

# PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN

SUMMER FELLOWSHIP 2017

THE ALBERT AND TINA

SMALL  
CENTER

FOR COLLABORATIVE DESIGN



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## **PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN**

USES A TRANSDISCIPLINARY  
AND COLLABORATIVE  
APPROACH TO RESTORE  
DECISION-MAKING POWER  
TO THE PEOPLE IT SERVES.

## ABOUT SMALL CENTER

The Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design is the community design center of the Tulane School of Architecture. Small Center operates at the intersection of design and civic engagement. Small Center believes that innovative solutions to the most pressing problems facing our communities lie in giving voice to the citizens who live here. Partner organizations bring their project ideas to us, and we bring our design expertise to bear in collaboration, supporting New Orleans residents in imagining and pursuing projects that strengthen neighborhoods and contribute to a city shaped by its citizens.

## ABOUT THE FELLOWSHIP

Each year, Small Center hires young designers from the Tulane School of Architecture to work in an 8-week intensive fellowship. This is an opportunity for students to sharpen their technical skills while assisting with real projects alongside leaders from organizations that work to meet the needs of New Orleans citizens. Small Center engages with the fellows as thought partners on questions and challenges in the field of public interest design. The 2017 Fellowship was made possible through the generous support of Morris Adjmi, Eskew+Dumez+Ripple, and the Sizeler family.



## ANA SANDOVAL

HONDURAS | M. ARCH, 4TH YEAR  
ADJMI FELLOW

### EXTRACURRICULARS

Architecture Student Government Sustainability  
Chair, Arcblocs

### HOBBIES

Drawing, painting, playing the classical guitar,  
reading

### FAVORITE SHOP TOOL

Hammer Drill

### FAVORITE PART OF FELLOWSHIP

The charrettes with the Groundwork Green Team

### CAREER GOALS

Becoming a licensed architect, traveling and  
practicing public interest design in Honduras



Coming from a country where poverty, social injustice, and inequality are prevalent, the ideas behind public interest design have always drawn my attention. The architecture field is typically viewed as a service industry that is exclusively about the built environment. In reality, architecture has environmental, social, political, economic, and cultural impacts. As a public interest design fellow, I had the opportunity to gain a better understanding of what public interest design means and to engage in collaborative and human-centered projects. Throughout the fellowship, I learned many lessons, but perhaps the most important was that design should not be a problem-

solving exercise where designers have all the knowledge, but rather a collaboration where both clients and designers bring valuable skills and expertise to the project. Though I really enjoyed when we were designing a specific structure or tool, my favorite moments were meeting with community members and organizations and talking about their values. The fellowship was an enriching experience that increased my understanding of design and New Orleans and has marked an important moment in my career path.



## KEKELI DAWES

COLUMBIA, SC | M. ARCH I, 2ND YEAR

ESKEW+DUMEZ+RIPPLE FELLOW

### EXTRACURRICULARS

National Organization of Minority Architecture  
Students, playing the drums, music

### HOBBIES

Music shopping, seeing concerts and live music

### FAVORITE SHOP TOOL

Angle Grinder

### FAVORITE PART OF FELLOWSHIP

Doing critiques with the Green Team

### CAREER GOALS

Working at a really great firm, making and playing  
music, going into academic research, activism work



This eight-week fellowship was a rare opportunity to challenge my own critiques of architecture practice. Throughout my architectural education, I've studied the shortcomings of designers who fail to recognize the social and political capacity of the built environment. It's one thing to critique a completed work, but it's another to critique a project as I'm working on it. By working at Small Center, I've started to see how critique can live in practice. I learned the importance of knowing when to interrogate certain design choices; a team must be flexible, creative, and

empathetic to design a proper response. I came into this fellowship for the opportunity to do practical work with real people, and at an immediate, intimate scale in the city in which I now live. In each of the projects, I found that it's not only possible to address historical inequality at even the smallest scale and scope of influence, but it's a vital aspect of the design process of any comprehensive project.



## CAROLYN ISAACSON

CHICAGO, IL | M. ARCH I, 2ND YEAR

### EXTRACURRICULARS

Changemaker Institute fellow, TSA Graduate Government

### HOBBIES

Cooking, photography, exploring urban sites

### FAVORITE SHOP TOOL

Hand Held Band Saw

### FAVORITE PART OF FELLOWSHIP

Collaboration

### CAREER GOALS

Work on adaptive reuse project and implementing community engagement practices



In just eight short weeks I learned more about New Orleans, its people and culture, than I ever imagined was possible. The power of this city as an evolving landscape, studded by human experience and a wealth of culture, is captivating; I am grateful to have observed and explored New Orleans this summer. My newly gained knowledge and understanding was perceived through specific design and ethnographic lenses and I plan on continuing with this mode of uncovering, processing, and analyzing urban conditions. This fellowship inspired in me a stronger curiosity about the way people perceive and interact with their

surroundings. I most appreciate the knowledge and insights about New Orleans that I gained from Small Center staff, our project managers, and each community member and advocate we met throughout the summer. Collaboration and conversation were constants during the fellowship and the stories that I heard only further solidified my understanding of the city. These interactions not only kept my work exciting and challenging but also allowed me to fully appreciate the depth of human perception relative to place and experience in New Orleans.



## CHRISTIE MELGAR

SILVER SPRING, MD | M. ARCH I, 2ND YEAR

### EXTRACURRICULARS

National Organization of Minority Architect  
Students Treasurer, TSA Graduate Government

### HOBBIES

Sleeping, running with dogs, traveling, drawing

### FAVORITE SHOP TOOL

Nail Gun

### FAVORITE PART OF FELLOWSHIP

“The cop incident” while surveying

### CAREER GOALS

Becoming a licensed architect, designing and  
building own house, founding a firm



Moving to New Orleans, jumping right into graduate school and working part-time at an architecture firm left me little time to explore New Orleans' culture and current issues. This fellowship gave me the opportunity to explore New Orleans while applying my education and skills to real work. The most rewarding experience this summer was being able to collaborate with people of different backgrounds and expertise, while visiting local communities and projects. Through site visits and discussions with residents and stakeholders, I got a glimpse of local issues

and concerns. Until recently, I wasn't aware of how a sense of empowerment or ownership could impact the longevity of a project. Often times discussing with community members what their community needed was far more beneficial for both the neighborhood and the design. I went into the fellowship having a slight interest in public interest design, but came out with a desire to pursue it as a career.



## RYAN SHAABAN

EVANSTON, IL | M. ARCH, 3RD YEAR

### EXTRACURRICULARS

American Institute of Architecture Students

### HOBBIES

Reading, walking through neighborhoods, computers, fabrication

### FAVORITE SHOP TOOL

Welder

### FAVORITE PART OF FELLOWSHIP

Getting to learn so much about New Orleans

### CAREER GOALS

Working at an environmental design firm, specializing in building or material fabrication



While working at Small Center, my knowledge of New Orleans grew with each project and task I worked on. My experiences made me see the inequities many communities in New Orleans experience because leaders of both private and public projects neglected to involve the people their projects purportedly serve. The modules we worked on helped me understand the web of stakeholders needed for a project to develop. Projects ranged from advocating for green infrastructure in our streets to affordable housing developments for increased density. Though these issues

seemed overwhelming at first, by exploring current research and talking to designers, residents, and other experts, we created a process that I can use for future projects. I realized that individual leaders can only do so much; real strength lies in people coming together to begin a project. Through conversation and practice, I realized that public interest design can have positive long term impacts on the users.



## KELSEY WILLIS

BELLINGHAM, WA | M. ARCH, 4TH YEAR  
SIZELER FELLOW

### EXTRACURRICULARS

Editor of the *Charrette*, Divest Tulane, French

### HOBBIES

Hiking, biking, petting cats, baking cookies, playing the violin

### FAVORITE SHOP TOOL

Steel Bandsaw

### FAVORITE PART OF FELLOWSHIP

Rolling wheelbarrows of stinky oysters down St. Charles Street

### CAREER GOALS

Working in urban planning or urban design; traveling and doing research around language, placemaking, and/or ecology



For me, the most difficult challenge during this fellowship was also the most rewarding: the necessity of constant collaboration. We learned that all the work changed quickly, sometimes painfully. Because the fast-paced nature of the work conflicted with all of our perfectionist instincts, our short projects became crash courses in teamwork. Fortunately, this new method of design created many of my most fun and memorable moments of the summer: laughing with high-school students as they tried to describe and act out their “dream bench,” covering the walls of Small Center in colorful sticky notes and

sketches, and making messy models of our wild ideas. We found that the design process became a way of building relationships, both among ourselves and with our community partners. In this context, I was surprised, entertained, and sometimes quieted by the conversations we had around our work. This summer was a valuable opportunity to pull back and remember that, as designers, we do work for real people, and that spending time connecting with those for whom we design is more valuable than anything we might do while sitting alone at a desk.

# LIVING WITH WATER



## PARTNER: RIPPLE EFFECT

Fellows worked with Ripple Effect, a local organization made up of teachers, water experts and designers collaborating to increase water literacy in schools. Ripple Effect creates curriculums focused on designing solutions for real places in New Orleans affected by water issues. Teachers are introduced to local water issues by experts, then collaborate with designers to plan site-specific design challenges for students to resolve.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Module 1 consisted of a crash course on water issues and flooding mitigation solutions in New Orleans, with site visits, stakeholder meetings, and case studies. Fellows worked with the Urban Conservancy to submit a design proposal for a public green infrastructure project in the 7th Ward, at the intersection of Columbus and Marais. Fellows also used resident and stakeholder input to design a community engagement tool that would be replicable for discussing similar issues across the city. The engagement tool was accompanied by a workbook resource to help neighborhood residents, public agencies, and NGOs work together to develop green infrastructure projects in public spaces. Ultimately, the goal is to have a complete toolkit to build collective understanding of the role that each citizen plays in water mitigation, and to define what “living with water” means for them.

## TIMELINE

MAY 31	JUNE 01 02	05 06	08 09	12 13	15	
Intro	Field trips to water management infrastructure and site visit	Columbus and Marais design charrette	Case studies and design tools	Lunch with water issues experts	Lunch with community engagement experts	Presentation of booklet and engagement design tool at FIKA, Blue House



## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN

The first week of the module was devoted to the development of a green infrastructure project proposal in the 7th Ward. Before we could begin the design process, we had a crash course in the city's particular and peculiar relationship with water, what has been built in response, what is possible in the future, and the cultural implications for New Orleans. Through readings, case studies, site visits, and discussions, we developed a base of knowledge to create a design proposal for new stormwater management systems on the intersection of Columbus and Marais Street. The designs were guided by input from residents and stakeholders who shape the city's water infrastructure.



## DESIGN PROCESS GUIDE

The design proposal was part of the Front Yard Initiative, the Urban Conservancy's larger grant program, which calls for residents to design proposals that help fix flooding in their own neighborhoods. Using critiques of present-day community engagement practices and a survey of other green infrastructure projects around the country, we designed a workbook which walks residents through the development of green infrastructure projects. The end goal is to develop a tool that better equips citizens to collectively play a larger role in determining how water moves through backyards, streets, and the larger city. We received feedback from members of public agencies, NGOs, and members of other community groups at various stages in drafting the workbook.

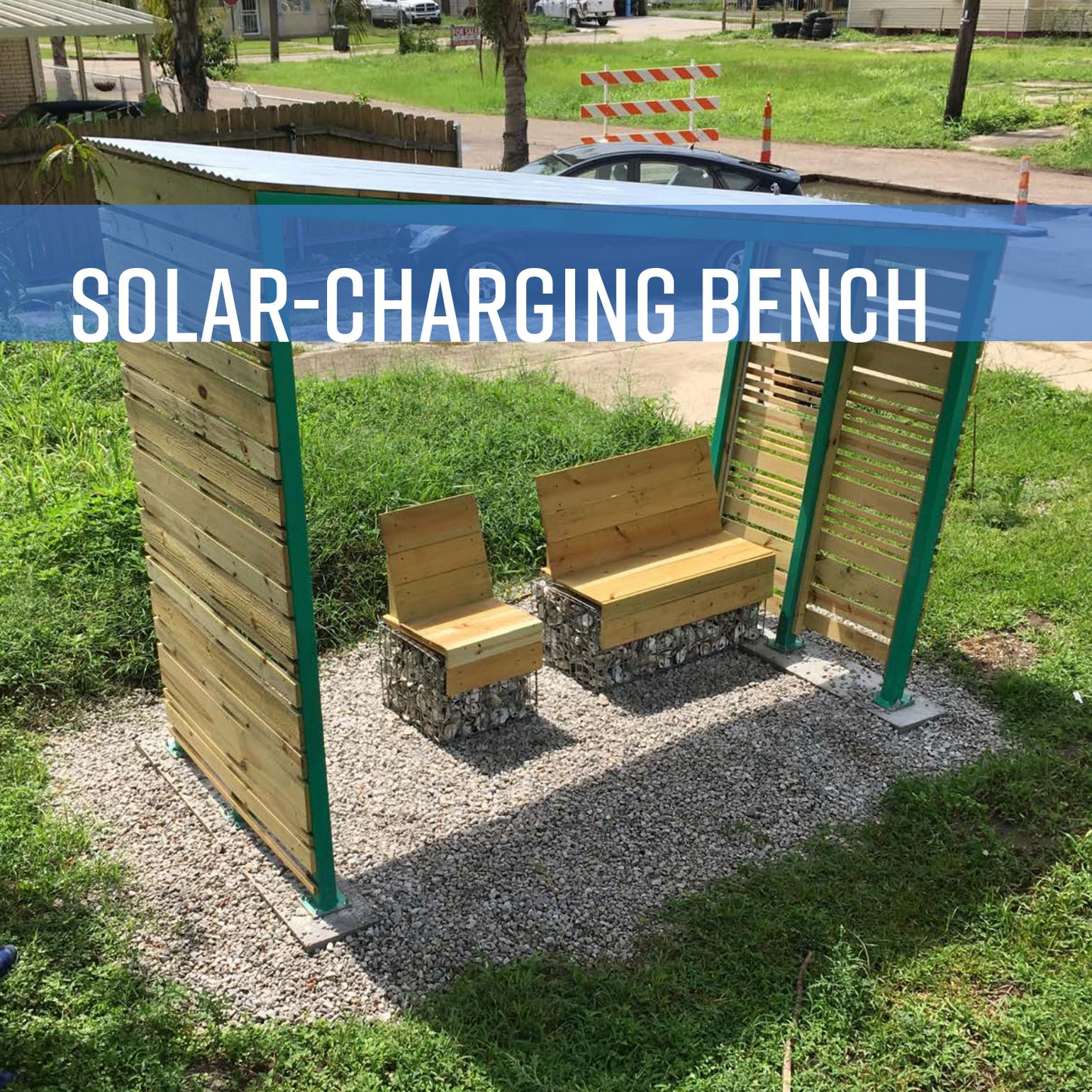
## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOL

Many forms of community engagement practices were critiqued throughout the duration of the module, and from those critiques, the fellows prototyped tools to better gather and synthesize design input from residents. The tool became an interactive tabletop game in which players could propose several stormwater management schemes for their streetcorners by arranging game pieces that represented various water mitigation strategies. Each piece carries a certain capacity for containing or moving water, and is ranked in water holding or mitigation capacity. The game works to educate residents about the consequences of certain design choices and the efficacy of certain water mitigation strategies, while the designer, planner, and other stakeholders can gauge the priorities and values of residents, recognizing what they would like to see in their own neighborhood.





# SOLAR-CHARGING BENCH



## PARTNER: GROUNDWORK NEW ORLEANS

Groundwork New Orleans is a local chapter of a national nonprofit that provides job training and employment opportunities to young adults. Groundwork New Orleans specifically addresses local issues of stormwater management and environmental education, striving to improve water management, water quality and neighborhood access to public amenities through empowerment of young people, businesses, and local organizations.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project consisted of designing and building a shade structure with a bench and a solar-powered USB charging station to be replicated by the Groundwork New Orleans Green Team in several locations around the city. Funding came from the EPA, who awarded Groundwork New Orleans a grant to construct three solar benches with the goal of using clean energy to educate and build resiliency in underserved communities. Fellows designed, built, and installed a prototypical solar bench at the intersection of N. Prieur and Caffin Street in the Lower Ninth Ward. The benches will educate residents about clean energy, and provide an emergency power source within the community.

## TIMELINE

JUNE 19	20	21	22	23		26	27	28	29	30
Meet the Groundwork Green Team	Designing and charrettes with Green Team			Build tutorials		Off-site build preparation		Pouring foundation and welding	Off-site build preparation	Installing bench on site



The second module began by going to Groundwork's Earth Lab to meet with the Green Team to talk about public transit and benches. Using those discussions as a starting point, as well as some research of bench typologies around the city, the team created multiple designs to present to Groundwork. The team pinned up precedents, gave everyone a pile of sticky notes, and then worked as a group to select three favorites. The next day, the Green Team visited Small Center, where they selected the ultimate design from three more developed options. After that, the fellows spent a week clarifying design details, selecting and purchasing materials, and fabricating the shelter. After the final design



was chosen, the fellows separated into two groups: one worked on educational signage and documentation, the other on design specificities. From the beginning, fellows moved quickly from sketches to at-scale physical prototyping. Because the bench design needed to be replicable, the fellows chose construction materials that the Green Team was familiar with: wood and steel, as well as wire gabion baskets. In the construction phase, the fellows built a jig and prepared the large steel frames in-house. While one group worked with the Green Team to pour concrete foundations on-site in the 9th Ward, the other welded the frames. To build the gabion baskets, the fellows collected wheelbarrow-



-loads of oyster shells from nearby restaurants, and then painstakingly cleaned the shells and dried them outside.

The last day of the module was dedicated to construction. Over the course of one day, the fellows and the Groundworks crew installed the frames, built and filled the gabion basket benches, and clad the entire structure in wood. A final day was dedicated to installing tubes for conduit and applying finishing touches before the Groundworks team installed the electrical components.

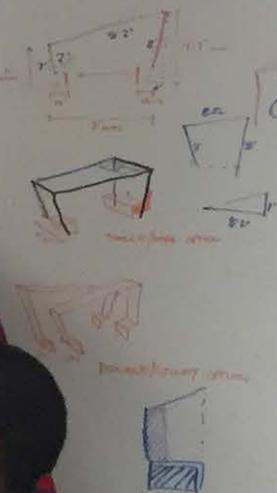


MAX 12' x 7'  
SOLAR PANEL(2) 24.8" x 26.4"  
BATTERY (2)  
↳ 12.9" x 6.8" x 8.7"  
CHARGE CONTROLLER  
↳ 3.46" x 6.30" x 1.46"  
USB CHARGER (2)  
↳ 2 x 1" (face) 1.5" (drill hole size)





WINGS (2)



GREEN TEAM

GREEN TEAM

GREEN TEAM

...ING PLACES

# HEALTHY TREMÉ



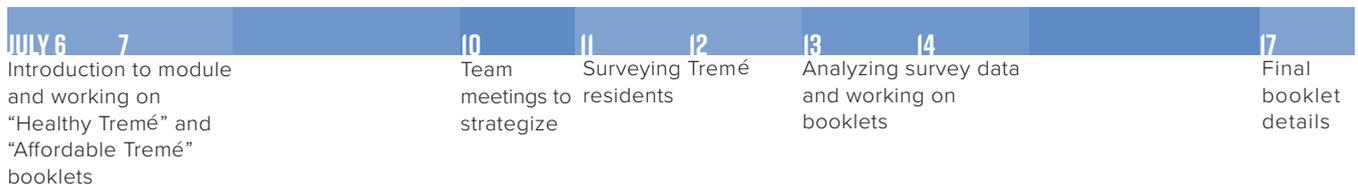
## PARTNER: THE GREATER TREMÉ CONSORTIUM, INC.

The Greater Tremé Consortium, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that provides affordable housing services, support for small business development, and resources for the preservation of indigenous culture and the traditions of the historic Tremé community. The Greater Tremé Consortium, Inc.'s Executive Director Cheryl Austin collaborated with Small Center on this project.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project consisted of planning, mapping, and door-to-door surveying in the Tremé neighborhood to advocate for better access to health-related resources such as parks, activities, and clinics. Fellows also documented existing neighborhood conditions to reveal opportunities for context-appropriate development, including increased density near transit, potential areas for investment to support the cultural economy, and better access to public amenities. The goal of this research is to advocate for improved access to and use of parks and to identify specific locations where infill construction could provide opportunities for affordable housing. The resulting document serves community leaders by combining input from residents with analytical mapping, and provides a structure for neighborhood residents and leaders to advocate for regulatory change.

## TIMELINE





## SURVEYING

The team spent three days surveying Tremé with help from the Greater Tremé Consortium, Inc., the Groundwork New Orleans Green Team, and local residents. Surveying consisted of interviewing residents about the green spaces, health care services, housing and potential activities that they use daily. Many reported a serious change in neighborhood dynamics due to gentrification, along with complex comments on why or why not they access various public amenities. We found recurring major reasons why residents did not use these areas, including safety concerns, lack of transportation, physical barriers, and distance.



## HEALTHY RESOURCES MAPPING

This part of the Healthy Tremé module involved mapping and researching public amenities in the neighborhood. We focused on the number of health resources and public green spaces used by residents around the neighborhood. Thorough mapping combined with on-site surveying yielded results on whether and how residents used nearby parks and health services.

## DENSITY ADVOCACY

This part of the module focused on analyzing the number of vacant lots and their possible development. The team compiled a spreadsheet of all vacant lots in Tremé and paired it with further analysis of the city's zoning ordinance to understand the dwelling capacity of each vacant lot and how it could be incorporated into Transit Oriented Development to encourage the development of additional affordable housing units. The team then created a list of recommendations for changes in zoning along with representative graphics. This information was condensed into a handout that explained possible development strategies along both transit corridors and residential infill lots.



SCHOOL  
SPEED  
LIMIT  
20  
SCHOOL  
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RESERVED  
PARKING  
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STOP

STOP

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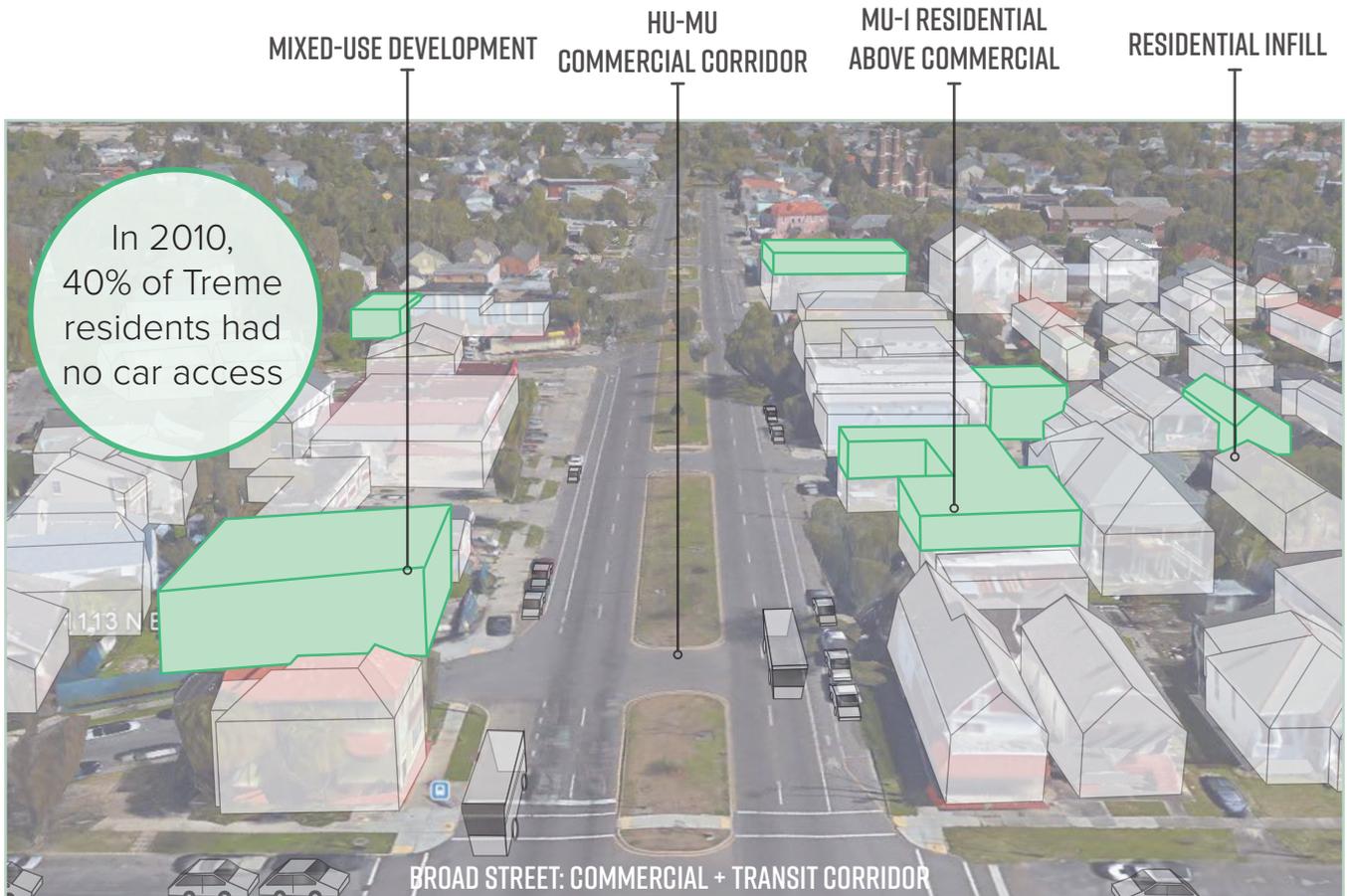
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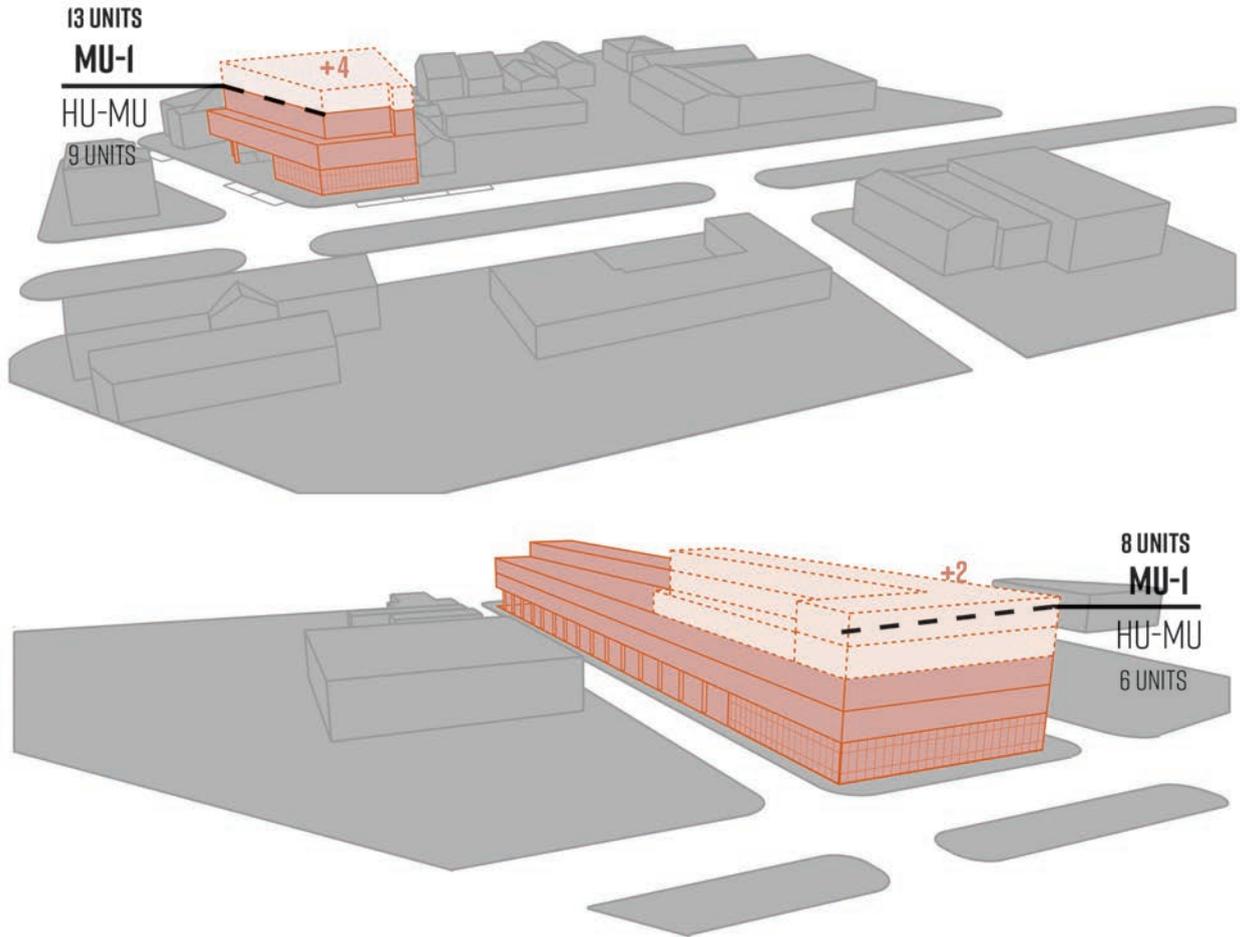


“ [Rent’s] going up. That’s why [the neighborhood] is changing. People don’t have money, they can’t reconstruct, **then they are forced out.** ”

*Treme resident, 2017*



# WHAT DOES DENSITY UPZONING LOOK LIKE?



## SITE VISITS AND FIELD TRIPS

Parasite Skate Park, **Gentilly**  
LOOP NOLA, **City Park**  
Pump Station #3, **Seventh Ward**  
Spanish Fort, **Lakeshore**  
Outfall Canal, **City Park**  
Grow Dat Youth Farm, **City Park**  
Lafitte Greenway, **Tremé and Midcity**  
Crescent Park, **Bywater**  
Earth Lab, **Marigny**  
Bayou St. John  
NORA Rain Gardens, **Seventh Ward and Holly Grove**  
Hollygrove Greenline, **Hollygrove**  
Musicians' Village, **St. Claude**  
Make It Right Homes, **Lower 9th Ward**  
Dillard University, **Gentilly**  
Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, **Lower Ninth Ward**

## READINGS

Design for Equity Articles  
Whitney Young, 1968 Keynote Speech to AIA  
Ivan Illich, "To Hell with Good Intentions"  
Cedric Johnson, "The Urban Precariat, Neoliberalization, and the Soft Power of Humanitarian Design"  
George Lipsitz, "Racialization of Space, Spatialization of Race"  
Yuki Cato, "Not just the price of food"  
Trushna Parekh, "'They want to live in the Tremé, but they want it for their ways of living': gentrification and neighborhood practice in Tremé, New Orleans"  
Michael E. Crutcher Jr., "Tremé"



