

# CAPSTONE

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How can vacant office buildings be adaptively reused into universally accessible community spaces?

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2024 - 2025  
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Fig. 1

**“People ignore designs that ignore people.”**

- Frank Chimero

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Fig. 2

# INTRODUCTION

Adaptive reuse is an architectural and urban planning approach that involves repurposing existing buildings for new functions and breathing new life into structures that may otherwise be underused or abandoned. This practice plays a crucial role in sustainable development, as it minimizes the environmental impact associated with demolition and new construction, reduces waste, and preserves historical and cultural assets within cities. In essence, adaptive reuse helps cities evolve in ways that are resource-efficient and respectful of the urban landscape's legacy, while providing opportunities to address social and economic needs. By transforming vacant or outdated buildings into spaces for new uses, adaptive reuse contributes to creating vibrant, multifaceted urban areas, fostering a sense of place and community.

Today's urban environments face multiple interconnected challenges. This research will look closely into the significant rise in vacant office spaces, especially due to shifting work habits following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left many central business districts with underutilized buildings. This trend highlights the need for new uses that can reintegrate these structures into the urban fabric, serving communities in innovative ways. Moreover, many urban areas suffer from social disconnection, where residents may feel isolated from one another and lack accessible, inclusive spaces that foster interaction and engagement. A further complication is the pressing need for inclusive design strategies that address diverse physical, cultural, and socio-economic needs, especially as cities grow more heterogeneous. These challenges underscore the

importance of rethinking public architecture to support stronger, more cohesive communities.

In response to these issues, this research aims to explore how adaptive reuse, guided by principles of universal design, phenomenology, environmental psychology and the 15-minute city theories, can contribute to enriching public architecture. Together, these approaches can inspire adaptive reuse strategies that bring new relevance and purpose to public spaces, benefiting both individuals and the broader urban environment.

This study will investigate the following questions:

- Can we create a "5-minute neighborhood" within a single community building, providing a range of essential amenities in a compact, accessible form?
- How might we enhance the urban experience by designing inclusive environments that prioritize accessibility and social connection?
- What precedents in adaptive reuse offer valuable lessons for this type of design?
- What does it mean to design "universally"?

By examining these questions, this research seeks to provide insights into how adaptive reuse can be harnessed not just for economic sustainability, but also as a catalyst for social cohesion and community well-being.

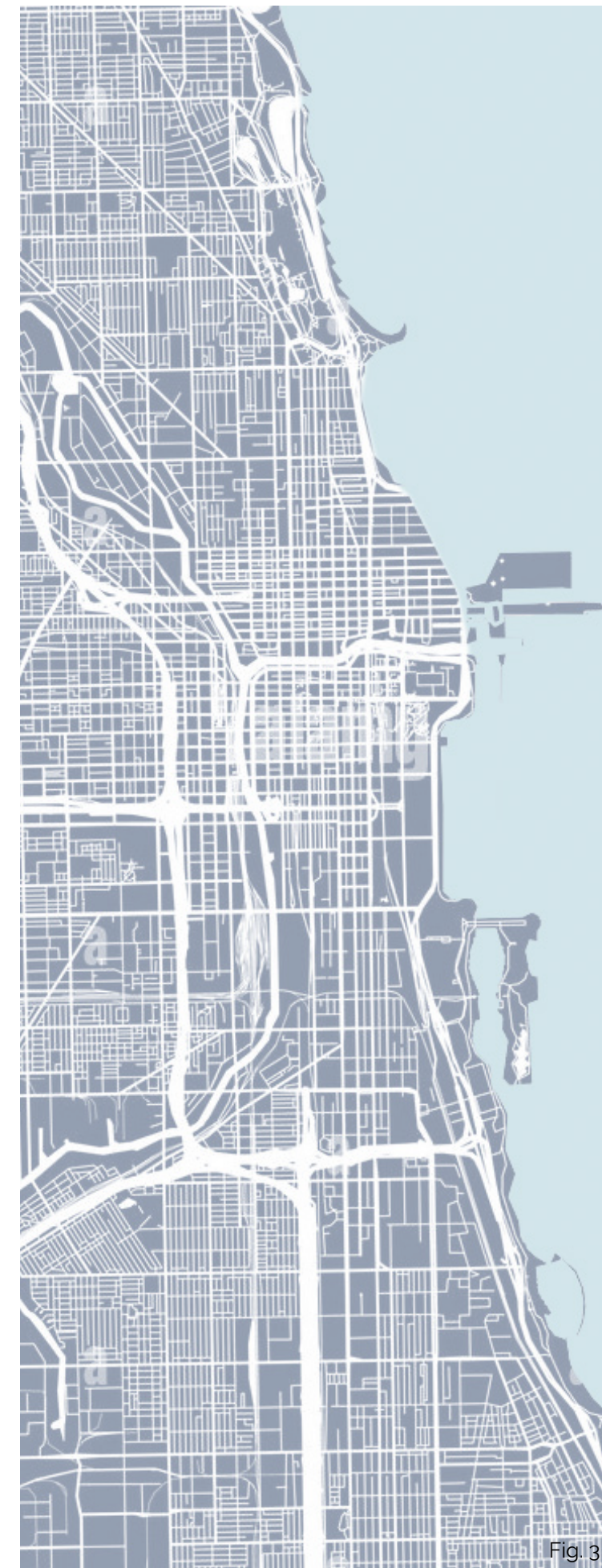


Fig. 3



Fig. 4  
Obsolescence Collage



Fig. 5  
Interior Urbanism Collage

When beginning to study adaptive reuse, one must take time to look toward what different components are impactful to define what may need to be “adapted”; one of these components is projects that may be societally “obsolete”. During a visit to downtown Cincinnati in search of “obsolescence”, one could not help but notice the abundance of vacant construction sites, “space for lease” signs in windows, and completely abandoned storefronts riddled throughout the city. A few types of obsolescent building types that were studied in this trip include movie theaters, printing services, big box stores, and factories, yet the one that stands out beyond these is office buildings. Rather than explore office buildings and similar large multi-floor structures that have already sat vacant and obsolete for some time, it was interesting to look at one of the nicer and more current office buildings of downtown Cincinnati: the Atrium. In this case, the Atrium seems somewhat full of life, even including a new food court hoping to bring in some traffic

downtown after Covid-19, yet beyond some of the more stunning architectural components of most midwest offices lied an estimated 80% vacant offices (according to the front desk), with many leases about to be up.

To reflect the understanding of obsolescence, this collage takes a lonesome Atrium building and speaks to the ever crumbling workspace infrastructure that lies within its walls. Sitting alone and “floating” on this collage, there are no other buildings around to ground the space just as the upcoming trends of remote working conditions will leave offices sitting alone and obsolete in their skylines, with no activity grounding them to the surrounding community. With more lively office scenes and “lights on” illustrated toward the top of the building, and more seemingly abandoned spaces transitioning to the bottom until the building falls apart completely, this collage speaks to the ever changing and almost inevitable timeline of obsolescence for office buildings.

Moving toward another significant point when considering adaptive reuse, interior urbanism explores the relationship of interior and exterior experiences or conditions. When considering interior urbanism throughout Cincinnati, places like Findlay Market and Factory 52 are some of the most significant examples. In these spaces, the most impactful aspects are the blurring of the thresholds between interior and exterior, and the blending of the experiences of “inside” and “outside”. To do this, many of the facades offer transparency between interior and exterior. This is reflected in this collage to note that the combination and collaboration of spaces don’t need to be starkly defined, but instead can be a mix of experiences and even act as an illusion of the differences between spaces. This is also hinted at in this collage with the group of people sitting seemingly outside with living room furniture and accessories, poking a bit of fun as to the real definition of where they are being left unknown. This bit points also to the way interior urbanism

can be defined in spaces that mix and blend experiences, similar to the following examples in these Cincinnati projects: the Gatherall in Factory 52 where interior market spaces with clerestories that offer views to the exterior, the Hi-Wire brewery in Factory 52 with large exterior overhangs that flow from the interior to allow for outdoor seating, and the exterior facing markets in Findlay with garage doors which can be open or closed to make the retail area a mix of inside and outside (illustrated on the right-most image in the collage). Overall, this collage speaks to the almost “optical illusion” that interior urbanism can bring to interiors as we blend, blur, and combine the experiences of interior and exterior design, a concept important to keep in mind moving forward into the design of this project.

# THEORETICAL INFLUENCE

The exploration of architecture through the lens of human experience opens the door to study how design can provide inclusive spaces in regards to their impacts of well-being, behavior, and health. By studying the design theories of Phenomenology, Universal Design, and Environmental Psychology, one can begin to understand how to create spaces that advocate for any kind of user. By crossing these theories with the 15-minute-city and 5-minute neighborhood urban design strategies, spaces begin to become accessible both in the sense of mobility and inclusivity, as well as quick access to necessary neighborhood assets like work, healthcare, education, dining, and entertainment. By using the duality of architectural phenomenology and environmental psychology through the lenses of Tomoko Tamari, Jos Boys, and Dak Kopac, the experience of a space and the specific design strategies used to both create and enhance this purposeful moment in a space can become a foundation for design.

By peering further into Jos Boy's phenomenology of crippling architecture, one learns of the concept of designing without the perspective of an "average, able bodied" human, introducing us to the concept of universal design and how to create spaces as accessible to any type of person. Typically, the notion of inclusive design is considered to mean enabling spaces for those physically and visually disabled, or those who fall under the needs for added ADA compliant accessories in spaces. While this aspect of inclusivity is incredibly important, the ideals of universal design go beyond disability, and choose to design for any type of person, as introduced

through the perspectives of Peter Hall and Robert Imrie. This means inclusive design includes accessibility for those of any age, demographic, background, or other categorizing factors without needing to adapt the space in any way. The definition of accessibility can go beyond ramps and wide hallways, and focus on making sure no type of person feels unwelcome in a space.

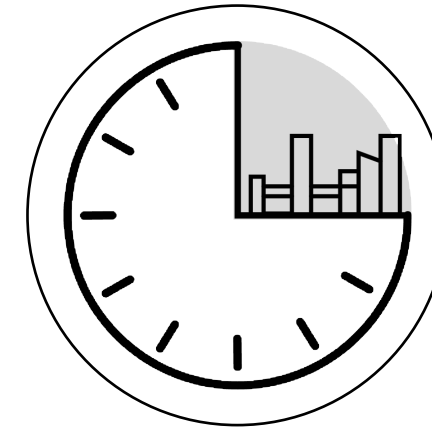
Once a space is accessible to all people, it is important that the definition of accessibility upgrades to one of availability. This means that by taking the strategies of Carlos Moreno's 15-minute-city, designers are reminded of their responsibility to consider city planning and the role of their space in an urban fabric. However, as many of the sites in this project will be one large formatted building rather than an entire neighborhood, the ideals of making any type of neighborhood asset into one space makes it one of a "vertical village". Through all of these well respected theories within interior design and urban planning, one can create a more holistic view of architecture focused on bringing a community together by making a design that encourages engagement, celebration, and inclusivity, all in one accessible space, putting human centered design at the forefront of architecture.



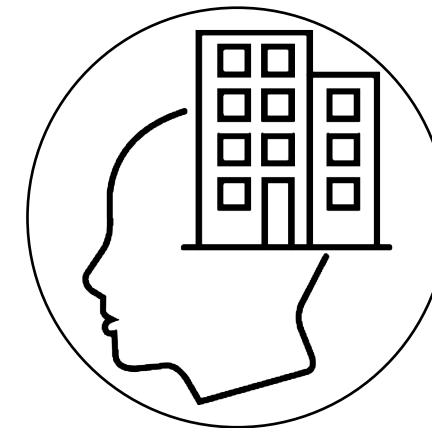
**ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY**  
The study of how people interact with their physical environments, including natural and built environments.



**UNIVERSAL DESIGN**  
The practice of designing environments to be usable by everyone, regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability.



**THE 15-MINUTE CITY**  
An urban planning concept that aims to provide residents with access to essential services within a 15-minute walking or biking distance.



**ARCHITECTURAL PHENOMENOLOGY**  
A philosophical approach to architecture that focuses on the human experience of the built environment.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Environmental Psychology

*The Great Indoors* by Emily Athens has a rather telling secondary title: *The Surprising Science of How Buildings Shape Our Behavior, Health, and Happiness*. Athens writes about a multitude of case studies in different disciplines of architecture from offices, prisons, and elementary schools to hospitals, autistic adult housing, and Mars. In every example, Athens explores and explains the science of how our built environments impact well-being, physical health, and behaviors in space. Through this exploration, Athens suggest urban planners and architects take this impact and study how their spaces can affect its users, and suggests designers are more intentional with this knowledge and the priorities we may have of designing for the human experience.

Alain de Botton's *The Architecture of Happiness* provides a more philosophical take on architecture's role in creating happiness and well-being, rather than the science within environmental psychology. De Botton argues that beauty and functionality in architecture are more important to our emotional health than we realize, and cities that prioritize aesthetic harmony can lead to a happier, more fulfilled society. By studying the effects that our designs have on an aesthetic standpoint, we can understand how people will react to them, rather than how they will behave within the spaces. The influence of character design within the facade of a building is not something that will exit one's mind after this reading.

A fundamental textbook, Dak Kopec thoroughly introduces the discipline of environmental psychology within architecture in his book *Environmental Psychology for Design*. Through perception, cognitive and emotional responses, and behavioral influence, Kopec introduces how designs can be more human-centered and intentional with their evoked responses. Along with this, Kopec discusses the role of built-environments and their impact on well-being, how to design for the needs of "special populations", and how sustainability plays a role in environmental psychology. Kopec suggests that by integrating principles of environmental psychology into design, architects and planners can create environments that enhance well-being, promote positive behavior, and encourage a sense of community.

As the title may suggest, Ian Donald's *Environmental and Architectural Psychology: The Basics* provides an introductory overview of the psychology of experience within built environments, exploring the interaction of people and their surroundings. Donald examines how architectural elements like space planning, lighting, and acoustics influence how people interact with their surroundings, and offers insight into how proxemics may be affected by cultural norms or social preferences. By looking at a multitude of niches or the environmental psychology discipline such as environmental stressors, sustainable responsibility, place attachment, sensory experiences, and inclusive design, one can create spaces that are arguably more valuable to considering the human experience.

## Universal Design

In Robert Imrie and Peter Hall's book *Inclusive design: Designing and Developing Accessible Environments*, the authors define inclusive design as the creation of environments that are usable by as many people as possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. This approach challenges traditional design practices that often cater to the "average" user, and instead promotes a more holistic and human-centered methodology that accounts for the diversity of human abilities. Through case studies, practical guidelines, and a deep engagement with the social and policy context, the authors create a guideline for design that advocates for a more inclusive approach to urban and architectural design that benefits society as a whole.

While not an article strictly relating to architecture, it is important to understand what the cultural impact of universal design consideration can mean in multiple disciplines. From the standpoint of education, the article *Using the Universal Design for Learning Framework to Support Culturally Diverse Learners* by Meia Chita-Tegmark, Jenna W. Gravel, Maria de Lourdes, B. Serpa, Yvonne Domings, and David H. Rose, published in *The Journal of Education* in 2011 reports on the needs for educational institutions to accommodate cultural and cognitive diversity. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework that aims to create flexible learning environments by offering multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement. Taking this perspective into account beyond educational institutions, public spaces can follow

a similar format as set forward in this project to accommodate as many people as possible by understanding the many diverse ways people think, learn, and traverse through the world.

In Mary Ann Jackson's article *Universal Design – Assisting Accessibility*, she emphasizes the correlation of universal design to sustainability and green building practices, emphasizing the importance of designing homes that are accessible to everyone, regardless of age, ability, or physical condition. While the article has an emphasis on residential projects, the promotion of longevity in spaces accommodating multiple types of people being inherently sustainable is a theology available to be brought into any type of space. Similar in theoretical influence to that of Imrie and Hall, Jackson adds to the application of Universal Design by suggesting simple adaptations to hallways, door frames, counter tops, and other simple features that could make a major difference in allowing for more accessible spaces.

## The 15-Minute-City

Carlos Moreno, Jan Gehl, and Martha Thorne's work, *The 15-minute city: A solution for Saving Our Time & Our Planet* introduces the concept of creating urban spaces where residents can access essential services within a 15-minute walk or bike ride. The authors argue that such urban designs not only impact the environment but also encourage stronger communities by prioritizing local living. The idea builds on Gehl's human-centered urban planning philosophy, prioritizing walk-ability, livability, and reducing reliance on cars. An impactful part of this reading is the argument that proximity can provide access to essential services, enabling people from all socioeconomic backgrounds to access amenities that are typically centralized to higher classes. This makes the city more inclusive and socially cohesive, addressing differences in resource access.

Looking into a city in Greece, Maria Shoina, Irene Voukkali, Apostolos Anagnostopoulos, Iliana Papamichael, Marinos Stylianou, and Antonis A. Zorpas in their article *The 15-Minute City Concept: The Case Study within a Neighbourhood of Thessaloniki* explores the impact of this urban concept and how it mitigated certain challenges within the city. With a certain focus on the inefficient waste management of the city, this article reflects new and interesting ways in which the 15-minute-city can impact a town beyond cultural and community dynamics. By creating more accessible services, there is an astounding environmental impact that coincides with the promotion of community teamwork and togetherness. This shows a real life example of

how accessible infrastructure there is a direct tie to environmental and social/community impact.

While dated, Gerda Wekerle's *Vertical Village: Social Contacts in a Singles High Rise Complex* speaks to the concept of bringing the accessible services of a 15-minute-city into one building, similarly to this capstone. Looking at a vertical village, Wekerle explores the social influences and the formation of community in a single space, and finds that by designing areas intended for social interaction will form a community in time due to proximity, repeated interaction, and the need for a social grouping. By understanding social norms and designing to influence community, one can create a space that fosters a sense of togetherness and community building/bonding, with an emphasis on those isolated in the study.

## Architectural Phenomenology

Looking beyond the mere definition of Phenomenology as a philosophy, Tamari Tomoko in *The Phenomenology of Architecture* explores the intersection of phenomenology and architecture, focusing on how buildings and spaces affect the human experience of the body, perception, and social interaction. Rather than architecture acting as something "tactile" or "aesthetic", Tomoko emphasizes the influence that the built environment has on experience and interaction with those around us. By using our senses as a major influence on how we perceive our surroundings, architecture can become a sort of "medium" in the creation of a very particular experience, which Tomoko encourages architects to explore. Beyond senses, architecture can also have an effect on emotion within the experiences of space to bring more awareness to both our environments and bodies.

In *Crippling Spaces? On Dis/Abled Phenomenology: In Architecture*, Jos Boys explores the intersection of disability and architecture, challenging traditional approaches to architectural design through the lens of disability. Boys critiques the typical architectural landscape, stating that designers tend to create spaces with only a non-disabled perspective in mind. By using the concept of "crippling spaces", designers are encouraged to approach architecture with a more inclusive and "abling" ideology in mind, arguing that more inclusive spaces are socially just. Through the lens of Phenomenology, one can see new light in how to approach the experience of architectural spaces through a disabled lens, creating more equitable spaces.

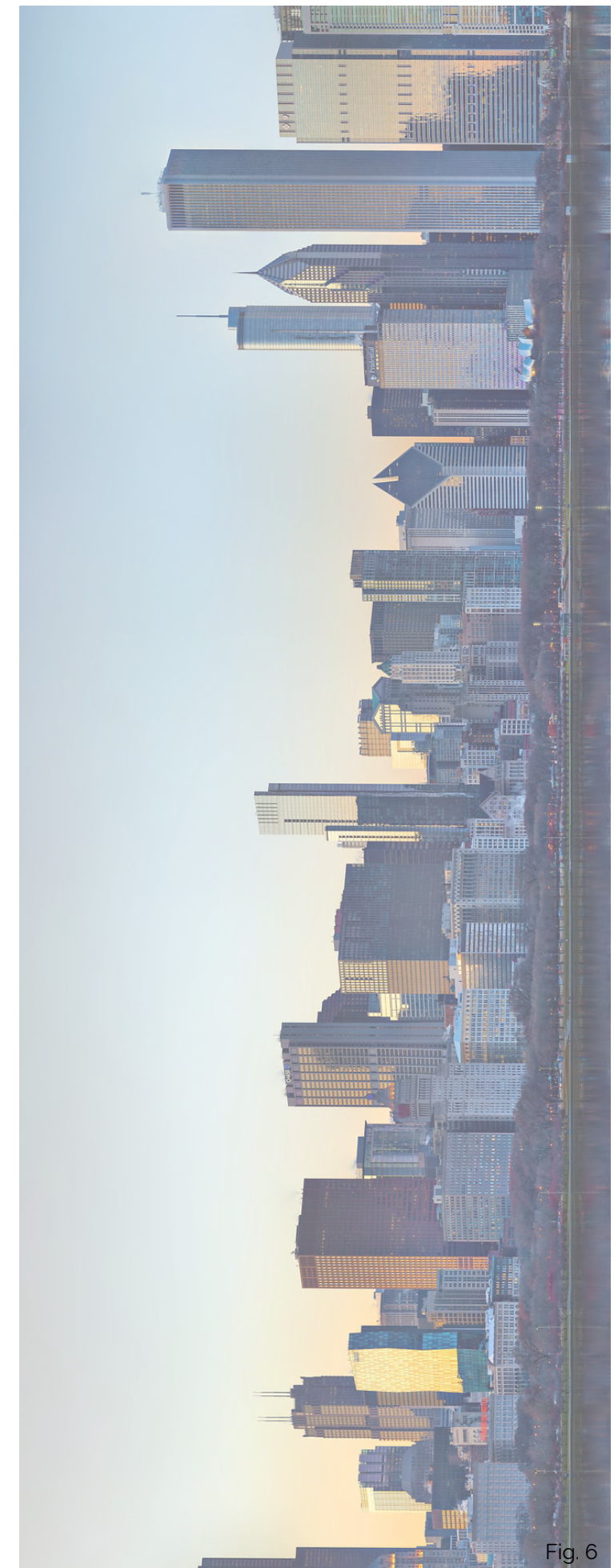


Fig. 6

# PRECEDENT RESEARCH

## Adaptive Reuse

When finding inspiration for design, it is important that the precedents studied illustrate significant problem-solving techniques, user experience design, and creative spaces that speak to the concept drivers of our projects. In these following projects, there are impactful spaces that signify aspects of 5-minute neighborhoods, community impact, purposeful reuse and adaptation of historic architecture, and a focus on accessibility for all. By looking into the history, urban context, architectural details, and programming of each project, one can find ways to bring these elements into current designs.

The first precedent project is the Crosstown Concourse, located in Memphis, Tennessee. This project is a true statement of a “5 minute neighborhood” within an adaptive reuse project. Beginning its history as the “Sears Concourse” in 1927, this 10 story building was a sign of innovation in the city and acted as a cultural hub. As the Sears establishment diminished in the 1980’s, as did its locations, leaving the concourse vacant. This vacancy had as much of an impact on the surrounding neighborhood as it did when it was thriving, leaving the entire area bare and lifeless, yet full of potential. In 2017, an artist, art historian, and philanthropist businessman opened the “Crosstown Concourse” as a revamped community space that set out to celebrate artists, hold residential spaces, offer workplace areas, and contain a multitude of food and drink venues open to the public.

By looking at this project in section (Fig. 10), it can be seen how the programming spills life into every corner of the 1.3 million square foot vessel with multiple atriums (Fig. 7) bringing light into more public spaces while offering circulation throughout the more private spaces as well. Many of the food and drink venues are held on the first floors with lots of openings for exterior dining spaces, allowing for community accessibility and a variety of dining experiences. In this concourse, there is a large emphasis on showcasing local artists through exhibit spaces and theaters, bringing a deeper meaning to “community spaces” to the first couple of floors. Upwards from there, the residential and office spaces bring the 5-minute neighborhood full circle. Overall, this precedent project is a wonderful example of adaptive reuse where a space is revamped into a true community based center with means to both celebrate the old architecture and bring hospitality to a future in the space.

One of the major relevant takeaways from this project is its redefinition of “accessibility” into ideals for community “availability”. While speaking to notes of the more private residential and office spaces, the largest emphases of this programming are the way the public community accessible areas are brought to the lower floors and flow into the outdoor venues and “front porch” (Fig. 8) of the concourse. Another takeaway here is the interior adaptation of architecture by cutting out atriums and making a point of vertical circulation details, with large and beautiful staircases that cause the community to flow into every space made available for them to interact with each other, small businesses, and local artisans.



Fig. 7 Interior Atrium



Fig. 8 Exterior Patio



Fig. 9 Overall Exterior View



Fig. 10 Interior Section Render





Fig. 11 Historical Terminal Image



Fig. 12 Modern Day Terminal Image



Fig. 13 Programming Diagram

Next, another impactful community space that speaks to a “5-minute neighborhood” is the Terminal, located in the historical Strip District of downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The story of this project’s location begins in the 1820’s when the district neighborhood began to become a booming neighborhood. This 5 block terminal building opened as the Pennsylvania Railroad Fruit Auction & Sales Building in 1929 (Fig. 11). Serving over 40 years, this building became vacant in the 1970’s and found itself on the National Registry of Historic Places by 1981. In 2021, the Terminal opened as the cultural hub we know today.

The most significant aspect to look at this precedent is its community based programming. In this vast space, there are multiple food and drink venues, spaces focused on physical health (gyms, physical therapy spaces, and a pharmacy), a bookstore, a plant store, offices, and spaces for play. Along with this, there are passageways that

speak to the urban fabric of the city and open the terminal to allow access to the residential buildings and the riverwalk that lay behind it. One of the most interesting parts of this project is the creativity it took to turn a terminal once meant for fruit distribution into multiple different venues that completely define what inclusion within a community can mean. Bringing this idea of inclusion and belongingness into my capstone, I look to the Terminal as an example of economic and demographic accessibility, encouraging anyone and everyone to join in the events and to play in the community they’re welcomed into. With an ADA accessible pathway, lots of outdoor seating, and a focus on celebrating local community businesses and artists through events and pop-ups, this project is a wonderful example of what kind of impact a built space can have on a neighborhood while being fun and celebrating historical architecture.

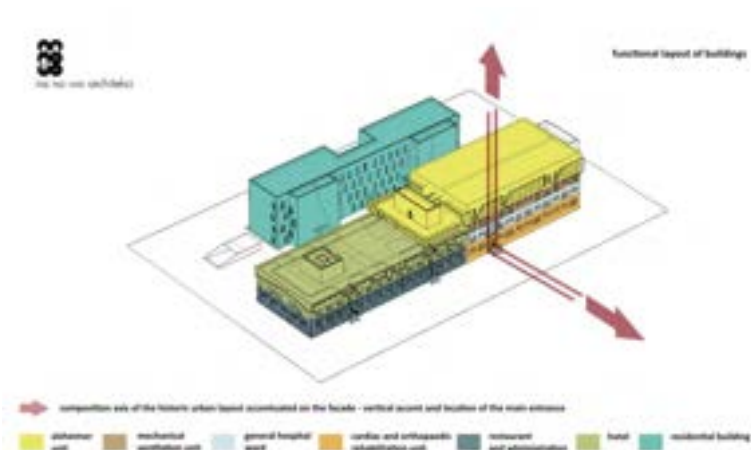


Fig. 14 (Above) Programming Diagram



Fig. 15 Before and After Adaptive Reuse Image



Fig. 16 (Right) Dining Area

The last precedent to take inspiration from is a completely different take on what a community space can be, and focuses on what inclusion and betterment of life can look like for a center to treat the disabled. The Leszczynski Antoniny Manor Intervention in Leszno, Poland, is a restoration project that transforms three historic farm buildings into a community-oriented space providing housing and care for the elderly, with a particular focus on Alzheimer’s patients. Prioritizing wellness and accessibility, the design is thoughtfully tailored to the needs of Alzheimer’s patients, with simple architectural details to reduce cognitive strain, vibrant wayfinding to assist with memory, and extensive access to outdoor spaces such as green areas and balconies to promote well-being. Another inspiring point of this project is its celebration not only of the farm buildings it took shape from, but the equal emphasis on its new and more modern facades, redefining what “adaptive reuse” architecture can look like.

The project’s program also contributes significantly to its role as a model for similar interventions: it includes housing for patients and guests, dining areas, health facilities, workspaces, and recreational zones. Rather than functioning as a “5-minute neighborhood,” the manor serves as a “total community,” offering everything a resident

might need for full-time care. Beyond patient care, the site also features a hotel and restaurant (Fig. 16), which not only provide accommodation for visitors but also create opportunities for social engagement, promoting mental health and inclusivity. This approach fosters a sense of community, encouraging people to visit and experience the diverse services offered. As I look to include intentional designing for mobility and disability access in my capstone, I will look to the Manor’s purposeful and beautiful ways of making a space altogether accessible and beautiful.

To conclude, these three adaptive reuse precedents offer different perspectives to the idea of a community space, and what inclusion can really be defined as through multiple viewpoints. Going forward, I will take note of the ways that a space can speak to its original architecture while respecting the new additions it may hold. Along with this, I will look to each new story of accessibility to a community each project told - through disciplines like economic, demographic, mobility, and disability inclusion alike - and turn this new project into a space that makes an impact on the community it sits in, just as every project studied here did in theirs.



Fig. 17 Ground Floor Plan



Fig. 18 Exterior View



Fig. 19 Interior Lounge View of Greenery

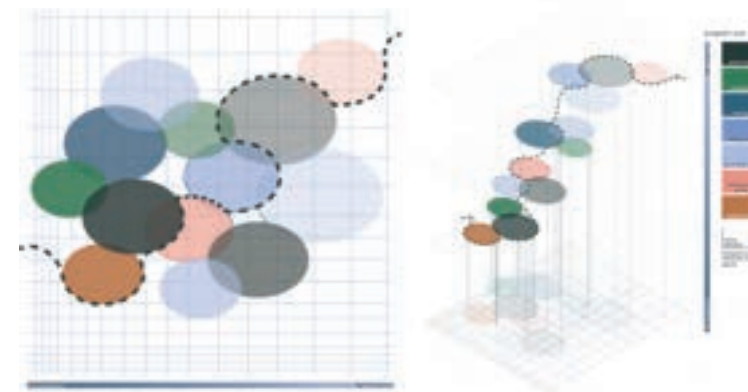


Fig. 20 Large Amphitheater

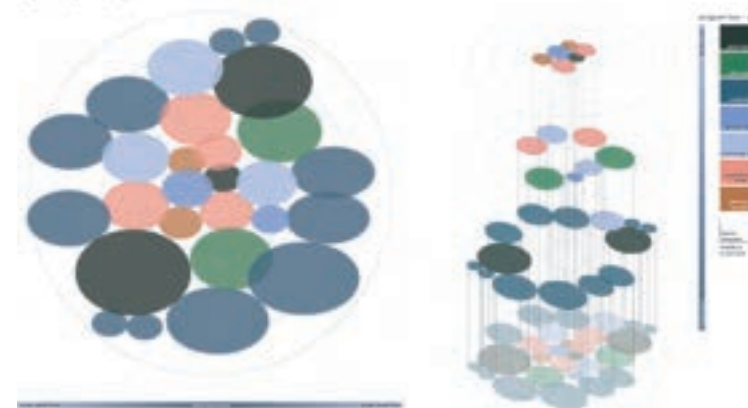
## Interior Urbanism

To contribute to the discussion on interior urbanism, it is also important to look at past precedents and examples that one can decipher about how it can impact our approach to the upcoming project. For this, I looked for examples of inclusive design - whether that be disability, demographics, or any other dictation. The "Enabling Village" in Redhill, Singapore by WOHA Architects was an interesting project that focuses on inclusivity, disability, and is even an adaptive reuse project. To speak to its inclusivity factor, one must understand that the culture in Singapore is already known for its consideration to overall acceptance and incorporation of all ages, demographics, cultures, and so on. With this, the village was less designed to bring these values to life, but rather enable a space to encapsulate this feeling of acceptance and provide a space to act upon these intentions. As far as disability is considered, the Enabling Village took many precautions to make every piece of this project

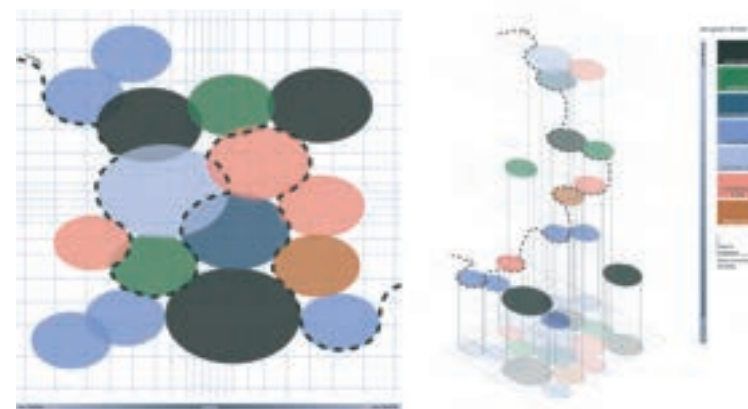
accessible on a large scale of different mobility types. The Architect claims the intentions behind this was to "connect disabled people to society" by providing space for everyone to interact and celebrate each other. The interior urbanism of this project comes into play when we look at the interaction of plantation and the interior, the blurred transitions of threshold between interior and exterior, and the large exterior amphitheater (Fig. 20) that has an surrounded interior feel to it. Other wonderful examples of interior urbanism in this project show in its careful consideration to wayfinding, transitional lighting sources both inside and out, and the large visuals from inside to the exterior gardens where it seems there is almost no barrier between you and the plants (Fig. 19). To further study this concept, three practice design program diagrams were developed with consideration to how interior urbanism can look in different constructs that may be further explored in the future of this project.



Program One - Community Center  
focused on transparency & intersection of spaces



Program Two - 5-Minute-Neighborhood  
focused on mobility & to surround



Program Three - Third Space  
focused on interconnection & mobility

The first program diagram takes a more abstract approach to programming, as it reflects the transition of transparency in different types of spaces. While community centers, green spaces, and entertainment centers may be more transparent to the public, health facilities and learning centers may stay more private, even in a community setting. Between these programs, some other spaces may transition and fluctuate between transparencies; the lines in the background of the diagram speak to the transition with more dense lines at the less transparent spaces and more spread out lines with the most transparent. Along with transparency, the intersection of spaces is important here as it speaks the most to interior urbanism, with the overlapping programming bubbles showing where thresholds are blurred, and interior urbanism can shine through with transparency and intersection of interiority and exteriority can occur.

The second diagram speaks in a similar format of abstraction, yet with the program of a "5-minute city", this time reflecting mobility and "to surround". The transition in density of linework here speaks to transportation time, with the more dense lines showing shorter transit times, while the longer distance between lines is a lengthier transit. When thinking about programming, it is important to consider some of the vital aspects of a project; here, it will be about intentional inclusive mobility throughout the entire project. The programming here is also slightly different, including residential and workplace spaces rather than a focus on a fully public program. The ideas of "to surround" in this diagram can show where interior urbanism can come into play. As placing more private spaces surrounding the public ones, there are a great number of opportunities in the close knit public spaces for the blurring of interior and exterior.

The last diagram once again shows the aspects of a less residential instance, with "third space" community of programs reflecting interconnection and flexibility of spaces. The interconnection of the spaces is shown by the translation of moving throughout each connected space through the overlaps of the programs. Then, flexibility comes into play with the transition of "more to less" flexible spaces shown through the density of linework once again, with the most flexible spaces in the middle of each axis. When considering interior urbanism, the flexibility of program and appearance between indoor and outdoor is very important, and can be shown in a program like this through the opportunities for a space to change. With community focused spaces in the middle, a flexible program like this would offer people to use it for any needs they may have, some of those needs could include the transition from interiority and exteriority, which these interconnected spaces can provide.



Fig. 21 Ace Hotel Los Angeles



Fig. 22 Balian Springs in Virginia



Fig. 23 Bailey's Upper Elementary School in Virginia

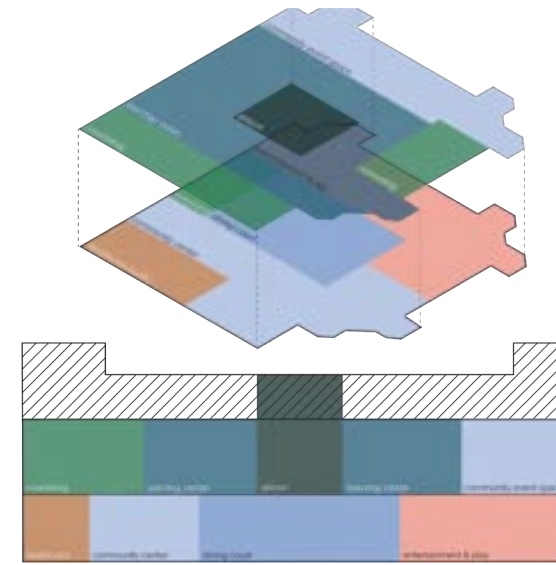


Fig. 24 Battersea Power Station, London

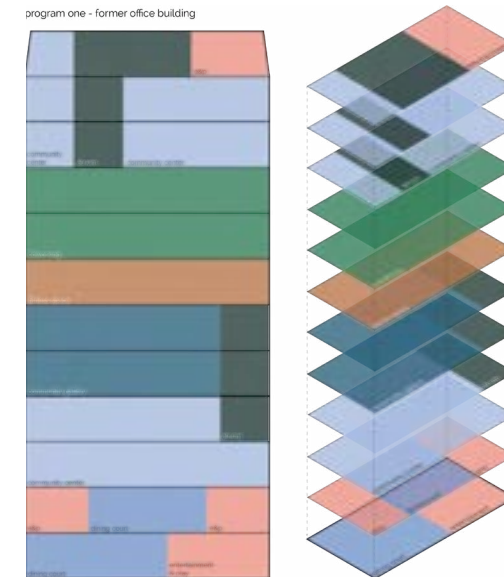
## Obsolescence

Transitioning back to the consideration of obsolescence, it is important to see where we have already been focusing on the reuse of soon to be vacant office spaces in order to look forward to their potential. Many sources including CNN, PBS, Time Magazine, and many more are reporting on the potential to convert vacant office buildings to residential housing to "solve the housing crisis". While this was somewhat successful, there are a lot of critiques with the process this adaptation takes - therefore it is important to look to other more public ways to reuse the office building. Adaptive reuse of obsolescent office buildings can be seen in many forms. From office building to hotel: the Ace Hotel in Los Angeles (Fig. 21), The Langham in Chicago, and the upcoming boutique hotel going into Rockefeller center are examples that celebrated the former architecture. There are also examples of research and healthcare facilities, one of which being the Summit Health building in

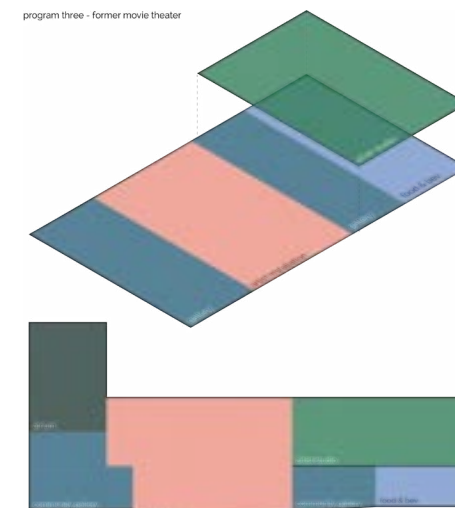
Long Island reused from an old 3-story office space. There are also shocking conversions of office to spa and school, with the Balian Springs Resort (Fig. 22) and Bailey's Upper Elementary School for the Arts & Sciences (Fig. 23) both in Virginia. Another way to adapt old office spaces in into new more flexible coworking hubs, making it still a place of work, but one that speaks to and reshapes the future. Lastly, the most prominent examples study for this capstone are places like the Battersea Power Station in London (Fig. 24) and the Ponce City Market in Atlanta that converted old office/factory plants into mixed use public spaces filled with dining, retail, and event spaces. Overall, it is easy to see the opportunities that may lie in the future of our workplace structures as our needs for them continue to shift. With this in mind, three more practice design concept diagrams were created reflecting different types of obsolescent buildings found in Cincinnati.



Program One - Big Box Stores



Program Two - Office Building



Program Three - Movie Theater

Another approach to adaptive reuse of an obsolescent space looks to big box stores - becoming vacant as our online shopping cultural movement has caused them to become unnecessary and in need for a new program. Taking the old Saks Off Fifth downtown and keeping the community space approach, this less precious building is one that can be slightly deconstructed to allow natural light into the space through an atrium. Also, the floors can be split in a program to be very public and accessible on the first floor and have a learning and coworking focused space above, separating the focused and the social spaces. Giving a space with a focused audience and demographic back to a community by updating a building downtown to be one more approachable for all people is the focus of this program and this entire project.

On this trip to downtown Cincinnati, the office buildings with vacancies, open lease signs in the windows, or completely boarded up blocks downtown were difficult to ignore. In accordance with the vacant office building crisis we are about to experience and using the precedents studied above, one way we can update a vacant office building is by turning it into a mixed-use space for the community. Using the historic Mercantile Building downtown, it is important to understand the architectural influence of the space and how to both respect and preserve it. By splitting the program as shown in these diagrams, there are more public programming opportunities on the first floors with the most access to circulation, with then more private or quiet programming in the center of the section, followed by public floors again on the top two floors to respect the public library that was once there.

In another exploration, there is some "coming to reality" that movie theaters are now obsolete due to how expensive tickets are and the new streaming services that seem to pop up every day. A movie theater, especially one in a less desirable part of town, is a type of architecture constructed in a very specific way, for a very specific activity within the space. However, giving this semi-artistic space a refresh while staying in a creative discipline is something that could bring the awkward existing architecture back to life. Inspired by the enabling village, an open gallery that celebrates bringing different communities together and displaying their work along with a chosen live-in artist and their instillation is another approach to bringing people together, and a new way to define a true "community centered" space.

# SITE RESEARCH

To begin looking for sites, it was important that this project offered a solution to a current major population in our communities. While it has been discussed for this project to focus on the problem in crippling and non inclusive spaces, as well as the possible obsolescent building typologies to inspire a need for adaptation, there is a specific spring in vacancy that we are seeing and could offer a solution to. Due to the incredible shift in workplace dynamics due to the pandemic, the heightened trend of remote or hybrid work has made the building vacancies in office buildings an issue that realtors and architects are looking to solve. Companies are downsizing office spaces or abandoning traditional offices entirely. Cushman & Wakefield, one of the world's largest real estate firms, is calling this rise in vacant offices the "urban doom loop" and their reports show that **1.4 billion square feet of office space is predicted to be obsolete by 2030**. According to a "60-Minutes Overtime" report with CBS News, there are already over 95 million square feet of vacant office space in just in New York at this moment. Chicago, another monopoly of office space in America, has a vacancy percentage of 19%, according to the September 2024 Office Market Report by Commercial Edge. We are currently seeing **the highest rate of obsolescence in office spaces in history of 20.1%**, however people are beginning to do something about it. PBS News posted an article in July 2023 discussing the urgent need to adapt office buildings, analyzing what it would take to update these spaces, stating that it is "doable, but not easy." These 3 office buildings in Chicago, Illinois offer the need for new life to find solutions to the needs of more accessible spaces, as well as the adaptation of old and unused office spaces.



Fig. 25

208 SOUTH LASALLE STREET,  
DOWNTOWN CHICAGO, IL



Fig. 26

111 WEST MONROE STREET,  
DOWNTOWN CHICAGO, IL



Fig. 27

333 SOUTH WABASH STREET,  
DOWNTOWN CHICAGO, IL



Fig. 28 3rd Floor Plan

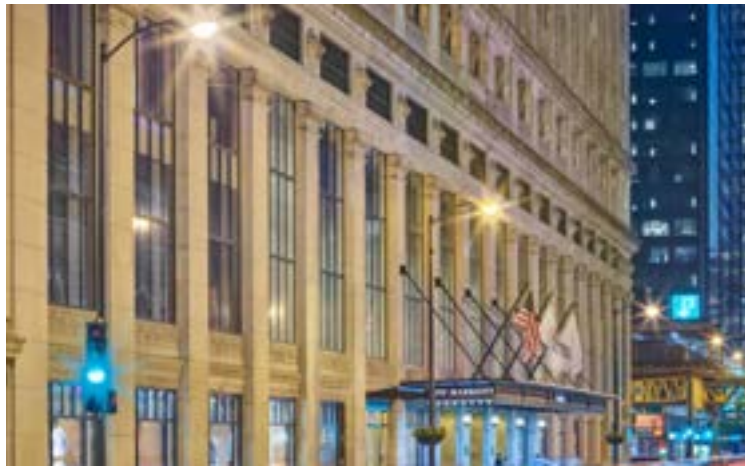


Fig. 29 Exterior View

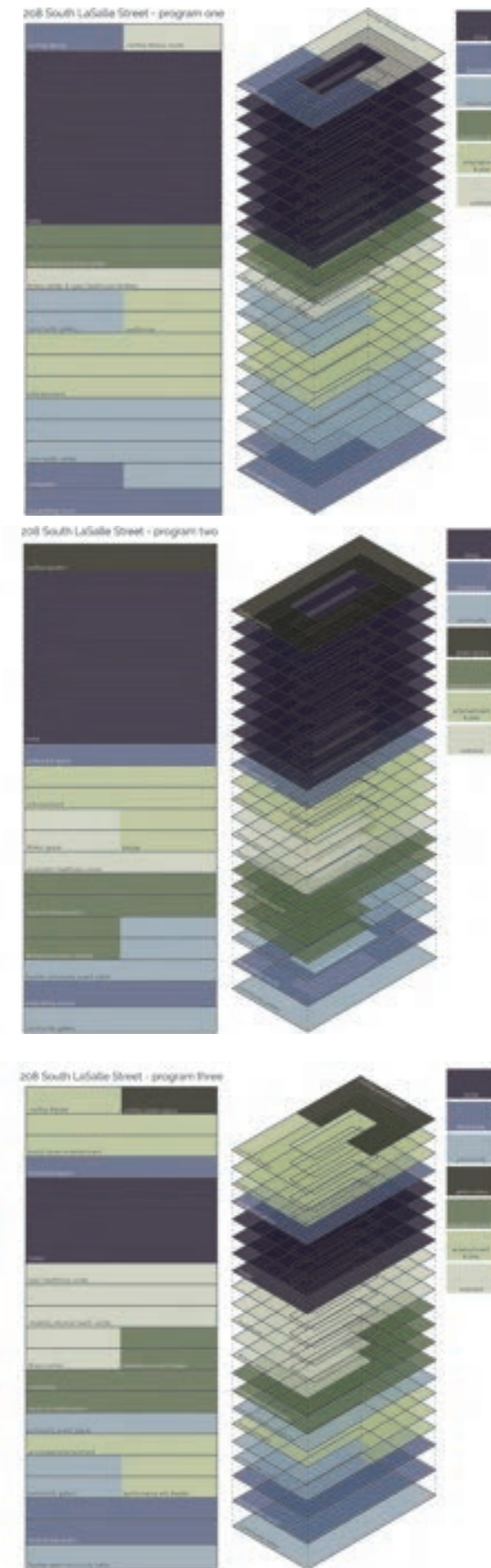


Fig. 30 Exterior View

## 208 South LaSalle Street

Looking into a historic site in the heart of the financial district of Chicago, Illinois, 208 South LaSalle Street provides great opportunities for a community based revamp of this old banking office building. Standing at 21 stories and over 350,000 square feet, the old Continental and Commercial National Bank office building constructed in the early 1900's is an ideal site to bring in food traffic with its proximity to many notable Chicago landmarks. This includes the Willis Tower, the river walk, the Rookery, the Chicago Board of Trade Building, and multiple notable high end hotels. According to LoopNet, a commercial real estate data site, this site is also within a 5 minute walk to 5 different metro systems. Some of the more notable architectural features of this building include its neoclassical, hand carved facades (Fig. 29), a beautiful 2 story lobby, and the large lightwell in the center of the building (Fig. 28).

What this urban fabric does not have, however, are any sites that offer accessibility to demographics outside of the tourist or the typical financial worker in a business suit. A truly inspiring former office building, bringing in programs like community event spaces, artist galleries, local food vendors, coworking opportunities, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, physical activity spaces, and many other public venues can breathe new life into this district of downtown Chicago.



The first program focuses on a rather typical style of community or third space with a dining court at the street level and a hotel space with priority to the top floors. When considering what types of program should be the most accessible with the least amount of "transit time" to other floors, the community center is most important, with the entertainment programming intermingling within the bottom half of the building. Then, purposefully squished into the center most floors of the structure are the quietest, least active programs for work, study, and wellness. The wellness floors are then reflected on the rooftop of the building, where a playful outdoor dining area is mixed in with enclosed rooftop sport courts. Overall, with the most accessible programs closest to the street, the least transparent spaces in the middle, and the hotel closest to the skyline views, this first program is a simple and predictable version of a mixed use vertical village.

Moving on to the second program, the local food court still holds some priority to be accessible to street level, however the first floor brings people straight into the community gallery before anything else. This program also holds higher priority to work/educational spaces as well as wellness and healthcare spaces, giving them a larger chunk of the overall programming with more accessibility to these spaces from the street. Toward the top of the building, the hotel space continues to take skyline view priority at the top, and the entertainment floors are held closer to this space as an extension of the more active living areas. This program also begins to explore how sharing and cutting into floors can begin to play and interact with other program types. Lastly, this space introduces green space with a rooftop garden area rather than a rooftop filled with activity. Due to the large lightwell on this building, this greenery could become enveloped in the center of the floorplan, bringing more biophilic aspects to the overall space.

The last programming exercise of this building explores a larger mixture of spaces, focusing on ways that they can intertwine and work together. Starting from the first floor, this program also focused on community and dining on the most accessible levels, but in a much larger format and flexible way. Moving up, this program emphasizes more of a performance arts based community space, followed by a larger amount of educational and work programming. Along with the higher emphasis on education, the healthcare area also takes up many more floors and focuses on accessible disability care. Following this, there is less of an importance placed on the hostel, as the floors at the top of the building contain more of a fun focused activity and entertainment programming, giving those spaces the top floors and rooftop.

# 208 SOUTH LASALLE STREET

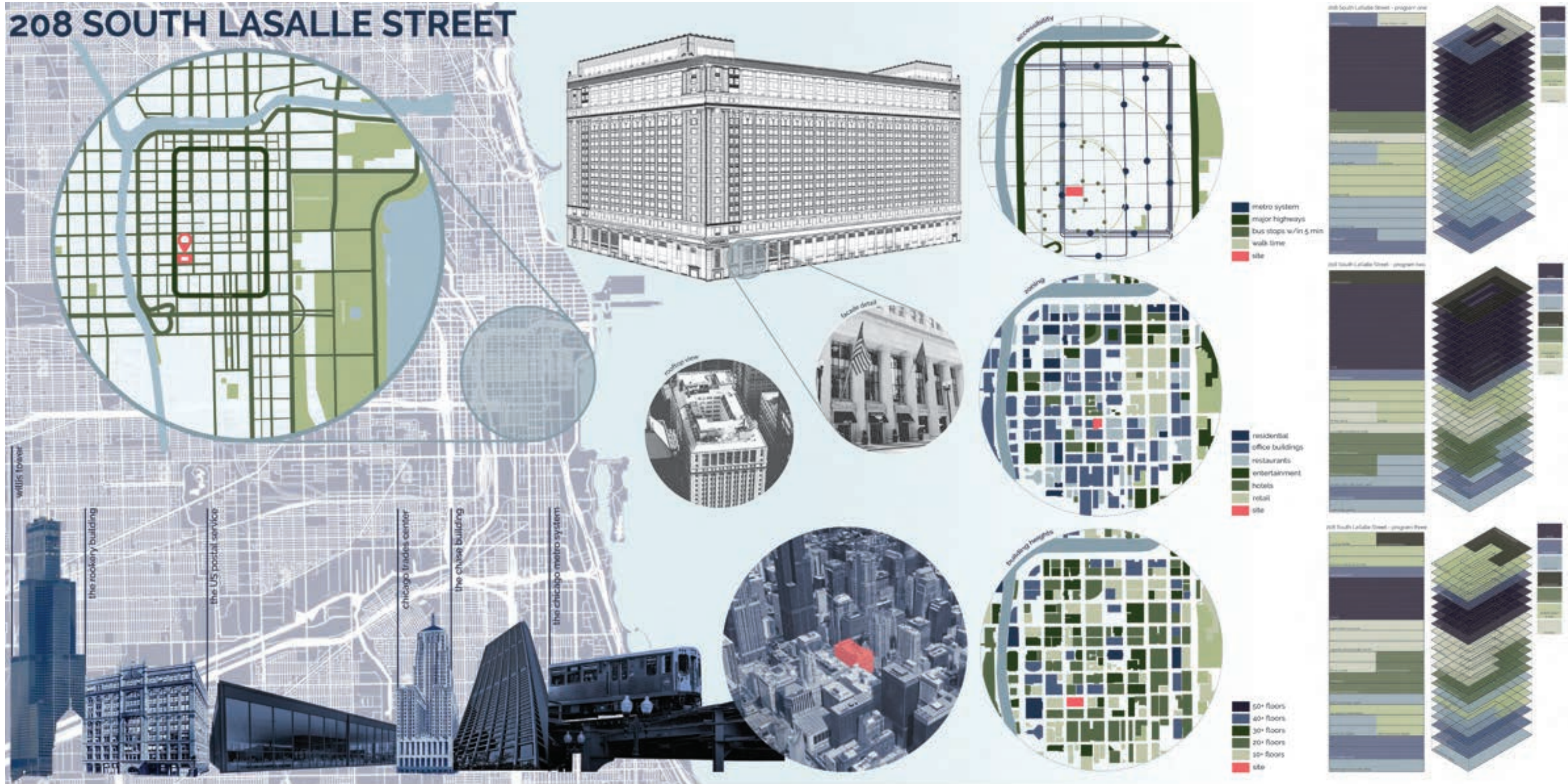




Fig. 31 Elevation Drawing



Fig. 32 Exterior View



Fig. 33 Exterior View

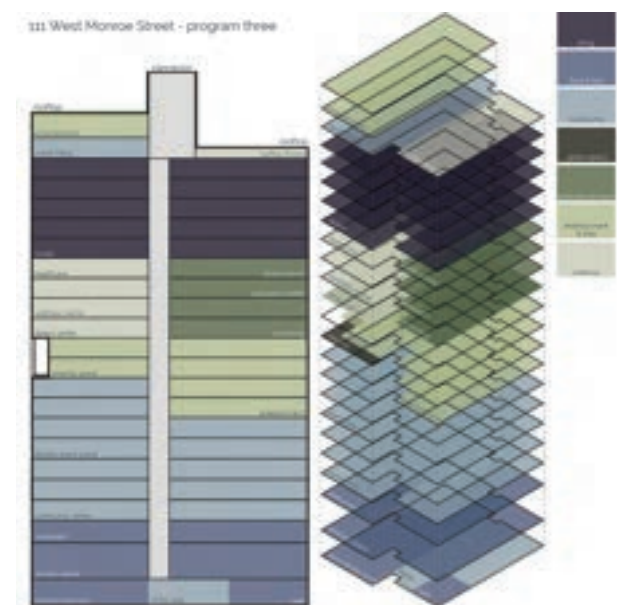
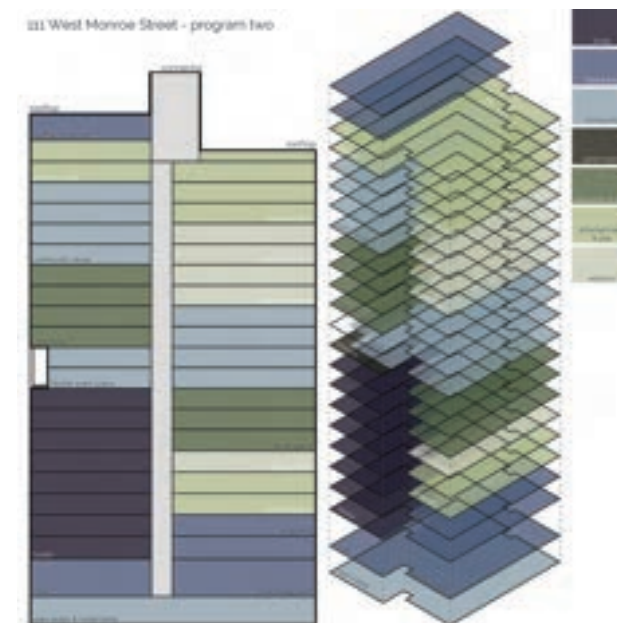
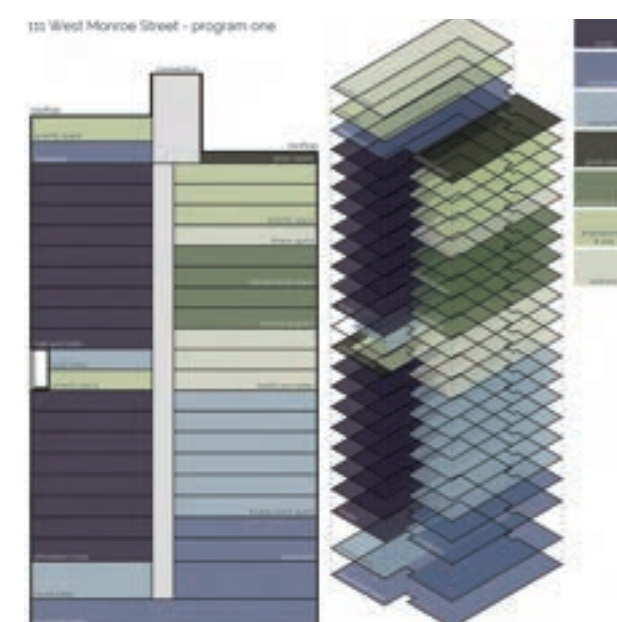


Fig. 34 Exterior View

## 111 West Monroe Street

Located once again in the heart of downtown Chicago, 111 West Monroe Street is located in the center of the loop, kitty corner from the Chase headquarters fountain. Built for Harris Banking in 1911 with an addition built in 1958, the most interesting part of this building is the dual facades that are built in two completely different styles. The first building has a neoclassical facade (Fig. 34) with a hidden connection to the adjacent modern office building (Fig. 33). Together, this building stands at 23 stories and is over 600,000 square feet. The building's current use is still the BMO Harris headquarters of Chicago, however with plans to move completely into their new 50 story building 4 blocks west, this office will soon become completely vacant. To bring in a wider population in, the site is less than two blocks from three different metro stations connecting to six different train lines, making the site more publicly

accessible to the city of Chicago. Being located in the loop means this building is surrounded by the financial district of Chicago, however that does not completely discount an accessible community center being appropriate for this context of the city. By counteracting the typical suit-and-tie targeted demographic of the area, this district may become one that begins to bring in a wider variety of people. By turning a former office building into an inclusive community hub that focuses on local vendors and flexible spaces, a project like this may completely revitalize this district.



Due to the public needs of this downtown district, it is important to have some type of hotel or housing included in this project. The first program explores containing both an affordable hostel and a higher end hotel in the newer, east building with lobbies and some amenity services included. The original west building will focus more on public outreach programming as it includes event spaces, healthcare and fitness centers, coworking and educational spaces, and other amenity and entertainment areas apart from the hotel sector. Now, while these programs are split between buildings, the structures themselves are not separated in any way, with continuous circulation between floors. To bring them together, a local dining court sits at the bottom floor, making it most accessible to the street as well as mixed between an additional amenity to the hotel/hostel as well as beginning the framework for the more public spaces.

The second program continues to explore bringing in living spaces into the program with a mid-priced hostel, however gives much more emphasis to the more public, community-centered spaces. This program also begins to explore more of a continuous program between structures, unlike the one before. The first two floors closest to street level contain the open lobby and food courts to make these as accessible and public as possible. However continuing up, the 3-10 floors explore a more typical hotel program with fitness spaces, amenity lounges, and coworking spaces as accessible to the rooming services as possible. On the top floors, 11-23, the structures come together to completely prioritize public and quiet areas beginning with flexible event spaces, continuing to private wellness centers and coworking areas, then giving the top most floors to public and energetic amenity and entertainment spaces. Overall, this split of spaces gives equal priority to hostel and community services.

Transitioning from most to least priority in hotel services, the third program gives the top floors with the best views to the mid-price hostel with a rooftop lounge and skyline lobby views, yet provides more square footage to community based programs. Below the hotel, the most private spaces are held with healthcare and wellness services and a fitness center in the east building, and education, study, and coworking spaces in the original west building. Below this, the entertainment and community/event spaces take highest priority with the most floors in the building being dedicated to them. By making these spaces as open and flexible as possible, more types of communities and people can use the space, preventing it from becoming obsolete like the strictly traditional office spaces here did before. On the bottom floors, food based venues are prioritized for the most public access to bring restaurant spaces, a grocery store, a local food court, and a cafe surrounded by an overall public lounge/lobby on the first floor.

# 111 WEST MONROE STREET

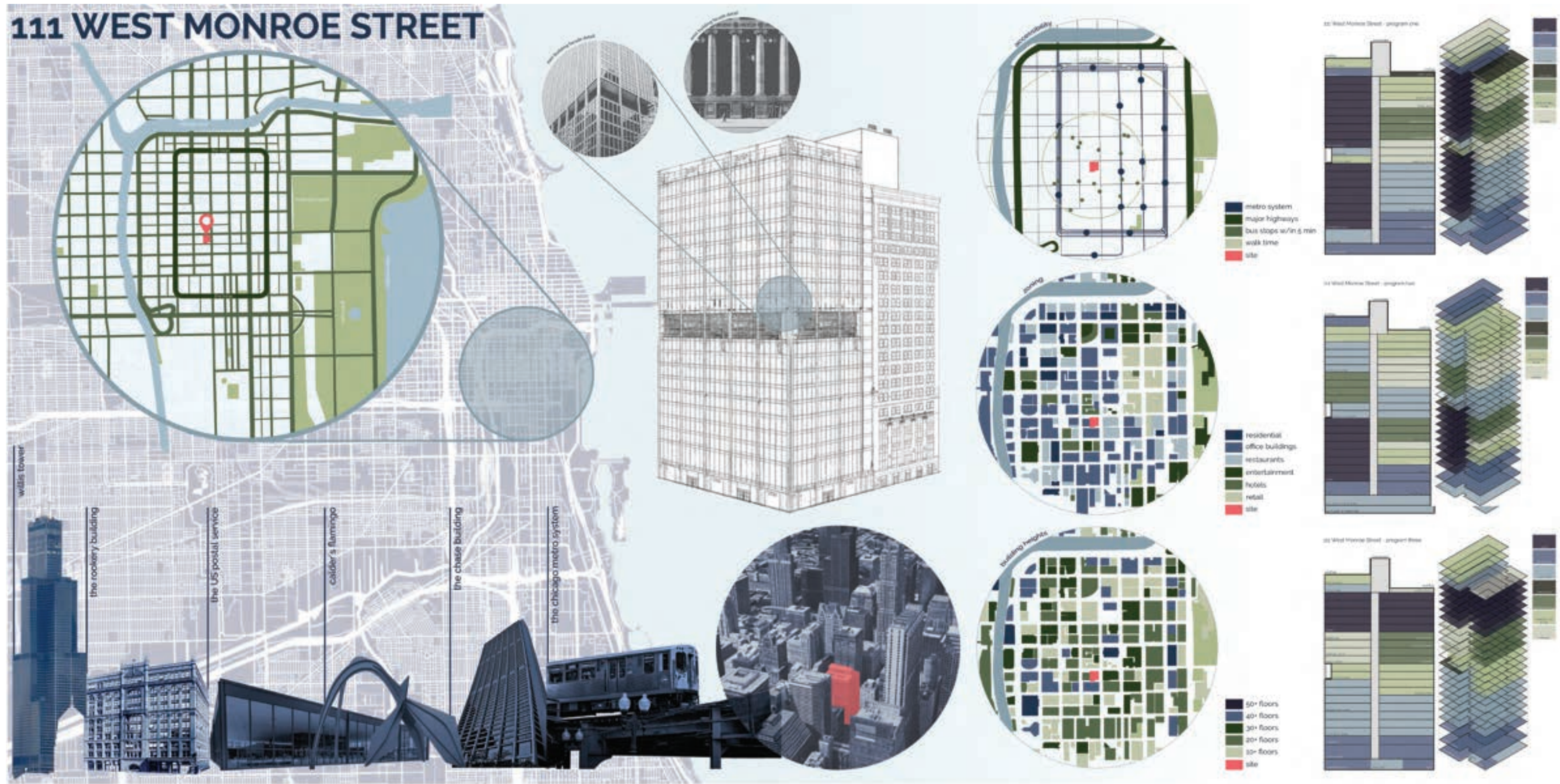






Fig. 35 Ground Floor Exterior View



Fig. 36 Facade Detail

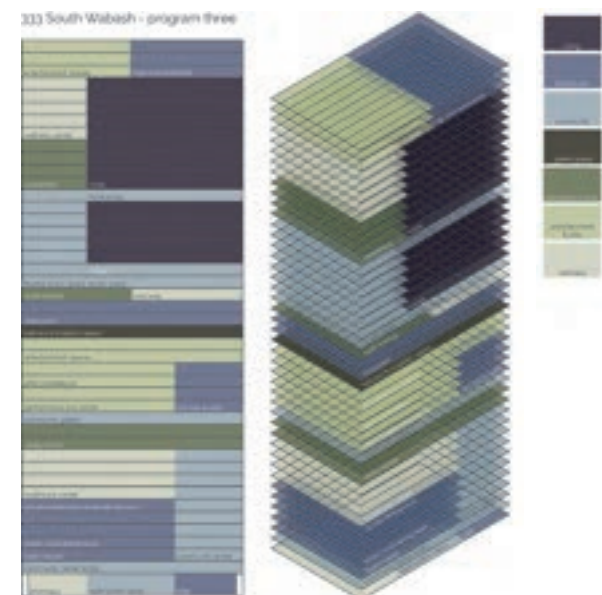
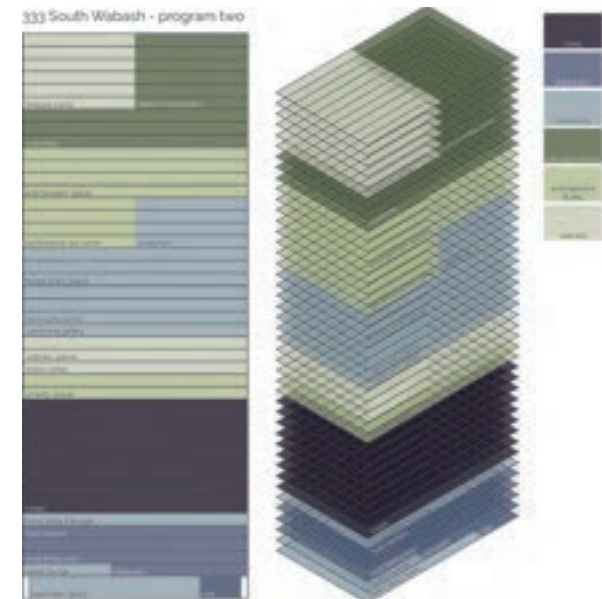
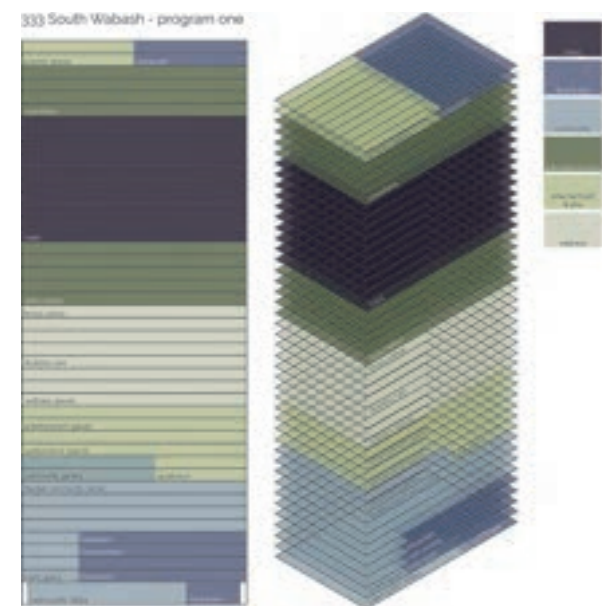


Fig. 37 Exterior View

## 333 South Wabash Street

The last office building in downtown Chicago is one that makes a statement throughout the lakefront skyline. Lovingly referred to as “Big Red”, 333 South Wabash Street, or the CNA Center, is a 44 story 1.2 million square foot international style steel building painted bright red. Built in 1972 and renovated in 2019, this office building has historically housed the CNA until 2015 and now stands at 91% leased office spaces and 9% amenity spaces. While not vacant, making a structure this apparent and accessible to the public into a community center could make a huge impact on both the surrounding people and the common tourist as it sits within a block from 4 metro stations and almost immediately adjacent to the lakefront green spaces. The immense scale of this structure allows for a multitude of opportunities in the space to include event centers, entertainment spaces, different types of housing, food and

dining services, and much more all within one big red vertical village. Furthermore, revitalizing 333 South Wabash as a community center could address diverse social needs, creating a central location for educational programs, recreational activities, and public events. With its substantial floor area, it could house multipurpose spaces like classrooms, workshops, galleries, and performance areas, encouraging creativity and skill-sharing. The building’s existing amenities and structural integrity allow for efficient renovation, enabling sections to be tailored to cater to different age groups and community needs, from youth mentorship programs to senior wellness activities. By transforming an iconic architectural landmark, 333 South Wabash could be the start to a new definition of social and community engagement available for any person of Chicago to enjoy.



The first program gives priority to the more privatized public spaces, that being the healthcare and wellness spaces, study and coworking areas, and flexible event spaces. Beyond this, the hotel space is given priority at the top of the building for better views out to downtown Chicago with amenity spaces and dining options at the top. Between these spaces sits the coworking spaces, paying homage to the initial programming of the office building - providing a statement that these buildings must not be solely reused into completely new ideas, but work to be brought into the future of ever-changing workspace needs. At the bottom of this building, the bottom floor will expand the existing cafe space into a more public area while the remainder of the ground floor acts as an introduction to the hotel and public programs of all 43 floors above. Above this sits a list of different accessible dining experiences to engage with the community and event centers. Overall, the more public programs act as a sandwich to hold the private areas between them, sheltering them both from the street and the busy skyline.

The second program uses more of a top-down approach, with the most public spaces sitting at the bottom of the structure, while the more private areas sit the furthest away from the urban street. Starting at the ground floor, the program here acts as a way to bring the urban street into the building and reflect the ways in which interior and exterior can transparently interact, sitting within the glass facade. Moving upward, the dining areas are intentionally the most publicly accessible spaces, then transitioning into the lounge areas that introduce the public hostel, followed by amenity and fitness spaces. Then, still public yet yielding less foot traffic sits the community center, followed by the flexible event spaces, and the entertainment areas/auditorium. At the top of the structure, the quieter and more private programs of wellness and healthcare spaces, study and coworking areas, and more intimate dining areas focus on the sensory accessibility of a quieter escape from the business of downtown Chicago.

The third program focuses on the idea of cutting not only into the architecture, but into the interaction of spaces as multiple future atrium spaces will bring accessible vertical movement between spaces. By incorporating the different spaces, the architecture may act as an example for the public to follow as they are encouraged to interact and act more as a community than separate persons existing in the same space. The focus on more social spaces may cause more people to connect and explore more of this structure, while giving priority to more equally available programs like pharmacies, markets, and wellness spaces. To assist with the full definition of a vertical village, there is a hotel that faces the city, while giving priority to lake views to provide a healing biophilic effect to community and public spaces. Overall, by creating a multitude of mixed spaces, the community engagement may follow suit by allowing the interior space to define their experience of intermingling, following the Chicago ideals of a “mixing pot”.

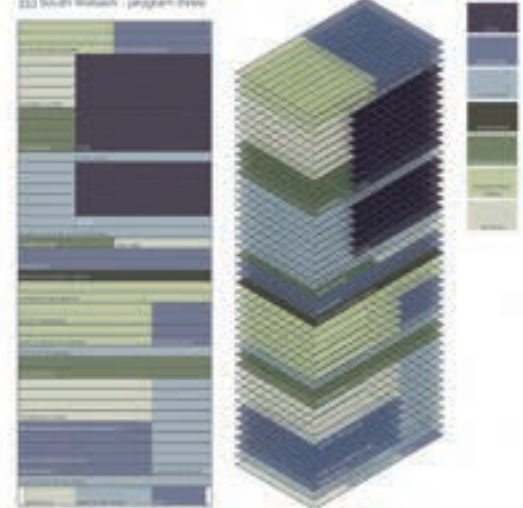
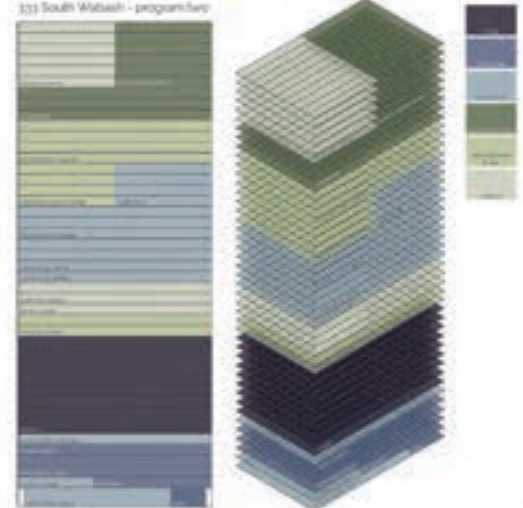
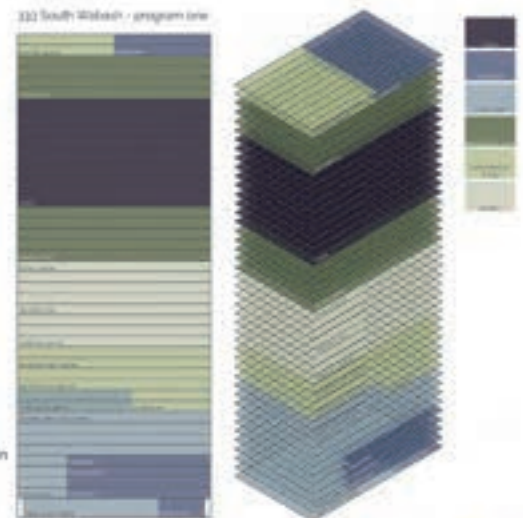
# 333 SOUTH WABASH STREET

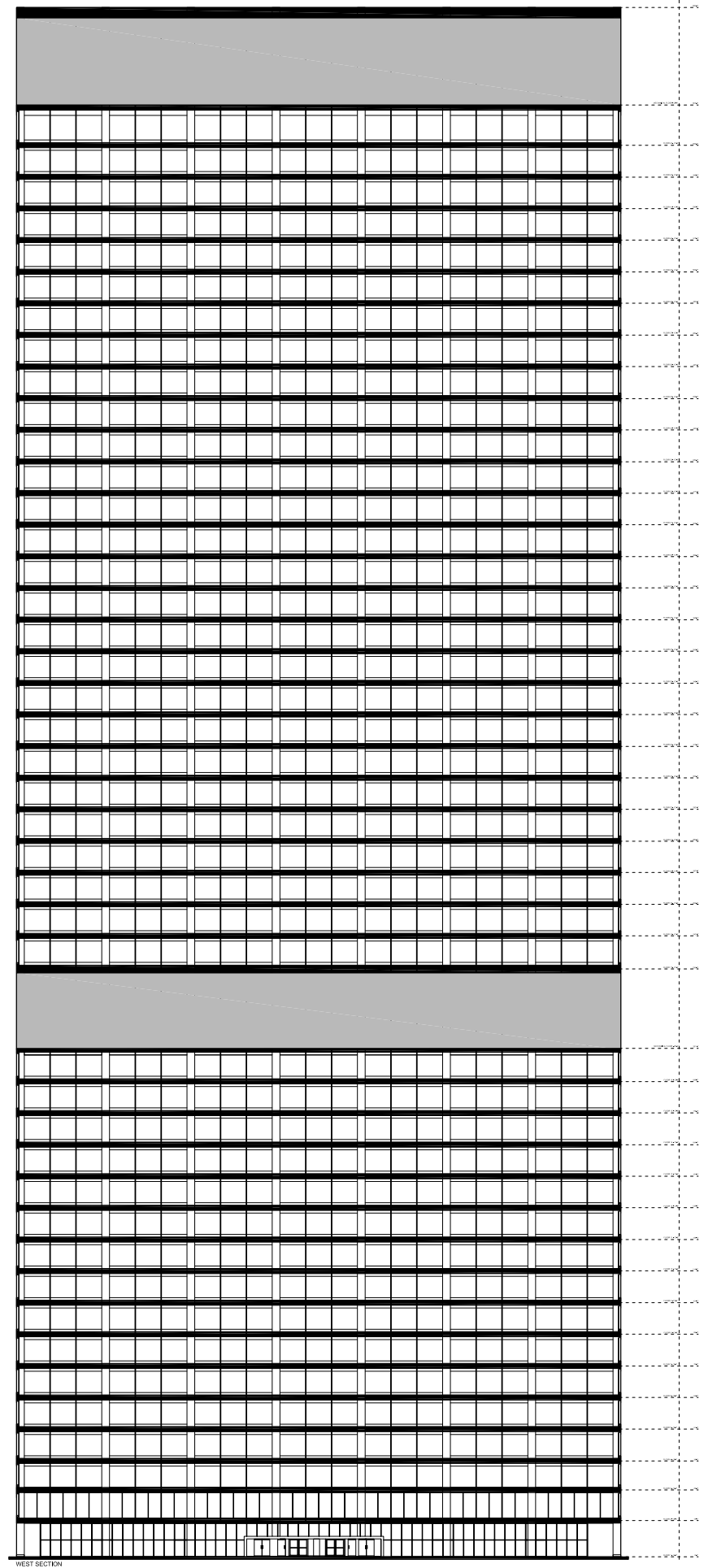
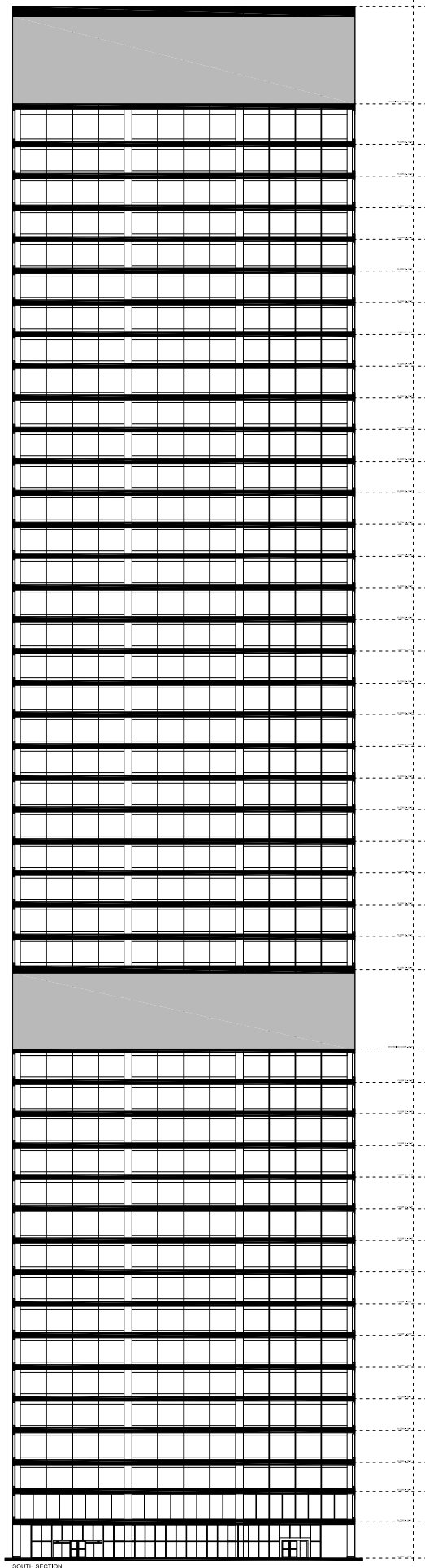
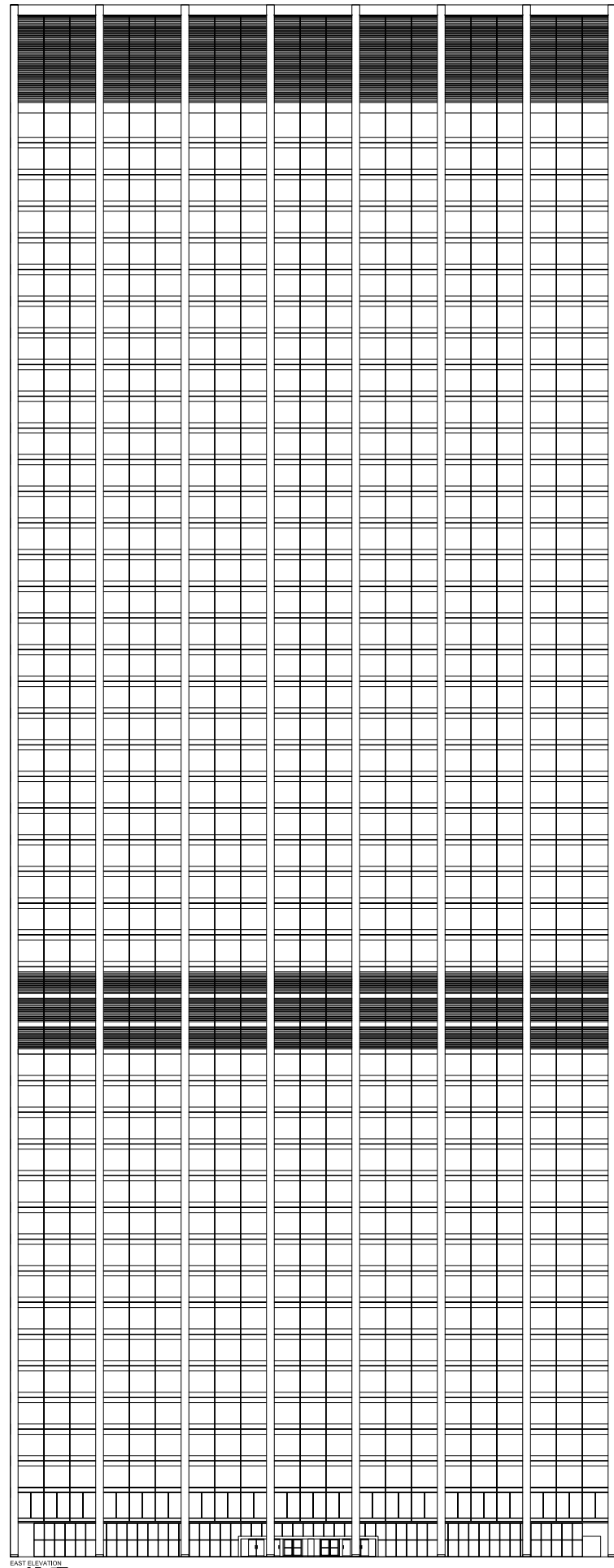
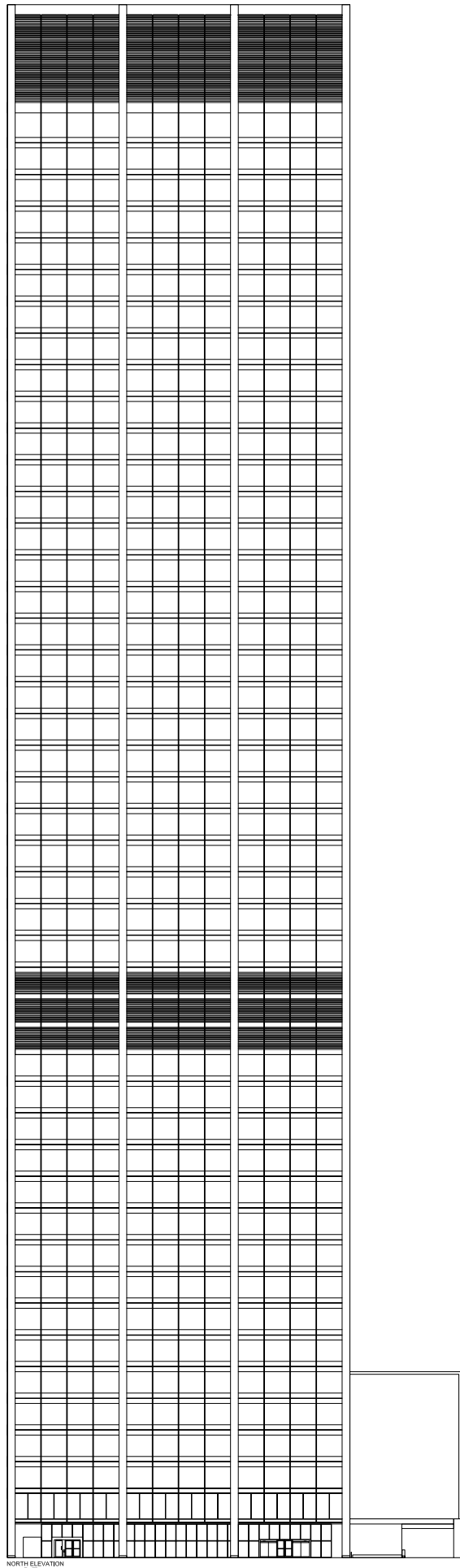


- metro system
- major highways
- bus stops w/in 5 min
- walk time
- site

- residential
- office buildings
- restaurants
- entertainment
- hotels
- retail
- site

- 50+ floors
- 40+ floors
- 30+ floors
- 20+ floors
- 10+ floors
- site





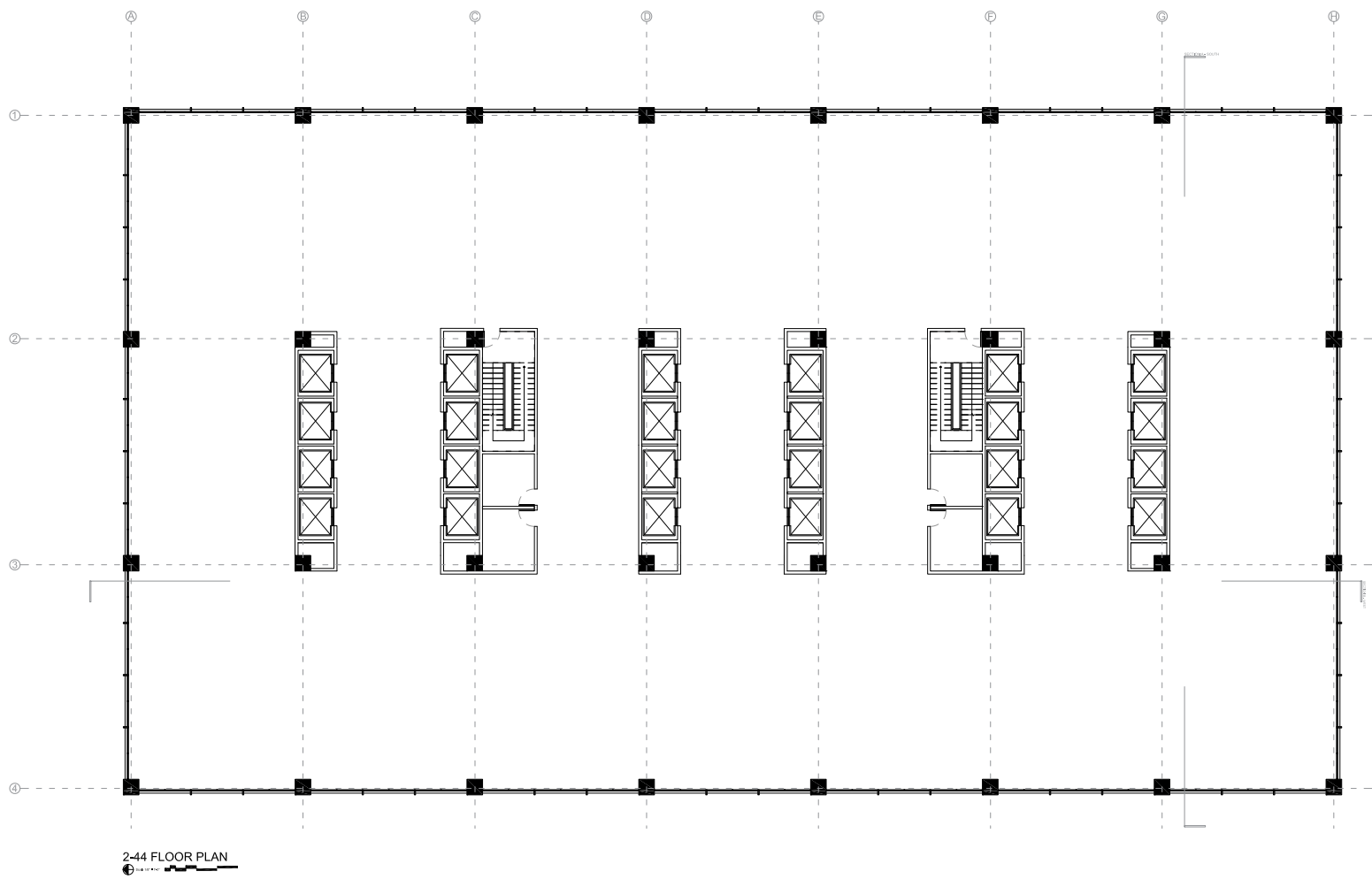
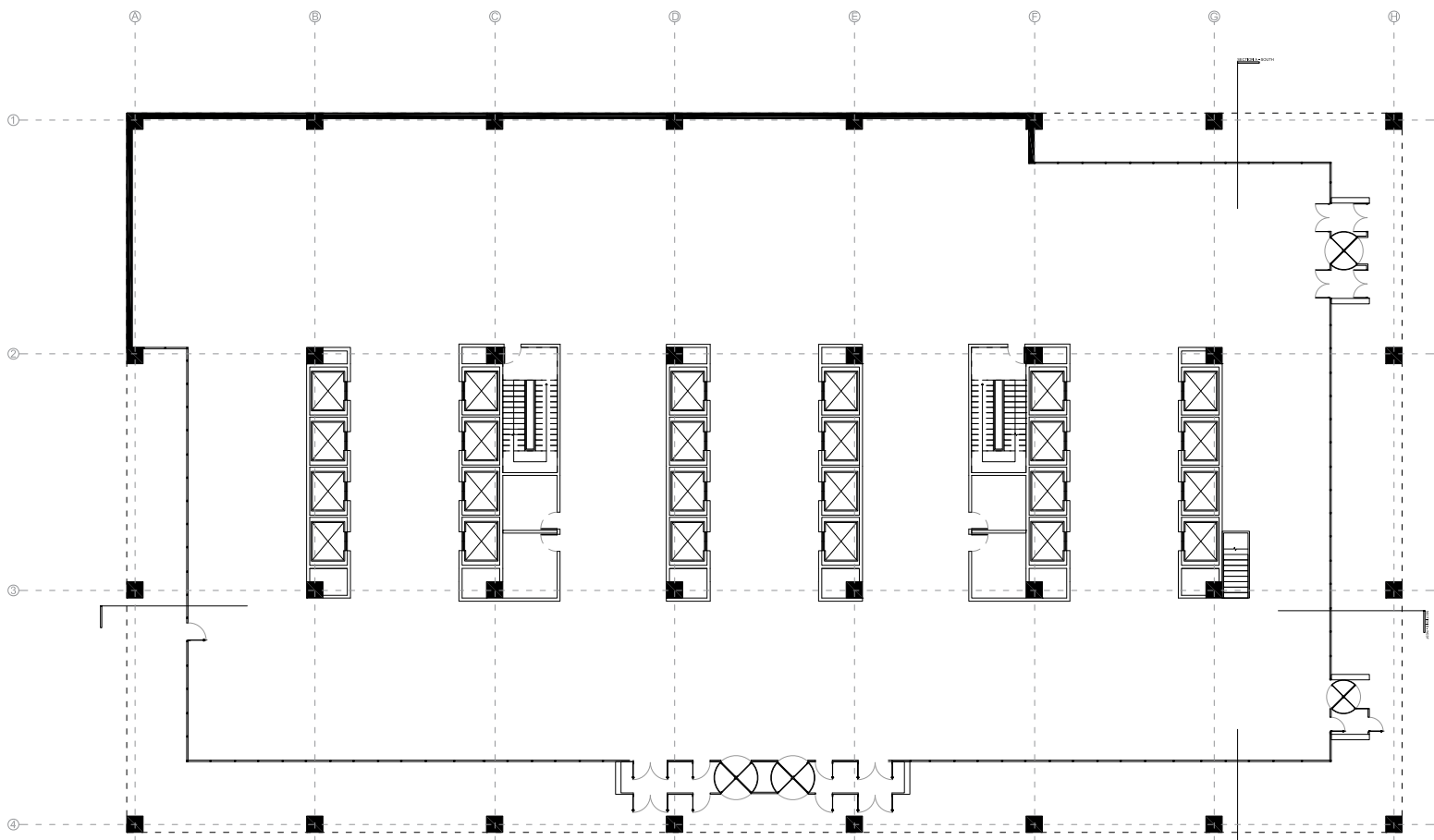


Fig. 38  
Ground Floor Interior View

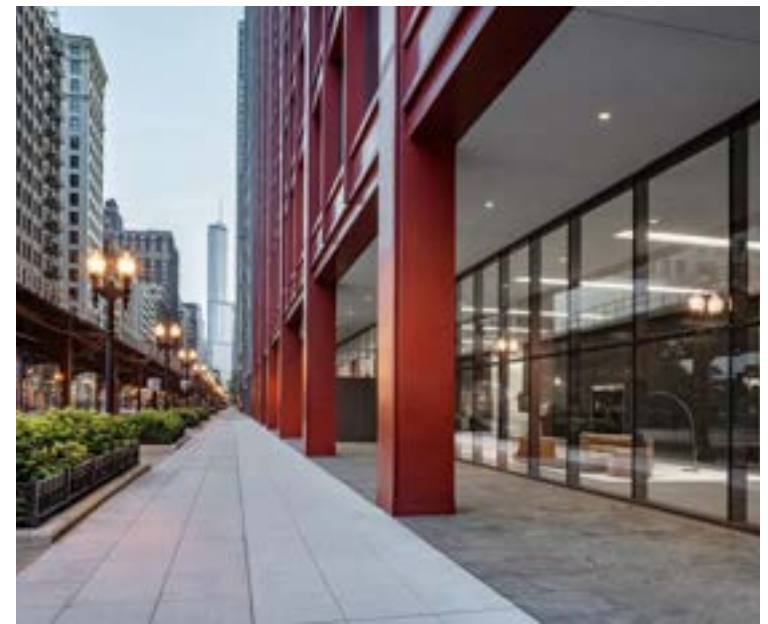


Fig. 39  
Ground Floor Exterior Frontage Zone

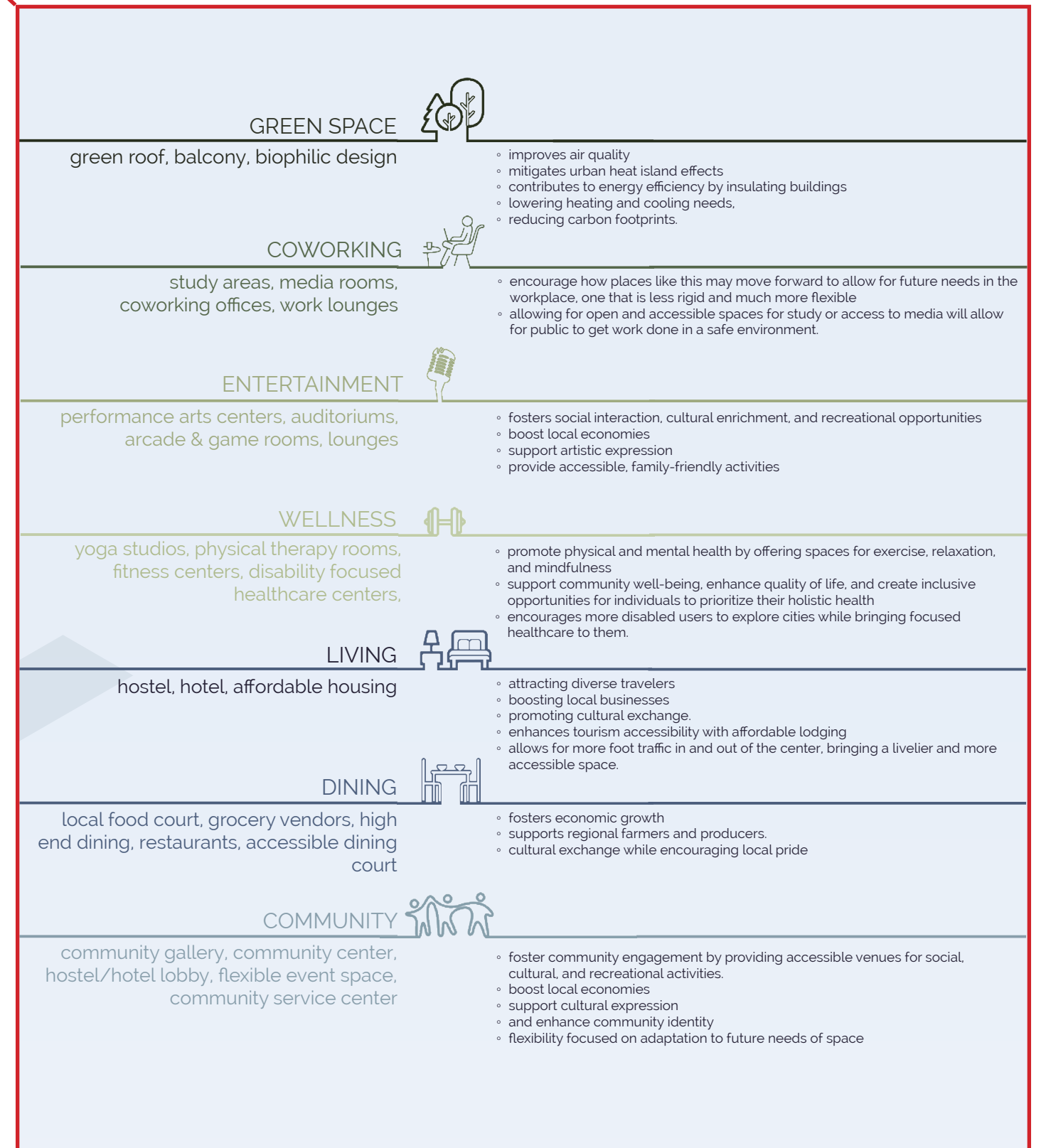
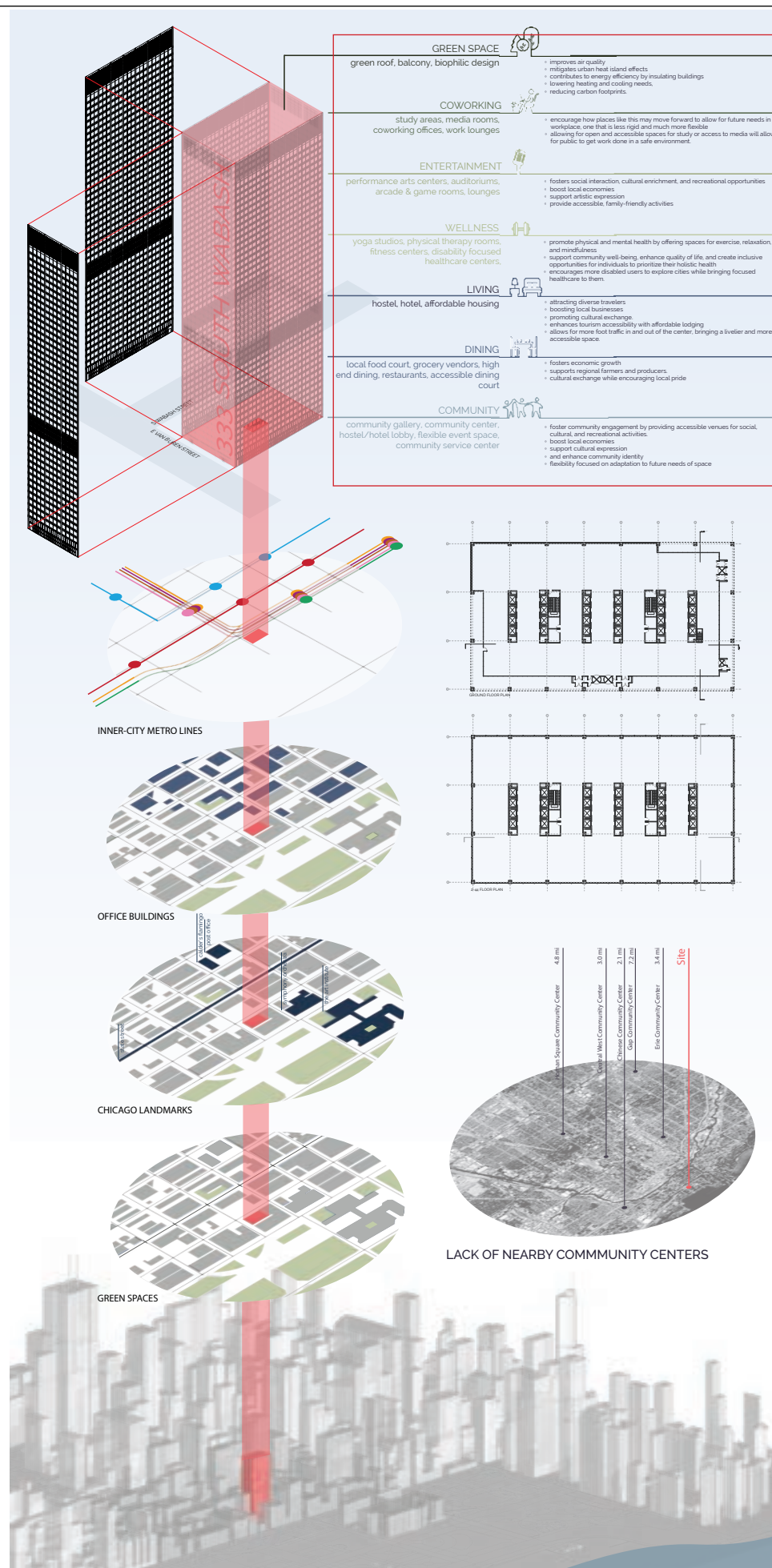


Fig. 40  
Ground Floor Interior View

## A NOTE ABOUT THE SITE -

Due to the aspect of universal designed spaces being open to any person, it is necessary to find a site that contains a wide variety of cultures and demographics to utilize the space. The final site was chosen due to its proximity to high tourist areas (bringing in high foot traffic), its distance from the financial district (to avoid allowing for only one type of consumer), and the accessibility to the program through a large multitude of nearby metro systems) and easy access to other forms of public transportation).

However beyond this, why is this building perfect to explore a future of office re-design? The answer is simple - placelessness. This international style building built in 1973 contains simple architecture components found in many office buildings, allowing for a similar concept to be translatable to a larger multitude of typical office spaces. However, while a less ornamental structure, the bright red color of the facade (as well as the transparent ground floor glazing) creates a statement to the public, announcing "I am here, come and explore". Furthermore, the grand scale of this project also allows for more exploration throughout a multitude of community centered programming so that a larger option of spaces may be displayed for future developments to "pick-and-choose". Overall, by constructing a format of universal design in this adaptable rectangular structure, there is more opportunity for a future of application to similar projects.



A deeper dive into the programming & their impacts on a community

## TRANSFORMING THE OFFICE BUILDING

Exploring Universally Designed Community Spaces within the Upcoming Vacancy of Workspaces

Resilience must be designed as a transformative approach within urban design and architecture, offering solutions that address growing resilience and the environmental impact of our buildings. This approach, which includes incorporating elements of universal design into new construction, play a crucial role in sustainable urban development. The office building challenges such as vacant office spaces, functional communities, and a diversified business plan design approach must provide a pathway toward rethinking urban environments while fostering accessibility, functionality, and resilience in response to these needs. This involves the integration of universal design principles into architectural design, construction, and the 12-month process, 12 principles to creating public architecture. Universal design promotes accessibility for people of all abilities, enabling more inclusive, welcoming spaces. Rethinking the built environment, can create design processes that consider how people perceive and interact with their environments. The design process should encourage building practitioners who people can most need of their skills, provide a clear path to take into the future, further explore the benefits of universal design. Together, these approaches can create more inclusive, resilient spaces that bring new resilience and innovation to public spaces, benefiting both individuals and the broader urban environment.

Due to the extent of universal design spaces being seen in any project, it is necessary to find a site that contains a wide variety of cultures and demographics to utilize the space. For this, each site was assessed in the heart of downtown Chicago. The first site was chosen due to its proximity to high transit areas, its distance from the financial district, and its accessibility to the program through a large number of nearby transit systems. Why to this building, located in a prime location in downtown Chicago. The project is a unique opportunity to create a new, inclusive, and resilient community space. The project is a unique opportunity to create a new, inclusive, and resilient community space. The project is a unique opportunity to create a new, inclusive, and resilient community space.

### The Seven Principles of Universal Design

1. Equitable Use
2. Flexibility in Use
3. Simple and Intuitive Use
4. Perceptible Information
5. Tolerance for Error
6. Low Physical Effort
7. Size and Space for Approach and Use

### 208 SOUTH LASALLE STREET

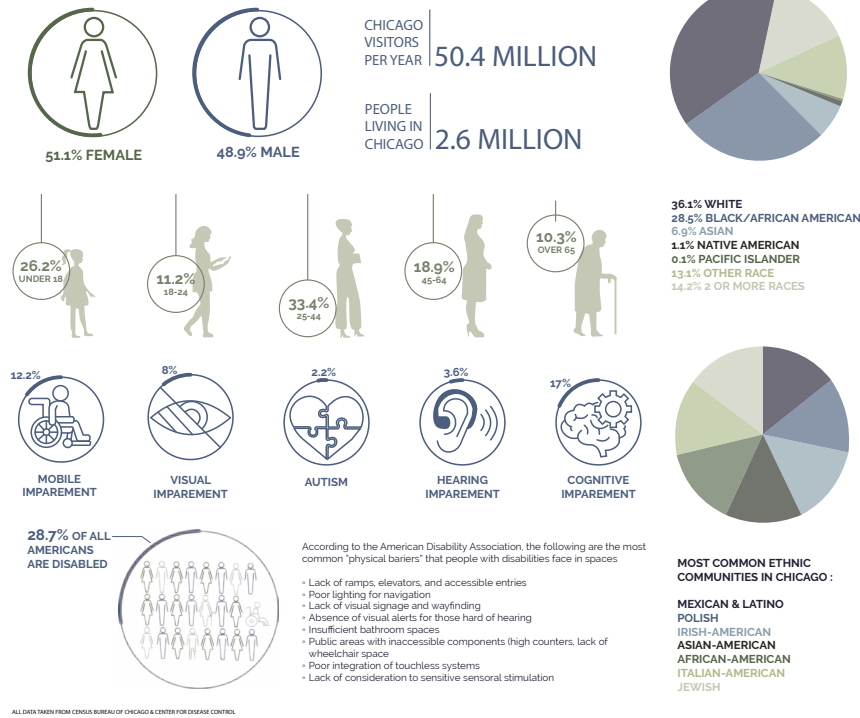
### 333 SOUTH WABASH STREET

### 111 WEST MONROE STREET

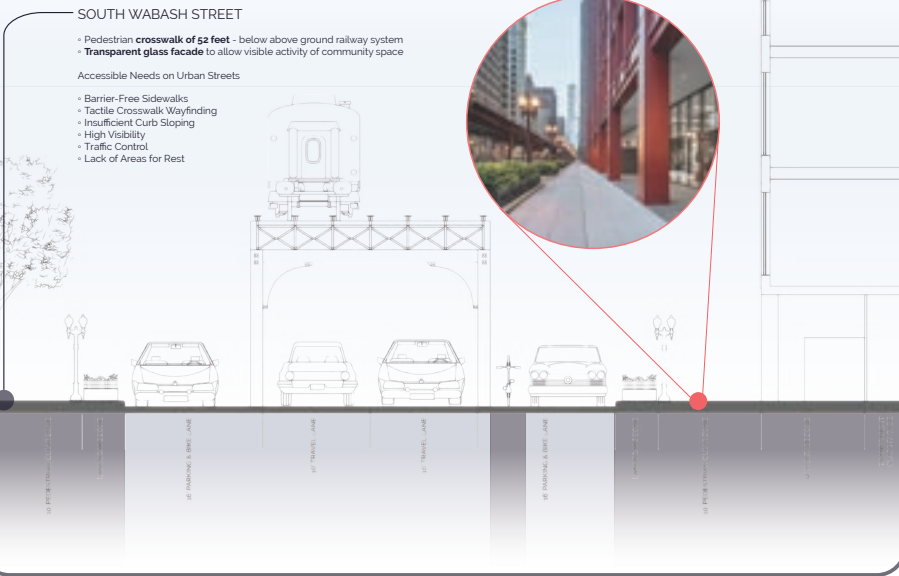
## UPCOMING VACANCY OF THE WORKSPACE



## DEMOGRAPHIC NEEDS IN THE AREA



## URBAN CONDITION & ACCESSIBILITY



**GREEN SPACE**  
green roof, battery storage, design

**CONCERNING**  
lack of green space, lack of green space, lack of green space

**ENTERTAINMENT**  
entertainment, entertainment, entertainment

**LIVING**  
living, living, living

**COMMUNITY**  
community, community, community

**INNER-CITY METRO LINES**

**OFFICE BUILDING**

**CHICAGO LANDMARKS**

**GREEN SPACES**

**LACK OF NEARBY COMMUNITY CENTERS**

# STRATEGY

## Inclusivity

To strategize how to design “inclusively”, one must first ask what it means to design with everyone in mind. People tend to think that there is a direct correlation between inclusive and disability design or “accessibility”. While designing for those who are disabled is an extremely important part of this definition, inclusive and universal design go far beyond this singular aspect. To design inclusively is to design with the intention that any person of any group, ability, demographic, age, or any other identifying characteristic is welcomed into a space due to the different aspects of the built environment. Inclusive, universal, and flexible design are all niches that intermingle with each other to create environments that are usable and habitable by any person. In the article *Designing Inclusive Environments: Rehabilitating the Body and the Relevance of Universal Design*, author Rob Imrie (author of *Inclusive design: Designing and Developing Accessible Environments*) criticizes the current adaptations of inclusive design by stating “such methodologies, and their underlying epistemological bases, appear to delimit the understanding of person-hood to bodies-without-impairment, or cultural norms that define the universal subject in ways whereby disabled people are regarded as aberrations.” Imrie later goes on to suggest moving forward from these disappointments in his quote “This observation leads contributors to the special issue to interrogate how far, and in what ways, practitioners may be able to develop universal design not only as a ‘design strategy’, but as a political strategy that has the potential to transform the dominant world view of universal able bodiedness.” To further summarize, the

ideals of designing inclusively are not meant to create a political statement, but rather offer up a community based space that does not place limits on the definition of said “community”. To move forward in this design basis, there are many strategies to accomplish this including equitable access, ease in operability, clear wayfinding solutions, consideration to safety and security, adaptable spaces, cultural sensitivity, and multi-sensory design. By using these, and evermore strategies, one can create a space meant to include any person, universally

## Human-Centered Design

When considering “human-centered design”, the ideals of designing for both the health and the wellbeing of the humans we design for sits at the forefront of this. When conducting research for what kinds of impact built environments and places can have on a person, much of what I read came back to The Center for Conscious Design (CCD), an established organization that I have followed for some time and feel inspired by each day. In the CCD’s introduction to health and wellness focused design, they define health as “not just the absence of illness but includes an ecosystem of components such as mental, emotional, social, and physical health.” This means what when designing for human health, we are not just thinking of ways to make someone visit the doctor less. The CCD also introduces the idea of “architects as health professionals” urging all designers to majorly consider the impacts their designs may have on wellness. To inhibit the priority of health in design, the CCD states that “poorly designed spaces can inhibit wayfinding, physical movement, and social interaction, while

creating unnecessary stress. Light, temperature, air quality, and noise are just a few of the tangible considerations of how the built environment impacts health and wellbeing.” To counteract this, designers are encouraged to design “environments that promote stress reduction, physical movement, and social connection will support the basic human needs that encourage health and wellbeing.”

Beyond creating environments that consider wellness, health and wellbeing spaces can be developed through the theory of “nudging” and the materiality chosen for a space. The Theory of Nudging, developed by Richard Thaler, is based upon “the idea that by shaping the environment, also known as the choice architecture, one can influence the likelihood that one option is chosen over another by individuals.” By creating spaces that may suggest a user to make healthier decisions, like having more wayfinding towards the salad bar versus the snack cart at an elementary school or making the stairs a more visual choice than the elevators, a designer can find ways to promote wellbeing without changing much of the design at all. Beyond this, materiality is also incredibly important in designing for health. There is a reason that healthcare design is so rigorous and specific with their material selection, as some surfaces provide easier cleanability and therefore healthier environments. From impacting air quality to understanding skin absorption, “green” buildings do not just have an impact on our natural environment, but on the health of every person who may inhabit the space. For this reason, designing to “nudge” or suggest healthier choices while using biophilic focused and non-toxic materials can be strategies used towards a design meant to focus on human well-being.

## Flexibility

With a modern cultural dynamic that seems to be ever changing, it is important to ask how we may design for our future, rather than constantly reacting to our present. Spaces that design with flexibility and adaptation in mind seem to thrive for longer standing times than those whose programming is rigid and traditional. One relevant example of this is the flexible coworking and remote working spaces versus the dying office cubicle as our work culture takes a major shift in how we approach the workspace. While it is important for designers to study and understand the functions of the spaces we create, it may be less beneficial to truly define them. As home has become office and work has become recreation, designing spaces that are able to adapt their function seems to be the only way to stay relevant in our fluctuating behavioral trends. While office trends are a tangible way to see this need for flexibility, it is important that this strategy is implemented in a large multitude of public spaces including event centers or learning spaces. To do this, it is important for designers to consider flexibility as it is defined by space, function, and temporality. Modular furniture, movable partitions, and optimizing multi-functional accessories and elements into a space are some ways to make a space more flexible. The impact of designing this way has not only benefited current cultural norms, but it also makes spaces more sustainable and cost efficient in the long run. By designing now for adaptable spaces without many major structural constraints, buildings are more likely to avoid becoming obsolete in the future.

Issue	Environmental Challenge	Universal Design Solution
<b>Mobility</b>	Stairs create multiple challenges for people who use mobility assistive devices.	One-storey living accommodations; stairless entryways; gradually inclined ramps with secure handrails; elevators.
	Threshold elevation changes often lead to trip-and-fall injuries.	Thresholds built flush with floors.
	People who use walkers and wheelchairs need sufficient room in entryways and hallways.	Pocket doors; doorway widths of at least 32–36 inches; hallways widths of at least 36–42 inches.
	People who use walkers and wheelchairs need sufficient room to move around furnishings.	Floor space of at least 32 inches around furnishings.
<b>Stability</b>	Smooth, wet surfaces are slippery.	Nonslip surfaces on floors, bathtubs, and ramps.
	People who experience dizziness need to feel that they are stabilized and not in danger of falling.	Grips or handrails in hallways and bathrooms.
	Dim lighting is problematic for people who have limited vision, and indirect lighting causes shadows that affect depth perception.	Bright direct lighting, particularly in stairways and entranceways.
<b>Grip</b>	Globe door handles pose a challenge for people who lack strength or dexterity.	Lever-style door handles.
	Toggle and twist-type light switches require manual dexterity.	Rocker light switches.
<b>Height</b>	Fixed shelving may require the use of stepstools and reaching devices.	Adjustable shelving and brackets.
	Electrical outlets installed at standard heights are inconvenient for wheelchair-bound people and others who cannot bend or kneel.	Electrical outlets installed 2 to 3 feet above floor level.

## Mobility

By remembering Jos Boy’s expression of understanding the “ablist” approach to design, it is important to note that not everyone moves the same way in a space, and it is foolish for a designer to create spaces in accordance with only one form of mobility. On a city scale, the definition of mobility moves beyond getting through an interior space, and includes the consideration of accessibility by car, public transit of different forms, bike routes, and the walkability of a city. Understanding this is important as it can be reflected into an interior environment by considering those who walk, use wheelchairs, walkers, canes, and any other sort of mobility aid. There also needs to be smooth transitions between spaces, including wide doorways, ramps, and accessible pathways, which eliminate barriers that may limit movement. Incorporating such features enhances the usability of spaces, promoting inclusivity and supporting the well-being of all

users, regardless of their physical condition. This design approach not only meets legal accessibility standards but also anticipates the diverse needs of an aging population and people with temporary or permanent mobility challenges. By referencing Table 6.1 (above) “Universal design solutions to common environmental challenges of disability” in Dak Kopec’s *Environmental Psychology for Design* textbook, there are a multitude of design solutions for challenges like mobility, stability, and so on. Beyond this table, other strategies also include hands-free technology, grab bars or support rails, minimal furniture obstructions, turning space, smooth spatial transitions, motion activated lighting, and much more. Overall, designing for mobility is the first step in accessible spaces.

Source	Design Solution
<b>Noisy appliances</b>	Install vibration mounts; isolate source in sound insulating enclosure.
<b>Ventilation noise</b>	Reduce blower speed; install acoustic lining and flexible connectors in ducts.
<b>Reverberant noise</b>	Install sound-absorbing materials, e.g., carpets and pads, drapery, upholstered furniture, acoustical wall padding, ceiling. Total surface area of absorbent material should be at least one-fourth of total room surface area.
<b>High-pitched sounds from ventilators, heating, refrigerant systems, high-velocity gas flow through furnaces and burners or worn-out or defective washers.</b>	Reduce pressure in plumbing system, and isolate pipes and valves from supporting wall and floor structures with resilient sleeves or collars. Replace worn or defective faucet washers or valve seals. Wrap pipes.
<b>Excessive noise from conversations (above 70 dB at 3 to 5 ft)</b>	Install barriers and/or a prefabricated, sound-insulated booth or field-office enclosure.
<b>Neighboring conversations (sounds from transmission through a partition or ductwork, and ventilation ducts).</b>	Caulk or seal all visible cracks at ceiling and floor edges of party wall. Remove cover plates of all electrical outlets in party walls to check for back-to-back installation; in such cases, pack cavities with foam mat or jute fiber wadding and then seal with a resilient caulk.
<b>Noise from upper floors</b>	Install a gypsum board ceiling mounted on resilient hangers, place foam mat blanket in void between ceilings. In some cases, you may need to specify wall-paneling with foam backing to be mounted on resilient furring channels.
<b>Outdoor noise</b>	Install window “plugs.” Install gaskets around existing windows and doors, install storm windows and doors, replace hollow core or paneled entrance doors with solid core doors.

## Noise sensitivity

Another step in accessible design is consideration to sensory sensitivity, from bright lights to loud noises to overwhelming tactile elements. While sensory overstimulation may not be a disorder that affects every person, it is equally important to design to the needs we may not see or experience to those that we do. In a case study by Emily Athens in her book *The Great Interiors*, she studies housing meant for adults with autism, and speaks specifically on the impacts that even the smallest amount of noise control between residences can have on making someone feel much more comfortable. To make these same impacts in a public space, we look again to Dak Kopec’s textbook at Table 6.2 (pg. 49), “Noise sources and design solutions”. Here we see a multitude of different sound stimuli and how to reduce the overwhelming of this sensory stimulus. Other sensory stimulants and sensitivities must be considered, as the annoying buzzing of an HVAC system is not the only thing

that may overwhelm those with Sensory Processing Disorder and similar types of challenges. For visual stimuli, it is important to choose calm colors and keep a space decluttered from too much nonsense. For tactile stimuli, offering a range of choices in seating materials can be extremely beneficial. Finally for olfactory sensitivities, it is important to implement equipment that helps to purify the air and rid of intense smells. Understanding the sensory perception of our spaces is not only important for impacting human behavior, but for creating spaces that do not disrupt the behavior of those more sensitive to the stimuli around us.



## Consideration to Neurodivergence

It is undeniable that each human has a biological and neurological response to built environments, there is even a type of architectural niche focused on studying and understanding this response - neuroarchitecture. As this study is something I personally find incredibly fascinating, I believe it is crucial that when designing accessible and inclusive environments that we consider those who are neurodivergent, not only neurotypical. Similar to designing for those who are both "abled" and "disabled", understanding how those with disorders like ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, and many other neurological conditions interact with spaces is equally impactful. While there is much more awareness now of designing for these kinds of disabilities than ever before, it still has a lot of growth and exposure to do before we see spaces that consider this widely. Some strategies to design with consideration to neurodivergence include designing for movement, including "quiet zones", having predictable and logical layouts, an emphasis on wayfinding, adjustable environmental controls, access to natural elements, privacy enhancements, and avoiding distracting stimuli. Designing for everyone does not only mean making sure that every space is available for every person, but can include spaces with special features that may assist a small group to allow them to participate in larger environments than before.

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# TACTICS

## Color

Color is experience visualized, and is a forefront aspect in shaping our daily interactions with our environment. The significance of color in interior design extends beyond just aesthetics; as it has a direct correlation to psychological and emotional responses, and can directly trigger reactions in the brain, affecting emotions such as stress, anxiety, happiness, and tranquility. Color is how we experience our surroundings, impacting not only our emotional responses, but how we perceive our spaces. The study of color psychology extends well beyond interior design, influencing various parts of daily life including marketing, entertainment, fashion, and cultural practices. In marketing, color choices significantly affect brand perception and consumer behavior. In entertainment, color is employed to convey emotional tones and narrative themes, enhancing the audience's engagement with films and animations. Also, color plays a major role in fashion, cultural traditions, and religious symbolism, both reflecting and shaping societal values and trends.

Within interior design, color is strategically used to manipulate spatial perceptions and emotional atmospheres. By applying aspects of color psychology, designers can craft environments that evoke specific and intentional responses. This can impact the spatial perspective of a room as well as be used as a tool through color psychology to impact the emotional reaction or by selecting certain color palettes, color can create a well thought out and purposeful feel to the space by using the comparison of colors to each other or invoking different associations of said color to create a specific atmosphere and reveal the space's intended purpose or use.

## Texture

Texture in interior design extends beyond mere aesthetics, serving critical roles in accessibility, functionality, and the intuitive understanding of objects through their surfaces. While in interior design texture is commonly intertwined with materiality, by taking a step back one can examine this quality of touch alone. As one of the primary senses used to interact with our environment, touch plays a crucial role in how textures influence our perception and experience within a space. The texture of materials can elicit a range of physiological and emotional responses, affecting our feelings of comfort, safety, and even associate certain textures with different moods.

For instance, textures can impact the functionality of a space: a smooth, hard countertop facilitates ease of cleaning, while a softer texture on seating allows for a more comfortable experience. Additionally, the texture of walls and large surfaces can alter spatial perception and support various interior uses when defining changes in programming of a space. In terms of accessibility, textures are instrumental in aiding visually impaired individuals by providing tactile cues for navigating changes in pathways or detecting steps. Lastly, texture in materiality can be brought into conversations about sustainability of design when considering materiality to benefit a project. Overall, texture is an important element in interior design, essential for its aesthetic appeal through both visuals and tactile elements, functional attributes, and contribution to a space's overall usability.

## Access to Lighting

Lighting is unarguably one of the most important aspects of the way built environments impact comfort, experience, and well being. Through working alongside Biophilic Designer Nicole Craanen, I learned first hand how access to lighting (both natural and well-thought out artificial lighting) can have a direct effect on health and the impact that sunlight does to our mental health. Also, by looking at the article "The Impact of Interior Design on Visual Discomfort Reduction: A Field Study Integrating Lighting Environments with POE Survey" by Kong, Utzinger, Freihoefer, and Steege (2018), the authors suggest designers prioritize natural lighting, while creating meaningful artificial lighting systems that reduce visual discomfort through the absence of glare and brightness to enhance the interior environment. By looking at precedents like the Crosstown Concourse with a multitude of atriums that let in natural light, as well as approaching window systems to let in as much comfortable daylighting as possible, one can create a comfortable space through one's access to light. Along with the benefits of health through lighting access, one must also consider having even lighting throughout a space to create less visual disparity for those visually disabled. By avoiding excessively bright or dark areas, spaces become more accessible without much effort.

## Human scale

Looking outside of one's project to understand the building's role in a larger urban landscape, especially in a larger city, is the first step to designing for human scale, before one dives deep into the human scale of an interior. It is important to know how people interact within an urban context, but also how they perceive their surroundings from an eye level. On a macro level, one must understand how scale can be defined by their surroundings - a 25 story building may define the skyline in Milwaukee and yet get lost in the skyline of Chicago - and the role it plays on that plane. On a micro scale, one must question how someone can interact with a building on their own plane. Then, one must understand the interaction of these two things and the impact it can have on the experience of space. This consideration to human scale is not only important when thinking about a site's importance in it's specific urban condition, but also how people of all scales are able to move throughout a space. For example, a long vertical handle bar on a door is accessible for children, people in wheelchairs, and adults. To quote Architect Jan Gehl in his TedTalk "In Search of the Human Scale", "think big, but always remember to make the places where people are to be small".

## Transparency

Beyond the typical association, yet not ignoring it, of transparency in architecture being dependent on large glass planes, there is a dynamic sense of culture one can create based on what spaces are more accessible to the public eye than others. In Deborah Ascher-Barnstone's article, "Transparency: A Brief Introduction," she talks about literal transparency, or the quality of materials, versus phenomenal transparency, referring to the perception of space and its spatial ambiguity rather than relying on physical openness. It is here that the tactic of perceptual transparency can take form as a metaphor, where the transparency of a space directly speaks to its intended inclusivity and accessibility. While not all spaces are meant to be completely open and observed, the experience of a space can be defined on a spectrum of open versus closed spaces, and how that controlled limitation may impact spatial perception and cultural symbolism.

In consideration to more literal transparency, the site 333 South Wabash allows for a perfect opportunity to explore this as the urban street facing facades of the ground floor are enveloped in perfectly transparent curtain glass walls. Following the precedent of the Pittsburgh African American Cultural Center, whose "picture frame facade" was described by the architect, Allison Williams, as, "this transparency invites the surrounding historic context in to enrich the interior experience and engage the place in the city. The building is a giant picture window framing the constant transformation, evolution and influence of African culture, active and glowing proudly from within."

Taking this inspiration, by allowing for the interior activities to be seen by passer-bys on the street, we further the community and urban influence by allowing what acts as an honest conversation that hides nothing from either viewer, but rather invites them to interact.

Transparency can also be described in this glazed facade by being a communication point for the urban street. By bringing aspects of the sidewalk to the interior, a new definition of interior urbanism can be developed. To further find inspiration from Allison Williams, she also describes the street level of the Cultural Center as. "To acknowledge the significance of the street as common space and as a stage for urban life, the sidewalk slides into the building, connecting the street level uses."

There is no end to how transparency can transform a space. By intersecting the programming of the space, we also allow for people in different cultures and communities to transparently interact just as the forms and uses of the building will. In this way, one would say that a communitative function will follow from within a transparent form.

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# CONCLUSION

In conclusion, adaptive reuse stands as a vital solution to the challenges of urban vacancy, community disconnection, and environmental sustainability. By transforming underutilized spaces into accessible, multi-functional environments, cities can promote a more connected, inclusive urban fabric. This research underscores the value of combining universal design principles with phenomenological approaches to create spaces that enhance well-being and inclusivity. By examining adaptive reuse projects that have successfully revitalized urban areas, this study highlights the potential of such projects to foster vibrant, accessible communities.

Many of these ideals have been shown in the precedent projects studied to inspire this design within its urban responsibilities, like the Terminal in Pittsburgh allowing for through traffic and bringing in needed businesses in the area, or the Crosstown Concourse which emphasizes bringing the public together in all parts of the building through an emphasis on vertical circulation. Other important lessons taken from precedents include specific details of accessible design taken from the Enabling Village and Leszczyński Antoni Manó Intervention like purposeful wayfinding and the inclusion of ramps or large circulation spaces.

By further focusing adaptive reuse strategies on the upcoming vacancy of office buildings, we can study how this rearranging of workspace culture can further inspire us to design with the future in mind. Not only how to take this study and translate, adapt, and apply it to other vacant spaces, but how to design flexibly. By using this strategy to design spaces that will adapt to future cultural shifts in places beyond workspaces,

designers can create true universal spaces that are accessible to people both now and in the future. Other strategies of design that will be important moving forward in the design of this capstone are intersection and transparency, as described earlier. By creating a space that may foster and encourage users to follow in behavior as the architecture intermingles between spaces and allows for visual access to many areas of design, one can hope that the public will then too intermingle and allow one another to see who they truly are - therefore creating an accessible and culturally dynamic space. Overall, each one of these strategies and tactics studied here will further emphasize the importance of universal design, and show in the end how important the details are to take down disability barriers and encourage all types of users into a space.

Moving forward, adaptive reuse strategies such as those discussed in this paper have the potential to shape future urban development as cities continue to face rising rates of vacant office spaces and evolving community needs. By integrating universal design, environmental psychology, and phenomenological theory, designers can create spaces that prioritize user experience, environmental sustainability, and inclusivity. The practical applications of these strategies within the adaptive reuse framework offer a promising path for urban centers worldwide, as they strive to develop environments that are resilient, accessible, and capable of fostering a more equitable and connected society.



Fig. 41

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# IMAGE SOURCES

Fig. 1  
Taken on iPhone by Erin Raebel

Fig. 2  
<https://twitter.com/ChicagoDPD/status/1800648623086088223>

Fig. 6  
<https://vastphotos.com/files/uploads/photos/10588/chicago-sky-line-photo-1.jpg?v=20240918092827>

Fig. 7  
<https://es.pinterest.com/pin/241013017554445673/>

Fig. 8  
<https://www.hooddesignstudio.com/crosstown-memphis>

Fig. 9  
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/crosstown-high-school>

Fig. 10  
[https://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/defining-desirable-cities-and-neighborhoods-through-regulations\\_o](https://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/defining-desirable-cities-and-neighborhoods-through-regulations_o)

Fig. 11  
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/a-view-of-the-produce-terminal-on-smallman-street-in-the-strip-district-may-1948--261419953344830390/>

Fig. 12  
<https://www.instagram.com/sdterminal/p/C5oDgewPt-D/>

Fig. 13  
[https://www.pittsburghpa.gov/files/assets/city/v/1/domi/images/17107\\_fig1.jpg](https://www.pittsburghpa.gov/files/assets/city/v/1/domi/images/17107_fig1.jpg)

Fig. 14  
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Fig. 15  
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Fig. 17  
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Fig. 21  
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Fig. 23  
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Fig. 24  
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Fig. 25  
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Fig. 26  
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Fig. 27  
[https://www.shvo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/333\\_carousel\\_2-1920x1080.jpg](https://www.shvo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/333_carousel_2-1920x1080.jpg)

Fig. 28  
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Fig. 27  
[https://www.shvo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/333\\_carousel\\_2-1920x1080.jpg](https://www.shvo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/333_carousel_2-1920x1080.jpg)

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Fig. 31  
<https://chicago.urbanize.city/sites/default/files/styles/950w/public/2024-09/111%20W.%20Monroe%20-%205%20-%20CCL.jpg?itok=HNSYUhhb>

Fig. 32  
<https://chicago.urbanize.city/sites/default/files/styles/950w/public/2024-09/111%20W.%20Monroe%20-%204%20-%20CCL.jpg?itok=b0To1oP3>

Fig. 33  
<https://chicago.urbanize.city/sites/default/files/styles/950w/public/2024-09/111%20W.%20Monroe%20-%205%20-%20CCL.jpg?itok=HNSYUhhb>

Fig. 34  
<https://chicago.urbanize.city/sites/default/files/styles/950w/public/2024-09/111%20W.%20Monroe%20-%202%20-%20CCL.jpg?itok=13lZouJF>

Fig. 35  
Taken from SHVO Instagram

Fig. 36  
[https://www.shvo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/333\\_carousel\\_4-1440x960.jpg](https://www.shvo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/333_carousel_4-1440x960.jpg)

Fig. 37  
[https://res.cloudinary.com/marketsphere/image/upload/c\\_fill,h\\_600,w\\_1200/cxzlkzs2t1lqfmevhmzx.jpg](https://res.cloudinary.com/marketsphere/image/upload/c_fill,h_600,w_1200/cxzlkzs2t1lqfmevhmzx.jpg)

Fig. 38

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Fig. 39  
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Fig. 40  
<https://www.hok.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/7-1200x802.png>

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**“When we design for disability first, we often stumble upon solutions that are not only inclusive, but are also often better than when we design for the norm.”**

- Elise Roy, TEDTalk