

The Pittsburg Project

Graduate Community/Urban Design-Historic Preservation Studio

Farhad Atash
Lin Chun-Chien
Lynn Cox-Keohan
Walter Daniels

Cheri (Spener) Favier
Tom Keohan
Chris Meinhardt
Doug McQuillan

David Peterson
Dean Roberts
Andrea Urbas

Critic: Professor James McCullar

Project Development

Pittsburg is a city of 20,000 people in southeastern Kansas. In a period of renewed economic activity, Pittsburg had begun to face physical growth problems now becoming familiar to many small urban centers across America. The city's nineteenth century traditional commercial center and surrounding neighborhoods were suffering in competition with recently developed suburban shopping centers and housing, and the resulting loss of vitality in older areas was viewed as contributing to their physical deterioration. A process of decline had been initiated which if allowed to continue, would result in costly and irreversible loss of the city's historic fabric and visual character. Recognizing this situation, the community saw the need for efforts to both preserve and revitalize older areas, and encourage patterns for growth that would — within community traditions, desires, and expectations — benefit their city. To assist with these efforts, the Graduate Community/

Urban Design-Historic Preservation Studio was invited to undertake a one semester study to define and address city development issues.

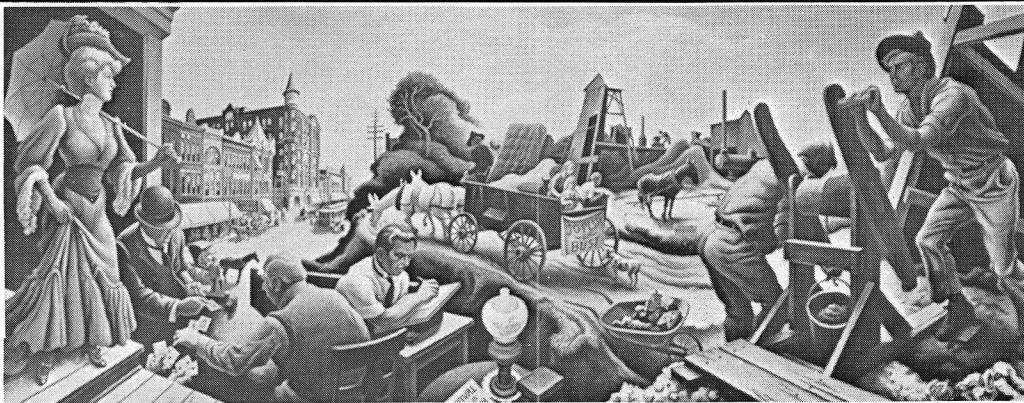
The studio brought together a broad range of specialization offered within the College of Architecture and Design. Disciplines represented included architecture, historic preservation, landscape architecture and regional and community planning. This combination offered opportunity to introduce participants to requirements and advantages of the design team process essential to large scale community planning and design. The inter-disciplinary studio was composed of eleven graduate and advanced undergraduate students with faculty advisors from each of their departments. Other academic advisors and critics included members of the larger university community and selected visitors to the campus. Within its role as community design consultant to Pittsburg, the group worked directly with representatives of the

community while individuals worked in their chosen areas of specialization. The resulting series of integrated projects were documented in a glossy four color printed and bound summary report. In addition, several other detailed reports discussed design implementation options, energy conservation strategies, parks master planning, and preservation opportunities.

The studio effort was divided into three phases: an inventory of existing resources and conditions followed by analyses and projections; development of planning and design proposals; and preparation of presentations, and publication of the report. Throughout the study, efforts overlapped as additional information and new insights called for re-examination, and generated new tasks.

Students studied the character of Pittsburg through examination of its historical evolution and contemporary context. This effort was a pre-

requisite for design study and proposals, and involved research of historic, demographic, economic, and physical contexts. Based upon the knowledge gained, analysis of existing resources and current trends revealed planning and design parameters and opportunities. Once these were established, alternative responses were formulated and reviewed, understanding that their interpretation and development would effect both general and particular issues. In order to develop appropriate design proposals, issues and characteristics identified were studied in still greater detail. The result was proposals focusing upon revitalization of the traditional city center with supporting concepts for neighborhoods and housing, parks and recreation, transportation, energy, and alternative future patterns of growth. The final studio effort — prepared as part of the study — was publication of *Report to the City of Pittsburg*. Summarizing the study's conclusions, the booklet was organized in two parts:



Joplin At The Turn Of The Century, 1896-1906 by Thomas Hart Benton, portrays and contrasts high cultural aspirations, modern city development, and booming industrial activity on the Cherokee Plains.

The city street scene closely resembles Pittsburg's commercial buildings and the Stillwell Hotel along Broadway with its double trolley tracks. Trolleys connected the city with many developing communities in the region.

Design proposals for development in Pittsburg were built upon four development concepts:

Re-use of under-utilized resources. developments would include: railroad rights-of-way for use as linear parks and city parking; central business district [CBD] vacant lots for use as mid-block arcades; abandoned and under-utilized buildings for use as housing, commercial, and office space; and floodplains for use as low maintenance parks and sport fields.

Recognition of the city's current and historic organizing elements. Some of these include: the CBD and Pittsburg State University [PSU] campus; Broadway, the axial path around which the city is organized; Lincoln Park, traditionally the major city park; through streets which follow a square mile grid pattern typical throughout the region; and trolley lines, which led to centralization of activities along Broadway.

The creation of unique activities and opportunities within Pittsburg to add to the vitality of the city. These include: designing special districts and activities along Broadway, including an "historic" CBD, revitalized commercial and civic activities and a regional center at PSU for art and theater; reintroducing a trolley along Broadway to connect those activities with ample parking for visitors along its route; developing residential uses and planting trees along Broadway to complete the return to a traditional feeling of community.

Provision of opportunities for mutually supportive industrial and community development. These include: planning locations for corporate offices, such as in the proposed city square development at Second Street, as a strategy for renewal in the CBD; and rehabilitation of older residences to provide housing for skilled workers needed for industrial growth.

These concepts were intended to provide a framework for new development that respects existing city fabric and character, and to provide a cost effective approach that strengthens community assets through their re-use.

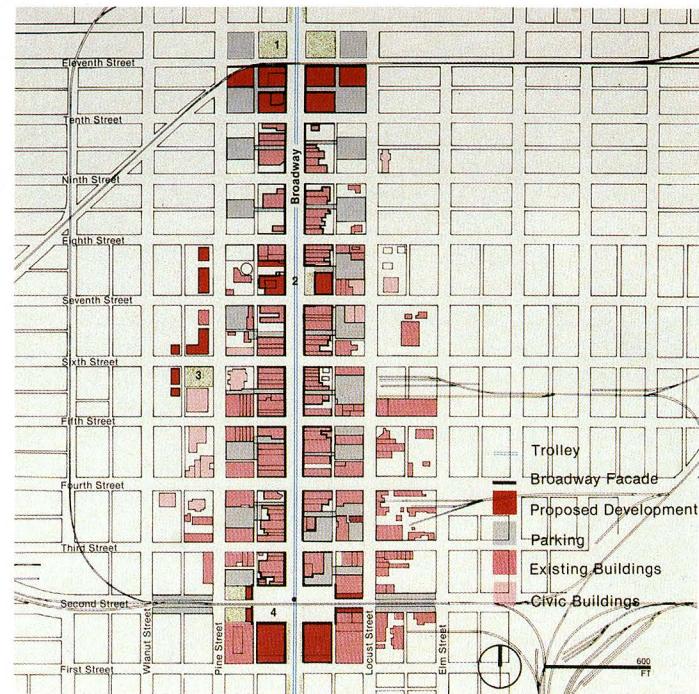
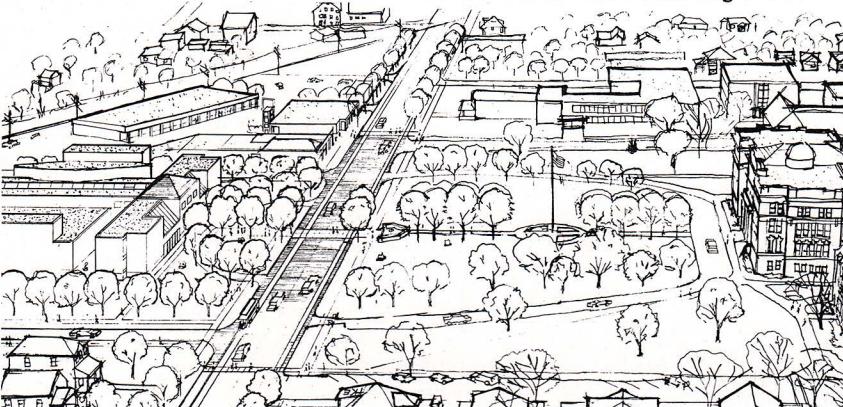
Central Business District

Proposals for the CBD build upon its positive assets to promote and accommodate new activities while retaining and strengthening its image and character. Key concepts include: preservation of building facades that line Broadway from First to Eleventh Streets, permitting freedom for development behind Broadway while retaining the "Main Street" image; four public places that function as centers for revitalization of commercial and civic activities: 1. Lincoln Parkway, 2. Stillwell Plaza, 3. Civic Center Square, 4. City Square; mid-block arcades connecting Broadway with parking lots behind buildings adjacent on each side; and widening of sidewalks to improve pedestrian circulation and complement mid-block arcades.

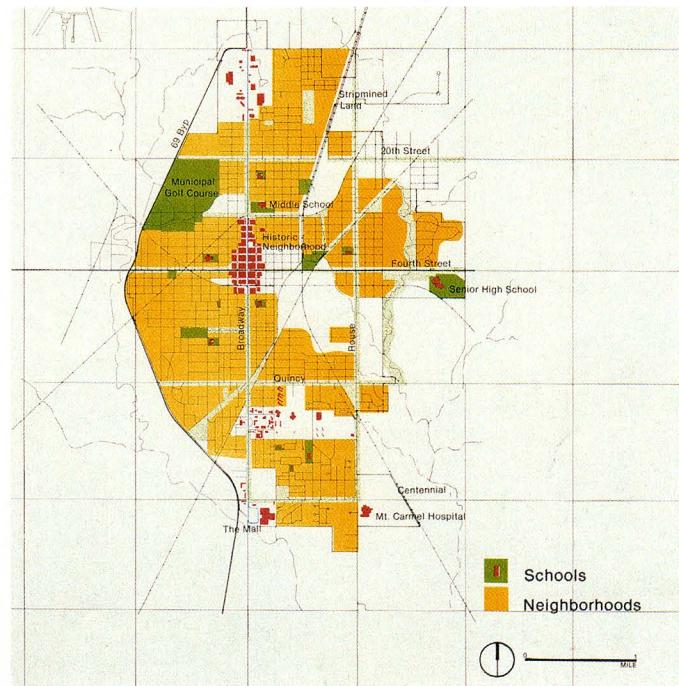
Neighborhoods

Neighborhood development proposals were generated by goals and needs to preserve older neighborhoods, support revitalization of the CBD and to respond to increasing costs of housing, energy, and municipal services. Five key concepts included: neighborhoods centered around schools and local parks; development of streets defining the square mile grid as arterial boulevards that both divert traffic around and link neighborhoods to Broadway; developing recreational pathways between neighborhoods and parks; identification of historic neighborhoods; and extension of trolley lines from Broadway through neighborhoods and to parks.

Proposed Pittsburg State University Center for Visual and Performing Arts



Central Business District



Neighborhoods

Part I included identification and analysis of the city's physical resources and distinguishing characteristics, and Part II offered proposals for preservation and development that would strengthen and build upon Pittsburg's resources and character. The publication served not only to document studio efforts for use by the city of Pittsburg, and to familiarize the students with graphic and narrative production requirements and processes, but also to further develop their knowledge about the role of color and pattern in analysis and design.

The absence of necessary planning information and current economic/demographic studies meant the studio had to generate information as well as develop design proposals. Consequently, studio analyses and design proposals focused upon broad aspects. The approach taken by the studio recognized the project's professional responsibility to produce recommendations for Pittsburg. To accomplish this purpose a pragmatic and flexible working approach was adopted, allowing for sincere analysis and appropriate, realistic proposals. Special emphasis was placed upon producing proposals sensitive to physical, social, and economic needs of the community and which would preserve and enhance Pittsburg's social and physical character.

Evolution of Context

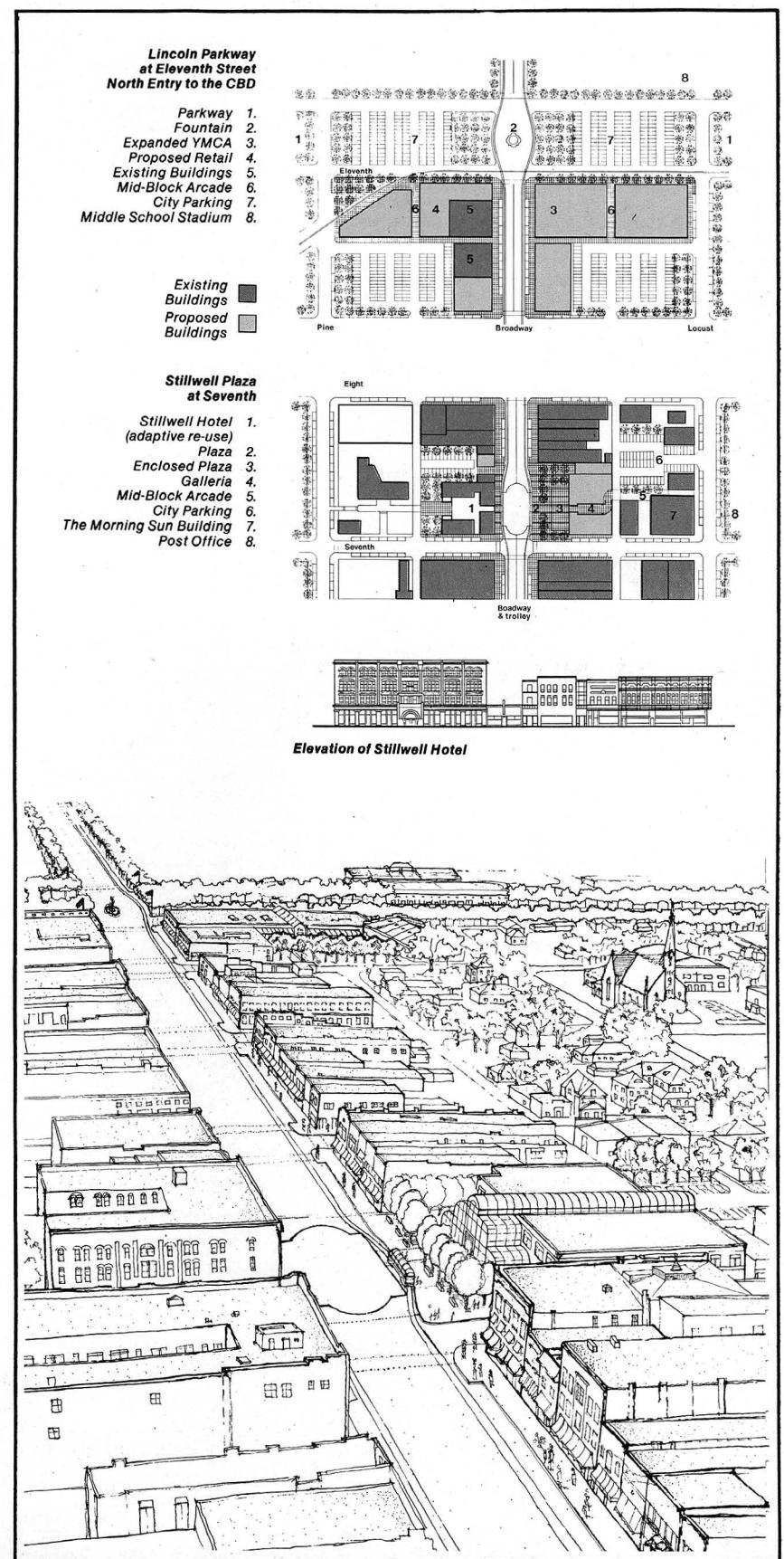
Soon after railroads reached southeast Kansas in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, four businessmen in the region joined interests to provide a coal loading station for the Pittsburg-Joplin Railroad Company. The men named the station site Pittsburg, after Pittsburg, Pennsylvania with the expectation their new city would also become a modern industrial center. After the city's founding in 1876, industrial development progressed rapidly as new industries took advantage of the Cherokee Plains' rich coal deposits. Pittsburg developed quickly as a transportation center to support its growth, constructing railways and

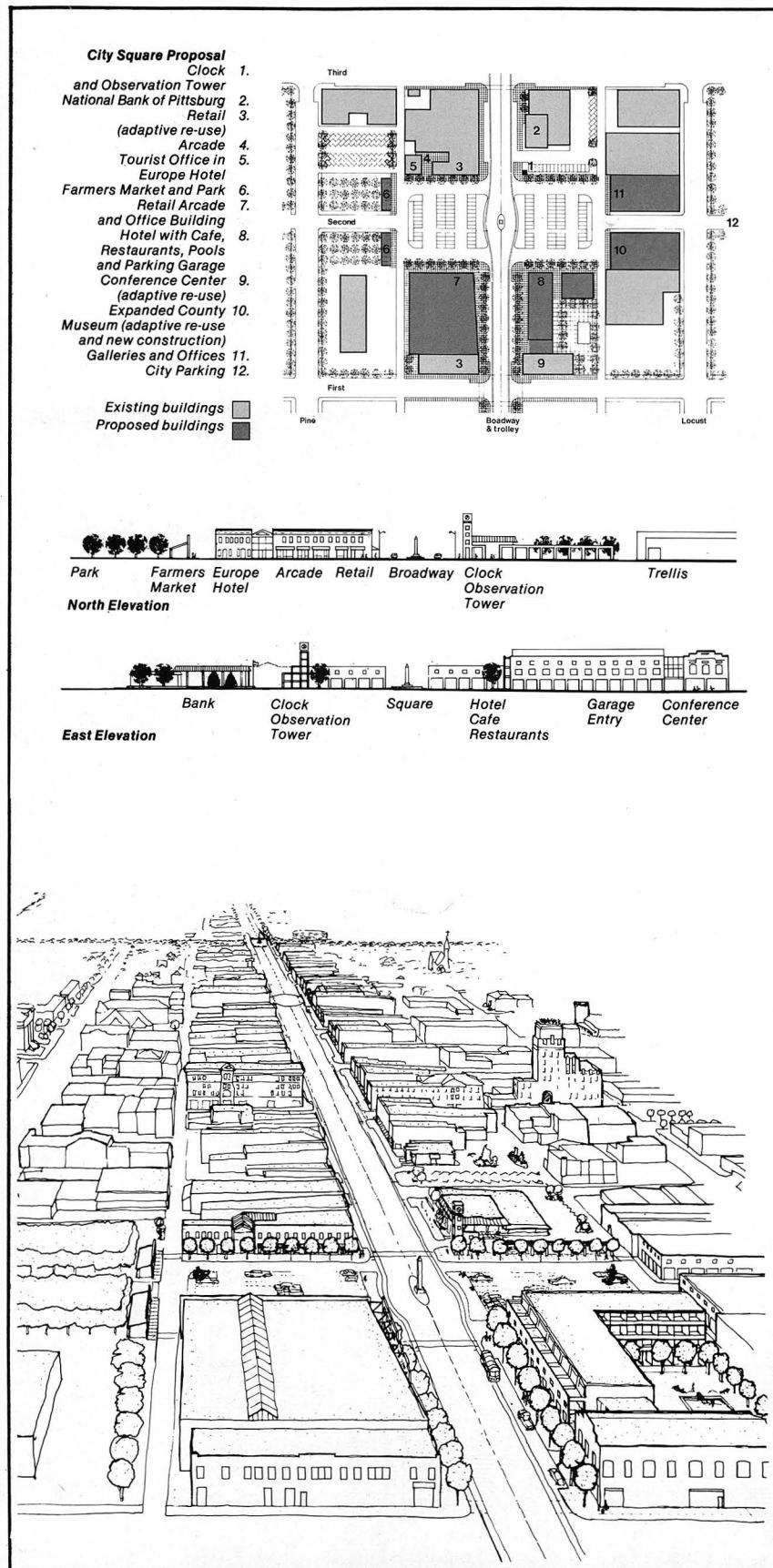
regional interurban trolley systems by 1890. In order to provide workers for coal mining and other industries, immigrants were recruited from European countries. They were received in hotels such as the *Europe* and assigned to mining camps on the basis of national origin. Complementing industrial development, Pittsburg and its region constituted a microcosm of emerging social and political movements in the late 19th century America including socialism, populism, unionism, and reactionary movements such as the Ku Klux Klan. In addition to providing a setting for industrial activity and social movements, the locale produced numerous accomplished writers and artists, and inspired early feminist activity.

By the turn of the century Pittsburg had reached its goal of becoming a modern industrial city with railroads, trolleys, utilities, hotels, banks, schools, churches, a public library, and a hospital. However, from about 1910, changes in technology, national economic policies, requirements of World War I, and geographical disadvantages combined with natural resources decline to dash hopes that Pittsburg and its region would attain permanent status as a nationally important industrial center.

The early history of Pittsburg can be viewed as the result of creative development of its natural resources by an unusual community of diverse and energetic individuals. Due to the city's economic stabilization in the middle of the 20th century,

Proposals for Eleventh and Seventh Streets include Lincoln Parkway and Stillwell Plaza developments. The parkway would function as the CBD north entry and includes an expanded YMCA, retail development, and parking within railroad rights-of-way. Stillwell Plaza would form a central focus in the CBD and include adaptive re-use of the Stillwell Hotel, a new shopping galleria opposite the Stillwell, a small plaza with trolley station, and a mid-block arcade to public parking.





much of its historic fabric remains intact today, preserved from the Post World War II urban blight that has affected so many American cities.

Discussion and Evaluation

Recent acceptance and examination of architecture from the past while working under assumptions and beliefs of modernism in the twentieth century has generated conflicts which in part describe current architectural crises. One such conflict occurs when certain modern design approaches are translated to effect architecture in multifunctioning contexts. Perhaps manifesting this conflict, a controversy among portions of urban design and historic preservation students and faculty arose. However, investigation, discussion and reflection inspired by this controversy proved enlightening. Historic preservationists argued in favor of design purely sensitive to the historic character of older areas. Although this viewpoint was put forth with apparent reason, students revealed after investigation of the urban milieu that preservation theory must address many other issues as well if there is to be integration — not isolation — of the past with the present. Rather than isolating preservation, studio proposals showed how restoration, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse could act with new development not to change, but to respond to changing needs and new aspirations of the community.

The approach taken by the studio seems especially appropriate during

Proposals from First to Third Streets center upon developing the south entry to the CBD within railroad rights-of-way at Second Street and Broadway. The square forms the major node on Broadway, between financial institutions, major industry offices, and near PSU. Its location adjacent to existing open space suggests multi-use office, hotel, shopping, and entertainment space with ample parking. The square can be blocked off and used for public activities such as celebrations.

a period in which communities are asked to preserve and fully utilize existing resources by an outlook predicting reduced development of new resources. This is an immediate challenge, especially for those students and architects who have somehow learned to avoid understanding what exists, and also for those who demand destructive change instead of careful development of the environment. Proposals for redevelopment in Pittsburgh show concern for the totality of urban experience, in which opportunities for selective activities remain. In addition, proposals showed how new development might be composed to promote human functions while maintaining design order. The existing organizing geometry of the grid is reinforced acknowledging its capacity to accept refinements and development. Proposals do not reveal reaction against 20th century modernism. They are not only conserving of 19th century development, but of contemporary development as well. However, reverent acceptance and conservation of what exists contrasts with recent modern schemes that renounced the past in manifestos for the future.

Upon the studio's conclusion, students were provided with an understanding of roles and opportunities within various design disciplines and an exposure to the factors and issues which influence city growth. Efforts moved beyond theoretical investigation and modeling. The studio practiced application of design theory in a creative and dynamic response to the complex and often unstructured nature of the contemporary urban environment.

Particularly today, when the world is in the hands of those who had to learn to understand it, clumsily, belatedly, and in many ways not at all, we need to introduce processes of growth instead of bulldozing our way through destroyed landscape to ends that prove sterile, disappointing, and ineptly planned.

Margaret Mead, from
Culture And Commitment