



*Fall 2011 - Spring 2012*



## PARTICIPANTS

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**Jackson Kinney**, Director of Community Development, City of Covington

**Rebecca Volpe and Jeremy Wallace**, Community Development, City of Covington

**Mike Yeager**, Assistant City Engineer, City of Covington

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## Introduction

The Niehoff Urban Studio is a unique interdisciplinary initiative undertaken to address urban issues that challenge the quality of life in Cincinnati. The studio endeavors to engage the community in an urban problem solving effort. During multi-year cycles, students and faculty collaborate with community stakeholders to address a specific topic related to urban design and community development in Cincinnati. During 2011-12 the studio theme was connected to a local initiative called “Place Matters” which is a program sponsored by a consortium of non-profits led by the United Way of Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. This effort aims concentrated funding and services on just three communities in the Cincinnati to promote comprehensive community redevelopment.

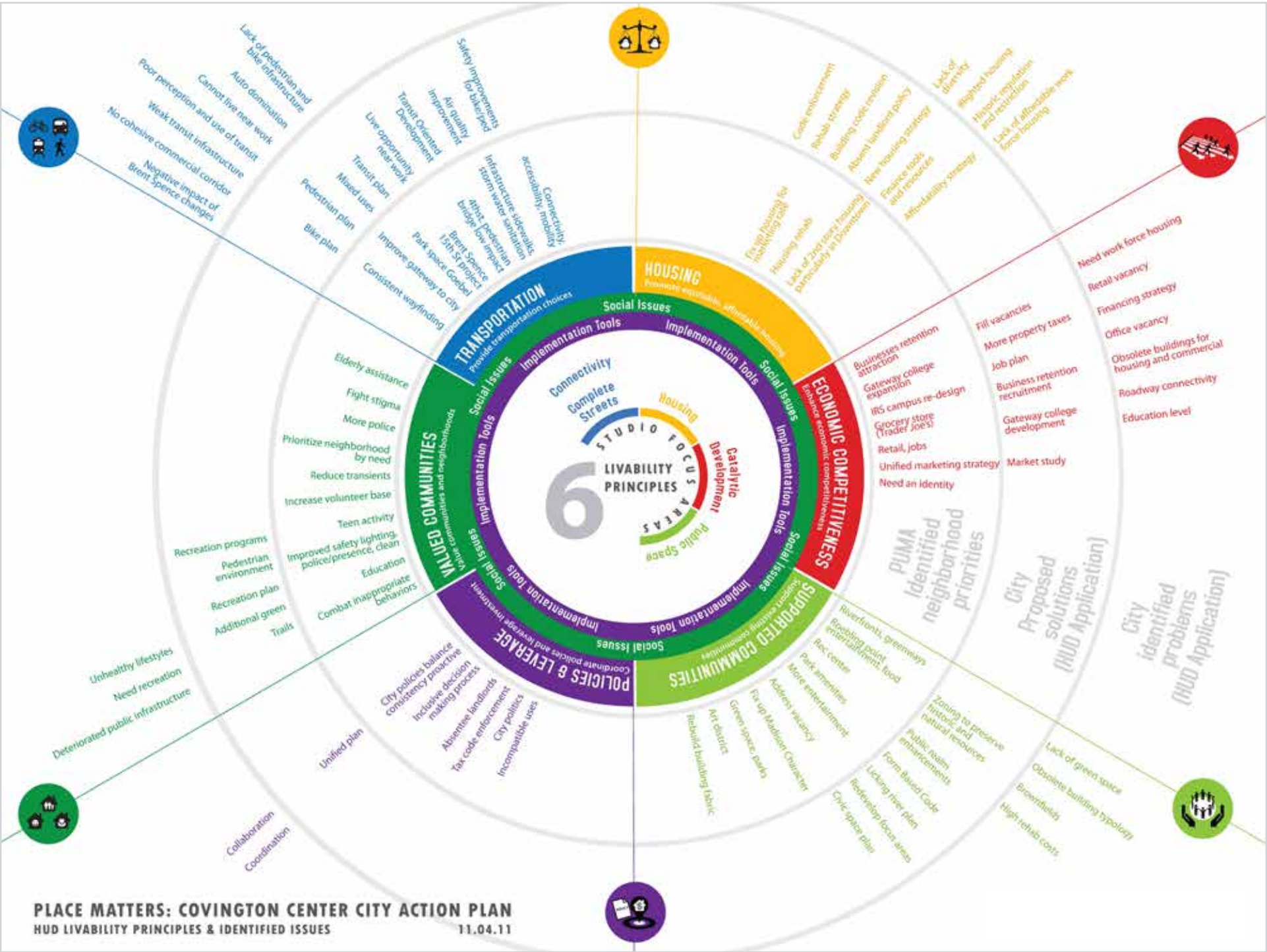
In the fall quarter of 2011 and the winter and spring quarters of 2012, civil engineering students, urban planning students, and journalism students studied the center city of Covington as a part of the Place Matters program. Covington suffers from significant physical, social, and economic disadvantages but remains an important asset in our region. The studio was invited to participate in the Covington Center City Action Plan by the City of Covington. This planning process was funded in part through a federal multi-agency HUD-DOT-EPA liveability grant, which aims for a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to community development. The Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) generously provided funding for studio work.



Visit [www.uc.edu/cdc/niehoff\\_studio/programs/place\\_matters.html](http://www.uc.edu/cdc/niehoff_studio/programs/place_matters.html) for detailed project description and image credits.



Introduction



Three Faculty and 102 students worked in studio and seminar over a three quarter period. Work of the studio was focused on five themes, which correspond with four HUD liveability areas: Transportation through Complete streets and Connectivity, Housing, Economic Competitiveness, and Supported Communities through Public space. These themes overlap and correspond with topics selected to frame the CCCAP which included Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Economy, and Public Realm. Students had the advantage of gathering feedback from public listening sessions organized by city consultants as well as previously identified priorities listed in the application for the HUD liveability grant.

Students conducted reconnaissance on existing conditions in Covington and collected best practice examples to better understand the thematic areas. Urban Framework plans were outlined by interdisciplinary student teams for each of the four themes. Urban Planning and Programming, Urban Design, and Engineering proposals were developed for specific project sites throughout the study area. This executive summary derives key finding and concepts from the body of student work.

In parallel with studio work eleven journalism students created profiles of notable Covington stakeholders as a way of exposing the character of civic life in the city. Four High School students photo documented the collaborators as a part of the Center for Great Neighborhood's youth art program.

Students had the unique opportunity early in the year to participate in public workshops hosted by the City of Covington and their professional consultants, in which they assisted with the engagment process. Later students reviewed their reconnaissance, research and proposals with city staff and consultants and benefitted from interaction during public exhibits of studio work at the Covington Artisan's Enterprise Center. Studio concepts and proposals informed the professional work of the consultants as they formulated the Covington Center City Action Plan.

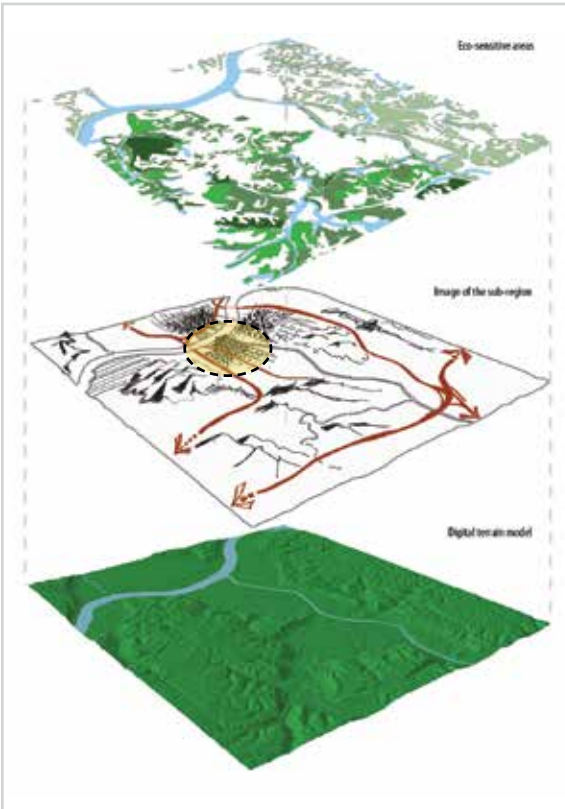


# Reconnaissance

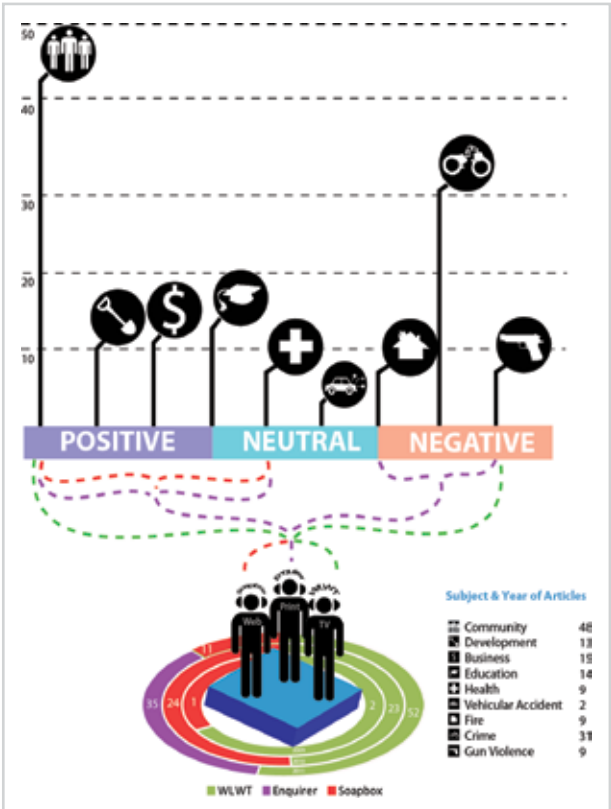
Students observed and analyzed aspects of Covington and the surrounding subregion to gain a thorough understanding of issues relevant to the planning effort. Notable findings are described below.

## Physical Factors

Natural Systems, Morphology, Movement and Circulation. Covington is well defined by waterways and hillside as a contiguous and low-lying basin subject to flooding. The built form of the city is organized into distinct areas as a result of varying street grid geometry and orientation. The elevated rail line further divides the city. The interstate highway strongly impacts and defines the west edge of the city. Movement through Covington is dominated by the one way east west couplet but several distict street corridors exist. Yet connectivity and orientation are severely challenged in this diverse environment.



Natural and built form in and around Covington



Perception of the Media to the community

## Social Factors

History, Demographics, Social and Cultural Perspectives. Covington suffers from a number of social challenges including loss of population, poverty, high unemployment rates, substantial crime rates, and other disadvantages. At the same time, strong self identity is present and this is leveraged in city pride and social programming.

## Policy and Planning

Land-use, Zoning, Planning Intitiatives. This area of Covington is strongly residential, but lacking in neighborhood serving businesses. Riverfront commercial uses are strongly separated from existing communities.

## Neighborhood Structure

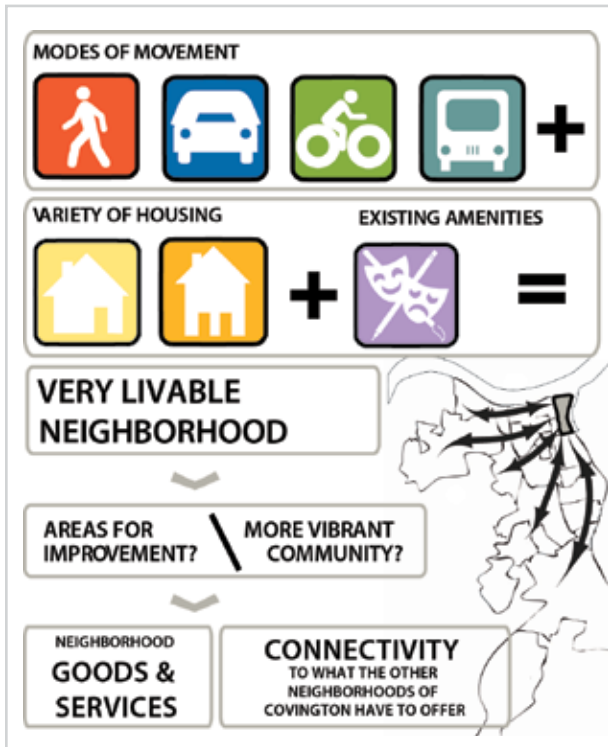
This area of Covington is a confederation of five highly distinctive and internally cohesive neighborhoods. Each area has strengths and weaknesses that contrast sharply with others and all are physically or functionally separated from each other.



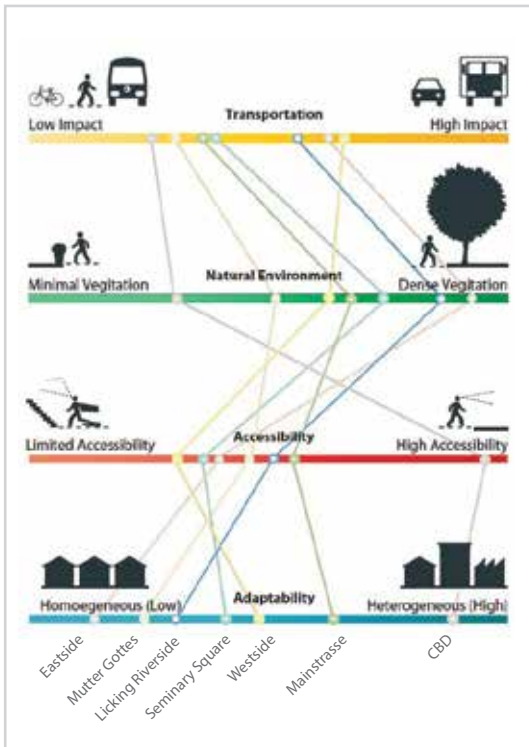
Street grid and structure of the study area



Different scales and mix of residential housing



Qualitative observation: historic Licking riverside district



Qualitative observations: Neighborhood characteristics





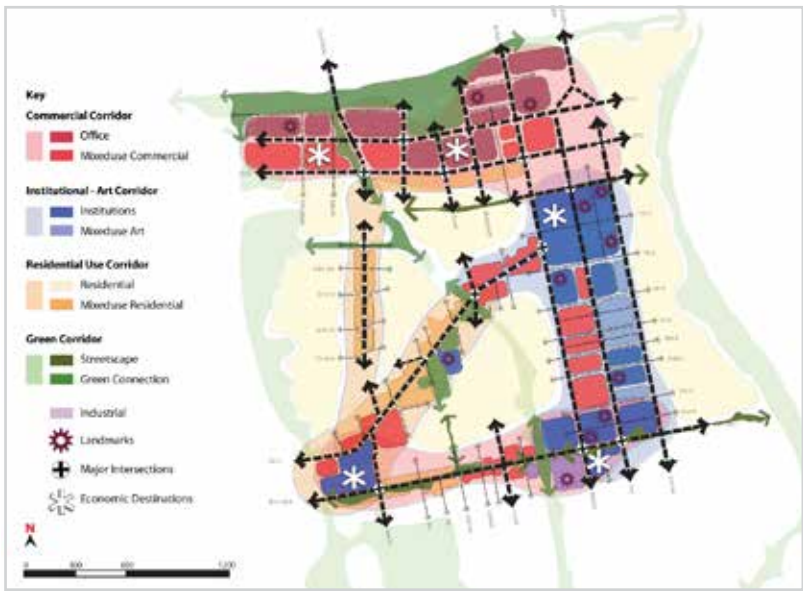


# Urban Framework Concepts

Before initiating specific individual urban design, engineering, or programming proposals, interdisciplinary student teams developed urban framework proposals which covered the entire study area. Framework components corresponded to the HUD liveability aspects. Notable framework concepts are described below.

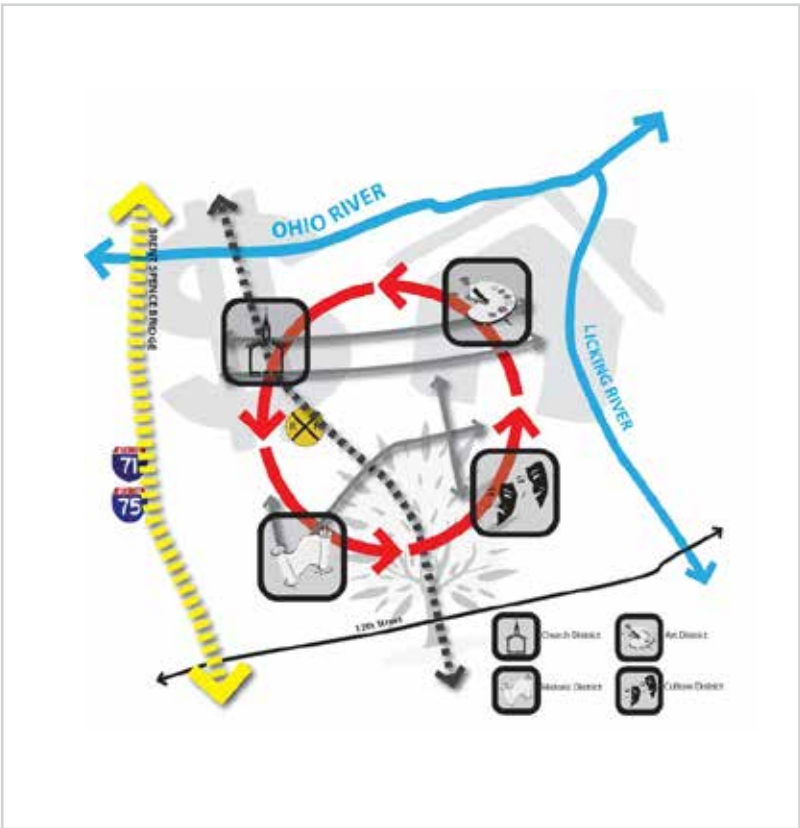


**A centering residential green space**  
In addition to both Ohio riverfront parks and a civic space near 4th and Greenup, a central recreation space might extended from Seminary Square to Pike, Russell, and 8th. This might function to meet demands for much needed green space, but also pull together neighborhoods separated by the elevated rail line.



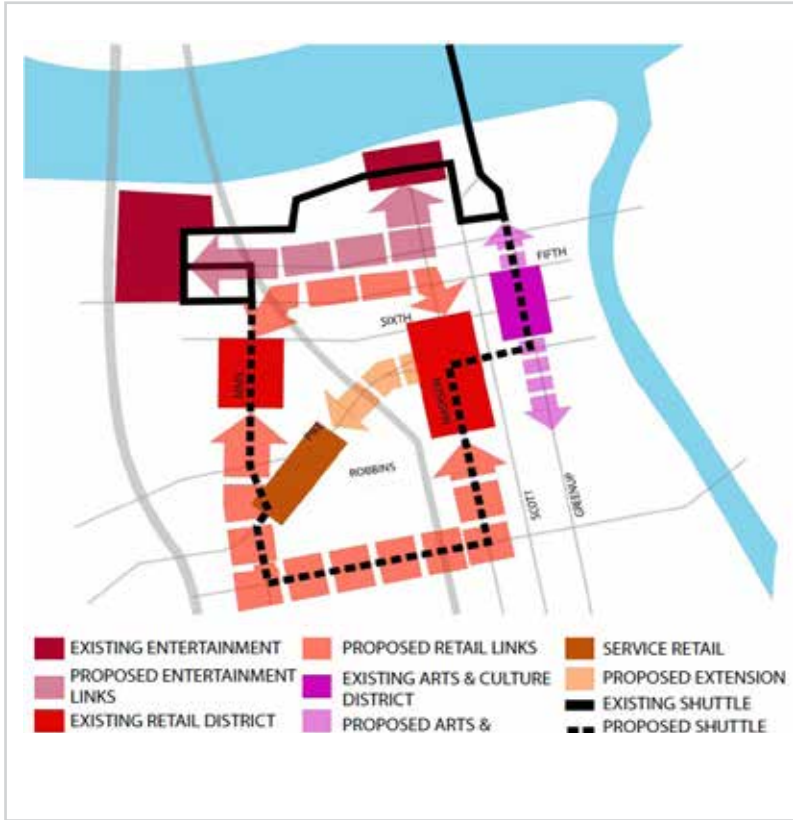
**Network five points of development**  
Five points of economic development (Madison, Hospitality District, River-center, Bavarian Brewery site, Duro-bag/Cathedral District) and the corridors between them could positively structure the fragmented study area.

**Programmatic Linkage**  
A linkage of functions with trails, shuttles, wayfinding, and coordinated programs could serve to reconnect divided parts of the study area.



**Railway as spine**  
The rail line and its residual green fringe and monumental structure could be organized to provide an important north-south green spine to the center of the city and connect it through to the riverfront.





### Network of key streets

The study area can be understood as a network of streets and those most prominent could be better distinguished and clearly connected to other prominent streets in a coherent network.



### Greenways and Green Networks

Greenways and green infrastructure in both right-of-ways and scattered site, can be instrumental in not only solving environmental problems, but also in providing a perceptible green network throughout the area. Alleys can be important components of this and dedicated streets like 6th can be greenways tying the city and its neighborhoods together.

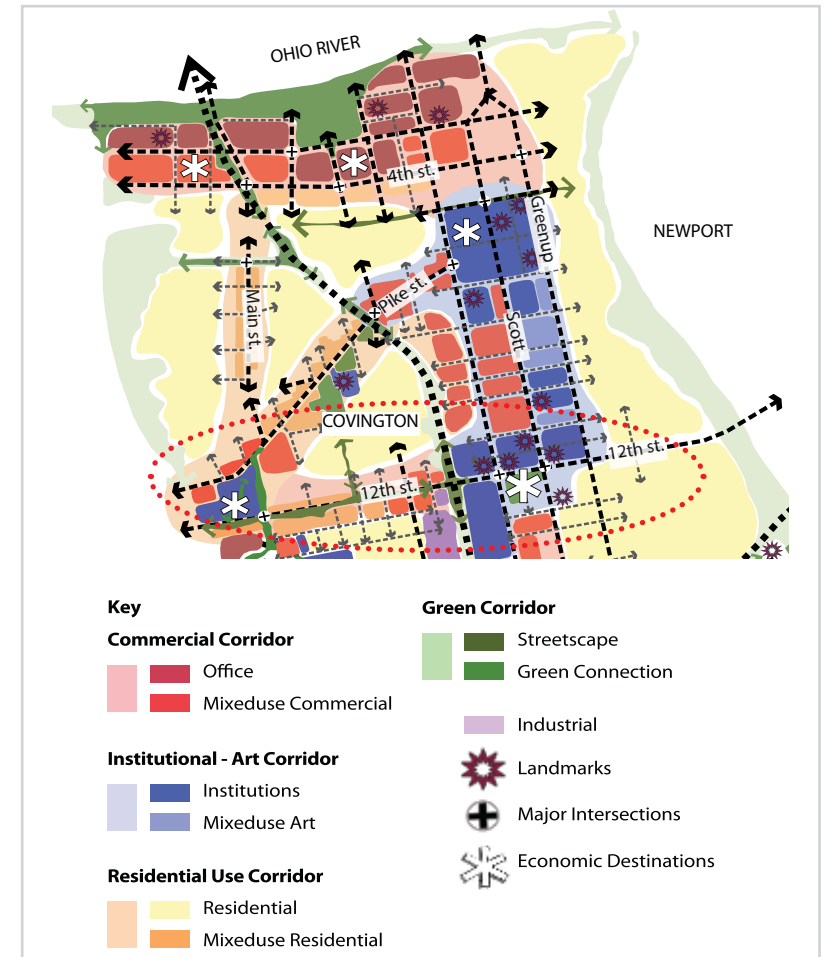
### Green Edges

The study area has strong green edges on three sides and a fourth possible in the MLK-12th street boulevard. These edges could be sewn together programmatically (trails) and perceptually through design to functions as an identifiable “frame” for the center city.



### MLK-12th Boulevard as structural armature

MLK and 12th street has tremendous potential to not only define the southern edge of the center city, but to accommodate a key gateway entry point at the Bavarian Brewery. This western cluster can tie together MLK-12th, Pike, and Main street in a cohesive fashion. At Madison, the new boulevard can center a contemplated “cathedral district” and a major redevelopment at Duro-Bag.





# Transportation Complete Streets and Connectivity

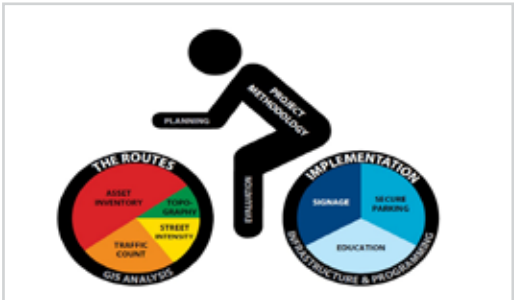
Student design projects addressed each of the following areas:

## Streets that support and promote walking

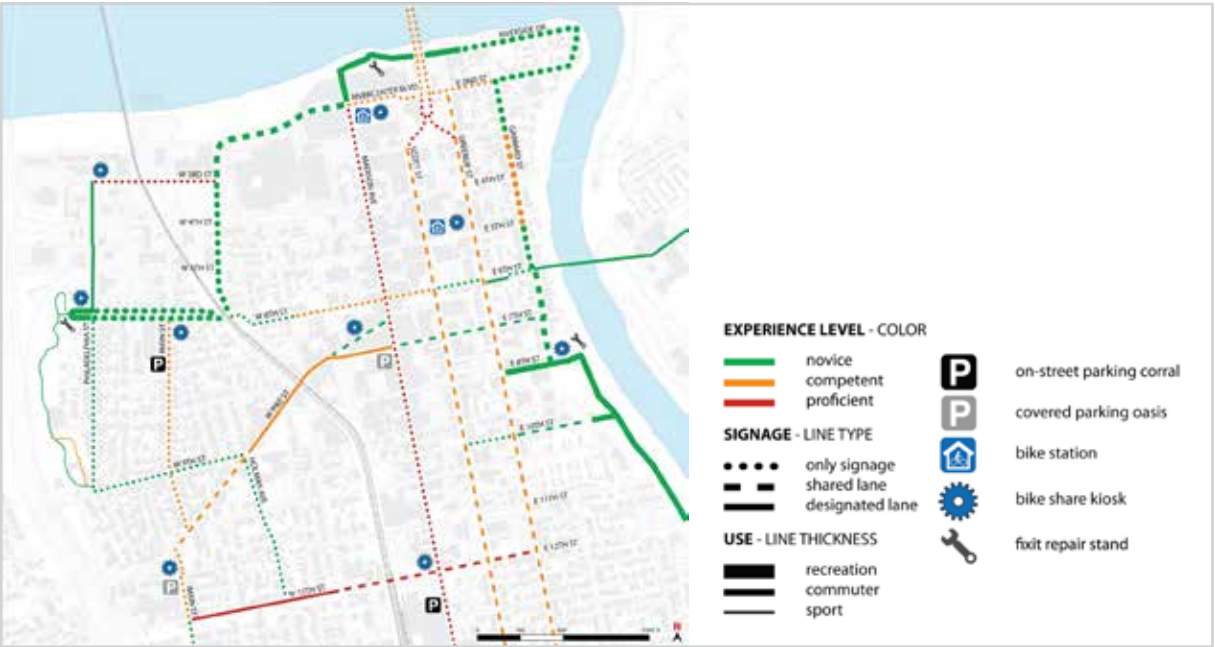
The enhancement of the public right-of-way to support all forms of movement was a consistent interest of the studio over both quarters. This included the improvement of the pedestrian realm with aesthetic, environmental, and functional applications that would support and promote walking throughout the city for benefits in health, sociability, commerce, and multi-modal capacity.



Proposed section view as a pedestrian focused retail area



Summary of bicycle network program



Proposed Bicycle network plan: Route types

## Streets that support biking

Covington is compact and relatively flat, which makes it ideal for biking. A defined bike network would appeal to and attract millennials as well as retiring baby boomers to a healthy lifestyle and mobility choice. Beyond providing additional multi-modal capacity, an established biking culture could have both identity and economic benefits for Covington when considered with all its ancillary retail and recreational activities.



Pedestrian and Bike Streetscape Amenities



Educating with a Bike Network Brochure



Pike st: Proposed as Complete street which accomodates all modes of movement



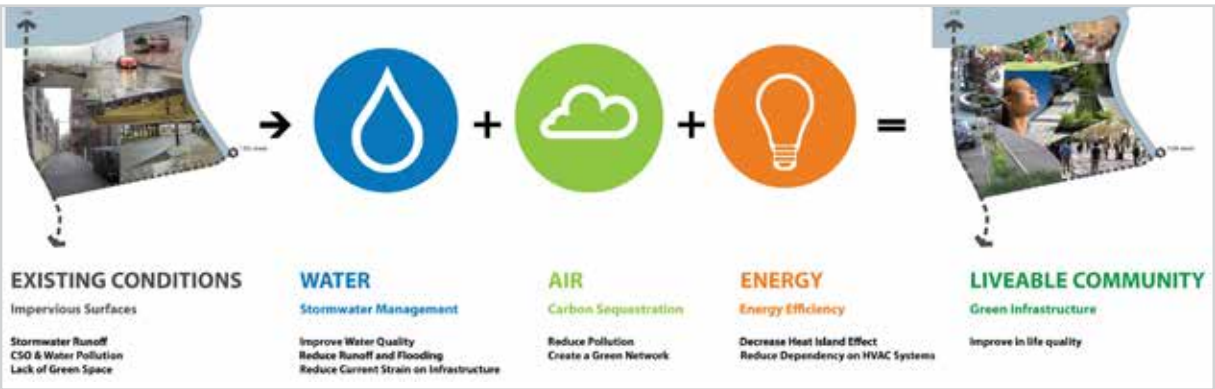
### Streets as greenways and green infrastructure

The interior of the Covington City center is challenged by a lack of green space. It was recognized that the public space of streets and alleyways represents a significant land area of the city that can be taken advantage of to create a network of greenways and greenspaces within the street right-of-way. These greenways, with additional trees and landscaping function not only to improve the visual environment, but they also affect energy consumption through shading provided during the hottest months of the year when heat builds up in the dense paved areas of the city. Vegetated areas when designed to absorb stormwater runoff in “rain gardens” and “bio-swales” reduce the demand placed on the local stormwater and sewage infrastructure to better meet federal EPA mandates. Finally, the green components proposed address environmental pollution through carbon sequestration and water filtering.



Example of green gateway for underpasses

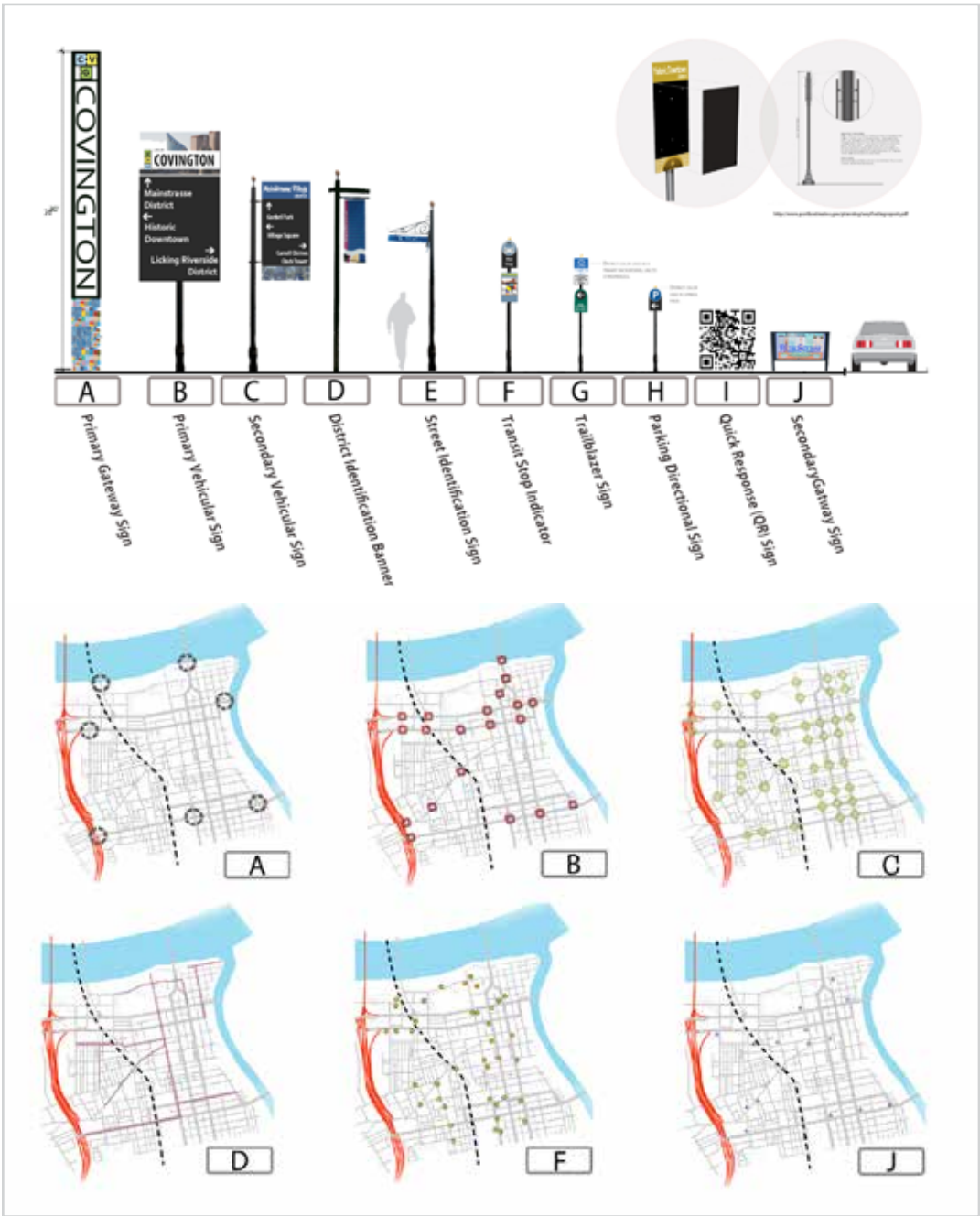
Improving right of ways with Green median and Stormwater planter



Improving the existing conditions with Green infrastructure and Stormwater management

### Streets that support navigation, orientation, and the appreciation of urban assets

One of the most frequently articulated deficits of the central downtown Covington area is difficulty in orientation and navigation that compounds the prevalent sense that the city is fragmented and divided. A comprehensive wayfinding system proposed would address part of this challenge. The redesign of important intersections, or “nodes”, and “gateways” into the center city would enhance orientation and the identity of Covington. Information points or kiosks at various locations could also provide information on events and attractions.



Proposed design and implementation of wayfinding



### Streets as specific activity corridors

Among the many streets that exist in Covington, a number stand out for their defining environmental and activity characteristics. These can be supported through design and programming to further strengthen existing identities or, in some cases, remake identities that are more viable and preferable. Among the former is Madison Avenue which was envisioned by students as a strengthened corridor for the arts and culture and is to be bolstered by the new Gateway Community College campus. Both 4th and 5th Streets were targeted by students for remaking to dampen their auto dominated character. And due to trends in reduced retail demand, the empty storefronts of Pike Street were proposed by students to be reused in a new live-over-work land-use concept compatible with artists, designers, and micro-scale office uses that would make this corridor unique in the city. Likewise, 6th street, because of its place as an important connector between Mainstrasse and Madison (and the future Gateway College campus) and its relatively low traffic volume was the subject of a remake into a unique linear eco-village centered on Mutter Gottes and utilized the above mentioned greenway-green infrastructure concept. An entirely new functional and identity concept was proposed for the newly widened MLK-12th street that would take advantage of its existing boulevard concept by lining it with a formal arrangement of mid scale apartment blocks instead of commercial uses.



Proposed infill development along the 12th street/MLK corridor



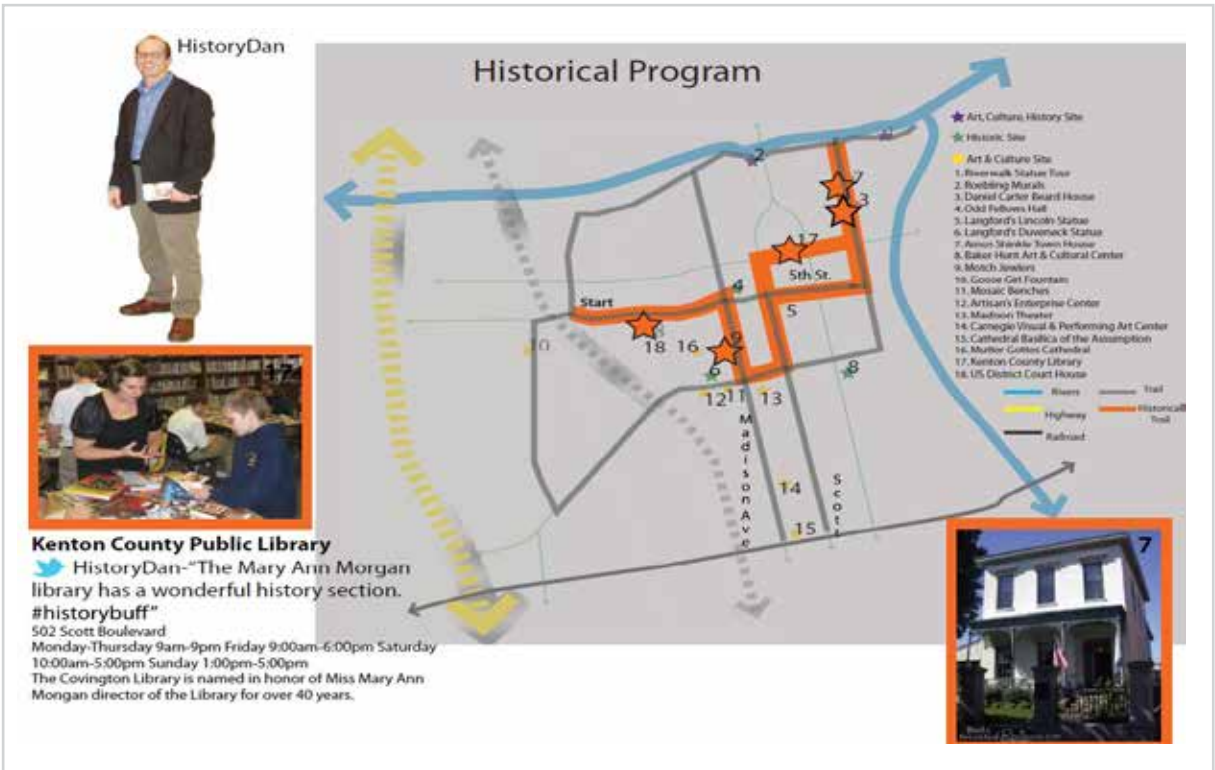
Arts and Live+Work Idea as Pike street redevelopment concept



Proposed residential spine on Pike

### Programming for Connectivity

Providing visitors and residents with a jointly programmed “cultural trail” that connects Covington’s scattered historic sites, museums, the library, and other cultural assets was proposed by a student team as an enhancement of a self-guided tour that already exists.



Proposed historical cultural trail program to enhance connectivity

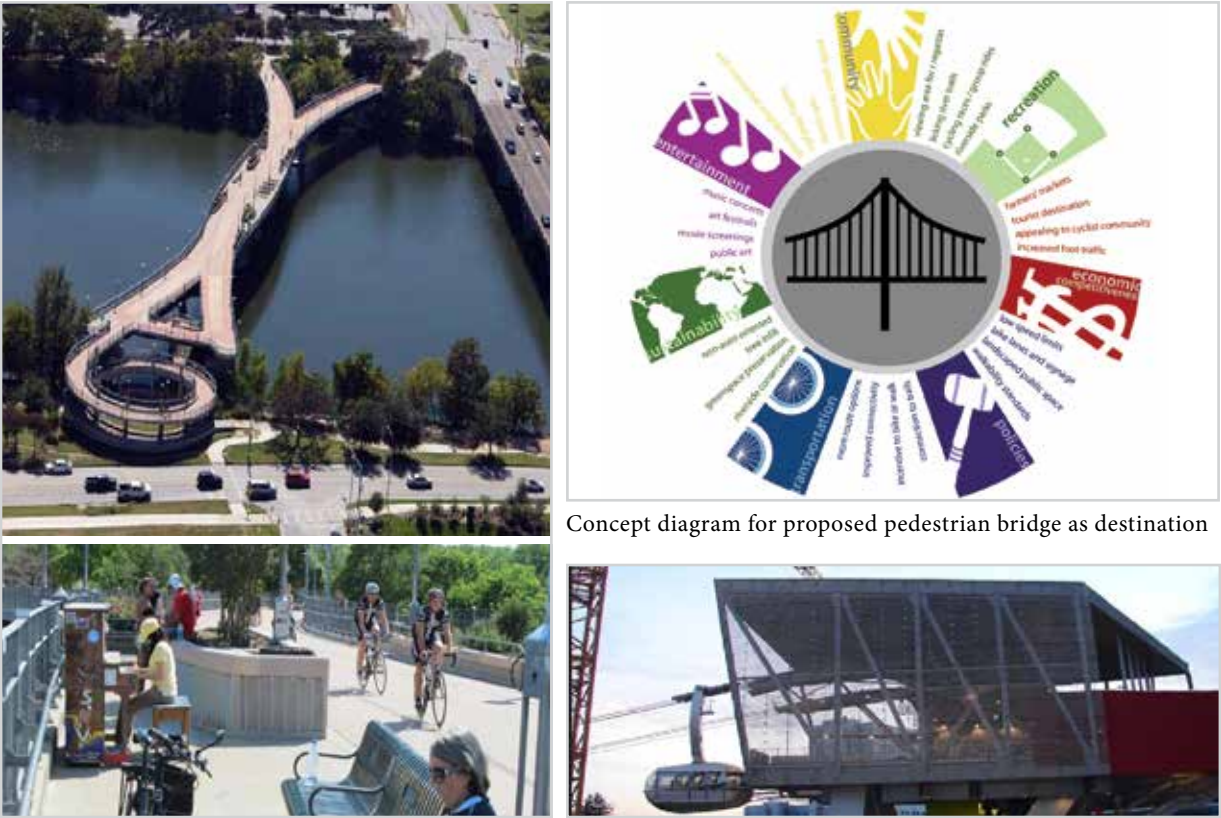


Mapping of existing and proposed green assets to brand 6th st. as a Greenway and Eco-village



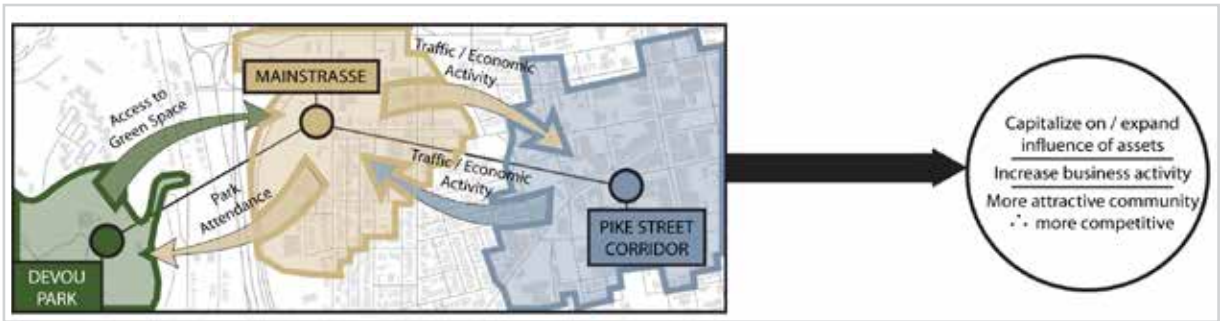
### Infrastructure for connectivity

Connecting Covington's various cultural and entertainment assets is an easy way to break down the sense of fragmentation that exists. A new dedicated shuttle system or an extension of the Southbank Shuttle was proposed to connect entertainment and cultural areas. Bike networks and wayfinding systems are also important tools to improve connectivity among city assets. While frequently mentioned as an important recreational opportunity, Devou Park was also seen as difficult to access because of the west side highway divide. An aerial tram was proposed connecting the park with Mainstrasse and continuing to Madison. Like the highway, the Licking River is seen as a barrier to connectivity to Newport and the future Licking River Greenway Trail. A pedestrian-bike bridge is envisioned at sixth street that will both accommodate movement and serve as an event destination in and of itself.



Austin, TX: Pfluger Pedestrian bridge which connects downtown and riverside

Concept diagram for proposed pedestrian bridge as destination



Proposed Covington Aerial tram: Connects Devou park, Mainstrasse and Pike street corridor

### Removing barriers to connectivity

Of great interest to the studio was the question of how to ameliorate the barrier effect of the elevated railway in Covington. Two studio projects studied examples and applied methods of modifying the existing railway underpasses to provide better perceptual and functional connections. Another studio project experimented with the concept of making the railway, with its monumental trusswork, a visual asset and landmark gateway.



Improving Covington Underpasses: Existing view, Visioning and Case studies



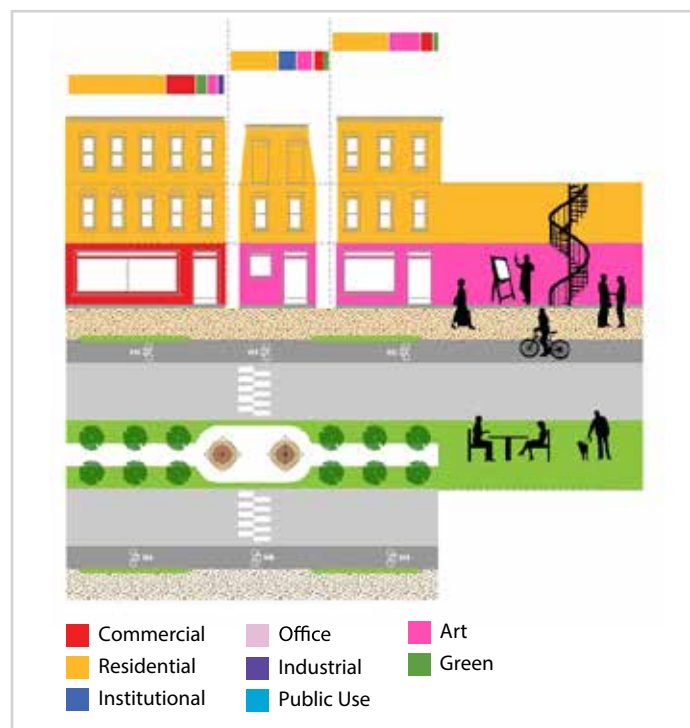
## Covington Center City Action Plan

# Housing

Student design projects addressed each of the following areas:

### Housing as a strategic redevelopment tool

The adaptive reuse of existing buildings and/or the development of new housing clusters in Covington was seen as a strategic opportunity to remake certain areas of the city. The aforementioned live-work artist's housing on Pike street, and the 6th street linear eco-village are such examples, effectively remaking corridors with valuable historic building stock into alternative living environments. Several other locations were seen by students as mixed-use housing cluster opportunities and these included Washington and Pike as well as Pike and Main where underutilized sites are found. For major residential redevelopment, the planning already underway for the redevelopment of the Jacob Price Homes stimulated studio concepts about how to extend market rate housing toward the edge of the Licking River to take advantage of views and access to this natural asset. Similarly an extension of the Mutter Gottes residential neighborhood into the blocks west of the IRS was considered as a way of remaking this area and providing a new construction, river-near market rate housing product.



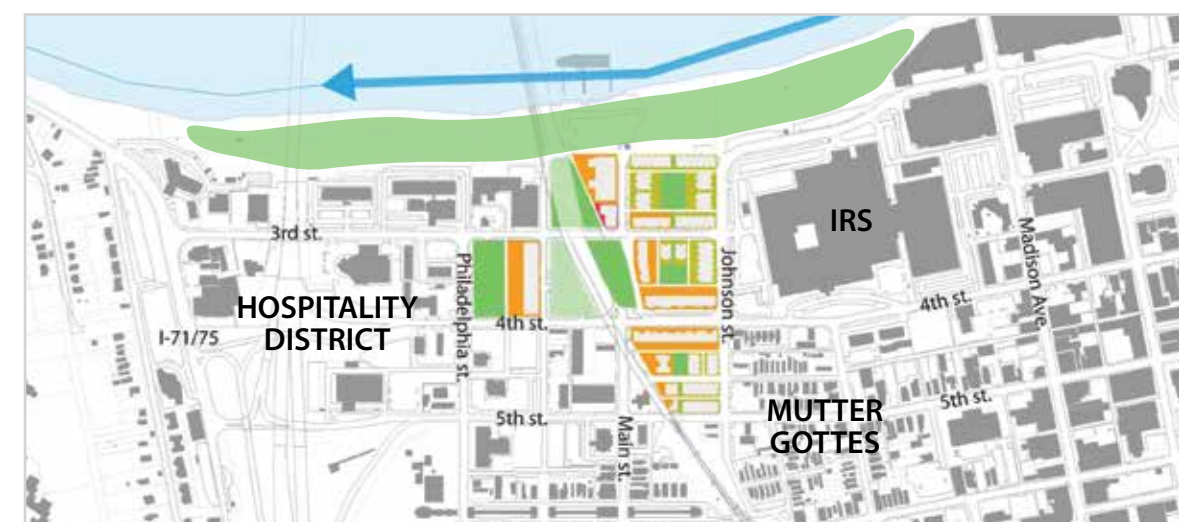
Redevelop Pike st. as mixed-use buildings for Live-work Artist Housing



Seattle, WA: Alcoyne, Appropriate riverfront housing



Diverse potential new housing and amenity concepts for Covington

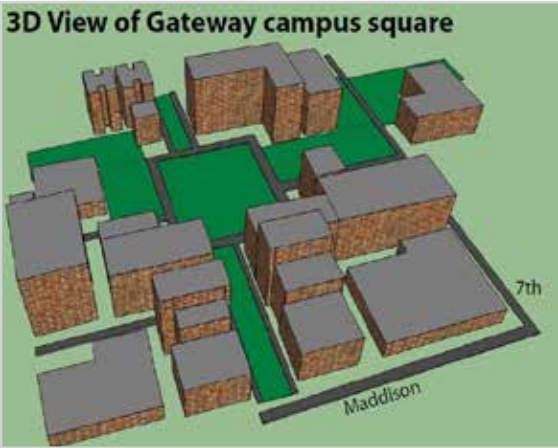


The extension of residential neighborhoods toward the riverfront



### Housing as complementary use

The prospect of the proposed Gateway Community College Campus at the center of the city invited proposals for complementary student housing and these were situated in and around the likely campus site at Greenup and 6th streets.



Proposed Student Housing around new Gateway Community College



Seattle, WA: Trader Joe's as appealing life style amenity for housing in Covington



Existing housing and opportunity districts for student housing for Gateway Community and Technical College

### Amenities to support new and existing housing

A discussion of what amenities were necessary to support existing and new housing produced a concept for a network of pocket parks throughout the city which would satisfy a stated need for more greenspace in Covington. Lack of a full service grocery north of 12th/MLK was also seen as a deficit and markets were proposed in several locations in either new construction or taking advantage of the adaptive reuse of existing vacant large footprint buildings. And again, the live-work, and eco-village ideas were seen as a way of supporting or re-establishing residential clusters.



Pocket park locations at vacant lots for housing amenities



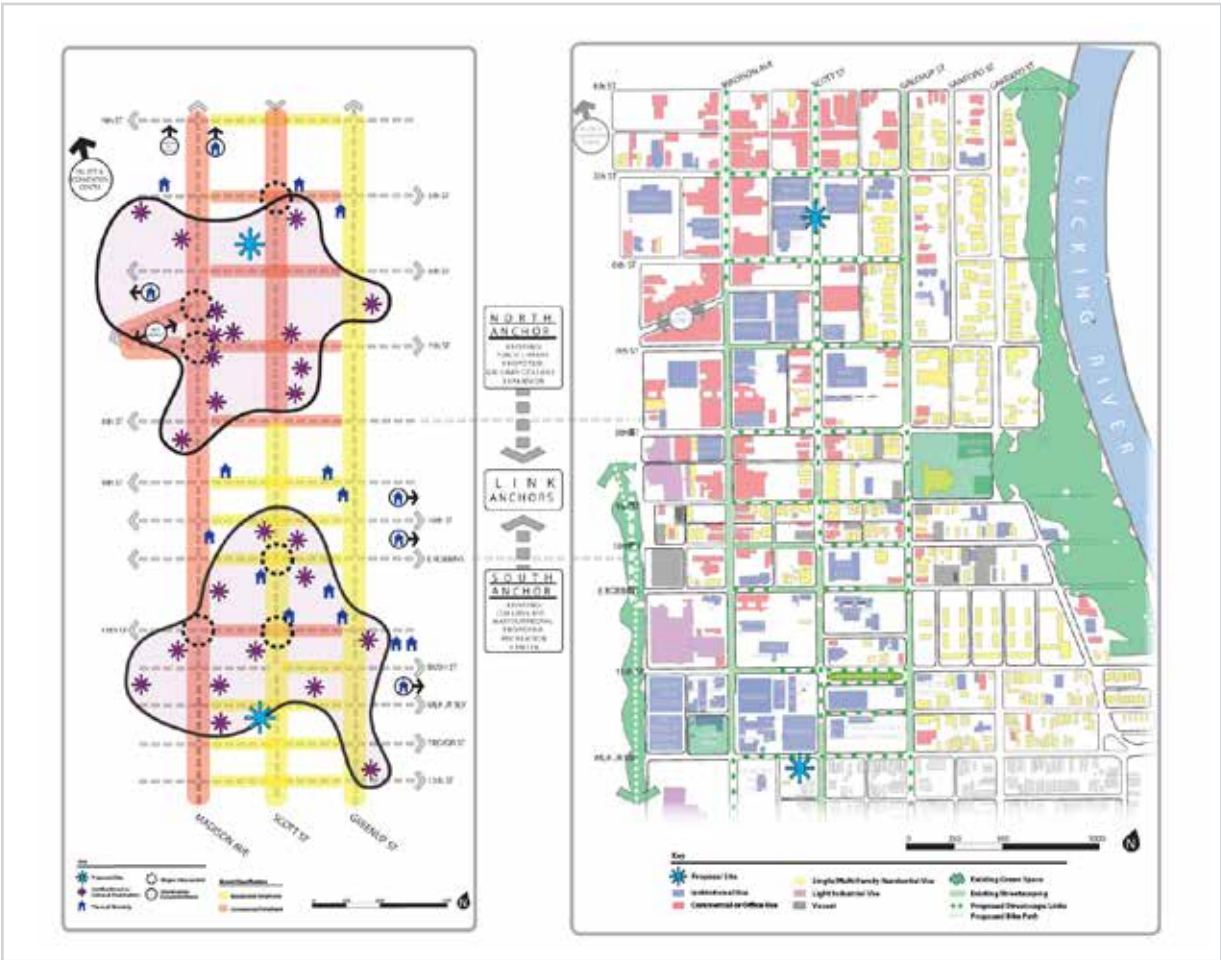
# Covington Center City Action Plan

## Economic Competitiveness

Student design projects addressed each of the following areas:

### Economic Development to strengthen existing area

Covington can boast of several successful commercial zones in the central area including the entertainment cluster of Mainstrasse and the riverfront office area. The Madison Avenue corridor, while historically the central economic corridor, has lost much of its critical mass of retail and office use to other areas of the city. One approach to recapturing economic growth is by capitalizing on existing cultural assets to draw visitors and introduce a creative economy to the corridor. A student proposal details a concept for linking existing cultural venues such as the library, the Carnegie and the Cathedral with small scale design, art, and art retail uses in a “cultural corridor” along Madison.



Institutional District Design Proposal: Connecting existing cultural venues on Madison



Duro Bag site adaptive reuse and vision for “Cathedral District”: Design project and Perspective



### Economic Development in Adaptive Reuse

The Center City area of Covington is fairly dense and while few open sites exist for new development, several large areas of existing and historic buildings may be suitable for adaptive reuse. The former Bavarian Brewery gateway site is one of those and students have rendered a reuse and redevelopment scenario for that that preserves the historic Brewery building and adds to it a mixed use plan around a medical arts function attached to St Elizabeth's hospital immediately to the south. At the other end of the widened MLK-12th street, a redeveloped Duro Bag site opens the possibility of creating some monumental open space around the Cathedral at 12th while reorganizing the manufacturing buildings to the south for a performance venue and municipal office buildings.



Bavarian Brewery gateway site: Reuse/redevelopment of the historic brewery building and green connections



Using brewery site to create connections with the realignment of Main Street, street grid extension and public space

### Economic Development in remaking districts

The hospitality district at the west end of 4th and 5th streets was an area of concern for the studio. While it is understood that the auto dominated uses that this area supports are well used, students saw the opportunity to remake this district into a more dense, more pedestrian friendly, and more diversified mix of uses. One proposal calls for extending some of the entertainment uses and the promenade found in Mainstasse, along a protected pedestrian promenade north into this area. This pedestrian promenade is protected from the heavily traveled 4th and 5th street and supports upper level residential uses that can have views and direct access to the riverfront.



Hospitality District Redevelopment Proposal: Dense, pedestrian friendly and mixed-use district



Proposed pedestrian promenade at Philadelphia Street



Parking structure. Morgantown, WV.



Example of mixed-use. Davidson, NC



Extending entertainment uses of Mainstrasse to the river



# Public Space Supported Communities

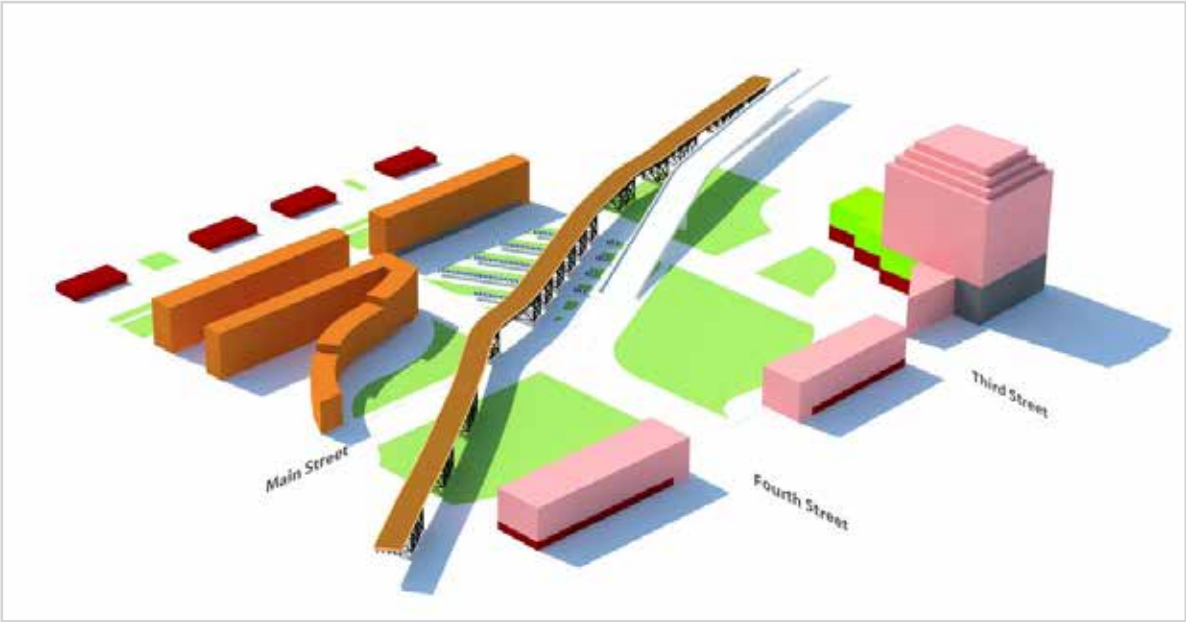
Student design projects addressed each of the following areas:

## Pubic Space from left over areas

Where the elevated railway and its uninviting underpasses were seen as a significant liability for Covington, one student team saw opportunity in the green fringes of the railway corridor that could be improved and linked together to create a verdant green ribbon, connecting the city south to north. Another student made the most of the elevated and monumental railroad trestle near the riverfront by rendering it as a the sculptural focal point for an urban park which was framed by residential and commercial uses.



Using the left over green space at the edge of the rail line to create a green buffer and trails into the heart of the city.



Proposal for the elevated railroad as a sculptural focal point for an urban park

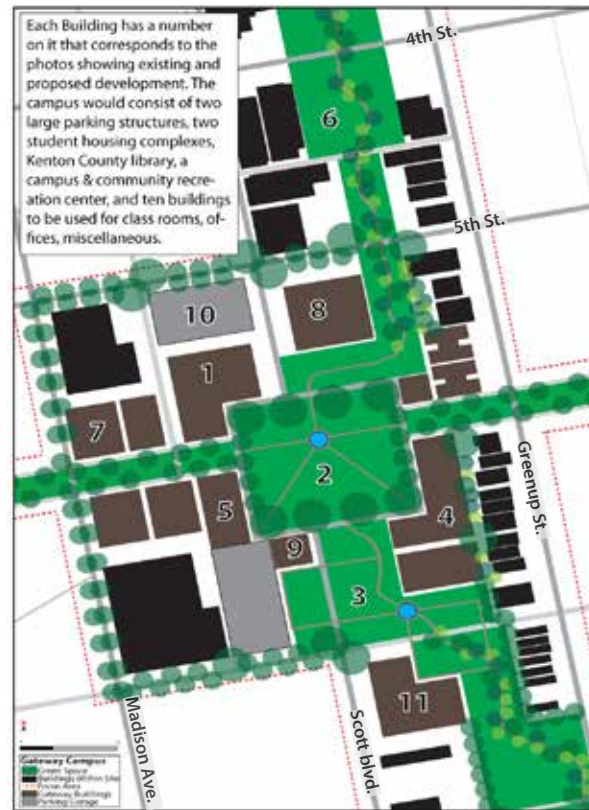


Organizing the left over space around the rail overpass into a central green space with connections



### Public Space as a strategic development tool

As was noted, Covington is short on public green space throughout. Students identified a number of places in the center city area where small public spaces could be provided to support surrounding uses and stimulate complementary development. These include a consolidation of surface parking into a two level structure which would open up small public green spaces better framing the beautiful Mutter Gottes Church. Another proposal provided an aspirational vision for the new Gateway College Campus that would surround a well formed green space on 6th street at Greenup, with a defined north and south alley connection to the Roebling Bridge.



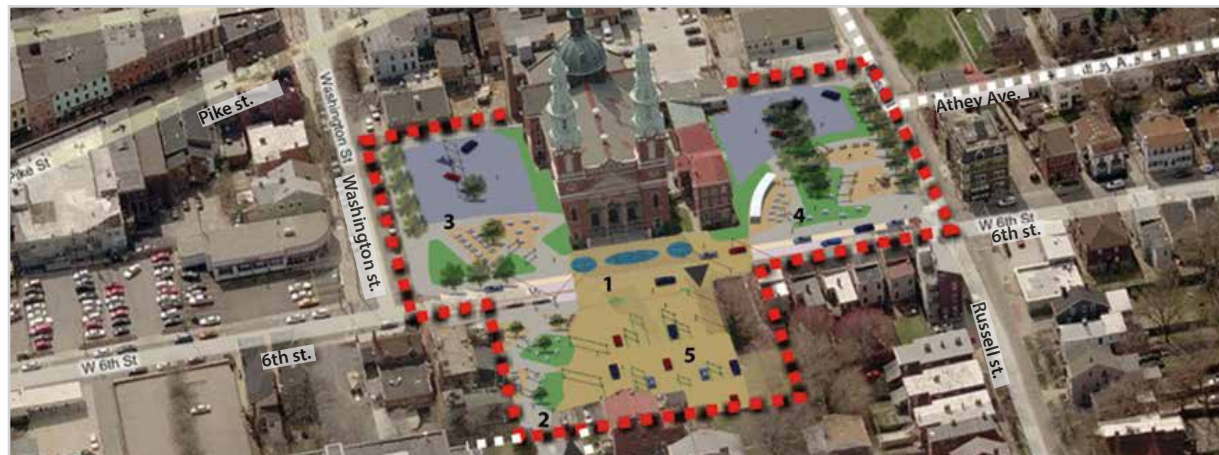
Proposed Gateway Community College campus square



Proposed public space instead of parking at the church



Proposed public square with opportunity for parking below



Perspective of Proposed Plaza surrounding the Mutter Gottes Church

### Public Space reclaimed at the water's edge

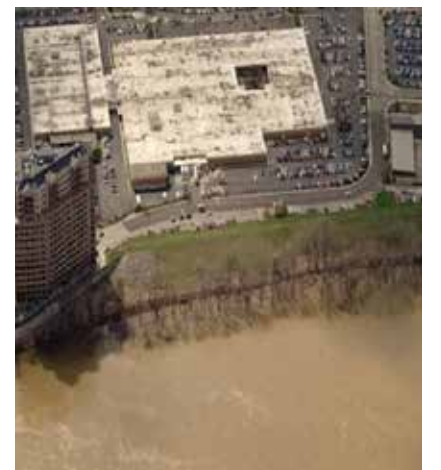
No city asset is more noticeable than the untapped potential of riverfront green space in Covington. Several student projects attempted to present credible proposals for the Ohio riverfront. A notable design focused on the Covington side of the Licking River and rendered a linear park with a variety of recreational uses. This park itself was envisioned to stimulate new housing development along its framing edge and was intended to connect the heart of Covington to the natural corridor extending far south up into the Licking River.



Conceptual Framework of Green Public Space on the Licking River



Utilizing the Levee with bike routes



Existing Covington riverfront



Nashville riverfront as model



Journalism Project



In parallel with studio work, eleven Journalism students spent the spring quarter profiling unique Covington stakeholders to better understand the civic life of Covington. These university students partnered with four High School students from the Center for Great Neighborhoods Youth Art Program who photographed the residents. Together the students developed compelling stories about the lives and hopes of these special stakeholders. For full profiles and photo credits visit [http://www.uc.edu/cdc/niehoff\\_studio/programs/place\\_matters/w12/jornalism\\_.html](http://www.uc.edu/cdc/niehoff_studio/programs/place_matters/w12/jornalism_.html)

1. University of Cincinnati Advanced Magazine Writing students
2. Mayor Chuck Scheper
3. Tom Wherry
4. Tim Dwight
5. Art by Covington's Future student photographers
6. Tanner Watts
7. Faye Massey
8. Marissa Tucker
9. Jerrod Theobald
10. Lindsay Vancini
11. Brandon Gabbard
12. Laura Knight
13. Steve Roenker





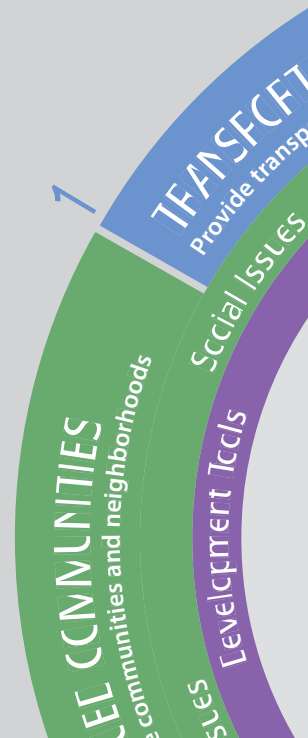


# Niehoff **Urban** Studio

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*This academic outreach partnership is sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. H.C. Buck Niehoff, the Harriet R. Williams Downey Fund, the Tilda Fund, the Faber Family Fund, and the University of Cincinnati and is administered by the Community Design Center of the College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning.*