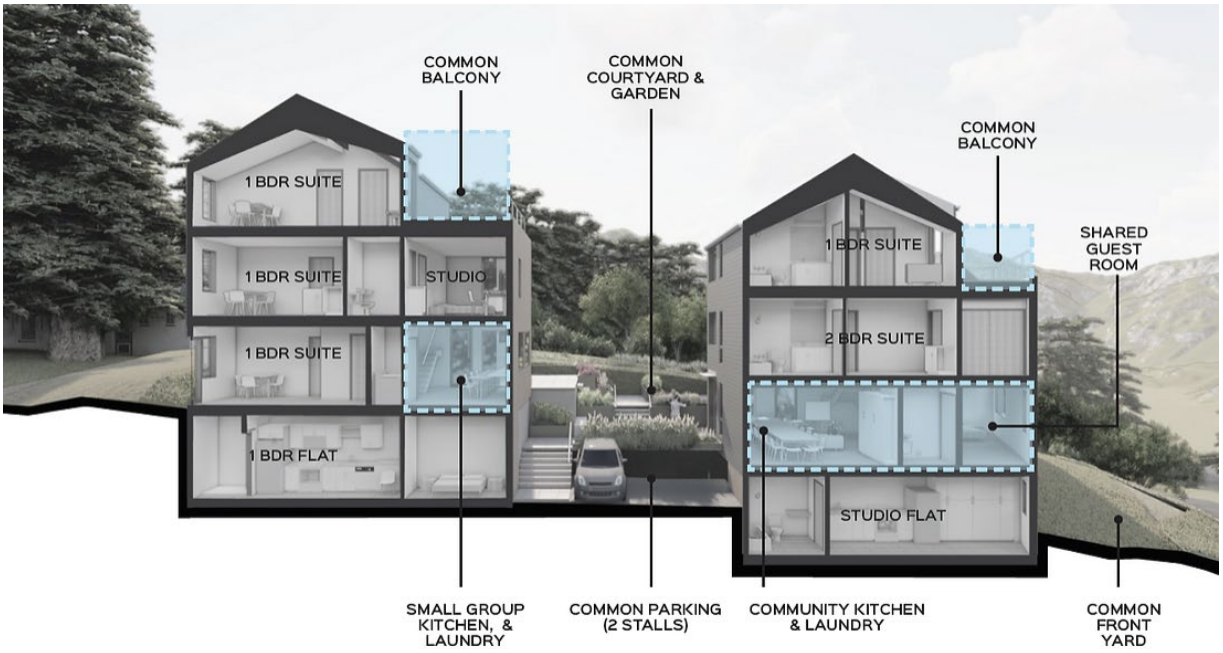
Corvidae Co-op is a cooperative housing project located in Seattle, WA designed and co-developed by Allied8 Architects, with an expected completion of June 2024. The project creatively uses two adjacent NR zoned lots to generate ten total residences, uses a shared-equity co-op structure to reduce purchase price, and shares multiple indoor and

outdoor communal spaces like kitchens, a central courtyard, and a guest suite (Allied8 2024). Of interest to the topic of neighborhood transformation in this thesis is both the physical design and layout of spaces as well as the cooperative financing model that provides a lower financial barrier to entry than a conventional home in Seattle. **Figure 5** shows a photograph of the central courtyard around which the residences are clustered.

Figure 5. Photograph of the communal central courtyard in the Corvidae Co-op project by Allied8 architects (Allied8 2024).

The physical design and layout of Corvidae is one element that deviates from typical approaches to residential housing. **Figure 6** is a sectional view of the project, looking North, and shows the relationship of spaces to one another and the variety of unit types and shared spaces that are in the project. A mix of studios,1-bedroom, and 2-bedroom units provide options that accommodate different housing and financial needs. These units

give individual privacy to residents, while a set of communal areas allows for the creation of a more generous set of shared spaces than could be realized in ten totally separate units.



These shared spaces include the larger central courtyard, terracing between the buildings to navigate the slope of the site. Two common dining rooms and kitchens, one on the West lot and one on the East lot, provide large kitchens and space to gather with other residents and friends to enjoy a meal or each other's company. Large, heated storage rooms, one on each lot, give room for safely storing bicycles and extra belongings. One of the design elements this project seems to tactfully navigate is the balance between shared space and private space. The generous nature of the communal areas encourages the utilization of the shared space, and therefore interaction between residents, but the private

Figure 6. Sectional view looking North of Corvidae Co-op that highlights the types and relationship of units and space in the project (Frolic 2024).

quarters are also sufficiently outfitted to allow people to choose how social they want to be at any given point in time.

The structure of the cooperative financing model is another element this project contributes to identifying strategies for equitable and shared agency over neighborhood transformation. Corvidae uses the Frolic ownership and financing model that was developed in the Center for Real Estate at MIT, and is part of the broader Frolic Community organization. Frolic's approach relies on co-development, where an existing home or property owner becomes the developer and leverages the value of their property in combination with investment from future residents and investors to fund the development of a cooperative project (Frolic 2024). Ownership is then shared between residents, with a portion being collectively owned and a portion being privately owned. The Frolic model works to reduce the required downpayment and total monthly costs, a combination of mortgage, cooperative dues, utilities, taxes, and insurance (Frolic 2024).

Red Willow Residences

Red Willow Residences is a 12-unit Passive House certified apartment building in South Seattle. Completed in early 2024, this project takes a unique approach in its development model, achieves high performance design, and provides affordable housing for the community. Part of the success of the project is undoubtedly due to the team that came together to make this vision a reality: Wayne Apostolik is a co-founder and owner of Triple Bottom Line construction, an employee owned General Contractor in Seattle, and has over 35 years of construction and remodel experience; Dan Whitmore is a designer,

builder, and Certified Passive House Consultant that has consulted on, designed, and/or built over 20 passive house projects; and Ginger Segal is an expert consultant in affordable housing with 33 years of experience in affordable housing policy and development. The architect is VY architecture out of Boise, Idaho that specializes in Passive House certified buildings. **Figure 7** shows a picture of the main entrance and covered porch space along the sidewalk.

Figure 7. Photograph of Red Willow Residences in Seattle, WA, a 12-unit Passive House certified apartment building with a unique investment structure to improve affordability (VY Architecture 2024).

In conversations with Wayne Apostolik and Dan Whitmore they shared with me their goals, development model, and processes for the Red Willow project. The 12-unit building replaces an old single-family home on a Lowrise 1, Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA), zoned lot near the Othello Light Rail station in South Seattle. While this zoning is one tier above the neighborhood residential zoning this thesis focuses on, it is the smallest scale of multi-family zoning in Seattle and is similar in scale to neighborhood residential zones, and I would argue this typology is compatible with goals of neighborhood transformation I describe throughout this thesis. The apartment building hosts a mix of unit types including five 1-bedroom, five 2-bedroom, and two 3-bedroom units. Rather than fit as many studio or 1-bed units as possible per floor plate, they decided to include a variety of unit types to accommodate families and help prevent displacement in the local community. Passive house certified envelope detailing, windows, mechanical systems, and rooftop photo voltaic (PV) array results in a hyper efficient building that utilizes less energy.

The development model is of primary interest to me. I see this as an example of smaller scale, more grassroots, development rather than development by a corporate conglomerate. When speaking with Wayne and Dan, the logic for their investment model was essentially this: we can invest in the detached stock market, or we can invest in a resource that contributes to the local community. The model relies on private equity investment of multiple parties, in this case the primary investors being Wayne, Dan, and Ginger, with the investors choosing to limit their return to a 5% return on investment, and keeping a long-term hold on the property, to try to keep rental prices of all units as low as possible.

In bringing together an interdisciplinary team with a common goal they were able to achieve a Passive House certified, affordable, apartment building that came in under budget and was less than 5% more expensive than a typical code-minimum apartment building of the same scale. An extension of this model would be finding how to make this even more locally controlled, so that existing residents have a pathway to ownership and equity in their neighborhood. However, this case study proves what you can pull off when you bring a like-minded and skilled team together to develop a project.

Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative and Community Land Trusts (CLT)

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), located in Roxbury, Massachusetts, is an example of a community scale effort to organize and control the transformation of the neighborhood through several strategies: a community land trust (CLT) to locally control development and provide hundreds of affordable housing units; a local merchants' organization that supports and encourages the growth of locally owned, independent and cooperative, businesses; the creation of a network of young people trained in urban agriculture; and a Resident Development Institute that hosts workshops to educate and train the community in economics and policy (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). I will provide a brief overview of the history of DSNI and give examples of how this community-scale approach and way of thinking has contributed to the generosity of the neighborhood.

DSNI is unique in that it was the first grassroots community organization in the United States to gain eminent domain over parcels of private land (Taylor 1995). In the

1980's, Dudley Street was suffering from the effects of discriminatory "redlining" by the city of Boston that prevented minority residents and business owners from getting loans or insurance (Taylor 1995). In response to the threat of "urban renewal/urban removal" the DSNI was formed in 1985 by residents and business owners, where they gained city support to control the future of city land and used eminent domain to claim abandoned private land, putting the control of development in the hands of the DSNI organization (Taylor 1995).

One of the key elements in this community scale control is the creation of Dudley Neighbors Incorporated (DNI), a CLT that controls more than 30 acres of previously public or abandoned private property in the Dudley Triangle (DNI 2024). The CLT structure means that DNI controls the land as a non-profit and that the land is not sold, removing it from the speculative real estate market. Land is instead leased by the CLT to be used for purposes that contribute to the community. In the case of DNI, this has meant the creation of 227 affordable homes, a community greenhouse and urban farm, playgrounds, gardens, and mixed-use spaces for the community (DNI 2024). The CLT model has been extensively used across the country and is a proven way to put the control of land in the hands of a community. **Figure 8** is a map of the Dudley Triangle that shows lots owned by DNI and their current land uses.

Figure 8. Map of the Dudley Triangle that shows lots owned by DNI and the type of land use that each lot is currently used for (DNI 2024).

DSNI has been cited as a prime example of Asset Based Community Development, or ABCD, which builds on the premise that "communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing (but often unrecognized) assets, and thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity. In particular, ABCD draws attention to social assets: the gifts and talents of individuals, and the social relationships that fuel local associations and informal networks" (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). Rather than a needs-based approach that focuses on the delivery of a product or a service by an outside, 'higher' government or non-government entity, this approach relies on the notion that communities themselves are best positioned to drive their own development and transformation. This approach and use of CLT and community organization to guide local scale development is one that should be extended and adapted to guide the transformation of our neighborhoods in Seattle.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Project Goals and Objectives

The design project of this thesis, as stated prior, is not a building proposal or suggested revision to zoning or policy in Seattle. It is the start of a framework for seeing and understanding a neighborhood in a more collective way so that its design and transformation contributes to fostering generous places to live and an abundance of kinship connections. The resulting process develops organically, with iterative feedback from my committee and advisors informing the next steps or evolutions in the methods.

One of the goals is to develop a hybrid method for analyzing a neighborhood, one that combines the power of data with the nuance of observation to truly 'see' the patterns of a place. This is not to say my method is new, but rather I hope to contribute to the existing practices we follow as design professionals. In architectural design school we are trained to conduct "site analysis" as a way of understanding the constraints and opportunities of a particular site. This is often the scale of a building site but can also extend to a broader urban or regional scale. We often utilize mapping exercises to do this, overlaying information to find relationships. We have access to an immense amount of data to make these maps. Tools like ArcGIS provide a platform for viewing all this data and

we should be leveraging this power of a data driven approach. However, a fundamental set of questions comes to light when thinking about these maps: what are the layers and patterns of a place that we are missing by only analyzing data driven maps, and what is the information that we can't find on a GIS database, information that can only come from careful observational study of a place?

Another goal is synthesizing information to identify patterns and to imagine possibilities of neighborhood transformations that build on existing patterns of place, and that contribute to the forming of kinship connections and fostering of generosity in the neighborhood. These possibilities are not proposed as specific buildings, but instead as relationships of space, people, and ideas that I hypothesize based on my own observations. These relationships are then meant to serve as inspiration for residents, community organizations, and other designers to start a conversation about what could be possible in a neighborhood.

Neighborhood Selection

Three neighborhoods were chosen for investigation to demonstrate that this approach can be applied to any place, and to iteratively practice the exercise of observing, mapping, making connections. The three neighborhoods include a series of blocks in Wedgwood, Beacon Hill, and Columbia City. **Figure 9** shows the location of each neighborhood in relation to the broader context of Seattle. The method for selecting these

neighborhoods, and then the specific subset of blocks within each, was done using the following process:

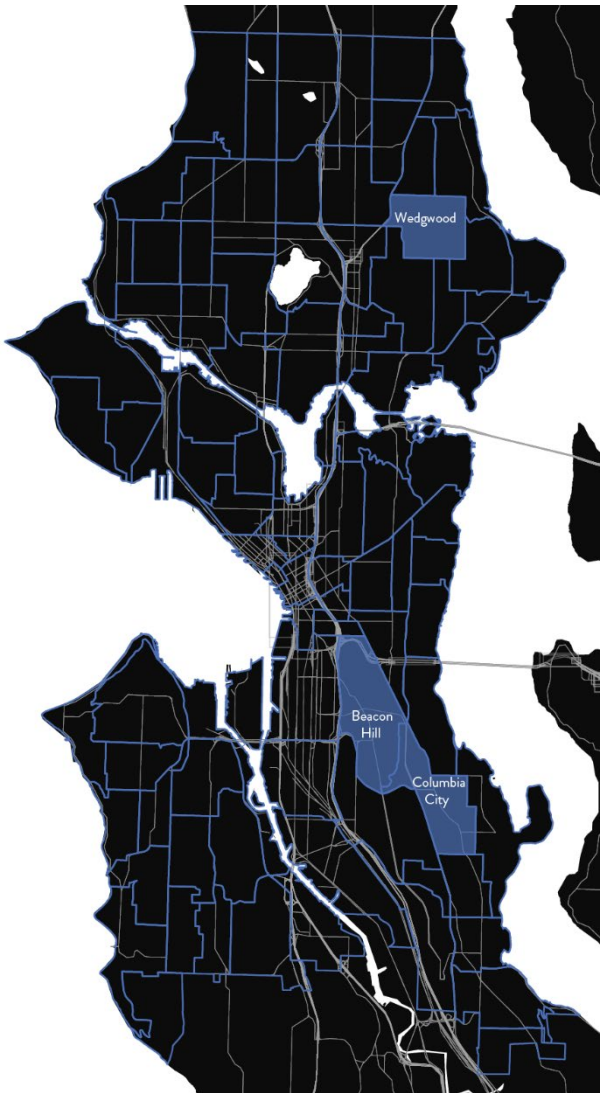


Figure 9. Graphic map of Seattle showing the location of the three selected neighborhoods (shaded blue) and the boundaries of all other Seattle neighborhoods (blue lines) as defined by the City of Seattle. Map data from City of Seattle, Office of Planning and Community Development.

- <u>Exploratory Searching in ArcGis:</u>

  This process is like using Google Earth or any other map viewer, where you can pan and zoom on maps containing layers with aerial imagery, streets, businesses, and other data. By utilizing the ArcGis map viewer and map layers from the City of Seattle I was able to overlay data about zoning, parcel lines, property ownership, satellite imagery and other layers of data collected by the City onto the same map. Data came from various ArcGIS data owners that are all under the City of Seattle: “SeattleData”, “Planning_SeattleCityGIS”, “PublicUtilities_SeattleCityGIS”, and “Transportation_SeattleCityGIS”. The goal of this step was to look for areas of overlap, where NR zoned areas were adjacent to mixed use zones, open space, transit, urban centers, or other interesting

relationships of space. No definite combination of layers was used for every neighborhood, rather the layers of data were constantly turned on and off to quickly iterate through combinations of information.

- Local Area Knowledge: People who have lived in a place tend to know that place not just in depth, but from their own unique perspective. I have lived in Seattle for the last eight years since moving for my initial undergraduate education. I understand the city as someone who primarily, and preferentially, uses a bicycle to commute and explore the city, and who is always looking for places with proximity and access to what I will broadly call nature. My committee members have all lived in Seattle for longer than I have, in different neighborhoods, and understand it from the perspectives of practicing architects, academics, parents, and people who engage with the world in a variety of ways. This life experience gives what we might call an 'intuition' about certain places that might have interesting overlaps to consider for this area of study. The final choice of neighborhoods was informed by some of this intuition uncovered during discussions with my committee and various advisors.
- Walking the Streets: Going to each neighborhood and walking the streets both confirmed observations gained from maps, but also revealed new relationships that would not have been identifiable otherwise. Each neighborhood was visited several times, including weekdays, evenings, and weekends. Walking up and down the streets and alleys, peeking over fences, and observing what was happening in each place is what often inspired many of the patterns and design possibilities presented later in this paper.

The end choice of the three different neighborhoods resulted from a variety of factors based on the process above. Below I will briefly outline examples of maps and observations that influenced the choice of each neighborhood for further study.

Columbia City

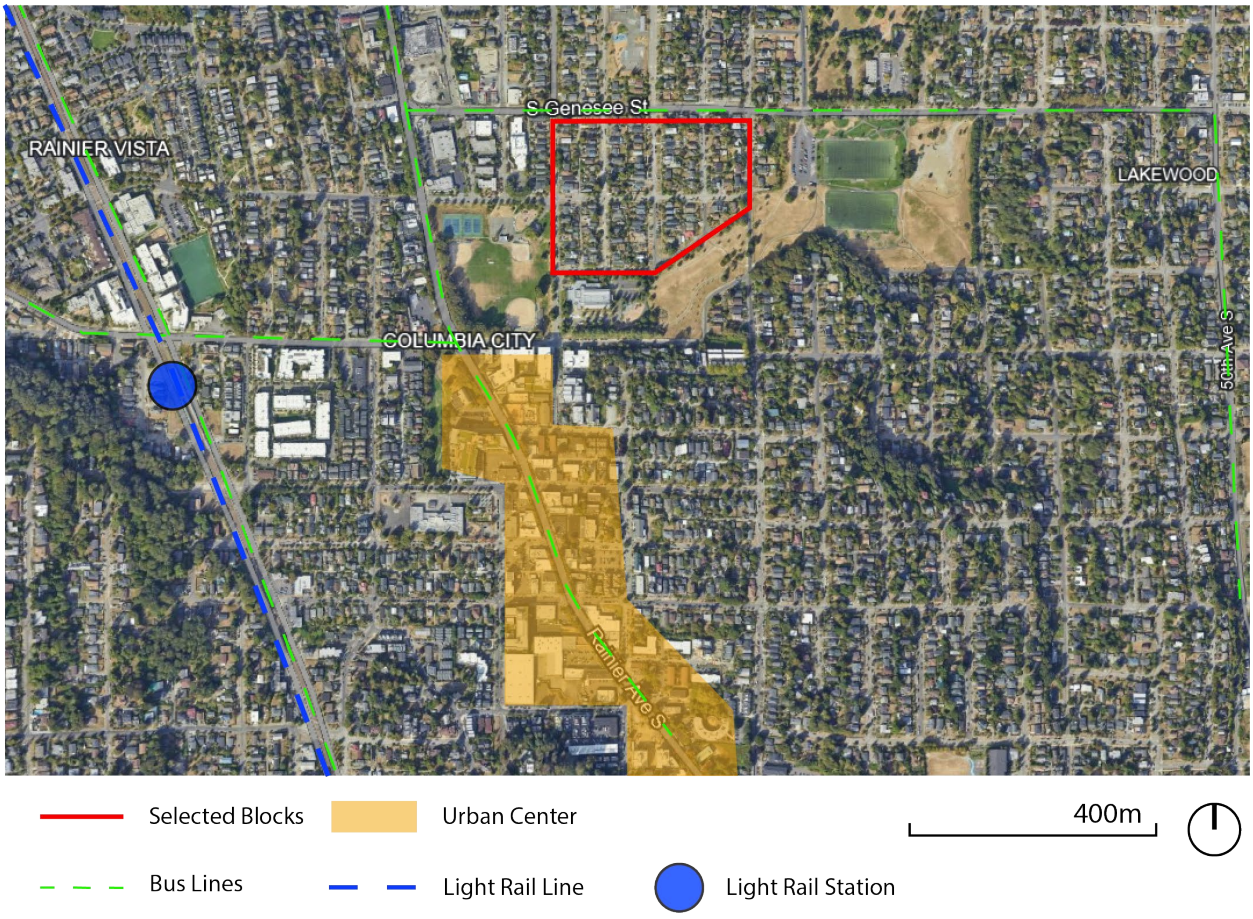


Figure 10. Vicinity map of Columbia City neighborhood. Diagram overlays to highlight surrounding infrastructure and transit. Satellite Imagery from Google Earth.

The selected series of blocks in Columbia City is shown in **Figure 10**. This neighborhood was chosen for a variety of reasons. One was its proximity to the urban center of Columbia City along Rainier Avenue South, a lively urban core with a variety of retail, food, and ammenities for residents. It is near major rapid transit lines, both buses and Light Rail. This series of blocks is also surrounded by City Park space, giving ample

access to open space. Lot sizes are relatively small, with many following the original platting of roughly 3000sf. Large planting strips are in the public right of way giving a feeling of larger volume to the public realm.

Wedgwood

Figure 11. Vicinity map of Wedgwood neighborhood. Diagram overlays to highlight surrounding infrastructure and transit. Satellite Imagery from Google Earth.

The selected series of blocks in Wedgwood is shown in **Figure 11**. This neighborhood is adjacent to 35th Ave, a North-South arterial with frequent bus transit and mixed use zoning along its path. These lots are larger in size than Columbia City, often between 5000sf and 7500sf. This additional space means the homes are often spaced further apart, setback further from the street, have more unbuilt space around each

building, and present the possibiliity of adding building area without taking away all of the outdoor space. There is also a very suburban nature to this neighbrohood, with large driveways in front of nearly every home and expansive front yard spaces between the house and street. This neighborhood is also unique in that it has ‘Penguin Park”, a community park that has been created in an abandoned right-of-way space where the platted continuation of 38th Avenue was never constructed.

Beacon Hill

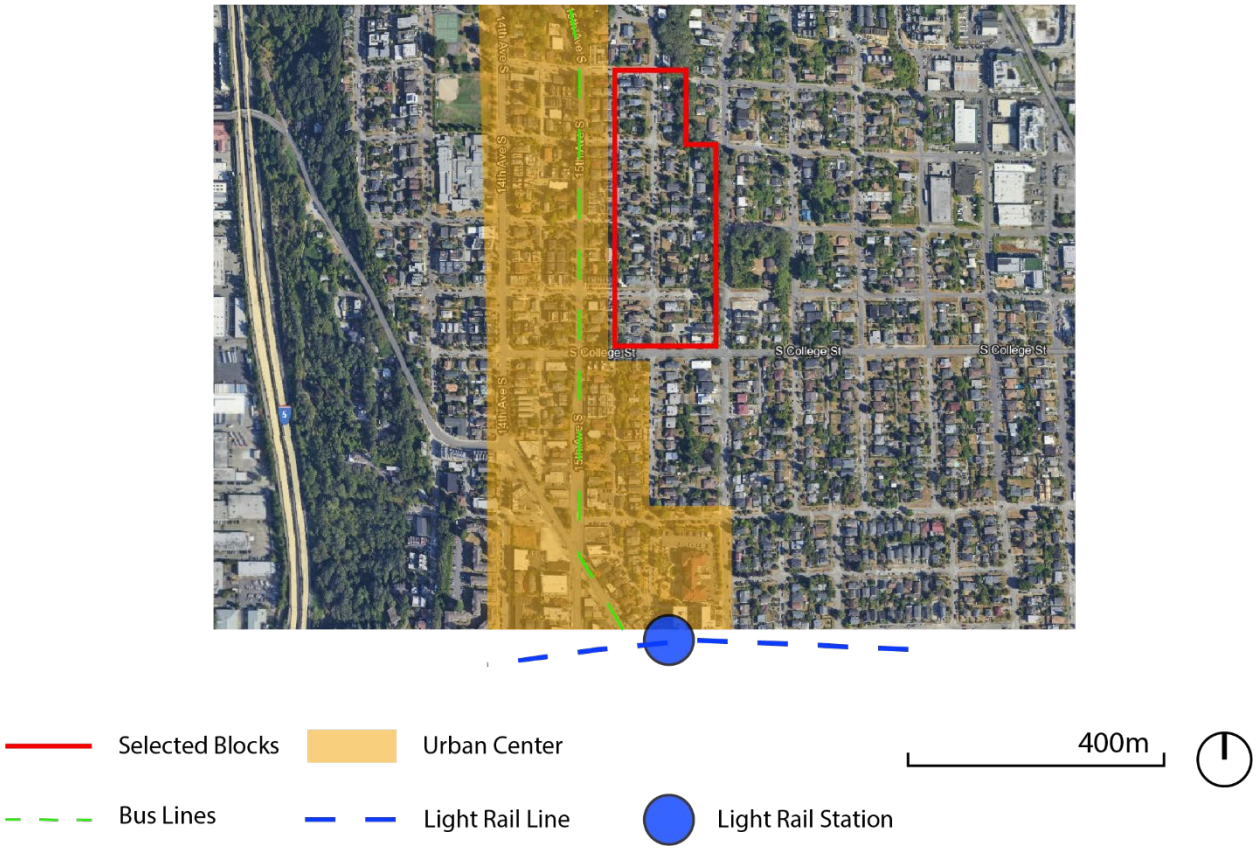


Figure 12. Vicinity map of Beacon Hill neighborhood. Diagram overlays to highlight surrounding infrastructure and transit. Satellite Imagery from Google Earth.

The selected series of blocks in Beacon Hill is shown in **Figure 12.** These blocks are also in proximity to transit, both bus and Light Rail, and the mixed-use urban center of

Beacon Hill. An aspect that was interesting in this series of blocks was a rapid topographical shift on the east side of the selected blocks, resulting in East-West street dead-ends that transition to pedestrian stairs to navigate the steep slope. These street ends are also connected by North-South alleys. These conditions create a series of blocks that experience very little vehicular through traffic and feel much more catered to pedestrians than surrounding areas. Similar to Wedgwood, most lots are larger than 5000sf and have the presence of a street on one side and an alley on the other.

'Seeing' a Place - Patterns and Design Possibilities

As mentioned above, each neighborhood was analyzed through a combination of mapping exercises and observational study. This analysis is used to generate graphical representations of the patterns of each place. The patterns are thought about at three different scales: the household, between neighbors, and across the neighborhood. These patterns are then used to generate simplified graphical and narrative stories about transformations that could foster kinship and create generous conditions for living. This section provides examples of expanding the way we see a neighborhood, its patterns, and its possibilities.

Methods for considering the elements that define a neighborhood, their analysis, and representation is informed by previous work done in Seattle. In 1975-76, the Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority, with Folke Nyberg and Victor Steinbrueck as consultants, conducted a "Neighborhood Inventories" project that worked to provide an

overview of Seattle neighborhoods by combining photographs and descriptions of buildings, urban design elements, sketches of the neighborhood, and a concise history of the place. **Figure 13** shows a sketch made for the inventory of the Central Area.

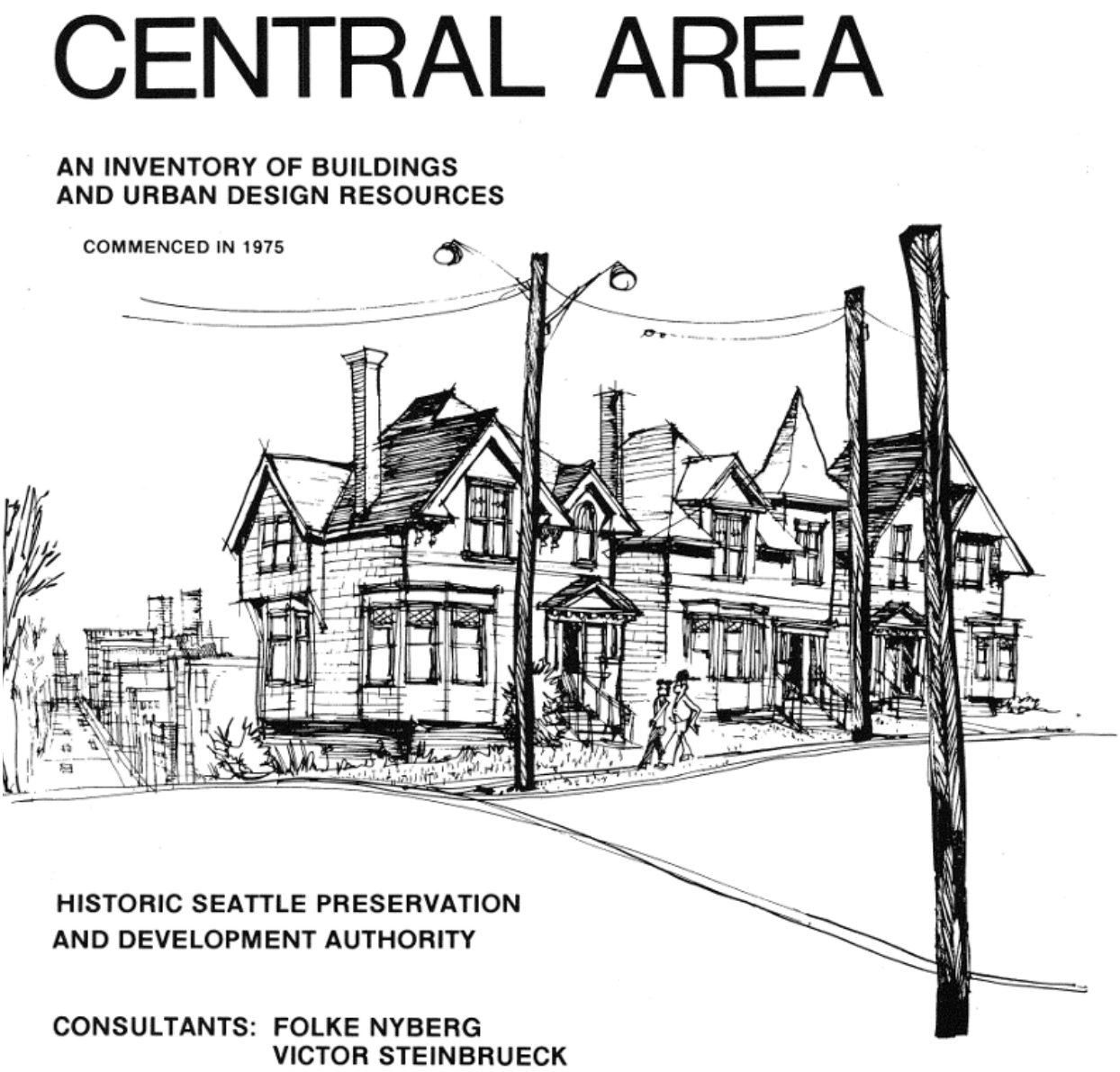


Figure 13. Sketch of Central Area neighborhood from the 1975-76 Neighborhood Inventories project conducted in Seattle. (Historic Seattle Preservation and Development Authority 1975)

What this sketch articulates is an elevated level of intention and observation that comes from creating a representation of a place rather than simply taking a photograph or copying data. Every element was drawn by hand, chosen by the author to be included. There is attention to multiple scales, from the scale of each home or a pair of pedestrians to the broader connection of the neighborhood to the city in the background. This drawing is a representation of a way of seeing. This thesis adopts this intentionality in observation, and the practice of observation and the making graphical representations, to see the neighborhood.

To practice this way of seeing we can look at an example of a small neighborhood business in the Ravenna neighborhood, the Seven Coffee Roasters Market and Café as shown in **Figure 14.** In the "One Seattle Plan" update, the City proposes this example as the type of small commercial space they want to encourage within residential neighborhoods.

Figure 14. Photograph of Seven Coffee Roasters Market and Café, an example of a commercial space nested within the neighborhood's ecosystem and scales of space (City of Seattle and MAKERS 2024).

However, if we really observe and look at what is in this picture, there is so much more than just a café and market. There are overlaps in space and use that generously contribute to the neighborhood and give possibility of future connections. The café overlaps with the public right-of-way in the form of café tables and benches that give people a place to gather and socialize. On the left we see an alley, and then several steps up to a household porch, presenting an opportunity for connection across scales of space. The café is nested adjacent to a backyard space of a home on the right. Seeing these adjacencies and overlaps of space allows for hypothesizing potential transformations.

For each neighborhood a series of patterns will first be summarized and accompanied by photographs relating to those patterns. Following the explanation of each pattern, axonometric diagrams will be shown that articulate possible transformations (shown as blue shaded regions) at the scale of the household, between neighbors, or across the neighborhood. These diagrams are meant to be a starting point for inspiration and a simple representation of what came to mind when examining the possibilities of spatial patterns, not a prescriptive typology or form that I think is best.

Columbia City – Patterns and Possibilities

The patterns of space in Columbia City include continuous strips of front yards, side-yard setbacks between tightly spaced homes, adjacent backyards, and wide planting strips in the public right-of-way. **Figure 15** shows a matrix of these patterns mapped as a figure-ground map of the neighborhood.

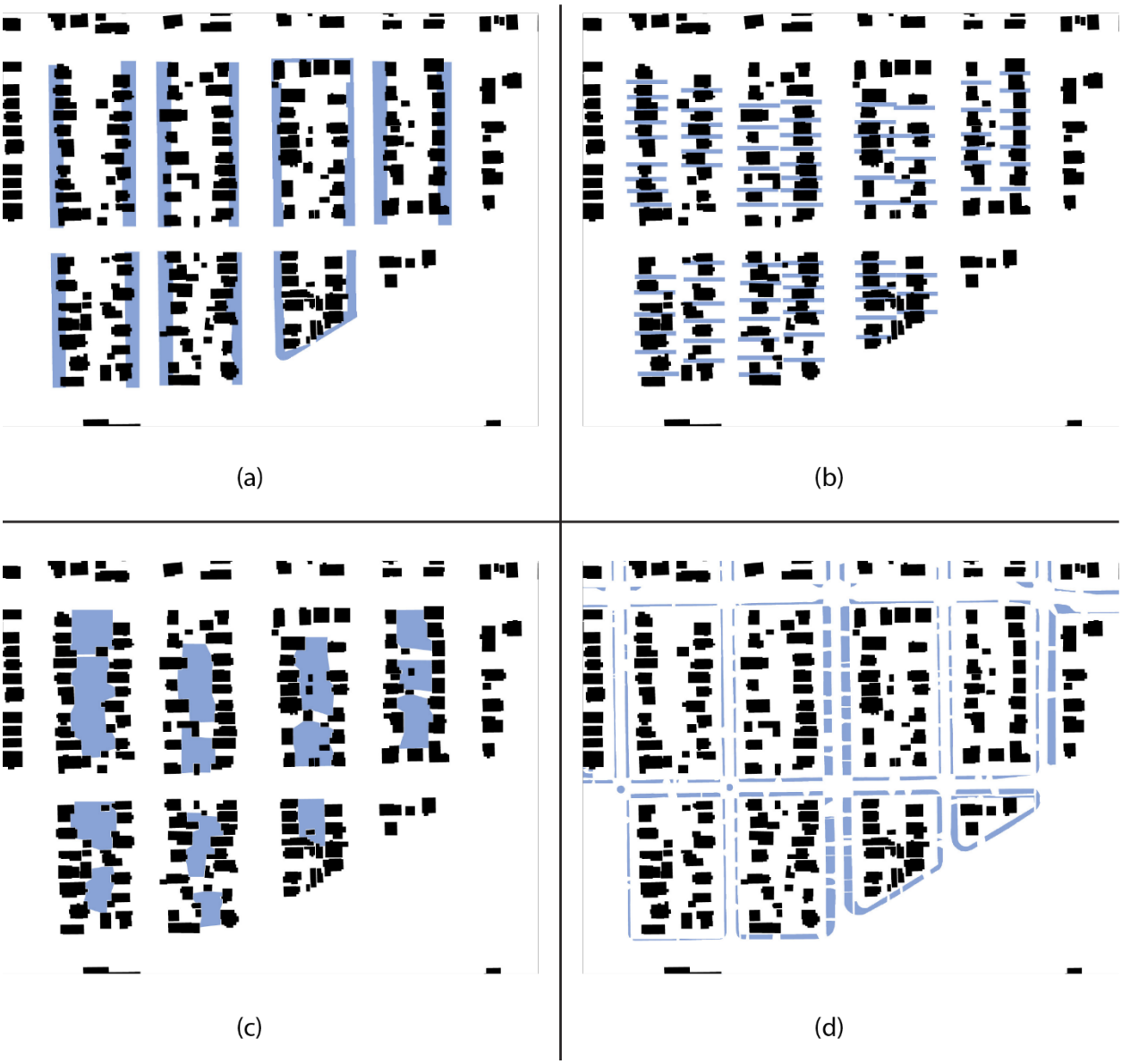


Figure 15. Pattern maps of Columbia City: (a) front yards, (b) side yard setbacks, (c) adjacent backyards, and (d) public planting strips.

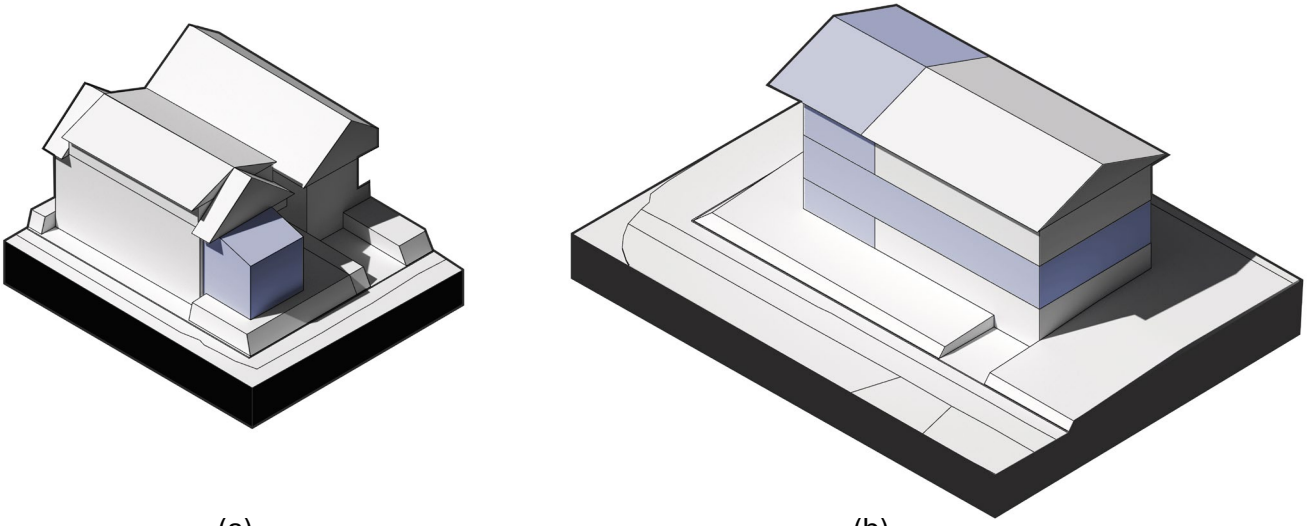
Front Yards: These are ubiquitous in NR zoned neighborhoods, a result of the 20ft front yard setback the zoning requires. **Figure 15a** shows a mapping of these front yards as continuous bars space along each sidewalk. This highlights that each pattern is often an overlap of different scales. While I primarily viewed front yards as a possibility for

household scale change, their adjacency to one another across multiple lots provides additional opportunity to think about them as one larger space. **Figure 16** shows photos taken while walking the neighborhood, giving a sense of the scale of these front yard spaces. Many are small because of tighter lots, but some larger lots, especially corner lots, have more abundant front yard space.

Figure 16. Photos of front yard spaces in Columbia City and their relationship to the public realm (Images by author).

When thinking about how these front yards could transform, I first started to think about the ways the house could extend into these spaces. With many homes being smaller in scale the front yards seemed like a natural place to allow the buildings to grow. The larger right of way spaces adjacent to the sidewalks means that additional building growth into this space won't significantly shrink the volume of the public space and provides the opportunity for private spaces in the household to start to overlap with the public space of the right-of-way. **Figure 17a** shows a diagram of a household space added to the front yard

of an existing structure. Maybe one of these homes is just a little too small to be renovated into a multigenerational triplex and adding 10 more feet makes that vision a reality. On larger lots, or corner lots, increased access to light and air allows for more generous additions to household space, articulated in **Figure 17b** as a house lift to add a floor and the addition of more building on the open corner of the lot. Maybe this transformation is even done to the scale of a small apartment building that takes advantage of open space on the two street-facing sides. The scale of the household transformation, its location, and its character gets informed by what each place allows and needs.



(a) (b)

Figure 17. Axons of household transformations: (a) front yard addition on small lots, and (b) a house lift and yard addition on a larger corner lot.

Side Yard Setbacks: Next, there are the narrow side yard setback spaces between homes, a result of the 5ft minimum side yard setback in NR zones, as shown in **Figure 15b**. These corridors have the opportunity for connection between neighbors, and to serve as a link from the public realm to the more private backyard spaces. **Figure 18** shows the common condition of these spaces today: thin strips of land, separated by a fence to mark the boundary of private property between neighbors.

Figure 18. Photographs of the corridors between homes created by side yard setbacks, and the fences that divide property (Images by author).

Rather than being seen as a separator, what if these spaces were instead understood as a connector? The space transforms into areas I am calling 'Setback Ways' that create connection between neighbors, as shown in **Figure 19**. Households could open onto these ways, creating patios to enjoy morning coffee or each other's company. What was previously just the side of a building now becomes a second front porch shared by you

and your neighbor. A roof between buildings could provide covered space to store bicycles, watercraft, or work on projects during the rainy winter months. They also serve as linkages from the front yards to the backyards of households, providing more opportunity for overlap between private, semiprivate, and public space.

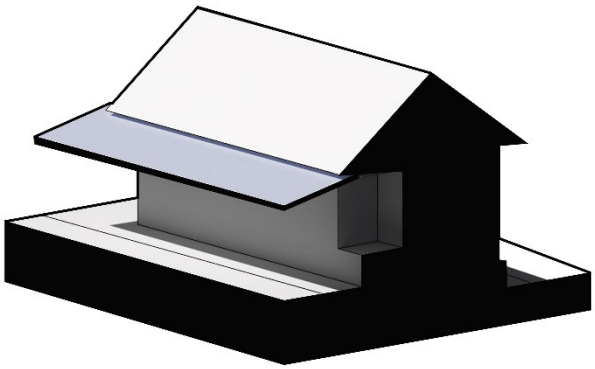


Figure 19. Axon of transformation between neighbors in the form of a shared 'Setback Way'.

Adjacent Backyards: Backyards are often viewed as part of the private realm, but this thesis instead looks at them as a series of adjacent spaces, mapped as contiguous space in **Figure 15c**. We separate our yards with fences, a marking of territory that disconnects us from our neighbors. In an effort to lay claim to what is 'mine', we actually diminish the generosity of the space for both ourselves, others, and the ecology. I propose we view our adjacent backyards as a 'Neighbor Yard Collectives' where adjacent neighbors, maybe four to eight lots, take down their backyard fences and share the resulting space. **Figure 20** shows such a transformation. A DADU can be built behind a house that otherwise would have had too small of a backyard to build a structure and enjoy outdoor space. Maybe this DADU serves as a common house

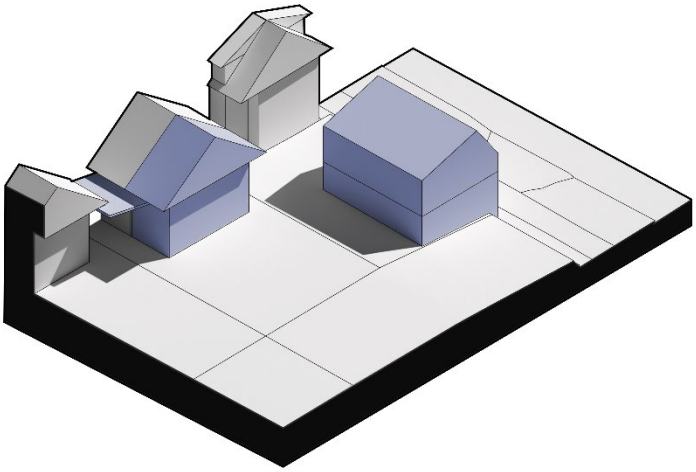


Figure 20. Axon of transformation between five neighbors to make a 'Neighbor Yard Collective" in the place of private backyards separated by fences.

for neighbors, making an increase in density of units on surrounding lots feel like a contribution to the community rather than a threat to your own space. The collective yard between neighbors can link household spaces, additions, and setback ways. Rather than merely exist in our fenced off squares of space, we can thrive together and enjoy a generous space to play, grow, and live.

Public Planting Strips: **Figure 15d** shows the planting strip space in the public realm, owned by the city, spread across the neighborhood. Often these strips are planted with grass, providing little added generosity to the human and non-human life around it. In this neighborhood many of the planting strips are already utilized by the community for productive growing as shown in **Figure 21.**

Figure 21. Photographs the wide public planting strips in Columbia City neighborhood. Both images show examples of residents transforming the space for urban growing. (Images by author).

When imagining the transformation of this neighborhood scale system, this series of blocks has particularly wide planting strips that can serve as part a neighborhood wide

system for urban agriculture and ecological systems enhancement, like the diagram in **Figure 22** shows. Local scale community agriculture can produce food, bring community members together, and teach people about the circular systems of food production. The creation of bioswales and stormwater management systems can help buffer the load of local runoff and create biodiverse ecological environments.

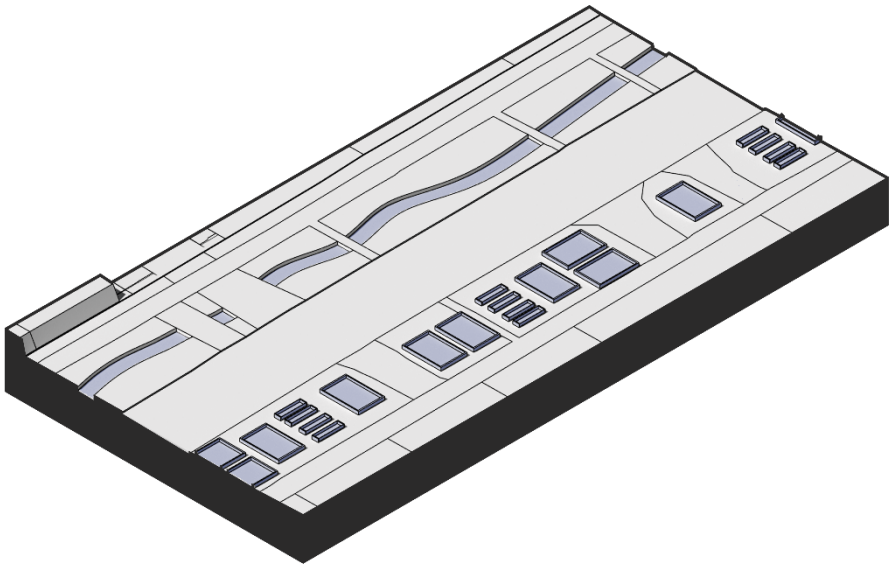
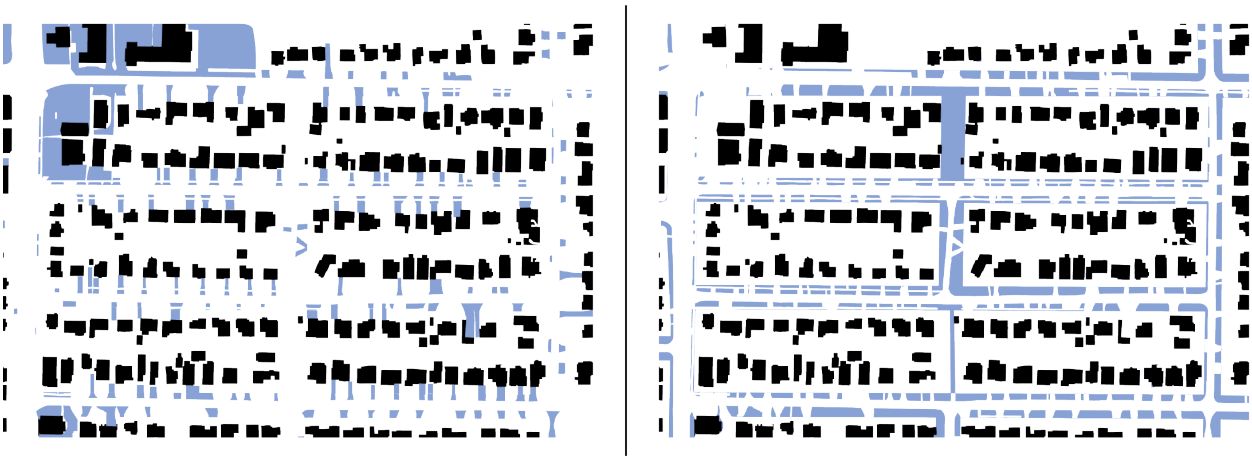


Figure 22. Axon showing transformation of the planting strips into productive urban agriculture and ecological swales.

Wedgwood – Patterns and Possibilities

The patterns of Wedgwood investigated in this thesis include the repetition of paved driveways and the presence of abandoned right-of-way space. **Figure 23** shows these patterns mapped on a figure ground map of the neighborhood.



(a) (b)

Figure 23. Pattern maps of Wedgwood: (a) paved driveways and (b) public right of way space, most notably the abandoned right of way in the upper center of the map that now serves as 'Penguin Park'.

Paved Driveways: Neighborhoods in Seattle were designed around the automobile. Main arterials feed into a grid of paved roads that feed into paved driveways that feed into garages. **Figure 23a** shows the repetition of paved driveways in front of nearly every house, and the parking lots on the east side of the map that service the commercial business along 35th Ave. **Figure 24** shows examples of driveways in this neighborhood.

Figure 24. Photographs paved driveways in Wedgwood. Some with wide multi-car garages (left) and others being transformed into additional living space or an ADU (right) (Images by author).

Some have multiple garages and enough room to store five vehicles on the lot. Others are already being transformed into alternate uses. In the future, hopefully a shift to more transit and bicycle-oriented modes of travel will render some of these driveway spaces obsolete. **Figure 25** imagines the transformation of driveways into something that contributes to both the household and the neighborhood. Additional living space can be created in what was once the garage to provide more housing. Some additions might serve as neighborhood businesses,

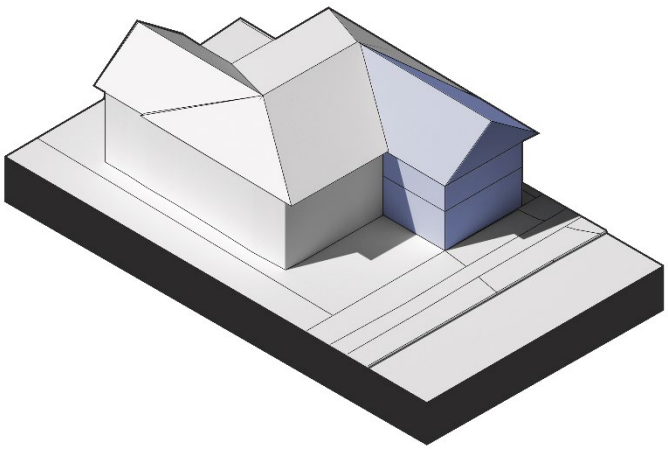


Figure 25. Axon of the transformation of a driveway into additional housing or a neighborhood business.

like a café that opens onto the street, an artist studio, or a barber shop. Businesses that give space for neighborhood residents to gather and connect.

Abandoned Right-of-Way: **Figure 23b** depicts the right-of-way greenspace in this neighborhood, and of particular interest was the large rectangle at the center-top of the map. This represents an abandoned right-of-way, space that was originally platted for the continuation of a North-South street but has now been absorbed as open space that the community utilizes. **Figure 26** shows pictures of the spaces, dubbed Penguin Park by the community.

Figure 26. Photographs of the abandoned right-of-way space in Wedgwood that was turned into Penguin Park by the community. (Images by author).

These types of space happen all over the city, where land was platted for a street but topography, lack of need, or some other factor meant it was never built. In this case, the community has created a collective space for residents to come enjoy outdoor space

together, furnishing it with picnic tables and maintaining the grounds. **Figure 27** imagines the transformation of lots around this park-like space. The access to light and open space might mean that more dense built space is appropriate. Maybe this is a neighborhood group home that houses aging residents and opens out onto the park. Maybe another lot has a childcare center or community space that contributes the generosity of this open space and allows for multigenerational interaction.

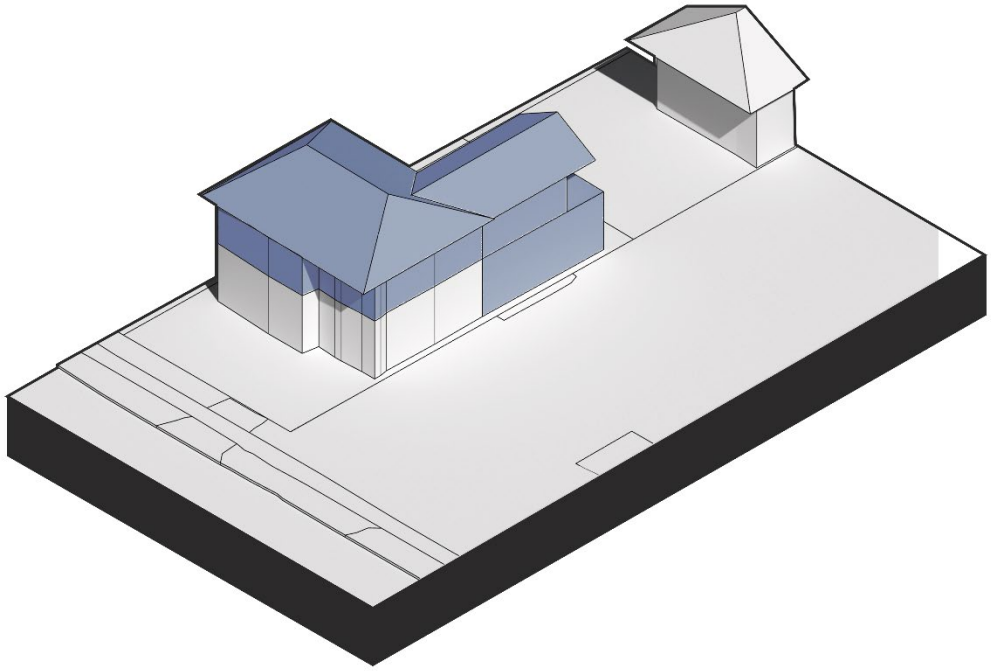
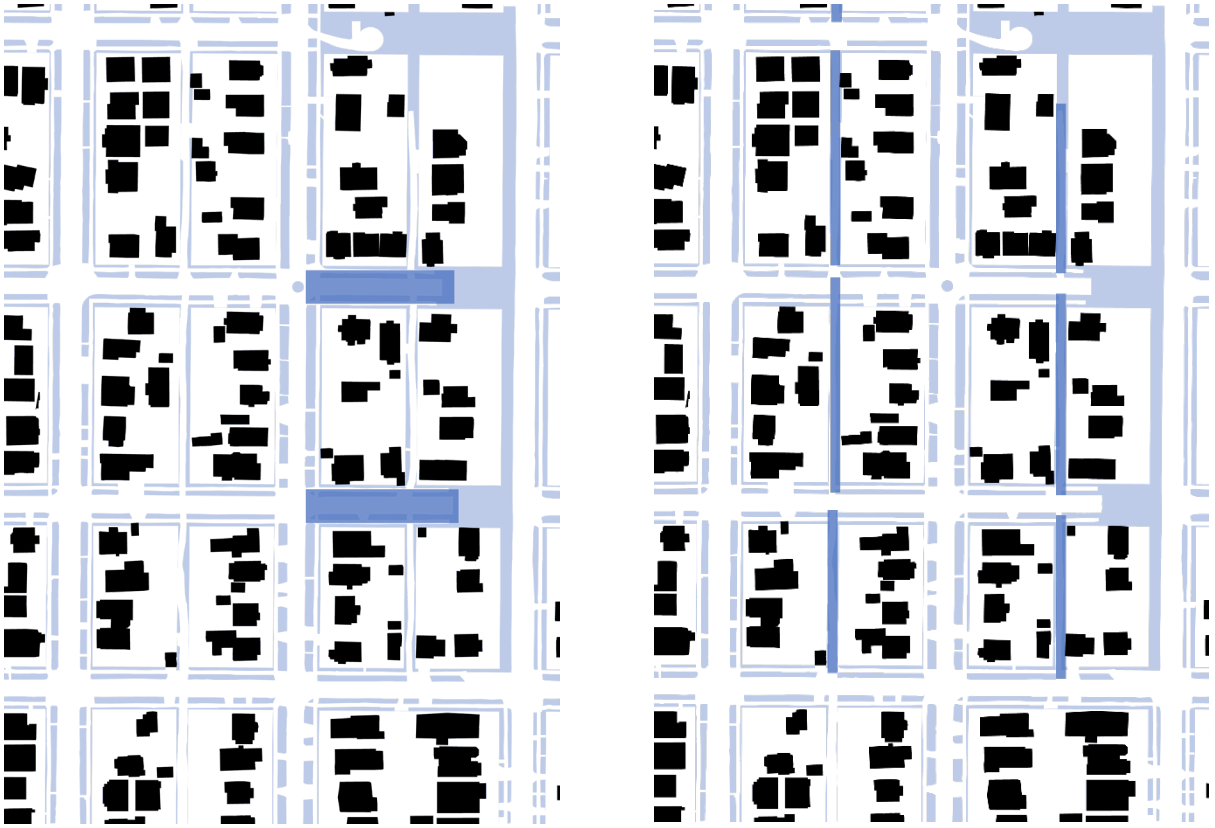


Figure 27. Axon of the transformation of a building adjacent to the abandoned right-of-way, where Penguin Park now resides. Additional building area interacts with the adjacent open space.

Beacon Hill – Patterns and Possibilities

The patterns of Beacon Hill that add to this thesis include dead-end streets and neighborhood alleys. **Figure 28** shows these patterns mapped on a figure ground map of the neighborhood, with public right of way in light blue and darker blue representing the dead-ends and alleys.



(a) (b)

Figure 28. Pattern maps Beacon Hill: (a) dead-end streets highlighted in darker blue and (b) alleys highlighted in darker blue. Lighter blue represents the rest of public green space in the neighborhood.

Dead-end streets: The East-West streets in this neighborhood dead-end at steep slope topography change, with stairs continuing down the slope to the East. The dead-ends are highlighted in dark blue in **Figure 28a**. These street ends are currently used primarily as

parking space, with some additional community use evidenced by the basketball hoop and addition of a Little Free Library and community post it board as seen in **Figure 29**.

Figure 29. Photographs of a dead-end street in the Beacon Hill neighborhood. These streets are often used for parking, but evidence of use by the community for other purposes can be seen with the addition of a basketball hoop and community post it board (Images by author).

With no through traffic, these dead-end streets can transform into spaces for the neighborhood to gather. Maybe the paved areas can turn into sport courts, with basketball hoops or pickleball courts. Maybe one of the street ends becomes an urban greenhouse and community workshop space for residents in the neighborhood to utilize for their own growing or maintenance. Lots that are adjacent to the dead ends can open up onto them with small businesses or common spaces, linking the scale of the household to the broader community. **Figure 30** thinks of these dead-ends as places the neighborhood can

grow into, creating neighborhood pedestrian pockets in areas that already have a natural lull in their vehicular activity.

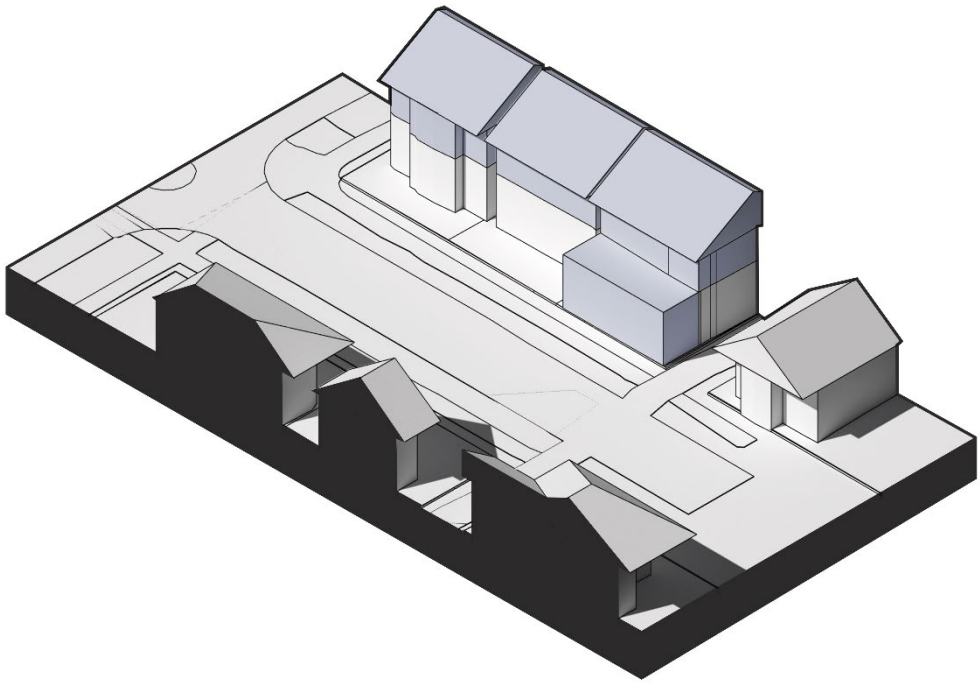


Figure 30. Axon of the transformation of a dead-end street into a neighborhood pedestrian pocket where adjacent buildings can open up to the space and neighborhood resources can be placed.

Alleys: The alley is present in neighborhoods across the city, and in this portion of Beacon Hill they intersect with the dead-end streets mentioned above. **Figure 28b** shows their position in dark blue. Alleys are not heavily trafficked streets, typically only used by residents to park in a garage or driveway, or for municipal waste services to pick up waste bins. **Figure 31** shows how the alleys in this neighborhood are imagined as transforming into more pedestrian oriented streets, with residential spaces opening onto the alley to create spaces for interaction between neighbors. Their connection to the dead-end streets enhances the possibilities of connection to a broader neighborhood system of pedestrian

space. Alleys also give the opportunity for buildings to open to a second front yard, one facing the main street and another facing the alley. If more units of housing or businesses get added to the neighborhood, they have more edges to interact with, and more areas for household space to overlap with neighbors and neighborhood space.

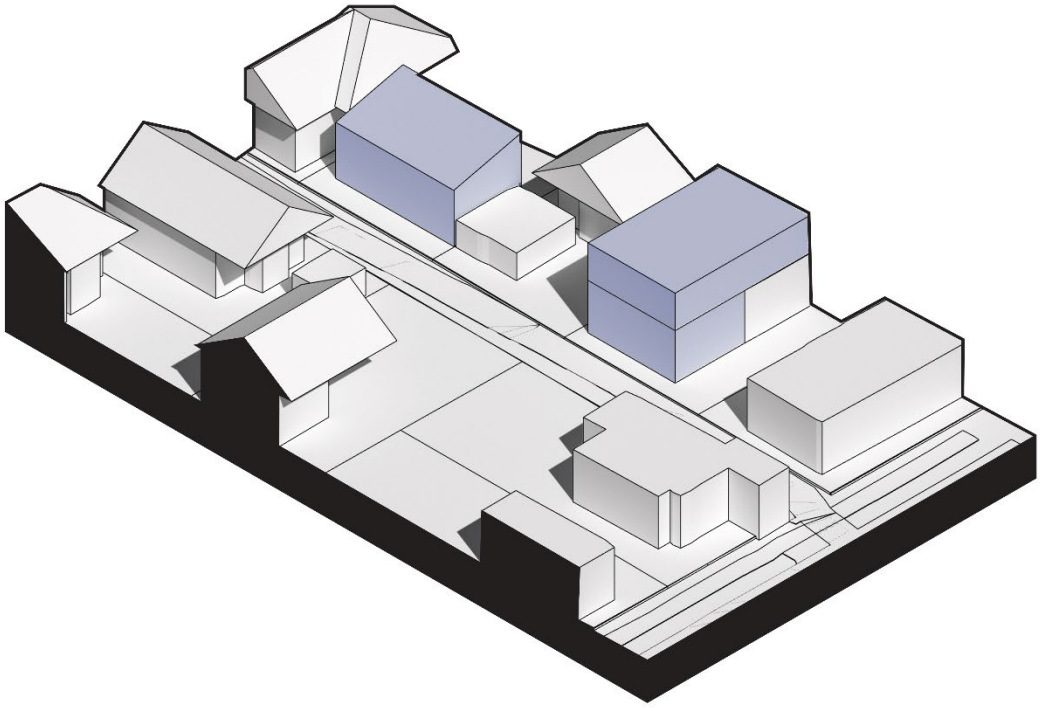


Figure 31. Axon of the transformation of an alley to become a pedestrian oriented street, with new built space treating the alley as a place for interaction between the household and neighborhood

Biodiversity and Connecting the Non-Human World

The examples above take a primarily human-centered view when explaining neighborhood patterns and the possible transformations. I think this human-centered view serves a purpose here in that it explains this thesis' different perspective on neighborhood transformation in a way that is more immediately relatable for the average person. However, we as humans have an undue influence on the natural world around us, and we must consider our broader role in contributing generosity to the non-human world and enhancing biodiversity. Each of these patterns and possibilities has a role to play in creating a thriving ecosystem for all, and ecological considerations were part of the discussion throughout the development of this thesis. Both front yard and backyard spaces were discussed as being not just independent household spaces, but a linked and contiguous series of spaces that span between neighbors and across the neighborhood. Taking down backyard fences and linking backyards means they could serve as wildlife corridors that provide expansive space for animals to roam and native plants to grow. Instead of separate grass patches in front of each house, landscape strategies can be chosen that allow bugs and pollinators to thrive. These same bugs and pollinators can help adjacent urban farms and agriculture in the planting strips or right-of-way thrive. Planting strips that are transformed to provide ecological systems services, like stormwater management, can help buffer runoff loads from our hardscaped surfaces and provided room for more wetland type ecologies to live. Transforming existing buildings and living more densely means less impact on our supply of resources. This mindset of living together and with others extends benefits to the non-human world around us.

Limitations

While this research was able to address three different neighborhoods, future work should be done to investigate each neighborhood in more detail, adding more layers of consideration and nuance. Finding additional layers of information that should be mapped, but are currently overlooked, would give this process more sources of inspiration for transformation. There are considerations of economics that need to be more heavily investigated and considered. Understanding what factors influence the financial cost of certain pathways to transformation allows us to start finding where we can save or reallocate funds. Exploring more models of cooperative and community ownership could help find pathways for collectively using funds to take advantage of economies of scale.

There was not time during this research to engage with community members in the form of surveys or interviews. Understanding the perspectives of various residents would add to the conversation of what place specific transformation might look like and would give a better picture of the assets already present in a community that transformation could build off. Designers are often critiqued for projecting their perspectives, ideas, and bias onto a place and project. Future research should look to find ways of gathering community input and identifying community priorities regarding neighborhood transformation.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Discussion

Design Project Findings

The findings of this design thesis are centered around a process rather than a product. The graphical and narrative representation of neighborhoods, patterns, and possibilities provide one perspective of each place, namely my perspective. However, what this process can achieve is a shift in mindset, and expansion of view, about how we see and think about neighborhoods. Going through this process has changed the way I think and see the spaces I interact with and pass by every day, and I look at neighborhoods differently now than I did six months ago.

Kinship is what makes us feel at home in the world. It is what builds trust, provides care, and creates true abundance in our lives. Starting at the onset of design with a focus on kinship and our connection to a broader community roots all design thinking and design solutions in a world of considerations beyond that of one specific site, one client, or one use. Kinship is also multigenerational, linking past, present, and future. Adopting the idea of transformation of built space links design ideas across time, as moving entities rather than a static target. Possible solutions become more creative and considerate, and we start to find ourselves inventing new ways of finding kinship and creating space.

Discussion of Concepts

This thesis was presented to a panel of architectural and design professionals on May 28, 2024, and the resulting discussion that followed offered many insights, considerations, and critiques of the work. Additional conversations with my committee, classmates, and others about this topic of neighborhood transformation have informed the concepts of this thesis and provide points of discussion and future development of the work.

One discussion point was regarding the rapid pace of development that the city needs to follow to create enough new units of housing for future projections of growth. The idea of incremental change was critiqued as thinking too slow, and that residential neighborhoods have long avoided change or changed too slowly. I agree that residential neighborhoods have changed slowly, staying primarily single family in nature. However, I put forward the idea that incremental transformation doesn't just mean doing the same thing, but slower, it means iteratively growing what we already have, learning from it, and adapting as we go. Transformation can happen quickly, rapidly evolving and shifting to adapt to new situations. I think the benefit this perspective brings is that it doesn't apply a blank slate solution to everything, and hope that in thirty years it was the right choice. We need to react quickly, and find solutions now, but we also need to be flexible in adapting as we go.

Another point brought up was how do you make this type of transformation happen? One conversation was around the idea of incentives. We need to find ways of financially incentivizing projects that create more units of housing, provide community resources, and contribute to the community in multiple ways. I think we also need to find ways of attributing value to the abundance of social resources and assets that a strong and kin-full neighborhood has. The value of financial dollars matters, but so do systems of care, existing knowledge and skills, and conditions for well-being and happiness. There was also discussion around the power of grassroots efforts to drive this change. How can we as designers lay out a roadmap to guide groups of like-minded individuals towards achieving their goal? One suggestion was for designers like me, who are motivated to make a change, to go out and find those people, and make it happen. People who are motivated will find ways to make things work, and leveraging the expertise and knowledge within a group of people with the same goal has the potential to make change happen outside of the typical routes for design and development of a project.

Conclusions

As a society and world, we are facing unprecedented crises of climate change, inequitable and unsustainable resource consumption, access to housing, and loneliness. Centering our decisions around a framework of kinship and care encourages generosity in the spaces we design, build, and inhabit. When we are connected to something we care for, it then has the potential to reciprocally care for us. I think a guiding question to every

decision we make is how does this contribute to generosity for all, and what does this leave behind for future generations? This thesis explores the practice of seeing differently, and a method of translating these observations into representational patterns and design possibilities. The focus on neighborhood scales of transformation is because this, to me, feels relatable at a human scale. Larger scale system-wide changes in practice and thinking are also necessary, but finding tangible avenues to initiate transformation in everyday life inspires us to take concrete action. I hope this work can start a conversation. A conversation between designers, policy makers, friends, and family to explore, and hopefully build, transformations that foster kinship and generosity.

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