HAMER CENTER

CURRICULUM-BASED PROJECT

LARCH 315/817: COMMUNITY DESIGN STUDIO, LANCASTER PA

Instructors: Leann Andrews, Travis Flohr, Lauren Sosa

Studio Title: Envisioning and Celebrating the Historic Southeast Lancaster Neighborhood, City of Lancaster, PA

Southeast Lancaster in South Central Pennsylvania has both a rich and troubled past. Throughout history, the southeast quadrant of Lancaster served as a haven for the city's poorest and most challenged residents – including African American slaves – and it experienced

the devasting effects of urban renewal, causing the widespread displacement of nearly all homes and businesses along the central corridor. Today the quadrant has become a haven for immigrants and its population is primarily Latino/a/x and Black, with comparatively low income and education levels. Despite challenges of disparities and racism, the historic Southeast neighborhood has a rich identity, including a strong presence of multicultural and religious institutions, cemeteries, community centers, businesses, and restaurants. In fall 2022, the Penn State Landscape Architecture Community Design Studio engaged with the historic southeast neighborhood to celebrate the gems, grapple with the systemic issues, and envision the future of the southeast quadrant.

A Listening Tour

The studio began with listening to the community's thoughts on their issues, their "gems," and their hopes for the future. Students created maps showing GIS spatial, historic, and demographic information, reviewed city planning documents, and visited the community to talk to residents and experience the neighborhood in a field trip to the southeast quadrant. Community members also invited us to join their Fall Festival, and we had a booth to gather feedback and learn about their culture firsthand.







Community Workshops

Students traveled to The Mix, an organization that supports youth and families in the southeast quadrant of Lancaster, and presented their preliminary design ideas. They received feedback from over 60 youth (ages 8 to 18), teachers, and their parents. A representative of the City of Lancaster Planning Department also joined. Students gained valuable communication and listening skills, and residents had the opportunity to discuss the ways they envision their future.

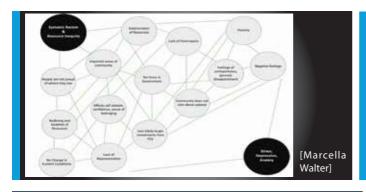
Visioning Charrettes

In addition to the community workshop, students spoke with over 20 people who lived or worked in the Southeast Lancaster in person or via Zoom video conferences. From this information, students then engaged in a series of internal charrettes to envision the future of the southeast quadrant at the community and the site scale.

The Hamer Center was instrumental to the engagement part of the course, providing transportation and materials to support the community and student activities.





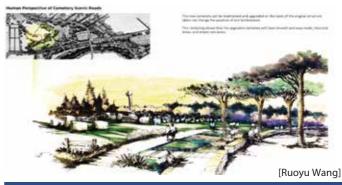


Module 1: The Wicked Problem

Students familiarized themselves with the people and places of Southeast Lancaster and learned about the community's concerns, hopes, dreams, and aspirations for themselves and their neighborhood. Students then diagrammed out a "wicked problem," or a systemic and complex set of issues that they would like to address through their design projects. Wicked problems ranged from addressing the effects of redlining and racisism, to a lack of greenspaces, to disinvestment in transportation and physical and mental health issues, and more.

Module 2: The Vision

During "The Vision" assignment, students worked in groups to identify a neighborhood vision and plan to address concerns of Historic Southeast Lancaster while enhancing its opportunities. These community-scale visions created by students could be used by residents to communicate their needs and desires to the city in the future



[Andrew Kuka]

Module 3: The Catalyst

The studio concluded with each student designing a smaller scale "catalyst project" that responded to the placemaking needs of the community. There was a wide range of student projects: community parks, riverfront trails, transportation corridors, economic investments in local businesses, affordable housing, greenspaces for festivals, cemetery revitalization projects, sports fields, community gardens and food-based centers, and more.

Community Response

The course had two final reviews: an internal in-person design review with faculty and an external online presentation that invited each community member that spoke to the class. Students learned valuable skills receiving community feedback and community members had an opportunity to engage in conversation about their future with other residents who live and work in the Southeast Lancaster, including representatives from the city.



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