Community Space in the Urban Context

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Division is everywhere in our culture. We are divided by races, economic level, political affiliations, religion, nationality, and the list goes on, and on. Everywhere we turn we are faced with things that divide us, but we are rarely brought together. There are very few things in the world that allow us to set aside our differences and come together. Unfortunately public housing complexes in the U.S. have far too often served as a dividing factor in our society. As many public housing complexes have become synonymous with violence, neglect, and criminal activity, residents have been forced to avoid the public spaces, allowing them to become deserted community wastelands.

But we can reverse the trend. This thesis will show that by creating spaces that encourage interaction between people, such as community centers, public parks, and retail nodes, we can begin to restore social housing complexes. By removing some of the barriers from our society we can help people reconnect with their neighbors and become more involved with their communities. This thesis will show that the removal of barriers from our public life also highlights the importance of reinforcing barriers in our private lives. This thesis will also demonstrate that bringing together different groups can not be accomplished by a single building but is most effective when accomplished by a group of buildings working in conjunction with each other. This thesis will show that careful planning and architecture can serve as the catalyst for bringing together people and communities.
I would like to thank my family for their continuing love, encouragement, and patience throughout this thesis. I would also like to thank my committee members for their guidance, support, brilliance, and encouragement. Without their masterful guidance this would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Valerie for her understand and help during my entire thesis journey. Finally, I would like to thank my fellow thesis students, who have made this incredibly more fun and exciting that I ever could have imagined. I would especially like to thank Mike, Sara, James, Mike R., my landscape advisory team of Lindsay and Brian, and of course all of my Argentinean friends.
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Unless Otherwise Noted All Images by the Author
The City of Frederick, MD
Frederick, MD
City Introduction

The City of Frederick was founded in 1745 in central Maryland and currently has a population of approximately 60,000 people. Located at the intersection of Interstates 70 & 270 and within close proximity to both Baltimore, MD and Washington D.C., Frederick has become a prime location for commuters who work in the DC and Baltimore Metro areas, as well as a leading location for companies who are searching for a location close to the nation’s capital. As a result of the economic boom of the late 1990’s and because of its proximity to two major metropolitan areas Frederick experienced a period of unexpected and uncontrolled growth.

Despite its recent growth Frederick has retained its elegant history, distinguished historic district, and rich architectural features. One of the most prominent architectural features of Frederick is the Clustered Spires of downtown. Buildings throughout the city rarely rise above 3 stories, allowing the spires of the churches to gracefully soar over the city. The image of the Clustered Spires has become the icon of the city and is immediately recognizable by all the city’s citizens.

Images
Previous Page:
(Top) City Hall & All Saints’ Episcopal Church
(Middle) Baker Park
(Right) Carroll Creek

Opposite Page:
Aerial photo montage of Frederick, MD and surrounding area
Frederick, MD
Downtown Core

The downtown retail core is located within the historic district and lies mainly along Market Street, the city’s main N-S street. While the downtown core is centered at the intersection of Patrick St. and Market St (Square Corner), the recent redevelopment of Carroll Creek has allowed the downtown area to have a secondary focal point and has given the citizens a small riverfront walkway to be proud of. Together Carroll Creek and Market St provide a lively central core for Frederick.

While most of the buildings in the downtown core are row houses that allow for mixed uses, buildings such as the Patrick Center which, as one of the tallest buildings in town, allows for a central commercial center within the downtown core. The Carroll Creek development follows the example of the Patrick Center and allows for buildings to grow above the city’s older structures and allow for added residential and commercial space.

Images
1. Carroll Creek
2. Frederick City Hall
3. Frederick City Police Station
4. Frederick Memonal Hospital new addition
5. Market Street; northern end
6. Junior Fire Company, No. 2
7. Church Street; view looking east from Market Street
8. Patrick Center

City Diagram
- Civic Structures
- Retail Centers
- Public Spaces
- Shopping Locations
Frederick, MD
Historic District

Frederick’s historic district includes much of the downtown region and all of the city’s oldest buildings. Centered at Square Corner, the historic district mainly consists of three-story brick row houses that have come to define the city’s architectural image. While the historic district is dominated by row houses, the district has allowed newer, larger structures to be built within the historic district. The ability to interweave the structures from different periods allows the historic district of Frederick to maintain its importance and grow with the city while still retaining its original experience.

In addition, the historic district has benefited from allowing structures to be re-used and adapted for other purposes. Many of the historic row houses have been adapted to allow for the ground floor to be used for retail while the upper floors are have been adapted for multi-family residential units and commercial office space. A prime example of this flexibility of use is the Francis Scott Key Hotel on Patrick St., which has been renovated several times, changing from a hotel, to a nursing home, to its current use of commercial space and luxury apartments. The building has also become a canvas for one of the city’s numerous public arts displays.
Frederick, MD
City Attractions

In addition to the historic district, the city features several unique features that attract numerous visitors. The most noticeable feature is Baker Park, which is the city’s largest public park and lies just west of the downtown core on the straddling the edge of the historic district. Frederick is also the home of Hood College, a former women’s college with a campus that covers 50 acres within a few blocks of the downtown core. Frederick is also home to Maryland School for the Deaf, one of the pre-eminent schools in the country for the hearing impaired.

Also, throughout the historic district there are numerous murals that adorn city structures. The most well known of these is the Community Bridge, which is part of the Carroll Creek development and crosses Carroll Creek. The bridge is covered in painted stonework with hidden images that were submitted by city residents. On one side of the bridge is an angel, which is painted to be viewed at an angle. Along with the Community Bridge there are several other murals throughout the town, most of which have undertones of angels.
Thesis Site:
North Bentz Street
5th Street to 7th Street
Site

Bentz Street Introduction

The site for my project is located along North Bentz Street between 5th Street and 7th Street. The two block area is located at the northwest corner of the historic district of Frederick and is bordered by Bentz Street on the west, Klinehart’s Alley on the east, and 5th and 7th Streets on the north and south sides respectively. Bentz Street is a one way street that funnels traffic from Route 15 and the northern section of town into downtown Frederick. The site is bisected by the east-west running 6th Street, which leads directly to Frederick Memorial Hospital, located a block to the west of the site. The site is located in close proximity to Hood College, Baker Park, the Carroll Creek development, and the downtown retail core of Market Street.

The trapezoidal site is at the intersection of the downtown grid and the angled Bentz Street. Because the intersection of North Bentz Street and 7th Street is one of the main access routes to downtown Frederick, this intersection serves as one of the main gateways into downtown Frederick. Unfortunately, the City of Frederick has never been able to successfully utilize the opportunity of this site to properly welcome people into downtown Frederick.

Images

(This Page) Aerial photo montage of downtown Frederick, MD
(Opposite Page) Aerial photo montage of 500 & 600 blocks of North Bentz Street; circa 2008
Site History

Prior to 2005 this two block area was home to the Roger Brooke Taney and John Hanson apartment complexes. Together the apartment complexes formed the largest public housing complex in the city, offering a total of 146 units. The Taney Apartments were constructed in 1943 and spread 68 units over 8 buildings. John Hanson Apartments, built in 1959, added another 78 units and 6 buildings to the site. As the aging buildings deteriorated and crime became rampant within the two complexes the decision was made in 2003 to demolish the 14 buildings on the site and redevelop the area as part of the federally funded HOPE VI affordable housing initiative, implemented by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

By early 2005 all the residents had been relocated to other housing units within the city and all of the buildings on the site were demolished. Since the complexes were demolished the city has struggled to develop and approve a plan for the site. As a result, the gateway to historic downtown Frederick has sat as a dormant, unwelcoming, empty field.
The Promise of a Field

“A field somewhere outside a town. For a few million years, it slept under a blanket of ice. Then a group of people with pronounced lower jaws settled on it, lit their fires and, on a stone plinth, sacrificed an occasional animal to strange gods. Millennia went by. The plough was invented, and wheat and barely were sown. The monks owned the field, then the king, then a merchant, and in the end a farmer, who received a generous sum from the government in return for surrendering it to the colorful progress of meadow buttercups, ox-eyed daisies and red clover.

The field has had an eventful life. People lay down in it in the evenings and wondered through it in oatmeal-coloured socks and spotted families of Black Redstarts. Foxes looked around. Mice made exploratory journeys. Worms kept their heads down.

But time has run out for the field. The patch of dandelions will soon be the living room of number 24. A few metres away, among the corn poppies, will be the garage for number 25, and there in the white campions, its dining room, where a person not yet born will one day have an argument with his or her parents. Above the hedgerow, there’ll be a child’s room, drawn up by a woman working on a computer in an air-conditioned office in a business park near a motorway. A man in an airport on the other side of the world will miss his family and think of home, its foundations dug where a puddle now lies. Great Cosby Village will do its best to imply its age and inevitability, and nothing more will be said of the redstarts, picnics or the long summer’s evening that rang to the sound of ‘Mellon Bakkar og Berg’.”

--Alain de Botton

The Architecture of Happiness; p253
Site Images

Images:
1. Looking south down Bentz Street; before site
2. Looking north up Bentz Street; at site
3. Looking north up Bentz Street; past site
Images
1. Looking south from 7th Street
2. Looking southeast from corner of Bentz & 7th Street
3. Community Mural - on edge of site
4. Looking southwest from 7th Street
5. Looking northeast from corner of Bentz & 6th Street
Images
1. Looking southeast from Bentz & 6th Street
2. Looking southeast from corner of Bentz & 6th Street
3. Looking south down Kinehart’s Alley
4. Looking northwest from Kinehart’s Alley
5. Looking east along southern site barrier
Site Images - West Elevation - Bentz Street
Surrounding Context

Images:
1. Housing in Frederick
2. Housing in Frederick
3. Housing in Frederick
4. Store on SW corner of Bentz & 6th Street
5. Gas station on SW corner of Bentz & 7th Street
6. Shopping Center on NW corner of Bentz & 7th Street
7. Commercial Building on Bentz Street
8. Frederick Memorial Hospital Viewed from Maple Ave
9. Habitat for Humanity housing project; adjacent to NE corner of site
North Bentz Street
Master Plan
Master Plan
Introduction

The goal of the master plan was to create a vibrant community that compliments downtown Frederick and facilitates community interaction, between both the residents and their surrounding neighbors. The first part of this required creating a proper gateway into the historic downtown core of Frederick and activating the street frontage along Bentz Street. The master plan also sought to create safe, unique exterior spaces that would provide the citizens a more intimate, secluded alternative to Baker Park. The master plan also sought to create a series of nodes throughout the site to encourage interaction and foster movement throughout the site.

The first step in this process was to determine the proper density for this two block site. Through this series of density studies it became clear that the most appropriate solution would be to attempt to match or slightly raise the density that was previously on the site, in the John Hanson and Roger Taney Apartment complexes. These studies also helped to determine initial building placement on the site.

Site Density Studies
1. 86 Townhouse Units
2. 79 Townhouse Units
3. 160 Units on 5 Floors
4. 160 Units on 10 Floors
5. 168 Units on 7 Floors
6. 122 Townhouse Units
Master Plan
Site Plans

Because the intersection of Bentz and 7th Streets is the entrance into downtown Frederick, this corner of the site had to become a visually dominant landmark in both the master plan and in the city. As the plan developed the building located at this intersection became the largest of the development. As a mixed use building with retail stores along the street and residences on the upper floors the six story building becomes one of the tallest in the downtown area and becomes the driving force of this part of the site. To further vitalize the Bentz Street frontage all of the buildings along Bentz Street allow for retail spaces on the ground floor and residential or office spaces on the upper floors.

The second aspect of the plan focused on creating safe exterior spaces that would encourage social interaction. As the plan developed the community mural on the east end of the site became the focal point of the main green space, which runs on axis with the mural. The main space is complimented by a smaller space to the north, meant more for the community residents, and a lawn to the south which terminates at the community center, the social heart of the community. The plan also reintroduces 5 ½ Street in the form of a telescoping plaza on the south side of the community center.

Images
1. Community Mural on east end of site

Master Plan Studies
A. Initial Study - Bentz St retail, community center along Bentz St, townhouses at east end
B. Study - Large exterior space, centered community center, re-emergence of 5 1/2 St
C. Study - East/west green space focused on mural, 5 1/2 St atrium, community center on corner, removal of townhouses, addition of 1 story community buildings
D. Study - South facing 5 1/2 St atrium with apartments, community center street frontage & rear court, courtyard at south end
E. Study - Plaza at 5 1/2 St, community center setback from 6th St.
F. Final Study - Telescoping plaza at 5 1/2 St, community center with apartments
Master Plan
Site Sections

To help activate Bentz Street, the ground floors of all the buildings facing Bentz Street have been designated as retail spaces. While this will help provide an active atmosphere along Bentz Street, it does nothing to ensure the safety of the interior green spaces of the complex. In order to help activate these spaces, and keep them clear of crime and safe for the residents, all of the residential entrances will be located on the interior of the site. This will help to the residents to keep an active environment in the spaces that criminals despise. Also as the complex moves from Bentz Street east toward downtown, the buildings on the site step down in size to better mesh with the low buildings in downtown Frederick. As a result the tallest buildings of the complex lie along Bentz Street.

Because the buildings along Bentz Street are taller, several of them rise above a majority of the buildings in downtown. This allows several of the buildings on the site to have visual dominance over much of the downtown region, and creates view sheds back to the Clustered Spires of Frederick.
Master Plan
Diagrams - Exterior Spaces

Site Diagram - Exterior Spaces
- Residential Access
- Private Residential Garden
- Community Lawn
- Public Garden
- Public Plaza
- Location of Existing Community Mural
Master Plan
Diagrams - Areas of Activity
Master Plan
Diagrams - Building Uses

Master Plan Diagram - Building Uses

- Residential Space
- Commercial Retail Space
- Community Space
- Commercial Office Space
Master Plan
Drawings - Site Plan
Master Plan
Drawings - Aerial Axonometric
Master Plan
Drawings - Axonometric Diagrams
Master Plan
Drawings - Street Sections
Master Plan
Drawings - Street Sections
Bentz Street Community Center
Community Center
Project Introduction

The focal point of the development is the community center located on the corner of Bentz Street and 6th Street. The community center is envisioned as a place where people from this community, and outside communities, can gather and safely interact with each other. The challenge of bringing different groups of people together is creating spaces that are flexible enough to serve numerous purposes and useful enough to be actively used, by large groups of people, on a regular basis.

The community center was conceived of as a pavilion within a building, with an apartment complex attached to it. The relationship of the two functions, which is highlighted in the West Elevation, helps to emphasize the sometimes awkward collision of our private lives with our social interactions. As the pavilion element of the building, the gymnasium was allowed to rise above the rest of the community center, giving it a visual hierarchy from the exterior. While respecting the activities of the gymnasium, as much natural light as possible was brought into the space, resulting in walls that are solid up to twelve feet above the floor and then become glass that is shielded from direct sunlight by the roofs of the surrounding spaces.
Community Center
Gymnasium

While in the past gymnasiums have been designed as fortresses that rarely allow natural light to enter, the gymnasium of the community center embraces the idea of transparency and natural light. The building within a building design allows an abundance of natural light to enter the building, while shielding the gymnasium from direct sunlight and glare. The roof structure of the gym also allows for extra daylight to be brought into the building, while also allowing for natural venting to occur.

To further enhance the transparency of space and dissolution of barriers the east wall of the gym is composed of mostly glass. This allows people in the second story aerobic space to look downward into the gym. The two end panels on the ground floor are also glass to allow people in the lobby to see the activity in the gym as well. The floor to ceiling glass panels on the ground floor also allows you to see up the entire height of the gymnasium wall, as a result of the floor above being pulled back from the surface of the wall.

Images
1. Gymnasium Section Showing Relationship to Spaces Beyond
2. Initial Gymnasium Section
3. Model of Gymnasium Roof Structure
4. Section Axonometric of Gymnasium/Lobby Relationship
5. Model of Gymnasium Roof Structure
6. Model of Gymnasium Roof Structure
7. Model of Gymnasium Roof Structure
Community Center
Apartments

While the community center looks into the community, the apartments look out onto the city and Bentz St. With retail spaces along the ground floor to help activate Bentz Street, the apartments above mimic the proportions and rhythms of the townhouses and row houses that are prevalent in downtown Frederick. The volumes of the apartment also help to re-enforce the movement down Bentz Street towards downtown Frederick. The volumes and massing of the apartment are also meant to be a basis for the other residential buildings within the master plan development.

Images:
1. Apartment Massing Study
2. Apartment Massing Study
3. Apartment Massing Study
4. Apartment Massing Study
Community Center
Apartment Divisions

During the investigation on ways to limit divisions between people through community design, it became important to re-enforce divisions in other aspects of life. So as the community center complex becomes a vehicle of inclusion, the apartment complex works to re-enforce barriers we desire in private life. To do this the parti walls that divide private spaces take on an almost sacred role. They become entities that are not to be passed through, and when they are passed through, it is done in a manner that respects the importance of the wall and makes you aware that you have crossed an important threshold.

Because of the importance of these walls in creating the division in our private lives, it then becomes important to allow those walls to express themselves on the exterior, which then allows them to become the basis for the rhythm and division of the massing and façade of the front of the building. This allows the walls, which rise above, and project in front of, the volumes of the apartments, to become the visually dominant feature of the front of the building.

Images
1. Location of Division Walls on Ground Level
2. Location of Division Walls on Second Level
3. Diagrammatic Elevation Sketch of Division Walls & Apartment Layout
4. View of Division Walls Looking South on Bentz Street
5. View of Division Walls Looking North on Bentz Street.
Community Center
Stair Towers

One of the few places that the sacred walls that divide the apartments is allowed to be penetrated is at the stairs. The building has two stair towers, one to the north and one to the south, that each service four apartment units and provide roof access. The stair towers are meant to symbolize the Clustered Spires, and are intended to be one the more visually prominent features of the buildings in the master plan. Each stair wraps itself around one of the division walls between apartments, which allows the user to travel along the edge of, and through, the wall.

Allowing the users to spiral around the stairs, which are intended as the main vertical circulation of the building, re-enforces the identity of the Clustered Spires of Frederick. As the resident ascends or descends the stairs, the path takes literally spirals them through the building. As the stairs rise above the building, they are enclosed in a glass wall that allows this spiraling action to be viewed by the public and allows those within the stair to have views back to the Clustered Spires in downtown Frederick.

Images
1. Location of Stair Towers on ground floor in previous scheme
2. Location of Stair Towers on ground floor in final scheme
3. Exterior view of north Stair
4. View of Stairs & Bentz St Elevation
5. View of Stairs & back of apartments
6. Exterior view of south Stair
Community Center
Grid Shift

One of the most intriguing aspects of this site is its location at the intersection of the downtown grid and the angled Bentz Street. This has allowed the building to become a showcase of clashing personalities and ideas coming together in harmony. In several places on the building elements emerge which highlight the joining of these two grids. On the north side of the building, the apartments have been allowed to penetrate through the wall and become parallel with 6th St. The apartments further acknowledge the grid change with an angled element that marks the entrance to the apartment units on the ground level. This element also helps to distinguish the apartment entrance from the retail space on the ground level.

In the community center the merging grids can be seen through the orientation of the gym to its circulation patterns. While the gym is perpendicular to the orientation of Bentz St, the entrance vestibules, and the 6th St façade, run perpendicular to 6th St. The roof above this façade runs parallel to the gym, further enhancing the combination of the two systems. The design of the stair to the second level of the community center is also derived from the two grid systems coming together.
Community Center
Drawings - Ground Level Plan

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1. Retail Space
2. Apartment Entrance
3. Gymnasium
4. Community Center Lobby
5. Community Center Staff Office
6. Locker Rooms
Images
1. Apartment 1 - Lower Level
2. Apartment 2 - Lower Level
3. Apartment 3 - Lower Level
4. Apartment 4 - Lower Level
5. Aerobic Space
Community Center
Drawings - Second Level Plan

Images:
1. Apartment 1 - Upper Level
2. Apartment 2 - Upper Level
3. Apartment 3 - Upper Level
4. Apartment 4 - Upper Level
Community Center
Drawings - Third Level Plan

Images:
1. Apartment 5
2. Apartment 6 - Lower Level
3. Apartment 7
4. Apartment 8 - Lower Level
Community Center
Drawings - Fourth Level Plan

Images:
1. Apartment 6 - Upper Level
2. Apartment 8 - Upper Level
Community Center
Drawings - Building Section
Community Center
Drawings - Building Section
Community Center
Drawings - Building Section Axon
Community Center
Drawings - 6th Street Elevation
Community Center
Drawings - East Elevation
Community Center
Drawings - Plaza Elevation
Community Center
Drawings - Bentz Street Elevation
Community Center
Drawings - Interior Perspectives

Images:
1. Gymnasium Interior
2. Interior Lobby
3. Managers Office Looking Towards Stair
4. Aerobic Space on Second Level
Community Center
Drawings - Exterior Perspectives

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1. Exterior View From Intersection of Bentz Street & 6th Street
2. Exterior View From 6th Street Looking West
3. Exterior View From Public Lawn
4. Exterior View From Bentz Street Looking North
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