This Is Not A Mall:

Leveraging Metropolitan Detroit's Dead Malls as Urban Revitalization Strategies

by
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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.
This is a true copy of this thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the American mall as one of the most important architectural typologies within the suburbs. Initially invented during a time when newly built suburbs lacked amenities to support their residents, the contemporary legacy of the mall has been altered by the rise of e-commerce, retail competition, and post-industrialization. This is resulting in the death and abandonment of malls across the country, notably in the Rust Belt, leaving behind large-scale contaminated sites, a gap in community gathering places, and the creation of neighborhood liabilities.

Within the Rust Belt, the metropolitan region of Detroit holds many similarities to the legacy of the mall. Both are looking for innovative ways to support their revitalization. After decades of decline, Detroit is starting to create new urban frameworks for its redevelopment. Landscape Urbanism, a theory that leverages landscape and ecology as not only an urban organizational tool but as a way to cultivate socio-cultural conditions, has proven to be a successful framework that responds to post-industrial cities given its use in Detroit's ongoing redevelopment projects. Similarly, the mall was originally thought of as a tool for social and urban revitalization. Architect Victor Gruen envisioned the mall to not only provide nodes of retail convenience for suburbanites but also function as recentralizing urban strategies that established places of gathering, socialization, and the emergence of culture. Ultimately, the theories around using landscape systems as socio-cultural cultivators in Detroit's redevelopment, and the mall's original purpose as a social and urban revitalization tool, go hand in hand.

By understanding metropolitan Detroit's regional, ecological, and social contexts, a proposed urban design will explore ways in which the region can leverage the dead mall as an urban revitalization strategy. The urban design will be informed through theories relating to metropolitan Detroit's contemporary urban redevelopment and the mall as a suburban asset.

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Prologue

"The Detroit Metropolitan area has become a rhizome, connected in every way, but completely separate all the same. An open grid of abandonment and development."

– Mitch Cope, In Detroit Time, 2004

Detroit has always been an important part of my life. Although I was born in Windsor, Ontario, my father traveled every day between the two cities for work. He was an engineer at one of the Big Three automotive manufacturers in Detroit during the early 2000s.

Every other weekend, our family would travel across the Ambassador Bridge to explore the city. My first memory of Detroit is Somerset Mall in the suburb of Troy. It was a world of its own; a place bustling with people, and full of wonder and excitement. Unfortunately, the same could not be said about the surrounding neighborhood. The issue was not the lack of community, but the lack of built infrastructure that connected the community to its broader contexts.

With the oldest malls in Detroit being demolished and redeveloped without a unified framework, there is a necessity to discuss what is being lost to history, and whether these redevelopment projects can be leveraged in a more strategic and contextualized way.



Figure 1. Somerset Mall, metro Detroit



Figure 2. Ceci n'est pas une pipe. by René Magritte

Introduction

"Magritte brought through his art the reflection of the new perception of reality that was being discussed in the philosophies of his time. [...] The pipe might only be the painting of a pipe, but immersing into his concept creates even bigger philosophical questions. He is interested in the mystery of this relation and leaves an open answer to it."

– Monica Fernandez, Why This Is Not A Pipe

America would not be the country it is today without the mall. Looking to establish a new identity and support its growing population after World War II, the government funded the development of suburbs and highways, leading to a suburban population that nearly doubled to 74 million between 1950 and 1970.[1] However, what these postwar developments lacked in order to sustain population growth, and therefore community, was a central and centering[2] space that allowed people to easily gather. American architectural critic and author Alexandra Lange argues that "in postwar suburban America, the mall was the only structure designed to fill that need."[3]

As the identity of America became solidified in its new suburbs and highways, the mall defined the culture of the people, so much so that "the late twentieth-century United States doesn't make sense without the mall."[4] However, the same cannot be said about the mall today. With the rise in e-commerce, retail competition, and the post-industrialization of American society, we are seeing malls across America dying, with 87% of large shopping malls projected to close

1 Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 1999), 152.

2 Alexandra Lange, *Meet me by the Fountain: An Inside History of the Mall* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 2-4.

3 Ibid, 6.

4 Ibid.

over the next 10 years.[5] The resulting dead and abandoned malls leave behind large-scale contaminated sites, a gap in social infrastructure, and neighborhood liabilities. Most notably seen in the Rust Belt region, this phenomenon inspires the question of what happens to the legacy of these malls after their death.

Sharing a similar fate, metropolitan Detroit was once the heart of the Rust Belt. Formerly the 4th largest city in America,[6] its early success can be attributed to the geographic and ecological benefits of the Great Lakes region. However, like other Rust Belt cities that relied solely on manufacturing, it was impacted by the effects of shifting domestic and outsourced production trends and a lack of economic diversification.[7] This was the catalyst that started the city's decentralization, creating urban issues which eventually affected Detroit's entire metropolitan region. With the death of the mall and the decentralization of Detroit both resulting in contaminated urban voids, fragmented social infrastructure, and neighborhood liabilities, it is clear that both metro Detroit and the mall share parallels between their history and legacy.

5 "Mall Closure Statistics," Research, Capital One Shopping, updated December 5, 2025, https://capitaloneshopping.com/research/mall-closure-statistics/.

6 "Detroit: Past and Future of a Shrinking City," Economy League, accessed June 23, 2026, https://www.economyleague.org/resources/detroit-past-and-future-shrinking-city.

7 Ibid.

Since the mid-2010s, metro Detroit has been exploring urban frameworks to sustain its ongoing population growth[8] and revitalization. These frameworks relate more specifically to the creation of distinct, innovative, community-oriented, and sustainable neighborhoods to attract and retain new residents.[9] In addition, current urban redevelopment projects make use of urban theories relating to Landscape Urbanism, which is a direct response to the post-industrial landscape of Detroit.[10] The theory reverses the industrial nature of the urban fabric through the use of landscape and ecology as an organizational tool, while also integrating the site into its broader socio-cultural contexts. This creates a more resilient social cohesion[11] that strengthens the metro region as a whole.

The unique circumstance in which metro Detroit finds itself means that it cannot follow a "business as usual"[12] approach for its redevelopment. Given the similarities in issues presented through the mall and metro Detroit's urban

8 Mary Sheffield, "Capping off a historic turnaround, Detroit now leads Michigan in population growth," City of Detroit, published May 15, 2025, https://detroitmi.gov/news/capping-historic-turnaround-detroit-now-leads-michigan-population-growth.

9 Detroit Future City, *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*, Detroit Future City, 2012, https://detroitfuturecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/DFC_Full_2nd.pdf.

10 Charles Waldheim, *Landscape as Urbanism* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 69.

11 Kongjian Yu, "Five Traditions for Landscape Urbanism Thinking," Turenscape, published September 2, 2016, https://www.turenscape.com/en/news/detail/219.htm.

12 Detroit Future City, *2012 Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*, Detroit Future City, 2012, https://detroitfuturecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/DFC_Full_2nd.pdf.

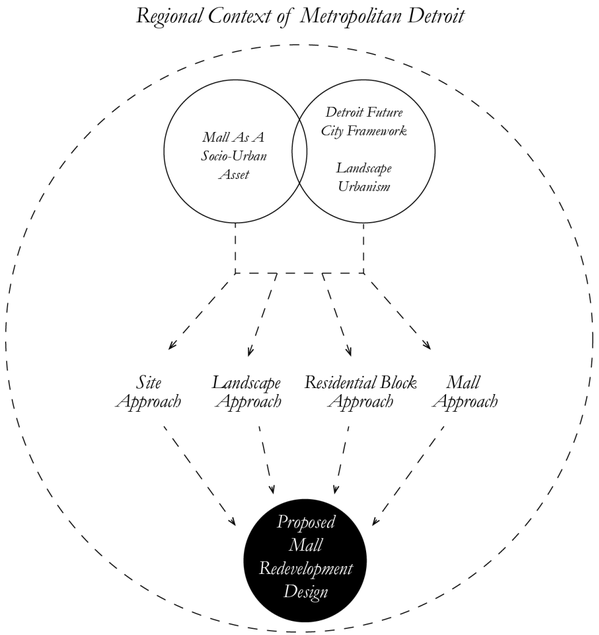


Figure 3. Thesis structure diagram

fabric, there is an opportunity to transform dead malls into neighborhood assets that also start to address regional urban issues.

This thesis explores how metropolitan Detroit can leverage the dead mall as an urban revitalization strategy given the regional, ecological, and social contexts of the metropolitan area. This is done through an alternative urban design proposal for the redevelopment of a selected dead mall, which will take into account theories relating to metro Detroit's urban redevelopment and the mall as a suburban asset. The proposed urban design, divided into four approaches — site, landscape, residential blocks, and the mall — will speculate on one possibility for the revitalization of metropolitan Detroit.

Structure

This thesis comprises 4 parts. Parts 1, 2, and 3 explore the broader context and theories that will inform the urban design proposal in Part 4.

Part 1 contextualizes the history of metro Detroit, its relationship to the mall, and establishes the opportunity in leveraging dead malls to support Detroit's ongoing revitalization.

Part 2 defines the first theory: understanding the mall as an urban asset through its purpose as social infrastructure and urban strategy. This establishes the reason why mall redevelopment matters, given the regional context of metropolitan Detroit.

Part 3 defines the second theory: Detroit's ongoing urban redevelopment strategies, looking first at the *Detroit Future City Framework*, and then at ongoing revitalization projects through the lens of Landscape Urbanism. By comparing these theories to current mall redevelopment projects in metro Detroit, missed opportunities in site, landscape, and programmatic approach are identified. This helps identify the proper design approaches to be taken in Part 4.

Finally, Part 4 starts by providing site context for the dead mall selected for design, which will enrich the two theories already explored in the sections above. The alternative urban design proposal for the dead mall is informed through approaches relating to the site, landscape, residential blocks, and the mall itself to theorize how mall redevelopment can start to respond to broader regional, ecological, and social contexts.

1| Metro Detroit: Birthplace of The Mall

1.1 Detroit Before The Mall
1.2 A New Typology: Victor Gruen's Mall
1.3 Contemporary Urban Issues & The Mall



Figure 4. The extent of the Rust Belt, highlighted in gray

1.1 Detroit Before The Mall

"'Daddy', he cried, 'what is this place?" The reply could only make one think the battle is already lost. 'It's called a city,' the father said. 'It's sort of like a shopping mall.'"

– John Gallagher, Detroit, 2004

Detroit was once the most influential city of the Rust Belt. Characterized as a region spreading from the eastern tip of northern Illinois to the East Coast, the Rust Belt is primarily centered around Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, and the southern portion of Lake Michigan, as outlined in light gray in *Figure 4*. The Rust Belt's early success can be attributed to its history as America's industrial heartland. Thanks to its economically strategic and mineral-rich location, it once had the highest concentration of manufacturers in the country.[13]

As a result, Detroit, located right in the center of the region, became home to some of the largest automotive companies in the world: General Motors, Ford Motor Company, and Chrysler.[14] Detroit has since been known as the Motor City. With manufacturing jobs at an all-time high, the city eventually became the fourth largest city in the United States by the 1920s.[15] To accommodate the growing population, Detroit's metropolitan region started to rapidly suburbanize. Within only 40 years, starting in 1900, subdivision activity rose by 1105%.[16]

13 Thomas J. Sugrue, "Motor City: The Story of Detroit," *History Now* 11 (2007), https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/essays/motor-city-story-detroit.

14 Ibid.

15 "Detroit: Past and Future of a Shrinking City," Economy League, accessed June 23, 2026, https://www.economyleague.org/resources/detroit-past-and-future-shrinking-city.

16 Michigan Planning Commission, *A Study of Subdivision Development in the Detroit Metropolitan Area* (Michigan Planning Commission, 1939), 2.

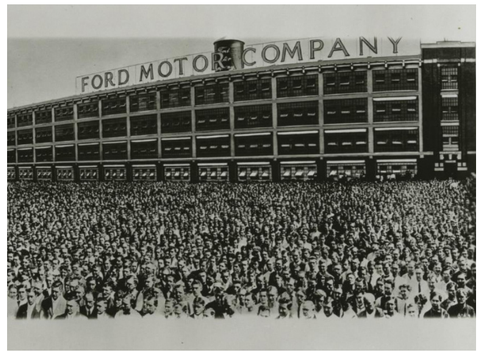


Figure 5. The 12,000 employees of Ford Motor Company, Detroit, 1913



Figure 6. The rows of suburban housing in metro Detroit

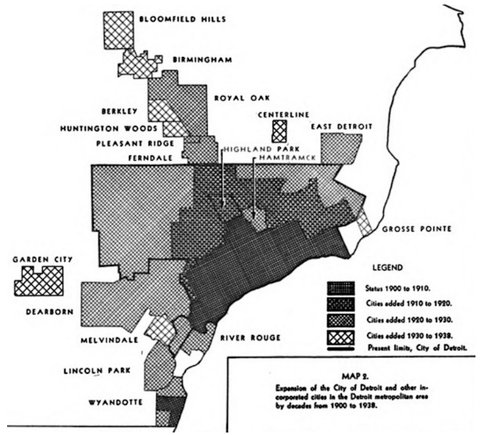


Figure 7. The suburban growth of metro Detroit from 1900-1938

Figure 7 compares the growth of the suburbs between the years of 1900 and 1938, while *Figure 8* demonstrates what it would eventually grow to by 1984.

The extent of Detroit's suburban sprawl would become the start of its urban issues. Not only would it lead to the heavy reliance on the automobile and place an immense strain on hard and soft suburban infrastructure, but it would also eventually cause the destruction of ecological systems that would all otherwise contribute to a strong metropolitan region.[17]

Nevertheless, with the goal of retaining the new population, suburbs were looking for ways to build communities where people wanted to live. This led to the invention and regional construction of the mall (*Figure 9*).

17 Michigan Planning Commission, *A Study of Subdivision Development in the Detroit Metropolitan Area* (Michigan Planning Commission, 1939).



Figure 8. The suburban growth of metro Detroit up until 1984



Figure 9. All of metropolitan Detroit's malls, indicated with a white triangle



Figure 10. Architect Victor Gruen

1.2 A New Typology: Victor Gruen's Mall

"When I say 'mall,' you see a place in time, one shopping trip, one amazing afternoon. But even in my lifetime, the mall has changed and changed again. It's an architecture born to be malleable, and in that malleability lies its future."

– Alexandra Lange, Meet Me by the Fountain, 2022

Victor Gruen is the father of the modern American shopping mall.[18] However, if it weren't for poor weather conditions and an emergency landing in Detroit, the mall would never have been invented.[19]

The mall was originally designed to solve a problem. As an immigrant to the United States during the Second World War, Gruen envisioned reviving the architecture of American retail by bringing his cultural and social understanding of European towns to U.S. suburbs.[20] Having grown up in Vienna,[21] he believed in human-centred urban planning, which had the potential to "enhance people's quality of life and foster a sense of community in the light of the sprawling suburbanization that he witnessed in the United States."[22] Detroit was the perfect location to test his theory. In his memoir *Shopping Town*, originally published in 1960, Gruen describes Detroit, stating that "everything seemed outdated, run-down and lifeless. There was only one dramatic exception. Amid the stagnant desolation, the ten-story

18 M. Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 2.

19 Alexandra Lange, *Meet me by the Fountain: An Inside History of the Mall* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 14.

20 "Victor Gruen, a Pioneer of Mall Architecture Across North America", SAJO, accessed June 23, 2026, https://sajo.com/insights/victor-gruen-the-father-of-the-american-shopping-mall/?cn-reloaded=1.

21 Ibid.

22 "Victor Gruen and the American Century," Austrian Embassy Washington, accessed June 23, 2026, https://www.austria.org/victor-gruen.



Figure 11. J.L. Hudson department store, historically located in downtown Detroit

block-long J.L. Hudson department store (*Figure 11*), with its seemingly endless brightly lit windows, was like a bulwark."[23] Inspired by the monumentality of the department store and the empty streets of Detroit, Gruen envisioned a new architectural typology for retail, remarking that "by mixing retail and non-retail establishments, profitable and subsidized functions, […] the shopping center would serve as 'the center of cultural activities and recreation. It would become 'the one important meeting place of the community,' like 'the market place or main square of the older cities.'"[24] Its impact on community and urban development would come not only from the popularity and success of the department store, but from promoting it as a cultural, social, and service center[25] built specifically for the local community. J.L. Hudson would eventually buy his idea and fund what would be known as America's first open-air regional shopping mall, Northland Center (*Figure 12*). Built in the Detroit suburb of Southfield and completed in 1954, it was an instant success. Around 45,000 shoppers were arriving at the mall on any given day within the same year it was built.[26] Northland became the catalyst that quickly spread across the nation.

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23 Alexandra Lange, *Meet me by the Fountain: An Inside History of the Mall* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 15.

24 M. Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 80.

25 Ibid, 27.

26 Katie Clarey, "They're building a Costco in the ruins of the nation's first mall," Michigan Enjoyer, published June 18, 2025, https://enjoyer.com/northland-center-mall-costco-globalization/.



Figure 12. Northland Center, 1954

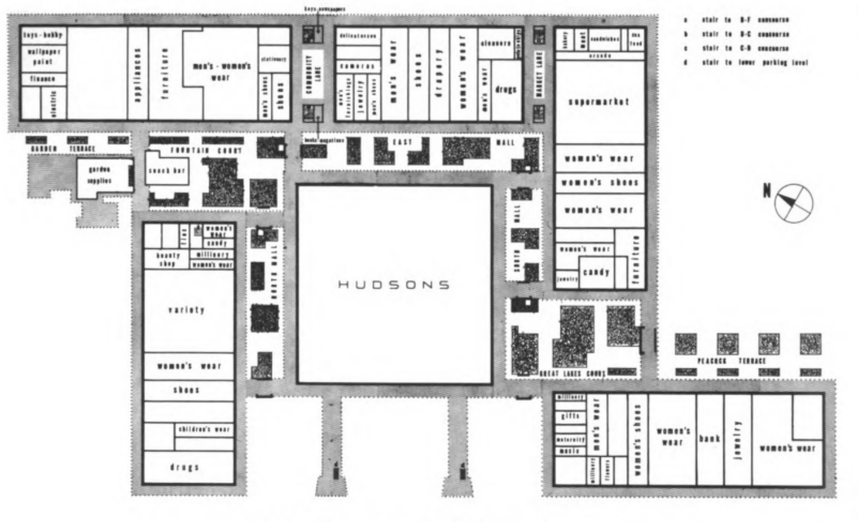
After Northland, the regional mall eventually evolved into a more robust typology, characterized as being an immense size of at least 800,000 square feet (around 74,000 sqm.), having three or more anchor stores, an atrium, a promenade, and a food court. Especially true in an auto-dominated metropolis like Detroit, the mall itself would be situated in the center of a parking lot that would take up the rest of the site's surface area. In addition, although Northland's floor plan was open-air (*Figure 13*), the mall's typology became a completely enclosed structure with introverted circulation (*Figure 14*). This was to encourage people to spend more time, and money, at the mall.

Gruen's idea had become reality, with America's retail culture forever changed. True to his philosophy, the mall was a place not only for retail, but for gathering, socialization, leisure, entertainment, and participation in civic life. By the 1990s, there were well over 38,000 operating shopping centers of different types and sizes in America.[27] The mall's scale of impact was so significant that it became commonplace during the 1970s for the typical American to spend "more time at the mall than any other place other than home or work."[28]

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27 Mark J. Eppli and John D. Benjamin, "The Evolution of Shopping Center Research: A Review and Analysis." *The Journal of Real Estate Research* 9, no. 1 (1994): 6. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44095533.

28 Kenneth T. Jackson, "All The World's A Mall: Reflections on the Social and Economic Consequences of the American Shopping Center," *The American Historical Review*, 101, no. 4 (1996): 1114, https://doi.org/10.2307/2169636.



Merchandising plan for Northland Center, Detroit.
Architects: Victor Gruen Associates

Figure 13. Northland Center's floor plan, 1954

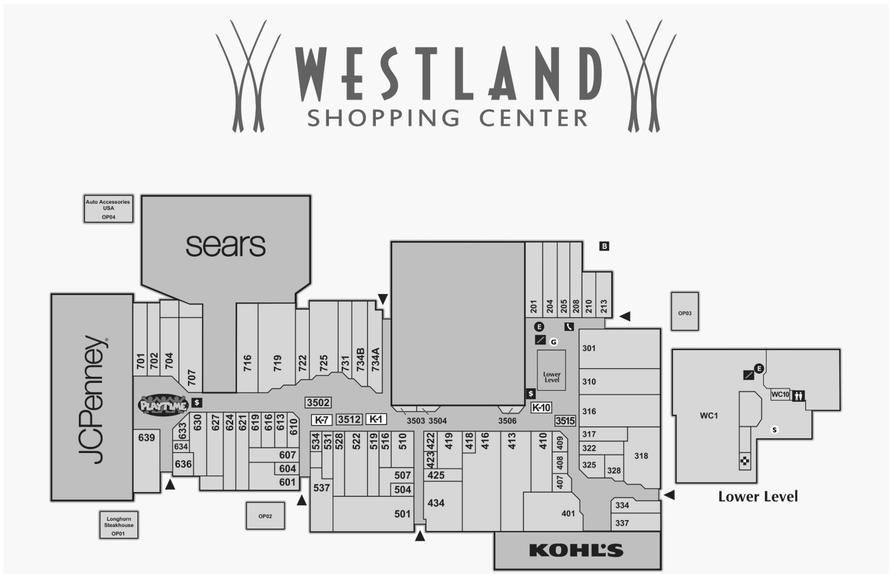


Figure 14. Westland Center's floor plan, 1965

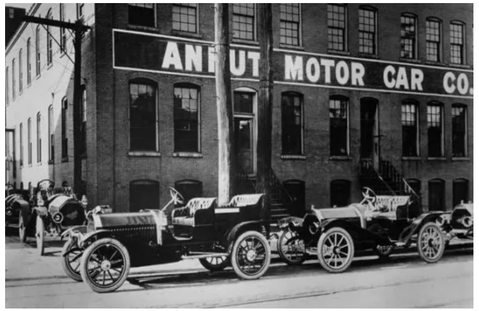


Figure 15. Detroit's mono-economy centered around the automotive industry



Figure 16. The 1973 oil crisis affects Motor City



Figure 17. Post-war housing and highway policies, coupled with shortcomings in city leadership



Figure 18. The event of the 1967 riots

1.3 Contemporary Urban Issues & The Mall

"That's where the predominant 'malls are dead' narrative fails. Yes, technology and a pandemic boosted online shopping. And yes, we need to drive less and walk more. But in the rush to dance on the mall's grave, we risk treating the mall as only a disposable consumer object and neglecting the basic human needs it answered."

– Alexandra Lange, Meet Me by the Fountain, 2022

Northland Center was built right before a pivotal turning point for the future of metropolitan Detroit.

By the mid-1960s, the automotive industry was quickly evolving; international automotive companies started to gain popularity, smaller automotive companies went out of business, factories started to leave the city, and the impact of the 1973 oil crisis[29] meant that Detroit's identity as the automotive capital of America was at risk. Coupled with federal housing & highway policies, shortcomings in city leadership, and compounded racial tensions over the years,[30] this accelerated the post-industrialization and decentralization of the city,[31] with Detroit experiencing its largest population drop of 20.4% during the 1970s.[32] Although the decentralization of Detroit started with the majority of the white middle class "fleeing" from the city to the suburbs,[33] the long-term effects of the city's decentralization eventually

29 Andrew Boyle, "The rise, fall, and resurgence of the Detroit auto industry (1898-2014)," CJ Pony Parts, published August 8, 2023, https://www.cjponyparts.com/resources/death-motor-city-infographic?srsltid=AfmBOopXrNc2z4GdcLFuNy8FEIUD8dMJ1PCCHV4XPqqMR6lQHgCdc3W.

30 "Anatomy of Detroit's decline," The New York Times, accessed June 23, 2026, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/08/17/us/detroit-decline.html.

31 "Detroit: Past and Future of a Shrinking City," Economy League, accessed June 23, 2026, https://www.economyleague.org/resources/detroit-past-and-future-shrinking-city.

32 Samuel Stebbins, "Detroit MI Has Lost Over Half Its Population since 1950," Michigan, published March 30, 2023, https://www.thecentersquare.com/michigan/article_e76e6e40-c48d-50b8-9fee-d177a7dfba82.html.

33 Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Rise and Fall of Detroit's Middle Class," The New Yorker, published July 22, 2013, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-rise-and-fall-of-detroits-middle-class.

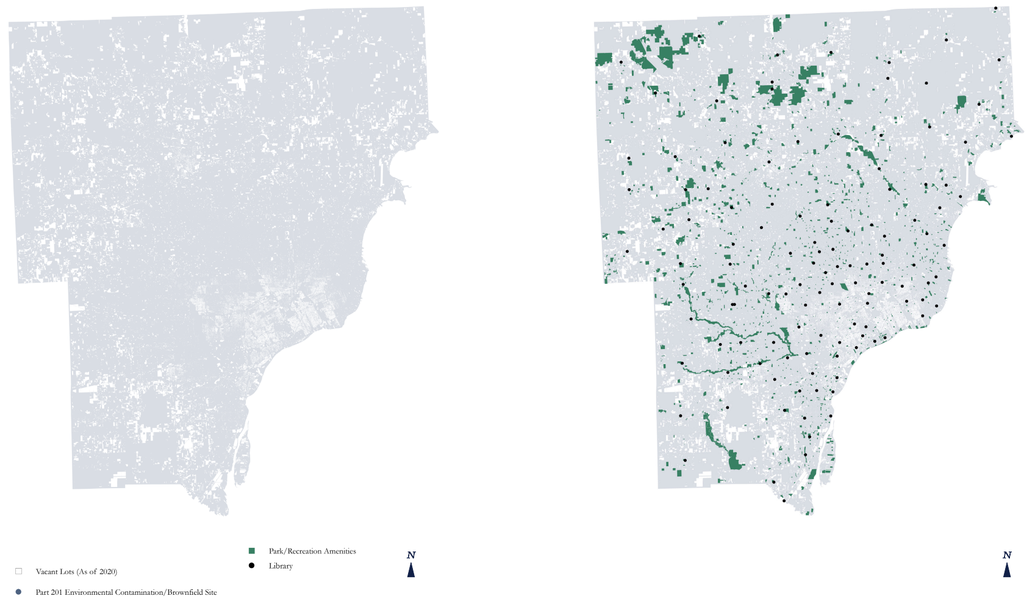


Figure 19. Mapping study showing the relationship between vacant lots (left), recreation amenities and cultural institutions (middle), and environmental contamination/brownfield sites (right)

impacted the suburbs as well. Since the decentralized city of Detroit was no longer the nucleus of a larger urban system, this weakened the overall urban fabric of the metropolitan area. The metropolitan region as a whole has since faced urban issues relating to uncontained sprawl, abandonment, paved landscapes, site contamination, inadequate social infrastructure, and neighborhood liabilities. This is shown in *Figure 19*, where the mapping of the urban issues mentioned above is clearly demonstrated throughout the entire region.

Coincidentally, the 1980s marked another turning point for the suburbs as mall construction reached its peak in 1982.[34] Since then, the mall has been dying at record rates. The number of active brick-and-mortar malls in the U.S. has dropped from 25,000 in 1986 to around 1,150 today, with more than 1,000 malls closing every year from 2017 to 2022.[35]

The map in *Figure 20* highlights this phenomenon, showing the concentration of dead malls by city. What is interesting is that the largest concentration of dead malls in America is within the Rust Belt. While the mall's death is typically attributed to the rise of online shopping, the 2020 pandemic,

34 Alan Ehrenhalt, "The Once and Future Shopping Mall," Governing, published March 19, 2024, https://www.governing.com/urban/the-once-and-future-shopping-mall.

35 "How struggling malls became new destinations for health, fun, and learning," Perkins & Will, published January 14, 2025, https://perkinswill.com/insights/shopping-mall-adaptive-reuse-renovation/.

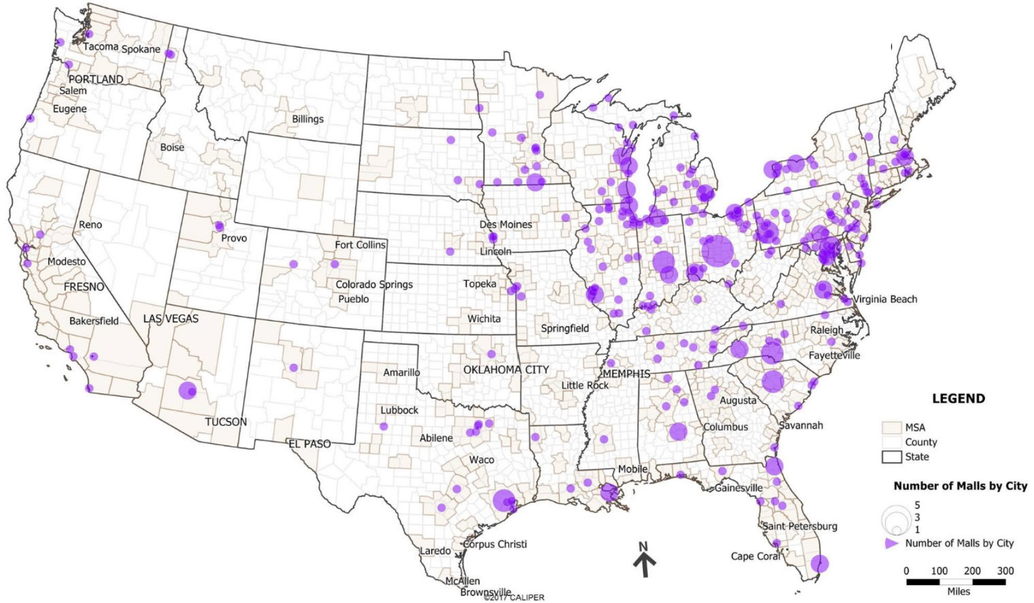


Figure 20. Concentration of dead malls in America, with most of them located in the Rust Belt



Figure 21. Decline in department store revenue, correlating to their closures

and the economic failure of anchor department stores (*Figure 21*), the urban issues that are affecting Rust Belt cities, and therefore Detroit, have undoubtedly also accelerated this phenomenon. It is clear that the decentralization of metropolitan Detroit and the death of the mall are the cause and effect of similar urban issues. *Figure 22* illustrates this relationship by overlaying the 23 metro Detroit malls and their status over the previously mapped contexts.

–

Innovation, grit, and resiliency are key to Detroit's history and identity. Given their parallels in decline and being affected by similar urban issues, the dead mall – once thought of as the center for social and cultural activity in the suburbs – presents an opportunity as the metropolitan region begins its redevelopment. Can the dead and dying malls of Detroit *(Figure 23)* become reclaimed urban assets?

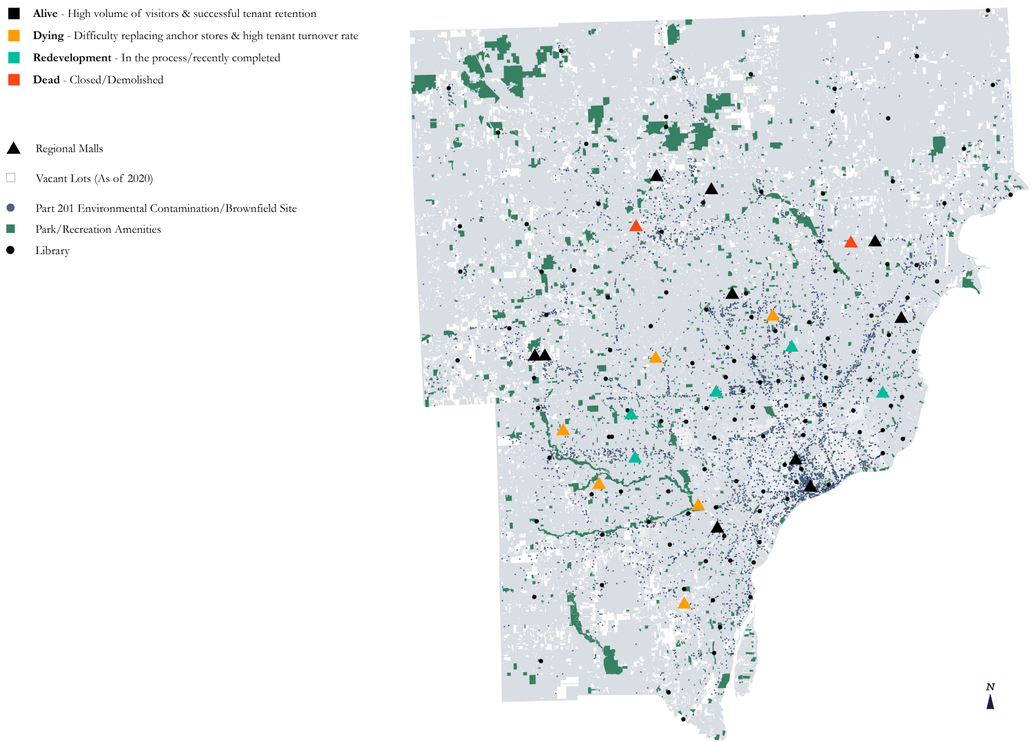


Figure 22. Mapping the relationship between metro Detroit's urban issues and its 23 malls

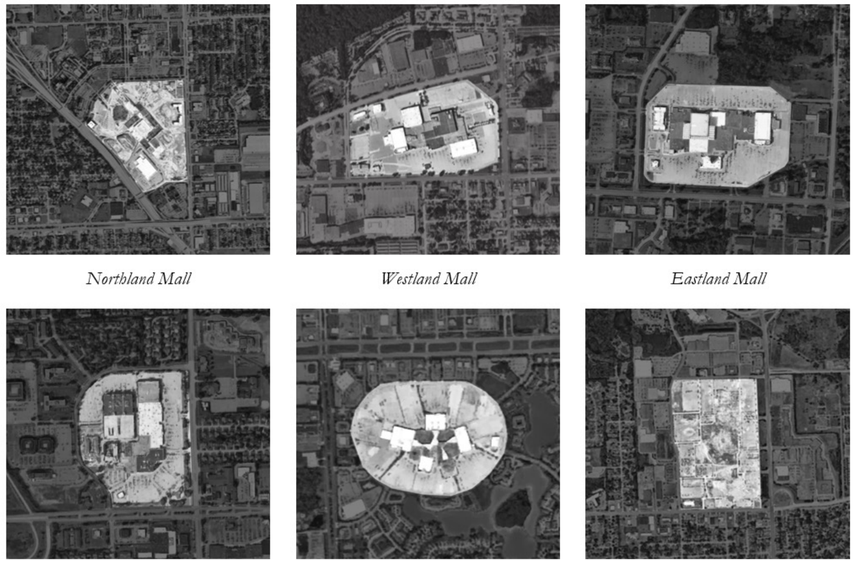


Figure 23. The dead and dying malls of metro Detroit

2| Theory: Understanding The Mall as an Asset

2.1 The Mall as Social Infrastructure
2.2 The Mall as Urban Strategy

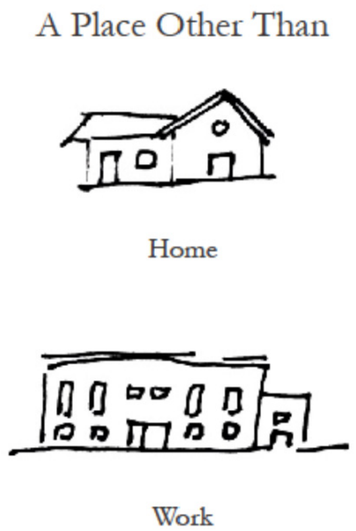


Figure 24. The Third Place is a place other than home and work.

2.1 The Mall as Social Infrastructure

"A home away from home."

– Ray Oldenburg, The Great Good Place, 1989

As Victor Gruen intended, the asset of the mall can be first attributed to its unique role as a cultivator of socio-cultural activity in a place that did not have any.

The Great Good Place, published in 1989, introduces us to the concept of the Third Place. The book argues that in the American context, "we do not have that third realm of satisfaction and social cohesion beyond the portals of home and work."[36] As a solution, the Third Place provides a space that encourages socialization and community building,[37] while being an important anchor to unify neighborhoods.[38] The mall was arguably one of the few Third Places within the suburbs; it offered a solution to the problem of insufficient social infrastructure in light of rapid suburbanization.

Although the modern-day mall is dominated by retail to maximize profit, analysis of Victor Gruen's early design concepts for the mall (*Figure 25*) reveals a prioritization of social programming and architectural language, with retail being a secondary amenity. The incorporation of public lounges, patios, covered walkways, a community center, a library, and a food market, all within walkable distances of

36 Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (Da Capo Press, 1989), 9.

37 Ibid, 42.

38 Ray Oldenburg, "Our Vanishing 'Third Places,'" *Planning Commissioners Journal*, no. 25 (1996): 7, https://plannersweb.com/wp-content/uploads/1997/01/184.pdf.

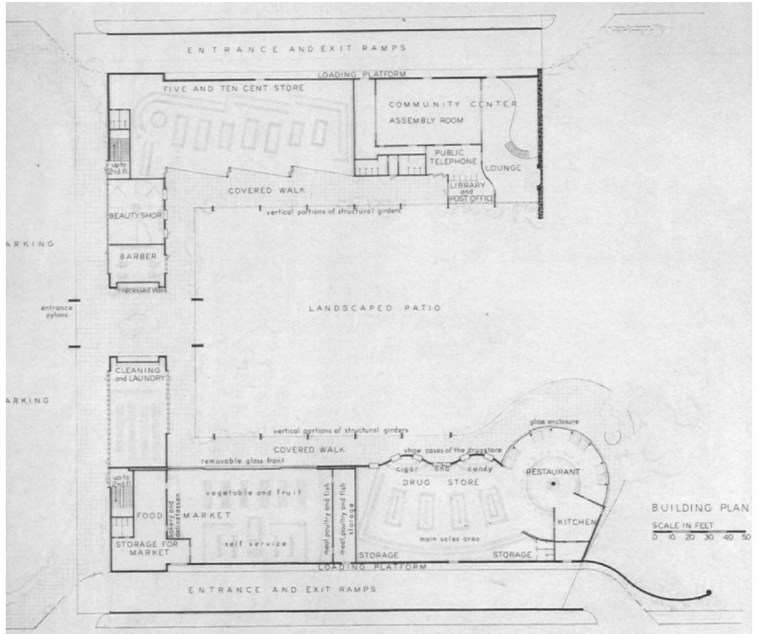


Figure 25. Early floor plan concept of the mall

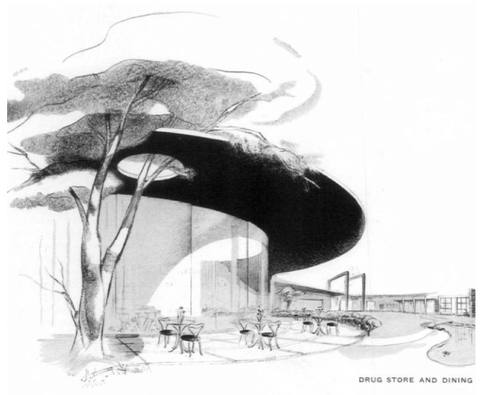


Figure 26. Early exterior sketch of the mall's courtyard, demonstrating visual connections between the mall's interior and the exterior patio, as well as pedestrian circulation

each other, emphasizes the mall's purpose in cultivating civic life. In addition, early exterior sketches propose visual connections and intersections between architecture and nature that make it easy for visitors to participate in social and recreational life (*Figures 26* and *27*).

Even after his concept became reality, the formal language of the first few malls built in America is also indicative of socio-cultural activity through the use of courtyards and walkways to create connections between buildings and programs (*Figure 28).* Extrapolated from the earliest mall typologies, a pattern of specific social categories can be formed through its architecture and placemaking: community building, recreation, and gathering (*Figure 29*).

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As we witness the death of the mall, how can these aspects continue contributing to its legacy as a place that people love to visit?

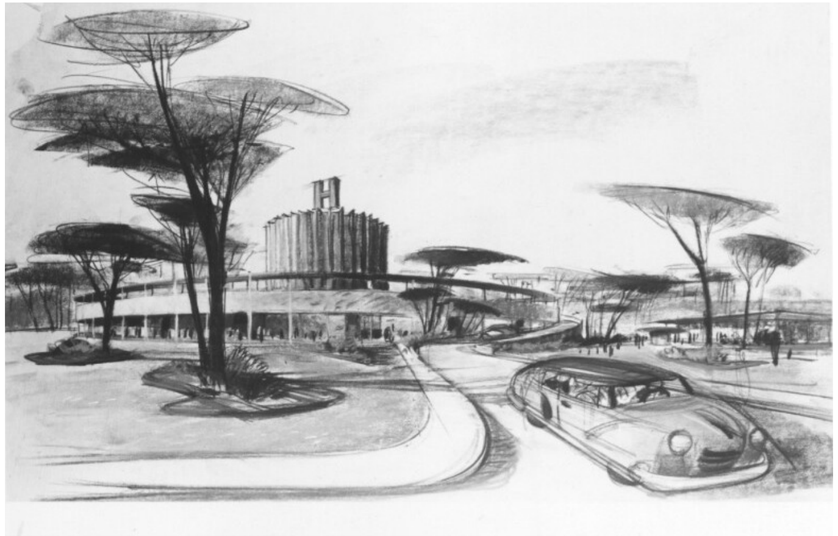


Figure 27. Early exterior sketch of the mall's main entrance, demonstrating its integration with nature

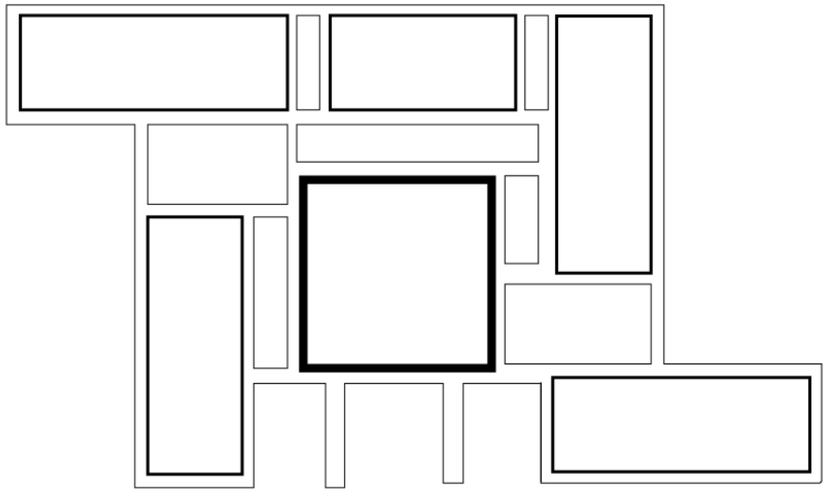


Figure 28. Northland Center's basic layout, with smaller buildings and garden courts grouped around a central department store



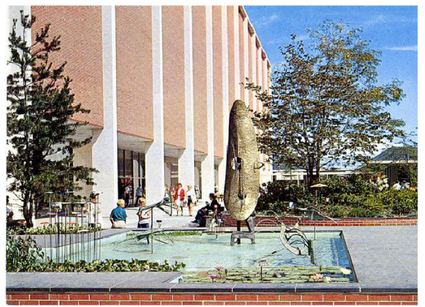
Courtyard
Northland Center Mall



Atrium
Fairlane Town Center Mall



Promenade
Northland Center Mall



Water & Landscape
Eastland Center Mall



Food Court
Somerset Mall

Community Building

Recreation

Gathering

Figure 29. Three social categories that relate to the mall's typological features: community building, recreation, and gathering

2.2 The Mall as Urban Strategy

"Yet the regional shopping center represents an important and significant step in the right direction. It has proved that it is able to play the role not merely of a commercial center but of a social, cultural and recreational crystallization point for the up-to-then amorphous, sprawling suburban region."

– Victor Gruen, The Heart of Our Cities, 1964

Gruen's vision for the mall's impact on suburban living did not stop at its programming. He envisioned their location and scale to become larger catalysts for regional urban development.

During the years following the construction of the first malls in the United States, Gruen published the book *The Heart of Our Cities* in 1964. In a chapter titled *The Emerging New Urban Pattern*, Gruen explains that at the time, there was "a trend towards recentralization,"[39] which was "detectable in nearly all metropolitan areas, expressing itself in a greater demand for living quarters close to places of work and shopping facilities."[40] However, as metropolitan areas established efforts towards recentralization, he concluded that the "new centers, […] are not large enough to be meaningful,"[41] and had the "tendency to replace only the profitable enterprises [...] without attempting to make up for other values which the old community core possessed."[42]

To explain why there was a trend towards recentralization, two diagrams were illustrated in his book, as seen in *Figures 30* and *31*.

39 Victor Gruen, *The Heart of Our Cities* (Simon and Schuster, 1964), 266.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid, 268.
42 Ibid.

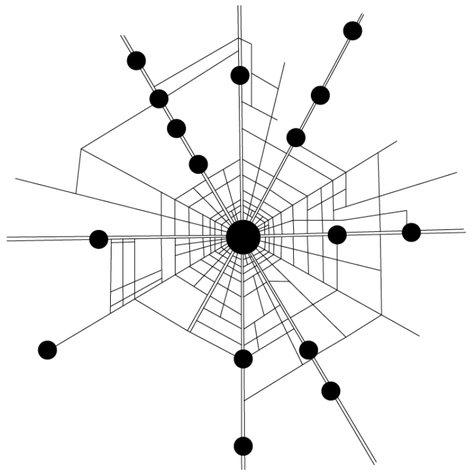


Figure 30. Urban patterning throughout the 19th century

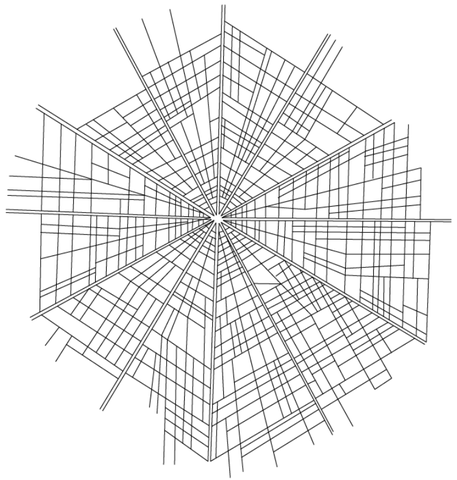


Figure 31. Urban patterning throughout the 20th century

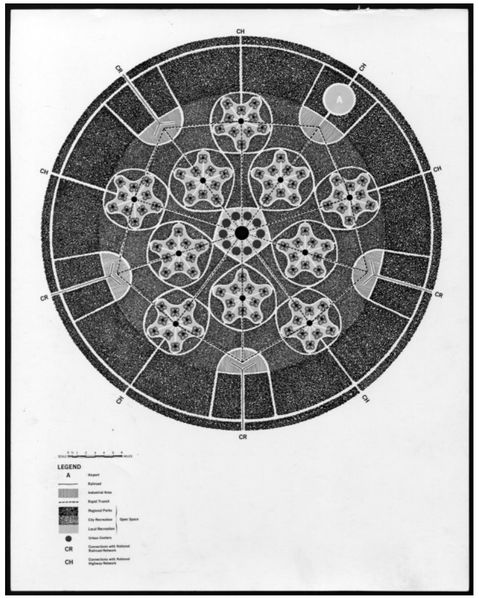


Figure 32. Gruen's solution to scattered urban growth, "The Metropolis of Tomorrow," inspired by cellular organisms

The first diagram to the far left represents urban patterning throughout the 19th century, and is what he deemed desirable: a tightly knit web of transit systems and roads, with clustered nodes of development surrounding a strong downtown core.

The second diagram in the middle represents urban patterning as it has evolved during the 20th century. The clustered nodes of development are replaced with scattered and uneven sprawl, weakening the overall urban structure and subsequently the downtown core.

Gruen's own solution to the issue of scattered and uneven growth was inspired by cellular organisms. He proposed that at the core of each development would be a nucleus; the governing center around which all other land types would be organized (*Figure 32*). This would not only help with the recentralization of urban patterning, but also help it re-adjust "to human and urban needs."[43]

His theory was later found to be similar to the theory of the Garden City (*Figure 33*). Popularized by urban planner Ebenezer Howard, the Garden City similarly organizes urban development around a central node that helps combat urban

43 Ibid, 271.

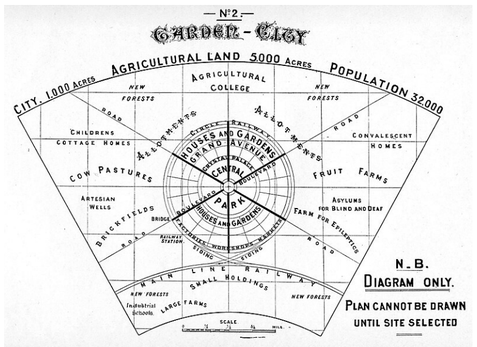


Figure 33. Ebenezer Howard's Garden City theory

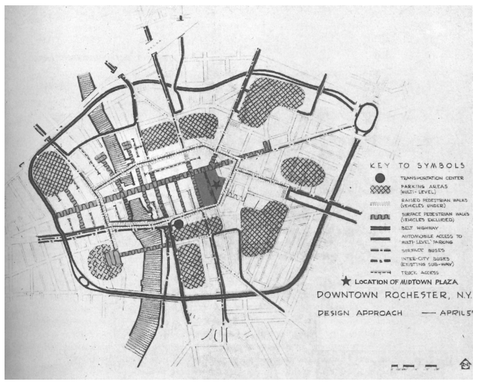


Figure 34. Revitalization concept for the downtown core of Rochester, Victor Gruen Associates

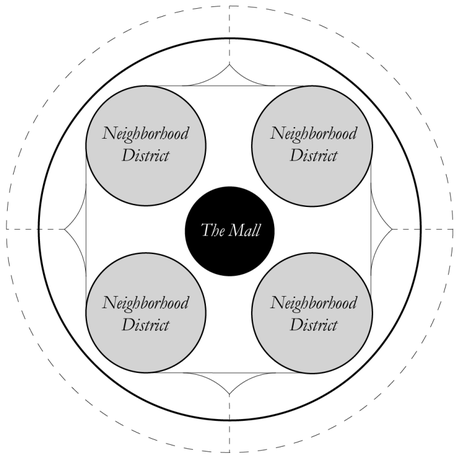


Figure 35. Author's synthesis of Victor Gruen's cellular urban diagram and the original purpose of the mall, showing potential for the mall to become a nucleus for urban development

sprawl, inadequate living conditions, and disconnected urban infrastructure.[44] Drawing from the Garden City and his own observations on urban patterning, Gruen's cellular theory would later heavily influence his early urban planning work, as shown in *Figure 34*.

–

Considering that Gruen's cellular theory envisioned a large nucleus centered around a network of neighborhoods, and that the nucleus should exhibit the social and cultural values that old community cores possessed, *Figure 35* synthesizes these ideas into a new cellular diagram, one that specifically leverages the mall as the new socio-cultural nucleus that will help organize and recentralize the surrounding urban environment. This reinstates the mall's purpose as "a powerful city planning tool"[45] for urban renewal, and as the new heart of the suburbs.[46]

44 Brett Clark, "Ebenezer Howard and the Marriage of Town and Country: An Introduction to Howard's 'Garden Cities of To-Morrow' (Selections)." *Organization & Environment* 16, no. 1 (2003): 87–97. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26161785.

45 M. Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 70.

46 Ibid, 12.

3| Theory: Metro Detroit's Redevelopment

3.1 Detroit Future City Framework
3.2 Detroit & Landscape Urbanism
3.3 Mall Redevelopment in Metro Detroit



Figure 36. Detroit Future City Framework

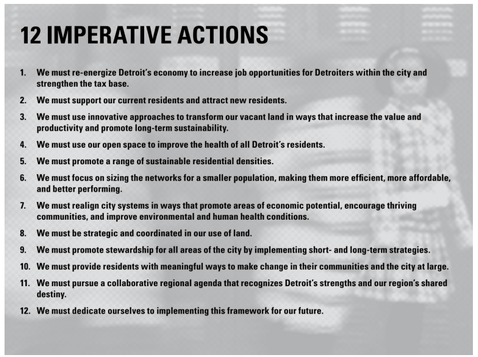


Figure 37. The 12 imperative actions defined by the framework

3.1 Detroit Future City Framework

"The way things are and 'business as usual' are no longer acceptable."

– Detroit Future City Framework, 2012

With the decentralization of Detroit, followed by years of decline, community groups and non-profit organizations started emerging to establish frameworks for metropolitan Detroit's urban renewal.

The goal amongst them is to create awareness and better coordination around the redevelopment of a more equitable and sustainable city.[47] By promoting a more resilient, asset-rich, and unified urban fabric, this helps envision the possibilities for Detroit in the near future.[48]

One of the first, and well-known, frameworks is the *Detroit Future City Framework*. By engaging with Detroit's residents, the framework sets imperative actions (*Figure 37*) that align with five planning elements: economic growth, land use, city systems, neighborhoods, and land & building assets. Through mapping, diagramming, and vignettes, the framework sets a future vision for the city built for the people, by the people. This is well demonstrated in the *Land Use* chapter, which specifically mentions that with Detroit having gone through three periods of growth – the riverfront development, the decentralizing industrial ring around the city, and the over-

47 "About Us," Detroit Future City, accessed June 23, 2026, https://detroitfuturecity.com/about/.

48 Ibid.

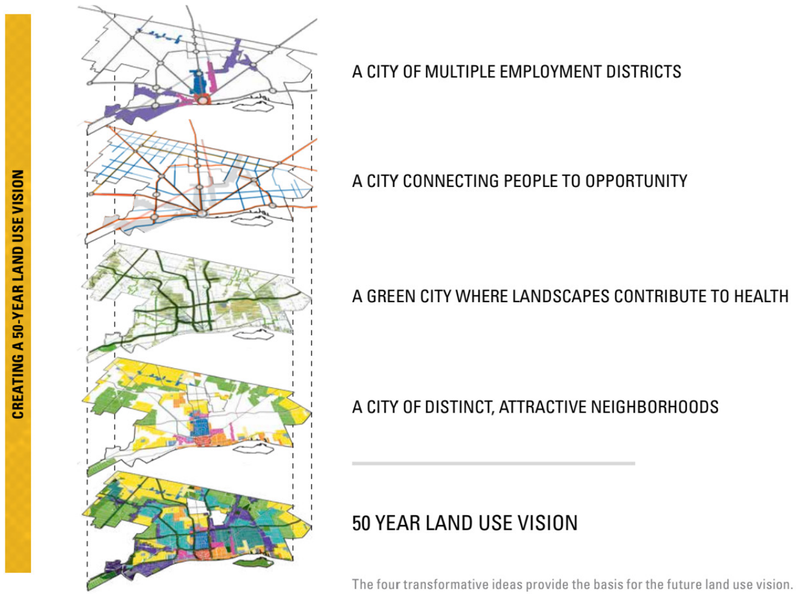


Figure 38. The layering of the land use visions established in the Detroit Future City Framework

scaled suburban sprawl[49] – it is now time for it to transition into its fourth growth period: one that is "stronger, greener, and more socially and economically vital,"[50] with "many centers and neighborhoods that each have a distinct identity and a character all their own."[51] The result would be a reunified metropolitan region and a stronger downtown core. The framework further states that this can be done through the creation of new urban forms relating to land use, neighborhood typologies, and using landscape as an urban catalyst. The future Detroit would "transform vacant land in ways that increase its value and productivity and promote long-term sustainability."[52]

Since the publication of the framework in 2012, the overall metropolitan region of Detroit has already made notable progress regarding its population and employment growth,[53] with future projections looking promising.

49 Detroit Future City, 2012 *Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*, Detroit Future City, 2012, https://detroitfuturecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/DFC_Full_2nd.pdf, 199.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid, 200.

52 Ibid, 217.

53 Mary Sheffield, "Capping off a historic turnaround, Detroit now leads Michigan in population growth," City of Detroit, published May 15, 2025, https://detroitmi.gov/news/capping-historic-turnaround-detroit-now-leads-michigan-population-growth.

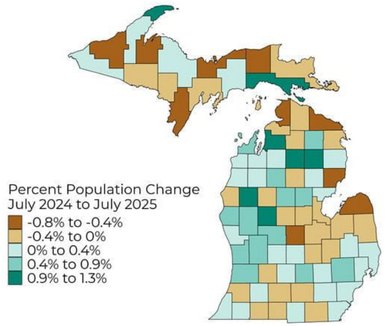


Figure 39. Percent population change 2024-2025, Michigan Center for Data and Analytics

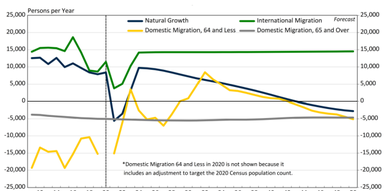


Figure 40. Components of Southeast Michigan's population growth, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments

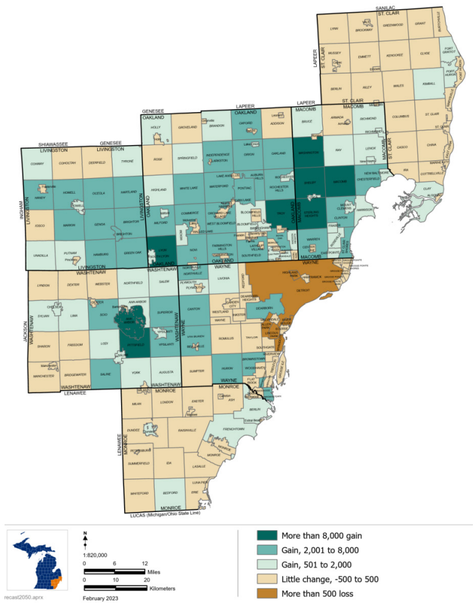


Figure 41. Population change 2020-2050, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments 2050 Forecast

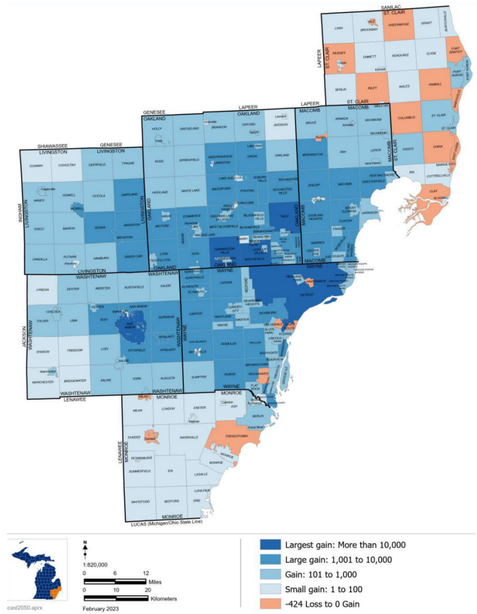


Figure 42. Employment change 2019-2050, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments 2050 Forecast

According to the *Michigan Center for Data and Analytics*, Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties all saw a positive population percent change from 2024 to 2025 (*Figure 39),* mainly attributed to international migration (*Figure 40*). Looking at future population change projections, the sustaining population growth is within the outer suburbs, as shown in *Figure 41.*

It is obvious that the question of how to retain and continue attracting an international and younger population is a key factor in metro Detroit's redevelopment. This is especially important with more jobs projected to be created within the city (*Figure 42).* The retention of middle-class suburban households helps to increase the regional tax base, stabilize housing, and lead to more sustainable and diverse living options, as stated by the updated *Detroit Future City 2030* framework.

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What role do dead malls have in these frameworks as catalysts for the development of resilient neighborhoods and sustainable community assets?

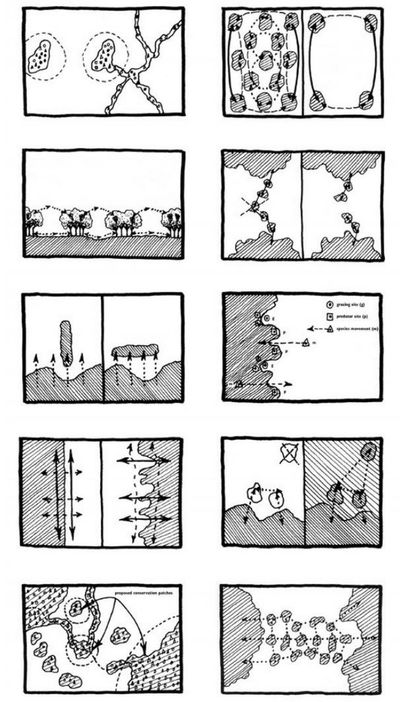


Figure 43. Ecologist Richard T.T. Forman's landscape ecology diagrams, linking ecological science with spatial patterning

3.2 Detroit & Landscape Urbanism

"As building fabric, street wall, and traditional public space recede as the primary determinants or urban order, landscape emerges as uniquely capable of restoring some form of spatial or social order."

– Charles Waldheim, Landscape as Urbanism, 2016

The importance the *Detroit Future City Framework* places on the transformation of vacant land is unique to Detroit's urban landscape given the metro region's history. In 2012, the city itself had around 20 square miles of total vacant land, almost equal to the size of Manhattan.[54] Considering the quantity of vacant land within the city and across metropolitan Detroit, there is an opportunity to capitalize on existing urban conditions to create new urban assets instead of developing from scratch. Specifically, the *Detroit Future City Framework* proposes that vacant land should be leveraged in innovative ways for productive and community-based purposes[55] by making landscape interventions, such as phytoremediation and the implementation of blue/green infrastructure, central to Detroit's revival.[56] This is defined as presenting "the greatest opportunity"[57] for the redevelopment of metropolitan Detroit.

Looking at some of the current, most influential revitalization projects in metro Detroit, these goals can already be seen in effect. In fact, the landscape-based goals defined by the framework directly correlate to the urban theory

54 Detroit Future City, 2012 *Detroit Strategic Framework Plan*, Detroit Future City, 2012, https://detroitfuturecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/DFC_Full_2nd.pdf, 22.

55 Ibid, 532.

56 Ibid, 42.

57 Ibid, 331.

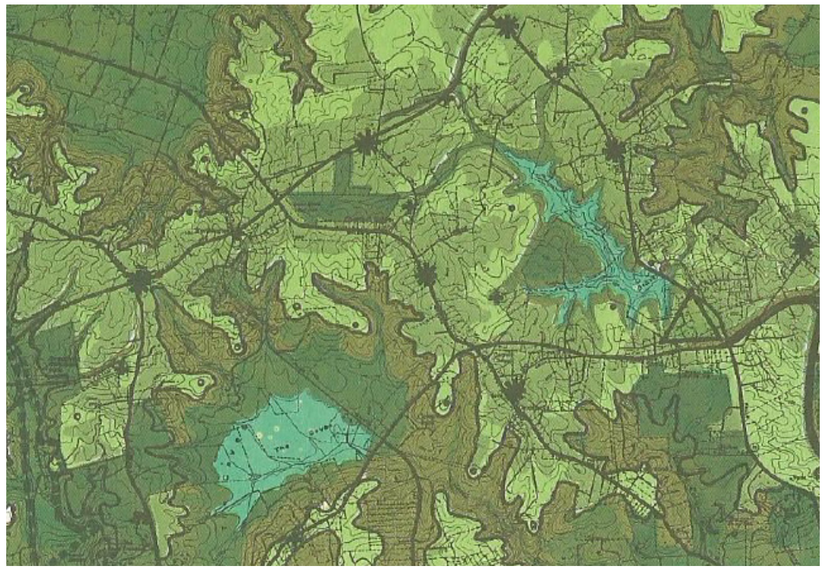


Figure 44. Ian McHarg's ecological mapping, with infrastructure layered on top

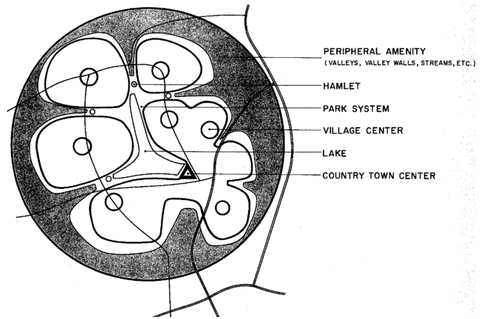


Figure 45. Ian McHarg's cellular urban organization, similar to both Gruen and Howard's urban theories

of Landscape Urbanism, which establishes landscape as the fundamental organizational strategy and approach to urban design.[58] In the book *Landscape as Urbanism* by Charles Waldheim, it is mentioned that "landscape urbanist practices emerged in relation to sites left in the wake of the restructuring of the industrial economy."[59] It is a direct response to Fordist economies, similar to Detroit, which have resulted in urban abandonment, paved landscapes, and contaminated soils. Landscape Urbanism helps reconcile neighborhoods and communities through introducing landscape as not only an urban and architectural tool, but as a new cultural category.[60] As a framework, Waldheim states that "priority should now be accorded to landscape (such as the urban example in *Figure 44*), rather than to freestanding built form and second, that there is a pressing need to transform certain megalopolitan types such as shopping malls, parking lots, and office parks into landscaped built forms."[61]

Waldheim's theories on landscape as an urban tool and new cultural category can be attributed to some of Landscape Urbanism's earliest thinkers: Richard T. T. Forman and Ian

58 Frederick Steiner, "Landscape ecological urbanism: Origins and trajectories," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 100, no.4 (2011): 333-337, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0169204611000570.

59 Charles Waldheim, *Landscape as Urbanism* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 69.

60 Ibid, 85.

61 Ibid, 18.

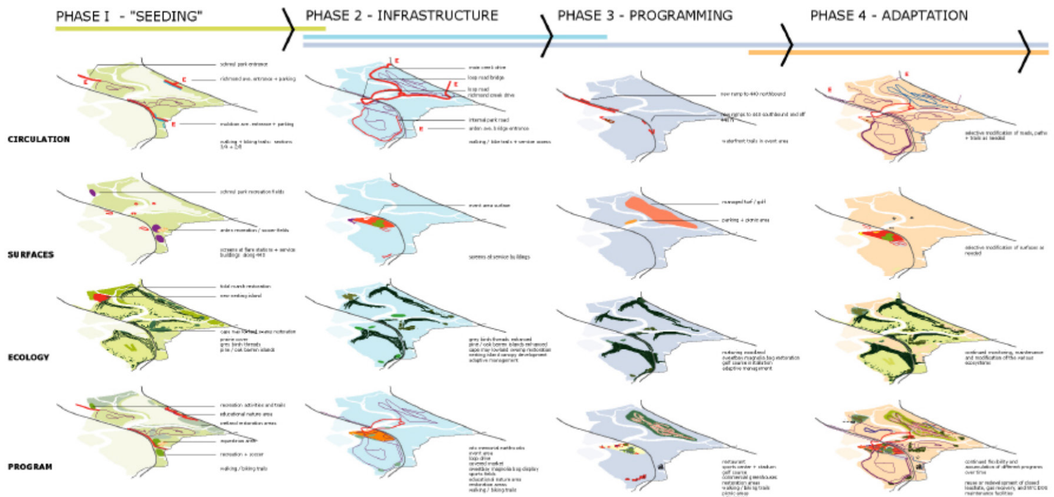


Figure 46. James Corner's system thinking, demonstrated through his Freshkills phasing diagram

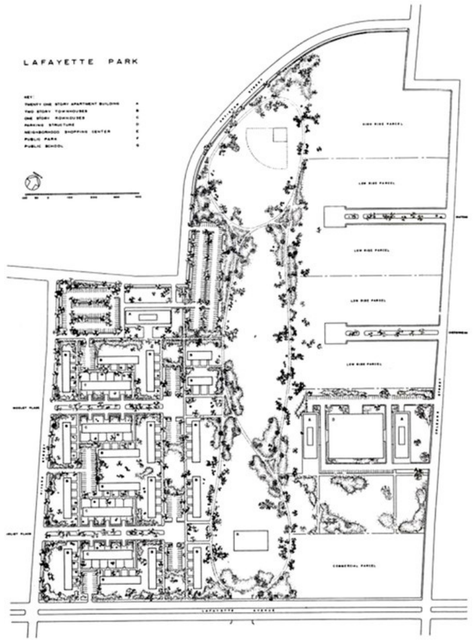


Figure 47. Urban plan of Lafayette Park, 1956

McHarg. Forman's *Landscape Ecology Principles in Landscape Architecture and Land-Use Planning* provided one of the first guidelines for the application of ecology in design and planning. McHarg's book *Design with Nature* was one of the first to encourage that natural patterns be used as an indication for land use, new urban forms, and landscape typologies,[62] supported by the layering of systems and ecological strategies throughout the design process. This use of systems thinking helps to further enhance a design's local and broader connectivity. A modern example of systems thinking in Landscape Urbanism can be attributed to James Corner's Freshkills landfill remediation strategy (*Figure 46*), which not only uses landscape as a remediation tool, but introduces it as a way to organize and cultivate programming.

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Landscape Urbanism is not a new theory to Detroit. Its use in Detroit's urban design can, in fact, be traced to the same decade that Northland Center was built. The first urban project in Detroit that used principles from Landscape Urbanism is Lafayette Park (*Figure 47*). Completed in 1956, it is a social housing and urban renewal project that leveraged landscape and transit infrastructure to organize the vacant

62 Ian McHarg, *Design with Nature* (Wiley, 1995).



Figure 48. Michigan Central Station revitalization project and its land remediation systems

site.[63] Following the existing network of green space, a 17-acre central park divides the site into different residential and commercial zones, while providing social and recreational amenities to the community. This was achieved by removing the typical 19th-century street grid and keeping most of the vehicular access to the perimeter of the site, placing more importance on interior pedestrian circulation.[64]

Since Lafayette Park, the legacy of Landscape Urbanism in Detroit has remained strong. The adaptive reuse and revitalization project for the abandoned Michigan Central Station, proposed in 2018, reintroduces the building as a testbed for urban mobility and transportation systems[65] (*Figure 48*). The landscape architect working on this project, Mikyoung Kim Design, states that the landscape will integrate stormwater management systems, a biodiverse landscape, green infrastructure, and clean energy systems, with the goal "to integrate human health issues with ecological resiliency – bringing health equity into this vision plan to reshape this neighborhood."[66] In addition, the landscape will add to social

63 Charles Waldheim, *Landscape as Urbanism* (Princeton University Press, 2016), 107.

64 Ibid, 110.

65 Robert L. Reid, "Michigan Central Station project redefines site's link to transportation," ASCE, published January 6, 2022, https://www.asce.org/publications-and-news/civil-engineering-source/civil-engineering-magazine/article/2022/01/michigan-central-station-project-redefines-sites-link-to-transportation.

66 "Ford's Michigan Central: A model for urban resiliency," The Plan, accessed June 23, 2026, https://www.theplan.it/eng/award-2022-Public-Space/fords-michigan-central-a-model-for-urban-resiliency-mikyoung-kim-design.



Figure 49. Ford Dearborn's Research and Engineering Center as a network of green neighborhoods

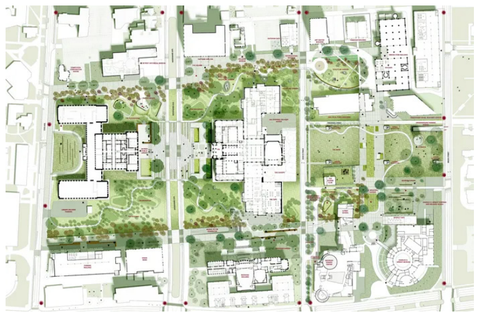


Figure 50. Detroit Cultural District revitalization plan as a green corridor

infrastructure by "connecting people with each other as neighbors and innovators, and by bringing the community closer to natural systems."[67]

Not long after, Snøhetta was commissioned to transform the heavily paved landscape of Ford Dearborn's Research and Engineering Center in 2019 (*Figure 49*). The design re-establishes the Ford Dearborn campus as a global automotive research epicenter that includes empowered workplaces, productive landscapes, and versatile mobility systems.[68] Emphasis is placed on the campus as its own symbiotic ecosystem that blends together buildings, landscapes, and communities to create distinct habitats across the site that ensure consolidated and interconnected workplaces for the employees.[69]

Finally, the most recent and one of the largest urban renewal projects in Detroit is the Detroit Cultural District Revitalization Plan, proposed in 2019 (*Figure 50*). Led by the Detroit Cultural Center Association, the plan implements ecological systems that work together with the proposed public spaces and the existing buildings to activate the district's voids. The project's commitment to sustainability also includes transforming 40% of the car-dominated spaces into permeable, publicly accessible areas that will serve as venues for cultural events and foster interaction between culture and community.[70]

–

Landscape Urbanism responds to post-industrial landscapes, such as those that make up metro Detroit's urban fabric, through the re-activation of vacant, abandoned, paved, and contaminated sites into productive landscapes, creating resilient and sustainable neighborhoods that connect to broader regional, social, and ecological contexts.

As shown in the projects above, some of Detroit's largest and oldest institutions are using Landscape Urbanism as a framework for their redevelopment. However, despite their size and socio-cultural purpose, one area where these frameworks are not being applied is mall redevelopment. What are the gaps between regional redevelopment trends and current mall redevelopment practices in metro Detroit?

67 Ibid.

68 "Ford Dearborn Master Plan," Snøhetta, accessed June 23, 2026, https://www.snohetta.com/projects/ford-dearborn-master-plan.

69 Ibid.

70 Maria-Chirstina Florian, "Detroit Cultural District Announces Transformative Urban Revitalization Project," ArchDaily, published December 3, 2024, https://www.archdaily.com/1024316/detroit-cultural-district-announces-transformative-urban-revitalization-project.



Figure 51. Livonia Mall redevelopment



Figure 52. Eastland Center redevelopment



Figure 53. Northland Center redevelopment

3.3 Contemporary Mall Redevelopment in Metro Detroit

"Detroit is a metaphor for America, for America's challenges and America's opportunities. It is a hothouse for new innovation, for ingenuity and risk taking."

– Darren Walker, 10th president of the Ford Foundation, 2015

It is important to state that some jurisdictions within the Rust Belt have already begun creating guidelines around mall redevelopment, mainly addressing issues around parking and walkability.[71] However, metro Detroit's lack of guidelines is resulting in the fragmented redevelopment of its malls. Gaps in metro Detroit's mall redevelopment practices can be identified by understanding what is currently happening to metro Detroit's dead malls.

Livonia Mall, the first mall redevelopment project to be completed in 2010, was converted into a smaller-scale shopping center, with the original anchor stores separated and retained, the addition of single-unit retail pavilions, and infilled with parking (*Figure 51*). This is the most common redevelopment strategy seen in the metropolitan area to date.

Eastland Mall, redeveloped in 2024, was completely demolished and rebuilt into three commercial warehouse buildings. It is now surrounded by other big box retailers (*Figure 52*).

Northland Center, the first open-air regional shopping mall in America designed by Victor Gruen, is also in the midst of redevelopment (*Figure 53*). The plan retains the mall's

71 City of Toronto, *Mall Redevelopment Guide*, City of Toronto, 2021, https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/975e-CityPlanningMall-Redevelopment.pdf.



Figure 54. Lakeside Mall redevelopment plan as of 2024

original retail pavilions, while infilling the rest of the site with residential blocks, a hotel, restaurants, and surface parking. Other large department stores will be constructed within the site's periphery.

Finally, the most recent mall in the process of redevelopment is Lakeside Mall in the suburb of Sterling Heights (*Figure 54*).

Thinking about the historic asset the mall provided to the suburbs, the cause of its death, its relationship with the urban issues that are affecting Detroit, and its correlations with the future redevelopment of the metropolitan region, there is a gap between what is currently happening with mall redevelopment and the potential to leverage mall redevelopment with more nuance to its regional, ecological, and social contexts.

These missed opportunities are identified as:

- The transformation of the mall's surface parking into productive landscaping through the implementation of alternative parking strategies, the use of ecology as an organizational tool, and the application of natural land remediation strategies and blue/green infrastructure to ensure the site's sustainability and the creation of neighborhood identity
- The development of interconnected residential neighborhoods that consider local residential typologies, prioritize pedestrian circulation, and create spaces where people can gather and foster community
- Leveraging the purpose and typology of the mall to create a distinct civic downtown, replacing traditional retail anchors with socio-cultural community programming that creates a lasting neighborhood asset

The following chapter addresses these missed opportunities in a new urban design proposal for a selected dead mall's redevelopment.

4| Proposed Design

4.1 Site Selection & Context
4.2 Site Approach
4.3 Landscape Approach
4.4 Residential Block Approach
4.5 Mall Approach
4.6 Site Phasing
4.7 Visualizing the Mall

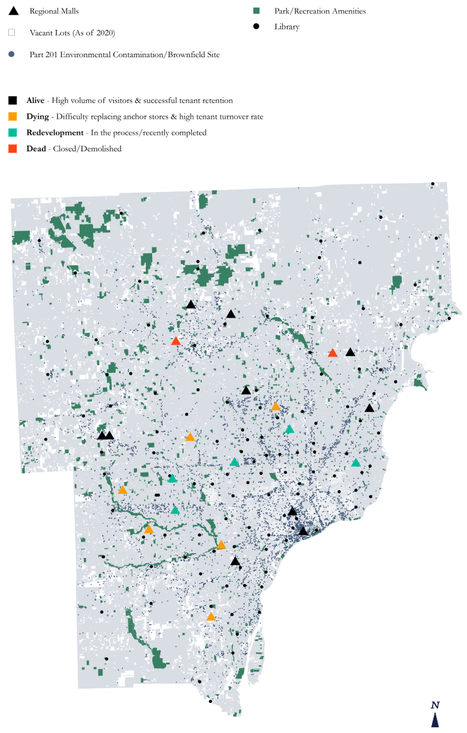


Figure 55. Regional malls, vacant lots (2020), recreation amenities and cultural institutions, and environmental contamination/brownfield sites

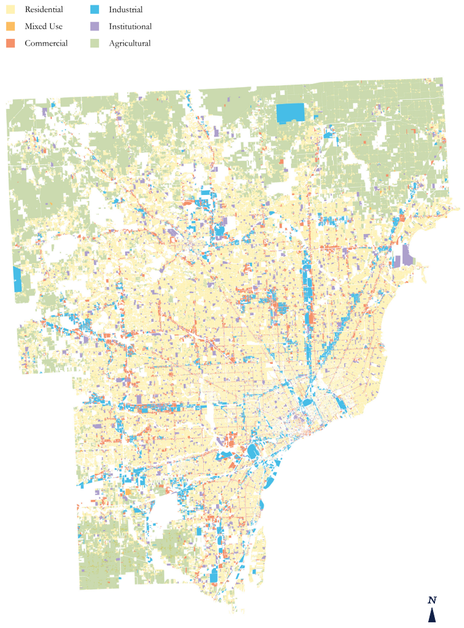


Figure 56. Metropolitan Detroit's land use, 2020

4.1 Site Selection & Context

The selection of a dead mall for the proposed urban design takes into account the state of the mall and its location in the broader contexts of metro Detroit's existing social, regional, and ecological contexts.

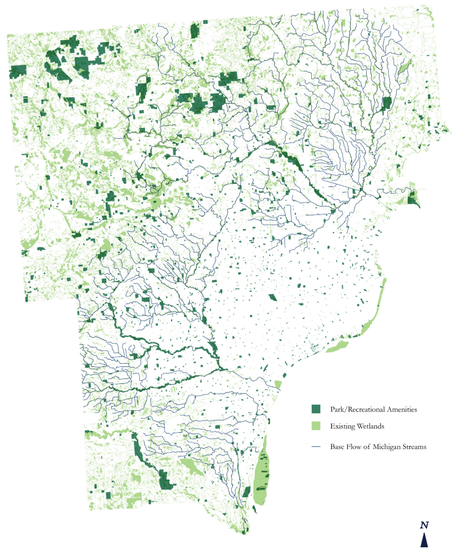


Figure 57. Metropolitan Detroit's existing wetlands, base flow of Michigan streams & parks/recreational amenities

The overlaid context maps (*Figure 58*) help to identify a mall that is most capable of responding to the urban issues outlined in this thesis.

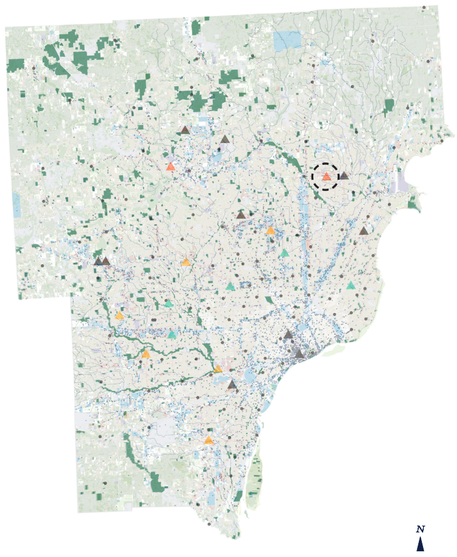


Figure 58. Overlaying of context layers to determine the mall with the most potential to respond to urban issues



Figure 59. Aerial view of Lakeside Mall



Figure 60. The abandoned Lakeside Mall, as of December 2025

Lakeside Mall (circled in *Figure 58* and shown in *Figure 59)*, located in the township of Sterling Heights, is a mall that is not only located within the proper contexts of urban abandonment, site contamination, and inadequate social infrastructure, but has also died within the last couple of years. Built 50 years ago in 1976, it "quickly became more than just a shopping destination. It was a community hub where patrons enjoyed several experiences,"[72] according to *Detroit Public Radio.* At the time, these experiences included ice rinks, water parks, and play structures. The township of Sterling Heights, which never had a downtown, used it as its unofficial civic center, leading to many people having "strong emotional connections to Lakeside Mall."[73]

Similar to the fate of other malls, Lakeside Mall was affected by the declining demand for department stores, which was eventually worsened by the pandemic.[74] Originally noticing its decline in the early 2000s because of local retail competition, the mall was officially pronounced dead in 2024.[75]

72 Anelle Scott, "The legacy and future of Lakeside Mall," Detroit Public Radio, published July 5, 2024, https://wdet.org/2024/07/05/the-legacy-and-future-of-lakeside-mall/.

73 Ibid.

74 Cassidy Johncox, "Lakeside Mall officially closing: What's next for the space," Click On Detroit, published June 30, 2024, https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/local/2024/06/30/lakeside-mall-officially-closing-whats-next-for-the-space/.

75 Elissa Robinson, "The rise and fall of 7 metro Detroit shopping malls," Detroit Free Press, published September 26, 2025, https://www.freep.com/picture-gallery/money/business/michigan/2025/09/26/dead-metro-detroit-shopping-malls/86366055007/.

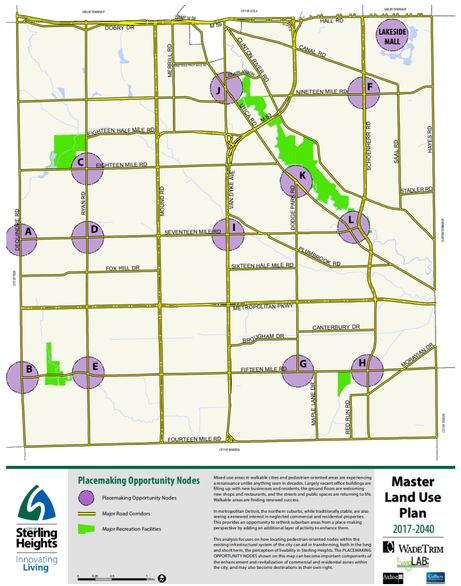


Figure 61. Establishing Lakeside Mall as a placemaking opportunity for the local community

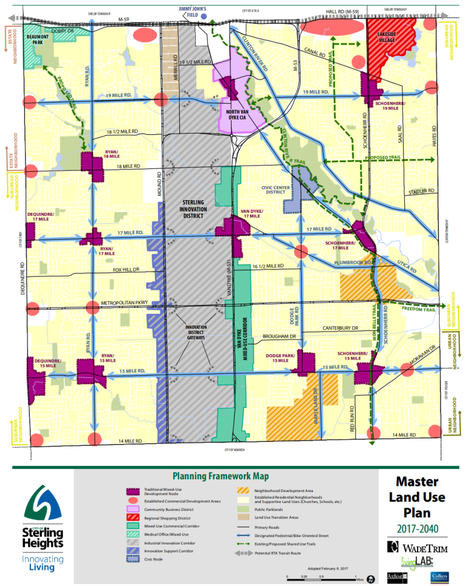


Figure 62. Establishing Lakeside Mall as a village, with commercial development, mixed-use nodes, proposed trails, and designated pedestrian-oriented streets forming a network around it

What is noteworthy is that by understanding the impact the mall once had on its community, the township of Sterling Heights has started incorporating the future vision for the mall into its future land use plans.

In *Figure 61*, Lakeside Mall is considered a placemaking opportunity node, specifically relating to walkable, mixed-use development that can enhance the livability of future neighborhoods and become a destination for residents living in the area.

Figure 62 speaks to the mall's broader catalyst for revitalization, showing how the new Lakeside Village starts to connect to nearby proposed mixed-use and commercial zones, as well as pedestrian and green corridors.

Broadly speaking, the understanding of malls as sites of opportunity is a crucial first step to ensure their integration in future urban development.

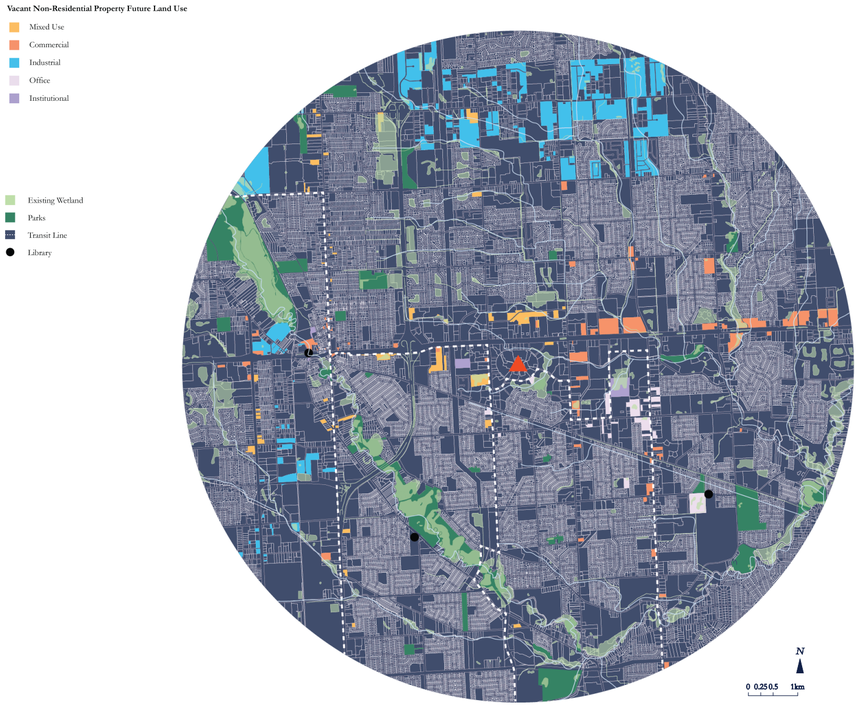


Figure 63. Looking at future land use, the location of parks, wetlands, libraries, and transportation systems surrounding Lakeside Mall

To understand the urban conditions that surround Lakeside Mall, broader context mapping is conducted. *Figure 63* explores the future land use of the region and its relationship to existing social and ecological infrastructure.

Future land use indicates that there will be multiple mixed-use and commercial development projects adjacent to the mall and around the main vehicular corridors. This aligns with Sterling Heights' ongoing international population growth, with 28% of the city's population currently identifying as foreign-born.[76] As more mixed-use neighborhoods are built, the location of existing parks and libraries is few and far between. New development should account for the addition of similar amenities that will support current residents and attract new ones. These new community amenities can further connect neighborhoods to larger recreation and natural systems, such as the Clinton River Park and the Clinton River, which cradles the mall from east to west.

What this scale of mapping successfully does is that it clearly identifies the mall as a centrally located node with the potential to host various programs and an adjacency to ecological patches that can broaden socio-cultural and ecological connectivity.

76 "Not My Parent's Macomb County," WE Global Network, accessed July 7, 2026, https://www.weglobalnetwork.org/not-my-parents-macomb-county/.

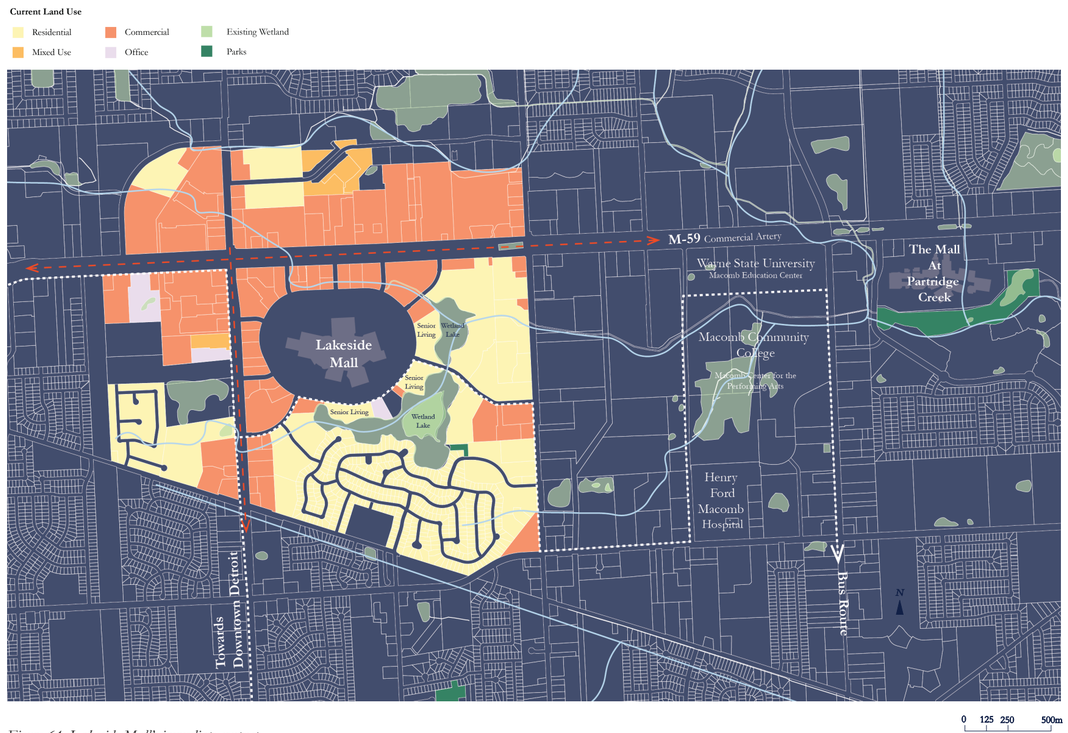


Figure 64. Lakeside Mall's immediate context

While the mapping in *Figure 63* showed future land use, the diagram in *Figure 64* specifically looks at what is around Lakeside Mall today.

To the northwest of the mall, an abundance of big-box department stores, pavilion retail, and hotels line the M-59 retail artery. The older neighborhoods are located to the southeast of the mall, mainly comprising townhouses and single-family houses. Three senior homes are located right next to the mall.

In addition to the abundance of department stores that already line the M-59, The Mall at Partridge Creek is another, smaller, open-air mall to the east of Lakeside Mall. This mall is still thriving despite the trends in mall closures, possibly attributed to its size and connection to the outdoors.

In between the two malls sit two satellite community colleges and a regional hospital. The surrounding retail, educational, and health institutions are beneficial infrastructure to have near a rapidly developing area.

In terms of natural systems, wetland lakes connecting to the Clinton River and patches of forested land can also be found within the mall's vicinity.



Figure 65. Lakeside Mall redevelopment proposal

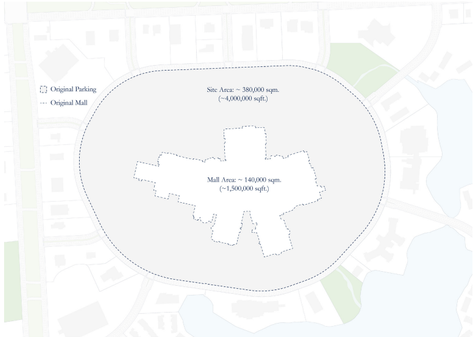


Figure 66. The original Lakeside Mall



Figure 67. Highlighting the proposed quantity of surface parking (which takes up 30% of the site), and the fragmentation of the mall that makes up the new development

With an understanding of the regional, ecological, and social contexts around Lakeside Mall, this places into question whether the current redevelopment proposal (*Figure 65*) offers the best way to leverage the opportunities presented by the dead mall. If the city of Sterling Heights places importance on the future of Lakeside Mall in their future land use plans, and envisions the Lakeside Mall redevelopment project to become a "vibrant urban center that celebrates the area's unique character and history,"[77] does proposing surface parking on 30% of the site, fragmenting the mall to prioritize vehicular access, and limiting pedestrian circulation to the site's center and periphery respond to the vision goals?

To speak more to what is being proposed on the site, it will accommodate around 2,800 residential units, of which 750 are senior living units, around 150,000 sq. ft. (13,935 sqm.) of retail, a 120-room hotel, and around 60,000 sq. ft. (5,574 sqm.) of office space.[78]

The mall is located on a brownfield, meaning that contaminants were found on the site, likely linked to the asphalt and the mall's initial construction. The redevelopment

77 "Lakeside City Center," City of Sterling Heights, accessed June 24, 2026, https://www.sterlingheights.gov/2069/Lakeside-City-Center.

78 Paula Gardner, "Lakeside Mall to close July 1, paving way for $1 billion redevelopment," Bridge Michigan, published May 1, 2024, https://bridgemi.com/business-watch/lakeside-mall-close-july-1-paving-way-1-billion-redevelopment/.

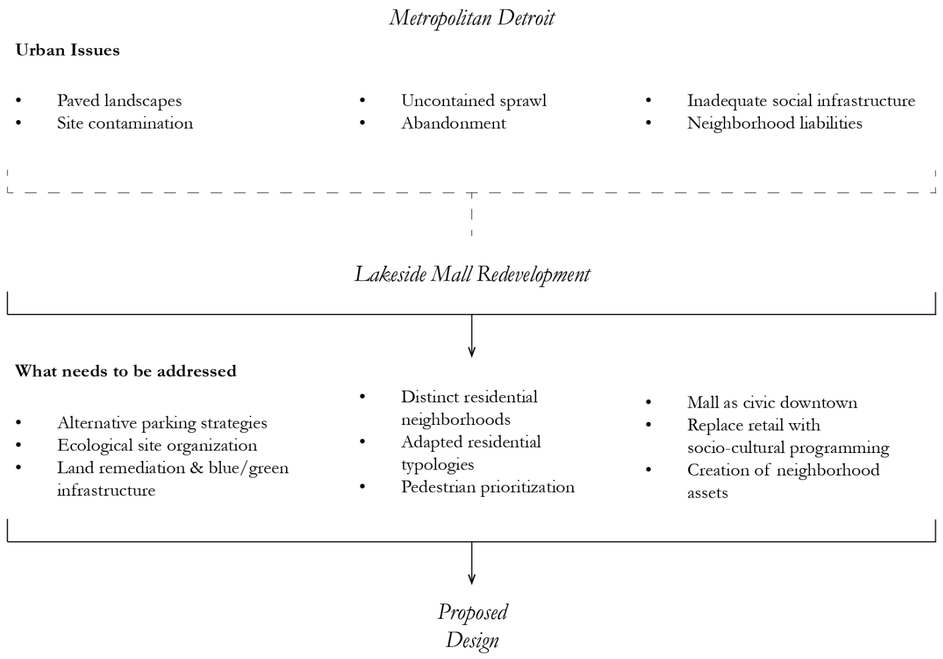


Figure 68. Urban issues and missed opportunities define the proposed design

project is currently seeking approval for Brownfield Tax Increment Financing and the Transformational Brownfield Program.[79] If properly used, not only will these help fund the remediation of the site and the implementation of sustainable infrastructure, but they will also provide the opportunity to create the resilient neighborhood assets that metro Detroit is looking for.

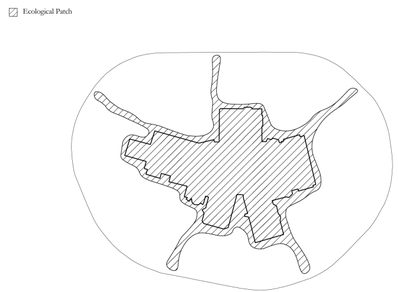
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To truly adapt Lakeside Mall into a community asset, address metropolitan Detroit's urban issues, and approach the missed opportunities within mall redevelopment (*Figure 68),* the biggest transformative ideas lie in what to do with the mall's parking and with the mall itself.

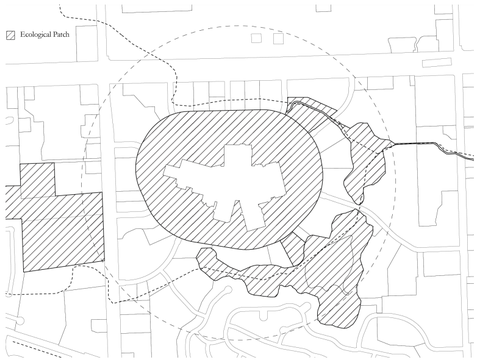
The following sections highlight approaches that can be used to rethink the possibilities of Lakeside Mall's redevelopment by leveraging theories relating to the mall as an asset and metro Detroit's regional revitalization plans through landscape-based urbanism.

79 DeJanay Booth-Singleton, "Sterling Heights City Council approves tax plan to redevelop former Lakeside Mall," CBS News, published May 6, 2026, https://www.cbsnews.com/detroit/news/sterling-heights-tax-plan-lakeside-mall/.

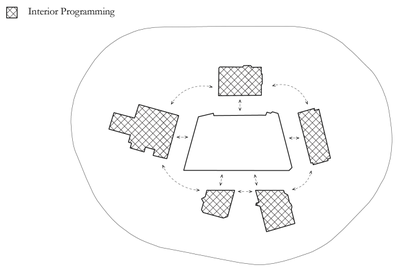
"An ecologically optimum patch provides ecological benefits, characterized by a rounded core for protection of resources, curvilinear boundaries, and fingers for ecological dispersal and interaction."



"An area located in close proximity to other ecological patches will have a higher chance of being integrated into the broader ecosystem it occupies."



"Smaller spaces that interrupt large areas act as stepping stones for movement."
"Instead of a larger program, related programming can thrive as a collective."



"The optimal spatial arrangement of a cluster of buildings around large areas provides additional circulation, while maintaining an overall array around the large areas to ensure connectivity."

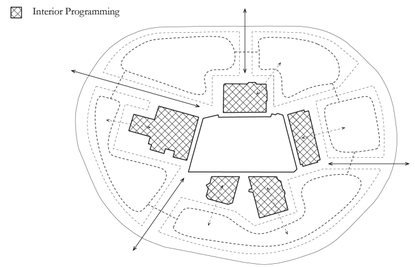


Figure 69. Site approach inspired by Richard T.T. Forman's landscape principles

4.2 Site Approach

True to the *Detroit Future City Framework* and current Detroit redevelopment projects, the base for the site approach is drawn from Landscape Urbanism principles, specifically from Richard T.T. Forman's book *Landscape Ecology Principles in Landscape Architecture and Land-Use Planning*. By choosing specific principles that respond the most to the site's conditions and desired outcomes, the four diagrams in *Figure 69* start demonstrating approaches to which the site could be organized.

The first two principles (top left and right) relate to the ecological optimization of the site. They rethink the paved surface of the site as an ecological patch, and consider which surrounding landscapes to integrate onto the site to ensure broader ecological connectivity. The last two principles (bottom left and right) look more specifically at the architecture of the mall, and how through its division into smaller units, this allows for the creation of a network of diverse neighborhood clusters that come together to thrive as a whole.

Figure 70 synthesizes these principles into a new urban design proposal for Lakeside Mall. Site-specific strategies are further explained through diagramming.

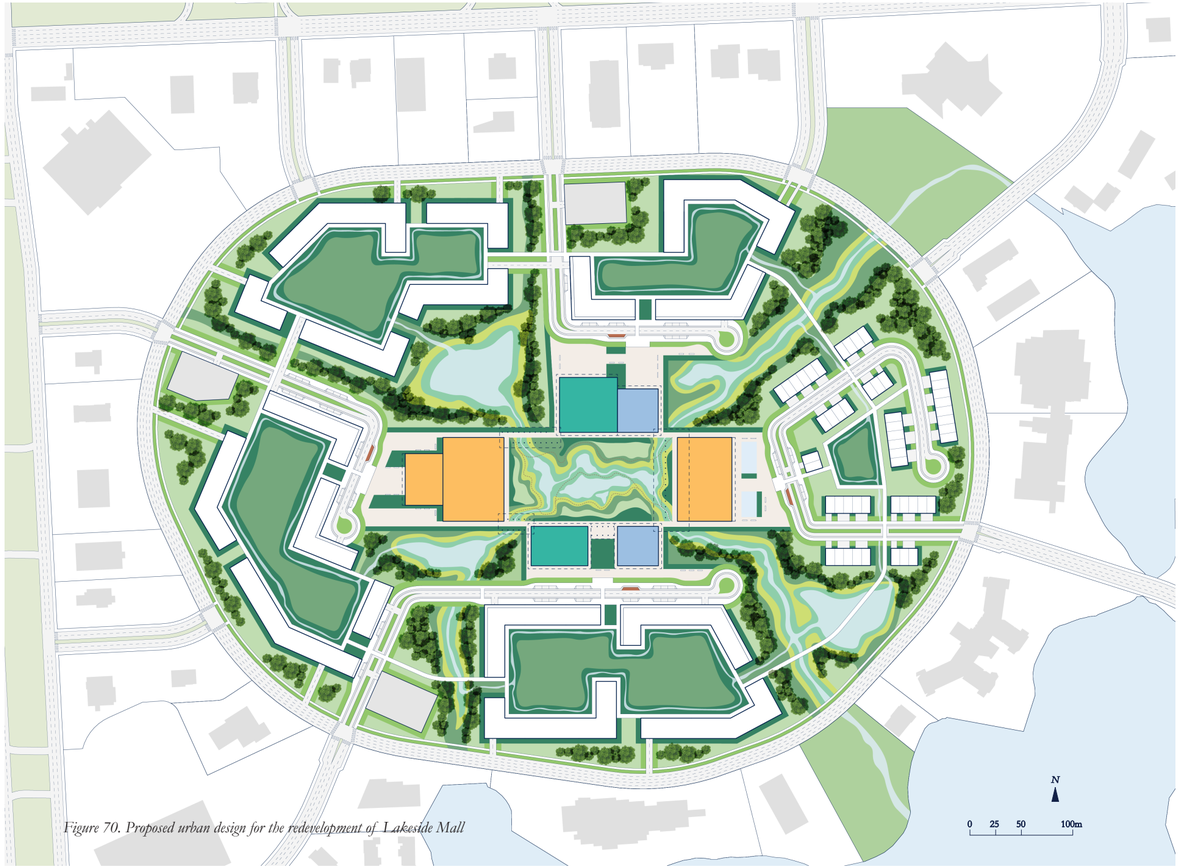


Figure 70. Proposed urban design for the redevelopment of Lakeside Mall

Neighborhoods & Civic Center

The new urban design proposal for Lakeside Mall creates five distinct neighborhoods named after the site's ecology. The residential typologies located in each neighborhood reflect the mall's surrounding land use. Lake, Forest, Marsh, and Wetland are mid-rise mixed-use communities, while Park is a townhouse community given its adjacency to senior living. The neighborhoods are organized around the mall, which acts as a newly established neighborhood center.

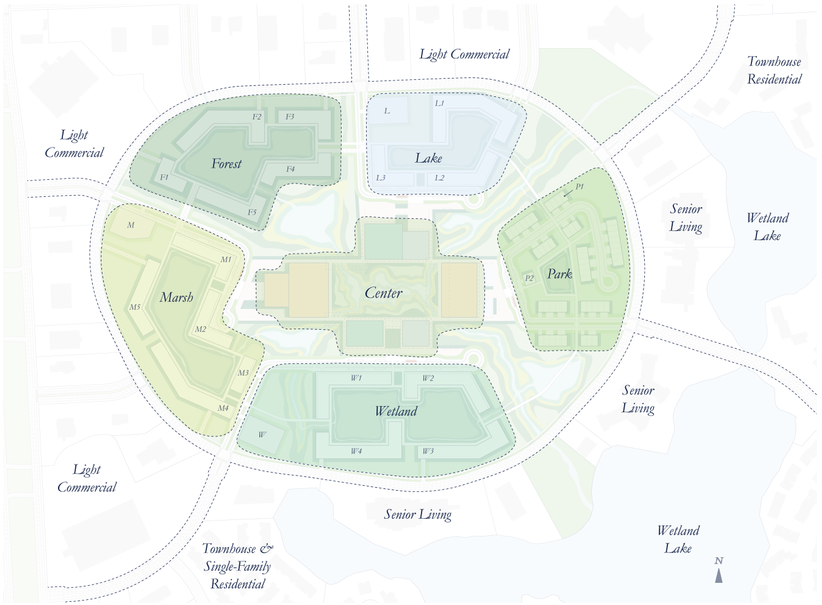


Figure 71. Lakeside Mall's new neighborhoods, organized around the mall

Natural Land Remediation Strategies

To address the brownfield, natural land remediation strategies are proposed as a more sustainable solution compared to the use of chemicals or concrete capping. Not only is natural land remediation directly tied to the site's overall landscape organization strategy, but it can involve community members in its management and maintenance, helping to create stronger social and environmental cohesion even during the redevelopment process.

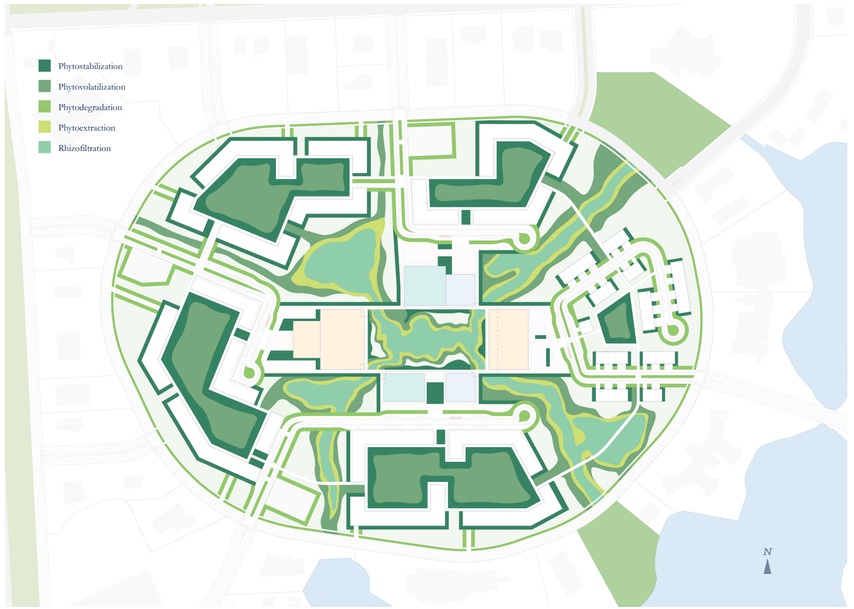


Figure 72. Natural land remediation strategies

Water Management Strategy

In addition to natural land remediation strategies, smaller wetland ponds are proposed on the site in strategic locations, given the sloping of the site, to ensure that water is properly managed or redirected into the existing larger wetland lakes that surround the mall. Since the wetland lakes already flow into the Clinton River, the site will naturally become connected to regional water systems.

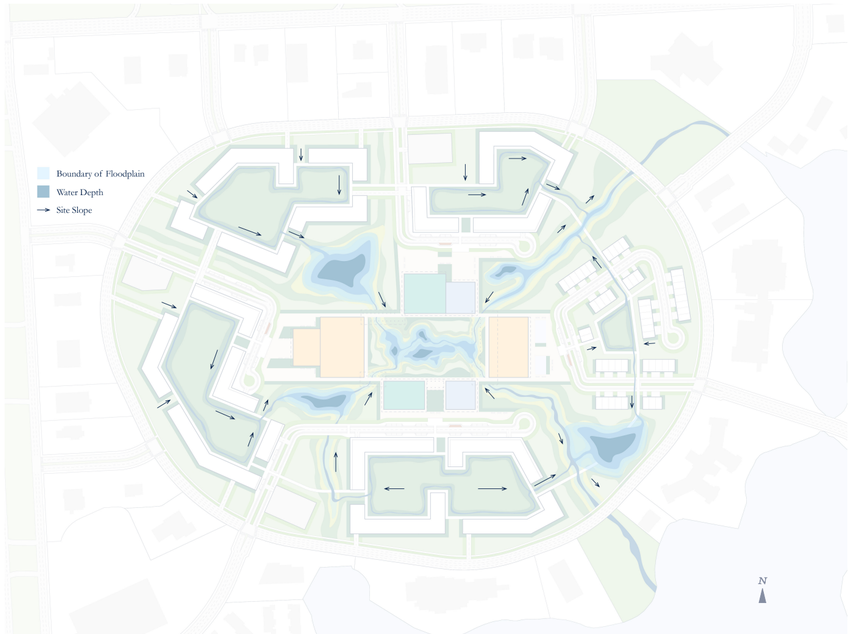


Figure 73. Water management strategy

Alternative Parking Strategies

Malls traditionally encourage visitors to park and walk to the entrance from their cars. By placing parking garages at the peripheries of the neighborhoods, constructing above-grade parking for the residential blocks and retail loading, and providing roadside parking for drop-offs, the mall is no longer centered around the car. Encouraging visitors to walk to the mall through the neighborhoods allows for more interaction between residents, the built environment, and nature, which fosters a sense of community.



Figure 74. Alternative parking strategy

Retail Strategy

Given the trend in department store closures, the mall will no longer be centered around retail. Instead, the retail on the site caters specifically to the residents of the neighborhoods, with designated ground-floor retail proposed for certain residential blocks. The proposed ground-floor storefronts draw visitors onto the site and activates the streets across from the mall's plazas. Since malls are typically located in heavily commercialized areas, there is already an abundance of retail opportunity in close proximity to the site.

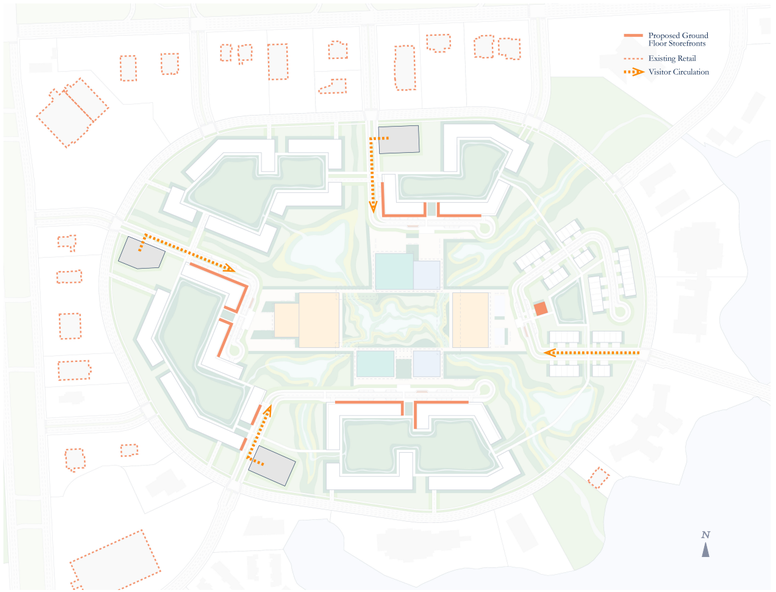


Figure 75. Retail strategy

Resident & Visitor Pedestrian Circulation

Pedestrian circulation on the site is not only confined to the main roads but also branches out to connect the neighborhoods. Visitor circulation offers a more direct approach to the site, while allowing people to flow easily in and around the mall. More privatized resident circulation branches off from the public paths, indicated by their pathways between residential blocks into the neighborhood courtyards.

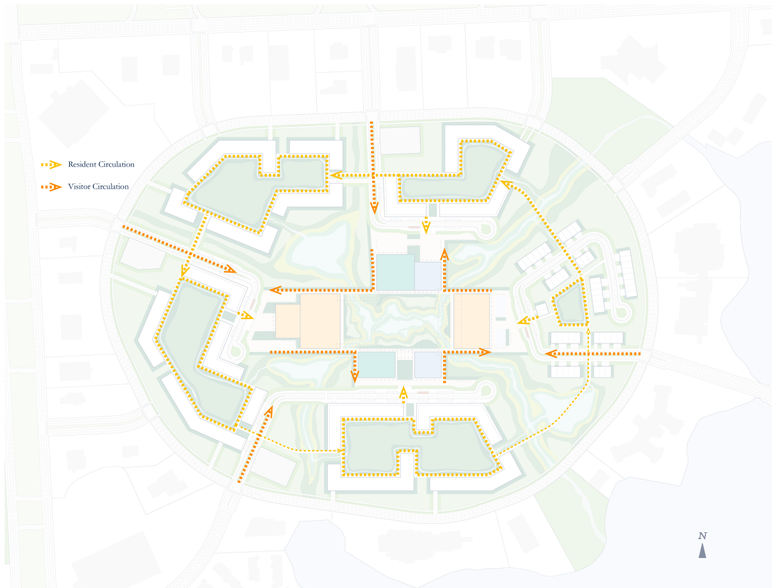


Figure 76. Pedestrian circulation

Possible Site Transportation Strategy

Thinking about the possibility of alternative modes of transportation on the site, the existing bus route offers the opportunity for a small shuttle system to bring visitors who use public transportation to the mall. Designated bus drop-off zones at the front of the mall's main entrances make it more accessible to the broader public.

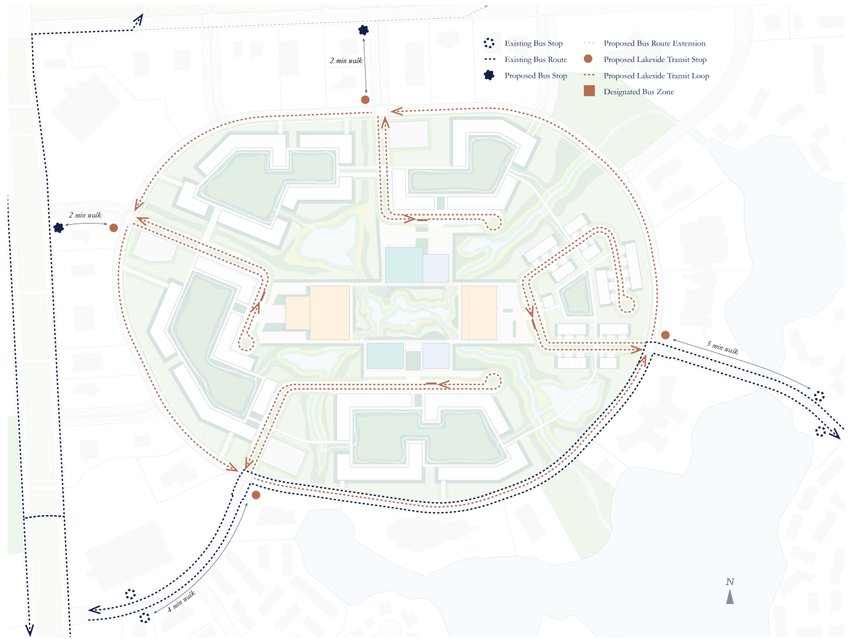


Figure 77. Possible site transportation strategy

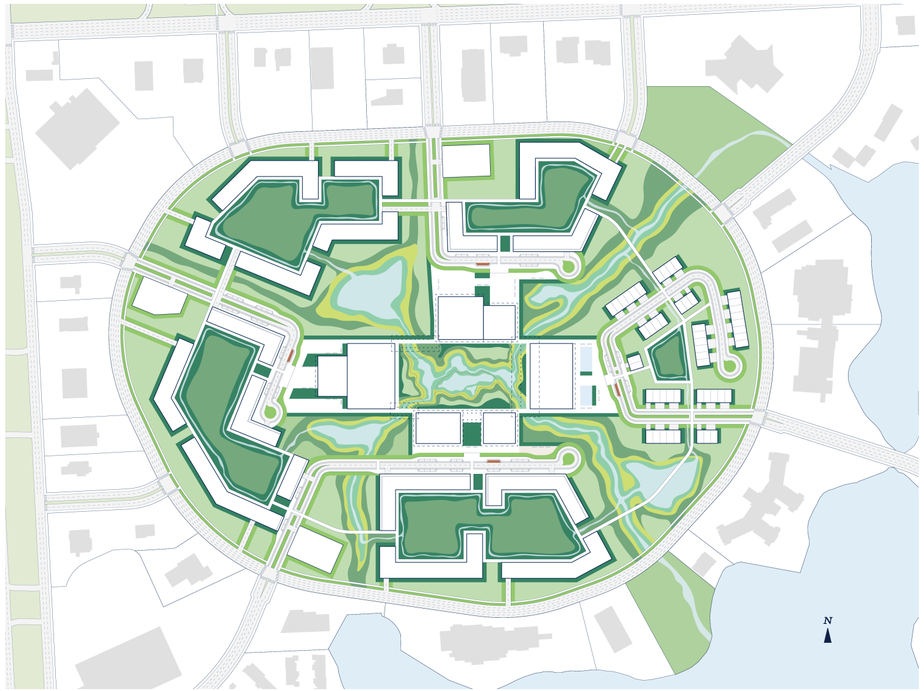


Figure 78. Landscape approach

4.3 Landscape Approach

In the same vein as using Landscape Urbanism principles for the site approach, the selected landscape approaches work together to remediate the soil and provide a healthier environment for the residents.

The use of natural land remediation systems ensures that existing toxins from the paving and outdated building materials are absorbed and discarded in a non-toxic way. Similar to the way nature organizes the buildings on the site, nature will also be used for the site's reclamation. The type of land remediation strategy applied is in relation to their optimal location given the possible type of soil contaminant on the site.

The additional implementation of blue/green infrastructure not only ensures that the land remediation plants will be protected and able to thrive, but further ensures the sustainability and health of the site and its residents.

Land Remediation Strategies & Chemical Process

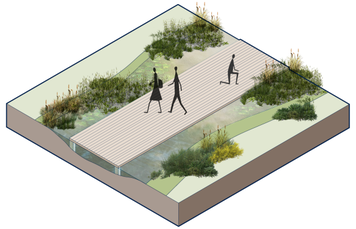


Figure 79. Rhizofiltration, solution for nickel & copper contaminants

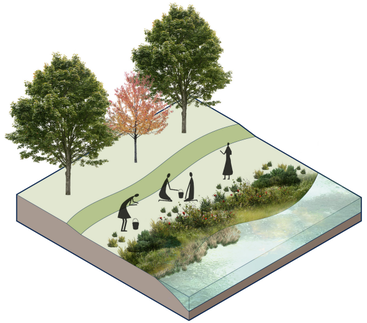


Figure 80. Phytoextraction, solution for lead contaminants

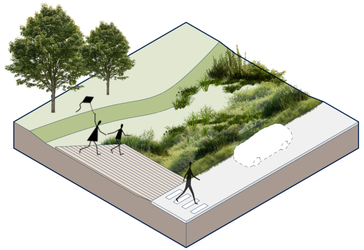


Figure 81. Phytodegradation, solution for petroleum contaminants

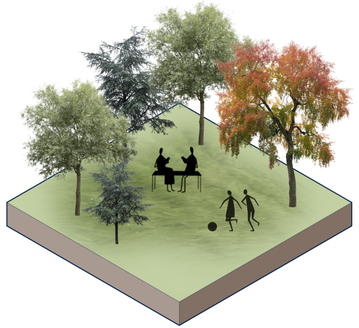


Figure 82. Phytovolatilization, solution for organochlorine contaminants

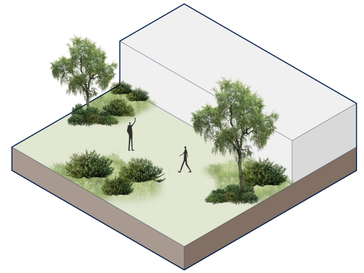


Figure 83. Phytostabilization, solution for nickel & copper contaminants

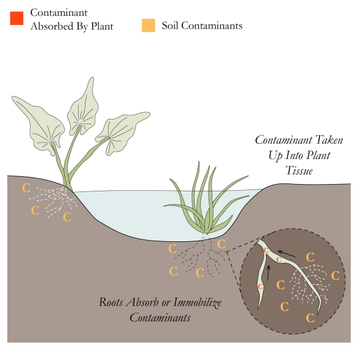


Figure 84. Rhizofiltration chemical process

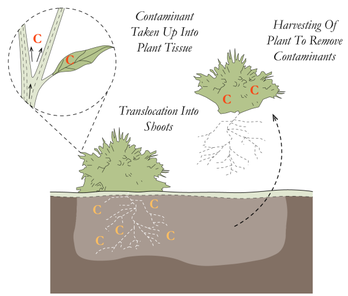


Figure 85. Phytoextraction chemical process

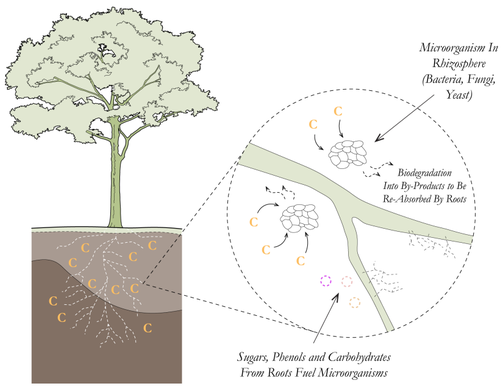


Figure 86. Phytodegradation chemical process

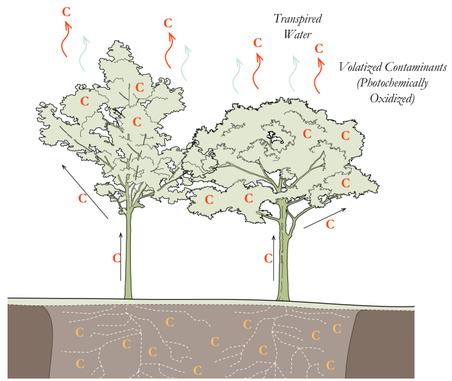


Figure 87. Phytovolatilization chemical process

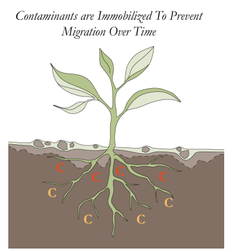


Figure 88. Phytostabilization chemical process



Figure 89. Natural land remediation strategies and their associated plan color

Sample Neighborhood Application of Land Remediation Strategies

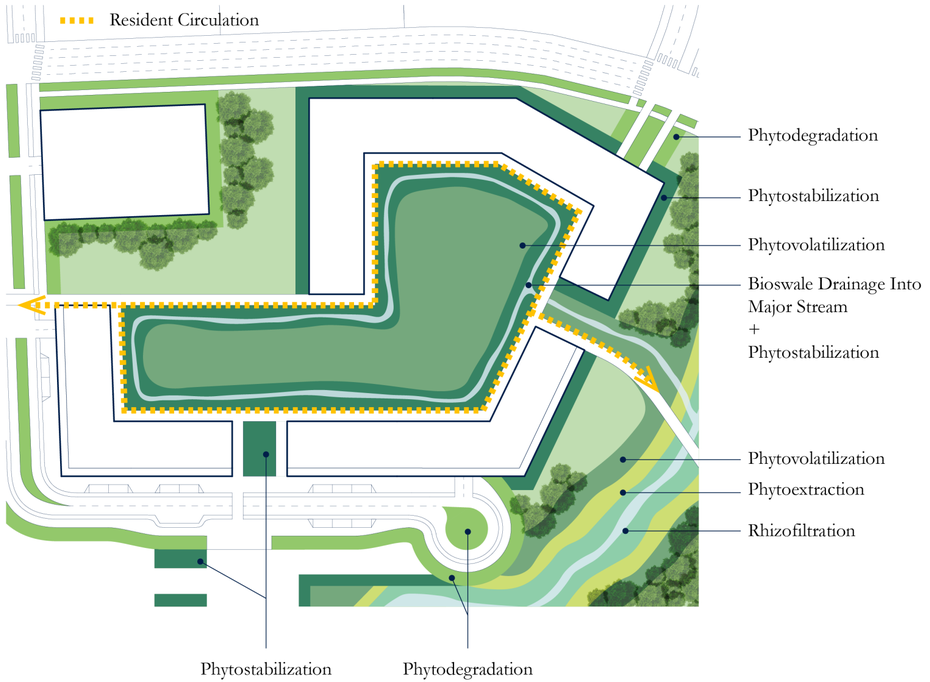


Figure 90. Sample neighborhood application of the natural land remediation strategies, showing the typical location of each one

Blue/Green Infrastructure Strategies

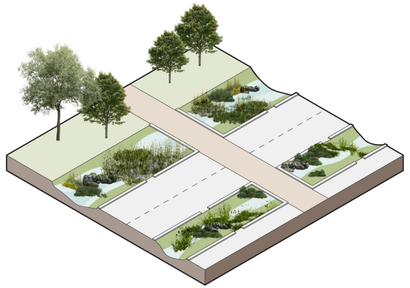


Figure 91. Implementation of blue/green street infrastructure (1)

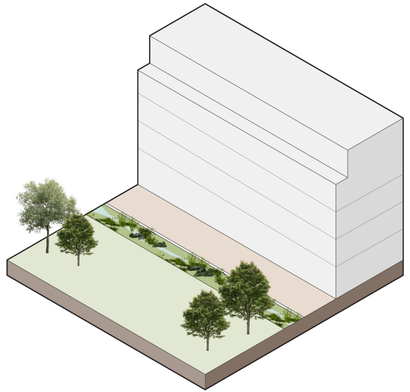


Figure 92. Residential block bioswale drainage (2)

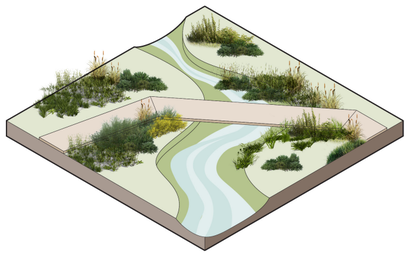


Figure 93. Prioritized wetlands (3)

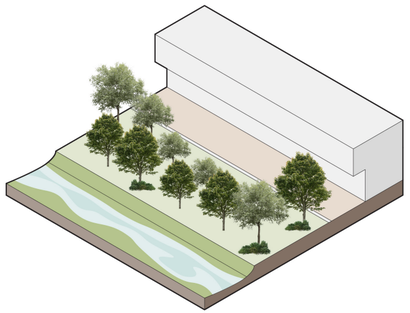


Figure 94. Appropriate wetland buffers (4)

Sample Neighborhood Application of Blue/Green Infrastructure Strategies

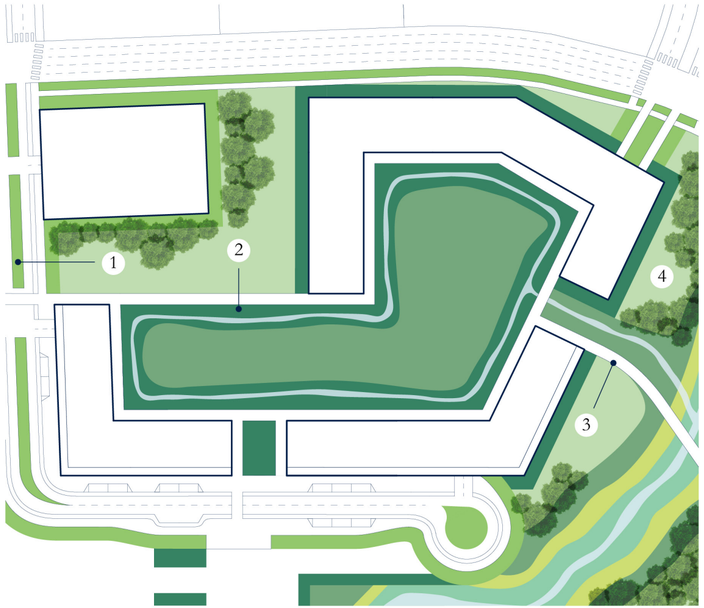


Figure 95. Sample neighborhood application of blue/green infrastructure strategies to manage water and protect proposed ecology

Landscape Sections

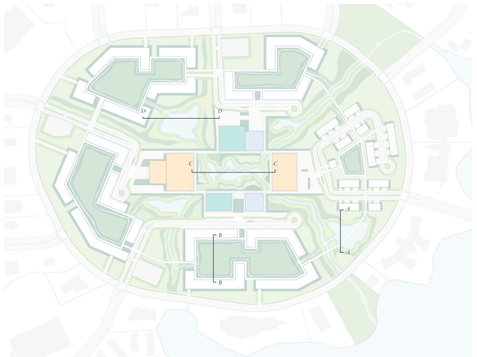


Figure 96. Landscape section cuts

Given that the mall is surrounded by wetland lakes and ecological patches, the landscape sections demonstrate the ability for the landscape strategies to form new ecosystems and integrate into the ones already present around the site.

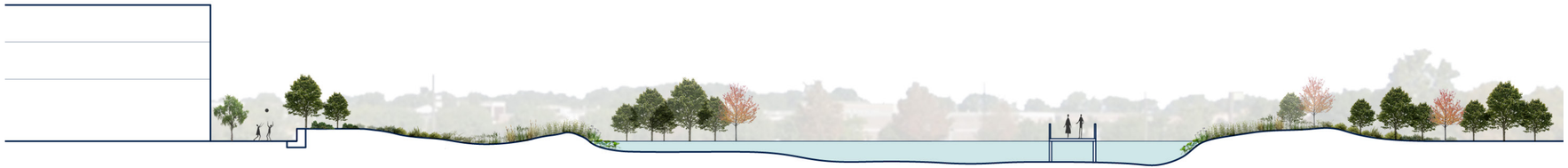


Figure 97. Section AA, cutting through a townhouse, backyard, wetland, and wetland pond



Figure 98. Section BB, cutting through a residential block courtyard

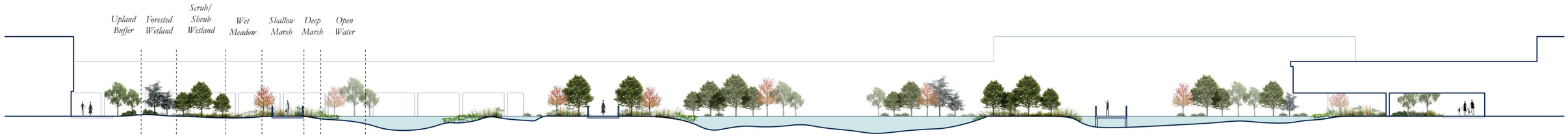


Figure 99. Section CC, cutting through the west mall anchor, the central wetland courtyard, and the east mall anchor. The layering of typical wetland vegetation types is diagrammed to the left, demonstrating the correlation between proposed land remediation strategies and natural wetland ecosystems

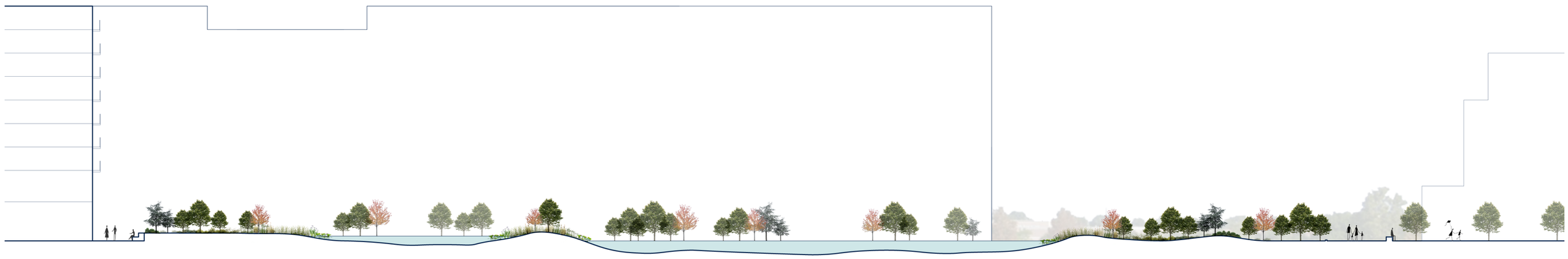


Figure 100. Section DD, cutting through a residential block tower, the wetland and wetland ponds, and a plaza on the eastern side



Figure 101. Residential block approach

4.4 Residential Block Approach

The layout and organization of the residential typologies must not only respond to the proposed landscaping but also create places that encourage community gathering.

Block rules are first implemented to ensure that the five neighborhoods all follow the same language. The new residential building typologies proposed on the site (the modern multi-block townhouse and the green mixed-use residential block) are adapted from existing residential buildings and will use the block rules to dictate their organization. More specifically, the residential blocks will be organized based on the courtyard typology, giving space between buildings for recreational and community-building programming.

To ensure an equivalent profitability to the original proposal, the number of residential units, retail area, and parking spaces are accounted for.

Residential Block Rules

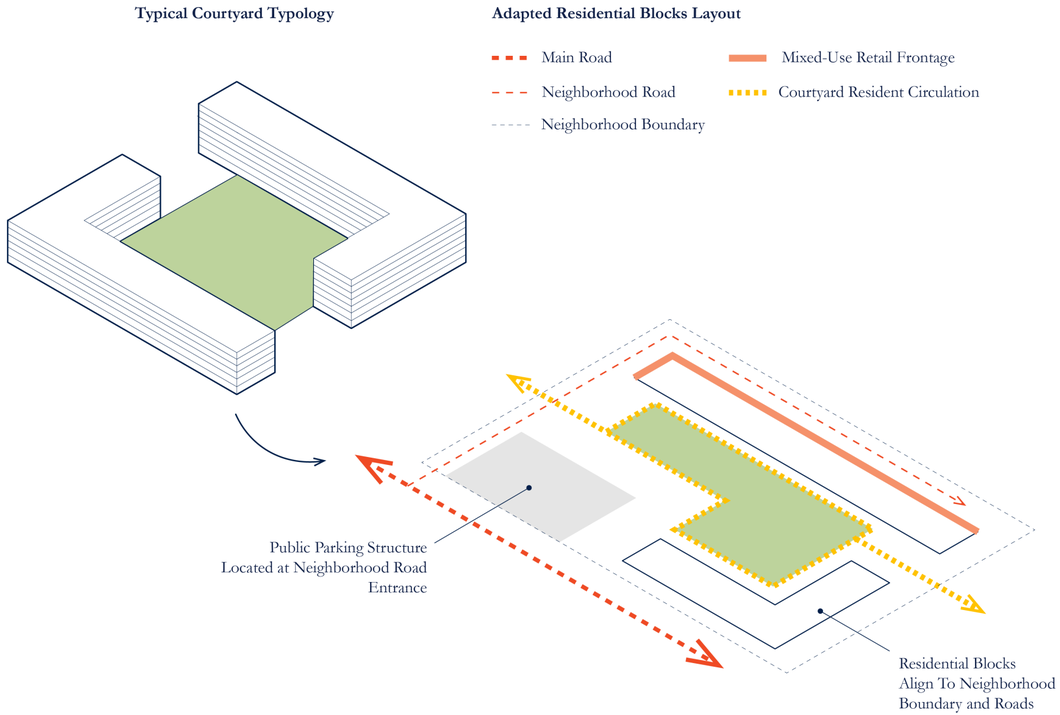


Figure 102. To set rules around the formation of the residential blocks, the typical courtyard typology is adapted to site conditions

Residential Block Adaptations

Existing residential typologies around the mall can give an indication of which typologies to use on the site. The two newly adapted typologies, the modern multi-block townhouse and the green mixed-use residential block, will help integrate the site's new neighborhoods into existing contexts, while also providing alternative solutions to housing.

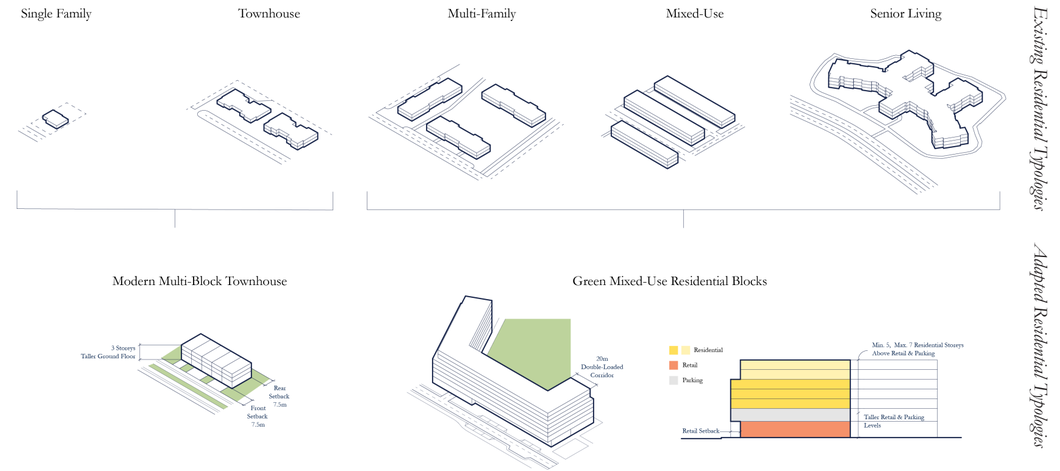


Figure 103. Two new residential typologies are proposed for the site based on existing residential typologies

Courtyard Design Approach

With the residential block rules and residential block typologies established, they work together to define each neighborhood's layout. Since the residential block rules were adapted from the typical courtyard typology, each neighborhood's courtyard space can later be adapted to include minor circulation paths and designed for recreational or community-building programs.

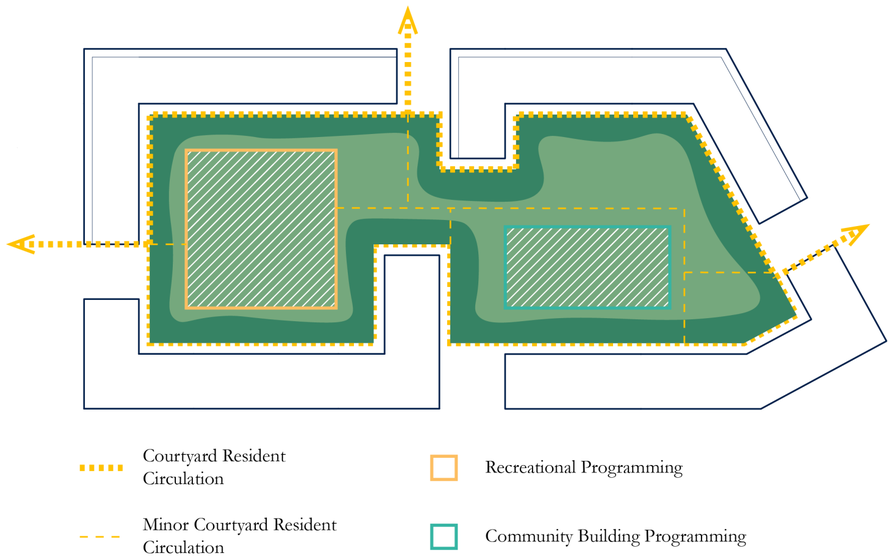


Figure 104. Once the residential blocks are placed, the courtyard that they form can be programmed to resident needs and act as a social space

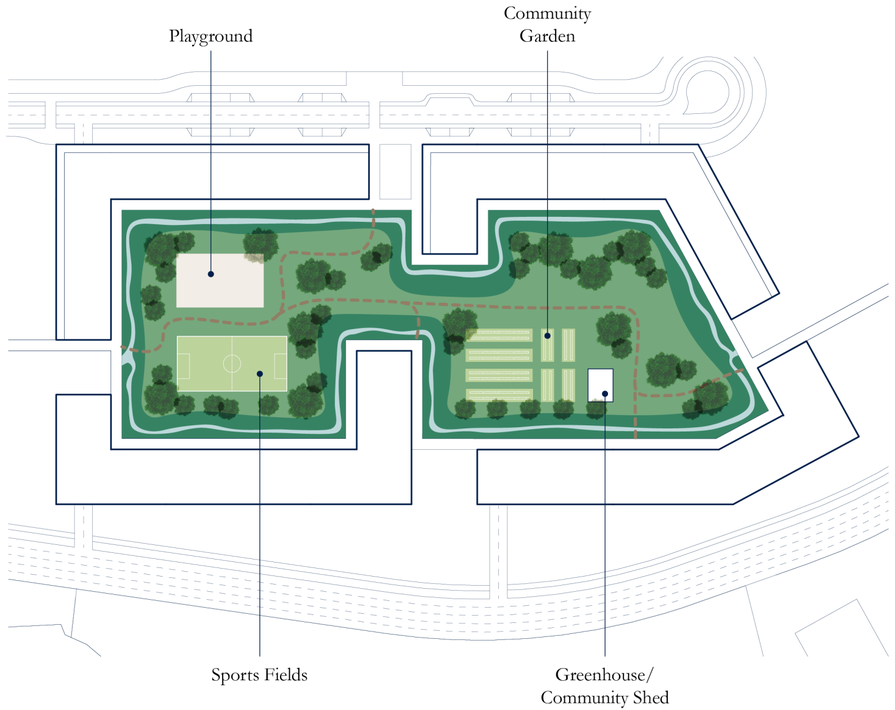
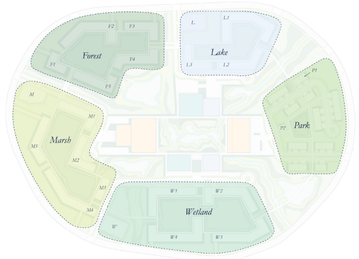


Figure 105. Sample neighborhood application of the courtyard design approach

Proposed Residential Building Statistics



Neighborhood and residential block key plan

Original No. Units: 2,800
Original No. Senior Units: 750
Original Est. Total Parking: 4,000
Original Retail Area: 150,000 sq ft. (13,935 sqm.)

Proposed No. Units: 2,861
Proposed No. Senior Units: 767
Proposed Parking (Including Garages and Roadside): 3,990
Proposed Retail Area: 148,504 sq ft. (13,796 sqm.)

Estimated Residential Block Unit Types and Sizes **

1 BD: 650 sq ft. (60 sqm.)

2 BD: 900 sq ft. (84 sqm.)

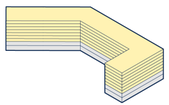
3 BD: 1000 sq ft. (93 sqm.)

*** Unit types and sizes averaged from the residential units being built in and around Sterling Heights*

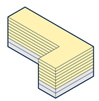
F1
Est. No. Units: 97
Est. No. Parking: 98



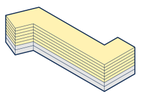
F2
Est. No. Units: 248
Est. No. Parking: 251



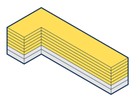
F3
Est. No. Units: 148
Est. No. Parking: 150



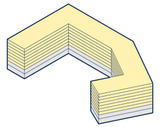
F4
Est. No. Units: 156
Est. No. Parking: 184



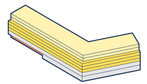
F5
Est. No. Senior Units: 148
Est. No. Parking: 174



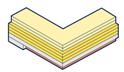
L1
Est. No. Units: 301
Est. No. Parking: 304



L2
Est. No. Units: 42
Est. No. Senior Units: 76
Est. No. Parking: 130
Est. Retail Area:
14,560 sq. ft. (1,353 sqm.)



L3
Est. No. Units: 35
Est. No. Senior Units: 64
Est No. Parking: 75
Est. Retail Area:
22,534 sq. ft. (2,093 sqm.)



P1
No. Units : 1
No. Parking: 2
No. Blocks: 50

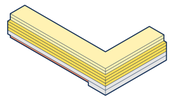


P2
No. Parking: 2
Retail Area:
6,285 sq. ft. (584 sqm.)

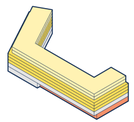


Figure 106. A list of all the residential buildings on the site. Their estimated number of units, senior units, parking, and retail area are calculated and compared to the statistics of the original proposal

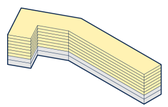
W1
Est. No. Units: 56
Est No. Senior Units: 100
Est. No. Parking: 165
Retail Area:
24,580 sq. ft. (2,284 sqm.)



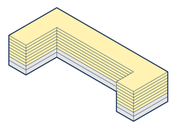
W2
Est. No. Units: 57
Est. No. Senior Units: 104
Est No. Parking: 173
Retail Area:
21,474 sq. ft. (1,995 sqm.)



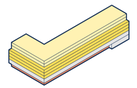
W3
Est. No. Units: 227
Est. No. Parking: 230



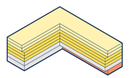
W4
Est. No. Units: 263
Est No. Parking: 266



M1
Est. No. Units: 48
Est. No. Senior Units: 73
Est. No. Parking: 86
Retail Area:
25,706 sq. ft. (2,388 sqm.)



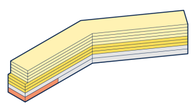
M2
Est. No. Units: 40
Est. No. Senior Units: 70
Est No. Parking: 99
Retail Area:
19,344 sq. ft. (1,797 sqm.)



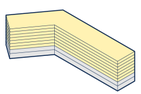
M3
Est. No. Units: 19
Est. No. Senior Units: 32
Est. No. Parking: 57
Retail Area:
5,733 sq. ft. (533 sqm.)



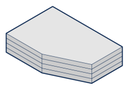
M3
Est. No. Units: 132
Est. No. Senior Units: 100
Est. No. Parking: 209
Retail Area:
8,288 sq. ft. (770 sqm.)



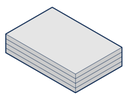
M4
Est. No. Units: 175
Est. No. Parking: 174



Parking Structure M
Est. No. Parking: 316



Parking Structures L & W
Est. No. Parking: 344



Residential Sections

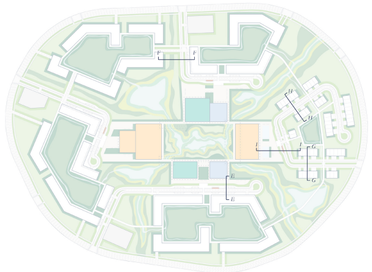


Figure 107. Residential section cuts



Figure 108. Section EE cutting through a typical road between the mall and a residential block

To show the different relationships between buildings, roads, plazas, and landscape strategies, each section represents a different condition on the site.

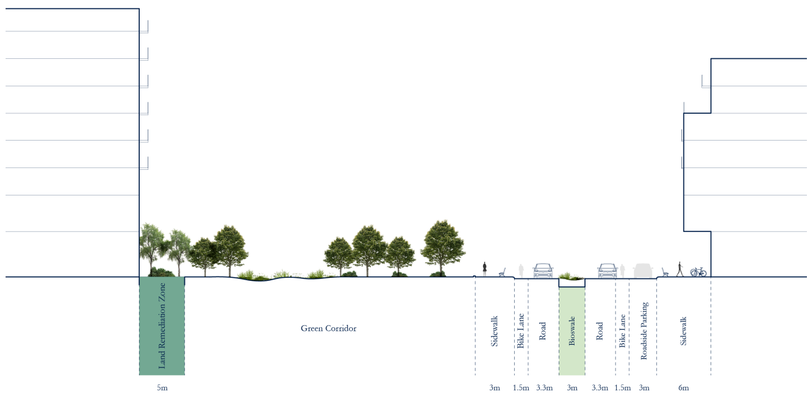


Figure 109. Section FF cutting through a typical road with blue/green infrastructure between the mall and a residential block

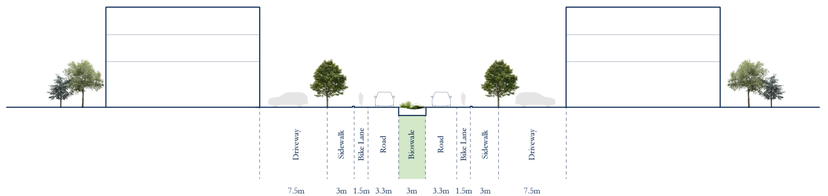


Figure 110. Section GG cutting through a typical road with blue/green infrastructure between townhouses



Figure 111. Section HH cutting through a typical road between townhouses

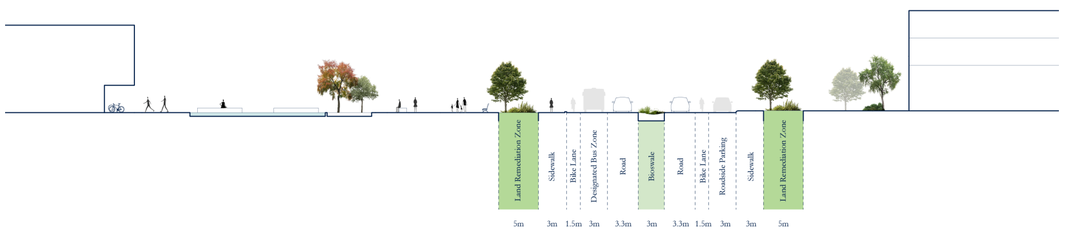


Figure 112. Section II cutting through a typical road with blue/green infrastructure between the eastern mall anchor and a townhouse

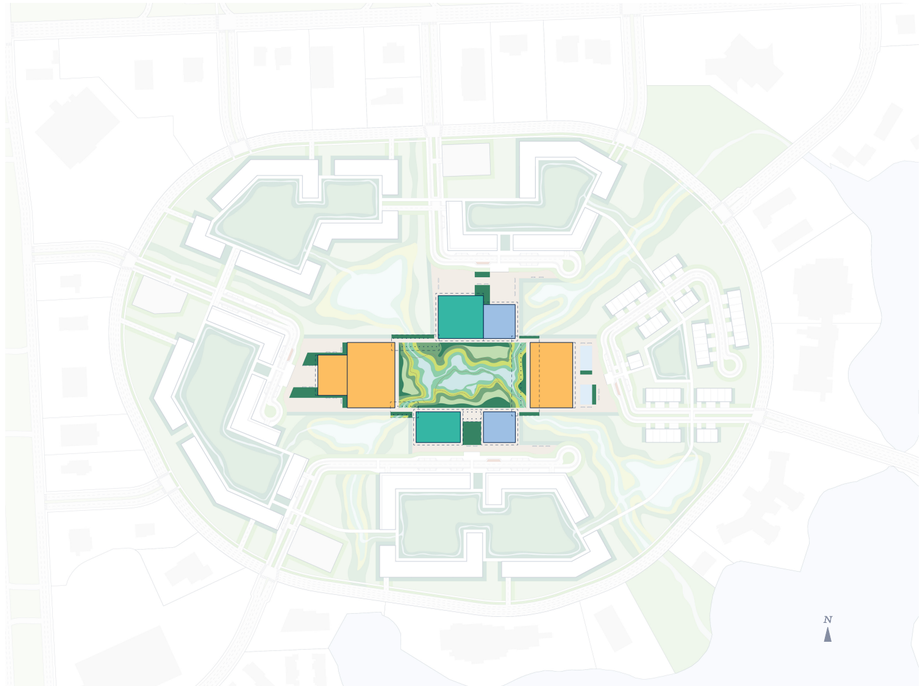


Figure 113. Mall approach

Weaknesses

- Lack of attractions / things to do
- Aging infrastructure (roads, bridges, water, sewer, city buildings)
- Lack of a defining feature(s)
- Drastic reductions in (city) staff
- Residential property maintenance issues
- Appearance of commercial properties
- Lack of cultural understanding / acceptance

Opportunities

- Regionalization / Partnership (CAUTION about losing control / identity)
- Redevelopment
- Redevelop in a GREEN way (reuse buildings / keep the green we have)
- Non-typical – include new things
- Partnership with School Districts (cultural understanding, parks / rec)
- Develop Clinton River - Utilize as a regional attraction
- Regional bike trail hub
- Develop full service community center
- Community focus area(s)
- Defining Sterling Heights
- Dodge Park
- Something to draw people in
- Leverage Lakeside Mall property (entertainment, condos)
- How to best market ourselves (now and as we progress)? And to whom?
- Town Center
- Defense industry – capitalize on this
- Set Sterling Heights apart from others
- Spruce up / beautify medians
- Keep areas clean
- Get businesses to adopt the medians
- Leverage parks (more invested, beautify)
- Common location (Velocity type of facility for education / research)
- College courses, skills needed in our industries etc.

Threats

- Aging demographics
- Lower household income
- Regional problems (Detroit bankruptcy, sewer/water, water rates, stigma)
- Other "more attractive" municipalities
- Declining revenue (federal, state, local)
- Diversity
- Retail trends
- Infrastructure
- Increase of crime
- Uncontrollable blight

Figure 114. Sterling Heights 2030 visioning plan SWOT analysis

4.5 Mall Approach

Given that the original mall is located on a brownfield, this raises concern about whether its initial construction contributed to the contamination. Ensuring that the land provides a safe environment for new neighborhoods to thrive, the original mall is proposed to be demolished and rebuilt. The mall's new formal language is a reflection of the original mall to honour it. By retaining the anchors, proposing pedestrian corridors on the ground and second levels, providing plaza space, and opening the center up for nature, the mall becomes integrated into its contexts and is reborn as a nucleus of socio-cultural and ecological cohesion.

With department stores no longer being reliable anchors for malls, there is an opportunity to replace retail with socio-cultural programming. This is a more sustainable option given that the suburbs rely on buildings like the mall for community building. By distilling the issues defined by Sterling Heights' visioning SWOT analysis (*Figure 114*), as well as analyzing what amenities the community needs through prior mapping, selected socio-cultural programming becomes the mall's new anchors.

Mall Morphology Strategy

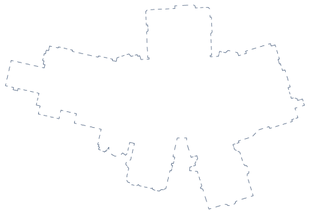


Figure 115. 1: Outline of the original mall

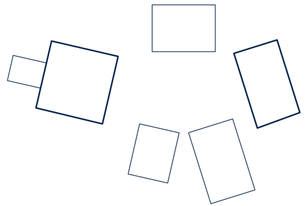


Figure 116. 2: Extracting anchors

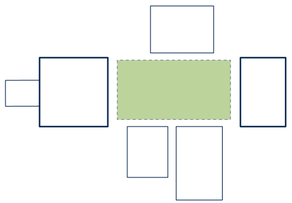


Figure 117. 3: Rotate anchors, propose green atrium

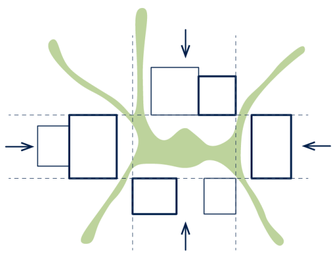


Figure 118. 2: Align anchors to grid, adjust to new program sizes, green atrium extends to create green corridors

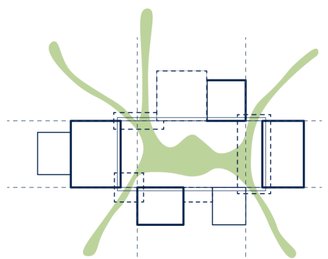


Figure 119. 5: Interior walkways and covered paths create a better pedestrian experience

Proposed Alternative Mall Programming

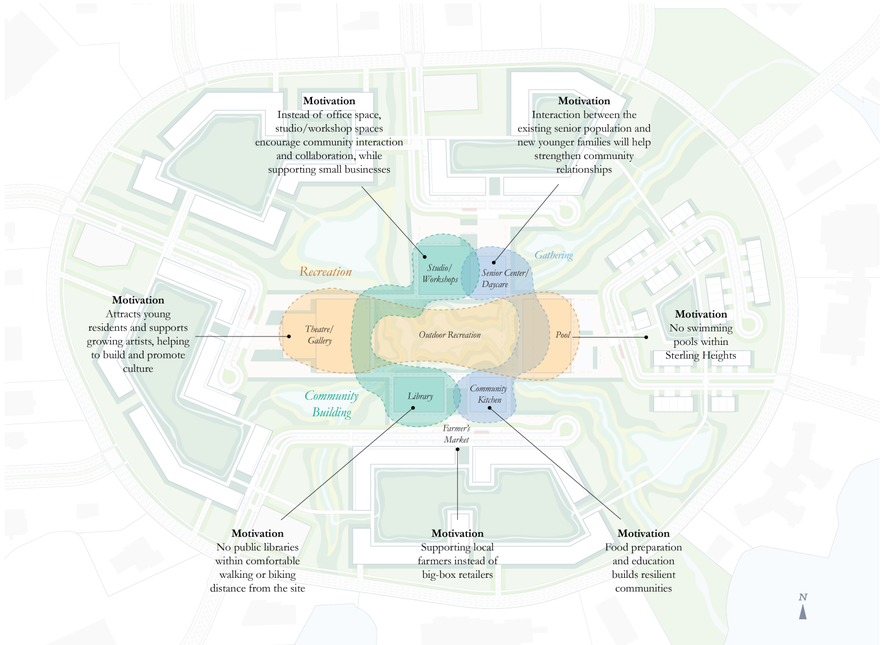


Figure 120. Instead of retail, the new mall programming honors its history as a Third Place and incorporates socio-cultural programming that the community can benefit from

Mall Plaza Use and Community Integration

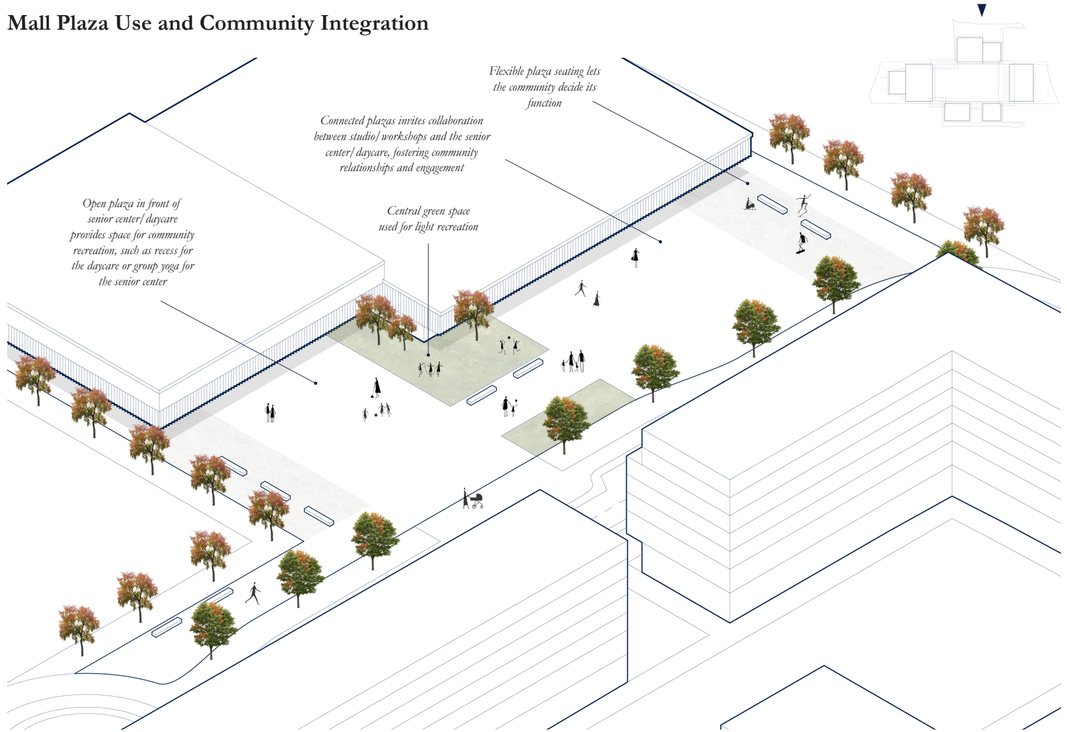


Figure 121. North anchor: Senior center/ daycare (left node) & studio/ workshop spaces (right node)

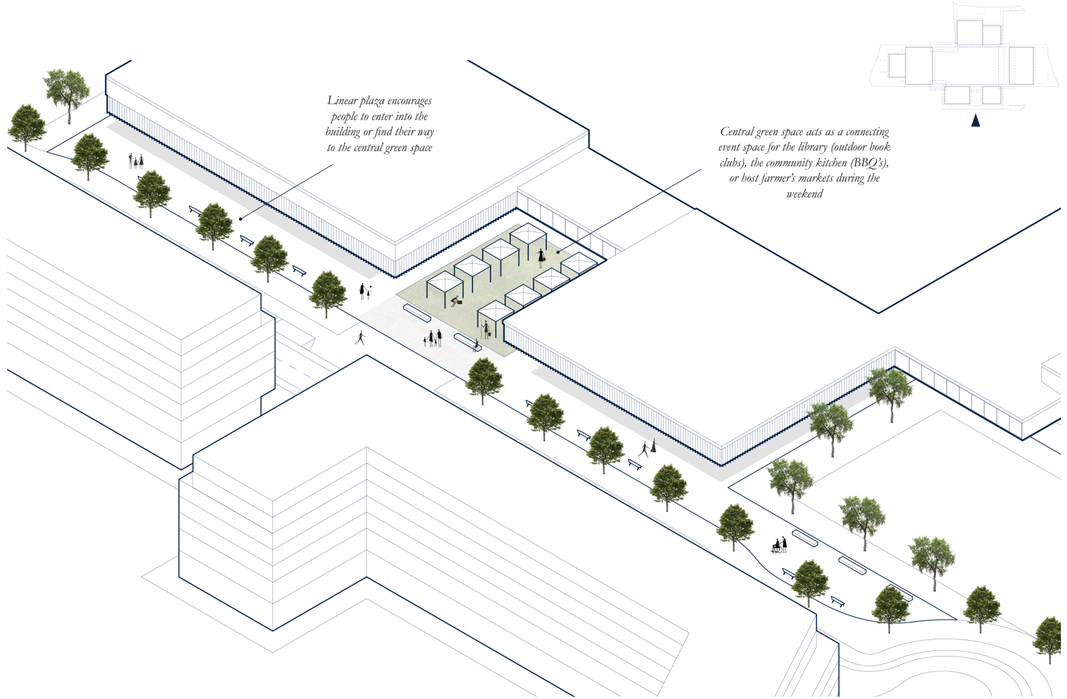


Figure 122. South anchor: Library (left node), farmer's market & community kitchen (right node)

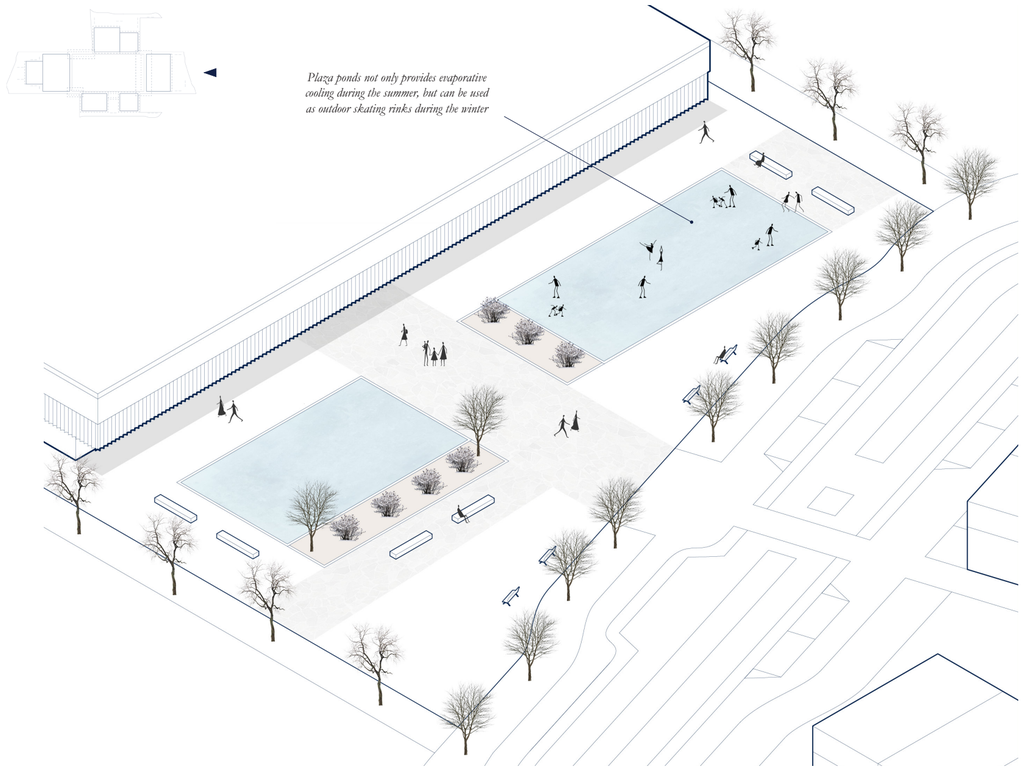


Figure 123. East anchor: Community pool

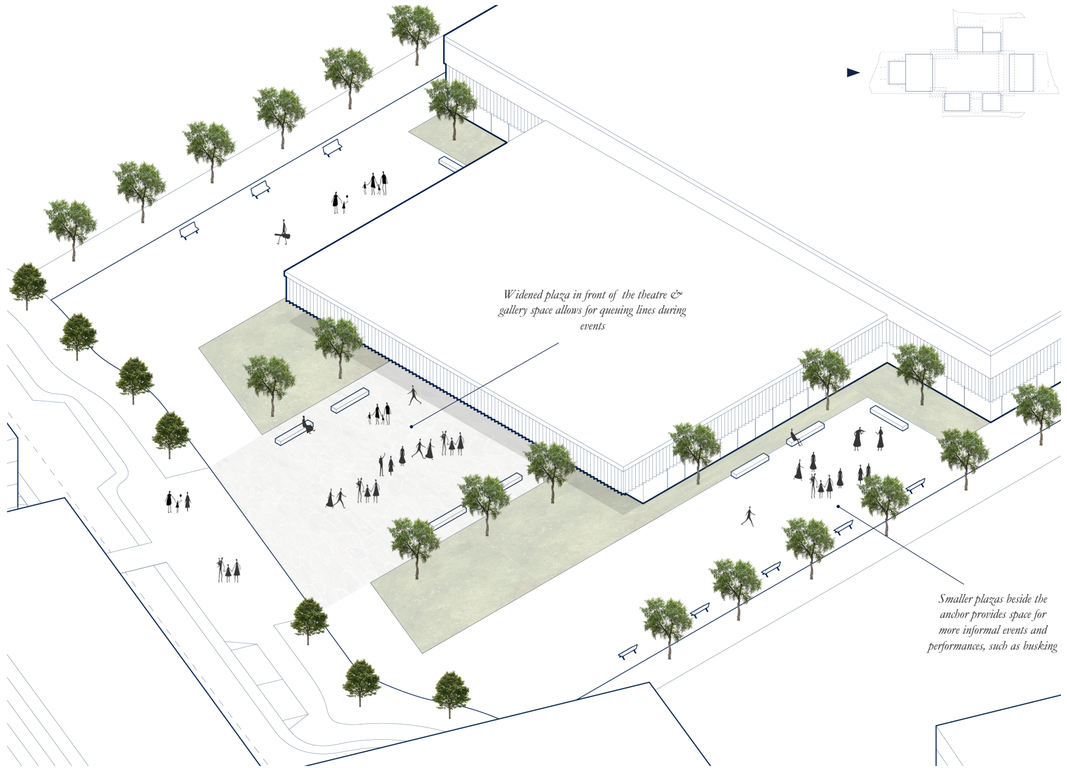


Figure 124. West anchor: Theatre & gallery space

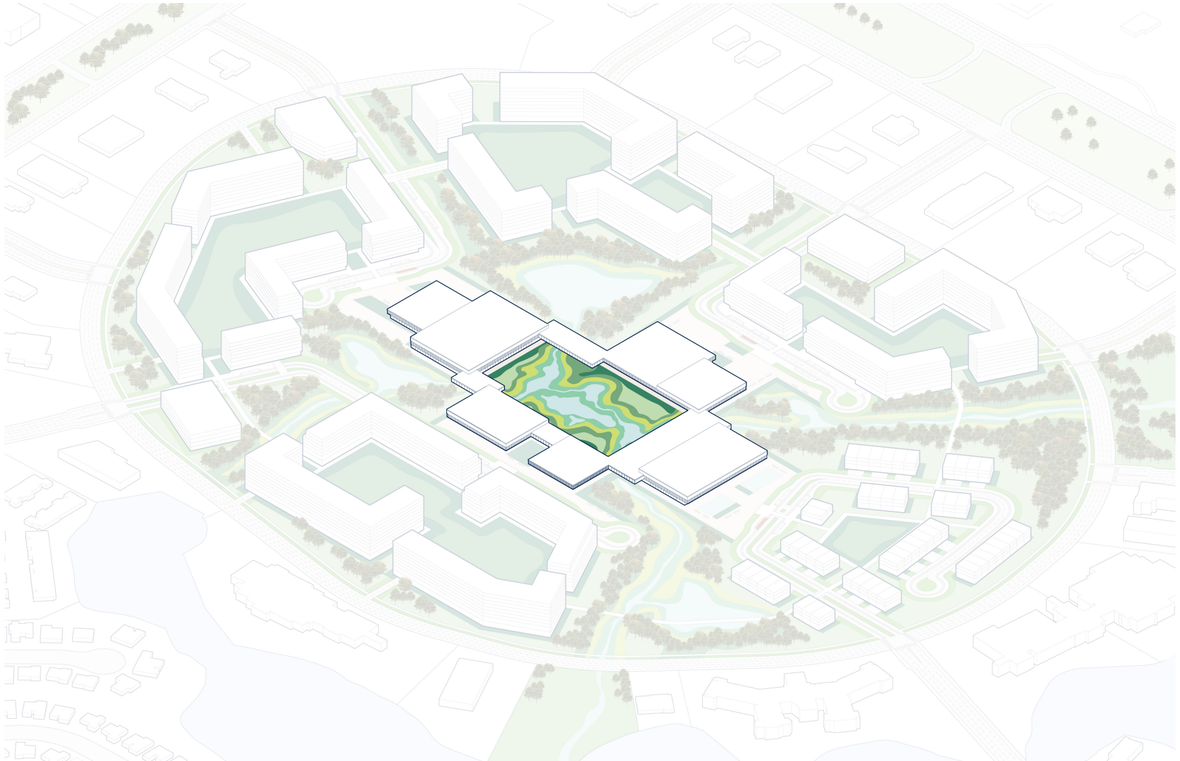


Figure 125. The mall as a centralized catalyst for new urban development



Figure 126. The mall as the heart of a newly formed urban ecosystem

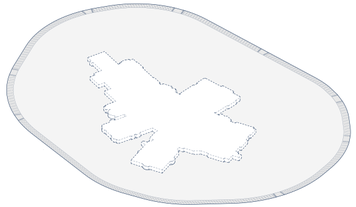


Figure 127. Phase 1: Demolish original mall and removal of asphalt

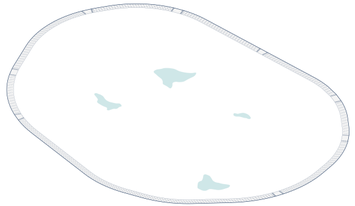


Figure 128. Phase 2: Excavate site to establish wetland ponds

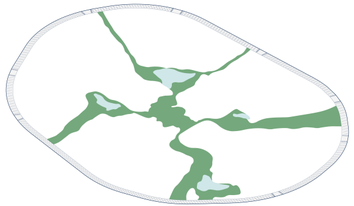


Figure 129. Phase 3: Planting of phytovolatilization remediation plants

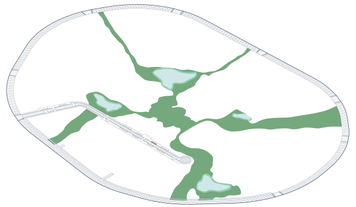


Figure 130. Phase 4: Construction of southern main road, rhizofiltration remediation planting is added next to wetland ponds

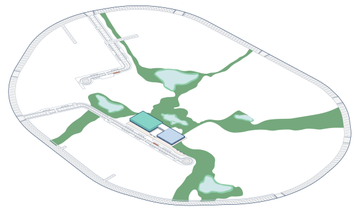


Figure 131. Phase 5: Construction of southern mall anchors, original wetland ponds start branching into smaller pools depending on water flow

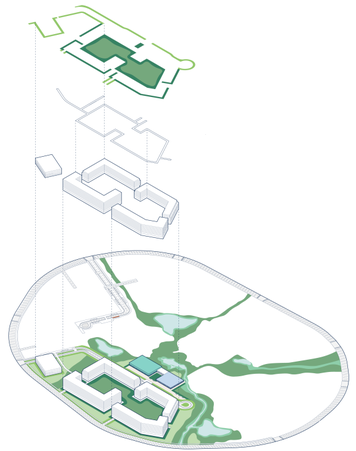


Figure 132. Phase 6: Construction of Wetland neighborhood in three stages - buildings, pedestrian paths, and remediation planting. Rhizofiltration planting is incrementally added to new water networks, along with the general greening of areas around residential blocks

4.6 Site Phasing

The new mall construction will take a phased approach to ensure the stability and sustainability of the ecological systems, the residential blocks, and the mall's program. Since the site will need to be remediated, the first couple of phases involve the implementation of natural systems and remediation strategies. Over time, the remediation strategies will build upon each other so that even after the land has been decontaminated, the resulting ecosystems will still thrive. The phased development of the residential blocks and the mall will ensure adaptability in case there is a need for changes in the urban layout.

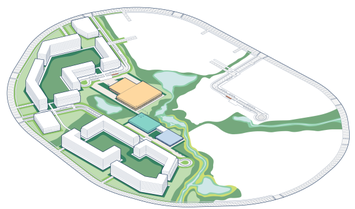


Figure 133. Phase 7: Construction of western mall anchor and Marsh neighborhood using the same stages as the Wetland neighborhood, phytoextraction remediation planting is started as rhizofiltration plants settle

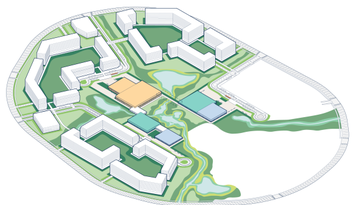


Figure 134. Phase 8: Construction of northern mall anchor and Forest neighborhood, southern and western anchors connected with pedestrian bridge, phytoextraction planting is incrementally added to new water networks

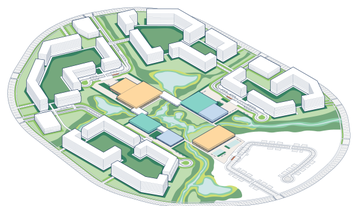


Figure 135. Phase 9: Construction of eastern mall anchor and Lake neighborhood, western and northern anchors connected with pedestrian bridge

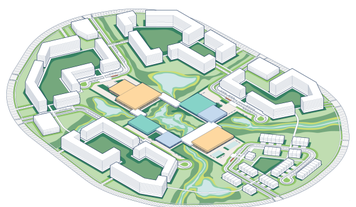


Figure 136. Phase 10: Construction of Park neighborhood, western and northern anchors connected with pedestrian bridge, final layering of phytostabilization planting is implemented as all planting ecosystems stabilize



Figure 137. Lakeside Mall's atrium in 1976



Figure 138. Lakeside Mall as of December 2025

4.7 Visualizing The Mall

To keep with the theme of honoring the original mall, the new mall's materiality and feel are inspired by old photos and first-hand experience of the mall.

The original mall's glass storefronts and the coffered ceiling (*Figure 137*) offer visual layering that plays with depth. Its exterior (*Figure 138*) also shows corbeled brick detailing. Inspired by this, the new mall features a layered facade that uses mesh and louvers to mitigate sunlight. The fluted louvers are a modern take on the original facade details.

While malls are typically built out of brick and concrete, the new mall uses lighter building materials to create visual connections between the other buildings, the plazas, and nature to encourage visitors and residents to engage with the architecture and their surroundings.



Figure 139. View of the mall from a pedestrian path between residential buildings



Figure 140. View from inside the mall's central wetland park, looking east at the path network



Figure 141. View from under an anchor's overhang, showing the intersection between nature and the built environment



Figure 142. View from the outskirts of a residential courtyard looking toward the north anchor, showing the intersections between community groups and how the plazas can become areas of informal gathering



Figure 143. View from outside the southern plaza, showing possible edge conditions for spaces around the mall, and the plaza activation from the proposed farmer's market



Figure 144. View from a pedestrian path around the west anchor, demonstrating the socio-cultural potential of the new proposed urban layout for the mall

Conclusion - Reflections

"If history itself is an urban construct, what survives in Detroit must challenge our idea of the city in history."

– Richard A. Plunz, Detroit is Everywhere, 1996

The mall is a unique architectural typology in the suburbs. Having been invented in metropolitan Detroit during a period of rapid suburban expansion, it was a place not only for retail but for suburban community building, recreation, and gathering. With the decentralization of the city of Detroit causing urban issues that eventually affected the suburbs, including uncontained sprawl, abandonment, paved landscapes, site contamination, inadequate social infrastructure, and neighborhood liabilities, the fate of the mall similarly fell on hard times. This has resulted in the death of many of Detroit's malls.

To fully understand the potential that dead malls hold, the mall must first be understood as a socio-urban asset. It once provided socio-cultural infrastructure to suburban areas that lacked community and civic life. Additionally, it holds the potential to act as a recentralizing urban nucleus for new development, providing structure to sprawling suburbs. By subsequently applying this understanding to existing metropolitan frameworks and theories, the extracted redevelopment approaches, such as using landscape-based principles to transform the mall's site into a living ecosystem, leveraging existing residential typologies, and replacing retail anchors with socio-cultural programming, start to transform dead malls into tools of urban resiliency.

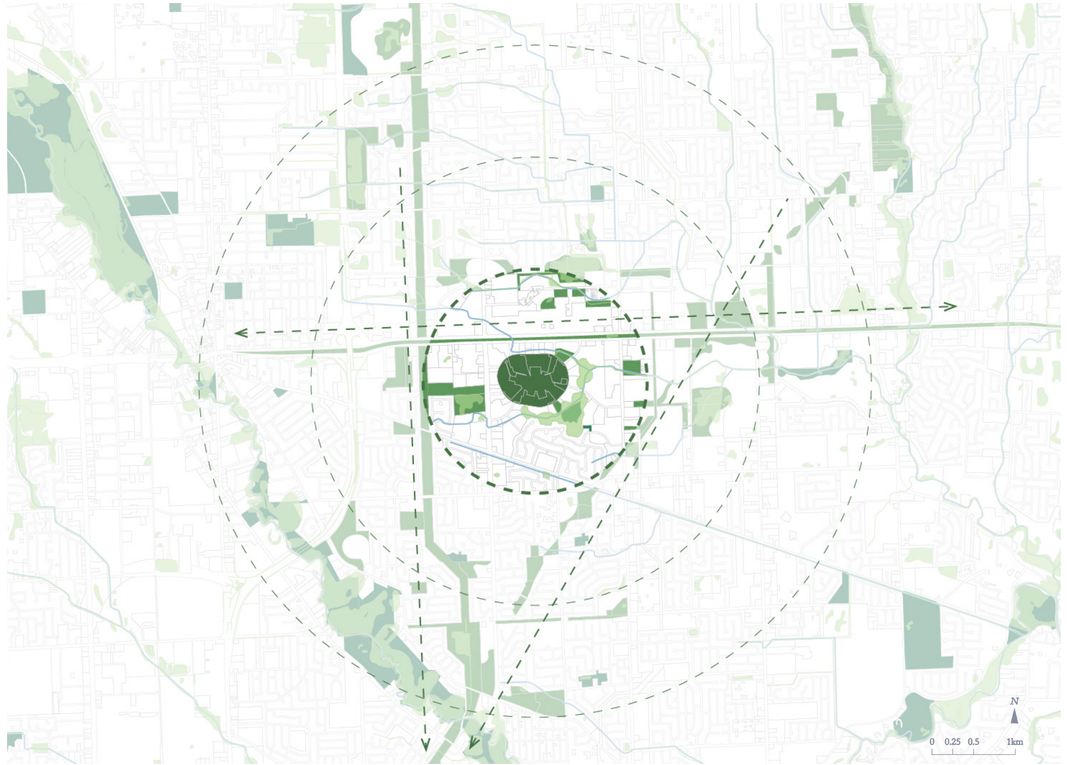


Figure 145. Hypothetical future where the mall becomes a catalyst for recentralization, the unification of urban fabric, resilient neighborhoods, and stronger socio-cultural infrastructure

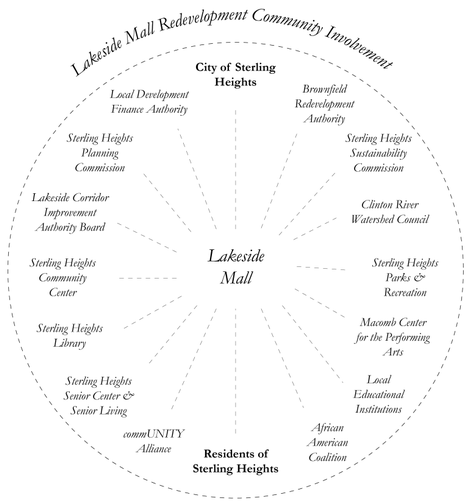


Figure 146. Network of existing community groups and organizations around and involved in Lakeside Mall's redevelopment, demonstrating the possibility to develop a strategic community framework that strengthens and unifies the mall's future as a next step in the redevelopment process

It is not a mall; it is a socio-cultural urban asset that post-industrial suburbs, like the ones in metropolitan Detroit, can leverage as revitalization strategies to create resilient and sustainable neighborhoods, strengthen social cohesion, and provide a new identity for the suburbs. As the site, landscaping, residential blocks, and the mall start interacting with local communities and green networks, the mall's ecological and socio-cultural ecosystem strengthens the urban region as a whole (*Figure 145*).

–

Given the ongoing redevelopment of metropolitan Detroit, it is important to continue building upon existing frameworks to ensure a unified vision for Detroit's new urban fabric. Building upon this thesis, the design proposal could further benefit from engagement with existing community groups and organizations during the design process. This is especially true since this thesis' proposed approach to mall redevelopment is based on a question of programming. Considering that metropolitan regions like Detroit rely on grassroots leadership and non-profit organizations to build community advocacy, collaborating with community groups will ensure that the proposed design is further refined to match community goals, enabling the long-term sustainability and success of the project. *Figure 146* is an example specific

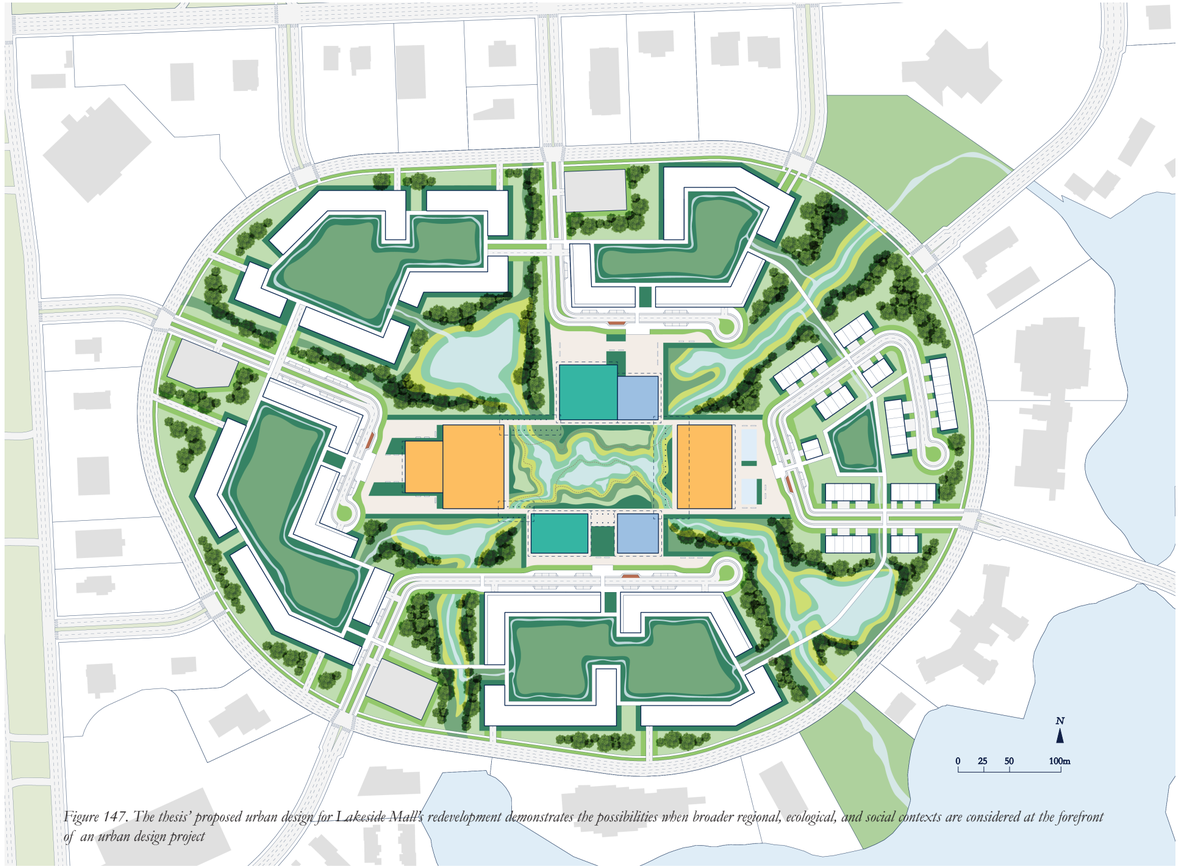


Figure 147. The thesis' proposed urban design for Lakeside Mall's redevelopment demonstrates the possibilities when broader regional, ecological, and social contexts are considered at the forefront of an urban design project

to Lakeside Mall that shows the network of community stakeholders that play a role in Lakeside Mall's redevelopment. Although a high-level understanding of their goals was implemented in this thesis' design proposal, a more in-depth understanding would contribute to a more holistic design of the urban form, landscaping systems, and programming that the site provides. As the stakeholders change, so will the purpose of the mall.

Ultimately, since mall redevelopment and its associated frameworks are still emerging concepts, this allows for the unique opportunity to experiment with different urban approaches. Although the proposed urban design in this thesis is one possibility given the selected contexts, it provides a basis for ways in which redevelopment can start answering greater urban, ecological, and social issues beyond what is typically expected.

–

The mall was an innovation that once answered Detroit's suburban needs. Now, the modern post-industrial metropolis like Detroit needs urban innovation to continue transforming liabilities into assets, build stronger communities, foster collective resiliency, and revitalize in a way that is sustainable for both current and future generations.

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