

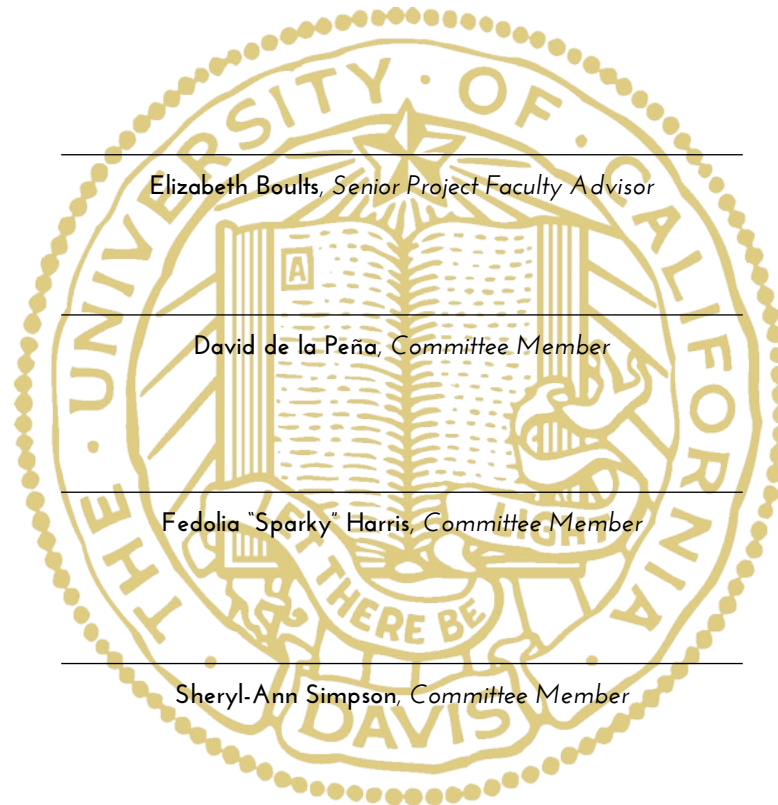


OPEN AIR

A JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
AND STRATEGIES FOR VACANT SPACES

JULIAN ROSARIO / 2014 / SENIOR PROJECT

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Presented to the faculty of the Landscape Architecture Department of the University of California, Davis, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelors of Science in Landscape Architecture.

ABSTRACT

Exponential urban population growth is putting a strain on metropolitan centers around the world. Pressures from urbanization heighten economic class division and social strife. These problems can be overwhelming. It can help to reduce these complex social problems to a smaller scale: What does a community need to thrive? What does an individual need to thrive? Countless blocks and neighborhoods that have been built fail to answer these questions. What results are holes and tears in our social fabric; gentrification, marginalized communities, and neighbors who have no connection to one another.

With the power to physically alter our environments, landscape architects have a great opportunity to create and utilize space to address these issues. In this research I examine what the community of Oak Park, Sacramento needs to thrive. I then synthesize community research and environmental design into a site design called Open Air. Open Air is a community inspired place that seeks to fill the needs of the community by channeling creativity into positive change. Everyone has something to contribute to the community. Sometimes all we need is a space to remind us we can. Open Air provides a space where all people can come together to learn, teach, connect, and express themselves. We all share the open air.

CONTENTS

00.

- Signature Page
- i Abstract
- ii Contents
- iii List of Figures
- iv Acknowledgments

01. INTRODUCTION

- 4 Introduction
- 5 Methodology
- 7 History

02. COMMUNITY RESEARCH

- | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|----|---------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| 11 | Preparation | 14 | Christian Brothers | 18 | McClatchy Park |
| 12 | Scouting Mission | 15 | Vacant Spaces Forum | 19 | Craft+Play at the 35th St. Fair |
| 12 | Sacramento Food Bank | 17 | Yisrael Family Farm | | |
| 13 | Oak Park's Creative Class | 18 | Oak Park Sol | | |

03. DESIGN

- | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------|----|----------------|----|--------------------------------|
| | <u>OPEN AIR</u> | | | | <u>11th AVE GREEN CORRIDOR</u> |
| 26 | Context | 31 | Overview | 47 | Context |
| 27 | Mapping | 32 | Master Plan | 49 | Community Garden |
| 29 | Existing Conditions | 33 | Open Air Views | 50 | Social Corner |
| 30 | Site Analysis | | | 51 | Active Alley |
| | | | | 52 | Food Forest |

04. TOOLKIT

- 55 Resources
- 57 Inspirations

LIST OF FIGURES

01. INTRODUCTION

- FIG 1.0 *Oak Park in relation to Sacramento: ArcGIS basemap*
- FIG 1.1 *The Oak Park Grocery and Pharmacy in c.1900: Center for Sacramento History, Janet Reynolds Stephens Collection, 1985/062/006*
- FIG 1.2 *The Entrance to Oak Park: City of Sacramento Parks and Recreation Department McClatchy Park History Sign*
- FIG 1.3 *Joyland wooden roller coaster: City of Sacramento Parks and Recreation Department McClatchy Park History Sign*
- FIG 1.4 *A Black Panther's meeting in 1973: Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento Bee Collection, 1983/001/SBPM00857*
- FIG 1.5 *Fruit Ridge Elementary (vacant).*

02. COMMUNITY RESEARCH

- FIG 2.0 *Art piece on the side of the Sac Food Bank warehouse.*
- FIG 2.1 *In the window sill of the Sac Food Bank warehouse.*
- FIG 2.2 *A warning sign attached to a fence at a vacant lot.*
- FIG 2.3 *The Broadway Triangle development.*
- FIG 2.4 *Oak Park Pre-School.*
- FIG 2.5 *Patris' Studio & Art Gallery.*
- FIG 2.6 *The Rutherford's Garden.*
- FIG 2.7 *Media covering the forum.*
- FIG 2.8 *Vacant spaces (red) and ACCE members (green).*
- FIG 2.9 *Community demands signed by Oak Park's elected official.*
- FIG 2.10 *Yisrael Family Farm.*
- FIG 2.11 *Chanowk's chickens.*
- FIG 2.12 *Oak Park Sol supporters.*
- FIG 2.13 *Oak Park Sol- "Spring Fling"*
- FIG 2.14 *McClatchy Park Improvements Groundbreaking.*
- FIG 2.15 *Panorama view of the fair.*
- FIG 2.16 *Communal dining area.*

- FIG 2.17 *Cultural performances.*
- FIG 2.18 *Design workshop.*
- FIG 2.19 *Gathering ideas.*
- FIG 2.20 *Youth engagement.*
- FIG 2.21 + 2.22 *Designs and smiles.*
- FIG 2.23 *Participating.*
- FIG 2.24 *Expressing need.*
- FIG 2.25 *Community member offering help with the set up.*
- FIG 2.26 *A reflection space.*
- FIG 2.27 + 2.28 *Filled Boards.*
- FIG 2.29 *A typical market in Oak Park.*

03. DESIGN

- FIG 3.0 *Vacant Housing by Block Group: ArcGIS basemap*
- FIG 3.1 *Unemployment Rate: ArcGIS basemap*
- FIG 3.2 *Average Household Income: ArcGIS basemap*
- FIG 3.3 *Population Density: ArcGIS basemap*
- FIG 3.4 *Diversity Index: ArcGIS basemap*
- FIG 3.5 *Median Age: ArcGIS basemap*
- FIG 3.6 *View from the North.*
- FIG 3.7 *View across Broadway & 34th.*
- FIG 3.8 *Southeast corner.*
- FIG 3.9 *Northeast corner.*
- FIG 3.10 *ACCE meeting.*
- FIG 3.11 *Context map.*
- FIG 3.12 *Design charrette.*
- FIG (3.13), (3.16), 3.18, (3.21) *Before: (Google Maps street view)*
- FIG 3.17 *Renato's alley farm.*
- FIG 3.14, 3.15, 3.19, 3.20 *Design concept.*
- FIG 3.22 *Playing with chalk.*

-All other figures are the product of Julian Rosario.

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God, for blessing me and providing opportunity everyday.

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The Oak Park Community, for welcoming me and encouraging my ideas.

Without you, the “Open Air dream” would not be possible.

PART 1 : INTRODUCTION

CHANOWK'S GIRLS WATERING THEIR GARDEN

INTRODUCTION

There was always something perplexing about going to a private Catholic high school in an area of Sacramento which has the reputation for being the most dangerous. Perhaps it was the daily commute from the safe suburbs of Natomas to a more bleak urban environment. Or maybe it was the tall fences and security guards that surrounded the campus. Whatever it was, I always pondered the stark differences when transitioning through environments.

The motto at Christian Brothers was "Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve". Over time, the importance of this motto became apparent to me. The faculty were using their skills as teachers to direct the next generation on a positive path. Like my teachers before me, I want to use my skills and education to direct positive change. Returning to Oak Park for my senior project is an opportunity to serve the community and explore how environmental design can address the questions I asked myself years ago.

Going into this project I knew I wanted to use environmental design to address the needs of the community and catalyze empowerment. Early on, I learned that community change has to come from within. To accomplish my goal, I engaged the community and invested myself in it.

This project is in part a journal of my experiences in Oak Park and how an outsider can approach and attempt to understand a community. The main component of this project however is Open Air. I discovered vacant spaces to be a primary cause of blight. Open Air is a conceptual site that takes a look at urban public space and refocuses it on what really connects a community, while also acting as a think tank for vacant spaces. It aggregates solutions for vacant lots into one space, so that one or several components can inspire other vacant lots. The 11th Ave Green Corridor showcases how these strategies can then be applied to vacant spaces in Central Oak Park. Tying it all together is a toolkit of resources and inspirations I used for this project that residents and activists could use to help build community.

METHODOLOGY

I choose to use community research and design in this project because “new knowledge in landscape architecture is expressed through a synthetic mix of theories drawn from the arts and humanities, biophysical sciences and social sciences, and applied to a reflective eidetic, and pragmatic blend of practices” (Swaffield, 2011). Landscape architects are being called upon to answer many of the “profound human and environmental challenges of the 21st century” (Swaffield, 2011). A more rigorous course of designing is demanded that must be complimented with research of matching intensity.

I used community research methods to create an “ethical, epistemological, and political framework” for this study (Nind, 2011). The flexibility of community and participatory techniques is another positive. Its ability to “be informal and formal, unstructured and structured, trained and untrained, explicit and implicit” allowed my research to be dynamic (Nind, 2011).

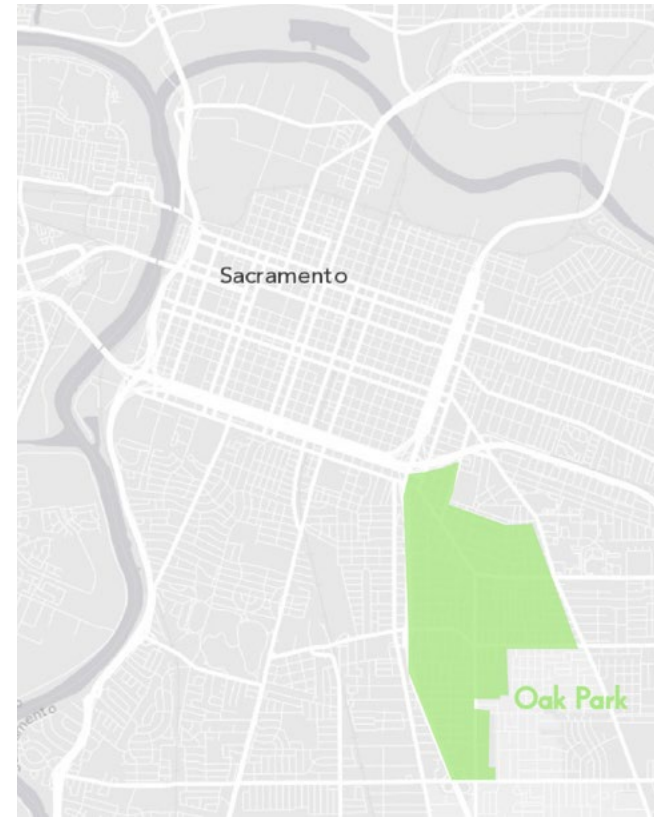


FIG 1.0 Oak Park in relation to Sacramento.

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods are used to conduct research and engage the Oak Park community. The first method used is uncovering the community history of Oak Park, which will be discussed later in this section. Part two explores using hands on approaches to engage the community. This includes visual + behavioral analysis, interviews, and craft + play. Lastly, part three is introduced with mapping and culminates with the synthesis of all of these methods into the design for Open Air.

Researching the history helped me see Oak Park in different contexts. Understanding what factors helped and did not are important reasons why Oak Park is the way it is today. One thing I appreciate about history is that you cannot change it, only build from it.

The hands on approaches found in part two supplied numerous primary sources and qualitative data for the project.

Mapping offered a more broad objective perspective while being able to quickly visualize complex data.

History, engagement, and mapping all have strengths and weaknesses. For example, crafts and play cannot provide hard objective data, but excels in a subjective reflexive output like design projection. Using a combination of community research methods is essential to inspired and informed site design that “involves those being researched in the decision-making and conduct of the research” (Nind, 2011).

A limitation of this work is that it simply describes the perspective of one person. This research does however, speak to a greater conversation of how community, research, and design can be used together to solve complex social and spatial problems. Places like Lafayette Greens in Detroit, Superkilen in Copenhagen, and Beacon Food Forest in Seattle are all renowned examples of landscape architecture that fuse the community and designers together to address the needs of the people. Landscape architecture as a discipline has the promise of inspiring individuals to be more connected and more invested to the people and open air that surrounds us.

HISTORY

Oak Park has an interesting and rich history. Analyzing and understanding a community's history is essential to comprehending its current state. Oak Park started in 1887, when Edwin Alsip subdivided the 230-acre William Doyle ranch into 56 whole or partial blocks and gave his subdivision the name "Oak Park" (Datel, 2010). Lots were then sold to individual buyers, although many of them were speculators. Although this slowed development a bit, a connection to downtown Sacramento was made in the 1890s via several electric streetcar lines. This helped stimulate development and lead to Oak Park's peak growth in 1900-1930.

Oak Park became known as Sacramento's first streetcar suburb. Many of the buildings in downtown Oak Park were mixed use, with commercial on the first floor and residential on additional floors. The downtown sufficiently provided for the residents of Oak Park and helped cultivate a prosperous community. In 1911 Oak Park's several thousand residents and thriving business district were annexed to the City of Sacramento. The annexation helped bring more residents, jobs, and city services to Oak Park. A 1912 headline in the Sacramento Bee declared, "Oak Park Flourishes Into Real Commercial Center" (Oak Park Neighborhood Association, 2014). Development slowed during the First World War, as the economy shifted to a wartime economy and resources diverted toward the war. The Great Influenza Epidemic of 1918 also caused a decline in population and development for several years.

JOYLAND

Also during this time was the grand opening of Joyland, Sacramento's first amusement park. The streetcar ended here and provided incentives and business from downtown Sacramento to come to Oak Park. A fire struck Joyland in 1920 and destroyed most of the rides and buildings, including the wooded roller coaster (McClatchy Park History Sign, 2014). The park would never be quite the same again, however this space would continue to be used as a gathering spot.



FIG 1.1 The Oak Park Grocery and Pharmacy in c.1900.



FIG 1.2 The Entrance to Oak Park.



FIG 1.3 Joyland wooden roller coaster.

BIG CHANGES IN THE 60s

Many of the original European homeowners in Oak Park left for newer suburbs. After World War II, more African Americans moved to Oak Park. This was in part because many worked at the city's military bases but also because many other neighborhoods were off-limits due to restrictive racial covenants (Datel, 2010). Another factor that added to this was the displacement of many African Americans downtown by urban renewal. Racial tensions increased during the Civil Rights era and many black organizations popped up in Oak Park, including the Black Panthers.

The economic landscape really started to change when Highway 99 opened in 1962 on the west side of historic Oak Park. This rerouted traffic from Stockton and Broadway to the freeway. This resulted in a decline of business on two major roads and many vacant business buildings. Businesses and jobs continued to leave Oak Park throughout the rest of the century and along with this came poverty. Blight caused by vacant and dilapidated spaces increased. Crime, prostitution, drugs, and gang activity found their home here.

THE RETURN OF OAK PARK

Oak Park has seen a resurgence in the past several decades. In 1973, the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency started to buy property in the neighborhood. They fixed up many dilapidated buildings and restored some of the places that identified people with historic Oak Park. New ethnicities started to move into Oak Park, including Latinos and Asians. The U.C. Davis Medical Center brought in more businesses and middle-income families. New development like the 40 acres building and Broadway Triangle are igniting Oak Park's old commercial corridor. The neighborhood is being called upon to meet the needs of, and find common ground among, a socially and ethnically diverse population (Datel, 2014).



FIG 1.4 A Black Panther's meeting in 1973.

CURRENT ISSUES

Although improving, Oak Park is still struggling to fix problems from its past. Residents are coming together to fight blight and crime in their neighborhood through creative means. Many are turning vacant spaces into gardens and growing food. By doing this, the residents are providing healthy food options and establishing food security for themselves and their families.

Oak Park has seen incredible change over the years. In its past, there was racial segregation, but today Oak Park is one of the most diverse communities in Sacramento. Its diversity is something the people who live in Oak Park pride themselves on. Today, residents fear economic segregation. With an influx of middle-income interest in the area, residents fear gentrification and displacement, similar to what happened to many African Americans because of urban renewal. It is important that new development does not repeat the same mistakes taken in the past. Learning about what made Oak Park thrive and fall in the past is important knowledge for determining what needs to be done in the future.

FIG 1.5 FRUIT RIDGE ELEMENTARY (VACANT)



PART 2 : COMMUNITY RESEARCH

JOURNAL

PREPARATION

Part two is all about engaging the community. This section covers my experiences in Oak Park over the past several months and the various methods I used to conduct research. Hands on community research is one of the best ways to discover different solutions and perspectives to your problem or project. It also provides many opportunities to interact with real people who have an invested opinion and will experience any effects of your work. This project was the first time I really incorporated this kind of approach into the design process. Although rewarding, it was quite daunting at first, especially since I cannot necessarily identify Oak Park as my community. Despite this drawback and my occasional timidity, I knew putting myself out there is the only way to really engage the community. I prepared to go into this research with a fresh perspective. When interacting with the diverse community of Oak Park, I kept my mind open and encouraged all and any ideas. Keeping this mental disposition in mind, I set out.



FIG 2.0 Art piece on the side of the Sac Food Bank warehouse.



FIG 2.1 In the window sill of the Sac Food Bank warehouse.

SCOUTING MISSION

To start off, I went on a scouting mission around downtown Oak Park to get a feel of the place. My goal for this experience was to really situate myself in the neighborhood and interact with the people of Oak Park; the residents, business owners, anyone walking down the street. Another goal of mine was to visually document what I saw with my camera.

SACRAMENTO FOOD BANK

I decided to start off somewhere familiar, the Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services. During my freshman year of high school, we were introduced to the Sacramento Food Bank as part of an outreach program.

The Sacramento Food Bank is one of the most recognized non-profit agencies in Sacramento and is headquartered in an area that needs it the most, Oak Park. It provides free goods and services to 30,000 men, women, and children each month. I knew the people who worked here were committed to helping the people of Oak Park.

After I parked, I entered the headquarters of the Sacramento Food Bank. After introducing myself to the receptionist I asked her a series of questions about what Oak Park needs and future plans for the Sacramento Food Bank. After telling me she would like more shops and cafes, she introduced me to Marshall, who is the properties manager for the Sacramento Food Bank. He informed me of the successes of his organization but also the needs of the people. Marshall also told me about the Broadway Triangle development which he said was well received by the community.

OAK PARK'S CREATIVE CLASS

This new development interested me so I headed toward the Broadway Triangle. While waiting to cross Broadway, a woman complimented my shoes. We started talking about Oak Park and she told me about how she was an artist and sometimes practiced at Patris Studio. She was kind enough to walk me there. While walking, she told me about how the Community Health Center was a great service and that she would like an open workspace. After thanking her, I went inside and met Patris. Patris expanded on the creative class in Oak Park. She told me there is a huge need for small studio spaces for artists. Artists of all kinds are attracted to Oak Park because of the diversity and low housing costs. I believe culture and creative power present here has the opportunity to turn Oak Park into a creative district. Artists hold an important role in forming unique public spaces. Local talent can activate a space and make it culturally relatable to the people in Oak Park.

I continued to explore after leaving Patris'. A big thing I noticed was the prevalence of fences in Oak Park. There were three types of fences in Oak Park: fences around vacant lots, fences around occupied lots, and fences around lots being built. I felt a strong notion of being "kept out". Fences are physical barriers that Oak Park residents see and live alongside every day. Keeping things private and guarded was a way of life. Even community gardens were fenced off. How can I create a space where people did not need to have a chain link fence looming over them?



FIG 2.2 A warning sign attached to a fence at a vacant lot.



FIG 2.3 The Broadway Triangle development.



FIG 2.4 Oak Park Pre-School.



FIG 2.5 *Patris' Studio & Art Gallery.*



FIG 2.6 *The Rutherford's Garden.*

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS

After walking around downtown Oak Park a bit more, I went to Christian Brothers to engage some of my old teachers and especially Ms. Lystrup, who teaches social justice and morality courses. I wanted to talk to her about the discrepancy between the Catholic beliefs of the school and lack of initiative to help the surrounding community. She told me about some of the school's programs such as the Brother David Brennen Program. The mission of this program is to fully fund the education of local youth to attend Christian Brothers. A current student in the program is Anthony Rutherford. His family runs a successful vegetable garden right off one of busiest roads in Oak Park, Martin Luther King Blvd. Anthony sells their produce to teachers and students at Christian Brothers and his father Ron, is known for selling watermelons right over the fence to people walking along MLK.

Overall, Ms. Lystrup believes "the school could do more to help the community. It is all a matter of funding. There are so many churches and schools in Oak Park. For example, two big institutions are the McGeorge School of Law and UC Davis School of Medicine". Ms. Lystrup also told me about one of her inspirations, Father Greg Boyle.. He founded Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles which is an organization that serves high-risk, formerly gang-involved men and women with free services and programs (Homeboy Industries, 2014). The expansive services and work opportunities range from tattoo removal to the Homeboy Bakery and Diner.

COMMUNITY VACANT SPACES FORUM

I attended a community forum hosted by the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE). The purpose of the forum was to review land use and more specifically, vacant spaces in Oak Park. The first part of the meeting was a chance for various organizations to introduce themselves and their current objective.

David, from Alchemist CDC (community development corporation), talked about access to healthy foods. Alchemist wants the convenience stores to start selling fresh produce. The problem is getting low quantities of into the stores, which supplies are not willing to do. Alchemist saw the incredible opportunity to convert vacant spaces to productive urban agriculture and then use the produce to supply the local convenience stores. David mentioned some constraints like how zoning regulation do not allow for this and vacant lots can be hard to acquire from non-responsive land owners.

Terry from WALKS Sacramento wants to increase walkability and connectivity. He proposed doing this by improving the Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. streetscape and building a tunnel on 2nd Ave. that connecting Oak Park and Franklin. He went on to describe how Oak Park was an older designed pre WWII neighborhood where all needs and services were only a twenty minute walk away.

Michael from Urban Sustainable solutions focuses on the youth, waste division, and food production. His organization hires 10 local youth and gives them a stipend to work and learn about these topics. He works with ECOS (Environmental Council of Sacramento) to spread a regional message of sustainability.

Dominic from Harvest Sacramento spoke of how understanding the spatial capacity of the land can help in tackling vacant space. Fruit trees represent receiving gifts from the past and by using the land productively, we can provide more opportunity for future generations. We talked later about how things like fruit trees make the initial connection between people and the land but that is only the beginning. Eco-productivity could lead to repairing the social connections in our communities.

The second part of the meeting was about how our elected officials are representing Oak Park and formulating a set of demands from them that address key issues.

A representative from Congressman Ami Bera's office said they are working on House Resolution 1010 to increase minimum. They are also working on bringing jobs back to Sacramento and redevelopment money to Oak Park.

Vice Mayor Jay Schenirer, who is also the Councilmember for Oak Park (District 5), spoke of how BHC (Building Healthy Communities) and his organization WayUP are working to make Oak Park better. They are finding and writing grants using tools like grants.gov to fund change.

He was happy to announce that his office helped pass an ordinance that distinguishes community garden as a land use. He is also working on increasing police and fire services in Oak Park. Jay mentioned that he has his own vacant spaces map in his office and is working to target them and remove blight. At the end of the forum, the community asked Jay to sign the demands they composed, promising he would continue to work toward them.

This was the first time I interacted with activists and community organizations in Oak Park. It was eye opening to find out how many groups of people were working to make Oak Park a better place. The great part is, many are helping each other out and combining efforts. It also introduced me to the politics involved in community development. The initiatives of these organizations rely on and need the support of Jay's office to represent them and their needs. This meeting also highlighted the biggest priorities and needs in Oak Park. I began to think of how I can help these answer these demands through environmental design.



FIG 2.7 Media covering the forum.



FIG 2.8 Vacant spaces (red) and ACCE members (green).

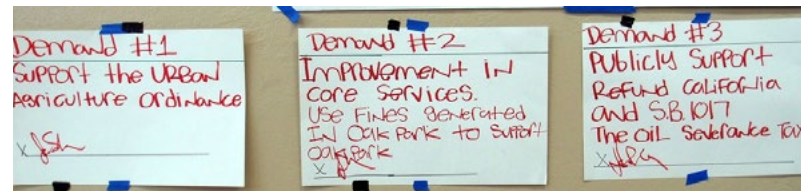


FIG 2.9 Community demands signed by Oak Park's elected official.



FIG 2.10 *Yisrael Family Farm.*



FIG 2.11 *Chanowk's chickens.*

YISRAEL FAMILY FARM

I visited Chanowk at Yisrael Family Farm where he told me how South Oak Park is a food desert. He said there's only "fast food and not many healthy options. Chanowk wants to change this. He teaches the local youth how to grow food and take responsibility for how and what they eat. Chanowk's farm is simply the space around his house. He needed to provide for his family and saw opportunity with the land he had. His farm grew and now he has chickens, bees, and is currently exploring the benefits of permaculture.

Chanowk also had another lot a couple blocks to the north of his house. It is a small corner lot with no fences. When we got there neighbors lent him a hose and his girls started watering the garden. "The lot had no water source so they help out" he said, "and in return I give them produce". "Water access [is] an issue - unlike rural farms, most urban spaces rely on tap water - and even before the drought, the cost of installing meters and drought-conscious irrigation [is] prohibitive for too many (Hubler, 2014). Urban agriculture is not as easy as one might think. Even policy like being unable to sell your produce are constraints to the urban farmer. Many organizations in Oak Park are working to get the policy changed and promote the urban agriculture ordinance in Sacramento.

OAK PARK SOL

I was invited to the Oak Park Sol “Spring Fling” event by a staff member of Jay’s office. This community garden is one of the most successful transformations of vacant spaces in North Oak Park and Oak Park as a whole. It was owned by an Oak Park resident who wanted to turn the space into a valuable community space.

They handed out awards and recognized all the organizations who made it possible. Generous donations from Home Depot and Western Health went into the project. It surprised me how much money was needed to actually build a community garden. Another thing they were celebrating was the new steel artistic fence. It was a garden inspired ornate fence that was much more welcoming than the typical chain link fence.

I also noticed the differences between Chanowk’s more informal space and Sol’s more traditional structure. Chanowk represents a common Oak Park resident. Sol is many different people coming together with the support of big groups. It reflects the realization that support available tends to increase the more north in Oak Park you are. Before Oak Park is a unified community, it needs to bridge the gaps between the divisions within itself.

McCLATCHY PARK

McClatchy Park has always been a key public gathering space in Oak Park. With new improvements coming, it will provide various activities and recreation opportunities for the community.



FIG 2.12 Oak Park Sol supporters.



FIG 2.13 Oak Park Sol- “Spring Fling”



FIG 2.14 McClatchy Park Improvements Groundbreaking.

Craft + Play at the 35th St. Fair



FIG 2.15 Panorama view of the fair.

To get a feeling of what the community wants, I used craft and play to creatively engage the community. Inspired by Candy Chang's "Before I Die," I set up two perpendicular chalkboard walls during the 35th St. Fair in Oak Park, which is an annual street fair in Oak Park that celebrates family, food, art, music, and culture. The prompts on the walls were, "I love Oak Park because..." and "Oak Park needs...". Being perpendicular, one can step back and look to the left and see the things that make Oak Park great then look to the right and see things we could work on. This social art experiment allows anyone walking by to pick up a piece of chalk, reflect on their lives, and share their personal aspirations in public space.

Next to the walls I set up a table where people could "design a park". This is where I told people more about my project and introduce them to the design process. I provided tools and spacial dimensions and they in return they gave me valuable input. The youth especially liked the craft+play approach.



FIG 2.16 Communal dining area.



FIG 2.17 Cultural performances.



FIG 2.18 Design workshop.



FIG 2.19 Gathering ideas.



FIG 2.20 Youth engagement.



FIG 2.21 + 2.22 Designs and smiles.

I talked with many people that day who inspired me with their excitement and encouragement. They really wanted a space like Open Air to come to life. They introduced me to community leaders and investors to try and get the ball rolling. The coordinator for the annual banana festival even commissioned me to set up the walls for her event. I was able to experience hands on what makes Oak Park shine-the people. Delicious (and affordable!) food, exciting performances, and different cultures were all present. The Oak Park Business Association (the organization who put the event together) did a fantastic job. I thought to myself, what if there was a space where this could happen every day?



FIG 2.23 Participating.



FIG 2.24 Expressing need.



FIG 2.25 Community member offering help with the set up.



FIG 2.26 A reflection space.



FIG 2.27 + 2.28 Filled Boards.

PART 3 : DESIGN



FIG 2.29 A TYPICAL MARKET IN OAK PARK.



OPEN AIR

on 2nd & Broadway

Oak Park needs...

- a grocery store
- art workshops
- positive places for kids
- community gardens
- compost stations
- more public art
- peace and togetherness
- more lighting
- a dog park
- a food truck fair
- studio spaces
- live music
- a teaching kitchen
- more animals
- less gentrification
- equality
- peace
- love...

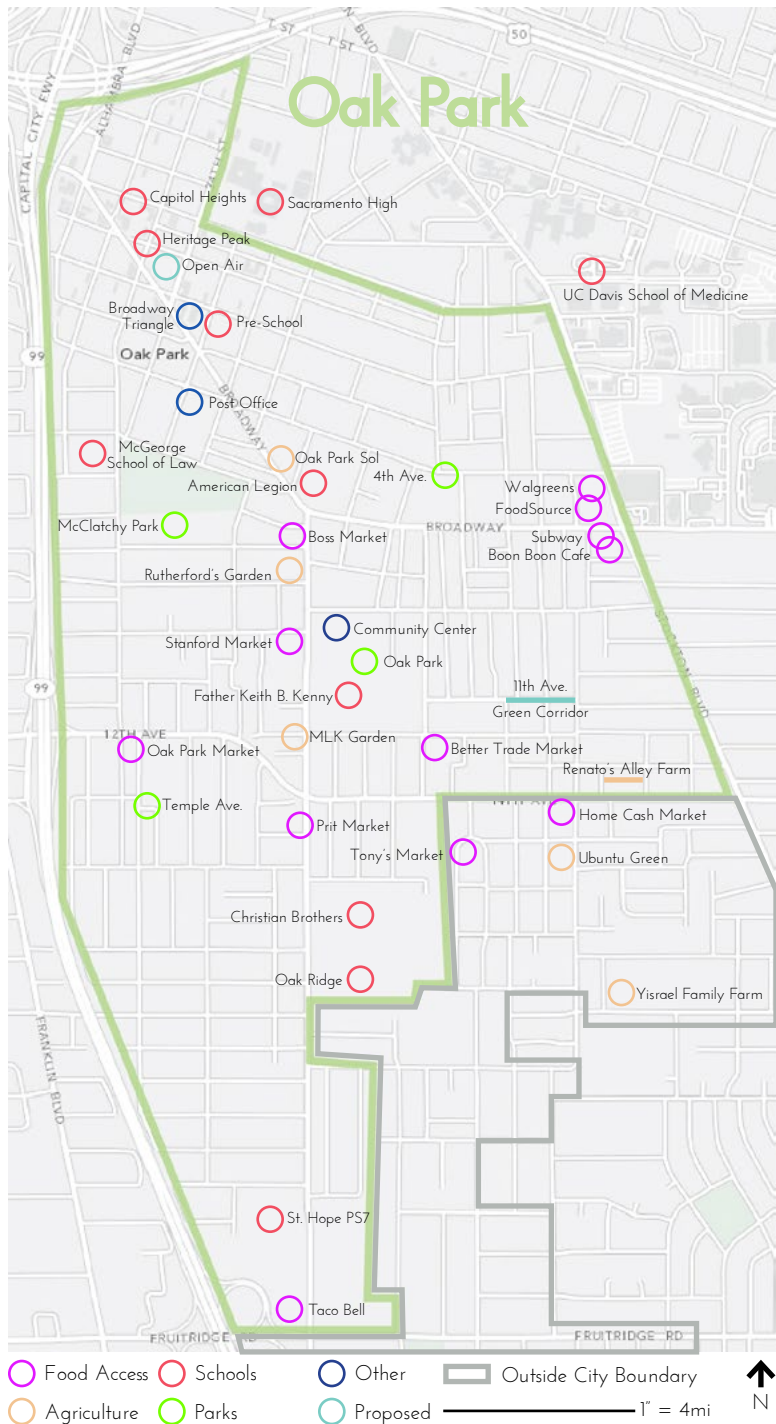
CONTEXT

These are all answers from the 35th St. Fair. How does a physical space that includes all of this look like? First let's take a look at the context of the area.

Oak Park is a large area located in the southeast corner of Sacramento and just north of South Sacramento. Being within city boundaries compared to being in Sacramento County makes a big difference when it comes to policies and regulations. Broadway in the north, Stockton Blvd. on the east, Martin Luther King Blvd. in the center, Fruitridge Road to the south, and Highway 99 on the west are all major thoroughways that frame Oak Park.

Oak Park has many schools and churches with several parks in the north and less in the south. There are also many convenience and liquor shops with little to no availability of fresh food.

North Oak Park is changing; quickly and dramatically. Much construction is happening in North Oak Park, but efforts are being made to extend the positive impacts to all of Oak Park. Much of the construction is around the Broadway Triangle. Arthur Henry's Supper Club (3406 Broadway), the Oak Park Brewery (3514 Broadway), and the Pet Stylista (3535 2nd Ave.) are all examples of new business in Oak Park. Nearly \$2.8 million are going into renovations for McClatchy Park. These improvements will include a running/walking track and a major new playground draws inspiration from Joyland. There is a trend of growth and revitalization occurring the North Oak Park.



MAPPING

Any kind of neighborhood development must be done with caution. It is important for Open Air to consider all demographics and be sensitive to the cultural identities of the residents. Choices must be made according to what's best for the area and the wants of the community. Balancing this with zoning, regulations, and neighborhood authorities can be tricky. Maps and mapping are important tools in that can help in understanding these factors analyzing beyond physical space.

There are physical gaps in Oak Park. Vacant spaces make these holes bigger. One lot could be a family's home while the lot next to it could where illegal activities take place. Providing uses for Oak Park's 156 vacant lots will reduce blight and help the community come back from high vacant housing rates and unemployment rates

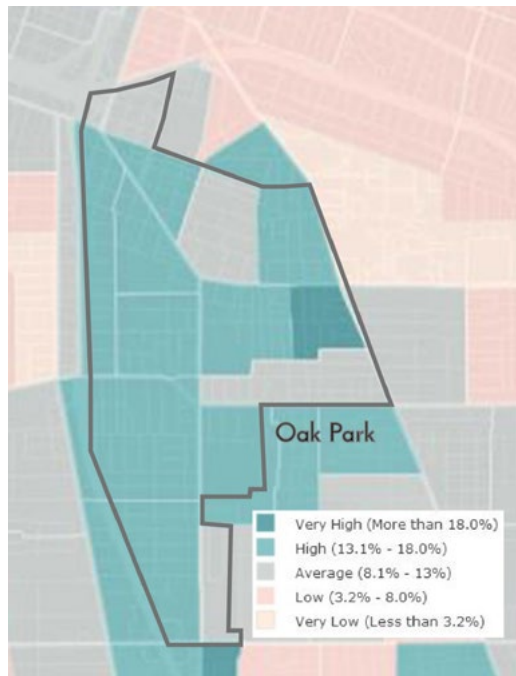


FIG 3.0 Vacant Housing by Block Group.

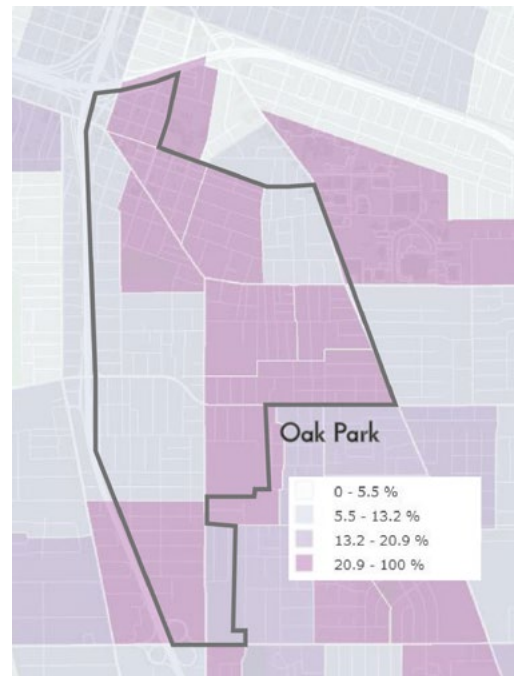


FIG 3.1 Unemployment Rate.

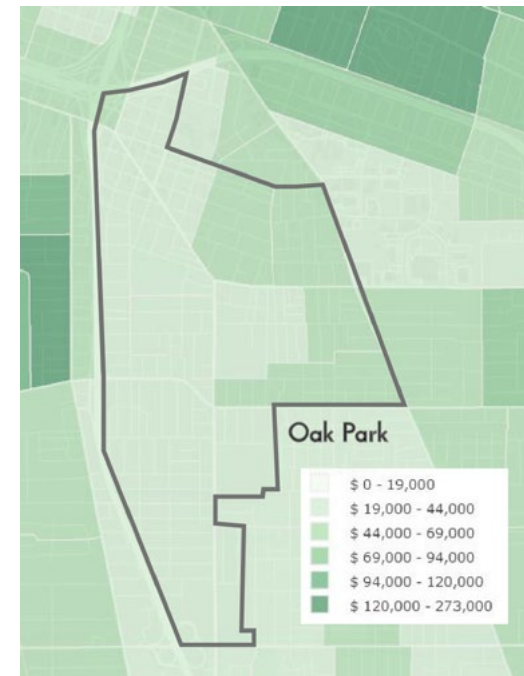


FIG 3.2 Average Household Income.

FIG 3.3 Population Density.

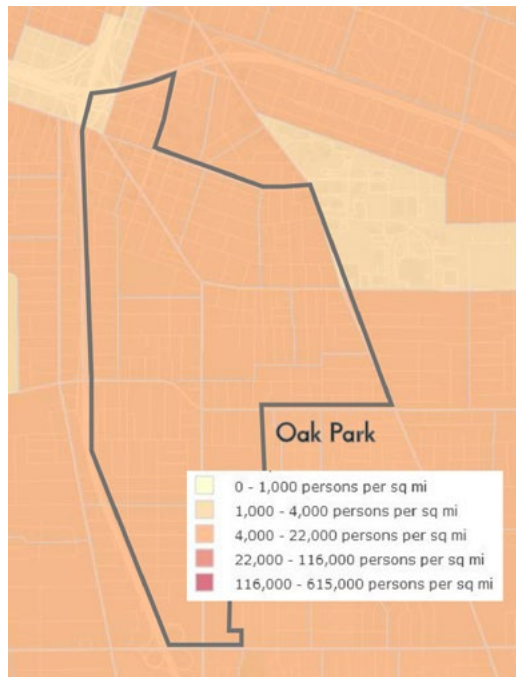


FIG 3.4 Diversity Index.

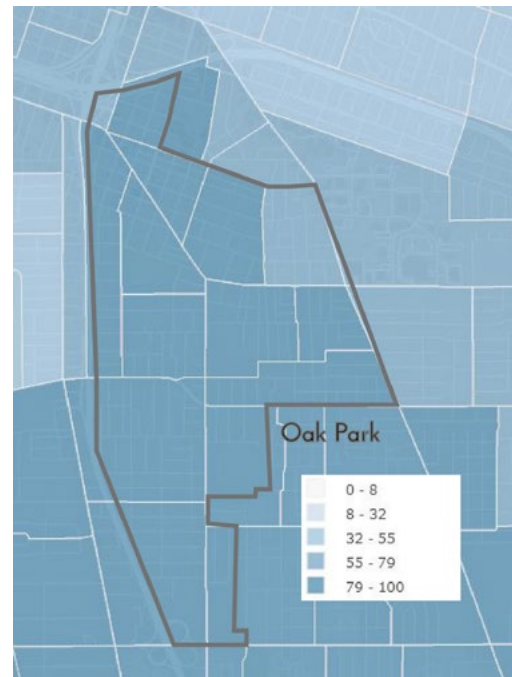
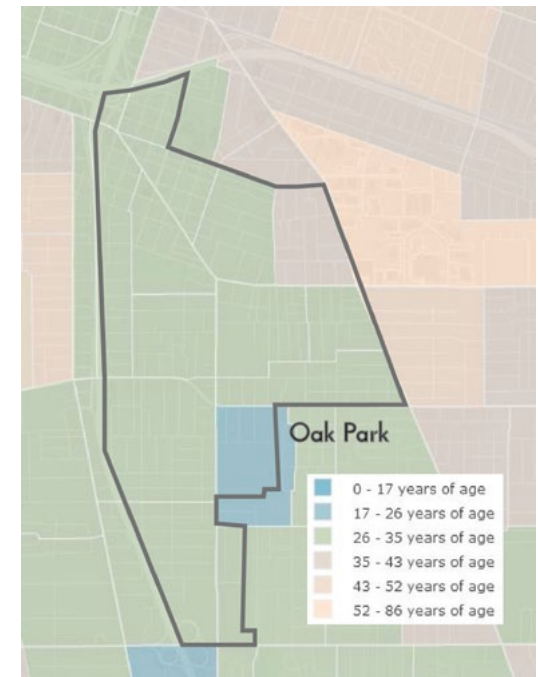


FIG 3.5 Median Age.



"GIS is a great tool for reducing something that is computationally complex into an easily understood visualization" (McElvaney, 2012). All of the maps shown here were made using GIS or Geographic Information System technology. Framing issues and factors visually helps in finding data and best case solutions.

When designing Open Air I looked at Oak Park as a whole. The site design would have an impact on more than the parcel it sat on. Some opportunities were that Oak was relatively dense, diverse, and young. Some constraints were the vacant housing, unemployment rate, and poverty levels.

A constraint of mapping in GIS is that the data can be inaccessible to many, especially being in digital form. Participatory mapping is another type of mapping that does not have this constraint. It is "a map-making process that attempts to make visible the association between land and local communities by using the commonly understood and recognized language of cartography" (IFAD, 2009). Community maps can usually be identified by the process of its production and that it represents the agenda of the community. Some positives are that it shows local knowledge not found on traditional maps and as such is not bound by their limitations. Although I did not use community maps in this project, I learned that GIS and community maps complement each other.



FIG 3.6 *View from the north.*



FIG 3.7 *View across Broadway & 34th St.*

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The lot I choose for Open Air is at the intersection of 2nd Ave. and Broadway in Sacramento. The assessor's parcel number is 010-0312-015-0000 (Sacramento County Assessor's Parcel Viewer). The site is approximately 1.6 acres. It is zoned for general commercial with land use marked as urban corridor low with a density of 20-110 and 0.3-3.0 floor area ratio (Sacramento Land Use and Urban Form Diagram, 2011).

This site was once the location of the Made Rite Sausage Company. It provided food processing jobs for Oak Park residents until it closed in 1986. One longtime resident has recalled that it "gave off meat odors you could smell for blocks and employed a lot of people in the area" (Patel, 2010).

Finding the lot's current owner was difficult. The first thing I did was call the Natoma Company, whose number was on the fence. They replied saying they sold the lot but could not disclose who to. During the scouting mission, I learned from the community that it was to be a Fresh & Easy neighborhood market that would provide fresh food to Oak Park. Fresh & Easy worked with the community and Oak Park was excited for it. They bought the lot on September 28, 2010. Unfortunately Fresh & Easy filed for bankruptcy and its parent company, Tesco, sold the chain to Yucaipa Companies (ThePacker). This lot was sold February of this year to EM-80 UAV Darko LLC, a company associated with Fortress Investment Group. I contacted the manager of the site and she said they have no interest in letting the community use this space either temporarily or permanent. Although a constraint, Open Air is a conceptual site design with ideas that extend to all vacant spaces in Oak Park.

SITE ANALYSIS

The current lot is a large vacant lot with no building footprint and a chain link fence that surrounds the perimeter, excluding the side where there is a building. The building on the west side of the lot is two stories tall and is the home of El Shaddai Ministry and the Heritage Peak Charter School. The teachers at Heritage Peak told me if anything was to be done with the vacant lot next door, they would want a plot where the students can grow food and learn.

Most pedestrian traffic around the site is along Broadway and 34th street. Broadway is a main road in south Sacramento that connects many neighborhoods. It is busy throughout the day and sees medium traffic. A design would need to be implemented that makes people feel safe from the traffic along Broadway and utilize the visibility from Broadway. With recent commercial development further along Broadway to the East, most pedestrians would be crossing over Broadway to get to Open Air. 34th Street is the exit to Oak Park from the freeway and also sees medium traffic throughout the day. There are also several bus stops along Broadway and 34th Street.

The location of the site is one of the main reasons I choose it for Open Air. Being a heavily frequented location and well known location, a unique public space at this site has the capacity to bring regional awareness and support to Oak Park.

The size was another key factor in choosing this location. It is one of the biggest empty lots in Oak Park. I wanted the design to be big enough to incorporate many different ideas and be a think tank for what could be done with vacant lots.



FIG 3.8 Southeast corner.



FIG 3.9 Northeast corner.



BROADWAY

34TH ST

HERITAGE PEAK
CHARTER SCHOOL

EL SHADDAI
MINISTRY

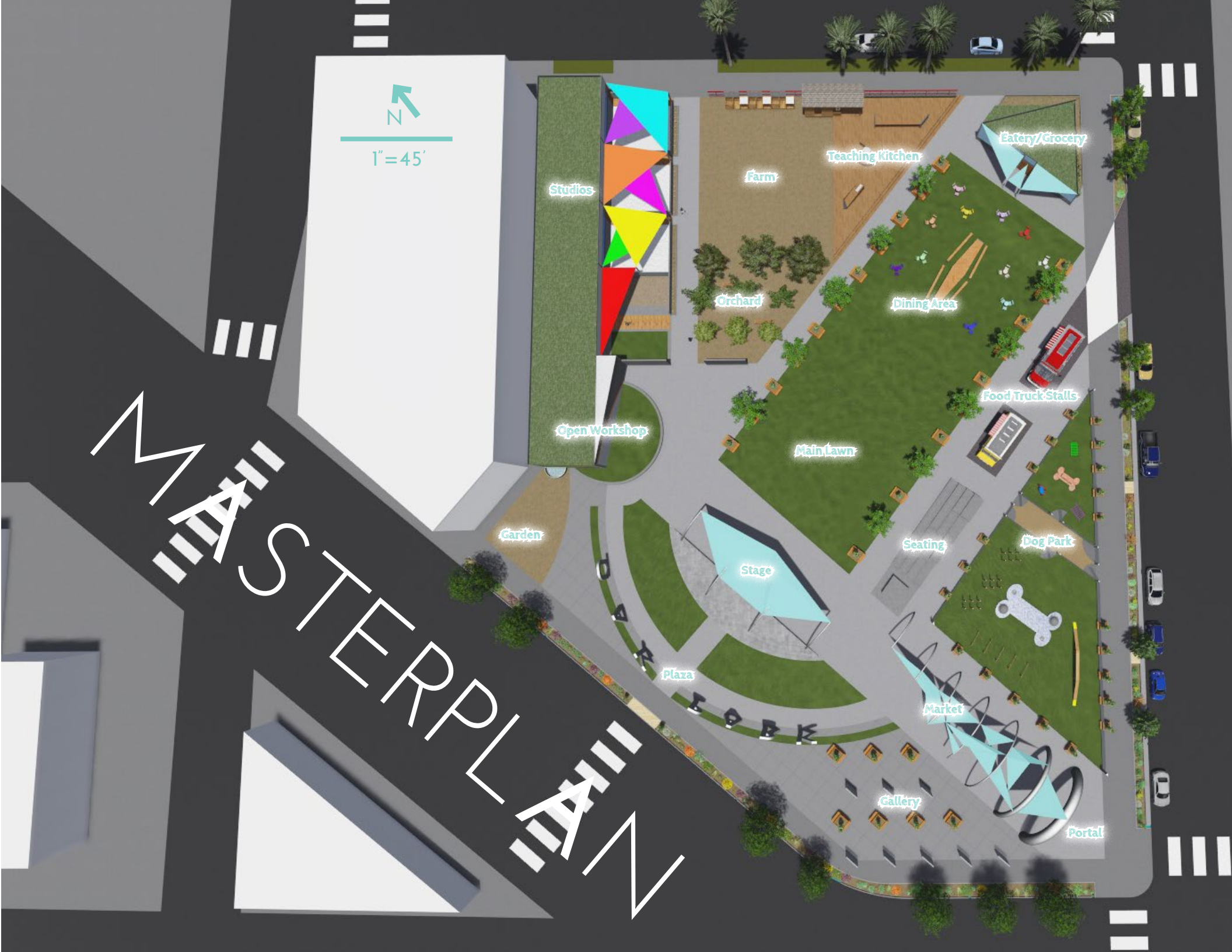
ACE OF FADES
BARBER SHOP

KOMBI HAUS

BUS STOP

2ND AVE

OVERVIEW



1" = 45'

Studios

Farm

Teaching Kitchen

Eatery/Grocery

Orchard

Dining Area

Open Workshop

Main Lawn

Food Truck Stalls

Garden

Stage

Seating

Dog Park

Plaza

Market

Gallery

Portal

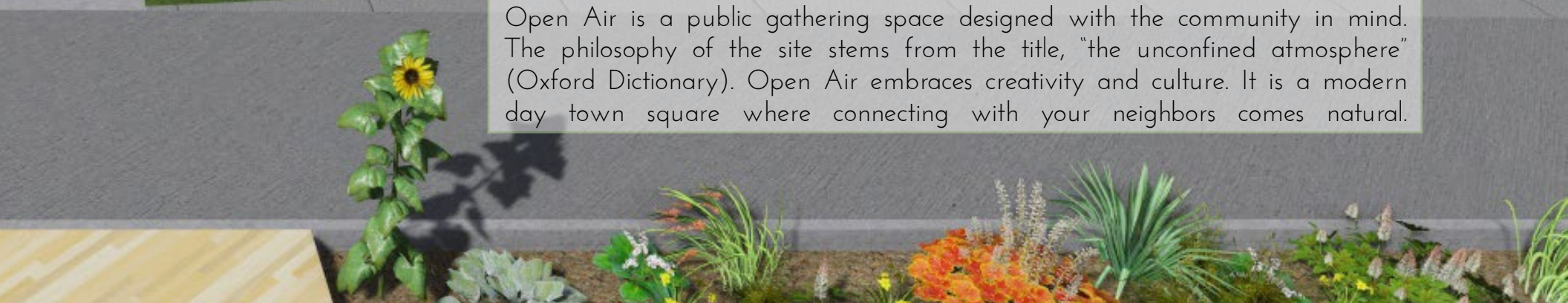
MASTER PLAN

OPEN AIR





Open Air is a public gathering space designed with the community in mind. The philosophy of the site stems from the title, "the unconfined atmosphere" (Oxford Dictionary). Open Air embraces creativity and culture. It is a modern day town square where connecting with your neighbors comes natural.



Facing Broadway, there are 12' tall steel letters that spell out OAK PARK. The letters call back to the old entrance to Oak Park (p7). They also provide valuable visibility and street presence while reminding people this is Oak Park. This place is where the people work hard to beat bad reputations and build a strong resilient community. It is a neighborhood you can be proud to be from. People can take pictures with the letters and share on social media "I am here and I love it". The letters proclaim to the larger Sacramento region a strong sense of identity and different understanding of what kind of place Oak Park is.

Behind the letters is a plaza area that welcomes pedestrians walking along Broadway into the site. Currently it is 475ft

between pedestrian crossings on Broadway. A proposed crosswalk forms an axis that leads pedestrians directly through the letters, into the site.

The southeast corner of the site features an interactive art space called the gallery. Within this space are 8 6'x6' concrete walls that act as canvases for a variety of information. One wall would tell the history of Oak Park while another could be a help wanted board or listing of community organizations in the neighborhood. This area also opens up opportunities for creativity. The walls and paving can be drawn, painted, or graffitied on. If the concrete surface doesn't work, artists are encouraged to customize them how they see fit.



OPEN AIR GALLERY



TELL YOUR STORY

THE HISTORY OF
COMMUNITY
& CULTURAL
ENJOYMENT
the
OAK PARK
BY JIM & BRIGID
DURING THE 1980S
JUNE - OCTOBER
9AM - 5PM

OUR HISTORY

Oak Park started in 1887, when Edwin Alsip subdivided the 230-acre William Doyle ranch into 56 whole or partial blocks and gave his subdivision the name "Oak Park".



OPEN
AIR MARKET

The portal is a large 35' wide, 20' tall highly polished stainless steel structure. Inspired by the Cloud Gate in Millennium Park, the Portal is the primary entrance to the site and greets people on the southeast corner of the site, where there is the heaviest amount of pedestrian traffic. While an artistic piece, the portal functions as a reflection space where people can see themselves and others when entering and leaving the site. Smaller portals in the same orientation extend from the entry portal. These portals set the main framework for the site. All other spaces can be accessed and stem from the portal path. Additionally

a customizable canopy cover can be attached to the portals via small slits in the steel. The inner ring of each portal has a place for LED lights that light up at night. The portal path is wide enough to accommodate pop up shops and temporary installations, in addition to foot traffic. The market space is part of what makes Open Air so welcoming. It provides the largest amount of customizable space on site. Artists, designers, farmers, or anyone with something to display or sell are encouraged to set up a table or booth here. Being along the main path of the site, sellers can rest assured that their product gets visibility.

OPEN AIR PORTAL





2 small
spaces left..
aim yours!

ARTS

9am - Yoga
3pm - Pottery Class
6pm - Salsa
9pm - Open Mic Night

AGRICULTURE

-CSA boxes ready for pick up!
-Help needed with the orchard.
3pm - Compost workshop
Harvest in: 20 days

OPEN AIR CREATIVE CORNER

The terminal point of the portal path is the creative corner. When people arrive to this end of the site they are greeted by two massive chalkboard walls. On the left is the arts side, where information pertaining to studios are written. On the right is the agriculture side, where information pertaining to the farm, the orchard, and the kitchen are written. This information includes event calendars, class/workshop times, help needed, space availability, harvest cycles, and DIY activities. This space is all about creativity and education. Whether it's learning how to salsa or compost, you can do it here. For many reasons, Open Air would not be what it is without the creative corner.

There are small rentable studio spaces here with floor plans that can be adjusted to accommodate many different kinds of artists and price ranges. The main building however, is an open workshop space with a large curved window that faces out to the portal path. Having private studios provides a source of income for the site and also important components for some of the programming of the space. A requirement of renting a private space is that you have to teach a class. This is a great opportunity for artists to collaborate and share skills with the community.

On the agriculture side, there is a small plot to farm on, a small orchard, a teaching kitchen, compost bins, a shed, and a wash station. The plot reserves space for teaching/classes and provides food for the eatery and grocery next door. There is also another plot adjacent to the building in the southwest corner that is reserved for the Heritage Peak Charter School. Tools in the shed are shared on site and in the community.

Another notable feature in this scene is the planter/bench combo. These combos are scattered throughout the site and provide personal incentives for people to return to Open Air. Each planter can be claimed by a household for a season. If properly maintained, the planter is then transported to a vacant lot nearby that household before harvest time. These simple planters can help initiate the first step in fighting blight and become iconic symbols throughout Oak Park.

Urban agriculture is blooming in Oak Park, however many do not know what to do with their produce. The teaching kitchen is a space where chefs and residents can share recipes while learning to prepare and cook food that they could then eat on site.

After preparing a fresh dish people can bring it right next door to the dining area. The centerpiece here is an oversized community dining table. Sharing a table has amazing community building capability. Food has a unique characteristic that connects all people. Also pictured in this scene is a eatery and small grocery. The number one want I found the community desired was a grocery that provided fresh food. Food produced on site will be sold here either raw or through the eatery. Open Air will also purchase locally grown food from residents who don't have the time sell it themselves. It is a small grocery that would provide the essentials and could act a collector and distributor of food in the form of a CSA (community supported agriculture) program. At night this area could transform into a viable night life space for eating, drinking, and socializing.



OPEN AIR *TEACHING KITCHEN*

OPEN AIR COMMUNITY DINING TABLE



OPEN AIR DOG PARK



During my experiences in Oak Park I encountered many dogs and dog owners. They all mentioned how there are no dog parks in Oak Park and that they have to drive miles to get to one. Dog parks offer a variety of benefits including an opportunity for both dogs and their owners to build companionship with one another. Located on site is a small sized dog park with a variety of feature including an agility bridge and seating and water in the middle. Leashes can cause dogs to become territorial (CanineUniversity). Just like humans, open space is beneficial

to dogs. The walls surrounding the dog park are translucent for visibility through the site. It also avoids the association to the typical chain link fences in Oak Park. Lined with the glass panels are the combo planters. When choosing one's planter, one might think where they likely are to spend their time. For example, a dog lover would choose a planter here so they could simultaneously maintain their planter plot while watching their dog roam.



OPEN AIR SMALL DOG AREA

Some small dogs don't like to play with the bigger dogs. That being said, there is a space for those dogs here. This area allows small dogs a sense of security or a chance to brush up their social skills before entering the bigger section. Also in this scene are the food truck stalls. There are two asphalt stalls that

indicate where food trucks or a mobile exhibition can rent a spot. On the right is the addition of green infrastructure along the road. Stormwater planters capture runoff from the street. A carriage walkout and bridges are provided for people entering and exiting their vehicle.



CPTED + NIGHT VISIBILITY

Another design consideration for Open Air is CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design). Used effectively, proper design can reduce crime, fear of crime, and improve quality of life. Strategies include natural surveillance, natural access control, and territorial reinforcement (CPTED, 2009). To accomplish this, I designed visibility across site with low vegetation and narrow permanent structures. The only fencing on site is at the dog park. I wanted this space to be different than all the other lots in Oak Park. There is no fence that restricts access but there is a sense of public ownership.

Night time visibility is important as well. I wanted to keep some spaces open for events so having ample light was key. The portal structures all feature LEDs facing the pavement. The top of the steel posts surrounding the dog park emit a light as well. "OAK PARK" illuminates at night with LEDs in the center of each letter. Topping it off are the string lights that run from fruit tree to fruit tree across the main lawn to create a down to earth ambiance.



NEXT STEPS:

11th AVE Green Corridor

11th Ave

"The Trash Yard"

"The Shady Corner"

"The Anxious
Alley"

"The Long Lost Lot"

44th St



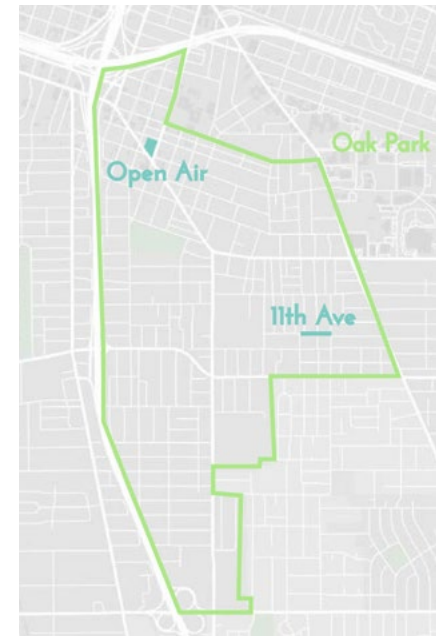
Even if Open Air is not physically realized, its ideas can still be expressed. This portion of the design component explores how strategies presented in Open Air can be applied to a string of vacant spaces ready for transformation in Central Oak Park.

When I became more acquainted with the ACCE Oak Park group, they told me about some of their plans for the future. They told me of their initiative to tackle blight in Central Oak Park by stringing together several vacant lots and turning them into productive green space.

This was the perfect opportunity to apply the strategies and solutions presented in Open Air to viable locations. With the help of Amelia and Pam from ACCE I put together a small design charrette. The people who participated were residents who lived next door to these vacant lots. They told me about their experiences dealing with the blight that these vacant spaces bring. Lance, who lives on 44th St. right in front of the in-progress community garden, said “[he has] had to tell [people doing illegal activities] to leave many times”. He added, “you can do it anywhere else, in your home, in front of your house but not here, not my neighborhood”. I received similar sentiments from the others. They seemed to agree that most people want the best for Oak Park but “there is always that one house on the block that causes trouble and everyone knows which house it is”. Their strategy was to build a strong network of ACCE members who work together as neighbors to build a positive neighborhood that pushes out troublemakers.

I helped provide design expertise and together we formulated design concepts for four vacant spaces along 11th Ave.

FIG 3.10
ACCE meeting.
FIG 3.11
Context map.
FIG 3.12
Design charrette.



PHASE I: COMMUNITY GARDEN

The first vacant lot being tackled is at 11th Ave. and 44th St. People would use the space as a trash can. Soon there were heaps of trash everywhere. Community member cleaned the place up and recently had its first planting party with plant donations from Ubuntu Green. This lot's success is important in pushing momentum toward the next phases.

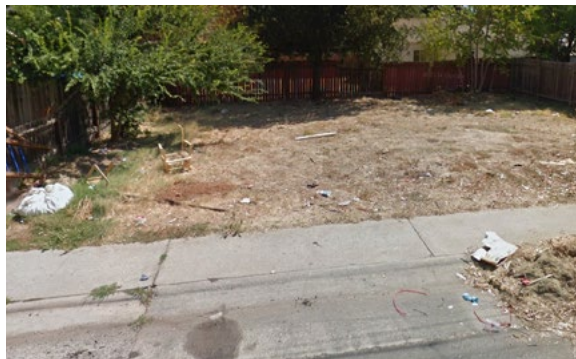


FIG 3.13 *Before.*



FIG 3.14 *Design concept.*

PHASE II : SOCIAL CORNER

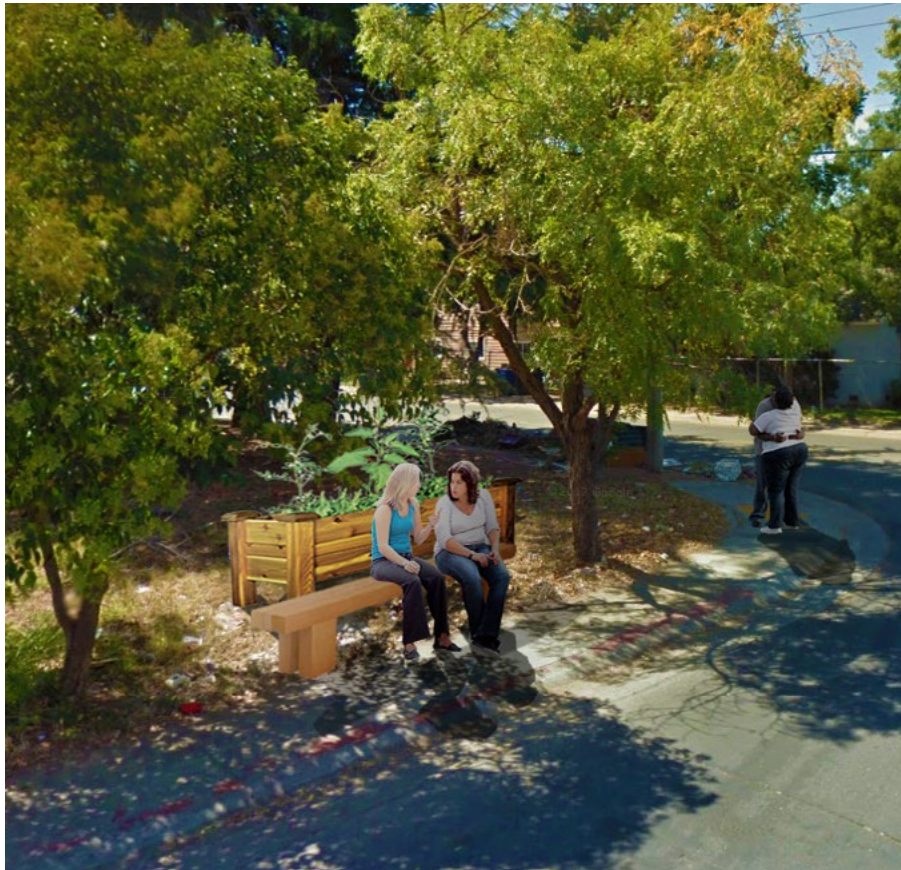


FIG 3.15 *Design concept.*

Just down 11th is a small corner where the owner is ready to transform into a green space. It is a shady spot with excellent visibility on street. This spot would be ideal for the planters project idea from Open Air. A simple planter to grow food and a place to sit is sometimes all it takes to bring people together. After this initial investment, the community would be more willing to invest their own resources into this location.



FIG 3.16 *Before.*

PHASE III : ACTIVATED ALLEYS

Alleys are a new kind of vacant space being targeted by ACCE. During the last ACCE meeting, we toured Renato's alley farm. He claimed an empty alley behind his house three years ago and now it is a thriving, productive landscape. He keeps it clean, saving the city on maintenance costs and gives his children and pets a place to run around and learn about agriculture. Alleys have an opportunity to provide a safe interactive pedestrian network in Oak Park. In this design, an archway is welcoming people in, similar to the portal, while corn grows along the fence. Ideally reclaiming this alley would mean reclaiming the space it leads to as well.



FIG 3.17 Renato's alley farm.



FIG 3.18 Before.

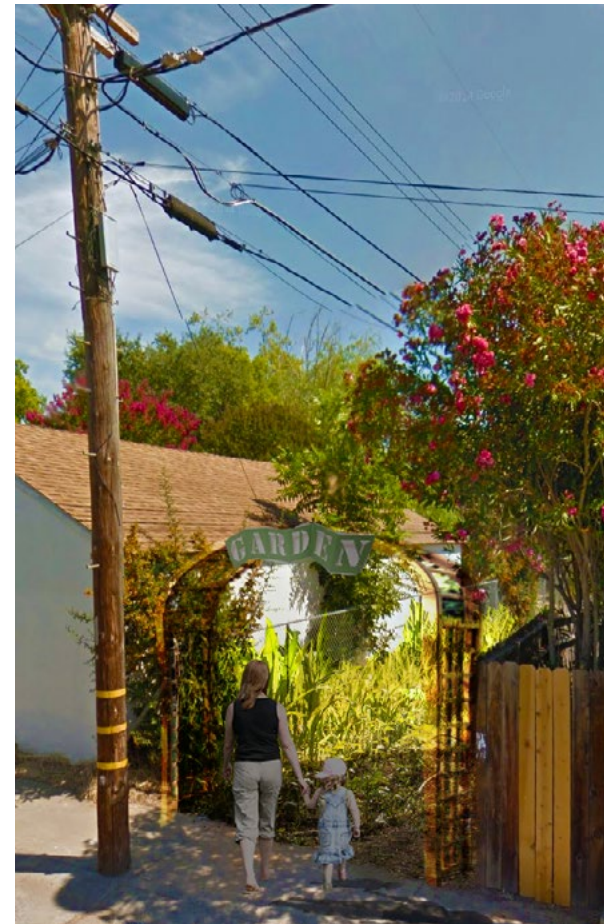


FIG 3.19 Design concept.

PHASE IV : FOOD FOREST



FIG 3.20 *Design concept.*

The alley leads to a large long lot off of 11th Ave. Participants in the design charrette recommended utilizing the long nature of the space for a relaxing trail to take a stroll or walk your dog. In addition, they liked the idea of the space providing shade, especially during the hot summer months. Tying into the goal of food security, fruit trees seemed like the right choice in providing a low maintenance shaded trail environment.

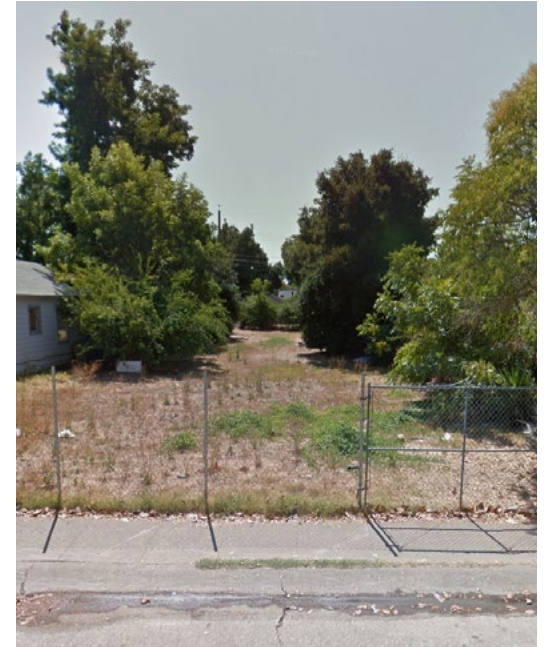


FIG 3.21 *Before.*

Open Air is a think tank for all kinds of spaces. Whether the successes are in big open parks, the street corner, or the alley, it is all about how these spaces can provide for the community. Creative uses of the land will help bring communities closer together and spark a personal relationship between an individual and his neighbors, the land, and the community.



PART 4 : TOOLKIT

FIG 3.22 PLAYING WITH CHALK

SOURCES

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"ArcGIS Base Maps"

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INSPIRATIONS

LOCAL:


ACCE
Alchemist CDC
Building Healthy Communities (BHC)
The City of Sacramento (Jay's Office + GIS Online resources)
Edible Sac High
Gather - Unseen Heroes
Harvest Sacramento
Neighborworks
Oak Park Farmer's Market
Oak Park Sol
OPBA/OPNA
Sac Food Bank
Soil Born Farms
The Hub BHC
Ubuntuu Green
Yisrael Family Farm
Walk Sacramento
WayUp Sacramento

WEB:

adpsr.org
assessorparcelviewer.saccounty.net/GISViewer/Default.aspx
communitydesign.org
empowered.org
nextdoor.com

RELATED PROJECTS+RESEARCH:

TheAlleyProject
Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD)
Beacon Food Forest, Seattle
The Better Block
Bryant Park
The Bowery Project
Campo de Cebada, Madrid
Carl Steinitz
Chartered Society of Designers - 'Understanding the Contribution Parks and Green Spaces can make to Improving People's Lives'
Department for Communities and Local Government - 'Making deprived areas better places to live'
Display, Emeryville
The Flyover, Liverpool
Garrett Devier - Cultural and Ethnic
Gap Filler
Hayes Valley Farm
Hope VI
Hunters Point, SF
Lafayette Greens, Detroit
Landscape Architecture Magazine
Minority Use of Open Space
Namad Gardens
Randolph Hester - Design for Ecological Democracy
Sacramento Revitalization Program
Sharon Zukin
Sol Collective
Spontaneous Interventions: Design Actions for the Common Good
Superkilinen, Copenhagen
Sustainable South Bronx
Third Space, Davis
Urban Catalyst, Berlin
Urban Renewal
Vacant Land: A resource for shaping Urban Neighborhoods
Vibrant Space / Problem Space
Walkable City, Jeff Speck
The Wall, Copenhagen
Walter Hood
Yards Park, Washington D.C.

A night scene of an outdoor park. In the foreground, a large green lawn is visible. In the middle ground, a large, green, triangular canopy structure is supported by several dark poles. Below the canopy, the words "OPEN AIR PARK" are written in large, white, block letters. The letters are arranged in a slightly curved line. Above the canopy, two strings of warm white string lights are strung across the scene. The background is a dark blue night sky with many small white stars. There are some trees and bushes visible in the background, and some wooden planters with plants in the foreground.

Open Air is a community inspired place that seeks to fill the needs of the community by channeling creativity into positive change. Everyone has something to contribute to the community. Sometimes all we need is a space to remind us we can. Open Air provides a space where all people can come together to learn, teach, connect, and express themselves. We all share the open air.

JULIAN ROSARIO