Each student project culminates the set of issues researched by the Inclusion & Neighborhood Resilience studio throughout the semester into one conclusive design proposal. By rethinking and redeveloping the previous site of The International Institute, students had to contend with existing adjacencies, increased parking demands, the optimal location for the housing component among others. The process began with the search for a viable program for the climate of Gravois Park community that could take advantage of the existing structure. The special-use program proposed by students ranges from small business incubators, early Head Start Education Centers, trade schools, after-school programs, and more.

In conjunction to the special-use program, each proposal incorporates a minimum of 40 apartment units into the site to be occupied by all members of the community ranging from refugees, to low income, and middle income residents. This was done either by annexing off the existing building, expanding stories above, or through an out parcel to the Northern, Northeastern, or Eastern sides of the site. By doing so, other factors such as access, circulation, and daylighting were evaluated. The following six proposals depict how design can respond proactively to adaptive reuse through meaningful redevelopment of the existing site, its building, and the building’s intended purpose.
SOCIAL SUSTENANCE
NURTURING CHANGE

Daniel Aguilera

Solutions born from an understanding of community strengths ensures deeper roots and an ability to address a variety of problematic areas. Programs and design need a focus on assets rather than just the problems, in order to help the community.

The site’s direct connection to S. Grand Blvd. and the existing building itself became the fabric on which program, design and intent were concentrated. The building presented for adaptive reuse was originally the South Buick Auto Center, a structure capable of vehicle occupation on each floor, including the roof. The elevated rate of Youth crime and the lack of activity space in the community brought about an idea for an alternative to re-incarceration of previous youth criminals, low employment rates and low educational and economic mobility for those individuals convicted of crimes between the ages of 17-25. Social Sustenance proposes a food truck incubator catered to previously incarcerated youths, at risk youths in the area as well as those interested in creating, owning or working in the developing food truck business. This program provides support to a variety of areas and allows for increased economic mobility, connection to the other parts of the city and the creation of an anchor for the immediate neighborhoods.

The residential component of the project engages the educational component through the exterior space, while maintaining an individual and private existence and identity within itself. Units are comprised of three socioeconomic typologies, market rate, low-income and refugee housing for either transitional living or long-term integration into the community. The structural system of the residential buildings, vertical concrete shear walls, creates a rigid and dimensional system within which a more flexible plan for the units can be optimized. This allows for a malleable organization prepared to shift from low-income to market rate, or convert a three-bedroom into a four bedroom through minimum change. The main purpose for this flexibility however, is the uncertainty of the size requirements or family dynamics of future refugees. The amount of refugees received by the International Institute of St. Louis fluctuate year by year based on cultural, regional and global issues, resulting in a fluctuating need for apartment sizes, quantities and types. Formally, both rigid systems of the adapted building and the residential component are softened and connected with the groundscape and interior walls.
Immigrants and refugees come into the United States with vast amount of skills and traits, but are not always granted the opportunity to showcase them. The International Business Incubator creates the opportunity for incoming refugees and immigrants to have a space that allows them to startup their own businesses. Incubation is defined as something that develops or produces or hatches. The space proposed is experienced through physical and visual connections that provide the guest with the ability to witness the production. The Incubator provides a series of spaces that our linked to classrooms, where guest can come learn how to make what is sold at the market, therefore, creating the ultimate interaction experience.
Third Space is a civic space that proposes journalism as a programmatic outlet for the Gravois Park and immigrant communities of St. Louis. Throughout history, journalism has been an invaluable platform and voice for marginalized communities through Foreign Correspondents clubs (FCC). FCCs are hubs where journalists, correspondents, diplomats, and citizens convene within the community. In these spaces community and club members can create periodicals, host forums and exhibitions, network with fellow members, learn about topical issues, reference libraries, and generally engage with their community in a meaningful way. Third Space provides these resources concurrently with a digital library to the Gravois Park community and the greater network of St. Louis cultural societies and newspapers.

The lower floor is the digital library which consists of an exhibition space, a cafe, a classroom, and digital archives in conjunction to technological resources such as audiovisual studios, a green screen room, and computer lab. Here community members and local schools can benefit from access to state-of-the-art technology, see exhibitions on local issues presented by journalists and artists, and screenings of movies hosted by Third Space. A town hall space to the northern side of the Third Space building provides a much needed venue for community interaction and activism since the current venue is too small to hold all the constituents. The upper floor is occupied by a Foreign Correspondents Club for journalists to network with St. Louis’ cultural and ethnic societies. An urban park provides a buffer between the community building and the housing units that frames the northern side of the lot. The housing complex totals 42 units that range from: four-bedroom units with balconies prioritized to large refugee families, and a mix of market rate and low-income three, two with balconies, and single bedroom units. In total, there are 6 1Bed/1Bath units, 13 2Bed/2Bath, 13 3Bed/2Bath, and 10 4Bed/2Bath units.
The building was constructed in 1926 as the Southside Automobile Company’s service center. The automotive industry has been an integral part of St. Louis’ history and precedents along Grand Blvd. Through my research which included a vast network of automotive buildings, historic and current, my intention is to transform the building back to the historic use bringing the lively nature of the automotive industry back to this area of Grand. The automotive service in St. Louis is still thriving and within the St. Louis area, and I propose a Trade School for Automotible Service - The School will have a service learning so parents and students will be able to work during their training. There are many businesses that can collaborate with the school to offer employment to the students during their education and after graduation. The program will aim to train students in servicing cars, while still also work in conjunction with a local school to help students finish high school while in training. In interviews conducted with personnel from the International Institute, I came to learn that refugees aged 17 to 21 have a hard time finishing school in the US, and consequently, finding jobs to help provide for their typically large families is very different from the rate from.

The Gravois neighborhood is a struggling neighborhood with children that have a low graduating high school and is plagued with high crime rates. While the graduation rates of St. Louis hover around 63% whereas Central VPA High School, a technical school for performing arts has a graduation rate of 93%. This is an indication of the need for technical programs as vital to the success of high schoolers in not only this neighborhood but the whole city. By creating more programs around the city that activate young minds, the crime rates is expected to decrease.

The proposed program is catered this specific demographic as well as those students in the neighborhood and other neighborhoods that have difficulties in graduating from school and are interested in a skill training and educational program. As a part of the building strategy, I intend to create transparency through the building to allow for visual connection between the program within the building and the street, as well as between spaces within the two levels of the building.
EARLY BEGINNINGS
INCLUSIVE EARLY HEAD START PROGRAM

Amanda Malone

Gravois Park is a unique neighborhood for its density and diversity, yet it is troubled with issues of economic disparity and crime at a rate similar to north St. Louis. Research shows that low income and education lead into crime. Gravois Park confirms this by showing the lowest education levels of degrees attained within the city of St. Louis along with some of the highest high school drop out rates for the public schools, in addition to the high rates of single mothers. School readiness, particularly among poor children, may help prevent the cascade of consequences of early academic failure and school behavioral problems. Specifically, the years before a child reaches kindergarten are among the most critical in his or her life to influence learning. Head Start programs to combat these issues are scattered throughout St. Louis, although are generally concentrated in the north side of the city. These Head Start programs are limited to those who are at or below the poverty line. They are 80% federally funded, while the remaining 20% must be generated from the community, whether that be by donations or volunteering. Therefore the neighborhood of Gravois Park could benefit with the addition of an Early Head Start program, along with a prenatal education program, that will be inclusive to people above the poverty line in order to cover the 20% while promoting socioeconomic diversity. This early educational gain attempt to increase students motivation and performance in subsequent years, ultimately leading to higher educational attainment and reduced drop-out rates.

As part of their development children need greater exposure to sunlight. The building at 3664 S. Grand though receives none on the interior since all of its window have been in-filled and plastered over. As part of the historical preservation strategy, the arched windows along the west and south sides will be restored. In addition, the north side of the building is carved out to allow the penetration of light in the interior. The classrooms for the children will be situated around these voids in order to light the classrooms with natural light while also the day while also giving direct access to the outdoor play area. The indoor play area is located along the south side arched windows to incentivise play. The residential is placed along the east side will also be carved out with voids to create communal outdoor spaces. Some will create interaction among the adjacent residents units, while others of the entire floor, meanwhile the roof of the Head Start program will be available for all of the residents.
The proposal for the reuse of the Donna Brown Building was the result of the analysis of the public space layout in S. Grand Ave. This included an understanding of the qualities of the promenade created in the S. Grand Commercial District through a “street diet”, and the beautification of the streetscape. I was in particular interested in studying parking as it clearly affects walkability and circulation. Though a series of studies in plan and section, I was able to look at the different parking typologies that existed along Grand. It was apparent in this study that as a pedestrian moved from north to south the appearance of the retail typology of the “box” changes completely the walkability and perception of safety. Therefore the neighborhood became less pedestrian friendly and connected to the commercial strip. As a result, the ability to appeal to those customers that are attracted to South Grand for its urban appeal increasingly diminished once you pass Utah Blvd.

Therefore, it was important to make the site a destination that could provide those customers an incentive to cross Gravois Ave. As a result, a courtyard surrounded by retail and a space for center for children from inside and outside the neighborhood to play was a vital piece in this proposal. The urban promenade continues from the courtyard to the roof garden, where ample views of the city are offered to the visitor.

Since more than half of the refugee children are under 14 year old and the Gravois Park’s demographic showed the existence of single mothers and households with your children, it was important to respond to the needs of these young households. Hence, an after care facility that could not only provide a safe environment for kids to play and work on their homeworks, but also the space for their parents to work on their cv, business plans, or just enjoy a coffee among other things. The adults and kids would be visually connected through the space. The housing program frames the courtyard and roof garden as well as it shape responds to specific views of the city.