



NASHVILLE CIVIC DESIGN CENTER

NEW SCHOOLS FOR DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE



JULY 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was produced by the Nashville Civic Design Center staff in cooperation with the Nashville neighborhood groups with which the center has worked in the past. The report was written by Finis Ray and Heydn Ericson, staff interns, and edited by Gary Gaston, Design Director.

Questions and comments may be directed to:

SCHOOLS FOR DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE

Nashville Civic Design Center
138 2nd Avenue North, Suite 106
Nashville, Tennessee 37201
(615) 248 - 4280 voice
gary@civicdesigncenter.org
www.civicdesigncenter.org

The Nashville Civic Design Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization with funding from the Frist Foundation, the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency, the University of Tennessee, and Vanderbilt University.

Founded in 2000, the Nashville Civic Design Center is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to elevate the quality of Nashville's built environment and to promote public participation in the creation of a more beautiful and functional city for all.

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Cover photos:

Vacant plots along 5th Avenue shot from Jefferson Street

Battle Academy in Chattanooga, part of the Southside's renewal

INTRODUCTION

An *American City Business Journals, Inc.* report from March of 2010 ranked Nashville as the 34th “Greenest City” among 43 United States metropolitan areas. Though slightly greener than Louisville and Birmingham, Nashville was greatly outranked by Atlanta, Jacksonville, Raleigh, and Charlotte. The ranking system surveyed a variety of environmental factors in the area including traffic congestion, urban sprawl, mass transit availability and use, air pollution, renewable energy use, and LEED-certified projects and accredited professionals. In the past, Nashville has received similar dubious distinctions among metropolitan areas across the United States - from being the most sprawling metropolitan area with a population of one million people or greater, to having the highest rate of commuter time per capita in the country. Nashville’s inability to be at the forefront of sustainability and urban living lies heavily with suburbanization.

Living in one of the many farflung suburbs of Nashville and commuting into the city for work has created a problematic situation for the sustainability of the urban core and the greater metropolitan area. With families moving away from Nashville in favor of suburban living, the economic and residential growth of the downtown area suffered. A major factor in the exodus from the city has been the availability of better public education and stronger school systems outside Nashville, causing schools themselves to become symptomatic of large-spread American suburbanization. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were 247,000 schools in the United States in 1930. In 2002, that number shrunk by two-thirds to 93,000 schools, despite the student population nearly doubling from 28 to 53.5 million.

Historically, following mid-to-late twentieth century real estate development, schools abandoned

community cores and existing infrastructure and relocated to the edges of existing communities, as a result increasing public infrastructure expenditures, traffic congestion, pollution, and consumption of green space. On a microcosmic scale, these large, suburban schools tend to shroud students in a “cloak of anonymity,” according to the National Association of Secondary School Principals, whereas smaller schools produce better academic results, lower dropout rates, and lessen student violence.

Contrasting with recent trends, the addition of two new schools in downtown could have a dramatic positive affect on the growth and new development in the urban core of Nashville, reversing the trends of suburbanization and promoting a more urban and sustainable lifestyle. In the book *Urban Design*, author Jon Lang describes the idea behind “plug-in urban design,” the strategic placement of infrastructure in a city to spur development and/or unify development, incentivize owners, and boost an area’s competitive advantage. Lang complements his discussion of plug-in design by examining the recent construction of two schools in Chattanooga: “[Schools] are part of every day life. Good schools are essential in attracting middle-income families to live nearby. The catalytic effect is social, economic, and physical.”

Universal reasons to invest in downtown schools:

- Schools must be an integral part of a downtown investment scheme to attract middle-income families with children, making the area more viable. According to recent demographic surveys, 46% of American households have children who are under 18 years old. That means the downtown market would be overlooked by nearly half of all families without quality, affordable educational opportunities.



Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet High School
(Nashville, TN)



Edward R. Roybal High School (Los Angeles, CA)

INTRODUCTION

- Through building smaller neighborhood schools, Nashville will begin to cultivate a more sustainable and urban lifestyle. As individuals and families relocate downtown and find themselves within walking distance of everyday amenities, they will rely more heavily on the walkability of their neighborhoods and mass-transit options. This could effectively reduce traffic and carbon emissions. Additionally, as all new city buildings must meet the United States Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards, the proposed schools themselves would physically exist as means of promoting a more sustainable community.
- Urban schools promote a greater sense of safety and security. Typically, more neighborhood-centered schools tend to reduce student isolation and alienation, and instead promote a stronger sense of individual identity and belonging, increased participation, and a strengthened connection between faculty and students.
- Schools and their role as public spaces can serve as catalysts for community development. As stated in a 2008 American Planning Association article, "Sustainable schoolyards provide schoolchildren with a healthy, dynamic, learning environment. A well-designed, green schoolyard can serve the wider community as well, by allowing nearby residents to walk, run, and bike to it as a valued, recreational resource. Planning that encourages the integration of schools as the centers of their communities helps create safer, more pedestrian/bike-friendly, and accessible routes to schools. In turn, more walk-able and bikeable destinations open up in the surrounding neighborhood." Establishing a strong sense of community and allowing neighborhood access to schools and their

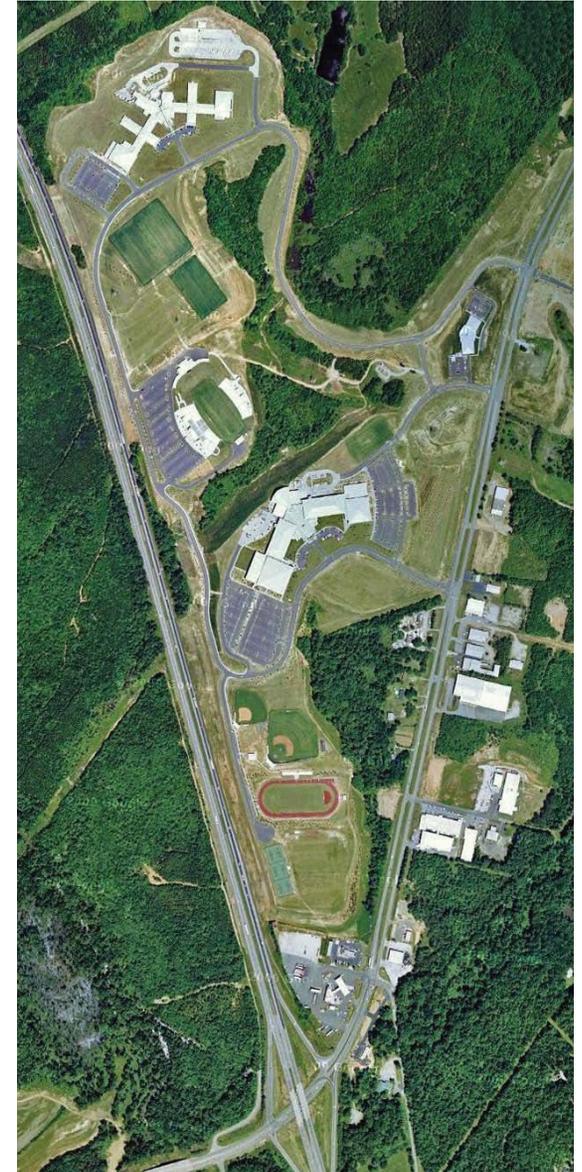
facilities are stated goals in the Metropolitan Nashville Schools 2007-2014 Strategic Plan.

- Neighborhood schools cultivate a sense of neighborhood identity and community pride. This contrasts greatly with suburban schools that are generally separate from their respective communities, both in terms of size and lack of relative context and design.
- Neighborhood schools also promote healthier communities. Not only is the environmental quality of life improved by decreased traffic and increased walkability and bikeability, but individual health is improved because students and parents walk and bike to local schools. Increased optimism and outlook for the future, stemming from the strengthened educational opportunities, helps develop long-lasting individual and community pride.



Above: Columbus Downtown High School (Columbus, OH), an example of an urban high school campus

Below: Dorman High School (Spartanburg, SC); example of the concept of new "mega" schools on isolated greenfield sites



BENEFITS OF DOWNTOWN SCHOOLS

Nashville's Downtown, like similar urban areas undergoing renewal across the country, is often associated with empty nesters, twenty-somethings, and young professionals. As a result, the development of quality educational facilities in the urban core has often been delayed due to the demographics of downtown. "Development," an official with Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools said, "usually happens prior to school construction."

According to the Nashville Downtown Partnership's 2010 Residential Report, 61% of downtown residents are aged 45 and under. Of that, 25% are aged 29 and under, and 36% are aged 30-45; the 2010 population projection of downtown is 5,155, with an estimated 7.4% increase in 2011 to 5,536.

In comparison, the estimated population of Memphis' downtown is 23,013 with a projected 1.9% increase in 2011 to 23,450; Chattanooga's downtown population is currently estimated at 11,000 and has seen a 22% increase since 2005. In recent years, both cities have constructed state-of-the-art schools in the heart of downtown, a factor that has been a significant incentive for people to move downtown.

The healthiest of cities have 2% of the city's metropolitan area living downtown. Nashville's metropolitan statistical area (MSA) is 1.28 million; for Nashville to meet the challenge of being a healthy city, an additional 25,000 people must move downtown.

As stated in the 2010 Residential Report, "Downtown Nashville is poised for continued residential growth in the future based on a variety of factors: overall national trends of urban movement, population growth, strong occupancy rates, increasing urban amenities including incremental growth of retail establishments over the past two years, increase in transportation options, and continued investment in

public and private projects in the downtown area."

In continuing the trend of residential growth in downtown Nashville, it is important to understand the value homebuyers attach to urban amenities. When purchasing, consumers and housing markets often attach great value to living within easy walking distance of service providers, restaurants, schools and parks. Moreover, walkability has become a paramount factor in choosing where people want to live. Homes in more walkable neighborhoods can command a premium of \$4,000 - \$34,000 over houses with average levels of walkability in typical metropolitan areas. The new neighborhood schools would not only increase the walkability of neighborhoods, but also generate less reliance on cars and increase pedestrian traffic and reliance on mass transportation, activating more street life within the city.

By implementing schools into Nashville's downtown, there is an immediate incentive to move downtown and purchase homes. The residential growth within the neighborhoods thus serves as a catalyst for subsequent economic growth, creating opportunity for long-term development within the city. Not only would the schools stimulate economic and residential growth, but also they would serve as an impetus to revitalize the existing neighborhoods.

The investment in the proposed new downtown elementary school and the arts magnet high school would serve as a factor in revitalizing existing communities, strengthening the identities of Nashville's neighborhoods, and elevating the overall quality of life simply from the spillover effects of school pride. Pride within schools, often stemming from strong academic performance, athletic teams, and the facility itself, tends to create neighborhood pride. Strong neighborhood pride and tightly-knit

communities make areas safer more desirable for living, continuing the cycle of residential and economic growth that stems from the investment in downtown schools.

Most importantly, however, the new schools in Nashville will provide better education and greater opportunities for students throughout the city, fostering excellence in public education, while simultaneously creating a more urban and sustainable lifestyle, a healthier city, and strengthened Nashville identity.

LEARNING FROM TENNESSEE - MEMPHIS DOWNTOWN ELEMENTARY

Though Memphis closed its last historic downtown school in the 1960's, Memphis City Schools completed the new Downtown Elementary School in 2002 as part of a new urban village adjacent to the downtown Autozone Park Baseball stadium. An employee for Memphis City Schools stated, "There was a lot of community interest, such as people working downtown, developers." The area, once dilapidated, is now renamed the Memphis Ballpark Neighborhood and has seen great growth and rejuvenation since the redevelopment efforts. According to Looney Ricks Kiss, the design firm responsible for the neighborhood redevelopment, "The area used to be eight city blocks of previously abandoned buildings, empty lots and X-rated theaters along the eastern border of downtown Memphis [and now thrives] as a desirable urban neighborhood to live, work, and play. The Redbirds' 14,000 seat AAA ballpark anchors the \$200 million mixed-use development covering 20 acres." The Memphis Ballpark Neighborhood has since received awards from the Urban Land Institute and the Congress for the New Urbanism. Downtown Elementary even named its sports team the "Skyscrapers."



Downtown Elementary, located in the heart of downtown Memphis, TN



AutoZone Park, Memphis, TN



Students worked with a local artist to create the floor mosaic in the school's common area

LEARNING FROM TENNESSEE - CHATTANOOGA BROWN ACADEMY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Chattanooga, whose last remaining downtown elementary schools closed in the 1980's, has rebuilt two downtown elementary schools since 2000. In a 2002 article written by Karen Hundt for the American Planning Association, Christine Kreyling is quoted, "We're putting big emphasis right now on getting more housing downtown and getting a mixture of people to live in it, including families with children. That means you need schools. If we built just one, [though,] it would be pretty much filled the day it opened, and with mostly poor kids. School superintendent Jesse Register said he didn't want a 'school of poverty.' And we wanted some growing room for subsequent downtown residential development." The solution was the construction of two downtown magnet schools, one of which was funded entirely from private donations.

Similar to the proposed sites for Nashville, the Battle Academy for Teaching and Learning was built on a small lot of 3.3 acres, while the typical Chattanooga school was traditionally situated on 8-13 acre lots. The Chattanooga architecture firm responsible for the school's design, TWH Architects, Inc., designed the facility as a two story L-shaped building, complete with community space to be made available for public use after operating hours. The school also boasts several sustainable features, such as window and room configurations that allow for full daylight illumination. Additionally, it is the first school in the area to feature a green roof. Aside from being aesthetically pleasing and beneficial as a recreational and learning space for students, green roofs reduce the urban heat island effect and have insulation qualities that reduce heating and cooling needs.

Prior to the construction of Battle Academy, the area's built and social environments were notoriously degraded.



The Battle Academy for Teaching and Learning, located in Chattanooga's Southside neighborhood



The interior public space of Battle Academy



Garden supplies for cultivating the gardens of the Academy's green roof

LEARNING FROM TENNESSEE - CHATTANOOGA

However, with vision, funding, and motivation from local organizations and the community, the school and an adjacent fire station were built. Now within walking distance from the school, hospitality options include a host of hip destinations: Niedlov's Breadworks, Blue Orleans Creole Restaurant, Link 41, a butcher shop, and Jefferson Heights Park. Additionally, the resource center "green|spaces" is located in the area, a center for Chattanoogaans to obtain information and knowledge about sustainable design. Many of the area's historic homes have been restored and several multi-story buildings have been built around the Academy. Even still, over three-quarters of the school's students are children of commuters, though the number of children from Battle's school district is rising.

TOMMIE F. BROWN INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY

Also in Chattanooga, the Tommie F. Brown International Academy promotes sustainability through design features. Located on a small, triangular site of 2.5 acres owned by the University of Tennessee, Brown International Academy boasts a three story, L-shaped floor plan, incorporating glass and sloped ceilings into the design for daylight illumination purposes. Brown Academy also features a green roof complete with a storm water recycling system to irrigate the landscaping. The abandoned railway adjacent to the school is in the planning phase of conversion into a public greenway.

A key lesson from Chattanooga relates to its student recruitment strategies. In an effort to attract a diverse student population, the school board gives preference for enrollment to downtown residents, then to children of downtown workers, and finally those children that neither live downtown or have parents that work downtown.

According to the Nashville Downtown Partnership's 2009 Downtown Business Census and Survey, 85% of downtown employees drive to work alone, begging the question of how many students could be brought downtown by parents who are downtown employees should more downtown schools exist.

Moreover, Battle Academy and Brown International Academy illustrate the profound positive effects downtown schools can have on revitalizing neighborhoods, attracting residential growth and inviting economic diversity.



One of many signs of reinvestment in Chattanooga's once dilapidated Southside

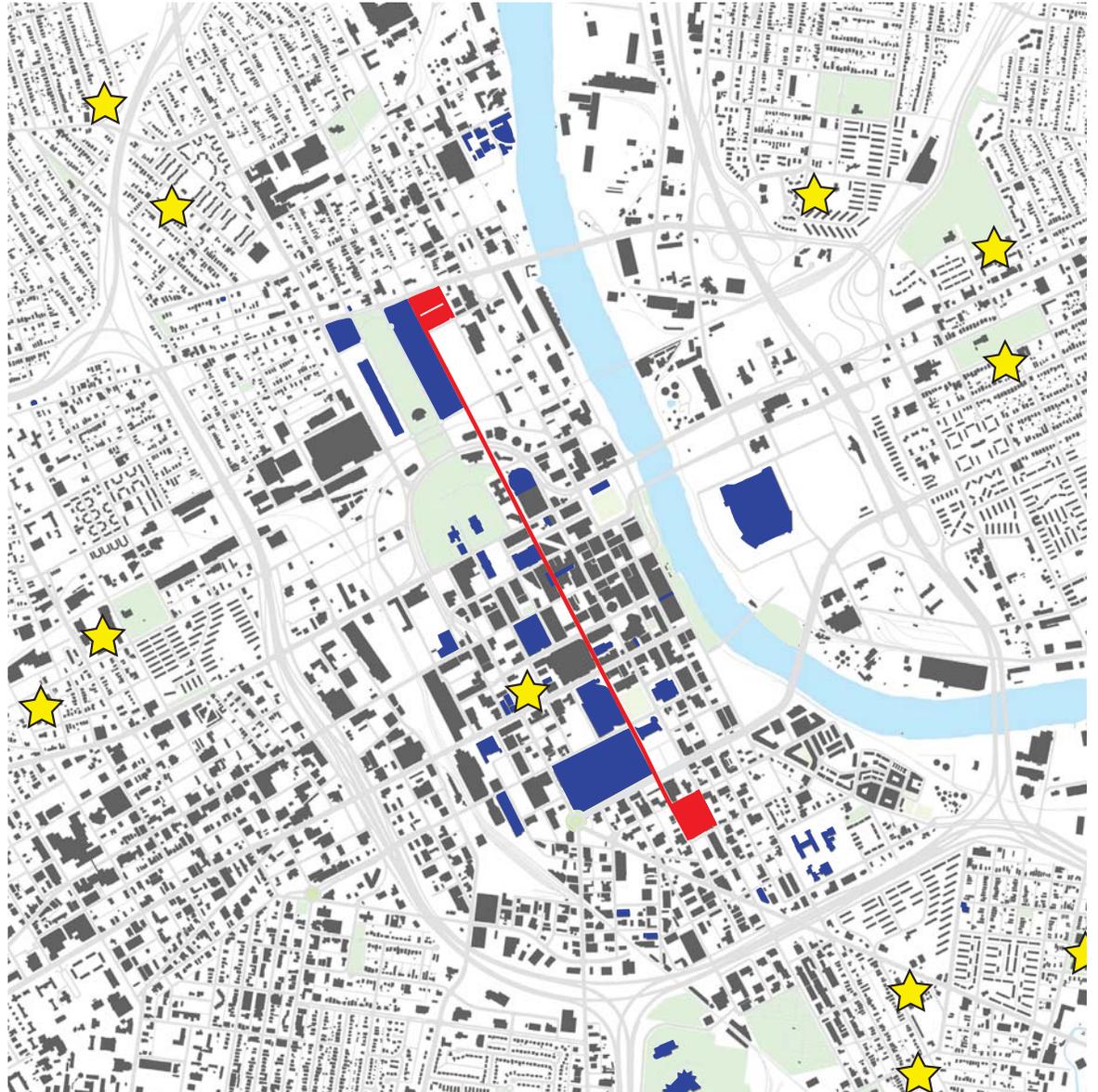


The Tommie F. Brown International Academy (Chattanooga, TN)

LOCATIONS FOR THE NEW SCHOOLS

The Nashville Civic Design Center proposes a new magnet elementary school in the Lafayette neighborhood and a magnet arts school in the Sulphur Dell neighborhood. The schools would share an axial relationship, as their sites are flanked by 4th and 5th Avenues (Avenue of the Arts). These locations would provide the schools with close proximity to downtown art and science museums, as well as many other educational institutions throughout the city. Additionally, the locational advantage of the proposed schools addresses goals from the city's [Schools Strategic Plan](#), namely "to market and promote relevant and engaging extracurricular activities for students risk of dropout", and to "select and use technology in developmentally appropriate ways to promote active learning, improve student engagement and individualize instruction."

Both structures would be a departure from the typical Nashville school, usually imagined as a wide, one story building set atop massive swaths of land. Typically, this type of campus is constructed due to zoning regulations within neighborhoods that require a minimum of five acres, with an additional one acre per 100 students. For a campus of 600 students, zoning would require a minimum of eleven acres devoted to school grounds. However, as both proposed school sites fall within the area under zoning rules of the newly-adopted Downtown Code, the schools could be as vertical as necessary. As imagined by a planner for the city of Nashville, "Basically, a school could be in any existing downtown building, or in a new, very urban building."



Map of downtown showing existing schools (stars), Avenue of the Arts and school sites (red), relevant businesses, galleries, cultural and government institutions and museums (blue), and parks (green)

DOWNTOWN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Plan of Nashville envisions a magnet elementary school placed on the site between 4th and 5th Avenues and Lea and Peabody Streets, complete with a shared park and recreation space. The site (approximately 4.34 acres) is located one block to the south of Korean Veterans Boulevard and the new Music City Center and headquarters hotel.



View of downtown elementary site (red) and the proposed shared park space (green)



The view of downtown from the proposed school site



In its current state, the site is in need of renovation

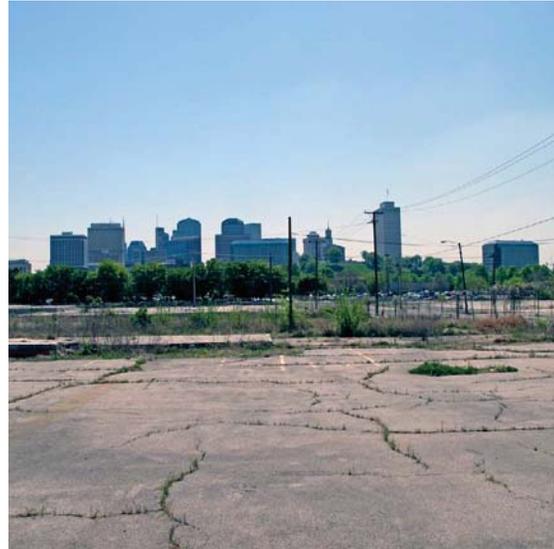


View towards the Gulch one-half mile from proposed site

ARTS MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL

In 2006, a citizen's committee met to propose the idea of relocating the Nashville School of the Arts to the Bicentennial Mall area, specifically the site between 4th and 5th Avenues and Jefferson and Jackson Streets. The site is approximately 3.5 acres, and is divided by Jackson Court into a 1.9 acre site to the north and 1.6 acre site to the south. In honor of who has been described as "Nashville's premier arts educator and artist," the committee recommended the school be named the Louise LeQuire Arts Magnet School.

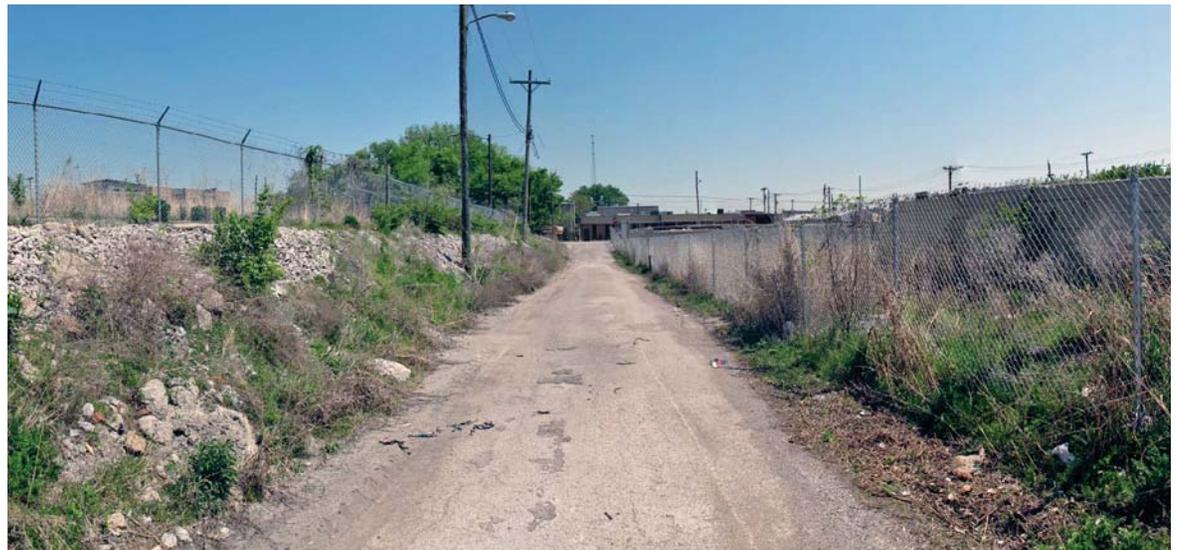
The Arts Magnet site was highlighted in the 2004 [Bicentennial Mall Urban Master Plan](#). Including the call for the construction of a new Tennessee State Museum and Library & Archives, the authors envision the area as "a place of celebration whose identity is linked with the learning about life and the making of the arts. It would be a place in the city where the creative impulses of the human spirit would find voice."



View of downtown from the proposed school site



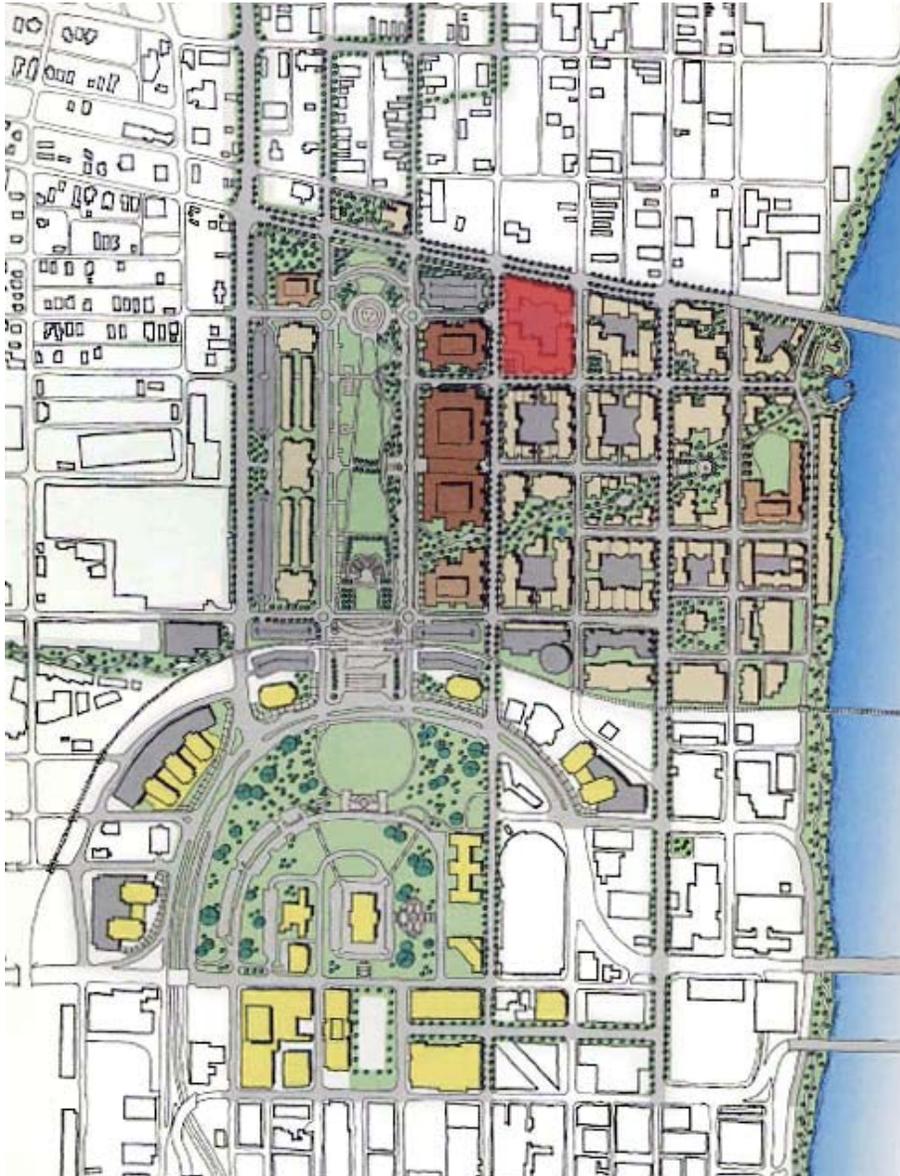
Jefferson Street Lofts lie adjacent to the proposed site



View of Jackson Court, bisecting the 3.5 acre site

ARTS MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL AND BICENTENNIAL MALL MASTERPLAN

The Bicentennial Mall Urban Master Plan, with the Arts Magnet School highlighted in red



Jefferson Street envisioned after the completed redevelopment of the area



View of the new Library/Archives (left) and the new Tennessee State Museum (center), on the eastern side of the Bicentennial Mall

CASE STUDY: SAN DIEGO

The Centre City Development Corporation of San Diego, a non-profit public organization focused on downtown redevelopment, recently contracted Competitive Edge Research and Communication to field questions about the construction of downtown schools. A group of 500 San Diego parents with children under the age of 11 were surveyed to measure the strengths and weaknesses of a new school and the likelihood of parents to move downtown for their children to attend a new educational facility.

The study found that when sending children to school, the universal top priorities include community and parental involvement, strong emphasis on science, technology and mathematics programs, and overall academic performance.

In an attempt to create greater localized enthusiasm for urban campuses and promote subsequent downtown living, the research group surveyed the specific priorities of parents concerned with downtown schools in San Diego. The most popular response was the recruitment of enthusiastic teachers, followed by an emphasis on foreign language, pre-school and after-school activities, and the incorporation of computers in each classroom. Other popular responses included educational science laboratories and routinely bringing people into the school from cultural, artistic, and business communities to speak to the students.

Upon identifying the necessities required by parents in downtown schools, the research group then sought to find the likelihood of parents to relocate to the urban core for the purpose of sending their children to better schools. It was found that parents with children under school age are unfamiliar with their children's future school, with parents of infants knowing even less. Thus, this lack of knowledge makes it easier to influence parents on school choice when their child is younger.

The study additionally identified that 26 is the “magic age” for parents to relocate, as most parents older than 26 are settled into their homes. As a result, in order to influence parents to move downtown, it is necessary for marketers of downtown residences to seek parents when they are young. For parents to move downtown, they need to know their children will be receiving a better education than what is available in their current neighborhood, and parents must also know that moving will enable them to attend the school through neighborhood preference for enrollment. The Chattanooga schools Battle Academy and Brown International Academy developed a successful marketing answer to enrollment preference; first preference is given to children who live downtown, second to children of downtown employees, and lastly to those who neither live nor work downtown.

Using the San Diego study model as a precedent, it is easy to determine what factors are most important when developing a strategy for successfully implementing schools into the urban landscape of Nashville. Investing in downtown projects such as the proposed elementary and arts magnet schools can dramatically affect the growth and new development in the urban core of the city. If schools have the ability to attract families with children to the neighborhood, especially homeowners, it can act as a force for neighborhood stabilization and revitalization by simply increasing families' commitment to and investment in the neighborhood.

Moreover, improving the educational facilities for the families already living in the neighborhood can make a large contribution to overall neighborhood revitalization. Schools that have a strong reputation for academic excellence can breed a good source of neighborhood pride, fostering a “culture of excellence.” The spillover effects of school and community pride, such as sense of community,

culture and property value, can positively affect aspects of family and neighborhood health, improving the long-term outlook for children, their families, neighborhood development, and the overall identity of Nashville.



Washington Elementary (downtown San Diego, CA)



Amici Park, a public space adjacent to Washington Elementary that functions as a park and schoolyard

CASE STUDY: CHICAGO

Standing out among its dull surroundings of empty warehouses and vacant lots, the brightly colored chartreuse Gary Comer College Preparatory High School, located in the Grand Crossing neighborhood Chicago, Illinois, shines as a beacon of hope for a neighborhood that is in great need of rejuvenation.

Named for Gary Comer, who grew up in the Grand Crossing neighborhood and was the founder of clothing retailer Land's End, the high school was funded by the tax credits from the Chicago Development Fund and the Comer Science and Education Foundation. Adjacent to the high school is the Gary Comer Youth Center, which has become part of the school's campus.

Opened to students in September 2010, the design of Gary Comer College Prep was overseen by John Ronan Architects. Aware of the neighborhood's need for greater optimism, Ronan sought to use the architecture of the space to better the learning environment for students, and give the community optimism for the future.

A compact 45,000 square feet, the high school boasts 25 classrooms, four science laboratories, and a computer laboratory. The wallpaper of the grand, two-story lobby is lined with the insignias of prestigious American universities, highlighting the administration's focus on preparing the students for college. Classrooms are arranged on the perimeter of the building and administrative offices are located in the core. This allows for natural light from skylights and the large interior and exterior windows to flood the classrooms, an effort to minimize electrical costs and maximize student potential. Moreover, the interior corridor windows allow the school administration the opportunity to monitor classroom activity at all time, promoting a culture of accountability and creating community within the confines of the school.

The school's cafeteria, gymnasium and theatre are located in the adjacent Youth Center, accessed by walking. Outdoors is also a plaza, nicknamed "the Quad," innately promoting social interaction among the student body. This campus arrangement gives the school the feel of a university campus, reinforcing the administration's focus on higher education and 100% college attendance.

Though the school has only been open since mid-2010, attendance is at a solid 96% and initiatives have already been taken to better the build environment and quality of life in the Grand Crossing neighborhood simply as a result of pride for the new school. In stabilizing the neighborhood, preliminary efforts have been made to rehabilitate the nearby Paul Revere Elementary School, build a new public library, and develop more affordable housing.

The early success of Gary Comer College Prep speaks to the intentions of constructing two new schools in downtown Nashville. It was just two years prior to Gary Comer opening the doors to students that the area was ridden with crime and was the scene of the senseless, accidental killing of a teenage girl. Since the construction of the school, the optimism invoked from Gary Comer has had positive spillover effects, resulting in decreased crime, stronger safety measures, and a united community taking initiative to better itself for the future.

This success shows the resounding positive effects new schools can have for Nashville, demonstrating precedence in how pride in education and school facilities can better the quality of life in communities and ensure a more stable and prosperous future for the neighborhood and the city.



Gary Comer College Prep School (Chicago, IL)



Gary Comer Youth Center, located adjacent to the high school

CASE STUDY: ST. LOUIS

Jefferson Elementary School, located two miles from downtown St. Louis, Missouri, was built in the 1960's to serve the children of the public housing projects in the surrounding neighborhoods. However, by the mid 1990's, Jefferson had become one of the lowest performing elementary schools in St. Louis. As a result, the school underwent physical and administrative restructuring in 1998, with the implementation of a new principal and instructional program. Though the building itself was not fully renovated, updates included landscaping, new interior flooring, fresh interior paint, computer access for each classroom, two new computer labs, the addition of an elevator, and air conditioning for the entire building.

The changes to the school were part of the transformation of the suffering public housing developments. McCormack-Baron, a for-profit developer of economically integrated urban neighborhoods, had worked on the redevelopment and management of Murphy Park, a neighborhood served by Jefferson Elementary. After completing a survey of O'Fallon Place, a housing development that bordered Murphy Park, Richard Baron found that a majority of the students in the development were being bussed to fifty different schools in the St. Louis Public School System. A majority of the students attending Jefferson were being bussed in from various parts of the county.

In an effort to continue the redevelopment of the area, and belief that schools play a key role in the rejuvenation of an area, McCormack-Baron saw an opportunity for reform and immense need for a strong school to ground the Murphy Park neighborhood. As a result, Richard Baron called upon the public school system to take the necessary steps to restructure Jefferson Elementary.

To update the school, the St. Louis Public School system funded \$400,000 for the improvements; an additional \$3.5 million was donated through a grant from the Danforth Foundation and corporate contributions from Edward Jones, Enterprise Leasing, Energizer, Southwest Bell and Bank of America.

At the reformed Jefferson Elementary School, COVAM, a non-profit that serves as an organizational support for neighborhood institutions, aids in fundraising and having a group of stakeholders interposed between the school and the school system who are in a position to protect the reforms at Jefferson should that become necessary. COVAM also monitors the progress of Jefferson School and serves as a community watchdog. A COVAM liaison specialist forms part of a bridge between the housing development and the school. The liaison spends a substantial amount of time at Jefferson School, serving as the "eyes and the ears" of the community and supporting activities that link community to the school.

The transformation of the reformed Jefferson Elementary School was a template of what could be done to elevate the St. Louis public school system standards and the relationship between school and community. As of now, parent participation is high and academic performance has improved; COVAM plays a strong role in monitoring the performance of the school and has instituted management practices designed to reinforce the high community standards that the school promotes. Expectation of greater family and neighborhood stability, as well as continued improvement of the instructional program, will help the school's academic performance and foster a positive cycle of school and neighborhood involvement.

More than a template for St. Louis public schools, the effects of reforming Jefferson Elementary School give precedence to the anticipated effects of implementing schools into the structure of downtown Nashville. The positive outcome of investing in a community school reinforces the need to integrate schools into the urban core, not only to create economic reverberations, but also to strengthen Nashville's diverse neighborhoods and provide more educational opportunities for families.



Jefferson Elementary School after redevelopment, St. Louis, MO



The Murphy Park neighborhood after redevelopment

FINAL THOUGHTS

In the Twentieth Century, Nashville and many other American cities saw a great exodus of population and financial capital from the urban core in favor of the suburban lifestyle. Currently, great attention is focused on revitalizing downtown Nashville as the unsustainability of the suburban lifestyle becomes more evident. Despite the gradual influx of population returning to the core of Nashville, suburban communities continue to hold a majority of Nashville families. Many families cite school systems, particularly the Williamson County School System as a main reason why they reside in a suburb of Nashville instead of Nashville itself. A reversal of the suburban trend is likely if greater emphasis is placed on creating a complete urban lifestyle that includes more family friendly neighborhoods, such as investing in urban school campuses that encourage community involvement and overall academic excellence.

“User-centered innovation is not sustainable,” Robert Vergani writes in a Harvard Business Review article. The idea of user-center innovation, or market indicators, has been the driving force behind major decision making in recent decades – resulting in excesses ranging from suburban mega schools on isolated greenfield sites to increased car size and greater fuel consumption.

Even following the economic downturn, Vergani argues such perspective on the excesses has been slated as the solution for all problems and opportunities. As continued in his article, Vergani writes, “User-centered sustainability has helped conduct us into an unsustainable world. [...] Only forward-looking executives, designers, and, of course, policy makers may introduce sustainable innovation into the economic picture. They need to step back from the current dominant needs and behaviors and envision new scenarios.”

Envisioning new scenarios as a means of introducing

economic innovation into the core of Nashville is necessary for the continued growth of downtown. The implementation of two urban campuses, an elementary magnet school and arts magnet high school, is a great new scenario for catalyzing economic growth and residential development and strengthening the identity of downtown Nashville.

Incorporating the proposed new schools into the urban landscape of Nashville will prove to be advantageous in many respects. Not only will the schools contribute to neighborhood revitalization by improving educational opportunities for families living in downtown neighborhoods, but it will also help to cultivate identity and neighborhood pride often associated with good schools. Elevating the academic excellence of the proposed schools to that of Hume-Fogg Academic Magnet High School and Martin Luther King Magnet High School, each of which consistently rank as two of the top public schools in the United States, will only prove to make downtown Nashville a more attractive place to live and work.

Perhaps most importantly, the implementation of the new schools is not only an excellent investment in public education and a means of stimulating residential and economic growth, but also an asset in advancing Nashville into a more prosperous Twenty-First Century. The incorporation of the schools is just one of the many stepping stones that have been laid to progress Nashville into a healthier, more sustainable city that fully encompasses the urban lifestyle.

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