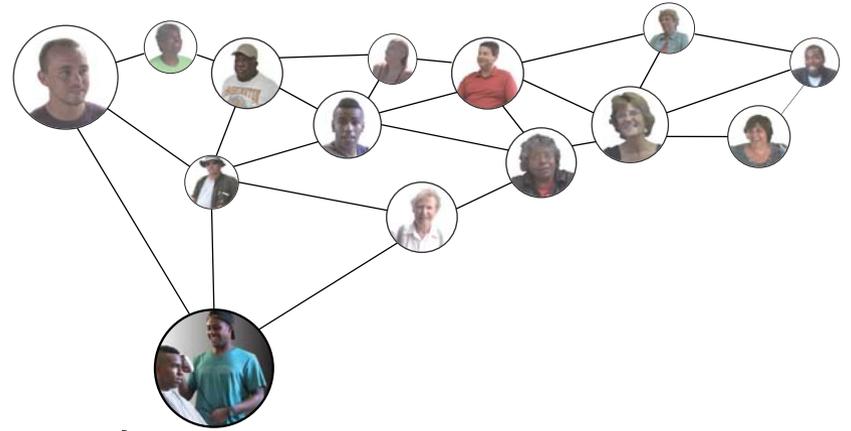


Bedford

Connections



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Foreword

Much of today's Urban Planning focuses on creating comprehensive or master plans that guide future development based on a unified vision for the community. Municipalities pour a tremendous amount of resources into community visioning processes, often hiring consultants to synthesize public input from workshops and focus groups into a community mission statement and identity. However, just as soon as these comprehensive documents are adopted, they are generally stowed away on a shelf as a reference that is seldom used by community members.

We recognize that small towns such as Bedford may not have the capacity to engage the public in large comprehensive planning processes nor the resources to carry out the grand development ideas resulting from comprehensive plans. All plans are subject to the vicissitudes of society, which can be hard to forecast in a rapidly changing world where national and global economies can heavily influence local development. Therefore, small towns with limited resources must make feasible and flexible plans that maximize their investment and allow for adaptations.

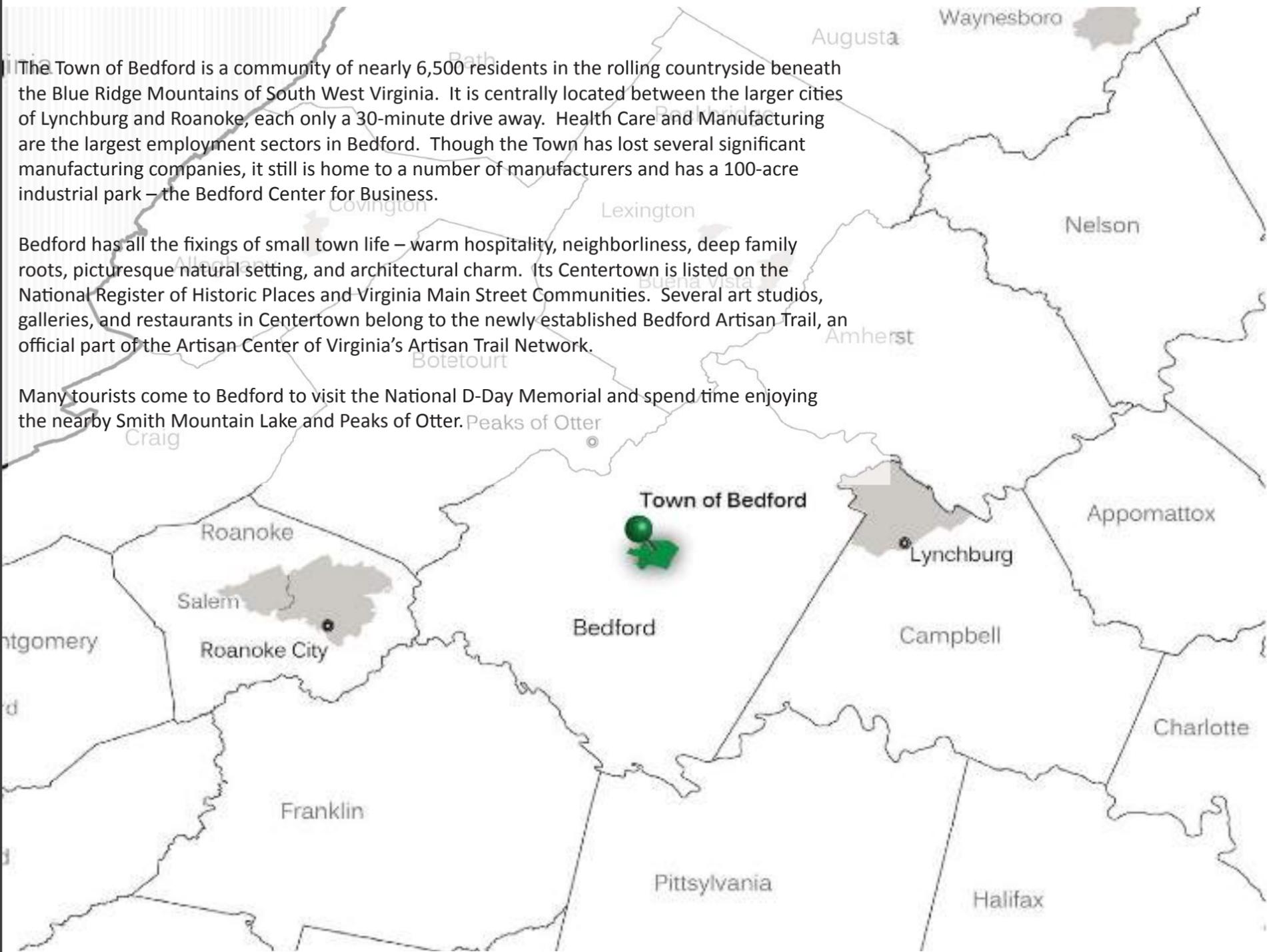
We also recognize that real communities are made up of multiple narratives, groups, and identities. For this reason, it is extremely difficult to generate one overarching vision for a place that reflects the needs and desires of all community members. However, the diversity in our communities is not a hindrance; in fact, it is what makes places interesting, vibrant, and abundant with opportunities. In order for our plans to be effective and beneficial, they must embrace the diverse visions and experiences of the different members of the community.

Bedford Connections is a model for fluid planning. Instead of creating large solutions, we wanted work with the community to design interventions that depend on the community's engagement and capacity. The project's interventions reflect the changing needs and desires of residents. Constructing these interventions, the community can develop areas of Downtown in iterations that allow for more resident engagement, feedback, and dialogue. Our hope is that the interventions become community projects that connect different residents and illustrate ways in which Bedford can continue to grow. We firmly believe that when residents are given agency in the planning and construction of their city or town, they become more active members and stewards of their community.

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Authored + Edited by: Aaron Axhoj Bond + Zachary Robert Klaas



The Town of Bedford is a community of nearly 6,500 residents in the rolling countryside beneath the Blue Ridge Mountains of South West Virginia. It is centrally located between the larger cities of Lynchburg and Roanoke, each only a 30-minute drive away. Health Care and Manufacturing are the largest employment sectors in Bedford. Though the Town has lost several significant manufacturing companies, it still is home to a number of manufacturers and has a 100-acre industrial park – the Bedford Center for Business.

Bedford has all the fixings of small town life – warm hospitality, neighborliness, deep family roots, picturesque natural setting, and architectural charm. Its Centertown is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and Virginia Main Street Communities. Several art studios, galleries, and restaurants in Centertown belong to the newly established Bedford Artisan Trail, an official part of the Artisan Center of Virginia’s Artisan Trail Network.

Many tourists come to Bedford to visit the National D-Day Memorial and spend time enjoying the nearby Smith Mountain Lake and Peaks of Otter.

Table 1: Bedford Census Statistics

	Town of Bedford	Lynchburg Metro	Virginia			
Median Age	45	40	37			
Sex						
-Male	45%	48.0%	49.0%			
-Female	55%	52.0%	51.0%			
Race/Ethnicity						
-White	76.0%	78.0%	70.0%			
-Black	22.0%	17.6%	19.0%			
-American Indian and Alaska Native	0.0%	0.4%	0.3%			
-Asian	0.3%	1.3%	5.5%			
-Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%			
-Some Other Race Alone	0.1%	0.6%	2.3%			
-Two or more races	1.5%	0.2%	2.8%			
-Hispanic or Latino	1.7%	2.0%	7.8%			
Education*						
-High School Graduate or Equivalency	33.1%	32.4%	25.2%			
-Bachelor’s Degree	13.5%	14.7%	20.3%			
Economy						
-Med. Household Income	\$35,863	\$45,953	\$63,636			
-Unemployment Rate	5.6%	7.2%	6.3%			
(Pop 20-60 years)						
-Population in Poverty	21.2%	15.3%	11.1%			
-Households receiving SNAP*	20.2%	12.0%	8.4%			
-Top Industries						
(Employing civilian population 16 years and over)						
1.	Health Care/Educ. Services/ Social Assistance	22.4%	Health Care/Educ. Services/ Social Assistance	24.8%	Health Care/Educ. Services/ Social Assistance	21.2%
2.	Manufacturing	16.4%	Manufacturing	14.6%	Retail Trade	10.9%



Community Interviews
Bedford Farmer's Market
August 6, 2013

Vision

Bedford Connections brings together Bedford residents around the goal of designing public spaces that exceptionally meet the needs of the community and provide a platform for continuous community exchange.

Our mission is threefold:

- Connect residents with each other, local government, and valuable assets Downtown.
- Empower residents to design and construct creative and relevant public space in Centertown.
- Encourage future community development centered around the needs and aspirations of Bedford residents.

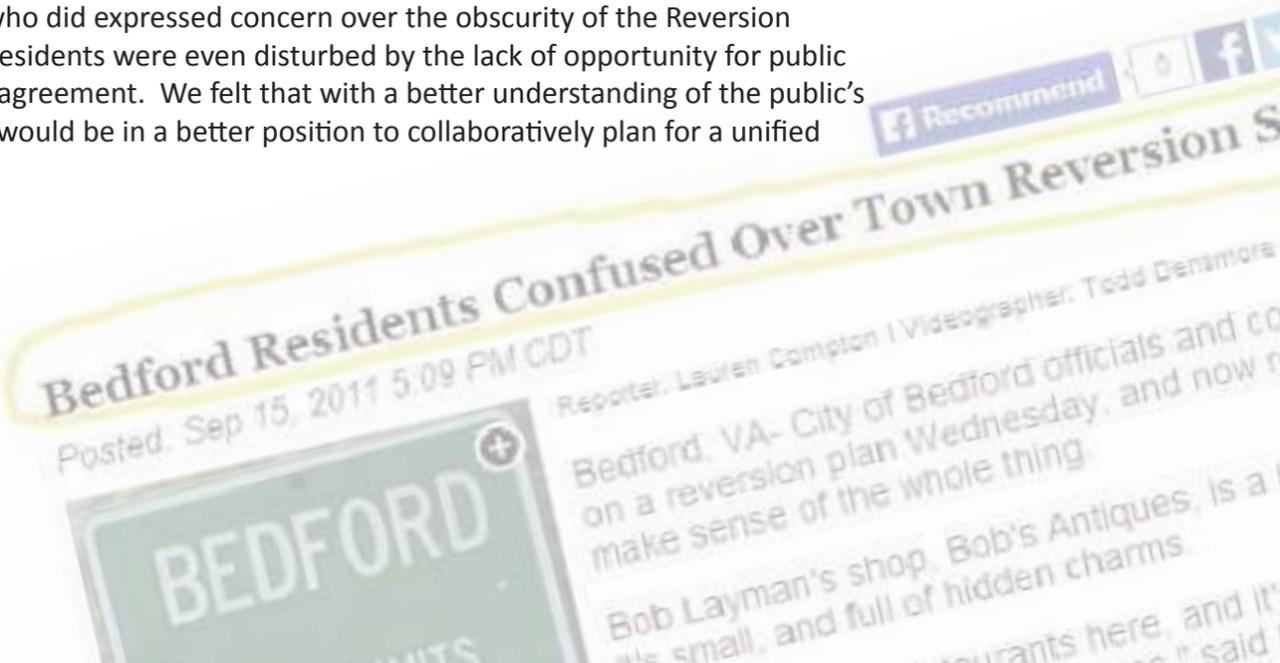
The project is the result of multiple interviews and workshops with different town residents and stakeholders. While we encountered similar sentiments echoing through many of our conversations, we also heard a diversity of stories that conveyed different resident experiences and perceptions of the town. Based on the different narratives we heard and the ideas of residents who participated in our workshops, we designed feasible, small-scale interventions that could be constructed by community members. Collectively, these interventions will form a public space for continuous storytelling, idea sharing, and community engagement.

Why Bedford? Why Now?

On July 1, 2013, Bedford grew more in one day than it had over the last several decades. In accordance with a Voluntary Settlement between the City of Bedford and Bedford County, the City of Bedford reverted to a town in Bedford County. Before the reversion, Bedford had been an independent city since 1968. The reversion was only the beginning of a long list of changes spelled out in the intergovernmental agreement. Perhaps the most important of these changes was the extension of the previous City boundaries into three boundary adjustment areas.

As an independent City, Bedford could not annex any of the surrounding territory belonging to Bedford County. However, as a town within Bedford County, Bedford can finally expand its boundaries. Upon reversion, the Town of Bedford grew by 1.8 square miles, gaining several hundred new residents from the County. The settlement also allows for the Town to incorporate another 6 square miles of contiguous area over the course of the next ten years. With these boundary adjustments, the Town of Bedford will double the size of the old Bedford City boundaries pre-reversion.

Even though the reversion will inevitably bring changes to Bedford, it did not receive the type of attention and community involvement we expected from such a large public decision. In fact very few residents attended the public hearings on the reversion and the few who did expressed concern over the obscurity of the Reversion Committee's decision-making process. Some residents were even disturbed by the lack of opportunity for public input in the drafting of the intergovernmental agreement. We felt that with a better understanding of the public's stories and visions, the new Town and County would be in a better position to collaboratively plan for a unified Bedford.

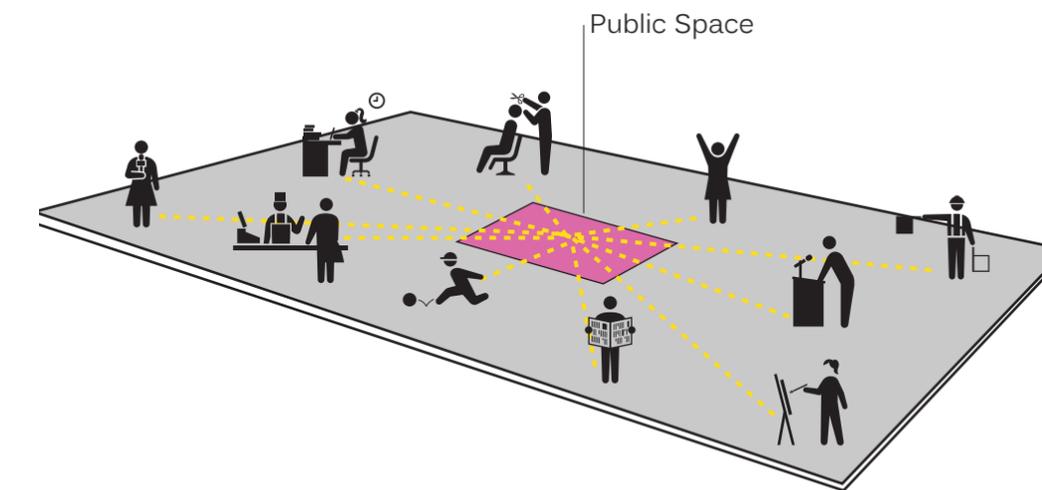


Why Bedford? Why Now?

The reversion and its subsequent changes mark a very pivotal moment in the history of Bedford. The Town of Bedford has a unique opportunity to renew its identity as a place and envision how it would like to develop in the future. As it enters into a new relationship with Bedford County, the town is tasked with balancing the needs of its residents and playing a key role in the economic and social vitality of the County.

Our project seeks to capitalize on this period of transition by providing opportunities for citizens of Bedford to engage in the physical development of their Downtown. Bedford Connections engages the community in assessing its own strengths and needs in order to design community-scale urban interventions in Centertown that illustrate the identity and aspirations of Bedford. By involving citizens in the design and construction of public space, we hope to increase connectivity between residents, neighborhoods, and valuable assets in Bedford. The relationships and collaboration spawned by the project will strengthen the foundation for the town's future planning initiatives. After all, Bedford's future can only be as bright as its relationships are strong.

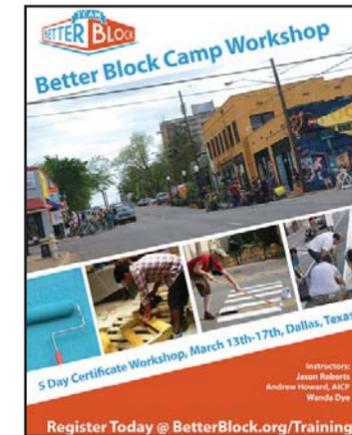
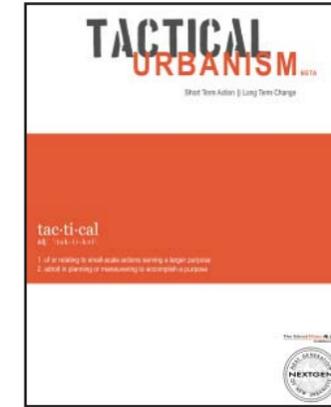
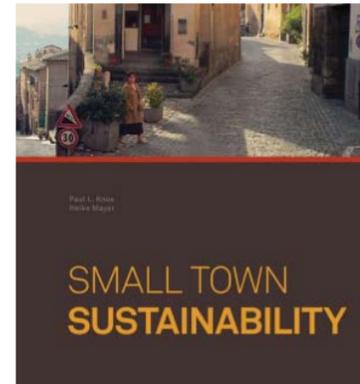
The community interventions resulting from Bedford Connections will create a platform for community exchange and expression that connects residents with each other and local government. Through the process of Bedford Connections, citizens can begin to envision and develop Bedford to best serve and represent its community. Now is the prime time for Bedford's citizens to join in creating the town they desire!



Seeds of Inspiration

We drew inspiration from a number of different sources in order to tailor the process of our project. Both Ideo's Human-Centered Design Toolkit and Stanford d.school's bootcamp bootleg were excellent resources showing how to implement design-thinking practices throughout the lifecycle of a community project. These resources gave us a framework for generating empathetic design. They are full of listening, brainstorming, and design activities that we used to craft our own.

In order to get a better sense of asset-based community projects happening on a small town scale, we referenced publications such as Small Town Sustainability written by Paul Knox and Heike Mayer, professors at Virginia Tech. These resources were helpful in highlighting ways of leveraging local assets to mobilize change in small towns and articulating challenges and issues that small towns face. They provided us case studies illustrating how local networks can successfully create innovative social and economic change in rural settings.



Seeds of Inspiration

The design portion of the project focuses on mobilizing community groups to create vibrant public spaces which respond to community desires. The goal was not to design for the community; rather, it was to enable community members in helping to develop and design the future of their community. We referenced materials such as Tactical Urbanism, a guide which explains the process of creating small-scale urban projects that impact the surrounding context in a great way using a small budget. These projects allow local actors to test ideas within a real context without substantial infrastructure improvements or economic investment. They often transform vacant, underutilized, or obsolete spaces into active areas of everyday life. The physical transformation of these spaces can introduce a larger paradigm shift in the community and encourage residents to think creatively about their community's future.

We found numerous precedents for our project in the Better Block initiative, a movement which provides a means for communities to actively engage in the construction of public spaces. In different places across the nation, communities have recognized the need for improving their public space and mobilized to create change. Their interventions have taken different forms such as an informal crosswalk painted across a busy street by locals. Although a local government usually removes these spontaneous improvements, they more than often recognize the need which the improvements sought to address and sometimes go as far as adopting the improvements in an official plan. These creative small-scale urban interventions not only help respond to issues quickly; they also revive neglected urban areas.

The Process

Bedford Connections consists of a four-phase process – **Hear**, **Ideate**, **Create**, and **Construct** – for developing a vibrant public space Downtown. The process gives deliberate attention to the desires and experiences of the daily users of Bedford – its residents. Each of the phases incorporates opportunities for residents to participate and collaborate with others.

First, in the Hear phase, we focused on listening to the different needs, aspirations, and stories of Bedford residents. The Ideate phase used the information collected in the Hear phase to determine the project's site and develop prototypes for the site's design. In the Create Phase, we elaborated on the ideas and prototypes of residents to create finished designs of community interventions for the project's site. The last phase, Construct, lies in the hands of residents and community partners that have expressed interest in the project. The Construct phase of this toolkit gives several considerations for implementing the project's community interventions. We have designed each of the community interventions so that they can be feasibly constructed with local resources and volunteer effort.

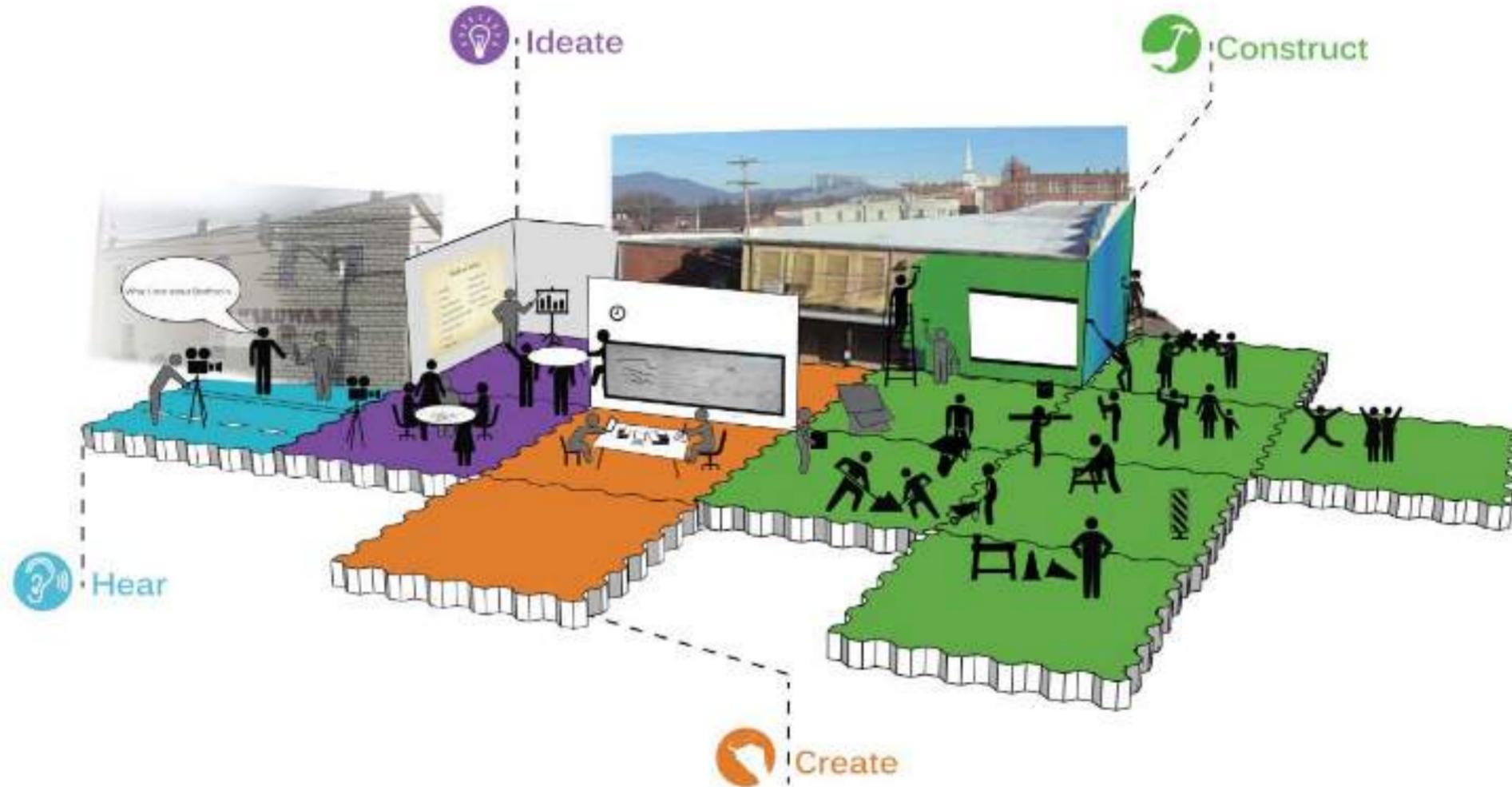


Fig. 1: Process Diagram



Pop-Up Workshop
Bower Center for the Arts
August 10, 2013

HEAR

From August 4th to 12th, 2013, we performed a community assessment in Bedford to better understand and appreciate its history, people, and assets. During this time we conducted interviews with a wide range of people. We spoke with long-time residents and newcomers; residents who use the Downtown and those who don't; business owners and passersby. In each of the interviews, we asked participants to share their experience living in Bedford. We relied on appreciative inquiry, focusing on ways in which Bedford is exciting and life-giving for people in order to discover residents' passions, hopes, and stories of their town. We found that people generally and genuinely wanted to tell their story. Whether residents expressed joy, hope, or disappointment, their stories and experience were intimately connected to the town and its community.

In addition to interviews, we hosted two community workshops at the Bedford Public Library where participants analyzed Bedford's Downtown, identifying prominent features. Through cognitive mapping exercises, residents illustrated their perceptions of different areas in town.

August 4 - 12	Community Interviews
August 10	Workshop
August 11	Workshop

Community Interviews



We asked residents:

How would you describe Bedford? What brought you to Bedford and what keeps you in Bedford?

What excites you about Bedford? What does your ordinary day in Bedford look like?

What do you think Bedford will look like twenty years from now?

How would you like Bedford to be in the future? How has Bedford changed over the years?

Would you like to see anything change? If so, what would you like to see change?



This is what we heard:

Bedford is receptive to growth and change



“This was as good a place as any to start a small business and it turned out to be successful.”



“I would support anybody with some positive change.”



“I'd love to see more attendance at our council meetings... and I would like to see more people involved in Town Government.”



“No matter where you come from, we are friendly.”

There is a need for bringing people together



“There needs to be a time where you step away from doing all the work your'e doing and get people together to do social things and have conversations about what they want.”



“We all got to meet on mutual ground... It's like everybody is kind of separated; everybody is wrapped up in doing what they're doing. Everyone has a story to tell but not everybody wants to listen or tell it.”



“We need different activities to get people out.”

Bedford currently lacks opportunities and amenities for children and young adults



“This town will make you old.”



“I would love for us to get more things for the children right here in the City of Bedford, to keep them busy and have them work their minds.”



“The teenagers need something...more non-threatening places for teenagers to hang out I think would be of great help in Bedford.”



“We do probably need a few more activities for young people...we probably need some after school and weekend activities.”



“Like most parents around here, my concern is that if my children go away for college it's likely that they won't come back.”

Community Interviews

Bedford is a Friendly Community



“The people are really friendly and accepting.”



“I like the people; I like the friendliness.”



“It’s a good family place.”



“We are close; everybody knows everybody.”



“Small, friendly town.”

Bedford has multiple identities.



“Average small town, I suppose?”



“I don’t know if there is a homogenous community. There are communities and different places for those communities...often times there is not a lot of cross over.”



“World’s Best Little Town”

Community Interviews



“It’s like a step back in a page of history.”



“We are more of a retirement community...we have been for a number of years.”

Bedford is in a transition period and the community will need to continue to find ways to grow in order to thrive.



“Bedford is trying to figure out what’s next.”



“People want to see the town thrive.”



“It needs to upgrade a little more...make it exciting – the way it’s supposed to look.”



“The town either stays small and dies or it keeps the same spirit and grows.”



“The driving force of change has been people themselves – individuals who saw their town in decline and were willing to step up and figure out what to do to make it better.”

Centertown Analysis

Throughout our time in Bedford, we paid particular attention to the form and function of Centertown in order to analyze its current conditions and discern future opportunities for its future development.



Here is what we saw:



Fig. 2: Parking Area v. Public Space Area in Centertown

Parking vs. Public Space

Despite the common perception that Centertown lacks parking spaces, there is a lot of space dedicated to parking in the Centertown area. However, many parking spaces are underutilized primarily due to issues of design. Improvements to lot line stripping, signage, and pedestrian connections would increase the convenience and use of the existing parking lots.

Contrary to its large parking area, Centertown's public space is very limited. There are few public outdoor spaces where residents can gather and interact with each other. Public space plays an integral role in making a downtown inviting and comfortable for all. Quality public spaces allow for residents to spend longer periods of time enjoying downtown.

2nd Story Residential and Adaptive Re-use

Centertown's old and classic buildings make it such a unique and valuable place. Built before the introduction of the automobile, Centertown's buildings were designed to create a walkable and comfortable environment for pedestrians. Their unique architectural details would be hard to re-create today when much construction is now pre-fabricated or built to standard. Therefore, it is vital that Bedford encourages adaptive and creative uses of these older buildings in order to keep them vibrant spaces of activity drawing people to Centertown. Bedford has many successful examples of re-using buildings for purposes other than the use they were intended to serve. In fact, some of the most active spaces, such as the art galleries downtown, are within re-purposed buildings.

More and more people are recognizing the value and convenience of living downtown where everything is in walking distance and there are many different opportunities for entertainment and shopping. Bedford already has several opportunities for living downtown. Many residents that we talked with shared a desire for creating more second story apartments in Centertown. These residential opportunities would increase activity downtown and potentially attract younger adults.



Fig. 3: 2nd Story and Adaptive Re-Use Examples and Potential in Centertown



Fig. 4: Centertown's Building Uses Map

Centertown has a mix of different uses making it an interesting and vibrant community. The two predominant building uses are general retail, such as antique and furniture stores, and professional services, which includes banks and attorney offices.

A number of religious and civic institutions are located in Centertown. These institutions bring a steady flux of people to Centertown and give it a sense of history and community pride. While restaurants are present in Centertown, many residents expressed a desire to have more entertainment opportunities especially at night.



Fig. 5: Centertown Foot Traffic Map



Community Workshop
Bedford Public Library
August 10, 2013

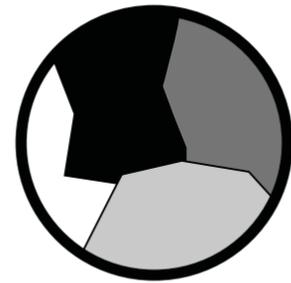
Workshops

We hosted three workshops in order to collect resident's perceptions of Centertown. Two of our workshops were held in the Bedford Public Library. For our third workshop, we set up a mobile post at different art galleries during Centertown's 2nd Friday event where local restaurants and venues stay open later for the public. At these different locations, we were able to elicit the participation of numerous passersby that we might not have reached otherwise.

At each of our workshops, we asked each participant to identify 7 different elements on a map of Centertown and its surrounding area: landmarks, nodes, paths, districts, edges, barriers, and areas of promising potential. Participants were encouraged to contemplate on their mental image of Bedford and their daily interactions within its space. When it was time to draw out each element on the map, residents explained their ideas to each other, sharing their perspectives of Bedford with the group. Residents identified elements differently but were in general consensus with their finished image of Bedford.

Elements of the City

In our workshops, we asked residents to identify seven elements from their image of the larger Centertown area. These elements included:



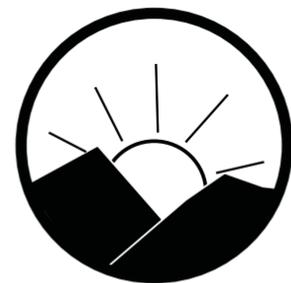
Districts

Districts are areas with a specific character which creates a cohesive image of the area.



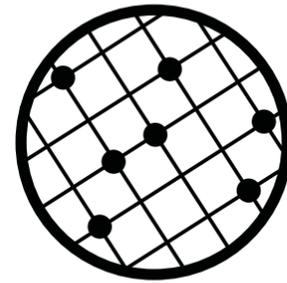
Landmarks

Landmarks are the key elements within the community which would be considered as the main monuments in the city.



Potentials

These are spaces perceived by the community as spaces with potential for growth and an opportunity for filling a community need in the near future.



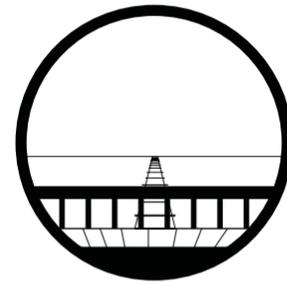
Nodes

Nodes are spaces where individuals within the community congregate and meet, often to travel to another location.



Pathways

Pathways are links between places and spaces in the community which unite individual elements.



Edges

Edges provide a comfortable barrier between two spaces, and still allow a visual link between the spaces.



Barriers

These are places within the community which create either a physical or mental barricade within the community.



Fig. 6: Map from Community Workshop (August 2013)

Districts



Fig. 7: District Map

Historic District

This district is mainly defined by its historic residences, a number of which date back to the 1800s. The Avenel Plantation, built circa 1838, is on the National Registrar of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Registrar.

Bedford Centertown

These four blocks constitute the dense and active center of town. They are unique in their diverse composition of businesses that draw different people at different times of the day.

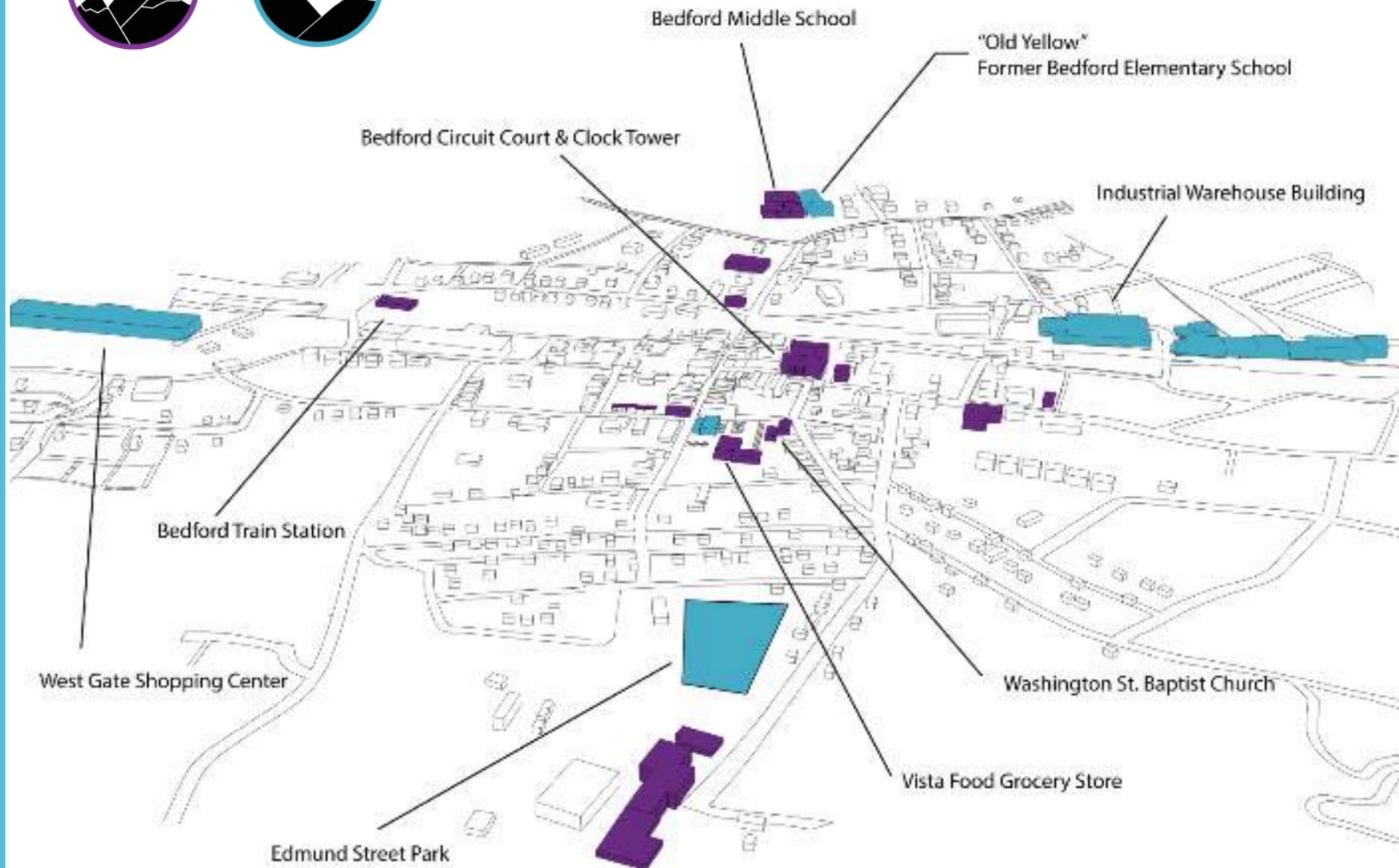
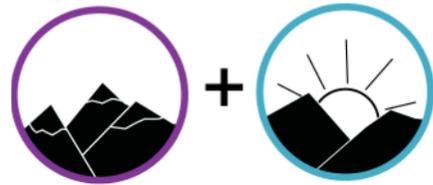
Black Neighborhood

Many residents alluded to the fact that this area of town has long been home to the majority of Bedford's Black population. Workshop participants noted how Centertown, in some ways, acts as a barrier separating this area from the other neighborhoods in town, such as the Historic District. Residents expressed the need Centertown to serve as a bridge connecting the different communities on its North and South ends.

Bottom of the Hill

According to residents, this area is characterized by its distinct depressed terrain and its shopping options. Win-Dixie once anchored the West Gate Shopping Center at the bottom of the hill and a number of businesses such as Peebles and Schewels Furniture Company are still located in the strip mall. This district is significant to residents as it supplements the opportunities in Centertown. Residents expressed a desire for this district to be better connected to the surrounding area.

Landmarks and Potentials



Bedford Circuit Court and Clock Tower

Most of the workshop participants agreed that the Bedford Circuit Court and its clock tower are iconic features within Centertown. The Clock Tower can be seen anywhere within the larger Centertown area and is an important reference point helping residents and visitors locate themselves within Bedford.

Vista Food

Locally owned grocery stores, especially those that are located within small towns, have become a rarity. Yet, everyone in town knows Vista Food and many residents shop there. For these reasons, Vista Food is an important landmark in the community and an asset contributing to the the identity of Centertown and the overall town.

Old Yellow

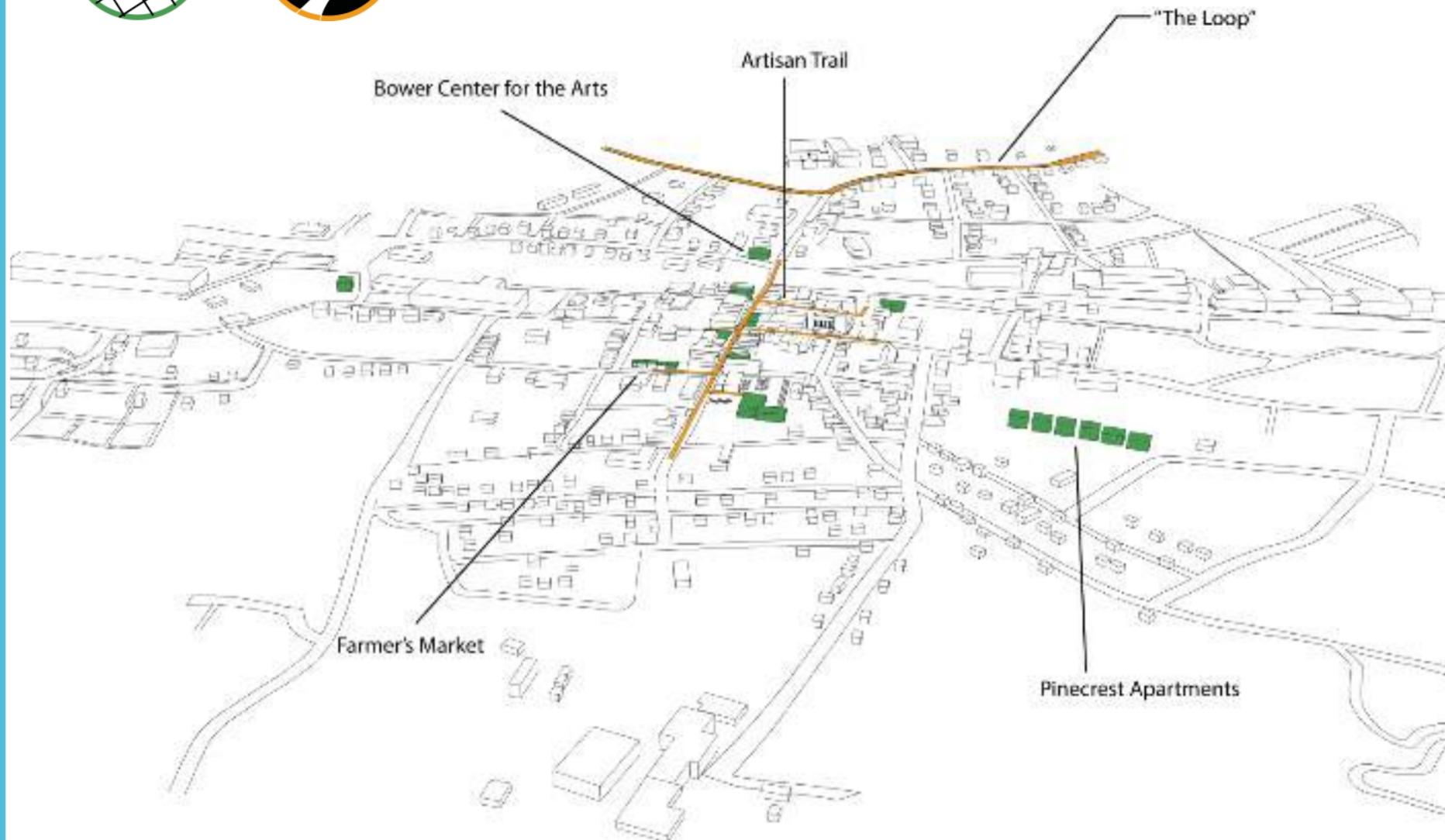
The early 1900s building was once Bedford's Elementary School but has been vacant since 1989. The building sits at the top a hill with an incredible view of Centertown on one side and the Peaks of Otter on the other. Many residents expressed hope that the building would be kept and converted into space serving the community in the future.

West Gate Shopping Center

Workshop participants felt this area had potential but was in dire need of attention. The Center houses several retailers and has recently acquired an industrial business in what was once Win-Dixie. However, the sprawling parking lot and the lack of safe and comfortable sidewalks leading to the site, make it less-attractive for pedestrians to visit. Currently, people drive to the strip mall for a particular item and then leave. Residents believed the center could be improved to accomodate other activities as well, such as entertainment and recreation.

Fig. 8: Map of Landmarks and Potentials

Nodes and Pathways



Farmer's Market

The Farmer's Market is a space where people come not only to buy produce; the market is a place for meeting up with others and socializing as well. The market is one of the strongest spaces in Centertown for connecting residents.

Pinecrest Apartments

Workshop participants characterized pinecrest apartments as a center of activity. Pinecrest is one of the largest multi-family apartment complexes in the area. Many residents have some connection with Pinecrest whether they themselves are tenants or have a family member or friend who lives there. Therefore, Pinecrest serves as an important social hub for people to gather and spend time with one another.

The Loop

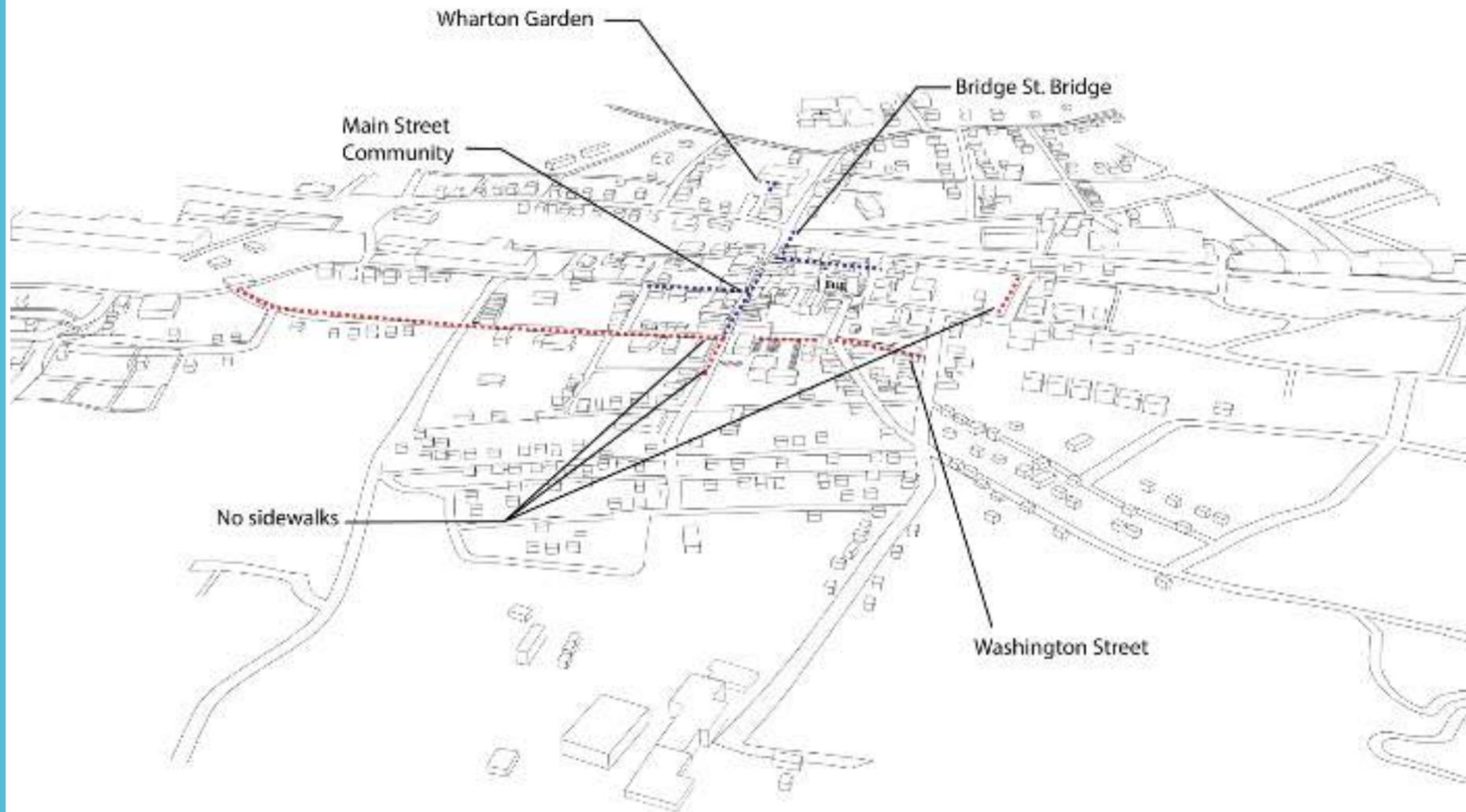
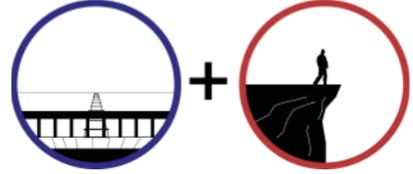
The loop is a 3 mile sidewalk path that runs along side historic homes and opens to some of Bedford's best views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Residents frequently walk the trail at different times of the day and often walk with friends or family. The trail is used by school athletics and by the YMCA for its Christmas Classic race.

Artisan Trail

Bedford recently established an official Artisan Trail Network with the Artisans Center of Virginia. This trail is comprised of a number of local art galleries, restaurants, and shops that have committed to leveraging their individual resources to strengthen the local community and their coalition of businesses. On 2nd Fridays, different venues in Centertown cooperate in creating a lively atmosphere with different activities that residents can walk to and from throughout the night.

Fig. 9: Nodes and Pathways

Edges and Barriers



Bridge Street Bridge

The bridge on bridge street is a fun and interesting edge downtown. Residents enjoy walking across the bridge and stopping to watch the trains passing below or to look down the railroad to see the mountains in the distance. The bridge and the railroad below are ever-present reminders that Centertown is connected to the larger Bedford and the surrounding region.

Wharton Memorial Garden

This garden, full of various plantings and flower hedges, creates a comfortable, enclosed public space for people to reflect, read, or relax. The garden is one of the few cozy and well-landscaped spaces in Centertown.

No Sidewalks

There are a number of streets downtown that do not have sidewalks or whose sidewalks are too narrow for people to comfortably walk. These sections of streets without sidewalks create a barrier for pedestrians.

Washington Street

While Washington Street is a busy road with a number of businesses and institutions that draw a lot of activity, it also is a barrier according to workshop participants and residents we interviewed. There is a general perception Centertown, as it is commonly defined, stops at Washington Street at its Southern Edge. Residents noted that those who visit Centertown do not walk past Washington Street and those who live South of Washington Street do not frequently visit Centertown.

Fig. 10: Edges and Barriers



Design Charrette
Bower Center for the Arts
January 18, 2014

IDEATE

Based on all the information collected in the Hear phase, we selected a site for our project. We returned to Bedford to analyze our site and meet with Town and County staff to learn more about the site's conditions and potential for development. We used the information gleaned from our meetings and analysis as a framework for brainstorming different ideas of community interventions for the site. We held two design charrettes where we encouraged participants to think creatively about how the site could look in the future and what function it could fulfill as an integral part of Centertown. In each of the charrettes, we challenged residents to consider Bedford's needs and the stories that we heard from those whom we interviewed when designing for the site. Residents presented their visions for the site and shared what interventions they believed would be feasible for the Bedford community.

- January 12 - 19 Inquiry about Site
- January 14 Design Charrete (Bedford Science and Technology Center)
- January 18 Design Charrete (Bower Center for the Arts)



Project Site
January 2014

The Site

After reflecting on our time in Bedford and everything we heard from residents, we began looking for options for the project site. We looked over all the information we collected during the Hear phase and watched all the footage from our interviews and workshops in order to decide what space in Centertown was best fit for immediate transformation. We wanted a site that could host multiple activities and had potential for connecting several community assets in Centertown. We gave particular attention to sites that were less developed and could be transformed into attractive, usable space by community interventions. Since our project focuses on the community's capacity to create change, we did not consider sites in Centertown that would need large infrastructure improvements or re-development.

The site we chose for the project is the County owned parcel west of Vista Foods. While reflecting on our experience in Bedford, this site emerged as a potential hub of activity linking different sections of Centertown. Being already owned by Bedford County, the site also has the potential of serving the public and meeting goals of the larger Bedford community. The top of the site has the one of the best vistas of the Peaks of Otter in all of Centertown. Currently, the site is a 2-acre gap in Centertown dividing an otherwise busy street. Any improvements to the area would increase the overall connectivity in Centertown and inform future development on its South side.



Site Walk Sheds

Fig. 11: Walking Areas from Site for Residents walking average pace (3 mph)

Site Context

The project's site is located between Washington and Franklin Street. The site's western boundary is Bridge Street, Centertown's north/south thoroughfare, and its eastern boundary is Vista Food's Grocery Store and parking lot.

The site is surrounded by several of the most populated places in Centertown and sits at the edge of what many consider to be Centertown's Main Street community. Vista Food, in many ways, functions as a community cross section attracting locals from all around town. Many of Vista Food's customers who walk to the store enter through the parking lot from the residential neighborhood on the South Side of the site. Washington Street Baptist Church, which is directly east of Vista Food, is another place drawing people to the general area. In addition to its weekend services, it hosts kid's afterschool activities and serves as a meeting place for the local NAACP branch and other organizations.

On the west side of Bridge Street, people often congregate for activities and services at the Bedford Christian Ministries building as well as the Farmer's Market on Friday afternoons. People sit and hangout under the shade at the farmer's market stand; however, there is no seats or tables for those who want to meet with others or relax.

Centertown shops and businesses along with the County building are located on the block north of the site. The School Board building and one of the town's oldest neighborhoods are south of the site. Residents coming from this neighborhood must walk through the site on their way to Centertown.



Site Conditions

Two adjacent buildings, the Christmas Station and Archery Building, face Washington Street from the northwest corner of the site. Both of these buildings are uninhabitable and past the point of renovation.

Since the Bedford County's Economic Development Authority acquired the buildings in 2001, it has spent nearly \$70,000 on repairs. However, due to severe flood damage on the back of the buildings and significant structural issues, the County Department of Public Works has determined that the poor condition of the buildings outweigh the continuous cost of renovation. The EDA estimated that the entire demolition of the two buildings would cost \$210,000, which would need to be spread out over the course of several fiscal years. While the EDA would like to see the buildings gone, it is likely that the buildings will remain standing and vacant for some time due to the high capital costs needed for demolition.

Apart from the two vacant buildings, the rest of the site is a large paved parking lot. The parking lot is predominantly used as spillover parking for County and School Board employees. Vista Foods has a loading dock on the east side of the parking lot. However, the majority of the parking lot is almost always empty.

Overall, the parking lot is in decent condition with some sections in need of re-stripping and repaving. Due to the steep slope in the middle of the parking lot and its vast impermeable surface, the low point of the parking lot at the north end of the site is prone to flooding after rain.

Fig. 12: Site Photos (January 2014)

Site Selection

"There's not really anything outdoorsy to do Downtown... There's no park or anything like that. So I think that might be nice."



Centertown's compact urban form makes it an enjoyable place to walk and see. However, it lacks park space where people can gather and recreate. Residents and tourists would be more apt to spend longer periods of time Downtown if there were engaging public outdoor spaces where they could lounge, play, or connect with others. There are places such as the Farmer's market that can be programmed for larger events and activities such as Centertown. What if there was a space that was designed for multiple and continuous activities? Being the largest publically owned vacant space in the Downtown, the site has ample space for hosting a number of simultaneous uses.

"This is the center of town. Everybody knows Washington Street."



Washington Street is a very important corridor for the Bedford community. Residents and visitors take Washington Street when entering Centertown from the South. Washington Street has two of the oldest and dearest Bedford institutions: Washington Street Baptist Church and Vista Food Grocery Store. Washington Street Baptist church dates back to 1866 and has been located on the corner of Washington and South Street since 1876 when its trustees bought the parcel for a sum of one dollar. Vista Food has served Bedford residents for generations and is the only grocery store downtown. Washington Street is also home to the Bedford Christian Ministries and Bedford Farmer's Market, which are prominent nodes of activity on different days of the week.

The County owned parcel on the corner of Washington and Bridge Street is currently a void and lifeless space in the middle of what otherwise is a very rich and active area. By choosing this site, we hope to create a public space that can connect and accentuate the different assets on Washington Street.

"Vista Food is the cross section of the town because there's such a mix of people there."



Vista Food Grocery Store serves an invaluable purpose in Centertown. Not only is it the only grocery store downtown; it is the nexus linking different residents and neighborhoods in Bedford. For generations, Vista has offered a food selection and competitive prices that have attracted a racially and economically diverse clientele. Both black and white, old and young, townies and newcomers shop at Vista. Throughout our interviews, many of the people who did not care for Centertown as a whole still valued the convenience and service at Vista Food.

We wanted to pick a site that had the potential of bringing different people together in order to strengthen the community and bridge new relationships. Therefore, we chose a location with a long history of indirectly bringing together different groups of people.

"The town itself, due to the history of this town, has a spirit of its own and it welcomes everybody here."



One of the aspects about Centertown that initially caught our attention was the discrepancy between its north and south entrance. The walk down Bridge Street from the North is comfortable and inviting. The pedestrian has sufficient sidewalk space, clear visibility through Centertown, the shade of developed trees, and buildings on either side of the street to look at. This experience starkly contrasts with walking downtown from the south side of Bridge Street. Centertown's south side entrance is drab and disorienting. As you cross Franklin Street, you encounter a sea of parking lot and have only a small sliver of a sidewalk separating you from the road. It feels as though Centertown was not planned to be entered from the South side of town.

We felt this entrance was important considering there is a sizable residential neighborhood that must use it to access Centertown. Bedford identifies itself as a hospitable and welcoming community. This welcome must be present in the design of Centertown – Bedford's activity center. Choosing this site, allows us to design a space that welcomes and draws people from the south side of Bedford to Centertown.

Design Charrettes

We held two design charrettes, fast-paced collaborative sessions, for residents to generate a series of design prototypes and layouts for the site. We encouraged participants to consider both short term improvements and potential long-term development of the site centered round the needs and stories of the community. For our first charrette, we worked with Danny Thomas' Building Construction class at Bedford Science and Technology Center. The students, who have experience with woodworking and construction machinery, were working to finish a modular home for Habitat for Humanity. With their knowledge of construction and personal ties to the site and the Bedford community, the students designed community interventions that could immediately address certain needs of Centertown and be built using tools and material from their shop. The students were excited about the possibility of constructing any one of their design ideas on the site as a class project that would serve the community and memorialize their story.

The second charrette, held at the Bower Center for the Arts, was open to the general public and advertised through WDBJ7 and the Bedford Bulletin. A dozen of residents with a diversity of experiences and expertise participated in the charrette, collaborating in small groups to design a vision for the site. The group shared a strong interest in Bedford's future development and a desire to see the town grow in its social and economic opportunities. Their passion and enthusiasm for envisioning Bedford's future were evident in the group work and conversations.

Design Charrette
Bedford Science and Tech. Center
January 14, 2014

Design Charrettes

The objective of the charrettes was to design creative ideas that could be immediately implemented on the site using low-cost materials, volunteer labor, and the site's existing infrastructure. At the same time, we encouraged participants to think big and consider larger, permanent development for the site, as an exercise for uncovering the sites potential and the community needs it was apt to meet. In order to get participants thinking creatively and innovatively before designing, we presented examples of urban interventions used to transform different spaces.



Fig. 13: Urban Intervention Examples (www.thisiscoossal.com)



Fig. 14: Design Charrette (January 14, 2014)

While there were many different interventions and site layouts designed in the two charrettes, there were a number of different designs and concepts that were shared among most of the groups. A number of the groups designed some type of park space at the top of the hill, taking advantage of the site's tremendous view of the Peaks. A pathway running through the site and connecting Franklin Street with Washington street was another prevalent design. Participants noted that residents frequently use the site as a passageway to Vista Food and other locations along Washington street despite the absence of a sanctioned path or delineated trail. Another common intervention was the use of building facades on the site for mural space or a movie screen. Knowing that the site's two vacant buildings were uninhabitable, participants proposed using the site to showcase important values or attributes of Bedford through art such as D-Day memorial or Liberty Highschool.

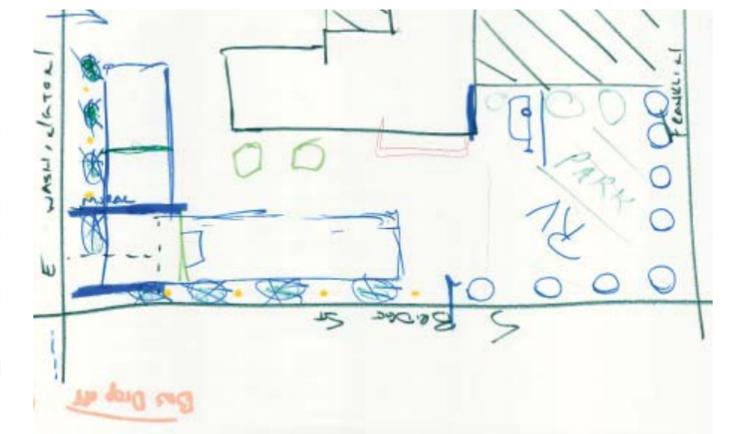
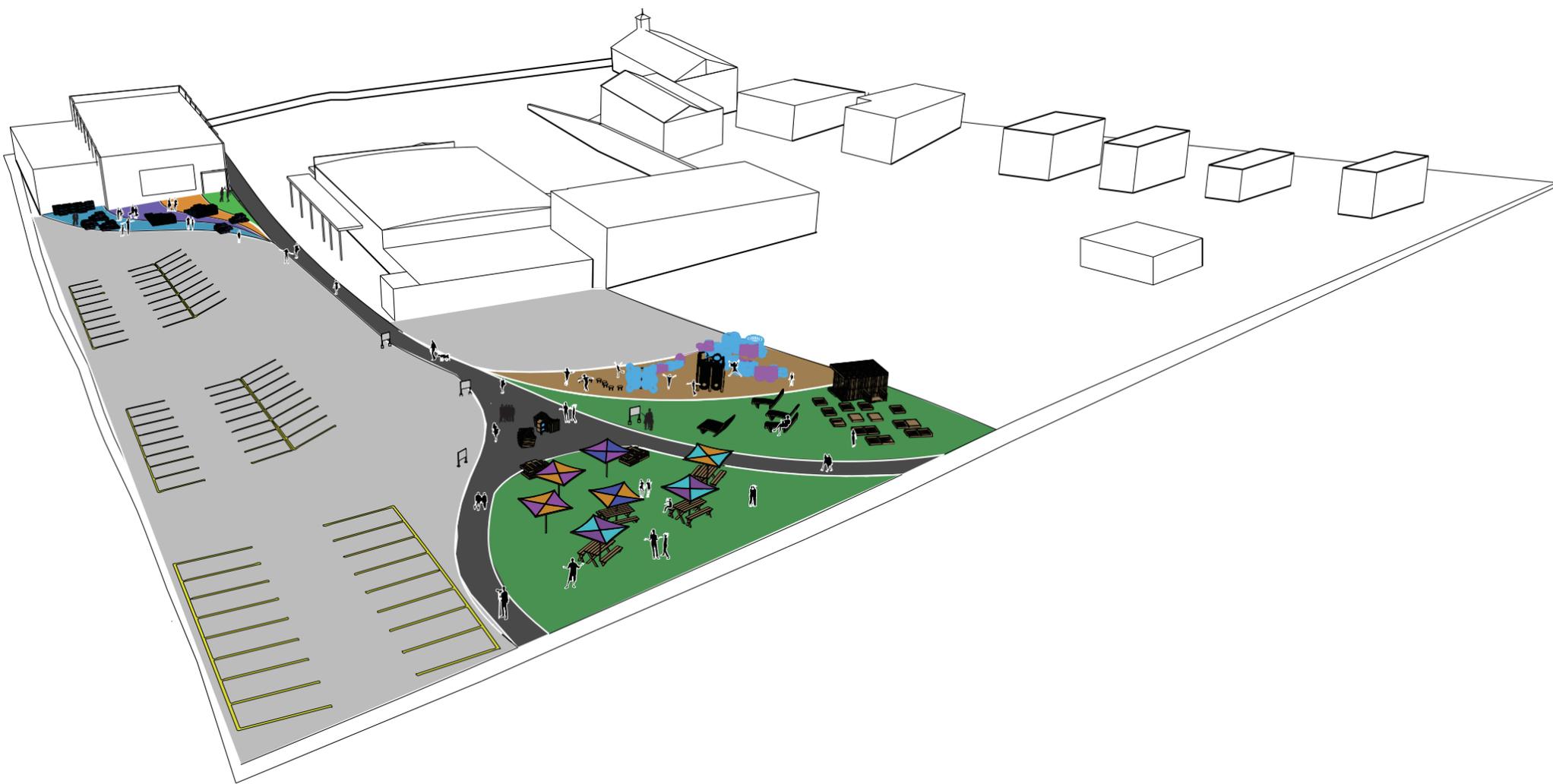


Fig. 15: Design Charrette (January 18, 2014)



CREATE

In the Create phase, we drew from the community members' ideas in the Ideate phase to design a series of community-centered interventions for the site. The interventions all stem from the designs generated by participants in the charrettes and reflect different experiences and stories we heard from residents throughout the Hear phase. We intentionally designed interventions that can be built by community members regardless of their technical experience and require minimal resources and financial investment. Collectively, these interventions have the potential to transform our site from a vacant, lifeless parking lot into an active public space connecting residents and different assets of Centertown. The interventions tie the site in with the rest of Centertown, increasing downtown's public space and bridging the divide between the activity and communities on either side of Washington Street. This guide will describe three potential spaces envisioned for the site and several specific designs which appear throughout the spaces.

Site Design

The site design we propose embodies various desires and needs we heard throughout our interactions with residents. The intent of this grab-bag of interventions is not to provide a specific set of construction documents dictating the precise way we believe the site must develop in order to be successful. Instead this is meant to become an example of one way the site might develop using small-scale interventions that respond to specific community desires. In our example, we have designed two distinct spaces at the north and the south of the site that are united by a pathway. These spaces are a park, pathway, and a platform for community exchange and activity. The goal was to create a site which could become an area of recreation as well as relaxation within Centertown, and to provide a space for a dialogue about the development of the community.

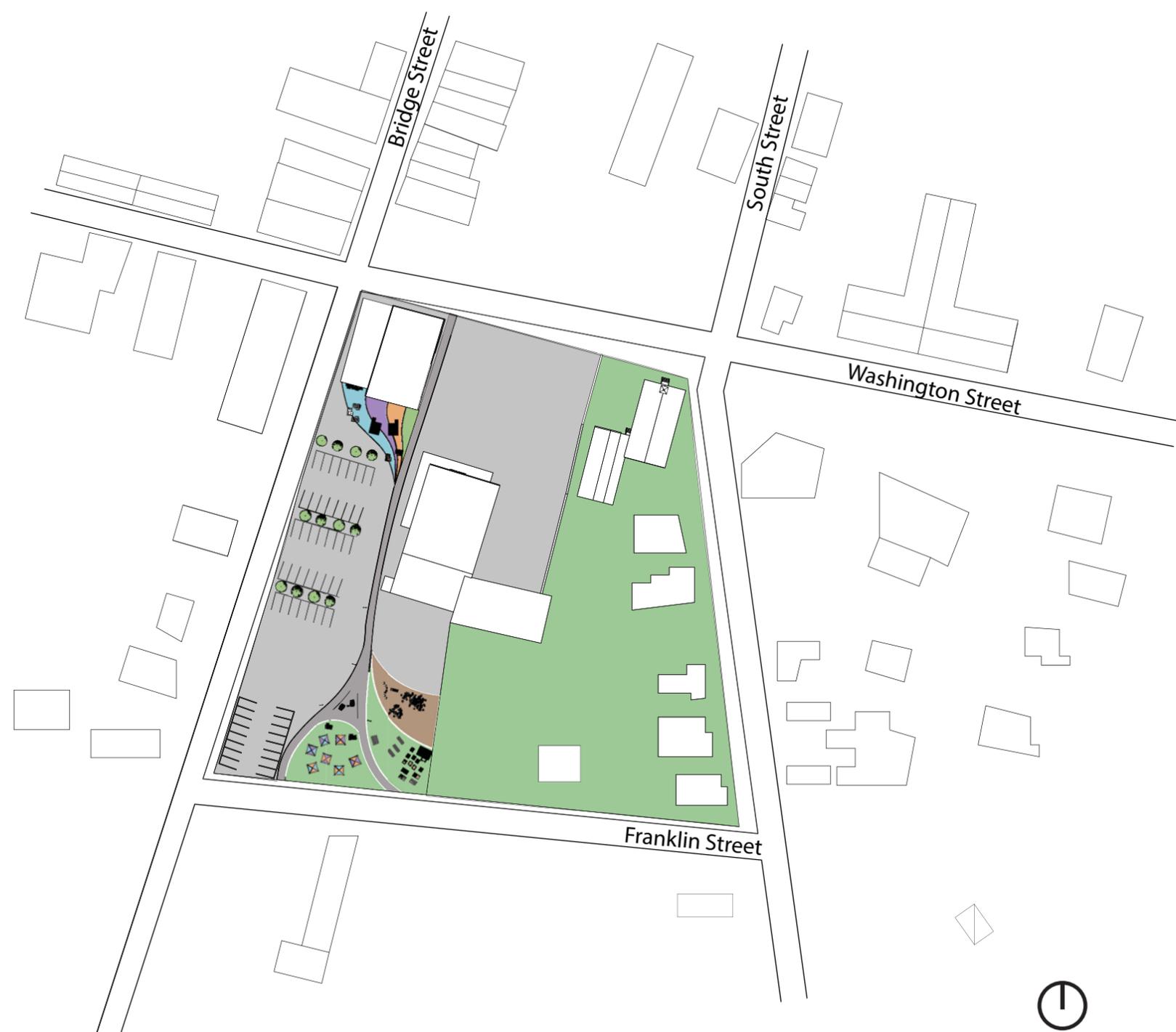


Fig. 16: Site Plan



Rendering 2: Vista Park looking north

Vista Park

Currently, Centertown lacks public space where people can gather, retreat, or recreate. In our charrettes, participants continuously expressed the desire for a park space on the site that would accommodate a number of different activities. Vista Park is a colorful and homely space balancing several different activities represented in the interests of residents whom we interviewed. The space is located on the top of the site, nearest to Franklin Street, and looks out onto the cool blue Peaks of Otter. Residents can withdraw from the bustle of everyday life to rest on the park furniture and enjoy the sites of Centertown and the mountains. Meanwhile, gardeners can tend to their plots in the urban garden and children can run and play on the tire playground. Vista Park mixes the bucolic features of a country hillside with those of an urban park, providing opportunities for different residents to enjoy spending time in Centertown.

The site's green and natural landscaping can be accomplished through de-paving. In a number of communities, residents are working together to remove old and underused sections of asphalt pavement and replacing it with natural landscaping, urban farms, or community green spaces. Green spaces play an integral role in the health of our communities. They connect us with the natural ecosystem, give us respite, and inspire us with their beauty and vibrancy. The benefits of de-paving also go beyond the community's enjoyment of natural space. De-paving impervious surfaces mitigates storm-water runoff, which is currently a problem for the site. De-paving a surface requires a number of steps but can be accomplished through community partnerships and volunteer effort. Detailed instructions for de-paving can be found in Depave's "Guide to Freeing Your Soil" (depave.org).

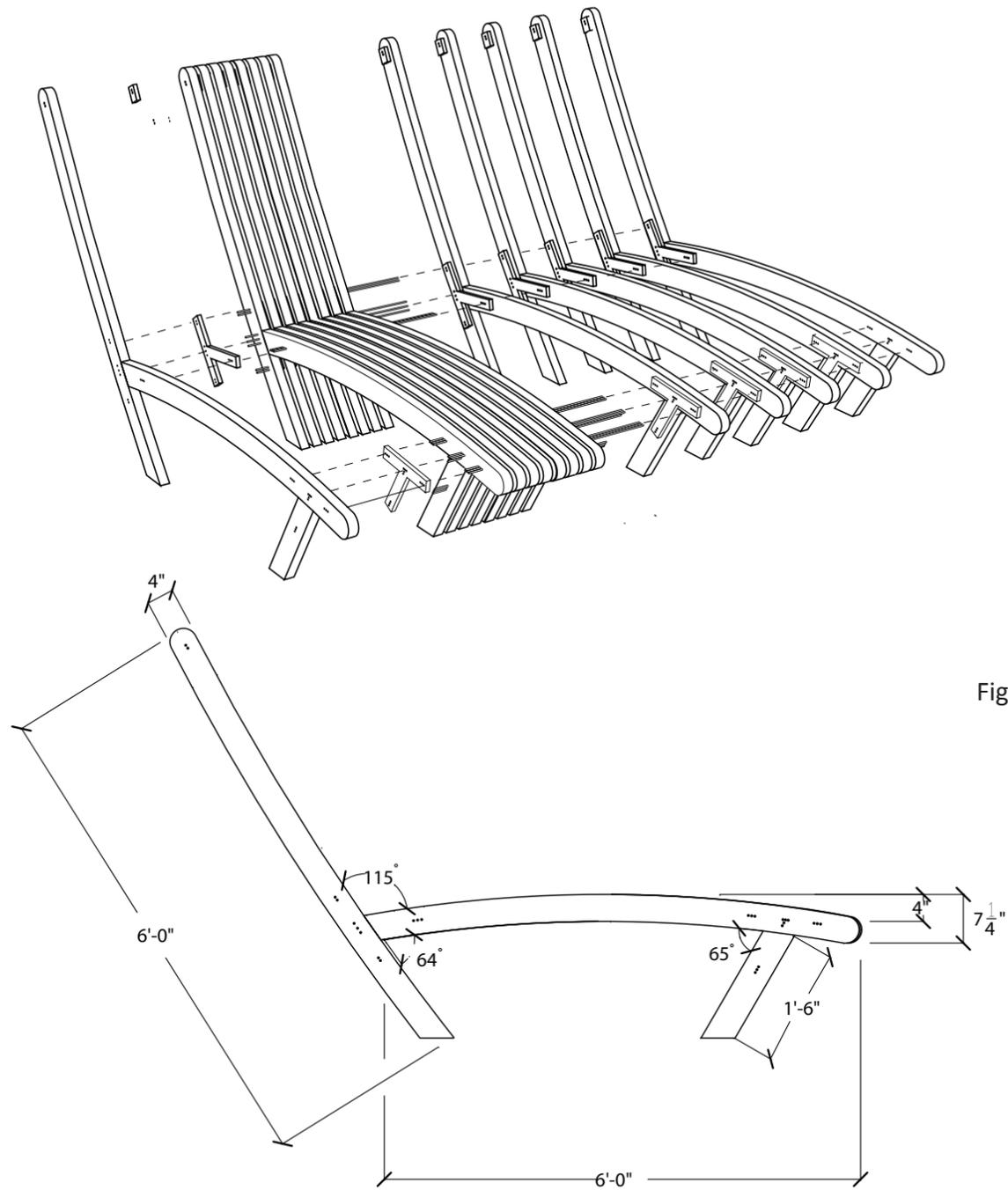


Fig. 17: Axonometric of Vista Park wooden lounge chairs

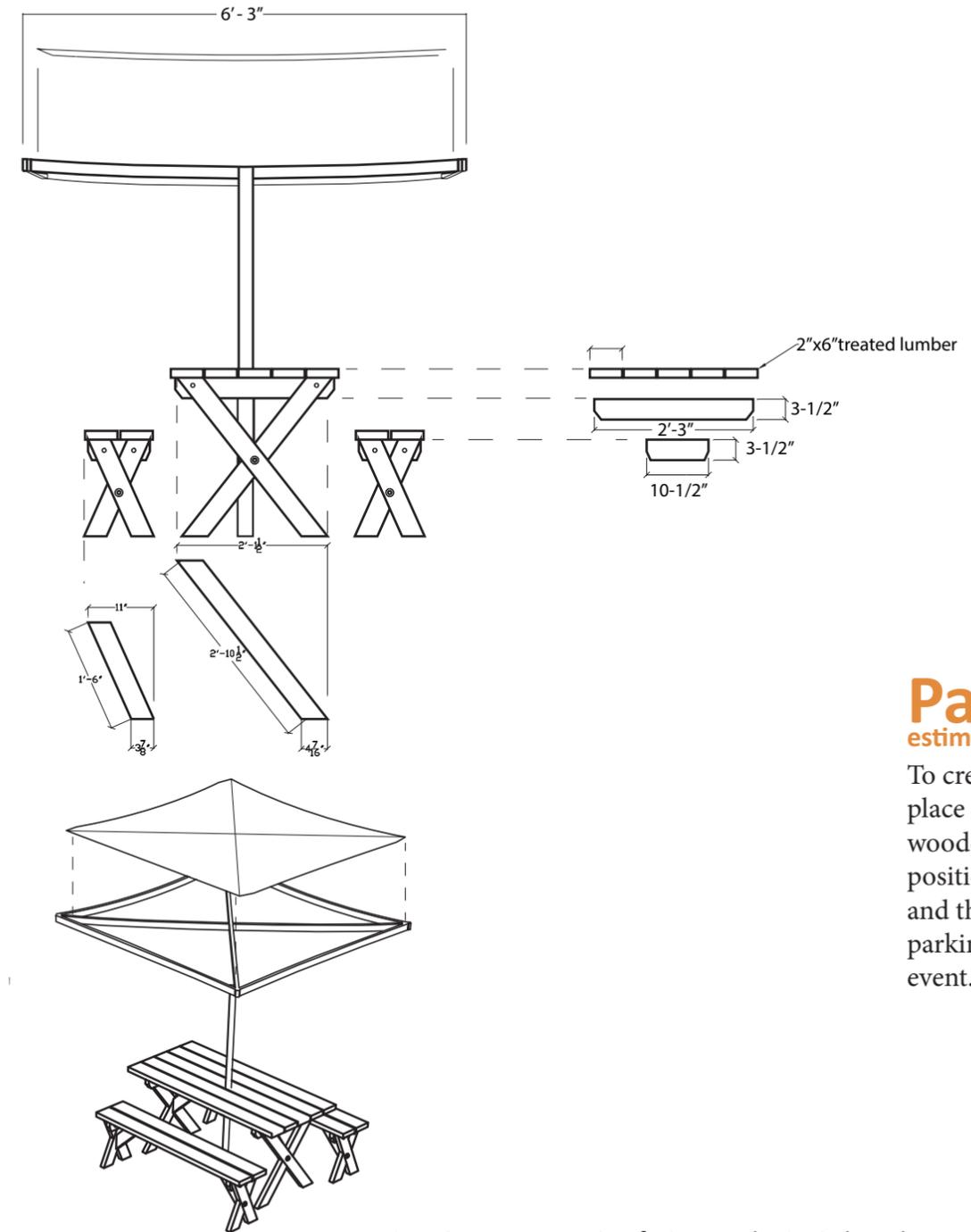
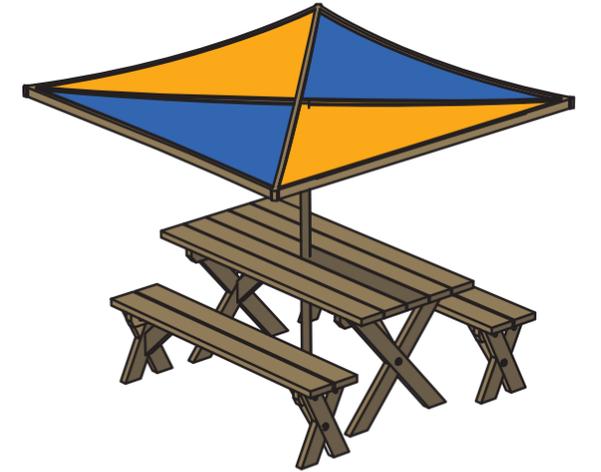


Fig. 18: Axonometric of Vista Park picnic benches



Park Furniture

estimated cost = \$ 200 - 250

To create an area of refuge and relaxation you must have a place to rest. We have designed two example types of seating: wooden lounge chairs and picnic benches. The lounge chairs are positioned to face Centertown's landscape and the Mountains, and the picnic benches are conveniently located near the on-site parking for those who want to drive to the site for a picnic or event.

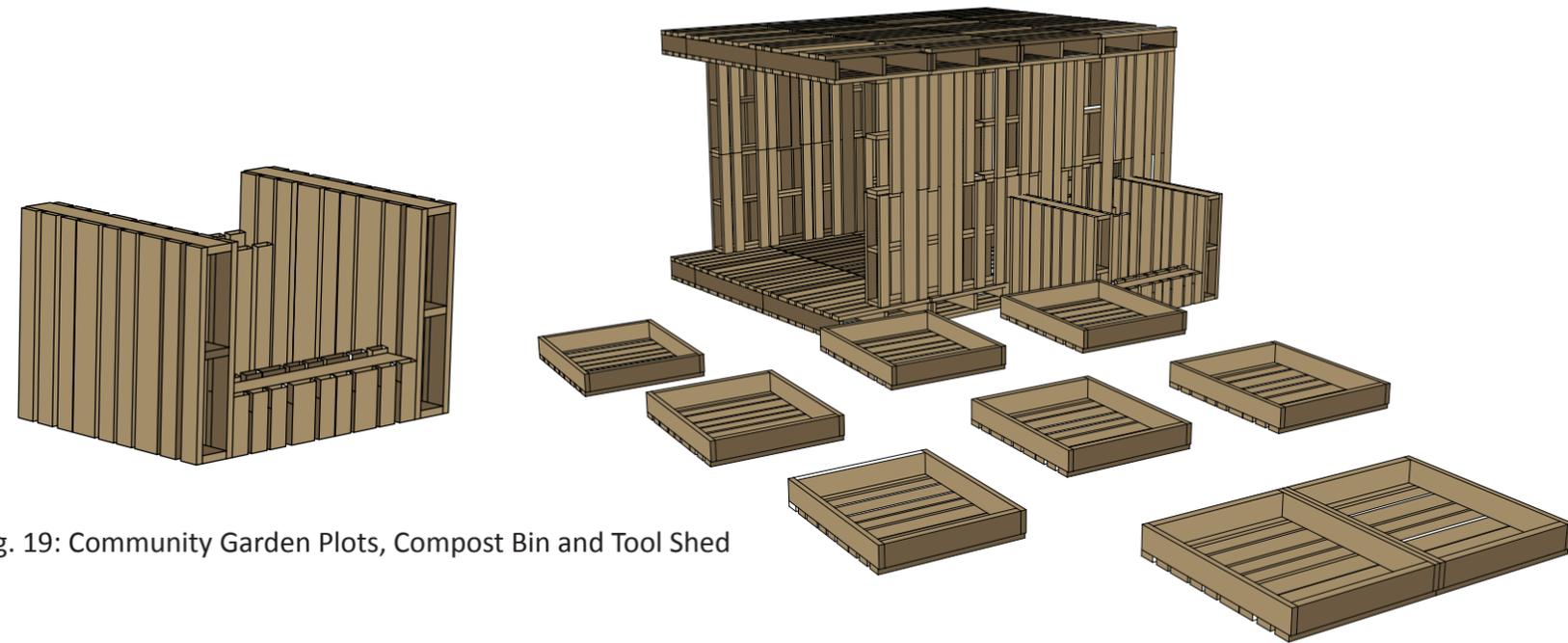


Fig. 19: Community Garden Plots, Compost Bin and Tool Shed



Fig. 21: Tire Playground

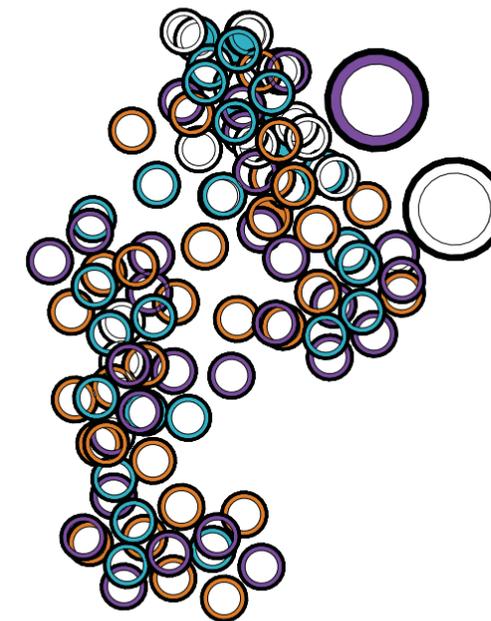


Fig. 20: Community Garden plot (dishfunctionaldesigns.blogspot.com)

Urban Farming Furniture

estimated cost = \$ 50 - 150

The park includes a number of green features. The urban farm plots, which could be rented out to residents by the County, provide a unique opportunity for community members to share their love for gardening with others. The surface of the park is de-paved and planted with grass and natural landscaping to create a beautiful green pasture.



Recycled Tire Playground

estimated cost = \$ 300 - 450

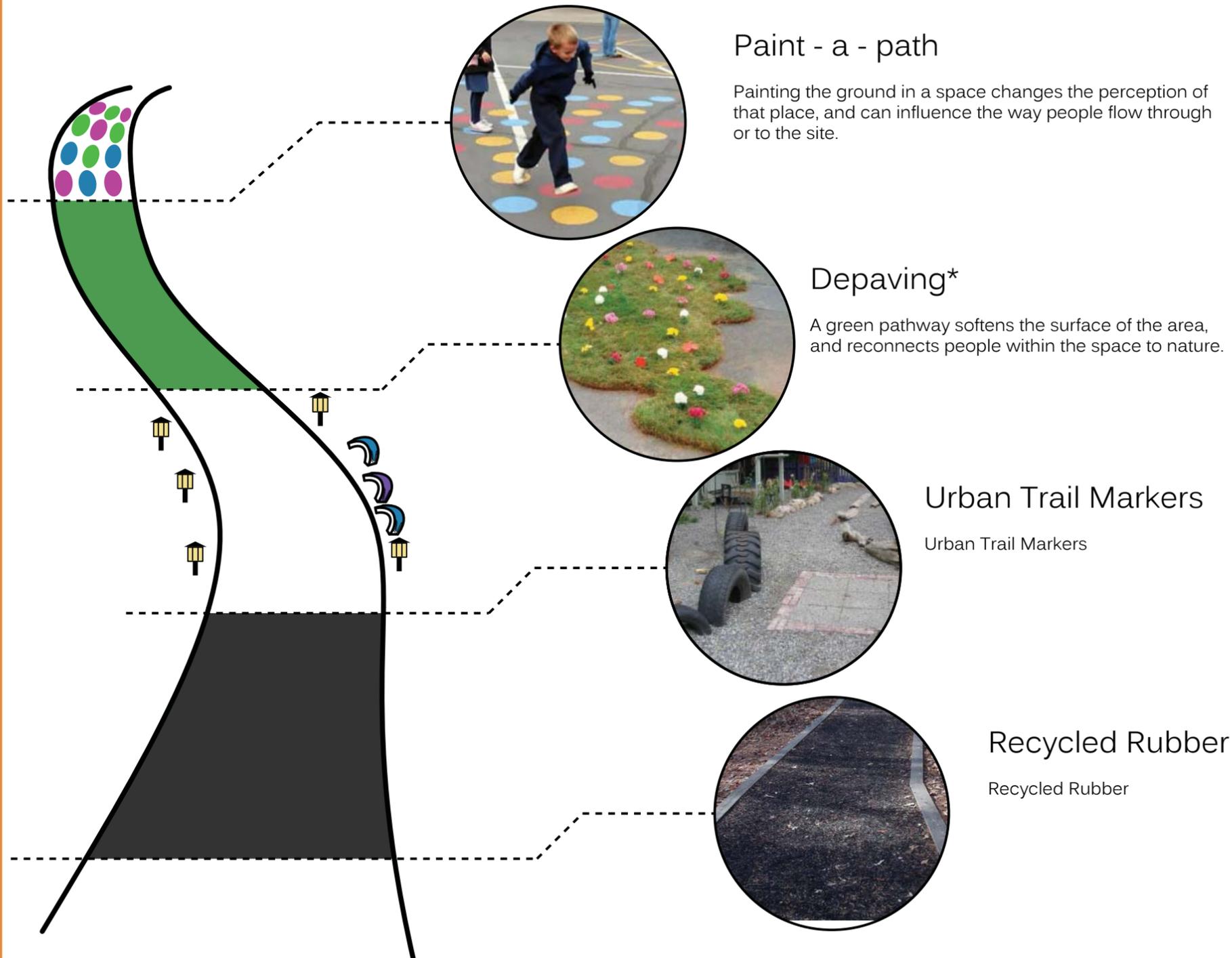
In keeping with our goal of designing low cost interventions, the playground is made of re-used old tires. The tires are filled with sand and dirt and configured into interesting formations for children to play on and enjoy.



Rendering 3: Pathway connecting Vista Park and the Corner

Pathway

The site's success heavily depends on its connections to the surrounding Centertown and neighborhoods. We also wanted a path to function as public route connecting the communities on either side of Washington Street. Therefore, we designed a comfortable pathway for residents to walk through the site on a route already taken by residents. The pathway is created from a number of different materials, making it interesting to walk. It is also lined with picture boards that illustrate different stories representative of Bedford's community. Residents walking from the south and north sides of the site can use the pathway to access the different spaces on the site as well as Vista Food Grocery Store.



Paint - a - path

Painting the ground in a space changes the perception of that place, and can influence the way people flow through or to the site.

Depaving*

A green pathway softens the surface of the area, and reconnects people within the space to nature.

Urban Trail Markers

Urban Trail Markers

Recycled Rubber

Recycled Rubber

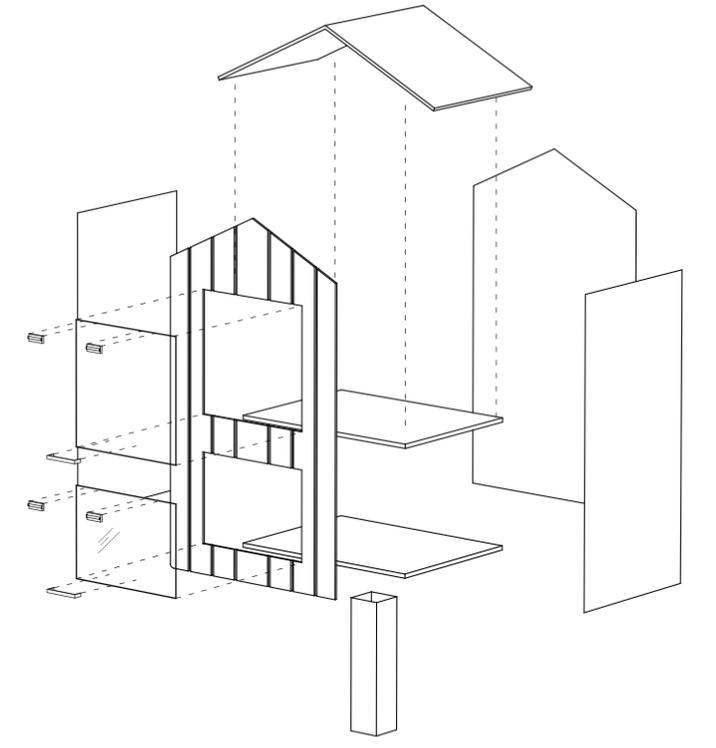
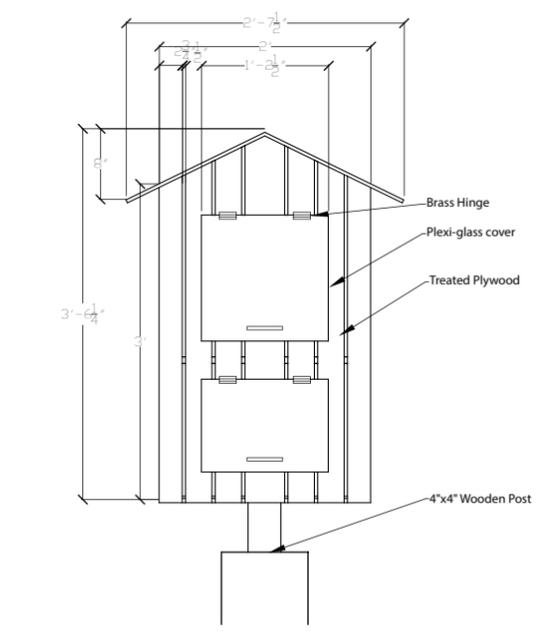


Fig. 23: Axonometric of Book Exchange

Pathway Markers

estimated cost = \$ 25-50

The Pathway, itself, is a colorful and interesting feature, lending to the dynamic aesthetic of the site. A series of features such as a book exchange and story boards along with various surface treatments could be used to demarcate the path for visitors. The photo boards tell stories of Bedford to those walking the pathway. Either side of the board is fitted for a large photograph. The boards could be managed by the County, who could frequently change them to exhibit different artwork and stories of community members.

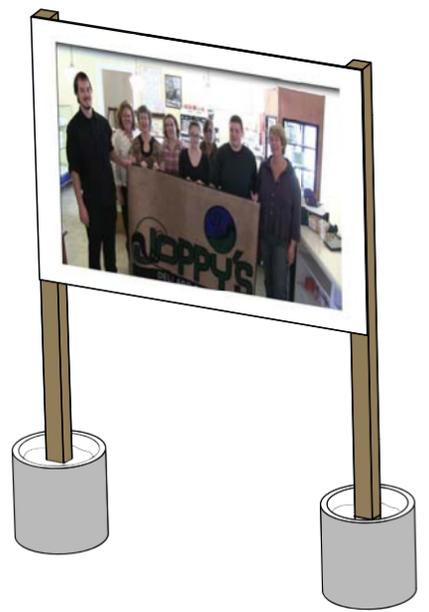


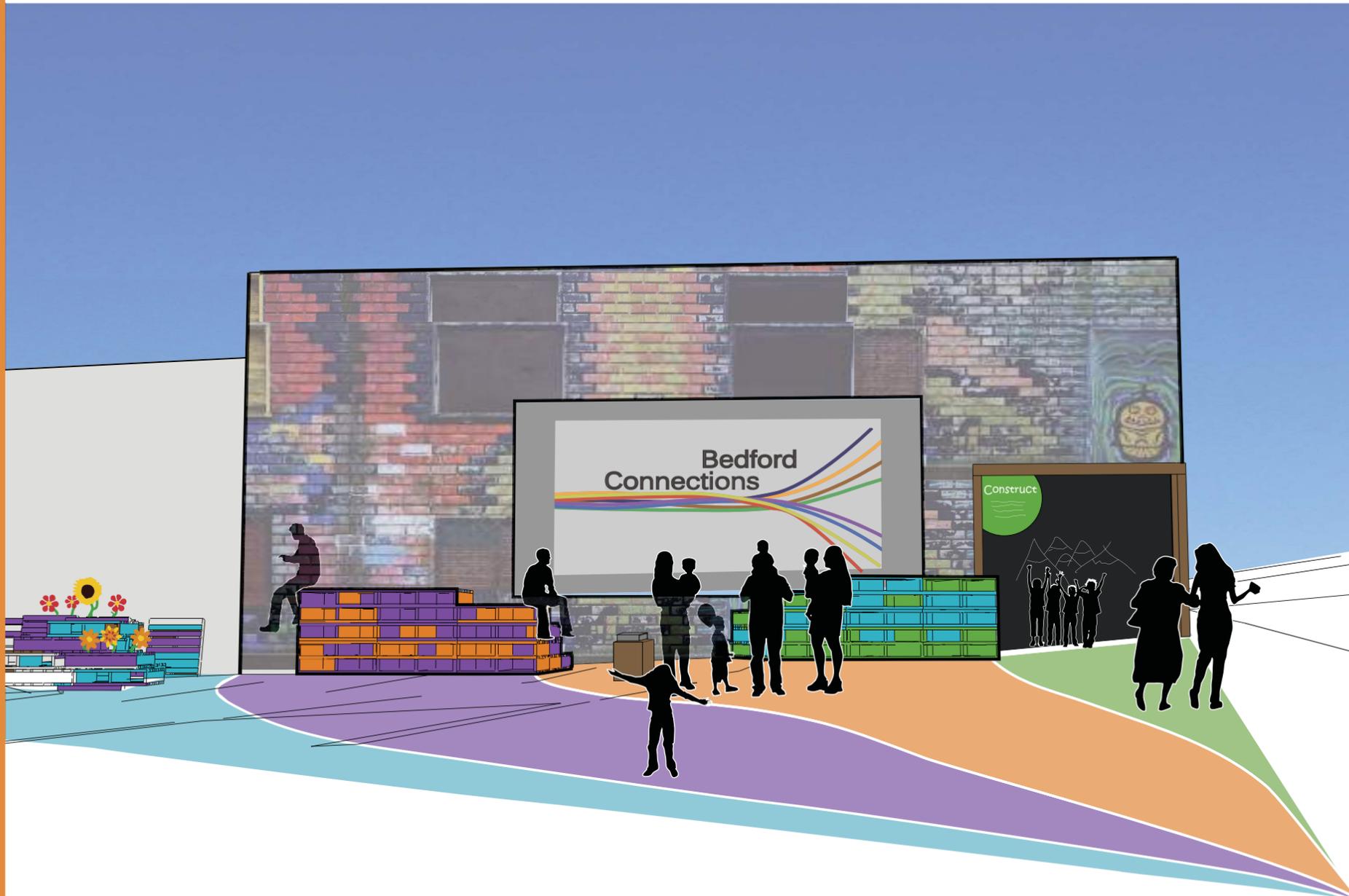
Fig. 24: Story Board



Rendering 4: The Corner - South and East Wall

The Corner

Throughout our interviews and workshops, residents spoke of the need for time and space where community members could come together to share their stories, become better acquainted, and discuss the state of Bedford. The Corner is an active space along the facades of the site's vacant buildings that is designed specifically for community exchange and expression. On the west side residents can express their ideas and feelings and share plans and events on the interactive process wall. On the south side of the buildings is a flexible space for residents to meet, show movies, hold events, or take part in building interventions for the site. The Corner is a hub for various activities that all residents can use, re-construct, and enjoy. Its very temporary nature means that it can be repurposed as the community grows and changes in the future.



Rendering 5: South Wall of Corner

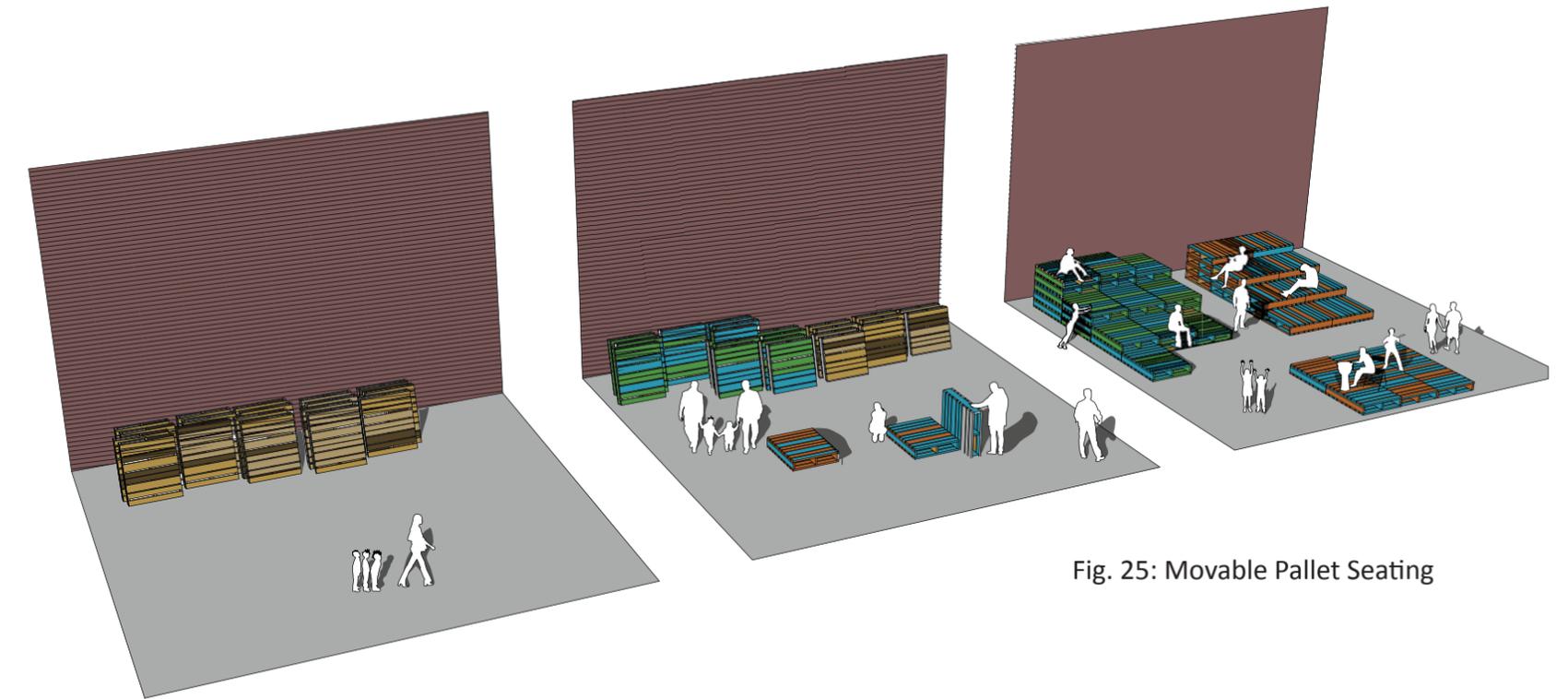


Fig. 25: Movable Pallet Seating

Flexible Space

estimated cost = \$ 50-100

On the back wall of the vacant buildings are attachments for a movie screen that can be hung up to show movies or presentations. Many residents alluded to the fact that Bedford currently does not have a movie theatre though, at one time, there was a popular drive-in theatre in town. The movie screen allows for the County to show public presentations and outdoor films to public audiences (as long as it pays for the viewing rights for films that are private).

Recycled pallets can be sanded down, painted, and sealed to create moveable seating for the Corner. These pallets can be stacked according the likes of residents and can be configured to make discussion circles, work areas, or stacked movie theatre seating.

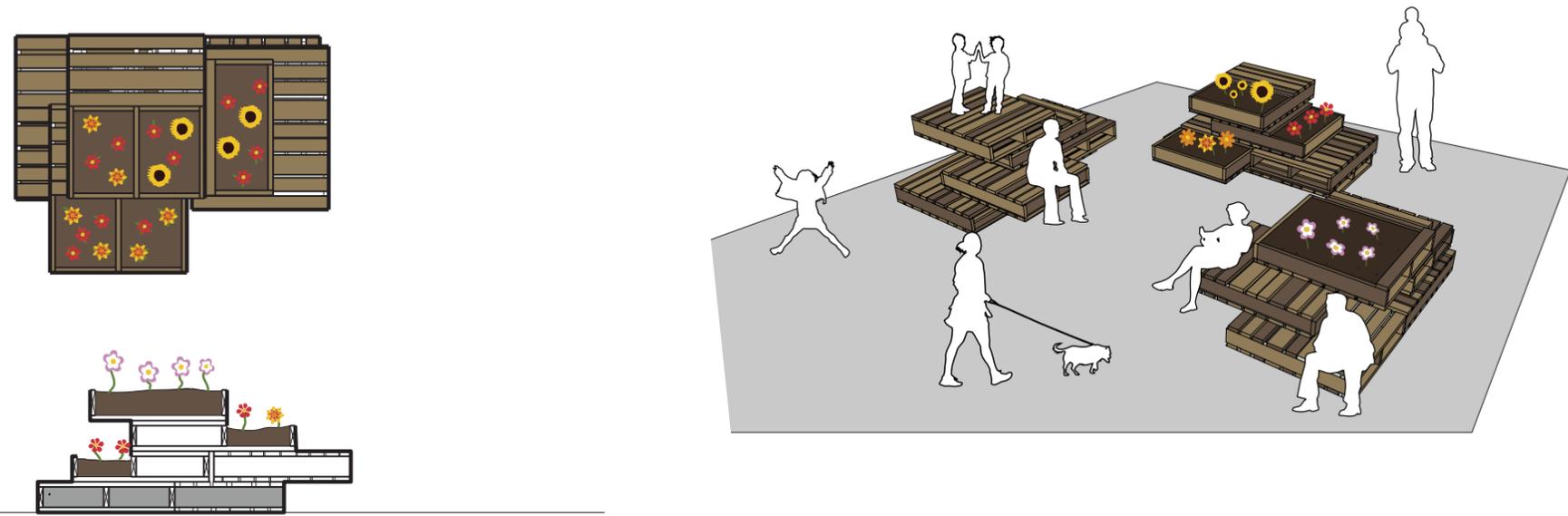


Fig. 26: Axonometric and Rendering of Pallet Planters

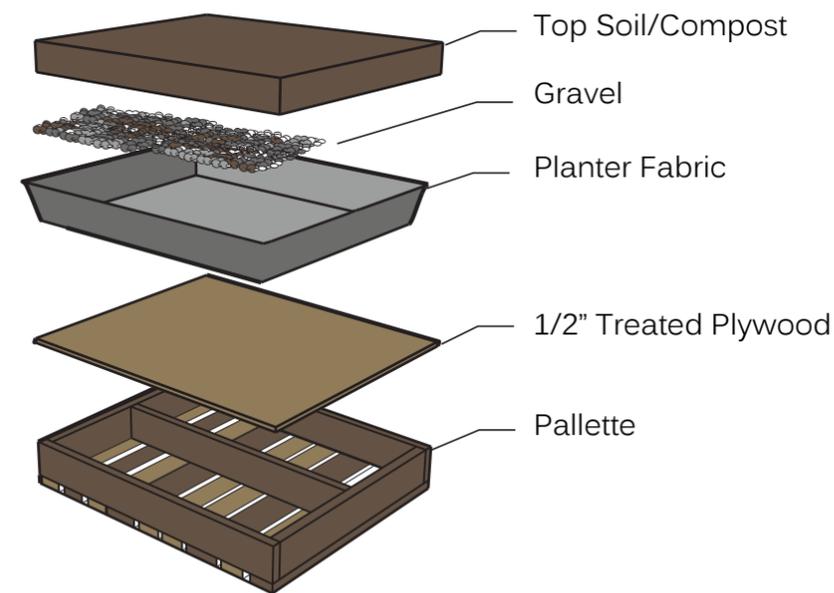


Fig. 27: Creative Pallet Uses for Gardening (dishfunctionaldesigns.blogspot.com)

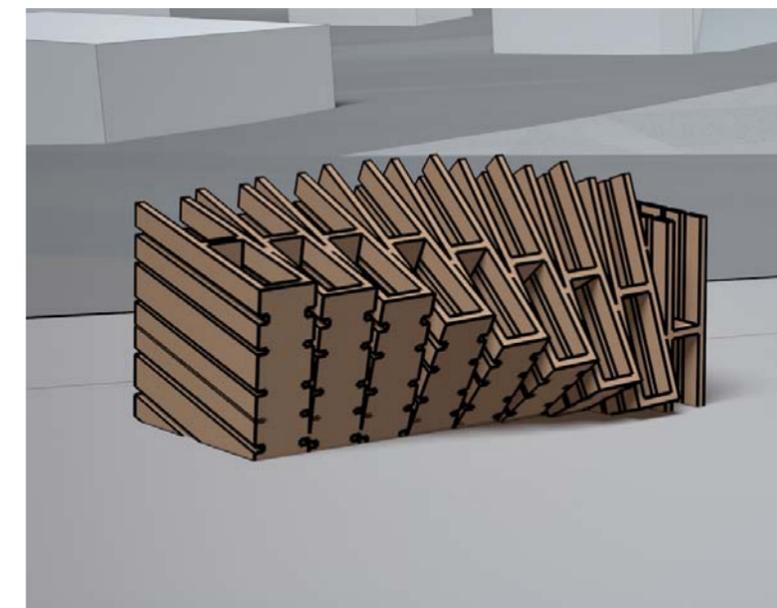


Fig. 28: Pallet Public Art

Pallet Planters

estimated cost = \$ 100 -300

The pallet planters use re-purposed wooden pallets designed to hold plantings. They are positioned at either end of the trail in order to create a colorful threshold inviting people into the two distinct spaces on either end of the site. These are examples of some of the ways these objects could be constructed but by no means do they represent the only ways these can or should be built!

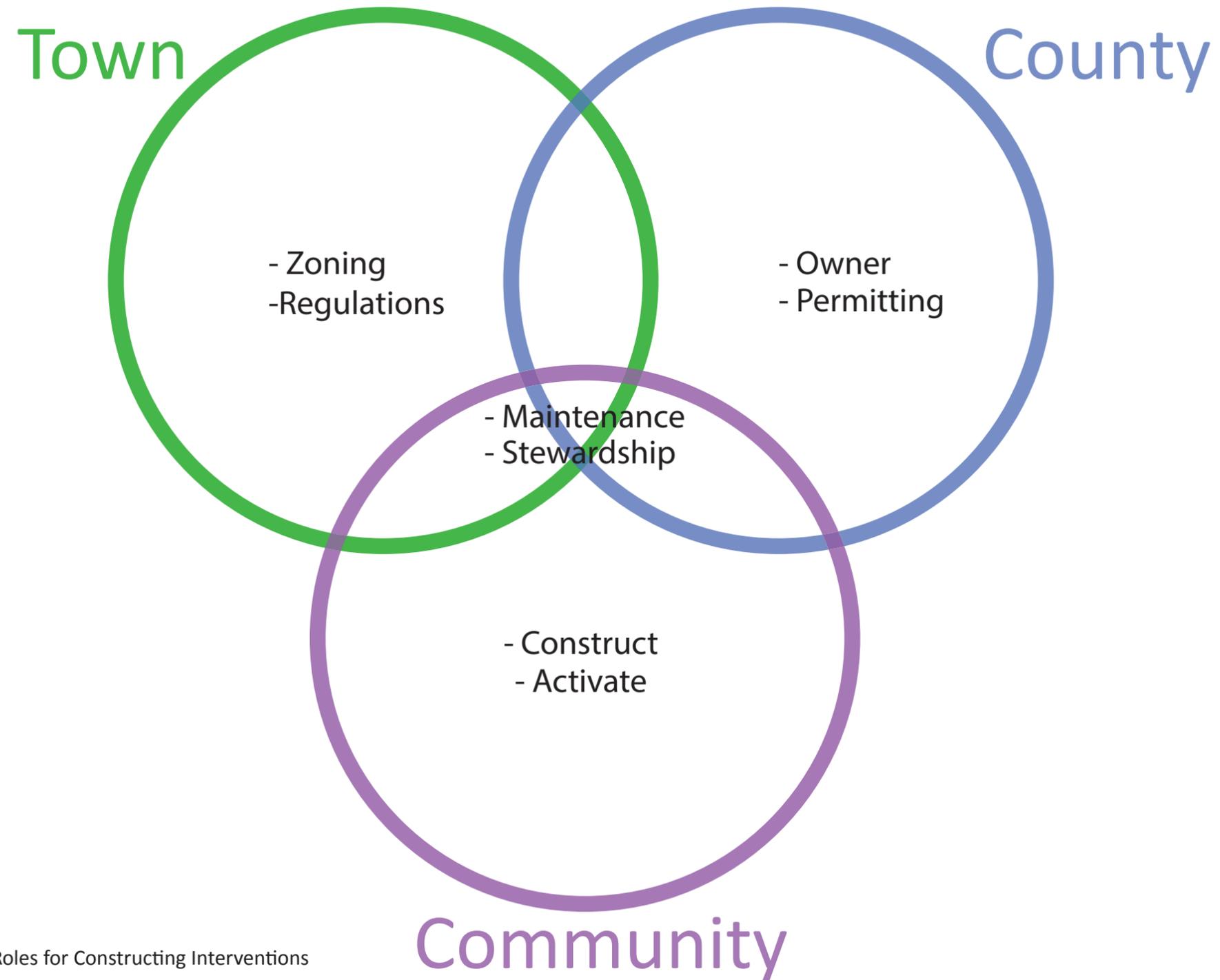


Process Wall + Community Mural

estimated cost = \$ 800

The process wall is the physical representation of our project's process. The wall transforms the blank eastern façade of the vacant buildings on the site into an interface for public expression and exchange. The installation will contain four sections, which represent the themes of each of the four phases in our project. Closest to Washington Street are the Hear and Ideate Sections, a large chalkboard inviting people to write out their desires, feelings, or ideas for what they want to see happen in Bedford's future. The corkboard Create Space will provide a place for exchange between community members and local government where events and opportunities can be advertised. Lastly, the Construct section is intentionally placed upon the corner of the building to draw the user down and around the building to the flexible space. This part of the wall is for people to post pictures of events or projects that have already occurred or write thank-you's or shout-outs to people they appreciate. The wall begins by catching the attention of people passing by and walking them around the building until they reach a public space designed and constructed through community partnerships.

In order to bring an extra layer of color and creative expression to Washington Street, a community mural is painted above the different phases of the wall. This mural designed and facilitated by local artisans is a vivid reflection of the strong assets on Washington Street and the overall Bedford Community. It will be a bright welcome for all those entering Centertown from Washington Street.



CONSTRUCT

There are a number of preliminary steps that must be taken before any of the interventions of this grab bag can be constructed on the site. Any development on this site relies on the mutual cooperation of the Town of Bedford and Bedford County. While the site is owned by the County's Economic Development Authority, it is located within Town boundaries and abides by the Town's Land Development Regulations and Zoning. Currently, the site sits within B-1 Limited Business which does not include public parks as one of its permitted uses. However, Town Council can approve a public park as a conditional use in the B-1 District if it is in the public interest and consistent with the intent of the Town's Land Use Plan. We propose that the Town Council approve the use of a public park for the parcel. With this change in zoning, the County could then issue permits to community members or local organizations to construct different interventions on the site.

While zoning and permitting are necessary for development, the success of the interventions is dependent on continuous maintenance and management. We propose that a Friends group of community members that are interested in the site and passionate for public spaces be created to steward the new public space. This group could be spawned with the help of Bedford's Main Street Organization and work in partnership with the County Economic Development Authority, the site's proprietor. The site interventions are only possible through the relationships between Bedford County, Town, and community members.

Fig. 28: Roles for Constructing Interventions



Now What?

These interventions can only be achieved through the support and initiative of community members (Like You!). We hope that this report, at the very least, inspires residents to make the changes they want to see and the local government to find new and innovative ways to engage residents in the planning and development of their Town. Bedford's real strength is in its connections.

If you would like to get involved, please visit our site and leave us a note
<http://bedfordconnections.wordpress.com>

We would like to hear more about your story and ideas. Bedford is a wonderful place because you live there and will only change if you make it happen! You're presence, engagement, and dreams are vital to the community's success and the Town's future.

Project	Material	Cost per item	Quantity	Total Expense
Table Umbrella				
	Wood Framing (4"x4") Treated Lumber @ 8'	\$ 7.77	1	\$ 7.77
	Wood Framing (1"x4") Treated Lumber @ 6'	\$ 2.77	8	\$ 22.16
	8'x10' Tarp or Fabric	\$ 10.00	1	\$ 10.00
Park Bench + Table				
	Wood Framing (2"x6") Treated Lumber @ 12'	\$ 8.97	15	\$ 134.55
	Screws	\$ -	50	\$ 28.49
	Polyurethane	\$ 34.57	2	\$ 69.14
Viewing Bench				
	4' x 8' Treated Plywood Sheathing	\$ 38.99	4	\$ 155.96
	3/4" Dia. X 4'L Dowel Rods	\$ 2.81	12	\$ 28.49
	Polyurethane	\$ 34.57	1	\$ 34.57
Movie Screen				
	White Sheet	\$ 20.00	1	\$ 20.00
	Wood Framing (2"x10") Treated Lumber @ 12'	\$ 14.97	6	\$ 89.82
	Wood Framing (2"x6") Treated Lumber @ 12'	\$ 8.97	8	\$ 71.76
	Masonry Anchor Bolts	\$ 3.00	12	\$ 28.49
	Masonry Drill Bits	\$ 5.00	4	\$ 20.00
Storyboards				
	Wood Framing (4"x4") Treated Lumber @ 8'	\$ 7.77	1	\$ 7.77
	4' x 8' Treated Plywood Sheathing	\$ 38.99	0.5	\$ 19.50
	5 gallon bucket filled w/ dirt	\$ 10.00	1	\$ 10.00
Community Book Exchange				
	Wood Framing (4"x4") Treated Lumber @ 8'	\$ 7.77	1	\$ 7.77
	4' x 8' Treated Plywood Sheathing	\$ 38.99	1	\$ 38.99
	5 gallon bucket filled w/ dirt	\$ 10.00	1	\$ 10.00
	3-Tab Shingles (package)	\$ 21.00	1	\$ 21.00
	Door Hinges (3 pack)	\$ 8.35	1	\$ 8.35
	24" x 18" Acrylic Sheet	\$ 10.28	1	\$ 10.28
Mural + Process Board				
	Paints (Exterior Acrylic) 5gal	\$ 98.97	5	\$ 494.85
	4' x 8' Treated Plywood Sheathing	\$ 38.99	4	\$ 155.96
	Chalkboard Paint (Exterior Latex) /gallon	\$ 5.00	3	\$ 15.00
	Non-sanded Grout	\$ 12.00	1	\$ 12.00
	Corkboard 2'x4' roll	\$ 8.99	4	\$ 35.96
	Wood Framing (2"x6") Treated Lumber @ 12'	\$ 8.97	10	\$ 89.70
	Scaffolding (Rental)	\$ -		\$ -
	Rollers + Extensions	\$ -		\$ -
	Drop cloths	\$ -		\$ -
	Masking tape	\$ -		\$ -
	Metal Scrapers	\$ -		\$ -
	Eye protection	\$ -		\$ -
Planter Furniture				
	4' x 8' Treated Plywood Sheathing	\$ 38.99	4	\$ 155.96
	Paint	\$ -		\$ -
	Plants	\$ -		\$ -
	Soil - cubic yard	\$ 75.00	2	\$ 150.00

Recycled Tire Playground + Planters				
	Recycled Automobile Tires	\$ -		\$ -
	Paints (Exterior Acrylic) 5gal	\$ 98.97	2	\$ 197.94
	Plants	\$ -		\$ -
	Mulch (2 cu. Ft)	\$ 3.00	40	\$ 120.00
	Soil - cubic yard	\$ 75.00	2	\$ 150.00
Stage				
	Treated Plywood	\$ 27.97	4	\$ 111.88
	Recycled Pallets	\$ -		\$ -
Mini-Putt				
	Old Golf Clubs	\$ -		\$ -
	Recycled Bricks	\$ -		\$ -
	Tarp	\$ 20.00	1	\$ 20.00
	Rocks	\$ -		\$ -
Misc. Tools + Supplies				
	Brooms	\$ -		\$ -
	5 Piece Paint Tray Kit	\$ 12.98	10	\$ 129.80
	Buckets (Clean up)	\$ -		\$ -
	Wood Screws (3") 20 pcs	\$ 3.50	10	\$ 35.00
	Concrete Screws (3") 15 pcs	\$ 20.00	2	\$ 40.00
	Rakes	\$ -		\$ -
	Shovels	\$ -		\$ -
Total Projected Costs				
				\$ 2,699.28



Estimated Costs

These interventions were each designed with the intent of creating projects which could be constructed by anyone with minimal experience, and also to make use of the resources available within the community. Many of the projects utilize recycled materials, and all of the suggested construction materials can be found within local hardware stores. We also assumed some partnerships with the city and county resources might also bring about some donations for items that are readily available.



Thank you!

We thank Bedford residents whose stories, hospitality, participation, and support made this project such an enjoyable and fulfilling experience. We have had such a wonderful time spending time and working with the Bedford community and our interest in Bedford has grown even deeper because of it. Our hope is for the chance to construct the interventions from the project alongside residents.

We liked to extend a special thank you to our community partners whose excitement and support made the project possible.

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