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# Building Healthy & Resilient Places

RETHINKING BURNET WOODS

*Fall 2014 - Spring 2015*

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URBAN  
**PARKS** AND  
**URBAN** LIFE  
BURNET WOODS



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- Chris Manning**, Landscape Architect, Human Nature
- Christy Samad**, Event Director, 3CDC
- Ken Stapleton**, The Safe Design Institute
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- Morgan Rich**, President Clifton Towne Meeting
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- John Cranley**, Mayor, City of Cincinnati

**Introduction**

The vision of the [Niehoff Urban Studio](#) is to foster interdisciplinary collaboration that responds to current urban challenges in the Cincinnati Region. As part of the studio process, faculty and students engage directly with community stakeholders to propose equitable solutions that enrich the communities and the quality of life for the residents they serve. Within the studio structure efforts are focused in bi-annual cycles on specific urban design and community development topics. Beginning in fall 2014, the Niehoff Studio introduced “[Building Healthy and Resilient Places](#)”, which focuses on placemaking in a variety of forms throughout the city.

Among healthy places, city parks are the most recognized. They provide important ecological functions that protect environmental quality, which, in turn, support community health. They provide a quiet green respite for the psychological well being of weary urban dwellers. They provide important active living recreational outlets for everything from team sports to dog walking. Few cities have benefitted from the quantity and quality of parks as Cincinnati has through its award-winning City Park Board who builds, maintains, and independently controls all city park land. In recent years the Park Board has built new parks or has rebuilt existing parks with great success in terms of making attractive places and activating whole districts of the city with life and vitality. In 2006 the Park Board and the Uptown Consortium created the Uptown Parks Study to revitalize the existing district parks. Among those parks was Burnet Woods, a highly prized large regional park. In 2014 the Niehoff Studio was invited to consider the various ways in which Burnet Woods could be understood and improved for the benefit of the residents and users of the district and the city.

This document highlights some of the student research and project proposals responding to challenges identified by stakeholder groups to re-envision Burnet Woods. It is designed to be a tool used to guide decision making by the community, practitioners, and government officials.



Urban Parks and Urban Life Discussion Panel



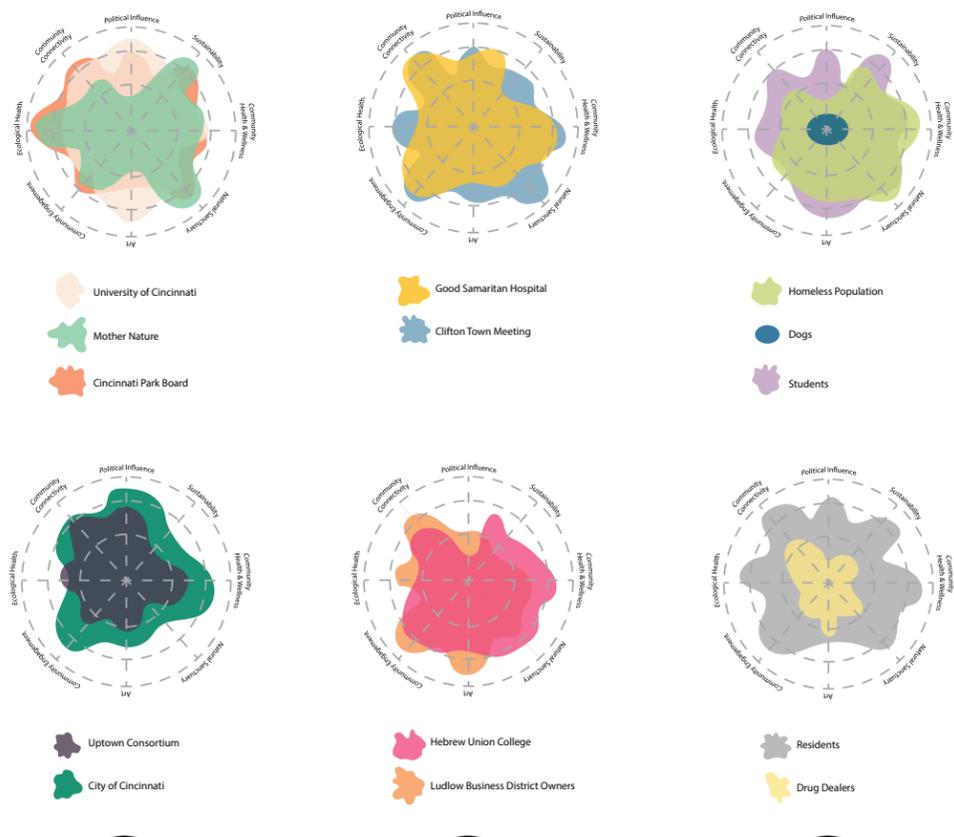
Between the fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters, 9 faculty and 112 students from Architectural Engineering, Civil Engineering, Urban Planning, Horticulture, and the UC Forward Interdisciplinary Program worked to engage with residents, civic leaders and municipal officials to re-envision Burnet Woods. Students worked through six different classes and at various times during this period in both separate classes and as mixed interdisciplinary teams to create **sixty-one separate proposals**. Students were joined at various points by outside collaborators who functioned as advisors, mentors, and critics of their work.

Students documented best practices, surveyed users, conducted site specific research, and undertook urban analysis for many types of urban parks, and parks-relevant issues. Fall semester work focused on understanding the park within the larger social, physical, and functional context at both district and city scale. This phase of the work surveyed the interests of the various stakeholder groups and their perceptions of the park. Six thematic proposals were developed for the park and its surroundings in this semester. Spring semester work was focused on practical applications of some of the ideas developed in the fall with work divided into project groups for green infrastructure, the park valley, the park highlands, and the park fringe.

The final student work was presented during an open house and panel discussion that was well attended by students, faculty, practicing professionals, and community stakeholders. During the open house, students displayed their work. Following the student exhibit, a panel discussion entitled 'Bright Ideas for Urban Parks and Urban Life' was held. The panel, moderated by John Yung of UrbanCincy, included Chris Manning, Parks Designer and Landscape Architect - Human Nature, Christy Samad, Events Director - 3CDC, and Ken Stapleton - Safe Design Institute. During the discussion, the panelists cited the most promising student proposals and discussed them within the overall context of place-making, programming, and perception of Burnet Woods. See UrbanCincy.com for more coverage of the panel content. <http://www.urbancincy.com/2015/04/record-crowd-at-niehoff-for-burnet-woods/> and [event video](#) All work may be viewed at [http://www.uc.edu/cdc/niehoff\\_studio/programs/healthy\\_resilient.html](http://www.uc.edu/cdc/niehoff_studio/programs/healthy_resilient.html)

# Research and Reconnaissance

A wide variety of research and reconnaissance was carried out by students. This included best practices research, district and site reconnaissance and analysis, demographic analysis, stakeholder surveys, student body surveys, and many other inquiries. Understanding the profiles and preferences of user groups emerged as a very important factor for proposed interventions. The history of the Park and the development of the district around it was also key to understanding the park and its context over time. While the studio lacked expertise in biology and environmental systems, significant research effort was focused here to understand the park as an ecological asset, its land-form, and hydrology. Together, this work formed a body of knowledge to inform relevant proposals.

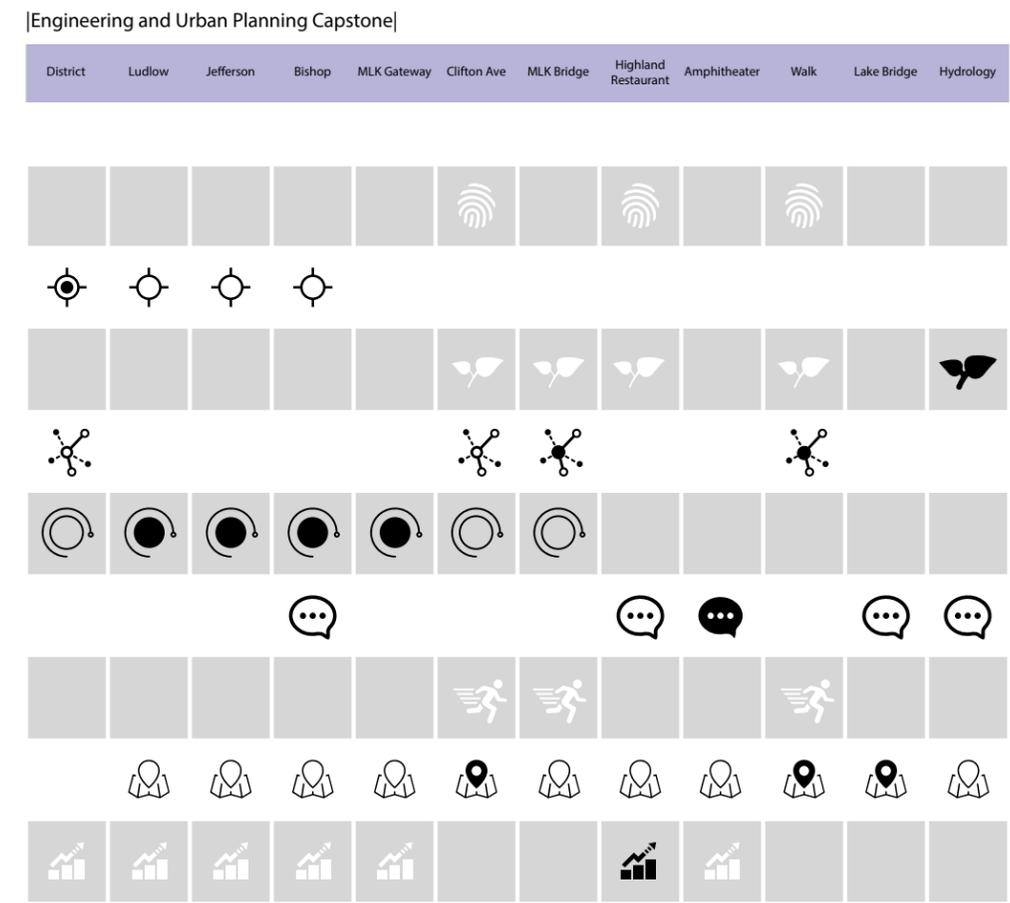
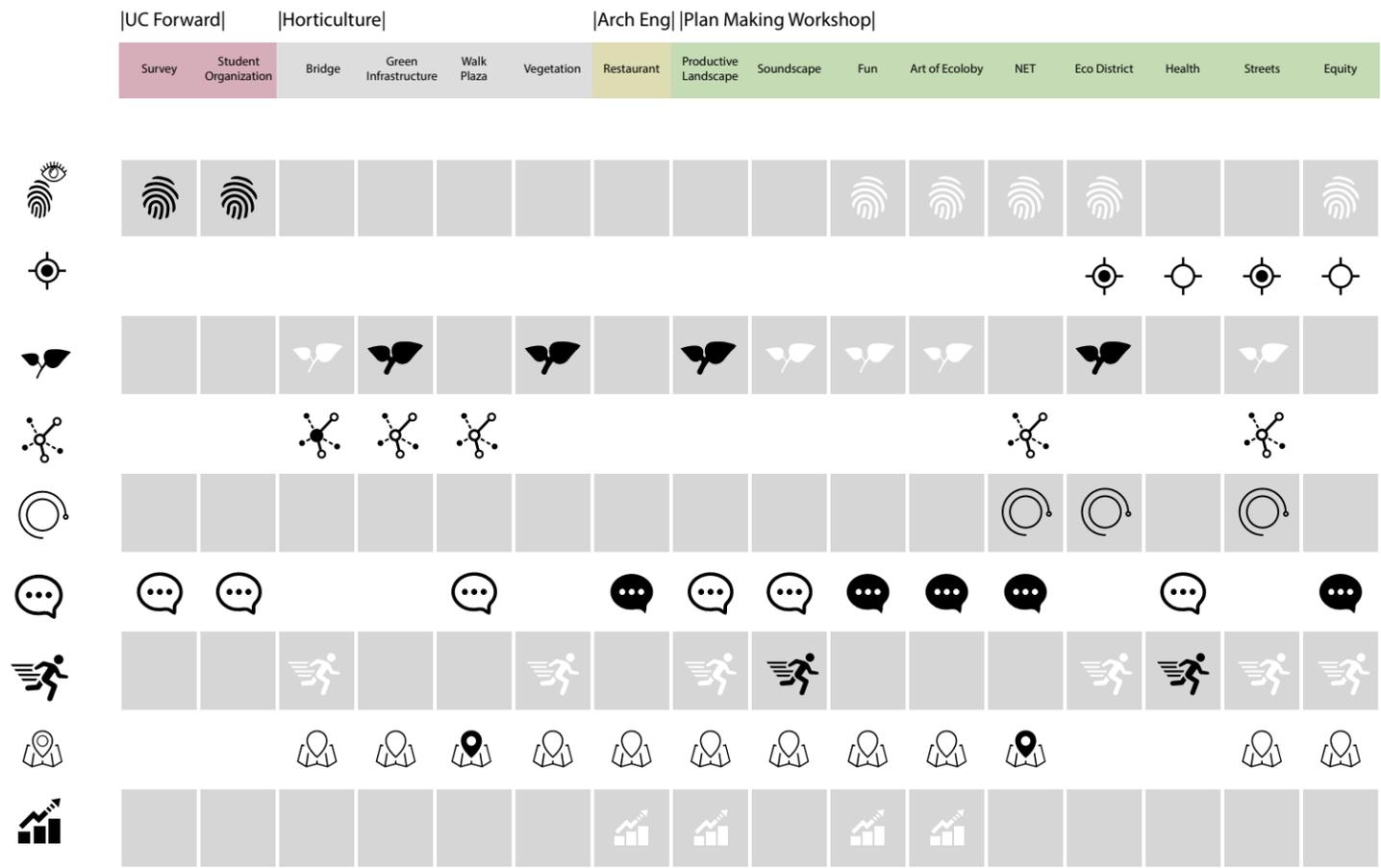


Stakeholder Values



Park Perceptions

# Projects | Categories



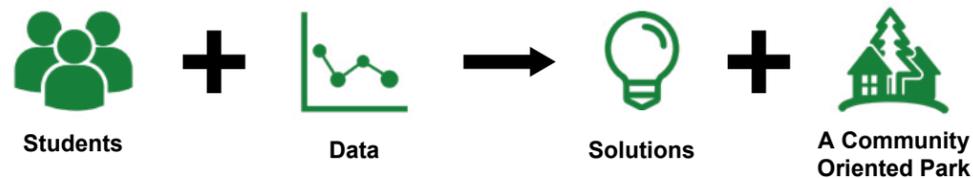
- PERCEPTION | IDENTITY
- PARK AS CENTER
- ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES
- CONNECTIVITY
- FRAMING DEVELOPMENT
- SOCIAL DIMENSIONS
- HEALTHY LIVING
- PLACE MAKING
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## Perception & Identity

Student research into the perception of and identity of Burnet Woods was problematic but did point to specific solutions. Anecdotal information, direct student surveys, and secondary information painted a picture of strongly divided perceptions of the park. Many Uptown users, including residents, but overwhelmingly students, had very limited knowledge or experience of the park. The perception of the park as inaccessible and unsafe was a strong theme among these users. These more negative views encouraged strong interventions in and around the park to make it safer or to result in the perception of safety within the park. Among positive viewpoints of the existing park, many longtime residents view it as a critical urban ecological preserve that justifies light use and benefits from inaccessibility. This point of view calls for little if any intervention. Perhaps this divided view is notably expressed in the very distinctive name of the park - Burnet Woods, which might describe a set-aside preserve for flora and fauna, rather than a heavily programmed park which may be the expectation of many.

Another remarkable distinction of Burnet Woods is a lack of clarity about which neighborhood residents think it resides in, with several claiming ownership and purview on its future. Yet, it was difficult to determine which of these communities' residents appeared to occupy the park as a group. Unlike many other parks of its size, Burnet Woods does not have a dedicated advisory group. It was clear that one dominant area group, UC students, did not use the park often, despite their superiority in numbers and, consequently, they appear to have the least interest in it. Studio students provided a substantial effort to survey and document student perceptions about the park and ultimately recommended the formation of a formal student organization and park advocacy group to be named "Bearcats in Burnet".

Ultimately, given inconclusive data on user perceptions, student proposals attempted to strike a balance between character changing interventions and conservation of existing conditions in the park. Fall semester work leaned in the direction of working within a theme for park interventions and identity. Spring Semester work was derived more clearly from specific site improvement ideas outlined in the 2006 Burnet Woods Concept Plan from the Uptown Parks Study.



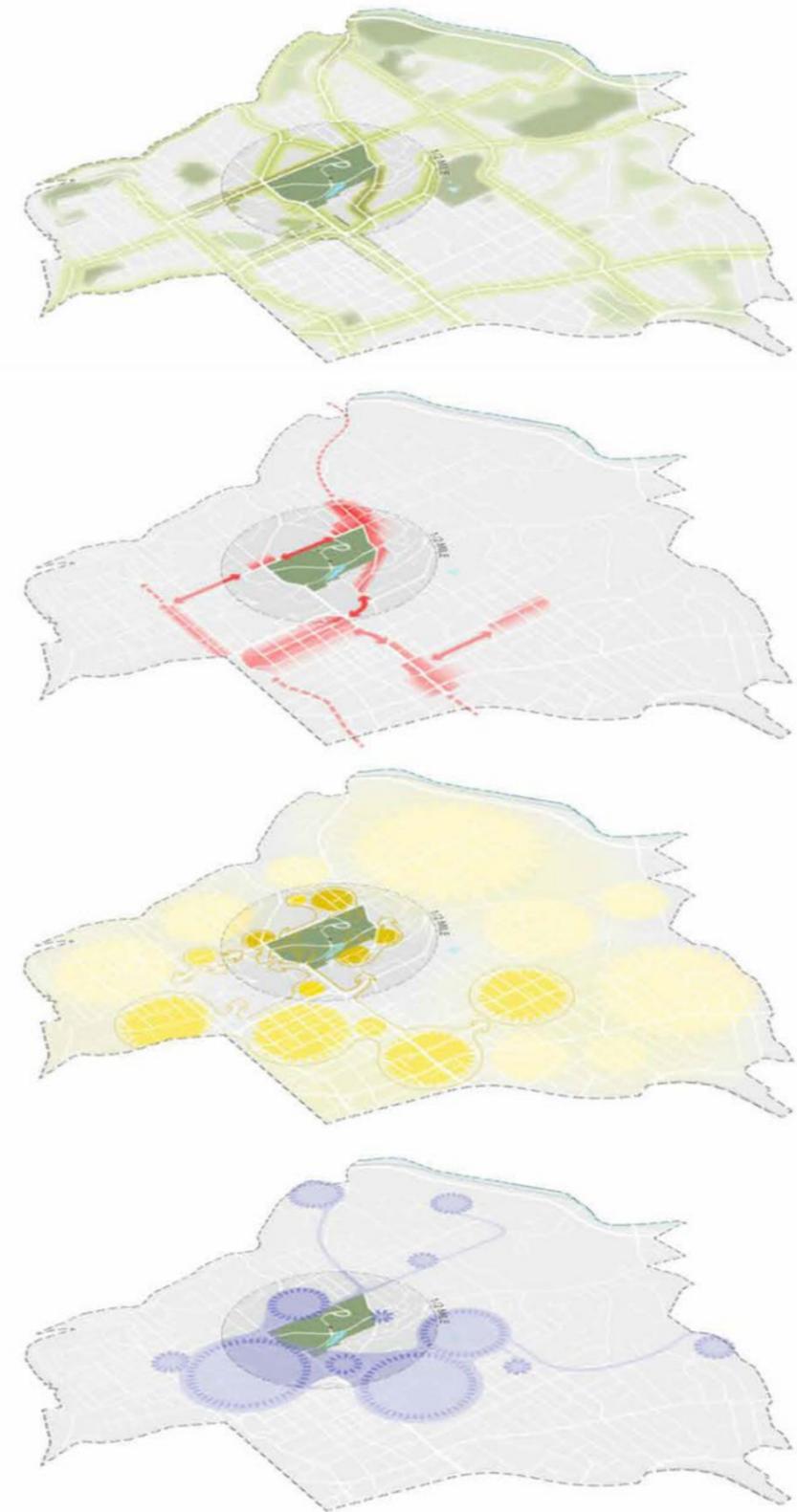
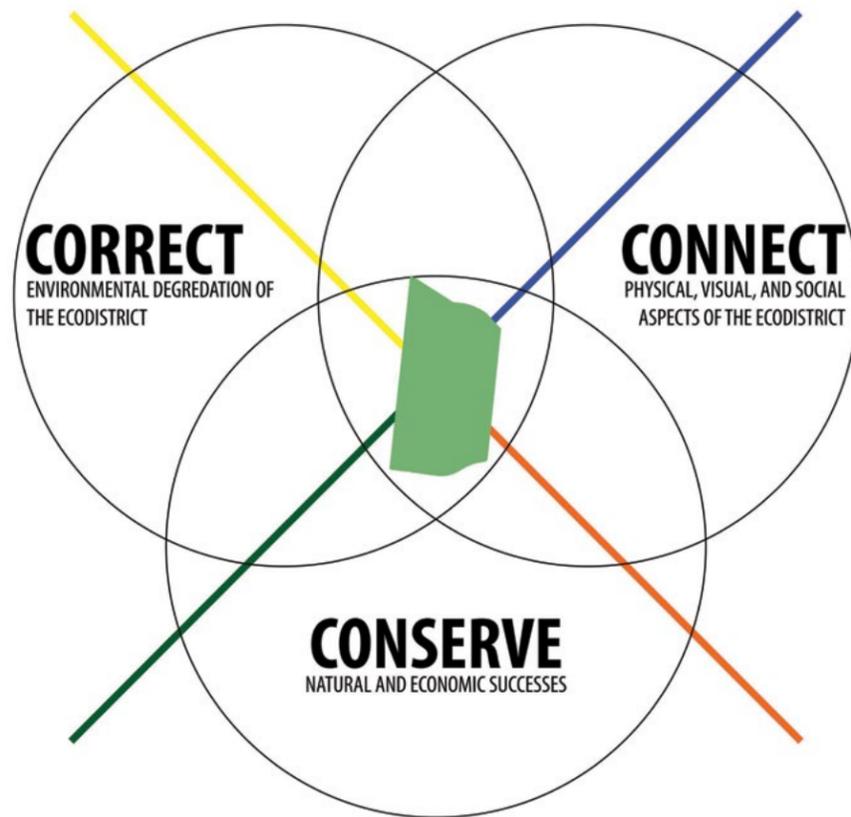
Student Inquiry Process



Student Organization Concept for Burnet Woods

## Park as Center

While it is not readily perceived, Burnet Woods is at the geographical center of the Uptown area in terms of the current and future greenspace network, commercial areas, residential zones, and institutional sites. Like many of the major existing institutional uses in Uptown, the park is perceived as an impenetrable “superblock” that is typically circulated around, and rarely moved into or through. Consequently, the park provides little active benefit to much of its sizeable residential population, and is perhaps entirely unappreciated by the tens of thousands of commuting workers, students, and hospital visitors. And, while the park does provide very significant passive benefits as an ecological asset, it may not be understood as an important center of a natural network. Student work explored these perceptions and conditions while envisioning district wide changes external to the park, along with internal improvements and programs that would make the park the central public space and a critical identity element for Uptown.



Current and Future Land Use and Development for Uptown.

- Burnet Woods, at 90 acres, is one of the largest green spaces in the city. It anchors Uptown. Seen in the context of a green network that stretches across the city, it is **the center of a radiating system of green corridors** that connect natural assets. As envisioned in the Kessler Plan of 1907, the park is still the substantial center point of a system of green boulevards that can be enhanced to accommodate more contiguous private and public green space, habitat, and civic places.
- Preservation of Burnet Woods and enhancement of its ecological capacity can serve as an impetus for re-envisioning the park as **the “epicenter” of an Uptown-wide eco-district** for habitat, water management, and other environmental aspects. If understood in this way, the park can become the centerpiece of a local ecological movement in both conservation activity as well as green infrastructure and energy investment.
- Burnet Woods may also be **branded as a central activity hub for Healthy Living** throughout Uptown with a focus on psychological, and physical health.
- The Woods may be **the locus for social networking to build community** between the strongly divided neighborhoods of Uptown through event programming and new attractions.
- Enhancement of park features, facilities, and programming may **spur development in surrounding fringe areas** that will, in turn, activate the park with new users and a demand for activities.



Burnet Woods as the Epicenter of an Ecodistrict



Burnet Woods within the 1907 Kessler Plan

## Ecological Approaches

Conservation and stewardship of existing park ecological assets was a clear directive to the studio. Natural areas in the park are roughly divided into meadow highlands, hillside forest areas, and valley wetlands, lake, and riparian corridor with habitat and user programmed areas spread throughout. Students recognized the substantial value of untouched woodland located at the heart of this densely urban core of the city but promoted enjoyment of those areas with trail improvements, recreational programming, and opportunities for environmental awareness and education. Arts and cultural installations were used to encourage exposure and interpretation of the natural features of the park. A regenerative approach was considered as well, which structured the park as the district stormwater management feature to capture and cleanse environmental pollutants. Designers also envisioned a “generative” landscape within the park that replaced tree loss with food producing varieties.

- The park and all of its **ecological assets** were framed as the “epicenter” of an eco-district that would promote energy conservation, stormwater management, heat sink mitigation, habitat protection, and food production throughout Uptown.
- Horticulture students documented plant species with attention to **re-introducing indigenous varieties** within the park.
- **Innovative recreational programming** was proposed throughout the park that was specific to the local natural feature or habitat, such as for bird watching overlooks or rope courses.



Ecological Interventions in the Park

# ECOLOGICAL PLAN

## TREES

The ecological stability of Burnet Woods depends on the health of the trees. Implementing a tree management, removal, and reforestation program will keep the woods safe from the threat of Emerald Ash Borer & the Asian Longhorn Beetle. Bio-allies like Chinese Wasps will reduce the population of the beetle. Dead trees will be removed for safety and implemented as artwork throughout the park. Trees infested by the Asian Longhorn Beetle will be removed, chipped, and burned. The city & community should hold tree planting days to make sure the trees of Burnet Woods will last for generations to come.

## FLORA

A greater biodiversity of native plant species should be introduced into the park, with a focus on ground-level plants that will work within the park's existing woodlands ecology, but that will also attract a richer variety of wildlife. A corridor-type environment will attract pollinators especially, as a continuous section of plantings and grasses will help these species to thrive. Invasive species should be removed through a combination of hand-pulling and more aggressive management. An annual art festival, timed with prime blooming dates, can become a yearly showcase of the park's wildflowers, helping solidify the park as a space that fosters both natural beauty and artistic expression.

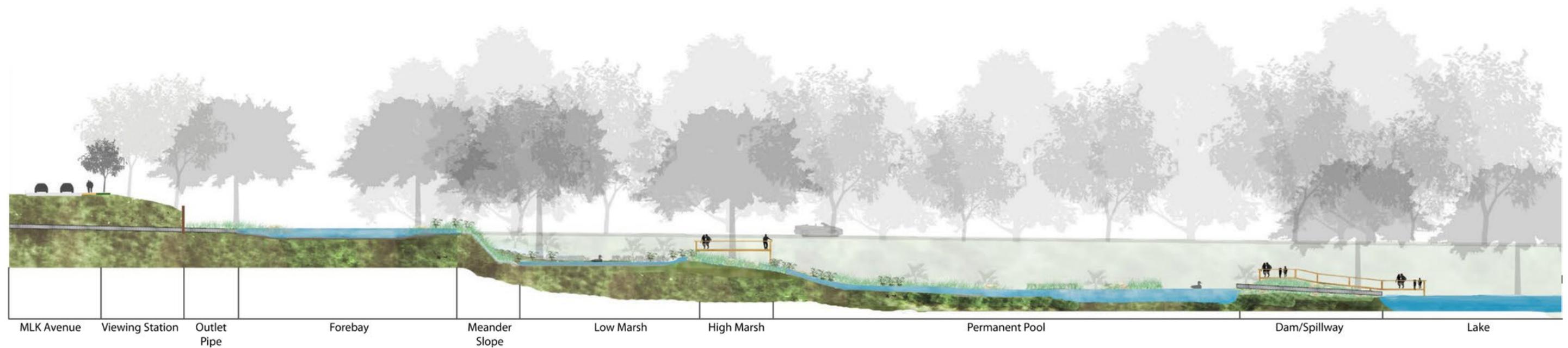
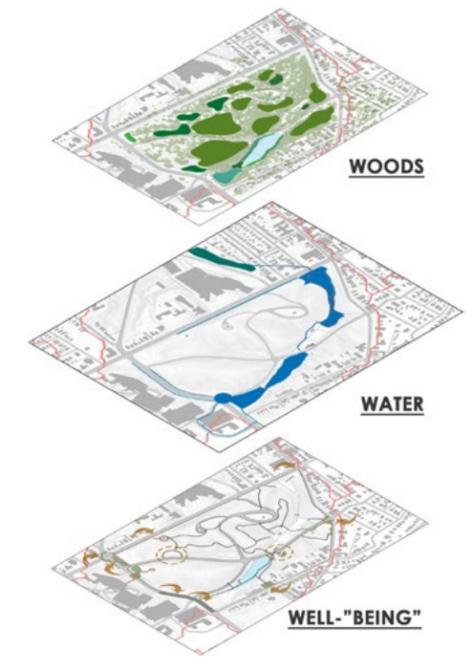
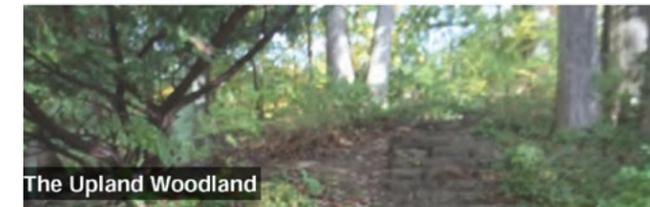
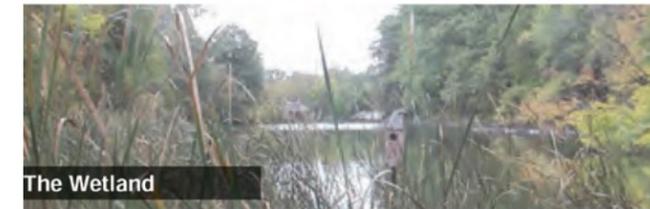
## FAUNA

The right blend of local fauna is vital to preserving ecological integrity. Key species broadly impact the environment, contributing to tree growth, pollination, healthy water, and more. Planting bird, squirrel, and pollinator friendly plants; installing cozy squirrel nest boxes and bat houses; and creating a clean environment for mussels and frogs will generate lasting benefits through a natural system of ecological maintenance. Colorful song birds and butterflies will offer a striking visual in themselves, while decorative, creatively arranged bird houses and apiaries contribute to the artistic character of the park.

## WATER

Because of the park's geography and topography, and to increase its ecological value, green infrastructure and art installations should be implemented in Burnet Woods to manage rainwater and maintain water features, while highlighting the ecological functions of water. Native plantings that can handle an influx of water, function as a wetland, and still attract pollinators should be incorporated into the wildflower corridor & areas surrounding the pond. The wildflower corridor can also serve as a bioretention area, helping to supplement the lake's water with naturally filtered stormwater runoff. Art installations can include artistic rain barrels placed at park structures, and floating, man-made wetlands in the pond. Both will highlight the role of water in this ecosystem, while complementing the green infrastructure that contributes to the natural functions & the aesthetic value of the park.

- **Better universal accessibility to more remote natural areas** was promoted to remove trail barriers for the disabled.
- **Interpretive features** throughout the park were planned to promote stimulating environmental education. This included **environmental art** designed to educate users about natural processes while creating a novel aesthetic experience.
- Art installations were proposed throughout the park as a way of **drawing users to remote or special environmental features** that might not otherwise be appreciated.
- Water was the subject of much inquiry and experimental design applications. The original park lake was recognized as a valuable environmental, aesthetic, and recreational asset, but the lake and its watershed were considered for **regenerative value in a comprehensive stormwater management system**. The park watershed includes much of the UC campus and this volume of stormwater is proposed to be stored and cleansed in the park through detention areas, wetlands, and daylighting the original valley stream. The system features are intended to complement the park user's experience through interpretive exhibits, wetland boardwalks, and creekside observation.
- Planting nut producing tree species was proposed as a way of **reforesting tree canopy** lost to the recent Emerald Ash Borer epidemic. Honey production was proposed. And a proposed greenhouse and gardens were designed to serve a proposed in-park restaurant.
- **Aquatic life** was considered in a proposed fish hatchery intended to continuously restock the existing lake for recreational fishing.



Proposed Wetlands Design at South end of the Lake

## Connectivity

Full use and enjoyment of the park depends on the perception and functionality of how it is connected to the surrounding physical and social context. Perceptually, potential users are challenged by visual inaccessibility and concerns about safety. Steep topography and heavy understory growth block views into the park. Feelings of insecurity exist related to the ability of users to survey their environment for danger and know that others can see into the park. Very wide high-traffic surrounding roadways limit pedestrian and bike access to uncomfortable signalized crossings. Limited programmed activities draw few users and the park is not claimed, nor occupied, by residents of any one community surrounding it in a way that would promote sustained stewardship. However, many residents view limited accessibility and minimal use as a practical way of preserving the ecological assets of the park. It was understood that accessibility occurred at many scales and for different functions ranging from a landing spot for the continent's migratory birds, a regional park resource, a waypoint within the citywide greenspace network, a pass-thru among abutting uptown locations, or simply a recreational destination. Students sought to make surgical interventions in various ways and at diverse scales to promote connectivity in physical, functional, and perceptual dimensions.

- **Accessibility** at existing entry points was proposed to be improved with clear signage, markings, and positively designed “gateway” configurations.
- Modifications were proposed to **promote enhanced walkability and bike use** along the streets surrounding the park to place more potential park users at park entries
- **Greater permeability** was envisioned along park edges to draw views and entry along the periphery.



Elevated MLK Blvd allows Park to Flow through to Campus



Land Bridge between Campus and Park

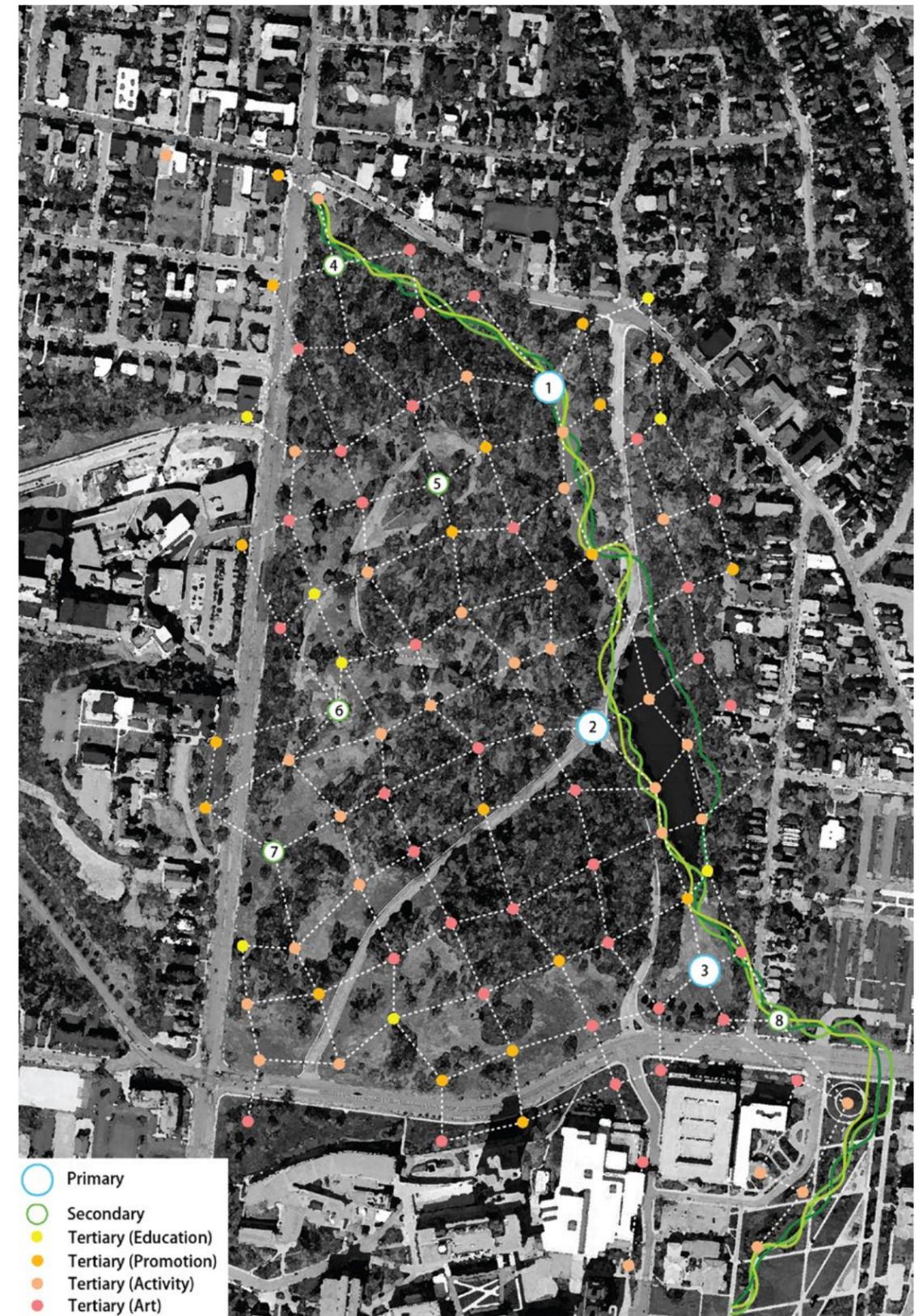


Enhanced Bike and Pedestrian Connectivity at Park Entry Points

- **Habitat preservation** was addressed to protect fauna using and moving within and outside the park.
- **Surface water movement to and from the park** was considered as a part of an overall stormwater management plan and a way of promoting ecological system extension.
- Extending substantial greenspace applications along enhanced right-of-way and private setbacks in radiating streets was envisioned as a way of consolidating and connecting residual green space outside the park with the park's central green assets. This would draw users, ease animal movement, and **promote natural corridor continuity**.
- Students envisioned a **"Network" of attraction points spread across the park** and throughout the surrounding communities that would link art, social, and recreational locations outside-to-inside in this portion of Uptown.
- **Opportunity for movement through the park** between the user density of the UC campus and a commercial destination in the Clifton Business District on Ludlow was modeled by remaking the park Valley Trail, enhancing roadway crossings, and creating a tangible linkage to the heart of the UC Campus along its existing "Main Street".
- **Integrating the greenspace of the UC Campus** and its user density with the park was a subject of much investigation. Students designed foot-bridges, elevated Martin Luther King Blvd to allow green space to flow underneath it, and illustrated a land bridge that would allow the free flow of movement and a greenway connection.



Green Network Radiating from the Park along Boulevards

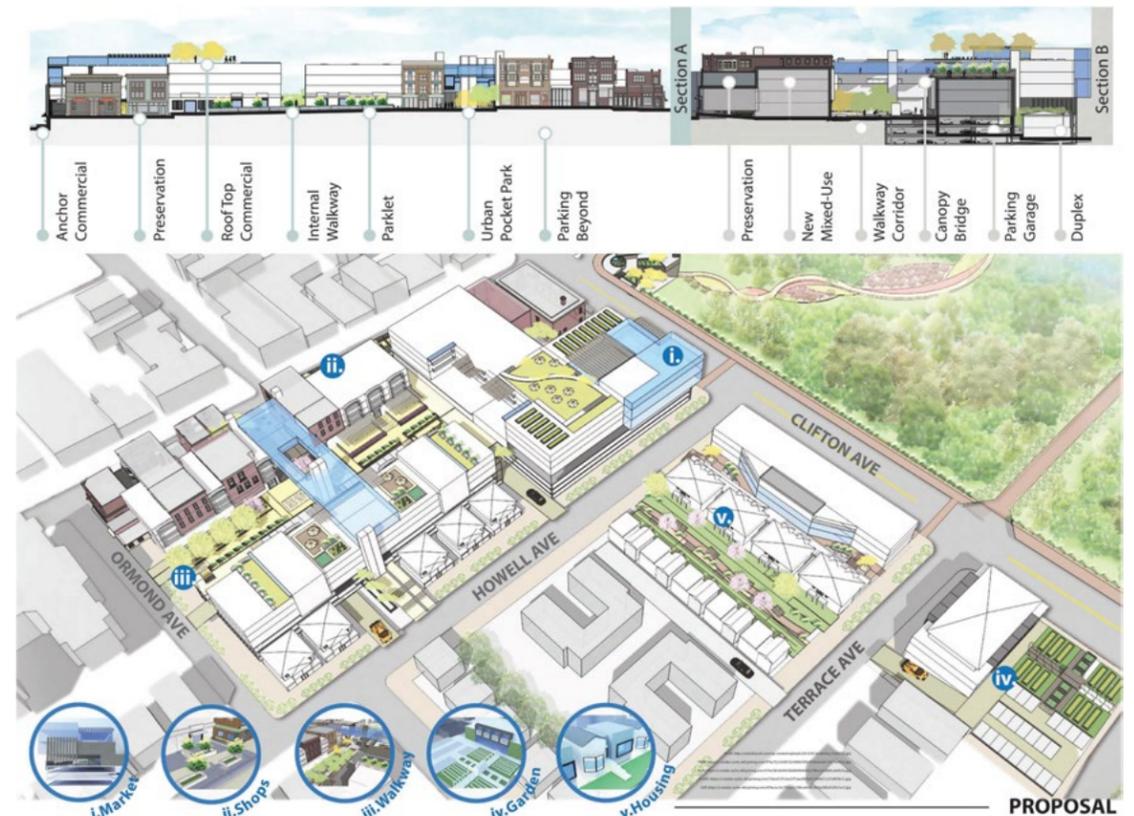
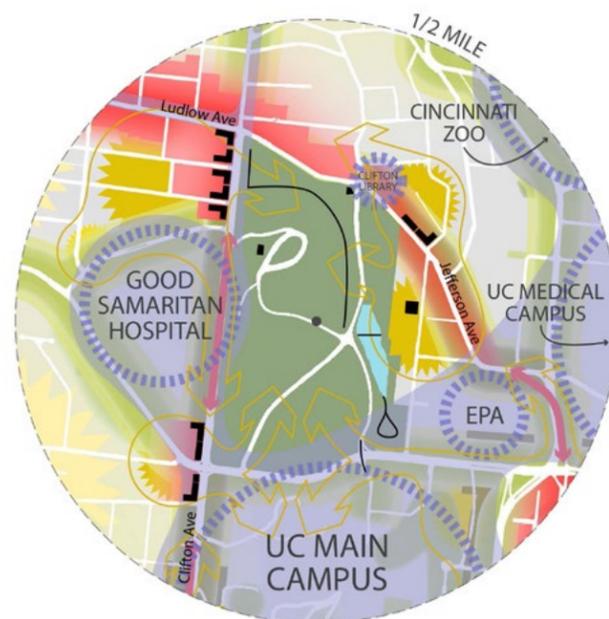


A Strong Connection between Campus Main Street and the Ludlow Business District and a "Net" of Activity Points

## Framing Development

Among studio concepts for Burnet Woods, redevelopment of surrounding areas was recognized as a key strategy to activating the park itself. This includes creating more density in existing mixed-use or residential areas and offering a greater variety in housing types and park relevant uses. This approach seeks to position more potential users around the park's periphery in design configurations that are oriented toward the park as a focal point.

- **Redeveloping the eastern blocks of the Clifton Business District** near Ludlow and Clifton is an opportunity to create much higher density mixed use at an important neighborhood commercial hub across from the park. Users and residents of this development would have easy accessibility to the park. Both new multi-story residential blocks, roof gardens, and the upper level deli of an expanded supermarket are oriented with views toward the park valley.
- **Higher density residential apartment block development is proposed for a portion of Jefferson Avenue.** Likewise, this design proposal orients development views toward the park and attempts to draw the park green space across Jefferson into semi-public gardens and entry courts.
- An idea to **redevelop existing apartment blocks on Bishop** led to a proposal for cluster housing that would encourage the flow of public space from a central courtyard of this proposal seamlessly into the eastern edge of the park and incorporate overlooking views of the Burnet Woods lake.
- A set of **mid-rise residential towers with an office base were proposed at MLK and Clifton Avenue.** This development capitalizes on campus proximity, takes advantage of expansive views of the park, and makes an appropriately scaled "gateway" at the intersection of these high volume boulevards.



Mixed Use Redevelopment at Clifton and Ludlow with Views into the Park

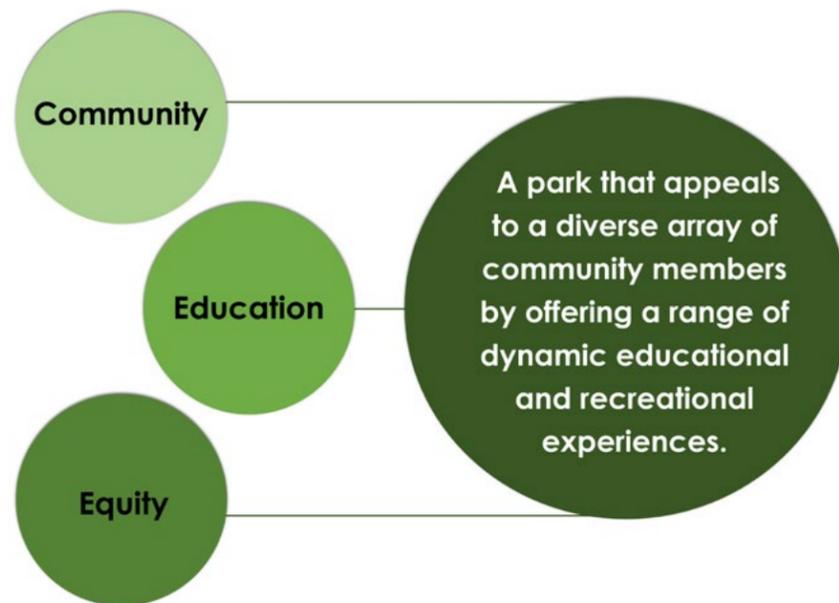


Multi-family Residential Redevelopment along Jefferson with a Focus and Connection to the Park

## Social Dimensions

Interventions that would impact the social dimension of the park were envisioned with places of attraction and interaction.

- New and expanded opportunities for recreation, education, and enjoyment of the natural environment were proposed in **seasonal programming for individuals and groups**.
- **Facility improvements** were proposed to support existing and new programming for recreation and entertainment, including a restaurant, an amphitheater, a valley walk, and others.
- **Common group activities** are promoted through programs and facilities for urban gardens, aquaculture, and other edible landscape efforts.
- In the above activities and others, students envisioned opportunities to **make the park a true public “commons”** where programs and facilities are provided to attract and mix very diverse abutting population groups and users from the region to promote understanding and social equity. These functions were seen as both areas for specific groups to “bond” and areas for all groups to “bridge” gaps between cultural identities in the process of developing social capital.
- Affinity for the park developed through social, and other outcomes, can be nurtured into **grass roots advocacy efforts to sustain and steward Burnet Woods**. Among others, students expect to cultivate a dedicated campus organization called “Bearcats in Burnet”.



Pop Up Markets



Seasonal Programming

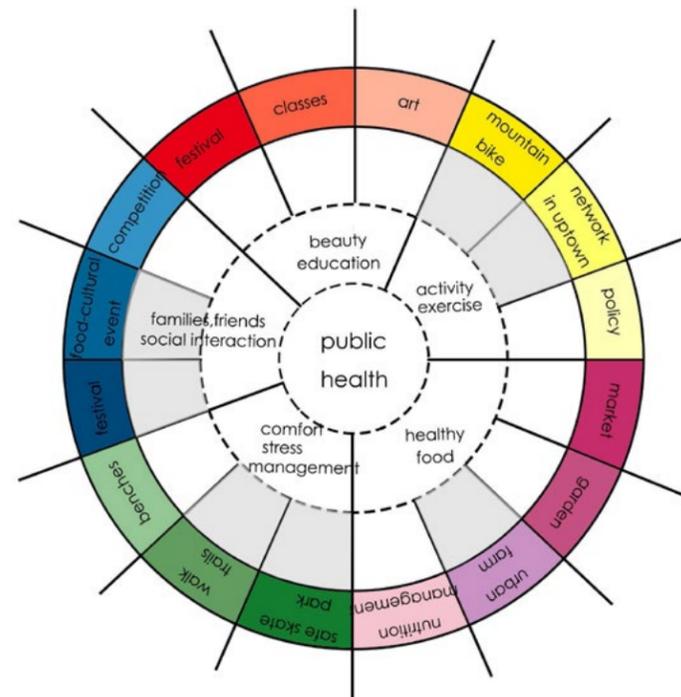


Art and Cultural Offerings

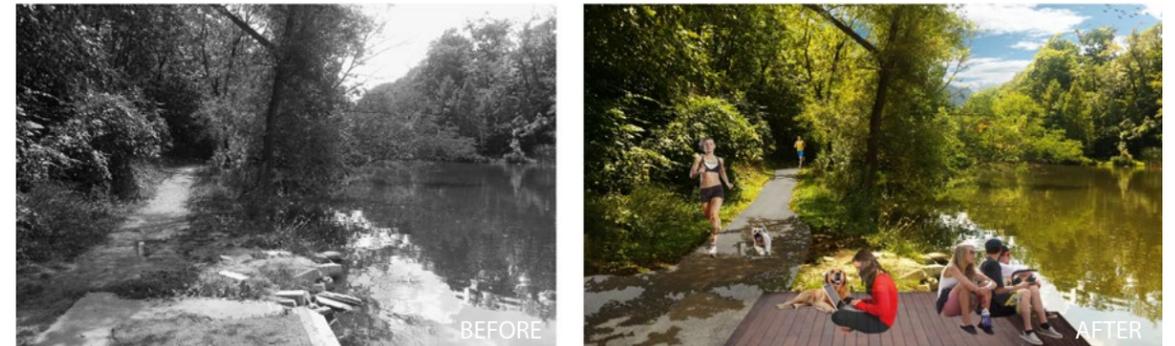
# Health

As with Ecology, Burnet Woods may be re-envisioned to be the epicenter for individual and group health in the Uptown District. This is especially relevant because of its situation among the region's largest health providers and also that a very diverse population may benefit from the outcomes.

- **Active living** leads the list of health improvement potentials that may come from new and expanded recreational programming in the park which may be developed with partnering health providers and institutions.
- Many **facilities improvements were proposed to support active recreation** including enhanced walking/running circuits, bike ways, expanded frisbee golf, new playgrounds, and others.
- Allowances for novel passive **experiences in the natural environment that would provide a psychological benefit** to users was recommended ranging from art enjoyment to a “soundscape” proposal that would reduce intrusive man-made noises and enhance natural ones.
- Above all, conservation of the park is critical to **cleansing air and water and controlling temperature** at the center of a dense urban area for general health benefits. Various student projects proposed innovative bio-engineering and green infrastructure projects to support that.



Soundscape Project



Active and Passive Recreation Improvements



Enhanced Pedestrian and Bike Access

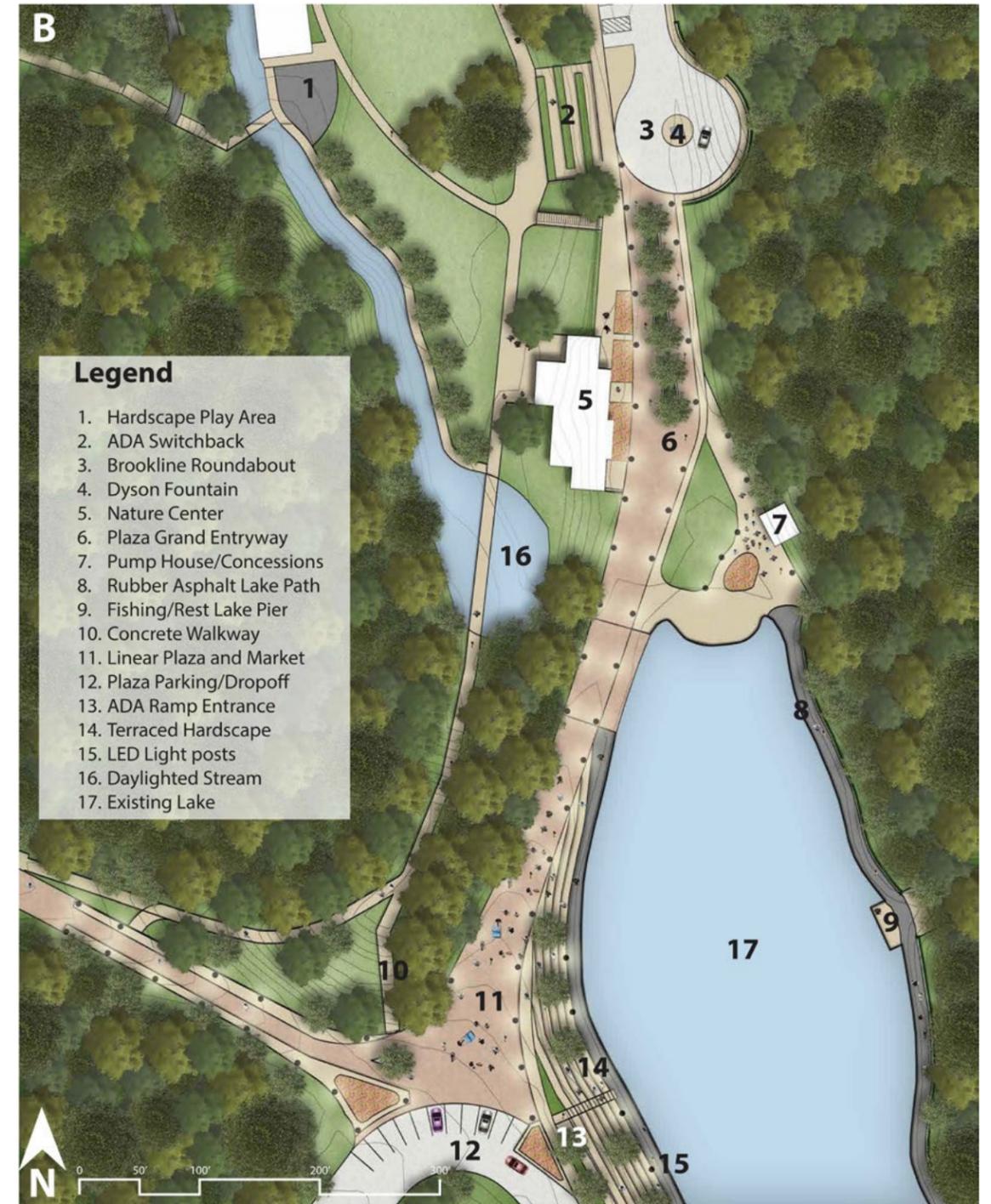
## Place Making

Clearly, without making any changes to the existing park, we have an extraordinary place designed in the 19th century serving to connect generations of users to a beautiful natural environment. Without disturbing the overall structure of the park design students sought to reinforce and add to best aspects of the park experience with designed places.

- **Productive landscape** operations offered locations for new place experiences such as nut tree groves, urban garden areas, a green house, apiary fields, a fish hatchery, and others.
- **Immersion into habitat** produced unique placemaking opportunities such as tree-top bird watching locations and other nature education functions.
- **Environmental Engineering and green infrastructure** for stormwater cleansing and management created a number of interesting places including a wetlands boardwalk, areas around a daylighted stream, rain gardens, and others.
- **Art installations** throughout the park change the perception of the areas around them in special ways that make memorable places.
- **Eco-art installations** were envisioned to create places to educate and introduce wonder about nature and natural processes, such as floating biometric islands that would cleanse pond water or artistic reuse of trees lost to the emerald ash borer epidemic to create trail amenities.
- Much effort was directed at **designing inviting places at the entry points to the park** to promote connectivity and draw user activity. These included landscaped gateways, signed entries, and enhanced intersections that would be attractive to pedestrians, bikers, and motorists. In one case the connecting element was developed into a place in its own right, as a proposed land bridge to campus.



Land Bridge Connecting Campus to Park

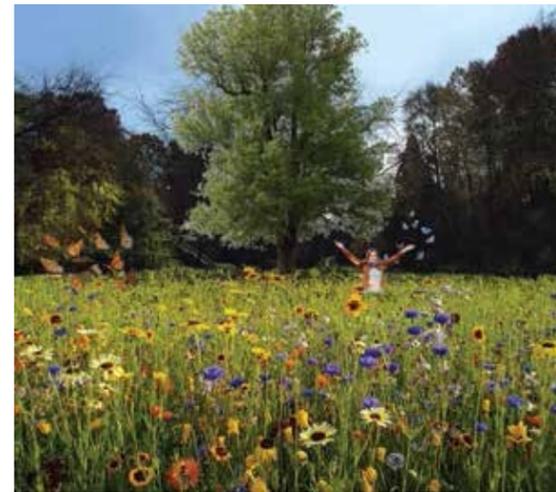


Valley Walk, Cental Events Plaza and Lakeside Amenities

- **Accommodating motorists and their parking needs** was an important consideration for a park that is currently relied on for that use alone. The art of designing a parking lot to fit into the park while becoming an attractive place was a particular challenge attempted by many student teams.
- **New entertainment venues** were proposed with attention to making places in and around them. The design of a proposed restaurant and banquet hall along Clifton Avenue explored methods of using a building to appropriately create a place in a sensitive natural environment. Alternative locations for an amphitheater were proposed, both integrating entry plazas and ancillary spaces that would benefit the park experience.
- **Placemaking opportunities were designed throughout the various pathways** through the park, including viewing areas at the lake, a fishing pier, a valley overlook, and others.
- The concept of creating a more robust linear plaza between the lake and Trailside Nature Center was developed to make a **central gathering space** for larger events, pop-up markets, and other activities.
- **Making places outside the periphery of the park** was also attempted in complementary landscaped areas, plazas, and other spaces in the proposed park “framing development”.



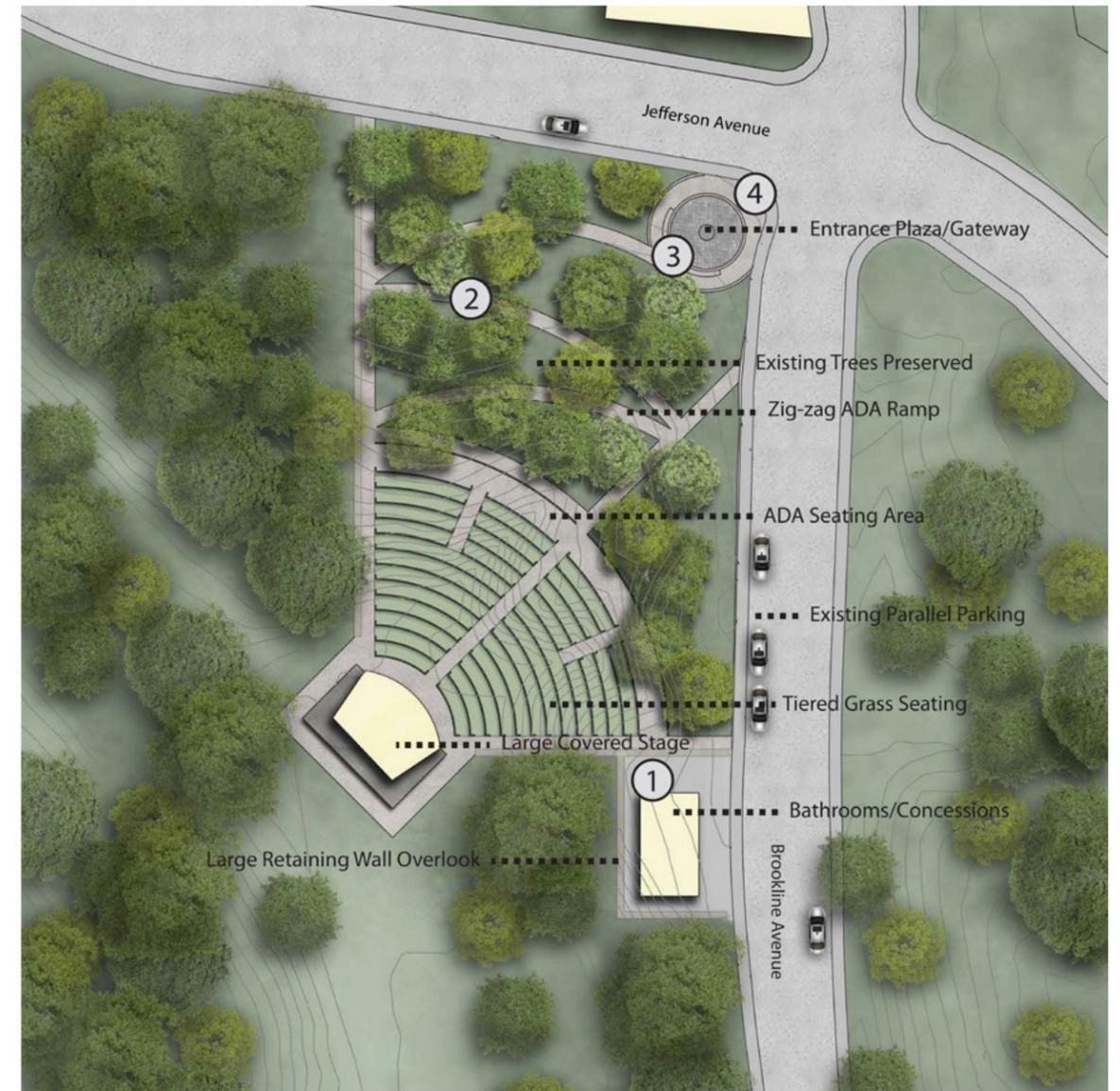
Art and Placemaking



Ecology and Placemaking



Placemaking with a Proposed Restaurant Building



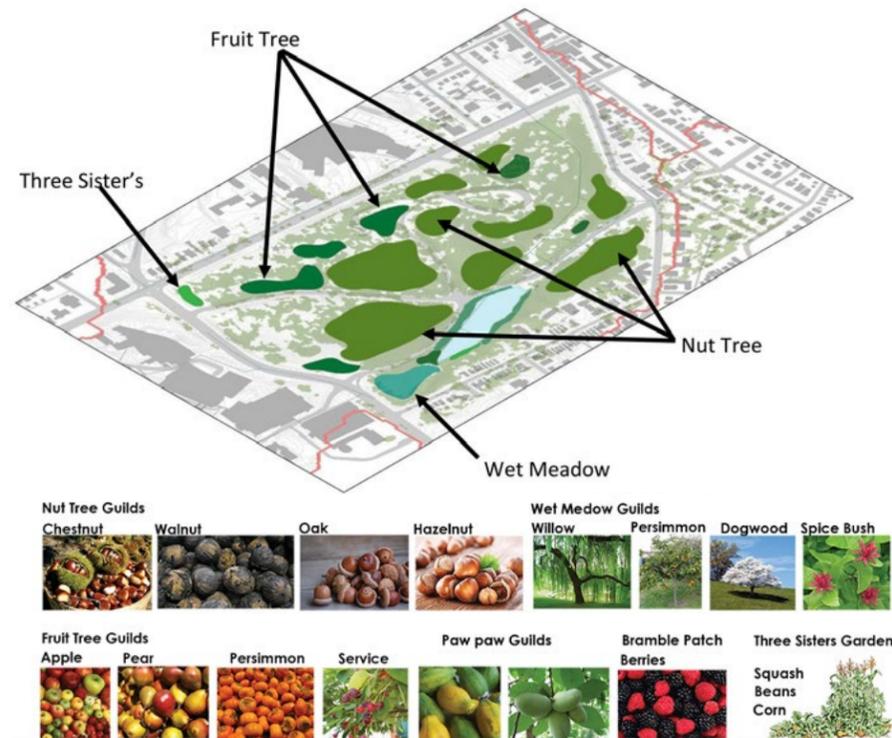
Proposed Amphitheater and Gateway



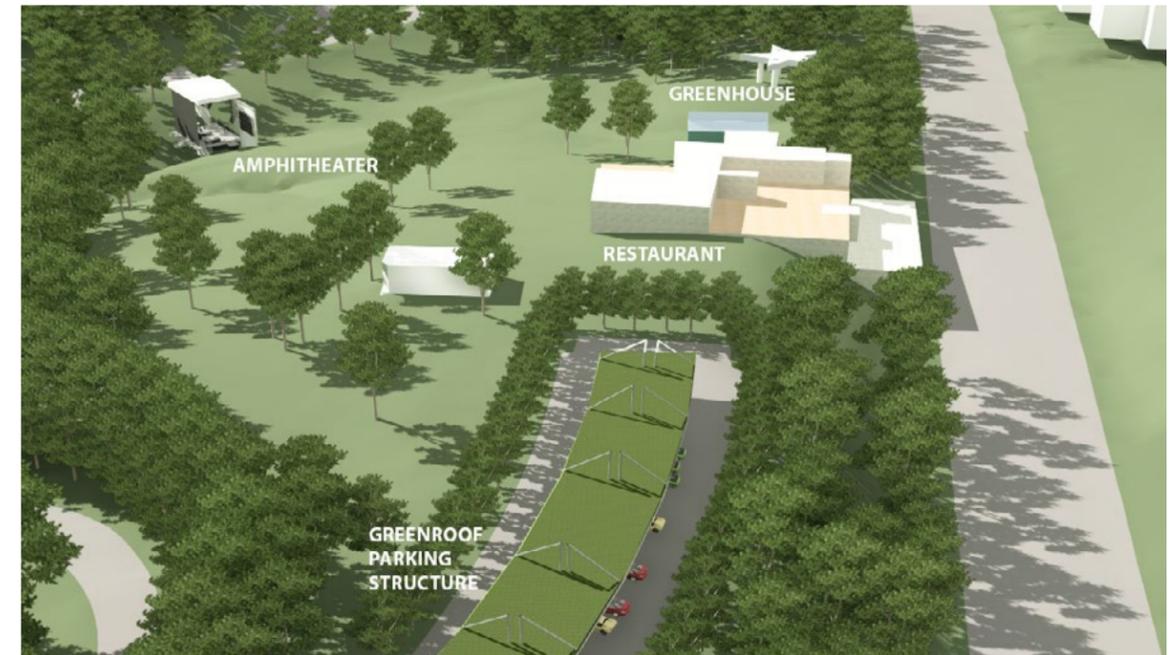
## Economic Development

The intention of almost all proposed student design and programming interventions was rooted in creating more value in and of the park. Whether this was through drawing more visitors for either passive or active pursuits, the assumption was that a more activated park would lead to more investment within and even outside of it, potentially creating jobs, or extended consumer expenditure.

- Existing restaurants in other city park locations have already proven successful in creating jobs and generating revenue for park maintenance. Consequently, a **proposed Burnet Woods restaurant** is intended to provide the same, if designed to complement the character of the park itself.
- Proposed garden and green house food production**, while not at substantial scale, has the potential to create a few jobs and, perhaps more importantly, supply the restaurant with the unique aspect of using produce grown on-site.
- Recommended **programming, events, and facility improvements** that serve them, draw visitors, activate the park, and make it a desirable location benefitting surrounding businesses and property values.
- An attractive and active park can become the impetus** for the redevelopment of surrounding areas that will bring new residents and support existing and new businesses in the Uptown area.



A Productive Landscape



Proposed Restaurant and Greenhouse



Pop-Up Market



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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, The Ladislav and Vilma Segoe Fund and the University of Cincinnati and is administered by the Community Design Center of the College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning.*