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Urban Living Room: Inclusive U District Station Plaza Design

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Abstract

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This thesis explores the social condition of homelessness in Seattle's city fabric, and the design project is to provide a healthier built environment for an inclusive group of users in U District Station plaza to encourage an interactive social communication. The introduction talks about the crucial questions of the thesis, including the reasons of researching this topic, design proposal and the audience of this design. The literature review and precedent studies focus on the discussion of how homeless experience and use the city and what services are existing in the American contemporary society as well as the discussion of lessons learned and how to improve. The site analysis chapter gives audience a better understanding of the history, current and future conditions of the site. Following is a detailed description of the design and the proposed program, and its connection with surrounding services. The conclusion discusses general thoughts on the continued challenges the design thesis faces.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this graduate thesis is to create a design proposal for the University District transit link station plaza (a formal urban public space in Seattle). It explores the potential of landscape design to improve the well being of an inclusive range of users in the city. Targeting the increasing population of homeless, my goal is to encourage the public to give more social

concern and interaction with homeless, and provide a flexible and inclusive environment in the community for different socio-economic groups and promote a positive and resilient public space. On the city scale, I propose this design as an example that could be applied in every neighborhood of the city in the future.

“In our profession in the last 15 years during the sustainability movement, we’ve spent a lot of time addressing the ecological issues and we doing a lot of researches on the ecological issues of climate change, storm water infiltration and materials, but we’ve not done a lot of research on the social aspects of sustainability, and my sense is that the sustainable agenda is changing and that the social aspect of sustainable is coming to the for in the current climate who are operating it. I think landscape architects as a group of well intentioned and probably have a good intent of intuition about what makes a good social space, but we largely operate with a research basis for what makes a good social spaces or how to predict how people are gonna behave or operate in social. I think that Google, Facebook and Amazon have a great deal of knowledge about predictive modeling in terms of how we behave socially, but we as a profession are designing social spaces, we are really quite ill equipped to deal with beyond god instinct and intuition.” –Ken Smith

Personally, I am particularly interested in the social aspect of built environment. I was raised in China for my first 20 years and moved to Seattle three years ago. The tremendous cultural and environmental difference between China and America made me curious about the unique phenomenon passionate about understanding the American society, culture

and history. My obligation of this graduate thesis is to understand the social system that lead to the formation of homelessness, and I would like to apply the discipline of landscape architecture to improve the health condition of the community and individual. Providing food, shelter and other resources for indigent is a moral and ethical response to people in need.

In the process of my design, I am interested in the issue of social justice, and believe that urban public space should be accessible to everyone, and everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. As Don Mitchell mentioned, "If anyone needs the right to the city, surely it is the homeless." (Mitchell, 2003) I am not attempting to advocate the right to sleep in the public for homeless. Rather, I put my focus on advocating for the right to inhabit, to interact and to control in the existing urban context.

1) Project Proposal

My project includes two scales: the city scale and the neighborhood scale. The city scale proposal is more theoretical and conceptual, and the neighborhood scale is more design based and practical.

The process of my design grows out an understanding that the rapid development of Seattle has led to increasing homelessness and other related issues. Although there are some shelters to help homeless with sleeping issue, the city lacks designed public spaces for them to pursue social activities and improve their mental health condition. Instead of gathering homeless in a contained space, my proposal is to de-centralize and encourage the homeless population to positively use public space as means of transitioning out of homeless. By providing services, connecting programs and creating multiple uses, this public "model" will be integrated into each neighborhood of the existing city fabric. In

the future, this comprehensive model would cover the whole city like an invisible net, which could provide the city with a more resilient support.

On the neighborhood scale, I chose the University District transit link station plaza as a site to explore appropriate programs and potential connections with the surrounding homeless services. The purpose of designing this plaza is to answer the question of how a plaza can comprehensively meet the needs of multiple groups, and how the design of this plaza could reflect a positive and active environment.

2) Audience of my Project

I am targeting an inclusive range of users of the site and especially concerned with the potential growing population of young homeless attracted to the homeless services in Seattle U District.

- **Definition of homeless**

"Homelessness is the condition of people without a regular dwelling. People who are homeless are most often unable to acquire and maintain regular, safe, secure and adequate housing, or lack 'fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence.'" - Federal Definition of Homeless

Homeless include people whose primary nighttime is in a homeless shelter, a vehicle, squatting, cardboard boxes, a tent, tarpaulins, or other out-of-housing situations. It also

includes people who sleep in public or private places that are not designed for use as a regular sleeping accommodation. (Homelessness, Wikipedia)

- **Definition of homeless youth**

“Young people” refers to both adolescence (age 13 –19) and emerging adulthood, which has been taken to extend nearly to age 30. (Furlong, 2009) This lengthy, complex period of development lies beyond childhood but before young adulthood. For “homelessness,” I oppose a monolithic view where the term is defined by the absence of shelter for the youth. Rather, I support a processional view where homelessness often becomes tied to one’s identity and how one perceives the world. It is related to past and ongoing circumstances (Bucher, 2008) . Thus, even people with shelter may consider themselves homeless if they still involved with street life, or still reliant on service agencies. (Woelfer, Palzkill, and Hrndry, 2011)

- **Characteristics of homelessness**

In American society homeless young people are more vulnerable than most people. Indeed, this vulnerability makes homeless young people an extraordinary user group, as the elderly are in some circumstances (Newell, 1995).

In exploring how to use landscape design to encourage inclusive social engagement and as a tool to fight for social justice,

the two crucial questions I have are how people of homelessness experience different stages and how do they use the city.

We all know that life is very difficult when a good deal of one’s time is spent in securing safety, food, and shelter, under conditions of chronic stress, often without basic life-skills for interacting with society’s institutions, and when physical and mental health and substance abuse problems are common. Taken all these psycho-social factors together, in a word, these environmental and individual characteristics make homeless people vulnerable. (Kidd, Sean A., and Larry Davidson, 2007), (Whitbeck , 2011)

“A violation of a civility, an indiscretion, a communication failure, or an unlucky setback can have serious consequences, often far more severe than would be experienced by a young person with stable family, or family-like, relations.” (Woelfer, Palzkill, and Hrndry, 2011) .

- **Design for homeless**

The hybrid analysis from interviewing, observation, documentation, and online research show that the preferred land for homeless include right of ways, close to water, undeveloped lands, flood plains, impervious services, parking lot, etc.

The means of assuring such an open and accessible space, Tier (1998, 290) mentions, is to practice “tough love.” Other than working on the construction of a vibrant public housing program that would make housing affordable, or designing a decent mental health system that would make the “care” that Tier advocates better than the disease, Tier (1993, 286) “call for public order” to “counteract the descent of urban public space into anarchy shades quickly into repression.” (Mitchell, 2003) In designing a “tough” or more comprehensive public space, it can shape healthier environment in transformation of an economic system and the mental care of homeless.

3) Conclusion

The questions I am grappling with in this design thesis include: How can I design a public plaza to improve the well being of multiple groups in the U District? How can I understand the needs of a normally unrepresented group (the homeless people) and include them in this design? What is a correct attitude in dealing with the problem of homelessness and social justice?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW, PRECEDENT STUDIES AND CRITICAL STANCE

“The functions of the city are universally influenced by economic, political, social and cultural forces.” (Noelle Higgins, 2007)

My goal in this chapter is to situate the U District station plaza in the context of the contemporary American city. Through a literature review and precedent studies of local and national cases, I'd like to discuss the complex challenges and opportunities that the contemporary American city is facing in addressing the issue of social justice.

I began my research by exploring ideas of the American city, theories about social justice, and expectations for a more adaptive city in the future. This led me to research the current policy and debate on homelessness. I also looked at the strategies and programs that promote equitable use of public places. Finally, I reviewed cases that are related to my design and drew lessons from each of them.

1) Literature Review

- **Built environment and social justice**

According to Carr et al., public spaces “protect the rights of user groups”. Because public spaces are “accessible to all groups and provide for freedom of action” and for “temporary claim and ownership”. A public space can be a place to act more freely than where under constraints such

as home or workplace. In most settings one can temporary lay claim to a piece to turf even when one does not own it. Ultimately, public space can be changed by public action, because it is owned by all. It can offer a sense of power and control limited only by rights of others. In public space, people can learn to live together” (Carr et al., 1993, p19)

However, there are existing problems in the contemporary society due to the fast development of the city. “Temporary uses of public space have always been part of our urban culture in America. As our economy has polarized, our society has marginalized American’s poorest citizens. Poverty is considered shameful in our society and the stigma associated with poverty is complex.” (Higgins, 2007)

As a designer, I understand that a space is a reflection and leading fact of social issues. According to Mitchell, “Conflict over rights often resolves itself into conflict over geography”, so spaces are not just the “stage upon which rights are contested,” it is a production of structure and struggle for rights. (Mitchell, 2003)

Built environment interventions, have a power to encourage social justice by bridging social capital.

“Bridging social capital is made up of links among members of a community who are dissimilar to one another with respect to social identity.” (Dannenberg, 2011)

By designing community and aiming explicitly to facilitate social interactions and include social shared space, promotes a sense of community.

- **Youth homeless and the city**

There is a large body of literature on homeless youth (Bucher, 2008; Karabanow and Naylor, 2010; Kidd and Shahar, 2008; Rice, 2010), which shows young people generally to be present-focused, often suffering from the effects of trauma caused by neglect or abuse early in life, and often distrustful of adults. At the same time, like all young people, homeless young people vigorously seek out and learn from new experiences, sometimes risky ones, and develop their identities. (Kidd and Shahar, 2008)

Homelessness is one of the biggest social problems and it is increasing with developments, such as highly competitive work, urban density and polarization. Homelessness in the U.S. has been a societal problem that has seen an increase since the economic crash in 2008. (Loftus-Farren, 2011) Since the economic

downturn, foreclosures have contributed to this increase. (National Coalition for the Homeless , 2009) The demographics of the homeless population have changed since then as well. There has been an increase in people new to homelessness, and increases in families, educated and employed people experiencing homelessness. National Coalition for the Homeless , 2009)

Over the past 100 years, responses to homelessness have widely ranged but typically include government programs for housing and food assistance, public housing, shelters run by private assistances and non- profits, food banks, obstructive municipal ordinances, and the use of police power. (Werner, 2014) The situation remains that people are forced to live on the street, and it widely recognized that one of the main causes of homelessness for the “situational” homeless is the lack of affordable housing. (Western Regional Advocacy Project, Without Housing.2010) The change in the demographics of the homeless population has implications for the program and spatial structuring of already existing homeless encampments in the Seattle area.

The City of Seattle, King County, and Washington State have enacted various measures to try to reduce homelessness through a variety of means, and have openly stated

repeatedly that it is a prioritized policy to provide shelter while affording dignity. However admirable these goals are, the reality often falls short due to a variety of issues, including lack of funding, NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard), and society’s long-held opinions of the homeless population as drug addicts, criminals, and mentally ill. As a result, local non-profits and religious organizations have responded to this necessity by helping fill the gaps in service provision and bringing visibility to the problem of homelessness. (Werner, 2014)

From conversations with the homeless

youth in U District, I found that they have a desire for education and job training.

According to the Seattle government of Human Services Department, “A variety of programs beyond shelter and housing is available to young people who are homeless. It is vital that young people on the streets know what help is out there — that there are trusted adults to help them. Outreach services ensure that homeless youth and young adults have access not only to meals and health care, but to stable housing, jobs, and an education.” (Staff of Homeless Youth Programs & Services)



[FIG 2.1] Occidental Park, Seattle, 2014

2) Precedent Studies

Occidental Park

My interest in homelessness began when I noticed the current use of Occidental Park (a city plaza that is close to a high density of homeless services in Downtown Seattle). In this section, I compare the neighborhood of my project site (U District) with the neighborhood of Occidental Park (Pioneer Square), which I believe has many comparable aspects in the geography context, surrounding services and potential space features and user groups. Through observation, research and comparison, I hope to understand more about how homeless use public plazas. This understanding could guide my design project.

- **Geographic context:**

Located at the Pioneer Square District near Downtown Seattle, Occidental park is close to the city transit station and has “world-class public transportation”(walkscore.com). The street and plaza are paved with red bricks, which define the space as a complete plaza from the streets to the park. According to the data from walkscore.com, Occidental park area is the second most walkable neighborhood in Seattle and regarded as a Walker’s Paradise with a Walking Score of 98 (out of 100). It is also known as a Rider’s Paradise with a Transit Score of 100. The area has world-class public transportation and about 97 bus and 1 light rail lines passing through it.

U District also has a high walk score of 97. People don’t need to drive with their daily errands, such as dining and drinking, grocery, shopping, parks culture and entertainments, and schools. The transit score of U District is 74, as “transit is convenient for most trips”. With the future proposal of the transit link stops at U District, the public transportation system will be upgraded.

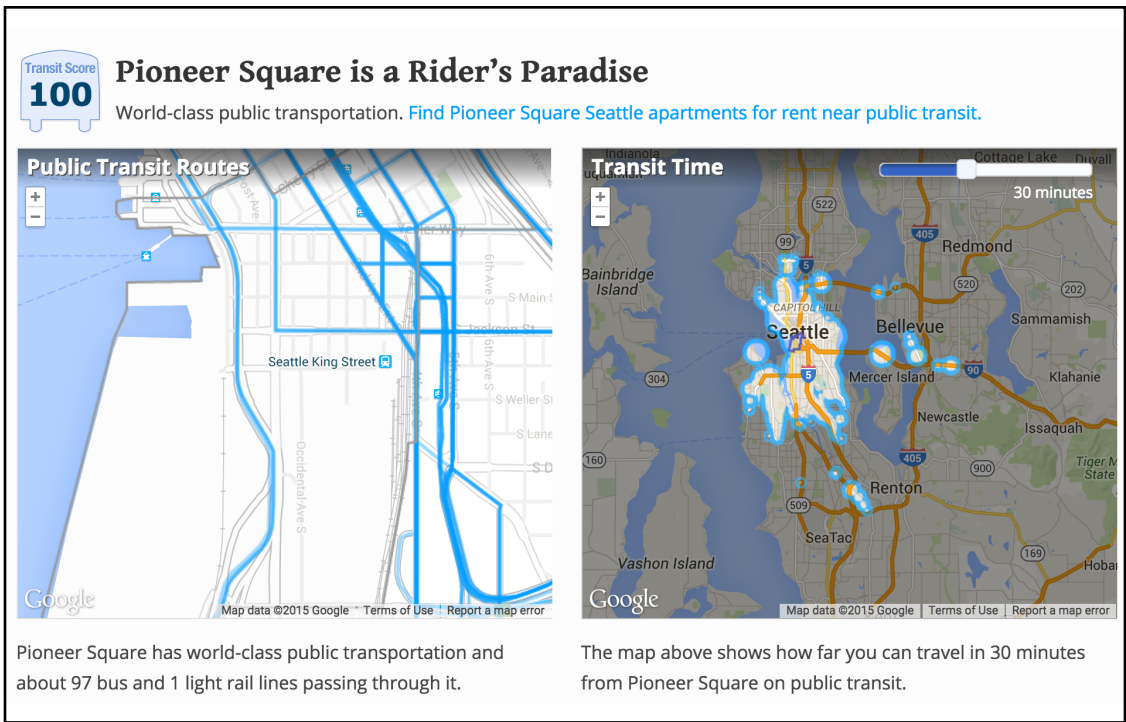
- **Local services:**

The adjacency of Occidental Park to the Downtown Emergency Shelter (DESC) creates a space that is almost exclusively used by the transient community. The park is open but not welcoming, and there is perceived danger from (and for) the people to use the park. On the other hand, U District has a high density of youth homeless services, such as ROOTS (emergency shelter), U District food bank and needle exchange.

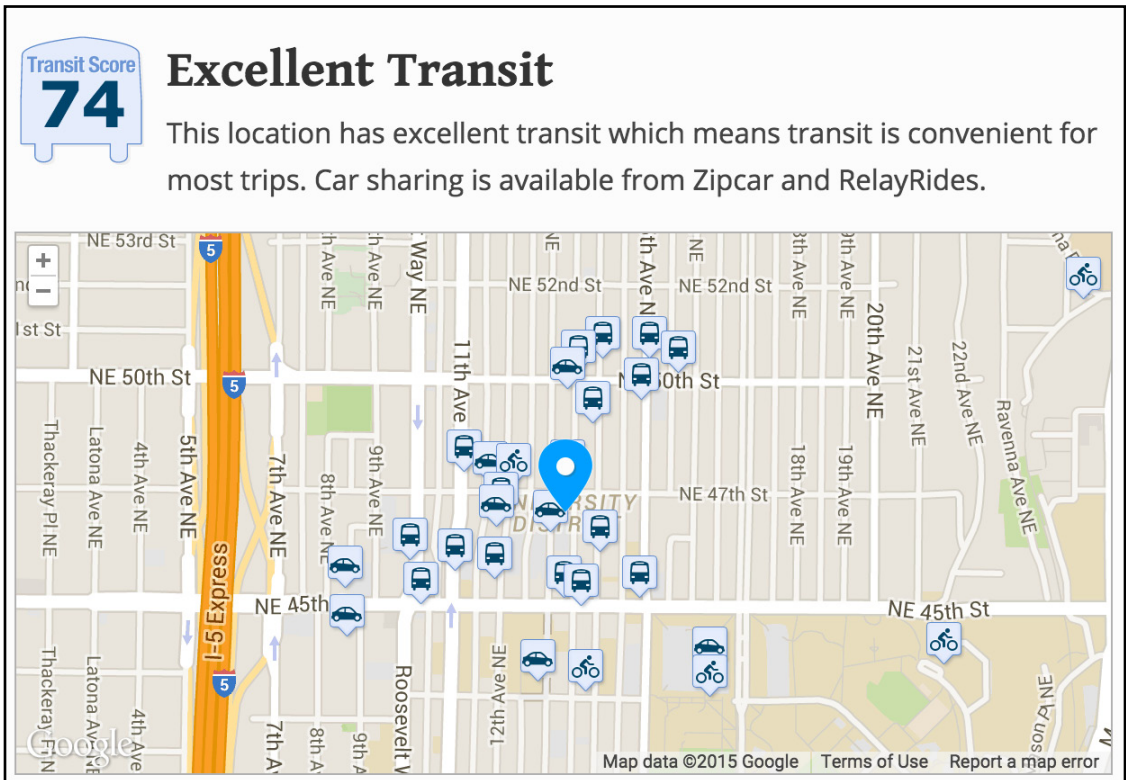
From the Crime Grade (walkscore.com), both the Personal Crime Grade and Property Crime Grade are among the least safe 10% of the neighborhood in Seattle.

- **Space feature and users**

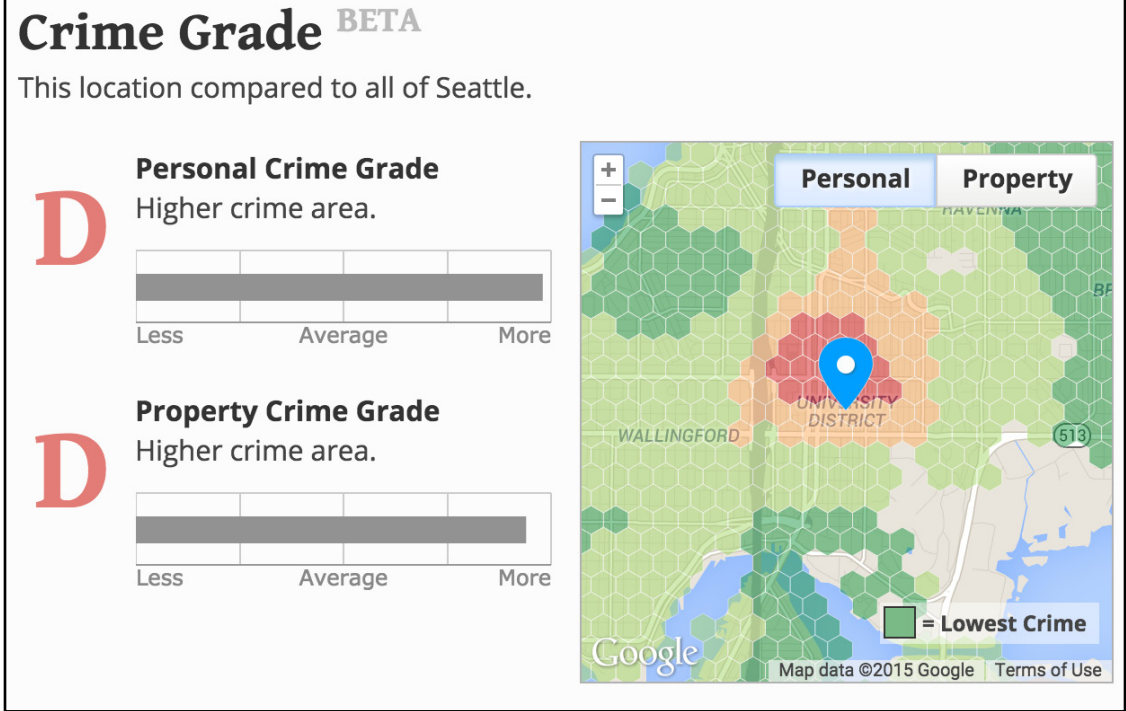
Due to the crowded conditions in nearby shelters, Occidental Park has become a surrogate living room, dining room, bathroom, bedroom and toilet for the homeless community who utilize services in the neighborhood. In spite of the unconventional uses and needs of this group, Occidental park currently serves as



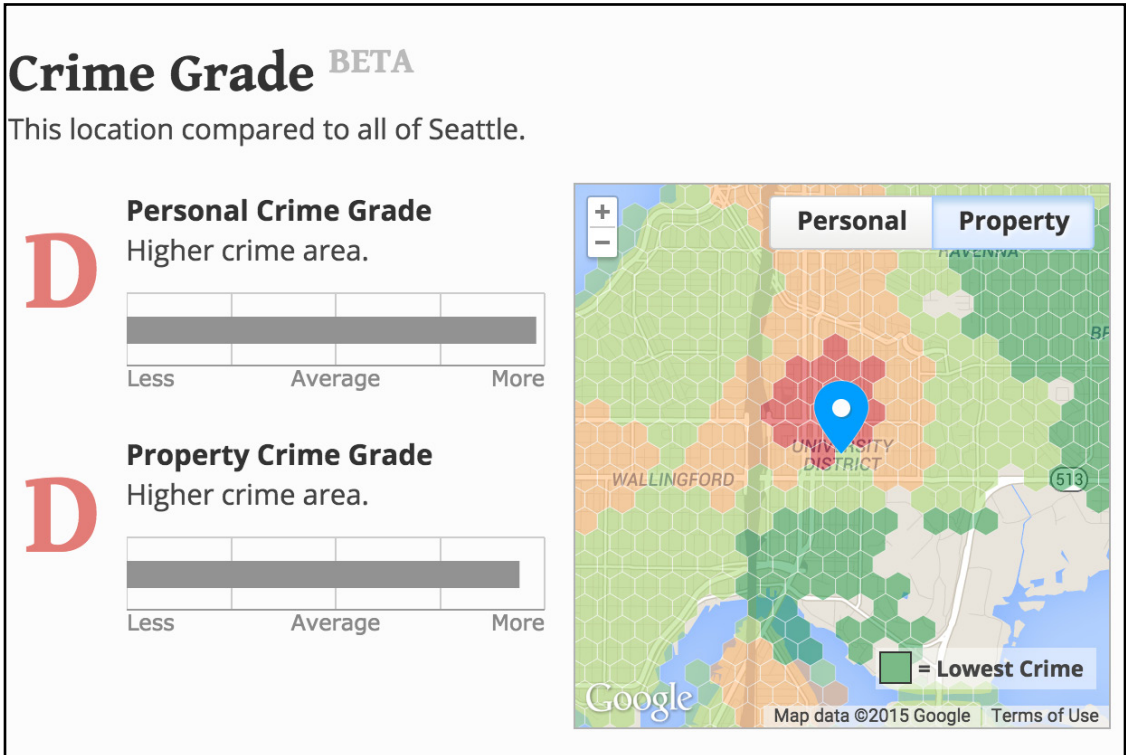
[FIG 2.2] Public Transit Score of Pioneer Square(<https://www.walkscore.com/score/u-district-Seattle>)



[FIG 2.3] Public Transit Score of U District (<https://www.walkscore.com/score/u-district-Seattle>)



[FIG 2.4] Personal Crime Grade of U District (<https://www.walkscore.com/score/u-district-Seattle>)



[FIG 2.5] Property Crime Grade of U District (<https://www.walkscore.com/score/u-district-Seattle>)

an important gathering and social space. Seattle's downtown has changed through many cycles of investment and disinterest. Since the early 1990's there have also been major efforts to sanitize and "improve" downtown Seattle and turn it into a "world class" destination for shopping, culture and eating (Gibson, 2004). These efforts ignore the fact that our homeless and lower income population is now also increasing. (Higgins, 2007)

With the new establishment of a Transit Station in the future, the U District Station Plaza could become a new living room for homeless. The key question for me from the study of Occidental Park is what should a public space provide to create a healthier environment for various users.

- **Lessons learned from Occidental Park:**

Although it is located in a very convenient and walking friendly area, and the red brick paving make the park look quite inviting, Occidental Park is often dominated by male homeless with mental illness. As a result, people avoid going through the park, let alone using the park for recreation and relaxing. From the observation of how homeless behave in the park, some of them were playing chess, some of them were helping cut hair for others, and one of them was setting up a stand and exhibiting his art work in the park. I am impressed by their use of place as a living room and hope to provide more facilities in my project in order to shape an active, interactive and healthy public space.



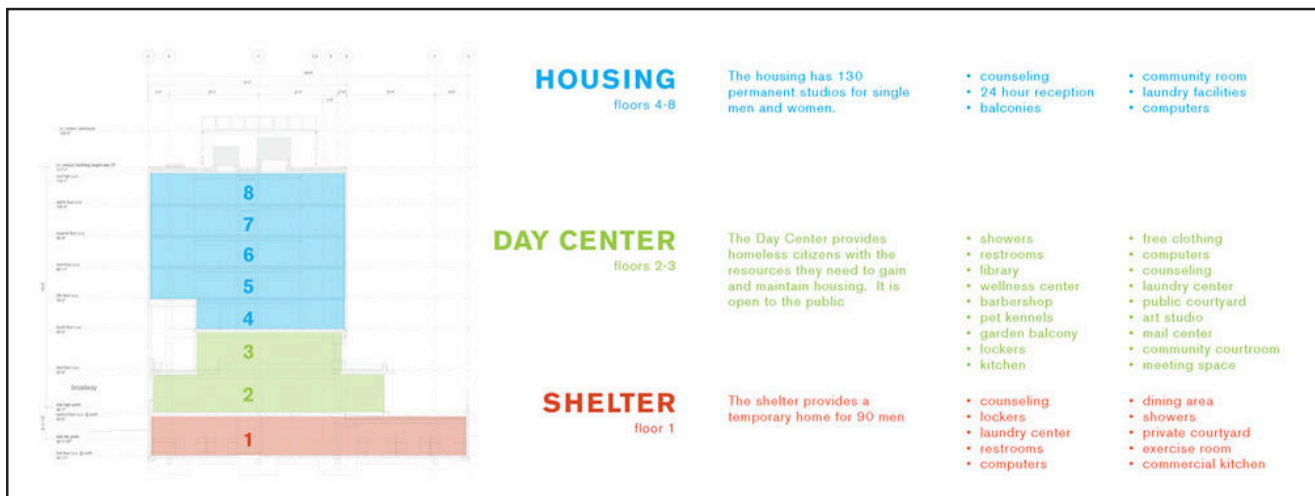
[FIG 2.6] Occidental Park, Seattle, 2014

- **Strategic lessons from Occidental Park:**
 1. Small interventions can help to form the use of the public space.
 2. Providing a large number of seats can accommodate wide arrange of users.
 3. The open public space of the park could help to adapt temporary and dynamic use for different activities.
 4. Provide various ways of defining the space could make the space more interesting and organic.
 5. Green lawns and trees provide visual relief in dense urban environment.
 6. Provide a diversity of public-private space, and open and sheltered space to provide dynamic use for different groups.

Bud Clark

Bud Clark is a comprehensive program that provides services for homeless people in the city of Portland. People on the street view it as a place full of hope, respect and positive change. Only half a year after its opening, there have been more than 300 people living there permanently or long term. The designer expected this program to be an example for other cities to start program and service for homeless people. The features of Bud Clark include ecological design courtyard, mixing use building, energy saving features, facilities for people who have experienced homelessness, etc.

This homeless transitional housing program is an advanced model in designing for the homeless. From the outdoor common garden, to the one-night temporary shelter on the first floor, to the everyday basic services on the second floor, and to the more stable affordable housing on the upper floors, Bud Clark serves as an example of how people in



[FIG 2.7] Bud Clark housing model diagram

different stages of homelessness could adapt to this program and how a homeless person without shelter could eventually live in their own house.

- **Lessons learned from Bud Clark:**

Learning from this transitional model for homeless, I argue that there should be another layer before the contained indoor shelter. The common outdoor garden could expand its function and provide a wide range of activities that help more homeless.

- **Strategic lessons from Bud Clark:**

1. Basic needs such as restroom and lockers are necessary and important for providing homeless a place to be.
2. The community and homeless group benefit from the idea of multiple steps of transitional programs.
3. The transparent fence of the garden provides safety and gives people less sense of segregation.

3) Critical Stance

With a foundation in observation, analysis, literature review and precedent studies, my exploration is structured at the scale of the city. Trying to bridge the disciplines of design, geography, sociology, and ecology, this work aims to better inform planning and design for homeless.

The problem of homelessness, according to Tier, is not a privation of affordable housing or decent community services, but one of “civility”. (Mitchell, 2003)

Due to the crowded conditions, people without shelter need somewhere to be. The reality is that we do not have enough housing or shelter. As long as our shelter system cannot meet the need, people who are homeless will make it by camping. As a result, individuals, informal groups, and organized camps can and do exist on public property.

Designers should work with other participants to make public land accessible and habitable for participants of the public-homeless.

“Let us support our neighbors who are forced to live in public places, and ensure that they are not harassed. Allow people to remain where they have chosen to be, as long as they are not disturbing the peace or interfering with the rights of others.” (Seattle/King county coalition on homelessness, 2012)

It is our responsibilities to find solutions that keep people safe, protect their rights, and advance our shared goal of ending homelessness. (Seattle/King county coalition on homelessness, 2012)

- **The Hub**

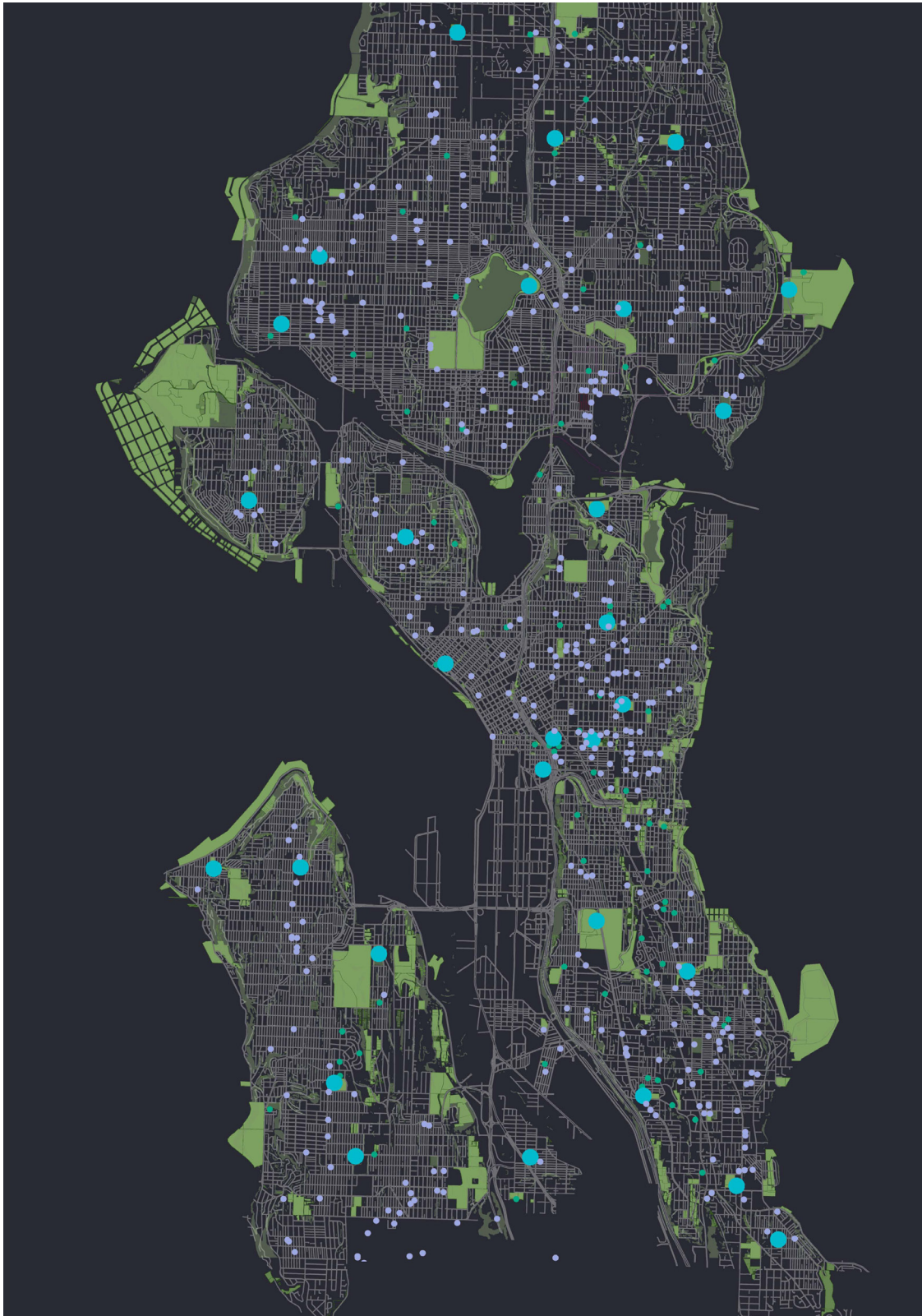
Homeless people in Seattle are geographically concentrated. A spatial regression model is estimated using data on Seattle City's homeless public services including general services for the public and specific service for homeless. It includes community gardens, parks and plazas, community centers, food banks, homeless shelters, churches, etc. The positive coefficient of mapping these facts enables us to explore how homeless networks across neighborhoods develop spatially.

The hub in my proposal refers to a public open space that could be used more inclusively by different groups. By creating the hub into every neighborhood of a city, my idea is to de-centralize the homeless population and encourage

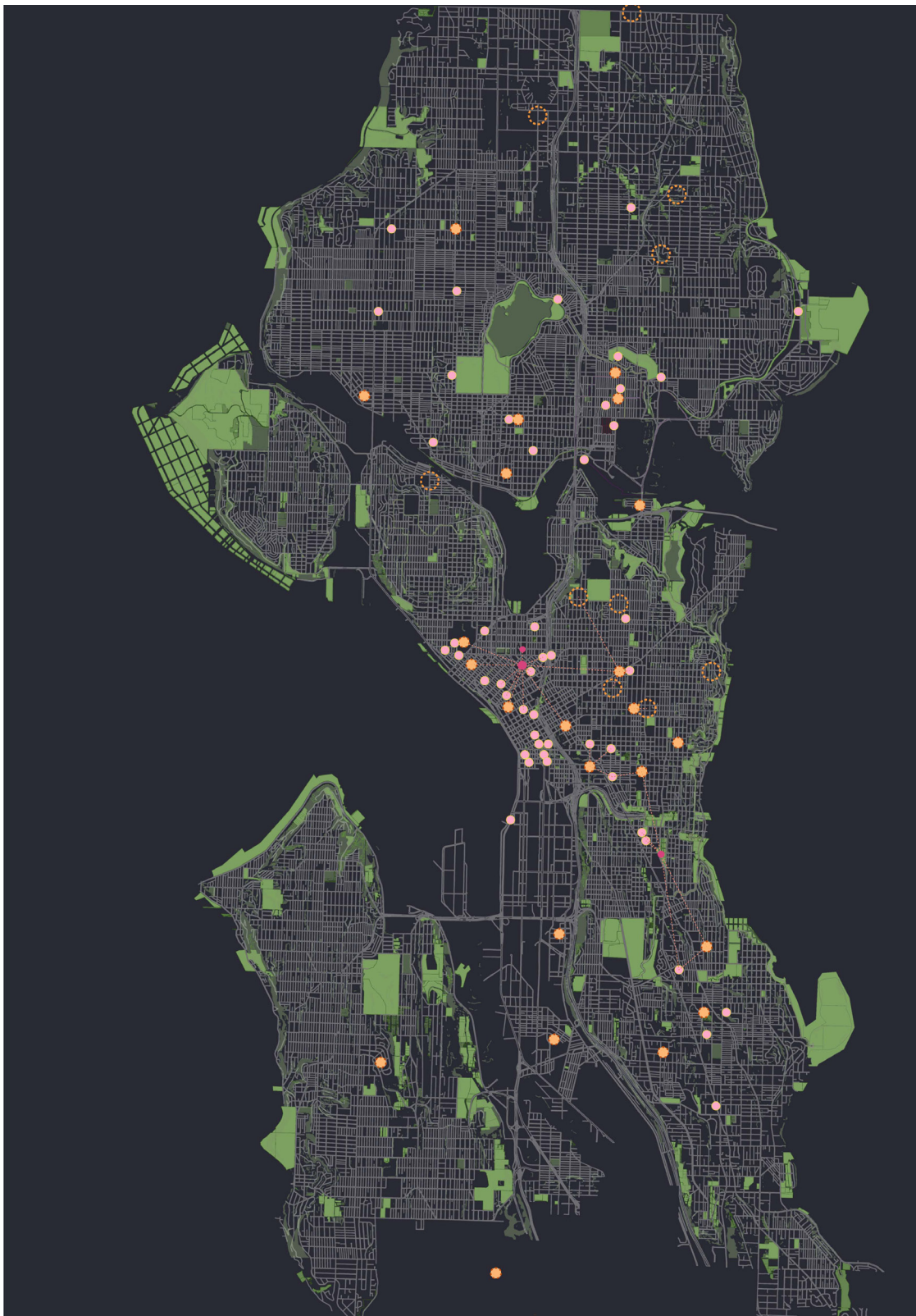
them to positively use the public space as a transitional stage for coming out of homeless. In the future, this comprehensive hub, as a model, would cover the whole city like an invisible net, and it could provide the city with a more resilient support.

Depending on the scale of a neighborhood, types of the space and different user groups, these hubs will include various programs, such as urban agriculture, outdoor libraries, digital stations, water access, etc. I hope this could be an inspiration for the community to develop more inclusive use of the public space.

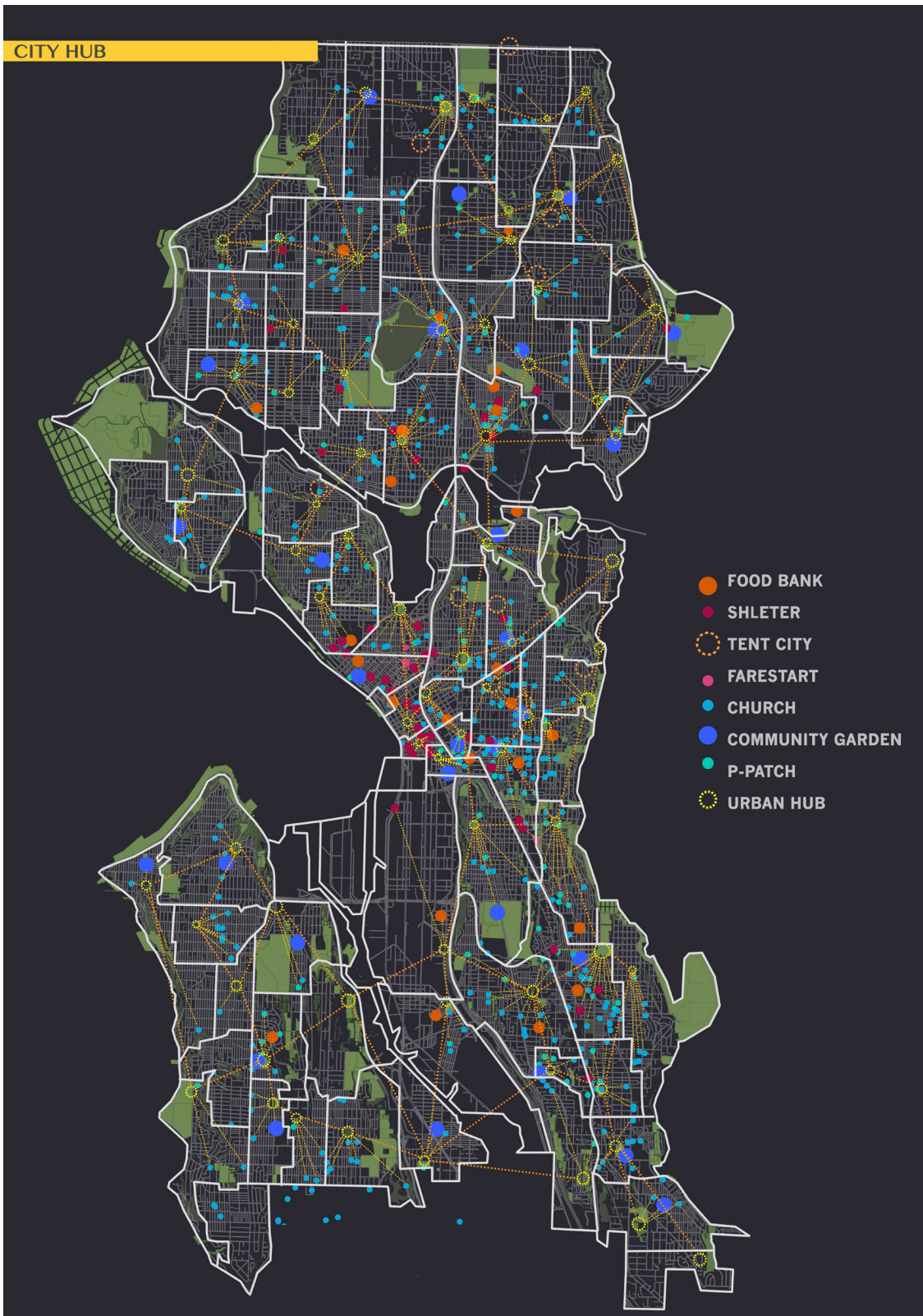
In my design project, I chose the U District as an example to represent the idea of Hub.



[FIG 2.8] Public Facilities mapping of Seattle



[FIG 2.9] Homeless Facilities mapping of Seattle



[FIG 2.10] Comprehensive connection between Hub and various facilities mapping of Seattle

CHAPTER THREE: SITE CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

The site is located on Brooklyn Ave NE between NE 45th and 43rd Streets in the U District, Seattle. It is the future site of a transit link station (U District Station), According to the Sound Transit website, the city is planning to build two underground stations from North and South sides, and my project is designing the plaza between the two stations. It will serve the surrounding residential community, the “Ave” business district, other employment sites, the UW Tower and the north University of Washington campus.

1) History of U District and the community development

Seattle’s University District is home of the University of Washington since 1895. It is located in the northeast of Seattle, north of Portage Bay part of Lake Union. Its main spurs to development were the developer James Moore (1861-1929), the 1895 move of the Territorial University from downtown to what was then called Brooklyn, and the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition on the University of Washington campus in 1909. In the late twentieth century, “city within a city” has been the developed by the nearby malls. It is a neighborhood of restaurants, cafes, a well-known street fair, a farmer’s market, and a few venerable institutions such as the University Book Store, University Inn, and the Meany Hotel. (HistoryLink Essay, historylink.org)

- **Early community in the U District**

The early community activists were the District’s first churches --- in 1891 the Methodists, Christians, and Congregationalists. Following the addition of its University, Brooklyn quickly became a progressive community and with its formation in 1901 the Brooklyn Community Club --- well stocked with faculty representatives -- was the energetic promoter of paved streets, sewers, a primary school, a library, and public corrals for the continuing menace of free ranging cows.

- **Post-war development-“city within a city”**

District changes that followed World War II were as noticeable as during it. By 1950, the University of Washington enrollment nearly tripled over its wartime low of barely 5,000 students. Suddenly University Way was plagued by traffic jams. District leaders had responded already in 1946 with parking meters and the University District Parking Associates. The still active University District Parking Associates paved and painted lines on its first lot on Brooklyn.

By the twentieth century’s halfway mark, the University District and its principal strip University Way were easily the best example Seattle-wide of a “city within a city.” In 1950, the first annual Seafair

Kiddies Parade marched down an Ave lined with students, leaders, and parents.

Walt Crowley summarizes the mood of the District and its “Main Street” in 1960 as still optimistic.

“Despite anxieties about the UW’s appetite for real estate and competition from Northgate and U Village, the District closed the decade prosperous and confident. Between 40th and 50th Streets, the Ave was a small city with a major department store in Penneys, two variety stores, a grocer, four drug stores, four book stores, a large printing company, numerous clothiers including Nordstrom and Lerner’s, more than a dozen restaurants and cafes, and scores of specialty retailers catering not only to students but to a nearby residential population of more than 30,000. The Ave proudly advertised itself as “A Department Store Eight Blocks Long,” and the future looked bright. No one in 1960 anticipated that the Ave would become a battle ground in a virtual cultural revolution just a few years hence”.

- **University District Movement**

The University District Movement of 1967 was a combined response of marches, students and street persons to these local events. On-campus protests against the war involved an alliance of thousands of students and citizens from every part of Seattle.

The Ave also had its own riot -- named variously the “Hippie riot of 1969” and the “police riot of 1969.” One of the unexpected effects of those two nights of broken windows, police batons, tear gas, and arrests was a series of conciliatory meetings held afterwards by representatives of the “hip community,” merchants, and district leaders. Cal McCune and Walt Crowley, activists respectively on the merchant and street sides, became friends as a result of their participation in these meetings.

A revitalizing addition was the University Heights Farmer’s Market, which opened in May 1993. By 1999, the market attracted about 100,000 shoppers during its May to November season. (Crowley and Dorpat, 1995)



[FIG 3.1] University District, looking east on 41st Street NE toward UW campus, 1903
Courtesy National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site



[FIG 3.2] University Way and 45th Street, looking southwest, ca. 1945
Courtesy Roy Nielsen



[FIG 3.3] Egyptian Theater, University Way, 1946
Courtesy MOHAI



[FIG 3.4] University District Street Fair, 1999
Photo by Priscilla Long



[FIG 3.5] University District Street Fair, 2007.
Photo by Joe Mabel



[FIG 3.6] This 1893 map shows the old street names of what was then the “Brooklyn” neighborhood. There is almost no development north of Franklin Street (now NE 45th Street). Brooklyn Avenue on this map is today’s 12th Avenue NE; Broadway is today’s Brooklyn NE; Columbus is University Way NE; Tremont is 15th NE.[4] The railway is now the Burke-Gilman Trail; several other streets have been rerouted, especially near the water.

2) Current geographic context of the site

Currently, the University District is a thriving neighborhood with over 14,000 residents, hundreds of small independent businesses, community services, and its own unique flavor. (seattle.gov) The U District is also one of Seattle's cultural and economic hubs. It has regional significances because it is home to University of Washington, and the surrounding business, services and related facilities. It also attracts a great amount of youth homeless to the district.

Through a year-long process called the University District Livability Partnership (udistrictpartnership.org), participants in an urban design working group and dozens of their neighbors and colleagues have discussions about how they want to see the U District change and grow.

Many people envision a mixed housing that serves a wider range of residents, including opportunities for all ages, income levels, and family sizes. Others want to increase the number and variety of jobs in the U District, attracting more large employers while supporting the existing small businesses.

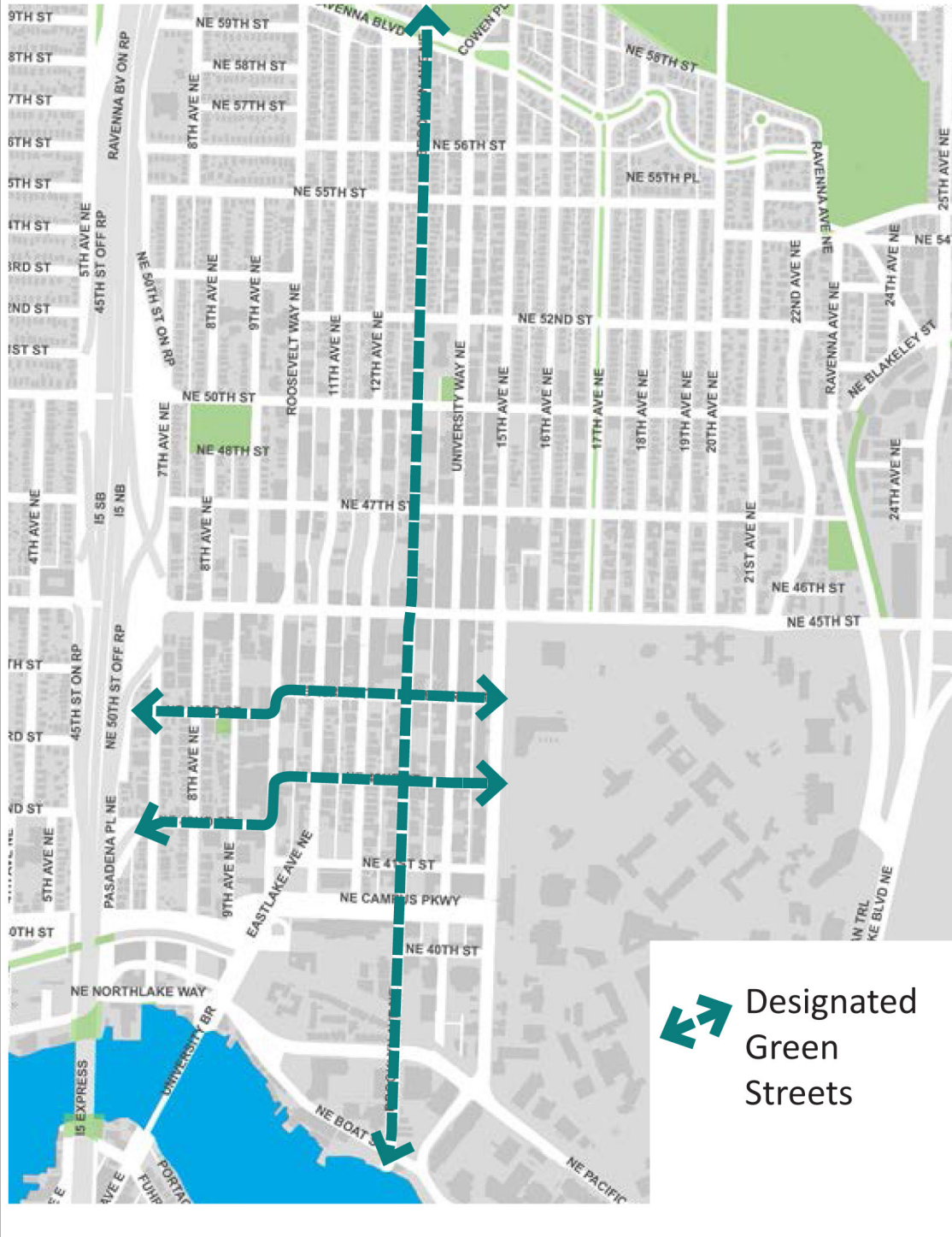
All participants want public safety improvements and attractive streets assisting all ways of travel, including bicyclists and pedestrians. Members of the community also desire to see new public spaces in the central of the neighborhood;

some advocate for a public square on top of the future light rail station. Most of all, the community hopes to find ways to preserve the neighborhood's unique and characters in the midst of development. (seattle.gov)

- **Existing site conditions**

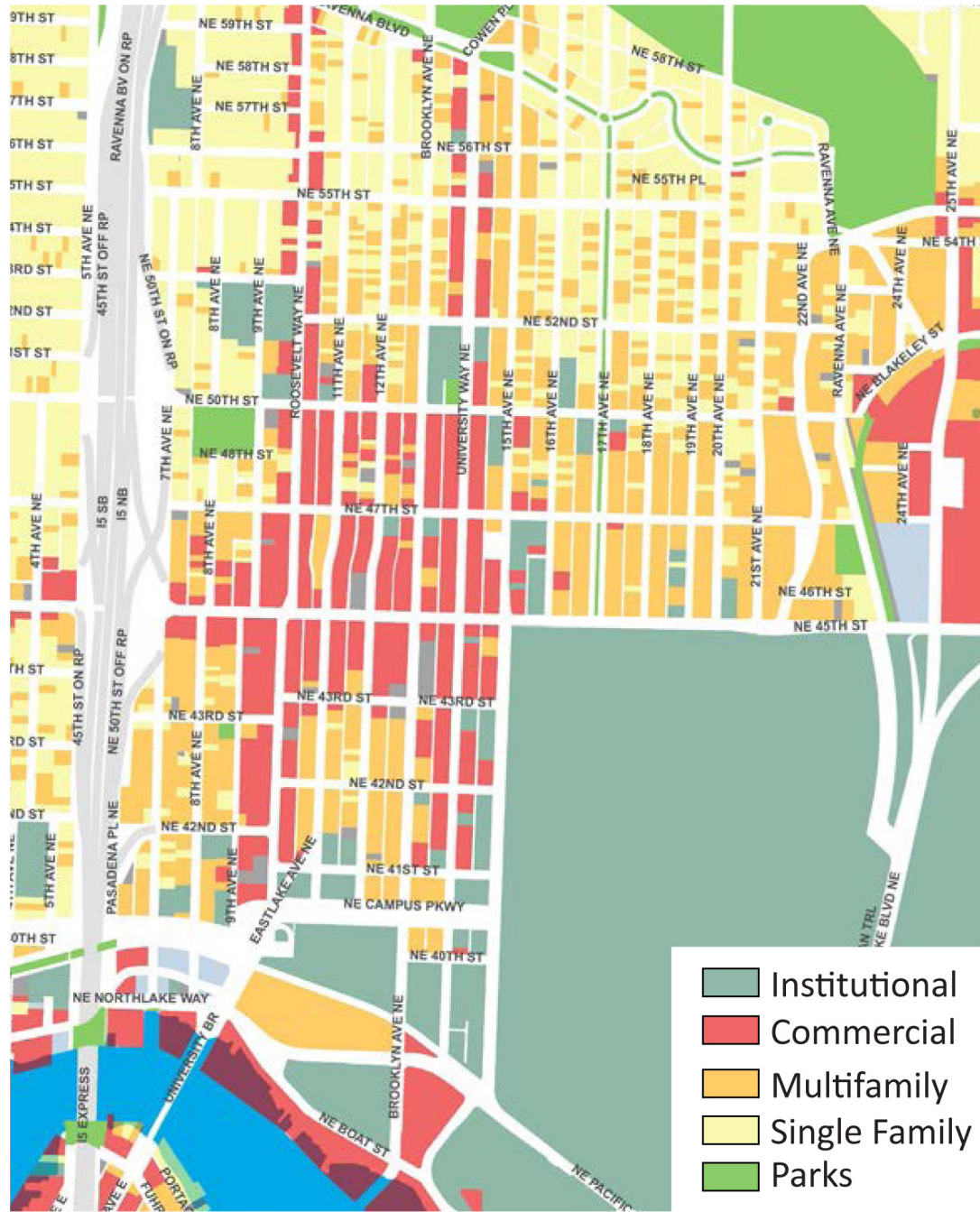
The complex issue of homelessness in the public realm is generally addressed by the field of Landscape Architecture as a programming issue, for any particular urban public space. (Higgins, 2007) In this section, I introduce some of the homeless services in U District, and the design proposal for the U District Transit Station in order to better understand the context.

Location



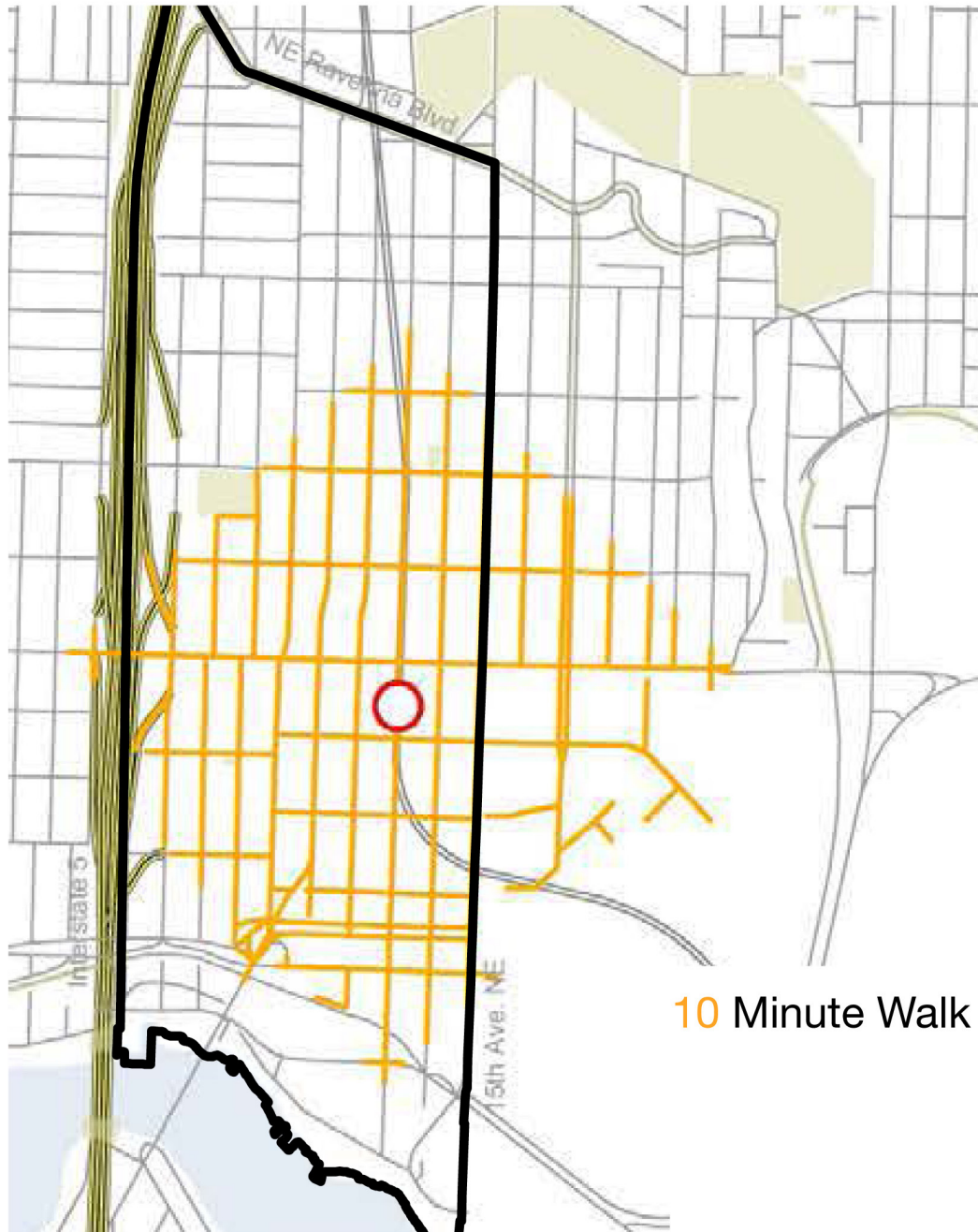
[FIG 3.7] Brooklyn is designated green street

Land Use



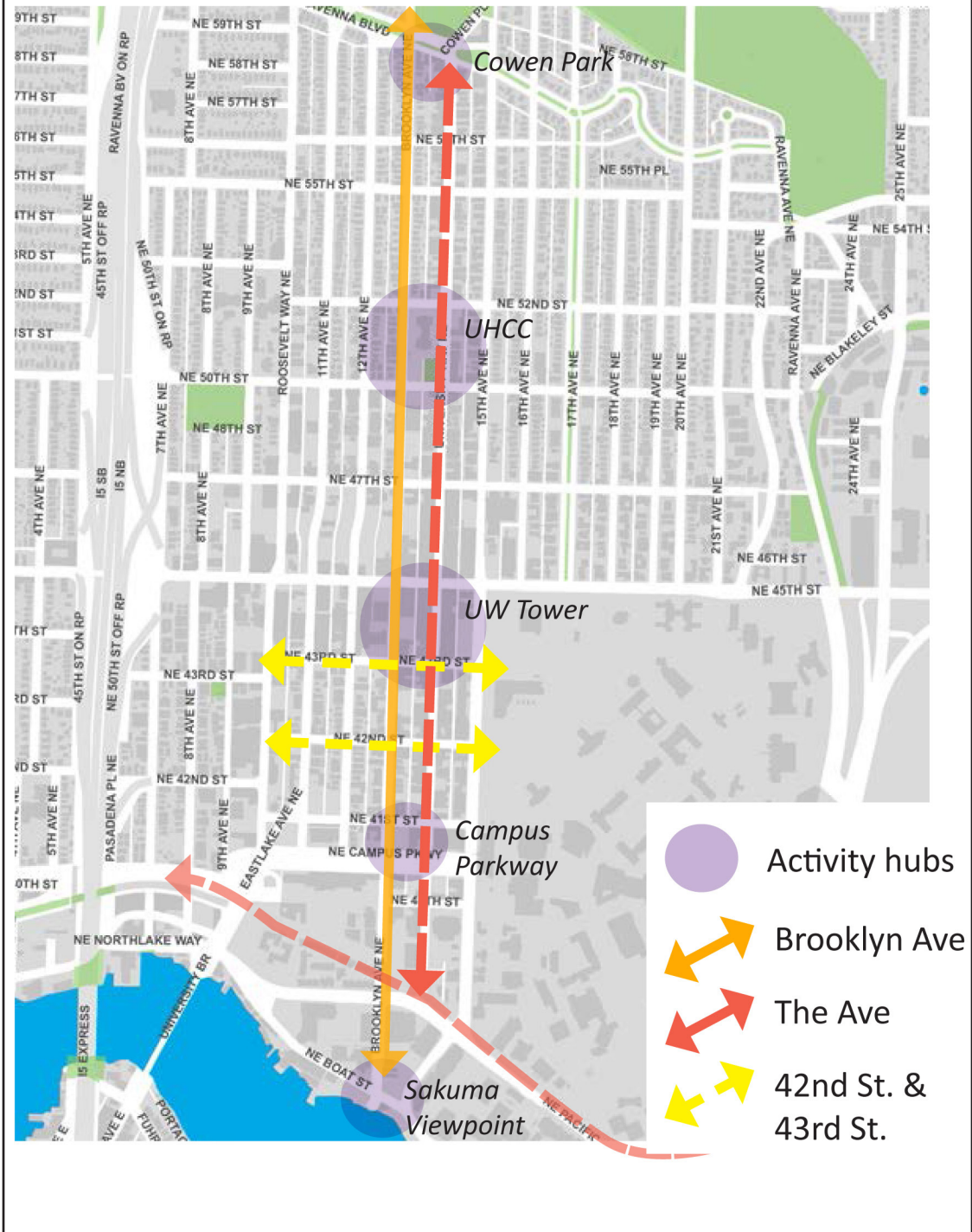
[FIG 3.8] Land Use map of the U District

Future growth



[FIG 3.9] 10 Minutes Walking area from the site

Walking



[FIG 3.10] Walking corridors of the site

- **Homeless services**

“Foyer model “

The services and organizations that do exist, like Youthcare, are always at capacity and working hard to take care of the day to day. However, many of these organizations are also looking to innovate in their approaches to the larger patterns of youth homelessness. One innovation that we looked at is the “Foyer model”.

“Foyers are integrated learning and accommodation centers providing safe and secure housing, support and training for young people aged 16-25” (foyer.net)

In order to support and facilitate a transition to independence, the Foyer model approaches and helps youth homelessness by focusing on the advantages and energy of the youth. Foyers provide housing, education, and job instruction in exchange for a commitment to care the community through their behavior and effort.

“In many cases the buildings and the services they provide become a beacon and landmark in the area and help the youth out of shadows and into society.” (YouthCare Visioning Studio)

The Foyer model approaches youth homelessness by focusing on the assets and energy of the youth in order to support

and facilitate a transition to independence. Foyers provide housing, education, and training in exchange for a commitment to support the community through their behavior and work. In many cases the buildings and the services they provide become a beacon and landmark in the area and help the youth out of shadows and into society. (YouthCare Visioning Studio)

PRO Youth

Connecting homeless Seattle youth with services is often done through PRO Youth (Partners Reaching Out to Youth Countywide). A partnership of the City of Seattle and seven local social service agencies operating throughout King County, PRO Youth agencies reach more than 700 youth on the street that might not otherwise be helped.

The primary goal of PRO Youth is to help hard-to-serve homeless youth make the transition to safe, permanent housing. Trained case managers work to help youth access housing and other resources including healthcare, benefits, employment, education, and counseling. PRO Youth peer leaders, who are formerly or currently homeless and understand problems that street youth face, usually make the all-important first connection with street youth. They give the supports from a perspective of a variety of issues including street survival and the prejudicial experiences homeless youth face every day.

PRO Youth is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1994, with matching dollars from the City of Seattle General Fund. “The 2013-2014 local and federal distributions PRO Youth services, including case management, outreach, housing placement and retention, and job training, total approximately \$968,658 per year.” (Homeless Youth Programs & Services)

3) Design guidelines of the site

“Most significantly, Sound Transit will bring light rail to the U District in 2021. A new station at Brooklyn Ave NE and NE 43rd St. will provide a high speed connection to downtown and neighborhoods north and south. This infrastructure investment will fundamentally change the context of the U District, leading to substantial development over the next 15-20 years. It will also require major coordination between transportation agencies.” - U District Urban Design Framework

U District station is one of the four proposed stations in Northgate Link Extension project. Northgate Link Extension (formerly known as “North Link”) is a northern extension of the University Link light rail line that will connect the University District to Northgate in Seattle. The 4.3 miles light rail extension includes stations in the University District,

Roosevelt, and Northgate neighborhoods. “Northgate Link Extension is scheduled to open for service in 2021. The project is part of the Sound Transit 2 (ST2) package approved by voters in November 2008.” (Northgate Link Extension” Wikipedia) When the station opens, riders will be able to travel to the airport in 41 minutes and to Northgate in about 5 minutes.

Right now, the site is fenced and under construction for site excavation. According to the sound transit official report, the design of the U District station is in 50 percent design phase and they will refine the design into the 90 percent design stage and present to the public in mid-2015. It is expected that riders will board trains underground. The station will have two entrances from Brooklyn Ave NE with elevators and stairs. The station will have about 100 bikes parking spaces. “This station was known as “Brooklyn Station” during earlier planning stages. Its official name is now U District Station.” (“U District Station.”)

The key features of the designs are:

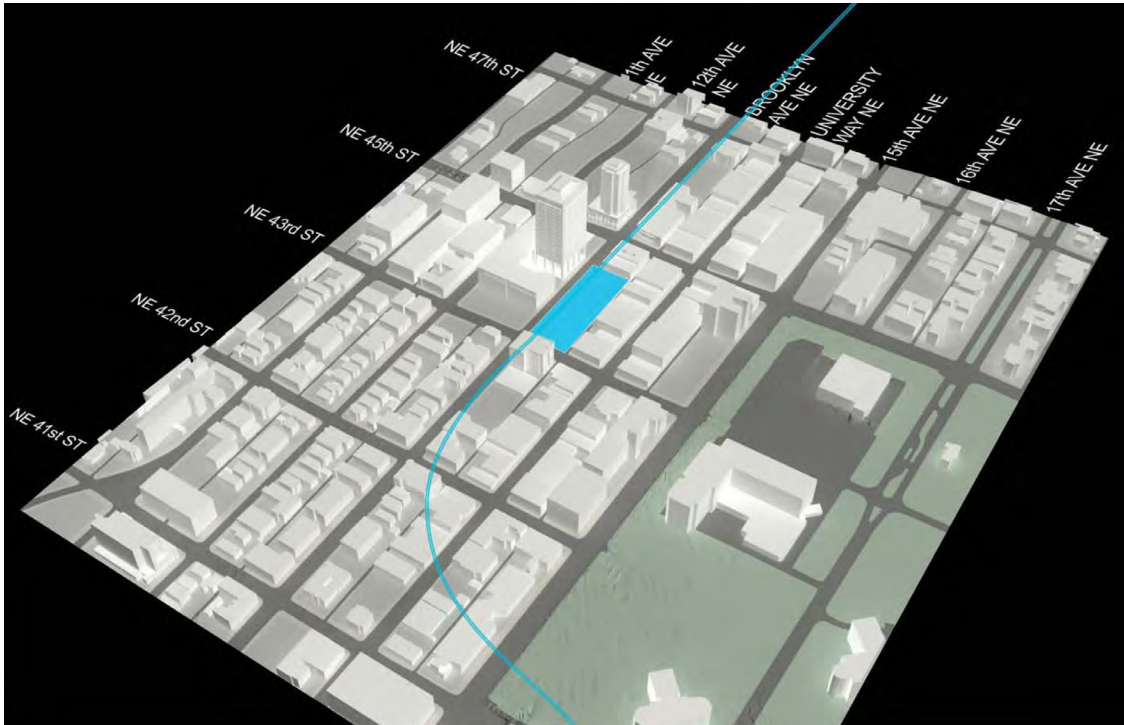
1. Station platform will be about 80 feet below ground
2. Two station entrances: one adjacent to the Neptune Theatre on Brooklyn Ave NE and the other at NE 43rd Street and Brooklyn Ave NE
3. Elevators, escalators and stairs at each entrance
4. Ticket vending machines
5. Covered bicycle storage (approximately 100 spaces)



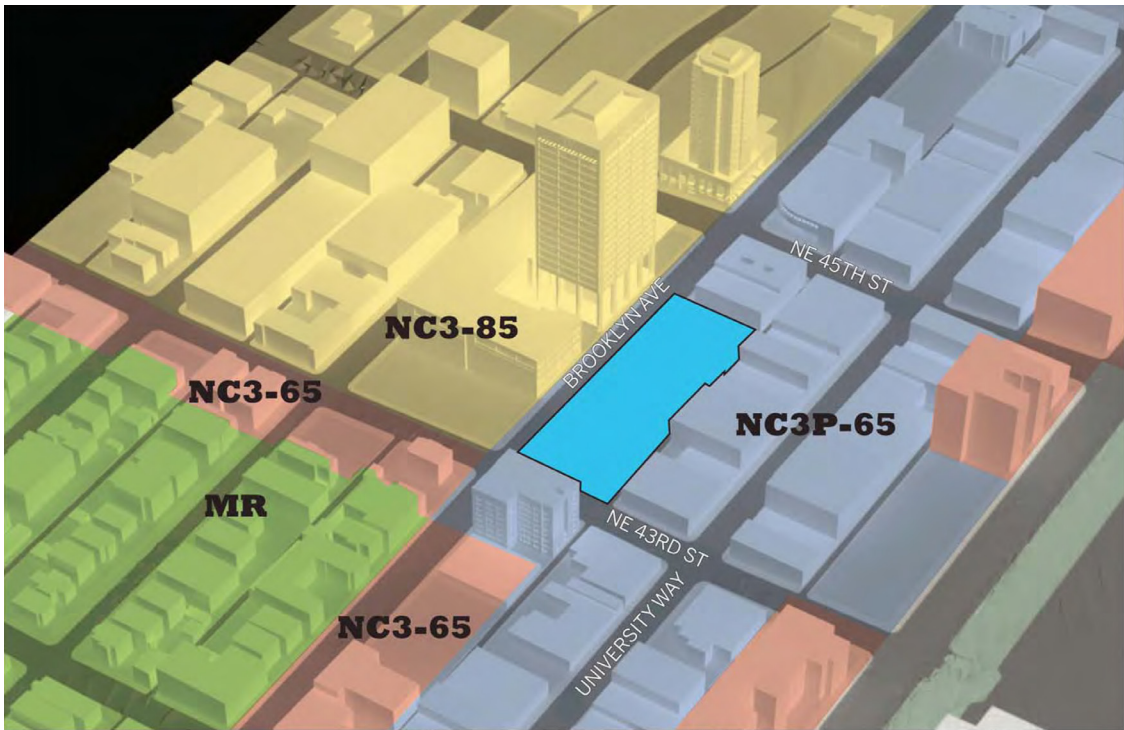
[FIG 3.11] Site Photos of South entrance of the Plaza



[FIG 3.12] Site Photos of North entrance of the Plaza

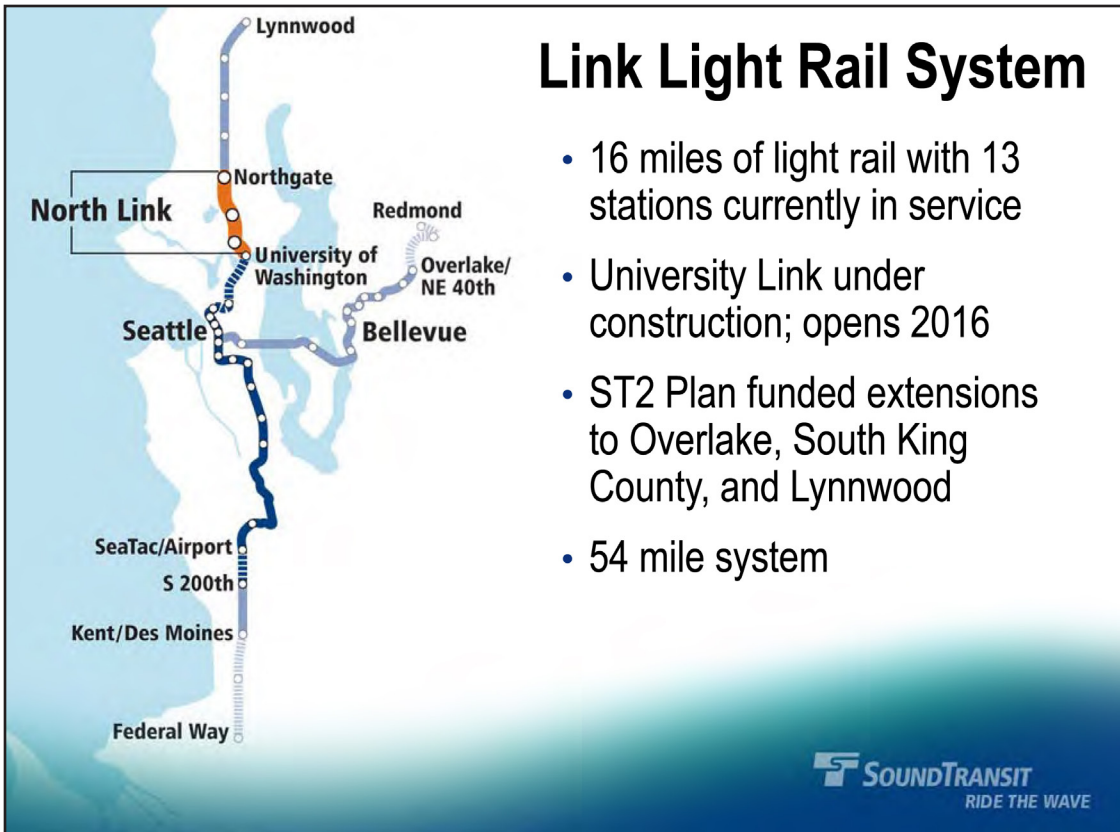


[FIG 3.14] Site context model

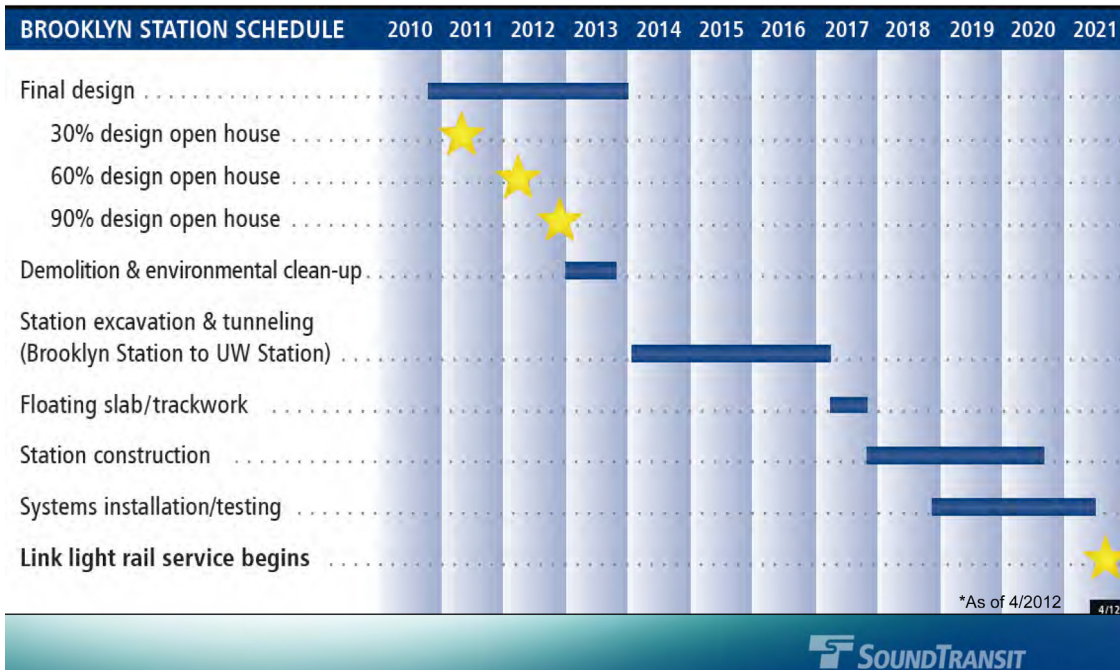


<p>NC3-85: NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL 3 85'-0" HEIGHT LIMIT</p>	<p>NC3-65: NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL 3 65'-0" HEIGHT LIMIT</p>	<p>NC3P-65: NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL 3 PEDESTRIAN ORIENTED 65'-0" HEIGHT LIMIT</p>	<p>MR: RESIDENTIAL, MULTI-FAMILY, MID RISE 60'-0" HEIGHT LIMIT</p>
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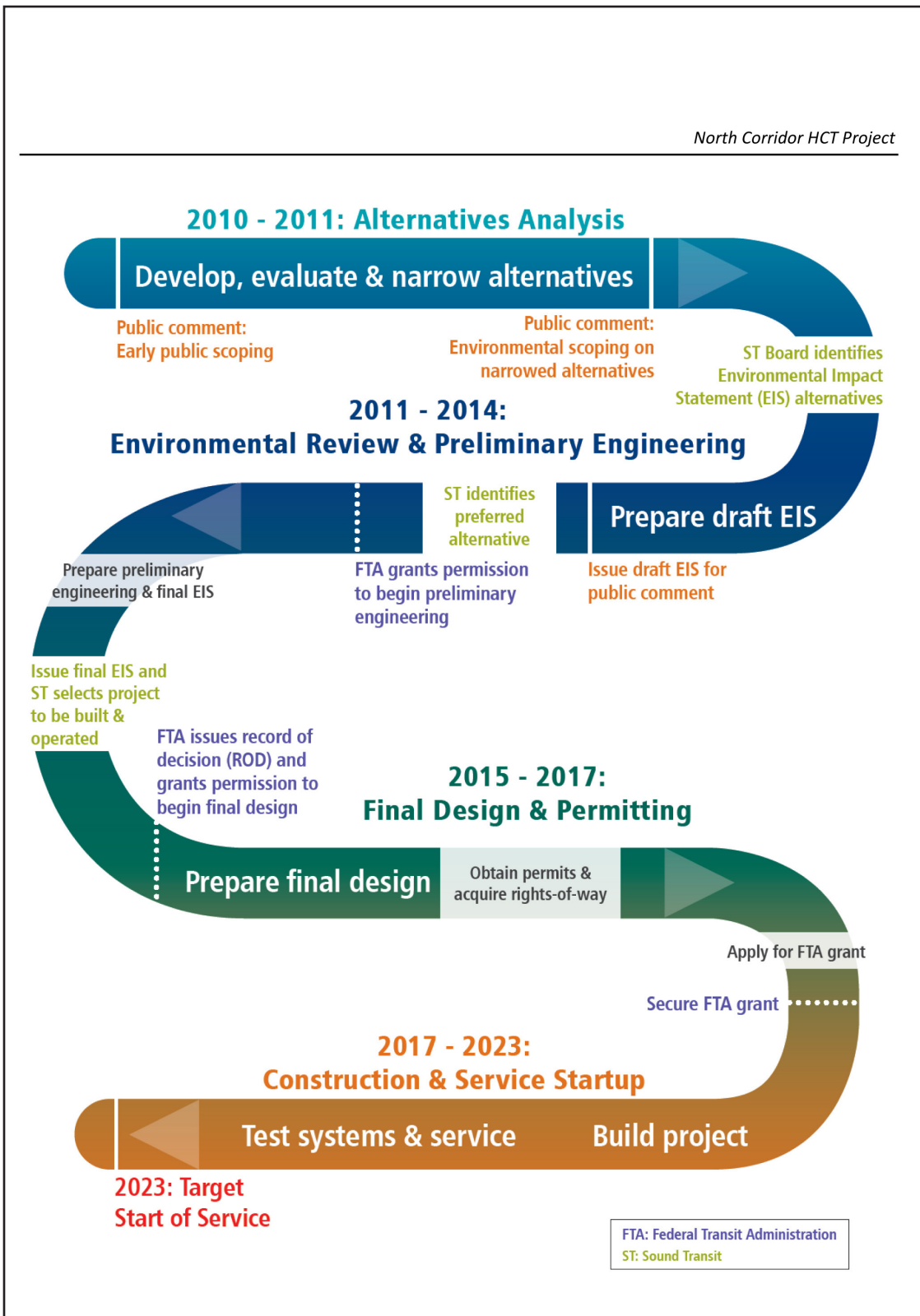
[FIG 3.15] Height limit of the site surroundings



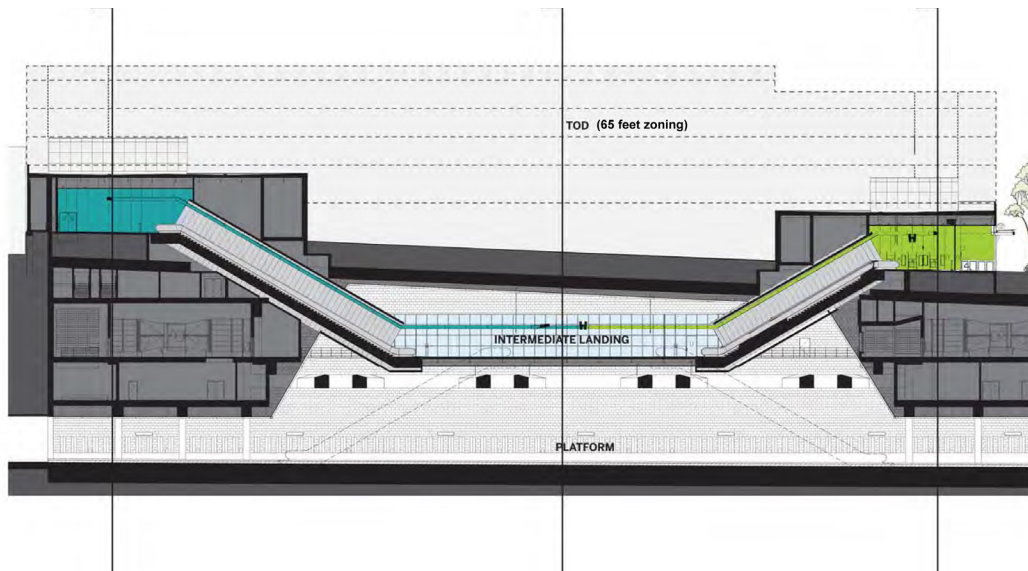
[FIG 3.15] Height limit of the site surroundings



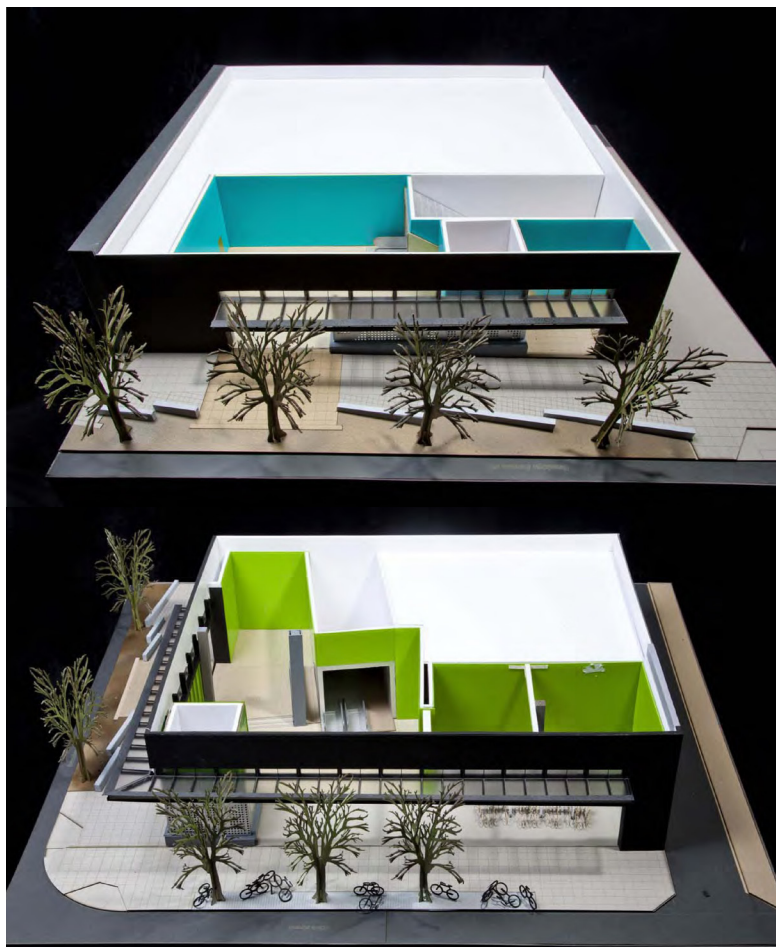
[FIG 3.17] Brooklyn Station Schedule



[FIG 3.18] Sound Transit North Corridor HCT Project timeline



[FIG 3.19] U District Station Proposal underground tunnel Section



[FIG 3.20] U District Station Proposal models



[FIG 3.21] U District Station Proposal Sections



[FIG 3.22] U District Station Proposal Perspective



[FIG 3.23] U District Station Proposal Perspective

- **Proposal of the new stations**

The U District Link Light Rail station, planned to begin service in 2021, is likely to be the single biggest driver for neighborhood change in the next 20 years. Not surprisingly, the U District community has a strong interest in the future of the station site and its surroundings.

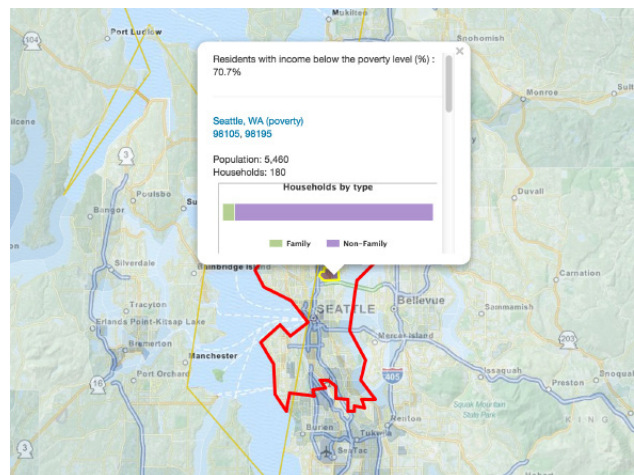
4) The challenges and opportunities of the site

“In March 2004, Seattle was recognized in a report released by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development as one of the seven cities in the United States that are leading the way towards reducing chronic homelessness.”
(“Homelessness in Seattle” Wikipedia)

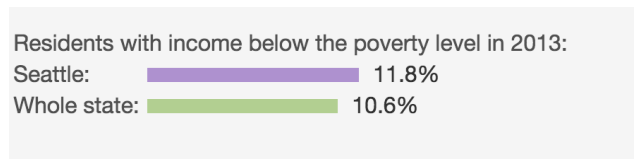
Besides traditional programs, such as homeless shelters, low-income housing and hygiene programs. Seattle also has some more innovative programs run by nonprofit groups. In U District, particularly, there are some programs (I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four) helping youth homeless to get job training and make money instead of panhandling, such as The Homelessness Project, Seattle Youth Garden Works and YMCA’s Working Zone.

However, according to 2015 One Night Count, which takes place at the end of January each year, there were 10,047 homeless in King County, and among them, there were 2,993 in the transitional housing, 3,282 in shelters and 3,772 on the streets. 3123 homeless have no place to sleep. The number without shelters grew by 21% in 2015.

Besides, the U-District has the highest poverty level (which is 70.7% according to city-data.com) among all the neighborhoods in Seattle, with the city average poverty level 11.8% and Washington State 10.6%.



[FIG 3.24] U District Poverty Level (city-data.com)



[FIG 3.25] City of Seattle and Washington State Poverty Level (city-data.com)

CHAPTER FOUR: SITE DESIGN AND PROGRAMS

The site is located in the U-District with the future use as a link transit station. The city is planning to build two underground stations from North and South sides, and my project is designing the plaza in between. Based on the youth population and needs of youth and adult homeless, this project is designed as a public plaza with kinds of social interactions. Building upon observations of and conversations with homeless, the idea of Urban Living Room represents a new way of living outdoor in the city. For the commuters, the plaza and streets are places for them to travel through and pause briefly. For the homeless, however, this plaza is a place for them to rest, eat, make money on their own, search for online information, study and grow. The plaza open space also provides the community a potential space to hold big events or exhibition and so on.

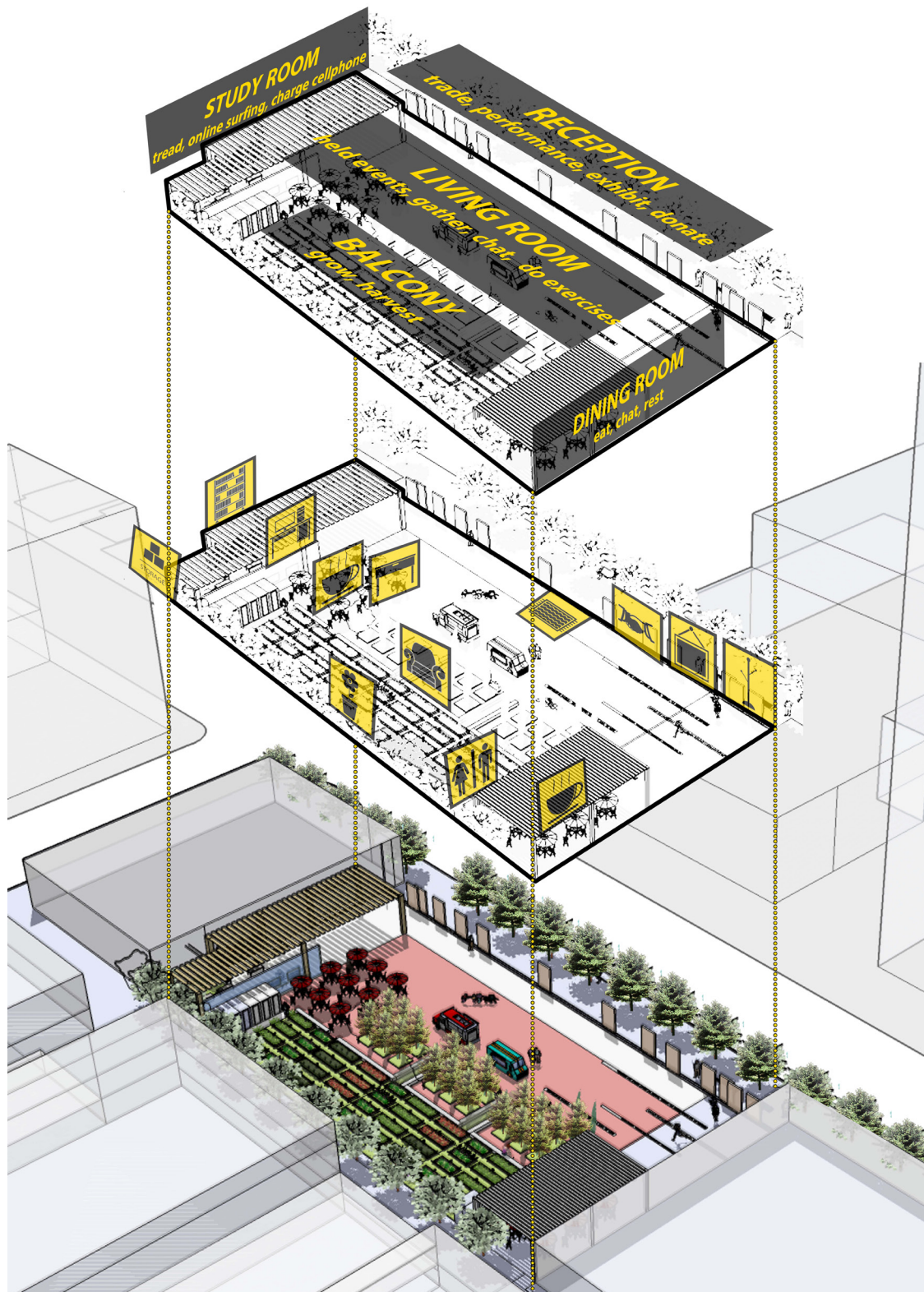
1) Design

- **Concept of urban living room**

I call my design “Urban Living Room” because I hope this plaza could provide people with a safe, relaxing, and productive, interactive space with sense of belonging just like being at home.

Based on the research of the site context, and the design guidelines from the U District Partnership, my design will include several aspects listed below:

1. East/west pedestrian connections will be crucial on NE 45th St. and NE 43rd St. Sidewalk improvements will be important, and may require ground level setbacks to make room on 45th. Explore tools to achieve mid-block east/west pedestrian pathways as part of redevelopment.
2. Improve surrounding intersections to make them more comfortable and convenient for pedestrians. Signal timing, special paving materials, “scramble” crossings, and new signage should all be considered.
3. Explore opportunities to create “festival streets” around the station, that is, streets that can be closed off easily for special events. Ideally this would include design elements that tie the sidewalks and the street together in a continuous design. The west and south edge of the station block are the highest priority, but it may be appropriate to extend these festival streets farther along Brooklyn and NE 43rd St.



[FIG 4.1] Analysis the concept of Urban Living Room

4. Redevelopment should include some kind of publicly accessible space such as a park, plaza, galleria, or arcade. There are several parcels that may be appropriate for this along Brooklyn and NE 43rd St. near or above the station. The station itself is the largest portion of the site, but part of the site will be occupied by aboveground station utilities. If any of these concepts are pursued, the City should evaluate regulatory mechanisms to “make whole” property owners that would experience any loss of development potential. This could be achieved through a transfer of development potential to other sites in the neighborhood.
5. Thoughtful, continuous programming and management will determine how successful any publicly accessible space will be. This activation could be through retail, services, recreational uses, cultural programming, a farmers market, or a combination thereof, but defined activities and maintenance responsibilities are crucial. Partnering between the City, business community, UW, and/or Farmer’s Market could help realize this vision.
6. Activating the alleys of the blocks identified (right) could build off of existing businesses with alley frontage (Cafe Allegro, Schultz’s) to create fine-grained network of shops and public spaces.

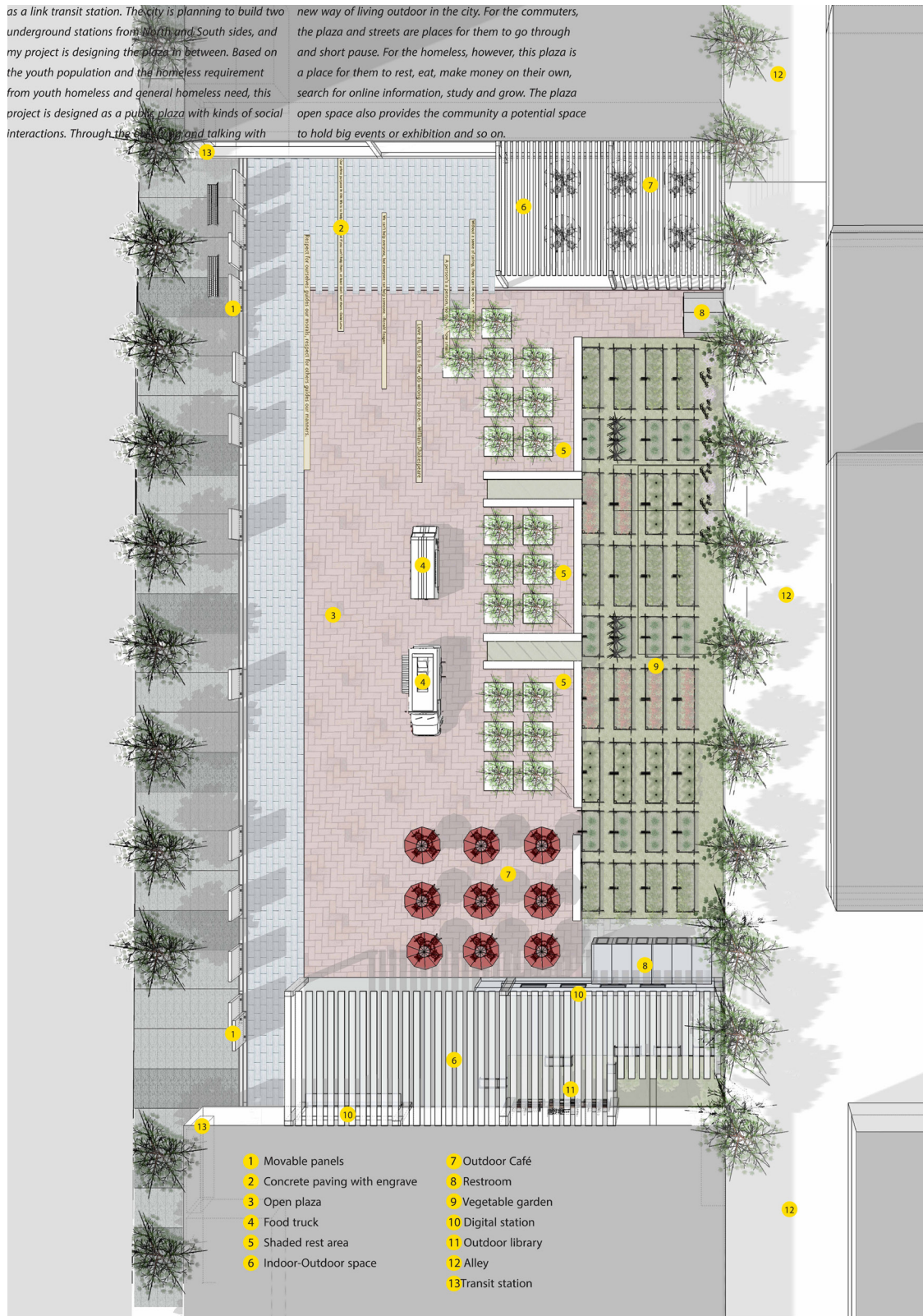
2) Programs in the design

As Seattle/King County coalition on homelessness (whose mission is to ensure safety and survival for people who are homeless, and to end the crisis of homeless in our region) reported, “To succeed, we must incorporate survival services into our systemic approach to ending homelessness by transforming the shelter system from a tattered safety net of overnight-only shelters to a model of 24-hour interim housing with on-site services tied to comprehensive street outreach. Doing this will better assist people who are homeless to meet their emergency needs, while working with them to secure stable, appropriate housing. Such models exist in our region on a limited basis, and have demonstrated success here and in other parts of the nation. This kind of systemic change, however, can only be accomplished with greater investment in survival services. The return on investment will be significant: fewer people on the street, greater ability to transition people to federal entitlement benefits and to housing with an appropriate level of services.” (Seattle/King County coalition on homelessness)

Most of the users in U District are youth. Talking with some of the homeless people in U District, a young girl inspire me by talking about her problem and need from the society: “Being a homeless youth, the biggest problem for me is hard to find what to do tomorrow. I hope to have something to do and live on my own soon.”

as a link transit station. The city is planning to build two underground stations from North and South sides, and my project is designing the plaza in between. Based on the youth population and the homeless requirement from youth homeless and general homeless need, this project is designed as a public plaza with kinds of social interactions. Through the sitting and talking with

new way of living outdoor in the city. For the commuters, the plaza and streets are places for them to go through and short pause. For the homeless, however, this plaza is a place for them to rest, eat, make money on their own, search for online information, study and grow. The plaza open space also provides the community a potential space to hold big events or exhibition and so on.



[FIG 4.2] Master Plan of the U District Station plaza design

With the prediction that there will be a lot more people coming to use the site after the establishment of U District station, I propose my design as an active place for various temporary activities and events, a convenient place for commuters passing through, a transitional place for homeless to get job training and education, a place that provides basic physical and digital needs, and a hub that encourages more social interactions.



[FIG 4.3] Examples of using the vertical wall as a donation station

The programs that this design provides include:

- **Movable panels**

Depending on the events and activities, the panels could be movable, in order to provide flexible use. It will be the most active reception zone in the plaza and attract people. The activities that might happen along the panels include trading, donation and exhibition. These panels could be an ideal place for “Real Change” vendors to sell newspapers; With some notices hanging on the panels, it could be a place for people to donate clothes to homeless.

Also, since there are some art training classes near the U District, the panels could potentially be walls for homeless to do art exhibitions. Overall, the movable panels could be a stage for different actors to perform in the public realm.

- **Engraved Concrete Paving**

The purpose of designing engraved paving is to remind the passengers to respect, help and value everyone in the city. By reading some quotes on the ground, I hope to create a caring, loving and respectful culture in this area. The quotes include:

1. "Respect for ourselves guides our morals, respect for others guides our manners."
2. "A person's a person, no matter how small."
3. "Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none. William Shakespeare"
4. "We can't help everyone, but everyone can help someone."
5. "Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them.-Dalai Lama"
6. "Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community."

- **Open plaza**

The design includes an open plaza for various activities. Learning from Bryant Park, there might be some outdoor classes targeting the people working or studying nearby during the weekdays. Classes might include yoga, language learning corner, plant recognition and so on. During the weekends and holidays, however, with the culture of street fairs on U Way, and with the future possibility of changing the Brooklyn Ave into a green belt for pedestrians, there might be more gathering activities for the public. So the purpose of this open plaza is to contain unique activities for different groups.



[FIG 4.4] Looking South of the Plaza from the station with engraved paving on the ground

- **Food truck**

The dominant users of the site are commuters passing through during rush hours, and people who working and studying nearby. A food truck would build upon the culture of dining on the Ave and provides an open space for people to enjoy the food. For the homeless, a food truck could connect with the garden on the site and the food bank service in the U District: People who grow and harvest vegetables could trade with the food bank, gain tokens, and use them to buy food from the food truck.

- **Outdoor Café**

This area contains movable chairs and tables. After people get the food from the food truck, they could come to outdoor café to take a rest. Homeless people could help build furniture from the nearby church or workshop. After they complete the pieces, they could sell them to the Seattle Park Department or the U District Organizations, move them to the plaza, and make money from it. They could also set up a donation station and put a notice to tell people the story behind the pieces of furniture.



[FIG 4.5] Outdoor Café and movable furniture



[FIG 4.6] Garden and resting area

- **Restrooms and lockers**

Although there may be some restrooms in the station, I am proposing more restrooms on the site. Water from the restroom units could be used to irrigate the gardens. The restrooms could also serve as storage rooms for tools used in the garden. Lack of restrooms and lockers are among the biggest problems for homeless. I hope to help them with this basic need on the site.

Not only homeless, lockers can also help to make the life easier for commuters. When people travel from a long distance and have some property not in use at the moment,

they could conveniently drop a quarter into the locker and stock their stuff in the lockers. After cleaning out the lockers, they could take back the quarter.

- **Green space and garden**

A green space cared for by its members, contains personal and shared areas gardened by members, and contains ornamental or agricultural plantings.

The American Community Gardening Association(ACGA, not to be confused with its antithesis, the American corn growers association) defines a community garden

as “any piece of land gardened by a group of people.” My current thinking about this defines three broad categories:

1. Park
2. A green space open to the public, but not cared for by them; no membership requirement
3. Community garden

Community gardens have always been temporary spaces. “Social actions by advocacy groups during times of need,” Mr. Hood said. “But when better milder created this nonprofit and gave ownership to these spaces, they become this real thing.” (Flatbush Gardener)

Dedicated to agricultural - food - production, and often setup as a program providing services to a targeted community, farming is one of the ways to help homeless with job training. The homeless youth need a regular work schedule, and I think the garden would provide more and more diverse job training for them. The community garden could be run as a profit-making venture.

- **Digital station and Outdoor library**

The digital time has led to a boundless age. For homeless young people in this community, being able to use digital media is largely contingent. There are two additive forces appear to bring out the way of living with digital media. For one, holding onto digital products, which are valuable, and are always positioned in fulfilling immediate

needs. As we have seen, immediate needs seem to include the “exchange of goodwill, which is likely crucial for survival on the street” (Bantchevska, 2008) . For another, access to necessary infrastructure is also contingent, “subject to its mere availability, but also subject to the control and surveillance by people or institutions”. (Woelfer, Jill Palzkill, and David G. Hendry, 2011)

In these social conditions, such as homeless with out a stable indoor place to live, we can realize a way of living with digital artifacts and media.

Explicitly, the reliant forces that appear are to present a challenge to “ensoulment” (Bleviss and Stolterman, 2007) and “product attachment theory” (Zimmerman, 2009) . This challenge seems important when products are designed to support “role transition—the design of products that support the process of discovering and inventing yourself” (Zimmerman, 2009) . Yet, homeless young people may benefit the most from such products. (Woelfer, J Palzkill, and David G. Hendry, 2011) From this perspective, we propose the following constraints for designing information systems for homeless young people: (Woelfer, Jill Palzkill, and David G. Hendry, 2011)

(1) Technological uses are ordinary but are conditioned by the extraordinary circumstances of homelessness.

(2) Digital artifacts, by their tethering to infrastructure, can subject young people to new forms of scrutiny.

(3) Young people are likely to use mobile devices and media to create and reciprocate goodwill for surviving on the street.

(4) Digital artifacts might be given up spontaneously or with forethought, but interest in media, especially music, is likely to persist.

(5) Young people may seek to repeatedly singularize digital devices and then later remake them as commodities.

In the project, realizing the necessity of digital media for homeless youth, I propose a digital station in the plaza. Adjacent to the station building, this station is under the shelter concerning the climate of Seattle. People could surf the Internet, charge their phones, read books and rest. This station is a combination of library and computer room, and the outdoor bookshelf as a media, provides people to donate and borrow books for free. Through the Internet, homeless could be able to learn more information about finding a job. Software developers could also build a digital system among the city to connect the employment news to the computers in this station.



[FIG 4.7] Digital Station with outdoor library

CHAPTER FIVE: DESIGN REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

*“The built environment can heavily influence human behavior, daily choices, and life opportunities that may lead to healthy or unhealthy living style. Because of its enormous influence on human lives, a mindfully, healthfully designed, planned and operated built environment could even act as a form of widespread preventive medicine for unhealthy of all forms, halting some diseases, illnesses and disabilities long before they even come to fruition”
(Frumkin, 2011)*

The design of the U District Station Plaza is an exploration on more social, comprehensive and dynamic programs of helping homelessness in this area. I hope this design can inspire the government to propose more diverse and systematic programs in this plaza to improve the living environment after the establishment of the stations. Besides, I hope this plaza, as a hub of the U District, could contain as much positive meanings as possible for different groups.

To homeless people, this design will be a connection between different programs and services in the U District. Like a front end in the computer programming, people use this public plaza to search for information, interact with others, and investigate the prospective possibilities of their living. The small design interventions are as medias, they not only provide some basic needs of a human being, but also offer the chance such as education, mental care, job training and so

on. Through this inclusive, accessible and social environment, homeless youth will experience an appropriate, encouraging, and optimistic living. With this transitional stage in the city, I hope the homeless youth could get better chance of education and job training as others and confident enough to control their own life.

This plaza, as I mentioned in Chapter one, is an example among the network of hubs that I propose. By creating a hub network in the urban fabric, the dynamic programs could enhance the city with a healthier social environment. Not only for homelessness, the individual hub can stipulate numerous services towards vulnerable people as an indication to mental, physical and environmental health care. From the city scale, each hub within distinctive neighborhood has a different cultural and background context, and one could potentially compensate for another in the design of programs.

As an example, the U District in Seattle has more public services, institution and commercial land with diverse cultural background youth homeless, so the design of the hub is to provide a comprehensive and active programs in education and so on. However, in the Wallingford neighborhood, there are more multi-family residential buildings and other life-related industries, such as dining, grocery and gym. The potential design of the hub in Wallingford might include affordable housing and food and fitness related programs.

The further exploration of this thesis will include the application to other neighborhoods in the city, and the broader functions for vulnerable people such as seniors, people with disability, people with low income and so on. Overall, I hope this thesis as an inspiration to guide the future generations and myself to explore the potential built environment design facing the challenge of American contemporary city development. As Daniel Callahan said, "Health is not just a term to be defined. Intuitively, if we have lived at all, it is something we seek and value"

"Although is hard to evaluate, define, and can be subjective, health should be viewed in a holistic sense including economic, environmental, ecological, physical, mental, spiritual, social and civic health, implying a relationship between people, culture, landscapes and ecological systems, spanning multiple scales of personal, local and global and time frames from immediate to long term. It is constantly evolving and difficult to predict. It requires constant evaluation and reflection against a pre-established standard best determined by all stakeholders and users of a project."
(Andrews, 2013)

In doing this thesis I have learned more unexpected things about my understanding of the American society, poverty and homelessness. I realize that in order to be a better designer, I must set aside my assumption first and be open-minded during the process. I feel that I have challenged myself by thinking in different social roles. The fresh perspective made me interested in this field. I hope that I could continue attempting to find the value and balance of being a landscape architect in contributing to the future society.

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