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Fringe to Focus - An Inversion of Peripheral Inhabitation

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“As architects we are given a gift and with it, a responsibility... The question is, do we have the courage to make our gift count for something?”
-Samuel Mockbee - Rural Studio

FRINGE TO FOCUS
AN INVERSION OF
PERIPHERAL INHABITATION
Request for Approval of Thesis Research
Project Book Presented to:
Professor Edwin E. Akins II
and to the
Faculty of the Department of Architecture
College of Architecture and Construction Management
By
Matthew Dakin McKim
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Architecture
Kennesaw State University
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Request for Approval of Project Book
Kennesaw State University
Department of Architecture
College of Architecture and Construction Management
Student’s Full Name: Matthew Dakin McKim
Thesis Project Title: Fringe to Focus: An Inversion of Peripheral Inhabitation
Student Signature ______________________ Date _____________
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Professor Edwin E. Akins, II, AIA, LEED AP
Thesis Coordinator ______________________ Date _____________
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Dr. Tony Rizzuto
1.1 Hypothesis/3MT

Growing cities is the issue of displacement as a result of redevelopment. As cities grow and improve, those living on the fringes of society are being forced to vacate and move on. My thesis aims to identify areas where struggling people are at a heightened risk of being further displaced by the rapid redevelopment of ‘fringe’ areas. It will seek to provide a proactive response to mitigate the harm, while aiding in an active rehabilitation process for impacted peripheral communities. I am proposing the concept of temporary centers that can be established in at-risk areas that would provide aid to those negatively affected by redevelopment. These temporary centers would be established in individual units, each providing unique services based upon the needs of the location. These units would provide a variety of supplemental living necessities such as water, sanitation, and access to services such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation, job training/opportunities, as well as assistance in the relocation process.

The goal is to provide stability and hope in an atmosphere of uncertainty. As these temporary structures begin aiding those struggling, the idea is that these people will be able to rise above their situations and find their own stability.

Based on current research one in twenty people will experience some type of homelessness in their lifetime. The unfortunate truth is that many of us are just one financial crisis, one bad breakup, one family illness... just one bad day away from experiencing homelessness. The homeless struggle through each day, often lacking many of the essential necessities of life such as food, water, and shelter.

Unfortunately, because of the complexity of the issue of homelessness and its wide variety of causes, it is unlikely that a single architectural project can completely solve the issue alone. But I do believe that we should try, that we have a responsibility to try.

A major issue currently facing Atlanta and many growing cities is the issue of displacement as a result of redevelopment. As cities grow and improve, those living on the fringes of society are being forced to vacate and move on.

My thesis aims to identify areas where struggling people are at a heightened risk of being further displaced by the rapid redevelopment of ‘fringe’ areas. It will seek to provide a proactive response to mitigate the harm, while aiding in an active rehabilitation process for impacted peripheral communities. I am proposing the concept of temporary centers that can be established in at-risk areas that would provide aid to those negatively affected by redevelopment. These temporary centers would be established in individual units, each providing unique services based upon the needs of the location. These units would provide a variety of supplemental living necessities such as water, sanitation, and access to services such as drug and alcohol rehabilitation, job training/opportunities, as well as assistance in the relocation process.

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1.2 The Problem

Atlanta, as a city, has long been the subject of study of urban theorists and planners. Its unique history, rapid growth, and subsequent redevelopment has resulted in a city that struggles with its identity. Rem Koolhaas once described Atlanta by stating that “Atlanta does not have the classical symptoms of a city; it is not dense; it is a sparse, thin carpet of habitation, a kind of supremacist composition of little fields. Its charged contextual Given are vegetal and infrastructural: forest and roads. Atlanta is not a city. It is a landscape.” (Koolhaas, 1994).

Atlanta’s turbulent history is filled with periods of growth, utter destruction, rapid regrowth, a flee to the suburbs, and an eventual return to the city. During these changes many things once visible have faded away and while others that were once invisible have been brought back to our attention. Much of this can be seen in the ever changing peripheries of the city. Atlanta is a city defined by its peripheries and those peripheries have taken many forms over the years, often defining the city in far more ways than one.

Atlanta’s growth after the Civil War was primarily led by its emergence as a hub of industry and rail transportation in the southeast. As the city continued to grow and became more populated there was an eventual shift away from the once defining features of rail transportation as the rail industry began to decline and the city began to shift from industry to commerce. Due to the decline of rail and industry coupled with periods of urban flight, residual spaces have been created and left behind as internal remnants of a time before. With the rise of renewed emphasis on city living inner city neighborhoods are now expanding and engulfing these residual spaces.

These residual spaces were often forgotten, falling into decay and obscurity as the city’s inhabitants focused on developing new communities and neighborhoods within the city center. As these areas were neglected and left behind they slowly became havens for those struggling within society. The poor, the refugee, the addict, the less fortunate, were pushed away and began to inhabit these ‘fringes’ of society, forming their own peripheral communities together.

As architects we are given a gift and with it, a responsibility…

The question is, do we have the courage to make our gift count for something?”

- Samuel Mockbee

“Atlanta is a city without a center... A city defined by peripheries”

- Rem Koolhaas

Figure 1.1

Figure 1.2
The major issue with redevelopment projects in areas such as Atlanta is that they often fail to acknowledge that these areas are in fact populated by homeless individuals who have taken refuge here. Although many developers attempt solutions such as providing "affordable" housing, the reality is that affordable housing simply is not a solution for homeless individuals as the majority of them often cannot qualify for them or even afford them at their reduced rates. As affordable housing and other similar programs (M.O.D, Section 8, etc.) require certain levels of income and proof of employment/ability many of homeless individuals are unable to qualify for programs such as these.

The lack of significant help available to those falling below the income standards for affordable housing is a major issue. As of now there are very few programs that actually provide a clear step by step process to move up and out of homelessness. The major issue with redevelopment projects is that they often fail to acknowledge that these areas are now thrust into the spotlight as possible locations for redevelopment projects. As Atlanta has continued to grow and expand with new inner city neighborhoods seeking to maximize their ability and power to influence and shape the lives of everyday people. Architecture is an art that has the opportunity to effect the lives of ordinary people. As architects, our every action and every decision is a rallying call for opponents of developments such as homeless shelters, pedestrian parks, industrial parks, rail lines, airports, and other projects that residents fear will negatively affect, devalue, or endanger their lives or property due to their perceived controversial nature. NIMBY-ism is a difficult concept as it pits individualism against social responsibility.

NIMBY-ism also brings up moral and ethical dilemmas. While there are very few solutions to the problem of displaced individuals many developers often results in nothing getting done at all. These differing beliefs and ways of thinking often lead to great deal of conflict and discussion and far too often arise as to what is to be done with these people as many homeless already taking shelter. The issue of further displacing the homeless, this project will tackle the transitional phase of these "fringe" areas making the future transformations a positive for all parties of the community.

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While there is still a significant homeless population that resides within the inner city of Atlanta, many have taken up refuge in these ‘fringe’ areas in order to escape from the harshness of the city. These areas provide a relative safety in anonymity that is provided through the low use and low public visibility found here. The terrain and geography also provides expanded opportunities for self-built shelters. Rather than being forced to sleep on the streets, the fringe allows for residents to construct more long-standing camps away out of site and out of the mind of the public.

“If you look at the Earth without architecture, it’s sometimes a little bit unpleasant. So there is this basic human need to do shelter in the broadest sense of the word...”

- Peter Zumthor

Often existing along the exterior corridor of Atlanta, many of these peripheral communities are located along access points to some kind of transportation. Existing outside of the heart of the city provides many benefits and opportunities, but also requires the need for some kind of transportation into the city for food, supplies, and job opportunities that are not present on site. The location of many of these peripheral camps are dependent on their access to transportation services such as buses, MARTA, and other rail yards.

The ‘fringe’ areas also provide aspects of (in)visibility that can be favorable to those seeking shelter in urban areas. Here they are provided with the opportunity to find peace by being further out of sight. This allows the inhabitants to construct more long-term shelters that provide a higher quality of safety and protection from the elements. Rather than having to rely on pop-up shelters that must be moved daily to avoid the public, residents are able to establish more long-standing settlements, even forming small hidden communities with others in the area. This can be beneficial as the added number of eyes can often increase the level of security through safety in numbers. However, this can also be exploited when communities become too large, when getting lost in the crowd can result in higher levels of crime. Many times, settlements often react with a sort of natural population leveling as inhabitants move into and away from settlements in order to find the middle ground.

The ‘fringe’ acts as a haven for struggling individuals as it provides an escape from the harshness of the city, access to transportation, the ability to remain invisible, and the opportunity for permanence.

“This is the core of architecture: To provide a space for human beings.”

- Peter Zumthor
2.2 Permanence

A simple element of importance for homeless individuals is the level of permanence that a structure has. Levels of permanence can vary from short term, temporary (disaster relief), to more solid, long term construction, and even hybrid models that combine the durability and protection of long term structures with the easy breakdown and mobility of temporary structures. These varying levels of permanence each offer unique benefits but also have their own limitations. Temporary shelters are often used in disaster relief, and can be set up quickly to provide shelter for those in need. They offer mobility and flexibility, allowing the user to move around as needed. However, their downside is that they are often temporary and lack the durability for long exposure to the elements. Long term shelters are known for their considerably more durable, protective qualities as well as providing a better sense of place. A variety of permanent shelters can be found, ranging from ‘brick and mortar’ shelters to tiny houses. Each type of shelter has its own advantages and disadvantages. The idea is that this is a middle step for them, helping them move from the street/woods back into a place of their own. Shelters also strive for similar goals but are more commonly one large communal space where larger groups are able to reside. The downside to these types of shelters is that their permanence can often result in dependence and stagnation. These shelters are commonly opposed by NIMBY’s, claiming that these types of settlements will degrade the area by harboring higher concentrations of crime. Hybrid units are a newer model that provides the positive aspects of temporary structures’ breakdown and transportation abilities along with the durability and permanence of longer term shelters. Units such as these have started appearing for uses such as disaster relief, military use, and even some homeless communities.
2.2.1 Partial Permanence

“The city of Atlanta understands that community engagement and involvement is an integral part of shaping the future of Atlanta. The Atlanta City Studio will continue to move around the city to ensure that every community can help guide us.”

- Tim Keane

The Atlanta City Studio is an excellent example of testing the notion of permanence as a driving programmatic element. Founded in 2016 as part of the City of Atlanta’s Department of City Planning, Atlanta City Studio acts as an incubator and workspace where both design professionals and interested citizens can meet and discuss ideas about future development plans. As part of the Studio’s mission, the studio will relocate every 6 months to a year. This is in effort to reach civilians all around the city of Atlanta. Its first lease was in the recently redeveloped Ponce City Market, a prime hotspot of urban growth and redevelopment along the Atlanta Beltline. After completing its very successful first lease, the Studio has now moved to Cascade Road in southwest Atlanta. This area is also currently undergoing considerable growth and the Atlanta City Studio hopes to involve the community in its efforts as much as possible.

The idea of partial permanence becomes an excellent case study as a way to reach out to large groups of people in different areas as individual areas are experiencing their own unique changes. This allows for close collaboration between the citizens directly affected and the officials making those decisions.

2.2.2 Permanence & Process

The ongoing experiment of Dignity Village is a unique attempt to end homelessness by providing transitional housing. Dignity Village stresses community and self-empowerment as key elements to their success. Starting off as a homeless ‘tent city’, Dignity Village became officially incorporated as a tiny house village in 2004. From here, 43 small, individual houses were constructed on the property that provided beds and a propane heater for approximately 60 people. The Village is a self-governed entity with strict rules that allow it to remain a safe and effective community. Residents pay $35 per month for rent and are required to be an active member of the community and contribute to the upkeep and general welfare of the village. As a transitional housing village, their contract limits residents to a maximum of 2 years of residence in order to promote self-sufficiency in the future as well as to allow for new residents to join the community.

Dignity Village values the aspect of permanence and understands the effect that it has on the psyche. Though having a place to call their own and becoming an active part in a community of others, residents are able regain some dignity and begin to help themselves get back onto their feet.
Forced Closure of Peachtree & Pine Homeless Shelter
City of Atlanta 2017

2.2.3 Permanence & Problems

The Peachtree and Pine Homeless Shelter in Atlanta has long been one of the biggest shelters in Atlanta, often housing of 500+ residents. This year, the decision was made to close the shelter, forcing those currently taking shelter there to leave. Reasons for the closure vary from crime, disease, and other hazards. A major issue resulting from this closure is that there were no preparations or plans set in place for the relocation of the 500+ residents currently taking shelter there.

One of the driving factors surrounding its closure was the rising visibility and profitability of Peachtree property. The area has been steadily growing and becoming a highly sought after area. Due to lack of sufficient funding, the shelter was already struggling with general maintenance and upkeep as well as adequately dealing with the high number of residents currently taking shelter there. The shortcomings of the shelter and its building value made the shelter a prime candidate for redevelopment.

The Peachtree & Pine Shelter is a prime example of the negative aspects that permanence can have on a shelter. Keeping that many people together in a high visual traffic area for an extended period led to increased concern from local neighbors and NIMBYs. The growing concerns over safety and welfare of the surrounding neighborhoods as well as the economic aspects of the shelter’s location ultimately doomed the shelter.

2.3 Visibility

A major aspect of shelter of homeless individuals is the degree visibility that is provided, both from the sight and from the design of the shelter itself. Because a vast majority of homeless self-built shelters are illegally built on privately owned land or quickly erected in side streets and alleyways, the level of invisibility is a crucial aspect of the shelter. Many individuals strive for invisibility in order to avoid land owners and law enforcement in hopes of maintaining a quiet and peaceful relationship out of sight, allowing them to continue to take shelter there.

Another opposing aspect of visibility is when the desire for increased visibility can play a key part in a public structure’s success. Many community centers strive to have highly visible designs so as to increase visual traffic and draw attention in order to better advertise their programs and services. Vacant residences can also go a long way in challenging stigmas about community shelters. A better designed, trendier appearing buildings that prudently fits into a neighborhood will likely be more easily accepted by the community than one that is run down and abrasive in appearance.

David Hemmings

“[The Mayor] doesn’t want to see us return to Third World conditions. I think the operative word is see.”

Figure 2.7

Figure 2.8

Figure 2.9
2.3.1 (IN)Visibility

‘Low-Rider’ Shelter
Atlanta, Georgia
Mad Housers
1987 - Present

The Mad Housers are an Atlanta-based non-profit corporation that seeks to provide shelters for homeless individuals and families. In their early days, the Mad Housers took extra precautions and maintained an air of relative secrecy about their work, hoping to provide some anonymity and protection to the individuals they were helping. Due to the pressures from stigma and NIMBY-ism, the Mad Housers adopted methods of extreme low visibility shelters. Constructing the shelters from discarded or donated materials, a set of standard designs were created that prioritized having a small footprint, minimalist design, and low visibility. While minimalist in design, the huts provide durable shelters that provide insulation from the cold but can also allow for air flow during warmer months. The Mad Housers also provide their plans and designs for free online, allowing other individuals to join in creating shelters for the homeless.

The goals of the Mad Housers are simple; provide individuals with their own shelter, a place that they can call home. Current president Tracy Woodard states that “The idea is to feed hope and provide the opportunity to give goals.” Their belief is that through providing individuals with a place to call their own will encourage them and provide a certain degree of self-confidence and improved self-worth.

“We’re not trying to build monuments or permanent structures. We are trying to build someone a shelter.”
- Jim Devlin
2.3.2 (Dual)Visibility

Women’s Shelter
Undisclosed Location
Montana State University
2002 - Present

In 2002, Montana State University was approached by a local battered women’s shelter interested in making some repairs and improvements on their current location. As the shelter is meant to be a safe location for women facing abusive situations to flee and find protection, discretion was high on the list of demands. The University noted that while most shelters of this type simply try to camouflage themselves with purposefully bland exteriors, this didn’t have to be the only solution. They theorized that “A building can stand out if you don’t know what’s in it” (Christopher Livingston). To this, the students designed a building in the guise of a unique apartment building, carefully controlling views into and out of the building so as to maximize security and safety while still allowing natural light in. The interior of the building was designed so as to reflect the healing nature of the shelter itself. Through bright colors and natural light, the shelter is meant to break the tradition of the usual dark, drab interiors of most shelters. Here it is the duality of interior and exterior that help to reinforce the meaning and hope of the battered women’s shelter.

In this case, the aspects of visibility are challenged as the design camouflages the building by standing out, using a false forced perception of interior programs.

2.4.1 Provisions in Action

“Everyone, rich or poor, deserves a shelter for the soul.”
- Samuel Mockbee

Another aspect of ‘fringe’ living is the availability of access services. Whether it’s shelters, soup kitchens, or help programs, homeless individuals are often dependent on many of these provided services for survival. The variety of needs are often based upon the location and the general circumstances of the area. The availability of these services can have major impacts on the entire community, getting volunteers involved in helping the community as well as providing homeless individuals with basic life sustaining needs.

There are a number of services and provisions that can be offered by the community including basic housing and shelter needs or supplies, access to adequate sanitation and medical treatment, food and water donations, as well as opportunities for community involvement and job opportunities, among many others.
Shelter Home for the Homeless  
Javier Larraz Architects  
Navarre, Spain  
2010

Javier Larraz Architects’ proposal provides shelter for two groups, a traveling hostel service and housing for medium stay stable homeless persons. The idea behind the design was that this shelter would go above and beyond simply providing food and shelter, it would provide real opportunities to improve one's quality of life. The shelter's design utilizes a small, thin plot of land and offers a high quality design that provides high levels of privacy while also creating a sense of pride among residents and passersby. The facility provides bedrooms, toilets and bathrooms, a laundry facility, dining rooms, common areas, as well as working areas.

2.4.3 Provisions in Progress

Quinta Monroy  
ELEMENTAL, Alejandro Aravena  
Tarapacá, Chile  
2003

Architect Alejandro Aravena of ELEMENTAL came up with a creative solution to maximizing use of the land available, allowing more people to inhabit the site at an affordable cost and with the ability for the inhabitants to personalize and grow their own home. The project started when they were asked to solve the problem of 100 families illegally occupying 5,000 sqm of space and provide housing for them that fit the Chilean Housing Policy. The problem came in the question of how to best utilize the land provided, maximize the number of inhabitants without overcrowding, all while keeping the cost of construction to a minimum. Rather than creating individual traditional style houses for each family, which would drastically eat up land use, or raw housing or high rise housing, both of which would face overcrowding with any form of user expansion, the final solution came in the form of a ‘half-built’ staggered block housing plan. Each unit would be constructed with the more expensive living needs (bathroom, kitchen) and while the spaces were not initially constructed, provided the structural framework for further expansion by the families. This kept the initial construction costs down by treating the project as an investment, allowing the inhabitants to finish on their own, according to their individual families needs and preferences. This helps the inhabitants live and grow at their own pace while in part designing and building their own space, helping them to obtain a stronger sense of ‘home’.

2.4.2 Provisions for Future

The facility offers these services in exchange for the residents active involvement in maintenance such as cleaning, washing, gardening and painting. The hope is that through this mutually beneficial relationship those staying will be able to get back onto their feet and learn valuable skills through their stay at the shelter. This symbiotic relationship allows the shelter to be largely self-sustaining and remain successful and allow it to continue running and helping as many members of the community as possible.
In choosing a viable site for this thesis, an area needed to be selected in which ‘fringe’ conditions had been created over time and were acting to provide refuge to homeless individuals. As is often the case for many ‘fringe’ areas, the selected area would also need to be under pressure of redevelopment that could negatively effect those currently taking shelter in the relatively (in)visibility provided by the ‘fringe’. This inversion of focus occurs in areas that were once forgotten or neglected and are now cast into the center of focus through redevelopment projects. Likewise, homeless inhabitants of many of these areas are losing their anonymity and being thrust into the spotlight as the public’s attention shifts to the land that once provided them with shelter.

In Atlanta, many of these conditions are met along the old railroad corridor and along sections of interstate overpasses. These areas are currently being considered for and undergoing massive urban redevelopment projects that look to transform them thriving neighborhoods of pedestrian trails, public transit, and urban revitalization. As redevelopment projects progress the spotlight becomes further focused on the people currently taking shelter in these areas, placing them in imminent danger of being displaced further out of society.

The addition of the Amazon Headquarters in Seattle has received mixed reviews from critics. While some are enthusiastic about the urban renewal and the addition of new shops, restaurants, and high-end buildings others are beginning to notice the societal changes that have taken place. Many of the original mom and pop shops have disappeared and the small homeless populations are being forced to alter their lifestyles and move out as the city reorders itself to suit the new business executives that now live there. The cities poor are being neglected in favor of welcoming new business and new money into the city.

This case is interesting to note as the Atlanta Gulch has come up in discussion for the proposed Amazon HQ 2. While early proposals promise positive urban renewal, new parks, and $80 million square feet of office space, one has to wonder if negative consequences similar to Seattle would arise with the addition of Amazon HQ 2.

Adding to the problem are the city’s outdated zoning laws. State laws now require at least one zone allowing for emergency shelters without a permit, but Atlanta’s current zoning requires additional approval processes for any permits. “They don’t have a shelter, they don’t have a transitional house, they don’t have a single unit of low-income subsidized housing” - Osha Neumann

The Albany Bulb peninsula was once an old scrapyard but has since become home to large art sculptures and an encampment of approximately 60 people. The inhabitants have been living there in a peaceful coexistence with the rest of society for some 30+ years. Some claim to have even left the streets to come live there and many consider it their home.

There are now plans to evict the inhabitants as the state is now pushing for the land to be turned into a new state park. While the city has raised funds to aid in the moving process, many inhabitants worry that with their limited income and no social security that they won’t be able to afford a place to live that is as safe as the camp. Advocates for the camp’s inhabitants claim that through the eviction of the camp, many of the current inhabitants are likely to end up back on the streets.

Adding to the problem are the city’s outdated zoning laws. State laws now require at least one zone allowing for emergency shelters without a permit, but Atlanta’s current zoning requires additional approval processes for any permits. “They don’t have a shelter, they don’t have a transitional housing, they don’t have a single unit of low-income subsidized housing” - Osha Neumann

The addition of the Amazon Headquarters in Seattle has received mixed reviews from critics. While some are enthusiastic about the urban renewal and the addition of new shops, restaurants, and high-end buildings others are beginning to notice the societal changes that have taken place. Many of the original mom and pop shops have disappeared and the small homeless populations are being forced to alter their lifestyles and move out as the city reorders itself to suit the new business executives that now live there. The cities poor are being neglected in favor of welcoming new business and new money into the city.

This case is interesting to note as the Atlanta Gulch has come up in discussion for the proposed Amazon HQ 2. While early proposals promise positive urban renewal, new parks, and $80 million square feet of office space, one has to wonder if negative consequences similar to Seattle would arise with the addition of Amazon HQ 2.

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After its destruction during the end of the Civil War, Atlanta's resurgence was largely led and shaped by its role as a major railway hub for the southeastern United States. Atlanta emerged as a major player in industry and transportation and shaped much of the city to suit this new role. As the city continued to grow and expand, rail companies saw the need to expand their main rail lines and proposed a charter for the Atlanta Belt Railway Company that would create a loop of connecting ‘belt’ rail lines that encircle the city of Atlanta. This initiative began as a joint effort between multiple rail lines over a number of years from 1871 - 1908 and implemented over 22 miles of track. The addition and completion of these new rail lines coincided with a massive boom in both the Atlanta economy (the railroad industry tripled in 30 years) and population (a 611% increase 1880-1920) as the city entered a new century.

As the 1900's reached their later years, the railroad industry saw a steady decline in Atlanta as the city moved to a more commercial/residential nature and away from its industrial origins. This was coupled with the addition of I-285, a massive interstate loop that more than doubled the size of the rail line corridor as Atlanta entered an era where automotive dominated city. This progression led to the steady decay of the original rail lines and many sections were abandoned and forgotten.

Similarly, with the introduction of the interstate systems, sections of Atlanta were essentially split and divided by the harsh lines of I-75, I-85, & I-20. These interstates not only split sections of the city, but left large amounts of residual space along the edges left over. Too small for many developments, or too close to roads for comfort, these areas often become refuge areas for homeless individuals seeking shelter along the interstates and under overpasses.

Projects such as the Beltline and the Stitch are seeking to turn these relatively unused and forgotten spaces into thriving urban developments and while these projects certainly have their merit, they often tend to disregard the homeless communities already located there.

In narrowing down the list of possible sites, a set of criteria was established in order to determine areas with higher rates of need and opportunities to succeed. The list of criteria is as follows:

- >25% of population below poverty line
- < 0.5 mile to public transport
- < 0.5 miles to health services
- < 1 mile to existing shelters/aid centers
- Within 1 mile of planned redevelopment project

Final locations will be determined based on number of criteria met and highest proximity to priority items.
The Beltline Expansion on the Westside Trail is planned to redevelop the area south of RDA Boulevard to University Avenue. The objective is to add over 10 acres of park space, 165 residences, ground level retail spaces as well as streetscar/light rail transportation along the Westside Trail.

The Gulch/Greenline Project
The Gulch/Greenline Project is aimed at redeveloping the area of the ‘gulch’ (abandoned rail yards and now used as parking lots) and the adjacent East-West Corridor. The proposal includes 94 acres of redevelopment including parks, enhanced urban space, & future plans for an intercity commuter railway.

The I75/I-85 Stitch proposal examines areas and communities along the interstate that have been split in two and divided by the addition of the north/south interstate. This project seeks to ‘stitch’ the two sides back together by capping sections of the interstate and filling the spaces with parks and infrastructure.

The Eastside Beltline Trail Extension is focusing on redeveloping areas along Memorial Drive and its crossing over I-20 and the existing CSX rail-yard. The plan calls for enhanced focus on mixed use developments of low density commercial and residential redevelopment.
Health/Medical Services

There are a large number of health and medical services available in the Atlanta area and are well distributed throughout the city to provide easy access to services in all parts of the city. These vary in type and size, with focuses varying from children, specialist care, emergency facilities, and low income health services. A few notable locations are:

• WellStar Atlanta
• Grady Memorial Hospital
• Mercy Care
• JenCare Medical Center

Homeless Aid Services

There are a number of locations throughout Atlanta that provide services and temporary housing for homeless individuals. A few notable locations are:

• Genesis House
• HOPE Atlanta
• Odyssey III
• Restart 320
The city’s MARTA system, coupled with the public transit buses provide reliable access throughout metro Atlanta. A few notable locations are:

- John Portman Station
- Peachtree Center Station
- King Memorial Station
- Five Points Station

Based off of the overlay of these diagrams, four areas have been pinpointed as possible sites. Each of these locations meet the pre-described requirements stated above, and have high concentrations of transit, health services, planned redevelopment projects, and existing homeless services.
3.5 Site Choice

The selected site is the lot on the southeastern side of I-75/I-85, north of Decatur Street. This site was selected because of its close proximity to multiple public transit access locations, several medical locations including some geared toward low-income patients, two on-site homeless help organizations, and within a mile of the proposed redevelopment of the Eastside Trail Extension.

This site offers the possibility of a partnership with the existing organizations and offers a wide variety of health and social services geared toward helping individuals find financial and personal stability as well as locating a permanent residence. The empty sections of the lot present an opportunity for an on-site temporary housing community for those facing immediate displacement.

Two Marta Stations are located with a half mile of the site, the King Memorial Station (left) and the Georgia State Station (right).

Two major health centers are located nearby, Grady Hospital and walk in clinic (left) and Mercy Care Health Center which offers medical service to low income patients (right).

Two homeless help organizations are located on site, Odyssey III which offers assistance in finding temporary shelters as well as long term residences (left) and Project Community Connections which offers free classes in finance, health practices, as well as dedicated case workers (right).

The site is nearby the Eastside Trail Extension and has two major developments planned in the Memorial Drive area as well as the I-85/I-75 Stitch Project.
3.6 Site Diagraming

- Directional Wind Diagram
- Solar Path Diagram
- Transportation Diagram
- Public vs. Private Spaces Diagram
- Proposed Program Diagram
4.1 Program

The concept for the programmatic layout of the design focuses on the idea of transitioning the homeless out of extreme poverty and providing them with the skills and necessities needed to re-integrate them back into society. The program will seek to involve the community in this effort by offering a number of services that will be open to the public as well as encouraging volunteering in the community. The individuals wishing to live here will apply to the program that will assist in their re-integration into society.

The design of Site 1 will consist of a renovation and redesign of the existing Odyssey and Community Connections buildings, a new community center, as well as the addition of a community of small individual dwelling units that will act as transitional housing for homeless individuals.

4.2 Program/Site Codes

In designing small dwellings, there are a number of specific design codes that have been made in regards to residential structures that fall under 400 sq ft.

Revisions to the 2012 IRC in regards to Tiny Houses - Revised Jan. 2018

APPENDIX AS102

TINY HOUSE. A dwelling that is 400 square feet (37 m2) or less in floor area excluding lofts.

SECTION 304

MINIMUM ROOM AREAS

R304.1 Minimum area. Habitable rooms shall have a floor area of not less than 70 square feet (6.5 m2).

SECTION AS103

CEILING HEIGHT

AS103.1 Minimum ceiling height. Habitable space and hallways in tiny houses shall have a finished ceiling height of not less than 6 feet 8 inches (2032 mm). Obstructions shall not extend below these minimum ceiling heights including beams, girders, ducts, lighting and other obstructions. Exception: Ceiling height in lofts are permitted to be a maximum of 5 feet (1524 mm).

AS104.1.1 Minimum area. Lofts shall have a floor area of not less than 35 square feet (3.25 m2).

AS104.1.2 Minimum dimensions. Lofts shall be not less than 5 feet (1524 mm) in any horizontal dimension.

AS104.2.2.1 Size and capacity. Ladders accessing lofts shall comply with Sections AS104.2.2.1 and AS104.2.2.2.

AS104.2.2.2 Incline. Ladders shall be installed at 70 to 80 degrees from horizontal.

Other Notable Zoning Codes

Definitions -

Dwelling Unit - Rooms connected, containing independent households. Contains kitchen and sleeping quarters.

Lodging Unit - Living quarters not containing independent kitchen units.

Rooming House - a grouping of lodging units

Accessory Structure - subordinate to principle structure. On same site/premises but not attached.

Notable Codes -

Must provide one private restroom (toilet, sink, shower/ bath) per every 8 occupants

Floor space - 80 sq ft per person, or 50 sq ft per person over 1 inhabitant, 150 sq ft kitchen space is included.

Necessary Zoning Changes

Site is currently Zoned Commercial C-4 but will need to be re-zoned to Residential RG - Sub-area 3 (allowing multiple dwelling and lodging units to be located on one site) in order for proposal to best comply with local zoning codes.

The community garden site can remain as is, as Commercial C-2 currently allows for community gardens.

The Community center site will need to be rezoned from Commercial C-4 to a residential accessory site.
4.3 The Stitch & Relation to Site

The Stitch proposal examines areas along the I-75/85 interstate that have been split and divided by the addition of interstate. The project seeks to ‘stitch’ the two sides back together by capping sections of the interstate and filling spaces with parks and infrastructure to help create a stronger and greener community in Atlanta. The proposal for the Grady Curve section that includes the Decatur Street bridge site entails a Vertical Greening design that seeks to replace the sound walls with natural noise dampening features such as trees and hanging vines. The addition to the city will help break the monotony of the concrete jungle and bring in more natural elements into the city. The Fringe to Focus proposal will seek to engage with the Stitch proposal by actively greening the street edge and creating pedestrian pathways through the wooded areas beside the site, creating public park spaces along the interstate.
4.3 Floor Plan Studies

Based off of current statistics on homelessness, I determined that there were multiple housing types that needed to be addressed and designed. Two different base models create opportunities to house individuals and families. A third base model represents a second tier of the program, a micro-apartment style residence designed for the more stable residents that provides them with higher degrees of freedom and prepares them for their next step out of homelessness. These base models can then be grouped to form smaller sub-communities within the site. The number of these units will be determined based off of the statistics of household types provided by the 2017 Report on Homelessness.
After determining the base unit sizes for the dwellings, the next step was to determine the best layout of the units within the community. The next step was to develop a series of 9 parti diagrams to study spatial relationships and assess their viability based off of their spatial relationships to each other and the ease of flow between them. Diagram #8 was chosen based off of its promising central shared space, its radial flow, and its utilization of multiple faces of the units. After selecting diagram #8 for further study, the design was then treated as a module that could then be mirrored. By subtracting one corner from the base design the design was then able to be mirrored on itself on different axes, thus creating larger clusters of spaces, each with their own individual shared spaces but now with larger shared community spaces.
4.5 Layout Studies/Analysis
5.1 Final Design

The final design for the Fringe to Focus Community includes a mix of ideas and principles gained from intensive studies of precedent projects. Learning from the study of Dignity Village, this design works to create a close-knit community of people seeking to improve their lives and move out of homelessness. The housing units employ the same ideas of efficiency of space and simplicity of construction that has been set in place by the Mild Houses. The smaller housing units are spaced so that the space between the houses can be utilized to meet their individual needs and wants. Much like the units designed by ELEMENTAL, these units provide the bare essentials and provide the structural framework that allows for easy future customization and construction. The community also includes several housing unit types that are proportional to needs of the inhabitants, based off of the data collected on homeless family types. The apartment style homes on the southern edge of the lot are the higher tier houses for those individuals and families who have proven to be stable enough to make the next step in the process of moving up. The small community center on the southeast corner of the site houses a security desk as well as enough restroom facilities for the immediate site. This community also employs similar ideas to those of Dignity Village and the Shelter Home, in that all of the residents will be asked to play an active role in the community. This will include participation in meetups, classes, as well as the general upkeep and grounds-keeping of the community.

The adjacent community center will provide necessary shower units, a community kitchen space, as well as additional classrooms and computer labs that can be used for skills training, educational classes, rehabilitation courses, and for applying for jobs.

The Community garden space will provide some of the food for the residents as well as providing them with work opportunities and the opportunity to sell their produce to the public community.

Community Guidelines

To create the best environment for the community, a number of guidelines will be set in place to ensure the optimal success of the community. Some of the guidelines include:

- All residents must apply to live on site, to be decided on by staff and fellow residents
- There is a 2 year limit on housing, the idea is to provide transitional housing for residents
- All residents must work the facilities and grounds keeping, as well as actively participate in classes.
5.2 Designing for the Future

Although this thesis has primarily focused on a more permanent transitional housing option that utilized the first site choice, the theory and ideas presented in this thesis can be offered and customized to achieve similar goals in a number of ways. While the first design schematic focuses on transitional housing communities, other schematics could include piggybacking off of future redevelopment projects and converting a small percentage of its program space to accommodate micro apartments for sub-low income individuals. Another schematic would further embrace the ideas of impermanence by creating a mobile option. These mobile centers would service at-risk areas and provide individuals with easy access to aid and other services.

Scheme 1 - Transitional Housing Community

Scheme one will be used in areas where there is a significant need for homeless aid, available unused land, and sufficient existing provisions to help support a permanent transitional housing community.

Scheme 2 - Micro-Apartments

Scheme two will be used in areas that are in planned redevelopment areas such as those along the Beltline. This scheme will implement a certain number of micro-apartments into developing apartment projects that will provide housing options to individuals who cannot yet meet the requirements of existing affordable housing.

Scheme 3 - Mobile Aid

Scheme 3 will be used in areas of sudden, rapid redevelopment that are in need of immediate help and are limited on land availability. This option has the ability to come and go as needed and provide help in numerous areas. This mobile option can utilize old buses or POD storage units and provide anything from beds and shelter to showers and sanitation facilities.
6.1 Conclusion

The solution to this thesis is presented in the form of small transitional housing communities that are established in areas that are transitioning from a peripheral area into an area of focus. This site, located along Decatur Street, adjacent to I-75/85 is a prime example of one of these such areas, it is currently an area that is run down and ignored, but through projects such as the Stitch, it is soon to become a prime area of focus. It is also located in a prime location that has access to health services as well as public transportation access. These features will play a key role in aiding the residents of the new community.

To best evaluate the viability of the thesis result, it needs to be assessed based on the three key aspects of fringe living: visibility, permanence, and provisions. In terms of visibility, most fringe dwellers thrive on the aspect of privacy and protection that it provides them, whereas the aspect of visibility is drastically inverted. The reason for this is that by inverting the visibility and making the community highly visible, we are directly calling attention to its existence. No longer will people be able to ignore or deny the issue. Rather than being pushed away, the problem of homelessness now occupies a key focal point in the community. This seeks to involve the community in aiding the effort to fight homelessness while also seeking to fight stigmas about homeless individuals through local public engagement.

In terms of permanence, the community provides a long-standing permanent community residing while also operating on some levels of impermanence. While the initial structures of the community are permanent, the scaffolding provided allows for continued customization and allows for the individuality of residents to be expressed. The guidelines set forth for the community will also limit residencies to two years in an effort to encourage growth and upward movement of residents. This limit will encourage a fresh flow of inhabitants that will further engage with the community and the public.

As for provisions, this thesis proposal seeks to provide medium term housing for residents as well as providing them with access to sanitation facilities, community kitchen space, educational classes, a community garden, and opportunities to advance their personal lives.

Looking into the future of this problem, it is likely that this one architectural proposal will not be enough to solve the issue of homelessness alone, but it does provide a viable framework that can be implemented in transitioning areas throughout the United States. For the site selected, its ideas and theory can be used on a number of sites and scales. A small mobile center could be established that would provide food and sanitation access to areas that are facing sudden change and re-use of land. In areas that are being redeveloped for mixed use commercial and residential, a case could be made for a certain percentage of micro-apartment units to be reserved for transitioning homeless individuals who cannot yet afford ‘affordable housing’.

Although the circumstances and the details may change, it is our duty as architects to continue to work towards ways of making thoughtful meaningful architecture that will help bring about positive changes for our world.

“As architects we are given a gift and with it, a responsibility… The question is, do we have the courage to make our gift count for something?”

- Samuel Mockbee
The issue of homelessness has continued into our modern age because it is often treated similarly to the homeless themselves, disregarded, often ignored, and preferred to be out of public sight. Rather than continue this trend of masking and hiding the problem, an effort should be made to take advantage of redeveloping areas and use them to invert the focus and make a strong, community effort to actively help those in need. Through the use of transition centers utilizing the positive aspects of 'home', community, and help the effort can be made to assist those in need and bring them out of the shadows and back into the community.
"Wake up wondering what you can do for someone who may need you...keep your eyes open...they’re out there... big or small"

-Mark Dakin McKim