

Reclaiming the Neighborhood:

Housing as More than Housing for the Pennsylvania Avenue
Corridor of Baltimore, MD.

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Abstract

The project, *Reclaiming the Neighborhood* is an exploration of how development strategies and architecture can contribute to making a socially, culturally and economically equitable community. The project originated as a criticism of recent housing developments along the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor of Baltimore, MD. The new houses developed by erasing the original building texture along Pennsylvania Avenue do not support the needs of the community. In this thesis, I argue that, while housing is a crucial component needed for the revitalization of this historic district of Baltimore, housing should be developed in a manner that promotes social, cultural and economic empowerment of the residents. *Reclaiming the Neighborhood* proposes a spatial, typological and an economic strategy to achieve this goal.

Acknowledgements

For my family and friends who encouraged me through this endeavour.

For my fellow classmates for their collective support.

For my advisors (both official and un-official) Professors Alex Anderson, Michael Pyatok, Sharon Sutton, and Brian Gerich.

and most of all for the residents of Baltimore's Pennsylvania Avenue corridor.

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1 Introduction



Figure 1.1 Image courtesy of Baltimore Historical Society
Pennsylvania Avenue was the place to be during its hayday.

Pennsylvania Avenue Corridor

Long time Pennsylvania Avenue resident Mr. Clarence Brown, now in his early 90's says he can remember every club, bar and store that was along the avenue when he was a teenager. During the daytime it was bustling with shoppers and residents. But at night brighter stars came out to play. Cab Calloway, Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Miles Davis – they all played at the Royal Theater on the avenue.¹ This was the Pennsylvania Avenue of Baltimore, MD.

The vibrant story of this one-and-a-quarter-mile corridor leading Northwest from the center of Baltimore can be traced back more than a century. From its beginnings as a commercial street in the early 19th century to its cultural pinnacle in the 1950's, Pennsylvania Avenue was the place to be. (*Figure 1.1*) In the late 20th century however, the prosperity of the avenue slowly began to decline. As in many other central urban neighborhoods in the United States at this time, people began to move out of urban areas and into the suburbs. Houses and businesses were abandoned and Pennsylvania Avenue began to suffer from neglect. About 40% of the houses around Pennsylvania Avenue corridor remain abandoned today.²

The Problem Statement

In recent years Pennsylvania Avenue has slowly begun to get back on its feet. Several housing projects have replaced derelict blocks along the avenue, and some businesses are getting facelifts in anticipation of

further development. Local non-profit development corporations are making concerted efforts to gentrify the neighborhood in hope of attracting new businesses and residents.³

The new development projects begun in 2003 and after, focus on replacing the housing component of the neighborhood. About 50 housing units Along Pennsylvania Avenue, and about 300 housing units in the immediate neighborhood have been built or renovated with the collaboration of a local Community Development Corporation.⁴ There are future plans to redevelop "...properties along Pennsylvania Avenue into a mixed-use complex anchored by the B.A.L.L. House (Black Athletes and Lost Legends) museum, devoted to Negro League baseball teams and players."⁵ This new focus on redeveloping Pennsylvania Avenue brings up the question - how can we revitalize this neighborhood without losing its rich social, cultural and economic heritage?

The new housing structures moving into the neighborhood have negatively affected the character of Pennsylvania Avenue. While new housing along Pennsylvania Avenue corridor have introduced much needed housing stock into the neighborhood, I believe their design does not address the social, cultural and economic needs of the community. (Figure 1.3)



Figure 1.2
The building vacancy rate of the neighborhood remains at 40 percent today.



Figure 1.3

Image courtesy of Google Maps

Incursion of recent housing developments along Pennsylvania Avenue corridor.

Thesis Overview

Since the renewal process along the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor is still in its beginning stages, this neighborhood is in a unique position to pursue a new urban renewal process that does not turn its back on long-term residents. The renaissance that is about to sweep through the Avenue does not have to come at the expense of its existing community and rich cultural heritage. As a result, the main question being explored through this thesis is - how can the built environment promote a socially, economically and culturally equitable form of community redevelopment?

It is evident that housing is a much-needed resource for the future of Pennsylvania Avenue corridor.⁷ In this thesis, I argue that the redevelopment process of Pennsylvania Avenue corridor should be implemented in a manner that promotes social, cultural and economic empowerment of the residents. *(Figure 1.4)*

The following chapters explore contemporary ideas and discussions about the community redevelopment process. Their aim is to develop an understanding of how architecture and the process of creating urban space can meet social, cultural and economic needs of a community. The research contributes to generation of specific design guidelines for Pennsylvania Avenue. The thesis then applies these guidelines to a specific block along the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor.



Figure 1.4
Housing as social, cultural and economic empowerment.

Notes

- 1 Christina Royster-Hemby, "Street of Dreams" Baltimore City Paper. (February 2, 2005) <<http://www2.citypaper.com/eat/story.asp?id=9603>>
- 2 Census Data. 2006-2010 American Community Survey, American Fact Finder, U.S. Census Bureau.
- 3 Klaus Philipsen (Owner of ArchPlan Baltimore, MD) in discussion with the author, September 2012.
- 4 Heritage Crossing (Hope VI), Housing Authority of Baltimore City, Accessed September 6, 2012. <http://www.baltimorehousing.org/public_housing.asp?rid=17>
- 5 "2101-2111 Pennsylvania Avenue Development, Baltimore, MD," ArchPlan Inc. Accessed September 6, 2012. <<http://www.archplan.com/sphinxclub.html>>
- 6 Mindy Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: RandomHouse, 2004)
- 7 Klaus Philipsen (Owner of ArchPlan Baltimore, MD) in discussion with the author, September 2012.

2 Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

The primary goal of this chapter is to document and discuss scholarly publications relating to the topic of equitable community redevelopment. In order to frame the discussion about this vast subject, I have organized this chapter into the three sub-categories of social, cultural and economic equity in relationship to community development. In the second half of the chapter, I will document several case studies that provide insights into the architectural or spatial expression of community redevelopment projects.

Social Equity in Redevelopment

Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We can Do About It.

The connection we maintain with our surroundings may not be a difficult concept to understand for many of us. But why is it so important in shaping our identity? When the historic Royal theater at the “bottom” of the Avenue was torn down in 1971, what did the Pennsylvania avenue community loose? Mindy Fullilove gives an eloquent explanation of the psychological connections we make with the physical environment around us, in her book *Root Shock*.¹ As a psychiatrist Fullilove provides a unique view into the way people connect with their surroundings. She argues that much like how we depend on biological systems to maintain an internal balance within the body, we employ an emotional system to maintain an external balance with the world around us. We grow emotional roots into the places where we live, work,

shop, play etc. When the world around us changes rapidly without our consent, the roots we had established get uprooted. This is when we experience *Root Shock*.

But an important point to consider is that root shock can be experienced by a collective of people, as well as by individuals. Fullilove argues that the destruction of urban neighborhoods in the name of urban renewal in late 20th century America, destroyed more than the physical environment of these marginalized communities. As people lost their connections to the world around them, whole communities experienced traumatic stress. As a result, these communities were destroyed and displaced both physically and emotionally.²

The unfortunate reality of urban renewal in the United States is that working class or poor African Americans almost always occupied the neighborhoods subjected to it. Reasons for this are many and complex, but the fact remained that in the social environment of the late 1900's, poor black communities were unable to defend their neighborhoods from forces exerted by a white-centered, capitalistic ideology. It can be argued that urban renewal is a form of discrimination (whether along lines of race, class or wealth) whose main weapon is the built environment.

Then on the same token, how can we create a more equitable built environment? The second half of Fullilove's book provides an insight into this question. Through her studies of the contemporary French urbanist Michel Cantal-Dupart, Fullilove proposes

four principles of creating what she calls *Aesthetic of Equity*. Those four principles are...

1. Respect the common life the way you would an individual life.
2. Treasure the buildings that history has given us.
3. Break the cycle of disinvestment.
4. Ensure freedom of movement.

1. Respect the common life the way you would an individual life.

To Fullilove, life in this context refers to the way people act in and use the spaces around them. In any environment no matter how disorganized it may be, people find ways to live and laugh. When these individual lives come together, a network of human relationships is created that can lead to a personal support system that helps “each and every person survive and thrive.”³ What Fullilove underlines here is the importance of both private and public space for creating self-supporting communities. More importantly, it is the blending of the private and the public functions that can allow for new connections to be made - for new roots to grow.

2. Treasure the buildings that history has given us.

At first glance this may seem a simple proposition; we all know the importance of saving historic buildings for future generations. But how do we measure the level of importance of history within the built environment? Even places that may look blighted to some may have sentimental value to others. It is not just the old Royal theaters, the Apollo theaters, the Washington monument and the union stations

that have historical value. People have done things that mattered to them in their homes, on their front porches and in the park across the street as well. This is why the involvement of local residents is an important part of neighborhood redevelopment. Outsiders to a community may have a difficult time understanding all but the most apparent history of a neighborhood, whereas insiders have lived through the important moments of their neighborhood. Therefore, treasuring the everyday histories that are important to people living in a community is crucial to creating an equitable built environment.

3. Break the cycle of disinvestment.

When a stray pebble breaks a window on a vacant building, it signals to passers by that no one cares about that building. People may begin to throw trash into the building through the broken window and other windows may get broken. Soon enough the lack of interest may spread to other buildings around the block. This is the thesis for Fullilove’s third principle of *Aesthetic Equity*. There is no single rule for breaking this cycle, but one good place to start is by giving ownership to people who will take responsibility for the “windows” around them. Fullilove describes a specific situation when:

rowdies took over the one bench in a roadside park, other people stopped coming. Cantal installed twelve benches, on the theory that twelve benches would give each group of park users-rowdies, mothers, old people-a bench to call their own.⁴

In this case, the park bench being occupied by the rowdies would have led to a cycle of disinvestment.

When other people were able to have a place of their own in the park, it belonged to more than just the rowdies. According to Fullilove this was enough to break the cycle of disinvestment.

4. Ensure freedom of movement.

The importance of movement in creating equitable places is its necessity for relationships between things. Movement from one place to another is a fundamental necessity for all of us. A tool planners and architects may utilize to ensure freedom of movement according to Fullilove is perspective. She argues that it is...

...at heart a democratic tool, because it is a linking tool. Cantal views it as essential to open perspective in many directions: to deepen connections with the past, to raise awareness of the bioregion, to create connections among producers and consumers, to create linkages with people near and far.⁵

As much as it is important to create connections between destinations, what we find along the way may be even more important in making equitable communities. Linkages are opportunities to connect people who may otherwise never occupy the same space together.

These four principles outlined by Fullilove as essential for creating an *aesthetic of equity*, may seem common knowledge to those engaged in the creation of physical environments. But she argues that they are dramatically different from the strategies used to redevelop American cities in the “era of urban renewal.”⁶

Cultural Equity in Redevelopment

Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History

The places and spaces we build for everyday use reflect our values and aspirations as a society, as much as - if not more than - the monuments we build to memorialize our cultural narratives. Therefore all built landscapes around us are testaments to our past and our collective struggles and endeavors. This is the main argument being made by Dolores Hayden in her book *Power of Place*. Hayden suggests that as a result, the built landscape is an apt medium to tell the story of our cultural identities to future generations. She writes that...

[Cultural] identity is intimately tied to memory: both our personal memories... and the collective or social memories interconnected with the histories of our families, neighbors, fellow workers and ethnic communities. Urban landscapes are storehouses for these social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbors, as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes. Decades of *urban renewal* and *redevelopment* of a savage kind have taught many communities that when the urban landscape is battered, important collective memories are obliterated.⁷

Through the second half of the book, Hayden documents the cultural history of Los Angeles and describes in detail, several projects that have utilized the built landscape as a medium for telling the cultural narrative of a range of social, and ethnic groups. She

uses these examples to point out that it is important to tell the stories of communities who are often marginalized. While the economically or socially privileged groups often get to express their cultural identities through various forms, disempowered groups may lack the resources to tell their story. Through examples such as Bidy Mason memorial, Embassy Auditorium's installation honoring Latina Women Workers' Union organizers and the public art installation honoring Japanese Americans in Little Tokyo, Hayden suggests the problem of cultural inequity may be answered by telling the stories of marginalized social groups through the media of public landscapes.

In *The Power of Place*, Hayden sets out to describe the ability of built landscapes to embody cultural narratives. I believe her thesis has a significant impact on how we may construct, read and understand the built environment around us.

Economic Equity in Redevelopment

Listening to Harlem. Gentrification, Community and Business
by David Murrasse.

While social and cultural reinforcements necessary to mitigate the impact of gentrification are often discussed, in my opinion the economic incentives needed to curb the negative effects of gentrification often take a back seat in this discussion. The book *Listening to Harlem: Gentrification, Community and Business* by David Murrasse addresses this issue by providing a comprehensive look at the gentrification of Harlem. Through his research, Murrasse documents the recent revitalization efforts and the needs of Harlem through the eyes of its residents.

Murrasse begins by stating that Harlem is the subject of ongoing redevelopment efforts, and while the neighborhood has not yet fully transformed from its historical character, gentrification is just around the corner.⁸ This uniquely positions the neighborhood to understand and address the needs of its long-term residents as the character of the neighborhood changes slowly. Murrasse claims that...

Gentrification often has been addressed largely in the context of housing and the relative access to affordable residential units. However, gentrification has many interrelated dimensions and affects neighborhoods at a variety of levels. In addition to real estate, commercial development and interpersonal relations should be addressed as well in painting a broader picture of dynamics in gentrification.⁹

With his insights into the subject, Murrasse proposes several points to consider when proposing redevelopment efforts in marginalized urban neighborhoods.

1. Avenues for housing ownership.
2. Availability of affordable housing.
3. Attention to small business needs.
4. Employment with training and advancement opportunities.
5. Effective partnership between community and local institutions.
6. Resident involvement in shaping public policy.
7. Strong community based organizations.

These points extended by the author can be grouped into the three categories of housing, economic and interpersonal issues related to gentrification. While Murrasse makes a convincing argument regarding each of these categories, what is especially compelling is his call for economic empowerment of gentrifying neighborhoods. He argues that low-income neighborhoods often have their internal economies based on small scale or informal businesses. When large-scale businesses move into such neighborhoods during the process of urban renewal, “they bring a level of competition that forces most residents to be employees rather than owners.”¹⁰

Designing an economically equitable redevelopment process is no easy task, and will require the collaboration between many interest groups and institutions. Therefore the relevance of Murrasse’s argument to this thesis – Reclaiming the Neighborhood – depends on how economic empowerment can be expressed spatially.



Figure 2.1
Housing as social, cultural and economic empowerment.

Theoretical Framework of Thesis

The goal of fostering social, cultural and economic empowerment through architecture, admittedly, is not a simple task. The scholarly publications summarized above provide valuable insights into how social cultural and economic factors can be embedded into the process of space making. For the purpose of generating design guidelines from these insights, social, cultural and economic factors will be reframed as three strategies relating to the process of space making. (see Figure 2.1)

As described previously, Fullilove has made a clear connection between the social structures of communities and the physical environment they inhabit. Social empowerment of communities is therefore directly linked to how the spatial character of their environment changes due to the process of community redevelopment.

Our cultural identity is similarly embedded in our immediate surroundings, as pointed out by Hayden. The way we use spaces, the meanings and interpretations we project onto the buildings we inhabit, strengthen our cultural identities. Along Pennsylvania Avenue, this cultural identity is as equally embedded into the ubiquitous rowhouse typology – as it is embedded into the cultural landmarks along the avenue. Over decades, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the black and the white, co-inhabited this Baltimore's beloved housing type. Building on this premise, this thesis proposes a new typological strategy based on the original Baltimore rowhouse type, to promote cultural empowerment for the residents of Pennsylvania Avenue corridor.

According to Murrasse economic issues play a great role in the process of community redevelopment. Negative impacts of gentrification can be mitigated through the provision of affordable housing and incentives for small-scale businesses. This thesis employs an economic strategy that addresses the economic issues encountered during the process of community redevelopment.

The combination of these three strategies – spatial,

typological and economic – provide the basis for a comprehensive approach to redeveloping communities. They will help create a socially, culturally and economically equitable Pennsylvania Avenue corridor for the future. The following chapter describes these three design strategies and how they are implemented as tangible design guidelines.

Notes

1 Mindy Fullilove, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It* (New York: RandomHouse, 2004)

2 Fullilove 20.

3 Fullilove 199.

4 Fullilove 205.

5 Fullilove 208.

6 Fullilove 209.

7 Dolores Hayden. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. (Cambridge: MIT Press. 1995) page9.

8 David Murrasse. *Listening to Harlem*. (New York: Routledge. 2006) p51.

9 Murrasse 48.

10 Murrasse 70.

3 Site Selection

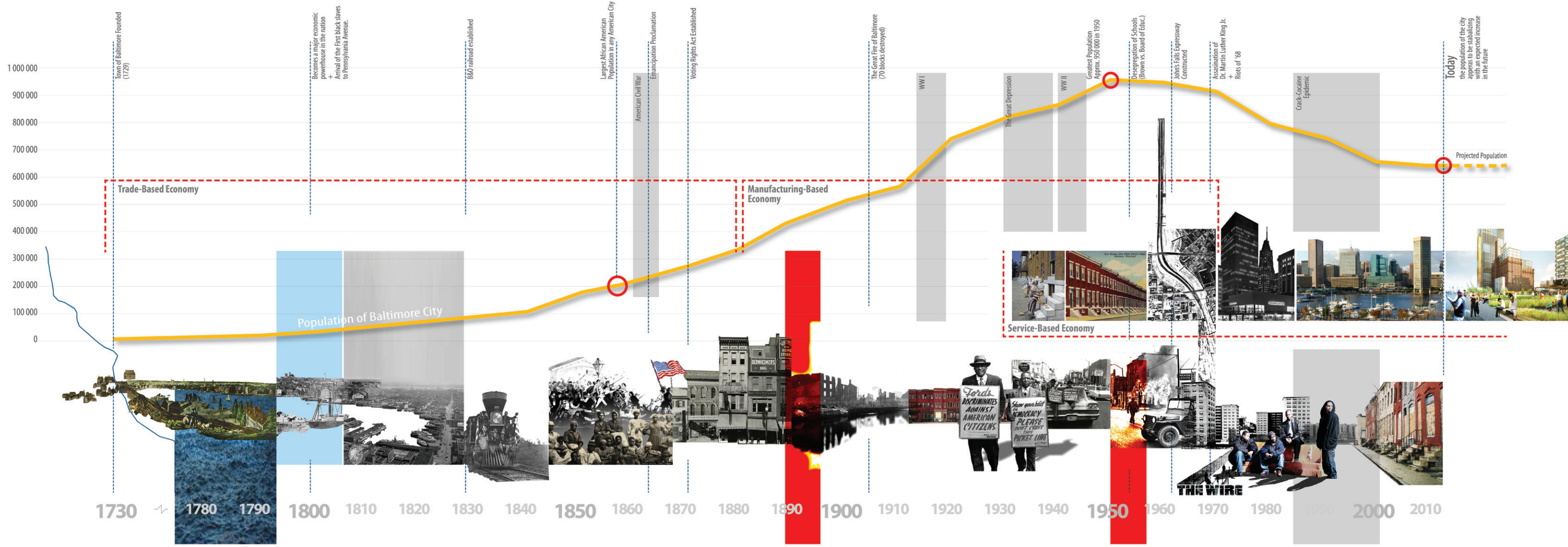


Figure 3.1
The population dynamics of Baltimore over time.

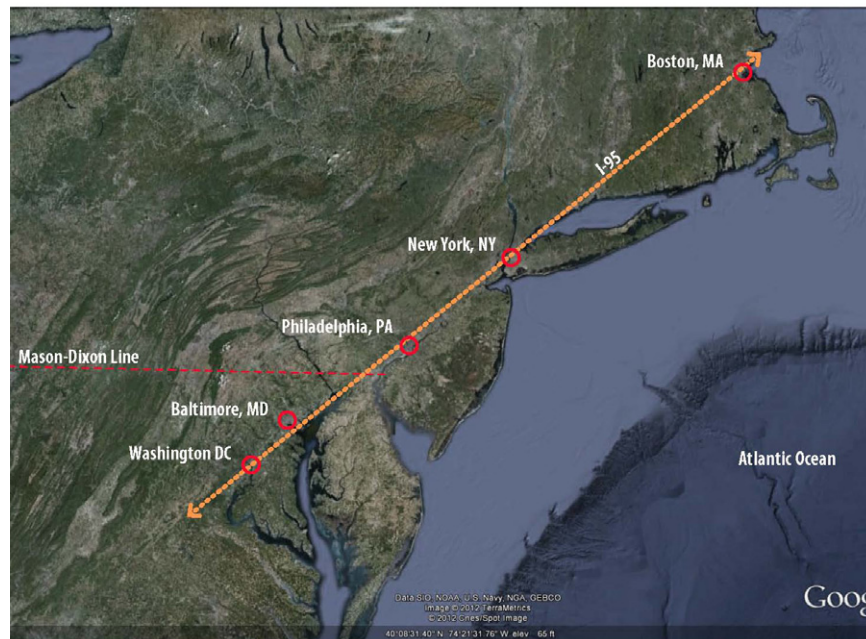


Figure 3.2

Geographic location of Baltimore city.

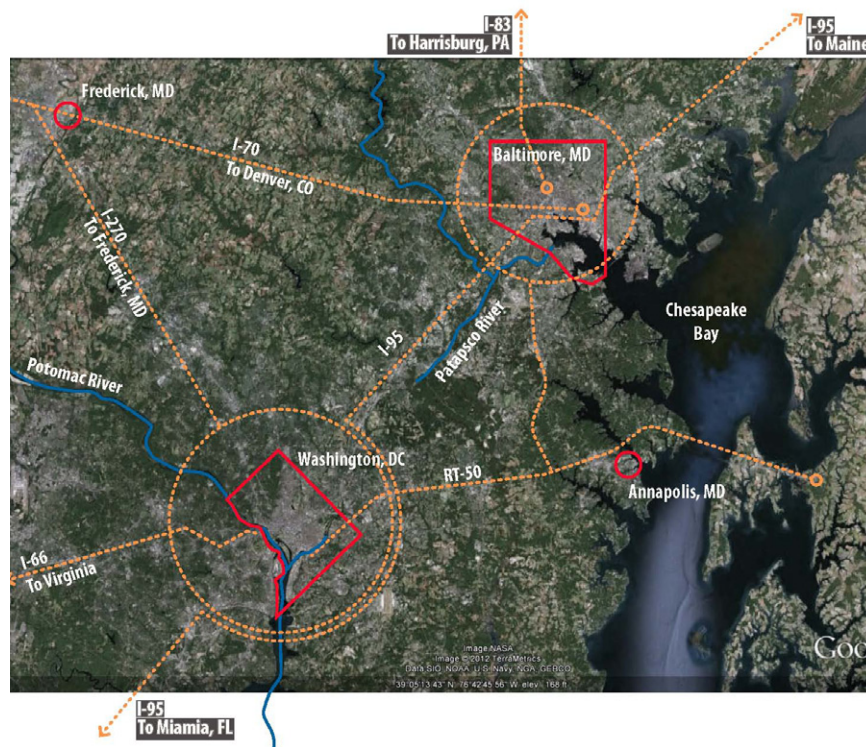


Figure 3.3

Baltimore's relationship to Washington DC.

Reclaiming the Neighborhood is a project that originated from the unique situation of Pennsylvania Avenue corridor of Baltimore, MD. The merit of this exploration depends on the characteristics of the place itself. As an academic project, this thesis may be applied on a specific site for the purpose of testing the ideas and proposals presented in the thesis. The following chapter documents characteristics of Pennsylvania Avenue from both a physical and historical point of view, as they relate to this project. The second half of the chapter describes conditions of the specific site chosen to test the design solution proposed in this thesis.

Relationship of Pennsylvania Avenue to the City of Baltimore

The city of Baltimore is located just south of the Mason-Dixon line that once unofficially marked the threshold of racial segregation in the United States. However, Baltimore is also located to the North of the nation's capitol where president Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, freeing those enslaved in confederate states at the time. (Figures 3.2 and 3.3) As a result of this unique geographic location, Baltimore was historically home to a large African American population. In 1820, the African American population of Baltimore exceeded that of any other American city at the time.¹ During this time of racial segregation, the neighborhood of Old West Baltimore emerged as the city's African American homestead.² It was through the heart of this neighborhood that Pennsylvania Avenue emerged over the next century as one of Baltimore's main commercial and entertainment corridors.

(See Figure 3.4)

The Physical Character of Pennsylvania Avenue

Pennsylvania Avenue is a mile-and-a-half long street that extends northwest from downtown Baltimore. Even though the street reaches far into southern Pennsylvania, the portion of the street with the name Pennsylvania Avenue lies between Fulton Avenue to the North, and West Franklin Avenue to the South.

Baltimore's Metro transit train – constructed in 1983 – passes directly under Pennsylvania Avenue and has two stops along the avenue - Penn North Metro stop and Upton Metro stop. (See Figure 3.5) The two metro entrances provide a great deal of energy to the neighborhood as they connect it to both Downtown Baltimore and the suburban neighborhood of Owings Mills, MD. The physical character of Pennsylvania Avenue can initially be divided into two categories. The lower part of the avenue affectionately known to the locals as *The Bottom*, is the section South of Wilson Street and North of Franklin Avenue. *The Bottom* was the primary entertainment district where venues like The Comedy Club and the Royal Theater were located. After the 1970's every single city block in *The Bottom* that faces Pennsylvania Avenue has been redeveloped, thereby erasing much of its original street character. In contrast, *The Top* of Pennsylvania Avenue – between Lauren Street and North Avenue, maintains a large number of its original buildings and historical street character. While new housing developments have encroached into several blocks in the area, majority of street fronts are representative of the original mixed-use street character cultivated over the decades along Pennsylvania Avenue. Therefore, I will be looking

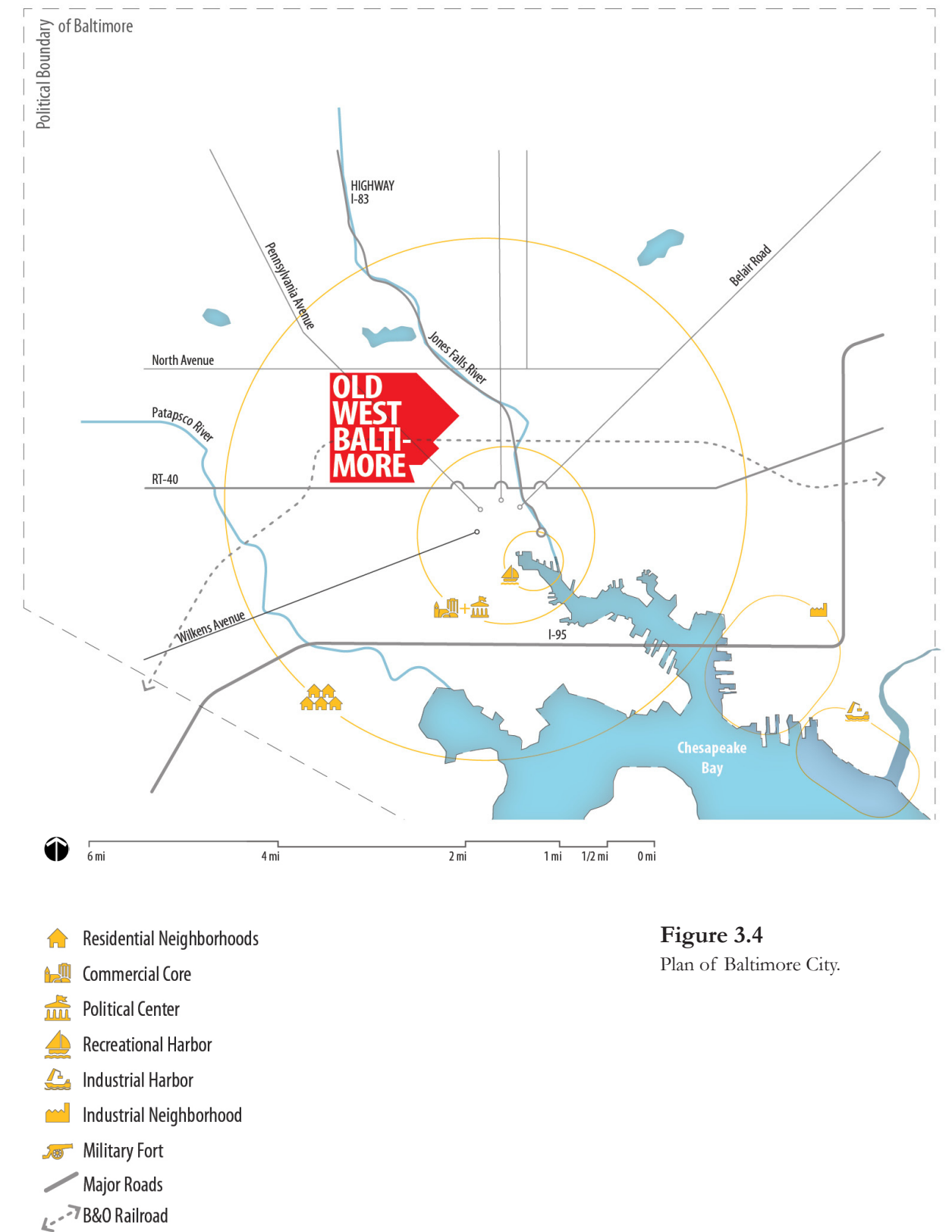


Figure 3.4
Plan of Baltimore City.

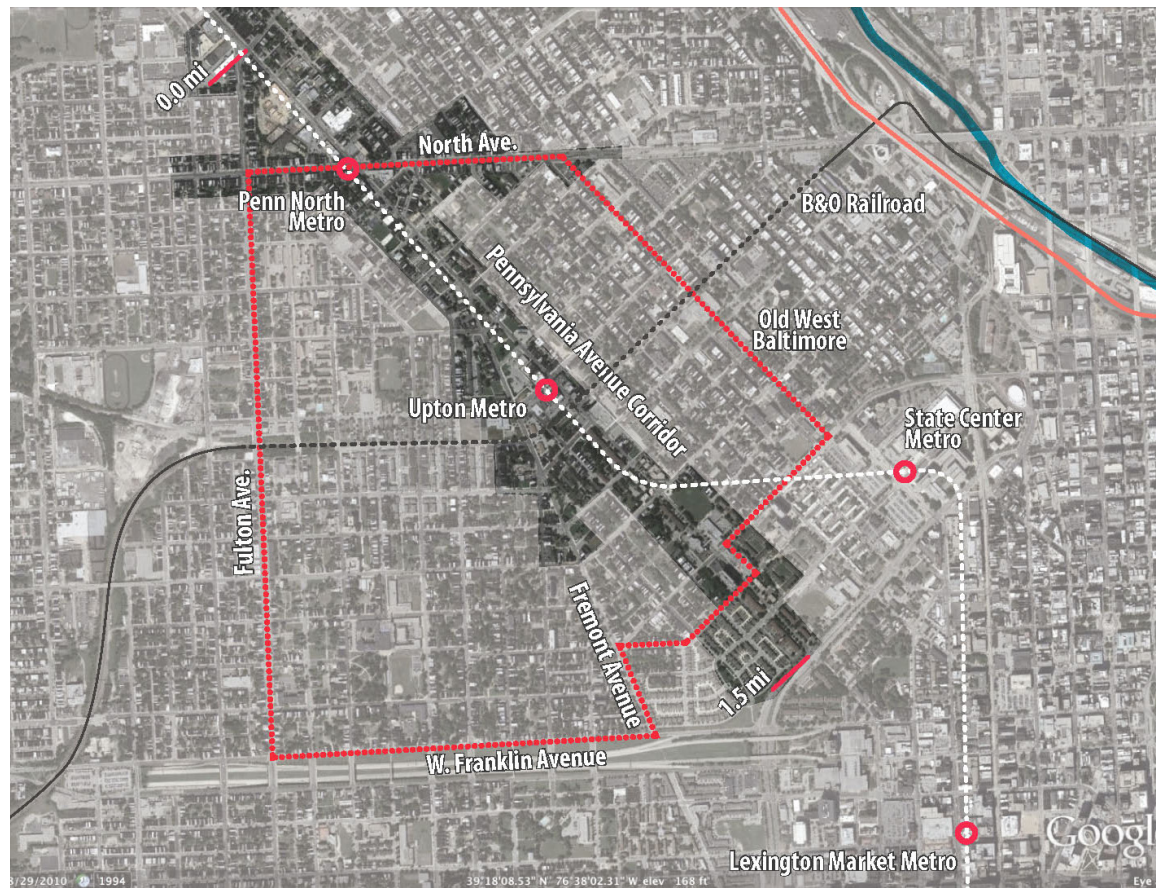


Figure 3.5
Overview of Pennsylvania
Avenue corridor.

more closely at *The Top* of Pennsylvania Avenue for the purpose of selecting a suitable site for this thesis.

The Top

One of the most striking features of neighborhoods abutting Pennsylvania Avenue is the high vacancy rate of buildings. In census tracts surrounding Pennsylvania Avenue, the collective vacancy rate is about 38 percent, compared to a 16 percent vacancy rate within the city of Baltimore.³ However, of the buildings directly facing the street, very few remain vacant. (See Figure 3.6)

The blocks directly adjacent to the Metro entrances remain densely packed with a mixture of commercial and residential activity. The majority of buildings in these mixed-use nodes were constructed between the years of 1890 and 1920.⁴ Most of these buildings are constructed with their main entrances at the sidewalk level; some are accessed by a stoop providing access to store entrances about three feet above the sidewalk. The approximately twelve-foot sidewalk is wide enough for the commercial uses from adjacent buildings to spill into the public domain. Colorful signage on building facades, street trees and street lamps, all contribute to a rich public space along the remaining mixed-use sections of Pennsylvania Avenue.

In contrast, the new housing developments constructed beginning in 2004 and continuing until today, display a different attitude towards the public space of the street. Most importantly, the newly developed blocks along Pennsylvania Avenue have converted the area into a residential-only section. The result is a much less active street front along the new housing developments.

The remaining two city blocks between the Metro entrances remain mostly vacant. These two blocks are bordered by Pennsylvania Avenue to the West, Brunt Street to the East, Gold Street to the North and Presstman Street to the South. While the buildings on these blocks are from the late 19th century, some have been torn down, resulting in vacant plots within the blocks.



- Mixed Use ■
- Residential - New Construction ■
- Public Green Space ■
- Metro Entrance M
- Religious Institution R
- Community Resource Center C
- School S
- Grocery / Market G
- Vacant Buildings ▬▬▬

Figure 3.6
Street character of Pennsylvania Avenue.

1/4 mile 0 1000

Google earth

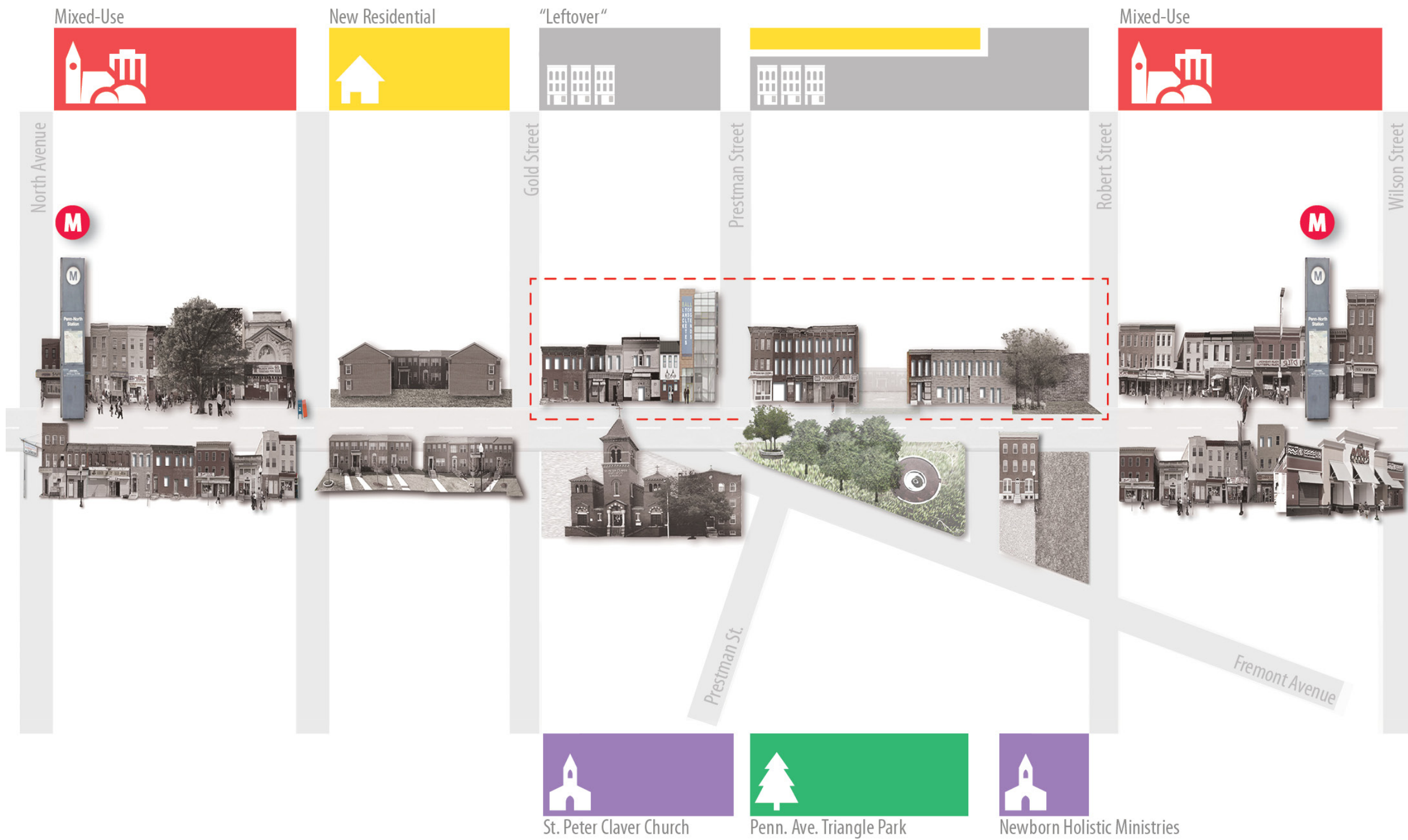


Figure 3.7
 “Zones” of architectural
 character along Pennsylvania
 Avenue.

The two blocks bounded by Gold Street and Presstman Street, and equidistant to the Metro entrances provide a suitable atmosphere for a mixed-use development with both housing and commercial components. While foot traffic to and from the Metro entrances will activate the commercial spaces along the street, the lack of high capacity vehicular traffic (similar to that of North Avenue) will provide a relatively quiet environment suitable for urban residential development. Furthermore the presence of Pennsylvania Triangle Park directly across from the main street to these blocks connects the site to the public space of Pennsylvania Avenue.

As a result of these factors, I chose the city block directly to the Northeast of Pennsylvania Avenue Triangle Park as the testing ground for the design proposal set forth by Reclaiming the Neighborhood. This block is bounded by Bloom Street to the North, Presstman Street to the South and Brunt Street and Pennsylvania Avenues to the East and West respectively. (See Figure 3.8)

The block chosen for this design proposal is representative of the rich architectural character seen throughout Pennsylvania Avenue corridor. Buildings of various styles, construction periods, occupation status and use are located on this 340ft long by 180ft wide city block.

Buildings along the West and South sides of the block were originally constructed between the years 1890 and 1920. Of these, the south facing houses were renovated in the mid 1990's by the Newborn



Figure 3.8
Site chosen for the design solution.



Figure 3.9
View of chosen site looking
southeast.

Ministries church located in the neighborhood. All of these houses along the south edge of the site are currently occupied. As a part of this renovation, Newborn Ministries also cleared out the empty plot at the Southwest corner of the block and planted it as a small urban park open to the street. (Figure 3.10)

Tye & Company Salon and Boutique and Wonderland Liquor Store occupy 3 of the 10 buildings remaining on the west edge of the block while the rest of the buildings remain vacant. (Figure 3.11) A vacant plot is present at the center of the west edge of block, indicating that some houses may have been demolished. Older attached rowhouses on the West edge of the block vary from three-story height to two-story height and are on average 14ft wide. The depth of the houses range from 50ft to about 65ft. Rowhouses are constructed of brick load-bearing walls typical of old Baltimore houses. Brick facades are often painted or left exposed to the elements, creating a uniform *street wall* along streets lined with Rowhouses. This *street wall* is often reinforced with metal or wooden cornice ornamentation at the top of building facades. Buildings that are constructed with a basement are often raised about 3ft off the street level to provide windows into the basement. These houses are easily recognizable by the marble stoops leading up to the main entry door of the house. These architectural features described above are representative of older Baltimore Rowhouses constructed near the beginning of the 20th century. (Figure 3.12)

More recently built houses on the East edge of the block show different architectural characteristics.



Figure 3.10
Park at the southwest corner of site.

Figure 3.11
Original building texture at the northwest corner of site.



Figure 3.12

Architectural elements and materials of Baltimore Rowhouses.

Original rowhouses along the East edge of the block were demolished and rebuilt by the local non-profit developer Druid Heights Development Corporation, in 2004. These new houses are about 20ft wide and about 35ft deep. (Figure 3.13) Rest of the property behind the houses is enclosed with fencing to create a private backyard for each house. While public alleyway running North-South through the center of the block, provide vehicular access to these backyards, vehicles do not seem to drive through the alley often. The houses consist of two aboveground levels, a partially sunken basement and a hip roof. As a result, recently developed houses along the East edge of the block appear to be of vastly different architectural character compared to the older houses facing Pennsylvania Avenue.

Houses along the East edge of the block are owned privately by homeowners, while the houses along the South edge of site are owned and operated as low-income rental housing by the Newborn Ministries church. Along the West edge of the block, either the City of Baltimore, or the Druid Heights Development Corporation owns much of the vacant properties.

As described above, the selected city block demonstrates the architectural, historical and spatial diversity present along Pennsylvania Avenue. The redevelopment process of this rich landscape should carefully consider all physical aspects of this building texture.



Image courtesy of Google Maps

Figure 3.13
Recently built houses along the east edge of block.

Zoning Designation of the Selected Site

The selected city block is located within the Baltimore City designated zoning district of *R-8 General Residence*. However, a look at the zoning district designation of the neighborhood shows that the rest of the Pennsylvania Avenue corridor is designated as *B-2-2 Community Business* – a zoning designation intended for commercial or retail districts. (Figure 3.14)

General Residence zoning code permits primarily residential uses that would create a residential character. Buildings of a maximum 35ft height are allowed in this district. While accessory shops are permitted in this area, they are expected to remain within the interior of the building. Signage and other exterior signs are restricted in this zoning district.

Community Business zoning district designated for the rest of Pennsylvania Avenue corridor is designed to promote retail corridors and neighborhoods. Front yards are not required for construction in this zoning district and businesses are allowed to spill over to the sidewalk with uses such as restaurant table services. Signage and other exterior advertising are not restricted in *Community Business* zoning districts.

While the zoning designation of the selected city block is different from that of the rest of Pennsylvania Avenue corridor, for the purpose of this project, it is important to create a uniform character throughout the avenue. Restrictions presented by the *General Residence* zoning district will be ignored for the purpose of creating a uniform architectural and urban character along Pennsylvania Avenue corridor.



- B-2-2 Community Business
- R-8 General Residence
- B-2-3 Community Commercial
- Selected Block

Figure 3.14
Designated zoning districts of the neighborhood.



Figure 3.13

Images courtesy of Baltimore Historical Society

Businesses along Pennsylvania Avenue were often owned by white immigrant families.

Figure 3.14

Pennsylvania Avenue was Baltimore's main African and American commercial corridor.

The Historical Character of Pennsylvania Avenue

A commercial avenue from the start...

Since its beginnings in the early 1800's Pennsylvania Avenue - or Wagon Road as it was named at the time, was a trade route that connected the industrial city of Baltimore to towns in the state of Pennsylvania. Over the next century, the avenue changed its name to Pennsylvania Avenue and slowly transformed into a major retail hub settled and operated by Jewish, Italian, German and other European immigrant families. As Old West Baltimore became Baltimore's premier African American neighborhood, Pennsylvania Avenue also transformed into a commercial and entertainment corridor catering to the black population of Baltimore. However, much of the commerce and entertainment venues remained under the ownership of white or other racial groups.⁵ (Figures 3.13 and 3.14)

A theater for public life and a homestead for private life...

1940's and 1950's arguably, marked the highpoint of Pennsylvania Avenue. The street was known as Baltimore's Harlem where artists like Eubie Blake, Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Dina Washington, Billie Holiday and Pearl Bailey played venues such as the Royal Theater, Arch Social Club and the Sphinx Club. It was during this time the role of Pennsylvania Avenue as a theater for the public life of its residents came to the forefront. From the top of the avenue to the bottom clubs, theaters, religious institutions, and civil rights organizations would engage the public space of Pennsylvania Avenue with rallies, fairs and other public functions. These events were not always

peaceful. As Baltimore's premier African American Neighborhood, Pennsylvania Avenue witnessed a great deal of violence during the 1968 riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Figures 3.15 and 3.16)

However, the private life of Pennsylvania Avenue residents co-existed with the busy public life on the street. While some upper level units of buildings lining Pennsylvania Avenue were extensions of retail stores and offices, many were residences. While I was not able to find statistical evidence for the ratio of houses to commercial spaces, historical photography and anecdotal evidence show the presence of residences along the upper levels of Pennsylvania Avenue. A survey of building façade as they remain today, suggest most residential spaces on the second level were accessed from the street front. Since most of the buildings are 12 to 18 feet wide, in some cases the whole ground level façade was divided into entrance doors – one for each floor – that provided private access to each level of the building.

The spatial organization of private and public spaces along Pennsylvania Avenue allowed for inter-mingling of public and private lives of residents in this neighborhood. However, the relatively narrow width of building facades made it challenging to provide multiple doorways from the front of the building while maintaining sufficient space for commercial use.



Source: <http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/naacpvotingrights/6/>

Figure 3.15

Local NAACP chapter voting campaign on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Image courtesy of University of Baltimore Photographic Archives

Figure 3.16

Baltimore riots of 1968 following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Notes

1 City of Baltimore, Pennsylvania Avenue Heritage Trail, <<http://www.pennsylvaniaavenuebaltimore.com/index2.htm>> (May 23, 2012).

2 City of Baltimore, Pennsylvania Avenue Heritage Trail, <<http://www.pennsylvaniaavenuebaltimore.com/index2.htm>> (May 23, 2012).

3 Vacancy rate data gathered from US Census data - American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2006-2010

4 Building construction date data gathered from Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation records.

5 City of Baltimore, Pennsylvania Avenue Heritage Trail, <<http://www.pennsylvaniaavenuebaltimore.com/index2.htm>> (May 23, 2012).

4 Design Methodology

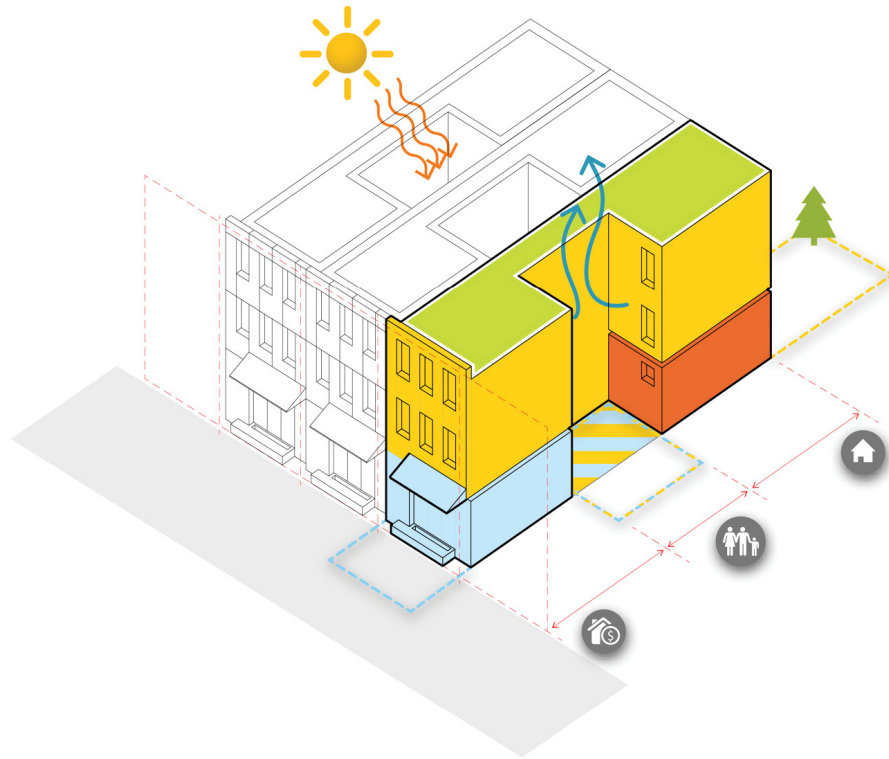


Figure 4.2
A typological strategy to promote cultural empowerment

Cultural Empowerment through a Typological Strategy

As evidenced by historic photography and other documentation, Pennsylvania Avenue during its heyday was successful at accommodating a myriad of functions. Churches neighbored clubs, houses neighbored stores and schools neighbored theaters. I believe this flexibility of uses contributed to Pennsylvania Avenue emerging as the cultural mecca of Baltimore during the 1940's and 1950's.¹

Recent housing developments along the avenue have neglected this need for diversity of uses along the street. These newly developed blocks only accommodate residential uses. As a result the newly developed regions of Pennsylvania Avenue have been transformed into dormitory communities devoid of cultural diversity.

Reclaiming the Neighborhood proposes a new typological strategy to foster cultural empowerment along Pennsylvania Avenue. (Figure 4.2) There are three main goals of this typological strategy...

1. Flexibility to accommodate multiple building uses with minimal adjustment to the building envelope.
2. Uphold the street wall character and rhythm of Pennsylvania Avenue.
3. Negotiate between the commercial street front and the protected residential front as proposed in the block-scale spatial strategy.
4. Provide better opportunities for gaining natural light and ventilation into the heart of the new buildings.

Economic Empowerment through an Economic Strategy

Although the neighborhood of Old West Baltimore had historically been the home to an economically diverse group of residents, during the phenomenon commonly known as "white flight," both white and black middle class residents of the neighborhood migrated out of the city and into suburbia.² Over time the financial woes of the neighborhood worsened, and today, about 40% of the population of Pennsylvania Avenue live below the poverty line.³ Therefore the upfront financial cost of homeownership would be an obstacle for most residents of Pennsylvania Avenue planning to own a home.

The recent housing developments along Pennsylvania Avenue have successfully established pathways for mixed-income housing ownership as evidenced by census data from the newly re-developed areas.

However, these housing developments still rely on government subsidies and grants as a way of promoting low-income housing ownership.⁴

In addition to government funding and subsidies, this project explores how architecture can contribute to making homeownership less burdensome to low-income residents through a two fold economic strategy.

I propose that houses along Pennsylvania Avenue should continue to be developed by local organizations such as community development corporations that are invested in the community. In addition this new economic strategy provides three main goals to reduce the financial burden of homeownership as follows...

(Figure 4.3)

1. Provide a rent-to-own purchasing option that would reduce the upfront financial cost of owning a house.
2. Develop spaces that can be used for home-based-businesses through which homeowners can gain a supplementary income.
3. Develop an additional rentable unit in houses that can be rented to a subtenant and thereby reducing the monthly financial cost of homeownership.

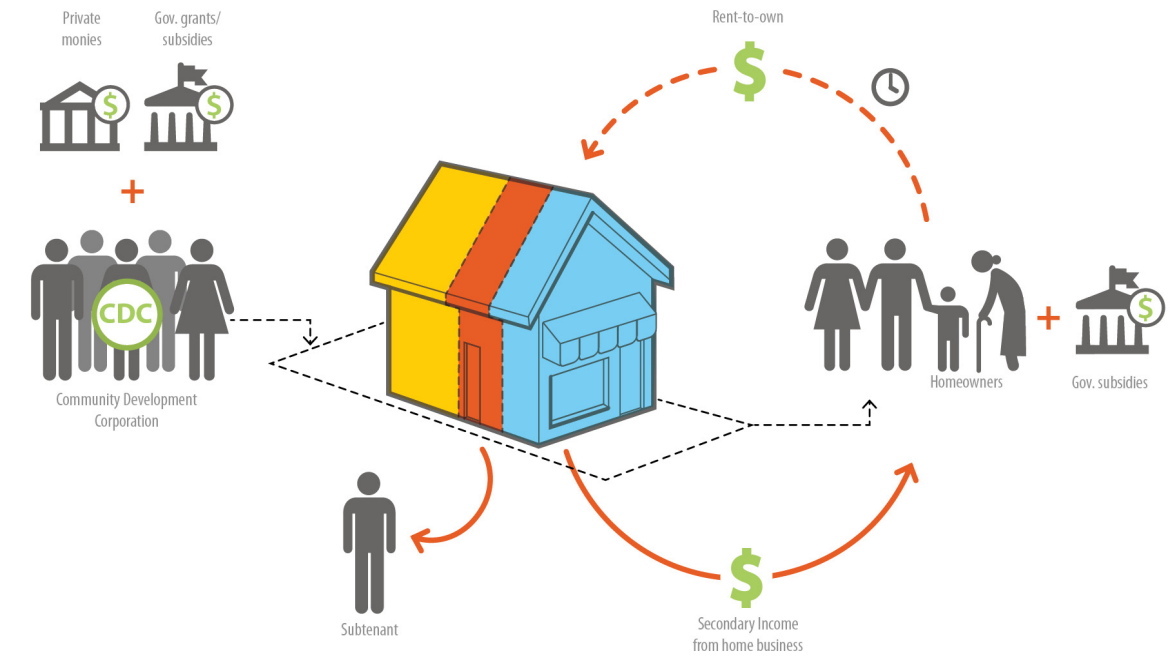


Figure 4.3
An economic strategy to promote economic empowerment.

Notes

- 1 Christina Royster-Hemby, "Street of Dreams" *Baltimore City Paper*. (February 2, 2005)
<<http://www2.citypaper.com/eat/story.asp?id=9603>>
- 2 Spencer Lean. *Baltimore City's Past Present and Future*, Accessed October 10, 2012.
<<http://baltimorefuture.blogspot.com/2008/04/old-west-baltimore-crying-for.html>>
- 3 Al-Ward et al. *Reverse Commuting: Connecting Inner-City Labor Force to Suburban Jobs in the Baltimore Metropolitan Area.*, Morgan State University.
- 4 Heritage Crossing (Hope VI), Housing Authority of Baltimore City, Accessed September 6, 2012. <http://www.baltimorehousing.org/public_housing.asp?rid=17>

5 Design Solution

The following chapter explains the design solution suggested by this thesis. The design is primarily based on the need for housing in this neighborhood. However, as described in the methodology chapter, a housing development process should address the social, cultural and economic needs of the neighborhood. Since the goals of this project are expressed in the form of three inter-related strategies, the design solution will also be described according to the same three categories of spatial, typological and economic strategy.

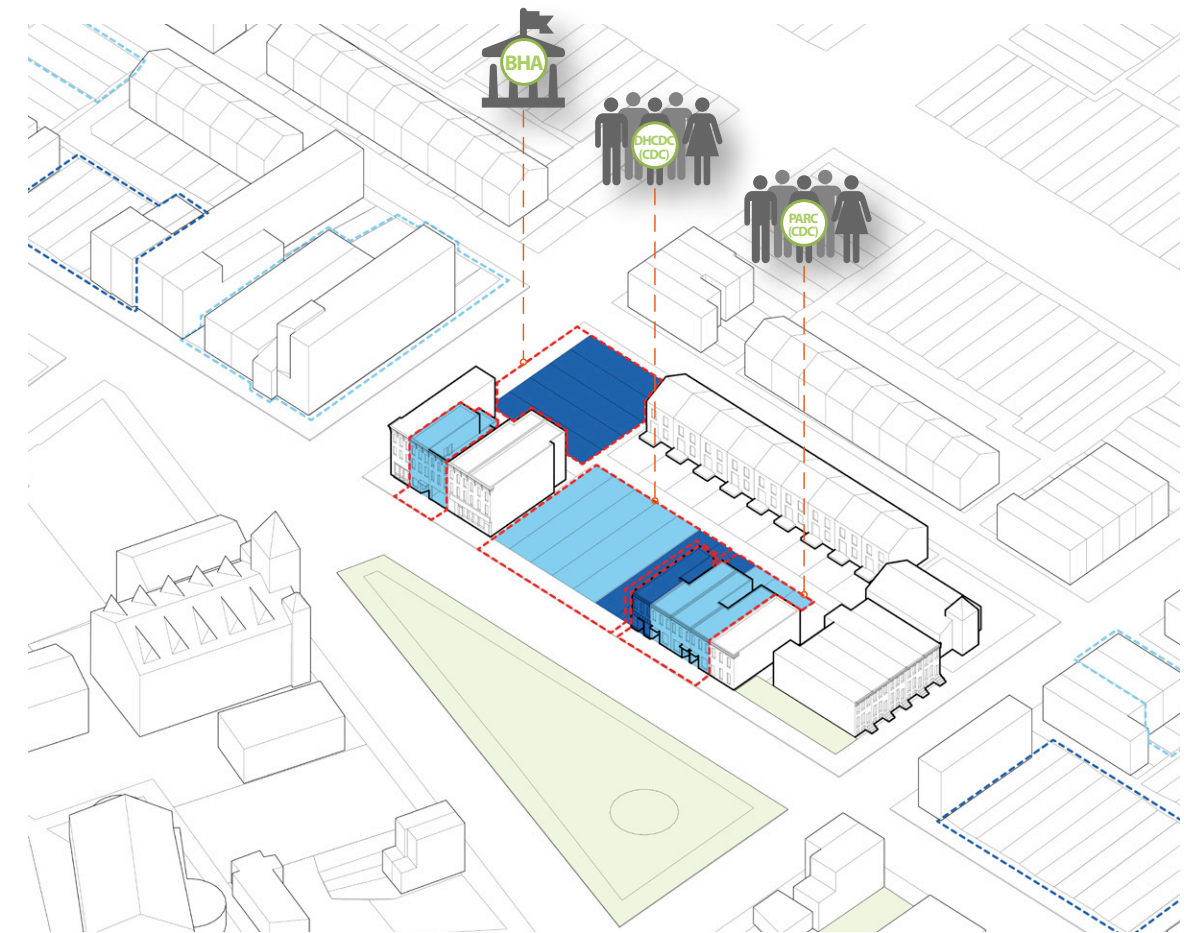
In order to test the design solution on a specific site, I have selected the block directly across from Pennsylvania Triangle Park. This block is bounded by Bloom Street to the North, Presstman Street to the South and Brunt Street and Pennsylvania Avenues to the East and West respectively.

A Spatial Strategy to Promote Social Empowerment

The goals of the spatial strategy are described as follows...

1. Creating a primarily commercial front facing the main street.
2. Creating a primarily residential front facing the interior of the block.
3. Developing the center of the block as a protected residential courtyard that can be shared by residents of the block.

In order to achieve these goals, the block needs to be enclosed. To minimize the amount of resources and capital required for this development process,



multiple development agents such as local community development corporations, private developers and the Baltimore Housing Authority will carry it out. (Figure 5.1) This pixilation of property development can diversify the available housing types, while decentralizing the power structure employed in community redevelopment. Once the city block is ready to be developed, there are three types of construction that can be implemented within the block. (Figure 5.2)

■ City Owned Property
■ CDC Owned Property

Figure 5.1
Developing blocks through multiple developing entities.

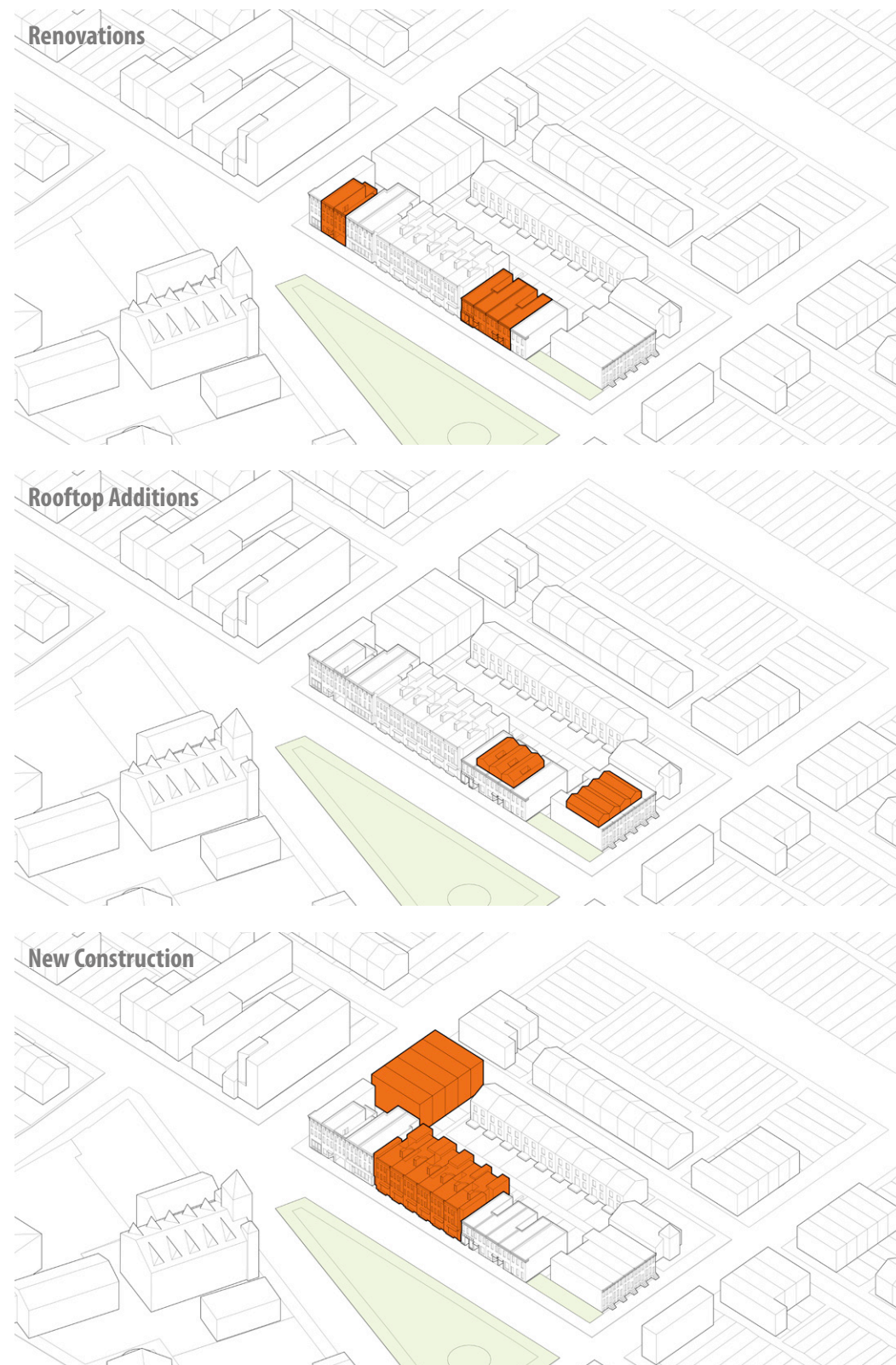


Figure 5.2

Three types of construction.

Renovations.

Renovating the abandoned housing stock rather than razing the block will allow for the embedded memory of the site to be carried into the future. While the original facades of buildings will help maintain the mixed-use character of the street, the interiors would be re-designed to suit modern living conditions. Since the condition of each abandoned building is different, this method will also have its own challenges.

Renovations with Rooftop Additions.

While most buildings on the block are three story structures, some were originally constructed as two story structures. The zoning guidelines for the area allow for a maximum of three stories for each building. Therefore it will be possible to maximize the useable space of two story renovations by adding a rooftop living unit. Rooftop living units can be designed either with access through the main house below or they can be designed as a group of rooftop units with common access through a single staircase.

New Construction.

Vacant lots on the block can be developed with infill construction that mimics the height and rhythm of original rowhouses. These units will be three stories tall with an accessible roof.

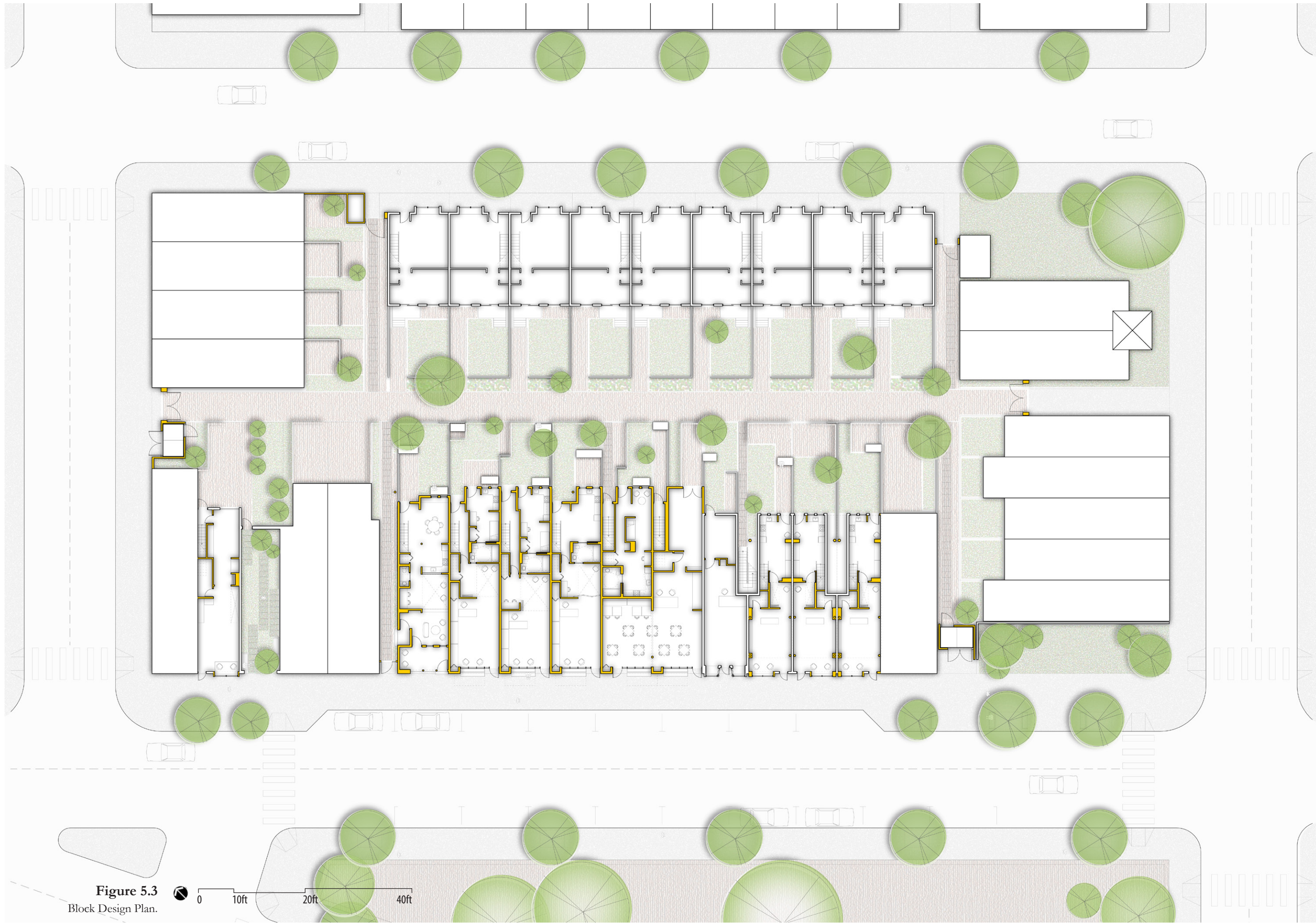
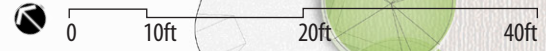


Figure 5.3
Block Design Plan.



Residential Front and Commercial Front.

Once the block is fully developed, it will be possible to create a protected residential court within the block. Residential spaces would open into this court creating a semi-private residential front, accessible only to the residents of the block and their guests. Vehicular access may be limited to emergency vehicles, and services such as trash collection will be moved to the perimeter of the block and directly onto the street.

(Figure 5.4)

Within the residential court, landscaping elements such as paving, planters and seats can modulate the backyards of houses. Fences can be designed at about a height of four-feet-six-inches to create privacy when sitting down, while allowing a person to look over and survey the space when standing up. Facades that open to the court will have volumetrically articulated facades with balconies and window bays facing the court as well as colorful patterning. I believe these design elements will achieve the goal of creating an inviting residential court where residents can feel safe.

The main design goal for the commercial front is to enhance the public domain of the street. With opportunities for people to gather and mingle, each storefront is designed with a large display window where businesses within could display their products. The marble bench in front of the display window will provide ample seating for passersby, while harkening back to the marble stoops of original Baltimore rowhouses. Retractable awnings, streetlamps and custom signage along the street will enhance the depth of the street while adding the choreographed chaos

indicative of urban public life. However, the facades themselves of buildings that make up the street front will remain relatively flat above the street level. These facades may be constructed with bricks or brick paneling as a contemporary interpretation of original brick rowhouse facades. In order to carry the cornice line of the original street wall, a system of planter-boxes will be designed at the top of each building façade. These planters will also help indicate the accessibility of the rooftop terraces where possible.

(Figure 5.6)

The design solutions described above show a spatial approach to redeveloping Pennsylvania Avenue. This spatial strategy will allow for the social structures of the community to be supported through architecture. The integration of renovations and new construction will promote an amicable resolution to the conflict between the new and the old. At the same time, the articulation of the street fronts and the residential court will allow for activities of varying degrees of social engagement.



Figure 5.4
View of residential court.



Figure 5.5
Commercial streetwall.



Figure 5.6
Architecture contributing to the rich character of street.



Figure 5.7

View of access corridor to rooftop residential units.

A Typological Strategy to Promote Cultural Empowerment

The goals of the typological strategy are defined as follows...

1. Flexibility to accommodate multiple building uses with minimal adjustments to the building envelope.
2. Uphold the street wall character and rhythm of Pennsylvania Avenue.
3. Negotiate between the commercial street front and the protected residential front as proposed in the block-scale spatial strategy.
4. Provide better opportunities for gaining natural light and ventilation into the heart of the new buildings.

To carry on the cultural identity of Pennsylvania Avenue both as a main African American commercial center and as Baltimore's premier African American homestead, I am proposing the re-adaptation of Baltimore's rowhouse typology. This housing type will apply to both renovations and new construction.

As described in the spatial strategy, the street fronts of houses will be developed as commercial or home-based-business space. Access to living spaces will be provided from the residential court at the center of the block. These entrances will provide access to the ground level of the house and to an internal staircase leading to upper levels. The space directly at the back of the house can be designed as either an independent rentable unit or as an extension of the main house.

The most important feature of the new rowhouse adaptation is an interior light well that opens to a flexible use space at the center of the house. This



Figure 5.8
The light-well space as an extension of living or commercial space.



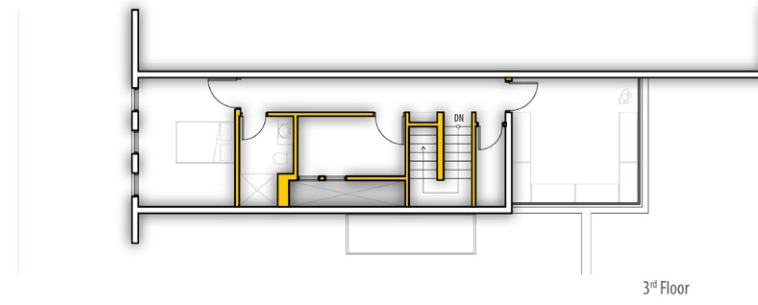
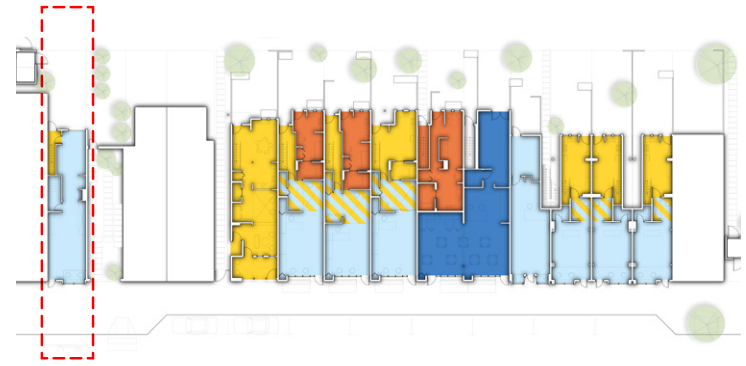
Figure 5.9

View looking up at skylight.

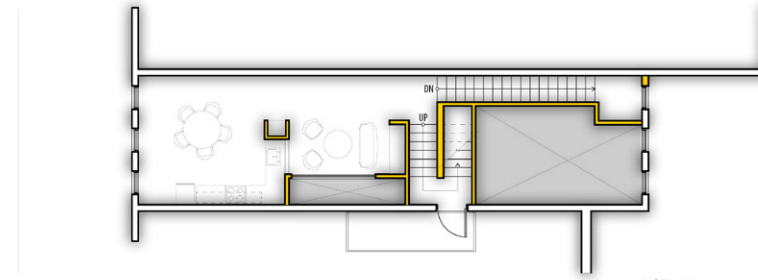
light well space will mediate between the commercial and residential functions of the house and can be configured as an extension of either function. (Figure 5.8) The light well will also provide opportunities gain valuable daylight into the heart of the house while creating sectional connections through the levels of the house. By designing the skylight to cut-off summer sun in the evening and to reflect winter sun into the space, thermal gain due to sunlight can be minimized. In addition, an operable window at the top of the skylight can be opened during the day to create natural ventilation through all spaces of the house.

The light-well space will be implemented in all three construction types - renovations, renovations with rooftop additions and new construction. However, each type will require the skylight to be designed based on the unique parameters of each construction type. Figures 5.10 through 5.12 show the unique sectional qualities created by the skylight in each construction type.

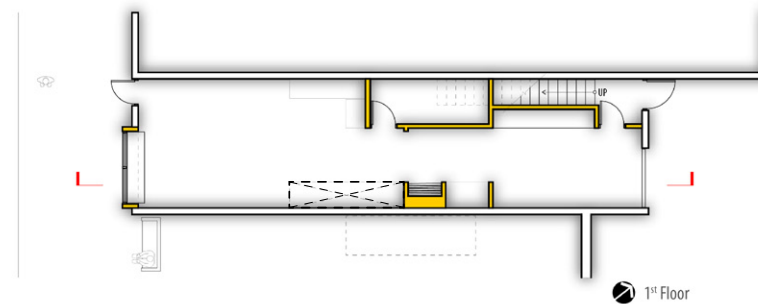
This typological strategy described is an adaptation of the original Baltimore rowhouse type to the distinct necessities of Pennsylvania Avenue. By returning the street front to commercial uses and designing the back of houses as residential spaces that open into the residential courtyard, this design aims to strengthen the cultural identity of this neighborhood as both an African American commercial center and as Baltimore's premier African American Homestead.



3rd Floor



2nd Floor



1st Floor

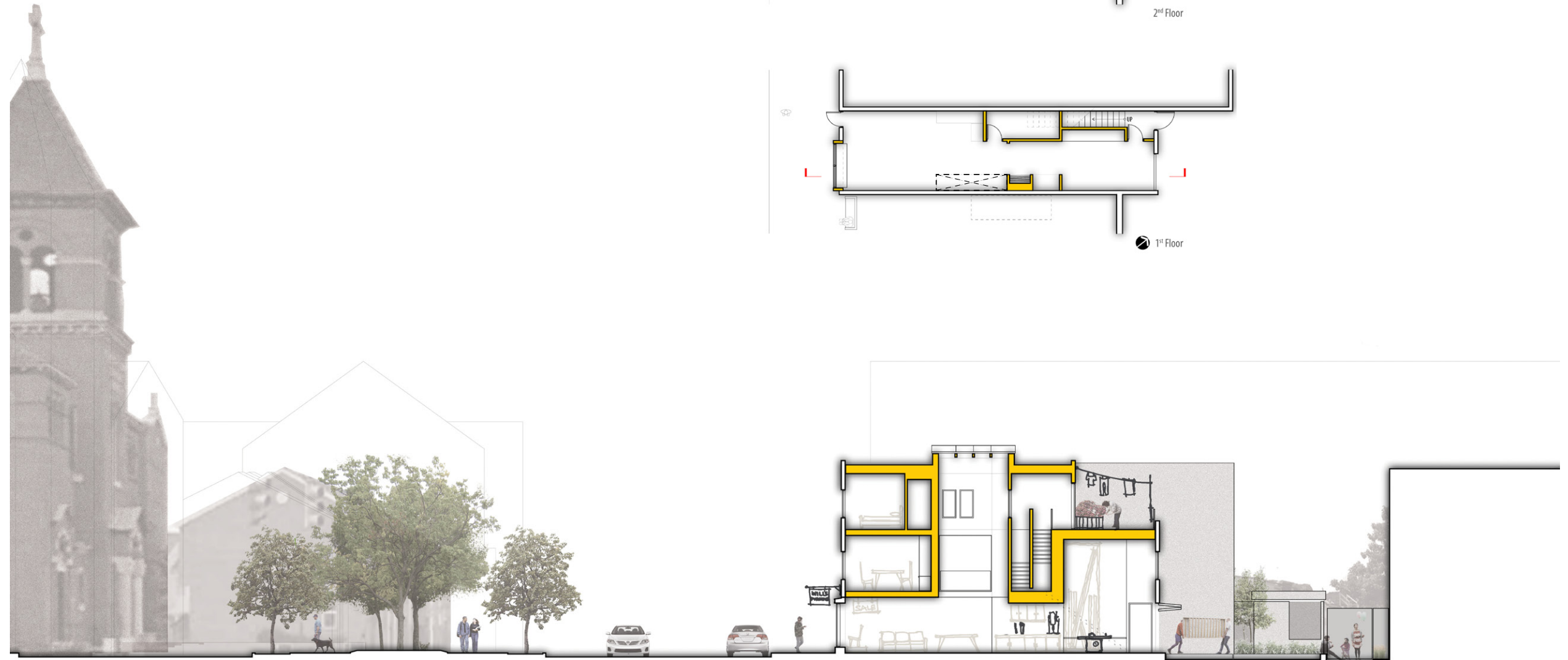


Figure 5.10
Section through renovation
construction type.

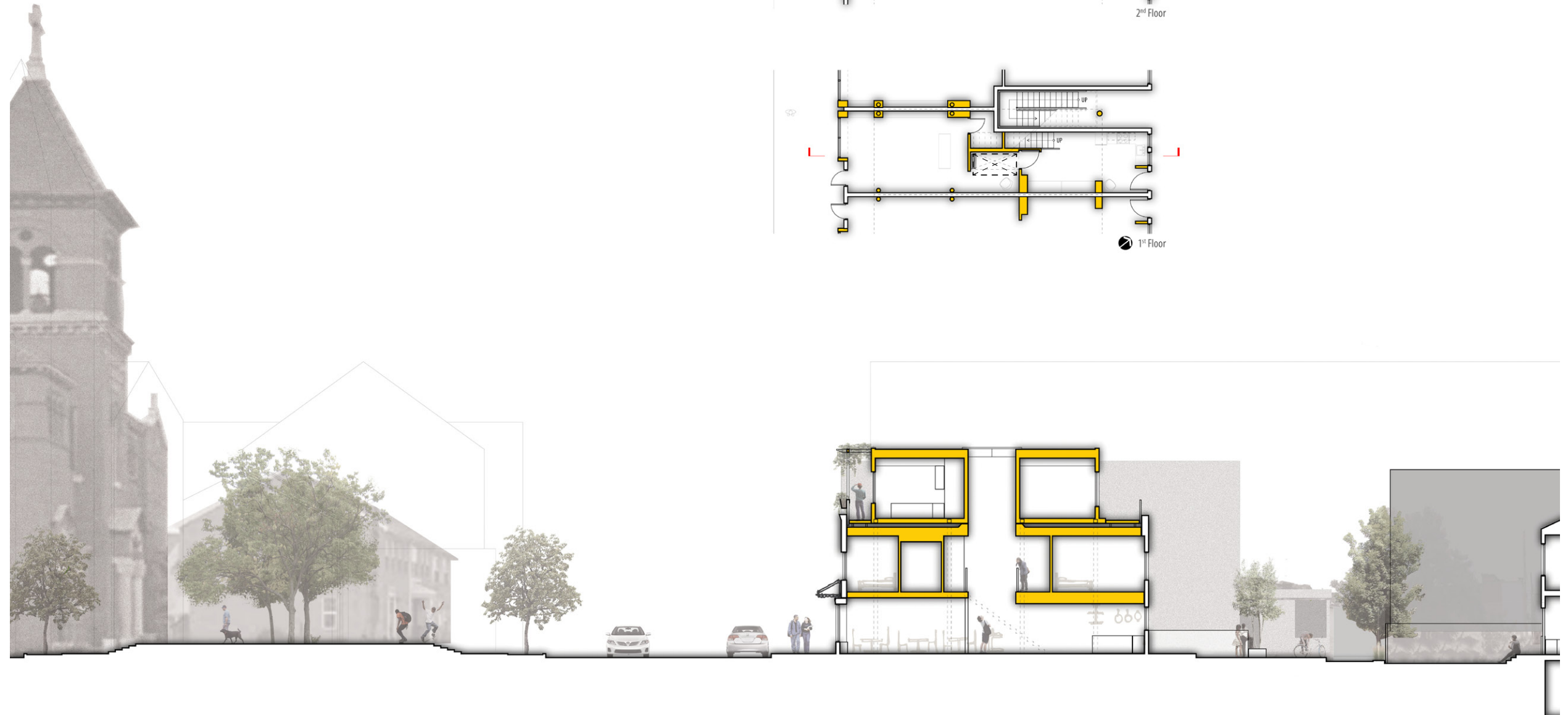
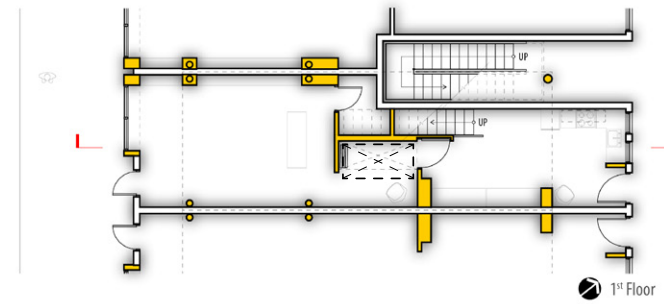
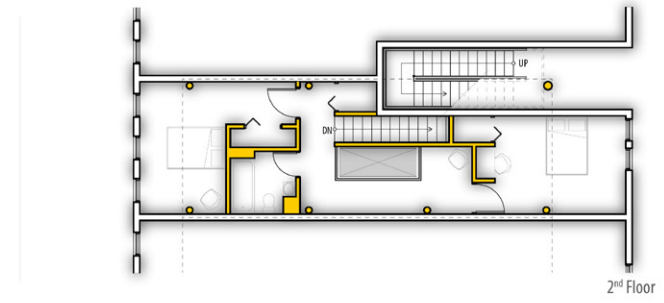
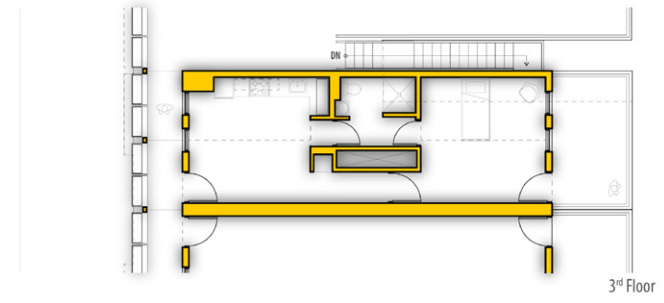
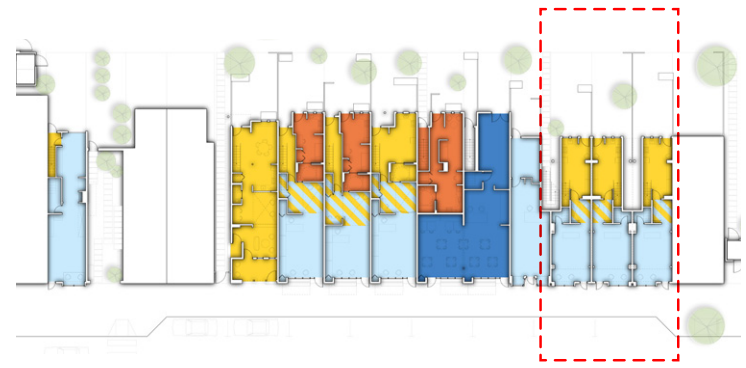


Figure 5.11
Section through renovation-with-rooftop-addition construction type.

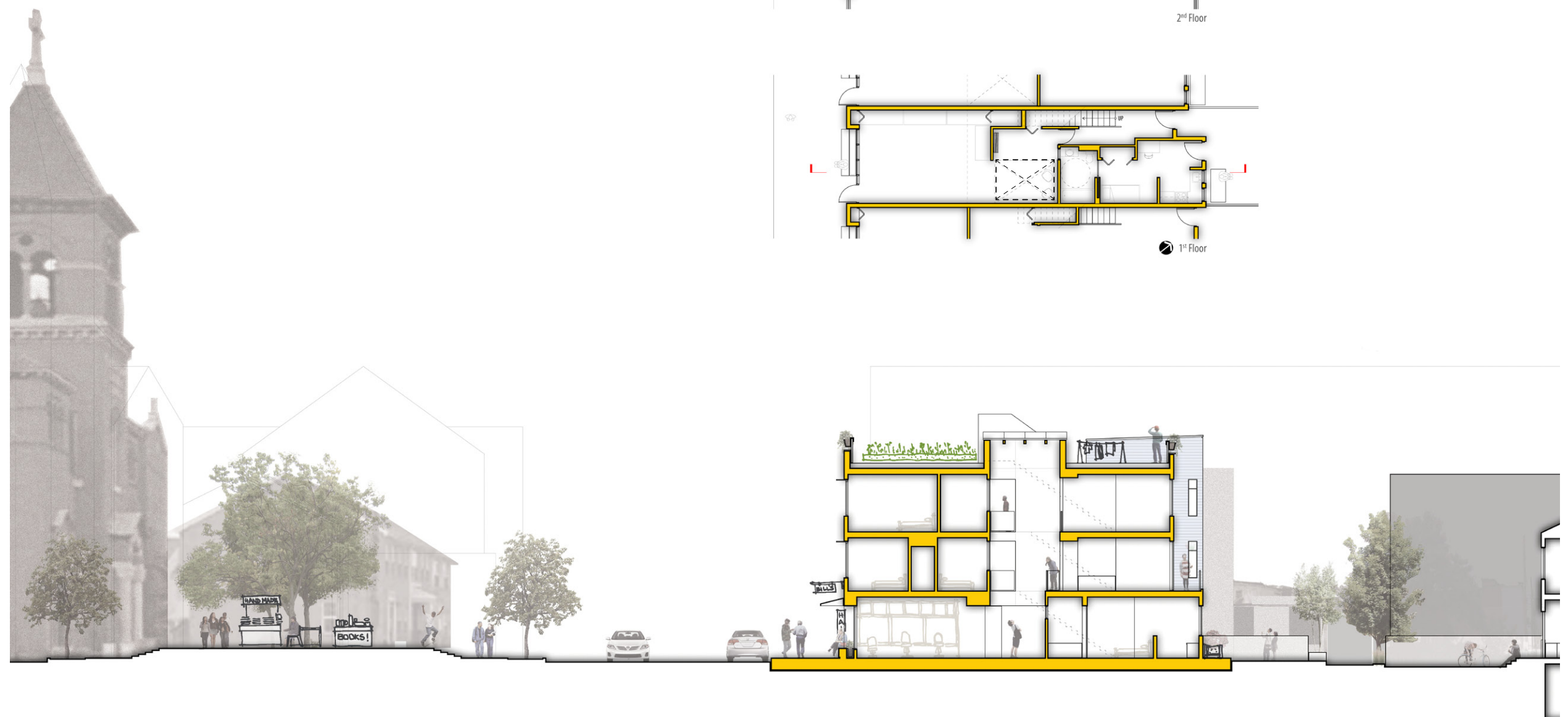
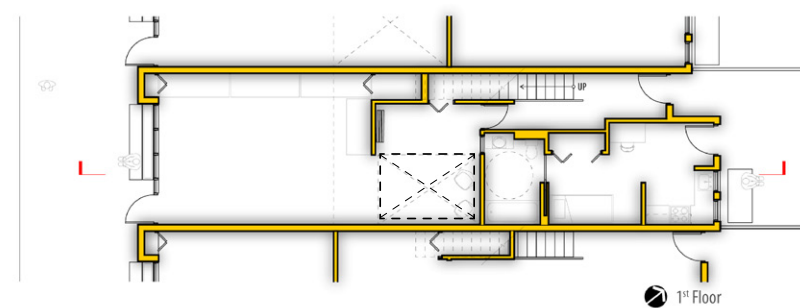
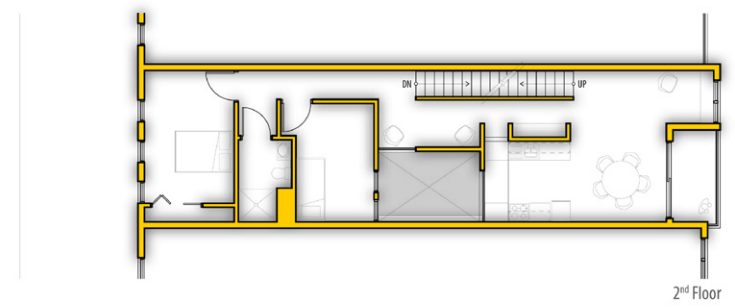
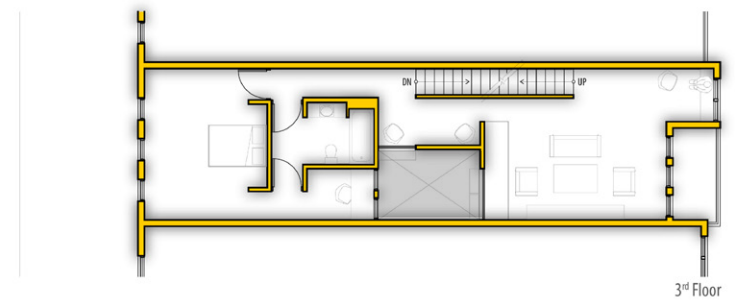


Figure 5.12
Section through new
construction type.

An Economic Strategy to Promote Economic Empowerment

The goals of the typological strategy are defined as follows...

1. Provide a rent-to-own purchasing option that would reduce the upfront financial cost of owning a house.
2. Develop spaces that can be used for home-based-businesses through which homeowners can gain a supplementary income.
3. Develop an additional rentable unit in houses that can be rented to a subtenant and thereby reducing the monthly financial cost of homeownership.

One of the driving forces behind this project was the goal of empowering long-term residents of the community as much as new residents who may move in as a result of redevelopment. Therefore the primary goal of the economic strategy described here is to serve the long-term residents of Pennsylvania Avenue corridor, while also attracting new residents to the area.

Compared to the rest of the city of Baltimore, the median income of residents along Pennsylvania Avenue tends to be lower, along with the median age and the percentage of married couple families. The poverty rate of these residents is also much higher than the rest of the city. Apart from indicating that these neighborhoods are generally poorer than the rest of the city, these data suggest that the family structures of such families can also vary significantly.

The economic burden put on low-income families by the up-front cost of homeownership can be

significant. While the recent housing developments along Pennsylvania Avenue were also designed with low-income families in mind, prospective owners rely heavily on government subsidies to purchase them. However architecture and the development process leading to space making can do a great deal to mitigate the financial burden of low-income homeownership on the homeowners as well as on the subsidizing entities.

The new economic strategy begins with the local non-profit community development corporations acquiring and developing the land. But unlike in the recent housing developments, the new houses will be sold through a rent-to-own system that reduces the upfront financial cost of homeownership. The monthly rent paid by residents is collected by the developer and is put in an interest-yielding fund. The generated interest from this fund will be used by the non-profit developer to pay property taxes and to provide maintenance services. At the end of a pre-determined time period, the tenant will be able to purchase the property from the non-profit developer, using the assets saved from the monthly rent and additional funding. (*Figure 5.13*)

The new houses are designed with spaces that generate additional income for the homeowner. The front store of the house can be used as a home-based-business by the residents, generating an income from the house. In addition, the independent living unit located at the back of the house could be rented to a sub-tenant, reducing the monthly financial burden put on the homeowner.

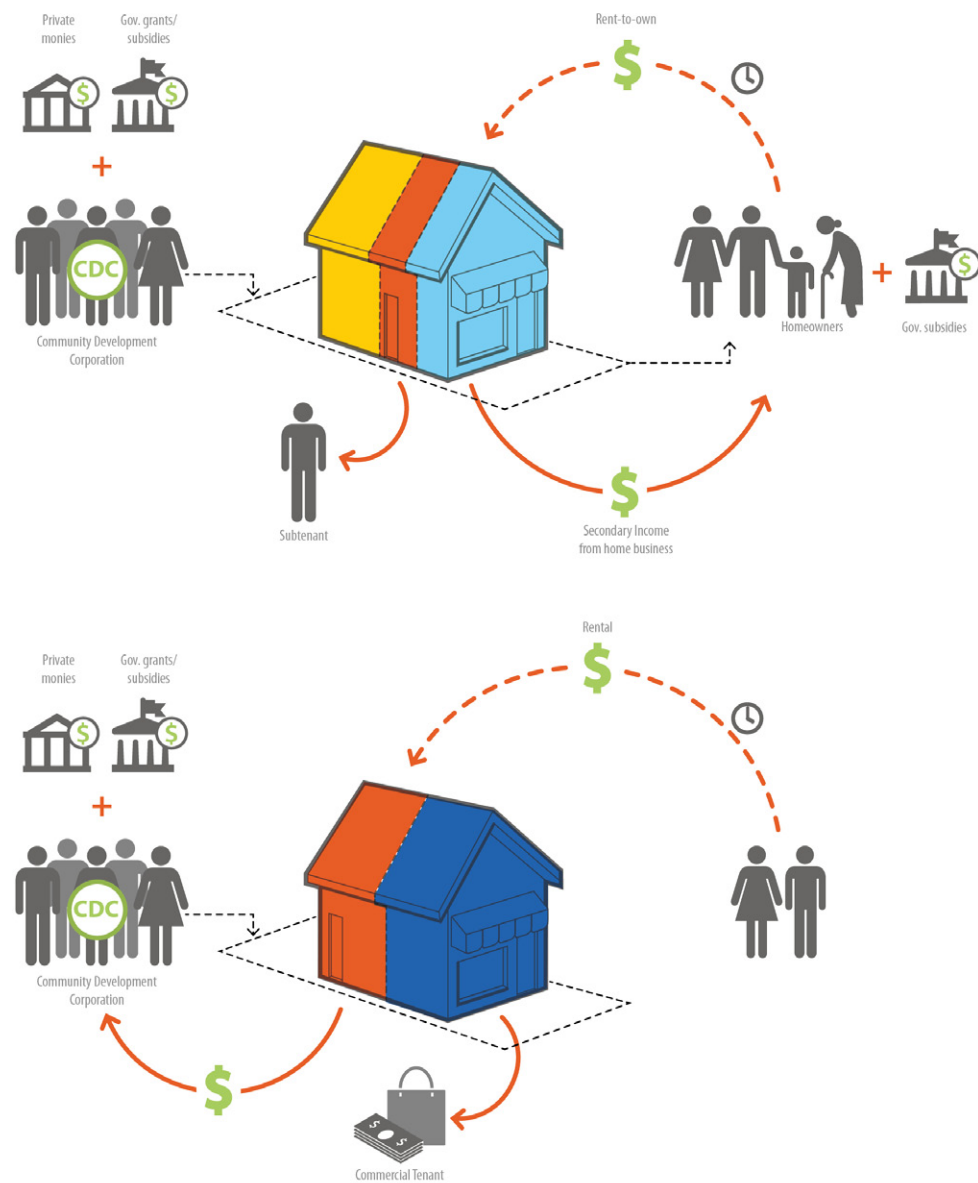


Figure 5.13

The two economic models employed by the developer.

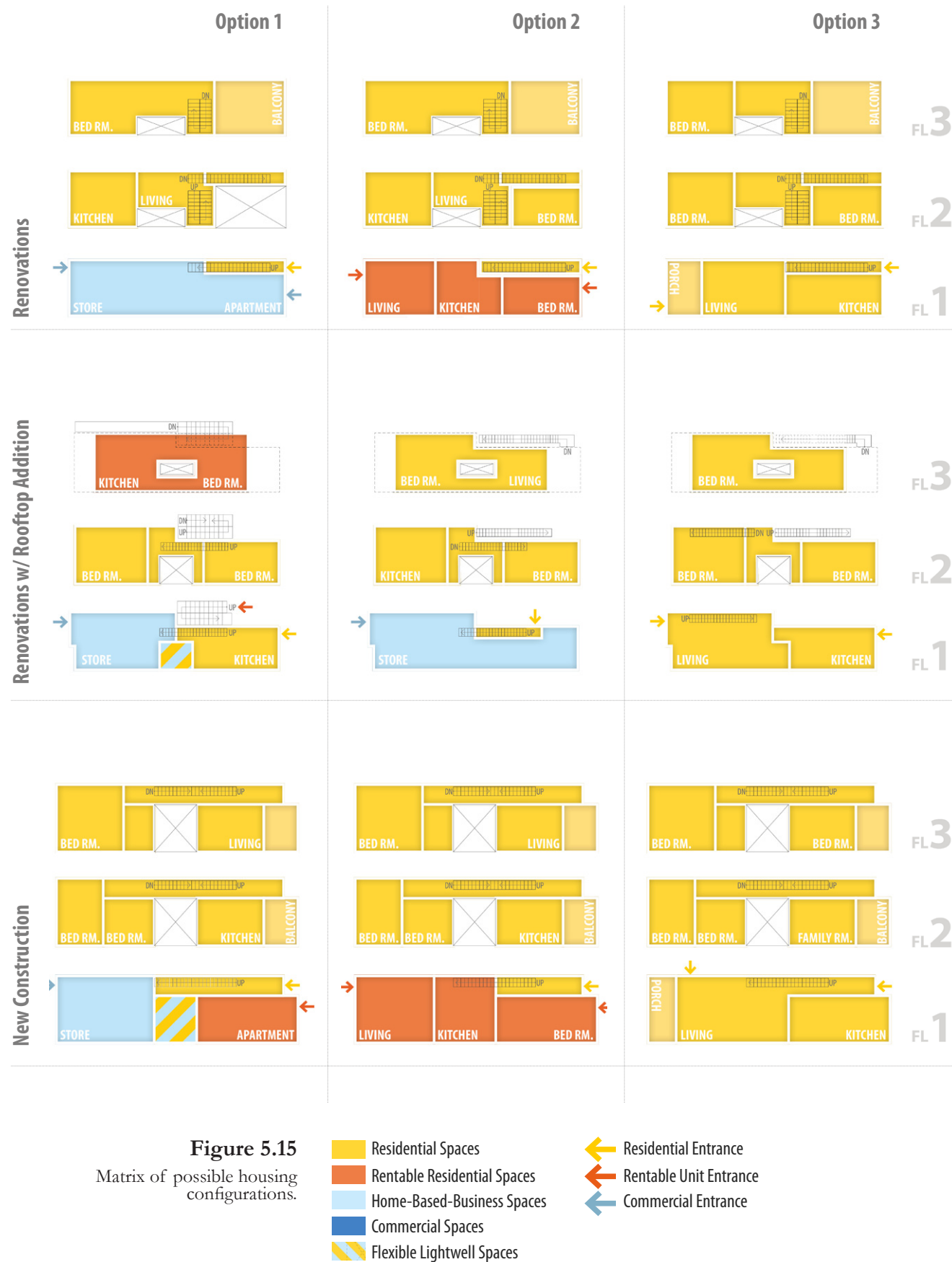


- Residential Spaces
- Rentable Residential Spaces
- Home-Based-Business Spaces
- Commercial Spaces
- ▨ Flexible Lightwell Spaces

Figure 5.14
Application of economic strategy to building uses. (Street level plan)

As a secondary economic strategy that benefits the non-profit development corporation, some houses can be designed to accommodate larger commercial tenants on the ground level, and market-rate living units on upper levels. The income generated by this strategy will allow the non-profit development corporation to develop more city blocks within the neighborhood. (Figure 5.13)

Since the family structure, economic status and the personal needs of each family will differ from household to household, the success of this economic strategy depends on how flexible it is at accommodating a range of family structures. In order to achieve this goal, new houses are designed to accommodate various combinations of living, commercial and rentable spaces. These various unit configurations will allow each house to be customized based on the unique socio-economic needs of each household. (Figure 5.15)



Conclusion

The three design solutions described in this chapter aim to provide social, cultural and economic empowerment through the process of creating architecture. The spatial, typological and economic strategies described also strive to advance the legacy of Baltimore's Pennsylvania Avenue corridor to the future. Even though the social cultural and economic conditions described are unique to this neighborhood, the design solution may be applied to other similar main streets of Baltimore with appropriate modifications.

6 Conclusion



Figure 6.1
Final design review.

The final design review for this thesis project was held on June 3, 2013. The project was strongly endorsed on the basis that it explores a comprehensive design solution. By recognizing and employing social, cultural and economic values of architecture, this thesis addresses a range of issues encountered in the community redevelopment process. The following section describes the strong points of the project as well as the recommendations offered by critics during the design review.

Main Strengths of the Project

1. A community centered solution.

As described above, this thesis considers social, cultural and economic factors encountered in the development process. These three categories of social, cultural and political factors are always framed through the needs of the community. While recent housing developments along Pennsylvania Avenue corridor aims to create an attractive community for outsiders, Reclaiming the Neighborhood aims to foster a neighborhood that is as equally empowering to the long-term residents as it is to new immigrants into the neighborhood. It is the intended symbiosis of both community groups that strengthens the community redevelopment proposal described in this thesis.

1. Addressing redevelopment issues at multiple scales.

While the design solution is applied to a single city block in this thesis, the intended outcome of the project is to create a uniform character for Pennsylvania

Avenue corridor. In order to achieve this goal, this thesis proposes design solutions at the neighborhood scale, block scale and individual building scale. It is evident that the community redevelopment process encompasses more than creating individual buildings. Design and planning decisions made at different scales can impact the outcome of community redevelopment projects. The spatial, typological and economic strategies set forth in this thesis each address issues at multiple scales, resulting in a well-rounded design approach.

Design Review Recommendations

1. Create varying degrees of privacy and access into the residential court.

One criticism of the projects was that fully enclosing the residential court does not allow the public to access the spaces in any way. In addition to limiting public benefits, this may not accommodate the needs of business owners and residents on the block. For example, some businesses might find it useful to have exterior spaces at the central court accessible to patrons. Residents may also want spaces that open to both the public domain of the street and the private areas of the court.

I believe the answer to this issue lies in the park spaces currently located at the North and South ends of the block. Businesses located adjacent to these parks can spill over into the green space. For example restaurants may provide seating and table services within the park, or a furniture maker's shop may use the park space as a staging area for large-scale projects. At the same

time these parks may be developed as children's play areas for young residents of the block. Residences adjacent to the blocks may also have balconies that open into the park spaces.

2. More "eyes" on the park spaces.

Along the same topic, critics pointed out that park spaces located along the perimeter require more visual access to create a sense of safety. Especially in neighborhoods with a high vacancy rate, issues such as crime, vandalism and drug trade can easily occur in open spaces with obstructed views. To follow Jane Jacobs's rule of "eyes on the street," these park spaces can be designed with residences, and stores opening onto them.

3. Buildings along the side streets should be developed differently.

While the main goal of this thesis is to address the unique issues of an urban commercial corridor, it is clear that the conditions along the main street are intricately tied to the organization of the whole city block and even the adjacent streets. The design solution only focuses on buildings directly adjacent to the main street; however, there is an opportunity to add variety to the available housing stock by designing the houses along side streets differently.

Houses located off the main commercial corridor provide different design challenges and opportunities. I believe the design articulation of these houses merit a more in-depth future study. For the purposes of this document, I have represented the houses along side streets at a simple volumetric level.

Lessons Learned

Reclaiming the Neighborhood started as a criticism of recent housing developments along Pennsylvania Avenue corridor of Baltimore, MD. The design of recent housing structures neglects the socio-economic needs of Pennsylvania Avenue's residents. It was this dissatisfaction that compelled me to take on this yearlong exploration. Reclaiming the Neighborhood was the result of my own research and the invaluable guidance of many mentors.

I began this project on the premise that our future should be built on the pillars of our past. As a result I believe one of the strengths of this project is its ability to seamlessly integrate new developments with the existing building texture.

As the exploration progressed, I was able to reframe the problem at hand around the social, cultural and economic needs of the community. Through the research I conducted and the guidance I received, the project went further to explore what architecture itself and the process of creating architecture can contribute to social, cultural and economic empowerment of communities.

One of the most important lessons learnt through this project is the impact built environment have on all aspects of our lives. While I did not explore the political process involved in developing communities, it is evident that the decisions made by a few can often cause great change in how others live their lives. Therefore as architects and designers, we have a great responsibility to the public on how we approach the

process of creating space. As an academic exploration, Reclaiming the Neighborhood has clarified that each architectural project needs to be approached with an understanding of the social, cultural and economic implications they will have on the lives of others.

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