

Shifting Perception:

Defining Space through Architectonic Form

Mauricio Pérez

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Shifting Perception:
Defining Space Through
Architectonic Form.

Masters of Architecture

University of Detroit Mercy
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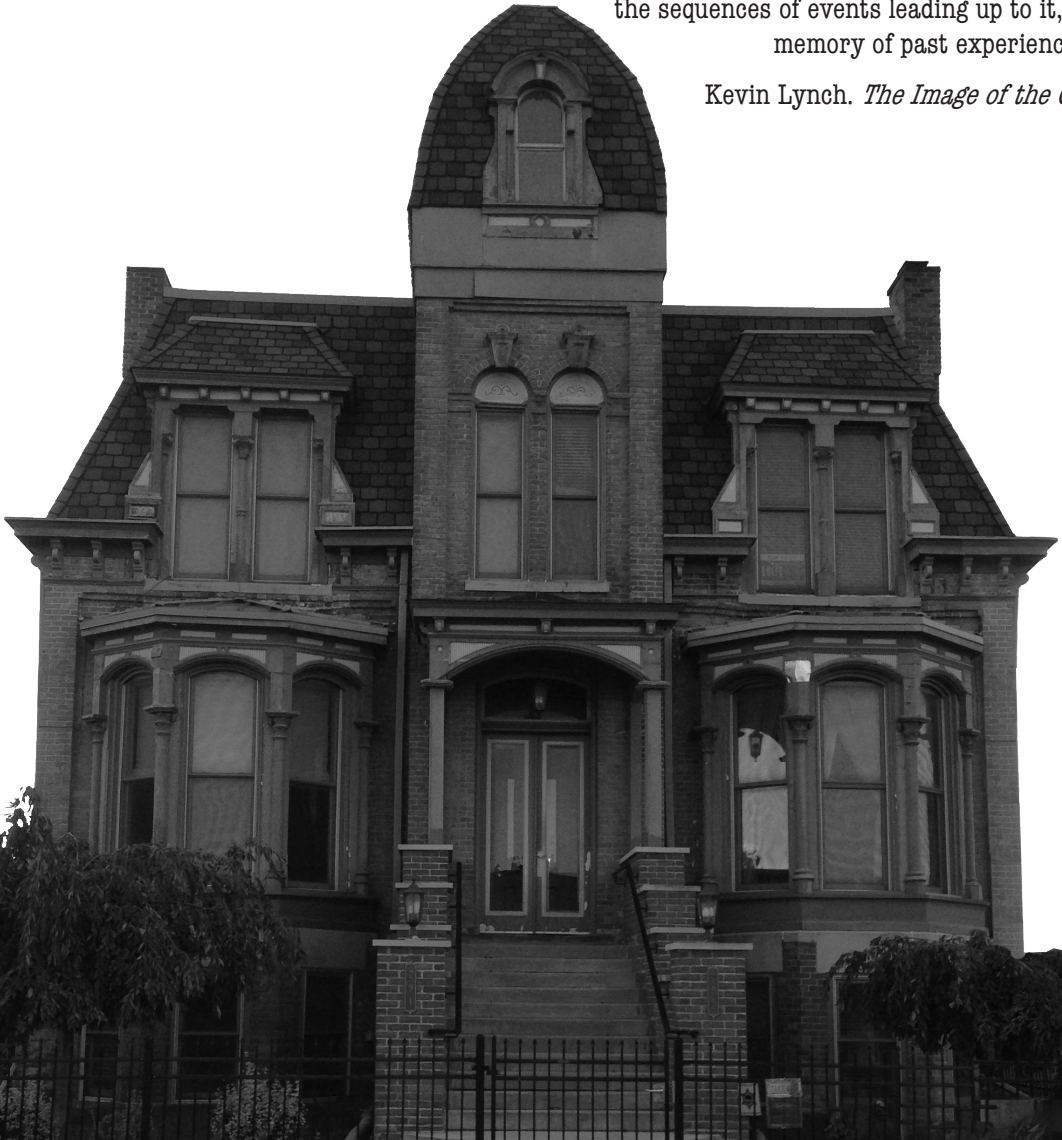
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Under the advisement of:
Noah Resnick, Associate
Professor of Architecture

April 2014.

“At every instance there is more than the eye can see,
more than the ear can hear...nothing is experienced by
itself, but always in relation to its surroundings,
the sequences of events leading up to it, the
memory of past experiences.”

Kevin Lynch. *The Image of the City.*



Contents:

Introduction	7
Site	11
History of Brush Park	17
Location	31
Methodology	37
Proposal	53
References	65
Acknowledgements	67



Down Down
17-18

Introduction



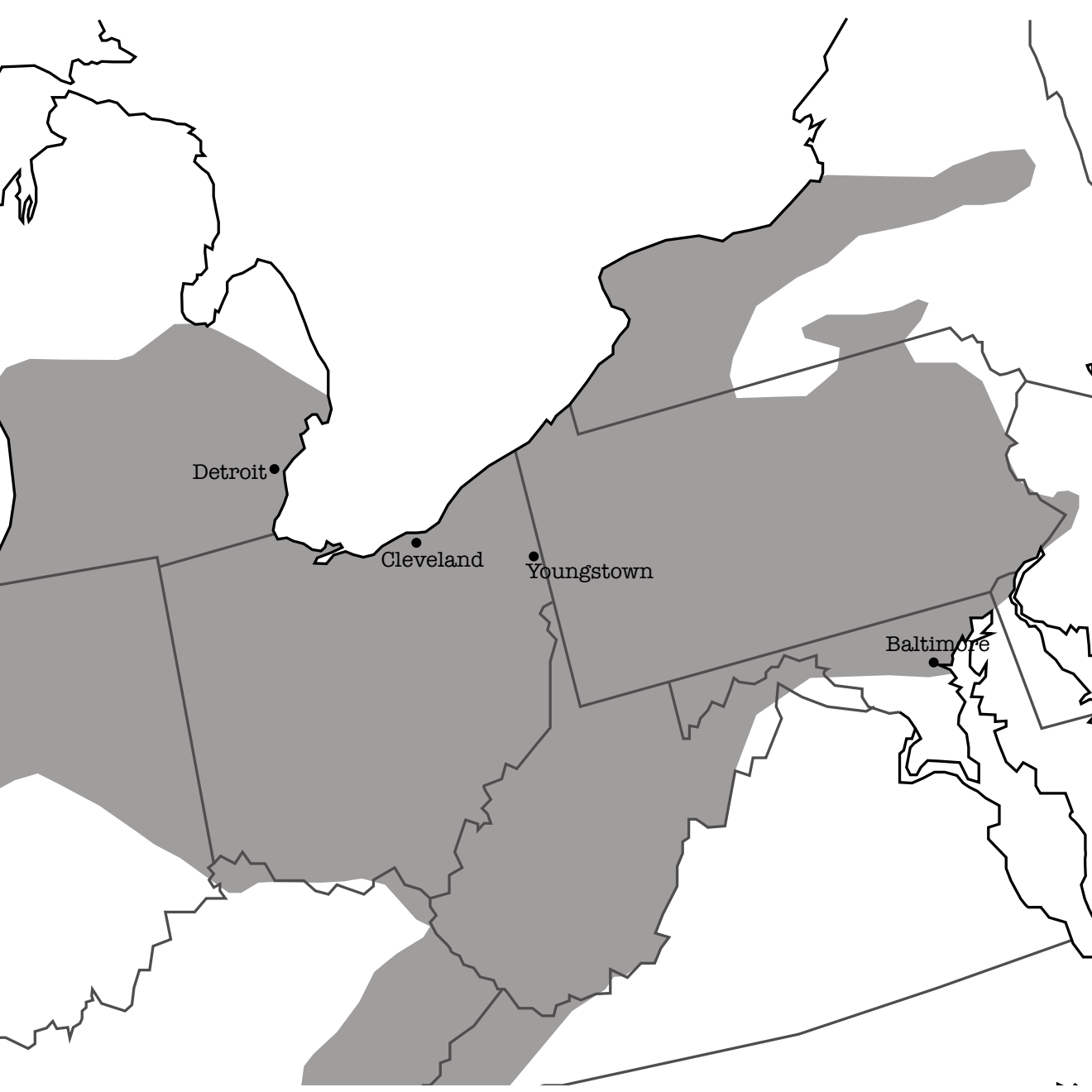
There exists a constant dialogue with an individual and their interaction with space, architecture, and being. At a primal level, the individual develops a dichotomous understanding of environment.

At one spectrum exists the physically tangible and regulated ideas; these emanate in formal definitions of country, state, city, and block. Many neighborhoods but more so turfs represent metaphysical space - varying in definition and regularly fluctuating. The latter is a culturally understood space and has blurred edges that change with each report. Whether physical or idealized, both equally shape an individual's perception of environment as they mature and develop.

Experience endures as both an inevitable and necessary part of life because to live is to engage with life and through doing so create experiences. While active experience only deals with individual points in time, the ability to remember them lends more to comprehension. Memory, in relation to experiential recall, is fundamental to spatial growth and active perception because it is derived from the continuum of experience. As an individual grows and engages life, the experiences and thus memories of their life blend to form a cumulative understanding.

Naturally, memory relies most heavily on the most recent experience or past prominent memories. Manipulating and creating a new memory of an environment allows for a shift in how it is experienced as well as the perception of it because to "experience is to learn; ...acting on the given and creating out of the given"². Using architectonic form as an intervention allows for a shift in the experience of an urban space and contributes to the creation of a new vision of how an environment can be developed and invested in based on any given proposal.

The intervention manipulates pre-conceived notions and ideals to strengthen, weaken, or ultimately remove them. The product of altering spatial perception through analysis, design, and implementation fosters new investment and growth by outside developers.



Detroit

Cleveland

Youngstown

Baltimore

Site

Critical to proper deliberation is a site unbridled with stigmas and idealizations of what that environment “is”. Throughout the United States, but primarily in the postindustrial region referred to as the “Rust Belt”, reside cities with locations and areas that exhibit these and other characteristics that define it as undesirable or as a forsaken community.

Typically as a result of urban sprawl, these areas reside in core areas of the city and have misappropriated perceptions of the potential. Detroit, Michigan, Youngstown, Ohio, Baltimore, Maryland, and Cleveland, Ohio are all infamous cities plagued with the dire consequences of urban sprawl.



Base Source: Google

Largely visited and widely photographed for its ruins stands, for now, Brush Park. Few places hold as many individually pre-conceived notions in the way that Brush Park does. The decision to cull Brush Park from among other disparagement sites draws from the duality of its history and physical location.

MAP OF THE
CITY OF DETROIT.
 1873.

Compiled by Eugene Robinson, City Surveyor.

Exist. according to Congress Act 1817 by Eugene Robinson in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

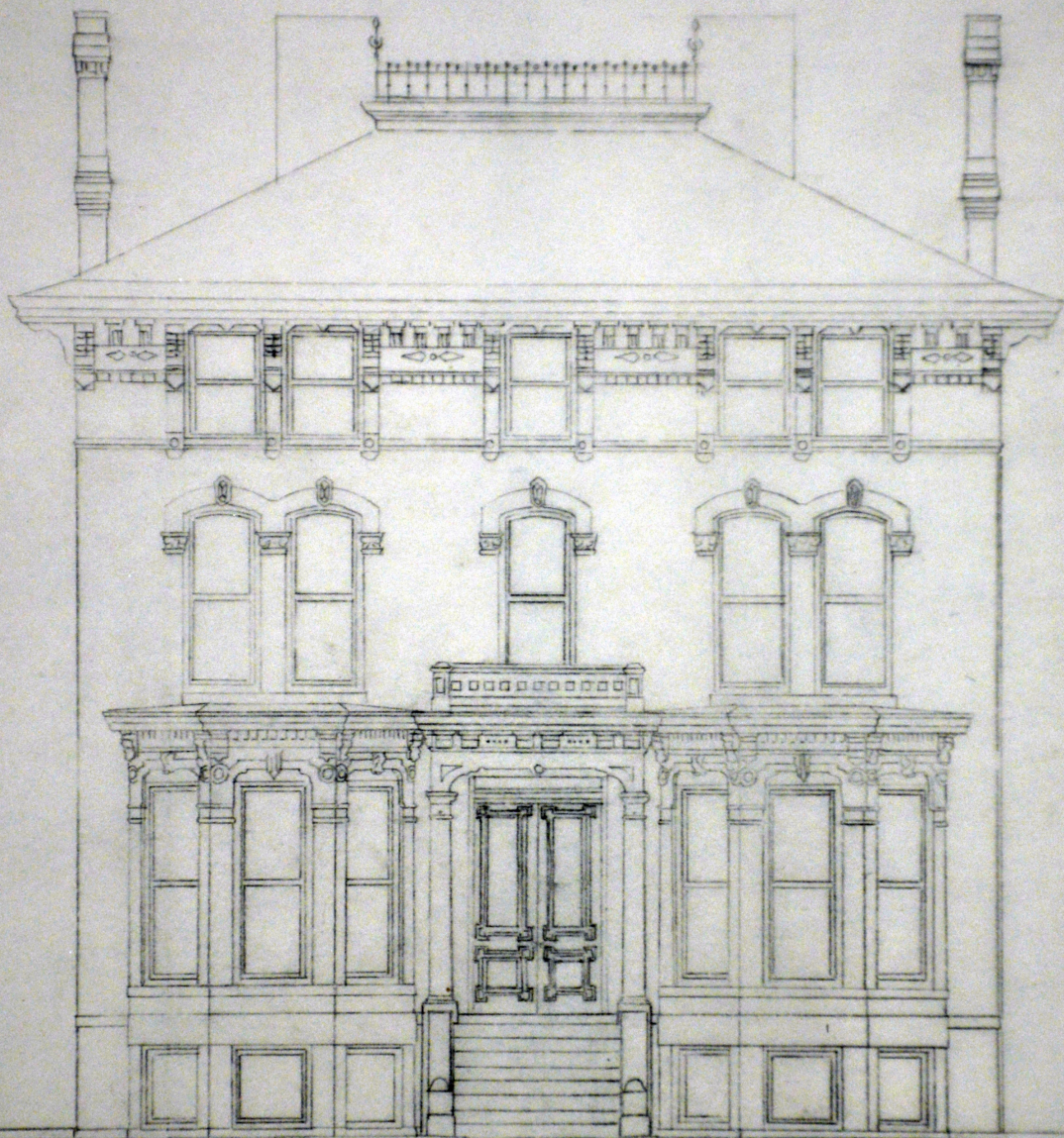
The Cabinet Lith. Co. Detroit



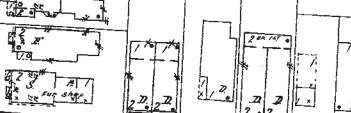
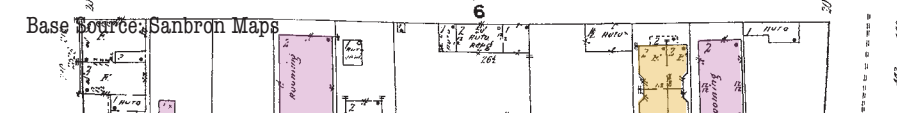
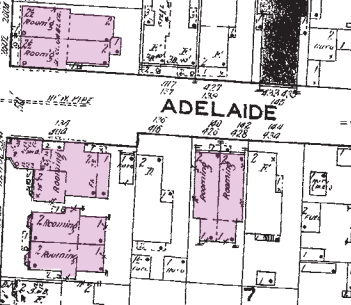
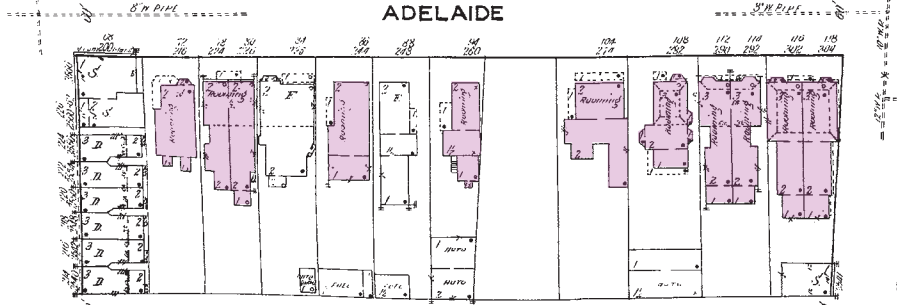
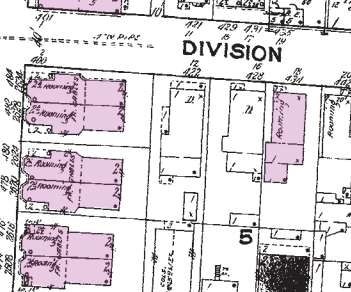
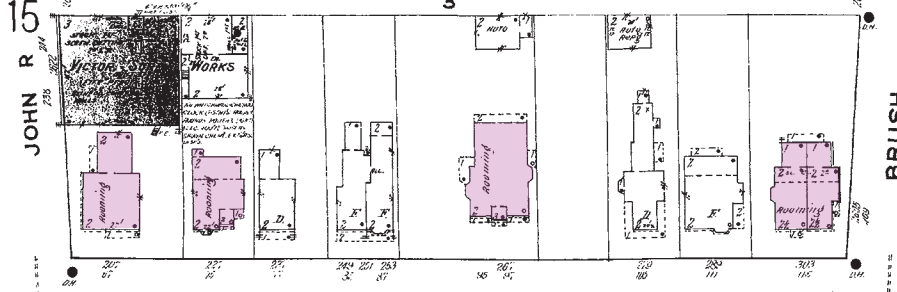
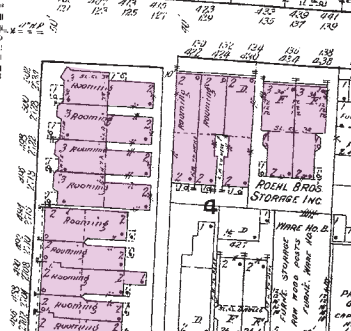
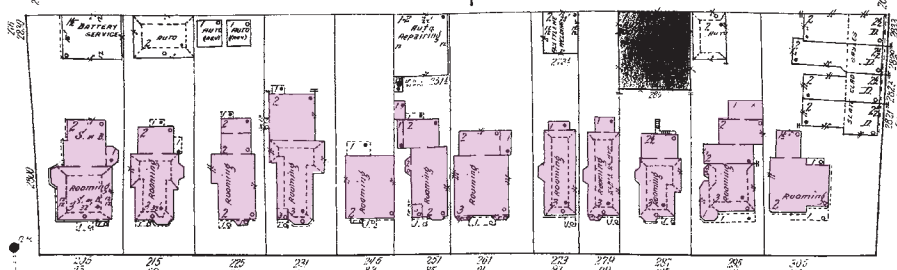
Base Source: State Atlas

O I T
 R I V E R

History of Brush Park



The history of Brush Park is extensive and varied. The location and name originate from its beginning as part of the French ribbon farm belonging to well-known Brush Family of Detroit. The Brush family proceeded to meticulously invest in order to distinguish the incipient neighborhood as a prominent community with homes and residents of quality and esteem. This led to the establishment of high standards of building and expensive lots due to their large size.



Base Source: Sanbron Maps

By the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, Detroit's population had grown to about 205,876 residents. With the increased numbers, several mansions and the overall image of Brush Park began to shift with most of the wealthy moving to the promising Boston-Edison and Indian Village Communities forming farther from the city center. On January 12, 1914 Ford implemented the five dollars for an eight-hour workday, about twice what most workers made at the time. The influx of applicants and new residents overwhelmed Detroit with the population reaching almost one million by 1920. As Detroit succumbed to industry, former mansions became apartment buildings or rooming houses (purple) to answer the demand. As population continued to grow many of Brush Park's homes, with their large lots, were added onto the back to add even more apartments or rooms (orange).



The history of Brush Park is extensive and varied. The location and name originate from its beginning as part of the French ribbon farm belonging to well-known Brush Family of Detroit. The Brush family proceeded to meticulously invest in order to distinguish the incipient neighborhood as a prominent community with homes and residents of quality and esteem. This lent itself to the establishment of high standards of building and expensive lots due to their large size.



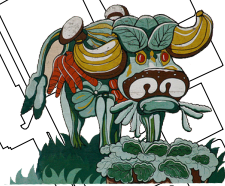
An issue that still endures today as with current Brush Park Resident Michael Farrell: when trying to purchase one of the houses “without a roof, no bank would float a mortgage... [even though he] ‘told them [he] needed the mortgage so [he] could fix the roof’”⁵ .



By the 1960s the neighborhood's reputation and aesthetic had become deficient. Over the decades many structures that deteriorated beyond repair were demolished; typically leaving the foundations buried.



Since then, few rehabilitation attempts have been made; most turned the homes into modern apartments. The growing number of vacant lots met with attempts to create infill housing. Several houses have been purchased by private parties recently and rehabilitated. The remaining structures have been stabilized in their conditions but the majority have been vandalized, been victim to nature, or been demolished.



Location



The physical location of Brush Park and the surrounding area renders it as prime real estate for development, yet it has lain dormant for years. Directly to the north and south of it are Midtown and Downtown, respectively; they are currently two of the most economically stable and densest parts of Detroit. Midtown is both Detroit's cultural, medical, and educational center as well as a high-rise business center.

Currently one of the fastest growing areas in Detroit it offers various opportunities for rehabilitation, restoration, as well as new construction. Along with its many cultural, educational, medical, and service institutions, Midtown also has a growing residential populace and is currently seeing the greatest influx of residents in the last decade.

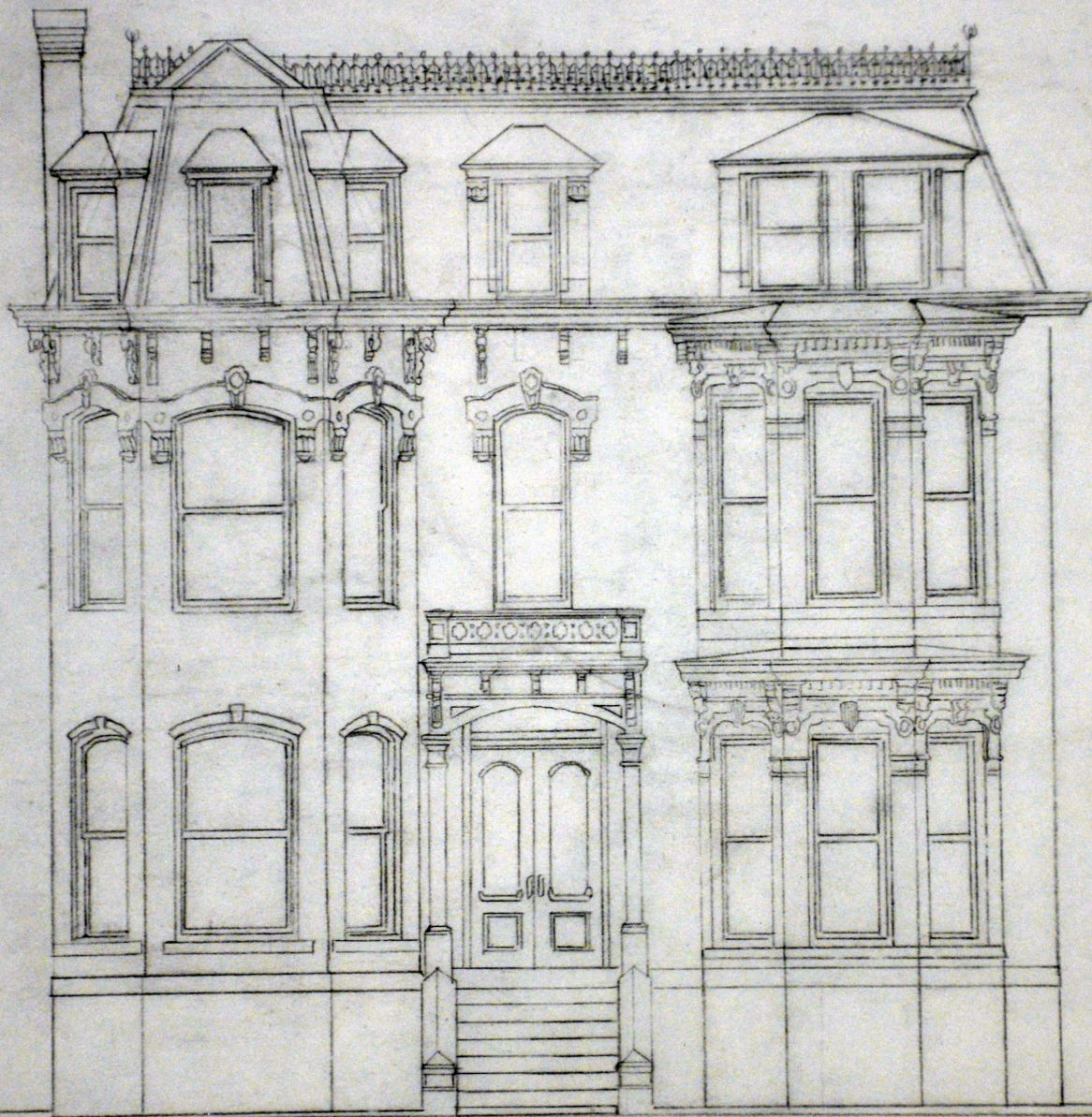
A prime financial opportunity, Whole Foods saw the demand for local groceries and chose Midtown as their new location, making them the first major grocery chain to open its doors in Detroit.

On Woodward there are several businesses and institutions including: The American Red Cross, Southeastern Michigan Regional Chapter, Bonstelle Theater (operated by Wayne State and their theater company), the Michigan State University Detroit Center (which houses many MSU Extension programs, arts and economic development initiatives, and partnerships in teaching and education, and the site of the future Red Wings Stadium.

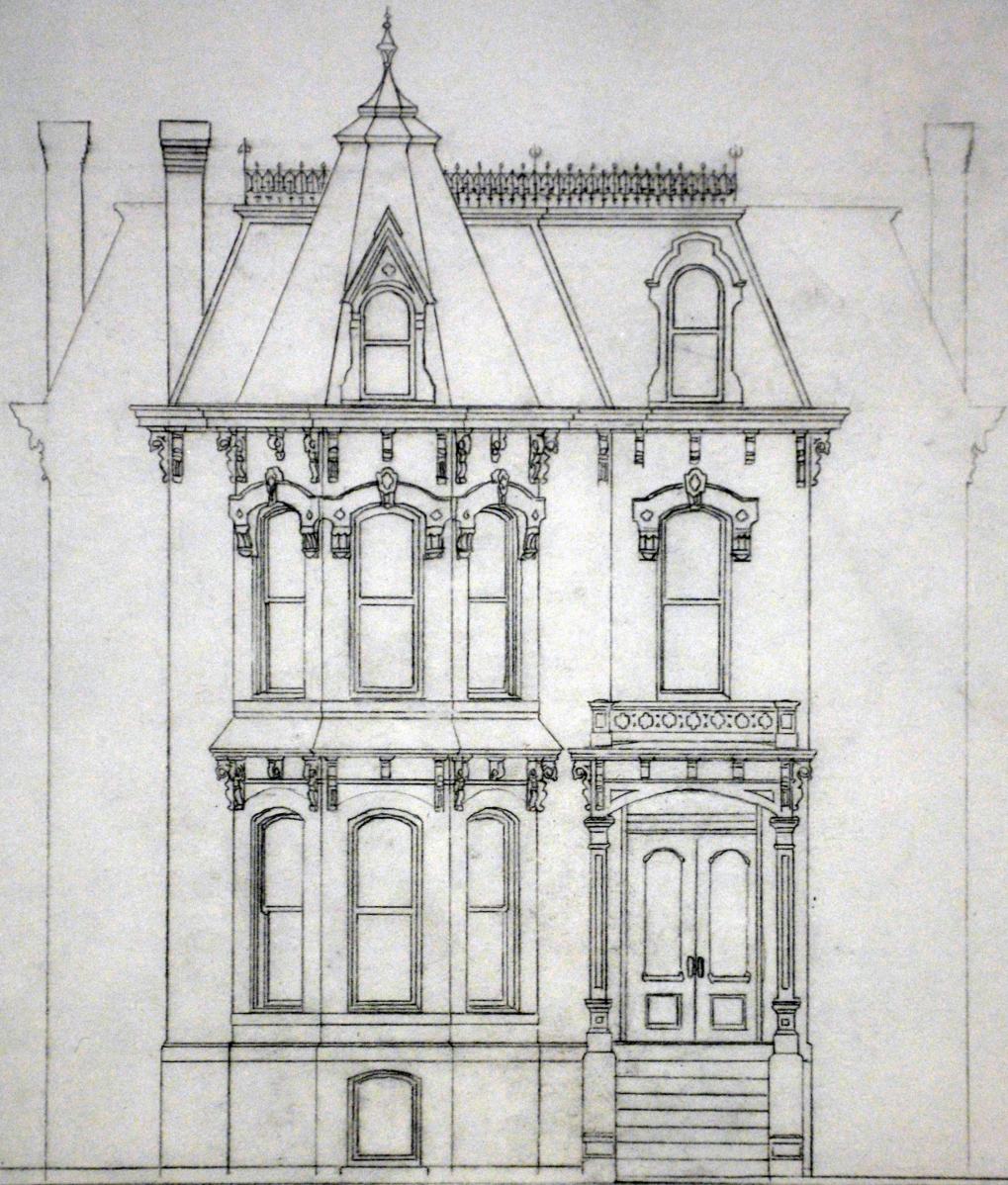


To the east is a thriving Detroit Eastern Market and the currently under deconstruction Brewster-Douglass Housing Projects.

To the south is the world's second largest theater district along with Comerica Park, Ford Field, and Downtown Detroit. New construction, businesses, and activity surrounds Brush Park and it is time that Brush Park becomes a part of it.



Methodology



Brush Park has potential beyond its current vestiges and prairie-like fields. Developers, investors, designers, and private individuals often look to the site with misappropriated ideals due to the limitations set on it by its Historic designation, zoning, and stigmas of what is allowed to exist or be built there.

The Historic designation often infers limitations of development as well as increased cost and problems later on. The design review committee that exists requires proposals to conform to a pre-defined design guideline in combination to the existing zoning. Cumulatively this lends to a site with potential problems that may not amortize investment. In combination with the high cost of land it is understandable that investment may be wan for “allowed” projects in this site.

For others to see the potential of the site, especially investors and those who have property rights to lots in Brush Park, the intervention needs to remove the preconceived notions they may have that “...create distance and destroy the immediacy of direct experience... [because] the elusive moments of the past draw near to us in present reality...”² and cloud possibility.

To some, that may be the notion of Brush Park as a place of grandeur, a symbol for the wealth and prowess of the people of Detroit and a city with a vibrant economy. Some hold onto that ideal and reminisce in it in the hopes that it will be as it once was. They must understand however that Brush Park “ha[s] ‘done [its] work.’ [It was] the best that the old economic and social order could have been expected to produce, but [it has] to be superseded if mankind [is] to attain a higher level of civilization”⁴.

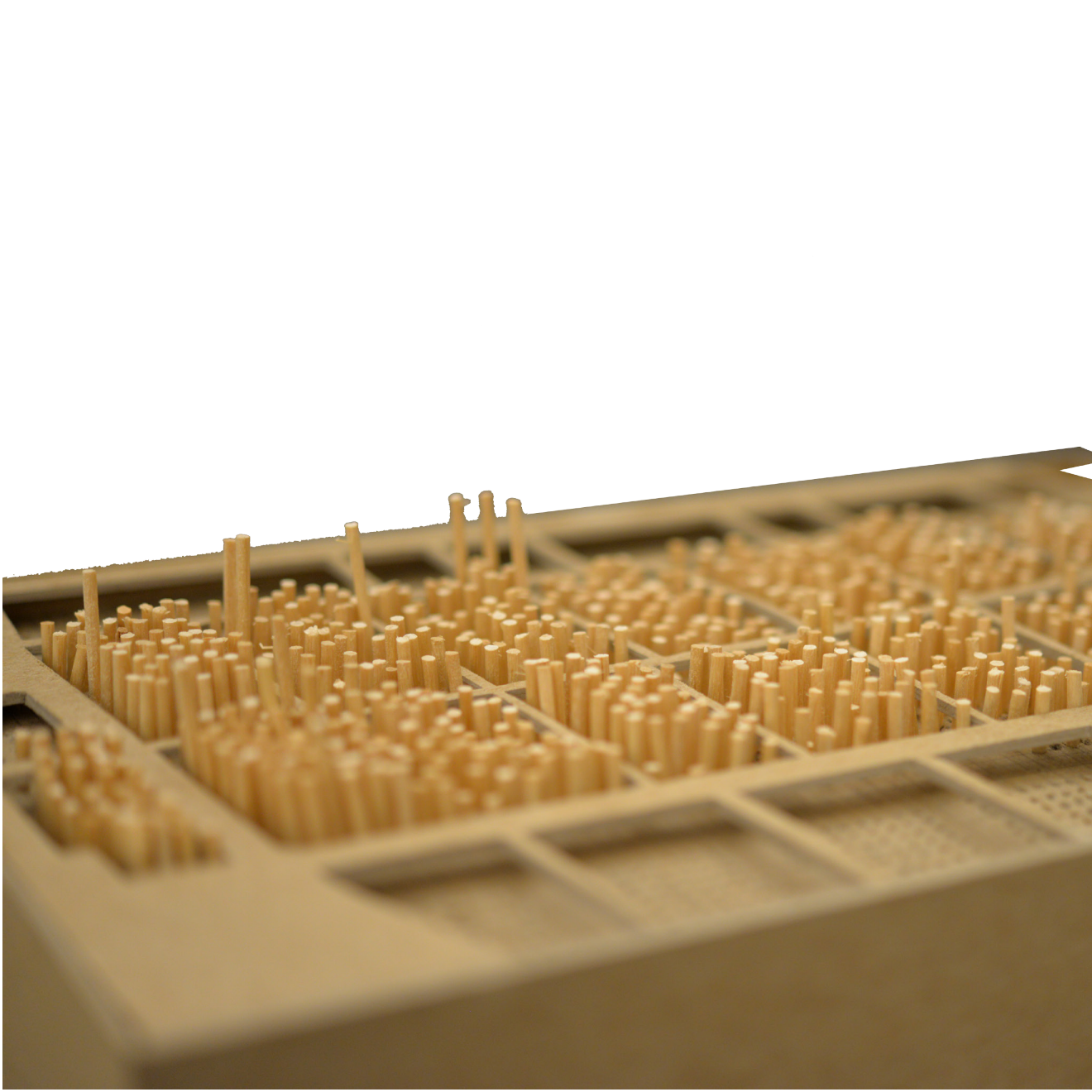


To others, it is a constant reminder of the horrible living conditions that existed in the past and the blight that devastates neighborhoods still today. At one time, economically limited from being able to live there, to moving into the unwanted “leftovers” white bourgeoisies left behind Brush Park is one of the first neighborhoods to be dramatically affected by urban sprawl.

The people of affluence set a pattern that emanates today; when new housing farther from the city center (modern day suburbs) becomes available they take it. The remaining homes are divided and rented or simply abandoned. The remnants of Brush Park stand as a monument to sprawl and there are those individuals would prefer it to be gone.

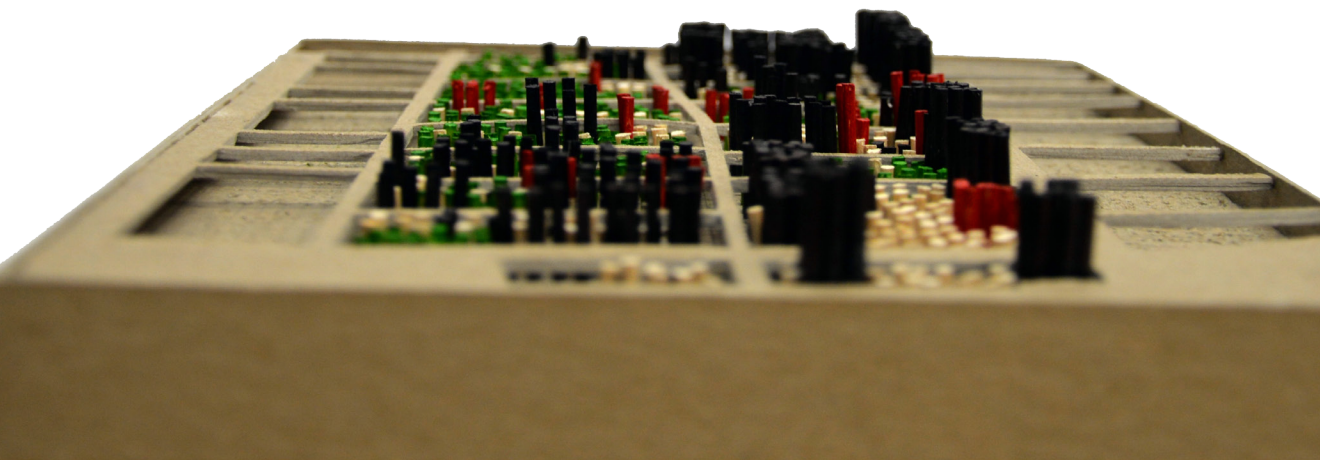
The complete destruction of Brush Park would also serve little purpose as Jane Jacobs puts it:

“There is a wistful myth that if only we had enough money to spend...we could...reverse decay in the great, dull, gray belts that were yesterday’s and day-before-yesterday’s suburbs... But look what we have built.... Low-income projects that become worse centers of delinquency, vandalism and general social hopelessness.... Housing projects... sealed against any buoyancy or vitality of city life.... This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities.”⁵



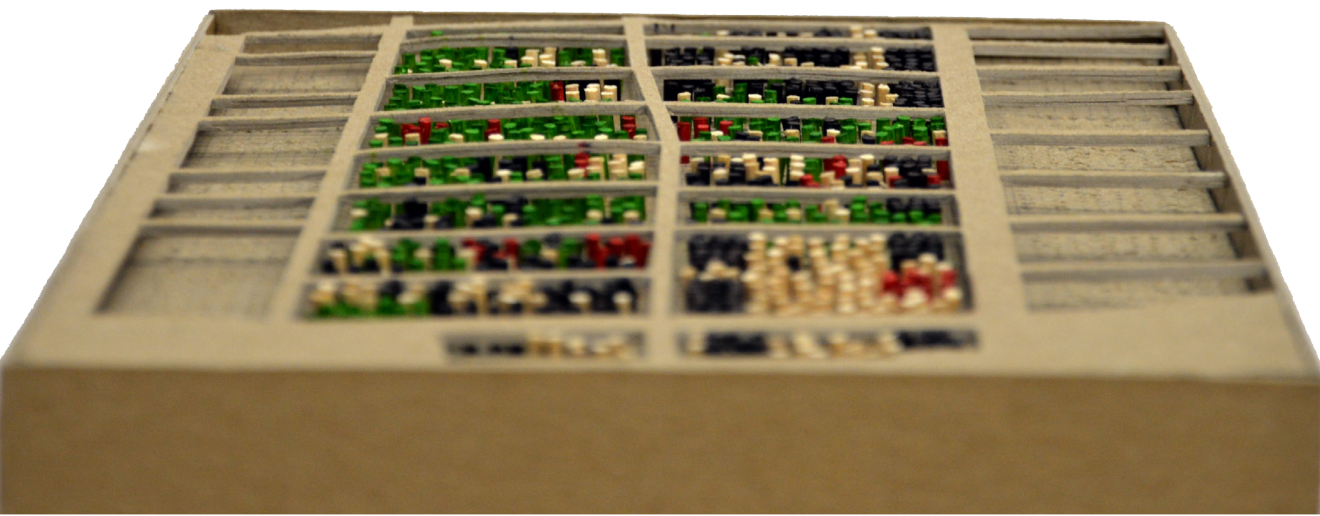
The variation in the perception of Brush Park lends to the formation of an intervention intent on understanding and reacting to the site and the conditions that beset it. The creation is an amalgam between the nostalgia for what exists a criticism of the historic designation, zoning ordinances, and resistance to new typologies. As an individual is influenced at multiple levels of engagement, the directive will look at those levels to create a holistic intervention that allows for a rebranding of the site to foster a new idea of Brush Park. Creating a synthesis between the nostalgic and the critical involves an in-depth analysis of each individual site. It looks at multiple factors to understand the responsibly history has on the site as well as how to move beyond it to flourish.

Brush Park, as a whole is a large area, encompassing about twenty-three city blocks. Brush Park, as a whole is a large area, encompassing about twenty-three city blocks. While some of Brush Park has seen some change, it has not been coordinated and occurs sporadically.



In order to subdivide the space, a 3-dimensional dot matrix model assisted in determining key relations in and around the site. The first iteration analyzes the existing Brush Park with regards to hierarchal value, as represented by height, and current functional condition, as represented by the color.

The black designates a built structure, green allows for a relational value i.e. green space, temporary installation, or developable structurally depending on each situation, the red refers to any structure or building that is uninhabited or in disrepair, and the nude wood is any transportation infrastructure i.e. road, sidewalk, path, alley.



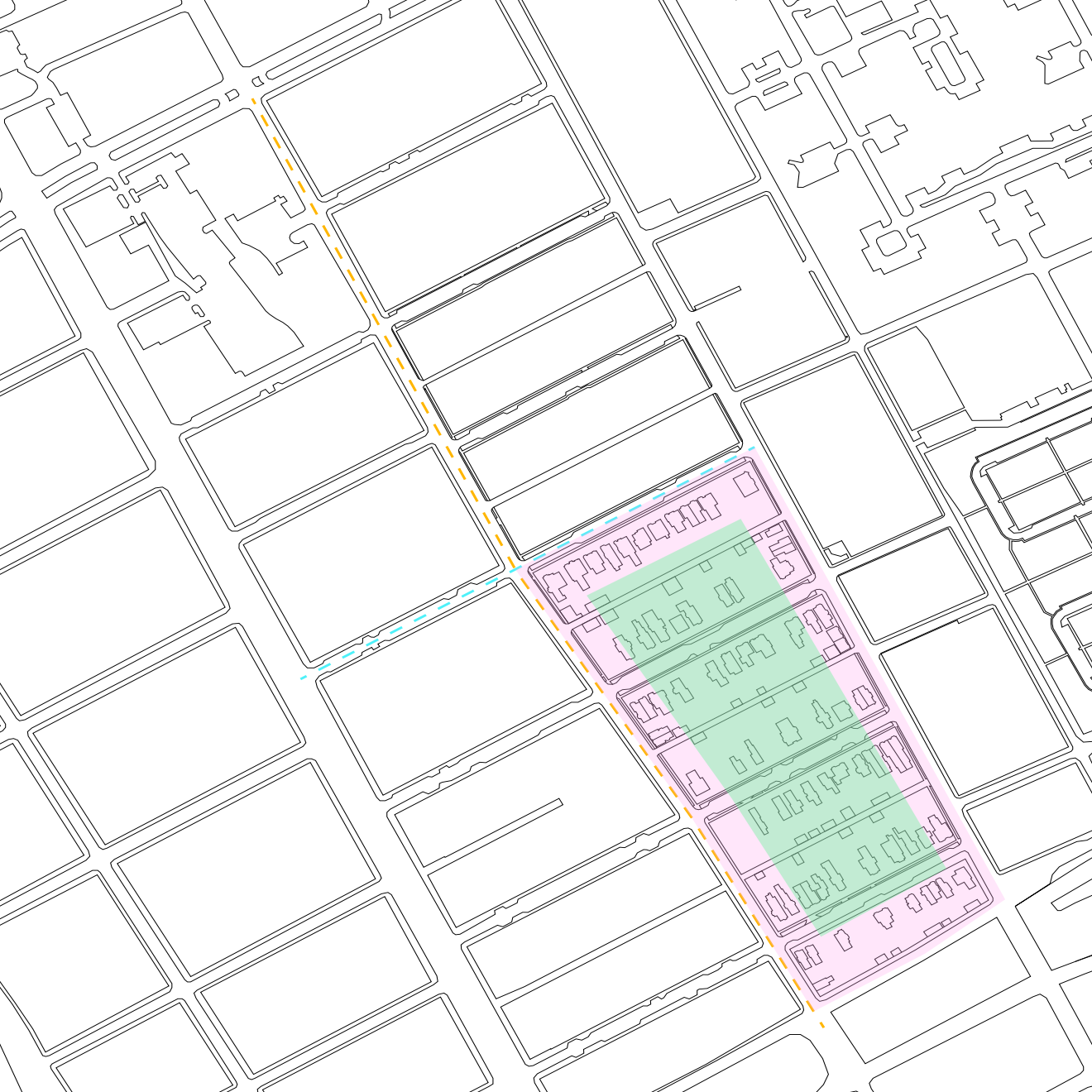
The matrix was then leveled out to start from a zero basis, with no predisposition other than their functional purpose.



The site was then evaluated for the intended final outcome. Each part of the matrix was looked at for how it relates to its surrounding piece as well as the street system and major components outside of the site e.g. stadiums, eastern market, whole foods, etc.

While some remain in a similar fashion to their origin, others required a change of function and as a result a change in the value of that area. The intent is to create a systematic approach to develop the site as an organization of individual components that all lend to form a cohesive structure that while dependent on each component has the flexibility to adapt.

Transience allows for the site to change with need, organization keeps a unified identity that guides it throughout the changes. It becomes a “continuous, well-connected, open place, conducive to development.”⁶



From the matrix, four quadrants emerged as self unified components lending to Brush Park's identity. Each quadrant seemed to have its own organization except for the southeast one. With respect to the other three quadrants, it has the highest number of missing structures (shown here) and the and the largest spans of vacant land. The southeast quadrant, or quad, is made up of four blocks; three of which have alleys cutting through the middle. The matrix identified the space as primarily having street front massing and an open, designable interior landscape.



Proposal



W. R.

W. R.

WOODWARD

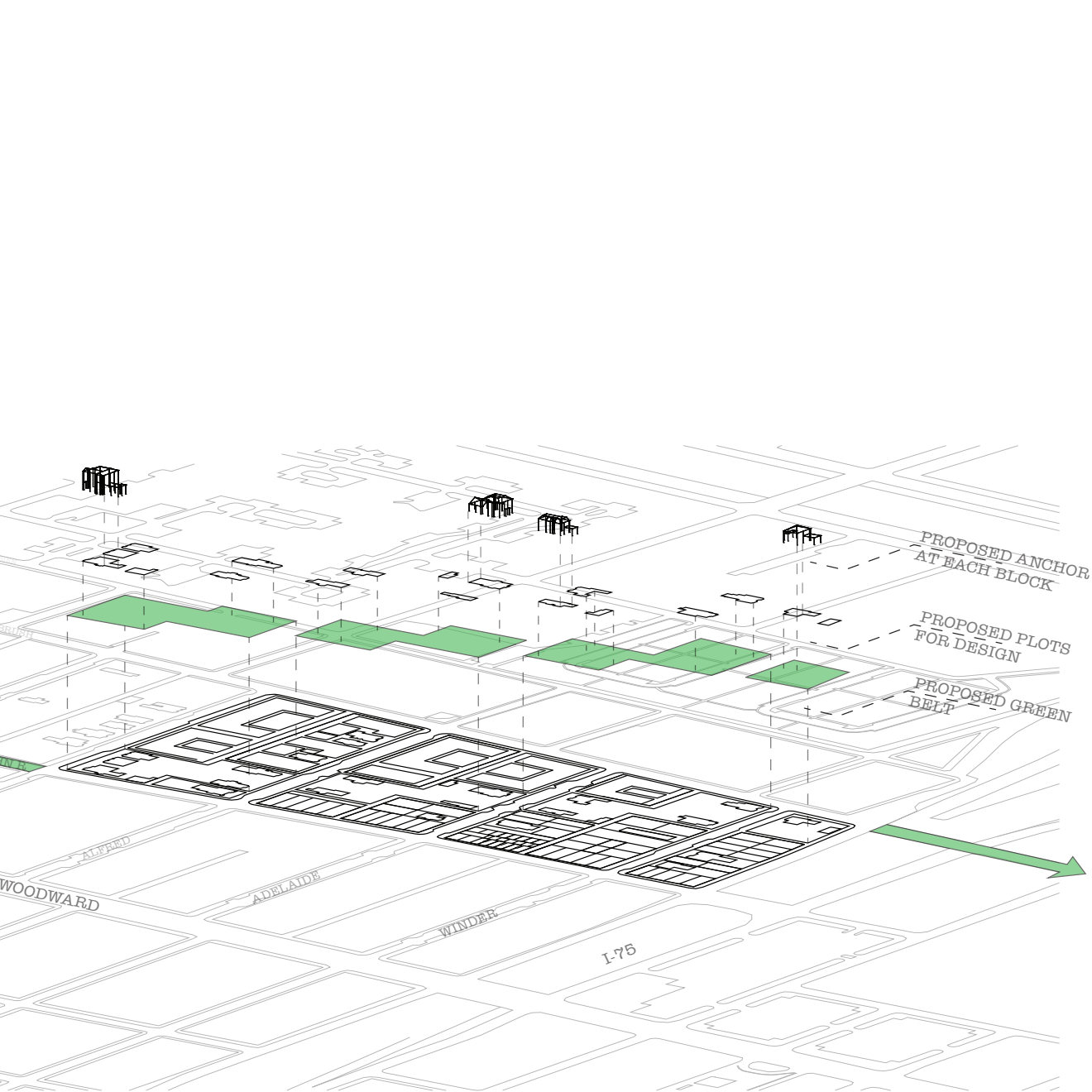
ALFRED

ADELAIDE

WINDER

I-75

An over-arching concept helps determine the massing and layout of the components of the quad. Redefining how the quad will be perceived compares to redefining a company or business. When a company is failing or looking to become profitable once again, they restructure or, if it is their image that needs revitalizing, go through a rebranding. Often this involves a complete change of procedures, logos, even the name itself. In the same way, an urban space too can be rebranded. The difference being that an environment has elevations, organization, massing, and programs instead of logos and standard operating procedures. Both a company and an environment require people to thrive, and both look to attract new people through changes.



PROPOSED ANCHOR
AT EACH BLOCK

PROPOSED PLOTS
FOR DESIGN

PROPOSED GREEN
BELT

WOODWARD

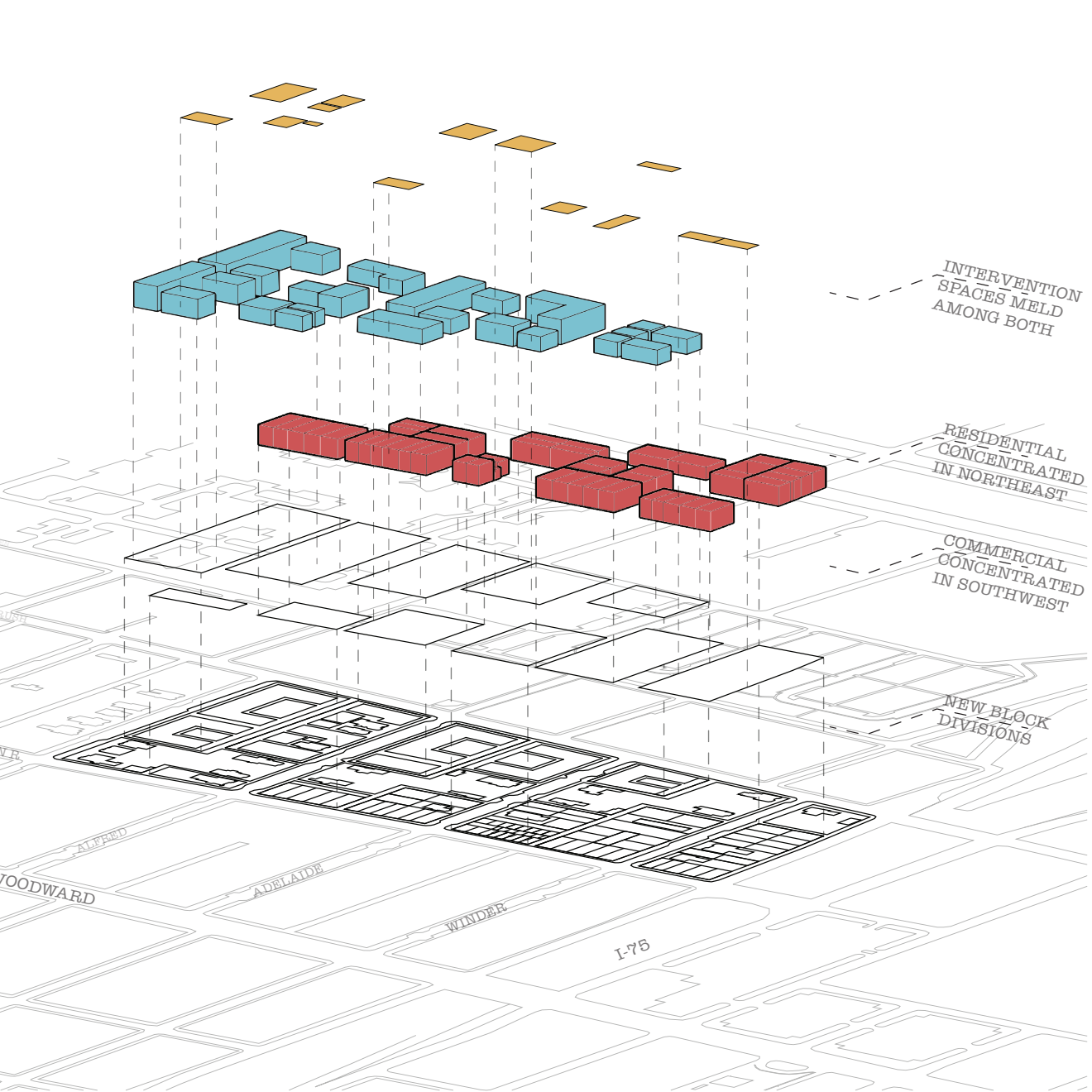
ADELAIDE

WINDEE

I-75

The overarching idea of this quad is to begin establishing a bridge rather than a border between midtown and downtown. The initial step will be to define a green-way that will link up to the Midtown Loop and will continue through Brush Street and link to Harmony Park and continue through Randolph Street until Renaissance Drive meeting up with the Riverfront and the Dequindre Cut. This connection forms a larger overall loop as the Dequindre Cut is currently under construction to bridge it into Brush Park and the Midtown Loop.

Initially erected within the green-way of each block is a temporary framework that serves as an anchor for future installations in the remaining foundations and designated locations on the following page.



INTERVENTION SPACES MELD AMONG BOTH

RESIDENTIAL CONCENTRATED IN NORTHEAST

COMMERCIAL CONCENTRATED IN SOUTHWEST

NEW BLOCK DIVISIONS

WOODWARD

ADELAIDE

WINDER

I-75

ALFRED

The dividing line will separate the quad with mixed-use commercial/residential (red) to the southwest side, to link in with the stadiums and entertainment district.

The northeast area will be a strictly residential area (blue) to tie into the housing demand from Midtown and the residential amenities afforded to it from Eastern Market, Whole foods, and the museums, science centers, and galleries to the north.

Located within the green-way as well as throughout designated public locations throughout each block are designated zone for installations that will function as an anchors for the site along with the frameworks.



Future installations would be funded through foundations such as Kresge or Knight. The purpose for the initial frameworks is merely to give a scale of reference and to add density to the area. The architectural intent for the new construction is purposefully left undefined (in gray) to allow developers in conjunction with the design review committee to arbitrate on the contributive value of their proposals rather than pre-define what the proposal should be.

It is understood the likelihood of a single architect or firm to plan, design, and build each and every component of a four block area is unrealistic. Taking a pragmatic standpoint to the idea that various investors, developers, and architects would play a role allows for a real understanding of how this proposal would be implemented.



Shifting the perceptual understanding of an environment, especially one so subjectively perceived as Brush Park requires the removal of enough of its original characteristic to change it. But as with the historicism present in Brush Park, one must be conscience enough not completely eradicate the value that it lends.

The most important aspect is the creation of an organizing structure that allows for it the area adapt and change without losing and changing it's identity every time it does, because while redefining the perception is critical to creating viability, creating a continuously transient identity lends itself to the appropriation of an undefinable environment and the creation of terrain vague. The framework structures hence serve as the proximity anchoring point from which the block can be scaled and architectonically defined; farther distance allows for greater striation from the historical norm.

As investors begin to in-fill the lots, the density of the area begins to change and effectively begins to disseminate out from this quadrant and begins the dialogue with surrounding quadrants and blocks leading to an organic growth of the original organizing system.

Notes:

¹Lynch, Kevin. *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1960. Print.

²Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*.

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³Martelle, Scott. *Detroit: a biography*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review, 2012. Print

⁴Fishman, Robert. *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier*. New York, NY: Basic, 1977. Print.

⁵Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York, NY: Modern Library, 2011. Print.

⁶Lynch, Kevin. *Good City Form*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1984. Print.

* All photography, drawings, and work by Author unless otherwise noted.

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My friends from Master's Studio

inFORM Studio

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